

And the Snow Falls

A Radio Adaptation by James Kemp

Based on a Play by Miklos Laszlo

Act One

(The first sound the audience hears is a recording of the song "The First Noel". Over the sound of the song, the audience first hears the voice of British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain announcing his agreement with Adolph Hitler. Next the audience hears the voice of Adolf Hitler. Finally, the audience hears the voice Franklin Delano Roosevelt. At the end of "The First Noel" music, the voice of the narrator can be heard. Introductory Christmas music fades out as Narrator's voice fades in).

Narrator – In December 1938, citizens of London, England are easy. In September, they had listened to their Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain, announce that he had reached an agreement with Adolph Hitler and that they would have "peace in our time". Not long after Mr. Chamberlain's announcement, Adolph Hitler's army invaded Czechoslovakia. Britain's people were hopeful that United States of America might intervene in European matters. But citizens of London became even more uneasy as the American president announced America's intent to not become involved in European matters.

The employees of a London cosmetics shop had stood in the dark around the radio in the owner's office, after their boss had gone home. They had listened to the news that seemed to imply imminent danger for themselves and for all citizens of Great Britain.

Hammersley's Perfumery, has been located on Oxford Street, not far from Selfridge's. Across the street on the North is a new store that sells records and phonographs. The store's sign reads "HMV", which is short for "His Master's Voice". For the holiday season, Mr. Hammersley has agreed to have an RCA Victor phonograph machine installed in his store for the entertainment of his customers.

Hammersley's Perfumery is an old established firm of high repute, founded by the present owner's grandfather. It is a pleasing old shop, comfortable, hospitable and with an air of stability about it. Apart from the latest model cash register and the new phonograph machine, the shop is old-fashioned and manufactures its own brand of cosmetics in the laboratory located in the rear of the shop.

The firm employs seven people: three salesmen, a sales woman, a chemist, a cashier, and an errand boy. Shelves full of bottles of perfume, soap, bath salts, lotion, and every kind of conceivable cosmetic run along the walls and below the sales counters. The shop is always full of bright colors and alluring scents.

The entrance from the street is between two large shop windows which contain cosmetic displays and seasonal decorations. Inside the shop, a frosted glass panel door leads to the office of the owner. Another interior door leads into the laboratory, where Miss Patience Baker, the staff chemist and sales person, formulates and packages the products.

On this particular Saturday evening, the Christmas season is in full swing. The perfumery is filled with customers. Seasonal noises from the street can be heard each time the door opens. The level of sales is so high, Mr. Hammersley himself needs to also wait on customers.

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Even though the harbingers of war occupy the subconscious minds of salespeople and customers alike, the overriding concern of all deals with the mundane matters of how well one looks and how well one smells to others.

The social interactions of the people within this microcosm reveal the common concerns of common people everywhere. Whom should I love? Will that person love me? Will that person be faithful to me? How happy would be together? Will I still have a job? What time is it? How much longer do I have to perform this silly job before I get to go home?

(Fade in crowd sounds with ringing cash register. It is a few minutes before shop closing time. The chemist, Miss Patience Baker, is busy creating cosmetics in the laboratory. The cashier, Miss Molson, sits at the cash desk by the front door. There is the usual increase in activity before closing time. The cash register hardly ever stops ringing. Outside, snow is falling in thick flakes and can be seen through the shop windows. Whenever the front door opens, the sounds of heavy traffic can be heard in the background.)

On Miss Molson's cashier's desk is the new phonograph from the shop across the street, playing a recordings of Christmas music. Every five minutes or so, Miss Molson stops processing sales in order to restart the record and, occasionally, to change it. Fade in sound of record player needle scraping across a record which has just stopped and the music starting again from the beginning with scratchy sounds before the melody starts again.

Mr. Hammersley's voice is heard speaking loudly over the music coming from the phonograph).

Hammersley – *(attending to a woman customer, Mrs. Worthley)* Anything else, Madam?

Mrs. Worthley – Uh, yes. Have you got any Coty L'Amour?

Hammersley – Perfume, Madam?

Mrs. Worthley – Powder.

Hammersley – Certainly, Madam. What shade?

Mrs. Worthley – Rachel.

Hammersley – *(to Ashwood)* Mr. Ashwood, Coty l'Amour, the Rachel scent, please.

Ashwood *(attending another woman customer, Mrs. Colby)* Small or large, sir?

Mrs. Colby – Beg your pardon, young man?

Ashwood – My humble apology, Madam. I was responding to Mr. Hammersley.

Mrs. Colby – Indeed! I see!

Hammersley *(to Mrs. Worthley)* What size, Madam?

Mrs. Worthley – How much is the small?

Ashwood – Nine and seven, Madam.

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Mrs. Colby – Nine and seven what, young man?

Ashwood – Apologies again, Madam. I was addressing another customer.

Mrs. Colby – I see! Please let me know when you plan on addressing my needs!

Mrs. Worthley – The large size?

Ashwood – Seventeen and six.

Mrs. Colby – There you go again! Really!

Ashwood – Sorry again, Madam!

Mrs. Colby – Hummph!

Hammersley – You'd do better to have the large box, if I may advise you.

Ashwood – It's the better bargain.

Mrs. Colby – (whom Ashwood has been attending to) I'm in rather a hurry, you know.

Ashwood – So sorry, Madam. Is there anything else I can get for you?

Mrs. Colby – Anything else? You haven't gotten anything for me! I need a new toothbrush!

Ashwood – Which do you prefer? Hard, medium, or soft?

Mr. Smith – (*to his customer*) If it's for your baby, Madam, I wouldn't use any other soap.

Mrs. Watson – Baby? What baby?

Mrs. Worthley – The small size will do for the moment.

Hammersley – Mr. Ashwood. A small Rachel powder for the lady, if you please.

Ashwood – Certainly, sir. Here you are, Madam. Anything else?

Mrs. Worthley – No, but I believe that lady needs a new toothbrush.

Mrs. Colby – But only if you can spare the time.

Mr. Smith – But of course, Madam. I only assumed there was going to be a baby. If the powder is for Madam, may I suggest our new line of powder. It's called Hay. It's quite natural.

Mrs. Watson – A bit strong, isn't it? Shouldn't it be called Straw?

Ashwood – Coming right up, Mr. Hammersley. Mr. Kelly, would you please show this fine lady our selection of toothbrushes? Please!

Kelly – Right you are, Ashwood. Madam, please be so kind as to allow me to conclude the transaction with this other customer. I will be right with you.

Mrs. Colby – We can only hope!

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Kelly – Here you are, Madam. A large bottle of our finest bath salts. Is there anything else? No? Please pay at the desk. Miss Molson will be happy to accept your payment.

Miss Molson – That will be fourteen and nine, Madam. (*Cash register sound*). Did you want that gift wrapped? No? Well then, thank you and good night. And Merry Christmas!

Hammersley (*shouting*) – Good night, Madam. Merry Christmas. (*Sound of door opening with traffic sounds and closing*).

Kelly – (*shouting*) Good night, Madam. (to Mrs. Colby) Now, about your order, Madam.

Mrs. Colby – I have been waiting here to see some toothbrushes for the last half hour!

Kelly – Oh! So sorry, Madam. We've a bit of a rush tonight. Holidays and all. Closed tomorrow don't you know?

Mrs. Colby – But I only need a toothbrush!

Kelly – But of course, Madam. Did you need hard, medium or soft?

Mrs. Colby – It's not for me! It's for my husband!

Kelly – But of course, Madam. What does your husband prefer?

Mrs. Colby – Soft. That blue one in soft.

Kelly – Certainly, Madam. Here you are. Will there be anything else?

Mrs. Colby – Not at any time in the foreseeable future. Next time, I intend to go to Selfridge's.

Kelly – Do they carry toothbrushes at Selfridges, Madam?

Mrs. Colby – I don't know. But I intend to find out. (*Sound of footsteps stomping away*).

Miss Molson – (*over the sound of the record player*) That will be fourteen and nine, Madam.

Mrs. Colby – For a toothbrush?

Miss Molson – Sorry Madam. My error. Four and six. My mind must have been on the music.

Mrs. Colby – That's more like it. Here. Keep the change and use it to buy a new record. That one is scratched! (*Cash register sound*).

Miss Molson – (*over the sound of the door opening with traffic sounds and closing*) Thank you, Madam. Merry Christmas, Madam.

Mr. Smith – (*shouting*) If you should ever decide to have a baby, I still recommend that same powder.

Mrs. Watson – I shall certainly NOT keep you informed of my reproductive intentions, sir!

Mr. Smith - Thank you, Madam. Merry Christmas, Madam. (*Sound of door opening with traffic sounds and slamming closed*).

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Ashwood – I'm afraid, Madam that we only have the large size of Coty L'amour in stock. It is a popular item.

Mrs. Worthley – I don't want that! I want the small!

Hammersley – We could have a small size for you by Monday.

Mrs. Worthley – Selfridge's closes in 30 minutes. I think I will check there first. I might return on Monday however.

Hammersley – Very well. Madam. I will have a small size available for you on Monday if you find that Selfridge's fails to meet your needs. Good night, Madam. Merry Christmas, Madam. (Sound of door opening with traffic sounds and closing).

Miss Richards – Thank you, sir. I hope your wife enjoys our products. I assure you that the ingredients in our products are far superior to those used in off-of-the-shelf brands. Merry Christmas, sir. And wish your wife the same. Good night.

Miss Molson – That will be two pounds eighteen and six. (*Cash register sound*) Thank you, sir. Good night.

Mr. Smith – Good night, Madam. I recommend this same baby powder to everyone; expecting or not.

Ashwood – Good night, Madam. Have a Merry Christmas.

(The sound of the door opening with traffic sounds and closing several times and of the cash register as customers make their final purchases).

Kelly – But I recall you used to like Royal Dendink, Madam. Not any more, eh? Oh well. Good night Madam.

Miss Molson – That will be three pound two and seven. (*Cash register sound*) Thank you, sir. Merry Christmas, sir.

Ashwood – You forgot your package, Madam. There you go. Merry Christmas.

Hammersley – I don't set the sales tax, Madam. The government does. It refuses to treat cosmetics as vital necessities which they are of course, and classes them as luxuries. But what can we do about it with that Mr. Hitler breathing down our necks? Good night, Madam.

Miss Molson – Shall I put that on your account? Very well. Good night, Madam. Merry Christmas.

(The crowd noises have faded. The record player can be heard over the sounds of closing up shop. The shop is now empty. The employees can be overheard breathing sighs of relief, closing display cases and clinking bottles of cosmetics onto shelves. Suddenly, the door is heard opening with traffic sounds and then closing out the sounds).

Policeman – Good evening.

Hammersley – Good evening, Constable.

Policeman – It's twelve minutes past the hour.

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Hammersley – Sorry, Officer. Mr. Ashwood, why isn't the door locked and the closed sign put out yet?

Ashwood – Oh. I forgot. I am sorry.

Hammersley – Do I need to remind you every blessed evening?

Policeman – We are rehearsing for another possible encounter with Jerry, if you get my meaning. We wouldn't want your fine shop to become a target now, would we? Good evening and let's get these lights turned off! (*Sound of door opening with traffic sounds and then closing*).

Ashwood – There was such a rush. I can't possibly think of everything.

Hammersley – How often have I asked you, Mr. Ashwood, to not contradict me in the presence of my customers?

Ashwood – I'm sorry sir. I didn't mean to.

Hammersley – The fact that you worked here longest does not entitle you to preferential treatment.

Ashwood – You're not being fair Mr. Hammersley.

Hammersley – Not being fair, eh? If you can't spare 10 seconds shutting the door, you can still ask Mr. Kelly or Miss Richards or Mr. Smith to see to it and put up sign. And it is still not up! What do any of you care whether I get fined or not? It's I who pays, not you. Is this business, thanks to your superhuman efficiency, Mr. Ashwood, so prosperous that I can safely be expected to put up with anything. You're right. If I can put up with you, there's nothing I can't put up with.

Ashwood – May I know the reason for this sudden change in your attitude towards me?

Smith – (*aside to Ashwood*) SHHHH!

Hammersley – Sudden? How so? What makes you think it is sudden? Perhaps it is not sudden at all. But now I have had enough. Miss Molson, turn off that blasted Christmas music! Now please!

Miss Molson – Yes, Mr. Hammersley. (*Christmas music suddenly ends mid-song*).

Ashwood – If you'd only tell me, Mr. Hammersley, what you're blaming me for.

Smith – (*aside to Ashwood*) Shut up!

Ashwood – I won't. This has been going on for days, and for no reason.

Hammersley – Are you sure that I have none?

Ashwood – I'm positive.

Hammersley – I don't wish to be told there is such a rush that you can't think of everything. Where's the rush? That stray customer every hour or so to sell a bar of soap to or a hairnet? Is that what you call a rush? Or do you refer to the everlasting preoccupation of the staff with cinemas and dog tracks? Is that what I employ seven people for? Is that how I'm supposed to pay the rent, the taxes, light, gas, wages, insurance, and so on and so forth? And if once a year before Christmas there happens to be half a dozen customers in the place at the same time, you dare to call that a rush. What name, Mr. Ashwood, would you give to my lot, then? The fact that I am still here and shout, the fact that I haven't locked the door

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and thrown the key away yet, the fact that I haven't given my staff their cards as my neighbors right left have done to keep the business going – find me a name for that Mr. Ashwood. *(heavy sound of shoes walking away followed by the slamming of the office door).*

Smith – I told you to shut up.

Ashwood – It was a bit too thick.

Smith – Is it any better now?

Ashwood – But what the hell have I done?

Smith – Haven't you got eyes in your head? He's been on edge for days.

Ashwood – Why pick on me? Here I am, working like a slave. I spend my whole life in this shop, and this is the reward I get.

Smith – He's got his troubles, too. Do you know what's getting him down?

Ashwood – I've been working here for nine years. What have I done? Tell me! Why has he been at me all week?

Smith – Rubbish!

Ashwood – For a whole week he's been treating me like dirt.

Smith – Didn't he tell me off yesterday? It's best to leave him alone. We don't know what's eating him. Maybe he had a row with his wife.

Kelly – How do you know?

Smith – I don't know. I was merely saying "maybe". How am I to know? No business of mine, is it?

Kelly – Who was staying for window dressing?

Ashwood – Don't know. Ask him.

Smith – Are you staying, Mr. Kelly?

Kelly – If I am needed.

Smith – Miss Richards, what about you?

Miss Richards – I haven't been asked to.

Smith – Mr. Hammersley wants the Christmas displays fixed tonight.

Miss Richards – I'm being taken to the pictures.

Smith – What are you going to see?

Miss Richards – What difference does it make to you? You're no film fan. Tell me truly Smithy, when did you last go to the flicks?

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Smith – Let me see. It was a big epic – all about the Crusades. There were armies and battles and cities falling. That was a picture for you. All for sixpence, a cup of tea and a biscuit thrown in.

Miss Richards – Never heard of it. Possibly before I was born.

Smith – Possibly but not probably. How old are you?

Miss Richards – Twenty.

Miss Molson – (*cash register rings*) And the rest?

Miss Richards – Did you say something, Miss Molson?

Miss Molson – I'm making up the accounts. Why?

Miss Richards – Then I heard you wrongly.

Miss Molson – I'm adding up. But try as I may, it still comes to at least thirty.

Miss Richards – What?

Miss Molson – This column.

Miss Richards – Smithy, dear, you shouldn't be so foppish about pictures. Take it from me, many highbrow people enjoy picture going.

Smith – How could I be foppish about it, dear miss Richards? On the contrary. If only I had time to go. Unfortunately, I haven't. I often feel embarrassed at a party when it comes to discuss pictures or a film star. I have to keep mum.

Miss Richards – Well I never. Do you go to so many parties? You don't look as if you do.

Smith – That was sarcastic. My dear miss Richards, a nice little girl like you shouldn't be sarcastic. It doesn't suit you.

Miss Richards – You don't say.

Smith – Nor should she try to be witty at all costs.

Miss Richards – It always pays to talk to a wise man, they say.

Smith – You're overrating me. I'm far from being wise. Merely that I didn't stop reading when I finished "Little Lord Fauntleroy". (*The telephone rings*).

Miss Molson – Hammersley's. Good evening Mrs. Hammersley. Will you hold please? Call Mr. Hammersley, will you?

Kelly – Mr. Hammersley, you wanted on the phone, Sir.

Miss Molson – It's Mrs. Hammersley.

Hammersley – Hello? Yes my dear. Cinema? I couldn't possibly. I told you this morning I'd be working late. Go. By all means. Are the children going with you? I can't tell you. No, I shan't be home by ten. Well, suppose you three go straight home after the show and I'll be there as soon as I can. No, I haven't

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forgotten. Anything else? What's that? How much? But I gave you a check this morning. All right, I'll send it over with an employee. Straightaway. Yes, dear. (*sound of phone hanging up*). Where's Raymond?

Kelly – He's not back yet, Mr. Hammersley.

Hammersley – Not back yet? He only had three parcels to deliver it is not back yet? I'll have the fire that nitwit.

Ashwood – I'll go if you like.

Hammersley – Not you, thanks. Don't trouble. Mr. Kelly, would you be good enough to take a bottle of Lentheric Forever to my wife, and Miss Molson, give me five pounds.

Miss Molson – Here, Mr. Hammersley. (*sound of large coins clinking*).

Hammersley – Give both to my wife.

Kelly – Very good, Sir.

Smith – Who is to stay to dress the windows, Mr. Hammersley?

Hammersley – Pardon? What's that?

Smith – Sorry. I've been wondering whom Mr. Hammersley wants to do the windows.

Hammersley – Oh, yes. Well, settle it among yourselves. Those who don't mind can stay.

Ashwood – I think Mr. Smith, Mr. Kelly and I can manage between us. The ladies could go, couldn't they?

Hammersley – You intend to stay? I'm surprised. I had the impression that the rush had so much exhausted you that you'd rather leave.

Ashwood – I never said I was exhausted.

Hammersley – Nevertheless, you may go, Mr. Ashwood. We shan't miss you.

Ashwood – I'd appreciate it, Mr. Hammersley, if you'd tell me what I've done.

Hammersley – I told you a minute ago. Want to hear it again?

Ashwood – Stop pinching me, Mr. Smith. I slave in this shop as though it were mine, not yours, Mr. Hammersley.

Hammersley – Is that so?

Ashwood – I never let up. If there's no customer to serve in the shop, I work in the lab. This morning, for instance, before the rush started, I filled a hundred tubes with Mona Lisa. And you, sir, keep nagging me for no reason.

Hammersley – For no reason?

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Ashwood – Not even the slightest. I'm sorry to flare up like this, but I happen to know who's put the poison in for me.

Hammersley – Do you think I've got no eyes on my head? No mind of my own?

Ashwood – You've held a different opinion of me for nine years. It's only changed recently.

Hammersley – It has. Because I've found out...

Ashwood – What? For God's sake, speak up!

Hammersley – That you've grown too cocksure. And that this shop would still survive without your assistance.

Ashwood – If you're not satisfied with my work, why don't you tell me so?

Hammersley – I am telling you. I keep on telling you. How often do you have to be told?

Ashwood – Well, in that case, I shall have to act accordingly.

Hammersley – Is that a threat? Do you expect me to get squeamish and beg you to stay, eh? You can go, Mr. Ashwood, and Godspeed. When are you leaving?

Ashwood – At once, Mr. Hammersley. *(sound of interior door with no traffic sounds, slamming after sound of male footsteps walking away).*

Hammersley – Miss Molson, did the cash balance?

Miss Molson – Yes, Mr. Hammersley. Would you mind checking it?

Hammersley – Later. Let me have the key. *(sound of keys jingling).*

Smith – Shall I start with the decorating, Mr. Hammersley?

Hammersley – Yes.

Smith – What shall I put out?

Hammersley – Please yourself. Where's the problem? There are only two boxes to choose from. Why do you keep asking questions?

Smith – Certainly, Mr. Hammersley. I'll go get a box of decorations from the store room immediately. *(sound of male shoes walking away and interior door).*

Miss Richards – Pardon me, Mr. Hammersley...

Hammersley – Yes?

Miss Richards – If you don't need me...

Hammersley – You can go, my girl.

Miss Richards – Thank you ever so. *(sound of high heels walking away and the interior door sound followed by the same door sound and other high heels walking into the room).*

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Miss Baker – I'm sorry, Mr. Hammersley, but I can't stand it any longer.

Hammersley – What is it, Miss Baker?

Miss Baker – Nothing, but I have to hand in my notice.

Hammersley – Oh? Why?

Miss Baker – He makes my life miserable. He says I've been plotting against him. He says I've undermined his position here. He says I live by my wits, not by my work, and that for me every day is a holiday. I'm just hanging around here and he has to take the blame for it. He called me a double-tongued serpent, a female Iago.

Hammersley – Who did? *(sound of interior door and male footsteps increasing)*

Ashwood – I did. At last I told her what I think of her.

Hammersley – You two had better settle this without me. *(sound of male shoes walking away and office door slamming followed by interior door sound and male footsteps and heavy breathing by Smith)*

Smith – These boxes get heavier and heavier each year. Where's Mr. Hammersley?

Ashwood – He went to his office.

Miss Baker – Tell me, what's your game? Why am I in your way? Do you want my job for a girl friend of yours?

Ashwood – Infantile! You are infantile!

Miss Baker – I've had enough of your rudeness and I'd rather clear out than put up with your slander any longer. See?

Ashwood – Slander? Mr. Smith, do you hear that? Mr. Smith?

Smith – I do but I can't help you.

Miss Baker – Now listen, Mr. Ashwood, because I'm going to speak up at last. From the minute I crossed this threshold, from the minute I started work here two years ago, you've been my enemy. *(Crying)* For two years I've been listening to your sarcastic comments on my work, to your uppish remarks about every word I say. From nine until six. If I come in five minutes early in the morning, you say in front of everyone, "Miss Baker is a bit of a crawler this morning." If I come in five minutes late, you're ready with the remark, "If Miss Baker'd endeavor to go to bed before the small hours, perhaps she could get here on time." According to you, I can't make up a parcel, I'm a bad salesgirl, I'm rude and careless, I scare customers away, I'm cheeky with the women and sexy with the men. *(sounds of female sobs)* But that's not all. You had the nerve to tell Mr. Hammersley that whenever I fill a tube of toothpaste, it comes out anywhere but the nozzle. It's a rotten lie!

Ashwood – What? A lie? *(sound of paste oozing out of a tube)* Here! Was I wrong? Your own work.

Baker – It isn't. You ordered the tubes. You okayed them.

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Ashwood – There! See how she twists things? See how she’s shifting the blame onto me? Me and the tubes. How do you account for the fact then, that whenever I fill the toothpaste tubes, it slides beautifully through the neck instead of a whole lot oozing out at the back? I suppose I have influence with the tubes.

Baker – I don’t care. I wouldn’t be surprised if you did in order to pay me back. It’s all in a day’s work for you.

Ashwood – Do you hear that, Mr. Smith? Can you suggest an answer I could give Miss Baker?

Smith – (stammers) uhhhh...

Miss Baker – Please, Mr. Smith, is it my fault if the tubes are defective?

Ashwood – Mr. Smith, do listen, please. It’s still the tubes, me and the tubes, the tubes and everybody except Miss Patience Baker.

Baker – If you call me Patience just once more, I’ll scream the place down.

Smith – Stop it for goodness sake. I don’t know what I’m doing. (sound of a Christmas ornament breaking on the floor) There now, are you two happy? I just broke a bulb.

Miss Baker – He keeps calling me Patience because he knows I hate it.

Ashwood – What do you say now, Mr. Smith?

Smith – Leave me out of this, please.

Ashwood - Am I responsible for her resplendent Christian name?

Miss Baker - Every inch a gentleman.

Ashwood - Gentleman? Am I supposed to throw you a kiss every time I receive another stab in the back?

Miss Baker - Now listen. I've got enough guts to tell you to your face that I hate you and won't spend another day with you in this shop.

Ashwood - You won't. I'm just packing up. Congratulations. (Sound of male shoes walki9ng across floor followed by door opening and then slamming shut).

Miss Baler - What's the matter with him, Mr. Smith? I've never hurt him.

Smith - Haven't you?

Miss Baker - I never even notice him.

Smith - That's just it.

Miss Baker - I just don't happen to fall for Mr. Ashwood's charms.

Smith - That's up to you, but why hate him?

Miss Baker - Because he is hateful.

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Smith - Then don't expect declarations of love from him, either.

Miss Baker - What? And if I were alone with him on a desert island...

Smith - Don't commit yourself. I may be daft, but for years you've been working behind this same counter, confined to these few square yards for eight hours a day, and still you haven't got used to each other's foibles. Maybe I'm too old to understand, Pat dear.

Miss Baker - See? He wouldn't call me Pat. He's never once called me Pat. The pig!

Smith - Look my dear. Pat is a pet name. And Ashwood has absolutely no reason to pet you.

Miss Baker - But Richards is Flo to him and Beatrice Molson is Bea. And I know the reason.

Smith - Well?

Miss Baker - Because he has had affairs with both of them!

Smith - (Laughing) Cute, aren't you?

Miss Baker - I've got eyes in my head.

Smith - Well go see an optician then.

Miss Baker - You are sweet, Mr. Smith. But I know what I know.

Smith - You're a twerp. Both girls are "reserved".

Miss Baker - Reserved?

Smith - Labeled "For Mr. Kelly".

Miss Baker - Kelly?

Smith - Are you really that dumb? Richards is his past and Molson is his future. At least he hopes so. Mark my words, we might witness a cozy little scandal in this shop, with Kelly in the lead.

Miss Baker - But Miss Richards has a fiance.

Smith - Pat, are you putting on an act? A man who drives a Rolls Royce, yet allows his future wife to sell soap, might be the chairman of a two hundred fifty million pound company, but never a fiance. Unless he is the chauffeur. Give me a duster, will you? I'd better clean up that old Christmas tree first.

Miss Baker - What did Ashwood mean by going to pack up?

Smith - He had a row with the old man. Just before the one he had with you.

Miss Baker - I didn't know that. What was the row about?

Smith - Trifles. The old man has been on edge for days. He told Ashwood off. Ashwood answered back. One word followed another until that twerp Ashwood "acted accordingly" and quit.

Miss Baker - And Mr. Hammersley?

Smith - He let him quit.

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Miss Baker - And is he really leaving?

Smith - Don't you worry. By Monday morning, they'll both have forgotten what the row was about. The old man is just jumpy. I'm sure he's sorry by now.

Miss Baker - But he must have a reason....

Smith - He didn't. I tell you, he's just nervy. For a week now, he's been impossible. Yesterday, he told me off, but I let him talk. It's no use his being rude to me, because I just go on smiling at him. And he accused me of something more concrete than he did Ashwood. For instance, that I had been stealing Eau de Cologne.

Miss Baker - What did you say?

Smith - I said, "Mr. Hammersley, do I look like a man who wears Eau de Cologne? (Miss Baker's muffled laughter can be overheard). He said he was sure I was selling it. (Miss Baker's gasp can be overheard). So I said, "Mr. Hammersley, do I look like a man who makes money on the side?" He lost more of his temper and shouted, "You look like a thief!" "Well, that I can't help, Mr. Hammersley," I said.

Miss Baker - No! Did he really call you a thief?

Smith - Worse than that!

Miss Baker - And you?

Smith - I apologized.

Miss Baker - Surely you didn't!

Smith - My dear Pat, people of my age and with my family responsibilities have got to apologize even though they have been wronged. Not because they are cowards. Don't think that. But because circumstances leave them no choice. And, if you think about it, what does it matter? In India, thousands of people die of famine every day. In Sicily, they ambush one another and pop one another off. Now add to that the fact that Mr. Hammersley called Mr. Smith in a shop in the south of England, a thief. So what? What does it matter?

(Sound of interior swinging open, followed by male footsteps as Mr. Kelly enters the salesroom).

Kelly - Hello, Pat darling.

Miss Baker - Good evening, Mr. Kelly.

Kelly - I haven't seen you since lunchtime.

Miss Baker - I've been busy in the laboratory. Where have you been?

Kelly - the old man sent me on an errand. Tell me, is he still sulking?

Miss Baker - I think so.

Kelly - Bad luck. Just today.

Miss Baker - Why?

And the Snow Falls

A Radio Adaptation by James Kemp

Based on a Play by Miklos Laszlo

Kelly – I meant to ask him for an advance, damn it. Would you do me a good turn? Lend me a quid till Friday.

Miss Baker – I'm awfully sorry, Mr. Kelly, but I have – I can't.

Kelly – You'll get it back on Friday, for sure. Look, I owe you four pounds anyway. Let me have another – that makes five, and that's a nice round figure. I can't promise you the lot on Friday, but I can guarantee three. And the rest in two weeks' time. All right?

Miss Baker – I was counting on having the four pounds yesterday.

Kelly – That was *force majeure*. Something cropped up that I couldn't possibly have foreseen.

Miss Baker – You said it was for three days, and for the last two months, you've kept bringing up those unforeseen circumstances. I miss those four pounds, you know. I've been behind with my rent ever since. It's never happened to me before.

Kelly – You'll have it on Friday. I give you my word. My sister's been taken ill. I simply must get her to a hospital.

Miss Baker – Last time it was your brother. Then it came out that you have no brother.

Kelly – Of course I have. A nephew. What's the difference? Pat, you'll get your money on Friday.

Miss Baker – I haven't got that much money on me.

Kelly – How much have you got?

Miss Baker – Half a crown.

Kelly – Well borrow the rest. You'll get it from me on Friday.

Miss Baker – Go on with you. Whom should I ask?

Kelly – Try Miss Molson. Or the Richards girl. They always have money on them.

Miss Baker – Then why don't you ask them yourself?

Kelly – I don't take money from women. You're an exception. You're not just a woman to me – you're a friend, my pal. You're a gentleman.

Miss Baker – Please stop it. I'll try.

(We hear the sound of the door opening. We hear the sound of a man's footsteps. We hear tinkling noises coming from a box as Smith enters the salesroom).

Kelly – Smithy, old chap.

Smith – Come off it. I haven't a farthing.

(We hear the sound of the telephone ringing and then of the phone receiver being picked up).

Kelly – Hammersley's. Mr. Hammersley? Who's speaking please? Hold on will you?

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A Radio Adaptation by James Kemp

Based on a Play by Miklos Laszlo

Smith – He's in his office.

Kelly – Miss Molson, Mr. Hammersley is wanted on the telephone.

Miss Molson – Miss Richards, telephone for Mr. Hammersley.

Miss Richards – Mr. Ashwood, Mr. Hammersley is wanted on the phone.

(We had a squeaking of the office door opening and then closing).

Hammersley – Who is it?

Kelly – Wouldn't give his name.

Hammersley – Hammersley. Yes it's me. Who is that? Yes. Yes. I see. In that case, I'd like to see you tonight. We'll nine o'clock suit you? No. No. Here in the shop. See you at nine, then. Thank you.

(We hear the sound of a telephone receiver being placed in the telephone cradle).

Kelly – Mrs. Hammersley will be expecting you at the restaurant opposite the Palace after the show, Sir. If you're not there by ten, they'll go home.

Hammersley – All right then. *(Pause. Then the sound of a man's shoes walking is heard).* The old tree doesn't look too bad, does it, Mr. Smith?

Smith – Lit up, it'll look better still. This'll be about enough artificial snow, don't you think?

Hammersley – I think so. Have a look at it from outside. *(Sound of man's shoes followed by sound of bells on shop door is heard with Christmas music coming in from the street. Sound of door closing followed by sound of man's shoes walking).* When will you be finished, Mr. Smith?

Smith – In a few minutes. Mr. Kelly could clear the other window in the meantime.

Hammersley – Not necessary. Time for that on Monday. When Mr. Smith is finished, you had all better go home.

Smith – All right, Mr. Hammersley.

Hammersley – I'm staying on. None of you need trouble to wait. I shall lock up.

(Sound of employees' room door is heard followed by woman's high heels crossing the floor).

Miss Richards – Good night, Mr. Hammersley.

Hammersley – Good night, Miss Richards.

(Sound of man's shoes followed by squeaking of the office door opening and closing).

(The following dialogue between Richards and Kelly takes place in near whispers to prevent Smith from overhearing it).

Miss Richards – Am I going to see you tomorrow?

Kelly – I'm afraid not.

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Miss Richards – And may I ask why not?

Kelly – You know jolly well why not. I do not play 50/50s when the other fifty drives a Rolls Royce.

Miss Richards – But you have done it for the past twelve months.

Kelly – And now I'm done!

Miss Richards – And I'll tell you another one. You're busy working on old Mrs. Hammersley.

Kelly – What's that?

Miss Richards – You have a plot to marry young Miss Hammersley. Marrying into the business, that is. Quite a climber aren't you?

Kelly – Oh shut up!

Miss Richards – I can save you the trouble. Miss Eve Hammersley wouldn't marry one of papa's shop boys

Kelly – That will do.

(Sound of a car horn this heard outside. The sound of a woman's high heels this heard, followed by the sound of the front door opening).

Miss Richards – *(in normal voice)* See you Monday, Smithy.

Smithy – Have a nice time, miss Richards.

(Sound of the front door closing is heard followed by the sound of a car door opening and closing and the car driving away).

(Sound of interior employees' room door opening and closing followed by man's footsteps walking across floor).

Ashwood – Well all the best, Mr. Smith. And thanks for everything.

Smith – You aren't really leaving us?

Ashwood – I got the sack, you know. Half an hour's notice. After nine years of hard work.

Smith – I thought you were more intelligent. I was mistaken.

Ashwood – Sorry to disappoint you.

Smith – To begin with, you are not sacked. It was you who gave notice. Now, you just come in on Monday and carry on as if nothing had happened. Because nothing has happened.

Ashwood – I thought the same a quarter of an hour ago.

Smith – Well?

Ashwood – I went up to the old man, prepared to say I'm sorry. Upon which he handed me my cards and my wages.

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Smith – That’s bad. That is sad!

Ashwood – He said times were bad, a cut was inevitable. He said I’m a young man. I’m single. With my efficiency, I’ll find a job in no time. Blah blah blah.

Smith – By the blazes, did you have to answer him back? I nudged you. I kicked you. I pinched you. But no. You had to resign. A punch on the nose is what you deserve.

Ashwood – Agreed. But he would’ve sacked me anyway. If not today, then tomorrow.

Smith – Tomorrow is Sunday. Tomorrow we’re closed. You know what I’ll do? I’ll talk to him.

Ashwood – Oh no you don’t!

(Sound of two men scuffling is heard).

Smith – Get out of my way, you fool.

Ashwood – Mr. Smith, please listen to me. We’ve known for some time. He can’t afford to keep all seven of us on. Business is slack. Whom do you think he would have to get rid of first?

Smith – Why me of course!

Ashwood – Exactly!

Smith – Because I’m 54 and not as quick as I used to be. And I’m laid up every now and then with my arthritis.

Ashwood – At any rate, he picked me. And you should thank your lucky stars. Because he is right. I am single. No one depends on me. When you have your family to provide for.

Smith – And you have none.

Ashwood – What I meant to say was – I’m not so sure that this present trouble wasn’t meant to save me from a worse one.

Smith – Blah blah blah.

Ashwood – You know, I’ve had a pen pal for the past 6 months.

Smith – Yes I remember. How was she doing?

Ashwood – Fine, thank you. And well, she has said yes.

Smith – Splendid! So the two of you have finally met at last.

Ashwood – Oh no! We haven’t. I was supposed to meet her tomorrow at 3:30 on the pier in front of the pavilion. But that’s off now. Thanks to Mr. Hammersley.

Smith – Wait a minute. Why off? The fact that you just got sacked shouldn’t affect your meeting her.

Ashwood – No. But I would soon have had to tell her that having no income means I can’t afford to marry.

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Smith – At the moment anyway.

Ashwood – Yes, at the moment.

Smith – So you see, it was not only mulish to quarrel with the old man, under the circumstances, it was entirely irresponsible.

Ashwood – I was looking forward to seeing her tomorrow. I don't know the sound of her voice or what her hands are like, what her hair color is. I don't know the shape of her face, though I hope it's oval. I have no idea whether she's skinny or full of curves. And that's an important point to me! And yet I can hear her heartbeat in her letters. And when I'm without a letter from her more than two days, I'm as miserable as sin.

Smith – Well in that case, if I were you, I'd be at the pavilion tomorrow. There's always the chance that her bust is 46.

Ashwood – Or that her Christian name is Grace or Mercy (*pause*) Or Patience! Gag!

Smith – What? You don't even know her name?

Ashwood – No. And she doesn't even know my name. Her box number is 105 and mine is 14. That's as far as identity goes. (*Pause*) Well, goodbye Mr. Smith.

Smith – Goodbye my lad. And mind you, don't forget us. You know where we live. And my wife is always glad to see you.

Ashwood – Thanks Smithy.

(The sound of a man's footsteps are heard, followed by the sound of the front door opening, followed by the sound of traffic on the street).

(These sounds are followed by the sound of the laboratory door opening and closing and then by the sound of a woman's high heels walking across the floor).

Miss Baker – Mr. Ashwood. I want you to know that I've never said a word against you to Mr. Hammersley. Believe it or not.

Ashwood – I'll make a note of that, Miss Patience Baker.

(This is followed by the sound of the door slamming).

Miss Baker – What do you know? He can't even speak a civil word to me.

Smith – Now Pat, stop carrying on about him. I won't have it.

Miss Baker – What's the matter now?

(The sound of the employees' room door opening and closing is followed by a man's footsteps).

Kelly – Good night.

Smith – Good night Mr. Kelly.

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Kelly – Thanks a lot, Pat. You'll get it on Friday. I'll make a point of it. Good night.

Miss Baker – Good night Mr. Kelly.

Kelly – You have a cigarette Mr. Smith?

Smith – You wouldn't smoke my kind.

Kelly – Why not?

Smith – Because I wouldn't give you one.

Kelly – What a sourpuss!

(The sound of a man's footsteps are heard, followed by the sound of the front door opening, followed by the sound of traffic on the street, followed by the sound of the front door closing).

Smith – As anemic as I am, that man makes my blood boil. If you wait for me, Pat. I'll walk with you part of the way.

Miss Baker – Okay

(We hear the sound of a bicycle bell, followed by the front door opening, followed by the sound of traffic on the street, followed by the sound of the front door closing in the sound of a man's footsteps on the floor).

Raymond – Good evening.

Miss Baker – Good evening Raymond. Mr. Hammersley is angry. Where have you been for so long?

Raymond – So what? He'll calm down. What about me? It's my blinking afternoon off. According to the Ministry of bloody labor. And she sends me about on private errands. What does she think I am? A blooming pack horse?

Miss Baker – Who sent you on private errands?

Raymond – Why Mrs. Hammersley of course. Six different places. All over the town. In this blinking weather. On a bike. Risking my neck. You can't even walk on the icy road. I had three spills.

(The sound of the employees' room door opening and closing is followed by a woman's footsteps).

Miss Molson – Coming Pat?

Miss Baker – I'm going with Smithy.

Miss Molson – See you Monday then.

Miss Baker – Good night Bea.

Miss Molson – And Raymond, where have you been hanging about all this time?

Raymond – Why, in a blooming Turkish bath, getting my sore muscles worked on.

Miss Molson – Don't be impertinent.

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Based on a Play by Miklos Laszlo

Raymond – Impertinent? I went to the Turkish baths to remind the old body basher and the old toe-twitcher to be sure and turn up tomorrow at Mrs. Hammersley's.

Miss Molson – Oh, I see. Well, see you Monday.

(We hear the sound of the front door opening, followed by the sound of traffic on the street, followed by the sound of a woman's footsteps on the floor, followed by the sound of a light switch, followed by the sound of the front door closing).

Raymond – She'd better be careful or I'll run her down with my bike. And then she'll enjoy the National Health Service for a couple of months.

Miss Baker – Raymond, running people over have become an obsession with you.

Raymond – Why does she always have to put her spoke into everything?

(The sound of the employees' room door opening and closing is followed by a man's footsteps).

Smith – Let's go Pat.

Miss Baker – Good night Raymond.

Raymond – Later.

(The sound of boxes being moved and Christmas ornaments tinkling is overheard as the office door sound is heard opening and closing followed by the sounds of a man's footsteps).

Hammersley – Who's there?

Raymond – It's me.

Hammersley – Who is me?

Raymond – Raymond.

Hammersley – What the blazes are you doing, making all that noise?

Raymond – Straightening up the Christmas ornaments.

Hammersley – In the dark?

Raymond – When the rest of them left, they turned off most of the lights.

Hammersley – Why didn't you say something to them?

Raymond – I can see all right by the light of the window.

Hammersley – But I couldn't see you.

Raymond – I didn't know that.

Hammersley – Where have you been all afternoon?

Raymond – I had run a few errands for Mrs. Hammersley.

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Based on a Play by Miklos Laszlo

Hammersley – What kind of errands?

Raymond – To Stratton's on Albert Road for Mrs. Hammersley's silver shoes, to Davis's for the Christmas cards. I fetched Master Harold's ski togs from the cleaners because he is leaving for Scotland tomorrow, and went for Mrs. Hammersley's Cape at the furrier's, and then Mrs. Hammersley wanted me to skin some hares for tomorrow.

Hammersley – Will there be hares tomorrow?

Raymond – Yes. Master Harold shot three.

Hammersley – Well you can go home now.

Raymond – But it's so mucky with the Christmas ornaments mixed up. I just started rearranging them.

Hammersley – You can do it on Monday.

Raymond – I don't mind doing it right now.

Hammersley – Don't argue. Good night.

Raymond – Yes sir.

Hammersley – Do you have any money?

Raymond – Not a farthing.

Hammersley – Here's half a crown.

Raymond – Thank you Mr. Hammersley.

Hammersley – I don't suppose my wife bothered to tip you, did she?

Raymond – No sir.

Hammersley – Typical.

(We hear the sound of the front door opening, followed by the sound of traffic on the street, followed by the sound of a man's footsteps on the floor, followed by the sound of the front door closing).

Detective – Good evening.

Hammersley – Good evening. Raymond, go now. Buzz off boy.

Raymond – But I have to lock up the joint. I had better wait for you.

Hammersley – Off you go now.

Raymond – Good night Sir.

(We hear the sound of a man's footsteps on the floor, the sound of the front door opening, followed by the sound of traffic on the street, followed by the sound of the front door closing).

Hammersley – Sit down will you?

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Detective – Thank you. Shall I start now?

Hammersley – Please do.

Detective – We are alone now, I take it?

Hammersley – We are. All of my staff has gone home. That delivery boy was the last to leave.

(Sound of a briefcase being unlocked, followed by rustling paper can be heard).

Detective – Our suspicions were right. Your wife spent the time between eight and 11 last night at the cinema with one of your employees. The Glen Hill Theater. With that Mr. S. Kelly.

Hammersley – With whom?

Detective – With a Mr. S. Kelly. One of your salesmen.

Hammersley – Go on.

Detective – At three minutes after 8 o'clock, we observed Mrs. Hammersley, in the company of Mr. Kelly as they entered the cinema. At 10 o'clock and 37 minutes, they came out of the cinema and walked to the Park Café. They took a table and were observed conversing *tete a tete*. At nine minutes after the hour of 11 o'clock, Mrs. Hammersley left unaccompanied, went to the garage around the corner, and drove off in a pale green car. Do you wish us to continue the observation?

Hammersley – No.

Detective – Some of our clients prefer to be present at the second check.

Hammersley – No. No. I'd like to settle up with you now.

(Sound of rustling paper can be heard).

Detective – Here you are Sir. An invoice for our services. Should the need arise, Sir, we hope you'll again make use of our services.

Hammersley – Here is my check.

Detective – Thank you sir. And good night.

Hammersley – Good night.

Detective – And a Merry Christmas, Sir.

(We hear the sound of the front door opening, followed by the sound of traffic on the street, the sound of a man's footsteps on the floor as the traffic sounds continue through the open door).

Policeman – Is that you Mr. Hammersley?

Hammersley – It is me, constable.

Policeman – I saw the light on the cash desk. Didn't know you were still here.

Hammersley – I was just about to go.

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Detective – Nice tree you have there.

Hammersley – Yes, isn't it?

Policeman – You have the nicest window on this street. Gives you a cozy feeling. Real?

Hammersley – Pardon?

Policeman – Is it a live tree?

Hammersley – Oh no. We have had that tree for years.

Policeman – Well it doesn't look like it. Good night then.

Hammersley – Good night Constable.

(We hear the sound of a man's footsteps on the floor over the traffic noise, followed by the sound of the front door closing and the traffic noise stopping, followed by the sounds of another man's footsteps moving slowly, followed by the sound of the office door opening and closing, followed by the front door and the traffic sounds, followed by the front door closing and no traffic sounds, followed by the sound of an man's footsteps walking rapidly, followed by the sound of the office door opening).

Raymond – Mr. Hammersley! What are you doing? Mr. Hammersley! Don't! You mustn't! Help!

(We hear the sound of a gunshot).

End of Act One

And the Snow Falls

A Radio Adaptation by James Kemp

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Act TWO

(At the beginning of Act 2, the audience listens to a mild version of jazz music as the narrator's voice is heard over the music).

Narrator – The human event known as Death has much in common with the human event known as the Blind Date. Both events have elements of the unknown about them. Both events contain elements of anxiety and surprise. And yes, both events can be associated with feelings of dread.

Unaware of their boss's fate, Mr. Smith has successfully convinced Mr. Ashwood that Mr. Ashwood should in fact keep his date with his female pen pal. Mr. Ashwood has received another communication from the unknown pen pal in which she proposes that they meet at a popular jazz club in London.

Mr. Ashwood has begged Mr. Smith to go with him to the jazz club where he has asked Mr. Smith to serve as his spy whose function will be to peek through the windows of the jazz club in an effort to provide Mr. Ashwood with a preview of this blind date.

(As the front door to the jazz club opens and closes, we see well-dressed people entering and leaving the club, and we hear the sounds of light jazz coming from the open door).

Mr. Ashwood – Mr. Smith, I really don't want to know what she looks like. I've already had enough bad news today. It will be even more difficult if she's beautiful. If she's ugly...well that would just take the cake now, wouldn't it?

Mr. Smith – It will be my secret. What was the name of the book she was supposed to be reading?

Mr. Ashwood – It's an Agatha Christie novel, "Appointment with Death". There will be a drawing of a snake on the dust cover. And don't forget she'll be wearing a sprig of heather like the one I'm wearing on my lapel.

Mr. Smith – Let me look through the window first.

Mr. Ashwood – Do you see her Smithy? I mean do you see a woman reading an Agatha Christie book, wearing a spring of heather on her dress?

Mr. Smith – As a matter of fact, I think I do see such a woman. She's very beautiful.

Mr. Ashwood – Mr. Smith, I specifically asked that you not tell me how she looks.

Mr. Smith – I am sorry but she looks very familiar.

Mr. Ashwood – Familiar how?

Mr. Smith – Well... Frankly, it looks like Miss Patience Baker.

Mr. Ashwood – Gag me! I hope they don't look that much alike.

Mr. Smith – I think it's possible that they might look very much alike.

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Based on a Play by Miklos Laszlo

Mr. Ashwood – And why would that be Mr. Smith?

Mr. Smith – I hate to tell you this Mr. Ashwood. But I believe that the woman I am looking at sitting there reading an Agatha Christie novel and wearing a sprig of heather is in fact, Miss Patience Baker.

Mr. Ashwood – No! Let me see. Move over, Mr. Smith. Bloody hell, she looked right at me. I've been caught!

Mr. Smith – At this point Mr. Ashwood, I think it might be best if you yourself were to go inside and keep your blind date even if it is with Miss Patience Baker.

Mr. Ashwood – But that woman and I have been fighting with each other for the past six months.

Mr. Smith – And that woman is the very woman you have been writing letters to for the past six months. The very woman whom you say you love and who has agreed to marry you.

Mr. Ashwood – All right Mr. Smith, you have been helped me up until this point. Now I think it's time for you to go home to your wife.

Mr. Smith – Very well. Mr. Ashwood, I wish you the best. You can tell me all about it at work on Monday.

(Sound of footsteps walking away as the sound of a door opening is heard with the increased volume of the jazz music coming from inside the club).

Maître d' – *(with a French accent)* Bon soir, Monsieur. Welcome to Café du Paris, London where you can listen to some of the best jazz music this side of the channel. Why don't you come inside? Do you have a reservation?

Mr. Ashwood – Well, I guess, well...lead the way.

(Sound of two pair of shoes walking through the door followed by the closing of the door).

Mr. Ashwood - I'm supposed to meet a young woman here tonight. I think she has already been seated.

Maître d' – By any chance could she be a young woman wearing a sprig of heather?

Mr. Smith – Yes. It's one like I'm wearing on my lapel.

Maître d' – Yes, I believe it is. Come this way and I will show you to her table. A few nights ago, we had a couple who had agreed to wear roses as a signal for their planned rendezvous. That one turned out very nicely. But once we had a very sad case in which the couple agreed to wear orchids. Perhaps, that turned out to be a very unfortunate experience for young man. Another young man mistook the orchid to be a signal for an out-of-the-ordinary meeting, shall we say. The young woman ended up leaving by herself. Tsk. Tsk.

Mr. Ashford – Yes, I'm sure. Well, I do see her over there reading her book. I can take it from here. Thanks...I didn't catch your name.

Maitre d' – Mssr. Pierre. Bon chance, Monsieur. Bon chance. I shall send a waiter tout droit. Immediately that is.

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Mr. Ashwood – Well, you can tell the waiter to take his time.

Maitre d' – But of course, Monsieur. Bien sur.

Mr. Ashwood – Good evening, Patien....I mean, Miss Baker. I uh guess you saw me peak through the window?

Miss Baker – Good evening, Mr. Ashwood. Yes. I saw you and Mr. Smith. Did you bring him as a second for this duel? Sorry, I didn't bring a second.

Mr. Ashwood – Now, Miss Baker... I was hoping that we might be able to keep this pleasant. I mean, it is all sort of funny. I mean us writing each other all these months. Why, you even agreed to marry me.

Miss Baker – I agreed, Mr. Ashwood, to marry the man I had been writing to. And I cannot now believe that you are in fact that man.

Mr. Ashwood – But I am. Look, I have my sprig of heather here. Is there anyone else in the room wearing another sprig of heather besides us?

Miss Baker – No, I would have noticed.

Mr. Ashwood – Well then, there it is. The two of us agreed to meet here.

Miss Baker – And here we are. In all of our glorious clumsiness.

Mr. Ashwood – May I sit down, Miss Baker?

Miss Baker – No. I do not believe that you should sit down, Mr. Ashwood. The irony of this situation is becoming more than I can bear.

Mr. Ashwood – Oh. And what about me?

Miss Baker – What about you, Mr. Ashwood?

Mr. Ashwood – How silly do you think I feel at this point?

Miss Baker – Silly enough to realize that any plans we may have written about are absurd in light of this meeting.

Mr. Ashwood – All right then. If you want me to, I'll leave.

Miss Baker – You must be reading my mind, Mr. Ashwood.

Mr. Ashwood – Well, take my sprig of heather. I won't be needing it anymore. Maybe you can use it to make a new scent in your laboratory.

Miss Baker – If the scent were to be derived from something you might be wearing, Mr. Ashwood, I do not think it would be popular enough to make it worth being manufactured.

Mr. Ashwood – Is that so?

Miss Baker – It is so.

Mr. Ashwood – Then we'll see around, Miss Baker.

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Miss Baker – Not if I am fortunate enough to see you before you see me, Mr. Ashwood. Good night.

Mr. Ashwood – Good night!

(Sound of one pair of shoes walking away followed by another walking toward the table).

Maitre d' – Is everything not going very well, mademoiselle?

Miss Baker – Actually, it all went quite well. He has left, hasn't he?

Maitre d' – And that is the way it was planned?

Miss Baker – Under the circumstances, yes. I would have planned it just as it went tonight.

Maitre d' – Ah well then. Good riddance, mademoiselle. Oui?

Miss Baker – Most decidedly, oui!

(Background jazz music fades as the narrator's voice is heard).

Narrator – On the following Monday morning after this last unfortunate meeting had taken place, another meeting was taking place in another part of London. This early morning meeting, being held extemporaneously at the Hammersley Perfumery, would prove to be a more fortunate meeting for all of those involved.

(We hear a tapping on the window of the shop. Then, the tapping becomes louder. Finally, we hear the shuffling of a man's bedroom slippers scuffing across the floor. We hear a key unlock the door and the door of the shop opening as the door bells ring. There is only the sound of light traffic coming in from outside when the door is opened. It fades when we hear the door close.)

Raymond – Good morning Sir.

Hammersley – Morning (we hear the sound of the door locking again) What time is it?

Raymond – Five minutes past the hour of 7 o'clock.

Hammersley – Dreary morning.

Raymond – Lousy. This slush is worse than frost.

Hammersley – Did you get a paper?

Raymond – None were out yet when I came. I'll go get one right now.

Hammersley – Later.

Raymond – You ought to get dressed. If you're not careful you catch your death. (pause) Well anyway, this pot of Rosie Lea tea will get cold.

Hammersley – Why did you bring tea? You know I drink coffee first thing in the morning.

Raymond – Because it's raining. It rains into a cup of coffee. But it can't rain into a pot of tea.

Hammersley – I suppose.

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Raymond – Besides, they sell cups of coffee but they sell pots of tea.

Hammersley – You could have covered a cup.

Raymond – I suppose I could have.

Hammersley – (sound of tea being important of cup this heard) You're a twerp.

Raymond – I know.

Hammersley – This roll is soaking wet.

Raymond – But I wrapped it in a paper serviette.

Hammersley – That's what I mean. Paper absorbs water. As I said, you're a twerp.

Raymond – I heard you the first time. Let me go get you a fresh roll from the bakers.

Hammersley – I don't think you can. Where did you get this roll?

Raymond – From the Central Hotel. Same as yesterday.

Hammersley – Well the dishes are still here from yesterday. Don't forget to return them today.

Raymond – Don't worry. I won't forget. Let me turn on the gas fire. (Sound of the gas jet can be heard with the striking of a match).

Hammersley – Have you brought everything we talked about?

Raymond – I brought everything on your list. Toothbrush. Large sponge...

Hammersley – Haven't we got enough sponges here already?

Raymond – Well I suppose we have. But I didn't think of that.

Hammersley – Have you got any brains at all?

Raymond – I do. But at the moment they are otherwise engaged.

Hammersley – Who did you see?

Raymond – Last night? I saw Mrs. Hammersley. I gave her your note and said everything should be ready for me to pick up and that I'd call for it early in the morning.

Hammersley – And was it all ready?

Raymond – It was not. Miss Eve **got** the stuff ready for me this morning.

Hammersley – Did they ask where I'm staying?

Raymond – Oh yes.

Hammersley – What did you say?

Raymond – I said I wouldn't know. All Mr. Hammersley just told me was to keep the suitcase until he sent further instructions by telegram.

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Hammersley – What further instructions?

Raymond – Where to take the suitcase.

Hammersley – Did I tell you to make up such claptrap?

Raymond – No but I had to make up something. You told me sir, not to let out that you've been sleeping in your office these last couple of nights. If I said a hotel, they might ring up and find out that you aren't staying there. First I thought I'd say you're staying with us. But they would never believe that anyway.

Hammersley – You didn't say anything about...

Raymond – About what?

Hammersley – What I have forbidden you to speak of.

Raymond – Of course not.

Hammersley – Not to anyone?

Raymond – So help me God. To no one.

Hammersley – That's my boy. Did you deliver the note Mr. Ashwood?

Raymond – I did, Sir. This morning. He was still asleep. I told him he better be in early before the others. Shall I unpack the suitcase?

Hammersley – No. You will have to carry it to the Central Hotel later.

Raymond – Are you going to move there Sir?

Hammersley – Yes.

Raymond – In the block where my old man's a porter, there is a room to rent, with telephone and all the usual. A lovely room, with a double French window. Nice people. Retired Colonel. 30 years, Indian Army. No children at all.

Hammersley – You chatter a lot, don't you?

Raymond – It just struck me. Because I know what decent people they are. My mom does for them.

Hammersley – Just take my suitcase into the office for now.

Raymond – Right you are, governor.

Hammersley – Light the gas plate, Raymond. And put the kettle on.

Raymond – Sir, yes Sir.

Hammersley – (dials a telephone number) Hello... Tell me, is Mr. Taylor up yet? Good I want to talk to him... Yes, it's me. Good morning Danny. Sorry to be so early... You are right. It is urgent. I tried here yesterday... So they told me. I want your advice, your legal advice... And action. No, nothing to do with the shop, purely private.... Not over the phone. Look, I know this is an unearthly hour, but do me a favor and meet me at the central hotel in half an hour... In the lounge... Fine. See you then. Thank you.

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Raymond – (sound of tea kettle boiling) Water is hot. Are you going to shave Sir?

Hammersley – Yes.

Raymond – I'll get the water. (Sound of footsteps on the floor followed by office door opening and closing).

Raymond – I'd better switch the light on.

Hammersley – You'd better not. I don't want people staring at me.

Raymond – It's dark. You'll cut yourself.

Hammersley – I can see well enough.

Raymond – Faces South. Telephone extension in the room. On entrance to the bedroom.

Hammersley – What's That?

Raymond – I'm talking about the room.

Hammersley – What room?

Raymond – At the Colonel's. You see, the flat is too large. Too large for them. Six rooms. And there's only the two of them. Their daughter got married last spring. It was her room. I know it. Flowered wallpaper. And a four poster bed.

Hammersley – That Will Be Quite Enough.

Raymond – I thought I'd mention it because I'm sure you'll never get used to hotel life.

Hammersley – Raymond.

Raymond – Yes?

Hammersley – Don't you dare tell a soul I have been sleeping here.

Raymond – Why should I? It's nobody else's business. (Telephone rings).

Hammersley – Go on, answer it.

Raymond – Raymond speaking... Good morning Madam... I couldn't say. I've just come in... I'll have to look. (Whispers). Mrs. Hammersley wants to know you're here, Sir. Shall I say you're not? So I say I have no telegram with instructions yet?

Hammersley – I'm coming.

Raymond – Hello... Mr. Hammersley is here Madam. He's just coming.

Hammersley – Yes?... Good morning. about... Do you really want an explanation?... Well then – I'm going to see Danny Taylor in half an hour's time. If you ring his office later on, you'll give you the explanation... No, you can't I am afraid. (Sound of receiver being hung up). Raymond, wipe the receiver. It's covered with soap. (We hear a knock at the front door).

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Raymond – Mr. Ashwood.(We hear the sound of a door being unlocked and opened). Good morning Mr. Ashwood.

Mr. Ashwood – Good morning Raymond. Good morning Mr. Hammersley.

Hammersley – Good morning my boy.

Ashwood – I got your note saying I should come.

Hammersley – Good.(Awkward pause)

Ashwood – So... Here I am.

Hammersley – I've asked you to come because I want to apologize. I wish you'd forget how rude and unfair I have been...

Ashwood – Please don't. I haven't been easy to get along with lately either.

Hammersley – It started 10 days ago. I received an anonymous letter. Read it over and over again, but didn't make any sense." It would be advisable to look into your wife's affairs, as she is in the habit of meeting one of your employees," it was signed, " A friend." I just couldn't fathom that. Of course one hears of such things, one reads about them in the papers. But to get a letter like that one self... It is shattering. What does it mean? Is it a joke? Who'd play such a poor joke? Who could the friend be? I even thought it could be my wife herself. Could she want to make me jealous or something? One thinks of a dozen possible solutions. Except one... That it could be true. One doesn't consider that. The day passes. The night comes, but speak doesn't. And all of a sudden it occurs to one what that wretched letter insinuates may be true. Next morning I found myself giving instructions to private detective. While I sat there and gave him my story, I kept assuring myself that my only reason for being in this dismal office was to prove to myself that my wife was one of the best. Because... How could I go on if it were true... How old are you?

Ashwood – Twenty-eight.

Hammersley – Are you in love?

Ashwood – I think I am.

Hammersley – Do you trust her?

Ashwood – I think I do.

Hammersley – If you do, then look at me. I am 60. For 23 years I trusted my wife. I thought my happiness was secure. And look at me. Here I am. With my white hair, fooled by an old woman who fancies herself still young. Because her hair is dyed yellow and her nails scarlet and the auto I gave her touches eighty miles per hour, she wouldn't grow old with me. She preferred to sell me to a gigolo.

Ashwood – Don't take it so hard.

Hammersley – I don't my boy. That page of the ledger is completed. Now, I'm going to open a new account. Up to now, I have worked full time for my family. I thought that's how it had to be. I shall not do it anymore. Night after night, I was awakened three times. First my daughter was coming home from

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a party at midnight. An hour later, my son was returning from God knows where. Then later, I heard my wife driving home. From where? The bridge party? Year-end, year out. Always the same routine. And it never occurred to that I was getting up at seven, winter, spring, summer and fall. I went to work each morning and worked until night just to make it possible for them to spend their time however they wished. You know what, Mr. Ashwood? It's my turn to imitate them. I don't even know what this town looks like by night. I'm going to get to know that.

Ashwood – Is that really your style? You'd soon come back here to the shop, your insides upset, and bored to death.

Hammersley – You really think so? (Pause) Who else was I to suspect but you? You have been with me for nine years. You are a friend of my family. Every so often, my wife and asked you to dinner. Who else was I to... Saturday night after you all had left, I learned that it was not you. Well, that is that. Take off your coat. It's getting warm in here.

Ashwood – Yes. Yes, it's nearly opening time.

Hammersley – The last two nights I've been sleeping on the divan in my office. You know what happened? Every night I woke with a start because I heard the nightbell ring.

Ashwood – What night bell? We don't have one.

Hammersley – That is just it. You know I had to sleep once a week on a narrow divan in an office. And I was awakened by the Bell about every five minutes. Have I told you that I'm a qualified pharmacist?

Ashwood – No, but I've often wondered. You know more about medicine than this shop calls for.

Hammersley – Yes, but I had to throw pharmacy overboard. It was mainly my mother's doing. She got around the family doctor and made him insist that my heart was not the strongest and that I should come home and take it easy for a year. You didn't know my mother. I didn't come home. During that year, my father died and I had to take over the business. I took over literally the same family pressures that he had taken over from his father some 70 years before. I had to shelve a couple of my ambitions. Soon, this place became a part of me.

Ashwood – I know what you mean. I really do. When I left here Saturday night and the shock of losing a job had died down, I realized that I'd lost more than my bread-and-butter. As you said before, this shop becomes part of your life. Why? I don't know. Maybe it's the decency of three generations of honorable man that you can sense within these walls.

Hammersley – thank you my boy. It's a pity my son has none of the stuff you are made of. Yet, he is a brilliant boy, you know. You have seen the mantelpiece in his room, full of trophies. For kicking a ball, for hitting a ball, for throwing a ball and for losing the ball. You cannot beat him there. The only problem is to never earn enough money to tip the bat boy. I sometimes toyed with the idea of marrying my daughter off to you. But that's off. I wouldn't let you get mixed up with my family.

(We hear the sound of Bremen entering the room, the sound of a broom sweeping the floor).

Raymond – The kettle is boiling Sir.

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Hammersley – I'm coming. I haven't washed up yet. I say Mr. Ashwood, could you do a show tonight? Fix something up for us please. Excuse me while I get dressed.

(We hear the sound of footsteps, the office door opening and closing).

Raymond – Mr. Ashwood...

Ashwood – What is it Raymond?

Raymond – Are you in the know also?

Ashwood – In the know about what?

Raymond – In the know about...it! You know. The thing that happened after everyone went home Saturday night.

Ashwood – Yes, I suppose I am.

Raymond – Me too. If I hadn't come back here Saturday night...

Ashwood – Yes, what then?

Raymond – We would be closed now due to the coroner's inquest.

Ashwood – What are you talking about?

Raymond – I can't tell you a thing. I've sworn not to. (Pause). I had left the padlock for my bike in the store room, and I had come back for it. There was no one here, but the light in the office was on. There was such a funny silence. I could smell there was something going wrong. I peeked into the office and my breath stopped. The old man was standing at the desk holding a revolver to his head. You know, the one he bought last year after the burglary at the furrier shop next door.

Ashwood – And?

Raymond – Well, I see him lift the Gat to his head. I jumped on his back. He bit me. Right here on my hand. I got hold of the revolver, but it goes off in the struggle. A policeman come in, but we tell him we didn't hear nothing. I make the copper a cup of tea. And that's that.

Ashwood – That is shocking!

Raymond – What an old bitty his old lady is! With a husband like him, the old Crow sneaks out, and goes spooning with a spiv. She will pay for it. I had her on my list for a long time. As soon as he is divorced, I'll run her over with my bike. She can go spooning at Cottage Hospital.

Ashwood – Mind that you don't go spreading that story around.

Raymond – Me? I wouldn't say a word to anyone.

Ashwood – So tell me Raymond. Is the spiv Mr. Kelly?

Raymond – Now what would your guess? Mr. Smith? Give me a break!

Hammersley – Raymond.

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Raymond – Coming Sir.

Hammersley – Where are my trousers?

Raymond – In the desk. Bottom drawer. Right side.

Ashwood – Mr. Hammersley...

Hammersley – Yes?

Ashwood – It's a dark morning. I think I better switch the lights on.

Hammersley – Do as you wish my boy.

Ashwood – I mean the lights in the windows also.

Hammersley – Right you are.

Ashwood – And the Christmas tree lights too?

Hammersley – Those too. Christmas only comes around once a year.

(Sound of the front door opening, bells on the door and door closing).

Ashwood – Good morning Mr. Smith.

Smith – Ashwood! I told you so.

Ashwood – Yes you told me so.

Smith – What happened?

Ashwood – Mr. Hammersley sent for me.

Mr. Smith – Well isn't that nice? Have you made up?

Ashwood – Yes we have.

Smith – That's great. Is the old man in?

Ashwood – Yes he is.

Smith – So early?

Ashwood – Uh...it seems he came in very early.

Smith – Is he still touchy?

Ashwood – No, Mr. Smith. He isn't anymore.

Smith – Not even a bit touchy?

Ashwood – Not in the least bit.

Smith – Would you call him cheerful?

Ashwood – Well... I would call him calm.

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Smith – Is that so? I am glad. You don't know what a rotten Sunday I spent after I left you at the jazz club. I didn't even have my game of chess.

Ashwood – I am so sorry.

Smith – I need to go change quickly. I can hardly wait to hear your news.

(Sound of a suitcase being dragged across floor).

Hammersley – Good morning Mr. Smith.

Smith – Why, good morning Mr. Hammersley.

Hammersley – How are you old chap? How is the family?

Smith – Uh... Fine. I guess. Thank you.

Hammersley – Glad to hear it.

(We hear the sound of the office door opening and closing).

Smith – He is quite at ease.

Raymond – Can I get anything for you Mr. Ashwood?

Ashwood – No. But where are you going?

Raymond – To the Central Hotel.

Ashwood – Remember. Not a word to anyone.

Raymond – Why would I say anything to anyone? None of their business.

Ashwood - Not even to Mr. Smith.

Raymond – No. It only concerns the three of us.

(We hear the sound of the front door opening, the sound of the door bells, sound of the door closing).

Smith – So fire away.

Ashwood – Where to?

Smith – How did it go with Miss Baker after I left?

Ashwood – It didn't.

Smith – But you did talk to her didn't you?

Ashwood – Only briefly. She didn't show much interest in talking to me.

Smith – Why do I waste my time with you? I'd have done it if I were you. If you are in love with her as much as you say.

Ashwood – Now listen, Mr. Smith...

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Smith – I'm not going to. You know what you are? A mean egotist! A pitiful sight! Because the tables were turned on you and you couldn't ride up on a white horse in knight's armor, you just brushed it all off and left the poor girl sitting there, reading her Agatha Christie. Do you know what you've done to her? You made her feel cheap!

Ashwood – You weren't there. You don't know how she reacted to seeing me.

(Sound of office door opening and closing).

Hammersley – I'll be back in half an hour.

(Sound of front door, door bells and door closing).

Smith – He doesn't look cheerful.

Ashwood – Call me if it gets busy. I'm going to the stock room to scribble another note to her. Perhaps I can make up for Sunday night.

(Sound of stock room door opening and closing).

Smith – Now that's the spirit! (Phone rings) Hammersley's...Mr. Smith speaking. Good morning, Mrs. Hammersley...I'm afraid he's not in. He went out a few minutes ago. As I said, he's not here...Why should I do that?...If he were in, I wouldn't tell you he was out. I'd appreciate it if you didn't call me names, Mrs. Hammersley. Hello...hello? She hung up on me.

(Sound of front door, door bells and door closing).

Smith – Good morning, Pat.

Miss Baker – Good morning, Mr. Smith.

Smith – How are you?

Miss Baker – Not so bad really. See you in a few.

(Sound of employees' room door, woman's shoes walking and door closing).

(Sound of front door, door bells and door closing).

Raymond – Good morning, Mr. Smith.

Smith – Morning.

(Sound of broom sweeping).

Raymond – I say, Mr. Smith. Would you like to try again?

Smith – Try again at what?

Raymond – At the sweepstakes.

Smith – Buzz off.

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Raymond – With pleasure, Mr. Smith. You're right. What difference would twenty-five thousand pounds make to you?

Smith – What are you babbling about?

Raymond – You heard me. Sweepstakes.

Smith – I told you last month...

Raymond – Never again, right? Here, buy a ticket before I've sold them all.

Smith – I haven't any money.

Raymond – You can have it on credit til Friday..

Smith – Hand me a ticket.

Raymond - Here. Fill it in

Raymond – 'Til Friday, mind you.

(Sound of employees' room door opening and closing, and woman's high heels walking).

Smith – Have a nice weekend off, Pat?

Miss Baker – Why yes I did. Did you?

Smith – I had to run an errand for a friend. Otherwise, yes. Ashwood is back.

Miss Baker – I know. I saw his coat on a peg.

Smith – You don't mind, do you?

Miss Baker – No. I don't think I mind.

Smith – Did you go to a show?

Miss Baker – Not this weekend, Smithy. I had a bit of a headache. *(sneezes)*

Smith – Want an aspirin?

Miss Baker – I think I have a cold coming on. I sat in a draft Sunday evening. A cold draft.

Smith – Let's see if you have a fever.

(Sound of drawer opening and closing).

Miss Baker – I haven't any fever, Mr. Smith. *(sneezes)*

Smith – Sit down, Pat. Here. Put this under your tongue. You look like a sparrow shivering on a telephone wire. (Pause). Let's have a look. One hundred. I'll go get your things. You'd better go home and get into bed.

Miss Baker – What for? Go to bed and get bored? I need to make up the parcels. Raymond needs to be at the post office by nine.

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Smith – Take it easy. I can do that.

Miss Baker – Will you do that? Thank you. The orders are on Mr. Hammersley's desk.

Smith – I'll find them.

Miss Baker – Raymond can help you.

Smith – All right.

(Sound of office door opening and closing).

Miss Baker – And don't forget, please put a calendar and a sample of our new shampoo into every parcel.

(Sound of office door opening and closing).

Smith – No new scent?

Miss Baker – No. Mr. Hammersley said we should give scent only to our personal shoppers. *(sneezes)*

(Sound of stock room door opening and closing).

Ashwood – Good morning, Miss Baker. Smith just told me you were not feeling up to much. If you'd rather go home, I'll explain it to Mr. Hammersley. There's no point in your staying if you're ill. Did you hear what I just said?

Miss Baker – Would you mind leaving me alone? *(sneezes)*

Ashwood – Listen, Miss Patien...Miss Baker. Listen to me just this once. Get your things together and go home.

Ashwood – Here. Look in this mirror. You look like two penny's worth of cheese.

Miss Baker – That's the limit!

Ashwood – The limit is that an adult person insists on spreading germs all over the place. As a matter of fact, I have a bit of a cold myself. Therefore, I am not in any danger of catching your cold myself. But there are others to be considered.

Miss Baker – What makes you think they'd prefer your germs to mine?

Ashwood – I'd go home willingly if I could be spared. But we can get along for a couple of days without you.

Miss Baker – Tell me Mr. Ashwood, what is there about me that makes you so angry?

Ashwood – I don't know. Nothing in particular, I guess.

Miss Baker – I won't feel hurt. Be honest. Whatever it might be. In fact, I'll actually be obliged to you if you tell me. I'm not so conceited. I can take it. Really I can. Do you think me dull? Does my face upset you? *(sneezes)*

Ashwood – I've never called you ugly. And I've never denied that are the best worker among the ladies.

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Miss Baker – Yet you said a minute ago that I could easily be spared.

Ashwood – That is not true. Please don't twist my words. What I said was that you could be more easily spared than I. And that's no insult. No one but a fool would stagger around with a cold if he's got a chance of taking to bed.

Miss Baker – I can't even get a cold without being criticized by you. (*sneezes*)

Ashwood – Never mind about that. There's malicious criticism and there's sympathetic criticism.

Miss Baker – And to keep calling me Patience when you know I hate the name...is that sympathy too?

Ashwood – That's just a clear case of harmless teasing that I'd rather refrain from discussing right now.

Miss Baker – And the scene on Saturday night when you called me a female lingo?

Ashwood – For that, I apologize.

Miss Baker – You do? (*sneezes*)

Ashwood – I am very sorry indeed.

Miss Baker – And what about the jazz club Sunday night?

Ashwood – What about it? You're the one who asked me to leave.

Miss Baker – I did not!

Ashwood – Did.

Miss Baker – Did not.

Ashwood – Did.

Miss Baker – See. See how you hate me? You've hated me ever since I crossed that threshold. For the past six months, I haven't had a kind word from you. (*sneezes*)

Ashwood – That's not true.

Miss Baker – It is. It is. It is! The others here all like me. Mr. Smith does. Miss Richards does. Miss Molson does. Mr. Hammersley is always nice to me. Even Raymond likes me.

Ashwood – You're forgetting Kelly.

Miss Baker – I am not. Compared to you, he's a gentleman. You're the only one against me.

Ashwood – Now let's get this straight. You talk as if I had every reason to kneel down to you and offer allegiance. You seem to forget how hostile your behavior to me has been ever since you crossed that threshold, as you put it, and you forget about the remarks you make against me behind my back. I was only too ready to help you to fit in when you first started work here.

Miss Baker – Are you kidding?

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Ashwood – Haven't you tried to make a laughing stock of me? Didn't you say you'll have to meet my mother before you believe I was born the natural way and not assembled from spare parts?

Miss Baker – Didn't you say you supposed I was twins because one single individual couldn't possibly be all that dumb?

Ashwood – Of course I did, after that spare parts remark from you.

Miss Baker – As did I, following that wisecrack about choosing between me and a toothache in which case, you said you'd choose the toothache.

Ashwood – Yes. After you said that in my presence, you wish you had worn woolen undies to keep your body from becoming icebound.

Miss Baker – I still feel that way. *(sneezes)*

Ashwood – Your wish has come true. Whenever I think of you, I see red flannel underwear. You know what you are? A landlady. A born boardinghouse nosey Parker. A sour spinster, looking down her nose at her lodgers and making everyone's life miserable. Incapable of loving anyone except her cat. You haven't a penny's worth of warmth and tenderness in you.

Miss Baker – Why did you say all of that?

Ashwood – Because you asked me to. You've never loved anyone. Don't expect anyone to love you. And least of all me.

Miss Baker – So I'm cold and unpleasant am I?

Ashwood – You made me say it.

Miss Baker – So I am incapable of loving anyone, Mr. Ashwood?

Ashwood – I'm convinced of that.

Miss Baker – And no one could ever care for me, Mr. Ashwood?

Ashwood – Precisely.

Miss Baker – That's where you're making a mistake. These letters you see here, have been written to me by a kind, gentle man. They were written to me by someone who said he loves me. Someone very different from you, Mr. Ashwood. I'm not in the least bit hurt by your frankness. I even asked you to be frank. Now how am I supposed to reconcile the wonderful man who wrote these letters with the imbecile who stands in front of me now? You machine-made doodle!

(Sound of woman's heels walking quickly. Sound of laboratory door opening and slamming shut.)

(Sound of stock room door opening and closing followed by man's footsteps)

Smith – Have you persuaded her to go home?

Ashwood – You know now to whom I have been writing love letters for the past 6 months.

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Mr. Smith – Yes, as we discovered at the jazz club Sunday night, you have been writing love letters to Miss Patience Baker.

Ashwood – Out of twenty million women in this country, I chose Miss Patience Baker as the one woman with whom I would exchange emotional outpourings of love with a view toward marriage.

Smith – It sounds like some kind of bad joke.

Ashwood – Mr. Smith, I've been an orphan since I was nine. I haven't got a soul to care for. I've constantly been on the move from one room with breakfast to another. I dream of a home of my own where someone waits for me. A wife. That's why I started writing letters top Box one hundred and five. Unknowingly, to Miss Patience Baker.

(Sound of stock room door opening and closing followed by sound of woman's heels walking).

Miss Richards – Good morning.

Ashwood – Morning, Flo.

Smith – Morning Flo. Mr. Ashwood, does Pat know about your past and about your desires for a future?

Ashwood – Of course. I told her in my letters.

Smith – Then try to figure it out. She spent all of Sunday evening waiting in a jazz club for the man of her dreams to show up. And who walked in wearing a sprig of heather in his lapel? You! Her arch nemesis at work. Give her some time to work all of this out.

(Sound of employees' room door opening and closing followed by sound of woman's heels).

Miss Molson – Good morning everyone.

Ashwood – Good morning, Bea.

Smith – Good morning, Miss Molson.

Miss Richards – Morning.

Smith – On the other hand, it won't do for you to simply stick your head in the sand.

Ashwood – All I know is that I may never be able to convince Miss Baker that I am the sort of man in her letters.

Smith – Well, it is a hopeless task.

(Sound of front door opening, door bells, front door closing).

Hammersley – Has anyone called for me while I've been gone?

Ashwood – No, Mr. Hammersley.

(Sound of man's footsteps followed by office door opening and closing).

Smith – Gracious me. There was a phone call from his wife.

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Ashwood – What did she want?

Smith – I told her he was out, and she said he was in and that I was a damned liar!

Ashwood – Forget it. She'll ring again.

(Sound of employees' room door opening and closing followed by sound of man's footsteps).

Miss Molson – Get a move on, Raymond. You'll be late.

Raymond – How the hell am I to get a move on with all of these deliveries lined up?

Miss Molson – Now then, watch your language, Raymond.

Raymond – I'd like to see you ride to Victoria Road station carrying all of this lot.

Miss Molson – Remember your place, Raymond.

Raymond – Remember my place. Remember my place. You better give me some more stamps for the postage.

Miss Molson – Is Mr. Hammersley in yet?

Smith – In his office.

(sound of knocking on office door).

Miss Molson – Good morning, Mr. Hammersley. May I have the keys to the cash register, please?

Miss Baker – Here, Raymond. You left this package behind.

Raymond – To send a chap out with a load like this on a bike in this weather. It's a slap in the face of the working class, I tell you. That's what it is. A slap in the face.

Miss Molson – Let me see the list, Raymond so that I can figure out the postage.

(Sound of laboratory door opening and closing, followed by woman's heels on floor and by a sneeze).

Smith – Did you decide to go home, Pat?

Miss Baker – No, Mr. Smith. I feel much better.

(Sound of woman's heels, followed by opening of stock room door and closing).

(Sound of front door opening, of door bells, of door closing, followed by man's footsteps).

Kelly – Good morning everyone.

(Sound of office door opening and closing).

Hammersley – Good morning, Mr. Kelly.

Kelly – Sorry I'm late, Mr. Hammersley.

Smith – Don't you think we ought to start decorating the other window now, Mr. Hammersley?...Please, Mr. Hammersley.

And the Snow Falls

A Radio Adaptation by James Kemp

Based on a Play by Miklos Laszlo

Hammersley – What do you want, Mr. Smith?

Smith – I thought we were going to arrange the other display window, Mr. Hammersley.

Hammersley – What? What do you want? Why are you pestering me?

Smith – The other window...

Hammersley – What do you want to do with the other window?

Smith – Arrange it.

Hammersley – Well, arrange it then. Why make a problem out of everything. Can you do nothing on your own, Mr. Smith?

(Sound of front door opening, of door bells, of door closing, followed by woman's footsteps).

Mrs. Winters – Good morning.

Ashwood – Good morning, Mrs. Winters.

Kelly – Good morning, madam. What can I do for you?

Mrs. Winters – I want a safety razor, a shaving stick, and a brush. Pack it all up quickly please.

Kelly – Straight away, Madam. After-shave lotion? Doesn't he need any hair cream?

Mrs. Winters – Is there a blade in the razor?

Kelly – Yes, Madame. Five. Anything I can do for you, Madame?

Mrs. Winters – Nothing else. I'm in a hurry.

Kelly – Can I interest you in a new shade of lipstick?

Mrs. Winters – I do not need anything else. Now can we please conclude this matter?

Kelly – Hand lotion? Eyelash makeup?

Mrs. Winters – As I said, I do not need anything else.

Kelly – Very well, Madame. Here you are.

(Sound of cash register).

Miss Molson – Your change, Madame.

Mrs. Winters – Thank you and good day!

Hammersley – Good day, Madame. Please visit us again soon.

(Sound of front door opening, of door bells, of door closing).

Hammersley – Mr. Kelly!

Kelly – Mr. Hammersley?

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Hammersley – Why did you pester that woman?

Kelly – I didn't pester her, sir.

Hammersley – You tried to force her to buy things she didn't want.

Kelly – That's good salesmanship, sir.

Hammersley – Not in my shop. Not in the House of Hammersley. You heard her say she was in a hurry. Why did you make personal remarks?

Kelly – But I didn't.

Hammersley – You referred to the lady's husband as needing the shaving supplies. How do you know she wanted the shaving supplies for him?

Kelly – She wasn't the type to shave...

Hammersley – You were insolent to the lady.

Kelly – That's not true.

Hammersley – Not true? Am I a liar, Mr. Kelly?

Kelly – You got me wrong, Mr. Hammersley.

Hammersley – Shut up! For once and for all, just shut up!

Kelly – You seem a bit put out this morning, sir. If I dare say so.

Hammersley – You rascal! You swine! You rat! You scoundrel! Get out! Get out of my house! Get out!

(Sound of crashing glass)

Kelly – Careful, Mr. Hammersley. You could injure someone.

Hammersley – Get out, I tell you! Get out! Someone throw him out! Throw him out or I'll kill him!

(Sound of scuffling followed by hit to face).

Ashwood – Mr. Smith, help me please.

(sound of front door opening, of door bells, of crashes, of door closing).

Miss Molson – Well. Did you ever?

(Sound of laboratory door opening and closing followed by woman's high heels).

Miss Baker – What happened?

Miss Molson – It was shocking! For no reason whatsoever, Mr. Hammersley started throwing bottles at Mr. Kelly. Our best salesman too. To throw glass about when there might be customers. Thank God, Mr. Kelly dodged it!

Raymond – He won't dodge me. I'll get him!

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(sound of front door opening, of door bells, of bicycle bells, of door closing).

Miss Baker – Was it one of Mr. Hammersley's heart attacks?

Miss Molson – Who knows? I'd better call Mrs. Hammersley. (Sound of phone being dialed). Mrs. Hammersley? Miss Molson speaking. Your husband is not well. I thought you ought to know. Very good, Mrs. Hammersley. *(sound of phone receiver being hung up)*. She's on her way.

Ashwood – Where does Mr. Hammersley keep his drops? I can't find them.

Miss Molson – In his desk. I'll get them.

Miss Baker – How is he?

Ashwood – Poorly.

Miss Baker – What has Mr. Kelly done?

Ashwood – I'll tell you some other time. Why are you still here? I told you to go home. Wait. Forget that. I just need to say...Pat... that I am sorry about last night. Smith, get Kelly's hat and coat and hand them out to him.

(Sound of employees' room door opening, followed by man's footsteps, followed by door closing).

Kelly – (from outside, muffled) – You should be ashamed of yourself, Ashwood. And in the presence of a lady!

Smith – Here you are, Mr. Ashwood. Kelly's coat and hat. Is he sacked?

Ashwood – That would be my guess, Mr. Smith.

Smith – Didn't I tell you there'd be a scandal with Kelly in the lead?

(sound of front door opening, of door bells, of bicycle bells, of door closing).

Miss Baker – Raymond. What's the matter with you?

Raymond – I had a collision.

Miss Baker – With what?

Raymond – Not what, Miss Baker. You mean with whom. I collided with Mr. Kelly!

End of Act Two

And the Snow Falls

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Act Three

(Sound of jazzy Christmas music can be heard and then fades as Narrator's voice is heard).

Narrator – In the human world of commerce, decisions often need to be made about how best to secure the wellbeing of a business. When one employee collides with another employee, the business owner needs to look at both employees and decide which one is the most valuable, the most loyal and best represents the interests of the business. Such decisions can be easily made. Some are not so easy.

On Oxford Street in the London of 1938, fortunately that decision was an easy one for Mr. Hammersley. However, his business was left with one fewer sales person at that time of the year when sales persons were most needed. But so were delivery boys needed at Christmas. So, Mr. Hammersley had to weigh sales person to delivery boy and to then decide.

Raymond had been a trustworthy employee. Raymond had been instrumental in preventing Mr. Hammersley's suicide. Raymond had been pestering Mr. Hammersley for years to be made a sales person.

Enter Ernie. Ernie had proven himself a skilled bicyclist. Ernie was willing to be trained by Raymond. Ernie was a street urchin like Raymond and needed the job. Besides, the delivery boy's uniform fit him.

Today is December 24, 1938. It is another Saturday. In fact, it is the next Saturday after the one on which Mr. Hammersley learned of his wife's indiscretions.

Earlier in July of that year, "Downbeat" magazine featured an article about the new music craze called "Boogie-Woogie". The news of the day reported how the Italian dictator Mussolini had provoked the Spanish Civil War. One year earlier, a painter named Pablo Picasso had been commissioned to create a painting depicting the bombing of the Basque town of Guernica by German and Italian forces.

On Oxford Street, there was a new skiff of overnight snow. A well-dressed, former delivery boy was walking toward the perfumery on that street. Raymond now looks like a sales person, dressed in a flashy, off-the-peg suit, overcoat and trilby. Raymond opens the front door (sound of front door, door bells and door closing), walks into the employees' room (sound of employees' room door opening) where he hangs his outer clothes on the peg where Mr. Kelly's clothes once hung (sound of employees' room door closing followed by sound of Raymond's footsteps).

Ashwood – Raymond, light the gas fire would you please?

Raymond -

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