

making goes on—ha, ha. The kitchen's the old dairy, with the dining-room next door in the hen-house—and the other spare bedroom is the piggery.

Robert I'm glad I didn't choose that.

Jacqueline (*opening the door to bedroom 1*) No, this is nicer. Lovely big bed.

Robert (*peering in*) Lovely.

Robert carries his case into the room

Jacqueline provocatively presses against him as he squeezes past her. Bernard glances at his watch while Jacqueline is not looking, and peers out of the window.

Jacqueline (*murmuring*) And don't lock your door tonight.

Bernard (*turning*) What?

Jacqueline (*turning to him*) Er . . . we've got to shop for more tonight.

Bernard Ah—yes.

Jacqueline I'd better make a list. What were you planning for dinner?

Bernard I, er . . . hadn't really thought.

Jacqueline You hadn't thought? Oh we must plan a nice meal. Is this

Suzette girl a good cook?

Bernard Cordon bleu, they said. And she serves it all, and washes up afterwards.

Jacqueline You were going to do yourselves proud!

Bernard Well, you know how Robert likes the little extras in life.

Jacqueline Yes. Well then, you can come with me.

Bernard Me? You don't need me.

Jacqueline Yes, I do.

Bernard What for?

Jacqueline To pay the bill.

Bernard But . . .

Jacqueline And carry the bags.

Bernard Ah.

Jacqueline And we must hurry—it's getting late.

Jacqueline goes into the kitchen

Bernard (*frantically*) Oh, God! Oh, hell!

Robert appears from bedroom 1

Robert Very nice for a cow-shed, I must say.

Bernard (*grabbing him urgently*) Quickly, Robert. We've got to think fast here.

Robert Eh?

Bernard I need your help, old son.

Robert What's wrong?

Bernard (*going to the bar*) Have a drink.

Robert (*sitting*) Already?

Bernard You're going to need it. Usual vodka and tonic?

Robert Plenty of tonic, please.

Bernard Same old Robert. (*Pouring two vodkas*) How long have we known each other, Robert? Fifteen years?

Robert Must be.

Bernard Don't see enough of each other.

Robert No.

Bernard But that doesn't stop us remaining good friends, does it?

Robert No, indeed.

Bernard (*bringing the drinks*) That's why we know we can rely on each other in a crisis.

Robert Certainly. What crisis?

Bernard Hold on to your hat, Robert.

Robert My hat?

Bernard (*sitting beside him on the sofa*) There's something you didn't know about this weekend.

Robert What?

Bernard Jacqueline wasn't supposed to be here.

Robert I know, she . . . no, I didn't know that, no.

Bernard She was going to go and stay with her mother. Much against her wishes.

Robert Her mother's?

Bernard No, Jacqueline's.

Robert Why?

Bernard She doesn't like leaving me on my own.

Robert Ah.

Bernard But there was something *she* didn't know.

Robert What?

Bernard I wasn't.

Robert You weren't what?

Bernard Going to be on my own. Know why?

Robert I was coming.

Bernard No, not . . . well yes, but that came later. And that didn't matter, because you'd provide a good alibi anyway.

Robert Alibi?

Bernard Yes.

Robert What for?

Bernard The reason I wasn't going to be on my own.

Robert (*puzzled*) Do you think you could elucidate a little?

Bernard You see, Robert, some time ago I met this girl.

Robert Really?

Bernard Superb. A model. Knock-out!

Robert Really?

Bernard Don't sound so surprised.

Robert No, no—it's just . . .

Bernard I fell for her—hook, line and sinker.

Robert Really?

Bernard And she fell for me.

Robert *Really?*

Bernard Please don't keep saying really like that!

Robert Sorry.
Bernard The point is, Jacqueline was supposed to be away for the weekend while Suzanne—that's the girl!—was here.
Robert (*looking round*) Here?
Bernard It's her birthday. It was all organized, you see, for a nice little celebration. And then the old buzzard got the flu.
Robert The girl?
Bernard Jacqueline's mother!
Robert Ah.
Bernard That's why Jacqueline's still here. She couldn't go. And it's landed me right in it.
Robert In what?
Bernard Use your brains, Robert!
Robert Yes, right.
Bernard She's coming here! She's going to be here any moment.
Robert I thought she had the flu.
Bernard The girl! The girl!
Robert Oh, the girl.
Bernard She's on her way! She was supposed to be on the same train you were on.

Jacqueline (*the light finally dawning*) Really!

Robert Yes, really.
Robert I see!
Bernard You didn't, did you?
Robert What?
Bernard See her.
Robert I don't know her.
Bernard (*making curvaceous gestures*) Oh, you'd have known if you'd seen her.
Robert Really?
Bernard Knock-out! I was supposed to pick her up at the station.
Robert You are right in it, aren't you?
Bernard That's why I need your help.
Robert My help?
Bernard Yes.
Robert How can I help?
Bernard I want you to say she's yours.
Pause
Robert My what?
Bernard Your mistress.
Robert My . . .
Bernard Yes.
Robert No.
Bernard Robert . . .
Robert No!
Bernard Robert . . .
Robert No!

Bernard Shhh! Why not?
Robert I've already got a . . . It wouldn't work.
Bernard It's the only way out.
Robert No, no, no. I can't. No, no, definitely not. It couldn't possibly work.
Bernard Why not?
Robert I've never even met her. I don't want to meet her. And even if I had met her I couldn't just turn up with her. I mean what would Jacqueline say?
Bernard Why should Jacqueline object?
Robert Jacqueline's my . . . I mean, she's . . .
Bernard You're a grown man. You've a perfect right to have a girl-friend.
Robert But she knows I haven't got a girl-friend. I've never even mentioned a girl-friend.
Bernard You have a private life, haven't you?
Robert That's my affair.
Bernard Exactly—and this is your affair. Who's to know?
Robert I'm to know! Jacqueline's to know. Jacqueline's mother's to know. I can't do it. I won't!
Bernard You must, Robert. My marriage depends on it.
Robert Is that why you invited me here? As an alibi?
Bernard No, no, not at all.
Robert But don't you think I'd have been somewhat in the way?
Bernard You wouldn't have been sharing the bed with us, old boy.
Robert I'm so glad.
Bernard But when you rang, I thought, well why not? I'd love old Robert to meet her. She's a knock-out!
Robert So you said.
Bernard And it would stop the neighbours talking.
Robert Why?
Bernard They'd think she was with you too.
Robert Well she isn't!

The phone rings

Bernard (*answering*) Hallo? . . . Suzanne—my darling! Where are you—still at the station? . . . I know, I'm sorry I'm not there, my angel, but something a bit tricky has turned up. Jacqueline's still here! . . . Yes—she's had to cancel her trip to her mother's. . . . No, no, no—don't worry, you don't need to go back. I've worked something out—it's all fixed.
Robert No, it isn't.
Bernard (*gesturing at him*) You remember my friend Robert I was telling you about?
Robert No, she doesn't.
Bernard Yes, the one who's staying here too . . .
Robert No, he isn't.
Bernard Well he's agreed to pretend you're his girl-friend.
Robert (*shouting into the phone*) No, he hasn't!
Bernard (*wrestling him for the phone*) Get off! Get off! (*Into the phone*) It's all right, my angel. Just take a taxi and get here as soon as you can. Then

all you have to do is pretend you're with Robert, and Jacqueline won't suspect a thing.

They are practically on the floor, fighting for the phone

Robert No, no!

Bernard Yes, yes! . . . I love you, beautiful. (*He blows kisses down the line. Tearing the phone away from Robert's grasp and replacing it*) There—it's fixed.

Robert I refuse! I absolutely, emphatically and categorically refuse!

Bernard Why? Is it so much to ask my oldest friend to help me out of a jam?

Robert It can't work. Think about it.

Bernard Why not?

Robert A whole weekend pretending to be lovers when we've never even met! Jacqueline will see through it in a second!

Bernard Why should she?

Robert For one thing, why haven't we arrived together?

Bernard She missed the train. Caught the next one.

Robert For another, how is it I'll seem to know nothing about her?

Bernard I'm taking Jacqueline off to the village. Give you time to get to know each other.

Robert For another, why is it we don't sleep together?

Bernard You do.

Robert For another . . . *What?*

Bernard You'll share the cow-shed.

Robert No, no, no . . .

Bernard Only temporarily of course. (*Pointing*) Until I arrive and you go into the piggery.

Robert I won't do it. Absolutely impossible!

Bernard But it's so simple.

Robert (*apologetic*) Simple! Simple! It's lunatic! People don't go swanning round the country taking mistresses to friend's houses.

Bernard Yes, they do.

Robert Well I don't.

Bernard What do you do?

Robert I visit mistresses in their own . . . I mean, I don't *have* mistresses. I'm not that sort.

Bernard But it's the only way out, Robert.

Robert No.

Bernard And I thought you were a true friend.

Robert I'm going back to Paris.

Bernard You can't!

Robert I'm leaving now. (*Heading for Bedroom 1*) Give Jacqueline my apologies. Tell her I've got an important business meeting I've just remembered I'd forgotten.

Robert vanishes

Bernard (*calling*) Well all right, but I'll still have to tell Jacqueline that Suzanne is your mistress.

Robert reappears

Robert Why?

Bernard What else can I tell her?

Robert Well you . . .

Bernard It's my only alibi.

Robert No, it's not—you can—

Bernard And Suzanne is on her way. She'll be here any second.

Robert Well she—

Bernard All ready to rush into your arms.

Robert Ahhhh! (*He goes into a dance of frustration and hammers his fist on a beam in rage*)

Jacqueline comes out of the kitchen and stands watching him for several seconds

He becomes aware of her and stops, looking foolish

Woodworm. You've got woodworm.

Jacqueline Are you trying to concuss them?

Robert Yes . . . no . . . I . . . I'm leaving.

Jacqueline What?

Robert I'm sorry, but I've remembered a very important business meeting. I must go back to Paris at once.

Jacqueline But you can't!

Bernard Just what I told him.

Robert (*heading back to bedroom 1*) I'm sorry, I must.

Jacqueline That's ridiculous.

Bernard Just what I said.

Robert It was lovely to see you both again.

Jacqueline I forbid it!

Bernard Just what I did.

Robert Beit up, you!

Bernard Tell her the truth, Robert.

Robert Just be careful or I might!

Bernard He's ashamed, you see.

Jacqueline What about?

Bernard He won't bring it out into the open.

Jacqueline What? Bring what out?

Bernard I've told him to be honest about it.

Jacqueline *What?*

Bernard The great affair.

Jacqueline Affair?

A moan from Robert

Bernard Yes. Since you're going to be here now, we may as well have it out. I've known for some time, you see.

Jacqueline You've known?

Robert No, no . . .

Bernard He told me all about it.