

Jacqueline I'm amazed you're not *petrified* with shame by now.

Robert Jacqueline, I beg you—please keep calm.

Jacqueline Keep calm! In the circumstances, I think I'm keeping remarkably calm.

Robert Then please don't shout.

Jacqueline I'm not shouting—not yet!

Robert He'll hear us!

Brigit 1 enters suddenly from the kitchen, with four side plates, four dessert plates and four dinner plates

Brigit 1 Aha!

Jacqueline Aha—what?

Brigit 1 Just—aha! I've brought the plates, that's all. Aha. . . .

Jacqueline Just put them on the table.

Brigit 1 Should I lay the places? (*She starts to lay them out*)

Jacqueline No, just leave them.

Brigit 1 But it's just as easy to set them out.

Jacqueline No. I'll set them out.

Brigit 1 Just leave them here? (*She puts the rest of the plates down*)

Jacqueline Yes.

Brigit 1 Just in a pile?

Jacqueline Yes.

Brigit 1 (*picking the plates up*) It wouldn't take a moment to . . .

Jacqueline Please. Just put them down in a pile. Just as they are.

Brigit 1 Just as you like. (*She leaves the plates on the table and goes to Robert*) And how about you, darling?

Robert What about me?

Brigit 1 Are you enjoying yourself, darling?

Robert Yes. Having a simply wonderful time.

Brigit 1 That's nice—so give us a kiss then, darling.

Robert Not now.

Brigit 1 (*to Jacqueline*) You wouldn't mind, would you, madam? Not going to upset you or anything like that?

Jacqueline Why on earth should it upset me? (*She looks towards the kitchen and sniffs*) What was happening in the kitchen when you left?

Brigit 1 Oh Lord—must be the mushrooms. That's the trouble with electric stoves—they don't understand the vegetables like the gas does. Hold on! I'll be right there.

Brigit 1 exits to the kitchen

Jacqueline I'm fed up to the teeth with that one. You've really picked yourself a dazzler there! (*She begins to lay out the plates—testily*)

Robert Jacqueline, darling, I implore you . . .

Jacqueline You can save your breath. I don't wish to discuss anything with you—except to ask where on earth did you find her?

Robert If only I could explain.

Jacqueline There is nothing to explain. I don't wish to hear it.

Robert If only you'd listen to me . . .

Jacqueline Never again . . . (*She sets a chair at the table*)

Robert I should never have agreed to come here. You and I, together, actually under Bernard's nose—hardly politic, rather distasteful.

Jacqueline You weren't so fussy when we saw each other in town.

Robert Right. But in town it didn't seem so distasteful. But here, in the country, in your house—that is, in his house. Well, it all seems a little sordid.

Jacqueline How dare you use that word. The only thing sordid in this house at this moment is that you've seen fit to import your mistress!

Robert But she's not my mistress!

Jacqueline I see. I suppose now you're going to start telling me that she's your long lost cousin, or your niece—well, you're wasting your time.

Jacqueline exits to the bedroom up L

Robert No. You've hit the problem right on the spot. That's exactly it. She's my niece. That is, well, exactly what you said—I'm her uncle.

Jacqueline returns with a chair

Jacqueline Oh, for goodness sake! Stop it, will you! (*She sets the chair at the table*)

Robert I can't stop now, don't you see, that's exactly why she didn't want to sleep in the same room with me.

Jacqueline She didn't want to sleep in the same room as you because you spend all night wheezing and sneezing—keeps your girl-friend from getting a wink of sleep.

Robert Not my girl-friend, my niece.

Jacqueline If she's your niece, how does your niece know that you sneeze all night?

Robert Because I'm her uncle.

Jacqueline You never sneeze in bed with me. (*She picks up another chair*)

Robert Ah, but that's in town, I only get hay fever in the country, so I only sneeze in the country . . . (*He sneezes*)

Jacqueline God bless you. (*She sets the chair at the table*)

Robert Thank you. You see, your Bernard thought it a little odd that I always seem to be on my own. So when he invited me down here, I thought it wise to bring my niece.

Jacqueline Well, why haven't you told him she's your niece?

Robert That's the trick of it. That's where the politics come in. If he thinks she's my mistress, then he's not going to start getting ideas about the relationship between you and me—is he?

Jacqueline No—I didn't see it like that . . . No, darling, now you've explained things I can only ask you to forgive me. I didn't understand. I should have trusted you.

They go to kiss each other

Robert Of course you should—

Jacqueline My brave, brave boy! My big, bold lion! (*She kisses him*)

Brigit I enters suddenly from the kitchen, with a tray of cutlery