

And the Snow Falls

A Musical Adaptation of a Miklos Laszlo Play

by James Kemp

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CHARACTERS: (in order of appearance)

MR. HAMMERSLEY, a man in his 60s and owner of HAMMERSLEY's Perfumery.

ASHWOOD, a man in his 30s and a salesman at the perfumery.

SMITH, a man in his 50s and a salesman at the perfumery.

MR. KELLY, a man in his 40s and a salesman at the perfumery.

MOLSON, a woman in her 40s and cashier at the perfumery.

MALE SHOPPER/ LONDON BOBBY/DETECTIVE/MAITRE D', a man in his 40s who exits in scene one and re-enters same scene as air raid warden/ a private investigator/ a waiter.

RICHARDS, a woman in her 30s and a saleswoman at the perfumery.

BAKER, a woman in her 20s and chemist at the perfumery.

RAYMOND, a man in his 20s and bicycle delivery person for the perfumery.

ERNIE, a young man in his teens who becomes a bicycle delivery person for the perfumery.

TIME: The Christmas season of 1938.

SETTING: HAMMERSLEY's Perfumery on Oxford Street, in London.

HAMMERSLEY's Perfumery is a pleasing old shop, comfortable, hospitable and with an air of stability about it. The shop is old-fashioned and manufactures its own brand of cosmetics in the laboratory located to the rear of the shop. 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. There is a large glass display case stage right.

The entrance door center stage left from the street is between two large shop windows which contain cosmetic displays and seasonal decorations. Inside the shop, a door center stage right, leads to the office of the owner. Another interior door stage right leads into the laboratory. A third door stage left leads to the employees' break room.

AT RISE:

A slide show of 1938 London scenes plays on a screen suspended above the stage. A prerecording of a narrator is heard saying,

NARRATOR: "In December 1938, citizens of London, England are uneasy. 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 the 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 HAMMERSLEY's 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."

(The curtain opens on a dark stage with characters frozen in place. This particular evening has been one of the last days of the Christmas season. The shop shows signs of having been in full swing, with sales books overflowing from the counter tops, with perfume bottles sitting out and with product boxes piled everywhere.

Seasonal sounds of carolers and heavy traffic can be heard from outside.

Before LIGHTS UP, the first sound cue is the jingling of the bells on the front door and outdoor Christmas music, as some unseen customer has just left with the front door visibly closing, followed by the sound of the cash register ringing as MOLSON puts cash into the cash drawer.

LIGHTS UP. SMITH, ASHWOOD, RICHARDS and KELLY begin to put things in order before the shop closes for the evening. MALE CUSTOMER stands at checkout counter holding a small item which he places on the counter where MOLSON finalizes the sale on the cash register. All of the employees wear white chemist coats with the letter "H" as an insignia on the lapels.

MOLSON: That will be fourteen and nine, sir.

MALE CUSTOMER: For a toothbrush? That's not the price your salesman quoted me.

MOLSON: Sorry, sir. My error. Four and six.

SMITH: *(shouting)* If you and the Mrs. should ever decide to have a baby, I still would still recommend that same toothbrush.

MALE CUSTOMER: *(Shouting)* I shall certainly NOT keep you informed of my reproductive intentions, sir!

SMITH: All the same, sir...

(ASHWOOD nudges SMITH who becomes silent. The cash register rings. The funds are exchanged. MOLSON places the toothbrush in a Christmas gift bag and hands it with change back to MALE CUSTOMER).

MOLSON: Thank you, sir. Visit us again please.

MALE CUSTOMER: I think I will visit Selfridge's instead.

SMITH: *(Yells.)* But do they sell toothbrushes at Selfridge's?

MALE CUSTOMER: I do not know, sir. However, I intend to find out. Good Day!

(MALE CUSTOMER exits to the sound of the bells ringing as the entrance door opens and closes behind him, with traffic sounds and carolers increasing and then decreasing as the front door closes. RICHARDS walks toward the checkout counter, uncovers a phonograph which has been on the counter but out of sight. RICHARDS places a record on a phonograph. The sound of 1930s Big Band Jazz is heard coming from the phonograph. The employees breathe sighs of relief, as they place clinking bottles of cosmetics into boxes and back onto shelves and into the display case. Suddenly, the office door opens and HAMMERSLEY, the shop owner walks to center stage.)

KELLY: Good evening Mr. HAMMERSLEY!

HAMMERSLEY: *(Nods toward KELLY)* Mr. KELLY. Everyone, good evening. It looks like we have had a good day. ASHWOOD, your report please.

ASHWOOD: Sir, that was my impression also. MOLSON?

MOLSON: It does appear to have been a good one.

HAMMERSLEY: Splendid. Well, you all know what needs to be done before we reopen in the morning.

(HAMMERSLEY turns to return to his office but stops and turns to address his employees.)

HAMMERSLEY: First however, I need to know if that last customer seemed satisfied. Did I hear him utter that swear word – Selfridge’s?

SMITH: Well sir, I...

ASHWOOD: *(Stammers)* S-s-sir. If I may. SMITH here had just offered a suggestion to the gentleman that our product would be superior to anything he might find at Selfridge’s.

HAMMERSLEY: I see. Very well. As long as we are serving the public and not disturbing them.

(HAMMERSLEY again turns toward his office as the front door opens and a LONDON BOBBY walks in. This part is played by the same actor who played MALE CUSTOMER. He has now made a quick change from a top coat, and clean shaven, to a London Bobby’s coat and hat, now wearing a handlebar mustache, and carrying a night stick.)

LONDON BOBBY: Good evening.

HAMMERSLEY: Good evening, Constable.

LONDON BOBBY: *(Tapping his night stick on the shop's open sign.)* It's twelve minutes past the hour.

HAMMERSLEY: Sorry, officer. ASHWOOD, why isn't the door locked and the closed sign put out yet?

ASHWOOD: Oh. I forgot. I am sorry, sir.

HAMMERSLEY: Do I need to remind you every blessed evening?

LONDON BOBBY: You should know that 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 down!

(Sound of outdoor Christmas music with traffic sounds and then stopping as LONDON BOBBY exits).

ASHWOOD: *(to HAMMERSLEY)* There was such a rush, Mr. HAMMERSLEY. I can't possibly think of everything.

HAMMERSLEY: How often have I asked you, ASHWOOD, as my shop manager, to not contradict me in the presence of my other employees?

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: B-b-but, 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 RICHARDS or SMITH to see to it and put up the closed 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, 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. RICHARDS, turn off that blasted music! Now please!

RICHARDS: Yes, Mr. HAMMERSLEY.

(Christmas music suddenly ends mid-song as RICHARDS lifts the needle from the record.)

ASHWOOD: If you'd only tell me, Mr. HAMMERSLEY, what you're blaming me for.

SMITH: *(aside to ASHWOOD)* Shut up!

ASHWOOD: *(aside to SMITH)* I won't. This has been going on for days, and for no reason.

HAMMERSLEY: Are you sure that I have no reason?

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 that noise you call Jazz? 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, 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 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 ASHWOOD.

(HAMMERSLEY opens his office door. He exits while slamming the door behind him. KELLY, RICHARDS and MOLSON quickly and silently finish their closing tasks as ASHWOOD angrily turns the OPEN sign to CLOSED and begins to dim the shop lights. KELLY, RICHARDS and MOLSON exit through employees' door, with heads bowed in silence. SMITH has now covered the display case with a sheet. SMITH produces a dry floor mop and begins to sweep the room.)

SMITH: I told you to shut up.

ASHWOOD: It was a bit too thick.

SMITH: Is it any better now?

ASHWOOD: No. In fact, it's getting worse. But, the old man still didn't tell me exactly why he has been so pissed at me. What in blazes have I done wrong?

SMITH: At his age, being pissed is easy.

(Music up for "What Did I Do Wrong?")

ASHWOOD: *(sighs as he looks at SMITH and sings)*

**Tell me, what's the wrong I did to get the boss's anger?
Did I short-change from a quid? Is that such a terror?
He said I need to please the world; and with no exceptions.
Now his anger has unfurled and flies in my direction.**

**I wish I had more of a clue.
Then I'd know just what to do.
I could turn it all around.
Without spending even half a crown.
Please, anyone just tell me what did I do wrong?**

**What rumors did I float?
To get his blooming goat?
I should stuff him with that mop.
And make his eyeballs pop!
Whatever in the bloody hell did I do wrong?**

**Did I fail to hold my gas?
Did I act above my class?
Did my ties all seem too bold?
Did I ever leave him cold?
Won't anybody tell exactly what the hell that I did wrong?**

**I always gave my best.
I passed his every test.
He once said so himself -
I live to bring him wealth.
Whatever in the bloody hell,
please tell me now and tell me well.
Come forth to me and please dispel
By ringing just one signal bell,
reminding me of what the hell that I did wrong?**

ASHWOOD: You'd think I had seduced his daughter or some such thing.

SMITH: Have you?

ASHWOOD: Hell no! Besides, I have my own love interest.

SMITH: Ah yes! The lady pen pal. How is that little matter coming along?

ASHWOOD: Splendidly! We are nearly a daily thing now. Each time I check my mailbox, there's a sweet response back from her with some enticing quip that motivates me to go directly to my writing desk where I carefully compose my own daily response.

SMITH: Spending much on postage, are we?

ASHWOOD: Not nearly enough! Besides, I think an actual meeting may be in store soon.

SMITH: Proof of the pudding?

ASHWOOD: I predict that the "pudding" will be smooth.

SMITH: And creamy?

ASHWOOD: SMITH, please! I've been working here for nine years. What have I done? Tell me! Why has he been angry at me all week?

(KELLY enters from SL employees' door. Unnoticed, he listens to ASHWOOD'S and SMITH'S conversation. He has removed his chemist's jacket and carries a top coat.)

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: Know what, Mr. KELLY?

KELLY: Whether or not Mr. HAMMERSLEY had a row with his wife.

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

KELLY: *(Shrugs and changes the subject)* Who is staying for window dressing?

ASHWOOD: I don't know. Ask SMITHy.

SMITH: Are you staying, Mr. KELLY?

KELLY: Only if I am needed.

(Richards enters from the employees' room door. She has removed her chemist's jacket and carries a fur coat.)

SMITH: RICHARDS, what about you? Are you staying to dress the windows? It's nearly Christmas and it hasn't been done yet.

RICHARDS: I haven't been asked to.

SMITH: Mr. HAMMERSLEY wants the Christmas displays fixed tonight.

RICHARDS: I'm being taken to the pictures tonight.

SMITH: Really? Which picture are you going to see?

RICHARDS: What difference does it make to you, SMITHy? You're no film fan. Tell me truly SMITHy, when did you last go to the flicks?

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 alright! All for sixpence, a cup of tea and a biscuit thrown in.

(Molson enters from the employees' room door. She has on a winter coat that is very plain looking.)

RICHARDS: Never heard of that picture, SMITHy. Possibly, it was before I was born.

SMITH: Possibly but not probably. How old are you, RICHARDS?

RICHARDS: Twenty.

MOLSON: *(under her breath, but loud enough to be heard)* And the rest?

RICHARDS: Did you say something, MOLSON?

MOLSON: Oh, excuse me. I was just adding up the accounts in my head. Why?

RICHARDS: Then I heard you wrongly.

MOLSON: I'm adding up. But try as I may, it still comes to at least thirty.

RICHARDS: What?!

MOLSON: *(points to an imaginary balance sheet)* This column. It adds up to at least thirty.

RICHARDS: (*shaking her head at Molson and turning to SMITH*) 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 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 discussing pictures or film stars. I have to keep mum.

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 Richards, a nice little girl like you shouldn't be sarcastic. It doesn't suit you.

RICHARDS: (*Absently, while taking long white gloves from her purse.*) You don't say.

SMITH: Nor should she try to be witty at all costs.

RICHARDS: (*Condescendingly*) It always pays to talk to a wise man, they say.

SMITH: You're overrating me. I'm far from being wise. It's merely that I didn't stop reading when I finished "Little Lord Fauntleroy".

(The telephone on the checkout desk rings. MOLSON answers.)

MOLSON: HAMMERSLEY's. Good evening Mrs. HAMMERSLEY. Yes, he is in his office. Will you hold please? (*the phone cord is not long enough to reach the office door with KELLY standing nearest to the door.*) Mr. KELLY, call Mr. HAMMERSLEY, will you? His wife needs to speak with him.

KELLY: (*tapping on the office door*) Mr. HAMMERSLEY, you're wanted on the phone, Sir.

(HAMMERSLEY enters the sales room with a puzzled look on his face.)

MOLSON: It's Mrs. HAMMERSLEY.

(HAMMERSLEY takes the receiver. The group of his employees lean in toward him, trying to be inconspicuous.)

HAMMERSLEY: Hello? Yes, my dear. Cinema? I couldn't possibly. I told you this morning I'd be working late. You can go yourself. By all means. Are the children going with you? Yes, I know they're nearly grown now. I can't tell you why I will be late. Proprietary business, don't you know. No, I shan't be home by ten. Well, suppose you go straight home after the show and I'll be there as soon as I can. No, I haven't 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 from his deliveries yet, Mr. HAMMERSLEY.

HAMMERSLEY: Not back yet? He only had three parcels to deliver. I'll have the fire that nitwit.

ASHWOOD: I'll take whatever it is you need me to take to Mrs. HAMMERSLEY. *(ASHWOOD pauses for a response)* 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. MOLSON, give me five pounds from the cash drawer. It seems my wife needs funds.

MOLSON: *(MOLSON does as she is asked to do and hands a five-pound note to HAMMERSLEY.)* Here, Mr. HAMMERSLEY.

HAMMERSLEY: *(turns to KELLY and hands him the note)* Mr. KELLY, take a bottle of Lentheric from the shelf. Stop by the house and give both to my wife.

KELLY: *(bows slightly)* Very good, Sir.

(KELLY puts on the coat he has been carrying, picks a bottle from a shelf and exits out the shop's entrance door. Christmas music from outside can be heard as the door opens and closes.)

SMITH: Who is to stay to dress the windows, Mr. HAMMERSLEY?

HAMMERSLEY: Pardon? What's that?

SMITH: Sorry, sir. I've been wondering whom Mr. HAMMERSLEY wants to stay and dress the windows?

HAMMERSLEY: Oh, yes. Well, settle it among yourselves. Those who don't mind staying can stay.

ASHWOOD: I think SMITH and I can manage that task. The ladies could go, couldn't they?

HAMMERSLEY: ASHWOOD, do 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, ASHWOOD. We shan't miss you.

ASHWOOD: I'd appreciate it, Mr. HAMMERSLEY, if you'd tell me what I've done to so annoy you lately?

HAMMERSLEY: I told you a minute ago. Want to hear it again?

(During this time, SMITH has been nudging and pinching ASHWOOD trying to convince ASHWOOD to be quiet.)

ASHWOOD: Stop pinching me, 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 skin cream. And you, sir, keep nagging me for no reason.

HAMMERSLEY: For no reason?

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. She's the newest employee and I have questioned her production procedures.

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 since we hired Miss Patience BAKER.

HAMMERSLEY: My attitude toward you has changed recently. Because I've found out...*(pauses)*

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, ASHWOOD, and Godspeed. When are you leaving?

ASHWOOD: At once, Mr. HAMMERSLEY. *(ASHWOOD stomps toward the employees' room door, exits and slams the door behind him. The other employees cower with heads slightly bowed.)*

HAMMERSLEY: MOLSON, did the cash balance?

MOLSON: Yes, Mr. HAMMERSLEY. Would you mind checking it?

HAMMERSLEY: Later. Let me have the key.

(Molson takes a key from her coat pocket and hands it to HAMMERSLEY.)

SMITH: Shall I start with the decorating, Mr. HAMMERSLEY?

HAMMERSLEY: Yes.

SMITH: What shall I put out, Mr. HAMMERSLEY?

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.

(SMITH exits through the employees' room door).

RICHARDS: Pardon me, Mr. HAMMERSLEY.

HAMMERSLEY: Yes, RICHARDS?

RICHARDS: If you don't need me, sir...

HAMMERSLEY: You can go, my girl.

RICHARDS: Thank you ever so. Pardon me while I go powder my nose.

(Richards exits through the employees' room door. Suddenly the same door swings open and BAKER enters.)

BAKER: I'm sorry to interrupt, Mr. HAMMERSLEY. But I can't stand it any longer.

HAMMERSLEY: What is it, BAKER?

BAKER: Nothing really. But I have to hand in my two weeks' notice.

HAMMERSLEY: Oh? Why?

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.

(ASHWOOD enters from the employees' room door.)

HAMMERSLEY: Who did?

ASHWOOD: I did. At last I told her what I think of her.

HAMMERSLEY: You two had better settle this without me.

(HAMMERSLEY exits through the office door, slamming it. At almost the same time, SMITH enters from the employees' room door, carrying a large box of Christmas decorations that clink and rattle as he walks.)

SMITH: These boxes get heavier and heavier each year. Where's Mr. HAMMERSLEY?

ASHWOOD: He went to his office.

BAKER: *(to ASHWOOD)* 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!

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? SMITH, do you hear that? SMITH?

SMITH: Oh, I hear it alright. But I can't help you. You wouldn't listen to me anyway.

BAKER: Now listen, 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. For two years I've been listening to your sarcastic comments on my work, to your uppity 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, "BAKER is a bit of a crawler this morning." If I come in five minutes late, you're ready with the remark, "If 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. But that's not all. You had the nerve to tell Mr. HAMMERSLEY that whenever I fill a tube of anything, it comes out anywhere but the nozzle. It's a rotten lie!

ASHWOOD: What? A lie? Here! *(he squeezes a tube of cold cream and it oozes out the bottom of the tube)* Was I wrong? Your own work.

BAKER: It isn't. You ordered the tubes. You okayed them.

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 order the wrong tubes, in order to pay me back. It's all in a day's work for you.

ASHWOOD: Do you hear that, SMITH? Can you suggest an answer I could give BAKER?

SMITH: *(stammering and still holding the box of ornaments)* Uhhhh...

BAKER: Please, SMITH, is it my fault if the tubes are defective?

ASHWOOD: *(faking real concern)* 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. *(a Christmas ornament falls from the box he carries and breaks on the floor)* There now, are you two happy? I just broke a bulb.

BAKER: He keeps calling me Patience because he knows I hate it.

ASHWOOD: What do you say now, SMITH?

SMITH: *(setting the box on the floor by the display window)* Leave me out of this, please.

(SMITH gets his dust mop and begins sweeping up the broken glass.)

ASHWOOD: Am I responsible for her resplendent Christian name?

(ASHWOOD stomps out the employees' room door and slams it.)

BAKER: Every inch a gentleman.

(Cue up song, "Every Inch A Gentleman")

BAKER: *(sings)*

**Every inch a gentle man.
So he'd like us to believe.
Every time he sneaks around,
He's hiding something up his sleeve.**

**Every inch from head to toes,
Ripples with I-told-you-sos.
When he comes to do you in,
He gives his knife a little spin.**

**He drinks vinegar with his tea.
He eats pounds of tweedled dee.
He only lives to make us sick.
The guy is just a perfect...idiot.**

**Every inch a gentle man.
Not a knave. More a Pan.
He dances to a different tune.
And quaffs his venom with a spoon.
Oh, such a gentle man!**

(ASHWOOD enters on the line "perfect...idiot". He now wears a top coat.)

ASHWOOD: Gentleman? Am I supposed to throw you a kiss every time you come to work late?

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 need to. I'm just packing up. Congratulations, you win. Curses. I forgot my hat.

(ASHWOOD exits to the employees' room again. SMITH and BAKER stand around the box of decorations and decorate the display window while talking.)

BAKER: What's the matter with him, SMITH? I've never hurt him.

SMITH: Haven't you?

BAKER: I never even notice him.

SMITH: That's just it.

BAKER: I just don't happen to fall for ASHWOOD's charms.

SMITH: That's up to you, but why hate him?

BAKER: Because he is hateful.

SMITH: Maybe I'm too old to understand, Pat dear.

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.

BAKER: But Richards is Flo to him and Beatrice Molson is Bea. And I know the reason.

SMITH: Well?

BAKER: Because he has had affairs with both of them!

SMITH: (Laughing) Cute, aren't you?

BAKER: I've got eyes in my head.

SMITH: Well go see an optician then.

BAKER: You are sweet, SMITH. But I know what I know.

SMITH: You're a twerp. Both girls are "reserved".

BAKER: Reserved?

SMITH: Labeled "For Mr. KELLY".

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.

BAKER: But 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, million-pound company, but he is never a fiance. Unless he is the chauffeur. Give me a duster, will you? I'd better clean up this old Christmas tree.

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.

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 ASHWOOD "acted accordingly" and quit.

BAKER: And Mr. HAMMERSLEY?

SMITH: He let ASHWOOD quit.

BAKER: And is ASHWOOD 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 already sorry by now.

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.

BAKER: What did you say?

SMITH: I said, "Mr. HAMMERSLEY, do I look like a man who wears Eau de Cologne? He said he was sure I was selling it. 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.

BAKER: No! Did he really call you a thief?

SMITH: Worse than that!

BAKER: And you?

SMITH: I apologized.

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 SMITH in a shop in the south of England, a thief. So, what? What does it matter? Furthermore, my dear Pat...

(Cue up music for "I Always Back Down")

SMITH: *(sings)* –

I Always Back Down

When faced with a row,

I always back down.

I'm a coward.

When trouble comes home,

I feed it a bone.

I'm a coward.

SMITH: (continues singing) –

**When the boss becomes mad,
I smile like I'm glad.
When thieves show a knife,
I stand behind Wife.
I'm a coward.**

**When they talk about war,
I hide 'neath a bar.
When the going gets tough,
I run quick as snuff.
I'm a coward.**

**C-O-W, cow, cow cow!
A-R-D, row, row, row.
Whatever you spell,
I'd jump down a well.
I'm a coward, and I always back down.**

(By this time, the decorating has ended and SMITH picks up the box and exits through the employees' room door. Then, KELLY enters through the front door, back from running his errand. His top coat has a slight powdering of snow on the shoulders).

KELLY: Hello, Pat darling.

BAKER: Good evening, Mr. KELLY.

KELLY: I haven't seen you since lunchtime.

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?

BAKER: I think so.

KELLY: I've had a run of bad luck today.

BAKER: Why?

KELLY: I meant to ask him for an advance. You see, I have a very special date tonight. Dear Pat, would you do me a good turn? Lend me a quid till Friday.

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?

BAKER: I was counting on having your four pounds yesterday.

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

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.

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.

BAKER: I haven't got that much money on me.

KELLY: How much have you got?

BAKER: Half a crown.

KELLY: Well borrow the rest. You'll get it from me on Friday.

BAKER: Go on with you. Whom should I ask?

KELLY: Try Molson. Or the Richards girl. They always have money on them.

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.

BAKER: Please stop it. I'll try.

(SMITH, MOLSON and RICHARDS all enter the salesroom from the employees' room door. They all wear the street clothes they had been wearing under the chemist jackets.)

KELLY: SMITHy, old chap.

SMITH: Come off it. I haven't a farthing.

(Each of the other two who have just entered, turn their backs on KELLY. The telephone rings. After looking at each other as if to say "Well, who's going to answer" and after four rings, KELLY answers.)

KELLY: HAMMERSLEY's. Mr. HAMMERSLEY? Who's speaking please? Hold the phone, will you?

(KELLY looks quizzically at the others.)

SMITH: He's in his office.

KELLY: MOLSON, Mr. HAMMERSLEY is wanted on the telephone.

MOLSON: RICHARDS, telephone for Mr. HAMMERSLEY.

RICHARDS: ASHWOOD, Mr. HAMMERSLEY is wanted on the phone.

(HAMMERSLEY bursts from his office door and demands to know.)

HAMMERSLEY: *(Grabbing the receiver from KELLY.)* Who is it?

KELLY: Wouldn't give his name.

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

(He places the receiver back on the telephone base and turns to the display window and looks longingly at it.)

KELLY: Mrs. HAMMERSLEY told me to tell you she will be expecting you at the restaurant opposite the Palace after the show, Sir. If you're not there by ten, she says she will go home.

HAMMERSLEY: All right then. *(Pause. Then HAMMERSLEY turns to his employees.)* The old tree doesn't look too bad, does it, 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. *(SMITH exits by the shop door with Christmas music coming in from the street.)* When will you be finished, SMITH?

SMITH: In a few minutes. Mr. KELLY could clear the other window in the meantime.

HAMMERSLEY: Not necessary. Time for that on Monday. 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.

ALL: Good night, Mr. HAMMERSLEY.

HAMMERSLEY: Good night, everyone.

(ALL except KELLY and RICHARDS who already have their coats, exit through employees' room doors to get their coats.)

RICHARDS: Am I going to see you tomorrow?

KELLY: I'm afraid not.

RICHARDS: And may I ask why not?

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

RICHARDS: But you have already been doing it for the past twelve months.

KELLY: And now I'm done!

RICHARDS: And I'll tell you another one. You're busy working on old Mrs. HAMMERSLEY.

KELLY: (*alarmed*) What's that?

RICHARDS: Furthermore, I'll wager you have a plot to marry young Miss HAMMERSLEY. Marrying into the business, that is. You're quite a social climber aren't you?

KELLY: Oh, shut up! You're one to call the kettle black.

RICHARDS: I can save you the trouble. Miss Eve HAMMERSLEY wouldn't marry one of papa's shop boys

KELLY: (*raises his hand to slap RICHARDS and then withdraws it*) That will do.

(The sound of a car horn is heard outside. RICHARDS peeks out the display window as SMITH enters from the employees' room door, wearing his coat and ready to go home.)

RICHARDS: (*ignoring KELLY*) See you Monday, SMITHy.

SMITH: Have a nice time tonight, RICHARDS.

(RICHARDS exits through the front door, followed by the sound of a car door opening and closing and next by the sound of the car driving away. KELLY exits through employees' room door just as ASHWOOD enters from the same door carrying a box of his personal belongings.)

ASHWOOD: Well all the best, 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.

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: Tomorrow is Sunday. Tomorrow we're closed. You know what I'll do? I'll talk to him.

ASHWOOD: Oh no you don't!

(SMITH starts for the office door, but ASHWOOD intercepts him.)

SMITH: Get out of my way, you fool.

ASHWOOD: 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 over 50 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. I am single. No one depends on me. When you have your family to provide for. As you know, I've had my pen pal for the past 6 months. I have reason to believe things are about to change.

SMITH: Change how?

ASHWOOD: I was supposed to meet her tonight at the Café de Paris jazz club. 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 she has agreed to marry me. I would soon have had to tell her that having no income means I can't afford to marry her.

SMITH: At the moment anyway.

ASHWOOD: Yes, at the moment. I was looking forward to seeing her tonight. 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. It's just...well, it's just...

(Music up for "The Way She Curls Her Ls")

The Way She Curls Her Ls

The way she curls her Ls.

The way she loops an S.

The way she crosses T

Says oh so much to me.

The way she folds a leaf.

The way her pressings crease.

The smell of her perfume

Is like she's in the room.

And if I should go to my box and find the shelf is bare,

It's just as if she's gone away and left me to my cares.

The way she greets in script,

Each time the sheath is ripped.

(ASHWOOD continues singing.)

The way her sentence flows

Like petals from a rose.

And if I could just follow her and see her in the flesh,

I'm sure our hearts would beat as one and everything would mesh.

ASHWOOD: *(Pause)* Well, goodbye Smithy.

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. And if you need someone to facilitate your pen-pal meeting, let me know.

ASHWOOD: Thanks Smithy.

(ALL of the remaining employees enter from the employees' room door, dressed in coats and ready to go home.)

BAKER: 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.

(ASHWOOD picks up his box of personal property and exits through the front door with the typical Christmas music being heard between the opening and closing of the door.)

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.

BAKER: What's the matter now?

(KELLY and the remaining staff enter from the employees' room door, fully dressed in winter clothing and ready to go home for the evening.)

KELLY: Good night.

SMITH: Good night Mr. KELLY.

KELLY: *(to BAKER)* Thanks a lot, Pat. You'll get it on Friday. I'll make a point of it. Good night.

BAKER: *(Sheepishly in front of other employees)* Good night Mr. KELLY.

KELLY: Say SMITHy, old boy, would you happen to have a cigarette on you?

SMITH: You wouldn't smoke my brand of cigarette.

KELLY: Why not?

SMITH: Because I wouldn't give you one to smoke in the first place.

KELLY: What a sourpuss!

(KELLY exits through the front door, as the Christmas music is heard between the opening and closing of the door.)

SMITH: As anemic and arthritic as I am, that man makes my blood boil and I would bop him if it came down to that. Pat, I'll walk with you part of the way.

BAKER: Okay. Maybe as far as the postal station if you would.

(The sound of a bicycle bell can be heard from outside, followed by the front door opening with the Christmas music also being heard. RAYMOND enters.)

RAYMOND: Good evening, everybody.

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 packhorse?

BAKER: Who sent you on private errands?

RAYMOND: Why, old 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.

MOLSON: See you Monday, Pat. RAYMOND, SMITHy, good evening then.

BAKER: Good evening, Bea.

MOLSON: And RAYMOND, other than running errands, where have you really been hanging about all this time?

RAYMOND: Why, in a blooming Turkish bath, getting my sore muscles worked on.

MOLSON: Don't be impertinent.

RAYMOND: Impertinent? I went to the Turkish baths to remind the old body basher there and the old toe-twitcher to be sure and turn up tomorrow at Mrs. HAMMERSLEY's when she needs someone to run errands for her.

MOLSON: Aha! I see. Well, don't expect Mr. HAMMERSLEY to pay you overtime for dawdling. See you Monday.

(MOLSON exits through the front door.)

RAYMOND: Dawdling? She had 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.

BAKER: RAYMOND, running people over has become an obsession with you.

RAYMOND: Why does she always have to put her spoke into everything?

SMITH: Let's go Pat. RAYMOND can stay here and ponder the mysteries of the universe.

BAKER: Good night RAYMOND.

RAYMOND: Later.

(Alone in the sales room, RAYMOND moves to the display window and noisily starts to rearrange the ornaments. HAMMERSLEY yells from his office.)

HAMMERSLEY: Who's there?

RAYMOND: It's me.

(HAMMERSLEY enters the sales room.)

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: The rest of them must have turned off most of the lights before I got back.

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.

HAMMERSLEY: What kind of errands?

RAYMOND: To Stratton's on Albert Road for Miss 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.

(DETECTIVE enters suddenly through the front door. He carries a briefcase.)

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. Go down and get your things and go home. Make sure the back is locked up when you leave. I'll get the front.

RAYMOND: Good night Sir.

(RAYMOND exits through the employees' room door.)

HAMMERSLEY: Sit down will you?

DETECTIVE: Thank you. Shall I start now?

HAMMERSLEY: Please do.

DETECTIVE: Now then, are we alone, I take it?

HAMMERSLEY: We are. All of my staff has gone home. That delivery boy is the last to leave. He's down getting his things. He'll leave out the back door.

(DETECTIVE places his briefcase down, unlocks it, and takes out a large envelope of papers.)

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: *(Shocked)* With whom?

DETECTIVE: With a Mr. S. KELLY. One of your salesmen.

HAMMERSLEY: KELLY?! 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 observation.

HAMMERSLEY: No. No. I'd like to settle up with you now.

(DETECTIVE pulls papers from his briefcase.)

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: I shall send you my check.

DETECTIVE: Thank you sir. And good night.

HAMMERSLEY: Good night.

DETECTIVE: And a Merry Christmas, Sir.

(HAMMERSLEY picks up the paperwork given to him by the detective. He turns and saunters toward his office with his head bowed. He enters his office and closes the door. We hear the sound of desk drawers opening and closing. Then, RAYMOND enters through the employees' room door. He hears the sound of a pistol hammer clicking and disappears into the office.)

RAYMOND: *(from within the office)* Mr. HAMMERSLEY! What are you doing? Mr. HAMMERSLEY! Don't! You mustn't! Help!

(We hear the sound of a gunshot. Lights out.)

End of Act One

Act TWO

Scene 1

AT RISE:

It is later in the evening on the same day. On a proscenium stage, this scene can be played in front of the closed main curtain. On a curtainless stage, this scene may be played in front of a darkened main stage with the café area only being lit. There are two café tables with two chairs each set center stage and at a comfortable distance from each other. A couple of potted palm plants are set stage right. The palm trees should be tall enough to accommodate two men hiding behind them. A lectern for the MAITRE d' is set stage left. Light jazz music from 1930s British big bands is playing as background music.

(In pantomime. BAKER enters from stage right. MAITRE D' helps BAKER remove her top coat which he carries with him as he leads BAKER to the table closest to stage right. Baker carries a book under her arm. Baker sits and examines the menu handed to her by the MAITRE d'. MAITRE d' exits stage right. BAKER wears a sprig of heather on her lapel area. After perusing the menu, she looks at the book she has carried in with her. ASHWOOD and SMITH enter from stage left and stand behind the potted palms. ASHWOOD wears a sprig of heather on his coat lapel.)

ASHWOOD: Smithy, I really don't want to know what she looks like. I've already had enough bad news today. If she's homely...well that would just take the cake now, wouldn't it?

SMITH: What was the name of the book Miss Pen-pal was supposed to be reading?

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.

SMITH: Let me make a visual inspection of the room.

(SMITH pulls a small pair of bejeweled opera glasses from his coat pocket and surveys the room.)

ASHWOOD: Do you see her Smithy? I mean do you see a woman reading an Agatha Christie book, wearing a sprig of heather on her dress?

SMITH: As a matter of fact, I think I do see such a woman. She's very beautiful.

ASHWOOD: Mr. Smith, I specifically asked that you not tell me how she looks.

SMITH: I am sorry but she looks very familiar.

ASHWOOD: Familiar how?

SMITH: Well... Frankly, this girl looks like Miss Patience BAKER.

ASHWOOD: – Gag me! I hope they don't look that much alike.

SMITH: I think it's possible that they might look very much alike.

ASHWOOD: And why would that be Smithy?

SMITH: I hate to tell you this 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.

ASHWOOD: (*grabs the opera glasses.*) No! Let me see. Move over, SMITH. Bloody hell, she looked right at me. I've been caught!

SMITH: At this point 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.

ASHWOOD: But that woman and I have been fighting with each other for years.

SMITH: And that woman over there, 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.

ASHWOOD: All right SMITH, you have been helped me up until this point. Now I think it's time for you to allow me to stand on my own two feet.

SMITH: Very well. ASHWOOD, I wish you the best. You can tell me all about it at work on Monday.

ASHWOOD: As YOU say. But I would advise you not to hold your breath while waiting for me to show up at work on Monday.

(SMITH and ASHWOOD exit stage left. MAITRE d' enters stage right and tends to matters on his lectern. ASHWOOD re-enters stage right.)

MAITRE d' – (*with a French accent*) Bonsoir, Monsieur. Welcome to Café du Paris, London where you can listen to some of the best jazz music this side of the channel. Do you have a reservation?

ASHWOOD: Well, I guess, well...I'm supposed to meet a young woman here tonight. I think she has already been seated.

MAITRE D': By any chance could she be a young woman wearing a sprig of heather?

ASHWOOD: Yes. It's one like I'm wearing on my lapel.

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.

ASHWOOD: 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.

ASHWOOD: Well, you can tell the waiter to take his time.

MAITRE D': But of course, Monsieur. Bien sur.

ASHWOOD: Good evening, Patien...I mean, Pat. I guess you saw me peak through the window?

BAKER: Good evening, Mr. Ashwood. Yes. I saw you and Smithy. Did you bring him as a second for this duel? Sorry, I didn't bring a second.

ASHWOOD: Now, Miss...Pat, 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.

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.

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?

BAKER: No, I would have noticed.

ASHWOOD: Well then, there it is. The two of us agreed to meet here.

BAKER: And here we are. In all of our glorious clumsiness.

ASHWOOD: May I sit down, Miss Baker?

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

ASHWOOD: Oh. And what about me?

BAKER: What about you, Mr. Ashwood?

ASHWOOD: How silly do you think I feel at this point?

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

ASHWOOD: All right then. If you want me to, I'll leave.

BAKER: You must be reading my mind, Mr. Ashwood.

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.

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.

ASHWOOD: Is that so?

BAKER: It is so.

ASHWOOD: Then we'll see around, Miss Patience Baker.

BAKER: Not if I am lucky enough to see you before you see me, Mr. Ashwood. Good night.

ASHWOOD: Good night!

(ASHWOOD stomps toward the lectern and exits SL. MAITRE D' walks to BAKER's table.)

MAITRE D': Is everything not going very well, mademoiselle?

BAKER: Actually, It all went quite well. He has left, hasn't he?

MAITRE D': And that is the way it was planned?

BAKER: Under the circumstances, yes. I would have planned it just as it went tonight.

MAITRE D': Ah well then. Good riddance, mademoiselle. Oui?

BAKER: Most decidedly, oui!

(Background jazz music increases as LIGHTS OUT. During blackout, set pieces used in the previous scene are struck.)

End of Act 2, scene 1

Act 2 Scene 2

AT RISE:

LIGHTS UP LOW. The scene has changed to the interior of the shop. Lighting is dim. RAYMOND appears outside the display window and taps on the window. RAYMOND carries a tray from a hotel which contains a pot of tea and some biscuits. Then, the tapping becomes louder. Finally, a light can be seen having been turned on inside the office. HAMMERSLEY enters into the sales room from his office. He wears a robe and bedroom slippers. He unlocks the front door and RAYMOND enters the shop. The sound of light traffic coming in from outside when the door is opened and then fades when the door closes. A café table sits CENTER STAGE with two chairs.)

RAYMOND: Good morning Sir.

HAMMERSLEY: (*locks the front door*) Morning. 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.

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: 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 baker's.

HAMMERSLEY: I don't think you can. Where did you get this roll?

RAYMOND: From the Central Hotel. Let me turn on the gas fire. *(RAYMOND strikes a match to light a gas heater SR.)*

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. *(RAYMOND focuses on pouring a cup of tea.)* 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.

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 were sleeping in your office last night. 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 to 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. Me mum 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 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.

RAYMOND: Water is hot. Are you going to shave Sir?

HAMMERSLEY: Yes.

RAYMOND: I'll get the water. 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. One entrance to the bedroom.

HAMMERSLEY: What's That?

RAYMOND: I'm talking about the room.

HAMMERSLEY: What room?

RAYMOND: The room 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 fourposter bed.

(Telephone rings.)

HAMMERSLEY: Go on, answer it.

RAYMOND: Hammersley's. 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 if you're here, Sir. Shall I say you're not? Should, I say I have no telegram with instructions yet?

HAMMERSLEY: Hand me the receiver, please.

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, he'll give you the explanation... No, you can't. *(Hangs up the receiver abruptly.)* Raymond, wipe the receiver. It's covered with soap.

(ASHWOOD appears in the display window, standing outside and tapping on the glass.)

RAYMOND: Ashwood is at the front door. *(RAYMOND unlocks and opens the front door.)* Good morning Mr. Ashwood. Come on in. We have been expecting you.

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. I 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 sleep 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.

(Music up for "I AM SIXTY")

HAMMERSLEY: *(sings)*

For 33 years I trusted my wife. My happiness seemed secure.

But with my white hair, I was fooled by her same old affair.

She fancies herself young, with hair dyed like dung.
Her nails painted scarlet, makes her look like a harlot.

The auto I gave her touches eighty miles per.
She wouldn't grow old with me.
She preferred to make love with a gigolo cur.

That page of the ledger's complete. I'm opening a new account.
I have worked for my family, and that's how it had to be.
I shall do it no more - waking three times each night.
First my daughter, home from a party. Next, my son from God knows where.
Then, my wife driving home, from a bridge party she'd claim.
Year after year after year after year, it was always the same routine.

I went to work each morning and worked until night
just to make it possible for them to spend their time
however they wished.
Now 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.

I am 60.

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 – Last night, I slept on the divan in my office. You know what happened? 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 last 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 men 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.

HAMMERSLEY – I’m coming. I haven’t washed up yet. I say 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 – 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? SMITH? Give me a break!

HAMMERSLEY – RAYMOND.

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 SMITH.

SMITH – ASHWOOD! I told you so.

ASHWOOD – Yes you told me so.

SMITH – What happened?

ASHWOOD – Mr. HAMMERSLEY sent for me.

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, 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.

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 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 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 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 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, SMITH...

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**...**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.

BAKER – Good morning, **SMITH**.

SMITH – How are you?

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, **SMITH**.

SMITH – Morning.

(Sound of broom sweeping).

RAYMOND – I say, **SMITH**. Would you like to try again?

SMITH – Try again at what?

RAYMOND – At the sweepstakes.

SMITH – Buzz off.

RAYMOND – With pleasure, **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?

BAKER – Why yes I did. Did you?

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

BAKER – I know. I saw his coat on a peg.

SMITH – You don’t mind, do you?

BAKER – No. I don’t think I mind.

SMITH – Did you go to a show?

BAKER – Not this weekend, SMITHy. I had a bit of a headache. *(sneezes)*

SMITH – Want an aspirin?

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).

BAKER – I haven’t any fever, 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.

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.

SMITH – Take it easy. I can do that.

BAKER – Will you do that? Thank you. The orders are on Mr. HAMMERSLEY’s desk.

SMITH – I’ll find them.

BAKER – RAYMOND can help you.

SMITH – All right.

(Sound of office door opening and closing).

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?

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, 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?

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

ASHWOOD – Listen, Miss Patien...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.

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.

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.

BAKER – Tell me ASHWOOD, what is there about me that makes you so angry?

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

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.

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.

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.

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.

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

ASHWOOD – For that, I apologize.

BAKER – You do? (*sneezes*)

ASHWOOD – I am very sorry indeed.

BAKER – And what about the jazz club Sunday night?

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

BAKER – I did not!

ASHWOOD – Did.

BAKER – Did not.

ASHWOOD – Did.

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.

BAKER – It is. It is. It is! The others here all like me. SMITH does. RICHARDS does. MOLSON does. Mr. HAMMERSLEY is always nice to me. Even RAYMOND likes me.

ASHWOOD – You're forgetting KELLY.

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.

BAKER – Are you kidding?

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?

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.

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.

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.

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.

BAKER – So I’m cold and unpleasant am I?

ASHWOOD – You made me say it.

BAKER – So I am incapable of loving anyone, ASHWOOD?

ASHWOOD – I’m convinced of that.

BAKER – And no one could ever care for me, ASHWOOD?

ASHWOOD – Precisely.

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, 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.

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 – 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).

RICHARDS – Good morning.

ASHWOOD – Morning, Flo.

SMITH – Morning Flo. 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).

MOLSON – Good morning everyone.

ASHWOOD – Good morning, Bea.

SMITH – Good morning, MOLSON.

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 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.

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).

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?

MOLSON – Now then, watch your language, RAYMOND.

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

MOLSON – Remember your place, RAYMOND.

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

MOLSON – Is Mr. HAMMERSLEY in yet?

SMITH – In his office.

(sound of knocking on office door).

MOLSON – Good morning, Mr. HAMMERSLEY. May I have the keys to the cash register, please?

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.

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?

BAKER – No, 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.

HAMMERSLEY – What do you want, 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, 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).

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?

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 – SMITH, help me please.

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

MOLSON – Well. Did you ever?

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

BAKER – What happened?

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!

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

BAKER – Was it one of Mr. HAMMERSLEY's heart attacks?

MOLSON – Who knows? I'd better call Mrs. HAMMERSLEY. *(Sound of phone being dialed).* Mrs. HAMMERSLEY? 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.

MOLSON – In his desk. I'll get them.

BAKER – How is he?

ASHWOOD – Poorly.

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, ASHWOOD. KELLY's coat and hat. Is he sacked?

ASHWOOD – That would be my guess, 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).

BAKER – RAYMOND. What's the matter with you?

RAYMOND – I had a collision.

BAKER – With what?

RAYMOND – Not what, BAKER. You mean with whom. I collided with Mr. KELLY!

End of Act Two