

ACT ONE

Late afternoon. A sunset sky.

The room is rather untidy. DANIEL is lying on the sofa in his dressing-gown, reading a magazine. He pours himself a neat whisky and drinks it between nervous pulls on a cigarette.

The sound of an engine stopping. A car door slams. DANIEL rushes to the window. The POLICE INSPECTOR comes in from the terrace.

- DANIEL Ah, Inspector, it's you. ~~I'm glad to see you.~~
- INSPECTOR I've only called in for a second . . .
- DANIEL (*tensely*) Well?
- INSPECTOR No news, I'm afraid.
- DANIEL ~~What?~~ Do you mean to say you've driven all the way from Chamonix just to tell me that?
- INSPECTOR (*mildly*) Five minutes' drive? ~~That's no distance.~~ Anyway, ~~it's our slack time just now.~~ I just dropped in to see how you were.
- DANIEL What have you done since I saw you last – anything?
- INSPECTOR I've put in a report. It's taking its course.
- DANIEL Taking its course! ~~What's the use of that? I want results.~~ Have you got any news of my wife or haven't you?
- INSPECTOR I'll thank you not to shout at me.
- DANIEL I'm sorry . . . I haven't been sleeping too well. I apologise. Do sit down, won't you?
- INSPECTOR ~~You're under a strain. I quite understand. But~~ You must stop torturing yourself. At least ten thousand wives leave their husbands every year in France alone. And ninety-nine out of a hundred come trotting back within a week.
- DANIEL What have you done to find her? Yes, I know, put in a report – but apart from that?

INSPECTOR It's not a police job to bring back flighty wives ~~to the fold~~ you know.

DANIEL My wife isn't flighty! She left me ten days ago after a quarrel and she left alone.

(He gulps down his drink.)

INSPECTOR Did you often quarrel?

DANIEL Now and again. Who doesn't? ~~The whole thing's too absurd.~~ She's only sulking. She'll come back, you're right. Would you like a drink?

INSPECTOR No, thank you. Have you any idea where she might have gone? Is there anywhere you can write to her?

DANIEL Yes, I told you. I wrote to her flat in Paris. Well, our flat, I suppose, except that I haven't set foot in it yet. The letter was returned. The porter had instructions to forward all mail here. Look, I've told you all this —

INSPECTOR *(stolidly)* Any relatives? Friends?

DANIEL I don't know much about her friends. She's never mentioned anyone special . . . and I haven't met any of her family yet. We've only been married three months. Anyway, she never sees them. There's a rich old uncle, but he's on his last legs.

INSPECTOR Where do you think she might have gone then?

DANIEL Cannes, maybe, Deauville — I don't know . . . some holiday place. And bored to death too, I should think. But she won't make the first move, ~~not she!~~ If I knew where she was I'd be there now. But I daren't leave here in case she telephones. Or comes back while I'm gone.

INSPECTOR She'll come back, M. Corban. My advice to you is stay where you are and wait until she does. So stop worrying. If anything's happened to her, we'll know soon enough.

DANIEL *(head in his hands)* Don't! If anything happened to her I'd never forgive myself. It's all my fault. Elizabeth is worth ten of me. And I gave her a bad time. That's the truth of it. She'll never come back, I just know it.

- INSPECTOR Nonsense, of course she will. And let's hope it teaches you a lesson. Is there anything you need?
- DANIEL Nothing, thanks.
- INSPECTOR How are you managing up here on your own?
- DANIEL The village grocer sends up what I need. Not that I'm eating much . . .
- INSPECTOR Now listen to me. You're young. Even supposing she doesn't come back, don't let it spoil your life. It's not worth it, nothing is. You get married in June and she leaves you in September. What's three months in a lifetime?
- DANIEL It's easy for you to talk.
- INSPECTOR ~~Take the long view, man.~~ With these rich women you can't win. They've had money all their lives and they're used to their own way. She'll either come begging for you take her back or you'll get a letter from her asking for a divorce.
- DANIEL (*outraged*) A divorce! ~~Oh, charming!~~ When she practically went down on her knees to get me to – I didn't want to get married. I was much too unsettled. ~~And she'd do a thing like that to me?~~ (*Abruptly.*) That's what you've come for, isn't it? Well, go on! Give me the divorce papers! Come on, let's have them!
- INSPECTOR (*patiently*) Why should I have any divorce papers? I'm a policeman, not a lawyer. I told you I had no news of your wife and haven't. Why should I lie to you?
- DANIEL (*feverishly*) All right then, let's just hang around and hope that our darling Elizabeth will come trotting back. I want her! I want her back!
-

(*The INSPECTOR exits. The police car is heard driving away. FATHER MAXIMIN appears at the door. He is a young man with a pleasant, open face. He taps on the door.*)

MAXIMIN Good evening.