

HARRIET  
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MAGGIE. (*Crossing L. to C., surveying him.*) Well, I must say you have certainly behaved with all of your accustomed grace and charm.

WHITESIDE. Look here, Puss—I am in no mood to discuss my behavior, good or bad. I had no desire to cross this cheerless threshold. I was hounded and badgered into it. I now find myself, after two weeks of wracking pain, accused of behaving without charm. What would you have me do? Kiss them?

MAGGIE. (*Giving up, crossing to Whiteside.*) Very well, Sherry. After ten years I should have known better than to try to do anything about your manners. But when I finally give up this job I may write a book about it all. "Through the Years with Prince Charming." (*Tosses him letters.*)

WHITESIDE. Listen, Repulsive, you are tied to me with an umbilical cord made of piano-wire. And now if we may dismiss the subject of my charm, for which, incidentally, I receive fifteen hundred dollars per appearance (*Enter Harriet L.*), possibly we can go to work... Oh, no, we can't. Yes?

(*Maggie crosses R. to D. R. This last is addressed to Harriet, a wraith-like lady of uncertain years, who has more or less floated into the room. She is carrying a large spray of holly, and her whole manner suggests something not quite of this world.*)

HARRIET. (*Crosses to him. Her voice seems to float, too.*) My name is Harriet Stanley. I know you are Sheridan Whiteside. I saw this holly, framed green against the pine trees. I remembered what you had written about *Tess and Jude the Obscure*. It was the nicest present I could bring you. (*She places holly in his lap, and exits upstairs C.*)

WHITESIDE. (*His eyes following her.*) For God's sake, what was that?

MAGGIE. (*Crosses L. to packages by sofa, takes them to chair up R.*) That was Mr. Stanley's sister, Harriet. I've talked to her a few times—she's quite strange.

WHITESIDE. Strange? She's right out of *The Hound of the Baskervilles*... You know, I've seen that face before somewhere.

MAGGIE. (*As she puts packages on chair U. C.*) Nonsense. You couldn't have.

WHITESIDE. (*Dismissing it.*) Oh, well! Let's get down to work. (*He hands her the armful of holly.*) Here! Press this in the Doctor's book.

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me? You and Johnny? *(John crosses R.)*

SARAH. Why, Mr. Whiteside!

JOHN. Sarah!

SARAH. Why, it kind of takes my breath away.

JOHN. It would be wonderful, Mr. Whiteside, but what would we say to Mr. and Mrs. Stanley?

WHITESIDE. Just "Goodbye."

SARAH. But—but they'd be awfully mad, wouldn't they? They've been very kind to us.

WHITESIDE. *(Lightly.)* Well, if they ever come to New York we can have them for dinner, if I'm not in town. Now run along and think it over. This is our little secret—just between us. And put plenty of sherry in that terrapin... Miss Preen! *(Sarah and John withdraw, in considerable excitement. Up R. Whiteside raises his voice to a roar.)* Miss Preen!

MISS PREEN. *(Appearing, breathless, drying her hands.)* Yes, sir? Yes, sir?

WHITESIDE. What have you got in there, anyway? A sailor?

MISS PREEN. I was—just washing my hands.

WHITESIDE. What time did Miss Cutler go out?

MISS PREEN. Oh, couple hours ago.

WHITESIDE. Mr. Jefferson called for her?

MISS PREEN. Yes, sir.

WHITESIDE. *(Impatiently.)* All right, all right. Go back to your sex-life.

*(Miss Preen goes. Whiteside tries to settle down to his book, but his mind is plainly troubled. He shifts a little; looks anxiously toward outer door. Harriet Stanley comes softly down steps. She seems delighted to find Whiteside alone.)*

HARRIET. *(Opening cardboard portfolio she has brought with her—crossing down c.)* Dear Mr. Whiteside, may I show you a few mementoes of the past? I somehow feel that you would love them as I do.

WHITESIDE. I'd be delighted. *(Observing her.)* Miss Stanley, haven't we met somewhere before?

HARRIET  
#2

START



HARRIET. Oh, no. I would have remembered. It would have been one of my cherished memories—like these. *(She spreads portfolio before him.)* Look! Here I am with my first sweetheart, under our lovely beechwood trees. I was eight and he was ten. I have never forgotten him. What happy times we had! What— *(She stops short as she hears footsteps on stairway.)*

STANLEY. *(From upstairs.)* But I tell you I'm going to.

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HARRIET. There's someone coming! I'll come back!...

*(She gathers up portfolio and vanishes into dining room U. R. Whiteside looks after her, puzzled. It is Stanley who comes down the stairs. He is plainly coming into the room for a purpose—this is no haphazard descent. He is carrying a slip of paper in his hand, and he is obviously at the boiling point. A few steps behind comes Mrs. Stanley, apprehensive and nervous.)*

MRS. STANLEY. *(From stairs.)* Now, Ernest, please—

STANLEY. *(To c.)* Be quiet, Daisy... Mr. Whiteside, I want to talk to you. I don't care whether you're busy or not. I have stood all that I'm going to stand.

WHITESIDE. Indeed?

STANLEY. This is the last straw. I have just received a bill from the telephone company for seven hundred and eighty-four dollars. *(He reads from slip in his hand.)* Oklahoma City, Calcutta, Hollywood, Australia, Rome, New York, New York, New York, New York. *(His voice trails off in an endless succession of New Yorks.)* Now I realize, Mr. Whiteside, that you are a distinguished man of letters—

MRS. STANLEY. *(c.)* Yes, of course, we both do.

STANLEY. Please... But in the past week we have not been able to call our souls our own. We have not had a meal in the dining room *once*. I have to tiptoe out of the house in the mornings.

MRS. STANLEY. Now, Ernest—

STANLEY. *(Waving her away.)* Oh, I come home to find convicts sitting at my dinner table—*butcher-shop* murderers. A man putting cockroaches in the kitchen.

MRS. STANLEY. They just escaped, Ernest.

STANLEY. That's not the point. I go into my bathroom and bump

JUNE. (*Pushing Sandy up R. and returning to room. Sandy exits.*) There's Dad.

STANLEY. (*Descending stairs, and crossing L. to coatrack.*) Forgive us for trespassing, Mr. Whiteside.

WHITESIDE. Not at all, old fellow—not at all. It's Christmas, you know. Merry Christmas, Merry Christmas.

MRS. STANLEY. (*Nervously.*) Ah—yes. Merry Christmas... Would you like to come along with us, June? We're taking some presents over to the Dexters.

JUNE. No—no, thank you, Mother. I—I have to write some letters. (*She goes upstairs.*)

STANLEY. Come along, Daisy.

WHITESIDE. Why, Mr. Stanley, what happened to your forehead? Did you have an accident?

STANLEY. No, Mr. Whiteside. I'm taking boxing lessons. ...Go ahead, Daisy. (*They go L.*)

(*Harriet, who has been hovering at head of stairs, hurries down as the Stanleys depart. She is carrying a little Christmas package.*)

HARRIET. (*Crosses R.*) Dear Mr. Whiteside, I've been trying all day to see you. To give you—*this*.

WHITESIDE. Why, Miss Stanley. A Christmas gift for me?

HARRIET. It's only a trifle, but I wanted you to have it. It's a picture of me as I used to be. It was taken on another Christmas Eve, many years ago. Don't open it till the stroke of midnight, will you?

(*The doorbell rings. Harriet looks apprehensively over her shoulder.*)  
Merry Christmas, dear Mr. Whiteside. Merry Christmas.

(*John enters up L. to exit L.*)

END WHITESIDE. Merry Christmas to you, Miss Stanley, and thank you. (*She glides out of the room, up R. In hallway, as John opens door, we hear a woman's voice, liquid and melting. "This is the Stanley residence, isn't it?" "Yes, it is." "I've come to see Mr. Whiteside. Will you tell him Miss Sheldon is here?"*)

Lorraine! My Blossom Girl!

LORRAINE. (*Coming into view. Enter L. to up L.*) Sherry, my sweet!

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START