

START

WHITESIDE. I'm fine, you presumptuous Cockney... Now, how was the trip, wonderful?

(Maggie sits arm of sofa.)

BEVERLY. (Crosses R., then U. L.) Fabulous. I did a fantastic amount of work. By the way, did I glimpse that little boudoir butterfly, La Sheldon, in a motorcar as I came up the driveway?

MAGGIE. You did indeed. She's paying us a Christmas visit.

BEVERLY. Dear girl! They do say she set fire to her mother, but I don't believe it... Sherry, (Sits on stool R. C.) my evil one, not only have I written the finest comedy since Molière, but also the best revue since my last one, and an operetta that frightens me it's so good. I shall play it for eight weeks in London and six in New York—that's all. No matinees. Then I am off to the Grecian Islands... Magpie, why don't you come along? Why don't you desert this cannonball of fluff and come with me?

MAGGIE. Beverly dear, be careful. You're catching me at a good moment.

WHITESIDE. (Changing the subject.) Tell me, Beverly, did you have a good time in Hollywood? How long were you there?

BEVERLY. (Rises, crosses to C.) Three unbelievable days. I saw everyone from Adrian to Zanuck. They came, poor dears, as to a shrine. I was insufferably charming and ruthlessly firm in refusing seven million dollars for two minutes' work.

WHITESIDE. What about Banjo? Did you see my wonderful Banjo in Hollywood?

BEVERLY. I did. He gave a dinner for me. I arrived, in white tie and tails, to be met at the door by two bewigged butlers, who quietly proceeded to take my trousers off. I was then ushered, in my lemon silk drawers, into a room full of Norma Shearer, Claudette Colbert, and Aldous Huxley, among others. Dear, sweet, incomparable Banjo. (Crossing to couch, he puts his arm about Maggie's shoulder.)

WHITESIDE. I'll never forget that summer at Antibes, when Banjo put a microphone in Lorraine's mattress, and then played the record the next day at lunch.

~~BEVERLY. (Crossing c.) I remember it indeed. Lorraine left Antibes by the next boat.~~

~~MAGGIE. (Half to herself.) I wish Banjo were here now.~~

BEVERLY. (Back to Maggie.) What's the matter, Maggie? Is Lorraine being her own sweet sick-making self?

MAGGIE. You wouldn't take her to the Grecian Islands with you, would you, Beverly? Just for me?

WHITESIDE. Now, now. Lorraine is a charming person who has gallantly given up her own Christmas to spend it with me.

BEVERLY. (Crosses to c.) Oh, I knew I had a bit of dirt for us all to nibble on. (He draws a letter out of his pocket.)

~~(Again library doors are opened and the Doctor's head comes through, D. R.)~~

~~BRADLEY. Mr. Whiteside.~~

~~WHITESIDE. No, no, not now. Go away.~~

~~(Doctor withdraws D. R., closing doors.)~~

~~BEVERLY. Have you kidnapped someone, Sherry?~~

~~WHITESIDE. Yes, that was Charley Ross... Go ahead. Is this something juicy?~~

BEVERLY. (To stool L. of wheelchair—sits.) Juicy as a pomegranate. It is the latest report from London on the winter manoeuvres of Miss Lorraine Sheldon against the left flank—in fact, all flanks—of Lord Cedric Bottomley. Listen: "Lorraine has just left us in a cloud of Chanel Number Five. Since September, in her relentless pursuit of His Lordship, she has paused only to change girdles and check her oil. She has chased him, panting, from castle to castle, till he finally took refuge, for several week-ends, in the gentlemen's lavatory of the House of Lords. Practically no one is betting on the Derby this year; we are all making book on Lorraine. She is sailing tomorrow on the *Normandie*, but would return on the *Atlantic Clipper* if Bottomley so much as belches in her direction." Have you ever met Lord Bottomley, Maggie dear? (Rise to c.)

MAGGIE. No, I haven't.

BEVERLY. (Goes immediately into an impersonation of His Lordship. Very British, very full of teeth, ~~stuttering~~) "Not ~~—~~ very good shooting

[Nasal + simpering
(or any idiocy of your choosing!)]

today, blast it. Only six partridges, four grouse and the Duke of Sutherland. Haw, haw."

WHITESIDE. (*Chuckling.*) My God, that's Bottomley to his very bottom.

BEVERLY. (*Still in character.*) "Ripping debate in the House today. Old Basil spoke for three hours. He dropped dead at the end of it. Ripping. Haw!" (*Eases L.*)

MAGGIE. You're making it up, Beverly. No one sounds like that.

WHITESIDE. It's so good it's uncanny... Damn it, Beverly, why must you race right out of here? I never see enough of you, you ungrateful moppet.

BEVERLY. (*Crosses R. to Whiteside.*) Sherry darling, I can only tell you that my love for you is so great that I changed trains at Chicago to spend ten minutes with you and wish you a Merry Christmas. Merry Christmas, my lad. My little Magpie.

MAGGIE. (*Rises to C.*) Beverly!

BEVERLY. (*A look at his watch, crosses L. to piano D. L.*) And now I have just time for one magnificent number, to give you a taste of how brilliant the whole thing is. It's the second number from my new revue. (*He strikes chord on piano, but before he can go further the phone rings.*)

WHITESIDE. Oh, damn! Get rid of them, Maggie.

(*Maggie crosses to phone D. R. on large ottoman R. of wheelchair. Maggie, whose mind is on other things, abstractedly reaches for phone.*)

MAGGIE. Hello... Oh, hello, Bert. Oh! Well, just a minute. Beverly, would you talk to a newspaper man for just two minutes? I kind of promised him.

BEVERLY. (*During phone conversation, softly playing a few bars of a "former" hit.*) Won't have time, Magpie, unless he's under the piano.

MAGGIE. Oh! (*Into phone.*) Wait a minute. (*To Beverly again.*) Would you see him at—the station, just for a minute before the train goes? (*Beverly nods.*) Bert, go to the station and wait for him. He'll be there in a few minutes... 'Bye.

WHITESIDE. The stalls are impatient, Beverly. Let's have this second-rate masterpiece.