

#1

~~His hair is long and untidy and he wears a woken artistic tie. He has a confiding, almost childish manner.)~~

~~(MOLLIE enters and moves up centre.)~~

~~Weather is simply awful. My taxi gave up at your gate. (He crosses and places his hat on the sofa table.) Wouldn't attempt the drive. No sporting instinct. (moving up to MOLLIE.) Are you Mrs. Ralston? How delightful! My name's Wren.~~

MOLLIE. How do you do, Mr. Wren?

CHRISTOPHER. You know you're not at all as I'd pictured you. I've been thinking of you as a retired general's widow, Indian Army. I thought you'd be terrifically grim and Memsahibish, and that the whole place would be simply crammed with Benares brass. Instead, it's heavenly (*crossing below the sofa to left of the sofa table*) – quite heavenly. Lovely proportions. (*pointing at the desk*) That's a fake! (*pointing at the sofa table*) Ah, but this table's genuine. I'm simply going to love this place. (*He moves below the armchair centre.*) Have you got any wax flowers or birds of Paradise?

MOLLIE. I'm afraid not.

CHRISTOPHER. What a pity! Well, what about a sideboard? A purple plummy mahogany sideboard with great solid carved fruits on it?

MOLLIE. Yes, we have – in the dining-room. (*She glances at the door down right.*)

CHRISTOPHER. (*following her glance*) In here? (*He moves down right and opens the door.*) I must see it.

(CHRISTOPHER exits into the dining-room and MOLLIE follows him. GILES enters through the archway up right. He looks round and examines the suitcase. Hearing voices from the dining-room, GILES exits up right.)

MOLLIE. (*off*) Do come and warm yourself.

(MOLLIE enters from the dining-room, followed by CHRISTOPHER. MOLLIE moves centre.)

START

CHRISTOPHER. *(as he enters)* Absolutely perfect. Real bedrock respectability. But why do away with a centre mahogany table? *(looking off right)* Little tables just spoil the effect.

(GILES enters up right and stands left of the large armchair right.)

MOLLIE. We thought guests would prefer them – this is my husband.

CHRISTOPHER. *(moving up to GILES and shaking hands with him)* How do you do? Terrible weather, isn't it? Takes one back to Dickens and Scrooge and that irritating Tiny Tim. So bogus. *(He turns towards the fire.)* Of course, Mrs. Ralston, you're absolutely right about the little tables. I was being carried away by my feeling for period. If you had a mahogany dining-table, you'd have to have the right family round it. *(He turns to GILES.)* Stern handsome father with a beard, prolific, faded mother, eleven children of assorted ages, a grim governess, and somebody called "poor Harriet," the poor relation who acts as general dogsbody and is very, very grateful for being given a good home!

GILES. *(disliking him)* I'll take your suitcase upstairs for you. *(He picks up the suitcase. To MOLLIE)* Oak Room, did you say?

MOLLIE. Yes.

CHRISTOPHER. I do hope that it's got a fourposter with little chintz roses?

GILES. It hasn't.

(GILES exits left up the stairs with the suitcase.)

CHRISTOPHER. I don't believe your husband is going to like me. *(Moving a few paces towards MOLLIE.)* How long have you been married? Are you very much in love?

MOLLIE. *(coldly)* We've been married just a year. *(moving towards the stairs left)* Perhaps you'd like to go up and see your room?

CHRISTOPHER. Ticked off! (*He moves above the sofa table.*)

But I do so like knowing all about people. I mean, I think people are so madly interesting. Don't you?

MOLLIE. Well, I suppose some are and (*turning to CHRISTOPHER*) some are not.

CHRISTOPHER. No, I don't agree. They're *all* interesting, because you never really know what anyone is like – or what they are really thinking. For instance, *you* don't know what *I'm* thinking about now, do you? (*He smiles as at some secret joke.*)

MOLLIE. Not in the least. (*She moves down to the sofa table and takes a cigarette from the box.*) Cigarette?

CHRISTOPHER. No, thank you. (*moving to right of MOLLIE*) You see? The only people who really know what other people are like are artists – and they don't know why they know it! But if they're portrait painters (*He moves centre.*) it comes out – (*He sits on the right arm of the sofa.*) on the canvas.

MOLLIE. Are you a painter? (*She lights her cigarette.*)

CHRISTOPHER. No, I'm an architect. My parents, you know, baptized me Christopher, in the hope that I would be an architect. Christopher Wren! (*He laughs.*) As good as halfway home. Actually, of course, everyone laughs about it and makes jokes about St Paul's. However – who knows? – I may yet have the last laugh.

(**GILES** enters from the archway up left and crosses to the arch up right.)

Chris Wren's Prefab Nests may yet go down in history!
(*to GILES*) I'm going to like it here. I find your wife *most* sympathetic.

GILES. (*coldly*) Indeed.

CHRISTOPHER. (*turning to look at MOLLIE*) And really very beautiful.

MOLLIE. Oh, don't be absurd.

(**GILES** leans on the back of the large armchair.)

CHRISTOPHER. There, isn't that like an Englishwoman? Compliments always embarrass them. European women take compliments as a matter of course, but Englishwomen have all the feminine spirit crushed out of them by their husbands. *(He turns and looks at GILES.)* There's something very boorish about English husbands.

~~**MOLLIE.** *(hastily)* Come up and see your room. *(She crosses to the arch up left.)*~~

~~**CHRISTOPHER.** Shall I?~~

~~**MOLLIE.** *(to GILES)* Could you stoke up the hot water boiler?~~

~~*(MOLLIE and CHRISTOPHER exit up the stairs left.)*~~

~~**GILES.** *scowls and crosses to centre. The door bell peals.*~~

~~*There is a pause then it peals several times impatiently.*~~

~~**GILES.** *exits hurriedly up right to the front door. The sound of wind and snow is heard for a moment or two.)*~~

~~**MRS. BOYLE.** *(off)* This is Monkswell Manor, I presume?~~

~~**GILES.** *(off)* Yes...~~

~~*(MRS. BOYLE enters through the archway up right, carrying a suitcase, some magazines and her gloves. She is a large, imposing woman in a very bad temper.)*~~

~~**MRS. BOYLE.** I am Mrs. Boyle. *(She puts down the suitcase.)*~~

~~**GILES.** I'm Giles Ralston. Come in to the fire, Mrs. Boyle, and get warm.~~

~~*(MRS. BOYLE moves down to the fire.)*~~

~~A awful weather, isn't it? Is this your only luggage?~~

~~**MRS. BOYLE.** A Major — Metcalf, is it? — is seeing to it.~~

~~**GILES.** I'll leave the door for him.~~

~~*(GILES goes out to the front door.)*~~

~~**MRS. BOYLE.** The taxi wouldn't risk coming up the drive.~~

~~*(GILES returns and comes down to left of MRS. BOYLE.)*~~

~~It stopped at the gate. We had to share a taxi from the station — and there was great difficulty in getting that. *(accusingly)* Nothing ordered to meet us, it seems.~~

END