

ACT TWO

SCENE 5

Dining Room, Highhurst Castle. A long narrow table under a vaulted ceiling, antique walls covered with tapestry and implements of battle.

SERVANTS move about. LORD ADALBERT and LADY EUGENIA sit at opposite ends of the table. Between them sit PHOEBE, MONTY and SIBELLA. The atmosphere is tense. MUSIC fades out.

LORD ADALBERT

This fish is an abomination!

LADY EUGENIA

(Dryly:)

You specifically requested cod.

LORD ADALBERT

She knows very well I detest cod.

(LORD ADALBERT notices WALTER, a servant.)

Who the devil are you?

(WALTER nearly quakes with fear.)

LADY EUGENIA

It's Walter, dear. From the kitchen. I gave Bellamy the night off to visit his sick mother.

LORD ADALBERT

Sick mother! There's a good one.

(Of his wife:)

Most gullible woman on earth.

LADY EUGENIA

It's true. I should never have believed your vow to love, honor and cherish.

LORD ADALBERT

(Raising a glass to her.)

Till death do us part, my darling!

LADY EUGENIA

(Blowing a kiss.)

It's what I cling to, my sweet!

(Awkward silence. After a long moment, SIBELLA feels compelled to fill the vacuum.)

cut #7

SIBELLA

The servant problem in London is dreadful. You simply can't keep anyone for longer than six months.

(LADY EUGENIA cannot bear SIBELLA'S self-aggrandizing prattle.)

LADY EUGENIA

(To one of her SERVANTS:)

How long have you been here at Highhurst, Shingle?

(A SERVANT turns around – it is the one and only MARIETTA SHINGLE.)

MISS SHINGLE

Thirty-nine years, my lady. First of next month.

(MONTY nearly gasps.)

MONTY

(Lowering his voice:)

Miss Shingle—! What are you doing here?

MISS SHINGLE

Enjoy the cod, sir.

(MISS SINGLE moves on to the next guest. PHOEBE notices that MONTY is on edge.)

PHOEBE

Monty, dear, are you quite all right?

(MUSIC starts under.)

#19 – Poison in My Pocket (Reprise)**MONTY**

(Dabbing his brow.)

Yes, Phoebe, I'm fine. Just a bit fatigued, perhaps.

SIBELLA

(To the table:)

Have you been to the symphony lately?

(After a beat:)

No...

(We hear MONTY'S thoughts as HE sings.)

~~MONTY~~

~~I AM SITTING HERE WITH POISON IN MY POCKET.
LOOK WHO'S HEAD IS FINALLY ON THE BLOCK,
IT SEEMS THAT NOW AT LAST THE MOMENT
I'VE BEEN WAITING FOR IS HERE.~~

SIBELLA

Mr. Holland and I were at the Albert Hall the other evening.

~~MONTY~~

~~ALL THAT'S REALLY LEFT TO BE DECIDED
IS THE DISH TO PUT THE POISON IN, PROVIDED
I CAN DO WHAT MUST BE DONE DISCREETLY
WHEN THE COAST IS CLEAR.~~

PHOEBE

Aspic, darling?

~~MONTY~~

(Startled:)

Yes! No! All right!

(Singing)

~~I CONFESS IT
PAINS ME SOME TO RUIN SOMEONE'S COOKING
OH, FOR GOD'S SAKE, NOW ANOTHER SERVANT'S LOOKING.
I HAVE HAD A RUN OF LUCK
BUT THIS ONE DOES REQUIRE SKILL~~

SIBELLA

An entire program of Beethoven. From the sound of it, he must have been such an unhappy man.

(No response.)

Don't you think?

~~MONTY~~

~~FISH OR FOWL, IT MUST BE WELL SELECTED
SO THAT NO ONE ELSE AT ALL WILL BE AFFECTED.
WHAT AN AWFUL WASTE TO DO IN SOMEONE
I DON'T WANT TO KILL.~~

(MUSIC fades out.)

LORD ADALBERT

The venison is too rich. Take it away!

(Belching.)

This cook will kill me yet.

(MONTY nearly chokes on his food.)

So—what do you make of the castle, Novello?

MONTY

Oh, it's magnificent. Don't you think so, Phoebe?

PHOEBE

Oh, yes, marvelous!

LADY EUGENIA

It's falling apart and reeks of mildew.

(A beat.)

Not unlike my husband.

LORD ADALBERT

The men who have defended these walls! And brought honour to the name of D'Ysquith!

(LORD ADALBERT gestures to the medieval weaponry in the room.)

You see that broadsword over there? Roland, the second Earl, eviscerated his very own brother!

LADY EUGENIA

Really, Adalbert!

LORD ADALBERT

That crossbow? Belonged to my grandfather Charles. The details of the accident remain rather vague...

LADY EUGENIA

Let's leave it at that, shall we?

(LORD ADALBERT gets up from the table and takes a rifle off the wall.)

LORD ADALBERT

And I must show you the weapon I used to defend the Empire during the Boer War.

LADY EUGENIA

Really, Adalbert, *must* you?

(To her GUESTS:)

I beg you, I beg you not to encourage him!

LORD ADALBERT

It was the battle of Majuba Hill back in '81. The Boers stormed the mountain, we were completely surrounded.

(Reliving it:)

In the panic, Jurgen, my loyal young Transvaalian valet, suddenly revealed himself as a Boer. He was a turncoat, cornering me with my own weapon...

(HE handles it lovingly.)

Martini-Henry Mark II! Ever fired one?

(HE points it at EVERYONE around the table.)

LADY EUGENIA

Adalbert, sit down at once.

(HE does.)

LORD ADALBERT

Yes, I have looked death in the face. And death looked right back.

(MUSIC starts under.)

LADY EUGENIA

Here we go again...

END

#20 - *Looking Down the Barrel of a Gun*

LORD ADALBERT

WHEN YOU'RE LOOKING DOWN THE BARREL OF A GUN,
IT CONCENTRATES THE MIND COMPLETELY,
AND SUDDENLY YOU FIND
A LOVE FOR HUMANKIND
THAT MAKES YOU LOOK UPON THE WORLD MORE SWEETLY.

WHEN ALL AT ONCE IT SEEMS YOUR LIFE IS DONE,
YOU RECOGNIZE IT ALL GOES BY SO FLEETLY.
THERE'S SO MUCH LEFT TO DO,
EXCEPT, OF COURSE, FOR YOU,
WHEN YOU'RE LOOKING DOWN THE BARREL OF A GUN.

PHOEBE

Oh, this trifle is delicious!

(LORD ADALBERT looks as if HE might eat his dessert, but then pushes it toward SIBELLA).