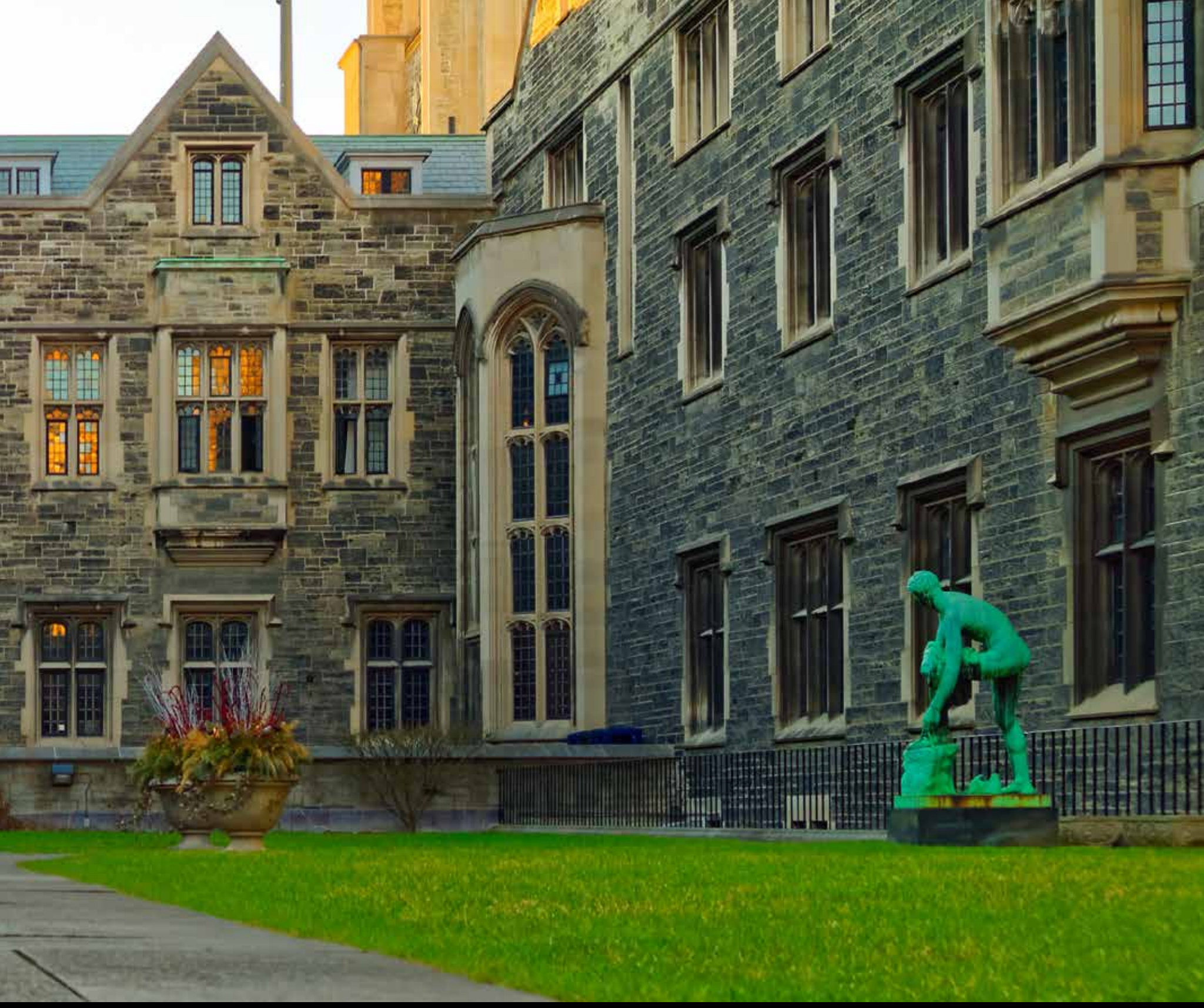

James Courage
PRIVATE HISTORY

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James Courage, 1938

INTRODUCTION: AN ALMOST PUBLIC HISTORY

Private History, James Courage's 1938 stage play, bought to public attention a matter of long standing: the intimate and sexual relationships of boys in boarding schools. Directed by Reginald Beckwith, *Private History* was performed at the Gate Theatre Studio in London's Villiers Street near the Strand.

Geoffrey Longman, a talented athlete at the fictional Bradbourn School in England, is the protagonist, and he has a crush on a younger student by the name of Gordon Danvers. Brian Nuthall, the sympathetic housemaster, is sent by a suspicious principal to ask Longman about his feelings for Danvers. Longman replies: 'Oh ... I don't know how to explain, but ... it's only that I haven't known lots of people ... and ... it's always a bit lonely at home. I never met anyone … before ... that I could – well, fall in love with'. The headmaster, an authoritarian character, perceives the potential threat to the school's moral authority. A senior student, Otley, had been expelled only days before. Otley had 'made it a joke to seduce younger boys – as a matter of street-corner dirtiness and smut'. The liberal-minded Nuthall insists Longman is not like Otley and persuades the principal not to expel him, but Longman ends up leaving the school regardless. When his mother visits for sports day she learns of her son's affection for Danvers, dismisses it out of hand – 'You and this other boy! That sort of thing utterly disgusts me; I've no words bad enough for it' – and takes him away.

The play resonates with the 'transplanted English atmosphere' of early-twentieth century Christchurch, the New Zealand city where James Courage was born and educated.[1] Christ's College, Courage's school between 1916 and 1921, had been closely modelled on the public schools of England. Its buildings, culture

and hierarchies drew upon English antecedents. There were other similarities too. E.C. Crosse took up the post of headmaster in Courage's last year, and he decided to 'stamp out the "homosexuality and self-abuse" he was convinced existed' at Christ's College.[2] The prefects were charged with the necessary enforcement.

Boys' boarding school life often involved a tense stand-off between romantic friendships and carnal engagements. The ideal of male romantic friendship, a deep and sometimes even spiritual attachment, had developed through the nineteenth century. Nobody was much threatened by the 'usual romantic friendship', to use Brian Nuttall's phrase, but sexual relationships could cause concern. Sex between boys led to purges at Westminster and Harrow Schools in London during the mid-1850s, but it is highly unlikely all the perpetrators were removed: poet and historian John Addington Symonds, himself homosexual, suggested 'the sport of naked boys in bed together' was very common at Harrow at the time.[3] Back at the fictional Bradbourn, boys like Otley had to be expelled least others be corrupted. The line between loving friendships and sexual desire could be blurry, however, and anyone may find himself on the wrong side of it. A boy named Melville suggested that Otley was probably 'no different from a lot of people' before admitting and defending his own 'crush' on Millar:

> Having a crush on Millar, Lealand, doesn't mean that I didn't find it very easy to forget him when I got home in the holidays and met a few decent girls, for once. I had a romantic friendship with Millar, nothing more. I haven't always found it easy to be shut up here at school for three months at a time and to keep my affections in cold storage. Does this satisfy your dirty little soul?

By the 1930s a new language inspired by Sigmund Freud, a psychiatrist, gave voice to such ambiguities. Young people needed to move from same-sex attachments to opposite-sex ones as part of their 'path' to 'maturity', and problems arose if they failed the transition. *Private History* alludes to this idea: it is implied that Longman may have developed an attraction to women if he had been treated sympathetically by the school and his own mother. Instead he came to realise he could enjoy only male company, and in early adulthood he went on to live with a man named Kit Brewster. He continued wondering, though, whether his 'nature'

might otherwise ‘have turned out differently’. Ever since his school days, Longman told Nuttall years later, ‘I’ve always turned to men, rather than women, for humanity … true companionship’. Horace Thorogood picked up this theme in his review of *Private History.* In Freudian fashion he suggested that ‘schoolboy passions are in certain boys natural phases of misdirected development that pass with time’, even though he acknowledged this was not Longland’s experience.[4] James Courage was not especially convinced by Freud’s account, thinking that same-sex desire was innate rather than an outcome of faulty socialisation. He did, however, offer his Freudian account in the ‘in the interests of common opinion’.[5]

Courage’s own life had male relationships at its centre. He left New Zealand in 1923 to attend Oxford University, and apart from a couple of extended holidays, one in New Zealand and another to see a former lover, Frank Fleet, in Argentina, he stayed in England. He came to see himself as an ‘invert’, an early-twentieth century term for men or women attracted to their own sex, and he went on to publish *A Way of Love* in 1959. This was the first gay novel penned by a New Zealander, and it proved something of a revelation to many.[6] But *Private History* is an important piece of writing too. The play tells of centuries-old attachments between schoolboys while gesturing to their transformation under the influence of much newer ideas about psychological development. In 1938 the topic was not well traversed in the public domain.

The Gate was a fashionable theatre club that boasted a subscription membership of between 500 and 1200, and its intelligent, bohemian audience was keen to see avant-garde work.[7] At the Gate, one wag wrote, ‘so many fine plays have been seen which likewise failed to confirm to the peculiar English ideas of what is fit for the stage and what is not’.[8] But Courage did well to have his play chosen. Manager Norman Marshall commissioned most of the plays put on at the Gate and he accepted only two, including *Private History*, ‘out of hundreds submitted by aspiring writers for the 1938 season’.[9]

Private History opened on the evening of 12 October. The play enjoyed packed-out houses and critical acclaim. Reviewers declared it ‘a powerful play extremely well-acted’, ‘very convincing’ with a ‘well-constructed plot’, and one suggested its ‘characterisation is poignantly truthful’. Thorogood wrote that the young actor Basil Coleman made the ‘shy affection and heartsick misery of Longman very moving’.[10]

There was something of a queer backstory too. Coleman's first major love had been Cecil Winter, the actor who played sympathetic housemaster Nuttall.[11] Acclaimed society photographer Angus McBean, also homosexual, immortalised Courage's sets and actors in a series of carefully composed images.

Courage's highly successful play was initially offered a transfer to a theatre in the West End, most likely the Apollo, but this did not eventuate. The Lord Chamberlain's office usually left alone private clubs like the Gate but censored public theatres by withholding licences; Marshall's memoir recalls the actions of the censor 'who seems to regard the susceptibilities of public school headmasters as coming under his special care, [and] refused a licence'.[12] For all that, *Private History* was 'a breakthrough for Courage both professionally and socially', as Christopher Burke writes, for it granted him a degree of access to London's homosexual and artistic circles.[13] Fans wrote to tell Courage how much they liked his work. Helen Robbins found *Private History*'s contemplation of male romantic companionship deeply thought provoking, and she declared the production 'one of the most interesting and best acted plays which I have seen at the Gate Theatre'. Christopher Draper, another fan, had this to say:

> I saw it twelve times in all and after it came off, felt quite lost. I do not think I could find a better way of putting my feelings about it into words than by saying on the last night it was as fresh and has as deep an effect upon me as when I first saw it. It would be too sad if we have seen the last of it and I am wondering if there is any chance of it being produced in book form as the Gate did with the Oscar Wilde play after that came off? My best wishes for 1939.[14]

It has been eighty-two years since Draper wrote to Courage asking for the play in book form, but here is an electronically published edition of *Private History*, complete with a copy of the programme and some of Angus McBean's evocative photographs.

CHRIS BRICKELL

NOTES

1 James Courage, ‘Present for K’, MS-0999/069, Hocken Collections, Dunedin (HC).

2 Don Hamilton, *College! A History of Christ’s College*, Christchurch: Christ’s College, 1996, p.371.

3 John Chandos, *Boys Together: English Public Schools, 1800–1864*, London: Hutchison, 1984, p.308.

4 Horace Thorogood, Review, MS-0999/002, HC.

5 James Courage, Diary, 5 October 1938, MS-0999/085, HC.

6 Peter Wells, ‘Introduction: Modest Achievements’, in Peter Wells and Rex Pilgrim (eds), *Best Mates: Gay Writing in Aotearoa New Zealand*, Auckland: Reed, 1997, pp.7-32.

7 John Lee, ‘A Private History: Towards a Biography of James Courage, Expatriate New Zealand Writer’, MA thesis, Victoria University of Wellington, 2001, p.63.

8 Newspaper clipping, MS-0999/005, HC.

9 Lee, ‘A Private History’, p.63.

10 Thorogood, Review.

11 William Kerley, personal correspondence with Chris Brickell, 8 November 2019. Kerley had been friends with Basil Coleman late in Coleman’s life.

12 Norman Marshall, *The Other Theatre,* London: John Lehmann, 1947, p.119.

13 Christopher Burke, ‘Speak to Me Stranger: Subjectivity, Homosexuality and the Preliberation Narratives of James Courage’, PhD thesis, University of Otago, 2012, p.291.

14 Christopher Draper to James Courage, 3 January 1939, MS-0999/005, HC.

Gate Theatre Studio

Private History

THE GATE THEATRE STUDIO

under the direction of Norman Marshall

presents

PRIVATE HISTORY

by

JAMES COURAGE

Characters in the order of their appearance:

Geoffrey Longman	Basil Coleman
Kit Brewster	John Kevan
Brian Nuthall	Cecil Winter
Judy Morland	Olga Edwardes
Unwin	Richard Pearson
Melville	David Evans
Garland	Kenneth Morgan
Caroline Nuthall	Vivienne Bennett
Mr. Maxton	Raymond Lovell
Mrs. Longman	Mary Hinton

THE PLAY PRODUCED BY REGINALD BECKWITH

Settings by Hedley Briggs

PROLOGUE	The Living-room of a small house near Falmouth	August afternoon 1938
ACT I	The House-prefects' Room in Nuthall's House, Bradbourn	Early Summer Evening 1931

INTERVAL

ACT II	Mr. Nuthall's Study	The following afternoon

INTERVAL

ACT III	The same as Act II	Five days later
EPILOGUE	The same as Prologue	August 1938

Telephone kindly lent by the G.P.O.

Stage Director	A. M. S. Mackenzie
Stage Manager	Michael Morice
Assistant Stage Managers	Eve Robertson and Muriel Byck
Scenery painted by	Joan Knight
Business Manager	E. M. Collett
Publicity	P. Laing

Membership of the Gate Theatre Studio costs 10/7. Particulars may be obtained from the Box Office

CHARACTERS

GEOFFREY LONGMAN

KIT BREWSTER

BRIAN NUTHALL

JUDY MORLAND

UNWIN

MELVILLE

GARLAND

CAROLINE NUTHALL

MR. MAXTON

MRS. LONGMAN

PROLOGUE

SCENES

PROLOGUE

The living-room of a small house near Falmouth,

August afternoon, 1938.

ACT I

The House Prefects' room in Mr. NUTHALL's house, Bradburn,

Early one summer evening, 1931.

ACT II

Mr. NUTHALL's study,

The following afternoon.

ACT III

The same as Act II,

Five days later.

EPILOGUE

The same as Prologue,

August 1938.

The living room of a small house near Falmouth, Cornwall, 1938. The room is the main room of a house built for and used as a summer holiday residence. The house is perched on a hillside overlooking the estuary of the river Fal. The windows, in consequence, show little save a large expanse of sky and the tops of a few of the beech-trees growing on the hillside below. The room itself is sparsely but brightly furnished: a centre table and some wicker chairs: nothing elaborate or expensive. There are two doors: (a) the front door of the house, opening directly into the room and really a part of the long windows at the back. This door, incidentally, is at the top of some steps leading up from a lane along the hillside below; (b) a door, R., leading to bedrooms and bathroom.

When THE CURTAIN RISES, GEOFFREY LONGMAN, a young man of twenty-five dressed in flannels and sports shirt, is seated on a corner of the table. He has a sheet of note-paper in one hand and a stub of pencil in the other, and is engaged in jotting down some sort of list. Presently he turns and calls towards the door on the R.

GEOFFREY: (*Calling*) Kit!

KIT: (*Answering from within*) Hullo?

GEOFFREY: Hurry up, for God's sake.

KIT: (*Off*) All right… Haven't got a spare razor-blade, have you?

GEOFFREY: Look in the cupboard. That blue packet.

KIT: (*Off*) Thanks.

GEOFFREY: You'd better buy yourself a few in Falmouth. I'll stick it down on the list. (*Writes*)

KIT: (*Off*) What list?

GEOFFREY: (*Reads from paper*) Coffee, sugar, bacon, tea, flour, sausages, cigarettes, lard, spaghetti, razor blades. (*Writes*) Oh, and matches.

KIT: (*Off*) Strewth… Why don't you come into Falmouth with me?

GEOFFREY: (*Lightly*) Because I want to be alone. No: old Mrs. Pen-what-not's coming up with the milk and eggs and stuff. I ought to be here to pay her, for once – these Cornish people are funny that way. (*Pencilling the list*) Anything needed in the bathroom?

KIT: (*Off*) This tube of tooth-paste's looking a bit anaemic.

GEOFFREY: I don't wonder, with the passion you have for cleaning your teeth. Positively indecent. (*Writes*) All right. Tube of tooth-paste – spelt 'dentifrice'. (*Pause*)

KIT: (*Off*) Oh, Geoff?

GEOFFREY: Hullo?

KIT: (*Off*) Look down and see if the car's all right, will you? I left it parked in the lane.

GEOFFREY: (*Moves to the windows at the back and glances down*) Yes, it's still there.

KIT: (*Off*) I ought to have shoved it back in the garage.

GEOFFREY: Yes, the lane is none too wide at the best of times.

KIT: (*Off*) anything coming along? Cornish cows or suchlike?

GEOFFREY: (*Looking out*) Not much. One car … about half a mile off. It may not come this way.

KIT: (*Off*) I'll be out in a jiffy … Any boats on the estuary?

GEOFFREY: (*Looking down*) a couple of yachts. There isn't much wind. It gets round behind the headland about lunch-time and stays there.

KIT: (*Off*) yes, damn it … Is the car still coming along?

GEOFFREY: (*Glancing out*) Yes. I think I'd better go down and back our bus into the garage. (*Moves*)

KIT: (*Calling*) No, look here, I've just finished.

HE ENTERS. A pleasant-faced, rather thick-set young man of about twenty-six or seven. Grey flannels and sports coat.

GEOFFREY: About time too, if you want to get back here for tea. Messing about all the afternoon …

KIT: You know, Geoff, I'm dashed glad I wasn't your fag at school. You must have given the poor little devil hell on earth.

GEOFFREY: I'm not sure I ever had a fag ... Come here, let me look at your tie. (*Reties tie for him*)

KIT: Odd sort of school it sounds to me.

GEOFFREY: Bradbourn? I support it was a bit odd. Hi, keep still. All I know is that I hated the damn place.

KIT: I've noticed you're never exactly chatty about it.

GEOFFREY: No …. I suppose not … We had a decent house-master, though – chap called Nuthall ... (*Finishing tie*) There you are, Monkey-face.

KIT: Thanks.

GEOFFREY: How did the cold-water shave go?

KIT: (*Fingering his shaven cheeks*) Gosh, I feel almost naked … Recognise me?

GEOFFREY: (*Lightly*) Just ... you'd better be off. Are you going to take a coat?

KIT: No, it's quite warm.

GEOFFREY: (*Handing him the paper*) Here's your list. What about money?

KIT: (*Producing coins from his pocket*) I've got about a quid, I think. Anyway, we'll work it out later: you can pay your whack then. (*Buttoning up his jacket*) Well, time I skipped.

GEOFFREY: (*Moving towards the door after him*) I'll come down to the car with you.

KIT: Right.

GEOFFREY: (*At the door*) Look after yourself. Don't be too long in Falmouth.

KIT: Right, I'll be back for tea. (*Both go out*)

The room is empty for a few moments, sounds of a car departing, below. GEOFFREY returns. Looks about him for a second, then fetches a couple of Jantzen bathing suits from the bathroom R., feels them to see if they are dry, then hangs them on the window sill in the sun. He lights a cigarette, goes to the bookshelf, and chooses a book, sits in one chair, then changes to another.

Sounds of a car below again, and the hoot of a Klaxon. GEOFFREY, puzzled, rises, crosses to the windows and looks down. Turns quickly, snatches a jacket from behind the door and pulls it on. Gives the room a quick lookover, then tackles the Jantzens from the windows and throws them out R.

A knock. GEOFFREY crosses and opens the door. A man of about thirty seven stands at the door. Tall and ascetically handsome.

GEOFFREY: (*Puzzled*) Good afternoon.

THE MAN: Good afternoon. Aren't you – Longman?

GEOFFREY: Yes, that's my name.

THE MAN: Mine's Nuthall. Perhaps you don't remember me?

GEOFFREY: (*Embarrassed*) But … yes, of course I do. At school.

NUTHALL: I know one's house-master is usually best forgotten. Still, one always hopes to be an exception. How are you, Longman?

GEOFFREY: Very well, sir. I … won't you come in?

NUTHALL: May I, for a few moments? (*Comes down*) I don't often come across Old Boys – they all seem to vanish. At any rate, from this isolated part of the world.

GEOFFREY: How did you know I was here, sir?

NUTHALL: (*Moving R.*) The Seddons told me. I think they let this house to you for a week or two.

GEOFFREY: Yes, we're taken it till the end of August. Just the summer holiday.

NUTHALL: My wife and I live further up the estuary here. About five miles away. I expect you remember my wife?

GEOFFREY: Yes, sir, very well. (*Moves to the window*) Is that her, down in the car, now?

NUTHALL: No: that's somebody you may also remember – a cousin of my wife's.

GEOFFREY Not – ?

NUTHALL: Judy Howland? Yes. She's staying with us for a week or two.

GEOFFREY: Oh … Yes I remember her. Wouldn't she care to come up?

NUTHALL: (*Smiles*) She's quite content where she is – for the moment. To be quite truthful, I made her promise to stay in the car. I'd like to have a talk to you alone for a bit.

GEOFFREY: Oh … all right, sir. Won't you sit down?

NUTHALL: Thanks. Tell me, Longman – you've a perfect right to turn me out – you don't mind me dropping in like this?

GEOFFREY: Not at all, sir. It was a bit of surprise, all the same. A friend of mine's just gone into Falmouth. When I heard your car, I thought he'd –

NUTHALL: Yes, there was a car just ahead of us in the lane. I thought it was going to block our way. May I smoke?

GEOFFREY: Have one of mine … It seems odd, Doesn't it – me offering you a cigarette?

NUTHALL: Why? Because of school?

GEOFFREY: I suppose so.

NUTHALL: Well, we've all got to get older, more's the pity. (*Having lit his cigarette*) Now, let's have a look at you … you've filled out a bit, quite a bit. Been doing any running lately?

GEOFFREY: Not much, sir. No sprinting, anyway – except for buses, in London.

NUTHALL: A pity. You won the House Cup for us, that last year – if I remember correctly.

GEOFFREY: Well, sir, … I helped to win it: I didn't –

NUTHALL: May I ask you something? Don't call me 'sir'. It makes me feel about two hundred.

GEOFFREY: I'm sorry. Habit dies hard. (*Smiles*)

NUTHALL: I've come to see you here as a friend, not – shall we say? – as one of those perennially boring creatures, an ex-schoolmaster.

GEOFFREY: (*Laughs*) Yes, sir. I mean, yes.

NUTHALL: In fact, to be truthful, the word 'sir' – so abject, so obsequious – makes me uncomfortable. All those poor little devils of boys. Well, well – their wives have to deal with them now ... Do you like this part of the world?

GEOFFREY: Very much. Have you been living down here long?

NUTHALL: Six years or so. My wife was born down this way – she'd always wanted to come back and live here. We've got a sort of market-garden at the head of the estuary, there. Lettuces and cauliflowers and other greenstock.

GEOFFREY: Gosh, I envy you. I wouldn't mind living here myself for good.

NUTHALL: (*After a glance at him*) I wonder. Cornwall can be very lonely sometimes, you know – it mightn't suit you. However, I know very little about your way of life.

GEOFFREY: That sounds rather sinister.

NUTHALL: Not at all. I should be very glad if you'd tell me a little about yourself – I mean since you left school.

GEOFFREY: (*Not quite happily*) I don't know that there's a great deal to tell. I've only –

NUTHALL: Somehow, you know, I've always been anxious to find out what had become of you.

GEOFFREY: That's very kind of you.

NUTHALL: You may not have realised it at the time, Longman, but all that unfortunate business at school made a considerable impression on me. On you, too, no doubt. I've always wanted to know how it affected you afterwards.

GEOFFREY: (*Getting up, embarrassed and reserved*) Oh ... yes ... I ...

NUTHALL: Are you happy in your life?

GEOFFREY: Now: ... Yes. I suppose I'm very happy.

NUTHALL: I'm glad of that ... I was afraid that perhaps your mother ... how is she, by the way?

GEOFFREY: Well ... my mother died, last year.

NUTHALL: Oh ... I'm sorry.

GEOFFREY: After she died, I sold the place we had in the country. I'm in London now. I've got a job in an advertising agency.

NUTHALL: Good. You wouldn't care to tell me anything more?

GEOFFREY: (*After a pause. Squarely*) Yes. If it would interest you.

NUTHALL: It would interest me. Very considerably. I think you may remember – I wasn't entirely unsympathetic, on a certain occasion at least.

GEOFFREY: Yes, I know. I've always wanted to thank you for that. Your sympathy made a very great difference. (*With an attempt at lightness*) In fact – if I can put it like that – I think it's made a difference to my life ever since.

NUTHALL: To be frank, that's what I've often wondered about. One has these afterthoughts.

A knock at the front door.

GEOFFREY: (*Surprised*) I'm afraid that's –

NUTHALL: I'm afraid it's probably Judy. (*Annoyed*) Tch. Why can these women never wait?

GEOFFREY: (*Moves towards the door*) I'll let her in.

NUTHALL: I told her to stay in the car. Let me speak to her. (*Moves*)

GEOFFREY opens the door.

GEOFFREY: Oh ... Hullo. Won't you come in?

JUDY MORLAND ENTERS. A young woman of twenty-three, very well-dressed in country clothes. Her manner is completely self-possessed.

JUDY: (*Rapidly, to GEOFFREY*) I'm sorry to break in on you like this. (*To NUTHALL*) Brian, there's a wagon trying to get past the car in the lane. I've tried to back, but I've got myself into the ditch. See what you can do, will you? The man's all hot and bothered.

NUTHALL: Oh. (*Reluctantly*) All right. I'll go. You ought to have to told me before. (*Goes*)

JUDY: (*Calling after him*) Better turn the car right round. (*To GEOFFREY*) I'm sorry about this.

GEOFFREY: The lane's very narrow. Kind of one-way traffic.

JUDY: (*Holding out her hand*) We've met before, haven't we.

GEOFFREY: Yes, I think we have. You came to the school – on Sports Day. (*Shakes hand*)

JUDY: I remember you simply as 'Longman'. I suppose even schoolboys do have Christian names.

GEOFFREY: (*As self-possessed as she*) A few of them, I believe.

JUDY: (*Nods*) Brian was your housemaster, wasn't he?

GEOFFREY: Yes.

JUDY: And you were a prefect?

GEOFFREY: A house-prefect, yes.

JUDY: You know, I've an apology to make to you. Do you remember?

GEOFFREY: (*Shortly*) Yes.

JUDY: You came into Brian's study, that night after Sports Day, to see your mother or something. Anyway, we met, and – I remember so well – I was beastly to you. Quite beastly.

GEOFFREY: Don't you think all that's better forgotten?

JUDY: You've hated me ever since, haven't you?

GEOFFREY: (*Moving away*) No, I can't say I've hated you. Only – well, I happened to be rather unhappy that evening, and –

JUDY: I know. Or rather, I think I've realised it since. I was very young then – I didn't know much about that side of human nature.

GEOFFREY: Oh, that's all right. Everybody makes mistakes.

JUDY: (*Nods*) That's true. (*Declines a cigarette*) No, thanks ... (*Resuming the conversation*) I only wanted to say I was sorry.

GEOFFREY: Do you mind if we talk of something else?

JUDY: No ... Let's talk about ... what? Cornwall? (*Crosses to the windows*) You've got such a beautiful view of the estuary from here.

GEOFFREY: Yes.

JUDY: (*Looking down*) Oh, thank Heavens, Brian's got the car out of the way. Poor Brian, he looks so angry ... (*Coming back into the room*) Have you been staying here long?

GEOFFREY: Just over a week.

JUDY: You're quite sunburnt.

GEOFFREY: We bathe most of the day, when it's hot enough.

JUDY: You're not living here alone, are you?

GEOFFREY: No. I'm sharing with another man. Kit Brewster. He's gone into Falmouth – a minute or two before you came. He'll be back about tea time.

JUDY: Oh. I see.

NUTHALL returns.

NUTHALL: I've had to back the car into your garage, Longman. Will that be all right?

GEOFFREY: Yes, of course.

NUTHALL: Well, Judy? Did you find something to talk about?

JUDY: We did indeed. I even made my little apology.

GEOFFREY: Miss Morland has a very good memory.

NUTHALL: Judy has? ... An understanding one, I hope?

JUDY: Understanding, even if not entirely sympathetic.

GEOFFREY: Your sympathies, Judy, are far too largely a matter of those very unstable things – your personal emotions. (*Sits*)

JUDY: A womanly failing, Brian. In this case – altogether womanly. (*To GEOFFREY*) Aren't I right?

GEOFFREY: If you think so.

NUTHALL: (*To JUDY*) Now look here, Judy, I came here this afternoon for the pleasure of talking to Longman alone. You, on the other hand, came for a little fresh air. I don't want to make myself clearer, but ...

JUDY: (*Conciliatory*) All right. I'll go. I'll go for a walk, down as far as the water.

NUTHALL: If you would.

JUDY: (*To GEOFFREY*) Goodbye for the moment. I'm sorry I spoke like that, just now.

GEOFFREY: That's all right.

JUDY: I'm apt to be rather a cat sometimes. (*To NUTHALL*) Caroline's expecting us back to tea, Brian. I'll give you a quarter of an hour.

NUTHALL: All right.

JUDY: If you're not down at the car then, I'll come up and fetch you.

GEOFFREY: I'd offer you tea here, but – well –

JUDY: (*Nods*) Don't worry. I quite understand. (*Going*) Oh, I'd almost forgotten, there was a little bit of news I wanted to tell you. (*To NUTHALL*) Shall I, Brian?

NUTHALL: (*Impatiently*) If you're talking about what I think you are, Judy, I don't think Longman would be in the least interested.

JUDY: All right. We'll leave it at that. Orange blossoms aren't everybody's flowers. (*She goes out*)

NUTHALL: I may be wrong but wasn't there something behind that tone of voice?

GEOFFREY: (*Seriously*) Yes. A good deal, I'm afraid.

NUTHALL: I see ... Well, Longman, where were we when – ?

GEOFFREY: We were talking about school, I think.

NUTHALL: Yes, I think I was asking you what effect ... all that ... had had on your life since, wasn't I?

GEOFFREY: Yes, that was it.

NUTHALL: Well?

GEOFFREY: You see, sir, it wasn't just a question of my nature; that might have turned out differently. I think it was rather ... the fact that you –

NUTHALL: (*Helping him*) That I –?

GEOFFREY: It's hard to explain, but ... you see, sir ... you were the only one at the time who made me realise that what I felt wasn't – oh, I don't know – something so utterly wrong and impossible.

NUTHALL: I only did what any sane man –

GEOFFREY: You did more then that: you understood. Even my mother didn't understand – your wife didn't – Miss Morland didn't. Only you did. What they couldn't understand, you – a man – could understand quite well.

The lights begin to dim.

That's what I mean to say when I say that your sympathy's made a difference to my life, ever since.

NUTHALL: But, Longman, that was six or seven years ago ... A long time ...

The lights go down on the PROLOGUE.

CURTAIN.

ACT I

The House-Prefects' Room in NUTHALL's House, Bradbourn, about six o'clock on an early summer evening (1931). The room (or study) is on the first floor and has big windows in the R wall looking on the trees growing in the quadrangle below. The single door is in the back wall. There is a table in the middle of the floor: some chairs grouped loosely about it: and, against the walls, four wooden desks with locks underneath. The room is untidy: books, papers, racquets, shoes, etc. are scattered about. The walls are hung haphazardly with school-groups, pictures of girls cut from magazine-advertisements etc. When the curtain rises, two boys are in the room. UNWIN, a chubby youth of about seventeen, lounges at the table, feet up, reading a moto-magazine. The other lad MELVILLE, sits at one of the desks, threading new laces into a pair of spiked running-shoes. He is about nineteen, his manner and speech almost mature.

UNWIN: (*After a moment or two, flicking over the pages of his paper*) Which would you rather have – a B.S.A. or a New Imperial?

MELVILLE: (*Without looking up*) Don't ask me. Not much in my line – motor bikes … Why?

UNWIN: My Pater says I can I get one on my twenty-firster. Four more bally years to wait. (*Sighs and returns to his paper*) … I say, look at this picture of a girl on a Rover. (*Holds out the paper*) What do you think of that for a piece of hot stuff?

MELVILLE: (*Looks dispassionately*) She certainly seems to have a good deal of leg attached to her.

UNWIN: (*Looking again*) Silk stockings too. (*Naively*) I suppose they just stuck her on the bike for a sort of advertisement.

MELVILLE: I shouldn't be in the least surprised.

UNWIN: Well, you needn't be so jolly sarcastic. (*Continues to gaze at the picture for a moment, then throws the paper on the table*) You wait till I am twenty-one. (*Yawns and stretches*) Gosh, I am hungry. Got anything to eat? A spot of biscuit?

MELVILLE: Hall's just over half an hour. You'd better wait.

UNWIN: (*In disgust*) Hall. Bread and blasted turnip-jam… enough to give anyone the bellyache.

MELVILLE: Nothing better for the training, as Smacks would say.

UNWIN: A bit of training wouldn't do old Smacks any harm himself. I'll bet they only made him Headmaster because he could sling a bit of weight about at Masters' meetings. (*Gets up*) Gosh, I've gone all rattly inside. (*Shakes himself*) Come on, give us a biscuit.

MELVILLE: I haven't got any bloody biscuits. What's more, if you're in for the High Jump on Wednesday you're better without them. Don't you know what training means?

UNWIN: Yes – belly-rattles. (*Crossing to one of the desks near the window*) I'm going to see if Longman's got anything. You keep cave while I look in his locker.

MELVILLE: Don't be a fool. Only means a row with Longman. In any case you wouldn't like him to go prying about in your private locker.

UNWIN: Who's funk of Longman, anyway?

MELVILLE: You'd be the first to be, my lad. He's a damn sight better athlete than you'll ever be.

UNWIN: Longman? Aw, pills. He's a mother's boy who can run a bit – that's all.

MELVILLE: A good deal more there than 'a bit'. He'll win the Mile on Wednesday – and the Half, with any luck. (*Flexing the soles of his running shoes in his hands*) I wish I could borrow his pace, over the Hurdles: suit me down to the ground.

UNWIN: (*Shaking his hands gently against his stomach*) Something's gone loose, in there … Gosh, I must have a biscuit ... I'm a growing boy. It's cruel. (*He bends to open the locker door*)

MELVILLE: You keep away from Longman's locker.

UNWIN: I'm only going to have a look.

> *He is about to open the locker when the study door bursts open and a sharp featured youth of about seventeen, GARLAND by name, ENTERS. He is dressed in a blazer, running shorts, etc.*

GARLAND: Hullo, you blokes.

UNWIN: (*Straightening up guiltily*) Oh … Hullo, Garters. Thought you were Longman.

GARLAND: Longman? Why?

MELVILLE: Unwin didn't recognise your dainty step in the passage, Garland.

GARLAND: Oh … (*Goes to his desk, takes a wrist-watch from his pocket and puts it in his locker*) Longman's out on the Field still, having a shot at the Miler. Nutters is timing him with a stop-watch.

MELVILLE: Any good?

GARLAND: Dunno. I've been sprinting. Jenkins said he was somewhere near the record.

MELVILLE: Good for Longman. He'll just be Nutter's white-headed boy if he breaks it on Wednesday. Nobody in this House has come within yards of winning the Miler for God knows how long – not since the end of the war probably.

GARLAND: No. (*Goes to the table, picks up and glances at UNWIN's motoring-paper*) I'd win the jolly race myself – on a motor-bike.

UNWIN: (*Naively*) You'd be bloody well disqualified.

GARLAND: (*Jeering*) Go on. Not me … I'm pretty hot on a bike, I am. Real dirt-track stuff.

MELVILLE: (*Scathing*) I should think 'dirt' was just about the word.

GARLAND: You ought to see me in the summer hols. You know… in the evenings … you've only got to ride along the lanes near where we live, throttle down the old engine a bit and keep your eyes skinned. You men'd be surprised.

MELVILLE: Evening classes for Nature Study, I suppose.

GARLAND: You bet. Animal life in the bracken.

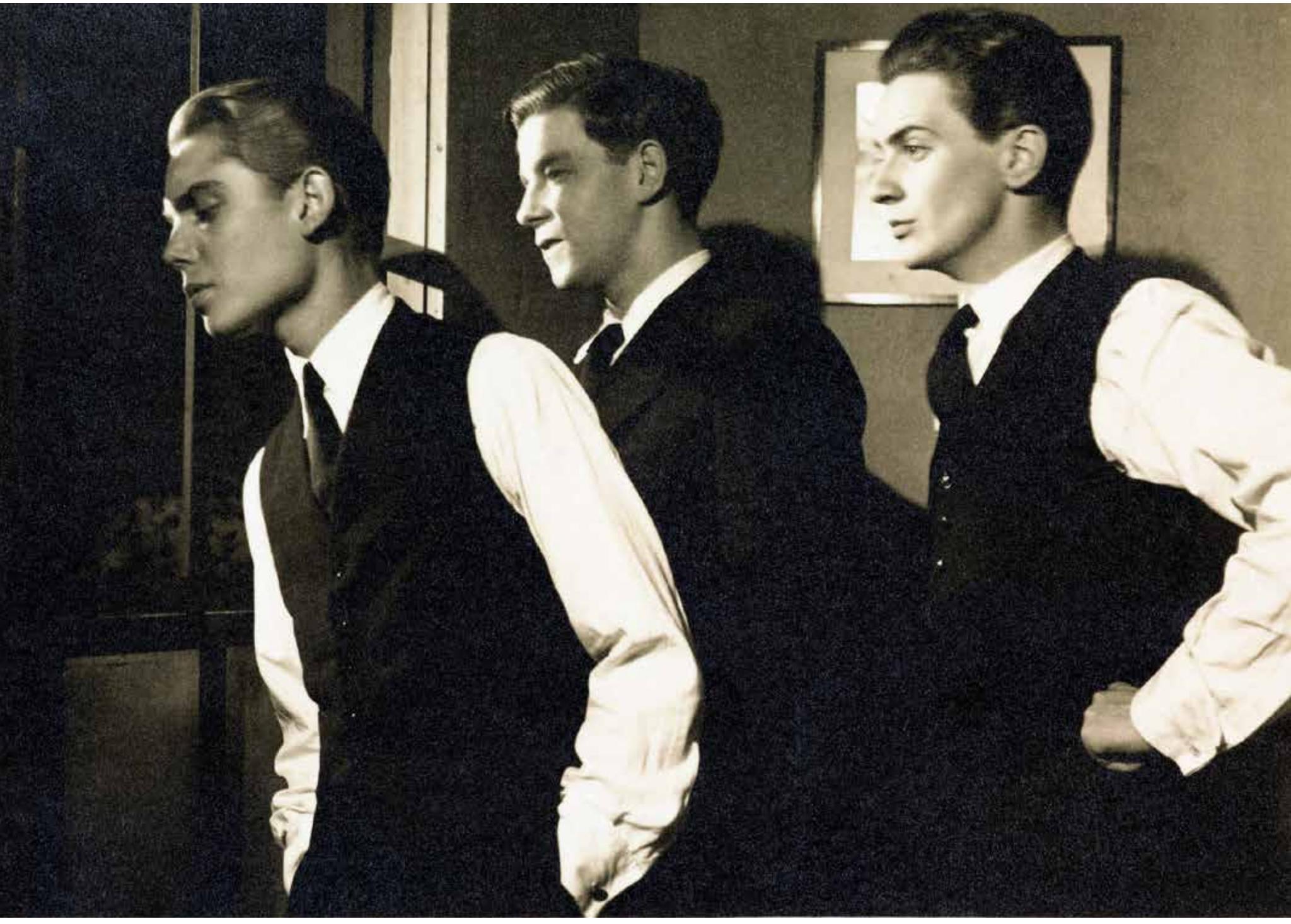
UNWIN: (*Innocently*) What do you mean? Moths?

MELVILLE: Moths. Come out of your pram.

UNWIN: Well, how was I to know –?

GARLAND: You ought to see their faces when I loom up on the old bike – (*Simulates an amazed and fatuous expression*)

MELVILLE: I don't wonder. Of all the dirty little peeping Toms you're the limit –



GARLAND: (*Defiantly*) Well, why not? Sex is sex, isn't it?

MELVILLE: Not in your stars, Horatio. To you, my boy, sex is smut. S-M-U-T.

GARLAND: (*To UNWIN*) List to him – gone all religious.

MELVILLE: (Exasperated) Oh, for Heaven's sake. … Anyway, you've got time enough to think about sex when you're old enough to appreciate it. You're only a damn school-kid yet.

GARLAND: (*Codding*) Huh. Nobody ever thinks about sex at school, do they. Oh-h-h, no.

MELVILLE: You think about it too ruddy much.

UNWIN: (*To GARLAND*) Yes – you jolly well do.

GARLAND: I'm not the only one. (*With the air of imparting a relished secret*) I suppose you chaps haven't heard what all the row was about in the New House yesterday?

UNWIN: You mean – about Otley?

GARLAND: Yes. (*To MELVILLE*) You heard, Melks?

MELVILLE: I heard that some ass in the New House had been turfed out, that's all. I didn't know it was Otley.

GARLAND: Well, I heard all about it. Old Smacks messing about caught Otley with one of the Junior kids in the corridor. There was a hell of a bust up. Otley's been sacked.

MELVILLE: Quite rightly too. If Otley wants to do that sort of thing with Juniors he ought to have enough sense to do it in private. A corridor is asking for trouble.

GARLAND: He's got all the trouble he wants from old Smacks, anyway. Poor old Otters went off by the train this morning. That's the end of him. Chucked out on his ear-hole.

MELVILLE: Who told you this fruity scandal?

GARLAND: Jenkins did. He was just coming out of one of the studies when it all happened.

MELVILLE: Listening behind the door, more likely, if I know anything of friend Jenkins. He's just about as big a gas-bag as you are.

UNWIN: Anyway, it's true about Otley. I heard it too. Everybody was gassing about it before chapel this morning.

MELVILLE: Charming pair of gossips, aren't you. Bang out of Cranford.

GARLAND: Well, anyway, Otley's sacked, why shouldn't we talk about it?

MELVILLE: No reason at all. Except that you both can't see beyond the end of your noses. You think it is nothing but a dirty little scandal.

UNWIN: Well, what else is it?

MELVILLE: Only a little side-light on most public schools. (*Flexes his running shoes*)

GARLAND: You try telling that to old Smacks and see what happens.

MELVILLE: That's just exactly what I'd like to do. Those masters get my goat – they must know things like the Otley-business go on. They go on in nine schools out of ten. Yet as soon as some silly young fool's caught kissing some other young fool, what happens? The balloons go up with a zip.

UNWIN: It's all jolly well for you to talk.

MELVILLE: Well – Good Lord – aren't I right? Because those masters – old Smacks and the rest – choose to blink at human nature, that doesn't mean the school's full of a collection of nice little saints with haloes on top. Far from it. Otley was no different from a lot of other people.

GARLAND: Oh, wasn't he? You listen to what Jenkins told me –

MELVILLE: I don't want to hear friend Jenkins' raptures, thanks. I mean what I say. Otley's was only a case that happened to come to light. I daresay if the truth were known, neither of you two is exactly ripe for a halo in that direction.

UNWIN: Here, you speak for yourself. What about you, anyway?

GARLAND: Yes, what about you?

MELVILLE: Well, what about me?

GARLAND: You aren't such a ruddy saint yourself. What about you and young Miller two terms ago? Go on, say you hadn't a crush on him.

MELVILLE: Very well, if you want to bring that up, I admit it: I had.

GARLAND: There you are. See?

MELVILLE: Having a crush on Miller, Garland, doesn't mean that I didn't find it very easy to forget him when I got home in the holidays and met a few decent girls, for once. (*Gets up and throws his shoes on the table*) I had a romantic friendship for Miller, nothing more. I haven't always found it easy to be shut up here at school for three months at a time and to keep my affections in cold store. Does that satisfy your dirty little soul?

GARLAND: I don't know about that. You try gassing to old Smacks about cold storage.

MELVILLE: Smacks prefers to take the worst possible view of any friendship. A wonderful example of the schoolmasterly tradition I was talking about.

UNWIN: He took the worst view of Otley's friendship all right.

MELVILLE: Exactly. Just as though Otley was one of those rotters you read about in the papers – Not a damn silly schoolboy.

A clock begins to strike distantly.

GARLAND: (*Galvanised into action*) Strewth there's six o'clock. I've got to have a shower and change before Hall … (*To MELVILLE*) So long, uncle. See you later. (*Goes*)

MELVILLE: (*After a slight pause, returning to his desk*) What a blinking Nosy Parker that kid is. Trust him to know all the savoury details about Otley. He thinks himself a bit of Scotland Yard, he does. (*Finds a comb on his desk, goes to the window, props up a small square mirror and combs his hair before it*)

UNWIN: (*Who has returned to his paper*) Otley wasn't so dashed innocent as you think, you know.

MELVILLE: Now don't you start. … Innocent or not, I'm damn glad he wasn't in this house. That's one blessing, anyway. We don't want any scandals here.

UNWIN: Speak for yourself. It might be a bit of fun. All this training on an empty gut gets me down.

GEOFFREY LONGMAN ENTERS. A good-looking boy of about seventeen.

He is in blazer, running-shorts etc., having just come in from the Field. His manner is reserved, even shy, though with no impression of weakness.

MELVILLE: (*Turning*) Hullo, kid … A bit late, aren't you?

LONGMAN: A little. I've been out on the Field. (*Crosses to his desk*) How long till Hall?

UNWIN: Six has just struck.

LONGMAN: Good: I've got half an hour … Nobody's left a note for me, have they?

UNWIN: No, I don't think so.

MELVILLE: I hear you're having a shot at the Miler. How did it go?

LONGMAN: Oh ... not too bad, thanks. Nutters was timing with a stop-watch.

MELVILLE: Got anywhere near the record?

LONGMAN: (*Sits and begins to massage his leg muscles with the palms of his hands*) Yes, not far off – I might get a bad start on Wednesday. (*Stretching one leg*) Phew, I am a bit stiff.

MELVILLE: Well, don't forget we are counting on you to bring the House Cup back to us.

LONGMAN: (*Smiles shyly*) Yes, that's just the trouble. I'll probably get stage-fright on Wednesday.

MELVILLE: Oh, rot. You're fit as a fiddle.

UNWIN: I say, Longman, have you heard the news about Otley?

LONGMAN: Otley? No ... why?

UNWIN: The Head is given him the sack.

LONGMAN: What for?

MELVILLE: (*To UNWIN*) Go on, you won't be happy till you've told him.

UNWIN: (*To LONGMAN*) Otley's got the push for mugging some Junior kid in New House.

LONGMAN: Oh … No, I hadn't heard.

UNWIN: (*Suggestively*) Interested?

LONGMAN: Well … I don't know … Otley was rather a slimy brute, anyway, wasn't he? I mean – he deserved to get the sack.

UNWIN: (*To MELVILLE*) There you are, Melks – what did I tell you.

MELVILLE: You know too ruddy much, you do. (*Makes a playful swipe at UNWIN in passing*) Personally, without going into this case too deeply, I think it's pretty hard luck on Otley. However, I won't start on that again. What do you think, Longman?

LONGMAN: I'm not sure, really.

UNWIN: A bit too near home, what?

LONGMAN: Near home? What do you mean?

UNWIN: (*Off-hand*) Nix, old boy, nix … All the same, what about you and young Danvers?

MELVILLE: Oh, shut up, Unwin. Mind your own business.

LONGMAN: (*To MELVILLE*) No, let him go on. (*To UNWIN*) Go on, what about me and Danvers?

UNWIN: Look out for old Smacks, that's all. And be careful where you walk on Sunday afternoons. Might be a spot of trouble.

LONGMAN: (*Rising*) You're a dirty swine, aren't you.

MELVILLE: Go on, Longman, smack him one. He's been asking for it.

LONGMAN: (*Snatching the motoring paper from UNWIN*) You think you're jolly clever, don't you. You take that back – about me and Danvers.

UNWIN: 'Strewth, anyone'd think I was the only one that knew. (*Rising*) Keep your hair on.

LONGMAN: You take that back – about me and Danvers.

MELVILLE: Steady, Longman. Go on, Unwin, apologise and get it off your chest.

UNWIN: Well, dammit, if he's caught he'll only get the sack like Otley.

LONGMAN: How do you know I'm like Otley. If you think I'm a swine like that –

UNWIN: Well, you might be, mightn't you.

LONGMAN: Go on, put your hands up. If you think I –

He hits UNWIN. They are about to close when the study door opens and MR. NUTHALL comes in. A man of about thirty. He waits a moment until the combatants have separated.

NUTHALL: (*To LONGMAN*) I came in to ask if you'd noticed where I put my stop-watch, Longman? I thought I had it in my pocket when I came from the Field just now. I seem to have lost it somewhere.

LONGMAN: (*Collecting himself*) Oh … I … I think you lent it to Mr. Maxton, sir. He wanted to time Cholmondley with it.

NUTHALL: Ah, yes, perhaps I did. We were so busy working out your own times I didn't notice ... Thank you … By the way, I wish you House-prefects wouldn't fight in the studies. Use the Gymnasium if you want to settle your private differences. Melville, you ought to know that: you're the senior here.

MELVILLE: Yes, sir. I'm sorry, sir.

NUTHALL: What's it all about, Longman?

LONGMAN: Oh, nothing much, sir. Just a … scrap.

NUTHALL: I see. Well, we don't want you with a broken nose on Wednesday. It's high time this House distinguished itself at the sports again. Don't you agree, Unwin?

UNWIN: Yes, sir. I'm training awfully hard.

NUTHALL: I'm glad to hear that. At the same time, Unwin, a little more application to your school wouldn't noticeably go astray. Body and mind, you know – the old Greek ideal. Ever heard that one?

UNWIN: (*Smiling*) Yes, sir.

NUTHALL: (*Amiably*) Good. Don't overlook it. As your House-master I've a professional interest in such matters … By the way, Longman, there was another little thing I wanted to see you about. (*Turning to MELVILLE and UNWIN*) Perhaps if these gentlemen would kindly leave us for a few minutes … Thank you.

MELVILLE and UNWIN go out.

NUTHALL: I found a letter from your mother waiting for me when I got in, Longman.

LONGMAN: Oh … Yes, sir?

NUTHALL: She said you'd written to her at the beginning of the term – when I made you a house-prefect – saying that you found it a little difficult to work in this study. She asked me about it.

LONGMAN: I didn't mean it quite like that, sir. I only meant that I found it a bit difficult to settle down at first.

NUTHALL: Difficult after the Common Room or after the holidays?

LONGMAN: Well, neither, exactly, sir. I think what I meant was it was a change to have the extra freedom – only to have to obey the House-prefects' rules and so on.

NUTHALL: I see. Oh, well, that's not very serious. You'll settle down. How old are you, incidentally?

LONGMAN: Seventeen. Nearly eighteen, sir.

NUTHALL: You've only been here a little over a year, haven't you? I seem to recollect that there was some difficulty about your admission because you'd had a tutor at home.

LONGMAN: Yes, sir. Only my father had been at school here and –

NUTHALL: So they waived the objection. Yes, I remember now. Your father's name's on the War Memorial in the chapel, isn't it? Were you the only child?

LONGMAN: Yes, sir.

NUTHALL: Your father had been rather a good athlete at school here, I believe.

LONGMAN: Yes, sir. He won the School Cup two years running, His name's on it.

NUTHALL: Well, let's hope you'll follow in his footsteps. Your performance this afternoon seemed a pretty good omen. I'm counting on you to carry off that Open Mile on Wednesday, you know: you're the only boy in this House who has a ghost of a chance. (*He has picked up a book from one of the desks as he talks and now opens it idly*) A ghost of a chance.

LONGMAN: Yes, sir. I'll do my best.

NUTHALL: It's your great occasion, in fact ... A pity we haven't got a Pindar to write an Ode for the victor ... (*He reads a line of Greek from the book in his hand*) Good old Pindar ... do you ever write poetry yourself?

LONGMAN: (*Slightly embarrassed*) I don't know that you'd call it poetry, sir. More like verse.

NUTHALL: Never mind, if you've got the lyric impulse – that's the main thing ... I'm afraid my wife has more time to read poetry than I do, these days. When you spend your days teaching History and French irregular verbs the Muse is apt to get a trifle neglected. The world is too much with us, and so forth ... What kind of verse do you write?

LONGMAN: Nothing very big, sir. One or two ... sonnets sometimes. They're a bit wobbly, though.

NUTHALL: (*His eyes still on the book*) Sonnets do you? I hope you find some pretty girl in the holiday to dedicate them to.

LONGMAN: (*Diffidently*) Well, no , sir ... I haven't yet. You see, it's usually rather ... Lonely at home. Just mother and a few country neighbours ... nobody much. I hardly ever meet anybody of my own age.

NUTHALL: I see. (*Closing the book*) By the way, Longman, my wife and I would be pleased if you'd come into supper with us on Sunday night after Chapel. That's if you don't think it would interfere with your training.

LONGMAN: Thank you, sir. I don't think it will.

NUTHALL: All right then. We have somebody staying with us you might be interested to meet. A pity about those sonnets. (*Smiles*)

LONGMAN: (*Smiles*) About the dedications, you mean, sir?

NUTHALL: (*Absently*) Yes. (*He has picked up Unwin's paper from the table and now turns the pages*) Whose is this? Unwin's?

LONGMAN: Yes, sir.

NUTHALL: The mechanical age ... motor-bicycles and mass-produced cars. How they love them. Tell me, Longman, you say you don't meet many people at home – are you lonely here at school? I ask because I've noticed you sometimes appear

to stand a little apart from the other prefects in the House. I know it isn't strictly my business –

The study door bursts open GARLAND rushes in, half-dressed, his wet hair falling in a fringe over his eyes.

GARLAND: I say, you blokes, lend me a comb, will you? (*Sees Nuthall*) Oh ... sorry, sir, I didn't know you were in here.

NUTHALL: Come in, Garland, come in. Don't mind me. Make yourself at home in your boudoir. (*Going*) Well, then, Longman, I can reassure your mother when I answer her letter –

LONGMAN: I think she'll be up for the Sports on Wednesday, sir, if you'd –

NUTHALL: Ah, then perhaps I can speak to her then. She might dine with us that evening: I'll ask my wife.

LONGMAN: Thank you, sir.

NUTHALL: (*At the door*) And you say I lent my stop-watch to Mr. Maxton?

LONGMAN: Yes, sir.

NUTHALL: Right, Oh, and remind Melville that I'll take over the Common Room prep. from him at eight o'clock, will you? Garland, you might do that for me.

GARLAND: Right oh, sir.

NUTHALL: (*In disgust*) 'Right oh'. Barbaric expression. You'll be saying okey-dokey next. (*Goes out*)

GARLAND: Gosh, didn't expect to find old Nutters in here? What did he want? Somebody got the skivvy with child? (*LONGMAN doesn't answer*) Hullo ... fallen into a trance? ... Anything up?

LONGMAN: (*Rousing himself*) No ... Nothing is up ... Didn't see Unwin in the changing-room, did you?

GARLAND: No ... You'd better look slippy if you want a shower before Hall ... Where's that comb of Melville's? (*Finding it on top of the mirror by the window*) Golly, the thing's full of hair. Old Melks must have a moult on.

LONGMAN: I say, Garland, is it true about Otley and that Junior kid in New House? I mean, was Otley sacked right away, like that?

GARLAND: You bet your life, he was. The end of his little slap-and-tickle.

LONGMAN: But ... do you think Otley was really fond of the kid?

GARLAND: (*Parting his hair at the mirror*) I don't suppose he was sloppy about him, if that's what you're getting at. Look, is this parting straight? (*He bends down his head*) Give it a squiz, will you?

LONGMAN: It's all right. So – it was just a question of – lust?

GARLAND: Who? Otley? Well, what else did you think it was? The Junior kid wasn't a girl: no lovey-dovey business about it.

LONGMAN: (*Slowly*) No, I suppose not. (*He moves to his desk, makes sure that his locker door is closed*) I must go and change. I may be a minute or two late for Hall, if Melville asks.

GARLAND: Okey-doke.

LONGMAN goes out. GARLAND, alone, finishes his hair, finds a penknife and cleans his nails. Takes a pair of socks-suspenders from his pocket and puts them on, hitching up his trouser-legs and whistling to himself. Feels one of his thighs gingerly.

MELVILLE and UNWIN return, first peering round the door to make sure that NUTHALL has gone.

MELVILLE: Nutters gone?

GARLAND: Yes. I came rushing in here and found him pi-jawing to Longman. Nutters went all coy.

UNWIN: He turfed us out, the dirty dog. Where's Longman gone?

GARLAND: Changing for Hall.

MELVILLE: (*To UNWIN*) Lucky for you, Unwin. (*To GARLAND*) Nutters probably prevented a murder. Longman and Unwin were enjoying a slight difference of opinion.

GARLAND: When Nutters came in? Was it a scrap?

MELVILLE: It was. (*Indicating UNWIN*) This little modest violet started making suggestions.

GARLAND: I just mentioned that kid Danvers name and Longman went up in the air. Silly ass.

MELVILLE: (*To UNWIN*) I should say 'mentioned' was a slight understatement. I may be wrong.

GARLAND: But ... Danvers. Good Lord ... I thought there was something funny.

MELVILLE: More than Unwin did – or would have in another five minutes.

GARLAND: No, I mean ... Look here, Jenkins told me this: he saw Longman and Danvers together in Birchington Woods, last Sunday afternoon.

MELVILLE: Well, what about it?

GARLAND: What about it. Only that it was out of bounds for Danvers and one of his House pro's saw him and jumped on him for it afterwards.

MELVILLE: And I suppose that's quite sufficient to damn Longman so far as you're concerned? My good lout, you make me vomit.

GARLAND: Well, I don't know ... Anyway, I've always been a bit suspicious about Longman.

UNWIN: So have I.

GARLAND: These blokes who don't come to school until they can go slap into the Lower Sixth. There's always something funny –

UNWIN: Yes, they don't have to fag, for one thing.

MELVILLE: What the blazes has all that got to do with it? You can't go attacking Longman's morals simply he's got a few more brains than you have. Which, God knows, isn't saying much.

GARLAND: Well, I do think it's all a bit fishy, anyway. And another thing – what about Nutters – always asking Longman to supper with him and Mrs. Nutts on Sunday nights?

MELVILLE: That, my lad, is sheer jealousy on your part. Don't think I haven't seen you hanging on the window for a look at the piece of goods that's staying with the Nutters. And very nice too. Only don't make that a point of jealousy against Longman – it won't work. Not with me, anyway.

UNWIN: Oh, shut up Melville; always jawing.

GARLAND: Yes, he's jealous himself. (*To MELVILLE*) I've seen you cocking your eye towards Nutters' house once or twice too. Sweet seventeen, eh? ... Go on, you dirty old man.

UNWIN: Oh, shut it, you two. She's only a kid anyway. (*Holding his stomach*) Gosh, I've started to rattle again. Food, food bee-ootiful food.

MELVILLE: Well, keep your nose out of Longman's locker. If he's got biscuits there, they're his not ours.

UNWIN: Longman. Huh. I'd have knocked the physog. off him if Nutters hadn't barged in like that.

MELVILLE: If, yes. I don't think.

UNWIN: Well, I jolly well would have ... (*Holding his stomach*) Ooh, I'm dying. How long till Hall, Garters?

GARLAND: Why the Hades don't you look at the Big Clock? (*Leans out of the window, sideways*) It's twenty past ...

UNWIN: Oh-oh, ten minutes.

GARLAND: (*Still leaning out, arrested by something in the Quadrangle below*) I say, you blokes, look; old Smacks having a jaw with Nutters down in the Quad. What price our fat Headmaster?

UNWIN: (*Jumping up and leaning out of the window beside GARLAND*) Wouldn't waste a tenner. (*Calling loudly*) Not one stinking tenner.

MELVILLE: (*Angrily: the Senior prefect*) Come in, you fool. What the dickens do you think you're doing?

UNWIN: Telling Smacks just what I think of him.

MELVILLE: Shouting out the window like a blasted housemaid.

UNWIN: (*Coming back, reluctantly*) Oh, ... all right. (*Comes to table and sits*) Don't be so jolly official – I'm a pre, too, don't forget.

MELVILLE: Yes. (*Scathingly*) So I've noticed.

GARLAND: (*Still leaning out the window*) What do you think they're jawing about? Some row, I'll bet.

MELVILLE: (*To GARLAND*) You'd better come in, too.

GARLAND: Old Smacks doesn't hit it off too well with Nutters, you know – thinks Nutters is a spot too free with us in the House. I believe he'd get him sacked if he could.

MELVILLE: Get Nutters sacked? Where did you hear that story?

GARLAND: Oh, just know. When Nutters got Birchington Woods put into bounds last term old Smacks nearly hit the roof. He even told the Masters' Meeting he'd whack the first kid from School House he caught going there.

MELVILLE: But didn't the Masters take a vote on it – about extending the bounds? Nutters may only have proposed it.

GARLAND: Yes, they took a vote all right – and Nutters won. I told you, Unwin, didn't I?

UNWIN: (*Yawning*) Yes.

MELVILLE: (*To GARLAND*) What I want to know is where you heard all this from? It strikes me you know more about what goes on in this damned school than you ought too.

GARLAND: Oh, do I. Well, if you want to know, I saw the Minute Book of the Meeting open on Smacks' desk one day when I had to go to his study. (*Unconsciously he feels the seat of his trousers*)

MELVILLE: Bright little nipper, aren't you. Scotland Yard's going to be just too thrilled.

GARLAND: Oh, shut up. ... Anyway, I'm right about Smacks and Nutters. You've got to be pretty blind not to see that Smacks always jumps harder on anyone in this House than in any of the others. That's just his rotten way of getting his own back at Nutters.

UNWIN: You wait till the Sports on Wednesday – somebody's going to have a shot at old Smacks' rear with the starting pistol.

GARLAND: I wish they would. That'd teach him to go about jumping on people in this House ... I hope Longman does the Miler – it'd be one up for us, for once.

UNWIN: Smacks has got his money on Cholmondley.

GARLAND: Yes, because Cholmondley's in School House, and Longman's in ours. Dirty old Bastard. (*Goes back to window*) Look at him.

MELVILLE: Are they still there?

GARLAND: Yes ... Poor old Nutters is looking a bit worried.

UNWIN: Smacks has probably bagged his stop-watch and pawned it.

MELVILLE: (*Who has taken up a tennis racquet and has been testing the strings*) Which one of you two adolescent charmers has run off with my racquet-press?

UNWIN: What? (*Turns*) Oh, Stokes borrowed it. It's probably in the other study.

MELVILLE: Blast Stokes. Meanwhile, my one and only decent racquet looks like a fishing-net. (*Moves towards the door*)

GARLAND: Oh, I say, Melville – Nutters told me to tell you he'd take over Prep. for you at eight.

MELVILLE: Oh ... right. Thanks. (*Goes out*)

UNWIN: I say, Garters ... are you hungry?

GARLAND: Yes, a good bit. (*Coming from the window*)

UNWIN: Take a look at Longmans' locker and see if he's got any biscuits.

GARLAND: What about training?

UNWIN: It won't hurt if we eat now, just before Hall ... Go on, have a look.

GARLAND: You keep cave then.

UNWIN: (*At once all attention*) Right-oh. (*Goes to the door, opens it stealthily and glances into the corridor*) All clear.

GARLAND: (*Bends down and opens the locker*) What'll they be in? A tin?

UNWIN: They were, last week.

GARLAND: (*Searching*) I can't see any. There's a smell of mice, though. (*Pulls out a scarf*) I say, what do you think of that? Silk. *(Feeling it)* Austin Reeds. (*Puts the scarf back and brings out a book. Reads out the title laboriously*) "Iolaus: An

Anthology of Friendship". What's that?

UNWIN: Some sort of crib, sure to be. Lend it here. Wait, I'll put a chair against the door. (*Does so*) You go looking for the biscuits. (*Takes the book*) Now, let's have a look.

GARLAND: Can't see any tins here.

UNWIN: Look under the books. He always hides everything. (*As he opens the Anthology a slip of paper falls out and flutters to the floor*) ... (*He picks up the paper and glances at it*)

GARLAND: You come and look yourself, you've looked before.

UNWIN: (*Looking up from the paper*) I say, Garters, listen to this. It fell out of the book.

GARLAND: What? (*Standing up*) What is it?

UNWIN: Bit of poetry – all written out.

GARLAND: Go on, read it.

UNWIN: (*Reads very smoothly*)

> Your name awaits you, yet you do not come,
> Helen, Alexis, Chloe, Jonathan:
> Forsake the dust of Athens or of Rome –
> Shine forth a woman or arise, a man.

The rest's torn off. What does it mean?

GARLAND: Perhaps it's out of a cracker ... Is that Longman's writing?

UNWIN: Looks like it.

GARLAND: Do you think he made it up?

UNWIN: Dunno ... can't you find the biscuits? Have another squiz. Right at the bottom.

GARLAND: All right. (*Returns to the search*) You keep a look-out. (*He dislodges a pile of books which fall out on the floor*) Oh, hang, look here ...

UNWIN: (*Has put the paper back in the book and is flicking over its pages*) This is awful muck, all classical. Shove it back.

GARLAND: I've upset all these ruddy books. (*Begins putting them back*) Give me a hand, quick.

UNWIN: Right. (*Begins to help him, then picks up a photograph from among the scattered books*) 'Strewth, look at this.

GARLAND: (*Shoving back the last of the volumes and closing the locker*) What? ... (*Looking over UNWIN's shoulder*) Who's that?

UNWIN: Who does it look like, you mug?

GARLAND: (*Taking the photograph*) Gosh. Young Danvers. Well, I'm – (*There is a push at the chair – closed door*) Here, cave. (*He hides the picture under his coat*)

MELVILLE comes in, carrying his racquet and press. He displaces the chair against the door.

MELVILLE: What the hell's this? A booby-trap?

UNWIN: No, just a sort of ... French cricket.

MELVILLE: Oh? What fun. (*Preoccupied, crosses to his desk*) I say, Garland, what was all that about some House prefect warning Danvers for being in Birchington Woods – out of bounds?

GARLAND: Yes, it was true. Last Sunday –

MELVILLE: Who was the House prefect? Somebody in School House?

GARLAND: Yes. Cholmondley. Why?

MELVILLE: Only that there seems to be some sort of row brewing over it. Stokes has just been telling me, in the other study.

UNWIN: What sort of row?

MELVILLE: Mainly about Longman. He seems to have got himself involved, rather stupidly.

GARLAND: Longman was with Danvers in the Woods when Cholmondley saw them.

MELVILLE: Exactly. And apparently Longman tried to use his authority as House prefect to get Danvers off of the rumpus.

UNWIN: But Danvers is in School House.

MELVILLE: Yes, Danvers is in School House – that's just it. Any authority Longman has extends only to the people in this House – his own House. He can't go swinging it about all over the school: he'll land himself in trouble.

UNWIN: Well, Gosh, that's Longman's funeral –

MELVILLE: Not entirely. I'm Head Prefect in this House. The trouble might come back at me. It certainly will do if it reaches old Smacks' ears.

GARLAND: It'd come back at Nutters more than you, for making Longman a prefect.

MELVILLE: Perhaps ... Anyway, nothing much has happened yet. It may all blow over. (*He crosses to the window and looks down*) I wonder if ... h'm ... the Head's just leaving Nutters now.

GARLAND: Do you think they've been –

MELVILLE: (*Cutting him short*) I don't know: it might have been anything. (*Looking down*) Hell, some idiot's gone and stuck a pair of white shoes to dry on the flower-bed. (*Crosses to the door*) Why the blazes can't these kids read the rules? I'll knock the little blighter's chump off when I find him. (*Goes out*)

GARLAND: (*Taking the photograph from under his coat*) Put the chair back against the door.

UNWIN: (*Does so*) Right.

GARLAND: Now, let's have a gaze ... Gosh, the thing signed ... "From Gordon" ... like a bally actors' ... (*In disgust*) Fancy keeping a thing like that in your locker.

UNWIN: I knew Longman had a crush on the kid – I jolly well told him so, too.

GARLAND: (*A thought striking him*) I say ... yes ... Look here, when I came in here just now – I mean when Nutters had cleared off – Longman started – bang off – asking me about Otley.

UNWIN: What about him?

GARLAND: Something about ... did I think Otley was really struck on that Junior kid – the one he'd been sacked for. You know ... all serious about it. I was combing my hair over by the window.

UNWIN: What did you say?

GARLAND: Well, I said the kid wasn't a girl. Then Longman didn't say much ... and went out. What do you make of that?

UNWIN: Well ... what?

GARLAND: It means the deuce of a lot, if you ask me. Danvers, for one thing, Birchington Woods, for another. Two and two makes four, doesn't it?

(*A bell rings distantly*)

UNWIN: There's the five-minute bell, for Hall. (*Hands back the photograph*) Here, you'd better put this back. You saw where it came from.

GARLAND: (*About to replace the picture, then hesitates*) No ... I say, look here, let's do something about this.

UNWIN: Do what?

GARLAND: Just let Longman know somebody's seen it. See? Just drop a hint.

UNWIN: You mean – say something to him?

GARLAND: No, you mutt. Don't say anything ... Got any sticking plaster?

UNWIN: No.

GARLAND: Well, stamp-paper then. Got one of those little two-bob stamp-books?

UNWIN: Yes ... somewhere. (*Goes to his desk and opens the locker*)

GARLAND: Come on. Quick. (*UNWIN produces a stamp-book. GARLAND snatches it*) It doesn't matter about the stamps. It's the sticky paper I want. (*Tears out a couple of strips*) There. You lick it: I'm dry.

UNWIN: But … Look here … What are you going to do?

GARLAND: Go, on, lick.

UNWIN: (*Does so*) All right ... Here you are.

GARLAND: (*Taking the paper*) Now ... (*He sticks the paper carefully across the face of the photograph*) Right bang on the physog.

UNWIN: (*Slightly horrified*) But ... well, what's Longman going to say?

GARLAND: He won't know who did it. We'll just prop it up on his desk. Pretty subtle, what.

UNWIN: (*Backing out*) Well, I didn't do it. You can't drag me in. I don't want to get Longman's rat up.

GARLAND: It was your stamp-paper. You licked it. (*He props up the defaced photograph on LONGMAN'S desk*) There, how's that for a hint? Jolly good, I call it.

UNWIN: Well, I think it's a low trick. Longman hasn't done anything to you.

GARLAND: Go on, you wanted to get a smack back at him, didn't you. Well, there you are.

> *The door is again pushed open and MELVILLE reappears. He again puts the chair aside. He carries a letter his hand.*

MELVILLE: (*Moving the chair*) Look here, what Hell is all this? Why can't you leave the chairs in their proper places?

GARLAND: (*Quickly placing himself in front of LONGMAN's desk to hide the photograph*) Why shouldn't we have a game? Don't be so bossy.

MELVILLE: Ring-a-ring-of-roses, I suppose. (*Places the letter on the table*) Isn't Longman back yet? This letter for him was in the rack. I'll leave it here.

GARLAND: Did you catch the kid who'd put his shoes out?

MELVILLE: Yes. He said he'd put them there for fun. I'm going to whack him after Hall. That'll be for fun too.

UNWIN: (*Has been glancing at LONGMAN's letter*) Did this come by the post? It's not stamped.

MELVILLE: I don't know. It probably came from one of the other Houses. (*Rummaging in a corner of the room amongst magazines, cricket-bats, boots, etc*) Where's that cane? It was here yesterday. Isn't a damn thing safe in this study? I suppose Stokes borrowed it?

GARLAND: He did, as a matter of fact. Said he wanted to practice on a cushion.

MELVILLE: Trust you to know. (*Moves*) Well, I suppose I'd better get it back. You didn't lend him a cushion too, did you?

GARLAND: He said he had one.

MELVILLE: Well, ask him to take the carpet next time. He might care to beat that. (*Goes out*)

UNWIN: (*To GARLAND*) You'd have looked a fool if that had been Longman.

GARLAND: (*Moves from before the desk*) So would you. (*Glances at the letter on the table*) Funny time to get a letter, isn't it? Just before Hall.

UNWIN: (*Reluctant, half-curious*) Leave it alone. It isn't addressed to you.

GARLAND: Who's touching it, anyway? (*Doing so, nevertheless*) That's a kid's writing.

UNWIN: (*Moving towards Longman's desk to inspect the defaced photograph*) How do you know?

GARLAND: Simple. Kids always put squiggles on their capital G's. (*Reads the address on the envelope*) "G. Longman, Nutthall's House (*Then, a thought striking him, he moves quickly to Longman's desk, takes up the defaced photograph and compares the signature upon it with the writing on the envelope*) I say ... wait a sec ...

UNWIN: What's up?

GARLAND: Know what? That *G* on the envelope's the same this *G* here – the one on "Gordon" Have a squiz yourself. See?

UNWIN: (*Reluctant*) Yes.

GARLAND: That just proves it. This letter's from the Danvers kid. (*Rubs his hands*) Hot piece of detection, what? (*Hearing a noise at the door*) Cave. (*He grabs hold of UNWIN and makes him stand in front of the photograph on Longman's desk, hiding it*) Come on, your turn.

MELVILLE RE-ENTERS, carrying a cane

MELVILLE: I'll brain the first chap who takes this out of here again. First thing we know, some Junior kid'll have made a bonfire off it. (*Gives GARLAND a by no means light flick on the rump with the cane*) Hear that, Sherlock Holmes?

GARLAND: (*His hands protecting his backside*) Gosh, Melville, steady on. I've got a boil coming there.

MELVILLE: (*Putting the cane away*) That won't help you much on Sports Day.

GARLAND: Whacking it won't either.

MELVILLE: Better get Matron to lance it for you, just as the Hundred Yards begins. You'd win at a canter. Nutters'd love for it, and the House Cup would be yours. (*Glancing at UNWIN*) What's suddenly struck you so dumb?

UNWIN: (*Gulping*) Me? ... Oh ... an empty belly.

MELVILLE: (*Picking up his running shoes again*) It doesn't usually have that desirable effect on you ... Hasn't Longman come in from changing yet?

GARLAND: He said he might be a minute or two late for Hall. I was to tell you.

MELVILLE: Oh ... Well, I hope to blazes there's not going to be a general bust-up about this Birchington Woods affair. We don't want Longman tangled up in any rows with the Head: not before Sports Day in any case.

GARLAND: What could old Smacks do, anyway?

MELVILLE: God knows. Depends on how much he hears, or imagines. Longman had no earthly right to try and get Danvers off a whacking if the kid was out of bounds. He ought to have realised that himself.

GARLAND: It'd give Smacks just the opportunity he wants: To come down hard on somebody in this House.

MELVILLE: Yes, that's just what I'm afraid off. Too good an opportunity altogether.

UNWIN: Why don't you ask Longman what happened?

MELVILLE: I may, later. Meanwhile, we'd all better keep quiet about it. That means you too, Garland – you keep your nose where it is, on your face.

A bell clangs distantly

MELVILLE: There's Hall. (*Crosses to the table for a second. Picks up LONGMAN's letter, then puts it down again*) H'm ... Well, come on. We'd better go.

MELVILLE goes out first. UNWIN and GARLAND exchange looks, then glance at the photograph on LONGMAN's desk.

UNWIN: (*Conscience-stricken*) Look here, don't you think we ought to –

GARLAND: Go on, don't be a funk. Leave it. Come on – I'm going. (*Goes out*)

UNWIN pauses for a moment, then, overcome by fresh pangs of hunger, slowly goes out. The room is left empty. Sounds of boys running and laughing in the corridor outside, gradually dying away into silence.

LONGMAN ENTERS. He is changed and brushed, but is doing up his coat. He goes to the table, sees the letter, tears it open and begins happily to read it. His face gradually clouds over into anxiety. Holding the letter in his hand he moves towards his desk. The defaced photograph confronts him. He sizes it, stares at it a moment, then looks round him with an expression of almost animal pain and bitterness.

CURTAIN

ACT II

Mr. Nuthall's Study, the following afternoon. A pleasant room, more like an under-graduate's sitting-room than an academic sanctum. Comfortable modern furniture, table-lamps, low book-cases, good reproductions of modern pictures. Vases well-arranged with spring flowers. French doors on to garden, L. Door into the interior of the House, R. A wide fire-place, upper R. A big desk close to the French doors. Telephone on desk. When the curtain rises NUTHALL is seated at the desk, correcting a pile of exercise books. Over his ordinary clothes he wears a black gown, carelessly, one sleeve half down, as though he had forgotten to take it off. Presently he looks up, lights a cigarette absently and begins to move about the room in an unsettled manner. A tap at the door and CAROLINE NUTHALL ENTERS. A woman of about thirty-two, slightly older than her husband. Good-looking, maternal in manner, well-dressed.

CAROLINE: (*At the door*) May I come in, Brian? Are you busy?

NUTHALL: Well, I was. What is it?

CAROLINE: Are any of the boys coming in for supper on Sunday night? I ought to order the food today. Saturday morning's always an unholy rush.

NUTHALL: Yes ... Yes, I asked Longman to come. (*Hesitates*) Oh, but wait a moment ... I don't know ... Can I tell you later?

CAROLINE: Very well, dear. Perhaps I'd better order a sirloin anyway. Judy can always help to finish it – I've seldom known a child with such an appetite.

NUTHALL: Judy. I shouldn't exactly call her a child, Caroline.

CAROLINE: All girls of sixteen are children my dear. They talk of nothing but hockey and boys – and not too much hockey, either. This place is the nearest approach to Heaven she's ever been in.

NUTHALL: Sexy little monkey. However, she's your relation, not mine. In any case, you'd better ask her to control her Heavenly raptures on Sports Day. There'll be more than enough excitement about, as it is.

CAROLINE: Very well, my dear. She can always reserve her less restrained emotions for the benefit of her diary.

NUTHALL: The thought of that diary rather makes me shudder, frankly. All that bleak adolescent fun –

CAROLINE: My dear, it's very good for her: it occupies hours of her time. She's upstairs now, perfectly happy with a pound of chocolates and a fountain pen.

NUTHALL: H'm. If I know anything about her, she's gazing out of the window waiting for the end of afternoon school.

CAROLINE: Don't blame her. She's very young. (*Crossing to him*) Your gown's slipping off. Come here. It looks to me as though it needed a stich in time. Look at it.

NUTHALL: (*Impatiently*) Oh, it's all right. (Restive) No, help me off with it. (*She does so*) I wish I never had to wear the confounded thing: It always makes me look a crow.

CAROLINE: It is a trifle funereal. A pity you don't wear a red one and look like a cardinal. (*Folds the gown over her arm*) I'll just glance at it and see if I can pull it together. (*Going*) Oh ... (*Turns*) And you did definitely ask Longman to come to supper on Sunday?

NUTHALL: Yes, but – well, never mind. By the way, I sent a message telling him I wanted to see him. He'll be here after last period. Let him come through at once, will you?

CAROLINE: All right, dear. (*Looking into one of the flower-vases, in passing*) He's a charming boy; I like him. He seems much more of an individual than most of the others.

NUTHALL: Does he?

CAROLINE: (*Inspecting the vase*) I think these flowers cold do with a little more water, don't you?

NUTHALL: (*Impatiently*) Oh, leave them now, Caroline. They've got enough to go on with.

CAROLINE: (*Turning after. Slight pause*) Are you worried about anything, Brian? I noticed it last night.

NUTHALL: (*Evasive, yet wishing to lean on somebody*) Oh, it's nothing much. Only a school matter.

CAROLINE: (*Wisely*) I know these 'school matters': they're worse than the domestic variety. Can't I help? Is it anything to do with Sports Day?

NUTHALL: No – I tell you it's nothing much.

CAROLINE: (*Resigned*) Very well, then. (*Going*) You haven't got a headache, have you? There's some aspirin in the bathroom cupboard.

NUTHALL: No, I haven't got a headache.

CAROLINE: Well, I'll go out and order the beef for Sunday. I'll telephone about it. (*At the door*) Can I use the hall extension?

NUTHALL: Yes, but ... wait a moment, Caroline. Are you – well, very busy?

CAROLINE: (*Smiling*) Not very busy, no. Judy helped me with most of the chores this morning. What is it you want? Just a talk?

NUTHALL: Well ... yes, perhaps that's it.

CAROLINE: I'll be back in two seconds. (*Puts gown on sofa-back*) I'll get my work basket and mend this in here ... Oh, and I've got to telephone. Can you wait?

NUTHALL nods. She goes out. NUTHALL throws away his cigarette. the telephone rings on the desk. He pays no attention until it rings a second time, urgently.

NUTHALL: (*Answering*) Yes? ... Yes, Nuthall speaking ... (*Stiffens*) Oh, yes: I thought it was my ringing – sorry. It's you, Maxton, is it? ... Yes ... Well, I haven't seen Longman yet ... No, I told him to come along after last period ... Yes, better for me to see him first ... I quite realise it's a school matter, I assure you, though I can't say that – otherwise – I take quite your view of it ... Naturally, I'm only the boy's Housemaster ... (*Impatiently*) Yes, yes, I know all about Otley and all that. but I don't think this is the same thing: in fact I'm sure it isn't ... Well, well, if you must .... Yes, I'll expect you in about half an hour ... (*Coolly*) Goodbye. (*Replaces the receiver, rubs his forehead. then goes to the French windows and opens them as if for air*)

A light tap on the door and JUDY MORLAND ENTERS. She is sixteen and is finding it, on the whole, great fun. NUTHALL's manner towards her during the following conversation is a trifle absent.

JUDY: Hullo.

NUTHALL: (*Turning*) Oh ... Hullo, Judy. What do you want?

JUDY: I want to borrow a dictionary. May I?

NUTHALL: Yes, I suppose so. There are several in the book-case, there.

JUDY: Thanks. I'm not very hot on more than three syllables. (*Goes to the book-case and bends down)* Here?

NUTHALL: Where's Caroline?

JUDY: In the hall, waiting for you to finish with the telephone. She wants to ring up the butcher. Disgusting. I hate meat.

NUTHALL: Really? ... You're looking very smart, this afternoon, aren't you?

JUDY: (*Glancing disparagingly at her dress*) Oh, this old thing ... It's a bit of a bag, really. I'm keeping my best bib-and-tucker for Wednesday – I'm going to look all Dietrich with a veil.

NUTHALL: You'll need it ... when do you go back to school?

JUDY: Next week, worse luck. Unless I can sham being ill a bit longer.

NUTHALL: I must say, you don't look very ill to me.

JUDY: I'm not. It was only a sort of green blush I had ... (*Selecting a dictionary from the shelves – one with green binding*) Can I have this one?

NUTHALL: Yes, take it. The colour may help.

JUDY: (*Giggles*) I think you're awfully waggish, you know. I do think, honestly. I don't know how Caroline stands you.

NUTHALL: To be truthful, Judy, I wonder that sometimes myself.

JUDY: Are you like that with the boys?

NUTHALL: No, Judy. I reserve it all for my wife's cousins. Write that down in your diary.

JUDY: How did you know I kept a diary? You are a pig. It's marked *Absolutely Private*.

CAROLINE RE-ENTERS, CARRYING a work-basket.

JUDY: (*Going to her*) Caroline, Brian's been teasing me again. I think he's a bit of a brute, really.

CAROLINE: (*Going placidly to the sofa*) Do you, Judy? That's a pity.

JUDY: He thinks I'm just a silly little school-girl. I can see it in his eye.

CAROLINE: Nonsense, Judy, dear, he couldn't be so tactless ... is that a novel you've got there?

JUDY: No. It's a dictionary. I wanted to look up a word. (*CAROLINE smiles*) Don't worry, Caroline, it isn't a medical dictionary.

CAROLINE: No, dear, the medical dictionary's up in your room already. (*Kisses her to cover this remark*) Unkind, aren't I?

School bell clangs in the distance.

JUDY: Oh ... is that the end of afternoon school?

NUTHALL: It is.

JUDY: Oh ... Well, I think I'll just go and finish what I was writing upstairs.

CAROLINE: You ought to be out of doors, Judy, it's a fine afternoon.

JUDY: Oh, Caroline ... Well, look, I'll sit by the window. Will that do?

CAROLINE: Yes, dear, that'll do.

JUDY: Don't laugh, Brian, I promise I will.

CAROLINE: Come down for tea, won't you.

JUDY: Yes, Caroline. (*Going*) And I'll sit by the open window.

Makes a face at NUTHALL and goes out.

CAROLINE: (*Sitting on the sofa*) Were you using the telephone just then, Brian? I couldn't get through.

NUTHALL: Yes. Maxton rung up. Did you listen to what we were saying?

CAROLINE: No: I heard a few words, that was all. Mr. Maxton sounded a little abrupt.

NUTHALL: Too damned abrupt for my liking.

CAROLINE: (*Taking the work-basket on her knees and threading a needle*). A pity you don't like that man more. As a Headmaster he has his points.

NUTHALL: I know. Unfortunately more of them stick into me.

CAROLINE: Is that what you wanted to talk to me about – one of these pinpricks?

NUTHALL: (*Absently*) Did I say I wanted to talk about anything in particular?

CAROLINE: (*Judicially*) No ... but your behaviour does. It has, ever since yesterday ... Do you know that you twice kicked all the blankets over to my side of the bed during the night? (*Begins to mend gown*)

NUTHALL: Did I? ... It was a warm night.

CAROLINE: Mine was ... No, my dear, blanket-kicking means worry – little kicks or big kicks. Last night's were big kicks.

NUTHALL: (*Coming to sit beside her, a little soothed*) I wish I could make everything seem amusing, as you do, Caroline ... The truth is, my dear, I'm in several kinds of dilemma.

CAROLINE: (*Placidly*) I thought so. What are they?

NUTHALL: To begin with ancient history – you know I was only appointed to this Housemaster's job on the spur of the moment, so to speak. The School Board really wanted an older man – one of the masters who've been here for donkey's years. If any of them had been a married man he'd have got the place in my stead.

CAROLINE: Well, none of them was a married man.

NUTHALL: No. I was the youngest man on the Staff – but I did have you. Oh, you know how parents talk – "Better for a Housemaster to be married". And so on. So they put me in. But some of the older men didn't like it. It was passing them by: They took it rather hardly.

CAROLINE: (*Gently, sewing*) I shouldn't worry, my dear. The atmosphere of a school doesn't exactly induce rational thinking.

NUTHALL: It induces a lot of jealousy and back-biting: I know that. Oh, I get on all right with the others in the ordinary way: if it comes to a division at a Masters' Meeting, for instance, they'll sometimes take my part, even against Maxton himself.

But the fact remains – I'm not as secure here as I ought to be.

CAROLINE: My dear, you're perfectly secure. You see too many sides to everything – that's your difficulty.

NUTHALL: The politics of this school are more delicately balanced than I think you realise, Caroline.

CAROLINE: See if you can find my thimble in the basket, will you? I'm pricking my finger.

NUTHALL: (*Paying no attention*) Everything's magnified out of all proportion. For example, some of the older masters think I'm not a strict enough disciplinarian in the House here. Having long ago ceased to regard the boys as human beings themselves they prefer to treat them as a cross between animal and devil.

CAROLINE: (*Pricking him lightly with her needle*) Rummage, will you? Thimble, dear.

NUTHALL: What? ... Oh, all right ... (*Produces a pair of scissors*) These?

CAROLINE: Thimble, my love, not scissors. It doesn't matter: I'll find it ... Personally, I always think you manage the boys very well. At any rate, the House isn't the bear-garden it was when you took over, eighteen months ago. The boys used to do exactly what they pleased.

NUTHALL: Yes, thanks to old Musgrove.

CAROLINE: He'd been ill for years. He ought to have resigned long before. Poor old chap.

NUTHALL: Ill or not, he'd let everything go down hill here. Everybody knew this was the slackest House in the place. Do you know, I was looking through the records the other day. For a whole two years – six terms – no boy in this House won a prize for class-work and no boy won a single event in the Sports or was in any of the School teams. (*Snaps the scissors*) A delightful state of affairs. I wonder the parents didn't appear in a body on the doorstep – they'd every right to.

CAROLINE: Yes. Now can you hand me the scissors? ... Well, nobody can say you haven't made an improvement.

NUTHALL: Not enough, I'm only just beginning. But at least I have got the place

at heart. Misguided or not, it really means something to me when one of the boys wins a distinction – I don't whether it's in a class-room or out on the field.

Gets up and crosses to the window.

CAROLINE: My dear, you don't have to tell me. The blankets stay without a kick for nights at a time.

NUTHALL: I don't know about that. I do know it makes me feel I've dug myself a little firmer into a secure position here. I'm less easily displaced.

CAROLINE: But Brian dear, you're absurd. If you're thinking of the other Masters, what power have they got to displace you? They've no authority to do so.

NUTHALL: (*Turning round*) The form-Masters haven't, no. But Maxton has. As Headmaster, any report he makes to the School Board is taken as gospel.

CAROLINE: But why worry about Mr. Maxton? Simply because you don't happen to see eye to eye over silly little points of discipline?

NUTHALL: I worry because Maxton's a clever man and he doesn't like me.

CAROLINE: (*Resigned*) Well, you know what I've always thought about school-mastering altogether. You know what I've prefer.

NUTHALL: Meaning –?

CAROLINE: You know very well what I mean. Cornwall.

NUTHALL: We can dream about that as much as we like. At the moment I've got more immediate things to think of. Frankly, Maxton's whole attitude – his whole ... manner towards me and my House – worries me to death.

CAROLINE: (*Putting aside her sewing*) Brian, come here ... Sit down by me ... Now don't be so unreasonable. You've as much right to your opinions and your methods as any headmaster. All this heart-searching because he occasionally offends you – all this vague fear of nothing in particular.

CAROLINE: You worry too much. Far too much.

NUTHALL: (*Makes a slight gesture. Pause*) I don't know ... (*Almost shyly takes one of her hands in his*) I wonder ... has it been a great disappointment to you – this marriage of ours, Caroline?

CAROLINE: (*Hurt. Withdraws her hand*) Have I ever given you the impression I was disappointed?

NUTHALL: No. I merely wondered. It can't have have been exactly a romantic Paradise – Marriage to a schoolmaster. That's all.

CAROLINE: I had no illusions about a romantic Paradise, my dear.

NUTHALL: That wouldn't have prevented you from missing it.

CAROLINE: If I'd been eighteen, perhaps. I happened to be thirty. That makes a difference.

NUTHALL: Men aren't quite the heroes you once thought them, I suppose. Well, you're right – My God, they're not. Schoolmasters least of all.

CAROLINE: (*With considerable tenderness*) Brian, why say things like that? Why on earth? You only hurt yourself. Don't you see that being married has made me very happy?

NUTHALL: Has it?

CAROLINE: You know it has. Before I married, I was lonely and miserable. I hid it from myself, but I was. I'd have grown into a bitter, back-biting old maid, growing my little plot of sweet-williams and living on strong tea.

NUTHALL: (*Smiling*) Not you.

CAROLINE: Yes, me. I think it's a dreadful fate for a woman, not to marry. She has nobody to think of but herself, nobody to love. (*Shudders*) Oh ... dreadful.

NUTHALL: Well, that's one way of looking at it. What about men? A stampede for connubial joy also?

CAROLINE: Yes, I think men ought to marry, too. Every normal man, anyway. As young as possible.

NUTHALL: (*Laughs and rises*) It certainly might solve a lot of difficulties. Even some of the old sex-problems at school. For normal people, at least ... What about the abnormal ones?

CAROLINE: There are so few of them it doesn't matter.

NUTHALL: Perhaps not. I'm inclined to be sorry for them, you know, all the same.

CAROLINE: Why? It's always seemed to be me that those sort of people mess up their lives and others' as well. (*Holds the gown*) Try this on now, will you?

NUTHALL: Is it all sewn up?

CAROLINE: Yes, unless you tear it putting it on.

NUTHALL: (*Donning the gown*) New feathers for the old crow ... Do crows moult? I've forgotten.

CAROLINE: Only when they fight with other crows, I think.

NUTHALL: (*Suddenly serious*) Yes, I suppose so. (*Inspecting gown*) Thank you, my dear. (*Kissing her*) And you're sure – no disappointment?

CAROLINE: (*Sincerely*) None. (*They kiss*) Ever.

A bell rings somewhere in the house. CAROLINE listens.

CAROLINE: Did you hear the door bell then?

NUTHALL: (*Looking at his watch*) Yes.

CAROLINE: I'll go. Mary's off for the afternoon.

NUTHALL: It's probably Longman. Tell him I'm waiting for him, will you?

CAROLINE: Very well, dear. (*Goes out*)

NUTHALL Crosses to his desk, half takes off his gown, then decides to keep it on. Shuts the French windows. A knock at the door.

NUTHALL: Come in.

LONGMAN ENTERS. Ordinary school clothes.

LONGMAN: Did you send for me, sir?

NUTHALL: Yes. (*Sits at the desk*) There's something I want to talk to you about. I think you better sit down.

LONGMAN: Yes, sir. (*Sits*)

NUTHALL: Now look here, Longman. I'm not going to waste words. After I'd spoken to you in the study yesterday evening, I met the Headmaster on his way to see me here. He was coming to talk to me about you.

LONGMAN: Oh ... yes, sir.

NUTHALL: It had come to this notice somehow – probably from one of his own prefects – that you and a boy from another House (I won't mention any names at present) had been seen in Birchington Woods together on Sunday. Well, as you know, there needn't necessarily be any offence in that. Unfortunately, however, the Woods are out of bounds for the other boy concerned. One of his House-prefects saw him and duly warned him – in your presence – that he'd be punished. Is that correct?

LONGMAN: Yes, sir. But Cholmondley –

NUTHALL: (*Stopping him*) At the moment I just want to get the facts. Explanations can come later.

LONGMAN: Yes, sir.

NUTHALL: Well, now, this younger boy who was with you was warned by his House-prefect that he'd be in for trouble. He wasn't supposed to be in the Woods – they're out of bounds for the boys in Mr. Maxton's house, as you know – and he'd have to take his medicine like anybody else. Am I right?

LONGMAN: Yes, sir.

NUTHALL: Now, Longman, according to the Headmaster's information you tried to interfere with the House-prefect's duty. You said that as this young boy, Danvers, was in your company the boundary rule didn't apply – or, at any rate, that you were responsible for him. Did you say something like that?

LONGMAN: Yes, sir.

NUTHALL: Why?

LONGMAN: I ... Because Cholmondley – the House-prefect – was out of bounds himself, sir.

NUTHALL: I asked Mr. Maxton about that. Apparently Cholmondley had a pass that afternoon. Anyhow the fact remains that you were responsible for trying to exempt Danvers from a punishment he deserved.

LONGMAN: I – I only tried to –

NUTHALL: I hope you realise that that was an extremely foolhardy thing to have

done? It has recoiled not only on you, but on me as well. Don't you see that it puts me in an awkward position as your Housemaster?

LONGMAN: I'm sorry, sir. I didn't think of it like that.

NUTHALL: Well, I've thought of it, I can assure you. However we'll pass over that for the time being. As you may know by now, your efforts to get Danvers out of a scrape were useless.

LONGMAN: Yes, sir.

NUTHALL: He was punished, and that was that – or at least it would have been if the whole business hadn't reached the Headmaster's ears.

Gets up and crosses the room. Finding that his gown trails, he takes it off.

NUTHALL: I'm afraid, Longman, you're in for a little more trouble than you realise.

LONGMAN: In what way, sir?

NUTHALL: To begin with, I don't have to remind you that you're a prefect and that Danvers is a Junior boy in another House. I don't know how old he is –

LONGMAN: He's nearly sixteen sir.

NUTHALL: Anyway, he's still ranked as a Junior. Now, Longman, as far as I'm concerned you're free to choose your friends where you like. Other masters, however, think differently: they don't encourage friendship outside a boy's own House. Particularly when the two friends are of slightly different ages. Do you see?

LONGMAN: Yes, sir. I'm afraid I knew that.

NUTHALL: The Headmaster, for one, doesn't approve at all of such friendships. He's always set himself against them. (*Pause*) You know, I suppose, that's a prefect in New House has just been expelled – a boy called Otley?

LONGMAN: (*Not at ease*) Yes, sir. I heard about it.

NUTHALL: I suppose you know also – without my going into it – why the Headmaster's seen fit to expel him?

LONGMAN: Yes, sir.

NUTHALL: Very well. Now, Longman, I'm going to be candid with you. Mr. Maxton has had certain suspicions roused over this case of Otley's. He doesn't like it. But what particularly affects us is that he's now got the idea firmly fixed in his head –

with or without proof, I don't know – that you and Danvers have been behaving in the same was as Otley. Do you understand?

LONGMAN does not answer.

NUTHALL: Do you?

LONGMAN: (*In a low voice*) Yes, sir. I understand.

NUTHALL: When the Headmaster spoke to me about all this last night, I naturally told him I thought he was mistaken. I didn't send for you at once, however, because I wanted time to think it over. I told Mr. Maxton that I'd speak to you first myself: as you were one of my prefects I had the right to do that.

LONGMAN: (*Faintly. He is sitting with his hands tightly clenched together on his knee*) Yes, sir.

NUTHALL: Well, I have thought it over. It's given me a sleepless night, I may tell you. You're one of the most promising boys I have in the House. I don't want to lose you. (*Returns to desk and sits*) So our best way is to find out just where we stand. I think I'd better ask you straight out – has Mr. Maxton any grounds for this suspicion about you and Danvers?

LONGMAN: (*After a moment*) No, sir.

NUTHALL: You're quite certain?

LONGMAN: Yes, sir. Danvers and I – I mean we –

NUTHALL: Is it simply a friendship?

LONGMAN: We – (*Makes as though to continue, then stops*) – we –

NUTHALL: I'm not going to bully you into an answer: that won't help either of us ... Is it any use my asking you to forget I'm a master and speak openly?

LONGMAN: Yes, sir. But ... it isn't easy ... anything I say ... you'll ... use as a master. You have to.

NUTHALL: (*Disquieted*) I hoped I was making it clear that I was trying to help you, Longman. You'll understand, I hope, that it's difficult for me to take sides against the Headmaster: but at least it's better for me to know something of the truth. (*Pause*) However, I think I'm beginning to see a little light – false or not.

LONGMAN: You see, sir, it's only that I ....

NUTHALL: You fancy that you're in love with this younger boy? Is that it?

LONGMAN: (*Looking quickly at him and away. Moistening his lips*) Yes, sir. I think so.

NUTHALL: (*Sitting*) I see.

LONGMAN: (*Quickly and with emotion*) Oh ... I don't know how to explain, but ... it's only that I haven't known lots of people and ... it's always a bit lonely at home. I'd never met anyone ... before ... that I could – well, fall in love with. I don't know how to ... show you ... that ....

Knock at the door.

NUTHALL: (*To LONGMAN*) Wait. (*Impatiently*) Yes, come in. What is it?

CAROLINE ENTERS.

CAROLINE: Forgive my disturbing you, Brian. I forgot to ask you – do you want your tea in here?

NUTHALL: Yes – no, I don't want any. Don't bother. I'll have some later.

CAROLINE: Very well, dear. But don't go and put it off and then forget. (*Smiles at LONGMAN*) That's what he usually does. Are you two talking about Wednesday?

LONGMAN: (*Embarrassed*) Oh ... no ... (*Glances at NUTHALL*)

CAROLINE: (*To LONGMAN*) We're all looking forward to seeing you win, you know. We want the House Cup badly.

LONGMAN: Oh ... Thank you.

NUTHALL: Leave us now, will you, Caroline? I'm busy.

CAROLINE: All right, dear. I'll keep tea for you ... (*Going*) Oh, and my work basket ... (*Collects it*) ... I mustn't forget that. (*Smiles at LONGMAN in passing, and goes out*).

NUTHALL: (*After a slight pause*) Now, Longman. How are we going to deal with you, eh? Tell me ... I know it isn't an easy question, but ... haven't you, ever in your life, met some girl or even some woman you could fall in love with?

LONGMAN: No, sir ... not really. You see ... oh, at home we're right away in the country ... and ... my mother doesn't like the people much ... and ... we haven't got many friends ...

NUTHALL: I see.

LONGMAN: Somehow I never seem to meet anybody I could ... fall in love with. It may sound silly, but –

NUTHALL: It isn't silly at all. But ... go on ... tell me ...

LONGMAN: And then, when I came to school here, I ... well, it was easier ...

NUTHALL: And – this like you have for Danvers – it seems a little more than the usual romantic friendship?

LONGMAN: Yes, sir. But it isn't ... what Mr. Maxton thinks ... honestly, it isn't. Danvers and I just talk ... he likes the same things as I do ... the same books and poetry. It isn't like Otley – I swear it isn't.

NUTHALL: And Birchington Woods?

LONGMAN: We go there on Sundays because there isn't anywhere else we can meet. Not to be really by ourselves.

NUTHALL: I see, Longman.

LONGMAN: You do believe me, don't you, sir? Ask Danvers himself ... he'll tell you the same. (*Hunts in his pockets*) I've got a letter somewhere ... you can read it. (*Finds it*) It's only a note, but ....

NUTHALL: From Danvers? (*Taking the letter and glancing through it*) Yes, I see... He's fond of you, isn't he ... (*Hands the letter back*) Thank you.

LONGMAN: You see, sir: that's all. There isn't anything else.

NUTHALL: Now listen to me, Longman. You may think I'm being a trifle cold and unsympathetic about all this. I don't want you to think that. I'm quite willing to believe you, but that isn't the point I want to make ... How old are you, by the way? You did tell me.

LONGMAN: Nearly eighteen, sir.

NUTHALL: Yes. Now what I want to say is this: you're seventeen and because you fancy you've fallen in love with another boy you've probably begun to tell yourself that the pattern of your life – of your emotional life – is already fixed. In other words that you're never really going to grow up – never going to fall in love in the normal way, with a girl.

LONGMAN: (*Looking at the floor*) I don't know, sir. I suppose I –

NUTHALL: (*Putting a hand on his shoulder*) My dear lad, don't be a fool. You can think; you've got a brain, haven't you?

LONGMAN: Yes, sir.

NUTHALL: Well, use it. At your age nothing in life is permanently fixed. You fall in love with the nearest object that shares your tastes and doesn't laugh at your affection.

LONGMAN: You mean – ?

NUTHALL: I mean that while you're at school here, in term time, you may think you've fallen in love with a Danvers. All right. But don't let that condition the rest of your life. You've got a long time in front of you – you'll meet women. This affair with another boy's only a passing sort of phase. You feel that, don't you?

LONGMAN: (*With difficulty*) No sir, not really. It seems ... everything to me.

NUTHALL: Listen, man; you may think I was never your age and at school, a House prefect. But I was. I know what it's like to be seventeen as well as you do.

LONGMAN: Do you, sir?

NUTHALL: To tell you the truth I seem to remember there was a Danvers in my career too. Some youth who used to scribble me notes and wait outside the Chapel for me. No doubt it was all very pleasant – an idyll, if you like. But I didn't picture it as the affair of a lifetime. I grew up – thank God.

LONGMAN: Yes, sir ... I see.

NUTHALL: There's always a Not Impossible She, somewhere. Remember that.

The door bell rings distantly.

LONGMAN: Yes, sir.

NUTHALL: (*Looking at his watch*) H'm ... Now, look here, Longman, we've got to get back to this business of the Headmaster and you. Mr. Maxton's due here to see me, now.

LONGMAN: (*Upset*) Oh ... Can I go, then, sir?

NUTHALL: No. I think you'd better wait.

LONGMAN: Sir ... I've no right to ask, I know: but will you stand by me? I mean, about Danvers.

NUTHALL: I don't know, Longman. I'll do my best.

LONGMAN: Thank you, sir.

NUTHALL: If there hadn't just been this row over Otley your case might have been a good deal easier to explain.

A knock at the door.

NUTHALL: Come in.

MR. MAXTON, the Headmaster, ENTERS. A stoutish man of about fifty. Dark clothes and gown. The impression he gives is one of slightly pompous rectitude, but this must not be caricatured in any way. His voice is rather harsh, and is capable of a very wounding inflection.

NUTHALL: Come in, Sir.

MAXTON: Ah, I see you've got Longman here, Mr. Nuthall. Good.

NUTHALL: You told me you'd prefer to see him here.

MAXTON: Yes, I think it is best. (*Looks at LONGMAN slowly*) Yes.

NUTHALL: Won't you sit down?

MAXTON: Thank you. I think I'll stand, for the moment. Well now, Longman. (*To NUTHALL*) I presume you've already questioned him?

NUTHALL: I've asked him about the facts, yes. They seem to be more or less as you told me – so far as they go.

MAXTON: (*Drily*) They seem to me to go quite far enough. However ... we shall see. (*To LONGMAN*) Now, you man, I trust you realise that you're in the presence of your Headmaster and your Housemaster. Yes. Do you hear?

LONGMAN: Yes, sir.

MAXTON: Good. In that case I should be glad if you'll make no attempt to disguise the truth.

LONGMAN: No, sir.

MAXTON: Now, Longman – you, a prefect in Mr. Nuthall's House here, tried to interpose yourself between a certain boy in my House and his just punishment. That is, according to my reliable information. Yes. Have you anything to say?

LONGMAN: (*Glances at NUTHALL, then hesitatingly*) I ...

NUTHALL: (*Makes the slightest gesture*) No, sir.

MAXTON: Very well. Your intention was no doubt very chivalrous, but – in the circumstances – a little misplaced. I may tell you that the boy in question was caned not only by the House-prefect who caught him but by me as well. Yes.

LONGMAN: (*Hotly*) I don't see why you had to cane him too –

MAXTON: <u>You</u> don't see! No doubt, sir, you don't <u>see</u>, either, why your authority as House-prefect doesn't extend to boys in other Houses?

NUTHALL: (*Intervening*) Mr. Maxton, I've been all over this with Longman. He fully realises that he is to blame.

MAXTON: A realisation that comes a trifle late in the day, I'm afraid.

NUTHALL: That may be. At the same time I think it would help both Longman and me, Mr. Maxton, if you'd come straight to the major point. I've already dealt with the minor ones myself.

MAXTON: Indeed?

NUTHALL: I understand you want to bring rather a different accusation against Longman.

MAXTON: All in good time. Let me deal with in my own way, please ... However, as you say, Mr. Nuthall, I have an accusation to make. Yes. (*To LONGMAN*) My accusation is this: I accuse you, a senior boy, of corrupting, or attempting to corrupt, a Junior boy in my house.

LONGMAN: That's not true, sir. I deny it.

MAXTON: Naturally, you deny it. At the same time I wonder if you're duly aware that Danvers has not denied it?

NUTHALL: Perhaps you could tell us, Mr. Maxton, what Danvers has said.

MAXTON: I could. He has said nothing.

NUTHALL: Then –

MAXTON: I haven't been a schoolmaster for thirty years, Mr. Nuthall, without knowing very well how to interpret that sort of silence. Yes.

LONGMAN: (*Bursting out*) You think it means guilt – it doesn't – it only means fear!

NUTHALL: (*Restraining*) Keep quiet, Longman.

MAXTON: (*To LONGMAN*) To me, sir, it means guilt. (*Walking about*) I may tell you I've had my eyes opened, this past week, to what's apparently been going on in my school. Yes.

NUTHALL: Mr. Maxton, you're making a –

MAXTON: (*Continuing*) Let me speak. By great good fortune I have caught one boy – Otley. I have expelled him. Where there is one case, however, there are others. I intend now to expel other boys.

NUTHALL: Mr. Maxton, I've been into this whole matter of Longman and Danvers. Longman and I have talked it over in a friendly spirit –

MAXTON: A <u>friendly</u> spirit? I think you say a friendly spirit?

NUTHALL: You did.

MAXTON: Without being unduly personal, Mr. Nuthall, am I to understand that you're on the side of this sort of thing?

NUTHALL: I believe Longman to be innocent of what you accuse him.

MAXTON: That doesn't quite answer my question. Am I to understand that your 'friendly' conversation with Longman means that you're in league with him against decent behaviour in my school?

NUTHALL: Such a question's ridiculous, Mr. Maxton. I simply believe that in this case Longman is innocent. In my opinion he has broken no moral law – either of this school or elsewhere.

MAXTON: (*With scathing irony*) The boys in your House, Mr. Nuthall, may be very promising athletes without being precisely clear on moral laws.

NUTHALL: (*Having taken this in. To LONGMAN*) I think the Headmaster and I can talk better alone, Longman. (*Crossing to the French windows*) if you'll wait out in the garden until I call you in ....

LONGMAN: Yes, sir. (*Goes through the doors*)

NUTHALL: (*Coming down*) Now, sir, since you've spoken to me in this rather unnecessary manner, I don't propose to waste time on politeness.

MAXTON: Indeed.

NUTHALL: In the first place, do you intend to expel that boy?

MAXTON: I do.

NUTHALL: For what reason?

MAXTON: For a reason that's as clear to me as it should be to you. Moral delinquency. Yes.

NUTHALL: Mr. Maxton, I may not perhaps be a very subtle man, but at least I'm subtle enough to believe that's untrue.

MAXTON: What you believe is immaterial to me.

NUTHALL: I believe something else also. I believe that you wish to expel Longman in order to damage my authority, in the school and in my own House. You've practically said as much.

MAXTON: (*Stung*) I – I have said no such thing, sir.

NUTHALL: Your remark just now about Longman certainly suggested it. Longman is a prominent member in my house. So far as I can see, you've no reason – no ghost of a reason, except that – for expelling him. If you were honest, you'd admit it.

MAXTON: Would I indeed?

NUTHALL: You would. If you had some concrete evidence – some witness even – of Longman's immorality, then I could understand you. As it is, you're acting simply from a personal prejudice.

MAXTON: What other singular ideas have you got into your head, if I may ask?

NUTHALL: Several. I'm a younger man than you are, Maxton, but this isn't the first time we've disagreed.

MAXTON: It is not.

NUTHALL: For one thing, you've never approved of Birchington Woods being in bounds because I was responsible for the Masters' vote that managed it.

MAXTON: Well?

NUTHALL: This business of Longman gives you an admirable chance to retaliate.

MAXTON: I suppose you flatter yourself that's a subtle argument?

NUTHALL: I flatter myself it's a true one. However, that's concerned more with myself than with Longman: Your prejudice against him is rather different.

MAXTON: Then perhaps you'll be good enough to tell me –

NUTHALL: I shall. It has to do with the Sports, next week. Longman is an excellent runner: it's more than probable he may win the House Cup for my House. That cup, Maxton, is at present held by your House.

MAXTON: If you imagine, Mr. Nuthall, that my mind works in the same devious way as yours, you're greatly mistaken. Yes. However, two can play at this game: let me tell you a thing or two.

NUTHALL: Certainly.

MAXTON: In common with several of the other masters in this school, I approve neither of you nor of the way you run your House. Why the charge of it was ever given to you I'm at a loss to understand.

NUTHALL: I suppose that accounts for your bias against the boys in my care?

MAXTON: I think the less we argue on that point the better, Mr. Nuthall. If I lose my temper it may be the worse for you. Yes.

NUTHALL: I'm not one of your boys, sir. It's no good talking to me like that.

MAXTON: It seems to me very little good talking to you at all. However, perhaps you'll now permit me to return strictly to the matter in hand. My time is valuable.

NUTHALL: Mine also.

MAXTON: Then be kind enough to answer me this: Are you on the side of moral decency in my school or are you on the side of that reprobate out there?

NUTHALL: I repeat, sir, Longman is innocent. This little affair of him and Danvers –

MAXTON: Answer my question. Don't quibble.

NUTHALL: Very well. If 'moral decency' means expelling a boy unjustly, then I am on Longman's side.

MAXTON: I warn you, Mr. Nuthall –

NUTHALL: Listen to me, sir. I'm not going to have that boy expelled. It may mean ruining his life for a mere suspicion.

MAXTON: Suspicion! –

NUTHALL: Less than that. Longman's case is not the same as Otley's – you've got to believe that!

MAXTON: Indeed?

NUTHALL: Otley was a boy who make it a joke to seduce young boys – a matter of street-corner dirtiness and smut. He deserved his expulsion.

MAXTON: (*Heavily*) Thank you.

NUTHALL: Longman's a very different matter. There's been nothing of that sort between him and Danvers. To confound his case with Otley's is absolutely wrong and unjust. Surely you can understand that?

MAXTON: Whether I understand it or not, I have always set myself against friendships between boys in different Houses, Mr. Nuthall, and I always shall. If the guilt is not already there, the possibility of it is.

NUTHALL: But you can't expel a boy on a possibility. You've no proof! You can't! It's a heinous thing to do.

MAXTON: (*Slight pause. For the first time he shows signs of conciliation*) I've a duty to the school ... to the other masters. Even if there was anything in what you say in Longman's favour –

NUTHALL: There is a great deal in what I say. Longman and Danvers have simply formed a romantic friendship, no different in essentials from millions of others.

MAXTON: Indeed?

NUTHALL: I refuse to let you expel Longman as though he were another Otley.

MAXTON: And if I insist on expelling Longman – what do you propose to do about it?

NUTHALL: Listen, sir. It may not have occurred to you that an expulsion might not be the straight sailing you imagine.

MAXTON: Well?

NUTHALL: To put it plainly, if Longman has no redress against you here at school he might very well obtain it elsewhere – or his parents might, for him.

MAXTON: Indeed? Where?

NUTHALL: In a court of law.

MAXTON: Mr. Nuthall, I –

NUTHALL: You asked me a second ago what I meant to do if you expel Longman. I'll tell you. I propose to advise Mrs. Longman to bring a legal action against you.

MAXTON: I warn you, Mr. Nuthall –

NUTHALL: Furthermore, if it's necessary, I'm willing to give evidence myself as to Longman's character and his dismissal without proof against him. Now do you understand?

MAXTON: (*Drumming with his fingers*) You make very noble gestures, Mr. Nuthall.

NUTHALL: Think of them how you please. But I warn you: that's the position.

MAXTON: (*Walking about the room*) I am not in the habit of making my decision under threats. Understand that, please. I'm Headmaster of this school and I act entirely as I think fit. Yes.

NUTHALL: Do you agree to drop this accusation against Longman?

MAXTON: (*After a short pause*) And if I do? You and your protege, I suppose, would crow very prettily over your triumph?

NUTHALL: I don't think it's always necessary to take the lowest view of human nature. No: I should simply tell Longman that the case had been dropped. Nothing more. As for me, the only triumph I gain is the vindication of the boy himself.

MAXTON: H'm ... and Longman's future relationship with this other boy, Danvers? Who's to answer for that?

NUTHALL: If you insist, I shall answer for that. I shall ask Longman to end his friendship.

MAXTON: (*Pause, then crisply*) Very well ... At the same time, Mr. Nuthall, there are certain things that have been brought up in the past half hour that are not so easily disposed of. I refer to matters affecting you as master and Housemaster in this school, both in relation to my superior authority.

NUTHALL: I accused you of acting less from evidence against Longman than from prejudice against my House.

MAXTON: Precisely. Do you withdraw that?

NUTHALL: As a matter of principle and apart from this case, no.

MAXTON: Very well. You have also threatened to take part in a legal action against me.

NUTHALL: I did.

MAXTON: I do not allow my Housemasters, Mr. Nuthall, either to accuse or threaten me, with impunity. No.

NUTHALL: I see.

MAXTON: The School board has a meeting at the end of next week. If you could see your way between now and – say, Thursday, to write me a letter of resignation –

NUTHALL: (*He clenches his fists*) My God, you ....!

MAXTON: I think it would simplify my report to them.

NUTHALL: (*Relaxes slowly, then brushes his forehead with his hand*) When do you want this letter?

MAXTON: I repeat, if I have a written resignation by Thursday, that will be sufficient. I shall expect it by then. (*Going*) Meanwhile, good afternoon, Mr. Nuthall. (*Goes out*)

> *NUTHALL does not answer. He stands for a few moments tapping on the desk with his fingers, then crosses to the French windows and beckons LONGMAN in.*

NUTHALL: Come in, Longman...

After a moment LONGMAN ENTERS.

LONGMAN: Has Mr. Maxton gone, sir?

NUTHALL: Yes .... He's gone.

LONGMAN: What is he going to do, sir?

NUTHALL: About you, LONGMAN? Nothing. His accusation's been dropped.

LONGMAN: Oh... (*Sincerely*) Thank you, sir. It was good of you to –

NUTHALL: Longman, I want you to promise me something.

LONGMAN: Yes, sir?

NUTHALL: I want you to promise me to break off your friendship with Danvers.

LONGMAN: (*Pause*) Is that necessary, sir. Must I?

NUTHALL: I'm afraid so. I've given my word to the Headmaster that you would.

LONGMAN: Oh....yes... I – I was afraid you might ask me to do that.

NUTHALL: There's no other way, Longman. A school being what it is ....

LONGMAN: (*Faintly*) Yes, sir.

NUTHALL: Well, do you promise?

LONGMAN: If only I –

NUTHALL: I'm afraid there are no conditions, Longman. Do you give me your word?

LONGMAN: (*Pause*) Sir, I know you helped me just now ... against Mr. Maxton. If it hadn't been for you, he'd have ... sacked me. (*Pause*) Yes, I'll try. I won't see Danvers any more.

NUTHALL: You've got the Sports coming on next week. You've got plenty of other things to occupy your mind.

LONGMAN: Yes, sir. (*Nods*) I know ... All right, I promise.

A knock at the door and CAROLINE ENTERS carrying a tea-tray.

CAROLINE: As you wouldn't come to tea, Brian, I've brought it to you. Has Mr. Maxton gone?

NUTHALL: He has.

CAROLINE: Oh, well, perhaps Longman can have his cup. (*Smiles at LONGMAN*) I'm sure you'd like some tea.

NUTHALL: But, Caroline –

CAROLINE: No buts, my dear. Help me with this tray. You must have your tea ... Where's Judy? I'll call her. (*Crosses to the door*)

CAROLINE: (*Calling*) Judy! Tea!

NUTHALL: You'd better go, Longman.

LONGMAN: (*To NUTHALL*) Yes, sir, I'll go. (*Moves*) Mrs. Nuthall, I'm afraid I –

CAROLINE: (*Returning*) Oh, but you mustn't go. I'd like you to meet my cousin. She's staying with us over Sports Day.

LONGMAN: (*Uncertainly*) Well, I –

CAROLINE: Just stay for a moment, then. (*To NUTHALL*) Brian, don't stand there like that. Shut the window ... I think Longman ought to meet Judy. (*Sits before the tray*)

JUDY ENTERS. She has changed her clothes.

CAROLINE: Judy, dear ... this is Longman. One of the House-prefects. (*Introducing*) Longman – Miss Judy Morland.

JUDY: (*Holding out her hand*) Oh ... how do you do?

LONGMAN: How do you do?

JUDY: (*Supressing a conspiratorial giggle*) Didn't I see you from my window just now – in the garden?

LONGMAN: Oh ... yes. I saw you too.

CAROLINE: (*With a glance at NUTHALL, hastily*) We're hoping for a better show from the garden next year, Longman. The last Housemaster had rather neglected it. (*Pours out tea*)

JUDY: (*To LONGMAN*) How long have you been at school?

LONGMAN: Only about ... (*Smiles shyly*) Not very long.

JUDY: It must be fun, being a prefect, isn't it? Whacking all the kids.

LONGMAN: (*Opening up a little*) Well, I don't know about that ... but ... (*He laughs, with her*)

NUTHALL: Judy, I don't want to insist, but if Longman's going to run on Wednesday we ought not to keep him now. He's got his training to do before Hall.

LONGMAN: (*Coming down to earth*) Oh, yes ... I ought to go.

JUDY: Oh but you can't rush off now. Can't you train in the garden?

LONGMAN: No. (*Smiles*) I must go.

NUTHALL: Cut along now, Longman. It's after five. (*Opens the door*)

LONGMAN: Yes, sir. (*To CAROLINE*) Goodbye, Mrs. Nuthall. (*To JUDY*) Well ... goodbye ...

CAROLINE: (*To NUTHALL, in a stage-whisper*) Sunday. Ask him.

NUTHALL: By the way, Longman, you're coming to supper on Sunday, aren't you?

LONGMAN: Yes, sir. Thank you.

JUDY: (*To LONGMAN*) Till Sunday supper.

LONGMAN: Yes. Well ... (*To NUTHALL at the door*) Good night, sir. (*Goes out*)

JUDY: Why did you hustle him off like that, Brian? You are beastly.

NUTHALL: There are many things in this world, Judy, you'll discover when you're older.

JUDY: Well, I think you're a bossy old pig ... I thought he was awfully nice-looking. Sweet.

CAROLINE: Don't be silly, Judy. You're going to see him again ... Now come and have your tea, both of you... All this fuss – anyone would think the heavens had fallen.

CURTAIN

ACT III

Five days later. The evening of Sports day. There are two people in NUTTALL's study – CAROLINE and MRS. LONGMAN. Both women are in evening dress. MRS. LONGMAN is a distinguished-looking woman of about forty. Her manner is quiet and firm – even a little over-assured. CAROLINE is re-arranging a vase of flowers (tulips) as she talks. MRS. LONGMAN sits on the sofa.

CAROLINE: I wonder if you know the kind I mean, Mrs. Longman – almost black in the centre?

MRS. LONGMAN: Rather like Tulipe Noire? That kind?

CAROLINE: A little, but much larger. They come from Holland. We planted some nearly two years ago. They came up beautifully in the late Spring. Then, when my husband and I were away in the holidays, a cat or some other noxious animal went and lay on them.

MRS. LONGMAN: How very tiresome.

CAROLINE: It was rather a tragedy. But a few of them are still flowering. (*Glancing from the French windows*) No, I don't think you can see them from here. They're in the far border. We might go and have a look at them after dinner.

MRS. LONGMAN: Yes, I should like to ... You're very fond of your garden, aren't you?

CAROLINE: It takes my mind off school worries, Mrs. Longman.

MRS. LONGMAN: And your husband – is he fond of gardening too?

CAROLINE: Brian? Oddly enough, it's always been my ambition to get him to come and start a market-garden with me: somewhere down in Cornwall. I was born in Cornwall you know. Near Falmouth.

MRS. LONGMAN: A market-garden? That sounds very enterprising of you.

CAROLINE: Not really, if we organised it properly. I'm sure we could make it pay. The winters are so mild down there: we could grow early flowers and send them up to London by Christmas-time.

MRS. LONGMAN: But surely your husband wouldn't like giving up his work here,

would he? My son always says he has such a genius for teaching: he seems to understand the boys' difficulties instinctively.

CAROLINE: Does he? This school-mastering was his idea, you know: not mine. I remember trying to persuade him on our honeymoon that some sort of out-door life would suit him far better than teaching. Does that sound unfair of me?

MRS. LONGMAN: Not at all. I like living in the country myself. My husband hated it.

CAROLINE: And your son?

MRS. LONGMAN: Oh. Geoffrey loves it. It's a bit lonely for him, of course, but I don't think he minds that. He and I are such very good friends: I rely on him tremendously. You have no children, have you?

CAROLINE: No, Mrs. Longman, unfortunately I haven't.

MRS. LONGMAN: Even one makes a difference. I missed my husband so dreadfully, after he was killed in the war: if I hadn't got my son I don't know how I should have got through the years since.

CAROLINE: Yes, he must have been a great help.

MRS. LONGMAN: Tremendous. When I sent him to school here, I could hardly bear to part from him. (*Smiles at CAROLINE*) I asked you about children because I wondered if that pretty girl who was with you at the Sports today was yours.

CAROLINE: No, a cousin. Judy Morland.

MRS. LONGMAN: Oh. She seemed so happy.

CAROLINE: She was very excited by your son's success, Mrs. Longman. (*Smiles*) You know what girls are at that age.

MRS. LONGMAN: Yes, I know.

CAROLINE: I'm afraid she's fallen a little in love with him.

MRS. LONGMAN: With Geoffrey? Oh, I hope not.

CAROLINE: Just a school-girl passion. Nothing serious. Your son came to supper with us on Sunday night: they chattered their heads off. It was quite funny.

MRS. LONGMAN: Is your cousin staying with you?

CAROLINE: Yes: she's upstairs at the moment. She'll be down for dinner. I wish she <u>was</u> my daughter, sometimes. Or do you think sons are more satisfactory?

MRS. LONGMAN: No, I wish sometimes I had had a daughter. Before Geoffrey was born I often used to ask myself if –

JUDY comes in.

CAROLINE: Oh, Judy, we were just talking about you. This is Mrs. Longman: she's dining with us.

JUDY: Oh ... How do you do, Mrs. Longman?

MRS. LONGMAN: How do you do? I saw you at the Sports this afternoon.

JUDY: Oh, yes. Didn't your son do marvellously – I was absolutely thrilled. I was really.

MRS. LONGMAN: I'm afraid Geoffrey'll be getting a swelled head.

JUDY: Oh, but so he ought to! After all, he did win the House Cup for us, didn't he?

CAROLINE: Yes Mrs. Longman. My husband was very pleased about that. We hadn't had the Cup for a very long time.

JUDY: All those other cups he won too. For the Mile, and for jumping over those gates –

CAROLINE: Not gates, Judy dear – hurdles.

JUDY: Well, you know what I mean: how many cups did he win, Mrs. Longman?

MRS. LONGMAN: I don't know, my dear. They're all in my room at the Hotel. He gave them to me to take home tomorrow. But I think there were only four or five.

CAROLINE: There ought to be a Sports Programme somewhere about. (*Looks round*) There may one in Brian's desk, Judy. Look, will you, dear?

JUDY: (*Runs over to the desk*) Is it open? Oh yes ... (*Searches*)

MRS. LONGMAN: (*To CAROLINE*) Geoffrey was quite nervous about his cups: afraid they'd get lost. But I locked my room at the Hotel; they'll be quite safe.

CAROLINE: Does he worry easily?

MRS. LONGMAN: Yes, too easily. I suppose – would it be a great nuisance? – might I see him for a moment, before dinner?

CAROLINE: Yes, of course, Mrs. Longman. I'll ask my husband to bring him over from the House for a minute. Dinner won't be ready for half an hour yet.

JUDY, meanwhile, has been searching among the papers on the desk, opening drawers, etc. She has found a certain letter which she first glances at, then studies attentively, her back to the two women.

MRS. LONGMAN: (*To CAROLINE*) Don't bother if it would be a nuisance.

CAROLINE: No bother at all. (*To JUDY*) Do you know where Brian is, Judy?

JUDY: (*Preoccupied*) Oh ... no, Caroline, I don't.

MRS. LONGMAN: I expect the poor man's resting after his strenuous day.

CAROLINE: I don't think so. I'll go and find him. (*To JUDY*) Did you find the programme, Judy?

JUDY: (*Putting the letter back in a drawer*) No, I didn't. It's not here.

CAROLINE: Well, dear, what are you doing? Those letters are not yours.

JUDY: (*Coming across, urgently*) Caroline – Do you know –

NUTHALL ENTERS

CAROLINE: Oh, here you are, Brian. Look, dear, Mrs. Longman wants to see her boy for a moment. Could you go and get him?

NUTHALL: Yes, if she wants him.

MRS. LONGMAN: I'm afraid it's very inconsiderate of me.

NUTHALL: Not in the least, Mrs. Longman. I expect he's in his study. It won't take me a moment.

MRS. LONGMAN: Thank you so much.

NUTHALL: (*Going*) Your son did very well today, Mrs. Longman. Even better than I'd anticipated.

CAROLINE: Yes!

MRS. LONGMAN: I hope you'll tell him that. He seemed so worried about it all.

NUTHALL: I shall. (*Goes out*)

CAROLINE: Well, now ... Judy dear, you're very silent. Come and sit down and talk.

JUDY: Caroline ... do you mind if I go into the garden for a bit?

CAROLINE: (*Surprised*) The garden? Why?

JUDY: I want to think about something. (*Going*) You don't mind, do you?

CAROLINE: I certainly do mind. Don't be absurd, Judy. Come here. I want you to stay and talk to Mrs. Longman while I go and see to the table. (*To MRS. LONGMAN*) I'm afraid I have a particularly stupid parlourmaid at the moment, Mrs. Longman. She's never been in service before; she piles everything in the middle of the table. Will you excuse me? (*Gestures to JUDY*)

MRS. LONGMAN: Yes, of course.

CAROLINE: Now, Judy, sit down and make yourself sociable.

JUDY: (*Semi-privately*) Caroline, can I talk to you for a moment?

CAROLINE: (*Firmly*) You can talk to me as much as you like later.

JUDY: I want to talk now. It's important.

CAROLINE: Then it'll be all the better for keeping. (*In a severe whisper*) Judy, behave yourself! (*To MRS. LONGMAN*) If you'd care to smoke, Mrs. Longman – (*To JUDY*) You know where the cigarettes are Judy ... I shan't be long. (*Goes out*)

MRS. LONGMAN: Perhaps, if you'd really care to go into the garden –

JUDY: Oh, no, it doesn't matter, thanks.

MRS. LONGMAN: Mrs. Nuthall has some Dutch bulbs she was telling me about. (*Rising*) I'd like to see them.

JUDY: Oh, but I only –

MRS. LONGMAN: Come on. You show them to me. I'd like a little fresh air before dinner.

JUDY: Oh, well ... (*Fetching the cigarettes from the mantelpiece*) Won't you have a cigarette?

MRS. LONGMAN: Thank you. I'll smoke it as we walk ... (*Going to the French windows*) I'm sure Geoffrey will manage to find us out here.

JUDY: Yes. (*She glances at the desk, then with set teeth follows MRS. LONGMAN out*)

NUTHALL: (*Looking round*) Come in, Longman. Your mother was here a moment ago. I expect my wife's taken her upstairs. If you wait I'll go and find her.

LONGMAN: No, sir. Please – I'd like to talk to you for a minute, before I see her.

NUTHALL: Oh ... all right. (*Closes door*) I'm afraid you won't have very long. What is it?

LONGMAN: It's about ... well, about Danvers, sir.

NUTHALL: I thought we'd talked all that out the other day?

LONGMAN: Yes, sir. I only wanted to tell you that I hadn't seen him again. I wrote him a letter and that was all.

NUTHALL: That's all right then. You see how easy it was?

LONGMAN: Yes, sir. It wasn't very easy, though ... I've felt rather a ... rotter about it.

NUTHALL: I see. But you don't feel quite as lonely as you thought you were going to?

LONGMAN: No, sir ... You know you said something, the other day, about ... well, about growing up. I mean about ... girls and so on.

NUTHALL: Yes, I think I know what you mean. (*Whimsically*) You know, Longman, I shall have to develop the Nelson form of vision – see only what I intend to see. Officially, at last.

LONGMAN: (*Smiling*) Yes, sir.

NUTHALL: I can hardly turn my house into – what shall I say? – a clinic for psychological experiments. However, I hope you see now that there are ... other forms of affection. The world isn't restricted to a one and only Danvers ... or even a series of 'em.

LONGMAN: No, sir. I think I'm beginning to see that now.

NUTHALL: I hope so. (*Moving towards the door*) Well, now, I'll fetch –

LONGMAN: There was something else I wanted to ask you too, sir. Today ... at the Sports ... I couldn't help hearing something Mr. Maxton said.

NUTHALL: The Headmaster no doubt said a number of things, Longman.

LONGMAN: Yes, sir. But this was ... well, just after I'd beaten Cholmondley in the Mile. I was getting my breath before I went back to the tent. I couldn't help overhearing.

NUTHALL: Well?

LONGMAN: Mr. Maxton said to one of the other masters that Cholmondley'd have a better chance next year – when you weren't here to train me.

NUTHALL: Oh.

LONGMAN: He said it just us though you were leaving, sir.

NUTHALL: (*Grimly*) Oh, did he?

LONGMAN: You're not leaving ... or resigning, or anything, are you, sir?

NUTHALL: What makes you think that?

LONGMAN: Only what I heard Mr. Maxton say, sir. I thought that ... if you were going, it might have something to do with ... oh, I don't know, but ...

NUTHALL: But what?

LONGMAN: Well, something to do with the Head-master and that row about Danvers and me, sir. If it was, you see ... I couldn't ...

NUTHALL: Couldn't what?

LONGMAN: I couldn't stay here, sir. If you went, I feel I ought to go, too.

NUTHALL: I think you're rather talking nonsense, Longman. In any case, my resignation should be my own affair.

LONGMAN: Yes, sir. But if –

NUTHALL: (*Firmly*) I'd be glad if you'd forget what you overheard today. Do you understand? ... Now, if you'll wait here I'll go and find your mother. (*Goes R.*)

LONGMAN stands uncertainly, then goes to the fireplace. JUDY hurries in from the garden, her face busy with purpose.

JUDY: (*Half-calling as she enters*) Caroline ... (*Stops on seeing LONGMAN*) Oh, you're here, are you?

LONGMAN: (*Smiles*) Oh ... Yes ... Hullo.

JUDY: (*Brusquely*) Where's Brian – Mr. Nuthall?

LONGMAN: He's just gone to look for my mother.

JUDY: Oh ... she's ... (*Makes a slight gesture towards the garden*)

LONGMAN: (*Confidently*) We haven't met since Sunday, have we?

JUDY: (*Hostile*) No, we haven't.

LONGMAN: Well I'm ever so glad –

JUDY: I don't think I want to meet you again, ever.

LONGMAN: (*Staring at her*) Oh ... Why not? I thought –

JUDY: (*With some force*) You know Mr. Nuthall's resigning because of you, don't you?

LONGMAN: (*Uncertainly*) What?

JUDY: You know all right. You know it was your fault.

LONGMAN: But I've just been talking to him ...

JUDY: I've seen the letter. I wasn't supposed to, but I've seen it. It was in his desk. He's resigning because of you and that other boy.

LONGMAN: Oh ... I didn't know ...

JUDY: Well, I think you're a liar. Yes, I do ... I thought you were a decent sort – the kind of person I could like – not a rotter who gets into a dirty row about another boy –

LONGMAN: You've no right to say that.

JUDY: I wish I'd never even met you. I'm sorry you won at the Sports today. Yes, I am. I think you're absolutely hateful – filthy and hateful.

LONGMAN: No ... Please ... you're the only –

JUDY: I hate you. I hate you.

LONGMAN: If you'd given me a chance to –

NUTHALL ENTERS. R.

NUTHALL: (*To JUDY*) What are you doing here, Judy?

JUDY: Saying a few things I wanted to say.

NUTHALL: (*With a glance at LONGMAN*) Oh, are you? Caroline said you were in the garden with Mrs. Longman.

JUDY: She wanted to finish her cigarette. I left her there.

NUTHALL: Well, go and find her again, please. Tell her Longman's here. Then you'd better go and help Caroline in the dining room. (*JUDY goes out. L.*) I thought your mother was in the house somewhere.

LONGMAN: (*Preoccupied and unhappy*) Yes. Sir.

NUTHALL: (*Noting his distress*) What was Judy talking about?

LONGMAN: About ... you, sir. About your resigning. She told me.

NUTHALL: Judy told you? But –

LONGMAN: It's true, sir, isn't it?

NUTHALL: (*Going to his desk, half to himself*) Well, that's a most extraordinary thing ... What else did Judy tell you?

LONGMAN: Only ... what ... I thought before, sir. That it was my fault.

NUTHALL: (*Nodding grimly*) I see.

LONGMAN: I'm sorry, sir. If I'd known –

NUTHALL: Now, listen, Longman: The Headmaster and I haven't been on good terms for some time. This business of you and Danvers simply brought our differences to a climax, that's all. Understand that, please.

LONGMAN: Yes, sir, but don't you see –

NUTHALL: Until this moment. I believed my intention to resign was known only to me. How that jackanapes, Judy, found out, I don't know. I haven't even told my wife yet.

MRS. LONGMAN and JUDY come in, L. JUDY crosses quickly at the back goes out R.

MRS. LONGMAN: (*To LONGMAN*) Ah, there you are, Geoffrey. (*Crosses and*

kisses him) How are you, darling? (*Brushes his hair straight with her hand*) Not overtired?

LONGMAN: No, mother.

MRS. LONGMAN: You do look a little tired. You ought to have come back to the hotel with me and rested.

LONGMAN: I'm quite all right. Really.

MRS. LONGMAN: Are you? (*Almost purring with pleasure*) It is so nice to see you; except for a moment after the sports I've hardly had a second to talk to you all day. My dear, I'm terribly proud of you. (*Turning toward NUTHALL*) Aren't I Mr. Nuthall?

NUTHALL: I hope so.

MRS. LONGMAN: Of course I am. I wish with all my heart my husband had been alive to see ... (*To LONGMAN*) Your father would have been even more thrilled than I was, my dear. I know he would.

LONGMAN: Mother, can I speak to you alone for a few minutes. Now, I mean.

MRS. LONGMAN: Now? But Geoffrey, I'm not sure dear ... (*A glance at NUTHALL*) I know we've a lot to say to one another but – well, perhaps it isn't very convenient – just as we were –

LONGMAN: May I, sir?

NUTHALL: Yes. I think so. (*Going*) Don't worry, Mrs. Longman. In any case I wanted a word or two with my wife before dinner. I'll leave you together in here. (*Goes out*)

MRS. LONGMAN: (*As the door closes*) Oh, thank you. (*To LONGMAN*) That's very kind of him. Now Geoffrey, we've only got a little while darling, and there's so much to say. You look a bit pale; are you really all right? I get so worried at home sometimes, thinking about you – so awfully lonely and worried.

LONGMAN: Mother, I want to speak to you –

MRS. LONGMAN: (*Rushing on*) Of course you do. Now come and sit down; you've been on your feet all day, tearing round. Now let me see... what home news have I got for you? Oh, you know Milly's come back to us – the only good cook

we've ever had. There I was alone with only a kitchen maid – quite desperate when she just came back ... appeared suddenly. I was so pleased. (*Laughing*) Oh, and how fat we shall get when you come home.

LONGMAN: Yes. Mother –

MRS. LONGMAN: I hope to goodness she won't quarrel with the other servants this time. It makes running a house so difficult.... Oh, and I know what else I had to tell you – you know that hedge we planted along the side of the garden? Well, the leaves are coming out at last; they're quite thick.

LONGMAN: Are they? (*But he is not interested*)

MRS. LONGMAN: Thank Heavens, we'll now be able to shy off the sight of those appalling people down the road. I know what your father would have called them 'bounders' (*Shudders*) Ugh, I hate the very shape of them.

LONGMAN: Mother, please –

MRS. LONGMAN: Yes, my darling? (*Looking at him, smiling*) Am I talking too much? If I am it's only because I miss you so dreadfully – dreadfully – at home. Nobody to laugh with about cooks and getting fat and common neighbours who bulge in the wrong places. Do you see dearest? Every time I open the door of your little room upstairs, and see all your books and your –

LONGMAN: (*Urgently*) Mother, listen, please .... I want..... (*He breaks off*) We've always been good friends, haven't we?

MRS. LONGMAN: But ... yes, of course. (*Nonplussed*) But my dear, what an odd thing to ask me suddenly like that.

LONGMAN: I only felt I ... wanted to make sure.

MRS. LONGMAN: To 'make sure'? But my darling, you're everything in the world to me. Surely I don't have to tell you that?

LONGMAN: No .... I know .... but ... if I –

MRS. LONGMAN: (*Perturbed*) Geoffrey, what is it? (*Rises and goes to him*) Why are you suddenly talking like this? Don't you feel well?

LONGMAN: I want to ask you to do something for me. Will you? (*Moves away from her*)

MRS. LONGMAN: But of course. Of course I will. You know that too. (*Sits*)

LONGMAN: Will you do what I ask without too many questions?

MRS. LONGMAN: (*Troubled*) But ... very well, dear. If you don't want me to ask questions.

LONGMAN: (*Bracing himself*) Mother, listen .... I want to get away from here. I want you to tell Mr. NUTHALL I'm going to leave.

MRS. LONGMAN: Going to leave? (*Astounded*) Do you mean leave school?

LONGMAN: Yes, I mean that.

MRS. LONGMAN: But ... Geoffrey, my dear, you don't know what you're talking about.

LONGMAN: I know perfectly well.

MRS. LONGMAN: But – why? – why do you want to leave? I don't understand. Just when you're getting on so well here.

LONGMAN: I asked you not to question me –

MRS. LONGMAN: Your work ... and ... today at the Sports. Don't you see, I must – I insist on asking you questions.

LONGMAN: (*Feverishly*) They're not necessary – I just want to get away. That's all. Isn't that enough?

MRS. LONGMAN: It may be for you. It certainly isn't enough for me.

LONGMAN: I want to leave. Only just that.

MRS. LONGMAN: (*After a slight pause. Deciding that something must be done about this situation*) Geoffrey, come here. Come and sit here, close to me; just as though you were at home. (*Rises and takes his arm*) Now, come along.

LONGMAN: No, leave me alone ... (*Pause. MRS. LONGMAN slowly returns to her seat*) .... I'm all right.

MRS. LONGMAN: Well ... can't you tell me ... Can't you explain a little –

LONGMAN: (*Stands with his back to her. Resignedly*) Yes, I suppose so ... I suppose I must .... if you want me to.

MRS. LONGMAN: I certainly do want you to.

LONGMAN: I don't know how to begin ... but ... well, you know I wasn't happy at home, always restless, I mean?

MRS. LONGMAN: Geoffrey.

LONGMAN: You'd always kept me with you – never let me get to know other people, or –

MRS. LONGMAN: But you were my son.

LONGMAN: Yes, I was your son. But I was lonely too. I had no friends – no real friends. You wouldn't let me have any, because they took me from you.

MRS. LONGMAN: My dear, you're exaggerating –

LONGMAN: No, I'm not. Until I came to school here I had no real friends – nobody I could really talk to.

MRS. LONGMAN: But you say you've got friends here now .... friends at school ... why are you asking me to take you away? Isn't that what you asked?

LONGMAN: Yes.

MRS. LONGMAN: (*Helplessly*) I don't understand you. If you've found other boys here you like ...

LONGMAN: Oh, it isn't that ... I've got myself into a mess here. You wouldn't understand.

MRS. LONGMAN: You mean you've got yourself into some trouble?

LONGMAN: Yes. About another boy. I suppose ... I was in love with him.

MRS. LONGMAN: In love with another boy? How could you be 'in love' with another boy?... Geoffrey, what are you saying?

LONGMAN: I told you you wouldn't understand.

MRS. LONGMAN: I don't. (*With a new emphasis*) I don't even like to think of what you're trying to say. Do you mean that you –

LONGMAN: Yes. I was in love with him. He was the first person I'd met who ... the first people in my life I –

MRS. LONGMAN: And you and this other boy –

LONGMAN: Yes, I got into a row about it. Oh, what's the good of talking? Can't you take me away and have done with it?

MRS. LONGMAN: I don't know what to say, Geoffrey. Frankly, I'm horrified ... Do you expect me to have any sympathy with you?

LONGMAN: You wouldn't let me alone till I told you.

MRS. LONGMAN: Yes, because you wanted me to take you away from school without good reason. The last thing I expected to hear was that you had mixed yourself up in some revolting –

LONGMAN: (*Facing her, angry*) It wasn't. I didn't say that.

MRS. LONGMAN: You and this other boy! That sort of thing utterly disgusts me; I've no words bad enough for it. If you expect me to sympathise with you, you're wrong. I've no sympathy. None at all.

LONGMAN: Mother, please listen. I didn't say that –

MRS. LONGMAN: No, Geoffrey, I don't want to hear you! I've always tried to bring you up properly; I've loved you and tried to teach you how decent people conduct their lives. If you've chosen to become a degenerate –

LONGMAN: (*In agony*) Stop it! Don't talk like that!

MRS. LONGMAN: (*Continuing*) I sent you here to a good school. Your father was here, and they were proud of him –

LONGMAN: No – don't – (*As though warding off a blow*)

MRS. LONGMAN: What he'd say to you I simply can't imagine.

LONGMAN: (*Almost the last straw*) Please – don't –

MRS. LONGMAN: There's no excuse for you. None! You've disgraced your father's memory here, shamefully ... (*Facing him*) Who else knows about all this? Mr. NUTHALL?

LONGMAN: Yes. It's because of him I want to leave.

MRS. LONGMAN: Because of Mr. NUTHALL? Now look here, Geoffrey, you've just told me –

LONGMAN: Mr. NUTHALL tried to defend me before the Headmaster. I don't know what happened, but he's got to resign.

MRS. LONGMAN: Because of you and this other boy?

LONGMAN: Yes. Through that.

MRS. LONGMAN: How could you involve another person? How could you!

LONGMAN: Haven't I told you enough?

MRS. LONGMAN: Yes, I think you've told me quite enough ... I'd never have believed such a thing possible. (*Shudders*) You, Geoffrey – no.

LONGMAN: Do you understand now, why I want to go away?

MRS. LONGMAN: Yes, I do. (*Pause*) It seems to me the best you can do ... You'd better come home with me tomorrow.

LONGMAN: (*Nods, humbly*) Yes.

MRS. LONGMAN: I think you'd better go and find Mr. NUTHALL now. I want to talk to him. (*LONGMAN goes in silence towards the door*) And will you please wait out in the hall?

LONGMAN: Yes. (*Turning at the door as though to appeal to her*) I ... won't you try to ...?

MRS. LONGMAN remains silent, her back to him. LONGMAN stands a moment, then goes out R. MRS. LONGMAN sits staring before her.

MRS. LONGMAN: (*After a moment, half attempting to recall him*) Geoffrey ... (*Then to herself*) No, – no – I can't – I won't –

NUTHALL enters.

NUTHALL: Your son told me you wanted to see me, Mrs. Longman.

MRS. LONGMAN: (*After a slight pause*) Mr. Nuthall, I'm afraid you many think what I'm about to say very abrupt. I'm sorry.

NUTHALL: I'm afraid I don't –

MRS. LONGMAN: I've decided to take Geoffrey away with me: away from school.

NUTHALL: (*Slight pause*) Did your son ask to be taken away?

MRS. LONGMAN: (*With difficulty*) Yes, he did.

NUTHALL: I suppose he gave a reason?

MRS. LONGMAN: Yes, he gave me a reason.

NUTHALL: I see. Would you mind speaking frankly?

MRS. LONGMAN: From what he has told me, Mr. Nuthall, my son seems to be ... or to have become ... abnormal. I hope you may understand him better than I do.

NUTHALL: Mrs. Longman, I think it's my turn to speak plainly. To you.

MRS. LONGMAN: Please do.

NUTHALL: I don't claim to be a doctor, Mrs. Longman, or even a very practical psychologist. But I think I do understand enough of your son's difficulties to explain –

MRS. LONGMAN: Nothing can explain to me why any son of mine should disgrace himself in the way Geoffrey apparently has with this other boy.

NUTHALL: I think you're being rather blind, if I may say so.

MRS. LONGMAN: I very much wish I could be. It isn't a pleasure to find that one's only child is abnormal.

NUTHALL: Your son is not abnormal, Mrs. Longman. He's simply and solely going through a phase which I, for one, have seen hundreds of times.

MRS. LONGMAN: Do you mean Geoffrey is lying to me?

NUTHALL: Lying? No. I admit I don't quite see why he told you about himself and this other boy –

MRS. LONGMAN: Then there is another boy?

NUTHALL: There was, yes. A romantic friendship which is now over and done with. But to condemn your son – simply on the strength of that – for being abnormal.

MRS. LONGMAN: Mr. Nuthall, if you're trying to excuse Geoffrey to me, it's very kind of you. You'll forgive me if I don't –

NUTHALL: Now, look here, Mrs. Longman. You're doing a very dangerous thing in condemning your son in this short-sighted way.

MRS. LONGMAN: (*Shaking her head*) I don't think so.

NUTHALL: Well, I do. Don't you see – it may result in fixing the boy, permanently, in the phase he's already outgrowing. If you condemn him outright – if you insist on taking him away –

MRS. LONGMAN: (*With set face*) I wish to take Geoffrey away with me, Mr. Nuthall. The boy himself wants to go, and I agree with him. My mind is made up.

NUTHALL: (*After a pause. Shortly*) Very well. Then I've no more to say.

MRS. LONGMAN: I think he'll be far better at home, with me. He can come with me, tomorrow. do you wish me to write to the Headmaster?

NUTHALL: No, I can do that. I've another letter to send him tonight in any case. The matron can pack your son's clothes in the morning.

MRS. LONGMAN: Thank you.

NUTHALL: Once again, Mrs. Longman, I think you're doing a foolish thing. Psychologically it may very well affect your son's whole life.

MRS. LONGMAN: I've made up my mind, Mr. Nuthall. Geoffrey comes with me.

CAROLINE enters.

CAROLINE: (*In a voice both worried and controlled*) Dinner will be ready in ten minutes, Brian. Judy and I are going upstairs to get tidy. I wondered if Mrs. Longman –

MRS. LONGMAN: (*Collecting herself*) Yes ... thank you. If I may.

CAROLINE: (*To NUTHALL, half-aside*) Brian, I want a word with you. (*As MRS. LONGMAN goes out*) I'll just tell Judy to look after (*Points a finger in MRS. LONGMAN'S wake*) Wait here.

CAROLINE goes out. NUTHALL sits at his desk and begins to write a letter. CAROLINE returns.

CAROLINE: (*Attacking*) Now, Brian, what's all this about you resigning? I couldn't understand a word Judy was saying. In any case, Judy had no business to know about it before I did. Did you tell her?

NUTHALL: I did not. (*Writing*) Presumably she got hold of my letter to Maxton.

CAROLINE: Letter? What letter? ... Stop writing, Brian. I must speak to you.

NUTHALL: (*Taking the letter of resignation from his pocket*) Here, you'd better read this. I ought to have told you about it all before. But I thought there'd be plenty of time. (*Continues to write*)

CAROLINE: (*Having taken the letter, reads it. Pause*) But ... But you're ... surely you're not going to –

NUTHALL: (*Writing*) You've always wanted me to resign, Caroline. Now I've done it, please don't raising objections.

CAROLINE: (*Strongly*) When I wanted you to resign, I wanted you to do it of your own free will. Not because of this – this – (*Indicates the letter*)

NUTHALL: Don't tear that letter! I don't want to write it again.

CAROLINE: I'm not going to take this lying down, Brian! I won't have you mixed up this business of Longman and –

NUTHALL: (*Writing*) It isn't only that: There are other reasons. I'm sick and tired of Maxton, for one thing. Always interfering, always carping ... No, I've had enough of it.

CAROLINE: You've no excuse for letting yourself down – or me either –

NUTHALL: (*Writing*) That resignation goes to Maxton tonight, Caroline. And this letter with it. Where are my envelopes?

CAROLINE: Brian, please, listen to me –

NUTHALL: You've always wanted to go back to Cornwall. Very well; at the end of this term back to Cornwall we go. (*Seals letter*)

CAROLINE: Brian – (*Seizing his arms*) Don't be so obstinate. You get yourself mixed up with some beastly little affair between boys – no, listen – why should you have to suffer for it? If anyone's to go, they it ought to be they, not you.

NUTHALL: If you want to know, one of them is going. (*Takes letter of resignation from her*)

CAROLINE: Longman?

NUTHALL: Yes.

CAROLINE: Well, I'm sorry, but it's a very good thing. To think – after all we've tried to do for that boy. Oh, I could –

NUTHALL: It's no earthly use getting hysterical. Leave him alone.

CAROLINE: It's he who ought to be blamed for this, not you. I could talk to him –

A knock at the door.

NUTHALL: Come in.

LONGMAN enters.

NUTHALL: (*To CAROLINE*) You'd better go, Caroline.

CAROLINE: No, Brian. Let me speak.

NUTHALL: My dear, there's no point in ... (*Crosses rapidly, to stop her speaking*)

CAROLINE: (*To LONGMAN*) It's you I want to speak to, young man. If it's been your ambition to spoil – to – to – utterly break up the career of the man who's understood you better than any other master in this school – then you've succeeded!

NUTHALL: (*Angry*) Caroline!

CAROLINE: You've succeeded only too well ... (*In tears*) I hope you suffer for this all the rest of your life! (*She goes quickly out*)

NUTHALL: I don't propose to apologise for my wife Longman. I'm afraid the news that I'm resigning has been rather a shock to her.

LONGMAN: Yes, she blames me for it, doesn't she?

NUTHALL: At the moment, yes. Later, I hope she'll understand the larger reasons behind it ... (*Crosses to desk*) Well, now your mother has spoken to me, Longman. I gather you know what she's decided for you.

LONGMAN: Yes, sir. I want to go.

NUTHALL: I've just written this letter to the Headmaster. It can go tonight. Unless you want to stop it?

LONGMAN: No, sir.

NUTHALL: Very well ... You know your mother's reason for taking you away?

LONGMAN: Yes, sir. I tried to tell her the truth; I don't think she understood, though.

NUTHALL: (*Shaking his head*) No ... I'm sorry, but there it is! I tried myself.

LONGMAN: (*He is on the verge of nervous collapse*) I've gone and messed up everything ... I ... (*Turns away*) I wish I were dead. (*Sobs*)

NUTHALL: That's a very weak thing to say. (*Makes him sit down*)

LONGMAN: You're the only one who ... sort of ... tries to understand.

NUTHALL: I do understand. All the same, Longman, you ought to face it – it's no good if you're going to brood and worry about this business all your life. No good at all.

LONGMAN: Yes, sir. (*Rises and pulls himself together*) I don't. I promise I won't.

NUTHALL: That's better. (*Pause*) Well now, I think we ought to say goodbye: I may not see you before you leave in the morning. (*Holds out his hand*) I hope, one of these days, we may meet again – I should very much like to know what becomes of you.

LONGMAN: Yes, sir ... Thank you, sir ... (*Shakes hands*)

NUTHALL: I want you to make a success of your life.

LONGMAN: Yes sir ... I see, sir ... I'll try to make a success.

NUTHALL: Oh – and Longman, thank you for winning the House Cup for us to-day. I'd forgotten that.

LONGMAN: (*Pause*) Goodbye, sir.

NUTHALL: Goodbye, Longman.

LONGMAN turns to go.

CURTAIN

EPILOGUE

As the lights go up, GEOFFREY and NUTHALL are revealed as we left them at the end of the Prologue. NUTHALL sits, GEOFFREY stands C.

NUTHALL: But, Longman, that was six or seven years ago ... A long time ...

GEOFFREY: I don't think that matters, sir. In any case, what's always mattered to me is that you were the only one at the time who was human enough to show some real understanding.

NUTHALL: I believe I did try to show something of the sort.

GEOFFREY: You succeeded ... Oh, I know it may sound off ... but ... that understanding you showed me then – it's had a kind of ... influence on my life, ever since.

NUTHALL: H'm ... What kind of influence?

GEOFFREY: It's difficult to explain. I suppose what it amounts to is this: ever since then I've always turned to men, rather than women for humanity ... true companionship. Oh, that sounds pompous, but I can't say it any other way. (*Smiles*)

NUTHALL: But your mother – surely, in time, she came to realise that she'd –

GEOFFREY: I'm afraid not. She always believed that – in all that school business – I'd disgraced her, and myself.

NUTHALL: I'm afraid your mother was apt to see everything as either black or white.

GEOFFREY: It could have made a lot of difference to me – if she'd tried to see my point of view, as you did.

NUTHALL: You mean, her sympathy might have turned your affections more towards women. Is that it?

GEOFFREY: Yes, I think so.

NUTHALL: You mean that my humanity – as you call it – turned you, my dear fellow, into a misogynist. (*Shakes his head*) I think you're deceiving yourself a little, Longman. I doubt if any man's life is as easily diverted into a side-channel as all that.

GEOFFREY: Mine has been, I assure you.

NUTHALL: I doubt it. I certainly blame your mother: but not quite for your reasons. As I see it, your mother's taking you away from school, at that particular juncture, left you in a phase of your emotional life you've never outgrown.

GEOFFREY: Outgrown?

NUTHALL: Yes. You were beginning, successfully, to survive your love for another boy – somebody of your own sex. What happened? Your emotions got a fright and back you went to the – what shall I say? – the Danvers level. There you've remained, ever since.

GEOFFREY: (*Laughing a little*) You know, you make me feel that might be true.

NUTHALL: Well, there you are!

GEOFFREY: Yes, here I am.

NUTHALL: And you've told me that you're happy?

GEOFFREY: I'm ... not unhappy.

NUTHALL: What age are you now?

GEOFFREY: Twenty-five.

NUTHALL: You look younger. And ... you're working in London, in an advertising agency. Do you like that?

GEOFFREY: I do now. I didn't at first. I didn't know anybody in London then: it was just hellishly lonely.

NUTHALL: What about the people in the office?

GEOFFREY: Oh, they're pleasant enough.

NUTHALL: The happy mediocrity?

GEOFFREY: (*Smiles*) Yes. I rather like them.

NUTHALL: And the man who's sharing this house with you?

GEOFFREY: He's a medical student. St. John's. I've known him for three years.

NUTHALL: (*After a significant pause*) I see.

GEOFFREY: Yes. That's it.

A knock at the door.

NUTHALL: That'll be Judy, on my trail. (*Looks at his watch*) Yes. (*Rises*)

GEOFFREY opens the door. JUDY enters.

JUDY: (*Coming in*) Brian, we must go. Caroline'll be throwing a fit at home. We're late for tea as it is.

NUTHALL: You'd better hurry: there's another car coming up the lane (*To GEOFFREY*) It looks like yours.

GEOFFREY: Oh. Yes, I expect it is.

JUDY: Well – (*To GEOFFREY*) Goodbye. I hope you've forgiven me.

GEOFFREY: (*To JUDY*) Yes, of course.

JUDY: We must meet again, some time. Unless ... (*With a glance at NUTHALL*) ... you'd come to my wedding, would you?

NUTHALL: Come along, Judy. Don't chatter.

GEOFFREY: (*To JUDY*) Yes, of course.

JUDY: My fiancé and I met in Switzerland, last Christmas. I think you were at school with him.

GEOFFREY: Oh, was I?

JUDY: I think so. Anyway, at the end of September I shall be Mrs. Gordon Danvers.

GEOFFREY: Danvers? (*Turns quickly to NUTHALL*) But – you didn't –

NUTHALL: Young people's secrets, Longman, should be their own affairs. (*Holds out his hand*) Goodbye.

GEOFFREY: Good-bye, sir.

JUDY: Well, goodbye. I'll send you a card. Shall I tell Gordon you are coming?

GEOFFREY: (*Slightly fazed*) Yes, do ... Tell him I'm very glad.

JUDY: I will. Good-bye.

NUTHALL and JUDY go out. GEOFFREY stands alone for a few moments as though in self-realisation.

KIT's voice is heard calling off-stage.

KIT: (*Off*) Geoff? Open the door, will you? ... Geoff?

GEOFFREY: (*Not moving*) Yes? ... Is that you, Kit?

KIT: (*Off*) I've got all these ruddy parcels. Open the door, will you?

GEOFFREY: (*Turns slowly, then hastens to the door*) Right. Hold on (*Opens door*) Glad you're back.

CURTAIN

was excellent.

GATE THEATRE

"PRIVATE HISTORY"

BY JAMES COURAGE

Geoffrey Longman	BASIL COLEMAN
Kit Brewster	JOHN KEVAN
Brian Nuthall	CECIL WINTER
Judy Morland	OLGA EDWARDES
Unwin	RICHARD PEARSON
Melville	DAVID EVANS
Garland	KENNETH MORGAN
Caroline Nuthall	VIVIENNE BENNETT
Mr. Maxton	RAYMOND LOVELL
Mrs. Longman	MARY HINTON

The theme of this play is the romantic friendship of an older for a younger boy at a public school, and it seems obvious that the author intends his narrative to be a sample and test case. In this instance the friendship is an innocent and natural episode of adolescence; the elder boy's schoolfellows discuss it with hostile cynicism, his mother learns of it with shocked and stupid amazement, a girl of his own age insults him, and his headmaster behaves to him with cold and perhaps scarcely credible brutality. But his housemaster both defends and understands him, and his chief anxiety is that the boy should not be, as the psychologists put it, fixated at this particular stage of adolescent development. But his efforts are rendered vain by the boy's mother, and, as a final stroke of irony and cynicism, later in life the boy explains that as once his housemaster alone understood him, he can now look only to men for companionship and kindness.

As a play, at any rate, all this is very convincing, a well constructed plot with persistent suspense and sharply defined characters. Mr. Basil Coleman is affecting and entirely credible in the part of the boy, Mr. Cecil Winter manages to be really sympathetic while always remaining, quite obviously, a housemaster, and as a headmaster Mr. Raymond Lovell is so deadly that he must have given many members of the audience an uncomfortable quarter of an hour. Both actors and author engage our sympathies for the theme, and their serious approach to it cannot possibly give offence. But as a general indictment, and apart from all theatrical values, the case might have been more formidable if the prosecution had risked more, and instead of producing so much evidence of the plaintiff's charm and innocence had accepted him as an ordinary graceless child.

THE subject of the Gate Theatre's new play, "Private History" by Mr. James Courage, is one to make the censor shudder. But it concerns a real problem and it is worthily treated. Schoolboy morals are the theme, illustrated by the case of a prefect, Longland, and his romantic passion for a younger boy. The affair is quite innocent. Longland at home had been too much coddled by his widowed mother.

Without brothers or sisters or girl acquaintances, his adolescent affections had found an outlet in this infatuation for a youth of similar tastes. The situation was not unusual. But there had been a scandal at the school over another friendship not at all innocent, involving an expulsion, and the headmaster, assuming the worst in Longland's case, decides that he too must be expelled. Longland's housemaster is the only one who believes in his innocence. He defends the boy and loses his job in consequence.

Longland, disbelieved in by his mother and scorned by the girl for whom he was beginning to feel a normal passion, leaves with a bitter sense of wrong. We are shown the effect upon him in an epilogue dated seven years later, when he, now 23, is living in Cornwall with a young man friend. He tells his old housemaster, who comes to look him up, "It caused me to look for sympathy and friendship only to men, never to women."

It is the suggestion of the play that these schoolboy passions are in certain boys natural phases of misdirected development that pass with time and wise treatment.

Lack of the wise treatment turned Longland into a misogynist if not something worse. Whatever one may think of the argument, it is a powerful play extremely well-acted, especially by Mr. Basil Coleman who made the shy affection and heartsick misery of Longland very moving.

H.

"Superman" in Modern Dress

Play: Man And Superman.
Author: George Bernard Shaw.
Theatre: Old Vic.

By CLIVE MacMANUS

They have knocked the Hell out of it. Don Juan does not appear in this revival.

But the abridged version is as fresh and funny as when it was first seen more than 30 years ago. Shaw in Modern Dress and with a modern ring.

Well, we all know it is a good play. How do the Old Vic play it?

The buoyant vigour of Anthony Quayle as Tanner blends nicely with the cool charm of Valerie Tudor's Ann. Miss Tudor's work at the Stratford Memorial Theatre had hardly prepared me for this achievement.

Basil Coleman makes a very good job of poor, poetic Tavy, created all those years ago by Lewis Casson (who produced this revival).

He avoids the pitfalls of caricature without making one take the boy too seriously; not so easy to do.

The chauffeur Straker, Ann's mother, and Roebuck Ramsden are drawn pleasantly by John Kidd, Ellen Compton, and Andrew Cruickshank. Altogether a jolly evening.

SCHOOL PIECE HAS BRILLIANT ACTOR

IT seems to me to be a pity that a play with a purpose like "Private History," by James Courage, is unlikely to receive the Lord Chamberlain's licence for public performance in the commercial theatre.

It is produced by the Gate Theatre Studio, where so many fine plays have been seen which likewise failed to conform to the peculiar English ideas of what is fit for the stage and what is not.

The play is about one of the major problems of adolescent boyhood, and, except for a prologue and an epilogue, the scene is laid in a public school.

Geoffrey Longman is a prefect whose attachment for a younger boy seems innocent if unwise, to his housemaster, but is seen in the worst possible light by the pompous head.

The housemaster's successful efforts to prevent an expulsion cost him his own position.

The sting is in the epilogue, which shows us Longman some years after leaving school.

Basil Coleman puts himself right into the front rank of young actors with his performance as the prefect.

A little gem of character acting comes from that accomplished performer, Mr. Raymond Lovell, as the ponderous and ponitifical head.

Cecil Winter is a likeable housemaster, and I think that his apparent unevenness in places was the fault of his script.