

## SIDE: JANET & WALTER ORMUND

20

I HAVE BEEN HERE BEFORE [ACT I]

SAM. Your bags are upstairs, off, and the car's in the garage.

ORMUND. Thanks. Bring me a large whisky-and-soda, will you? MacFarlane's Old Liqueur, if you've got it.

(SAM goes out and shuts the door.)

(Telephoning.) Hello, Brensham? Oh—that you, Sykes? Walter Ormund here. We're fixed up in a little pub on the moors—the Black Bull, Grindle Moor. 'Phone number's Grindle five. . . . Yes, get me here any time—shan't be going far. . . . Yes, well, you work out the marketing costs, and I'll do the rest. . . . I've got all the information here, including Orgenbaum's report. . . . Who? Pensfield? . . . No, he won't make any trouble. I'll offer him a seat on the board. That'll keep him quiet. . . . Not he! I know too much about him. . . .

(SAM comes in up R.C. with a large whisky-and-soda. He stops in the doorway as he sees ORMUND is still telephoning, then tiptoes towards the table. As he is passing, ORMUND reaches out and takes the whisky, to SAM'S surprise, and has a long drink while still listening. SAM gives him a droll look and goes out and shuts the door after him.)

Yes . . . nothing in that, Sykes. . . . Add two and half per cent to the overhead then. . . . I'll ring you up before Monday morning. . . . Well, work all night then—put a wet towel round your head and a bottle of whisky on your desk. . . . Non-sense! Holidays are for boys and girls, not men. . . . I know all about your children, but they can get on without you. . . . All right. I'm depending on you. 'Bye.

(He puts down the telephone, takes his drink to the table, and pulling an old envelope out of his pocket, makes a few quick notes on it. Then he looks at what he has written, so absorbed that he does not notice the entrance of JANET, who comes in quietly up R.C., shutting the door. She watches him take an absent-minded pull at his drink.)

JANET (coming down to the back of the chair R. of the table). You know, Walter, you'd several whiskies at that place where we had dinner.

ORMUND. I know. And I'd several before that. And now I'm having another. And what I say is this. If the only way I can find dividends for several hundred shareholders and wages for several thousands of employees is by drinking several whiskies, then I must drink several whiskies. (He sits in the chair above the table.)

JANET (moving up to R. of him). But you're not going to do any work this week-end?

ORMUND (now sitting with his notes). I must.

(JANET moves away a little.)

ACT I] I HAVE BEEN HERE BEFORE 21

I've just been telephoning Sykes. We've a whole big scheme to work out before Wednesday.

JANET (coming back to beside him). This isn't going to be much of a change for you, is it? More work—more whisky.

ORMUND. A change is too much to hope for. Let me just keep ticking over—just ticking over—that'll do.

JANET (at once sorry and protesting). I can't blame you for being bitter, Walter, but it isn't going to help us.

ORMUND (sincerely). Bitter! I'm not being bitter, my dear. Not in the least. (He takes a good drink.)

JANET (getting a whiff, perhaps, as she passes behind him to the chair L. of the table). Loathsome stuff! I can't think how you go on and on drinking it.

ORMUND. There's a good reason why the distilleries are working at full blast. They're busy giving us Old Highland Blended Courage by the case. Faith and Hope at twelve-and-six a bottle. Love seven years in bond.

JANET. And in another minute, Walter, you'll be attacking me again.

ORMUND. No, no, I'm not attacking you, I'm defending whisky. It's dependable. It doesn't change its mind, think it's in love with you and then know better. It may have a little more fusel oil in it this year than last, but that's all the difference. That's why people all over the world now are steadily pickling themselves in it.

JANET (going to the window). If it made you silly-drunk, I don't think I'd object.

ORMUND. My dear Janet, you'd walk straight out on me.

JANET. No. The trouble is, it only makes you gloomy.

ORMUND. No, if I pour enough down into the darkness inside, they begin to floodlight things down there. Beautiful images begin to shine. Venuses rise from the sea of Scotch and soda, glorious smiling kind wenches, all looking rather alike— (He breaks off suddenly as JANET turns to look at him.) Rooms all right?

JANET (grateful for this, moving in a little). Yes. Queer little windows and a heavenly country smell.

ORMUND. Any spotted china beasts?

JANET. Yes. Dogs with long necks. They've blue spots in my room, red spots in yours.

ORMUND. Good! I haven't seen any of those beasts for years and I'm fond of 'em.

JANET (hopefully, going to L. of him). I believe you're going to like it here.

ORMUND (with sudden change of mood). No. (He finishes his drink, rises and moves down R.) I can't help feeling it was a mistake coming here.

JANET (mildly). It was your idea.



ORMUND. A lot of my ideas are bad. This is too small, too quiet. It throws us straight back on to ourselves—

JANET. That's a good thing.

ORMUND. It's a good thing when people are all right with one another. But when they're trying to be easy and friendly and one of 'em has died on the other, as if he were last year's worst hat—then if they've any sense they want to go and stay at some large damn silly place screaming with jazz bands where you can't possibly think. Here you can't help thinking.

(JANET goes up to the sideboard to get her book.)

I've started already. . . .

(FARRANT enters up R.C., leaving the door open. He still has his book. He stops short, and he and JANET look at each other. The clock chimes the three-quarters. Then ORMUND looks too, and the clock joins in with its tick and chime, as if it had been expecting this. An odd tenseness for a moment.)

FARRANT (with a certain effort). We'd better introduce ourselves. My name's Farrant.

ORMUND (his bewilderment over). That's it, of course. You're Oliver Farrant, Head of Lamberton. I'm Walter Ormund. My wife.

FARRANT (R. of the table). I didn't expect to meet one of the school governors here.

(JANET sits in the chair L. of the table.)

ORMUND (not importantly). I've been too busy to go and see the school yet, but I was one of the governors who put you in there. Thought we ought to have a young man.

FARRANT (smiling). You were quite right.

ORMUND. But what are you doing here? Term time, isn't it?

FARRANT. I was told to knock off and have a rest.

ORMUND. Overworking?

FARRANT. That's what they said. I feel rather a fraud—I'm walking miles and miles every day, and eating like a horse—

ORMUND (looking hard at him). Look a bit nervous, though

JANET. How did you find your way up here?

(ORMUND works spasmodically throughout the next scene.)

FARRANT. Mrs. Pratt—that's the landlord's daughter—has a boy, Charlie, who's at Lamberton. He told me about it.

JANET. Mrs. Pratt was telling me all about her boy. Is he clever?

FARRANT (not at his best). Yes, he's got brains. He's the kind of boy who makes me feel glad I'm a schoolmaster. Ought to be fairly certain of an Oxford scholarship later on. We've a good many boys of his kind.

JANET. Do you mean—clever?

FARRANT (rather deliberately). Yes, in this class. A lot of them have

JANET (who does not like his manner to me that they wouldn't have.

FARRANT. And it's part of our job to encourage them.

ORMUND (dryly). Yes, it was part of the school.

FARRANT. Sorry, I was forgetting.

ORMUND. That's all right.

FARRANT. No, thanks. Too good.

ORMUND. There's a bar in the school.

FARRANT. Yes. But the talk is about staying here?

ORMUND (almost giving him up). Yes, staying here?

FARRANT. Yes, a Doctor Görtler.

ORMUND. German?

FARRANT. Yes, Professor of Mathematics here. Judging by his talk at supper he's a long way from mathematics now.

JANET. Why?

FARRANT. Oh—he seems to be having seen too much trouble. The Government stand the strain. (After a pause.) I want to talk about the school.

(He nods and goes out down stage)

ORMUND and JANET

ORMUND (quietly). Without his record—and against considerable opposition—gentleman appointed Head of Lamberton.

JANET (rather grimly). My dear

ORMUND. Well?

JANET (with irony). Oh—very young man—not the least little bit very charming—humph! (She looks at her watch.)

ORMUND (starting to collect his things). Ordinary thing. Thought I'd take a note on paper. And he looks all right. (He goes to the sideboard.) Ought, in fact, to be well—there you are—

(He now turns to the door up R.C. and goes. This brings him face to face with just entered. DR. GÖRTLER looks at especially at JANET, and is then