

HE WAS NOT THERE

HE WAS NOT
THERE

By

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Characters

MARGARET	<i>Elder daughter of the Johnson family</i>
EMILY JOHNSON	<i>Arthur Johnson's wife</i>
ARTHUR JOHNSON	<i>An Industrialist</i>
ANNA	<i>Their younger daughter</i>
ALEC	<i>Their unmarried son</i>
MARY ELLEN	<i>Their long-time family servant</i>
LILI VON BRÜLOW	<i>Arthur Johnson's niece</i>
JOHN	<i>The Johnsons' elder son</i>
VAL	<i>His wife</i>

Two passers-by

*The action takes place in the living-room of the Johnson home
at the present time*

ACT I

Scene 1

The living room of a well-to-do family in Washington or London. Great preparations are going on as it is Christmas Eve. The room is a spacious one with a large fireplace stage left. Around it are comfortable armchairs and a sofa. Stage right is an undecorated Christmas tree. A ladder and decorations are close by. There are two steps up to the back of the room, leading to the large folding doors opening into a hallway and the front door. Behind the sofa stage left is a window, and beneath it a large radiogram playing Christmas carols as the curtain rises. Downstage right is a door leading into the dining room, kitchen and pantry.

As the curtain rises it is dark. There is a light from the fire. It is snowing outside the window. A light from a street lamp lights up the scene outside. From the radio come "Jingle Bells" and Christmas carols. A telephone on a small table stage left starts ringing a little after the curtain rises. The door downstage right opens and a burst of laughter comes from the dining room. A woman of about thirty-five runs across the stage and answers the telephone. She switches on the lamp on the table as she speaks. She is Margaret Johnson, the elder daughter of the family.

MARGARET Hello. Yes. Yes, this is 9-4986. Who is it? Oh, it's you, Aunt Kate. Yes. Do you want to speak to Mother? She is just finishing dinner, I'll—

(As she is talking, an elderly woman sails into the room. It is Emily Johnson, a very well-preserved woman in her sixties.

She is dressed in a long, wine-coloured velvet house coat, and she has an expensive embroidered shawl around her shoulders. Everything about her, her pearls, the diamond pin and the cut of her clothes is expensive)

EMILY Who is it, Margaret?

MARGARET It's for you, Mother.

EMILY (*Impatiently*) Yes, but who is it?

MARGARET It's Aunt Kate, Mother.

EMILY (*Snatching the receiver*) Then why didn't you tell me?
(*Sweetly into the receiver*) Hello—yes, dear. Oh, it's you, Kate. No, you're not disturbing me. I was through my dinner. I don't eat much these days.

MARGARET (*With disgust*) Mother!

EMILY I seem to have lost my appetite. I've not been at all well lately. I seem to get more and more of these terrible heads. Thank you, dear, thank you. You're so sympathetic. I wish I could say the same about my family. No, I'm sorry to say they don't seem to understand. And now this niece of Arthur's is turning up out of the blue from Germany. Yes, his sister's girl. Goodness knows what she wants. And just at Christmas time when there's so much to do.

MARGARET (*Throwing herself angrily on to the sofa*) Mother!
It's Father's—

EMILY (*To Margaret*) Please be careful, Margaret, how you sit on those new covers. Do you know how much they cost a yard? Of course, you don't have to pay the bill. (*Into the phone*) Yes? Sorry, dear, I didn't hear what you said. Yes. We're having the new carpets done right after Christmas. Exactly. Having this girl come at that time is so

inconvenient, and I really didn't feel well enough to have another one in the house. Well, I wish you'd talk to the family. They might at least listen to you.

(The door from the dining room opens and the rest of the family stream into the room. First there is Arthur Johnson, a good-looking, elderly grey-haired man. He is a typical industrialist. He is followed by his younger daughter, Anna, a very pretty young woman of twenty-five or twenty-six. She is the apple of his eye. Next comes Alec Johnson, a tall dark young man of twenty. He is the unmarried and younger son of the family. He is smoking a cigarette, has a brandy in his hand and he looks discontented and defeated. He is obviously bored with the proceedings)

ARTHUR For goodness' sake, let's have more light.

ANNA *(Dramatically)* Light, more light! *(Switching on the light)*

EMILY *(Irritated)* Please, Anna, I'm talking. I can't hear—it's Aunt Kate.

ALEC Wanting a nice fat cheque for Christmas.

EMILY *(Ignoring him)* I'm sorry, dear. I'll call back later. The family are making too much noise. But thank you for calling and being so understanding. Goodbye, dear, happy Christmas to you. I only hope mine will be. *(She sighs)* Well, goodnight. *(She puts the receiver down)*

ARTHUR *(Without much interest)* Was that Kate, my dear?

EMILY You know perfectly well it was. What a silly question. Can't you think of something better to ask?
(There is a tense silence. Anna throws herself into an armchair and picks up a magazine)

ANNA Ye old Yuletide spirit.

EMILY What did you say?

ANNA These family parties are such fun.

ARTHUR (*Trying to smooth things over*) Sh! Anna!

EMILY Exactly. I always have tried to have a happy time but you seem to deliberately go out of your way to make things unpleasant and difficult.

MARGARET (*Trying to change the subject*) Father, tell us about Lili. She'll be here quite soon and we ought to know something about her before she comes.

ARTHUR I'd like to. You know, of course, she's my sister Blanche's girl. Extraordinary her turning up after all these years out of the blue.

ANNA How long ago did Blanche die?

ARTHUR It was during the war in an air-raid—1943, I think. I made every inquiry about the girl but I could never find any trace of her. I thought she must have gone too.

MARGARET Blanche was your favourite sister, wasn't she, Dad?

ARTHUR Yes, we were inseparable as children. Shortly after the First World War, on a holiday in the Black Forest, she met Ernst von Brülöw. There was the Rhine, and wine and picnics and he was a good-looking fellow. She married him. It was a great shock to your grandmother. My brother, Bill, had been killed in France during the war. There was a lot of feeling in the family. Blanche was torn in her loyalty. She drifted further and further away from the family. I saw her once in Frankfurt just before the Second War started. She was pathetically glad to see me.

I didn't realise how much she felt the separation. She was planning to come with Ernst and Lili to visit us in the summer holidays. That was 1939. War broke out again. It was just by chance we heard she died in an air-raid and Ernst with her. Poor girl, she must have gone through a lot.

ANNA I wonder if Lili will be like her.

ARTHUR Yes, I do too. I'm really looking forward to her coming. It brings back so very many memories.

EMILY She could have chosen a better time to do it.

MARGARET Mother, how can you, after all Father's just said?

EMILY (*Rising in anger*) After all Father's just said—exactly. You take your father's side against me. Don't hurt Father. Do any of you think of how I feel? Do any of you ever think about me? I've not been at all well lately, but none of you seem to care. Who orders the meals? Who gets everything you want? Who runs this house? After all, I don't ask for much—just a little affection and a few flowers. Alec, get up off there! Go on. Dr. Littlefair says I'm very run down and need a rest. I keep getting these dizzy feelings, most unpleasant. But none of you care what happens to me.

ARTHUR Sit down, my dear. Let's be cheerful. After all, it's Christmas Eve.

EMILY (*Shaking him off*) Leave me alone, please. I shall go to my room and lie down. I'm sure I don't want to spoil your Christmas. I hope you have a very happy time all together. I'm sure you'll enjoy yourselves much better without me. I don't want to spoil your fun. (*She swoops to the door and stops for a moment*) And if this girl does turn up

tonight of all nights, I suppose you'd better let me know. If I'm well enough I'll come down and greet her.

(Emily goes out and bangs the door behind her. There is a silence. Alec goes over and turns up the radio. A man's voice says sentimentally, "Peace on earth, goodwill to men". The tension is broken and the family roar with laughter)

ALEC *(Drinking his brandy)* You can say that again. Aren't family parties fun?

ANNA *(Gaily)* Come on, let's decorate the tree. In spite of this jolly atmosphere, let's make things look a little gay.

(The door opens and Mary Ellen enters. She is the cook, a pillar of the family and a comfortable, motherly soul who's been with the family for thirty years. She is a friend and confidante of every member of the family to whom she is devoted)

MARY ELLEN Well, how're we doing?

ARTHUR Not so well, I'm afraid, Mary.

ANNA Mother's in one of her moods. She swep' out.

MARY ELLEN Why?

ALEC We didn't sympathise with her dizzy feelings.

MARGARET *(Bitterly)* She says she has no appetite, but she eats enormous meals, never takes a step of exercise, and then wonders why she has dizzy feelings.

ARTHUR Poor lady—

MARGARET Poor lady, my foot! You know it, Father. You just sit there saying "poor lady" while she drives us all mad. You ought to pick her up and give her a darned good spanking. It's what she's needed for years, and she would respect you a good deal more if you did it.

ARTHUR Please, Margaret! Don't speak about your mother like that.

MARGARET We need to, Father. You just give in, give in, and give in, and life's hell around here. I can't stand it much longer.

ALEC (*Rising*) Neither can I. I think I'll go out and get drunk. It'll be much more amusing. Expect me back when you see me.

MARGARET (*Going to him*) Please don't go, Alec. I'm sorry I talked like that. Please don't go out with that crowd.

ARTHUR No, Alec, please. That won't do you any good.

ALEC What good do you think it's going to do me staying around in this charming company? Dad, I wish you'd quit hounding me about "that crowd". They're interesting, they think—they're progressive—they want to see things different, and who wouldn't living in an atmosphere like this?

ARTHUR Please don't talk like that, Alec. You've been given everything—a good home, a good education, a car—everything you've wanted. That's probably been the trouble.

ALEC What's the point of it all? I'm fed up with life around this house.

ANNA Come on Alec, remember it's Christmas—

ALEC Christmas! Don't talk to me about Christmas. It's just a pagan binge. Lots of drink, lots of expensive gifts. Peace on earth, goodwill to men—family rows—everyone fighting each other. Families, communities, nations—the

world's in just one helluva mess, and who cares? Well, my crowd, as you call them, want to do something about it. You may not like the way they're doing it, but they're doing something, and it's a darned sight more interesting than just staying around here sympathising with Mother's dizzy feelings and your business interests, Dad, and then respectably going to church tomorrow to sing hymns and listen to things we, none of us, have any intention of living. It's just damned hypocrisy and I'm sick of it. I'm going out to get blind, roaring drunk. Does that shock you? Well, I am. Merry Christmas to you all! (*He exits*)

ARTHUR (*Wretchedly*) I don't know what to do with that boy. His mother spoiled him.

ANNA So have you, Father. You've spoiled all of us.

ARTHUR What are we going to do for Lili if she comes? We've got to give her a cheery Christmas.

ANNA Oh, lord, let's all be ever so jolly!

ARTHUR It's not funny, Anna. This will be her first impression of an American home.

MARGARET Let's at least get the tree decorated for her. That'll brighten things up a bit. Mary Ellen, can you go up to the attic and get the rest of the decorations? There's a big box full upstairs. And the manger! Don't forget the manger.

(*Anna climbs the ladder and begins to decorate the tree*)

ANNA How d'you like the star on top, Grete? Remember the wax fairy we used to have when we were kids, and the lights melted her face? She looked horrible. I remember I cried for hours. Christmas was so exciting in those days.

Life was exciting, and now look at us all. You a war widow, Margaret, and my marriage—three glorious, rapturous years, and then—well, I don't want to go into the rest of that sordid business. Hand me my drink, will you? (*She gulps down a gin and tonic*) Well, let's think of more cheerful things. I hate Christmas. It brings back so many memories. (*She takes another gulp*) Never mind, another handsome hunk of heaven will come along, and life will be another glorious technicolored romance—heart throbbing, pulsating, thrilling. (*She topples and falls off the ladder*) Exactly! Keep your feet on the ground, sister. Hand me the tinsel, will you?

MARGARET I wonder what time she'll be here.

ARTHUR Who?

MARGARET Lili, of course.

ARTHUR Why, of course. (*Takes a telegram out of his pocket and reads*) "Arriving almost immediately. Expect me when you see me—Lili". That could mean today, tomorrow, or six weeks. We must be prepared for her. I've had the strongest feeling she'll come today, but I don't really know anything. I don't even know where she's coming from.

MARGARET (*Looking at her watch*) It's eight o'clock now. I doubt if she'll come tonight. Let's finish the tree and go to bed. There's nothing else to do. I haven't got the guts to go out and get drunk like Alec, but I feel I'd like to.

ARTHUR (*Sitting and covering his face with his hands*) Margaret, please don't.

MARGARET (*Going over and kneeling by him*) Sorry, Dad. I didn't mean to say that—but what's wrong with us all?

MARY ELLEN (*Entering breathlessly*) Sorry to have been so long. (*She dumps a large box underneath the tree*) You know, I've searched the attic; I've searched the house from top to bottom, but it's not there. I can't find the Christ Child anywhere.

CURTAIN

ACT I

Scene 2

The same as Scene 1 two hours later. The tree is all decorated. Arthur is dozing in his chair. Anna is curled up asleep on the sofa. Margaret is sitting looking into the fire. She tip-toes over to her father and kisses him lightly on his forehead.

MARGARET Good-night, Dad. Don't disturb yourself. I'm going to bed. I'm not going to wait up any longer.

(There is a loud ring on the door bell. Anna wakes and sits up quickly. Arthur rises from his chair)

ARTHUR Quickly, Margaret, see who it is. It may be her.

ANNA *(Yawning)* It is probably carol singers. It's too late for her now, surely.

(Margaret goes into the hallway, leaving the door open so that you can see as she opens the front door. As she opens it a small figure stands shivering in the doorway. She has one shabby suitcase. It is Lili von Brülow)

MARGARET *(Gasping)* Oh! It is you. Come in. We've been waiting for you.

(She takes her arm and leads her to the top of the steps where she stands blinking in the doorway. She is a small pale-faced young woman between twenty-five and thirty. She has no hat but a scarf tied over her head and she wears an old raincoat)

ARTHUR *(Going forward)* Lili, bless your heart! Come in, come in! We've been waiting for you. It's been a long time.

(Lili stands quite still and seems to be unable to move)

MARGARET (*Taking her suitcase from her*) Please let me take this.
(*Lili still seems unable to move*)

ARTHUR (*Gently*) Come over by the fire, my dear. Give me your coat. You must be cold. Anna, quickly go and get some more wood for the fire and something hot to drink.

MARY ELLEN (*Bustles in still half asleep*) Bless my soul! I thought I heard the doorbell. I thought it might be the last mail. Christmas, you know.

ARTHUR This is Lili, Mary, Blanche's girl. (*He stands looking at her*)

MARY ELLEN Bless your heart and little cotton socks! We've been all waiting for you. So, you're Blanche's girl.
(*Lili nods*)

MARY ELLEN (*Continues*) Sit down now, dear, and make yourself at home. I'll get you a nice hot cup of something. There is nothing that a nice hot cup of something won't cure, I always say. It just touches the spot.
(*Lili sits on the edge of the sofa still ill at ease*)

ARTHUR Anna, run up quickly and tell your mother Lili's arrived.

ANNA Margaret, you do it. (*She laughs*)

ARTHUR Please, Anna, quickly.
(*Anna exits to right*)

ARTHUR Where have you come from? You said nothing in your wire and so we couldn't meet you.

LILI I came from Hanover. I didn't know if I'd get on the plane. At the last minute there was a cancellation. So, here I am.

ARTHUR This is all a wonderful surprise. You know, my dear, I didn't even know you were alive. What happened after your mother died?

LILI They took me to Berlin to one of Father's sisters. East Berlin—I've lived with her there ever since.

ARTHUR East Berlin—

LILI Yes. I got away from there about two weeks ago. I managed to get into the western zone—a friend—no—I don't want to tell you, but someone looked after me and hid me. When I was safe, I went to the authorities. I said I wanted to reach my uncle in America. I didn't know where you were, but Mother had told me about the business and your name, of course, and all about you. And so they found you for me. They were in touch with you about the invitation, as you know. I'll tell you all about it later if I may.

ARTHUR Of course. You must be very tired. I—er—I didn't realise from the cables where you came from. I'm doubly glad you've come.

LILI (*Looking around*) Yes, I'm free. I wonder if you over here realise what that means. I've planned this and I've dreamed about this for a long, long time (*she sighs*) and now I'm here.

(*The door opens. Emily appears. She is in a different negligée. She comes in coldly, stands looking at Lili who looks a forlorn figure*)

EMILY So you're Blanche's girl. How do you do? What a time to arrive! I'm afraid they had to wake me out of a sleep. I'm sorry I wasn't down to meet you. You must be

tired. Margaret, what are you standing around for? Why don't you take her to her room? Has her luggage been taken up?

MARGARET (*Picking up her bag*) I'll take it up now, Mother.

EMILY Is that all she has?

LILI Yes, that's all I've got.

EMILY I'm sorry the house is rather upside down with Christmas and new stair carpets and all the children home at once. The house is *very* full, you know. Your visit was rather unexpected.

LILI (*Turns, looks from one to the other*) Yes, it is very unexpected. (*She suddenly bursts into tears and runs from the room*)

MARGARET It's all right, Dad, I'll go after her. (*She exits*)

EMILY What an extraordinary way to behave. She didn't even ask me how I was.

ARTHUR Do you realise where that girl has come from?

EMILY Please don't talk to me in that tone of voice. You know perfectly well I don't.

ANNA Mother, she's just escaped from behind the Iron Curtain. She's from Berlin—do you realise—

EMILY Behind the Iron Curtain! A Communist—here—in my house.

ARTHUR I don't know what she is. She hasn't been able to tell us. I don't know any more than you do, but I do know one thing. As long as she's in my house you are never going to talk like that again. You're going to treat her decently. She's Blanche's girl. And you will treat her properly. Do

you understand? And if you don't like it—well, you can go somewhere else. (*He exits*)

EMILY (*Completely taken aback*) Well—I—uh—I've never heard your father talk like that before.

ANNA It's about time, Mother.

EMILY You too! I—well—I don't know⁴² what to say. I'm not at all well. I have these dizzy feelings. Perhaps if something does happen to me *then* you will⁴³ understand. I'm going to my room. Kindly ask Mary to bring me a little something on a tray tomorrow. I shall not interfere or spoil the family reunion, I can assure you. After that I don't know where I'll go or what I'll do. Aunt Kate will have me for a few days. She will understand and sympathise—but then I don't know. I wish I were dead. I mean it. I wish I were dead. (*She sweeps from the room in an orgy of self-pity*)

MARY ELLEN (*Enters with a steaming cup of tea*) Here's a nice hot drink, dear.

ANNA (*Pouncing on it*) For heaven's sake give it here then.

MARY ELLEN Good heavens, child, whatever's happened? Where are the others?

ANNA Mother was rude to Lili. Dad was rude to Mother and Mother wishes she were dead. (*From the radio comes the same sentimental voice—"Peace on earth, goodwill to men"*) Oh, shut up, will you! It's a farce. The whole thing's a farce. (*She too dashes from the room*)

(*From the radio come Christmas carols. Mary Ellen stands and listens and then goes over to the Christmas tree and looks at the manger, but there is no Christ Child. She shakes her head*)

MARY ELLEN I can't think where He's gone. He's just not here. I don't know. I'm sure I don't know.

(She goes and turns off the lights and the radio and once more there is just the firelight and the street light outside. The stage is quite empty for a minute and then the door opens quickly and Lili comes in. She is in a sweater and skirt and she goes over to the fireplace and stands looking at the fire. Margaret comes in and stands just behind her)

MARGARET Can I get you anything?

LILI *(Jumps)* Oh! You made me jump.

MARGARET You're still scared, aren't you?

LILI Yes—yes, I am.

MARGARET *(Turning on the lamp, she sees the cup left by Mary)*

Come and sit down. Oh—here's your drink. Drink it up! You'll feel better. Everyone else has gone to bed.

LILI You should go, too. Please, don't wait up for me. I'd rather you didn't. Please do go.

MARGARET I'd like to stay if you don't mind. I couldn't sleep, if I did go to bed now. I don't sleep very well, you see. I'd like to talk to you. I'd like to get to know my new cousin.

LILI Why don't you sleep?

MARGARET Oh, lots of things. Worry, I suppose.

LILI You've got worries?

MARGARET Lots of them.

LILI Are you married?

MARGARET I was. My husband was killed in the war.

LILI I'm sorry. In Germany?

MARGARET Yes, in Germany.

LILI (*Looking at her*) I'm so sorry. Mother felt terrible, you know. She was torn. It's never seemed to make any sense to me. My mother and father were killed by your people.

MARGARET I know. I'm sorry. (*She bursts out*) What is it all for? Here am I growing older, looking after Mother, who is an old tyrant, pleasing her, making her more and more selfish. What's it all about? Life, I mean.

LILI (*Looking at her, horrified*) Don't you know, either?

MARGARET I shouldn't be talking like this to you now. I'm sorry.

LILI I ran away because life was cruel and senseless and horrible, too, but I thought you'd have the answer over here. I thought life here would be different. What about your sister? Does she feel like you do?

MARGARET Anna?

LILI The pretty young girl. Is her name Anna?

MARGARET Yes. Anna's younger than I.

LILI What about her?

MARGARET Anna fell in love with a boy at the university they went to. Terry is his name. It was one of those Hollywood boy-girl romances, and it ended the same way.

LILI I don't understand.

MARGARET Well, I suppose you haven't seen those Hollywood romances. It's just like the tinsel on that tree. It looks pretty, but it doesn't last. They were divorced. So were many of her friends, and mine, too—hundreds and thousands of us every year. Lucky she didn't have any kids. But

think of the poor little things—not feeling anyone really cares—parents who are just ^btoo darned ^dselfish.

LILI That happens here?

MARGARET All the time.

LILI So that's what they think freedom ^fmeans. (*She pauses and pokes the fire*) Are there any more ^eof you?

MARGARET It's not a very pretty picture, but you're real and I want you to know the truth. It's no use pretending.

LILI Go on.

MARGARET Well, there's my brother, Alec. He may be in any minute. He'll probably be roaring drunk. He often is. He's got mixed up with a rotten crowd—drink and a lot of other things. They are young, and progressives they call themselves. I don't know what they are progressing to exactly. They have a lot of ideas of new systems and a new society, but the way they live together with their heads in the clouds and their feet stuck in the mud, leaves you sick. But, I haven't anything better to offer him. He's been spoiled by Mother and lectured by Father, and he's bored, and I don't blame him—so am I. I can't go along with him, that's all. I sometimes wish I could.

LILI I see. Is that all?

MARGARET Good lord! Isn't that enough? (*She laughs sarcastically*) Actually, it isn't all. There's another brother and sister-in-law. But we don't talk about them very much. They are just a big disappointment. We kind of keep them dark.

LILI Why? What have they done?

MARGARET They've not been a success, not as they promised

to be. You see, John was Mother's pet. He was everything she wanted him to be, a brilliant scholar, amusing, popular, brilliant at games. He became a big football star—quite a hero in his way.

LILI Then what?

MARGARET He got married to the actress, Val Evans. Did you ever hear of her?

LILI No, we didn't get much of that kind of news where I come from.

MARGARET Well, she was a young actress on the stage and screen, one of the up-and-coming movie stars. She'd been offered a contract which would have made her famous across the world. Mother was against it at first. She'd have been against anyone who took John away from her.

LILI Yes, go on.

MARGARET Well, gradually Mother came round. Val was famous, glamorous, and charming. Their wedding was a sensation—headlines, newsreels, the couple of the day—both popular and successful. Mother lapped up every bit of it. Father was pleased, too, in a quiet sort of way. Then suddenly it happened.

LILI What?

MARGARET They gave it *all* up!

LILI For what?

MARGARET Well, it's funny, but it is difficult to explain. It only happened a few months ago. Val was all set for a new play on Broadway and a big offer from Hollywood. John had a new job with a great future. They wrote and apologised to us for the selfish way they had lived in the past.

They said they'd found the thing they wanted to give their lives to. Val cancelled her contracts, and John resigned from his job. Mother was absolutely furious. She wired, she threatened. Father wrote calmer but strong letters of protestation. But it didn't do any good. They haven't been home since. Mother's livid with them. You see, they've ruined all her hopes of being the mother of celebrities and she can't forgive them. So, you see, we are quite a family. But I've talked so much about us. What about you?

LILI (*Pauses and then says*) I went through the bombings as a child. I was with Mother and Father when they were killed. They pulled me out of the rubble. They didn't think I'd live. A friend took care of me and nursed me back to health, and then took me to my father's sister in Berlin. She was a woman with a great passion. She hated National Socialism and all it stood for, like my father had and, of course, my mother. She—my aunt I mean—and her husband had meetings in their home. I was too young then to understand what it meant. When the war was over and the Russians and the Americans walked in, my aunt and uncle welcomed the Russians as liberators. They said they'd found an ideology which was the next great forward step in history. It would set people free.

(*Lili rises and walks over to the fire and stands silently looking at it*)

MARGARET Yes?

LILI It is the greatest hoax in history. It's just hideous and terrible lies. You can intrigue, lie, murder; the end justifies

the means and all is done in the name of the brotherhood of man. (*She kicks a piece of coal and pokes the fire angrily, then turns and faces Margaret*) And you in this great democracy, what have you got to offer us? You talk of quarrels, divorce, drink. I read in your newspapers, as I came, about delinquency, debauchery. Is this what I've dreamed about? Is this your alternative to millions who want something different—is it? (*She goes over and stands looking at her*) Is it?

MARGARET (*Rises and sits her on the sofa*) Lili, you're overwrought. Sit down. You'll feel better in the morning. It's Christmas Day tomorrow and we'll light this tree, and you'll have your first American Christmas. You'll see, it'll be fun.

LILI Christmas, where I come from, is a fairytale, another hoax. What does it mean to you?

(*Lili looks intently at Margaret and then walks out of the room. Margaret rises, goes to the door, then hesitates and walks back to the tree. She stands looking at it, then kneels and begins to search in the box containing the figures of the crib for the lost Christ Child*)

CURTAIN

ACT II

Scene 1

As Act 1, the following day, Christmas Day. It is early afternoon, and the family are just finishing their Christmas dinner. Mary Ellen comes through the stage door, centre, with an empty tray, and the rest of the family enter from the dining room. Arthur has a paper cap on his head. Anna has a crown. There is a false attempt to be jolly. Arthur takes the tray from Mary Ellen.

ANNA Dad, you ate twice too much. You're going to get fat.

ARTHUR I know, but I love it. Mary, is Mother coming down to join us for coffee?

MARY ELLEN No. She says she's not going to spoil the family party, and she's feeling very dizzy, and can't even enjoy the turkey or plum pudding, but she nearly ate the pattern off the plate. And she'd have had a second helping if there'd been one to offer her. (*She winks*) Bless her heart! She does enjoy being miserable more than any living soul I've ever met. She needs something to make her feel miserable about, I tell her sometimes. She's going to be a long time dead, but she might as well enjoy herself while she's with us. (*Lili enters. She is quiet and thoughtful. Margaret is with her. She has on a paper sunbonnet*)

MARGARET Will you bring the coffee in here, Mary? If you'll stack the dishes, you can come and join us and we'll all pitch in together later on.

ALEC (*Enters. He is morose and gloomy, with a cracking headache*) And for heaven's sake bring the brandy, my head's splitting. I need something to revive me. (*He turns to Lili*) Well, cousin Lili, and how are you enjoying your first taste of Christmas? It's great fun, isn't it? (*He slumps into an armchair*) Anna, let's turn on the lights. Even if it's still afternoon, it's so dark and gloomy. Let's get a bit of dazzle around here. Lights! Let's turn on the lights.

(*Margaret turns on the lights*)

ANNA There. Isn't that pretty. I must say I do love a Christmas tree. Lili, come and have a look. Is this the first tree you've ever seen?

LILI No. When I was a child we used to have a beautiful tree. My mother and father used to decorate it themselves on Christmas Eve. Not with all those gorgeous balls and tinsel. It was very simple—the dark green tree with red rosy apples and straw animals and lovely gold paper angels. It was very simple but it was beautiful. We had red and white candles, not electric light bulbs like this, but candles. We used to sit and watch it till every candle flickered out. And we'd sing together, not very well, but I can remember Mother singing "Silent Night, Holy Night". She had a very sweet voice.

ANNA Let's turn on the radio now. We can get some carols.

LILI No. Do you mind? I meant out of a heart. It's different, isn't it?

(*Mary Ellen enters with coffee*)

MARY ELLEN There's the paper boy. Wants his Christmas box. Anyone got any change, or shall I take it out of my burial fund?

MARGARET Take it out of your burial fund, will you? We'll pay you back later.

MARY Well, don't forget now. It's getting low and if there should be an accident I want a nice coffin with brass ends.

ANNA (*Laughing*) Mary keeps a tin box with money in it for her funeral. We're always having to borrow from it. I really don't know what we'd do without Mary's burial fund. She is a character.

(*There is a ring at the doorbell*)

ARTHUR Another one. It goes on all day long. It's probably a postman this time. Christmas is just one huge racket and very expensive.

ALEC (*Half asleep*) Exactly. Just one big pagan binge, hurrah!
(*His head falls forward and he is asleep. The doorbell rings again*)

ARTHUR Margaret, go and see who it is, will you, or it'll keep up all day.

(*Margaret exits, closing the door behind her*)

ANNA Well, let's have a game and brighten things up. Let's make some kind of show of gaiety even if we aren't all little rays of sunshine and there's a thundercloud upstairs.

(*Margaret enters breathless and excited*)

MARGARET Guess what!

ANNA What?

MARGARET Guess who's outside—go on, three guesses!

ALEC Santa Claus.

MARGARET One.

ANNA Dear Aunt Kate who's so sympathetic.

MARGARET Two.

ARTHUR I don't know, my dear. Who?

MARGARET Go on, guess.

MARY ELLEN (*Rushing in*) I saw them. I saw them coming up the drive. Oh bless their hearts and little cotton socks!

(*She flings open the double doors and, standing in the doorway, are Val and John. The family is speechless. Then everyone speaks at once, "Val!" "John!" "Father!" "Alec!" "Anna!"*)

The family all gather round excitedly. Lili stands a little apart by the fireplace, watching the scene. John is the first to see her. He is a good-looking young man of thirty. His wife is vivacious and attractive. John goes over to Lili)

JOHN And who's this?

ARTHUR My dear boy, in all the excitement I quite forgot.

This is Blanche's girl Lili. My sister Blanche, from Germany, you know.

JOHN (*Amazed*) You mean—you're alive.

VAL (*Laughing*) No, dear, she's a ghost.

JOHN Well, I can't believe it. But—my goodness we're glad you're here. When did you arrive?

LILI (*Responding to the genuine care*) Last night.

JOHN Last night. Why it's marvellous to arrive together, a real family reunion.

ALEC (*Sarcastically*) Hurrah, what fun!

ANNA Alec's got a hangover, don't pay any attention to him.

JOHN (*Breaking away and going to his brother. He puts his hand on his shoulder and looks down at him with real compassion*)

Perhaps it will be fun after all.

ALEC (*Looking up at him*) I've got a splitting headache.

JOHN I see you have. You need an aspirin. Val has one.

VAL Here, I've got one. Anyone got a glass of water?

ALEC Never heard of the stuff.

JOHN (*Handing him one*) This'll do the trick for you.

ALEC Hey, what's happened to you? You didn't use to notice I was here.

JOHN No, that was the trouble. I'm sorry. I'm really sorry. (*He stands looking at the misery that he sees on the boy's face and is deeply moved*) We'll have a talk later. Well, there's a lot I want to tell you. (*He looks around at all the faces*) I can't believe it—Val, we're home. Good heavens! In all the hullabaloo I hadn't noticed. Where on earth is Mum? (*He goes to the dining room*) I know—in the kitchen, it's Christmas Day, I quite forgot.

MARGARET (*Stopping him*) No, John, she's not in there. She's upstairs.

ANNA In bed.

ALEC In a sulk.

JOHN (*Laughing*) Now I know I'm home. Come on, Val, let's go up and see her.

(*They start for the door but as they are about to exit, Emily enters. She stands in the doorway in her dark red negligee of the first act. She is pale and angry*)

EMILY I thought I heard voices. I thought—(*she pauses and sees John and Val*) It's not—I, I can't—

(*John rushes over and hugs her. Val stands and watches*)

EMILY John, please, careful—my hair—I have these dizzy feelings. Please, I must sit down. It's quite a shock. Why didn't you let me know? The house is very full you know.

You'll all have to help. Mary, go and get me a cup of something hot. I feel quite upset.

(Exit Mary)

VAL Well, Mother dear, aren't you glad to see us?

EMILY I suppose—why, yes, of course I am, I don't know—I mean after all these dreadful letters, that foolishness. They are still keeping your job open for you, you know. I hope you've come to your senses.

JOHN Yes, Mother, I think at last we have.

EMILY Well, thank heaven for that! Anna, run up and get my smelling salts—on the top shelf in the bathroom. Margaret, get me out my glasses, will you? They're in the small red writing case by my bed. *(To John)* I can't carry it down myself any more. I get dizzy feelings, you know.

ALEC And dear Aunt Kate is so sympathetic.

ARTHUR Alec, please.

ALEC Oh hell. I'm going upstairs, if they're going to start all this again.

JOHN No, Alec, please don't go. We need you here. We've got so much to tell you. *(Alec sits down reluctantly)* Oh, but before we start, I almost forgot—Merry Christmas, all! *(He takes out of his pocket a small box and hands it to Emily. Val opens her bag and hands out gifts to each of the others. They all excitedly open them. There are exclamations—"How lovely!" "Thank you so much." Only Lili sits silently watching. Val suddenly catches sight of her)*

VAL Why, Lili. I didn't know you were here. I'm so sorry. Oh, wait a minute. I've got something for you. *(She takes off a lovely coloured Japanese scarf)* This is for you.

LILI (*Hesitating*) No, I couldn't, it's yours.

VAL No, please, really I want you to have it. It suits you much better than me.

LILI (*Looking at her*) Oh, but it's beautiful. Such lovely colours and print. I haven't seen anything like this—ever. Thank you. Thank you ever so much.

EMILY (*Opening her box*) How very nice. I'm sorry it isn't a bracelet. I hoped your father would give me one for Christmas. Of course, he didn't. But this will be very nice on my new suit. If it's big enough. Thank you, my dears, it was very sweet of you to think of me. (*She looks in the box*) Oh, Mikimoto's—Tokyo—Japan.

JOHN Yes, Mum, we've just come from there.

ANNA Now?

VAL Yes.

ANNA Good heavens!

VAL It was Christmas Day yesterday. That's why we forgot to say Happy Christmas today. You see we crossed the dateline.

ARTHUR My dears, you must be tired.

VAL It was a long flight.

EMILY Thank goodness you've come home safely. I hope you'll stay for a while now. What on earth were you doing in Japan?

JOHN Do you really want to know, Mother?

EMILY Of course, my dear boy.

JOHN Well, we were part of a force bringing an ideology to Japan.

EMILY Don't be ridiculous—you?

JOHN Yes, Mother—me. You see, unless the Japanese find a superior ideology, the Communists' plan to take over Japan by 1960 may succeed.

EMILY And what on earth do you think you can do about it? You must have gone out of your senses. Anyway, let's change the subject. I'm sorry, but I don't like that word ideology. *(She opens her gift again and looks at it)* It's very pretty. I understand cultured pearls are half the price in Japan. I'm sorry you didn't bring me a graded strand. I could have worn them every day and put my good ones in the bank.

(Lili watches her horrified. She rises and walks over to her)

LILI You know, while you're interested in your jewellery, someone else may have an ideology that will take over the country. So perhaps even if you don't like the word, you'd better listen to your son. I'm interested, John, very interested.

EMILY *(Angrily)* I'd be grateful if you didn't interrupt just now, Lili. This is the first chance I've had to talk with my son for six months. I'd be grateful if you wouldn't interfere. Perhaps you'd help Mary get the tea. There are lots of people in the house and very little help and we can't all sit around being waited on.

(Lili pauses and starts to say something and stops. She walks slowly to the door stage right. She stops)

LILI I'm sorry. I shouldn't have said that. I just couldn't help it. I'm really very sorry.

VAL *(Rising)* May I come with you, Lili? I'd like to help get the tea.

EMILY There's no need for you, Val.

VAL Please, Mother, I'd like to. (*Follows Lili out*)

EMILY Well, really, she's quite the most unpleasant girl I've ever met. She's got absolutely no manners. Why she had to come and park herself on us just at this time—well, I suppose she thought you had money, Arthur.

ARTHUR (*Rising angrily*) Emily, I meant what I said yesterday. You're not going to talk like that about Blanche's girl.

EMILY Thank goodness you've come home, John. I don't know what's happened to your father, since this girl came. Yesterday he told me to leave the house.

MARGARET Mother, you know that's a lie.

EMILY You stay out of this, Margaret. You always take your father's side. If this girl stays on here much longer, she'll break up our home.

ARTHUR You know that's not true, Emily.

EMILY (*Beginning to cry tears of self-pity*) She's making my life a perfect misery. And you all take sides against me.

ALEC (*Rising grumpily*) Oh heck, I'm getting out. Sorry to leave just as you've come, John, but I can't stick around here. I'm moving in with a friend of mine tomorrow. I'll be over sometime next week and look you both up. Merry Christmas to you all. (*He goes out*)

ANNA Can't you stop him? He'll just go and get drunk.

JOHN (*Going to the window*) He's drinking?

ANNA Yes—heavily. He's always with this Jack Bevan and his crowd—suede shoes, long hair, dirty nails. It's disgusting.

EMILY (*Still weeping*) John, why don't you do something?

JOHN (*Coming and sitting down on the sofa beside her*) Yes, Mother, I really think I will.

ARTHUR (*Rising*) I think I'll get some fresh air before tea.

JOHN No, Father, don't go. I want to talk to you both. (*Margaret and Anna start to go*) I'd like you all to hear what I've got to say. Can you get Val? I'd like her to be here, too, if you don't mind. (*Anna slips out to get her*) Well, where do I start? It's difficult to know where to begin. (*Anna enters with Val. They come and sit by the fire*) I guess we better begin at the point where we can all agree. Point one—the world's in a hell of a mess. (*They all nod in agreement*) And our family's in a hell of a mess. (*He pauses*) Well, there's one place we can all start. It's with ourselves—or rather, to bring it even closer to home, I can at least begin with myself. Mum, I want to tell you what kind of a son you really had.

EMILY Don't talk nonsense, John, you were always the best of the lot. You never contradicted me.

JOHN Exactly. I played up to you for what I could get out of you, so I became your blue-eyed boy. I was just a little more clever than the rest. That's all.

EMILY Please! I don't want to hear any more of that kind of talk. John, please, I'm not feeling too well.

JOHN (*Gently, but firmly*) Mum, I don't want to hurt you, really I don't, but we need to face facts. Mother, you always looked at me through rose-coloured glasses, but tonight we need to take them off. We've got to face reality about ourselves and our family and our nation. God help us if we don't.

(As he is talking Lili enters with a tray of cups and saucers. She hesitates for a moment, not sure whether to disturb them or not)
Come in, Lili. *(He gets up and takes the tray. She is about to go)*
Do come and join us. You're part of the family.

EMILY She's helping Mary get—

JOHN *(With real authority which even leaves Emily speechless for once)* I know, Mum, but tea can wait. *(Lili still hesitates)*
Come and sit down, Lili. Here's a chair with your name on it. *(He puts her in a chair by the fireplace)* I was just telling the family that tonight we need to face a few facts. We've all agreed that the world is in a mess, and our family is in a mess and that there's one place we all can start, and that is with ourselves. *(He sits again on the sofa by his mother)* Mum, you always thought me a perfect son. Well, I'm afraid I was far from that. You see, I was a hypocrite. I—

EMILY But you weren't—you were—

JOHN Yes, Mum, I know I was charming, successful, popular—at least that's what people said. I did very well at school and college, I know. I was a hero in the eyes of you and many others. But I was only out for myself. I was smooth and charming on top but incredibly ruthless and selfish underneath. I lied and cheated and wangled to get what I wanted and I didn't care who got hurt as long as I got to the top.

EMILY It's not true. You—

JOHN But it was true, Mother. Look at Alec. I can hardly look at that boy now because I see how much I am to blame. In debates at college I got great applause for speeches on peace and brotherhood. But look how I treated my own

brother. I never really gave him a thought. I rode roughshod over him and looked down on him as my inferior.

MARGARET (*Thoughtfully*) John!

JOHN And you, Margaret, I never really cared about you. Not even when David died. I was sorry, of course, but I thought you'd got bitter and sour, and I just didn't want to be around. I'm so sorry.

ANNA And what about me?

JOHN (*Looking at her*) You, Anna. I didn't lift a finger when things went wrong with Terry and you got your divorce. I thought, "She's the kind who'll get another husband as soon as possible. Good luck to her." That's the kind of unfeeling, callous creature you have as a brother. I'm terribly sorry.

ARTHUR I—er—I don't understand all this. You had a good education. I gave you the very best of everything.

JOHN Yes, Dad, and I'm grateful for all the advantages you gave me, but I believe parents need to wake up and see what they really are giving their sons when they put them into colleges. Do you know what one professor taught me—that morals were old-fashioned and God was a myth. He systematically broke down anyone who tried to stand for moral standards. He made him a laughing stock in front of the whole class, and he was just one of many. It was systematic subversion and it ended in literally hundreds of cases in perversion. Yes, we need to wake up and face the truth, or God help this country of ours.

ARTHUR If that is so, it's a shocking business. Why didn't you tell me about it before?

JOHN Dad, you were so nice, so respectable, so decent. I never felt I could be honest with you. I went to church with you every Sunday like a good, dutiful son, but I lied to you about what I did on Saturday nights and most other nights, too. I only really came to you when I wanted money. I feel very, very ashamed of myself, but that's true. (*There is a silence and then he turns to his mother*) Mother, I think I owe you the deepest apology.

EMILY (*Tensely*) And what have you got to say to me?

JOHN I was resentful and bitter about the way you treated Father and Margaret, especially. When I saw the way you flirted with all the young men who came to the house and saw what a fool it made of Dad—

EMILY But I never—

JOHN I used to go to my room and literally cry with fury. Many, many times there was real hate in my heart. I'm not blaming you, Mother, I'm just so sorry that I've never been a real son to you, nor given you the love you've longed and craved for.

EMILY (*Starting to cry*) There's so much you don't understand—

JOHN I know, Mother, but I want to now. You see, while judging and condemning you, there was so much that was wrong in me. I can only ask your forgiveness. (*There is a long pause*) Can't we make a new start all of us together?

EMILY (*Does not say a word. She is obviously fighting with herself. Suddenly she rises*) I don't want to hear any more about this—please. I don't think you realise how unwell I feel. I think it's very unkind of you to say these things on Christmas Day.

JOHN But, Mother—

EMILY (*Turns on him, blazing with fury and hurt pride*) To say you've had hate in your heart against your own mother after all I've done for you—(*John takes a step towards her*) Leave me alone, please.

MARGARET Mother, don't spoil everything. We wanted to have a happy day around the tree.

EMILY (*Livid with rage*) Me spoil everything? It's always *my* fault. You're all the same. I know what you say about me behind my back. I wish I could go out and drown myself. You'd all be much happier without me. I wish I were dead. (*She goes to the door and catches sight of Lili*) And as for you, you've been the cause of all this trouble ever since you arrived here.

ARTHUR (*Sharply*) Emily, please!

EMILY I'm going to say what I think. This is my house, do you understand? Even if she is your precious sister's daughter. (*She goes out and bangs the door. There is a long pause*)

LILI (*Goes over to Arthur*) I think I'd better go.

ARTHUR No, no, my dear, please. You mustn't take any notice of what she says. She doesn't mean it. Poor lady, poor lady.

JOHN (*With sudden passion*) Father, how can you go on saying that, "She doesn't mean what she says—poor lady." You've allowed her to carry on like this for years and years, and you don't seem to mind what it does to anyone around her.

ARTHUR Please, John. I think you were very wrong to say the things you did, when she wasn't feeling well. She does get these—er—dizzy feelings.

JOHN You know you don't believe that. Mum's got the constitution of a horse. Most of us would be dead if we carried on like she does. No, Dad, you've just appeased and appeased and appeased, and everyone's had to pay the price.

ARTHUR But I've given her—everything.

JOHN Yes, Dad, you've given her materially everything she's wanted, plenty of money, a nice home, cars, furs, jewellery. It's just like America. In Japan, where Val and I have just come from, we, the Western nations, give money, material aid and arms, but it's not enough. They want an ideology, a way of life that works.

LILI Yes, Uncle, he's right. I know what he's talking about. I know what it means to live in a country under the wrong ideology. It's hell to live under a materialistic dictatorship. I thought, If only I could be free! I must get away to the West because life will be different there. I schemed, I planned for months, for years, to come to you and your family. But it's just another dictatorship, another materialism, a different kind, yet in a way just as selfish and just as cruel. You've not got it either.

VAL Yes, she's right. Lili, I'm sorry. I've been part of all this you talked about. I've been selfish, greedy, indulgent, the kind of woman who creates class war and bitterness which causes millions like you to live under a Communist dictatorship. I wanted a man who'd give me money, position, success. (*She turns to the family*) I owe you all an apology. So many of the things you felt about me were true. I loved John's success, popularity; it all fed my tremendous ambition—the wedding, the publicity. I just grabbed him

for what I could get out of him. I didn't know what real love meant. I was completely self-centred and irresponsible and out for myself. It's women like me who do so much harm in the world.

(To Lili) I know how you must feel, Lili, seeing the way we live, after all you've been through. Lord! But I saw the cost of the way I lived as I went through the East—on every placard and every bill board, lurid hideous posters advertising sex and sensation. Do you wonder they've lost respect for the West when we glorify and dramatise in our movies a way of life that's just plain dirty and immoral? Do you know what one mother said, "I'd rather my son died or went to war than he should go to the West and learn their way of life"? It's why John and I have decided to give our lives to restore for that kind of thing—to bring an answer before it's too late.

MARGARET Is that why you've given up your contracts and John his job?

VAL Yes.

MARGARET But you've been given a great talent.

VAL Yes, I believe the theatre and the movies can bring new life to the whole world. They can give hope to millions who have lost their way.

LILI *(Repeats slowly)* Hope to millions who have lost their way. *(She suddenly puts her head in her hands and bursts into tears)* I don't think you really know what that means. I wonder if any of you really understand. Val, if it's true what you say, *(she starts to laugh)* for the first time I believe

there is hope. (*Her face suddenly becomes serious*) But I forgot. I can't stay here.

ARTHUR My dear, you're going to stay.

LILI No, it'll only cause more trouble. I seem to have caused so much already.

JOHN (*Firmly*) Lili, you're not the cause of the trouble. Mother's been like this all her life. But it's not going to go on. This is Christmas Day, but it's going to be a very different kind of Christmas, not a sentimental "Jingle Bells".

ANNA Not a pagan binge, as Alec calls it.

JOHN No, it's not. It's going to be the real, genuine article because everything's going to be different—
(*There is a ring at the front doorbell*)

ARTHUR Margaret, will you see who that is, my dear.

MARY ELLEN (*Enters with a tray with tea and cups*) Here's a nice hot cup of something. (*She sees Lili mopping her tears*) Just come at the right time. A nice hot cup of tea makes all the difference.

(*There are sounds of voices in the hall and Margaret appears looking scared and shaken*)

MARGARET Father. There's been an accident.

ARTHUR (*Rising quickly*) Your mother?

MARGARET It's Alec. He's been hurt. In a car. They are bringing him in now.

(*Mary runs to the front door. Two men carry in Alec. There is a gash on his head, and he is unconscious. The family gather round*)

FIRST MAN Make room, please. Give him air. Where shall I put him?

MARGARET (*Motioning to the sofa*) Put him here. (*She gasps as she looks at him*)

SECOND MAN He's hurt, but I think he'll be all right. Lucky to be alive. The car was smashed to smithereens. No one else hurt, but don't know how they did it. The police will be over later with particulars. Not a very nice Christmas present I'm afraid, sir.

ARTHUR Thank you for bringing him home.

SECOND MAN The other young man gave his address. He'd had a drop too much, celebrating as you might say. (*He shakes his head*) These young people. They're going too fast and don't know where they are going half the time. (*He starts to go but pauses by the tree and looks at the crib*) Nice tree you've got. See the crib's empty. Lost the Christ Child?

ARTHUR (*Looking down at his son, shakes his head*) Yes, yes, I'm afraid we have.

CURTAIN

ACT II

Scene 2

The same, some hours later. The family have gone to bed. Margaret comes from the dining room having made herself a hot drink. She walks to the fireplace and sits down. The door opens and John and Val appear. They are in their dressing gowns.

JOHN (*Surprised to see Margaret*) Hello, sis! Not in bed yet?

MARGARET No, I couldn't sleep. I don't sleep well anyway.
How is he?

JOHN He seems a little better. He opened his eyes and recognised me. He's asleep now. The doctor doesn't seem to think it's serious or necessary to move him to the hospital. But he'll see him in the morning. He gave Mother the sedative.

MARGARET You might have thought she'd had the accident, the fuss she made. It's always the same. She's always got fatal symptoms but she'll be alive long after the rest of us have been pushing up the daisies.

VAL Would you like me to make you some tea, John?

JOHN I'd love some. It'll just hit the spot, as Mary would say.
(*Val exits*)

MARGARET (*Continuing her train of thought about her mother*)
I just had to leave her room. I couldn't stand it. There she was demanding more and more attention and more and more sympathy. I just freeze up. She drives me mad.

JOHN (*Looking at her*) You hate Mother, don't you, Margaret?

MARGARET (*Pauses and looks up defiantly*) Yes I do. She's killed every bit of love I ever had for her. The way she treats Father, me—everyone—Lili—imagine treating a girl like that who's been through hell. She's a wicked woman.

JOHN (*Quietly*) Yes that's true. But what are you going to do about it?

MARGARET Well what can we do?

JOHN Change her. Meet the deepest needs in her heart.

MARGARET (*Laughing sarcastically*) You try.

JOHN I'm going to.

MARGARET You'll never change that woman. (*Bitterly*) She's the most monumentally selfish woman I've ever met. Look how she reacted to what you said to her to-night. You can't do anything with a woman like that.

JOHN No, but God can. Do you still go to church, Margaret, like you used to?

MARGARET Yes, I do.

JOHN What for?

MARGARET I don't know. Comfort, I suppose. All my friends do. Habit partly. (*She pauses*) And to worship.

JOHN Do you think Jesus Christ came on earth just to make us more comfortable or did He come to revolutionise our living and thinking, to answer every problem, to meet the needs of a woman like Mother? To change a family like ours?

MARGARET It's no use, John. You don't live with her any more. (*Bitterly*) I do. She's a devil, she enjoys hurting people and she wants to control and dominate everyone and everything.

JOHN Margaret, why don't you ask God to show you what's happened to a faith which has lost its power to change people? Do you think it could be that we talk about things we no longer believe are possible?

MARGARET "Love your enemies, pray for those who persecute you, return not evil for evil but good for evil," you mean?

JOHN Yes. You know, Grete, I realised that I and actually our whole country want the fruits of our Christianity without living the life.

MARGARET That's quite a thought. (*She pauses and continues*) "Why note the splinter in your brother's eye and not see the plank in your own eye? You hypocrite." It was quite strong, wasn't it?

JOHN Yes it must have been quite something to have lived around Him. He must have made people feel very uncomfortable. I suppose it's why they wanted to get rid of Him.

(*Val enters with some hot drinks and biscuits and sits on the sofa beside John*)

MARGARET We're talking about a faith that could change Mother.

JOHN (*Laughing*) And don't forget the plank.

MARGARET Yes, I suppose, and me. (*Flaring out*) She's the one who needs to change. She makes everyone's life a misery. I wait on her hand and foot. I carry that wretched little red writing case up and downstairs. I do all I can.

JOHN That's what she says.

MARGARET Well, I do.

JOHN Everything but love her.

MARGARET You can't love a woman like that.

VAL You can't love the things she does. But perhaps you could love her enough to help her to be different.

JOHN We don't mean a sentimental, sloppy kind of love that is just selfishness. We've got such a screwy idea of what love is. No, I mean the kind of love which means you lay down your life for somebody else until they are really different.

MARGARET I don't want to lay down my life for Mother. I want to get away just as soon as I can, and in the new year I'm getting a rise in my job and with my pension I'll be able to live very comfortably on my own. Thank God, then I'll be free.

VAL Will you? With all that hatred and bitterness in your heart you'll never be a free woman.

MARGARET I'm not bitter.

VAL What are you then?

MARGARET I don't know. I don't know. I'm just terribly unhappy, that's all, and I don't know what to do. (*She starts to cry*)

VAL It's David too, isn't it?

MARGARET (*Nodding*) Yes. Just when we were so happy together, and hundreds and thousands are divorced and dying to get away from each other. It's not fair. Why should it happen to me? Yes I suppose I am bitter, terribly, terribly bitter. I hate Mother too, I have all my life. My heart's just full of bitterness and hatred and meanness. You are

right when you say I'm bitter and sour. Well I am. But I can't do anything about it, I'm just dried up.

JOHN I suppose if Jesus could heal the sick and raise the dead and cure the withered arm, He could bring to life a heart that has dried up. Don't you think that's the kind of faith we need?

MARGARET (*Drying her eyes*) If that were really possible!

VAL It is.

MARGARET Yes, but how?

JOHN You pray to God, don't you?

MARGARET Yes.

JOHN Do you ever listen for the reply?

MARGARET No, how?

JOHN Well just sit quietly and listen. And thoughts will begin to come to you. Thoughts that are absolutely honest and absolutely pure, absolutely unselfish and absolutely loving. And when I get thoughts like that they don't come from me. Then you write them down, because you'll forget them if you don't.

MARGARET Then what?

JOHN You obey them, that's very important. And when you do, miracles begin to happen.

VAL It's a tremendous adventure, Margaret, because then you're no longer insecure and blown about by this one and that, but you can find God's plan for your life. You can find a new direction and a new purpose for living. Why don't we just try it—

MARGARET Now?

JOHN Why not?

MARGARET Supposing it doesn't work?

JOHN (*Laughing*) You can always go back to the mess you've been in.

MARGARET What do I do?

JOHN (*Taking out his note book and tearing a page from it*) Get a pencil and paper.

MARGARET (*Goes to the table and opens her bag*) I've got my pen.

(*They sit down quietly together and begin to write*)

MARGARET (*Putting down her pen*) It doesn't work.

VAL You wrote down something. What was it?

MARGARET "Apologise to Mother. You've always hated her." No. I can't do it. Why should I? She's been mean and hateful. No. I won't do it.

JOHN That's more honest. Come on, why don't we listen some more? It seems to be working very well to me. (*They are all quiet again. This time there is quite a long silence, long enough for all the audience to listen*)

MARGARET (*Half to herself*) I see.

JOHN What have you got?

MARGARET "Apologise to Mother. You've always hated her." In my heart I've been just as mean and hateful to her as she has been to others. "You, too, are a difficult woman. Unless you change, you will end up exactly like her." How can I help her when my own heart is cold and bitter and judging? That's the plank. Because while seeing all that is wrong in her, my own heart is full of self-pity and longing

for sympathy. "Stop mourning for David and begin to live for the things he gave his life for. Begin to care for others as you've longed and craved to be cared for. Lay down the burden of hate and blame and bitterness and let God, Who is love, fill your heart." (*There is another silence*) I want to do that. (*Pause*) I feel as though a great stone has rolled away from my heart. However can I thank you two enough?

JOHN Don't thank us. We haven't done anything.

MARGARET What did you write down?

VAL To be a sister to you, Margaret. (*She reads*) "I've been such a prima donna. I've never really had time to care for anyone but myself," and to "have a talk with Margaret. Let her know what kind of a sister-in-law she really has."

MARGARET I've always felt afraid of you. I think it was more feeling inferior. You were always so attractive and clever and I always felt so dull. I think in a way I was jealous. You had so many of the things I wanted.

VAL I'm so sorry. I don't wonder. I need you and I need your help to be different.

MARGARET I feel quite different about you already. It's really wonderful, isn't it? Why, this is what the whole world needs, isn't it? Sorry, John, what did you write down?

JOHN "It's going to be Christmas for the whole family every day from now on. Lay down your life for Alec. There will be a miracle in his health and in his heart if you are faithful. Be patient with Mum, it won't happen overnight." Then it came, "So live that everyone around you finds a faith."

MARGARET Yes that's what I've lacked, a faith. It's meant to

be a flame and a sword. But I've used mine as a kind of aspirin to soothe my fears and worries instead of to get at the root of them; and worse than that, I've tried to use God to help me be a success. Good heavens! I'm beginning to see a lot of things and I expect I'll go on seeing them.

VAL (*Laughing*) If you're anything like us, you will.

MARGARET But it's a beginning. You know, for the first time in years I've got hope, and I feel years younger already. (*She rises and goes to them*) Thank you both, so very much. Good night.

JOHN Sleep well.

MARGARET For the first time in a long, long time I really think I will.

CURTAIN

ACT III

Scene 1

It is the same, five days later. It is New Year's Eve. Alec is lying on the sofa. His head is bandaged and he is lying quietly listening to a radio programme. Messages are coming in from all over the world. Anna enters. She switches on the light. She is dressed very smartly in a cocktail dress and is obviously going on a spree. She is enjoying herself and singing as she enters.

ANNA (*Sings*) "Oh, what a beautiful morning! Oh, what a beautiful day! I've got a wonderful feeling. Everything's going my way"—God's way—I don't know. Anyway it's simply amazing and I can't believe it.

ALEC What?

ANNA Everything. Do you need anything, my dear little brother? Sorry to be rather exuberant. I'm feeling so gay.

ALEC Well, that's a change in this house.

ANNA There's a lot of changes going on in this house, I can tell you, my boy, so you'd better look out!

ALEC You can be quite certain of one thing, my dear sister. They're not going to change me, if that's what you're talking about.

ANNA (*Teasing*) No dear, you just stay exactly as you are. (*She laughs*) Do you want anything before I go? Anything to read?

ALEC No thanks. I can't do much reading yet. Where are you going?

ANNA Pierre's.

ALEC Who with?

ANNA Terry.

ALEC Who?

ANNA Terry.

ALEC (*Suddenly it registers. He sits up*) What! (*Drops back again*)

ANNA I told you I couldn't believe it.

ALEC What on earth happened?

ANNA I tried it and it worked.

ALEC What?

ANNA One of those experiments. I saw where I'd been wrong for a change and wrote and told him so. He said he wanted to see me and talk things over. The details will have to wait because this time I'm not going to be late. He'll really believe in miracles if I'm on time. (*She puts a hand on his shoulder*) Good night, my dear boy, take care of yourself. Why don't you have a talk with John? If he could help you the way he's helped me, life might begin to be fun for a change. Good night. May see you when I get back.

(*She exits*)

(*Mary enters with a hot cup of tea*)

MARY ELLEN. Here's a nice hot—

ALEC Hot cup of something, it'll do you good.

MARY ELLEN Well, so it will, my boy. Better than what you've been having lately. That hasn't done you much good.

(*She goes over and pokes up the fire and shakes up the cushions*)

You're a lucky boy, if you ask me, to have been given another chance.

ALEC What do you mean, another chance?

MARY ELLEN Just what I say. If you'd gone this time I'm not at all sure where you'd have ended up. (*She pokes the fire.*)

ALEC I don't believe in that kind of superstition.

MARY ELLEN You may be surprised to find it's not all superstition, one of these days, my boy, so don't you be too sharp, or you'll cut yourself. You and that crowd you've been going around with, they could do with a bit of hell fire and they'll get it if they're not careful. I'd like to put them all in a nice bath and scrub them down with good hot soap and water and a scrubbing brush and scour them proper, inside and out.

ALEC One of these days you are going to be very grateful to "that crowd" as you call them. They're interested in the masses and people like you.

MARY ELLEN I don't know about the masses, but I know the messes you're all in.

ALEC (*Annoyed*) It's not a laughing matter, Mary. For people like you a new system and a new social order would mean—

MARY ELLEN I'll tell you frankly, if a new system and a new social order means that you look like that Jack someone or other that you go around with, with his long hair and bad manners, and it means the kind of mess you keep your room in and I, as one of the masses, have to clean up, I'm not at all interested, thank you very much.

(*John enters. He has some books and newspapers under his arm and he goes over to his brother*)

JOHN How are you feeling, fellow?

ALEC Better. But my head still throbs.

JOHN Sorry. You'd better stay quiet and not move too much. You've done well, the doctor says. Can I help you back to your room? I found these and thought they might interest you.

ALEC (*Takes them and looks at them*) Thanks. I can't read much. (*He turns over a copy of "Will Asia Lead the Way?"*) Is this what you've been doing?

JOHN Yes.

ALEC I'll read it sometime.

MARY ELLEN Shall I take your cup? Would you like any more?

ALEC No thanks, Mary.

MARY ELLEN (*To John*) What about you?

JOHN Not for me, Mary. Thanks all the same.

(*Mary exits*)

JOHN Would you like to be read to? (*He picks up the paper and reads the headlines*) "Sputnik Policy Challenges the West", "Race in Ballistic Missiles", "Mid-East Furore", "Tension Grows", "Rivalries Continue Despite Threat of War", "Paris Crisis Starts Fourth Week", "Company Accused of Union Busting", "Delinquency Grows at Alarming Rate". Sorry I can't find anything more cheerful for you.

ALEC Well, what do you expect? The whole darn system's wrong.

JOHN Do you want me to go on?

ALEC No. I'd rather talk if you don't mind. Do you have anything else to do?

JOHN No, I came to be with you.

ALEC Where's Val?

JOHN With Mother and Margaret.

ALEC Mother's really enjoyed having the doctor in the house. She's able to have a field day with her dizzy feelings. She's pumped full of injections, pills, and sedatives. I think she'd live to be a hundred if she'd stop taking all that medicine.

JOHN Alec—

ALEC Yeah?

JOHN You weren't with us on Christmas Day, when I apologised to the family.

ALEC What for?

JOHN Oh, a good many things. To Dad, for just going to him when I wanted money; to Margaret and to Anna, for being pretty cold and callous; and to Mother for having been bitter and resentful and for having had hate in my heart because of the way she treated Dad.

ALEC You told her that?

JOHN Yes.

ALEC You've got courage.

JOHN I meant it—the apology, I mean.

ALEC What did she say?

JOHN She didn't like it.

ALEC I wouldn't think so. What did you do it for?

JOHN Because Val and I have decided to give the rest of our lives to bring the answer to those headlines—and it's not much use trying to put the world right when you've got a mess in your own backyard.

ALEC You and Mary have a lot in common.

JOHN Have we?

ALEC Yeah.

JOHN And I've got something to say to you.

ALEC What is it?

JOHN I've been pretty mean to you too.

ALEC Have you? How?

JOHN Well, I've enjoyed being better than you, to put it bluntly. I've enjoyed being big and making you feel small. It was pretty rotten. Sorry is a very small word when you feel as much as I do. I just haven't cared or ever really known you—as a brother. I was so busy getting to the top.

ALEC (*Bitterly*) Yeah, I felt small all right. (*Mimicking his mother's face*) Look at John. He gets such good marks. He's so good at games. He's such a success. Why don't you do what he does?

JOHN It must have made you pretty mad and bitter.

ALEC Yes, I guess it did. (*A sullen look comes over his face*) And it made me determined to do just the opposite.

JOHN (*Picking up the newspaper*) It's not much good expecting nations to get along together if brothers like us can't agree.

ALEC (*Stares at him and then nods*) Yes, I suppose you're right.

JOHN Why have you stuck around here? It can't have been much fun.

ALEC It's been hell most of the time, to be honest. I suppose I'm ungrateful. Mum and Dad have given me everything—a car, all the money I want—they pay my debts. It's comfortable, easy, but I can't stand it. Mother's moods and domination and then at times a kind of gooey sweetness, "Don't you love me, dear?" And Father's such a nice guy, but I haven't a thing in common with him. We don't even

know what to talk about. He's a good man all right, but what for? He's good for nothing as far as I can make out. While the world's in one hell of a mess, he doesn't do one darn thing about it. He just carries on with his business and his golf and he loves being slapped on the back and being called a good fellow. He and millions like him don't see the writing on the wall.

JOHN It's true Alec, they don't. I suppose we just all hate to face reality. I believe these really are the darkest days in the history of man. Unless we can find a totally new way of doing things, not just a new system, but a new type of man who has learned to turn enemies into friends, we're finished. *Homo sapiens* will simply be as extinct as the dinosaur. You're darned right, we need to do something about it, and fast. We've—

(*Val enters breathlessly*)

VAL Have you seen Lili?

JOHN No.

VAL Well, she's gone. She's not in her room.

JOHN Gone? Isn't she with Margaret?

VAL No, she's not. She's left this. (*She hands him a note*)

JOHN (*Reading*) "Dear John and Val, I'm off. Please understand. My staying around here only makes things worse for Aunt Emily. Don't worry about me, please. I'll be all right. But thank you for your friendship. I shall never forget it. Lili." When did you find this?

VAL Just now. I went to see if she was all right. She wasn't there. Her things had gone, too, and I found this note on the dressing-table. Oh, John, what can we do?

ALEC Does she have any money?

VAL I don't think so.

ALEC Then she can't have gone far.

JOHN (*Going to the door*) I'll get the car. We'll go after her.

VAL Yes, but where? She could have gone anywhere by now.

(*Margaret enters*)

MARGARET What's up? Where are you going, John?

JOHN It's Lili. She's gone.

MARGARET Gone!

JOHN Yes. She left this note. (*He hands her the note which she reads*)

MARGARET Oh no! It was Mother. She made a crack at her just before dinner. She asked her how long she planned to stay, and if she intended to get a job. She indicated that she was just sponging on the family. I saw the look on her face. She just couldn't take it.

(*Arthur enters*)

ARTHUR (*Brightly*) Well, we're not far off the New Year now. Turn on the radio, John. We must hear—(*He realises something is wrong*) Well, what is it? What has happened? Anything wrong?

MARGARET (*Going to him*) Yes, it's Lili, Father. She just couldn't take it. It was Mother again. She left this note.

ARTHUR Give it to me. (*They hand it to him. He reads it*)

MARGARET I'm afraid she's gone.

ARTHUR (*Sternly*) Where's your mother?

MARGARET In her room.

ARTHUR (*He walks to the door slowly and then pauses. He turns and faces them*) This time it's not going to be "poor lady". You've all had to put up with this far too long, because of my cowardice. I'm sorry. It's been hard on you. I realise that now, and it's been hard on her. This time her temper and her tears and tantrums won't pay. And what's more I believe she's going to have the time of her life. (*There's a glint in his eye as he exits*)

MARGARET Well, bless my soul and little cotton socks, as Mary would say. Now I believe anything can happen.

JOHN Well, let's get going. We can't waste any more time.

We must find her. Are you coming, Margaret?

MARGARET No, you go with Val. I'll stay here with Alec.

ALEC Where are you going?

JOHN I don't know yet.

ALEC Well, why don't you try this guidance of yours?

(*Alec laughs cynically*)

JOHN Darned good idea. Let's be quiet for a minute and listen.

(*There is a silence*)

JOHN Well?

VAL I had a feeling that she'd want to think things over, that she might have gone to the drugstore down the road to have a cup of coffee before moving off. John, I feel we should go now and go fast if we want to catch her.

JOHN Let's go. Thanks, Alec. You're an inspired man.

(*They exit*)

ALEC (*Laughing cynically*) It'd be really funny if it worked.

MARGARET (*Laughing*) Yes, the laugh really would be on you, my boy, wouldn't it?

ALEC Put on the lights on the tree, would you, Grete. We might as well be gay. After all it's New Year's Eve, you know.

MARGARET (*Walks over and turns on the lights*) You know, Alec, after years and years of feeling unutterably gloomy, I actually do feel gay. I really wake up and look forward to the day. (*She sits and looks at the tree*) I just love looking at a tree, don't you? (*She catches sight of the crib and gets up and kneels and looks at it*) It's a pity we've lost the Child in the crib. But I have a sort of feeling that we're going to find it somewhere.

CURTAIN

ACT III

Scene 2

It is the same scene some hours later. Alec is dozing on the sofa and Margaret is sitting by the fire.

ALEC (*Stretches and yawns*) Well, they haven't come back. It doesn't seem to have worked.

MARGARET What?

ALEC Well, they obviously didn't find her at the drugstore. They'll probably be just careering down town on a wild goose chase.

MARGARET (*Is deep in thought*) I've been thinking about Father. It all sounds so quiet upstairs. I've kept expecting Mother to appear any moment saying she's going to leave and will *never* come back.

ALEC Mother probably fainted when Father stood up to her, if he did.

MARGARET Oh, he did all right. I went up twice. The first time I could hear Father. He was talking for a change. His voice sounded entirely different. The second time, the light was still on and I could hear them. They were still talking, but it didn't sound like a row or anything. I think I heard Mother laugh.

ALEC Don't be silly.

MARGARET No, really.

ALEC I'd like to have been a fly on the wall.

MARGARET (*Laughing*) So would I.

ALEC If anything happened to change Mother—then—(*He pauses*)

MARGARET Yes?

ALEC Well, I'd have to do a bit more thinking. Hey, Grete, do you think you could give me a hand? I'd like to wait up and see what happens when the others get back. But I think I've been up long enough.

MARGARET How do you feel?

ALEC Pale but interesting. I'm beginning to have one of Mother's dizzy feelings. That'd be the last straw.

(*Margaret goes over and helps him up*)

MARGARET Take it easy.

(*He gets to his feet*)

ALEC (*They both laugh. He walks slowly to the door*) Happy New Year, Grete, if I don't see you till tomorrow.

MARGARET I have a feeling it's going to be a New Year, Alec.

ALEC It needs to be. The world's in a lousy mess. To be absolutely honest, as John would say, I'm not so hot myself.

MARGARET I haven't helped you much. I'm sorry, Alec. But I do want to now. Let me know if there's anything I can do.

ALEC (*Looking at her*) Much as I hate the word, you have changed, Grete. You're practically human.

(*They exit and their voices can be heard trailing off as they go upstairs. The dining room door opens and Mary Ellen enters, carrying Lili's suitcase. She beckons to Lili to come in and exits with case upstairs. Lili looks around furtively. She has on her*

raincoat. She goes over to the fire. She shivers and warms her hands. Then she goes to the window and looks out. There is a noise of the front door opening and voices. Lili starts and looks for some way of exit but the door opens and she shrinks back by the window. Val and John enter.)

JOHN Well, that's that.

VAL I feel so disappointed.

(Margaret enters)

MARGARET You're back. Did you find her?

VAL No. We were right. She was at the drugstore, at least the man at the counter described someone just like her. We must have just missed her by seconds.

JOHN We went all around but couldn't find her. But I have a real feeling she'll come back.

LILI *(Coming forward)* And you are right.

(They are all startled and speak at once)

ALL Lili! You're back!

LILI I'm sorry to have given you so much trouble. I really am.

VAL Come and sit down. You must be tired.

MARGARET I'll get you one of Mary's hot drinks.

LILI No, don't, Margaret, I've drunk enough coffee to keep me going for a week. *(She sits on a stool by the fire)*
(They all watch her and there is a moment's silence)

VAL Tell us what happened.

LILI Well, you remember just before dinner, what Aunt Emily said.

MARGARET *(Nods)* Yes. I thought so. You couldn't stand it.

LILI No. I felt angry and humiliated and hopeless, that the only thing was to get away. So I went. I did go to the drugstore to get a cup of coffee and think where I should go. I actually saw you drive up. I managed to hide behind the bookstall and slipped out while you talked to the man at the counter.

VAL Good heavens! Then where did you go? We drove all around.

LILI I knew you'd come looking for me, so I waited in a doorway until you drove past again. Then I went to the bus stop and got a bus going up town. I went into a small café and had more coffee. I really felt terrible. All kinds of things raced round in my mind, angry, bitter, resentful thoughts. And then I became calmer and began to think what I could do, how to get a job temporarily and earn enough money to get back to Europe. (*She pauses*)

MARGARET And then?

LILI Then a woman came and sat down opposite me. She looked desperate. I asked her what was the matter. She poured out a terrible story. Her home was breaking up and she had three small children. She said she felt helpless and hopeless and didn't know what to do. I sat there not knowing what to say. (*She pauses*)

JOHN And then?

LILI Then I caught sight of the headlines of a newspaper a man at the next table was reading. The news was terrible. I thought the whole world has gone raving mad. Everyone at each other's throats. Chaos, confusion, fear—then suddenly—(*She pauses*)

VAL Yes?

LILI A thought came into my mind like an answer. It was something you said to me yesterday, John. You said, "the only sane people in an insane world are those guided by God". Suddenly it was like the missing piece in the puzzle. Like a gleam of light. I thought, Why not try it—try being quiet and listening like you said. I told the lady at the table all I could remember that you had told me. So we took the menu and tore it in half. And then we were quiet and listened. God really spoke to that woman (*she pauses*) and to me.

VAL Go on.

LILI She got up and said, "I'm going home. I'm going to put my half of things right. I believe God sent me here tonight. How can I ever thank you?" It was the first person I'd ever helped like that, though I knew I'd done nothing. I knew God had spoken to my heart and hers.

MARGARET (*Interested*) What did you write down?

LILI (*Taking half a torn menu from her bag and reading*) "Don't run away any more. Go back. These are the darkest days in human history. Man must turn back to God or perish. That means you. While demanding others live right you've lived wrong yourself. Apologise to Aunt Emily. It's true she's terribly wrong and terribly selfish, but so are you." I've hated her for humiliating me and I've hated many other people. The world is torn apart with bitterness and hate. "Will you be part of the disease or part of the cure?" (*She pauses*) So I've come home. (*She turns to Val and John*) I want to learn with you, Val and John, and you, Margaret,

how to build that new world I've dreamed about, because I see now that no new society is possible unless we can learn to create a new type of man who can make it work.

(The door opens and Arthur enters. He starts as he sees Lili)

ARTHUR Lili! Thank God! You've come home. My dear child, how can I ever apologise to you enough?

LILI You don't have to apologise, Uncle.

ARTHUR *(Shaking his head)* Yes, I do. You've been made to feel unwelcome and insulted in my own house. Blanche's girl. *(He finds it hard to speak)* You must forgive her. *(He indicates Emily upstairs)* And you must forgive me, because so much of it has been my fault.

LILI *(Thoughtfully)* I suppose it's been all our faults really.

ARTHUR *(Continuing)* You see I've been doing a lot of thinking since Val and John came back. I've had no answer for the difficult person. I'm like our democracy. We hate Communism, but we have no answer for it. We have no compassion for those who have been led astray and no passion to bring an answer. It's really because we have no answer here in our own hearts. I've known how unhappy Emily has been, but until John and Val came home, I saw no way to help her. I wanted my comfort and security. And you've all had to suffer for it. We talk about the Iron Curtain, but there's been an iron curtain right here in my own home. Since the early days of our marriage I closed my heart to hurt and pain. I padded it round with cushions and comforts and protectives of every kind, so no one could see the steely selfishness behind it. People slap me on the back and say what a good fellow I am and I've loved

it. But I've been callous and cruel and a hypocrite. I've had no answer for Emily, for Alec, for any of you. And you, my dear, lost hope because of the way we've lived.

LILI [But I'm finding it again, Uncle. You don't know what this means. What you're saying.] At the risk of my life I used to listen to the radio coming from the free world. My friends and I would huddle round waiting, listening for the hope of an answer. The nations of the free world told us how wonderful they were, what a high standard of living they had. But that didn't help us, because we were cold and hungry and could do nothing about it. They told us how terrible Communism was. Well, we knew that only too well, far, far better than they did. What we longed to hear was some great idea—some alternative to live for, something so powerful that it would break the power of Communism. [I've lived through terrible days. Man is not just a beast to be given work and food. Man has a soul and spirit. Mother used to tell me we were made in the image of God. I've never forgotten that. That's what I came here to find. But I didn't see it until I met Val and John. It was like jumping from a burning ship only to be drowned at sea. But *(she goes over to Arthur and grasps his hand)* now you've thrown me a life belt. For the first time I really see hope, not just for myself but for all the millions who have lost their way.] *(With great passion and feeling she turns to all of them)* Oh, I do pray that we may wake up in time. This is such a great country. We can give the answer the whole world is waiting for. Only a passion can answer a passion. There are people where I come from and here, right in your midst, living, eating, sleeping, planning twenty-four hours a

day, day in, day out for their idea to conquer the world. Easy-going selfishness is no match for it. You must believe me or it will be too late. So very much later than most of us think. [John and Val, I want to fight, to give everything with you—and all of you—to bring this, this illumination, this new light to every home in the nation.]

(There is a silence)

JOHN A new light in every home. I suppose before Thomas Edison invented the electric light, no one could believe that every house could be lit up. You're right, Lili, we need a new illumination in the hearts of men everywhere that the America of Lincoln and Washington and the vision and the simple truths they stood for becomes a reality in all our lives.

VAL I want to live my faith so compellingly that the millions behind the Iron Curtain and the Bamboo Curtain say, "This is it. This is how we want to live for ourselves, our nations".

(The door opens and Anna comes in. She is radiant and peaceful)

ANNA *(Walking over to her father she kisses him lightly on the head)* Hi, everyone! Well—

JOHN Well?

ANNA Well, you're all invited to a wedding.

JOHN What do you mean?

ANNA Terry and I are getting married again.

VAL Boy! We'll all be there. *(They all laugh)*

ANNA So you'd better be. This time it's for life. Terry will be over in the morning and we'll wait to tell you all about it. *(She turns to Lili)* You know, Lili, my father-in-law's in

the Senate. He makes great speeches about peace and new relations between the peoples of the world, but he couldn't do a thing to help his own son and daughter-in-law. We just fought like cat and dog. It doesn't make sense, does it? His father's working on the new Foreign Relations Bill. We've got a few points for him that might come in useful.

LILI It's just what we've been talking about.

ANNA You know I'm not very clever—not an intellectual type and perhaps that's a good thing, because they don't seem to have done very well lately. But tonight talking with Terry it seemed so simple. People have forgotten how to get along together. We fight in our homes, at work, in the nations. When you add it all up it spells war. And now with these horrible ballistic—whatever you call them—and atomic bombs, well, we'd better find a new way of doing things and fast. (*She laughs*) Do you know what Terry said tonight?

JOHN No, what?

ANNA He was talking about Mum. She hasn't exactly been his favourite pin-up girl, and so many of our fights started over her. Well, he said, "Think of it—man can fly in the air, build great bridges, fire off rockets into outer space, but he's not yet learned how to get on with his mother-in-law." (*They all laugh*)

JOHN We have gone ten thousand years ahead of ourselves technically and scientifically, but morally and spiritually we are in the kindergarten. Unless we grow up fast, we will be like destructive children and blow ourselves off the face of the earth. So we'd better not waste any more time.

ARTHUR (*Looking at his watch*) Talking of time, it's nearly midnight. Turn on the radio, will you, John? Let's hear the messages coming in from all over the world.

(*John switches on the radio and voices come from the far north and the deep south, messages from all around the globe. As they listen the door opens and Emily appears*)

ALL Mother!

MARGARET I thought you were asleep.

EMILY I couldn't sleep. I thought I'd come down and help see the New Year in with all of you. I couldn't stand being alone any longer.

MARGARET (*Rising*) I understand, Mother. Come and sit down. I'm so glad you've come.

EMILY (*Stares at her*) Well! You want me here?

JOHN (*Going over to her*) Of course, we do, you silly old thing. We always have.

EMILY (*Catches sight of Lili*) So, you're here!

ARTHUR (*Teasingly*) Emily!

EMILY (*Pauses—looks at him*) I mean, you're back! Well, I'm glad. (*The whole family give a sigh of relief*)

LILI (*Going over to her*) I'm sorry I ran away and have given you all so much trouble. I'm sorry I lost my temper with you before dinner. I've always had a terrible temper since I was a small child.

EMILY (*Seating herself*) So did your mother.

LILI (*Something rises in her, but she looks at all the family and then breaks into a smile*) I know she did, so you'll have to help me. I really need your help.

EMILY (*Taken aback*) Well, that's very nice of you to say so, I'm sure. (*She pauses*) You know my grandfather had a terrible temper, too. We lived with him when I was a child. We lived in fear and terror of him. I hated him for what he did to my father. (*She pulls herself up*) I don't know why I'm talking about these things. I'd rather not think of them.

MARGARET But I never knew. Will you tell me about it sometime? I'd love to hear.

EMILY (*Looking at her*) If you want to, maybe sometime I will, but not now. (*She is lost in thought*) It's the nights that are difficult. All kinds of things I'd rather forget.

MARGARET I understand, Mother, really I do—but I know now there's an answer to all my greatest fears.

EMILY You've changed quite a lot, Margaret. You're so much more understanding. I suppose you've all found me rather difficult, too, sometimes. But let's be a little more cheerful. It's New Year's Eve. It's nearly time, isn't it? Let's open the front door and let it in. Let's hope the New Year will be better than the last one.

ARTHUR My dear, I'm quite sure it will be.

(*Over the radio comes the sound of bells*)

LILI (*Rising, her face is alight. She turns to all of them*) A very happy New Year.

ANNA Mother, Terry is coming home.

(*The door from the dining room opens and Mary Ellen rushes in*)

MARY ELLEN (*Breathlessly*) Well, I never! I couldn't hardly have believed it. I searched everywhere—all over the

house—honestly I did, but it was there all the time—right under my very nose—and I couldn't see it.

VAL What was, Mary?

MARY ELLEN (*Holding out her hand*) Why look! The Christ Child. He was there all the time.

(The family gather round as she goes over and kneels and places it in the crib. They all stand silently looking at it. Over the radio voices are singing "O Little Town of Bethlehem". As the words come over the air Lili listens and quietly repeats them to herself)

LILI (*Quietly*) "The hopes and fears of all the years are born in you tonight." *(As she says the words the curtain slowly closes with the family standing around the manger. The bells peal out)*

CURTAIN