

DORA / VENABLES / SHIRLEY / CAMPBELL

ACT II

SCENE 1

The same. Fifteen minutes later

When the CURTAIN rises Venables lies prostrate on the settee with a large ice pack on his head. Dora hovers in attendance

Dora Come along, Moley. You'll be all right. Take deep breaths, that'll make you feel better. You've had a nasty shock that's all.

Venables That's *all*? (*He groans*) My reputation. (*He groans*) My head.

Venables tries to sit up but Dora pushes him down again

Dora Out like a light, you were. You must try and rest for a while.

Venables It's a nightmare. I know it is.

Shirley enters from the library, wearing the outdoor coat she arrived in

Shirley Where is Mr Campbell? I want my dress.

Campbell enters from the ante-room

Campbell Did someone call?

Shirley There you are. I think you should reimburse me.

Dora (*lightly*) Shirley! None of that, dear.

Venables I know I'm only the Prime Minister, but will someone *please* tell me what's happening?

Campbell We have come to an arrangement, sir. I've taken twenty pounds from the Petty Cash, so that Shirley here can pop out to buy herself a new dress.

Dora Don't worry, Shirley, I'll hold the fort.

Shirley Be sure he doesn't try to get rid of you. You've got to watch these politicians. I'll be back as soon as I can.

Venables (*with feeling*) No hurry.

Shirley See you later, Daddy.

Shirley blows a kiss and exits by the main door

Venables (*weakly*) Campbell?

Campbell Sir?

Venables Do me a favour will you, and tell me it's eight o'clock in the morning.

Campbell (*puzzled*) Er—it's eight o'clock in the morning.

Venables Tell me I've had a night full of nightmares. Tell me it was all a dream. Tell me I'm not anyone's father, tell me I don't know this lady,

and above all, tell me that the Chancellor of the Exchequer didn't see what he thought he saw.

Campbell All those undressed ladies?

Dora It wasn't a nightmare, Moley, you silly old thing.

Venables Oh God! (*He falls prostrate on the settee again*)

Dora He's had another turn, Mr Campbell—no he hasn't, his eyes are open—crossed but open.

Campbell bends over Venables

Campbell Everything's been smoothed over, sir.

Venables It has?

Campbell (*moving to the Gladstone portrait, opening it and taking out the whisky decanter*) I told the Chancellor the ladies undressed to give samples for National Blood Week.

Venables Oh?

Campbell And I said Miss Springer here was part of the organization.

Dora Well, would you believe it?

Venables No, but if Cramond does, I'm in the clear for a while. And my wife, Campbell? What did you tell her?

Campbell Oh, the same. She got the general gist, she doesn't have much of an ear for detail. She was just delighted to have more blood donors.

Dora Oh, that explains it. She made us all give blood samples. I can still feel that needle in my thumb.

Campbell walks towards the ante-room with the whisky decanter

Venables Campbell—where are you taking my whisky?

Campbell To Miss Rotherbrook. (*He points towards the ante-room*)

Venables She's still here?

Campbell In there. She was all set to tell the whole story in her father's paper.

Venables I *am* finished, then!

Campbell Not yet, sir. By the time she's had a few Gladstones she'll have a change of heart.

Venables Good luck, Campbell. Remember the Party's reputation's at stake.

Campbell Yes, sir.

Venables And my job.

Campbell Yes, sir.

Venables And yours.

Campbell exits into the ante-room with the decanter

Dora You do as we ask, and it'll all be fine. You've just got to alter that Budget.

Venables (*sitting up*) I'd forgotten that little catch. Dora—may I call you Dora?

Dora You used to call me "Lotus Blossom".

Venables I'll stick to Dora. (*Pause*) I confess that I too find these punitive measures hard to take.

Dora Don't take them then. And don't make your country take them. Listen, Moley, I don't believe in all-out debauchery, lechery and drunkenness any more than you, or your Chancellor. But you're going too far. What's life without joy and freedom? Within reason, Moley.

Venables Moderation in everything, I agree. I'd change these measures, I really would but . . .

Dora But what?

Venables I can't. This is the Chancellor's obsession, his brainchild. He doesn't change his mind easily.

Dora How would you like to speak to Mr Cramond?

Venables Through a spiritualist.

Dora *(after a pause)* You're scared of Cramond, aren't you?

Venables No. *(Pause)* Yes.

Dora Stand up, Moley.

Venables stands. Dora looks at him critically, then walks round him in silence

You're Prime Minister, Moley.

Venables Yes.

Dora Remember Churchill. He wasn't dictated to by his ministers. He'd a will of iron. Nerves of steel. He was a man of mettle. Years ago I saw you at a political meeting, Moley, soon after Shirley was born. You were a young firebrand then with guts, yes, guts.

Venables squares his shoulders and pulls in his sagging abdomen

It was at Palmers Green. I can't remember what you were talking about. Matter of fact, I couldn't follow it at the time, but I looked at you up there on the platform with nice white teeth and curly hair. Nobody would have shoved you around in those days. And now? Well, you're still *you*, Moley. Stand by your convictions: if you really disagree with these puritanical reforms *do* something!

Venables You're right! I'm not a weakling. I'll send for the Chancellor right now, and I'll ask him—no *tell* him to change his Budget at once.

Dora That's my Moley! You tell the Chancellor. Tell the Cabinet, and if they won't do as they're told . . .

The internal telephone rings. Venables answers it

Venables *(into the telephone)* Hello? The Arabian Trade Delegation? . . .

But I sent them to the Foreign Secretary. . . . Oh, they're back. . . .

Shake hands with them? Oh well if that's all they want. Oh, and by the way, tell the Chancellor I want to see him.

Dora *(in a loud whisper)* At once.

Venables At once.

Dora *(in a loud whisper)* It's urgent.

Venables It's urgent.

Dora Well done, Moley.

Venables Well done, Moley—no, I mean, that's all, Miss Braithwaite. *(He replaces the receiver. To Dora)* You'll have to excuse me for a moment.

