

**MISS RUSSELL.** I don't mean to be a bother. It's only - my knee is acting up again.

**SHEPPARD.** Too much running about at Fernly I shouldn't wonder?

**MISS RUSSELL.** Quite so. Keeping track of Mr. Ackroyd's personal and business affairs requires constant movement. I wonder if you had any more of that liniment?

**SHEPPARD.** Certainly!

**MISS RUSSELL.** Not that I believe it really helps.

**SHEPPARD.** Well, it can't do any harm. Here you are.

*(He hands her a bottle.)*

**MISS RUSSELL.** I have no faith in all these drugs, you know. But, they are a necessary evil, in a way.

*(The telephone rings.)*

A temporary solution. Why -

**SHEPPARD.** Excuse me, Miss Russell. Hello?

*(RALPH appears, elsewhere, on the other end of the line.)*

**RALPH.** Dr. Sheppard? It's Ralph Paton calling.

**SHEPPARD.** Why, hello, there.

**RALPH.** I hope you won't mind the call, Doctor.

**SHEPPARD.** Not at all. In fact, I'm quite glad to hear from you.

**RALPH.** Dear old Sheppard. You're the one man, perhaps the only man in this infernal town I've always felt I could count on.

**SHEPPARD.** Are you all right?

**RALPH.** Afraid not. I'm in a devil of a mess.

**SHEPPARD.** I'm sorry to hear that. Are you nearby?

**RALPH.** Yes, that's why I'm calling. I know you saw me yesterday. Please don't mention to my family that I'm in town. I don't wish to see them.

**SHEPPARD.** Oh, come now. I should think they'd all be pleased to -

**RALPH.** I'm the ne'er-do-well step-son of a wealthy widower, Doctor. Nobody's ever pleased with me. Especially now.

**SHEPPARD.** Tell me what's happened.

**RALPH.** I'm fairly up against it, this time. And I just can't see my way ahead.

**SHEPPARD.** Can I be of help, son?

**RALPH.** Awfully good of you, Sheppard. You've always been kind to me. And here I am behaving like a coward. Do you know, when I returned home from the war, you were the one person in this village to shake my hand, look me straight in the eye and ask me how I was? Nobody else, not even my family, thought to ask me what I'd been through. They all prefer keeping secrets rather than facing the truth.

**SHEPPARD.** I'm always happy to be an ear.

**RALPH.** I know that, Sheppard. But I can't let you in on this. I've got to play a lone hand this time, I'm afraid. Thanks awfully.

*(He hangs up and exits.)*

**SHEPPARD.** ...Right, then.

**MISS RUSSELL.** As I was saying, drugs do a lot of harm, don't they?

**SHEPPARD.** What? Oh, yes, I suppose they do.