

FLORA. I thought I heard your voice down here! Admiring the family heirlooms, Doctor Sheppard?

SHEPPARD. Flora! My! You look lovely.

FLORA. Did I interrupt, Miss Russell?

(**MISS RUSSELL exits.** **FLORA greets SHEPPARD at the curio table.**)

Ooo. I think she positively hates me. Oh, this house can be suffocating. I've been holed up so long – like those trinkets in that case. You know, I don't believe Charles The First ever even wore baby shoes.

SHEPPARD. We'll never know!

FLORA. You haven't congratulated me yet. I'm sure you've heard. There are no secrets in King's Abbot, are there? Ralph and I are engaged to be married. It's going to be announced tomorrow.

SHEPPARD. Oh! How wonderful, Flora. You must be very happy.

FLORA. Yes, I must be. Uncle is pleased. It keeps me in the family. Perhaps he'll give us a house to live in. We can pretend to farm in the summer and hunt in the winter. What more could one ask?

(**GERTRUDE ACKROYD, Ackroyd's sister-in-law, enters. She's a bit ghoulish, in a long flowing dress.**)

GERTRUDE. Yes! What more could any mother ask for her daughter? And, looky looky who has come for dinner! Hallo! Dear, Dr. Sheppard!

SHEPPARD. Ah, Gertrude! Delighted to see you!

GERTRUDE. Oh, Doctor. Am I blushing? Give a little kiss. Such a dear. Isn't he a dear, Flora?

FLORA. Yes, Mother. A dear in headlamps.

GERTRUDE. Flora, stand up straight. Posture is everything!

FLORA. Everything to you, perhaps.

GERTRUDE. And where is your sister, Doctor? We missed Caroline at Mahjong last week.

SHEPPARD. I'm afraid I can't keep track of her.

GERTRUDE. Well, you must tell her hello. You know, Flora and I were only just talking about you. We wish for a teensy favor, you see.

FLORA. Mother!

GERTRUDE. Oh, hush now. Doctor, you are such a dear old friend of Roger's and we know how much he values your discretion. Perhaps you could talk to him on our behalf?

SHEPPARD. I don't follow.

GERTRUDE. I'm only the widow of Roger's brother, so it's difficult for me to speak to him about money matters, you see. When we lived in Montreal, we were quite independent. Then Cecil died and everything changed.

Well, Roger hasn't been forthcoming about his affairs now that Flora and Ralph are engaged. So, what am I to do? I imagine he will offer us some assistance but as you know, Roger has always been a *leeetle* peculiar about money. Might you sound him on the subject?

(**MAJOR HECTOR BLUNT enters, smartly dressed. He's a whirlwind of a man.**)

MAJOR BLUNT. Seven thirty, precisely. All ready for dinner?

FLORA. Ah! The cavalry's arrived.

MAJOR BLUNT. Flora, Gertrude. And who are you, sir? Do I know you? I don't think I know you.

SHEPPARD. You must be Major Blunt, the big game hunter. I've heard quite a bit about you, sir. I'm Dr. Sheppard.