

was just before the office Christmas party and he decided to put Mrs Carter in charge of the—no, it wasn't Carter. What was her name now...?

FIONA Darling, we are all simply panting for our second course.

WILLIAM and MARY *swivel*.

TERESA Did you ever hear that very funny story about the wife who came home unexpectedly and found her husband in bed with the baby-sitter.

MARY Oh!

WILLIAM No I don't believe we have.

TERESA Well, there they both were, you see. Him and this girl—

WILLIAM Terry, I wonder if I could just—

TERESA Both of them on the bed. At it for dear life—

The doorbell rings.

—and the wife just stands there and says—

WILLIAM Isn't that the doorbell?

TERESA The wife says—let it ring—says to her husband very sweetly—

WILLIAM I think that was the doorbell.

TERESA (*sharply*) Let it ring—she says to him, terribly sweetly, "You can practise till you're blue in the face, darling, but you'll never get it right."

MARY *laughs nervously*.

WILLIAM (*appalled*) Mary!

MARY *stops laughing*. WILLIAM and MARY *swivel*.

FRANK (*slamming down his spoon, having suddenly remembered*)
Fraser! That was it. Mrs Fraser.

FIONA Well done, darling. I'll get the rest. *(She rises and picks up the tray from trolley)*

MARY *also rises.*

No, sit still Mary. I can manage.

FRANK Anyway, now then. Mrs—I've forgotten what I was telling you about now.

WILLIAM The office Christmas party.

FRANK Oh yes. And Mrs—

MARY Mrs Carter.

FRANK Carter? That wasn't her name.

WILLIAM Mrs Fraser.

FRANK Fraser! That's it, Fraser. Yes, the Chairman decided to put Mrs—I don't think that was her name either, come to think of it. What was it now?

FIONA *(going out with the plates)* Darling, you really are becoming awfully tedious.

FIONA *goes out to the kitchen right.*

As she does so TERESA's doorbell rings. WILLIAM and MARY swivel.

WILLIAM *(rising)* I think I'd better answer it.

TERESA It's entirely up to you, Bill. I'm not answering anything. I'm going to enjoy my dinner.

FRANK *polishes his cutlery thoughtfully on the tablecloth.*

BOB's *singing is heard off.*

WILLIAM *opens the door and recoils as BOB lunges in holding a carrier bag.*

BOB Well, well, all tucking in are we? Filling ourselves with goodies? Very nice too. Did you cook anything for me, love, or shall I go the Café?

for after a second she dashes out of the front door in pursuit of BOB. She pulls the door to but does not latch it.

The stage is empty for a second. Silence. Both doorbells ring. A pause. They ring again.

WILLIAM peers round the double doors upstage left. MARY peers around front door upstage right. A few moments then WILLIAM and MARY enter, both in their thirties. He carries a hat and wears a soaking wet mac and enters through FIONA's front door. She, although in a coat, is bone dry. She enters through TERESA's door.

WILLIAM (calling) Hallo...

MARY (calling) Hallo...

WILLIAM and MARY move cautiously and cross downstage meeting upstage centre. They look at each other.

WILLIAM Nobody here.

MARY Funny.

WILLIAM Very odd.

MARY (anxiously) We're not early are we?

WILLIAM Of course we're not.

MARY (calling off one way) Hallo!

WILLIAM No, don't do that. Don't do that.

MARY Let them know we're here.

WILLIAM Well, we can just wait quietly. Don't have to shout about. They'll be here when they're ready, I expect...

MARY Table's laid.

WILLIAM Oh yes?

MARY (nervously laughing) We're expected, anyway.

HOW THE OTHER HALF LOVES

WILLIAM Yes, well we would be.

MARY (*wandering right and back to right of WILLIAM, nibbling her nails*) Oh—I feel awful just, walking into their house. I—

WILLIAM Now don't start to get nervous. There's nothing at all to get nervous about. Just keep calm. (*He takes her hand from her mouth and smacks it like he would a child's*) Sit down if you want to.

MARY No, I won't sit down—I...

WILLIAM Did you take your tablets?

MARY Yes...

WILLIAM *puts his arm round MARY and then crosses to downstage left of FIONA's table.*

WILLIAM Good. Now you just have to be natural. No need to put on any act. No need at all. Just be yourself.

MARY Yes. It's just I—never—seem to be able to say anything.

WILLIAM You don't have to if you don't want to. Nobody's asking you to say anything unless you feel you want to.

MARY But if I don't I feel so—so...

FIONA enters from the kitchen right.

FIONA Darling, I...

MARY *hides behind WILLIAM. WILLIAM steps forward.*

(*crossing downstage to WILLIAM*) Oh, Good Lord. You're here. Hallo.

WILLIAM Hallo. Sorry to surprise you, but we rang a couple of times—didn't get a reply—and the door was off the latch, so we...

FIONA Oh, well. Good heavens, yes, very sensible of you. Frank must have left it open. He's having a go at our drains... Good heavens, let me take your coat. You're soaked.