

David Henry Wilson

# **A GREAT BRITISH FARCE**

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**Characters:**

George Porteous, Leader of the Opposition, in his 50's

Dorothy, his wife, in her late 40's

Jenkins, their manservant, in his mid 60's

Barrett, in his 40's

**The Set:**

Apart from the prologue and epilogue, the whole play takes place in George and Dorothy's bedroom.

## PROLOGUE

*A party political broadcast, introduced by "Land of Hope and Glory". GEORGE addresses the audience:*

GEORGE: Look at this once great country of ours. Ravaged by crime, disease, poverty, vandalism, greed, homelessness, litter, the weather. And it's all the fault of this government. Look at the Prime Minister. With a smile for every crisis. He has no feelings for ordinary people, no understanding. Whereas I do. I am an ordinary man. I may appear superhuman to you, but at heart, I am one of you. And I love you. I really do. I'm not ambitious. Power means nothing to me. But I want to make this country great again. I want to help the poor, the sick, the old, the deprived. I lie awake at night, worrying about them, worrying about the future that we're creating for our children. I love children. A country without children is a country without a future. And I worry about our old people, cast off by this government like downtrodden slippers. I love old people. We shall all be old one day, if this government doesn't kill us off first. I intend to raise pensions sky-high. What about the workers, I hear you cry? The workers are the backbone of our economy. They keep our wheels turning and our lifeblood flowing. I love the workers. I shall give them full employment, cut working hours, and ensure that everyone gets a decent living wage. I shall. Believe me, I shall. Management, and the professions? Indispensable, every one of 'em. Directors, doctors, lawyers, you're all safe with me. I shall cut your taxes. Swingeingly. But fairly. There's enough cake for everyone. Trust me, and you'll get your slice, and a thick, fruity slice it shall be. Education? More buildings, more books, more equipment, more facilities, and more pay for teachers. Education, education, the future of our nation! Europe? I want us in. Or out. Or both. Health? Without your health, what are you? Sick! But under this government, it's the Health Service that's sick. I shall cure it with the biggest cash transfusion ever seen. Our wealth for our health. It's one of our slogans. And here's another: No expense too high for defence. We shall protect this sacred island, that it may remain the bastion of freedom for which once we fought them on the beaches. The environment? Leave it to me. Polluters beware, the Green Champion is there. The arts? A subsidy a day for book, song, and play. How are we going to pay for all these things? I don't know. But we can. We will. We must. Before we sink for ever beneath the yoke that this government has smeared all over us. But I don't want to talk about this government. Because I don't like horror stories. No, I want to finish on a happy note. I want to talk about families. I believe in families. I'm a family man myself. And I want you to meet my family, because we are as happy and united as our country will be if you elect me Prime Minister. Let me introduce my beloved wife. Come along, darling, don't be shy. This is my wonderful Dorothy.

*The wonderful DOROTHY has joined him.*

And Dorothy, this is the great British public - our friends. Twenty-six years, isn't it, darling?

DOROTHY: That's right, dear.

GEORGE: They've been such good years. Happy years.

*He pecks her on the cheek.*

We're devoted to each other. And we're devoted to our children, too, though unfortunately they can't be with us tonight. Our dear son Andrew is undergoing special treatment in a clinic in Switzerland, trying to break a rather nasty habit. And our darling daughter Penelope is living in some sort of commune, and we haven't heard from her for eighteen months. We'd be grateful for any information. But the person we do have with us tonight is Jenkins. Jenkins, come and meet our friends.

*Jenkins joins them.*

Jenkins has been a part of our family for...how long is it now, Jenkins?

JENKINS: A long time, master.

GEORGE: "Master"! Ha ha! We couldn't do without our Jenkins. And our Jenkins couldn't do without us. Eh, Jenkins?

JENKINS: No, master.

*"Land of Hope and Glory" in the background.*

GEORGE: We're all devoted to one another, and together we form a team that works as smoothly as this country will work if you'll only vote for me. You can trust me, because I'm on your side. I'm the man for you. I am. I really am. Vote for me, and you'll vote for happiness, peace, prosperity, for whatever you want. You name it, and I'll give it to you. Because I love you all. I do. I really do. Vote for love! Vote for me!

*End of Prologue, accompanied by end of "Land of Hope and Glory".*

## **ACT ONE**

*The stage is in darkness. George is snoring. There is a sound of scraping and chinking.*

DOROTHY: George! George, wake up!

GEORGE: Ergh?

DOROTHY: George!

GEORGE Ugh, not now, Patsy.

DOROTHY: Who's Patsy?

GEORGE: What? Mmm? Oh, Dorothy!

DOROTHY: Someone's trying to get in.

GEORGE: What?

DOROTHY: Listen!

GEORGE: Hm, a bird, I should think.

DOROTHY: At this time of night?

GEORGE: Could be an owl.

*The crash of breaking glass. and a loud cry.*

What the...

DOROTHY: Oh!

*She switches on the light, revealing the bedroom: velvety drapes, rugs, lamps, twin beds, wardrobes, dressing-table, TV etc. Rising from the floor, in the midst of all this opulence, is BARRETT, dirty, unshaven, seedy, ragged.*

BARRETT: Bloody hell! You want to get that bloody window seen to! I've bloody cut meself! Look at that!

DOROTHY: Who are you?

BARRETT: I'll sue you for bloody damages.

DOROTHY: George, ring for the police.

BARRETT: Ring for an ambulance, more like it. I could die losing all this blood.

DOROTHY: George, phone, now!

GEORGE: Police or ambulance?

BARRETT: Leave it. Or I'll blow your head off.

*He pulls out a gun.*

Put your hands up. Go on. You too, missus.

*George and Dorothy both obey.*

And I hope you've done under your armpits.

DOROTHY: George, talk to him.

GEORGE: Well I'm sorry about the window...

BARRETT: Plaster.

GEORGE: What?

BARRETT: Sticking plaster. For me hand.

GEORGE: Oh.

DOROTHY: It's in the bathroom.

BARRETT: Get it. If you're not back in twenty seconds, I'll shoot him. One, two, three...

*Dorothy hastens out of bed and bedroom. George puts his hands down.*

Not bad, your wife. Still put the odd shadow in her cabinet, do you?

GEORGE: Look, I'd be greatly obliged if you...

BARRETT: Sixteen, seventeen, eighteen...

*Dorothy returns with the plaster.*

Just arrived in the knickers of time. Here.

*He holds out his hand for her to plaster, but withdraws it as soon as she touches it.*

Ow!

DOROTHY: Keep still!

BARRETT: It hurt!

DOROTHY: I can't plaster it if you keep waving it around.

BARRETT: Well don't be so rough. I'm sensitive.

*He looks away as she puts the plaster on.*

DOROTHY: It's done.

*He examines it.*

BARRETT: Bit crooked. That's privatisation for you. Right, back to bed, where you belong.

*She goes back to bed.*

Nice place you've got. Bit different to our little council house. Our little council house'd just about fit in this room.

DOROTHY: Whatever it is you want, would you kindly take it and leave us alone.

BARRETT: You speaking to me?

DOROTHY: I am.

BARRETT: You watch your tone when you're speaking to me. I know my rights. If I don't want to leave you alone, I don't have to leave you alone. You politicians, you think you own the country.

GEORGE: No, no, that's the government. We're the opposition.

BARRETT: You'll think you own it if you become the government.

GEORGE: Oh yes, please!

BARRETT: Enjoyed your speech the other day. The bit about vote for love. That's what I believe in, love. That's why I have to give me wife a bashing now and then - she's not so keen on it, you see. She hasn't got a loving nature. But I could see what a loving family you are.

GEORGE: Yes, we are.

BARRETT: I'll do the talking.

GEORGE: Sorry.

BARRETT: I said to the wife: That's a loving family. He's a man who cares.

GEORGE: Oh I am. I do.

BARRETT: And you know what she said? She said: He's a lying sod. And you know why she said it? Because she knows, and I know, that you don't care about us.

GEORGE: Us?

BARRETT: Us. The criminalised victims of society. You had plenty to say about kids and pensioners and lawyers and teachers, but not a word about us. And in this age of unemployment and economic crises, who are the model workers in an ever expanding industry? Us. And what are you offering us?

GEORGE: Um...well...I believe in law and order.

BARRETT: So do I, George, so do I. If you haven't got law and order, what have you got?

GEORGE: Um... lawlessness?

BARRETT: And disorder. I'll tell you, on the council estate where I live, people are afraid to walk the streets at night. Apart from me daughter. Even I, when I come back from a night's work, I can't be sure someone isn't lurking round the corner waiting to jump on me. And as like as not, it's a policeman. What are you going to do to help people like me, who've been forced, against their will, through no fault of their own, under conditions not of their making, victims of poverty, deprivation, psychological kinks, or sheer bloody-mindedness to embrace a life of crime? Where do we fit in?

GEORGE: Well...(gesturing expansively)...Prison reform. I believe in prison reform.

BARRETT: What sort of prison reform?

GEORGE: Well...reform...of the prisons.

BARRETT: Go on.

GEORGE: Our prison system is grossly outdated - old buildings, inadequate facilities, primitive conditions, overcrowding. We believe that criminals must be treated humanely - but firmly. Firmly - but humanely. Criminals are human beings, and human beings are criminals. In some cases. That's what I believe, and that's what my party believes, and that's what we shall strive for, with might and main, and we shall not rest until we have reached our goal. But we need help. We need the help of the great British people, because together we can do it. Together we can return to greatness, and put this country back where it belongs - at the top of the international league table. Of prison reform.

BARRETT: Why don't you abolish prisons?

GEORGE: Abolish prisons?  
BARRETT: You believe in freedom, don't you?  
GEORGE: My party is a bastion of freedom.  
BARRETT: Well you can't be free if you're in prison.  
GEORGE: No.  
BARRETT: So prison should be abolished.  
GEORGE: Well, it might solve the problem of overcrowding.

*Dorothy picks up her bedside telephone.*

BARRETT: Use the buildings for government offices. Six civil servants per cell. *(To Dorothy:)* What you doing?  
DOROTHY: I'm telephoning the police.  
BARRETT: Put it down.  
DOROTHY: Hello? Get me the police.

*Barrett shoots and she falls back with a cry.*

BARRETT: Now look what you made me do! Bloody hell! Did you see that? She bloody made me shoot her!  
GEORGE: Dorothy, are you all right? Dorothy!  
*She groans.*  
BARRETT: Come in here, just innocent breaking and entering, nearly get bled to death, and then she goes and makes me shoot her. Be just my luck if she conks out.

*Jenkins knocks at the door.*

JENKINS: Is everything all right in there, sir and madam?  
BARRETT: What's that?  
GEORGE: It's Jenkins, our lackey.  
BARRETT: Tell him to come in.  
GEORGE: Come in, Jenkins.

*Jenkins enters, in his nightshirt.*

JENKINS: I thought I heard a shot, master.  
GEORGE: You did hear a shot, Jenkins. This gentleman has just shot madam.  
JENKINS: Oh! Might I ask where, sir?  
GEORGE: In here, Jenkins.  
JENKINS: What part of the body, sir?

*George takes a look.*

GEORGE: Looks like the heart.  
JENKINS: Then it could be serious, sir.  
BARRETT: I knew it! I'm so bloody unlucky!

GEORGE: She's still breathing.  
JENKINS: In that case, sir, she may still be alive.  
BARRETT: Close that door, will you? There's a draught.  
JENKINS: Yes, sir.  
*He closes the door.*  
Will there be anything else, sir?  
BARRETT: Sit down.  
JENKINS: Thank you, sir.  
GEORGE: Now look here, Mr...  
BARRETT: Barrett.  
GEORGE: Mr Barrett. Why don't you go away now, hm? You've shot my wife, and she's in urgent need of medical attention.  
BARRETT: Different story, isn't it, when it's your wife needs medical attention. You weren't so worried when I was in pain. *(To Jenkins:)* Nearly sliced me hand off getting in here - blood pouring out everywhere, and I had to go down on me knees to get a bit of plaster.  
JENKINS: It's all these cuts in the health service, sir.  
GEORGE: Exactly! This government has no feelings for the sick.  
JENKINS: I shouldn't wonder, sir, if you weren't entitled to some compensation.  
BARRETT: That's what I said. I could sue him.  
JENKINS: Are you a member of a union, sir?  
BARRETT: Well, I know someone in the Mafia.  
JENKINS: That could be useful.  
GEORGE: Whose side are you on, Jenkins?  
JENKINS: Begging your pardon, sir, but as the gentleman shot madam, I assumed he was a friend of yours.  
GEORGE: The fellow broke in here, Jenkins, shot madam in cold blood, and is now holding you and me at gunpoint.  
JENKINS: I see, sir. *(To Barrett:)* In that case, sir, may I point out to you that these are not my official hours of duty, and so officially I am not here.  
BARRETT: Well I'm not here officially meself, so that's two of us.  
*Dorothy groans.*  
Whassat?  
GEORGE: It's my wife. She groaned.  
BARRETT: Well tell her to shut up.  
DOROTHY: George!  
GEORGE: Mr Barrett said you should shut up, dear.  
DOROTHY: Fetch a doctor.  
BARRETT: I can't stand moaning women. My wife's always moaning. I give her a belting, but it doesn't stop her, I don't know why. What are your views on women, George?  
GEORGE: Women? Well, my party believes in women. Women have a vital part to play in our society, and we shan't rest until every woman...  
BARRETT: Women should be either in the kitchen or in bed. Right?  
GEORGE: Yes indeed. My sentiments precisely.  
DOROTHY: Fetch a doctor.



BARRETT: Is that her again?  
GEORGE: She's asking for a doctor.  
BARRETT: She'll be lucky at this time o' night.  
GEORGE: We're privately insured.  
BARRETT: Yes, you would be, wouldn't you? One rub o' your credit card, and whoosh, Bupaman's on your doorstep.  
JENKINS: I must say, I agree with Mr Barrett, sir. It's no use you preaching equality and practising privilege.  
GEORGE: If I'm ill, Jenkins, I want to be treated when I like, and where I like.  
JENKINS: So do we all, sir.  
GEORGE: Then get yourself insured.  
JENKINS: On the wages you pay me, sir, I can't afford to.  
GEORGE: Then that's your hard luck, Jenkins.  
JENKINS: It is indeed, sir.  
DOROTHY: Help!  
GEORGE: What's the matter, dear?  
DOROTHY: I've been shot, George.  
BARRETT: What did she say?  
GEORGE: She said she'd been shot.  
BARRETT: And I suppose she's blaming me for that, is she?  
GEORGE: Well it was you who shot her.  
BARRETT: (*To Jenkins:*) There you are. They're always blaming the working class.  
JENKINS: Ts ts.  
GEORGE: Mr Barrett, why don't you just take what you want and go?  
BARRETT: I'm not leaving till I've finished my business here.  
GEORGE: Business?  
BARRATT: Political business.  
DOROTHY: George!  
GEORGE: Political?  
DOROTHY: George!  
GEORGE: Just a minute, dear. The man wants to talk politics.  
JENKINS: Might I make a suggestion, sir?  
GEORGE: What is it, Jenkins?  
BARRETT: Hold on, hold on, I'm the one giving orders here.  
JENKINS: Begging your pardon, sir.  
BARRETT: All right. What's the suggestion?  
JENKINS: Perhaps while you discuss politics with the master, sir, I might attend to the madam.  
BARRETT: You know something about medicine?  
JENKINS: I have a third cousin who was once chauffeur to a vet.  
BARRETT: Fair enough. But no funny business.  
JENKINS: No, sir. I'll leave the humour to you, sir. (*To George:*) You realize, master, that this constitutes time and a half.  
GEORGE: You wouldn't count this as voluntary work, Jenkins?  
JENKINS: No, sir. Not with a gun pointing at my abdomen, sir.  
GEORGE: It's not my gun, Jenkins.

JENKINS: But it is your bedroom, sir.

BARRETT: Pay him time and a half.

GEORGE: Oh, very well.

JENKINS: (*To Barrett:*) Thank you, sir.

GEORGE: Under protest.

*Jenkins now busies himself with Dorothy.*

What's this political business, Mr Barrett?

BARRETT: I have come here tonight, George, at great personal risk, to offer you my services.

GEORGE: Your services?

BARRETT: You said in your speech that you want to help people. I also want to help people. I want to help people to live the way I want them to live. And I particularly want to help people to help me to live the way I want to live. (*To Jenkins:*) Where do you think you're going?

JENKINS: To the bathroom, sir.

BARRETT: Ah! Is it short or is it long?

JENKINS: I beg your pardon, sir?

BARRETT: The wee one or the big one?

JENKINS: I wish to dress madam's wound, sir.

BARRETT: Oh! Right.

JENKINS: Thank you, sir.

*He goes out.*

BARRETT: So George, I want you to win the election.

GEORGE: So do I, Mr Barrett,

BARRETT: And when you've done so, I would like a suitable position.

GEORGE: What sort of position?

BARRETT: I was thinking of Chancellor of the Exchequer.

GEORGE: Ah!

BARRETT: I have a lot of ideas about how to spend money. And if I could lay me hands on a few billion pounds, I could do meself a great deal of good. I'd cut you in, of course.

GEORGE: Well, thank you.

BARRETT: Don't mention it. You don't think I know about money, do you? Now listen.

We spend billions on planes and guns and bombs, and we're not even at war. Right?

Scrap your planes and your guns and your bombs, and you can give free beer and fags to every man in England, and pay for the health service to cure their cancer.

*Jenkins returns with a bowl of water and dressings.*

And what's more, Jenkins here can retire when he's 65 instead of 85. If he's not 85 already.

JENKINS: Thank you, sir.

BARRETT: I'll tell you something else. This country is full of crooks. It's true. You look at my family. My kids are all on the dole, but we could live on me eldest daughter's earnings alone. Fiddles? My Dad was 64 when he died, and he'd been drawing the old age pension for 33 years. Since his Dad died. My middle son worked for a bit in a factory. Every day there were 200 clockings-in and 200 clockings-out. And the only bloke that was there was the bloke in charge of the clocker. He liked that job.

GEORGE: Why did he leave?

BARRETT: Cos the bastards went bankrupt.

*Dorothy slaps Jenkins' hand.*

JENKINS: Oh!

DOROTHY: There's no need for that, Jenkins.

BARRETT: What's going on?

JENKINS: I was merely bathing madam's wound.

DOROTHY: Just be careful what you bathe, Jenkins.

JENKINS: Yes, madam.

BARRETT: So I know a thing or two about money, George.

GEORGE: I can see that, Mr Barrett.

BARRETT: Chancellor would do me nicely.

GEORGE: Well, you could hardly do worse than the present one, eh?

*He laughs, very loud and very forced.*

Jenkins!

JENKINS: Yes, master?

GEORGE: Joke!

JENKINS: Ah!

*Joint laughter, which eventually dies down after laboured prolongation by George.*

BARRETT: So do I get the job?

GEORGE: Certainly, Mr Barrett. As soon as I'm Prime Minister, I'll send for you, and have you installed.

BARRETT: Just like that.

GEORGE: You have my word for it. The word of a politician.

BARRETT: And how will I get into Parliament?

GEORGE: Ah!

*Jenkins, with a bowl of water in his hands, takes a couple of steps towards Barrett. Startled, Barrett shoots and Jenkins drops the bowl.*

JENKINS: Aaaargh!

BARRETT: Get back!

JENKINS: You could have killed me!

BARRETT: Lucky for you I didn't, threatening me like that.

JENKINS: I was only taking this to the bathroom.

BARRETT: You don't want to move like that. It could make me nervous.

JENKINS: And you don't want to shoot like that. It could make me dead. Quite apart from making me wet. Look at me. I'm soaked through.

BARRETT: Then you should watch where you're chucking your water. *(To George:)* Give him a pair of pyjamas.

GEORGE: What?

BARRETT: You heard. Give him a pair of pyjamas.

*George goes to the wardrobe, and brings out a pair of pyjamas.*

GEORGE: Here you are, Jenkins.

JENKINS: Thank you, sir.

GEORGE: These are very expensive pyjamas.

JENKINS: I deserve them, sir.

GEORGE: Well, just be careful with them, that's all.

*Jenkins starts to take off his nightshirt, sees that he is being watched, and modestly turns round.*

I really don't see why I should give him a pair of my pyjamas.

BARRETT: Because if he hadn't been working for you, he wouldn't have got wet, would he? Now then, how do I get into Parliament?

GEORGE: What?

BARRETT: You should do something about this deafness of yours, George. How are you going to make me an M.P.?

GEORGE: Ah, well, it's too late now for this election, but as soon as there's a vacant seat, I'll put you in it.

BARRETT: I can make a seat vacant any time.

GEORGE: You mean with a gun, ha ha?

*He laughs alone.*

Yes, you do. Good heavens, Jenkins, what's happened to you?

*Jenkins is now wearing the pyjamas, which are far too big for him.*

JENKINS: Nothing has "happened" to me, sir.

GEORGE: You can't be as small as all that, man. Don't exaggerate.

JENKINS: I'm not exaggerating, sir. Your pyjamas are merely the wrong size.

BARRETT: Anyone seen Snow White?

JENKINS: I don't think there's any call for these personal remarks. It's not my fault if the master is overweight.

GEORGE: *(pulling in his stomach)* Nonsense. Roll the legs and sleeves up, Jenkins, before you trip over your arms.

*Jenkins struggles. George helps him.*

Where have you put your hands?

JENKINS: Never mind *my* hands, sir. Would you be careful where you put *yours*.

GEORGE: Sorry, Jenkins. How on earth did you get this thin?

JENKINS: Working for you, sir.

GEORGE: Don't be ridiculous. I work for me, and I'm not thin.

JENKINS: No, sir. I expect you get preferential treatment.

BARRETT: He's got one leg shorter than the other.

*George steps back to look. He then gives one trouser leg an additional roll, and steps back again. Jenkins now has huge bulges of pyjama round elbows and knees.*

GEORGE: Is that better?

*Barrett adopts the pose of an art critic.*

BARRETT: Right sleeve up a bit.

*George rolls it up.*

Left leg down a bit.

*George rolls it down.*

Stand straight, Jenkins.

JENKINS: I am standing straight, sir.

BARRETT: Then stand crooked.

*Jenkins adjusts his position.*

JENKINS: May I make a suggestion, sir?

BARRETT: Back to Nature?

JENKINS: No, sir. But I was thinking that since madam is now at rest, perhaps...

GEORGE: At rest?

JENKINS: Yes, sir.

GEORGE: Do you mean dead?

JENKINS: No, sir. I mean at rest.

GEORGE: Ah. So where was the wound?

JENKINS: I'd rather not say, sir. If I might continue, sir? With madam at rest, and you two gentlemen discussing politics, I should like permission to return to my bed.

GEORGE: Certainly, Jenkins.

BARRETT: Certainly not, Jenkins. Nobody leaves this room till I get what I came for.

GEORGE: What is it you want now, Mr Barrett?

BARRETT: Chancellor.

GEORGE: Well, it isn't easy, Mr Barrett.

BARRETT: Life is never easy, George. It may seem easy to those who ponce in the corridors of power, but for us who pick the pockets of the real world outside, life has never been easy.

JENKINS: Why don't you give Mr Barrett a peerage, sir, and let him minister from above?

GEORGE: Lord Barrett! That's an idea. Where do you live, Mr Barrett?

BARRETT: East Bumstead.

GEORGE: Bumstead East! A marginal seat!

BARRETT: Marginal backside of beyond, Bumstead is.

GEORGE: Lord Barrett of Bumstead East. It has a certain ring to it. Splendid idea, Jenkins! I think that solves the problem, Mr Barrett, or should I call you Milord, eh, ha ha?

BARRETT: Fred'll do.

GEORGE: Oh, that's kind of you, Fred. Well, give me your address, and I'll contact you as soon as I've won the election. Jenkins, fetch me my address book.

JENKINS: Certainly, sir. Where is it?

GEORGE: Right of wardrobe, brown jacket, inside pocket.

BARRETT: I'll get it, Jenkins. Don't want you falling over your kneecaps.

JENKINS: Thank you, sir.

*Barrett goes to the wardrobe, finds the address book, and flicks through it.*

BARRETT: Interesting. Suzy Applegate... Betty Binks...Liz Chumley...  
GEORGE: Sh!  
*He casts an agitated look in Dorothy's direction.*  
BARRETT: Typing pool, George?  
GEORGE: Exactly. Jenkins, see if madam's still breathing.  
*Jenkins has a look.*  
JENKINS: She appears to be sleeping.  
GEORGE: *(with a "foof" of relief)* Right, Fred, if I could just have the address book...  
BARRETT: Alison Ponsonby-Smyth. How's her shorthand, George?  
GEORGE: Er.. .very satisfactory.  
BARRETT: Shorthand – long leg...  
GEORGE: If I could just have it...  
BARRETT: You mean you haven't had it?  
GEORGE: I mean the book.  
BARRETT: Here, Jenkins.  
*He throws the book to Jenkins.*  
Write this down, will you? Lord Barrett of Bumstead East... Bramley Hall...  
GEORGE: That's a coincidence!  
BARRETT: Wisteria Drive...Horley...  
GEORGE: But...that's our address!  
BARRETT: You didn't think I'd sit at home, did you, waiting to be marched off to East Bumstead Police Station? I shall be staying at this address until you've won the election, George.  
JENKINS: Excuse me, sir.  
BARRETT: Yes, Jenkins?  
JENKINS: Might I point out that the master is not going to win the election?  
GEORGE: Of course I shall win the election, Jenkins.  
JENKINS: Not according to the opinion polls, sir.  
GEORGE: Opinion polls are always wrong!  
JENKINS: Not by 43%, sir.  
GEORGE: Is that the margin?  
JENKINS: It was on the news tonight, sir.  
GEORGE: Oh God, don't let me be massacred! I can't understand why people are against me.  
JENKINS: It might help, sir, if you had a policy.  
GEORGE: What's the good of a policy, Jenkins? If you go left, you upset everyone on the right, and if you go right, you upset everyone on the left.  
BARRETT: Why don't you go straight?  
GEORGE: That's rich, coming from you.  
JENKINS: If you don't go left, sir, and you don't go right, you'll upset those going left and those going right.  
GEORGE: No, no, Jenkins, you don't understand politics. The art is to make them think you're going their way. I know what I'm doing, Jenkins.  
JENKINS: Yes, sir, and so do the voters.  
BARRETT: How do you make them think you're going left and right?  
GEORGE: Ask me a question, Fred.

BARRETT: Any question?

GEORGE: Anything at all.

BARRETT: How does Suzy Applegate like it?

GEORGE: (*frantic glance at Dorothy*) No, no, a political question.

BARRETT: A political question. What are Suzy Applegate's politics?

GEORGE: No, a question you can answer from the left or from the right.

BARRETT: Which side does Suzy Applegate like it from?

JENKINS: May I, sir?

GEORGE: Thank you, Jenkins.

JENKINS: What is your party's policy on the trade unions?

GEORGE: We believe in trade unions. Just as we believe in management. The trade unions have a vital part to play in our society, and my party's policy has always been absolutely clear: the trade unions must continue, as they have always done, to represent the interests of our workers. And management must continue to manage. And so we must work in partnership with the trade unions, and in partnership with management, acting together in a spirit of cooperation and harmony for the good of industry as a whole. And that can only be good for Britain.

BARRETT: That sounds all right.

GEORGE: Or all left, ha ha.

JENKINS: And what form is this partnership to take, sir?

*George shrugs his shoulders.*

GEORGE: Just words, Jenkins. The language of politics.

BARRETT: I'll ask you a question, then. What is your party's policy on sex?

GEORGE: Sex is hardly a matter of politics, Fred.

BARRETT: Are you in favour of a permissive society?

GEORGE: My party stands for the highest moral principles.

BARRETT: So you're against free intercourse.

GEORGE: I didn't say that. My party is firmly in favour of intercourse. At the proper time and in the proper place. We believe in the freedom of the individual - within the framework of the high moral standards that this country has always upheld and always will. And if we are elected, we shall ensure that the moral discipline so sadly declining under this corrupt and corrupting government will be regenerated in a manner that will make us once more proud to be British - while at the same time preserving every individual's right to have intercourse as and when he pleases.

BARRETT: So are you in favour or against?

GEORGE: I think I've made my position clear.

JENKINS: (*to Barrett*) Excuse me, sir. If I must stay here, would you mind if I sat down? I get pains in the legs if I stand too long.

BARRETT: Sorry, Jenkins, I thought you were sitting down.

JENKINS: Thank you, sir.

*He sits down and falls asleep. In the course of the ensuing dialogue, Barrett eventually finishes up with his back to Dorothy.*

BARRETT: You say things that don't mean anything, don't you?

GEORGE: Or things that mean everything. That is the art.

BARRETT: Don't you ever say anything definite?

GEORGE: Only when desperate. You as Chancellor, for instance, can come up with a definite prophecy: "In two years' time, inflation will be less than one per cent." Or "our growth rate will have risen by four point three per cent." So people think yes, the government's policy is working. And in two years' time, everyone's forgotten what you said.

BARRETT: Are all the parties the same?

GEORGE: Oh no, there are huge differences. But the differences don't make any difference. Whichever party's in power, the country'll still be in a mess. So the government pretends to be sorting out the mess, and the opposition says the government has caused the mess. That's the cut and thrust of parliamentary debate. They say they're solving the problems, we say things are getting worse; they say we couldn't do any better, we say we could; they ask how, we tell them, they say it wouldn't work, we say it would, but we all know that nothing'll work because whatever the crisis, we politicians are the last people to know how to solve it.

BARRETT: So the government never actually does anything.

GEORGE: Oh yes it does. You only go into politics if you want power, and what's the good of power if you don't do anything? The moment you get in, you start undoing whatever the previous government did. That's called "building a new society". The net result, of course, is another crisis, and so round and round we go.

BARRETT: It'll be different when I'm in charge. People will just do as they're bloody well told.

*At this moment Barrett has his back to Dorothy, who has slowly and quietly risen from her bed, and now launches herself onto Barrett.*

DOROTHY: Got you!

BARRETT: Ow!

DOROTHY: Help me, George! Jenkins!

*Jenkins wakes up with a start. In the ensuing melee, the gun goes flying, and Barrett ends up on the floor, with Dorothy and Jenkins on top of him, while George flaps around on the periphery.*

BARRETT: Gerroff! Ow! My head! Christ!

DOROTHY: Get the gun, George.

GEORGE: What?

DOROTHY: The gun. And stop flapping.

BARRETT: Gerroff!

DOROTHY: You guttersnipe!

BARRETT: Ow!

DOROTHY: Stay down!

BARRETT: I give in.

DOROTHY: Take that!

BARRETT: Ow!

JENKINS: May I slosh him as well, madam?



DOROTHY: Certainly, Jenkins.  
JENKINS: Thank you, madam. This is from Snow White.  
BARRETT: Ow!  
JENKINS: And this is from me.  
BARRETT: Oh! I surrender!  
GEORGE: I've got the gun, dear. I'll keep him covered.  
DOROTHY: That's very brave of you, George. I don't know what we've have done without you.  
*She gets off Barrett.*  
GEORGE: Thank heavens you're all right, Dorothy.  
DOROTHY: I'm touched by your concern, George.  
*Barrett groans.*  
You can get off him now, Jenkins.  
JENKINS: Thank you, madam.  
*He gets off, dusting his hands.*  
BARRETT: You've bloody killed me! Get us a doctor.  
DOROTHY: We'll get you the doctor who saved my life, shall we?  
BARRETT: You never had a doctor.  
DOROTHY: *(smiling sweetly)* Yes, that's the one. Jenkins, ring for the police.  
BARRETT: Oh Gawd!  
GEORGE: No, wait a minute, Jenkins. We mustn't be too hasty, dear. This is a very delicate matter.  
DOROTHY: The man has broken into our bedroom, shot me, threatened you, and almost murdered Jenkins. I fail to see anything delicate about that.  
GEORGE: Well he's from Bumstead East, Dorothy.  
DOROTHY: I don't care if he's from Canterbury Cathedral, George. I want him locked up.  
GEORGE: Bumstead East is a marginal. The government have a majority of twelve. We need every vote we can get.  
DOROTHY: We don't need the votes of murderous guttersnipes. Jenkins.  
GEORGE: One moment. Mr Barrett, how many exactly are there in your family?  
BARRETT: Well, there's my dear wife, and my six beautiful children. They all depend on me...  
GEORGE: How old are your children?  
BARRETT: Well, Lonnie - he's my eldest - he's handicapped, poor kid. Can't read or...  
GEORGE: How old is he?  
BARRETT: Twenty-two. They couldn't keep him in school, you see...  
GEORGE: What about the others?  
BARRETT: There's Sandra - she's the one I mentioned, who does a little night duty...  
GEORGE: Just tell us the ages.  
BARRETT: She's twenty-one. Harold, my middle son, is twenty. Young Wayne is nineteen. And then there's the twins - two little girls, Raquel and Marilyn. They're just eighteen.  
GEORGE: All over eighteen! Eight votes! They could swing Bumstead East!  
DOROTHY: I don't care if they could swing the lead, a roundabout, or low sweet chariot, George, he's going to jail.

BARRETT: I could get you more than eight votes. My lad Lonnie's got friends who protect people. He'll get you as many votes as you like.

GEORGE: There you are, Dorothy.

BARRETT: (*out of the corner of his mouth*) And if you want some forged ballot papers, my Wayne's a dab hand.

GEORGE: Thank you, Mr Barrett. It's a key constituency, Dorothy. Win Bumstead East, and you've won the country.

JENKINS: Excuse me, sir.

GEORGE: What is it, Jenkins?

JENKINS: Would you mind pointing the gun at Mr Barrett and not at me, sir. I feel I've had enough excitement for one night.

GEORGE: Sorry, Jenkins.

DOROTHY: Before the master shoots us all, Jenkins, get some rope to tie this riff-raff up.

JENKINS: Yes, madam.

*He goes out.*

BARRETT: I'm so unlucky! Everything happens to me!

DOROTHY: I fail to see the relevance of luck to your breaking in here and shooting me.

BARRETT: But I got caught!

DOROTHY: I'd put that down to skill rather than luck.

BARRETT: Listen, missus, don't send for the police. I've had a rotten life. My childhood was very unhappy.

DOROTHY: Then that'll prepare you nicely for your very unhappy old age.

GEORGE: Dorothy, leave this to me. Why don't you go and see to those dreadful injuries of yours?

DOROTHY: So you noticed! No, George, I couldn't leave you alone with this murderous scum.

GEORGE: I've got the gun. I'll keep him covered.

DOROTHY: You've been covering the whole room, George. And while you're covering the wardrobe and the ceiling, Mr Barrett might just slip away through the window.

*Jenkins returns with some rope.*

Ah, well done, Jenkins.

JENKINS: Thank you, madam.

DOROTHY: Now then, you hooligan, sit down while Jenkins ties you up.

JENKINS: Should I use a bowline, madam, or a half hitch, clove hitch, reef knot, thumb knot, fisherman's, surgeon's, or Jenkins' special hangman's?

DOROTHY: Oh the Jenkins' special hangman's, Jenkins. What could be more appropriate?

*Barrett sits, and Jenkins starts tying him to the chair.*

BARRETT: This is my very first offence. Honest. And I'd never have done it if it wasn't for the way me Dad used to beat me Mum and us poor children. He drank every penny we had. Us children had to steal to live - and when me poor crippled Mum died, it was left to me, the eldest, to fend for me little brothers and sisters.

JENKINS: Keep your head still, sir, or I can't do the strangulation knot.

BARRETT: Sorry, Mr Jenkins.

GEORGE: Dreadful story. Tragic. What happened to your little brothers and sisters?

BARRETT: All dead now. Died of starvation and disease. I never wanted to turn to a life of crime, but I had to, to save them.

DOROTHY: If they're all dead, Mr Barrett, aren't they a little past saving?

BARRETT: They are now, madam, God rest their souls. But I had to steal then to keep them alive.

DOROTHY: But I thought this was your first offence.

BARRETT:(*at a loss*) Ah! Ah!

DOROTHY: Ah!

BARRETT: I meant it's the first offence I've committed in here.

DOROTHY: Ah.

BARRETT: But I've learnt my lesson. You've taught me so much in the short time we've known each other.

DOROTHY: Good. And I'm sure you'll be taught a lot more in the long time you'll spend in prison.

JENKINS: I've ligatured him, madam.

DOROTHY: Well done, Jenkins. How did you learn to tie such wonderful knots?

JENKINS: By listening to politicians, madam.

*Dorothy laughs.*

DOROTHY: Well now, I'll go and see to my dreadful injuries, and then, Mr Barrett, I shall see to you.

*She takes a nightdress from the dressing-table, and goes out.*

GEORGE: Tidy up in here, will you, Jenkins? Take those bloody sheets out.

JENKINS: (*slightly shocked*) There's no need to adopt that tone, sir.

*George points at the sheets.*

Ah!

*He begins to tidy.*

(*To Barrett:*) As if I hadn't enough to do.

BARRETT: It's not my fault. It's her blood.

JENKINS: You shot her.

BARRETT: I couldn't have shot her if she hadn't been there, could I?

JENKINS: You couldn't have shot her if *you* hadn't been there.

GEORGE: That'll do now, Jenkins. Get on with your work.

JENKINS: Begging your pardon, master. Merely indulging in my right of free speech, to which I am entitled.

GEORGE: Just take those things outside, Jenkins.

JENKINS: Will it be safe to leave you, sir?

GEORGE: I can look after myself, Jenkins.

JENKINS: (*sotto voce*) Not since I've known you.

*He goes out.*

GEORGE: You stupid, incompetent, bungling idiot, Arthur.

BARRETT: I couldn't help it.

GEORGE: All you had to do was shoot her, steal something, and get out.

BARRETT: I didn't know I was going to cut meself, did I? On your bloody window. I told you to leave the bloody window open.

GEORGE: I did leave the bloody window open. But it opens by the handle, not the hinge.

BARRETT: Well I couldn't see in the dark. You should have left a light on.

GEORGE: People don't go to sleep with a light on.

BARRETT: I do.

GEORGE: What for?

BARRETT: 'Cos I don't like the dark.

GEORGE: You should have done the job and got out when I told you. Instead of all this lunacy about being Chancellor.

BARRETT: I thought that was very convincing.

GEORGE: And look where it's got you! Tied up in a Jenkins' special!

BARRETT: That's not my fault. I didn't know your wife would jump me, did I? If you can't keep your wife under control, you can't blame me.

GEORGE: My wife was supposed to get a bullet between the eyes, and you were supposed to be a crack shot who never misses.

BARRETT: I am a crack shot.

GEORGE: So how come she's still alive?

BARRETT: She moved.

GEORGE: You could have shot her again.

BARRETT: Well she laid flat then, didn't she? You can't shoot between the eyes when they lay flat. Not unless you shoot in-off the ceiling.

GEORGE: So now what are we going to do?

BARRETT: I don't know, mate. You got me into this, so now you can get me out.

GEORGE: You can't break the rope, can you?

*Barrett tugs and grunts.*

BARRETT: No.

GEORGE: She's going to send for the police.

BARRETT: If I go, you go.

GEORGE: You wouldn't tell, would you?

BARRETT: Every detail.

GEORGE: I'll double your fee.

BARRETT: No deal.

GEORGE: Treble. And a free pardon if I'm elected.

BARRETT: Elected? If I sing, you won't even be on the register.

GEORGE: I should never have started this business.

BARRETT: It's not a bad idea - have your wife shot a week before the election, chew an onion before your next party political, and you should get more crosses than the Pope. And your secretary'd be pleased too, wouldn't she?

GEORGE: My secretary?

BARRETT: The luscious Patsy, is it?

GEORGE: What do you know about Patsy?

BARRETT: The same as everyone else in the House of Common Knowledge.

GEORGE: My God, is nothing sacred?

BARRETT: If you're going to get me out of here, you'd better hurry up.

GEORGE: Right. We'll just have to say you broke loose.

*He puts the gun down, and starts to untie Barrett. Dorothy enters, wearing a clean nightdress. She is followed by Jenkins.*

DOROTHY: Reliving your triumphs with the boy scouts, George?

GEORGE: Ah, Dorothy! No, he...he was trying to escape. I was just tightening the knots.

DOROTHY: Strange, those two there seem to have come loose, George.

GEORGE: Yes, the swine. Good job I caught him.

DOROTHY: Well, Mr Barrett, I've decided not to send for the police after all.

BARRETT: Oh thank you, thank you, milady.

GEORGE: Well done, Dorothy. Splendid decision.

DOROTHY: After all, they'd only put you in prison for a year or two, and then you'd be out on the criminal road again.

GEORGE: You're quite right, Dorothy.

DOROTHY: So there's no point in handing you over to them. I've therefore decided...

*She picks up the gun*

*...to shoot you instead.*

## **CURTAIN**

## **END OF ACT ONE**

## **ACT TWO**

*Immediate continuation.*

BARRETT: I don't think I quite heard you right.

DOROTHY: I'm going to shoot you, Mr Barrett.

GEORGE: Now hold on, Dorothy.

DOROTHY: It's time someone took a stand against vicious thugs like you.

BARRETT: I'm not a vicious thug, am I, George?

GEORGE: Dorothy, he's not a vicious thug.

DOROTHY: A vicious, murderous, evil-smelling thug.

GEORGE: Evil-smelling maybe, but..

DOROTHY: We shall say that he broke in, you George heroically tackled him, and in the struggle the gun went off.

GEORGE: No-one will believe that, Dorothy.

DOROTHY: I admit that for anyone who knows you, the heroic tackle will be hard to swallow, but the rest is feasible.

BARRETT: Look here, lady, there's a few things you ought to know...

GEORGE: One moment, one moment, keep calm, everybody, keep calm, my God...I mean.. .Look, the man's tied up, Dorothy. You can't struggle with a man who's tied up.

DOROTHY: We shall untie him after we've shot him.

GEORGE: But this is murder.

DOROTHY: And it'll look like self-defence.  
BARRETT: I am not going to sit here...  
GEORGE: Hold on, Barrett, keep calm, don't panic. Now Dorothy, I will not be a party to murder.  
DOROTHY: Then you can shut your eyes until it's over.  
GEORGE: Dorothy, this is...this is a man with six children - one of them mentally handicapped. And he's a loving father who, through the cruel policies of this present government, finds himself unable to support his family. He's a victim, Dorothy.  
DOROTHY: He's a thug, George. And if we shoot a few thugs today, we might have fewer thugs tomorrow.  
GEORGE: But that's treating thuggery with thuggery.  
DOROTHY: Thuggery is the only language that thugs understand.  
BARRETT: (*To Jenkins*) A lot of obscene talk going on here.  
JENKINS: Thuggery, you thug, not buggery. Excuse me, sir.  
GEORGE: Yes, Jenkins?  
JENKINS: Might I make a suggestion? Since madam wishes to shoot the gentleman dead, and you don't wish to shoot the gentleman at all why not compromise?  
DOROTHY: What sort of compromise, Jenkins?  
JENKINS: Let madam shoot merely to cripple.  
BARRETT: Oh, thanks very much.  
GEORGE: He should not be shot at all.  
BARRETT: No, I bloody shouldn't, and I bloody won't.  
GEORGE: Of course you won't. It's out of the question.  
JENKINS: Might I be so bold, sir, as to ask you to repeat your party's policy on the treatment of criminals?  
GEORGE: Our party's policy on the treatment of criminals is absolutely clear. Criminals must be treated like criminals.  
JENKINS: And how's that, sir?  
GEORGE: By due process of law. (*To Barrett:*) Humanely applied.  
JENKINS: Then perhaps you should hand him over to the police, sir.  
GEORGE: You keep out of this, Jenkins. It's got nothing to do with you.  
DOROTHY: I'm in favour of both Jenkins' suggestions.  
GEORGE: What?  
DOROTHY: We'll cripple him first, and hand him over afterwards.  
GEORGE: But Dorothy, think of the consequences.  
DOROTHY: What consequences?  
GEORGE: The consequences, the...the...the resulting...results. The unions! My God, we'll have the unions down on us like a herd of football fans.  
DOROTHY: Thugs don't have a union, George.  
GEORGE: No, but he's got contacts, Dorothy, and Bumstead East is a marginal, and...and...and how can we prove that he is a thug?  
DOROTHY: If he's not a thug, George, what's he doing here?  
GEORGE: Now that's obvious, Dorothy. He's here because we've tied him up.  
DOROTHY: Why did he come here in the first place?  
GEORGE: He'll say that we kidnapped him.  
DOROTHY: And why would we do that?

GEORGE: To force him to get union votes for us. That's what he'll say, won't you, Arthur?

DOROTHY: Arthur?

GEORGE: Fred.

BARRETT: There's a lot of things I might say, George, if I'm pushed.

GEORGE: Exactly. The man's desperate. And let's face it, Dorothy, it's only our word against his.

JENKINS: Might I point out, sir, that I too am a witness.

DOROTHY: Thank you, Jenkins.

GEORGE: You keep out of this, Jenkins.

DOROTHY: I imagine, George, that the police would take the word of two respectable witnesses plus yourself against that of one thug.

GEORGE: But the mere allegation, Dorothy - it could be fatal. You know what the media are like.

JENKINS: On the other hand, sir, this might give a boost to your campaign. And heaven knows, you need one.

GEORGE: A boost, Jenkins?

JENKINS: Desperate thug breaks in, shoots the madam, is captured by you - heroically, as madam said. Madam in hospital, in critical condition perhaps, yet you, sir, gallantly continue to campaign, fighting back the fears and the tears. You'd win a lot of sympathy, sir. And admiration. And votes.

GEORGE: I could never stoop to get votes that way, Jenkins. Such a thought would never cross my mind.

DOROTHY: I think it's a splendid idea. Though I'm not so sure about my critical condition.

GEORGE: Your condition has always been critical, Dorothy. Not a day goes by...

DOROTHY: It could even win you the election, George. The public love a hero. We'll shoot him, and hand him over.

BARRETT: Oh no you won't!

GEORGE: Of course we won't! It's cheap, it's unworthy, it's dishonest. I could never live with my conscience, Dorothy. And nor could you. Integrity, Dorothy, is the foundation-stone of our lives, and if I became Prime Minister through lies, violence, deceit, we could never look into each other's eyes again.

DOROTHY: Tell us, George, what do you suggest we do with him?

GEORGE: My suggestion is a very bold one. You might not appreciate its subtlety at first, but when you think about it, turn over the implications, complications, ramifications, connotations, denotations, significations...

DOROTHY: What's your suggestion, George?

GEORGE: That we let him go.

DOROTHY: Let him go?

GEORGE: Think, Dorothy, think!

*She thinks.*

DOROTHY: I've thought, George.

GEORGE: Good.

DOROTHY: And I don't see why we should let him go.

GEORGE: Think of his crippled wife, his handicapped children...

DOROTHY: I thought it was his Mum that was crippled.

GEORGE: Mother and wife. A tragic case. We can't send this poor man to prison. We can't lock him up with hardened criminals, who'll twist his view of the world, and lead him into darker depths of criminality...

DOROTHY: This poor man, George, broke into your house, shot your wife, shot your trusty servant...

JENKINS Thank you, madam.

DOROTHY: ..tried to take over the government. How much darker and deeper can he go?

GEORGE: Dreadful crimes. Truly dreadful. And he repents. Look at his face - the face of a true penitent. Tell my wife how sorry you are, Mr Barrett.

BARRETT: Sorry.

GEORGE: There you are, Dorothy, straight from the heart. Remember those unforgettable words from the Bible, dear: "One sinner that repenteth..." something or the other.

DOROTHY: Jenkins, phone for the police.

JENKINS: Yes, madam

GEORGE: No, no, wait! Wait! There's something else you should know.

DOROTHY: And what's that, George?

GEORGE: Something very important. I didn't want to tell you but... (*Desperately stalling*)...No, I must tell you. It's only right that you should know. But is it right to tell you? Yes, yes, I must.

DOROTHY: Tell us what, George?

GEORGE: He's dying. Yes, Mr Barrett is dying. Forgive me, Barrett, I didn't want to betray your secret.

BARRETT: Feel free, feel free.

GEORGE: Mr Barrett has just a few weeks to live. He came here to try and secure the future of his wife and six children before...going to the other side.

DOROTHY: You mean he's going to vote against you, George?

GEORGE I mean...the unknown country from which no traveller returns. Mr Barrett has AIDS.

DOROTHY: Oh! Why didn't you tell us earlier, George?

GEORGE I wanted to spare you the pain, Dorothy.

DOROTHY: How considerate. And Mr Barrett never mentioned it either. (*To Barrett:*) I should have worn rubber gloves when I dressed your wound. But I mustn't think of myself. How did you catch it, Mr Barrett? Not from our window, I hope.

GEORGE: You can't catch AIDS from a window, Dorothy.

DOROTHY: And besides, there'd have been no time for the diagnosis. In fact, I'm surprised there was time for Mr Barrett to tell you about it, after going through his family history, his union connections, his repentance...all in two minutes. Let me see now...East Bumstead...Dr Lindsay's the AIDS specialist there. How do you get on with him, Mr Barrett?

BARRETT: Very well.

DOROTHY: A tall, dark man, isn't he?

BARRETT: That's right, very tall.

DOROTHY: And very dark.



BARRETT: Well, fairly dark.  
DOROTHY: Yes, he would be, coming from Nigeria.  
BARRETT: Well yes, he's dark for a Nigerian.  
DOROTHY: Shame about his hare lip.  
BARRETT: Yes, it is a bit hairy.  
DOROTHY: And that third eye right in the middle of his forehead.  
BARRETT: Third eye?  
DOROTHY: The police, Jenkins.  
JENKINS: Yes, madam.  
GEORGE: No, wait, Jenkins! Stop! My God, this is a terrible situation. Dorothy, you must trust me. I've never asked much of you - and Lord knows you've never given me much - but believe me, it's vital that Mr Barrett should not fall into the hands of the police. I admit, the AIDS story is untrue. Mr Barrett is not dying.  
DOROTHY: Thank heavens!  
GEORGE: But there are pressing reasons for this whole sorry affair to be kept absolutely secret.  
DOROTHY: Namely?  
GEORGE: Pardon?  
DOROTHY: The reasons, George.  
GEORGE: I can't tell you. It's a matter of national security.  
DOROTHY: Oh?  
GEORGE: I'd like to tell you, Dorothy, believe me, I would, I really would. But I mustn't, for the safety of England.  
DOROTHY: Is Mr Barrett a secret agent? How exciting! That would explain the change of name.  
GEORGE: Change of name?  
DOROTHY: Why you called him Arthur instead of Fred.  
GEORGE: Ah! Exactly.  
DOROTHY: But why would a secret agent climb through our window and pretend to be a thug? Jenkins, are you in M15?  
JENKINS: No, madam.  
DOROTHY: And I'm certainly not. So obviously, Mr Barrett, you came to see my husband. In which case, George, you must have been expecting him.  
GEORGE: Nonsense!  
DOROTHY: Yet you pretended not to know him. And then...why did he shoot me? Why would a secret agent shoot the wife...  
GEORGE: Aaaargh!  
DOROTHY: What's that, George?  
GEORGE: (*clutching his chest*) AAAARGH!  
DOROTHY: Something wrong, George?  
GEORGE: EEEERGH! AAAARGH!

*He staggers to his bed, knocks down the telephone, falls across Dorothy's bed, and knocks down the other phone, groaning loudly all the time.*

DOROTHY: (*To Barrett*) He does trampolining exercises.

GEORGE: It's my heart, Dorothy.  
DOROTHY: Sorry, what is it, George?  
GEORGE: My heart! Aaaargh, the pain!  
DOROTHY: I'll fetch a doctor, shall I?  
*She makes to pick up one of the phones.*  
GEORGE: (*gesturing towards Barrett*) Get him out of here! Aaaaah!  
*He lies limp and still.*  
DOROTHY: Jenkins, undo the master's pyjama jacket, will you?  
JENKINS: Yes, madam.  
*He does.*  
DOROTHY: Now put your cold hand on the master's chest.  
JENKINS: Yes, madam.  
*He does. George twitches.*  
DOROTHY: Now move your cold hand a little lower down, Jenkins.  
JENKINS: Yes, madam.  
*He does. George twitches again, giggles, and tries to cover the giggle with a loud cough.*  
DOROTHY: Welcome back, Mr Lazarus.  
GEORGE: Stop it, Jenkins.  
DOROTHY: Such bravery! The man who giggles at pain.  
*George knocks Jenkins' hand away. He then "sees" Barrett.*  
GEORGE: Is he still here? For heaven's sake, let him go. We've got enough to cope with.  
DOROTHY: He'll soon be gone, George. Pick up the phone, Jenkins.  
JENKINS: Yes, madam.  
GEORGE: Aaaargh!  
DOROTHY: The police for Mr Barrett, and Equity for the master.  
GEORGE: Aaaargh! Aaaargh!  
*Jenkins picks up a phone, and starts to dial.*  
BARRETT: You better put that phone down, unless you want George behind bars for the next ten years.  
*Jenkins stops dialling.*  
DOROTHY: Behind bars?  
GEORGE: Oh my God!  
BARRETT: Shall I tell them, George, or will you?  
GEORGE: I'll give you ten thousand.  
BARRETT: No deal. It was his idea, missus. He paid me to come in here and shoot you.  
GEORGE: It's a lie!  
BARRETT: And he's just offered me ten thousand to keep quiet.  
DOROTHY: I see.  
GEORGE: I deny every word. You can't trust him, Dorothy. He's a thug - you said so yourself.  
DOROTHY: A repentant thug, George, who's dying of AIDS - you said so yourself. Mr Barrett, do go on.  
GEORGE: Don't listen to him, Dorothy.  
BARRETT: It's like Mr Jenkins said...  
GEORGE: Lies, lies, lies...  
BARRETT: He thought if you were killed...

GEORGE: Lies, lies, lies...

BARRETT: He'd float into Number Ten on a wave of public sympathy.

GEORGE: Lies, lies, lies. The man should be in politics.

DOROTHY: Killed?

BARRETT: I was to shoot you between the eyes.

GEORGE: What an imagination!

BARRETT: One shot and goodbye.

GEORGE: The Jeffrey Archer of Bumstead East!

DOROTHY: Why did you offer him ten thousand just now, George?

GEORGE: Ten thousand?

DOROTHY: To which he replied "No deal".

GEORGE: When was this, Dorothy?

DOROTHY: Jenkins, did you hear the master offer ten thousand to Mr Barrett?

JENKINS: Yes, madam.

GEORGE: Will you keep out of this, Jenkins! It's no concern of yours! In fact, I'm sick and tired of your carryings-on, constantly complaining and threatening and interfering - a man can't feel at home in his own home - and to tell you the honest truth, I haven't been satisfied with your work for a long time...

DOROTHY: George.

GEORGE: ...and it would better for all of us if you...

DOROTHY: Why did you offer Mr Barrett ten thousand?

GEORGE: Dorothy, I'm trying to put this servant in his place.

DOROTHY: And you were trying to put ten thousand pounds in Mr Barrett's place.

GEORGE: I see. So you take Barrett's word against mine, do you? This is what it's come to. One is woken up at dead of night by a vicious thug, and an hour later, one is being put on trial by one's own wife and servant. This man is a criminal, and if I had my way, by heaven, I'd bring back capital punishment for him, and on reflection, Dorothy, I think you were absolutely right, and the best thing to do is shoot him. Where's the gun?

DOROTHY: (*waving it*) Here.

GEORGE: Let me have it, Dorothy, and I'll deal with this evil-smelling thug once and for all.

DOROTHY: Just a moment, George. Let's hear some more of Mr Barrett's stories. Like how much you were paying him.

BARRETT: Two thousand five hundred.

DOROTHY: Mean as ever, George.

BARRETT: I'd never have done it, though, missus. I'm not that sort of man. Don't like violence, you see.

DOROTHY: So why did you take the job?

BARRETT: I needed the money.

DOROTHY: Ah yes, for your tragic family. So you missed me deliberately.

BARRETT: If I'd wanted to kill you, missus, I'd have killed you. I'm a crack shot. Darts champion of the block three years running.

DOROTHY: I owe you my life, Mr Barrett.

BARRETT: That's all right. Any time.

DOROTHY: Once is enough, thank you. Well, George

GEORGE: Complete and utter fabrication. There's no more truth in his stories than in a government white paper. I have never spoken to him in my life before tonight.

DOROTHY: Mhm. You can uncross your fingers now, George.

GEORGE: What?

*He puts his hands behind his back.*

DOROTHY: Mr Barrett, have you ever spoken to my husband before tonight?

BARRETT: Yes. At the rubbish dump.

DOROTHY: You mean the House of Commons.

BARRETT: No, no, the Waste Disposal Centre.

DOROTHY: Ah! How very appropriate! Jenkins, get us a cup of tea, will you? All this excitement does make one thirsty.

JENKINS: Yes, madam.

BARRETT: Milk and three sugars for me, please.

*Jenkins looks at Dorothy, who nods.*

You haven't got any cake, have you?

DOROTHY: Have we?

JENKINS: I believe we have some Angel Cake, madam.

DOROTHY: Equally appropriate.

GEORGE: I'll have some tea and cake, too, Jenkins.

JENKINS: I don't know if there'll be enough for you, sir.

*He goes out.*

GEORGE: Jenkins, you're fired! D'you hear? I've just fired Jenkins, Dorothy.

DOROTHY: And I can't wait to see him fire back, George.

BARRETT: You couldn't untie me, missus, could you? I'm beginning to get a migraine in me legs.

DOROTHY: Oh, you poor man. It must be the after effects of your AIDS.

*She puts the gun down within reach of herself, and unties Barrett as they talk.*

Now then, what were you and my husband doing at the rubbish dump?

BARRETT: He told me to meet him there.

DOROTHY: And how was the meeting arranged?

BARRETT: He rang me up, didn't he?

DOROTHY: What did he say? "Hello, Mr Barrett. Leader of the Opposition here. Meet me at the rubbish dump."

BARRETT: No, he never said who he was - not even when we met. He disguised himself - dark glasses, hat over his eyes, and a funny accent.

DOROTHY: Oh George, it wasn't your Humphrey Bogart impersonation, was it?

*George is now sitting on his bed, sulking.*

BARRETT: Of course I recognized him straight away.

DOROTHY: Yes, you would. George isn't very good at impressions. What exactly did he say?

BARRETT: *(Bogart voice)* "I'll give you two an' a half grand to bump off my wife."

DOROTHY: That's very good. I'll bet George wasn't as good as that. There you are.

*She has finished untying him.*

BARRETT: Thanks, missus.

*He stands up, rubbing and flexing his limbs. Dorothy picks up the gun.*

DOROTHY: So he told you when, where and how. Did you, as they say, case the joint?

BARRETT: Just the outside. He told me which window.

DOROTHY: But didn't tell you how to open it. The fatal flaw.

*Jenkins returns with tea, cake etc. on a tray.*

Ah, well done, Jenkins. Bring it over here.

JENKINS: Yes, madam.

*He puts the tray down, and dishes out.*

DOROTHY: Just what we all need. A large chunk of Angel Cake for Mr Barrett, and... three sugars, was it?

*Barrett nods.*

And help yourself, Jenkins, when you're ready.

JENKINS: Thank you, madam.

*He does so, after serving Barrett. Dorothy helps herself.*

DOROTHY: Excellent, Jenkins. You make a splendid cup of tea.

JENKINS: Thank you, madam.

GEORGE: What about me?

DOROTHY: Oh, did you want some, George? What a pity, it's all gone.

GEORGE: Jenkins, bring me a cup of tea.

JENKINS: I'm afraid I don't work for you any more, sir.

DOROTHY: You fired him, remember? So now he works for me.

*George stands up.*

GEORGE: Dorothy, I demand that gun. And a cup of tea.

DOROTHY: If you menace me, George, I shall ask Mr Barrett to defend my honour. And my tea.

GEORGE: (*changing tone*) Dorothy... darling... we mustn't quarrel like this. After all our years of togetherness, of happiness, how can you take this criminal's part against your own husband? I tell you, the man is a liar. Isn't that enough for you?

DOROTHY: No, George. I think you're the liar.

GEORGE: Oh Dorothy, you don't know how that pains me.

JENKINS: Madam, why not give the master a chance to defend himself? Let him cross-examine Mr Barrett.

DOROTHY: What a lovely idea, Jenkins. You really are a treasure. George, you can be counsel for the defence, I'll be prosecutor, and Jenkins can be judge. All right, Jenkins?

JENKINS: Thank you, madam. I find the defendant guilty...

DOROTHY: Not yet, your worship. We'll hear the evidence first.

GEORGE: (*advancing*) I'm not playing silly games with you. I'm prepared to let Barrett go, and forget the whole business. Now give me the gun.

DOROTHY: Do stop trying to be masterful, George.

BARRETT: If you take one more step, I'll knock your nose right through the back of your head.

*George stops in his tracks.*

DOROTHY: Now that's what I call masterful.

GEORGE: I thought you didn't like violence.

BARRETT: In this life we can't always not do what we don't like.

GEORGE: Can't always... not...

DOROTHY: It's a positive example of negative thinking, George. Your witness.  
GEORGE: Oh all right, if we're going to play childish games. Barrett, tell us your criminal record  
DOROTHY: Objection.  
JENKINS: Objection sustained.  
GEORGE: What's the objection?  
JENKINS: (*to Dorothy*) What's the objection?  
DOROTHY: The record is not revealed till after the trial. It might prejudice the jury.  
JENKINS: (*to George*) Stop trying to prejudice the jury.  
DOROTHY: Wait a minute.  
JENKINS: Wait a minute.  
DOROTHY: Mr Barrett's not on trial, is he? And it would be fun to hear his record. (*To Jenkins:*) You can allow the question.  
JENKINS: What was the question?  
DOROTHY: He's to tell us his criminal record.  
BARRETT: Well, I have been inside occasionally.  
GEORGE: For what offences?  
BARRETT: Burglary, assault, robbery with violence. Nothing serious. And I'm going straight now.  
GEORGE: When did you last come out of prison?  
BARRETT: Six days ago.  
GEORGE: Aha! Six days ago, and he's going straight!  
BARRETT: So I was, till you forced me back into a life of crime.  
GEORGE: I rest my case.  
DOROTHY: It's too early for a rest, George. You haven't proved anything yet.  
JENKINS: Quite right, madam. I order the trial to continue.  
GEORGE: Then tell us about your last crime, Barrett.  
BARRETT: I broke into a place and nicked some money.  
GEORGE: What place?  
BARRETT: Somewhere for old people.  
GEORGE: And what happened to the 84-year-old man who tried to stop you?  
BARRETT: He had an accident.  
GEORGE: What sort of accident?  
BARRETT: He accidentally fell over me leg, and got accidentally kicked a few times by me foot.  
GEORGE: For which you have just served seven years.  
BARRETT: Diabolical. Seven years for an accident.  
GEORGE: I think that proves the sort of man we're dealing with.  
JENKINS: Madam, could I ask the master a question?  
DOROTHY: Of course you can, Jenkins. Judges can always ask questions.  
JENKINS: How, sir, did you know about the 84-year-old?  
*Pause.*  
DOROTHY: Well done, Jenkins! What a splendid question!  
JENKINS: Thank you, madam.  
GEORGE: Jenkins, I've warned you before about interfering...  
DOROTHY: Answer the question, George.

GEORGE: (*after pause for thought*) Barrett told me while you were out of the room.

DOROTHY: Ah yes, that amazing conversation. There were more confessions in those two minutes than the Pope hears in two weeks.

JENKINS: I'd like to ask the defendant another question.

DOROTHY: Oh yes, Jenkins, do.

JENKINS: I'd like to know why you hired Mr Barrett in particular.

GEORGE: I went through the list of prisoners about to be released, and he seemed the most...

*He stops, and looks aghast.*

I never hired Barrett! It's all lies!

DOROTHY: Brilliant, Jenkins!

JENKINS: Thank you, madam.

DOROTHY: We've been wasting your talents all these years.

GEORGE: I refuse to play any more of these idiotic games.

DOROTHY: Mr Barrett, could I ask you a question? Why exactly was I to be killed, and not just wounded?

BARRETT: Oh, that's easy...

GEORGE: Barrett, I forbid you to say another word! Not one more word if you value your life!

BARRETT: Miss Titworth.

GEORGE: Barrett!

DOROTHY: Miss Titworth?

GEORGE: Christ!

BARRETT: Miss Patsy Titworth.

GEORGE: God, send down a thunderbolt.

DOROTHY: My husband's private secretary?

BARRETT: Your husband's very private secretary.

GEORGE: Slander! You'll be hearing from my solicitor, Barrett!

DOROTHY: You mean my husband is having an affair with Miss Titworth?

GEORGE: Everyone knows Miss Titworth is in love with the Shadow Minister for Energy.

DOROTHY: So if I was killed...

BARRETT: A new Prime Minister and a new Mrs Porteous.

DOROTHY: Two birds with one bullet. Ingenious, George. And remarkably far-sighted for someone in your profession.

GEORGE: I'd like to know who's paying him to concoct this absurd story.

DOROTHY: You, George. Two and a half thousand pounds. Milord, you've heard the evidence. How do you find the defendant?

JENKINS: Pathetic, madam.

DOROTHY: Guilty or not guilty?

JENKINS: Absolutely guilty, madam.

DOROTHY: Then all that remains is the sentence. I think the court should now adjourn so I can have a little chat with Mr Barrett. Jenkins, take the master to the kitchen.

JENKINS: Yes, madam.

GEORGE: I refuse to leave this room.

DOROTHY: George, either I do a deal with Mr Barrett, or you're a ruined man.

GEORGE: I demand to be present.

DOROTHY: The only thing you can demand, George, is a fair trial. Take this gun, Jenkins, and if the master gives you any trouble, shoot to kill.

JENKINS: It'll be a pleasure, madam. This way, "master".

*He jabs George with the gun, and forces him towards the door.*

GEORGE: You'll live to regret this, Jenkins.

JENKINS: And I hope you'll do the same, sir.

*They go out.*

DOROTHY: Well done, Arthur! A little overdone at times, but well done all the same.

BARRETT: I don't know about me overdone. I thought I'd really shot you. Where'd all that blood come from?

DOROTHY: Initially a sheep, and subsequently the Women's Institute Dramatic Society. I'm so glad you came to me, Arthur, after he'd come to you. It gives us both so much more to live for. Now, the deal is this: you'll agree to keep quiet - and of course so shall I - on condition that he gives me a divorce plus this house and half of everything he has.

BARRETT: What will you do if he becomes Prime Minister?

DOROTHY: With policies like his, Arthur, and a party like his, and a personality like his, he'll never be Prime Minister. And after this election, he won't even be Leader of the Opposition.

BARRETT: So what'll happen then?

DOROTHY: He'll doze off on one of the back benches, and eventually, if things work out, I may possibly doze off with the Shadow Minister for Energy.

BARRETT: Ah!

DOROTHY: That's strictly between ourselves, Arthur.

*She goes to the dresser, and takes out a packet.*

Five thousand pounds in cash as we agreed.

BARRETT: Well.

DOROTHY: Well?

BARRETT: Five thousand pounds was agreed before the other offer.

DOROTHY: What other offer?

BARRETT: From your husband. The figure he mentioned was ten thousand.

DOROTHY: But you turned him down.

BARRETT: I assumed that if he offered ten, you'd offer twenty.

DOROTHY: We agreed on five.

BARRETT: Him and me agreed on two and a half, but he upped it to ten. His ten's twice your five, and twice ten is twenty.

DOROTHY: Your maths are admirable, and your ethics abominable. Five we agreed, and five it will be.

BARRETT: I don't think so.

DOROTHY: I haven't got twenty thousand pounds.

BARRETT: I'll take fifteen.

DOROTHY: He offered you ten to keep quiet about Miss Titworth. But you didn't, so what would he pay you ten for now?

BARRETT: For information.

DOROTHY: What information?



BARRETT: For instance, who it was that set him up, who told me about Miss Titworth, who's planning to doze off with the Shadow Minister for Energy...

DOROTHY: You are the creepiest, crawliest, slimiest, grubbiest, nastiest, wartiest toad ever to emerge from the muckiest depths of the murkiest pond.

BARRETT: Fifteen thousand.

DOROTHY: I haven't got it.

*Barrett goes to the door.*

BARRETT: Jenkins! Bring George in here!

DOROTHY: I might be able to raise it to seven or eight.

BARRETT: Not enough, missus. I'll take twelve. Going, going...

*Jenkins brings George in. Barrett looks at Dorothy, who lowers her head.*

Gone.

GEORGE: I demand to know what's going on in here.

BARRETT: And so you shall, my beauty. Everything that's going on, and that's been going on.

GEORGE: Dorothy, what have you decided?

DOROTHY: I've decided to shoot Mr Barrett. Jenkins, give me the gun.

BARRETT: You keep the gun, Jenkins.

GEORGE: Maybe you'd better give me the gun, Jenkins.

DOROTHY: Jenkins!

BARRETT: Jenkins!

GEORGE: Jenkins!

JENKINS: I think I'll hold on to the gun,

BARRETT: Good man, Jenkins. It's funny, when I told the wife where I was working tonight, she said I'd be out of me depth. But with you lot, I feel like a rubber duck in a bathtub. Now then, George, I've got some information to sell you.

GEORGE: What sort of information?

BARRETT: Ten thousand pound sort of information.

GEORGE: Were you discussing it with my wife?

BARRETT: Ten thousand pounds.

GEORGE: How do I know it's worth ten thousand?

BARRETT: Look at your wife's face.

GEORGE: Pretty sour. But then it usually is.

BARRETT: Well let me put this to you: I could tell the world you tried to murder your wife. It would pay you to have me on your side.

GEORGE: Of course I deny it. Is this blackmail?

BARRETT: On the contrary, I'm trying to prevent you from being blackmailed.

GEORGE: I don't understand.

BARRETT: I am not the only person who knows that you tried to murder your wife.

GEORGE: Aren't you?

BARRETT: The information that I can give you - correction, sell you - will prevent this other person from using her knowledge to your disadvantage.

GEORGE: Do you mean Dorothy?

BARRETT: The speed of thought is blinding.

GEORGE: But why would Dorothy blackmail me? Ah! On account of Miss Titworth! Though of course I've never had anything but a strictly professional relationship with

Miss Titworth, who as everyone knows is in love with the Shadow Minister for the Environment.

BARRETT: I thought it was the Shadow Minister for Energy.

GEORGE: There's been a reshuffle. So Dorothy, you want to blackmail your own husband, eh?

BARRETT: And all you did was try and kill her. Ts, women - no sense of proportion. Now if she was to reveal our little secret, the key figure in the proceedings would obviously be my good self.

GEORGE: Yes?

BARRETT: And if you were prepared to buy this little piece of information for ten thousand pounds, I would be prepared to tell the truth, not quite the whole truth, and nothing but part of the whole truth.

GEORGE: Ten thousand pounds is a lot of money.

BARRETT: Not as much as half of what you own plus this house.

*A heavy silence.*

GEORGE: You wouldn't, Dorothy!

BARRETT: Do I get my ten thousand?

DOROTHY: The information that this odious Bumstead snake is trying to sell you, George, is that I knew all about your plot.

BARRETT: Here, you can't tell him that!

GEORGE: What?

DOROTHY: He'll tell you that I offered to pay him to pretend to shoot me in order to incriminate you so that I could get him to testify against you that you'd tried to kill me so that I could then blackmail you.

GEORGE: Could you say that again, Dorothy?

DOROTHY: In this packet, George, is five thousand pounds which I was going to pay Mr Barrett for threatening to reveal the fact that you had paid him to kill me.

GEORGE: If I've understood this, Dorothy - and I'm not at all sure that I have - one of you is playing a very dirty trick. Not that there's a grain of truth in the allegations, but such talk could ruin my career.

BARRETT: But that's where I come in, George. Such talk need never take place. Because I can prove you're not guilty.

GEORGE: You can? How?

BARRETT: Through the information which you would have bought for ten thousand pounds if your wife had kept her mouth shut.

GEORGE: Ah! So I don't have to pay for it after all?

BARRETT: That is correct.

GEORGE: Oh, well done, Dorothy!

BARRETT: But what you will have to pay for - and the price has now gone up to twenty thousand pounds - is my decision as to which piece of information I shall divulge.

GEORGE: What do you mean?

BARRETT: For twenty thousand pounds, I will testify that your wife paid me to break in here and take a shot at her, so that she could say you had paid me to break in here and take a shot at her.

GEORGE: So it was her plot.

BARRETT: Which it was.

GEORGE: Not my plot...

BARRETT: Which it was.

GEORGE: But her plot.

BARRETT: Which it was.

GEORGE: Is this true, Dorothy? You actually paid this thug to come in here and ruin my career?

DOROTHY: You paid him, George.

BARRETT: You both paid me. The only question is, which of you do I testify against?

GEORGE: Ah, I see! If I pay you twenty thousand, you'll testify against her. And if she...

BARRETT: You've got it.

GEORGE: Do you mind if I talk this over with my wife, Mr Barrett?

BARRETT: Not at all. Have a party conference if you like.

*George takes Dorothy to one side.*

Well now, Jenkins, what do you make of all this?

JENKINS: It's a remarkable business, sir.

BARRETT: I bet you never knew the type of people you were working for.

JENKINS: Life is full of surprises, sir. Like gunshot wounds without bullet holes.

BARRETT: Aha! So you knew I hadn't shot her. You kept that close to your chest, Jenkins.

JENKINS: And so did madam. May I assume, sir, that the bullet you fired at me was also a blank?

BARRETT: Oh they're not blanks, Jenkins. I deliberately missed her, but you were just lucky.

JENKINS: Thank you, sir. That's a comforting thought.

*George and Dorothy finish their conference.*

BARRETT: Decision taken?

GEORGE: It is, Barrett. We're in complete accord. Neither of us will pay you anything. We've never met you before. You're a complete stranger who broke into our house, but since you took nothing and no-one's been hurt, we'll let you off this time. You're free to go.

BARRETT: I see. We've got a coalition, have we? Let's join hands and do the sod together. Well, you carry on coalishing, while I go and see a friend of mine at the Bumstead Gazette. I'll explain to him...

GEORGE: One moment, Barrett. The Bumstead Gazette, you say?

BARRETT: It has a very large front page.

GEORGE: I'd just like to talk this over for a moment with my wife.

BARRETT: Talk it over, George. While there's talk there's hope.

*George and Dorothy go to one side again.*

Why don't you sit down, Jenkins? Take the weight off your pyjamas.

JENKINS: Thank you, sir.

*He sits down.*

BARRETT: You and me should be on the same side, really. Representing the working classes.

JENKINS: I don't regard myself as working class, sir.

BARRETT: Well no, nor do I. Never done a day's work in me life. But it should be you and me against them. A bit of solidarity.

JENKINS: There's nothing quite so solid, sir, as a unit of one.  
*George and Dorothy finish their conference.*

GEORGE: Right.

BARRETT: Aha. I take it we now have a policy change.

GEORGE: We do indeed, Barrett. You leave us with no alternative.

BARRETT: Good. I'd like it in cash.

GEORGE: We shall have to have you shot.

BARRETT: What?

GEORGE: Jenkins, shoot Mr Barrett.

JENKINS: Ts, I've only just sat down.  
*He struggles to his feet.*

BARRETT: No, no, wait, Jenkins, wait! You can't go shooting me just 'cos they tell you to. That's murder, that is. You realize what that makes you?

JENKINS: A murderer, sir?

BARRETT: Exactly! Don't do it, Jenkins!

JENKINS: I've no intention of doing it, sir. I'm struggling to my feet in order to hand the murder weapon over to those who wish to commit murder.

GEORGE: Are you disobeying me, Jenkins?

JENKINS: Yes, sir.

GEORGE: Very well. You're fired. Again.

JENKINS: Thank you, sir.

GEORGE: Give me the gun. I'll do it myself.

BARRETT: No, wait, George, don't you do it! You'll be playing right into her hands!

GEORGE: Whose hands?

BARRETT: Your wife's! That's just what she wants! If you shoot me, whose prints'll be on the gun?

GEORGE: Mine.

BARRETT: And what will that prove?

GEORGE: *(after some thought)* I give up!

BARRETT: It'll prove that you're the murderer, and there'll be two witnesses to confirm it. She can blackmail you into anything she wants.

GEORGE: Ah!

DOROTHY: There's a simple answer to that. Jenkins, give me the gun.

GEORGE: Good idea, Dorothy. You shoot him.

BARRETT: No, don't! If you shoot me, you know what he'll do, don't you?

DOROTHY: What will he do, Barrett?

BARRETT: Gawd, it's like the Arabian Nights! Listen, he hired me to get rid of you, right? He's not on your side! So if you shoot me, and your prints are on the gun, he'll have you in the same position as you wanted to have him. Over a bloody barrel. You know you can't trust him.

GEORGE: Of course you can trust me, Dorothy. I'm your husband.

DOROTHY: *(to Barrett)* You're right.

BARRETT: I know I'm right. My advice to you, as a completely neutral observer, is to pay me off and forget the whole thing.

DOROTHY: Perhaps my husband and I should talk this over.

BARRETT: By all means, madam. Don't mind us. We can entertain ourselves.

*George and Dorothy go to one side again.*

How can you work for people like that, Jenkins? Must be like dusting the Chamber of Horrors. Are they all the same?

JENKINS: Are who all the same as what, sir?

BARRETT: Politicians, the same as them?

JENKINS: Politicians are only human, sir.

BARRETT: Well I'm human, but I'm not like them.

JENKINS: (*without any change of accent*) O would some Power the giftie gie us to see ourselves as others see us.

BARRETT: Winston Churchill.

JENKINS: Robbie Burns, sir.

*George and Dorothy finish their conference.*

BARRETT: And have we now finally passed a motion?

DOROTHY: We have, Barrett.

BARRETT: And?

DOROTHY: We are going to shoot you.

BARRETT: We?

DOROTHY: Both of us.

BARRETT: Now that's just plain stupid. What you going to tell the police? You both happened to grab the gun at the same time, and you pulled the left of the trigger and you pulled the right?

DOROTHY: You are to be shot twice, Barrett. The first shot - fired in the struggle with my heroic husband - will wound you, and the second shot - fired when the gun falls loose - will kill you.

BARRETT: Blimey!

DOROTHY: The gun, please, Jenkins.

BARRETT: Wait! Isn't there something you've forgotten?

DOROTHY: Is there?

BARRETT: I bloody hope so.

DOROTHY: Well?

BARRETT: Aha!

DOROTHY: Aha what?

BARRETT: You've been very clever, missus, but your scheme won't work.

DOROTHY: Why not?

BARRETT: That's what you'd like to know.

DOROTHY: And so, no doubt, would you.

BARRETT: Oh, I know what I'm doing. You see, the whole story has changed now.

DOROTHY: It has indeed, Mr Barrett. And your part in it is now about to end.

BARRETT: No. No, no. No, no, no, no, no, no, no, no. On the contrary, the exact opposite. Because fortunately, as luck would have it, by sheer chance I still have one last trump card up my sleeve. The one thing you haven't thought of.

DOROTHY: And which you are still trying to think of. Jenkins, the gun.

BARRETT: Exactly!

DOROTHY: Exactly what?

BARRETT: Would you grant me just two minutes more of life? A little reprieve, so that I can explain? Two minutes?

DOROTHY: Shall we give him two minutes, George?

GEORGE: I'd be inclined to shoot first and let him explain afterwards.

DOROTHY: Maybe that's why you're 43% behind in the opinion polls, George. Explain away, Mr Barrett. Jenkins, shoot him if he tries to escape.

JENKINS: Very well, madam.

BARRETT: It's quite simple. You've overlooked one basic fact. George, would you mind standing over here, please?

GEORGE: What for, Barrett?

BARRETT: You'll see in a moment.

*George stands where he is told.*

And your ladyship next to him, please.

*She joins George.*

Now Jenkins, you stand in the middle.

DOROTHY: Do as he says, Jenkins.

*Jenkins stands between George and Dorothy, but still points the gun at Barrett.*

GEORGE: Is he going to take a photograph, or what?

BARRETT: Perhaps, Jenkins, you could just come half a step forward.

DOROTHY: Your two minutes are nearly up.

BARRETT: Just a few more seconds. Now, I want you all to notice that her ladyship's bed is on my left-hand side. Right?

*Nods and grunts.*

And the window - this is very important - the window is behind you. You all agree?

*They all agree.*

Right. Now, just hand me that a second, Jenkins, will you?

*Involuntarily Jenkins gives him the gun.*

The door of course is behind me. Thank you very much. And above all - and this is the trump card I was mentioning to you - the gun is now in my right hand, pointing towards you. In other words, you've been had.

GEORGE: I don't see the point about the bed and the window.

DOROTHY: George, he's got the gun.

GEORGE: Oh! How did he get that?

BARRETT: Oldest trick in the book. *(To George:)* You should show that one to your Shadow Minister of Defence. Now, let's reopen negotiations, shall we?

JENKINS: My God, who's that at the door?

*Barrett turns to look, and Jenkins snatches the gun.*

Thank you, sir.

BARRETT: You bastard, Jenkins!

JENKINS: Second oldest trick in the book.

GEORGE: There's nobody at the door, Jenkins.

BARRETT: If I ever get my hands on you.

JENKINS: I'll see that you don't, sir.

DOROTHY: Well done, Jenkins.

JENKINS: Thank you, madam.

GEORGE: But there's nobody there.

DOROTHY: Jenkins got the gun back.

GEORGE: Did he? Oh, I see! Very good, Jenkins. It was a trick, Dorothy. There was no one at the door at all.

DOROTHY: No, George.

GEORGE: I must show that to the Shadow Minister of Defence, eh, Barrett? Right, well, to use your own terminology, Barrett, let's reopen negotiations, shall we?

DOROTHY: There's not going to be any more negotiating, George. Jenkins, where are you off to?

*Jenkins has moved away from them all.*

JENKINS: Nowhere, madam. Just putting myself at a safe distance.

DOROTHY: Well, you'd better give me the gun.

JENKINS: I don't think so, madam.

DOROTHY: What? Are you going to shoot him yourself?

JENKINS: I'm not going to shoot anybody, madam, unless I have to.

GEORGE: Jenkins, don't point the gun at us.

JENKINS: I'm pointing the gun at all of you, sir, to make sure that none of you move.

GEORGE: Are you feeling all right, Jenkins?

JENKINS: Perfectly well, sir, thank you. But I am about to make a speech.

GEORGE: You're not going into politics, are you?

BARRETT: He's ripping us off!

JENKINS: Keep still, Barrett. I shan't hesitate to shoot if I have to. Now sit on the floor, all of you.

*They all sit on the floor.*

GEORGE: Do you understand what's going on, Dorothy?

DOROTHY: Yes, George.

*He waits for an explanation that doesn't come.*

GEORGE: Oh!

JENKINS: In the light of your various crimes, all three of you deserve to spend the rest of your lives in jail. However, I shall spare you this fate, partly because the prisons contain more than enough riff-raff already, and partly because I am not averse to buttering my own bread. I shall therefore pass the following sentences: firstly, you, madam. You always were a snob, a shrew, and a schemer, but I never thought you would stoop to conspiracy, blackmail, or attempted murder. I have been shocked by your behaviour...

GEORGE: And so have I, Dorothy. Deeply shocked.

JENKINS: ...which until now I had thought was only typical of the worst criminals, and politicians. I shall require you to pay five thousand pounds to the National Union of Domestic Employees Benevolence Organizing Trust, or NUDEBOT. There is a second part to your sentence which I shall come to later. And now to you, "master". I had assumed in the past that you were merely stupid, but now I find that you are also a wicked, selfish, witless, detestable, despicable, ruthless, repellent...

GEORGE: Steady on, Jenkins.

JENKINS: ...hypocritical, murderous pompous prat. I intend to protect the Great British public against you for evermore. You will announce your resignation from politics forthwith, in a farewell speech which I will help you to prepare. You will also write a cheque for ten thousand pounds, payable to NUDEBOT.

GEORGE: I refuse.

JENKINS: In the event of your refusal, I shall hand over to the police the recording which I have made of the night's events.

GEORGE: Recording? How could you have made a recording? You're bluffing! You can shoot me if you wish, but I shan't resign, and I shan't put a penny into your NUDEBOT.

*(To the others:)* He's bluffing.

JENKINS: In that case, sir, you will all - as they say - go together when you go. And now to your sentence, Barrett, assuming the master will change his mind.

*George begins to search for the recording - at first surreptitiously, then overtly, and then with desperation, flinging open doors, pulling out drawers, ripping off bedclothes.*

Just as the master is retiring from politics, I myself am retiring from domestic service. As I have no home or family, however, I shall continue to live here with the master and madam, who will continue to live here with me and with each other. And with you, Barrett. You will take over my job, and will serve them and, especially, me.

DOROTHY: I will not have this guttersnipe in my house, Jenkins.

JENKINS: That, madam, is the second part of your sentence. As advertised. *(To George:)* I trust you'll be tidying up after you, sir.

GEORGE: There is no recording. In my judgment, it's a complete bluff.

JENKINS: Your judgment always was unfailingly wrong, sir.

DOROTHY: Barrett, help us look for it.

*She and Barrett join in the search, and Jenkins calmly watches them tearing the room apart.*

GEORGE: There's nothing here.

JENKINS: Keep your distance, Barrett.

GEORGE: Bluff, bluff, bluff.

DOROTHY: I agree. Jenkins, we're calling your bluff.

BARRETT: And when we've called it, Jenkins, I shall tear your limbs off one by one and send them all to NUDEBOT.

JENKINS: Stand back, all of you. Go on. Further.

*They all retreat. He rummages into his oversized pyjamas, and brings forth a little cassette recorder. There is a stunned silence.*

In another sphere, I believe this would be called a full house.

GEORGE: Dammit!

DOROTHY: You're a clever man, Jenkins.

JENKINS: Thank you, madam.

BARRETT: Why don't we rush him?

JENKINS: The first person to rush me will be shot. I have every right to defend myself against would-be murderers. And the machine will record the evidence.

GEORGE: Is it still recording?

JENKINS: Yes, sir.

GEORGE: I DENY EVERYTHING!

DOROTHY: Don't be ridiculous, George. He's beaten us. I accept your terms, Jenkins, however nauseating they and you may be.

JENKINS: Thank you, madam. And you, sir?

*Pause.*

DOROTHY: You have no choice, George.

GEORGE: You mean I have to resign?



*She nods.*

A week before the election?

JENKINS: Judging by the opinion polls, sir, it's either the week before or the week after.

GEORGE: (*who has suddenly had an idea*) Very well, Jenkins, I'll do it.

JENKINS: I thought you would, sir. And the cheque?

GEORGE: Ten thousand. I'll write it straight away. And I agree to take on Barrett. You're a rogue, Jenkins, but a damn clever rogue, and you've beaten us, curse you.

JENKINS: Mr Barrett, do you accept the terms?

BARRETT: What's the alternative?

JENKINS: About ten to twelve years, I should think.

BARRETT: I accept.

GEORGE: Good, then we've all agreed. You've won the day, Jenkins, and there the matter rests. Now, if you'll just hand over the recording...

JENKINS: Stand back, sir, if you please. The recording stays with me - that is, until it's in the safe hands of my solicitor. He'll be instructed to play it only if I should die from causes other than natural.

GEORGE: Damn!

DOROTHY: Nice try, George.

GEORGE: (*To Dorothy*) I was trying to get the recording from him.

DOROTHY: Yes, I'd noticed.

GEORGE: You wouldn't like me to put it in the safe, would you, Jenkins? Save you carrying it around with you.

JENKINS: No, thank you, sir. But your thoughtfulness is much appreciated. And will be a sad loss to the nation. In your resignation speech tomorrow, I want you to mention your gift to NUDEBOT, and you will also take your leave officially of Miss Titworth. It's to be a clean break from all your underhand activities. Now then, madam, I'd like you to tidy this room, and Barrett, you will make breakfast for three. You can of course take your own in the kitchen. Meanwhile, you and I, sir, will prepare your farewell address. We must find some memorable phrases for you, filled with that characteristic integrity of yours. Get to work, all of you. Come along now.

*They all stand looking at him. He raises the gun high in the air.*

Jump!

*He fires, and they all jump.*

**Curtain.**

**END OF ACT TWO**

**EPILOGUE**

*A party political broadcast, as before.*

GEORGE: It's a decision which I've reached only after a titanic struggle. And believe me, if I could have gone on with my campaign, I would have done. It was ever my

dearest wish to see you, the great British public, happily prospering under my glorious leadership. But it cannot be. Because a public figure like myself, on the surface so strong and so massively in control, is nevertheless subject to pressures - powerful pressures, known only to those that are closest to him. These pressures have ultimately proved too powerful for me to resist, for they were as tangible as the recording now being made of this speech. But you will never know the heart-rending conflicts that have preceded this moment - and I wouldn't want you to know. Suffice it to say that I should never have taken this decision without the full participation of my wife and my staff. They have been constantly at my side throughout this last phase of my political career. Indeed, they refused to leave my side, and had it not been for them, I should never have faced you as I do today. First, my dear wife, Dorothy.

*She joins him.*

Twenty-six years we've been together, haven't we, darling?

DOROTHY: That's right, dear.

GEORGE: Good years. Happy years. And how they've shot past.

DOROTHY: Shot past indeed.

GEORGE: But I've been selfish, Dorothy. I've put my interests before yours, and had you not been the woman you are, I could so easily have lost you. Now we shall always be together. Like Romeo and Juliet.

DOROTHY: Or Bonnie and Clyde. .

GEORGE: (*mirthless*) Ha, ha, ha. And now, to our dear friend Jenkins.

*Jenkins joins them.*

Jenkins has been with us for more years than I care to remember. Haven't you, Jenkins?

JENKINS: Yes, master.

GEORGE: And you'll never leave us, will you, Jenkins?

JENKINS: No, master.

GEORGE: What would I have done without you, I wonder.

JENKINS: I shudder to think, master.

GEORGE: Jenkins has seized this opportunity himself to retire from active service, but he will live with us as an equal, sharing in the new life he has done so much to create. As an acknowledgment of our debt to him, my wife and I are donating respectively five and ten thousand pounds to NUDEBOT, a charity for retired and needy domestic servants. Both of us felt a direct compulsion to support this worthy cause. Now finally, I would like to introduce you to our new member of staff, Barrett. He hasn't been with us long, but already one might say he's broken in. He has a consistent record of service in many public institutions, and his principles have certainly helped to shape his convictions. Welcome to our happy home, Barrett.

BARRETT: Thank you, master.

GEORGE: Dear friends, you may wonder why, shortly before a general election, the great leader should not only resign, but should also take the trouble to present his wife and his staff to you. You may ask what this has to do with the major issues of our time. And I will tell you frankly, I don't know. Perhaps those who are nearest to me could answer better than I can. I know only that this is my mission. And I shall see it through. As I have always done. To the end.

*Jenkins whispers to him.*

Ah! I have one more sad duty to perform. I have to bid farewell to my secretary, Miss Titworth, whom I thank for the bottom...from the bottom of my heart for all her services. I hope she will find a satisfactory employer...of her software.

*"Land of Hope and Glory" in the background.*

Ladies and gentlemen, voters, friends, I leave you – reluctantly, humbly, sadly. My dream was to lead you to the milk and honey so long denied us by those abusers of power now masquerading as a government. I would have fought them on the beaches, on the landing grounds, in the fields and in the streets, but Fate climbed in through my window, and cried "Surrender." Surrender I must. Farewell to you all. Farewell, and love one another, as I love you.

*End of Epilogue, accompanied by "Land of Hope and Glory".*

**Lights out**

**The End**