

JEAN: What's this play again?

HAZEL: It's a thriller. I thought it was the sort of thing you'd enjoy.

JEAN: Oh, I do. Is it like 'Gaslight'?

HAZEL: I dunno. Maybe.

JEAN: Oh. I didn't like that.

HAZEL: We don't have to stay.

JEAN: No, no, we're here now. Who's in it?

HAZEL: *(sighing)* I'll get a programme.

HAZEL gets up, taking her purse, and steps past the couple at the end of the row. She exits at the rear of the stage. While she is gone, JEAN studies her foot in its slipper, pointing her toes and rotating her ankle. That done, she gets out another sweet. She then fidgets uncomfortably, and then switches to HAZEL's seat, causing some awkwardness with the person in seat 2. It also causes a domino effect in the seats behind her, with each successive row having to switch about to accommodate the altered heights of each person in the row in front. LIONEL extends a hand across MARTIN to JENNY

LIONEL: Purbright.

JENNY: What?

LIONEL: Purbright. My name, madam. Lionel Purbright, at your service. Bright by name, bright by nature. Known for my sunny disposition throughout the Royal Estate.

MARTIN: I thought you said you were a plumber?

LIONEL: Oh no, no. I was a stalwart employee of J. G. Harkins Plumbing Supplies for 30 years before my recent retirement, but always in an administrative capacity. Strictly white-collar work. Mr. Harkins himself was good enough to say to me that the selling of plumbing supplies would never be the same again, without my little pleasantries to everybody.

JENNY: *(to MARTIN)* Who is this?

MARTIN: This is Mr. Purbright, ex-purveyor of superior quality pipework, husband to Marjorie and apparently a resident of one of the royal homes.

LIONEL: Oh, dear me, no! Not that I wouldn't welcome the chance to live in some proximity to Her Royal Majesty, God bless her! No, no, I live in the Royal Estate. That currently comprises of Majesty Way, Princess Close, Queen Street and Duchy Walk, though we don't talk to them. There is talk of constructing Regal Road and a new bypass, but I don't think anything will come of it.

JENNY: *(ignoring LIONEL completely)* A matinee performance! Great idea, Martin! God! I need a fag.

JENNY starts burrowing in her bag and produces a packet of cigarettes and a lighter

MARTIN: Well, I can't say I'm working late again; it has to be a matinee.

LIONEL: *(to JENNY)* Oh, I do hope you're not going to light that, madam.

JENNY: Well, I could shove it up y...

MARTIN: Come on, Jenny. No smoking in here.

JENNY shoves the cigarette back into the pack with a bad grace, shoves the pack and lighter back into her bag, takes off her jacket and flings herself back in her seat. Then she takes out her mobile and starts texting, ignoring MARTIN in his attempts to get her attention

HAZEL enters carrying a programme and returns to her seat, to find JEAN sitting there. The couple at the end of the row have to move again. When HAZEL sits down in the remaining seat there is more consternation behind them and a further change about in seating arrangements in the rows behind

HAZEL: *(to the couple at the end of the row)* Sorry. *(To JEAN)* Mum, why did you move?

JEAN: I can't see properly. Can't we go and sit nearer? I won't hear a thing back here. What did you get us these seats for?

HAZEL: I thought you'd be fine, here. You always say you don't like being too near the stage.

JEAN: I get a crick in my neck, looking up all the time.

HAZEL: Well, there you are, then.

JEAN: But they were good seats at that show we went to with Phil. He did us proud with those tickets.

HAZEL: *(unenthusiastically)* Mmm.

JEAN: *(laughing)* Oh, I thought I'd die when they got me up on that stage!

HAZEL: I just wished it.

JEAN: Your face! When he got those balloons out, well ...*(she subsides into mirth)*

HAZEL: Yes, Mum.

JEAN: *(sobering up)* Oh, I s'pose we'd better stay here, then.

HAZEL: We can't just move. They're somebody else's seats.

JEAN: Well, there's no-one in 'em. That's the problem with matinees. Half the seats'll be empty. We could have sat in lots of other places.

HAZEL: You don't like being out at night! That's why I made it a matinee!
(JEAN tuts) Anyway, we're not moving. You did that to me last time. I've never been so embarrassed in my life.

JEAN: Yes, you have. Where's the programme?

HAZEL hands the programme over. She puts her purse away in her bag and puts the bag at her feet. JEAN nudges her

JEAN: You don't want to leave that there. It'll get nicked.

GERTRUDE hears this and looks annoyed. KATHLEEN also hears it and glares at JEAN. HAZEL notices this

HAZEL: *(to GERTRUDE)* Sorry. Apparently euthanasia's illegal. *(To JEAN)* Look, nobody's going to get it while I'm here, are they?

JEAN: You don't know. *(She begins to rummage in her bag)* Have you seen my glasses? I hope I haven't forgotten them. Oh, here we are. *(She puts on her glasses, opens the programme and begins to read aloud in a monotone)* Right. Let's see. 'Murder by Moonlight. Jerry and Marcia are entertaining guests at their weekend cottage when they hear a shot and discover the body of an unknown man in their summer-house. Who was the murdered man? Was he Marcia's estranged first husband? Was he their mysterious next-door neighbour? Or was he the prowler seen recently in the district? The only clues the police have are a scrap of yellow paper, a blue bead and a missing wristwatch.' Well, if it's missing they haven't got it, have they?

HAZEL: It's just a figure of speech.

JEAN: *(JEAN continues to peruse the programme while musing aloud)* Hmm. Sounds all right, I s'pose. The yellow paper's going to be the

will. Yellow paper's always a will. This bead – the blue bead – will be off of that Marcia's necklace and the watch'll have got some initials or something on it. That's probably why it's gone missing. There'll probably be an inspector bloke – ooh, yes, look – Inspector Galbraith. He'll find the watch, and see the initials and they'll be the first husband, what's still alive, so ... she'll have committed bigamy, and I bet she's tried to kill off her first husband, but she's got the wrong man, and it'll turn out she's killed some investigator, some private eye that was watching them for some reason.

HAZEL: *(rising)* Right, well, let's go, shall we? We don't need to see it now.

JEAN: Keep your hair on. I expect it'll be all right. Want a humbug?

HAZEL: *(sitting back down)* No, thanks.

JENNY: What is this rubbish, anyhow?

LIONEL: *(proffering his programme)* Allow me.

JENNY: To do what? *(She realizes, and takes the programme)* Oh! Ta. Oh, bloody hell, Martin! 'Murder by Moonlight'? *(She flips disgustedly through the programme)* You could at least have chosen something decent.

JEAN: So who's in this? Let's have a look. *(She studies the programme intently)* Ooh, I don't like the look of him.

HAZEL: Who?

JEAN: Him, that plays Jerry. He looks a bit sinister. He was in EastEnders, apparently.

HAZEL: Well, that'll explain it, then.

JEAN: *(snorting)* Look at this! The one that plays Marcia. I remember her from the telly, years ago, it was. She was in that thing with ... oh, what's his name? Blond bloke, really nice looking. Tom something? Tim? He played her boss and they had an affair. Oh, what was it called? Erm ... and he was married to that actress ... oh, erm ... Julia something. She was in that war-time series, a few years ago. I used to love that. Was it 'Wings of Desire' or something? She was in love with a pilot and he was shot down and ended up in a prisoner of war camp. No, I know! Edward Meredith!

HAZEL: I'm sorry. I've lost the will to live. What the hell are you drivelling on about?

JEAN: That Marcia!

HAZEL: You were just going on about some man called Edward!

JEAN: No, I wasn't. You want to watch out. You're a bit young to be losing the thread like that. I was talking about this actress who plays Marcia.

HAZEL: What about her?

JEAN: Weeelll, you can add 20 years to the photo. That's never a recent one.

HAZEL: I expect she wanted to look her best. Doesn't everyone?

JEAN: Well, you don't.

HAZEL: *(nettled)* What's that supposed to mean?

JEAN shrugs. HAZEL continues to look annoyed while JENNY and MARTIN are talking

JENNY: God! Let's go before it starts!

MARTIN: No. Why?

ANNOUNCER: Ladies and gentlemen, please take your seats. The curtain will rise in three minutes.

LIONEL: Oh, dear!

MARTIN: *(to LIONEL)* What?

LIONEL: My good lady still isn't here.

JENNY: Lucky bloody her. *(MARTIN quietly takes JENNY's hand. She takes it back)* I'm missing a meeting for this! Come on, Martin, let's go out to the bar.

MARTIN: *(to JENNY)* What's wrong?

LIONEL: Well, I've never known her be as late as this.

MARTIN: *(to LIONEL)* Not you!

JENNY: You really don't know, do you?

MARTIN: Oh ...

LIONEL: I think I do.

JENNY: *(to LIONEL)* Be quiet, you irritating little man!

MARTIN: (to JENNY) Shush!

JENNY flings the programme back at LIONEL

HAZEL: Come on. What does that mean: 'I don't want to look my best'?

JEAN: You were such a pretty thing when you were little. Always loved dressing up. Men aren't going to take a second glance at you, love, if you don't go in for a bit of window-dressing. They like a bit of colour, heels, a flash of leg.

HAZEL: And it's not every man can wear heels.

JEAN: You know perfectly well what I mean! I'm talking about getting them to notice you.

HAZEL: Well, you'd know!

JEAN: (*complacently*) I had my moments. And I kept the lads interested. Nothing too much. Just a hint.

HAZEL: A hint!? More like a socking great billboard! Like I said - I've seen the photos. You had the sort of cleavage that could have featured on Ski Sunday. And sorry to disappoint you, but women these days don't define their lives in terms of men, you know.

JEAN: Women in my day didn't, either. We just let them think we did.

HAZEL: This generation's more honest.

JEAN: Honest? Is that what they're calling it now? Being honest is a bit of a waste if your man isn't worth it. After all, Mark wasn't very honest, was he?

HAZEL: Yes, I thought we'd be getting to that before very long. After all we've been together now for – what? 45 minutes? – high time my brief and inglorious marriage got a mention.

JEAN: Did I say a word about your divorce?

HAZEL: You don't have to. You paused and raised an eyebrow. On you, that's the equivalent of about 20 minutes on my faults and foibles.

JEAN: So he hasn't been in touch then, recently?

HAZEL: (*shortly*) No.

JEAN: Does Stuart still miss him?

HAZEL: Stuart and I are fine. *(Pause)* He's in the school football team, did I tell you?

JEAN: That boy needs a father. And I don't suppose Mark's sending any money still?

HAZEL: He's been gone years, Mum! You know he doesn't bother to contact us; you know he doesn't support us; you know all of this and yet every time we meet you have to go over it all again. I was living with the man, you know. I did notice that he's there any more. It's not like I'm really forgetful and have to keep being reminded. *(Ironically)* I'll just make us both a nice cup of coffee – oh! Forgot again – he moved out! Now, remind me again: why are the car, the sofa and four suitcases missing? Oh, yes, he's bugged off! That'll be why the bank's foreclosing on the mortgage! Tch! Forget my own head next! Can we just drop this? Stuart and I are fine. He's fine at school. I'm fine at work. We're fine.

JEAN: Oh, of course. You've got your career.

HAZEL: Meaning?

JEAN: Nothing.

The lights begin to dim a little. Background conversation from the rest of the 'audience' begins to peter out.

JEAN: Phil sent me some lovely flowers for my birthday. Did you see them? In the kitchen?

HAZEL: *(unenthusiastically)* Yes, they're very nice.

JEAN: He sent a note with them. He couldn't get away from work, apparently. He's far too busy. Some new project he's in charge of.

A couple of late arrivals appear, trying to sneak in quietly for one of the rows further back. Those seated in that row all stand awkwardly, clutching bags and coats, while the new arrivals move along to their seats. JEAN twists round in her seat in order to study them openly, then turns back to HAZEL

JEAN: Yes, he's moving soon.

HAZEL: Really? Where to now?

JEAN: Big posh place along the London Road, he says. Five bedrooms! He's going to invite me to stay once he's settled in.

The 'audience' begins to clap. There is then a moment of silence and the 'play' begins. There is a background noise of voices talking from

the 'stage', but it is not possible to distinguish the words. Everybody is paying rapt attention, except for JENNY, who is concentrating on her mobile and JEAN, who is noisily rustling the sweet bag. HAZEL frowns at her

JEAN: *(quietly)* I can't get the wrapper off!

HAZEL snatches the sweet from JEAN and succeeds in unwrapping it. She hands the sweet to her mother and settles back in her seat. After a moment there is a prolonged sucking noise from JEAN. HAZEL gestures angrily to JEAN, who misunderstands this as a request for a sweet and proffers the bag again. In pushing it away HAZEL upsets it. She thrusts the bag at her mother, then has to grovel awkwardly, as though another row of seats is in front of her, in order to pick the sweets up. She dumps the sweets back into her mother's lap and exaggeratedly settles back into her seat. There is silence for a moment

JEAN: *(in a very loud whisper)* What's he saying?

HAZEL: *(more quietly)* He's talking about the people that are coming to stay.

JEAN: Oh! *(Pause, while she stares at the 'stage')* Who's he, then?

HAZEL: *(with exaggerated patience)* He's their friend, David.

MAN #1: Ssshhh!

There is silence from the 'audience' for a moment, but JEAN begins shuffling in her seat

HAZEL: *(quietly, but aggrieved)* Oh, what now?

JEAN: *(in loud whisper)* I can't get comfy. I think I'm sitting on a button.

They are being glared at by their neighbours. JEAN continues to shift about until finally she pulls the coat out from under her and puts it on top of her bag. She is quiet for a moment, then realizes that she's covered up her bag of sweets, which is in her bag. She tries to take them out quietly, but doesn't succeed. KATHLEEN glares across at her. JEAN finally settles with her bag on her lap, the coat on her bag and the sweets balanced on top. She stares ahead in fierce concentration for a moment

JEAN: *(in a loud whisper)* Do you know what's going on?

HAZEL: *(hissing)* Yes! You're being a pain in the arse!

JEAN: *(in a loud whisper)* No! On stage!

HAZEL: *(whispering angrily)* Who knows?

MAN #2: *(leaning forward and tapping HAZEL on the shoulder)* Would you be quiet, please?

JEAN grins mischievously and settles back in her seat.