

HYACINTH

1

EMMET: Determination. Artistic passion. I intend this production to be memorable. I want even the smaller parts to shine. I know the role's not enormous, but I want the audience to see an elegant, gracious Lady Malvern.

HYACINTH has re-entered, right, and she stops dead as she hears this. As she digests it her sudden interest is written clearly on her face.

EMMET has also stopped dead in his pacing and that he can read her face is also written on his face together with his appalled reaction.

HYACINTH: Elegant - gracious - person required to play a titled lady. Now who does that remind you of?

EMMET: Hyacinth I have to tell you that you'd hate . . .

HYACINTH: And I have to tell you that you must not look at me for the part - made in heaven though you might think it would be. You know I hate to disappoint you, Emmet, but you really must not ask.

EMMET: I won't. I promise. I won't ask. Tell her Liz. She can have it in writing.

HYACINTH: I really shouldn't. I have so many other commitments.

EMMET: I agree, you really shouldn't. Tell her, Liz.

LIZ: We understand, Hyacinth. Please don't feel you have to oblige us. There's your painting . . .

HYACINTH: But then again, I ought not to be selfish and think only of my own needs.

EMMET: Yes, you should. Of course, you should. It's the artist's duty to be selfish.

HYACINTH: How many glittering gowns would Lady Malvern have to wear? I can do gowns. And, of course, she'd need something simpler but chic to wear round the house. What do you think, Mr Milson?

EMMET: He thinks you ought to be selfish.

MILLY: It's no good asking me. If it's not computers I get things wrong. Marriage for instance.

HYACINTH: Poor Mr Milson. If I joined the cast, you'd have someone to lean on.

EMMET: We have Liz for leaning on.

LIZ: Story of my life.

HYACINTH: Look at Emmet. He's quite distraught. He's so disappointed at my not being available. How can I treat him like that?

EMMET: You can. You can treat me like that. Tell her Liz.

HYACINTH: Poor Emmet. Of course, I'll do it. I'll be your elegant Lady Malvern. No, no, please, I want no thanks. Although I would expect to give you my input with regard to her wardrobe.

EMMET: Gone. The part's gone. I'm sorry, it's gone. Tell her it's gone.

LIZ: Apparently it's gone, Hyacinth.

HYACINTH: Gone?

EMMET: I'm offering it to Doreen Pringle.

HYACINTH: Doreen Pringle? That little mouse. Well, of course, you know I like Doreen Pringle. I once almost invited her to one of my candlelight suppers until I found someone more suitable. She's an absolute dear but not if you're looking for elegance.

LIZ: But, Hyacinth, what about your painting?

HYACINTH: Well, I'm sure I can take a little time off for other interests. Picasso did. Very extensively from what one hears.

EMMET: You'd hate the part, Hyacinth. You'd also have to play another part as well, you see. It's hard work. Time consuming.

HYACINTH: He worries about me so. Worry not, Emmet. Your problems are solved. I look forward to working with you, Mr Milson. I'm so pleased that you've found your way to the right sort already. *(To EMMET as she pats his stricken cheek)* I promise you, Emmet, I'll be a Lady Malvern you'll remember.

HYACINTH exits, right, singing happily "There's No Business Like Show Business."

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2

HYACINTH enters, right.

HYACINTH: I don't think the vicar even heard me. Why else would he shoot off? I suppose I speak too softly. You must learn to use your voice now, Hyacinth, and be a credit to the acting profession. *(She spots someone in the hall and waves. Her voice rips out.)* Hello, Mrs Partington . . . It's Hyacinth . . . Bookay. Here - on the stage. She's looking every way but this. Poor dear, she does need those glasses. Do have a look at the arts' exhibition, Mrs Partington. I'd escort you but I'm rather busy here. Playing Lady Malvern. *(Frowns)* Another one gone. Is my voice failing?

She belts out a couple of mee mee mees. A crash of something falling behind the curtain - a muffled expletive.

HYACINTH's phone rings. The ringtone is "The World is Alive to the Sound of Music."

HYACINTH: You have reached the personal mobile of . . . Richard! You interrupted me . . . I think people are judged by the way they answer their phones . . . I'll forgive you this time but I can't afford any lapse of manners now I'm being Lady Malvern . . . I know I haven't started yet but one has to prepare. I have to feel like Lady Malvern . . . Well, how nice of you to say so, Richard. Yes, it's true I suppose I have always behaved a little like a Lady Malvern. Is it just what you think, or will other people have noticed? . . . Really? Well, there you are,

you see. It was worth what we spent on those his and her towels for the guest bathroom . . . Daddy's where, dear? . . . Why is he coming here? (*Looks around and lowers her voice*) Tell me he's not wearing his gas mask again? . . . Good. I ought really to confiscate it but then he'll panic when he hears a siren . . . Richard, don't be unkind. It's only natural that a siren makes him take a few precautions. Just make sure he doesn't order anymore barbed wire. He showed you what pictures? . . . The pictures he wants to enter in the arts' exhibition - oh Daddy, how marvellous. He's been painting . . . Not painting? Postcards from his army days in Egypt. Well, why not? A few views of the pyramids . . . Not the pyramids? . . . (*As she listens, she reels in shock*) Are they in a plain envelope? . . . Couldn't you take them off him? . . . You tried to but he blows his whistle? . . . How loud? . . . A wartime one they used to use for invasion warnings? Oh, I'll see to him. But I could do without a whistling Daddy at the moment. I don't want any invasion warnings when Mrs Debden is here.

She puts her phone away and sighs.

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3

DEBDEN: I say - you there! You said the Bucket woman was this way.

With her back still turned, HYACINTH winces and speaks through gritted teeth.

HYACINTH: Bookay?

DEBDEN: What was that? Speak up.

HYACINTH sighs and realises she has no escape. She stops peering over her glasses - sets them firmly in place - then turns to face MRS DEBDEN adopting an attitude of near imbecility behind which she has decided to hide.

HYACINTH: (*Very bad village-idiot accent*) That were 'Good Day', mum. I were bidding you good day. As I were always raised to do with my betters. Specially when they talks nice like you.

DEBDEN: I see - well good day to you. Though why are you speaking like that? You sounded perfectly normal vocally at least when you were speaking to the dummy.

HYACINTH: Ah, that would be my acting voice, mum. I 'as to rehearse for my part in this play.

DEBDEN: Are you very badly sighted? I'm over here.

HYACINTH: Ah, there we go then. I expects we'll get along swimmingly now I've got the direction right.

DEBDEN: I suppose one has to admire the way you potter on despite your disabilities. Perhaps you can help me. I'm looking for . . . Can you hear me? You're not deaf as well?

HYACINTH: No, that's the vicar, mum. I'm sharp as a pin.

DEBDEN: I'm afraid you do rather give the impression that not much is sinking in.

HYACINTH: Don't you believe it, my dear, I'm ready for any little service. Go on. Try me. Give 'er a shot.

DEBDEN: Do you know Mrs Bucket?

HYACINTH: Only as Bookay, mum.

DEBDEN: You're losing me again. Have you seen her?

HYACINTH: I don't see too well on account of the lack of vitamins. And then there was the accident when I fell off the milking stool.

DEBDEN: Not very high, surely.

HYACINTH: We were on the barn roof, mum. Old Buttercup 'ad been up there since the flood. Fair took to it she did.

DEBDEN: Hallucinates too! Ye gods, woman you've got the full package. Are you able to work here?

HYACINTH: Oh, they lets me come to keep warm as long as I stay away from 'ealthy people.

DEBDEN: Why is that?

HYACINTH: It's the disease, mum. I passes it terrible. I only 'as to look at some folk and you can fair see the spots arriving.

MRS DEBDEN backs a pace. She indicates over her shoulder.

DEBDEN: Can I get back the way I came?

HYACINTH: Oh argh, mum. Door at the end. I could take you.

DEBDEN: No, no. I'll find my way.

MRS DEBDEN hurries back to the exit, right.

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