

3.

*(Piers sitting in the armchair)*

Elizabeth *(offstage)* – Piers. We're back.

*(enter Elizabeth and Abby)*

Elizabeth – Hello, darling. I'm sorry we took so long, the train was late and –

Piers – Abby my dear. How are you?

Abby – Grandpa.

Piers – What, no kiss for your old grandfather?

*(Abby goes to him, kisses him awkwardly, without much affection)*

Piers – Yes, that's right. Stand back child, let me have a look at you. My, my, you've grown since last we saw you. Turn around. Go on my dear. *(Abby turns reluctantly)* Look at you now, all grown up. How is school?

Abby – Fine.

Piers – Yes, good. We must talk about your plans. Your grandmother is still insisting on you staying on for the sixth form. It is entirely your choice of course Abby, but I thought, I have heard of a very good place, just right for a girl of your abilities. The headmaster is an old friend of mine. What do you think?

Abby – I don't know.

Piers – No, no, of course. Well, we can discuss it later.

Elizabeth – I think Abby could probably do with a cup of tea.

Abby – Yes, thank you.

Elizabeth – I'll just go and make some shall I?

Piers – Yes. Sit down, child. Sit. *(exit Elizabeth)* We have so much to talk about.

Abby – Grandma says the school will still do very nicely.

Piers – Yes, well, your grandmother has very strange views on the suitability of schools. The politics of the headmaster is more important in her opinion than the quality of the education. My dear, you are so much better than that. How is your father?

Abby – Fine thanks.

Piers – Any news of your mother?

Abby – No.

Piers – Elizabeth has been so looking forward to meeting you.

Abby – She seems nice.

Piers – Yes.

Abby – She's very young.

Piers – Yes, isn't she.

Abby – Why don't you respond to Daddy's letters?

Piers – He is not well, Abby, you must see that.

Abby – Grandma looks after him.

Piers – He needs professional help.

Abby – He is seeing a psychotherapist.

Piers – Well, I wouldn't set too much store by that.

Abby – It seems to help him.

Piers – A lot of nonsense if you ask me. Talking never cured cancer. Your father has a disease. It needs to be cut out, got rid of.

Abby – Grandma says there's no such thing as mental illness.

Piers – Then your grandmother is a fool.

Abby – It's all society, class oppression you know.

Piers – Your grandmother sees everything through the distorting lens of socialism. Anyway, surely John should be one of the oppressors. He'll be a lord one day, health permitting.

Abby – Oh, he says he's given all that up.

Piers – You can't give it up, Abby, it's a duty.

Abby – I'm not sure I think much of that word, 'duty'. Grandma says you were once a socialist.

Piers – A long time ago.

Abby – What happened?

Piers – I visited Russia.

Abby – With grandma. She talks about it often. She says it opened her eyes to the beauty of socialism.

Piers – Then she must have seen a very different place.

Abby – Perhaps she just sympathises with the workers in a way you never can.

Piers – Your grandmother is not quite the daughter of the proletariat she would have you believe, Abby. You don't want to trust everything she says. I despise injustice. I have made it my life's work to fight it whenever I can. The good of humanity is my highest, I would almost say my only, concern.

*(Abby tries and fails to suppress a smile)*

Piers – What is it Abby? What is so funny?

Abby – Nothing grandpa.

Piers – No, come on, out with it.

Abby – Grandma always says you are a pompous prig. I think I see what she means.

*(Elizabeth enters with tea things on a tray)*

Elizabeth – Well, here we are. *(she sets the tea things on the table and sits)* What's the matter? Has something happened?

Abby – We were just discussing politics.

Elizabeth – Then I'm not surprised you look so miserable. Really, Piers, do you think that is an appropriate topic of discussion for a young girl?

Piers – I think Abby is more than capable of holding her own.

Abby – Thank you for the tea, Elizabeth. The tea set looks lovely.

Elizabeth – Why thank you my dear. It was a wedding present from the Cliftons. Sir Alec Clifton and his wife. You'd like them, such lovely people, don't you think, Piers?

Piers – I don't think Abby is fond of pompous prigs.

Elizabeth – Don't worry, Abby, they're not pompous at all. They're just Tories.

*(Piers catches Abby's eye and they both smirk)*

Elizabeth – What? Some Tories are very nice people.

Piers – I'm sure they are, my dear, I'm sure they are.

Abby – I like your dress.

Elizabeth – Thank you. A present.

Abby – From the Cliftons?

Elizabeth – Oh no, from the Batemans.

Abby – Are they Tories too?

Elizabeth – Oh, good lord, no, they're bohemians darling.

Piers (*can't help himself*) – Hah!

Elizabeth – Abby, you are making fun of me.

Abby – I'm sorry.

Piers – Don't you believe it. She's not sorry at all.

Elizabeth – Well, she should be. It's very rude you know.

Piers – I think a bit of rudeness is only to be admired in one so young. It shows spirit.

Elizabeth – I don't think spirit is entirely a good thing.

Abby – Elizabeth, I am sorry. I didn't mean to be rude. It's just that –

Elizabeth – Lets just leave it at the apology, shall we, and we'll say no more about it.

(*pause*)

Elizabeth – How is your tea?

Abby – It's very nice thank you Elizabeth.

Elizabeth – Good. If you two could just stop smirking, I'm sure we will all get along famously.