

Blindsight

A Play by

ANNE WOLRIGE GORDON

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Characters

BILL, THE DOORMAN
STELLA
MARTINE
MARTINE'S MOTHER
MARTINE'S FATHER
HERMIONE HURST
LOUISA SIM
THE HON. PETER CONSTANTINE
JOURNALIST
PERCY
SIR GIDEON KELMAN
DR MARQUIS
JOHN MARQUIS
ERIC SWINLER
LAWRENCE EASTON

This is an allegorical play about modern society. It depicts part of every country and every human being.

BLINDSIGHT was first produced at the Westminster Theatre, opening on 28 May, 1970 with the following cast:

BILL, the doorman	Philip Newman
STELLA, a blind girl	Carolyn Courage
MARTINE	Sharon Duce
MARTINE'S MOTHER	Chris Channer
MARTINE'S FATHER	Chris Johnston
HERMIONE HURST, a widow	Joyce Heron
LOUISA SIM	Mary Jones
JOURNALIST	Tim Buckland
PETER CONSTANTINE, a statesman	Richard Grant
PERCY, a drunk	Michael Martin
SIR GIDEON KELMAN	Philip Friend
DR MARQUIS	Michael Malnick
JOHN MARQUIS, his son	Paul Hastings
ERIC SWINLER, a stockbroker	Geoffrey Colvile
LAWRENCE EASTON, a philanthropic organiser	Antony Higginson

Directed by Henry Cass
Settings by W. Cameron Johnson
Lighting by Louis Fleming

ACT ONE

This play is an allegory. It therefore presents reality in terms of a fable. The people are real people, but they depict the various parts of society rather than themselves. What they do should not be taken literally at all times. The action must be made credible, but never lose the essence of myth and the intangible, which is always part of allegory.

The tension in this play is between extremities of good and evil. The blind people, except for Stella, become part of evil. They chose blindness. They do not want to see, or they are blind to others. This is no reflection on blind people, but indicates a state of mind which has nothing to do with physical health.

The curtain opens on a bare stage and an umbrella stand which holds several white walking sticks.

A doorman in uniform enters.

DOORMAN Well, here we all are. Perhaps I ought to tell you who I am. I'm the Doorman. No – not the Doorman of the Ritz or of Claridges, or even of Buckingham Palace – although sometimes I wish I was – all that marching up and down, “Present Arms!” “At ease!” Lovely – but I'm just the Doorman, without a door.

(A light comes up on a young girl. She has a white stick with which she is feeling her way down the aisle of the theatre)

Come along, my dear. Do help her one of you. I find it hard to believe but there are people these days who won't help a blind person across a road, or carry her shopping, or give up their seat on a bus.

(If nobody does help her, the doorman goes down and gives her a hand up the steps on to the stage. If they do help her, he thanks them warmly)

There are six steps here, and we've made it. People don't seem to care much these days. They don't want to get involved.

(Stella moves slowly round the stage)

It's a hard world. There are plenty of people who are dead keen on giving food to the starving millions, but when it comes to helping somebody right next door to them, they won't lift a finger. They're not interested. They just see what they want to see.

STELLA I often wonder what it is like to see.

DOORMAN Oh, well now, sometimes it's heaven on earth to see. When the trees get their first green shoots in the springtime, or you pick a snowdrop when there's no other flower in bloom, or you watch the waves toss themselves high into the air on a rough day, or see a child take its first stumbling steps. Those are the days when it's grand to have eyes to see. And then other days – well, I wouldn't like to tell you the things I see. I've seen men die. I've seen children who just got turned out in the streets and the door slammed in their faces to play in the gutter. I've seen women as rich as Rockefeller and hard as nails and sour as quinine under the make up. I've seen young people who look older than me, and old people who keep trying so hard to be young so it hurts to look at 'em. I've seen people with perfectly good eyes who can't see anything – even what's right in front of them.

STELLA Are they blind?

DOORMAN Yes, dear. Blind as bats. They don't look it, mind you, but they're a good deal more blind than you'll ever be. Oh, I could tell you some tales.

(The light fades and comes up on a couple standing arm in arm. They stand stiffly like the figures on top of a wedding cake. In front of them with her back to the audience stands their daughter, Martine. Organ music is playing a suitable hymn – "Love Divine, all loves excelling". At first loudly, and then softly as the doorman begins to speak)

DOORMAN There was this young couple. It was a June

wedding. I stood here and watched them as they left the service. Everybody cheering and the sun shining down on them – just like a blessing it was. It lifted your heart up like a bird. But then weddings do that to me.

STELLA They must have been very happy.

DOORMAN They were. They had a daughter, Martine. A lovely girl. It looked as if everything was going right for them, but then . . . well, it happens to so many of them now, doesn't it?

STELLA What happened?

(The organ music stops abruptly. The couple break arms. The wife turns on her husband)

DOORMAN The first years were all love and kisses.

MOTHER Our daughter was born – a lovely child.

FATHER And that made us quite happy – for a while.

DOORMAN Then they spoke to each other less and less. Their interests grew apart. Martine was trying to pass her exams. She needed peace and quiet. But the rows between her parents got worse.

MOTHER I don't know why you expect me to stay in night after night. We never go out, hardly ever see people. It's that bloody television or nothing.

FATHER That's all I want after a day's hard work.

MOTHER What do you think I do all day? I've had to do everything. I've slaved for you night and day; I've brought up your flaming kid; gone out to work—

FATHER Shut up!

MOTHER And paid the bills.

FATHER *(Slapping wife's face)* Will you stop going on about money. Go on, get out. Do what you like, but just leave me alone.

MOTHER Right! That's all I needed. I'm through with you.

I'm getting out. You can look after your own blasted daughter. (*Exit*)

MARTINE Mum, don't go, please. (*Turning to her father*) Dad, go after her. Bring her back. You mustn't let her go like this.

FATHER It's all your fault. We were all right till you came along. It's a pity you were ever born. Get out of my sight. (*Exits*)

MARTINE Oh, no, no. (*Puts her hands to her eyes as she becomes blind. The doorman hands her a white stick*)

DOORMAN Here you are, my girl. This may help a little. (*Martine taps her way and sits next to Stella. Stella takes her hand*)

DOORMAN And I've seen fine people destroy themselves without even realising they were doing it.

STELLA Why should they do that?

DOORMAN There was this young woman – she was bright as a spring morning.

(*A light comes up on Mrs Hurst*)

MRS HURST I was pretty when I was a girl, or so they told me, and I thought life wonderful – romantic. I was determined to get everything I could out of it. I wanted to enjoy every experience – love, money, sun, furs, parties, expensive restaurants – the lot. My first husband was a farmer. I was only seventeen when I married him. I had to. It was all trees and grass and cows, and all the talk I ever heard was about trees and grass and cows or cabbages and manure. I wanted to dance, wear pretty clothes, be admired, yes, flirt. Why not! When you're young, you want to live. I found my next man. We were dancing together. (*She is dancing to the music of an Ivor Novello waltz*) I looked into his eyes – you know how it is – and that was it. He was successful, rich and married, but I didn't care. (*Music stops*) I knew this was where I was meant to be, and I got him in

the end. It was everything I ever dreamed – a house in town, one in the country; parties, theatres, even the opera (which I couldn't bear really – all that terrible singing, but it was cultural). But something was wrong. There was no love. We just used each other, and somehow I never belonged – and I was on my own again, looking round for my next. He picked me up one night when I was losing a lot of money at the Casino in Cannes – corney, eh, but true. He was one of the jet set – a senior member. Yes, he was much older than I was. He was lonely, kind, considerate and wanted to squeeze as much fun as possible out of the last few years of his life. We were always travelling, living in aeroplanes and hotels, and there were times when I didn't know whether I was in Paris, London or New York. The hotels looked exactly the same to me. I met thousands of people but had no friends – real friends – and I never really got to know my husband. We were too busy to get to know each other. And then it happened. A heart attack during a cruise, and it was all over. I couldn't face the future. I was so lonely. I needed help. (*She becomes blind. The doorman goes up and gives her a white stick*)

DOORMAN Here you are, Mrs Hurst. You'll want this. This way.

(*He helps her across. Mrs Hurst goes down stage right, past Martine and Stella, and stands a little apart looking out at the audience*)

MARTINE Did she have any children?

DOORMAN A daughter, I believe. By the first husband. Don't think I ever heard what happened to her. Mrs Hurst never seemed to mention her at all.

MARTINE Think of having a mother like that.

DOORMAN It's sometimes worse having a mother who worships the ground you tread on. I've seen plenty of them. They think they've given birth to a blooming genius when it's just an ordinary kid.

(The light comes up on an elderly lady. She sits in a chair and talks to the audience. Her voice is soft and sweet – a little unreal)

MRS SIM We knew there was something different about him the moment he was born. He was special, you know. Not like other children. He spoke so early, and he used such long words. He never said, "Ta" and "Da da", always "Thank you" and "Father" right from the beginning. You couldn't treat him like a child. It wasn't right. He was brilliant. They said at school he would go far, and not to restrict him in any way. So, we always gave him what he wanted at home. He only asked for sensible things, you see. Some people said we were spoiling him. But you couldn't spoil him. He was so sensitive. I said to my husband, "You know, Jim, we've produced a genius." I don't remember ever getting cross with him. He was always so good – so kind. So loving to me.

DOORMAN And so horribly cruel to everybody else.

MRS SIM Never. He was never cruel.

DOORMAN Not at first he wasn't. But after he got hooked on those drugs, there was no stopping him.

MRS SIM That's not true. I would have known.

DOORMAN That dope used to send him quite wild. Off his head he was. He had a great friend, you see. They went everywhere together. They had a fight one night with knives, and her son was yelling, "Kill! Kill! Kill!" He didn't know what he was doing.

MRS SIM My boy never fought. He wouldn't hurt a fly.

DOORMAN Stuck a knife, he did, right through his friend's heart. Then he just stood there, quiet like, as if all the life had gone out of him.

(Louisa Sim gets up. She walks across the stage towards Mrs Hurst, talking to herself. Bill hands her a white stick)

MRS SIM It couldn't be my boy. I know my boy. It couldn't possibly be him. He wouldn't do anything so wicked.

DOORMAN She never would agree that her boy was guilty, even after he was convicted.

STELLA Was he guilty?

DOORMAN Yes, indeed he was. But she'll never admit it.

MRS HURST She should be made to admit it. No wonder the country is full of criminals.

MARTINE I suppose you're perfect.

STELLA Don't let's quarrel.

DOORMAN Then there was the Right Honourable Peter Constantine. Had a friend, he did, served in the Cabinet with him. They were as close as two peas in a pod. Went everywhere together. Then some Cabinet secrets were passed for money. It happened in Mr Constantine's house. Right under his very nose.

(A light comes up on Constantine – a smooth, polished politician. He is being interviewed by a journalist)

JOURNALIST Excuse me, sir, have you any statement to make?

CONSTANTINE None whatsoever.

JOURNALIST Is it true that you will be offering your resignation?

CONSTANTINE Certainly not. Why should I?

JOURNALIST The secrets were passed in your house, sir. Are you suggesting you knew nothing about it?

CONSTANTINE Unlike you, I don't make it my business to pry into other people's affairs. Michael Chambers is a friend of mine – a dear friend. He assures me that nothing illegal has taken place.

JOURNALIST And you believe him?

CONSTANTINE I have no reason to doubt his word. Cabinet Ministers are not in the habit of lying, you know. We leave that to you fellows.

JOURNALIST But surely, sir, this could be serious for you. Mr

Chambers was associating with some very odd people in your house.

CONSTANTINE I have never believed that a man's private life had anything to do with his public service. It would be the beginning of a police state if it did.

JOURNALIST So you knew all about these meetings?

CONSTANTINE I knew, yes. They have not taken place for some time. I really don't see what this has to do with the present situation.

JOURNALIST And you have nothing further to add.

CONSTANTINE Nothing at all.

(The light fades on the two men)

MRS HURST But he did resign, didn't he?

DOORMAN Yes. He had to. It was the end of his career.

STELLA Did he know about the secrets?

DOORMAN Sure he did. But he lied for the sake of his friend.

MRS SIM I don't think you should say that. The papers make up all sorts of untrue stories about people. I don't believe half of them.

MRS HURST There must have been something in it, though. No smoke without fire.

MRS SIM You're trying to make out that he's some sort of a traitor.

DOORMAN I'm not suggesting that, ma'am.

MRS SIM Mr Constantine is a fine man. I think it's very spiteful of you.

DOORMAN It's just that he's never quite seen things the same since.

(Constantine enters. He is blind. The doorman hands him a white stick)

DOORMAN Lovely day, sir.

CONSTANTINE I suppose it is. I wouldn't really know.

DOORMAN No, sir. I understand.

(Constantine taps his way to join the others)

STELLA He sounds terribly sad.

(As they talk a drunk enters unsteadily. He leans heavily on the doorman. His name is Percy. He is dressed in a flashy tweed jacket and yellow waistcoat)

PERCY Sad? Sad? Who's sad? I tell you, I'm feeling on top of the world. Top, top, top of the world.

DOORMAN Poor old Percy.

PERCY Hello, Bill. What's doing?

DOORMAN You need some help, Percy. Where are you off to?

PERCY Never you mind, Bill. Never you mind. I'm not telling a soul where I'm going. I'm going to live it up, at a hundred miles an hour.

DOORMAN You're in no fit state to drive, Percy.

PERCY Rubbish, Bill. Nonsense.

DOORMAN You're drinking a lot too much these days.

PERCY Must, you know, Bill. Can't face it otherwise. Wicked world this. Must drink. Must forget it all . . .

(Percy sways off stage)

STELLA Can't somebody stop him?

MRS HURST I wouldn't interfere if I were you.

MRS SIM It will all end up all right in the end, dear. He'll come to no harm.

(A car door slams. An engine starts up)

MARTINE I hope you're right.

(There is a screech of brakes. A crash. Screams. Silence)

DOORMAN Well, that's that, I'm afraid. I've told him scores of times, but he just couldn't lay off the bottle. It's terrible the way some men take to drink like that.

(Percy re-enters. He is blind. The doorman hands him a white stick)

PERCY It wasn't my fault you know, Bill. I couldn't see a thing.

DOORMAN No, Percy. You were drunk – blind drunk, I'm afraid.

PERCY Oh no, Bill. You've got it all wrong. It was a mistake. The whole thing was a terrible mistake.

DOORMAN Well, some folk kill others by mistake and some do it on purpose. But it all ends up the same way. More's the pity of it.

(Percy taps his way over to the others)

(Sir Gideon Kelman enters. He is a man in his early sixties. He is well dressed in a sober kind of way. He is unmarried, a sensitive person, having devoted his life to the arts and charities. He stops for a moment to talk to the doorman)

SIR GIDEON Good morning, Bill. I haven't seen you for a long time.

DOORMAN No indeed, sir. It's been a while since you were last here. Business good, sir?

SIR GIDEON Fair, Bill, fair. But I shall not be at it for much longer.

DOORMAN Oh, sir. I hope you're not retiring yet. You're just in your prime I should say, sir.

SIR GIDEON Thank you, Bill. Sometimes one has no choice in the matter.

(Sir Gideon steps into a spotlight where there is a single chair. Beside it stands Dr Marquis, a specialist. He is in his fifties, dark and well groomed, and efficient. He greets Gideon)

MARQUIS I got the final results of the tests yesterday.

SIR GIDEON You don't need to tell me what they say, Mark. I know already.

MARQUIS Just listen a moment, Gideon . . .

SIR GIDEON It's going to be a pretty eternal moment, isn't it?

MARQUIS It could be a great deal worse. I've known you a

long time. In fact, I must know you better than any of my patients. It is never easy to give a patient the facts, even one as courageous and sensible as you.

SIR GIDEON Oh, come on, Mark. Surely you can tell me the truth.

MARQUIS Of course, Gideon. I would never hold it from you. But it's a difficult job to tell a man that he is never going to see again. That, in spite of all that medical science can do, there is no hope of saving either of his eyes. It's harder still when those eyes belong to a friend whom you admire, and whom you would give anything to help.

SIR GIDEON That's a kind thing to say, Mark. But you need not have worried. I've known for weeks that I was going blind. Every time I came here to see you, you handed out hope, and I knew it was false. A veil has been coming down over these eyes, and day after day that veil gets thicker and stronger. The days get shorter and darker.

MARQUIS I think we could relieve you of some discomfort.

SIR GIDEON Good lord, no. I don't mind discomfort. I want to live through this experience as I've lived through life, tasting and savouring each moment to the full. You know, Mark, you never realise what a miracle it is to see – until you face the certainty of never seeing again. All my life I've had to work, and I've made enough money to relax, to plan my future with leisure and precision. Suddenly my world has been turned upside down. I race from one event to another. I stare at people in the streets until they think I'm mad. I kick leaves in the gutter as I used to when I was a boy. I'm desperate to remember the sights which will so soon be sounds and nothing else.

MARQUIS It will be a very big adjustment, I'm afraid, Gideon.

SIR GIDEON I realise that. But you know, Mark, I've no family. All I have is my money. I want to spend it wisely and well, and that's where I need your help.

MARQUIS Now look, Gideon, I may be a specialist in medicine, but I'm certainly not one in finance. I would never advise you about money.

SIR GIDEON I don't want your advice on my money, Mark. I want you to spend it.

MARQUIS That sounds a most attractive suggestion, Gideon, but hardly one which I could accept.

SIR GIDEON I want you to buy a house for me, Mark. It must be large and beautiful. Spend as much as you like on it. Make the gardens a paradise; the rooms elegant; put in every modern comfort; but above all, make it a masterpiece for living without eyes.

MARQUIS You're going to find a house that size very lonely. Surely something smaller and nearer the centre of things would suit you far better.

SIR GIDEON I'm not thinking of myself only. You see, I want to live in it, but I want to live in it with other blind people – people who have suffered more severely than I have. I want you to find those people.

MARQUIS Now look, Gideon. You've spent half your life thinking of other people. Surely this is the time to think of yourself.

SIR GIDEON I find that prospect very bleak. I want friends, Mark. I need friends.

MARQUIS I don't see how you can expect me to pick your friends for you.

SIR GIDEON Well, if you like, form a committee. With unlimited money, you'll have the opportunity of doing something worthwhile for a branch of medicine that you really care about.

MARQUIS I'm sorry, Gideon. But I can't do it.

SIR GIDEON Why not?

MARQUIS If you want my honest opinion, the money would

be far better spent on research rather than subsidising the hopeless cases.

SIR GIDEON That's not a very charitable thing to say.

MARQUIS No. But it makes sound sense. When you have spent all your life in medicine, you stop being sentimental about these things.

SIR GIDEON Even when it would mean something to an old friend?

MARQUIS Gideon, we need money for so many more important things. Discoveries which could affect the future of mankind.

SIR GIDEON And what about the present condition of mankind? Think about it, Mark. You may change your mind.

(Sir Gideon leaves. He walks slowly feeling his way. The doorman hands him a white stick)

DOORMAN Oh no, sir, not you. Never thought it would come to this. I'm sorry, I must say.

SIR GIDEON *(Tapping his way forward)* It's dark, terribly dark. Strange how one longs for the sun when day is like night. What I would give to see a tree once more, the veins in the leaves, the winter branches – just simple things which now have become memories. The glory of colour and movement which is all past. Past. I mustn't think about the past. I must think of the future. I can still hear the sounds. I can still smell the fragrances and feel the cold and warmth of the world I loved.

(As Sir Gideon talks, the others move towards him, tapping with their sticks. They surround him and the tapping gets louder. The doorman stands with his hands behind his back. He is not part of this scene, as he sees, and therefore cannot share in the life of the blind)

SIR GIDEON What's that noise? Who's there? What do you want? Come along, speak up.

(Stella goes forward and takes hold of Sir Gideon's hand)

SIR GIDEON Who are you?

STELLA I'm Stella. I'm blind. I would like to help you.

SIR GIDEON Help me, my child? It is I who must help you.

STELLA Oh no. It is much worse for you. You have seen. You have experienced the brilliance of the earth and lost it. I've lost nothing. Everything I have experienced by touch or sound has been for me a gain. Tell me, what are colours?

SIR GIDEON How can I tell you that?

STELLA Didn't you see them only yesterday?

SIR GIDEON Yes. But how can I explain them to you? They are vivid. As vivid as touching warmth and cold, or the smell of wood smoke on an autumn evening.

STELLA They must be lovely.

SIR GIDEON Yes, they are. But who are you? Who are all these people?

MARTINE We are the blind. We can't see at all.

CONSTANTINE We feel our way with care.

MRS HURST Day and night are the same to us.

MRS SIM We want to keep the comfort of the dark.

SIR GIDEON You want to remain blind?

PERCY We have no option, sir. It's just our luck.

SIR GIDEON It's strange I should meet you so soon.

STELLA Why?

SIR GIDEON Because I think I can help you. Come with me.

DOORMAN They talk about the blind leading the blind. Can't say I've ever seen it happen before. But then that girl has something about her.

(As the doorman talks, Stella takes Sir Gideon's hand and leads him off, followed by the rest. There is a blare of loud pop music. The spotlight comes up on Dr Marquis and his son, John. A radio is playing loud and clear. John Marquis is the epitome of

the eternal student. He has untidy hair, and wears tight jeans and a vivid shirt. He has never had a job, although he might be in his late twenties. He sits on the floor and doodles with a pencil on a note pad, and his head sways in time to the beat)

DOORMAN Listen to that row. Just as smoking kills the taste buds in your mouth, that noise kills the think buds in your brain. You never can tell with young John Marquis. Sometimes it's meditation for days on end. And then this racket for a week or two.

(Bill goes and sits on a bench with his hands on his ears, and the noise of the radio blares even louder)

MARQUIS For God's sake, turn that off.

(John makes no reply)

MARQUIS I'm tired. Turn it off, John. *(Marquis goes over and snaps off the radio)*

JOHN Oh, Lord. You do bore me.

MARQUIS You might be less bored if you found something to do with yourself. I find my life fascinating. The only sore spot on the horizon is you.

JOHN At least your sore spot is on the horizon. A lot of other people's sore spots have totally disappeared.

MARQUIS I don't want to quarrel with you.

JOHN Why not. Let's have a gorgeous row.

MARQUIS It's not funny. I know you think everything I've ever done is worthless. But you just sit on your rump and do nothing.

JOHN That's just it. "Nothing" is the answer.

MARQUIS It may be for you, but it is not for me. I've gone without a lot of the things which you take for granted today. I put you first. I made a mistake. I should have put myself first and it might have knocked a little sense into you.

JOHN Look, you've always put your medicine before me. You

even put medicine before my mother, so you lost her to another man. Bad luck. But don't blame me for it.

MARQUIS That's past, John. Nothing is gained from bringing it all back.

JOHN That's right. Avoid it. Don't look at it. I'm supposed to face reality – to earn my keep, to get a job; to take a long hard look at myself. But you never have to. You just want to keep everything the same because it suits you best. Well, I want to blow the whole damn lot to pieces.

MARQUIS And just what are you going to put in its place?

JOHN That, my dear father, is an idiotic question.

MARQUIS You may think so, but it's one a lot of people are asking.

JOHN That proves its stupidity. Society is irrelevant. People are meaningless.

MARQUIS People like you certainly are.

JOHN First we must destroy what *is*. We must wipe the slate clean. You can't expect us to build anything on your rotten foundations. It is only out of the ruins that we will conceive the new society.

MARQUIS It takes centuries to build a civilisation, John. To destroy it can take only seconds. This one may not be perfect, but millions of people have lived and died in order to pass something on to you.

JOHN I didn't ask them to, did I? And I certainly wish they hadn't. Without our protest, your lot would quietly sink into oblivion.

MARQUIS Look, my dear son, month after month you end up in court on some charge or other, and I have to pay the fines. You have your freedom of expression, but I have to pay the bills. Isn't it time you did a little work?

JOHN I don't see why. I've managed perfectly well without it.

MARQUIS You'll end up in gaol, John. It's one thing to march

with a placard, or sit down in the street. It's quite another to destroy an innocent person's property and take what you fancy. I give you fair warning, I'm not going to pay up this time. You can find the money yourself.

JOHN Why I ever chose you for a father, I just don't know.

MARQUIS You certainly wouldn't have been my choice for a son.

(The light fades on John and Dr Marquis, and comes up on Swinler and Easton. Eric Swinler is a stockbroker. He is smartly dressed in a well-cut suit and has dark smooth hair. He is well fed and moves briskly across the stage. Lawrence Easton has glasses and looks rather untidy. He is an intellectual Christian and fumbles with a bundle of papers as he crosses the stage)

DOORMAN *(Getting up from his bench)* Good evening, Mr Swinler, sir.

(Swinler makes no answer)

DOORMAN Good evening, Mr Easton.

EASTON Oh, good gracious me, yes. Good evening. And how are you keeping?

SWINLER Come along, Lawrence. We can't wait all day.

EASTON No, no. Of course not. Well . . . every blessing on you.

DOORMAN Thank you kindly, sir.

(Easton follows Swinler across the stage. The doorman talks to the audience)

DOORMAN He's religious. You could see that, couldn't you? Just by the way he spoke to me. He's got what I call holy hiccoughs. It's the pause between the words that does it. He says if everyone has enough food and cash, they'll all love each other. He's very sincere, mind you. He gets people to give any amount of money to the poor and suffering. He says that's what modern faith is all about. Material help and

not spiritual sermons. The other chap, Mr Swinler, works in the City. He's brilliant at making money too – but I don't think he likes religion. He says that most people don't know what's good for them, and need to be told. He's no time for ideals. "Ideals don't pay," he says, and that's what counts with Mr Swinler. If you've got money, Mr Swinler is interested in you. If you let him invest your money, he's your friend. If you've got nothing – he hardly notices you. (*The light comes up on Marquis, Swinler, Easton and John Marquis*)

MARQUIS A drink, gentlemen?

SWINLER Thank you, Mark.

MARQUIS Get them, John.

JOHN Certainly. What would you like, Mr Easton? Something civilised or something really wild?

EASTON A sherry, thank you, John.

JOHN How dull. (*Exits for drinks*)

MARQUIS You find everything dull.

SWINLER I should have thought the exception to that was spending money. He doesn't find that dull, I imagine.

JOHN It's certainly dull making it. (*From off stage*)

SWINLER (*Calling off*) I didn't know you had made any.

MARQUIS He hasn't.

EASTON Well, money isn't everything, is it?

MARQUIS It is in medical research. You can only do what money allows.

(*John brings in drinks*)

SWINLER How is the research going, Mark?

MARQUIS It's good. In fact, I could say it's amazing. It may only be a matter of months before we perform a complete frontal lobe transplant.

EASTON Are you sure it will work?

MARQUIS As sure as we can be without actually doing it.

SWINLER I suppose in that case, you'll be needing more money?

MARQUIS We will. It's very expensive work.

EASTON It's very difficult to raise funds for this kind of thing.
There is great resistance to it, I find.

JOHN Well, it's hardly Christian is it?

EASTON Christianity is not opposed to progress, John. We are in favour of all movement – wherever it leads. It is motion that counts. The life cycle of man never stands still. If Christianity stands still, it's a dead duck. We can't cling to the old ideas – however comfortable they may be.

JOHN I think they're damned uncomfortable.

EASTON Yes. Yes. Well, for young people like you we must find the new and attractive methods. We can't expect sheep to come into the fold any more. We must go out into the wilderness and lose ourselves with them.

SWINLER Before you lose yourself entirely, Lawrence, let's come back to the question of money. Can you raise any more?

EASTON I rather doubt it. It's hard to sell this idea of brain transplant to people of faith.

MARQUIS Well, unless we do succeed in selling it, we may none of us be here in fifty years. We've got to control life, or it will kill us all.

SWINLER Exactly, Mark. But the trouble is that most people are far more interested in themselves here and now than they are in the future. You need to find rich supporters who are interested in you personally. Have you no wealthy patients?

MARQUIS Yes, masses. They have to be rich to come to me.

SWINLER Surely they would support you.

MARQUIS I don't know. In any case, I can't go round asking

my patients for money. It would look bad. I never discuss my research with them.

EASTON And none of them ask about it?

MARQUIS A few. In fact, some even offer me money. There was one in here today – Sir Gideon Kelman. He's been a patient of mine for years, but unfortunately he's losing his sight now. He offered me as much money as I wanted to start some hare-brained scheme for blind people. Of course, I refused.

SWINLER A pity. A great pity. You should grab every penny you're offered.

MARQUIS I think his whole idea is just a waste of money. I couldn't possibly accept.

SWINLER Why not? Take the money that's offered and use most of it on your research.

MARQUIS That's fraud, Eric.

SWINLER Just a moment. The rest of it can go into Kelman's hare-brained scheme. If you like, make it a loan and pay it back when it suits us. You're going to be a rich man, Mark, once your project hits the headlines.

MARQUIS He will never agree to a loan.

EASTON Now, look here. This sounds most improper to me.

MARQUIS I quite agree. I don't like it.

SWINLER But if you're serious about raising this money, you can't expect to keep your skirts clean. Business is business, and a lot of it is tough, unfair and occasionally dishonest. That's one reason why Christianity and business don't mix, Lawrence.

EASTON We have to draw the line somewhere, Eric.

JOHN Why? I thought you said you wanted to get lost in the wilderness. This seems to be your chance, Mr Easton.

MARQUIS I'd hate to hurt Gideon. He's been a good friend.

SWINLER Why hurt him? He'll never know. In the end he may feel he's had a part in medical history.

MARQUIS He will have.

EASTON That is a point. One sometimes has to hurt people to help them. But the money must be repaid, Eric. And within a limited time.

MARQUIS As soon as possible.

SWINLER Naturally. We don't want to have any fuss.

JOHN Hell no! Otherwise you'd all end up in gaol - with me. That would be divine.

MARQUIS I hope you'll be sensible enough to mind your own business, John.

EASTON I understand just how he feels. It leaves a nasty taste. And the young are so fair-minded nowadays.

SWINLER You'll keep quiet about this, John, because we'll make it worth your while. Your case comes up next week, doesn't it?

JOHN Yes.

SWINLER I think I can arrange something for you. I have influence in certain places which I'm prepared to use on condition you keep quiet about all this.

JOHN I'm easy.

SWINLER I'm afraid that's not good enough.

JOHN OK, OK. I promise.

SWINLER Good. I think this will work very simply. There will be plenty of money to do everything Gideon Kelman wants, and at the same time enough for Mark to finish his work. That's fair surely?

EASTON Well, put like that it sounds acceptable.

MARQUIS I'll need your help with Gideon.

SWINLER First of all, you must tell him your decision. I'm sure he'll be delighted to hear it.

MARQUIS I expect he will. It will probably make his day.

SWINLER It will certainly make mine. With more money coming in, our cut should increase considerably.

(The light fades and comes up on the doorman)

DOORMAN Well, well, well. It's a funny business being very rich. You've got so much to lose. Everybody's after you for what they can get out of you. You'd think if you gave the whole lot away that would be the end of the problem. But is it? Not on your life. It's just the beginning. First of all, who do you give it to? Anything from a cats' home or a bloke like me. If you give it to a cats' home, you can kick up rough if the cats don't get it. But then if you give it to a bloke like me, I can spend it just how I like. You may not enjoy that idea at all. But you've given it to me, and that's that. Well, that's just what Sir Gideon has done. He thinks he's done something very worthwhile with his money. And it's not my place to say he hasn't. But he's picked a rum crowd to handle it, hasn't he? They've been very busy lately. Bought up an old property, and done it up beautifully, so I've heard. Still, never can be sure about the things you hear these days . . .

(The light comes up on Dr Marquis, sitting with Easton and Swinler on either side. John sits on the table or stands. Marquis is looking through his papers)

MARQUIS We have quite a number of applicants here.

SWINLER We must discriminate carefully.

MARQUIS Exactly. Gideon is very sentimental.

EASTON I think it's best to have certain clearly defined rules of entry. It avoids argument.

JOHN No hippies. No yippies, and no drug pushers. A completely moral establishment, run by a pure and honourable committee.

EASTON I don't think you should make fun of genuinely unselfish efforts, John. It's a little cruel.

JOHN I'm a sadist at heart.

SWINLER What rules would you make, Lawrence?

EASTON I think we should select those who would create a harmonious family spirit. After all, Sir Gideon is the most important member of it.

JOHN A family spirit is not always harmonious.

SWINLER No, but we can avoid obvious trouble-makers.

MARQUIS We must have only those who have become blind through accident or old age. People who are blind from birth are far more sensitive.

EASTON Will Kelman agree to that?

MARQUIS He must.

JOHN Good old Dad. Benevolent dictator and the world's benefactor.

MARQUIS That's enough, John. Here comes Gideon.

(Sir Gideon Kelman crosses the stage and steps forward to meet Marquis)

MARQUIS Hello, Gideon. Lovely to see you.

SIR GIDEON I wish I could say the same, Mark. I'm so grateful to you for doing this.

MARQUIS Gideon, may I introduce Mr Swinler and Mr Easton?

SIR GIDEON I'm so glad to meet you gentlemen.

MARQUIS They're going to help us make our selection here this morning.

SIR GIDEON It's very good of you to come along like this. I appreciate it.

SWINLER It's our pleasure, I assure you, Sir Gideon.

EASTON After all, it's in a wonderful cause.

MARQUIS And this is my son John, Gideon. I thought a younger opinion would be in order.

SIR GIDEON I'm delighted to have you, John. I'm always in favour of young ideas.

JOHN That's a relief. My father hates them.

MARQUIS We'll ask Bill to show the first one in.

SIR GIDEON Excellent.

(The doorman steps forward)

MARQUIS All right, Bill. We're ready for them. Just send them in one at a time.

DOORMAN OK, sir. Right away, sir.

(The doorman lines up the blind characters in a queue with the girl at the end)

Come along now everyone, into line. There you are now. One at a time. No need to push. Let's keep it nice and orderly. First one, please.

(Enter Martine)

MARQUIS Good morning.

MARTINE Good morning, sir.

MARQUIS Your name please?

MARTINE Martine.

MARQUIS Martine who?

MARTINE A daughter.

SWINLER Whose daughter?

MARTINE I can't remember.

EASTON Can't remember? Surely you remember who your parents were?

MARTINE I'm an orphan. My parents were killed in an air crash.

JOHN Lucky girl.

SWINLER We didn't ask for your opinions.

MARQUIS How old were you when your parents died?

MARTINE I was two when it happened.

SWINLER So you never knew them?

MARTINE No. I don't remember them at all. Some relations took care of me and sent me to school.

MARQUIS Why do you want to come here then? Surely your relations could look after you now?

MARTINE No, no. They don't want to any more. Please let me come. I've nowhere else to go.

MARQUIS But what about your sight? Could it not be restored?

MARTINE No. Nothing can be done about it.

MARQUIS Are you sure?

MARTINE Quite sure. I'm happy as I am.

SWINLER Did your parents leave you any money?

MARTINE No. No – nothing at all.

MARQUIS We'll accept you, Martine.

MARTINE Oh, thank you, sir. Thank you very much. I'm ever so grateful.

MARQUIS Not at all. Next one, please.

(The blind girl exits slowly, feeling her way)

SIR GIDEON Mark, can't you be a bit more human? Can't you find out what sort of people they are? Their interests, their hopes?

MARQUIS Of course, Gideon. But we must get the facts straight for the records. There will be plenty of time for the rest later.

EASTON You get all sorts of scroungers on a project like this, Sir Gideon. Some of them might not be blind at all. We have to take every precaution.

SIR GIDEON I understand. But I do think human kindness costs so little and goes such a long way.

EASTON Of course it does, Sir Gideon. And none should know it better than you.

(Enter Louisa Sim)

DOORMAN Step.

MRS SIM Thank you.

MARQUIS Your name please, my dear.

MRS SIM Louisa Sim – a widow and mother.

MARQUIS Of how many children?

MRS SIM Of one child. A perfect child. A son. He did nothing wrong in his life. He never caused me a day's trouble.

EASTON How wonderful. And why is he not able to give you a home now?

MRS SIM Oh, I wouldn't want him to. I want him to be free. He's got a wonderful life ahead of him, and I'd be a burden to him.

SWINLER But surely he will want to come and visit you?

MRS SIM No. Never. I haven't told him where I am. He is such a fine boy. I think it would be wrong to spoil his life.

MARQUIS But why do you want to come here?

MRS SIM Because you're all such wonderful people. I know. I can't see you, but I sense your goodness and kindness. I can feel it. And I know that is what you are.

JOHN My dear lady, how can you be so sure?

(Easton and Swinler give John a hard look)

MRS SIM I am sure. All this wickedness and evil people talk about. It's all in the mind, you know. People are full of love and understanding underneath. I know some of them look bad, but they aren't really. It's just the way you see them that makes them good or evil. And I like to see goodness in everyone.

SWINLER You have an indomitable spirit, madam.

EASTON A wonderful spirit. Full of the milk of human kindness. Isn't that just what you were talking about, Sir Gideon?

SIR GIDEON Yes, indeed it is.

MRS SIM Oh, Sir Gideon, I want you to know what a marvellous thing it is that you're doing for all of us. Not many people nowadays want to think about the elderly or the sick, let alone give them a home or money. But you're doing both. And I shall never forget it.

SIR GIDEON Thank you, my dear.

MARQUIS And your eyesight, madam? Is there no chance of something being done for you?

MRS SIM Everything has been tried, but to no avail.

SWINLER What a tragedy.

MRS SIM I accept it all as part of life's blessings. It's no tragedy to me. I always try to look on the bright side of everything. And when you've done that for as long as I have, you don't really see the tragedies any more. Pain is no longer painful, wrongs are no longer sinful, and life is happy for you and for everyone around you.

JOHN I don't see how you can be sure of that.

MRS SIM But I am, young man. It's my experience you see. It's what I know. My boy helped me a lot in life. I could tell you all sorts of stories about him – wonderful stories.

MARQUIS Yes, of course you could. And I only wish we had time to hear them. But there are so many more people to interview.

SWINLER Another time, my dear lady, we would all be enchanted to hear about your fine son.

MARQUIS Once you've settled among us.

EASTON And how delighted we'll be to have you, Mrs Sim.

MRS SIM Thank you. Thank you very much. I'm more than grateful.

(Louisa Sim exits)

DOORMAN *(To Marquis)* The next one's quite a gentleman, sir. But a little on the quiet side.

(The doorman brings the statesman forward by the arm)

MARQUIS Your name, please, sir?

CONSTANTINE Peter Constantine.

MARQUIS The politician.

CONSTANTINE Yes.

SWINLER A politician who has given up politics, I presume?

CONSTANTINE I had to.

EASTON And why was that?

CONSTANTINE Something unfortunate happened.

SWINLER You mean you lost your eyesight?

CONSTANTINE Oh no. That happened afterwards.

SWINLER After what?

CONSTANTINE Some State secrets were exchanged for money.
They say it happened in my house.

EASTON Oh yes, I remember. Most unfortunate. And you had to resign?

CONSTANTINE It had nothing to do with me, I assure you. I never knew it was happening. I had no idea. The Minister concerned was a dear friend of mine. I still can't believe it. It was all so horribly sordid. I never saw anything wrong. Perhaps I was going blind even then.

MARQUIS And afterwards you did go completely blind?

CONSTANTINE Yes. I never saw again.

EASTON It must have been a terrible ordeal for you. You're sure nothing can be done at all to help you regain your sight?

CONSTANTINE Oh no, nothing can be done. It might have happened, but I can't believe it did. I don't believe that anybody I know personally would behave like that. I suppose you could say that I've led rather a sheltered life, a Victorian upbringing, and these modern – well, scandals – are quite beyond my understanding.

SWINLER You must find them very distasteful.

CONSTANTINE Yes, I do. In fact, I was only too glad to be out of political life and away from it all.

MARQUIS And why do you come to us?

CONSTANTINE I thought you would understand my position. So few people do.

EASTON There is so little compassion in the world today, I'm afraid.

SWINLER You feel that you are to blame, I suppose?

CONSTANTINE No, no. I was innocent of the whole thing, but people do seem to blame me. I feel an outcast, and I know now I need the right sort of friends. I want to get away from the past altogether.

SIR GIDEON I think that's quite splendid of you.

MARQUIS We'd be only too glad to have you with us.

CONSTANTINE Thank you, gentlemen. You are most kind.

(The statesman goes)

DOORMAN Come along, my dear.

(Mrs Hurst enters)

MARQUIS And who are you, my dear lady?

MRS HURST Hermione Hurst.

SWINLER What a charming name.

MARQUIS Are you married?

MRS HURST Yes. I've had three wonderful husbands.

EASTON Oh dear, oh dear.

MRS HURST They all adored me. I've had a brilliantly happy life. So many wonderful friends, that I've never known a day's loneliness.

MARQUIS How fortunate for you.

MRS HURST I know. I've been so lucky. And it's meant that people have flocked to me, like moths to the light.

SWINLER I'm not surprised. Tell me, Mrs Hurst, have you any money?

MRS HURST Oh yes. I have a small income. I'd like to make a contribution towards my expenses.

SWINLER Good. We certainly won't refuse help. This is an expensive business.

SIR GIDEON No, no, Mrs Hurst. There is no need for you to contribute at all. There is plenty of money for everything.

EASTON Money is not of primary interest to us, Mrs Hurst. Why do you want to come here?

MRS HURST It's something different, isn't it? I rather enjoy new things.

EASTON I wouldn't refer to it like that.

MARQUIS Have you no children who could look after you, Mrs Hurst?

MRS HURST Oh no. But I'm very happy by myself.

SWINLER I hate to think of you alone, Mrs Hurst.

MRS HURST I'm never alone. I'm always surrounded by people.

SWINLER I'm not surprised.

EASTON I can't imagine why you want to come here.

MRS HURST I like meeting new people. I think I could liven everything up a bit.

EASTON It's not a night club, you know.

SWINLER I think you'd be a splendid asset. I think we should take her.

MARQUIS I agree. We'll take you, Mrs Hurst.

MRS HURST Lovely. I'm sure you won't regret it.

(Mrs Hurst leaves. Percy, the drunk, comes in)

DOORMAN I think the next one can speak for himself, sir.

PERCY Hello, gents. I'm a very friendly person, and I'll get on well with all sorts. You'll have no trouble with me.

Never caused a moment's trouble to anyone. Good hearted. That's what I am.

EASTON Indeed. And what made you go blind?

PERCY It was, how shall I put it, a bit of bad luck on the road. An upset. The other driver was killed, I'm afraid. That worried me a little, but I couldn't see a thing. I wasn't to blame.

SWINLER Perhaps you shouldn't have been driving?

PERCY Well, I think you're right. I didn't really know I was. I suddenly found myself in the car.

JOHN It sounds to me as if you had your upset off the road, rather than on it.

PERCY In a manner of speaking you could say that. Yes, but I couldn't help it. I was driven to it.

EASTON And who drove you to it?

PERCY My wife, sir. She was on at me night and day. I don't know how it started. First it was just the odd nag now and again. You can put up with that. But then it got worse – much worse. It never stopped. I couldn't put a foot right. Then I'd come home and she'd never be in. I thought at first it might be bingo or something. But I soon knew otherwise. She brought them home in the end, so I couldn't avoid knowing. We argued, of course. I tried to reason with her – to talk her out of it. But she wouldn't listen. In the end the bottle was the only way out.

MARQUIS I see. And it was while you were drinking that you had your accident?

PERCY That's right.

EASTON And have you been able to stop drinking since?

PERCY Well, I couldn't quite say that, sir. I can stop whenever I want, but if ever I see the wife or remember her at all, well, a drink's the best answer to that.

EASTON We won't want heavy drinking in this establishment.

PERCY There'll be no wife, sir.

SWINLER And you're sure you can keep off it?

PERCY Sure I can. Yes. I promise. I won't touch the stuff.
Just as long as I don't have to see the wife. No chance of
that is there, me being blind and all?

MARQUIS Unless you could ever see again.

PERCY Oh no. They said after the accident that there was no
hope at all.

MARQUIS Well, in that case it seems all right. But you'll have
to behave yourself. Is that clear?

PERCY Oh yes.

MARQUIS We can't afford any trouble.

PERCY I'll be no trouble. I don't want any more accidents.

SIR GIDEON I think we should let the poor fellow in. He
seems to have had a wretched life.

SWINLER You can't afford to feel too sorry for that type of
person, Sir Gideon. They're very unreliable.

PERCY I promise you, Sir Gideon, I'll behave myself.

MARQUIS We'll accept you. But if there's any kind of upset,
we'll have to think again.

PERCY I understand that, sir. Thank you very much, sir. But
there won't be. I promise you, I won't touch another drop.
*(The drunk moves off, and the doorman takes Stella's arm and
leads her towards the interviewers)*

DOORMAN Come along, my dear. You're next.

STELLA What shall I say?

DOORMAN Just answer the questions. There's no need to
worry. Just tell them what they want to know.

STELLA Maybe I won't know the answers.

DOORMAN Sure you will, dear. They won't hurt you. Here's
the last one, gentlemen. Young lady by the name of Stella.

(Marquis doesn't look up from his papers where he is busy writing)

MARQUIS And why do you want to come here, Stella?

STELLA I have nowhere else to go.

EASTON No home? Or parents who wish to take care of you?

STELLA No.

MARQUIS I see. How long have you been blind?

STELLA Always.

MARQUIS You mean you have been blind from birth?

STELLA Yes.

MARQUIS Well, that's most unfortunate, my dear. I'm afraid we cannot accept you here.

STELLA Why? What have I done?

EASTON You've done nothing.

MARQUIS Nothing at all. It's just that we are only accepting those who have become blind since birth. People who have suffered some accident.

STELLA I see.

SIR GIDEON Hasn't she suffered more than all the rest of us? She has never seen anything. Her world is totally dark.

SWINLER Of course that's right, Sir Gideon. And she has our deep sympathy. But we have to draw the line somewhere, don't we?

SIR GIDEON Why should she be excluded? I want you to take her, Mark.

MARQUIS It's rather difficult, Gideon.

SIR GIDEON Even if you leave all the rest, I want you to take her.

SWINLER I don't think she'll fit in well, Sir Gideon. She's very young. She has not suffered in the same way as the others.

EASTON It seems ruthless to exclude anybody, Sir Gideon. I

know just how you feel. But I think you will find your money goes further if you don't lavish it indiscriminately.

SIR GIDEON That may be. But it's my money, and I'm going to have some say in how it is spent. I want you to take this girl, Mark.

MARQUIS I strongly advise against it.

SWINLER So do I.

JOHN She looks perfectly harmless. I strongly advise you to take her, Sir Gideon.

EASTON There are so many people who need the help more.

JOHN I can't see what all the fuss is about. She's blind, isn't she, like the rest?

SIR GIDEON Far more so than the rest. Now, I hadn't meant to interfere, gentlemen, but I do insist on this one girl. She's alone. She has nobody in the world to care for her except us. Apart from that, she happens to have helped me through these first difficult days of my own blindness.

EASTON I see. She's a personal friend of yours, Sir Gideon?

SIR GIDEON Not exactly. But I feel I owe her something. Something important to me.

MARQUIS Very well, Gideon. In that case, we'll take her.

STELLA Oh, thank you, Sir Gideon. Thank you for helping me.

SIR GIDEON It is I who should be thanking you, my dear. You've been a light in a very dark world.

STELLA I did nothing.

SIR GIDEON It meant everything to me.

DOORMAN This way.

(Stella leaves)

SWINLER Well, I hope she won't unsettle the others by her presence.

EASTON So do I. I don't like having attractive young girls in an establishment of this kind. It creates problems.

JOHN I think she'll brighten the place up a bit. God knows it will need it.

SIR GIDEON She's still a child. And yet she has this amazing sensitivity, like a much older person. I'm sure you'll find her a great addition.

DOORMAN Well, that's the lot gentlemen. No more to come.

MARQUIS Thank you, Bill. You've been a great help.

DOORMAN Not at all, sir.

(Bill comes downstage and talks to the audience. As he does so, the stage is set for the first visit to Samson's Waste. Benches are brought on. A bucket with a cloth over the side stands in centre stage to catch the drips from the ceiling. Against the backcloth there is a french window with broken panes in it, and the general appearance is of a derelict house. There is a large gilt picture frame. It is empty. There is a table, old, dusty and unpolished)

DOORMAN Well, they made a start. They've got the property. It's called Samson's Waste – very appropriate. It's a great big barn of a place – a bit of a mess, if you ask me. Even a bucket to catch the drops when it's raining. I wouldn't live there for all the tea in China. I prefer my own fireside in the front room. I like my independence. I don't want to owe anybody anything. But then, if you're blind you haven't much choice, have you?

(The light comes up as John carries on a tape recorder. It can play the music of bird song, water and other country sounds. He switches it on. Enter Marquis leading Sir Gideon. The blind people follow behind him with Swinler and Easton. The sound of rushing water and bird song fills the stage. Gideon Kelman stands listening for a moment)

MARQUIS Here we are, Gideon. This is it. Strangely enough, it's called Samson's Waste.

DOORMAN Good name for it.

SWINLER A splendid situation, and a very profitable piece of real estate.

DOORMAN Condemned property.

EASTON It has many possibilities. There are large gardens.

DOORMAN Mostly weeds.

SIR GIDEON This is better than I ever dreamed possible. Listen to those birds. This is wonderful, Mark.

MARQUIS I'm glad you think so, Gideon.

SWINLER We have put some remarkable paintings on the walls.

DOORMAN All reproductions.

SIR GIDEON I'm so glad to hear you have put some beautiful things in the house. It gives it the right feel.

CONSTANTINE I've never had time to enjoy the beautiful things of life. And now that I'm blind, I'm surrounded by them. Rather ironic, isn't it?

MRS HURST I love art. It's so meaningful.

SWINLER We have one special acquisition, Sir Gideon. I thought it would mean a very great deal to you personally.

SIR GIDEON It sounds exciting.

SWINLER It is. (*He takes Gideon to the empty frame*) It's an original Cézanne – an exquisite piece of work and worth a fortune.

DOORMAN Huh!

SWINLER We were very lucky to get it.

CONSTANTINE I should say you were. It must be priceless.

EASTON It's called 'A Summer's Day in Provence'.

SIR GIDEON My beloved Provence. How thoughtful of you.

MRS SIM I can feel its warmth. I can see the sunlight coming through the trees.

CONSTANTINE How much is it worth?

SWINLER Well, it's not worth insuring – if that means anything to you.

CONSTANTINE Indeed it does. I hope nobody tries to steal it.

MRS SIM Why should anybody steal such a beautiful thing?

SWINLER They're doing it all the time.

EASTON Yes, but I'm sure they would never want to take it from here. After all, this is a special place – an unselfish venture in human love.

(Swinler takes Gideon to the table)

SWINLER I'm sure you'd be interested in this table, Sir Gideon. It's a 15th century oak refectory table. It came from one of our ancient monasteries.

DOORMAN Another reproduction.

SIR GIDEON *(Feeling with his hands)* Feel the finish on that surface.

SWINLER It takes centuries of work to get wood looking like that.

SIR GIDEON It's beautiful. I can imagine all the monks sitting round it.

PERCY Monks don't drink, do they?

SIR GIDEON Of course they do. They have some of the finest wine cellars in the world. And they make pretty good liqueurs too, Percy.

PERCY Jolly good show. Can't wait to join them.

MARTINE Just think of this being five hundred years old. We'll have to be careful how we use it.

SWINLER Oh, you needn't be, Martine. It's as strong as the oak tree from which it was made. We have some rather fine Georgian silver on the sideboard over there.

DOORMAN Electro-plate. *(Exit)*

SWINLER I got it at an auction. Otherwise it would have gone to those Americans.

SIR GIDEON I'm so glad you did that, Mr Swinler. I hate seeing all our lovely things taken across the Atlantic.

SWINLER So do I, Sir Gideon.

SIR GIDEON How much did all this cost us, Mark?

MARQUIS A great deal of money, I'm afraid, Gideon.

SIR GIDEON Don't be afraid. It's worth every penny.

MARQUIS I'm delighted you think so.

SIR GIDEON You might think blind people don't need the comforts and luxuries of life. But they need to be lifted by atmosphere.

MARQUIS I can understand that, Gideon.

SIR GIDEON All my life I've hoped to do something like this, and now it's happened it seems like the most natural thing in the world. I feel as if I've been here for a lifetime, standing like this – listening to these wonderful sounds, enjoying these beautiful things. I can almost see the gardens, and feel the wind in my hair.

STELLA What colour is the wind?

SIR GIDEON You do ask some difficult questions, my dear. (*He turns to the others*) Come on everyone, what colour is the wind?

MARTINE It hasn't got any colour.

STELLA Then you cannot see it?

PERCY Sure, you can see it. It moves things – like trees and waves, and it blows the leaves in thousands. It's powerful.

CONSTANTINE No, Percy. You can feel it more than see it.

MRS HURST I hate the wind. It musses up my hair.

MRS SIM The wind is kind and gentle. It will touch your cheek on a warm day and cool it. It will brush the petal of the first spring flower and not break it.

SIR GIDEON Does that answer your question, Stella?

STELLA It must be wonderful to see.

SIR GIDEON It is. Why don't we go outside?

MARTINE Oh good. I'm longing to run for miles and miles.
We never had a garden.

MRS SIM Anyone can have a garden, Martine. Even on a back window.

PERCY Yes, but you can't run along a window sill, can you?

SIR GIDEON Come along. Let's all go. Mark, you lead the way.

(Martine goes on ahead. Marquis takes Gideon's arm. As Mrs Hurst leaves, she crosses the stage and trips heavily over the bucket)

SIR GIDEON *(Turning back)* What's that?

SWINLER *(Going to Mrs Hurst's rescue)* Oh, nothing Sir Gideon. Just Mrs Hurst falling over a chair. It's difficult to get to know the place all at once. There are bound to be a few upsets. *(Swinler takes Mrs Hurst by the arm)* There now, my dear, are you all right?

SIR GIDEON I hope you are not hurt.

MRS HURST No, no, thank you. So stupid of me. I never felt anything in front of me. It just seemed to knock my feet from under me. I'm quite all right now, thank you. We'll soon get to know our way around, and it will be like home.
(All exit except Mrs Hurst, Swinler, John and Stella. Swinler goes down stage and turns off the machine. The birdsong ceases. He signals to John to wipe up the water and move the bucket to the wings)

SWINLER *(Taking Mrs Hurst's arm)* Of course it will. Now let me help you a little, Mrs Hurst.

MRS HURST Please call me Hermione, Mr Swinler.

SWINLER I'd be delighted to. And you must call me Eric.

MRS HURST So kind, Eric. So very kind.

(They leave except for Stella who still stands at the window. As John and Stella talk, you can see the others pass the window outside. John wipes up the water and takes the bucket to the side.)

He goes up to the window and stands by Stella. She puts out her hand to feel, sensing his presence)

STELLA John?

JOHN Yes.

STELLA I was thinking something very strange.

JOHN What was that?

STELLA Just that it did not sound like a chair when Mrs Hurst fell. It sounded like a bucket.

JOHN Well, you couldn't see it, could you?

STELLA No, but I heard it. I heard drips of water falling into the bucket earlier. It was a bucket, wasn't it?

JOHN Yes, yes it was. But I wouldn't worry about it.

STELLA Why did Mr Swinler say it was a chair?

JOHN (*Nervously*) I don't know. But I'd forget about it if I were you.

STELLA Why should I?

JOHN Because you're very pretty, and I'd hate to find you had gone when I came back.

STELLA You do say silly things.

JOHN Quite often, but not this time. I think I've said two very sensible things.

STELLA Have you?

JOHN You know, Stella, you have beautiful hair and an open face which is full of goodness, and eyes which, although blind, are very much alive; and a mouth which can tell no lies. You're very beautiful.

STELLA I never knew I looked like that. Are you telling me the truth?

JOHN Yes I am, on this occasion.

STELLA Meaning you don't always?

JOHN It doesn't always pay.

STELLA I think it does.

JOHN Yes, you would.

STELLA And what was the other sensible thing you said?

JOHN Just to forget about the bucket.

STELLA I can't forget.

JOHN Well then, just don't mention it again.

STELLA Are you frightened I will?

JOHN No.

STELLA I'm very frightened sometimes. I'm frightened of Mr Swinler, Mr Easton and Dr Marquis. He's your father, isn't he?

JOHN Yes. I shouldn't take much notice of him.

STELLA Why do they frighten me so much? And what have you got to do with them?

JOHN Nothing much.

STELLA I don't trust them.

JOHN Look, Stella, I don't know why you don't trust them. For that matter, I don't know why you trust me. You're the first person who ever has. But in any case, please don't talk about it. Try and think about something else.

STELLA All right then. Why have the birds stopped singing?

JOHN Oh, birds don't sing all the time, do they? Perhaps they're eating or flying, or even sleeping.

STELLA Or perhaps the window is closed and we can't hear them. (*Stella turns to feel the window*) I'll open it.

(*Stella reaches the window with her hands and John grabs her away*)

JOHN Don't do that. You'll hurt yourself.

STELLA Why on earth should I?

JOHN Well, you might fall out. I'll do it later.

STELLA Why should I fall out?

JOHN Look Stella, forget it.

STELLA It seems to me there are an awful lot of things you want me to forget.

JOHN It's your own fault for asking too many questions.

STELLA Do I ask a lot of questions?

JOHN Yes, all the time – "What's this?" and "Why's that?"

STELLA I'm sorry. I didn't mean to hurt anybody's feelings.

JOHN You haven't hurt anybody. I think I've probably hurt you. I seem to spend my time doing it. I think I rather like hurting people.

STELLA Why should you?

JOHN Because they hurt me, and I want to hit back. Don't you ever feel like that?

STELLA No. Nobody has hurt me.

JOHN They certainly have. You were born blind, weren't you?

STELLA That was nobody's fault.

JOHN (*Angry*) Of course it was. I'll bet your mother had some illness, or you were damaged at birth and you lost the use of your eyes. And whose fault was that? The doctor's? Yours, I suppose? Or perhaps you think it was the fault of God Almighty?

STELLA Don't, John. Don't. It hurts when you talk like that. It's so bitter.

JOHN You should feel bitter. You have the right to feel bitter.

STELLA But I don't. I don't think I was ever meant to see. Of course, I have longed to enjoy the world as other people can, but I don't hate anybody because I never shall.

JOHN I do. I hate for you.

STELLA You must stop it. I don't want you to.

JOHN I don't care a damn what you want.

STELLA John, why do you hate so much?

JOHN You'd hate if you lived with my father.

STELLA I'm sorry. Why?

JOHN He's never cared a damn about me. And I don't blame him. I feel just the same way about him. And what about your family? Where are they?

STELLA They put me in a home after I was born. It was too difficult to have a blind child at home. They had a large family and a small house, and not much money.

JOHN And you don't hate them for that?

STELLA Not any more. I used to. But when I hated I seemed to feel my blindness more than ever. All the world was very dark. When the hate went, it was almost as if I could see.

JOHN That's crazy.

STELLA Yes, I know.

JOHN But you believe it?

STELLA Yse. You see, it actually happened to me.

JOHN You're quite different from anybody I've ever met.

STELLA Tell me what you can see from this window, John. Are there gardens and fountains?

JOHN I suppose so.

STELLA You can see it all. And that's the only thing you can think of to say?

JOHN I'm not much good at catching an atmosphere.

STELLA Then tell me about the flowers.

JOHN I've never been much of a nature lover, I'm afraid.

STELLA You don't want to tell me.

JOHN My father says I'm poor at expressing myself.

STELLA That should depend on who you're talking to.

(There are voices in the distance and the crowd is returning. You can hear the tap, tap of the sticks, and the murmur of voices)

JOHN Listen, Stella, they're coming back. But I do want to see you again. And if I don't get angry with you and answer all your questions, and never say a bitter word, you will

be pleased to see me again, won't you?

STELLA Of course I will. Thank you for looking after me today, John. It was very kind of you.

JOHN It made my day.

(The crowd enter led by Marquis and Sir Gideon)

MARQUIS Well, Gideon, I hope you are satisfied with Samson's Waste?

SIR GIDEON It's everything I could wish for.

MARTINE The rose garden is really super.

CONSTANTINE It must be. But you know, I couldn't smell the roses.

MARTINE Oh, I could. Mr Easton told us all about them.

MRS SIM And when he'd finished, I could smell them all. I could see that lovely climbing Albertine.

CONSTANTINE Maybe I've got a touch of hay fever.

MRS SIM I expect that's what it is, Mr Constantine.

EASTON The shrubbery is one of the finest in the country.

MRS SIM And Mr Easton is an expert on shrubs.

SIR GIDEON I think we all agree that no place could have offered us more.

PERCY Hear, hear.

SIR GIDEON I propose a vote of thanks to you, Mark, and your friends for an unqualified success.

(The blind all clap, with shouts of "Hear, hear!")

EASTON The debt of gratitude is ours, Sir Gideon. Without you we could have achieved nothing. Personally, I have found today very pleasant. I am delighted with the company here, and I know you'll all get on very well together.

MRS SIM I'm sure we will, Mr Easton.

(Mrs Hurst and Swinler enter Mrs Hurst is laughing and Swinler still has her by the arm)

MRS HURST I think you're a gorgeous man, Eric. You've been so understanding.

SWINLER Not at all, my dear. I hope we will spend many happy hours together.

MRS HURST I feel sure we shall.

MARQUIS I think we should thank Sir Gideon for the idea of this home, and for providing the resources which made it possible.

PERCY I quite agree.

MRS HURST We owe you so much, Sir Gideon.

MARTINE I don't know what to say. It's like a dream.

CONSTANTINE Sir Gideon, all our gratitude.

ALL Sir Gideon, Sir Gideon.

SIR GIDEON No, no. Please, please.

(Swinler goes over and turns on the tape recorder. The air is filled once again with birdsong. The blind sit in silence listening)

STELLA Listen, John. The birds have just started to sing again.

JOHN I expect they're glad to get rid of me.

STELLA Maybe they want you to stay.

MARQUIS Come along, John.

(John leaves. Easton, Marquis and Swinler settle the blind and look at each other with a satisfied grin as the curtain falls)

ACT TWO

The stage is set, as before, for Samson's Waste. The Doorman addresses the audience as he did at the beginning of the play.

DOORMAN I hope you've come back refreshed and ready for the rest of the story. There's been a lot of comings and goings round here. Dr Marquis must have won the pools or something. He's spending money like water – and it doesn't all go on research. Still I suppose we shouldn't ask too many questions. Talk of the

(Enter Dr Marquis)

DOORMAN Lovely morning, sir.

MARQUIS Yes, it is Bill. I'm too busy to enjoy it, I'm afraid.

DOORMAN I know, sir. Never idle for a moment these days.

MARQUIS That's right, Bill. Hardly time to eat or sleep. I just go from one job to another.

DOORMAN It's telling on you, I'm afraid, sir. You should take care. Men of your age can't afford to live under that kind of pressure. It ends up with all sorts of trouble.

MARQUIS I don't think I'm overdoing it, Bill. I'll be retiring soon in any case.

DOORMAN That's what they all say, sir. But some of them never make retirement. They're just looking forward to putting their feet up and getting a good fat pension – and then they're knocked out just like that. I'd watch it, really I would, sir.

MARQUIS It's the worry more than the work that does it, Bill.

DOORMAN I wouldn't know about that, sir. Never had any cause to worry. My mother always said if you had a clear conscience you'd never lose a night's sleep. Well, I must have a clear conscience all right, because I sleep like a log.

MARQUIS I envy you, Bill. You're a lucky man.

DOORMAN I wouldn't say that, sir. My job's just the same all day, every day. You see life, but you don't make any difference to it. While men like you, sir, you're in charge. You decide the way things go. You make the decisions. People look up to you. They expect a lot from you. They'll remember you after you've gone. Nobody will ever think of me again. I'll go. And another man will take my place. Most people will never know the difference.

MARQUIS I'm not sure you're right, Bill. People don't forget a good friend.

DOORMAN That's true, sir. But then some people don't know a bad friend when they meet one. They'll do just what somebody else tells them, and end up in an awful mess. They won't forget that either.

MARQUIS It's surprising how quickly they do. Good day to you, Bill.

DOORMAN Good day, sir. He seems all right, doesn't he?

(Marquis joins Easton and Swinler who are already seated. John is there, reading a book. He sits knees up, on the floor)

SWINLER I think it went very well don't you, Mark?

MARQUIS Yes, but was it really necessary to embroider quite so much? All that about the monks' table and the Cézanne not worth insuring. That at least was accurate.

EASTON I'm not happy about it at all. I think we should have some good antique furniture in Samson's Waste.

SWINLER Yes, yes, all in good time. They enjoy them whether they are there or not.

MARQUIS Well let there be no mistake about that, Eric.

SWINLER Of course not my dear fellow.

EASTON I didn't like seeing that empty garden – not a flower to be seen, and Eric discussing the roses with Mr Constantine as if we were at the Chelsea Flower Show.

SWINLER You have so little imagination, Lawrence.

EASTON It goes against all my principles.

JOHN I thought your principles had to be bent to move with the times.

EASTON Yes, my dear John, but they still exist.

MARQUIS The place needs to be cleared up. It was a bad mistake to leave that bucket lying around.

EASTON Mrs Hurst could have been seriously hurt.

MARQUIS It might have shattered the whole image.

JOHN Talking of images – for God's sake, Mr Swinler, stop turning the birds on and off like a ruddy yo-yo.

SWINLER I was the only one who covered up for Mrs Hurst when she fell.

MARQUIS The girl was on to it right away.

SWINLER I don't like her.

EASTON She's a pretty creature, but I don't suppose she's got a brain in her head.

SWINLER She's not as stupid as she looks.

JOHN Stop talking about her, all of you.

SWINLER She could be a nuisance. I don't like the way she stays by herself all the time, and then cuts in with a searching question.

JOHN She's not like the others, that's all.

SWINLER That's exactly what I mean.

MARQUIS I wouldn't feel sorry for her, John.

JOHN Strangely enough, I think she's sorry for me.

MARQUIS She must have more sense than I thought.

EASTON I don't think you should be too harsh on the young people. I'm sure they mean no harm. After all, Eric, you were carrying on quite openly with that Mrs Hurst.

SWINLER (*Laughing*) Don't tell me that shocked you, Lawrence. It's just one of the perks of the job.

EASTON She has been married three times.

SWINLER So have lots of people. What's wrong with that? It so happens some women find me attractive. It means nothing to me, but it means a lot to Mrs Hurst. She likes having a man to lean on.

EASTON Oh, quite, quite. I just point out that she's successfully lent on three others before you.

SWINLER I don't intend to be the fourth, Lawrence, if that's what you mean. I'm not in this for love, you know. I'm in it for money.

EASTON I find that depressingly crude. I hate materialism.

SWINLER Oh, grow up, Lawrence. You get well paid for your charitable work. Don't tell me you'd do it out of the kindness of your holy heart.

EASTON I often have. But I don't expect you to understand it.

MARQUIS I'm afraid this whole business has put both of you under a considerable strain. (*Marquis takes two envelopes out of his pocket*) I hope this will go some way towards repaying you for your efforts, including the stress involved.

JOHN Don't I get a golden handshake? I'm a nervous wreck.

SWINLER (*Opening his envelope and looking at the cheque*) You've already had yours, John. I paid it, if you remember. I hope you realise we've risked our reputation for you, Mark. (*Smacking down the envelope*) Personally, I expected better thanks than this.

EASTON I don't want a penny of it. I hope you will put my payment towards furnishing Samson's Waste, which is what we agreed in the first place.

MARQUIS Look, I'm sorry you feel like this. Really I am. But the money has run short very much faster than I expected. I only wish I could repay Sir Gideon; I only wish I could give you both what you deserve; but I've told you before, research eats up money. I simply don't have enough.

SWINLER Ask for more then.

MARQUIS I can't Eric. He gave me a small fortune the first time.

SWINLER You sign his cheques, don't you?

EASTON Now look here, Eric. I don't go along with this at all. It's quite different from the agreement we made at the beginning.

MARQUIS I'm sure Gideon will give me anything I want. He trusts me, and he's always been generous with his purse. But I don't want to ask him unless you insist.

SWINLER I do insist. I'm not going to be fobbed off with a tip in an envelope. I want my fair share or I'm out.

EASTON I've never understood why money is so important to you, Eric. It's a great weakness.

SWINLER Money buys things, Lawrence. In case you forget, your church is one of the richest organisations in the world, and now that most of your people have lost their faith, you'd have nothing at all without money. I don't work for peanuts. I never have. And I never will.

EASTON I've never suggested that you did.

SWINLER It's your sentimental nonsense that's going to get us into trouble, Lawrence. You've got no drive, no business sense. Once you've started on a venture like this, you've got to carry it through. Be hard. Be ruthless. Afterwards you can afford to be kind.

EASTON I don't believe you would know how to be kind, Eric. It's not in your nature. You have lost sight of our inspiration – our goal.

SWINLER And what is our inspiration, Lawrence?

EASTON To comfort the suffering – to fill the hungry with good things.

SWINLER And do you suppose Mark has that in mind? Do you believe for one moment that his share of the money will be spent on such an illusion?

EASTON I do believe it. Mark is an honest man.

JOHN That's what you think.

MARQUIS Honesty is an illusion. The only real honesty is scientific fact.

SWINLER And so you will spend your money on antiques and impressionist paintings?

MARQUIS Not at all. I've been honest enough to say from the start that I think the whole idea of Samson's Waste is ridiculous. It's not worth a penny, except in so far as it helps my research. And that's where my money will go – every bit of it.

SWINLER There you are, Lawrence. What did I tell you? Where your treasure is there will your heart be also.

EASTON I chose to believe that Mark's treasure is in the right place, Eric. And before long his heart will follow – if we are patient. Remember that even in the darkest corner of mankind – God makes His dwelling place.

JOHN Hallelujah!

(Lights fade, and spotlight comes up on Doorman)

DOORMAN I knew that lot would get in each other's hair. They were heading for it. It only takes an argument about money to set them off. They won't stop now. Evil feeds upon evil. I've seen people kill for money, or go to gaol for thirty years, and once they've got it, they want more. And the more they get, the more miserable they become. And who gets hurt? Everyone. Even innocent people. In the end they hurt themselves, but can they think of that? No, it's just money, money, money. *(Spot fades as Doorman exits)*

(The light comes up on Sir Gideon and the other blind inmates at Samson's Waste. Percy and Constantine are playing chess. Martine sits with them. Mrs Sim knits in her chair, and Mrs Hurst sits up by the window alone. Sir Gideon sits in a chair with his stick held in his hands. Stella sits beside him)

PERCY Your move.

SIR GIDEON (*Looking out over the audience*) This is a perfect day. I can almost see the distant hills rising like castles – brown, purple and a misty grey.

MRS SIM When you talk like that, Sir Gideon, it brings back memories of my childhood. Wonderful days running through the long grass – leaping, jumping, under the wide summer skies. It's so lovely to be young.

MARTINE Not always. A lot of young people are miserable.

MRS SIM That's their own fault, Martine.

MARTINE Sometimes it's other people's fault. But you wouldn't understand that, living in your rosy glow.

MRS SIM That's a spiteful thing to say, Martine.

MARTINE It's the truth.

MRS HURST All the more reason to avoid saying it.

MRS SIM Oh well, it doesn't matter. There's a good intention buried within the hardest heart.

MARTINE I wish you would stop saying that. You know it's a lie.

PERCY Stop talking all of you. I can't think. Lot of gas bags.

CONSTANTINE Your move, Percy.

PERCY Don't rush me. I'm not in your class, Mr Constantine.

MRS HURST It's a challenge, Percy. Never refuse a challenge.

CONSTANTINE I don't agree. A challenge brings out the worst in people.

MRS HURST Oh no, Mr Constantine. A challenge brings the cream to the top.

CONSTANTINE It also brings competition and courage, and all sorts of dangerous emotions.

PERCY Why is courage dangerous?

CONSTANTINE It makes people feel that they are right. They can't see the other point of view. There's no element of doubt about courage. And doubt is the greatest of virtues.

PERCY It's a lot of hot air to me. Without courage we'd never have any greatness or sacrifice.

CONSTANTINE We don't want greatness. That's all past. Nowadays we've got to come down to earth. Keep things small where we can control them.

PERCY I like things to be great.

CONSTANTINE That's because you've never grown up, Percy.

PERCY Oh, you're so superior.

MRS SIM You shouldn't talk like that, Percy. Mr Constantine knows about these things.

PERCY No better than I do.

MRS HURST A lot better than you do. He's a man of the world, Percy.

PERCY And you're a woman of the world. But that's not much of a recommendation.

MRS SIM That's shocking.

CONSTANTINE You must watch your tongue, Percy.

MARTINE Why should he? It's a free country, isn't it?

MRS HURST Poor Percy, he has no breeding.

PERCY And I'm proud of it. Some people have a lot too much.

SIR GIDEON I do hope we can forget our differences and live happily here.

MRS SIM Of course we can, Sir Gideon.

PERCY Some hope, I should say.

MRS SIM If there's any trouble, you'll be at the bottom of it, Percy.

PERCY I doubt it. Women are at the bottom of most things.

SIR GIDEON Stella?

STELLA Yes.

SIR GIDEON You're very silent, my child.

STELLA Am I?

SIR GIDEON Yes. Do you not share in this glorious view?
(*He waves his stick*)

STELLA I can't.

SIR GIDEON I'm sorry. If there's anything else we can give you to make you happy?

STELLA No, you have given me everything that I could wish for, Sir Gideon, and more.

SIR GIDEON Yet you are sad.

STELLA I don't sense the beauty of this place. It doesn't seem peaceful to me.

SIR GIDEON (*Disappointed*) So you don't like it here?

STELLA There is something wrong. And I don't trust those men.

SIR GIDEON They are my friends.

STELLA I don't think so.

SIR GIDEON You're young, Stella. You do not know the world as I do. These men have provided you with comfort and security.

STELLA There is no security here.

SIR GIDEON Why do you say that?

STELLA I know.

SIR GIDEON How can you know?

STELLA You believe their lies, but I know the truth. They will destroy us all.

SIR GIDEON Nonsense. Nobody wishes to harm you. Everything here is for your good.

STELLA No. You must believe me. It is not what you think. You trust what you hear. But I trust what my heart tells me. I have to. I have no other way of knowing.

(*Marquis, Swinler and Easton enter. Stella gets up and moves away*)

MARQUIS Good morning. It's a lovely day, Gideon.

SIR GIDEON It is, Mark. We have been sitting here admiring it.

SWINLER Good morning, everyone. And how are we today?

ALL Good morning, Mr Swinler.

MRS HURST Oh, lovely to see you again, Eric, if you know what I mean. I was hoping you'd come.

SWINLER How kind of you to say so, Hermoine.

MRS SIM She's only expressing what we all feel, Mr Swinler.

(Swinler sits down next to Mrs Hurst)

EASTON I'm so pleased to see a game of chess. I used to play a lot in the old days, you know.

PERCY *(Getting up)* Well, sit down here, Mr Easton, and try and beat Mr Constantine. He's too good for me.

MARTINE He's won six games in a row.

PERCY Now, now, my girl, don't give the show away.

EASTON I don't think I should take your place, Percy.

PERCY You do that, Mr Easton. I'd like to see you win, really I would. Somebody should beat him. It's bad for him to win all the time.

CONSTANTINE I'd enjoy a game with you, Mr Easton.

EASTON I'll probably lose. I'm very rusty. *(Easton sits down at the board)*

MRS SIM It may be a draw. Then both of you will win. I always think it's so hard to be the loser.

SWINLER Don't worry, Mrs Sim. It's part of the good Christian life to lose with grace. And Mr Easton is a devout Christian.

MRS SIM How lovely.

EASTON It's Christian to win too, Eric. "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might."

SWINLER Yes! I think we might take a turn round the garden. It's a lovely day. What do you say, Hermione?

MRS HURST I think it's a grand idea. So kind of you to ask me. What a comfort you are to me, Eric. (*Exit with Swinler*)

PERCY I hope Mr Swinler knows what he's taken on.

EASTON I hope Mrs Hurst knows what she wants.

CONSTANTINE There's no doubt about that.

MRS SIM I think it's quite wrong of you to talk behind their backs. I hate gossips.

MARTINE Well, you're always saying things about us.

MRS SIM Only nice things.

MARTINE With a great big sting in the tail.

EASTON Now, ladies, please. Let's not allow ourselves to walk along the precipice of anger.

MRS SIM I don't think I've ever been angry, you know. I have a very pleasant temperament.

EASTON I'm sure you have, Mrs Sim. Martine meant no harm.

MARQUIS I'd like a word with you, if you can spare a moment.

SIR GIDEON Of course, Mark.

MARQUIS (*Looking at Stella*) In private.

(*Stella moves away, but remains within earshot*)

MARQUIS I hate to bring up this subject, Gideon, especially so soon after your generous gift towards the house. But I'm running short of funds.

SIR GIDEON Of course, of course. It must be difficult for you coming to me every time you want money. Supposing I make over everything to a trust fund with you in charge. That would solve the problem.

MARQUIS That's very generous, Gideon. But only if you're really sure that's what you want to do.

SIR GIDEON It will take time to arrange, of course. How much do you need in the meantime?

STELLA (*Running from the window*) Don't do it, Sir Gideon.
Don't give them your money. Please, please don't do it.

CONSTANTINE What's all that about?

MRS SIM What a thing to say!

MARQUIS What a deplorable outburst. I didn't know that your opinion was invited on Sir Gideon's financial affairs.

EASTON I think that was meant to be a private conversation, my dear. It was a little rude to interrupt.

STELLA I don't care. (*To Sir Gideon*) Please listen to me, Sir Gideon. They won't use your money as you want, I know. I know.

MARQUIS It's a great pity that you had to behave in this way, you know. Especially as we had grave doubts about accepting you here in the first place.

CONSTANTINE Yes, yes. Why don't you stop getting involved in other people's affairs, Stella?

MRS SIM What an ungrateful child. Doesn't she understand what has been done for her?

PERCY Silly girl. She doesn't know her luck.

MRS SIM Fancy not liking these wonderful kind people. They've been so good to us all, especially to her.

MARQUIS I was afraid something like this might happen. You're getting rather tense, my dear.

(Marquis puts his hands on Stella's neck. She shrinks away in fear. There is a loud scream from the garden. Then silence. The blind tap in fear, except for Stella who sits with her head in her hands. There is confusion, alarm. All turn towards the place where the sound of the scream came from)

MARQUIS Everyone stay here. I'll go and see what has happened. (*He runs out*)

EASTON (*Turning back as he follows Marquis*) Do please keep calm everyone.

SIR GIDEON It sounded as if it came from the terrace.

MRS SIM It was probably a peacock.

CONSTANTINE No, it was someone crying out in great pain.

MARTINE Ssh. It's quiet now.

CONSTANTINE It was horrible. It gave me quite a shock.

SIR GIDEON Whatever it was, I'm sure Dr Marquis will be able to cope with it.

PERCY Yes. He'll know what to do.

MRS SIM I don't think it was anything. It was probably nothing at all.

CONSTANTINE That's right. Nothing.

MARTINE Yes. It wasn't anything. It wasn't anything.

(The light fades on the crowd and comes up on Swinler, Marquis and Easton. Swinler is badly out of breath and dishevelled. They are standing over Mrs Hurst who is lying on the ground)

SWINLER I think she's fainted, I tell you, just fainted.

MARQUIS What happened then?

SWINLER It was most extraordinary. She started screaming. It must have been some sort of attack.

EASTON You are a fool, Eric. I told you it would end badly.
(Marquis feels her pulse)

SWINLER We were having a perfectly friendly chat. I think she was pleased I took notice of her. It gave her a bit of excitement. She'd only just said to me, "I don't know what I'd do without you, Eric. I look forward to your visits so much. I rely on them. They make me feel young again."

MARQUIS *(Who has been examining Mrs Hurst)* Well, she won't be looking forward to anything from now on, Eric.

SWINLER Why not?

MARQUIS She's dead.

SWINLER Dead? She can't be. I tell you, I didn't touch her.

MARQUIS Nobody suggested you did.

EASTON It wouldn't surprise me in the least if he had. Eric is capable of anything.

MARQUIS She's badly bruised on her head and neck.

SWINLER She must have fallen.

EASTON Didn't you see what happened?

SWINLER Of course I did. I put my arm round her, in a friendly way. She suddenly let out this scream. I tried to stop her. She went limp in my arms. It must have been a heart attack.

MARQUIS She didn't fall on anything?

SWINLER No. She fell in my arms, I tell you.

EASTON Then how do you explain the bruises?

SWINLER It's not my job to explain anything. It's got nothing to do with me.

MARQUIS Was she upset by something you said?

EASTON Or frightened by something you did?

SWINLER I don't make a habit of frightening women. Nor do I upset them.

EASTON People don't collapse like that for no reason.

SWINLER For God's sake, Lawrence, don't be so dramatic. People collapse and die all the time. It could happen to you or me at any moment.

EASTON Mrs Hurst was a perfectly healthy woman.

SWINLER You can't be sure of that. She might have had high blood pressure, or anything

EASTON I don't believe you, Eric. You're not telling us the truth.

SWINLER If you're trying to suggest that I had something to do with Mrs Hurst's death, I reject it utterly.

EASTON I do suggest it, unless you can tell us why she died.

MARQUIS Stop it, both of you.

EASTON I want nothing to do with it, Mark. When I agreed

to take part in this cause, it was all above board, and I didn't bargain for being caught up in a scandal. I'm going.

MARQUIS (*Taking Easton's arm*) Look, Lawrence, of course you had nothing to do with this. Nor did I. Nor did Eric, most probably.

EASTON I disagree.

MARQUIS We must talk it over calmly. (*To Swinler*) I think you had better go back and explain to the others just what has happened to her.

SWINLER Why should I explain?

MARQUIS Because you're the only one who knows what happened, and they were terrified.

EASTON They'll notice Mrs Hurst has not come back.

SWINLER You seem to forget that none of them can see a thing. You and Lawrence are the only ones who've seen anything.

EASTON What are you suggesting?

MARQUIS They heard her screams, Eric. They know she is missing. They're not fools. You could land us in serious trouble. You must go back and explain everything to them. Try and calm them down. Lawrence and I will deal with Mrs Hurst. We'll meet back at my house in an hour. Just give them the facts.

(Marquis and Easton pick up Mrs Hurst's body and carry it outside. Swinler goes into the room where the blind are. There is a hum of anticipation)

SWINLER Now, it's all right, everyone.

CONSTANTINE What's happened? What was that screaming?

SWINLER It was nothing really. Nothing at all. The whole thing was a false alarm. I must apologise.

PERCY It must have been something. We heard it.

MARTINE Yes, we did. It was frightening.

SWINLER There is no cause for alarm, I assure you. Mrs Hurst

had a slight fall. She bruised herself, but it was nothing serious.

PERCY Funny. We all thought it was somebody in great pain.

SWINLER Oh no. There's nothing to worry about. Sometimes you imagine things when you cannot see. Sounds become magnified.

CONSTANTINE Indeed they do. And where have the others gone?

SWINLER They took Mrs Hurst away for treatment. They hoped you would understand.

CONSTANTINE Yes, of course. They do altogether too much for us as it is.

(The blind people take their seats again. Stella sits on a bench by herself. Percy moves up to Swinler and takes him to one side)

PERCY Look here, old chap, didn't you and Mrs Hurst go out on the terrace together?

SWINLER Of course.

PERCY Well, she's not come back, has she? Not even to get her coat or her handbag.

SWINLER I know that.

PERCY Well, where is she?

SWINLER I told you, she's gone off to get treatment.

PERCY It sounds wrong to me. Too sudden.

SWINLER Yes, it was sudden. It was an accident.

PERCY I thought she'd have mentioned it to us before leaving. She's always been keen to tell us everything about herself.

SWINLER I dare say. But this time she preferred to slip off without saying anything. She was upset.

PERCY It sounds very odd to me. I don't like it.

SWINLER Well, what about a drink and we'll forget all about it?

PERCY I promised Dr Marquis I wouldn't, you know

SWINLER Oh, I know all about that. But it's not good to deprive yourself all the time.

PERCY A little of what you fancy does you good, eh? Well, I won't say no.

SWINLER Good. (*Taking a flask from his pocket he pours out a capful and hands it to Percy. Percy downs it, and Swinler hands him the flask*) There you are. I hope you enjoy yourself and forget all your troubles, Percy.

PERCY I shall, Mr Swinler. I shall. Can't remember a thing. It's gone right out of my mind.

(*Percy staggers back to the bench, next to Stella. He swigs from the flask occasionally. Swinler crosses the stage and meets the Doorman*)

DOORMAN Everything all right in there?

SWINLER Yes, yes. It was nothing at all.

DOORMAN Sounded like screams to me, sir. Human screams.

SWINLER Yes. Just a couple of ladies going for each other. They get on each other's nerves in there, you know.

DOORMAN I see, sir.

SWINLER Ladies are like that.

DOORMAN Yes, sir. (*Swinler goes off*) Things look different to different people. (*Exit*)

(*Lights come up on Samson's Waste. Percy is now well oiled, and sits holding his flask. He nudges Stella from time to time, as she sits quietly next to him*)

PERCY Hello, sweetheart. Got nothing to say to me, eh? No nice little words of encouragement?

STELLA You're drunk.

PERCY Oh, I know that my dear. Tight as a tick. I haven't felt so great in years. I'm as strong as an ox. (*He flexes his arm muscle and roars with laughter*)

STELLA If you got off this bench, you'd fall flat on your face. Who gave you that drink?

PERCY You can't see any drink.

STELLA No, but I can smell it. Who gave it to you?

PERCY Ssh. I'm not telling. It's a secret.

STELLA It was Mr Swinler, wasn't it?

PERCY Can't remember a thing.

STELLA That's just why he gave it to you. Where's Mrs Hurst?

PERCY She's OK, dearie. She's gone for treatment.

STELLA That's what Mr Swinler told you, isn't it?

PERCY Don't know. Somebody told me. In any case Mrs Hurst's just fine. She's gone off with the doctor, and that's all I can remember.

STELLA (*Standing up*) You *must* remember. Don't you understand, something awful's happened? Mrs Hurst might be lying out there wounded. She may even be dead.

MRS SIM Stop behaving like that.

CONSTANTINE Calm down, Stella. There's nothing wrong with Mrs Hurst. She'll be back in no time.

MRS SIM She fell down the steps by the terrace. We saw it happen.

STELLA You saw nothing.

MARTINE We did. We were at the window.

CONSTANTINE She just cried out in fear, that's all.

STELLA That was the scream of a woman dying.

MRS SIM Don't listen to her. She has never seen anything in her life. She can't know.

CONSTANTINE You're a trouble-maker, Stella.

MARTINE She always wants to spoil everything.

PERCY It's better to be like me and remember nothing - sweet, sweet nothing.

STELLA I can't forget that scream, I tell you, and you're all trying to pretend you didn't hear it.

PERCY Then be a good girl and don't talk about it.

STELLA I cannot forget that bottle.

PERCY It's a present. It was kind of Mr Swinler to give it to me. He did it to please me.

STELLA He did it to destroy you.

PERCY (*Laughing*) Rubbish. It won't destroy me. It would take more than a bottle of booze to destroy me.

STELLA It's already destroyed your memory and your hearing.

PERCY Temporarily, my dear, temporarily.

STELLA You'll remember too late.

PERCY Too late? What's the hurry? Can't see why you're in such a rush. Just like all these young people nowadays. They can't stop and enjoy life at all – they just have to rush on. Now I like to take my time

STELLA There is no time. Don't you see, we'll be left here while they get away?

PERCY Away from what? Can't understand a thing you're talking about.

STELLA No. None of you want to understand what I'm saying. But you'll have to soon. You'll just have to.

CONSTANTINE Will you stop being so emotional.

PERCY And poking your nose in where you're not wanted.

MRS SIM We don't want any unpleasantness here. There was none until you started making this fuss.

PERCY She didn't approve of my having one fiddling drink.

MARTINE She's never satisfied, that's her trouble.

PERCY It's interference. That's what it is. Interference in our private lives.

CONSTANTINE You want to dictate to us. You want to control everything yourself.

STELLA I don't.

CONSTANTINE Oh yes you do. You're always at the bottom of these suspicions and rumours.

PERCY (*Waving the bottle at the girl*) It's very naughty of you to want to take this away, you know. It's all I have to comfort me.

STELLA I never said I wanted to take it from you.

PERCY Well, you meant it, by the way you disapproved of it. Just as you want to take away what we have been given here, and deprive us of our small piece of happiness.

STELLA No, really I don't. I want to give you something. I don't want to take anything away.

MRS SIM They said you would not fit into our community and they were right.

CONSTANTINE Why don't you just leave, Stella? We've had enough of you.

MRS SIM Yes. We don't want you here.

MARTINE That's right. We don't want you here.

STELLA All right. I'll go. I'll go. (*Exit*)

(*Lights fade and come up on John Marquis. He is sitting reading. Stella enters*)

STELLA John, John. Where are you?

JOHN Stella, what are you doing here?

STELLA I had to leave. The others told me to go.

JOHN Why? What did you say to them?

STELLA Mrs Hurst is dead, John. I know she's dead. They wouldn't believe it, but it's true.

JOHN Don't be ridiculous, Stella. You're letting your imagination run away with you.

STELLA It's true, John. I tell you it's true.

JOHN Now look, Stella. You've got to go back to Samson's Waste at once. If my father finds out you've come here, he'll be very angry.

STELLA Your father came to see Sir Gideon this morning with those other two men. They wanted his money.

JOHN I know that.

STELLA Then why didn't you do something about it?

JOHN What the hell could I do? I didn't ask for any money. I didn't go with them.

STELLA You should have warned Sir Gideon.

JOHN He'd never have believed me.

STELLA That doesn't matter. You should have been there and spoken up, instead of sitting here doing nothing.

JOHN Now look here, Stella. I've done a lot. Much more than you realise.

STELLA I haven't noticed it. You're part of this whole messy business.

JOHN Yes, I am. And that's the strength of my position. I can speak from the inside, and I may be able to turn things the right way in the end.

STELLA That's what you say, John, but they've fooled you just like the rest. First you agree to be part of what's wrong, and then you don't even see what's wrong.

JOHN Stop it, Stella. Did Sir Gideon give my father the money?

STELLA No. He was just about to. But I stopped him.

JOHN You are a fool, Stella. You shouldn't have done that. I've told you before to keep your mouth shut.

STELLA Perhaps if you'd been there I wouldn't have had to do it. But you weren't. All your life, John, you've blamed other people. First of all your parents for what they did to you. Then the system which you think is ruthless; the Establishment because it has all the power; the people because they're lazy and stupid . . .

JOHN For God's sake, Stella, stop it.

STELLA No, I won't stop it, I'm going to tell you because it's

about time somebody told you the sort of person you really are. Stop blaming everyone else, John and take a look at yourself. You haven't done a stroke of hard work in your life, and whose fault is that? Yours. You feel bitter and neglected, but who have you ever cared for? Nobody. You hate the system – but you're part of it. And you're just as ruthless yourself when it comes to the things you believe in and want. Oh yes, you protest about everything that's wrong. But you don't lift a finger to put anything right. It's just enough for you to say you're against it. And when it comes to the pinch, you're a coward, and you do nothing.

JOHN Shut up.

STELLA I'm going back to Samson's Waste. If you want to help, it's up to you.

(Stella goes, and leaves John standing with his back to the audience)

DOORMAN Out on a limb, isn't she? Don't envy her much, going back to that place. But she's very little choice. Strange how cruel we can be to each other, isn't it?

(The light comes up on Marquis, Swinler and Easton)

EASTON Why didn't you tell them she was dead?

SWINLER There are some things it is better for them not to know.

EASTON I disagree with that in principle. It's most dishonest.

SWINLER Isn't it time you buried a few of your principles, Lawrence?

EASTON When we started on all this, it was for the benefit of blind people.

SWINLER Was it?

EASTON Ultimately, yes.

MARQUIS And it was also to raise money for my research.

EASTON Why didn't you explain that at the beginning?

MARQUIS Surely that was perfectly clear?

SWINLER Yes. We all understood it, Lawrence.

EASTON I would never have agreed to it, I tell you. I've always been strictly honest.

SWINLER I doubt it. You can't tell me all the money you raise in that charity of yours reaches the people it should.

EASTON We do our best. We occasionally fail, but our intent is good.

MARQUIS I'm worried about that girl Stella. We'll have to get rid of her.

SWINLER I agree.

EASTON You can't do that. What will the others say?

SWINLER They don't need to know about it.

EASTON Of course they do.

MARQUIS They want her to leave.

EASTON Sir Gideon likes her very much, and you won't be able to remove her without his permission.

SWINLER There are ways of explaining these things, Lawrence. You don't have to tell the whole truth.

(All three start to go blind very slowly)

SWINLER Why is it so dark all of a sudden?

MARQUIS She's a menace to the harmony of the house. Frankly I think that outburst of hers was almost that of a psychotic.

SWINLER Exactly. Anyway, she's dangerous to have around.

EASTON That's a terrible thing to say.

SWINLER Not nearly as terrible as it will be for us if she stays there.

MARQUIS She's a frightened girl, and people who are afraid say stupid things.

EASTON I don't know. This is really most unpleasant. Where are you going to take the girl?

MARQUIS Don't worry, Lawrence. We won't harm her in any way.

SWINLER We'll find a place where she won't make a nuisance of herself – where she can't talk.

EASTON I don't believe Gideon will agree to it. Not for a moment.

SWINLER He must.

MARQUIS It's our only chance, Lawrence. It's Stella or us.

(The lights fade on the three men and come up on Samson's Waste. The blind sit near each other, with the exception of Stella who is sitting alone. John Marquis crosses the stage and goes to Stella)

JOHN Are you all right, Stella?

STELLA Yes, John. I knew you'd come.

JOHN I'm sorry I left you for so long. I am going to stay with you now. You don't need to be afraid any more. I've come back to tell you all the truth.

CONSTANTINE Well, I don't want to hear it. I don't care for people who bare their souls in public. It's embarrassing. They usually do it to get attention. It's wicked – even a little sinister.

JOHN Perhaps telling lies in public is wicked.

CONSTANTINE I don't know what you mean.

JOHN And that's what you've been doing, ever since those secrets were handed over in your house.

CONSTANTINE I've already explained, I knew nothing about it.

JOHN That's what you said at the time, but it wasn't true.

CONSTANTINE Of course it was true. How was I to know that a close friend of mine was involved in that kind of scandal?

JOHN He was a little more than a close friend, wasn't he?

CONSTANTINE That's a libellous suggestion.

JOHN If the cap fits

CONSTANTINE Now look here, there's absolutely no proof whatsoever that anything untoward took place in my house.

JOHN Except for the proof of what actually did happen.

CONSTANTINE And what proof is that?

JOHN Just that a man of your ability and experience must have chosen not to see for a very definite reason.

CONSTANTINE It's got nothing to do with you.

JOHN No, but it has a lot to do with your country.

CONSTANTINE It has nothing to do with my country. It's a personal matter. Why do you go on and on about this? This is exactly what I came here to escape.

JOHN And have you escaped? Have you forgotten?

CONSTANTINE No. But I could if only you would leave me alone.

JOHN You never will, until you face up to the truth.

CONSTANTINE You can't ask me to do that. It would ruin me. My life would be finished.

JOHN No. Your life would begin again.

CONSTANTINE It isn't as easy as that. I'm a proud man.

JOHN Honesty is the most difficult thing in the world. But it would give you back your sight.

(Constantine walks forward)

CONSTANTINE Yes, I did know about the secrets. I knew Michael Chambers handed them over in my house, but I had to protect him. His friendship meant more to me than anything else in life. I told him to deny the charges. Then I told lies myself. That's why honesty frightens me so much. I've always wanted to admit it, but I've never quite had the courage. You know, I thought I could see people out there.

JOHN You can.

CONSTANTINE But it's impossible. I haven't seen anybody for years.

JOHN I know that. You've been so wrapped up in yourself, you've hardly noticed them.

CONSTANTINE I *can* see them. I can see. I can see.

STELLA Oh, it's wonderful, Mr Constantine. I'm so happy for you.

(As he moves away, Martine comes forward)

MARTINE Oh, I wish I could see.

JOHN You could if you wanted to.

MARTINE How could I?

JOHN It's bitterness that makes you blind.

MARTINE I'm not bitter.

JOHN Your parents are still alive, Martine. They didn't die in an air crash, did they?

MARTINE Don't you talk about my parents.

JOHN They turned you out of the house, and you hate them for it.

MARTINE I hate you. I never asked you for advice.

JOHN They never gave you any money. They were poor. You've always tried to hide that.

MARTINE Just because your father is rich and important, there's no need to look down on me for being poor.

JOHN I don't.

MARTINE You do.

JOHN Can't you see, it's up to you. You can choose.

MARTINE How can I? It's not my fault my parents wished I'd never been born.

JOHN No, Martine. But you choose to feel bitter. And that bitterness blinds you. I know, because I felt just the same.

MARTINE You could never understand what I feel.

JOHN I do. My parents separated and I hated them both, until I met somebody who had lost her bitterness. She had far

more reason to be bitter than I had. But she was free. I think you could be free too.

MARTINE I'd like to be free. I would like to see, more than anything else.

JOHN More than holding on to your hate?

MARTINE Yes, much more. Wait a minute – I can see! I tell you, I can see! It's a miracle! I can see everything.

(Louisa Sim steps forward)

MRS SIM How nice for you. I'm not sure I'd like to see again.

MARTINE But of course you would.

MRS SIM There's no hope for me, my dear. I've been blind too long. In any case, I don't feel bitter about anything. I've had a wonderful life – everything about it has been perfect.

JOHN Has it?

MRS SIM Yes, of course it has.

JOHN I thought you had a son.

MRS SIM Yes, I do. A wonderful son.

JOHN He's in prison, isn't he?

MRS SIM Oh no. That's not true. It was all a terrible mistake I tell you, I know he's innocent.

JOHN You know that's a lie.

MRS SIM I never tell lies. It's people like you who tell lies. You want to turn me against my boy. But he's loving, he's kind.

JOHN You must stop running away from the truth, otherwise you'll always be blind. Is that what you want?

MRS SIM I want my son.

JOHN The only way is to face the truth about him.

MRS SIM But you don't understand. He murdered a man.

JOHN Well, there now, you've said it.

MRS SIM Yes I did. But it makes me look so awful. I'm afraid of what people might think.

JOHN There. You've faced the facts at last. It wasn't so bad, was it?

MRS SIM I *liked* being blind. You see, the darkness was kinder than the light.

JOHN For you, but not for him.

MRS SIM No. Not for him. He's all on his own. I'm going to see him. Good gracious, you know it's raining. I hope it's only a shower. I can see the rain drops. You know, rain always makes me feel depressed.

JOHN That's the first time I've ever heard you say anything real.

MRS SIM I suppose it is. I've felt so miserable most of my life, but I've always pretended to be happy.

Mrs Sim moves away, as Percy gets up and comes into the spotlight

PERCY Well, I'm always happy. Just as long as I have my comforts. *(Percy takes the lid off the flask)*

JOHN Don't take that.

PERCY Why ever not? It's none of your business.

JOHN Yes it is.

PERCY Now, look here, young man, you've come down here today bringing a lot of trouble with you. You've been only too willing to explain to us all how dishonest we've been. But that's no reason why you should talk down to us, is it? In any case, I don't believe all you've had to say. How do we know you aren't telling lies?

JOHN It's always been the bottle that's stood in your way, hasn't it, Percy?

PERCY What do you mean?

JOHN You've not told the truth, have you? You said it was your wife who made you take to drink. That wasn't true. It was your drink that made your wife unfaithful.

PERCY You watch what you're saying. You never knew my wife.

JOHN No, but I know you. You've always taken a drink to forget something. First it was to forget how you treated your wife. Then it was to forget the fellow you killed on the road. Then to forget Mrs Hurst. Now it's to forget what you don't want to see.

PERCY I can't help that. I'm blind.

JOHN You don't have to be. You want to be blind.

PERCY You're lying.

JOHN You drove your wife away, Percy.

PERCY You've got a nerve. Talking to me like that.

JOHN Somebody had to. So you could throw away that stick and open those eyes.

PERCY I've never wanted to look at it that way before. But it's true. I did drive her away. She couldn't take it any more. It was all my fault. (*Percy gives the flask to John*) I'm sorry about what I said to you just now, John. I can see things more clearly now. Sometimes it's a lot easier to ignore the facts than to face up to them.

(*Sir Gideon enters*)

JOHN Sir Gideon, I have something to tell you.

SIR GIDEON Yes, young man. What is it?

JOHN I owe you an apology.

SIR GIDEON Me? Whatever for?

JOHN I took some of your money – the money you gave for Samson's Waste. I spent it on myself – getting myself out of trouble. I want to pay it back.

SIR GIDEON It's very good of you to tell me, John.

JOHN But that's not all. Mrs Hurst is not here any more.

SIR GIDEON No. I understand she had a fall and she's gone for treatment.

JOHN Well, that's what Mr Swinler said, but it's not true.
She's dead.

PERCY Good God!

SIR GIDEON Dead. She can't be.

MRS SIM Why didn't they tell us?

MARTINE That's terrible.

MRS SIM Then Stella was right.

JOHN Yes. She was. Sir Gideon, this house is not what you think. Look, put your hand on this broken window pane. Feel the wind come through it. There's been no money spent on this place. The floors are rotting and the roof leaks. And outside there is no garden, but a waste land.

SIR GIDEON No garden? But I heard the music of the birds and the fountains. I heard them quite clearly.

MRS SIM We all heard them.

(John goes over and turns on the machine. It plays the music of the birds and water)

JOHN There's the music of your birds, Sir Gideon. You can turn them on and off with the flick of a wrist. *(He turns the machine off)* The paintings on the walls – just all reproductions. Even your beloved Provence – everything. It's all fake.

SIR GIDEON This is incredible. I don't believe it.

STELLA It's true, Sir Gideon. You must listen to him.

SIR GIDEON I could never have been fooled like this. It's not possible.

JOHN Stella is the only one who saw through it.

SIR GIDEON But I've known your father for years, John. He would never do this to me.

JOHN You know everything about money, Sir Gideon. But you're more interested in your works of art, your gifts to the nation, and your unselfish public spirit than you ever

have been in people. You're sentimental about your friends. So they can exploit you. And they have.

SIR GIDEON What right have you to speak to me like this?

JOHN None. I could never have done it unless I'd faced the truth about myself. Stella made me do that. I'm trying to help her. I'm trying to help you all.

SIR GIDEON *Is he speaking the truth, Stella?*

STELLA Yes, Sir Gideon. He is.

SIR GIDEON How blind I've been. My God! I can see again. I can see your face. (*He touches Stella's head*) I can see your hair. (*He looks round at Samson's Waste*) Good God! Look at this place. I've been a fool. A sentimental fool.
(*Enter Marquis, Swinler and Easton*)

MARQUIS I hope you've not been listening to my son, Gideon.

SIR GIDEON And why not?

MARQUIS I'm sure he sounds convincing, but he's probably after your money.

SIR GIDEON After my money?

MARQUIS Yes, and he might tell you all sorts of stories to get it.

SIR GIDEON As a matter of fact, he's just told me he wanted to give me back my money.

MARQUIS Don't believe a word of it. He's not to be trusted.

SIR GIDEON Is that so?

MARQUIS He's always lying his way out of trouble.

SIR GIDEON No, Mark. It's you that's been lying. All you wanted to do is rob me.

EASTON You've got it all wrong, Sir Gideon. It's not what you think. You mustn't judge the outward appearance. Look to the heart, Sir Gideon. The heart is good. We meant well, really we did.

SIR GIDEON Leave me alone. Let us all out of here.

SWINLER No. You're not leaving.

SIR GIDEON (*Trying to force his way through*) You can't keep me here any longer.

SWINLER (*Pushing him to the ground*) Get back there, you fool.

STELLA Leave him alone. You mustn't hurt him.

JOHN (*Helping Sir Gideon to his feet*) There's nothing you can do about it now. He can see.

MARQUIS I don't believe it.

SWINLER The others can't see. They won't see in a million years.

JOHN Don't be too sure.

(One by one, those who were blind throw down their white sticks. As they do so, the three men start to go blind themselves)

SWINLER I can't see a thing.

MARQUIS Nor can I.

SWINLER For God's sake turn the light on, Lawrence.

EASTON It's dark in here. I can't find my way.

SWINLER Why doesn't someone turn on the light.

MARQUIS Hurry up, Lawrence. It's dark as hell.

EASTON (*Scared*) I can't see, I tell you. I can't see anything.

(Easton bends down and picks up one of the discarded sticks. He feels round him but cannot tell where he is. He begins to tap)

EASTON They're not here. They must have gone.

SWINLER You must have let them out then. Nobody came past me.

MARQUIS I can't hear them.

(They all have sticks now and begin to tap their way round the stage)

EASTON We should never have come back here. I never wanted anything to do with it. I can't go on. I tell you, I can't.

SWINLER Pull yourself together. (*Exits*)

EASTON I don't want to be left here. I don't want to have any part in it. (*Exits*)

MARQUIS Get the girl, Eric. She can't see. They won't go without her. We must get the girl. We must find Stella. (*Exits*)

DOORMAN (*To Stella and John*) Well, I'm glad to see you two together. That's a good idea. One set of eyes to share, and one with no eyes who sees a lot more than those who have them.

STELLA I wish that were true.

JOHN It is true. I'd never have got here without you.

STELLA I did nothing, John.

DOORMAN I wish you could see their faces. All lit up they are.

STELLA (*Though she is, of course, still blind*) I can see them. I can see them as clearly as a summer's day.

JOHN I like to hear you say that.

STELLA It's true.

JOHN I'm afraid I've not got much to offer you, Stella. But at least you know the truth about me.

STELLA That's all that matters, John. That, and the courage to put things right.

DOORMAN Well, they make a fine pair, don't they? Love doesn't mean much nowadays – love, hate, sex, marriage, divorce. It's all much the same. But it will be different with them. If you told people that a blind girl could see as clearly as a summer's day – why, they'd laugh at you. Rubbish, they'd say. We don't believe in that sort of thing. A sort of miracle it is. But then, that's a word I shouldn't use nowadays. No such things as miracles are there? Just happenings. Some of you'll go out of here just the same as you came in.

Good luck to you. But then there's some might not go out quite the same – perhaps they won't notice it. Perhaps they will.

It's all a matter of choice. A choice to follow truth when evil is easier. A choice to see truth when everything is in darkness. A choice to fight for truth when it looks better to abandon it. And I guess it's going to go on that way. I've seen it all. Life is like a vast tapestry, and somewhere in that tapestry is you.

CURTAIN