

Bald Soprano

The Characters

MR. SMITH

MRS. SMITH

MR. MARTIN

MRS. MARTIN

MARY, *the maid*

THE FIRE CHIEF

SCENE: *A middle-class English interior, with English armchairs. An English evening. Mr. Smith, an Englishman, seated in his English armchair and wearing English slippers, is smoking his English pipe and reading an English newspaper, near an English fire. He is wearing English spectacles and a small gray English mustache. Beside him, in another English armchair, Mrs. Smith, an Englishwoman, is darning some English socks. A long moment of English silence. The English clock strikes 17 English strokes.*

MRS. SMITH : There, it's nine o'clock. We've drunk the soup, and eaten the fish and chips, and the English salad. The children have drunk English water. We've eaten well this evening. That's because we live in the suburbs of London and because our name is Smith.

MR. SMITH: [*continues to read, clicks his tongue.*]

MRS. SMITH: Potatoes are very good fried in fat; the salad oil was not rancid. The oil from the grocer at the corner is better quality than the oil from the grocer at the bottom of the street. However, I prefer not to tell them that their oil is bad.

MR. SMITH: [*continues to read, clicks his tongue*]

MRS. SMITH: However, the oil from the grocer at the corner is still the best.

MR. SMITH: [*continues to read, clicks his tongue*]

MRS. SMITH: Mary did the potatoes very well, this evening. The last time she did not do them well. I do not like them when they are well done.

MR. SMITH: [*continues to read, clicks his tongue*]

MRS. SMITH: The fish was fresh. It made my mouth water. I had two helpings. No, three helpings. That made me go to the w.c. You also had three helpings. However, the third time you took less than the first two times, while as for

me, I took a great deal more . I eat better than you this evening. Why is that? Usually, it is you who eats more. It is not appetite you lack.

MR. SMITH: [*clicks his tongue*]

MRS. SMITH: But still, the soup was perhaps a little too salt. It was saltier than you. Ha, ha, ha. It also had too may leeks and not enough onions. I regret I didn't advise Mary to add some aniseed stars. The next time I'll know better.

MR SMITH: [*continues to read, clicks his tongue*]

MRS. SMITH: Our little boy wanted to drink some beer; he's going to love getting tiddly. He's like you. At table did you notice how he stared at the bottle? But I poured some water from the jug into his glass. He was thirsty and he drank it. Helen is like me: she's a good manager, thrifty, plays the piano. She never asks to drink English beer. She's like our little daughter who drinks only milk and eats only porridge. It's obvious that she's only two. She's named Peggy. The quince and bean pie was marvelous. It would have been nice, perhaps, to have had a small glass of Australian Burgundy with the sweet, but I did not bring the bottle to the table because I did not wish to set the children a bad example of gluttony. They must learn to be sober and temperate.

MR. SMITH [*continues to read, clicks his tongue.*]

MRS. SMITH: Mrs. Parker knows a Rumanian grocer by the name of Popesco Rosenfeld, who has just come from Constantinople. He is a great specialist in yogurt. He has a diploma from the school of yogurt-making in Adrianople. Tomorrow I shall buy a large pot of native Rumanian yogurt from him. One doesn't often find such things here in the suburbs of London.

MR. SMITH [*continues to read, clicks his tongue.*]

MRS. SMITH: Yogurt is excellent for the stomach, the kidneys, the appendicitis, and apotheosis. It was Doctor Mackenzie-King who told me that, he's the one who takes care of the children of our neighbors, the Johns. He's a good doctor. One can trust him. He never prescribes any medicine that he's not tried out on himself first. Before operating on Parker, he had his own liver operated on first, although he was not the least bit ill.

MR. SMITH: But how does it happen that the doctor pulled through while Parker died?

MRS. SMITH: Because the operation was successful in the doctor's case and it was not in Parker's.

MR. SMITH: Then Mackenzie is not a good doctor. The operation should have succeeded with both of them or else both should have died.

MRS. SMITH: Why?

MR. SMITH: A conscientious doctor must die with his patient if they can't get well together. The captain of a ship goes down with his ship into the briny deep, he does not survive alone.

MRS. SMITH: One cannot compare a patient with a ship.

MR. SMITH: Why not? A ship has its diseases too; moreover, your doctor is as hale as a ship; that's why he should have perished at the same time as his patient, like the captain and his ship.

MRS. SMITH: Ah! I hadn't thought of that. ..Perhaps it is true. ..And then, what conclusion do you draw from this?

MR. SMITH: All doctors are quacks. And all patients, too. Only the Royal Navy is honest in England.

MRS. SMITH: But not sailors.

MR. SMITH: Naturally [*A pause. Still reading his paper:*] Here's a thing I don't understand. In the newspaper they always give the age of deceased persons but never the age of the newly born. That doesn't make sense.

MRS. SMITH: I never thought of that!

[*Another moment of silence. The clock strikes seven times. Silence. The clock strikes three times. Silence. The clock doesn't strike.*]

MR. SMITH [*still reading his paper*]: Tsk, it says here that Bobby Watson died

MRS. SMITH: My God, the poor man! When did he die?

MR. SMITH: Why do you pretend to be astonished? You know very well that he's been dead these past two years. Surely you remember that we attended his funeral a year and a half ago.

MRS. SMITH: Oh yes, of course I do remember. I remembered it right away, but I don't understand why you yourself were so surprised to see it in the paper.

MR. SMITH: It wasn't in the paper. It's been three years since his death was announced. I remembered it through an association of ideas.

MRS. SMITH: What a pity! He was so well preserved.

MR. SMITH: He was the handsomest corpse in Great Britain. He didn't look his age. Poor Bobby, he'd been dead for four years and he was still warm. A veritable living corpse. And how cheerful he was!

MRS. SMITH: Poor Bobby.

MR. SMITH: Which poor Bobby do you mean?

MRS. SMITH: It is his wife that I mean. She is called Bobby too, Bobby Watson. Since they both had the same name, you could never tell one from the other when you saw them together. It was only after his death that you could really tell which was which. And there are still people today who confuse her with the deceased and offer their condolences to him. Do you know her?

MR. SMITH: I only met her once, by chance, at Bobby's burial.

MRS. SMITH: I've never seen her. Is she pretty?

MR. SMITH: She has regular features and yet one cannot say that she is pretty. She is too big and stout. Her features are not regular but still one can say that she is very pretty. She is a little too small and too thin. She's a voice teacher.

[The clock strikes five times. A long silence.]

MRS. SMITH: And when do they plan to be married, those two?

MR. SMITH: Next spring, at the latest.

MRS. SMITH: We shall have to go to their wedding, I suppose.

MR. SMITH: We shall have to give them a wedding present. I wonder what?

MRS. SMITH: Why don't we give them one of the seven silver salvers that were given us for our wedding and which have never been of any use to us? *[Silence.]*

MRS. SMITH: How sad for her to be left a widow so young.

MR. SMITH: Fortunately, they had no children.

MRS. SMITH: That was all they needed! Children! Poor woman, how could she have managed!

MR. SMITH: She's still young. She might very well remarry. She looks so well in mourning.

MRS. SMITH: But who would take care of the children? You know very well that they have a boy and a girl. What are their names?

MR. SMITH: Bobby and Bobby like their parents. Bobby Watson's uncle, old Bobby Watson, is a rich man and very fond of the boy. He might very well pay for Bobby's education.

MRS. SMITH: That would be proper. And Bobby Watson's aunt, old Bobby Watson, might very well, in her turn, pay for the education of Bobby Watson, Bobby Watson's daughter. That way Bobby, Bobby Watson's mother, could remarry. Has she anyone in mind?

MR. SMITH: Yes, a cousin of Bobby Watson's.

MRS. SMITH: Who? Bobby Watson?

MR. SMITH: Which Bobby Watson do you mean?

MRS. SMITH: Why, Bobby Watson, the son of old Bobby Watson, the late Bobby Watson's other uncle.

MR. SMITH: No, it's not that one, it's someone else. It's Bobby Watson, the son of old Bobby Watson, the late Bobby Watson's aunt.

MRS. SMITH: Are you referring to Bobby Watson the commercial traveler?

MR. SMITH: All the Bobby Watsons are commercial travelers.

MRS. SMITH: What a difficult trade! However, they do well at it.

MR. SMITH: Yes, when there's no competition.

MRS. SMITH: And when is there no competition?

MR. SMITH: On Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Tuesdays.

MRS. SMITH: Ah! Three days a week? And what does Bobby Watson do on those days?

MR. SMITH: He rests, he sleeps.

MRS. SMITH: But why doesn't he work those three days if there's no competition?

MR. SMITH: I don't know everything. I can't answer all your idiotic questions!

MRS. SMITH *[offended]*: Oh! Are you trying to humiliate me?

MR. SMITH *[all smiles]*: You know very well that I'm not.

MRS. SMITH: Men are all alike! You sit there all day long, a cigarette in your mouth, or you powder your nose and rouge your lips, fifty times a day, or else you drink like a fish.

MR. SMITH: But what would you say if you saw men acting like women do, smoking all day long, powdering, rouging their lips, drinking whisky?

MRS. SMITH: It's nothing to me! But if you're only saying that to annoy me ...I don't care for that kind of joking, you know that very well!

*[She hurls the socks across the stage and shows her teeth. She gets up. *]*

MR. SMITH *[also getting up and going towards his wife, tenderly]*: Oh, my little ducky daddles, what a little spitfire you are! You know that I only said it as a joke! *[He takes her by the waist and kisses her.]* What a ridiculous pair of old lovers we are! Come, let's put out the lights and go bye-byes.

MARY *[entering]*: I'm the maid. I have spent a very pleasant afternoon. I've been to the cinema with a man and I've seen a film with some women. After the cinema, we went to drink some brandy and milk and then read the newspaper.

MRS. SMITH: I hope that you've spent a pleasant afternoon, that you went to the cinema with a man and that you drank some brandy and milk.

MR. SMITH: And the newspaper.

MARY: Mr. and Mrs. Martin, your guests, are at the door. They were waiting for me. They didn't dare come in by themselves. They were supposed to have dinner with you this evening.

MRS. SMITH: Oh, yes. We were expecting them. And we were hungry. Since they didn't put in an appearance, we were going to start dinner without them. We've had nothing to eat all day. You should not have gone out!

MARY: But it was you who gave me permission.

MR. SMITH: We didn't do it on purpose.

* In Nicolas Bataille's production, Mrs. Smith did not show her teeth, nor did she throw the socks very far.

MARY *[bursts into laughter, then she bursts into tears. Then she smiles]*: I bought me a chamber pot.

MRS. SMITH: My dear Mary, please open the door and ask Mr. and Mrs. Martin to step in. We will change quickly.

[Mr. and Mrs. Smith exit right. Mary opens the door at the left by which Mr. and Mrs. Martin enter.]

MARY: Why have you come so late! You are not very polite. People should be punctual. Do you understand? But sit down there, anyway, and wait now that you're here.

*[She exits. Mr. and Mrs. Martin sit facing each other, without speaking. They smile timidly at each other. The dialogue which follows must be spoken in voices that are drawling, monotonous, a little singsong, without nuances. *]*

MR. MARTIN: Excuse me, madam, but it seems to me, unless I'm mistaken, that I've met you somewhere before.

MRS. MARTIN: I, too, sir. It seems to me that I've met you somewhere before.

MR. MARTIN: Was it, by any chance, at Manchester that I caught a glimpse of you, madam?

MRS. MARTIN: That is very possible. I am originally from the city of Manchester. But I do not have a good memory, sir. I cannot say whether it was there that I caught a glimpse of you or not!

MR. MARTIN: Good God, that's curious! I, too, am originally from the city of Manchester, madam!

MRS. MARTIN: That is curious!

MR. MARTIN: Isn't that curious! Only, I, madam, I left the city of Manchester about five weeks ago.

MRS. MARTIN: That is curious! What a bizarre coincidence! I, too, sir, I left the city of Manchester about five weeks ago.

MR. MARTIN: Madam, I took the 8:30 morning train which arrives in London at 4:45.

MRS. MARTIN: That is curious! How very bizarre! And what a coincidence! I took the same train, sir, I too.

MR. MARTIN: Good Lord, how curious! Perhaps then, madam, it was on the train that I saw you?

*In Nicolas Bataille's production, this dialogue was spoken in a tone and played in a style sincerely tragic.

MRS. MARTIN: It is indeed possible; that is, not unlikely. It is plausible and, after all, why not!—

But I don't recall it, sir!

MR. MARTIN: I traveled second class, madam. There is no second class in England, but I always travel second class.

MRS. MARTIN: That is curious! How very bizarre! And what a coincidence! I, too, sir, I traveled second class.

MR. MARTIN: How curious that is! Perhaps we did meet in second class, my dear lady!

MRS. MARTIN: That is certainly possible, and it is not at all unlikely. But I do not remember very well, my dear sir!

MR. MARTIN: My seat was in coach No.8, compartment 6, my dear lady.

MRS. MARTIN: How curious that is! My seat was also in coach No.8, compartment 6, my dear sir!

MR. MARTIN: How curious that is and what a bizarre coincidence! Perhaps we met in compartment 6, my dear lady?

MRS. MARTIN: It is indeed possible, after all! But I do not recall it, my dear sir!

MR. MARTIN: To tell the truth, my dear lady, I do not remember it either, but it is possible that we caught a glimpse of each other there, and as I think of it, it seems to me even very likely.

MRS. MARTIN: Oh! truly, of course, truly, sir!

MR. MARTIN: How curious it is! I had seat No.3, next to the window, my dear lady.

MRS. MARTIN: Oh, good Lord, how curious and bizarre! I had seat No.6, next to the window, across from you, my dear sir.

MR. MARTIN: Good God, how curious that is and what a coincidence! We were then seated facing each other, my dear lady! It is there that we must have seen each other!

MRS. MARTIN: How curious it is! It is possible, but I do not recall it, sir!

MR. MARTIN: To tell the truth, my dear lady, I do not remember it either. However, it is very possible that we saw each other on that occasion.

MRS. MARTIN: It is true, but I am not at all sure of it, sir.

MR. MARTIN: Dear madam, were you not the lady who asked me to place her suitcase in the luggage rack and who thanked me and gave me permission to smoke?

MRS. MARTIN: But of course, that must have been I, sir. How curious it is, how curious it is, and what a coincidence!

MR. MARTIN: How curious it is, how bizarre, what a coincidence! And well, well, it was perhaps at that moment that we came to know each other, madam?

MRS. MARTIN: How curious it is and what a coincidence! It is indeed possible, my dear sir! However, I do not believe that I recall it.

MR. MARTIN: Nor do I, madam. [*A moment of silence. The clock strikes twice, then once.*] Since coming to London, I have resided in Bromfield Street, my dear lady.

MRS. MARTIN: How curious that is, how bizarre! I, too, since coming to London, I have resided in Bromfield Street, my dear sir.

MR. MARTIN: How curious that is, well then, well then, perhaps we have seen each other in Bromfield Street, my dear lady.

MRS. MARTIN: How curious that is, how bizarre! It is indeed possible, after all! But I do not recall it, my dear sir.

MR. MARTIN: I reside at No. 19, my dear lady.

MRS. MARTIN: How curious that is. I also reside at No. 19, my dear sir.

MR. MARTIN: Well then, well then, well then, well then, perhaps we have seen each other in that house, dear lady?

MRS. MARTIN: It is indeed possible but I do not recall it, dear sir.

MR. MARTIN: My flat is on the fifth floor, No.8, my dear lady.

MRS. MARTIN: How curious it is, good Lord, how bizarre!

And what a coincidence! I too reside on the fifth floor, in flat No.8, dear sir!

MR. MARTIN [*musings*]: How curious it is, how curious it is, how curious it is, and what a coincidence! You know, in my bedroom there is a bed, and it is covered with a green eiderdown. This room, with the bed and the green eiderdown, is at the end of the corridor between the w.c. and the bookcase, dear lady!

MRS. MARTIN: What a coincidence, good Lord, what a coincidence! My bedroom, too, has a bed with a green eiderdown and is at the end of the corridor, between the w.c., dear sir, and the bookcase!

MR. MARTIN: How bizarre, curious, strange! Then, madam, we live in the same room and we sleep in the same bed, dear lady. It is perhaps there that we have met!

MRS. MARTIN: How curious it is and what a coincidence! It is indeed possible that we have met there, and perhaps even last night. But I do not recall it, dear sir!

MR. MARTIN: I have a little girl, my little daughter, she lives with me, dear lady. She is two years old, she's blonde, she has a white eye and a red eye, she is very pretty, her name is Alice, dear lady.

MRS. MARTIN: What a bizarre coincidence! I, too, have a little girl. She is two years old, has a white eye and a red eye, she is very pretty, and her name is Alice, too, dear sir!

MR. MARTIN [*in the same drawling nonotonous voice*]: How curious it is and what a coincidence! And bizarre! Perhaps they are the same, dear lady!

MRS. MARTIN: How curious it is! It is indeed possible, dear sir. [*A rather long moment of silence. The clock strikes 29 times.*]

MR. MARTIN [*after having reflected at length, gets up slowly and, unhurriedly, moves toward Mrs. Martin, who, surprised by his solemn air, has also gotten up very quietly. Mr. Martin, in the same flat, monotonous voice, slightly sing-song*]: Then, dear lady, I believe that there can be no doubt about it, we have seen each other before and you are my own wife. ..Elizabeth, I have found you again!

[*Mrs. Martin approaches Mr. Martin without haste. They embrace without expression. The clock strikes once, very loud. This striking of the clock must be so loud that it makes the audience jump. The Martins do not hear it.*]

MRS. MARTIN: Donald, it's you, darling!

[*They sit together in the same armchair, their arms around each other, and fall asleep. The clock strikes several more times. Mary, on tiptoe, a finger to her lips, enters quietly and addresses the audience.*]

MARY: Elizabeth and Donald are now too happy to be able to hear me. I can therefore let you in on a secret. Elizabeth is not Elizabeth, Donald is not Donald. And here is the proof: the child that Donald spoke of is not Elizabeth's daughter, they are not the same person. Donald's daughter has one white eye and one red eye like Elizabeth's daughter. Whereas Donald's child has a white right eye and a red left eye, Elizabeth's child has a red right eye and a white left eye! Thus all of Donald's system of deduction collapses when it comes up against this last obstacle which destroys his whole theory. In spite of the extraordinary coincidences which seem to be definitive proofs, Donald and Elizabeth, not being the parents of the same child, are not Donald and Elizabeth. It is in vain that he thinks he is Donald, it is in vain that she thinks she is Elizabeth. He believes in vain that she is Elizabeth. She believes in vain that he is Donald -they are sadly deceived. But who is the true Donald? Who is the true Elizabeth? Who has any interest in prolonging this confusion? I don't know. Let's not try to know. Let's leave things as they are. [*She takes several steps toward the door, then returns and says to the audience:*] My real name is Sherlock Holmes. [*She exits.*]

[*The clock strikes as much as it likes. After several seconds, Mr. and Mrs. Martin separate and take the chairs they had at the beginning.*]

MR. MARTIN: Darling, let's forget all that has not passed between us, and, now that we have found each other again, let's try not to lose each other any more, and live as before.

MRS. MARTIN: Yes, darling.

[*Mr. and Mrs. Smith enter from the right, wearing the same clothes.*]

MRS. SMITH: Good evening, dear friends! Please forgive us for having made you wait so long. We thought that we should extend you the courtesy to which you are entitled and as soon as we learned that you had been kind enough to give us the pleasure of coming to see us without prior notice we hurried to dress for the occasion.

MR. SMITH [*furious*]: We've had nothing to eat all day. And we've been waiting four whole hours for you. Why have you come so late?

[*Mr. and Mrs. Smith sit facing their guests. The striking of the clock underlines the speeches, more or less strongly, according to the case. The Martins, particularly Mrs. Martin, seem embarrassed and timid. For this reason the conversation begins with, difficulty and the words are uttered, at the beginning, awkwardly. A long embarrassed silence at first, then other silences and hesitations follow.*]

MR. SMITH: Hm. [*Silence.*]

MRS. SMITH: Hm, hm. [*Silence.*]

MRS. MARTIN: Hm, hm, hm. [*Silence.*]

MR. MARTIN: Hm, hm, hm, hm. [*Silence.*]

MRS. MARTIN: Oh, but definitely. [*Silence.*]

MR. MARTIN: We all have colds. [*Silence.*]

MR. SMITH: Nevertheless, it's not chilly. *[Silence.]*

MRS. SMITH: There's no draft. *[Silence.]*

MR. MARTIN: Oh no, fortunately. *[Silence.]*

MR. SMITH: Oh dear, oh dear, oh dear. *[Silence.]*

MR. MARTIN: Don't you feel well? *[Silence.]*

MRS. SMITH: No, he's wet his pants. *[Silence.]*

MRS. MARTIN: Oh, sir, at your age, you shouldn't. *[Silence.]*

MR. SMITH: The heart is ageless. *[Silence.]*

MR. MARTIN: That's true. *[Silence.]*

MRS. SMITH: So they say. *[Silence.]*

MRS. MARTIN: They also say the opposite *[Silence]*

MR. SMITH: The truth lies somewhere between the two *[Silence]*

MR. MARTIN: That's true. *[Silence]*

MRS. SMITH *[to the Martins]*: Since you travel so much, you must have many interesting things to tell us.

MR. MARTIN *[to his wife]*: My dear, tell us what you've seen today.

MRS. MARTIN: It's scarcely worth the trouble, for no one would believe me.

MR. SMITH: We're not going to question your sincerity!

MRS. SMITH: You will offend us if you think that.

MR. MARTIN *[to his wife]*: You will offend them, my dear, if you think that ...

MRS. MARTIN *[graciously]*: Oh, well today I witnessed something extraordinary. Something really incredible.

MR. MARTIN: Tell us quickly, my dear.

MR. SMITH: Oh, this is going to be amusing.

MRS. SMITH: At last.

MRS. MARTIN: Well, today, when I went shopping to buy some vegetables, which are getting to be dearer and dearer...

MRS. SMITH: Where is it all going to end?

MR. SMITH: You shouldn't interrupt, my dear, it's very rude.

MRS. MARTIN: In the street, near a café, I saw a man, properly dressed, about fifty years old, or not even that, who...

MR. SMITH: Who, what?

MRS. SMITH: Who, What?

MR. SMITH *[to his wife]*: Don't interrupt, my dear, you're disgusting.

MRS. SMITH: My dear, it is you who interrupted first, you boor.

MR. SMITH *[to his wife]*: Hush. *[To Mrs. Martin:]* What was this man doing?

MRS. MARTIN: Well, I'm sure you'll say that I'm making it up---he was down on one knee and he was bent over.

MR. MARTIN, MR. SMITH, MRS. SMITH: Oh!

MRS. MARTIN: Yes, bent over.

MR. SMITH: Not possible.

MRS. MARTIN: Yes, bent over. I went near him to see what he was doing. ..

MR. SMITH: And?

MRS. MARTIN: He was tying his shoe lace which had come undone.

MR. MARTIN, MR. SMITH, MRS. SMITH: Fantastic!

MR. SMITH: If someone else had told me this, I'd not believe it.

MR. MARTIN: Why not? One sees things even more extraordinary every day, when one walks around. For instance today in the Underground I myself saw a man, quietly sitting on a seat, reading his newspaper.

MRS. SMITH: What a character!

MR. SMITH: Perhaps it was the same man!

[The doorbell rings.]

MR. SMITH: Goodness, someone is ringing.

MRS. SMITH: There must be somebody there. I'll go and see

[She goes to see, she opens the door and closes it, and come back.] Nobody. *[She sits down again.]*

MR. MARTIN: I'm going to give you another example. ..

[Doorbell rings again.]

MR. SMITH: Goodness, someone is ringing.

MRS. SMITH: There must be somebody there. I'll go and see

[She goes to see, opens the door, and comes back.] No one

[She sits down again.]

MR. MARTIN *[who has forgotten where he was]*: Uh ...

MRS. MARTIN: You were saying that you were going to give us another example.

MR. MARTIN: Oh, yes...

[Doorbell rings again.]

MR. SMITH: Goodness, someone is ringing.

MRS. SMITH: I'm not going to open the door again.

MR. SMITH: Yes, but there must be someone there!

MRS. SMITH: The first time there was no one. The second time, no one. Why do you think that there is someone there now?

MR. SMITH: Because someone has rung!

MRS. MARTIN: That's no reason.

MR. MARTIN: What? When one hears the doorbell ring, that means someone is at the door ringing to have the door opened.

MRS. MARTIN: Not always. You've just seen otherwise!

MR. MARTIN: In most cases, yes.

MR. SMITH: As for me, when I go to visit someone, I ring in order to be admitted. I think that everyone does the same thing and that each time there is a ring there must be someone there.

MRS. SMITH: That is true in theory. But in reality things happen differently. You have just seen otherwise.

MRS. MARTIN: Your wife is right.

MR. MARTIN: Oh! You women! You always stand up for each other.

MRS. SMITH: Well, I'll go and see. You can't say that I am obstinate, but you will see that there's no one there! *[She goes to look, opens the door and closes it.]* You see, there's no one there. *[She returns to her seat.]*

MRS. SMITH: Oh, these men who always think they're right and who're always wrong!

[The doorbell rings again.]

MR. SMITH: Goodness, someone is ringing. There must be someone there.

MRS. SMITH *[in a fit of anger]*: Don't send me to open the door again. You've seen that it was useless. Experience teaches us that when one hears the doorbell ring it is because there is never anyone there.

MRS. MARTIN: Never.

MR. MARTIN: That's not entirely accurate.

MR. SMITH: In fact it's false. When one hears the doorbell ring it is because there is someone there.

MRS. SMITH: He won't admit he's wrong.

MRS. MARTIN: My husband is very obstinate, too.

MR. SMITH: There's someone there.

MR. MARTIN: That's not impossible.

MRS. SMITH *[to her husband]*: No.

MR. SMITH: Yes.

MRS. SMITH: I tell you *no*. In any case you are not going to disturb me again for nothing. If you wish to know, go and look yourself!

MR. SMITH: I'll go.

[Mrs. Smith shrugs her shoulders. Mrs. Martin tosses her head.]

MR. SMITH *[opening the door]*: Oh! how do you do. *[He glances at Mrs. Smith and the Martins, who are all surprised.]* It's the Fire Chief!

FIRE CHIEF [*he is of course in uniform and is wearing an enormous shining helmet*]: Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. [*The Smiths and the Martins are still slightly astonished. Mrs. Smith turns her head away, in a temper, and does not reply to his greeting.*] Good evening, Mrs. Smith. You appear to be angry.

MRS. SMITH: Oh!

MR. SMITH: You see it's because my wife is a little chagrined at having been proved wrong.

MR. MARTIN: There's been an argument between Mr. and Mrs. Smith, Mr. Fire Chief.

MRS. SMITH [*to Mr. Martin*]: This is no business of yours!

[*To Mr. Smith:*] I beg you not to involve outsiders in our family arguments.

MR. SMITH: Oh, my dear, this is not so serious. The Fire Chief is an old friend of the family. His mother courted me, and I knew his father. He asked me to give him my daughter in marriage if ever I had one. And he died waiting.

MR. MARTIN: That's neither his fault, nor yours.

FIRE CHIEF: Well, what is it all about?

MRS. SMITH: My husband was claiming. . .

MR. SMITH: No, it was you who was claiming.

MR. MARTIN: Yes, it was she.

MRS. MARTIN: No, it was he.

FIRE CHIEF: Don't get excited. You tell me, Mrs. Smith.

MRS. SMITH: Well, this is how it was. It is difficult for me to speak openly to you, but a fireman is also a confessor.

FIRE CHIEF: Well then?

MRS. SMITH: We were arguing because my husband said that each time the doorbell rings there is always someone there.

MR. MARTIN: It is plausible.

MRS. SMITH: And I was saying that each time the doorbell rings there is never anyone there.

MRS. MARTIN: It might seem strange.

MRS. SMITH: But it has been proved, not by theoretical demonstrations, but by facts.

MR. SMITH: That's false, since the Fire Chief is here. He rang the bell, I opened the door, and there he was.

MRS. MARTIN: When?

MR. MARTIN: But just now.

MRS. SMITH: Yes, but it was only when you heard the doorbell ring the fourth time that there was someone there. And the fourth time does not count.

MRS. MARTIN: Never. It is only the first three times that count.

MR. SMITH: Mr. Fire Chief, permit me in my turn to ask you several questions.

FIRE CHIEF: Go right ahead.

MR. SMITH: When I opened the door and saw you, it was really you who had rung the bell?

FIRE CHIEF: Yes, it was I.

MR. MARTIN: You were at the door? And you rang in order to be admitted?

FIRE CHIEF: I do not deny it.

MR. SMITH [*to his wife, triumphantly*]: You see? I was right. When you hear the doorbell ring, that means someone rang it. You certainly cannot say that the Fire Chief is not someone.

MRS. SMITH: Certainly not. I repeat to you that I was speaking of only the first three times, since the fourth time does not count.

MRS. MARTIN: And when the doorbell rang the first time, was it you?

FIRE CHIEF: No, it was not I.

MRS. MARTIN: You see? The doorbell rang and there was no one there.

MR. MARTIN: Perhaps it was someone else?

MR. SMITH: Were you standing at the door for a long time?

FIRE CHIEF: Three-quarters of an hour.

MR. SMITH: And you saw no one?

FIRE CHIEF: No one. I am sure of that.

MRS. MARTIN: And did you hear the bell when it rang the second time?
 FIRE CHIEF: Yes, and that wasn't I either. And there was still no one there.
 MRS. SMITH: Victory! I was right.
 MR. SMITH *[to his wife]*: Not so fast. *[To the Fire Chief:]* And what were you doing at the door?
 FIRE CHIEF: Nothing. I was just standing there. I was thinking of many things.
 MR. MARTIN *[to the Fire Chief]*: But the third time--it was not you who rang?
 FIRE CHIEF: Yes, it was I.
 MR. SMITH: But when the door was opened nobody was in sight.
 FIRE CHIEF: That was because I had hidden myself—as a joke.
 MRS. SMITH: Don't make jokes, Mr. Fire Chief. This business is too sad.
 MR. MARTIN: In short, we still do not know whether, when the doorbell rings, there is someone there or not!
 MRS. SMITH: Never anyone.
 MR. SMITH: Always someone.
 FIRE CHIEF: I am going to reconcile you. You both are partly right. When the doorbell rings, sometimes there is someone, other times there is no one.
 MR. MARTIN: This seems logical to me.
 MRS. MARTIN: I think so too.
 FIRE CHIEF: Life is very simple, really. *[To the Smiths:]* Go on and kiss each other.
 MRS. SMITH: We just kissed each other a little while ago.
 MR. MARTIN: They'll kiss each other tomorrow. They have plenty of time.
 MRS. SMITH: Mr. Fire Chief, since you have helped us settle this, please make yourself comfortable, take off your helmet and sit down for a moment.
 FIRE CHIEF: Excuse me, but I can't stay long. I should like to remove my helmet, but I haven't time to sit down. *[He sits down, without removing his helmet.]* I must admit that I have come to see you for another reason. I am on official business.
 MRS. SMITH: And what can we do for you, Mr. Fire Chief?
 FIRE CHIEF: I must beg you to excuse my indiscretion *[terribly embarrassed]* ...uhm *[He points a finger at the Martins]* ...you don't mind. ...in front of them...
 MRS. MARTIN: Say whatever you like.
 MR. MARTIN: We're old friends. They tell us everything.
 MR. SMITH: Speak.
 FIRE CHIEF: Eh, well—is there a fire here?
 MRS. SMITH: Why do you ask us that?
 FIRE CHIEF: It's because—pardon me—I have orders to extinguish all the fires in the city.
 MRS. MARTIN: All?
 FIRE CHIEF: Yes, all.
 MRS. SMITH *[confused]*: I don't know. ...I don't think so. Do you want me to go and look?
 MR. SMITH *[sniffing]*: There can't be one here. There's no smell of anything burning.*
 FIRE CHIEF *[aggrieved]*: None at all? You don't have a little

* In Nicolas Bataille's production Mr. and Mrs. Martin sniffed too.

fire in the chimney, something burning in the attic or in the cellar? A little fire just starting, at least?
 MRS. SMITH: I am sorry to disappoint you but I do not believe there's anything here at the moment. I promise that I will notify you when we do have something.
 FIRE CHIEF: Please don't forget, it would be a great help.
 MRS. SMITH: That's a promise.
 FIRE CHIEF *[to the Martins]*: And there's nothing burning at your house either?
 MRS. MARTIN: No, unfortunately.

MR. MARTIN *[to the Fire Chief]*: Things aren't going ~ well just now.

FIRE CHIEF: Very poorly. There's been almost nothing, a few trifles—a chimney, a barn. Nothing important. It doesn't bring in much. And since there are no returns, the profits on output are very meager.

MR. SMITH: Times are bad. That's true all over. It's the same this year with business and agriculture as it is with fires, nothing is prospering.

MR. MARTIN: No wheat, no fires.

FIRE CHIEF: No floods either.

MRS. SMITH: But there is some sugar.

MR. SMITH: That's because it is imported.

MRS. MARTIN: It's harder in the case of fires. The tariffs are too high!

FIRE CHIEF: All the same, there's an occasional asphyxiation by gas, but that's unusual too. For instance, a young woman asphyxiated herself last week—she had left the gas on.

MRS. MARTIN: Had she forgotten it?

FIRE CHIEF: No, but she thought it was her comb.

MR. SMITH: These confusions are always dangerous!

MRS. SMITH: Did you go to see the match dealer?

FIRE CHIEF: There's nothing doing there. He is insured against fires.

MR. MARTIN: Why don't you go see the Vicar of Wakefield, and use my name?

FIRE CHIEF: I don't have the right to extinguish clergymen's fires. The Bishop would get angry. Besides they extinguish their fires themselves, or else they have them put out by vestal virgins.

MR. SMITH: Go see the Durands.

FIRE CHIEF: I can't do that either. He's not English. He's only been naturalized. And naturalized citizens have the right to have houses, but not the right to have them put out if they're burning.

MRS. SMITH: Nevertheless, when they set fire to it last year, it was put out just the same.

FIRE CHIEF: He did that all by himself. Clandestinely. But it's not I who would report him.

MR. SMITH: Neither would I.

MRS. SMITH: Mr. Fire Chief, since you are not too pressed, stay a little while longer. You would be doing us a favor.

FIRE CHIEF: Shall I tell you some stories?

MRS. SMITH: Oh, by all means, how charming of you. *[She kisses him.]*

MR. SMITH, MRS. MARTIN, MR. MARTIN: Yes, yes, some stories, hurrah!

[They applaud.]

MR. SMITH: And what is even more interesting is the fact that firemen's stories are all true, and they're based on experience.

FIRE CHIEF: I speak from my own experience. Truth, nothing but the truth. No fiction.

MR. MARTIN: That's right. Truth is never found in books, only in life.

MRS. SMITH: Begin!

MR. MARTIN: Begin!

MRS. MARTIN: Be quiet, he is beginning.

FIRE CHIEF *[coughs slightly several times]*: Excuse me, don't look at me that way. You embarrass me. You know that I am shy.

MRS. SMITH: Isn't he charming! *[she kisses him.]*

FIRE CHIEF: I'm going to try to begin anyhow. But promise me that you won't listen.

MRS. MARTIN: But if we don't listen to you we won't hear you.

FIRE CHIEF: I didn't think of that!

MRS. SMITH: I told you, he's just a boy.

MR. MARTIN, MR. SMITH: Oh, the sweet child! *[They kiss him.*]*

MRS. MARTIN: Chin up!

FIRE CHIEF: Well, then! [*He coughs again in a voice shaken by emotion:*] "The Dog and the Cow," an experimental fable. Once upon a time another cow asked another dog: "Why have you not swallowed your trunk?" "Pardon me," replied the dog, "it is because I thought that I was an elephant."

MRS. MARTIN: What is the moral?

FIRE CHIEF: That's for you to find out.

MR. SMITH: He's right.

MRS. SMITH [*furious*]: Tell us another.

FIRE CHIEF: A young calf had eaten too much ground glass. As a result, it was obliged to give birth. It brought forth a cow into the world. However, since the calf was male, the cow could not call him Mamma. Nor could she call him Papa, because the calf was too little. The calf was then obliged to get married and the registry office carried out all the details completely a la mode.

MR. SMITH: A la mode de Caen.

MR. MARTIN: Like tripes.

FIRE CHIEF: You've heard that one?

MRS. SMITH: It was in all the papers.

MRS. MARTIN: It happened not far from our house.

*In Nicolas Bataille's production, they did not kiss the Fire Chief.

FIRE CHIEF: I'll tell you another: "The Cock." Once upon a time, a cock wished to play the dog. But he had no luck because everyone recognized him right away.

MRS. SMITH: On the other hand, the dog that wished to play the cock was never recognized.

MR. SMITH: I'll tell you one: "The Snake and the Fox." Once upon a time, a snake came up to a fox and said: "It seems to me that I know you!" The fox replied to him: "Me too." "Then," said the snake, "give me some money." "A fox doesn't give money," replied the tricky animal, who, in order to escape, jumped down into a deep ravine full of strawberries and chicken honey. But the snake was there waiting for him with a Mephistophelean laugh. The fox pulled out his knife, shouting: "I'm going to teach you how to live!" Then he took to flight, turning his back. But he had no luck. The snake was quicker. With a well-chosen blow of his fist, he struck the fox in the middle of his forehead, which broke into a thousand pieces, while he cried: "No! No! Four times no! I'm not your daughter."**

MRS. MARTIN: It's interesting.

MRS. SMITH: It's not bad.

MR. MARTIN [*shaking Mr. Smith's hand*]: My congratulations.

FIRE CHIEF [*Jealous*]: Not so good. And anyway, I've heard it before.

MR. SMITH: It's terrible.

MRS. SMITH: But it wasn't even true.

MRS. MARTIN: Yes, unfortunately.

MR. MARTIN [*to Mrs. Smith*]: It's your turn, dear lady.

MRS. SMITH: I only know one. I'm going to tell it to you. It's called "The Bouquet."

MR. SMITH: My wife has always been romantic.

MR. MARTIN: She's a true Englishwoman. * *

MRS. SMITH: Here it is: Once upon a time, a fiance gave a bouquet of flowers to his fiancee, who said, "Thanks"; but before she had said, "Thanks," he, without saying a single word, took back the flowers he had given her in order to teach her a good lesson, and he said, "I take them back." He said "Goodbye", and took them back and went off in all directions

*This story was deleted in Nicolas Bataille's production. Mr. Smith went through the gestures only, without making a sound.

**These two speeches were repeated three times in the original production.

MR. MARTIN: Oh, charming! [*He either kisses or does not kiss Mrs. Smith.*]

MRS. MARTIN: You have a wife, Mr. Smith, of whom all the world is jealous.

MR. SMITH: It's true. My wife is intelligence personified. She's even more intelligent than I. In any case, she is much more feminine, everyone says so.

MRS. SMITH [*to the Fire Chief*]: Let's have another, Mr. Fire Chief...

FIRE CHIEF: Oh, no, it's too late.

MR. MARTIN: Tell us one, anyway.

FIRE CHIEF: I'm too tired.

MR. SMITH: Please do us a favor.

MR. MARTIN: I beg you.

FIRE CHIEF: No.

MRS. MARTIN: You have a heart of ice. We're sitting on hot coals.

MRS. SMITH [*falls on her knees sobbing, or else she does not do this*]: I implore you!

FIRE CHIEF: Righto.

MR. SMITH [*in Mrs. Martin's ear*]: He agrees! He's going to bore us again.

MRS. MARTIN: Shh.

MRS. SMITH: No luck. I was too polite.

FIRE CHIEF: "The Headcold." My brother-in law had, on the paternal side, a first cousin whose maternal uncle had a father-in-law whose paternal grandfather had married as his second wife a young native whose brother he had met on one of his travels, a girl of whom he was enamored and by whom he had a son who married an intrepid lady pharmacist who was none other than the niece of an unknown fourth-class petty officer of the Royal Navy and whose adopted father had an aunt who spoke Spanish fluently and who was, perhaps, one of the granddaughters of an engineer who died young, himself the grandson of the owner of a vineyard which produced mediocre wine, but who had a second cousin, a stay-at-home, a sergeant-major, whose son had married a very pretty young woman, a divorcee, whose first husband was the son of a loyal patriot who, in the hope of making his fortune, had managed to bring up one of his daughters so that she could marry a footman who had known Rothschild, and whose brother, after having changed his trade several times, married and had a daughter whose stunted great-grandfather wore spectacles which had been given him by a cousin of his, the brother-in-law of a man from Portugal, natural son of a miller, not too badly off, whose foster-brother had married the daughter of a former country doctor, who was himself a foster-brother of the son of a forrester, himself the natural son of another country doctor, married three times in a row, whose third wife...

MR. MARTIN: I knew that third wife, if I'm not mistaken. She ate chicken sitting on a hornet's nest.

FIRE CHIEF: It's not the same one.

MRS. SMITH: Shh!

FIRE CHIEF: As I was saying. ...whose third wife was the daughter of the best midwife in the region and who, early left a widow...

MR. SMITH: Like my wife.

FIRE CHIEF: ...Had married a glazier who was full of life and who had had, by the daughter of a station master, a child who had burned his bridges. ...

MRS. SMITH: His britches?

MR. MARTIN: No his bridge game.

FIRE CHIEF: And had married an oyster woman, whose father had a brother, mayor of a small town, who had taken as his wife a blonde schoolteacher, whose cousin, a fly fisherman....

MR. MARTIN: A fly by night?

FIRE CHIEF: Had married another blonde schoolteacher, named Marie, too, whose brother was married to another Marie, also a blonde schoolteacher. ...

MR. SMITH: Since she's blonde, she must be Marie.

FIRE CHIEF: And whose father had been reared in Canada by an old woman who was the niece of a priest whose grandmother, occasionally in the winter, like everyone else, caught a cold.

MRS. SMITH: A curious story. Almost unbelievable.

MR. MARTIN: If you catch a cold, you should get yourself a colt.

MR. SMITH: It's a useless precaution, but absolutely necessary.

MRS. MARTIN: Excuse me, Mr. Fire Chief, but I did not follow your story very well. At the end, when we got to the grandmother of the priest, I got mixed up.

MR. SMITH: One always gets mixed up in the hands of a priest.

MRS. SMITH: Oh yes, Mr. Fire Chief, begin again. Everyone wants to hear.

FIRE CHIEF: Ah, I don't know whether I'll be able to. I'm on official business. It depends on what time it is.

MRS. SMITH: We don't have the time, here.

FIRE CHIEF: But the clock?

MR. SMITH: It runs badly. It is contradictory, and always indicates the opposite of what the hour really is.

[Enter Mary.]

MARY: Madam... sir. ...

MRS. SMITH: What do you want?

MR. SMITH: What have you come in here for?

MARY: I hope, madam and sir will excuse me ...and these ladies and gentlemen too. ..I would like. ..I would like ...to tell you a story, myself.

MRS. MARTIN: What is she saying?

MR. MARTIN: I believe that our friends' maid is going crazy ...she wants to tell us a story, too. .

FIRE CHIEF: Who does she think she is? *[He looks at her.]* Oh!

MRS. SMITH: Why are you butting in?

MR. SMITH: This is really uncalled for, Mary. ...

FIRE CHIEF: Oh! But it is she! Incredible!

MR. SMITH: And you?

MARY: Incredible! Here!

MRS. SMITH: What does all this mean?

MR. SMITH: You know each other?

FIRE CHIEF: And how!

[Mary throws herself on the neck of the Fire Chief.]

MARY: I'm so glad to see you again. ..at last!

MR. AND MRS. SMITH: Oh!

MR. SMITH: This is too much, here, in our home, in the suburbs of London.

MRS. SMITH: It's not proper! ...

FIRE CHIEF: It was she who extinguished my first fires.

MARY: I'm your little fire hose.

MR. MARTIN: If that is the case. ...dear friends. ..these emotions are understandable, human, honorable...

MRS. MARTIN: All that is human is honorable.

MRS. SMITH: Even so, I don't like to see it ...here among us...

MR. SMITH: She's not been properly brought up. ...

FIRE CHIEF: Oh, you have too many prejudices.

MRS. MARTIN: What I think is that a maid, after all--even though it's none of my business--is never anything but a maid...

MR. MARTIN: Even if she can sometimes be a rather good detective.

FIRE CHIEF: Let me go.

MARY: Don't be upset! ...They're not so bad really.

MR. SMITH: Hm. ..hm ...you two are very touching, but at the same time, a little. ..a little. ...

MR. MARTIN: Yes, that's exactly the word.

MR. SMITH: A little too exhibitionistic...

MR. MARTIN: There is a native British modesty--forgive me for attempting, yet again, to define my thought--not understood by foreigners, even by specialists, thanks to which, if I may thus express myself...of course, I don't mean to refer to you...

MARY: I was going to tell you...

MR. SMITH: Don't tell us anything...

MARY: Oh yes!

MRS. SMITH: Go, my little Mary, go quietly to the kitchen and read your poems before the mirror...

MR. MARTIN: You know, even though I'm not a maid, I also read poems before the mirror.

MRS. MARTIN: This morning when you looked at yourself in the mirror you didn't see yourself.

MR. MARTIN: That's because I wasn't there yet. ..

MARY: All the same, I could, perhaps, recite a little poem for you.

MRS. SMITH: My little Mary, you are frightfully obstinate.

MARY: I'm going to recite a poem, then, is that agreed? It is a poem entitled "The Fire" in honor of the Fire Chief:

The Fire

The polypoids were burning in the wood

A stone caught fire

The castle caught fire

The forest caught fire

The men caught fire

The women caught fire

The birds caught fire

The fish caught fire

The water caught fire

The sky caught fire

The ashes caught fire

The smoke caught fire

The fire caught fire

Everything caught fire

[She recites the poem while the Smiths are pushing her offstage]

MRS. MARTIN: That sent chills up my spine....

MR. MARTIN: And yet there's a certain warmth in those lines...

FIRE CHIEF: I thought it was marvelous.

MRS. SMITH: All the same....

MR. SMITH: You're exaggerating....

FIRE CHIEF: Just a minute I admit...all this is very subjective....but this is my conception of the world. My world. My dream. My ideal....And now this reminds me that I must leave. Since you don't have the time here, I must tell you that in exactly three-quarters of an hour and sixteen minutes, I'm having a fire at the other end of the city. Consequently, I must hurry. Even though it will be quite unimportant.

MRS. SMITH: What will it be? A little chimney fire?

FIRE CHIEF: Oh, not even that. A straw fire and a little heartburn.

MR. SMITH: Well, we're sorry to see you go.

MRS. SMITH: You have been very entertaining.

MRS. MARTIN: Thanks to you, we have passed a truly Cartesian quarter of an hour.

FIRE CHIEF [*moving towards the door, then stopping*]: Speaking of that---the bald soprano? [*General silence, embarrassment.*]

MRS. SMITH: She always wears her hair in the same style.

FIRE CHIEF: Ah! Then goodbye, ladies and gentlemen.

MR. MARTIN: Good luck, and a good fire!

FIRE CHIEF: Let's hope so. For everybody.

[Fire Chief exits. All accompany him to the door and then return to their seats.]

MRS. MARTIN: I can buy a pocketknife for my brother, but you can't buy Ireland for your grandfather.

MR. SMITH: One walks on his feet, but one heats with electricity or coal.
 MR. MARTIN: He who sells an ox today, will have an egg tomorrow.
 MRS. SMITH: In real life, one must look out of the window.
 MRS. MARTIN: One can sit down on a chair, when the chair doesn't have any.
 MR. SMITH: One must always think of everything.
 MR. MARTIN: The ceiling is above, the floor is below.
 MRS. SMITH: When I say yes, it's only a manner of speaking.
 MRS. MARTIN: To each his own.
 MR. SMITH: Take a circle, caress it, and it will turn vicious.
 MRS. SMITH: A schoolmaster teaches his pupils to read, but the cat suckles her young when they are small.
 MRS. MARTIN: Nevertheless, it was the cow that gave us tails.
 MR. SMITH: When I'm in the country, I love the solitude and the quiet.
 MR. MARTIN: You are not old enough yet for that.
 MRS. SMITH: Benjamin Franklin was right; you are more nervous than he.
 MRS. MARTIN: What are the seven days of the week?
 MR. SMITH: Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday.*
 MR. MARTIN: Edward is a clerk; his sister Nancy is a typist, and his brother William a shop-assistant.*
 MRS. SMITH: An odd family!
 MRS. MARTIN: I prefer a bird in the bush to a sparrow in a barrow.
 MR. SMITH: Rather a steak in a chalet than gristle in a castle.
 MR. MARTIN: An Englishman's home is truly his castle.
 MRS. SMITH: I don't know enough Spanish to make myself understood.

*In English in the original.— Translator's note.

MRS. MARTIN: I'll give you my mother-in-law's slippers if you'll give me your husband's coffin.
 MR. SMITH: I'm looking for a monophysite priest to marry to our maid.
 MR. MARTIN: Bread is a staff, whereas bread is also a staff, and an oak springs from an oak every morning at dawn.
 MRS. SMITH: My uncle lives in the country, but that's none of the midwife's business.
 MR. MARTIN: Paper is for writing, the cat's for the rat. Cheese is for scratching.
 MRS. SMITH: The car goes very fast, but the cook beats batter better.
 MR. SMITH: Don't be turkeys; rather kiss the conspirator.
 MR. MARTIN: Charity begins at home.
 MRS. SMITH: I'm waiting for the aqueduct to come and see me at my windmill.
 MR. MARTIN: One can prove that social progress is definitely better with sugar.
 MR. SMITH: To hell with polishing!

[Following this last speech of Mr. Smith's, the others are silent for a moment, stupefied. We sense that there is a certain nervous irritation. The strokes of the clock are more nervous too. The speeches which follow must be said, at first, in a glacial, hostile tone. The hostility and the nervousness increase. At the end of this scene, the four characters must be standing very close to each other, screaming their speeches, raising their fists, ready to throw themselves upon each other.]

MR. MARTIN: One doesn't polish spectacles with black wax.
 MRS. SMITH: Yes, but with money one can buy anything.
 MR. MARTIN: I'd rather kill a rabbit than sing in the garden.
 MR. SMITH: Cockatoos, cockatoos, cockatoos, cockatoos, cockatoos, cockatoos, cockatoos, cockatoos, cockatoos, cockatoos.

*In English in the original.- Translator's note.

MRS. SMITH: Such caca, such caca, such caca, such caca, such caca, such caca, such caca, such caca, such cacao
MR. MARTIN: Such cascades of cacas, such cascades of cacas, such cascades of cacas, such cascades of cacas, such cascades of cacas, such cascades of cacas, such cascades of cacas, such cascades of cacas.
MR. SMITH: Dogs have fleas, dogs have fleas.
MRS. MARTIN: Cactus, coccyx! crocus! cockaded! cockroach!
MRS. SMITH: Incasker, you incask us.
MR. MARTIN: I'd rather lay an egg in a box than go and steal an ox...
MRS. MARTIN [*opening her mouth very wide*]: Ah! oh! ah! oh! Let me gnash my teeth.
MR. SMITH: Crocodile!
MR. MARTIN: Let's go and slap Ulysses.
MR. SMITH: I'm going to live in my cabana among my cacao trees.
MRS. MARTIN: Cacao trees on cacao farms don't bear coconuts, they yield cocoa! Cacao trees on cacao farms don't bear coconuts, they yield cocoa! Cacao trees on cacao farms don't bear coconuts, they yield cocoa.
MRS. SMITH: Mice have lice, lice haven't mice.
MRS. MARTIN: Don't ruche my brooch!
MR. MARTIN: Don't smooch the brooch!
MR. SMITH: Groom the goose, don't goose the groom.
MRS. MARTIN: The goose grooms.
MRS. SMITH: Groom your tooth.
MR. MARTIN: Groom the bridegroom, groom the bridegroom.
MR. SMITH: Seducer seduced!
MRS. MARTIN: Scaramouche!
MRS. SMITH: Sainte-Nitouche!
MR. MARTIN: Go take a douche.
MR. SMITH: I've been goosed.
MRS. MARTIN: Sainte-Nitouche stoops to my cartouche.
MRS. SMITH: "Who'd stoop to blame? ...and I never choose to stoop."
MR. MARTIN: Robert!
MR. SMITH: Browning!
MRS. MARTIN, MR. SMITH: Rudyard.
MRS. SMITH, MR. MARTIN: Kipling.
MRS. MARTIN, MR. SMITH: Robert Kipling!
MRS. SMITH, MR. MARTIN: Rudyard Browning..
MRS. MARTIN: Silly gobblegobblers, silly gobblegobblers.
MR. MARTIN: Marietta, spot the pot!
MRS. SMITH: Krishnamurti, Krishnamurti, Krishnamurti!
MR. SMITH: The pope elopes! The pope's got no horoscope. The horoscope's bespoke.
MRS. MARTIN: Bazaar, Balzac, bazooka!
MR. MARTIN: Bizarre, beaux-arts, brassieres!
MRS. SMITH: a,e,i,o,u, a,e,i,o,u, a,e,i,o,u, i!
MRS. MARTIN: B, c, d, f g, l, m, n, p, r, s, t, v, w, x, z!
MR. MARTIN: From sage to stooge, from stage to serge!
MRS. SMITH [*imitating a train*]: Choo, choo, choo, choo, choo, choo, choo, choo, choo, choo, choo, choo!
MR. SMITH: It's!
MRS. MARTIN: Not!
MR. MARTIN: That!
MRS. SMITH: Way!
MR. SMITH: It's!
MRS. MARTIN: O!

MR. MARTIN: Ver!

MRS. SMITH: Here!

[All together, completely infuriated, screaming in each others' ears. The light is extinguished. In the darkness we hear, in an increasingly rapid rhythm:]

*Translator's note: in the French text these speeches read as follows:

MME SMITH.—N'y touchez pas, elle est brisee.

M. MARTIN.—Sully!

M. SMITH.—Prudhomme!

MME MARTIN, M. SMITH.—Francois.

MME SMITH, M. MARTIN.—Coppee.

MME MARTIN, M. SMITH.—Coppee Sully!

MME SMITH, M. MARTIN.—Prudhomme Francois.

ALL TOGETHER: It's not that way, it's over here, it's not that way, it's over here, it's not that way, it's over here ,
it's not that way, it's over here!*

[The words cease abruptly. Again, the lights come on. Mr. and Mrs. Martin are seated like the Smiths at the beginning of the play. The play begins again with the Martins who say exactly the same lines as the Smiths in the first scene, while the curtain softly falls.]

* When produced some of the speeches in this last scene were cut or shuffled. Moreover, the final beginning again, if one can call it that, still involved the Smiths, since the author did not have the inspired idea of substituting the Martins for the Smiths until after the hundredth performance.