

18.

*(Sarah, Tom and Bettie sitting in silence. A knock at the door)*

Sarah – That must be Paul.

*(she answers the door)*

Sarah – Paul. Come on in. Come in. Tom and Betty are here.

Paul – Tom. Betty.

*(Tom nods to Paul)*

Paul – Piers not here?

Sarah – He's working. He said he'd be down soon. That was half an hour ago. Drink?

Paul – Thanks. How are you Tom?

Tom – Fine.

Paul – And your boy?

Tom – Andrew? Fine.

Paul – He's a good lad that one. One of my recruits to the party.

Tom – Don't know as I'm too happy about that. No good'll come of it.

Sarah – How many children do you have?

Betty – Seven.

Sarah – That must be difficult.

Tom – It's the way it is.

Sarah – It doesn't have to be.

Betty – I wouldn't be without any of them.

Tom – Our Jane's been playing with your boy.

Sarah – Yes I know.

Tom – I hope she's not bothering him too much.

Sarah – Oh, no, I think it's delightful. Children are just blind, aren't they, to the class differences that so afflict us adults.

Tom – As long as she's not bothering him.

*(pause)*

Sarah – Listen to the sea. It's such a glorious sound, don't you think?

Tom – Can't say as I notice it too much.

Sarah – But you must love the sea.

Tom – Sea took my father. I don't like it much no.

Sarah – Of course. I'm sorry.

Betty – He were a good man your father.

Tom – He was that.

Paul *(to Sarah)* – You were in the Soviet Union, weren't you?

Sarah – A few years ago, yes.

Paul – I haven't been.

Sarah – Oh you must go. It is so exhilarating to see what can be achieved when society is organised correctly.

Paul – Let us hope that soon I won't have to travel to the Soviet Union to see that for myself.

Sarah – Well, quite.

Paul – Your husband was not so enamoured with Russia I hear.

Sarah – We have a difference of opinion. Largely over means rather than ends I think. He wants to see socialism in this country as much as I do.

Paul – We'll have our chance soon enough if the government keeps up its attitude towards the miners.

Betty – How is John?

Sarah – He's very well thank you Mrs Potter.

Betty – I always sees him down at the beach.

Sarah – He loves it there.

Tom – He wants to wrap up warm mind. He'll catch his death.

Sarah – I keep telling him. But you know what little boys are like. They never listen.

Tom – He gets a good hiding he'll listen all right.

Sarah – I don't believe in physical chastisement.

Tom – You got seven of the buggers you ent got much choice.

Betty – Andrew was always good though, wasn't he?

Tom – Never had to lift a finger to that boy, that's right.

Betty – Not like David, our middle one. Had the devil in him that boy.

Tom – He come out right in the end though.

Betty – That's right, he did.

*(enter Piers. Tom and Betty stand)*

Piers – Ah, everyone's here. Mr and Mrs Potter. Please sit. *(Tom and Betty sit)* Mr Howlett. I'm sorry, I was unavoidably detained. I hope you have managed without me.

Sarah – Have you finished for the day?

Piers – I'm never finished for the day. The life of a freelancer I'm afraid. Always something else one ought to be doing.

Paul – Preferable to a shift underground.

Piers – Undoubtedly. But someone has to write in support of socialism don't they. We can't let the views of the Daily Mail monopolise the field.

Paul – The revolution will happen anyway. It's inevitable.

Piers – Nothing is inevitable Mr Howlett. Well, I could do with a drink. Mr Howlett?

Paul – Yes.

Piers *(to Tom)* – We don't have any beer I'm afraid. Will a gin and tonic do?

Tom – I don't drink. Nor does Betty here.

Piers – I could get the housekeeper to make you a cup of tea.

Betty – Don't go to any trouble. We're fine thank you.

Piers – As you wish. Sarah?

Sarah – Yes.

Piers (*to Paul as Piers fixes the drinks*) – So what do you think of the Samuel Commission?

Paul – They're just stalling for time. Nothing will come of it. You wait and see.

Piers – I'm rather afraid I agree with you. But it's what happens when the government announces its intentions that worries me.

Paul – The miners will strike, that's what. Maybe try and see if we can't turn it into something bigger.

Piers – A general strike would be a disaster.

Paul – It would be a step closer to the revolution.

Piers – Quite.

Sarah – Something must be done for the miners. Their demands are quite reasonable.

Piers – Of course they are. That doesn't mean they will be met.

Paul – Which is why revolution is required.

Tom – We've had enough bloody upheaval to last a lifetime. Last thing we need is any more.

Paul – The upheaval will have a purpose this time, Tom. Not like the war.

Piers – War of any kind is to be regretted.

Paul – You don't need to lecture me about war.

Sarah – Paul was in the trenches.

Piers – Then he will not need reminding of the horrors that war unleashes.

Paul – I can't bloody forget them. What did you do in the war comrade?

Piers – I tried to stop the whole bloody slaughter.

Paul – Yeah, well I'd do it all again in the service of the revolution.

Piers – I sincerely hope that you don't have to.

Sarah – Comrades, we are all for socialism here. The future of civilisation is at stake.

Paul – Civilisation hasn't begun yet.

Sarah – Perhaps we ought to have more drinks. Piers.

Piers – Same again?

Paul – Sure.

*(Piers fixes the drinks again)*

Paul – I hear your lecture tour went well.

Piers – All a bloody waste of time of course. But the marvellous thing about Americans is that you can be as rude as you like about their society and they pay you handsomely for it.

Sarah – I'm not sure that's a virtue.

Piers – Just lap it up.

Sarah – That's probably because they don't actually listen to what you're saying.

Piers – It wouldn't be like that in the Soviet Union.

Paul – No, they have more sense than that.

Piers – Lenin wouldn't have it.

Sarah – He also wouldn't pay you two hundred dollars a lecture.

Piers – Precisely. Do you remember what Trotsky said to me?

Sarah – Not this again. Piers, you hardly met him.

Piers – I only said that I didn't think revolution was any kind of way to usher in socialism. What did he say to me?

Sarah – He said you were the kind of aristocratic intellectual who held his nose against the stink of capitalism whilst complaining about the smell.

Paul – Rather a good line that.

Sarah – Yes, very perceptive I thought.

Piers – Where's the free speech there, eh?

Sarah – He was in the middle of fighting a civil war. *(to Paul)* Piers had heard he was in St Petersburg and he insisted on meeting him.

Piers – We were part of the British Labour delegation.

Sarah – Being shown round quite adequately, meeting important officials.

Piers – Always go to the top.

Sarah – He was on his way to a meeting. And you try and engage him in political debate. You're lucky he didn't just tell you to fuck off.

Piers – That is more like the kind of rhetoric I expect from the man. Still, at least he knew who I was. That's something I suppose.

Paul – We must all take our comfort where we can.

Tom – It's time we were going I think.

Sarah – Must you?

Tom – Early start.

Sarah – Let me show you out.

Piers – Lovely to meet you Mr Potter. Jane must come for tea. John would like that.

Tom – Yes. Well, I'll wait to hear from you about that. Good night. *(to Paul)* Just you mind out for my boy. I don't like him being mixed up in this politics business.

Paul – He's a big boy Tom, he can look after himself.

*(exit Sarah, Tom and Betty)*

Piers – Christ they were dull.

Paul – Salt of the earth.

Piers – If they're the salt of the earth then God help us.

Paul – You don't like working people do you?

Piers – We all work, Mr Howlett, some of us harder than others. But if you mean manual labour, no, I see no special dignity in that. Lack of education, poor nutrition, inadequate housing, boring and repetitive work. This does not make a man noble. It impoverishes him, spiritually and emotionally. I fight for socialism because it is just, not because of some sentimental attachment to the working classes. *(Paul laughs and shakes his head)* What is so funny Mr Howlett?

Paul – There's a class war coming comrade. I just wonder what side you will be on.

Piers – The adoption of socialism will allow us to avoid class war. That is why I agitate for it so fervently.

Paul – It won't be like that comrade. Just you wait.