THE CONSTANT WIFE

by W. Somerset Maugham

AUDITION SIDE — CONSTANCE & MORTIMER

Act II

MORTIMER. *(to Constance, with difficulty restraining his fury)* I thought you might like to know that your husband is my wife's lover.

MARIE-LOUISE. Morty!

CONSTANCE. *(very coolly to Mortimer)* Oh! What makes you think that?

MORTIMER. *(taking a gold cigarette-case out of his pocket)* Do you recognise this? I found it under my wife's pillow last night.

CONSTANCE. Oh, I am relieved. I couldn't make out where I'd left it. *(Taking it from him.)* Thank you so much.

MORTIMER. *(angrily)* It's not yours.

CONSTANCE. Indeed it is. I was sitting on Marie-Louise's bed and I must have slipped it under the pillow without thinking.

MORTIMER. It has John's initials on it.

CONSTANCE. I know. It was presented to him by a grateful patient, and I thought it much too nice for him, so I just took it.

MORTIMER. What sort of fool do you take me for, Constance?

CONSTANCE. My dear Morty, why should I say it was my cigarette-case if it wasn't?

MORTIMER. They had dinner together.

CONSTANCE. My poor Morty. I know that. You were going to a City banquet or something, and Marie-Louise rang up and asked if she might come and take pot-luck with us.

MORTIMER. Do you mean to say she dined here?

CONSTANCE. Isn't that what she told you?

MORTIMER. Yes.

CONSTANCE. It's quite easy to prove. If you won't take my word for it we can ring for the butler and you can ask him yourself... Ring the bell, John, will you?

John makes a move towards the bell.

MORTIMER. *(uneasily)* No, don't do that.

John checks.

MORTIMER. If you give me your word, of course I must take it.

CONSTANCE. That's very kind of you. I'm grateful to you for not exposing me to the humiliation of making my butler corroborate my statement.

MORTIMER. If Marie-Louise was dining here, why were you sitting on her bed?

CONSTANCE. John had to go out and do an operation, and Marie-Louise wanted to show me the things she'd got from Paris, so I walked round to your house. It was a lovely night. You remember that, don't you?

MORTIMER. Damn it, I've got more important things to do than look at the night.