PHYLLIS. *(Offstage.)* The *what*?!

GERRY. It's *all* right, Phyllis, it's all *right*!

PHYLLIS. *(Steps onstage.)* But that's supposed to be the Delhi Diamond!

GERRY. We had to change it, Phyllis.

PHYLLIS. For what *possible* reason?!

SAUL. *(Offstage.)* It looked silly next to the liverwurst!

PHYLLIS. *(Looks uncertainly toward direction of his voice.)* *What* liverwurst? There's no *liverwurst* in *my* play!

VIOLET. We just wanted to *keep* it that way.

PHYLLIS. I beg your pardon?

GERRY. Phyllis! Trust me! Please go back off the stage, and Aggie will explain the change to you.

PHYLLIS. But – ?

GERRY. *Please,* Phyllis? We *open* tomorrow night!

PHYLLIS. Well – I – oh, very well, very well!

(Exits; **GERRY** *sinks back into seat.)*

GERRY. Go ahead with the show, people.

SMITTY. *(Offstage.)* From the top? I already put the featherduster away.

GERRY. No, no, no! Right from where we broke.

HENRY. Oh, all right. Violet – would you – ?

VIOLET. Oh, sure. *(Into character.)* "...the famous White Ruby of Ranchipur – ?!"

HENRY. "Fiddlesticks! A lot of hogwash! Damned superstitious rot!"

VIOLET. *(Will close book and put it back on shelf as she speaks.)* "But the book distinctly says that Lord Clyde Fortescue, the first owner of the Del – the White Ruby of Ranchipur – " *(Stops.)* Gerry, can I just say "ruby"?! I hate to say the whole mouthful every time!

GERRY. Yes, yes, yes! Just go *on,* go *on*!

VIOLET. *(Back into character.)* " – distinctly says that Lord Clyde Fortescue, the first owner of the ruby, was found floating in his tub, in his own blood! And the next owner, Sir Giles Renfrew, had no sooner purchased the ruby from Lord Clyde's estate, when *he* was found in his stables, trampled to death by his favorite horse! And the *next* owner – "

HENRY. "Balderdash! Nonsense! A lot of old wives' tales!"

VIOLET. "How *can* it be? They *are* all dead – aren't they?"

HENRY. "Yes, but consider: I bought the ruby this morning – and I'm fine!"

*(***HENRY** *suddenly puts a hand to his head and sways.)*

VIOLET. "Lord Dudley – is anything wrong?"

HENRY. "No-no. Nothing. Just one of my beastly attacks."

VIOLET. "How long have you had them?"

HENRY. "Since this morning."

VIOLET. "You don't suppose – ?"

HENRY. "Ridiculous! Sheer coincidence! Merest chance!"

SMITTY. *(Steps into room.)* "Doctor Forbes is here, Lord Dudley."

HENRY. "Ah! It is your fiancé, Diana!" *(To* **GERRY**.*)* That's a pretty dumb line, isn't it? She *knows* he's her fiancé.

PHYLLIS. *(Offstage.)* But the audience doesn't!

SAUL. Why don't I just wear a signboard?

PHYLLIS. *(Offstage.)* Now, really, Saul!

GERRY. Will you all stop your gabbing and get on with the *play*?! It's far too late to make alterations now!

HENRY. Oh, all right. "...It is your fiancé, Diana!"

VIOLET. "Yes, being engaged to the world-famous scientist has made me the envy of all the girls in England!"

HENRY. "Ah, but a lovely belle like you deserves to have a ring!"

VIOLET. Speaking of dumb lines – !

GERRY. Violet – !

PHYLLIS. *(Offstage.)* That line is *supposed* to be light-hearted. The merriment provides emotional contrast with the atmosphere of terror.

SMITTY. That's the general *atmosphere,* all right.

GERRY. Will you all *please* – ?!

VIOLET. Yes, yes, yes! *(Into character.)* "You flatter me, Lord Dudley."

HENRY. "Doris, will you show the gentleman in?"

SMITTY. "At once, milord!"

(She exits and **SAUL** *enters.)*

SAUL. *(Bows, briefly.)* "Lord Dudley. Diana."

HENRY. "I'm sure you young people will want to be alone."

(Starts toward upstage doorway.)

"I'll just toddle off to my room and putter about."

GERRY. Not that exit, Henry! That goes to the kitchen and the maid's quarters!

HENRY. Oh, that's right.

(Starts toward right doorway, but pauses short of exit.)

Of course, she's quite a good looking maid – !

POLLY. *(Offstage.)* Henry!

HENRY. Only joking, dear.

SMITTY. *(Offstage.)* You mean I'm *not* good looking?

HENRY. Uh – well – um –

GERRY. Henry, just *finish* your line and *go*!

HENRY. Saul's got a line, first.

SAUL. I have? Oh! Right! ... "Really, Lord Dudley, you needn't go."

HENRY. "Nonsense. I was once in love, myself!"

POLLY. *(Offstage.)* Why does he say that in the past tense?!

GERRY. Polly, please – !

POLLY. *(Offstage.)* Sorry.

*(***HENRY** *exits;* **SAUL** *moves to* **VIOLET** *and embraces her.)*

SAUL. "My dearest darling!"

VIOLET. "My sweet!"

(They kiss, lightly, then stand apart.)

SAUL. "My darling, I have a little surprise – "

(Reaches into his pocket, then slumps.)

Oh, damn!

GERRY. What's the matter?

SAUL. Forgot the stupid necklace!

(Starts offstage.)

Aggie – ?!

AGGIE. *(Steps on, extending necklace.)* Here. Sorry about that.

GERRY. Aggie, as stage manager, you're supposed to make certain everyone has all their props!

AGGIE. I know, I know. Phyllis was talking to me about "nuances" and I missed Saul's entrance.

GERRY. Phyllis – you really mustn't chat backstage when people have work to do.

PHYLLIS. *(Offstage.)* I do apologize, Geraldine. I forgot Agnes had things to do.

AGGIE. My fault for not reminding her.

(Exits, on:)

"Agnes"! Ye gods!

SAUL. Pick it up from where we left off?

GERRY. Good a spot as any.

SAUL. "My darling, I have a little surprise – the White Ruby of Ranchipur!"

VIOLET. "Oh! How incredibly lovely it is! Might I – try it on?"

SAUL. "Not afraid of the curse?"

VIOLET. "Well – not *very* much... May I – please – ?"

SAUL. "Certainly you shall. Here, allow me..."

(She turns, he hangs it about her neck, then turns her around to face him.)

"It *is* lovely – in such a lovely *setting*!"