(Lays her head against his shoulder.)

VIOLET. "If Doctor Forbes should come upon us – !"

BILLY. "*Hang* your illustrious fiancé! He shall not have you!"

(Kisses her again, a bit more firmly.)

"Oh, Diana – !"

VIOLET. Oh – Billy!

BILLY. Oh – Violet!

(And they go into a real clinch, clutching and caressing and swaying, the metal chairs rattling until:)

LOUISE. *(Enters.)* What's all that clattering – ?!

(They spring apart and come to their feet.)

Ha! No *wonder* you want a real sofa!

VIOLET. Now, Louise – !

LOUISE. I didn't see a thing. Not a thing.

(Gives a happy cackle of amusement and exits.)

VIOLET. Billy – do you think she suspects?!

BILLY. How could she? I didn't suspect, *myself,* till just a moment ago!

VIOLET. Oh, darling, neither did I!

(They almost embrace, but break decorously apart and try to look innocent as they hear:)

PHYLLIS. *(Offstage.)* *Yoo*-hoo – ?! Anybody *here* – ?!

VIOLET. Billy! That sounds like Miss Montague!

BILLY. Tonight? But she promised not to come back till dress rehearsal!

(Others reappear onstage via various routes, all wearing the same apprehensive look as our duo.)

GERRY. Did *you* all hear what *I* heard – ?

POLLY. It sounded like *Phyllis*!

SAUL. Probably with five new pages of dialogue for *you*!

POLLY. *(With patient forebearance.)* Saul – I just accepted *one* apology from you – do you want to have to make *another*?!

SAUL. *(Sincerely.)* Sorry, Polly.

(This time we can definitely pinpoint the source of the voice as emanating from the rear of the theatre:)

PHYLLIS. *Yoo*-hoo! How *are* you all?!

(All turn and peer out into theatre, watching the progress of **PHYLLIS MONTAGUE** *– a maiden lady of indeterminate age, probably anywhere between forty-two and fifty-seven – and especially noting the sheaf of papers she carries, as she hurries happily down the aisle toward the stage.)*

GERRY. Why – Phyllis – we weren't expecting you – at least, not tonight – !

PHYLLIS. Oh, I *know* I'm being a *naughty* girl, Geraldine, but I have so many new and good things to share with you all that I simply *couldn't* wait until the dress rehearsal!

SAUL. *(Wide-eyed, and absolutely frank.)* Well, *that's* a mercy!

*(***PHYLLIS** *has gotten up onstage, now, and is moving along the row of people there, handing each an identical sheaf of stapled-together pages, during:)*

GERRY. Phyllis! *More* changes? We *open* in four nights!

PHYLLIS. That's why I decided not to wait until dress rehearsal to stop by. This would be much too much to have to learn in one night!

HENRY. What makes you think we can do it in *three*?

PHYLLIS. Oh, don't be a tease, Henry. It's really all very simple. I've simply added just *one* extra character and cut the love scene.

BILLY & VIOLET. *(In woeful unison.)* "*Cut* the *love* scene"?!

PHYLLIS. Perhaps I'm putting it too strongly – it's not precisely cut – just cut out of Act Two and moved back to Act One.

BILLY. Oh, well, that's not so bad.

PHYLLIS. Except it's no longer between Diana and Stephen.

VIOLET. Then – between who else?

AGGIE. Yeah, the Lord and Lady are already married –

SMITTY. You *can't* mean the Doctor and the *maid* – *can* you?

PHYLLIS. Oh, dear, perhaps I didn't make it clear. *Diana* still plays the scene – but now it's with Sir Percival!

GERRY. What? But Phyllis –

LOUISE. How can you do such a thing?

PHYLLIS. Oh, well, I got to thinking that perhaps a knight of the realm was a better catch for Diana than a mere rich commoner like Stephen, so –

LOUISE. Phyllis, I didn't say *why* – I said *how* can you do it? We don't *have* a Sir Percival in the play!

GERRY. Exactly! Everybody *refers* to him, all the time, but he never actually *appears*!

SAUL. Besides, it's kind of rough on *Diana* if you make that switch – considering that I *bump off* Percival before I show up at the house!

PHYLLIS. You *do*?

POLLY. Don't you even remember your own *plot*, Phyllis?

PHYLLIS. Yes, but I don't recall a *murder*...show me where it says so.

BILLY. We never actually *see* it done. But once we find that Percival has vanished, and then Rex has the famous gemstone Percival was bringing to the party, we figure out who *killed* him, see?

PHYLLIS. *(Pondering deeply.)* Murder. I never thought of it as a murder. I just thought that, well, Rex had picked Percival's pocket, and perhaps drained all the petrol from the tank of his car to keep him from the party. After all – murder is so – so –

GERRY. *Popular* with our *patrons*!

POLLY. And we're already *advertising* it as a murder mystery!

AGGIE. And we *do open* in *four nights*, Phyllis, for Pete's *sake*! It's a bit late to audition Percivals!

PHYLLIS. Oh, but I've written you all the loveliest new lines...!

(Looks ready to weep.)

Won't you – won't you at least have a *look* at them – ?

(There is a pause, and an exchange of glances among the group, and then – since none of them is truly heartless – they all shrug and mumble some sort of assent, and start looking – just a bit warily – at the new pages.)

VIOLET. *(Gasps.)* I'm *pregnant*!

(Others react, of course.)

BILLY. You're *what*?!

VIOLET. I mean *Diana* is!

(Others evince great relief; she continues:)

But who's the father?

PHYLLIS. That's on the third sheet.

(All flip pages like mad; then:)

AGGIE. Lord Dudley!

POLLY. *(Appalled.)* Henry!

HENRY. *(Patiently.)* Polly, don't be an idiot.

POLLY. Oh. Yes. But – it *was* a bit of a shock.

BILLY. This is crazy! Phyllis, how can Dudley be the father, when he and Diana have only just met?!

PHYLLIS. Oh, that's on the fifth sheet.

(All flip pages again.)

GERRY. *Amnesia?!*