WILDIN 6

ROSE. Mrs. Graves …
LOTTY. But then I suppose it was his ghost, naturally. *(Mrs. Graves eyes Lotty, who looks at Rose, who looks away, pained.)*
MRS. GRAVES. Do you have references?
ROSE. Shouldn't we be the ones asking for references from you, Mrs. Graves?
MRS. GRAVES. *(Surprised that this has come from Rose. Gathering all of her dignity.)* If you must, you may communicate with the President of the Royal Academy, the Archbishop of Canterbury, and the Governor of the Bank of England.
ROSE. I see.
LOTTY. *(Rising, deflecting.)* Is the large portrait of your father, Mrs. Graves?
MRS. GRAVES. Yes. That is himself. But we were speaking of references, Mrs.Wilton.
LOTTY. And the other portrait is your mother?
MRS. GRAVES. My mother?! That, Mrs. Wilton, is the good Queen Victoria.
LOTTY. I don't think references are nice things between decent English women. We needn't distrust each other. We're not Americans.
ROSE. *(Rising.)* References bring an atmosphere into our holiday plan that isn't quite what we want, Mrs. Graves. Good day. *(She pushes Lotty toward the exit.)*
MRS. GRAVES. How are the expenses to be divided?
LOTTY. *(Excitedly.)* Fifteen pounds each for rent, plus food. A real bargain!
MRS. GRAVES. I'm an old woman. I don't eat much.
ROSE. That would certainly be your choice to make, Mrs. Graves.
LOTTY. Perhaps we can catch our own, Mrs. Graves. How are you with a bow? *(Mrs. Graves is stricken again.)*
MRS. GRAVES. Your advertisement clearly stated that there would be a cook. My stick prohibits me from entering kitchens.
ROSE. There is a woman by the name of Costanza. *(Ko-stahn-zah.)*
MRS. GRAVES. Costan…? Fifteen pounds. Really, ten seems most reasonable, considering the circumstances.
ROSE. Fifteen, Mrs. Graves.
LOTTY. Fifteen is fair, Mrs. Graves.
MRS. GRAVES. The wisteria is guaranteed?
ROSE. Look …
LOTTY. Mrs. Graves, Mr. Wilding has assured us that we shall have wisteria.

MRS. GRAVES. *(With great reluctance.)* I shall waive references. But no wisteria and I'll expect a deduction. *(Sits.)*
ROSE. Thank you, Mrs. Graves. You've been most … *(Mrs. Graves gestures for them to sit. They obey.)* I can't seem to find the word I'm looking for.
MRS. GRAVES. Is the fourth of our party a widow as well? *(Lotty and Rose look at each other, perplexed.)*
LOTTY. A widow, Mrs. Graves? Well, no. Actually … *(Mrs. Graves raises her hand for silence.)*
MRS. GRAVES. *(Gravely.)* All in good time. All in good time. *(Reciting, frighteningly.)* "Old sisters of a day gone by / Gray nurses, loving nothing new / Why should they miss their yearly due / Before their time? They too will die." *(Lotty and Rose cower. Mrs. Graves cracks a nut, smiles.)* May I offer you a nut? *(Thunder.)*

Scene 7

Rain. The flat of Antony Wilding. A table, two chairs, a coat rack with coats and umbrellas. Lotty and Rose stand attentively.

WILDING. Oh yes, the wisteria is everywhere, as advertised. You can see some of the view in these photographs here. *(The ladies turn their eyes away from Wilding himself, who wears a loose, open shirt and an even more open smile.)* I took these myself, I'm afraid. You'd hardly mistake them for professionals. *(He turns the photo. They huddle together, turning their heads.)* It's a small castle, but of course it has most of the "modern improvements," as an estate agent would say. Its name is *San Salvatore. (Salvator-ay.)*
LOTTY and ROSE. *(Trying it out.) San Salvatore.*
LOTTY. It sounds sacred, Rose.
ROSE. What is that there, Mr. Wilding?
WILDING. *(Looking at Rose, distracted by something in her face.)* What, Mrs. Arnott?
ROSE. *(Pointing.)* That. *(He continues to stare, pulls himself away to look at the photo.)*
WILDING. That, I'm afraid, appears to have been my left thumb.

WILDING

(The ladies smile discreetly.) But had it not been there, it would be a view of the sea and of the lower garden. The castle has both upper and lower gardens, with a lovely terrace between. *(He hands them a card.)* For you. A postcard of the village below.
LOTTY and ROSE. *(Reading.)* Mez-zago.
WILDING. *(To Rose, enunciating.)* Met-zago.
ROSE. *(Self-consciously.)* Met-zago. *(Wilding smiles.)*
WILDING. I like your face, Mrs. Arnott. *(Rose freezes.)* But here, let's make you comfortable. *(He removes their coats.)* In April, you know, the area is simply a mass of flowers. *(Admiring Rose's figure. To her.)* You must wear white.
ROSE. *(Embarrassed.)* White?
WILDING. Yes. There's a dock and small boat, if … well, if your husbands are so inclined.
LOTTY. Our husbands, Mr. Wilding? *(In mock mourning.)* Our husbands, I'm afraid … will not be with us.
WILDING. Forgive me. So many widows these days.
ROSE. No …
LOTTY. There will be four of us, however. Lady friends.
WILDING. Really? *San Salvatore* should be filled with friends. It can be a bit lonely.
ROSE. Is *San Salvatore* a family home?
WILDING. Yes. Or it was. I've no longer any family, so it's no longer a home, I suppose.
LOTTY. Oh.
WILDING. Father's parents had the place built. A love nest of sorts, from the way he told it. I never knew them, unfortunately, but some of the stories are delightful.
LOTTY. It sounds wonderful.
WILDING. *(At Rose.)* Yes. It's beautiful. *(Pulling away.)* Father loved the place. Mother never cared for it much, really, until her later years alone. And then, while I was away in the Army, she and *San Salvatore* seemed to become one.
LOTTY. Where did you serve, Mr. Wilding? *(His smile fades.)*
WILDING. Flanders, mostly.
LOTTY. *(Sincerely.)* Brave battles.
ROSE. We are indebted to you, Mr. Wilding. *(Wilding nods.)*
WILDING. I lost Mother last year, sad to say. She always said that there was something enchanted about the castle in April. I hate to miss it this year, but I've work in Rome.
ROSE. What is your work, Mr. Wilding?

WILDING. I paint. Portraits. Classical, of course. Two eyes, one mouth, and so on. *(Lotty thinks.)*
LOTTY. Marvelous!
WILDING. I've a studio in Bloomsbury. Perhaps you both could visit sometime and be studied. I'm said to have a particular talent with the female form. *(Rose lets out a small gasp. Lotty hurriedly hands an envelope to Wilding.)*
LOTTY. Our final payment, Mr. Wilding.
WILDING. Well. *(Takes the envelope.)* Now I'm richer … *(He hugs Lotty, to her delight.)* … and you're happier. *(He starts toward Rose, but she cringes.)* What would you say to celebrating our union, as it were, over a cup of hot tea? *(He motions for them to sit.)*
LOTTY. Oh, that would be lovely. *(Sits.)*
ROSE. That's very kind, Mr. Wilding. *(Sits.)*
WILDING. Good. Now, I have plain English black, or, for the more daring, a Moroccan blend I'm fond of with just a dash of cinnamon that goes by the rather audacious name of "Indiscreet."
LOTTY. *(Bursting out in giggles.)* Oh, my! The "Indiscreet" sounds most intriguing.
WILDING. Wonderful! And for you, Mrs. Arnott? *(Rose considers.)*
ROSE. I shall have the black.
WILDING. Right. *(Serving.)* Now you must tell me all about the friends you are taking.
ROSE. We hardly know a thing about them, really.
LOTTY. We took your lead, Mr. Wilding, and placed an advertisement.
WILDING. Oh?
LOTTY. There's Lady Caroline Bramble, who likes cognac and dancing. And Mrs. Clayton Graves, who knew Tennyson and likes … *(Thinks.)*
ROSE. Nuts.
WILDING. How interesting. Well, I'm certain that you will all find *San Salvatore* to your liking. Mrs. Arnott, this will sound a bit extraordinary, but there is a portrait of you there.
ROSE. A portrait of me?
WILDING. Yes. A Madonna. There's one on the stairs really exactly like you. *(Rose is stunned.)*
ROSE. Well … *(Thunder.)*
WILDING. *San Salvatore* will certainly be a nice change from this weather.
LOTTY. Yes.