MELLERSH

Scene 2

Rain. The Wilton home. A table, two chairs, a coat rack with coats and umbrellas. Mellersh Wilton sits at the table, looking into a small table mirror, trimming his moustache. A towel is draped around his neck, underneath which he is dressed for an evening business engagement, save for an untied tie. Lotty flutters around him, preparing herself.

MELLERSH. *(Who believes himself to be the image of premature wisdom. He speaks to Lotty without looking at her.)* Charlotte! It's unlike you to be late and make us have to hurry so. A wife's impunctuality always reflects poorly on the husband, I believe, if not in one way, then in another.
LOTTY. I'm sorry, Mellersh.
MELLERSH. At the least it conveys a lack of concern on her part, and, at the most, a lack of control on his.
LOTTY. Forgive me, Mellersh, but I got into a most interesting conversation at my ladies' club.
MELLERSH. That's all very well, but …
LOTTY. Do you know a gentleman from here in Hampstead by the name of Arnott?
MELLERSH. Why? What has he done?
LOTTY. Oh, nothing that I'm aware of. I'm sure he's quite the usual, in fact. I just thought you might know him through business.
MELLERSH. The name's not familiar. It will look very bad if we are late, Charlotte.
LOTTY. I am sorry, Mellersh. I wish that you would just go without me, really. You know I only feel awash with these artistic sorts.
MELLERSH. But a family solicitor must show his family, now, mustn't he? It's not so important that you enjoy yourself, but that you simply are there. *(He checks his teeth.)*
LOTTY. It's just that I always feel so … negligible. I never know what to say. And if, by chance, I do have something to say, it only comes out wrong.
MELLERSH. If you're asked for your opinion, you need merely say "marvelous," or something of that nature, and leave it at that.

That's all they want to hear anyhow. Try it.
LOTTY. "Marvelous."
MELLERSH. You'll be surprised how far it will get you.
LOTTY. It's Impressionists again, then?
MELLERSH. Why?
LOTTY. It's all just a bit of a muddle. To my eye.
MELLERSH. Sometimes one has to step back a bit. Have you tried that?
LOTTY. And then what?
MELLERSH. And then … "Marvelous." It's not so much the artists I'm interested in, anyhow, but their patrons and sponsors, who might be in need of legal counsel.
LOTTY. I understand. Might we go to dinner after?
MELLERSH. We will eat at home. Where have you put my *Times*, Charlotte?
LOTTY. "Times," Mellersh?
MELLERSH. Yes.
LOTTY. You mean the newspaper?
MELLERSH. Of course the … have you taken leave of your senses? What else would I mean by "my *Times*"?
LOTTY. *(Busying herself nervously.)* Of course that's what you meant. *(Mellersh waits.)*
MELLERSH. Well?
LOTTY. Well what, Mellersh?
MELLERSH. *(Steadying himself.)* Where have you put today's *Times*?
LOTTY. It seems I forgot to pick one up. *(Mellersh eyes her, Lotty moves on.)*
MELLERSH. I shall miss it now.
LOTTY. Yes. Perhaps it would be best if, in future, you picked up your own *Times*.
MELLERSH. But you pick up my *Times*, Charlotte. I see no reason to change procedure now. You need merely be sure to remember.
LOTTY. Yes, but …
MELLERSH. *(Raising a hand.)* Case closed, my dear. Case closed. *(Lotty boils.)*
LOTTY. Mellersh?
MELLERSH. Yes?
LOTTY. Do you know what the weather is like in Italy in April?
MELLERSH. Quite lovely, I imagine. Why do you ask?
LOTTY. Oh, no reason, really. We were just talking about it today. About holidays.