each other's heads and wear them round their waists.

**BETTY.** Clive!

**CLIVE.** Don't be squeamish, Betty, let me have my joke. And what has my little dove done today?

**BETTY.** I've read a little.

**CLIVE.** Good. Is it good?

**BETTY.** It's poetry.

**CLIVE.** You're so delicate and sensitive.

**BETTY.** And I played the piano. Shall I send for the children?

**CLIVE.** Yes, in a minute. I've a piece of news for you.

**BETTY.** Good news?

**CLIVE.** You'll certainly think it's good. A visitor.

**BETTY.** From home?

**CLIVE.** No. Well of course originally from home.

**BETTY.** Man or women?

**CLIVE.** Man.

**BETTY.** I can't imagine.

**CLIVE.** Something of an explorer. Bit of a poet. Odd chap but brave as a lion. And a great admirer of yours.

**BETTY.** What do you mean? Whoever can it be?

**CLIVE.** With an H and a B. And does conjuring tricks for little Edward.

**BETTY.** That sounds like Mr. Bagley.

**CLIVE.** Harry Bagley.

**BETTY.** He certainly doesn't admire me, Clive, what a thing to say. How could I possibly guess from that. He's hardly explored anything at all, he's just been up a river. You should have said a heavy drinker and a bit of a bore.

**ACT I**

**CLIVE.** But you like him well enough. You don't mind him coming?

**BETTY.** Anyone at all to break the monotony.

**CLIVE.** But you have your mother. You have Ellen.

**BETTY.** Ellen is a governess. My mother is my mother.

**CLIVE.** I hoped when she came to visit she would be company for you.

**BETTY.** I don't think mother is on a visit. I think she lives with us.

**CLIVE.** I think she does.

**BETTY.** Clive you are so good.

**CLIVE.** But are you bored my love?

**BETTY.** It's just that I miss you when you're away. We're not in this country to enjoy ourselves. If I lack society that is my form of service.

**CLIVE.** That's a brave girl. So today has been all right? No fainting? No hysteria?

**BETTY.** I have been very tranquil.

**CLIVE.** Ah what a haven of peace to come home to. The coolth, the calm, the beauty.

**BETTY.** There is one thing, Clive, if you don't mind.

**CLIVE.** What can I do for you my dear?

**BETTY.** It's about Joshua.

**CLIVE.** Joshua has been my boy for eight years. He has saved my life, I have saved his life. He is devoted to me and mine. I have said this before.

**BETTY.** He is rude to me. He doesn't do what I say. Speak to him.

**CLIVE.** Tell me what happened.

**BETTY.** He said something improper.

**CLIVE.** Well, what?
BETTY. I don't like to repeat it.
CLIVE. I must insist.
BETTY. I had left my book inside on the piano.
I was in the hammock. I asked him to fetch it.
CLIVE. And? And did he not fetch it?
BETTY. Yes, he did eventually.
CLIVE. And what did he say?
BETTY. Clive—
CLIVE. Betty.
BETTY. He said fetch it yourself. You've got legs under that skirt.
CLIVE. Joshua!

(JOSHUA comes)

Joshua, madam says you spoke impolitely to her this afternoon.
JOSHUA. Sir?
CLIVE. When she asked you to pass her book from the piano.
JOSHUA. She has the book sir.
BETTY. I have the book now, but when I told you—
CLIVE. Betty, please, let me handle this. You didn't pass it at once?
JOSHUA. No, sir, I made a joke first.
CLIVE. What was that?
JOSHUA. I said my legs were tired, sir. That was funny because the book was very near, it would not make my legs tired to get it.
BETTY. That's not true.

JOSHUA. Did madam hear me wrong?
CLIVE. She heard something else.
JOSHUA. What was that, madam?
BETTY. Never mind.
CLIVE. Now, Joshua, it won't do you know. Madam doesn't like that kind of joke. You must do what Madam says, just do what she says and don't answer back. I'm very shocked, Joshua, very shocked.
(CLIVE winks at JOSHUA unseen by BETTY. JOSHUA goes.) I think another drink, and send for the children, and isn't that Harry riding down the hill? Wave, wave. Just in time before dark. Cuts it fine, the blighter. Always a hothead, Harry.
BETTY. Can he see us?
CLIVE. Stand further forward. There, he waved back.
BETTY. Do you think so? I wonder what he saw. Sometimes sunset is so terrifying I can't bear to look.
CLIVE. It makes me proud. Elsewhere in the empire the sun is rising.
BETTY. Harry looks so small on the hillside.

(ELLEN comes)

ELLEN. Shall I bring the children?
BETTY. Shall Ellen bring the children?
CLIVE. Delightful.
BETTY. Yes, Ellen, make sure they're warm. The night air is deceptive. Victoria was looking pale yesterday.