

## SCENE I

*August 1942. Willie's room.*

RADIO *(Voice emphatic and cheerful)*

... from Vo-RO-nezh ... one moment ... allow me to correct that, please. From VO-ronezh to the Black Sea ...

*(Static)*

General von ... sorry, I'm having a little trouble reading the name. General von has reached the Bock. Let me just take that again. General von Bock has reached the Don.

*(Static)*

... Prime Minister Winston Churchill is in Moscow for a friendly meeting with ...

*(Static)*

... during which the Russian leader has asked for a military operation ...

*(Pronouncing with difficulty, as though reading a foreign language)*

... an engagement... which he calls ... a Second Front...

*(Increasingly cheerful)*

Today, August 14th, the weather continued to be humid and hot, with temperatures in the high nineties. Offices and stores closed early here in Montreal, a number of persons having collapsed owing to heat prostration. Light casualties were reported at Danceland Paradise, when the dance-floor caved in.

*(Static)*

... wishing to draw the extra sugar ration for making jam and pickles should present their ...

*(Record of 'Oh Rose Mark, I love you ...')*

*Stops abruptly, as if put on by mistake.*

*Record of 'A-Hunting We Will Go.'*

*During this, Willie Howe's room has been revealed. A window covered with a blanket. A kitchen table on which is an old-fashioned radio, a large tea-cosy and a bachelor's muddle of cups and glasses. Electric fixture with dangling wires. Bed with suitcase underneath. Spanish War posters. Four plain kitchen chairs.*

*Molly, Jenny, Willie Howe, Mrs. Bailey.*

*Molly is 20, Jenny 18, Willie about 27, Mrs. Bailey another generation altogether.*

*Willie sits between Molly and Jenny. Mrs. Bailey, apart, knits a balaclava helmet as if the war depended on it. The women are dressed for a hot summer night — cotton dresses, bare arms and legs, plain sandals. No makeup or jewelry, though Molly and Mrs. Bailey wear wedding rings. The younger women's hair is long and straight. A fanatical neatness. Molly holds a large paper bag. Willie is dressed for a Bible Society meeting in a damp chapel: Dark suit, sober tie, clumsy respectable boots. To a North American eye, in 1942, he would seem shabby, provincial and poor.*

MRS. BAILEY *Turning off 'A-Hunting We Will Go'*

All right... Willie. Carry on.

WILLIE *(Strong Glasgow)*

If you two girls are sincerely interested in politics, remember that the first rule is never to have friends who might be friends of other friends.

JENNY *(Across Willie to Molly)*

What do you make of the accent? Is it real?

MOLLY I'm not sure. Wait till he says something else.

WILLIE It is a wise rule, in fact, to have no friends at all.

MOLLY It isn't natural. It's nerves.

*Willie bends down and unties his bootlaces. Seems to wonder why he has done this. Tries to tie them again. One breaks.*

MOLLY Foreigners wear ugly shoes.

JENNY Does he count as foreign? He speaks English. Sort of. He does seem poor. What could make him foreign.

WILLIE *(Giving up on the bootlaces)*

No friends at all. A wise rule.

MOLLY He can't be poor. He's a designer. He made one of those posters.

WILLIE As for the second wise rule of political action ...

JENNY What does he do with his money, then?

MOLLY I think he's being blackmailed. By the Trotskyites in Glasgow.

JENNY That's terrible.

WILLIE ... the importance of complete discretion. The doors and windows amply curtained. The telephone muffled and isolated ...

MOLLY He fought in Spain, you know. They blackmail each other like anything.

*Molly offers the bag of biscuits to Mrs. Bailey, who shakes her head, knitting fiercely. Molly offers it to Willie.*

MOLLY *(Quite loudly, as though Willie were bound to be deaf)*  
Have a ginger biscuit, Willie. Go ahead. Take a handful. We brought them for you.

*Willie takes several. Removes crumbs from his chin with a large handkerchief.*

MOLLY *(To Jenny, both eating biscuits)* Not a bad place for an immigrant. I wonder if he found it straight off?

JENNY The tea-cosy belongs to Mrs. Bailey.

MOLLY Can you read what it says on the posters?

JENNY 'No pasaran.' It could mean anything.

WILLIE *(Still having trouble with crumbs)* The third rule of politics is this ... When ... *(He chokes)*

JENNY That's not a very nice looking handkerchief.

MOLLY Left-wing foreigners are always snobby about using Kleenex.

JENNY Just between us, Molly. Is Willie a *real* Stalinist? He seems — I don't know — too confused.

MOLLY I've been wondering that too.

MRS. BAILEY *(To Willie)* Try holding your breath. I'll take over. Girls! We're wasting time. What is the Movement?

JENNY The Movement is a capacious vehicle moving at its own speed.

JENNY ... from its starting point to its objective ...

MOLLY Time being in its favour ...

JENNY We've left something out.

MOLLY From its starting point to its objective ...

JENNY No, we went wrong before that. Willie's fainted.

MOLLY The heat. It must be over a hundred in here.

*(Molly starts for the window)*

MRS. BAILEY You know that we do not open windows.

MOLLY Nobody can see in — we're on the third floor.

JENNY Besides, we're not doing anything. Just sitting around eating biscuits.

MRS. BAILEY You are not just sitting around. You are receiving instruction.

JENNY *(Wishing to be agreeable)* It is something like Confirmation class. What is your name? M or N.

MRS. BAILEY The immediate need is for ...

JENNY AND MOLLY A Second Front.

MRS. BAILEY A real Stalinist knows ...

MOLLY Some of the answers.

JENNY Most of the answers.

MOLLY Where to find the answers.

JENNY All the questions.

MRS. BAILEY The first thing we do after the war is ...

JENNY (*Happily*)  
Get rid of Franco.

MOLLY After the war, the men won't let a Fascist state exist.

JENNY They'll never put up with it.

MOLLY They're learning, now. Contact with European workers ...

JENNY With political unions ...

MRS. BAILEY What does your husband say, Molly?

MOLLY Not much. He's in England, and you know how that is. Feudal.  
Still by the time they all get to Berlin ...

JENNY They'll have learned not to take things lying down any more.  
The way they took the Depression.

MRS. BAILEY Jenny. Jenny. You're preaching counter-revolution.

JENNY I am?

WILLIE (*Faintly*)  
There is a fourth wise rule ...

MOLLY (*To Jenny*) You can read Duncan's letter about the situation in  
England, if you like. It's in the bag, under the biscuits. Don't  
read the last paragraph. That's only for married people.  
(*At the window*) If Willie doesn't need air, some of the rest of  
us do. (*Tugs at blanket, which falls*) Jenny, come and look at  
the stars. (*Jenny engrossed in last paragraph*) I told you not to  
read that. (*Molly removes the tea-cosy, revealing Willie's  
telephone*)

MRS. BAILEY (*To Molly*) Just let me try this for shape.

MOLLY (*To Mrs. Bailey*) I have to call my mother.

MRS. BAILEY Your heart's in the right place, Molly, but if you go on like  
this you'll never be useful (*Fits balaclava helmet over Molly's  
head*)

JENNY (*Gently fanning Willie with the letter*) This is a beautiful  
apartment, Willie. I mean it. I'd give anything to have one like  
it. But you have to pay black market prices for leases now. I  
can't save up enough. The reason why I've never joined the  
Movement is I've never had the two dollars.

MOLLY     *(To Mrs. Bailey, who removes helmet, satisfied)* My mother's useful. She looks after the kid.

MRS. BAILEY Children are a handicap in times like these. How old is he?

MOLLY     Let me think. I was pregnant the first time two years ago. But I didn't have that one. Then there was a problem in June. Was I pregnant or only late? I'd just as soon have been only late. Then in September. I was sure in November. We got married in January. Duncan went overseas in March. Wait. I've missed out a year. What are we now? August?

JENNY     He's two months old. *(To Willie)* She's got a marvellous memory for everything except that.

WILLIE     You must study, Jenny. You musn't waste these years. You must learn history, languages.

JENNY     Oh, I do. That's what I spend my money on. The little I earn, that is. I took Russian last winter. An evening course — thirty-seven hours. We learned poetry. Well, one poem.

MOLLY     *(At the telephone)* Momma? How's Chuck? What do you mean, all right? I can hear him yelling from here.

JENNY     *(To Willie)* It's by a famous poet. Do you want to hear it?  
*(Reciting)*  
Alexei! Oh, Alexei!  
How bright your eyes did shine  
Outside the Lenin Library  
Where you said you'd be mine.  
Leonid! Oh, Leonid!  
I wish I knew you better.  
I'm sending you a telegram,  
A postcard and a letter.  
Vladimir! Oh, Vladimir!  
With you I'd love to travel.  
I like you more than Fyodor,  
Yevgeny, Lev or Pavel.  
Nikolai! Oh, Nikolai!

WILLIE     Go on.

JENNY     That was as far as we got. It was the end of the course. Thirty-seven hours. 'Constructive Russian,' it was called.

MOLLY     *(To her mother)* Well, if that's what he seems to want, why don't you give it to him? Or something like it. At that age he won't know the difference. He's only ...

JENNY     Two months.

MOLLY Two months old. How much concrete experience do you think he's picked up in two months?

JENNY *(To Willie)* Now that I've finished with Russian I'm studying Strategic Journalism. It's important, it's my whole future. Three classes a week. Then one evening here, taking instruction. That makes four evenings a week. The other three I take Botany, Ethnology, Popular Superstitions, Moths and Butterflies of the British Isles, Bookbinding and Illumination ...

WILLIE That seems a heavy educational burden.

JENNY There's nothing else to do at night.

MOLLY *(Covers telephone with her hand and speaks to Willie)* The war, Willie. No men. All gone away. An enormous world with no men in it. None worth looking at twice, that is.

JENNY Don't take that to heart, Willie. You're here. And there's Mr. Gillespie, too.

WILLIE Who's Gillespie?

JENNY The editor of 'The Beacon'. His family founded it. It's our finest newspaper. You can see their name, Gillespie, on the masthead. And the family motto, 'O Shed Thy Light'.

MOLLY *(To her mother)* Stop worrying about me. I'm with Jenny Thurstone. We're having ice-cream sodas.

JENNY That's where I work. In the Department of Appraisements and Averages. But it's not where I want to be. I'm trying to get into the Editorial Department.

MOLLY *(To her mother)* You did *not* hear a man's voice. I'm with Jenny.

JENNY It would be a lot more interesting. And I could do something useful. *(Mrs. Bailey turns on radio)*

MRS. BAILEY Quiet. The news.

RADIO Legal action has been threatened over last night's blackout which, some people claim, caused, quote, intolerable inconvenience, end quote.

MOLLY *(To her mother)* I've got to hang up: There's a queue waiting to use the phone. All women.

RADIO The Anti-Blackout League intends to issue a further statement.

JENNY *(To Molly)* You leave the tea-cosy off. I have to call Mr. Gillespie.

RADIO According to the Prime Minister, an annual blackout in wartime is not a sacrifice too great ...

JENNY        (*Dialling*) Lancaster 9875. L-A-N-9-8-7-5. Is that Lancaster 9875?

RADIO        ... Jehovah's Witnesses and other banned organizations were suspected of fomenting the anti-blackout movement ...  
(*Mrs. Bailey, exasperated, turns radio off*)

MRS. BAILEY(*To Willie*) Are you sure there isn't someone you want to call, too?

WILLIE        I have no friends.

JENNY        Mr. Gillespie? It's Jenny here. Jenny Thurstone, from Appraisements and Averages. Here's news from England — war news. A friend of mine has her husband over there. Lance Corporal ... I *am* getting to the point, Mr. Gillespie.

MRS. BAILEY(*To Willie*) Do you often have those spells of unconsciousness?

JENNY        Here it is (*Reading from letter*) The beer in the pubs is too warm and the men are complaining.

MOLLY        Lance-Corporal Duncan Sutherland.

JENNY        Well, I thought it might make a nice little story. I'm sorry, Mr. Gillespie. You've got your son over there ... your boy ... Barry. I'm sorry ... Gary ... Larry ... your boy *Harry*, is it? Never complains. Never a word of ... Proud to do ... Happy to be ... Harry Gillespie. Oh, it *is* Barry. Lieutenant B. Gillespie. You must be proud of him. I can see that. I'm sorry I bothered you. I *really* am. (*Hanging up*) He wasn't interested.

WILLIE        Perhaps it's not a very exciting story.

JENNY        One of the things they tell you in Strategic Journalism is to keep calling editors until they realize your worth.

WILLIE        You're useful where you are. From each according to his ...

JENNY        It's true that I'm good with averages. I once made 99 divided by seven work out to 100. They were pleased.

MOLLY        Can you work out why my husband enlisted?

MRS. BAILEY(*Ferocious*) To have his own telephone.

MOLLY        He didn't only leave. He left ... me. There's a difference.

WILLIE        To be with his friends.

MOLLY        I'm his friend.

JENNY        Actually, I do know. I worked it out for an inquiry 'The Beacon' ran. 'Why They Enlist.' It turned out to be over food. They weren't getting the ideal meal at home. I worked out the average ideal meal, too. The editors wouldn't accept my conclusion. They wanted me to work it out to 'Hatred of

Oppression'. Then they decided 'hatred' sounded negative. They wanted 'Personal Ideals'. Mr. Gillespie turned it down. (*Quoting him*) 'Nobody in his right mind buys a newspaper to read about ideals.' I forget what they finally printed.

MOLLY Can you remember the ideal meal? (*Finds pencil in bag of biscuits. Writes on the back of Duncan's letter*)

MOLLY (*Writing*) Ideal ... meal ... for ... men. Because it *is* men. No woman ever left home over a meal.

JENNY (*Reciting*) Tomato juice or soup.

MOLLY What kind of soup?

JENNY I didn't do the soup breakdown. Olives.

MOLLY (*Writing*) Olives ...

JENNY That's before the soup. I'm sorry. Meat loaf. Flour gravy.

MOLLY (*Giving up*) Some men had that every day of their lives and they still left.

WILLIE Go on, Jenny. I'd like to hear the whole thing.

JENNY (*Slightly hurt*) Stewed tomatoes.

MRS. BAILEY Anti-Blackout League! Put 'em in jail, where they belong.

JENNY Buttered carrots. Baked or mashed potatoes.

MRS. BAILEY Swine. Profiteering swine. The whole lot of 'em.

MOLLY I've got to leave. My mother gets nervous when I'm late.

JENNY Hot rolls. Butter.

WILLIE (*Writing*) Not so fast.

MOLLY Do you cook, Willie?

JENNY Chocolate pudding or apple crumble.

MRS. BAILEY The same crooks who made money out of the Depression are making it now out of the war.

JENNY Oatmeal cookies.

WILLIE Chocolate pudding or *what*?

MRS. BAILEY Their days are numbered.

MOLLY Jenny. Jenny, come on. It's late.

MRS. BAILEY Swept aside like dead leaves. And we'll be the brooms.

JENNY Tea, coffee or milk.

MOLLY Goodnight, Willie, Goodnight, Mrs. Bailey.

WILLIE Goodnight, Jenny.

JENNY Goodnight, Mrs. Bailey.

(*Mrs. Bailey turns radio on*)

RADIO A shortage of sliced pineapple has been reported in some areas. There appears to be no shortage of the crushed. The Prime Minister has issued a statement on the pineapple question: 'If

the freedom-loving peoples of the world want to see sliced pineapple on the dinner-table again, let them buy Victory Bonds.'

*Willie, Molly and Jenny make their goodbyes unheard. Mrs. Bailey, who has started a new helmet, goes on knitting. Willie puts the ideal menu away as if it were a love letter. 'A-Hunting We Will Go' follows news bulletin. Willie covers telephone, starts to hang blanket over window. Stops, looking down to street. Mrs. Bailey lowers music.*

MRS. BAILEY What? (*Jenny and Molly are heard laughing and talking*)

WILLIE (*To himself*) Goodnight, Jenny.

JENNY (*From street*) What do you suppose they're talking about?

MRS. BAILEY Do you happen to remember the fourth rule, Willie?

WILLIE 'No personal feelings.'

MRS. BAILEY           Whoever forgot to make it the first rule ought to be shot.  
(*Tantivy chorus from 'A-Hunting We Will Go'*)