

Oates After His Fingers

a radio play by Steve Walker

first broadcast on BBC Radio 4 on December 2, 1991

CHARACTERS

ARCHIE MUNTING.....of Munting Hall
EUROPA MUNTING.....his wife
JAMES HENDRIX.....something like a butler
MARTHA MUNTING.....Archie's Ma
CAPTAIN L.E.G."Titus" OATES.....a visitor from Antarctica

Also:

CAPTAIN R.F. SCOTT
DR. E.A.WILSON.....of Scott's expedition
MR. KRISHNAGUPTIRISHNAN.....a Hindu
SIMON.....another Hindu
MEIN HOST
MANFRED.....a ski instructor
DAVID LLOYD GEORGE.....the statesman
HUNGRY FRED.....a horse
DOCTOR COOMBS
DOCTOR FITCH
H.R."Birdie" BOWERS.....of Scott's expedition
KING EDWARD VII
An annoying Parrot

In 'Other England':

FUNICULAR BUTTONPUSHER
SNOOTY WOMAN
NITTY MAN
HERBERT
CABBY
ARTHUR MUNTING
'OTHER' ARCHIE.....played by 'This England' original
'OTHER' EUROPA.....played by 'This England' original
'OTHER' MA.....played by 'This England' original
'OTHER' HENDRIX.....played by 'This England' original
POLICECONSTABLE
POLICESERGEANT
OLD BAILEY JUDGE
JAILER
A STRANGLER

NOTES

The play is set in 2065, by which time everyone in England speaks with an accent so transatlantic you can taste New England clams in it. To Oates' ears, and you ours, Archie and his household sound like Americans. But they most certainly are not: THEY ARE ENGLISH! Their American-ness has an English-ness about it, as if they got stuck while

pretending.

That said, Archie sounds like John Wayne trying to be James Stewart playing Robert Browning, Europa like Scarlett O'Hara played by Joan Fontaine. Hendrix is Walter Brennan. Ma is less affected than the others: she sounds like an English Duchess after twelve quiet years in Kansas City.

As for Oates, to us in the here-and-now his Edwardian accent sounds impossibly 'English'. To those in 2065 he sounds even odder. His voice is that of a muscular Noël Coward who has forgotten he is Noël Coward while sinking the German fleet in the most English of war films. In 'Other England', meanwhile, the speech is generally toffee-nosed. The pace throughout the proceedings is breathless, brisk, almost breakneck.

SCENE 1

ANTARCTICA. SCOTT'S TENT. MARCH 16, 1912.

WE BEGIN WITH JUST THIS: AN ICE-CUBE DROPS INTO A GIN-AND-TONIC. THEN ANOTHER. THEN ANOTHER. THE GLASS IS SHAKEN

OATES:

(SHIVERS) Brrrrrrrrrrr!!!

INTERIOR ACOUSTIC OF THE TENT. THE FIERCEST BLIZZARD THAT EVER THERE WAS IS RAGING OUTSIDE. IT SUCKS AND BLOWS THE CANVAS

SOUNDS OF OATES IN HIS FROZEN CLOTHING GETTING TO HIS FEET

SCOTT:

(SLEEPILY, EXHAUSTED) Titus? Titus? What are you doing, man?

OATES:

(BRAVELY, WITH IMPORT) I am just going outside and may be some time.

FROZEN FLAP OF TENT OPENS, LETTING IN THE SCREECH OF THE BLIZZARD

WE HEAR THE CRUNCH OF OATES'S FEET AS THEY PRESS INTO THE ICY SNOW

SCOTT AND WILSON CLOSE THE FLAPPING TENTFLAP: INTERIOR ACOUSTIC OF TENT

WILSON:

(SINKING BACK EXHAUSTED, IN DESPAIR) A brave soul.

SCOTT:

A gallant gentleman.

BRING UP WAIL OF BLIZZARD. RATTLE OF ICE. THE SAD QUACK OF A PENGUIN

CUT SUDDENLY. SCOTT SPEAKS WITH A BACKGROUND OF SILENCE, AS IF FROM THE GRAVE

SCOTT:

Had we lived, I should have had a tale to tell of the hardihood, endurance and courage of my

companions which would have stirred the heart of every Englishman. (FADE SCOTT AS HE SAYS) These rough notes and our dead bodies must tell the tale....

BRING IN QUICKLY A VERSE FROM "The Little Horses"
A CHILDREN'S LULLABY FROM THE SOUTHERN STATES

*Hush you bye
Don't you cry
Go to sleepy little baby
When you wake
You'll have a sweet cake
And all the pretty little horses.
A brown and a gray
And a black and a bay
And a coach and six-a-little horses*

SCENE 2

THE GROUNDS OF MUNTING HALL, BERKSHIRE, JULY 2065.

THE INSTANT THE SONG ENDS WE HEAR ARCHIE GRUNTING
AS HE THRUSTS HIS SPADE INTO GRITTY ENGLISH EARTH

THE SOUNDS OF AN ENGLISH SUMMER'S DAY. ALSO,
PARROTS SQUAWKING

ARCHIE: Gee, it's hot!

HENDRIX: Not so hot as yesterday.

ARCHIE: Tis so.

HENDRIX: Taint. What you digging for, anyways?

ARCHIE: You know.

HENDRIX: Don't.

ARCHIE: That Cavalier treasure you told me that pa was always a-searching for. You said they buried pots of gold under the oak trees when they were running away from each other way back when. Gold! Only thing worth spit these days! Lookie-here, this oaktree's what? ... 500 if it's a day. Betya I'll find something.

HENDRIX: Dingbat.

ARCHIE: If I find a fortune I can pay off the Bundesbank and everything'll be swell around here. I might even pay you some wages. Speaking of which, shouldn't you be helping with this?

HENDRIX: No.

ARCHIE: Back in the twentieth century we Englishmen used to take pride in hard work.

HENDRIX: Huh!

ARCHIE DIGS SOME MORE

ARCHIE: Any lemonade?

HENDRIX: I drank it.

ARCHIE: I'm drier than this soil...and that's saying something.

HENDRIX: It rained frogs in the Wirral Sunday. From a clear sky.

ARCHIE: Get outta here!

HENDRIX: Not a drop of rain though. Not all summer long.

ARCHIE: (WITH A POETIC SNIFF OF AIR) Lovely though, ain't it?

HENDRIX: What is?

ARCHIE: Great God, this is a beautiful place! Look, this soil. (SNATCHES UP TWO HANDFULS) It's my soil! Mine!?

HENDRIX: It's the Bundesbank's.

ARCHIE: Not yet it aint! No sir!

HENDRIX GLUGS LEMONADE

ARCHIE: Say, you've got lemonade! Hand it over!

HENDRIX RUNS OFF CACKLING LIKE WALTER BRENNAN

ARCHIE: (SHOUTING) I'll whack your bum black-n-blue with this shovel you fumish old grampus.

HENDRIX: (TROTTING BACK OUT-OF-BREATH) Say, there's two carloads a-coming along the willows. Big cars.

ARCHIE: Where?
(GLUGS LEMONADE, SPITS IT OUT IN SHOCK)
God help us, it's the Hindoos!

HENDRIX: Gee!

SCENE 3

ARCHIE.

ARCHIE SPEAKS DIRECTLY TO US

ARCHIE: Hi, I'm Archie Munting ... of Munting Hall, here in Berkshire (HE SAYS BERK- NOT BARKSHIRE). The Hall has been in my family since the Middle Ages or thereabouts. But now, halfway through the 21st century, things being what they are ... Hell, I'm in hock, way deep with the bank and I'm having to pull some tricks. Cos I won't sell. No, sir, this is my piece of England and I love it as much as I love my wife ... (FARMBOY BASHFUL) ... and I love Europa like mad, always have. But they can just step in and steal it from under yer and there aint nothing yer can do. I've done everything I can! Jeez I've tried! But since the plague there aint nobody above ground to buy what's left of my old

Gainsborrows and Hobleins. (WHISPERS CONFIDENTIALLY) What I'm trying to do is lease the place out to some Hindoos, one of these crummy religious parties we've got everywhere nowadays. Then mebbees they'll let me and Ma - she's stuck in her bed after a stroke - mebbees they'll let us have a few rooms upstairs in the old servants' quarters. Hell, I'll sing their Hindoo songs and dance fandangoes with my bum painted blue if they'll let us stay.

SCENE 4

MUNTING HALL, INTERIOR.

ARCHIE IS GIVING THE HINDOOS A TOUR OF THE HALL. THEY CHATTER IN THE BACKGROUND. WE FOLLOW AS THEY WALK

ARCHIE: This here's my great-great-grandfather's grandfather's father's father's brother. He was something real big back in some century or other. He built most of everything from the top of the staircase here on up. There was over forty butlers in the house back then. Say, take care near those banisters, gents. We average one guy every ten years going over. Don't want ya coming back as bullfrogs too soon, huh?.

If you'll just come this way ... This is the library. Have you ever seen so many books! I aint read none myself. But Hendrix can tell you what's what if you've a mind. Course, they're all pretty old, from before the flood every one ... (CHUCKLES) ... that's our flood, where we lost east Anglia, not Noah's. Do you worship Noah, you Hindoos?

MR. KRISHNAGUPTIRISHNAN: (A BOMBAY ACCENT) These cracks in the ceiling. Are they of long standing?

ARCHIE: Only the flies.

MR. KRISHNAGUPTIRISHNAN: Excuse me?

ARCHIE: Stand on the ceiling.

MR. KRISHNAGUPTIRISHNAN: This is a very serious matter.

ARCHIE: Er, it's just the dry weather, tis all. Everywhere's the same.

GUNSHOTS OUTSIDE. THE HINDOOS MUTTER, WORRIED

ARCHIE: Tis just Hendrix shooting a few parrots. Nothing to worry about. If you'll just come this way ...

QUICK FADE AS THEY WALK AWAY. BRING BACK ARCHIE QUICKLY, APPROACHING

ARCHIE: This is the old billiard room. It has a swell amb-
iance, don't it? You could put a nice shrine in
that alcove there, whatya think? Or right here if
yer moved the table over.

MR KRISHNAGUPTIRISHNAN: Yes, yes. (ASIDE, TO ANOTHER HINDU) I feel a stillness.

SIMON, ANOTHER HINDU: A quietness in the ventricles.

MR KRISHNAGUPTIRISHNAN: Exactly right, Simon!

DOGS BARKING IN DISTANCE. RUNNING CLOSER. HENDRIX IS RUNNING WITH THEM, BEING TRIPPED

HENDRIX: (MUTTERS) I hate one of those dogs, but I can't remember which one.

ARCHIE: A problem, Hendrix?

HENDRIX: I think I found it!

ARCHIE: What?

HENDRIX: You know.

ARCHIE: No.

HENDRIX: Sure you do.

ARCHIE: Not ... you know?

HENDRIX: You got it!

ARCHIE: (TO HINDUS) Erm, gents, something's come up. Wander about for yourselves, whynot, huh? Right down that stairway you'll come out by the pigsty. (AS HE GOES) We've got more piggywigs here than anywhere in England. We've got eleven and another litter on the way.

SCENE 5

THE ORCHARD, MUNTING HALL.

ARCHIE IS CLIMBING A TREE, BADLY. WE ARE DOWN BELOW WITH HENDRIX

ARCHIE: Where? Where?

HENDRIX: (DOWN BELOW) Higher!

ARCHIE: Godammit, Hendrix, I aint climbed this tree since I was twelve.

HENDRIX: It's there! Treasure. I seen the sun making glints on it. There! In that knothole!

EFFORT SOUNDS FROM ARCHIE

ARCHIE: I'm there!

HENDRIX: Good boy!

ARCHIE: I'm reaching in! Yes, yes, there's something there. (GROANS IN DISAPPOINTMENT) Shucks taint nothing but an old parrot's nest.

HENDRIX: But the treasure!

ARCHIE: It's that stuff from Ma's dresser. Those parrots we chased last week must've flew off with it and planted it in here. Catch!

SOUND OF NECKLACES BEING DROPPED INTO HENDRIX'S HANDS

HENDRIX: I'd rip their bumfeathers out if I hadn't shot the rotters to bits already.

CRACK AND SNAP OF BRANCH. SCREAM OF ARCHIE AS HE FALLS DOWN ONTO HENDRIX, WHO WHEEZES AS HE GETS SQUASHED

SCENE 6

MA'S SICKROOM.

ARCHIE SPEAKS IN A HUSHED SICKROOM VOICE. IN THE BACKGROUND IS THE RHYTHMIC PHLEGMY BREATHING OF MA MUNTING

ARCHIE: Ma? Ma? I brought your stuff back, Ma. It's okay. I washed the parrot-stink off it. It's back on your dresser and they'll not get it again. Hendrix shot most of them anyways. He's okay too. Doctor Fitch says his ribs aint broken, not even cracked. Just bruised is all. I'm okay too.

Ma? Ma? You aint said a word in so long I've forgotten what your voice sounds like. I'm sorry about those Hindoos barging in on you like that. And they let all the piggywigs out. Just stood there ringing little bells while the piggywigs hogged it through the orchard. Doctor Fitch says Hindoos worship piggywigs. But they're not a bad crowd. When I told him we don't actually eat the piggywigs just keep 'em as pets, for traditions's sake, ... well, off they ran after them. It was a sight to see. You would have laughed, ma. (ALMOST BREAKS DOWN IN TEARS) I bet you're laughing now, inside. Aint yer? Huh?

Gee, I wish Europa was back. Ski-ing can't be all that much fun. Say, wait'll those Hindoos get a look at her. I expect she'll have the trousers off the lot of them. No, no, it aint true. She's not so bad as that. But I wish she was back.

Say, you used to go ski-ing when you was young, didn't yer, Ma? In the 30s, huh? When they still had snow in the Alps. It's all in Antarctica these days, M. Europa says it's swell down there, green valleys, glaciers. A new world altogether. Some of it, she says, is like what England used to be, except that it's full of Germans.

SCENE 7

AN ALPINE-ISH INN IN ANTARCTICA.

IMMEDIATELY AFTER ARCHIE SAYS 'Germans' WE PLAY A FAST YODELLING TUNE WHICH MOVES QUICKLY INTO A

RAUCOUS INN

EUROPA: (SHOUTING OVER THE NOISE) Fill this up, mein host! More! More! I'm going to pour it over Manfred's head. He's being simply horrid.

HO-HO-ING FROM MEIN HOST

MANFRED: Europa! No, Liebling! Please!

A SPLASH AS THE BEER IS CHUCKED OVER MANFRED. HE HOWLS. EUROPA SQUEALS WITH LAUGHTER.

EUROPA: Serves you bloody well right!

MEIN HOST HO-HOS LIKE SANTA CLAUS

MANFRED: I am wet all over. Now, I shall not be taking you onto the glacier tomorrow.

EUROPA: Yes you will.

MANFRED: I will not!

EUROPA: Come here, you little schweinehund ... I'll lick every drip off you. Got ya!

MANFRED: No, please. Please ...

HE GIGGLES AS SHE LICKS HIM DRY. SHE MAKES A NOISE LIKE A DOG LICKING MARROW OUT OF A BONE. MEIN HOST SPLITS HIS LEDERHOSEN WITH HO-HOING

SCENE 8

THE ANTARCTIC PISTE: THE BEARDMORE GLACIER.

WE HEAR THE SWISH OF EUROPA'S SKIS, SWISHING ACROSS OUR FIELD FROM LEFT TO RIGHT

EUROPA: Cummon, yer cowardy custard! There's a zowie-spanking-horrible slope right ahead. Simply miles of white, white snow. (OFF SHE GOES) Wheeeee... !

MANFRED: (APPROACHING US) Not that way, Liebling! We are having danger of an avalanche upon us! Europa! (TAKING OFF AFTER HER) Europa!

EUROPA: (APPROACHING US) Wheeeeeee!!!! (AND ZOOMING PAST US) Wheeeeeeeeeee.....!!!!

MANFRED: (APPROACHING US, SHOUTING) Please you little twit-person, do not be shouting! (HUSHED, REALIZING HIS MISTAKE) Do not be going wheeeeeeeee! (TO HIMSELF) Oh, bitteschoen, keep your pretty mouth shut!

A RUMBLE BEGINS

EUROPA: (SKIING TO A HALT IN FRONT OF US. IN AWESTRUCK HORROR) Oh, fiddle-de-dee! I've gone and done it this time!

THE RUMBLE GROWS

MANFRED: (SHOUTING FROM A DISTANT APPROACH) Hurry away!
Hurry away! Schnell! Schnell!

EUROPA: (SCREAMS) MANFRED!!! HONEY!!!

THE AVALANCHE SMOTHERS THEIR SCREAMS. WE HEAR THEM
GAGGED UNDER THE SNOW, THEN THE NOISE OF THE
AVALANCHE DROWNS THAT OUT

SNOW FALLS UNTIL THERE IS NO MORE TO FALL

SILENCE

WE HEAR AGAIN THE ICE-CUBES BEING DROPPED ONE-BY-
ONE INTO THE GIN-AND-TONIC

SCENE 9

AN OBSCURE HUT ON MOUNT HOPE.

THE LATCH OF A RICKETY WOODEN DOOR IS LIFTED.
EUROPA PUSHES IN WITH A COUGH AND A SNEEZE

EUROPA: Oh! Hello.

NO ANSWER

EUROPA: Hi there!

NO ANSWER

EUROPA: Say, this old hut is a lifesaver. Was you caught
in the avalanche, too?

OATES: (AFTER A PAUSE: ALL HIS REPLIES ARE DELAYED A
BEAT) In a manner of speaking.

EUROPA: (SIGHS WITH RELIEF) Wow, you speak English.

OATES: Naturally.

EUROPA: Say, you've no ... fingers.

OATES: Unfortunately not. Frostbitten off, d'yer see.

EUROPA: (LAUGHS) Where'd you get that accent from? You
sound like an olden-time movie.

OATES: Pardon?

EUROPA: Any food?

OATES: No.

EUROPA: No fingers at all?

OATES: None.

EUROPA: What about toes?

OATES: Unfortunately not.

EUROPA: Never mind. I've got plenty for both of us. At
least I did have, last time I looked. (SUDDENLY

UPSET) Say, I lost my boyfriend back there.

OATES: I lost my friends also.

EUROPA: Can I sit beside you, huh?

OATES: I'd much rather you didn't.

EUROPA: Can I sit beside you, huh?

SHE SITS AND SNUGGLES

EUROPA: Can I put my hands in here?

OATES: NO!!!

EUROPA: Say, how does a guy with no fingers manage to undress himself?

OATES: With great difficulty.

EUROPA: (TURNING UP HER SEDUCTION TECHNIQUE) Look, erm, I've some matches. Do you think that there stove will burn a fire for us? (SHE GOES TO MAKE A FIRE, HER FEET CLANKING ON THE BOARDS) We'll be nice and snug tonight, huh? I don't mind that you aint got no fingers. As long as you've something else, eh? What ya say?

OATES: I fail to grasp your meaning, Miss.

SHE GATHERS BITS OF WOOD WHILE SHE SPEAKS

EUROPA: You must think I'm a terrible girl, what with my boyfriend lying buried out there. But I've a passion for life, see. I'm very passionate.

OATES: I see.

EUROPA: How long you been up here, anyhow?

OATES: 153 years.

EUROPA: Huh?

OATES: Since 1912.

EUROPA: That's some time.

OATES: (AS IF RELATING A DREAM ON A PSYCHIATRIST'S COUCH) I walked out of the tent expecting to die. But I didn't die.

EUROPA: Three cheers for you.

OATES: I was a frozen statue, a man of ice, dreaming, dreaming the same dreams over and over ... for 153 years. Then, this morning, I was rolling down with snowballs and the warm sun was on my face. (SUDDENLY ANNOUNCES HIMSELF) I am Lawrence Edward Grace Oates. My friends used to call me Titus.

EUROPA: (A LITTLE TAKEN ABACK) Titus, neat. I'm Europa Munting, of Munting Hall in Berkshire. That's in

England. (SHE STRIKES A MATCH AND BLOWS) Wee, that's swell! Oooooh!

OATES: Is England much changed?

EUROPA: Huh?

OATES: Since 1912. 1910 in fact when we set sail on the Terra Nova.

EUROPA: (HUMOURING HIM) You'll notice a few changes, I reckon. Look, honey, your poor lips are all cracked from the cold.

OATES: Yes.

EUROPA: (WITH SEDUCTIVE HEAT) I know a neat cure for that.

OATES: You do?

EUROPA: Want for me to show you?

OATES: I'd rather not.

EUROPA: (GIGGLES)

OATES: Control yourself, please.

EUROPA: (ANGRY) Aw, I just wanna little human contact, that's all.

OATES: Your fire has gone out.

EUROPA: Not mine, honeybun.

OATES: It is a dream, a disgusting dream. Brrrrrrrrrrr! Brrrrrrrrrrrr

EUROPA: (WHISPERS WHILE KISSING) Such sore lips.

WE LAUNCH INTO 'Merrie England' FROM GERMAN AND HOOD'S OPERETTA OF THE SAME NAME. THIS CARRIES US FROM THIS ANTARCTIC HUT ... BACK TO ENGLAND

SCENE 10

MUNTING HALL. THE HALLWAY.

A WOOFING OF SIXTEEN DOGS, EXCITABLY GREETING EUROPA

EUROPA: (GREETING DOGS) Hiya, hiya, ookums, what a good boy, yes what a good boy. (TO OATES) You're not afraid of dogs, are you?

OATES: (BLANKLY) I love dogs.

A DOG SNARLS NASTILY

EUROPA: (CALLS) Hendrix! Hendrix! Where is the man?

HENDRIX: (HOBBLING FROM BACKGROUND) Mrs Munting! That you?!

EUROPA: Do hurry, man! We have a guest!

HENDRIX APPROACHING, KICKING DOGS AS HE GOES. THEY YELP

HENDRIX: Hope you don't mind, but I shot one of these dogs this morning.

EUROPA: What was wrong with it?

HENDRIX: Nuttin. Just didn't like it.

EUROPA: You're joking, of course.

HENDRIX CHUCKLES A CHUCKLE WHICH TELLS US HE OBVIOUSLY WASN'T JOKING

EUROPA: Hendrix.

HENDRIX: Heuh?

EUROPA: This is Captain Oates. He'll be staying with us for a while.

HENDRIX: (WISELY) I see.

EUROPA: Go and fetch our luggage from the car.

HENDRIX: Luggage?

EUROPA: Yes.

HENDRIX: I broke all my ribs. I'll never be the same again.

EUROPA: Are you going to fetch the luggage or not?

HENDRIX: I suppose. (ON HIS WAY, CALLS BACK. A DIFFERENT SERIOUS TONE IN HIS VOICE) Oh, Mrs Munting. Archie. He's missed you something horrible. Worse than ever.

EUROPA: Of course.

SCENE 11

MUNTING HALL. THE NURSERY.

EUROPA PULLS BACK LARGE CURTAINS

EUROPA: I hope you'll be okay in here, honey. It's the only room not crawling with bugs. It was Archie's old nursery. You okay?

OATES: That staircase. It made me feel somewhat dizzy-headed.

EUROPA: You'd better lie down. Here, I'll undo your buttons for you.

OATES: Thankyou.

THE CHARGING, BREATHLESS APPROACH OF ARCHIE, WHO HAS RUN FROM THE OTHER END OF THE HOUSE. HE IS IN ECSTASIES

ARCHIE: (SPEAKING ZOOMINGLY QUICKLY, KISSING HER AS HE SPEAKS) Europa! Europa! Darling one! You're back. Hendrix said but I thought he was joshing. I was dreaming ... last night ... I said to mother ... Oh, she's fine, just the same but fine. And the Hindoos, wait till I tell you. God, you're beautiful. All pink and white from the snow. Skin so cool. I'll go with you next time, promise. I (SUDDENLY PUTS ON THE BRAKES, SAYS WITH CONSIDERABLE DISTASTE, SLOWLY) Who the Hell is that?

EUROPA: This is Captain Oates, sweetums. He'll be staying for a while.

ARCHIE: Oh, yeah!

OATES: How-do-you-do, sir. I would shake you warmly by the hand, but as you see ...

ARCHIE: Eugh! He's no fingers!

EUROPA: Captain Oates was frozen in the ice for 153 years, Archie.

ARCHIE: He was, was he?

OATES: Your house, sir, is most charming. It reminds me of my own beloved Gestingthorpe.

ARCHIE: Get him outta here!

EUROPA: Archie!

ARCHIE: I've waited for you coming back, like a stupid kid and this is what you do to me! You really think you can ship your fancyman in here under my nose, huh? Huh? Oh yeah - don't worry about Archie, I can wrap him round my little finger. Huh?

EUROPA: Captain Oates saved my life. He came to my rescue in a particularly desperate situation.

ARCHIE: Desperate for what!!!

OATES: Perhaps if I was to say that the only woman I have ever loved was my mother.

EUROPA: See!

ARCHIE: I know your game, sunny jim! (VERY UPSET, SUDDENLY GIVES IN) What the heck ... I'll see you at dinner.

EUROPA: (WORRIED ABOUT HIM) Archie?

ARCHIE: (ON HIS WAY) I'm all right. Just overexcited. (ALMOST GONE, PATHETICALLY) I'm sorry.

THE DOOR CLICKS SHUT

OATES: There have been many men?

EUROPA: Lemme get those buttons for you.

OATES: Many men?
SHE UNDRESSES HIM DURING HER NEXT SPEECH

EUROPA: Look, sweetums, don't turn into another Archie, huh? I love Archie, of course. But with Archie I'm just Archie's Europa. With different blokes I can be a different person, every day if I like, someone completely different. With you I'm a special person, Titus's Europa, only yours ... she only exists for you.

OATES: I am unavoidably old fashioned. I think you are terribly wicked.

EUROPA: (LAUGHS WICKEDLY) We've a couple of hours before dinner.

OATES: (BLANKLY) There is a dead parrot in the fireplace.

EUROPA: Offputting, aint it?

SCENE 12

MUNTING HALL'S DINING ROOM.

SOUNDS OF DINNER TABLE

ARCHIE: (HIGHLY MIFFED) Must you sit with your arms around him?

EUROPA: I have to cut his food for him, don't I?

OATES: I most humbly apologise, sir, for ...

EUROPA: Open wide.

OATES: (HE HAS FOOD SHOVED IN HIS MOUTH, CONTINUES WITH HIS MOUTH FULL) ... being such a nuisance.

ARCHIE: Why can't you just shove his face in the plate?

EUROPA: Titus is going into New London next week to get fitted for some artificial fingers.

ARCHIE: Yeah. And who's paying?

EUROPA: He's a famous man out of history. Hendrix had heard of him. He'll sell his story to the newspapers.

ARCHIE: Nobody reads newspapers no more.

EUROPA: They do too. I saw someone reading one at the airport.

OATES: Everything is so strange to me. I'm still back in 1912.

ARCHIE: You can drop that act. I aint fooled.

OATES: Pardon?

ARCHIE: And that queer voice too.

OATES: I come from a very different England, Mr Munting. I really do. An England that ruled half the world. A quiet England of forests and fields, but busy, everywhere busy and teeming with people. This England seems empty.

ARCHIE: Tell him about the flood.

EUROPA: You know about the flood, Titus.

ARCHIE: Sure he does.

OATES: What flood?

ARCHIE: For Chrissake! After the Bonskey Crisis. You know. And the plague!!! Killed nearly everybody, everywhere. Specially in the towns. Just us lot in the big houses left. When Hendrix was a boy - he'll tell you - Oxford and Readng were so full of people you couldn't walk in a straight line down the street. And cars! Bumper to bumper from the sea back to where they came from. (AMAZED AT HIS FACT) In those days; in an average year there were more tourists in England than there's people living here now.

OATES: (ANXIOUS) My old home was near Bury St Edmunds, on the Suffolk/Essex border.

EUROPA: Gee, that's long under the splash, honey.

OATES: (BROKENHEARTED) Oh.

ARCHIE: (EATING WITH GUSTO, PLEASED AT OATES'S UPSET) They tell some real spooky stories about some old towns, how these wet ghosts go a-flittin up the streets scaring the fish.

OATES: I'm quite numbed by all this. It's not what I expected. I mean to say, if I am totally frank, sir, Europa and yourself don't seem the least bit English to me . More like ... Americans.

ARCHIE: (Goddamned cheek! Still, I suppose you've a point. (LAUNCHES INTO HIS MUSINGS LIKE JOHN WAYNE JAWING PATRIOTICALLY BESIDE A BURNT-OUT WAGON TRAIN) I don't know what ENGLISHMAN means these days. Now that there's so few of us we all tend to live inside our heads in our own little country. Our brains in there have sorta changed shape, just like England's changed its shape on the weathermap. (GETTING MORE AND MORE EMOTIONAL) Yer see, it's the part of us that did the thinking that got flooded, like Ma's brain after her stroke. The rest's cracked earth, cracked and sore. Got one for yerh! ... When something changes a little bit every day, how long before it's something completely different? Tricky question, huh?

OATES: Dashed.

ARCHIE: (A SHRUG IN HIS VOICE) Hell, we're all sunk, but we can still feel. Huh? It's what we was always best at. (A CRY OF OPTIMISTIC PRIDE) Most passionate people in the history of the world, us English!

OATES: Do you really think so?

ARCHIE: Sure. But now that's all we are. Packed full of passions that rush inside until you just wanna sleep or run away from yourself. Hell, I've sobbed my guts out twice today already. Even Hendrix: he's been shooting parrots for years, then one day he felt sorry for one and blubbed like a soft kid. And Doctor Fitch tried to hang himself last Christmas Eve over something his sister said.

EUROPA: (SADLY) I'm like that too, sometimes.

ARCHIE: Yeah, we're all crazy. We're all in love with people and things and places and little pet ideas. Even Brussels Sprouts. I have this thing about Brussels Sprouts. Can't get enough of them.

OATES: (BEGINS TO LAUGH. A HUGE LAUGH, LETTING OUT ALL THE TENSION OF 153 YEARS IN THE ICE)

ARCHIE: What's with him?

SCENE 13

MA:

MA.

When I was a girl and the summers started getting really long and hot I never wore a stitch. Not for years. The Hall was full of people in those days but nobody seemed to care. Even when I was - what? - 15, with my nipples poking out in front of me as if they were being pulled by wires, I wandered the countryside with the sun all over me. Ooh, I remember, I had a straw hat. Hendrix stole it from me one day. 'Come along and see,' he said. And he took me down to one of those flooded pools at the bottom of the willows. And there ... (SHE LAUGHS GIRLISHLY) ... was this porpoise, trapped in there after the floodwater went down, swimming around wearing my hat, with his big fishy smile. I've never seen such a thing, before or since. It was there all summer or it may have been years, I don't remember. It used to laugh at the dogs and got them really upset. Then one day it was gone. We didn't know if it had escaped or been fished out or what.

It must be my heart I keep hearing. I tell you what it's like. It's like a cricketball being hit for six and dropping into deep water. There it is again.

ARCHIE: Ma, Ma, this is Captain Oates. He's a friend of Europa's, staying in the nursery for a while. (WHISPERS TO OATES) Lean over so she can see your face.

MA: (IN A FEVERISH RUSH) I haven't moved. I haven't said a word. I've hardly rolled an eye ... in I can't tell how long. I keep a diary, write it down in my head, see myself sat down writing it and the ink wet on the pages, but they're not real pages, just imaginary and they all get jumbled and lost and sometimes, I get so rattled I rip them to bits and stamp. Oh, I've itches digging into my back like sharp crumbs the size of loaves. Maybe I've been here for a thousand years. There's Archie, of course, I can see time passing on his face. He must be nearly 40 now. If only we had winter, I could see frost on the windows, I could count the years that way. (SUDDEN FRIGHT) That man's got no fingers! It's horrible! Take him away! (SHE BREATHES QUICK SCARED BREATHS)

ARCHIE: You okay, Ma? (TO OATES) She breathes like that sometimes. We don't know what does it.

OATES: Nightmares.

ARCHIE: Oh, she aint sleeping. No, she never sleeps. She's always the same.

OATES: It reminds me of my time in thc ice.

ARCHIE: 153 years, huh?

OATES: Correct. Since 1912.

ARCHIE: Well, that's your story and you're sticking to it.

MA: (IN AN EXCITED RUSH) I've got it! 1912, plus 153 makes 2065. It's 2065. I was born in 1991, so that makes me 74. Jesus, I'm 74. I've been staring at that ceiling for 9 years.

It feels like a Sunday. Okay: Sunday the First of what ... August, it's always August, 2065. Jeez, that sounds like the future, but here I am in it. Archie ... that's my youngest and only surviving boy, Arthur died in the plague, you know, with his father. Archie brought a strange man to see me, no fingers, says he's the Captain Oates who walked out of the tent to save his companions. Crazy as a parrot.

EUROPA: Ma? Ma? Whatya think of Titus? Handsome, aint he? I'll bet he's just your sort, huh? Real olden time gent.

MA: This is Europa. Lovely girl. Prettiest girl left in the world, I'll bet. My boy's wife. Crying shame she can't have kids, but there's so many like that now, she says. Sometimes, I imagine I'm her, running naked through the fields with the dogs following, all with cricket-balls between their teeth and panting. And there's that Oates guy, swimming in a half-dried-out pool in a straw hat and stroking the water with all his fingers back on his hands.

SCENE 14

A SWIMMING HOLE ON THE MUNTING ESTATE.

SPLASHING FROM OATES. HE HUMS "Rule Britannia".

EUROPA: (BREATHLESS, ROMANTIC, MORE LIKE SCARLETT O'HARA THAN EVER) Say, get out of there, you!!!

OATES: (STARTLED) Who said that?

EUROPA: I'm here in the bushes. Don't you peek now. I aint wearin nutthin.

OATES: Great Scott!

DOGS WOOF DEEPLY

EUROPA: That there's my swimming-hole! I was coming down for a swim, never expecting to find any huge men in it!

OATES: Dreadfully sorry, Miss! I had no idea.

EUROPA: I'll set the dogs on yer. (DOGS WOOF) I'll get Hendrix to shoot you. (GIGGLES) Say, you're wearing your jim-jams!

OATES: No I'm not. It's my swimming costume. I bought it in Southend in 1908. It's the latest thing.

EUROPA: Put your head underwater till I get in.

OATES: How will I know when you're in?

EUROPA: You'll know.

PAD OF EUROPA'S FEET ACROSS MUD. SPLASH AS SHE DIVES IN

EUROPA: Wheee!

OATES COMES UP SPLUTTERING

OATES: Please, Miss, get off my back, please, we shall both drown.

A SPLASH. A CRY FROM EUROPA

EUROPA: (COUGHING, FURIOUS) You made me swallow half the water.

OATES: (LAUGHS) Serves you right.

EUROPA: Oh yeah. Here, lemme try those jim-jams on.

OATES: I will not!

EUROPA: Go on.

OATES: No.

EUROPA: Just the top half, then.

OATES: It's all in one piece.

EUROPA: (BEGS) Aw.

OATES: Very well.

SOUND OF OATES GETTING OUT OF HIS COSTUME. SPANK OF WET CLOTH

OATES: Here you are, then.

EUROPA: Hey, these are swell. What lovely fingernails you've got.

SOUND OF OATES GETTING OUT OF HIS COSTUME. SPANK OF WET CLOTH

OATES: Thankyou.

SOUND OF EUROPA PUSHING HER WAY INTO THE COSTUME. A DOG WOOF'S LOUDLY. SPLASH AND DRIP AS EUROPA GETS OUT OF THE WATER

OATES: Excuse me, where are you going, please?

EUROPA: I'll just wander in the fields a while.

OATES: But ...

EUROPA: I have to dry off these jim-jams, or how do I know if they suit me?

OATES: But ... it's cold in here. I'll freeze to death.

EUROPA: (A SUDDEN ENTHUSIASTIC IDEA) Say, you done any ice-skating?

OATES: A little.

EUROPA: (STRIPPING OUT OF THE WET CLOTH) Here put these back on and get out. I'll freeze the water and we can skate.

OATES: Freeze the ... what in heaven's name ... ?

EUROPA: (This is a dream, honeylamb. We can do anything we want.

FIZZ AND WHIRL OF SKATING. GRAINGER'S "English Waltz" PLAYS IN BACKGROUND. EUROPA LAUGHS DEEPLY, LIKE A MAN

EUROPA: (WHIZZING BY) I can't remember when I've ever enjoyed anything so much.

OATES: (LAUGHING) Wheeeeeeeeeeee!

BRING IN MA LAUGHING TO HERSELF OVER THE SKATING AND MUSIC

SCENE 15

MA.

MA: (CLOSE) Monday August the Second, 2065. Ha! Ha! Archie was talking to the horses this morning when Captain Oates sauntered in. Do you know, dear diary, I think I'm falling in love with him. Nothing else to do, is there? So Archie says:

ARCHIE: Horseman, are you?

MA: (CLOSE) And Captain Oates says:

OATES: Not bad.

MA: (CLOSE) So Archie, that's my youngest, says to Hendrix:

ARCHIE: Hendrix, saddle up Hungry Fred, will you?

HENDRIX: Hungry Fred ... but?

ARCHIE: Hungry Fred. Go on.

HENDRIX: All right. (CHUCKLES)

MA: (CLOSE) Now Hungry Fred is the maddest horse that ever went giddyup. Archie's father would have shot him for sure, but Archie's too soft-hearted.

MAD WHINNY OF HUNGRY FRED

ARCHIE: Can you hold reins without yer pinkies?

OATES: I think I can manage.

MA: (CLOSE, GIRLISHLY AMUSED) Manage? Manage? Did he manage. He rode Hungry Fred outta that there stable and down the Buckleberry Road as calm as you please. I wish I could have seen Archie's face.

HENDRIX: (LAUGHS LIKE A HYENA)

ARCHIE: Shuttup, Hendrix!

MA'S LAUGHTER COVERS HENDRIX'S. THE GALLOP OF HOOVES

OATES: Come on, Hungry Fred, let's see if you can jump that fence.

THE SOUND OF THE JUMP

OATES: Hooooooooorahhhhhhh!!!!!!!

SCENE 16

HENDRIX IN MA'S SICKROOM.

SILENCE, STILLNESS. THE TICKING OF A GRANDFATHER CLOCK. IT CHIMES

HENDRIX: Years ago, when I was a youngun and England was green all summer long, before the first parrots appeared squarking in the willows, you and I,

Martha, had the whole world to ourselves. We made the last snowman ever in England right under your window here. I loved you then.

MA: (AFFECTIONATELY) Silly old toothless fool.

HENDRIX: And when my pa got killed falling dead drunk over the banisters, you sat under the stairs with me for three days, stroking my hair. You know, Martha, when I'm in my bare feet downstairs I can trace the crack his head made with my toes. Hell, we was always barefoot back then. Even after you was married we'd go for long toesore walks, all day, picking our route around the floodwater pools, like flies walking around mirrors but never looking in for fear of finding out what they were. We never said a word, did we? Never once.

MA: I have taken those walks again in my dreams, James. So many times. Your funny little face was my greatest joy.

SCENE 17

THE CELLAR, MUNTING HALL.

HOLLOW ACOUSTIC. ARCHIE TAKING DUSTY STEPS DOWN CELLAR STAIRS

ARCHIE: Titus! Titus! What you doing down here, kid?

OATES: It's cool.

ARCHIE: Shut the ice-box door for Chrissake, everything'll go off.

OATES: So sorry.

OATES SHUTS THE ICE-BOX DOOR

ARCHIE: Say, you're all wet. You been swimming or what?

OATES: I'm so dreadfully hot. I've been in the nice cold ice for 153 years, remember.

ARCHIE: (HUMOURING HIM) Yeah, yeah, I know. Look, one of the piggywigs those Hindoos didn't catch has turned up in Buckleberry. It would be swell to walk over there if you've a mind. Can you manage a little hike? I mean, without your toes and all.

OATES: A hike sounds delightful. If I lag behind you can meet me on the way back.

A PARROT FLIES PAST

PARROT: Captain Oates! Captain Oates!

ARCHIE: Say, didn't that parrot say Captain Oates?

OATES: (AMUSED) I hardly think so.

PARROT: Captain Oates!

ARCHIE: Naw, couldn't have.

SCENE 18

THE BUCKLEBERRY ROAD.

PARROTS SQUARKING IN THE TREES. CRICKETS CHIRRUPING IN GREAT NUMBERS AT THE ROADSIDE.

CLUMP OF ARCHIE'S FOOTSTEPS, OATES'S SHUFFLING ALONGSIDE. DURING THIS SCENE OATES IS CONSTANTLY FALLING BEHIND. WE STAY WITH ARCHIE.

ARCHIE: Going too fast, am I?

OATES: No, no, I'm still here.

ARCHIE: Hendrix dug me out a book. I've been reading up on you.

OATES: How terribly boring for you.

ARCHIE: Naw, it's a great story. That was an incredible thing you did. I'm impressed, really.

OATES: What did I do, exactly?

ARCHIE: Walking out of the tent like that. I wouldn't have done it.

OATES: Oh, I think you would.

ARCHIE: Not me, sunshine.

OATES: You are an Englishman, aren't you? We're all the same when it comes to the nitty-gritty.

ARCHIE: (LAUGHS) Hell, wouldn't it be swell if you really was?

OATES: I don't follow.

ARCHIE: If you really was Captain Oates.

OATES: (ALMOST HUSHED) But I am.

PARROT: Captain Oates! Captain Oates!

THEY WALK IN SILENCE

OATES: (INCREASINGLY BREATHLESS) This isn't like England at all, you know.

ARCHIE: So where is?

OATES: It reminds me of South Africa, actually. The veldt, you know.

ARCHIE: Oh yeah.

OATES: I was there in the Boer War.

ARCHIE: What war?

OATES: (CATCHING UP) Boer War.

ARCHIE: Never heard of it.

OATES: It was in all the papers. Mafeking. Ladysmith. I was wounded in the leg.

ARCHIE: You don't say.

OATES: Ten years later on the way back from the Pole my old wound started opening up. A pain, just here ... OW! It was as if the bullet was hitting me again and again. It slowed me up worse than the frostbite.

ARCHIE: (STOPPING IN HIS TRACKS, FURIOUS) Just drop it! Drop it, will ya! Okay, so you're playing around with my wife. It aint no secret. I know. Hendrix knows. Ma knows. Hungry Fred knows! The stones of Munting Hall all know. Just drop the playacting, huh, and we'll get on fine.

THEY WALK IN SILENCE

OATES: (NERVOUSLY BREAKING THE SILENCE) Look, I am most dreadfully sorry. I've never done anything like this before, never, not with any woman, never mind a married woman. Not when I was alive, I mean. The last time.

ARCHIE: There you go again!

OATES: I'm sorry but I really am Captain Oates.

ARCHIE: You're crazy, that's it, aint it, just plain crazy?

OATES: (IN A NERVOUS RUSH) You are right, sir, I'm sure, to despise me. But, unless the ice has corrupted my soul, I don't feel I am doing wrong. Europa, d'yer see, has breathed her spirit into me. She has restored me to life, thawed me out. Surely that can't be so obnoxious? From your point of view, I realize, but in the wider sense.

ARCHIE: Let's skip this subject, huh?

OATES: If you like.

ARCHIE: What you make of New London?

OATES: A calamitous place, horrid in its every detail.

ARCHIE: After old London went under with the flood they tried to make the new one look the same, but it was too big a job and then everyone died, so it'll be like that forever. Half built.

OATES: Dr McNab says they can fit me with fingers in a week or two. I can't wait!

ARCHIE: (SNIDE) Europa introduce ya to those newspaper guys?

OATES: Er, yes, she did.

ARCHIE: (DELIGHTED, KNOWS THE ANSWER) And?

OATES: They wouldn't believe I was who I said I was.

ARCHIE: Huh! (TAKES A DEEP BREATH OF ENGLISH AIR) We can rest here!

OATES: (INSISTENT, AS IF TO CAPTAIN SCOTT) I don't need to rest. We can press on.

ARCHIE: There's a swell view of the Hall from here. See.

OATES: Super, yes.

ARCHIE: (THROUGH GRITTED TEETH) I won't ever leave. Never. Never.

OATES: That's the spirit.

ARCHIE: (SLOW, THOUGHTFUL) Funny, but it's the little details I love, not the whole shebang. Let them have the Hall if I can keep the little details. Does that make sense? See this dog-rose climbing up the pillar here ... if I couldn't see this dog-rose, if I couldn't see the sunlight caught, see, on the windows of the Hall ... then I'd not be Archie Munting, not be me nomore.

OATES: I understand, of course. But Europa?

ARCHIE: Oh, she don't care, not in the same way. She's always up and off from here. A different place, a different guy for Europa is a different life. She likes to make out for herself that there's lots of different Europas. But if she didn't have HERE to come back to ... if HERE wasn't HERE ... which maybe soon it won't be ... then her variations on a theme wouldn't have a theme. Say, she played her old record-player for you yet?

OATES: She plays everything fast. Wouldn't say why.

ARCHIE: (PROUD) I knows why. I can tell ya. When Europa was at boarding-school, height of the plague this was, the dormitory half empty, they had an old record-player that was busted. It would only play fast. Ever since it's the only way she'll take music. Twice as fast.

OATES: How very odd.

ARCHIE: Europa reckons the world was given us on a plate. But she wants a different plate, a different meal on the plate, then more plates. She can't have it. No one can. But she tries. You'll soon find out. She never sleeps in the same bedroom two nights together. Always shifting about. And her clothes. Five times a day. Always a quick change act. My love for Europa is like my love for the Hall. One day she'll go away for too long, come back and find I've faded away for want of her. Romantic, aint it?

OATES: Where did you meet?

ARCHIE: Down by the pool there, when it was a pool. It had just dried up that summer and was full of bones. Even the skeleton of a porpoise, right there in the middle, stuck in the cracked mud. My brother and me threw stones at Europa and her pals. They was trying to yank the porpoise out, see, and it was OUR porpoise. After a while we got to talking and we aint stopped since.

IN DISTANCE AN ICE-CREAM VAN PLAYING "Greensleeves"

Hell, can you hear that?

OATES: I hear something.

ARCHIE: It's an ice-cream van! There aint been one up this way in donkeys!!! (HE IS OFF LIKE A RABBIT , CALLS BACK) You shuffle along after, huh? I'll fill yer crazy mouth with choc-ice.

OATES: (SHUFFLING AFTER) I'm coming! I'm coming!

PARROT: Captain Oates! Captain Oates!

SCENE 19

A BALL IN LONDON. 1910.

GRAINGER'S "English Waltz" PLAYING IN BACKGROUND. HUM OF CHATTER IN LARGE BALLROOM. SOUND OF DANCERS STEPPING LIGHTLY PAST

WILSON: (WHISPERS) Watch out, Robert, Lloyd George is coming right for you.

SCOTT: Cripes!

LLOYD GEORGE: Lookhere, Captain Scott, boyo. That big horsey-faced fellow over there dancing with that enchanting young girl in the snowy white dress. He's one of yours, isn't he?

SCOTT: That's Titus Oates, sir. He will indeed be sailing with us for the Antarctic tomorrow. He's in charge of our horses. Top-hole man.

LLOYD GEORGE: You couldn't introduce us, could you, isn't it?

SCOTT: Of course. (CLICKS FINGERS, CALLS DISCREETLY) Titus! Titus!

OATES IS MORE CLIPPED, MORE NOËL COWARDISH IN THIS SCENE. HE AND MA SWISH UP FROM THEIR WALTZING.

OATES: (PRESENTING HIMSELF LIKE A SOLDIER) Captain Scott, sir.

SCOTT: Titus, the Chancellor of the Exchequer would like to meet you.

OATES: I am very honoured, sir.

LLOYD GEORGE: Course you are, aren't you, isn't it? (WITH SLY LASCIVIOUSNESS) And ... the lady?

SCOTT: (UNDER HIS BREATH) Errm ... Titus? The girl.

OATES: Oh, sorry, yes. This is Miss Martha Munting of Munting Hall in Berkshire.

MA: Delighted to make your acquaintance, sir.

LLOYD GEORGE: I knew your father, didn't I? You and this fine fellow: you're not engaged or anything?

MA: (WITH HOPEFUL HEAT) Are we Titus?

OATES: (DEEPLY EMBARRASSED) Well, er, no, not as such. If I ... I should say WHEN I return from the Pole, then perhaps ...

MA: Oh, Titus!

LLOYD GEORGE: Well, that's all right then, if you're not engaged. You won't mind if I take her upstairs for a bit, isn't it? There's lovely.

WILSON: (WHISPERS, OUTRAGED) What a cad!!!

SCOTT: Look here, now!

MA: It's quite all right, Captain Scott, I can deal with this little matter. (WITH PERFECT POLITENESS) I am most terribly sorry, Mr Lloyd George, but I wouldn't be much fun for you. I had a cerebral haemorrhage nine years ago and have been lying speechless on my back in my room in Munting Hall ever since. I'm there now.

LLOYD GEORGE: Oh, there's a pity, isn't it? And me just getting worked up for it. (HUSHED) You don't happen to know if any of these other girls here might be ... obliging?

MA: This is a dream. You can have anyone you like.

LLOYD GEORGE: But I want you, isn't it?

MA: Any but me.

LLOYD GEORGE: But why?

MA: It's my dream. (SHE BEGINS TO SOUND AS IF SHE'S SPEAKING FROM HER BED AS WELL AS IN THE DREAM) and I have already found my perfect man.

OATES: Oh, Europa!

MA: (VEXED) Not Europa. Martha.

OATES: Sorry. Oh, Martha!

MA: Oh, Titus!

RISE MUSIC. BRING TO END WITH CACOPHONY AS IF ORCHESTRA HAS FALLEN DOWN A HOLE

SCENE 20

MA'S SICKROOM.

MA SPEAKS HER DIARY

MA: Friday the 13th of August, 2065. Captain Oates came back from New London with his new fingers today. They all came straightaway upstairs to show me. How proud he was! How handsome! Something about him reminded me of my poor boy Arthur. (SHE CALLS OUT TO HIM) Titus! Titus! (TO DIARY) He held his fingers above my face and kept making fists.

THE SOUND OF OATES MAKING FISTS: LITTLE CREAKY SOUND, LIKE MICE ENTERING HEAVEN

ARCHIE: Say, they make a funny little noise.

OATES: No, they don't!

EUROPA: Of course they don't!

ARCHIE: (MIFFED, MUMBLES) Do too.

OATES: (ON HIS WAY) I must try them out properly! Cummon, Europa, you'll toss me a cricket-ball, won't you! I'll saddle Hungry Fred! I'll scratch a piggywig on its chinny-chin-chin!

OATES AND EUROPA RUN OFF LAUGHING LIKE CHILDREN

ARCHIE: What a guy! Know something, Ma, I reckon he loves it here near as much as I do. No fear of him taking Europa away from us. We'll all be here forever ... or until it rains, whichever comes first, huh!

SCENE 21

HUNGRY FRED.

HUNGRY FRED ADDRESSES US DIRECTLY. HE IS IN HIS STALL AND WE HEAR HIS HOOVES KNOCKING ON WOOD, THE RUSTLE OF HAY ALSO. HIS SPEECH IS A SLOW BACKWOODS DRAWL

HUNGRY FRED: Am I a judge of men or aint I? Miss Europa is always cummin here and saying to me 'Hungry Fred, you're a good judge of men, all the other horseys say so, whatya think of Henry or Reginauld or whoever-may-be?' (HE WHINNIES) And I always says my piece. Not that she listens, cos she don't understand nohow. But this latest guy, this Oates ... (HE HUMMERS) ... I caint get enough of Oates. Hell, does he know horseys. He sees right through ya. I wonder if folk were all like that way back when. Course there was more horseys than flies in those days. Imagine that.

So I gets myself so fond of the Captain that I

won't be without him.

A MAD WHINNY. A KICKING OF THE STALL

I kicked down my stall and ran right up the steps into the Hall. Middle of the night and me all sweaty and moonlit. Old Hendrix comes for me with a broom. So I kicks him one ...

SOUND OF THE KICK AND HENDRIX FALLING OVER YELLING

... and down he goes looking for his teeth. Captain Oates comes from his sleep with Miss Europa, both of them as nekked as my good self and he strokes me with his squeaky little fingers, then climbs up and pulls her up and we go riding away, right down to the Thames and through the plashwater onto the little islands, nearly as far as the sea. Hell, we had a night of it.

But I was ornery after that. Wouldn't let him outta my sight. Followed him everywhere like an old beaglehound. When he and Mr Archie makes up their minds to go boating they had to take me with them, just had to, or I'd have swummed along behind till I sank. We chugged 20 miles to the mouth of the Thames River, then out where the church spires poke from the shallow silver-glintin water.

SCENE 22

A CHUGGING BOAT SOMEWHERE OVER SUNKEN EAST ANGLIA.

THE BOAT CHUGS. SEAGULLS SCREAM. SPLASH OF WATER. HUNGRY FRED HUMMERS

OATES: (EXCITED) This is the place, what?

ARCHIE: By my reckoning Gestinghtorpe Hall should be right under our feet.

OATES: Golly gosh.

HUNGRY FRED WHINNIES AND STAMPS IN THE DECK. THE UNMISTAKABLE SOUND OF HORSE DUNG SPLATTING ONTO DECK

ARCHIE: Whose idea was it to bring along that goddamn horse.

OATES: He's no trouble.

ARCHIE: Look what he done!

OATES: (LAUGHS) Oh, dear!

ARCHIE: You used a snorkel before?

OATES: I don't remember.

ARCHIE: Watch me. You go in backwards.

SPLASH AS ARCHIE GOES IN. HE COMES UP COUGHING AS IF HE'D SWALLOWED A FISH

OATES: Here I come!

SPLASH AS OATES HITS WATER

ARCHIE: (SPITTING OUT WATER AND COUGHING) You okay?

OATES: Fine, thankyou. You?

ARCHIE: Okay. Hell, that goddamn horse! It's coming after!

WHINNYING OF MAD HORSE. HOOVES KICKING DECK

OATES: Ooo!

HORSE-SIZED SPLASH. HUNGRY FRED SWIMS UP TO THEM HUMMERING WETLY

OATES: (WORRIED) How are we going to get him back aboard?

ARCHIE: (LAUGHS HILARIOUSLY) I don't know! (SPLUTTERS) I don't know!

SCENE 23

HUNGRY FRED.

HUNGRY FRED:

They swam down through water greener than Miss Europa's eyes, down to Captain Oates's old home. It was all there, just like he'd known it, and a statue to him in the garden with all the poor drowned trees a-waving their hellos. And there was the patio where he sat in his chair while his leg fixed from his warwound. And the outbuildings where he'd played hide-go-seek with his sisters. And there was the window of the waterfilled room that he'd dreamed about so much when he was freezing to death on the South Pole.

Mr Archie, he only went down once, but Captain Oates, he dived again and again, till his face was purplyblue. He was crazier than me that afternoon. I carried him away on my back and he was asleep with his fingers a-twitchin by the time my hooves found a mudbank. Mr Archie followed along in the boat, screaming himself hoarse: he'd seen a shark somewheres. Somebody tell me what a shark is anyhow? (HUMMERS)

SCENE 24

OATES.

WE HEAR AGAIN THE LULLABY

*Hush you bye
Don't you cry
Go to sleepy little baby
When you wake
You'll have a sweet cake*

*And all the pretty little horses.
A brown and a gray
And a black and a bay
And a coach and six-a-little horses*

BRING UP THE WHISTLE OF AN ANTARCTIC BLIZZARD.
ICE-CUBES RATTLING IN A GLASS

PARROT: Captain Oates!

OATES: We shot all our ponies. At the foot of the Beardmore Glacier. We'd never have got them up. Jehu, Jimmy Pigg ... and Christopher. He was a mightily silly beast. You couldn't hold him back in the mornings, dragged me off over the ice, wore me out. A brave, skittish soul. We cut him up and left him at Shambles Camp to eat on the way back. I cried over him and I hadn't cried since I was at Eton. I was closer to the horses than to the men, d'yer see. That's why I was there, to look after the horses. Never expected to be picked to make the final push to the Pole. Thought I'd go back to base with Lashley and Crean. I'd have gone home on the next ship, lived my normal life, killed on the Somme or something, or grown old at Gestingthorpe with my sisters to look after me.

BRING UP THE WHISTLE OF AN ANTARCTIC BLIZZARD.
ICE-CUBES RATTLING IN A GLASS

SCOTT: (SHOUTING INTO THE BLIZZARD) Titus! Titus! Come back man!

BRING DOWN BLIZZARD. QUIET EXCEPT FOR OATES.

OATES: I don't think I ever would have married. Europa is the only woman I've met who has excited me more than a gallop at dawn. But when, that awful day at Munting Hall, she fell over the banisters, I didn't feel a thing. Hardly a thing. She was broken like Humpty Dumpty. There are lots of versions of that rhyme, you know, lots. But does he ever come out alive in the end? I don't know. Her arms were flung wide, so pale that the freckles had died on her skin. And I was at the top of the stairs with Archie ... but my heart was on the ice again, looking down at poor Taff Evans, seeing the wild look in his frozen eyes before he keeled over. I'm talking too much. I do sometimes. Every few years or so.

Archie, you know, is a lot like Scott. Emotional. Unsure. Determined. We'd just come back from a spiffo boating trip ... Europa was halfway down the stairs ... when the telephone rang in its little room in the porchway.

SCENE 25

MUNTING HALL.

THE TELEPHONE RINGS. IT IS A MODERN, FUTURISTIC RING

HENDRIX: (CALLS, APPROACHING) I'll never get there. It'll stop. Five times today it done this to me.

ARCHIE: It's okay. I've got it! Munting Hall. Yes, that's me. (A RASPING WHISPER TO OATES) It's the Hindoos! (INTO PHONE) I thought our solicitors were doing the biz from here on in. Hmm? Yeah. Mr Krishna-gupti-rishnan. Shucks. Yeah. Oh, that's bad. I'm sorry. (WITH INCREASING DESPAIR) Gee, sure, I understand. Of course. (AUTOMATICALLY CHEERFUL) Bye-now.

HE SLOWLY REPLACES THE RECEIVER.

EUROPA: (IN DISTANCE, WORRIED) What is it?

ARCHIE: (IN BLANK DESPAIR) The Hindoos. Their spiritual big-chief, Mr Krishna-gupti-rishnan. Snapped himself doing a yoga exercise. Very difficult one, the guy said, never been done before. Stone dead, he is.

EUROPA: They've pulled out, haven't they?

ARCHIE: (HIS VOICE CRACKING WITH EMOTION) Yeah.

OATES: Archie. I am most terribly sorry.

ARCHIE: (TRYING TO BE CHEERFUL) Hell, the bank don't know yet. We can still hang on here awhile. Maybe I'll find that Cavalier treasure, huh?

HENDRIX: (SORRY, WEEPY) There aint no Cavalier treasure, son. What there was your Pa dug up in the orchard when you was still in diapers. Used the money to fix the roof. I only said about it ... because, you know, some hope. Hell, it's my home too.

SCENE 26

OATES.

OATES: I thought I'd better leave husband-and-wife alone. So I said I was going out for a walk and might be some time. When I came back I could hear them arguing in Archie's room. They must have been arguing all day.

WE HEAR A MUFFLED ARGUMENT. OATES'S FOOTSTEPS CREAKING ON THE STAIRS.

OATES: I went into my room and sat in the window-seat, feeling like a little boy whose parents have had a falling out. After a bit I put on the bowler hat I found on a peg in the toy cupboard. I'd worn it before and it had amused them. I thought it might again.

But when I got down to the main landing Europa came charging towards me with her hair in her eyes.

EUROPA IS ON THE MOVE: TOWARDS US AND PAST ...

EUROPA: There's plenty of empty places, especially up North.

ARCHIE: (CHARGING AFTER, FURIOUS) Up North! We'd have our throats slit by wild gangs!

EUROPA: A different house every day if we like.

ARCHIE: (A VEHEMENCE MADE OF SAYING THIS TO HER TEN TIMES ALREADY IN THIS ROW) I won't leave!

EUROPA: Well, I'm outta here! It's falling to bits anyways.

ARCHIE: Careful, hon ... the banisters ... careful!

EUROPA: I'll take Titus, we can go ex ...

A SHARP, QUICK CRACK OF BREAKING WOOD. FROM EUROPA, A LITTLE SHOCKED CRY, AS IF SHE'S BEEN PUNCHED UNEXPECTEDLY BY A NUN

ARCHIE: (YELLS AS SHE FALLS, HIS TONE FALLING WITH HER) Europaaaaaaaaaaaaa!

A PAUSE WHILE WE WAIT FOR HER TO FINISH FALLING. A THUMP AS SHE HITS GROUND BELOW US

OATES: (AS IF READING THOUGHTFULLY FROM AN OLD DIARY) It is a terrible thing to lose a companion in this way.

ARCHIE: (PATHETICALLY) Honey?

SCENE 27

EUROPA'S SICKROOM.

OATES: (DIRECTLY TO US, SOMBRE AND POETIC) But the day's miseries weren't over. I was talking to the doctors in Europa's room in a light that glared like snow.

DOCTOR COOMBS: (QUIETLY) Even if she survives she'll be paralyzed.

DOCTOR FITCH: And brain function?

DOCTOR COOMBS: Did someone mention sandwiches?

OATES: (DIRECTLY TO US) I went to the window to gain comfort from the night and saw a huge gargoyle crouched on the ledge outside the highest turret room in the Hall. It was Archie, getting ready to jump.

(TO DOCTORS) Excuse me a mo, will you?

DOCTOR COOMBS: (CALLING AFTER) No butter on mine!

SCENE 28

THE LEDGE.

A NIGHT BREEZE. FAINTLY: AN OWL HOOTS. ARCHIE'S VOICE SOUNDS RAW, IN THE OPEN, SOME SHORT DISTANCE FROM US. OATES IS WITH US, CALLING INTO THE NIGHT

OATES: Archie! Don't be a ninny!

ARCHIE: GO AWAY!!!

OATES: Europa's not dead!

ARCHIE: As good as!

OATES: She's alive!

ARCHIE: Only one of her is alive. All the others are dead. It's over. I'm outta here!

OATES: (IN PANIC AS ARCHIE ALMOST JUMPS) ARCHIE!

ARCHIE: Ough, nearly! Next time. One. Two ...

OATES: WAIT! There is another Europa! There is! There is!

ARCHIE: GO AWAY!!!

OATES: Please believe me! Come down and I'll tell you. There is another England. Under Antarctica. An England just like this one. Not quite the same. They've had a different ride in their history, if you get my drift. It's always been there. But it's green, Archie, the way things used to be, and so full of people and tramcars and cricket, and busy and alive ... ARCHIE!!!

ARCHIE: I'm about to kill myself and you're talking balderdashery!

OATES: Here, catch.

THE TWINK OF A SIXPENCE BEING FLICKED AND CAUGHT

ARCHIE: What's this?

OATES: A sixpence. Look at the date.

SCENE 29

OATES.

OATES: (DIRECTLY TO US) Just then the moon came out from behind a fluff of cloud. Its beams hit the sixpence, smiling on it as if on a long-lost little brother, brightening it for Archie's eyes. Far below, a statue of Lord Castlereagh was looking up as if daring him to jump.

SCENE 30

THE LEDGE.

ARCHIE: 1968.

OATES: Yes, yes, and the head ... look at the head, the King on the head.

ARCHIE: Edward the 8th. So?

OATES: Edward the 8th abdicated here, in this England, in 1936. But down there, in this other England, he didn't. He was King till 1972. I wasn't in the ice 153 years, d'y'er see, only 150 years. For three incredible years I was there.

ARCHIE: Where?

OATES: In the other England. Look couldn't you come inside and I'll tell you more.

ARCHIE: (CASUALLY) All right.

SCENE 31

EUROPA'S SICKROOM.

THE DOCTORS NATTER IN THE BACKGROUND, RIGHT

DOCTOR COOMBS: I need a second opinion on this, Doctor Fitch.

DOCTOR FITCH: (PAUSE WHILE HE THINKS) Cheese and pickle, I think.

DOCTOR COOMBS: That's a pickle, is it?

DOCTOR FITCH: What are they jawing about?

DOCTOR COOMBS: They're very upset.

DOCTOR FITCH: Do you think we oughtta sedate them?

OATES AND ARCHIE CLOSER, LEFT, SPEAKING HUSHED AND SECRETIVE

ARCHIE: So who's King there now?

OATES: King Michael.

ARCHIE: Same as here then.

OATES: Different chap, actually.

ARCHIE: Let me throw this at ya and tell me if I've got it straight. You thawed out three years back.

OATES: My block of ice floated away in an underground stream. I woke up right under London Bridge. In old London.

ARCHIE: Their old London, not ours?

OATES: Mm-hmm.

ARCHIE: So this England didn't have any wars in the last century. And there's just England, no America or nowheres?

OATES: Portugal.

ARCHIE: Portugal.

OATES: And the Balearic Islands.

ARCHIE: Of course.

OATES: But that's all. The rest's just rock and caves.

ARCHIE: And it's 2065 there too?

OATES: Naturally. But it's more like things were here a hundred years ago. 1965 or so. Much better than here, honest.

ARCHIE: So you only came back to get your fingers put on?

OATES: They can't make proper ones there. Not quite so up on science, d'yer see.

ARCHIE: No.

OATES: Except for the funicular.

ARCHIE: The wha..?

OATES: It's how we get down. The entry point is right by the Pole, in the middle of a pine-forest. It comes out just behind Harrods.

ARCHIE: Harrods?

OATES: That's a department store.

ARCHIE: And the folks there, they're the same folks as here? So there's another Europa in the other England?

OATES: She's there. I promise. We'll find her. You can woo her and win her all over again.

ARCHIE: Gee. Maybe she'll be even better than my poor broken old one, huh? (HE SOBS NERVOUSLY)

OATES: There, now. Aren't you glad you didn't kill yourself?

THE PARROT GOES MAD, FLAPPING ITS WINGS AND SHOUTING A PASSIONATE SQUARKING OF 'CAPTAIN OATES!!!!!!'. A GUNSHOT. PARROT SQAWKS PAINFULLY, THEN SILENT

SCENE 32

MA AND EUROPA IN DREAMLAND.

THERE IS A HOLLOW ACOUSTIC FOR THIS SCENE. WE ARE IN THE CORRIDORS OF MA'S AND EUROPA'S MIND

EUROPA: (TERRIFIED, BREATHLESS, AS IF TOSSING IN A FEVER) Great God, this is a scary place! Where am I? I'm inside myself. Everything smells of ... pickle? I'm in the corridor that leads from the nursery to the attic stairs, but it has no end, either way, no end. I keep opening doors and there's a different dream going on behind each door. But I don't want any of that. I want the fields, real

fields. I can't feel my legs. It's hot, so hot ...

MA: Europa, honey?

IN THE REST OF THE SCENE EUROPA MOVES ABOUT,
CIRCLING US. MA STAYS PUT

EUROPA: Who is it?

MA: I didn't know you was dead, sweetiepie?

EUROPA: Ma, that you, Ma? I aint dead. I fell over the banisters. I'm all broke up. In bed in the room right below yours. I keep seeing faces, folks in fancy dress.

MA: It's just the ghosts, honey. The pass through me too, all the time. Thought you was one. Mr Krishnaguptirishnan has been pestering me ever since he died.

MR. KRISHNAGUPTIRISHNAN: (COULDN'T BE MORE CHEERFUL) A gracious good day!

MA: Get lost!!!

MR. KRISHNAGUPTIRISHNAN: (IN GENUINE SPIRITUAL HEAT) Your soul is the whole world.

MA: Shove off, buster!!!

MR. KRISHNAGUPTIRISHNAN: (DISAPPEARING DOWN A TUNNEL) If you so wish.

MA: Say, aint this nice? Just us girls, huh? We can lay here and jaw and jaw.

EUROPA: I don't wanna. I wanna go running through the fields ahead of the dogs. Where's Archie?

MA: Heck, he's long gone.

EUROPA: Gone?

MA: To the other England. The one underneath Antarctica.

EUROPA: Sure, yeah, Manfred told me there was such a place. He knew a guy from there.

MA: Open that door, honey. That one.

EUROPA: This one?

MA: Uh-huh.

EUROPA: Hell, it's Archie ... and Titus. I can see them!

FADE UP CRANKITY-CRANK, WHIRRING NOISE OF THE
FUNICULAR

EUROPA: What's that crazy-looking thing they're in?

SCENE 33

A FUNICULAR UNDER ANTARCTICA.

STEADY WHIRR-CUM-HUMM-WITH-OCCASIONAL-CLANKS OF FUNICULAR. THE TORNADOS' "Telstar" PLAYS TINNILY AS MUZAK IN BACKGROUND

ARCHIE: You sure this funicular thing is safe?

OATES: (MORE CLIPPED THAN USUAL) Absolutely.

ARCHIE: How long's it take?

OATES: An hour or so.

ARCHIE: (WHISPERS TO OATES) That guy pushing the buttons is looking at me funny. (TO BUTTONPUSHER) Morning.

BUTTONPUSHER: (A COCKNEY WITH A HEART-OF-GOLD) G'morning. Mr Munting, isn't it?

ARCHIE: (HESITANT ABOUT OWNING UP) Yeah, that's right.

BUTTONPUSHER: You not arf lost weight!

ARCHIE: Huh?

BUTTONPUSHER: Still working at Harrods, is yer?

ARCHIE: Not me, sunshine.

BUTTONPUSHER: Could've sworn!

ARCHIE: Naw.

BUTTONPUSHER: Gettaway, yers having me on. I seen yer. Sellin titfers to a geezer.

ARCHIE: What to a what? (WHISPERS IN BEFUDDLED DESPAIR) Gawd, Titus ... dream another dream for me, huh?

OATES: Wait till you see London, Archie, old pip. It'll be like going home. I promise.

FUNICULAR COMES TO A CLANKING HALT

ARCHIE: This us?

OATES: This is Portugal. Ours is next stop.

RAISE "Telstar", AS IF OUR EARS ARE AGAINST THE SPEAKER

SCENE 34

LONDON STREET, 'OTHER' ENGLAND.

BRING DOWN MUZAK BY BRINGING UP ... LOUD HUM OF BUSY CITY. HOOTING HORNS. SHOPPERS' BUZZING TALK AND CLIP-CLOP ON PAVEMENT

NEWSPAPERSELLER: (SHOUTING IN BACKGROUND) President Rinaldi resigns. Latest! Latest!

OATES: (LAUGHING) Didn't I tell you? Now, isn't this more like the REAL England?

ARCHIE: (HAVING A PANIC ATTACK) All these people! So many people! (RUNNING AWAY) Let's go away! Let's hide!

OATES: They won't hurt you! (RUNNING AFTER) Archie! You great ninny!

SCENE 35

'OTHER' HARRODS.

IN MIDDLE BACKGROUND:

SNOOTY WOMAN: No I don't think it suits him.

NITTY MAN: No, doesn't suit me. Look, I bought a hat here once, thirty years ago. Lost it in a gale. Perhaps if I described it ...

'OTHER' ARCHIE: (BACK TO CUSTOMARY ENGLISH) But this is my latest design, sir, all the young blades are wearing it.

APPROACHING:

OATES: At last I've found you!

CLOSE:

ARCHIE: Shhhhh! It's me.

OATES: What!

ARCHIE: There. Selling hats to that ass.

OATES: Great Scott, so it is! He's much fatter though isn't he?

ARCHIE: Maybe I've gone bust here too and sold the Hall. Must've ... to end up selling hats!

OATES: No, look at the display. They are your own hats. You're a hat designer. Ascot and whathaveyou.

ARCHIE: (SCORNFULLY) Hats! (BRIGHT) Say, let's go and buy a couple off him, huh?

OATES: All right ... no, wait ... look who's coming.

ARCHIE: (IN TEARFUL RELIEF) It's her, she's okay. You were right. Hell, I feel fine now. My belly's stoppped churnin.

IN MIDDLE BACKGROUND:

'OTHER' ARCHIE: (HORRIFIED) Europa, darling. Your legs!

'OTHER' EUROPA: (BACK TO CUSTOMARY ENGLISH) It's a mini-skirt. Groovy, what!

'OTHER' ARCHIE: But you can see ... everything!

'OTHER' EUROPA: Don't be a square, Archie. Get your skates on or

we shall miss our choo-choo.

'OTHER' ARCHIE: Take over the counter please, Herbert.

HERBERT: (MISERABLE, RESENTFUL) All right.

CLOSE:

ARCHIE: They're going. Cummon, let's go after them.

SCENE 36

'OTHER' LONDON. ALSO MA AND EUROPA.

STREET NOISES. TRAFFIC. BUSTLE

ARCHIE: Taxi! Taxi!

SLAM OF DOOR

CABBY: Where to?

OATES: I say, this is fun!

ARCHIE: Follow that cab.

CABBY: Yer wha?

ARCHIE: Follow! Hurry, Goddammit!

EUROPA: (CLOSE, FROM HER DREAMSCAPE) So many people, and they all look so angry!

MA: When I was a girl there were twice as many folks as that!

EUROPA: No!

MA: And ten times as angry! Guys caving-in each other's heads with umbrellas everywhere ya looked.

EUROPA: That girl who's me. She's a real beauty, huh? Better than me.

MR. KRISHNAGUPTIRISHNAN: Oh, most beautiful, a vision of loveliness.

MA: Get lost!!!

SCENE 37

OATES.

WHISTLE AND CHOO-CHOO OF STEAM TRAIN

OATES: (DIRECTLY TO US) At Paddington Station Archie and myself boarded the train right behind the other Archie and Europa. Though it was rather a warm day her skin was pink, blushed as if by bathing in snow. I caught her eye a couple of times. Archie, my Archie, not her Archie, hid behind a newspaper with two holes poked in so that he could watch her. He kept saying:

ARCHIE: Aint she a smasher, huh?

OATES: And he pressed his nose to the window:

ARCHIE: I can't believe how green the land is. It hurts my eyes. This aint England. England's the colour of mustard.

OATES: At the station Archie and Europa had a car waiting for them. Archie and I took off over the fields. I'd never seen him so happy, so excited. He swiped at bees with a stick.

THE FIELDS: TWEET OF PROPER ENGLISH BIRDS. SWISH OF GRASS AS THEY HURRY THROUGH IT.
OATES IS PANTING BEHIND IN BACKGROUND

ARCHIE: Cummon, Titus! Taint far! The Hall's just through them trees! Can't wait!

OATES: (CATCHING UP, BREATHLESS) But what on Earth are you going to do when you get there? It's his Munting Hall, not yours, remember.

ARCHIE: (HURRYING AHEAD) I'll say I'm his long-lost brother Arthur, back from the grave.

OATES: (DIRECTLY TO US) It was the most perfect day I ever saw in that other England. At my own home a hundred miles away in Essex the little family, the descendants of my other self, were spooning honey onto muffins, a slap-up tea, titbits for the dogs. I cannot thank them enough for taking me in, a fingerless man dropped out of a block of ice, on a similar, but not quite so sunny a day three years before. I am thinking about my room, with the lilac tree tapping on the window. I shall think about it, keep a vision of it in my eyes, right until the last moment.

SCENE 38

'OTHER' MUNTING HALL.

OPENING A LARGE FRONT DOOR

'OTHER' HENDRIX: (BACK TO CUSTOMARY ENGLISH) Yes, sir?

ARCHIE: Hiya, Hendrix you fumish old grampus! Ha! Ha! You're just as horrible as ever!

'OTHER' HENDRIX: (UNMOVED, WITH BUTLERISH BLANKNESS) Who shall I say is calling, sir?

ARCHIE: Ha! Ha! Get him, Titus!

OATES: (WHISPERS) Remember, it's not your Hendrix. It's the other Hendrix.

ARCHIE: (REMEMBERING) Sure, of course. Thanks. Erm, tell Mr Munting that it's his long-lost brother Arthur.

ARTHUR: (APPROACHING) Is there any bother, Hendrix?

ARCHIE: (HEARTSTRICKEN, AMAZED) Arthur! Jeez, I thought you was dead!

ARTHUR: Sorry, you have the better of me. We weren't at school together?

ARCHIE: It's me. Me!

'OTHER' MA: (BACK TO CUSTOMARY ENGLISH, APPROACHING) Arthur, where are you all?

ARTHUR: (CALLS TOWARD HER APPROACH) Archie and Europa are just changing.

'OTHER' MA: (ARRIVING) I've a lovely spread on the lawn and the flies are getting all of it. Friends of yours, Arthur?

ARCHIE: (PASSIONATELY) Ma? Ma? You're okay. You're on your feet and everything.

'OTHER' MA: (WORRIED) Arthur ...

ARCHIE: (WEEPING) Gee, I'm so happy, Ma. It's like bein a kid again. And Pa? Pa. (FIERCE) Where's Pa?

'OTHER' MA: Mr Munting is playing croquet with the bishop. You must be some of his racing friends.

OATES: Yes, that's it. (WHISPERS) Come on, Archie, let's go.

ARCHIE: Go?

OATES: This is getting out of hand, sport.

ARCHIE: Ma. I'm Archie. It's me. Look. Don't you recognise me?

ARTHUR: Look here, I don't know who you are, but this has gone far enough. Hendrix, give me a hand.

A BRIEF SCUFFLE. ARCHIE BREAKS FREE

ARCHIE: (SHOUTS) I'm Archie Munting! I'm Archie Munting!

'OTHER' ARCHIE: (CALLS DOWN FROM UP STAIRS) Someone calling my name?

ARCHIE RUNS UPSTAIRS.WE GO WITH

ARCHIE: Whose name, you sonofabitch! Whose Goddamn name! I'm Archie Munting and this is my house ...

OATES: (FROM BELOW, CALLS) Archie! Archie!

'OTHER' ARCHIE: Yes, I'm Archie. Want to order a hat or something?

'OTHER' EUROPA: (APPROACHING FROM UP CORRIDOR) Is there a fire?

ARCHIE: (ARRIVING AT THE TOP, BREATHLESS) And that there's my wife, see. Hiya, hun.

'OTHER' ARCHIE: (HUMOURING A LUNATIC) Your wife, yes of course, old man. (SHOUTS DOWN NERVOUSLY) Hendrix, do something, will you!

'OTHER' HENDRIX: (CALLS BACK) What can I do? I'm 74. You do something for a change.

'OTHER' EUROPA: Isn't he that strange man who was spying on us on the train?

'OTHER' ARCHIE: Look, please, whoever you are, perhaps we can discuss this in the library, while Hendrix phones for the police ... erm: while Hendrix makes some of his scrummy pickle sandwiches. What'dyuh say, eh?

ARCHIE: (GIGGLES) All right, let's go downstairs.

'OTHER' ARCHIE: Jolly good show.

ARCHIE: I'll walk down. But you, you're going down over there.

'OTHER' ARCHIE: Careful, please, the house is full of the ghosts of the johnnies who've slipped over these banisters. Keep back! This has gone beyond a joke.

OATES: (WHILE RUSHING UP THE STAIRS) Archie! Archie!

'OTHER' ARCHIE: Arrrrrhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!

SCREAMS FROM 'OTHER' EUROPA AND 'OTHER' MA. A WHUMP AS 'OTHER' ARCHIE HITS THE GROUND. OUR ARCHIE IS LAUGHING HIS HEAD OFF

ARTHUR: (SCREAMING FROM BELOW) YOU LUNATIC! MADMAN!!!

OATES: (CLOSE, IN COMPLETE HORROR) What have you done?

ARCHIE: (WIPING AWAY TEARS OF LAUGHTER) It's okay, pardner. It's all a dream. I jumped off the ledge yesterday, right on top of Lord Castlereagh. I've been dreaming this crazy dream ever since.

DOWNSTAIRS 'OTHER' EUROPA AND 'OTHER' MA ARE WEEPING

ARTHUR: (SCREAMS FROM BELOW) You lunatic! Madman!

OATES: But it's not a dream.

ARCHIE: Tis too.

OATES: No.

ARCHIE: Hell, you're just a part of the dream yerself.

OATES: (IN DEEPEST DESPAIR) Oh, it's all my fault. If only I'd died long ago.

ARCHIE: I'm starving. Let's go out on the lawn and have tea, huh?

OATES: (GENTLY) We must go. The police will be here soon.

ARCHIE: Police? What for?

OATES: To arrest a murderer.

ARCHIE: (SUDDENLY SCARED) Not me? I didn't mean nuttin. It was an accident. You saw? (SHOUTS DOWNSTAIRS) Say, it was an accident.

LOUDER WEeping

ARCHIE: Don't bawl, Ma, honeylamb. You've still got me!

OATES: (FIERCELY) Let's go!!!!!!

ARCHIE: (FADE DURING THIS LINE) We get chased and chased now, right? Till I wake up.

BRING UP WAIL OF 1960s POLICE SIREN

SCENE 39

A BARN, SOMEWHERE IN 'OTHER' ENGLAND.

THE THEME FROM "No Hiding Place" PLAYS SOFTLY IN BACKGROUND

OATES: (DIRECTLY TO US, IN A RUSH) We took the train towards London as far as Slough, then a bus into the city. The idea was to catch the funicular and escape back to the proper world. But the police were checking everyone getting on board. The buttonpusher who had recognised Archie that morning was wearing spectacles and looking each of his passengers hard in the face.

We headed west. Just outside of Torquay is the entrance to a cave system which would take us to Portugal and there we could connect with another system that would take us to the surface. In this England my old companion Captain Scott had been a speleologist, walking and crawling through the centre of the Earth. The other Captain Oates had accompanied him. Both went missing eleven miles under Melbourne in 1924.

Something similar might have happened to Archie and myself. But the Police caught up with us in a barn on the edge of Dartmoor.

PATTER OF RAIN. BREATHLESSNESS OF OATES AND ESPECIALLY ARCHIE, WHO IS ALSO WEeping. IN BACKGROUND POLICEDOGS ARE BARKING, POLICE WHISTLES ARE BLOWN. SHOUTS OF POLICE APPROACHING ACROSS THE MOORS

ARCHIE: (TEARFULLY) What we going to do? Huh? Huh?

A COW IN THE BARN MOOS

OATES: Nothing, Archie. They are going to catch us. We may as well sit tight and have these last moments

together my friend.

ARCHIE: Gee! Gee! Gee!

DOGS, WHISTLES, POLICE CLOSER

OATES: (SUDDEN ENTHUSIASM) Archie ...

ARCHIE: Uh?

OATES: Get in behind that cow and throw some straw over yourself.

ARCHIE: It'll roll over and squish me.

OATES: Do as I say man! If I give myself up and say it was me who shoved that poor man to his death, then maybe they won't bother to search for anyone else.

ARCHIE: But my folks saw me do it!

OATES: Weeks ago, old pip. They'll have forgotten both our faces by now. Quick, they are almost upon us.

ARCHIE: Okay! Okay!

MIFFED MOO OF COW AS ARCHIE CLIMBS IN BESIDE IT

OATES: I'm going outside now. Toodle-oo, Archie!

WE STAY INSIDE, HEARING OATES'S ARREST FROM ARCHIE'S POINT OF VIEW

POLICECONSTABLE: Here he is, sarge!

OATES: (CALLS) I'm the man you want!!!

POLICESERGEANT: Cuff him, Dennis!

SCUFFLE AND CLICK OF CUFFS.

POLICECONSTABLE: Who's been a naughty boy, then?

THE COW MOOS

ARCHIE: Shhhhh, silly cow!

SCENE 40 'OTHER' OLD BAILEY.

RUCKUS OF EXCITED COURTROOM

JUDGE BANGING HIS GAVEL. THE COURTROOM QUIETENS. THE JUDGE SPEAKS IN A THIN, CHURCHILLIAN DRAWL

JUDGE: (VEXED) Another disturbance like that and I shall be forced to clear the court!

CLEARs HIS THROAT. TAKES A DRINK FROM A GLASS WITH RATTLING ICE-CUBES IN IT. CLEARs HIS THROAT AGAIN AND SAYS IN HIS BEST GRAVEYARD VOICE:

Lawrence Edward Grace Oates ... You have been found guilty of the deliberate and callous murder of Archibald Gervase Munting. I now pronounce sentence upon you, that you be taken from here to a place of execution and that there you shall be hanged from the neck ... by the neck (WHISPERS TO A CLERK) ... is it from the neck or by the neck, I can never remember. (TO COURTROOM) Hanged, anyway. (TRAILING OFF) May God have mercy on your soul.

RUCKUS RETURNS TO COURTROOM

ARCHIE: (CALLING THROUGH RUCKUS) Titus! Titus! This is a nightmare! I'll wake up when they hang you, will I?

OATES: (CHEERFULNESS EDGED WITH TERROR) I say, Archie, they are, aren't they? Going to hang me.

ARCHIE: They didn't look like they was joshing, no.

CUT RUCKUS ... BRING IN IMMEDIATELY ARCHIE'S FOOTSTEPS, VERY CRISP IN 'OTHER' OLD BAILEY CORRIDOR

SCENE 41

OUTSIDE COURTROOM.

ARCHIE'S FOOTSTEPS CLICKING ALONG. A SUDDEN RUSH OF OTHER FOOTSTEPS

ARTHUR: Excuse me, I'm Arthur Munting.

ARCHIE: Huh? Yeah, I know ya.

ARTHUR: What you said in court, about your pretending to be my brother so that the murderer would attack you instead. Very brave of you.

ARCHIE: Was nuttin.

ARTHUR: I'd like to shake your hand and thank you for trying. You're a gent.

ARCHIE: It's okay, okay.

ARTHUR: Look, I couldn't offer you a lift, could I? My sister-in-law is in the car. I know she'd like to thank you herself.

ARCHIE: Sure. Sure.

THEY WALK OFF

ARTHUR: I do like that funny accent of yours. I expect it's the fashionable thing in Chelsea, is it?

ARCHIE: Yeah.

SCENE 42

A LIMOUSINE DRIVING THROUGH 'OTHER' LONDON.

SOUND OF TRAFFIC. GENTLE WHIR OF BENTLEY

'OTHER' EUROPA: He must be dreadfully wicked, your friend.

ARCHIE: Titus? Gawd, yeah.

'OTHER' EUROPA: Those creaky little fingers of his. I've been seeing them in nightmares all week.

ARCHIE: Me too.

'OTHER' EUROPA: Please excuse me ... but I've forgotten your name.

ARCHIE: Erh ... Smith.

'OTHER' EUROPA: I like your cut, Mr Smith.

ARTHUR: (WARNS) Europa! You promised!

'OTHER' EUROPA: Gosh, Arthur, leave a girl in peace. (COQUETTISHLY TO ARCHIE) Arthur's a dunce where girls are concerned. You're not though, are you, Mr Smith?

ARCHIE: Call me John, please.

'OTHER' EUROPA: John or Jonny?

ARCHIE: I dunno ... errrr.

ARTHUR: (AN ALMOST RUDE HINT) Where can we drop you, Mr Smith?

ARCHIE: Errrr ...I dunno.

'OTHER' EUROPA: Oh, Jonny's coming to Munting Hall for the weekend, aren't you, Jonny?

ARCHIE: Yeah. Yeah I am. Say, what's wrong with them trees? Their leaves are droppin out.

'OTHER' EUROPA: It's autumn, very nearly.

ARCHIE: (PROFOUNDLY IMPRESSED) Autumn. Then winter, I guess. And snow.

PARROT: Captain Oates! Captain Oates!

ARCHIE: Say, you guys ... you hear a parrot just then?

SCENE 43

OATES'S CELL

RATTLE OF CHAINS

STRANGLER: (DOLEFULLY) What time you swinging?

OATES: 7.30.

STRANGLER: Never, I'm 7.30.

OATES: Perhaps we both swing together.

STRANGLER: Yeah. (SNIFFS) How come you've got no fingers, then?

OATES: I did have. They took them from me.

STRANGLER: Bastards. You the one who pushed that geezer over the banisters?

OATES: That's me. And you?

STRANGLER: (WITH PRIDE) I strangled a whole street full of people. I started with the woman next door and worked my way along. Number 42 was out shopping, worse luck. I could strangle you now, if yerh like, save yer a hanging?

OATES: No thankyou.

PAUSE. BRING UP WHISTLE OF ANTARCTIC WIND. OATES ADDRESSES US DIRECTLY

OATES: In Antarctica the night lasts for months. Suddenly, one morning you find yourself pointing your face at the sun. The sky is blue and yellow. And the ice too, people think it's white, but it's blue, all sorts of blues. And the sea sometimes is pink with krill. And the breath of the ponies in the morning ... and a dragonfly visiting my garden at Gestingthorpe, over 150 years ago.

HEAVY RATTLE OF KEYS OPENING HEAVY WOODEN DOOR. IT CREAKS OPEN

JAILER: Okay, lads, let's be having you.

A PRIEST MUTTERS THE LORD'S PRAYER IN BACKGROUND

STRANGLER: It wasn't me, honest! I'm as innocent as a lamb!

OATES: Chin up, old boy. Come, come, now.

JAILER: Who wants to go first?

STRANGLER: (TERRIFIED) Him! He does!

OATES: (EXTRA CALM) Yes. I'll go first.

WE HEAR THE CREAK OF THE TRAPDOOR AND THE WHUMP OF OATES DROPPING THROUGH THE TRAPDOOR.

SCENE 44

MA'S SICKROOM, MUNTING HALL, BERKSHIRE, ENGLAND.

ARCHIE: (WITH FORCED GAIETY) Ma? Ma? Hungry Fred escaped again today. (BREAKING DOWN) You shoulda seen him gallop. (DESPERATE) Doctor Fitch, is there no hope?

DOCTOR FITCH: You'd better say your goodbyes, Archie.

ARCHIE: If only she could have held on till Europa got back from her ski-ing holiday. Antarctica, you know, they all go there these days.

DOCTOR FITCH: Her lips moved!

ARCHIE: Naw. They aint moved in years.

DOCTOR FITCH: They moved.

MA: (A STRANGE, HOARSE DEATHRATTLING WHISPER) Captain Oatessssssssss. (A LONG EXHALATION)

DOCTOR FITCH: What'd she say?

ARCHIE: Sounded like ... Captain Oates.

DOCTOR FITCH: Who's that?

ARCHIE: Dunno. Some guy she knew before Pa maybe. Or just dreaming, huh? (SUDDEN EXCITEMENT) Say, look at the window! It's snowing! That's snow! Look! I aint seen snow but once. Jeez! Mebbees things'll go back to how they was, huh? In the olden days. See, Ma, snow. Ma?

DOCTOR FITCH: She can't hear you, Archie. She is with the Lord.

SCENE 45

A RECEPTION ROOM, 1913.

HUBBUB OF MANY PEOPLE. SOME SAY 'Congratulations', 'Well done!'

LLOYD GEORGE: (ANNOUNCES) Ladies and Gentlemen, His Imperial Majesty, King Edward the Seventh.

EDWARD VII: (APPROACHING) What brave and gallant gentlemen you are! First men to reach the South Pole, and return again in one piece. Jolly good show. Which one are you?

OATES: Oates, sir.

EDWARD VII: And you'll be ... let's guess: Bowers?

ARCHIE: (STILL AMERICAN-ISH) No, I'm Munting, sir. This is Bowers.

BOWERS: (A TINY NERVOUS VOICE) Hello.

EDWARD VII: You know, England isn't a place ... as a place it doesn't really exist. England is an idea. And today, with your achievement, you have given something new to put into our idea, whatever that idea may be.

A MODEST ROUND OF APPLAUSE

CAPTAIN SCOTT: We have something for you, Your Majesty. A little present, from Antarctica. Several presents, actually.

EDWARD VII: (DELIGHTED) Presents? Good-O! What are they? Give them to me then.

CAPTAIN SCOTT: Snowballs, sir.

EDWARD VII: (SUSPICIOUS) Snowballs?

CAPTAIN SCOTT, OATES, ARCHIE, WILSON, BOWERS, EVANS: (YELL AS THEY THROW) SNOWBALLS!!!!!!!!!!!!

THUNK AND SPLAT OF SNOWBALLS AS THE MEN
ENERGETICALLY THROW THEM. THE KING SCREAMS.

PLAY OUT WITH GRAINGER'S "English Waltz", PLAYED
THE WAY EUROPA LIKES IT: AT DOUBLE SPEED. THE
PARROT SQUAWKS 'Captain Oates' OVER AND OVER.
HUNGRY FRED WHINNIES.