

The Bald Soprano

The Characters

MR. SMITH - Logan Neville
 MRS. SMITH - Kathleen Brewster
 MR. MARTIN - Logan Neville
 MRS. MARTIN - Megan Sierzeaga
 MARY, the maid - Celeste Phillips
 THE FIRE CHIEF - Charles Arase

SCENE: A middle-class English interior, with English armchairs. An English evening. Mr. Smith, an Englishman, seated in his English armchair and wearing English slippers, is smoking his English pipe and reading an English newspaper, near an English fire. He is wearing English spectacles and a small gray English mustache. Beside him, in another English armchair, Mrs. Smith, an Englishwoman, is darning some English socks. A long moment of English silence. The English clock strikes 17 English strokes.

A MRS. SMITH: There, it's nine o'clock. We've drunk the soup, and eaten the fish and chips, and the English salad. The children have drunk English water. We've eaten well this evening. That's because we live in the suburbs of London and because our name is Smith.

B MR. SMITH: [continues to read, clicks his tongue.]

C MRS. SMITH: But still, the soup was perhaps a little too salty. It was saltier than you. Ha, ha, ha. It also had too many leeks and not enough onions. I regret I didn't advise Mary to add some aniseed stars. The next time I'll know better.

D MR. SMITH: [continues to read, clicks his tongue.]

E MRS. SMITH: Mrs. Parker knows a Rumanian grocer by the name of Popesco Rosenfeld, who has just come from Constantinople. He is a great specialist in yogurt. He has a diploma from the school of yogurt-making in Adrianople. Tomorrow I shall buy a large pot of native Rumanian yogurt from him. One doesn't often find such things here in the suburbs of London.

F MR. SMITH [continues to read, clicks his tongue.]

G MRS. SMITH: Yogurt is excellent for the stomach, the kidneys, the appendicitis, and apothecosis. It was Doctor Mackenzie-King who told me that, he's the one who takes care of the children of our neighbors, the Johns. He's a good doctor. One can trust him. He never prescribes any medicine that he's not tried out on himself first. Before operating on Parker, he had his own liver operated on first, although he was not the least bit ill.

H MR. SMITH: But how does it happen that the doctor pulled through while Parker died?

- A MRS. SMITH: Because the operation was successful in the doctor's case and it was not in Parker's.
- B MR. SMITH: Then Mackenzie is not a good doctor. The operation should have succeeded with both of them or else both should have died.
- C MRS. SMITH: Why?
- D MR. SMITH: A conscientious doctor must die with his patient if they can't get well together. The captain of a ship goes down with his ship into the briny deep, he does not survive alone.
- E MRS. SMITH: One cannot compare a patient with a ship.
- F MR. SMITH: Why not? A ship has its diseases too; moreover, your doctor is as hale as a ship; that's why he should have perished at the same time as his patient, like the captain and his ship.
- G MRS. SMITH: Ah! I hadn't thought of that. ...Perhaps it is true. ...And then, what conclusion do you draw from this?
- H MR. SMITH: All doctors are quacks. And all patients, too. Only the Royal Navy is honest in England.
- I MRS. SMITH: But not sailors.
- J MR. SMITH: Naturally *[A pause. Still reading his paper.]* Here's a thing I don't understand. In the newspaper they always give the age of deceased persons but never the age of the newly born. That doesn't make sense.
- K MRS. SMITH: I never thought of that!
- [Another moment of silence. The clock strikes seven times. Silence. The clock strikes three times. Silence. The clock doesn't strike.]*
- L MR. SMITH *[still reading his paper]*: Tsk, it says here that Bobby Watson died
- M MRS. SMITH: My God, the poor man! When did he die?
- N MR. SMITH: Why do you pretend to be astonished? You know very well that he's been dead these past two years. Surely you remember that we attended his funeral a year and a half ago.
- O MRS. SMITH: Oh yes, of course I do remember. I remembered it right away, but I don't understand why you yourself were so surprised to see it in the paper.
- P MR. SMITH: It wasn't in the paper. It's been three years since his death was announced. I remembered it through an association of ideas.
- Q MRS. SMITH: What a pity! He was so well preserved.

A MR. SMITH: He was the handsomest corpse in Great Britain. He didn't look his age. Poor Bobby, he'd been dead for four years and he was still warm. A veritable living corpse. And how cheerful he was!

B MRS. SMITH: Poor Bobby.

C MR. SMITH: Which poor Bobby do you mean?

D MRS. SMITH: It is his wife that I mean. She is called Bobby too, Bobby Watson. Since they both had the same name, you could never tell one from the other when you saw them together. It was only after his death that you could really tell which was which. And there are still people today who confuse her with the deceased and offer their condolences to him. How sad for her to be left a widow so young.

E MR. SMITH: Fortunately, they had no children.

F MRS. SMITH: That was all they needed! Children! Poor woman, how could she have managed!

G MR. SMITH: She's still young. She might very well remarry. She looks so well in mourning.

H MRS. SMITH: But who would take care of the children? You know very well that they have a boy and a girl. What are their names?

I MR. SMITH: Bobby and Bobby like their parents. Bobby Watson's uncle, old Bobby Watson, is a rich man and very fond of the boy. He might very well pay for Bobby's education.

J MRS. SMITH: That would be proper. And Bobby Watson's aunt, old Bobby Watson, might very well, in her turn, pay for the education of Bobby Watson, Bobby Watson's daughter. That way Bobby, Bobby Watson's mother, could remarry. Has she anyone in mind?

K MR. SMITH: Yes, a cousin of Bobby Watson's.

L MRS. SMITH: Who? Bobby Watson?

M MR. SMITH: Which Bobby Watson do you mean?

N MRS. SMITH: Why, Bobby Watson, the son of old Bobby Watson, the late Bobby Watson's other uncle.

O MR. SMITH: No, it's not that one, it's someone else. It's Bobby Watson, the son of old Bobby Watson, the late Bobby Watson's aunt.

P MRS. SMITH: Are you referring to Bobby Watson the commercial traveler?

Q MR. SMITH: All the Bobby Watsons are commercial travelers.

R MRS. SMITH: What a difficult trade! However, they do well at it.

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A MR. SMITH: Yes, when there's no competition.

B MRS. SMITH: And when is there no competition?

C MR. SMITH: On Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Tuesdays.

D MRS. SMITH: Ah! Three days a week? And what does Bobby Watson do on those days?

E MR. SMITH: He rests, he sleeps.

F MRS. SMITH: But why doesn't he work those three days if there's no competition?

G MR. SMITH: I don't know everything. I can't answer all your idiotic questions!

H MARY *[entering]*: I'm the maid. I have spent a very pleasant afternoon.

I MRS. SMITH: I hope that you've spent a pleasant afternoon.

J MARY: Mr. and Mrs. Martin, your guests, are at the door. They were waiting for me. They didn't dare come in by themselves. They were supposed to have dinner with you this evening.

K MRS. SMITH: Oh, yes. We were expecting them. And we were hungry. Since they didn't put in an appearance, we were going to start dinner without them. We've had nothing to eat all day. You should not have gone out!

L MARY: But it was you who gave me permission.

M MR. SMITH: We didn't do it on purpose.

N MARY *[bursts into laughter, then she bursts into tears. Then she smiles]*: I bought me a chamber pot.

O MRS. SMITH: My dear Mary, please open the door and ask Mr. and Mrs. Martin to step in. We will change quickly.

[Mr. and Mrs. Smith exit right. Mary opens the door at the left by which Mr. and Mrs. Martin enter.]

P MARY: Why have you come so late! You are not very polite. People should be punctual. Do you understand? But sit down there, anyway, and wait now that you're here.

[She exits. Mr. and Mrs. Martin sit facing each other, without speaking. They smile timidly at each other. The dialogue which follows must be spoken in voices that are drawling, monotonous, a little singsong, without nuances.]

Q MR. MARTIN: Excuse me, madam, but it seems to me, unless I'm mistaken, that I've met you somewhere before.

R MRS. MARTIN: I, too, sir. It seems to me that I've met you somewhere before.

A MR. MARTIN: Was it, by any chance, at Manchester that I caught a glimpse of you, madam?

B MRS. MARTIN: That is very possible. I am originally from the city of Manchester. But I do not have a good memory, sir. I cannot say whether it was there that I caught a glimpse of you or not!

C MR. MARTIN: Good God, that's curious! I, too, am originally from the city of Manchester, madam!

D MRS. MARTIN: That is curious!

E MR. MARTIN: Isn't that curious! Only, I, madam, I left the city of Manchester about five weeks ago.

F MRS. MARTIN: That is curious! What a bizarre coincidence! I, too, sir, I left the city of Manchester about five weeks ago.

G MR. MARTIN: Madam, I took the 8:30 morning train which arrives in London at 4:45.

H MRS. MARTIN: That is curious! How very bizarre! And what a coincidence! I took the same train, sir, I too.

I MR. MARTIN: Good Lord, how curious! Perhaps then, madam, it was on the train that I saw you?

J MRS. MARTIN: It is indeed possible; that is, not unlikely. It is plausible and, after all, why not!— But I don't recall it, sir!

K MR. MARTIN: Nor do I, madam. *[A moment of silence. The clock strikes twice, then once.]* Since coming to London, I have resided in Bromfield Street, my dear lady.

L MRS. MARTIN: How curious that is, how bizarre! I, too, since coming to London, I have resided in Bromfield Street, my dear sir.

M MR. MARTIN: How curious that is, well then, well then, perhaps we have seen each other in Bromfield Street, my dear lady.

N MRS. MARTIN: How curious that is, how bizarre! It is indeed possible, after all! But I do not recall it, my dear sir.

O MR. MARTIN: I reside at No. 19, my dear lady.

P MRS. MARTIN: How curious that is. I also reside at No. 19, my dear sir.

Q MR. MARTIN: Well then, well then, well then, well then, perhaps we have seen each other in that house, dear lady?

R MRS. MARTIN: It is indeed possible but I do not recall it, dear sir.

S MR. MARTIN: My flat is on the fifth floor, No.8, my dear lady.

- A MRS. MARTIN:** How curious it is, good Lord, how bizarre! And what a coincidence! I too reside on the fifth floor, in flat No.8, dear sir!
- B MR. MARTIN** *[musing]*: How curious it is, how curious it is, how curious it is, and what a coincidence! You know, in my bedroom there is a bed, and it is covered with a green eiderdown. This room, with the bed and the green eiderdown, is at the end of the corridor between the w.c. and the bookcase, dear lady!
- C MRS. MARTIN:** What a coincidence, good Lord, what a coincidence! My bedroom, too, has a bed with a green eiderdown and is at the end of the corridor, between the w.c., dear sir, and the bookcase!
- D MR. MARTIN:** How bizarre, curious, strange! Then, madam, we live in the same room and we sleep in the same bed, dear lady. It is perhaps there that we have met!
- E MRS. MARTIN:** How curious it is and what a coincidence! It is indeed possible that we have met there, and perhaps even last night. But I do not recall it, dear sir!
- F MR. MARTIN:** I have a little girl, my little daughter, she lives with me, dear lady. She is two years old, she's blonde, she has a white eye and a red eye, she is very pretty, her name is Alice, dear lady.
- G MRS. MARTIN:** What a bizarre coincidence! I, too, have a little girl. She is two years old, has a white eye and a red eye, she is very pretty, and her name is Alice, too, dear sir!
- H MR. MARTIN** *[in the same drawling monotonous voice]*: How curious it is and what a coincidence! And bizarre! Perhaps they are the same, dear lady!
- I MRS. MARTIN:** How curious it is! It is indeed possible, dear sir.
- [A rather long moment of silence. The clock strikes 29 times.]*
- J MR. MARTIN** *[after having reflected at length, gets up slowly and, unhurriedly, moves toward Mrs. Martin, who, surprised by his solemn air, has also gotten up very quietly. Mr. Martin, in the same flat, monotonous voice, slightly sing-song]*: Then, dear lady, I believe that there can be no doubt about it, we have seen each other before and you are my own wife. ..Elizabeth, I have found you again!
- [Mrs. Martin approaches Mr. Martin without haste. They embrace without expression. The clock strikes once, very loud. This striking of the clock must be so loud that it makes the audience jump. The Martins do not hear it.]*
- K MRS. MARTIN:** Donald, it's you, darling!

[They sit together in the same armchair, their arms around each other, and fall asleep. The clock strikes several more times. Mary, on tiptoe, a finger to her lips, enters quietly and addresses the audience.]

A MARY: Elizabeth and Donald are now too happy to be able to hear me. I can therefore let you in on a secret. Elizabeth is not Elizabeth, Donald is not Donald. And here is the proof: the child that Donald spoke of is not Elizabeth's daughter, they are not the same person. Donald's daughter has one white eye and one red eye like Elizabeth's daughter. Whereas Donald's child has a white right eye and a red left eye, Elizabeth's child has a red right eye and a white left eye! Thus all of Donald's system of deduction collapses when it comes up against this last obstacle which destroys his whole theory.

[She takes several steps toward the door, then returns and says to the audience:] My real name is Sherlock Holmes. [She exits.]

[The clock strikes as much as it likes. After several seconds, Mr. and Mrs. Martin separate and take the chairs they had at the beginning.]

B MR. MARTIN: Darling, let's forget all that has not passed between us, and, now that we have found each other again, let's try not to lose each other any more, and live as before.

C MRS. MARTIN: Yes, darling.

[Mr. and Mrs. Smith enter from the right, wearing the same clothes.]

D MRS. SMITH: Good evening, dear friends! Please forgive us for having made you wait so long. We thought that we should extend you the courtesy to which you are entitled and as soon as we learned that you had been kind enough to give us the pleasure of coming to see us without prior notice we hurried to dress for the occasion.

E MR. SMITH [furious]: We've had nothing to eat all day. And we've been waiting four whole hours for you. Why have you come so late?

[Mr. and Mrs. Smith sit facing their guests. The striking of the clock underlines the speeches, more or less strongly according to the case. The Martins, particularly Mrs. Martin, seem embarrassed and timid. For this reason the conversation begins with, difficulty and the words are uttered, at the beginning, awkwardly. A long embarrassed silence at first, then other silences and hesitations follow.]

F MR. SMITH: Hm. [Silence.]

- A MRS. SMITH: Hm, hm. [Silence.]
- B MRS. MARTIN: Hm, hm, hm. [Silence.]
- C MR. MARTIN: Hm, hm, hm, hm. [Silence.]
- D MRS. MARTIN: Oh, but definitely. [Silence.]
- E MR. MARTIN: We all have colds. [Silence.]
- F MR. SMITH: Nevertheless, it's not chilly. [Silence.]
- G MRS. SMITH: There's no draft. [Silence.]
- H MR. MARTIN: Oh no, fortunately. [Silence.]
- I MR. SMITH: Oh dear, oh dear, oh dear. [Silence.]
- J MR. MARTIN: Don't you feel well? [Silence.]
- K MRS. SMITH: No, he's wet himself. [Silence.]
- L MRS. MARTIN: Oh, sir, at your age, you shouldn't. [Silence.]
- M MR. SMITH: The heart is ageless. [Silence.]
- N MR. MARTIN: That's true. [Silence.]
- O MRS. SMITH: So they say. [Silence.]
- P MRS. MARTIN: They also say the opposite [Silence.]
- Q MR. SMITH: The truth lies somewhere between the two [Silence.]
- R MR. MARTIN: That's true. [Silence.]
- S MRS. SMITH [to the Martins]: Since you travel so much, you must have many interesting things to tell us.
- T MR. MARTIN [to his wife]: My dear, tell us what you've seen today.
- U MRS. MARTIN: It's scarcely worth the trouble, for no one would believe me.
- V MR. SMITH: We're not going to question your sincerity!
- W MRS. SMITH: You will offend us if you think that.
- X MR. MARTIN [to his wife]: You will offend them, my dear, if you think that ...

A MRS. MARTIN [graciously]: Oh, well today I witnessed something extraordinary. Something really incredible.

B MR. MARTIN: Tell us quickly, my dear.

C MR. SMITH: Oh, this is going to be amusing.

D MRS. SMITH: At last.

E MRS. MARTIN: Well, today, when I went shopping to buy some vegetables, which are getting to be dearer and dearer...

F MRS. SMITH: Where is it all going to end?

G MR. SMITH: You shouldn't interrupt, my dear, it's very rude.

H MRS. MARTIN: In the street, near a café, I saw a man, properly dressed, about fifty years old, or not even that, who...

I MR. SMITH: Who, what?

J MRS. SMITH: Who, What?

K MR. SMITH [to his wife]: Don't interrupt, my dear, you're disgusting.

L MRS. SMITH: My dear, it is you who interrupted first, you boor.

M MR. SMITH: [to his wife]: Hush. [To Mrs. Martin:] What was this man doing?

N MRS. MARTIN: Well, I'm sure you'll say that I'm making it up—he was down on one knee and he was bent over.

O MR. MARTIN, MR. SMITH, MRS. SMITH: Oh!

P MRS. MARTIN: Yes, bent over.

Q MR. SMITH: Not possible.

R MRS. MARTIN: Yes, bent over. I went near him to see what he was doing. ..

S MR. SMITH: And?

T MRS. MARTIN: He was tying his shoe lace which had come undone.

U MR. MARTIN, MR. SMITH, MRS. SMITH: Fantastic!

V MR. SMITH: If someone else had told me this, I'd not believe it.

A MR. MARTIN: Why not? One sees things even more extraordinary every day, when one walks around. For instance today in the Underground I myself saw a man, quietly sitting on a seat, reading his newspaper.

B MRS. SMITH: What a character!

C MR. SMITH: Perhaps it was the same man!

[The doorbell rings.]

D MR. SMITH: Goodness, someone is ringing.

E MRS. SMITH: There must be somebody there. I'll go and see.

[She goes to see, she opens the door and closes it, and come back.] Nobody. *[She sits down again.]*

F MR. MARTIN: I'm going to give you another example. ..

[Doorbell rings again.]

G MR. SMITH: Goodness, someone is ringing.

H MRS. SMITH: There must be somebody there. I'll go and see. *[She goes to see, opens the door, and comes back.]* No one. *[She sits down again.]*

I MR. MARTIN *[who has forgotten where he was]*: Uh ...

J MRS. MARTIN: You were saying that you were going to give us another example.

K MR. MARTIN: Oh, yes...

[Doorbell rings again.]

L MR. SMITH: Goodness, someone is ringing.

M MRS. SMITH: I'm not going to open the door again.

N MR. SMITH: Yes, but there must be someone there!

O MRS. SMITH: The first time there was no one. The second time, no one. Why do you think that there is someone there now?

P MR. SMITH: Because someone has rung!

Q MRS. MARTIN: That's no reason.

A MR. MARTIN: What? When one hears the doorbell ring, that means someone is at the door ringing to have the door opened.

B MRS. MARTIN: Not always. You've just seen otherwise!

C MR. MARTIN: In most cases, yes.

D MR. SMITH: As for me, when I go to visit someone, I ring in order to be admitted. I think that everyone does the same thing and that each time there is a ring there must be someone there.

E MRS. SMITH: That is true in theory. But in reality things happen differently. You have just seen otherwise.

F MRS. MARTIN: Your wife is right.

G MR. MARTIN: Oh! You women! You always stand up for each other.

H MRS. SMITH: Well, I'll go and see. You can't say that I am obstinate, but you will see that there's no one there! *[She goes to look, opens the door and closes it.]* You see, there's no one there. *[She returns to her seat.]*

I MRS. SMITH: Oh, these men who always think they're right and who're always wrong!
[The doorbell rings again.]

J MR. SMITH: Goodness, someone is ringing. There must be someone there.

K MRS. SMITH *[in a fit of anger]*: Don't send me to open the door again. You've seen that it was useless. Experience teaches us that when one hears the doorbell ring it is because there is never anyone there.

L MRS. MARTIN: Never.

M MR. MARTIN: That's not entirely accurate.

N MR. SMITH: In fact it's false. When one hears the doorbell ring it is because there is someone there.

O MRS. SMITH: He won't admit he's wrong.

P MRS. MARTIN: My husband is very obstinate, too.

Q MR. SMITH: There's someone there.

R MR. MARTIN: That's not impossible.

S MRS. SMITH *[to her husband]*: No.

A MR. SMITH: Yes.

B MRS. SMITH: I tell you no. In any case you are not going to disturb me again for nothing. If you wish to know, go and look yourself!

C MR. SMITH: I'll go.

[Mrs. Smith shrugs her shoulders. Mrs. Martin tosses her head.]

D MR. SMITH [opening the door]: Oh! how do you do. [He glances at Mrs. Smith and the Martins, who are all surprise.] It's the Fire Chief!

E FIRE CHIEF [he is of course in uniform and is wearing an enormous shining helmet]: Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. [The Smiths and the Martins are still slightly astonished. Mrs. Smith turns her head away, in a temper, and does not reply to his greeting.] Good evening, Mrs. Smith. You appear to be angry.

F MRS. SMITH: Oh!

G MR. SMITH: You see it's because my wife is a little chagrined at having been proved wrong.

H MR. MARTIN: There's been an argument between Mr. and Mrs. Smith, Mr. Fire Chief.

I MRS. SMITH [to Mr. Martin]: This is no business of yours!

[To Mr. Smith:] I beg you not to involve outsiders in our family arguments.

J MR. SMITH: Oh, my dear, this is not so serious. The Fire Chief is an old friend of the family. His mother courted me, and I knew his father. He asked me to give him my daughter in marriage if ever I had one. And he died waiting.

K MR. MARTIN: That's neither his fault, nor yours.

L FIRE CHIEF: Well, what is it all about?

M MRS. SMITH: My husband was claiming. ...

N MR. SMITH: No, it was you who was claiming.

O MR. MARTIN: Yes, it was she.

P MRS. MARTIN: No, it was he.

Q FIRE CHIEF: Don't get excited. You tell me, Mrs. Smith.

R MRS. SMITH: Well, this is how it was. It is difficult for me to speak openly to you, but a fireman is also a confessor.

A FIRE CHIEF: Well then?

B MRS. SMITH: We were arguing because my husband said that each time the doorbell rings there is always someone there.

C MR. MARTIN: It is plausible.

D MRS. SMITH: And I was saying that each time the doorbell rings there is never anyone there.

E MRS. MARTIN: It might seem strange.

F MRS. SMITH: But it has been proved, not by theoretical demonstrations, but by facts.

G MR. SMITH: That's false, since the Fire Chief is here. He rang the bell, I opened the door, and there he was.

H MRS. MARTIN: When?

I MR. MARTIN: But just now.

J MRS. SMITH: Yes, but it was only when you heard the doorbell ring the fourth time that there was someone there. And the fourth time does not count.

K MRS. MARTIN: Never. It is only the first three times that count.

L MR. SMITH: Mr. Fire Chief, permit me in my turn to ask you several questions.

M FIRE CHIEF: Go right ahead.

N MR. SMITH: When I opened the door and saw you, it was really you who had rung the bell?

O FIRE CHIEF: Yes, it was I.

P MR. MARTIN: You were at the door? And you rang in order to be admitted?

Q FIRE CHIEF: I do not deny it.

R MR. SMITH [*to his wife, triumphantly*]: You see? I was right. When you hear the doorbell ring, that means someone rang it. You certainly cannot say that the Fire Chief is not someone.

S MRS. SMITH: Certainly not. I repeat to you that I was speaking of only the first three times, since the fourth time does not count.

T MRS. MARTIN: And when the doorbell rang the first time, was it you?

U FIRE CHIEF: No, it was not I.

V MRS. MARTIN: You see? The doorbell rang and there was no one there.

- A MR. MARTIN: Perhaps it was someone else?
- B MR. SMITH: Were you standing at the door for a long time?
- C FIRE CHIEF: Three-quarters of an hour.
- D MR. SMITH: And you saw no one?
- E FIRE CHIEF: No one. I am sure of that.
- F MRS. MARTIN: And did you hear the bell when it rang the second time?
- G FIRE CHIEF: Yes, and that wasn't I either. And there was still no one there.
- H MRS. SMITH: Victory! I was right.
- I MR. SMITH [to his wife]: Not so fast. [To the Fire Chief:] And what were you doing at the door?
- J FIRE CHIEF: Nothing. I was just standing there. I was thinking of many things.
- K MR. MARTIN [to the Fire Chief]: But the third time—it was not you who rang?
- L FIRE CHIEF: Yes, it was I.
- M MR. SMITH: But when the door was opened nobody was in sight.
- N FIRE CHIEF: That was because I had hidden myself—as a joke.
- O MRS. SMITH: Don't make jokes, Mr. Fire Chief. This business is too sad.
- P MR. MARTIN: In short, we still do not know whether, when the doorbell rings, there is someone there or not!
- Q MRS. SMITH: Never anyone.
- R MR. SMITH: Always someone.
- S FIRE CHIEF: I am going to reconcile you. You both are partly right. When the doorbell rings, sometimes there is someone, other times there is no one.
- T MR. MARTIN: This seems logical to me.
- U MRS. MARTIN: I think so too.
- V FIRE CHIEF: Life is very simple, really. [To the Smiths:] Go on and kiss each other.
- W MRS. SMITH: We just kissed each other a little while ago.
- X MR. MARTIN: They'll kiss each other tomorrow. They have plenty of time.

- A MRS. SMITH: Mr. Fire Chief, since you have helped us settle this, please make yourself comfortable, take off your helmet and sit down for a moment.
- B FIRE CHIEF: Excuse me, but I can't stay long. I should like to remove my helmet, but I haven't time to sit down. [He sits down, without removing his helmet.] I must admit that I have come to see you for another reason. I am on official business.
- C MRS. SMITH: And what can we do for you, Mr. Fire Chief?
- D FIRE CHIEF: I must beg you to excuse my indiscretion [terribly embarrassed] ...uhm [He points a finger at the Martins] ...you don't mind. ...in front of them...
- E MRS. MARTIN: Say whatever you like.
- F MR. MARTIN: We're old friends. They tell us everything.
- G MR. SMITH: Speak.
- H FIRE CHIEF: Eh, well—is there a fire here?
- I MRS. SMITH: Why do you ask us that?
- J FIRE CHIEF: It's because—pardon me—I have orders to extinguish all the fires in the city.
- K MRS. MARTIN: All?
- L FIRE CHIEF: Yes, all.
- M MRS. SMITH [confused]: I don't know. ...I don't think so. Do you want me to go and look?
- N MR. SMITH [sniffing]: There can't be one here. There's no smell of anything burning.
- O FIRE CHIEF [aggrieved]: None at all? You don't have a little fire in the chimney, something burning in the attic or in the cellar? A little fire just starting, at least?
- P MRS. SMITH: I am sorry to disappoint you but I do not believe there's anything here at the moment. I promise that I will notify you when we do have something.
- Q FIRE CHIEF: Please don't forget, it would be a great help.
- R MRS. SMITH: That's a promise.
- S FIRE CHIEF [to the Martins]: And there's nothing burning at your house either?
- T MRS. MARTIN: No, unfortunately.
- U MR. MARTIN [to the Fire Chief]: Things aren't going ~ well just now.

A MRS. SMITH: Mr. Fire Chief, since you have helped us settle this, please make yourself comfortable, take off your helmet and sit down for a moment.

B FIRE CHIEF: Excuse me, but I can't stay long. I should like to remove my helmet, but I haven't time to sit down. [He sits down, without removing his helmet.] I must admit that I have come to see you for another reason. I am on official business.

C MRS. SMITH: And what can we do for you, Mr. Fire Chief?

D FIRE CHIEF: I must beg you to excuse my indiscretion [terribly embarrassed] ...uhm [He points a finger at the Martins] ...you don't mind. ...in front of them...

E MRS. MARTIN: Say whatever you like.

F MR. MARTIN: We're old friends. They tell us everything.

G MR. SMITH: Speak.

H FIRE CHIEF: Eh, well—is there a fire here?

I MRS. SMITH: Why do you ask us that?

J FIRE CHIEF: It's because—pardon me—I have orders to extinguish all the fires in the city.

K MRS. MARTIN: All?

L FIRE CHIEF: Yes, all.

M MRS. SMITH [confused]: I don't know. ...I don't think so. Do you want me to go and look?

N MR. SMITH [sniffing]: There can't be one here. There's no smell of anything burning.

O FIRE CHIEF [aggrieved]: None at all? You don't have a little fire in the chimney, something burning in the attic or in the cellar? A little fire just starting, at least?

P MRS. SMITH: I am sorry to disappoint you but I do not believe there's anything here at the moment. I promise that I will notify you when we do have something.

Q FIRE CHIEF: Please don't forget, it would be a great help.

R MRS. SMITH: That's a promise.

S FIRE CHIEF [to the Martins]: And there's nothing burning at your house either?

T MRS. MARTIN: No, unfortunately.

U MR. MARTIN [to the Fire Chief]: Things aren't going ~ well just now.

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A FIRE CHIEF: Shall I tell you some stories?

B MRS. SMITH: Oh, by all means, how charming of you. *[She kisses him.]*

C MR. SMITH: And what is even more interesting is the fact that firemen's stories are all true, and they're based on experience.

D FIRE CHIEF: I speak from my own experience. Truth, nothing but the truth. No fiction.

E MR. MARTIN: That's right. Truth is never found in books, only in life.

F MRS. SMITH: Begin!

G MR. MARTIN: Begin!

H MRS. MARTIN: Be quiet, he is beginning.

I FIRE CHIEF: Well, then! *[He coughs again in a voice shaken by emotion:]* "The Dog and the Cow," an experimental fable. Once upon a time another cow asked another dog: "Why have you not swallowed your trunk?" "Pardon me," replied the dog, "it is because I thought that I was an elephant."

J MRS. MARTIN: What is the moral?

K FIRE CHIEF: That's for you to find out.

[Mr. Smith improvises a story entirely from gestures.]

MR. MARTIN: Oh, charming! *[He either kisses or does not kiss Mrs. Smith.]*

MRS. MARTIN: You have a wife, Mr. Smith, of whom all the world is jealous.

MR. SMITH: It's true. My wife is intelligence personified. She's even more intelligent than I. In any case, she is much more beautiful. Everyone says so.

[Enter Mary.]

A MARY: Madam... sir. ...

B MRS. SMITH: What do you want?

C MR. SMITH: What have you come in here for?

D MARY: I hope, madam and sir will excuse me ...and these ladies and gentlemen too. ...I would like. ...I would like ...to tell you a story, myself.

E MRS. MARTIN: What is she saying?

F MR. MARTIN: I believe that our friends' maid is going crazy ...she wants to tell us a story, too.

G FIRE CHIEF: Who does she think she is? [He looks at her.] Oh!

H MRS. SMITH: Why are you butting in?

I MR. SMITH: This is really uncalled for, Mary. ...

J FIRE CHIEF: Oh! But it is she! Incredible!

K MR. SMITH: And you?

L MARY: Incredible! Here!

M MRS. SMITH: What does all this mean?

N MR. SMITH: You know each other?

O FIRE CHIEF: And how!

[Mary throws herself on the neck of the Fire Chief.]

P MARY: I'm so glad to see you again. ...at last!

Q MR. AND MRS. SMITH: Oh!

R MR. SMITH: This is too much, here, in our home, in the suburbs of London.

S MRS. SMITH: It's not proper! ...

T FIRE CHIEF: It was she who extinguished my first fires.

U MARY: I'm your little fire hose. I was going to tell you...

V MR. SMITH: Don't tell us anything...

A MARY: Oh yes!

B MRS. SMITH: Go, my little Mary, go quietly to the kitchen and read your poems before the mirror...

C MR. MARTIN: You know, even though I'm not a maid, I also read poems before the mirror.

D MRS. MARTIN: This morning when you looked at yourself in the mirror you didn't see yourself.

E MR. MARTIN: That's because I wasn't there yet. ..

F MARY: All the same, I could, perhaps, recite a little poem for you.

G MRS. SMITH: My little Mary, you are frightfully obstinate.

H MARY: I'm going to recite a poem, then, is that agreed? It is a poem entitled "The Fire" in honor of the Fire Chief:

The Fire
The polypoids were burning in the wood
A stone caught fire
The castle caught fire
The forest caught fire
The men caught fire
The women caught fire
The birds caught fire
The fish caught fire
The water caught fire
The sky caught fire
The ashes caught fire
The smoke caught fire
The fire caught fire
Everything caught fire !

[She recites the poem while the Smiths are pushing her offstage]

I MRS. MARTIN: That sent chills up my spine....

J MR. MARTIN: And yet there's a certain warmth in those lines...

K FIRE CHIEF: I thought it was marvelous.

L MRS. SMITH: All the same....

M MR. SMITH: You're exaggerating....

A FIRE CHIEF: Just a minute I admit....all this is very subjective....but this is my conception of the world. My world. My dream. My ideal....And now this reminds me that I must leave. Since you don't have the time here, I must tell you that in exactly three-quarters of an hour and sixteen minutes, I'm having a fire at the other end of the city. Consequently, I must hurry. Even though it will be quite unimportant.

B MRS. SMITH: What will it be? A little chimney fire?

C FIRE CHIEF: Oh, not even that. A straw fire and a little heartburn.

D MR. SMITH: Well, we're sorry to see you go.

E MRS. SMITH: You have been very entertaining.

F MRS. MARTIN: Thanks to you, we have passed a truly Cartesian quarter of an hour.

G FIRE CHIEF [*moving towards the door, then stopping*]: Speaking of that—the bald soprano?
[*General silence, embarrassment.*]

H MRS. SMITH: She always wears her hair in the same style.

I FIRE CHIEF: Ah! Then goodbye, ladies and gentlemen.

J MR. MARTIN: Good luck, and a good fire!

K FIRE CHIEF: Let's hope so. For everybody.

[*Fire Chief exits. All accompany him to the door and then return to their seats.*]

32:00 !!

L MRS. MARTIN: I can buy a pocketknife for my brother, but you can't buy Ireland for your grandfather.

M MR. SMITH: One walks on his feet, but one heats with electricity or coal.

N MR. MARTIN: He who sells an ox today, will have an egg tomorrow.

O MRS. SMITH: In real life, one must look out of the window.

P MRS. MARTIN: One can sit down on a chair, when the chair doesn't have any.

Q MR. SMITH: One must always think of everything.

R MR. MARTIN: The ceiling is above, the floor is below.

S MRS. SMITH: When I say yes, it's only a manner of speaking.

T MRS. MARTIN: To each his own.

- A** MR. SMITH: Take a circle, caress it, and it will turn vicious.
- B** MRS. SMITH: A schoolmaster teaches his pupils to read, but the cat suckles her young when they are small.
- C** MR. MARTIN: One doesn't polish spectacles with black wax.
- D** MRS. SMITH: Yes, but with money one can buy anything.
- E** MR. MARTIN: I'd rather kill a rabbit than sing in the garden.
- F** MR. SMITH: Dogs have fleas, dogs have fleas.
- G** MRS. MARTIN: Cactus, coccyx! crocus! cockaded! cockroach!
- H** MRS. SMITH: Incasker, you incask us.
- I** MR. MARTIN: I'd rather lay an egg in a box than go and steal an ox...
- J** MRS. MARTIN [*opening her mouth very wide*]: Ah! oh! ah! oh! Let me gnash my teeth.
- K** MR. SMITH: Crocodile!
- L** MR. MARTIN: Let's go and slap Ulysses.
- M** MR. MARTIN: Robert!
- N** MR. SMITH: Browning!
- O** MRS. MARTIN, MR. SMITH: Rudyard.
- P** MRS. SMITH, MR. MARTIN: Kipling.
- Q** MRS. MARTIN, MR. SMITH: Robert Kipling!
- R** MRS. SMITH, MR. MARTIN: Rudyard Browning..
- S** MRS. MARTIN: Silly gobblegobblers, silly gobblegobblers.
- T** MR. MARTIN: Marietta, spot the pot!
- U** MRS. SMITH: Krishnamurti, Krishnamurti, Krishnamurti!
- V** MR. SMITH: The pope elopes! The pope's got no horoscope. The horoscope's bespoke.
- W** MRS. MARTIN: Bazaar, Balzac, bazooka!
- X** MR. MARTIN: Bizarre, beaux-arts, brassieres!

- A MRS. SMITH: a,e,i,o,u, a,e,i,o,u, a,e,i,o,u, i!
- B MRS. MARTIN: B, c, d, f g, l, m, n, p, r, s, t, v, w, x, z!
- C MR. MARTIN: From sage to stooge, from stage to sergel
- D MRS. SMITH [*imitating a train*]: Choo, choo, choo, choo, choo, choo, choo, choo, choo, choo, choo!
- E MR. SMITH: It's!
- F MRS. MARTIN: Not!
- G MR. MARTIN: That!
- H MRS. SMITH: Way!
- I MR. SMITH: It's!
- J MRS. MARTIN: O!
- K MR. MARTIN: Ver!
- L MRS. SMITH: Here!
- M ALL TOGETHER: It's not that way, it's over here, it's not that way, it's over here, it's not that way, it's over here, it's not that way, it's over here!

[The words cease abruptly. Again, the lights come on. Mr. and Mrs. Martin are seated like the Smiths at the beginning of the play. The play begins again with the Martins who say exactly the same lines as the Smiths in the first scene, while the curtain softly falls.]

