

MINT & HALL p1

[*The boy exits. Pause. There is a rumble of thunder and sounds of gusty rain sweeping the attic roof. Mint's arm snakes out of the curtained alcove to haul into it an old chamber pot decorated with faded roses, and also some crumpled newspaper sheets. Sound of footsteps rapidly ascending the attic stairs are heard. Hall enters. He is a tall, sharp-featured young man in a flashy, tight-fitting plaid suit, obviously subjected to long wear.*]

HALL: Well, where are you, Mint? —Was told you occupied this untenable-looking attic.

MINT [*in a thin voice from the alcove*]:
Scrotum-on-Swansea,
Ever do or die!
May the heavens bless thee
Through eternity!

HALL [*glumly*]: Yes. If my recollection serves me correctly, the composer of that dear old school song was accidentally dropped off the chapel belfry soon after its composition. Now did you or didn't you ask me up here for tea?

MINT: Did, did, oh yes, certainly did, repeatedly—repeatedly, dear Hall . . . Care of your last known address, P.O. Box Sixty-six, was it? [*Mint crawls out of the alcove.*] What a happy reunion this is!

HALL [*dubiously*]: Hmmm. —What're you crawling for, Mint?

MINT: To extend greetings.

HALL: In that horizontal position, half in and half out of your pants?

MINT: Will explain later. Soon as I've fetched my box of old snapshots, mementos of our glorious days at Scrotum-on-Swansea.

HALL: No, no, no, no, no. I am gasping for a good hot cup of tea.

[*A mechanical piano fades in faintly with the old tune, "Tea for Two."*]

MINT: I may require of bit of assistance from you to conduct you to the tea table.

HALL: Seeing you in this condition, I must congratulate myself that I've never suffered an affliction.

MINT: None at all?

HALL: No, none ever.

MINT: Accidents?

HALL: Not since a bee stung me in Hyde Park at the age of eleven. No allergy, no ill effect.

MINT [*gasping*]: What—amazing—luck! Do hope—will continue.

HALL: Confident of it. My theory about afflictions and accidents is that they're self-induced.

MINT: By— [*He swings to another hook.*] —what?

HALL: Tendency. Susceptibility. As for you, Mint, there was never much question among us acquainted with you at Scrotum, really no question.

MINT: About?

HALL: Your inclination toward accident and affliction. In fact, I find it surprising that you've survived even to hang on a hook. No offense intended.

MINT: Oh, none taken— [*He swings to the next hook, and another.*] —none whatsoever, dear Hall. [*He loses his grasp of a hook and falls to the floor.*] Ow.

HALL: Took a bit of spill?

MINT: Would you please hook me back up?

HALL: Now how could I do that?

MINT: Just, just— [*Gasps.*] —lift me, please, I'm—not heavy.

HALL: Not at all sure I wish to take the risk.

MINT: Risk? Risk of?

HALL: Placing myself within range of your itchy fingers, Mint. You know what I mean, that old impulse of yours to take unsolicited liberties with the lower appendage of a schoolmate after lights out in the dorm. Must confess to you that I only accepted that flirtatiously phrased invitation to tea because I found myself in the vicinity of Mme. Le Monde's rooming-house, it was starting to rain and my expensive new bumbershoot was turned inside out by a fearful gust of wind that swept Piccadilly Circus about an hour ago. By the way, may have to borrow yours or Mme. Le Monde's when I brave the elements again after tea. Meanwhile let us remain at a respectful distance, you over there and me here.

MINT: Please be assured, dear Hall, that I, that I, that I—

HALL: Out with it, man, you *what?*

MINT: Entertain no such impulses, I swear by the blood of Our Blessed Saviour.

HALL: Remain unconvinced.

MINT: Also I've just experienced a sexual assault by one of the Madame's innumerable— [*Gasps.*] —children, a male one, hung like a dray horse, kept on the place for— [*Gasps.*] —incestuous relations with the lady.

HALL: All right, all right, I'll run the risk of hooking you back up if you'll quit this unappetizingly sordid chattering blather. [*He lifts Mint from the floor with pretense of terrible effort and holds him under the hook farthest removed from the tea.*] Grab hold before I drop you, you bloody sod! [*The intimidated Mint seizes a hook beside the entrance.*] There now, stay there, lemme get on with my tea.

MINT: Oh, dear, you've hooked me up hopelessly far away from—

HALL: Sorry. Too many hooks to distinguish one from another. Curious situation here, Mint, did you grope me when I picked you off the floor?