

Characters

Brenda (F)	-	The ghost. (This is not revealed until the end of play)
Mrs. Violet Sangston (F)	-	Wife of Harry Sangston.
Lucy (F)	-	A family friend.
Betty (F)	-	A family friend.
May (F)	-	A family friend.
Mrs. Gorman (F)	-	A war widow with her eye on Captain Ransom.
Tony Jackson (M)	-	Known as Jackson. A friend of Reggie's.
Captain Ransom (M)	-	A retired army officer.
Harry Sangston (M)	-	The householder.
Bernard (M)	-	Friend of Reggie.
Reggie (M)	-	Harry and Violet's son.

Scene 1 – Drawing Room

(Enter everyone, apart from Brenda, who enters on the perimeter of the group, enters the main stage in a cluster, laughing, chatting noisily, as if coming out of another room after a good dinner. Brenda goes to stand on the different section of stage. As soon as Brenda begins to speak, the others freeze in a tableau, as if in animated conversation.)

Brenda: **(Addressing audience)** Christmas Eve! I always find myself here on Christmas Eve! I wish I was strong enough to refuse the invitation, but somehow or other this is where I always end up; I'm sure you know how it is. But of all the houses in Surrey, there seems to be no other large house where I could possibly spend the last night before Christmas. Every year my heart sinks; every year I say never again – **(Sighs)** never again. I expect you've done exactly the same? **(Exasperated)** It's a bore I tell you! - Anyway, here I am. I'm getting too old for these sorts of games! That first year we all played 'Hide and Seek'. I was wildly excited by the atmosphere and the company, and when it was my turn I went rushing around the house, not knowing or caring where I was going; upstairs, downstairs. I ended up in the servants' quarters! Look at them all. It's always the same, year after year, the after-dinner games. But I expect I'll join in; I always do. It always upsets me.

(Brenda exits)

Lucy: That was a wonderful meal Mrs. Sangston; I'm so full. If anyone suggests hide and seek, I think I'll go and lie down somewhere!

Captain Ransom: Here here! The pheasant was excellent. And if anyone suggests hide and seek, I think I'll go and lie down as well.

Mrs. Gorman: **(Teasingly)** Saucy Captain Ransome, saucy!

Captain Ransom: **(Embarrassed)** Oh, I meant alone, you know perfectly well I meant alone!

Betty: Hide and seek! Oh, do let's play hide and seek!

Bernard: We could turn the lights out to make it more difficult!

May: We could play moving hide and seek!

Jackson: It would be difficult for me; I haven't been introduced to everyone yet.

Lucy: Well if you will arrive late Jackson, you'll have to memorize all our faces instantly!

Jackson: I think I know pretty well most of you, apart from the girl I waved to when I came out from dinner. **(looks around)**

Mrs. Sangston: Oh, we always have a houseful at Christmas Jackson. I hardly know who everyone is myself sometimes; Reggie brings friends, and friends bring friends. **(Looks at husband)** It's nice; it keeps us young doesn't it Harry? But Jackson has got a point, how will he know who he's looking for, especially in the dark? **(Laughs)** In fact, I really don't know how anyone would know anyone in the dark!

Captain Ransom: You could tickle them

Mrs. Gorman: (Teasing) Oh, Captain Ransom!

Captain Ransom: (Stiffly) What's the matter with tickling?

Reggie: You could feel their faces.

Mrs. Sangston: No, you might poke them in the eye!

Betty: You could ask them!

Lucy: (Giggles) If you could poke them in the eye?

Harry Sangston: I don't think playing hide and seek in the dark is a good idea.

Bernard: It would be fun!

Harry Sangston: Hmm, well, we'll have to leave the lights on in the passage leading to the first-floor back stairs. There's a door in front of them, and it's dangerous if you don't know about the stairs. I've often thought about having the door taken off. In the dark a stranger to the house might think they were just walking into another room....

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Mrs. Sangston: Oh dear, yes, please don't go near it! Something quite dreadful happened here ten years ago.

May: What happened Mrs. Sangston?

Betty: Do tell!

Mrs. Sangston: Oh, it was before we came here thank goodness. The people that lived here were having a party and they and their guests were playing Hide and Seek. One person was looking for somewhere to hide, when they must have heard someone coming. They ran along that passage and wrenched open the door to the stairs, thinking it was a room, as you would, and hurtled straight down the er...oh dear...

Bernard: Were they er..?

Harry Sangston: As a dodo I'm afraid. A bad business.

Mrs. Sangston: Oh, but we don't want to feel sad on Christmas Eve! We didn't know the person in question. Now I want us all to live to be ninety! Let's play a different game.

Reggie: We could play Smee? We could just dim the lights.

May: Smee? I don't know that one Reggie.

Reggie: Smee – means 'it's me!' Smee – the words run together you see.

Betty: I don't know that game either.

Reggie: It's topping fun Betty, better than hide and seek. Everyone takes a slip of paper. They're all blank, except one, which has got 'Smee' written on it. The person who takes that slip is 'Smee', but no one else knows. Everyone has to find Smee, and Smee has to try and elude everyone. So, every time you come across someone, you ask 'Smee? If they're not Smee they'll say no right away, and you have to keep on looking. You can make as much noise hunting Smee as you like! If they are Smee they stay silent and don't answer you, and you go and sit or stand with them, and you have to be quiet, until everyone's all together in a big group all quiet. Last one pays a forfeit! I'll go and make some paper slips. Come and help me Lucy. **(Exits with Lucy.)**

(Brenda enters and stands on perimeter of group)

Jackson: **(To Bernard)** Who is that girl over there? **(Looks over to Brenda)**

Bernard: Which one?

(Brenda exits)

Jackson: Oh, she's moved, the slight dark haired one. She's pretty, and she looks clever, although she doesn't seem very friendly Bernard. Mrs. Sangston introduced me to everyone, but I was late of course, and it was all in a bit of a hurry before er - **(Interrupted by Reggie & Lucy bounding in noisily)**

Reggie: Come and take your slips. When you've checked to see if you're Smee or not, I'll blow the whistle for the off! We'll just turn the lights off for a minute to give everyone a chance to get away!

(Everyone apart from Brenda withdraws a paper slip from its holder and looks at it.)

Reggie: Everyone ready?

(Everyone says yes. Lights dip. Reggie blows a whistle. Everyone, apart from Jackson, scurry offstage intermittently shouting 'Smee?'. When they come across someone. If there's room in the auditorium, wander round looking for Smee. Make as much noise as you like! Otherwise, intermittently cross and re-cross stage asking each other if they're Smee. Jackson is last of the departing group, and is just about to exit the stage, when he spots Brenda entering from opposite side of stage. Brenda enters. Sits on chair at end of the row of 3 chairs on the separate part of stage, or specified separate area. Jackson turns back, and approaches Brenda. Stands.)

Jackson: Smee?

(Brenda makes no reply.)

Jackson: Smee?

(Brenda makes no reply.)

Jackson: **(Delighted)** Ah ha, *you* must be Smee! Talk about beginner's luck! I'll sit here with you; that's what we have to do isn't it? **(Sits next to her.)**

(The shouts of 'Smee' die down a bit, so as not to drown conversation between Jackson and Brenda.)

Jackson: **(Laughs)** They're all going in the wrong direction!

(Brenda looks at him coldly)

Jackson: Oh sorry, forgot, we have to be quiet! Actually, we don't really need to be quiet, do we? There's no-one else around so it's not cheating. And it is a party. Anyway, I don't think we've been introduced. Bit of a whirl these parties. I'm Jackson, Tony Jackson actually, but they called me Jackson at boarding school, and it's kind of stuck. That's where I met Reggie.

(Brenda remains silent)

Jackson: Please tell your name.

Brenda: **(Falteringly)** Brenda.

Jackson: Brenda, that's a nice name. Brenda who?

(Brenda remains silent)

Jackson: Er Brenda who?

Brenda: Ford.

Jackson: How do you do Brenda Ford.

(Jackson offers his hand, and she takes it slowly)

Jackson: My you're as cold as ice! These old houses are draughty holes. Have you come far Brenda Ford?

(Brenda does not reply)

Jackson: **(Trying to make conversation)** Sorry if I seem a bit green! I'm rather at sea with who's who. I didn't arrive until just before dinner. I know Violet and Harry Sangston of course and their son Reggie. It was Reggie who invited me down here. I've been abroad for a while. Mrs. Gorman, I met at dinner, she's a hoot. I haven't met Captain Ransome before; I rather think Mrs. Gorman's got her eye on him! She's a war widow. Bernard, he's apparently a regular. I was introduced to Lucy and Betty before dinner; they seem like good sports. Oh, and May, she's quite shy. That's eleven of us all together isn't it?

(Brenda remains silent)

Jackson: Do you know everyone? Well apart from me?

(Brenda remains silent. Jackson shuffles uncomfortably and looks at her. She looks cold & aloof)

Jackson: Oh well, only 9 more to go!

(Mrs. Gorman enters. Stands. Addresses both)

Mrs. Gorman: Smee?

(Jackson and Brenda remain silent)

Mrs. Gorman: Wonderful! At last! I've traipsed all over the place! Upstairs and downstairs and in my lady's chamber. **(Sits next to Jackson)** It's Tony, Jackson isn't it? Are you Smee? **(Looks at Brenda now)** Or is it you— I'm sorry, I don't know your name my dear?

(Brenda remains silent)

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Mrs. Gorman: Oh, I know I shouldn't be talking, but rules were made to be broken!

Jackson: It's alright Mrs. Gorman, we're cheating too! Let me introduce you to Brenda. Brenda's being very good about keeping to the rules.

Mrs. Gorman: **(Leans over and touches Brenda's arm)** How do you do Smee? My word, your arm's as cold as ice my dear! Perhaps we should all huddle together like Eskimos! That is what Eskimos do isn't it? **(She grabs Jackson's arm and huddles up with her head on his shoulder. Then she removes her shawl or stole and throws it over her and Jackson's head)** Come on Smee, huddle, or you'll catch your death!

(Brenda slips away unnoticed by Jackson and Mrs. Gorman, as they sit huddled under her shawl.)

Jackson: **(From under shawl)** The whispers have died down. There must be a time limit to finding Smee. That means we've won doesn't it? They haven't found Smee!

(Jackson and Mrs. Gorman laugh delightedly)

Mrs. Gorman: Oh what a lark!

(Reggie enters to where Jackson and Mrs. Gorman are seated snuggled together. Looks down at them. Indignant.)

Reggie: What are you two up to? We're supposed to be playing a game!

(Jackson emerges from shawl)

Jackson: We *are* playing a game, we've found Smee! We're the winners! **(He looks at empty chair where Brenda was sitting)** Oh, Smee was here – where's she gone off to now?

(Mrs. Gorman emerges from shawl and looks around.)

Reggie: I don't think so! You see *I* was Smee! You two are the only ones missing of the ten players!

Jackson: Eleven of us Reggie, you can't have counted!

Reggie: There's ten of us in this party, no more, no less old chap. Lucy & I made ten slips. **(Impatient)** Come on! We're all waiting for another game. You two can pay forfeits for being last!

(Jackson and Mrs. Gorman look at each other puzzled. Mrs. Gorman shrugs. Reggie exits. Mrs. Gorman follows Reggie and exits. Brenda enters and stands at edge of area. Jackson is about to follow Mrs. Gorman, when he spots Brenda from corner of his eye. Turns.)

Jackson: You *pretended* to be Smee!

(Brenda shakes head silently.)

Jackson: **(Hurt)** Well you did; and it's not very sporting of you! I know I was cheating a bit by talking, but you were cheating a lot more! Anyway, as you seem to prefer your own company, I'll leave you.

(Jackson exits. Brenda sits on one of the three chairs on separate area of stage. Rest of cast enter, Mrs. Gorman is speaking animatedly. They sit on settee as before; Jackson joins them)

Mrs. Gorman: **(To group)** She was here I tell you! Ask Jackson! She said she was Smee – well actually she didn't say anything – she was silent, and so, obviously, we thought she must be Smee. Perhaps she was a gatecrasher! **(Sympathetically)** Funny though, a girl on her own. Poor thing, she was so cold, cold as ice, and so pale.

Captain Ransom: **(Huffily)** Hmm, from what I've heard, you wouldn't have noticed if Father Christmas was seated beside you!

Mrs. Gorman: **(Teasing)** Why Captain Ransom, I do believe you're jealous!

Captain Ransom: **(embarrassed)** Stuff and nonsense!

Betty: Perhaps she's still here? Shouldn't we go and look for her?

May: She might be an escaped lunatic!

Mrs. Sangston: Oh May, please don't!

Bernard: Well I rather wish I'd met her, she sounds intriguing!

Harry Sangston: She sounds like a lot of things, but does she have a name, this mystery woman?

Jackson: Yes, she does, though she was reluctant to tell me for some reason. It's Miss Ford.

Mrs. Sangston: I feel faint; what name did you say!

Jackson: Ford, Brenda Ford.

Reggie: Please don't upset mother Jackson! If you and Mrs. Gorman were having a cuddle, that's your private affair!

Jackson: We were not having a cuddle! We were keeping warm! Brenda was frozen. Mrs. Gorman and I both touched her arm. It was like marble.

Mrs. Gorman: And Jackson, the dear boy, is far too young for a merry widow like me! **(Smiles at Captain Ransom)**

Jackson: The girl was, well, she was different – almost as if, as if –

Mrs. Sangston: **(Faintly)** As if – as if what?

Jackson: Well, it would sound silly if I said it aloud.

Lucy: **(Pressing)** As if, what Jackson?

Harry Sangston: **(Firm, protective of the ladies)** I don't mind a joke, but enough is enough Jackson. We don't want to upset the ladies. Brenda Ford is the name of the girl who broke her neck plunging down the servants' staircase, ten years ago today!

(Cast all freeze in horror. Stay frozen while Brenda says the last lines)

Brenda: **(Stands)** Christmas Eve; I always find myself here on Christmas Eve. I wish I was strong enough to refuse the invitation, but somehow or other - this is where I always end up.

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