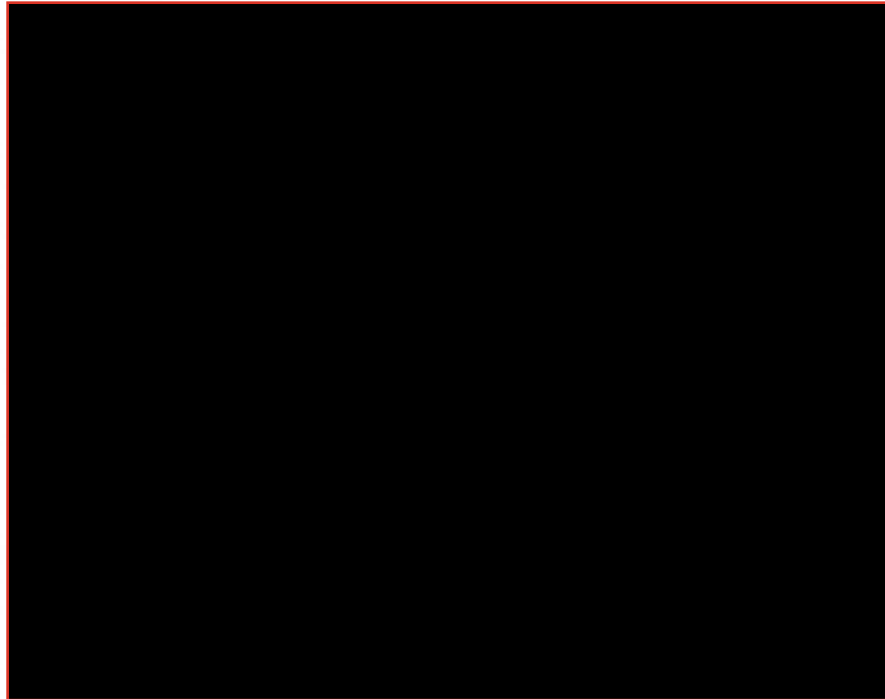




GARRY. Sit down. I want to talk to you about your play.

ROLAND. (*Sits in armchair center, gloomily.*) I expect you hated it.

GARRY. Well, to be candid, I thought it was a little uneven.

ROLAND. I thought you'd say that.

GARRY. I'm glad I'm running so true to form.

ROLAND. I mean it really isn't the sort of thing you would like, is it?

GARRY. In that case why on earth did you send it to me?

ROLAND. I just took a chance. I mean I know you only play rather trashy stuff as a rule, and I thought you just might like to have a shot at something *deeper*.

GARRY. What is there in your play that you consider so deep, Mr. Maule? Apart from the plot which is completely submerged after the first four pages.

ROLAND. Plots aren't important, it's ideas that matter. Look at Chekov.

GARRY. In addition to ideas I think we might concede Chekov a certain flimsy sense of psychology, don't you?

ROLAND. You mean my play isn't psychologically accurate?

GARRY. (*Gently.*) It isn't very good, you know, really it isn't.

ROLAND. I think it's very good indeed.

GARRY. I understand that perfectly, but you must admit that my opinion might be the right one, based on a lifelong experience of the theatre.

ROLAND. (*Contemptuously.*) The commercial theatre.

(*Pause.*)

GARRY. Oh dear, oh dear, oh dear.

ROLAND. I suppose you'll say that Shakespeare wrote for the commercial theatre and that the only point of doing anything with the drama at all is to make money! All those old arguments. What you don't realize is that the theatre of the future is the theatre of ideas.

GARRY. That may be, but at the moment I am occupied with the theatre of the present.

ROLAND. (*Rises. Heatedly.*) And what do you do with it? Every play you appear in is exactly the same, superficial, frivolous and without the slightest intellectual significance. You have a great following and a strong personality, and all you do is prostitute yourself every night of your life. All you do with your talent is to wear dressing-gowns and make witty remarks when you might be really helping people, making them think! Making them feel!

GARRY. There can be no two opinions about it. I am having a most discouraging morning.

ROLAND. (*Sits next to GARRY.*) If you want to live in people's memories, to go down to posterity as an important man, you'd better do something about it quickly. There isn't a moment to be lost.

GARRY. I don't give a hoot about posterity. Why should I worry about what people think of me when I'm dead as a doornail anyway? My worst defect is that I am apt to worry too much about what people think of me when I'm alive. But I'm not going to do that any more. I'm changing my methods and you're my first experiment. (*Rise.*) As a rule, when insufferable young beginners have the impertinence to criticize me, I dismiss the whole thing lightly because I'm embarrassed for them and consider it not quite fair game to puncture their inflated egos too sharply. But this time, my highbrow young friend, you're going to get it in the neck. To begin with your play is not a play at all. It's a meaningless jumble of adolescent, pseudo-intellectual poppycock. It bears no relation to the theatre or to life or to anything. (*Crosses to chair center.*) And you yourself wouldn't be here at all if I hadn't been bloody fool enough to pick up the telephone when my secretary wasn't looking. Now that you are here, however, I would like to tell you this. If you wish to be a playwright you just leave the theatre of tomorrow to take care of itself. Go and get yourself a job as a butler in a repertory company if they'll have you. Learn from the ground up how plays are constructed and what is actable and what isn't. Then sit down and write at least twenty plays one after the other, and if you can manage to get the twenty-first produced for a Sunday night performance you'll be god-damned lucky! (*Sits on pouffe.*)

ROLAND. (*Rises. Hypnotized.*) I'd no idea you were like this. You're wonderful!

GARRY. (*Flinging up his hands.*) My God!

ROLAND. (*Crossing to him.*) I'm awfully sorry if you think I was impertinent, but I'm awfully glad too because if I hadn't been you wouldn't have got angry, and if you hadn't got angry I shouldn't have known what you were really like.

GARRY. You don't in the least know what I'm really like.

ROLAND. Oh yes, I do – now.