

## **The Second Threshold** **Miranda and Jock**

Miranda: Hello Jock.

Jock: Hello Mandy.

Miranda: Have you seen father?

Jock: Yes – he's down there in the garden.

Miranda: Does he know you're here.

Jock: Don't think so. I just looked down and saw him puttering with flowers. That's a new one. He used to call everything petunias.

Miranda: You'll find some other changes in him if you look closely.

Jock: This one I like. He's got a harmless occupation at last.

Miranda: Sit down, Jock.

Jock: You look to me, Mandy, like a girl with a very long story on the tip of her tongue. Kindly make it as short as possible. I've got to get back to Southampton this afternoon.

Miranda: You won't want to go back when you know how it is here.

Jock: We'll argue that one later. Shoot.

Miranda: You'd better snap out of that beach club lightheadedness because we've run into something desperately serious, you and I.

Jock: He looks all right.

Miranda: However he looks, I don't think he has much longer to live.

Jock: What's he got?

Miranda: There isn't a name for it. You might say – spiritual malaise in its most malignant form.

Jock: Spiritual malaise my foot. You'd say something like that only if you'd been to college.

Miranda: There's every sign that he intends to kill himself.

Jock: I don't believe it. I simply don't believe it. Not him.

Miranda: That's just what I said to Toby, last night.

Jock: Who's Toby?

Miranda: Dr. Well's son. He's also a doctor.

Jock: I remember him. He's not much older than us. He can't know anything.

Miranda: He doesn't have to, in this case. He broke it to me as gently as he could – too gently. Since then, I've realized it's much worse than he said – much more immediate.

Jock: What? Did you find a gun in the desk drawer with one silver bullet?

Miranda: For God's sake, Jock? You've got to see this plain—

Jock: And for God's sake, Mandy, why didn't you give me this baloney on the telephone last night and – save me the trouble of making a long trip?

Miranda: Just take a look at this baloney!

Jock: What's this?

Miranda: Some legal papers. They were sent up from the bank this morning for you and me to sign. Father's sign them already.

Jock: What does it all mean?

Miranda: Father has settled practically all his money on the two of us. It's all in cash. It's sitting there, in the bank, waiting for us to go and pick it up. I'm not taking mine. Of course, you can do as you please with yours – spend it, give it away, hide it under a brick—

Jock: This probably means nothing but some kind of tax doge. In which case, I'll be glad to cooperate to help the old man out.

Miranda: I was sure you'd be big about it.

Jock: Is this all you have to go on?

Miranda: There's too much more, and it all adds up. Jock – you love him, don't you?

Jock: No – I don't think I do. Any why should I? Do you love somebody who's never given you anything but contempt?

Miranda: Plus a big allowance.

Jock: Too big, if you ask me. It was conscience money. He had a God complex – thought – he could create me in his image. Well, it didn't work. I failed him, because I happened to have a heart of my own and it just wasn't in the legal profession. Now, I guess he's begun to suspect that maybe he isn't God, after all, and he's trying to square accounts in the only way he knows how to.

Miranda: I'd call you an ungrateful louse, Jock – if I didn't happen to know you aren't a louse. You're just terribly wrong. Last night he talked about you. He said he was the failure, not you –

Jock: He said that, did he!

Miranda: And there was none of that God complex creating you in his image. He said you'd done the wise thing in choosing to live your own life.

Jock: Oh, hell, Sis – I hate it – I hate not being fond of him the way I used to be, when we were kids. He never had time to pay much attention to us, and Mother was always all over us, but I never had any respect for her and I had real respect for him. When he did have time for us, he could do nice little human things. Like letting me hold the fish-pole if there was only one. If he's only done one little human thing since I grew up and disappointed him! Why – last winter I had a terrific part with the Top Hat Players. I was excited about it because it was my first appearance in New York. I asked Father if he'd like to see it. He said he was sorry, he couldn't get off any evening that week, when I know he wasn't doing anything. And he didn't even bother to send me a telegram saying 'kindest regard' and 'best wishes.'

Miranda: He's lost the knack for doing human things, including living.

Jock: Have you figured out how he proposes to knock himself off?

Miranda: It will be an "accident."

Jock: Such as?

Miranda: Crashing an airplane on a bad landing or swimming our beyond his capacity to swim back...

Jock: Oh – those accidents. You can't make a case out of those. Anyway, some people are what is called "accident prone."

Miranda: What do you know about that?

Jock: Well, it's a well-known scientific fact. I read it somewhere. Some people are just more likely to have accidents.

Miranda: Yes – jockeys or trapeze artists. Father never was one of those. He never was a gambler.

Jock: He never was afraid to take risks. He wouldn't have gotten where he did—

Miranda: But they were always, remarkably well-calculated ones. If he's "accident prone" now, it means only one thing: he's deliberately careless and reckless. He's gambling with his own life because it's a currency that has lost all value for him. "If the salt has lost its savor –"

Jock: If he wanted to commit suicide, why wouldn't he do it simply? Why go to such elaborate lengths as chartering a plane to crash it?

Miranda: That's out of consideration for us – make it look like an accident – nothing messy. He would never do anything that was messy.

Jock: No – always legally correct.

Miranda: Jock, somebody's got to get through to him – stimulate him—revive him – make him feel he's needed.

Jock: Who can do that?

Miranda: All of us. His family. Last night—after I talked to you—I called up Mother, in Santa Barbara.

Jock: I'll bet she was a fat lot of help!

Miranda: She understood, all right. She said she always knew that if Josiah Bolton ever lost interest in his chosen mission of reforming the world—he'd be dead. She promised to call him up today.

Jock: When she wakes up – which will be about 4:00pm our time. Has any real doctor been called in on this?

Miranda: He wouldn't see one. It's got to be someone who loves – whom he loves.

Jock: Is there anyone left?

Miranda: Certainly no one, unless it's you and me.

Jock: That narrows it down to you. Listen Mandy. Why don't you face it?

Miranda: What am I trying to do but face it? And make you face it, too?

Jock: You know I'm no good in this. I'm only the wayward son, the after-thought in his love affair with mother.

Miranda: Jock! What a horrible thing to say!

Jock: All right – alright!! This is horrible! But it's true! That's your problem, exclusively. I don't mean a thing to him – except as a reminder of his own failure – and you know that all he cares about in this world is you. It's like an obsession.

Miranda: That's wrong – it's fantastically wrong!!

Jock: Then why does he talk o so about your getting married? Did it ever occur to you that maybe – ?

Miranda: Will you please shut up?

Jock: Gladly.