

THE SEVEN CREAM JUGS, OR, IT RUNS IN THE FAMILY

A one act play based on a story by Saki

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By Frank J. Morlock
C 1981

Etext by Dagny

CHARACTERS:

A servant
Peter Pigeoncote
Lady Eleanor Pigeoncote
Wilfred Pigeoncote, Peter's cousin

SCENE: A contemporary drawing room.

A large, ornate room filled with cardboard boxes in gift wrapping. Most of the boxes, large and small, have been opened, and the gifts give the room a joyous air.

A servant enters laden with more gifts and dumps them on a couch, shrugs and leaves.

(Enter Peter Pigeoncote, middle-aged, distinguished looking, very solid and formal. He stumbles over some boxes and utters an oath.)

Peter

Break your neck with all these damn fool wedding gifts.

(Peter kicks a box furiously. Lady Eleanor has entered behind him, and, the perfect lady, she corrects her husband's crudity.)

Eleanor

Peter, I wish you wouldn't swear like that. The guests will hear you.

Peter

Damn the guests!

Eleanor (warningly)

Peter!

Peter

Oh, very well. It's a fine thing if a man can't express himself in his own house after nearly breaking his ankle, and on his daughter's wedding day. Freedom, I say freedom, no longer exists in these benighted isles.

Eleanor

Oh, Peter. She's so beautiful.

Peter (complacently)

Takes after me, of course.

Eleanor

Wretch!

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Peter

She certainly has cleaned up. (surveying the gifts) Look at all this silver. (he takes up a gorgeous silver pot) Must be worth hundreds.

Eleanor

She's got six others, just like it.

Peter

Very nice. I suppose we can't sell them, can we?

Eleanor

Peter, how can you?

Peter

Not all of them. She could keep one. Might help pay for this bash.

Eleanor

Peter, you're a terrible man.

Peter

Precisely the reason I married you, my dear. I was the ideal husband.

Eleanor

Stop being a tease.

Peter

After all, (musingly) I am a Pigeoncote, and it is well known that we Pigeoncotes are a disreputable lot. . . . In fact, disreputability is our principal claim to fame. (wryly) We are a nice lot.

Eleanor

Well, I admit that having a kleptomaniac as head of the family is a rather dubious distinction.

Peter

Yes, it was rather inconsiderate of Uncle Arthur to die and leave his estate to Wilfred the Snatcher.

Eleanor

I can't understand how Uncle Arthur could do such a thing. After all, there were several other members of the family more nearly related to Uncle Arthur than the Snatcher.

Peter

Like all Pigeoncotes, Uncle Arthur had a perverse sense of humor. He always liked to epater le bourgeois. He's probably up there (pointing heavenwards) thumbing his nose at us all.

Eleanor

I still think it must have been a mistake. He had three nephews named Wilfred. He was just confused.

Peter

It's a possibility. Wilfred has been a baptismal weakness in the family since the time of Wilfred the Conqueror.

Eleanor

That shows the danger of adhering to ancient traditions.

Peter

Please don't be so defensive because your family can only trace its lineage to the reign of Richard Lionheart.

Eleanor

Don't be ridiculous, my dear. I just think it's awful for you to be passed over in favor of a kleptomaniac.

Peter

Well, it's a minor failing. The Snatcher is perfectly undistinguished in every other respect. Besides, I'm told he lacks the taste of a connoisseur. Anything portable, Wilfred will take. In every other respect Wilfred is quite harmless and respectable. Doesn't even disgrace himself with women like Uncle Arthur.

Eleanor

I suppose he won't show up for the wedding, now that he's the heir?

Peter

We can hardly expect him to, in view of the frigid way we treated him when he was a prospective nobody. I don't think we've set eyes on him since he was twelve.

Eleanor

Well, after all, there was a perfectly good reason. A person with his failing is not the sort one wants around the

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house.

Peter

Absolutely Still, I can appreciate that he might not sympathize with our point of view.

Eleanor

But, if he came, he might give Diana the perfect gift.

Peter

I should prefer not having to worry if it were paid for. Besides, we would have to worry that he might steal one we've received already.

Eleanor

Peter, please don't use such a crude word to describe Wilfred's failing.

Peter

I'm afraid I was always taught to call a spade a spade. As I recall, we always had to search his luggage whenever he was a guest, to make sure he hadn't taken anything "by mistake". It would be rather more embarrassing now that he's full grown and the head of the family.

Eleanor

That is still a drawback, but one would like to make the acquaintance of the head of the family, and have him bestow his blessing on Diana. Besides, having money will make all the difference.

Peter

Poverty is no crime, but money excuses it, eh?

Eleanor

Certainly not. Peter, don't be obtuse. You know perfectly well what I mean. If he has money, all suspicion of a sordid motive disappears.

Peter

Lots of things disappear when Wilfred is around. Not just motives.

Eleanor

Don't be so cynical. It would be nice, you know . . . for Diana's wedding.

Peter

You know it killed his mother. Aunt Margaret was a fine old lady. Died of chagrin when he was fifteen. He was caught red-handed trying to steal a ring when he was presented at court.

(The servant enters with a telegram on a salver. She presents it to Peter, who takes it and reads it. The servant exits.)

Peter

This is a surprise. Here's a telegram from Wilfred saying he's passing through and would like to stop by and pay his respects. Must be the Snatcher.

Eleanor

How do you know it's the Snatcher? It might be the Gunner or the Attaché?

Peter

Not very likely. Wilfred the Gunner is with his regiment, east of Suez somewhere, and Wilfred the Attaché is in Burma or Thailand. No, the Snatcher is the only Wilfred Pigeoncote left in England.

Eleanor

Good gracious! This is rather an awkward time to have someone with his failing in the house. (looking at all the presents) I'm sure I'll be a nervous wreck.

Peter

I thought you were just saying you wanted him to come.

Eleanor

But, that was before I knew for sure he was coming, and seriously considered the complications.

Peter

It will be an interesting test of your theories.

Eleanor (aghast)

But, I don't even know for sure what we've got yet.

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Peter

Lock them up.

Eleanor

But, we can't. He's sure to want to see them.

Peter

Tell him "no" he can't see them.

Eleanor

We can't do that.

Peter

Why not? We used to lock things up, when he came before?

Eleanor

But, he's the head of the family now.

Peter

I fail to see how that alters things. He's still a thief.

Eleanor (sharply)

Peter! I will not have you use such language about Wilfred.

Peter (annoyed)

Very well. Kleptomaniac.

Eleanor (evenly)

No, Peter. He's afflicted. And one shouldn't mention an affliction, or call attention to it. We must pretend we are not aware of his affliction. That's good manners.

Peter (mumbling)

We must pretend we are not aware of his affliction. (shouting) So, we let him steal what he wants—is that it?

Eleanor (hesitating)

Nnnno. But, these practiced kleptomaniacs . . . I mean (unable to think of a euphemism) Damn. Anyway, they're so clever.

Peter

We must keep a sharp lookout, that's all.

Eleanor

I'll die if he suspects we are watching him.

Peter

I'll die before I let him steal something. For God's sake, Eleanor. Just because he's got money now, you're afraid to offend him.

Eleanor

I am not afraid to offend him. I'd just rather not, that's all. But, it's going to be difficult. I suppose we could hide some of the more expensive presents.

Peter

Kleptomaniacs have a genius for ferreting out the ones that are hidden. They know that something hidden is something highly prized.

Eleanor

This is such a dilemma.

(Enter servant with a salver which she presents to Peter. He removes a card, and the servant exits. Peter stares at the card.)

Peter

Good God, he's here already. This is his card.

(Lady Eleanor snatches one of the presents and rushes about the room, looking for a hiding place. First, she selects one place, then abandons it in favor of another. Nothing proves satisfactory. Peter watches her in consternation. He wants to say something, hesitates, and finally speaks in exasperation.)

Peter

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Eleanor, stop behaving like an ass. We simply must see it through.

(Enter Wilfred. He is a tall, distinguished looking young man, elegantly dressed. He also has elegant manners. He is quite at his ease.)

Wilfred

Evening, Cousin Peter, Lady Eleanor. I'll bet I arrived almost as soon as my telegram.

Peter

Er, yes, Wilfred. We just got it.

Wilfred

That's the way I planned it. I didn't want you to make any special preparations.

(Lady Eleanor, trying to conceal the presents she still has in her hands from his sight, struggles to keep facing him throughout the remainder of the scene.)

Eleanor

You—er—succeeded in preventing us from making any special preparations.

Peter (aside)

Clever devil. (aloud) Devilish clever of you, Wilfred.

Wilfred (looking at the presents, which he begins to touch)

I say. What a stash of loot. Cousin Diana is really doing well for herself.

(During the remainder of the scene Wilfred resembles nothing so much as a frolicking chipmunk into an acre of nuts. He goes from one present to another with lightning speed and short attention span. Every time he touches one, Peter lurches toward him to grab it away from him, but is checked by an imperious sign from Lady Eleanor. Peter relaxes a little, but not much, under a quelling stare from his wife.)

Wilfred (picking one up)

Let me see, what is this? (picking up another) This is cute, too. (he moves to another present) I've never seen one of these before. (moving on) Very nice. (moving on) Diana must be so pleased. (pause) You mustn't think I'm rude. I just can't resist looking at someone else's presents.

(Peter and Lady Eleanor exchange a glance. Peter again renews his vigilance, this time with less resistance from Lady Eleanor.)

Wilfred

I am so glad I could come. I didn't think I'd be able to get away.

Eleanor

Yes, we're surprised to you could make it.

Wilfred

I never miss an opportunity like this, if I can help it. Not for anything. (looking around)

Peter

I dare say.

Wilfred (fondling a present)

Lucky girl, Diana. Wouldn't mind having one of these myself.

Peter

I expect not.

Wilfred

But, I don't propose to get married to do it.

Peter

I'll say.

Wilfred

So needless.

Peter

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Yes.

Wilfred

Been years since I've seen you. Just a boy then. But, I've grown up a lot. Bet you didn't recognize me.

Peter

Didn't really.

Eleanor

No, you don't look much the same. You've improved, though. Hasn't Wilfred improved, Peter?

Peter

Oh, yes. Much more clever than he used to be.

Wilfred (to Eleanor)

Give us a hug, for old times sake, Lady Eleanor.

(Lady Eleanor desperately tries to hide the present she is holding.)

Wilfred

Say, what's that your holding?

Eleanor

Oh, just a silly present.

Wilfred

Here, let me see that.

Eleanor

Oh, no. You wouldn't be interested. It's just a silver dish.

Wilfred

I'm an expert on silver. I have quite a collection, you know.

Eleanor (trying to say something, but choking)

Hgghhh.

Wilfred (patting her on the back)

Here, here, old girl. Let me take that. (taking the dish) Peter, better get Cousin Eleanor a glass of water.

(Peter exits backward, facing Wilfred. Wilfred does not notice, so absorbed is he in the present.)

Wilfred (examining the present)

Very elegant, Cousin. The workmanship is of the very highest quality. This is a real collector's item.

(Peter returns with the water.)

Peter (to Eleanor)

Didn't take my eyes off him.

Wilfred

What say, Peter?

Peter

I say I can't keep my eyes off this gift.

Wilfred

Can't blame you. (still holding the gift) Do you have any place to lock this stuff up?

Eleanor (confused)

Er, no. We'll just lock the doors to the drawing room.

Wilfred (expertly)

Not very safe. A thief could pick that lock in no time. Take that from me. I've got a little experience in this sort of thing. Why, I'd have no trouble with it myself.

(Lady Eleanor and Peter exchange a pregnant look.)

Peter

You seem to have developed quite a bit of expertise.

Wilfred

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You ought to hire a guard. Have you got one already, perhaps?

Peter

No, until you came, the thought never crossed my mind.

Wilfred

A pity. It would be a shame if you woke up in the morning, and found all this stuff gone.

Peter

Yes, it would. I shan't let that happen. I shall sleep on the couch myself. (with significant emphasis) With my gun.

Wilfred

You keep weapons about the house? That's good to know.

Peter

Yes, they're useful; for shooting snipe and (significantly) sneaks.

Wilfred

That's a capital idea. I'd be glad to do it for you, if you like.

Peter (aside)

I'll bet you would. (aloud) I couldn't let you do that. You're a guest.

Wilfred

But, you must be awfully tired. I'd be glad to help you out any way I can.

Eleanor

I know you would, but Peter is quite inflexible in observing the rules of hospitality. Aren't you, Peter?

Peter

I'm inexorable.

Wilfred

Just as you think best. Only trying to help out.

Eleanor

It's very kind of you. Let me show you the other gifts.

(Peter makes signs for her not to do it, but Lady Eleanor ignores him. Eleanor speaks to Peter as Wilfred takes a present to the light to examine it.)

Eleanor

Our only hope of stopping him, is to make him think we suspect nothing.

Peter

Bravo! Bright girl.

Eleanor (to Wilfred)

Nice, useful gifts. A few duplicates, of course.

Peter

Seven cream jugs.

Wilfred

You'd never miss one, would you?

Eleanor

Oh, we'd know immediately. People do have such limited imaginations, don't they?

Wilfred

It's a shame to give a duplicate. (musing) Makes a person look foolish.

(Although they are trying to be nonchalant, Peter and Lady Eleanor grab the gifts back from Wilfred after he touches them.)

Wilfred

Of course, you could just dispose of some of them, and say they were stolen.

Peter (nervously)

I suppose we could do that. I had thought of selling them. All, but one set.

Eleanor (anxiously)

Did you give me back the dish? This is its place, here.

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Wilfred

Sorry, I put it down by the tea service. (handling another object)

Eleanor

Could I have that, again? I have to label who it comes from, before I quite forget. (clutching it impulsively)

Wilfred (giving it back)

Oh, certainly. Well, I'd better go see Diana, and then get to bed. (looking at his watch) It's been a long day. See you in the morning.

(Wilfred goes out gaily. The minute the door closes behind him, Lady Eleanor and Peter pounce on the gifts, trying to see if anything is missing.)

Eleanor

He's taken something, I just know it.

Peter

I fancy by his manner, there was something up. "Better go see Diana," indeed. The scoundrel. Do you miss anything?

Eleanor

How can I tell? I don't even know what we've got.

Peter

Count them.

Eleanor

That's a good idea. (begins counting) Twenty. Twenty-six. Thirty. Thirty-four. I can only make it thirty-four. I think there were thirty-five. Am I right?

Peter

I don't know. I didn't count them in the first place.

Eleanor

Neither did I.

Peter

Well, what's the use of counting then?

Eleanor

Well, it was your idea.

Peter

Damn!

Eleanor

Whatever shall we do?

Peter

We could call the police.

Eleanor

That's out of the question. Besides, we can't even say what's missing, because we don't know.

Peter

Yes, because you didn't count them as they came in.

Eleanor

I suppose you couldn't have counted them?

Peter

I was too busy greeting the guests.

Eleanor

Sampling the Port.

Peter

Just like a woman, to blame her husband for her own mistake.

Eleanor

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I shall scream.

(They walk up and down, and ignore each other.)

Peter

The mean pig hasn't even brought us a present. I'm hanged if he shall carry one off.

Eleanor

I have it.

Peter

You remembered how many gifts we received?

Eleanor

No.

Peter

Then, what?

Eleanor

He's going to . . . he's sure to take a bath.

Peter

What do you suggest? Hiding his clothes?

Eleanor

Don't be so dull. He's bound to leave his keys somewhere. You'll go through his luggage while he's bathing.

Peter

But, that's uncivilized.

Eleanor

It's the only thing to do. It's the only way to avoid a scandal.

Peter

I won't do it.

Eleanor

You must.

Peter

Would you have me rifle the luggage of a guest? Besides, it's against the law.

Eleanor (heroically)

I'll stand look-out!

Peter

I'll do it.

(They go out, talking about details as the lights dim. Pause. When the lights go back up, Peter and Lady Eleanor reenter furtively.)

Peter

The cunning brute. He took a cream jug, because there were so many. He thought it wouldn't be missed.

Eleanor

Put it back with the others.

(Peter places the jug with the other jugs. Enter Wilfred. Peter and Lady Eleanor jump like frightened cats. Wilfred has an air of outrage about him.)

Wilfred

Oh, here you are, Peter. I've been looking all over for you. Finally, it occurred to me, you said you would be standing guard here.

Peter (uneasily)

Looking for me, were you?

Eleanor

Whatever for, at this time of night?

Peter

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I thought you must be asleep by now.

Wilfred

It's a good thing you were standing watch here. Something most unpleasant has happened.

Eleanor (with exquisitely feigned concern)

What is it?

Wilfred

There's a thief in the house. Good thing I warned you to stand guard over the gifts.

Peter

A thief in this house, ha, ha. Impossible.

Wilfred

I'm sure of it. Something's been taken from my portmanteau.

Eleanor (astonished)

Really?

Peter (to Eleanor, low)

What gall.

Wilfred

What say, Peter?

Peter

I said, I hope you didn't leave your luggage in the hall?

Wilfred

By no means. It was in my room. Must have happened while I was in the bath.

Peter

This is really dreadful.

Wilfred

Perhaps, we'd better call the police.

Eleanor (scared)

Oh, no.

Peter (to Eleanor)

Nerves of steel. He lies like a politician. What effrontery. Call the police against the owners of the property you've stolen.

Wilfred

I realize calling the police is unpleasant, especially at a festive occasion like this.

Eleanor (significantly)

Yes. All the guests would have to be investigated. I've sure Scotland Yard does quite thorough background checks.

Wilfred (unperturbed by this warning)

Very unpleasant for you, and particularly Diana. But, it's the right thing to do.

Peter

Perhaps, there's a kleptomaniac in the house?

Eleanor

Yes, everyone's background would be investigated, even the complainant's.

Wilfred

It is rather a nasty business. But, I paid over two hundred pounds for it in Cairo.

Peter

Paid that much. Whatever is it, anyway?

Wilfred

A silver cream jug, very like the seven others you have. I bought it for Diana as a present from myself and my mother.

Eleanor

A silver cream jug?

Peter

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What a coincidence.

Wilfred

Exactly. It's slightly different, Arabic markings. But, after seeing all those duplicates, I'd have felt like a fool giving it to you, so I decided to exchange it in the morning.

Peter (dryly)

Exceedingly kind of you.

Wilfred

Now, it's gone. (pause) Mother will be most upset.

Eleanor

Did you say your mother?

Wilfred

Yes, of course.

Peter

I thought your mother had been dead for some time?

Wilfred

Oh, no. Lady Constance is quite well, thank you. No, no. It's Lady Margaret who is dead. You know, the Snatcher's mother.

Eleanor and Peter The Snatcher!

Wilfred

I say, he's not here is he? That would explain a lot.

Peter

Oh, no. We'd never invite him. And, he would never come.

Wilfred

I should hope not. Even all that money he's inherited shouldn't buy him entrance in a respectable home like this. Still, if he were here, that would explain everything.

Peter (weakly)

So it would. (to Eleanor) It's Wilfred the Attaché. I remember him now.

Eleanor

It would be much better to have the Snatcher here, than to think there are thieves in the house.

Wilfred

That's a way of looking at it. I haven't seen the Snatcher in many years, poor devil. It must be very embarrassing to be a kleptomaniac.

Peter

Embarrassing for his hosts, too.

Eleanor

One doesn't quite know what to do in such situations.

Wilfred

But, think of the fear of being caught. I mean, for a person of good family, who is otherwise respectable.

Peter (morosely)

Agonizing . . . absolutely agonizing.

Eleanor (nervously)

Just terrible.

Wilfred

Dr. Freud says they get sexual gratification from it. Makes them randy.

Peter (who is having trouble standing in one place)

Seems like something one could do without.

Wilfred

We've really got to do something about the present incident. No use standing around talking. Whoever the wretch is, he must be brought to justice.

Peter (devastated)

Wretch is not quite the word I would use.

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Wilfred

Well, what else can you call him, and remain without the limits of decorum? Swine, perhaps.

Eleanor

Perhaps, someone who simply made a mistake.

Wilfred

A mistake! Don't be so charitable Lady Eleanor. A mistake like that will put him in gaol for ten years.

Peter (aghast)

Ten years!

Wilfred

That's the most you can expect these days from the bleeding hearts on the bench. Something should be done about the penal system in this country. Puts criminals right back on the street.

Eleanor

But, what if it were someone we knew?

Wilfred

What of it? He's a swine, that's all. I tell you, I mean to prosecute.

Peter and Eleanor Prosecute!

Wilfred

Well, certainly. We cannot leave people like that running around. Menace to society, and all that.

(During this scene Peter and Lady Eleanor have tried to put themselves between Wilfred and the cream jugs.)

Eleanor

But, perhaps, if the jug were returned, surely you would . . . ?

Wilfred

Nonsense. I'm a man of principle. It's not the cost of the jug that's important. I waste as much in a week gambling. It's the idea of its being stolen.

Peter (with desperation)

Before we go too far, we should establish that you haven't lost or misplaced it.

Wilfred

Lost it? I should think not. I haven't even taken it from my luggage. It was when I was looking for my pajamas after taking my bath that I discovered it was missing.

Eleanor

Perhaps, in all the excitement . . . ?

Wilfred

Dear lady Eleanor, I know how you like to make excuses to avoid unpleasantness. But the fact will not go away, that there's a thief in the house.

Eleanor

Perhaps, if we looked around.

Wilfred

Where would one look?

Eleanor (losing her head completely)

Here, perhaps.

Wilfred

Why here? A thief would hide it here.

Eleanor

You never know. Hiding something in plain sight is supposed to be ever so clever. (counting the jugs) Why, there are eight jugs here. I only remember seven. (wildly) You must have brought it here yourself before you went to your bath.

(Wilfred stares open-mouthed at Lady Eleanor.)

Peter (with desperate heartiness)

One's mind often plays one little tricks like that. Why, only the other day I went to town to pay a bill, only to find

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I had paid it the day before. Clean forgot.

Wilfred (grimly)

My memory is better than that, Cousin Peter. (looking at the jugs and holding one up) But, this is certainly the jug I bought for you.

(Wilfred has evidently concluded in his own mind that he is in the presence of the thief or thieves, but hasn't quite made up his mind what to do. Lady Eleanor perceives his state of mind and prepares to take resolute action to avert a disaster. She collapses in a semi-faint.)

Eleanor

Peter, get my smelling salts, dear. I think they're in my dressing room.

Peter (rushing out with ill-concealed gratification at so happy a delivery)

At once, my dear! At once. (aside) Never so glad to get out of a room in my life.

Eleanor (rising as soon as Peter leaves)

Thank God, he's gone. Now, I can explain.

Wilfred

Are you all right, Lady Eleanor? Good. As for explaining, I'm sure I've never seen anything less in need of explanation in my life. It's cruelly obvious what has happened. I have an unpleasant duty to do, that's all.

Eleanor

Surly a diplomat like you will know how to treat this as if it hadn't happened? Peter's little weakness; it runs in the family.

Wilfred (shocked)

Good Lord! Do you mean to say he's a kleptomaniac like Cousin Snatcher?

Eleanor (mildly)

Not exactly like the Snatcher. He would never touch anything he found lying about. But he can't resist raiding things that are locked up.

Wilfred

You must have a terrible time, Lady Eleanor. You have all my sympathy.

Eleanor (the martyred wife)

Thank you for your support, Wilfred. One needs someone who understands.

Wilfred

Brave little woman.

Eleanor (tragically)

He must have pounced on your luggage the moment you went to your bath. (with tears in her eyes) Of course, he had no motive in taking your cream jug. We have seven already. Not that we don't value your gift. Shhh! He's coming.

Wilfred (heroically)

I quite understand. Count on me.

Peter

Here are your salts, darling. (holding them out to her)

Eleanor

Bring it here. (whispering to him) It's all right. I've explained everything to him. Don't say any more about it.

Peter (jubilant and proud)

Heroic woman. I don't know how you did it. I couldn't.

Eleanor (low to Peter)

Be glad you have a wife, like me. Finesse. (aloud) Help me up. I need to rest. Please excuse us.

Wilfred

Certainly, Lady Eleanor. (to himself) Poor martyr.

(Lady Eleanor goes out, supported by Peter. Then Wilfred goes out. The lights dim. When the lights go up again, it is the next morning. Sun shines through the windows. Wilfred enters, with his luggage, ready to leave.)

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Wilfred

Well, I must say, it's been a strange night. Who would have thought that Cousin Peter shared the Snatcher's proclivities? (he looks at the gifts) At least I've warned the other guests.

(The servant enters, laughing.)

Servant (tittering)

I've never seen anything like it. All the guests are carrying their luggage to the bathroom with them. Sometimes two or three pieces.

Wilfred

It certainly is unusual. But, perhaps, it's a necessary precaution (low) in this house.

(The servant leaves.)

Wilfred (still looking at the gifts)

A shame that such a weakness should run in so respectable a family. (examining the silver dish) This will go perfectly with the tea service I obtained from the Thai embassy. (with a practiced sweep of his hand, the dish vanishes into his suitcase) Well, I'd better be going before Peter starts rummaging through my things again.

(Wilfred leaves. The curtain starts to fall, hesitates, then rises again. Lady Eleanor and Peter enter.)

Peter

Well, I, for one, am glad that is over.

Eleanor

It was most trying. It's a good thing I have a certain social sense. It would have killed most women, making a mistake like that.

Peter

In the unwritten annals of domestic heroism, you have certainly earned a prominent place.

Eleanor

So silly to think that the Attaché was the Snatcher.

(Enter a servant with a salver. The servant presents it to Peter, who takes a card.)

Peter

Ridiculous of us to get so upset, and make such an error.

Eleanor

The Snatcher would never show up.

(Peter looks at the card and, without saying a word, weakly hands it to his wife.)

Eleanor

Oh, no. It can't be.

Peter (groaning)

It is. The Snatcher. He's come.

(Lady Eleanor collapses. Peter is too weak to go for the smelling salts himself, and the servant runs out, shrieking. This time the curtain falls.)