

The Nurse in Brightberry

By

Brandon Ramos

(1935. Miss Middleton and Sarah are at the door to the Norfolk mansion.

Miss Middleton is slow and deliberate. She is dressed in a black and grey servant's uniform.

Sarah is youthful but keeps herself sternly in check under Miss Middleton's eye. She wears the same uniform, but on her thin frame the effect is smart if still conservative.

Inside, Gus Norfolk is paring down the nose of a balsa wood glider. He is dressed in pajamas and a thick robe. He's unshaven, and carries a small but ambitious potbelly.

On every table top and shelf of the ornately furnished living room there are fresh flowers of various blooms.

Miss Middleton turns away from the door to address Sarah.)

MISS MIDDLETON

Sarah, keep in mind that Lillette was my protégée. She exemplifies the very best qualities a nurse can have. I do hope some of it will rub off on you.

(Miss Middleton turns to knock, but then turns back to Sarah.)

MISS MIDDLETON

Watch her. The way she relates to the Norfolks is key. That's how she got this post in Brightberry. She's a ray of sunshine to this haggard family.

(Again Miss Middleton turns to knock, but then back to Sarah.)

MISS MIDDLETON

And she is by the book. Reputation first.

(Finally Miss Middleton knocks.)

GUS

Hold your horses.

MISS MIDDLETON (ASIDE)

Oh, he's not supposed to be up.

MISS MIDDLETON

Mr. Norfolk?

GUS

I am en route.

MISS MIDDLETON

Mr. Norfolk, please just call for Lillette, won't you?

GUS

Lillette, you have company!

MISS MIDDLETON

No, just call Lillette to get the door!

(Gus shuffles ably the door and swings it open.)

GUS

She's round back with Viv and the gardener. Please come on in.

MISS MIDDLETON

Mr. Norfolk, you're out of bed!

GUS

Well, its two thirty in the PM. I thought it was time to get a start on the day.

MISS MIDDLETON

Not to be rude, Mr. Norfolk ...

GUS

Gus will do just fine, Miss Middleton.

MISS MIDDLETON

Not to be rude, Gus, but the last time I saw you, you were...

GUS

... looking ready for the old dirt-nap?

MISS MIDDLETON

... just a bit incapacitated.

GUS

A pair of heart attacks can do that to a man.

SARAH

And what happened?

MISS MIDDLETON

I beg your pardon Mr. Gus. Ms. Lynch must have forgotten herself.

GUS

Well I don't see how anyone could forget Ms. Lynch.

SARAH

Sarah is fine, sir.

MISS MIDDLETON

But Miss Lynch fits so nicely.

(Lillette enters from the back hall. She is dressed in a dark skirt and blouse. Sarah and Miss Middleton are frozen by her out-of-uniform appearance.)

LILLETE

Did I hear someone call for me?

GUS

It's all right, Lillette. Your sisters from the agency have landed. Come in.

LILLETTE

Oh, hello darlings.

(Lillette crosses the room to stand at Gus's side as though she were the woman of the house.)

MISS MIDDLETON

Lillette. Hello. Where is Mrs. Norfolk?

LILLETTE

Didn't Gus tell you? She's out back with the gardener. And who's this delight you've brought along?

GUS

This is Sarah ...

MISS MIDDLETON

Miss. Lynch.

LILLETTE

Enchanting either way.

MISS MIDDLETON

Miss Lynch is finishing up her training and I thought I could show her a *real* example of nursing. But apparently...

LILLETTE

I am just charmed you thought of me. I remember when we went on our little tour. 'One audience with each member of the house.' Miss Middleton, you are a right pillar of experience. You know Gus, she taught me everything I learned about nursing.

GUS

Is that so?

(Gus eyes Miss Middleton with new interest)

LILLETTE

Of course I had to come up with a few tricks on my own to take care of you.

(Gus' interest fades.)

GUS

I bet you did.

MISS MIDDLETON

Right, so I think we should start straight off with Mrs. Norfolk.

GUS

Aren't you a regular broken record? I'll go do a little recon and see if I can't extract her from the garden.

(Gus exits. Miss Middleton's face is all smiles until Gus is out of the room. Then her jowls fall to an accusatory grimace.)

MISS MIDDLETON

Lillette, where is your uniform? I am getting a sense that something, something *heinous* is going on here.

LILLETTE

Miss Middleton, whatever do you mean?

SARAH

Yeah, *heinous* sounds just awful.

LILLETTE

Oh, it is awful dear.

MISS MIDDLETON

Don't be coy. Do I need to remind you that it's against the tenets of Mary's Day and Evening Care to cavort or gambol with the convalescent. Doing so means the immediate removal of the nurse at hand.

(Sarah looks back to Lillette for another translation.)

LILLETTE

She means mushing with the Norfolks, darling.

SARAH

Oh. *Oh!*

MISS MIDDLETON

Have you lost all regard for your reputation, Lillete? Your prized possession, your pearl?

LILLETTE

My pearl is just fine, thank you, so let's just calm ourselves. Vivian Norfolk will be here in just a shake and you can ask her about anything you please. However, might I suggest *you* keep things discrete so as to preserve the pristine reputation of Mary's Day and Evening Care. And, if you do find anything *heinous*, well I'll have no choice but to do as you will.

MISS MIDDELTON

Lillette, if the Norfolks weren't such important patrons I'd..

(Vivian Norfolk enters wearing a silk kimono and holding a glass of champagne. Following dutifully behind her is an attractive, muscular man wearing overalls and gardening gloves. His eyes seemed glazed over and his steps suggest Frankenstein-like reanimation. Miss Middleton's demeanor turns instantly cheerful.)

VIVIAN

Did I hear someone looking for me?

MISS MIDDLETON

Oh, Mrs. Norfolk. Delighted to see you.

VIVIAN

Yes, mutual delight.

LILLETTE

Viv, this is Sarah. Another little maid in training. They were hoping to ask you some questions.

VIVIAN

I suppose I can endure a few for your sake, Lillette. She's been a dream. She even helped us find our dear gardener.

(The gardener raises a gloved right hand and waves hello with a vulgar oscillation of the fingers.)

SARAH

Charming.

VIVIAN

Lillette, where did you say you dug him up?

LILLETTE

I can't give away trade secrets, Viv. Now why don't I go fix some tea in the kitchen while you all chat?

(Lillette whispers something to the gardener and heads off to the kitchen. The Gardener slowly makes his way back outside. Vivian seats herself in the living room.)

VIVIAN

Isn't he just an eyeful Miss Middleton?

MISS MIDDLETON

I suppose he is.

SARAH

Like a steamboat.

MISS MIDDLETON

Sarah, control yourself!

VIVIAN

Now come on Miss Middleton, we're all girls here. Sarah knew what I was talking about.

MISS MIDDLETON

Very well, Mrs. Norfolk.

VIVIAN

Yes, and let's switch to 'Vivian'.

(Miss Middleton smiles awkwardly and produces a notebook and pen from her large purse.)

MISS MIDDLETON

Ok. Vivian. These are just a few questions they like us to ask down at the office.

VIVIAN

I'll be as forthcoming as my mood permits.

MISS MIDDLETON

Right. And you shouldn't be afraid to touch on any unsavory business. Not that there should be any, or that there has ever been any at Mary's Day and Evening Care that we didn't right straight away - Our reputation is impeccable - but if there happens to be anything going on, or that you think is going on but you're not sure, or that ...

VIVIAN

Certainly, Miss Middleton.

MISS MIDDLETON

Do you think Lillette's work here has really been helpful - you can be honest now.

VIVIAN

You saw for yourself Ms... what is your first name Miss Middleton.

MISS MIDDLETON

Margery.

VIVIAN

How quaint. Well you saw for yourself Miss Middleton, Gus is ruttier than a billy goat.

MISS MIDDLETON

(Writing) Much increased virility.

And how would you describe Mr. Norfolk's disposition of late?

VIVIAN

Happy. Cheerful. He comes down from his bedroom each day with a big grin on that jug head of his.

MISS MIDDLETON

So, you don't share a bed, ah, a bedroom with Mr. Norfolk?

VIVIAN

Miss Middleton, we're an older couple.

MISS MIDDLETON

Of course.

SARAH

Where do you sleep Mrs. Norfolk?

MISS MIDDLETON

Sarah. We understand the Norfolks are an elderly couple.

VIVIAN

Oh please, let the child be curious. Actually, Sarah, I've taken to sleeping downstairs. It's right next to the cellar where I do my gardening projects. I don't like to disturb Gus, when I am, gardening.

MISS MIDDLETON

(Writing) ... gardening projects.
And, how would you describe your relationship with Lillette?

VIVIAN

To be truthful, Lillette and I didn't get on that well at first. I found her to be rather sly for a woman.

MISS MIDDLETON

(Writing happily) Sly you say? Go on.

VIVIAN

I thought she might have sticky fingers, if you follow me? You remember the trouble we had with our first girl.

MISS MIDDLETON

Yes, of course, but that was the first and last ...

VIVIAN

Anyway, my opinion changed last October. Gus was improving, while I was, to be honest I was feeling rather lonely. I'm forty-five years old. I'm sure you both know what it's like to feel, unfrequented.

MISS MIDDLETON

Wintry.

VIVIAN

Bereft.

SARAH

Old and dried up?

MISS MIDDLETON

Shush, child!

VIVIAN

It's fine, Miss Middleton. She's right. I was feeling a bit dried up. Gus was busy recovering at his sessions ...

MISS MIDDLETON

Sessions?

VIVIAN

Radical treatment. 'Body-work' Lillette calls it. Anyway, one night I just up and told her, I still can't believe I was so honest, but I told her just how lonely I was.

SARAH

What did she say?

VIVIAN

She asked me if I loved Gus. I told her it'd been twenty years. Twenty. Lillette didn't say anything more, she just hugged me. We stood in the kitchen for a long time holding on to each other.

MISS MIDDLETON

Hugging?

VIVIAN

Yes.

SARAH

Embracing?

VIVIAN

Oh yes, child. And then Lillette told me that I did love Gus. That she could feel it. But she said a woman should have a passion for other things.

SARAH

What kind of other things?

VIVIAN

Pastimes. Hobbies. Why, for me it was gardening. That night, Lillette gave me a session. I couldn't believe the pretzels she got me into. They were from the East, she said. Fascinating, really. And the next morning, she brought the gardener around for an interview. She's just the most able woman I've ever met. It's exhausting just talking about her.

MISS MIDDLETON

But don't you think anything more about your first impression of Lillette?

(Lillette enters carrying a tray of warm biscuits. Gus follows with a teakettle and cups)

LILLETTE

And how is everyone getting on out here?

VIVIAN

I'm at the very brink of my attention.

MISS MIDDLETON

Just fine, Lillette, fine. But I have some questions for Mr. Norfolk.

GUS

Sure, so long as you don't mind me doing a little whittling in the process.

MISS MIDDLETON

Not at all. And we were also hoping to speak with your son ...

LILLETTE

Michael.

(Gus and Vivian exchange worried glances.)

GUS

Michael is a bit of a late sleeper. And I don't know if he's been feeling that well.

VIVIAN

He, ah, he shares his mother's taste for remedies.

(Vivian toasts Miss Middleton with her champagne glass.)

LILLETTE

Nonsense you two. I saw Michael up bright and early this morning.

SARAH

You did?

LILLETTE

Oh yes. We spent some of last night talking about a new invention. He seemed very excited about it. I'm not sure he's slept at all but I'll make sure he comes down to say hello.

VIVIAN

How do you like that, Gus?

GUS

Extraordinary.

SARAH

What's the invention?

LILLETTE

Well, I shouldn't like to say. I'm sure you'll get a demonstration. Gus, I think it's your turn to play doctor with these fine ladies. Do try and be a good patient. And you be a careful doctor, Miss Middleton. I don't want any complaints of *malpractice*.

MISS MIDDLETON

I'm sure you don't, Lillette.

LILLETE

Vivian, why don't you head back outside? The gardener is going to be churning the soil. I think he's uncovered something rather large in the daisy bed.

VIVIAN

I do like to watch him churning.

(Vivian moves to look out the window.)

VIVIAN

Mmmmmm. Be a dear and bring me out a cocktail ... immediately.

(Vivian saunters outside.)

LILLETE

My pleasure is to serve.

(Lillette slips briskly off to the kitchen. Gus takes a seat opposite Sarah and Miss Middleton. He picks up a shaft of wood from the table and begins whittling it down into an aircraft.)

GUS

All right ladies, you don't mind if I work the kinks out of this fuselage while we debrief?

MISS MIDDLETON

I guess not.

SARAH

Were you an airman, Mr. Norfolk?

GUS

Right on the money, my dear. During the big one, I was an instructor to the 94th Aero-Squadron. Flew with Lufbery and Rickenbaker. I was in the air when Lufbery caught a tracer in the fuel tank.

SARAH

My father was in the war. An infantryman.

MISS MIDDLETON

Oh men and there war stories.

SARAH

I think they're rather heroic.

GUS

Well then you're a wonder of a modern woman, Sarah. Viv pretended like she was interested for years. I just don't think they raised women to listen to men in her day.

MISS MIDDLETON

Well Mrs. Norfolk seems to have found other interests, so let's talk about your experience with Lillette. Can you give me your first impression?

(Gus looks off into the distance with a wistful smile)

GUS

So, the first thing I remember doesn't make much sense. It was nighttime and I was pretty out of it. Someone had opened the windows because, I remember this gust of wind woke me up and was making the bed and the dresser rattle on the floor. And then I saw Lillette, and her hair was swirling around in the wind. She was above me. Her eyes were like fire. And she reached down to me with her soft hands ...

MISS MIDDLETON

Ok, Mr. Norfolk. I think you've answered my question.

SARAH

What was she doing?

MISS MIDDLETON

Sarah, no need to make Mr. Norfolk recount more of his nightmare. You were on a rather healthy dose of morphine, weren't you, Gus?

GUS

Oh yes - tons.

MISS MIDDLETON

You see? Things are difficult to remember, sometimes, when you're on morphine. Trust me Sarah. Now Gus, can you give me an idea of your daily experience with Lillette? Feel free to mention anything out of the ordinary.

GUS

Everything about Lillette is out of the ordinary. She's a regular American Mary Poppins. She does everything around here. Cooking. Cleaning. I half expect her to be flying around by an umbrella.

MISS MIDDLETON

And you don't think anything she does is too, sly?

GUS

I don't know about sly. Sometimes I wonder how a woman can accomplish so much. I joke with her. I tell her its witchcraft. Honestly it can even be a little unnerving at times. And of course, the sessions are just magic.

SARAH

What happens at the session?

GUS

First Lillette asks me if I feel like an airman or an infantryman ...

MISS MIDDLETON

All right, Gus, thank you so much for being candid. But I must know how Vivian feels about your *treatment*?

GUS

Viv wasn't used to having another woman in the house at first. But now they are getting on like old lady friends. I'm more worried about them ganging up on me one of these days.

SARAH

Do you think you could handle them both?

GUS

I might be old but I'm still an airman, Sarah. We handle all kinds of tactical situations.

MISS MIDDLETON

And your son, just how does he feel about Lillette, and the changes she's made around here?

GUS

Well, I'm not sure. Michael and I don't always get on well. He's like his mother ...

MISS MIDDLETON

No? We'll just have to meet him. I mean the office wants us to speak with each member of the house.

GUS

Sure I'll try. Don't get me wrong. Michael is a brilliant inventor. Ran his own plastics company in San Francisco. This family just likes to do its own thing.

MISS MIDDLETON

No, Gus, nothing to worry about. I think I have a pretty good idea of what's going on here. And Michael should just round out the process.

(Gus shuffles off to get Michael, but before he goes off-stage, he flies his balsa glider to Sarah.)

GUS (ASIDE)

The old man's still got it.

(Ms. Middleton gingerly removes the glider from Sarah's lap like it was a piece of garbage.)

SARAH

Miss Middleton, this wasn't exactly what I expected coming to visit the Norfolks.

MISS MIDDLETON

No, I can't say it's what I expected either. I guess I'm thankful for your naïveté. Just keep your eyes alert and follow my lead. We'll deal with Lillette as quickly and quietly as possible.

SARAH

You know, it doesn't seem like the Norfolks really seem to mind Lillette? They might even...

MISS MIDDLETON

Well then think about it, girl, just think about what marriage and love and nursemaids are all about. And if Lillette and her sessions are really what you'd want for your husband when you're living through your golden years in the 1960's. You heard straight from Mrs. Norfolk that she suspected Lillette was crooked.

SARAH

Crooked?

MISS MIDDLETON

Yes. Too sly for her own good. And Gus even said he thinks she's a witch. That's what men say when they suspect a woman is indecent. They don't have the heart to come right out and say it, so its witch this and witch that. When they really mean licentious, thieving ...

(Lillette breezes in from the garden)

LILLETTE

Sorry girls, Michael is hard at work but he'll be down in a moment - I made him promise.

MISS MIDDLETON

Well that gives you a few last minutes to explain yourself, Lillette.

LILLETE

Miss Middleton, you old inquisitor, you. Haven't Gus and Vivian explained everything? Haven't they told you they're happy?

(Miss Middleton cocks a rueful eyebrow at Lillette and they stare each other down)

SARAH

Well they said you were sly and a witch.

MISS MIDDLETON

Child, it's not decent to give the details.

LILLETTE

Rubbish. Sometimes the details are the only things that make a story decent. I'm quite happy Vivian thinks I'm sly. And when Gus tells me I'm a witch, maybe he means I'm an able young woman. Or maybe he means witch.

MISS MIDDLETON

Whatever he means I'm going to have you out on your ear. I have never seen a...

(Michael Norfolk strides into the room, a bit bewildered. He is a slight man, wearing horn-rimmed bifocals and his hair is messy. He carries a silver suitcase.)

MICHAEL

Lillette, you wanted to see me.

LILLETTE (ASIDE)

We'll have to continue this darling admonishment later.

Michael, this is Miss Middleton and Miss Sarah Lynch. Michael has been working on the most delightful product all night. I think he's about retake the west coast by storm with it.

SARAH

I've always wanted to visit California. How long did you lived there?

MICHEAL

Five years. Or was it seven?

SARAH

And you owned your own plastics business.

MICHEAL

It was a technology trust in the valley outside San Francisco. It was owned and then it was lost.

SARAH

How can technology fail in California?

MICHEAL

Well I just don't know. I must be a pioneer in the field.

(Both Michael and Sarah laugh together)

MISS MIDDLETON

Well that's just wonderful, Michael. Now we just have a few ...

MICHEAL

Don't you want to see it?

MISS MIDDLETON

See what?

MICHEAL

My invention?

MISS MIDDLETON

I'm sure it's delightful ...

SARAH

I'd love to see it. I've never seen a real invention.

MICHAEL

Well, really it's an old product with a new spin.

LILLETE

Nonsense, Michael I'd say you're coming at it from an entirely new angle.

SARAH

What is it?

MICHEAL

What did we decide to call it, Lil?

MISS MIDDLETON

Just have it out already.

MICHEAL

All right then. This is just a prototype. So an actual production model will probably vary.

(Michael reaches into his silver suitcase and produces a long, pink, battery operated vibrator.)

SARAH

Uh, is that an invention?

MICHEAL

Well, it's a completely plastic housing so it warms up and you can wash it easily. And it's, totally battery powered so you don't have to plug it into the wall outlet or hook it up to an auto battery.

LILLETTE

It's really ahead of its time.

SARAH

I'm sorry but, uh, how would I, ah, one use such a device?

MICHAEL

Well ...

(Michael switches the vibrator on. All three women startle excitedly at the hum.)

MICHAEL

Yes, well, you see it's a, uh ...

LILLETTE

A Massager

MICHAEL

Yes. A massager.

LILLETTE

A stress ...

MICHEAL

A Stress Reliever!

LILLETTE

An all around ...

MICHAEL

All around, all purpose, home appliance. No marriage should be without one. A veritable necessity.

LILLETTE

Why don't you give Sarah a little demonstration?

(Michael walks behind Sarah and begins running the vibrator over the back of her neck.)

SARAH

Well, that seems nice.

(Michael lets the 'massager' roam over her clavicle, circling toward her breast.)

SARAH

Oh, I see. A, ah, veritable necessity.

MISS MIDDLETON

I think we've seen just about enough of your device.

(Miss Middleton snatches the vibrator away from Michael)

MISS MIDDLETON

That invention is not new at all. They used to advertise them in the Sears and Roebuck catalogue. That is, until, people started getting wise.

SARAH

Getting wise?

MISS MIDDLETON

Just what you are going to do right now, Missy. Get wise. That thing is a *vibrator*. And I've heard all about them. They show up all the time, in *Stag Films*.

LILLETTE

Miss Middleton, please calm yourself. Michael is a genius inventor. He's not interested in making any Stag Films ... Right now. With his experience in plastics and his, dare I say, revolutionary perspective, I foretell he will be a father of a great industry.

MISS MIDDLETON

Don't degrade yourself anymore, Lillette! I can't stand it and I will not pretend I don't see it.

LILLETTE

Oh, Miss Middleton, please calm ...

MISS MIDDLETON

I will not calm down ...

LILLETTE

At least for these youths.

MISS MIDDLETON

They're not that much younger than you, Lillette.

LILLETTE

Well than let's practice some of that decency you talk so much about. Come into the drawing room. You and I can speak honestly, woman to woman. And after we've each said our part, I promise I'll submit to your will, whatever that may be.

MISS MIDDLETON

Very well, Lillette. Sarah, stay here.

SARAH

Yes, Miss Middleton.

(Lillette leads Miss Middleton out of the room with Sarah's and Michael's eyes watching intently. As soon as Miss Middleton is out of site, Sarah lets down her guard. Her demure façade slips and a much sharper Sarah emerges)

SARAH

I think this will be the end of Lillette.

MICHEAL

Do you?

SARAH

Miss Middleton is not one to be talked out of something. Especially when it's dismissing a nurse. She's a righteous old battle-axe.

MICHEAL

Maybe she should give my massager a try.

SARAH

Your stress-reliever?

MICHAEL

Yes. My all around, all purpose, home appliance.

SARAH

For her it *is* a veritable necessity.

(Sarah and Michael laugh together)

SARAH

It's too bad about Lillette. She seemed like such a, I don't know, so able.

MICHEAL

She certainly is ahead of her time.

SARAH

Oh Michael, don't be dense. There's plenty more going on here. It's plain as the cute little nose on your face. Miss Middleton would rather toss her out than have it go down to Salem for a trial.

MICHEAL

Trial? Please. My father is healthy. My mother is happy for the first time in her life. Clearly something sleazy is a foot.

SARAH

That's not what I mean.

MICHEAL

But that's certainly what I mean. It must look strange from outside but ... I don't know how to explain it. Lillette, she is like a force in this house.

SARAH

A force?

MICHEAL

Yes. Like gravity or magnetism. She's honest with you, so wildly honest. She makes you feel, I don't know, lighter. You stop caring about all the little problems ...

SARAH

And you don't question it? Everything is stellar and you just turn a blind eye to the woman who's come in to run the place.

MICHEAL

I, well, look, I ...

SARAH

Come on, Michael, you seem like a bright college boy, hmmm? A woman comes to house in Brightberry, New England - a wealthy one, with a good reputation. A real model home.

MICHEAL

To a family that secretly can't stand each other.

SARAH

Even better. The woman comes in and astonishingly heals the old man. And when they wife gets wise, the woman has a little talk with her late one night. Now they're both under her influence.

MICHEAL

Influence? I'd call it grace.

SARAH

Let's compromise. How about 'spell'? These women, if you can call them that, they're all sweetness up front but just you wait...

MICHEAL

Wait for what? All she's done is encourage us a little.

SARAH

Sure, sure. And when the son comes home, it's not long before he's fallen under her charm ...

MICHEAL

Nonsense. Hysteria. As this families representative to the twentieth century Lillette is certainly not some kind of Witch!

SARAH

What? Who said anything about a witch? She's a grifter, Michael. A gold-digger. Most likely she's after your dad's safe. It's not the first time Mary's Day and Evening Care has had problems like this.

MICHEAL

Grifter?

SARAH

Of sorts. Long-con. And by con I mean confidence artist. She's got all the earmarks. I've read all about them, but she seems a right mind better than the ones I've heard about.

MICHEAL

No way, no how. I'm telling you, Lillette is the most honest woman I've ever met. Honest to a fault. It's like her mental outlook is evolved.

SARAH

Don't be such a rube, Michael. You're sweet but I think you have too many numbers flying around in that head of yours.

MICHEAL

No ... Well ... To be honest, I mean, if you're right, well I don't think we'd even care.

SARAH

Now that is the effect of a woman ahead of her time. Maybe Miss Middleton has got more than she bargained for in there.

(Sarah and Michael wait, occasionally glancing at each other, then fliriting with their eyes. Finally both of them settle their stare on Michael's invention.)

SARAH

Would you like to wait upstairs?

MICHAEL

Definitely.

(Sarah snatches up the vibrator and charges off stage with Michael - just as Miss Middleton and Lillette return to the living room. Miss Middleton's hair is down and she is holding a half-full martini.)

MISS MIDDLETON

You really think I should try two?

LILLETTE

Indubitably, my dear. That way no one gets tired. Really, it's the only way to run a garden.

MISS MIDDLETON

And no one will know? It won't get back to the office? That I'm ... gardening.

LILLETTE

Not if you don't tell them. In this day and age, reputation isn't everything.

(From outside, two muscular men wearing the gardener overalls and gloves enter with slow, zombie-steps.)

LILLETTE

Ah, I see we've dug up some extra help.

MISS MIDDLETON

Well I am certainly sorry for suggesting, well, about the dirty harlot thing.

LILLETTE

Think nothing of it, my dear.

MISS MIDDLETON

And about the more sailors than Shanghai part. And..

LILLETTE

Honesty is always the best policy with me, Margery.

(The gardeners link arms with Miss Middleton and begin to steer her outside. Miss Middleton looks positively giddy and waves to Lillette.)

LILLETTE

Do check on Mrs. Norfolk. She gets sun burnt in the worst places.

GUS (O.S.)

Lillette? I'm ready when you are.

LILLETTE

I'll be right there, Gus. A good nurse's work is never done.

(Lillette pauses and turns her eyes on the audience)

And the rest of you, well, I leave the rest of you to your own sweet vices.

(Lillette glides offstage.)