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# HIS SAINTED GRANDMOTHER

Drawn from:

## Seven Modern Comedies

*By*

**Lord Dunsany**

G. P. Putnam's Sons  
London & New York

### *DRAMATIS PERSONAE*

PHYLLIS TRAVERNE.

HER FATHER.

LUCY.

ANNIE.

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## HIS SAINTED GRANDMOTHER

*SCENE: An old room with a four-poster in the middle. Wainscot about seven feet high. A fire-place on the left-hand side (Stage left), at which Phyllis, when she sits about the middle of the left side of the bed, can easily warm her hands. Nearer the footlights a door in the left-hand side. A dressing-table in the middle of the right side.*

*Enter Phyllis Traverne, followed by her Father.*

PHYLLIS. But, Father, I don't like this room.

HER FATHER. I have had your things put here.

PHYLLIS. But I don't like it.

HER FATHER. Why?

PHYLLIS. Nobody likes it.

HER FATHER. Do they give any reason?

PHYLLIS. It is so old.

HER FATHER. It's in good enough repair.

PHYLLIS. Oh, I don't mean that. But it's not for us.

HER FATHER. Not for us? What do you mean?

PHYLLIS. Why, it's all made for people a long time ago. Dead people. Not like us. It's full of their needs, their ways, and their awful faces. Don't make me sleep in it!

HER FATHER. Do you call that an awful face?

*[Points at the portrait, with its crinolines and its sainted expression.]*

PHYLLIS. No, only I, only....

HER FATHER. What?

PHYLLIS. It's full of their ways.

HER FATHER. Very well then, I'll come to that at once.

PHYLLIS. Come to that, Father?

HER FATHER. Yes. I have put you here with good reason.

PHYLLIS. Good reason? Why?

HER FATHER. If you could possibly draw any influence out of the shadows of this old room, its hangings, its furniture, above all that portrait, from those sane and sober ways you so much despise; if you could find *anything* of a bygone grace, both of spirit and body, from this quiet gloom that is laden with memories of my grandmother, you might—well, all I can say is, you might be the better for it.

PHYLLIS. In what way, Father?

HER FATHER. Do you want me to explain myself?

PHYLLIS. It's awfully late, Father.

HER FATHER. I trust not too late.

PHYLLIS. What do you mean by that?

HER FATHER. I will explain.

PHYLLIS. Oh, well.

*[So she sits on bed and lights a cigarette.]*

HER FATHER. One should not need to have to explain. Well, to begin with, there is this young fellow Shawley.

PHYLLIS. Peter?

HER FATHER. Oh, you call him Peter then?

PHYLLIS. Of course.

HER FATHER. Well, Peter, then. How many times did you dance with Peter to-night?

PHYLLIS. Seven.

HER FATHER. Why?

PHYLLIS. There was nobody else there I wanted to dance with. And he didn't want to dance with anyone else either. Only there was a woman there he couldn't avoid dancing with. You don't know or, or you'd understand; but there it was. So we only danced seven, otherwise I'd have danced....

HER FATHER. Seven. And in my day if a man danced more than three times with the same girl, it was tantamount, why it amounted to....

PHYLLIS. But I like dancing with Peter.

HER FATHER. Evidently.

PHYLLIS. Then why shouldn't I?

HER FATHER. To *begin* with, to begin with because you make yourself conspicuous.

PHYLLIS. But who to, Father?

HER FATHER. To the whole room.

PHYLLIS. But they are dancing with each other.

HER FATHER. Not seven times with the same partner.

PHYLLIS. Lots of them dance with one partner all the evening.

HER FATHER. In my time that would have been tantamount to an engagement, and would have been taken as such by everybody.

PHYLLIS. But, Father, mayn't the times change?

HER FATHER. Yes, in externals. Fashions must change, and customs, and even perhaps manners, though it is unfortunate that they all change for the worse. But there are things that surely must shock all the right-minded people in any age as much as they would have shocked my sainted grandmother, who seems to watch you now so sorrowfully.

PHYLLIS. But, Father, who can object? (*A glance, almost of fear, at the portrait.*) I mean, who that's living to-day and knows our ways can object to my dancing seven dances with Peter?

HER FATHER. Young Arnold.

PHYLLIS. (*lowers her cigarette and thinks a little gravely for a second*). What? Dick?

HER FATHER. You call him Dick, then?

PHYLLIS. Well, we all do.

HER FATHER. Then what does Dick think of it?

PHYLLIS. It isn't his business.

HER FATHER. I see, so his business is limited to taking you out in his motor-launch whenever you want sea air, or to driving you a hundred miles from here, and back again the same evening, all alone together, a thing inconceivable in her time (*pointing to portrait*)....

PHYLLIS. They hadn't motors, Father.

HER FATHER. They had morals.

PHYLLIS. Oh, well.

HER FATHER. And that isn't all; this Dick of yours has to get you tickets for any theatre you want, has to do all kinds of odd jobs for you, and actually has had more than once to hang about with his motor on the chance that you might want him to take you to other people's tennis-parties.

PHYLLIS. Oh well, it rained that day, Father.

HER FATHER. It wasn't the only day.

PHYLLIS. Father, is it *really* wrong?

HER FATHER. *Really* wrong! Good heavens, how shall I answer it? Only by placing you, as I have placed you, in such contact as may touch you here from a godlier age, in a room whose very shadows are hallowed with the long association of a calm and sainted lady. If no influence of hers can reach you here to tell you that in all ages and places it is wrong to have one man to amuse you all day and dance half the night with another, then you are indeed lost. Good-night.

[*Exit.*

PHYLLIS. Oh, dear me.

[*She sits a few moments in thought, knocking off cigarette-ash into an ash-tray, then throws the end of the cigarette into the fire-place and rises and goes across to her dressing-table, looking at the great four-poster as she passes it, and giving a shudder at the gloomy old room. She sits down at her dressing-table to do her hair, or what not, and sighs. Then over on the far side of the four-poster, whence she had come, the ghost of her great-grandmother is seen, without any appearance (where practicable) of having entered or moved. Phyllis, turning round after a while, stares and cranes her head nearer, from her chair, not only in fright, but because the ghost is a little dim.*

PHYLLIS. Great-grandmamma.

[*The Ghost nods its head twice. Phyllis pauses, gives way to fear, runs to bell, and pulls it hard.*

GHOST. Don't do that, dear.

PHYLLIS. I've done it.

GHOST. Never mind.

[*Looks at door and gives a little laugh.*

PHYLLIS. Great-grandmamma, are you angry with me?

GHOST. No, child.

PHYLLIS. Great-grandmamma.

GHOST. Yes, child.

PHYLLIS. You're quite young.

GHOST. Yes.

[*A little laugh.*]

PHYLLIS. But you were quite old, great-grandmamma. You didn't look like that.

GHOST. Oh, that was only my body. But I was like this always.

PHYLLIS. Then what made you old, great-grandmamma?

GHOST. Oh, that was the spirit wearing the body out. It wears it quite out in the end.

PHYLLIS. Great-grandmamma.

GHOST. Don't call me great-grandmamma.

PHYLLIS. Er, sainted spirit.

GHOST. Call me Lucy.

PHYLLIS. Oh. (*Smiles.*) Well, Lucy, are you quite sure you aren't angry with me?

GHOST. Mercy no, child.

PHYLLIS. Not about Dick and Peter?

GHOST (*interested*). Dick and Peter? Tell me about them.

PHYLLIS. Well, you see, Peter—Peter's wonderful; I like him ever so much. He's—I can't explain, but he's marvellous. More than anyone else in the world I should think. Well, anyway, he's perfectly wonderful. But, of course, he hasn't any money. He'll make some in a year or two, because he's so wonderful. He's at the bar, and he'll make a lot one day. But it's a bit dull waiting. So then, you see, there's Dick. (*Ghost titters.*) He's got lots of money. And he likes taking girls out in his—in his barouche, you know. And he doesn't care much who he takes so long as they're pretty. So it may just as well be me, mayn't it, Lucy? But you know what Papa is. (*Ghost laughs.*) You aren't angry with me, are you? I'm so glad, Lucy dear.

GHOST. And what does your Papa say?

PHYLLIS. Oh well, *he* says—he says, if only you could teach me better ways.

GHOST. Oh, it was he that was invoking me then. I thought it was you.

PHYLLIS. Invoking you, Lucy?

GHOST. This old place was calling me so strongly.

PHYLLIS. I'm so glad you came.

GHOST. I had to.

PHYLLIS. Had to, Lucy?

GHOST. Yes, the pull of old places, you know. And then when anyone stirs it at all, as he was doing, it begins to draw you at once, and back you come.

PHYLLIS. Lucy, Lucy, may I ask you something?

GHOST. Yes, anything you like, child.

PHYLLIS. Then, Lucy, where do you come from?

GHOST. Come from? From over there.

PHYLLIS. Over there? What's it like, Lucy?

GHOST. Oh, I can't stop all night in a tiny place like Earth to explain all that to you.

PHYLLIS. Can't you, Lucy? Well, do tell me one thing that really matters. Do tell me what I ought to do about Peter and Dick. I can't find out from Father, he gets so angry. And Dick's such a silly ass he can't tell one anything. I've no one else to ask.

GHOST. Well, my dear, if I were you....

PHYLLIS. Yes, Lucy.

GHOST. Well, I'd stick to Peter.

PHYLLIS. Oh, would you, Lucy?

GHOST. Yes, and meanwhile——

PHYLLIS. Yes, Lucy.

GHOST. While you're waiting, I mean.... You say Dick has a barouche.

PHYLLIS. Oh yes, Lucy. A great big ... I mean a nice fast one.

GHOST. Well, I always preferred a phaeton. They're smarter.

PHYLLIS. Well, he has a phaeton too. It's a Rolls, really, but you wouldn't quite understand that.

GHOST. A Rolls?

PHYLLIS. A new maker.

GHOST. No, he wasn't a carriage-builder in my time. I expect the old firms are the best.

PHYLLIS. Yes, I suppose they are. What were you saying about Dick?

GHOST. Oh, well, if he has a smart phaeton, there's nothing like a nice drive in the country. And then, of course, the less you compromise yourself the pleasanter it is to look back on.

PHYLLIS. Compromise myself, Lucy?

GHOST. Yes. One wouldn't choose for an outing villages where you might be known, or any large village at all. And then there are some quite becoming bonnets that can satisfactorily conceal your identity if you do meet people that....

PHYLLIS. We don't wear bonnets now, Lucy.

GHOST. Oh well, a pretty parasol, if held adroitly, can be a complete protection.

PHYLLIS. Oh, what a lot you know, Lucy.

GHOST. I was here for eighty years.

PHYLLIS. Yes, I suppose you were. But hasn't it altered a good deal since?

GHOST. I don't know. But it hadn't altered much up to my time.

PHYLLIS. What? Not ever?

GHOST. Well, I don't suppose so, child.

PHYLLIS. But Lucy, about Dick. I've sometimes wondered what would happen if Peter hears that I am always about with him. You know so much, I'm sure you can advise me.

GHOST. Let him hear, child. But always in moderation. Let him hear.

PHYLLIS. Let him hear?

GHOST. He mustn't think he's the only fish in the sea.

PHYLLIS. But he is, for me. And I wouldn't mind if he knew.

GHOST. Oh, no, that would never do.

PHYLLIS. Wouldn't it? He's awfully fond of me.

GHOST. But you want to keep him so.

PHYLLIS. Oh yes.

GHOST. Well, there's nothing like letting him know he might lose you.

PHYLLIS. Oh, Lucy, do you really think so?

GHOST. My dear child, I was here eighty years.

PHYLLIS. I—I suppose you're right.

GHOST. Of course I'm right, child.

PHYLLIS. But, Lucy, you led such a—such a sainted life.

[*Ghost titters. A knock is heard on the door.*]

PHYLLIS. Oh! Er—don't come in.

[*A housemaid's head, in curl-papers, looks in. She is in nightdress and carries a candle. She comes in no further and Phyllis is able to conceal the Ghost.*]

ANNIE. Mr. Traverne wanted to know what you rang for, Miss.

PHYLLIS. Oh, nothing. Nothing at all.

ANNIE. Nothing, Miss?

PHYLLIS. No, no. Just nothing.

ANNIE. Then there's nothing you want, Miss?

PHYLLIS. No, thank you, Annie. Nothing at all. Really.

ANNIE. All right, Miss. I'll tell Mr. Traverne.

[*Exit.*

PHYLLIS. Oh! Lucy, do you mind if I smoke?

GHOST (*laughs*). No, child.

PHYLLIS. Why are you laughing, Lucy?

GHOST. I smoked once.

PHYLLIS. You, Lucy? (*Looks at portrait.*) Did you really?

GHOST. Yes. There was a bit of a fuss. But I *smoked*.

PHYLLIS. Oh, Lucy. Is there anything you didn't do?

[*She lights up.*

GHOST. Well, of course, eighty years isn't long.

PHYLLIS. No, I suppose it isn't, really.

GHOST. But whatever one can do in eighty years, I did.

PHYLLIS. Oh, Lucy, you must know a lot more than Father. (*Ghost laughs.*) Lucy, do tell me more about what I ought to do.

GHOST. Have a good time, child.

PHYLLIS. Oh, Lucy, and what else?

GHOST. That's all.

PHYLLIS. Then, Lucy, perhaps you think I ought to marry Dick. He's got tons of money.

GHOST. Not a bit of it. You'd have a wretched time.

PHYLLIS. Why, Lucy?

GHOST. Because you want Peter.

PHYLLIS. Yes, I do.

GHOST. Well, you get him then.

PHYLLIS. Oh, Lucy, how nice you are.

GHOST. I'm sure Peter's a nice young man.

PHYLLIS. Oh, yes, Lucy, he is.

GHOST. But I'm sure he hasn't such nice whiskers as ... oh, well, never mind now.

PHYLLIS. Well, they don't wear whiskers now, Lucy; nothing to speak of.

GHOST. Not wear whiskers! Oh, well, I've no doubt they're nice boys even if they do look frights.

PHYLLIS. Peter doesn't look a fright, Lucy. Well, not quite, you know.

GHOST. Well, never mind, child, I must go now.

PHYLLIS. Oh, Lucy.

GHOST. Yes, I must go back over there.

PHYLLIS. Oh, Lucy, you've hardly told me anything.

GHOST. I must go back. I can't stay here much longer.

PHYLLIS. Oh, Lucy, why not?

GHOST. It's all so tiny. It's like fastening your eyes on a line of a page of a little book in a room, when summer's outside.  
But you won't understand that yet.

PHYLLIS. I think I can see what you mean, Lucy. But do stay a little longer. Just tell me what I should do for a little while.

GHOST. Spend Dick's money for him, if he wants you to.

PHYLLIS. Yes, Lucy?

GHOST. Have a good time. And then one day give Peter a good time.

PHYLLIS. Yes, Lucy, and then?

GHOST. Why then, one day you come to us.

PHYLLIS. But Lucy, what if Peter won't have me?

[*Ghost gets dimmer.*]

GHOST. (*sleepily*). What do you say, child?

PHYLLIS. Lucy, Lucy, don't go yet. What if Peter won't have me?

GHOST. Who's Peter?

PHYLLIS. Lucy, come back. Tell me what to do about Peter.

[*Ghost brightens again.*]

GHOST. Oh, Peter, yes. Tell him from me....

PHYLLIS. From you, Lucy?

GHOST. Yes, tell him from me, that if he isn't good to you, I'll haunt him.

PHYLLIS. Oh, Lucy, that is good of you.

GHOST. Good-bye now, child.

*[She begins to fade. A heavy knock is heard.]*

PHYLLIS. That's Papa.

*[Ghost brightens again and titters. Enter Traverne. The Ghost folds demure hands and turns up pious eyes as in portrait.]*

HER FATHER. What was all that noise you were making with the....

GHOST. Obey your dear father in all things and order your ways reverently.

PHYLLIS. Yes, great-grandmamma.

GHOST. You understand, my dear?

PHYLLIS. Yes, Lucy.

*[Ghost vanishes.]*

HER FATHER *(recovering from wainscot, against which he had reeled)*. I trust, I trust you have had a lesson.

*[Phyllis bursts into laughter. Her Father runs for the smelling-salts, takes out the stopper, and comes towards her with it.]*

CURTAIN

#### TRANSCRIBER'S NOTE

Two minor spelling errors have been corrected and can be identified in the body of the text by a grey dotted underline:

(...) draw any influence ou of the shadows (...)

If no influence of her's can reach you

(...) draw any influence **out** of the shadows (...)

If no influence of **hers** can reach you

[The end of *His Sainted Grandmother* by Lord Dunsany]