

ENCHANTED APRIL

ACT ONE

Scene 1

Darkness. Half-light rises on two tables, four chairs, a coat rack with coats and umbrellas. Rose Arnott sits at one table. Lotty Wilton stands at the other, looking off. Thunder, followed by the sound of steady rain. Lights up in a London ladies' club, 1922. "The Great War" is over by four years, and with it the lives of one million British men. Rose reads a copy of the London Times. Lotty gazes out of an unseen window. Both are dressed heavily in dark colors, hair up, with hats on or nearby. Lotty's appearance suggests uncertainty. Rose is spare to the point of severity. Lotty speaks to us. Her essence is of deep sadness and withering valiance, from which genuine hope spontaneously and regularly bursts forth, leaving her endlessly off-balance.

LOTTY. I was once told the story of a man who, while surveying the grounds of his home, dug his walking stick into the earth, as a reminder of where he wished to one day have an acacia tree. One he could watch from his veranda, and lie under with his wife on warm summer afternoons, cooled in the shadow of its white flowers, and blanketed in their sweet scent. But when planting season came 'round and he returned with a spade and an acacia sapling, the man was vexed. The stick he had left had taken root and begun to grow. It was nearly as tall as himself now, in fact, with young, awkward branches and small clusters of frail new leaves. This, on the very spot that was to be his acacia. The man buried his spade into the ground to unearth the strange thing ... but stopped. For among the leaves, underneath, he spied a small blossom.

(*Enchanted.*) It was acacia. (*Considers.*) "Enchantment," some would say. Or "providence," perhaps. I suppose the only real certainty is that the fellow had lost a perfectly good walking stick. If that's the part you choose to see. The rest is open to opinion. (*Sighs, thinks.*) Were it only that some enchantment would step in for us all, to change what we have into what we wish for. To bridge the awkward gap between all of our many before and afters. Because, for every after found, a before must be lost. And loss is, by nature, an unbalancing thing. More unbalancing, however, is to discover your before gone without an after having taken its place. Leaving you merely to wait and to wonder if there is to be an after at all. Or if, perhaps, waiting and wondering are your after in themselves. (*Thinks.*) I wasn't expecting my after to begin that day at my ladies' club. I wasn't waiting for enchantment to show itself, or providence. I had merely been gazing out of the window, wondering if the rain was ever going to stop. And what my husband might like for dinner that night. And about the fact that the day before I had wondered the same things. And surely would the following day, and the day after that, and the day after. When I came upon the advertisement. ROSE. (*Reading.*) "To those who appreciate wisteria and sunshine ..."

LOTTY. A small advert, placed discreetly in the agony column of the *Times*.

ROSE. "Small castle on the Mediterranean, Northern Italy ..."

LOTTY. Heaven!

ROSE. "To be let for the month of April. Cook, gardens, ocean view. Reply Box Eleven."

LOTTY. (*Beaming.*) The words washed over me, filling me suddenly with warmth and peacefulness, as if the advertisement were there especially for me, and was pleased I'd found it. "To those who appreciate wisteria and sunshine." That's me! (*Thunder. Considers.*) But who am I to be reading about Italian castles, and Aprils on the Mediterranean? Who am I? (*Inspired.*) But then, why would I bother to read the newspaper at my ladies' club, when I surely would read my husband's copy tomorrow morning after house-keeping? And why would I come to my club at all on a Tuesday, when my regular city day is Wednesday? And certainly why would I notice the lady, that particular lady I see so often at church, and was thinking of only moments ago? Providence? Enchantment? (*To Rose, with great enthusiasm.*) Are you reading about the castle and the wisteria?