



DECEPTION AND BEHAVIOURAL EXPECTATIONS

BY DR. WARREN MCKINNON

UBC, CONTINUING EDUCATION | MEMBER, VANCOUVER PLAYHOUSE TEACHER ADVISORY BOARD (VPTAB)

- ✓ **POST-VIEWING LESSON/ACTIVITY**
- ✓ **TYPE:** POINTS TO PONDER, DISCUSS OR WRITE ABOUT
- ✓ **SUITABILITY:** GRADE 10-12

BRIEF ENCOUNTER – SCRIPT SEGMENT – ACT 2, SCENE 5 (PP. 61 – 63)

(Dolly Messiter bustles into the refreshment room...She is laden with parcels. She sees Laura [Alec also at the table].)

Dolly: Laura! What a lovely surprise!

Laura: Oh, Dolly!

Dolly: My dear, I've been shopping till I'm dropping! My feet are nearly falling off, and my throat's parched. I thought of having tea in Spindle's, but I was terrified of losing the train. I'm always missing trains, and being late for meals, and Bob gets disagreeable for days at a time. Oh, dear –
(She flops down at their table.)

Laura: This is Doctor Harvey.

Alec: How do you do!

Dolly *(shaking hands):* How do you do! Would you be a perfect dear and get me a cup of tea! I don't think I could drag my poor old bones as far as the counter. I must get some chocolates for Tony, too, but I can do that afterwards.
(She offers him money.)

Alec *(waving it away):* No, please –

(He goes over to the counter, gets another cup of tea from Myrtle. Meanwhile Dolly continues to talk.)

Dolly: My dear – what a nice-looking man. Who on earth is he? Really, you're quite a dark horse. I shall telephone Fred in the morning and make mischief – that is a bit of luck. I haven't seen you for ages, and I've been meaning to pop in, but Tony's had measles, you know, and I had all that awful fuss about Phyllis – but of course you don't know – she left me!

Laura *(with an effort):* Oh, how dreadful!

Dolly: Mind you, I never cared for her much, but still Tony did. Tony adored her, and – but, never mind, I'll tell you all about that in the train.

(Alec arrives back at the table with her tea – he sits down again.)

Thank you so very much. They've certainly put enough milk in it – but still, it'll be refreshing. *(She sips it.)* Oh, dear – no sugar.

Alec: It's in the spoon.

Dolly: Oh, of course – what a fool I am – Laura, you look frightfully well. I do wish I'd known you were coming in today, we could have come together and lunched and had a good gossip. I loathe shopping by myself, anyway. *(There is the sound of a bell on the platform.)*

Laura: There's your train.

Alec: Yes, I know.

Dolly: Aren't you coming with us?

Alec: No, I go in the opposite direction. My practice is in Churley.

Dolly: Oh, I see.

Alec: I'm a general practitioner at the moment.

Laura: Doctor Harvey is going out to Africa next week.

Dolly: Oh! How thrilling.

(There is the sound of Alec's train approaching.)

Alec: I must go.

Laura: Yes, you must.

Alec: Good bye.

Dolly: Good bye.

He shakes hand with Dolly, looks at Laura swiftly once, then presses her hand under cover of the table and leaves hurriedly through the audience as the train is heard rumbling into the station. Laura sits quite still.)

He'll have to run – he's got to get right over to the other platform. How do you meet him?

Laura: I got something in my eye one day, and he took it out.

Dolly: My dear – how very romantic! I'm always getting things in my eye and nobody the least bit attractive has ever paid the faintest attention – which reminds me – you know about Harry and Lucy Jenner, don't you?

Laura *(listening for the train to start):* No – what about them?

Dolly: My dear – they're going to get a divorce – at least, I believe they're getting a conjugal separation, or whatever it is, to begin with, and the divorce later on. *(The train starts, and the sound of it gradually dies away in the distance.)* It seems that there's an awful Mrs. Something or other in London that he's been carrying on with for ages – you know how he was always having to go up on business. Well, apparently Lucy's sister saw them, Harry and this woman, in the Tate Gallery of all places, and she wrote to Lucy, and then gradually the whole thing came out. Of course, it was all most disgraceful. To begin with, I think it was a dirty trick to make such a fuss openly – it might have been smoothed over perfectly easily and no one would have known anything about it.

POINTS TO PONDER

In an effort to be “*respectable*,” Alec and Laura are conscious of the behavioural expectations of their community that govern where, when, and how often they are seen with each other. From the outset, Laura feels guilty but Alec makes their meeting respectable by describing it as “*accidental*,” “*ordinary*,” and “*natural*.” But before they part, he pleads with Laura and she agrees to meet him the same time next Thursday. The regularity of their meetings is noticed by people in the community – the staff at the train station café and by Laura’s friends Mary and Hermione at a dine and dance ballroom. Laura pretends that Mary met Alec earlier when they both attended one of Laura’s dinner parties. The need for deception occurs again later at Stephen Lynn’s flat. Laura’s community image as well as her self-image is damaged. Alec and Laura’s brief encounter ends with the deception of another community member, Laura’s neighbour, Dolly Messiter. Ironically, Dolly describes a couple whose impending divorce might have been avoided if people hadn’t made “*such a fuss openly*.” What kind of behavioural expectations do we have today and how do they help or harm the way we marry and raise families?

Please note:

Part 1: Story, Background, Creators, Characters and Glossary is available for downloading at
VANCOUVERPLAYHOUSE.COM

Send us feedback and questions regarding our Play Guides

Request a copy of a script (for educational purposes)

Contact: Stasa Andric at **604 637 3094** / sandric@vancouverplayhouse.com

or Meredith Elliott at **604 629 2097** / melliott@vancouverplayhouse.com

SEE YOU AT THE PLAYHOUSE!

ALL PERFORMANCES AT HAMILTON & DUNSMUIR