

LOYALTIES

By

JEFFREY A. LEE

a play in four scenes

set on an occupied island

between England and France

during the time of the

Second World War.

The island is fictitious and all characters are

creations of the playwright's imagination.

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CAST

LADY WINCOMBE: wife of the deceased Bailiff of the Island.

LILIAN: her housekeeper and companion.

GENERAL MEYER: the occupying General.

CAPTAIN HANS SHRABEL: a German engineering officer.

CAPTAIN VON RICHTER: a German officer in charge of security and deportations.

JOSEPH NOY: A Jew trying to escape from the German occupiers.

The action of the play, which lasts for approximately two hours occurs in the main living-room of Lady Wincombe's crumbling manor house on the island.

SCENE ONE

The play is set in the Nineteen Forties.

The scene is the substantial living room of the Manor on an island occupied by enemy forces. The room is furnished somewhat lavishly in Victorian or early Edwardian style and exudes the atmosphere of genteel decay. Upstage centre is a large French window through which, during daytime, we catch glimpses of a somewhat neglected but erstwhile grand terrace, beyond which, through a belt of trees, we view the sea.

It is a tranquil evening in midsummer. The French windows are open, and the light outside is beginning to fade. An old style gramophone is playing 'Land of Hope and Glory', a rendering by Dame Sarah Butt from the time of First World War.

Lady Wincombe is seated just downstage of the window looking out towards the sea.

As 'Land of Hope and Glory' fades we hear the distant murmuring of the sea.

Enter LILIAN, LADY WINCOMBE'S companion and housekeeper, carrying an oil lamp.

LILIAN: I've brought in the lamp.

LADY W: A bit early, isn't it?

LILIAN: I thought you might be having a sizz.

LADY W: What's that got to do with it?

LILIAN: Nothing. I had a feeling it might be one of those nights.

LADY W: It's always one of those nights. (*Pointing at a table imperiously*) Put it down there.

LILIAN puts the oil lamp on a side table. She goes to the gramophone and takes off the record.

LADY W: What do you mean by one of those nights, anyway?

LILIAN: Just a feeling. Nothing in particular.

LADY W: One of your famous intimations of immortality, you mean?

- LILIAN: Nothing so grand. There'll be a full moon. I thought we might expect another raid.
- LADY W: You mean you put two and two together and made five and a half.
- LILIAN: Something like that. It's common sense, isn't it?
- LADY W: Common sense piffle. I don't believe in it. Common sense never got me anywhere. I go by instinct.
- LILIAN: That's what I mean.
- LADY W: Thank goodness we've got that sorted out. I thought we were about to have one of those interminable arguments you specialise in.
- LILIAN: What would you like for supper?
- LADY W: Supper, supper? What's supper? We used to call it dinner when Horace was alive.
- LILIAN: Yes, but you see there's isn't much, is there? So I thought I'd downgrade it.
- LADY W: You thought you'd downgrade it! Who's in charge here?
- LILIAN: I think Blink and Blank and Cock of the North are in charge at present.
- LADY W: Is that all we've got - eggs?
- LILIAN: Thank God for them. I don't know what we'll do when they stop laying in the winter.
- LADY W: Well 'It is better to live rich than to die poor' as Doctor Johnson said.
- LILIAN: Did he say that?
- LADY W: No. I adapted it. What he actually said was 'It is better to live rich than to die rich' which suits us rather better since we've got hardly a crumb between us. I think we'll have egg on toast. That's if we've got any bread.
- LILIAN: I managed to make some on Saturday. Don't you remember?
- LADY W: Good girl! So you did. I shall forget my own name next week. Tell me, Lilian, who am I?

LILIAN: Stop pretending. It isn't funny!

LADY W: Another of your intimations of immortality, Lillian?

LILIAN: I just don't like to speak of it. It's tempting Fate.

LADY W: Whatever that may be. All the same, tell me who I am. I like to be reminded so that I can fall back on it when I forget.

LILIAN: Sometimes I really can't make you out ...

LADY W: Don't worry. it'll be a lot worse when you get to my age. Tell me who I am.

LILIAN: You are Lady Wincombe.

LADY W: Good. Good. That's a start. How old am I?

LILIAN: I think you're eighty years old.

LADY W: Surely you must remember that. We celebrated my birthday in the spring. You cooked a potato cake...

LILIAN: Sorry about that...

LADY W: Don't be sorry. It was all you had. And we planted a candle in the middle. Surely you remember? It was like those midnight feasts in the dorm when I was at school. But you won't remember that.

LILIAN: I wasn't there.

LADY W: I know you weren't there. Don't be facetious. When did Horace die?

LILIAN: Horace?

LADY W: My husband Horace. When did he die?

LILIAN: The Bailiff died eighteen months ago, Lady Wincombe.

LADY W: You mustn't mind saying his name, Lillian. He won't bite you. You're not superstitious, are you?

LILIAN: I don't like speaking of the dead.

LADY W: Not even praiseworthy things? 'Let us now praise famous men ... And our fathers that begat us ...' D'you know, I rather dislike that word 'begat', always have done. It sounds unnecessarily coarse.

- LILIAN: I don't know how you can joke about these things, Lady Wincombe.
- LADY W: Why not? 'Our sincerest laughter ... With some pain is fraught'. Shelley, you know. And he didn't have much to joke about.
- LILIAN: All the same ...
- LADY W: Horace wouldn't mind. By the way, I don't remember. Did I ever thank you properly for helping to nursing him in those last months?
- LILIAN: It was a privilege. He was a good man. Everyone on the island respected him.
- LADY W: So they should. He did his best, you know.
- LILIAN: He did far better than that.
- LADY W: That's one of your famous non sequitur's, Lillian. Nobody can do better than his best.
- LILIAN: Well he did, and that's enough for me.
- LADY W: You're very headstrong, Lillian, but you have a good loyal heart. Remember Horace's funeral? Splendid occasion. Something I shall remember for the rest of my days. Isn't that a silly thing to say at my age?
- LILIAN: Not at all. I'm quite sure you'll live to be at least a hundred.
- LADY W: Good God, what a dismal prospect! I'm bad enough already! But they all turned out for Horace, didn't they? Two thousand at least, I should think. Impossible to count. Not to mention all those letters and cards and floral tributes. I hate flowers at a funeral, Lillian, all drooping and fading in the sun. Still one must be grateful. It was a demonstration of loyalty, I suppose
- LILIAN: More than loyalty. Grief and respect and love as well. Your husband was greatly loved.
- LADY W: You're a sentimentalist, Lillian. But you're right: Horace was loved. Always went out of his way to be decent and kind to everyone. Especially the poor. And they - the occupiers I mean - had the sense at least not to interfere with the funeral.
- LILIAN: The General was there.

- LADY W: Yes. He had the good sense to keep himself in the background.
- LILIAN: He took his hat off and bowed as the Bailiff passed.
- LADY W: And he sent a ridiculous message of condolence in that dreadful Teutonic script they favour. I'm grateful for one thing, at least, though ...
- LILIAN: The soldiers kept well away from the church when they saw there was no danger of a riot.
- LADY W: I'm talking about water and electricity.
- LILIAN: But we haven't got any.
- LADY W: That's what I mean. Horace refused to have them laid on. And that's been our saving.
- LILIAN: I hadn't thought of it like that.
- LADY W: I have constantly. It's because you have to draw water from the well and bring in the oil lamps when it gets dark, not to mention cooking which is primitive to say the least, that they've left us alone.
- LILIAN: Yes, of course.
- LADY W: We've discussed it any number of times.
- LILIAN: Yes, we have.
- LADY W: Then you must remember. If we had all modern conveniences here, they'd have billeted half a dozen of their beastly officers on us. So that's one good thing, isn't it?
- LILIAN: I'll get the egg on toast.
- LADY W: Good girl. Bring yours in and we'll have it together as usual.
- LILIAN: Yes, Lady Wincombe.
- LILLIAN moves to the lamp and turns it up. It is now getting quite dark in the room, though the light from the moon shines in.*
- LADY W: And another thing, Lillian. Open a bottle of Scotch whisky and pour out two glasses. I think we should celebrate.
- LILIAN: Celebrate what?

LADY W: I don't know. The fact that we're here still sitting on this damned volcano, of course. It doesn't matter what we celebrate, does it?

LILIAN: I suppose it doesn't, Lady Wincombe.

LILIAN makes a move towards the door. As she does so there is the distant rumble of anti-aircraft fire. LILIAN turns.

LILIAN: (*eagerly*) There you are. What did I tell you? They're coming.

LADY W: So your prophecy is about to be fulfilled. Why do you sound so pleased?

LILIAN: I thought we'd both be pleased.

LADY W: You know what it means, don't you?

LILIAN: It means they'll probably bomb the gun emplacements.

LADY W: It also probably means that some poor devils are about to be killed. Is that something to celebrate?

LILIAN: Don't you want me to bring the whisky then?

LADY W: Stop being ridiculous. Our giving up whisky isn't going to save anybody, is it? Anyway, they might hit us by mistake.

LILIAN: Perhaps I should draw the curtains.

LILIAN makes a move towards the window.

LADY W: Don't you dare! If there's something to see I want to see it.

LILIAN: What about the lamp. I think I should turn it down.

LADY W: Fiddlesticks! Stop fussing, girl. They can see all they want without our little light. Help me to push my chair closer to the window so that I can see for myself.

LADY W gets up with the aid of a stick and LILIAN pushes her chair forward so that she has a better view. She then hands LADY W a telescope which LADY W trains on the view outside.

LADY W: That's more like it. Now you can go and get supper ready. Actually, I've decided I like the word supper after all. It's so much cosier than dinner, isn't it? I think we should down grade it. Don't you think that was a good idea of mine, Lilian?

LILIAN: A very good idea, Lady Wincombe.

LADY W: *(looking through the telescope)* Nothing much to see, except the moon. I think they've changed their minds to spite you, after all. Can you hear anything?

LILIAN: No. Everything's quiet now. They've probably changed course for another target.

LADY W: Perhaps the moon has swallowed them up turned them to stone like Medusa. Do you believe in moon madness, Lillian?

LILIAN: I don't know anything about that, Lady Wincombe.

LADY W: Gracious! I can see the Man in the Moon. There is a face on it, you know - a great big beaming face!

LILIAN: That's all nonsense.

LADY W: Here, look for yourself.

LADY W hands LILIAN the telescope. LILIAN trains the telescope on the moon

LILIAN: Do you know, I think you're right.

LADY W: Nonsense! Fiddlesticks! You'll be telling me it's made of green cheese next. Whoever heard of such a thing!

LILIAN hands back the telescope.

LILIAN: I think you're going to be disappointed tonight.

LADY W: Pity about the cheese. I could fancy a huge slice of cheddar on toast at this very moment.

LILIAN: I'll get the supper.

The sound of a staff car approaching.

LADY W: What's that? Are the planes coming, after all?

LILIAN goes to the window and looks out.

LILIAN: *(with breathless excitement)* No, no. It's a staff car. It's just turned into the drive.

LADY W: Good gracious! Are we about to have a visitation?

LILIAN goes out onto the patio.

LILIAN: *(hands to her mouth)* I think it's the General. He's getting out of the car. He looked up at the house.

LADY W: I refuse to see him. We must pretend to be out.

LILIAN: I think he might have spotted me.

LADY W: Oh, bother! Look, I'm going to bed. If you tell him I'm in bed he'll go away. Yes, you pop down and tell him I'm in bed.

LADY W gets up and stands supported by her stick.

LILIAN: *(fearfully)* But supposing he won't go away?

LADY W: He must! He must! I can't be bothered with him.

There is a loud knock at the outer door.

LILIAN: It's too late!

LADY W: All right! Give me my blanket! I'll pretend to be ga ga.

LILIAN hurriedly grabs LADY W's blanket. She drags LADY W's chair away from the window, LADY W sits down on the chair and tries to look stupid. LILIAN covers her knees with her blanket.

LADY W: How's that?

LILIAN: That will do nicely.

There is another loud knock at the door.

LILIAN: I'd better go. He's getting impatient.

LADY W: Yes, yes, it doesn't do to keep an impatient General waiting. But don't hurry and don't forget you're a bit stupid too!

LILIAN nods hurriedly, composes herself, and exits.

LADY W leans forward and listens intently. We hear the GENERAL and LILIAN off. As their voices approach closer, LADY W arranges herself as an old lady to receive him.

LILIAN enters.

LILIAN: General Meyer, Madam.

LADY W: What's that? A visitor?

GENERAL MEYER enters and clicks his heels. He is fiftyish and courteous - a career soldier, well educated and suave.

GENERAL M: Good evening, Lady Wincombe. I hope I don't intrude.

LADY W: Not at all, General. We're always pleased to have visitors (*tartly*) especially of the civilised sort.

GENERAL M: I hope you're in good health, Lady Wincombe. Your housekeeper tells me you are not quite well.

LADY W: Nonsense! Fiddlesticks! I'm as strong as a horse! It's just old age, you know. I abhor age. Quite the worse thing that can happen to a person. It should never have been allowed.

GENERAL M: They say the good die young, Lady Wincombe.

LADY W: One of the Greeks mentioned it, I believe. Possibly Menander. Yes I'm sure it was Menander. It was complete nonsense, anyway! Menander was a comedian.

GENERAL M: What a clever mind you have, Lady Wincombe.

LADY W: Clever is as clever does, General. To what do I owe this honour?

GENERAL M: (*holding out a basket*) I thought you might care to accept a little gift ...

LADY W: What's this? Some kind of peace offering?

GENERAL M chuckles indulgently

GENERAL M: Such a wonderful sense of humour you have, Lady Wincombe. So English, I believe.

GENERAL M lays the basket on the table before LADY W.

LADY W peers at it suspiciously.

LADY W: It isn't a bomb, is it? I won't have bombs in the house. Oh, no, it's a yellow basket (*singing croakily*) 'A tisket a tasket, I found my yellow basket'.

GENERAL M: What is this tisket, you sing of?

LADY W: Don't you know about Ella FitzGerald's yellow basket, General? No, I suppose you wouldn't.

GENERAL M: I've heard of the Little Red Riding Hood, of course.

LADY W: Oh, yes: Little Red Riding Hood! ! She took eggs to her Granny in a yellow basket, but the Bad Wolf stole them. What have you brought me, General?

LADY W looks in to the basket curiously.

LADY W: Ah, what can these be? (*Looking sharply at the GENERAL*)
Timeo Danaos et dona ferentes, you know.

GENERAL M: What is that 'Timeo Danaos'?

LADY W: 'I fear the Greeks, even when they bring gifts'. It's Aeneid, but I expect you knew that.

GENERAL M: The Greeks again, of course.

LADY W: Lilian, please look and see what the General has brought us, will you?

LILIAN moves to the table hesitantly.

GENERAL M: (*raising his arms magnanimously*) If you please, Freuline. Do as Lady Wincombe bids you!

LILIAN reaches into the basket and takes out a bottle wrapped in tissue paper.

GENERAL M: Go on, please. Unwrap. See what I have brought for you.

LILIAN cautiously unwraps the bottle and holds it up. GENERAL M preens himself.

LADY W: What is it, champagne?

GENERAL M: Not champagne, Lady Wincombe! Champagne is French. This is Sekt, a German drink. Much better than champagne.

LADY W: Well, thank you, General! This is an honour even from a Greek General!

GENERAL M: (*gesturing at LILIAN*) Look! Look! There is more!

LILIAN draws a well-wrapped cake from the basket.

GENERAL M: Good! Good! Perhaps you will be kind to unwrap this, Lady Wincombe?

LILIAN places the cake on the table before LADY W.

- LADY W: What's this? (*Lifting the corner of the cover*) My goodness, It's a cake!
- GENERAL M: (*beaming proudly*) Not a cake, Lady Wincombe! This is more than a cake. This is baumkuchen!
- LADY W: Oh, yes, baumkuchen. I remember. I had some when I was at school. I had a German friend. We used to have midnight feasts in the dorm, you know.
- GENERAL M: Ah, the great English Public School! 'Tom Brown's Schooldays'. I read it when I was a kinder.
- LADY W: Mine was a girls' school, General.
- GENERAL M: Naturally, naturally! How you joke, Lady Wincombe. I do so much enjoy your English sense of humour, especially when you laugh at yourselves.
- LADY W: Yes. We have a laugh for all seasons, General. We sometimes even laugh when we should be crying.
- GENERAL M: Your laughing is very brave, Lady Wincombe. We Germans should, perhaps, learn to laugh a little more.
- LADY W: But not at yourselves, surely!
- GENERAL M: Do not mock, Lady Wincombe. It is not right to mock one's friends.
- LADY W: I thought you were the enemy.
- LILIAN: (*intervening quickly*) Lady Wincombe is grateful for the cake, General. Would you like a slice? And the Sekt. Shall we open it now?
- LADY W: Nonsense! Fiddlesticks! These are for a special occasion, aren't they, General? Anyway, we haven't had our supper yet. Egg on toast. Would you care to join us, General?
- GENERAL M: Is that all you have?
- LADY W: Egg on toast is more than adequate for an old lady, General, and, if we open the Sekt now, I shall start laughing and babbling all kinds of rubbish.
- GENERAL M: They say we speak truth when we have the drink, Lady Wincombe.

LADY W: Yes, that's what I'm afraid of. Please sit down. Lilian will pour you a glass of Scotch whisky instead. A wee dram will warm the cockles of your General's heart.

LILIAN goes to a cupboard and gets out a bottle of Scotch and two glasses.

GENERAL M: A strange saying, Lady Wincombe. What are these cockles you speak of?

LADY W: 'Cockle' from the French 'coquille', General. A cockle is one's innermost heart. That's why the Scots are so determined.

GENERAL M: So? Your knowledge is very great, Lady Wincombe. You make us all eat humble pie. Is that the way you say it?

LADY W: Excellent, General. We should all eat a good deal more of it. Then perhaps we might endeavour to survive as a species instead of blowing one another to bits.

LILIAN has poured two glasses of whisky, one of which she hands to the GENERAL and the other to LADY W.

GENERAL M: *(takes the glass of whisky with a nod)* Those days will soon be over, Lady Wincombe. *(Raising his glass)* Prosit! Cheers! Is that correct?

LADY W: *(raising her glass)* 'Good health' might be better if you want to get on in the world.

The GENERAL and LADY W sip their drinks in silence. LILIAN looks on.

LADY W: Lilian, why don't you go and attend to the supper? I'm sure the General will understand.

GENERAL M: *(holding up his glass to LILIAN)* Of course.

LILIAN gives a slight bow and withdraws quietly. The GENERAL turns to watch as she exits.

GENERAL M: A very fine woman! How long has she been with you?

LADY W: *(cautiously)* For many years - at least ten years I should think.

GENERAL M: She is not old. Where is her husband?

LADY W: I don't think Lilian's been married, General. Why do you ask?

GENERAL M: It is curiosity. One likes to know who is who on the island, you know. If one must look after people, one must know much about them.

As the conversation continues LADY W becomes more sharp and businesslike.

LADY W: Now that we are alone, General, I wonder if you would be so kind as to tell me the real reason for your visit.

Pause.

GENERAL M: You are very direct, Lady Wincombe. That is a quality I admire, especially in a woman.

LADY W: And in a man, perhaps?

GENERAL M: Of course! But in a woman it is, shall we say, more unusual.
(Raising his glass to LADY W)

LADY W: You see, General, now that my husband has passed on, I feel in some way responsible for the island ... for the people. There is no Bailiff now. The people expect something of me and I cannot let them down. I hope you understand?

GENERAL M: I believe your son is in America?

LADY W: So you see even we poor old women have to do our best in that station of life into which God has called us.

GENERAL M: Yes, yes, of course. We Germans know that very well. Which means ...

GENERAL M savours his whisky. He then gets up and takes a few steps about the room, He appears to be somewhat ill at ease.

GENERAL M: ... Which means we each have a cross to bear, Lady Wincombe. You to look after your people, I to look after my men and the interests of the Reich as well as the people here. So we understand one another, yes?

GENERAL M is standing with his back to the French windows.

LILIAN enters with another lamp. She gives a start and almost drops the lamp. The GENERAL moves to help her.

GENERAL M: Be careful! Let me take it! We don't want to burn the house down, do we?

LILIAN: Thank you. I can manage.

LILIAN stands the lamp on a table to one side. She gives a slight bow and exits.

GENERAL M: I see Lilian is a little nervous with me.

LADY W: She's a housekeeper and companion and you're a General. So it's scarcely surprising, is it? It's probably hunger too. We are all hungry. And that makes us jumpy.

GENERAL M: Yes, you are hungry. That is why I brought the baumkuchen. And I will send up more food, Lady Wincombe.

LADY W: That is very kind. But you shouldn't treat us differently from everyone else. The whole community needs more food.

GENERAL M: I will send it to feed my officers, Lady Wincombe.

Pause.

LADY W: Which officers? What do you mean?

The GENERAL sits down again.

GENERAL M: You see, Lady Wincombe, I have a little difficulty. There are two officers coming to the island. Berlin has sent them to do special work.

LADY W: Ah, now I begin to see the reason for the baumkuchen ... but what you are about to suggest is quite impossible.

GENERAL M: I'm afraid I must billet them with you, Lady Wincombe.

LADY W: It is out of the question! How can I look after two German officers here? We have no running water or electricity. I no longer have any servants. And I'm too old to do anything but grumble and complain.

GENERAL M: But that is nonsense, Lady Wincombe! Servants are not necessary and your wit is as sharp as a shark's tooth.

LADY W: Then your officers should stay away in case they get bitten!

GENERAL M: There! That is an excellent example. And your Lilian is also very capable. She will do everything and, if necessary, I will send an army cook to look after the officers...

LADY W: An army cook! Here at the Manor! I've never heard of such a thing! This isn't a barracks, General!

GENERAL M: ... Though most of the time the officers will take their meals at my head quarters. That is why I want them stationed at the Manor. As you know, my head quarters are just down the

road, no more than half a mile away. We are already overcrowded there. I need them quite close. They have special duties and must report to me many times a day.

LADY W: What are these special duties, General?

GENERAL M: (*somewhat formally*) I cannot discuss military matters with you, Lady Wincombe. All I can say is that you must expect the two officers tomorrow.

LILIAN enters carrying a tray upon which is a covered plate.

GENERAL M: (*becoming jovial again*) Ah, your supper has arrived, Lady Wincombe! I hope the eggs are to your satisfaction.

LADY W: I'm sure they will be. I can pretend I'm gorging caviare.

GENERAL M: Then I must leave you.

GENERAL M gets up briskly, clicks his heels, and bows.

GENERAL: Auf Wiedersehen, Lady Wincombe! I hope we have the pleasure of meeting again soon. I have enjoyed your shark's tooth. You are a wise woman.

The GENERAL turns to LILIAN.

GENERAL M: Auf Wiedersehen, Lilian. I will trust you to take good care of my officers. And please don't see me to the door. I don't like unnecessary formality.

GENERAL M goes to the door and turns abruptly.

GENERAL M: Heil, Hitler!

GENERAL M exits before the two women can respond.

LADY W and Lilian exchange looks of astonishment. LADY W growls. Lilian goes to the French windows and looks out.

LILIAN: He's gone! Thank goodness for that!

We hear the sound of the General's staff car as it pulls away from the house.

LADY W: Yes, he's gone, but for how long? I didn't like the sound of that auf Wiedersehen ... not to mention Heil Hitler.

LADY W takes the cover off her plate.

LADY W: What's this? You haven't brought your own supper in.

LILIAN: *(swaying slightly)* I don't feel hungry.

LADY W looks at LILIAN sharply.

LADY W: You're not sick, are you, Lillian?

LILIAN: I'm quite well. I just don't feel hungry.

LADY W: Nonsense! You must eat. *(Leaning forward intently)* We need to keep strong, Lillian!

LADY W stares at LILIAN.

LADY W: You heard what he said, didn't you? You were listening at the door.

LILIAN: *(with a faint smile)* Of course.

LADY W: About the two officers.

LILIAN: And the special duties.

LADY W: Yes, the special duties. I wonder what those can be.

LILIAN: I know what they are, Lady Wincombe.

LADY W: What? What special duties?

We see sudden flashes in the window and hear the sound of anti-aircraft fire. LILIAN moves to the French windows, closes them, and draws the curtains across.

LADY W: That's right. Shut it out. The bombers are coming. Your forecast was correct.

Pause. We hear the sound of aircraft approaching

LADY W: *(leaning forward)* What special duties, Lillian?

LILIAN moves towards LADY W. Her hands are clasped and we see that she is trembling.

LILIAN: Deportations!

The noise of low flying aircraft grows louder. We hear the sound of falling bombs. There are loud explosions. The house seems to rock as...

THE CURTAIN FALLS