**Hands across the Sea**

**By: Noel Coward**

In the drawing room of the Gilpins' stylish Mayfair flat in London, Walters, the maid, takes a telephone message for her employers. The caller is Mrs. Rawlingson with whom Maureen "Piggie" Gilpin and her friend Maud Dalborough once stayed when temporarily stranded in Samolo in the South Pacific during a world cruise. On seeing the message, Piggie explains to her husband, Commander Peter Gilpin, R.N., that Mrs. Rawlingson and her husband are visiting London and, having asked them to tea, Piggie has forgotten the appointment until now (extending or accepting and then forgetting invitations is a habit of Piggie's). She makes urgent phone calls to recruit friends to join her to entertain the Rawlingsons, and Peter persuades a naval colleague to invite the visitors to tour the naval dockyard at Portsmouth during their stay.

As soon as the Gilpins leave the room, Walters ushers in Mr. and Mrs. Wadhurst, a couple whom Piggie and Maud met in Malaya. As with the Rawlingsons, Piggie has invited them to tea and then forgotten about the appointment. Another visitor is shown in: Mr. Burnham, a young employee of a company that is designing a speed boat for Peter. He and the Wadhursts make polite, slightly stiff conversation. While they wait for the Gilpins to appear, Clare Wedderburn and Bogey Gosling, close friends of the Gilpins, arrive. Clare and Bogey make themselves loudly at home and liberally hand round cocktails.

Piggie enters, greets her old friends and welcomes the Wadhursts, whom she mistakes for the Rawlingsons. Conversation is continually interrupted by the telephone on which Piggie and later Peter and Clare are called to talk to other friends, which they do uninhibitedly, to the confusion of the Wadhursts. At one point, Burnham rises and tries to give Peter a long roll of cardboard, but is thwarted when Peter is again called to the telephone. The conversation is interrupted again when Piggie takes a call from Mrs. Rawlingson, who apologises that she and her husband cannot come after all. Piggie, realising her error, tries to discover tactfully who the Wadhursts actually are. Just as they are about to leave to go to the theatre, Mrs Wadhurst mentions Pendarla, where she and Wadhurst live. This finally jogs Piggie's memory, and she bids them an effusive farewell, inviting them to dine one evening and go to the theatre. She and the Wadhursts leave the room.

Clare, like Piggie, has assumed that Burnham is the Wadhursts' son. She is puzzled when he does not leave with them. He explains who he is, and that he has brought the designs for Peter's new boat. Piggie, meanwhile, takes another telephone call and apologises to her caller for forgetting their engagement that afternoon. As Burnham creeps out, she, still unaware that he is not the Wadhursts' son, bids him goodbye: "It's been absolutely lovely, you're the sweetest family I've ever met in my life."