

Scene 5

SCENE: LIGHTING change: Autumn afternoon.

AT RISE: TURING Enters with DILLWYN KNOX. KNOX is about 60; Eton and King's; walks with a slight limp; he is carrying a bulky file.

KNOX. So you found us all right?

TURING. Yes, thank you, no problems.

KNOX. Silly question, really. I mean, here you are. Of course you found us. (*Puts the file on a table.*) Punctual to the minute. Bravo. That's quite an achievement these days. If only Churchill could take a leaf out of Mussolini's book and make the trains run on time. Which one did you catch?

TURING. I got here this morning, actually.

KNOX. This morning?

TURING. I didn't want to be late.

KNOX. You've been here all day?

TURING. Yes.

KNOX. Oh dear, poor you. Bletchley doesn't have much to offer — as you must have discovered.

TURING. I went to the cinema.

KNOX. Well, exactly. Nothing else to do here. What did you see?

TURING. A cartoon film: *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*.

KNOX. I think I saw it; I took one of my nieces. I invariably fall asleep at the cinema. Isn't there a wicked witch?

TURING. Yes, she gives Snow White a poisoned apple.

KNOX. Don't tell me it's got a sad ending.

TURING. No, she wakes up in the arms of a handsome prince. It's really quite touching.

KNOX. Really?

TURING. Well, in a sentimental sort of way.

KNOX. Obviously I wasn't paying enough attention. I must make a point of seeing it again sometime. *(He sits; TURING sits.)* You must be wondering what this is all about.

TURING. I know your reputation as a code-breaker, Mr. Knox, so I assumed it was something to do with the deciphering work you're doing here.

KNOX. Ah. You've heard about that.

TURING. Nothing much, just talk.

KNOX. What sort of talk?

TURING. Amongst my colleagues at Cambridge. *(KNOX is clearly disconcerted.)*

KNOX. It's supposed to be tremendously secret, this place — I mean quite tremendously secret. Hence all the barbed wire and soldiers and passwords and so on.

TURING. Yes, I realize that.

KNOX. How did you get in, by the way? Did they tell you the password?

TURING. I showed them your letter.

KNOX. Oh good, well done. I always make a frightful balls-up of this password nonsense. It must be some-

thing to do with my age.

TURING. In what respect?

KNOX. Failing memory. We all live far too long, that's the trouble: faculties fade, the body disintegrates, the mind crumbles. My solicitor says that dentists are to blame. He opines that nature intended us to die as soon as our teeth drop out; but thanks to the advances in dentistry, we struggle on into an infirm and wretched old age. *(brief pause)* Yes...?

TURING. I didn't speak.

KNOX. What was I saying?

TURING. Passwords.

KNOX. Ah yes. We're supposed to call this place Station X, but of course, everyone knows it's the Government Code and Cipher School: the G.C.C.S. — waggishly referred to as the Golf Club and Chess Society. *(He laughs; TURING smiles; KNOX opens the file.)* You'll have to bear with me, Turing; I'm not an administrator, neither am I a mathematician — but since it seems highly likely that we shall be working together, the powers-that-be think we should have some sort of exploratory conversation. Is that all right with you?

TURING. Of course.

KNOX. Good. *(Indicates a file.)* This is your file. I shall consult it from time to time. There's no need to be alarmed.

TURING. I'm not.

KNOX. Good. *(Looks at the file.)* So you went to Sherborne, Cambridge, *(some surprise)* — and then America: 1936 to 1938; two years in America. How was that? Did you enjoy Princeton?

TURING. Well, yes, it was ... yes.

KNOX. Enjoy is scarcely the right word, perhaps.

TURING. No, no, as a matter of fact, it was very enjoyable — some of it, anyway. Peculiar, too, until I got used to it.

KNOX. In what way peculiar?

TURING. Oh, many ways: peculiar clothes, peculiar food, peculiar habits of speech. Whenever you thank them for anything, Americans always say, "you're welcome." I found this rather charming at first — thinking they meant that I was indeed welcome. But in fact it's just a conversational tic; it comes back like a ball thrown against a wall: extremely irritating.

KNOX. Aha.

TURING. They say that a lot too.

KNOX. Say what?

TURING. Aha. When they can't think of a suitable reply, but think silence would be rude, they tend to say, "Aha."

KNOX. (*TURING'S sharpness makes him a little uneasy.*) I see. Fascinating. What exactly did you do there?

TURING. Um ... well, I'd just published a paper, "On Computable Numbers," and I was able to develop some of those ideas and, uh ... various other things, various other research projects.

KNOX. All concerned with mathematics and logic?

TURING. Yes.

KNOX. Yes. (*turning a page*) And your interest in codes and ciphers: how did that begin?

TURING. I've always been interested, I think, ever since I was a boy. I got a prize at school: a book called