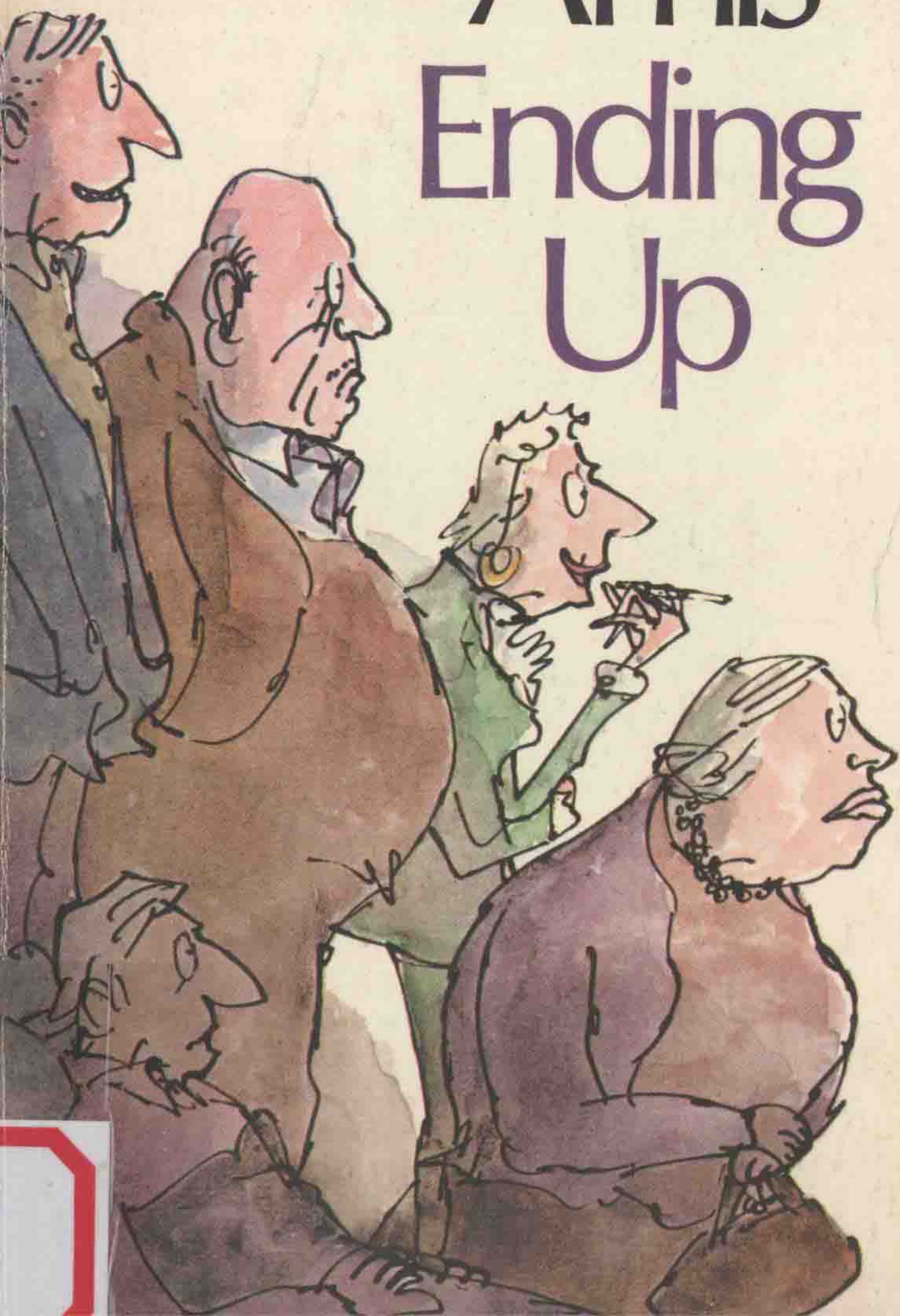




Kingsley Amis Ending Up



KINGSLEY AMIS

ENDING UP



Penguin Books Inc
New York • Baltimore

Penguin Books Inc
72 Fifth Avenue
New York, New York 10011

Penguin Books Inc
7110 Ambassador Road
Baltimore, Maryland 21207

First published in the United States by
Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., New York, 1974
Published by Penguin Books Inc, 1976

Reprinted by arrangement with Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc.

Copyright © Kingsley Amis, 1974

Printed in the United States of America by
George Banta Co., Inc., Menasha, Wisconsin

OTHER BOOKS BY KINGSLEY AMIS

Novels

Lucky Jim
That Uncertain Feeling
I Like It Here
Take a Girl Like You
One Fat Englishman
The Anti-Death League
I Want It Now
The Green Man
Girl, 20
The Riverside Villas Murder

Short Stories

My Enemy's Enemy

Poems

A Case of Samples: Poems 1946-1956
A Look Round the Estate: Poems 1957-1967

Nonfiction Books

New Maps of Hell: A Survey of Science Fiction
What Became of Jane Austen? and Other Questions
On Drink

KINGSLEY AMIS

ENDING UP



Penguin Books Inc
New York • Baltimore

Penguin Books Inc
72 Fifth Avenue
New York, New York 10011

Penguin Books Inc
7110 Ambassador Road
Baltimore, Maryland 21207

First published in the United States by
Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., New York, 1974
Published by Penguin Books Inc, 1976

Reprinted by arrangement with Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc.

Copyright © Kingsley Amis, 1974

Printed in the United States of America by
George Banta Co., Inc., Menasha, Wisconsin

TO BETTY AND PAUL FUSSELL



1

‘How’s your leg this morning, Bernard?’ asked Adela Bastable.

‘Much as it was yesterday morning,’ said her brother in his usual bantering tone. ‘Or afternoon, for that matter. Sorry, but there it is.’

‘Because it’s quite a long way from this new place to the car-park. From the supermarket itself, I mean. You have to come out at the front, where you go in, and go all the way round to the back. You’d think they’d have an entrance or an exit at the back, wouldn’t you?’

‘Or even both. In a sense, yes, you would. Why not go to the old place?’

‘I’ve explained all that to you I don’t know how often,’ said Adela in her thick voice, one that seemed to make it hard for her to express by its tone any emotion but a mild resentment. ‘We’re getting poorer the whole time because of inflation, so I have to keep trying new places to see that we get the best value for money. If you took the slightest interest in the affairs of the household you wouldn’t have to be told that.’

‘Wouldn’t I? Anyway, I do, don’t I, Shorty? Take

an interest in the affairs of the household. I can't help my leg.'

The man Bernard Bastable had spoken to was not short. Nor was he tall enough for the name to be appropriate as an irony. He was known as Shorty partly because his surname was Shortell, and partly because it was generally felt that his domestic status, not on a level with the others' and yet not properly that of servant, rather ruled out the use of his Christian name, which was Derrick. He said in a sort of Irish accent, although he was not Irish, 'Och, now, a course ya can't, me ould darlin. Ya can't go expectin a fella to—'

'I don't see what stops him taking an interest,' said Adela. 'Actually physically prevents him.'

'Shorty means to express his agreement with the proposition that I can't help my leg,' said Bernard, speaking as clearly as he could, which was not very clear. He still sounded rather drunk, but he was no more drunk than Shorty was Irish; he had not been drunk for fifteen years.

'How a bad leg prevents you from being able to carry things is a mystery to me.'

'Yes, I know it is. It's something of a mystery to me as well. And of course it's a complete mystery, hidden in total and impenetrable darkness, to Mainwaring. Or Maine-wearing, as he seems to think it's pronounced.' Bernard referred to the local doctor, one much despised and much in demand.

'Anyway, you can't come to the supermarket.'

'Only as a companion. Not as a carrier of things.'

'Look, I'll come, Adela,' said Shorty in his native modified-Cockney.

'No, Shorty, you're needed here. Don't forget that Trevor and Tracy are coming to luncheon, so you'll do the vegetables, won't you? And you'll clear up breakfast.'

'Shorty clears up breakfast every morning of his life.'

'Indeed he does. It's amazing how many things a bad leg can prevent one from doing.'

Bernard started reading the *Radio Times*, or his glance fell to it.

'There's bound to be a bloke there who'll carry your stuff, Adela,' said Shorty. 'Some kid or other.'

'They have to know you before they'll do that.'

'Yet one more argument for going to the old place,' said Bernard.

'I've already explained about that and I haven't the time or the inclination to run over it again.' Adela looked at her hefty wristwatch. 'I must be off; I've got to go to the chemist and the cleaners as well. And I might be able to fit in the electricity shop too. We need a plug for that lamp. The one by the sitting-room window. I'll just have to see how things turn out. It's largely a question of the traffic. You just can't tell in advance. It seems to be quite unpredictable. Bernard.'

'What?'

'Bernard,' said Adela more loudly.

'I heard you say my name. I was asking in effect

what you wanted, not for a repetition of what you had said. As my use of a falling rather than a rising inflection might have suggested.'

'Oh, honestly ... You'll go in and see George, won't you?'

'What about?' Bernard seemed struck by unlooked-for possibilities.

'You know very well. Just see him.'

'Just seeing him would hold few enough attractions. Talking to him, which is what you mean, holds fewer still. Being talked to by him, that is.'

'I freely undertake to give you the undeniable support of my companionship in your charitable enterprise, Bernard,' said Shorty.

'Don't forget it's because of you he's here,' said Adela to Bernard.

'What?'

'Don't forget it's because of—'

'Oh, what nonsense,' said Bernard lightly. 'It was all your idea, as you well know.'

'In his condition ... given his circumstances ...' Adela's head moved about on its short neck as if she were looking for physical escape. 'He hadn't got anybody else. You must realize ...'

'That bloody dog.'

'But you can't expect—'

'We all realize, Adela,' said Shorty. 'Even Bernard when he's not playing silly buggers. You go off now before the shops fill up. Go on.'

'When will you be back?' asked Bernard. 'In case some man comes or rings up or something.'

'I've told you : as soon as I've been to the supermarket and the cleaners and the—'

'When will you be back?'

'What o'clock is what the brigadier desires to be informed,' said Shorty.

Adela looked at her watch again. 'With luck, about twelve.'

'Ah,' said Bernard. 'Twelve-thirty. Ish.'



Stumbling slightly over the threshold, Adela Bastable left Tuppenny-hapenny Cottage by its front door. The house, standing at the edge of a fair-sized tract of woodland and once, perhaps, the abode of gamekeepers, had been her and her brother's and Shorty's home for eleven years. Adela, to whom it had fallen to conduct all the dealings, had picked the place up cheap from an artistic couple who said they had found it too large for them. They might have added that they had also found it too cold in winter, in too much disrepair to be renovated except at great expense, and too isolated : three miles from the nearest village and nearly seven from the nearest town, Newmarket. Nobody would deliver milk or newspapers. So it had not been cheap in the sense of

being a bargain, only in that of being what, for the new occupants, it had had to be—low in price and not actually uninhabitable. To Adela, it was a pretty house too, prettier than anywhere else she had ever lived, at any rate on the outside.

As always when leaving or returning, she paused now and looked up at the long, crooked façade with conscious pleasure. Eighteenth-century timber-frame was what she called the style of the house when asked, and sometimes when not. She would admit to herself that she was not really sure about either half of the description. The estate agent had been emphatic as to the period, but had turned vague, though staying emphatic, when asked to specify a date. It was her guess that the building had originally been called something else now left far behind by the flight of whim that had retitled it. The timber-frame issue was unclear too, in that there was not very much timber involved. But never mind: what with the quiet, the nearby woods and all their wild life, the results of Shorty's work in the garden, it was far from a bad place to end up.

She had been in the driver's seat of her 1967 Morris 1100 estate car for some little time before she realized that the ignition key, since it was neither in its socket nor in her handbag, must be on her dressing-table. Back in the house, she passed Bernard on his way to the sitting-room. He was limping heavily, but then he could have heard her come in. When she explained about the key, he said with a smile that it was a good idea to go and fetch it,

because he had always found that cars worked better with their ignition switched on. Adela mounted the steep, creaking stairs. She wished, as she still occasionally found herself doing, that her brother would let her love him, but of course it was too late for that. It had been too late since they were children before the first war.

Finding somebody she could love had been the main quest of Adela's life until about the time of her fiftieth birthday, when its impracticability had become clear to her. The prospect of receiving love she had abandoned much earlier. She had never been kissed with passion, and not often with even mild and transient affection. This she explained to herself as the result of her extreme ugliness. She was a bulky, top-heavy woman with a red complexion, hair that had always been thin, and broad lips. To love somebody, she had found, was impossible unless something was given in return: not indeed love, nor so much as positive liking, but interest, notice. Her career in hospital catering, taken up after she had been told, without further explanation, that she was not the right type to become a nurse, had brought her into contact with thousands of people until her retirement in 1961. None of them had become her friend, in the sense that none had agreed to go to a theatre or a coffee-shop or a sale with her more than a couple of times, and so she had lived alone throughout her working life. Now, after Bernard had made his astonishing offer, that she could housekeep for him and Shorty, she was among people and, with all

the difficulties this seemed inevitably to bring, happier than at any time since her childhood. Her only fear was of falling helplessly ill and having nobody to leave in charge ; it was a comfort that Dr Mainwaring, whom she trusted in medical matters, had told her that her gastric ulcer, while bringing her occasional bouts of pain and nausea, was under control, and that she was otherwise in good condition for a woman of seventy-one.

The Morris lurched and swung its way along the fifty yards of unmade track to the road. She must tell Shorty to have another go at filling in the pot-holes, which seemed to reappear with every heavy fall of rain, such as the mid-autumn skies now threatened. Adela was late and would have to face the traffic and the crowds, but she knew she could manage that.



'You'd be far better off *in* a home,' sang Shorty, vigorously running a wire pad round a frying-pan, vigorously enough to shorten its effective life by one per cent or so — 'you'd be far better off *in* a home ...' He had picked up the tune in his Army days, and singing it was largely an unconscious habit. Not altogether : now and then the thought would recur

to him that these words might pass for a comment on his situation in life, so Adela heard them from him fairly regularly. He sang them through again several times in the course of preparing the sprouts and potatoes and tidying up the little dark lopsided kitchen.

A good half of the space here was taken up by a bare rectangular table ; farmhouse style, it was sometimes said, and whenever it was said Shorty would mutter to himself that the thing must have come from the part of the farmhouse they kept for the shower that shovelled the shit. The table had indeed a cheap, hasty look. Round it stood some upright chairs, no two the same, lone survivors of otherwise vanished sets. The china crowding the dresser showed further unplanned variety, also the cutlery drawer, in which Shorty laid the final egg-eroded teaspoon.

He went to work briefly on the floor with a broom, leaving some fragments behind among the irregularities of the tiles, shoving the majority through a useful crack under the sink. The pit beneath must fill up some day, but he reckoned it would last his time. After shaking the greasy rush mat in the outer doorway, he replaced it in front of the range, where a log fire burned. Really successful fires at Tuppennyhapenny Cottage were far from the rule, but this one had never quite gone out for over two months, and was now well on the way to gaining a hold. He checked the gas-oven (the range was never hot enough for actual cooking) just as the clock above