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THE WORKS OF  
STANLEY HOUGHTON  
VOLUME  
II

*This Edition consists of one thousand and  
forty copies, of which one thousand  
are for sale.*







**MR. STANLEY HOUGHTON.**

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THE WORKS OF  
**STANLEY HOUGHTON**

EDITED WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

HAROLD BRIGHOUSE

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. II



LONDON

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PARTNERS

A COMEDY IN THREE ACTS

'They say. What say they? Let them say.'



## CHARACTERS

OLIVER.

LYDIA.

CYNTHIA.

SIR ISAAC GRUNDY.

VERNON.

LADY GRUNDY.

THE WAITER.



*The scene is the lounge of the Pink Hydrangea Hotel, Babylon-on-Sea. The action, which is continuous, takes place in the late afternoon and early evening.*

NOTE.—*Since the scene is a public room, and contains three entrances, it has not been thought necessary to indicate precisely the particular entrance by which a character comes in or goes out. In most cases this is quite immaterial, and can safely be left to the producer's discretion.*

*The Comedy should be played throughout with intense gravity, and a high level of polish should be maintained. The most preposterous things should be acted quite earnestly, as if the performers thoroughly believed in them.*



## PARTNERS

### ACT I

*The lounge of the Pink Hydrangea Hotel is an octagonal apartment, but only five sides can be seen by the spectator. One side, at the back, runs parallel to him ; two others run at an angle of forty-five degrees from each end of this ; and from the ends of the two last the remaining sides run at right angles to the spectator, ending at the footlights. In each angle there is a column or pillar, and these are joined by archways which support balconies thrown out from the floor above. Between each archway, enclosing the lounge, run light frameworks or screens of white woodwork and glass, about six feet in height. These shut off the corridor which runs round the lounge behind the columns, and render the lounge itself more cosy and private. The columns and visible parts of the walls are painted cream and gold ; the white wooden framework is hung with rose-coloured curtains, and the carpet is of rose-colour too. The furniture is the best bamboo or wicker work, very elegant in design ; and some of the chairs are covered tastefully with brocades and chintzes, or have cushions of those materials. Great pots of tall climbing pink roses, of pink hydrangeas and azaleas, stand at various places, and the electric fittings fastened to the columns and hanging from the archways are shaded with pink. There are three entrances from the sur-*

rounding corridor : one in the middle of the back, and the others right and left down by the footlights.

*Small tables with attendant chairs and lounges stand on each side of the centre entrance, and right and left near the other two entrances.*

*There are no windows visible. All the light comes from a glass roof, out of sight of the spectator.*

*When the curtain rises it is about five o'clock on an afternoon in May. LADY GRUNDY and SIR ISAAC are discovered having tea at the right-hand lower table. LADY GRUNDY is an exceedingly stout but well-preserved and handsome woman, very richly dressed. She has white hair which is most beautiful, and a pink complexion. SIR ISAAC is a rather spare old gentleman with a wispy grey beard and spectacles. They are both about sixty years of age. The WAITER, a pleasant, precise old man, is standing patiently in front of LADY GRUNDY holding an immense silver tray laden with cakes and light pastries. LADY GRUNDY examines the cakes closely, and at last selects three or four, which she transfers to her plate.*

LADY G. That will do, Francis. I don't think I shall be able to eat more.

WAITER. Very good, my lady. (*He pauses in front of SIR ISAAC.*) You don't take these sweet things, sir?

SIR I. No, Francis. Chronic dyspepsia forbids me. I enjoy myself vicariously now, by watching Lady Grundy consume them.

WAITER. Yes, sir; it is a pleasure to see her ladyship eat cakes, isn't it?

LADY G. Sir Isaac thinks I eat too much. You don't think I eat too much, do you, Francis?

WAITER. Oh no, my lady ; as long as you are stopping at the hotel *en pension* you are entitled to eat as much as you please.

(*The WAITER goes slowly out with his tray.*)

LADY G. There ; you see, Isaac, Francis agrees with me. I knew he would ; that 's why I asked him. Francis is a perfect judge of such matters, he has had such a lot of experience.

SIR I. At the same time, my dear, we must not forget that Sir Leopold distinctly advised no pastry.

LADY G. My dear Isaac, if I followed Sir Leopold's advice I should be cured in no time, and then I should have no excuse for calling him in. For a fashionable physician, Sir Leopold is extraordinarily incompetent ; I often have the greatest difficulty in persuading him that there is anything the matter with me at all.

SIR I. He is certainly lacking in tact. Why don't you give him up ?

LADY G. Oh, I understand him so well now.

SIR I. You mean *he* understands *you* so well.

LADY G. No, I don't. Sir Leopold has the most intimate acquaintance with the private affairs of the aristocracy. I am convinced that next time he comes to see me I shall get the truth about the Duchess of Morecambe out of him.

SIR I. I hope, Louisa, that you will do nothing of the kind. Have you forgotten that your getting to know the truth about Mrs. Fontenoy cost me a thousand pounds ? Now if Mrs. Fontenoy could make me pay a thousand pounds in an action for slander, how much do you think the Duchess of

Morecambe would get? It's merely a problem in proportion.

LADY G. The story about Mrs. Fontenoy was true.

SIR I. Yes; that's why she brought the action. People don't bring actions for slander unless they have something to conceal.

LADY G. You would not have me connive at her immorality by remaining silent about such a matter. I should be nothing less than an accessory after the fact, and that, I understand, is a thing you can be prosecuted for.

SIR I. It is admirable to have a conscience, but it is a mistake to allow it to run away with you. Most of our eminent moralists and divines recognise that as a great truth.

LADY G. My dear Isaac, this affair of Mrs. Rede and Mr. Walmesley promises to turn out a first-class scandal; it is asking too much of any woman that she should ignore it.

SIR I. I don't ask you to ignore it; all I ask is that you should refrain from talking about it. You are far too ready to see evil where there is evil.

LADY G. I am of an exceedingly sanguine temperament, it is true. At the same time, Isaac, even with your scandalous readiness to believe well of people, I do not see how it is possible for you to suppose that Mr. Walmesley is staying in this hotel for any other reason than because Mrs. Rede is staying here.

SIR I. Nonsense.

LADY G. Where is Mrs. Rede's husband? Tell me that.

SIR I. She is probably a widow.



LADY G. A widow ! Rubbish ! She is far too serious to be a widow.

(LADY GRUNDY rings an electric bell which is fastened to a screen. The WAITER enters at once.)

LADY G. Do you happen to know, Francis, how long Mr. Walmesley intends to stop here ?

WAITER. I could not say for certain, but I am inclined to agree with your ladyship that Mr. Walmesley is likely to remain as long as Mrs. Rede does.

SIR I. Do you mean to say that you have been listening to our conversation, Francis ?

WAITER. Whilst I am serving tea, sir, it is almost impossible to avoid hearing what is said on this side of the screen. That is one of the disadvantages of hotel life, for the conversation of the visitors is usually very tedious, I find. But you do not need to be alarmed, sir. I will undertake that whatever you say shall go no further.

SIR I. But, really, my dear, you must be more careful in future. It is hardly fair to cause Francis any inconvenience.

WAITER. Not at all, sir ; Lady Grundy's conversation often gives me the greatest pleasure, I assure you. Her views on current morality are entirely admirable, if I may say so. I often wish my own wife were more like her. A virtuous woman is a crown to her husband.

SIR I. Her price is certainly often above rubies, Francis, as you will find out if ever you are concerned in an action for slander.

WAITER (*smiling indulgently*). Very good, sir ; very good indeed. I have never had the experience

of being defendant in a slander action ; though I have been the co-respondent in a divorce case.

LADY G. And what did your wife say when she found that you were co-respondent in a divorce case ?

WAITER. She was not in a position to say anything, my lady. She was the respondent in the same case.

LADY G. Ah, you married her. I felt sure I was not mistaken in my favourable estimate of your character, Francis.

WAITER. Thank you, my lady. I see Mr. Walmesley is coming this way, so perhaps we had better defer this conversation until a more suitable opportunity.

(OLIVER WALMESLEY, a tall, dark, handsome man of thirty, comes in.)

WAITER. Will you take tea now, sir ?

OLIVER. Please, Francis.

WAITER. Very good, sir. (*He is going.*)

OLIVER. Francis, tea for two.

WAITER. Tea for two, sir. Very good, sir.

(*The WAITER goes out.*)

LADY G. Tea is so refreshing after bridge, isn't it, Mr. Walmesley ? Personally I always find bridge a most fatiguing game.

OLIVER. You take it so seriously, Lady Grundy. I do not think that games were intended to be played seriously.

LADY G. But, my dear Mr. Walmesley, after all we must be serious about something. I cannot think that we were intended to live only for pleasure. And games are the only things you can get people to be serious about nowadays. All the important

matters in life they treat so lightly ; such as marriage, for instance.

OLIVER. Perhaps that is because people are beginning to look upon marriage as a sort of game too.

LADY G. Now, Mr. Walmesley, if you talk so cynically I shall begin to suspect that you are married yourself. I notice that most of the cynics are married men.

OLIVER. Sir Isaac is not a cynic, is he ?

LADY G. Certainly not.

OLIVER. Yet you are married to him, Lady Grundy.

LADY G. It is because Sir Isaac is married to me that he is not a cynic.

OLIVER. How true that must be.

LADY G. Now you are flattering me, and you expect me to flatter you in return, but I shall not.

OLIVER. I am disappointed. Flattery is the sincerest form of imitation.

SIR I. I seem to have heard something like that before.

OLIVER. Something like it, no doubt.

SIR I. It is exceedingly witty. What does it mean ?

OLIVER. It is very difficult to say exactly what it means. Most witty things are like peaches. If you handle them, you rub off the bloom.

*(The WAITER comes in with the tea. LADY GRUNDY rises.)*

LADY G. Well, Mr. Walmesley, we are going for a stroll on the beach in order to get an appetite for dinner. You will have to take your tea in solitary state.

OLIVER. Mrs. Rede has promised to help me to eat it.

LADY G. Mrs. Rede ? She has a kind heart.

OLIVER. Didn't you hear me order tea for two ?

LADY G. Yes ; but I always do that myself when I am hungry. They bring you twice as many anchovy and cress sandwiches if you order tea for two.

(CYNTHIA REDE, *a graceful, fair young woman of about twenty-six, comes in. She has a cheque in her hand.*)

CYNTHIA. Tea ready ? Delightful. (*To LADY GRUNDY.*) I have been obliged to make out a cheque. I find I have spent all my money.

LADY G. Oh, my dear Mrs. Rede, you shouldn't have troubled to do that.

CYNTHIA. It isn't any trouble, I assure you. I always prefer to pay my debts in this way ; it does not seem like spending money when you write out a cheque. Seven pounds six, was it not ?

(*She gives the cheque to LADY GRUNDY, who puts it in her purse.*)

LADY G. Thank you so much, dear Mrs. Rede ; it is always a pleasure to receive money, isn't it ?

CYNTHIA. Yes ; especially after you 've worked hard for it.

LADY G. Sir Isaac and I are ready to give you your revenge any time you like, Mrs. Rede.

CYNTHIA. Thanks so much, dear Lady Grundy, but I hardly think I can afford to have my revenge.

LADY G. Surely you would not let that stand in your way.

OLIVER. I am sure Mrs. Rede would not. I can't afford to play bridge for a pound a hundred any more than Mrs. Rede can. If I could, I shouldn't

do it. The man who risks what he can afford is a coward.

LADY G. What a shocking person you are. You say the most terrible things. I hardly dare listen to you whilst my husband is present. I am always expecting you to scandalise him.

(LADY GRUNDY and SIR ISAAC go out centre.)

OLIVER. I doubt whether even Lady Grundy could afford to play for a pound a hundred unless she made a point of winning.

CYNTHIA. For a good woman she certainly has the most extraordinary luck.

(CYNTHIA sits at the tea-table and begins to pour out tea. OLIVER comes and sits by her. Presently he tries to take her hand.)

(Withdrawing her hand quickly.) Don't, Oliver; remember that we are alone.

OLIVER. Darling!

CYNTHIA. You must not say such things to me in private, Oliver. I do not object to your making love to me publicly, because everybody does that, and so I am not compromised by your attentions. Indeed it would cause comment if you did not make love to me publicly; every one would be certain you had a very good reason for not doing so.

OLIVER. I am going to make love to you in future every minute of the day, both publicly and privately.

CYNTHIA. For how long?

OLIVER. For the present.

CYNTHIA. Until I am tired of it?

OLIVER. No; until *I* am tired of it.

CYNTHIA. But that will be such a long time.

OLIVER. No; I always make a point of growing tired of a woman before she grows tired of me. That is what is called tact.

CYNTHIA. Tact?

OLIVER. Certainly. Tact is the knack of doing unto others what you would like them to do unto you.

CYNTHIA. You mean that, in love, it is better to have too little than too much?

OLIVER. Far better; and that is not true of love merely. It is true of everything. If you rise from the feast unsatisfied, you look back on it with regret; and the things one regrets the most were always the happiest. At least that is how one feels afterwards. (*He takes her hand again.*) I love you, Cynthia.

CYNTHIA. You have told me that before.

OLIVER. I know. I thought you didn't hear me. When are you going to pay any attention to me?

CYNTHIA. Are you serious?

OLIVER. Of course I am serious.

CYNTHIA. How many times have you told a woman that?

OLIVER. Many a time; and I have always been right. That is why I know that I am serious now.

CYNTHIA. What do you want me to do?

OLIVER. Leave England with me.

CYNTHIA. But why leave England?

OLIVER. Of course it is not strictly necessary; but some women prefer to. They have perhaps an exaggerated sense of delicacy. But certainly on the Continent there is less chance of running up

against acquaintances provided we go to the wrong places.

CYNTHIA. The right places.

OLIVER. The right places are the wrong places.

When shall you be ready to start ?

CYNTHIA. Do you know that I am married ?

OLIVER. I have thought it possible, in spite of your wedding ring. You are not going to tell me that you are a widow, are you ?

CYNTHIA. No, I am not a widow.

OLIVER. I knew that.

CYNTHIA. How ?

OLIVER. Because you seemed unhappy. Perhaps that is too strong a term. You seemed to regret something.

CYNTHIA. Yes, I did.

OLIVER. When I saw that, I promised myself that I would try and make you forget your trouble, that I would try and wipe away your regret. Have I succeeded ?

CYNTHIA. If I say ' Yes ' I shall be flattering you.

OLIVER. I am fond of flattery.

CYNTHIA. Yes; your temperament is thoroughly masculine.

OLIVER. Now tell me what it was you were regretting when first I saw you.

CYNTHIA. It was my husband.

OLIVER. When did he leave you ?

CYNTHIA. He didn't.

OLIVER. So much the better. When did you leave him ?

CYNTHIA. I have never left him.

OLIVER. Then, my dear Cynthia, where is he ? I

do not want to see him, mind you, but I should be very grateful if you would give me some idea what has happened to him.

CYNTHIA. My husband and I are enjoying our first annual holiday.

OLIVER. What do you mean? You are not a firm of drapers, are you?

CYNTHIA. Not at all. We are people of independent means, and our position is a comfortable one. My husband and I are taking a holiday, not from an occupation but from each other.

OLIVER. What a splendid idea! How very necessary you must find it to get away from your husband.

CYNTHIA. Why? Do you know my husband?

OLIVER. Not at all.

CYNTHIA. Then how do you know that it is good to get away from him?

OLIVER. Because he is your husband. Every wife ought to have a holiday from her husband.

CYNTHIA. A good many get it whether they like it or not.

OLIVER. The tragedy is that those who get it seldom want it, and those who want it seldom get it. But how on earth did you persuade your husband to let you have your holiday?

CYNTHIA. We promised each other at our marriage that we would separate for exactly one month in every year.

OLIVER. But one promises so many things when one gets married. I hope that you are not going to take them all seriously.

CYNTHIA. I intend to exercise my own judgment as to which I shall take seriously. That was quite



the most important thing we promised each other, absolute freedom.

OLIVER. So you were able to insist upon this month's separation.

CYNTHIA. Oh, my husband insisted upon it as well.

We both hated the idea of separating, but we were both very firm. I think that was such a fine trait in the characters of both of us. Plenty of husbands and wives have to undergo prolonged separation, you know. For instance, if he had been a sailor, he might have had to go away for six months at a time; or if I had been a suffragette, I might have had to go to gaol for three months; but there was something much nobler in our mutual renunciation. It was voluntary, you see.

OLIVER. I see. And when did you begin to enjoy your annual holiday?

CYNTHIA. Three weeks ago to-day; and you can't think how wretched I was.

OLIVER. Wretched?

CYNTHIA. Well—lonely.

OLIVER (*taking her hand*). Cynthia!

CYNTHIA. Yes, that was where *you* came in; but I had been lonely for quite thirty-six hours before I met you.

OLIVER. But you will never be lonely again. I shall never leave you.

CYNTHIA. In that case, when the month is up it will be hardly possible for me to be lonely. Indeed it seems probable that I shall fly to the other extreme. That is what my grandmother used to say about me, that I am so liable to fly to extremes.

OLIVER. Don't join your husband ; come with me.

CYNTHIA. I am sure that my husband would not like that. I think I ought to consider his feelings.

OLIVER. Why should you ? He does not consider yours. What do you suppose he is doing now ?

CYNTHIA. I have not the least idea. I don't even know where he is.

OLIVER. What ! Do you mean to say that he has left you without a word, without a sign ? That you might be ill, dead even, and not be able to tell him so ?

CYNTHIA. Of course ; that was part of the compact. I don't know where he is, and he doesn't know where I am ; we are not to communicate with each other during the month.

OLIVER. And your husband agreed to that ?

CYNTHIA. He couldn't help himself, because he gave me his word of honour when we were married.

OLIVER. When a man is in love he does not know the meaning of honour.

CYNTHIA. A woman does.

OLIVER. Yes ; when she is in love she learns it for the first time. Do you know, I think your husband has treated you shamefully. He had no right to let you run such a risk.

CYNTHIA. What risk, pray ?

OLIVER. The very real risk of being fallen in love with. He must be a most conceited man, your husband.

CYNTHIA. Why ?

OLIVER. Because he evidently thinks that nobody can make love so well as he can. Such complacency is offensive ; it ought to be severely

castigated. Cynthia, it is your duty to punish your husband.

CYNTHIA. How ?

OLIVER. There is only one way of punishing one's husband.

CYNTHIA. Yes; but there are so many methods. Which one do you want me to adopt ?

OLIVER. The boat for France leaves here at midnight.

CYNTHIA. I do not know whether I can trust myself with you.

OLIVER. Are you afraid that I don't love you well enough ?

CYNTHIA. No; I am afraid that you love me too well. I am afraid that if my husband should divorce me you would want to marry me.

OLIVER. Why should such a prospect appal you ? You like me.

CYNTHIA. I like cake; but if I had nothing to eat but cake, I should pine for bread and butter. You are not commonplace enough to perform the ordinary daily duties of a husband.

OLIVER. I have not had the right to perform them yet.

CYNTHIA. You are selfish.

OLIVER. All great men and artists are selfish.

CYNTHIA. You are thoughtless. You never bring me flowers, for instance.

OLIVER. Why should I bring you flowers ? I have brought you my heart.

CYNTHIA. I cannot decorate my room with your heart. My husband used to buy me flowers, even after we were married.

OLIVER. I must say, Cynthia, I do not think it nice

of you to throw your husband at my head in this way. We might be married already.

CYNTHIA. I am sorry. I like you both in such different ways. He is so useful and attentive in small things, whilst your sudden bursts of passion are so splendid. I wonder which would prove the better in the long run.

OLIVER. There is no doubt that your husband's qualities will wear longer than mine, but we are not thinking of that just at present.

CYNTHIA. It is so difficult to choose. What a pity one cannot have two husbands—one for the day and the other for the night.

OLIVER. I will help you to choose, Cynthia. You do not need to be afraid. I promise you that I will not ask you to marry me, even if your husband should divorce you.

CYNTHIA. But how do I know that you will keep your promise?

OLIVER. Because I am married already.

CYNTHIA (*gladly*). Really?

OLIVER. Certainly.

CYNTHIA. You are not deceiving me?

OLIVER. Cynthia, can you not trust me?

CYNTHIA. I think I can. But oh! Oliver, it seems too good to be true.

OLIVER. I can see that I shall have to show you my marriage lines.

CYNTHIA. No; you make me ashamed of myself. I don't want to see your marriage lines. Forgive me for doubting your word. You are married, that is all that matters now; I can go away with you without fear, Oliver!

*(She raises her head. OLIVER rises and bends over her and kisses her passionately.)*

OLIVER. Your mouth is like a crocus.

CYNTHIA. Will you go and see about the tickets, dear, and verify the hour the boat leaves. I should not like there to be any mistake about it.

OLIVER. At once, dearest.

CYNTHIA. And ask Francis what he is doing with the cakes.

*(OLIVER goes to the centre entrance, just as FRANCIS appears there with the tray of cakes.)*

OLIVER. Here he is.

*(OLIVER goes out.)*

CYNTHIA. Why, Francis, you might have known that I was asking for you.

WAITER. Yes, ma'am, I might, mightn't I? It is a quality very much admired in a waiter, knowing just when to appear. That is why I am so successful in the profession.

*(SIR ISAAC comes in. CYNTHIA takes a cake, and the WAITER retires.)*

CYNTHIA. Why, Sir Isaac, I thought you were going out for a stroll.

SIR I. We intend to do so, unless it begins to rain before Lady Grundy has put on her hat. I imagine that will be extremely probable.

*(He sits near CYNTHIA, and produces a folded cheque from his pocket.)*

My dear Mrs. Rede, I want to give you this.

CYNTHIA *(unfolding it)*. What is it? A cheque! My dear Sir Isaac, I couldn't think of it. I never accept presents from men I know.

SIR I. Please do not misunderstand me, Mrs. Rede.  
Look at the amount of the cheque.

CYNTHIA. Seven pounds six.

SIR I. The exact sum that Lady Grundy won from  
you to-day at bridge.

CYNTHIA. Of course ! But why should you offer to  
repay it ?

SIR I. I beg that you will not ask me that.

CYNTHIA. I cannot possibly accept it without an  
explanation.

SIR I. Then you force me to acquaint you with the  
fact that Lady Grundy cheats at cards.

CYNTHIA. Lady Grundy ! But she is the most moral  
person I know.

SIR I. Alas ! morality is no barrier to indulgence in  
one's vices. It is very often a most convenient  
cloak, however. And we all have our secret  
vices ; even I have mine.

CYNTHIA. You, Sir Isaac !

SIR I. Yes ; it is a horrible thing to confess, but I  
am passionately fond of musical comedy.

CYNTHIA. Really, Sir Isaac, I am surprised at you.  
We are all fond of musical comedy, but most of  
us have the good taste to pretend to despise it.  
Lady Grundy has the good taste to remain silent  
about *her* secret vice, you see.

SIR I. If she talked about it, she might not get the  
opportunity of indulging in it.

CYNTHIA. But why do *you* talk about it ?

SIR I. I had no desire to talk about it, but you would  
not accept the cheque without an explanation,  
and I cannot see a charming young lady robbed  
of her money.

CYNTHIA. It occurs to me, Sir Isaac, that one can hardly cheat at bridge without the aid of a confederate.

SIR I. That is true.

CYNTHIA. And it also occurs to me that you were Lady Grundy's partner.

SIR I. I am always Lady Grundy's partner.

CYNTHIA. Then I don't think you are any better than she is.

SIR I. Lady Grundy enjoys cheating ; I do not.

CYNTHIA. Then why do you do it ?

SIR I. Lady Grundy is my wife, Mrs. Rede.

CYNTHIA. I am sure she is. Indeed I can see no reason why you should go about with her if she were not. But what has that to do with it ?

SIR I. When I married Lady Grundy I promised to love, honour and obey her.

CYNTHIA. No ; that was what she promised.

SIR I. Was it ? Then I think she must have been labouring under a misapprehension. At any rate, I have always found it advisable, if not to love and honour her, at least to obey her.

CYNTHIA. I say, I wish you'd tell me how you work it.

SIR I. Work it ?

CYNTHIA. The confederate business, I mean.

SIR I. You are not thinking of going into it yourself, are you ?

CYNTHIA. Oh no. I fear that my reputation is not sufficiently good to permit me to do that.

SIR I. Well, I do not mind telling you something about it. The whole business is extremely simple. It is merely a matter of signals. For instance, when

I want Lady Grundy to lead trumps, I blow my nose very hard.

CYNTHIA. You blow your nose very hard ?

SIR I. Trumps. You understand.

CYNTHIA. Of course. How stupid of me.

SIR I. And so on and so forth. I am obliged to do it to satisfy Lady Grundy, but as an honourable man I disapprove of the practice, and make it my business to see that nobody suffers any financial loss through it.

CYNTHIA. You must find it very expensive to repay all the money that Lady Grundy wins.

SIR I. Not at all. If she did not win it at cards I should have to give it to her as pocket-money. It comes to the same thing in the end.

(VERNON, a fair, good-looking, well-dressed young man, comes in, carrying a hat, stick, gloves, and a nice big bunch of white violets.)

VERNON. Good heavens !

CYNTHIA. Vernon !

VERNON. Cynthia !

CYNTHIA. What lovely flowers.

VERNON. They are for you.

CYNTHIA (*taking them*). Oh, thank you so much, Vernon. I should like to introduce you to Sir Isaac Grundy. This is my husband, Sir Isaac.

SIR I. Very pleased to make your acquaintance, sir.

VERNON. How do you do ?

SIR I. I was not aware that you expected Mr. Rede.

CYNTHIA. I did not expect to see him so soon.

SIR I. A pleasant surprise, then. The unexpected is always delightful.

(SIR ISAAC rises.)



I must see if Lady Grundy has put on her hat yet. We shall meet again at dinner.

(SIR ISAAC goes out.)

CYNTHIA. How sweet of you to give me these flowers. But you know it is a breach of our compact.

VERNON. I don't care, so long as you are pleased with them.

CYNTHIA. I cannot tell you how pleased I am. No one has offered me flowers for exactly three weeks.

VERNON. Of course not, Cynthia. I never doubted you.

CYNTHIA. Doubted me, Vernon? I hope I do not misunderstand you. You know that I have a perfect right to accept flowers or anything else that is offered to me.

VERNON. I am delighted to admit that you have the right, provided you do not exercise it. I could not endure the thought that you had been receiving flowers from anybody but me.

CYNTHIA. That is sweet of you. You are so divinely jealous. There would be some pleasure in deceiving you; I shall have to try it some day. But how did it happen that you forgot that I do not care for white violets? You are not usually so thoughtless.

VERNON. Good heavens! How incredibly stupid of me! Here, let me give them to the waiter.

CYNTHIA. Certainly not. I shall not part with them now. (*She buries her face in the bunch.*) Some tea?

VERNON. No thanks. (*He looks at his watch.*) So

it is just three weeks to-day since we began our first annual holiday. It has seemed a long time, hasn't it ?

CYNTHIA. Awfully long. What have you been doing with yourself ? Oh, I beg your pardon ; I ought not to ask that, perhaps.

VERNON. I should like to tell you, but I dare not.

CYNTHIA. Then I insist.

VERNON. Thinking of you. What have you been doing ?

CYNTHIA. *Not* thinking of you.

VERNON. Brave little girl. What a struggle you must have had. And you have got to keep it up for another week.

CYNTHIA. Yes ; another week. We meet on the 21st.

VERNON. Dinner at the Ritz on the 21st.

CYNTHIA. You won't forget, will you ? I should not like to have to wait about for you.

VERNON. How would it be possible for me to forget ? The minutes are like tortoises.

CYNTHIA. Tortoises ?

VERNON. Yes ; the tortoise has been used from times immemorial to symbolise the quality of leisureliness. (*He looks at his watch again.*) Well, I suppose I ought to be going.

CYNTHIA. I suppose you ought. Where are you going to ?

VERNON. I don't know. I intended to stay here. I can't very well do that now, can I ?

CYNTHIA. You think people might talk ?

VERNON. Not exactly. I was thinking of our compact.

CYNTHIA. We will ask Francis if there is another decent hotel. (*She rings the bell.*)

VERNON. Who is Francis ?

CYNTHIA. The waiter.

VERNON. I say, you cannot very well expect him to tell you that, can you ?

(*Enter the WAITER.*)

CYNTHIA. Oh, Francis, can you tell me if there is another good hotel in the place ?

WAITER. May I ask, ma'am, whether you are dissatisfied with us ?

CYNTHIA. By no means. It is my husband who wishes to go to another one.

WAITER (*bowing towards* VERNON). Of course, sir. Very natural.

VERNON. What do you mean by that ?

WAITER. I am a married man myself, sir. I know from experience that a respite from the cares of domestic life is often beneficial. Only I can never persuade my wife to see things in the same light. The Blue Elephant, on the Marine Parade, is always spoken of as being an excellent hotel. I understand that the cuisine is not quite so good as ours, but the charges are slightly more moderate. There is no doubt that our charges are excessive.

VERNON. The Blue Elephant. Thank you, Francis. I suppose I shall have to go there.

WAITER. I am sure you will be very comfortable, sir. The head waiter is a personal friend of my own ; and if you mention my name, you will receive every attention.

CYNTHIA. Thank you, Francis. We are very much obliged to you.

WAITER. Not at all, ma'am. It is always pleasant to put business in the way of the Blue Elephant, because the hotel is owned by a limited company, and I hold some of the ordinary shares.

(FRANCIS goes out.)

VERNON (*standing up*). Well . . . good-bye.

CYNTHIA. Good-bye.

VERNON (*looking round*). This is a jolly place, you know. I have taken quite a fancy to this hotel.

CYNTHIA. Curious.

VERNON. I imagine it must be the waiter. I cannot think what else it can be.

CYNTHIA. Of course, strictly speaking, there is no need for you to go. You could stop just as you would have done if I had not been here, without taking any notice of me. It never occurred to us to arrange anything about an accidental meeting.

(*A slight pause. She suddenly becomes very serious.*)

By the way, I suppose that this meeting *is* accidental? You had no idea that I was here when you came?

VERNON. Good heavens! Of course not.

CYNTHIA. You are quite sure that nobody has been telling you tales about me?

VERNON. My dear Cynthia, why on earth should anybody tell tales about you? What tales are there to be told?

CYNTHIA. None, of course. That is why I am so liable to have them told about me. It is the people who have nothing to conceal who are

always suspected of concealing something. Scandal is based upon the principle that where there is no smoke there is sure to be a fire.

VERNON. I trust you absolutely, Cynthia.

CYNTHIA. Dear Vernon, I am glad of that. If I thought you could not trust me, and had come here to watch me, I should never have forgiven you. Stay here.

VERNON. You wish me to ?

CYNTHIA. Yes. You are my prince ; when I see you all other men are nothing to me. Can you understand that ?

VERNON. Quite easily.

CYNTHIA. I think it is because you trust me so absolutely that I adore you.

VERNON. My true heart ! How wonderful it is to be loved like this !

*(He attempts to kiss her.)*

CYNTHIA. No, Vernon ; not here.

VERNON. Why not ? We are husband and wife.

CYNTHIA. People do not know that.

VERNON. We will tell them.

CYNTHIA. Yes ; but if they see us kissing one another they will not believe us. We must have some regard for convention.

VERNON. Prude !

CYNTHIA. And do you not admire a touch of prudishness in your wife ?

VERNON. Of course. Every man does. What he does not admire is prudishness in other men's wives.

CYNTHIA. Vernon, we must never part again.

VERNON. I do not think it would be altogether wise

to abandon our annual holiday in future. Absence has made us realise how much we are to each other. Our love springs up afresh, invigorated and unspoilt. The pain of parting has been keen, but it is more than compensated for by the pleasure of meeting. We must certainly renew the experience next year.

CYNTHIA. Very well. But a month is too long. It will be sufficient if we separate for three weeks.

VERNON. As you please. Three weeks has been long enough this time, has it not ?

CYNTHIA. Quite long enough. I am sure I should have run away with Francis if you had not turned up.

VERNON (*suspiciously*). Francis ?

CYNTHIA. Only the waiter, dear.

VERNON. Ah yes. But I cannot bear to think of you running away with any man, not even the waiter.

CYNTHIA. My dear Vernon, Francis has never even mentioned the subject to me. If he had done so I should certainly have reported him to the manager.

VERNON. I am very glad to hear it. (*He rises.*) And now, if you will excuse me, I have to write a letter.

CYNTHIA. A letter ! Need you write it now ?

VERNON. I must. It is very important. But it will only take me a moment.

(*OLIVER comes in with a Bradshaw in his hand.*)

OLIVER. Oh, I beg your pardon.

CYNTHIA. Please don't go away, Mr. Walmesley. I want to introduce my husband to you. Vernon, this is Mr. Walmesley. I hope that you will be great friends.

OLIVER. How do you do ?

VERNON. How do you do ? I have to write a letter.  
You will excuse me.

OLIVER. With pleasure.

(VERNON goes out.)

OLIVER. Cynthia, what is the meaning of this ?

CYNTHIA. The meaning of what ?

OLIVER. Who is that man ?

CYNTHIA. He is not a man. He is my husband.

OLIVER. What is he doing here ?

CYNTHIA. He is staying here.

OLIVER. He gave you these flowers ?

CYNTHIA (*smelling them*). Yes. Are they not lovely ?

OLIVER. Upon my word, I consider it scandalous. I cannot leave you for a moment without coming back to find you flirting with your husband.

CYNTHIA. Why shouldn't I flirt with my husband ?

OLIVER. Because it is highly improper. I have never been treated like this before ! Have you forgotten that you are going to elope with me to-night ?

CYNTHIA. No, Oliver ; I am not going to elope with you to-night.

OLIVER. Not ?

CYNTHIA. I am going to remain here with my husband.

OLIVER. Good heavens ! Have you no sense of shame ? You can't throw me over now. I've bought the tickets !

(*He waves the tickets in her face. The WAITER comes in. They separate.*)

WAITER (*indicating the table*). Excuse me, ma'am.  
The tea-things.

*(He collects the tea-things, and then looks from OLIVER to CYNTHIA and back again. They are on opposite sides of the stage with their backs to one another.)*

WAITER *(smiling indulgently)*. Weather's very changeable to-day, isn't it, sir?

*(He takes up the tray to go out.)*

*The CURTAIN falls.*



## ACT II

*The scene is the same as the First Act, and the action goes straight on. The WAITER, who was preparing to go out at the end of the First Act, is seen disappearing with the tea-things. When he has gone, OLIVER turns and crosses to CYNTHIA.*

OLIVER. Cynthia, listen to me. You shall not escape me like this. I will carry you off by force, if necessary.

CYNTHIA. How delightful! I should love to be carried off by force. I often envy the women that the Vikings used to capture and bear away in their galleys. But I feel certain the purser would object if you tried to carry me on board the steamer.

OLIVER. I am in no mood for persiflage. Upon my soul, Cynthia, you seem to have no moral sense whatever.

CYNTHIA. I will pay for my ticket, if that is what you are referring to.

OLIVER. I am not referring to the tickets, though I think you might take them into consideration. I am attempting to show you that it is your duty to keep your word. Do you not understand the meaning of a promise? Have you never read your Bible?

CYNTHIA. I promised to go away with you to punish Vernon for his neglect. Now he has turned up, so there is no occasion to punish him.

OLIVER. But surely you were going away with me because you loved me. That was one of the reasons. Do not lose sight of it, pray. You have not ceased to love me, Cynthia?

CYNTHIA. Of course not. My capacity for loving people is infinite. I do not love you any less, but I find that I love Vernon more, that is all.

OLIVER. I love you fifty times as much as I did.

CYNTHIA. That is only natural, under the circumstances, is it not?

OLIVER. I cannot understand what you see in him.

CYNTHIA. I am touched by the perfect trust he reposes in me. It would be criminal to take advantage of it.

OLIVER. It would be criminal not to take advantage of it. What else are such men for? Besides, I don't know why you should assume that he *does* trust you absolutely. What is he doing here, anyhow?

CYNTHIA. He has come here quite by accident.

OLIVER. Accident!

CYNTHIA. Yes; accidents will happen in the best regulated families.

OLIVER. Do you mean to tell me that with all the hotels in the United Kingdom, to say nothing of Ireland, to choose from, your husband actually dropped quite by accident into the hotel where you happen to be staying? I am aware that coincidence has a long arm, but this is stretching it a bit too far.

CYNTHIA. What other explanation is there ?

OLIVER. It is perfectly obvious. Some kind friend has been telling him about you and me, and he has come here to see for himself.

CYNTHIA. You suggest that he does not trust me ?

OLIVER. Why should he ? I should not, if I were your husband.

CYNTHIA. But who could have told him ?

OLIVER. Anybody. Lady Grundy, for instance.

CYNTHIA. Lady Grundy does not know Vernon.

OLIVER. She would never let that stand in her way.

CYNTHIA. No, Oliver. That explanation occurred to me at first, but I am convinced that it is not the true one.

OLIVER. How do you know ?

CYNTHIA. Because I have asked Vernon.

OLIVER. And do you believe everything that Vernon tells you ?

CYNTHIA. Always ; unless I have a very good reason for choosing not to do so. It saves ever so much trouble and anxiety. No, Oliver ; it is useless to try and prejudice me against Vernon. I know it is fantastic of me to believe in him, but I always was an unreasonable creature. As soon as I saw him I realised that I am tremendously fond of him. Do you know what it is that opened my eyes ?

OLIVER. What ?

CYNTHIA. It was these flowers. The tenderness and thoughtfulness that made him bring them for me. It is true that I particularly detest white violets, but that is not the point.

OLIVER. Preposterous ! If I had known you wanted

flowers, I could have got you an armful for a guinea.

CYNTHIA. You ought to have known, but you didn't.

Vernon did. That is the difference between you.

OLIVER. By the way, Cynthia, if Vernon did not know that you were here, how did he come to have those flowers ready to give you?

CYNTHIA. I don't know. I suppose he happened to have them with him.

OLIVER. Do you imagine that he has been carrying them about for the last three weeks on the chance of meeting you? There is more in this than appears on the surface.

CYNTHIA. It is certainly rather curious, but I daresay Vernon will be able to explain.

OLIVER. I daresay he will. I could do that myself.

But shall we be able to accept his explanation? My own impression is that we shall not.

CYNTHIA. *We?* What have you to do with it?

OLIVER. Don't be so selfish. I have entered your life, for good or evil, and I shall certainly refuse to be ignored.

CYNTHIA. I hope you are going to behave yourself, Oliver.

OLIVER. So do I; but I am a person of most uncertain temper.

CYNTHIA. At least you will have some consideration for me.

OLIVER. Why should I? Your husband has none. It is most inconsiderate of him to turn up at such a time. I will go further and say that it is indelicate. No husband with any respect for his wife would do such a thing, I assure you. All

the husbands I have had to do with before have been gentlemen.

CYNTHIA. Do you insinuate that Vernon is no gentleman?

OLIVER. I should not care to commit myself so far, but I am prepared to maintain that he is subject to lapses.

CYNTHIA. Oh, this is intolerable! I am not going to remain here whilst you insult my husband.  
(*She rises.*)

OLIVER. Cynthia! (*He attempts to take her hand.*)

CYNTHIA. Please don't touch me. Have you forgotten that I am a married woman?

OLIVER. No, I have not forgotten; but I thought we had agreed to ignore the fact.

CYNTHIA. Your pleasantries are not in the best of taste. I do not wish to hear any more of them.

OLIVER. Very good. Shall I leave you, or will you leave me?

CYNTHIA. Good afternoon, Mr. Walmesley.

OLIVER. Good afternoon, Mrs. Rede.

(*They separate, and are going out by different ways just as LADY GRUNDY and SIR ISAAC come in.*)

LADY G. Isaac! Did you see that?

SIR I. What, my dear?

LADY G. Mrs. Rede and Mr. Walmesley. They separated as we came in.

SIR I. Well, my dear, you did not expect them to embrace, did you?

LADY G. They were perturbed. Mrs. Rede's manner was most emotional.

SIR I. She is no doubt excited by the arrival of her husband.

LADY G. What do you say? Her husband! Has he arrived?

SIR I. Certainly. I have been introduced to him.

LADY G. Why did you not tell me this before?

SIR I. I did not know that you were interested in Mr. Rede.

LADY G. Of course I am enormously interested in him.

SIR I. Why, you don't know him. There is nothing special about him, I assure you; quite an ordinary man.

LADY G. You are incredibly stupid, Isaac. Cannot you see that he has followed them?

SIR I. Now, Louisa, be careful; pray, be careful. Your habit of arguing from the general to the particular has got us into trouble more than once.

LADY G. It is useless for you to try and stifle my sense of propriety. I am always prepared to do my duty. I have never been known to shrink from it, whatever the cost may be.

SIR I. That is what I complain about. The cost is apt to be so very considerable.

(VERNON *is seen at the back, ordering a drink from the WAITER.*)

Hush! Here he comes.

LADY G. Introduce me.

(VERNON *enters.*)

VERNON. Ah, Sir Isaac, have you seen my wife?

SIR I. She went out just as we came in. I do not know whether we should be justified in tracing

a connection between the two circumstances.

May I introduce you to Lady Grundy, Mr. Rede?

My dear, this is Mrs. Rede's husband.

LADY G. So pleased to see you here at last, Mr. Rede. I have been expecting you ever so long.

VERNON. Have you, Lady Grundy? That is more than Mrs. Rede has been doing.

LADY G. Yes; I gathered that.

VERNON. You know I did not intend to come here at all. It is owing to quite unforeseen circumstances that I have joined her.

LADY G. I am not surprised to hear it. We will have a little chat about that later. Just now I am anxious to get out for a stroll whilst it is fine. I find I cannot eat as much as I should like unless I take regular exercise; and it is no use stopping at an expensive hotel unless you are in a position to take the fullest advantage of it.

(LADY GRUNDY and SIR ISAAC go out. The WAITER brings a glass of sherry to VERNON.)

VERNON. Thank you, Francis. By the way; Sir Isaac and Lady Grundy. Can you tell me anything about them? Who are they?

WAITER. Sir Isaac is Garden Seeds, I believe, sir, but in a very large way of business. Lady Grundy is a lady whom one respects, even though one does not admire her.

VERNON. Quite so. Thank you, Francis.

(The WAITER goes out. LYDIA, a tall, auburn-haired woman, comes in and looks round. She sees VERNON, advances and touches his shoulder.)

VERNON. Lydia! You? (*Rising.*) What are you doing here?

LYDIA. I have come to look for you. Are you not glad to see me?

VERNON. Most emphatically not. It is too bad of you, Lydia, indeed it is, to upset all our arrangements like this. It was understood that we were not to meet until we were on the boat.

LYDIA. You have just sent a letter across to my hotel, telling me that you will not be able to elope with me to-night, and now you have the assurance to complain that it is I who am upsetting our arrangements.

VERNON. I am aware that I owe you an apology, Lydia, but I explained quite clearly why I should be unable to elope to-night.

LYDIA. You said that you would be otherwise engaged.

VERNON. I told you that my wife was here. I should have thought that a woman of any natural feeling would have taken the hint and stayed away.

LYDIA. If you had wanted me to stop away you should not have told me your wife was here. You might have known it was the one thing that would bring me. What is she like?

VERNON. Beautiful.

LYDIA. Anything like me?

VERNON. Not a bit.

LYDIA. I find it difficult to reconcile your two statements. However, I daresay we shall get on very well together. I am always attracted by people who are totally dissimilar to me.



VERNON. My dear Lydia, you do not suppose you are going to meet her.

LYDIA. Why not, pray?

VERNON. What do you expect me to introduce you to her as?

LYDIA. You are so inartistic! Why not leave something to her imagination?

VERNON. We may safely leave everything to Cynthia's imagination, if once she sees you. Cynthia is no fool, Lydia. I hope you will be good and return to your hotel at once.

LYDIA. I cannot. I have already engaged a room here.

VERNON. What have you done that for?

LYDIA. I thought it would be handier. I could not very well wander about this hotel looking for you, unless I was staying here, could I?

VERNON. I hope you will not wander about this hotel looking for me, Lydia, even if you do stay here. Though I should appreciate the compliment very highly, at present such a proceeding would be embarrassing and possibly extremely inconvenient. Lydia, I will tell you all. I have a horrible confession to make. I am in love with my wife.

LYDIA (*calmly*). You are too sentimental, Vernon, that is what is the matter with you. You let yourself be carried away by the first pretty face you come across. I do not object to your loving your wife at the proper time; just now you have a previous engagement.

VERNON. I regret having made it, Lydia. You force me to remind you that a married man has no right to make previous engagements.

LYDIA. But if I don't mind your being married, what on earth does it matter? You men are so incredibly selfish. Had it never occurred to you that I might be married also?

VERNON. I had hoped so.

LYDIA. Hoped so?

VERNON. I should be inclined to regret the comprehensiveness of your knowledge in an unmarried English girl. I speak now purely as a patriot. In a French girl it would have seemed natural and even attractive. But, Lydia, even if you are speaking the truth, and you *are* married, there is no harm done. It is not yet too late.

LYDIA. It is too late. Last night I wrote to my husband and told him everything.

VERNON. But there was nothing to tell him.

LYDIA. You are stupid. I told him that I intended going to France to-night.

VERNON. Why did you do that?

LYDIA. Oh, you do not need to be afraid. I did not mention your name. I merely referred to you as a gentleman, so there is no danger of his recognising you.

VERNON. I am not deficient in personal bravery, Lydia. I think you are unnecessarily quixotic, that is all.

LYDIA. Although I am separated from my husband, I could not think of deceiving him unless he knew all about it.

VERNON. What a Puritan you are!

LYDIA. I flatter myself that my moral standard is exceedingly high.

VERNON. You do not attempt to live up to it.

LYDIA. That would be impossible. Explorers tell us that the air of the most elevated peaks is too rarefied to breathe with comfort.

VERNON. That perhaps explains why your husband left you.

LYDIA. Excuse me, my husband did not leave me. He is a man of the most perfect taste. We quarrelled on political grounds.

VERNON. I see. You wanted the vote.

LYDIA. Good gracious, no. What good would the vote do me? What good does the vote do you?

VERNON. None. But then I never exercise it. You see, I am a Home Rule Tariff Reformer, so I never get a chance.

LYDIA. It was upon no petty question that we differed. We differed about the economic dependence of women upon men.

VERNON. I suppose your husband refused to make you an allowance.

LYDIA. Each of us has an independent income.

VERNON. Then I do not see how the question could affect you keenly.

LYDIA. It did not. It was a matter of principle with both of us.

VERNON. I presume that your husband objected to your advanced views.

LYDIA. On the contrary, I objected to *his* advanced views. My demands went no further than the endowment of motherhood. He was disposed to press for the endowment of fatherhood also. It was in vain that I pointed out the practical difficulties lying in the way of his scheme.

VERNON. May I ask how many children you have?

LYDIA. None. Our interest was purely academic.

VERNON. Then if that was the only point upon which you differed——

LYDIA. It was not. We differed about a much more serious question. Even if they have no children, a married couple can manage to exist all right ; but they cannot manage to exist without a home of some sort.

VERNON. And your husband refused to provide you with one ?

LYDIA. Not at all. He wished to provide me with two.

VERNON. There is nothing to complain of in that.

LYDIA. You do not understand what I mean. It was not a flat in town and a house on the river that my husband wished to maintain. He actually wanted to keep up two establishments.

VERNON. I trust, Lydia, that you are not going to tell me anything that is unfit for my ears.

LYDIA. You have a positive genius for misunderstanding me. Did I not say that our difference was purely political ? As a result of my arguments my husband became a strenuous advocate of the Woman's Cause. I might say that he embraced it with ardour.

VERNON. The Cause ?

LYDIA. The Cause. What else ?

VERNON. Your language is a trifle flamboyant. I beg your pardon.

LYDIA. He argued that women should be treated just the same as men. He insisted that I should have absolute freedom ; and to prove that he was a complete convert to my opinions, he pro-

posed that we should occupy separate flats. Thus whilst remaining husband and wife, we should both enjoy equal freedom and independence.

VERNON. How long had you been married when he made this proposal ?

LYDIA. About three years.

VERNON. Hum.

LYDIA. What do you mean by that ?

VERNON. Do you know, I think you could convert a good many of the anti-feminists on similar terms.

LYDIA. Do you insinuate that my husband only pretended to hold advanced views in order to have the excuse to propose separate flats ?

VERNON. I did not say that.

LYDIA. No ; you are a man, and therefore ashamed to say it. But you thought it ?

VERNON. Certainly not.

LYDIA. Then you are more stupid than I took you to be. Why, it is perfectly obvious. But I did not tell him so. I said : ' No ; you are too generous in your enthusiasm for the Cause. I cannot consent that you shall live apart from me.'

VERNON. That *you* should live apart from *him*, you meant.

LYDIA. No ; I did not. That was how *he* put it. I said : ' I cannot accept such a sacrifice.' He said that he loved me too much not to insist. So the consequence was we separated for ever.

VERNON. Not for ever, surely.

LYDIA. Well, we are not on speaking terms, at any rate.

(OLIVER enters the lounge. He is crossing

*it when he sees LYDIA. He stops and looks at her. She rises. OLIVER bows and goes out. LYDIA sits down again.)*

LYDIA. What is that gentleman doing here ?

VERNON. Do you know him ?

LYDIA. We are related.

VERNON. In what way ?

LYDIA. By marriage.

VERNON. Related by marriage ?

LYDIA. Yes. He is my husband. I told you we were not on speaking terms.

VERNON (*fervently*). Your husband ! Then, Lydia, what an opportunity is this ! Did you not see the unutterable anguish in his eyes ?

LYDIA. You are incorrigibly sentimental, Vernon. He was probably glaring at you out of pure jealousy, that is all. It is true that he has quarrelled with me, but I do not suppose he likes to see me with another man, in spite of that. You men are all dogs in the manger.

VERNON (*earnestly*). No, Lydia, I am convinced he loves you. I cannot bear to see a fellow-creature suffer. If that is being sentimental, then I confess with pride that I *am* sentimental. Let me urge you to be reconciled to him. He looks a nice man.

LYDIA. There are so many nice men.

VERNON. On the contrary, there are very few nice men.

LYDIA. It is merely a question of the point of view, I suppose.

VERNON. Lydia, I have set my mind on bringing you together.

LYDIA. I have told you we are not on speaking terms.

VERNON. Then let me speak to your husband for you.

LYDIA. You ? I am afraid that Oliver might think your interference unwarrantable.

VERNON. Why should he ? We have been introduced.

LYDIA. You have ? By whom ?

VERNON. By a mutual acquaintance.

LYDIA. I could have told *you* that.

VERNON. Then, if you must know, by my wife.

LYDIA. Your wife ? Does Oliver know your wife ?  
(*She laughs.*)

VERNON. What do you mean ?

LYDIA. My poor Vernon.

VERNON. If you are trying to make me jealous, you are wasting your time. You do not know my wife.

LYDIA. No ; but I know my husband.

VERNON. You revolt me, Lydia. I am a plain honest Briton. I can see nothing but cause for regret in marital infidelity.

LYDIA. Yet you were running away with me.

VERNON. It is true that for once my instincts got the better of my reason. That is an accident that may happen to every one of us. You should be the last person to reproach me in the present instance.

LYDIA. I do not reproach you. I merely remind you. You seem to have forgotten. I warn you that *I* have not forgotten.

(*The WAITER comes in.*)

WAITER (*inquiringly*). Excuse me, ma'am, Mrs. Walmesley ?

LYDIA. Yes ?

WAITER. A cab has just called with some luggage, ma'am.

LYDIA. Thank you. I will come.

WAITER. Very good, ma'am.

(*The WAITER goes out.*)

LYDIA. It would be so nice of you to go and pay my cabman.

VERNON. Certainly not.

LYDIA. I will pay you back afterwards.

VERNON. It is not the money. I am surprised at you. What would my wife think if she found me getting in your luggage ?

LYDIA. Perhaps she would think ever so much more of you in future.

(*LYDIA goes out just as LADY GRUNDY enters.*)

VERNON. Ah, Lady Grundy, you have not been out very long.

LADY G. It threatened to rain, so I came in. Sir Isaac refused ; he is so venturesome.

VERNON. He is your husband. But surely, Lady Grundy, *you* are not deficient in personal bravery.

LADY G. Morally, I can dare anything. Physically, I shrink. Alas ! I am not the stuff that martyrs are made of. The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak. The flesh is weak, Mr. Rede.

VERNON. I am sorry to hear that, Lady Grundy, but you must struggle against it. You should consult a clergyman. Why do you make me the recipient of these confidences ?



LADY G. I have sought you out for that purpose, Mr. Rede.

VERNON (*rising*). I trust that my behaviour has always been perfectly respectful, Lady Grundy.

LADY G. Certainly. Sit down, pray. I have much to say to you.

VERNON. Are you sure I can listen to it with propriety? My wife is staying here, you know.

LADY G. I know. And that brings me at once to the point I want to discuss. Mr. Rede, I have surprised your secret.

VERNON (*gravely*). Which one, Lady Grundy? I have so many.

LADY G. I know why you have come to this hotel.

VERNON (*alarmed*). You don't say so.

LADY G. (*nodding and smiling*). Yes.

VERNON. This is a matter that I cannot discuss with you. Let us talk about something else.

LADY G. Do not let us change the subject, Mr. Rede. Believe me, I am entirely sympathetic. I consider your object in coming here a most laudable one.

VERNON. I regret to hear such sentiments from a lady of your eminently respectable appearance. You should remember that you are not really a member of the aristocracy. Though you bear a title, it is not a sufficiently exalted one to justify your disregarding the ordinary conventions of society.

LADY G. But, Mr. Rede, it is because I am such a strong upholder of convention that I am determined to help you.

VERNON. Please do not talk like Mr. G. K. Chesterton.

Why is it that our moralists insist on speaking in paradoxes nowadays? You speak of helping me, Lady Grundy. How on earth could you do that?

LADY G. This is a very delicate business. I dare say you feel reluctant to mention it to your wife.

VERNON. Good heavens! I should think so.

LADY G. Then perhaps you would like me to break the ice by speaking to her first.

VERNON. Most certainly not.

LADY G. Perhaps, after all, it would be too bad to usurp your privilege.

VERNON. My privilege! Lady Grundy, you must be mad! There are some things a man does not discuss with his wife unless he is obliged. This is one of them.

LADY G. Why not? It would do her good.

VERNON. Lady Grundy, you are either exceedingly immoral or else exceedingly ingenuous.

LADY G. The two qualities are not mutually exclusive, I believe.

VERNON. You said you had surprised my secret. I begin to suspect you are mistaken.

LADY G. Indeed! Then perhaps you will tell me why you came here?

VERNON. I came here for the sea-bathing.

LADY G. And that is your secret?

VERNON. That is my secret.

LADY G. Then what have we been discussing, pray?

VERNON. That is what I want to know. You began it.

LADY G. I am afraid there has been some mistake.

I am sorry. I am the last person to wish to make trouble between husband and wife. I am quite sure that Mrs. Rede is more sinned against than sinning.

VERNON. I beg your pardon. Pray continue.

LADY G. No. Wild horses shall not drag anything further out of me.

VERNON. I do not propose to employ them. You will tell me without any such adventitious stimulus.

LADY G. Indeed I shall not. I am probably quite mistaken; and even if I am not, I think it is your own fault. You have no right to leave a young wife alone for a prolonged period.

VERNON. What is it that Mrs. Rede has been doing?

LADY G. Don't ask me. I always refuse to mix myself up with these affairs.

VERNON. What affairs?

LADY G. Affairs of the sort.

VERNON. Affairs of what sort?

LADY G. Really, Mr. Rede!

VERNON (*rising, solemnly*). Who is the man?

LADY G. You can't expect me to tell you that.

VERNON. Why not? Is it Sir Isaac?

LADY G. Good gracious! Of course not! He has far too much respect for *me*. Why should it be Sir Isaac?

VERNON. I cannot otherwise account for the extraordinary interest you take in the matter. Hitherto you have been most communicative, in spite of your easily understood reluctance to give away another woman. Surely you will not refuse to tell me his name?

LADY G. I have learnt from experience that it is never safe to mention names.

VERNON. Very well, I shall ask Cynthia herself.

LADY G. By all means. That is the correct course to pursue. But pray do not tell her that it is I who have told you about her.

VERNON. I see that, like all good people, you prefer to hide your light under a bushel. However, you need not be uneasy; she will probably guess. I am very much obliged to you for your information.

LADY G. You quite understand that only a stern sense of duty impelled me to give it.

VERNON. Of course. To a conscientious mind the performance of duty is the highest pleasure attainable.

(VERNON goes out.)

(The WAITER comes in with several evening papers. He places them on the tables.)

LADY G. Has Sir Isaac come in yet, Francis?

WAITER. Yes, my lady; I believe he is in the American bar.

LADY G. In the American bar! Will you tell him from me that it is time to dress for dinner, Francis.

WAITER. Very good, my lady.

(The WAITER goes out.)

(LYDIA has come in, and not seeing VERNON, sits at a table and takes up a paper. LADY GRUNDY is sitting at another table. Presently OLIVER enters without noticing LYDIA. He goes to a table to get a match for his cigarette. As he strikes it LADY GRUNDY looks up.)

LADY G. Ah, Mr. Walmesley, are we going to play bridge after dinner to-night ?

OLIVER. I 'm afraid not, Lady Grundy. I expect to be rather busy to-night.

(LYDIA *lays down her paper and looks at OLIVER.*)

LADY G. No doubt. So unexpected, Mr. Rede turning up like this.

OLIVER. Was it ? I didn't know.

LADY G. Dear Mrs. Rede must be pleased.

OLIVER. I daresay. Aren't you ?

LADY G. I hardly know him yet.

OLIVER. Oh ! then you had better ask *him* to play bridge to-night.

LADY G. I am afraid *he* will be busy too.

(LADY GRUNDY *sails out.* OLIVER *sees* LYDIA, *and the two look at each other for some time.*)

OLIVER (*at length*). How do you do ?

LYDIA. How do you do ?

OLIVER. It would be stupid not to speak under the circumstances.

LYDIA. Yes. Because we have quarrelled there is no reason why we should be rude to each other.

OLIVER. Thanks for your letter.

LYDIA. You got it all right, then ?

OLIVER. Yes ; it was forwarded on to me. I received it this afternoon. Very kind of you to think of sending it.

LYDIA. I felt sure you wouldn't like me to elope without letting you know.

OLIVER. Certainly not. There is so little marital consideration shown nowadays. Forgive my

curiosity, but the gentleman you refer to in your letter was Mr. Rede, was it not ?

LYDIA. It would be useless to deny it.

OLIVER. Why should you ? He seems a nice fellow.

LYDIA. You 've met him, then ?

OLIVER. Oh yes. His wife introduced us.

LYDIA. What 's she like ?

OLIVER. Pretty little woman. Not much in her.

LYDIA. I wonder. Do you know her well ?

OLIVER. Met her here, that 's all.

LYDIA. Oh yes.

(*A pause.*)

OLIVER. You crossing the Channel to-night ?

LYDIA. I—we—intended to do so.

OLIVER. Ah ! Hope you 'll have a calm passage.

LYDIA. Thanks. It 's getting about time to go and dress, I suppose.

OLIVER. Just about. They dine at half-past. Well, I don't expect I shall see you again before you go.

LYDIA. It is hardly likely.

OLIVER. Pleased to have met you.

LYDIA. Good-bye.

OLIVER. Good-bye. (*He shakes her hand warmly.*)

There is nothing I can do for you ?

LYDIA. I think not. I—I—— (*She stops.*)

OLIVER. Is anything wrong ?

LYDIA. I 'm—I 'm afraid so. (*She turns away.*)

OLIVER (*seizing her*). What is it, Lydia ? Don't tell me that Rede is treating you badly.

LYDIA. Worse than that.

OLIVER. Worse ! What can be worse ?

LYDIA. Vernon is in love with his wife.

OLIVER. The scoundrel ! What does he mean by it ?

LYDIA. He is very nice about it and very sorry, but he doesn't want to go away.

OLIVER. Why, the man must be a complete cad.

LYDIA. No ; it is merely a case of temporary aberration. That is a thing all men are subject to.

OLIVER. I hate to see you in trouble. Do let me help you.

LYDIA. I should be so grateful.

OLIVER. I will do anything in the world for you.

LYDIA. How can I thank you ! (*She takes his hands.*)

OLIVER. Don't mention it. A husband and wife ought to stand by one another.

LYDIA. You shall not make light of it in this way. You are amazingly generous. Vernon would never make such an offer ; he is too selfish.

OLIVER. You begin to find that out already ? Ah, Lydia, do not judge too harshly. No man is perfect ; even I have my faults.

LYDIA. You have very few. Since I left you I find that you have fewer than I had thought.

OLIVER. Pray do not try and deprive me of my faults. I am proud of them. They give me individuality. A man's faults are his character.

LYDIA. Then it must be because you are a man of singularly little character that I have always liked you.

OLIVER. Always ?

LYDIA. Yes, always. Have you forgotten how bitterly we quarrelled ? Only people who are very fond of each other can do that.

OLIVER. But what is it you want me to do, Lydia ?

I can't take the fellow by the coat collar and say: 'Look here, I'll break your neck if you don't elope with my wife.'

LYDIA. If you could manage to detach that woman from him.

OLIVER. That woman! I see, you mean Mrs. Rede?

LYDIA. You would not find it very difficult. Believe me, Oliver, you have still all your old power of fascination.

OLIVER. Lydia, you must not ask me to do this.

LYDIA. You said you would do anything in the world for me.

OLIVER. I will do anything but this. You are asking too much.

LYDIA. I only want you to make love to Mrs. Rede.

OLIVER. Is that so small a thing?

LYDIA. Yesterday you would not have hesitated a moment.

OLIVER. Yesterday I had not seen you.

LYDIA. Oliver, you are flirting with me. You must not do that, you know. It is most unusual for a wife to flirt with her husband.

OLIVER. No; it is coming into fashion again, I hear.

LYDIA. You have promised to help me. Are you going to fulfil your promise?

OLIVER. Let me off.

LYDIA. Certainly not.

OLIVER. Let me off my promise.

LYDIA. No.

(OLIVER *seizes her and tries to kiss her. She leans back against a table.*)

Oh! how dare you!

OLIVER. Let me off my promise.



LYDIA. No.

*(She smacks his face. Instantly he crushes her to him and kisses her by force several times passionately. She does not resist, but lies limp in his arms.)*

*(Quickly.)* Some one coming !

OLIVER. No.

LYDIA. Yes, yes. Listen !

*(They separate quickly, and listen. CYNTHIA appears in evening dress, carrying the bunch of violets behind her back. She looks at the two.)*

I let you off your promise, Oliver.

*(LYDIA goes out.)*

CYNTHIA. What promise was that ?

OLIVER. I don't think I ought to tell you.

CYNTHIA. You are growing very friendly with your wife.

OLIVER. You are growing very friendly with your husband.

CYNTHIA. I see. You are trying to make me jealous. It is not the slightest use, my poor Oliver.

OLIVER. I suppose not. I had better go and dress for dinner instead.

CYNTHIA. At any rate you will not be wasting your time.

*(OLIVER bows and goes out. CYNTHIA smells the violets. VERNON enters in evening dress.)*

VERNON. Ah ! Here you are at last.

CYNTHIA. At last ! I have been looking everywhere for you.

VERNON. There is something I wish to say to you, Cynthia. When we separated three weeks ago

we did so for a specific purpose. We had loved each other fondly for a year, and though we flattered ourselves our store of affection was boundless, we thought it inadvisable to draw upon it too freely. We agreed to take a holiday. (*Gravely.*) Cynthia, I little thought when we did so that yours would be a bus-man's holiday.

CYNTHIA. Who has been talking to you ?

VERNON. I am informed that during the last three weeks you have spent most of your time philandering with a gentleman whose name I do not know, and who may indeed be a perfect stranger to me.

CYNTHIA. So it appears that during the last three weeks *you* have spent your time making inquiries about me ; and as if that were not enough, you finish up by coming here to spy on me yourself.

VERNON. No ; not to spy on you, Cynthia.

CYNTHIA. You had no idea that I was here when you came ?

VERNON. Not the least.

CYNTHIA. On your honour ?

VERNON. Certainly, on my honour.

CYNTHIA. Then perhaps you will explain why you brought this bunch of violets to give to me.

VERNON. At first sight your question is an embarrassing one. I am surprised you did not ask it before.

CYNTHIA. I did not think of it before.

VERNON. Of course I did not bring the flowers to the hotel expressly for you. I happened to be carrying them when I met you, and took the opportunity of presenting them to you.

CYNTHIA. And how was it you happened to be carrying them ?

VERNON. I often do so nowadays. The truth is, Cynthia, I have grown extremely fond of the perfume of white violets.

CYNTHIA. Do you expect me to believe a story like that ?

VERNON. I do not expect it, but I am living in hope.

CYNTHIA. I am surprised at your lack of imagination. You might at least have told me they were for another woman.

VERNON. For shame, Cynthia.

CYNTHIA. And why for shame, pray ? I had rather a thousand times you had come here after another woman than to watch me. However, you have made your bed and you must lie on it. You have found out the truth ; and the truth, like virtue, must be its own reward.

VERNON. Then it is true ?

CYNTHIA. Of course it is true. That is your punishment.

VERNON. I fail to see why *I* should be punished.

CYNTHIA. You believed I was false.

VERNON. And I was right.

CYNTHIA. That is why I can never forgive you.

*(She goes towards the door.)*

The one thing I ask for in a man is absolute faith ; I can dispense with everything else. You cannot give it to me. I must go to one who can. These violets are the symbol of your treachery. Take them back again.

*(She flings the violets down on the floor and sweeps out. VERNON tries to save them.)*

VERNON. I say ! Mind what you 're doing ! White violets are jolly expensive just at present.

*(He stoops down and picks up the bunch ruefully, and attempts to straighten it.)*

*The CURTAIN falls.*

## ACT III

*The action goes straight on. VERNON, who at the end of Act II had picked up the bunch of violets, is still ruefully looking at it. The WAITER enters and crosses the stage.*

VERNON. Francis.

WAITER. Sir ?

VERNON. Will you bring me a glass of water, Francis.

WAITER. Very good, sir.

*(The WAITER goes out. VERNON sits down, lays the flowers on a table and contemplates them mournfully. The WAITER returns with the glass of water and places it on the table at VERNON'S elbow. Then he looks sympathetically at VERNON.)*

WAITER. Glass of water, sir.

VERNON *(sadly)*. Thank you, Francis.

WAITER. If you'll excuse the liberty, sir, I think a brandy and soda would be more in your line just now.

VERNON. You mistake my purpose, Francis. The water is not for me, but for the flowers.

WAITER. I beg your pardon, sir.

*(Together they arrange the flowers in the glass.)*

WAITER. Can I do anything more for you, sir ?

VERNON. Can you do anything more for me ?  
(*Wildly.*) Francis, canst thou minister to a mind diseased, pluck forth the memory of a rooted sorrow ?

WAITER. I could not definitely undertake to do so, sir, but I always endeavour to give satisfaction, no matter what I am asked for. Would you mind being a little more explicit, sir ?

VERNON. I am married, Francis.

WAITER. Cheer up, sir ; don't let that worry you. It's nothing when you are used to it. I am married myself.

VERNON. And are you happy ?

WAITER. Not altogether, sir, I am glad to say.

VERNON. Glad ?

WAITER. If I were completely happy there would be nothing left to hope for, and consequently life would hardly be worth living.

VERNON. And what is it you are still hoping for ?

WAITER. I am hoping that my wife may leave me, sir.

VERNON. But if you were completely happy you would not want your wife to leave you.

WAITER. Ah, sir, you do not know my wife. That is why I am able to tell you all these intimate details about her. One may talk about one's wife to a person who is a stranger to her, but not to a person who knows her—unless he knows her very well. For instance, it is not right for you to talk to me about your wife, because I know her.

VERNON. I beg your pardon, Francis ; you are quite right. But it is your own fault ; I cannot help

confiding in you. I look upon you not as a waiter, but as a friend.

WAITER. That is very good of you, sir. There is no reason why I should not be both.

(LYDIA enters in evening dress. The WAITER goes out. VERNON does not observe LYDIA at first. She looks at him.)

LYDIA. Well ?

VERNON. Lydia ! Why, I had almost forgotten you !  
(Seeing the violets and handing them to her.) Wear these for me.

LYDIA. Thank you. But they are wet.

VERNON. We will wipe them. (He wipes them with his handkerchief.) What have you been doing lately ?

LYDIA. Dressing for dinner.

VERNON. Ah ! You have already packed up ?

LYDIA. Packed up ?

VERNON. Have you forgotten our design to cross the Channel to-night ?

LYDIA. I understood that the idea was abandoned.

VERNON. That is no reason why we should give it up.

LYDIA. But, Vernon, it is hardly an hour since you positively refused to do what I asked.

VERNON. I admit that for a moment my selfishness got the upper hand, but in the end my better judgment prevailed. I cannot disappoint you, Lydia.

LYDIA. But you won't.

VERNON. What ?

LYDIA. I mean to say that I should get over it, in time. I should probably suffer terribly for a fortnight or even less.

VERNON. You are not going to leave me in the lurch, Lydia. I do not know what the lurch is, but I am sure that nobody would willingly be left there if he could help it.

LYDIA. My dear Vernon, I should hate to do anything that you might regret afterwards.

VERNON. Alas! Whatever I do I shall do that. The only way to avoid regrets is to do nothing at all, and even then you are likely to regret your inactivity.

LYDIA. Of course, if you insist——

VERNON. Insist! Lydia, you astound me! You ought not to need pressing. Remember, pray, the burning words that recently you poured into my chaste unwilling ear.

LYDIA. I hope you are not going to be so ungentlemanly as to quote my previous speeches against me. We are not a couple of cabinet ministers.

VERNON. No, Lydia; that is why I feel bound to fulfil my promises. Do not let us forget that you are an English lady and I am an English gentleman. We must not shrink from our duty, no matter how unpleasant it may be. Go and pack up, Lydia.

LYDIA. But there will not be time before dinner.

VERNON. There will not be time after dinner. There never is. Besides, after dinner is no fit season for the performanec of unpleasant duties. One's sense of responsibility is too slight. I suppose the mind is concentrated upon the process of digestion. Now is the time! Go and pack up, Lydia.



(LYDIA *thinks for a moment and then bows her head and goes out quickly.*)

I say, you've forgotten the violets.

(*He hurries after her with them.* LADY GRUNDY *enters quickly, followed by SIR ISAAC.*)

LADY G. Surely that was Mrs. Walmesley and Mr. Rede. It is extraordinary how people run away in this hotel as soon as one appears. There must be a good many guilty consciences about.

SIR I. Perhaps, my dear, it is merely that they have an objection to our company.

LADY G. I have always admired their good taste hitherto.

SIR I. And I their discretion. No doubt we were both right.

(CYNTHIA *comes in.*)

LADY G. Here is Mrs. Rede.

CYNTHIA. I have been looking for you, Lady Grundy. I have recently had a serious dispute with my husband.

LADY G. I congratulate you on your husband, Mrs. Rede. Sir Isaac has hardly spirit enough to be rude to the telephone girl, although he knows perfectly well that she can't get at him. Married life is so dull without an occasional difference of opinion.

CYNTHIA. Unless I am much mistaken, Lady Grundy, *you* are the cause of the difference between Mr. Rede and myself.

SIR I. Would you care for me to retire, Louisa?

LADY G. Certainly not. It is true that there have been confidential passages between Mr. Rede and myself, but they were not of a sentimental nature.

(*OLIVER enters during this speech.*)

OLIVER. I beg your pardon. I seem to be intruding.

CYNTHIA. You are. This is a private quarrel at present, but as I have no doubt that you will be dragged into it very shortly, you had better stop and hear it out. You have no objection, Lady Grundy ?

LADY G. Not the least. Mr. Walmesley is always welcome. And now, if there is no one else you would like to invite, we will resume our discussion. You imply that I am responsible for the unfortunate difference between you and Mr. Rede. You are quite mistaken. It is your behaviour, in the first instance, that is the cause of it.

CYNTHIA. Excuse me. What I did would not have mattered in the least, provided my husband had not heard of it. You have been talking to him. What have you been telling him ?

LADY G. I have been telling him the truth.

CYNTHIA. You have been talking scandal.

LADY G. You are making a distinction without a difference.

SIR I. Excuse me, my dear, that is not quite correct. There are two kinds of scandal: the true and the untrue. The only difference is that the true kind costs more than the other. I sincerely hope that the scandal about Mrs. Rede is not true.

CYNTHIA. It is perfectly true.

SIR I. I am sorry to hear it. I warned you, Louisa, that you would overstep the mark again. Do you propose to take action against my wife, Mrs. Rede ? Can we not settle it out of court ?

CYNTHIA. I do not propose to take any action.

SIR I. I am exceedingly obliged to you. At the same time, should you change your mind, perhaps you could see your way to take proceedings in the criminal court instead of the civil.

LADY G. Whether Mrs. Rede proposes to take action, I neither know nor care. I am a British matron. In the name of all wives and mothers, I stand up for the family and the sanctity of the British home.

CYNTHIA. What right have *you* to speak on behalf of the wives and mothers?

LADY G. I will leave Sir Isaac to answer that question.

OLIVER. Precisely. That you are a wife, Sir Isaac is a tangible and obvious proof. We have not, however, had the pleasure of meeting your family.

SIR I. Lady Grundy and I have three sons, all married. Unhappily we shall not be able to introduce them to you, because we are not on speaking terms. Lady Grundy has quarrelled with their wives.

OLIVER. With all of their wives?

SIR I. With the wives of all of them. I prefer to put it that way. Lady Grundy never does things by halves.

CYNTHIA. I was not referring to Lady Grundy's biological qualifications. I have no doubt that physically she is competent to fulfil the functions of wife and mother. It is on moral grounds that I deny her right to lecture me. (*To LADY GRUNDY.*) Do you imagine that I am going to allow you to accuse me—whether justly or not

is immaterial—of all kinds of immorality, when you yourself are accustomed to cheat at bridge ?

OLIVER. My dear Cynthia, you must withdraw that statement.

CYNTHIA. Why should I ?

OLIVER. Because I am sure it is not true.

CYNTHIA. But it *is* true. Ask Sir Isaac.

OLIVER. Then that is all the more reason why you should not have made it.

LADY G. You are right. She is strangely lacking in delicacy.

OLIVER. After all, it is purely a question of degree. When we ask each other what conventions we play at bridge, we are merely arranging a code of signals. For instance, I discard from strength ; and if I throw away a diamond, my partner knows perfectly well that I want him to lead one to me. Why should it be thought more discreditable, when I want trumps, to sneeze twice, or to kick my partner under the table ? I suggest that Lady Grundy is merely carrying the theory of conventions to its logical conclusion.

LADY G. Thank you, Mr. Walmsley. You mean well, but you are talking rubbish. It is no use pretending that cheating at bridge is anything but cheating. You cannot make me believe the contrary. I have a profoundly moral nature, you see. That is my misfortune.

OLIVER. Misfortune ?

LADY G. Yes, alas ! It is a misfortune to be too good. I wonder if I can make you understand that. You have heard how sometimes an excellent young man, after rigidly behaving himself for

a long time, will suddenly break out—go on the ‘batter,’ I believe the term is.

SIR I. My dear, how did you become acquainted with such a term ?

LADY G. Never mind. I am surprised to find that *you* have heard of it. The young man, having been on the ‘batter,’ resumes his blameless existence until such time as he finds it again too much for him. In a similar way, I find that the dead monotony of an exalted level of virtue becomes so oppressive, that if I did not sin in some way, I should go mad. The human eye cannot bear to gaze upon the sun.

OLIVER. I find your explanation both fascinating and convincing. But why, may I ask, do you select cheating at cards as the particular sin with which to correct your too superabundant moral sense ?

LADY G. Because it is a purely intellectual sin, as it were. There is nothing fleshly about it.

CYNTHIA. It is not everybody who has the opportunity of indulging in sins of a fleshly nature.

OLIVER. Surely you would count getting drunk among the fleshly sins, and even Lady Grundy could find opportunities for doing that.

LADY G. Precisely ; but my doctor has forbidden me alcohol. No ; on the whole I am inclined to congratulate myself on my selection. Cheating at cards is a nice clean sin.

CYNTHIA. And a profitable one too.

LADY G. As you point out, that is another of its advantages. I hope that I have satisfied you that my indulgence in it, so far from disqualifying

me from forming a judgment of you, is actually a consequence of my moral elevation. (*She goes towards the entrance.*) Come, Isaac, I have much to say to you before dinner.

(*She goes out.*)

SIR I. You have given me away, Mrs. Rede.

CYNTHIA. I am sorry, Sir Isaac.

SIR I. Perhaps it was too much to expect that a woman should hold her tongue, under the circumstances. This is what becomes of being an honest man. I shall never let it occur in the future.

(SIR ISAAC goes out after LADY GRUNDY. As soon as he has gone, CYNTHIA rushes to OLIVER and throws her arms round his neck.)

CYNTHIA. At last! Oliver!

OLIVER (*horrified*). Cynthia! Are you mad? (*He pushes her away.*)

CYNTHIA. What is the matter?

OLIVER. The matter! Good gracious, you tried to kiss me.

CYNTHIA. Well, why not?

OLIVER. We might have been seen!

CYNTHIA. You tried to kiss me this afternoon.

OLIVER. That is different. It is a weak case that is reduced to a *tu quoque* argument.

CYNTHIA. I cannot see that it is worse for me to kiss you than for you to kiss me. What is the difference?

OLIVER. You ask me that. For shame, Cynthia! Remember you are married.

CYNTHIA. I was married before.

OLIVER. Well, then, I am married.

CYNTHIA. You were before.

OLIVER. But you didn't know it.

CYNTHIA. I don't understand you, Oliver. This afternoon you talked about carrying me away by force, and now you won't even let me kiss you. You are treating me cruelly.

OLIVER. I am cruel only to be kind. The surgeon's knife hurts, but it heals. Cynthia, your immoral proposal revolts me. I've not been much of a fellow myself, and I daresay I've done a good many things that I ought not to have done. But, Cynthia, I know that black is black and white is white; and those admirable words of Lady Grundy's have reminded me that in this world we ought to play the game. With all respect to you, I say that this thing you ask me to do is not playing the game. To run away with another woman's husband may be a pleasant and desirable thing, a fascinating spiritual experience—but it is not playing the game. It may bring you fame and the esteem of the illustrated weeklies—but it is not playing the game. It may bring you the favour of duchesses and prove a passport into the most exclusive circles—but it is not playing the game. It may even enable you to take high place in the ranks of the emancipated—but it is not playing the game. In other words, Cynthia, it is not cricket.

CYNTHIA. If you fail me, Oliver, what am I to do?

OLIVER (*solemnly*). 'Thy husband is thy lord, thy life, thy keeper; Thy head, thy sovereign . . .'

CYNTHIA. What do you say?

OLIVER. I am only quoting our immortal poet.

CYNTHIA. Who is that ? Kipling ?

OLIVER. No ; Shakespeare.

CYNTHIA. So Shakespeare said that, did he ? Well, he didn't mean it. He had too much sense for that. He only put it in to please the public.

OLIVER. This is no time for indulging in vague literary speculations. Return to your husband, Cynthia. As a man of honour, that is the only thing I can advise you to do.

CYNTHIA. And how long have you been a man of honour ?

OLIVER. I have always been a man of honour, Cynthia. If the fact has not been so evident of late, it is not for *you* to reproach me. I would remind you that now, at any rate, my ethical standard compares very favourably with your own.

CYNTHIA. How am I to return to my husband when he won't have me ? (*She is slightly pathetic.*)

OLIVER. You ought not to wash dirty linen in private. I cannot listen to any complaints about your husband. They have nothing to do with me.

CYNTHIA. On the contrary, they have everything to do with you. It is because of you that he does not trust me.

OLIVER. Ah ! So *that* is why he will not have you back ?

CYNTHIA. Yes. And if he *would*, I wouldn't go.  
(*She is weeping slightly.* VERNON enters.)

VERNON. What is this ? You are weeping, Cynthia !  
(*To OLIVER.*) What have you been doing to my wife ?

OLIVER. I have been giving her some moral advice.

VERNON. You have no right to give her moral advice.



OLIVER. What sort of advice do you want me to give her? Immoral?

(Enter LYDIA with some luggage labels. She is wearing the violets.)

LYDIA. Can anybody oblige me with a fountain pen? I wish to address these luggage labels.

CYNTHIA (to OLIVER). Will you kindly introduce me to your wife?

OLIVER. I doubt very seriously whether I ought to introduce you to my wife.

CYNTHIA. You are very rude.

OLIVER. Not at all. My hesitation is on your account. The acquaintance can lead to no good consequences and might easily lead to very serious ones. Why do you want to know my wife?

CYNTHIA. I wish to ask her where she gets those violets she is wearing.

OLIVER. The game is hardly worth the candle.

CYNTHIA. Because, unless I am very much mistaken, I was wearing them myself half an hour ago.

LYDIA. Vernon! You have given me flowers that belong to your wife?

VERNON. Yes. The token seemed to symbolise our relations to perfection.

OLIVER. What *are* your relations?

VERNON. Very distant ones.

OLIVER. Look here. Since you object to my giving *your* wife moral advice, perhaps you will tell me what you mean by giving *my* wife violets.

VERNON. I do not propose to allow you to adopt this tone. In fact, I had proposed to adopt it myself. It appears that some one has been

flirting with my wife during the last three weeks. I cannot avoid the suspicion that it is you.

OLIVER. I can assure you on the best authority that your suspicions are well grounded.

VERNON. You admit it ?

OLIVER. Certainly. You have been flirting with my wife. Why should not I flirt with yours ? I don't see why you should have both. I think it is most unreasonable of you to expect it.

VERNON. I did not want both. I only wanted one. Hang it all, I'm not so selfish as all that.

OLIVER. Do you mean you wanted one in particular ?

VERNON. No ; I mean I wanted one at a time.

OLIVER. You are a monogamist. Good ! I respect an honest adversary. But since I admired your wife you might have returned the compliment and admired mine.

VERNON. Ah, I begin to understand now, Cynthia. All your virtuous indignation was part of a plot by which you hoped to get rid of me and join this gentleman.

OLIVER. I beg your pardon. It is true that I did admire your wife, but all trace of that feeling has disappeared.

VERNON. And how long ago is it, may I ask, since all trace of that feeling disappeared ?

OLIVER. About three-quarters of an hour ago. The revulsion has been rapid but complete. I have not the least desire to be joined by Mrs. Rede. Indeed, I positively decline to be joined by her. I was engaged in making that quite clear to her when you came in just now.

VERNON. Indeed ! And who are you that you should presume to take exception to my wife ? What is the matter with her, if you please ?

OLIVER. I make no complaint against her except that her attentions are embarrassing. I beg that you will use your influence to induce her to discontinue them.

VERNON. Confound it, sir, do you insinuate that Cynthia is not good enough for you ?

OLIVER. Comparisons are odious.

VERNON. Not at all. They are always instructive, and frequently entertaining.

OLIVER. Very well. You force me reluctantly to confess that I prefer my own wife.

VERNON. Then, sir, you add the offence of execrable taste to your previous offence of childish discourtesy.

OLIVER. I cannot help that. Much as I respect Mrs. Rede, I would not run away with her if she were the only woman in the world.

VERNON. You scoundrel ! I'll teach you to insult my wife !

(VERNON goes for OLIVER.)

OLIVER. Come on, then !

*(They close and struggle. OLIVER gradually gets the upper hand and succeeds in tripping VERNON. They fall upon the ground, OLIVER uppermost.)*

CYNTHIA. You coward !

*(CYNTHIA throws herself upon OLIVER and drags him away, throwing him backwards on the carpet.)*

OLIVER (to CYNTHIA). Mind ! You're choking me.

CYNTHIA. You coward ! To hit a man when he is down !

*(She pummels OLIVER soundly.)*

LYDIA *(seizing CYNTHIA'S arm)*. Don't you dare to strike my husband.

CYNTHIA. Why not ?

LYDIA. Because I am the only person who has the right to do that.

CYNTHIA. I don't care. I shall strike your husband if he strikes mine. *(Shaking OLIVER.)* You coward !

LYDIA. He is not a coward. He knocked your husband down, anyhow.

CYNTHIA. He didn't knock him down ; he tripped him up.

LYDIA. The result was the same, at any rate. *(To OLIVER.)* Get up !

OLIVER. *You're* not going to strike me, are you ?

LYDIA. No. *(OLIVER gets up.)* I want to kiss you. *(She puts her arms round his neck.)* You have risked your life for me ; and now that I see you standing there victorious, I love you as I have never loved you before. *(She kisses him and then looks down at VERNON, who is still sitting on the floor nursing his leg.)* As for you, Vernon, now that I see you in that preposterous attitude, I begin to wonder what I ever saw in you.

CYNTHIA. What !

VERNON. I say ! Hold hard, Lydia.

LYDIA. No ; I have returned to my senses. Some one has opened a window and let in the fresh air. I have done with deception.

VERNON. Are you going to tell your husband ?

LYDIA. My husband ? *He* knows. I am going to tell your wife.

VERNON (*sinking on the floor*). Oh, my goodness !

CYNTHIA. What is it you are going to tell me ?

LYDIA. I am going to confess to you.

CYNTHIA. Confess ? What ! Do you mean to say that you came to this town with my husband ?

LYDIA. Certainly not. You might give us credit for a little common sense. We came here separately. He came to this hotel and I went to the Blue Elephant. We did not intend to meet until we got on board the boat.

CYNTHIA. On board the boat ?

LYDIA. We were going to elope.

CYNTHIA. Elope ?

*(She turns upon VERNON, who jumps up quickly and scrambles behind a chair.)*

VERNON. Cynthia, I am conscious that I have merited your contempt and scorn, but I beg that you will not make a scene.

CYNTHIA. Listen to me. You came here to elope with Mrs. Walmesley ?

VERNON. Undoubtedly.

CYNTHIA. And you had no intention of spying on me at all ?

VERNON. Of course not. I have been trying to tell you so all afternoon, but you wouldn't believe me.

CYNTHIA. I would have believed you if you had told the truth.

VERNON. I told you the truth as far as I went.

CYNTHIA. That was the mistake. Half the truth is not half so good as a good lie.

*(She goes to VERNON and puts her arms about him.)*

Vernon, I'm so happy. It is beautiful to find that you trusted me after all. Our annual holiday has been a success, hasn't it?

VERNON. Quite a success. We won't risk it again.

*(They embrace.)*

LYDIA. Mrs. Rede, your husband brought these violets for me. I hope that you will allow me to give them to you.

CYNTHIA. Won't you keep them? Mr. Walmsley so seldom buys one flowers. Your need is greater than mine.

LYDIA. Not at all. They go with your husband. You may as well have the lot.

CYNTHIA. Thank you. *(She takes the violets.)* It is such a pleasure to have met you. I hope we shall see each other again when we return from France.

LYDIA. You are going to France?

CYNTHIA. Certainly. Since Vernon intended to go to-night it is a pity to disappoint him.

OLIVER. Then you may as well have these.

*(He produces an envelope and gives it to CYNTHIA.)*

CYNTHIA. What does this contain?

OLIVER. Two tickets for Paris.

CYNTHIA. Then you are not coming too?

OLIVER. No.

CYNTHIA. I think you are very wise.

OLIVER. Yes?

CYNTHIA. And I think your wife is very beautiful.

OLIVER. And I think you are perfectly right.

*(The gong rings for dinner. The WAITER appears at the back.)*

CYNTHIA. Let us all have dinner together to-night.

LYDIA. That will be delightful.

OLIVER. Very well. Francis, a table for four.

*(The WAITER bows and goes out.)*

VERNON *(to LYDIA)*. Shall we go ?

*(He offers her his arm.)*

OLIVER. One moment.

*(He leads CYNTHIA to VERNON, bows and takes LYDIA'S arm himself.)*

VERNON. I beg your pardon. My mistake.

OLIVER. Not at all. A very natural one under the circumstances.

*(They go out as the curtain begins to fall.)*





HINDLE WAKES

A PLAY IN THREE ACTS



## CHARACTERS

CHRISTOPHER HAWTHORN { (*a Slasher at Daisy  
Bank Mill*).

MRS. HAWTHORN (*his Wife*).

FANNY HAWTHORN { (*their Daughter, a Weaver at  
Daisy Bank Mill*).

NATHANIEL JEFFCOTE (*Owner of Daisy Bank Mill*).

MRS. JEFFCOTE (*his Wife*).

ALAN JEFFCOTE (*their Son*).

SIR TIMOTHY FARRAR { (*Chairman of the Education  
Committee at Hindle*).

BEATRICE FARRAR (*his Daughter*).

ADA (*Maid at Bank Top*).



## SCENES

ACT I.—Scene 1. *Kitchen of the HAWTHORNS' house, 137 Burnley Road, Hindle. Bank Holiday, Monday, August 6th. 9 p.m.*

Scene 2. *Breakfast-room of the JEFFCOTES' house, Bank Top, Hindle Vale. The same night. 10.30 p.m.*

Scene 3. *Breakfast-room at the JEFFCOTES'. The same night. 1 a.m.*

ACT II.—*Breakfast-room at the JEFFCOTES'. Tuesday, August 7th. 8 p.m.*

ACT III.—*Breakfast-room at the JEFFCOTES'. Tuesday, August 7th. 9 p.m.*

NOTE.—The scene for Act I, Scene 1, should be very small, as a contrast to the room at the Jeffcotes'. It might well be set inside the other scene so as to facilitate the quick change between Scenes 1 and 2, Act I.

## NOTE ON THE LANCASHIRE DIALECT

THIS play is about Lancashire people. In the smaller Lancashire towns it is quite usual for well-to-do persons, and for persons who have received good educations at grammar schools and technical schools, to drop more or less into dialect when familiar, or when excited, or to point a joke. It is even usual for them to mix their speech with perfect naturalness. 'You' and 'thou' may jostle one another in the same sentence, as, for instance: 'You can't catch it, I tell thee.' As a general rule they will miss out a good many 'h's,' and will pronounce vowels with an open or flat sound. The final consonants will usually be clipped. At the same time it is unnecessary laboriously to adopt any elaborate or fearsome method of pronunciation. The Lancashire dialect of to-day—except amongst the roughest class in the most out-of-the-way districts—has had many of its corners rubbed off. It varies in its accents, too, in each separate town, so that it may be attempted with impunity by all save the most incompetent. The poorest attempt will probably be good enough to pass muster as 'Manchester,' which has hardly a special accent of its own, but boasts a tongue composed of all the other Lancashire dialects mixed up, polished and made politer, and deprived of their raciness.

# HINDLE WAKES<sup>1</sup>

## ACT I

### SCENE 1

*The scene is triangular, representing a corner of the living-room kitchen of No. 137 Burnley Road, Hindle, a house rented at about 7s. 6d. a week. In the left-hand wall, low down, there is a door leading to the scullery. In the same wall, but further away from the spectator, is a window looking on to the back yard. A dresser stands in front of the window. About half-way up the right-hand wall is the door leading to the hall or passage. Nearer, against the same wall, a high cupboard for china and crockery. The fireplace is not visible, being in one of the walls not represented. However, down in the L. corner of the stage is an arm-chair, which stands by the hearth. In the middle of the room is a square table, with chairs on each side. The room is cheerful and comfortable. It is nine o'clock on a warm August evening. Through the window can be seen the darkening sky, as the blind is not drawn. Against the sky an outline of roof-tops and mill chimneys. The only light is the dim twilight from the open window. Thunder is in the air. When the curtain rises, CHRISTOPHER HAWTHORN, a decent, white-bearded man of nearly sixty, is sitting in the arm-chair*

<sup>1</sup> By arrangement with Messrs. Sidgwick & Jackson, Ltd.

*smoking a pipe.* MRS. HAWTHORN, *a keen, sharp-faced woman of fifty-five, is standing gazing out of the window. There is a flash of lightning and a rumble of thunder far away.*

MRS. HAWTHORN. It 's passing over. There 'll be no rain.

CHRISTOPHER. Ay! We could do with some rain.

*(There is a flash of lightning.)*

CHRISTOPHER. Pull down the blind and light the gas.

MRS. HAWTHORN. What for?

CHRISTOPHER. It 's more cosy-like with the gas.

MRS. HAWTHORN. You 're not afraid of the lightning?

CHRISTOPHER. I want to look at that railway guide.

MRS. HAWTHORN. What 's the good? We 've looked at it twice already. There 's no train from Blackpool till five-past ten, and it 's only just on nine now.

CHRISTOPHER. Happen we 've made a mistake.

MRS. HAWTHORN. Happen we 've not. Besides, what 's the good of a railway guide? You know trains run as they like on Bank Holiday.

CHRISTOPHER. Ay! Perhaps you 're right. You don't think she 'll come round by Manchester?

MRS. HAWTHORN. What would she be doing coming round by Manchester?

CHRISTOPHER. You can get that road from Blackpool.

MRS. HAWTHORN. Yes. If she 's coming from Blackpool.

CHRISTOPHER. Have you thought she may not come at all?

MRS. HAWTHORN *(grimly)*. What do you take me for?



CHRISTOPHER. You never hinted.

MRS. HAWTHORN. No use putting them sort of ideas into your head.

*(Another flash and a peal of thunder.)*

CHRISTOPHER. Well, well, those are lucky who haven't to travel at all on Bank Holiday.

MRS. HAWTHORN. Unless they've got a motor-car, like Nat Jeffcote's lad.

CHRISTOPHER. Nay. *He's* not got one.

MRS. HAWTHORN. What? Why, I saw him with my own eyes setting out in it last Saturday week after the mill shut.

CHRISTOPHER. Ay! He's gone off these Wakes with his pal George Ramsbottom. A couple of thick beggars, those two!

MRS. HAWTHORN. Then what do you mean telling me he's not got a motor-car?

CHRISTOPHER. I said he hadn't got one of his own. It's his father's. You don't catch Nat Jeffcote parting with owt before his time. That's how he holds his lad in check, as you might say.

MRS. HAWTHORN. Alan Jeffcote's seldom short of cash. He spends plenty.

CHRISTOPHER. Ay! Nat gives him what he asks for, and doesn't want to know how he spends it either. But he's *got* to ask for it first. Nat can stop supplies any time if he's a mind.

MRS. HAWTHORN. That's likely, isn't it?

CHRISTOPHER. Queerer things have happened. You don't know Nat like I do. He's a bad one to get across with.

*(Another flash and gentle peal. MRS. HAWTHORN gets up.)*

MRS. HAWTHORN. I 'll light the gas.

*(She pulls down the blind and lights the gas.)*

CHRISTOPHER. When I met Nat this morning he told me that Alan had telegraphed from Llandudno on Saturday asking for twenty pounds.

MRS. HAWTHORN. From Llandudno ?

CHRISTOPHER. Ay ! Reckon he 's been stopping there. Run short of brass.

MRS. HAWTHORN. And did he send it ?

CHRISTOPHER. Of course he sent it. Nat doesn't stint the lad. *(He laughs quietly.)* Eh, but he *can* get through it, though !

MRS. HAWTHORN. Look here. What are you going to say to Fanny when she comes ?

CHRISTOPHER. Ask her where she 's been.

MRS. HAWTHORN. Ask her where she 's been ! Of course we 'll do that. But suppose she won't tell us ?

CHRISTOPHER. She 's always been a good girl.

MRS. HAWTHORN. She 's always gone her own road. Suppose she tells us to mind our own business ?

CHRISTOPHER. I reckon it *is* my business to know what she 's been up to.

MRS. HAWTHORN. Don't you forget it. And don't let her forget it either. If you do, I promise you I won't !

CHRISTOPHER. All right. Where 's that postcard ?

MRS. HAWTHORN. Little good taking heed of that.

*(CHRISTOPHER rises and gets a picture postcard from the dresser.)*

CHRISTOPHER *(reading)*. ' Shall be home before late on Monday. Lovely weather.' *(Looking at the picture.)* North Pier, Blackpool. Very like, too.

MRS. HAWTHORN (*suddenly*). Let 's have a look.  
When was it posted ?

CHRISTOPHER. It 's dated Sunday.

MRS. HAWTHORN. That 's nowt to go by. Any one  
can put the wrong date. What 's the postmark ?  
(*She scrutinises it.*) ' August 5th, summat P.M.'  
I can't make out the time.

CHRISTOPHER. August 5th. That was yesterday, all  
right. There 'd only be one post on Sunday.

MRS. HAWTHORN. Then she was in Blackpool up to  
yesterday, that 's certain.

CHRISTOPHER. Ay !

MRS. HAWTHORN. Well, it 's a mystery.

CHRISTOPHER (*shaking his head*). Or summat worse.

MRS. HAWTHORN. Eh ? You don't think *that*, eh ?

CHRISTOPHER. I don't know what to think.

MRS. HAWTHORN. Nor me neither.

*(They sit silent for a time. There is a rumble of thunder, far away. After it has died away, a knock is heard at the front door. They turn and look at each other. MRS. HAWTHORN rises and goes out in silence. In a few moments FANNY HAWTHORN comes in, followed by MRS. HAWTHORN. FANNY is a sturdy, determined, dark little girl, with thick lips, a broad, short nose and big black eyes. She is dressed rather smartly, but not very tastefully. She stands by the table unpinning her hat and talking cheerfully. MRS. HAWTHORN stands by the door and CHRISTOPHER remains in his chair. Both look at FANNY queerly.)*

FANNY. Well, you didn't expect me as soon as this,

I'll bet. I came round by Manchester. They said the trains would run better that way to-night. Bank Holiday, you know. I always think they let the Manchester trains through before any of the others, don't you ?

MRS. HAWTHORN. We didn't see how you were to get here till past ten if you came direct. We've been looking up in the guide.

FANNY. No. I wasn't for coming direct at any price. Mary wanted to.

CHRISTOPHER. Mary !

(CHRISTOPHER *is about to rise in astonishment, but MRS. HAWTHORN makes signs to him behind FANNY'S back.*)

MRS. HAWTHORN. Oh ! So Mary Hollins wanted to come back the other way, did she ?

FANNY. Yes. But I wasn't having any. They said the Manchester trains would be—oh ! I've told you all that already.

MRS. HAWTHORN. So you've had a good time, Fanny.

FANNY. Rather ! A fair treat. What do *you* think ?

MRS. HAWTHORN. Was Mary Hollins with you all the time ?

FANNY. Of course she was.

(*She steals a puzzled glance at MRS. HAWTHORN.*)

MRS. HAWTHORN. And she came back with you to-night ?

FANNY. Yes.

MRS. HAWTHORN. And where's she gone now ?

FANNY. She's gone home of course. Where else should she go ?

(*There is a short pause.*)

CHRISTOPHER (*quietly*). You 're telling lies, my girl.

FANNY. What, father?

CHRISTOPHER. That 's not the truth you 've just been saying.

FANNY. What 's not the truth?

CHRISTOPHER. You didn't spend the week-end in Blackpool with Mary Hollins.

FANNY. Who says I didn't?

CHRISTOPHER. I say so.

FANNY. Why do you think I didn't, father?

CHRISTOPHER. Well, did you?

FANNY. Yes, I did.

(CHRISTOPHER *turns helplessly to his wife.*)

MRS. HAWTHORN. All right, Chris, wait a minute. Look here, Fanny, it 's no use trying to make us believe you 've been away with Mary.

FANNY. What? I can bring you any number of folk out of Hindle who saw us in Blackpool last week.

MRS. HAWTHORN. Last week, happen. Not this week-end?

FANNY. Yes.

MRS. HAWTHORN. Bring them, then.

FANNY. How can I bring them to-night? They 've most of them not come back yet.

MRS. HAWTHORN. Tell us who to ask, then.

FANNY (*thinking*). Ask Polly Birtwistle. Or Ethel Slater.

MRS. HAWTHORN. Yes. After you 've got at them and given them a hint what to say.

FANNY. Of course if you 'll believe that it 's no use asking Mary. You 'd only say *she* was telling lies as well.

(*There is a pause.*)

FANNY. Will you go round and see Mary ?

CHRISTOPHER. No.

MRS. HAWTHORN. Fanny, it's no use seeing Mary.  
You may as well own up and tell us where you've been.

FANNY. I've been to Blackpool with Mary Hollins.

MRS. HAWTHORN. You've not. You weren't there this week-end.

FANNY. Why, I sent you a picture postcard on Sunday.

MRS. HAWTHORN. Yes; we got that. Who posted it ?

FANNY. I posted it myself at the pillar-box on the Central Pier.

*(There is a pause. They do not believe her.)*

FANNY *(flaring up)*. I tell you I've been all week-end at Blackpool with Mary Hollins.

CHRISTOPHER *(quietly)*. No, you've not.

FANNY *(pertly)*. Well, that's settled then. There's no need to talk about it any more.

*(A pause. FANNY nervously twists her handkerchief.)*

FANNY. Look here. Who's been saying I didn't ?

CHRISTOPHER. We know you didn't.

FANNY. But you can't know.

MRS. HAWTHORN. As certain as there's a God in Heaven we know it.

FANNY. Well, that's not so certain after all.

CHRISTOPHER. Fanny! Take heed what you're saying.

FANNY. Why can't you speak out ? What do you know ? Tell me that.

MRS. HAWTHORN. It's not for us to tell you any-

thing. It's for you to tell us where you've been.

FANNY (*mutinously*). I've told you.

(*They do not speak. FANNY rises quickly.*)

MRS. HAWTHORN. Where are you going?

FANNY. Are you trying to hinder me from going out when I please, now? I'm going to see Mary Hollins.

MRS. HAWTHORN. What for?

FANNY. To fetch her here. You shall see her whether you like it or not.

CHRISTOPHER. Fanny, I've already seen Mary Hollins.

(*FANNY turns and stares at him in surprise.*)

FANNY. When?

CHRISTOPHER. This morning.

FANNY. She was at Blackpool this morning.

CHRISTOPHER. So was I.

FANNY (*amazed*). What were you doing there?

CHRISTOPHER. I went there with Jim Hollins. We went on purpose to see Mary.

FANNY. So it's Mary as has given me away, is it?

CHRISTOPHER (*nodding, slowly*). Yes. You might say so.

FANNY (*angrily*). I'll talk to her.

CHRISTOPHER. It wasn't her fault. She couldn't help it.

MRS. HAWTHORN. Now will you tell us where you've been?

FANNY. No, I won't. I'll see Mary first. What did she say to you?

CHRISTOPHER. When I told thee I went with Jim Hollins to Blackpool, I didn't tell thee quite

everything, lass. (*Gently.*) Mary Hollins was drowned yesterday afternoon.

FANNY. What! (*She stares at CHRISTOPHER in horror.*)

CHRISTOPHER. It was one of them sailing boats. Run down by an excursion steamer. There was over twenty people on board. Seven of them was drowned.

FANNY. Oh! My poor Mary!

(*FANNY sinks down into her chair and stares dully at CHRISTOPHER.*)

MRS. HAWTHORN. You didn't know that?

FANNY (*shaking her head*). No, no. (*She buries her head in her arms on the table and begins to sob.*)

MRS. HAWTHORN. Now then, Fanny. (*She is about to resume her inquisition.*)

CHRISTOPHER. Hold on, mother. Wait a bit. Give her a chance.

MRS. HAWTHORN (*waving him aside*). Now then, Fanny. You see you've been telling lies all the time.

(*FANNY sobs.*)

MRS. HAWTHORN. Listen to me. You weren't at Blackpool this week-end.

FANNY (*to herself*). Poor, poor Mary!

MRS. HAWTHORN (*patiently*). You weren't at Blackpool this week-end.

(*FANNY sobs.*)

MRS. HAWTHORN. Were you?

FANNY (*sobbing*). N—no. (*She shakes her head without raising it.*)

MRS. HAWTHORN. Where were you?



FANNY. Shan't tell you.

MRS. HAWTHORN. You went away for the week-end ?

(*No answer.*) Did you go alone ? (*No answer.*)

You didn't go alone, of course. (*No answer.*)

Who did you go with ?

FANNY. Leave me alone, mother.

MRS. HAWTHORN. Who did you go with ? Did you go with a fellow ?

(*FANNY stops sobbing. She raises her head the tiniest bit so that she can see her mother without seeming to do so. Her eyes are just visible above her arm. MRS. HAWTHORN marks the movement, nevertheless.*)

MRS. HAWTHORN (*nodding*). Yes. You went with a chap ?

FANNY (*quickly dropping her head again*). No, I didn't.

MRS. HAWTHORN (*roughly*). You little liar, you did !

You know you did ! Who was he ?

(*MRS. HAWTHORN seizes FANNY by the shoulder and shakes her in exasperation. FANNY sobs.*)

MRS. HAWTHORN. Will you tell us who he was ?

FANNY (*sharply*). No, I won't.

(*There is a slight pause.*)

CHRISTOPHER. This is what happens to many a lass, but I never thought to have it happen to a lass of mine !

MRS. HAWTHORN. Why didn't you get wed if you were so curious ? There's plenty would have had you.

FANNY. Chance is a fine thing. Happen I wouldn't have had them !

MRS. HAWTHORN. Happen you 'll be sorry for it before long. There 's not so many will have you now, if this gets about.

CHRISTOPHER. *He* ought to wed her.

MRS. HAWTHORN. Of course he ought to wed her, and shall too, or I 'll know the reason why! Come now, who 's the chap?

FANNY. Shan't tell you.

MRS. HAWTHORN. Look here.

*(She places her hand on FANNY'S arm. FANNY turns round fiercely and flings it off.)*

FANNY. Leave me alone, can't you? You ought to be thankful he did take me away. It saved my life, anyhow.

MRS. HAWTHORN. How do you make that out?

FANNY. I 'd have been drowned with Mary if I hadn't gone to Llandudno.

MRS. HAWTHORN. Llandudno? Did you say——?  
*(She stops short.)*

CHRISTOPHER. Why, mother, that 's——

MRS. HAWTHORN *(cutting him short)*. Be quiet, can't you?

*(She reflects for a moment, and then sits down at the other side of the table, opposite FANNY.)*

MRS. HAWTHORN *(with meaning)*. When you were in Llandudno did you happen to run across Alan Jeffcote?

*(FANNY looks up and they stare hard at each other.)*

FANNY *(at length)*. How did you know?

MRS. HAWTHORN *(smiling grimly)*. I didn't. You 've just told me.

FANNY (*gives a low moan*). Oh! (*She buries her head and sobs.*)

MRS. HAWTHORN (*to CHRISTOPHER*). Well, what do you think of her now?

CHRISTOPHER (*dazed*). Nat Jeffcote's lad!

MRS. HAWTHORN. Ay! Nat Jeffcote's lad. But what does that matter? If it hadn't been him it would have been some other lad.

CHRISTOPHER. Nat and me were lads together. We were pals.

MRS. HAWTHORN. Well, now thy girl and Nat's lad are pals. Pull thyself together, man. What art going to do about it?

CHRISTOPHER. I don't know, rightly.

MRS. HAWTHORN. Aren't you going to give her a talking-to?

CHRISTOPHER. What's the good?

MRS. HAWTHORN. What's the good? Well, I like that! My father would have got a stick to me. (*She turns to FANNY.*) Did he promise to wed you?

FANNY (*in a low voice*). No.

MRS. HAWTHORN. Why not?

FANNY. Never asked him.

MRS. HAWTHORN. You little fool! Have you no common sense at all? What did you do it for if you didn't make him promise to wed you?

(*FANNY does not reply.*)

MRS. HAWTHORN. Do you hear me? What made you do it?

(*FANNY sobs.*)

CHRISTOPHER. Let her be, mother.

MRS. HAWTHORN. She's turned stupid. (*To FANNY.*)

When did you go? (*No answer.*) Did you go in his motor-car? (*No answer.*) Where did you stay?

(*There is no answer, so she shakes FANNY.*)

Will you take heed of what I 'm saying? Haven't you got a tongue in your head? Tell us exactly what took place.

FANNY. I won't tell you anything more.

MRS. HAWTHORN. We 'll see about that.

CHRISTOPHER (*rising*). That 's enough, mother.

We 'll leave her alone to-night. (*He touches FANNY on the shoulder.*) Now then, lass, no one 's going to harm thee. Stop thy crying. Thou'd better get upstairs to bed. Happen thou 's fagged out.

MRS. HAWTHORN. You *are* soft. You 're never going to let her off so easy?

CHRISTOPHER. There 's plenty of time to tackle her in the morning. Come, lass.

(*FANNY rises and stands by the table, wiping her eyes.*)

Get to bed and have some sleep, if thou can.

(*Without a word FANNY slowly goes to the door and out of the room. She does not look at either of them.*)

MRS. HAWTHORN. Now then. What 's to be done?

CHRISTOPHER. Ay! That 's it.

MRS. HAWTHORN. You 'll have to waken up a bit if we 're to make the most of this. I can tell you what 's the first job. You 'll have to go and see Nathaniel Jeffcote.

CHRISTOPHER. I 'll see him at the mill to-morrow.

MRS. HAWTHORN. To-morrow! You 'll go and see him to-night. Go up to the house at Bank Top.

If Alan's come home with Fanny he'll be there as well, and you can kill two birds with one stone.

CHRISTOPHER. It's a nasty job.

MRS. HAWTHORN. It's got to be done, and the sooner the better. How would it be if I come with you?

CHRISTOPHER (*hastily*). Nay, I'll go alone.

MRS. HAWTHORN. I'm afraid you'll be too soft. It's a fine chance, and don't you forget it.

CHRISTOPHER. A fine chance?

MRS. HAWTHORN. To get her wed, thou great stupid. We're not going to be content with less. We'll show them up if they turn nasty.

CHRISTOPHER. He *ought* to wed her. I don't know what Nat'll say.

MRS. HAWTHORN. Look here, if you're not going to stand out for your rights I'll come myself. I'm not afraid of Nat Jeffcote, not if he owned twenty mills like Daisy Bank.

CHRISTOPHER. I'm not afraid of him, neither, though he's a bad man to tackle. (*He rises.*) Where's my hat?

(MRS. HAWTHORN *gives him his hat and stick, and he goes to the door.*)

MRS. HAWTHORN. I say, I wonder if she's done this on purpose, after all. Plenty of girls have made good matches that way.

CHRISTOPHER. She said they never mentioned marriage. You heard her.

MRS. HAWTHORN. Well, he mightn't have gone with her if she had. Happen she's cleverer than we think!

CHRISTOPHER. She always was a deep one.

MRS. HAWTHORN. That 's how Bamber's lass got hold of young Greenwood.

CHRISTOPHER. But there was a—— *He* couldn't help it, so well.

MRS. HAWTHORN. Yes. (*She reflects.*) Ah, well. You never know what may happen.

(CHRISTOPHER *goes out, followed by* MRS. HAWTHORN, *as the curtain falls.*)

## SCENE 2

*The breakfast-room at NATHANIEL JEFFCOTE's house, Bank Top, Hindle Vale, is almost vast, for the house is one of those great old-fashioned places standing in ample grounds that are to be found on the outskirts of the smaller Lancashire manufacturing towns. They are inhabited by wealthy manufacturers who have resisted the temptation to live at St. Anne's-on-the-Sea, or Blackpool. In the wall facing the spectator is the door from the hall, which when the door is open can be seen distinctly, a big square place. The fireplace is in the right-hand wall, and a bow window in the left-hand one. The furniture is solid and costly, but the room is comfortable and looks as if it is intended to be lived in. A table stands in the middle, a side-board near the door, arm-chairs near the hearth, whilst other chairs and furniture (including a bookcase filled with standard works) complete the rather ponderous interior. The JEFFCOTES use the breakfast-room for all meals except ceremonious ones, when the dining-room is requisitioned and an elaborate dinner is substituted for the high tea which NATHANIEL persists in regarding as an essential of comfort and homeliness. It is*

*about 10.30 on the same Bank Holiday evening. The room is well lighted by gas, not electricity, but of course there is no fire.*

NATHANIEL JEFFCOTE *and his wife are sitting alone in the room. He is a tall, thin, gaunt, withered, domineering man of sixty. When excited or angry he drops into dialect, but otherwise his speech, though flat, is fairly accurate. MRS. JEFFCOTE has even more fully adapted herself to the responsibilities and duties imposed by the possession of wealth. She is a plump, mild and good-natured woman. She sits under the chandelier embroidering, whilst her husband sits in an arm-chair by the empty hearth working calculations in a small shiny black notebook, which he carries about with him everywhere, in a side pocket.*

MRS. JEFFCOTE. I asked Mrs. Plews to let me have a look through Hindle Lodge to-day.

JEFFCOTE (*looking up*). Eh? What's that?

MRS. JEFFCOTE. Mrs. Plews is leaving Hindle Lodge at Christmas.

JEFFCOTE. What of it?

MRS. JEFFCOTE. I was thinking it would do very well for Alan when he gets married.

JEFFCOTE. Is Alan talking about getting married?

MRS. JEFFCOTE. Beatrice was mentioning it last week.

JEFFCOTE. How long have they been engaged? A year?

MRS. JEFFCOTE. Eleven months. I remember it was on September the 5th that it happened.

JEFFCOTE. How on earth can you remember that?

MRS. JEFFCOTE. Because September the 5th is your birthday.

JEFFCOTE. Is it? (*He grunts.*) Well, eleven months isn't so long after all. Let 'em wait a bit longer.

MRS. JEFFCOTE. I thought we might be speaking for the Lodge.

JEFFCOTE. What do they want with a house like the Lodge? Isn't there plenty of room here? We've got four living-rooms and fourteen bedrooms in this house, and there's never more than three of them going at the same time.

MRS. JEFFCOTE. Really, Nat! They'll want a house of their own, no matter how many bedrooms we've got empty, and it's only natural.

JEFFCOTE. There's no hurry as far as I can see. Alan won't be twenty-five till next March, will he?

MRS. JEFFCOTE. You were only twenty-two when you married me.

JEFFCOTE. I didn't marry a girl who'd been brought up like Beatrice Farrar. I married a girl who could help me to make money. Beatrice won't do that. She'll help to spend it, likely.

MRS. JEFFCOTE. Well, he'll have it to spend. What's money for?

JEFFCOTE. Money's power. That's why I like money. Not for what it can buy.

MRS. JEFFCOTE. All the same, you've always done yourself pretty well, Nat.

JEFFCOTE. Because it pays in the long run. And it's an outward sign. Why did I buy a motor-car? Not because I wanted to go motoring. I hate it. I bought it so that people could see Alan driving about in it, and say: 'There's Jeffcote's lad in his new car. It cost five hundred



quid.' Tim Farrar was so keen on getting his knighthood for the same reason. Every one knows that him and me started life in a weaving shed. That 's why we like to have something to show 'em how well we 've done. That 's why we put some of our brass into houses and motors and knighthoods and fancy articles of the kind. I 've put a deal of brass into our Alan, and Tim Farrar's put a deal into his Beatrice, with just the same object in view.

*(There is a short pause. JEFFCOTE goes on with his reckoning and MRS. JEFFCOTE with her sewing. Then she speaks quietly.)*

MRS. JEFFCOTE. I was wondering what you intend to do for Alan when he gets married.

JEFFCOTE. Do for him? What do you mean?

MRS. JEFFCOTE. He doesn't get a regular salary, does he?

JEFFCOTE *(suspiciously)*. Has Alan been putting you up to talk to me about this?

MRS. JEFFCOTE. Well, Nat, if he has——?

JEFFCOTE. Why can't he talk to me himself?

MRS. JEFFCOTE *(placidly continuing)*. You're not such a good one to tackle. I daresay he thought I should do it better than he would.

JEFFCOTE. I don't keep him short, do I?

MRS. JEFFCOTE. No. But Sir Timothy will expect him to show something more definite before the wedding.

JEFFCOTE. Tim Farrar don't need to be afraid. I hope he 'll leave his lass as much as I shall leave Alan. That lad 'll be the richest man in Hindle some day.

MRS. JEFFCOTE. I daresay. Some day! That's not much good to set up house on. Why don't you take him into partnership?

JEFFCOTE. Partnership?

MRS. JEFFCOTE. You always say he works hard enough.

JEFFCOTE (*grudgingly*). Well enough.

MRS. JEFFCOTE. I suppose it comes to this. You don't want to take him into partnership because it would mean parting with some of that power you're so fond of.

JEFFCOTE. He mightn't work so well if he was his own master.

MRS. JEFFCOTE. But if you gave him a junior partnership he wouldn't be his own master. You'd see to that.

JEFFCOTE (*jocularly dropping into dialect*). Eh, lass, thou'd better come and manage mill thyself.

MRS. JEFFCOTE. I shouldn't make such a bad job of it, neither! Remember that if you take him in you'll have less work to do yourself. He'll share the responsibility.

JEFFCOTE. Hold on a bit. The owd cock's not done with yet.

MRS. JEFFCOTE. If Beatrice starts talking about the date——

JEFFCOTE. Oh, if you'll stop your worritting I daresay I'll take the lad into partnership on his wedding-day.

MRS. JEFFCOTE. Can I tell Sir Timothy that?

JEFFCOTE. If you like. I told him myself six months ago.

MRS. JEFFCOTE. You *are* a caution, Nat, indeed

you are ! Why couldn't you tell me so at once, instead of making a fool of me like this ?

JEFFCOTE. I like to hear thee talking, lass.

*(Having brought off this characteristic stroke of humour, JEFFCOTE resumes his work. The door opens and ADA comes in.)*

ADA. If you please, sir, there 's some one to see you.

JEFFCOTE *(absorbed)*. Eh ?

MRS. JEFFCOTE. Who is it, Ada ?

ADA. His name 's Hawthorn, ma'am.

MRS. JEFFCOTE. It 'll be Christopher Hawthorn, Nat.

JEFFCOTE. What does he want coming so late as this ? Fetch him in here.

*(ADA goes out.)*

Can't be owt wrong at the mill, seeing it 's Bank Holiday.

*(ADA shows in CHRISTOPHER, who stands near the door.)*

MRS. JEFFCOTE. Good evening, Mr. Hawthorn.

CHRISTOPHER. Good evening, Mrs. Jeffcote.

JEFFCOTE *(rising)*. Well, Chris !

CHRISTOPHER. Well, Nat !

*(These two old comrades address each other by their first names, although master and man.)*

JEFFCOTE. Sit down. The rain 's held off.

CHRISTOPHER. Ay ! *(He is obviously ill at ease.)*

MRS. JEFFCOTE. Where have you been these Wakes ?

CHRISTOPHER. Nowhere.

MRS. JEFFCOTE. What ? Stopped at home ?

CHRISTOPHER. Ay ! Somehow we don't seem quite as keen on Blackpool as we used to be. And the missus was badly last week with her leg, and

what with one thing and another we let it drift this time round. You've not been away, either?  
MRS. JEFFCOTE. No; we went to Norway in June, you know.

CHRISTOPHER. Ay! so you did. That must be a fine place—from the pictures.

MRS. JEFFCOTE. Alan is away, though. He is motor-ing in North Wales. We expect him back to-night.

JEFFCOTE. Business is too bad to go away, Chris. I was down in Manchester Tuesday and Friday. It isn't Wakes in Manchester, thou knows!

CHRISTOPHER. Anything doing?

JEFFCOTE. I landed ten sets of those brown jac-conets on Friday. Five for October and five for November.

CHRISTOPHER. For the forty-four inch looms?

JEFFCOTE. Ay! And hark you, Chris! they're com-plain-ing about the tint. Not bright enough, they say in India. They've sent a pattern over this mail. You'd better have a look at it to-morrow. We've got to give them what they want, I reckon.

CHRISTOPHER. I don't think they do know what they want in India, Nat.

JEFFCOTE. You're about right there, Chris.

*(A pause. CHRISTOPHER looks uncomfortably at MRS. JEFFCOTE.)*

JEFFCOTE *(at length)*. When are you going to bed, mother?

MRS. JEFFCOTE *(taking the hint)*. Any time now.

JEFFCOTE. That's right. Just reach me the whisky before you go.

(MRS. JEFFCOTE gets a bottle of whisky, a syphon and glasses from the sideboard cupboard.)

MRS. JEFFCOTE. Are you going to sit up for Alan ?

JEFFCOTE. Why ? Hasn't he got his latch-key ?

MRS. JEFFCOTE. I expect so.

JEFFCOTE. Then I reckon he 'll be able to find the keyhole, and if he can't he won't thank me for sitting up to welcome him.

MRS. JEFFCOTE (*smiling*). You do talk some nonsense, Nat. Good night, Mr. Hawthorn.

CHRISTOPHER (*rising*). Good night, Mrs. Jeffcote.

(MRS. JEFFCOTE goes out of the room.)

JEFFCOTE. Have a drink, Chris ?

CHRISTOPHER. No thanks, Nat.

JEFFCOTE (*incredulously*). Get away !

CHRISTOPHER. Well—just a small one, then.

(JEFFCOTE pours out two drinks.)

JEFFCOTE. Light your pipe, Chris.

CHRISTOPHER. Ay ! Thanks. (*He does so.*)

JEFFCOTE. It's a long while since we had a quiet chat together. We don't see so much of each other as we did thirty years ago ?

CHRISTOPHER. No. You've other fish to fry, I reckon.

JEFFCOTE. I'm always right glad to see you. How long have you been taping for me, Chris ?

CHRISTOPHER. I came to you in '95. I remember because Joe Walmesley's shed was burnt down the same year.

JEFFCOTE. Ay ! That was during the General Election, when Tories knocked out Mark Smethurst in Hindle. Joe was speaking at one of Mark's

meetings when they come and told him his mill was afire. That was the only time I ever saw Joe Walmesley cry.

CHRISTOPHER. He was fond of them looms, was Joe!

JEFFCOTE. You missed your way, Chris, you did indeed, when you wouldn't come in with me and put your savings into Trafalgar Mill.

CHRISTOPHER. That 's what the missus is never tired of telling me.

JEFFCOTE. You might have been my partner these fifteen years instead of only my slasher.

CHRISTOPHER. You 'd never have got on with a partner, Nat. You 're too fond of your own way.

JEFFCOTE. You 're right there. I've been used to it for a good while now.

CHRISTOPHER. You don't remember Daisy Bank being built, Nat?

JEFFCOTE. No. I was living over Blackburn way then.

CHRISTOPHER. I was only a lad at the time. I used to come along the river bank on Sundays with the other lads. There were no weaving sheds in Hindle Vale in those days; nothing but fields all the way to Harwood Bridge. Daisy Bank was the first shed put up outside Hindle proper. They called it Daisy Bank because of the daisies in the meadows. All the side of the brow falling away towards the river was thick with them. Thick dotted it was, like the stars in the sky of a clear night.

JEFFCOTE. Look here, old lad, thou didn't come up

here at this time of night just to talk about daisies.

CHRISTOPHER. Eh ?

JEFFCOTE. You 've come up here with a purpose, haven't you ?

CHRISTOPHER. That 's so, Nat.

JEFFCOTE. I could see that. That 's why I sent the missus to bed. I know you of old. What is it that 's troubling you ? Get it off your chest !

CHRISTOPHER. It 's about my lass.

JEFFCOTE. Hullo !

CHRISTOPHER. I 'm worried about her.

JEFFCOTE. What 's she been doing ?

CHRISTOPHER. Getting into trouble.

JEFFCOTE. What sort of trouble ?

CHRISTOPHER (*troubled*). Well, thou knows—there 's only one sort of trouble—

JEFFCOTE. Ay—ay ! With a lad ?

CHRISTOPHER. Ay !

*(There is a slight pause.)*

CHRISTOPHER. It 's only by chance we found it out. The missus is in a fine way about it, I can tell you !

JEFFCOTE. Then it 's proper serious, like ?

CHRISTOPHER. They 've been away together, these Wakes.

JEFFCOTE (*whistling*). Humph ! She 's a cool customer. What art going to do in the matter ?

CHRISTOPHER. That 's what I 've come up to see thee about. I wasn't for coming to-night, but missus, she was set on it.

JEFFCOTE. Quite right, too. I 'll help thee any road

I can. But you mustn't take it too much to heart. It's not the first time a job like this has happened in Hindle, and it won't be the last!

CHRISTOPHER. That's true. But it's poor comfort when it's your own lass that's got into trouble.

JEFFCOTE. There's many a couple living happy to-day as first come together in that fashion.

CHRISTOPHER. Wedded, you mean?

JEFFCOTE. Ay! Wedded, of course. What else do you think I meant? Does the lad live in Hindle?

CHRISTOPHER. Ay! (*He does not know how to break it to JEFFCOTE.*)

JEFFCOTE. Whose shed does he work at?

CHRISTOPHER. Well, since you put it that way, he works at yours.

JEFFCOTE. At Daisy Bank? Do I know him?

CHRISTOPHER. Ay! You know him well.

JEFFCOTE. Then, by Gad! I'll have it out with him to-morrow. If he doesn't promise to wed thy Fanny I'll give him the sack!

CHRISTOPHER (*dazed*). Give him the sack!

JEFFCOTE. And I'll go further. If he'll be a decent lad and make it right with her at once, I'll see that he's well looked after at the mill. We're old pals, Chris, and I can't do no fairer than that, can I?

CHRISTOPHER. No.

JEFFCOTE. Now, then, who's the chap?

CHRISTOPHER. Thou'll be a bit surprised-like, I reckon.

JEFFCOTE. Spit it out!

CHRISTOPHER. It's thy lad, Alan.



JEFFCOTE (*sharply*). What? (*A slight pause.*) Say that again.

CHRISTOPHER. Thy lad, Alan.

JEFFCOTE. *My* lad?

CHRISTOPHER. Ay!

(*After a short pause, JEFFCOTE springs up in a blazing rage.*)

JEFFCOTE. Damn you, Chris Hawthorn! why the devil couldn't you tell me so before?

CHRISTOPHER. I were trying to tell thee, Nat——

JEFFCOTE. Trying to tell me! Hasn't thou got a tongue in thy head that thou mun sit there like a bundle of grey-cloth while I'm making a fool of myself this road? (*He paces up and down in his agitation.*) Here! How do you know it's Alan? Who says it's Alan?

CHRISTOPHER. Fanny.

JEFFCOTE. Fanny, eh? How do you know she's not lying?

CHRISTOPHER (*stoutly*). You can settle it soon enough by asking Alan. I thought to have found him here to-night.

JEFFCOTE. He's not come home yet?

CHRISTOPHER. No.

JEFFCOTE. And a good job for him, too!

CHRISTOPHER. Wouldn't he fetch Fanny back, think you?

JEFFCOTE. Would he, the dickens! He's not altogether without sense. Do you think he'd run her in the car through Hindle market-place and up Burnley Road and set her down at your house for all the folk to see?

CHRISTOPHER. No.

JEFFCOTE (*suddenly flaring up again*). The bally young fool! I'd like to break his silly neck for him! And that lass of thine is just as much to blame as he is! I've marked her—the hot-blooded little wench!

CHRISTOPHER. I can't defend her. She's always been a bit of a mystery to her mother and me. There's that in her veins as keeps her restless and uneasy. If she sees you want her to do one thing she'll go right away and do t'other out of pure cussedness. She won't be driven, not any road. I had a dog just like her once.

JEFFCOTE. Eh, old lad, it's a good job you never had any boys if you don't know how to manage a girl!

CHRISTOPHER. Happen I could have managed lads better. I never could clout a girl properly.

JEFFCOTE. I can manage my lad without clouting. Always could.

CHRISTOPHER. Folk are different, you see. Happen you couldn't have managed our Fanny.

JEFFCOTE. I'd have had a damn good try! Where is she now?

CHRISTOPHER. At the house. She was overdone, and I sent her to bed to get her out of range of the missus's tongue. She was talking rather bitter, like.

JEFFCOTE. She had a sharp way with her when she was Sarah Riley, had your missus, and I reckon it won't have improved with the passing of years! I shouldn't wonder if it was your missus who got the truth out of Fanny.

CHRISTOPHER. So it was.

JEFFCOTE. And what *did* she get out of her? Let's be knowing just what took place.

CHRISTOPHER. I can tell you nowt save that they stayed in Llandudno. You'll have to go to your lad for the rest of the story.

JEFFCOTE. All right. I'll see you to-morrow at the mill. There's nowt more to be done to-night.

CHRISTOPHER. Maybe it's a queer fancy, but I'd like to have seen him to-night. There's no chance of him coming in shortly, think you?

JEFFCOTE. He may come in the next five minutes, or he may not come home at all. There's no telling what may happen on Bank Holiday.

CHRISTOPHER. Then it's no use me waiting a while?

JEFFCOTE. Nay, you can't wait here. I'm going to bed. I'm not going to let this business spoil a night's rest. I'd advise you to look on it in the same light.

CHRISTOPHER. Ah, Nat; but it's not so hard on you as it is on me!

JEFFCOTE. Is it not? How do you know what plans of mine will come to naught through this job? (*More kindly.*) Come, old lad, thou mun clear out. Thou can do nowt here.

CHRISTOPHER. Well, I've not said all that my missus told me to say, and I doubt she'll be on my track, but I reckon it's a bit too previous afore we've seen the lad.

JEFFCOTE. If your wife wants to say anything to me, she's welcome. You'd better fetch her up here to-morrow night, and bring Fanny along as well. I'll be ready for you by then.

CHRISTOPHER. To-morrow night?

JEFFCOTE. About nine o'clock. Do you understand?

CHRISTOPHER. Ay! (*He goes to the door, and JEFFCOTE rises.*) My wife said—

JEFFCOTE (*curtly*). I can guess all that thy wife said. You can tell her this from me. I'll see you're treated right. Do you hear?

(*JEFFCOTE opens the door.*)

CHRISTOPHER. I can't ask for more than that.

JEFFCOTE. I'll see you're treated right.

(*They go into the hall out of sight. ADA comes into the room with a tray, which she places on the table. The tray holds bread, cheese, butter, a bottle of beer and a tumbler.*)

JEFFCOTE (*out of sight in the hall*). I'm not afraid of thy wife, if you are.

(*The front door bangs. JEFFCOTE returns into the room and sees the tray, which he examines irritably.*)

JEFFCOTE. What's this for?

ADA. Mr. Alan's tray, sir. We always leave it when he's out late.

JEFFCOTE (*flaring up*). Take it away!

ADA. Take it away, sir?

JEFFCOTE. Yes. Do you hear? Take the damned thing away!

ADA. What about Mr. Alan's supper, sir?

JEFFCOTE. Let him do without.

ADA. Yes, sir.

(*ADA takes the tray out. JEFFCOTE watches her, and then goes to the window to see if it is fastened. MRS. JEFFCOTE, mostly undressed and attired in a dressing wrap, appears in the hall.*)

MRS. JEFFCOTE. Nat ?

JEFFCOTE. What do *you* want ?

MRS. JEFFCOTE. Is anything the matter ?

JEFFCOTE. Why ?

MRS. JEFFCOTE. I thought I heard you swearing, that 's all.

JEFFCOTE. Happen I was.

MRS. JEFFCOTE. You 've not quarrelled with Christopher Hawthorn ?

JEFFCOTE. No; we 're the best of friends. He only wanted my opinion about summat.

MRS. JEFFCOTE. What had you got to swear about, then ?

JEFFCOTE. I was giving him my opinion.

MRS. JEFFCOTE. Well, but——

JEFFCOTE. That 's enough. Get along to bed with you. Maybe I 'll tell you all about it to-morrow. Maybe I won't !

MRS. JEFFCOTE. Well, I 'm glad it 's no worse. I thought you were coming to blows.

(MRS. JEFFCOTE *goes out and upstairs.* JEFFCOTE *sees the two glasses of whisky and soda which neither of the men has remembered to touch. He takes his own and drinks it.* ADA *appears.*)

ADA. Please, sir, do you want anything else ?

JEFFCOTE. No. Get to bed. (*She is going.*) Have the other girls gone upstairs yet ?

ADA. Yes, sir.

JEFFCOTE. And you 've fastened the back door ?

ADA. Yes, sir.

JEFFCOTE. Good night.

ADA. Good night, sir.

(ADA *goes upstairs.* JEFFCOTE *slowly drinks*

*the second glass of whisky and soda. He puts both the empty glasses on the sideboard and looks round the room. He turns out all the gases except one, which he leaves very low. He goes out into the hall, leaving the breakfast-room door open, and is seen to go out of sight to the front door, as if to assure himself that it is on the latch. Then he turns the hall gas very low indeed, and goes upstairs.)*

*The CURTAIN falls.*

### SCENE 3

*The curtain rises again immediately. The scene is the same room about two hours later, that is to say at about one o'clock in the morning. Everything looks just the same. At first there is silence. Then is heard the scratching noise of a latch-key being inserted into the front door. The process takes some time. At last the door is heard to open, and some one stumbles in, making rather too much noise. The door is closed very quietly. A match is struck in the hall, out of sight. It goes out at once. Then a figure is dimly seen to appear in the doorway of the breakfast-room, lean against the jamb and look round. It is ALAN JEFFCOTE, who, if he could be seen distinctly, would be found a well-made, plump, easy-going young fellow, with a weak but healthy and attractive face and fair hair. He is of the type that runs to stoutness after thirty, unless diet and exercise are carefully attended to. At present he is too fond of luxury and good living to leave any doubt that this pleasant fellow of twenty-five*

*will be a gross, fleshly man at forty. He is dressed by a good Manchester tailor, and everything he has is of the best. He does not stint his father's money. He has been to the Manchester Grammar School and Manchester University, but he has not lost the characteristic Hindle burr in his accent, though he speaks correctly as a rule. He does not ever speak affectedly, so that his speech harmonises with that of the other characters. This is important, for though he has had a far better education than any of the other characters except BEATRICE, he is essentially one of them, a Hindle man. He has no feeling that he is provincial, or that the provinces are not the principal asset of England. London he looks upon as a place where rich Lancashire men go for a spree, if they have not time to go to Monte Carlo or Paris. Manchester he looks upon as the centre or headquarters for Lancashire manufacturers, and therefore more important than London. But after all he thinks that Manchester is merely the office for Hindle and the other Lancashire towns, which are the actual source of wealth. Therefore Hindle, Blackburn, Bolton, Oldham, and the rest are far more important in his eyes than London or Manchester, and perhaps he is right. Anyhow, the feeling gives him sufficient assurance to stroll into the most fashionable hotels and restaurants, conscious that he can afford to pay for whatever he fancies, that he can behave himself, that he can treat the waiters with the confidence of an aristocrat born—and yet be patently a Lancashire man. He would never dream of trying to conceal the fact, nor indeed could he understand why anybody should wish to try and conceal such a thing. He is now slightly intoxicated, not seriously drunk, only*

*what he would himself describe as 'a bit tight.' He strikes another match and lurches towards the gas, only to find that it is already lighted. He blows out the match and tries to turn up the gas. As he reaches up he knocks a small bronze vase off the end of the mantelpiece. It falls into the fire-irons with an appalling crash.*

ALAN. Curse it!

*(He turns up the gas and clumsily picks up and replaces the vase. He sees on the mantelpiece a couple of letters addressed to him. He tears them open, stares at them, and crams them unread into his pocket. Then he gazes at the table as if in search of something.)*

ALAN. Where's that tray? Where the devil's that tray?

*(He shakes his head and proceeds to look in the sideboard cupboard for food. He can find none, so he turns to the whisky and soda, and fills one of the empty glasses. This he puts on the mantelpiece, and then he sits in the arm-chair by the hearth, sinks back and holds his head in his hands. He seems to be going to sleep.*

*In the hall is observed a flickering light, coming nearer by degrees. Old NATHANIEL JEFFCOTE appears, a lean picturesque figure in pyjamas and dressing-gown, carrying in one hand a lighted bedroom candle and in the other a poker. He comes to the door of the room, stands at the threshold and contemplates his son. At length ALAN seems*



*to feel that he is not alone, for he slowly steals a glance round to the door, and encounters his father's stern gaze.)*

ALAN. Hello! (*He smiles amiably.*) Thought you were in bed.

JEFFCOTE. So it 's you, is it? What are you making all this din about?

ALAN. 'S not my fault. You don't s'pose I did it on purpose, do you?

JEFFCOTE. I'll not have you coming in and raising Cain at this time of night. It 's enough to waken the dead!

ALAN. I can't help it. They go and stick that beastly thing up there! (*He points to the vase.*) Can't blame me for knocking it over. 'S not my fault. (*He hiccoughs.*) I can't help it.

JEFFCOTE. Are you drunk?

ALAN (*rising and standing with his back to the hearth in a dignified way*). You've never seen me drunk yet! (*He hiccoughs.*)

(*JEFFCOTE approaches him and scrutinises him by the light of the candle.*)

JEFFCOTE. I've never seen thee nearer drunk, anyhow. Thou didn't drive the car home in this state, surely?

ALAN. No fear!

JEFFCOTE. Where have you left it?

ALAN. At 'George and Dragon,' in Hindle.

JEFFCOTE. I see. You've been at 'George and Dragon'? Didn't they chuck you out at eleven?

ALAN. Ay! Then we went round to the Liberal Club.

JEFFCOTE. Who's 'we'?

ALAN. Me and George Ramsbottom.

JEFFCOTE. Has George Ramsbottom been with you this week-end ?

ALAN. No. I met him at the 'Midland' at Manchester. We had a bit of dinner together.

JEFFCOTE. Ah ! Where 's George Ramsbottom been during the week-end ?

ALAN. After his own devices.

JEFFCOTE. Humph ! Like thyself, no doubt ?

ALAN. Happen !

JEFFCOTE. What 's thou been up to these Wakes ?

ALAN. Nothing. Why ?

JEFFCOTE (*holding the candle up to ALAN's face*).  
Hast been with a girl ?

ALAN (*flinching slightly*). No.

JEFFCOTE. Thou hardened young liar !

ALAN (*staggered*). Why ?

JEFFCOTE (*looking hard at him*). Chris Hawthorn 's been here to-night.

ALAN (*vaguely*). Chris Hawthorn ?

JEFFCOTE. Ay !

(ALAN cannot bear his father's gaze. He is not able to keep up the pretence of coolness any longer. He turns towards the arm-chair and stumbles into it, his attitude of collapse denoting surrender.)

JEFFCOTE. Thou cursed young fool ! I could find it in my heart to take a strap to thee, so I could. Why hadn't thou the sense to pay for thy pleasures, instead of getting mixed up with a straight girl ? I've never kept thee short of brass. And if thou must have a straight girl, thou might have kept off one from the mill. Let alone her father's one of my oldest friends.

ALAN. What does he say ?

JEFFCOTE. Say ? What dost thou think he said ?

Does thou think as he come up here to return thanks ?

ALAN. But—but, how did he know ?

JEFFCOTE. The lass has told them, so it appears.

ALAN. She promised not to.

JEFFCOTE. Happen she did. And what then ?

ALAN. What 's going to be done ?

JEFFCOTE. I said I 'd see him treated right.

ALAN (*brightening*). What 'll they take ?

JEFFCOTE (*dangerously*). I said I 'd see them treated right. If thou expects I 'm going to square it with a cheque, and that thou 's going to slip away scot free, thou 's sadly mistaken.

ALAN. What do you want me to do ?

JEFFCOTE. I know what thou 's going to do. Thou 's going to wed the lass.

ALAN. What do you say ?

JEFFCOTE. Thou 's heard me all right.

ALAN. Wed her ? Fanny Hawthorn !

JEFFCOTE. Ay ! Fanny Hawthorn.

ALAN. But I cannot.

JEFFCOTE. Why not ?

ALAN. You know—Beatrice—I can't !

JEFFCOTE. Thou mun tell Beatrice it 's off.

ALAN. How can I do that ?

JEFFCOTE. That 's thy look-out.

ALAN (*rising and holding on to the mantelpiece*). Look here, I can't do it. It isn't fair to Beatrice.

JEFFCOTE. It 's a pity thou didn't think of that before thou went to Llandudno !

ALAN. But what can I tell her ?

JEFFCOTE. Thou mun tell her the truth if thou can't find owt better to say.

ALAN. The truth!

(ALAN again collapses in the chair. A pause.)

JEFFCOTE. What's done is done. We've got to stand by it.

ALAN. Father! I don't want to wed Fanny. I want to wed Beatrice.

JEFFCOTE. Dost thou love Beatrice?

ALAN. Yes.

JEFFCOTE. I'm glad of it. It's right that thou should suffer as well as her.

(ALAN is overcome, and drops into dialect as he pleads.)

ALAN. Father, thou'll not make me do it! Thou'll not make me do it! I cannot. I'd have all the folk in Hindle laughing at me.

(ALAN breaks down, excitement and drink combined being too much for him.)

JEFFCOTE (*brusquely*). Come now, pull thyself together.

ALAN. Ay! It's easy talking that road.

JEFFCOTE. Thou art a man, now. Not a kid!

ALAN. It's me that's got to go through it. It doesn't hurt thee if I wed Fanny Hawthorn.

JEFFCOTE. Does it not?

ALAN. No.

JEFFCOTE. So thou thinks it easy for me to see thee wed Fanny Hawthorn? Hearken! Dost know how I began life? Dost know that I started as tenter in Walmesley's shed when I were eight years of age, and that when the time comes I shall leave the biggest fortune ever made in the cotton trade in Hindle? Dost know what my

thought has been when labouring these thirty years to get all that brass together? Not what pleasure I could get out of spending, but what power and influence I were piling up the while. I was set on founding a great firm that would be famous not only all over Lancashire but all over the world, like Horrockses or Calvert's or Hornbys of Blackburn. Dost think as I weren't right glad when thou goes and gets engaged to Tim Farrar's lass? Tim Farrar as were Mayor of Hindle and got knighted when the King come to open the new Town Hall. Tim Farrar that owns Lane End Shed, next biggest place to Daisy Bank in Hindle. Why, it were the dearest wish of my heart to see thee wed Tim Farrar's lass; and, happen, to see thee running both mills afore I died. And now what falls out? Lad as I'd looked to to keep on the tradition and build the business bigger still, goes and weds one of my own weavers! Dost think that's no disappointment to me? Harken! I'd put down ten thousand quid if thou could honestly wed Beatrice Farrar. But thou can't honestly wed her, not if I put down a million. There's only one lass thou can honestly wed now, and that's Fanny Hawthorn, and by God I'm going to see that thou does it!

(JEFFCOTE *stalks out of the room with his candle and his poker, which he has never put down, and ALAN remains huddled up and motionless in a corner of the arm-chair.*)

*The CURTAIN falls.*

## ACT II

*The scene is again the breakfast-room at the JEFFCOTES' house. It is shortly after 8 p.m. on the day following that on which the First Act took place. The evening meal, tea, is just over. Only MR. and MRS. JEFFCOTE have partaken of it. ADA has almost finished clearing away; there is a loaded tray on the sideboard and the coloured cloth is not yet spread, although the white cloth has been removed. MRS. JEFFCOTE is sitting by the hearth, and JEFFCOTE is standing with his back to the empty fireplace filling his pipe. It is not yet dark, but the light is fading.*

JEFFCOTE (*to ADA*). Come now, lass, be sharp with your siding away.

*(ADA is about to spread the coloured cloth.*

*MRS. JEFFCOTE rises and assists her.)*

MRS. JEFFCOTE. Give me that end, Ada.

*(They spread the cloth whilst JEFFCOTE lights his pipe, and then ADA hurries out with the tray.)*

JEFFCOTE. That girl wants wakening up.

MRS. JEFFCOTE. What are you in such a hurry about, Nat?

JEFFCOTE. I've got summat to say to you.

MRS. JEFFCOTE. Something to say to me. Why couldn't you say it whilst we were having tea?

JEFFCOTE. It's not quite the sort of thing to say before the servant.

MRS. JEFFCOTE (*surprised*). Why, Nat, what is it?

JEFFCOTE. Last night you were talking of taking Hindle Lodge for Alan?

MRS. JEFFCOTE. Yes. I was going to call on Mrs. Plews this afternoon, only it came on wet.

JEFFCOTE (*briefly*). Don't go.

MRS. JEFFCOTE. Why not?

JEFFCOTE. There's no need.

MRS. JEFFCOTE. Surely, Nat, you've not changed your mind again?

JEFFCOTE. Alan won't want to live in a place like Hindle Lodge.

MRS. JEFFCOTE. His wife will.

JEFFCOTE. How do you know that?

MRS. JEFFCOTE. I've asked her.

JEFFCOTE. Nay, you've not.

MRS. JEFFCOTE. Why, Nat, I mentioned it to Beatrice only a week ago.

JEFFCOTE. Happen you did. Alan's not going to marry Beatrice.

MRS. JEFFCOTE (*dumbfounded*). Not going to marry——? (*She stops.*)

JEFFCOTE. That's what I said.

MRS. JEFFCOTE. Why? Have they quarrelled?

JEFFCOTE. No.

MRS. JEFFCOTE. Then, what's the matter? What has happened? When did you get to know about it?

JEFFCOTE. I first got to know about it last night.

MRS. JEFFCOTE. That was what you were talking to Alan about when you went downstairs last night?

JEFFCOTE. Ay!

MRS. JEFFCOTE. And you said you were lecturing him on coming home so late. Why didn't you tell me the truth?

JEFFCOTE. I knew you'd learn it soon enough, and I didn't want to spoil your night's rest.

MRS. JEFFCOTE. Why didn't you tell me to-day, then?

JEFFCOTE. I've been at the mill all day.

MRS. JEFFCOTE. You could have told me as soon as you came home.

JEFFCOTE. I didn't want to spoil your tea for you.

MRS. JEFFCOTE (*wiping her eyes*). As if that mattered!

JEFFCOTE. Well, then, I didn't want to spoil *my* tea.

MRS. JEFFCOTE. Oh, Nat! what is it that's happened?

JEFFCOTE. To put it in a nutshell, Alan's not going to marry Beatrice because another girl has a better right to him.

MRS. JEFFCOTE. But how can that be? He's been engaged to Beatrice for nearly a year.

JEFFCOTE (*grimly*). Ay! He's only been engaged to Beatrice. With the other girl he's gone a step further.

MRS. JEFFCOTE. He's not gone and got wed already?

JEFFCOTE. No; he's not got wed. He dispensed with the ceremony.

MRS. JEFFCOTE. Dispensed with it?

JEFFCOTE. Did without.

MRS. JEFFCOTE (*shocked*). Oh, Nat!



JEFFCOTE. Ay. He spent last week-end with a girl at Llandudno.

MRS. JEFFCOTE. The creature!

JEFFCOTE. Eh?

MRS. JEFFCOTE (*indignantly*). Why are such women allowed to exist?

JEFFCOTE (*scratching his head*). Thou mun ask me another. I never looked on it in that light before.

MRS. JEFFCOTE. And at Llandudno, too, of all places! Why, I've been there many a time.

JEFFCOTE. What's that got to do with it?

MRS. JEFFCOTE. I shall never be able to fancy it again! And I'm so fond of the place.

JEFFCOTE. That's a pity. Happen you'll get over the feeling when they're married.

MRS. JEFFCOTE. But, Nat, it's impossible! Alan can't marry a woman of that sort!

JEFFCOTE. She's not a woman of that sort. She's a straight girl.

MRS. JEFFCOTE. How can you call her that?

JEFFCOTE. Well, you know what I mean. It's not been a matter of business with her.

MRS. JEFFCOTE. I don't see that that makes things any better. There might have been some excuse for her if it had been a matter of business. Really, Nat, you must see that the woman is not fit to marry Alan!

JEFFCOTE. Not quite so fast. You don't even know who she is yet.

MRS. JEFFCOTE. Whoever she is, if she's not above going away for the week-end with a man, she can't be fit to marry our son.

JEFFCOTE. Not even when our son's the man she's been away with?

MRS. JEFFCOTE. That has nothing to do with the case. It is evident that she is a girl with absolutely no principles.

JEFFCOTE. Dash it all! at that rate some folk might say that Alan's not fit to marry her because of what he's done.

MRS. JEFFCOTE. Well, if you can't see the difference——

*(He does not choose to. She shrugs her shoulders and continues.)*

I'm surprised at you, Nat; I really am. You seem to take a delight in being perverse and making difficulties.

JEFFCOTE. Upon my soul, mother, I'd no idea thou were such an unscrupulous one before. Don't you want to do what's right?

MRS. JEFFCOTE. Can't you offer the girl some money?

JEFFCOTE. Would you think that right treatment?

MRS. JEFFCOTE. She wouldn't object. She'd jump at it.

JEFFCOTE. Shall I tell you who she is?

MRS. JEFFCOTE. Of course you'll tell me who she is. Though that won't make me much wiser, for I don't suppose I've ever heard her name before.

JEFFCOTE. What makes you think that?

MRS. JEFFCOTE. I'm sure nobody I know would do a thing like that.

JEFFCOTE. She's not exactly a friend of yours, but her father is a very old friend of mine. His name's Christopher Hawthorn.

MRS. JEFFCOTE (*open-mouthed*). What !

JEFFCOTE. And the lass is his daughter Fanny.

MRS. JEFFCOTE. Fanny Hawthorn ! Do you mean to tell me that the lad's going to marry one of our own weavers ? Why, Nat, you must be out of your senses !

JEFFCOTE (*stubbornly*). Think so ?

MRS. JEFFCOTE. Why, all the folk in Hindle will be laughing at us.

JEFFCOTE. Anything else ?

MRS. JEFFCOTE. I should just think I have got something else. What about Timothy Farrar, for instance ? Have you thought what he'll say ?

JEFFCOTE. What does it matter what Tim Farrar says ?

MRS. JEFFCOTE. There's Beatrice.

JEFFCOTE. Ay ! there's Beatrice. I'm right sorry for that girl. But there's the other girl to be considered, mind you.

MRS. JEFFCOTE. Does Beatrice know yet ?

JEFFCOTE. No. I told Alan we'd go up to Farrar's to-night and have it out with them.

MRS. JEFFCOTE. Perhaps he's there now.

JEFFCOTE. Nay. He'll not be back from Manchester yet. He was stopping later because Raleigh's had got a cable in from India, and it wasn't translated when I left. Business before pleasure, mother !

MRS. JEFFCOTE. Then, thank goodness, it's not too late.

JEFFCOTE. What do you mean by that ?

MRS. JEFFCOTE. This affair has got to be stopped.

JEFFCOTE. Now, old lass, don't thou start meddling with what doesn't concern thee.

MRS. JEFFCOTE. That a nice thing! It concerns me as much as you. I've a right to have my say when it comes to a wife for Alan, and I'll not give way without a struggle to a girl like Fanny Hawthorn.

JEFFCOTE. Come, now, what's wrong with her, after all?

MRS. JEFFCOTE. She's a girl without any character.

JEFFCOTE. Now, I should say she's a girl with a good deal of character.

MRS. JEFFCOTE. The wrong sort.

JEFFCOTE. How do you know that? We don't know what made her go away with Alan.

MRS. JEFFCOTE. I do. It was one of two things. Either she's thoroughly wicked, or else she was simply trying to make him marry her, and whichever it was it's evident she's no fit wife for Alan.

JEFFCOTE. Alan should have thought of that earlier.

MRS. JEFFCOTE. You are taking much too serious a view of this affair, Nat; you are indeed. Mind you, I'm not defending what Alan's done. I'm as shocked as any one. I know it's a sin, and a grievous one too. What puzzles me is how he could do it. I wonder what made him. I don't know where he got it from. I'm sure he didn't get it from my side of the family!

JEFFCOTE. Happen he got it from Adam.

MRS. JEFFCOTE. Very well, then, all the more reason why you should overlook it.

JEFFCOTE. We can't overlook them sort of things

in Lancashire same as we could in the Garden of Eden.

MRS. JEFFCOTE. If you can't overlook it altogether, there's no reason why you should want to punish the lad like this. It's just cruelty, that's what it is, to make him marry a girl out of the mill.

JEFFCOTE. You mean she's beneath him?

MRS. JEFFCOTE. Of course she's beneath him.

JEFFCOTE. It's queer what short memories some folks have! What was my father, I should like to know? And thine, too, if it comes to that? Why, I wore clogs myself until I was past twenty.

MRS. JEFFCOTE. Yes; and if you don't look out, your grandson will wear them again. Don't forget the old saying: 'There's three generations from clogs to clogs.'

JEFFCOTE. A man may wear worse things than clogs. They're grand tackle for keeping the feet out of the wet.

MRS. JEFFCOTE. Don't talk so foolishly, Nat! I know as well as you do that before you die you're hoping to see Alan a big man. Member for Hindle, perhaps. You know whether a wife like Fanny Hawthorn would be a hindrance to him or not.

JEFFCOTE. If a man's wife gets in the road of his career, then his career will have to suffer.

MRS. JEFFCOTE. And every one knows what that means. He'll be blaming her all the time for standing in his light, and so his home life will be ruined as well.

JEFFCOTE. Marriage is a ticklish business anyhow. There's always the chance of a bust-up.

MRS. JEFFCOTE. Chance, indeed! It's as sure as Fate if Alan marries Fanny, and you know that. They'll be separated in five years. We've seen cases like that before.

JEFFCOTE. And shall again, I've little doubt.

MRS. JEFFCOTE. Well, Alan's shan't be one of them if I can help it.

JEFFCOTE. But you can't, old lass. I wear the breeches in this house.

MRS. JEFFCOTE. I'll be no party to it, anyhow! It shan't be said that I didn't lift my voice against the wedding.

(MRS. JEFFCOTE is nearly sobbing by this time. The room is in semi-darkness. JEFFCOTE listens.)

JEFFCOTE. There's the front door. It'll be Alan. Come now, mother, don't make a scene.

(MRS. JEFFCOTE wipes her eyes. ADA comes in.)

ADA. If you please, ma'am, Sir Timothy Farrar and Miss Beatrice.

MRS. JEFFCOTE. Oh! (*A pause.*) Mr. Alan hasn't come in yet?

ADA. No, ma'am.

MRS. JEFFCOTE. Are they in the drawing-room?

ADA. Yes, ma'am.

MRS. JEFFCOTE. Very well.

(ADA withdraws.)

MRS. JEFFCOTE. Dear me, Nat, this is very awkward. Why doesn't Alan come home? It's too bad of him, it is indeed.

JEFFCOTE. He's ashamed to face his mother, happen?

MRS. JEFFCOTE. He should know his mother better than that.

JEFFCOTE. Then he's trying to drive it too late to go up to Farrar's to-night.

MRS. JEFFCOTE. That's more likely.

JEFFCOTE. Very well. He's reckoned without his dad. If he's too much of a coward to face the music himself, I'll do it for him.

MRS. JEFFCOTE. What are you going to do?

JEFFCOTE. Just go and send Tim Farrar in here, while you keep Beatrice company in the other room.

MRS. JEFFCOTE. Are you going to tell him?

JEFFCOTE. Ay!

MRS. JEFFCOTE. But what shall I say to Beatrice?

JEFFCOTE. Say nowt.

MRS. JEFFCOTE. But I can't talk to her just as if nothing has happened. It would be like deceiving her. I'm not cut out for a hypocrite.

JEFFCOTE. All right. Tell her everything. She'll have to know some time.

MRS. JEFFCOTE (*pleading*). Need she ever know?

JEFFCOTE. Whatever falls out, it's not going to be hushed up.

MRS. JEFFCOTE. Strike a light, Nat.

(*He lights the gas.*)

Do I look as if I'd been crying?

JEFFCOTE. Why? Have you been crying?

MRS. JEFFCOTE. No.

JEFFCOTE. It doesn't show. Nothing to speak of.

(*MRS. JEFFCOTE goes out, and JEFFCOTE lights the other gas-jets, until the room is brightly illuminated. He gets out the whisky and soda. SIR TIMOTHY FARRAR, a portly red-faced, rough Lancashire man of fifty-nine*)

*or so, with a scrubby growth of hair under his chin, appears in the doorway. He is much the coarsest and commonest person in the play.)*

JEFFCOTE (*curtly*). How do, Tim.

SIR TIMOTHY. How do, Nat.

JEFFCOTE (*nodding to a chair*). Sit you down.

SIR TIMOTHY (*choosing the best chair*). Ay—ay!

JEFFCOTE (*holding out a cigar-box*). The old brand.

SIR TIMOTHY (*choosing the best cigar with deliberation*). I'll have a drop of whisky, too, Nat.

JEFFCOTE. Help yourself.

(JEFFCOTE *places the whisky handy, and then closes the door.*)

So they've made you Chairman of Hindle Education Committee, Tim?

SIR TIMOTHY. Ay! Why not? Thou knows I were reet mon for the job.

JEFFCOTE. Thou's not done much studying since thou were eight year of age.

SIR TIMOTHY. Happen I haven't. But I'm going to take damn good care that Hindle new Technical School is the finest in Lancashire. Or Yorkshire either, if it comes to that!

JEFFCOTE. Why not finest in England whilst you are about it?

SIR TIMOTHY. If it's finest in Lancashire and Yorkshire it goes without saying it's finest in England. They don't know how to spend money on them in the South. Besides, what should they want with Technical Schools in them parts? They don't *make* anything to speak of.

JEFFCOTE. They're a poor lot, it's true.



SIR TIMOTHY. I were in London all last week.

JEFFCOTE. Corporation business ?

SIR TIMOTHY. Ay !

JEFFCOTE. Expenses paid ?

SIR TIMOTHY. Ay !

JEFFCOTE. That 's the style.

SIR TIMOTHY. Where 's the lad ?

JEFFCOTE. Not got home yet.

SIR TIMOTHY. Beatrice were expecting him to telephone all day, but he didn't. So as soon as we 'd done eating she were on pins and needles to look him up.

JEFFCOTE. He was coming round to your place to-night.

SIR TIMOTHY. I told the lass he 'd be sure to. She hasn't seen him for ten days, thou knows, and that seems a long time when it 's before the wedding. It doesn't seem so long afterwards. That reminds me ! Have you seen the *Winning Post* this week ?

JEFFCOTE. Nay. I rarely look at it.

SIR TIMOTHY. There 's a tale in this week—it 'll suit thee down to the ground.

JEFFCOTE. Hold on a bit. There 's something I 've a mind to tell you.

SIR TIMOTHY. Let me get mine off my chest first. It 's about a fellow who took a girl away for the week-end——

JEFFCOTE. So 's mine.

SIR TIMOTHY. Oh ! It 's the same one. (*He is disappointed.*)

JEFFCOTE. Nay, it isn't.

SIR TIMOTHY. How do you know ?

JEFFCOTE. Mine 's true.

SIR TIMOTHY. True, is it? (*He considers.*) Well, let 's hear it. Who 's the fellow?

JEFFCOTE. Chap out of Hindle.

SIR TIMOTHY (*looking him in the face*). Here! Who 's been giving me away?

JEFFCOTE. Eh?

SIR TIMOTHY. I say, who 's been giving me away?

JEFFCOTE. Thee? (*He stares at SIR TIMOTHY and then breaks into a roar of laughter.*) Thou 's given thyself away, Tim Farrar. I wasn't talking about thee at all.

SIR TIMOTHY (*wiping his brow*). Eh! I thought as some one had seen us at Brighton. I don't mind thee knowing, but if the wrong person gets hold of that sort of thing all Hindle is apt to hear about it. Well, who 's the chap?

JEFFCOTE. Our Alan.

SIR TIMOTHY. What! The young devil! I'd like to give him a reet good hiding.

JEFFCOTE. Come. Thou 'rt a nice man to talk, after what I've just learned.

SIR TIMOTHY. Hang it all, it 's different with me! I'm not engaged to be wed. Why, I haven't even got a wife living. (*Fuming.*) The young beggar!

JEFFCOTE. I thought I'd better tell thee first.

SIR TIMOTHY. Ay—ay! I'll talk pretty straight to him.

JEFFCOTE. Perhaps you'll choose to tell Beatrice yourself.

SIR TIMOTHY. Tell who?

JEFFCOTE. Beatrice.

SIR TIMOTHY. Why? What's it got to do with her?

JEFFCOTE. Some one will have to tell her. She'll have to know sooner or later.

SIR TIMOTHY. God bless my soul, Nat Jeffcote! hast thou told thy missus everything thou did before thou got wed?

JEFFCOTE. I'd nowt to tell her.

SIR TIMOTHY. I always thought there was summat queer about thee, Nat. (*He shakes his head.*) Well, I'm not going to have Bee told of this affair, and that's flat. It's all over and done with.

JEFFCOTE. It's not all over. You don't understand. This girl is a decent girl, thou knows. Daughter of Chris Hawthorn.

SIR TIMOTHY. What! Him as slashes for thee?

JEFFCOTE. Ay!

SIR TIMOTHY. I've seen her. A sulky-looking wench. Well, I cannot see what difference it makes who the girl was. I reckon Alan's not going to marry her.

JEFFCOTE. That's just what he is going to do.

SIR TIMOTHY. What!

JEFFCOTE. You heard what I said.

SIR TIMOTHY. But he's going to marry my Beatrice.

JEFFCOTE. If he does he'll be had up for bigamy.

SIR TIMOTHY. Do you mean to say he's going to throw her over?

JEFFCOTE. There's no need to put it that way.

SIR TIMOTHY. There's no other way to put it if he weds Fanny Hawthorn.

JEFFCOTE. What else can he do?

SIR TIMOTHY. There's ways and means.

JEFFCOTE. For instance——

SIR TIMOTHY. It 's only a question of money.

JEFFCOTE. Have you forgotten who she is ?

SIR TIMOTHY. She 's one of thy weavers. That 'll cost thee a trifle more.

JEFFCOTE. She 's daughter of one of my oldest friends.

SIR TIMOTHY. I 'm one of thy oldest friends, likewise. What about my lass ? Have you thought what a fool she 'll look ?

JEFFCOTE. I 'm sorry. But t'other girl must come first. I think well enough of Beatrice to know she 'll see it in that light when it 's put to her.

SIR TIMOTHY. And who 's going to put it to her, I should like to know ?

JEFFCOTE. You can put it to her yourself, if you 've a mind.

SIR TIMOTHY. Dang it ! It 's a nice awkward thing to talk to a lass about. Here ! before I go any further with this job I want to see Alan, and know for certain what he 's going to do.

JEFFCOTE. He 'll do what I tell him.

SIR TIMOTHY. I doubt it ! I know he 's a fool, but I don't think he 's such a fool as all that.

*(The door opens and ALAN looks in.)*

SIR TIMOTHY. Why—talk of the devil——

ALAN. Hello, Sir Timothy ! Has Bee come with you ?

JEFFCOTE. She 's with your mother in the drawing-room.

ALAN. Right.

*(ALAN is withdrawing when JEFFCOTE calls him back.)*

JEFFCOTE. Here! I say! Just wait awhile. We've summat to say to you.

(ALAN comes in reluctantly.)

JEFFCOTE. Anything fresh in Manchester?

ALAN. No.

JEFFCOTE. Nowt for us in that cable?

ALAN. No.

JEFFCOTE. You're very late.

ALAN. I got something to eat in Manchester.

(He is for withdrawing again.)

JEFFCOTE. Hold on a bit. You'd better shut the door and sit down.

SIR TIMOTHY. Now then, what's all this I hear tell about thee?

ALAN (to JEFFCOTE). Have you been telling him?

JEFFCOTE. Ay!

ALAN. You'd no right to!

JEFFCOTE. Hello!

ALAN. It was my business.

JEFFCOTE. It was your business right enough, but if I'd left it to you it wouldn't have been done. I can see that you weren't for going up to Farrar's to-night.

ALAN. No, I wasn't.

JEFFCOTE (*grimly*). I knew it.

ALAN. And that's just why you hadn't any right to tell Sir Timothy.

JEFFCOTE. You young fool! What was the good of hanging back? Sir Timothy had got to be told some time, I reckon.

ALAN. Why?

JEFFCOTE. Why? You don't suppose he's going to see you throw his Beatrice over without knowing why?

ALAN. Who says I'm going to throw his Beatrice over ?

JEFFCOTE (*looking hard at him*). I say so.

ALAN. Happen it would be better if you'd stick to what concerns you in future.

JEFFCOTE (*rising*). What the deuce dost thou mean by talking to me that road ?

SIR TIMOTHY (*rising*). Here ! hold on a bit. Don't go shouting the lad down, Nat Jeffcote. I want to hear what he's got to say.

ALAN. If father hadn't opened his mouth there'd have been no call to say anything. It wasn't me who started to make difficulties.

SIR TIMOTHY. I'll bet it wasn't. You'd have let the thing slide ?

ALAN. I'd have tried to settle it.

SIR TIMOTHY. Then I take it thou's no desire to wed Fanny Hawthorn ?

ALAN. I don't think it's necessary.

SIR TIMOTHY. No more do I.

JEFFCOTE (*to ALAN*). I thought we had this out last night. Were you so drunk that you couldn't take in what I said ?

ALAN. No.

JEFFCOTE. Why did you not speak out then ?

ALAN. You never gave me a chance. You did all the talking yourself.

SIR TIMOTHY. I'd be ashamed to say that. I'd like to see the man as could shut *my* mouth when I'd had too much to drink. *Thou* couldn't do it, Nat, fond of shouting as thou art !

ALAN. He's not your father.

SIR TIMOTHY. Art afraid of him ?

ALAN. No.

SIR TIMOTHY. Then stand up to him. I'll back thee up.

ALAN. I've told him I'm not going to wed Fanny. What more does he want?

JEFFCOTE. You've made up your mind?

ALAN. Yes.

JEFFCOTE. Very well. I've rarely been beat up to now, and I'm not going to be beat by my own lad!

SIR TIMOTHY. Hang it all, Nat, thou cannot take him by the scruff of the neck and force him to wed where he doesn't want to!

JEFFCOTE. No; that's true. And no one can force me to leave my brass where I don't want to.

SIR TIMOTHY. Thou's not serious?

JEFFCOTE. I am that.

SIR TIMOTHY. Thou wouldn't care to leave Daisy Bank outside the family.

JEFFCOTE. It wouldn't go outside the family if I left it to his cousin Travis.

SIR TIMOTHY (*grimacing*). Thou art a queer chap, Nat!

ALAN. So it comes to this. If I don't marry Fanny you'll leave your brass to Travis?

JEFFCOTE. That's it.

ALAN. I see. (*He thinks a moment.*) And would Travis be expected to take Fanny over along with the mill?

(*JEFFCOTE winces, and makes as if to reply angrily, but he thinks better of it and remains grimly silent. A pause.*)

ALAN. Very well. Leave it to Travis. I'm going to stick to Beatrice.

JEFFCOTE. Right. You haven't thought what you and Beatrice are going to live on, have you?

ALAN. I'm not such a fool that I can't earn my own living.

JEFFCOTE. What you'll earn won't go very far if you have to keep a girl like Beatrice.

ALAN. Beatrice and I can manage like you and mother did.

JEFFCOTE. No, you can't. You haven't been brought up to it.

ALAN. Then Sir Timothy will help us.

JEFFCOTE. Sir Timothy? Oh, ay! (*He laughs sardonically.*) I'd like to hear what Tim Farrar thinks of the situation now.

SIR TIMOTHY (*scratching his head*). It's not straight of thee, Nat. Thou's not acting right.

JEFFCOTE. I've put thee in a bit of a hole, like?

SIR TIMOTHY. Thou's made it very awkward for me.

ALAN. I like that! It was you who told me to stand up to father. You said you'd back me up.

SIR TIMOTHY. Oh, ay! I'll back thee up all right. But there's no good in losing our tempers over this job, thou knows. I don't want to see a split 'twixt thee and thy father.

ALAN. If I don't mind, I don't see why you should.

SIR TIMOTHY. Lord bless thee! if thou art bent on a row, have it thy own way. But thy father's one of my oldest friends, think on, and I'm not going to part from him for thy sake. *Thou* can quarrel with him if thou's a mind to, but don't expect me to do the same.

ALAN. You're trying to draw out, now.



SIR TIMOTHY. I'll stand in at anything in reason, but I'll be no party to a bust-up. Besides, now I come to think of it, I'm not sure thou's treated my Beatrice right.

ALAN. Hello!

SIR TIMOTHY. No, I'm not. When a chap's engaged he ought to behave himself. From the way thou's been carrying on thou might be married already.

ALAN. Look here! You knew all this five minutes ago, when you told me to stand up to my father. What's happened to change you?

SIR TIMOTHY. Thou's very much mistaken if thou thinks I've changed my mind because thy father's leaving the mill to thy cousin Travis. I'm not the man to do that sort of thing. Besides, what do I care about thy father's brass? I'm worth as much as he is.

JEFFCOTE (*pleasantly*). That's a lie, Tim Farrar.

SIR TIMOTHY. Lie or not, I'm worth enough to be able to snap my fingers at thy brass. I'll not see my lass insulted by thy lad, not if thou were ten times as rich as thou makes out!

ALAN (*exasperated*). But don't you see——

SIR TIMOTHY. No, I don't.

JEFFCOTE. Yes, you do. You're only trying to draw a red herring across the track.

SIR TIMOTHY. Be damned to that for a tale!

JEFFCOTE. It's right.

SIR TIMOTHY. Dost take me for a mean beggar?

JEFFCOTE. No. I take thee for a business man. I never think of thee as owt else.

SIR TIMOTHY (*with heat*). Dost tell me thou can

believe I don't wish Alan to marry Bee just because of what thou's said about leaving thy brass?

JEFFCOTE. I do.

(*A pause.* SIR TIMOTHY *looks hard at* JEFFCOTE.)

SIR TIMOTHY. Well! And why not?

JEFFCOTE. Don't ask me. I don't object.

ALAN. Aren't you ashamed to say that?

SIR TIMOTHY. No. And if thou'd been in weaving as long as I have, thou wouldn't either. Thou's got to keep an eye on the main chance.

ALAN. But you've got plenty of money yourself. Quite enough for the two of us.

SIR TIMOTHY (*whimsically*). Well, blow me if thou aren't the best business man of the lot! Thou comes along and asks me for my daughter and my money. And what dost thou offer in exchange? Nowt but thyself! It isn't good enough, my lad.

ALAN. Good enough or not, it's the best I can do.

SIR TIMOTHY. It won't do for me.

ALAN. I shan't bother about you.

SIR TIMOTHY. Eh? What's that?

ALAN. I don't want to marry you. I shall leave it to Beatrice.

SIR TIMOTHY. Bee'll do what I tell her. Thou can take that from me.

ALAN. No thanks. I'll ask her myself. I don't care a hang for the pair of you. I'm going to stick to Beatrice if she'll have me. You can cut us off with a shilling if you've a mind to, both of you.

SIR TIMOTHY (*worried*). Hang it! Thou knows I cannot do that with my Bee. I call it taking a mean advantage of me, that I do!

JEFFCOTE. Why cannot you cut off your lass?

SIR TIMOTHY. Thou knows well enough that I cannot.

JEFFCOTE. I could.

SIR TIMOTHY. I don't doubt it. But, thank God, I'm not like thee, Nat Jeffcote. I sometimes think thou 'st got a stone where thy heart should be by rights.

JEFFCOTE. Happen, I've got a pair of scales.

SIR TIMOTHY. That's nowt to boast of. I'd as soon have the stone.

(*The door opens and MRS. JEFFCOTE looks in.*)

MRS. JEFFCOTE (*seeing ALAN*). Beatrice wants to speak to you, Alan.

(*MRS. JEFFCOTE enters, followed by BEATRICE FARRAR, a determined straightforward girl of about twenty-three.*)

SIR TIMOTHY (*to BEATRICE*). Now, my lass—

BEATRICE. Father, I want to speak to Alan.

SIR TIMOTHY. I'd like to have a word with thee first, Bee.

BEATRICE. Afterwards, father.

SIR TIMOTHY. Ay! but it'll be too late afterwards, happen!

JEFFCOTE. Come, Tim, thou can't meddle with this job.

SIR TIMOTHY (*worried*). I call it a bit thick!

BEATRICE. Please, father.

MRS. JEFFCOTE. Come into the drawing-room, Sir Timothy. You can smoke there, you know.

SIR TIMOTHY (*grumbling*). A bit thick!

(*He is led out by MRS. JEFFCOTE. JEFFCOTE is following, when he turns in the doorway.*)

JEFFCOTE. I'll overlook all you've said to-night if you'll be guided by me. But it's your last chance, mind.

ALAN. All right.

JEFFCOTE (*half to himself*). I never fancied thy cousin Travis.

(*SIR TIMOTHY returns to the doorway.*)

SIR TIMOTHY (*indignantly*). Here! What's all this? Thou wouldn't let me stop behind! What's thou been saying to Alan?

JEFFCOTE. Telling him not to make a fool of himself.

SIR TIMOTHY. I don't call it fair——

JEFFCOTE. Come along. Don't *thee* make a fool of thyself, either.

(*JEFFCOTE draws SIR TIMOTHY out of the room.*)

(*After they have gone ALAN closes the door, and then turns slowly to BEATRICE. They do not speak at first. At last BEATRICE almost whispers.*)

BEATRICE. Alan!

ALAN. So they've told you?

BEATRICE. Yes.

ALAN. Perhaps it's as well. I should have hated telling you.

BEATRICE. Alan, why did you——?

ALAN. I don't know. It was her lips.

BEATRICE. Her lips?

ALAN. I suppose so.

BEATRICE. I—I see.

ALAN. I'm not a proper cad, Bee. I haven't been

telling her one tale and you another. It was all an accident, like.

BEATRICE. You mean it wasn't arranged ?

ALAN. No, indeed, it wasn't. I shouldn't like you to think that, Bee. I ran across her at Blackpool.

BEATRICE. You didn't go to Blackpool to meet her ?

ALAN. On my oath I didn't ! I went there in the car with George Ramsbottom.

BEATRICE. What became of him ?

ALAN. Him ? Oh ! George is a pal. He made himself scarce.

BEATRICE. Just as you would have done, I suppose, if he had been in your place ?

ALAN. Of course ! What else can a fellow do ? Two 's company, you know. But old George would be all right. I daresay he picked up something himself.

BEATRICE. You knew her before you met her at Blackpool ?

ALAN. Of course. There 's not so many pretty girls in Hindle that you can miss one like Fanny Hawthorn. I knew her well enough, but on the straight, mind you. I thought she looked gay, that was all. I 'd hardly spoken to her before I ran into her at the Tower at Blackpool.

BEATRICE. So you met her at the Tower ?

ALAN. Yes. We 'd just had dinner at the Metropole Grill-room, George and I, and I daresay we had drunk about as much champagne as was good for us. We looked in at the Tower for a lark, and we ran into Fanny in the Ball-room. She had a girl with her—Mary—Mary—some-

thing or other. I forget. Anyhow, George took Mary on, and I went with Fanny.

BEATRICE. Yes ?

ALAN. Next day I got her to come with me in the car. We went to Llandudno.

BEATRICE. Yes ?

ALAN. There 's not much more to say.

BEATRICE. And I 've got to be satisfied with that ?

ALAN. What else do you want me to tell you ?

BEATRICE. Didn't you ever think of me ?

ALAN. Yes, Bee, I suppose I did. But you weren't there, you see, and she was. That was what did it. Being near her and looking at her lips. Then I forgot everything else. Oh ! I know. I'm a beast. I couldn't help it. I suppose you can never understand. It 's too much to expect you to see the difference.

BEATRICE. Between me and Fanny ?

ALAN. Yes. Fanny was just an amusement—a lark. I thought of her as a girl to have a bit of fun with. Going off with her was like going off and getting tight for once in a way. You wouldn't care for me to do that, but if I did you wouldn't think very seriously about it. You wouldn't want to break off our engagement for that. I wonder if you can look on this affair of Fanny's as something like getting tight—only worse. I'm ashamed of myself, just as I should be if you caught me drunk. I can't defend myself. I feel just an utter swine. What I felt for Fanny was simply—base—horrible——

BEATRICE. And how had you always thought of me ?

ALAN. Oh, Bee, what I felt for you was something  
—higher—finer—

BEATRICE. Was it? Or are you only trying to  
make yourself believe that?

ALAN. No. I respected you.

BEATRICE (*thinking*). I wonder which feeling a woman  
would rather arouse. And I wonder which is  
most like love?

ALAN. All the time, Bee, I have never loved any one  
else but you.

BEATRICE. You say so now. But, forgive me, dear,  
how am I to know? You have given Fanny  
the greater proof.

ALAN. I'm trying to show you that Fanny was  
one thing, you were another. Can't you under-  
stand that a fellow may love one girl and amuse  
himself with another? (*Despondently.*) No; I  
don't suppose you ever can?

BEATRICE. I think I can. We were different kinds  
of women. On separate planes. It didn't matter  
to the one how you treated the other.

ALAN. That's it. Going away with Fanny was just  
a fancy—a sort of freak.

BEATRICE. But you have never given me any proof  
half so great as that.

ALAN. Haven't I? I'll give it you now. You know  
that father says I am to marry Fanny?

BEATRICE. Your mother told me he wished it.

ALAN. Wished it! He's set his mind on it. He  
won't leave me a farthing unless I marry her.

BEATRICE. What did you tell him?

ALAN. If you can't guess that you haven't much  
confidence in me.

BEATRICE. That 's hardly my fault, is it ?

ALAN. No. Well, I told him I 'd see him damned first—or words to that effect.

BEATRICE (*with a movement of pleasure*). You did ?

ALAN. Yes. Is that good enough for you, Bee ?  
You wanted proof that it is you I love. I 've chucked away everything I had to expect in the world rather than give you up. Isn't that good enough for you ?

BEATRICE. Alan !

ALAN (*quickly clasping her*). Bee, in a way I 've been faithful to you all the time. I tried hard enough to forget all about you, but I couldn't. Often and often I thought about you. Sometimes I thought about you when I was kissing Fanny. I tried to pretend she was you. She never guessed, of course. She thought it was her I was kissing. But it wasn't. It was you. Oh, the awfulness of having another girl in my arms and wanting you !

(BEATRICE *does not answer. She closes her eyes, overcome.*)

Bee, you 'll stick to me, although I shan't have a penny ? I 'll get to work, though. I 'll work for you. You won't have any cause to reproach me. If only you 'll stick to me. If only you 'll tell me you forgive me !

BEATRICE (*at length*). Could you have forgiven me if I had done the same as you ?

ALAN (*surprised*). But—you—you couldn't do it !

BEATRICE. Fanny Hawthorn did.

ALAN. She 's not your class.

BEATRICE. She 's a woman.



ALAN. That 's just it. It 's different with a woman.

BEATRICE. Yet you expect me to forgive you. It doesn't seem fair!

ALAN. It isn't fair. But it 's usual.

BEATRICE. It 's what everybody agrees to.

ALAN. You always say that you aren't one of these advanced women. You ought to agree to it as well.

BEATRICE. I do. I can see that there is a difference between men and women in cases of this sort.

ALAN. You can?

BEATRICE. Men haven't so much self-control.

ALAN. Don't be cruel, Bee. There 's no need to rub it in!

BEATRICE. I 'm not being personal, Alan. I 'm old-fashioned enough to really believe there is that difference. You see, men have never had to exercise self-control like women have. And so I 'm old-fashioned enough to be able to forgive you.

ALAN. To forgive me, and marry me, in spite of what has happened, and in spite of your father and mine?

BEATRICE. I care nothing for my father or yours. I care a good deal for what has happened, but it shows, I think, that you need me even more than I need you. For I do need you, Alan. So much that nothing on earth could make me break off our engagement, if I felt that it was at all possible to let it go on. But it isn't. It 's impossible.

ALAN. Impossible? Why do you say that? Of course it 's not impossible.

BEATRICE. Yes, it is. Because to all intents and purposes you are already married.

ALAN. No, Bee!

BEATRICE. You say I'm old-fashioned. Old-fashioned people used to think that when a man treated a girl as you have treated Fanny it was his duty to marry her.

ALAN. You aren't going to talk to me like father, Bee?

BEATRICE. Yes. But with your father it is only a fad. You know it isn't that with me. I love you, and I believe that you love me. And yet I am asking you to give me up for Fanny. You may be sure that only the very strongest reasons could make me do that.

ALAN. Reasons! Reasons! Don't talk about reasons, when you are doing a thing like this!

BEATRICE. You may not be able to understand my reasons. You have always laughed at me because I go to church and believe things that you don't believe.

ALAN. I may have laughed, but I've never tried to interfere with you.

BEATRICE. Nor I with you. We mustn't begin it now, either of us.

ALAN. Is this what your religion leads you to? Do you call it a Christian thing to leave me in the lurch with Fanny Hawthorn? When I need you so much more than I've ever done before?

BEATRICE. I don't know. It's not what I can argue about. I was born to look at things just in the way I do, and I can't help believing what I do.

ALAN. And what you believe comes before me?

BEATRICE. It comes before everything. (*A pause.*)

Alan, promise that you 'll do what I wish.

ALAN. You love me ?

BEATRICE. If I love anything on earth I love you.

ALAN. And you want me to marry Fanny ?

BEATRICE. Yes. Oh, Alan ! can't you see what a splendid sacrifice you have it in your power to make ? Not only to do the right thing, but to give up so much in order to do it. (*A pause.*) Alan, promise me.

ALAN (*nodding sullenly*). Very well.

BEATRICE (*gladly*). You have sufficient courage and strength ?

ALAN. I 'll do what you ask, but only because I can see that your talk is all humbug. You don't love me. You are shocked by what I did, and you 're glad to find a good excuse for getting rid of me. All right. I understand.

BEATRICE (*in agony*). You don't—you don't understand.

ALAN. Faugh ! You might have spared me all that goody-goody business.

BEATRICE (*faintly*). Please——

ALAN. You don't care for me a bit.

BEATRICE (*passionately*). Alan ! You don't know what it 's costing me.

(*ALAN looks at her keenly, and then seizes her violently and kisses her several times. She yields to him and returns his embrace.*)

ALAN (*speaking quickly and excitedly*). Bee, you 're talking nonsense. You can't give me up—you can't give me up, however much you try.

(*BEATRICE tears herself away from him.*)

BEATRICE. You don't know me. I can. I will.  
I shall never be your wife.

ALAN. I won't take that for an answer—Bee——

BEATRICE. No, no, no! Never, never! whilst Fanny  
Hawthorn has a better right to you than I have.

*(There is a long pause. At length comes a  
knock at the door.)*

ALAN. Hello!

*(JEFFCOTE puts his head inside.)*

JEFFCOTE. Nine o'clock.

ALAN. What of it?

JEFFCOTE. Hawthorns are due up here at nine.

ALAN *(shortly)*. Oh!

BEATRICE. Is my father there?

JEFFCOTE. Ay! *(Calling.)* Tim!

*(SIR TIMOTHY appears in the doorway.)*

SIR TIMOTHY. Well? Fixed it up, eh?

BEATRICE. Alan and I are not going to be married,  
father.

*(There is a pause.)*

JEFFCOTE. Ah!

SIR TIMOTHY. I'm sure it's all for the best, lass.

BEATRICE. Are you quite ready, father? I want  
you to take me home.

SIR TIMOTHY. Ay—ay! Shall I get thee a cab,  
Bee?

BEATRICE. I'd rather walk, please. *(BEATRICE goes  
to the door.)* I'll write to you, Alan.

*(She goes out, followed by SIR TIMOTHY.)*

JEFFCOTE. So you've thought better of it?

ALAN. Seems so.

JEFFCOTE. And you'll wed Fanny Hawthorn, I  
take it?

ALAN (*laconically*). Ay!

JEFFCOTE. Thou 'rt a good lad, Alan. I'm right pleased with thee.

(ALAN *bursts into a loud peal of mirthless laughter.*)

(JEFFCOTE *stares at ALAN in surprise.*)

JEFFCOTE. What 's the matter?

ALAN. Nothing, father.

(*He flings himself listlessly into an arm-chair.*)

JEFFCOTE, *after another look at him, scratches his head and goes out.*)

*The CURTAIN falls.*

## ACT III

*The scene is the same as in the previous Act, the time a few minutes later. The room is empty. ADA opens the door and shows in MRS. HAWTHORN, CHRISTOPHER, and FANNY, who file in silently and awkwardly. Instead of a hat, FANNY is wearing the shawl that Lancashire weavers commonly wear when going to the mill.*

ADA (*glancing back at them from the door*). Will you take a seat, please.

(*ADA goes out. CHRISTOPHER and MRS. HAWTHORN sit on chairs placed against the back wall. FANNY remains standing.*)

MRS. HAWTHORN. Fanny, sit you down.

(*FANNY silently seats herself. They are all three in a row along the back wall, very stiff and awkward.*)

(*Presently JEFFCOTE enters. The HAWTHORNS all rise. He greets the three drily.*)

JEFFCOTE (*nodding*). Evening, Chris. (*To MRS. HAWTHORN.*) Good evening. (*He stops in front of FANNY.*) Good evening, lass.

(*He eyes her from tip to toe with a searching stare. She returns it quite simply and boldly.*)

JEFFCOTE (*satisfied*). Ay!

*(He turns away to the hearth, where he takes his stand just as MRS. JEFFCOTE comes in. She is stiff and ill at ease.)*

MRS. JEFFCOTE *(to them all without looking at them).*  
Good evening.

*(MRS. HAWTHORN and CHRISTOPHER murmur a greeting, and MRS. JEFFCOTE passes on to the fire, having cut them as nearly as she dared. ALAN lounges in sheepishly. He does not say anything, but nods to the three in a subdued way, and sits down sullenly on the L., far away from his father and mother.)*

JEFFCOTE *(to the HAWTHORNS).* Sit down.

*(They are about to sit against the wall as before, but he stops them.)*

JEFFCOTE. Not there. Draw up to the table.

*(They seat themselves round the table. The disposition of the characters is as follows. On the extreme L. is ALAN, in a big arm-chair. Sitting on the left of the table is FANNY. Behind the table, MRS. HAWTHORN. On the right of the table, CHRISTOPHER. Further to the right, in an arm-chair near the hearth, is MRS. JEFFCOTE. As for JEFFCOTE, he stands up with his back to the empty fireplace. Thus he can dominate the scene and walk about if he feels inclined.)*

JEFFCOTE. Well, here we are, all of us. We know what's brought us together. It's not a nice job, but it's got to be gone through, so we may as well get to business right away.

CHRISTOPHER. Ay!

JEFFCOTE. We don't need to say owt about what's happened, do we ?

MRS. HAWTHORN. No ; I don't see as we need.

MRS. JEFFCOTE. Excuse me. I think we do. I know hardly anything of what has happened.

MRS. HAWTHORN. It's admitted by them both.

MRS. JEFFCOTE. But what is admitted by them both ? It's rather important to know that.

MRS. HAWTHORN. You're hoping that we won't be able to prove owt against Alan. You think that happen he'll be able to wriggle out of it.

JEFFCOTE. There'll be no wriggling out. Alan has got to pay what he owes, and I don't think there's any doubt what that is. It's true I've only heard his version. What's Fanny told you ?

CHRISTOPHER. Nowt.

JEFFCOTE. Nowt ?

CHRISTOPHER. Nowt.

JEFFCOTE. How's that ?

MRS. HAWTHORN. She's turned stupid, that's why.

JEFFCOTE. I'll have to have a go at her, then. (*To FANNY.*) It seems my lad met you one night in Blackpool and asked you to go to Llandudno with him ?

FANNY. Yes. What then ?

JEFFCOTE. He was drunk ?

FANNY. No ; he wasn't what you'd call drunk.

JEFFCOTE. As near as makes no matter, I'll bet.

FANNY. Anyhow, he was sober enough next morning when we went away.

JEFFCOTE. And where did you stay at Llandudno ? Did he take you to an hotel ?

(*FANNY does not reply.*)



MRS. HAWTHORN (*sharply*). Now then, Fanny.

JEFFCOTE. Come, lass, open thy mouth.

ALAN. All right, father. I'll answer for Fanny.

We stopped at St. Elvies Hotel, Saturday till Monday.

JEFFCOTE. What did you stop as ?

ALAN. Man and wife.

MRS. HAWTHORN (*gratified*). Ah !

ALAN. You 'll find it in the register if you go there and look it up.

JEFFCOTE (*to* MRS. JEFFCOTE). There ! Are you satisfied ?

MRS. JEFFCOTE. Quite, thank you, Nat. That was all I wanted to know. I didn't want there to be any mistake.

CHRISTOPHER. There 's one thing bothering me. That postcard. It was posted in Blackpool on Sunday. I don't see how you managed it if you left on Saturday.

FANNY. I wrote it beforehand and left it for Mary to post on Sunday morning.

MRS. HAWTHORN. So Mary was in at all this !

FANNY. If Mary hadn't been drowned you 'd never have found out about it. I 'd never have opened my mouth, and Alan knows that.

MRS. HAWTHORN. Well, Mary 's got her reward, poor lass !

CHRISTOPHER. There 's more in this than chance, it seems to me.

MRS. HAWTHORN. The ways of the Lord are mysterious and wonderful. We can't pretend to understand them. He used Mary as an instrument for His purpose.

JEFFCOTE. Happen. But if He did it seems cruel hard on Mary, like. However, it 's all over and done with, and can't be mended now, worse luck ! These two young ones have made fools of themselves. That don't matter so much. The worst feature of it is they 've made a fool of me. We 've got to decide what 's to be done. (*To Mrs. HAWTHORN.*) I gave Chris a message for you last night.

Mrs. HAWTHORN. Yes ; you said as how you 'd see us treated right.

JEFFCOTE. That 's it. That 's what I 'm going to do. Now what do you reckon is the right way to settle this job ?

Mrs. HAWTHORN. He ought to marry her. I 'll never be satisfied with owt less.

JEFFCOTE. That 's your idea, too, Chris ?

CHRISTOPHER. Ay !

JEFFCOTE. It 's mine as well. (*Mrs. HAWTHORN nods eagerly.*) Before I knew who the chap was I said he should wed her, and I 'm not going back on that now I find he 's my own son. The missus there doesn't see it in the same light, but she 'll have to make the best of it. She 's in a minority of one, as they say.

Mrs. HAWTHORN. Then we may take it that Alan 's agreeable ?

JEFFCOTE. Whether he 's agreeable or not I cannot say. He 's willing, and that 'll have to be enough for you.

Mrs. HAWTHORN. You 'll excuse me mentioning it, but what about the other girl ?

JEFFCOTE. What other girl ? Has he been carrying on with another one as well ?

MRS. JEFFCOTE. She means Beatrice. Alan was engaged to Miss Farrar.

MRS. HAWTHORN. Yes; that 's it. What about her?

JEFFCOTE. That 's off now. No need to talk of that.

CHRISTOPHER. The lad 's no longer engaged to her?

MRS. JEFFCOTE. No.

MRS. HAWTHORN. And he 's quite free to wed our Fanny?

JEFFCOTE. He is so far as we know.

MRS. HAWTHORN. Then the sooner it 's done the better.

JEFFCOTE. We 've only got to get the licence.

CHRISTOPHER (*brokenly*). I 'm sure—I 'm sure—we 're very grateful.

MRS. HAWTHORN (*wiping her eyes*). Yes; we are indeed. Though, of course, it 's only what we 'd a right to expect.

CHRISTOPHER. I 'm sure, Mrs. Jeffcote, that you 'll try and look on Fanny more kindly in time.

MRS. JEFFCOTE. I hope I shall, Mr. Hawthorn. Perhaps it 's all for the best. More unlikely matches have turned out all right in the end.

MRS. HAWTHORN. I 'm sure there 's nothing can be said against Fanny save that she 's got a will of her own. And after all, there 's a many of us have that.

CHRISTOPHER. She 's always been a good girl up to now. You can put trust in her, Alan.

JEFFCOTE. It 's evidently high time Alan got wed, that 's all I can say, and it may as well be to Fanny as to any one else. She 's had to work at the loom for her living, and that does no woman any harm. My missus has worked at

the loom in her time, though you 'd never think it to look at her now; and if Fanny turns out half as good as her, Alan won't have done so badly. Now we've got to settle when the wedding's to be.

MRS. JEFFCOTE. What *sort* of wedding is it to be?

JEFFCOTE. You women had better fix that up.

MRS. JEFFCOTE. It ought to be quiet.

JEFFCOTE. It'll be quiet, you may lay your shirt on that! We shan't hold a reception at the Town Hall this journey.

MRS. JEFFCOTE. I should prefer it to take place at the registrar's.

MRS. HAWTHORN. No. I'll never agree to that. Not on any account.

MRS. JEFFCOTE. Why not?

MRS. HAWTHORN. No. In church, if you please, with the banns and everything. There's been enough irregular work about this job already. We'll have it done properly this time.

ALAN. I should like to hear what Fanny says.

MRS. HAWTHORN. Fanny'll do what's thought best for her.

ALAN. Anyhow, we'll hear what she thinks about it, if you please.

FANNY. I was just wondering where I come in.

MRS. HAWTHORN. Where you come in? You're a nice one to talk! You'd have been in a fine mess, happen, if you hadn't had us to look after you. You ought to be very thankful to us all, instead of sitting there hard like.

JEFFCOTE. You'd better leave it to us, lass. We'll settle this job for you.

FANNY. It's very good of you. You'll hire the parson and get the licence and make all the arrangements on your own without consulting me, and I shall have nothing to do save turn up meek as a lamb at the church or registry office or whatever it is.

JEFFCOTE. That's about all you'll be required to do.

FANNY. You'll look rather foolish if that's just what I won't do.

MRS. HAWTHORN. Don't talk silly, Fanny.

JEFFCOTE. What does she mean by that?

MRS. HAWTHORN. Nothing. She's only showing off, like. Don't heed her.

MRS. JEFFCOTE. I beg your pardon. We will heed her, if you please. We'll see what it is she means by that.

JEFFCOTE. Hark you, lass. I'm having no hanky-panky work now. You'll have to do what you're bid, or maybe you'll find yourself in the cart.

CHRISTOPHER. Fanny, you'll not turn stupid now?

FANNY. It doesn't suit me to let you settle my affairs without so much as consulting me.

MRS. HAWTHORN. Consulting you! What is there to consult you about, I'd like to know? You want to marry Alan, I suppose, and all we're talking about is the best way to bring it about.

FANNY. That's just where you make the mistake. I don't want to marry Alan.

JEFFCOTE. Eh?

FANNY. And what's more, I haven't the least intention of marrying him.

MRS. HAWTHORN. She's taken leave of her senses!

*(They are all surprised. ALAN is puzzled. Mrs. JEFFCOTE visibly brightens.)*

JEFFCOTE. Now then, what the devil do you mean by that ?

FANNY. I mean what I say, and I 'll trouble you to talk to me without swearing at me. I 'm not one of the family yet.

JEFFCOTE. Well, I 'm hanged !

*(He is much more polite to FANNY after this, for she has impressed him. But now he rubs his head and looks round queerly at the others.)*

CHRISTOPHER. Why won't you wed him ? Have you got summat against him ?

FANNY. That 's my affair.

MRS. HAWTHORN. But you must give us a reason.

*(FANNY remains obstinately silent.)*

CHRISTOPHER. It 's no good talking to her when she 's in this mood. I know her better than you do. She won't open her mouth, no, not if she was going to be hung.

JEFFCOTE. Dost thou mean to tell me that all us folk are to stand here and let this girl beat us ?

CHRISTOPHER. Fanny 'll get her own way.

JEFFCOTE. We 'll see.

MRS. JEFFCOTE. Why shouldn't she have her own way ? I don't think we have any right to press her ; I don't really.

MRS. HAWTHORN. All you 're after is to get Alan out of the hole he 's in. You don't care about Fanny.

MRS. JEFFCOTE. I 'm sorry for Fanny, but of course I care more about my own child.

MRS. HAWTHORN. Well, and so do we.

MRS. JEFFCOTE. After all, she knows better than we do whether she wants to marry Alan.

JEFFCOTE. Now then, Alan, what's the meaning of this?

ALAN. I don't know, father.

JEFFCOTE. You've not been getting at her to-day and wheedling her into this?

ALAN. Good Lord, no! What would have been the good of that? Besides, I never thought of it.

JEFFCOTE. Well, *I* can't account for it!

ALAN. Look here, father, just let me have a talk to her alone. It's not likely she'll care to speak with all you folk sitting round.

JEFFCOTE. Do you reckon she'll open her mouth to you?

ALAN. I can but try, though it's true she never takes much notice of what I say.

JEFFCOTE. We'll give you fifteen minutes. (*He looks at his watch.*) If thou cannot talk a lass round in that time thou ought to be jolly well ashamed of thyself. I know I could have done it when I was thy age. Mother, you'd better show Chris and his missus into t'other room for a bit.

(*MRS. JEFFCOTE goes to the door.*)

MRS. JEFFCOTE. Will you come this way, please?

(*MRS. JEFFCOTE goes out, followed by CHRISTOPHER.*)

MRS. HAWTHORN. Now, Fanny, think on what you're doing. For God's sake, have a bit of common sense!

(*FANNY is silent. MRS. HAWTHORN goes out.*)

JEFFCOTE. Fifteen minutes. And if you 're not done then we shall come in whether or not.

AT

~~DOOR~~ UR (JEFFCOTE goes out.)

ALAN. Look here, Fanny, what's all this nonsense about?

X TO C

FANNY. What nonsense?

ALAN. Why won't you marry me? My father's serious enough. He means it when he says he wants you to. He's as stupid as a mule when he once gets an idea into his head.

FANNY. As if I didn't know that. He's like you, for that matter!

ALAN. Well, then, what are you afraid of?

FANNY. Afraid? Who says I am afraid?

ALAN. I don't see what else it can be.

FANNY. You can't understand a girl not jumping at you when she gets the chance, can you?

ALAN. I can't understand you not taking me when you get the chance.

FANNY. How is it you aren't going to marry Beatrice Farrar?

STANDS X TO C (ALAN)

ALAN. I can't marry both of you.

FANNY. Weren't you fond of her?

ALAN. Very.

FANNY. But you were fonder of me—eh?

ALAN. Well—

FANNY. Come now, you must have been or you wouldn't have given her up for me.

ALAN. I gave her up because my father made me.

FANNY. Made you? Good Lord, a chap of your age!

ALAN. My father's a man who will have his own way.



FANNY. You can tell him to go and hang himself. He hasn't got any hold over you.

ALAN. That's just what he has. He can keep me short of brass. *TO FANNY*

FANNY. Earn some brass.

ALAN. Ay! I can earn some brass, but it'll mean hard work and it'll take time. And, after all, I shan't earn anything like what I get now.

FANNY. Then all you want to wed me for is what you'll get with me? I'm to be given away with a pound of tea, as it were?

ALAN. No. You know I like you, Fanny—I'm fond of you.

FANNY. You didn't give up Beatrice Farrar because of me, but because of the money.

ALAN. If it comes to that, I didn't really give her up at all. I may as well be straight with you. It was she that gave me up. *TO FANNY*

FANNY. What did she do that for? Her father's plenty of money, and she can get round *him*, I'll bet, if you can't get round *yours*.

ALAN. She gave me up because she thought it was her duty to.

FANNY. You mean because she didn't fancy my leavings. *TO FANNY*

ALAN. No. Because she thought you had the right to marry me. *TO FANNY*

FANNY. Glory! She must be queer!

ALAN. It was jolly fine of her. You ought to be the first to see that. *TO FANNY*

FANNY. Fine to give you up? (*She shrugs her shoulders, and then admits grudgingly.*) Well, I reckon it was a sacrifice of a sort. That is, if

she loves you. If I loved a chap I wouldn't do that.

ALAN. You would. You're doing it now.

FANNY. Eh?

ALAN. Women are more unselfish than men and no mistake!

FANNY. What are you getting at?

ALAN. I know why you won't marry me.

FANNY. Do you? (*She smiles.*) Well, spit it out, lad!

ALAN. You're doing it for my sake.

FANNY. How do you make that out? X To C (1.2.11)

ALAN. You don't want to spoil my life.

FANNY. Thanks! Much obliged for the compliment. MINE L

ALAN. I'm not intending to say anything unkind, but of course it's as clear as daylight that you'd damage my prospects, and all that sort of thing. You can see that, can't you?

FANNY. Ay! I can see it now you point it out. I hadn't thought of it before.

ALAN. Then, that isn't why you refused me?

FANNY. Sorry to disappoint you, but it's not.

ALAN. I didn't see what else it could be.

FANNY. Don't you kid yourself, my lad! It isn't because I'm afraid of spoiling *your* life that I'm refusing you, but because I'm afraid of spoiling *mine*! That didn't occur to you?

ALAN. It didn't.

FANNY. You never thought that anybody else could be as selfish as yourself.

ALAN. I may be very conceited, but I don't see how you can hurt yourself by wedding me. You'd come in for plenty of brass, anyhow.

FANNY. I don't know as money's much to go by when it comes to a job of this sort. It's more important to get the right chap.

ALAN. You like me well enough.

FANNY. Suppose it didn't last? Weddings brought about this road have a knack of turning out badly. Would you ever forget it was your father bade you marry me? No fear! You'd bear me a grudge all my life for that.

ALAN. Hang it! I'm not such a cad as you make out.

FANNY. You wouldn't be able to help it. It mostly happens that road. Look at old Mrs. Eastwood—hers was a case like ours. Old Joe Eastwood's father made them wed. And she's been separated from him these thirty years, living all alone in that big house at Valley Edge. Got any amount of brass, she has, but she's so lonesome-like she does her own housework for the sake of something to occupy her time. The tradesfolk catch her washing the front steps. You don't find me making a mess of my life like that.

ALAN. Look here, Fanny, I promise you I'll treat you fair all the time. You don't need to fear that folk'll look down on you. We shall have too much money for that.

FANNY. I can manage all right on twenty-five bob a week.

ALAN. Happen you can. It's not the brass altogether. You do like me, as well, don't you?

FANNY. Have you only just thought of that part of the bargain?

ALAN. Don't be silly. I thought of it long ago.  
You *do* like me? You wouldn't have gone to  
Llandudno with me if you hadn't liked me?

FANNY. Oh yes, I liked you.

ALAN. And don't you like me now?

FANNY. You're a nice, clean, well-made lad. Oh,  
ay! I like you right enough. */ To Alan*

ALAN. Then, Fanny, for God's sake, marry me, and  
let's get this job settled.

FANNY. Not me! *in front to PC*

*How to face*  
ALAN. But you must. Don't you see it's your duty  
to.

FANNY. Oh! come now, *you* aren't going to start  
preaching to me?

ALAN. No. I don't mean duty in the way Beatrice  
did. I mean your duty to me. You've got  
me into a hole, and it's only fair you should get  
me out.

FANNY. I like your cheek!

ALAN. But just look here. I'm going to fall between  
two stools. It's all up with Beatrice, of course.  
And if you won't have me I shall have parted  
from her to no purpose; besides getting kicked  
out of the house by my father, more than likely!

FANNY. Nay, nay! He'll not punish you for this.  
He doesn't know it's your fault I'm not willing  
to wed you.

*STRAIGHT*  
*OUT*  
ALAN. He may. It's not fair, but it would be father  
all over to do that.

FANNY. He'll be only too pleased to get shut of  
me without eating his own words. He'll forgive  
you on the spot, and you can make it up with  
Beatrice to-morrow.

ALAN. I can never make it up with Bee !

FANNY. Get away !

ALAN. You <sup>won't</sup> understand a girl like Bee. I couldn't think of even trying for months, and then it may be too late. I'm not the only pebble on the beach. And I'm a damaged one, at that !

FANNY. She's fond of you, you said ?

ALAN. Yes. I think she's very fond of me.

FANNY. Then she'll make it up in a fortnight.

ALAN (*moodily*). You said *you* were fond of me once, but it hasn't taken you long to alter.

FANNY. All women aren't built alike. Beatrice is religious. She'll be sorry for you. I was fond of you in a way.

ALAN. But you didn't ever really love me ?

FANNY. Love you ? Good heavens, of course not ! Why on earth should I love you ? You were just some one to have a bit of fun with. You were an amusement—a lark.

ALAN (*shocked*). Fanny ! Is that all you cared for me ?

FANNY. How much more did you care for me ?

ALAN. But it's not the same. I'm a man.

FANNY. You're a man, and I was your little fancy. Well, I'm a woman, and *you* were *my* little fancy. You wouldn't prevent a woman enjoying herself as well as a man, if she takes it into her head ?

ALAN. But do you mean to say that you didn't care any more for me than a fellow cares for any girl he happens to pick up ?

FANNY. Yes. Are you shocked ?

ALAN. It's a bit thick ; it is really !

FANNY. You 're a beauty to talk !

ALAN. It sounds so jolly immoral. I never thought of a girl looking on a chap just like that ! I made <sup>dec</sup> sure you wanted to marry me if you got the chance.

FANNY. No fear ! You 're not good enough for me. The chap Fanny Hawthorn weds has got to be made of different stuff from you, my lad. *My* husband, if ever I have one, will be a man, not a fellow who 'll throw over his girl at his father's bidding ! Strikes me the sons of these rich manufacturers are all much alike. They seem a bit weak in the upper storey. It 's their fathers' brass that 's too much for them, happen ! They don't know how to spend it properly. They 're like chaps who can't carry their drink because they aren't used to it. The brass gets into their heads, like !

ALAN. Hang it, Fanny, I 'm not quite a fool.

FANNY. No. You 're not a fool altogether. But there 's summat lacking. You 're not man enough for me. You 're a nice lad, and I 'm fond of you. But I couldn't ever marry you. We 've had a right good time together, I 'll never forget that. It *has* been a right good time, and no mistake ! We 've enjoyed ourselves proper ! But all good times have to come to an end, and ours is over now. Come along, now, and bid me fare-well.

ALAN. I can't make you out rightly, Fanny, but you 're a damn good sort, and I wish there were more like you !

FANNY (*holding out her hand*). Good-bye, old lad.

ALAN (*grasping her hand*). Good-bye, Fanny! And good luck!

(*A slight pause.*)

FANNY. And now call them in again.

ALAN (*looking at his watch*). Time's not up yet.

FANNY. Never heed! Let's get it over.

*To Door*  
(ALAN goes out, and FANNY returns to her chair and sits down. Presently ALAN comes in and stands by the door, whilst MRS. JEFFCOTE, MRS. HAWTHORN, and CHRISTOPHER file in and resume their original positions. Last of all comes JEFFCOTE, and ALAN leaves the door and goes back to his chair. JEFFCOTE comes straight behind the table.)

JEFFCOTE. Well? What's it to be?

(ALAN and FANNY look at each other.)

Come. What's it to be? You, Fanny, have you come to your senses?

FANNY. I've never left them, so far as I know.

JEFFCOTE. Are you going to wed our Alan or are you not?

FANNY. I'm not.

JEFFCOTE. Ah!

MRS. HAWTHORN. Well!

ALAN. It's no good, father. I can't help it. I've done all I can. She won't have me.

JEFFCOTE. I'm beat this time! I wash my hands of it! There's no fathoming a woman. And these are the creatures that want us to give them votes!

(*After this JEFFCOTE does not attempt to influence the discussion.*)

MRS. HAWTHORN (*in a shrill voice*). Do you tell us you 're throwing away a chance like this ?

FANNY. You 've heard.

MRS. HAWTHORN. I call it wicked, I do, indeed ! I can see you are downright bad, through and through ! There 's one thing I tell you straight. Our house is no place for thee after this.

FANNY. You 're not really angry with me because of what I 've done. It 's because I 'm not going to have any of Mr. Jeffcote's money that you want to turn me out of the house.

MRS. HAWTHORN. It 's not ! It 's because you choose to be a girl who 's lost her reputation, instead of letting Alan make you into an honest woman.

FANNY. How can he do that ?

MRS. HAWTHORN. By wedding you, of course.

FANNY. You called him a blackguard this morning.

MRS. HAWTHORN. So he is a blackguard.

FANNY. I don't see how marrying a blackguard is going to turn me into an honest woman !

MRS. HAWTHORN. If he marries you he won't be a blackguard any longer.

FANNY. Then it looks as if I 'm asked to wed him to turn him into an honest man ?

ALAN. It 's no use bandying words about what 's over and done with. I want to know what 's all this talk of turning Fanny out of doors ?

CHRISTOPHER. Take no heed of it ! My missus don't rightly know what she 's saying just now.

MRS. HAWTHORN. Don't she ? You 're making a big mistake if you think that. Fanny can go home and fetch her things, and after that she may pack off !



CHRISTOPHER. That she 'll not !

MRS. HAWTHORN. Then I 'll make it so hot for her in the house, and for thee, too, that thou 'll be glad to see the back of her !

FANNY. This hasn't got anything to do with Mr. and Mrs. Jeffcote, has it ?

(FANNY rises.)

ALAN. It 's got something to do with me, though !  
I 'm not going to see you without a home.

FANNY (*smiling*). It 's right good of you, Alan, but I shan't starve. I 'm not without a trade at my finger tips, thou knows. I 'm a Lancashire lass, and so long as there 's weaving sheds in Lancashire I shall earn enough brass to keep me going. I wouldn't live at home again after this, not anyhow ! I 'm going to be on my own in future. (*To CHRISTOPHER.*) You 've no call to be afraid. I 'm not going to disgrace you. But so long as I 've to live my own life I don't see why I shouldn't choose what it 's to be.

CHRISTOPHER (*rising*). We 're in the road here !  
Come, Sarah !

JEFFCOTE. I 'm sorry, Chris. I 've done my best for thee.

CHRISTOPHER. Ay ! I know. I 'm grateful to thee, Nat. (*To MRS. JEFFCOTE.*) Good night, ma'am.

MRS. JEFFCOTE. Good night.

(MRS. HAWTHORN and CHRISTOPHER go out, the former seething with suppressed resentment. Neither says anything to ALAN. JEFFCOTE opens the door for them and follows them into the hall. As FANNY is going out MRS. JEFFCOTE speaks.)

MRS. JEFFCOTE. Good-bye, Fanny Hawthorn. If ever you want help, come to me.

FANNY. Ah! You didn't want us to wed?

MRS. JEFFCOTE. No.

FANNY. You were straight enough.

MRS. JEFFCOTE. I'm sure this is the best way out.

I couldn't see any hope the other way.

FANNY. Good-bye.

(MRS. JEFFCOTE *holds out her hand, and they shake hands. Then FANNY goes out with ALAN. There is a slight pause. MRS. JEFFCOTE goes to the door and looks into the hall, and then returns to her chair. Soon JEFFCOTE comes in.*)

MRS. JEFFCOTE. Have they gone?

JEFFCOTE. Ay!

(JEFFCOTE *sits down in an arm-chair and fills his pipe.*)

MRS. JEFFCOTE. Where's Alan?

JEFFCOTE. Don't know.

MRS. JEFFCOTE. What are you going to do about him?

JEFFCOTE. Don't know.

(ALAN *opens the door and looks in. He is wearing a light Burberry mackintosh and a soft felt hat.*)

MRS. JEFFCOTE. Where are you going to, Alan?

ALAN. I'm just running round to Farrar's.

JEFFCOTE (*surprised*). To Farrar's?

ALAN. To see Beatrice.

MRS. JEFFCOTE (*not surprised*). You're going to ask her to marry you?

ALAN (*laconically*). Happen I am!

JEFFCOTE. Well, I 'm damned ! Dost thou reckon she 'll have thee ?

ALAN. That remains to be seen.

JEFFCOTE. Aren't you reckoning without me ?

ALAN. Can't help that.

(JEFFCOTE *grunts.*)

ALAN. Hang it ! be fair. I 've done my best. It 's not my fault that Fanny won't have me.

JEFFCOTE. Well, if Beatrice Farrar can fancy thee, it 's not for me to be too particular.

ALAN. Thank you, father.

JEFFCOTE. Get along ! I 'm disgusted with thee !

(ALAN *slips out of the door.*)

MRS. JEFFCOTE. Beatrice will have him.

JEFFCOTE. How do you know that ?

MRS. JEFFCOTE. She loves him ; she told me.

JEFFCOTE. There 's no accounting for tastes ! (*He ruminates.*) So Beatrice loves him, does she ? Eh ! but women are queer folk ! Who 'd have thought that Fanny would refuse to wed him ?

MRS. JEFFCOTE. It *is* strange. It makes you feel there *is* something in Providence after all.

*The CURTAIN falls.*



THE PERFECT CURE

A COMEDY IN THREE ACTS



## CHARACTERS

VINCENT CRAY.

MADGE CRAY (*his Daughter*).

TOM PROBYN.

MISS SCANDRETT.





SCENE.—*Parlour of VINCENT CRAY'S house, in an outlying  
suburb of London.*



# THE PERFECT CURE

## ACT I

SCENE.—*The parlour of VINCENT CRAY'S house is a small cosy place, furnished tastefully but not showily. The things are by no means new, and there is no evidence of superfluous wealth in the household. Still, it is certain that the people who live here are not in straitened circumstances.*

*The scene is set triangularly, only two sides of the room being visible. Of these, the longer one is left, the shorter right. In the right wall is the door into the passage, which is seen when the door is open. Through this door one gets to the kitchen and stairs by turning towards the proscenium, and to the front door by turning towards the back of the stage. Against this wall, but nearer the proscenium than the door, is a sofa. The left wall contains the fireplace, down near the footlights, and further back is a big box window with a very low window-seat. An arm-chair is by the hearth, above it. A corner cabinet with ornaments is in the angle between the two walls at the back. The mantel is full of ornaments. The table is centre. Other chairs and furniture dress the stage.*

*The house is not new. It is one of those small rather quaint old cottages with big gardens which get absorbed into a growing suburb, with rows of new dwellings all round them.*

*When the curtain rises, a small fire is burning and the gas is lighted, for it is about half-past nine on an evening in early summer. VINCENT CRAY is sitting in the arm-chair reading an evening paper. He is smoking a pipe, which has gone out. He feels for matches, and finds none. He gets up and looks on the mantelpiece, and examines the vases for a taper or a paper spill. There are none. VINCENT CRAY is a man of fifty, whom self-indulgence and selfishness have spoilt. He is really a charming fellow, but he rarely tries to be. Generally he is querulous and bad-tempered. He wears little patches of side-whiskers which make him look much older than he need do. He wears carpet slippers and a coloured smoking cap, and screws a monocle into his eye as he reads. When he can find no matches or tapers he calls querulously 'Madge' two or three times. No answer. He goes to the door, opens it and shouts 'Madge!' Then he returns to his chair. MADGE CRAY runs in. She could be a most pretty girl if she were properly dressed and all that sort of thing. At present she has a simple print blouse and dark skirt. Her hair is done simply, drawn back rather tightly. She wears a coarse canvas apron over her skirt, and upon this she is wiping her hands when she enters.*

MADGE. Did you call, father?

CRAY. Did I call, my dear? (*Satirically.*) Oh no, I've not been shouting myself hoarse for the last five minutes, have I?

MADGE. I'm sorry, father.

CRAY. And my throat's bad enough as it is, with these east winds in June.

MADGE. I didn't hear you. Why didn't you ring the bell?

CRAY. I won't have you answering the bell, just as if you were a servant. I don't like it.

MADGE. We're all alone, and it would save you so much trouble.

CRAY. It's the principle of the thing. I hate to do it. Can't you see that? But there, there, I don't suppose you can. You've no delicacy of perception.

MADGE. But I should hear you so much better, if you rang the bell.

CRAY. If you'd a daughter's proper feelings, you'd keep your ears open.

MADGE (*patiently*). What is it you want, father?

CRAY. Where are the spills? You know I always like to have a supply of spills to light my pipe by.

MADGE. Here they are, father.

*(She indicates a little table on his left, where a heap of paper spills is lying. He had not looked on this table before.)*

CRAY. Eh? (*Irritably*.) What do you put them there for? How do you expect anybody to find them there? Eh?

MADGE. I thought they'd be handier for you. You wouldn't have to get up.

CRAY. I like them in that vase on the mantelpiece. You know that.

MADGE. I'm sorry, father. I'll try and remember next time. Is that all? (*She is going*.)

CRAY. No, it is not all. Don't try and run away when I'm talking to you. What are you doing with that apron on at this time of night?

MADGE (*meekly*). Washing up.

CRAY. Do you mean to say the dinner things are not washed up yet ?

MADGE. Not quite. I've been very busy to-day.

CRAY. What on earth have you been doing, girl ?

MADGE. Ursula wasn't able to come to-day, you know. I've had to do everything myself.

CRAY. Well, and if you have, for once in a way, there's not so much work to do in this little house. An able-bodied girl like you ought to be able to manage it easily enough.

MADGE. Oh, I *can*, father. Ursula *had* to stop at home ; her mother's ill. I'm not complaining.

CRAY. But I am. I wouldn't mind if you didn't make Ursula's absence the excuse for all your sins of omission. I think it's mean of you to try and throw the blame of everything upon poor Ursula.

(MADGE *does not answer. She stands waiting.*)

What are you waiting there for ? Why don't you get your work done ? You're late enough in all conscience.

MADGE. I thought you wanted to speak to me.

CRAY (*looking at her keenly*). Your irony is perilously like impertinence sometimes, my dear.

MADGE. I . . . I . . . (*She stops, seeing it is useless to excuse herself, and slowly goes to the door. At the door.*) Shall I leave the door open ?

CRAY. Why ?

MADGE. Then I can hear when you call.

CRAY. Then I can catch my death of cold, you mean.

(MADGE *goes out and closes the door.*)

(CRAY lights his pipe at the fire with a spill, and then settles down to read. After a moment he looks at his watch, and ejaculates 'By Jove!' He gets up and goes to the door, opens it and calls out.)

Madge! Madge! Where are my boots?

MADGE (*in the distance*). All right, father.

(CRAY returns to his chair, and MADGE hurries in with a pair of boots.)

Going round to the club, father?

CRAY. Yes. (*Taking up the boots and looking at them.*) This pair won't do. I want my thick ones.

MADGE. But it's quite dry, father, and the club's only just round the corner.

CRAY. If you don't want the trouble of fetching the other pair, I'll go myself.

MADGE. All right, father.

(*She takes the boots out, and quickly hurries in with another pair. CRAY sits waiting meanwhile, the picture of a martyr.*)

These are the ones you want, aren't they?

(*For reply, he lifts up his foot. MADGE takes off his slipper and puts the boot on, afterwards doing the same for the other foot. CRAY continues reading the paper, and there is silence for the most part whilst this is going on, but occasionally CRAY mutters these ejaculations.*)

CRAY. Easy, now, easy. That's my bad foot. . . .

Mind you leave those slippers by the hearth where I can find them when I come in. . . . That lace isn't properly fastened, is it? . . . There's not

much polish on these boots. What do you clean them with ?

MADGE. Nugget.

CRAY. What they want is elbow-grease.

MADGE (*cheerfully*). They're not very bright, are they ?

CRAY. Did you clean them yourself ?

MADGE. No ; Ursula did them.

CRAY. That 's right. Blame Ursula.

(MADGE *does not reply*. CRAY *rises and goes to the door*. MADGE *hurries out first and brings his hat, coat and muffler, with which she invests him in the doorway*.)

Chilly for the time of the year. Fires in June.  
Confound the weather.

MADGE (*buttoning him up*). There now. Mind you put the muffler on when you come out of the hot room.

CRAY (*more graciously*). Thank you, my child.

MADGE. When will you be back ?

CRAY. I don't know. If I play bridge, I daresay I shall be late.

MADGE. Shall I wait up for you ?

CRAY. No ; you don't need to wait up to-night. You won't be going out again, so I'll lock the front door after me and take the key.

MADGE. Wouldn't it be nice to have a latch-key put on the front door ?

CRAY. A latch-key ?

MADGE. Those Yale locks are so convenient.

CRAY. Now why do you want a latch-key ?

MADGE. It would be so much less trouble for you than carrying that great front-door key about with you.



CRAY. And for you when you go out shopping.

MADGE. Well, it would be handy for me too.

CRAY. Yes; I thought you weren't thinking about me entirely.

MADGE. Oh, father . . .

CRAY (*sticking his hat jauntily on the side of his head*).

No, my dear; I'll put up with the front-door key a little longer.

(*He goes out, and she follows him to the front door, which is heard to close.*)

(MADGE returns, and takes off her apron and straightens her hair before the mantel-glass. She tidies up CRAY'S table, puts his slippers by the hearth, and gets out some mending from a drawer, with which she sits down near the fire. Suddenly there is a low tapping at the window. Startled, she looks up. The tapping is repeated.)

MADGE. Who's there?

(*Again the tapping. MADGE goes to the window, draws aside the curtain, and throws open the window. The head and shoulders of TOM PROBYN, a nice-looking, manly young fellow of twenty-five, with curly hair, are seen above the low sill, in the light from the room.*)

TOM! You?

TOM. Why not?

MADGE. But how *could* you? Suppose father had been in the room?

TOM. I knew he wasn't. I've just dogged his footsteps to the club.

MADGE. He may be back any time.

TOM. Not he. When he gets settled down there at a

bridge-table with a few old cronies and a glass of whisky and soda he won't stir until closing time.

MADGE. Father doesn't drink whisky and soda.

TOM. Doesn't he? I stood him a couple the night before last.

MADGE. Oh, why did you do that?

TOM. Because he was your father. You don't suppose I did it for his own sake, do you?

MADGE. But the doctor says whisky and soda is bad for his liver.

TOM. Shouldn't wonder. I thought something had disagreed with him.

MADGE. Promise me, Tom, that you'll never tempt him to drink whisky again.

TOM. Rather. You don't mind *me* drinking it, sometimes?

MADGE. Your liver is all right, is it?

TOM. I've nothing to complain of up to the present.

MADGE. Then it's all right, so long as you don't drink too much. But poor father's health is so bad.

TOM. What's the matter with him?

MADGE. He's really, really ill.

TOM. Yes; but what's his particular brand of disease?

MADGE. I don't know exactly. The doctor thinks it must be a sort of complication. Of course it's most unfortunate when they can't find out which organ is affected, because they don't know how to treat him properly. And worst of all, he doesn't get any sympathy from people.

TOM. I'm sure he gets plenty from you.

MADGE. Oh, well, he's a right to that, hasn't he?

And then I live with him every day, and I know how ill he is. But old Mr. Abercrombie was in the other night, and he laughed at father, and said he was as sound as a bell, and hit him in the chest with his fist as he said it. He meant to be cheerful, of course, but oh! father did sound hollow when he hit him. And his lungs were bad for *days* afterwards.

TOM. I say! You must get rather bored with his complaints day after day.

MADGE. No; I'm used to looking after him. (*A pause.*) I sometimes wish I could get out a bit more, that's all.

TOM. Look here, come with me now, and we'll go to the Picture Palace for an hour. There's some ripping films this week.

MADGE. Me! Come with you! My dear Tom!

TOM. Why not? We'll be back long before your father comes in.

MADGE. I daren't leave the house.

TOM. It won't run away.

MADGE. Father is so *particular* about not having the house left alone.

TOM. What's he afraid of?

MADGE. Burglars.

TOM (*laughing*). Burglars? They don't patronise this sort of house. They want a place where there's plenty of silver plate.

MADGE (*simply*). Our best dessert spoons are solid silver, Tom, and we've a complete half-dozen of them.

TOM. Put them in your pocket.

MADGE. And there's the silver tray father got after

playing the organ for twelve years at St. Ethelbert's, Devonport.

TOM. We 'll bury it in the back garden.

MADGE. You mustn't joke about that tray, Tom. Father values it very highly.

TOM. But, my dear girl, what 's the good of your stopping at home to look after these heirlooms? If a burglar takes a fancy to your silver spoons, do you imagine that a girl like you is going to frighten him away?

MADGE. They don't frequent houses where there is some one in, Tom. It 's the houses that are locked up for an hour or so that get robbed. They wait on the other side of the road and watch for you to go out.

TOM. Do they? Now isn't that considerate of them? That 's so that they shan't alarm the ladies.

MADGE. Don't be silly.

*(She is sitting on the window-seat. She ruffles his hair with her hand. He seizes her hand and kisses it. She tries to draw it away, and he pulls her face down to him and kisses her lips.)*

*(Struggling to get away.)* Tom, Tom. Don't. They can see you from the road.

TOM *(looking round cautiously)*. They can't see us from the road. The wall 's over six feet high, to say nothing of the rhododendrons.

MADGE *(placidly)*. Oh, then it 's all right, if you 're quite sure.

TOM. I say, Madge. *Do* come out with me.

MADGE. Some one would be certain to see us in the

Picture Palace, and then father would get to know.

TOM. Then we won't go to the Picture Palace. We'll go for a walk.

MADGE. I can't, really.

TOM. Your father wouldn't have the ghost of an idea.

MADGE. It wouldn't be fair to him. He's gone out leaving me in charge, and he expects me to stay in. I *must*, really.

TOM. Very well, if you won't come out, let me come in.

MADGE. Would you like to ?

TOM. Rather.

MADGE. You might, only the front door is locked.

TOM. Unlock it.

MADGE. Father's taken the key.

TOM. Do you mean to say he's locked you in ?

MADGE. No, of course not. He knew I shouldn't be going out again to-night.

TOM. Well, that doesn't matter. Do you know what knights of old used to do when they came across the fairy princess locked up in the tower ?

MADGE (*alarmed*). Now, Tom, you're not going to force the door ?

TOM. They got in through the window. Like this. (*He lightly pulls himself up and climbs into the room.*)

MADGE. Tom, you are a naughty boy. You might have been killed.

(*He laughs.*)

And look at the mess your dirty feet have made on the cushions. (*She goes to the hearth for the shovel.*)

TOM (*forestalls her*). Here, let me.

MADGE. Thank you, Tom.

*(He brings the shovel to the window-seat, and flicks the dust from the cushion on to the shovel with his handkerchief. Then he throws the dust out of the window.)*

That's a good boy. Now you can sit down. Here. *(She points to her father's arm-chair.)*

TOM (*doing so*). Where will you sit? *(He flings the red cushion which is on the chair on to the window-seat.)*

MADGE. Here. *(She sinks to the floor at the front of his chair, and rests her head on his knee.)*

*(NOTE.—She is no longer the tame, meek, precise girl she was when alone with her father. Her eyes sparkle, she is brighter and gayer. Somehow she looks prettier when animated.)*

TOM (*seriously*). When shall we be married, Madge?

MADGE (*troubled*). I don't know.

TOM. But I want you to make up your mind.

MADGE. Aren't you very happy?

TOM. Very; but I think we might be happier.

*(MADGE does not answer.)*

Don't you?

MADGE. Yes.

TOM. Look here, Madge, I wish you'd let me speak to your father about it.

MADGE. No, Tom, you mustn't do that.

TOM. But why not?

MADGE. I'd rather do that myself.

TOM. Yes; but you don't do it. You've said that a long time, now.

MADGE. It's a little difficult, you know, Tom.

TOM. I know. That's why I want you to let me do it for you.

MADGE. Isn't it rather too soon, at present ?

TOM. Good Lord, Madge! Do you know, it's nearly eighteen months since that day I took you to Hampton Court. It was a year last August Bank Holiday.

MADGE. So it was. Father had gone away for the week-end.

TOM. How much longer are you going to make me wait ?

MADGE. I know it's hard on you, Tom . . .

TOM. And what about you ? Isn't it hard on you too ?

MADGE. Yes.

TOM. I want to get you away from here. I don't think a girl ought to give up all her life to looking after her father. And it's not as if he treated you very well, either.

MADGE (*earnestly*). Oh, Tom, I've never complained about the way he's treated me. He treats me very kindly, on the whole, though I sometimes think he's a little thoughtless. But after all he's my father, and he's not got another near relation in the world, and he's a right to expect me to take care of him as well as I'm able. He's getting an old man now.

TOM. Ho-ho! Don't let him hear you say that, my dear.

MADGE. I suppose, Tom dear, that if we were married you wouldn't like to have father living with us ?

TOM (*looking blank*). Er—well, it's not usual, is it ?

MADGE. He would help us with the household expenses.

TOM. We can manage on two-fifty a year, I should say, without being helped by anybody.

MADGE. Or we might even live with him here. This house is quite big enough.

TOM. I'd set my heart on a nice little house of our own—in fact, I know where it is at this minute; and best of all, it's empty, and I can get it tomorrow if I want.

MADGE. Where is it?

TOM. Acacia Road. The last on the left-hand side. And I've all mother's furniture and belongings that I stored when she died, so that we could set up house in a week if necessary, with everything complete.

MADGE (*thoughtfully*). I daresay, after all, that even if we proposed it, father wouldn't agree to live with us.

TOM. No; I don't think we need to be afraid of that.

MADGE. I think he'd want to be master in his own house.

TOM. I can tell you one thing, he wouldn't be master in mine.

MADGE. No; it wouldn't do.

TOM. Now, look here, Madge, you'll have to leave your father to take care of himself.

MADGE (*shaking her head*). I can never do that.

TOM. When you're my wife you'll have to. I'm not going to have Mrs. Tom Probyn spending her days attending to an infirm old gentleman, just because he happens to be her father.



MADGE. But *some one* will have to look after him.

TOM. Let him get a nurse. He can afford it.

MADGE. A stranger. That wouldn't be nice, would it ?

TOM. He 'd soon get used to her. I was a stranger to you once, but we 've managed to get over that.

MADGE. Don't you think you 're just a little selfish, Tom ?

TOM. I shouldn't wonder. Everybody has to be just a little selfish, or else he gets taken advantage of, horribly.

(MADGE, *without replying, gets up and takes the mending which she had begun before TOM entered ; sits down again in a chair and begins darning.*)

TOM. What 's that you 're doing ?

MADGE. Mending father's socks.

TOM. Father's socks again !

MADGE. Well, if we were married, it would be *your* socks. I wish father would get some new ones. These take such a *lot* of darning.

TOM. Your father hasn't the least idea that I ever see you now, has he ?

MADGE. I 'm sure he hasn't. I should have heard about it soon enough if he had.

TOM. He 's always been quite polite to me at the club and everywhere since that night we had the row.

MADGE. Of course. Why shouldn't he be ? Father 's a gentleman.

TOM. I hope he 'll behave like a gentleman when you tell him.

MADGE. He 'll be very angry.

TOM. You 're really afraid of telling him, aren 't you?

MADGE. He 'll take it very badly at first. I hope he 'll soon get over it.

TOM. But I don't like to think that it 's you who 'll have to go through it. Why won't you let me call and see him and have it out with him properly? I don't mind if he does get in a rage. I 'm big enough. He can try and punch my head off if he chooses. And then when he 's tired of cursing me he 'll begin to see that he can't help it, and that it 's just got to be.

MADGE. That would be awful. That 's just why I want to tell him myself. He must be prevented from getting excited, at all costs.

TOM. Oh, hang it all! Do you wrap him up in cotton wool when there 's a frost?

MADGE. Don't you see, he mustn't get excited because of his heart.

TOM. What 's wrong with his heart?

MADGE. It 's got a murmur, or something like that.

TOM. I thought you said that the doctors couldn't find out what particular part of his inside was affected?

MADGE. I meant in connection with this new illness. His heart has always been weak, ever since I can remember.

TOM. Good Lord, what a wreck he must be! And he looks healthy enough.

MADGE. That 's what everybody tells him, and it makes him so angry.

TOM. But if it makes him angry, that must be bad for his heart.

MADGE (*sadly*). You make fun of him too. Nobody is sorry for him except me.

TOM. I'm very sorry for him, of course, but I'm sorry for you and for myself as well; and I imagine that we've just as much right to be considered as he has. Now look here, I'm going to put an end to all this. I shall call here tomorrow and tell him everything. All right. I'll do it as gently as possible.

MADGE. Please don't, Tom.

TOM. You've got to be saved from yourself.

MADGE. What are you going to tell him, Tom?

TOM. I'm going to tell him that you and I are engaged, and have been engaged for the last year, in spite of his forbidding us to see each other. I'm going to tell him that the time has come for us to get married, and that we propose to have the wedding as soon as the arrangements can be made. And I'm going to tell him that if he doesn't like it he can lump it. How long will it take you to get some clothes?

MADGE (*gravely*). Tom, I can't get married without father's consent.

TOM. Good gracious! You're twenty-three; nearly twenty-four.

MADGE. It doesn't make any difference.

TOM. Madge! Oh, put down that damned knitting. (*He takes the sock from her and flings it on the table.*) Listen to me. (*Flings himself on the floor by her chair and looks up into her face.*) Madge, Madge, Madge. You're too much like a saint for this world. That's why I liked you first. Your quiet little grave ways, and the sweetness

that made you always think the best of everybody else. If it was your pretty face that attracted me, it was your own self that made me fall in love with you. There are plenty of pretty faces, but there 's only one you. And yet I want you to do something that 's really clean against your nature. I want you to be a wee bit less considerate of other people, just for once.

MADGE (*stroking his hair*). Tom, you 're tempting me. It 's wrong to tempt me.

TOM (*eagerly*). It isn't. It 's right. I mean it 's wrong really, but this once it 's right.

MADGE. Don't, Tom.

TOM. It 's a sin to go on living as you are doing. After all, human nature has some claim on you.

MADGE. And is there no higher claim than that ?

(TOM *does not answer. He silently and softly covers her hands with little kisses. She sits motionless. There is a pause. VINCENT CRAY appears at the open window and stares at them for some moments, his eyes bulging with horror.*)

CRAY. Devil take it ! What 's the meaning of this ?

TOM and } (together). {Hallo !  
MADGE } {Father !

CRAY. What in the name of all the furies is the meaning of this outrageous scene ! (*Recognising TOM.*)  
Thomas Probyn ! You scoundrel ! You—you—  
Don Juan !

TOM. Excuse me, sir . . .

CRAY. I'll not excuse you, sir. I'll pursue you with the utmost rigour of the law. I'll sue you

for damages ; and if I can't do that, I'll prosecute you for abduction.

MADGE. Father ! Please don't get excited.

CRAY. Damn it all ! Not get excited upon an occasion like this ! (*To TOM*). Will you wait there until I come in, or must I summon the police at once ?

TOM. I'll wait here with pleasure. Indeed, I want to speak to you, so it isn't at all likely that I should try to escape. But in any case I don't see what the police have got to do with it.

CRAY. You don't, don't you ?

TOM. I suppose Madge can invite a friend into the house without the permission of the police.

CRAY. She can't without my permission. Besides, how did you get in ? The door 's locked.

TOM. Through the window.

CRAY. Then that 's breaking into the house. It 's burglary ! At least it is technically. I'll show you, sir.

(*CRAY disappears from the window.*)

MADGE. Oh, *what* are we to do ?

TOM. All right. This is a good opportunity to tell him. Leave it to me.

MADGE. Promise me you won't lose your temper.

TOM. Righto !

(*VINCENT CRAY stamps in. He has had one or two whiskies at the club, and is consequently more flamboyant than before. He is, however, not at all drunk.*)

CRAY (*to MADGE*). Close that window ! At once !

(*TOM waves MADGE aside, and closes the window and draws the curtain.*)

You may choose to enact your passages of shameful dalliance in the view of the whole neighbourhood ; but I prefer that no scene in which I take part shall be in the nature of a public ceremony.

TOM. Look here, sir . . .

CRAY (*not heeding him*). And *this* is my daughter ! My daughter, for whose maidenly purity I would have vouched at the stake, if necessary. Down on your knees, child, and pray that your sainted mother is not looking down upon you at this moment.

MADGE. But, father . . .

CRAY. Your sainted mother ! (*In full cry.*) For the first time since her death, I thank God that she is sleeping in the little cemetery of St. Ethelbert's where I laid her to rest seven years ago. She, at least, is spared the ignominy of this sight.

MADGE. Father, there is no need to make such a fuss.

CRAY. Ye gods and little fishes ! No need to make a fuss, she says. Hear her ! No need to make a fuss ! You 're not ashamed of yourself, I suppose ?

MADGE. No.

CRAY. Of course not. Why, she 's *brazen* ! The girl 's *brazen* ! She 's not ashamed to be alone all night with a man in the house.

MADGE. Father, Tom isn't a man. He's an old friend.

CRAY. All the worse. A viper. Viper. Viper in the grass.

TOM (*coolly*). Don't you think you're getting a little theatrical, sir ?

CRAY (*staggered*). Theatrical ? Eh ? And why not ? Can you answer me that ?

TOM. What we need now is a bit of common sense.

CRAY. Thank you. Thank you. Much obliged to you. You don't consider me capable of it, sir. Eh ?

TOM. What you are saying doesn't seem to ring true, somehow.

CRAY. Would you like me to kick you out of the house ? Would you understand that any better ?

TOM. I should say you've enough common sense not to try that.

CRAY. You won't go ? You defy me ? You take advantage of your youth and strength and my failing powers. Very well ; I summon the police !

TOM. Don't talk rubbish.

CRAY. You impudent young cub. (*Shaking his stick in TOM's face.*) You come here to seduce my daughter and insult me, and you actually decline to leave my house when I order you to do so !

TOM (*seizing the stick gently but firmly, and twisting it out of CRAY's hand*). Excuse me. You might hurt somebody with that stick.

CRAY. Do you know that's a common assault ? You've assaulted me, on my own premises. I'll make you pay for it.

TOM. I'm not going just yet because I want to speak to you. It's no good your blustering like this. If you wish to bring this painful scene to an end, you had better listen to what I've got to say.

CRAY (*more soberly*). You dictate terms to me ?

TOM. Certainly.

CRAY. By what right do you do this ?

TOM. I'm top dog, do you see ?

CRAY. I doubt it.

TOM. Will you sit down and listen to me quietly ?

CRAY. I'll listen to you, but I won't sit down.

And I won't ask you to sit down, either. What do you want ?

TOM. I want to marry Madge.

CRAY. We had this out a year ago. You wrote and asked me for my daughter. I refused.

You came and saw me, and asked my reasons for refusing. I told you that you were not earning enough money to keep her.

TOM. I'm earning quite enough now.

CRAY. So your prospects have improved ? There was room for them to do so.

TOM. You said at the time that you had no personal objection to me.

CRAY. I hadn't then. I thought you were a gentleman. Now I find you have been behaving like a cad.

TOM. A cad ?

CRAY. You have been sneaking here behind my back, during the past year.

TOM. That's your fault, not mine. You don't suppose that I was going to give up seeing Madge because you objected, do you ? And if you wouldn't let me come openly, there was nothing for it but meeting her secretly.

CRAY. I don't wonder at any meanness you may have committed, sir. I do not expect anything but a grunt from a pig. What horrifies me is to find that my girl has been your partner in



this deception—my own girl, whom I would have trusted with my life.

TOM. Take care, sir. You're getting theatrical again.

MADGE. Father dear, I didn't want to disobey your wishes, but I felt that you couldn't understand that I simply *had* to see Tom sometimes, and it wasn't any use trying to make you understand.

CRAY. That's right. That's right. I've no proper feeling. I'm devoid of the instincts of a father. I'm a monster. I know. I know.

MADGE. I don't mean that.

CRAY. Oh yes, you do! Oh yes, you do! Don't tell me. If you don't, what *do* you mean?

MADGE. That you never thought of me as . . . It never occurred to you that . . . I was . . .

TOM. A human being.

MADGE. That I might hope to do something besides keep house for you all my life.

CRAY (*dramatically, to the world at large*). How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is to have a thankless child.

MADGE. Father!

CRAY. Shakespeare. What a psychologist that man was.

MADGE. I'm not ungrateful.

CRAY. She's not ungrateful! I gave her birth! I fed her, clothed her, brought her up and educated her, and surrounded her with an infinity of loving kindness, and this is how she rewards me. She wants to go away with a comparative stranger.

TOM. Curiously enough, sir, it is what happens in

most households. If it didn't, where should we be ?

CRAY. I'll hear no more. I'm upset. Grieved. Shocked. (*To TOM.*) Go away and don't let me ever hear of you again. I forgive you.

TOM. But, excuse me, I want an answer.

CRAY. I've given it.

TOM. You won't consent ?

CRAY. Certainly not. Shouldn't think of it. Not on any account.

TOM. Very well. We shall have to do without your consent.

CRAY (*as if having heard wrongly*). Do without my consent ?

TOM. It isn't at all necessary, you know.

CRAY. God bless my soul.

TOM. Madge is over twenty-one.

CRAY. You infernal scoundrel ! You would try and persuade Madge to defy me. You would break for ever the peace and sanctity of a happy English home ? I don't believe it is possible. She won't listen to you.

TOM. Won't she ? Ask her.

CRAY. Madge ?

MADGE. I want to marry Tom.

CRAY. You recognise my authority as a father, although you are of age ?

MADGE. Yes.

CRAY. And you still wish to throw me over for him ?

MADGE (*weeping*). Oh, please don't put it that way. It sounds so cruel.

(CRAY *for the first time is alarmed. He sees*

*that the case is more serious than he had imagined. He must change his tactics. He paces up and down once or twice, reflecting.)*

CRAY (*to TOM*). I perceive that your influence over my daughter is very considerable.

TOM (*a little too confidently*). I hoped you 'd find that out, sooner or later.

CRAY (*with a keen look*). Yes? Better late than never.

TOM. Well?

CRAY. You must leave us now. I have spoken violently, no doubt, and I ask you to forgive me. I am very much shaken. I want to recover my composure.

TOM. Certainly. I'll go at once, if you'll just tell me it's all right.

CRAY. We will write to you as soon as possible.

TOM. But why? Let us settle it here, now.

CRAY. I should like to talk it over with my daughter, first.

TOM. What is there to talk over?

CRAY (*craftily*). You said you were going to dictate terms to me. You are making them very hard for me.

*(A pause. TOM bows his head.)*

TOM. All right. I'll expect a letter to-morrow, or I'll come and see you if you prefer. (*He is going to the door.*) I say, you're not going to try and bully her into refusing me, are you?

CRAY (*wincing*). Does a gentleman harbour such a suspicion?

TOM. I daresay not, but I'm taking no chances.

CRAY. You have my word that I shall not attempt to 'bully' her.

MADGE. Please! Tom, that's all right.

TOM (*nodding*). Righto! See you to-morrow.

(CRAY sees him out, and fastens the front door after him. He does not come back at once.)

(MADGE listens, and at last goes to the door and calls.)

MADGE (*slightly alarmed tone*). Father!

(CRAY comes to the door silently, and stands leaning against the door-post.)

Are you all right, father?

CRAY. All right, my dear.

(She watches him as he slowly walks across to his chair and sits in it silently. A pause.)

(Suddenly, in a queer thin voice.) Do you mind getting me a little brandy, my dear?

MADGE. Are you ill, father?

CRAY. No, no . . . only . . . (*he puts his hand on his heart and breathes heavily*) . . . my heart . . .

MADGE. It's bad again? (*She gets a bottle of brandy and a tumbler out of the cupboard.*)

CRAY. Ah! (*He gives a sharp cry, and sinks back in the chair.*)

MADGE (*frightened*). Oh, father, what is it?

(*He does not answer. His eyes remain closed.*)

Hadn't I better go and fetch Dr. Jackson?

CRAY (*opening his eyes sharply, and speaking much more vigorously*). No, certainly not.

MADGE. You're feeling better?

CRAY (*more faintly*). A little. (*Motioning with his hand.*) Brandy.

MADGE. Here it is. (*She tenderly helps him to sip the brandy.*)

CRAY. Thank you, my dear.

MADGE. That 's better.

CRAY (*shivering*). I think so. (*He shivers again, very violently.*)

MADGE. What is it ?

CRAY. My feet are so cold.

MADGE. Will you have them in mustard and hot water ? Perhaps you got a chill when you went out.

CRAY. I think it 's the circulation.

MADGE. I 'll see if the water 's hot.

(*She whips up her apron and goes out tying it on.*)

(*As soon as she has gone out CRAY looks round smartly, quite a different man. His glance travels round the room until it lights upon the red cushion that TOM had removed from the chair. Listening intently, he gets up very briskly and runs across, fetches the cushion and tucks it into the back of the chair, and settles down again comfortably.*

*MADGE comes in.*)

The water 's boiling. I 've left the bath to fill.

(*CRAY holds out his foot as usual. She begins to take off his boots.*)

Don't you think you 'd be more comfortable if you went straight to bed afterwards ?

CRAY. Not just yet. I 'm afraid to lie down whilst my heart 's like this.

MADGE. Just as you like, dear. Are you sure you wouldn't like Dr. Jackson, after all ?

CRAY. You 're better than any doctor, my girl.

MADGE (*smiling*). That 's right, father.

CRAY. I don't know what will happen to me when you 're gone.

(MADGE *doesn't* reply. *Having taken off the boots, she hurries out again. This time, CRAY gets up and hastily pours out some more brandy, which he drinks off at once. Soon MADGE comes in. She has pinned up her skirt underneath her apron, and carries a foot-bath with handles, full of steaming mustard and water.*)

MADGE (*setting it down in front of CRAY*). There you are. Now your socks. (*She takes off his socks and rolls up the ends of his trousers.*)

CRAY. It 's not too hot, is it ?

MADGE. I put some cold in.

(CRAY *gingerly dips his toe in and draws it out quickly. The business is repeated once or twice until he finally gets both feet in. Then MADGE takes a little flannel blanket which she brought in over her arm and wraps it round the whole affair, to keep the steam in. CRAY sits solemnly in his chair, thus enveloped.*)

CRAY (*mildly*). I 'm afraid I spoke rather harshly to you just now.

MADGE. It must have been a shock to come in and find Tom here. We were very wrong to go on seeing each other and never telling you.

CRAY. It wasn't treating me quite fairly. And so you 've been seeing each other all the last year ?

MADGE. Not very often. He 's only been up to the

house a few times. We used to meet when I was out shopping, and he wrote very often.

CRAY (*suspiciously*). Wrote? I've never noticed any letters in his handwriting.

MADGE. He didn't send them by the post. He used to come in the garden at night and push them under the thatch of the old summer-house, and I used to leave mine there for him.

CRAY (*acidly*). Oh, you did, did you? (*Remembering himself.*) Ah, my dear, what a web of deception have you been spinning all these months.

MADGE. What else could I do?

CRAY. I'm sorry. Sorry you should have been driven to such a course. You blame me for it all, don't you?

MADGE. Oh no, father. You didn't understand, that is all.

CRAY. So you're going to leave me, Madge?

MADGE. Don't put it that way, father. I shan't be far away.

CRAY. You may live near me, you may even live in the same house, but when you are married there will be a gulf between us that never can be bridged.

MADGE. No, father.

CRAY. Yes, Madge. I know. This is the end of our happy secluded life together. Since your dear mother's death you have looked after me with the care and thoughtfulness of a wife and a daughter too; now I shall pass into the hands of strangers. Alas! It was inevitable, had I but realised it. This is one of the sorrows that flesh is heir to.

MADGE. I hate to think of you living here with only a servant or a housekeeper.

CRAY. I must resign myself to it.

MADGE. Is there nobody else we could find ?

CRAY. My dear, you know that you and my cousins Martha and Bob are the only relatives I have in the wide, wide world.

MADGE. Cousin Martha ? Miss Scandrett ? I wonder . . .

CRAY. Yes, Madge ?

MADGE. Would it be possible to get her to come and live with you for a while ?

CRAY. Live here ? Why, we've never met for years.

MADGE. You were great friends at one time, weren't you ?

CRAY. Who told you that ?

MADGE. I think mother once said so.

CRAY. Your mother. (*He reflects.*) Yes ; it would be your mother. Perhaps the fact that we were great friends once upon a time would make it difficult for us to renew the intimacy.

MADGE. I see.

CRAY. And then your Cousin Martha is not an impoverished old maid who would be glad of a home. She is quite well off. Her father left her a lot of railway shares. Besides, even if she *were* willing, it is exceedingly improbable that the arrangement would prove successful. She doesn't know my ways.

MADGE. That would apply to any one we got, wouldn't it ?

CRAY. True. True. But I daresay that Martha has



ways of her own now ; and she might expect other people to fall in with *her* ideas, instead of adapting herself to theirs. . . . No, no, my dear, that's impossible. (*He thinks.*) Let me see, who was that woman old Mr. Stevens had as housekeeper ?

MADGE. Mrs. Bingham ?

CRAY. That was it. Mrs. Bingham. Do you think she 'd do ?

MADGE. Why, father, she used to drink. Don't you remember she nearly set the house on fire one night ? They found her in bed with a bottle of whisky.

CRAY. Yes. Ah, well, I shall have to put up with some disadvantages now. Perhaps after all it would be better if I got a capable maid, and tried to attend to the housekeeping myself.

MADGE. You wouldn't care for that, I'm afraid.

CRAY. Needs must when the devil drives. No offence to you or Tom, my dear. I doubt whether I can afford to pay a housekeeper. It cost me such a lot to have the house painted outside this spring ; and what with this Government, and everything going up in price, I'm often pressed for ready money. I may find it better to live alone, and have Ursula in during the day to clean up.

MADGE (*alarmed*). You can't do that, father.

CRAY. Oh, I should get along very well. I can buy in for myself. That part of the business would be all right. What worries me is sleeping in the house alone.

MADGE. But suppose you were taken ill !

CRAY. If I had one of my attacks during the night !  
(*He smiles sadly.*) Ah, well. We mustn't think of that. We must hope for the best. We must look on the bright side of things. Perhaps I shall only have the attacks during the day.

MADGE. Oh dear !

CRAY. I may as well tell you, Madge, whilst I remember. If ever I'm found—that is, if anything happens to me some night suddenly, and I have no time to bid you farewell, my will is in the left-hand bottom drawer of the writing-desk in the dining-room. It's nearly all yours, my girl, but there are one or two little bequests to old friends that I shouldn't like overlooked.

MADGE. Father ! Don't talk like this.

CRAY. We may as well be prepared for the worst. It's got to come sooner or later. . . . (*A pause.*)

MADGE. Father, you are upsetting me terribly. It seems so cruel and hard-hearted to talk of leaving you whilst you are in this state.

CRAY. Nonsense. I'm all right. Strong as a horse.  
(*He stands up in the bath and smites himself on the chest. Then suddenly he sinks down into the chair as if overcome.*)

MADGE. There ! Oh, why did you do that ?

(*CRAY does not speak, but waggles his head about slightly.*)

I must fetch Dr. Jackson.

CRAY (*with rather too great force*). I will not have Dr. Jackson.

MADGE. But you're very ill indeed.

CRAY. There is nothing whatever the matter with me.

(MADGE feels his pulse. She pours out a little more brandy, and offers it to him. He waves it away. She watches him.)

MADGE. You 'd better have it.

(CRAY nods. She gives him the brandy.)

CRAY (*feebly*). I had always hoped you would have been near to close my eyes at the last . . .

MADGE (*weeping*). Father . . . (*She sits in the chair by the table.*)

CRAY. It won't be very long now. My days are numbered . . .

MADGE. Oh! I can't leave you. I must stop with you for a while. I'll write to Tom and tell him we shall have to wait.

CRAY (*very feebly*). No, no.

(*A pause. MADGE wipes her eyes.*)

I can't have it. . . . I won't agree to such a sacrifice. . . . You're not to write to-night.

MADGE. Yes, I will. To-night.

(*A pause. She sits still by the table.*)

CRAY (*at length*). Did you say you were going to write to-night?

MADGE. Yes.

(*A pause. She sits thinking. CRAY looks at the clock.*)

CRAY. Of course, if you *insist* on writing to-night . . .

MADGE. I do. (*She gets up quickly and takes pen, ink and paper from the cupboard. She sits at the table and writes hurriedly.*)

CRAY (*whilst she is writing*). What are you doing, my dear? . . . I won't have it. . . . I forbid you. (*More pathetically.*) Don't worry about me. . . . You must leave me to my fate. . . . Leave me to die alone. . . .

Youth must be served. . . . We old ones must make way for the young ones. I shan't be here to trouble you for long. Tell him that, my dear; tell him I shan't keep him waiting long.

*(She blots the paper and addresses the envelope.)*

What have you said to him, my dear?

MADGE *(sealing the letter)*. I've told him that he'll have to wait at least a year.

CRAY. Ho! *A year!* Is that what you give me? I shan't . . .

MADGE. I hope you'll be completely better in a year.

CRAY. No doubt. One way or the other. One way or the other. I shall be at peace, whichever it is.

*(MADGE looks in a vase on the mantelpiece for something. She cannot find it, and goes to the cupboard to look. CRAY follows her with his eyes.)*

Whatever are you looking for? A stamp?

MADGE. Yes.

CRAY. Here. *(He feebly taps his waistcoat pocket.)*  
In my pocket-book.

*(MADGE takes a little book from the pocket and gets a stamp. She replaces the book, stamps the letter and goes to the door.)*

MADGE. Shall you be all right for a few minutes while I run to the pillar-box?

CRAY *(with vigour)*. Certainly, my dear.

*(Just as she is about to leave the room there is a loud ring at the front door. They both look surprised.)*

MADGE. Some one at the door, at this time!

*(She is going when he calls her back.)*

CRAY. Madge! Don't open the door. Look through the letter-box first.

MADGE. Why?

CRAY. Do you think it's young Probyn? I don't feel equal to seeing him again to-night.

MADGE. I'm sure it's not.

(MADGE goes out and returns quickly.)

I've looked. It's a woman.

CRAY. A woman! (*Irritably.*) Well, well, why don't you open the door?

(MADGE goes out.)

(*The front door is opened. Voices are heard. Somebody comes into the hall. MADGE enters the room quickly and closes the door behind her.*)

MADGE (*in a loud whisper*). It's Cousin Martha Scandrett.

CRAY (*amazed*). Eh? Martha Scandrett! What in the name of all that's holy . . .

MADGE. Shall I ask her in here?

CRAY (*gathering together his blanket*). Wait a moment . . .

MADGE (*wrapping the blanket round his feet*). It's all right. I told her you weren't very well.

CRAY. You shouldn't have done that.

MADGE (*opens the door and calls*). Will you come in now, Miss Scandrett.

(*Enter MARTHA SCANDRETT, a plump, brawny, jolly, honest lady of middle age. She brings with her a breath of fresh air. She is the opposite of a humbug and is sometimes painfully frank. She is richly and strikingly dressed, and the effect of her bonny face and slight Lancashire accent is charming.*)

MARTHA (*hands akimbo, surveying CRAY*). Well, I never did! So this is how I find you, Cousin Vincent.

CRAY (*standing up in the bath*). How do you do, Martha. I must apologise . . .

MARTHA (*forcing him to sit down again*). Nay, nay. Sit you down. I'm sorry to hear you're ill.

CRAY. Nothing to speak of. A slight chill, that's all.

MARTHA. Oh, that's nothing.

CRAY. It's worse than appears.

MARTHA. My goodness, the room's hot enough, in all conscience.

MADGE. It's the steam from the bath. (*To CRAY*.) Father, what do you think Cousin Martha's come for?

MARTHA. I've come begging a bed, Vincent. I've got all my luggage outside on a cab. Can you put me up for a day or two?

MADGE. Of course we can.

CRAY. Delighted, Martha. It's a long time since you stopped with us.

MARTHA. Twenty years, I reckon.

CRAY. Madge, just help the cabby in with Cousin Martha's trunks.

MARTHA (*looking at him*). Nay, nay. She's only a slip of a girl. Where's the maid?

MADGE. We haven't got one just at present.

MARTHA (*to CRAY*). You've not got your boots on?

CRAY. No.

MARTHA. Then I'll help him myself.

(*She goes out smartly.*)

CRAY. Madge, is the towel there?

(*MADGE hands him a towel and he wipes his feet and slips on his socks and slippers.*)

Where will Cousin Martha sleep ?

MADGE. I'll put some sheets on the spare bed. The room's all ready.

CRAY. What brings her here like this at such a time ? Why didn't she let us know she was coming ? It might have been most inconvenient.

MADGE. She's come up to London on business, she says, and the hotel she generally stops at is full.

CRAY. Why didn't she try another ?

MADGE. She tried several, but they were all full. It's the Horse Show this week.

*(MARTHA appears at the door holding one end of a great trunk which is tied round with cord. A cabman is holding the other end, and carries also two or three small packages.)*

MARTHA. I'll leave this down here in the hall for to-night, I reckon. Just here, cabby.

*(They put the trunk down outside the door.*

*MARTHA pays the cabman.)*

*(Adding more money.)* And that's for yourself.

CABMAN. Thank ye, ma'am. Much obliged.

*(He touches his hat and goes.)*

CRAY *(to MADGE)*. Hadn't you better ask the cabman to post that letter ?

MADGE. Yes.

*(MADGE goes after him, to give him the letter and to close the door.)*

*(MARTHA comes into the room. CRAY has his slippers on by this time.)*

MARTHA. Well, I hope you're pleased to see me.

CRAY. Welcome to my house, Martha, for as long as you wish to stay.

MARTHA. You 've not forgotten how to make fine speeches, I see.

CRAY. I mean it.

MARTHA. I 'm sure you do. I 'm right glad that I thought of you. I got sick of going round in a taxi and finding everywhere full up, so at last I told the man to drive to Paddington, and found there was a train here at half-past nine. It was too late to wire you, so I risked it. All 's well that ends well.

(MADGE comes in.)

CRAY. Madge will get you some supper if you 'd like it.

MARTHA. No supper, thanks.

CRAY. Would you like to go up to your room? Madge, just carry your cousin's things upstairs.

MARTHA. Nay. Let them alone. We 're not going to bed yet. We 're going to talk things over a while. My word, but it 's close in here. Somebody ought to open the window. *(She does so.)*

CRAY. But I shall be in a draught! *(He points to his arm-chair, which is near the window.)*

MARTHA. Then you sit over there. *(She points to the smaller and much less comfortable chair on the other side of the hearth.)* You want some fresh air in this house.

*(She takes CRAY'S arm-chair herself and makes herself comfortable, putting her feet on the fender and tucking up her skirts out of the way. CRAY, with a grimace, sits in the other chair.)*

*The CURTAIN falls.*



## ACT II

*The scene is the same as in Act I. It is three days later. Again it is about half-past nine in the evening. There is no fire to-night ; the weather is warmer.*

VINCENT CRAY *is sitting in his arm-chair reading the paper.* MARTHA *comes in with some papers in her hand.*

CRAY. Sit here, Martha, won't you ? (*He jumps up gallantly and offers her his chair.*)

MARTHA. No thank you, Vincent. I prefer to be near the table.

*(She lays the papers on the table and takes a chair by it.)*

CRAY. Would you care to look at the *Evening Standard* ?

MARTHA. Is that the close of play ?

CRAY. The what ?

MARTHA. The cricket ?

CRAY. Oh yes ; the cricket scores are in this.

MARTHA. Let 's have a look. I always like to see how Lancashire 's done. I follow Lancashire, you know.

CRAY. Do you, really ?

MARTHA. Yes ; when I 'm at home I often go to Old Trafford for the day.

CRAY. I shouldn't have thought you 'd have been interested.

MARTHA. I'm interested in everything. It's the only way to keep young. How do *you* keep young?

CRAY. I don't know. (*He looks at himself in the mirror.*) Do I keep young?

MARTHA. It is your own fault if you don't. You're not a Methuselah. Why do you wear those whiskers?

CRAY (*feeling them*). I really couldn't say. They . . . er . . . just grew.

MARTHA. Like Topsy.

CRAY. Topsy who?

MARTHA. Did you never read *Uncle Tom's Cabin*?

CRAY. Of course. A long time ago.

MARTHA. I read it once a year.

CRAY. But, seriously, why shouldn't I wear whiskers? My father wore them.

MARTHA. That's a very good reason why *you* shouldn't.

CRAY. Don't you like them?

MARTHA. They put ten years on your age.

CRAY (*startled*). Do you really think so?

MARTHA. Well, just *look* at us. No one would think we're the same age.

CRAY. But we *are*, you know.

MARTHA. Who'd believe it?

CRAY (*not relishing the comparison*). Perhaps you're right. It must be the whiskers.

MARTHA (*looking at the paper*). Lancashire all out 147. Well, upon my soul! Isn't it an extraordinary thing? They always lose their nerve against Yorkshire. And they're a much finer team on paper.

CRAY. You follow the game very closely.

MARTHA. Certainly. It's a fine game. I love it.

Don't you remember how we used to play cricket in the orchard at home?

CRAY (*excited*). You used to bowl over-arm.

MARTHA. I'd play now if I could. (*Standing up and feeling her muscle, and slowly bringing her arm round like a bowler.*) I'm too stiff.

CRAY. You seem in pretty good condition.

MARTHA. I take plenty of exercise.

CRAY. Do you do any motoring?

MARTHA. I said exercise. I don't call motoring exercise. I ride a bicycle.

CRAY (*incredulously*). You?

MARTHA. The Cheshire roads are splendid for cycling.

I can do my forty or fifty miles a day.

CRAY. You astound me. I've never ridden a bicycle in my life.

MARTHA. Learn. It will do you no end of good.

CRAY (*scandalised*). Learn! Me? My dear Martha, I may not be very old, but I'm too old to go risking my neck by falling off a bicycle.

MARTHA. There's no need to fall off. I've never fallen off.

CRAY. But you took it up when you were a young woman.

MARTHA. I took it up when I was over forty.

CRAY. Did you, now? You're a wonderful woman,

Martha. Is there anything you can't do?

MARTHA. Yes.

CRAY. I should be glad to hear it.

MARTHA. I can't make out what's going on at Wilkes and Grignall's Brewery.

CRAY. Do you hold shares in it ?

MARTHA. I do. Worse luck.

CRAY. They didn't pay any dividend this year.

MARTHA. Not a darned halfpenny.

CRAY. Ahem. I trust that all your money isn't invested with them ?

MARTHA. No fear. I don't keep all my eggs in one basket. It doesn't make much difference to me whether they pay a dividend or not, but I don't like being done.

CRAY. Done !

MARTHA. I've been in communication with some of the other shareholders, and we've had a good firm of solicitors on the job, and we've got some particulars about the managing director. I should like to show them to you and ask your advice.

CRAY. With pleasure. At once, if you like.

MARTHA. No ; it's getting about your usual time for going round to the club.

CRAY. That doesn't matter. I can stop at home for once in a way.

MARTHA. No ; I won't have you miss your game of billiards. It's the only exercise you *do* get. But I'll tell you what you *can* do if you like. You can go with me to the adjourned general meeting next Thursday, and we'll put some questions to the managing director.

CRAY (*surprised*). Eh ? Where is the meeting held ?

MARTHA. Cannon Street Hotel.

CRAY. I never go into town now.

MARTHA. For once in a way.

CRAY. Oh, I *could*, of course. . . . But from what

you say, this meeting is likely to be disturbed.  
There might be a row.

MARTHA. Yes; I daresay there will be. That's why  
I'd like to have a man with me.

CRAY (*looking blank*). Hum. Yes; I see. I'm afraid  
I've forgotten most of my boxing.

MARTHA. Don't you come if you don't feel like it.

CRAY. And I've not been up to the mark lately.

MARTHA. I can go alone quite well.

CRAY. I'll think about it.

MARTHA. I shouldn't like you to run into any danger.

CRAY. No; I'll watch that.

(MARTHA *gets up and goes to the door.*)

Are you going upstairs?

MARTHA. I find I've forgotten my fountain pen.

CRAY. Do you mind asking Madge to come and put  
my boots on?

MARTHA (*amazed*). To do *what*?

CRAY (*placidly*). Put my boots on.

MARTHA. Whatever for?

CRAY. Because I'm going to the club.

MARTHA. Why don't you put on your boots your-  
self?

CRAY (*puzzled*). Eh? Why, Madge always does it.  
She likes to do these little offices for me.

MARTHA. Does she? Well, it's more than I'd do.

CRAY. I shouldn't expect it of you.

MARTHA. If I were your daughter, I mean. You  
wouldn't get a general servant to put your boots  
on.

CRAY. And can you see no difference between my  
daughter and a general servant?

MARTHA. I'm not sure whether you can, at any

rate. (*She goes into the hall, and calls.*) Madge!  
Come and get your father ready to go out ta-ta!

(*MARTHA disappears, snorting with indignation.*)

(*CRAY looks as if he would like to shout something after her, but thinks better of it.* MADGE comes in with the boots.)

CRAY (*pettishly*). Not those. I want my thin ones.

MADGE. These are your thin ones, father.

CRAY. Oh, are they? Why couldn't you say so at first?

(*He holds out his foot. She puts the boots on.*)

Your Cousin Martha is not a tactful woman.

MADGE. I thought you got on so well with her, father.

CRAY. I get on with her right enough. But she is hasty. She says things that she will be sorry for later on.

MADGE. Of course if you find that she inconveniences you, I shall have to speak to her. She probably does not allow for the state of your health.

CRAY. No, no. She's not harsh or unfeeling. It's largely her manner. These Northern people have a brusque way with them. I'm glad she's come, on the whole.

MADGE. I think she's splendid. She seems to have wakened us up, as it were. She enjoys life so thoroughly.

CRAY. Yes; she probably enjoys excellent digestion.

(*CRAY gets up, and MADGE offers him his coat and hat. He takes the hat.*)

I won't take the coat to-night, Madge.

MADGE. Will it be safe?

CRAY. I'll risk it. The weather's been so much warmer to-day.

(MARTHA enters with a fountain pen.)

MADGE. Do you think it's warm enough for father to go to the club without his overcoat?

MARTHA. Good Lord, yes. It's only just round the corner. You'll be sending him in a perambulator next.

(CRAY looks indignantly at MARTHA, who takes no notice. MADGE and CRAY go out.)

(MARTHA sits down to the table and prepares to write. MADGE looks in again.)

MADGE. I've just got to finish the pastry, Cousin Martha.

MARTHA. All right, my dear. Don't worry about me. I'm busy.

(MADGE goes out.)

(There is a pause. MARTHA writes. There is a tapping on the window, as in the First Act. MARTHA does not hear it at first. At length she seems to hear something and looks up. She cannot find out where the noise comes from and returns to her work. It is heard again. She gets up in a determined way and looks round and listens. Then she locates it at the window. She silently takes up the poker and goes to the window and listens. Then she cautiously puts her hand between the curtains and opens the window a little, keeping out of sight herself.)

TOM (outside). Darling!

(MARTHA straightens in astonishment.)

Darling!

(MARTHA cautiously tries to peep through the curtains.)

Is that you, darling ?

MARTHA (*in a big voice*). No ; it isn't.

(*She draws aside the curtains and throws open the window.*)

Who are you calling names ?

TOM (*staggered*). I beg your pardon.

MARTHA. I should think so.

TOM. I've made a mistake.

MARTHA. So it appears.

TOM. I must apologise for interrupting you. Please excuse me.

(*He is about to withdraw, when she seizes his coat-collar, flourishing the poker in the other hand.*)

MARTHA. Here. Not so fast. Let's hear what your business is before you go.

TOM. Do you mind not being quite so handy with the poker ? I know you don't want to hurt me, but accidents will happen.

MARTHA. What's your name ?

TOM. Tom Probyn. What's yours ?

MARTHA. What's that got to do with you ?

TOM (*nicely*). I've told you mine. You might tell me yours, and then we shall be properly introduced.

MARTHA. My name is Martha Scandrett.

TOM. Pleased to meet you.

MARTHA. Now then. What are you doing here ?

TOM (*pleasantly*). I might ask you what *you* are doing here, if I did not choose not to be rude.

MARTHA. There's a difference, young man. I don't know you. I've never seen you here before.



TOM. If it comes to that, I've never seen you here before.

MARTHA. That's true. I'm staying here. I'm a relation.

TOM. What! Madge's aunt?

MARTHA. No; I'm Madge's cousin.

TOM. Are you? I'm Madge's young man.

MARTHA. What! Madge's young man?

TOM. That's it.

MARTHA. Are you quite sure? Why, I never heard she'd got one!

TOM. She has; you bet.

MARTHA. Wait a minute. *(She goes to the door, opens it and listens. Then she closes it and returns to the window.)* You'd better come in.

TOM. Last time I came in I was ordered out.

MARTHA. By Mr. Cray?

TOM. Yes.

MARTHA. Oh-ho! Never mind. I want to have a look at you, and Mr. Cray's gone to the club.

TOM. I know. That's what I've been waiting for.

MARTHA. If I open the front door Madge'll hear me. Can you get through the window?

TOM. Look out.

*(TOM swings himself into the front room as he did before.)*

MARTHA. I wish I could do that.

*(TOM laughs.)*

Don't laugh. I could have done it once, and not so long ago, either.

*(She draws the curtain over the window. Then she stands in front of TOM and looks hard at him.)*

I like the look of you.

TOM (*rather confused*). Thanks very much.

MARTHA. Do you like the look of me ?

TOM (*looking at her eyes*). Yes.

MARTHA. *That's* all right. Now then, who are you ?

Your name 's Tom Probyn ?

TOM. Yes. I 'm assistant manager at Oddy's, whole-sale chemists and druggists in the City.

MARTHA. How much do you get ?

TOM. Two hundred and fifty a year.

MARTHA. Enough to be going on with. Any prospects ?

TOM. Sure. The old man 's not got any sons.

MARTHA. You look steady enough. Anything against you in that way ?

TOM. I smoke tobacco and drink beer.

MARTHA. Neither in excess, I hope ?

TOM. Not in my opinion.

MARTHA. In Mr. Cray's, perhaps ?

TOM. Lord, no ! He does much more than I do in that line, himself.

MARTHA. Does he ? You are not hinting that *he* oversteps the mark ?

TOM. Oh, not at all.

MARTHA. Well then, it appears that you are an entirely eligible young man. What is Mr. Cray's objection ?

TOM. I couldn't tell you.

MARTHA. Now, my lad, you don't expect me to swallow that ?

TOM. It 's a fact. Really. He 's never been able to give me a decent reason for his refusal. He seems to like me well enough when I meet him outside or at the club.

MARTHA (*shaking her head*). You 're not being quite open with me.

TOM. Look here. Which side are you on ?

MARTHA. I don't know the rights and wrongs of the case. But I tell you this. My heart 's always on the side of the young ones, no matter what my common sense may say.

TOM. Well then, I'll tell you what I really think. It may sound improbable, and you may call me a cad for thinking it, but in my opinion Mr. Cray doesn't want Madge to get married at all, because he wants her to stay at home and take care of him. Could you believe that of a father ?

MARTHA. Why, of course. And of a mother too. They all think like that more or less, especially when it 's a case of an only daughter. Only not so many of them show it.

TOM. Very well, that 's why Mr. Cray objects, as far as I can make out.

MARTHA. But even if Mr. Cray is so selfish, what on earth does it matter ? Fathers have got to put up with their little disappointments just the same as everybody else.

TOM. Not Mr. Cray. You don't understand. He 's a tough customer. I never saw such a man for getting his own way.

MARTHA. My dear boy, you talk as if we were living in the Middle Ages. Mr. Cray can't forbid Madge marrying whom she chooses. She 's over twenty-one ; you may take that from *me*, whatever she 's told you, and I reckon that *you* 're not a minor. Why don't you get married without his consent ?

TOM. I'd do that like a shot, but I can't get married without Madge's consent, you know.

MARTHA. And why won't *she* consent?

TOM. *He* won't let her.

MARTHA. Now, now! Don't try and make me believe a fairy tale like that.

TOM. All right. Just read this letter from her. I got it the day before yesterday, and I've been trying to have a word with her ever since; besides writing her three letters which she's never answered.

(TOM takes out a letter and gives it to MARTHA.)

MARTHA (reading). What's this? . . . 'My father's illness.' . . . 'Wait at least a year longer.' . . . 'Stay with him until he dies.' . . . Sentimental nonsense. *Is* he going to die? Eh?

TOM. Sooner or later, I suppose.

MARTHA. 'My father's illness.' What's his complaint?

TOM. Heaven knows!

MARTHA. I should be very much surprised if it does.

TOM. Don't you believe there's anything the matter with him?

MARTHA. Yes; I do. And I know what it is. (Flourishing the poker.) I'd like to take him in hand. I'd cure him soon enough.

TOM. How?

MARTHA. How? (Wagging the poker in front of his eyes.) With this.

(MADGE comes into the room, and seeing them, gives a cry of alarm.)

MADGE. Oh, Tom . . . Cousin Martha! What's the matter?

MARTHA. I've just been making friends with your young man, my dear.

MADGE. I'm glad it's no worse. Oh, Tom, why have you come?

MARTHA. Come! That's no welcome to give him.

MADGE. You don't understand, Cousin Martha.

MARTHA. Yes; I do. I've been having a chat with Tom. He's told me all about it.

MADGE. Has he told you that I asked him not to come and see me again for the present?

MARTHA. He's shown me your letter, and I beg leave to say that a more scandalous letter was never written to a lad by his young woman.

MADGE. You make it harder for me, Cousin Martha.

(MADGE *turns away*. MARTHA *softens*.)

MARTHA. There, there, my dear. I'm sorry if I spoke roughly; but I've a sharp tongue when I'm roused.

MADGE. I don't see what you've got to be roused about.

MARTHA. My dear, would *you* have been angry if you'd seen those parents in the Bible sacrificing their children to Moloch, or whatever his nasty name was, even if you hadn't happened to be related to them?

MADGE. You are all so cruel to poor father.

MARTHA. And what about Tom, eh? Is nobody cruel to him?

MADGE. Oughtn't a father to come first?

MARTHA. No. Certainly not.

MADGE. We were told to love, honour and obey our parents.

MARTHA. We were told to love, honour and obey our

husbands, those of us who were lucky enough to get hold of one. It's true that we don't always do it, especially as regards the two latter items. And it's true also that Tom's not your husband yet; but you *do* love him, anyhow?

MADGE. Tom knows that.

MARTHA. It's not fair to him to expect him to wait for ever.

MADGE. I don't expect him to wait for ever. Can't you wait for another year, Tom?

MARTHA. No, he can't, and it wouldn't be human nature if he could.

TOM. I wouldn't object to wait even a year, Madge, but you know what might happen at the end of that. Your father might be no better, and there would be another delay, perhaps. It might go on indefinitely. Why not face it now, once for all?

MADGE. Oh, don't. Don't press me like this, both of you. You make it so hard for me to do my duty.

MARTHA. Your duty, child! To whom do you imagine that you owe your duty?

MADGE. First of all to father.

MARTHA. No.

MADGE. To Tom, do you mean?

MARTHA. No; to yourself. It's your duty, and everybody's duty, to be free, first of all. Do you know what's the world's great tragedy? It's the tragedy of every nation and of every person that they grow old. Old age can't understand youth. It sees youth full of excitement and enthusiasm about things it can't appreciate,

and it thinks those things foolishnesses and stupidities and horrible mistakes. Sometimes they *are* foolishnesses and the rest of it, but that doesn't matter. Youth's got to go forward with them and find out what they are worth for itself. It has no right to take the opinion of old age on the point. For instance, Tom might be a young scoundrel, and your father might be very wise in trying to stop your marriage, but you'd be wrong to listen to him if you love Tom. All your instincts tell you to marry Tom, and you've got to trust them. They're a truer guide in the long run than the cut-and-dry wisdom of the older generation. There's a struggle between every generation. It's terrible and cruel; but it's bound to come. Every son who's worth his salt has a row some time or other with his father, and they're both the better for it. Every young partner in a firm finds sooner or later that he's got to overcome the pig-headed opposition of the old members of the firm. Every inventor, every statesman, every artist when he tries to strike out for himself finds all the time that he's baffled and fought tooth and nail by the forces that are interested in having things remain as they are. And this is where the tragedy comes in—and like most tragedies it's really very comie in a certain sense—those same eager young inventors and reformers and artists who fought so bravely for their new ideas become in time the older generation which grows up afterwards. And their opposition is all so useless. The younger genera-

tion is bound to win. That's how the world goes on.

(*A slight pause.*)

I seem to have been preaching you a sermon. You must forgive me, my dear. When I get properly going I find it hard to pull up.

MADGE. I know you mean to help me, and it's very good of you to take so much trouble. What is it you want me to do?

MARTHA (*to TOM*). What will satisfy you?

TOM. I want you to tell your father that you are going to marry me as soon as the arrangements can be made.

MARTHA. There you are. That's all he wants.

MADGE. I'm very sorry. I can't do it.

MARTHA. But, you obstinate little creature! Upon my soul, you're as stupid as your father was when he was a boy.

MADGE. People say I take after him.

MARTHA. I could find it in my heart to give you a good shaking, that I could. Have you no regard for common sense?

MADGE. I hope so.

MARTHA. You can't have, or you'd not refuse to take my advice.

MADGE. But I *am* taking your advice.

MARTHA. My child, you're simply disregarding me and going your own way.

MADGE. Yes; but that *was* your advice. You said that the younger generation ought to do what it wanted in spite of the older generation. And I was very glad to hear that the younger generation is bound to win.



MARTHA. But I didn't mean that.

MADGE (*quite seriously*). I thought you did. It was very good advice, and so I took it.

MARTHA. There are exceptions to every rule, and I'm one of the exceptions. I'm not one of the older generation. I'm still young, and always shall be, now. I'm a sort of female Peter Pan, the little girl who wouldn't grow up. If I were your mother I daresay I shouldn't be talking in this way. I should be as selfish as Vincent Cray, perhaps.

MADGE. Why do you all call father selfish?

MARTHA. Well! They say love is blind, but I thought that applied to only one particular sort of love.

MADGE. Do *you* consider him selfish, Tom?

TOM (*after a pause*). Yes.

MARTHA. Of course *Tom* does. He's an interested party.

MADGE. I'm not at all blind to father's faults. In a way he *is* selfish, but then so we all are. Tom and I are selfish because we want to get married without troubling about other people. You're selfish, Cousin Martha, because you want to get your money out of that brewery company before it fails. Father expects me to do a lot of little things for him that he might quite well do for himself, but he has a right to expect a good deal of attention from me. He did a lot for me when I was a child, and he's kept me ever since.

MARTHA. No; he shan't have any credit for that. He couldn't help it. The law made him. What wages has he paid you?

MADGE. What wages will Tom pay me?

MARTHA. My child, I wish you wouldn't answer my questions by asking another question in return.

MADGE. I believe that I ought to do these little things for father, even if they do seem rather unnecessary, and if he doesn't seem very grateful for them. They don't mean very much extra work for me. And after all, he is getting old, you know.

MARTHA. The fact is, you think you are quite indispensable. That, let me warn you, is only a form of pride. It's sinful.

MADGE (*mildly*). I shouldn't wonder. I know I'm wicked.

MARTHA. The proper way to teach your father to do without you is the way they teach puppies to swim.

TOM. How do they do that?

MARTHA. Throw them into the middle of a pond. Then they've got to swim or they are drowned.

MADGE. Do you propose that we should throw father into a pond?

MARTHA. No; the proper way to treat your father is to leave him in the house by himself, and then he'd not only have to put on his own boots, but cook his own bacon, and best of all, wash up the greasy dishes afterwards. That'd teach him.

MADGE. I daresay that would be very good exercise for a man who was just selfish and nothing more, but father couldn't be left alone because he's not well enough.

MARTHA. That's what Tom has been telling me. Now what is it that's wrong with Vincent, pray?

MADGE. There's something wrong with his heart.

MARTHA. I know that. It's much too hard.

MADGE. I mean he has attacks.

MARTHA. He 's been lively enough whilst I 've been here.

MADGE. Of course there are intervals when he 's better. But he daren't undergo any form of violent exercise, or exert himself too much in any way.

MARTHA. I suppose that 's why he can't put his boots on ?

MADGE. To some extent. It is bad for him to stoop too much.

MARTHA. And is that all ? Anything else the matter with him ?

MADGE. His health generally is not at all good.

TOM. That 's what *he* says. Dr. Jackson can't find out anything.

MADGE. Doesn't that prove that the complaint is very serious, when they can't discover what it is ?

MARTHA. At that rate I must be beyond all hope, for I 'm sure no doctor could find anything wrong with me. No, my dear, I know what 's the matter with your father, and I assure you that he 's quite as strong and healthy as thousands and thousands of men who have to work hard every day for their living.

TOM. Well ?

MARTHA. He 's a humbug.

MADGE. Oh, Cousin Martha !

MARTHA. I knew him when he was a boy. He used to come and stay with us at the farm, near Kirkham, and he was a humbug then. When he didn't want to go to church he used to have the

stomach-ache. When he didn't want to be sent into the village on an errand he used to have a sprained ankle. I remember once when my father was going to punish him for stealing an apple pasty out of the larder he had an epileptic fit. He foamed at the mouth. Do you know how he did that ?

MADGE. No.

MARTHA. Soft soap. He showed me how afterwards, and I tried it for myself. It was extremely unpleasant.

MADGE. But why do you tell us all this ? It took place when father was a boy.

MARTHA. The child is the father of the man.

TOM (*eagerly*). Do you mean that he 's still shamming ?

MARTHA. That 's just what I do mean.

MADGE (*indignantly*). Cousin Martha ! How dare you say such a thing !

MARTHA. Because it 's true.

MADGE. You say that he isn't ill at all, but that he 's only pretending ? What on earth should he do that for ?

MARTHA. You little innocent ! To keep you from leaving him. He knows well enough that he won't get anybody else to look after him for nothing ; and that if he did get somebody else, she wouldn't look after his comfort half so well as you do.

MADGE. Oh, this is shameful, Cousin Martha. I won't allow you to say such things about father in his own house. I've a good mind never to speak to you again.

MARTHA. Think it over, my dear.

MADGE. I won't. It would be too mean. It's not true. You don't believe it, Tom, do you?

(TOM *doesn't reply. He looks down.*)

Tom, do you believe it?

TOM. I'm afraid I do, Madge.

MADGE. You're prejudiced against him as well.

TOM. We can't get away from facts.

MADGE (*wiping her eyes*). Because he is making us wait.

TOM. No; I'll wait as long as you wish, Madge.

I don't think it's necessary, that's all. But if *you* think it is, there's no more to be said.

I can wait for you for ever, Madge.

MARTHA. It won't be necessary for you to wait quite so long as that. Look here, Madge, what would you do if your father came to you to-morrow and said he was quite recovered?

MADGE. I'd marry Tom at once.

MARTHA. Whether Vincent consented or not?

MADGE. Yes.

MARTHA. And supposing it was proved to you that there had been nothing seriously wrong with him all this time? Would you marry Tom at once?

MADGE. Yes; but if you think you're going to persuade me . . .

MARTHA. You keep quiet, can't you? I'm not going to persuade you at all. All I ask you to do is to give me a week to work in.

MADGE. What are you going to do?

MARTHA. Ah, that would be telling. You can watch me closely to see that I don't poison your father.

MADGE. And what have I to do?

MARTHA. Nothing. Behave just as usual.

TOM. And what have I to do ?

MARTHA. You ? Oh, *you* can get a special licence, if you like.

TOM. I will.

MARTHA. If you 're not married in a week, call me a Dutchman.

MADGE. Hush !

*(They listen.)*

Father's key in the door.

TOM. What shall I do ?

MARTHA. Get out of the window. Quick !

*(TOM draws aside the curtain and gets out of the open window.)*

Don't come round here again until I tell you. I'll call and see you some time in the City.

TOM. Righto ! Good-bye. Good-bye, Madge.

*(TOM disappears, and MARTHA draws the curtain again.)*

MARTHA. Don't let your father see you've been crying, child.

MADGE. I haven't.

MARTHA. Your eyes are red.

MADGE. I'll go in the kitchen and bathe them.

*(MARTHA hastily settles down to the papers at the table, and MADGE opens the door and goes out, just missing CRAY, who enters when she has disappeared.)*

*(CRAY has had his whiskers shaved off, and looks very much smarter and younger. He wears a bright, gay neck-tie.)*

CRAY (*gaily chanting*). Tum, ta-ra-ra. Tira-lira-lay. Why ! still at work ?

MARTHA (*not looking round*). You've not been long over your game.

CRAY. I didn't go to the club . . .

(MARTHA *looks at him*.)

MARTHA (*startled*). What the . . . what in the name of goodness gracious have you been doing to yourself? (*Seeing it*.) Why, you've shaved off your whiskers!

CRAY (*self-conscious*). Ahem, yes. At least, I had them shaved off. As I was passing Smithers the barber's on my way to the club, I saw Smithers leaning against the door in his shirt sleeves, smoking a pipe. I generally give him a good word when I go past; he's a very respectable man, you know, though he is a barber; and as I stopped to say that it was a warm evening, the curious fancy took me that I should like to have my whiskers shaved off on the spot. I told Smithers, and he said, 'It's out of my hours, but I'm always ready to oblige an old customer.'

MARTHA. I should think he was rather surprised.

CRAY. No; he said he expected I found them very warm in this weather.

MARTHA. So you've taken my advice. I'm sure it's a great compliment.

CRAY (*posing before her*). Well, how do you like the effect?

MARTHA (*quizzing*). There's something else . . .

CRAY. Yes; that's the tie.

MARTHA. Of course.

CRAY. I slipped into Smith and Bertie's as they were putting up the shutters, and changed in the shop.

(MARTHA gets up and straightens the tie for him.)

I've come to the conclusion that I've been dressing too quietly. I don't mean to go in for anything loud, you know; but there is a great tendency amongst us Englishmen to neglect the value of colour. But you haven't told me how you like the effect.

MARTHA (*turning him round by the shoulders so that he can see himself in the mirror over the mantel*).  
Don't you think I was right?

CRAY. Right?

MARTHA. Ten years younger.

CRAY (*delighted*). No? Really?

MARTHA. You make me think of old times. That's more like the Vincent I used to know.

(CRAY smiles at himself in the glass, slaps his chest two or three times in a debonnair manner, and sits in his chair well pleased.)

CRAY. Where's Madge?

MARTHA. I think she's making pastry. Shall I call her?

CRAY. Oh no, no, no. Don't want Madge. What should I want Madge for? So I'm more like the Vincent you used to know, Martha? Curious what a tuft of hair will do, isn't it? Now, do you know, when first I saw you the other night I thought you'd hardly altered a bit.

MARTHA. I'm too old a bird to be taken in by flattery.

CRAY. No. On my honour as a gentleman. You never looked more charming than you do at this moment. (*Shaking his finger at her.*) Ah! you're blushing.



MARTHA. That's because I've not lost all my maidenly modesty. But I've filled out a trifle, haven't I?

CRAY (*airily*). A trifle, oh, a trifle. You never were exactly a sylph, Martha. I remember . . . (*He laughs.*) Do *you* remember the day a bough broke under you when you were climbing the old apple tree?

MARTHA. Perfectly. Eh, but that takes us back a long time, Vincent!

CRAY. It does.

(*A slight pause. They are thinking.*)

How was it you never got married, Martha?

MARTHA. Ah!

CRAY. You must have had more than one opportunity?

MARTHA. More than one! Oh, I'd plenty of offers, right enough.

CRAY. Then why didn't you take one of them?

MARTHA (*looking straight at him*). Because the right person never asked me.

CRAY. There *was* a right person then, Martha?

MARTHA. *You* know that, well enough.

CRAY (*slightly confused, carrying it off*). Ahem. Ahem. Well, he missed a treasure. He did, indeed. (*A pause.*) It was fortunate for you, Martha, that Uncle Scandrett left you enough to live on.

MARTHA. I daresay I could have made money if I'd been put to it. Most of us find we can do things when we're obliged.

CRAY. Oh, I'm sure you could. But it wasn't necessary. Uncle left you comfortably situated, eh?

MARTHA. I've seven hundred a year of my own.

CRAY. What! (*He sits up.*)

MARTHA. Not counting the money invested in Wilkes and Grignall's.

CRAY. Seven hundred a year! I'd no idea your father was so well off.

MARTHA. He wasn't. He left me five thousand pounds in North Western stock. I sold out most of it and invested on my own account.

CRAY. Wonderful!

MARTHA. What's wonderful?

CRAY. That a woman should have the ability to succeed in such delicate financial operations.

MARTHA. Rubbish! It only needs a little common sense. I suppose that's why so many men make a mess of it.

CRAY. Of course *you*'ve come a cropper over this brewery, Martha.

MARTHA. You can't always spot the winner, Vincent. If I could I should have been a millionaire long ago. And there wouldn't be half as much fun in it if you always won. I've enjoyed dabbling in an investment here and there because it's been something for me to do.

CRAY. That's an unusual complaint—not having enough work.

MARTHA. I was made for work. Rather than sit idle I'd set to and scrub a floor. I should have made a fine mother of a family; a big family for choice.

CRAY. I'm sure you would. As it is, your talents are wasted.

MARTHA. No; merely diverted into another channel.

CRAY. Has your brother Bob still got the farm at Kirkham ?

MARTHA. Yes ; but I never go there now. I can't stand his wife.

CRAY. That 's a pity. He 's your only near relation.

MARTHA. It 's only fair to say that she can't stand me either. I never think there 's much in these family ties. Relations ought to see as little of each other as possible.

CRAY. That must be why we 've not met for twenty years.

MARTHA (*rather sadly*). No ; I 've not avoided you purposely. Not lately, at any rate. In fact, I 've often meant to write or come and see you when I was up in London, but somehow . . . you know how these things get left over.

CRAY. And I daresay you 've plenty of friends at home.

MARTHA. I 've plenty of friends, but friends aren't everything. Lately I 've begun to feel very lonely at times.

CRAY (*reflecting*). Lonely ?

MARTHA. I feel I want somebody to love.

CRAY. Ahem.

MARTHA. I wonder whether Madge would come and pay me a nice long visit. For a few months, I mean.

CRAY. Madge ? A few months ? I 'm afraid not. I could hardly spare her ; and if I could, she wouldn't come for so long. She 's a regular home-bird is Madge.

MARTHA. Well, then, I suppose I shall have to keep a cat, or get married.

CRAY. You 've no preference ?

MARTHA. It would be cheaper to keep a cat.

CRAY. Not if your husband had a little money of his own.

MARTHA. Where am I to find such a paragon ?

(CRAY gets up and looks at himself in the mirror. He adjusts his tie and smoothes his hair.)

If I could find him, I think I should rather be inclined to accept him. I'm just at the age when a woman most regrets not having married.

CRAY (*turning to her*). Martha ! What about me ?

MARTHA. Well, what about you ?

CRAY. What do you think of me ?

MARTHA. How do you mean ?

CRAY. As a husband ?

MARTHA. Oh ! I didn't understand. (*With agitation.*)

Are you making me a proposal ?

CRAY. That was my endeavour.

MARTHA. But, Vincent, I . . . (*She rises.*)

CRAY. There, there, now. Take it easy, take it easy.

We mustn't get excited. We're not chickens, either of us.

MARTHA (*sitting again*). I know, but even so . . . (*She cannot proceed.*)

CRAY. Consider it quietly, now we're both of us lonely people . . .

MARTHA. You've got Madge.

CRAY. Madge is young. No doubt before long she may be wanting to leave the nest and build one of her own.

MARTHA (*nodding*). Yes; you *did* think of that, then.

CRAY. I should be lonely then, shouldn't I? We're both of us in easy circumstances. I can't pretend to an income equal to yours, Martha, but I've sufficient to make it clear to you that it is not your money I am thinking of in making this proposal.

MARTHA. My dear Vincent, of course not.

CRAY. And then, most important of all . . . forgive me for touching upon the point, but I must do . . . we were once very fond of each other.

MARTHA. Yes.

*(A pause.)*

CRAY. Whose was the blame?

*(He waits. MARTHA does not reply.)*

Well, never mind. A woman came between us. I married her instead of you. I'm not going to pretend that I regret it. She was a good woman, and she made me very happy. She was very fond of me, fonder than I deserved, I daresay.

MARTHA. I never harboured an evil thought of her all my life, although she did take you away from me.

CRAY. I'm sure you never did.

MARTHA. She caused me a great deal of pain, but I understood that she didn't do it maliciously. She couldn't help it. Life is like that.

CRAY. H'm. How admirable to be fortified by such philosophy. Then, Martha, you feel that you can seriously consider my proposal?

MARTHA. I shouldn't refuse it for sentimental reasons. In fact, sentimental reasons would make me want to accept, but . . .

CRAY. But . . .

MARTHA (*more briskly*). Ought you to ask any woman to marry you ?

CRAY. Why not ?

MARTHA. Are you fit to get married ?

CRAY. My dear Martha, I trust you have not been hearing any slanders about me. In a small suburb like this, scandal is the principal topic at the tea-table.

MARTHA. It's nothing I've heard. I speak from my own acquaintance of you.

CRAY (*stiffly*). Will you please tell me what are these defects to which you refer ?

MARTHA. Don't get angry. They are purely physical.

CRAY. Physical ? Martha, you astound me. Why, I've shaved off my whiskers to please you.

MARTHA. Your personal appearance is attractive, I grant you. What about your health ?

CRAY. My health ? Why, I'm as sound as a bell.  
(*He struts about and smites his chest.*)

MARTHA. I thought the night I arrived . . .

CRAY. Oh, the mustard bath ? That was nothing. Merely a slight chill. Any of us liable to that. In fact I got it through being too foolhardy and confident.

MARTHA. You've nothing internal ?

CRAY. A good deal, I hope. But all in good order.

MARTHA. Isn't your heart weak ?

CRAY. Nonsense. I had a touch of nicotine poisoning some years ago. I haven't to smoke too much, that's all.

MARTHA. Then how is it that you don't exert yourself a bit more ?

CRAY. Well . . . I've let things drop, you know.

MARTHA. I should like my husband to lead an active life. I do so myself, and I'm sure I shouldn't get on with a man who did nothing but sit in an arm-chair all the time.

CRAY. Come, come. I'm not so decrepit as all that. By the way, I'll come with you to that meeting at the Cannon Street Hotel on Thursday.

MARTHA. Very well. That'll be a beginning, at any rate. But I should like my husband to share my pursuits and amusements. To be a real companion to me. For instance, to go out cycling with me.

CRAY. I should have to draw the line there. I don't do it.

MARTHA. I've already told you to learn.

CRAY. I haven't got a bicycle.

MARTHA. Get one.

CRAY (*scratching his head*). I suppose I could. What sort? A tandem?

MARTHA (*quickly*). No; don't get a tandem.

CRAY. Why not?

MARTHA. I should have to do all the work.

CRAY. Well, well. In for a penny, in for a pound.

MARTHA. Then again, why don't you take up some game?

CRAY. Game? You mean . . .

MARTHA. Some vigorous outdoor game.

CRAY. Martha, not even to win your hand will I be persuaded to play Association football.

MARTHA. I don't suggest it. You could play tennis. I'd take you in hand. You wouldn't give me much of a game, but I could owe you thirty to

begin with. Or if tennis is too strenuous, there 's always golf. I 'm afraid I shall be reduced to golf myself before many years.

CRAY (*sitting and rubbing his head comically*). But this means positively going into training.

MARTHA. Certainly. And it won't be wasted, whether you marry me or not. It 'll do you all the good in the world.

CRAY. Here! You must play fair. If I buy a bicycle I shall expect you to marry me. Will you promise me ?

MARTHA. It 's too soon. I must think it over.

CRAY. How long do you want ?

MARTHA. Give me a week.

CRAY. You 're going to watch me for a week.

MARTHA (*smiling*). Well, I 'm going to see whether I think I can make a permanent cure.

CRAY. Cure ?

MARTHA. Yes; cure. And promise me one thing. Don't tell Madge just yet.

CRAY. Of course not. What do you take me for? If you won't have me I shall never tell Madge at all.

*(The door opens and MADGE comes in cheerfully. She advances to CRAY and kneels before his chair, in order to take off his boots as usual. She does not look at CRAY's face.)*

CRAY. What do you want, my dear ?

MADGE. Your boots, father.

CRAY (*kindly*). Nonsense, my dear. I 'll do that myself.

MADGE (*protesting*). Oh no . . .



CRAY (*waving with his hand for her to rise*). You don't think I'm quite an old man yet, do you?

(*He vigorously unlaces his boots. MADGE gets up and looks at him in surprise. She is puzzled.*)

MADGE. Why, father, what has happened to you? You're quite different.

CRAY (*rather snappishly*). Eh?

MADGE (*clapping her hands*). Oh, I know. It's your whiskers!

*The CURTAIN falls.*

## ACT III

*The same scene, a week later. It is a summer morning. The window is open, showing a pleasant bit of garden, bounded by an old high brick wall.*

*On the table there is a big new hat-box, open. It bears the initials 'M. P.' on its further side. A new golf-bag full of new clubs stands against the window-seat.*

*MADGE is standing before the mirror trying on a big, pretty, new summer hat. MARTHA is watching her. Both are dressed smartly. MARTHA rather gaily, and MADGE in a well-cut tailor-made coat and skirt. Her hair is done more becomingly, and she is animated and far brighter than before.*

MADGE. Really, Cousin Martha, it's just too lovely.

It's a sin to wear it. (*She turns and kisses MARTHA.*) It is good of you. You've given me far too many things already.

MARTHA. Nonsense, child. Take it off and put it away, and then run and finish getting ready.

It's after eleven already.

MADGE. You are sure father will be back in time?

MARTHA. He can't be more than a minute or two.

I wanted to get him out of the way, so I sent him to the station to buy me a *Manchester Guardian*. I don't feel comfortable unless I get a look at it each day.

MADGE. I can't help wishing we'd told him.

MARTHA. Much better as it is, Madge. It's saved him ever so much worry. Where ignorance is bliss, et cetera.

MADGE. I hope he won't be too angry. (*She takes off the hat.*)

MARTHA. It will be rather a relief if he is. The angelic temper which has prevailed during the past week is wholly unnatural. There now, run along.

(MADGE goes out quickly, after hastily kissing MARTHA again.)

(MARTHA puts the new hat carefully in the box and fastens it up. One sees CRAY'S head and shoulders through the window as he cycles unsteadily into view. He tumbles off the machine, places it against the wall of the house, and comes up to the low window-sill. He is wearing a soft felt hat, which he removes and lays on the window-seat, revealing a bandage tied round his left temple. He has in his hand a captive golf-ball and a copy of the London edition of the 'Manchester Guardian.' The latter he throws across to MARTHA.)

CRAY. There's your paper. Look what I've bought. (*Holding up the ball.*)

MARTHA (*picking up the paper*). Thanks. What is it?

CRAY. Captive ball. You can practise driving in the garden. Just hand me that driver.

(MARTHA takes the driver from the bag of clubs and gives it him.)

Thank you.

*(He is seen to tee the ball and take a drive. He misses the ball. He looks down at it.)*

Missed it, by Jove! Takes a bit of getting into.

*(He drives again and hits it.)*

MARTHA. Bravo!

CRAY *(coming to the window and leaning on the sill)*.

I'm to have a lesson from the pro. this afternoon. He says there's no reason why I shouldn't turn out quite a decent player once I've mastered the swing properly.

MARTHA. How did the bicycle behave this morning?

CRAY. She got away with me turning into the High Street, and nearly ran up the steps of the Conservative Club, but I managed to keep my seat. Surprising how easy it is, once you have the nerve to let yourself go.

MARTHA. You must be careful. You might have hurt your head again.

CRAY. Do you know what the chances are against getting hurt twice on the same spot?

MARTHA. No.

CRAY. I don't either, but I understand they are simply enormous.

MARTHA. But it's a delicate place. *(She touches his bandage.)* You can't afford to run any risks.

CRAY. Don't talk like an old woman, Martha. One might think nobody had ever been in a scrap before, the way you're worrying.

MARTHA. It is only right that the forlorn maiden should be anxious about the injuries the gallant knight has received in her defence.

CRAY *(grinning with pleasure)*. Gallant knight! Oh,

I say, you know, Martha, that 's coming it a bit thick, it is really. I couldn't let the fellow hit you with a chair, even if he was a managing director.

MARTHA. I shall always be deeply grateful to you.

CRAY. Hang your gratitude ! That won't do for me.

When am I to receive my reward ?

MARTHA (*plucking a rose from the wall and handing it to him*). For valour.

CRAY (*kissing it*). I shall wear this always, in my helmet. (*He tries to stick it in the band of his hat, which is lying on the window-seat.*)

MARTHA. Better wear it in your buttonhole.

CRAY. Next to my heart. (*He tries to find a button-hole on the right side.*)

MARTHA. The other side.

CRAY. I've one on each side.

MARTHA. What ? Heart ?

CRAY. No ; buttonhole. I've no heart at all.

MARTHA. How 's that ?

CRAY (*with mock pathos*). I've lost it. You know who 's got it.

MARTHA. Do you want it back again ?

CRAY. Never.

MARTHA. You can have it if you like.

CRAY. Martha, do you know that to-day is a very important day ?

MARTHA. Why ?

CRAY. You promised to give me your answer to-day.

MARTHA. Did I ?

CRAY. Now you know you did. Don't you ?

MARTHA. I didn't say what time of the day, did I ?

It's rather too soon after breakfast.

CRAY. No, no, Martha. You're not going to keep me in suspense all day?

MARTHA (*more seriously*). No; I won't. I want to have a serious talk with you. You'd better come in to the house. We can't have it like this.

CRAY. All right. Out of the way. (*He prepares to get in through the window.*)

MARTHA (*alarmed*). Do be careful. You're never going to . . .

CRAY. Yes, I am.

*(He swings himself up and leaps in, as easily as TOM did in the First Act.)*

MARTHA. How rash of you. You might have been killed. And look at the mess your dirty feet have made of the cushions.

CRAY. Blow the cushions!

*(Now that CRAY is in the room it is seen that he is wearing tweed knickerbockers and stockings. Just as CRAY is swinging himself through the window MADGE enters and sees him. She stops and gazes at him in astonishment. She is wearing a neat, small, quiet toque to go with her costume.)*

CRAY (*noticing the hat-box*). Hello, whose is this?  
Yours, Martha?

MARTHA. No.

CRAY. This yours, Madge?

MADGE. Yes; Cousin Martha's given it me.

CRAY. That's very kind of her. (*Looking at her dress.*) Why, I've never seen that costume before.

MADGE. No; it's new.

CRAY. I don't remember you asking me for a new dress.

MADGE. Cousin Martha's given me this as well.

CRAY. It's too good of you, Martha. You mustn't do it. You're spoiling her. A new dress and this handsome case . . . er . . . what-do-you-call-it. (*He looks at it and turns it round, and sees the initials.*) Why, they've got the initials wrong.

MARTHA. No; they haven't.

CRAY. Yes, yes. 'M. P.' It ought to be 'M. C.' Madge Cray. They must have misunderstood you. You should speak more distinctly, my dear. Now it will have to be altered.

MARTHA. I shouldn't trouble. It's true that Madge's initials are M. C. at present, but they will be M. P. when she's married.

CRAY. Married! When's she going to be married?

MARTHA. This morning. So it's hardly worth while bothering about the initials.

CRAY (*in a voice of thunder*). This morning? (*Theatrically.*) Ye gods and little fishes! I don't believe it. I don't believe it. I *won't* believe it.

MARTHA. There. Take it easy, won't you? It really doesn't signify whether you believe it or not, but I can assure you that it's going to happen.

CRAY (*appealing to the heavens*). Married! My daughter married! And to whom? (*Fiercely.*) To that scoundrel Probyn?

MARTHA. I've always found him a very decent fellow.

CRAY (*bullying*). Madge!

MADGE (*quietly, but without her customary meekness. She is now his equal, and speaks to him without a trace of fear, though not pertly or rudely*). Yes, father ?

CRAY. Is this true, or is it a nightmare ? Or is it perhaps some cruel practical joke ?

MADGE. It is perfectly true. I am going to be married to Tom by special licence at St. Clement's Church this morning at half-past eleven. The cab is coming for me at twenty-five past, so that if you 've anything to say you 'd better get it said, for there 's not much time.

CRAY (*dazed*). But I don't understand. How is it ? Why have I heard nothing of all this ?

MADGE. We thought it better to make all the arrangements without consulting you. You would have only upset yourself to no purpose.

CRAY. You impudent hussy. This to your father ! This to the one person in the world who has a right to demand your respect and obedience. *You* thought it better, did you ?

MADGE. You see you *are* upsetting yourself. That proves we were right.

CRAY. Silence ! To your room, child, and remain there for the rest of the day.

MADGE. Please don't be ridiculous.

CRAY. Ridiculous ? Do you call me ridiculous ? I mean it, girl, I mean it. If you don't go I 'll lock you up with my own hands.

MARTHA. Nay, you won't, Vincent. You 'll have to reckon with me first, and I 'm not so easy to deal with when I 'm roused.

MADGE. All right, Cousin Martha. Father hasn't



the least intention of doing such a thing. He is only blustering.

CRAY. Do you refuse to recognise my authority ?

MADGE. In this case, yes. I am over age. You can't control me.

CRAY. Where is your gratitude ? Have you no respect and affection for the father who has kept you for so many years ? For the father who has provided you with a home and food and clothes and education ?

MADGE. Well, I've worked for them, haven't I ?

CRAY. Great heavens ! Is this my child who measures my love against her service with a mercenary hand ? I can't believe it. This is not my Madge.

MARTHA. Oh yes, it is.

CRAY. She is different. Something has happened to her.

MARTHA. She's come to her senses.

CRAY (*coldly*). Be silent, I beg you. (*Apostrophising the heavens.*) What has changed her ?

MADGE. If you really want to know, it is Cousin Martha. She has made me see that I was looking at everything in the wrong light. She showed me that if I did not make an effort to get away from you, I should stop here year after year, growing older and older, and more and more in your power, until I shouldn't be able to get away at all. This house has been different since she came into it. Before it was dull and close and stuffy. Now it's bright and cheerful and sweet. She seems to have let in the fresh air and sunshine. Haven't you noticed it yourself ?

CRAY. I notice a change, but it does not seem a change for the better.

MADGE. I'm sure it is. Why, you yourself are altered. You *must* know that.

CRAY. I am not aware that I have altered in the least, or that any change in me was desirable.

MARTHA. It's well that some one was satisfied with you.

CRAY. It's the ingratitude that cuts me to the heart. You weren't going to tell me, or ask me to your wedding.

MADGE. Yes; I was going to ask you now. Will you come, father?

CRAY. Come! In these clothes!

MADGE. It will be a very quiet affair. Only Cousin Martha and Tom's brother. I should like you to give me away.

CRAY. You add insult to injury. I decline to give you away. I shall not come to the ceremony.

MADGE. Please, father.

CRAY. No. (*Sits down heavily in the arm-chair.*)

MARTHA. Then Tom's brother will have to give you away. Now then, it's nearly half-past. (*She runs to the window.*) The cab's waiting. We must be off.

MADGE. Good-bye, father.

(*CRAY does not reply. He puts his hand to his heart and gives a cry.*)

CRAY. Ah!

MADGE (*alarmed*). Father!

CRAY. All right . . . go your way . . . leave me to die . . . Never mind me . . . (*Again he cries out.*) Ah!

MADGE. Quick, Cousin Martha! The brandy's on the top shelf of the sideboard.

MARTHA. Never mind the brandy. The cab's waiting. You'll be late.

MADGE. But I can't leave father like this.

MARTHA. He's right enough.

MADGE. It's his heart again. (MADGE *has got out the brandy.*)

(CRAY *gives a low moan.*)

MARTHA. Tom will be getting anxious.

MADGE. I can't and won't leave father alone whilst he is like this.

MARTHA. Very well, there's only one thing to be done. You must go alone and I'll stop here with him.

MADGE. But you are so keen on coming to the church.

MARTHA. That can't be helped. We can't both go, and if I go instead of you, Tom might not be pleased.

(CRAY *moans again.*)

I'll look after him, sure enough.

MADGE. You are kind.

MARTHA. Come straight here after it's over.

MADGE. We shan't be long; the church is so near, you know. Sure you don't mind?

MARTHA. I'm only regretting my new hat. I got it specially for the wedding. (MARTHA *kisses MADGE.*) Now, run along, my dear.

(MADGE *hurries out, followed by MARTHA, who looks out of the door after her, and then returns and leans out of the window for a last glimpse. She waves her hand and turns back towards CRAY.*)

MARTHA. Do you really want some of this brandy ?

(CRAY *does not reply.*)

Because if you don't, I'll put it away.

(CRAY *feebly waves his hand.* MARTHA *puts the brandy away, and takes the hat-box into the hall and returns.*)

You are not impressing me in the least, my dear man ; so you may as well stop that shamming and sit up.

(CRAY *opens one eye and looks at her.*)

(*Nodding.*) Yes ; I see. You old humbug !

CRAY. Martha !

MARTHA. I know you. You always were a humbug, my dear. I knew perfectly well that you weren't ill. What good has it done you ? You've simply prevented me from seeing Madge married, that's all.

CRAY. You can go and see her married. I do not require you to remain.

MARTHA. Yes ; and as soon as she saw me come into the church she'd think you were dead, and would go into a faint at the foot of the altar. Not likely.

CRAY. Martha, an awful responsibility rests upon your shoulders. You have estranged my daughter from me. When you think of that, does no twinge of conscience reproach you ?

MARTHA. Not a twinge.

CRAY. Had I known, ten days ago, what an influence I was admitting into my house and home ; what a serpent—I use the term figuratively, Martha—what a serpent I was cherishing in my bosom, I should have acted differently. I cannot understand why you have concerned yourself with this

affair at all. Your interference was most unwarrantable. Why couldn't you mind your own business?

MARTHA. It *was* my business.

CRAY. I do not see how you make that out . . . unless . . . (*He reflects.*) By Jove, I believe I do. (*He laughs.*) Ha! ha! Now I understand, Martha. You're a diplomat. You wanted Madge off my hands because you didn't like marrying a man with a grown-up daughter. Isn't that it, Martha? Confess? A very natural feeling.

MARTHA. Don't flatter yourself.

CRAY. Then what do you mean by saying that it was your business to interfere?

MARTHA. Because all my life I've made it my business to try and remedy any case of injustice or tyranny that I come across.

CRAY. Those are strong words, Martha.

MARTHA. It's a case where strong words are needed. I give you credit for not being a scoundrel, Vincent.

CRAY. Thank you, Martha.

MARTHA. I merely think you didn't realise that you were trying to ruin a girl's life . . .

CRAY. Martha!

MARTHA. For your own selfish ends . . .

CRAY. No! no!

MARTHA. By means which I can only describe as cunning and hypocritical.

CRAY. This is too bad, Martha! *You* call me a hypocrite. *You* who have spent all last week plotting behind my back.

MARTHA. When you are in Rome, you must do as

Rome does. I had to fight you with your own weapons. I knew that Madge wouldn't leave you whilst you were so ill, so I had to set about finding a cure for you.

CRAY. A cure ?

MARTHA. Haven't I been successful ? No wonder Madge thought she might safely leave you when she saw you able not only to take part in a free fight at the Cannon Street Hotel ; not only to ride a bicycle, and play golf, and climb in at a window ; but actually to put on your own boots.

CRAY. Do you mean to say that besides putting all these ideas into Madge's head, teaching her to disobey me, you've also been playing a double game and making a fool of me ?

MARTHA. There was a fable I used to be very fond of when I was a little girl. No doubt you remember it too. I forget who wrote it. I daresay it was Æsop, but that doesn't matter, anyhow. It was about a dog who was crossing a bridge over a river with a most appetising and delightful bone in his mouth. I don't think we knew definitely why he was crossing the river, but when he got to the middle of the bridge he looked over the edge, and behold ! to his astonishment he saw beneath him another doggie also carrying a bone in his mouth. Now this other bone seemed to him to be far more desirable than his own. It appeared to be bigger and juicier, and he was perfectly certain that there was a great deal more meat on it. Do I need to go on with the story ? You remember how the poor greedy creature tried to take the bone from the other

dog, and dropped his own into the water in the attempt. And so in the end he had none at all.

CRAY. What on earth has this got to do with me ?

MARTHA. Do I need to explain ? When I came here first I found that you had got Madge firmly between your teeth. You weren't going to let anybody take that bone from you, if you could help it. It was necessary to make you drop it, somehow. I thought of the fable. I saw that you would only drop it in order to snap up something else instead, so I decided to try and tempt you with another bone. That was me. The bigger, juicier bone . . . with a great deal more meat on it. You fell into the trap and let Madge go. And now, you see, you're left without any bone at all.

*(A slight pause.)*

CRAY *(quietly)*. So the whole thing was a . . . a trick . . . from beginning to end. You've never had any intention of marrying me ?

MARTHA *(after a slight wait, not looking at him)*. No.

CRAY. You just wanted to persuade Madge to leave me ?

MARTHA *(as before)*. Yes.

CRAY. Well—you've been very successful. You must be proud of yourself, eh ?

MARTHA *(stoutly)*. Yes.

CRAY. The first half of your fable is right enough, I'll admit. I didn't want to let Madge go. It may have been selfish. I suppose it was. But the second half isn't true. I didn't drop the bone because the second was—what did you call it ?—bigger and juicier.

MARTHA (*grimly, with set face*). No ?

CRAY. I suppose by that you mean that I was attracted by your money and that sort of thing ?

MARTHA. Well—something of the sort.

*(By this time she is afraid she has been too cruel, and is a little ashamed of herself for hurting him, so she is self-conscious and gruff.)*

CRAY (*with sincerity*). I wasn't. Never. I hate you to think so. Look here, I'm nothing like so well off as you are, Martha, but I've between three and four hundred a year coming in. That's enough to live on comfortably, isn't it ? A man with nearly four hundred a year can't be suspected of trying to marry a woman just for her money.

MARTHA (*defending herself as much to herself as to him*). But you did drop the first bone because you were attracted by the second one.

CRAY. I wish you'd drop that confounded fable. I admit that you attracted me so much that I forgot all about keeping a tight hand on Madge, or if I didn't forget it, I didn't choose to trouble about it.

MARTHA. You tried it on again only just now.

CRAY. Ah ! that was force of habit. I did it automatically, without stopping to think. That was stupid of me.

MARTHA. Well, what was the attraction I had for you ?

CRAY. I liked you. Let's call it that, simply. It would be ridiculous for people of fifty to get sentimental, wouldn't it ?



MARTHA (*firmly*). I'm not a sentimental woman.

CRAY. Quite sure ?

MARTHA. Quite.

CRAY. You never married anybody else, though, did you, Martha ?

(MARTHA *looks at him. She says nothing.*)

Well, you're not sentimental and I'm not sentimental. But I liked you when you came to stay here. You saw that I liked you ?

(MARTHA *nods.*)

You led me on. And all the time you were simply fooling me ?

MARTHA. I'm sorry if I've been cruel in the way I've behaved.

CRAY. Cruel !

MARTHA. I can't expect you to forgive me.

CRAY. You can't ?

MARTHA. Not that I really care whether you do or not.

CRAY (*rising*). Martha ! Listen to me. I do forgive you. In spite of what has passed, I ask you to marry me.

MARTHA. What a strange man you are, Vincent.

CRAY. I put you a straight question. Will you marry me ?

MARTHA. A straight question demands a plain answer. No.

CRAY. Why not ?

MARTHA. You're still the same old selfish Vincent.

CRAY. I'm not.

MARTHA. Yes, you are.

CRAY. I'm not. But even if I am, won't you try and alter me ?

MARTHA. Thank you. That 's a nice prospect, isn't it? To spend the rest of my life in constant attendance on you as a sort of moral or intellectual hospital nurse.

CRAY. Then you won't have me?

MARTHA. No. (*A pause.*) Have you a Bradshaw in the house?

CRAY. Eh? Bradshaw? There's one over there.

(*He points to a desk heaped with papers and books. MARTHA sits still and looks at it. CRAY gets up, finds the Bradshaw and gives it her.*)

MARTHA. Thank you.

CRAY. What do you want a Bradshaw for?

MARTHA. I'm going home.

CRAY. Why?

MARTHA. I don't suppose you'll let me stay here after what's happened; and even if you will, Mrs. Grundy won't, now that Madge is going away.

CRAY. Confound Mrs. Grundy! Confound Madge! Confound . . . yes, hang it, confound you, Martha . . .

MARTHA. The same to you, and many of them. Don't mind me. Have it out with yourself. It'll do you good. (*She is turning over the pages.*) What are you going to say to them when they come back?

CRAY. Who?

MARTHA. Madge and Tom. They'll be here directly.

CRAY. What? Already? Can one take such an irrevocable and fatal step in so short a time?

MARTHA. Haven't you ever read the marriage service? The bare bones of it—if you miss out all the fancy frills—are surprisingly short.

CRAY. But look here, Martha, I won't have them in the house. Not that fellow Probyn, anyhow. I'll lock the front door against them.

MARTHA (*going to the window*). You'll have to be quick, then, for here they are.

*(She hurries out into the hall.)*

*(CRAY undecidedly takes a few steps this way and that. He seems puzzled and irritated. MARTHA is heard to greet the couple and to demand kisses. CRAY goes quickly to the window to escape. Then he stops and thinks better of it. He stands by the hearth waiting, with a stern expression on his face. MADGE and TOM come in alone. TOM is wearing a new simple and neat lounge suit, with a flower in his buttonhole. He carries a bowler hat, gloves and a stick, which he lays on the table as MADGE advances towards her father. MARTHA stands in the doorway and watches.)*

MADGE. Father!

CRAY (*putting out his hands to ward her away*). Don't come near me. You ought to be ashamed of yourself. (*To TOM.*) And you too.

TOM. Why ought we to be ashamed of ourselves?

CRAY. Because of what you've just done.

TOM. We've only got married. There's nothing to be ashamed of in that. Most parents would talk in this way if we *hadn't* got married.

CRAY. Even then, it's not exactly what you've done, as the nasty underhand way you've done it.

TOM. That's largely your own fault . . .

CRAY. Don't be impudent, sir . . .

TOM. I don't intend to be . . .

CRAY. Yes, you do! Yes, you do! I won't stand it . . .

*(They are talking together, excitedly, when MARTHA breaks in, coming between them.)*

MARTHA. Now then! Now then! That's quite enough. Tom, keep your mouth shut. Vincent, listen to me. These children are too good to you, that's what they are. They come here asking your forgiveness when you ought, by rights, to be on your knees asking theirs for all the worry and trouble your selfishness has caused them.

CRAY. Haven't you interfered enough already in this house?

MARTHA. I daresay I have, but this time it's for your own good. That ought to make you listen to me, anyhow. If you turn Madge and Tom out of doors now, do you realise what you're letting yourself in for? A life of loneliness, without a child, without any one of your own blood to turn to when you need consolation.

CRAY. I don't care.

MADGE. But I do, father. I can't bear to think of you all alone; and I can't bear to think that I shan't be able to see you when I want to. Father, don't let me go away without telling me you forgive me. It will make me wretched. My married life will start all wrong, as it were. All under a shadow. Father, father, for my sake . . .

MARTHA *(very kindly and gently)*. Vincent, make an effort. Everybody's happiness depends upon you.

Don't be obstinate. Don't let any foolish ideas about pride and dignity stand in your way.

(CRAY is undecided. He stands still for a moment. Then he turns away and takes a step or two evidently under a mental struggle. He turns towards MADGE and holds out his hands.)

CRAY. My child.

MADGE. Father!

(She throws herself into his arms and kisses him.)

(MARTHA, on seeing this, disappears into the kitchen.)

CRAY. We must try and forget all the hard words we've said about each other.

MADGE. Father, I'm so glad. (Embracing him, and calling to TOM.) Tom!

CRAY (holding out a disengaged hand). Tom.

(TOM takes his hand and shakes it heartily.)

TOM. Thank you.

CRAY. We'll be good friends, Tom.

TOM. I hope so, sir.

(MARTHA comes in bearing a wedding-cake on a great dish. This she sets down in the middle of the table.)

MADGE. Oh, Cousin Martha! How lovely of you. What a delightful surprise.

MARTHA. Why, it wouldn't have been legal without.

(MARTHA hands MADGE a knife.)

MARTHA. Now then. Cut the first slice.

(MADGE cuts a great slice, and cuts that up into smaller pieces. MARTHA hands her small plates and she distributes the pieces.)

MADGE. Father?

CRAY. A tiny taste, my dear.

MADGE. Dare you risk it ?

CRAY. Risk it ? Give me a big lump !

*(He takes the plate. MARTHA takes a plate and so do TOM and MADGE. They all eat.)*

CRAY. This is uncommonly good. The first I've tasted for years.

MADGE. You mustn't make yourself ill, father.

MARTHA. For goodness sake, leave your father alone. Now you're married, he's old enough to look after himself.

MADGE. He'll have indigestion to-night.

CRAY. Well, and why not ? I've not had it for months. It'll be a change.

MARTHA *(looking at the time)*. You mustn't miss your train. The cab is waiting, isn't it ?

TOM. Yes.

CRAY. Where are you going ?

MADGE. Windermere.

TOM. We'll be back in a fortnight.

MADGE. Then you'll come and see our house, won't you ?

CRAY. Certainly, my dear.

MADGE. I'm wondering what's going to happen to you whilst we're away, father.

CRAY. I shall be all right. When your Cousin Martha's gone home I shall manage to subsist on tinned tongue and sardines.

MADGE. And afterwards ?

MARTHA. Good gracious, girl, don't be always worrying about other people.

MADGE. Perhaps you could come and stay with us for a time. What do you think, Tom ?

TOM (*looking very blank*). Well . . . er . . .

MARTHA. Of course not. Did you ever hear such rubbish! Why, it wouldn't be proper!

MADGE. But something will have to be done about him.

MARTHA. I'll look after your father.

MADGE. But you can't live here. That wouldn't be proper.

MARTHA. Tush! You've got your own affairs to look after now. Besides, it's quite time you left if you're going to catch that train.

TOM. Yes, it is. Come along, Madge.

CRAY. Good-bye, my child.

MADGE. Good-bye, father. (*She embraces him.*)

(*They go out arm-in-arm. TOM follows.*)

(*MARTHA rushes to the cupboard and takes out a box of confetti and hurries out scooping up a handful as she goes. The sound of good-byes is heard in the hall.*)

MARTHA (*outside*). Good gracious! I've quite forgotten a slipper.

(*MARTHA hurries in, looks round, and pounces on one of CRAY's house slippers and rushes out with it. There is more noise and laughter, and at last the door closes. MARTHA and CRAY, covered with confetti, re-enter.*)

MARTHA. What a mess! We shall never get rid of this stuff.

CRAY. Never mind. Once in a lifetime!

(*MARTHA stares at him.*)

MARTHA. That's not like your old self.

CRAY (*shrugging his shoulders*). I daresay not.

MARTHA. Let me see. I was looking up a train. (*She picks up the Bradshaw.*)

CRAY. There 's one about four from both Euston and St. Pancras.

MARTHA. I think so. (*She turns over the pages and then lays the book down.*) Vincent, I want to congratulate you.

CRAY. Eh ?

MARTHA. You 've done a good day's work to-day, after all. You 've sent Madge away happy. I tell you candidly I didn't expect that you 'd do it.

CRAY. You 've always thought badly of me, Martha.

MARTHA. I have ; but I'm beginning to wonder whether I oughtn't to revise my opinion. You 've changed.

CRAY. Of course I've changed. You must have noticed the change.

MARTHA. I thought it was only superficial.

CRAY. And it's you who's changed me. You've suddenly acquired an enormous influence over me. I've done things for you that no one has persuaded me to do for years. And the amazing thing is that I've felt better for doing them.

MARTHA. That's natural.

CRAY. I've changed not only in my health and habits, but I think in my outlook on things as well. You seemed to bring . . . what was it Madge said ? . . . fresh air and sunshine into the house. You seemed to come into a stuffy room and open the window. It's done me a world of good. (*He passes his hand over his face.*) I'm speaking quite sincerely, Martha. I don't believe I've spoken really sincerely for years until this moment.

MARTHA. I'm glad I've done some good, Vincent ;



even if I've done it rather brutally. I don't suppose you can ever forgive me the trick I played you.

CRAY. I can forgive you. (*Softly.*) And you can make amends if you choose.

MARTHA (*gently*). Are you asking me to marry you again, Vincent?

CRAY. I'm not going to complain if you can't. If you hadn't tried your cure on me I daresay I should be telling you it was your duty to carry out your part of the bargain; and that a promise was sacred; and whining about my lonely life.

MARTHA. It will be rather lonely now, won't it?

CRAY. I shall have to make the best of it. I can go away for a time, or live in lodgings. And you've given me the idea of taking up new interests. I shan't be so helpless as I should have been before you came here.

MARTHA. Am I to give you an answer now?

CRAY. When you like. Whenever you feel that you can . . . that you can risk it.

MARTHA (*smiling*). Oughtn't I to think about it a bit more?

CRAY. You want to make sure that your cure is permanent?

MARTHA. No; I'm not a coward. But I'm not quite sure whether I should make you happy.

CRAY (*quietly*). That's my look-out, Martha, isn't it?

MARTHA (*smiling*). Well, then . . . (*Taking his hands, after a tiny pause.*) Let's risk it.

*The CURTAIN falls.*

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