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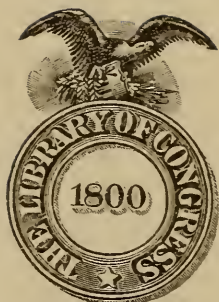
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1914

MODERN PLAYS

THE BROWN WOMAN

EDWIN PHILIPSON



Class PR5177
Book 54
1914



THE SECRET WOMAN

THE SECRET WOMAN

A PLAY IN FIVE ACTS

BY

EDEN PHILLPOTTS

NEW YORK

BRENTANO'S

1914

PR 5177
S 4
1914

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CHARACTERS

ANTHONY REDVERS, *of Harter Farm*

JESSE REDVERS
MICHAEL REDVERS } *his sons*

NATHANIEL TAPP } *labourers at Harter*
JOSHUA BLOOM }

WILLIAM ARSCOTT, *veterinary surgeon*

JOSEPH WESTAWAY, *of Watchett Hill Farm*

TOBY HANNAFORD

NED PEARN
HALF A DOZEN OTHER MEN } *who came to the meeting of*
AND TWO WOMEN } *Mr. Westaway's creditors*

A POLICE INSPECTOR AND

TWO CONSTABLES

ANN REDVERS, *wife of Anthony*

BARBARA WESTAWAY } *daughters of Joseph Westaway*
SALOME WESTAWAY }

SARAH TAPP, *wife of Nathaniel*

(One year passes between Act II and Act III)

The scene is in and near Harter Farm in the Dartmoors

CAST OF THE FIRST PRODUCTION AT
THE KINGSWAY THEATRE, ON TUESDAY,
FEBRUARY 20TH, 1912

ANTHONY REDVERS
JESSE REDVERS
MICHAEL REDVERS
NATHANIEL TAPP
JOSHUA BLOOM
WILLIAM ARSCOTT
JOSEPH WESTAWAY
TOBY HANNAFORD
NED PEARN
POLICE INSPECTOR
ANN REDVERS
BARBARA WESTAWAY
SALOME WESTAWAY
SARAH TAPP

CLAUDE KING
HUNTER NESBIT
HAROLD CHAPIN
E. H. PATERSON
WILLIAM FARREN
HORACE HODGES
CHARLES DALY
J. E. DANIELS
ALLAN WADE
TOM MOWBRAY
JANET ACHURCH
ESMÉ HUBBARD
IRIS HOEY
MRS. A. B. TAPPING

ACT I

SCENE : *The kitchen of Harter Farm in the Dartmoors.*

A white-washed room with large, open hearth, on which a fire burns. A flight of stone steps descends into the kitchen. At back, open two windows with deep embrasures, wherein are set pots of geraniums and succulent plants. On the left there stands a tall dresser with 'willow pattern' and other blue and white crockery. Beside the stairs, there stands a 'grandfather' clock. From the ceiling suspend hams, tied up in canvas, and a few bunches of herbs in muslin bags. Upon the mantelshelf are arranged various bright canisters of tin and brass and a piece of ornamental crockery at each end. Above, against the wall, hang a gun and a whip or two on a rack, a pair of spurs, and an old powder-flask. On one side of the mantelshelf hangs a fox's mask with a grocer's almanac under it; on the other side, a stuffed badger in a glass case. Upon the hearth are pots and pans. A long, bare, deal table runs down left of centre and benches stand on each side of it. There is a smaller table between the windows with a board and rolling-pin, a flour-dredger and a jar or two upon it. A pail, brooms

and dusters litter the floor. A settle stands at right angles to the fire.

[JOSHUA BLOOM *and* SARAH TAPP *discovered.*

BLOOM. The days of peace are over.

SARAH. [*Rolling pastry.*] That's like you men! That's the thanks a woman gets. The missis goes to nurse her sick mother and all of us be sheep without the shepherd while she's away. Yes, all of us, Joshua Bloom—from her husband downward. And now, because she's coming back——

BLOOM. You know what I mean.

SARAH. Yes, I know. A woman like Ann Redvers do gall the common sort a bit. You want to be fine yourself to mark her fineness.

BLOOM. Well, you'd best to tidy up this here rogue's roost of a kitchen afore she comes home, else you'll hear more about her fineness than like. [*A whistling heard.*] Hark to master! When she's away, he wants her home again; when she's home, he'll soon want her away.

[*Enter* ANTHONY REDVERS.

REDVERS. William Arscott be riding down the hill, Joshua. Get over to him and take him to the stable. The mare's better since morning by the look of her.

[*Exit* BLOOM.

SARAH. Lucky for her! I pity any beast that gets into that hateful hoss doctor's hands. He's harder than moorstone—that man—for the granite lets the moss live on it.

REDVERS. You're not fair to him, Sarah. He's only hard outside.

SARAH. Hard, hard all through. We women know. Ax Barbara Westaway.

REDVERS. She might have done worse than take him when he offered; for, if she had, the family wouldn't be in such a tight place as it is now.

SARAH. 'Twill be the workhouse for 'em all.

REDVERS. Nonsense, nonsense! They've some good friends yet. And the girls are both fighters. Where's Jesse and Michael got to?

SARAH. Michael have gone to catch a trout for his mother's tea. Jesse's reading by the waterfall.

REDVERS. Dash that chap! He'll be reading when the Trump of Doom sounds.

SARAH. Same as you'll be whistling, master. No doubt each human creature will be surprised following out his habits. And that's a sure reason why us should have good habits and not bad. Not much hope for them as be caught red-handed in wickedness at the Last Trump.

REDVERS. You preach another time, Sarah, or you'll be caught red-handed in this muck of a kitchen. 'Tis the missis, not the Last Trump be coming. [*Enter JESSE with book.*] You'd best to put that book away, Jesse, and buzz about. Mother'll be home by tea-time and I've got fifty things to do yet afore then. [*To SARAH.*] Has Nathaniel started with the trap?

SARAH. He was away an hour agone.

JESSE. I met Barbara Westaway this morning, father. The Westaways are coming over presently.

REDVERS. Ah!

JESSE. They know that mother's due back, and they're set on bringing a little gift to mark her home-coming.

REDVERS. [*Whistles while JESSE speaks, and goes on whistling a few notes after he has finished. Suddenly he stops and speaks.*] How would it do if we asked 'em to tea?

JESSE. Why not?

SARAH. Haven't you got more sense? Be it likely that missis will want a pack of strangers?

JESSE. They're not strangers.

REDVERS. Sarah's right all the same. 'Twouldn't do. [*Passes flowers in window.*] I wish that geranium had blowed for her—the white one she's so fond of; but flowers don't care no more for people than bees do for Sunday.

[*Exit whistling.*]

[*JESSE sits down by the fire and lolls back with his hands in his pockets and a pipe in his mouth. He takes a feather from a tin of feathers on the mantelshelf and cleans his pipe.*]

SARAH. Now don't you sit caddling there, Jesse—it ban't the time for it. I want your room, not your company.

JESSE. There's an hour yet.

[*Enter MICHAEL.*]

SARAH. Hast caught a fish for mother, Michael?

MICHAEL. Yes, I have—a whacker; a good half-pound he runs. She'll have it fresh as fresh. I be going up over to meet the trap in a minute.

SARAH. 'Tis a red-letter day. I always vow that this house be like a corpse without her.

[She begins to tidy up, and MICHAEL helps her for a time.]

MICHAEL. So 'tis then; father's nought when she's away. All he does be to make bad bargains. 'Tis my mother has the brains, Sarah.

[Stops helping SARAH, takes a whip from the bracket above the fireplace and prepares to mend it at the table. To do so he brings cobbler's wax and whipcord from a drawer in the dresser.]

JESSE. *[Shutting his book and flinging it across into the settle.]* That's foolishness, Michael. I know mother's wiser than the run of women, and watchful for father, and a saint of God if you like; but in brains—no. Father's first there.

MICHAEL. I like father well enough—as well as you like mother anyway; but mother's the light of this house. And if you be going to speak against mother, Jesse, don't you do it afore me. I care for her better than you do, and you're jealous of me, because she loves me best.

SARAH. Hush, you boys! Go an' get your fish, Michael, and be quiet.

MICHAEL. I won't hear mother run down by him, or anybody on God's earth.

JESSE. D'you think I mind because mother likes you best? Why, 'tis the proper thing. You're all mother through and through—save in wits. And I'm father over again. He understands me.

MICHAEL. If he do, you're about the only thing he does understand.

JESSE. [*Starting up.*] You're a wicked rascal to say that! But you shan't anger me with with your trash. I see your game; you want to drive me out of my father's house and be free of me. Well, it may happen that way. I don't love Harter, and I don't love you.

MICHAEL. [*Passionately throwing down his whip.*] Jesse, Jesse! You'll drive me mad! Ban't you my elder brother? God, He knows I never thought of such a thing—never.

JESSE. Oh, shut up—here's Arscott.

[*Enter WILLIAM ARSCOTT.*]

ARSCOTT. Where's the whistling man?

MICHAEL. Gone to look for the hoos-doctoring man, I reckon.

JESSE. Father was here a minute ago.

ARSCOTT. Well, give me a drop of cider and then I'll away. Can't wait for him.

[*Exit SARAH scowling at ARSCOTT.*]

MICHAEL. They don't call you Busy Billy for nothing, Mr. Arscott.

ARSCOTT. No, my son, they do not. I'll send over

a ball for the mare. There's nothing much wrong. Don't work her till I've seen her again.

MICHAEL. [*Looking at JESSE.*] Father thought she was going to die.

[*Enter SARAH with jug and mug on tray.*

ARSCOTT. And you'd like to put a pinch of poison in it, wouldn't you, Mrs. Tapp?

SARAH. I say you're hard and I know you're hard.

ARSCOTT. Must be 'ard if you want to be 'appy. Good luck, ma'am, I'd sooner have this tap than yours.

[MICHAEL *laughs*. ARSCOTT *drinks*. REDVERS' *whistle is heard*. He enters as ARSCOTT *puts down mug*.

ARSCOTT. [*Shakes hands.*] Well, Redvers, your mare ban't going home this time.

REDVERS. Bother the mare, Billy; what's this I hear tell about Joe Westaway?

ARSCOTT. How should I know? That he's a silly old fool and wants it both ways, perhaps. But you can't eat your cake and have it too. 'Tis time a few of us saw our money.

REDVERS. Don't you be too short with the man. He's done a lot of good in his time.

ARSCOTT. If you was a creditor, you wouldn't be so large-minded.

MICHAEL. 'Tis all very well to give the children pennies, when you're owing the fathers pounds. That's what Mr. Westaway does.

ARSCOTT. [*To MICHAEL*] Ah! You're the chap for

me! Money's money, and he's got to face the music—like the rest of us.

[Exit with MICHAEL. JESSE goes back to his book.]

SARAH. A holy terror that man! He'd sell the primrosen off his mother's grave. Poor old Joe won't have a shirt to his back when Arscott have done with him.

[Picks up broom and dusters and goes upstairs.]

REDVERS. There's no credit for being generous now-a-days. In fact there's no credit for anything.

JESSE. *[Putting down book.]* Why does mother like Michael better than me, father?

REDVERS. Stuff and nonsense!

JESSE. He's little better than a fool sometimes.

REDVERS. Michael's no fool. He's your mother again. You and me ban't quite so hard at the edges as mother and Michael—more like to be broken in consequence. *[Whistles gently.]*

JESSE. I don't care—so long as I am your favourite.

REDVERS. There's the Westaways! *[Goes to the door as the Westaways pass the window.]* Come in, come in. *[He throws open the door.]*

[Enter JOSEPH WESTAWAY, with BARBARA and SALOME behind him.]

REDVERS. Why! Here's a fine sight for sore eyes! How's yourself, flock-master?

[Both JESSE and ANTHONY show great pleasure. They all shake hands.]

WESTAWAY. Under the weather a bit and I won't

deny it. 'Twill come right no doubt, but the means be hid from me for the minute. No matter about my troubles. Your missis be coming home, so nought would do but Salome must pick her a gert bunch of bluebells and Barbara fetch along a brave pair of ducks. 'Tis coals to Newcastle, as I told 'em.

[JESSE takes the ducks from BARBARA and the bluebells from SALOME.]

REDVERS. Far from it, Joe. She'll be properly pleased, I promise you.

JESSE. We'll get some water for these, Salome.

SALOME. Will this jug do?

[Goes to dresser and takes a jug from it.]

JESSE. Mother's fond of bluebells.

[Exeunt JESSE and SALOME.]

WESTAWAY. [*Sitting in armchair by the fire, as REDVERS directs.*] Far be it from me to throw a shadow on the day; but things be at a climax to Watchett Hill, my dear.

REDVERS. So I hear; and I don't believe it.

BARBARA. You ask Busy Billy.

WESTAWAY. Who'd have thought such things could hap? A good while ago we was cornered for money here and there, and so I just up and signed a few documents. 'Twas as easy as shelling peas, Anthony, and I made up my mind, very steadfast from that moment, that my beautiful girls shouldn't be pinched—not so long as I could put my hand to a document.

REDVERS. A pity 'twas Arscott you went to.

WESTAWAY. Why? The man thought the world of

me and my family. He offered ten year ago for Barbara!

BARBARA. You didn't ought to mention it, father.

REDVERS. Everybody knows it, my dear.

WESTAWAY. And he kept single for ever after, because she couldn't do with him. But I could; and knowing him for a very deep and clever chap, where money was the matter, I went to him, 'in a large spirit, and he met me in the same—so I thought at the time.

BARBARA. Three hundred we borrowed from him on a mortgage.

WESTAWAY. And now the money have mounted up something shocking.

REDVERS. Didn't you pay no interest?

WESTAWAY. Certainly I'd meant to do so. But it slipped my memory, along of one thing and another, and he was too much the gentleman, as I thought, to name it. And what with standing him treat at 'The Hearty Welcome' and 'The Green Man'—scores and scores of times; and what with sending him many and many a good goose and turkey; and what with fresh eggs and a bit o' cream and so on, I thought it would turn out all right. Then, being uncommon short, I offered to put my hand to another document again—last week 'twas—and, to my surprise, Master Billy went so nasty as a rat in a trap and forgot all about they geese and turkeys and free drinks and all! Properly mazed I was. You see my interest have gone on compounding all by itself.

That's the worse of money! it won't stand still. It always runs from you, or to you.

REDVERS. True enough, Joe.

BARBARA. And now father will mighty soon be a flock-master without any flock.

WESTAWAY. And a farmer without any farm.

REDVERS. 'Tis a thousand pities you let the interest go.

WESTAWAY. So 'tis then. And us have got to take the boots and shoes out of the bread-and-butter at Watchett Hill in consequence—ain't we, Barbara? But next year will see us righted, I hope. We be going to retrench.

BARBARA. If there was vartue in a word, we'd soon be easy. 'Tis 'retrench' with father from morn till night now.

REDVERS. The thing is to do it.

WESTAWAY. Dallybuttons! And don't I do it? Like a hawk I be grown. Why, I'll snap the sugar-basin off the table if I think my maidens be making too free—aye, and the teapot, too! I tell 'em to go out in the hedges and gather marjoram and brew herby tea—same as our grandmothers did.

BARBARA. Billy Arscott's the danger. The others be a kindly lot.

[JESSE enters with SALOME. Both are downcast.]

WESTAWAY. I don't want mercy nor nothing like that. I've gived and gived all my life, Redvers, and if there's none to give to me in my turn—why, I can go without. I'm a patient old blade. as we all should

be at seventy; but justice—justice I've a right to claim.

JESSE. Just the one thing you can take your oath you won't get, Mr. Westaway.

WESTAWAY. Don't you be so acid at your time of life, my son.

REDVERS. [*Impulsively, after looking at SALOME.*] Well, come in here with me, Joe—in my workshop. I'm wishful to hear a bit more about this. Don't you go, you girls; I shan't keep him long. [*Aside to SALOME.*] Bide a bit.

BARBARA. Where's Mrs. Tapp to?

REDVERS. She's busy sweeping and garnishing. The missis was due at Okehampton afore five. Tapp's off to fetch her. Come on, Joe.

JESSE. Sarah's up over, Barbara.

BARBARA. Then I'll run and see her. [*Goes upstairs.*]

REDVERS. This way, master.

[*Exeunt REDVERS and WESTAWAY.*]

SALOME. There, mind you tell her I picked 'em for her.

[*Puts jug of bluebells on table.*]

JESSE. You don't answer me—you must do that at least, Salome. You know how things are with me. It's like coming alive out of death when I'm alone with you for a moment. Oh, Salome, why not, my pretty bird? But you say nought—and no news isn't good news when a chap's courting.

SALOME. [*Treating JESSE as if he were a boy.*] I'm not for a husband, my dear. We must be sensible.

'Tis all the poor can be. No time to think about marrying. My sister and me have got to keep father out of the workhouse somehow.

JESSE. If I could only help!

SALOME. You can't. None can, so we must stir ourselves.

JESSE. If I had money!

SALOME. If—if! Nobody's got no money here, but Arscott. He's made of it.

JESSE. My father's well to do.

SALOME. Long may he bide so.

JESSE. I hope Arscott will be generous.

SALOME. Not him! I reckon my father can show him where that road leads.

JESSE. I'm such a useless brute.

SALOME. Don't you say that. You've got plenty of brains—if you'd but use 'em.

JESSE. Salome, would twenty pounds be any use?

SALOME. No, nor yet fifty. Keep your savings.

JESSE. I feel I could do things, if I were once out of this place. 'Tis like a prison to me sometimes. If it wasn't for you here—and father.

SALOME. You can't do wiser than stick to him, and forget me.

JESSE. Mother's so——

SALOME. Yes—I understand. Well—she'll be here and wish us at Jericho in a minute. [*Rising.*] You've said some pretty things to me, Jesse, and I'm sure you meant them; but I'm not the marrying sort. I must be free,

JESSE. [*Gloomily.*] The likes of you don't go free for long.

SALOME. I'm far off what you think. There's a lot of the devil in me, Jesse.

JESSE. You wake the devil in others. You're an angel yourself—all—all angel—to the dinky dimple at the corner of your mouth. [*SALOME smiles, but not at him.*] I'll win you yet! I'll live to do some mighty big thing, and *make* you love me!

[*SARAH and BARBARA descend the stairs.*]

SALOME. Then set about it. Stop reading books and go into the world. You're all boy still.

[*Exit* JESSE.]

BARBARA. 'Tis no use saying them things against the vetinary, Mrs. Tapp. William Arscott lent father good money on the farm at a very ticklish time; and now he wants it again; as we all well knew he would. And why not? Who shall blame him? I don't for one. The man's honest, and we must be the same.

SARAH. A saint of God like your father! Anybody did ought to be proud to lend him money—and forget it.

[*Enter* REDVERS and WESTAWAY.]

WESTAWAY. 'Tis more, far more than I can ask or expect, Anthony.

REDVERS. Stuff and rubbish. Wouldn't you help me at a pinch, if it had been t'other way round?

WESTAWAY. List, you girls. 'Tis an answer to

prayer. Redvers be going bail for me! He will do it, though I beg him not.

BARBARA. You can't, Mr. Redvers—'tis out of reason.

REDVERS. Right's better than reason, Barbara. You very well know what your father and you girls be to me. Not another word. I'll see Hannaford to-morrow, and Arscott too.

BARBARA. [*To SARAH.*] What'll Mrs. Redvers say?

SARAH. [*Going off with rolling-pin and board, &c.*] Same as your father: that 'tis an answer to prayer.

[*Exit.*]

BARBARA. We can't thank you. 'Tis high above thanks.

REDVERS. I'm properly glad to do it.

WESTAWAY. You'll reap your reward in this world, as well as the next, my son. For 'twill *pay* you, Anthony—over and above the kindness and goodness and Christian charity and the blessing of it—beyond all that, there's the *interest*, and you'll be just so much amazed as I was to see the way that jumps up. Pounds and pounds in your pocket in no time!

BARBARA. Come on home, father. Mrs. Redvers will be back before you've done talking.

WESTAWAY. Good-bye; good-bye, my dear man; and God bless you and reward you.

BARBARA. We can only feel it.

SALOME. I'll come after. I want to tell Mr. Redvers about they ponies Tom Bassett takes to market next week.

REDVERS. Good-bye—good-bye. Let your minds be easy. Everything's going all right.

[BARBARA and MR. WESTAWAY go out.]

REDVERS. [*Looks round to see they are alone.*] O lord, I thought I was never going to get a glimpse of my precious girl!

[*Puts his arms round SALOME.*]

SALOME. Take care, Tony. Where's Sarah? You darling man to help 'em! But can you—can you do this for father and not hurt your own?

REDVERS. Of course I can, and proud to do it! The money's safe enough in the long run, if I take over the mortgage and the life insurance from Arcott. Leave that.

SALOME. I couldn't speak when I heard, because I knew so well 'twas for me you'd done it.

REDVERS. What better reason? Be all safe for Thursday?

SALOME. Of course it be.

REDVERS. At the broom patch. There's a full moon.

SALOME. I'll be there. Whistle and I'll come to you, Tony. I'll come singing—and love to come—always—always!

REDVERS. My little armful of joy!

[*Takes her in his arms again.*]

SALOME. [*Sings 'Widcombe Fair' very softly for his ear alone.*]

“Tom Pearce, Tom Pearce, lend me thy grey mare,
All along, down along, out along lee,

For I want for to go to Widecombe Fair,
Wi' Bill Brewer, Jan Stewer, Peter Gurney."

REDVERS. [*Sings softly.*]

"Peter Davy, Dan'l Whiddon, Harry Hawk!"

SALOME.

"Old Uncle Tom Cobleigh and all—
Old Uncle Tom Cobleigh and all!"

REDVERS. I love that song better'n any music on earth! It means you—you dinky, grey-eyed thing!

SALOME. Our fun's over for a bit I reckon. A heavenly time we've had, Tony!

REDVERS. Better'n heaven, Sally. There won't be no Halstock Glen in heaven. There won't be no little holt for you and your old red fox in heaven.

SALOME. [*Kisses him.*] Ban't you tired of me?

REDVERS. When I'm tired of my life—not sooner.

SALOME. Are you glad she's coming home?

REDVERS. Yes, I am. I think the wide world of Ann, and you know it. She's a grand woman—a wonder among women. She did ought to come home happy, for she's nursed her mother into life again after she was given up by the doctor. Please God all will go smooth, as I like it to. We can live our lives but once, and 'tis a sad pity to see a woman so stern and hard with herself as Ann. Terrible high-minded and religious is she.

SALOME. Darkness to your light. . . . If she knew. . . .

REDVERS. I feared once, but I don't now. What

the heart don't guess, the soul don't smart for. She'll never know.

SALOME. Jesse offered marriage to me again by the waterfall just now. 'Tis like hearing a child chirrup about love—after knowing a man's.

REDVERS. I must rattle up Jesse and make him tackle life. He's always mooning over his books. [*Embraces her.*] Well, get going. [*Kisses her.*] Till Thursday. I'll make a snug nest for my li'l dormouse!

[She goes off and REDVERS walks to the door and watches her with happiness in his eyes. He whistles 'Widcombe Fair' gently. He then returns to the kitchen and begins to help in the business of making it tidy.]

[Enter SARAH.]

REDVERS. Don't you say nothing about that matter of helping Joe Westaway, Sarah.

SARAH. [*Takes tablecloth from drawer in the dresser and begins to prepare for tea on the long table.*] 'Tis no business of ours. You'll tell your wife when you choose. *[Enter BLOOM.]*

BLOOM. The trap be in sight up 'pon top of the hill, master!

REDVERS. I'll run out then. Put they bluebells in the midst of the table, Sarah. They'll please her tremendous. *[Exit.]*

BLOOM. He's like a play-actor, that man. Be damned if he ain't fooling himself he wants her back!

SARAH. You bitter-weed! Here, take they pots and get 'em out of the way, and fill the kettle.

BLOOM. [*Staring round.*] My stars! The kitchen ain't looked like this since she went out of it.

[*Exit with a pot or two, the kettle and a saucepan from the hearth. Enter MICHAEL, he carries some hand luggage.*

MICHAEL. Here she is—here's mother, Sarah. And she's so thin as a herring and pale as a lily. But she's all right! She's all right!

[*Enter TAPP with a yellow tin box. There follow him ANN REDVERS and REDVERS.*

ANN. [*Coming down and watching TAPP take her box upstairs.*] Be careful at the corner, Nat. If that box touches the wall, 'twill leave an ugly mark we're better without. [*Exit TAPP upstairs.*] And how are you, Sarah? [*Shakes hands with MRS. TAPP.*] You're looking pretty well and feel so, I hope. All be suent and vitty, I see.

[*Takes in the room swiftly. Her manner is quick, sharp and apprehensive.*

SARAH. We've done our bestest. The house be water-sweet from top to bottom.

REDVERS. Sarah's been up at cock-light this week past, and everyone of us has lent a hand.

MICHAEL. Never was a properer spring-cleaning, mother. [*Exit.*

ANN. We shall see as to that. [*Her eyes are every where.*] 'Tis good to be back. But how much to do Where's Jesse? He did ought—

REDVERS. [*Aside to ANN.*] He's about, but he's down on his luck. There's a reason. I'll whisper it come presently. [*Enter JESSE.*]

JESSE. Ah! mother dear! [*Takes off his hat and kisses her*] You look but poorly though, and pale and tired.

ANN. I've only got the headache along of the train. A cup of tea will cure it. Be you all right?

[*Enter BLOOM with kettle.*]

BLOOM. Good evening, missis. I hope I see you pretty clever.

ANN. Nicely, Joshua, nicely. And your rheumatics?

BLOOM. Worse and worse, ma'am. They do gnaw my bones, like a hungry dog of a night.

[*MRS. REDVERS moves about; her eyes perceive everything. All are solicitous to please her.*]

ANN. Take them bluebells off the table and out of that jug, Sarah. That's the one I don't use. 'Tis worth money.

JESSE. Salome Westaway brought the bluebells for you, mother.]

ANN. Very kind of her. The window-sill's the place for them—not the tea-table. [*SARAH moves flowers and puts them into another jug.*] The plants do look a bit thirsty to my eyes.

REDVERS. Don't you trouble about them. They're all right.

ANN. "Don't trouble!" That's your old motto, father. I don't want to hear that. [*TAPP descends the staircase with a piece of rope.*] I'll go and take off my

hat and then tea will be ready. Don't you cook nothing for me; I'm off my food just now.

REDVERS. My life, that won't do! 'Tis time and more'n time you was home again.

ANN. [*Going up staircase.*] More'n time, as you say, father.

[REDVERS *follows her with hand luggage and a parcel or two.*

ANN. [*Turning.*] Leave 'em there. I'll go through 'em presently. Just a little gift or two for all of 'e. I shan't be two minutes.

TAPP. I've took the rope off the box, missis.

ANN. Put it by in the loft. 'Tis new. I want you, Sarah.

[*She goes upstairs. SARAH follows her. TAPP goes out and Bloom follows him. REDVERS turns to exit whistling.*

JESSE. What's upset the apple-cart now? Was it my fault?

REDVERS. She's only tired and full of thoughts what to do first.

JESSE. And what to undo that we've done to please her.

REDVERS. Nay, nay. Her quick eye taketh in so much more than we men know about. 'Tis only the headache; she'll come round presently.

[*Enter SARAH from upstairs and MICHAEL with a frying-pan and a fish.*

MICHAEL. Where's the fat, Sarah? 'Tis time as I cooked my trout for mother.

SARAH. Missis will be down house in a minute and the water's near boiling. *[Goes off.]*

REDVERS. Brew it strong, Sarah ; brew it strong.

[Exit whistling with JESSE. SARAH returns with some grease for the fish on a plate and MICHAEL puts it upon the fire.]

SARAH. I doubt she'll eat it, Michael.

MICHAEL. Yes, she will—when she hears tell that I've catched it and cooked it for her. Don't forget the water-cresses.

SARAH. There! If I hadn't. *[She goes off.]*

MICHAEL. *[Shouting.]* Mother, be you coming ? I've got a brave trout frying for 'e.

ANN. *[Upstairs.]* I'm down in a moment, Michael boy.

MICHAEL. *[Shouting.]* 'Tis damn fine to hear your beautiful voice again, mother !

ANN. *[At top of stairs.]* Don't you use them bad words, my dear.

[Descends the stairs. She has taken off her hat and jacket.]

MICHAEL. Look at this gert fish waiting for you to eat 'un !

ANN. I doubt I can eat it. I be off my food for the minute.

MICHAEL. *[Takes fish off the fire and rises.]* You must eat it, mother. You be wisht. *[Looks at her closely.]* There's something fretting you. Don't tell me there isn't, for I know it.

ANN. Yes, I'm a bit worried.

MICHAEL. Tell me.

ANN. [*Smiling for the first time.*] What a chap for finding out your mother's secrets!

MICHAEL. I'll bet 'tis some of father's secrets more like.

ANN. His secrets be all meant so well that I haven't the heart—but there 'tis—his surprises—buying ponies and one thing and another—they mostly come out wrong side the ledger.

MICHAEL. He's got ponies on the brain still.

ANN. 'Tisn't that—but—well, I'd best think no more about it.

MICHAEL. All's well now you be home again. You'll soon steady father down.

ANN. [*Laughs.*] I'd be a cleverer woman than I am to do that.

MICHAEL. Cleverer than you be! I'd like to see the cleverer woman than you.

ANN. [*Now in good temper.*] You flatterer! You'll be a fine love-maker some day, Michael.

MICHAEL. I shall never see a girl like you to fall in love with, mother.

[ANN smiles and goes to table. SARAH enters with water-cress and plate for fish.

MICHAEL brings his fish to the table. SARAH then goes to door.

SARAH. [*Calling.*] Tea—tea—tea be ready!

[TAPP and BLOOM enter and take their places at the table.

TAPP. You do look a thought pinnikin and poor like, missis.

ANN. Along of that stuffy Exeter, Nathaniel. Nobody has their fair share of air in a town, I reckon.

[Enter REDVERS and JESSE. MICHAEL takes his place beside his mother, who sits at the top of the table. SARAH sits on MICHAEL'S left. JESSE goes to the left of his mother and REDVERS takes the bottom of the table. The tea pot is before MRS. REDVERS.]

SARAH. Shall I pour for 'e, ma'am?

ANN. No, thank you, Sarah. Ax a blessing, father, please.

REDVERS. For what we are about to receive——

Curtain.

ACT II

SCENE: *The rear yard of Harter Farm. The house-door with deep porch opens on the left of the scene, and beside it stands a grindstone upon which are some tools. At the back, dividing the yard from the moor, falls a sharp cleft in the hills surmounted by trees. A gully lies beneath. A low, broken wall separates the yard from this gully, and at one spot, on the right, there is an opening in the wall from which steps descend and drop unseen to the water below. There are two further exits opening on the right of the stage, with the wall of a barn between them, and an exit on the left below the grindstone. There is a litter of straw and red fern about the yard, and a good pile of clean fern beside the barn. Behind the trees, the undulations of the moor roll away to tors on the horizon. There is a wooden bench beside the low wall at the back. A cream pan or two stands near the doorway on a board. The time is evening, and, during the act the light fades gradually from rosy brightness to the cool, pearl-grey twilight of June. The murmur of an unseen waterfall is heard.*

[JESSE and ANTHONY REDVERS discovered.]

JESSE *sits on the bench and looks over the wall to the water beneath; his father sharpens a scythe on the grindstone.*

REDVERS. I can't understand—I can't understand dear mother. She went out last night to see Mrs. Ford, and that late she returned that I was in bed and asleep afore she came home. But to bed she never did come—nor have I seen her to-day, though I rose at dawn and hunted high and low. When I was out of the way she came back, so Sarah tells me, all weary and draggled—as if she'd been pixy-led.

JESSE. [*Looks up at the house.*] She's home now.

REDVERS. I know it—she's in her chamber and the door fast locked against me. Never did the like happen afore.

JESSE. If mother's got anything on her mind, you should hear it, I suppose.

REDVERS. Surely—surely. What be I for but to take the fret of life off her shoulders? Though, Lord knows, you can't always do it, when a person hides her troubles so close.

JESSE. I should have thought a wife would have no troubles away from her husband, nor secrets either.

REDVERS. Nay, nay; we've all got secrets. 'Tis part of human nature to harbour 'em.

JESSE. [*Listlessly.*] I can't keep secrets—must be sharing them. You don't think like mother.

REDVERS. She's a strong thinker, and I'm never too comfortable when she gets thinking. [JESSE *nods.*

[Enter BLOOM with milk pails.

REDVERS. A faulty, erring man, am I, Jesse; but I do my poor best for them I care about. But this —this antic of locking herself up. She never did that afore.

BLOOM. That baggering heron be down on the river again.

REDVERS. He's better dead. He eats a lot of trout. I'll tell Michael to get his gun.

[He looks up at the windows and shows uneasiness; but he whistles from force of habit. Then he goes off.

BLOOM [Putting down his cans.] Be there a thunder planet in the air? I'll wager she's heard about the master helping Joe Westaway?

JESSE. He hasn't told her yet.

BLOOM. But somebody else have. She was in the village last night, with the Fords, and she didn't come home till Lord knows when. A helpless pauper like Joe be born to make trouble—sure as the sparks fly upwards. And goes his way rejoicing and says 'tis an answer to prayer! But a cat and a fool always fall on their feet.

JESSE. The prayer to pray is the one you can answer yourself.

BLOOM. That's right. Hard work's the only prayer as gets answered on Dartymoor.

JESSE. 'Tis the fools make all the fret and worry, Joshua.

BLOOM. You be a fool, too—running after a maiden.

JESSE. How about when you were in love?

BLOOM. Never—no more than a caterpillar, I never cared a cuss for females. Nature tickles us humans into breeding afore we've got the sense to keep away from it—that's her craft. But she didn't get over me.

JESSE. You was never a hopeful man.

[*Enter SARAH from house.*]

BLOOM. Never, and never shall be.

SARAH. Come on Joshua, I'm waiting for that milk.

BLOOM. [*To JESSE.*] But you'll get your turn—don't fear. Us all have the chance to show what we be good for once in our lives.

JESSE. Did you?

BLOOM. Yes, I did. And I was drunk at the time and missed it.

SARAH. You be so impatient, Jesse—impatient with humans and impatient with hosses and impatient with the very growing things in the fields.

JESSE. Patient people always get left behind, Sarah—'tis no virtue. [*Exit.*]

SARAH. He can say that! And brought up a Christian! Ban't God in Heaven patient before all things.

BLOOM. God A'mighty patient! I should hope He was. 'Tisn't a very strange thing, surely, for the

father of a large family to be patient with his own cranky childer? If the Lord can't bear with us, who should?

SARAH. His ways ban't our ways. 'Twould be taking the bread out of parson's mouth if we understood the Almighty.

BLOOM. And well parson knows it! Yonder boy is after Salome Westaway, and she won't take him.

[Picking up buckets.]

SARAH. You didn't lift his hopes, I lay?

BLOOM. No man hears me praise matrimony. I've got to thank it for all my troubles.

SARAH. You? You're a bachelor.

BLOOM. Born in wedlock.

[Exit. As he goes off, ANN REDVERS comes out of house. She is dressed in black and looks haggard and very weary.]

SARAH. Good Lord, missis—what's—?

ANN. Tell Michael I'm down, Sarah.

SARAH. I'll seek him. He's clamouring for you.

[SARAH goes off. ANN sits on the bench and looks before her, staring at the picture in her thoughts. MICHAEL hurries in. He carries a gun and leans it against wall.]

MICHAEL. Mother! Thank goodness you be down house again! *[Kisses her.]* Whatever's amiss? I'm terrible troubled for 'e.

ANN. Scorched up—scorched up, body and soul. 'Twas like you to fret. Oh, my God! there ban't none to fret no more for me—none but you.

MICHAEL. Shall I call father?

ANN. Oh, Michael, Michael, he's nothing to us no more. A traitor, Michael—another woman.

MICHAEL. Father with another woman! You're dreaming—you're ill!

ANN. I saw with these eyes. False—false as the first snake—deep as the pit under his eternal laughing and gentleness.

MICHAEL. Be you sure? Be you sure, mother?

ANN. [*Very wearily.*] I've growed so old to-day—'tis so far to look back. And you're my dear son still; and he's your father.

MICHAEL. If I knowed where he was in me, I'd tear him out!

ANN. You mind, on the night I came home, that you thought I looked troubled?

MICHAEL. Aye.

ANN. 'Twas along of meeting Farmer Fortescue in Exeter. Your father wrote that he was going to Crediton market. But he never went. Fortescue had seen him that very afternoon alone in Halstock Woods.

MICHAEL. What troubled you?

ANN. To know he'd spoke false. Still I put it away and hoped he'd forgot. But yesterday evening I was along with the Fords—and Henry Ford began laughing how he'd seen father in Halstock Glen

by night. But why he couldn't guess. Then I set homeward and remembered father was out last night. Presently I stopped on the hill and listed to a nightjar churn out his queer talk. And then I saw Halstock lying dark over the river, and something made me slip down to the water and across the stepping-stones and climb up the Glen. Somehow I knew he was there; and I laughed to myself to think how I'd surprise Anthony if I chanced upon him. So I went under a rowan and waited for moon-rise. She came up behind the cleave all silver-bright, and the darkness was full of light and the silence was full of peace. My last peace in this world, Michael boy! But I thought 'twas good to be there. I said to myself, "You'd be wiser, Ann Redvers, if you comed out like this of a night sometimes, after the bustle of day, and let your soul take rest at the edge of the dark." Then I felt small and mean—to be hid—prying—Ann Redvers prying! My heart rose, and I stood up in the moonlight and turned to go away. [*Pause.*] But all of a moment, afore I could be gone, there fell a noise out of the night. A man whistling 'Widecombe Fair.' It sounded ugly and broke the fine peace. But I knew 'twas Anthony and thought no ill.

MICHAEL. Happy or sad he must be whistling.

ANN. I was going straight to him with my tale of being puzzled and troubled. And then—and then—— [*Pause.*] The man was laden. He carried a bundle of fern, and threw it down in a snug place, where the

yellow broom grew high round about. Its flowers were all turned to whiteness by the moonlight. And he spread the fern and made a soft couch of it. Presently he laughed—he laughed; and his laughter touched something deep down in me. 'Twas the laugh that always goes before a drink of cider with him, and the Sunday dinner, and such good things. And I said, "What feast be coming to Anthony Redvers here?" And suddenly I guessed. [*She breaks off and walks up and down. MICHAEL stares at her half in fear.*] I came near screaming then—near screaming I came. He sat down and still he whistled 'Widcombe Fair.' And then—far'off—scarce louder than a bird, that wakes at night and sings a little note—a woman's voice; and he leapt upon his feet. "My li'l nightingale!" he said. Oh God! I'd fought so hard to save one spark of hope till then. But that killed it. . . . She came—just a shadow out of the light—and I saw the two of them thicken into one, and I heard his kisses on her face. But she spoke nought. So they sank into the dark and I rushed off, careless of the noise I made. They heard nothing. They were glorying and drowning in each other. The Trump of God wouldn't have reached 'em. I wandered till light came. I tramped my feet raw. 'Twas a misty morning and the stars were smothered afore the dawn. I fell in the river once, Michael, and got wetted and bruised and never knew it.

MICHAEL. [*Going to her.*] Mother, mother! You

shan't suffer this. You shall leave father and come away along with me.

ANN. At first I weren't so very angry. Ban't that strange? 'Twas all astonishment. Him—so simple and thankful for small mercies where I was concerned! A man I'd chilled and chastened in his flesh. That he should look elsewhere! To think how he frisked when I come back, same as a dog that welcomes its mistress. 'Twas like a window opening into his soul, Michael—a window that I didn't know was there. And through it I saw him clean emptied of me and full of another woman.

MICHAEL. 'Tis a very wicked, shameful thing for certain.

ANN. Death—death's the least word. The insult the dishonour, the sin! God judge him—God judge him for it!

MICHAEL. Speak, and I'll take you away this very night.

ANN. Nay, my work's to do. He must hear—he must know.

[Enter REDVERS. *He exhibits great anxiety.*

REDVERS. At last, mother! For God's sake tell me what's gone wrong. I shall go mad at this gait.

MICHAEL. Mother . . .

REDVERS. [*Impatiently.*] You be off; I don't want you. Get you gone and try and shoot that thieving heron down the river. [MICHAEL *hesitates.*] Begone, I say!

[MICHAEL looks at his mother, takes up his gun, and then goes out. He indicates acute dislike of his father.]

REDVERS. Curse that boy! He treats me as if I was a bad smell. I'll have a whip-thong about his shoulders yet—old as he is. What's amiss, Ann? For God's love get it off your mind. There's all the woe of the world in your face.

ANN. [*Standing before him and speaking suddenly in a loud voice.*] What were you doing in the broom patch with a woman last night?

[REDVERS falls back and gasps. He keeps his eyes on her, draws a red handkerchief from his pocket and mops his face.]

ANN. I'd have believed it of any living man before you.

REDVERS. [*Very slowly.*] Once I thought you was bound to find out, and I feared it; and then time passed and I feared no more, and I thought you would never find out. And now you have. And so all's up. Thank God you can keep cool about it. No wife ever forgives that—no woman ever understands. What's your will, Anne?

[*Sits down quietly on form by the wall.*]

ANN. Have I been a good partner to you?

REDVERS. My pride and glory for three and twenty years—my first thought and prayer.

ANN. Liar! Cruel liar to talk that trash. False while you kissed me—false while you—

REDVERS. [*Rising.*] No, Ann—never. I call God to strike me dead where I stand if I tell anything but truth. I've been so true to you as I have been to myself.

ANN. True to yourself; false to all others belike.

REDVERS. Never. You've had my love and worship always.

ANN. I saw you make her bed.

REDVERS. Is it false to one woman to be fond of another? Has no man ever loved two women true and tender? 'Tis a thing in their power, I tell you—a thing that scores have done. I love you with all my heart and soul. I'd die for you, and die laughing. Can you call home an impatient word, or harsh speech, or unkind deed from me in all your life? I've loved you rising and sleeping—year in, year out—and you know it, Ann—you know it in your heart. And t'other be a dear thought to me also. I wouldn't deny it if I could. I know 'tis death to you to hear me say that; but it shall be said.

[*He sits down again.*]

ANN. She's younger than me?

REDVERS. Leave her out. There's no stain on her. The fault be mine—mine through and through. All went well enough, because none was hurt by it. But now that you be hurt so cruel, 'tis different. You won't understand. An angel from heaven wouldn't understand. 'Twould take a devil from hell to do

that—according to what you believe. The way of a man's body— [*Pause. REDVERS rises, and beats his breast.*] This here dust be nought—'twill go down to the pit ere long, and be forgot. But, afore God, my conscience is clear of evil.

ANN. Conscience! To come to me from cuddling her!

REDVERS. Try and grasp hold of my meaning afore tis too late, Ann. I'm built so. My flesh and blood's a bit too much for you and always was. And a bit too much for me sometimes. Try and understand that a man like me be turned on a different lathe from a woman like you. He's hungrier—thirstier—beastlier—yet I won't grant that neither, for I've never been that. [*She looks at him with passionate dislike, moves from him and goes down by the grindstone.*] Well, life's done. I won't ax you to be generous—that would be mean; and yet, if I don't ax it, you'll think that I don't want you to be. But if it had happened t'other way round—

ANN. [*Turns in wrath. She has taken a heavy knife off the grindstone where it lies with others.*] You dare! To think that—to harbour such a thought in your filthy mind against me!

REDVERS. No, no, no! I thought no such thing. There's no common clay at all in you. Who should know that like I know it?

ANN. [*Dropping the knife.*] If I'd been a bad wife—

REDVERS. The best ever a man had. I've blown

a trumpet about my luck ever since we wedded! 'Twas only the fret and trouble, and the children, and trifles like that ever came between us. But I was a weak fool to let such things hurt.

ANN. Ann Redvers to marry a weak fool! What was it to find that out? [*Staring at him.*] But I loved you. I was true as steel and I hid my feelings deep. You'd never have known them to your dying hour—but for this.

REDVERS. [*Strokes his beard and gives a little laugh.*] Did you think I didn't know? Nay, nay—'twasn't hid from me, Ann. I knew what you thought of me well enough. Your eyes told me. Often—often I've seen you despise me with 'em. . . . And now the past be past and done. I'm sorry—bitterly sorry about it—so all's said.

ANN. Why for are you sorry—you that pretend you did no sin?

REDVERS. Sorry 'tis found out. That's all. It went very well and offered a little joy for two harmless people.

ANN. Harmless! You've killed your soul—that's what you've done—and her's—and her's! Who have shared this masterpiece of wickedness with you?

REDVERS. Thank God you don't know—and please God you never shall. That's so much to the good anyway.

[*He sits down again. He reveals great grief upon his countenance. He leans forward and puts his hands between his knees.*]

ANN. After two and twenty years. . . .

[Her face indicates that she is thinking of old times. Emotions cross it. Grief fades to indifference, which anger banishes. Her expression grows inert, and then quickens into a momentary happiness. Looking into the bygone years, she smiles. For a moment she forgets. Then her face grows tender and yearning. He sees nothing; his eyes are on the ground. He whistles a few notes, then is silent. He turns to the wall presently and buries his face upon his arm. She takes a step or two towards him, then hesitates. She weeps and puts her hands over her face and goes into the house.]

REDVERS. *[Ignorant that she has gone.]* Don't tell the boys just yet, Ann. I'll do any mortal thing in reason. A hugeous upheaval. You say 'tis death—'tis worse than death. Death makes an end. But this—— *[Turns round and finds that his wife has gone. The sunset fires have faded and the light is dying. He walks to the door; then stands still. He picks up the knife that Anne dropped and puts it back on the grindstone. Then he goes to look over the broken wall at rear of yard. He stands where it is lowest and sets one foot upon it. He thrusts his hands into his breeches pockets. There is heard the sound of the waterfall.]* Poor Ann—poor Salome! *[He whistles mechanically. His face is unutterably mournful. He*

looks down into the gully and then up at the hills. For a few moments he ceases to whistle.] If I could bear it all,

[*He takes a step or two and then returns to the wall and the former position. Now he whistles 'Widecombe Fair' slowly. Enter ANN REDVERS from the door behind him. She weeps no more. Her face is bright with the spirit of forgiveness.*

ANN. Husband—I be going to pardon——

[*She breaks off and listens to the tune that he is whistling. It silences her and instantly changes her mood. ANN'S expression alters into one of fury. She glares at REDVERS, and loses her self-control. She flies at him, and strikes him with both hands together at the back of his neck. MICHAEL and JESSE appear down left. MICHAEL carries his gun.*

ANN. [*Screaming.*] Lewd, pitiless wretch!

REDVERS. [*Putting up both hands.*] Ann!

[*He topples forward and disappears. There is a moment's silence, then his body is heard to strike the rocks beneath.*

JESSE. You've killed him mother!

[*He hurries across to the steps in the wall and descends them.*

MICHAEL. [*Dropping his gun and hastening to ANN.*

Oh mother, you've done for him!

ANN. Help Jesse—quick—quick!

MICHAEL. I'll stick up for you for ever.

ANN. Go!

[MICHAEL descends the steps after JESSE.

JESSE. [*Below.*] I do think he lives.

ANN. Please God—Please God! [*She goes to the top of the steps.*] Gently. Hold up his head, Jesse!

[*She descends a few steps to help them.* JESSE and MICHAEL carry up their father.

JESSE. Lie him down here—heap the fern for his head.

[*They lower him gently on fern that litters the yard, near the wall of the barn.*

ANN. Fetch the brandy, Michael.

[ANN REDVERS kneels beside him and opens his collar and shirt. While she is thus engaged, JESSE starts running across to right exit. MICHAEL, who is now near door into house, leaps to his gun and picks it up.

MICHAEL. Stop! Come you back Jesse Redvers, or, by Christ, I'll shoot you!

JESSE. [*Turns and walks back. Both young men are trembling with rage.*] Shoot then—shoot me in the back—like she killed my father. I was going for doctor. But shoot, and be a murderer too. I don't want to live if he's gone.

[*He goes off.* ANN pays no heed to either of them. She knows now that her husband is dead.

MICHAEL. [*Calls off to JESSE.*] Bring back any other but doctor, and I'll swing for you!

[*Drops gun and turns to his mother.* ANN

places the head of ANTHONY REDVERS back gently and buttons up his shirt. She takes the red handkerchief from his pocket and wipes his face. Then she rises and moves away, but does not lift her eyes from him.

ANN. He's dead.

MICHAEL. 'Twas justice—and God knows it—and them that wouldn't understand never shall know it.

[She still gazes at REDVERS. MICHAEL creeps up to her and holds her hand. There remains the murmur of the waterfall.]

Curtain.

ACT III

SCENE: *The Parlour, Watchett Hill Farm. A poor room with a blurred looking-glass over the chimney-piece, and wedding and funeral cards stuck down the sides of it. The gilded frame is tarnished in many places. A suite of faded and withered green rep occupies the room, and some of the chairs, with broken legs, stand propped against the wall. The table carries a vase of dried grass, a family Bible, a worsted mat or two and a few books. There is also a small, light table, with ledgers and pen and ink upon it. Oleographs, hung very high, and mostly crooked, occupy the walls. The lace window-curtains are torn. The blind is white and ragged. Under the window stands the couch of the suite. The carpet is very threadbare, and there are stains of past leaks on the faded, outer wall of the room. Fir-cones are piled to fill the empty fireplace. A few withered photographs in frames stand upon the chimney-piece, and, before the hearth, lies a mat, made of the skins of sheep-dogs. There is a harmonium in one corner of the room. Doors to the right and the left.*

[BARBARA and SALOME discovered. They are

moving the things off the table and piling them on the floor. They also thrust back the arm-chairs and clear the room as much as may be. BARBARA is unchanged. SALOME is paler, thinner and perceptibly older. She speaks more slowly and with a heavy indifference. The lustre of happiness has departed from her. Both women are clad in print dresses, wear aprons, and have their sleeves turned over their elbows.

SALOME. When do they come to sell us up?

BARBARA. Half past four o'clock 'tis to be. I doubt there's room for 'em all in here.

SALOME. I can't see us away from Watchett Hill, Barbara.

BARBARA. Can't you? You soon will—unless—[*She is at the mantelpiece putting something upon it from the table. A card in the looking-glass falls and attracts her attention.*] My! Strange 'twas that one! Poor Anthony Redvers—his funeral card. It must be a year as near as can be.

SALOME. 'Tis a year to-day.

BARBARA. Little that dead man thought his money would only put off the trouble for a twelvemonth. [*Putting back card.*] Poor Anthony—he done his best. He gave us a year more. But now 'tis the hoss doctor, and devil take the hindmost.

SALOME. Arscott was patient enough with all his faults.

BARBARA. So's a lot of other things. For why? They can afford to be. Well might the man bide patient. His patience be growing gold for him—same as the

patience of the earth grows corn. But I don't quarrel with Billy and never have.

SALOME. [*Listlessly.*] I suppose it will be a cottage for father, and us in service?

BARBARA. No, it won't. I ain't going to leave father—not for service anyway. Something have got to be managed. Since we can't do it single, we must see if we can do it double.

SALOME. What d'you mean?

BARBARA. I mean marriage.

SALOME. Takes two for that.

BARBARA. Well, and the man's waiting in your case. Jessie Redvers be wearing his heart out for 'e.

SALOME. 'Husband'! A queer word.

BARBARA. [*Grows very self-conscious and looks cautiously round her.*] Not half so queer as the thing by all accounts. But I've got my ideas. I don't preach to you what I'm afraid to practise. I mean Billy Arscott. 'Tis now or never.

SALOME. You shan't do it! You shan't do it, Barbara. A market bargain! Never would father have a moment's peace.

BARBARA. Oh yes, he would! There'd be peace, and plenty too. The man would straighten us out in no time. Safe as a rock for a husband.

SALOME. And as hard.

BARBARA. But I ain't the fine thing I was ten years ago, and nobody knows that better than I do. I feel very friendly to him, however, though 'tis bitter likely he's got no more use for me. Don't whisper it to father

[*Enter* JOSEPH WESTAWAY *and* JOSHUA BLOOM.

WEST. Eight or ten of 'em be coming. Toby Hannaford and a good few others. And Billy Arcscott will drop in an hour earlier. [*He looks at his watch.*] He's going through the books once more, with Barbara, so as to save time at the meeting.

BLOOM. Sharpening his claws—the wretch!

BARBARA. [*To* BLOOM.] Why do you poke in? We don't owe you nothing anyway, Joshua Bloom.

WEST. Joshua's an inquiring sort of man and wants to add to his knowledge. He's never seen a meeting of creditors afore and may never get the chance again, so I've let him come.

BLOOM. I be here in a most neighbourly spirit, miss, and got a whole holiday for it and all! I can't do nought, but I can shed the light of my countenance.

BARBARA. If that would fright 'em away, I'd say nothing.

WEST. 'Tis a trying thing for a man in my position to be pressed for cash. You'd never guess it, Bloom, but I've signed a cheque for forty-nine pounds, eighteen shillings in my time! Yes—and made no stir about it. But bankrupt's not the word. No man can be made a bankrupt with my faith in God, and my knowledge of sheep, and two such good daughters as these here women.

BLOOM. And when all's said, us shall soon all be in our graves and at peace.

WEST. True again! This life's no more than the sour rind to a sweet nut, Joshua. Not so sour,

neither. Your poor master, Anthony Redvers, knowed that well enough. If he'd been spared——

BLOOM. 'Tis this day year he dropped. The missis and Michael have took the wreath to the grave and Mister Jesse's going to call here come presently. The wreath be a terrible brave trophy—so bright as the sun and all in a glass case. 'Twill make his mound the pride o' the churchyard.

BARBARA. 'Tis a black day for her.

BLOOM. Black for all of us. But life's three parts black days, and the rest be grey. And no doubt you feel terrible down-daunted with this rally of creditors hanging over you.

WEST. 'Tis but a small thing against that widow's grief.

BLOOM. The dead be out of it. The grave be a very cheerful state in my judgment—but for the getting there. I can see Redvers now—lying on the fern in the yard—for all the world as if he slept. And then come the inquest, and blame thrown on that dangerous place in the wall, and the sympathy with the widow and her sons.

WEST. Well might the folk be sorry.

BARBARA. Nothing but good could any say of that man and none will ever forget his funeral. The most unexpected folk cried like childer.

WEST. 'Twas a thing to remember without a doubt. Come, Joshua Bloom. I must be going to the village; but you'll be back in lots 'o time for the fun. Us'll look at my grass on the way. 'Tis a wonderful crop.

BLOOM. Grass be nothing without beasts to eat it.

WEST. A very true saying. Beasts and grass be the halves of a flail—one nought without t'other. But land's the solemn thought—the land under a man's feet.

BLOOM. And never more solemn than when you be going to lose it, flock-master.

[*Exeunt WESTAWAY and BLOOM. WESTAWAY looks in at door again immediately.*]

WEST. Here's Jesse Redvers come. [*Exit.*]

BARBARA. We don't want him yet.

SALOME. His mother kissed me last time I fell in with her. [*Goes to door.*]

BARBARA. [*Busy at left of room.*] Who'd have thought the likes of her would miss a man so much?

SALOME. She loved him. Love takes many patterns.

[*SALOME opens the door for JESSE.*]

BARBARA. I wish I knowed what pattern Billy Arscott's be like to take.

[*JESSE enters. He is clad in work-a-day clothes with a black band on his arm. He wears his father's big silver watch-chain.*]

BARBARA. You be a lot too soon, Jesse.

JESSE. I can't keep away to-day. You know that.

[*SALOME and JESSE stand at the doorway.*]

BARBARA *pays no heed to them.*

SALOME. Bloom says the new wreath be a fine sight.

JESSE. There's fairer things on his grave already. A great bunch of white windflowers lies there. Others loved him beside us.

SALOME. Flowers be all you can give the dead.

JESSE. 'Tis strange to see the grass so green. It seems only yesterday his pit was dug for him.

SALOME. But the sorrow's old—like thicky band I stiched upon your sleeve.

JESSE. Nay—that's worn rusty. The torture of my memory is fresh enough. [BARBARA goes to the window.] They talk of hell, hell's here on earth or nowhere.

[ARSCOTT passes window.

SALOME. Aye; 'tis the living get hell, not the dead.

BARBARA. Here he is! [ARSCOTT raps at the door. BARBARA takes off her apron and turns down her sleeves.] Here's Billy Arscott.

[She opens the door and lets in WILLIAM ARSCOTT.

JESSE. With a flower in his buttonhole, as though 'twas a revel !

ARSCOTT. If I'm in the way, say so ; but half after three was my hour. [To JESSE.] You and me must knock our heads together for these maidens when the meeting is over. Have 'e got the books, Barbara ? There's a dozen men and women coming, and they'll all be so punctual as winter.

SALOME. You don't want me ?

BARBARA. [Nervously.] I may do. You bide in the kitchen, please, Salome ; and Jesse can go about his business and come back later.

JESSE. [To ARSCOTT.] 'Tis understand we meet after.

[Exit JESSE. SALOME casts a searching look at BARBARA, and then at ARSCOTT. She goes off.

BARBARA. [*Fetching books from table.*] At Quarter Day Watchett Hill's yours, William—to the last daisy in the meadow—and we must go forth—father and sister and me.

ARSCOTT. [*Sitting down at the table and taking out his spectacle case.*] Naked we come into the world and naked we leave it. Nobody's more sorry for Joe than I am.

BARBARA. [*Putting the books in front of him.*] 'Tis the land he loves so dear. I do pray just the leastest scrap o' land can be spared for him. Surely a man that's owned five and twenty acres—you wouldn't put him in a house in a row, with nought but a back fence and a back garden and a rope to dry the washing on?

ARSCOTT. I want to keep him out of the house that's got a hundred windows and no garden at all—the Union Workhouse.

BARBARA. He's helped to save many another from it.

ARSCOTT. Why, my dear woman, you wasn't used to pipe that silly stuff! Have time broke your pluck?

BARBARA. We can't all wear like William Arscott. The years pass you by and never leave a mark.

[*Goes to glass and smooths her hair.*]

ARSCOTT. That's true. I don't feel my age.

BARBARA. And don't look it.

[*She gets some account books from the side table and brings pen and ink. He sits by the big table and puts on his spectacles.*]

ARSCOTT. And my hair's so thick as thatch yet; and

when I was at the tooth-drawer's to Okehampton, the man said as he'd never seen a better lot of grinders.

BARBARA. All very good signs.

ARSCOTT. There's a sight more sap in me than anybody guesses, Barbara.

BARBARA. A good husband flung away in my opinion.

ARSCOTT. And who flung him away?

BARBARA. I'm speaking about you—not me.

[ARSCOTT rises and goes to the window.

BARBARA stands by the fireplace, then she kneels, picks up a fallen fir-cone and upsets others. She is nervous.

BARBARA. You ain't against marriage as a general thing, however?

ARSCOTT. Good lord, no! The world must go on. Didn't I ax you to marry me?

[They go back to the books.

BARBARA. [Sitting down.] We—we all make mistakes.

[Shows deep anxiety to see how he will take this admission.

ARSCOTT. [Misunderstanding.] Well, well—but some might think 'twas you that did—not me.

BARBARA. [Setting her teeth, frowning and then speaking.] I might think so myself.

[A long silence. He turns away from the books. Then he stands up and looks at her. She turns and sits at the table with her back to him. He regards her very closely and

*she is conscious of it and begins to suffer.
She puts her hands up to her neck.*

BARBARA. Speak for God's sake! Don't creep about like that behind me. I can feel your eyes in my back.

ARSCOTT. [*Putting his spectacles into their case and then into his pocket.*] Take a easy chair and keep cool. 'Tis for me to grow warm—not you. Do 'e see all that hangs to this?

[He draws out an easy chair. She does not move, so he sits in the easy chair himself, crosses his legs, picks his teeth and smiles.]

ARSCOTT. Ban't leap year neither, Barbara!

[Laughs.]

BARBARA. I've said it—though it cost more than any male could ever know, or dream. I've said it, and I mean it.

ARSCOTT. You're sorry for that 'no' ten year ago? [*BARBARA nods her head.*] Well, well! What a day may bring forth! and me just beginning to think serious of Widow Powesland—at the 'Red Lion,' over to Tavistock!

BARBARA. I didn't know that, William.

ARSCOTT. Of course you didn't—more do she.

BARBARA. We'd better do the books.

ARSCOTT. Plenty o' time. 'Tis a very startling thing for a woman to propose marriage to a man. It don't often happen and I'm a bit flustered accordingly. 'Tis a great compliment—if you be thinking of me and not your father.

BARBARA. You've a right to put it so, and I knew you would. Of course it ain't poetry, like it was ten years ago.

ARSCOTT. Don't say that neither. I'm sure 'tis very poetical for a woman to pop the question.

BARBARA. I've long larned to make sixpence do the work of a shilling, William, if that's anything.

ARSCOTT. The craft of you women! 'Anything'? Dammy! It's everything! How many females know the power in a penny? But there's fors and againsts. A man mustn't forget his duty to himself.

BARBARA. You're not likely to do that.

ARSCOTT. Ten years is ten years; and ten years hits a woman harder than a man. You mustn't expect them tearing fine speeches of ten years ago, Barbara.

BARBARA. No—I don't. The gilt's off the gingerbread—I know that. I shan't think the worse of you if you feel the hour be gone past.

[ARSCOTT gets up and saunters about the room.]

ARSCOTT. As a rule, your ugly, time-stained people are wiser than the handsome ones. Cast your eyes over me; I've got ten wrinkles to your father's one. And as for you—a woman's face and figure be delicate subjects; but truth is truth, and this is the time for it, and the truth is that you— [Shakes his head.] Thinner round the bosom, to be plain, and paler in the cheek, and not quite the old crown of honey-coloured hair that I used to doat on.

BARBARA. [*Shivers and lifts her hands to her breast*]

as though to hide it.] I've been hungry more than once since then.

ARSCOTT. And so have I—for you, Barbara! Thin—yes, but you're worth your corn to any man. Tough and not frightened of work, and good-looking and good-tempered, and better'n a barrel-load of young, giglet girls, that don't know they're born. [*Extends his arms as if he wanted her to come into them.*] So, cut it short, and come—I'll take you—and proud to!

BARBARA. [*Bows her head.*] You know how we are placed, William. Father's got none to trust to but——

ARSCOTT. Be loverly! Be loverly! Don't drag him in.

BARBARA. I wouldn't mix business with pleasure, William—don't think that.

ARSCOTT. More wouldn't I. And 'tis a real, proper pleasure, all of a sudden, like this, to think of marrying you.

BARBARA. [*Humbly.*] Thank you kindly, William.

ARSCOTT. I'm hard, but I'm sporting. I'll do my part, and do it well. But don't rub in your father just now. Give me a kiss, Barbara! Be blessed if there isn't a bit of poetry to it—even after all these years!

BARBARA. I know you're sporting.

[*Lets him kiss her.*]

ARSCOTT. Mind and keep dumb for a bit. Let the chaps all come with their long faces and I'll burst it among 'em presently. Think of Toby Hannaford's

mug! And your father's! So good as a circus I promise you.

BARBARA. Oh, William, be a real lover and grant one favour—only one. I'll never ask another.

ARSCOTT. Ha—ha—you're begging early! Come here—let me stroke your fine arms. Sit on my lap—just half a second! Why not? A bowerly maiden you be—and—and—— [Takes her in his arms.

BARBARA. Swear to God, you'll never tell no living creature 'twas I that axed you.

ARSCOTT. Ashamed of your forward ways a'ready! No, be sure I won't squeak about that. They'll all say I'm a scoundrel and drove a sinful hard bargain—but let 'em! I don't care—so long as I've got you.

BARBARA. [*Very gratefully.*] Thank you, William [*Leaves him and prepares to go*] And, William—— [*Returns impulsively, kisses him warmly, and hurries off.*

ARSCOTT. [*Licking his lips.*] If I'd only guessed, I'd have made old Joe gallop before this!

[*Enter JOSEPH WESTAWAY. He carries a black bottle and a parcel in a paper bag.*

ARSCOTT. You're a lucky old fool, flock-master—and don't deserve a pennyworth of it! What have you got in thicky bottle—poison?

WEST. I've bought a cake and wine, William. Cake and wine for the creditors.

[*Takes a big cake out of bag. Enter BARBARA.*

ARSCOTT. You be dying game, my old bird!

BARBARA. God's goodness, father! This ban't a party.

WEST. It is and it ain't. Where the males assemble together, save in church or at hounds, there's got to be eating and drinking. For a wedding or a funeral, solids; for a christening or a meeting of creditors, just a drop of sherry wine and a nibble of plum cake—to make the people patient. So get a corkscrew and some glasses and no more about it.

ARSCOTT. You do what you're told, Barbara, and be sharp.

[Exit BARBARA. Men's voices heard off and men pass the window.]

WEST. Here they come.

ARSCOTT. Two and two and all in black—like carrion crows to a dead oss!

[Enter BLOOM.]

BLOOM. The creditors be on 'e, Joe! A proper rally of 'em!

[Enter SALOME, who wears a sun bonnet, followed by BARBARA. The latter carries glasses and a corkscrew on a tray. WEST-AWAY puts corkscrew into bottle.]

ARSCOTT. Why be you like that cork, Joe?

[Enter JESSE REDVERS, TOBY HANNAFORD, NED PEARN and others, including two elderly women]

HANNAFORD. We be come, neighbour—and cruel sorry to come.

PEARN. I wish there was any way out, Joe; but the age of miracles be gone, I'm fearing.

WEST. Don't you say that, Ned. The Almighty's all powerful still. He could get me out of this fix with a turn of His Holy Wrist if He willed it so. [*Enter two more men.*] Come in—come in You're all welcome.

ARSCOTT. This ain't fair to the drawing-room carpet. Let's go in the yard! Fetch along the books, Barbara, and lend me a hand.

WEST. A good thought. Hand the chairs out of the window, Salome; there's some in the kitchen too. But you folk must have a wet afore we begin.

HANNAFORD. Nay, nay—we ban't here to drink wine.

BLOOM. To suck blood more like—eh Toby?

ARSCOTT. Come you all into the yard and hear the figures first; and then I'll ax you to list to me.

[EXEUNT ARSCOTT, HANNAFORD, PEARN *and others.* BLOOM *helps* BARBARA *to hand some chairs through the window.* JESSE *and* SALOME *go off.*

BLOOM. 'Tis for all the world as if the brokers were in a'ready!

WEST. [*To* ARSCOTT *outside the window.*] Put 'em on the lew side o' the big linhey, William. Lend a hand with the table, Barbara.

[BARBARA and WESTAWAY go out carrying the small table between them.]

BLOOM. No doubt this will come after. [*Smells the bottle.*] Pretty drinking by the smell of it.

[*Enter JESSE and SALOME. He carries two kitchen chairs and she carries one. BLOOM and another take JESSE'S two chairs and go out with the remaining men. JESSE hands SALOME'S chair through the window.*]

JESSE. You don't mean to be there?

SALOME. Why should I watch 'em fight for our bones?

JESSE. Arscott don't want me yet. My mother's wishful to help—if she can—and——

SALOME. [*Flings her sunbonnet on to the sofa.*] She's done enough already.

JESSE. She only kept my father's promise.

SALOME. I warrant she's down-daunted to-day.

JESSE. Her sorrow has opened my eyes to the sorrow of all the world. And to yours—yours too Salome.

SALOME. [*Starting slightly.*] What do you mean?

JESSE. You hide yourself from everybody but me; but love makes me see the truth of you.

SALOME. Love's blind.

JESSE. You're sad and sorry and the world bears hard on you. You *feel* the grief of it—same as I do.

SALOME. Yes, but I'd shame to share my griefs.

[*She sits on table near him.*]

JESSE. My heart's always crying to share. A shared grief's the lighter, Salome.

SALOME. Then you'd share for selfishness.

JESSE. [*Starts.*] What a thought!

SALOME. Work, I tell you. Work your fingers to the bone. Work till your flesh aches and makes you forget your aching heart. Copy your mother. Grief have made her sweet, like the frost ripens the sloe. That kindly she's grown with young and old—as gentle as she used to be stern. She kissed me when last I saw her.

JESSE. She's very fond of you.

SALOME. If you could look in my heart, young Jesse, you'd find that I know more of her loss than any other creature.

JESSE. [*He nods.*] I've heard you say truer things about my father than anybody. If I was more like him, perhaps then——?

SALOME. [*Shakes her head.*] You and me be the sort to die together—not live together. I've loved and I've lost. [*Half to herself.*] He called himself my red fox; but he wasn't a red man really.

JESSE. [*Astonished.*] What are you saying?

SALOME. He's gone—like last year's sunshine.

JESSE. I never heard you name a sweetheart, Salome.

SALOME. You make folk blab things—like you do yourself. Why should I tell you? Water to his wine you are—tears to his laughter; but I love you, too, you poor, sad Jesse. You be fit company for mourners.

JESSE. My heart's very full to-day—full and empty both. [*Pause.*] Father thought the world of you, His eye would light when your name was named.

SALOME. [*She looks at him watchfully and shows no emotion.*] You ought to be with your mother—not with me.

JESSE. Michael is with her.

SALOME. A tower of strength that man.

JESSE. But he's no more use to my sad mother than I am.

SALOME. He believes like she does.

JESSE. If I could show her truth! I've fought to do it, Salome—for her peace. From many books and much thinking I've got to doubt; and from seeing the ache of the world; and from watching the good and patient go down to dust and sorrow. To reach her heart with the truth! I've often thought she might take it from you.

SALOME. No angel from heaven would shake her trust in God.

JESSE. But a woman from earth might shake her trust in hell. I've talked till I'm weary, but 'tis all vain.

SALOME. What have you told her?

JESSE. That 'tisn't conscience but remorse that's eating her alive. Remorse—a hateful, foul poison that kills life and hope. If she could but take up her life for the sake of the living—instead of hungering to die for the sake of the dead. She makes the wages of sin life, not death.

SALOME. Sin?

JESSE. 'Tis her word, not mine. Sin's only a parson's scarecrow to fright us human children. You can be guilty and sinless, Salome. And sinless she is. "We are free, we are free agents," she says—like a bell tolling; but 'tis tolling a lie. There's no free will—none. D'you understand that?

SALOME. Then this God, they tell about, hasn't the right to judge any man?

JESSE. There 'tis! Make her see that—make her feel that! No free will, no judgment. [*Loud laughter outside.*] Mother says her immortal soul is lost. I say, granted she's got a soul, it isn't lost.

SALOME. Every man's free to go uphill or down—to eat or starve.

JESSE. Not one! And if no choice—then no sin

SALOME. You poor word-spinner!

JESSE. Suppose you'd done a thing in the past, SALOME, and couldn't be sure whether 'twas good or evil?

SALOME. [*Weary of the theme.*] Your heart tells you if 'tis evil or not.

JESSE. But they lie and say the heart of man is desperately wicked, so we daren't listen to our hearts. 'Tis conscience we heed: the things our mothers taught us. The Ten Commandments—why the rocks they were writ on are more a part of God's word than them! I've thought 'em to nothing—every one of 'em.

SALOME. You'll think yourself into a madhouse some

day. You can leave God out; but you can't leave man out. You can't get away from justice. Stealing means prison, and murder means hanging.

JESSE. [*Deeply interested.*] But it wasn't murder—that's what I've fought to show her ever since my father died. She struck him in a moment of wrath.

[*Pause.*]

SALOME. Struck him—she—she——?

JESSE. Salome!

[*Looks at her and puts his hand to his forehead.*]

SALOME. 'Twasn't accident?

JESSE. I forgot—my heart was bursting with it to-day.

SALOME. She struck him?

JESSE. Like the flash of the lightning. He fell and the rocks in the river-bed killed him.

[*SALOME succumbs and sits down abruptly on the sofa behind her. She stares at JESSE. Shouts of laughter rise without. ARSCOTT'S voice heard. SALOME recovers self-control and assumes a tense, watchful manner, like a hunting cat.*]

SALOME. Ann Redvers. There's only one thing that woman would have done—murder for.

JESSE. Not murder—not murder. Never say it or think it. There was a wretch got hold of him—some nameless harlot. And mother found out—and——

SALOME put her face down against the back of the sofa and hides her eyes with her hands.] She'll be thank-

ful to God you know. She'll say 'twas her God made it slip out and loosed my tongue. She's always on her knees praying to be punished. When it happened, we made her promise not to give herself up—Michael swore he'd kill himself if she did. But now—you, Salome. It must come to good. It must, Salome—— [SALOME *stares fixedly, but does not display her emotion.*] Speak to me.

SALOME. I'm looking at Ann Redvers.

JESSE. By his grave now. The unhappiest woman in the world. Think what 'twould be to comfort that broken heart.

SALOME. Comfort!

[BLOOM *comes in.*

BLOOM. You be wanted, Mister Jesse. There's signs and wonders happening in the land, I warn 'e! Laugh! Why, the folk have shook Dartymoor!

[*Exit BLOOM.*

JESSE. If anything was ever sacred, 'tis what you've heard this day, Salome.

[*He looks back to see her still staring, but self-controlled. Then he follows BLOOM.*

SALOME. Anthony'

[*She sinks into a posture of grief. Anon she steadies herself and reflects. Presently she indicates anger and a desire to be moving. She leaps up and looks about her. Then she puts on her sunbonnet. Without, there are laughter and voices, that grow louder as men and women pass the window.*

SALOME is just about to go to the door but she sees that the people are there. She hastens off as the other door opens. There enter WILLIAM ARSCOTT, JOSEPH WESTAWAY, JESSE REDVERS, and BARBARA with the other women. TOBY HANNAFORD, NED PEARN, BLOOM, and the rest follow, or remain at the window looking in.

WEST. What did I tell my unbelieving girls?
That an old man's faith can move mountains still!

[Pours out the wine and puts a glass into the hands outstretched towards him.]

BARBARA. Sally must know!

[Runs across and exit.]

BARBARA *[Off.]* Salome!

HANNAFORD. Good luck and long live to 'em!

THE OTHER MEN AND WOMEN. Good luck! Long life!

CURTAIN.

ACT IV

SCENE: *Harter kitchen as before. A year has passed and there are certain inevitable alterations in the arrangement of the furniture and minor details of the room. Different hams and herbs suspend from the ceiling. The grocer's almanac has disappeared, and there are no plants in the recesses of the windows. A shawl hangs over the back of the settle by the fireplace. The time is night. Dark blinds are drawn. A candle burns on the mantelpiece, and a tall paraffin lamp with a white glass shade stands upon the table. Under the lamp is the work-box of Ann Redvers, open, with a litter of white work about it.*

[ANN REDVERS discovered, with SARAH TAPP, NATHANIEL TAPP, and MICHAEL. ANN is working; SARAH knits beside the fire, and NATHANIEL is near her. MICHAEL smokes, sitting near his mother.]

TAPP. No, ma'am, you don't judge the evil-doer so stern as you did use to do. But the times call for it.

There's a lot of wickedness about, and 'tis no good looking t'other way.

ANN. Let each begin at home, Nathaniel.

TAPP. So I say, and so I do. 'Tis a very good thing to sweep the Gospel broom round the dark corners of the heart.

SARAH. There be many that shake at the thought of not having a spring cleaning; yet they never think about a soul cleaning from one year's end to another. *[Rises and gathers her knitting.]*

MICHAEL. You ought to join the Methodies, Sarah.

SARAH. I call a spade a spade, and a sinner a sinner.

ANN. We must do good for evil, Sarah—and think good for evil.

SARAH. I never could do good for evil myself, and I won't pretend it.

TAPP. More don't the Law of the land. Justice for evil be the Law.

MICHAEL. What is justice?

TAPP. 'Tis the best that man can do. Mercy be better left to God.

ANN. Maybe His mercy is the highest justice.

MICHAEL. There; you're answered, Nat. God's all love, or else He's nought.

TAPP. That ain't my idea, Mister Michael, nor yet Jehovah's—not if I know him.

SARAH. *[Lights candle at little table beside the 'Grandfather' clock. To TAPP.]* Come, master, tis

bedtime for you and me. Good-night, missis; good-night, Michael.

MICHAEL. Good-night, good-night. Pray for charity, Nat. [*Exeunt NATHANIEL and SARAH TAPP.*]

ANN. Ban't Jesse home yet?

MICHAEL. Lord knows—I don't.

ANN. I'm wishful to hear how it went at Westaway's.

MICHAEL. Be bright, be bright, for God's sake, mother! Put your work by and talk.

ANN. [*Puts down her work and leans forward, with her elbow on the table and her hand on her forehead.*] Ah, Michael boy—I'd talk, if you'd but heed. If I could make you see—on this dark day—

MICHAEL. Never—never! Don't begin that no more for I won't hear it.

ANN. Jesse understands.

MICHAEL. Understands! 'Tis he, with his cursed sighing and groaning keeps the thing before you and serves it up red-hot on every morn. Haven't you suffered enough? [*Bitterly.*] But well I know you'd give yourself up this very hour if I'd let you.

ANN. I've tried to punish myself, Michael—with secret rods.

MICHAEL. [*Starting up and walking about.*] Curse Jesse for that! 'Tis him that's the green wound—'tis him that won't let the dead rest in his grave. Yet you blame me—not him—me—me, that would cut my throat to save you a pang. Ban't I somebody,

too? Ban't my great fight to count, too? Do I look at you with eyes like a judge? Do I——?

ANN. He can't help it; he's built so.

MICHAEL. God keep me from unbuilding him!

ANN. Don't rage against Jesse. [*Rises and puts her arms round him.*] He loves me as well as you do in his own way. He wants my spirit to be in peace, Michael.

MICHAEL. Then why for don't he leave it in peace and look to his own? I wish he was dead and in his grave. That's the only peace he'll ever know.

[*Breaks from her and strides up and down.*]

ANN. [*Sighing deeply.*] He tries to help me, too. You be both love mad for your mother. But 'tis blind love—cruel love—love that shuts the door of Heaven against me.

MICHAEL. Hell's my home for ever if 'tis yours. [*Enter JESSE.*] And Harter's hell, so long as he be in it [*points at JESSE*]. But I'll fight you and the devil both for mother—and beat you both.

ANN. Michael!

MICHAEL. Mind it, mind it; and you mind it, mother. So sure as you give yourself up, I'll do for myself. And so sure as any other lays a finger on you, I'll do for him. From the first I've said it and, by God, I mean it!

JESSE. If you weren't a fool——

ANN. Don't have no high words to-night, dear sons; don't quarrel to-night. Words won't change what lies between us three. I sinned—I took a

man's life—and there's only Christ between me and eternal death now. And you hide me from Him—you shield me from the justice of this world, that might mean forgiveness in the next.

MICHAEL. Trust your God then, through thick and thin. You're His child; but you're our mother.

ANN. Wrong—double wrong was done—by me—by you.

MICHAEL. There was only one right for a son.

ANN. Truth was the only right.

JESSE. You won't see truth, mother.

ANN. I shall feel it through eternity, Jesse.

JESSE. I'll help you to win peace yet.

[*Enter BLOOM.*

MICHAEL. [*To JESSE.*] Who be you to croak of peace?

BLOOM. Hast told 'em, Mister Jesse?

JESSE. I've told nothing.

BLOOM. Then I'm full of news! Barbara Westaway have took the hoss-doctor. No doubt to save her father 'twas done. Arscott blazed it out afore the creditors.

[*Ann returns to her work.*

MICHAEL. Old Joe's weathered the storm again then.

ANN. Have you had your supper, Jesse?

JESSE. I want no supper. I want you.

BLOOM. It spoilt the fun, because all ended in laughter and sherry wine. But nobody offered me a drop.

MICHAEL. You shall drink yet. [*Gets his hat.*

ANN. [*To JESSE.*] Did Barbara bear up pretty brave?

BLOOM. She's so proud as a peacock about it, ma'am.

MICHAEL. We'll pop across to Watchett Hill. Won't take a minute. No talk of devils and hell there anyway. [*To* JESSE.] If I get drunk, 'tis your fault.

ANN. Michael!

MICHAEL. Just to wish Barbara luck, mother. Old Joe will have his brandy bottle out to-night. Come on, Bloom—stir your stumps!

[*Exeunt* MICHAEL and BLOOM.]

JESSE. He's right there. Harter's a dark hole nowadays.

ANN. Do others find it dark? Be there any darkness but mine?

JESSE. I'm trying hard to bring you light, mother.

ANN. Hope is the only light. Trouble be but froth on life's flood, while there's hope. 'Tis the horror of losing Heaven that makes all dark. For her that's lost Heaven, the little trials of saints and martyrs be nought, Jesse. She envies them.

JESSE. If there's a Heaven, none can lose it. A great thing's happened to me to-day.

ANN. [*Rising.*] Eat first and talk afterwards. Get up to your chamber and tidy yourself. I'll fetch you some supper.

JESSE. It happened all in a flash. I never meant it. Like enough you'll say 'twas a miracle, mother. [*Goes up stairs.*] But I pray 'tis good.

[*Exit up stairs.*]

ANN. Yes, yes—if you say so.

[ANN clears a part of the table. Then she goes off. After a brief pause SALOME enters. She looks about her, marks the empty kitchen and notes Ann's work on the table. She goes to door and listens. Then she comes back to the centre of the room. JESSE appears at top of stairs.

JESSE. You! [Comes down quickly.]

SALOME. Do she know you've told me?

JESSE. Not yet.

SALOME. Get you gone then. I see her alone.

JESSE. [Considers.] It might be best. I was just going to tell her; but—Come to it gently. She's very sad. A woman's pity—a godsend to her to-night.

SALOME. Be Michael out o' the way?

JESSE. [Picks up hat and prepares to go.] He's gone to wish Barbara joy. I bless you for this, Sally. [Door opens slowly.] 'Twas good to come to her so quick.

[Exit JESSE as ANNE enters. She carries a tray with some cold meat on a plate, bread and a heavy knife on a trencher, a jug of beer, and a mug. There are also a cruet and a knife and fork on the tray.]

ANNE. [Standing still at sight of SALOME.] Why, my dear! What does this mean? [Looks upstairs.] Jesse! Here's—

SALOME. He's gone out. I don't want him.

ANN. [Puts down tray on the table.] He's had no food since noon and be full of some great matter. So

Barbara's tokened to Arscott? I hope 'tis no ugly buying and selling?

SALOME. [*Suddenly.*] Ban't there bloodstains on the linen when you sew? [ANNE drops her work and stares at SALOME.] I've come knowing the black truth of you, Ann Redvers.

ANN. [*A great breath escapes her.*] Poor Jesse—'twas that! I prayed he'd be led to it—the last hope for me.

SALOME. Killed him—killed Anthony Redvers.

[*They stand with the table between them.*]

ANN. To hear it in another mouth—and that mouth a woman's. 'Tis like a dream! I—— Be merciful, Salome. Be just. True mercy—not false.

SALOME. I'd put the rope round your neck with my own hands!

ANN. Then go to them that will. For a soul's sake—to save a soul! Do it quickly—this night—while you can.

SALOME. Who was she?

ANN. I asked him and he wouldn't tell! "Thank God you don't know," he said.

SALOME. Know now then, you cold-blooded, man-killing fiend! I—I was his secret woman—I that stand here! I loved every breath of his voice, every hair of his head. His good was mine—and his evil. I blessed my lot that I could kiss away a little of his troubles. I worshipped him; I prayed to him. He was my sun, and air, and food. I only nursed my

flesh to keep it plump and sweet for him. His very, very own I was—a part of himself; and all my light and joy you killed when you killed him—all—all. I'm his widow—not you. 'Tis I that suffered till my bones very near came through my skin—not you. 'Tis I that roamed the hills and cursed God—not you. To the light you wear your black—mine's hid against my bosom! [*She tears open her cotton frock and reveals black beneath it.*] 'Tis out now—'tis ended—I've revenged him. [*ANN's intense spiritual excitement and hope give place to mere interest and astonishment during this speech. She gazes almost stupidly at SALOME. When the speech is spoken, ANN broods in silence. Her eyes traverse SALOME darkly and curiously. They look through her and ravish her.*] Be you dumb? Be you frozen, you murderess?

ANN. [*Displaying no emotion and no spark of anger.*] You—you at the very gates of Harter! Be what the men like never known to us? Poor girl! And you hid it after. What is there we can't hide?

SALOME. Nought beyond the time. 'Tis you shall suffer now, you flint-hearted wretch. They'll put you away if there's justice in the world. I've given you up. Your time's short. They'll tear you out of this to-night. [*ANNE lifts her hands to Heaven and forgets SALOME.*] For hate—for everlasting hate I done it.

ANN. Not the hate of women nor the hands of men can hurt me, Salome. What be the hate of this world to her that has lost the next? Do you know what is is to let the devil slip into your heart to steal your

soul? You poor, broken thing, I've prayed for this to happen night and day. And now 'tis come. Dark are the Lord's ways and wonderful.

SALOME. Never name your Lord to me—for hate, I say.

ANN. Your woman's hate do stand for God's love.

SALOME. What love should you have that killed Anthony? Be your bloody soul worth saving?

[Enter JESSE in haste and fear.

JESSE. Police have driven up from Okehamp-ton——

ANNE. The messengers

JESSE. Mother, you haven't——?

SALOME. 'Twas I. Get her bonnet and shawl. They won't let her out of their sight no more.

ANN. The Lord have used my son to save me.

[Enter the police; an Inspector and two constables.

JESSE. Yonder woman's daft. [Points at SALOME.

ANN. God called: she was bound to hear.

INSPECTOR. I have a warrant to——

ANN. I know it, neighbour.

JESSE. It shan't be, mother!

ANN. Thank God it shall be, Jesse.

JESSE. Michael! Michael!

ANN. [To INSPECTOR.] Come, friend. Hate have done what love could not. So God works. [To SALOME.] If a sinful woman's prayer can reach the Throne for you—— [Kisses JESSE.] Tell Michael that his mother be in peace at last.

[*Takes shawl from settle and puts it over her head. The Inspector goes out. The two policemen walk one on each side of ANN and she goes out in obvious joy between them.*]

JESSE. Mother—mother!

[*Hastens out. SALOME buttons her dress and stands and listens. She picks up her sun-bonnet and is about to go when JESSE returns.*]

JESSE. Tell me!

SALOME. They wouldn't believe it, but I made 'em. I hope they'll kill her.

JESSE. Are you mad?

SALOME. [*Shakes her head.*] Only cursed tired. 'Tis funny—I can scarce keep my eyes open.

JESSE. You traitor!

SALOME. Not I. Faithful—faithful to him always. Would that I'd let her be.

JESSE. Speak clear if you know how.

SALOME. I've let her out of hell and Ann Redvers be going to pray to her brave God to forgive me! Better she prayed for you, you poor slack-twisted shadow. [*JESSE makes frantic questioning gesture.*] You, that can't keep red secrets—you, that don't believe in souls! Here's a better tale than yours. Meat for your master was I—your 'nameless harlot'—your father's jewel—his joy—his own. Ah! Now 'tis your turn, you poor wretch.

JESSE. Unsay it!

SALOME. She went like a girl to her lover. Did you see the light on her face? Did you see her eyes?

JESSE. 'Tis death, Salome.

SALOME. I meant it so. But 'tis life—life for her—dust and ashes for me.

JESSE. 'Tis death, I tell you. What's there left now? 'Tis I that have given her up, not you. 'Tis I have put her away. You hid from me; you lied to me—you've done for me—I that loved you so true. All gone—all—every hope—every straw to catch it.

SALOME. Think of yourself—always yourself. The way of your folk. The way of your mother and her soul. But it wasn't his way—not my Anthony's.

JESSE. 'Twas for mother I fought, for mother I came to you—that you might make her burden lighter.

SALOME. Be glad then. For I've took her burden off. Her God was on her side, wasn't He? I meant to break her. But she laughed at me—same as I laugh at you.

JESSE. I'll fight no more.

SALOME. Fight for your soul. Believe Ann Redvers. Souls be the only standby for the likes of you. [MICHAEL and BLOOM heard talking outside.] Here's Michael!

JESSE. Oh, that I had been a steadfast fool like him.

SALOME. Souls are more than sons, or mothers, or lovers. I said you and me might die together. We shall be dust afore his rage in a minute.

JESSE. Get gone then for God's sake!

[*Goes to door.*]

SALOME. Be you afeared? Who shall be feared that have a soul? You'll be in Heaven afore your mother yet! Let Michael put me to sleep—I'd thank him.

[*Enter BLOOM and MICHAEL.*]

MICHAEL. [*Market merry.*] Hullo Sally! More good luck—eh? But me and Bloom have had a skinful with your father to-night. And damned strong we had it too. Bloom's a goner.

BLOOM. [*Fresh.*] He—he—he! A 'skinful' be a very clever word! Brandy's the boy for me! It goeth for 'e like a tiger!

MICHAEL. Be it good luck, you two?

SALOME. You can wish your mother good luck. She's happy—she's got her way.

MICHAEL. Well done her. A brother must have a kiss, Sally!

[*Approaches SALOME to kiss her.*]

SALOME. You'll find your mother to Okehampton in the lock up. I've saved her soul. They've took her for the murder of her husband a year ago. All my brave work! Now kiss me!

[*MICHAEL regards JESSE, and his face changes from happiness to horror.*]

JESSE. 'Tis truth. I told her.

[*MICHAEL falls back a step to the table. His eyes are only on JESSE. Then he picks up the bread-knife from the trencher. JESSE crosses his arms and waits for his brother. MICHAEL, with a loud and in-*

articulate sound, dashes at JESSE and catches him round the neck. But BLOOM catches MICHAEL round the waist and SALOME seizes his right hand with the knife, as he swings it back to strike. The knife falls. JESSE gets clear of the others. MICHAEL struggles. SALOME helps BLOOM to hold him back.

BLOOM. Run—run for God's sake—us weak worms can't hold him!

JESSE. I'll spare you that, Michael boy!

[Goes out, leaving the door open behind him.

MICHAEL throws SALOME off. She falls and rises quickly. Then MICHAEL, now beside himself, strikes BLOOM in the face and brings him to his knees. He tears BLOOM'S hands away from his legs and is free. He starts for door. At this moment a gun is heard to fire whence JESSE has gone. MICHAEL stops his rush and stands motionless. The eyes of all three are turned to the open door. A whiff of smoke drifts through it.

BLOOM. *[On one knee.]* He's done you!

[He rises and hastens off. MICHAEL follows BLOOM quickly.

Curtain.

ACT V

SCENE: *The parlour at Watchett Hill Farm. There is a fire in the grate and a large, dog-eared arm-chair beside it. A kettle stands upon the hob. Red curtains have taken the place of the old ones. The walls are newly papered and the room has become comfortable in every way. The pictures are set straight; there is a new carpet on the floor. Two small lamps stand on the mantelpiece. In a corner, on a little table, is a big photograph of WILLIAM ARSCOTT in a showy frame. The time is night. JOSEPH WESTAWAY discovered walking up and down the room. He exhibits deep anxiety and looks at his watch. Then he goes to the window and throws it open. There is bright moonlight outside.*

WESTAWAY. [*Calling into the night.*] Be that you, Barbara?

BARBARA. Yes, father. I'm waiting for William.

WESTAWAY. Surely to God the news be out. 'Tis almost more than a body can bear to bide like this!

[*Enter BARBARA. She looks round the room, shakes a curtain, and moves a lamp.*]

BARBARA. He won't know this room, William won't.

Light your pipe, father ; don't tramp the new carpet. You can't hasten it.

WESTAWAY. I've a'most lost sight of all our blessings afore these terrible times at Harter.

BARBARA. We must have another lamp—to show up this corner—just for once. We'll have a blaze—to please William.

WESTAWAY. [*Going to window.*] The verdict and sentence were to be out hours ago.

BARBARA. Don't fuss yourself, my old dear. Very likely William will have heard. And I do hope you'll show him your grateful feelings, father. There's more than five pounds gone on this room.

WESTAWAY. He knows all I feel about it. Either Joshua Bloom was to come over first thing, or else Nathaniel Tapp. Mrs. Tapp promised faithful one should come the moment they heard.

BARBARA. If 'tis good news, Nathaniel will bring it ; if 'tis bad, you may count on Bloom. [*Goes to door and calls off.*] Salome, fetch in the little pink lamp, will 'e? I want a bit more light, to show William all we've done in the parlour.

WESTAWAY. I think more of Michael than her. She's made her peace with God whatever happens—but him—poor wretch ! The world be very empty for him now.

BARBARA. I don't pity him. He'd have killed his rother himself in another moment, and he never denied it. [*Enter SALOME with a lamp.*] 'Tis that poor, dead, weak-witted Jesse I'm sorry for—not

Michael—nor yet his mother. Put it here—to show up William's photo. My! we do look fine! Don't you forget to say a word of thanks, Salome.

WESTAWAY. [*At window.*] There's a man coming now and travelling fast.

BARBARA. 'Tis William if he goeth quickly. They chaps from Harter be slow as beetles. [*Goes out.*]

WESTAWAY. Don't keep him if he's got the news. It have been a terrible day. I hope I'll never be called to live through such another. All suffer for evil—none can stand alone afore it.

[*Enter WILLIAM and BARBARA.*]

BARBARA. William hasn't heard. It wasn't known when he came away. [*Exit SALOME.*]

ARSCOTT. [*Looking round.*] Well, my old bird, what do 'e think of this? 'Tis a bit braver than it used to be—eh? We'll have a pianer yet, instead of that 'roarer' in the corner.

WESTAWAY. 'Tis a royal palace, William! 'Tis a dazzling scene, and us shan't never go or come without blessing you, I'm sure.

ARSCOTT. [*Lighting his pipe.*] Pretty clever, no doubt—thanks to my purse and Barbara's fingers. Well, the wedding's in sight, Joe.

WESTAWAY. I know—I know. Thank God my girl won't be far off. You must let her come up every day of her life, William—aye, and sleep sometimes in her old chamber.

ARSCOTT. So she shall. When we quarrel, I'll pack her off to you.

BARBARA. It takes two to quarrel, Billy.

WESTAWAY. I ban't all I could wish to-night, along of the fearful trouble in the air. A very terrible thing, and till we know how 'tis to end, there's no peace for anybody. *[Exit.*

ARSCOTT. 'Twill be brought in manslaughter—no worse than that. *[Sits in a big chair by the fire.]* Come and pitch on my lap, Barbara—there's a dear. I like to feel the fine weight of 'e. Only a fortnight now! You don't want to cry off your bargain?

BARBARA. *[Puts out the lamp in the corner.]* Cry off? Not I—I love you dearer and dearer, William.

ARSCOTT. A mortal pity you wasted ten years, Barbara.

BARBARA. We'll make up for 'em!

[She sits on his knee and he kisses her and rubs his face against hers.]

ARSCOTT. How's your sister going on? This must have shook her a bit. To think of her nipping down in cold blood to give that woman up!

BARBARA. 'Twasn't in cold blood—'twas in hot. She won't tell about it and 'tis too ticklish a subject for father or me. But I can see very well how 'twas really. Mrs. Redvers hungered terribly to give herself up—for the saving of her soul.

ARSCOTT. Yes, she'd feel like that, no doubt.

BARBARA. But her boys wouldn't let her. They made her swear she never would. And then Jesse, poor chap, goes daft and hits upon the thought to

tell Salome and make her tell again—for his mother's salvation.

ARSCOTT. A very clever thought, I call it.

BARBARA. Stark madness, knowing Michael.

ARSCOTT. Your sister must be made of tougher stuff than you, Barbara.

BARBARA. She's a queer girl. I don't know nothing about her inside her skin.

ARSCOTT. I wonder Michael didn't strangle her.

[*The face of JOSHUA BLOOM appears at the window.*]

BLOOM. [*Clears his throat. BARBARA starts away, but ARSCOTT holds her tightly.*] I ban't looking.

ARSCOTT. 'Tis only that old night-bird from Harter. Come in, Joshua, come in!

[*BARBARA leaves her lover and goes to the door.*]

BARBARA. He brings the news for certain. Oh, I hope 'tis good!

ARSCOTT. It can't be good. Bad's the best.

[*BARBARA hurries out, ARSCOTT rises and goes across.*]

ARSCOTT. [*Calling off.*] Here's Joshua Bloom from Harter, Joe!

[*Enter BARBARA followed by BLOOM.*]

BLOOM. You must listen patient. I ban't going to say it all anyhow and spoil it. 'Tis the chance of a lifetime to tell a tale like this.

BARBARA. Father's cruel put about.

[*Enter JOSEPH WESTAWAY followed by SALOME.*]

WESTAWAY. Ah! Joshua — thank God you be here!

BLOOM. Sit you down—all of you—and let me stand in the midst with my solemn news. And don't you try to hurry me, 'cause I won't be hurried.

WESTAWAY. The Law—

BLOOM. I be ashamed of the Law! Tapp heard it first. A telegraph come to the Vicarage a good bit ago, but you know what a close man is reverence is. However, it slipped out of the back door to the people, and everybody knows it now.

ARSCOTT. Know's what?

BLOOM. The jury was a bit soft and showed a very great sympathy with the prisoner, because the woman pleaded guilty. 'Woman' I call her; but of course to us she's still Ann Redvers of Harter. And leaning to the side of mercy, they fetched it in manslaughter; because she said she never meant to kill him. The terrible judge believed it too, and the upshot is that she don't die. That's how the Law gets weaker and weaker—along of they baggering Dissenters! Five years of penal servitude Ann Redvers have been sent to; but they say, if she's as good as gold in prison, they may let her free in less. I call it playing with justice and a poor look out for husbands; but that's how it stands—a paltry five year!

[All listen with varying interest.]

WESTAWAY. Thank God! 'tis a cruel weight off my shoulders.

ARSCOTT. I'm sorry for her all the same.

BLOOM. More than she was for herself. I lay she feels very near as disappointed as what I do. 'Twas a mean-spirited sentence in my opinion.

WESTAWAY. She'll sing in clink, like a caged lark, now her soul be saved.

BLOOM. No, she won't. She'll spend all her spare time on her knees praying for Jesse's soul. His death shook her a bit, I can tell 'e.

WESTAWAY. And t'other woman's name never come up in the argument?

BLOOM. None knows it. She must have found the newspapers pretty hot reading—eh?

BARBARA. She've had her wormwood, if she loved Anthony.

WESTAWAY. To think that one, nameless, scarlet female should be thrown into a family, like a cannon-ball, to kill off a generation and send strong men to the grave!

BLOOM. And I'll dare swear the shameless wretch goes to church in her frill-de-dills with the best of us, and makes eyes at the males and has 'em trailing after her like a comet's tail!

ARSCOTT. They ought to catch her and stone her. 'Tis she killed the men: 'tis her damned work.

BLOOM. They easy women will be up to any devilries 'tis said. Thank God I've 'scaped 'em.

ARSCOTT. Enough! 'Tis a thirsty subject and I want cheering.

[Exit BARBARA.]

WESTAWAY. Have a drink afore you go, Joshua.

BLOOM. [*Picking up his hat.*] Nay I'm for the

village. This thing have got to be rolled on the tongue a bit yet.

ARSCOTT. You're a snarling old dog, Bloom—poor company for a bridegroom.

BLOOM. I never can abide a hopeful fool.

WESTAWAY. But William's right. Sorrow ban't spilled over every page of life and we must laugh with the happy as well as mourn with the sad. Christ's self could smile on a wedding.

[*Enter BARBARA with glasses and bottle on tray, SALOME helps her.*]

ARSCOTT. Aye, and help the feast and give the folk joy. Bloom here—he'd turn the wine into water if he could.

BLOOM. I won't cry peace when there's no peace; but if you ax me to the wedding, I'll be there.

WESTAWAY. You shall come, Joshua Bloom.

BLOOM. Good night all, then. And don't number your chickens till they be hatched, hoss-doctor. You may be cut down afore the day yet.

[*Exit BLOOM.*]

ARSCOTT. The tale be told, and us have all got to go on living, except them that are dead.

WESTAWAY. [*Getting a long churchwarden pipe from mantelshelf.*] To think that big-hearted Anthony—so generous as the sun—so ready to bring happiness to young and old—

ARSCOTT. A man built of comfortabler mud I never neighboured with.

BARBARA. Always whistling, or else laughing. It warmed you to meet him on a winter day.

ARSCOTT. His light o' love felt the same no doubt. I'll warrant he was good to her. I'd give my best gaiters to know who 'twas. [*Exit SALOME.*]

BARBARA. [*Pouring water from the kettle.*] You'll have it hot, father?

WESTAWAY. Hot and strong both. This bit o' work have knocked the stuffing out of me a lot. It cuts every way, for us all depend on each other, like the ears of corn in the harvest field, or the little bees in the butt.

ARSCOTT. It have hit your girl hard by the look of her.

WESTAWAY. It have. She done her duty and little thought what awful things would come of it.

BARBARA. She's tongue-tied now. We never hear her voice. 'Tis like a dumb woman in the house.

ARSCOTT. 'Tis pretty well known that dead boy loved her.

BARBARA. But she cared nought for him.

ARSCOTT. Did you think it was right now, to bury the poor chap with Christian burial beside his father?

WESTAWAY. Most certain sure, William. The Lord turned him daft—poor soul—so as he should let out the secret to our Salome. That's how I read it. Then she went hot-foot. And now she mourns in secret. But God willed it so.

[BARBARA gives her father his drink.]

BARBARA. What will Michael do ?

[*Gives ARSCOTT his drink.*

ARSCOTT. Wait for her! Wait—on the prison steps if he could. Wait, if 'tis till the Trump of Doom. Let the world spin as it may, 'Time stands still for that man till he's got his mother again.

[*Enter SALOME.*

BARBARA. [*Looking at SALOME.*] No more of it to-night, William.

ARSCOTT. You're right, my sweeting; and if 'tis a crime to be cheerful, the Lord'll forgive lovers. Stir my sugar with your finger.

[*BARBARA sits by WILLIAM ARSCOTT and sips his drink. SALOME goes to window and looks out.*

BARBARA. Draw they curtains and shut out that gashly moonlight, Salome.

WESTAWAY. [*Going to SALOME.*] Us must cheer you up now, my Sally. 'Tis a brave, still night, and Halstock Glen full o' fairies.

BARBARA. Full of ghosts I should think. [*Shivers.*] I'll swear there's one haunted woman creeps there sometimes.

WESTAWAY. And belike poor Anthony doth walk, for 'tis said that spirits turn ever where they had their greatest joy.

ARSCOTT. Leave it, Joe! We don't want the creeps! Enough, or I'll be gone. It might be worse, and it couldn't be better; so let them smart that deserve it,

and we'll thank the Lord 'tis nothing to us. Remember a fortnight hence.

[SALOME *still looks out* at the moonlight. *The other three talk together. The men drink.*

WESTAWAY. Of course I give her away. My Sunday black be equal to it—with a brave favour in the buttonhole.

BARBARA. But you must have a new hat, father. Your best one's a disgrace.

ARSCOTT. 'Tis a pity if customers can't furnish a hoss-doctor with carriages cheap on such a day. Grey hosses too! Us 'll be pulled for love by my grateful patients! [They laugh.

WESTAWAY. I be going to ask every one of they creditors to the feast.

BARBARA. You mustn't call 'em creditors no more, father.

WESTAWAY. Thanks to William, here. A crown of glory, I'm sure, to owe no man anything and die so innocent as you was born.

[BARBARA *pours more drink.*

ARSCOTT. Let's have a song! Come on, Barbara. I know you can sing with the best of 'em. Haven't I watched you hollering in the choir to church scores o' times?

BARBARA. Nay—nay—Salome's our song-bird.

WESTAWAY. A rare gift she hath; but 'tis many a long day since she've sung to us now.

ARSCOTT. Sing Salome! Sing!

BARBARA. Do 'e, Sally, for old time's sake.

[*They turn their heads and look at her. She still stares out into the moonlight.*]

WESTAWAY. Sing, my little heart!

[*SALOME looks at them, and then looks out again into the night. After a pause, she clasps her hands and sings, in a far-away, gentle voice, to ears that are dust. Her listeners feel an uneasy influence. They are chilled, look into each other's faces, and take no joy of the song.*]

SALOME.

“Tom Pearce, Tom Pearce, lend me thy grey mare,
All along, down along, out along lee,
For I want for to go to Widecombe Fair,
Wi' Bill Brewer, Jan Stewer, Peter Gurney,

[*Pause.*]

Old Uncle Tom Cobleigh and all—
Old Uncle Tom Cobleigh and all.”

Curtain slowly descends while SALOME sings.

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