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SOCIETY NOTES

BY
DUFFY R. WEST



STEWART KIDD

MODERN PLAYS

EDITED BY

FRANK SHAY

1922

Fifty Contemporary One-Act Plays

Edited by

FRANK SHAY and PIERRE LOVING

THIS volume contains FIFTY REPRESENTATIVE ONE-ACT PLAYS of the MODERN THEATER, chosen from the dramatic works of contemporary writers all over the world and is the second volume in the *Stewart Kidd Dramatic Anthologies*, the first being *European Theories of the Drama*, by Barrett H. Clark, which has been so enthusiastically received.

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STEWART KIDD MODERN PLAYS

Edited by Frank Shay

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CHARACTERS

MARY SEDGEWICK

REGINALD STAUNTON

MRS. SEDGEWICK

MISS FLORENCE FOUNTAIN

MR. SEDGEWICK

DR. GLEN CORRE

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of gold and her hair is carefully dressed. Staunton is in conventional evening clothes. He is an exceedingly well-groomed, heavy-set man in his late thirties. His manner is self-confident and tremendously conceited.

MARY

You may as well run along and amuse yourself in the billiard room until the ball begins. I must go and slip on my dress, and we're not getting any further in this argument.

STAUNTON

Let's keep it up a bit longer. I haven't begun to show my strength.

MARY

I appreciate your coming early to add the last touch to the success of the evening. But I tell you once and forever Mr. Reginald Staunton, I will never marry you, never, never, never.

STAUNTON

And I tell you, you will marry me, Miss Mary Sedgewick. Your mother wants you to.

MARY

My mother wouldn't have to live with you. I would. My mother and I don't agree on most subjects anyway.

STAUNTON

You're the first woman I've pleaded with in all these years.

MARY

That's the chief reason I won't listen to you. Those other women have spoiled you and petted

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you and given in to you until you haven't a shred of respect left for any of them.

STAUNTON

I have for you.

MARY

You wouldn't, if I yielded.

STAUNTON (*advancing toward her*)

Try me.

MARY (*retreating*)

And be victim two hundred and twenty-seven?

You underestimate my powers of resistance, Mr. Staunton.

STAUNTON

No, I don't think I do. That's what attracts me so tremendously, I believe.

MARY

Of course it attracts you. You like my line. It's something new. But I'm looking ahead to the long, long evenings when I'd be something old, and you and your gray roadster would seek refuge from boredom at any other doorway but your own. I'd be reduced to being a married vamp. Hateful creatures!

STAUNTON

Why should there be those evenings of boredom for people like you and me? We can take our pick of the amusements of the world, cruise, travel, when we tire of things around here and —of each other. (*He sits on the sofa and pulls her down beside him.*) Come, what do you say? Let's announce it tonight at your ball. Think how your mother would love it.

MARY

Isn't it a pity she can't have you for herself?

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No, I won't take you until I've gone on a bit of a search. (*Cynical but wistful.*) I've heard there are married couples who like to spend those long, long evenings alone, at home—together. Incredible, isn't it?

STAUNTON

Tommy-rot! What's life for, if not to pack in as many good times as a man has the money to pay for? What can have started your mother's daughter off on such a tangent? Are you in love with another man, some queer duck we none of us know? (*He looks at her shrewdly.*) By Jove, I believe that's it. Who is he? (*Grimly taking her hands and turning her towards him.*) No matter! He won't get you. I never wanted anything yet that I couldn't get, and I want you.

MARY (*shakes off his hands and rises*)

Wrong again. He's not a man, he's an ideal, and I shan't marry until I find him.

(*The voices of Mrs. Sedgewick and Miss Fountain are heard offstage.*)

MISS FOUNTAIN

Really astonishing. Quite, quite ravishing.

MRS. SEDGEWICK

Yes, it all takes ability, real executive ability, but I—

MARY (*runs to door, left*)

Oh, glory, there comes Mother and her beloved Society Notes. I can't stand any more of that twaddle. (*She points to the door, right.*) If you go through that door, the butler will give you

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an appetizer for the evening's bliss. (*Pretends to raise a glass to her lips.*) See you later.

(*Mary goes off, left, and Staunton, right.*)

(*Mrs. Sedgewick and Miss Fountain enter from the sun room. Mrs. Sedgewick is a portly, commanding person, still conscious of her corsets, and gowned in full evening regalia, with magnificent jewels. She uses her lorgnettes as a weapon of offense. Miss Fountain is a large, thin, voluble woman, past her first youth, sprightly, fervent, almost kittenish when she is with the right set. Her face in repose shows the strain of constant enthusiasm over other people's good times. She is dressed in a very fussy evening dress, feathers, fringe, beads dangling indiscriminately. The fact of her having been well-born gives her a certain ease of manner with the clients whose careers she helps mould. She is the Society Editress for the Morning Star.*)

MISS FOUNTAIN

Charming, exquisite, ravishing. Marvelous to me how you accomplish these results. C'est épouvante! Such atmosphere, such unique atmosphere. I feel this will be *the* Ball of the season.

MRS. SEDGEWICK

Yes, I am sure dear Mary's début ball is going to be a great success.

(*Mrs. Sedgewick moves about the room, complacently touching things into place, glancing with satisfaction over the cards that came with the flowers.*)

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MRS. SEDGEWICK

No expense has been spared. All the right people are coming and none of the wrong ones have been asked.

MISS FOUNTAIN

So wise of you, dear Mrs. Sedgewick. In these Bolshevistic times you stand for Society's Rock of Ages.

MRS. SEDGEWICK

Yes, I must admit I am very strict on the subject of exclusiveness, very strict indeed. I cannot understand some of our acquaintances who open their doors to anyone. I tell Mary every day it is not necessary for her to know everyone who wants to know her.

MISS FOUNTAIN

Certainly not. The dear child has been so carefully reared. She is even a bit aloof with me at times.

MRS. SEDGEWICK

For instance, this Dr. Corre, a young doctor who attends Mr. Sedgewick. A very estimable young man in his way, no doubt, but not our kind at all; Mary had to have him invited. To my surprise he sent his regrets.

MISS FOUNTAIN

You'll occasionally find that some of these people have the good sense not to come where they know they'll feel out of place.

MRS. SEDGEWICK

Exactly. But Mary is a bit—er—what shall I say—difficile. She refuses to understand why some people belong and others do not. You simply cannot imagine the people she wanted to

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insist on asking here tonight. Some very queer ones indeed. I had to be very firm. Old acquaintances of Sunday-school days, women she met in war work, in the canteen and the motor corps—she wanted them all. The child has no sense of discretion. It's my belief anyway that most women went into war work for the sole purpose of meeting society folk like us on an equal basis. Personally, I was very careful only to work with people I knew. Chambers disgust me so.

MISS FOUNTAIN

Discretion will come to Mary in time, dear lady. You will mould her, never fear. And she is so ravishing, so beautiful, that very soon I know some marvelous Prince Charming will open her eyes to the privilege of belonging to the American Noblesse.

MRS. SEDGEWICK

There are several on the waiting list. One whom I specially favor. Mr. Stanton.

MISS FOUNTAIN (*giving a signal of delight at the great name*)

How splendid! Dear Mrs. Sedgewick, mayn't I just hint at it? Something like this. (*Half closes her eyes and composes.*) During the gayeties of the evening, one of our most delightful and eligible dancing men was allowed to enjoy a great many dances with the debutante, with whom he also led the cotillon later in the evening after the inner man had been satisfied.

MRS. SEDGEWICK

Delightful! That will be just enough.

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MISS FOUNTAIN

Dear lady, how grateful Society should be that it has such stalwart bulwarks as you to ward off the vulgar invasion of the masses. (*Mrs. Sedgewick smoothes down her portly hips doubtfully. Miss Fountain hurriedly covers her slip.*) Figuratively, I mean. Metaphorically speaking of course. As I composed myself to write the account of your ball for the Sunday papers, for once duty and pleasure went hand in hand. It was a joy to write about the affair, the house, the sumptuousness—and dear Mr. Sedgewick. (*At the mention of Mr. Sedgewick's name, his wife shows distinct uneasiness.*) He is always such a charming host in spite of his delicate health. Rheumatism, is it not?

MRS. SEDGEWICK

Yes—er rheumatism. A very unusual kind.

MISS FOUNTAIN

Inflammatory?

MRS. SEDGEWICK

Yes, very! He will strain every effort to be present; he is looking forward to the ball with such pleasure. He dotes on Mary. We could not make the list exclusive enough to suit him.

MISS FOUNTAIN

So thoughtful, so aloof, so untiring in his efforts for others. He really should be careful of himself for the good of the community. The true aristocrat.

MRS. SEDGEWICK (*suddenly businesslike*)

Miss Fountain, you brought the account of the ball with you? That is as much as you could write before it takes place?

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MISS FOUNTAIN (*produces a sheaf of typewritten pages out of a satin bag*)

Here it is almost as you dictated it to me. All I have to do is to fill in a list of the guests and their gowns.

MRS. SEDGEWICK (*goes to the table and takes a piece of notepaper out of the drawer*)

Here is the list of guests whose names I want published. The names underlined are the people whose costumes and appearance I want specially emphasized. You understand, I know.

MISS FOUNTAIN (*takes the page and glances over it rapidly*)

Surely, dear lady.

MRS. SEDGEWICK (*looks over Miss Fountain's shoulder*)

For example, people like the Browns or the Jenkses or the Pickleheimers. One must ask them, you know, but you needn't put them in the notes, no matter how often they say good evening to you.

MISS FOUNTAIN

I understand perfectly. The effect of an affair on the public mind is so enhanced by the proper treatment of these details. (*She finishes looking over the list hurriedly, nodding her head with satisfaction, before she stuffs it into her bag.*) Such a satisfactory list. You have a flair, a real genius, for social subtleties.

MRS. SEDGEWICK (*squeezes Miss Fountain's hand*)
Dear child, I do appreciate your interest.

MISS FOUNTAIN

And I yours. Now I'm off through the rooms

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for a last loving survey, before the guests arrive. Au revoir.

(Miss Fountain goes into the sun room, leaving Mrs. Sedgewick alone on the stage reading the typewritten pages with an air of great complacency. Mary enters, door, left. Her manner is listless, almost unhappy. Her attitude toward her mother is careless to the point of indifference. The mother's manner is that of a general who expects his troops to rebel on the eve of battle. During the following scene Mrs. Sedgewick is glancing over the typed papers when she is not looking at Mary.)

MRS. SEDGEWICK *(looking at her daughter in dismay)*

Why aren't you dressed?

MARY

Plenty of time. All I have to do is to slip into my gown.

MRS. SEDGEWICK *(nervously)*

Do you know if your father is ready?

MARY

I just left him. Dr. Corre is giving him a last shot so that he can do the family proud.

MRS. SEDGEWICK

Mary! No well-bred girl talks that way about her father.

MARY

Who said I was well-bred? I wouldn't be accepted in any exclusively pedigreed animal show —after the judges had seen Father.

MRS. SEDGEWICK

Mary!!

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MARY (*carelessly*)

Sorry. Won't do it again. Dr. Corre assures me that Father will hold up for at least five hours. Quite a record for him, isn't it? (*Pause.*) I asked Dr. Corre to try to come tonight.

MRS. SEDGEWICK

He probably regretted in the first place because he knew he would not fit in. I only consented to ask him because he is around your father so much.

MARY

You were smarter than I was. He refused again. Said he wasn't interested. (*Wearily.*) I don't suppose I interest him either for that matter.

MRS. SEDGEWICK (*scornfully*)

You interest him? The very idea! Really, Mary, considering your rearing, you are very hard to understand at times.

MARY

Yes, all things considered, I am a misfit. I never felt it so acutely as I do tonight. All this fussing and fuming and wasted energy and not one bit of pure happiness or real kindness in the lot. I'm bored to extinction before I begin. I'm not Glen Corre's type. I've never been taught to think. Something like Reg Staunton will be my fate, I suppose.

MRS. SEDGEWICK (*happy, eager, excited*)

Has he said anything?

MARY (*scornfully*)

Several times. Any time I give him the chance.

MRS. SEDGEWICK (*bitter and frustrated*)

Most of the girls who are coming here tonight would give their souls for your chance.

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MARY

He'd love that. I wish the nastiest six could have him. That would about satisfy him—for a time. Selfish old beast!

MRS. SEDGEWICK

Love often comes after marriage.

MARY

I know. Love for another woman.

MRS. SEDGEWICK

Mary, one of the chief things you have to learn is not to let your interests roam too far outside your own circle. Go to concerts and lectures; be a patroness as often as you please, if the list is an exclusive one; have your little charities—

MARY (*explodes*)

Oh, Lord!

MRS. SEDGEWICK (*rises and folds the papers indignantly*)

Really I refuse to stand this insolence of yours another minute.

MARY (*her voice suddenly softens with contrition and she lays her hands on her mother's shoulders*)

Mother dear, I'm sorry if I hurt you. If you would only try to understand me, we could be so happy together.

MRS. SEDGEWICK (*blindly obdurate, goes right on*)

After all that is being done for you, your tea, your clothes, your jewels, and now this ball, all for you—

MARY (*repulsed, gives a hard laugh*)

For me? What a joke! If you didn't have me to give a ball for, you'd find another débutante to give one for, the swellest on your list. That's

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the way all the elderly society fans keep things going for themselves after they've outlived their own youth.

MRS. SEDGEWICK

I should hate to have Miss Fountain find you in this mood.

MARY

Your friend would be too tactful to notice it. (*She takes the papers from her mother and looks them over mischievously.*) Lord! what a line to write. Covering people's defects with twaddle and exalting their commonplaceness into virtue. What tommy-rot!

MRS. SEDGEWICK (*sarcastic*)

You seem to find them interesting, nevertheless.

MARY

I want to see how your friend Miss Fountain camouflaged the past records of our family this time. I am looking to see whether she touched on the career of my maternal great-uncle. She is such a shark for ancestry, you know.

MRS. SEDGEWICK (*in vexed alarm*)

Mary, how dare you recall that? Give me those papers this instant.

MARY

Oh, yes, here it is. (*She pretends to read*). And it came to pass that Ben Higgins, the great uncle of the *débutante* on the mother's side, while spending an enforced rest cure at the State Penitentiary, became so expert in making shoes that on regaining his liberty, he went into the business. And he did teach his brother, Josiah Higgins, the *débutante's* grandfather,

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the art, and these two together did roll up the tremendous fortune which in time attracted the attention of one Percival Sedgewick, impoverished and dissipated aristocrat, and he did marry Sarah Ann Higgins and these two begat—

MRS. SEDGEWICK (*making for Mary and the papers in a towering rage*)

Mary, I insist—such thoughts—such language—

MARY (*waving her off laughingly*)

The language is Biblical. The thoughts aren't as ridiculous as this really reads. Listen to this. (*She reads.*) "Balls may come and balls may go, but *The Ball* of the season was given last night." (*Interpolates*) And the evening is still young. (*Skims down the pages.*) "Princely host"—(*grins*) "Loving understanding"—How delicious! "Twining garlands of orchids punctuated by roses; Mrs. Sedgewick is an expert in flora and fauna, flower culture being her great delight in summer." Oh, what a naughty lie, Mummy dear, when you don't even know the difference between a larkspur and a skylark.

MRS. SEDGEWICK (*snatches the papers from Mary*)

You really are too exasperating. Go and dress. Here comes your father, and I've had about enough.

(*Corre ushers in Mr. Sedgewick, left, ready for the festivities. Corre is a clean-cut, humorous, attractive type of young man, dressed in well-made business clothes. Sedgewick is an emaciated, trembling, repulsive wreck of a man in irreproachable evening dress. He moves across the stage haltingly, with the slithering walk of a man*

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suffering from locomotor ataxia. He drops into the chair next to the smoking table. Mary is standing near the fireplace, and her mother is near her, the papers still fluttering in her hands. During the following scene, whenever Corve is not in the action, his eyes involuntarily seek Mary, who stubbornly refuses to meet his gaze. He watches her father with a sort of painful amusement. Mrs. Sedgewick's manner turns to one of strained politeness, for company only.)

MRS. SEDGEWICK

Good evening, Percival. Good evening, Dr. Corve. Everyone is ready now but Mary. I hope your—er—rheumatism is better, Percival?

MR. SEDGEWICK *(Looks at his wife with an ironic leer. His voice is cultured but snarling. He has no company manners.)*

My rheumatism? Ha! Ha! Rheumatism! Well I can tell you this damned excitement doesn't do it any good. Ugh, that dress you have on! Designed for a woman half your age and a beauty at that. *(He takes her with a glare.)* And it doesn't even look fresh. Your things never do. *(Waving his hands.)* Where'd all these flowers come from? Ugly lot!

MRS. SEDGEWICK

From friends. *(She lays Society Notes on the table and hands him a trayful of cards.)* Here are the cards.

(Sedgewick sits looking over the cards with grunts of disapproval. Mrs. Sedgewick crosses over to Corve, who is leaning against the back of a chair,

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left, looking at Mary. She speaks to him in a low voice.)

MRS. SEDGEWICK

How is your patient tonight, Dr. Corre?

CORRE

Unusually well, Mrs. Sedgewick. He will hold up splendidly, I think.

MRS. SEDGEWICK

If you could only give him something to keep him from being offensive to people.

CORRE

You are asking a great deal of science, Mrs. Sedgewick.

SEDGEWICK

Rotten lot of cards. Is that all? You never did know how to make the best people your friends. Where's your menu? (*Mrs. Sedgewick hands it to him. He looks at it and gives a cry of rage.*) In all these years haven't I taught you that it's utterly vulgar as well as suicidal to serve lobster mayonnaise and ice cream at the same time? I never read anything as absolutely common as the selection of this menu. Your work, I suppose.

CORRE (*comes over to him and taps him on the shoulder*)

It isn't wise to excite yourself unnecessarily, Mr. Sedgewick.

SEDGEWICK (*shouts*)

Unnecessarily? My God! man, when the favors look like a Christmas fête for charity children, and the flowers look like the festooning in a bar-room—and—and—where is the list of

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guests? (*He half rises from the chair, his feet slide about helplessly, and he subsides again.*)

(*Mrs. Sedgewick hands him the list. He looks it over, snorting with scorn.*)

SEDGEWICK

Bunch of muckers. Not many people fit to associate with these days.

(*Mary, who has watched the scene in ironic silence, suddenly chuckles out loud. Her father glares around at her.*)

SEDGEWICK

I'd like to be amused. Give me something to laugh at. Tell me the joke.

MARY

It would take too long. I'd have to review the entire family history. I'm off now to get into my frock. Prepare for a vision when I return. (*She goes out, left.*)

SEDGEWICK

Insolent little devil. But she shows class. (*He looks at his wife.*) Takes after my people. (*He throws out his sunken chest.*) I tell you, breeding shows every time. (*He rises with much difficulty but ultimate success.*) Going to view the rest of the mismanagements of this party. (*He totters toward the sun room.*)

CORRE

Follow my directions as closely as you can, Mr. Sedgewick. And if you need me, I'll be at my home this evening.

SEDGEWICK

Stay for the ball, Corre. (*Sarcastically.*) Awfully amusing. I'll give you pointers.

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CORRE

Thanks. Not this evening. Work to do at home.

(As Sedgewick reaches the sun room he bumps into Miss Fountain, who, notebook in hand, is going in the opposite direction. She overflows effusively.)

MISS FOUNTAIN

How lovely! Everything so chaste, so charming, so rav—

SEDGEWICK (*grunts*)

. . . d'evening. *(They go off in opposite directions.)*

MRS. SEDGEWICK

Dr. Corre.

CORRE

Yes, Mrs. Sedgewick?

MRS SEDGEWICK

Can't you make him a bit steadier just for this evening?

CORRE

I've stimulated him as much as I dare, Mrs. Sedgewick.

MRS. SEDGEWICK (*gives a long sigh*)

How long does a man in his condition usually last?

CORRE

Your husband has unusual powers of resistance, really marvelous vitality. And he responds splendidly to medical treatment. I've seen men in his condition last for years. *(Mrs. Sedgewick gives another long sigh.)* Good-

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night, Mrs. Sedgewick, I hope the evening will be everything you can wish for.

MRS. SEDGEWICK (*perfunctory*)

So sorry you're not coming.

CORRE

My evenings are very full. However, I appreciate your kindness.

MRS. SEDGEWICK (*patronizing, as if she were announcing something to the old family butler*)

You are so deeply interested in the family that I know you will like to hear that we shall have a very pleasant announcement to make in the course of a few days. My daughter and a man in—er—her own circle. You've heard his name, no doubt. Mr. Reginald Staunton.

CORRE (*stung out of his usual indifference*)

Your daughter Mary to that man Staunton? Mrs. Sedgewick, surely you can't mean it?

MRS. SEDGEWICK (*mistaking his repugnance for awe*)

Yes, isn't it lovely? Everything a mother could wish for her child. And I know she will find complete happiness in remaining in the same station of life to which she has been accustomed.

CORRE

I doubt it. However, I am only your medical advisor and I fear I am limited to that.

(Miss Fountain enters from the sun room and Mary from the door, left, at the same time. Miss Fountain passes Corre with a chilly little nod, which he returns coolly. Mary, radiant in evening dress, advances to the center of the room. Corre, after one glance at her, turns his back and stands

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looking out of window. Miss Fountain applauds Mary with gasps of delight.)

MISS FOUNTAIN

How chic—how spirituelle—how ravishing—really, ravishing is the only word for it, is it not, Mrs. Sedgewick?

MRS. SEDGEWICK (*who has regained her complacency with the advent of her chief ally*)

It's from Paris. An original Cheruit model. Turn around, Mary, so that Miss Fountain can get the full details.

(Mary stands stock-still.)

MISS FOUNTAIN

Ravishing! Simply and exquisitely ravishing.

MRS. SEDGEWICK

Yes, isn't it? Turn around, Mary.

MARY (*does not budge*)

Mother, I am sure Miss Fountain's marvelous imagination can fill in the details. That wonderful imagination! Where should we be without it?

MRS. SEDGEWICK (*hurriedly takes Miss Fountain by the arm and beats a retreat toward the sun room*)

Come, my dear, I want to explain that last figure again.

MISS FOUNTAIN (*her voice floating back as they go off through the sun room*)

Oh, yes. Where the buds form a circle, and the dancing men revolve—

(Corre still stands looking out of the window. Mary crosses to the fireplace, and looks at herself

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rather sadly in the mirror above it. Suddenly she speaks in a tone entirely different from that she used before, a wistful, girlish, musical voice.)

MARY

Don't you wish to see this ravishing sight, Dr. Corre?

CORRE (*turns slowly with his hands shielding his eyes as if from the sun*)

I'm not keen about being ravished. It's too devastating.

MARY

Bear it like a man. Just one look.

(Corre takes his hands away from his eyes, looks at her squarely, and continues to look and look until she grows uncomfortable.)

MARY

That will do. You've acquitted yourself nobly. Did it hurt much?

CORRE

A lot. It still does. (*He continues to stare.*)
But it's worth it. What shall I do? Now I've started looking I can't stop.

MARY

Try a cigarette. The blaze of the match may distract your attention. (*She offers him one from a box on the table.*)

CORRE

Thanks. I prefer my own. (*He takes one from his case.*) Will you light it for me? (*She lights one for herself and then his, and they sit on the sofa before the fireplace.*)

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MARY

Seize the fleeting moment. This is the only happy one I expect to enjoy this evening.

CORRE

That's rather a queer statement in view of the alliance your mother intimated to me a few minutes ago.

MARY (*looks at him quickly*)

Already? You mean she spoke as if I were going to announce my engagement to Mr. Staunton?

CORRE

You do know of it then? I had almost hoped— (*Rising.*) Well, I think in view of the circumstances, you should be able to pass a few happy moments with him.

MARY

Sit down. (*He sits.*) He's Mother's choice, not mine, and she's a long way from being his adoring mother-in-law.

CORRE

Lord knows, he has a lot to offer any girl.

MARY

Yes, I know that. But aside from his wealth and position, they say he is the best student in feminine psychology in town. And I couldn't expect him to give up his studies after marriage and concentrate his energies on one specimen of the sex, could I?

CORRE

I'm not pleading any man's cause with you, Miss Sedgewick. I do know of one man who would like to devote all the lives he could collect studying the psychology of one woman.

SOCIETY NOTES

MARY

That would necessitate spending long, quiet evenings at home with that one woman, wouldn't it?

CORRE

It would. Tell me, does the very thought of long, quiet evenings at home with just one admiring male make you yawn with boredom?

MARY

If you only knew. (*She reaches back of her and brings over the copy of Society Notes, left lying on the table.*) Here's the sort of thing that is killing me by inches. (*Reading.*) "Mr. and Mrs. Sedgewick received their guests in a veritable fairyland bower of pink roses. Mr. Sedgewick, as always handsome, dignified, aristocratic, was his usual charming self, showing the influence of the society of foreign capitals grafted on our fine old American stock." (*She looks at him quizzically.*) That enchanting description is supposed to be Father—my father.

CORRE

That's one very good point in his favor, Miss Miss Sedgewick, the fact that he is your father.

MARY

Yes, he has always considered that the one redeeming feature in an otherwise ill-spent life. Do you want to hear another gem?

CORRE

I love the sound of your voice.

MARY (*hurriedly*)

Here's one sentence, all lies, two hundred words without a break. (*Reading with affected elo-*

SOCIETY NOTES

quence.) "The effect of the congenial and beautiful home life and loving and exquisite care which have been the keynote of the débutante's rearing, her aunt on her mother's side having married the Earl of Conant, it being a matter of poignant regret that the Countess cannot be here for her niece's début, affairs of state demanding her presence elsewhere, and many of her kinsfolk on her father's side being descended from that fine old aristocracy of the southern states, masters of lordly plantations, where hospitality was a high art; her maternal progenitors having been captains of finance—shone in her beatific young face as she greeted her hosts of admiring friends and guests." (*She tosses the paper back on the table with a gesture of despair.*) You see, quite apart from a lack of syntax in these descriptions, there isn't a word of truth in them either. My aunt, the countess, is occupied at present getting a divorce from a perfect rotter of a husband. And the most important of my maternal progenitors—(*she looks at him searchingly, and he allows himself a broad grin.*) You've heard rumors, no doubt?

CORRE

I have heard that before he was a captain of finance he served a term as a captive of finance.

MARY

Can't you see what a laughingstock this makes me feel? When I know that others know and are revelling in it, especially those that aren't asked here tonight? When I know—Oh, Lord! (*She quotes despairingly.*) "Mr. Sedge-

SOCIETY NOTES

wick, his charming self—congenial home life—beatific young face—” (*She pushes her face in front of his, inviting scrutiny.*) Look. Can you observe a happy shine on this beatific young countenance?

CORRE

Don't ask me to inspect that countenance again tonight. I did it once at my own risk. Next time I do it, it will be at yours.

MARY (*insistent*)

Look at me, please. (*She makes a grimace like a child crying.*) My beatific young face.

CORRE (*turns and looks deep into her eyes. Her face grows sweet and serious. He lays his hands on her shoulders; she does not draw away*)

I don't have to look at your face, Mary Sedgewick. I've had it before me waking and sleeping for more than a year. I've loved the innocence of it, the wistfulness of it, and the fine sincerity that glows in your dark eyes. And I've damned my helplessness to snatch you away from these fool influences that were trying to mould you into a chuckle-headed little flapper. (*He releases her shoulders and catches hold of her hands.*) Mary, my dear, my dear, chuck these things you hate and come away with me.

MARY

You mean—

CORRE

Marry me now. We'll have our youth together.

MARY

Are you acting from a sense of duty, sort of rescue work affair—or—

SOCIETY NOTES

CORRE

Rescue work? Good Lord, when I spend my waking hours thinking new ways of telling you you're the most wonderful thing on God's green earth. You've put my work on the blink, my practise on the blink, and me on the blink. Now, who needs rescue, I'd like to know?

MARY

Both of us, perhaps. We'll draw up a fifty-fifty rescue scheme for you and me.

CORRE

We needn't draw it up. They'll do it for us at the City Hall. They call it a marriage license.

MARY

Oh!

CORRE

If I go shopping for one tomorrow, will you come with me to help me select a nice one?

MARY

I'm busy tomorrow. Won't next week do?

CORRE

Mary, Mary, don't make it too long, dear. I won't be really living until I've got you fast; until I see you sitting across my hearth from me.

MARY (*dreamily*)

Across your hearth from you. Why, how jolly that sounds.

CORRE

Doesn't it? And Mary—

MARY

Yes?

CORRE

I had such a cute, snappy way of proposing to you, but you messed it all up.

SOCIETY NOTES

MARY

I did?

CORRE

Yes, you excited me so I forgot my lines. Shall I tell you the other one now?

MARY

Oh, do. And I can accept the one I like best.

CORRE

Here goes. I could die a happy man—if—if I could kiss you—once.

MARY

I'd hate to see you die—but—

(She does not lean away from him. He seizes her in his arms and kisses her. She releases herself.)

CORRE

That wasn't a real one. I went slow at first.

MARY

It seemed rather rapid to me. Have you—have you another variety of those, too?

CORRE

Several. Here's another. *(He catches her and kisses her.)* That one was on second speed. And here goes one on high.

(He takes Mary in his arms again, and they are interrupted in a very thorough embrace by Staunton, who enters from the right, and stands looking at them a moment before he speaks.)

STAUNTON

I knew I was right. *(They spring to their feet. Corre glares at Staunton.)* You said there was no other man.

SOCIETY NOTES

MARY

There wasn't—then.

CORRE (*coldly emphatic*)

There most decidedly is now.

STAUNTON

Didn't take you very long to learn a woman's tricks, did it, Miss Sedgewick? Prevaricating so prettily about loving an ideal when all the time it was this man's arms and his kisses you were thinking about. (*Roughly.*) How long has this been going on?

CORRE (*walks up to Staunton and speaks very gently*)

I don't like your tone. Please change it.

STAUNTON

You are assuming a good deal of authority in a house where you are not even a guest.

CORRE

I won't tell you again I don't like your insolence. You say another word I don't like and I'll take you out in the rear and spoil your appearance as a guest for some time to come.

STAUNTON (*disgustedly*)

Cave-man stuff! (*Corre starts towards him. He turns nervously to Mary.*) Hold your friend off; I don't want my hair mussed. By the way, I think your mother will have a word or two to say in this argument.

MARY (*airily*)

Let Mother divorce Father and marry you herself. It would give her great pleasure, coming and going.

SOCIETY NOTES

(A loud tuning of instruments is heard from the sun room. Mrs. Sedgewick enters excitedly.)

MRS. SEDGEWICK

Mary, Mary, come this instant. The first guests are arriving and we must form our receiving line.

MARY

Don't get excited, Mother. You've always said the first guests are sure to be poor relations and people who don't count, so we'll have plenty of time to finish this argument we're having.

STAUNTON *(sourly)*

Your daughter has an important announcement to make to you first, Mrs. Sedgewick.

MRS. SEDGEWICK *(blissful)*

Oh, Mr. Staunton.

STAUNTON

She wants to tell you she's engaged to be married.

MRS. SEDGEWICK *(hurries over to Staunton and buries her head on his shoulder)*

What happiness, what joy. You are the only man in the world my mother's heart can gladly give her to—*(At a loss for words.)* How ravishing, how simply and divinely ravishing! Reginald, my dear, dear son.

STAUNTON

I hate to disillusion you, Mrs. Sedgewick, but you are embracing the wrong son. *(Mrs. Sedgewick straightens up, suddenly aware of strained relations. She looks from one to the*

SOCIETY NOTES

other.) I regret to say I am not the ravishing one. Dr. Corre is the—er—lucky man.

MRS. SEDGEWICK

Dr. Corre, I am amazed at your effrontery.

MARY (*in a tone of appeal*)

Mother, please!

MRS. SEDGEWICK (*the old Ben Higgins strain crashing through the Sedgewick veneer as she yields to her rage and disappointment*)

Mary, you ungrateful, impertinent thing, be still or leave the room. I know what I am doing. After all I have done for you—this!

MARY

I believe I'll stay. I'm a bit interested in the outcome.

MRS. SEDGEWICK (*the Sedgewick veneer totally submerged*)

Then hold your tongue. (*She turns to Corre.*) To sneak into the sanctity of our home and try to beguile this child into a marriage which can mean nothing but misery and sacrifice; made-over clothes, hashed-over food, loss of servants, and loss of friends—am I right?

CORRE (*politely interested*)

I'm sure I don't know. I have never met people like that intimately. Very interesting though, no doubt.

MRS. SEDGEWICK

To take this girl away from a position of prominence and luxury to share the life of a poor, unknown professional man, to run his office, do his work—What have I done to deserve all this?

SOCIETY NOTES

CORRE

Mrs. Sedgewick, aren't you drawing a good bit on your imagination? I'd like to correct some of your impressions, if I may. I am not a poor, unknown professional man, proof enough that I attend your husband. And my people have been doctors and men of science as far back as we can trace them. And I rather think I am going to make a big thing of my career. It won't be my fault if I don't. You are mistaken if you think I am a poor weakling seeking a leg up by marrying into a rich family. (*Ruefully.*) As it is, it will take me years to live this down among the doctors.

MRS. SEDGEWICK

I have made my plans. I will not have them interfered with. Dr. Corre, you had better go at once.

MARY

If he goes, I go with him. Now! Tonight! Then where are your plans?

MRS. SEDGEWICK (*loses her head*)

You are a thoroughly ungrateful, disobedient, insolent girl and not to be trusted for an instant. I will not have you to dictate to me; I will lock you in your room first.

MARY

Quite aside from the foolishness of that threat, you would have to make some very curious explanations to your guests. Hush, listen! (*The strumming of instruments and broken chords float in with the sound of voices. Mary is very grave.*) Quick, Mother! What is it to

SOCIETY NOTES

be? Am I to live my own life in my own way, or shall I refuse to appear tonight?

MRS. SEDGEWICK (*waking up to her powerlessness*)

Mary, Mary, what has gotten into you?

MARY (*suddenly begins to dance about the room*)

Oh, I'm happy, I'm happy, happy, happy; I'm happy for the first time in my life. I'm so happy it hurts. I want to cry and laugh and sing and shout. I love everyone. Oh, start the music, someone, I have to dance. (*Her father totters in and she throws her arms about him, almost flinging him off his feet.*) Oh, Father, Father, I'm so happy. I'm engaged to be married.

SEDGEWICK (*grouchy*)

The devil you are. To whom?

CORRE (*coming forward*)

To me, Mr. Sedgewick.

SEDGEWICK (*grinning broadly, to the surprise of all and the consternation of his wife*)

By Jove, that's the best news I've heard in years. Fine! Fine! Get some strong, new blood in the family. Correct your mother's mistake in marrying me, my dear. (*He kisses her.*)

STAUNTON (*goes toward the door, right*)

This is the door, I believe? (*They all look at him questioningly.*) Where the butler dispenses appetizers for the evening's bliss? My congratulations! You take the bliss, I'll take the appetizers. (*He goes off, right.*)

MRS. SEDGEWICK (*weakly*)

I'm sure I don't see—

SOCIETY NOTES

(Miss Fountain's voice is heard offstage. Mrs. Sedgewick straightens, and takes command again.)

MRS. SEDGEWICK

Hush! Not a word! I hear Miss Fountain. *(She makes a supreme effort and recaptures her company manners.)* Percival, Mary, we must form in line.

SEDGEWICK

I say, Corre, you want to stand in well with the old man. Let me have one of those appetizers to bliss. Not much in 'em, just a bit of vermouth and a bit of gin and a bit of old bourbon, and a dash of bitters—ah, if you only knew how the thought of one affects me.

CORRE

Make it a half a one, sir.

SEDGEWICK

A parent's blessing on your young head. *(He goes out, right.)*

MRS. SEDGEWICK *(crosses quickly to where Mary and Corre stand at the door, left.)*

I believe you said er—your ancestors—such an interesting detail, you know—they have been doctors for generations, you said?

CORRE

Back to the Revolution, and not a chiropodist or a veterinary in the lot.

MRS. SEDGEWICK

Dr. Corre—in time—I hope you will forget—forgive—I love my daughter—I want her to be happy.

SOCIETY NOTES

CORRE (*with an ingratiating smile*)

Mrs. Sedgewick, I hope you will forgive—I love your daughter—I'll make her happy.

MRS. SEDGEWICK

My childr—

(*Miss Fountain sails in from the sun room.*)

MARY (*pulling Corre through the door*)

Oh, glory, here comes Society Notes. Run!

(*Mary and Corre go off, left.*)

(*Miss Fountain advances to the center. Mrs. Sedgewick has made a quick recovery.*)

MISS FOUNTAIN

And everything so unbelievably wonderful. And dear Mr. Sedgewick—I saw him just now—so full of spirits. And Mr. Staunton—so stunning, so aristo—

MRS. SEDGEWICK (*interrupts suavely and confidentially*)

Miss Fountain, it was on that subject I wanted a moment's talk with you. You know how it is when a girl has so many suitors—we had rather thought that Mary and Mr. Staunton—but I fear I was a bit premature this evening—

MISS FOUNTAIN

I see. Mary wishes to enjoy her girlish freedom a bit longer.

MRS. SEDGEWICK

Not exactly. Mary has always been so intellectually, so spiritually inclined, that she has placed her affections where she can develop the higher side of her nature. In the meantime I can tell you that Dr. Corre—

SOCIETY NOTES

MISS FOUNTAIN (*overcome to the point of indiscretion for the only time in her life*)

Dr. Corre?

MRS. SEDGEWICK (*blandly and imperturbably*)

That Dr. Corre is a leader in the medical profession, his ancestors having been distinguished doctors as far back as the Mayflower. We are very well pleased. I shall be able to give you information for a full column for next Sunday's Society Notes.

MISS FOUNTAIN (*who has been swallowing her surprise during Mrs. Sedgewick's speech, and who has now recovered her usual poise*)

Splendid, glorious, ravishing, simply ravishing!

(Full and loud the dance music is heard through the sun room. They rise. Miss Fountain stands, her right arm flung aloft, her face and pose alight with the fervor and glorious expectancy of the Angel in the Annunciation.)

MISS FOUNTAIN

Hush! THE BALL of the season is beginning.

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