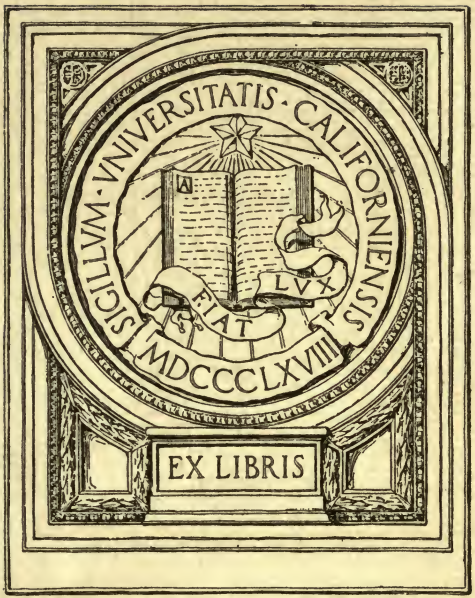
UC-NRLF
$B 248 198

The Big Drum

Arthur W. Pinero


SIGILLVM · VNIVERSITATIS · CALIFORNIENSIS
LVX
FIAT
MDCCCLXVIII
EX LIBRIS

954
P651
li

THE BIG DRUM

THE PLAYS OF ARTHUR W. PINERO

Paper cover, 1s. 6d.; cloth, 2s. 6d. each

THE TIMES
THE PROFLIGATE
THE CABINET MINISTER
THE HOBBY-HORSE
LADY BOUNTIFUL
THE MAGISTRATE
DANDY DICK
SWEET LAVENDER
THE SCHOOLMISTRESS
THE WEAKER SEX
THE AMAZONS
THE SECOND MRS. TANQUERAY
THE NOTORIOUS MRS. EBBSMITH
THE BENEFIT OF THE DOUBT
THE PRINCESS AND THE BUTTERFLY
TRELAWNY OF THE "WELLS"
†*THE GAY LORD QUEX*
IRIS
LETTY
A WIFE WITHOUT A SMILE
HIS HOUSE IN ORDER
THE THUNDERBOLT
MID-CHANNEL
THE "MIND THE PAINT" GIRL

* This Play can be had in library form, 4to, cloth, with a portrait, 5s.

† A Limited Edition of this play on hand-made paper, with a new portrait, 10s. net.

THE PINERO BIRTHDAY BOOK

SELECTED AND ARRANGED BY MYRA HAMILTON

With a Portrait, cloth extra, price 2s. 6d.

LONDON: WILLIAM HEINEMANN

THE BIG DRUM

A COMEDY

In Four Acts

BY ARTHUR PINERO

"*The desire of fame betrays an ambitious man into indecencies that lessen his reputation; he is still afraid lest any of his actions should be thrown away in private.*"

ADDISON

LONDON: WILLIAM HEINEMANN
MCMXV

Copyright 1915, *by Arthur Pinero*

PR5182
B6
1915
MAIN

This play was produced in London, at the St. James's Theatre, on Wednesday, September 1, 1915

334354

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2007 with funding from
Microsoft Corporation

http://www.archive.org/details/bigdrumcomedyinf00pinerich

PREFACE

THE BIG DRUM is published exactly as it was written, and as it was originally performed. At its first representation, however, the audience was reported to have been saddened by its "unhappy ending." Pressure was forthwith put upon me to reconcile Philip and Ottoline at the finish, and at the third performance of the play the curtain fell upon the picture, violently and crudely brought about, of Ottoline in Philip's arms.

I made the alteration against my principles and against my conscience, and yet not altogether unwillingly. For we live in depressing times; and perhaps in such times it is the first duty of a writer for the stage to make concessions to his audiences and, above everything, to try to afford them a complete, if brief, distraction from the gloom which awaits them outside the theatre.

My excuse for having at the start provided an "unhappy" ending is that I was blind enough not to regard the ultimate break between Philip and Ottoline as really unhappy for either party. On the contrary, I looked upon the separation of these two

people as a fortunate occurrence for both ; and I conceived it as a piece of ironic comedy which might not prove unentertaining that the falling away of Philip from his high resolves was checked by the woman he had once despised and who had at last grown to know and to despise herself.

But comedy of this order has a knack of cutting rather deeply, of ceasing, in some minds, to be comedy at all ; and it may be said that this is what has happened in the present instance. Luckily it is equally true that certain matters are less painful, because less actual, in print than upon the stage. The " wicked publisher," therefore, even when bombs are dropping round him, can afford to be more independent than the theatrical manager ; and for this reason I have not hesitated to ask my friend Mr. Heinemann to publish THE BIG DRUM in its original form.

ARTHUR PINERO

LONDON,
September 1915

THE PERSONS OF THE PLAY

PHILIP MACKWORTH
SIR RANDLE FILSON, KNT.
BERTRAM FILSON (*his son*)
SIR TIMOTHY BARRADELL, BART.
ROBERT ROOPE
COLLINGHAM GREEN
LEONARD WESTRIP (*Sir Randle's secretary*)
ALFRED DUNNING (*of Sillitoe and Dunning's Private Detective Agency*)
NOYES (*Mr. Roope's servant*)
UNDERWOOD (*servant at Sir Randle's*)
JOHN (*Mr. Mackworth's servant*)
A WAITER

OTTOLINE DE CHAUMIÉ, COMTESSE DE CHAUMIÉ, *née* FILSON
LADY FILSON
HON. MRS. GODFREY ANSLOW
MRS. WALTER QUEBEC
MISS TRACER (*Lady Filson's secretary*)

PERIOD—1913

ACT I.

ROBERT ROOPE'S FLAT IN SOUTH AUDLEY STREET. JUNE.

ACT II.

MORNING-ROOM AT SIR RANDLE FILSON'S, ENNISMORE GARDENS. THE NEXT DAY.

ACT III.

MACKWORTH'S CHAMBERS, GRAY'S INN. NOVEMBER.

ACT IV.

THE SAME PLACE. THE FOLLOWING MORNING.

The curtain falls for a moment in the course of the First and Third Acts.

THE BIG DRUM

THE FIRST ACT

The scene is a room, elegantly decorated, in a flat in South Audley Street. On the right, two windows give a view, through muslin curtains, of the opposite houses. In the wall facing the spectator are two doors, one on the right, the other on the left. The left-hand door opens into the room from a dimly-lighted corridor, the door on the right from the dining-room. Between the doors there is a handsome fireplace. No fire is burning and the grate is banked with flowers. When the dining-room door is opened, a sideboard and a side-table are seen in the further room, upon which are dishes of fruit, an array of ice-plates and finger-bowls, liqueurs in decanters, glasses, silver, etc.

The pictures, the ornaments upon the mantelpiece, and the articles of furniture are few but choice. A high-backed settee stands on the right of the fireplace; near the settee is a fauteuil-stool; facing the settee is a Charles II arm-chair. On the left of the room there is a small table with a chair beside it; on the right, not far from the nearer window, are a writing-table and writing-chair. Pieces of bric-à-brac lie upon the tables, where there are also some graceful statuettes in

ivory and bronze. Another high-backed settee fills the space between the windows, and in each window there is an arm-chair of the same period as the one at the fireplace.

The street is full of sunlight.

(*Note: Throughout, "right" and "left" are the spectators' right and left, not the actor's.*)

[ROBERT ROOPE, *seated at the writing-table, is sealing a letter.* NOYES *enters at the door on the left, followed by* PHILIP MACKWORTH.

NOYES.

[*Announcing* PHILIP.] Mr. Mackworth.

ROOPE.

[*A simple-looking gentleman of fifty, scrupulously attired—jumping up and shaking hands warmly with* PHILIP *as the servant withdraws.*] My dear Phil!

PHILIP.

[*A negligently—almost shabbily—dressed man in his late thirties, with a handsome but worn face.*] My dear Robbie!

ROOPE.

A triumph, to have dragged you out! [*Looking at his watch.*] Luncheon isn't till a quarter-to-two. I asked you for half-past-one because I want to have a quiet little jaw with you beforehand.

PHILIP.

Delightful.

ROOPE.

Er—I'd better tell you at once, old chap, whom you'll meet here to-day.

PHILIP.

Aha! Your tone presages a most distinguished guest. [*Seating himself in the chair by the small table.*] Is she a *grande-duchesse*, or is he a crowned head?

ROOPE.

[*Smiling rather uneasily.*] Wait. I work up to my great effect by degrees. We shall only be six. Collingham Green——

PHILIP.

[*In disgust.*] Oh, lord!

ROOPE.

Now, Phil, don't be naughty.

PHILIP.

The fellow who does the Society gossip for the *Planet!*

ROOPE.

And does it remarkably neatly, in my opinion.

PHILIP.

Pouah! [*Leaning back in his chair, his legs outstretched, and spouting.*] "Mrs. Trevelyan Potter, wearing a gown of yellow charmeuse exquisitely draped with chiffon, gave a dance for her niece Miss Hermione Stubbs at the Ritz Hotel last night." That sort o' stuff!

ROOPE.

[*Pained.*] *Somebody* has to supply it.

PHILIP.

"Pretty Mrs. Claud Grymes came on from the opera in her pearls, and Lady Beakly looked younger than her daughter in blue."

ROOPE.

[*Ruefully.*] You don't grow a bit more reasonable, Phil; not a bit.

PHILIP.

I beg pardon. Go ahead.

ROOPE.

[*Sitting on the fauteuil-stool.*] Mrs. Godfrey Anslow and Mrs. Wally Quebec. Abuse *them*.

PHILIP.

Bless their innocent hearts! *They'll* be glad to meet Mr. Green.

ROOPE.

I trust so.

PHILIP.

[*Scowling.*] A couple of pushing, advertising women.

ROOPE.

Really——!

PHILIP.

Ha, ha! Sorry. That's five, with you and me.

ROOPE.

That's five, as you justly observe. [*Clearing his throat.*] H'm! H'm!

PHILIP.

The sixth? I prepare myself for your great effect.

ROOPE.

[*With an effort.*] Er—Madame de Chaumié is in London, Phil.

PHILIP.

[*Sitting upright.*] Madame de Chaumié! [*Disturbed.*] Is *she* coming?

ROOPE.

Y-y-yes.

PHILIP.

[*Rising.*] Confound you, Robbie——!

ROOPE.

[*Hastily.*] She has got rid of her house in Paris and rejoined her people. She's with them in Ennismore Gardens.

PHILIP.

Thank you, I'm aware of it. One reads of Ottoline's movements in every rag one picks up. [*Walking over to the right.*] She's the biggest *chasseuse* of the crowd.

ROOPE.

I assure you she appears very much altered.

PHILIP.

What, can the leopard change his spots!

ROOPE.

Her family may still bang the big drum occasionally, and give it an extra whack on *her* account; but Ottoline herself——

PHILIP.

Faugh! [*Returning to* ROOPE.] Why the devil have you done this?

ROOPE.

[*Feebly.*] I confess, in the hope of bringing about a reconciliation.

PHILIP.

You—you good-natured old meddler. [*Quickly.*] Does she expect to find me here?

ROOPE.

No.

PHILIP.

[*Making for the door on the left.*] I'll bolt, then.

ROOPE.

[*Rising and seizing him.*] You shall do nothing of the kind. [*Forcing him down upon the fauteuil-stool.*] You'll upset my luncheon-table! [*Tidying himself.*] You're most inconsiderate; you are positively. And you've disarranged my necktie.

PHILIP.

[*In a low voice.*] How is she looking, Robbie?

ROOPE.

Brilliant. [*Putting his necktie in order.*] Is that straight? Brilliant.

PHILIP.

[*Gazing into space.*] Ten years ago, old man!

ROOPE.

Quite.

PHILIP.

It was at her father and mother's, in Paris, that I made *your* acquaintance. Recollect?

ROOPE.

Perfectly; in the Avenue Montaigne. I had a flat in the Palais-Royal at the time.

PHILIP.

[*Scornfully.*] You were one of the smart set. It was worth their while to get hold of *you*.

ROOPE.

My dear Phil, do be moderately fair. *You* weren't in the smart set.

PHILIP.

No; I was trying my hand at journalism in those days. Dreadful trade! I was Paris correspondent to the *Whitehall Gazette*. That's why *I* was favoured. [*Abruptly.*] Robbie——

ROOPE.

Hey?

PHILIP.

You'll scarcely credit it. One evening, while I was at work, Ottoline turned up with her maid at my lodgings in the Rue Soufflot, sent the maid out of the

room, and proposed that I should "mention" her family in my letters to the *Whitehall*.

ROOPE.

Mention them ?

PHILIP.

Drag in allusions to 'em constantly—their entertainments and so forth ; boom them, in fact.

ROOPE.

Was that the cause of the—the final——?

PHILIP.

[*Nodding.*] Yes. The following week her engagement to de Chaumié was announced.

ROOPE.

[*After a slight pause.*] Well, in spite of all this, I'm convinced she was genuinely attached to you, Phil—as fond of you as you were of her.

PHILIP.

[*Resting his head on his hands.*] Oh, shut up !

ROOPE.

Anyhow, here's an opportunity of testing it, dear excellent friend. She's been a widow twelve months ; you need have no delicacy on that score.

PHILIP.

[*Looking up.*] Why, do you suggest——?

ROOPE.

Certainly; and without delay. I hear there's a shoal of men after her, including Tim Barradell.

PHILIP.

[*With a grim smile.*] "Bacon" Barradell?

ROOPE.

[*Assentingly.*] They say Sir Timothy's in constant attendance.

PHILIP.

And what chance, do you imagine, would a poor literary cove stand against a real live baronet—and the largest bacon-curer in Ireland?

ROOPE.

[*Rubbing his chin.*] You never know. Women are romantic creatures. She *might* prefer the author of those absorbing works of fiction whose pages often wrap up Tim Barradell's rashers.

PHILIP.

[*Rising.*] Ha, ha, ha! [*Giving himself a shake.*] Even so it can't be done, Robbie; though I'm grateful to you for your amiable little plot. [*Walking about.*] Heavens above, if Ottoline married me, she'd be puffing my wares on the sly before the honeymoon was half over!

ROOPE.

And a jolly good job too. [*Moving to the left, peevishly.*] The truth is, my dear Phil, you're a crank—an absolute crank—on the subject of the—ah—the natural desire of some people to keep themselves in

the public eye. Mercy on us, if it comes to that, *I'm* an advertiser!

PHILIP.

If it comes to that, you miserable old sinner, you *are*.

ROOPE.

I admit it, frankly. I own it gratifies me exceedingly to see my little dinner-parties and tea-parties, here or at my club, chronicled in the press. And it gratifies my friends also. Many of them wouldn't honour me at all if my list of guests wasn't in the fashionable intelligence next morning.

PHILIP.

Oh——!

ROOPE.

Yes, you may roar. I declare I shudder to think of the difference it 'ud make to me socially if I didn't advertise.

PHILIP.

Robbie, I blush for you.

ROOPE.

Tosh! It's an advertising age.

PHILIP.

[*Stalking to the fireplace.*] It's a beastly vulgar age.

ROOPE.

It's the age I happen to live in, and I accommodate myself to it. [*Pacing the room as he warms to his theme.*] And if it's necessary for a private individual such as myself to advertise, as I maintain it is, how

much more necessary is it for *you* to do so—a novelist, a poet, a would-be playwright, a man with something to sell! Dash it, they've got to advertise soap, and soap's essential! Why not literature, which *isn't?* And yet you won't find the name of Mr. Philip Mackworth in the papers from one year's end to another, except in a scrubby criticism now and again.

PHILIP.

[*Calmly.*] Excuse me, there are the publisher's announcements.

ROOPE.

Publishers' announcements! I'm not speaking of the *regular* advertising columns. What I want to see are paragraphs concerning you mixed up with the news of the day, information about you and your habits, interviews with you, letters from you on every conceivable topic——

PHILIP.

[*Grinning.*] *Do* you!

ROOPE.

[*Joining* PHILIP.] Oh, my dear Phil, I entreat you, feed the papers! It isn't as if you hadn't talent; you *have.* Advertising *minus* talent goes a long way; advertising *plus* talent is irresistible. Feed the papers. The more you do for them, the more they'll do for you. *Quid pro quo.* To the advertiser shall advertisement be given. Newspaper men are the nicest chaps in the world. Feed them gratis with bright and amusin' "copy," as you term it, and they'll love and protect you for ever.

PHILIP.

Not for ever, Robbie. Whom the press loves die young.

ROOPE.

It's fickle, you mean—some day it'll turn and rend you? Perhaps. Still, if you make hay while the sun shines——

PHILIP.

The sun! You don't call *that* the sun! [*Disdainfully.*] P'ssh!

ROOPE.

[*Leaving him.*] Oh, I've no patience with you! [*Spluttering.*] Upon my word, your hatred of publicity is—is—is—is morbid. It's worse than morbid—it's Victorian. [*Sitting in the chair by the small table.*] There! I can't say anything severer.

PHILIP.

[*Advancing.*] Yes, but wait a moment, Robbie. Who says I have a hatred of publicity? *I* haven't said anything so absurd. Don't I write for the public?

ROOPE.

Exactly!

PHILIP.

[*Standing near* ROOPE.] I have no dislike for publicity—for fame. By George, sir, I covet it, if I can win it honestly and decently!

ROOPE.

[*Shrugging his shoulders.*] Ah——!

PHILIP.

And I humble myself before the men and women of my craft—and they are many—who succeed in winning it in that fashion, or who are content to remain obscure. But for the rest—the hustlers of the pen, the seekers after mere blatant applause, the pickers-up of cheap popularity—I've a profound contempt for them and their methods.

ROOPE.

You can't deny the ability of some of 'em.

PHILIP.

Deny it! Of course I don't deny it. But no amount of ability, of genius if you will, absolves the follower of any art from the obligation of conducting himself as a modest gentleman——

ROOPE.

Ah, there's where you're so hopelessly Victorian and out o' date!

PHILIP.

Well, that's my creed; and, whether I've talent or not, I'd rather snuff out, when my time comes, neglected and a pauper than go back on it. [*Walking away and pacing the room.*] Oh, but I'm not discouraged, my dear Robbie—not a scrap! I'm not discouraged, though you do regard me as a dismal failure.

ROOPE.

[*Deprecatingly.*] No, no!

PHILIP.

I shall collar the great public yet. You mark me, I shall collar 'em yet, and without stooping to the tricks and devices you advocate! [*Returning to* ROOPE.] Robbie——

ROOPE.

[*Rising.*] Hey?

PHILIP.

[*Laying his hands on* ROOPE'S *shoulders.*] If my next book—my autumn book—isn't a mighty go, I —I'll eat my hat.

ROOPE.

[*Sadly.*] Dear excellent friend, perhaps you'll be obliged to, for nourishment.

PHILIP.

Ha, ha, ha! [*Taking* ROOPE'S *arm.*] Oddly enough —oddly enough, the story deals with the very subject we've been discussing.

ROOPE.

[*Without enthusiasm.*] Indeed?

PHILIP.

Yes. You hit on the title a few minutes ago.

ROOPE.

Really?

PHILIP.

When you were talking of Ottoline and her people. [*Dropping his voice.*] "The Big Drum."

ROOPE.

[*Thoughtfully.*] C-c-capital!

PHILIP.

Titterton, my new publisher, is tremendously taken with the scheme of the thing—keen as mustard about it.

ROOPE.

Er—pardon me, Phil——

PHILIP.

Eh ?

ROOPE.

[*Fingering the lapel of* PHILIP'S *coat.*] I say, old man, you wouldn't be guilty of the deplorably bad taste of putting *me* into it, would you ?

PHILIP.

[*Slapping him on the back.*] Ha, ha ! My dear Robbie, half the polite world is in it. Don't tell me you wish to be left out in the cold !

ROOPE.

[*Thoroughly alarmed.*] Dear excellent friend——!

[NOYES *enters again at the door on the left, preceding* COLLINGHAM GREEN.

NOYES.

[*Announcing* GREEN, *and then retiring.*] Mr. Collingham Green.

GREEN.

[*A gaily-dressed, genial soul, with a flower in his button-hole, a monocle, a waxed moustache, and a skilful arrangement of a sparse head of hair—shaking hands with* ROOPE.] How are you, my deah fellow ?

ROOPE.

My dear Colly, delighted to see you.

GREEN.

An awful scramble to get heah. I was afraid I shouldn't be able to manage it.

ROOPE.

You'd have broken our hearts if you hadn't. You know Mackworth ?

GREEN.

And his charming works. [*Shaking hands with* PHILIP.] Haven't met you for evah so long.

PHILIP.

How d'ye do ?

GREEN.

Ouf ! I must sit down. [*Sitting on the fauteuil-stool and taking off a pair of delicately tinted gloves.*] The Season is killing me. I'm shaw I sha'n't last till Goodwood, Robbie.

ROOPE.

Yes, it's a shockin' rush, isn't it !

GREEN.

Haw ! You only *fancy* you're rushed. Your life is a rest-cure compared with mine. You've no conception, either of you, what my days are just now.

PHILIP.

[*Finding himself addressed.*] Exhausting, no doubt.

GREEN.

Take to-day, for example. I was in my bath at half-past-seven——

ROOPE.

Half-past-seven!

GREEN.

Though I wasn't in bed till two this morning. At eight I had a cup of coffee and a piece of dry toast, and skimmed the papers. From eight-thirty till ten I dictated a special article on our modern English hostesses—"The Hostesses of England: Is Hospitality Declining?", a question I answer in the negative——

ROOPE.

[*In a murmur.*] Quite right.

GREEN.

At ten o'clock, a man from Clapp and Beazley's with some patterns of socks and underwear. Disposed of *him*, dressed, and by a quarter-to-eleven I was in the Park. Strolled up and down with Lady Ventnor and Sir Hill Birch and saw everybody there was to be seen. I nevah make a single note; my memory's marvellous. Left the Park at twelve and took a taxi to inquire after Lord Harrogate, Charlie Sievewright, and old Lady Dorcas Newnham. I'm not boring you?

ROOPE.

Boring us!

GREEN.

Lady Dorcas caught sight of me from her window and hailed me in. I sat with her for twenty minutes —"Greenie" she always calls me—[*mimicking*]

" Now, Greenie, what's the noos ? " Haw, haw, haw ! I walked away from Lady Dorcas's, and was in Upper Grosvenor Street punctually at one. [*To* ROOPE.] There's been a meeting at the Baroness Van der Meer's to-day, you know, over this fête at the Albert Hall.

ROOPE.

Ah, yes; I'm to be in Lady Freddy Hoyle's Plantagenet group. I'm a knight in attendance on King John.

GREEN.

I had a short private chat with the Baroness, and followed her into the drawing-room. They were still at it when I sneaked out at a side door, and heah I am.

ROOPE.

Extraordinary ! Hey, Phil ?

PHILIP.

[*Leaning against the chair by the writing-table, dryly.*] Most interesting.

GREEN.

[*To* PHILIP, *rising.*] I lunch with Roope—[*to* ROOPE] you'll have to let me off at three, Robbie—and then my grind begins again.

ROOPE.

[*Throwing up his hands in admiration.*] Oh !

GREEN.

Horse Show, two musical parties—Lady Godalming's and Mrs. Reggie Mosenstein's ; then home and more dictation to my secretary. Dine with Sir

Patrick and Lady Logan at the Carlton, and then to the Opera with my spy-glass. From Covent Garden I dash down to Fleet Street, write my late stuff, and my day's done—unless I've strength left for Lady Ronaldshaw's dance and a crush at Mrs. Hume-Cutler's.

ROOPE.

[*Repeating his former action.*] Oh! Oh!

[NOYES *reappears.*

NOYES.

Mrs. Walter Quebec.

[MRS. WALTER QUEBEC *enters and* NOYES *withdraws.*

ROOPE.

[*Taking* MRS. QUEBEC'S *hand.*] My dear Mrs. Wally, how *are* you?

MRS. QUEBEC.

[*A bright, energetic, fairly young lady.*] How'r you, Robbie? Walter is so grieved; he's lunching at the Auto with Tony Baxter. He did try to wriggle out of it—[*Discovering* GREEN *and going to him with her hand extended.*] Oh, I *am* glad! You're just the man I'm dying to see.

GREEN.

[*Kissing her hand.*] Haw——!

MRS. QUEBEC.

Lady Skewes and I are getting up a concert in aid of the poor sufferers from the earthquake in—what's the name of the place?—I forget—Lady Skewes knows it—and we want you to say a lot about us in your darling paper. Only distinguished amateurs;

that's where the novelty comes in. Lady Skewes is going to play the violin, if she can pull herself together —she hasn't played for centuries—[*seeing* PHILIP, *advancing, and shaking hands with him casually*] how d'ye do ?—[*to* GREEN] and *I've* promised to sing.

GREEN.

Splendid.

ROOPE.

But how captivating !

MRS. QUEBEC.

[*To* GREEN.] I've sung so seldom since my marriage, and they've had *such* a difficulty to lure me out of my tiny wee shell. Would you mind dwelling on that a little ?

GREEN.

Of course not ; anything I can do, deah lady——

MRS. QUEBEC.

That's too utterly sweet of you. You shall have full particulars to-morrow. I wouldn't bother you, but it's charity, isn't it ? Oh, and there's something else I want you to be kind over——!

[NOYES *returns.*

NOYES.

Mrs. Godfrey Anslow.

[*The* HON. MRS. GODFREY ANSLOW *enters and* NOYES *goes out again.*

MRS. ANSLOW.

[*A tall, languishing woman with a toneless drawl—to* ROOPE.] Am I late ?

ROOPE.

[*Pressing her hand.*] Not a second, my *very* dear friend.

MRS. ANSLOW.

Can't help it if I am. My car got smashed up last week in Roehampton Lane, and the motor people have lent me the original ark, on wheels. [MRS. QUEBEC *comes to her.*] Hullo, Esmé!

MRS. QUEBEC.

[*Shaking hands.*] How'r you, Millicent?

MRS. ANSLOW.

[*Going to* GREEN *and giving him her hand.*] Oh, and here's that horrid Mr. Green!

GREEN.

My deah Mrs. Anslow!

MRS. QUEBEC.

Horrid! What's he done? [*Sitting in the chair by the small table.*] I consider him a white-robed angel.

MRS. ANSLOW.

I sent him a long account of my accident at Roehampton and he hasn't condescended to take the slightest notice of it.

MRS. QUEBEC.

Oh, Mr. Green!

MRS. ANSLOW.

[*To* GREEN.] It's cruel of you.

GREEN.

[*To* MRS. ANSLOW, *twiddling his moustache.*] Alack and alas, deah lady, motor collisions are not quite in my line!

MRS. ANSLOW.

You might have passed it on to the accident man. Or you could have said that I'm to be seen riding in the Row evidently none the worse for my recent shock. *That's* in your line.

GREEN.

Haw! I might have done that, certainly. [*Tapping his brow.*] Fact is—height of the Season—perfectly distracted——

MRS. ANSLOW.

[*With the air of a martyr.*] It doesn't matter. I sha'n't trouble you again. I've never been a favourite of yours——

GREEN.

[*Appealingly.*] Haw! Don't——!

MRS. ANSLOW.

It's true. I was one of the few stall-holders at the Army and Navy Bazaar whose gowns you didn't describe—[*Seeing* PHILIP *and nodding to him hazily.*] How d'ye do?

ROOPE.

[*Prompting her.*] Mr. Mackworth——

[MRS. ANSLOW *goes to* PHILIP *and proffers him a limp hand.* GREEN *retreats to the fireplace and* MRS. QUEBEC *rises and pursues him.*

MRS. ANSLOW.

[*To* PHILIP.] I think we met once at my cousins', the Fairfields'.

PHILIP.

[*Bowing.*] Yes.

MRS. ANSLOW.

You write, don't you ?

PHILIP.

[*Evasively.*] Oh——!

ROOPE.

[*Joining them.*] My dear Mrs. Anslow, Mr. Mackworth is one of the most gifted authors of the present day.

PHILIP.

[*Glaring at* ROOPE.] Tsssh !

ROOPE.

[*To* MRS. ANSLOW.] Get his books from your library instantly. I envy you the treat in store for you—— [NOYES *again appears.*

NOYES.

Madame de Chaumié.

[OTTOLINE DE CHAUMIÉ *enters—a beautiful, pale, elegant young woman of three-and-thirty, with a slightly foreign air and perfect refinement of manner.* NOYES *retires. Everybody is manifestly pleased to see* OTTOLINE, *except* PHILIP *who picks up a little figure from the writing-table and examines it critically.*

ROOPE.

[*Hurrying to her and taking her hand.*] Ah——!

OTTOLINE.

Robbie dear!

MRS. QUEBEC.

[*Going to* OTTOLINE.] Oh! [*They embrace.*] This is lovely!

OTTOLINE.

[*To* MRS. ANSLOW, *who comes to her.*] Millicent——! [*To* GREEN, *who bustles forward and kisses her hand.*] How do you do?

MRS. QUEBEC.

[*To* OTTOLINE.] You didn't stay long at the Railtons' last night, Ottoline.

OTTOLINE.

I had a headache—mother was so vexed with me——

MRS. ANSLOW.

Headache or not, you looked divine.

MRS. QUEBEC.

A vision!

GREEN.

[*To* OTTOLINE.] Haw! I hope you saw the remarks about you in this morning's papah, deah lady.

OTTOLINE.

[*To* GREEN.] For shame, Mr. Green! Have you been flattering me again?

GREEN.

Haw, haw, haw, haw——!

ROOPE.

[*Standing near* PHILIP.] Madame de Chaumié——

OTTOLINE.

[*Advancing.*] Yes ?

ROOPE.

Here's an old friend of ours whom you haven't met for years—Mackworth.

[*She starts and then waits, rooted, for* PHILIP'S *approach. He replaces the figure carefully and comes to her, and their hands touch.* ROOPE *leaves them and engages the others in conversation.*

OTTOLINE.

[*To* PHILIP, *in a low voice, her eyes sparkling.*] I had no idea I was to have this pleasure.

PHILIP.

[*Gently, but without exceeding the bounds of mere courtesy.*] Robbie excels in surprises; he has been almost equally reserved with me. Are you very well ?

OTTOLINE.

Very. And you ?

PHILIP.

Very. And Sir Randle and Lady Filson ?

OTTOLINE.

Quite well—and my brother Bertram. [*Chilled.*] Perhaps you've heard that I am making my home with them now in London, permanently—that I've left Paris ?

PHILIP.

Robbie—and the newspapers—have told me. It's late in the day to do it—may I offer you my sympathy ?

OTTOLINE.

[*With a stately inclination of the head.*] Thank you. And I my congratulations on your success ?

PHILIP.

[*Quietly.*] Success!

OTTOLINE.

[*Comprehending.*] Ah ? *Le public est si bête.* I've read every line you've written, I believe. [*He bows.*] I —I have felt proud to think that we were once—that we were once—not *des inconnus.*

[*He bows again, and there is silence between them. The dining-room door opens and* NOYES *presents himself. A waiter is seen in the dining-room, standing at the side table.*

NOYES.

[*To* ROOPE.] Lunch is served, sir.

ROOPE.

[*To everybody.*] Come along! Come along, dear excellent friends! [OTTOLINE *smiles graciously at*

PHILIP *and turns from him.*] Lead the way, dear Mrs. Anslow. Madame de Chaumié! [MRS. ANSLOW *slips her arm through* OTTOLINE'S.] You both sit opposite the fireplace. Dear Mrs. Wally! Come along, my dear Phil! [*Putting an arm round* GREEN'S *shoulder.*] Colly——!

[*They all move into the dining-room, and the curtain falls. It rises again almost immediately. A chair, withdrawn from the further window, is now beside the fauteuil-stool, on its right; and the chair which was close to the small table has been pulled out into the room, and faces the fauteuil-stool at some little distance from it. The doors are closed.* MRS. ANSLOW *and* MRS. QUEBEC *are taking their departure. The former is saying good-bye to* OTTOLINE, *who is standing before the fireplace; the latter is talking to* ROOPE *near the door on the left. On the right is* PHILIP, *ready to receive his share of the adieux.*

MRS. ANSLOW.

[*Shaking hands with* OTTOLINE.] Good-bye. You *might* come on to Olympia; my sister-in-law's box holds six.

OTTOLINE.

Sorry. I really am full up this afternoon. [MRS. QUEBEC *comes to* OTTOLINE *as* MRS. ANSLOW *goes to* PHILIP. ROOPE *opens the door on the left and remains there, waiting to escort the ladies to the outer door.*] Can I give you a lift anywhere, Esmé?

MRS. QUEBEC.

Thanks; Millicent's taking me along with her to the Horse Show.

MRS. ANSLOW.

[*Shaking hands with* PHILIP.] Very pleased to meet you again. Ever see anything now of the Fairfields?

PHILIP.

Never.

MRS. ANSLOW.

No loss. I believe dear old Eustace is off his head.

PHILIP.

Possibly.

MRS. ANSLOW.

[*Tolerantly.*] But then, so many people are off their heads, aren't they?

PHILIP.

A great many.

MRS. ANSLOW.

[*Bestowing a parting nod upon* PHILIP *and crossing to the open door.*] Sha'n't wait, Esmé. It's a month's journey to Hammersmith in the ark.

MRS. QUEBEC.

[*Kissing* OTTOLINE.] Good-bye.

MRS. ANSLOW.

[*To* ROOPE.] Charming lunch. Enjoyed myself enormously.

MRS. QUEBEC.

[*Shaking hands with* PHILIP *hastily.*] Good-bye, Mr. Mackworth.

PHILIP.

Good-bye.

[ROOPE *and* MRS. ANSLOW *have disappeared;* MRS. QUEBEC *follows them.* OTTOLINE *approaches* PHILIP *slowly.*

OTTOLINE.

[*Giving him her hand.*] Good-bye.

PHILIP.

[*Bending over it formally.*] Good-bye.

OTTOLINE.

We—we're in Ennismore Gardens, you know. [*He acknowledges the information by a stiff bow. She interests herself in her glove-buttons.*] You—you've chosen to drop out of my—out of our lives so completely that I hardly like to ask you to come and see us.

PHILIP.

[*Constrainedly.*] You are very good; but I—I don't go about much in these days, and I'm afraid——

OTTOLINE.

[*Quickly.*] Oh, I'm sure you're wise. [*Drawing herself erect.*] A writer shouldn't give up to society what is meant for mankind, should he?

[*She passes him distantly, to leave the room, and he suddenly grips her shoulder.*

PHILIP.

Ottoline——!

[*By a mutual impulse, they glance swiftly at the open door, and then she throws herself into his arms.*

OTTOLINE.

Philip——!

[*Just as swiftly, they separate; and a moment afterwards* ROOPE *returns, rubbing his hands cheerily.*

ROOPE.

[*Advancing, but not shutting the door.*] There! Now we're by ourselves! [*To* OTTOLINE.] You're not running away?

OTTOLINE.

[*Confused.*] Oh, I—I——

ROOPE.

It's only half-past-three. Why don't you and Mackworth sit down and have a little talk together? [*To* PHILIP, *who has strolled to the further window and is looking into the street.*] You're in no hurry, Phil?

PHILIP.

Not in the least.

ROOPE.

[*Crossing to the writing-table.*] I'll finish answering my letters; I sha'n't have a moment later on. [*Gathering up his correspondence.*] You won't disturb me; I'll polish 'em off in another room. [*To* OTTOLINE.] Are you goin' to Lady Paulton's by-and-by, by any chance?

OTTOLINE.

[*Again at the fireplace, her back to* ROOPE *and* PHILIP.] And Mrs. Jack Cathcart's—and Mrs. Le Roy's——

ROOPE.

You shall take me to Lowndes Square, if you will. [*Recrossing.*] Sha'n't be more than ten minutes. [*At the door.*] Ten minutes, dear excellent friends. A quarter-of-an-hour at the outside.

[*He vanishes, closing the door. There is a pause, and then* PHILIP *and* OTTOLINE *turn to one another and he goes to her.*

OTTOLINE.

[*Her hands in his, breathlessly.*] You *are* glad to see me, then! [*Laughing shyly.*] Ha, ha! You *are* glad!

PHILIP.

[*Tenderly.*] Yes.

OTTOLINE.

You brute, Phil, to make me behave in such an undignified way!

PHILIP.

If there's any question of dignity, what on earth has become of mine? I was the first to break down.

OTTOLINE.

To break down! Why should you try to treat me so freezingly? You can't be angry with me still, after all these years! *C'est pas possible!*

PHILIP.

It was stupid of me to attempt to hide my feelings. [*Pressing her hand to his lips.*] But, my dear Otto—my dear girl—where's the use of our coming into each other's lives again ?

OTTOLINE.

The use—? Why *shouldn't* we be again as we were in the old Paris days—[*embarrassed*] well, not quite, perhaps——?

PHILIP.

[*Smiling.*] Oh, of course, if you command it, I am ready to buy some smart clothes, and fish for opportunities of meeting you occasionally on a crowded staircase or in a hot supper-room. But—as for anything else——

OTTOLINE.

[*Slowly withdrawing her hands and putting them behind her.*] As for—anything else——?

PHILIP.

I repeat—*cui bono?* [*Regarding her kindly but penetratingly.*] What would be the result of your reviving a friendship with an ill-tempered, intolerant person who would be just as capable to-morrow of turning upon you like a savage——?

OTTOLINE.

Ah, you *are* still angry with me ! [*With a change of tone.*] As you did that evening, for instance, when I came with Nannette to your shabby little den in the Rue Soufflot——

PHILIP.

Precisely.

OTTOLINE.

[*Walking away to the front of the fauteuil-stool.*] To beg you to *prôner* my father and mother in the journal you were writing for—what was the name of it ?——

PHILIP.

[*Following her.*] *The Whitehall Gazette.*

OTTOLINE.

And you were polite enough to tell me that my cravings and ideals were low, pitiful, ignoble !

PHILIP.

[*Regretfully.*] You remember ?

OTTOLINE.

[*Facing him.*] As clearly as you do, my friend. [*Laying her hand upon his arm, melting.*] Besides, they were true—those words—hideously true—as were many other sharp ones you shot at me in Paris. [*Turning from him.*] Low—pitiful—ignoble——!

PHILIP.

Otto——!

[*She seats herself in the chair by the fauteuil-stool and motions him to sit by her. He does so.*

OTTOLINE.

Yes, they were true ; but they are true of me no longer. I am greatly changed, Philip.

PHILIP.

[*Eyeing her.*] You are more beautiful than ever.

OTTOLINE.

H'sh !—changed in my character, disposition, view of things. Life has gone sadly with me since we parted.

PHILIP.

Indeed ? I—I'm grieved.

OTTOLINE.

My marriage was an utter failure. You heard ?

PHILIP.

[*Shaking his head.*] No.

OTTOLINE.

No ? [*Smiling faintly.*] I thought *everybody* hears when a marriage is a failure. [*Mournfully.*] The fact remains ; it was a terrible mistake. Poor Lucien ! I don't blame him for my nine years of unhappiness. I engaged myself to him in a hurry—out of pique——

PHILIP.

Pique ?

OTTOLINE.

Within a few hours of that fatal visit of mine to your lodgings. [*Looking at him significantly.*] It was *that* that drove me to it.

PHILIP.

[*Staring at her.*] *That——!*

OTTOLINE.

[*Simply.*] Yes, Phil.

PHILIP.

Otto!

OTTOLINE.

[*Plucking at the arm of her chair.*] You see—you see, notwithstanding the vulgarity of my mind, I had a deep respect for you. Even then there were wholesome signs in me! [*Shrugging her shoulders plaintively.*] Whether I should have ended by obeying my better instincts, and accepting you, I can't say. I believe I should. I—I believe I should. At any rate, I had already begun to chafe under the consciousness that, while you loved me, you had no esteem for me.

PHILIP.

[*Remorsefully.*] My dear!

OTTOLINE.

[*Raising her head.*] That scene between us in th Rue Soufflot set my blood on fire. To have a request refused me was sufficiently mortifying; but to be whipped, scourged, scarified, into the bargain—! I flew down your stairs after I left you, and drove home, scorching with indignation; and next morning I sent for Lucien—a blind adorer!—and promised to be his wife. [*Leaning back.*] *Comprenez-vous, maintenant?* Solely to hurt *you;* to hurt you, the one man among my acquaintances whom I—admired!

[*She searches for her handkerchief. He rises and goes to the mantelpiece and stares at the flowers in the grate.*

PHILIP.

[*Almost inaudibly.*] Oh, Otto!

OTTOLINE.

[*Wiping a tear from her cheek.*] Heigh, dear me! Whenever I go over the past, and that's not seldom, I can't help thinking you might have been a little gentler with me—a girl of three-and-twenty—and have made allowances. [*Blowing her nose.*] What was Dad before he went out to Buenos Aires with his wife and children; only a junior partner in a small concern in the City! Wasn't it natural that, when he came back to Europe, prosperous but a nobody, he should be eager to elbow himself into a respectable social position, and that his belongings should have caught the fever?

PHILIP.

[*Wretchedly.*] Yes—yes——

OTTOLINE.

[*Rising and wandering to the writing-table.*] First we descended upon Paris—you know; but Paris didn't respond very satisfactorily. Plenty of smart men flocked round us—*la belle Mademoiselle Filson* drew *them* to the Avenue Montaigne!——

PHILIP.

[*Under his breath, turning.*] T'scht!

OTTOLINE.

But the women were either hopelessly *bourgeoises* or slightly *déclassée*. [*Inspecting some of the pieces of bric-à-brac upon the table.*] Which decided us to

attack London—and induced me to pay my call on you in the Rue Soufflot——

PHILIP.

I understand.

OTTOLINE.

To coax you to herald us in your weekly *causeries*. [*Wincing.*] Horrible of me, *that* was; horrible, horrible, horrible! [*Replacing an object upon the table and moving to the other side of the room.*] However, I wasn't destined to share the earliest of the London triumphs. [*Bitterly.*] Mine awaited me in Paris, and at Vaudemont-Baudricourt, as the Comtesse de Chaumié! [*Shivering.*] Ugh-h-h-h——!

[*She is about to sit in the chair on the left when he comes to her impulsively and restrains her.*

PHILIP.

My poor girl——!

OTTOLINE.

[*With abandon.*] Ah——!

PHILIP.

My poor dear girl!

OTTOLINE.

It's a relief to me to open my heart to you, Philip. [*He leads her to the fauteuil-stool.*] Robbie won't interrupt us yet awhile, will he?

PHILIP.

We'll kick him out if he does. [*They sit, close together, upon the fauteuil-stool.*] Oh, but he won't! This is a deep-laid plot of the old chap's——

OTTOLINE.

Plot ?

PHILIP.

To invite us here to-day, you and me, to—to——

OTTOLINE.

Amener un rapprochement ?

PHILIP.

Exactly.

OTTOLINE.

[*Softly.*] Ha, ha ! Dear old Robbie ! [*He laughs with her.*] Dear, dear old Robbie ! [*Her laughter dies out, leaving her with a serious, appealing face.*] Phil——

PHILIP.

Eh ?

OTTOLINE.

Your sneer — your sneer about me and the papers——

PHILIP.

Sneer ?

OTTOLINE.

I detected it. Almost the first thing you said to me when I arrived was that you'd been gathering news of me lately from the papers !

PHILIP.

[*Gently.*] Forgive me.

OTTOLINE.

It's been none of my doing ; I've finished with *le snobbisme* entirely. [*Pleadingly.*] You don't doubt me ?

PHILIP.

[*Patting her hand.*] No—no.

OTTOLINE.

Nowadays I detest coming across my name in print. But my people—[*with a little* moue] they will persist in——!

PHILIP.

Beating the big drum ?

OTTOLINE.

Ha ! [*Brushing her hair from her brow fretfully.*] Oh ! Oh, Phil, it was blindness on my part to return to them—sheer blindness !

PHILIP.

Blindness ?

OTTOLINE.

They've been urging me to do it ever since my husband's death ; so I had ample time to consider the step. But I didn't realize, till I'd settled down in Ennismore Gardens, how thoroughly I——

PHILIP.

[*Finding she doesn't continue.*] How thoroughly——?

OTTOLINE.

How thoroughly I've grown away from them—ceased to be one of them. [*Stamping her foot.*] Oh, I know I'm ungrateful ; and that they're proud of me, and pet and spoil me ; [*contracting her shoulder-blades*] but they make my flesh feel quite raw—mother, Dad, and my brother Bertram ! Their intense satisfaction

with themselves, and everything appertaining to them, irritates me to such a pitch that I'm often obliged to rush out of the room to stop myself from being rude. [*Impetuously.*] And then to have to watch Dad and mother still pushing, scheming, intriguing; always with the affectation of despising *réclame*, yet doing nothing—not the most simple act—without a careful eye to it! Years ago, as I've said, there was an intelligible motive for our paltry ambitions; but now, when they have *forcé les portes* and can afford to be sincere and independent——! [*Checking herself.*] But I oughtn't to speak of my folks like this, ought I, even to you whom I can trust! [*Penitently.*] It's awfully wrong of me. I—I beg your pardon.

PHILIP.

[*After a short silence.*] What do you intend to do, then, Otto, ultimately—re-establish yourself in Paris?

OTTOLINE.

[*Drearily.*] Paris! Is Paris so full of cheerful memories for me, do you suppose, that I should cling to it!

PHILIP.

[*Soothingly.*] Oh, come——!

OTTOLINE.

I travelled about for some months after I became a widow, and when I saw Paris again—! [*Starting up as if to rid herself of disagreeable sensations.*] No, my one great desire is to escape from it all, Phil—[*moving to the chair on the left*] to escape——!

PHILIP.

[*Rising.*] Escape ?

OTTOLINE.

To alter the whole current of my life, if it's possible, [*sinking into the chair*] and to breathe some fresh air ! [*Fanning herself with her hand.*] Phew-w-w-w !

PHILIP.

H'm ! [*Approaching her and looking down upon her.*] According to report, Ottoline, you'd have very little difficulty in—escaping.

OTTOLINE.

[*Glancing up at him.*] Report ?

PHILIP.

Rumour has it that there are at least a dozen ardent admirers at your feet, each with a wedding-ring in his waistcoat-pocket.

OTTOLINE.

[*Reproachfully, her eyes meeting his.*] Why, have you been listening to tittle-tattle as well as studying newspaper paragraphs ! [*He bows, good-humouredly.*] My dear Philip, allowing for exaggeration, granting that my *soupirants* number *half*-a-dozen, which of them would enable me to fill my lungs with fresh air ? Who *are* they, these enterprising men——?

PHILIP.

[*Leaving her abruptly and going to the mantelpiece.*] Oh, pray don't ask *me ! I* don't know who the fellows are—except—they say—Sir Timothy Barradell——

OTTOLINE.

[*Lightly but softly.*] Sir Timothy! Sir Timothy has only just succeeded in fighting his way into the world I'm sick and tired of! [*Shaking her head.*] Poor Sir Tim! [*Pityingly.*] Ha, ha, ha, ha!

PHILIP.

[*His back towards her.*] Otto——

OTTOLINE.

Yes?

PHILIP.

What sort of world would you be willing to exchange for your present one, my dear?

OTTOLINE.

What sort——?

PHILIP.

What sort—spiritual and material?

OTTOLINE.

[*Resting her elbow upon the arm of her chair and her chin upon her hand, musingly.*] Oh, I believe any world would content me that's totally different from the world I've lived in so long; any world that isn't flat and stale and stifling; that isn't made up of shams, and petty aims and appetites; any world that—well, such a world as you used to picture, Phil, when you preached your gospel to a selfish, common girl under the chestnuts in the Allée de Longchamp and the Champs-Elysées! [*Half laughing, half sighing.*] Ha, la, la, la!

[*Again there is a pause, and then he walks to the further window and gazes into the street once more.*

PHILIP.

[*In a low voice.*] Ten years ago, Otto!

OTTOLINE.

Ten years ago!

PHILIP.

[*Partly in jest, partly seriously.*] Do the buds still sprout on those trees in the Allée de Longchamp and the Champs-Elysées, can you tell me?

OTTOLINE.

[*Falling in with his humour.*] Ha, ha! Every spring, *cher ami*, regularly.

PHILIP.

And the milk at the Café d'Armenonville and the Pré-Catelan—is it still rich and delectable?

OTTOLINE.

To the young, I assume; scarcely to the aged widow——!

PHILIP.

Or the grey-haired scribbler! Ha, ha, ha, ha!

OTTOLINE.

Ha, ha, ha, ha——!

[*He turns and advances to her slowly, looking at her fixedly and earnestly.*

PHILIP.

Ottoline—I wonder whether you'd care to walk under those trees with me again, for sentiment's sake, some fine day in the future——!

OTTOLINE.

[*Staring at him.*] C-care——?

PHILIP.

And if you would, whether I ought to tempt you to risk it!

OTTOLINE.

[*Rising, smiling but discomposed.*] To—to risk finding that *le lait n'est pas crémeux*, do you mean?

PHILIP.

[*Tenderly.*] To risk even that. [*Drawing nearer to her.*] Otto——!

OTTOLINE.

I—I should be delighted—if—if ever——

PHILIP.

No, no; not as friends, Otto—save in the best sense——

OTTOLINE.

[*Faintly.*] I—I don't——

PHILIP.

As husband and wife. [*She stands quite still.*] Husband and wife! Some day when I've achieved a solid success; when I've captured the great public, and can come to you, not as a poor, struggling writer, but holding my prizes in both hands!

OTTOLINE.

[*Putting her hand to her forehead.*] It—it's not too late, is it?

PHILIP.

[*Recoiling.*] Too late—for me—to be successful?

OTTOLINE.

[*Passionately.*] Oh, my God, don't say that to me —[*going to him, and clinging to him*] too late for me to recover a little of what I've lost!

PHILIP.

[*Pressing her to him.*] Ah! Too late for neither of us. It's a bargain?

OTTOLINE.

Yes—yes; but——

PHILIP.

But——?

OTTOLINE.

[*Her head drooping.*] Must it be—*some* day? [*Piteously.*] *Some* day!

PHILIP.

There are signs in the sky; the day isn't far distant!

OTTOLINE.

I—I've money, Philip——

PHILIP.

H'sssh! [*Frowning.*] Ottoline!

OTTOLINE.

Ah, je vois que votre orgueil est plus fort que votre amour!

PHILIP.

Ha, ha! *Peut-être; je ne m'en défends pas.* You consent?

OTTOLINE.

[*Pouting.*] I may let my people know of the arrangement, may I not? You'll see them?

PHILIP.

My dear, what would be gained by that *now?*

OTTOLINE.

It would enable you to come often to Ennismore Gardens, and have cosy teas with me in my room. We couldn't be—what we *are*—on the sly indefinitely; it's impracticable There'll be a storm at first, but it will soon blow over. [*Making a wry face.*] Still, if you'd rather——

PHILIP.

No, no; I'll see them, if you wish me to. [*Nodding.*] We'll be open and above-board from the start.

OTTOLINE.

Ha, ha! [*Sighing happily.*] Ah-h-h-h!

PHILIP.

[*His tone changing to one of misgiving.*] Ah, Otto, I begin to be afraid that I oughtn't—that I oughtn't to have spoken to you——

OTTOLINE.

Why?

PHILIP.

[*Gravely.*] You will never be patient—you'll never be content to wait, if need be!

OTTOLINE.

Content, no. But *patient!* [*In a whisper.*] Shall I tell you a secret?

PHILIP.

Well?

OTTOLINE.

I've been waiting—waiting for you—in my dreams—for ten years!

PHILIP.

[*Ardently.*] Otto——!

OTTOLINE.

Isn't *that* patience?

[*Their lips meet in a lingering kiss. The handle of the door on the left is heard to rattle. Looking at the door, they draw back from one another. The handle rattles again.*

PHILIP.

It's that idiot Robbie.

OTTOLINE.

Ha, ha, ha, ha——!

[*The door opens, and* ROOPE *appears, with an air of unconcern.*

ROOPE.

[*Humming.*] Tra, lal, lal, la——! *That's* done, dear excellent friends! [*Closing the door, and coming forward.*] Upon my word, letters are the curse of one's existence——!

OTTOLINE.

Ha, ha——! [*Seizing him.*] Robbie——!

ROOPE.

[*Startled.*] Hey ?

OTTOLINE.

I can't take you to Lady Paulton's—or anywhere else. Philip and I are going to spend the rest of the afternoon here, if you'll let us—and talk—and talk——! [*Suddenly embracing him, and kissing him upon the cheek.*] Ah! *Que vous êtes gentil! Merci—merci—merci——!* [*Sitting in the chair on the left and unpinning her hat.*] Ha, ha, ha, ha——!

ROOPE.

Turning to PHILIP, *his eyes bolting.*] Phil——!

PHILIP.

[*Nodding.*] Yes. [*Wringing* ROOPE'S *hand.*] Much obliged, Robbie.

END OF THE FIRST ACT

THE SECOND ACT

The scene is a morning-room, richly furnished and decorated, in a house in Ennismore Gardens. The walls are of panelled wood for two-thirds of their height, the rest being covered with silk. In the wall at the back, between the centre and the left-hand corner, there is a handsome double-door opening upon another door, covered in thick cloth, which is supposed to give admittance to the library. On the right, in a piece of wall running obliquely towards the spectator from the back wall to the right-hand wall, is a companion double-door to that on the left, with the difference that the panels of the upper part of this door are glazed. A silk curtain obscures the glazed panels to the height of about seven feet from the floor, and above the curtain there is a view of a spacious hall. When the glazed door is opened, it is seen that the hall is appropriately furnished. A window is at the further end of it, letting in light from the street, and on the right of the window there is a lofty screen arranged in such a manner as to suggest that it conceals the front door of the house.

The fireplace, where a bank of flowers hides the grate, is in the left-hand wall of the room. On the further side of the fireplace there is an armchair, and before the fireplace a settee. Behind the settee, also facing the fireplace, are a writing-table

and chair ; close to the further side of the writing-table is a smaller chair ; and at the nearer end of the settee, but at some distance from it, stands a low-backed arm-chair which is turned in the direction of the door on the right.

On the other side of the room, facing the spectator and following the line of the oblique wall, is a second settee. On the left of this settee is an arm-chair, on the right a round table and another chair. Books and periodicals are strewn upon the table. Against the wall at the back, betweeen the doors, are an oblong table and a chair ; and other articles of furniture and embellishment—cabinets of various kinds, jardinières, mirrors, lamps, etc., etc.—occupy spaces not provided for in this description.

Among other objects upon the oblong table are some framed photographs, conspicuously displayed, of members of the Royal Family, and a book-rack containing books of reference.

It is daylight.

[MISS TRACER, *a red-haired, sprightly young lady, is seated upon the settee on the right, turning the leaves of a picture-paper. A note-book, with a pencil stuck in it, lies by her side. There is a knock at the door on the left.*

MISS TRACER.

[*Calling out.*] Eh ?

[*The door opens and* LEONARD WESTRIP *appears. He carries a pile of press-cuttings.*

WESTRIP.

[*A fresh-coloured, boyish young man.*] I beg your pardon——[*seeing that* MISS TRACER *is alone*] oh, good morning.

MISS TRACER.

Good morning.

WESTRIP.

[*Entering and closing the door.*] Lady Filson isn't down yet?

MISS TRACER.

No. [*Tossing the picture-paper on to the round table.*] She didn't get to bed till pretty late last night, I suspect.

WESTRIP.

[*Advancing.*] I thought she'd like to look through these. [*Showing* MISS TRACER *the press-cuttings.*] From the press-cutting agency.

MISS TRACER.

[*Picking up her note-book and rising.*] You bet she would!

WESTRIP.

[*Handing her the press-cuttings.*] Let me have them back again, please. Sir Randle hardly had time to glance at them before he went out.

MISS TRACER.

[*Inquisitively, elevating her eyebrows.*] He's out very early?

WESTRIP.

Yes; he's gone to a memorial service.

MISS TRACER.

Another! [*With a twinkle.*] That's the third this month.

WESTRIP.

So it is. I'm awfully sorry for him.

MISS TRACER.

[*Laughing slyly.*] He, he, he! Ho, ho!

WESTRIP.

[*Surprised.*] What is there to laugh at, Miss Tracer?

MISS TRACER.

You don't believe he has ever really known half the people he mourns, do you?

WESTRIP.

Not known them!

MISS TRACER.

[*Crossing to the writing-table and laying the press-cuttings upon it.*] Guileless youth! Wait till you've breathed the air of this establishment a little longer.

WESTRIP.

[*Puzzled.*] But if he hasn't known them, why should he——?

MISS TRACER.

For the sake of figuring among a lot of prominent personages, of course.

WESTRIP.

[*Incredulously.*] Oh, Miss Tracer!

MISS TRACER.

Gospel. [*Taking up the press-cuttings and looking through them.*] Many are the sympathetic souls who are grief-stricken in these days for the same reason. Here we are! [*Reading from a cutting.*] Late Viscount Petersfield . . . memorial service . . . St. Margaret's, Westminster . . . among those present . . . h'm, h'm, h'm . . . Sir Randle Filson . . . wreaths were sent by . . . h'm, h'm, h'm, h'm . . . Sir Randle and Lady Filson! [*Replacing the press-cuttings upon the table.*] Ha, ha, ha, ha—! [*Checking herself and turning to* WESTRIP.] Our conversation is strictly private, Mr. Westrip?

WESTRIP.

[*Somewhat disturbed.*] Strictly.

MISS TRACER.

[*Smiling at him winningly and moving to the settee before the fireplace.*] You're a nice boy; I'm sure you wouldn't make mischief. [*Sinking on to the settee with a yawn.*] Oh! Oh, I'm so weary!

WESTRIP.

Weary? Before you've begun your morning's work!

MISS TRACER.

Before I've begun it! I had a parade downstairs in the servants' hall at a quarter-to-ten.

WESTRIP.

Parade?

MISS TRACER.

We've two new women in the house who are perfect idiots. They *can't* remember to say "yes,

my lady " and " no, my lady " and " very good, my lady " whenever Lady Filson speaks to them. One of them actually addressed her yesterday as " ma'am." I wonder the roof didn't fall in.

WESTRIP.

[*Meditatively.*] I've noticed that Sir Randle and Lady Filson have a great relish for being Sir'd and Lady'd.

MISS TRACER.

Ha, ha! Rather! [*Over her shoulder.*] *You* take a friendly hint. If your predecessor had Sir Randled and Lady Filson'd them more frequently, you wouldn't be standing in his shoes at this moment.

WESTRIP.

[*In the middle of the room, his hands in his pockets.*] Why *was* Sir Randle knighted, do you know?

MISS TRACER.

Built a large drill-hall for the Territorials near his country place at Bramsfold.

WESTRIP.

[*Innocently.*] Oh, is he interested in the Territorials?

MISS TRACER.

[*Partly raising herself.*] Interested in the Territorials! How simple you are! He cares as much for the Territorials as I care for snakes. [*Kneeling upon the settee and resting her arms on the back of it, talkatively.*] The drill-hall was *her* notion; she engineered the whole affair.

WESTRIP.

[*Opening his eyes wider and wider.*] Lady Filson ?

MISS TRACER.

[*Nodding.*] Her maid's my informant. A few years ago he was growing frightfully down-in-the-mouth. He fancied he'd got stuck, as it were—that everybody was getting an honour but himself. So the blessed shanty was run up in a devil of a hurry—excuse my Greek; and as soon as it was dry, Mrs. Filson, as she then was, wrote to some big-wig or other—without her husband's knowledge, she explained—and called attention to the service he'd rendered to the cause of patriotism. Lambert saw the draft of the letter on her mistress's dressing-table. [*Shaking with laughter.*] Ho, ho, ho! And what d'ye think ?

WESTRIP.

W-well ?

MISS TRACER.

The corrections were in *his* handwriting !

WESTRIP.

[*Shocked.*] In Sir Randle's——!

MISS TRACER.

[*Jumping up.*] Phiou! I'm fearfully indiscreet. [*Going to* WESTRIP *and touching his coat-sleeve.*] Between ourselves, Mr. Westrip !

WESTRIP.

[*Moving to the round table.*] Quite—quite.

MISS TRACER.

[*Following him.*] Oh, they're not a bad sort, by any means, if you just humour them a bit. We all have our little weaknesses, haven't we? I've mine, I confess.

WESTRIP.

They've both been excessively kind to *me*. [*Turning to her.*] And as for Madame de Chaumié——

MISS TRACER.

Oh, she's a dear—a regular dear!

WESTRIP.

[*Fervently.*] By Jove, isn't she!

MISS TRACER.

But then, *my* theory is that she was changed at her birth. *She's* not a genuine Filson, I'll swear. [*Suddenly walking away from him.*] H'sh!

[LADY FILSON, *a handsome, complacent woman of about fifty-seven, enters from the hall.*

LADY FILSON.

[*Who carries a hand-bag crammed with letters, cards of invitation, etc.*] Good morning.

MISS TRACER *and* WESTRIP.

Good morning, Lady Filson.

LADY FILSON.

[*Closing the door and advancing.*] Oh, Mr. Westrip, I wish you'd try to find the last number of the

Trifler. It must have been taken out of my bedroom by one of the servants.

WESTRIP.

[*Searching among the periodicals on the round table.*] Certainly, Lady Filson.

MISS TRACER.

Oh, Lady Filson, don't keep that horrid snapshot of you and Sir Randle! It's *too* unflattering.

LADY FILSON.

[*At the writing-table.*] As if that mattered! So are the portraits of Lord and Lady Sturminster on the same page. [*Sitting at the table and emptying her bag.*] These absurd things give Sir Randle and me a hearty laugh; that's why I preserve them.

WESTRIP.

It isn't here. [*Going to the glazed door.*] I'll hunt for it downstairs.

LADY FILSON.

Thank you. [*Discovering the pile of press-cuttings.*] What's this? [*Affecting annoyance.*] *Not* more press-cuttings! [*Beginning to devour the cuttings.*] Tcht, tcht, tcht!

[*As* WESTRIP *reaches the door,* BERTRAM FILSON *enters. He is wearing riding-dress.*

BERTRAM.

[*A conceited, pompous young man of thirty.*] Good morning, Mr. Westrip.

WESTRIP.

Good morning, Mr. Filson.

[WESTRIP *goes out, closing the door.*

BERTRAM.

[*To* MISS TRACER.] Good morning, Miss Tracer.

MISS TRACER.

[*Who has seated herself in the chair at the further side of the writing-table—meekly.*] Good morning.

LADY FILSON.

[*Half turning to* BERTRAM, *the press-cuttings in her hand.*] Ah, my darling! Was that you I saw speaking to Underwood as I came through the hall?

BERTRAM.

Yes, mother dear. [*Bending over her and kissing her.*] How are you?

LADY FILSON.

[*Dotingly.*] Enjoyed your ride, my pet?

BERTRAM.

Fairly, mother.

LADY FILSON.

Only fairly?

BERTRAM.

[*Shutting his eyes.*] Such an appalling crowd of ordinary people in the Row, I mean t'say.

LADY FILSON.

How dreadful for you! [*Giving him the press-cuttings.*] Sit down, if you're not too warm, and look at this rubbish while I talk to Miss Tracer.

BERTRAM.

Press-cuttings ?

LADY FILSON.

Isn't it strange, the way the papers follow all our doings !

BERTRAM.

Not in the least, mother. [*Sitting upon the settee on the right and reading the press-cuttings.*] I mean t'say, I consider it perfectly right and proper.

LADY FILSON.

[*Sorting her letters and cards—to* MISS TRACER.] There's not much this morning, Miss Tracer. [*Handing some letters to* MISS TRACER.] *You* can deal with these.

MISS TRACER.

Thank you, Lady Filson.

LADY FILSON.

[*Reading a letter.*] Lady Skewes and Mrs. Walter Quebec . . . arranging a concert in aid of . . . [*sighing*] tickets, of course ! . . . what tiring women ! . . . [*turning the sheet*] oh ! . . . may they include me in their list of patronesses ? . . . Princess Cagliari-Tamponi, the Countess of Harrogate, the Viscountess Chepmell, Lady Kathleen Tring . . . [*laying the letter aside*] delighted. [*Heaping together the cards and the rest of the letters.*] I must answer those myself. [*To* MISS TRACER.] That's all. [MISS TRACER *rises.*] Get on with the invitations for July the eighth as quickly as you can.

MISS TRACER.

[*Going to the glazed door.*] Yes, Lady Filson.

LADY FILSON.

[*Turning.*] Miss Tracer——

MISS TRACER.

[*Halting.*] Yes, Lady Filson ?

LADY FILSON.

I think Madame de Chaumié wants you to do some little commissions for her. Kindly see her before you go to your room.

BERTRAM.

[*To* MISS TRACER, *looking up.*] No, no ; don't.

LADY FILSON.

[*To* BERTRAM.] Not ?

BERTRAM.

My sister is engaged, mother.

LADY FILSON.

Engaged ?

BERTRAM.

With Sir Timothy Barradell.

LADY FILSON.

Oh—? [*To* MISS TRACER.] By-and-by, then.

MISS TRACER.

Yes, Lady Filson.

[MISS TRACER *departs, closing the door.*

LADY FILSON.

[*To* BERTRAM, *eagerly.*] Sir Timothy——!

BERTRAM.

He called half-an-hour ago, mother, Underwood tells me, with a note for Ottoline.

LADY FILSON.

From himself ?

BERTRAM.

Presumably; and Dilworth came down and took him up to her boudoir.

LADY FILSON.

[*Rising.*] An unusual time of day for a call! [*Approaching* BERTRAM *and speaking under her breath.*] Are matters coming to a head between them, my dear boy ?

BERTRAM.

Don't ask *me,* mother. [*Rising.*] You are as capable of forming an opinion as I am, I mean t'say.

LADY FILSON.

I've a feeling that *something* is in the air. He positively shadowed her last night at the Gorhams' !

BERTRAM.

[*Knitting his brows.*] I admit I should prefer, if my sister contemplates marrying again, that her choice fell on one of the others.

LADY FILSON.

Mr. Trefusis—or George Delacour——?

BERTRAM.

Even Trevor Wilson. [*Wincing.*] The idea of a merchant brother-in-law doesn't appeal to me very strongly, I mean t'say.

LADY FILSON.

Still, a baronet——!

BERTRAM.

And I suppose——?

LADY FILSON.

Oh, enormously!

BERTRAM.

[*Magnanimously.*] Anyhow, my dear mother, if Ottoline is fond of the man, I promise you that not a murmur from me shall mar their happiness.

LADY FILSON.

[*Tenderly, pinching his chin.*] My darling!

BERTRAM.

[*With a shiver.*] I'm afraid I *am* getting a little chilled; [*giving her the press-cuttings*] I'll go and change.

LADY FILSON.

Oh, my pet, run away at once!

[*She moves to the settee on the right. He pauses to gaze at her.*

BERTRAM.

You look exceedingly handsome this morning, mother.

LADY FILSON.

[*Gratified.*] Do I, Bertram? [*Seating herself upon the settee, and again applying herself to the press-cuttings, as* BERTRAM *goes to the glazed door.*] In spite of my late hours!

BERTRAM.

[*Opening the door.*] Here's my father——

[SIR RANDLE FILSON *enters, dressed in mourning. He is a man of sixty-three, of commanding presence, with a head resembling that of Alexandre Dumas Fils in the portrait by Meissonier, and a bland, florid manner. He seems to derive much satisfaction from listening to the rich modulations of his voice.*

SIR RANDLE.

Bertram, my boy! [*Kissing him upon the cheek.*] Been riding, eh?

BERTRAM.

Yes. I'm just going to change, father.

SIR RANDLE.

That's right; don't risk catching cold, whatever you do. [*Seeing* LADY FILSON *and coming forward.*] Ah, your dear mother *is* down!

[BERTRAM *goes out, closing the door.*

LADY FILSON.

[*Beaming upon* SIR RANDLE.] You haven't been long, Randle.

SIR RANDLE.

[*A cloud overshadowing his face.*] I didn't remain for the Dead March, Winnie. [*Taking off his black*

gloves.] I need hardly have troubled to go at all, as it turned out.

LADY FILSON.

Why, dear ?

SIR RANDLE.

The sad business was most abominably mismanaged. No reporters.

LADY FILSON.

No reporters !

SIR RANDLE.

Not a single pressman in the porch. [*Blowing into a glove.*] Pfhh ! Poor old Macfarlane ! [*Pulling at his second glove.*] The public will never learn the names of those who assembled, at serious inconvenience to themselves, to pay respect to his memory.

LADY FILSON.

Shocking !

SIR RANDLE.

[*Blowing.*] Pfhh ! [*Folding the gloves neatly.*] I am almost glad, in the circumstances, that I didn't regard it as an event which laid me under an obligation to send flowers.

LADY FILSON.

[*With a change of tone.*] Er—Randle——

SIR RANDLE

[*Putting his gloves into his tail-pocket.*] Yes, dear.

LADY FILSON.

[*Significantly.*] Sir Timothy is upstairs.

SIR RANDLE.

Sir Timothy Barradell ?

LADY FILSON.

[*Nodding.*] With Ottoline, in her sitting-room.

SIR RANDLE.

Indeed ?

LADY FILSON.

He brought a note for her half-an-hour ago, evidently asking her to receive him.

SIR RANDLE.

[*Going to* LADY FILSON.] An early call !

LADY FILSON.

Extremely.

SIR RANDLE.

[*Sitting near her, in the arm-chair on the left of the settee, and pursing his lips.*] It may mean nothing.

LADY FILSON.

Oh, nothing.

SIR RANDLE.

[*Examining his nails.*] A nice, amiable fellow.

LADY FILSON.

Full of fine qualities, if I'm any judge of character.

SIR RANDLE.

None the worse for being self-made, Winnie.

LADY FILSON.

Not in *my* estimation.

SIR RANDLE.

H'm, h'm, h'm, h'm——!

LADY FILSON.

[*Softly.*] It wouldn't *sound* bad, Randle.

SIR RANDLE.

[*Leaning back in his chair and closing his eyes.*] "Lady Barradell."

LADY FILSON.

[*In the same way.*] "Lady Barradell."

SIR RANDLE.

[*In a murmur, but with great gusto.*] "A marriage is arranged and will shortly take place between Sir Timothy Barradell, Bart., of 16, The Albany, and Bryanstown Park, County Wicklow, and Ottoline, widow of the late Comte de Chaumié, only daughter of Sir Randle and Lady Filson, of 71, Ennismore Gardens, and Pickhurst, Bramsfold, Sussex."

LADY FILSON.

[*After a short pause, in a low voice.*] Darling Ottoline! What a wedding she shall have!

[*Again there is a pause, and then* SIR RANDLE *leaves his chair and seats himself beside* LADY FILSON.

SIR RANDLE.

[*Putting his arm round her, fondly.*] Mother!

[*They look at one another, and he draws her to him and kisses her. As he does so, the glazed door opens and* WESTRIP *returns, carrying an illustrated-weekly.* LADY FILSON *rises hastily and goes to the writing-table.*

WESTRIP.

[*Handing her the paper.*] It was in the servants' hall, Lady Filson.

LADY FILSON.

[*Laying the paper and the press-cuttings upon the writing-table, and sitting at the table and busying herself with her letters.*] Thank you so much.

WESTRIP.

[*To* SIR RANDLE.] Are you ready for me now, Sir Randle?

SIR RANDLE.

[*Abstractedly.*] Er—is there anything of grave importance to-day, Mr. Westrip? I forget.

WESTRIP.

[*Coming to him.*] Boxfield and Henderson, the photographers, are anxious to photograph you and Lady Filson for their series of "Notable People," Sir Randle.

SIR RANDLE.

[*Rolling his head from side to side.*] Oh! Oh, dear; oh, dear!

LADY FILSON.

[*Wearily.*] Oh, dear!

SIR RANDLE.

How we are pestered, Lady Filson and I!

LADY FILSON.

Terrible!

SIR RANDLE.

No peace! No peace!

LADY FILSON.

Or privacy.

WESTRIP.

[*Producing a note-book from his pocket.*] They will attend here any morning convenient to you and Lady Filson, Sir Randle. It won't take ten minutes.

SIR RANDLE.

[*To* LADY FILSON, *resignedly.*] Winnie——?

LADY FILSON.

[*Entering the appointment on a tablet.*] Tuesday at eleven.

SIR RANDLE.

[*To* WESTRIP.] Remind me.

WESTRIP.

[*Writing in his note-book.*] Yes, Sir Randle.

SIR RANDLE.

And advise Madame de Chaumié and Mr. Bertram, with my love, of the appointment. Her ladyship and I will be photographed with our children grouped round us.

WESTRIP.

[*To* SIR RANDLE.] Then there's the telegram from the *Daily Monitor*, Sir Randle——

SIR RANDLE.

[*Puffing himself out.*] Ah, yes! The editor solicits my views upon—what is the subject of the discussion which is being carried on in his admirable journal, Mr. Westrip?——

WESTRIP.

" Should Women Marry under Thirty ? "

SIR RANDLE.

H'm ! [*Musingly.*] Should Women Marry under Thirty ? [*To* WESTRIP.] Reply paid ?

WESTRIP.

Forty-eight words.

SIR RANDLE.

[*Rising and strolling across to* LADY FILSON, *as if seeking for inspiration.*] Should Women Marry under Thirty ? [*Humming.*] H'm, h'm, h'm—! [*To* Lady FILSON.] Winnie——?

LADY FILSON.

[*Looking up at him.*] I was considerably under thirty when *we* married, Randle.

SIR RANDLE.

[*Triumphantly.*] Ha ! [*Chuckling.*] Ho, ho, ho ! Capital ! Ho, ho, ho ! [*Patting* LADY FILSON'S *shoulder.*] Clever ! Clever ! [*To* WESTRIP, *grandly.*] There we have my response to the inquiry, Mr. Westrip. [*Closing his eyes again.*] Sir Randle Filson's views are best expressed by the statement that Lady Filson was considerably under thirty when she did him the honour of—er—becoming his wife.

WESTRIP.

Excellent, sir.

SIR RANDLE.

[*Opening his eyes.*] Pray amplify that in graceful language, Mr. Westrip—restricting yourself to forty-eight words—[*He breaks off, interrupted by the appearance of* OTTOLINE *at the glazed door.*] Ah, my darling!

OTTOLINE.

Good morning, Dad. [*To* WESTRIP.] Good morning.

WESTRIP.

[*Shyly.*] Good morning.

OTTOLINE.

[*To* SIR RANDLE—*advancing a few steps, but leaving the door open.*] Are you and mother busy?

SIR RANDLE.

Not at all.

LADY FILSON.

[*Who has turned in her chair at* OTTOLINE'S *entrance.*] Not at all, Otto.

SIR RANDLE.

[*To* WESTRIP.] I will join you in the library, Mr. Westrip. [WESTRIP *withdraws at the door on the left, and* SIR RANDLE *goes to* OTTOLINE *and embraces her.*] My dear child!

OTTOLINE.

[*In rather a strained voice.*] Sir Timothy Barradell is here, Dad.

SIR RANDLE.

I heard he had called.

LADY FILSON.

So sweet of him to treat us informally!

OTTOLINE.

[*To* LADY FILSON.] He would like to see you and Dad for a minute or two, mother——

LADY FILSON.

Charmed!

SIR RANDLE.

Delighted!

OTTOLINE.

Just to—just to bid you good-bye.

LADY FILSON.

Good-bye?

SIR RANDLE.

Good-bye?

OTTOLINE.

Yes; he's going away—abroad—for some months. [*With a motion of her head towards the hall.*] He's in the hall. May I——?

LADY FILSON.

[*Rising.*] Er—do.

SIR RANDLE.

Do.

OTTOLINE.

[*Returning to the door and calling.*] Sir Timothy——!

[*There is a brief pause, during which* SIR RANDLE *and* LADY FILSON *interrogate each other silently, and then* SIR TIMOTHY

BARRADELL *enters. He is a well-knit, pleasant-looking Irishman of about forty, speaking with a slight brogue.*

LADY FILSON.

[*Advancing to greet him.*] My dear Sir Timothy!

SIR TIMOTHY.

[*As they shake hands.*] And how's my lady this morning? Are you well?

OTTOLINE.

[*At the door.*] I'll leave you——

SIR TIMOTHY.

[*Turning to her hastily.*] Ah—! [*Taking her hand.*] I'm not to see you again?

OTTOLINE.

[*Shaking her head.*] No. [*Smiling.*] We've said good-bye upstairs. [*Withdrawing her hand.*] *Que Dieu vous protège!* Good luck to you!

SIR TIMOTHY.

[*Ruefully.*] Luck! [*In an undertone.*] I've never had anything else till now; and now it's out entirely.

OTTOLINE.

[*Gently.*] Shsssh——!

[*She goes into the hall and he stands watching her till she disappears. Then he closes the door and faces* LADY FILSON *and* SIR RANDLE.

SIR TIMOTHY.

[*Mournfully but good-humouredly.*] Ha! *That's* over.

LADY FILSON.

Over?

SIR RANDLE.

Over?

SIR TIMOTHY.

Over. [*Passing* LADY FILSON *and shaking hands with* SIR RANDLE.] It might be that it 'ud be more decent and appropriate for me to write you a letter, Sir Randle; but I'm not much of a hand at letter-writing, and I've your daughter's permission to tell you by word of mouth that—that she—[*to* LADY FILSON] but perhaps you can guess, both of you——?

LADY FILSON.

Guess——?

SIR RANDLE.

Guess——?

SIR TIMOTHY.

[*Rumpling his hair.*] The fact is, it isn't exactly easy or agreeable to describe what's occurred in plain terms.

SIR RANDLE.

[*Encouragingly.*] Can't you—can't you give us a hint——?

LADY FILSON.

The merest hint——

SIR TIMOTHY.

Hint, is it! Ah, I can manage that. [*With a bold effort.*] You're not to have me for your son-in-law. Is that hint enough?

LADY FILSON.

[*Under her breath.*] Oh!

SIR RANDLE.

God bless me! Frankly, I had no conception——

LADY FILSON.

Nor I—the faintest.

SIR TIMOTHY.

And as I've received a great deal of kindness and hospitality in this house, I thought that, in common gratitude, I ought to explain the cause of my abrupt disappearance from your circle.

SIR RANDLE.

[*In a tone of deep commiseration.*] I—I understand. You—you intend to——?

SIR TIMOTHY.

To take a trip round the world, to endeavour to recover some of the wind that's been knocked out of me.

SIR RANDLE.

[*Closing his eyes.*] Distressing! Distressing!

LADY FILSON.

Most. [*Coming to* SIR TIMOTHY, *feelingly.*] Oh—oh, Sir Timothy——!

SIR TIMOTHY.

[*With sudden bitterness.*] Ah, Sir Timothy, Sir Timothy, Sir Timothy! And what's the use of my

baronetcy *now*, will you inform me—the baronetcy I bought and paid for, in hard cash, to better my footing in society ? The mockery of it ! Now that I've lost *her*, the one woman I shall ever love, I don't care a rap for my footing in society ; [*walking away*] and anybody may have my baronetcy for tuppence !

SIR RANDLE.

[*Reprovingly.*] My good friend——!

SIR TIMOTHY.

[*Turning to* SIR RANDLE *and* LADY FILSON.] And why not ! The only advantage of my baronetcy, it strikes me, is that I'm charged double prices at every hotel I lay my head in, and am expected to shower gold on the waiters. [*Sitting on the settee on the right and leaning his head on his hand.*] Oh, the mockery of it ; the mockery of it !

SIR RANDLE.

[*Going to him.*] If my profound sympathy—and Lady Filson's—[*to* LADY FILSON] I may speak for you, Winnie——?

LADY FILSON.

Certainly.

SIR RANDLE.

[*To* SIR TIMOTHY.] If our profound sympathy is the smallest consolation to you——

SIR TIMOTHY.

[*Emphatically, raising his head.*] It is *not*. [*With a despairing gesture.*] I'm broken-hearted, Sir Randle. That's what I am ; I'm broken-hearted.

LADY FILSON.

[*Sitting in the low-backed arm-chair on the left.*] Oh, dear!

SIR TIMOTHY.

[*Sighing.*] If I'd had the pluck to declare myself sooner, it might have been different. [*Staring before him.*] From the moment I first set eyes on her, at the dinner-party you gave to welcome her on her arrival in London—from that moment I was captured completely, body and soul. The sight of her as she stood in the drawing-room beside her mother, with her pretty, white face and her elegant figure, and a gown clinging to her that looked as though she'd been born in it—'twill never fade from me if I live to be as old as a dozen Methuselahs!

SIR RANDLE.

[*Pryingly.*] Er—has Ottoline—I have no desire to probe an open wound—has she assigned any—reason——?

SIR TIMOTHY.

[*Rousing himself.*] For rejecting me?

SIR RANDLE.

[*With a wave of the hand.*] For——

LADY FILSON.

For not seeing her way clear——

SIR RANDLE.

To—er—in short—accept you?

SIR TIMOTHY.

She *has*.

LADY FILSON.

Has she!

SIR TIMOTHY.

The best—and, for me, the worst—of reasons. There's another man in the case.

SIR RANDLE.

Another——?

LADY FILSON.

Another——!

SIR RANDLE.

[*To* LADY FILSON.] Extraordinary!

LADY FILSON.

Bewildering.

SIR RANDLE.

We have been blind, Winnie.

LADY FILSON.

Absolutely.

SIR TIMOTHY.

And, whoever he may be, I trust he'll worship her as devoutly as I do, and treat her with half the gentleness *I'd* have treated her with, had she selected *me* for her Number Two.

SIR RANDLE.

[*Piously.*] Amen! [*To* LADY FILSON.] Winifred——?

LADY FILSON.

[*Rather fretfully.*] Amen.

SIR TIMOTHY.

[*Rising.*] And with that sentiment on my lips, and in every fibre of my body, I'll relieve you of my depressing company. [*Going to* LADY FILSON, *who rises at his approach, and taking her hand.*] My dear lady——

LADY FILSON.

[*Genuinely.*] My dear Sir Timothy!

SIR RANDLE.

[*Moving to the glazed door.*] Painful! Painful!

[*As* SIR TIMOTHY *turns from* LADY FILSON, BERTRAM *reappears, in morning-dress, entering from the hall.*

BERTRAM.

[*Drawing back on seeing* SIR TIMOTHY.] Oh—! [*To* SIR RANDLE.] Am I intruding?

SIR RANDLE.

Come in, my boy. You're just in time to give a parting grasp of the hand to our friend here.

BERTRAM.

[*Advancing to* SIR TIMOTHY, *surprised.*] Parting——?

LADY FILSON.

[*To* BERTRAM.] Sir Timothy is going abroad, Bertram.

BERTRAM.

Really? [*To* SIR TIMOTHY.] Er—on business?

SIR TIMOTHY.

Well, not precisely on pleasure. [*Shaking hands with* BERTRAM.] Good-bye to you.

BERTRAM.

[*Puzzled.*] Good-bye. [SIR TIMOTHY *makes a final bow to* LADY FILSON *and departs, followed by* SIR RANDLE, *who leaves the door open.* BERTRAM *turns to* LADY FILSON *inquiringly.*] What——?

LADY FILSON.

[*Pointing to the open door.*] H'sh!

[BERTRAM *shuts the door and* LADY FILSON *seats herself upon the settee on the right.*

BERTRAM.

[*Coming to her.*] What has happened, mother?

LADY FILSON.

What I conjectured. I was certain of it.

BERTRAM.

He *has* proposed to my sister?

LADY FILSON.

Yes.

BERTRAM.

[*Struck by his mother's manner.*] She has refused him?

LADY FILSON.

[*Nodding.*] She's *éprise* with another man.

BERTRAM.

Who is it?

LADY FILSON.

She didn't——

BERTRAM.

Is it Trefusis ?

LADY FILSON.

I believe it's Delacour.

BERTRAM.

[*Walking about.*] Possibly ! Possibly !

LADY FILSON.

[*Anxiously.*] I do hope she realizes what she's doing, Bertram. Sir Timothy could buy them both up, with something to spare.

BERTRAM.

I agree, my dear mother ; but it would have been horribly offensive to *us*, I mean t'say, to see the name of Ottoline's husband branded upon sides of bacon in the windows of the provision-shops.

LADY FILSON.

Oh, disgusting ! [*Brightening.*] How sensibly you look at things, darling !

BERTRAM.

[*Taking up a position before the fireplace.*] Whereas George Delacour and Edward Trefusis are undeniably gentlemen—gentlemen by birth and breeding, I mean t'say.

LADY FILSON.

Trefusis is connected, through his brother, with the Northcrofts !

BERTRAM.

Quite so. If Ottoline married Edward, she would be Lady Juliet's sister-in-law.

LADY FILSON.

Upon my word, Bertie, I don't know *which* of the two I'd rather it turned out to be!

[SIR RANDLE *returns, with a solemn countenance. He closes the door and comes forward.*

SIR RANDLE.

[*To* LADY FILSON.] A melancholy morning, Winnie.

LADY FILSON.

[*Sighing.*] Ahhh!

SIR RANDLE.

[*Producing a black-edged pocket-handkerchief and unfolding it.*] Poor Macfarlane—and then *this!* [*Blowing his nose.*] Upsetting! Upsetting! [*Glancing at* BERTRAM.] Does Bertram——?

LADY FILSON.

I've told him.

BERTRAM.

My dear father, I cannot—I cannot profess to regret my sister's decision. I mean to *say*——!

SIR RANDLE.

[*Suddenly.*] Nor I. [*In an outburst, pacing the room.*] Nor I. I *must* be candid. It's my nature to be candid. A damned tradesman!

BERTRAM.

Exactly. It shows my sister's delicacy and refinement, I mean t'say.

SIR RANDLE.

[*To* LADY FILSON, *halting.*] Who, in your opinion, Winnie——?

LADY FILSON.

I'm inclined to think it's Mr. Delacour.

SIR RANDLE.

[*Resuming his walk.*] So be it. [*Raising his arms.*] If I am to lose my child a second time—so be it.

BERTRAM.

I venture to suggest it may be Edward Trefusis.

SIR RANDLE.

[*To* BERTRAM, *halting again.*] My dear boy, in a matter of this kind, I fancy we can rely on your mother's wonderful powers of penetration.

BERTRAM.

[*Bowing.*] Pardon, father.

LADY FILSON.

[*Closing her eyes.*] "Mrs. George Delacour."

SIR RANDLE.

[*Partly closing his eyes and again resuming his walk.*] "A marriage is arranged and will shortly take place between George Holmby Delacour, of—of—of——"

BERTRAM.

[*Closing his eyes.*] "90, St. James's Street——"

SIR RANDLE.

[*Halting and opening his eyes.*] One thing I heartily deplore, Winifred——

LADY FILSON.

[*Opening her eyes.*] What is that, Randle?

SIR RANDLE.

Ottoline being a widow, there can be no bridesmaids; which deprives us of the happiness of paying a pretty compliment to the daughters of several families of distinction whom we have the privilege of numbering among our acquaintances.

LADY FILSON.

There can be no bridesmaids, strictly speaking; but a widow may be accompanied to the altar by a bevy of Maids of Honour.

SIR RANDLE.

Ah, yes! An equally good opportunity for an imposing—[*closing his eyes*] and reverential display! [*To* LADY FILSON.] Lady Maundrell's girl Sybil, eh, Winnie?

LADY FILSON.

Decidedly. And Lady Eva Sherringham.

BERTRAM.

Lady Lilian and Lady Constance Foxe——

SIR RANDLE.

Lady Irene Pallant——

[LADY FILSON *rises and almost runs to the writing-table, where she sits and snatches at a sheet of paper.* SIR RANDLE *follows her and stands beside her.*

BERTRAM.

[*Reclining upon the settee ont he left.*] Lady Blanche Finnis——

LADY FILSON.

[*Seizing her pen.*] Wait; don't be so quick! [*Writing.*] "Hon. Sybil Maundrell——"

[*The glazed door is opened softly and* OTTOLINE *enters. She pauses, looking at the group at the writing-table.*

SIR RANDLE.

[*To* LADY FILSON, as she writes.] Lady Eva Sherringham——

BERTRAM.

Ladies Lilian and Constance Foxe——

LADY FILSON.

[*Writing.*] "Lady Eva Sherringham—Ladies Lilian and Constance Foxe——"

BERTRAM.

Lady Irene Pallant——

SIR RANDLE.

I *pray* there may be no captious opposition from Ottoline.

LADY FILSON.

Surely she doesn't want to be married like a middle-class widow from Putney! [*Writing.*] "Lady Blanche Finnis——"

BERTRAM.

If pages are permissible—to carry my sister's train, I mean t'say——

SIR RANDLE.

Pages—yes, yes——

BERTRAM.

There are the two Galbraith boys—little Lord Wensleydale and his brother Herbert

LADY FILSON.

[*Writing.*] Such picturesque children!

SIR RANDLE.

I doubt whether the bare civilities which have passed between ourselves and Lord and Lady Galbraith

LADY FILSON.

They are country neighbours.

BERTRAM.

No harm in approaching them, my dear father. I mean to *say*——!

[OTTOLINE *shuts the door with a click.* SIR RANDLE *and* LADY FILSON *turn, startled, and* LADY FILSON *slips the list into a drawer.*

SIR RANDLE.

[*Benignly.*] Otto?

OTTOLINE.

[*In a steady voice.*] Sorry to disturb you all over your elaborate preparations, Dad. I see Sir Timothy has saved me the trouble of breaking the news.

SIR RANDLE.

Y-you——?

OTTOLINE.

[*Nodding.*] You were too absorbed. I couldn't help listening.

SIR RANDLE.

Ahem! Sir Timothy didn't *volunteer* the information, Ottoline——

OTTOLINE.

Peu m'importe! [*Advancing, smiling on one side of her mouth.*] What a grand wedding you are planning for me! *Quel projets mirifiques!*

SIR RANDLE.

[*Embarrassed.*] Your dear mother was—er—merely jotting down——

OTTOLINE.

[*Passing her hands over her face and walking to the settee on the right.*] Ha, ha, ha, ha——!

LADY FILSON.

[*Rising and moving to the fireplace, complainingly.*] Really, Ottoline——!

OTTOLINE.

[*Sitting upon the settee.*] Ha, ha, ha——!

LADY FILSON.

[*To* BERTRAM, *who is slowly getting to his feet.*] Go away, Bertie darling.

OTTOLINE.

Mais pourquoi? Bertie knows everything, obviously.

LADY FILSON.

Why shouldn't he, Otto? Your brother is as interested as we are——

OTTOLINE.

But of course! *Naturellement!* [*With a shrug.*] *C'est une affaire de famille.* [*To* BERTRAM, *who is now at the door on the left, his hand on the door-handle.*] Come back, Bertie. [*Repeating her wry smile.*] I shall be glad to receive your congratulations with mother's and Dad's. [*To* SIR RANDLE *and* LADY FILSON.] Sit down, Dad; sit down, mother. [SIR RANDLE *sits in the chair on the left of the settee on the right,* LADY FILSON *in the low-backed arm-chair, and* BERTRAM *at the oblong table.*] Are you very much surprised, dear people?

SIR RANDLE.

Surprised? Hardly.

LADY FILSON.

Poor Sir Timothy! No, we are hardly surprised, Ottoline.

OTTOLINE.

Ah, but I don't mean surprised at my—having made Sir Timothy unhappy; I mean surprised at hearing there is—someone else——

SIR RANDLE.

My dear child, *that* surprises us even less.

LADY FILSON.

Your dear father and I, Ottoline, are not unaware of the *many* eligible men who are—how shall I put it?—pursuing you with their attentions.

SIR RANDLE.

Parents are notoriously short-sighted; but they are not necessarily—er—what are the things?—tssh!—the creatures that flutter——

BERTRAM.

Bats, father.

SIR RANDLE.

[*To* BERTRAM.] Thank you, my boy.

OTTOLINE.

[*In a rigid attitude.*] It's cowardly of me perhaps, but I almost wish I had told Sir Timothy—a little more——

LADY FILSON.

Cowardly?

OTTOLINE.

So that he might have taken the edge off the announcement I'm going to make—and spared me——

SIR RANDLE.

The edge——?

LADY FILSON.

Spared you—? [*Staring at* OTTOLINE.] Ottoline, what on earth——!

OTTOLINE.

[*Relaxing.*] Oh, I know I'm behaving as if I were a girl instead of a woman who has been married—a widow—free—independent—[*to* SIR RANDLE] thanks to your liberality, Dad! But, being at home, I seem to have lost, in a measure, my sense of personal liberty——

SIR RANDLE.

[*Blandly but uneasily.*] My child!

OTTOLINE.

That's *it!* Child! Now that I've returned to you, I'm still a child—still an object for you to fix your hopes and expectations upon. The situation has slipped back, in your minds, pretty much to what it was in the old days in the Avenue Montaigne. You may protest that it isn't so, but it *is.* [*Attempting a laugh.*] That's why my knees are shaking at this moment, and my spine's all of a jelly! [*She rises and goes to the chair at the writing-table and grips the chair-rail. The others follow her apprehensively with their eyes.*] I—I'm afraid I'm about to disappoint you.

LADY FILSON.

H-how?

SIR RANDLE.

Disap-point us?

OTTOLINE.

[*Abruptly.*] What's the time, Dad?

SIR RANDLE.

[*Looking at a clock standing on a commode against the wall on the right.*] Twenty minutes past eleven.

OTTOLINE.

He—he will be here at half-past. Don't be angry. I've asked him to come—to explain his position clearly to you and mother with regard to me. There's to be nothing underhand—*rien de secret!*

LADY FILSON.

A-asked whom?

OTTOLINE.

[*Throwing her head back.*] Ho! You'll think I'm ushering in an endless string of lovers this morning! I promise you this is the last.

SIR RANDLE.

Who is coming?

OTTOLINE.

[*Sitting at the writing-table and, her elbows on the table, supporting her chin on her fists.*] Mr. Mackworth.

LADY FILSON.

[*After a pause.*] Mackworth?

OTTOLINE.

Philip Mackworth.

LADY FILSON.

[*Dully.*] Isn't he the journalist man you—you carried on with once, in Paris?

OTTOLINE.

What an expression, mother! Well—yes.

SIR RANDLE.

[*Simply.*] Good God!

OTTOLINE.

He doesn't write for the papers any longer.

LADY FILSON.

W-what——?

OTTOLINE.

A novelist chiefly.

LADY FILSON.

[*Faintly.*] Oh!

SIR RANDLE.

Successful?

OTTOLINE.

It depends on what you call success.

SIR RANDLE.

I call success what everybody calls success.

BERTRAM.

[*Rising, stricken.*] There are novelists and novelists, I mean t'say.

OTTOLINE.

Don't imagine that I am apologizing for him, please, in the slightest degree; but no, he *hasn't* been successful up to the present, in the usual acceptation of the term.

LADY FILSON.

[*Searching for her handkerchief.*] Where—where have you——?

OTTOLINE.

I met him yesterday at Robbie Roope's, at lunch. [LADY FILSON *finds her handkerchief and applies it to her eyes.*] Oh, there's no need to cry, mother dear. For mercy's sake——!

LADY FILSON.

Oh, Otto! [*Rising and crossing to the settee on the right, whimpering.*] Oh, Randle! [*To* BERTRAM, *who comes to her.*] Oh, my boy!

SIR RANDLE.

[*Gazing blinkingly at the ceiling as* LADY FILSON *sinks upon the settee.*] Incredible! Incredible!

BERTRAM.

[*Sitting beside* LADY FILSON, *dazed.*] My dear mother——!

OTTOLINE.

[*Starting up.*] Oh, do try to be understanding and sympathetic! Mr. Mackworth is a high-souled, noble fellow. If I'd been honest with myself, I should have married him ten years ago. To me this is a golden dream come true. Recollect my bitter experience of the *other* sort of marriage! [*Walking away to the fireplace.*] Why grudge me a spark of romance in my life!

SIR RANDLE.

[*Raising his hands.*] Romance!

LADY FILSON.

[*To* SIR RANDLE *and* BERTRAM.] Just now she was resenting our considering her a child!

OTTOLINE.

[*Looking down upon the flowers in the grate.*] Romance doesn't belong to youth, mother. Youth is greedy for reality—the toy that feels solid in its fingers.

I was, and bruised myself with it. After such a lesson as I've had, one yearns for something less tangible—something that lifts one morally out of oneself—an ideal——!

SIR RANDLE.

Ha! An extract from a novel of Mr. Mackworth's apparently!

LADY FILSON.

[*Harshly.*] Ha, ha, ha, ha——!

OTTOLINE.

[*Turning sharply and coming forward.*] Sssh! Don't you sneer, mother! Don't you sneer, Dad! [*Her eyes flashing.*] *C'est au-dessus de vous de sentir ce qu'il y a d'élevé et de grand!* [*Fiercely.*] *Tenez! Qu'il vous plaise ou non——!*

[*She is checked by the entrance of* UNDERWOOD *from the hall.*

UNDERWOOD.

[*Addressing the back of* LADY FILSON'S *head.*] Mr. Philip Mackworth, m'lady.

LADY FILSON.

[*Straightening herself.*] Not for me. [*Firmly.*] For Madame de Chaumié.

UNDERWOOD.

I beg pardon, m'lady. The gentleman inquired for your ladyship——

OTTOLINE.

[*To* UNDERWOOD.] In the drawing-room—[*with a queenly air*] no, in my own room.

UNDERWOOD.

[*To* OTTOLINE.] Yes, mad'm.

[UNDERWOOD *withdraws.*

OTTOLINE.

[*Approaching* SIR RANDLE *and* LADY FILSON.] Dad—mother——?

LADY FILSON.

Your father may do as he chooses. [*Rising and crossing to the writing-table, where she sits and prepares to write.*] I have letters to answer.

OTTOLINE.

[*To* SIR RANDLE.] Dad——?

SIR RANDLE.

[*Rising.*] Impossible—impossible. [*Marching to the fireplace.*] I cannot act apart from your dear mother. [*His back to the fireplace, virtuously.*] I never act apart from your dear mother.

OTTOLINE.

Comme vous voudrez! [*Moving to the glazed door and there pausing.*] You *won't*——?

[SIR RANDLE *blinks at the ceiling again.* LADY FILSON *scribbles audibly with a scratchy pen.* OTTOLINE *goes out, closing the door.*

BERTRAM.

[*Jumping up as the door shuts—in an expostulatory tone.*] Good heavens! My dear father—my dear mother——!

SIR RANDLE.

[*Coming to earth.*] Eh ?

BERTRAM.

[*Agitatedly.*] My sister will pack her trunks and be off to an hotel if you're not careful. She won't stand this, I mean t'say. There'll be a marriage at the registrar's, or some ghastly proceeding—a scandal—all kinds of gossip——!

LADY FILSON.

[*Throwing down her pen and rising—holding her heart.*] Oh——!

BERTRAM.

[*With energy.*] I mean to say——!

SIR RANDLE.

[*To* LADY FILSON, *blankly.*] Winnie——?

LADY FILSON.

R-Randle——?

SIR RANDLE.

[*Biting his nails.*] He's right. [BERTRAM *hastens to the glazed door.*] Dear Bertram is right.

BERTRAM.

[*Opening the door.*] You'll see him——?

LADY FILSON.

Y-yes.

SIR RANDLE.

Yes. [BERTRAM *disappears.* SIR RANDLE *paces the room at the back, waving his arms.*] Oh ! Oh !

LADY FILSON.

[*Going to the fireplace.*] I won't be civil to him, Randle! The impertinence of his visit! I won't be civil to him!

SIR RANDLE.

A calamity! An unmerited calamity!

LADY FILSON.

[*Dropping on to the settee before the fireplace.*] She's mad! That's the only excuse I can make for her!

SIR RANDLE.

Stark mad! A calamity.

LADY FILSON.

You remember the man?

SIR RANDLE.

[*Taking a book from the rack on the oblong table and hurriedly turning its pages.*] A supercilious, patronizing person—son of a wretched country parson—used to loll against the wall of your *salon*—with his nose in the air.

LADY FILSON.

[*Tearfully.*] A stroke of bad fortune at last, Randle! Fancy! Everything has always gone so well with us——!

SIR RANDLE.

[*Suddenly, groaning.*] Oh!

LADY FILSON.

[*Over her shoulder.*] What is it? I can't bear much more——

SIR RANDLE.

He isn't even in *Who's Who*, Winnie!

[BERTRAM *returns, out of breath.*

BERTRAM.

I caught her on the stairs. [*Closing the door.*] She'll bring him down.

LADY FILSON.

[*Weakly.*] I won't be civil to him. I refuse to be civil to him.

SIR RANDLE.

[*Replacing the book in the rack and sitting in the chair at the oblong table—groaning again.*] Oh!

[*There is a short silence.* BERTRAM *slowly advances.*

BERTRAM.

[*Heavily, drawing his hand across his brow.*] Of course, my dear father—my dear mother—we must do our utmost to quash it—strain every nerve, I mean t'say, to stop my sister from committing this stupendous act of folly.

LADY FILSON.

[*Rocking herself to and fro.*] Oh! Oh!

SIR RANDLE.

A beggarly author!

BERTRAM.

[*The picture of dejection.*] But if the worst comes to the worst—if she's obdurate, I mean t'say—an alliance between Society and Literature—I suppose there's no actual disgrace in it.

SIR RANDLE.

A duffer—a duffer whose trash doesn't sell——!

LADY FILSON.

Taking advantage of a silly, emotional woman, to feather his nest!

SIR RANDLE.

[*Rising and pacing up and down between the glazed door and the settee on the right.*] I shall have difficulty —[*shaking his uplifted fist*] I shall have difficulty in restraining myself from denouncing Mr. Mackworth in her presence!

BERTRAM.

[*Dismally.*] As to the wedding, there's no reason that I can see—because a lady marries a literary man, I mean t'say—why the function should be a shabby one.

LADY FILSON.

[*Rising and moving about at the back distractedly.*] That it sha'n't be! If we can't prevent my poor girl from throwing herself away, I'm determined her *wedding* shall be smart and impressive!

SIR RANDLE.

[*Bitterly, with wild gestures.*] "The interesting engagement is announced of Mr.—Mr.——"

BERTRAM.

[*Wandering to the fireplace, his chin on his breast.*] Philip, father.

SIR RANDLE.

"—Mr. Philip Mackworth, the well-known novelist, to Ottoline, widow of the late Comte de Chaumié—

[*peeping into the hall through the side of one of the curtains of the glazed door—his voice dying to a mutter*] only daughter of Sir Randle and Lady Filson——"

LADY FILSON.

"Mrs.—Philip—Mackworth"! Ha, ha, ha! Mrs. Philip Nobody!

BERTRAM.

[*Joining her.*] Perhaps it would be wiser, mother, for me to retire while the interview takes place.

LADY FILSON.

[*Falling upon his neck.*] Oh, my dear boy——!

SIR RANDLE.

[*Getting away from the door.*] They're coming!

BERTRAM.

[*Quickly.*] I'm near you if you want me, I mean t'say——

[*He goes out at the door on the left.* LADY FILSON *hastily resumes her seat at the writing-table, and* SIR RANDLE, *pulling himself together, crosses to the fireplace. The glazed door opens and* OTTOLINE *appears with* PHILIP.

OTTOLINE.

[*Quietly.*] Mr. Mackworth, mother—Dad——

PHILIP.

[*Advancing to* LADY FILSON *cordially.*] How do you do, Lady Filson?

LADY FILSON.

[*Giving him a reluctant hand and eyeing him askance with mingled aversion and indignation.*] H-how do you do?

PHILIP.

This is very good of you. [*Bowing to* SIR RANDLE.] How are you, Sir Randle?

SIR RANDLE.

[*His head in the air, severely.*] How do you do, Mr. Mackworth?

PHILIP.

[*Breaking the ice.*] We—we meet after many years——

SIR RANDLE.

Many.

LADY FILSON.

[*Still examining* PHILIP.] M-many.

PHILIP.

And—if you've ever bestowed a thought on me since the old Paris days—in a way you can scarcely have expected.

LADY FILSON.

[*Turning to the writing-table to conceal her repugnance.*] Scarcely.

SIR RANDLE.

Scarcely.

PHILIP.

[*To* SIR RANDLE.] Oh, I am not vain enough, Sir Randle, to flatter myself that what you have heard from Ottoline gives you and Lady Filson unmixed pleasure. On the contrary——

LADY FILSON.

[*Gulping.*] Pleasure! [*Unable to repress herself.*] Unmixed—! Ho, ho, ho, ho——!

SIR RANDLE.

[*Restraining her.*] Winifred——!

OTTOLINE.

[*Coming to* LADY FILSON *and touching her gently—in a low voice.*] Mother——!

PHILIP.

[*Smiling at* OTTOLINE *apologetically.*] It's my fault; I provoked that. [*Walking away to the right.*] I expressed myself rather clumsily, I'm afraid.

SIR RANDLE.

[*Expanding his chest and advancing to* PHILIP.] I gather from my daughter, Mr. Mackworth, that you are here for the purpose of "explaining your position" in relation to her. I believe I quote her words accurately——

OTTOLINE.

[*Moving to the fireplace.*] Yes, Dad.

PHILIP.

That is so, Sir Randle—if you and Lady Filson will have the patience——

[SIR RANDLE *motions* PHILIP *to the settee on the right.* PHILIP *sits. Then* OTTOLINE *sits on the settee before the fireplace, and* SIR RANDLE *in the arm-chair by* PHILIP. LADY FILSON *turns in her chair to listen.*

SIR RANDLE.

[*To* PHILIP, *majestically.*] Before you embark upon your explanation, permit me to define *my* position—mine and Lady Filson's. [PHILIP *nods.*] I am going to make a confession to you; and I should like to feel that I am making it as one gentleman to another. [PHILIP *nods again.*] Mr. Mackworth, Lady Filson and I are ambitious people. Not for ourselves. For ourselves, all we desire is rest and retirement—[*closing his eyes*] if it were possible, obscurity. But where our children are concerned, it is different; and, to be frank—I *must* be frank—we had hoped that, in the event of Ottoline remarrying, she would contract such a marriage as is commonly described as brilliant.

PHILIP.

[*Dryly.*] Such a marriage as her marriage to Monsieur de Chaumié, for example.

SIR RANDLE.

[*Closing his eyes.*] *De mortuis,* Mr. Mackworth! I must decline——

PHILIP.

I merely wished, as a basis of argument, to get at your exact interpretation of brilliancy.

SIR RANDLE.

[*Dismissing the point with a wave of the hand.*] It is easy for you, therefore, as you have already intimated, to judge what are our sensations at receiving my daughter's communication.

PHILIP.

[*Nodding.*] They are distinctly disagreeable.

SIR RANDLE.

[*Conscientiously.*] They are—I won't exaggerate—I mustn't exaggerate—they are not far removed from dismay.

LADY FILSON.

Utter dismay.

SIR RANDLE.

[*Shifting his chair—to* PHILIP.] I learn—I learn from Ottoline that you have forsaken the field of journalism, Mr. Mackworth, and now devote yourself exclusively to creative work? [*Another nod from* PHILIP.] But you have not—to use my daughter's phrase—up to the present—er——

PHILIP.

[*Nursing his leg.*] Please go on.

SIR RANDLE.

You have not been eminently successful?

PHILIP.

Not yet. Not with the wide public. No; not yet.

SIR RANDLE.

Forgive me—any private resources?

PHILIP.

None worth mentioning. Two-hundred-a-year, left me by an old aunt.

LADY FILSON.

[*Under her breath.*] Ho——!

SIR RANDLE.

[*To her.*] My dear——! [*To* PHILIP.] On the other hand, Mr. Mackworth, as you are probably aware, my daughter is—no, I won't say a rich woman—I will say comfortably provided for; *not* by the late Comte de Chaumié, but by myself. [*Closing his eyes.*] I have never been a niggardly parent, Mr. Mackworth.

OTTOLINE.

[*Softly, without turning.*] Indeed, no, Dad!

PHILIP.

[*To* SIR RANDLE, *bluntly.*] Yes, I *do* know of the settlement you made upon Ottoline on her marriage, and of your having supplemented it when she became a widow. Very handsome of you.

LADY FILSON.

[*As before.*] Ha!

SIR RANDLE.

[*Leaning back in his chair.*] *There* then, my dear Mr. Mackworth, is the state of the case. Ottoline is beyond our control——

LADY FILSON.

Unhappily.

SIR RANDLE.

If she *will* deal this crushing blow to her mother and myself, we must bow our heads to it. But, for the sake of your self-esteem, I beg you to reflect! [*Partly to* PHILIP, *partly at* OTTOLINE.] What construction would be put upon a union between you and Madame de Chaumié—between a lady of means and

—I *must* be cruel—I *must* be brutal—a man who is—commercially at least—a failure ?

LADY FILSON.

There *could* only be one construction put upon it !

OTTOLINE.

[*Rising.*] Mother——!

PHILIP.

[*To* SIR RANDLE, *calmly.*] Oh, but—ah, Ottoline hasn't told you——!

OTTOLINE.

[*To* PHILIP.] No, I hadn't time, Philip——

PHILIP.

My dear Sir Randle—[*rising and going to* LADY FILSON]—my dear Lady Filson—let me dispel your anxiety for the preservation of my self-esteem. Ottoline and I have no idea of getting married yet awhile.

OTTOLINE.

No, mother.

LADY FILSON.

When, pray——?

PHILIP.

We have agreed to wait until I have ceased to be —commercially—a failure.

OTTOLINE.

[*To* SIR RANDLE *and* LADY FILSON.] Until he has obtained public recognition ; [*coming forward*] until,

in fact, even the member's of one's own family, Dad, can't impute unworthy motives.

SIR RANDLE.

[*To* PHILIP, *incredulously—rising.*] Until you have obtained public recognition, Mr. Mackworth ?

PHILIP.

[*Smiling.*] Well, it may sound extravagant——

LADY FILSON.

Grotesque !

SIR RANDLE.

[*Walking about on the extreme right.*] Amazing !

OTTOLINE.

Why grotesque ; why amazing ? [*Sitting in the low-backed arm-chair.*] All that is amazing about it is that Philip should lack the superior courage which enables a man, in special circumstances, to sink his pride and ignore ill-natured comments.

PHILIP.

[*To* LADY FILSON.] At any rate, this is the arrangement that Ottoline and I have entered into ; and I suggest, with every respect, that you and Sir Randle should raise no obstacle to my seeing her under your roof occasionally.

LADY FILSON.

As being preferable to hole-and-corner meetings in friends' houses——!

OTTOLINE.

[*Coolly.*] Or under lamp-posts in the streets—yes, mother.

LADY FILSON.

[*Rising and crossing to the round table.*] Ottoline——!

SIR RANDLE.

[*Bearing down upon* PHILIP.] May I ask, Mr. Mackworth, how long you have been following your precarious profession? Pardon my ignorance. My reading is confined to our great journals; and *there* your name has escaped me.

PHILIP.

Oh, I've been at it for nearly ten years.

LADY FILSON.

Ten years!

PHILIP.

[*To* SIR RANDLE.] I began soon after I left Paris.

SIR RANDLE.

And what ground, sir, have you for anticipating that you will *ever* achieve popularity as a writer?

LADY FILSON.

[*Sitting in the chair by the round table.*] Preposterous!

OTTOLINE.

[*Stamping her foot.*] Mother——! [*To* SIR RANDLE.] Philip has high expectations of his next novel, Dad. It is to be published in the autumn—September.

SIR RANDLE.

[*To* PHILIP.] And should that prove no more successful with the "wide public" than those which have preceded it——?

PHILIP.

Then I—then I fling another at 'em.

SIR RANDLE.

Which would occupy you——?

PHILIP.

Twelve months.

LADY FILSON.

And if *that* fails——!

PHILIP.

[*Smiling again, but rather constrainedly.*] Ah, you travel too quickly for me, Lady Filson—you and Sir Randle! You heap disaster on disaster——

SIR RANDLE.

If *that* fails, another twelve-months' labour!

LADY FILSON.

While my daughter is wasting the best years of her life!

SIR RANDLE.

[*Indignantly.*] Really, Mr. Mackworth! [*Throwing himself upon the settee on the right.*] Really! I appeal to you! Is this fair?

LADY FILSON.

Is it fair to Ottoline?

OTTOLINE.

Absolument! So that it satisfies me to spend the best years of my life in this manner, I don't see what anybody has to complain of. *Mon Dieu!* I am relieved to think that some of my best years are still mine to squander!

SIR RANDLE.

[*To* PHILIP, *who is standing by the writing-table in thought, a look of disquiet on his face—persistently.*] Mr. Mackworth——!

OTTOLINE.

[*Rising impatiently.*] My dear Dad—my dear mother—I propose that we postpone this discussion until Mr. Mackworth's new book *has* failed to attract the public, [*crossing to* SIR RANDLE] and that in the meantime he sha'n't be scowled at when he presents himself in Ennismore Gardens. [*Seating herself beside* SIR RANDLE *and slipping her arm through his.*] Dad——!

LADY FILSON.

[*To* PHILIP.] Mr. Mackworth——!

PHILIP.

[*Rousing himself and turning to* SIR RANDLE *and* LADY FILSON—*abruptly.*] Look here, Sir Randle! Look here, Lady Filson! I own that this arrangement between Ottoline and me is an odd one. It was arrrived at yesterday impulsively; and, in her interests, there *is* a good deal to be said against it.

LADY FILSON.

There's nothing to be said *for* it. Oh——!

SIR RANDLE.

[*To* LADY FILSON.] Winifred—[*To* PHILIP.] Well, Mr. Mackworth?

PHILIP.

Well, Sir Randle, I—I'm prepared to take a sporting chance. It may be that I am misled by the sanguine temperament of the artist, who is apt to believe that his latest production will shake the earth to its foundation. I've gammoned myself before into such a belief, but—[*resolutely*] I'll stake everything on my next book! I give you my word that if it isn't a success—an indisputable popular success—I will join you both, in all sincerity, in urging Ottoline to break with me. Come! Does that mollify you?

[*There is a short silence.* SIR RANDLE *and* LADY FILSON *look at each other in surprise and* OTTOLINE *stares at* PHILIP *open-mouthed.*

OTTOLINE.

Philip——!

PHILIP.

[*To* SIR RANDLE.] Sir Randle——?

SIR RANDLE.

[*To* LADY FILSON.] Winnie——?

LADY FILSON.

[*In a softer tone.*] It certainly seems to me that Mr. Mackworth's undertaking—as far as it goes——

OTTOLINE.

[*With a queer laugh.*] Ha, ha, ha! As far as it goes, mother! [*Rising, thoughtfully.*] Doesn't it go a little

too far ? [*Contracting her brows.*] It disposes of *me* as if I were of no more account than a sawdust doll ! [*To* PHILIP.] Ah, traitor ! [*In a low voice.*] *Vos promesses à une femme sont sans valeur !*

PHILIP.

[*Taking her hands reassuringly.*] No, no——!

OTTOLINE.

[*Withdrawing her hands.*] Zut ! [*Moving slowly towards the glazed door.*] You have acquitted yourself bravely, *mon cher Monsieur Philippe !* [*Shrugging her shoulders.*] Say good-bye and let me turn you out in disgrace.

PHILIP.

[*Deprecatingly.*] Ha, ha, ha ! [*Going to* LADY FILSON.] Good-bye, Lady Filson. [*She rises and shakes hands with him.*] Have I bought my right of *entrée ?* I may ring your bell at discreet intervals till the end of the season ?

LADY FILSON.

[*Stiffly.*] Ottoline is her own mistress, Mr. Mackworth ; [*more amiably*] but apart from her, you will receive a card from me —music—Tuesday, July the eighth.

[*He bows and she crosses to the fireplace. Then he shakes hands with* SIR RANDLE, *who has risen and is standing in the middle of the room.*

PHILIP.

[*To* SIR RANDLE.] Good-bye.

SIR RANDLE.

[*Detaining* PHILIP, *searchingly.*] Er—pardon me —this new novel of yours, on which you place so much reliance—pray don't think me curious——

OTTOLINE.

[*Suddenly.*] Ha! [*Coming to the back of the settee on the right, her eyes gleaming scornfully at* SIR RANDLE.] Tell my father, Philip—tell him——

PHILIP.

[*Shaking his head at her and frowning.*] Otto——

OTTOLINE.

Do; as you told it to me yesterday. [*Satirically.*] It will help him to understand why your name has escaped him in the great journals!

SIR RANDLE.

Any confidence you may repose in me, Mr. Mackworth——

OTTOLINE.

[*Prompting* PHILIP.] It's called—*allons! racontez donc!*——

PHILIP.

[*After a further look of protest at* OTTOLINE—*to* SIR RANDLE, *hesitatingly.*] It's called "The Big Drum," Sir Randle.

SIR RANDLE.

[*Elevating his eyebrows.*] "The Big Drum"? [*With an innocent air.*] Military?

PHILIP.

No; social.

SIR RANDLE.

Social ?

PHILIP.

[*Leaning against the arm-chair on the left of the settee on the right.*] It's an attempt to portray the struggle for notoriety—for self-advertisement—we see going on around us to-day.

SIR RANDLE.

Ah, yes ; lamentable !

PHILIP.

[*Deliberately, but losing himself in his subject as he proceeds.*] It shows a vast crowd of men and women, sir, forcing themselves upon public attention without a shred of modesty, fighting to obtain it as if they are fighting for bread and meat. It shows how dignity and reserve have been cast aside as virtues that are antiquated and outworn, until half the world—the world that should be orderly, harmonious, beautiful —has become an arena for the exhibition of vulgar ostentation or almost superhuman egoism—a cockpit resounding with raucous voices bellowing one against the other !

SIR RANDLE.

[*Closing his eyes.*] A terrible picture !

LADY FILSON.

[*Closing her eyes.*] Terrible.

PHILIP.

It shows the bishop and the judge playing to the gallery, the politician adopting the methods of the

cheap-jack, the duchess vying with the puffing draper; it shows how even true genius submits itself to conditions that are accepted and excused as "modern," and is found elbowing and pushing in the hurly-burly. It shows how the ordinary decencies of life are sacrificed to the paragraphist, the interviewer, and the ghoul with the camera; how the home is stripped of its sanctity, blessed charity made a vehicle for display, the very grave-yard transformed into a parade ground; while the outsider looks on with a sinking of the vitals because the drumstick is beyond his reach and the bom-bom-bom is not for *him!* It shows——! [*Checking himself and leaving the arm-chair with a short laugh.*] Oh, well, that's the setting of my story, Sir Randle! I won't inflict the details upon you.

SIR RANDLE.

Er—h'm—[*expansively*] an excellent theme, Mr. Mackworth; a most promising theme! [*To* LADY FILSON.] Eh, Winifred?

LADY FILSON.

[*Politely.*] Excellent; quite, quite excellent!

PHILIP.

[*Bowing to* LADY FILSON *and going to* OTTOLINE.] Thank you.

OTTOLINE.

[*To* PHILIP, *glowingly.*] Splendid! [*Laying her hand upon his arm.*] You have purged your disgrace. [*Softly.*] You may come and see me to-morrow.

PHILIP.

[*To* OTTOLINE.] Ha, ha——!

SIR RANDLE.

[*In response to a final bow from* PHILIP.] Good-bye.

LADY FILSON.

Good-bye.

[OTTOLINE *opens the glazed door and* PHILIP *follows her into the hall. Immediately the door is shut,* LADY FILSON *hurries to* SIR RANDLE.

SIR RANDLE.

[*In high spirits.*] Winnie——!

LADY FILSON.

That will never be a popular success, Randle!

SIR RANDLE.

Never. An offensive book——!

LADY FILSON.

Ho, ho, ho, ho——!

SIR RANDLE.

A grossly offensive book!

LADY FILSON.

[*Anxiously.*] He—he'll keep his word——?

SIR RANDLE.

To join us in persuading her to drop him——

LADY FILSON.

If it fails?

SIR RANDLE.

[*With conviction.*] Yes. [*Walking about.*] Yes. We *must* be just. We owe it to ourselves to be just to Mr. Mackworth. He is not altogether devoid of gentlemanlike scruples.

LADY FILSON.

[*Breathlessly.*] And—and *she*——?

SIR RANDLE.

I trust—I trust that my child's monstrous infatuation will have cooled down by the autumn.

LADY FILSON.

[*Supporting herself by the chair at the writing-table, her hand to her heart—exhausted.*] Oh! Oh, dear!

SIR RANDLE.

[*Returning to her.*] I conducted the affair with skill and tact, Winifred?

LADY FILSON.

[*Rallying.*] It was masterly—[*kissing him*] masterly——

SIR RANDLE.

[*Proudly.*] Ha!

[*She sits at the writing-table again and takes up her pen as* SIR RANDLE *stalks to the door on the left.*

LADY FILSON.

Masterly!

SIR RANDLE.

[*Opening the door.*] Bertram—Bertram, my boy—Bertie——!

[*He disappears.* LADY FILSON *scribbles violently.*

END OF THE SECOND ACT

THE THIRD ACT

The scene represents two rooms, connected by a pair of wide doors, in a set of residential chambers on the upper floor of a house in Gray's Inn. The further room is the dining-room, the nearer room a study. In the wall at the back of the dining-room are two windows; in the right-hand wall is a door leading to the kitchen; and in the left-hand wall a door opens from a vestibule, where, opposite this door, there is another door which gives on to the landing of the common stair.

In the study, a door in the right-hand wall admits to a bedroom; in the wall facing the spectator is a door opening into the room from the vestibule; and beyond the door on the right, in a piece of wall cutting off the corner of the room, is the fireplace. A bright fire is burning.

The rooms are wainscotted to the ceilings and have a decrepit, old-world air, and the odds and ends of furniture—all characteristic of the dwelling of a poor literary man of refined taste—are in keeping with the surroundings. In the dining-room there are half-a-dozen chairs of various patterns, a sideboard or two, a corner-cupboard, a "grandfather" clock, and a large round table. In the study, set out into the room at the same angle as the fireplace, is a writing-table. A chair stands at the writing-table, its back to the fire, and in the

front of the table is a well-worn settee. On the left of the settee is a smaller table, on which are an assortment of pipes, a box of cigars and another of cigarettes, a tobacco-jar, an ash-tray, and a bowl of matches; and on the left of the table is a capacious arm-chair. There is an arm-chair on either side of the fireplace; and against the right-hand wall, on the nearer side of the bedroom door, is a cabinet.

On the other side of the room, facing the bedroom door, there is a second settee, and behind the settee is an oblong table littered with books and magazines. At a little distance from this table stands an arm-chair, and against the wall at the back, on the left of the big doors, is a chair of a lighter sort. Also against the back wall, but on the left of the door opening from the vestibule, is a table with a telephone-instrument upon it, and running along the left-hand wall is a dwarf bookcase, unglazed, packed with books which look as if they would be none the worse for being dusted and put in order.

In the vestibule, against the wall on the right, there is a small table on which are Philip's hats, caps, and gloves; and an overcoat and a man's cape are hanging on some pegs.

It is late on a November afternoon. Curtains are drawn across the dining-room windows, and the room is lighted rather dimly by an electric lamp standing upon a sideboard. A warm glow proceeds from the nearer right-hand corner as from a fire. The study is lighted by a couple of standard lamps and a library-lamp on the writing-table, and the vestibule by a lamp suspended from the ceiling.

The big doors are open.

[PHILIP, *a pipe in his mouth and wearing an old velvet jacket, is lying upon the settee on the right, reading a book by the light of the lamp on the writing-table. In the dining-room,* JOHN *and a waiter—the latter in his shirt-sleeves—are at the round table, unfolding a white table-cloth.*

JOHN.

[*A cheery little man in seedy clothes—to the waiter, softly.*] Careful! Don't crease it.

PHILIP.

[*Raising his eyes from his book.*] What's the time, John?

JOHN.

Quarter-to-six, sir.

PHILIP.

Have my things come from the tailor's yet?

JOHN.

[*Laying the cloth with the aid of the waiter.*] Yes, sir; while you were dozing. [*Ecstatically.*] They're lovely, sir. [*A bell rings in the vestibule.*] Expect that's the cook, sir. [*He bustles into the vestibule from the dining-room. There is a short pause and then he reappears, entering the study at the door opening from the vestibule, followed by* ROOPE.] It's Mr. Roope, sir!

PHILIP.

No! [*Throwing his book aside and jumping up.*] Why, Robbie!

ROOPE.

[*As they shake hands vigorously.*] My dear fellow!

PHILIP.

Return of the wanderer! When did you get back?

ROOPE.

Last night.

PHILIP.

Take your coat off, you old ruffian. [*Putting his pipe down.*] I *am* glad.

ROOPE.

[*To* JOHN, *who relieves him of his hat, overcoat, and neckerchief.*] How are *you*, John?

JOHN.

Splendid, Mr. Roope. [*Beaming.*] Our new novel is *sech* a success, sir.

PHILIP.

Ha, ha, ha, ha!

ROOPE.

[*To* JOHN.] So Mr. Mackworth wrote and told me. [*Giving his gloves to* JOHN.] Congratulate you, John.

JOHN.

[*Depositing the hat, coat, etc., upon the settee on the left.*] Thank you, sir.

ROOPE.

[*Crossing to the fireplace, rubbing his hands, as* JOHN *retires to the dining-room.*] Oh, my dear Phil, this dreadful climate after the sunshine of the Lago Maggiore!

PHILIP.

[*Walking about and spouting, in high spirits.*] "Italia! O Italia! thou who hast the fatal gift of beauty——!

ROOPE.

Sir Loftus and Lady Glazebrook were moving on to Rome, or I really believe I could have endured another month at their villa, bores as they are, dear kind souls! [*Looking towards the dining-room, where* JOHN *and the waiter are now placing a handsome centre-piece of flowers upon the round table.*] Hallo! A dinner-party, Phil?

PHILIP.

Dinner-party? A banquet!

ROOPE.

To celebrate the success of the book?

PHILIP.

That and something more. This festival, sir, of the preparations for which you are a privileged spectator—[*shouting to* JOHN] shut those doors, John——

JOHN.

Yessir.

PHILIP.

[*Sitting in the chair on the left of the smoking-table as* JOHN *closes the big doors.*] This festival, my dear Robbie—[*glancing over his shoulder to assure himself that the doors are closed*] this festival also celebrates my formal engagement to Madame de Chaumié.

ROOPE.

[*Triumphantly.*] Aha!

PHILIP.

[*Taking a cigarette from the box at his side.*] Ottoline and I are to be married soon after Christmas. The civilized world is to be startled by the announcement on Monday.

ROOPE.

[*Advancing.*] My dear chap, I've never heard anything that has given me greater pleasure. [PHILIP *offers* ROOPE *the cigarette-box.*] No, I won't smoke. [*Seating himself upon the settee on the right.*] When was it settled?

PHILIP.

[*Lighting his cigarette.*] The day before yesterday. I got Titterton to write me a letter—Titterton, my publisher—certifying to the enormous sales of the book, and sent it on to Sir Randle Filson. Nothing like documentary evidence, Robbie. [*Leaning back in his chair with outstretched legs and exhaling a wreath of tobacco-smoke.*] Twenty-five thousand copies, my boy, up to date, and still going strong.

ROOPE.

Wonderful.

PHILIP.

Phew! The critics treated me generously enough, but it hung fire damnably at first. At one particularly hellish moment I could have sworn it wouldn't do more than my usual fifteen or eighteen hundred, and I cursed myself for having been such a besotted fool as to pin my faith to it. [*Sitting upright.*] And

then, suddenly, a rush—a tremendous rush ! Twenty-four thousand went off in less than six weeks. Almost uncanny, eh ? [*Touching the tobacco-jar.*] Oh, lord, sometimes I think I've been putting opium into my pipe instead of this innocent baccy, and that I shall wake up to the necessity of counting my pence again and apologizing to John for being in arrear with his wages !

ROOPE.

And Titterton's letter brought the Filsons round ?

PHILIP.

[*Nodding.*] Brought 'em round ; and I must say they've accomplished the change of attitude most graciously.

ROOPE.

[*Oracularly.*] Graciously or grudgingly, they couldn't help themselves, dear excellent friend. As you had pledged yourself in effect to resign the lady if your book was a failure, it follows that they were bound to clasp you to their bosoms if it succeeded. I don't want to detract from the amiability of the Filsons for an instant——

PHILIP.

Anyhow, their opposition is at an end, and all is rosy. [*Rising and pacing the room.*] Master Bertram is a trifle glum and stand-offish perhaps, but Sir Randle—! Ha, ha, ha ! Sir Randle has taken Literature under his wing, Robbie, from Chaucer to Kipling, in the person of his prospective son-in-law. You'd imagine, to listen to him, that to establish ties of relationship with a literary man has been his chief aim in life.

ROOPE.

[*Jerking his head in the direction of the dining-room.*] And this is to be a family gathering——?

PHILIP.

The first in the altered circumstances. I proposed a feast at a smart restaurant, but Sir Randle preferred the atmosphere which has conduced, as he puts it, to the creation of so many of my brilliant compositions. [*Behind the smoking-table, dropping the end of his cigarette into the ash-tray—gaily.*] Robbie, I've had a magnificent suit of joy-rags made for the occasion!

ROOPE.

[*Earnestly.*] Good! I rejoice to hear it, dear excellent friend, and I hope it portends a wholesale order to your tailor and your intention to show yourself in society again freely. [*With a laugh,* PHILIP *goes to the fireplace and stands looking into the fire.*] Begin leaving your cards at once. No more sulking in your tent! [*Rising and crossing to the other side of the room.*] You have *arrived,* my dear chap; I read your name in two papers in my cabin yesterday. [*Marching up and down.*] Your foot is on the ladder; you bid fair to become a celebrity, if you are not one already; and your approaching marriage sheds additional lustre on you. I envy you, Phil; I do, positively.

PHILIP.

[*Facing* ROOPE.] Oh, of course, I shall be seen about with Ottoline during our engagement. Afterwards——

ROOPE.

[*Halting.*] Afterwards——?

PHILIP.

Everything will depend on my wife—[*relishing the word*] my *wife*. Ottoline has rather lost her taste for Society with a capital S, remember.

ROOPE.

[*Testily.*] That was her mood last June, when she was hypped and discontented. With a husband she can be proud of, surely——!

PHILIP.

[*Coming forward.*] As a matter of fact, Robbie, I'm inclined to agree with you; I've been staring into my fire, or out of my windows here, a jolly sight too much. [*Expanding his chest.*] It'll be refreshing to me to rub shoulders with people again for a bit—[*smiling*] even to find myself the object of a little interest and curiosity.

ROOPE.

[*Delighted.*] Dear excellent friend!

PHILIP.

Ha, ha! You see, I'm not without my share of petty vanity. I'm consistent, though. Didn't I tell you in South Audley Street that I was as eager for fame as any man living, if only I could win it in my own way?

ROOPE.

You did.

PHILIP.

[*Exultingly.*] Well, I *have* won it in my own way, haven't I! [*Hitting the palm of his hand with his fist.*] I've done what I determined to do, Robbie; what I

knew I *should* do, sooner or later! I've *got there*—got there!—by simple, honest means! Isn't it glorious?

ROOPE.

[*Cautiously.*] I admit——

PHILIP.

[*Breaking in.*] Oh, I don't pretend that there haven't been moments in my years of stress and struggle when I've been tempted to join the gaudy, cackling fowl whose feathers I flatter myself I've plucked pretty thoroughly in my book! But I've resisted the devil by prayers and fasting; and, by George, sir, I wouldn't swap my modest victory for the vogue of the biggest boomster in England! [*Boisterously.*] Ha, ha, ha! Whoop! [*Seizing* ROOPE *and shaking him.*] Dare to preach your gospel to me *now*, you arch-apostle of quackery and self-advertisement!

ROOPE.

[*Peevishly, releasing himself.*] Upon my word, Phil——! [*The bell rings again.*

PHILIP.

The cook! [*To* ROOPE, *seeing that he is putting on his muffler.*] Don't go.

ROOPE.

I must. [*Taking up his overcoat.*] I merely ran along to shake hands with you, and I'm sorry I took the trouble. [PHILIP *helps him into his overcoat laughingly.*] Thanks.

PHILIP.

[*Suddenly.*] Robbie——!

ROOPE.

[*Struggling with an obstinate sleeve.*] Hey ?

PHILIP.

It's just struck me. Where are *you* dining to-night ?

ROOPE.

At the Garrick, with Hughie Champion. [*Picking up his hat and gloves.*] He's getting horribly deaf and tedious ; but I had nothing better.

PHILIP.

Bother Colonel Champion ! I wish you could have dined with *me.*

ROOPE.

[*His hat on his head, drawing on his gloves.*] Dear excellent *friend !* I should be out of place.

PHILIP.

Rubbish ! Your presence would be peculiarly appropriate, my dear Robbie. Wasn't it you who brought Ottoline and me together, God bless yer ! [*Observing that* ROOPE *is weakening.*] There's heaps of room for an extra chair. Everybody 'ud be delighted.

ROOPE.

[*Meditatively.*] I could telephone to Hughie excusing myself. He didn't ask me till this afternoon. [*With an injured air.*] I resent a short notice.

PHILIP.

[*His eyes twinkling.*] Quite right. Mine's short too——

ROOPE.

That's different.

PHILIP.

Entirely. You'll come ?

ROOPE.

If you're certain the Filsons and Madame de Chaumié——

PHILIP.

Certain. [*Following* ROOPE *to the door admitting to the vestibule.*] Eight o'clock.

ROOPE.

[*Opening the door.*] Charming.

PHILIP.

Won't you let John fetch you a taxi ?

ROOPE.

[*Shaking hands with* PHILIP.] No, I'll walk into Holborn. [*In the doorway.*] Oh, by-the-by, I've a message for you, Phil.

PHILIP.

From whom ?

ROOPE.

Barradell, of all people in the world.

PHILIP.

[*Surprised.*] Sir Timothy ?

ROOPE.

He's home. I crossed with him yesterday, and we travelled in the same carriage from Dover.

PHILIP.

What's the message ?

ROOPE.

He saw your book in my bag, and began talking about you. He said he hadn't met you for years, but that I was to give you his warm regards.

PHILIP.

Indeed ?

ROOPE.

[*Astutely.*] My impression is that he's heard rumours concerning you and Madame de Chaumié while he's been away, and that he's anxious to show he has no ill-will. I suppose your calling so often in Ennismore Gardens has been remarked.

PHILIP.

Extremely civil of him, if that's the case. [*Loftily.*] Decent sort of fellow, I recollect.

ROOPE.

[*Going into the vestibule.*] Very ; very.

PHILIP.

Poor chap !

ROOPE.

[*Opening the outer door.*] Eight o'clock, dear excellent friend.

PHILIP.

[*At his elbow.*] Sharp.

ROOPE.

[*Disappearing.*] *Au revoir !*

PHILIP.

Au revoir! [*Calling after* ROOPE.] Mind that corner! [*Closing the outer door with a bang and shouting.*] John! [*Coming back into the study.*] John! [*Closing the vestibule door.*] John! [*Going to the big doors and opening the one on the left a little way.*] John——!

[OTTOLINE, *richly dressed in furs, steps through the opening and confronts him. Her cheeks are flushed and her manner has lost some of its repose.*

OTTOLINE.

[*Shutting the door behind her as she enters—playfully.*] *Qu'est-ce que vous désirez John?*

PHILIP.

[*Catching her in his arms.*] My dear girl!

OTTOLINE.

Ha, ha! I'm not going to stop a minute. [*Rapidly.*] I've been to tea with Kitty Millington; and as I was getting into my car, I suddenly thought—! [*He kisses her.*] I waited in there to avoid Robbie Roope.

PHILIP.

Robbie came back yesterday. I hope I haven't done wrong; I've asked him to dine here to-night.

OTTOLINE.

Wrong! Dear old Robbie! But I didn't want him just now. [*Loosening her wrap and hunting for a pocket in it.*] I've brought you a little gift, Phil—*en souvenir de cette soirée*——

PHILIP.

[*Reprovingly.*] Oh——!

OTTOLINE.

I got it at Cartier's this afternoon. I meant to slip it into your serviette to-night quietly, but it's burning a hole in my pocket. [*She produces a small jewel-case and presents it to him.*] Will you wear that in your tie sometimes ?

PHILIP.

[*Opening the case and gazing at its contents.*] Phiou ! [*She leaves him, walking away to the fireplace.*] What a gorgeous pearl ! [*He follows her and they stand side by side, he holding the case at arm's-length admiringly, his other arm round her waist.*] You shouldn't, Otto. You're incorrigible.

OTTOLINE.

[*Leaning her head against his shoulder—softly.*] Phil——

PHILIP.

[*Still gazing at the scarf-pin.*] To-morrow I'll buy the most beautiful silk scarf ever weaved.

OTTOLINE.

Phil, I've a feeling that it's from to-night, when I sit at your table—how sweet your flowers are ; I couldn't help noticing them !—I've a feeling that it's from to-night that we really belong to each other.

PHILIP.

[*Pressing her closer to him.*] Ah——!

OTTOLINE.

[*With a shiver, closing her eyes.*] What has gone before has been hateful—hateful!

PHILIP.

[*Looking down upon her fondly.*] Hateful?

OTTOLINE.

Until—until your book commenced to sell, at any rate. Suspense—a horrid sensation of uneasiness, mistrust—the fear that, through your foolish, hasty promise to mother and Dad, you might, after all, unite with them to cheat me out of my happiness! That's what it has been to *me*, Philip.

PHILIP.

[*Rallying her, but a little guiltily.*] Ha, ha, ha! You goose! I knew exactly how events would shape, Otto; hadn't a doubt on the subject. [*Shutting the jewel-case with a snap and a flourish.*] *I* knew——

OTTOLINE.

[*Releasing herself.*] Ah, yes, I dare say I've been dreadfully stupid. [*Shaking herself, as if to rid herself of unpleasant memories, and again leaving him.*] Well! *Sans adieu!* [*Fastening her wrap.*] Get your hat and take me downstairs.

PHILIP.

Wait a moment! [*Chuckling.*] Ho, ho! I'm not to be outdone altogether. [*Pocketing her gift, he goes to the cabinet on the right and unlocks it. She watches him from the middle of the room. Presently he comes*

to her, carrying a little ring-case.] Take off your glove —[*pointing to her left hand*] that one. [*She removes her glove tremulously. He takes a ring from the case, tosses the case on to the writing-table, and slips the ring on her third finger.*] By George, I'm in luck; blessed if it doesn't fit!

[*She surveys the ring in silence for a while; then she puts her arms round his neck and hides her face on his breast.*]

OTTOLINE.

[*Almost inaudibly.*] Oh, Phil!

PHILIP.

[*Tenderly.*] And so this is the end of the journey, Otto!

OTTOLINE.

[*In a whisper.*] The end?

PHILIP.

The dreary journey in opposite directions you and I set out upon nearly eleven years ago in Paris.

OTTOLINE.

[*Quivering.*] Ah——!

PHILIP.

My dear, what does it matter as long as our roads meet at last, and meet where there are clear pools to bathe our vagabond feet and sunshine to heal our sore bodies! [*She raises her head and rummages for her handkerchief.*] Otto——!

OTTOLINE.

Yes?

PHILIP.

In April—eh——?

OTTOLINE.

[*Drying her eyes.*] April——?

PHILIP.

You haven't forgotten the compact we entered into at Robbie Roope's?

OTTOLINE.

[*Brightening.*] Ah, no!

PHILIP.

In April we walk under the chestnut-trees once more in the Champs-Elysées——!

OTTOLINE.

[*Smiling through her tears.*] And the Allée de Longchamp——!

PHILIP.

As husband and wife—we shall be an old married couple by then——!

OTTOLINE.

[*Pulling on her glove.*] And drink milk at the d'Armenonville——!

PHILIP.

And the Pré-Catelan——!

OTTOLINE.

And we'll make pilgrimages, Phil——!

PHILIP.

Yes, we'll gaze up at the windows of my gloomy lodgings in the Rue Soufflot—what was the number ?——

OTTOLINE.

[*Contracting her brows.*] *Quarante-trois bis.*

PHILIP.

[*Banteringly.*] Where you honoured me with a visit, madame, with your maid Nanette——

OTTOLINE.

[*Warding off the recollection with a gesture.*] Oh, don't——!

PHILIP.

Ha, ha, ha ! A shame of me——!

OTTOLINE.

[*Turning from him.*] Do get your hat and coat.

PHILIP.

[*Going into the vestibule.*] Where's your car ?

OTTOLINE.

[*Moving towards the vestibule.*] In South Square.

PHILIP.

[*Returning to her, a cape over his shoulders, a soft hat on his head.*] Eight o'clock !

OTTOLINE.

Eight o'clock.

[He takes her hands and they stand looking into each other's eyes.

PHILIP.

[*After a pause.*] Fancy!

OTTOLINE.

[*Faintly.*] Fancy! [*He is drawing her to him slowly when, uttering a low cry, she embraces him wildly and passionately.*] Oh! [*Clinging to him.*] Oh, Phil! Oh—oh—oh——!

PHILIP.

[*Responding to her embrace.*] Otto—Otto——!

OTTOLINE.

[*Breaking from him.*] Oh——!

[*She hurries to the outer door. He follows her quickly, closing the vestibule door after him. Then the outer door is heard to shut, and the curtain falls. After a short interval, the curtain rises again, showing all the doors closed and the study in darkness save for the light of the fire. The bell rings, and again there is an interval; and then the vestibule door is opened by* JOHN—*attired for waiting at table—and* BERTRAM *brushes past him and enters.* BERTRAM *is in evening dress.*

BERTRAM.

[*As he enters, brusquely.*] Yes, I know I'm a little too soon. I want to speak to Mr. Mackworth—before the others come, I mean t'say——

[JOHN *switches on the light of a lamp by the vestibule door. It is now seen that* BERTRAM *is greatly flustered and excited.*

JOHN.

[*Taking* BERTRAM'S *hat, overcoat, etc.*] I'll tell Mr. Mackworth, sir. He's dressin'.

[JOHN, *eyeing* BERTRAM *wonderingly, goes to the door of the bedroom. There, having switched on the light of another lamp, he knocks.*

PHILIP.

[*From the bedroom.*] Yes ?

JOHN.

[*Opening the door a few inches.*] Mr. Filson, sir.

PHILIP.

[*Calling out.*] Hallo, Bertram !

JOHN.

Mr. Filson wants to speak to you, sir.

PHILIP.

I'll be with him in ten seconds. Leave the door open.

JOHN.

Yessir.

[JOHN *withdraws, carrying* BERTRAM'S *outdoor things into the vestibule and shutting the vestibule door.*

PHILIP.

[*Calling to* BERTRAM *again.*] I'm in the throes of tying a bow, old man. Sit down. [BERTRAM, *glaring at the bedroom door, remains standing.*] O'ho,

that's fine! Ha, ha, ha! I warn you, I'm an overpowering swell to-night. A new suit of clothes, Bertram, devised and executed in less than thirty-six hours! And a fit, sir; every item of it! You'll be green with envy when you see this coat. I'm ready for you. Handkerchief—? [*Shouting.*] John—! Oh, here it is! [*Switching off the light in the bedroom and appearing, immaculately dressed, in the doorway.*] Behold! [*Closing the door and advancing to* BERTRAM.] How are you, Bertram? [BERTRAM *refuses* PHILIP'S *hand by putting his own behind his back.* PHILIP *raises his eyebrows.*] Oh? [*A pause.*] Anything amiss? [*Observing* BERTRAM'S *heated look.*] You don't look well, Filson.

BERTRAM.

[*Breathing heavily.*] No, I'm not well—I mean t'say, I'm sick with indignation——

PHILIP.

What about?

BERTRAM.

You've attempted to play us all a rascally trick, Mackworth; a low, scurvy, contemptible——

PHILIP.

[*Frowning.*] A trick?

BERTRAM.

I've just come from Mr. Dunning—a man I've thought it my duty to employ in the interests of my family—Sillitoe and Dunning, the private-inquiry people——

PHILIP.

Private-inquiry people ?

BERTRAM.

Dunning rang me up an hour ago, and I went down to him. The discovery wasn't clinched till this afternoon——

PHILIP.

The discovery ?

BERTRAM.

[*Derisively.*] Ho ! This precious book of yours—" The Big Drum " ! A grand success, Mackworth !

PHILIP.

[*Perplexed.*] I don't——

BERTRAM.

" The Big Drum " ! Wouldn't " The Big Fraud " be a more suitable title, I mean t'say ?

PHILIP.

Fraud ?

BERTRAM.

Reached its twenty-fifth thousand, and the demand still continues ! You and Mr. what's-his-name—Titterton—ought to be publicly exposed, Mackworth ; and if we were in the least spiteful and vindictive——

PHILIP.

[*Tightening his lips.*] Are you sober, Filson ?

BERTRAM.

Now, don't you be insolent, because it won't answer. [PHILIP *winces, but restrains himself.*] The

question is, what are we to do *to-night*—for Ottoline's sake, I mean t'say. We must spare her as much shock and distress as possible. I assume you've sufficient decency left to agree with me there. My father and mother too—they're quite ignorant of the steps I've been taking——

PHILIP.

[*Controlling himself with difficulty.*] My good fellow, will you condescend to explain——?

BERTRAM.

[*Walking away.*] Oh, it's no use, Mackworth—this air of innocence! [*Puffing himself out and strutting to and fro on the left.*] It's simply wasted effort, I mean t'say. In five minutes I can have Dunning here with the whole disreputable story. He's close by—bottom of Chancery Lane. He'll be at his office till half-past-eleven——

PHILIP.

[*Between his teeth—thrusting his hands into his trouser-pockets.*] Very accommodating of him!

BERTRAM.

I tried to get on to my father from Dunning's—to ask his advice, I mean t'say—but he'd dressed early and gone to one of his clubs, and they couldn't tell me which one. [*Halting and looking at his watch.*] *My* suggestion is that you and I should struggle through this farce of a dinner as best we can—as if nothing had happened. I mean t'say—and that I should reserve the disclosure of your caddish conduct till

to-morrow. You assent to that course, Mackworth ? [*Dabbing his forehead with his handkerchief.*] Thank heaven, the announcement of the engagement hasn't appeared !

PHILIP.

[*In a calm voice.*] Bertram—[*pointing to the chair on the left of the smoking-table*] Bertie, old man—[*seating himself easily upon the settee on the right*] you're your sister's brother and I'm not going to lose my temper——

BERTRAM.

[*Sneeringly.*] My dear sir——

PHILIP.

[*Leaning back and crossing his legs.*] One thing I seem to grasp clearly ; and that is that, while I've been endeavouring to conciliate you, and make a pal of you, you've been leaguing yourself with a tame detective with the idea of injuring me in some way with Ottoline and your father and mother. [*Folding his arms.*] That's correct, isn't it ?

BERTRAM.

[*With a disdainful shrug.*] If you think it will benefit you to distort my motives, Mackworth, pray do so. [*Returning to the middle of the room.*] What I've done, I've done, as I've already stated, from a sheer sense of duty——

PHILIP.

[*Again pointing to the chair.*] Please! You'll look less formidable, old man——

BERTRAM.

[*Sitting, haughtily.*] Knowing what depended on the fate of your book, I felt from the first that you might be unscrupulous enough to induce your publisher to represent it as being a popular success—in order to impose on us, I mean t'say—though acutally it was another of your failures to hit the mark; and when Titterton started blowing the trumpet so loudly, my suspicions increased. [PHILIP *slowly unfolds his arms.*] As for desiring to injure you with my family at any price, I scorn the charge. I've had the delicacy to refrain from even mentioning my suspicions to my father and mother, let alone Ottoline. [*Putting his necktie straight and smoothing his hair and his slightly crumpled shirt-front.*] Deeply as I regret your connection with my sister, I should have been only too happy, I mean t'say, if my poor opinion of you had been falsified.

PHILIP.

[*His hands clenched, but preserving his suavity.*] Extremely grateful to you, Bertie. I see! And so, burdened by these suspicions, you carried them to Mr.—Mr. Gunning?

BERTRAM.

Dunning. I didn't regard it as a job for a respectable solicitor——

PHILIP.

[*Politely.*] *Didn't* you!

BERTRAM.

Not that there's anything against Dunning——

PHILIP.

[*Uncrossing his legs and sitting upright.*] Well, that brings us to the point, doesn't it ?

BERTRAM.

The point ?

PHILIP.

The precise, and illuminating, details of the fable your friend at the bottom of Chancery Lane is fooling you with.

BERTRAM.

[*In a pitying tone.*] Oh, my dear Mackworth ! I repeat, it's no *use* your adopting this attitude. You don't realize how completely you're bowled over, I mean t'say. Dunning's got incontestable proofs——

PHILIP.

[*Jumping up, unable to repress himself any longer.*] Damn the impudent scoundrel——! [*The bell rings.*

BERTRAM.

[*Listening.*] Your bell !

PHILIP.

[*Striding to the left and then to the fireplace.*] You said he's still at his office, didn't you ?

BERTRAM.

[*Rising.*] Yes.

PHILIP.

[*Pointing to the telephone, imperatively.*] Get him here at once.

BERTRAM.

[*Rather taken aback.*] At once ?

PHILIP.

I'll deal with this gentleman promptly.

BERTRAM.

[*Icily.*] Not before Ottoline and my parents, I *hope ?*

PHILIP.

[*Seizing the poker and attacking the fire furiously.*] Before Ottoline and your parents.

BERTRAM.

A most painful scene for them, I mean t'say——

PHILIP.

A painful scene for you and Mr. Dunning.

BERTRAM.

After dinner—when they've gone—you and I'll go down to Dunning——

PHILIP.

[*Flinging the poker into the grate and facing* BERTRAM.] Confound you, you don't suppose I'm going to act on your suggestion, and grin through a long meal with this between us ! [*Pointing to the telephone again.*] Ring him up, you treacherous little whelp—quick ! [*Advancing.*] If *you* won't——!

BERTRAM.

[*Bristling.*] Oh, very good ! [*Pausing on his way to the telephone and addressing* PHILIP *with an evil*

expression.] You were always a bully and a blusterer, Mackworth; but, take my word for it, if you fancy you can bully Mr. Dunning, and bluster to my family, with any satisfactory results to yourself, you're vastly mistaken.

PHILIP.

[*Gruffly.*] I beg your pardon; sorry I exploded.

BERTRAM.

[*Scowling.*] It's of no consequence. [*At the telephone, his ear to the receiver.*] I am absolutely indifferent to your vulgar abuse, I mean t'say.

[JOHN *announces* ROOPE. *Note:* ROOPE *and the rest of the guests divest themselves of their overcoats, wraps, etc., in the vestibule before entering the room.*

JOHN.

Mr. Roope.

ROOPE.

[*Greeting* PHILIP *as* JOHN *withdraws.*] Am I the first——?

PHILIP.

[*Glancing at* BERTRAM.] No.

BERTRAM.

[*Speaking into the telephone.*] Holborn, three eight nine eight.

ROOPE.

[*Waving his hand to* BERTRAM.] Ah! How *are* you, my dear Mr. Filson?

BERTRAM.

[*To* ROOPE, *sulkily.*] How'r you? Excuse me——

ROOPE.

[*To* PHILIP.] My dear Phil, these excursions to the east are delightful; they are positively. The sights fill me with amazement. I——

PHILIP.

[*Cutting him short by leading him to the fireplace.*] Robbie——

ROOPE.

Hey?

PHILIP.

[*Grimly, dropping his voice.*] Are you hungry?

ROOPE.

Dear excellent friend, since you put the question so plainly, I don't mind avowing that I *am*—devilish hungry. Why——?

PHILIP.

There may be a slight delay, old chap.

ROOPE.

Delay?

PHILIP.

Yes, the east hasn't exhausted its marvels yet, by a long chalk.

ROOPE.

[*Looking at him curiously.*] Nothing the matter, Phil?

BERTRAM.

[*Suddenly, into the telephone.*] That you, Dunning——?

PHILIP.

[*To* ROOPE.] Robbie——

[*Turning to the fire,* PHILIP *talks rapidly and energetically to* ROOPE *in undertones.*

BERTRAM.

[*Into the telephone.*] Filson. . . . Mr. Filson. . . . I'm speaking from Gray's Inn. . . . Gray's Inn—Mr. Mackworth's chambers—2, Friars Court. . . . You're wanted, Dunning. . . . Now—immediately. . . . Yes, jump into a taxicab and come up, will you? . . .

ROOPE.

[*To* PHILIP, *aloud, opening his eyes widely.*] My dear Phil——!

PHILIP.

[*With a big laugh.*] Ha, ha, ha, ha——!

BERTRAM.

[*To* PHILIP, *angrily.*] Quiet! I can't hear. [*Into the telephone.*] I can't hear; there's such a beastly noise going on—what? . . . Dash it, you can get something to eat at *any* time! I mean to *say*—! . . . Eh? . . . [*Irritably.*] Oh, of course you may have a wash and brush up! . . . Yes, he *is*. . . . You're coming, then? . . . Right! Goo'bye.

ROOPE.

[*To* PHILIP, *who has resumed his communication to* ROOPE—*incredulously.*] Dear excellent friend——!

[*The door-bell rings again.*

PHILIP.

Ah—! [*Pausing on his way to the vestibule door—to* BERTRAM.] Mr. Dunning will favour us with his distinguished company?

BERTRAM.

[*Behind the table on the left, loweringly.*] In a few minutes. He's washing.

PHILIP.

Washing? Some of his customers' dirty linen? [*As he opens the vestibule door,* JOHN *admits* SIR RANDLE FILSON *at the outer door.*] Ah, Sir Randle!

SIR RANDLE.

[*Heartily.*] Well, Philip, my boy! [*While* JOHN *is taking his hat, overcoat, etc.*] Are my dear wife and daughter here yet?

PHILIP.

Not yet.

SIR RANDLE.

I looked in at Brooks's on my way to you. I hadn't been there for months. [*To* JOHN.] My muffler in the right-hand pocket. Thank you. [*Entering and shaking hands with* PHILIP.] Ha! They gave me quite a warm welcome. Very gratifying. [ROOPE *advances.*] Mr. Roope! [*Shaking hands with* ROOPE *as* PHILIP *shuts the vestibule door.*] An unexpected pleasure!

ROOPE.

[*Uneasily.*] Er—I am rather an interloper, I'm afraid, my dear Sir Randle——

SIR RANDLE.

[*Retaining his hand.*] No. [*Emphatically.*] *No.* This is one of Philip's many happy inspirations. If my memory is accurate, it was at your charming flat in South Audley Street that he and my darling child —[*discovering* BERTRAM, *who is now by the settee on the left.*] Bertie! [*Going to him.*] I haven't seen you all day, Bertie dear. [*Kissing him on the forehead.*] Busy, eh?

BERTRAM.

[*Stiffly.*] Yes, father.

PHILIP.

[*At the chair on the left of the smoking-table, dryly.*] Bertram has been telling me how busy he has been, Sir Randle——

SIR RANDLE.

[*Not perceiving the general air of restraint.*] That reminds me—[*moving, full of importance, to the settee on the right—feeling in his breast-pocket*] the announcement of the engagement, Philip—[*seating himself and producing a pocket-book*] Lady Filson and I drew it up this morning. [*Hunting among some letters and papers.*] I *believe* it is in the conventional form; but we so thoroughly sympathize with you and Ottoline in your dislike for anything that savours of pomp and flourish that we hesitate, without your sanction, to —[*selecting a paper and handing it to* PHILIP] ah! [*To* ROOPE, *who has returned to the fireplace—over his shoulder.*] I am treating you as one of ourselves, Mr. Roope——

ROOPE.

[*In a murmur.*] Dear excellent friend——!

SIR RANDLE.

[*To* PHILIP.] We propose to insert it only in the three or four principal journals——

PHILIP.

[*Frowning at the paper.*] Sir Randle——

SIR RANDLE.

[*Blandly.*] Eh ?

PHILIP.

Haven't you given me the wrong paper ?

SIR RANDLE.

[*With a look of alarm, hurriedly putting on his pince-nez and searching in his pocket-book again.*] The wrong——?

PHILIP.

This has " Universal News Agency " written in the corner of it.

SIR RANDLE.

[*Holding out his hand for the paper, faintly.*] Oh——!

PHILIP.

[*Ignoring* SIR RANDLE'S *hand—reading.*] " The extraordinary stir, which we venture to prophesy will not soon be eclipsed, made by Mr. Philip Mackworth's recent novel, ' The Big Drum,' lends additional interest to the announcement of his forthcoming marriage to the beautiful Madame de Chaumié —" [*The bell rings. He listens to it, and then goes on reading.*] "—the beautiful Madame de Chaumié, daughter of the widely and deservedly popular—the

widely and deservedly popular Sir Randle and Lady Filson——"

[*After reading it to the end silently, he restores the paper to* SIR RANDLE *with a smile and a slight bow.*

SIR RANDLE.

[*Collecting himself.*] Er—Lady Filson and I thought it might be prudent, Philip, to—er—to give a lead to the inevitable comments of the press. [*Replacing the paper in his pocket-book.*] If you object, my dear boy——

PHILIP.

[*With a motion of the head towards the vestibule door.*] That must *be* Lady Filson and Ottoline.

[*He goes to the door and opens it.* LADY FILSON *and* OTTOLINE *are in the vestibule and* JOHN *is taking* LADY FILSON'S *wrap from her.*

LADY FILSON.

[*Brimming over with good humour.*] Ah, Philip! Don't say we're late!

PHILIP.

[*Lightly.*] I won't.

LADY FILSON.

[*Entering and shaking hands with him.*] Your staircase is so dark, it takes an age to climb it. [*To* ROOPE, *who comes forward, shaking hands with him.*] How nice! Ottoline told me, coming along, that we were to meet you.

ROOPE.

[*Bending over her hand.*] Dear lady!

LADY FILSON.

[*Coming to* SIR RANDLE.] *There* you are, Randle! [*Nodding to* BERTRAM, *who is sitting aloof in the chair on the extreme left.*] Bertie darling! [SIR RANDLE *rises.*] Aren't these rooms quaint and cosy, Randle?

SIR RANDLE.

[*Still somewhat disconcerted.*] For a solitary man, ideal. [*Solemnly.*] If ever I had the misfortune to be left alone in the world——

LADY FILSON.

[*Sitting on the settee on the right.*] Ho, my *dear!*

[PHILIP *has joined* OTTOLINE *in the vestibule. He now follows her into the room, shutting the vestibule door. She is elegantly dressed in white and, though she has recovered her usual stateliness and composure, is a picture of radiant happiness.*

OTTOLINE.

[*Giving her hand to* ROOPE, *who raises it to his lips—sweetly.*] I am glad you are home, Robbie, and that you are here to-night. [*To* LADY FILSON *and* SIR RANDLE.] Mother—Dad—[*espying* BERTRAM] oh, and there's Bertram—don't be scandalized, any of you! [*To* ROOPE, *resting her hands on his shoulders.*] *Une fois de plus, mon ami, pour vous témoigner ma gratitude!*

[*She kisses him.* LADY FILSON *laughs indulgently, and* SIR RANDLE, *wagging his head, moves to the fireplace.*

ROOPE.

Ha, ha, ha——!

OTTOLINE.

Ha, ha, ha! [*Going to the fireplace.*] Ah, what a lovely fire! [*To* SIR RANDLE, *as* ROOPE *seats himself in the chair by the smoking-table and prepares to make himself agreeable to* LADY FILSON.] Share it with me, Dad, and let me warm my toes before dinner. I'm frozen!

PHILIP.

[*Coming to the middle of the room.*] My dear Ottoline—Lady Filson—Sir Randle—I fear we shall *all* have time to warm our toes before dinner. [ROOPE, *who is about to address a remark to* LADY FILSON, *puts his hand to his mouth, and* SIR RANDLE *and* LADY FILSON *look at* PHILIP *inquiringly.*] You mustn't blame me wholly for the hitch in my poor entertainment——

LADY FILSON.

[*Amiably.*] The kitchen! I guess your difficulties, Philip——

PHILIP.

No, nor my kitchen either——

OTTOLINE.

[*Turning the chair on the nearer side of the fireplace so that it faces the fire.*] The cook wasn't punctual! [*Installing herself in the chair.*] *Ah, la, la! Ces cuisinières causent la moitié des ennuis sur cette terre!*

PHILIP.

Oh, yes, the cook was punctual. [*His manner hardening a little.*] The truth is, we are waiting for a Mr. Dunning.

LADY FILSON.

Mr. ——?

SIR RANDLE.

Mr. ——?

OTTOLINE.

[*From her chair, where she is almost completely hidden from the others—comfortably.*] Good gracious! Who's Mr. Dunning, Philip?

[JOHN *and the waiter open the big doors. The dining-table, round which the chairs are now arranged, is prettily lighted by shaded candles.*

PHILIP.

[*To* JOHN, *sharply.*] John——

JOHN.

Yessir?

PHILIP.

Tell the cook to keep the dinner back for a little while. Do you hear?

JOHN.

[*Astonished.*] Keep dinner back, sir?

PHILIP.

Yes. And when Mr. Dunning calls—[*distinctly*] Dunning——

JOHN.

Yessir.

PHILIP.

I'll see him. Show him in.

JOHN.

Yessir.

PHILIP.

You may serve dinner as soon as he's gone. I'll ring.

[JOHN *and the waiter withdraw into the kitchen, whereupon* PHILIP, *after watching their departure, deliberately closes the big doors.* ROOPE, *who has been picking at his nails nervously, rises and steals away to the left, and* SIR RANDLE, *advancing a step or two, exchanges questioning glances with* LADY FILSON.

OTTOLINE.

[*Laughingly.*] What a terrible shock! I was frightened that Philip had sprung a strange guest upon us. [*As* PHILIP *is shutting the doors.*] *Vous êtes bien mystérieux, Phil?* Why are we to starve until this Mr. Dunning has come and gone?

PHILIP.

Because if I tried to eat without having first disposed of the reptile, Otto, I should choke.

LADY FILSON.

[*Bewildered.*] Reptile?

OTTOLINE.

Philip!

PHILIP.

[*At the chair beside the smoking-table—to* LADY FILSON.] I apologize very humbly for making you and Sir Randle, and dear Ottoline, parties to such unpleasant proceedings, Lady Filson; but the necessity is forced upon me. [*Coming forward.*] Mr.

Dunning is one of those crawling creatures who conduct what are known as confidential inquiries. In other words, he's a private detective—an odd sort of person to present to you !——

LADY FILSON.

[*Under her breath.*] Great heavens !

PHILIP.

And he has lightened your son's purse, presumably, and crammed his willing ears with some ridiculous, fantastic tale concerning my book—" The Big Drum." Mr. Dunning professes to have discovered that I have conspired with a wicked publisher to deceive you all; that the book's another of my miss-hits, and that I'm a designing rogue and liar. [*To* BERTRAM.] Come on, Bertram; don't sit there as if you were a stuffed figure ! Speak out, and tell your father and mother what you've been up to !

LADY FILSON.

[*Open-mouthed.*] Bertie !

SIR RANDLE.

[*Moving towards* BERTRAM, *mildly.*] Bertram, my boy——?

BERTRAM.

[*Curling his lip—to* PHILIP.] Oh, you seem to be getting on exceedingly well without my assistance, Mackworth. I'm content to hold my tongue till Dunning arrives, I mean t'say.

PHILIP.

[*Approaching* LADY FILSON.] You see, Lady Filson, Master Bertram is endowed with an exceptionally active brain; and when I gave those assurances to you and Sir Randle last June, it occurred to him that, in the event of my book failing to attract the market, there was a danger of my palming it off, with the kind aid of my publisher, as the out-and-out triumph I'd bragged of in advance; and the loud blasts of Titterton's trumpet strengthened Master Bertie's apprehensions. [OTTOLINE, *unobserved, rises unsteadily and, with her eyes fixed fiercely upon* BERTRAM, *crosses the room at the back.*] So what does he do, bless him for his devotion to his belongings! To safeguard his parents from being jockeyed, and as a brotherly precaution, he enlists the services, on the sly, of the obliging Mr. Dunning. We shall shortly have an opportunity of judging what that individual's game is. [*With a shrug.*] He *may* have stumbled legitimately into a mare's nest; but I doubt it. These ruffians'll stick at nothing to keep an ingenuous client on the hook—[*He is interrupted by feeling* OTTOLINE'S *hand upon his arm. He lays his hand on hers gently.*] Otto dear——

OTTOLINE.

[*Clutching him tightly and articulating with an effort.*] It—it's infamous—shameful! My—my brother! It's infamous!

PHILIP.

Oh, it'll be all over in ten minutes. And then Bertie and I will shake hands—won't we, Bertie?—and forget the wretched incident——

OTTOLINE.

[*Confronting* BERTRAM, *trembling with passion.*] How dare you! How dare you meddle with my affairs—mine and Mr. Mackworth's! How dare you!

BERTRAM.

[*Straightening himself.*] Look heah, Ottoline——!

OTTOLINE.

Stand up when I speak to you!

[BERTRAM *gets to his feet in a hurry.*

LADY FILSON.

[*Appealingly.*] Otto——!

OTTOLINE.

[*To* BERTRAM.] All your life you've been paltry, odious, detestable——

BERTRAM.

Look heah——!

OTTOLINE.

But *this!* My God! For you—for any of us—to impugn the honesty of a man whose shadow we're not fit to walk in——!

SIR RANDLE.

[*To* LADY FILSON—*pained.*] Winifred——!

OTTOLINE.

[*To* BERTRAM.] You—you—you're no better than your common, hired spy——!

LADY FILSON.

[*Rising and going to* OTTOLINE.] My child, remember——!

OTTOLINE.

[*Clenching her hands and hissing her words at* BERTRAM.] *C'est la vérité! Tu n'es qu'une canaille—une vile canaille——!*

LADY FILSON.

Control yourself, I *beg!*

OTTOLINE.

[*To* LADY FILSON.] Leave me alone——!

[*She passes* LADY FILSON *and sits on the settee on the right with glittering eyes and heaving bosom.* PHILIP *has withdrawn to the fireplace and is standing looking into the fire.*

LADY FILSON.

[*To* BERTRAM.] Bertie dear, I'm surprised at you! To do a thing like this behind our backs!

BERTRAM.

My dear mother, I knew that you and father wouldn't do it——

LADY FILSON.

I should think not, indeed!

SIR RANDLE.

[*To* BERTRAM.] Your mother and I!

LADY FILSON.

[*Horrified at the notion.*] Oh!

BERTRAM.

Upon my word, this is rather rough! [*Walking away.*] I mean to *say*——!

PHILIP.

[*Turning.*] We mustn't be too hard on poor Bertram, Lady Filson——

BERTRAM.

[*Pacing the room near the big doors.*] Poor Bertram! Ho!

SIR RANDLE.

[*To* PHILIP.] I trust we are never unduly hard on our children, my dear Philip——

PHILIP.

To do him justice, he was most anxious to postpone these dreadful revelations till to-morrow——

BERTRAM.

Exactly! [*Throwing himself into the chair between the big doors and the vestibule door.*] I predicted a scene! I predicted a scene!

PHILIP.

[*To* SIR RANDLE *and* LADY FILSON, *penitently.*] Perhaps it would have been wiser of me—more considerate—to have complied with his wishes. But I was in a fury—naturally——

LADY FILSON.

[*Sitting on the settee on the left.*] Naturally.

SIR RANDLE.

And excusably. I myself, in similar circumstances——

PHILIP.

[*Rubbing his head.*] Why the deuce couldn't he have kept his twopenny thunderbolt in his pocket for a few hours, instead of launching it to-night and spoiling our *sole à la Morny* and our *ris de veau*——*!*

OTTOLINE.

[*Gradually composing herself and regaining her dignity*]. P-P-Philip——

PHILIP.

[*Coming to the smoking-table.*] Eh ?

OTTOLINE.

[*Passing her handkerchief over her lips.*] Need you —need you see this man to-night ? Can't you stop him coming—or send him away ?

PHILIP.

Not see him——?

OTTOLINE.

Why—why should you stoop to see him at all ? Why shouldn't the matter be allowed to drop—to drop ?

PHILIP.

Drop !

OTTOLINE.

It—it's too monstrous; too absurd. [*To* BERTRAM, *with a laugh.*] Ha, ha, ha ! Bertie—Bertie dear——

BERTRAM.

[*Sullenly.*] Yes?

OTTOLINE.

Ha, ha! I almost scared you out of your wits, didn't I?

BERTRAM.

You've behaved excessively rudely——

LADY FILSON.

Bertram—Bertram——

BERTRAM.

I mean to *say*, mother! What becomes of family loyalty——?

OTTOLINE.

[*To* BERTRAM, *coaxingly.*] Forgive me, Bertram. I'm ashamed of my violent outburst. Forgive me——

ROOPE.

[*Who has been effacing himself behind the table on the left, appearing at the nearer end of the table.*] Er—dear excellent friends—[SIR RANDLE *and* LADY FILSON *look at* ROOPE *as if he had fallen from the skies, and* BERTRAM *stares at him resentfully*] dear excellent friends, if I may be permitted to make an observation——

PHILIP.

[*To* ROOPE.] Go ahead, old man.

ROOPE.

In my opinion, it would be a thousand pities not to see Mr. Dunning to-night, and have done with him.

[*Cheerfully.*] The fish is ruined—we must resign ourselves to that; [*sitting in the chair on the extreme left*] but the other dishes, if the cook is fairly competent——

SIR RANDLE.

[*Advancing.*] Mr. Roope's opinion is my opinion also. [*Ponderously.*] As to whether Lady Filson and my daughter should withdraw into an adjoining room——

LADY FILSON.

I feel with Philip; we couldn't sit down to dinner with this cloud hanging over us——

SIR RANDLE.

[*Sitting in the chair by the smoking-table.*] Impossible! I must be frank. Impossible!

ROOPE.

Dear Madame de Chaumié will pardon me for differing with her, but you can't very well ignore even a fellow of this stamp—[*glancing at* BERTRAM] especially, if I understand aright, my excellent friend over there still persists——

BERTRAM.

[*Morosely.*] Yes, you do understand aright, Roope. I've every confidence in Dunning, I mean t'say——

PHILIP.

[*Turning away, angrily.*] Oh——!

LADY FILSON.

[*Severely.*] Bertie——!

SIR RANDLE.

Bertram, my *boy*——!

[*The bell rings. There is a short silence, and then* BERTRAM *rises and pulls down his waistcoat portentously.*

BERTRAM.

Here he is.

OTTOLINE.

[*To* LADY FILSON, *in a low voice.*] Mother——?

LADY FILSON.

[*To* PHILIP.] Do *you* wish us to withdraw, Philip ?

PHILIP.

[*Sitting at the writing-table.*] Not at all, Lady Filson. [*Switching on the light of the library-lamp, sternly.*] On the contrary, I should like you both to remain.

LADY FILSON.

[*To* OTTOLINE.] Otto dear——?

OTTOLINE.

[*Adjusting a comb in her hair.*] Oh, certainly, mother, I'll stay.

LADY FILSON.

[*Arranging her skirt and settling herself majestically.*] Of this we may be perfectly sure ; when my son finds that he has been misled, purposely or unintentionally, he will be only too ready—*too* ready——

SIR RANDLE.

[*Leaning back in his chair and closing his eyes.*] That goes without saying, Winifred. A gentleman—an English gentleman——

BERTRAM.

[*Who is watching the vestibule door—over his shoulder, snappishly.*] Oh, of course, father, if it turns out that I've been sold, I'll eat humble-pie abjectly.

ROOPE.

[*Shaking a finger at* BERTRAM.] Ha, ha! I hope you've brought a voracious appetite with you, dear excellent friend.

BERTRAM.

[*To* ROOPE, *exasperated.*] Look heah, Mr. Roope——!

[*The vestibule door opens and* JOHN *announces* DUNNING.

JOHN.

Mr. Dunning.

[DUNNING *enters and* JOHN *retires.* MR. ALFRED DUNNING *is a spruce, middle-aged, shrewd-faced man with an affable but rather curt manner. He is in his hat and overcoat.*

DUNNING.

[*To* BERTRAM.] Haven't kept you long, have I? I just had a cup o' cocoa—[*He checks himself on seeing so large an assembly, removes his hat, and includes everybody in a summary bow.*] Evening.

BERTRAM.

[*To* DUNNING.] Larger gathering than you expected. [*Indicating the various personages by a glance.*]

Sir Randle and Lady Filson—my father and mother——

DUNNING.

[*To* SIR RANDLE *and* LADY FILSON.] Evening.

BERTRAM.

My sister, Madame de Chaumié——

DUNNING.

[*To* OTTOLINE.] Evening.

BERTRAM.

Mr. Roope—Mr. Mackworth——

DUNNING.

[*To them.*] Evening.

[SIR RANDLE, LADY FILSON, *and* ROOPE, *looking at* DUNNING *out of the corners of their eyes, acknowledge the introduction by a slight movement.* PHILIP *nods unpleasantly.* OTTOLINE, *with a stony countenance, also eyes* DUNNING *askance, and gives the barest possible inclination of her head on being named.*

BERTRAM.

[*Bringing forward the chair on which he has been sitting and planting it nearer to* SIR RANDLE *and* LADY FILSON—*to* DUNNING.] I suppose you may——

DUNNING.

[*Taking off his gloves and overcoat—to* PHILIP.] D'ye mind if I slip my coat off, Mr. Mackworth ?

PHILIP.

[*Growling.*] No.

DUNNING.

Don't want to get overheated, and catch the flue. I've got Mrs. D. in bed with a bad cold, as it is.

BERTRAM.

[*To* DUNNING.] Now then, Mr. Dunning! I'll trouble you to give us an account of your operations in this business from the outset——

DUNNING.

[*Hanging his coat over the back of the chair.*] Pleasure.

BERTRAM.

The business of Mr. Mackworth's new book, I mean t'say.

DUNNING.

[*Sitting and placing his hat on the floor.*] Pleasure.

BERTRAM.

Middle of October, wasn't it, when I——?

DUNNING.

Later. [*Producing a dog's-eared little memorandum-book and turning its leaves with a moistened thumb.*] Here we are—the twenty-fourth. [*To everybody, referring to his notes as he proceeds—glibly.*] Mr. Filson called on me and Mr. Sillitoe, ladies and gentlemen, on the twenty-fourth of last month with reference to a book by Mr. P. Mackworth—" The Big Drum "—published September the second, and drew our

attention to the advertisements of Mr. Mackworth's publisher—Mr. Clifford Titterton, of Charles Street, Adelphi—relating to the same. Mr. F. having made us acquainted with the special circumstances of the case, and furnished us with his reasons for doubting Titterton's flowery statements, [*wetting his thumb again and turning to the next leaf of his note-book*] on the following day, the twenty-fifth, I purchased a copy of the said book at Messrs. Blake and Hodgson's in the Strand, Mr. Hodgson himself informing me in the course of conversation that, as far as his firm was concerned, the book wasn't doing anything out of the ordinary. [*Repeating the thumb process.*] I then proceeded to pump one of the gals—er—to interrogate one of the assistants—at a circulating library Mrs. D. subscribes to, with a similar result. [*Turning to the next leaf.*] My next step——

SIR RANDLE.

I wonder whether these elaborate preliminaries——?

BERTRAM.

Oh, don't interrupt, father! I mean to *say*——!

DUNNING.

[*Imperturbably.*] My next step was to place the book in the hands of a lady whose liter'y judgment is a great deal sounder than mine *or* Mr. Sillitoe's—I allude to Mrs. D.—and her report was that, though amusing in parts, she didn't see anything in it to set the Thames on fire.

PHILIP.

[*Laughing in spite of himself.*] Ha, ha, ha!

ROOPE.

Ha, ha! [*To* PHILIP, *with mock sympathy.*] Dear excellent friend!

BERTRAM.

[*To* ROOPE.] Yes, all right, Mr. Roope——!

DUNNING.

[*Turning to the next leaf.*] I and Mr. Sillitoe then had another confab—er—consultation with Mr. Filson, and we pointed out to him that it was up to his father and mother to challenge Titterton's assertions and invite proof of their accuracy.

ROOPE.

[*Quietly.*] Obviously!

DUNNING.

Mr. F., however, giving us to understand that he was acting solely on his own, and that he wished the investigation kept from his family, we proposed a different plan——

BERTRAM.

To which I reluctantly assented.

DUNNING.

To get hold of somebody in Titterton's office—one of his employees, male or female——

LADY FILSON.

[*Shocked.*] Oh! Oh, Bertie!

OTTOLINE.

[*Rising, with a gesture of disgust.*] Ah——!

SIR RANDLE.

[*To* BERTRAM.] Really! Really, Bertram——!

[*Seeing* OTTOLINE *rise,* PHILIP *also rises and comes to her.*

LADY FILSON.

That a son of mine should countenance——!

OTTOLINE.

[*Panting.*] Oh, but this is—this is outrageous! [*To* SIR RANDLE *and* LADY FILSON.] Dad—mother—why should we degrade ourselves by listening any further? [*To* PHILIP.] Philip——!

PHILIP.

[*Patting her shoulder soothingly.*] Tsch, tsch, tsch——!

BERTRAM.

[*To* LADY FILSON *and* SIR RANDLE.] My dear mother—my dear father—you're so impatient!

PHILIP.

[*To* OTTOLINE.] Tsch, tsch! Go back to the fire and toast your toes again.

BERTRAM.

I consider I was fully justified, I mean t'say——

[*Falteringly* OTTOLINE *returns to the fireplace. She stands there for a few seconds, clutching the mantel-shelf, and then subsides into the chair before the fire.* PHILIP *advances to the settee on the right.*

PHILIP.

[*To* DUNNING.] Sorry we have checked your flow of eloquence, Mr. Dunning, even for a moment. [*Sitting.*] I wouldn't miss a syllable of it. [*Airily.*] Do, please, continue.

SIR RANDLE.

[*Looking at his watch.*] My dear Philip——!

BERTRAM.

[*To* DUNNING, *wearily.*] Oh, come to the man—what's his name, Dunning?—Merryweather——!

DUNNING.

[*Turning several pages of his note-book with his wet thumb.*] Merrifield.

BERTRAM.

Merrifield. [*Passing behind* DUNNING *and half-seating himself on the further end of the table on the left.*] Skip everything in between; [*sarcastically*] my father and mother are dying for their dinner.

LADY FILSON.

Bertram!

DUNNING.

[*Finding the memorandum he is searching for, and quoting from it.*] Henry Merrifield—entry clerk to Titterton—left Titterton, after a row, on the fifteenth of the present month——

BERTRAM.

A stroke of luck—Mr. Merrifield—if ever there was one! I mean t'say——

DUNNING.

[*To everybody.*] Having gleaned certain significant facts from the said Henry Merrifield, ladies and gentlemen, [*referring to his notes*] I paid two visits last week to the offices of Messrs. Hopwood & Co., of 6, Carmichael Lane, Walbrook, described in fresh paint on their door as Shipping and General Agents; and the conclusion I arrived at was that Messrs. Hopwood & Co. were a myth and their offices a blind, the latter consisting of a small room on the ground floor, eight foot by twelve, and their staff of the caretakers of the premises—Mr. and Mrs. Sweasy—an old woman and her husband——

ROOPE.

[*To* DUNNING.] If I may venture to interpose again, what on earth have Messrs. Hopwood——?

SIR RANDLE.

Yes, what have Messrs. Hopwood——?

BERTRAM.

[*Over his shoulder.*] Ho! What have Messrs. Hopwood——!

ROOPE.

[*To* BERTRAM, *pointing to* DUNNING.] I am addressing *this* gentleman, dear excellent friend——

DUNNING.

[*To* ROOPE.] I'll tell you, sir. [*Incisively.*] It's to the bogus firm of Hopwood & Co. that the bulk of the volumes of Mr. Mackworth's new book have been consigned.

BERTRAM.

[*Getting off the table, eagerly.*] Dunning has seen them, I mean t'say——

SIR RANDLE.

[*To* BERTRAM, *startled.*] Be silent, Bertie!

LADY FILSON.

[*To* BERTRAM, *holding her breath.*] Do be quiet!

ROOPE.

[*Blankly.*] The—the bulk of the volumes——?

PHILIP.

[*Staring at* DUNNING.] The—the bulk of the——?

DUNNING.

[*To* SIR RANDLE *and* ROOPE.] Yes, gentlemen, the books are in a mouldy cellar, also rented by Messrs. Hopwood, at 6, Carmichael Lane. There's thousands of them there, in cases—some of the cases with shipping marks on them, some marked for inland delivery. I've inspected them this afternoon—overhauled them. Mr. Sweasy had gone over to the Borough to see his married niece, and I managed to get the right side of *Mrs.* S.

SIR RANDLE.

[*Softly, looking from one to the other.*] Curious! Curious!

LADY FILSON.

[*Forcing a smile.*] How—how strange!

ROOPE.

[*To* LADY FILSON, *a little disturbed.*] Why strange, dear Lady Filson? Shipping and other marks on the cases! These people are forwarding agents——

DUNNING.

[*Showing his teeth.*] Nobody makes the least effort to *despatch* the cases, though. That's singular, isn't it?

ROOPE.

But——!

DUNNING.

[*To* ROOPE.] My good sir, in the whole of our experience—mine and Mr. Sillitoe's—we've never come across a neater bit of hankey-pankey—[*to* PHILIP] no offence—and if Merrifield hadn't smelt a rat——

ROOPE.

But—but—but—the cost of it all, my dear Mr. Dunning! I don't know much about these things—the expense of manufacturing many thousands of copies of Mr. Mackworth's new book——!

SIR RANDLE.

[*Alertly.*] Quite so! Surely, if we were to be deceived, a simpler method could have been found——?

ROOPE.

[*With energy.*] Besides, what has Mr. Titterton to gain by the deception?

SIR RANDLE.

True! True! What has *he* to gain——?

PHILIP.

[*Who is sitting with his hands hanging loosely, utterly bewildered—rousing himself.*] Good God, yes! What has Titterton to gain by joining me in a blackguardly scheme to—to—to——?

DUNNING.

[*To* SIR RANDLE *and* ROOPE.] Well, gentlemen, in the first place, it's plain that Titterton was too fly to risk being easily blown upon——

BERTRAM.

He was prepared to prove that the books *have been* manufactured and delivered, I mean t'say——

DUNNING.

And in the second place, on the question of expense, the speculation was a tolerably safe one.

LADY FILSON.

[*Keenly.*] Speculation?

DUNNING.

Madarme dee Showmeeay being, according to my instructions—[*to* LADY FILSON, *after a glance in* OTTOLINE'S *direction*] no offence, ladies—[*to* SIR RANDLE *and* ROOPE] Madarme dee Showmeeay being what is usually termed a catch, Mr. Mackworth would have been in a position, after his marriage, to reimburse Titterton——

[PHILIP *starts to his feet with a cry of rage.*

PHILIP.

Oh——!

ROOPE.

[*Jumping up and hurrying to* PHILIP—*pacifying him.*] My dear Phil—my *dear* old chap——

PHILIP.

[*Grasping* ROOPE'S *arm.*] Robbie——!

[SIR RANDLE *rises and goes to* LADY FILSON. *She also rises as he approaches her. They gaze at each other with expressionless faces.*

ROOPE.

[*To* PHILIP.] Where does Titterton live ?

PHILIP.

Gordon Square.

ROOPE.

[*Pointing to the telephone.*] Telephone—have him round——

PHILIP.

He's not in London.

ROOPE.

Not——?

PHILIP.

He's gone to the Riviera—left this morning. [*Crossing to* SIR RANDLE *and* LADY FILSON—*appealingly.*] Lady Filson—Sir Randle—*you* don't believe that Titterton and I could be guilty of such an arrant piece of knavery, do you ? Ho, ho, ho ! It's preposterous.

SIR RANDLE.

[*Constrainedly.*] Frankly—I must be frank—I hardly know *what* to believe.

LADY FILSON.

[*Pursing her mouth.*] We—we hardly know *what* to believe.

PHILIP.

[*Leaving them.*] Ah——!

ROOPE.

[*Who has dropped into the chair by the smoking-table—to* SIR RANDLE.] Sir Randle—dear excellent friend—let us meet Mr. Dunning to-morrow at Messrs. Hopwood's in Carmichael Lane—we three—you and I and Mackworth——

PHILIP.

[*Pacing up and down between the table on the left and the bookcase.*] Yes, yes—before I wire to Titterton—or see Curtis, his manager——

ROOPE.

[*Over his shoulder, to* DUNNING.] Hey, Mr. Dunning?

DUNNING.

Pleasure.

[*While this has been going on,* DUNNING *has put his note-book away and risen, gathering up his hat and overcoat as he does so.* BERTRAM *is now assisting him into his coat.*

SIR RANDLE.

[*Advancing a step or two.*] At what hour——?

DUNNING.

[*Briskly.*] Ten-thirty suit you, gentlemen?

SIR RANDLE, PHILIP, *and* ROOPE.

[*Together.*] Half-past-ten.

ROOPE.

[*Scribbling with a pocket-pencil on his shirt-cuff.*] 6, Carmichael Lane, Walbrook——

DUNNING.

[*Pulling down his under-coat.*] I'll be there.

ROOPE.

[*Lowering his hands suddenly and leaning back in his chair, as if about to administer a poser.*] By the way, Mr. Dunning, you tell us you have a strong conviction that Messrs. Hopwood & Co. are a myth, and their offices a sham—[*caustically*] may I ask whether you've tried to ascertain who *is* the actual tenant of the room and cellar in Carmichael Lane ?

BERTRAM.

[*Sniggering.*] Why, Titterton, of course. I mean to *say*——!

ROOPE.

[*Waving* BERTRAM *down.*] Dear excellent friend——!

DUNNING.

[*Taking up his hat, which he has laid upon the smoking-table—to* ROOPE, *with a satisfied air.*] Mr. Sillitoe's got that in hand, sir. What I *have* ascertained is that a young feller strolls in occasionally and smokes a cigarette——

BERTRAM.

And pokes about in the cellar——

DUNNING.

Calls himself Hopwood. But the name written on the lining of his hat—[*to* BERTRAM, *carelessly*] oh, I forgot to mention this to you, Mr. Filson. [*Producing his memorandum-book again.*] Old mother Sweasy was examining the young man's outdoor apparel the other day. [*Turning the pages with his wet thumb.*] The name on the lining of his hat is—[*finding the entry*] is "Westrip." "Leonard Westrip."

BERTRAM.

Westrip?

SIR RANDLE.

Leonard—Westrip?

LADY FILSON.

Mr. Westrip!

SIR RANDLE.

[*To* DUNNING, *blinking.*] Mr. Westrip is my secretary.

BERTRAM.

[*To* DUNNING, *agape.*] He's my father's secretary.

DUNNING.

[*To* SIR RANDLE.] Your seckert'ry?

PHILIP.

[*Coming to the nearer end of the settee on the left.*] The —the—the fair boy I've seen in Ennismore Gardens!

ROOPE.

[*Rising and joining* SIR RANDLE *and* LADY FILSON *—expressing his amazement by flourishing his arms.*] Oh, my dear excellent friends——!

LADY FILSON.

[*To* SIR RANDLE.] Randle—what—what next——!

SIR RANDLE.

[*Closing his eyes.*] Astounding! Astounding!

DUNNING.

[*Looking about him, rather aggressively.*] Well, I seem to have accidentally dropped a bombshell among you! Will any lady or gentleman kindly oblige with some particulars——? [*To* OTTOLINE, *who checks him with an imperious gesture—changing his tone.*] I beg your pardon, madarme——

[OTTOLINE *has left her chair and come to the writing-table, where, with a drawn face and downcast eyes, she is now standing erect.*

OTTOLINE.

[*To* DUNNING, *repeating her gesture.*] Stop! [*To* LADY FILSON *and* SIR RANDLE, *in a strained voice.*] Mother—Dad——

[*Everybody looks at her, surprised at her manner.*

LADY FILSON.

Otto dear——?

OTTOLINE.

I—I can't allow you all to be mystified any longer. I—I can clear this matter up.

SIR RANDLE.

You, my darling?

OTTOLINE.

[*Steadying herself by resting her finger-tips upon the table.*] The—the explanation is that Mr. Westrip

—[*with a wan smile*] poor boy—he would jump into the sea for me if I bade him—the explanation is that Mr. Westrip has been—helping me——

LADY FILSON.

Helping you——?

SIR RANDLE.

Helping *you*——?

OTTOLINE.

[*Inclining her head.*] Helping me. He—he—[*Raising her eyes defiantly and confronting them all.*] *Écoutez!* Robbie Roope has asked who is the actual tenant of the cellar and room in Carmichael Lane. [*Breathing deeply.*] *I* am.

LADY FILSON.

[*Advancing a few steps.*] *You* are! N-n-nonsense!

OTTOLINE.

Mr. Westrip took the place for me—my arrangement with Titterton made it necessary——

LADY FILSON.

With Titterton! Then he—he *has*——?

OTTOLINE.

Yes. The thousands of copies—packed in the cases with the lying labels—*I* have bought them—they're mine——

LADY FILSON.

Y-y-yours!

OTTOLINE.

I—I was afraid the book had failed—and I went to Titterton—and bargained with him——

LADY FILSON.

So—so everything—everything that your brother and Mr.—Mr. Dunning have surmised——?

OTTOLINE.

Everything, mother—except that I am the culprit, and Mr. Mackworth is the victim.

LADY FILSON.

Ottoline——!

OTTOLINE.

[*Passing her hand over her brow.*] It—it's horrible of me to give Titterton away—but—what can I do ?—[*She turns her back upon them sharply and, leaning against the table, searches for her handkerchief.*] Oh ! Need Mr. Dunning stay——?

[BERTRAM, *aghast, nudges* DUNNING *and hurries to the vestibule door.* DUNNING *follows him into the vestibule on tiptoe. Slowly and deliberately* PHILIP *moves to the middle of the room and stands there with his hands clenched, glaring into space.* SIR RANDLE, *his jaw falling, sits in the chair on the extreme left.*

LADY FILSON.

[*Touching* PHILIP'S *arm sympathetically.*] Oh, Philip——!

DUNNING.

[*To* BERTRAM, *in a whisper.*] Phiou! Rummy development this, Mr. Filson!

BERTRAM.

[*To* DUNNING, *in the same way.*] Awful. [*Opening the outer door.*] I—I'll see you in the m-m-morning.

DUNNING.

Pleasure. [*Raising his voice.*] Evening, ladies and gentlemen.

LADY FILSON.

[*Again sitting on the settee on the left, also searching for her handkerchief.*] G-g-good night.

SIR RANDLE.

[*Weakly.*] Good night.

ROOPE.

[*Who has wandered to the bookcase like a man in a trance.*] Good night.

[DUNNING *disappears, and* BERTRAM *closes the outer door and comes back into the room. Shutting the vestibule door, he sinks into the chair lately vacated by* DUNNING. *There is a silence, broken at length by a low, grating laugh from* PHILIP.

PHILIP.

Ha, ha, ha, ha! Ha, ha, ha——!

LADY FILSON.

[*Dolefully.*] Oh, Ottoline—Ottoline——!

PHILIP.

Ha, ha, ha——!

OTTOLINE.

[*Creeping to the nearer end of the writing-table.*] H'ssh! H'ssh! Philip—Philip——!

PHILIP.

[*Loudly.*] Ho, ho, ho——!

OTTOLINE.

Don't! don't! [*Making a movement of entreaty towards him.*] Phil—Phil——!

[*His laughter ceases abruptly and he looks her full in the face.*

PHILIP.

[*After a moment's pause, bitingly.*] Thank you—thank you—[*turning from her and seating himself in the chair by the smoking-table and resting his chin on his fist*] thank you.

[*Again there is a pause, and then* OTTOLINE *draws herself up proudly and moves in a stately fashion towards the vestibule door.*

OTTOLINE.

[*At* BERTRAM'S *side.*] Bertram—my cloak——

[BERTRAM *rises meekly and fetches her cloak.*

SIR RANDLE.

[*Getting to his feet and approaching* PHILIP—*mournfully.*] Your mother's wrap, also, Bertram.

LADY FILSON.

[*Rising.*] Yes, let us all go home.

SIR RANDLE.

[*To* PHILIP, *laying a hand on his shoulder.*] My daughter has brought great humiliation upon us—upon her family, my dear Philip—by this—I must be harsh—by this unladylike transaction——

LADY FILSON.

I have never felt so ashamed in my life!

SIR RANDLE.

[*To* PHILIP.] By-and-by I shall be better able to command language in which to express my profound regret. [*Offering his hand.*] For the present—good night, and God bless you!

PHILIP.

[*Shaking* SIR RANDLE'S *hand mechanically.*] Good night.

[*As* SIR RANDLE *turns away,* LADY FILSON *comes to* PHILIP. BERTRAM, *having helped* OTTOLINE *with her cloak, now brings* LADY FILSON'S *wrap from the vestibule.* SIR RANDLE *takes it from him, and* BERTRAM *then returns to the vestibule and puts on his overcoat.*

LADY FILSON.

[*To* PHILIP, *who rises.*] You must have us to dinner another time, Philip. If I eat a crust to-night it will be as much as I shall manage. [*Speaking lower, with genuine feeling.*] Oh, my dear boy, don't be too cast down—over your clever book, I mean! [*Taking him by the shoulders.*] It's a cruel disappointment for

you—and you don't deserve it. May I——? [*She pulls him to her and kisses him.*] Good night.

PHILIP.

[*Gratefully.*] Good night.

[LADY FILSON *leaves* PHILIP *and looks about for her wrap.* SIR RANDLE *puts her into it and then goes into the vestibule and wrestles with his overcoat.*

BERTRAM.

[*Coming to* PHILIP, *humbly.*] M—M—Mackworth —I—I——

PHILIP.

[*Kindly.*] No, no; don't you bother, old man——

BERTRAM.

I—I could kick myself, Mackworth, I could indeed. I've been a sneak and a cad, I mean t'say, and—and I'm properly paid out——

PHILIP.

[*Shaking him gently.*] Why, what are you remorseful for? You've only brought out the truth, Bertie——

BERTRAM.

Yes, but I mean to *say*——!

PHILIP.

And *I* mean to say that I'm in your debt for showing me that I've been a vain, credulous ass. Now be off and get some food. [*Holding out his hand.*] Good night.

BERTRAM.

[*Wringing* PHILIP'S *hand.*] Good night, Mackworth. [*Turning from* PHILIP *and seeing* ROOPE, *who, anxiously following events, is standing by the chair on the extreme left.*] Good night, Roope.

ROOPE.

G-g-good night.

LADY FILSON.

[*Half in the room and half in the vestibule—to* ROOPE, *remembering his existence.*] Oh, good night, Mr. Roope!

ROOPE.

Good night, dear Lady Filson.

SIR RANDLE.

[*In the vestibule.*] Good night, Mr. Roope.

ROOPE.

Good night. Good night, dear excellent friends.

LADY FILSON.

[*To* OTTOLINE, *who is lingering by the big doors.*] Ottoline——

[LADY FILSON *and* BERTRAM *join* SIR RANDLE *in the vestibule and* SIR RANDLE *opens the outer door.* PHILIP, *his hands behind him and his chin on his breast, has walked to the fireplace and is standing there looking fixedly into the fire.* OTTOLINE *slowly comes forward and fingers the back of the chair by the smoking-table.*

OTTOLINE.

Good night, Philip.

[*He turns to her, makes her a stiff, formal bow, and faces the fire again.*

ROOPE.

[*Advancing to her—under his breath.*] Oh——!

OTTOLINE.

[*Giving him her hand.*] Ah! [*With a plaintive shrug.*] *Vous voyez! C'est fini après tout!*

ROOPE.

No, no——!

OTTOLINE.

[*Withdrawing her hand.*] Pst! [*Throwing her head up.*] Good night, Robbie.

[*With a queenly air she sweeps into the vestibule and follows* SIR RANDLE *and* LADY FILSON *out on to the landing.* BERTRAM *closes the vestibule door, and immediately afterwards the outer door slams.*

ROOPE.

[*To* PHILIP, *in an agony.*] No, no, Phil! It mustn't end like this! Good lord, man, reflect—consider what you're chucking away! You're mad—absolutely mad! [PHILIP *calmly presses a bell-push at the side of the fireplace.*] I'll go after 'em—and talk to her. I'll talk to her. [*Running to the vestibule door and opening it.*] Don't wait for me. [*Going into the vestibule and grabbing his hat and overcoat.*] It's a tiff—a lovers' tiff! It's nothing but a lovers' tiff!

[*Shutting the vestibule door, piteously.*] Oh, my dear excellent friend——!

[JOHN *appears, opening one of the big doors a little way. Again the outer door slams.*

PHILIP.

[*To* JOHN, *sternly.*] Dinner.

JOHN.

[*Looking for the guests—dumbfoundered*] D-d-dinner, sir ?

PHILIP.

Serve dinner.

JOHN.

[*His eyes bolting.*] The—the—the ladies and gentlemen have gone, sir !

PHILIP.

Yes. I'm dining alone.

[JOHN *vanishes precipitately; whereupon* PHILIP *strides to the big doors, thrusts them wide open with a blow of his fists, and sits at the dining-table.*

END OF THE THIRD ACT

THE FOURTH ACT

The scene is the same, the light that of a fine winter morning. The big doors are open, and from the dining-room windows, where the curtains are now drawn back, there is a view of some buildings opposite and, through a space between the buildings, of the tops of the bare trees in Gray's Inn garden.

Save for a chair with a crumpled napkin upon it which stands at the dining-table before the remains of PHILIP'S *breakfast, the disposition of the furniture is as when first shown.*

A fire is burning in the nearer room.

[PHILIP, *dressed as at the opening of the preceding act, is seated on the settee on the right, moodily puffing at his pipe.* ROOPE *faces him, in the chair by the smoking-table, with a mournful air.* ROOPE *is in his overcoat and is nursing his hat.*

PHILIP.

[*To* ROOPE, *shortly, as if continuing a conversation.*] Well ?

ROOPE.

Well, what happened was this. I——

[*He breaks off to glance over his shoulder into the further room.*

PHILIP.

Go on. Nobody'll hear you. John's out.

ROOPE.

What happened was this. I overtook 'em at the bottom of the stairs, and begged 'em to let me go back with them to Ennismore Gardens. Lady Filson and I got into one cab, Sir Randle and Madame de Chaumié into another. Bertram Filson slunk off to his club. At Ennismore Gardens we had the most depressin' meal I've ever sat down to, and then Madame Ottoline proposed that I should smoke a cigarette in her boudoir. [*Distressed.*] Oh, my dear Phil——!

PHILIP.

W-w-what——?

ROOPE.

I can't bear to see a woman in tears; I can't, positively.

PHILIP.

[*Between his teeth.*] Confound you, Robbie, who can! Don't brag about it.

ROOPE.

At first she swept up and down the room like an outraged Empress. Her skirts created quite a wind. I won't attempt to tell you all the bitter things she said——

PHILIP.

Of me?

ROOPE.

And of *me*, dear excellent friend.

PHILIP.

[*Grimly.*] For your share in the business.

ROOPE.

[*With a nod.*] The fatal luncheon in South Audley Street. However, she soon softened, and came and knelt by the fire. And suddenly—you've seen a child fall on the pavement and cut its knees, haven't you, Phil?——

PHILIP.

Of course I have.

ROOPE.

That's how she cried. I was really alarmed.

PHILIP.

The—the end of it being——?

ROOPE.

[*Dismally.*] The end of it being that she went off to bed, declaring that she recognizes that the breach between you is beyond healing, and that she's resolved never to cross your path again if she can avoid it.

PHILIP.

[*Laying his pipe aside.*] Ha! [*Scowling at* ROOPE.] And so this is the result of your self-appointed mission, is it?

ROOPE.

[*Hurt.*] That's rather ungrateful, Phil——

PHILIP.

[*Starting up and walking away to the left.*] P'sha!

ROOPE.

If you'd heard how I reasoned with her——!

PHILIP.

[*Striding up and down.*] What had I better do? It's good of you to be here so early. [ROOPE *rises.*] I'm *not* ungrateful, Robbie. Advise me.

ROOPE.

[*Stiffly.*] I assume, from your tone, that what you *wish* to do is to—er——?

PHILIP.

To abase myself before her; to grovel at her feet and crave her pardon for my behaviour of last night. What else should I want to do, in God's name!

ROOPE.

[*Dryly.*] I see, you've slept on it.

PHILIP.

Laid awake on it. [*Fiercely.*] Do I look as if I'd slept the sleep of a healthy infant?

ROOPE.

I don't know anything about infants, I am happy to say, healthy or ailing; but certainly your treatment of Madame de Chaumié was atrocious.

PHILIP.

Brutal, savage, inhuman! [*Halting and extending his arms.*] And what's been her fault? She's dared to love me eagerly, impetuously, uncontrollably—*me*, a conceited, egotistical fellow who is no more worth her

devotion than the pompous beast who opens her father's front-door! And because, out of her love, she commits a heedless, impulsive act which deals a blow at my rotten pride, I slap her face and turn my back upon her, and suffer her to leave my rooms as though she's a charwoman detected in prigging silver from my cash-box! [*Clasping his brow and groaning.*] Oh—! [*In sudden fury at seeing* ROOPE *thoughtfully examining his hat.*] Damn it, Robbie, stop fiddling with your hat or you'll drive me crazy!

[*He sits on the settee on the left and rests his head on his fists.* ROOPE *hastily deposits his hat on the smoking-table.*

ROOPE.

[*Approaching* PHILIP *coldly.*] I was considering, dear excellent friend—but perhaps in your present state of irritability——

PHILIP.

[*Holding out his hand penitently.*] Shut up!

ROOPE.

[*Presenting* PHILIP *with two fingers.*] I was considering—when you almost sprang at my throat—I was considering that it isn't at all unlikely that Madame de Chaumié's frame of mind is a trifle less inflexible this morning. *She* has slept—or laid awake—on the events of last night too, recollect.

PHILIP.

[*Raising his head.*] Having been kicked out of this place a few hours ago, her affection for me revives with the rattle of the milk-cans!

ROOPE.

[*Evasively.*] At any rate, she must be conscious that you were smarting under provocation. She confessed as much during our talk. [*Magnanimously.*] Even *I* admit you had provocation.

PHILIP.

That never influenced a woman, Robbie. Besides, I've insulted this one before—grossly insulted her, in the old days in Paris——

ROOPE.

Ancient history! *My* advice is—since you invite it—my advice is that you write her a letter——

PHILIP.

I've composed half-a-dozen already. [*Pointing to a waste-paper basket by the writing-table.*] The pieces are in that basket.

ROOPE.

No, no; not a highly-wrought performance. Simply a line, asking her to receive you. [PHILIP *rises listlessly.*] Send it along by messenger. [*With growing enthusiasm.*] Look here! I'll take it!

PHILIP.

[*Gloomily, his hand on* ROOPE'S *shoulder.*] Ho, ho! You—you indefatigable old Cupid!

ROOPE.

[*Looking at his watch.*] Quarter-past-ten. [*Excitedly.*] Phil, I bet you a hundred guineas—[*correcting himself*] er—well—five pounds—I bet you five pounds

I'm with you again, with a favourable reply, before twelve !

PHILIP.

[*Clapping* ROOPE *on the back.*] Done ! [*Crossing to the writing-table.*] At the worst, I've earned a fiver.

ROOPE.

[*As* PHILIP *sits at the table and takes a sheet of paper and an envelope from a drawer.*] May I suggest——?

PHILIP.

[*Dipping his pen in the ink.*] Fire away, old chap.

ROOPE.

[*Seeking for inspiration by gazing at the ceiling.*] H'm—[*Dictating.*] " Forgive me. I forgive you. When may I come to you ? " [*To* PHILIP.] Not another word.

PHILIP.

[*As he writes.*] By George, you've got the romantic touch, Robbie ! If you'd been a literary bloke, what sellers *you'd* have written !

ROOPE.

[*Behind the smoking-table, smoothing his hair complacently.*] Funny, your remark. As a matter of fact, I *used* to dabble a little in pen-and-ink as a young man.

PHILIP.

[*Reading, a tender ring in his voice.*] " Forgive me. I forgive you. When may I come to you ? " [*Adding his signature.*] " Philip."

ROOPE.

Admirable!

PHILIP.

[*Folding and enclosing the note—catching some of* ROOPE'S *hopefulness.*] In the meantime I'll array myself in my Sunday-best—[*moistening the envelope*] on the chance——

ROOPE.

Do; at once. [*Putting on his hat.*] She *may* summon you by telephone——

PHILIP.

[*Addressing the envelope.*] She gave me a scarf-pin yesterday—such a beauty. [*Softly.*] I'll wear it. [*Rising and giving the note to* ROOPE.] Bless you, old boy!

[ROOPE *pockets the note, grasps* PHILIP'S *hand hurriedly, and bustles to the vestibule door.*

ROOPE.

My quickest way is the Tube to Bayswater, and then a taxi across the Park——

[*He has entered the vestibule—omitting to close the door in his haste—and has opened the outer door when* PHILIP *calls to him.*

PHILIP.

[*Standing behind the smoking-table—with a change of manner.*] Robbie——

ROOPE.

Hey?

PHILIP.

Robbie—[ROOPE *returns to* PHILIP *reluctantly, leaving the outer door open.*] Oh, Robbie—[*gripping* ROOPE'S *arm*] how I boasted to you of my triumph—my grand victory! How I swaggered and bellowed, and crowed over you——!

ROOPE.

[*Fidgeting to get away.*] Yes, but we won't discuss that now, Phil——

PHILIP.

[*Detaining him.*] Wait. [*Brokenly.*] Robbie—should Ottoline show any inclination to—to patch matters up, you may tell her—as from me—that I—I've done with it.

ROOPE.

[*Wonderingly.*] Done with it?

PHILIP.

My career as a writing-man. It's finished. [*Hanging his head.*] I'm sorry to break faith with her people; but she may take me, if she will, on her own terms—a poor devil who has proved a duffer at his job, and who is content henceforth to be nothing but her humble slave and dependant.

ROOPE.

[*Energetically.*] My dear Phil, for heaven's sake, don't entertain such a notion! Abandon your career just when you're making a noise in the world——!

PHILIP.

[*Throwing up his hands.*] Noise in the world!

ROOPE.

When you're getting the finest advertisement an author could possibly desire!

PHILIP.

[*Choking.*] Advertisement——!

ROOPE.

I can sympathize with your feeling mortified at not scoring entirely off your own bat; but, deuce take it, your book *is* in its thirteenth edition!

PHILIP.

[*Laughing wildly.*] Ho, ho, ho! [*Moving to the fireplace.*] Ha, ha, ha, ha——!

ROOPE.

[*Testily.*] Oh, I'm glad I amuse you——!

PHILIP.

[*Coming to the settee on the right.*] You're marvellous, Robbie—incomparable——!

ROOPE.

[*Again preparing to depart.*] Indeed?

PHILIP.

Ha, ha, ha——!

[*A moment earlier,* SIR TIMOTHY BARRADELL *has appeared in the vestibule, trying, in the dim light there, to decipher the name on the outer door. Hearing the sound of voices, he turns and reveals himself.*

SIR TIMOTHY.

[*Looking into the room and encountering* ROOPE.] Roope!

ROOPE.

[*As they shake hands—astonished.*] Dear excellent *friend*, what a surprise!

SIR TIMOTHY.

Ah, don't flatter yourself you're the only early riser in London! [*Seeing* PHILIP.] Mr. Mackworth—[*advancing*] I found your door open and I took the liberty——

PHILIP.

[*Meeting him in the middle of the room.*] Sir Timothy Barradell, isn't it?

SIR TIMOTHY.

It is. [*They shake hands, cordially on* SIR TIMOTHY'S *part, with more formality on* PHILIP'S.] It's an unceremonious hour for a call, but if you'd spare me five minutes——

PHILIP.

[*Civilly.*] Pray sit down. [*Joining* ROOPE *at the entrance to the vestible.*] Robbie *has* to run away——

ROOPE.

[*Diplomatically.*] Can't stay another moment. [*Waving a hand to* SIR TIMOTHY.] *Au revoir*, dear Sir Timothy!

SIR TIMOTHY.

[*Laying his hat upon the settee on the right and taking off his gloves.*] So long! [PHILIP *and* ROOPE *stare at* SIR TIMOTHY, *whose back is towards them.* ROOPE

gives PHILIP *an inquiring look, which* PHILIP *answers by a shrug and a shake of the head; and then* PHILIP *lets* ROOPE *out and comes back into the room.* SIR TIMOTHY *turns to him.*] I'm afraid you think I'm presuming on a very slight acquaintance, Mr. Mackworth——

PHILIP.

[*Shutting the vestibule door.*] Not in the least.

SIR TIMOTHY.

Anyhow I'll not waste more of your valuable time than I can help. [PHILIP *points to the settee and the two men sit,* SIR TIMOTHY *on the settee,* PHILIP *in the chair by the smoking-table.* SIR TIMOTHY *inspects the toes of his boots.*] Mr. Mackworth, I—I won't beat about the bush—it's a delicate subject I'm approaching you on.

PHILIP.

[*Leaning back in his chair.*] Really ?

SIR TIMOTHY.

An extremely delicate subject—[*raising his eyes*] Madame de Chaumié.

PHILIP.

Madame de Chaumié ?

SIR TIMOTHY.

In the first place, I suppose you're aware that I had the temerity to propose marriage to the lady in the summer of this year ?

PHILIP.

Yes, I'm aware of it. Madame de Chaumié informed me of the circumstance.

SIR TIMOTHY.

[*Nodding.*] She would; she would. [*Straightening himself.*] Well, Mr. Mackworth, while I was abroad I heard from various sources that you had become a pretty regular visitor at the house of her parents, and that you and she were to be seen together occasionally in the secluded spots of Kensington Gardens; and I naturally inferred that it was yourself she'd had the good taste to single out from among her numerous suitors.

PHILIP.

[*With a smile.*] I'd rather you didn't put it in that way, Sir Timothy; but I guessed yesterday that the facts of the case had reached you through some channel or other.

SIR TIMOTHY.

Yesterday?

PHILIP.

When Robbie Roope brought me your kind greetings.

SIR TIMOTHY.

Ah, that's nice of you! [*Constrainedly.*] That's—nice of you.

PHILIP.

[*Changing his position and unbending.*] But tell me! I don't know yet what you have to say to me about Madame de Chaumié—but why should you find it embarrassing to speak of her to me? [*Gently.*]

We're men of the world, you and I; and it isn't the rule of life that the prize always goes to the most deserving. [*With animation.*]

"And in the world, as in the school,
I'd say, how fate may change and shift;
The prize be sometimes with the fool,
The race not always to the swift.
The strong may yield, the good may fall,
The great man be a vulgar clown,
The knave be lifted over all,
The kind cast pitilessly down."

So sang one of the noblest gentlemen who have ever followed my calling!

[*There is a brief silence, and then* SIR TIMOTHY *rises abruptly and walks to the fireplace.* PHILIP *looks after him, perplexed.*

SIR TIMOTHY.

[*Facing the fire.*] Mr. Mackworth——

PHILIP.

Eh?

SIR TIMOTHY.

I saw Bertram Filson last night—her brother.

PHILIP.

[*Pricking up his ears.*] You did? Where?

SIR TIMOTHY.

At the club—the Junior Somerset. He came in late, looking a bit out of gear, and ate a mouthful of dinner and drank a whole bottle of Pommery; and

afterwards he joined me in the smoking-room and—and was exceedingly communicative.

PHILIP.

[*Attentively.*] Oh ?

SIR TIMOTHY.

I didn't encourage him to babble—[*turning*] 'twas he that insisted on confiding to me what had occurred——

PHILIP.

Occurred ?

SIR TIMOTHY.

That you and Madame de Chaumié had had a serious difference, and that there's small prospect of its being bridged over.

PHILIP.

[*Glaring.*] Oh, he confided *that* to you, did he, Sir Timothy ?

SIR TIMOTHY.

He did.

PHILIP.

[*Rising and pacing up and down on the left.*] And what the devil does Filson mean by gossiping about me at a club—me and my relations with Madame de Chaumié !

SIR TIMOTHY.

[*Advancing a little.*] Ah, don't be angry ! The champagne he'd drunk had loosened his tongue. And then, I'm a friend of the family——

PHILIP.

Infernal puppy !

SIR TIMOTHY.

Referring to *Filson?*

PHILIP.

Of course.

SIR TIMOTHY.

[*Mildly.*] Well, whether young Filson's a puppy or not, *now* perhaps you begin to appreciate my motive for intruding on you?

PHILIP.

[*Halting.*] Hardly.

SIR TIMOTHY.

You don't! [*Rumpling his hair.*] I'll try to make it plainer to you. [*Behind the smoking-table.*] Er—will I smoke one of your cigarettes?——

PHILIP.

[*Frigidly polite.*] Please.

SIR TIMOTHY.

[*Taking a cigarette from the box on the table.*] Mr. Mackworth, if Filson's prognostications as to the result of the quarrel between you and his sister are fulfilled, it's my intention, after a decent interval, to renew my appeal to her to marry me. [*Striking a match.*] Is that clear?

PHILIP.

Perfectly. [*Stiffly.*] But all the same, I'm still at a loss——

SIR TIMOTHY.

[*Lighting his cigarette.*] At a loss, are you! [*Warmly.*] You're at a loss to understand that I'm

not the sort of man who'd steal a march upon another where a woman's concerned, and take advantage of his misfortunes in a dirty manner! [*Coming to* PHILIP.] Mackworth—I'll drop the Mister, if you've no objection—Mackworth, I promise you I won't move a step till I have your assurance that your split with Madame de Chaumié is a mortal one, and that the coast is open to all comers. That's my part o' the bargain, and I expect you on your side to treat me with equal fairness and frankness. [*Offering his hand.*] You will?

PHILIP.

My dear Sir Timothy—my dear Barradell—[*shaking* SIR TIMOTHY'S *hand heartily*] you're the most chivalrous fellow I've ever met!

SIR TIMOTHY.

[*Walking away.*] Ah, go on now!

PHILIP.

[*Following him.*] I apologize sincerely for being so curt.

SIR TIMOTHY.

Don't mention it.

PHILIP.

It's true, Ottoline and I *have* had a bad fall out. [*Keenly.*] Did Filson give you any particulars——?

SIR TIMOTHY.

I gathered 'twas something arising out of a book of yours——

PHILIP.

Y-y-yes ; a silly affair in which I was utterly in the wrong. I lost my accursed temper—made a disgraceful exhibition of myself. [*Touching* SIR TIMOTHY'S *arm.*] I *will* be quite straight with you, Barradell—Robbie Roope has just gone to her with a note from me. I don't want to pain you ; but Robbie and I hope that, after a night's rest—[*The bell rings in the vestibule.*] Excuse me—my servant isn't in. [*He goes into the vestibule, leaving the door open.* SIR TIMOTHY *picks up his hat. On opening the outer door,* PHILIP *confronts* OTTOLINE.] Otto——!

OTTOLINE.

[*In the doorway, giving him both her hands.*] Are you alone, Philip ?

PHILIP.

[*Drawing her into the vestibule, his eyes sparkling.*] No. [*With a motion of his head.*] Sir Timothy Barradell——

[OTTOLINE *passes* PHILIP *and enters the room, holding out her hand to* SIR TIMOTHY. *Her eyes are black-rimmed from sleeplessness ; but whatever asperity she has displayed overnight has disappeared, and she is again full of softness and charm.*

OTTOLINE.

Sir Tim !

PHILIP.

[*Shutting the outer door—breathing freely.*] Kind of Sir Timothy to look me up, isn't it ?

OTTOLINE.

[*To* SIR TIMOTHY.] *Vous êtes un vaurien!* When did you return?

SIR TIMOTHY.

[*Who has flung his cigarette into the grate—crestfallen.*] The day before yesterday.

OTTOLINE.

Then I mustn't scold you for not having been to see us yet. [*Wonderingly.*] You find time to call on Mr. Mackworth, though!

SIR TIMOTHY.

[*With a gulp.*] I—I was on my way to my solicitors, who are in Raymond Buildings, and I remembered that I knew Mackworth years ago——

PHILIP.

[*Loitering near the vestibule door, impatient for* SIR TIMOTHY'S *departure.*] When I was a rollicking man-about-town, eh, Barradell!

SIR TIMOTHY.

[*Retaining* OTTOLINE'S *hand—to her, earnestly.*] My dear Madame de Chaumié——

OTTOLINE.

Yes?

SIR TIMOTHY.

[*Bracing himself.*] A little bird brought the news to me shortly after I left England. [*She lowers her eyes.*] I—I congratulate you and Mackworth—I congratulate you from the core of my heart.

OTTOLINE.

[*In a quiet voice.*] Thank you, dear Sir Timothy.

SIR TIMOTHY.

May you both be as happy as you deserve to be, and even happier!

PHILIP.

[*Laughing.*] Ha, ha, ha!

SIR TIMOTHY.

[*Squeezing her hand.*] Good-bye for the present.

OTTOLINE.

[*Smilingly.*] Good-bye. [*He passes her and joins* PHILIP. *Unseen by* OTTOLINE—*who proceeds to loosen her coat at the settee on the right*—PHILIP *again gives* SIR TIMOTHY *a vigorous hand-shake.* SIR TIMOTHY *responds to it disconsolately, and is following* PHILIP *into the vestibule when he hears* OTTOLINE *call to him.*] Sir Tim!

SIR TIMOTHY.

[*Turning.*] Hallo!

OTTOLINE.

[*Lightly.*] Is your car here?

SIR TIMOTHY.

[*Brightening.*] It is.

OTTOLINE.

You may give me a lift to Bond Street, if your business with your lawyers won't keep you long.

SIR TIMOTHY.

[*Emphatically.*] It will *not.* [*Beaming.*] I told you a lie. I've *no* business with my lawyers. I came here expressly to improve my acquaintance with the man who's to be your husband, and for no other purpose. [*They all laugh merrily.*

OTTOLINE.

Ha, ha, ha! [*To* SIR TIMOTHY.] Wait for me in South Square, then. I sha'n't be many minutes.

SIR TIMOTHY.

[*Going into the vestibule.*] Ah, I'd wait an eternity!

[PHILIP *and* SIR TIMOTHY *shake hands once more, and then* PHILIP *lets* SIR TIMOTHY *out.*

PHILIP.

[*As he shuts the outer door.*] By George, he's a splendid chap! [*He comes back into the room, closes the vestibule door, and advances to* OTTOLINE *and stands before her humbly.*] Oh, Ottoline—oh, my dear girl! Shall I go down on my knees to you?

OTTOLINE.

[*In a subdued tone.*] If you do, I shall have to kneel to *you*, Phil.

PHILIP.

[*Slowly folding her in his arms.*] Ah! Ah! Ah! [*In her ear.*] What a night I've spent!

OTTOLINE.

[*Almost inaudibly.*] And I!

[*He seats her upon the settee on the right and sits beside her, linking his hand in hers.*

PHILIP.

How merciful this is of you! I've just sent you a letter by Robbie Roope, begging you to see me; you've missed him. [*Smiling.*] It isn't as eloquent as some I started writing at five o'clock this morning. Would you like to hear it? [*She nods. He recites his note tenderly.*] "Forgive me. I forgive you. When may I come to you?" That's all.

OTTOLINE.

Isn't that eloquent, Phil?

PHILIP.

[*Smiling again.*] It's concise—and as long as you forgive me—[*eyeing her with a shadow of fear*] you're *sure* you've forgiven me?

OTTOLINE.

Sure.

PHILIP.

[*Persistently.*] Without reserve?

OTTOLINE.

Should I be here—[*indicating their proximity*] and *here*—if I hadn't?

PHILIP.

[*Pressing her hand to his lips ardently, and then freeing her shoulders from her coat.*] Take this off——

OTTOLINE.

[*Gently resisting.*] Poor Sir Timothy——!

PHILIP.

[*In high spirits.*] Oh, a little exercise won't do Sir Timothy any harm! [*Helping her to slip her arms out of her coat.*] Dash it, you might have let *me* escort you to Bond Street!

OTTOLINE.

No, no; your work——

PHILIP.

[*His brow clouding.*] W-w-work——?

OTTOLINE.

You mustn't lose your morning's work.

[*There is a short pause, and then he rises and moves a few steps away from her. With an impassive countenance, she fingers the buttons of her gloves.*

PHILIP.

[*Stroking the pattern of the carpet with his foot.*] Otto——

OTTOLINE.

[*Looking up.*] Yes, Phil?

PHILIP.

I asked Robbie to tell you, if he had the opportunity, that I've decided to make my farewell salaam to authorship. I'm no good at it; I'm a frost; I realize it at last. I've had my final whack on the jaw; I've fought—how many rounds?—and now I take the count and slink out of the ring, beat. [*Producing his keys, he goes to the cabinet on the right,*

unlocks it, and selects from several cardboard portfolios one which he carries to the writing-table. While he is doing this, OTTOLINE—*still with an expressionless face —rises and moves to the left, where she stands watching him. He opens the portfolio and, with a pained look, handles the sheets of manuscript in it.*] Ha! You and I have often talked over this, haven't we, Otto?

OTTOLINE.

[*Calmly.*] Often.

PHILIP.

[*Taking the manuscript from the portfolio—thoughtfully.*] It was to have been—oh, such an advance on my previous stuff—kindlier, less strenuous, more urbane! Success—success!—had sweetened the gall in me! [*Glancing at a partly covered page.*] Here's where I broke off yesterday. [*With a shrug.*] In every man's life there's a chapter uncompleted, in one form or another! [*Throwing the manuscript into the portfolio.*] Pst! Get back to your hole; I'll burn you later on. [*He rejoins her. She half turns from him, averting her head.*] So end my pitiful strivings and ambitions! [*Laying his hand on her shoulder.*] Ah, it's a miserable match you're making, Ottoline! My two-hundred-a-year will rig me out suitably, and provide me with tobacco; and the dribblets coming to me from my old books—through the honest publishers I deserted for Mr. Titterton!—the dribblets coming from my old books will enable me to present you with a nosegay on the anniversaries of our wedding-day, and—by the time your hair's white—to refund you the money Titterton's had from you. And there—with a little fame unjustly won, which,

thank God, 'll soon die!—there you have the sum of my possessions! [*Seizing her arms and twisting her round.*] Oh, but I'll be your mate, my dear—your loyal companion and protector—comrade and lover——!

[*He is about to embrace her again, but she keeps him off by placing her hands against his breast.*

OTTOLINE.

[*Steeling herself.*] Phil——

PHILIP.

[*Unsuspectingly.*] Eh?

OTTOLINE.

I arrived at a decision during the night too, Phil.

PHILIP.

Yes?

OTTOLINE.

Don't—don't loathe me. [*Shaking her head gravely.*] I am not going to marry you.

PHILIP.

[*Staring at her.*] You're not going to—marry me?

OTTOLINE.

No, Philip.

PHILIP.

[*After another pause.*] You—you're overwrought, Otto; you've had no sleep. Neither of us has had any sleep——

OTTOLINE.

Oh, but I'm quite clearheaded——

PHILIP.

[*Bewildered.*] Why, just now you said you'd forgiven me—repeated it——!

OTTOLINE.

I do repeat it. If I've anything to forgive, I forgive you a thousand times——

PHILIP.

And you allowed me to—to take you in my arms——

OTTOLINE.

You shall take me in your arms again, Phil, once more, before we part, if you wish to. I'm not a girl, though you call me one——

PHILIP.

[*Sternly.*] Look here! You don't imagine for an instant that I shall accept this! You——!

OTTOLINE.

Ssh! Try not to be hasty; try to be reasonable. Listen to me——

PHILIP.

You—you mean me to understand that, in consequence of this wretched Titterton affair, you've changed your mind, and intend to chuck me!

OTTOLINE.

Yes, I mean you to understand that.

PHILIP.

[*Turning from her indignantly.*] Oh——!

OTTOLINE.

[*Sitting in the chair by the smoking-table.*] Philip—Philip—[*He hesitates, then seats himself on the settee opposite to her. She speaks with great firmness and deliberation.*] Philip, while you were lying awake last night, or walking about your room, didn't you—*think?*

PHILIP.

[*Hotly.*] *Think——!*

OTTOLINE.

No, no—soberly, steadily, searchingly. Evidently not, *cher ami!* [*Bending forward.*] Phil, after what has happened, can't you see me as I really *am?*

PHILIP.

As you—are?

OTTOLINE.

An incurably vulgar woman. An incurably common, vulgar woman. Nobody but a woman whose vulgarity is past praying for could have conceived such a scheme as I planned and carried out with that man Clifford Titterton—nobody. This—how shall I term it?—this refinement of mine is merely on the surface. We women are like the—what's the name of the little reptile?—the chameleon, isn't it? We catch the colour of our surroundings. But what we were, we continue to be—in the grain. The vulgar-minded Ottoline Filson, who captivated, and disgusted, you in Paris is before you at this moment. The only difference is that then she was a natural person, and now she plays *les grands rôles.* [*Sitting upright and pressing her temples.*] Oh, I have fooled myself as well as you, Phil—deluded myself——!

PHILIP.

You're dog-tired, Otto. Your brain's in a fever. All you've done, you've done from your love for me, my dear—your deep, passionate love——

OTTOLINE.

[*Wincing.*] Passionate love—*parfaitement!* [*Looking at him.*] But that feeling's over, Phil.

PHILIP.

Over?

OTTOLINE.

[*Simply.*] I shall always *love* you—always—always; but my passion exhausted itself last night. For months it has borne me along on a wave. It was that that swept me to the door of Titterton's office in Charles Street, Adelphi; it was strong enough to drive me to any length. But last night, in those dreadful small hours, the wave beat itself out, and threw me up on to the rocks, and left me shivering—naked—ashamed—[*drawing a deep breath*] ah, but in my right senses!

[*She unbuttons her left-hand glove, rolls the hand of the glove over her wrist, and takes her engagement-ring from her finger.*

PHILIP.

[*Aghast.*] Otto! Otto! What are you doing! What are you doing! [*She lays the ring carefully upon the smoking-table and rises and walks away. He rises with her, following her.*] To-morrow—when you've had some sleep—to-morrow——

OTTOLINE.

Never. Don't deceive yourself, Philip. [*Going to the fireplace.*] If anything was needed to strengthen my resolution, the announcement you've just made would supply it.

PHILIP.

[*On the left.*] Announcement ?

OTTOLINE.

With regard to your literary work. [*Turning to him.*] *Ne voyez-vous pas !* I have begun to degrade you already !

PHILIP.

[*Consciously.*] Degrade me ?

OTTOLINE.

Degrade you. If I hadn't come into your life again, you would have accepted your reverse—your failure to gain popularity by your latest book—as you've accepted similar disappointments—with a shrug and a confident snap of your fingers. [*Advancing.*] But I've humbled you—bruised your spirit—shaken your courage; and now you express your willingness—*you !*—to throw your pen aside, and tack yourself to my skirts, and to figure meekly for the rest of your existence as " Mrs. Mackworth's husband " ! [*At the nearer end of the writing-table.*] *Mon Dieu !* This is what I have brought you to !

PHILIP.

[*Biting his lip.*] You—you wouldn't have me profit by the advertisement I've got out of " The Big

Drum," Ottoline—[*ironically*] the finest advertisement I could wish for, according to Robbie! You wouldn't have me sink as low as that?

OTTOLINE.

You can write under an alias—a *nom de plume*—until you've won your proper place——

PHILIP.

[*Uneasily.*] Oh, well—perhaps—by-and-by—when we had settled down, you and I—and things had adjusted themselves——

OTTOLINE.

Yes, when you'd grown sick and weary of your new environment, and had had time to reflect on the horrid trick I'd employed to get hold of you, and had learned to despise me for it, you'd creep back to your desk and make an effort to pick up the broken threads! [*Coming to the settee on the right.*] *Eh bien!* Do you know what would happen *then*, Phil?

PHILIP.

W-w-what?

OTTOLINE.

[*Intensely.*] I should *puff* you, under the rose—quietly pull the strings—use all the influence I could rake up——

PHILIP.

No, no——

OTTOLINE.

I should. It's in my blood. I couldn't resist it. Whether you wrote as Jones, or Smith, or Robinson, you'd find Jones, Smith, or Robinson artfully puffed

and paragraphed and thrust under people's noses in the papers. I'm an incurably vulgar woman, I tell you! [*Snatching at her coat—harshly.*] *Ah, que je me connais ; que je me connais !*

[*She fumbles for the arm-holes of her coat. He goes to her quickly and they stand holding the coat between them and looking at each other.*

PHILIP.

[*After a silence.*] You you're determined ?

OTTOLINE.

Determined.

PHILIP.

You—you *can't* be !

OTTOLINE.

I am—I swear I am.

PHILIP.

[*After a further silence.*] Then it *is*—as you said last night——?

OTTOLINE.

What did I say last night ? I forget.

PHILIP.

[*In a husky voice.*] *C'est fini—après tout !*

OTTOLINE.

[*Inclining her head.*] *C'est fini—après tout.*

PHILIP.

[*Bitterly.*] Ho ! Ho, ho, ho ! [*Another pause.*] So when—when April comes—we—we sha'n't——!

OTTOLINE.

[*Lowering her eyes—all gentleness again.*] We sha'n't walk under the trees in the Champs-Elysées, Phil——

PHILIP.

Nor in the Allée de Longchamp—where we——

OTTOLINE.

No, nor in the Allée de Longchamp.

PHILIP.

[*Releasing her coat and thrusting his hands into his trouser-pockets.*] Somebody else'll gulp the milk at the Café d'Armenonville——!

OTTOLINE.

And at the Pré-Catalan——

PHILIP.

And there'll be no one to gaze sentimentally at my old windows in the Rue Soufflot——

OTTOLINE.

[*Softly.*] *Quarante-trois bis.* [*Sighing.*] No one.

PHILIP.

[*With a hollow laugh.*] Ha, ha, ha! *C'est fini—après tout!*

OTTOLINE.

[*Firmly.*] *C'est fini—après tout.* [*She holds out her coat to him and he helps her into it. Suddenly, while her back is turned to him, he utters a guttural cry and grips her shoulders savagely. She turns in surprise, her hand to her shoulder.*] Oh, Phil——!

PHILIP.

[*Pointing at her.*] I see! I see! I see the end of it! You'll marry Barradell! You'll marry the fellow who's cooling his heels down below in South Square!

OTTOLINE.

[*Placidly, fastening her coat.*] I may.

PHILIP.

[*Choking.*] Oh——!

OTTOLINE.

I may, if I marry at all—and he bothers any more about me.

PHILIP.

[*Stamping up and down.*] Bacon Barradell! Bacon Barradell! The wife of Bacon Barradell!

OTTOLINE.

[*With a sad smile.*] He has social aims; a vulgar, pushing woman would be a serviceable partner for Sir Tim.

PHILIP.

Oh! Oh—! [*Dropping on to the settee on the left and burying his face in his hands.*] Ho, well, more power to him! He can sell his bacon; I—I can't sell my books!

[*Again there is a silence, and then, putting on her left-hand glove, she goes to* PHILIP *and stands over him compassionately.*

OTTOLINE.

Mon pauvre Philippe, it's you, not I, who will take another view of things to-morrow. [*He makes a gesture*

of dissent.] Ah, come, come, come! You have never loved me as I have loved you. Unconsciously—without perceiving it—one may be half a *poseuse;* but at least I've been sincere in my love for you, and in hungering to be your wife. [*Giving him her right hand.*] You're the best I've ever known, dear; by far the best I've ever known. [*He presses her hand to his brow convulsively.*] But when we had our talk in South Audley Street, how did you serve me? You insisted on my waiting—waiting; I who had cherished your image in my mind for years! You guessed I shouldn't have patience—you almost prophesied as much; but still—I was to wait!

PHILIP.

[*Inarticulately.*] Oh, Otto!

OTTOLINE.

[*Withdrawing her hand.*] What did that show, Phil? It showed—as your compromise with mother and Dad showed afterwards—that the success of the book you were engaged upon came first with you; that marrying me was to be only an incident in your career; that you didn't love me sufficiently to bend your pride or vary your programme a jot. [*He gets to his feet, startled, dumbfoundered. He attempts to speak, but she checks him.*] H'sh! H'sh! I'm scolding you; but, for your sake, I wouldn't have it otherwise. Now that I'm sane and cool, I wouldn't have it otherwise.

PHILIP.

[*Struggling for words—thickly.*] Ottoline—Ottoline—[*his voice dying away*] I——!

OTTOLINE.

[*Taking his hands in hers.*] Good-bye. Don't come downstairs with me. Let me leave you sitting at your table, at work—at work on that incomplete chapter. We shall tumble up against one another, I dare say, at odd times, but this is the last we shall see of each other *dans l'intimité;* and I want to print on my memory the sight of you—[*pointing to the writing-table*] there—keeping your flag flying. [*Putting her arms round him—in a whisper.*] Keep your flag flying, Philip! Don't—don't sulk with your art, and be false to yourself, because a trumpery woman has fretted and disturbed you. Keep your flag flying—[*kissing him*] my—my dear hero!

[*She untwines her arms and steps back. Slowly, with his hands hanging loosely, and his chin upon his breast,* PHILIP *passes her and goes to the writing-table. There, dully and mechanically, he takes the unfinished page of manuscript from the portfolio, arranges it upon the blotting-pad and, seating himself at the table, picks up his pen. Very softly* OTTOLINE *opens the vestibule door, gives* PHILIP *a last look over her shoulder, and enters the vestibule, closing the door behind her. There is a pause, during which* PHILIP *sits staring at his inkstand, and then the outer door slams. With an exclamation,* PHILIP *drops his pen, leaps up, and rushes to the vestibule door.*

PHILIP.

Otto! Otto! [*Loudly.*] Ottoline——!

[*With his hand on the door-handle, he wavers,*

his eyes shifting wildly to and from the writing-table. Then, with a mighty effort, he pulls himself together, strides to the smoking-table, and loads and lights his pipe. Puffing at his pipe fiercely, he reseats himself before his manuscript and, grabbing his pen, forces himself to write. He has written a word or two when he falters—stops—and lays his head upon his arm on the table.

PHILIP.

[*His shoulders heaving.*] Oh, Otto—Otto——!

THE END

Printed by BALLANTYNE, HANSON & CO. LTD.
At the Ballantyne Press
LONDON AND EDINBURGH

THIS BOOK IS DUE ON THE LAST DATE STAMPED BELOW

AN INITIAL FINE OF 25 CENTS

WILL BE ASSESSED FOR FAILURE TO RETURN THIS BOOK ON THE DATE DUE. THE PENALTY WILL INCREASE TO 50 CENTS ON THE FOURTH DAY AND TO $1.00 ON THE SEVENTH DAY OVERDUE.

NOV 5 1933

NOV 6 1933

LD 21–100*m*·7,'33

XB 72849

U. C. BERKELEY LIBRARIES

C045627896

334354

Pinero

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA LIBRARY