

TWENTIETH CENTURY PLAYS

BRITISH

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REVISED AND ENLARGED

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MODERN BRITISH DRAMA

AFTER 1777, the date of *The School for Scandal*, not one acting play of literary merit was written in England for more than a hundred years. London theaters depended on revivals of the classics, paltry farces and melodramas, plunderings from the French, and new plays by such fifth-rate playwrights as the years produced. The Romantic movement at the turn of the century yielded a rich poetry but no actable drama; the Victorian period, which was prodigal in poetry, fiction, and essay, yielded no dramatic literature. In 1880, for example, English drama was intellectually centuries behind other forms of English literature in the age of Huxley, Mill, Carlyle, Ruskin, George Eliot, Meredith, Hardy, Browning, Arnold, and Tennyson, the theater was being served by the trivial plays of Boucicault, Wills, H. J. Byron, Buchanan, Lytton, Reed, and Knowles. Victorian drama was completely divorced from contemporary significance and from literature.

The first ray of hope appeared in the 1860's with the superficially realistic comedies of Tom Robertson *Society* (1865) and *Caste* (1867) are important only for their beginnings of a sane stage realism; their characterization and dialogue are stogy, and the treatment of "problems" most elementary. Robertson did, however, insist on workable blinds, practicable doors, actual teacups and saucers, rooms with ceilings; stage realism was a necessary step in what William Archer terms the steady advance of dramatic art by the gradual elimination of lyrical and exaggerative elements and the substitution of a "sober and accurate imitation of life." Unfortunately, Robertson was a solitary figure, for his immediate successors—H. J. Byron, James Albery, Tom Taylor, W. G. Wills—either borrowed shamelessly from Scribe and Sardou, or ground out flatulent pieces in the manner of Knowles and Lytton. William Archer speaks thus of these barren years: "As I look back to 'seventy-nine and the early 'eighties, I confess I am puzzled to conceive how anyone with the smallest pretension to intelligence could in those years occupy himself with the English theater. The Robertsonian comedies of the 'sixties had brought with them a little flicker of hope; but it seemed to have died away in the inanities of H. J. Byron [whose trashy saccharine comedy *Our Boys* started in 1875 its phenomenal run of 1,362 nights] and to have left behind it nothing but inspissated gloom. The stage was flooded with adaptations of French drama and farce, with illiterate transcriptions of French opera-bouffe, and with the punning vulgarities and idiocies of British burlesque." The priceless extravaganzas of Gilbert and Sullivan formed an oasis in this desert of tawdriness, but they do not belong to the drama proper. The best of Gilbert's non-musical plays, such as *Sweethearts*, if not trivial, are at least quite fragile.

Then in the eighteen eighties two playwrights pulled the theater out of the slough of vulgarity and inaugurated a renaissance which was to restore the drama to its rightful place among the arts. These two playwrights were Arthur Wing Pinero, who was influenced by Ibsen and other Continental pioneers, and Henry Arthur Jones, who strove to make the drama a criticism of life rather than mere innocuous entertainment. In 1884 was produced Jones's *Saints and Sinners*, which, although crudely melodramatic, is the first English play of social criticism. His *Crusaders* (1891) is the first English play to present satirically an entire social group. *The Case of Rebellious Susan* (1894) was the first English high comedy since Sheridan. *The Liars* (1897) is the best English high comedy of the nineteenth century. Jones was also a tireless lecturer and writer for a more

adult theater, for publication and reading of plays, and for abolition of the censorship. Pinero electrified the dramatic world with *The Second Mrs Tanqueray* in 1893, a domestic tragedy comparatively bold in theme and honest in treatment and obviously Ibsen-like. Although modern taste leans to his early farces, such as *The Magistrate*, rather than to his pretentious studies of character such as *Iris*, *His House in Order*, and *The Thunderbolt*, his serious plays are far more significant as models of a masterly technique and as forcible character studies.

Jones and Pinero were soon joined by a score of playwrights who restored to the drama a vigor and importance it had not enjoyed in more than a century. Between 1892 and 1895, Oscar Wilde wrote four witty comedies, one of which, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, is often revived. Haddon Chambers, St. John Hankin, Hubert Henry Davies and Somerset Maugham followed Jones in the field of high comedy. Stephen Phillips injected some vitality into the almost obsolete poetic drama. Bernard Shaw started the vogue for the thesis play in 1892 with *Widowers' Houses*. Shaw's plays deal primarily with ideas, and only secondarily with characters, he scorns the notion of art for art's sake and regards the theater as a medium for the propagation of his social and economic prejudices. But he is more than pulpiteer: he is a great wit and, perhaps in spite of himself, at times a great artist. One of his distinguished disciples is Granville Barker, whose excellent discursive plays *Waste*, *The Voyage Inheritance*, and *The Madras House* are too static for popular taste. Another disciple was Stanley Houghton, whose thesis play *Hamlet Wakes* (1912) is one of the most successful of this genre. John Masefield's tragedies are marked by a somber beauty; especially noteworthy are *The Tragedy of Nan* (1908) and *Melloney Holtspur* (1923). In Ireland, a native drama was encouraged as a vital part of the Celtic revival, and reached its fine flower in the plays of Lady Gregory, William Butler Yeats, John Millington Synge, Loid Dunsany, St. John Ervine, Lennox Robinson, and Sean O'Casey.

The most important playwrights in the new century before the war were Synge, Barrie, Galsworthy, and Shaw, of whom Sir James Barrie is the greatest genius. Barrie's work, which ranges from the realistic to the fantastic, from satire to moving tragedy, eludes pat classification. Around the hackneyed triangle situation he builds in *What Every Woman Knows* one of the finest and freshest of English comedies; *The Admirable Crichton*, at once a satire, a high comedy, and a romance, is his sole attempt at intellectual drama; *Dear Brutus* and *Mary Rose* have elements of the supernatural. *Peter Pan*, along with Rostand's *Cyrano de Bergerac*, will probably outlive most European plays of the last fifty years. John Galsworthy is a thesis playwright like Shaw, but is more consciously an artist. In most of his plays he succeeds in subordinating idea to character, and successfully achieves objectivity.

Since the World War only Shaw and Somerset Maugham of the older dramatists have been able to maintain their earlier eminence. When one thinks of the noteworthy plays Maugham has written since the war—*The Unknown*, *The Circle*, *The Constant Wife*, *The Sacred Flame*, *For Services Rendered*—he is liable to forget that Maugham has been writing plays since 1902 and, in years at least, does not belong to the younger school. Since the war dramatic literature has continued to flourish, although in close perspective no one playwright seems so significant as Synge, Barrie, Galsworthy, or Shaw. A. A. Milne has continued the Barrie tradition of gentle and whimsical humor; Noel Coward, the *enfant terrible* of the post-war theater, adapts the manner of Restoration comedy to the modern temper and tempo; Rudolph Besier, Clifford Bax, and Gordon Daviot have handled historical themes in the light of modern psychology and have substituted plausible

dialogue for oratory; John Drinkwater has written historical plays in a more conventional manner, but with a simple dignity, Eden Philpotts has written a half-dozen excellent comedies of Devonshire folk, John Van Druten is an assiduous experimenter with the realistic method, Clemence Dane's novels share their unsentimental and uncompromising veracity with her plays; Frederic Lonsdale has devoted his brilliant talent to the comedy of manners. When one thinks of the many other established and promising dramatists—Sutton Vane, R. C. Sheriff, Maurice Browne, Mordaunt Shairp, Ivor Novello, E. M. Delafield, R. M. Harwood, C. L. Anthony, Anthony Armstrong—one takes refuge in the trite "too numerous to mention."

This is surely the golden age of English drama; if we subtract Shakespeare, the Elizabethan period sinks easily to a subordinate position. The dream of the pioneers of the dramatic renaissance has been realized—the drama again provides adult entertainment. The advance has been that of modern literature in general—toward truth and realism. The alarms and excursions of expressionism and kindred novelties have been interesting and for the most part valuable in keeping the dramatic form elastic and living, but never has drama conformed more closely to Aristotle's succinct definition. An imitation of life.

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THE THUNDERBOLT
(1908)

BY

SIR ARTHUR WING PINERO

THE PERSONS OF THE PLAY

JAMES MORTIMORE
ANN, *his wife*
STEPHEN MORTIMORE
LOUISA, *his wife*
THADDEUS MORTIMORE
PHYLLIS, *his wife*
JOYCE } *The Thaddeus Mortimore's children*
CYRIL }
COLONEL PONTING
ROSE, *his wife, née Mortimore*
HELEN THORNHILL
THE REV. GEORGE TRIST
MR VALLANCE, *solicitor, of Singlehampton*
MR ELKIN, *solicitor, of Linchpool*
MR. DENYER, *a house-agent*
HEATH, *a man-servant*
A servant girl at Nelson Villas
Two others at "Ivanhoe"

The scene of the First Act is laid at Linchpool, a city in the Midlands. The rest of the action takes place, a month later, in the town of Singlehampton

SIR ARTHUR WING PINERO

ARTHUR WING PINERO was born in London on May 24, 1855, the son of a solicitor. He was educated in private schools and later read for the bar. His enthusiasm for the theater, however, won him away from the study of law before he was twenty and he joined the fine company of Sir Henry Irving to receive, like Shakespeare, a practical education on the boards. A competent but undistinguished actor, he played only minor rôles, and thereby was provided with the necessary leisure to follow his urge for dramatic writing. Like Shakespeare, too, he began his long period of authorship as a hack-writer for the theater, dramatizing popular fiction and adapting plays from the French. From one-act curtain raisers he advanced to farces and sentimental Robertsonian comedies such as *Sweet Lavender*, finally to such serious and memorable problem plays as *The Profligate* and *The Second Mrs Tanqueray*. In the twentieth century he has written his finest plays—*Iris*, *His House in Order*, *Mid-Channel*, and *The Thunderbolt*. In recent years he has had little success on the stage (except in the revival of early farces or such a museum piece as *Trelawney of the "Wells"*). Never a profound student of human life, he has remained essentially a Victorian in a changing world he makes no effort to interpret. Pinero died in 1934.

In the history of the English drama there is no more expert maker of plays than Pinero. From his first play in 1877 to his most recent, audiences and readers have relished his superb craftsmanship. The well-knit plots, the steady crescendo of interest, the exciting climaxes and forceful endings have called forth the opprobrious adjective "well-made" in an age when expressionistic and "talky" plays win most critical approval. The artificiality of Pinero's work is apparent, but only the most churlish of critics can deny their historical importance in the advance of the modern drama, or overlook the excellent gallery of Pinero portraits and his gripping stories. Much of the recent depreciation of Pinero is unfair, grossly so the common dismissal of his work as "theatrical." (It would seem that the contemptuous use of "theatrical" is a bit irrational when applied to pieces designed for performance in the theater!) Nevertheless, the assertion that Pinero has taken the stage too seriously and life not seriously enough is not without justification; with his great technical gifts there must be some reason for his being only an important playwright and not a great dramatist like Chekhov, Rostand, and Barrie.

The plays of Pinero most worth reading are *The Magistrate* (1885), a diverting farce; *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* (1893), an old-fashioned but notable problem play which established the Ibsen influence on the English drama; *The Gay Lord Quex* (1899), a bright comedy of manners with an extraordinarily dramatic climax; *Iris* (1901), a flawless example of the "well-made" tragedy; *His House in Order* (1906), a serious study of a second marriage, refreshingly free from the "problems" that weigh heavily on most Edwardian dramas; *The Thunderbolt* (1908); and *Mid-Channel* (1909), a grim, unpalatable story of a wrecked marriage.

The Thunderbolt, perhaps Pinero's finest play (by no means the most popular) and one of the best pre-war plays of the modern English drama, is relatively free of those faults that weaken and date many of this dramatist's serious plays—the emphasis on social problems that have paled in significance, the obtrusion of theatrical machinery, and sentimental concessions to popular taste. *The Thunderbolt* is a masterpiece of careful realism, a bitter satire on universal weaknesses; yet the play is primarily a study of character

revelation under the stress of circumstance, and not patently a satire as is Ben Jonson's *Volpone*, which it resembles. The relative unpopularity of the play is due to its drab and cynical humor, which arouses anything but comfortable laughter, to its lack of those elements of romance and sentiment obligatory in a "success" (*The Thunderbolt* is one of the few great plays without a love story or sex interest), and to the remorseless delineation of the morals and manners of a group to which many are conscious of belonging. The motif of the play is the ancient one of the lost will, but the truth and firmness of the satire and characterization bring new vitality to the old theme. The technical skill for which Pinero is renowned is shown in the expert handling of a large number of characters, in the effective preparation for Phyllis's confession, and its repetition by Thaddeus with no diminution of interest, and in the skilful final act, which escapes being anticlimactic. Few will cavil at Wilham Archer's comment on the third act "The act in which the thunderbolt falls into the midst of the family council is one of the most thrilling pieces of drama ever conceived." When the play was first performed, it was denounced as "an insult to the provinces"; a former Lord Mayor of Sheffield called it "an unwarrantable attack on provincial life" Such denunciations are tributes to the tart satire and the veracious portraiture in the play.

THE THUNDERBOLT

ACT I

A large, oblong room, situated on the ground floor and furnished as a library, in the residence of the late Edward Mortimore, in Linchpool.

At the back are three sashed windows, slightly recessed, with Venetian blinds. There is a chair in each recess. At the farther end of the right-hand wall a door opens from the hall, the remaining part of the wall being occupied by a long dwarf-bookcase. This bookcase finishes at each end with a cupboard, and on the top of each cupboard stands a lamp. The keys of the cupboards are in their locks.

On the left-hand side of the room, in the middle of the wall, is a fireplace with a fender-stool before it, and on either side of the fireplace there is a tall bookcase with glazed doors. A high-backed armchair faces the fireplace at the farther end. A smoking-table with the usual accessories, a chair, and a settee stand at the nearer end of the fireplace, a few feet from the wall.

Almost in the center of the room there is a big knee-hole writing-table with a lamp upon it. On the farther side of the table is a writing-chair. Another chair stands beside the table.

On the right, near the dwarf-bookcase, there is a circular library-table on which are strewn books, newspapers, and magazines. Round this table a settee and three chairs are arranged.

The furniture and decorations, without exhibiting any special refinement of taste, are rich and massive.

The Venetian blinds are down, and the room is in semi-darkness. What light there is proceeds from the bright sunshine visible through the slats.

Seated about the room, as if waiting for somebody to arrive, are JAMES and ANN MORTIMORE, STEPHEN and LOUISA, THADDEUS and PHYL-LIS, and COLONEL PONTING and ROSE. The ladies are wearing their hats and gloves. Everybody is in the sort of black which people hurriedly muster while regular mourning is in

the making—in the case of the MORTIMORES, the black being added to apparel of a less somber kind. All speak in subdued voices.

ROSE [a lady of forty-four, fashionably dressed and coiffured and with a suspiciously blooming complexion—on the settee on the left, fanning herself]. Oh, the heat! I'm stifled.

LOUISA [on the right—forty-six, a spare, thin-voiced woman]. Mayn't we have a window open?

ANN [beside the writing-table—a stolid, corpulent woman of fifty]. I don't think we ought to have a window open.

JAMES [at the writing-table—a burly, thick-set man, a little older than his wife, with iron-gray hair and beard and a crape band round his sleeve]. Phew! Why not, mother?

ANN. It isn't usual in a house of mourning—except in the room where the—

PONTING [in the armchair before the fireplace—fifty-five, short, stout, apoplectic]. Rubbish! [Dabbing his brow] I beg your pardon—it's like the Black Hole of Calcutta.

THADDEUS [rising from the settee on the right, where he is sitting with PHYL-LIS—a meek, careworn man of two-and-forty]. Shall I open one a little way?

STEPHEN [on the farther side of the library-table—forty-nine, bald, stooping, with red rims to his eyes, wearing spectacles]. Do, Tad.

[THADDEUS goes to the window on the right and opens it.]

THADDEUS [from behind the Venetian blind]. Here's a fly.

JAMES [taking out his watch as he rises]. That'll be Crake. Half-past eleven. He's in good time.

THADDEUS [looking into the street]. It isn't Crake. It's a young fellow.

JAMES. Young fellow?

THADDEUS [emerging]. It's Crake's partner.

JAMES. His partner?

STEPHEN. Crake has sent Vallance.

JAMES. What's he done that for? Why

hasn't he come himself? This young man doesn't know anything about our family.

ANN. He'll know the law, James

JAMES. Oh, the law's clear enough, Mother.

[*After a short silence, HEATH, a middle-aged man-servant, appears, followed by VALLANCE VALLANCE is a young man of about five-and-thirty*]

HEATH. Mr. Vallance.

JAMES [*advancing to VALLANCE as HEATH retires*]. Good morning.

VALLANCE Good morning. [*Inquiringly*]. Mr. Mortimore?

JAMES. James Mortimore

VALLANCE Mr Crake had your telegram yesterday evening.

JAMES Yes, he answered it, telling us to expect him

VALLANCE He's obliged to go to London on business. He's very sorry. He thought I'd better run through.

JAMES. Oh, well—glad to see you [*Introducing the others*]. My wife My sister Rose—Mrs Ponting. My sister-in-law, Mrs. Stephen Mortimore. My sister-in-law, Mrs. Thaddeus. My brother Stephen

STEPHEN [*rising*]. Mr Vallance was pointed out to me at the Institute the other night. [*Shaking hands with VALLANCE*]. You left by the eight forty-seven?

VALLANCE. Yes I changed at Mirtlesfield.

JAMES. Colonel Ponting—my brother-in-law. [*PONTING, who has risen, nods to VALLANCE and joins ROSE*] My younger brother, Thaddeus.

THADDEUS [*who has moved away to the left*]. How d'ye do?

JAMES [*putting VALLANCE into the chair before the writing-table and switching on the light of the lamp*]. You sit yourself down there [*To everybody*] Who's to be spokesman?

STEPHEN [*joining LOUISA*]. Oh, you explain matters, Jim.

[*LOUISA makes way for STEPHEN, transferring herself to another chair so that her husband may be nearer VALLANCE*]

JAMES [*to PONTING*]. Colonel?

PONTING [*sitting by ROSE*]. Certainly; you do the talking, Mortimore.

JAMES [*sitting in the middle of the room, astride a chair, which he fetches from the window on the right*]. Well, Mr. Vallance, the reason we wired you yesterday—wired Mr. Crake, rather—asking him to meet us here this morning, is this Something has happened here in Linchpool

which makes it necessary for us to obtain a little legal assistance.

VALLANCE. Yes?

JAMES Not that we anticipate legal difficulties, whichever way the affair shapes. At the same time we consider it advisable that we should be represented by our own solicitor—a solicitor who has our interests at heart, and nobody's interests but ours [*Looking around*] Isn't that it?

STEPHEN. We want our interests watched—our interests exclusively.

PONTING. Watched—that's it I'm speaking for my wife, of course.

ROSE [*with a languid drawl*]. Yes, watched. We should like our interests watched

JAMES [*to VALLANCE*]. These are the facts. I'll start with a bit of history. We Mortimores are one of the oldest, and, I'm bold enough to say, one of the most respected, families in Singlehampton. You're a newcomer to the town; so I'm obliged to tell you things I shouldn't have to tell Crake, who's been the family's solicitor for years. Four generations of Mortimores—I'm not counting our youngsters, who make a fifth—four generations of Mortimores have been born in Singlehampton, and the majority of 'em have earned their daily bread there.

VALLANCE. Indeed?

JAMES. Yes, sir, indeed. Now, then, [*Pointing to the writing-table*]. Writing-paper's in the middle drawer [*VALLANCE takes a sheet of paper from the drawer and arranges it before him*] My dear father and mother—both passed away—had five children, four sons and a daughter. I'm the second son; then comes Stephen; then Rose—Mrs. Colonel Ponting; then Thaddeus. You see us all round you.

VALLANCE [*selecting a pen*]. Five children, you said?

JAMES. Five. The eldest of us was Ned—Edward—

STEPHEN. Edward Thomas Mortimore

JAMES Edward cut himself adrift from Singlehampton six-and-twenty years ago. He died at a quarter-past three yesterday morning.

STEPHEN. Upstairs.

JAMES. We're in his house.

STEPHEN. We lay him to rest in the cemetery here on Monday.

VALLANCE [*sympathetically*]. I was reading in the train, in one of the Linchpool papers—

JAMES. Oh, they've got it in all their papers.

VALLANCE. Mr. Mortimore, the brewer?

JAMES. The same. Aye, he was a big man in Linchpool.

STEPHEN. A very big man.

JAMES. And, what's more, a very wealthy one; there's no doubt about that. Well, we can't find a will, Mr. Vallance

VALLANCE. Really?

JAMES. To all appearances, my brother's left no will—died intestate

VALLANCE. Unmarried?

JAMES. Unmarried; a bachelor. Now, then, sir—just to satisfy my good lady—in the event of no will cropping up, what becomes of my poor brother's property?

VALLANCE. It depends upon what the estate consists of. As much of it as is real estate would go to the heir-at-law—in this instance, the eldest surviving brother.

PONTING [*impatiently*]. Yes, yes, but it's all personal estate—personal estate, every bit of it.

JAMES [*to VALLANCE*]. The Colonel's right. It's personal estate entirely, so we gather. The Colonel and I were pumping Elkin's managing-clerk about it this morning

VALLANCE. Elkin?

JAMES. Elkin, Son, and Tulhs

STEPHEN. Mr. Elkin has acted as my poor brother's solicitor for the last fifteen years.

JAMES. And *he's* never made a will for Ned.

STEPHEN. Nor heard my brother mention the existence of one.

JAMES [*to VALLANCE*]. Well? In the case of personal estate—?

VALLANCE. In that case, equal division between next-of-kin

JAMES. That's us—me, and my brothers, and my sister?

VALLANCE. Yes

JAMES [*to ANN*]. What did I tell you, Ann? [*To the rest.*] What did I tell everybody?

[STEPHEN polishes his spectacles, and PONTING pulls at his mustache, vigorously. ROSE, ANN, and LOUISA resettle themselves in their seats with great contentment]

VALLANCE [*writing*]. "Edward"—[*looking up*].—Thomas? [JAMES nods.] "Thomas Mortimore—"

JAMES. Of 3 Cannon Row and Horton Lane—

STEPHEN. Horton Lane is where the brewery is.

JAMES. Linchpool, brewer.

STEPHEN. "Gentleman" is the more

correct description. The business was converted into a company in nineteen hundred and four.

LOUISA. Gentleman, ah! What a gentlemanly man he was!

ANN. A perfect gentleman in every respect.

ROSE. Most gentlemanlike, poor dear thing.

PONTING. Must have been I never saw him—but must have been

JAMES [*to VALLANCE*]. Gentleman, deceased—

STEPHEN. Died, June the twentieth—

JAMES. Aged fifty-three. Two years my senior.

VALLANCE [*with due mournfulness*]. No older? [*Writing*] You are James—

JAMES. James Henry "Ivanhoe," Claybrook Road, and Victoria Yard, Singlehampton, builder and contractor

ANN. My husband is a parish guardian and a rural-district councillor.

JAMES. Never mind that, Mother.

ANN. Eight years treasurer of the Institute, and one of the founders of the Singlehampton and Claybrook Temperance League

LOUISA. Stephen was one of the founders of the League, too—weren't you, Stephen?

JAMES [*to VALLANCE*]. Stephen Philip Mortimore, 11 The Crescent, and 32 King Street, Singlehampton, printer and publisher; editor and proprietor of our Singlehampton *Times and Mirror*.

LOUISA. Author of the "History of Singlehampton and Its Surroundings"—

STEPHEN. All right, Lou.

LOUISA. With Ordnance Map

JAMES. Rose Emily Rackstraw Ponting—

ROSE. My mother was a Rackstraw.

JAMES. Wife of Arthur Everard Ponting, West Sussex Regiment, Colonel, retired, 17a Coningsby Place, South Belgrave, London. That's the lot.

ANN. No—

JAMES. Oh, there's Tad. [*To VALLANCE*] Thaddeus John Mortimore—

[THADDEUS is standing, looking on, with his elbows resting upon the back of the chair before the fireplace.]

THADDEUS. Don't forget me, Jim.

JAMES. 6 Nelson Villas, Singlehampton, professor of music. Any further particulars, Mr. Vallance?

VALLANCE [*finishing writing and leaning back in his chair*]. May I ask, Mr. Mortimore, what terms you and your sis-

ter and brothers were on with the late Mr Mortimore?

JAMES Terms?

VALLANCE What I mean is, your late brother was a man of more than ordinary intelligence; he must have known who his estate would benefit, in the event of his dying intestate.

JAMES [*with a nod*] Aye

VALLANCE. My point is, was he on such terms with you as to make it reasonably probable that he should have desired his estate to pass to those who are here?

JAMES [*rubbing his beard*]. Reasonably probable?

STEPHEN Certainly.

PONTING In my opinion, certainly

JAMES [*looking at the others*]. He sent for us when he was near his end—

STEPHEN Showing that old sores were healed—thoroughly healed—as far as he was concerned.

VALLANCE. Old sores?

JAMES He wouldn't have done that if he hadn't had a fondness for his family—eh?

ANN Of course not

LOUISA. Of course he wouldn't.

PONTING Quite so

VALLANCE. Then, I take it, there had been—er—?

STEPHEN An estrangement. Yes, there had.

JAMES Oh, I'm not one for keeping anything in the background. Up to a day or two before his death, we hadn't been on what you'd call terms with my brother for many years, Mr Vallance

STEPHEN. Unhappily.

JAMES. *De mortuis*—how's it go—?

STEPHEN. *De mortuis nil nisi bonum*.

JAMES. Well, plain English is good enough for me. [*To VALLANCE*.] But I don't attempt to deny it—at one time of his life my poor brother Edward was a bit of a scamp, sir.

STEPHEN. A little racketsy—a little wild. Young men will be young men.

ANN [*shaking her head*]. I've a grown-up son myself.

LOUISA [*inconsequently*]. And there are two sides to every question. I always say—don't I, Stephen—?

STEPHEN Yes, yes, yes.

LOUISA. There are two sides to every question.

JAMES [*to VALLANCE*]. No, sir, after Edward cleared out of Singlehampton, we didn't see him again, any of us, till about fifteen years back. Then he came to settle

here, in this city, and bought Cordingly's brewery

LOUISA Only forty miles away from his birthplace

STEPHEN Forty-two miles.

LOUISA That was fate

STEPHEN Chance

LOUISA I don't know the difference between chance and fate.

STEPHEN [*irritably*] No, you don't, Lou

JAMES Then some of us used to knock up against him occasionally—generally on the line, at Mirtlesfield junction. But it was only a nod, or a how-d'ye-do, we got from him, and it never struck us till last Tuesday morning that he kept a soft corner in his heart for us all

VALLANCE Tuesday—?

ANN. First post

JAMES. We had a letter from Elkin, telling us that poor Ned was seriously ill; and saying that he was willing to shake hands with the principal members of the family, if they chose to come through to Linchpool

STEPHEN Thank God we came.

JAMES Aye, thank God.

ANN and LOUISA Thank God

ROSE [*affectedly*]. It will always be a sorrow to me that I didn't get down till it was too late. I shall never cease to reproach myself

JAMES [*indulgently*]. Oh, well, you're a woman o' fashion, Rose.

ROSE [*with a simper*]. Still, if I had guessed the end was as near as it was, I'd have given up my social engagements without a murmur. [*Appealing to PONTING*.] Toby—!

PONTING. Without a murmur—without a murmur; both of us would.

VALLANCE [*rising, putting his notes into his pocketbook as he speaks*]. I think it would perhaps be as well that I should meet Mr. Elkin.

STEPHEN. That's the plan.

JAMES [*rising*]. Just what I was going to propose.

STEPHEN. Elkin knows that we have communicated with our solicitor.

JAMES [*looking at his watch*]. He's gone around to the Safe Deposit Company in Lemon Street

STEPHEN. His latest idea is that my brother may have rented a safe there.

PONTING. Preposterous. Never heard anything more grotesque

JAMES The old gentleman will want to drag the river Linch next.

PONTING. As if a man of wealth and

position, with safes and strong-rooms of his own, would deposit his will in a place of that sort 'Pon my word, it's outrageous of Elkin

STEPHEN. It does seem rather extravagant

ROSE Absurd

VALLANCE [*coming forward*] We must remember that it's the duty of all concerned to use every possible means of discovery. [*To JAMES*] Your brother had an office at the brewery?

JAMES Elkin and I turned that inside-out yesterday.

STEPHEN. In the presence of Mr Holt and Mr. Friswell, two of the directors

VALLANCE And his bank—?

JAMES. London City and Midland Four tin boxes We've been through 'em

STEPHEN. The most likely place of deposit, I should have thought, was the safe in this room.

PONTING Exactly The will would have been there if there had been a will at all.

[*JAMES switches on the light of the lamp which stands above the cupboard at the farther end of the dwarf-bookcase*]

JAMES [*opening the cupboard and revealing a safe*]. Yes, this is where my brother's private papers are.

STEPHEN. This was his library and sanctum.

JAMES [*listening as he shuts the cupboard door*]. Hallo! [*Opening the room door a few inches and peering into the hall*] Here is Elkin.

[*There is a slight general movement denoting intense interest and suspense.*

ANN gets to her feet. JAMES closes the door and comes forward a little—grimly.]

Well! Hey! I wonder whether he's found anything in Lemon Street?

PONTING [*clutching ROSE'S shoulder and dropping back into his chair—under his breath*]. Good God!

ANN [*staring at her husband*]. James—!

JAMES [*sternly*] Go and sit down, Mother [*ANN retreats and seats herself beside ROSE*] If he has, we ought to feel glad; that's how we ought to feel.

STEPHEN [*resentfully*] Of course we ought. That's how we shall feel.

JAMES. Poor old Ned! It's his wishes we've got to consider—[*returning to the door*—his wishes. [*Opening the door again*] Come in, Mr. Elkin. Waiting for you, sir. [*He admits ELKIN, who is a*

gray-haired, elderly man of sixty He presents VALLANCE] Mr. Vallance—Craze and Vallance, Singlehampton, our solicitors [*ELKIN advances and shakes hands with VALLANCE*] Mr. Vallance has just run over to see how we're getting on

ELKIN [*to VALLANCE, genially*]. I don't go often to Singlehampton nowadays I recollect the time, Mr Vallance, when the whole of the south side of the town was meadow-land Would you believe it—meadow-land! And where they've built the new hospital, old Dicky Dunn, the farmer, used to graze his cattle. [*JAMES touches his sleeve. He turns to JAMES*] Eh?

JAMES [*rather huskily*] Excuse me Any luck?

ELKIN Luck?

JAMES. In Lemon Street Find anything?

ELKIN [*shaking his head*] No. There is nothing there in your brother's name. [*Again there is a general movement, but this time of relief*] It was worth trying.

JAMES Oh, it was worth trying.

STEPHEN [*heartily*]. Everything's worth trying

PONTING [*jumping up*] Everything Mustn't leave a stone unturned

[*The strain being over, ROSE and ANN rise and go to the fireplace, where PONTING joins them. THADDEUS moves away and seats himself at the center window.*]

ELKIN [*sitting beside the writing-table*] This is a puzzling state of affairs, Mr. Vallance.

VALLANCE Oh, come, Mr. Elkin!

ELKIN I don't want to appear uncivil to these ladies and gentlemen—very puzzling.

VALLANCE Scarcely what one would have expected, perhaps; but what is there that's puzzling about it?

JAMES [*standing by ELKIN*] People have died intestate before to-day, Mr. Elkin

STEPHEN. It's a common enough occurrence.

VALLANCE [*to ELKIN*]. I understand you acted for the late Mr. Mortimore for a great many years?

ELKIN Ever since he came to Linchpool

VALLANCE. His most prosperous years [*ELKIN assents silently.*]

JAMES. When he was making money to leave

VALLANCE [*to ELKIN*]. And the sub-

ject of a will was never broached between you?

ELKIN. I won't say that. I've thrown out a hint or two at different times

VALLANCE. Without any response on his part?

ELKIN. Without any practical response, I admit. [*JAMES and STEPHEN shrug their shoulders.*] But he must have employed other solicitors previous to my connection with him. I can't trace his having done so, but no commercial man gets to eight-and-thirty without having something to do with us chaps.

VALLANCE [*sitting on the settee on the left*]. Assuming a will of long standing, he may have destroyed it, may he not, recently?

ELKIN. Recently?

VALLANCE. Quite recently. Here we have a man at variance with his family and dangerously ill. What do we find him doing? We find him summoning his relatives to his bedside and becoming reconciled to them—

JAMES. Completely reconciled.

STEPHEN. Completely.

ELKIN [*to VALLANCE*]. At my persuasion. I put pressure on him to send for his belongings

VALLANCE. Indeed? Granting that, isn't it reasonable to suppose that, subsequent to this reconciliation—?

ELKIN. Oh, no; he destroyed no document of any description after he took to his bed. That I've ascertained.

VALLANCE. Well, theorizing is of no use, is it? We have to deal with the simple fact, Mr. Elkin.

JAMES. Yes, that's all we have to deal with.

STEPHEN. The simple fact.

ELKIN. No will.

PONTING [*who, with the rest, has been following the conversation between ELKIN and VALLANCE*]. No will.

ELKIN [*after a pause*]. Do you know, Mr. Vallance, there is one thing I shouldn't have been unprepared for?

VALLANCE. What?

ELKIN. A will drawn by another solicitor, behind my back, *during* my association with Mr. Mortimore.

VALLANCE. Behind your back?

ELKIN. He was a most attractive creature—one of the most engaging and one of the ablest, I've ever come across; but he was remarkably secretive with me in matters relating to his private affairs—remarkably secretive.

VALLANCE. Secretive?

ELKIN Reserved, if you like. Why, it wasn't till a few days before his death—last Saturday—it wasn't till last Saturday that he first spoke to me about this child of his.

VALLANCE Child?

ELKIN. This young lady we are going to see presently

VALLANCE [*looking at JAMES and STEPHEN*]. Oh, I—I haven't heard anything of her

ELKIN Bless me, haven't you been told?

JAMES [*uncomfortably*]. We hadn't got as far as that with Mr. Vallance.

STEPHEN [*clearing his throat*]. Mr. Elkin did not think fit to inform us of her existence till yesterday.

JAMES [*looking at his watch*]. Twelve o'clock she's due, isn't she?

ELKIN [*to James*]. You fixed the hour. [*To VALLANCE*] I wrote to her at the same time that I communicated with her brothers Unfortunately, she was away, visiting

STEPHEN. She's studying painting at one of those art-schools in Paris

ELKIN. She arrived last night. Mrs. Elkin and I received her. Only four-and-twenty. A nice girl

VALLANCE. Is her mother living?

ELKIN. No.

JAMES. The mother was a person of the name of Thornhill.

STEPHEN. Calling herself Thornhill—some woman in London She died when the child was quite small.

JAMES [*with a jerk of the head towards the safe*]. There's a bundle of the mother's letters in the safe

ELKIN. This meeting with the family is my arranging. As matters stand, Miss Thornhill is absolutely unprovided for, Mr. Vallance. And there was the utmost affection between Mr Mortimore and his daughter—as he acknowledged her to be—undoubtedly. Now you won't grumble at me for my use of the word "puzzling"?

VALLANCE [*looking round*]. I am sure my clients, should the responsibility ultimately rest with them, will do what is just and fitting with regard to the young lady.

JAMES More than just—more than just, if it's left to me.

STEPHEN. We should be only too anxious to behave in a liberal manner, Mr. Vallance

LOUISA. We're parents ourselves—all except Colonel and Mrs. Ponting.

ANN. My own girl—my Cissy—is nearly four-and-twenty.

ROSE [*seated upon the fender-stool*] I suppose we should have to make her an allowance of sorts, shouldn't we?

JAMES A monthly allowance.

STEPHEN. Monthly or quarterly.

PONTING. Yes, but this art-school in Paris—you've no conception what that kind of fun runs into

JAMES. Schooling doesn't go on forever, Colonel.

PONTING But it'll lead to an *atelier*—a studio—if you're not careful

ROSE. The art-school could be dropped, surely?

STEPHEN. Perhaps the art-school isn't strictly necessary.

ROSE. And she has an address in a most expensive quarter of Paris—didn't you say, Jim?

JAMES. The Colonel says it's a swell locality.

PONTING. Most expensive. The father—if he *was* her father—seems to have squandered money on her.

STEPHEN. Well, well, we shall see what's to be done

PONTING. Squandered money on her recklessly.

JAMES. Yes, yes, we'll see, Colonel; we'll see.

[*PHYLLIS, who has taken no part in what has been going on, suddenly rises. She is a woman of thirty-five, white-faced and faded, but with decided traces of beauty. Everybody looks at her in surprise.*]

PHYLLIS [*falteringly*]. I—I beg your pardon—

LOUISA [*startled*]. Good gracious me Phyllis!

PHYLLIS [*gaining firmness as she proceeds*]. I beg your pardon With every respect for Rose and Colonel Ponting, if we come into Edward Mortimore's money, we mustn't let it make an atom of difference to the child.

LOUISA Really, Phyllis!

STEPHEN [*stiffly*]. My dear Phyllis—

JAMES [*half amused, half contemptuously*] Oh, we mustn't, mustn't we, Phyllis?

PHYLLIS He was awfully devoted to her in his lifetime, it turns out. Colonel Ponting and Rose ought to remember that.

PONTING [*walking away in umbrage to the window on the left, followed by ROSE*]. Thank you, Mrs. Thaddeus.

THADDEUS [*having risen and come to the writing-table*]. Phyl—Phyl—

PHYLLIS [*to JAMES and STEPHEN*].

Jim—Stephen—you couldn't stint the girl after pocketing your brother's money; you couldn't do it!

ANN James—

JAMES. Eh, Mother?

ANN. I don't think we need to be taught our duty by Phyllis.

STEPHEN [*rising and going over to the fireplace*]. Frankly, I don't think we need.

LOUISA [*following him*]. Before Mr. Elkin and Mr. Vallance!

THADDEUS Stephen—Lou—you don't understand Phyl.

JAMES It isn't for want of plain speaking, Tad.

THADDEUS [*sitting at the writing-table*]. No, but listen—Jim—

JAMES [*joining those at the fireplace*]. Blessed if I've ever been spoken to in this style in my life!

THADDEUS. Jim, listen. If we come into Ned's money, we come into his debts into the bargain. There are no assets without liabilities The girl's a debt—a big debt, as it were Well, what does she cost? Five hundred a year? Six—seven—eight hundred a year? What's it matter? What would a thousand a year matter? Whatever Ned could afford, *we* could, amongst us. Why he should have neglected to make Miss Thornhill independent is a mystery—I'm with you there, Mr. Elkin. Perhaps his sending for us, and shaking hands with us as he did, was his way of giving her into our charge. Heaven knows what was in his mind. But this is certain—if it falls to our lot to administer to Ned's estate, we administer, not only to the money, but to the girl, and the art-school, and her comfortable lodgings, and anything else in reason. There's nothing offensive in our saying this.

ELKIN Not in the least.

THADDEUS [*with a deprecating little laugh*] Ha! We don't often put our oar into family discussions, Phyl and I. Stephen—[*turning in his chair*—Rosie—

JAMES [*looking down on THADDEUS—grinning*] Hallo, Tad! Why, I've always had the credit of being the speaker o' the family. You're developing all of a sudden.

[*HEATH enters*]

HEATH [*looking round the room*]. Mrs. Thaddeus Mortimore—?

THADDEUS [*pointing to PHYLLIS, who is now seated in a chair on the right*]. Here she is.

HEATH [*in a hushed voice*]. Two young ladies from Roper's to fit Mrs. Thaddeus Mortimore with her mourning.

THADDEUS [*rising*]. They weren't

ready for Phyllis at ten o'clock. [*Over his shoulder as he joins PHYLLIS at the door.*] Hope you don't object to their waiting on her here

HEATH [*to THADDEUS*] On the first floor, sir.

[*PHYLLIS and THADDEUS go out.*

HEATH is following them]

VALLANCE [*to HEATH, rising*]. Er— [*to ELKIN*]. What's his name?

ELKIN [*calling to HEATH, who returns*] Heath—

VALLANCE [*going to HEATH*] Have you a room where Mr Elkin and I can be alone for a few minutes?

HEATH. There's the dining-room, sir.

VALLANCE [*turning to ELKIN*]. Shall we have a little chat together?

ELKIN [*rising*]. By all means

VALLANCE [*to the others*]. Will you excuse us?

ELKIN [*taking VALLANCE'S arm*] Come along. [*Passing out with VALLANCE—regretfully.*] Ah, Heath, the dining-room . . . !

HEATH [*as he disappears, closing the door*] Yes, Mr. Elkin, that's over, sir.

JAMES. What have those two got to say to each other on the quiet in such a deuce of a hurry?

PONTING. My dear good friends, I beg you won't think me too presuming . . .

JAMES [*sourly*]. What is it, Colonel?

PONTING. But you mustn't, you really mustn't allow yourselves to be dictated to—bullied—

JAMES. Bullied?

PONTING. Into doing anything that isn't perfectly agreeable to you.

STEPHEN. You consider we're being bullied, Colonel?

JAMES. If it comes to bullying—

PONTING. It has come to bullying, if I'm any judge of bullying First, you have Mr. Elkin, a meddlesome, obstructive—

STEPHEN [*sitting at the writing-table*] Oh, he's obviously antagonistic to us, obviously.

PONTING. Of course he is. He sniffs a little job of work over this Miss Thornhill. It's his policy to cram Miss Thornhill down our throats. That's his game

JAMES [*between his teeth*]. By George—!

PONTING. And then you get Mr. Vallance, your own lawyer—

JAMES [*sitting*]. Aye, I'm a bit disappointed with Vallance.

PONTING. Dogmatizing about what is just and what is fitting—

STEPHEN. Hear, hear, Colonel! You

don't pay a solicitor to take sides against you.

JAMES. As if we couldn't be trusted to do the fair thing of our own accord!

PONTING. The upshot being that Miss Thornhill, supported openly by the one and tacitly by the other, will be marching in here and—and—

JAMES. Kicking up a rumpus.

PONTING. I shouldn't be surprised

LOUISA. A rumpus! She wouldn't dare!

ANN. That would be terrible—a rumpus—

ROSE. I shouldn't be surprised either. You mustn't expect too much, you know, from a girl who's . . .

STEPHEN [*interpreting ROSE'S shrug*]. Illegitimate

ANN. No, I suppose we oughtn't to expect her to be the same as our children.

PONTING. And finally, to cap it all, you have your brother Thaddeus—your brother—

JAMES. Ha, yes! Tad obliged us with a pretty stiff lecture, didn't he?

LOUISA. So did Phyllis.

ANN [*seating herself beside LOUISA*]. It was Phyllis who began it.

ROSE [*swaying herself to and fro upon the back of the chair next to the writing-table*]. Tad's wife! She's a suitable person to be lectured by, I must say.

STEPHEN. Poor old Tad! He was only trying to excuse her rudeness.

ROSE. Just fancy! The two Tads sharing equally with ourselves!

STEPHEN. It is curious, at first sight.

ROSE. Extraordinary

STEPHEN. But, naturally, the law makes no distinctions.

ROSE. No. It was the lady's method of announcing that she's as good as we are.

JAMES. Tad and his wife with forty or fifty thousand pound, p'raps, to play with! So the world wags

ROSE. Positively maddening.

LOUISA. We shall see Phyllis aping us now more than ever.

ANN. And making that boy and girl of hers still more conceited.

LOUISA. They needn't let apartments any longer; that's a mercy.

ANN. We shall be spared that disgrace.

JAMES. Strong language, Mother!

STEPHEN. Hardly disgrace. You can't call the curate of their parish church a lodger in the ordinary sense of the term.

LOUISA. Phyllis's girl might make a match of it with Mr. Trist in a couple of years' time. She's fifteen.

ANN. A forward fifteen.

ROSE It's a fairy story. A woman who's brought nothing but the worst of luck to Tad from the day he married her!

JAMES The devil's luck.

STEPHEN Been his ruin—his ruin professionally—without the shadow of a doubt.

LOUISA Such a good-looking fellow he used to be, too

ANN. Handsome.

LOUISA [*archly*]. It was Tad I fell in love with, Stephen—not with you.

STEPHEN. And popular. *He'd* have had the conductorship of the choral societies but for his mistake; Rawlinson would never have had it. Councillor Pritchard admitted as much at a committee-meeting.

PONTING [*seated upon the settee on the right*] Butcher—the wife's father—wasn't he?

ROSE. Just as bad Old Burdock kept a grocer's shop at the corner of East Street

STEPHEN West Street.

ROSE. West Street, was it? She's the common or garden over-educated petty-tradesman's daughter

JAMES [*oratorically*] No, no; you can't overeducate, Rose. You can *wrongly* educate —

ROSE. Oh, don't start that, Jim. [*To PONTING*] She was a pupil of Tad's.

STEPHEN [*holding up his hands*] Marriage—marriage —!

LOUISA. Stephen!

JAMES. If it isn't the right sort o' marriage!

STEPHEN Poor old Tad!

JAMES. *Rich* old Tad to-day, though! [*Chuckling*] Ha, ha!

ROSE [*glancing at the door*]. Sssh!

[*THADDEUS returns The others look down their noses or at distant objects*]

THADDEUS [*closing the door and advancing*]. I—I hope you're not angry with Phyllis.

STEPHEN [*resignedly*]. Angry?

THADDEUS. Or with me.

ANN. Anger would be out of place in a house of mourning.

JAMES Women's tongues, Tad!

STEPHEN. Yes; the ladies—they will make mischief.

LOUISA. Not every woman, Stephen.

THADDEUS. Phyllis hasn't the slightest desire to make mischief. Why on earth should Phyl want to make mischief? [*Sitting in the chair in the middle of the room.*] She's a little nervy—a little unstrung; that's what's the matter with Phyllis.

LOUISA. There's no cause for *her* to be specially upset that I can think of.

ANN *She* didn't know Edward in the o'd days as we did.

THADDEUS. No, but being with him on Wednesday night, when the change came—that's affected her very deeply, poor girl; bowled her over [*To ROSE*] She helped to nurse him.

ROSE [*indifferently*]. One of the nurses cracked up, didn't she?

JAMES The night-nurse.

THADDEUS [*nodding*]. Sent word late on Wednesday afternoon that she couldn't attend to her duties.

STEPHEN The day-nurse knocking off at eight o'clock! Dreadful!

THADDEUS. There we were, rushing about all over the place—all over the place—to find a substitute.

JAMES And no success.

THADDEUS [*rubbing his knees*] That's where Phyllis came in handy, there's where Phyl came in handy.

LOUISA. Phyllis hadn't more than two hours of it, while Ann and I were resting, when all's said and done

ANN Not more than two or three hours alone, at the outside.

THADDEUS. No; but, as I say, it was during those two or three hours that the change set in It's been a shock to her.

LOUISA The truth is, Phyllis delights in making a fuss, Tad.

THADDEUS. Phyl!

ANN *She* loves to make a martyr of herself

THADDEUS. Phyl does!

LOUISA *You* delight to make a martyr of her, then, perhaps that's it.

ANN I suppose you do it to hide her faults.

LOUISA It would be far more sensible of you, Tad, to strive to correct them —

ANN. If it's not too late—far more sensible.

LOUISA. And teach her a different system of managing her home —

ANN And how to bring up her children more in keeping with their position —

LOUISA With less pride and display.

ANN. They treat their *cousins* precisely like dirt.

LOUISA. Dirt under the foot.

ANN. Why Phyllis can't be satisfied with a cook-general passes my comprehension —

ROSE [*wearily*]. Oh, shut up!

JAMES Steady, Mother!

THADDEUS [*looking at them all*]. Ah, you've never liked Phyllis from the beginning, any of you.

LOUISA. Never liked her!

THADDEUS Never cottoned to her, never appreciated her Oh, I know—old Mr. Burdock's shop! [Simply] Well, Ann; well, Lou; shop or no shop, there's no better wife—no better woman—breathing than Phyl.

LOUISA One may like a person without being blind to shortcomings

ANN Nobody's flawless, nobody

LOUISA There are two sides to every person as well as to every question, I always maintain

THADDEUS. However, maybe it won't matter so much in the future. It hasn't made things easier for us in the past. [Snapping his fingers softly] But now —

STEPHEN [caustically]. Henceforth you and your wife will be above the critical opinion of others, eh, Tad?

JAMES Aye, Tad's come into money now. Mind what you're at, Mother! Be careful, Lou! Tad's come into money

THADDEUS [in a quiet voice, but clenching his hands tightly]. My God, I hope I have! I'm not a hypocrite, Jim. My God, I hope I have!

[The door opens and ELKIN appears]

ELKIN Miss Thornhill is here. [There is a general movement. THADDEUS walks away to the fireplace JAMES, STEPHEN, and PONTING also rise and ROSE joins PONTING at the library-table. ANN and LOUISA shake out their skirts formidably, their husbands taking up a position near them. HELEN THORNHILL enters, followed by VALLANCE, who closes the door. ELKIN presents HELEN.] Miss Thornhill. [To HELEN, pointing to the group on the left] These gentlemen are the late Mr Mortimore's brothers. [Pointing to ROSE] His sister.

HELEN [a graceful, brilliant-looking girl with perfectly refined manners, wearing an elegant traveling-dress—almost inaudibly] Oh, yes.

ELKIN [with a wave of the hand towards the others]. Members of the family by marriage.

[She sits, at ELKIN'S invitation, in the chair beside the writing-table. The attitude of the JAMES and STEPHEN MORTIMORES, and of the PONTINGS, undergoes a marked change.]

JAMES [after a pause, advancing a step or two]. I'm the eldest brother. [Awkwardly.] James, I am.

STEPHEN [drawing attention to himself by an uneasy cough]. Stephen.

ANN [humbly]. I'm Mrs. James.

LOUISA [in the same tone] Mrs. Stephen.

ROSE [seating herself at the left of the library-table] Rose—Mrs Ponting [Glancing at PONTING] My husband.

THADDEUS [now standing behind the writing-table] Thaddeus My wife is upstairs trying on her —

[He checks himself and retreats, again sitting at the center window]

[HELEN receives these various announcements with a dignified inclination of the head]

JAMES [seating himself at the writing-table; to HELEN] Tired, I dessay?

HELEN A little.

STEPHEN [bringing forward the armchair from the fireplace] You weren't in Paris, Mr. Elkin tells us, when his letter —?

HELEN. No; I was nearly a nine hours' journey from Paris, staying with friends at St. Etienne.

ROSE A pity.

LOUISA Great pity

HELEN Mr. Elkin's letter was re-posted and reached me on Wednesday. I got back to Paris that night

ELKIN [seating himself beside her]. And had a hard day's traveling again yesterday.

STEPHEN [sitting in the armchair] She must be worn out

ANN. Indeed she must

PONTING [sitting by ROSE]. Hot weather, too. Most exhausting.

ELKIN [to HELEN]. And you were out and about this morning with Mrs. Elkin before eight, I heard?

HELEN She brought me round here

ELKIN [sympathetically] Ah, yes.

JAMES Round here? [ELKIN motions significantly towards the ceiling] Oh—aye. [After another pause, to HELEN.] When did you see him last—alive?

HELEN. In April. He spent Easter with me. [Unobtrusively opening a little bag which she carries and taking out a handkerchief.] We always spent our holidays together. [Drying her eyes] I was to have met him at Rouen on the fifteenth of next month; we were going to Etretat.

ELKIN [after a further silence]. Er—h'm!—the principal business we are here to discuss is, I presume, the question of Miss Thornhill's future.

HELEN [quickly]. Oh, no, please.

ELKIN. No?

HELEN If you don't mind, I would rather my future were taken for granted, Mr. Elkin, without any discussion.

ELKIN. Taken for granted?

HELEN I am no worse off than thou—

sands of other young women who are suddenly thrown upon their own resources I'm a great deal better off than many, for there's a calling already open to me—art. My prospects don't daunt me in the least

ELKIN No, no, nobody wants to discourage you—

HELEN [*interrupting ELKIN*]. I confess—I confess I am disappointed—hurt—that Father hasn't made even a slight provision for me—not for the money's sake, but because—because I meant so much to him, I've always believed He *would* have made me secure if he had lived longer, I am convinced.

ELKIN [*soothingly*]. Not improbable, not improbable.

HELEN But I don't intend to let my mind dwell on that. What I do intend to think is that, in leaving me with merely my education and the capacity for earning my living, he has done more for my happiness—my real happiness—than if he had left me every penny he possessed. With no incentive to work, I might have drifted by and by into an idle, aimless life I *should* have done so.

STEPHEN. A very rational view to take of it.

PONTING Admirable!

[*There is a nodding of heads and a murmur of approval from the ladies.*]

ELKIN. Very admirable and praiseworthy [*To the others, diplomatically*] But we are not to conclude that Miss Thornhill declines to entertain the idea of some—some arrangement which would enable her to embark upon her artistic career—

HELEN Yes, you are I don't need assistance, and I couldn't accept it. [*Flaring up.*] I will accept nothing that hasn't come to me direct from my father—nothing. [*Softening.*] But I am none the less grateful to you, dear Mr. Elkin—[*looking round*—to everybody—for this kindness.

STEPHEN [*with a sigh*]. So be it; so be it, if it must be so

PONTING We don't wish to *force* assistance upon Miss Thornhill.

STEPHEN. On the contrary; we respect her independence of character.

[*ELKIN shrugs his shoulders at VAL-LANCE, who is now seated upon the settee on the right.*]

JAMES [*stroking his beard*] Art—art. You've been studying painting, haven't you?

HELEN. At Julian's, in the Rue de Berri, for three years—for pleasure, I imagined.

JAMES [*glancing furtively at ANN*]

D've do oil portraits—family groups and so on?

HELEN I'm not very successful as a colorist. Black and white is what I am best at

JAMES [*dubiously*] Black and white—

STEPHEN. Is there much demand for that form of art in Paris?

HELEN. Paris? Oh, I shall come to London

JAMES. London, eh?

HELEN. My drawing isn't quite good enough for over there It's only good enough for England I shall sell my jewelry and furniture—I'm sharing a flat in the Avenue de Messine with an American girl—and that will carry me along excellently till I'm fairly started Oh, I shall do very well.

ROSE. I live in London. My house will be somewhere for you to drop into, whenever you feel inclined

HELEN Thank you.

PONTING [*pulling at his mustache*]. Often as you like—often as you like—

ROSE [*loftily*]. As I am in "society," as they call it, that will be nice for you.

JAMES [*to ANN*] Now, then, Mother, don't you be behindhand—

ANN I'm sure I shall be very pleased if Miss Thornton—[*a murmur*]—Thornhill— If she'll pay us a visit. We're homely people, but she and Cissy would play tennis all day long.

LOUISA If she does come to Singlehampton, she mustn't go away without staying a day or two in the Crescent [*To HELEN*] Do you play chess, dear? [*HELEN shakes her head*] My husband will teach you—won't you, Stephen?

STEPHEN Honored

THADDEUS [*having risen and come forward*]. I'm sorry my wife isn't here. We should be grieved if Miss Thornhill left us out in the cold.

HELEN [*looking at him with interest*]. You are Father's musical brother, aren't you?

THADDEUS. Yes—Tad.

HELEN [*with a faint smile*]. I promise not to leave you out in the cold [*To everybody*] I can only repeat, I am most grateful. [*To ELKIN, about to rise.*] Mrs. Elkin is waiting for me, to take me to the dressmaker—

ELKIN [*detaining her*]. One moment—one moment [*To the others*] Gentlemen, Mr. Vallance and I have had our little talk, and we agree that the proper course to pursue in the matter of the late Mr. Mortimore's estate is to proceed at once to

insert an advertisement in the public journals.

JAMES. An advertisement?

ELKIN With the object of obtaining information respecting any will which he may have made at any time.

JAMES [after a pause] Oh—very good.

STEPHEN [coldly]. Does Mr. Vallance really advise that this is the proper course? [VALLANCE rises and THADDEUS again retires]

VALLANCE [assentingly]. In the peculiar circumstances of the case.

ELKIN. We propose to go a step further. We propose to circularize.

JAMES. Circularize?

PONTING [disturbed]. What the dev—what's that?

ELKIN. We propose to address a circular to every solicitor in the law-list asking for such information.

HELEN. Is that necessary?

ELKIN. Mr. Vallance will tell us—

VALLANCE. It comes under the head of taking all reasonable measures to find a will.

HELEN [looking round]. I—I sincerely hope that no one will think that it is on my behalf that Mr. Elkin—

ELKIN [checking her]. My dear, these are formal, and amicable, proceedings, to which everybody, we suggest, should be a party.

VALLANCE. Everybody.

ELKIN [invitingly]. Everybody.

JAMES [breaking a chilly silence]. All right. Go ahead, Mr. Elkin. [To STEPHEN]. We're willing?

STEPHEN. Why not; why not? Rose—?

ROSE [hastily]. Oh, certainly.

VALLANCE [to JAMES] I have your authority, Mr. Mortimore, for acting with Mr. Elkin in this matter?

JAMES. You have, sir.

ELKIN [to VALLANCE, rising]. Will you come round to my office with me?

[HELEN rises with ELKIN, whereupon the other men get to their feet ANN and LOUISA also rise as HELEN comes to them and offers her hand.]

ANN [shaking hands]. We're at the Grand Hotel—

LOUISA [shaking hands]. So am I and my husband.

HELEN. I'll call, if I may.

[She shakes hands with STEPHEN and JAMES and goes to ROSE].

ROSE [rising to shake hands with her] We're at the Grand, too. Colonel Ponting and I would be delighted—

PONTING Delighted.

[HELEN merely bows to PONTING; then she shakes hands with THADDEUS and passes out into the hall.]

ELKIN [having opened the door for HELEN—to everybody, genially]. Good day, good day

JAMES and STEPHEN Good day, Mr Elkin. Good day.

[ELKIN follows HELEN.]

VALLANCE [at the door—to JAMES and STEPHEN]. Where can I see you later?

JAMES. The Grand. Food at half-past one.

VALLANCE Thank you very much.

[He bows to the ladies and withdraws, closing the door after him.]

PONTING [pacing the room indignantly]. I wouldn't give the fellow so much as a dry biscuit!

[There is a general break-up, ANN and LOUISA joining ROSE on the right.]

JAMES [pacifically]. Oh, there's no occasion to upset yourself, Colonel.

PONTING [on the left]. I wouldn't! I wouldn't! He's against us on every point

JAMES. Let 'em advertise, if it amuses 'em. [In an outburst] Let 'em advertise and circularize till they're blue in the face

ROSE [with a shrill laugh]. Jim! Ha! ha! ha!

ANN and LOUISA [solemnly] Hus—s—sh!

JAMES [dropping to a whisper]. Oh, I—I forgot.

STEPHEN. Yes, yes, yes; it's nothing more than a lawyer's trick, to swell their bill of costs.

JAMES. Of course it isn't; of course it isn't. [Passing his hand under his beard] I want some air, Mother. Get out o' this.

ANN [fastening her mantle]. You've an appointment at the tailor's, remember

STEPHEN [looking at his watch]. So have I.

JAMES Are you coming, Colonel? [Finding himself in the center of a group—with a change of manner.] I say what

a beautiful girl, this girl of Ned's!

STEPHEN. Exceedingly.

PONTING [producing his cigarette case]. Charming young woman.

ANN and LOUISA. Lovely. A lovely girl.

ROSE. Quite presentable.

JAMES. And she doesn't ask a shilling of us—not a bob.

STEPHEN. She impressed me enormously.

PONTING [*with an unlighted cigarette in his mouth*] Charming, charming.

JAMES Ned ought to have left her a bit, he ought to have left her a bit [*Resolutely*] Mother—we'll have her down home

STEPHEN We must tell some fib or other as to who she is Yes, we'll show her a little hospitality.

PONTING. And Rose—in London. That'll make it up to her

ROSE. Yes, that'll make it up to her.

[*The ladies move into the hall; the men follow JAMES is standing in the doorway and speaks to THADDEUS, who is now seated at the writing-table*]

JAMES Tad, I'll stand you and your wife a good lunch. One-thirty.

[*THADDEUS nods acceptance, and JAMES goes after the others. THADDEUS rises, and, looking through the blind of the middle window, watches them depart Presently PHYLLIS appears, putting on her gloves*]

PHYLLIS [*at the door, drawing a breath of relief*]. They've gone

THADDEUS [*turning*]. Is that you, Phyl?

PHYLLIS [*coming farther into the room*]. I've been waiting on the landing.

THADDEUS Why didn't you come back, dear? You've missed Miss Thornhill.

PHYLLIS [*walking away to the left, working at the fingers of a glove*] Yes, I—I know.

THADDEUS. The very person we were all here to meet.

PHYLLIS I—I came over nervous. [*Eagerly*.] What is she like?

THADDEUS Such an aristocratic-looking girl.

PHYLLIS Is she—is she?

THADDEUS. I'll tell you all about her by and by [*Pushing the door to and coming to PHYLLIS, anxiously*] What do you think they're going to do now, Phyl?

PHYLLIS. Who?

THADDEUS. The lawyers. They're going to advertise.

PHYLLIS Advertise?

THADDEUS. In the papers—to try to discover a will

PHYLLIS. I—I suppose that's a mere matter of form?

THADDEUS. Elkin and Vallance say so. According to Stephen, it's simply a lawyer's dodge to run up costs. [*Brightening*] Anyhow, we mustn't complain, where a big estate is involved . . .

PHYLLIS Is it—such a—big estate?

THADDEUS. Guess.

PHYLLIS. I can't.

THADDEUS [*coming closer to her*] I heard Elkin's managing-clerk tell Jim and the Colonel this morning that poor Ned may have died worth anything between a hundred and fifty and two hundred thousand pounds

PHYLLIS [*famly*]. Two hundred thousand——!

THADDEUS. Yes.

PHYLLIS Oh, Tad——!

[*She sits, on the settee on the left, leaning her head upon her hands*]

THADDEUS. Splitting the difference, and allowing for death duties, our share would be close upon forty thousand. To be on the safe side, put it at thirty-nine thousand Thirty-nine thousand pounds! [*Moving about the room excitedly*.] I've been reckoning. Invest that at four per cent—one is justified in a calculating upon a four per cent basis—invest thirty-nine thousand at four per cent, and there you have an income of over fifteen hundred a year Fifteen hundred a year! [*Returning to her*.] When we die, seven hundred and fifty a year for Joyce, seven hundred and fifty for Cyril! [*She rises quickly and clings to him, burying her head upon his shoulder and clutching at the lapel of his coat*.] Poor old lady! [*Putting his arms round her*.] Poor old lady! You've gone through such a lot, haven't you?

PHYLLIS [*sobbing*]. We both have.

THADDEUS. Sixteen years of it.

PHYLLIS Sixteen years

THADDEUS. Of struggle—struggle and failure.

PHYLLIS. Failure brought upon you by your wife—by me.

THADDEUS. Nonsense—nonsense——

PHYLLIS. You always call it nonsense; you know it's true. If you hadn't married me—if you'd married a girl of better family—you wouldn't have lost caste in the town——

THADDEUS. Hush, hush! Don't cry, Phyl, don't cry, old lady.

PHYLLIS You'd have had the choral societies, and the High School, and the organ at All Saints; you'd have been at the top of the tree long ago You know you would!

THADDEUS [*rallying her*]. And if you hadn't married me you might have captivated a gay young officer at Claybrook and got to London eventually. Rose did it, and you might have done it. So that makes us quits Don't cry.

PHYLLIS [*gradually regaining her com-*

posure] There was a young fellow at the barracks who was after me.

THADDEUS [*nodding*]. You were prettier than Rose, a smarter girl altogether.

PHYLLIS [*drying her eyes*] I'll be smart again now, dear. I'm only thirty-five. What's thirty-five?

THADDEUS. The children won't swallow up everything now, will they?

PHYLLIS No, but Joyce shall look sweeter and daintier than ever, though.

THADDEUS. Cyril shall have a first-class, public-school education; that I'm determined upon. There's Rugby—Rugby's the nearest—or Malvern—

PHYLLIS [*with a catch in her breath*]. Oh, but Tad—we'll leave Singlehampton, won't we?

THADDEUS. Permanently?

PHYLLIS. Yes—yes—

THADDEUS. Won't that be rather a mistake?

PHYLLIS. A mistake!

THADDEUS. Just as we're able to hold up our heads in the town.

PHYLLIS. We should never be able to hold up our heads in Singlehampton. If we were clothed in gold we should still be lepers underneath, the curse would still rest on us.

THADDEUS [*bewildered*]. But where—where shall we—?

PHYLLIS. I don't care—anywhere. [*Passionately*]. Anywhere where I'm not sneered at for bringing up my children decently, and for making my home more tasteful than my neighbors'; anywhere where it isn't known that I'm the daughter of a small shopkeeper—the daughter of "old Burdock of West Street"! [*Imploringly*] O Tad—

THADDEUS. You're right. Nothing is ever forgiven you in the place you're born in. We'll clear out.

PHYLLIS [*slipping her arm through his*]. When—when will you get me away?

THADDEUS. Directly, directly; as soon as the lawyers—

[*He pauses, looking at her blankly*.]

PHYLLIS [*frightened*]. What's the matter?

THADDEUS. We—we're talking as if—as if Ned's money is already ours!

PHYLLIS [*withdrawing her arm—steadily*]. It will be

THADDEUS. Will it, do you think?

PHYLLIS [*with an expressionless face*]. I prophesy—it will be

[*HEATH enters, and, seeing THADDEUS and PHYLLIS, draws back*.]

HEATH. I'm sorry, sir. I thought the room was empty

THADDEUS. We're going [*As he and PHYLLIS pass out into the hall*]. Don't come to the door.

HEATH. Thank you, sir

[*HEATH quietly and methodically replaces the chair at the window on the right. Then, after a last look round, he switches off the lights and leaves the room again in gloom*.]

ACT II

It is a month later.

The drawing-room of a modern, cheaply built villa, the residence of the THADDEUS MORTIMORES, in the town of Singlehampton. In the wall at the back are two windows. One is a bay-window provided with a window-seat; the other, the window on the right, opens to the ground into a small garden. At the bottom of the garden a paling runs from left to right, and in the paling there is a gate which gives access to a narrow lane. Beyond are the gardens and backs of other houses.

The fireplace is on the right of the room, the door on the left. A grand piano-forte, with its head towards the windows, and a music-stool occupy the middle of the room. On the right of the music-stool there is an armchair, and against the piano, facing the fireplace, there is a settee. Another settee is at the farther end of the fireplace, and on the nearer side, opposite this settee, is an armchair. Also on the right hand there is a round table. An ottoman, opposing the settee by the piano, stands close to the table.

At the end of the piano there is a small table with an armchair on its right and left, and on the extreme left of the room stands another armchair with a still smaller table beside it. On the left of the bay-window there is a writing-table, and in front of the writing-table, but turned to the window, a chair. Other articles of furniture fill spaces against the walls.

There is a mirror over the fireplace and a clock on the mantel-shelf, and lying upon the round table are a hat and a pair of gloves belonging to HELEN. Some flowers in pots hide the empty grate

The room and everything in the room are eloquent of narrow means, if not of

actual poverty. But the way in which the cheap furniture is dressed up, and the manner of its arrangement about the room, give evidence of taste and refinement.

The garden is full of the bright sunshine of a fine July afternoon.

-HELEN, engaged in making a sketch of JOYCE and CYRIL, who are facing her, is sitting in the chair on the right of the table at the end of the piano. A drawing-block is on her knees and a box of crayons is on the table at her elbow. JOYCE is a slim, serious girl of fifteen; CYRIL, a handsome boy of fourteen.

HELEN and the THADDEUS MORTIMORES are dressed in mourning, but not oppressively so.

THADDEUS is at the piano, accompanying a sentimental ballad which TRIST, standing beside him, is singing. TRIST is a big, healthy-looking, curly-headed young fellow in somewhat shabby clerical clothes. PHYLLIS, looking more haggard than when last seen, is on the settee by the fireplace. Her hands lie idly upon some needlework in her lap, and she is in deep thought.

THADDEUS [starting afresh with the symphony]. Once more . . .

HELEN [to the children, softly]. Do you want a rest?

CYRIL [standing close to his sister]. No, thanks.

JOYCE [in the chair at the extreme left]. Oh, no; don't give us a rest.

[As the symphony ends, the door opens a little way, and JAMES pops his head in.]

JAMES. Hallo!

THADDEUS. Hallo, Jim!

[JAMES enters, followed by STEPHEN; both with an air of bustle and self-importance. They also are in mourning, are gloved, and are wearing their hats, which they remove on entering.]

STEPHEN. May we come in?

JAMES. Good afternoon, Mr. Trist.

STEPHEN. How do you do, Mr. Trist?

TRIST [to JAMES and STEPHEN].

How are you; how are you?

JAMES [to the children, kissing JOYCE] Well, kids! [Shaking hands with HELEN] Well, my dear! [Crossing to PHYLLIS, who rises] Don't get up, Phyllis. What's this? You're not very bob-bish, I hear.

PHYLLIS [nervously]. It's nothing.

THADDEUS [studying his music]. She's sleeping badly just now, poor old lady.

STEPHEN [who has greeted HELEN and the children—to PHYLLIS]. Oh, Phyllis, Louisa has discovered a wonderful cure for sleeplessness at the herb-alist's in Crown Street. A few dried leaves merely. You strew them under the bed and the effect is magical.

JAMES. Glass of warm milk's my remedy—

STEPHEN. Eighteen-pence an ounce, it costs.

JAMES. Not that sleeplessness bothers me.

PHYLLIS [sitting on the ottoman and resuming her work—to STEPHEN]. Thank you for telling me about it.

JAMES [to HELEN]. Making quite a long stay here.

HELEN [smiling]. Am I not?

STEPHEN. You and Phyllis, Tad, are more honored than we were at the Crescent.

JAMES. Or we were at the "Ivanhoe" She was only a couple of nights with us.

STEPHEN. Less with us. She arrived one morning and left the next.

JAMES [to HELEN]. Been in Nelson Villas over a week, haven't you?

HELEN [touching her drawing]. Is it more than a week?

JAMES [looking at HELEN'S drawing]. Taking the youngsters' portraits, too.

STEPHEN [also looking at the drawing]. H'm! I suppose children are difficult subjects.

TRIST [moving towards the door—to HELEN]. Miss Thornhill, don't forget your engagement.

HELEN [to JOYCE and CYRIL]. Mr. Trist is going to treat us to the flower-show by and by.

CYRIL. Good man!

JOYCE. Oh, Mr. Trist!

STEPHEN [to TRIST]. Not driving you away, I hope?

TRIST [at the door]. No, no; I've some work to do.

[He withdraws. STEPHEN puts his hat on the top of the piano.]

JAMES [after watching the door close]. Decent sort o' young man, that; nothing of the lodger about him.

STEPHEN. I've always said so [To THADDEUS, lowering his voice] Mr. Trist knows how—er—h'm—poor Edward left his affairs?

THADDEUS. Everybody does; it's all over the town.

STEPHEN [*resignedly*] Yes, impossible to keep it to ourselves

JAMES Thanks to their precious advertisement [*To JOYCE and CYRIL, loudly*] Now, then, children; be off with you! I want to talk to your father and mother

JOYCE [*to HELEN*]. Will you excuse us?

CYRIL. Awfully sorry, Helen

[*The children pass through the open window into the garden and disappear.*

HELEN rises, and, having laid her drawing-block aside, is following them]

JAMES [*to HELEN*]. Not you, my dear. You're welcome to hear our business.

HELEN. Oh, no; you mustn't let me intrude.

STEPHEN. I think Helen ought to hear it. [*HELEN pauses, standing by the table on the right*] I think she ought to be made aware of what's going on.

JAMES. Tad—

THADDEUS [*coming forward*]. Eh?

JAMES The meeting's to take place this afternoon.

[*PHYLLIS looks up from her work suddenly, with parted lips*]

THADDEUS. This afternoon?

STEPHEN. At four o'clock.

THADDEUS [*glancing at the clock on the mantelpiece*]. It's past three now.

JAMES [*placing his hat on the table at the end of the piano and sitting at the left of the table*]. It's been fixed up at last rather in a hurry.

STEPHEN [*sitting in the chair at the extreme left*]. We didn't get Elkin's letter, telling us he was coming through, till this morning.

THADDEUS. You might have notified us earlier, though, one of you. Just like you fellows!

STEPHEN [*waving his arms*] On the day I go to press I have quite enough to remember.

JAMES [*to THADDEUS, roughly*]. It's your holiday-time; what have you got to do? An hour's notice is as good as a week's.

STEPHEN [*to HELEN*]. This is a meeting of the family, Helen, to be held at my brother's house, for the purpose of—

HELEN [*advancing a little*]. Winding matters up?

JAMES. For the purpose of receiving Elkin and Vallance's report.

HELEN [*keenly*] And to — —?

JAMES. And to decide upon the ad-

ministration of the estate on behalf of the next-of-kin.

HELEN In my words—wind matters up. [*With an appearance of cheerfulness*] Which means an end to a month's suspense, doesn't it?

THADDEUS [*apologetically*]. A not very satisfactory end to yours.

HELEN. To mine? [*With an effort*] Oh, I—I've suffered no suspense, Mr. Tad. Mr. Elkin has kept me informed of the result of the advertising and the circularizing from the beginning

THADDEUS. But there has been no result.

HELEN No result is the result.

STEPHEN Exactly

[*During the following talk, HELEN moves away and seats herself in the chair by the head of the piano. PHYLLIS has resumed her work again, bending over it so that her face is almost hidden.*]

THADDEUS [*to JAMES and STEPHEN*]. Will Rose and the Colonel be down?

JAMES We're on our way to the station to meet 'em.

STEPHEN [*bitterly*]. Ha! Will they be down?

THADDEUS. You didn't overlook them, evidently

JAMES [*with a growl*]. No; the gallant Colonel doesn't give us much chance of overlooking him.

STEPHEN. Colonel Ponting might be the only person interested, judging by the tone he adopts.

JAMES. A nice life he's been leading us lately.

STEPHEN. Elkin and Vallance are sick of him.

JAMES. Hasn't two penny pieces to clink together; that's the size of it.

STEPHEN. A man may be hard up and yet behave with dignity.

JAMES. I expect the decorators are asking for a bit on the nail.

THADDEUS [*sitting on the right of the table at the end of the piano*]. Decorators?

STEPHEN [*to THADDEUS*]. Haven't you heard?

THADDEUS. No.

STEPHEN. The magnificent house they've taken in Carlos Place—?

JAMES. Close to Berkeley Square.

STEPHEN [*correcting JAMES'S pronunciation*]. Barkeley Square.

JAMES. Stables and motor-garridge at the back

STEPHEN. Oh, yes; they're decorating

and furnishing most elaborately Lou had a note from Rose a day or two since

JAMES He'll strip my sister of every penny she's come into, if she doesn't look out

STEPHEN The gross indelicacy of the thing is what offends me We have been content to remain passive

JAMES And I fancy our plans and projects are as important as the Colonel's STEPHEN. I should assume so

JAMES [*to STEPHEN, with a jerk of the thumb towards THADDEUS*]. Shall I . . . ?

STEPHEN. No harm in it *now*.

JAMES [*to THADDEUS, leaning forward—impressively*] Tad . . .

THADDEUS. What?

JAMES That land at the bottom of Gordon Street, where the allotment grounds are—

THADDEUS. Yes?

JAMES It's mine.

THADDEUS Yours, Jim?

JAMES. It belongs to me I've signed the contract and paid a deposit.

THADDEUS. What do you intend to do with it?

JAMES. What should I intend to do with it—eat it? I intend to build there—build the finest avenue of houses in Singlehampton. [*Rising and going to the piano, where he traces a plan on the lid with his finger*]. Look here! [*THADDEUS joins him and watches the tracing of the plan*]. Here's Gordon Street. Here's the pub at the corner. I come along here—straight along here—to Albert Terrace Opposite Albert Terrace I take in Clark's piano factory; and where Clark's factory stands I lay out an ornamental garden with a fountain in the middle of it On I go at a curve, to avoid the playground of Fothergill's school, till I reach Bolton's store He stops me, but I'll squeeze him out some day, as sure as my name's James Henry! [*To THADDEUS*]. D'ye see?

THADDEUS [*uncomfortably, eyeing HELEN*] Splendid; splendid.

JAMES [*moving round the head of the piano to the right*]. Poor old Ned! Ha! My brother won't have done so badly by his native town after all

THADDEUS [*under his breath, trying to remind JAMES of HELEN'S presence*]. Jim—Jim—

JAMES [*obliviously, coming upon HELEN*]. D'ye know the spot we're talking about, my dear?

HELEN. No.

JAMES. You must get 'em to walk you

down there [*To PHYLLIS*] You trot her down there, Phyllis.

PHYLLIS [*without raising her eyes from her work*] I will

STEPHEN [*to JAMES*] You haven't told them *everything*, Jim

JAMES [*sitting upon the settee by the piano*] Haven't I? [*Mopping his brow*] Oh, your offices—

STEPHEN [*to everybody*] It isn't of the greatest importance, perhaps, but it's part of James's scheme to erect an exceptionally noble building in the new road to provide adequate printing and publishing offices for the *Times and Mirror*.

THADDEUS. What, you're not deserting King Street, Stephen?

STEPHEN [*rising and walking to the fireplace*]. Yes, I've had enough of those cramped, poky premises.

THADDEUS. They are inconvenient

STEPHEN [*on the hearthrug, facing the others*]. And, to be perfectly frank, I've had enough of Mr. Hammond and the *Courier*.

THADDEUS. I don't blame you there. The *Courier* is atrociously personal occasionally.

STEPHEN [*pompously*]. I don't say it because Hammond is, in a manner, my rival—I'm not so small-minded as that—but I do say that he is a vulgar man and that the *Courier* is a vulgar and mischievous journal.

JAMES. He's up to date, though, is Mister Freddy Hammond.

STEPHEN. His plant is slightly more modern than mine, I admit.

JAMES [*chuckling*] Aye, you'll be able to present those antediluvian printing-presses of yours to the museum as curiosities.

STEPHEN [*with a wave of the hand*] Anyhow, the construction of Jim's new road marks a new era in the life of the *Times and Mirror*. [*Leaving the fireplace*] I'm putting no less than twelve thousand pounds into the dear old paper, Tad.

THADDEUS [*standing by the table on the left*] Twelve thousand—!

STEPHEN. How will that agree with Mr. Hammond's digestion, eh? Twelve thousand pounds! [*Coming to THADDEUS*]. And what are *your* plans for the future, if one may ask? You'll leave these wretched villas, of course?

THADDEUS [*evasively*]. Oh, I—I'm waiting till this law business is absolutely settled.

STEPHEN [*hastily*]. Quite right; quite

right. So am I, so am I, actually. But we may talk, I suppose, among ourselves—

JAMES [*looking at his watch and rising*] By George! We shall miss Rose and the Colonel.

STEPHEN [*fetching his hat*] Pish! the Colonel.

JAMES [*shaking hands hurriedly with HELEN, who rises*] Ta-ta, my dear [*As he passes PHYLLIS*] See you at the meeting, Phyllis.

STEPHEN [*to HELEN across the piano*] Good-bye, Helen.

JAMES [*who has picked up his hat, at the door*] Don't be late, Tad.

STEPHEN [*at the door*]. No, no; don't be late.

THADDEUS Four o'clock.

STEPHEN Sharp.

[*THADDEUS follows JAMES and STEPHEN into the hall and returns immediately*]

THADDEUS [*closing the door*] My dear Helen, I apologize to you most humbly.

HELEN For what?

THADDEUS For Jim's bad taste, and Stephen's, in talking before you as they've been doing.

HELEN Oh, it's of no consequence.

THADDEUS. I could have kicked Jim.

HELEN [*impulsively*]. Mr. Tad—[*giving him her hand*]—I congratulate you. [*Going to PHYLLIS and kissing her lightly upon the cheek.*] I congratulate you both heartily. No two people in the world deserve good fortune more than you do.

THADDEUS. It's extremely kind and gracious of you to take it in this way.

HELEN. Why, in what other way could I take it?

THADDEUS. At your age, you mayn't esteem money very highly. But—there are other considerations—

HELEN [*turning away and seating herself upon the settee by the piano*]. Yes, we won't speak of those.

THADDEUS [*walking to the bay-window*]. And there was just a chance that the inquiries might have brought a will to light—a will benefiting you. Though you were anxious not to appear unfriendly to the family, you must have realized that.

HELEN. Whether I did or not, it's all done with now finally—finally. [*Blowing the subject from her.*] Phew!

THADDEUS [*his elbows on the piano, speaking across it to HELEN*]. Phyl and I are not altogether selfish and grasping. She has been worrying herself to death these last few days—haven't you, Phyl?—ever

since we heard the meeting was near a hand.

PHYLLIS [*in a low voice*]. Yes.

THADDEUS Ever since you came to us, in fact.

HELEN [*jumping up*]. Ah, what a nuisance I've been to you! [*Sitting beside PHYLLIS*] How relieved you'll be to pack me off to-morrow!

THADDEUS To-morrow?

[*Uttering a little sound, PHYLLIS stops working and stares straight before her*]

HELEN [*slipping an arm round PHYLLIS'S waist*] That letter I had while we were at lunch—it was from a girl who used to sit next to me at Julian's. She's found me some capital rooms, she says, close to Regent's Park, and I'm going up to look at them. [*THADDEUS comes to her*] In any event, the sooner I get out of Singlehampton the better.

THADDEUS. Why?

HELEN. Everybody in the town eyes me so queerly, I'm certain they suspect.

THADDEUS It's your imagination.

HELEN It isn't [*Hesitatingly*]. I—I've confided in Mr. Trist.

THADDEUS [*surprised*]. Confided in Trist?

HELEN [*nodding*] I hated the idea of his thinking me—deceitful.

THADDEUS [*sitting on the settee by the piano*] Trist would never have guessed.

HELEN. Oh, Mr. Tad, who, in heaven's name, that wasn't born yesterday *could* believe the story of my being simply a *protégé* of Father's, the daughter of an old business friend of his? Your brother Stephen may be an excellent editor, but his powers of invention are beneath contempt.

THADDEUS [*laughing*]. Ha, ha, ha! [*Rubbing his knees*] That's one for Stephen; that's a rap for Stephen.

HELEN And then, again, the other members of the family are becoming so horribly jealous.

THADDEUS [*seriously*] Ah, yes.

HELEN You noticed your brother's remarks? And Mrs. James and Mrs. Stephen almost cut me in East Street this morning.

THADDEUS [*clenching his fists*]. Thank God, we shall have done with that sort of thing directly we shake the dust of Singlehampton from our feet!

HELEN. Directly you —!

THADDEUS [*gaily*]. There! Now I've let the cat out of the bag. Phyllis will tell you. You tell her, Phyl! [*Rising*] I promised Rawlinson I'd help him index his madrigals this afternoon; I'll run round to

him and explain [*Pausing on his way to the door*] Helen, you must be our first visitor in our new home, wherever we pitch our tent. Make that a bargain with her, Phyl! [*At the door, to PHYLLIS*] We'll start at ten minutes to, old lady. Be ready [*He disappears, closing the door after him*].

HELEN [*rising and walking away to the left*]. Well! I do think it shabby of you, Phyllis. You and Mr. Tad might have trusted me with your secret [*Facing her*]. Phyllis, wouldn't it be glorious if you came to London to live—or near London? Wouldn't it?

PHYLLIS [*in a strange, quiet voice, her hands lying quite still upon her lap*]. Helen—Helen dear.

HELEN Yes?

PHYLLIS. That morning, a month ago, in Linchpool—while we were all sitting in your poor father's library waiting for you.

HELEN [*returning to her*]. On the Friday morning—

PHYLLIS. There was a discussion as to making you an allowance, and—[*her eyes avoiding HELEN'S*—] and everybody was most anxious—most anxious—that you should be placed upon a proper footing.

HELEN. Mr. Elkin broached the subject when I arrived. You were out of the room.

PHYLLIS. Yes. And you declined. . .

HELEN. Certainly I gave them my reasons. Why do you bring this up?

[*PHYLLIS rises, laying her work upon the table behind her*].

PHYLLIS [*drawing a deep breath*]. Helen—I want you to reconsider your decision.

HELEN. Reconsider it?

PHYLLIS. I want you to reconsider your determination not to accept an allowance from the family.

HELEN. Impossible.

PHYLLIS. Oh, don't be so hasty. Listen first. This good fortune of ours—of Tad's and mine—that you've congratulated us upon—I shall never enjoy it—

HELEN [*incredulously*]. Oh, Phyllis!

PHYLLIS. I shall not. It will never bring me a moment's happiness unless you consent to receive an allowance from the family—[*HELEN seats herself in the chair on the extreme left with her back to PHYLLIS*—]—sufficient to give you a sense of independence—

HELEN. I couldn't.

PHYLLIS. And to make your future perfectly safe.

HELEN. I couldn't.

PHYLLIS [*entreatingly*]. Do—do—

HELEN. It's out of the question.

PHYLLIS. Please—for my sake—

HELEN [*turning to her*]. I'm sorry to distress you, Phyllis, indeed I'm sorry. But when you see me gaining some little position in London, through my work, you'll cease to feel miserable about me.

PHYLLIS. Never—never—

HELEN [*starting up and walking to the fireplace impetuously*]. Oh, you don't understand me—my pride. A pensioner of the Mortimore family! I! How can you suggest it? I refused their help before I was fully acquainted with these, to me, uncongenial relations of Father's—I don't include Mr. Tad in that expression, of course, and now I am acquainted with them I would refuse it a thousand times. If I were starving, I wouldn't put myself under the smallest obligation to the Mortimores.

PHYLLIS [*unsteadily*]. Obligation—to—the—Mortimores—obligation—! [*As if about to make some communication to HELEN, supporting herself by leaning upon the table on the right, her body bent forward—almost maudibly*]. Helen—Helen—

HELEN. What—?

[*There is a short silence, and then PHYLLIS drops back upon the settee by the piano*].

PHYLLIS [*rocking herself to and fro*]. Oh—oh, dear—oh—!

HELEN [*coming to her and standing over her*]. You're quite ill, Phyllis; your bad nights are taking it out of you dreadfully. You ought to have the advice of a doctor.

PHYLLIS [*weakly*]. No—don't send for the doctor—

HELEN. Go up to your room, then, and keep quiet till Mr. Tad calls you. [*Glancing at the clock*]. You've a quarter of an hour—

PHYLLIS [*clutching HELEN'S skirt*]. Helen—you're fond of me and Tad—you said yesterday how attached you'd grown to us—

HELEN [*soothingly*]. I am—I am—very fond of you.

PHYLLIS. And the children?

HELEN. Yes, yes.

PHYLLIS. My poor children!

HELEN. Hush! Why poor children? Pull yourself together. Go up to your room.

PHYLLIS [*taking HELEN'S hand and caressing it*]. Helen, if you won't accept an allowance from the entire family, accept it from Tad and me.

HELEN. No, no, no!

PHYLLIS Four—three hundred a year

HELEN No

PHYLLIS Two hundred.

HELEN No.

PHYLLIS. We could spare it We shouldn't miss it; we should never miss it

HELEN Not a penny

PHYLLIS [*rising and gripping HELEN'S shoulders*]. You shall—you shall accept it, Helen.

HELEN Phyllis! [*Releasing herself and drawing back*] Phyllis, you're very odd to-day You've got this allowance idea on the brain Look here, don't let's mention the subject again, or I—I shall be offended.

PHYLLIS [*dully, hanging her head*] All right Very well

HELEN Forgive me. It happens to be just the one point I'm sensitive upon [*Listening, then going to the open window*] Here are the children Do go upstairs [*Calling into the garden*] Hallo! [*PHYLLIS leaves the room as CYRIL and JOYCE appear outside the window The boy is carrying a few freshly cut roses.*] Now, then, children! Isn't it time we routed Mr Trist out of his study?

CYRIL [*entering and going towards the door*] I'll stir the old chap up. [*Remembering the nosegay*] Oh— [*Presenting it to HELEN, who comes forward with JOYCE*] Allow me—

HELEN For me? How sweet of you! [*Placing the flowers against her belt and then at her breast.*] Where shall I wear them—here or there?

CYRIL. Anywhere you like. [*Awkwardly*] We sha'n't see anything nicer at the flower-show, I'm certain.

HELEN No; they're beautiful

CYRIL [*his eyes on the carpet*]. I don't mean the flowers . . .

HELEN [*inclining her head*]. Thank you. [*CYRIL again makes for the door.*] Don't disturb Mother. [*Moving away to the fireplace, where, at the mirror, over the mantelshelf, she fixes the roses in her belt*] She has to go to Claybrook Road with your father in a little while, and I want her to rest.

CYRIL [*pausing*] She is seedy, isn't she? [*Puckering his brows.*] Going to Uncle Jim's, are they?

HELEN. Yes

CYRIL That's to do with our money, I expect.

HELEN [*busy at the mirror*] With your money?

CYRIL. Father's come into a heap of money, you know

JOYCE [*reproachfully*]. Cyril!

CYRIL [*not heeding her*] So have Uncle Jim and Uncle Stephen and Aunt Rose.

HELEN I'm delighted

[*JOYCE signs to CYRIL to desist*]

CYRIL [*to JOYCE*] Oh, what's the use of our keeping it dark any longer?

JOYCE We promised Mother—

CYRIL Ages ago. But you heard what Father said to Uncle Stephen—it's all over the town Young Pither says there's something about it in the paper

HELEN. The paper?

CYRIL The *Courier*—that fellow Hammond's paper Hammond was beastly sarcastic about it last week, Pither says [*Going to the door*] I don't read the *Courier* myself. [*At the door, he beckons to JOYCE She joins him, and his voice drops to a deep whisper*] Besides—[*he glances significantly at HELEN, whose back is turned to them*]—it'll make it easier for us [*Nudging JOYCE*] Now's your chance, do it now [*Aloud*] Give me five minutes, you two I can't be seen at the flower-show in these togs

[*He withdraws. Having assured herself that the door is closed, JOYCE advances to HELEN*]

JOYCE. Helen . . .

HELEN Hallo!

JOYCE [*gravely*]. Have you a minute to spare?

HELEN [*coming to the round table*]. Yes, dear.

JOYCE Helen, it's quite true we've come into a great deal of money. Uncle Edward, who lived at Linchpool—oh, you knew him, didn't you?—he was a friend of yours—

HELEN [*nodding*] He was a friend of mine.

JOYCE. Uncle Edward has left his fortune to the family—[*breaking off*]—you've been told already!

HELEN Well—yes

JOYCE We haven't received our share yet; but we *shall*, as soon as it's all divided up. [*Timidly*] Helen . . . [*HELEN seats herself upon the ottoman in an attitude of attention.*] I needn't tell you this will very much improve Father and Mother's position.

HELEN. Naturally.

JOYCE. And mine and Cyril's, too. I'm to finish abroad, I believe.

HELEN. Lucky brat.

JOYCE. But it's Cyril I want to talk to you about—my brother Cyril . . .

HELEN. Cyril?

JOYCE Cyril is to be entered for one of the principal public schools

HELEN Is he?

JOYCE One of those schools which stamp a boy a gentleman for the rest of his life

HELEN He is a gentleman, as it is I've a high opinion of Cyril

JOYCE Oh, I am glad to hear you say so, because—because

HELEN. Because what? [JOYCE turns away in silence to the settee by the piano.] What are you driving at, Joycsey?

JOYCE [lounging on the settee, uneasily and inelegantly] Of course, Cyril's only fourteen at present; there's no denying that

HELEN. I suppose there isn't

JOYCE But in three years' time he'll be seventeen, and in another three he'll be twenty

HELEN [puzzled]. Well?

JOYCE And at twenty you're a man, aren't you?

HELEN A young man.

JOYCE [seating herself, her elbows on her knees, examining her fingers] And even then he'd be content to wait

HELEN To wait? What for?

JOYCE [in a low voice] Cyril wishes to marry you some day, Helen.

HELEN [after a pause, gently] Does he?

JOYCE. He consulted me about it soon after you came to us, and I advised him to be quite sure of himself before he spoke to you. And he is, quite sure of himself.

HELEN. And he's asked you to speak for him?

JOYCE. He prefers my doing it. [Looking, under her lashes, at HELEN.] Are you furious?

HELEN. Not a scrap.

JOYCE [transferring herself from the settee to the floor at HELEN'S feet—embracing her]. Oh, that's lovely of you! I was afraid you might be.

HELEN. Furious?

JOYCE [gazing at her admiringly]. At our aiming so high. I was afraid you might consider that marrying Cyril would be marrying beneath you.

HELEN [tenderly]. The girl who marries Cyril will have to be a far grander person than I am, Joycsey, to be marrying beneath her.

JOYCE. Oh, Cyril's all right in himself, and so is Father. Father's very retiring, but he's as clever a musician as any in the midlands. And mother is all right in herself. [Backing away from HELEN.] It's not Mother's fault; it's her misfortune—

HELEN Her misfortune—?

JOYCE [bitterly] Oh, I'll be bound they mentioned it at "Ivanhoe" or at the Crescent

HELEN Mentioned—?

JOYCE [between her teeth] The shop—grandfather's shop—

HELEN Ah, yes.

JOYCE [clenching her hands] Ah! [Squatting upon her heels, her shoulders hunched] Grandfather was a grocer, Helen—a grocer. Oh, mother has suffered terribly through it—agonies

HELEN. Poor mother!

JOYCE We've all suffered. Sometimes it's been as much as Cyril and I could do to keep our heads up—[proudly, with flashing eyes]—but we've done it. The Singlehampton people are beasts

HELEN. Joycsey!

JOYCE If it's the last word I ever utter—beasts. [Swallowing a tear.] And only half of it was grocery—only half.

HELEN Only half—?

JOYCE It was a double shop. There were two windows; the other half was bottles of wine. They forget that; they forget that!

HELEN. A shame

JOYCE [embracing HELEN again]. What shall I say to him, then?

HELEN Say to him?

JOYCE. Cyril—what answer shall I give him?

HELEN. Oh, tell Cyril that I am highly complimented by his offer—

JOYCE [eagerly]. Complimented—yes—?

HELEN. And that, if he's of the same mind when he's a man, and I am still single, he may propose to me again

JOYCE [in alarm]. If you're—still single—?

HELEN. Yes—[shaking her head] and if he's of the same mind

[There is a sharp, prolonged rapping on the door. JOYCE and HELEN rise]

JOYCE [going to the door]. It's that frightful tease

[She opens the door and TRIST enters, carrying his hat, gloves, and walking-stick]

TRIST Ladies, I have reason to believe that several choice specimens of the *Dianthus Caryophyllus* refuse to raise their heads until you grace the flower-show with your presence

[JOYCE slaps his hand playfully and disappears HELEN takes her hat from the round table and standing before

the mirror at the mantelpiece, pins it on her head. TRIST watches her
 HELEN [*after a silence, her back to TRIST*]. The glass reflects more than one face, Mr. Trist.

TRIST [*moving*]. I beg your pardon.

HELEN. You were thinking—?

TRIST Philosophizing—observing your way of putting on your hat

HELEN. I put it on carelessly?

TRIST. Quickly. A convincing sign of youth. After you are five-and-twenty the process will take at least ten minutes

HELEN. And at thirty?

TRIST. Half an hour. Add another half-hour for each succeeding decade—

HELEN [*turning to him*]. I'm afraid you are a knowing, worldly parson

TRIST [*laughing*]. No, no; a tolerant, human parson.

HELEN. We shall see. [*Picking up her gloves*]. If ever you get a living in London, Mr. Trist, I shall make a point of sitting under you.

TRIST. I bind you to that.

HELEN [*pulling on a glove*]. By-the-by, I set out to seek my London living to-morrow.

TRIST [*with a change of manner*]. To-morrow?

HELEN. To-morrow.

TRIST [*blankly*]. I—I'm sorry.

HELEN. Very polite of you. I'm glad.

TRIST. Glad?

HELEN. It sounds rather unkind, doesn't it? Oh, I'm extremely fond of everybody in this house—Mr. and Mrs. Tad and the children, I mean. But I'm sure it isn't good, morally, for me to be here, even if there were no other reasons for my departure.

TRIST. Morally?

HELEN. Yes; if I remained here, all that's bad in my nature would come out on top. Do you know that I've the makings in me of a most accomplished liar and hypocrite?

TRIST. I shouldn't have suspected it.

HELEN. I have. [*Coming nearer to him*]. What do you think takes place this afternoon?

TRIST. What?

HELEN [*with gradually increasing excitement*]. There's to be a meeting of the Mortimore family at James Mortimore's house at four o'clock. He and his brother Stephen have just informed me, with the delicacy which is characteristic of them, that they are going to arrange with the lawyers to administer my father's estate without any more delay. And I was dou-

ble-faced enough to receive the news smilingly and agreeably, and all the time I could have struck them—I could have seen them drop dead in this room without a pang of regret—

TRIST. No, no—

HELEN. I could. [*Walking away and pacing the room on the left*]. Oh, it isn't Father's money I covet. I said so to the family in Linchpool, and I say it again. But I deceived myself.

TRIST. Deceived yourself?

HELEN. Deceived myself. I can't bear that Father should have forgotten me. I can't bear it; I can't resign myself to it, I shall never resign myself to it. I thought I should be able to, but I was mistaken. I told Mr. Thaddeus that I've been suffering no suspense this last month. It's a falsehood; I've been suffering intense suspense. I've been watching the posts, for letters from Elkin; I've been praying, daily, hourly, that something—anything—might be found to prove that Father had remembered me. And I loathe these people, who step over me and stand between me and the being I loved best on earth, I loathe them. I detest the whole posse of them, except the Thaddeuses; and I wish this money may bring them, and those belonging to them, every ill that's conceivable. [*Confronting TRIST, her bosom heaving*]. Don't you lecture me.

TRIST [*good-humoredly*]. I haven't the faintest intention of doing so.

HELEN. Ha! [*At the piano, mimicking JAMES*]. Here's Gordon Street—

TRIST. Eh?

HELEN. You come along here, to Albert Terrace—taking in Clark's piano factory—

TRIST. Who does?

HELEN [*fiercely*]. Here—here's the pub at the corner!

TRIST [*bewildered*]. I—I don't—

HELEN [*speaking to him across the piano*]. James Mortimore is buying land and building a new street in the town.

TRIST. Really?

HELEN. And Stephen is putting twelve thousand pounds into his old-fashioned paper, to freshen it up; and the Pontings are moving into a big house in London—near Berkeley Square, as James calls it; and they must needs discuss their affairs in my hearing, brutes that they are! [*Coming to the chair on the left of the table at the end of the piano*]. Oh, thank God, I'm leaving the town to-morrow! It was only a sort of curiosity that brought me here [*Sitting and producing her handker-*

chief] Thank God, I'm leaving to-morrow!

[TRIST walks to the window on the right to allow her to recover herself, and then returns to her]

TRIST My dear child, may I speak quite plainly to you?

HELEN [*wiping her eyes*]. If you don't lecture me

TRIST. I won't lecture you. I merely venture to suggest that you are a trifle illogical

HELEN I dare say.

TRIST After all, recollect, our friends James and Stephen are not to be blamed for the position they find themselves in.

HELEN. Their manners are insufferable

TRIST. Hardly insufferable Nothing is insufferable.

HELEN There you go!

TRIST. Their faults of manner and breeding are precisely the faults a reasonable, dispassionate person would have no difficulty in excusing And I shall be much astonished, when the bitterness of your mortification has worn off—

HELEN You *are* lecturing!

TRIST. I'm not; I give you my word I'm not

HELEN. It sounds uncommonly like it. What did I tell you the other day—that you were different from the clergymen I'd met hitherto, because you were—?

TRIST. Jolly.

HELEN [*with a shrug*] Jolly! [*Wearily*] Oh, please go and hurry the children up, and let's be off to the flowers.

TRIST [*not stirring*]. My dear Miss Thornhill—

HELEN [*impatently*]. I'll fetch them—

TRIST. Don't. [*Deliberately*] My dear Miss Thornhill, to show you how little I regard myself as worthy of the privilege of lecturing you; [*smiling*] to show you how the seeds of selfishness may germinate and flourish even in the breast of a cleric—may I make a confession to you?

HELEN. Confession—?

TRIST I—I want to confess to you that the circumstance of your having been left as you are—cast adrift on the world, unprotected, without means apart from your own talent and exertions—is one that fills me with—hope.

HELEN. Hope?

TRIST. Fills me with hope, though it may scarcely justify my presumption [*Sitting opposite to her.*] You were assuming a minute ago, in joke perhaps, the possibility of my obtaining a living some day.

HELEN [*graciously, but with growing uneasiness*] Not altogether in joke.

TRIST. Anyhow, there *is* a decided possibility of a living coming my way—and practically in London, as it chances.

HELEN I—I'm pleased

TRIST. Yes, in the natural order of events a living will be vacant within the next few years which is in the gift of the father of an old college chum of mine It's a suburban parish—close to Twickenham—and I'm promised it.

HELEN That would be—nice for you

TRIST [*gazing at her fixedly*]. Jolly.

HELEN [*her eyes drooping*]. Very—jolly

TRIST I should still be a poor man—that I shall always be; but poverty is relative It would be riches compared to my curacy here [*After a pause*] The vicarage has a garden with some grand old trees.

HELEN Many of the old gardens—in the suburbs—are charming.

TRIST I—I could let the vicarage during the summer to increase my income.

HELEN. May a vicar—let—his vicarage?

TRIST. It's done Some bishops object to it; [*innocently*] but you can dodge the old boy

HELEN Dodge the—old boy!

TRIST There are all sorts of legal fictions to help you. I know of a bishop's son-in-law who let his vicarage for a term under the pretence of letting only the furniture.

HELEN. Wicked.

TRIST [*leaning forward*]. But I shouldn't dream of letting my vicarage if my income—proved sufficient—

HELEN It would be wealth—you say—in comparison—

TRIST Yes, but I—I might—marry.

HELEN [*hastily*]. Oh—oh, of course [*The door opens and JOYCE and CYRIL enter, dressed for going out. CYRIL is in his best suit, is gloved, and swings a cane which is too long for him At the same moment THADDEUS lets himself into the garden at the gate. He is accompanied by DENYER, an ordinary-looking person with whiskers and mustache HELEN and TRIST rise, and she goes to the mirror in some confusion and gives a last touch to her hat.*]

JOYCE. Have we kept you waiting?

CYRIL. Sorry. Couldn't get my tie to go right.

THADDEUS [*in the garden*]. Come in.

Denyer. [*At the window, to those in the room*] What, haven't you folks gone yet?

TRIST [*with the children, following HELEN into the garden*]. Just off.

THADDEUS [*to HELEN, as she passes him*] Hope you'll enjoy yourself.

TRIST [*to DENYER*]. Ah, Mr. Denyer, how are you?

DENYER. How are you, Mr. Trist?

JOYCE and CYRIL [*to THADDEUS*] Good-bye, Father.

THADDEUS [*kissing them*]. Good-bye, my dears.

[*TRIST opens the gate, and HELEN and the children pass out into the lane.*

TRIST follows them, closing the gate

THADDEUS and DENYER enter the room. DENYER is carrying a newspaper.]

CYRIL [*out of sight, shrilly*]. Which way?

TRIST [*out of sight*] Through Parker Street.

JOYCE [*out of sight*]. Who walks with who?

HELEN [*out of sight*]. I walk with Cyril.

[*The sound of the chatter dies in the distance*]

DENYER [*to THADDEUS*]. Then I can put up the bill at once, Mr Mortimore?

THADDEUS [*laying his hat upon the table on the left*]. Do, Denyer. To-morrow—to-day—

DENYER. I'll send a man round in the morning. [*Producing a note-book and writing in it*]. Let's see—your lease is seven, fourteen, twenty-one?

THADDEUS. That's it.

DENYER. How much of the first seven is there to run—I ought to remember . . . ?

THADDEUS. Two years and a half from Michaelmas.

DENYER. Rent?

THADDEUS. Forty.

[*The door opens a little way and PHYLLIS peeps in. Her features are drawn, her lips white and set*]

DENYER. Fixtures at a valuation, I s'pose?

THADDEUS. Ha, ha! The costly fixtures at a valuation.

DENYER. You may as well sell 'em, if they only fetch tuppence. [*He sees PHYLLIS, who has entered softly*]. Good afternoon, ma'am.

PHYLLIS [*in a low voice*]. Good afternoon.

THADDEUS [*turning to her*]. Phyl,

dear! I met Mr. Denyer in the lane. [*Gleefully*]. The bill goes up to-morrow—"house to let"—to-morrow morning—[*to DENYER*] first thing—

[*PHYLLIS moves to the bay-window without speaking*].

DENYER. First thing. [*Putting his pocketbook away*] Excuse me—you're on the lookout for a new residence?

THADDEUS. Oh—er—one must live somewhere, Denyer

DENYER. And a much superior house to *this*, Mr. Mortimore, I lay a guinea

THADDEUS [*walking about with his hands in his pockets*] The children are springing up—getting to be tremendous people

DENYER [*genially*]. Oh, come, sir! We know.

THADDEUS [*pausing in his walk*]. Eh? DENYER. Everybody in the town knows of your luck, and the family's.

[*Picking up his hat and newspaper, which he has laid upon the ottoman*]. Here's another allusion to it in this week's *Courier*.

THADDEUS *The Courier*?

DENYER [*handing him the paper*]. Just out. You keep it; I've got another at 'ome. [*THADDEUS is searching the paper*] Middle page—"Town Topics."

THADDEUS. Thanks.

DENYER Mr. Hammond—he will poke his fun [*Gong to the window*]. P'r'aps you'll give us a call, sir?

THADDEUS [*following him absently, reading*]. Yes, I'll call in.

[*DENYER turns to PHYLLIS, who is sitting in the chair by the bay-window*]

DENYER. Good-day, ma'am. [*In the garden, to THADDEUS, persuasively*]. Now you won't forget Gibson and Denyer, Mr. Mortimore?

THADDEUS [*at the window*]. I won't; I won't.

DENYER. The old firm. [*Opening the gate*]. What we haven't got on our books isn't worth considering, you take it from me.

[*He disappears, closing the gate. THADDEUS comes back into the room*]

THADDEUS. Upon my soul, this is too bad of Hammond! This'll annoy Jim and Stephen frightfully—drive 'em mad. [*Flinging the paper on to the settee by the piano*]. Oh, well . . . ! [*Putting his necktie in order at the mirror*]. By Jove, we've done it at last, old lady! "House to let," hey? I believe I'm keener about it than you are, now it's come to it. What a sensation it'll cause at "Ivanhoe," and at the

Crescent! I tell you what, you and I must have a solemn talk to-night—a parliament—when the children have gone to bed, a regular, serious talk. [*Turning.*] You know, I'm still for Cheltenham. Cheltenham seems to me to offer so many advantages [*PHYLLIS rises slowly*] There's the town itself—bright and healthy, then the College, for Cyril As for its musical tastes— [*Breaking off and looking at the clock*] I say, do get your things on, Phyl [*Comparing his watch with the clock and then timing and winding it*] We shall catch it if we're not punctual.

PHYLLIS. I—I'm not going, Tad.

THADDEUS. Not going, dear?

PHYLLIS. No—I— [*He advances to the right of the piano solicitously.*] I can't go.

THADDEUS. Aren't you up to it?

[*She moves to the open window and looks into the garden*]

PHYLLIS. They won't—be back—for a long while?

THADDEUS. The children, and Trist and Helen? Not for an hour or two.

PHYLLIS [*turning*]. Tad—that girl—that girl—

THADDEUS. Helen?

PHYLLIS [*coming forward a little*]. We're robbing her; we're robbing her. [*Shaking.*] We're all robbing her

THADDEUS [*at her side*]. You've got another bad attack of nerves this afternoon—an extra bad one—

PHYLLIS [*suddenly, grasping his coat*]

Tad—I—I've broken down—

THADDEUS. Broken down?

PHYLLIS. I've broken down under it. I—I can't endure it.

THADDEUS [*soothingly*]. What—what—?

PHYLLIS. Your brother—Edward—your brother—Edward—

THADDEUS. Yes?

PHYLLIS. Everything—everything—belongs to her—Helen—

THADDEUS. My dear, the family were prepared to offer Helen—

PHYLLIS. No, no! He left every penny to her—left it to her. [*Staring into his face.*] There was a will.

THADDEUS. A will?

PHYLLIS. I saw it

THADDEUS. You saw it?

PHYLLIS. I read it—I had it in my hand—

THADDEUS [*incredulously*]. You did!

PHYLLIS. Yes, I—I did away with it—

THADDEUS. Did away with it?

PHYLLIS. Destroyed it.

THADDEUS. A will—Ned's will—! [*She turns from him and sinks helplessly on to the settee by the fireplace. He stands looking down upon her in a half-frightened, half-puzzled way; then his face clears and he looks at the clock again Calmly*] Phyl, I wish you'd let me have Chapman in.

PHYLLIS [*in a faint voice*]. No—no—

THADDEUS. My dear, we can afford a doctor now, if we require one. That bromide stuff he prescribed for you once—that did you no end of good. [*Going towards the door*] I'll send Kate

PHYLLIS [*raising herself*] Tad—

THADDEUS [*reassuringly*]. I'll stay with you till he comes.

PHYLLIS. Tad—[*getting to her feet*]—you—you think I'm not right in my head. Tad, I—I know what I'm saying. I'm telling the truth I'm telling you the truth.

THADDEUS. A will—?

PHYLLIS [*at the round table*]. Yes—yes—

THADDEUS. No, no, you're talking nonsense [*He goes to the door and there pauses, his hand on the door-knob*] When—when—?

PHYLLIS. When—?

THADDEUS. When did you see it?

PHYLLIS. On the—on the Wednesday night.

THADDEUS. The Wednesday night?

PHYLLIS. You remember—the night there was no night—nurse?

THADDEUS. I remember, of course.

PHYLLIS. Ann and Louisa had gone to the hotel to lie down, and—I was alone with him.

THADDEUS. I remember it all perfectly.

PHYLLIS [*moving towards the ottoman, supporting herself by the table*]. I was with him from eight o'clock till nearly eleven

THADDEUS. Till the others came back. That was the night he—the night he sank.

PHYLLIS. Yes; it was just before then that he—that he—

THADDEUS [*leaving the door*]. Just before then—?

PHYLLIS. It was just before the change set in that he—that he sent me downstairs.

THADDEUS. Downstairs?

PHYLLIS. To the library.

THADDEUS. The library?

PHYLLIS. With the keys.

THADDEUS. Keys?

PHYLLIS. His bunch of keys.

THADDEUS. Sent you downstairs—to the library—with his keys?

PHYLLIS. Yes.

THADDEUS. What for?

PHYLLIS. To fetch something.

THADDEUS. Fetch something?

PHYLLIS. From the safe

THADDEUS. The safe?

PHYLLIS. The safe in the library—[*sitting on the ottoman*—the safe in the bookcase in the library.

THADDEUS [*coming to her*]. What—what did he send you to fetch, dear?

PHYLLIS. Some—some jewelry.

THADDEUS. Jewelry?

PHYLLIS. Some pieces of jewelry. He had some pieces of jewelry in his safe in the library, that he'd picked up, he said, at odd times, and he wanted to make me a present of one of them . . .

THADDEUS. Make you a present . . . ?

PHYLLIS. As a keepsake. [*Her elbows on her knees, digging her fingers into her hair*] It was about half-past nine I was sitting beside his bed, thinking he was asleep, and I found him looking at me. He recollected seeing me when I was a child, he said, skating on the ponds at Claybrook; and he said he was sure I—I was a good wife to you—and a good mother to my children. And then he spoke of the jewelry—and opened the drawer of the table by the bed—and took out his keys—and explained to me how to open the safe.

THADDEUS [*his manner gradually changing as he listens to her recital*]. You—you went down . . . ?

PHYLLIS. Yes.

THADDEUS. And—and . . . ?

PHYLLIS. And unlocked the safe. And in the lower drawer I—I came across it.

THADDEUS. Came across . . . ?

PHYLLIS. He told me I should find four small boxes—and I could find only three—and that made me look into the drawer—and—and under a lot of other papers—I—I saw it.

THADDEUS. It?

PHYLLIS. A big envelope, with "My Will" written upon it

[*There is a short silence; then THADDEUS seats himself upon the settee by the piano.*]

THADDEUS [*in a whisper*]. Well?

PHYLLIS [*raising her head*]. I put it back into the drawer, and locked the safe, and went upstairs with the jewelry. Outside the bedroom door I found Heath. I'd given him permission to run out for an hour, to get some air, with Pearce and

Sadler, the housemaids. He asked me if they could do anything for me before they started. I told him No, and that Mr Mortimore seemed brighter and stronger. I heard him going down the servant's staircase; and then I went into the room—to the bed—and—and he was altered.

THADDEUS [*moistening his lips with his tongue*]. Ned . . . ?

PHYLLIS. His cheeks were more shrunken, and his jaw had dropped slightly, and his lips were quite blue; and his breathing was short and quick. I measured the medicine which he was to have if there was any sign of collapse, and lifted him up and gave it to him. Then I rang the bell, and by and by the woman from the kitchen answered it. He was easier then—dozing, but I told her to put on her hat and jacket and go for Dr. Oswald. And then I stood watching him, and—and the idea—came to me.

THADDEUS. The—the idea?

PHYLLIS. My head suddenly became very clear. Every word of the argument in the train came back to me—

THADDEUS. Argument?

PHYLLIS. Between James and the others—in the train, going to Linchpool, on the Tuesday—

THADDEUS. Oh—oh, yes.

PHYLLIS. If Edward died, how much would he die worth? Who would come in for all his money? Would he remember the family, to the extent of a mourning ring or so, in his will? If he should die leaving no will! Of course Ned would leave a will, but—where did a man's money go to when he *didn't* leave a will?

THADDEUS [*under his breath*]. To his—next-of-kin . . . !

PHYLLIS [*rising painfully*]. After a time, I—I went downstairs again. At first I persuaded myself that I only wanted to replace the jewelry—that I didn't want to have to explain about the jewelry to Ann and Lou; [*moving about the room on the left*] but when I got downstairs, I *knew* what I was going to do. And I did it as if it was the most ordinary thing in the world. I put back the little boxes—and took out the big envelope—and locked up the safe again, and—read the will. [*Pausing at the piano.*] Everything—everything—to some person—some woman living in Paris. [*Leaning upon the piano, a clenched hand against her brow.*] "Everything I die possessed of to Helen Thornhill, now or late of—" such-and-such address, "spinster, absolutely"; and she was to be his executrix—"sole executrix." That was all, except

that he begged her to reward his old servants—his old servants at his house and at the brewery. Just a few lines—on one side of a sheet of paper—

THADDEUS. Written—in his own—hand?

PHYLLIS. I think so

THADDEUS. You—you've seen his writing—since—

PHYLLIS [*leaving the piano*]. Yes—I'm sure—in his own hand.

THADDEUS [*heavily*]. That clears it up, then.

PHYLLIS. Yes.

THADDEUS. He'd made his will—himself—himself—

PHYLLIS [*her strength failing a little*]. Three years ago I—noticed the date—[*dropping into the chair on the extreme left*]—it was three years ago—

[*Again there is a silence; then he rises and walks about aimlessly*]

THADDEUS [*trying to collect his thoughts*]. Yes—yes, this clears it up This clears it all up. There was a will. There was a will. He didn't forget his child; he didn't forget her. What fools—what fools we were to suppose he *could* have forgotten his daughter!

PHYLLIS [*writhing in her chair*] Oh, I didn't know—I didn't guess—! His daughter! [*Moaning*.] Oh! oh!

THADDEUS. Don't; don't, old lady. [*She continues her moaning*] Oh, don't, don't! Let's think; let's think, now; let's think. [*He seats himself opposite to her*] Now, let's think. Helen—this'll put Helen in a different position entirely; a different position entirely—won't it? I—I wonder—I wonder what's the proper course for the family to take. [*Stretching out a trembling hand to her*.] You'll have to write down—to write down carefully—very carefully—[*breaking off, with a change of tone*] Phyl—

PHYLLIS. Oh! oh!

THADDEUS. Don't, dear, don't! Phyllis, perhaps you—didn't—destroy the will; not—actually—destroy it? [*Imploringly*.] You didn't destroy it, dear!

PHYLLIS. I did—I did—

THADDEUS [*leaning back in his chair, dazed*] I—I'm afraid—it—'s rather—a serious matter—to—to destroy—

PHYLLIS [*starting up*] I did destroy it; I did destroy it. [*Pacing the room on the right*] I kept it—I'd have burnt it then and there if there'd been a fire—but I kept it—I grew terrified at what I'd done—oh, I kept it till you left me at Roper's on the Thursday morning; and then I—I went on

to the Ford Street bridge—and tore it into pieces—and threw them into the water. [*Wringing her hands*] Oh! oh!

THADDEUS [*his chin on his breast*]. Well—well—we've got to go through with it We've got—to go—through— [*Rising and walking about unsteadily on the left*] Yes, yes, yes, what a difference it'll make to everybody—not only to Helen! What a difference it'll make at "Ivanhoe," and at the Crescent—and to Rose—!

PHYLLIS. They'll curse me! They'll curse me more than ever!

THADDEUS. And to—to us!

PHYLLIS. To us—the children—!

THADDEUS [*shaking a finger at her across the piano, cunningly*]. Ah-ah-ah, but when the affair's really settled, we'll still carry out our intention. We—we'll still—

PHYLLIS [*facing him*]. Our intention? Our—?

THADDEUS. Our intention—of leaving the town—

PHYLLIS [*wildly*]. Leaving the town! Oh, my God, we shall *have* to leave the town!

THADDEUS [*recoiling*] Oh—!

PHYLLIS. Leave it as beggars and outcasts!

THADDEUS [*quietly*]. Oh, yes, we shall—have—to leave the town—now—

[*The door opens and a little mad-servant enters. THADDEUS looks at her with dull eyes*]

THE SERVANT. Please, sir—

THADDEUS. Eh?

THE SERVANT. Maud's just come down from "Ivanhoe." They're waiting for you.

THADDEUS. W—waiting?

THE SERVANT. That's the message, sir. Mr. James and the family's waiting for Mr. Thaddeus.

THADDEUS. Oh, I— [*Taking out his watch and fingering it*.] Yes, of course—[*to the servant*].—I—I'm coming up. [*THE SERVANT withdraws. THADDEUS picks up his hat from the table on the left and turns to PHYLLIS*] Good-bye, dear. [*Taking her in his arms, and kissing her, simply*] I—I'll go up.

[*He puts his hat on, finds his way to the door with uncertain steps, and disappears*]

ACT III

The dining-room in JAMES MORTIMORE'S house in Singlehampton. In the rear wall there is an arched recess

with a fireplace at the back of it, and on either side of the fireplace, within the recess, there is a chimney-seat. On the right of the recess a door opens into the room from a hall or passage. Standing out in the middle of the room is a large, oblong dining-table, uncovered. On the table are a couple of ink-stands, some pens, paper, and blotting-paper. Ten chairs are placed at regular intervals at the table—three at each side and two at the ends. Against the wall on the right, near the door, stands a heavy sideboard. On it are several pieces of ugly-looking, showy plate, a carafe of water and a tumbler, and, upon a tray, a decanter of red wine and some wine-glasses. Against the same wall there is a cabinet. In front of the cabinet there is a round table, covered with a white cloth, on which teacups and saucers are laid for ten persons. Also on the table are a teacaddy and teapot, a plated kettle-stand, a plum-cake, and other accompaniments of afternoon tea. On each side of the tea-table there is an arm-chair belonging to the same set of chairs that surround the dining-table. Against the left-hand wall is another heavy piece of furniture. Except for this, and the sideboard and the cabinet, the walls, below the dado rail, are bare. The architecture, decorations, and furniture are pseudo-artistic and vulgar. The whole suggests the home of a common person of moderate means who has built himself a "fine house"

JAMES and STEPHEN are seated at the further side of the dining-table with a newspaper spread out before them. Standing by them, reading the paper over their husbands' shoulders, are ANN and LOUISA. ROSE is sitting, looking bored, at the right-hand end of the table, and PONTING, smoking a cigar, is pacing the room on the left. LOUISA and ROSE, the latter dressed in rich half-mourning, are wearing their hats.

JAMES [*scowling at the paper*]. It's infamous.

LOUISA. Abominable!

ANN. It oughtn't to be allowed, James.

STEPHEN. Ah, now James is stabbed at as well as myself.

JAMES. The man's a blackguard; that's what he is.

LOUISA. His wife's a most unpleasant woman

STEPHEN [*leaning back and wiping his spectacles*]. Hitherto I have been the chief object of Mr Hammond's malice.

LOUISA. You'll soon have your revenge now, Stephen. [*To the others*] Stephen will soon have his revenge now.

JAMES. By George, I've half a mind to ask Vallance to give me his opinion on this!

STEPHEN. We might consult Vallance, certainly.

LOUISA. And tell him what Mrs. Hammond was

ANN. When she was plain Nelly Robson

STEPHEN. Sssh, sssh! Do, pray, keep the wife out of it.

PONTING [*looking at his watch as he walks across to the right*] I say, my friends, it's four o'clock, you know. [*The MORTIMORES stiffen themselves and regard him coldly.*] Where are these lawyer chaps?

JAMES [*folding the newspaper*]. They're not in my pocket, Colonel

STEPHEN. No, we're not in the habit of carrying them about with us.

LOUISA [*laughing slyly*] Oh, Stephen!

ROSE. We mustn't lose the—what's the train back, Toby?

PONTING [*behind her chair, annoyed*]. Five fifty-seven.

ROSE. I shall be dead with fatigue; I've two parties to-night

JAMES. Parties?

ROSE [*to PONTING*]. Destinn is singing at the Trench's, Toby.

STEPHEN [*rising*]. H'm! Indeed?

ANN [*in an undertone, withdrawing with LOUISA to the fireplace*]. Singing!

JAMES [*rising*]. So you're going to parties, are you, Rose? Pretty sharp work, with Ned only a month in his grave.

PONTING. We're not conventional people

ROSE [*rising and walking away to the left*]. No, we don't mourn openly.

PONTING. We don't carry our hearts on our what-d'ye-call-it—sleeve.

ROSE. And Edward wasn't in the least known in London society.

JAMES [*walking about on the right*]. You knew him

PONTING. In London, my friends, reg'lar mournin' is confined to the suburbs nowadays. May I have an ash-tray?

ROSE. And we go to Harrogate on the twenty-ninth.

PONTING. Good Lord, yes; I'm kept devilish quiet there.

[ANN takes a metal ash-tray from the mantelpiece and gives it to STEPHEN,

who almost flings it on to the table. The door opens and a maid-servant enters followed by ELKIN and VALLANCE. The lawyers carry small leather bags. The servant retires.]

JAMES [*shaking hands heartily with ELKIN and VALLANCE*] Here you are!

ELKIN A minute or two behind time—my fault.

STEPHEN. How d'ye do, Mr. Elkin? [*Shaking hands with VALLANCE*] Good afternoon.

ELKIN [*to PONTING*]. How d'ye do?

PONTING [*shortly, not rising*]. H'ah you?

VALLANCE [*shaking hands with ANN and LOUISA and bowing to ROSE*]. How do you do?

ELKIN [*to ROSE*]. Hope you're very well, Mrs. Ponting.

ROSE Thanks

VALLANCE [*to PONTING, who nods in return*]. Good afternoon.

PONTING [*bringing the palm of his hand down on the table*] Now, then!

JAMES [*to ELKIN and VALLANCE, inviting them by a gesture to be seated*]. Excuse the dining-room, gentlemen; looks more like business than the drawing-room.

STEPHEN [*on the left*]. Where's Tad?

ANN. Yes, where's Tad?

LOUISA [*sitting beside her*]. Where are Tad and Phyllis?

JAMES [*looking at his watch*]. Five past, by my watch.

ROSE [*sitting at the left-hand end of the table*]. Oh, never mind them

JAMES [*to STEPHEN*]. P'r'aps you told 'em four-thirty?

STEPHEN [*netitled*]. Perhaps I told them!

JAMES. All right, all right; don't flare up! P'r'aps I did; there *was* a talk of making it half-past.

STEPHEN [*raising his arms*]. On the day I go to press—

JAMES. Ring the bell. [*Opening the door and calling*] Maud! Maud—!

[*STEPHEN rings the bell. ELKIN and VALLANCE are now seated, ELKIN in the farther chair at the right-hand end of the dining-table, VALLANCE in the chair between ELKIN and ANN. They open their bags and sort and arrange their papers.*]

PONTING. We shall be here till midnight.

JAMES. Maud—!

ROSE [*pushing her chair away from the table*]. How vexing!

PONTING [*with a sneer*]. I suppose

one can buy a soot of pyjamas in the town, eh, Mrs James?

ELKIN. I sha'n't detain you long

[*The servant appears at the door.*]

JAMES. Maud, run down to Nelson Villas—just as you are—

ROSE [*satirically*]. Don't hurry them, Jim. Phyllis is smartening herself up.

STEPHEN [*seating himself in the farther chair at the left-hand end of the dining-table, loudly*]. Say we are waiting for Mr. Thaddeus.

JAMES [*to the girl*]. Mr. James and the family are waiting for Mr. Thaddeus. [*As he closes the door*] Go along Collier Street; you may meet him.

PONTING [*fussily*]. We can deal with preliminaries, at any rate. Kindly push that ash-tray a little nearer. [*To VALLANCE.*] Mr. Vallance—

JAMES [*leaving the door, resenting PONTING'S assumption of authority*]. I beg your pardon, Colonel; we'll give my brother another five minutes' grace, with your permission.

PONTING [*shrugging his shoulders*]. By all means—ten—twenty—

JAMES [*finding that he has the newspaper in his hand*]. Oh—here—! [*Opening the paper.*] While we're waiting for Tad—

STEPHEN. Ah, yes Read it aloud, Jim.

PONTING [*rising and moving away impatiently*]. Tsch!

JAMES. Mr. Vallance, Mr. Elkin—oblige us by listening to this. It's from the *Courier*.

STEPHEN. This week's *Courier*—published to-day—

VALLANCE [*to ELKIN*]. One of our local papers

JAMES. Owned by a feller o' the name of Hammond. [*Reading*] "Town Topics."

ANN. He married a Miss Robson.

LOUISA. A dreadful woman

STEPHEN. Sssh, sssh! Mr. Hammond's offensive remarks are usually directed against *myself*, but in this instance—

JAMES [*walking about as he reads*] "A curious complication arises in connection with the estate of the late Mr. Edward Mortimore of Linchpool."

STEPHEN. He doesn't cloak his attack, you see.

JAMES. "As many of our readers are aware—[*running his hands over his pockets*]—as many of our readers are aware—"

STEPHEN. *He has made them aware of it.*

JAMES [to ANN]. Where did I put them, Mother?

ANN [producing her spectacles] Try mine, James.

[ANN gives her spectacles to STEPHEN, STEPHEN gives them to ROSE, and ROSE presents them to JAMES]

JAMES I'm getting as blear-eyed as Stephen. [Resuming.] "As many of our readers are aware, the whole of that gentleman's wealth passes, in consequence of his having died intestate, to a well-known Singlehampton family——"

LOUISA That points to us

STEPHEN [irritably]. Of course it does; of course it does

LOUISA. There's no better-known family in Singlehampton than ours.

STEPHEN. Sssh, sssh!

JAMES. "—two members of which——"

ANN. The Mockfords were an older family—but where are the Mockfords?

JAMES [to ANN]. Give me a chance. Ann [Continuing.] "—two members of which have been for many years prominently associated with the temperance movement in this town."

STEPHEN [rising]. My brother James and myself.

JAMES [standing at the table, facing ELKIN and VALLANCE, in his oratorical manner] Twelve years ago, gentlemen, I was instrumental in founding the Singlehampton and Claybrook Temperance League——

LOUISA. Stephen was another of the founders.

STEPHEN [joining JAMES]. I was another

JAMES And day in and day out I have devoted my best energies to furthering the objects of the League in Singlehampton and in Claybrook.

STEPHEN. Very materially aided by the *Times and Mirror*, a temperance organ.

JAMES. And I submit that it's holding us up to ridicule and contempt—holding us up to public obloquy and derisions——

VALLANCE [to JAMES]. What is your objection to the paragraph, Mr Mortimore?

JAMES. Objection!

ELKIN. There's more to come, I expect

JAMES [grimly]. Aye, a bit more. [Sitting at the table.] What d'ye think of this? [Reading.] "When it is remembered that the late Mr. Mortimore's fortune was derived from the brewing and the sale of beer——"

STEPHEN [sitting beside JAMES]. The word "beer" is in italics.

VALLANCE Oh, I see.

JAMES. "—it will be understood that our two distinguished fellow-townsmen are placed in an extremely difficult position"

STEPHEN. This is the most spiteful part of it

JAMES. "We have no doubt, however, that, as conscientious men, they will prove fully equal to the occasion by either renouncing their share of their late brother's property or by dedicating it entirely to the advancement of the cause they have at heart." [Throwing the newspaper to ELKIN and VALLANCE] There it is, gentlemen.

[In wandering round the room, PONTING has come upon the decanter of wine and the wine-glasses standing on the sideboard. He is now filling a glass]

PONTING. Every man has a right to his convictions [Taking the glass in his hand] A little alcohol hurts nobody——

JAMES. You won't find any in my house.

PONTING What's this, then?

JAMES Currant.

PONTING [replacing the glass, with a wry face]. My dear Mortimore . . .!

[He sits at the right-hand end of the table, beside ELKIN, and pres at the documents which ELKIN has taken from his bag. VALLANCE and ELKIN are reading the paragraph together, VALLANCE drawing his chair closer to ELKIN'S for that purpose.]

JAMES [to VALLANCE] Well, what's your opinion, Mr Vallance? Is that libellous, or isn't it?

STEPHEN Docs it, or does it not, go beyond the bounds of fair comment—eh, Mr. Elkin?

VALLANCE [pacifically] Oh, but aren't you attaching a great deal too much importance to this?

JAMES Too much——!

ELKIN Why not ignore it?

STEPHEN Ignore it!

VALLANCE. Treat it as a piece of pure chaff—badinage——

ELKIN In more or less bad taste

VALLANCE. Take no notice of it whatever.

JAMES [rising and walking away to the fireplace] Take no notice of it! The townspeople will take notice of it pretty quickly.

STEPHEN [rising]. In my opinion, that paragraph renders our position in the League absolutely untenable.

JAMES [standing over VALLANCE]

Unless that paragraph is apologized for, withdrawn—

STEPHEN [*standing over ELKIN*]. Explained away—

JAMES Aye, explained away—

VALLANCE I don't see how it can be explained away.

ELKIN [*dryly*]. The proposition is a perfectly accurate one, whatever you may think of the corollary

VALLANCE You *are* ardent advocates of temperance

ELKINS. Your late brother's property was amassed mainly by beer

VALLANCE. It can hardly be explained away.

STEPHEN [*walking to the left*]. Good heavens above, I've explained things away often enough in *my* paper!

JAMES [*coming forward on the right*] This does us at the League, then—*does* us, knocks our influence into a cocked hat

ELKIN [*to JAMES and STEPHEN, while VALLANCE folds the paper*]. After all, gentlemen, when you come to reflect upon it, the laugh is with *you*.

JAMES. *Is it?*

ELKIN [*genially*]. The *Courier* has its little joke, but *you've* got the money, remember.

JAMES Oh, that's true

STEPHEN [*walking about on the left, rattling his loose cash*]. Aye, *we've* got the mopuses.

ROSE [*tilting her chair on its hind legs*]. I say, Jim—Stephen—why don't you two boys, between you, present the League with a handsome hall—?

JAMES [*pausing in his walk*] Hall?

ROSE Build the temperance folk a meeting-place of their own—a headquarters—

PONTING [*mischievously*] He, he, he! That 'ud smooth 'em down. Capital idea, Rosie!

JAMES and STEPHEN We!

JAMES I'd see 'em damned first [*To the ladies*] I beg pardon—

ANN [*with unusual animation*] No, no; you're quite right, James.

STEPHEN [*at the fireplace*] That would be playing into Mr. Hammond's hands with a vengeance.

JAMES [*walking across to the left, derisively*] Ha! Wouldn't Hammond crow, hey! Ha, ha, ha!

STEPHEN. No, if the situation becomes too acute—painful as it would be to me—I sha' resign.

JAMES [*determinedly*] Resign.

STEPHEN. Sever my connection with the League

JAMES. Leave 'em to swill themselves with their lemonade and boiled tea—!

STEPHEN [*coming forward on the right*] And to find out how they get on without us

JAMES. Serve 'em up in their own juice!

STEPHEN [*meeting JAMES in the middle of the room on the nearer side of the dining-table*] You know, Jim, we've never gone *quite* so far—you and I—with the principles of temperance as some.

JAMES [*eyeing him curiously*] Never gone so far—?

STEPHEN As old Bob Amphlett, for example—never

JAMES Oh, yes, we have, and a deuced sight farther.

STEPHEN. Excuse me—I've *always* been for moderation rather than for total abstinence

JAMES. Have yer? [*Walking away to the left*] First I've heard of it.

STEPHEN. Anyhow, a man may broaden his views with years and experience [*Argumentatively*] Take the hygienic aspect of the case Only the other day, Sir Vincent West, probably the ablest physician in England—

LOUISA [*abruptly*] Stephen!

STEPHEN [*angrily*] Don't interrupt me.

LOUISA [*with energy, rising*] I've maintained it throughout my life—it's nothing new from my lips—

STEPHEN. What—

LOUISA There are two sides to every question

STEPHEN [*hurrying round the table to join LOUISA*]. Exactly—exactly—as Lou says—

LOUISA. It's been almost a second religion with me I've preached it in season and out of season—

STEPHEN [*with conviction*]. There are two sides—

LOUISA Two sides to every question

JAMES [*to ANN, pointing to the door*]. Mother . . . [*The door has been opened by another maid-servant, who carries a tray on which are a plated kettle, a dish of toast, and a plentiful supply of bread-and-butter. The girl remains in the doorway. ANN rises and goes to her and takes the kettle from the tray JAMES comes forward and seats himself on the nearer side of the dining-table in the maid's chair.*] Look here; I don't wait another minute for the Tads—not a second

PONTING. Ah!

[*LOUISA follows ANN and takes the toast and the bread-and-butter from the servant, who then disappears, closing the door*]

STEPHEN [again sitting in the farther chair at the left-hand end of the dining-table]. Inexcusable of them—inexcusable.

[*ANN and LOUISA come to the tea-table and, drawing the two armchairs up to it, seat themselves and prepare the tea. The kettle is set upon the stand, the spirit-lamp is lighted, ANN measures the tea from the caddy into the pot, and LOUISA cuts the plum-cake.*]

JAMES. Mr. Elkin—Mr. Vallance—

PONTING. Now, Mr. Vallance; now, Mr. Elkin!

ELKIN [to VALLANCE]. Will you . . . ?

VALLANCE. No, no—you . . .

ELKIN. Well, gentlemen—[to ROSE]—Mrs. Ponting—Mr. Vallance and I have to report to you that we've received no communication of any kind in answer to our circulars and advertisements—

[*ANN is making a clatter with the kettle*]

JAMES [to ANN]. Steady, Mother.

PONTING [to the ladies at the tea-table]. Sssh, sssh, sssh!

ELKIN. No communication from any solicitor who has prepared a will for your late brother, nor from anybody who has knowingly witnessed a will executed by him.

STEPHEN. Mr. Vallance has apprised us of this already.

JAMES [raising a hand]. Order! There's a formal way of doing things and a lax way.

STEPHEN. I merely mentioned—

[*PONTING raps the table sharply with his knuckles*]

ELKIN. I may say that, in addition to the issuing of the circulars and advertisements, I have made search in every place I could think of, and have inquired of every person likely to be of help in the matter. In fact, I've taken every possible step to find, or trace, a will.

VALLANCE. Without success.

ELKIN. Without success.

JAMES [magnanimously]. And I say that the family bears no grudge to Mr. Elkin for doing his duty.

STEPHEN [in the same spirit]. Hear, hear!

PONTING [testily]. Of course not; of course not.

ROSE. It's all the more satisfactory, it seems to me, that he has worried round

JAMES. The family thanks Mr. Elkin

STEPHEN. We thank Mr. Elkin.

ELKIN [after a stiff inclination of the head]. The only other observation I wish to make is that several gentlemen employed in the office of the brewery in Linchpool have at different times witnessed the late Mr. Mortimore's signature to documents which have apparently required the attestation of two witnesses.

PONTING [curtly]. That amounts to nothing.

JAMES. There are a good many documents, aren't there, where two witnesses are required to a signature?

ELKIN. Deeds under seal, certainly.

STEPHEN. I remember having to sign, some years ago—

[*PONTING again raps the table*]

VALLANCE. But none of these gentlemen at the brewery can recall that any particular document appeared to him to be a will, which is not a document under seal

JAMES. Besides, a man signing a will always tells the witnesses that it is his will they're witnessing, doesn't he, Mr. Vallance?

VALLANCE. A solicitor would, in the ordinary course of practice, inform the witnesses to a will of the nature of the document they were attesting, undoubtedly.

ELKIN. Granted; but a testator, supposing he were executing his will in his own house or office, and not in the presence of a solicitor, is under no legal necessity to do so, and may omit to do so.

JAMES [rolling about in his chair]. Oh, well, we needn't—

PONTING [looking at his watch]. In heaven's name—!

STEPHEN. We needn't go into all this.

ELKIN. No, no; I simply draw attention to the point. [Unfolding a document.] Well, gentlemen—Mrs. Ponting—this is a statement—[handing another document to VALLANCE]—here is a copy of it, Mr. Vallance—this is a statement of particulars of stocks, shares, and other items of estate, with their values at the death of the late Mr. Mortimore, and a schedule of the debts so far as they are known to me.

[*There is a general movement. JAMES rises and goes to VALLANCE. STEPHEN also rises, stretching out an eager hand towards VALLANCE. ROSE draws nearer to the table. PONTING still closer to ELKIN. ANN and LOUISA, too, show a disposition to desert the tea-table.*]

JAMES [to ANN, as he passes her] You get on with the tea, Mother [To VALLANCE] Allow me, Mr Vallance—

[VALLANCE gives him the duplicate of the statement]

PONTING. What's it come out at; what's it come out at?

STEPHEN. What's it come out at?

ROSE. Yes, what does it come out at?

Jim—

STEPHEN. Jim—

[JAMES joins STEPHEN and they examine the duplicate together. ROSE rises and endeavors to read it with them]

ELKIN. I estimate the gross value of the estate, which, as you will see, consists entirely of personal property, as one hundred and ninety-two thousand pounds.

PONTING. The gross value.

STEPHEN. Yes, but what do we get?

PONTING and ROSE. What do we get?

JAMES. After all deductions

ELKIN. Roughly speaking, after payment of debts, death duties, there will be about a hundred and seventy thousand pounds to divide. [Those who are standing sit again. JAMES seats himself next to STEPHEN and, with pen and ink, they make calculations on paper. PONTING does the same. ROSE, closing her eyes, fans herself happily, and the two ladies at the tea-table resume their preparations with beaming countenances. ELKIN leans back in his chair.] Mr. Vallance—

VALLANCE [to ROSE, JAMES, and STEPHEN]. Mrs Ponting and gentlemen—[PONTING raps the table and JAMES and STEPHEN look up]—I advise you that, as next-of-kin of the late Mr. Mortimore, if you are satisfied—and in my opinion you may reasonably be satisfied—that he died intestate—I advise you that any one or more of you, not exceeding three [the door opens quietly and THADDEUS appears. He is very pale, but is outwardly calm. After a look in the direction of the table, he closes the door]—may apply for Letters of Administration of your late brother's estate. It isn't necessary or usual, however, I may tell you, to have more than one administrator, and I suggest—

[Hearing the click of the lock as THADDEUS shuts the door, everybody turns and glances at him.]

ROSE [opening her eyes]. Here's Tad.

STEPHEN [grumpily]. Oh—

ROSE [tossing THADDEUS a greeting]. Hallo!

JAMES [to THADDEUS, with a growl]. Oh, you've arrived.

STEPHEN [to THADDEUS]. Did I say four or half-past—?

LOUISA Where's Phyllis?

ANN. Where's Phyllis?

THADDEUS [in a low voice, advancing] She—she didn't feel well enough—

[PONTING raps the inkstand with his penholder.]

JAMES [pointing to the chair beside him, imperatively]. Sit down; sit down. [THADDEUS sits, his elbows on the table, his eyes cast down] Mr. Vallance . . .

VALLANCE [to THADDEUS]. Good afternoon, Mr. Mortimore.

ELKIN [nodding to THADDEUS]. How d'ye do?

THADDEUS [almost inaudibly]. Good afternoon

VALLANCE [to the others]. I suppose we needn't go back . . . ?

A MURMUR. No, no; no, no.

JAMES [pushing the duplicate of the statement under THADDEUS'S eyes]. A hundred and seventy thousand pounds to divide.

STEPHEN. A hundred and seventy thousand

PONTING [finishing his sum]. Forty-two thousand five hundred apiece.

VALLANCE [resuming]. I was saying that it isn't usual to have more than one administrator, and I was about to suggest that the best course will be for you, Mr. James, to act in that capacity, and for you, Mr. Stephen, and you, Mr. Thaddeus, or one of you, and Colonel Ponting, to be the sureties to the bond for the due administration of the estate.

JAMES [cheerfully]. I'm in your hands, Mr. Vallance.

STEPHEN. I'm agreeable.

PONTING. And I.

VALLANCE. The procedure is this—perhaps I'd better explain it. [Producing a form of "Oath for Administrators" which is among his papers.] The intended administrator will make an affidavit stating when and where the deceased died, that he died intestate [THADDEUS looks up]—a bachelor without a parent, and that the deponent is a natural and lawful brother and one of the next-of-kin of the deceased—

THADDEUS [touching VALLANCE'S arm]. Mr. Vallance . . .

VALLANCE. Eh?

THADDEUS. We—we mustn't go on with this.

VALLANCE. I beg pardon?

THADDEUS. The family mustn't go on with this

VALLANCE. Mustn't go on—?

JAMES [*to THADDEUS*] What a'yer talking about?

THADDEUS [*after a hurried look round*] There—there was a will.

VALLANCE. A will?

THADDEUS. He—he made a will.

JAMES. Who did?

THADDEUS. Edward. He—he left a will.

JAMES [*roughly*] What the——!

ELKIN [*to JAMES, interrupting him*]. One moment Your brother has something to say to us, Mr. Mortimore

STEPHEN. What—what's he mean by——?

ELKIN [*to STEPHEN*] Please! [*To THADDEUS*] Yes, sir? [*THADDEUS is silent*] What about a will? [*THADDEUS as still silent*] Eh?

THADDEUS. I—I saw it.

ELKIN. Saw a will?

THADDEUS. I—I opened it—I—I read it——

ELKIN. Read it?

THADDEUS. I—tore it up—got rid of it.

[*Again there is silence, the MORTIMORES and the PONTINGS sitting open-mouthed and motionless*]

ELKIN [*after a while*] Mr. Vallance, I think we ought to tell Mr Mortimore that he appears to be making a confession of the gravest kind——

VALLANCE. Yes

ELKIN. One that puts him in a very serious position.

VALLANCE [*to THADDEUS, after a further pause*]. Mr. Mortimore . . .?

[*THADDEUS makes no response.*]

ELKIN. If, understanding that, he chooses to continue, there is nothing to prevent our hearing him.

THADDEUS [*looking straight before him, his arms still upon the table, locking and unlocking his hands as he speaks*]. It—it happened on the Wednesday night—in Cannon Row—in Ned's house—the night before he died—the night we were left without a nurse. [*Another pause. VALLANCE takes a sheet of paper and selects a pen. ELKIN pushes the inkstand nearer to him.*] Mrs. James—and Mrs. Stephen—my—my sisters-in-law——

[*ANN and LOUISA get to their feet and advance a step or two.*]

ELKIN [*hearing the rustle of their skirts and turning to them*]. Keep your seats, ladies, please.

[*They sit again, drawing their chairs close together*]

THADDEUS. My sisters-in-law had gone home—that is, to their hotel—to get a few hours' sleep in case of their having to sit up through the night. Jim and Stephen and I were out and about, trying to find a night-nurse who'd take Nurse Ralston's place temporarily. At about nine o'clock, I looked in at Cannon Row, to see how things were getting on.

VALLANCE [*who is writing*]. The Wednesday? Mr. Edward Mortimore dying on Thursday, the twentieth of June——

ELKIN. On the morning of Thursday, the twentieth.

VALLANCE. That makes the Wednesday we are speaking of, Wednesday, June the nineteenth.

ELKIN [*to THADDEUS*]. You looked in at Cannon Row——?

VALLANCE. At about nine o'clock on the night of Wednesday, June the nineteenth.

THADDEUS. I—I went upstairs and sat by Ned's bed, and by and by he began talking to me about—about Phyllis. He—he'd taken rather a fancy to her, he said, and he wanted to give her a memento—a keepsake

ELKIN. Phyllis——?

VALLANCE [*to ELKIN*]. His wife. [*To THADDEUS*] Your wife?

[*THADDEUS nods*]

ELKIN [*recollecting*]. Of course.

THADDEUS [*moistening his lips with his tongue*]. He—he had some little bits of jewelry in his safe, and he—he asked me to go downstairs and—and to bring them up to him.

ELKIN [*keenly*]. In his safe?

VALLANCE. The safe in the library?

[*THADDEUS nods again.*]

ELKIN. Quite so

VALLANCE. And—er——?

THADDEUS. He—he gave me his keys, and I—I went down—I——

[*He stops suddenly and VALLANCE glances at him. Noticing his extreme pallor, VALLANCE looks round the room. Seeing the water-bottle upon the sideboard, VALLANCE rises and fills the tumbler. Returning to the table, he places the glass before THADDEUS and resumes his seat.*]

THADDEUS [*after a gulp of water*]. It was—it was in the drawer of the safe—the drawer——

ELKIN. What was?

THADDEUS [*wiping his mouth with his*

handkerchief]. A large envelope—a large envelope—the envelope containing the will

VALLANCE. How did you know—?

THADDEUS. "My Will" was written on it

VALLANCE [*writing*] "My Will" . . .

ELKIN. On the envelope? [THADDEUS *nods*] You say you opened it?

[THADDEUS *nods*.]

VALLANCE. Opened the envelope—

ELKIN. And inside—you found—

VALLANCE. What did you find?

THADDEUS. Ned's will.

VALLANCE [*writing*] What appeared to be your brother Edward's will

ELKIN. You read it? [THADDEUS *nods*] Will you tell us—?

[The MORTIMORES and the PONTINGS crane their necks forward, listening breathlessly]

THADDEUS. He left everything—[*taking another gulp of water*—everything—to Miss Thornhill.

[*There is a slight, undecided movement on the part of the MORTIMORES and the PONTINGS*]

ELKIN [*calmly but firmly*]. Keep your seats; keep your seats, please. [To THADDEUS] Can you recall the general form of the will?

THADDEUS [*straining his memory*] Everything he had—died possessed of—to Helen Thornhill—spinster—of some address in Paris—absolutely. And—and he appointed her his sole executrix

ELKIN. Do you recollect the date?

THADDEUS. Date—?

ELKIN. Did you observe the date of the will?

THADDEUS [*quickly*]. Oh, yes; it was made three years ago.

ELKIN [*to VALLANCE*]. When she came of age.

THADDEUS. Oh, and he asked her to remember his servants—old servants at the brewery and in Cannon Row. [*Leaning back, exhausted*.] There was nothing else It was very short—written by Ned—

ELKIN. The whole of it? [THADDEUS *nods, with half-closed eyes*] The whole of it was in his handwriting? [THADDEUS *nods again*.] Ah! [To VALLANCE, with a note of triumph in his voice] A holograph will, Mr. Vallance, prepared by the man himself.

VALLANCE [*now taking up the questioning of THADDEUS*] Tell me, Mr. Mortimore, have you any exact recollection as to whether this document, which you describe as a will, was duly signed and witnessed?

THADDEUS [*rousing himself*]. It was—it was—signed by Ned

VALLANCE. Was it signed, not only by your brother, but by two witnesses under an attestation clause stating that the testator signed in the joint presence of those witnesses and that each of them signed in his presence?

THADDEUS. I—I don't recollect that

VALLANCE [*writing*] You've no recollection of that

[JAMES, STEPHEN, and PONTING stir themselves.]

JAMES [*hoarsely*]. He doesn't recollect that, Mr. Vallance.

STEPHEN [*in quavering tones*] No, he—he doesn't recollect that

PONTING [*pulling at his mustache with trembling fingers*]. That's most important, Mr. Vallance, isn't it—isn't it?

VALLANCE [*to THADDEUS, not heeding the interruption*]. You say you destroyed this document—

ELKIN. Tore it up.

VALLANCE. When—and where? In the room—in the library?

THADDEUS [*thinking*]. N-no—out of doors.

VALLANCE. Out of doors. When?

THADDEUS [*at a loss*] When . . . ?

VALLANCE. When? [*Looking at him in surprise*] You can't remember?

THADDEUS [*recollecting*]. Oh, yes, yes, yes. Some time between ten and eleven on the Thursday morning, after I left Phyllis—after I left my wife at Roper's to be measured for her black.

VALLANCE [*writing*]. What did you do then?

THADDEUS [*readily*]. I went to Ford Street bridge, and tore up the paper, and dropped the pieces into the Linch

VALLANCE [*writing*] Into the river . . .

ELKIN. One more question, Mr. Mortimore—to make your motive perfectly clear to us. May we assume that, on the night of June the nineteenth, you were sufficiently acquainted with the law of intestacy to know that, if this dying man left no will, you would be likely to benefit considerably?

THADDEUS. Well, I—I had—the idea . . .

ELKIN. The idea?

THADDEUS. I—I—[*recollecting*]. Oh, yes; there'd been a discussion in the train, you see, on the Tuesday, going to Linchpool—

ELKIN. Discussion?

THADDEUS. Among us all, as to how a

man's money is disposed of, if he dies intestate.

ELKIN [*nodding*] Precisely. [*To JAMES and STEPHEN*] You remember that conversation taking place, gentlemen?

JAMES. Oh, I—I dessay

ELKIN [*to THADDEUS*]. So that, when you came upon the envelope with the endorsement upon it—"My Will" . . . ?

THADDEUS [*leaning his head upon his hands*]. Yes—yes . . .

VALLANCE [*running his eyes over his notes, to THADDEUS*]. Have you anything to add, Mr. Mortimore?

THADDEUS [*in a muffled voice*] No. [*Quickly*] Oh, there is one thing I should like to add. [*Brokenly*] With regard to Miss Thornhill—I—I hope you'll bear in mind that I—that none of us—heard from Mr Elkin of the existence of a child—a daughter—till the Thursday—middle-day . . .

ELKIN. That is so.

THADDEUS. It doesn't make it much better; only—a girl—alone in the world—one wouldn't—[*breaking off*—no, I've nothing more to say.

ELKIN [*to THADDEUS*] And we may take it that your present act, Mr. Mortimore, is an act of conscience, purely?

[*THADDEUS inclines his head. There is silence again, the MORTIMORES and the PONTINGS presenting a picture of utter wretchedness. The ladies' tears begin to flow.*]

JAMES [*after a time, speaking with some difficulty*]. Well—

STEPHEN [*piteously*]. Mr. Vallance . . . ?

JAMES. What—what's to be done, Mr. Vallance?

PONTING [*to the ladies*]. For God's sake, be quiet!

JAMES [*with a clenched fist on the table*]. What we want to know is—what we want to know is—who does my brother Edward's money belong to now—her or us?

STEPHEN [*in agony*]. Her!

PONTING. Don't be a damn fool, Mortimore!

VALLANCE. Well, gentlemen, I confess I am hardly prepared to express an opinion off-hand on the legal aspect of the case—

PONTING. The will's torn up—it's destroyed—!

STEPHEN. It's destroyed—gone—gone!

PONTING. Gone.

VALLANCE. But I need not remind you. there is another aspect—

PONTING I don't care a rap for any other aspect—

STEPHEN. We want the law explained to us—the law—

PONTING The law—!

JAMES [*to ELKIN*]. Mr. Elkin—?

ELKIN You appeal to me, gentlemen?

STEPHEN and PONTING. Yes—yes—

ELKIN Then I feel bound to tell you that I shall advise Miss Thornhill, as the executrix named in the will, to apply to the Court for probate of its substance and effect—

VALLANCE [*to ELKIN*]. Ask the Court to presume the will to have been made in due form—?

ELKIN Decidedly

[*STEPHEN and PONTING fall back in their seats in a stupor, and once more there is silence, broken only by the sound of the women sniveling. ELKIN and VALLANCE slowly proceed to collect their papers*]

JAMES [*turning upon THADDEUS, brutally*]. Have you—have you told Phyllis—have you told your wife what you've been up to?

[*At the mention of PHYLLIS there is a movement of indignation on the part of the ladies.*]

ROSE Ha!

JAMES [*to THADDEUS*]. Have yer?

THADDEUS Y-yes—just before I came out. [*Weakly.*] That—that's what made me so late.

JAMES [*between his teeth*]. What does she think of yer?

THADDEUS Oh, she—she's dreadfully—cut up—of course.

ROSE [*hysterically*]. The jewelry! Ha, ha, ha! [*Rising.*] She's managed to get hold of some of the jewelry, at any rate

ANN [*with a sob*] Yes, she—she managed that

LOUISA [*mopping her face*]. She's kept that from us artfully enough.

ROSE [*going over to ANN and LOUISA, who rise to receive her*]. Ha, ha! Edward's little bits of jewelry!

ANN. Little bits!

ROSE. They're little bits that are left.

LOUISA How many did she have of them, I wonder!

ROSE. She shall be made to restore them—

LOUISA Every one of them.

THADDEUS. No, no, no—[*Stretching out a hand towards the ladies.*] Rosie—Ann—Lou—Phyllis hadn't any of the jew-

elry—not a scrap I put it all back into the safe I—I swear she hadn't any of it.

ELKIN. Why did you do that?

THADDEUS [*agitatedly*] Why, you see, Mr. Elkin, when I carried it upstairs, I found my brother Edward in a state of collapse—a sort of faint—

ELKIN [*with a nod*] Ah—

THADDEUS. And Phyllis—my wife—she sent me off at once for the doctor. It was on the Wednesday evening, you know—

VALLANCE [*pricking up his ears*]. Your wife, Mr. Mortimore—?

THADDEUS. It was on a Wednesday evening that the change set in

VALLANCE [*to THADDEUS*]. Your wife sent you off at once—?

THADDEUS. To fetch the doctor.

VALLANCE [*raising his eyebrows*] Oh, Mrs. Mortimore was in the house while this was going on?

THADDEUS. Y—yes; she was left in charge of him—in charge of Ned—

ELKIN [*to VALLANCE, in explanation*]. To allow these other ladies to rest, preparatory to their taking charge later.

THADDEUS. Yes

VALLANCE. I hadn't gathered—

JAMES [*who had been sitting glaring into space thoughtfully*]. Hold hard. [*To THADDEUS*] You didn't go for the doctor.

THADDEUS. Yes, I—I went—

STEPHEN [*awakening from his trance*]. Phyllis sent the cook for the doctor.

THADDEUS. Yes, yes; you're quite right. The cook was the first to go—

ELKIN [*to THADDEUS*]. You followed?

THADDEUS. I followed.

JAMES [*knitting his brows*]. It must have been a good time afterwards.

THADDEUS. Y—yes, perhaps it was.

JAMES. I was at Dr. Oswald's when the woman arrived. The doctor was out, and—

VALLANCE [*to THADDEUS*]. You said your wife sent you at once.

THADDEUS. Told me to go at once. There—there was the jewelry to put back into the safe . . .

VALLANCE [*eyeing THADDEUS*]. What time was it when you got to the doctor's?

THADDEUS. Oh—ten, I should say—or a quarter-past

JAMES [*shaking his head*]. No. I sat there, waiting for Dr. Oswald to come in—

STEPHEN [*to THADDEUS*]. Besides,

that couldn't have been; you were with me then.

JAMES [*to STEPHEN*] Was he?

STEPHEN. Why, yes; he and I were at the Nurses' Home in Wharton Street from half-past nine till ten

JAMES. Half-past nine—?

STEPHEN [*becoming more confident as he proceeds*]. And we never left each other till we went back to Cannon Row.

VALLANCE. Let us understand this—

PONTING [*having gradually revived, eagerly*] Yes—yes—[*to the ladies*]—sssh!

STEPHEN. And, what's more, we allowed ourselves a quarter of an hour to walk to Wharton Street

JAMES [*quietly, looking round*] Hallo . . . !

THADDEUS. It—it's evident that I—that I'm mistaken in thinking that I—that I went to Dr. Oswald's—

VALLANCE. Mistaken?

THADDEUS. I—I suppose that, as the woman had already gone, I—I considered it—wasn't necessary . . . [*To ELKIN and VALLANCE, passing his hand before his eyes*] You must excuse my stupidity, gentlemen

VALLANCE [*to THADDEUS, distrustfully*]. Then, according to your brother Stephen, Mr. Mortimore, you were in Cannon Row, on the occasion of this particular visit, no longer than from nine o'clock till a quarter past?

STEPHEN. Not so long, because we met, by arrangement, at a quarter-past nine, in the hall of the Grand Hotel—

JAMES. The hotel's six or seven minutes' walk from Cannon Row—

PONTING. Quite, quite.

THADDEUS [*a little wildly*]. I said I called in at Cannon Row at about nine o'clock. It may have been half-past eight; it may have been eight—

JAMES. Ann and Lou didn't leave Cannon Row till past eight—

LOUISA [*standing, with ANN and ROSE, by the tea-table*]. It had gone eight—

JAMES. I walked 'em round to the Grand—

STEPHEN. The three of us walked with them to the Grand—!

LOUISA. All three—

JAMES. So we did.

STEPHEN [*excitedly*]. And then Thaddeus went off to the Clarence Hospital with a note from Dr. Oswald—

JAMES. By George, yes!

STEPHEN. I left him opposite the Ex-

change—it must have been nearly half-past eight *then*!

[*JAMES rises. The ladies draw nearer to the dining-table*]

THADDEUS Ah, but I didn't go to the hospital—I didn't go to the hospital—

STEPHEN [*rising*] Yes, you did You brought a note *back* from the hospital, for us to take to Wharton Street—

VALLANCE [*to ELKIN*] How far is the Clarence Hospital from the Exchange?

ELKIN. A ten-minutes' drive It's on the other side of the water.

THADDEUS. I—I—I'd forgotten the hospital—

JAMES [*scowling at THADDEUS*]. Forgotten—?

THADDEUS I—I—I mean I—I thought the hospital came later—after I'd been at Wharton Street . . .

JAMES [*going to VALLANCE and tapping him on the shoulder*]. Mr Vallance—

THADDEUS. I—I must have gone to Cannon Row *between* my return from the hospital and my meeting Stephen at the Grand—

JAMES [*to ELKIN and VALLANCE*]. Why, he couldn't have *done* it, gentlemen—

PONTING. Impossible!

STEPHEN. It's obvious, he *couldn't* have done it.

THADDEUS. I—I was only a few minutes at the hospital—

ELKIN [*scribbling on the back of a document*]. Oh, yes, he could have done it—barely—

VALLANCE [*making a mental calculation*]. Assuming that he left his brother at the Exchange at eight-twenty—

ELKIN. Ten minutes *to* the hospital.

VALLANCE. If he drove there—

THADDEUS. I did drive—I did drive—

PONTING [*also figuring it out on paper*]. Ten minutes back—

ELKIN. Ten minutes *at* the hospital—

PONTING. Eight-fifty—

THADDEUS. Eight-fifty in Cannon Row! That was it—that was it, Mr. Elkin—

JAMES. Give him twenty minutes in Cannon Row—*give* it him! He couldn't have done all he says he did in the time, gentlemen—

STEPHEN. He couldn't have *done* it—

PONTING. Impossible!

ELKIN [*to PONTING*]. No, no, please—not impossible.

VALLANCE [*to STEPHEN*]. When you met Mr Thaddeus Mortimore—you—when you met him in the hall of the Grand Hotel, before starting for Wharton Street, did he say anything to you as to his having just called at the house—?

STEPHEN No

VALLANCE Nothing as to an alarming change in your brother's condition?

STEPHEN. Not a syllable.

JAMES [*to ELKIN and VALLANCE*]. Oh, there's a screw loose here, gentlemen, surely?

STEPHEN [*joining JAMES*]. That is *most* extraordinary, Mr. Vallance—isn't it? Not a syllable!

[*ANN and LOUISA join their husbands and the four gather round ELKIN and VALLANCE. ROSE stands behind PONTING'S chair.*]

THADDEUS You see—Edward—Edward had rallied before I left Cannon Row. He—he'd fallen into a nice, quiet sleep—

JAMES. All in twenty minutes, gentlemen—twenty minutes at the outside!

VALLANCE [*to THADDEUS*] Mr. Mortimore—

ANN I remember—

PONTING [*to ANN*]. Hold your tongue!

VALLANCE Mr. Mortimore, *who let you into the house* in Cannon Row on the night of June the nineteenth?

PONTING. Ah, yes—

VALLANCE. At *any* time between the hours of eight o'clock? . . .

STEPHEN. And eleven.

ELKIN [*to THADDEUS*]. Who gave you admittance—which of the servants?

THADDEUS. I—I can't—I don't [*blankly, addressing VALLANCE*] was it she—the butler? . . .

VALLANCE. No, no; I ask *you*. [*To ELKIN, who nods in reply*] Have you the servants' addresses?

THADDEUS. But you wouldn't—you wouldn't trust to the servants' memories as to—as to which of them opened the front door to me a month ago! [*With an attempt at a laugh*] It's ridiculous!

ELKIN [*reprovingly*]. Ah, now, now, Mr. Mortimore!

THADDEUS [*starting up from the table*] Oh, it isn't fair—it isn't fair of you to badger me like this; it isn't fair!

VALLANCE. Nobody desires to "badger" you—

THADDEUS. Trip me up, then—confuse me. [*At the left-hand end of the table, clutching the back of a chair.*] The will—the will's the main point—Ned's will.

What does it matter—what can it matter, to a quarter of an hour or so—when I was in Cannon Row, or how long I was there? One would think, by the way I'm being treated, gentlemen, that I'd something to gain by this, instead of everything to lose—everything to lose!

JAMES [*coming forward, on the farther side of the table*] Don't you whine about what *you've* got to lose—!

STEPHEN [*joining him*]. What about us!

THE LADIES. Us!

PONTING [*hitting the table*]. Yes, confound you!

VALLANCE. Colonel Ponting!

ELKIN [*to JAMES and STEPHEN*] It seems to me—if my friend Mr. Vallance will allow me to say so—that you are really bearing a little hardly on your brother Thaddeus

THADDEUS [*gratefully*]. Thank you, Mr. Elkin.

ELKIN. What reason—what possible reason can there be for doubting his good faith?

THADDEUS Thank you

ELKIN. Here is a man who forfeits a considerable sum of money, and deliberately places himself in peril, in order to right a wrong which nobody on earth would have suspected him of committing. Mr. Mortimore is *accusing* himself of a serious offense, not defending himself from it.

VALLANCE [*obstinately*]. What we beg of Mr. Mortimore to do, for the sake of all parties, is to clear up certain inconsistencies in his story with his brothers' account of his movements and conduct on this Wednesday evening. We are entitled to ask that.

JAMES Aye—entitled.

STEPHEN and PONTING Entitled.

ELKIN [*to JAMES and STEPHEN*]. Yes, and Mr. Mc timore is equally entitled to refuse it.

JAMES, STEPHEN, and PONTING [*indignantly*]. Oh—!

THADDEUS. But I—I haven't refused. I—I've done my best—

ELKIN. On the other hand, if he has no objection to her doing so, the person to assist you, I suggest—distressing as it may be to her—is the wife

VALLANCE [*assentingly*]. The wife . . .

[*THADDEUS pushes aside the chair which he is holding and comes to the table*]

ELKIN *She* ought to be able to satisfy you as to what time he was with her—

VALLANCE [*to everybody*] By-the-bye, has she ever mentioned this visit of her husband's to Cannon Row—?

ANN and LOUISA Never—never—

ELKIN. Attaching no importance to it. But now—

THADDEUS [*stretching out a quivering hand to them all*] No No, no. Don't you—don't you drag my wife into this. I—I won't have my wife dragged into this—

JAMES [*in a blaze*]. Why not?

STEPHEN. Why not?

THE LADIES [*indignantly*]. Ah—!

THADDEUS. You—you leave my wife out of it—

JAMES [*to THADDEUS, furiously*] Who the hell's your wife—!

ELKIN and VALLANCE Gentlemen—gentlemen—

LOUISA Who's Phyllis—!

ANN Who's *she*—!

ROSE Ha!

JAMES and STEPHEN [*derisively*]. Ha, ha, ha!

THADDEUS Anyhow, I do object—I do object to your dragging her into it—

[*his show of courage flickering away*]—I—I do object—[*coming to the nearer side of the table, rather unsteadily*] Mr. Elkin—Mr. Vallance—I—I don't think I can be of any further assistance to you to-day . . .

[*VALLANCE shrugs his shoulders at ELKIN.*]

ELKIN [*to THADDEUS, kindly*] One minute—one minute more. Mr. Vallance has taken down your statement roughly. [*To VALLANCE*] If you'll read us your notes, Mr. Vallance, Mr. Mortimore will tell us whether they are substantially correct—[*To THADDEUS.*] Perhaps he will even be willing to attach his name to them . . .

[*With a nod of patient acquiescence, THADDEUS sinks into the middle chair. VALLANCE prepares to read his notes, first making some additions to them.*]

JAMES [*to THADDEUS, from the other side of the table*]. Look here—!

THADDEUS [*feebly*] No—no more questions. I—I'm advised I—I may refuse—

JAMES. Mr. Vallance asked you just now about your conscience—

THADDEUS. I—I'm not going to answer any more questions—

STEPHEN [*to JAMES*]. It was Mr. Elkin—

JAMES. I don't care a curse which it was—

THADDEUS. No more questions—

JAMES [*leaning across the table towards THADDEUS, fiercely*]. When the devil did your conscience begin to prick you over this? Hey?

STEPHEN [*to THADDEUS*]. Yes, you've been in excellent spirits apparently this last month—excellent spirits.

JAMES [*hammering on the table*]. Hey?

STEPHEN [*to ELKIN and VALLANCE*]. There was no sign of anything amiss when we were with him this afternoon, gentlemen—none whatever, I give you my word.

JAMES. Less than two hours ago—not a symptom!

STEPHEN [*to JAMES*]. He was gay enough at the club dinner on Tuesday night. It was remarked—commented on.

LOUISA [*at STEPHEN'S elbow, unconsciously*]. It's Phyllis who's been ill all the month, not Thaddeus.

JAMES [*in the same way, with a hoarse laugh*]. Ha! If it had been his precious wife who'd come to us and told us this tale—

STEPHEN. Yes, if it had been the lady—

JAMES. If it had been—[*Struck by the idea which occurs to him, JAMES breaks off. THADDEUS doesn't stir JAMES, after a pause, continues thoughtfully.*] If it had been . . .

STEPHEN [*holding his breath, to JAMES*]. Eh?

JAMES [*slowly stroking his beard*]. One might have—understood it . . .

[*ELKIN has been listening attentively.*]

ELKIN [*in a tone of polite interest*]. How long has Mrs. Mortimore been indisposed?

JAMES [*disturbed*]. Oh—er—a few weeks—

VALLANCE [*quietly*]. Ever since—?

JAMES [*with a nod*]. Aye [*ELKIN and VALLANCE look at each other inquiringly.*]

STEPHEN [*staring into space*]. Ever since—Edward—as a matter of fact—

ROSE [*going to ANN and LOUISA*]. What's wrong with her? What's wrong with his wife?

ANN [*obtusely*]. She's not sleeping.

LOUISA [*looking from one to the other*]. No—she isn't—

[*There is a further pause, and then THADDEUS, slowly turning from the table, rises.*]

THADDEUS [*in a strange voice, his hands fumbling at the buttons of his jacket*]. Well, gentlemen—whatever my

sins are—I—I decline to sit still and hear my wife insulted in this style. If it's all the same to you, I'll call round on Mr. Vallance in the morning and—and sign the paper—

[*While THADDEUS is speaking, JAMES and STEPHEN come forward on the left, ELKIN and VALLANCE on the right. The three women get together at the back and look on with wide-open eyes. The movement is made gradually and noiselessly, so that when THADDEUS turns to go he is startled at finding his way obstructed. After a time PONTING also leaves the table, watching the proceedings, with a falling jaw, from a little distance on the right.*]

ELKIN [*rubbing his chin meditatively, to THADDEUS*]. Mr. Mortimore, your wife traveled with you and the other members of the family to Linchpool on the Tuesday—?

JAMES Aye, she was with us—

ELKIN [*to THADDEUS*]. She was in the railway carriage when the—when the discussion arose—?

STEPHEN Yes, yes—

ELKIN. The discussion as to where a man's money goes, in the absence of a will?

ANN [*from the other side of the table*]. Yes—

LOUISA [*close to ANN*]. Of course she was

ELKIN [*nodding*]. H'm. [*To THADDEUS.*] I—I am most anxious not to pain you unnecessarily. Er—the conversation you had with your brother Edward at the bedside, in reference to Mrs. Thaddeus Mortimore—when he said that he—that he—

JAMES [*breathing heavily*]. He'd taken a fancy to her—

ELKIN. That he wished to make her a present of jewelry—she was within hearing during that talk?

THADDEUS [*avoiding everybody's gaze, his hands twitching involuntarily at his side*]. She—she may have been.

ELKIN [*piercingly*]. He was left in her charge, you know.

THADDEUS. She—she was moving about the room—

ELKIN She would scarcely have been far away from him.

THADDEUS [*moistening his lips with his tongue*]. N-no.

ELKIN. And when he handed you his keys and asked you to go downstairs and

open the safe—did she hear and witness that also?

THADDEUS. She—she—very likely

ELKIN [*raising his voice*] There was nothing at all confidential in this transaction between you and your brother?

THADDEUS. Why—why should there have been?

ELKIN. Why *should* there have been? [*Coming a step nearer to him*] So that, feeling towards her as he did, there was no reason why, if you hadn't chanced to be on the spot—there was no reason why he shouldn't have held that conversation with *her*, and intrusted *her* with the keys.

THADDEUS. She—she was almost a stranger to him. He—he hadn't seen her since she was a child—

ELKIN [*interrupting him*]. Tell us—this illness of Mrs. Mortimore's—?

THADDEUS. My—my wife's a nervous, delicate woman—always has been—

ELKIN [*nodding*]. Quite so

THADDEUS. She—she was upset at being alone with Edward when he—when he swooned—

JAMES. That was the tale—

ELKIN [*to THADDEUS*]. Although you happened to be in the library, a floor or two below, at the time.

THADDEUS. He—he might have died suddenly, in her arms. She's a nervous, sensitive woman—

ELKIN [*nodding*]. And she's been unwell ever since. [*With an abrupt change of manner*.] Mr. Mortimore, how is the lock of the safe opened?

THADDEUS. Opened—?

ELKIN [*sharply*]. The safe in the library in Cannon Row—how do you open it? [*THADDEUS is silent*] Is it a simple lock, or is there anything unusual about it?

THADDEUS. He—he gave me directions how to open it.

ELKIN. Tell us.

THADDEUS. I—I forget . . .

ELKIN. Forget?

THADDEUS. It—it's gone from me . . .

JAMES [*in a low voice*]. Gentlemen, you couldn't forget that—

STEPHEN [*in the same way*]. You couldn't forget it.

ELKIN [*to THADDEUS, solemnly*]. Mr. Mortimore, are you sure that the conversation at the bedside didn't take place between your brother and your wife solely, and that it wasn't *she* who was sent downstairs to fetch the jewelry?

THADDEUS [*drawing himself up, with a last effort*]. Sure . . . !

ELKIN. Are you positive that *she* didn't open the safe?

THADDEUS. It—it's ridiculous . . .

ELKIN [*quickly*]. When you took her to Roper's, the draper's, on the Thursday—you left her there?

THADDEUS. Yes, I—I left her . . .

ELKIN. Are you sure that *she* didn't then go on to the bridge, and tear up the will, and throw the pieces into the river?

THADDEUS. I—I decline to answer any more questions—

ELKIN [*raising his voice again*]. Were you in Cannon Row, sir, on the night of June the nineteenth, for a *single moment* between eight o'clock and eleven—?

THADDEUS [*losing his head completely*]. Ah! Ah! I know—I know! You mean to drag my wife into this!

ELKIN [*to THADDEUS*]. You were late in coming here this afternoon, Mr. Mortimore—

THADDEUS [*to ELKIN, threateningly*]. Don't you—don't you dare to do it—!

ELKIN. Owing, you say, to your having made a communication to Mrs. Mortimore about this affair—

THADDEUS [*clinging to the chair which is behind him*]. You—you leave my wife out of it—!

ELKIN. Are you sure that you were not delayed through having to *receive* a communication from her—?

THADDEUS [*dropping into the chair*]. Don't you—drag her—into it—!

ELKIN. Are you sure that the story you have told us, substituting yourself for the principal person of that story, is not exactly the story which she has just told you? [*There is a pause. PONTING goes to ROSE*] Mr. Vallance . . .

VALLANCE. Yes?

ELKIN. I propose to see Mrs. Mortimore in this matter, without delay.

VALLANCE. Very good.

ELKIN. Will you . . . ?

VALLANCE. Certainly.

[*Quietly, VALLANCE returns to the table and, seating himself, again collects his papers. ELKIN is following him*]

JAMES. Mr. Elkin—

ELKIN [*stopping*]. Eh?

JAMES. Stealing a will—destroying a will—what is it?

ELKIN. What is it?

JAMES. The law—what's the law?

ELKIN [*to JAMES*]. I—I'm sorry to have to say, sir—it's a felony.

THADDEUS [*with a look of horror*]
Oh . . . !

[ANN and LOUISA come to JAMES and STEPHEN hurriedly. ELKIN sits beside VALLANCE, and, picking up their bags from the floor, they put away their papers]

JAMES [*standing over THADDEUS*]
Well! Are yer proud of her now?

STEPHEN *This is what his marriage has ended in!*

LOUISA. I'm not in the least surprised
ANN. Old Burdock's daughter!

ROSE [*from the other side of the table*]
Thank heaven, my name isn't Mortimore!

THADDEUS [*leaping to his feet in a frenzy*] Don't you touch her! Don't any of you touch her! Don't you harm a hair of her head! [*To the group on the left*] You've helped to bring this on her! You've helped to make her life unendurable! You've helped to bring her to this! She's been a good wife to me. Oh, my God, let me get her away! [*Turning towards the door*] Mr. Elkin—Mr. Vallance—do let me get her away! Don't you harm a hair of her head! Don't you touch her! [*At the door.*] She's been a good wife to me! [*Opening the door and disappearing*] She's been a good wife to me—!

JAMES [*moving over to the right, shouting after THADDEUS*] Been a good wife to you, has she!

STEPHEN [*also moving to the right*]
A disgrace—a disgrace to the family!

LOUISA [*following STEPHEN*] I always said so—I said so till I was tired—

JAMES. *We've helped to bring her to this!*

ANN [*sitting in a chair on the nearer side of the dining-table*] A vile creature!

PONTING [*coming forward on the left with ROSE*]. Damn the woman! Damn the woman! My position is a cruel one—

STEPHEN [*raising his arms as he paces the room on the right*]. Here's a triumph for Hammond!

JAMES [*to PONTING, contemptuously*]. *Your position—!*

LOUISA. Nelly Robson's got the better of me now.

PONTING [*to JAMES*]. I'm landed with an enormous house in Carlos Place—my builders are in it—

ROSE [*pacing the room on the left*]
Oh, we're in a shocking scrape! We're up to our necks—!

JAMES [*approaching PONTING*]. D'ye think you're the only sufferer—!

STEPHEN [*wildly*] A triumph for Hammond! A triumph for Hammond!

JAMES [*to PONTING*]. I've bought all that dirt at the bottom of Gordon Street—acres of it—!

PONTING [*passing him and walking away to the right*] That's your business

STEPHEN [*now, with LOUISA, at the further side of the dining-table*]. Hammond and his filthy rag!

JAMES [*going after PONTING, in a fury*]. Aye, it *is* my business—

PONTING [*turning upon him viciously*]. I wish to God, sir, I'd never seen or heard of you or your family

ROSE [*coming forward*]. O Toby, don't—!

JAMES [*to PONTING*]. You wish that, do yer—!

ANN [*rising and placing herself between JAMES and PONTING*]. James—!

STEPHEN [*shaking his fists in the air*]. Blast Hammond and his filthy rag!

JAMES [*to PONTING*]. You patronizing little pauper—!

ROSE [*to JAMES*]. Don't you speak to my husband like that—!

PONTING. You're a pack of low, common people—!

ROSE [*going to PONTING*] He's the only gentleman among you.

JAMES. The only gentleman among us—!

STEPHEN [*coming forward with LOUISA*]. The only gentleman—!

JAMES. We could have done without such a gentleman in our family—[*to ANN, who is forcing him, coaxingly, towards the left*]—hey, Mother?

STEPHEN [*advancing to PONTING, still followed by LOUISA*]. Exceedingly well—exceedingly well—

LOUISA [*taking STEPHEN'S arm*]. Don't lower yourself—!

JAMES [*over ANN'S shoulder*] The Colonel never came near us the other day till he saw a chance o' picking up the pieces—!

STEPHEN. Nor Rose either—neither of them did!

JAMES. It's six o' one and half a dozen o' the other!

ROSE [*to JAMES and STEPHEN*]. Oh, you cads, you boys—!

JAMES [*mockingly*]. Didn't they bustle down to Linchpool in a hurry then! Ha, ha, ha!

STEPHEN [*waving his hand in PONTING'S face*]. This serves you right, Colonel; this serves you right

ROSE [*leading PONTING towards the door*]. Don't notice them—don't notice them—

JAMES [to ANN] I'm in a mess, Mother; I'm in a dreadful mess!

STEPHEN [*sinking into a chair by the tea-table*]. On I go at the broken-down rat-hole in King Street, on I go with my worn-out old plant——!

[*On getting to the door, PONTING discovers that ELKIN and VALLANCE have taken their departure. He returns with ROSE to the farther side of the dining-table*]

ANN. You must get rid of your contract, James.

JAMES. Who'll take it—who'll take it——!

STEPHEN. I've always been behind the times——

LOUISA Nelly will laugh her teeth out of her head——

PONTING [to JAMES and STEPHEN, trying to attract their attention]. Mortimore—Mortimore——

ANN [to JAMES]. It's splendid land, isn't it?

JAMES Nobody's been ass enough to touch it but me!

STEPHEN [*rocking himself to and fro*]. Always behind the times—no need to tell me that——

PONTING [to JAMES]. Mortimore——

JAMES [to PONTING]. What?

PONTING [*pointing to the empty chairs*]. They've gone . . .

JAMES [*sobering down*]. Hooked it——

STEPHEN [*looking round*]. Gone——?

JAMES Elkin——

STEPHEN [*weakly*]. And Vallance——

JAMES. They might have had the common civility——

PONTING [*coming forward slowly and dejectedly*]. They've gone to that woman——

ROSE [*at the farther side of the table*]. I hope they send her to jail—the trull—the baggage!

[ANN and LOUISA join ROSE.]

PONTING The whole business will be settled between 'em in ten minutes—the whole business . . .

JAMES [*coming to PONTING*]. Aye, the whole concern.

STEPHEN [*who has risen, holding his head*]. Oh, it's awful!

PONTING [*laying a hand on JAMES and STEPHEN who are on either side of him*]. My friends, don't let us disagree—we're all in the same boat——

JAMES [*grimly, looking into space*]. Aye, they'll be talking it over nicely——

PONTING Let us stick to each other. Aren't we throwing up the sponge prematurely——?

JAMES [*not heeding him*]. Tad and his wife and the lawyers—ha, ha——!

STEPHEN. And that girl——

JAMES [*nodding*]. The young lady.

PONTING. What girl?

STEPHEN Miss Thornhill.

PONTING Thornhill——?

JAMES. She's staying with 'em.

PONTING She is!

ROSE [*coming forward on the left*].

Staying with the Tads——?

PONTING. In their house! Elkin and Vallance will find her there!

JAMES [*nodding*]. Aye.

* PONTING [*violently*]. It's a conspiracy——!

JAMES Conspiracy——?

PONTING I see it! The Thornhill girl's in it! [*He goes to ROSE as ANN and LOUISA come forward on the left*] They're cheating us—they're cheating us! I tell you we ought to be present. They're robbing us behind our backs——

STEPHEN [*looking at JAMES*] Jim——?

JAMES [*shaking his head*]. No, it's no conspiracy——

PONTING. It is! They're robbing us——!

STEPHEN [to JAMES]. Still, I—I really think——

PONTING Behind our backs!

THE LADIES. Yes—yes—yes——

JAMES [*after a pause, quietly, stroking his beard*]. By George, we'll go down——!

[*Instantly they all make for the door*]

STEPHEN. We'll be there as soon as Elkin——

PONTING. A foul conspiracy——!

ANN [*in the rear*]. Wait till I put on my hat——

ROSE. Jim, you follow with Ann.

PONTING [to STEPHEN]. We'll go on ahead.

STEPHEN. Yes, we'll go first.

LOUISA. I'm ready.

JAMES. No, no; we'll all go together.

PONTING Robbing us behind our backs——!

JAMES Look sharp, Mother!

THE OTHERS. Be quick—be quick—be quick . . .!

[*Seizing ANN and pushing her before them, they struggle through the doorway.*]

ACT IV

Again, the drawing-room in the house of the THADDEUS MORTIMORES. VALLANCE is seated at the writing-table by the bay-window, reading aloud from a written paper PHYLLIS, in deep abasement, is upon the settee by the piano, and THADDEUS is standing by her, holding her left hand in both of his. On the left of the table at the end of the piano sits HELEN, pale, calm, and erect, and opposite to her, in the chair on the other side of the table, is ELKIN. PONTING is sitting in the bay-window, STEPHEN is standing upon the hearth-rug, and the rest of the "family" are seated about the room—all looking very humble and downcast ANN and LOUISA are upon the settee on the right, ROSE is in the armchair on the nearer side of the fireplace, JAMES on the ottoman. ROSE, ANN, and LOUISA are in their outdoor things

VALLANCE [reading]. "It was broad daylight before my husband and I got back to our lodgings. The document was then in a pocket I was wearing under my dress. Before going to bed I hid the pocket in a drawer. At about eleven o'clock on the same morning my husband took me to Roper's, the draper's, in Ford Street, and left me there. After my measurements were taken I went up Ford Street and on to the bridge. I then tore up both the paper and the envelope and dropped the pieces into the water."

ELKIN [half turning to PHYLLIS]. You declare that that is correct in every particular, Mrs. Mortimore?

[PHYLLIS bursts into a paroxysm of tears]

THADDEUS [to PHYLLIS, as if comforting a child]. All right, dear; all right. I'm with you—I'm with you. [She sobs helplessly.] Tell Mr. Elkin—tell him—is that correct?

PHYLLIS [through her sobs]. Yes.

ELKIN [to PHYLLIS]. You've nothing further to say?

[Her sobbing continues.]

THADDEUS [to PHYLLIS]. Have you anything more to say, dear? [Encouragingly, as she tries to speak.] I'm here, dear—I'm with you. Is there anything—anything more—?

PHYLLIS. Only—only that I beg Miss Thornhill's pardon. I beg her pardon. Oh, I beg her pardon.

[ELKIN looks at HELEN, who, however, makes no response]

THADDEUS [to PHYLLIS, glancing at the others] And—and—

PHYLLIS And—and Ann and Jim—and Stephen—and Lou—and Rose and Colonel Ponting—I beg their pardon—I beg their pardon.

[She sinks back upon the settee, and her fit of weeping gradually exhausts itself.]

THADDEUS. And I—and I, Mr. Elkin. I wish to offer my apologies—my humble apologies—to you and Mr. Vallance—and to everybody—for what took place this afternoon in my brother's dining-room

ELKIN [kindly]. Perhaps it isn't necessary—

THADDEUS Perhaps not—but it's on my mind. [To ELKIN and VALLANCE] I assure you and Mr. Vallance—[to the others]—and I assure every member of my family—that when I went away from here I had no intention of inventing the story I attempted to tell you at "Ivanhoe." It came into my mind suddenly—quite suddenly—on my way to Claybrook Road—almost at the gate of the house I must have been mad to think I could succeed in imposing on you all I believe I was mad, gentlemen; and that's my excuse, and I hope you'll accept it.

ELKIN Speaking for myself, I accept it freely.

VALLANCE. And I.

THADDEUS Thank you—thank you [He looks at the others wistfully, but they are all staring at the carpet, and they make no response. Then he seats himself beside PHYLLIS and again takes her hand.]

ELKIN [after a pause] Well, Mr. Vallance—[VALLANCE rises, the written paper in his hand, and comes forward on the left.] I think—[glancing over his shoulder at PHYLLIS]—I think that this lady makes it perfectly clear to any reasonable person that the document which she abstracted from the safe in Cannon Row, and subsequently destroyed, was the late Mr. Edward Mortimore's will, and that Miss Thornhill was the universal legatee under it, and was named as the sole executrix [VALLANCE seats himself in the chair on the extreme left.] As I said in Mr. James Mortimore's house, the advice I shall give to Miss Thornhill is that she applies to the Court for probate of the substance and effect of this will

VALLANCE. Upon an affidavit by Mrs. Thaddeus Mortimore—?

ELKIN. An affidavit disclosing what she has done and verifying a statement of the contents of the will

VALLANCE And how, may I ask, are you going to get over your great difficulty?

ELKIN My great difficulty . . . ?

VALLANCE The fact that Mrs Thaddeus Mortimore is unable to swear that the will was duly witnessed

PONTING Ah! [*Rising and coming forward, but discreetly keeping behind HELEN*] That seems to me to be insuperable—insuperable [*Anxiously*] Eh, Mr Vallance?

STEPHEN [*advancing a step or two*] An obstacle which cannot be got over.

PONTING [*eyeing HELEN furtively*] It—ah—may appear rather ungracious to Miss Thornhill—a young lady we hold in the highest esteem—and to whom I express regret for any hasty word I may have used on arriving here—unreserved regret—[*HELEN'S eyes flash, and her shoulders contract; otherwise she makes no acknowledgment*]—it may appear ungracious to Miss Thornhill to discuss this point in her presence; [*pulling at his mustache*] but she will be the first to recognize that there are many—ah—interests at stake.

STEPHEN Many interests—many interests—

PONTING. And where so many interests are involved, one mustn't—ah—allow oneself to be swayed by anything like sentiment.

STEPHEN [*at the round table*]. In justice, one *oughtn't* to be sentimental

PONTING. One *daren't* be sentimental

LOUISA [*meekly, raising her head*]. I always maintain—

STEPHEN [*to LOUISA*]. Yes, yes, yes.

LOUISA. There are two sides—

STEPHEN. Yes, yes.

ELKIN [*ignoring the interruption*]. Mrs. Thaddeus Mortimore is prepared to swear, Mr Vallance, that she believes there were other signatures besides the signature of the late Mr Mortimore.

VALLANCE. But she has no recollection of the names of witnesses—

PONTING None whatever.

STEPHEN Not the faintest.

VALLANCE. Nor as to whether there was an attestation clause at all

PONTING. Her memory is an utter blank as to that

STEPHEN An utter blank

[*As PONTING and STEPHEN perk up, there is a rise in the spirits of the ladies at the fireplace ROSE twists her chair*

round to face the men. JAMES doesn't stir]

ELKIN Notwithstanding that, I can't help considering it reasonably probable that, in the circumstances, the Court would presume the will to have been made in due form

PONTING [*walking about agitatedly*]. I differ.

STEPHEN [*walking about*] So do I

PONTING I don't pretend to a profound knowledge of the law—

STEPHEN As a mere layman, I consider it extremely improbable—extremely improbable

VALLANCE [*to STEPHEN and PONTING*]. Well gentlemen, there I am inclined to agree with you—

PONTING [*pulling himself up*]. Ah!

STEPHEN [*returning to the round table*] Ah!

VALLANCE. I think it doubtful whether, on the evidence of Mrs. Thaddeus Mortimore, the will could be upheld.

PONTING Exactly [*To everybody*]. You've only to look at the thing in the light of common sense—

STEPHEN [*argumentatively, rapping the table*]. A will exists or it does not exist—

PONTING If it ever existed, and has been destroyed—

STEPHEN. It must be shown that it was a complete will—

PONTING. Shown beyond dispute.

STEPHEN. Complete down to the smallest detail

VALLANCE [*continuing*]. At the same time, in my opinion, the facts do not warrant the making of an affidavit that the late Mr. Mortimore died intestate.

PONTING [*stiffly*]. Indeed?

STEPHEN [*depressed*] Really?

VALLANCE. And the question of whether or not he left a duly executed will is clearly one for the Court to decide.

ELKIN Quite so—quite so.

VALLANCE. I advise, therefore, that, to get the question determined, the next-of-kin should consent to the course of procedure suggested by Mr. Elkin.

ELKIN I am assuming their consent.

PONTING [*blustering*]. And supposing the next-of-kin do *not* consent, Mr. Vallance—?

STEPHEN. Supposing we do *not* consent—?

PONTING. Supposing we are convinced—convinced—that the late Mr. Mortimore died without leaving a properly executed will?

ELKIN. Then the application, instead of being by motion to the judge in Court, must take the form of an action by writ. [To VALLANCE] In any case, perhaps it should do so.

[There is a pause STEPHEN wanders disconsolately to the window on the right and stands gazing into the garden.

PONTING leans his elbows on the piano and stares at vacancy]

ELKIN [to HELEN, looking at his watch]. Well, my dear Miss Thornhill—?

[VALLANCE rises.]

HELEN. Wait—wait a moment—

[The sound of HELEN'S voice turns everybody, except JAMES, THADDEUS, and PHYLLIS, in her direction]

ELKIN [to HELEN] Eh?

HELEN Wait a moment, please. There is something I want to be told—there's something I want to be told plainly.

ELKIN What?

HELEN Mrs Thaddeus Mortimore—

ELKIN Yes?

HELEN [slowly]. I want to know whether it is necessary, whatever proceedings are taken on my behalf—whether it is necessary that she should be publicly disgraced. I want to know that.

ELKIN. Whatever course is adopted—motion to the judge or action by writ—Mrs Thaddeus Mortimore's act must be disclosed in open Court.

HELEN. There are no means of avoiding it?

ELKIN. None.

HELEN. And the offense she has committed is—felony, you say?

[ELKIN inclines his head. Again there is silence, during which HELEN sits with knitted brows, and then JAMES rouses himself and looks up.]

JAMES What's the—what's the penalty?

ELKIN The—the penalty?

JAMES The legal punishment.

ELKIN I think—another occasion—

[Suddenly THADDEUS and PHYLLIS rise together, he with an arm round her, supporting her, and they stand side by side like criminals in the dock]

THADDEUS [quickly]. No, no—now—

PHYLLIS [faintly]. Yes—now—

THADDEUS [to ELKIN and VALLANCE] We—we should like to know the worst, gentlemen. I—I had the idea from the first that it was a serious offense—but hardly so serious—

ELKIN [with a wave of the hand]. By and by—

THADDEUS. Oh, you needn't hesitate, Mr. Elkin [Drawing PHYLLIS closer to him.] We—we shall go through with it. We shall go through with it to the end. [A pause] Imprisonment, sir?

ELKIN [gravely] A person convicted of stealing or destroying a will for a fraudulent purpose is liable under the statute to varying terms of penal servitude, or to imprisonment with or without hard labor. In this instance, we should be justified, I am sure, in hoping for a considerable amount of leniency.

[THADDEUS and PHYLLIS slowly look at one another with expressionless faces. JAMES rises and moves away to the fireplace where he stands looking down upon the flowers in the grate. VALLANCE goes to the writing-table and puts the written paper into his bag. ELKIN rises, takes up his bag from the table at the end of the piano, and is following VALLANCE. As he passes HELEN, she lays her hand upon his arm.]

HELEN. Mr Elkin—

ELKIN [stopping] Yes?

HELEN. Oh, but this is impossible.

ELKIN Impossible?

HELEN Quite impossible. I couldn't be a party—please understand me—I refuse to be a party—to any steps which would bring ruin on Mrs Mortimore

ELKIN [politely]. You refuse—?

HELEN. Absolutely. At any cost—at any cost to me—we must all unite in sparing her and her husband and children.

ELKIN My dear young lady, I join you heartily in your desire not to bring suffering upon innocent people. But if you decline to take proceedings—

HELEN. There is no "if" in the matter—

ELKIN. If you decline to take proceedings, there is a deadlock

HELEN. A deadlock?

ELKIN As Mr Vallance tells us, it's out of the question that the next-of-kin should now apply for Letters of Administration in the usual way.

HELEN. Why? I don't see why—I can't see why.

ELKIN [pointing to JAMES and STEPHEN]. You don't see why neither of these gentlemen can make an affidavit that Mr. Edward Mortimore died intestate!

HELEN [with a movement of the head towards PHYLLIS]. She has no remembrance of a—what is it called . . . ?

PONTING [*eagerly*] Attestation clause
STEPHEN [*coming to the head of the piano*] Attestation clause

HELEN [*haughtily, without turning*]. Thank you. [*To ELKIN.*] Only the vaguest notion that there were witnesses.

PONTING. The vaguest notion.

STEPHEN. The haziest

ELKIN. Her memory is uncertain there. [*To HELEN*] But you know—you know, Miss Thornhill—as we all know—that it was your father's will that was found in the safe at Cannon Row and destroyed

HELEN [*looking up at him, gripping the arms of her chair*]. Yes, of course I know it. Thank God I know it! I'm happy in knowing it. I know he didn't forget me; I know I was all to him that I imagined myself to be. And it's because I've come to know this at last—through her—that I can afford to be a little generous to her. Oh, please don't think that I want to introduce sentimentality into this affair—[*with a contemptuous glance at PONTING and STEPHEN*—any more than Colonel Ponting does—or Mr. Stephen Mortimore Mrs Thaddeus did a cruel thing when she destroyed that will. It's no excuse for her to say that she wasn't aware of my existence. She was defrauding some woman; and, as it happened—I own it now!—defrauding that woman, not only of money, but of what is more valuable than money—of peace of mind, contentment, belief in one who could never speak, never explain, never defend himself. However, she has made the best reparation it is in her power to make—and she has gone through a bad time—and I forgive her. [*PHYLLIS releases herself from THADDEUS and drops down upon the settee. He sits upon the ottoman, burying his face in his hands. HELEN rises, struggling to keep back her tears, and turns to the door.*] I—I'll go upstairs—if you'll allow me . . .

ELKIN [*between her and the door*]. Miss Thornhill, you put us in a position of great difficulty—

HELEN [*impatiently*]. I say again, I don't see why. Where is the difficulty? [*To VALLANCE and ELKIN.*] If there's a difficulty, it's you gentlemen who are raising it. Let the affair go on as it was going on. [*Turning to JAMES*] Mr. Mortimore! [*To ELKIN.*] I say, let Mr. James Mortimore and the others administer the estate as they intended to do. [*JAMES has left the fireplace and slowly advanced to her. She addresses him.*] Mr. Mortimore—

ELKIN [*to HELEN*]. Then you would

have Mr James Mortimore deliberately swear that he believes his late brother died without leaving a will?

HELEN. Certainly, if necessary. Who would be hurt by it?

ELKIN [*pursing his lips*]. Miss Thornhill—

HELEN [*holyly*]. Why, which do you think would be the more acceptable to the Almighty—that I should send this poor lady to prison, or that Mr. James should take a false oath?

ELKIN H'm! I won't attempt to follow you quite so far. But even then a most important point would remain to be settled.

HELEN. Even then . . .

ELKIN. Assuming that Mr. James Mortimore did make this affidavit—that he were permitted to make such an affidavit . . .

HELEN. Yes?

ELKIN. What about the disposition of the estate?

HELEN [*nodding, slowly and thoughtfully*]. The—the disposition of the estate . . .

[*STEPHEN steals over to PONTING, and ROSE, ANN, and LOUISA quietly rise and gather together. They all listen with painful interest.*]

ELKIN [*to HELEN*]. Morally, at all events, the whole of the late Mr. Mortimore's estate belongs to you.

HELEN [*simply*]. It was his intention that it should do so. [*Looking at JAMES, as if inviting him to speak.*] Well . . . ?

JAMES [*stroking his beard*]. Look here, Miss Thornhill. [*Pointing to the chair on the extreme left.*] Sit down a minute. [*She sits. JAMES also seats himself, facing her, at the right of the table at the end of the piano. VALLANCE joins ELKIN, and they stand near HELEN, occasionally exchanging remarks with each other.*] Look here. [*In a deep, gruff voice*] There is no doubt that my brother Ned's money rightfully belongs to you.

PONTING [*nervously*]. Mortimore—

JAMES [*turning upon him*]. You leave us alone. Don't you interfere. [*To HELEN*] I've no more doubt about it, Miss Thornhill, than that I'm sitting here. Very good. Say I make the affidavit, and that we—the family—obtain Letters of Administration. What then? The money comes to us. Still—it's yours. We get hold of it, but it's yours. Now! What if we offer to throw the whole lot, so to speak into your lap?

STEPHEN [*biting his nails*]. Jim—

JAMES [to STEPHEN]. Don't you interfere [To HELEN] I repeat, what if we offer to throw the whole lot into your lap? [*Leaning forward, very earnestly*] Miss Thornhill—

PONTING May I—?

JAMES [to PONTING] If you can't be silent—! [To HELEN] Miss Thornhill, we're poor, we Mortimores. I won't say anything about Rose—[with a sneer]—it wouldn't be polite to the Colonel; nor Tad—you see what he's come to But Stephen and me—take our case. [To ELKIN and VALLANCE] Mr Vallance—Mr. Elkin—this is sacred. [To HELEN] My dear, we're prominent men in the town, both of us; we're looked up to as being fairly warm and comfortable; but in reality we're not much better off than the others My trade's being cut into on all sides; Stephen's business has run to seed; we've no capital; we've never had any capital. What we might have saved has been spent on educating our children, and keeping up appearances; and when the time comes for us to be knocked out, there'll be precious little—bar a stroke of luck—precious little for us to end our days on. So this is a terrible disappointment to us—an awful disappointment. Aye, the money's yours—it's yours—but—[opening his hands]—what are you going to do for the family?

[There is a pause. The PONTINGS, STEPHEN, ANN and LOUISA draw a little nearer.]

HELEN [to JAMES]. Well—since you put it in this way—I'll tell you what I'll do. [Another pause.] I'll share with you all.

JAMES [to the others]. You leave us alone; you leave us alone. [To HELEN.] Share and share alike?

HELEN [thinking]. Share and share alike—after discharging my obligations.

JAMES. Obligations?

PONTING and STEPHEN Obligations?

HELEN. After carrying out my father's instructions with regard to his old servants.

JAMES [nodding]. Oh, aye

PONTING [walking about excitedly]. That's a small matter.

STEPHEN [also walking about]. A trifle—a trifle—

PONTING. Then what it amounts to is this—the estate will be divided into five parts instead of four.

STEPHEN. Five instead of four—obviously.

HELEN [still thinking]. No—into six.

JAMES. Six?

PONTING and STEPHEN. Six?

ROSE and LOUISA [who with ANN are moving around the head of the piano to join PONTING and STEPHEN] Six!

HELEN [firmly] Six. A share must be given, as a memorial to my father, to one of the hospitals in Linchpool

PONTING and STEPHEN [*protestingly*]. Oh—!

ROSE, ANN, and LOUISA. Oh—!

PONTING. Entirely unnecessary.

STEPHEN. Uncalled for.

HELEN. I insist

PONTING [coming to HELEN]. My dear Miss Thornhill, believe me—believe me—these cadging hospitals are a great deal too well off as it is.

HELEN I insist that a share shall be given to a Linchpool hospital.

PONTING I could furnish you with details of maladministration on the part of hospital-boards—

ROSE. Shocking mismanagement—

STEPHEN There's our own hospital—

LOUISA. A scandal.

STEPHEN. Our Jubilee hospital—

ANN It's scarcely fit to send your servants to.

HELEN [to JAMES, rising]. Mr. Mortimore—

JAMES [rising, to PONTING and the rest]. Miss Thornhill says that one share of the estate's to go to a Linchpool hospital. D'ye hear? [*Moving towards them authoritatively*.] That's enough.

[PONTING and STEPHEN bustle to the writing-table, where they each seize a sheet of paper and proceed to reckon. ROSE, ANN, and LOUISA surround them. JAMES stands by, his hands in his pockets, looking on.]

PONTING [sitting at the writing-table—in an undertone] A hundred and seventy thousand pounds . . .

STEPHEN [bending over the table—in an undertone]. Six into seventeen—two and carry five . . .

PONTING. Six into fifty—eight and carry two . . .

STEPHEN. Six into twenty . . .

PONTING. Three . . .

[HELEN seats herself in the chair on the right of the table at the end of the piano. ELKIN and VALLANCE are now in earnest conversation on the extreme left. While the calculation is going on, THADDEUS and PHYLLIS raise their heads and look at each other.]

STEPHEN. Carry two . . .

PONTING. Six into twenty again—three and carry two . . .

STEPHEN. Again, six into twenty—three and carry two . . .

PONTING. Six into forty—six and carry four . . .

STEPHEN. Six into forty-eight . . .

PONTING. Eight . . .

STEPHEN. Twenty-eight thousand, three hundred and thirty-three pounds, six shilling and eight pence.

PONTING [*rising, his paper in his hand*]. Twenty-eight thousand apiece.

THADDEUS [*rising*]. No!

PHYLLIS [*rising*]. No!

THADDEUS [*as everybody turns to him*]. No, no —

JAMES. Eh?

PONTING [*to THADDEUS*]. What do you mean, sir?

STEPHEN [*to THADDEUS*]. What do you mean?

THADDEUS [*agitatedly*]. I don't take my share—my wife and I don't take our share—we don't touch it —

PHYLLIS [*clinging to THADDEUS*]. We won't touch it—oh, no, no, no, no —!

JAMES [*to THADDEUS*]. Don't be a fool—don't be a fool!

THADDEUS. Fool or no fool—not a penny —

PHYLLIS. Not a penny of it —

THADDEUS. Not a penny.

HELEN. Very well, then. [*In a clear voice*.] Very well; Mr. Thaddeus Mortimore will not accept his share

PONTING [*with alacrity*]. He declines it.

HELEN. He declines it.

PONTING. That alters the figures—alters the figures —

STEPHEN. Very materially.

ROSE [*to ANN and LOUISA*]. Only five to share instead of six.

ANN [*bewildered*]. I don't understand . . .

LOUISA [*shaking her arm*]. Five instead of six!

[*Laying his paper on the top of the piano, PONTING produces his pocket-pencil and makes a fresh calculation. STEPHEN stands at his elbow. ROSE, ANN, and LOUISA gather round them*]

STEPHEN [*in an undertone*]. A hundred and seventy thousand . . .

PONTING [*in an undertone*]. Five into seventeen . . .

STEPHEN. Three . . .

PONTING. Five into twenty . . .

STEPHEN. Thirty-four thousand exactly.

PONTING. Thirty-four thousand apiece.

ROSE, ANN, and LOUISA [*to each other*]. Thirty-four thousand!

HELEN. Wait—wait. Wait, please. [*After a short pause*] Mr Thaddeus Mortimore refuses to accept his share. I am sorry—but he appears determined.

THADDEUS. Determined — determined . . .

PHYLLIS. Determined . . .

HELEN. That being so, I ask that his share shall be settled upon his boy and girl. [*To ELKIN*.] Mr. Elkin . . . [*ELKIN advances to her*.] I suppose an arrangement of that kind can easily be made?

ELKIN [*with a shrug*]. Mr. Thaddeus Mortimore can assent to his share being handed over to the trustees of a Deed of Settlement for the benefit of his children, giving a release to the administrator from all claims in respect of his share.

HELEN [*turning to THADDEUS*]. You've no objection to this? [*THADDEUS and PHYLLIS stare at HELEN dumbly, with parted lips*] They're great friends of mine—Cyril and Joyce—and I hope they'll remain so. [*There is a pause*] Well? You've no right to stand in their light. [*There is a pause*.] You won't, surely, stand in their light? [*A pause*.] Don't.

[*Again there is silence, and then PHYLLIS, leaving THADDEUS, totters forward, and drops on her knees before HELEN, bowing her head in HELEN'S lap*]

PHYLLIS [*weeping*]. Oh-oh-oh —!

[*Calmly, HELEN disengages herself from PHYLLIS, rises, and walks away to the fireplace. THADDEUS lifts PHYLLIS from the ground and leads her to the open window. They stand there, facing the garden, she crying upon his shoulder*.]

ELKIN [*advancing to the middle of the room, with the air of a man who is about to perform an unpleasant task*]. Miss Thornhill—[*HELEN turns to him*]—Mr. Vallance and I—[*to VALLANCE*]—Mr. Vallance—[*VALLANCE advances*]—Mr. Vallance and I have come to the conclusion that, as all persons interested in this business are *sui juris* and agreeable to the compromise which has been proposed, nobody would be injured by the next-of-kin applying for Letters of Administration.

VALLANCE [*to ELKIN*]. Except the Revenue.

ELKIN [*indifferently, with a nod*]. The Revenue.

VALLANCE. The legacy duty being at three per cent. instead of ten.

ELKIN [*nodding*]. H'm, h'm! [*To HELEN*] But, my dear young lady, we have also to say that, with the information we possess, we do not see our way clear to act in the matter any further.

VALLANCE [*to JAMES, who has come forward on the left*]. We certainly could not be parties to the making of an affidavit about the deceased died intestate.

ELKIN. We couldn't reconcile ourselves to that.

VALLANCE. We leave it, therefore, to the next-of-kin to take their own course for obtaining Letters of Administration.

ELKIN. In fact, we beg to be allowed to withdraw from the affair altogether. I speak for myself, at any rate.

VALLANCE [*emphatically*]. Altogether.

JAMES [*after a pause*]. Oh, all right, Mr. Elkin; all right, Mr. Vallance.

HELEN [*to ELKIN*]. Then—do I lose you—?

ELKIN. I am afraid—for the present—

HELEN [*with dignity*]. As you please. I am very grateful to you for what you have done for me.

ELKIN [*looking round*]. If I may offer a last word of advice, it is that you should avoid putting the terms of this compromise into writing.

VALLANCE [*assentingly*]. Each party must rely upon the other to fulfil the terms honorably.

ELKIN [*to HELEN*]. You have no legal right to enforce those terms; but pray remember that, in the event of any breach of faith, there would be nothing to prevent you propounding the will even after Letters of Administration have been granted.

JAMES. Breach of faith, sir—!

PONTING and STEPHEN. Oh—!

JAMES. There's no need, Mr. Elkin—

ELKIN. No, no, no—not the slightest, I'm convinced. [*To Helen, taking her hand*]. The little hotel in London—Norfolk Street—?

HELEN. Till I'm suited with lodgings.

ELKIN. Mrs. Elkin will write.

HELEN. My love to her. [*He smiles at her and leaves her, as VALLANCE comes to her and takes her hand.*]

VALLANCE. Good-bye.

HELEN. Good-bye.

ELKIN [*to those on the left*]. Good afternoon.

A MURMUR. Good afternoon.

VALLANCE [*to those on the left*]. Good afternoon.

A MURMUR. Good afternoon.

[*JAMES has opened the door. ELKIN and VALLANCE, carrying their bags, go out. JAMES follows them, closing the door*]

PONTING [*coming forward*]. Ha! We can replace those gentlemen without much difficulty.

STEPHEN [*coming forward*]. Old Crane has gone to pieces and this fellow Vallance is playing ducks and drakes with the practice—ducks and drakes.

PONTING [*offering his hand to HELEN, who takes it perfunctorily*]. Greatly indebted to you—greatly indebted to you for meeting us half-way and saving unpleasantness.

STEPHEN. Pratt is the best lawyer in the town—the best by far.

PONTING [*to HELEN*]. Nothing like a compromise, provided it can be arrived at—ah—

STEPHEN. Without loss of self-respect on both sides. [*JAMES returns.*]

PONTING [*to JAMES*]. Mortimore, we'll go back to your house. There are two or three things to talk over . . .

[*ROSE comes to HELEN as PONTING goes to STEPHEN and JAMES*]

ROSE [*shaking hands with HELEN*]. We sha'n't be settled in Carlos Place till the autumn, but directly we are settled . . .

HELEN [*distantly*]. Thank you.

ROSE. Everybody flocks to my Tuesdays. Let me have your address, and I'll send you a card.

[*ROSE leaves HELEN, making way for LOUISA and STEPHEN.*]

LOUISA [*to HELEN*]. Don't forget the Crescent. Whenever you want to visit your dear father's birthplace—

STEPHEN [*benevolently*]. And if there should be any little ceremony over laying the foundation-stone of the new *Times and Mirror* building—

LOUISA. There's the spare bedroom.

[*They shake hands with her and, making way for ANN and JAMES, follow the PONTINGS, who have gone out.*]

ANN [*shaking hands with HELEN, gloomily*]. The next time you stay at "Ivanhoe," I hope you'll unpack more than one small trunk. But, there—[*kissing her*]
—I bear no malice.

[*She follows the others, leaving JAMES with HELEN.*]

JAMES [*to HELEN, gruffly, wringing*

her hand]. Much obliged to you, my dear; much obliged to you

HELEN [*after glancing over her shoulder in a whisper*]. Mr. Mortimore . . .

JAMES. Eh?

HELEN [*with a motion of her head in the direction of THADDEUS and PHYLLIS*]. These two—these two . . .

JAMES [*lowering his voice*]. What about 'em?

HELEN. She's done a wrong thing, but recollect—you all profit by it. You don't disdain, any of you, to profit by it. [*He looks at her queerly, but straight in the eyes.*] Try to make their lives a little easier for them.

JAMES. Easier . . . ?

HELEN. Happier. You can influence the others, if you will. [*After a pause*] Will you?

[*He reflects, shakes her hand again, and goes to the door.*]

JAMES [*at the door, sharply*]. Tad . . . ! [*THADDEUS turns*] See you in the morning. Phyllis . . . ! [*She also turns to him, half scared at his tone.*] See you both in the morning. [*Nodding to her*] Good-bye, old girl

[*He disappears. HELEN is now standing upon the hearth-rug, her hands behind her, looking down into the grate. THADDEUS and PHYLLIS glance at her; then, guiltily, they too move to the door, passing round the head of the piano.*]

PHYLLIS [*at the door in a low, hard voice*] Helen . . . [*HELEN partly turns.*] You're leaving to-morrow. I'll keep out of your way—I'll keep up-stairs to my room—till you've gone.

[*She goes out. THADDEUS is following her, when HELEN calls to him*]

HELEN. Mr. Thaddeus . . . [*He closes the door and advances to her humbly. She comes forward*] There's no reason why I should put your wife to that trouble. It's equally convenient to me to return to London this evening [*He bows.*] Will you kindly ask Kate to pack me?

THADDEUS. Certainly.

HELEN. Er—[*thinking*—] Mr. Trist had some calls to make after we left the flower-show. If I've gone before he comes back, tell him I'll write . . .

THADDEUS [*bowing again*]. You'll write.

HELEN. And explain.

THADDEUS [*under his breath, looking up quickly*]. Explain . . . !

HELEN. Explain, among other things,

that I've yielded to the desire of the family—

THADDEUS. Desire . . . ?

HELEN. That I should accept a share of my father's property.

THADDEUS [*falteringly*]. Thank you—thank you . . .

HELEN [*after a while*]. That's all, I think.

THADDEUS [*offering his hand to her*]. I—I wish you every happiness, Miss Thornhill [*She places her hand in his.*] I—I wish you every happiness.

[*She inclines her head in acknowledgment, and again he goes to the door; and again, turning away to the round table where she trifles with a book, she calls him*]

HELEN. Oh, Mr. Tad— [*He halts.*] Mr. Tad, I propose that we allow six months to pass in complete silence—six months from to-day—

THADDEUS [*dully, not understanding*]. Six months—silence—?

HELEN. I mean, without my hearing from your wife. Then perhaps, she—she will send me another invitation—

THADDEUS [*leaving the door, staring at her*]. Invitation—?

HELEN. By that time, we shall, all of us, have forgotten a great deal—sha'n't we? [*Facing him.*] You'll say that to her for me?

[*He hesitates, then he takes her hands and, bending over them, kisses them repeatedly.*]

THADDEUS. God bless you. God bless you. God bless you.

HELEN [*withdrawing her hands*]. Find—Kate—

[*Once more he makes for the door.*]

THADDEUS [*stopping half-way and pulling himself together*]. Miss Thornhill—my wife—my wife—you've seen her at a disadvantage—a terrible disadvantage. Few—few pass through life without being seen—once—or oftener—at a disadvantage. She—she's a splendid woman—a splendid woman—a splendid wife and mother. [*Moving to the door*] They haven't appreciated her—the family haven't appreciated her. They've treated her abominably; for sixteen years she's been treated abominably. [*At the door*] But I've never regretted my marriage—[*defiantly*—] I've never regretted it—never, for a single moment—never regretted it—never—never regretted it—

[*He disappears. She goes to the table at*

the end of the piano and takes up her drawing-block and box of crayons. As she does so, TRIST lets himself into the garden. She pauses, listening, and presently he enters the room at the open window]

TRIST [*throwing his hat on the round table*] Ah——!

HELEN [*animatedly*]. Mr. Trist——

TRIST Yes?

HELEN. Run out to the post-office for me—send a telegram in my name——

TRIST. With pleasure.

HELEN. Gregory's Hotel, Norfolk Street, Strand, London—the manager Miss Thornhill will arrive to-night—prepare her room——

TRIST [*his face falling*]. To-night!

HELEN. I've altered my plans. Gregory's Hotel—Gregory's——

TRIST [*picking up his hat*]. Norfolk Street, Strand——

HELEN [*at the door*]. Mr. Trist—I want you to know—I—I've come into a small fortune.

TRIST A fortune——?

HELEN. Nearly thirty thousand pounds.

TRIST. Thirty thousand——!

HELEN. They've persuaded me to take a share of my poor father's money.

TRIST. I—I'm glad.

HELEN. You—you think I'm doing rightly?

TRIST [*depressed*]. Why—of course.

[*She opens the door and he goes to the window*]

HELEN Mr. Trist—! [*She comes back*

into the room] Mr. Trist—! [*He approaches her*] Mr. Trist—don't—don't——

TRIST. What?

HELEN [*her head drooping*] Don't let this make any difference between us—will you——?

[*She raises her eyes to his and they stand looking at each other in silence. Then she turns away abruptly and leaves the room as he hurries through the garden*]

THE END

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After All, John Van Druten

DOLLY REFORMING HERSELF

(1908)

BY

HENRY ARTHUR JONES

CAST

MRS HARRY TELFER, *Dolly*
HARRY TELFER, *her husband*
MATTHEW BARRON, *her father*
CAPTAIN LUCAS WENTWORTH, *her cousin*
PETERS, *her maid*
CRIDDLE
THE REV. JAMES PILCHER, *Vicar of Crookbury*
PROFESSOR STURCESS
MRS STURCESS, *Renie*

*The action of the play takes place in the drawing-room of HARRY
TELFER'S house at Crookbury Green, Surrey.*

ACT I The afternoon of January 1st, 1907.

ACT II: After dinner on the same day.

ACT III: The same night—later.

ACT IV: The afternoon of January 1st, 1908.

HENRY ARTHUR JONES

WHEN Henry Arthur Jones and Sir Arthur Pinero began writing plays in the eighties, the English theater had surrendered almost entirely to melodrama, burlesque, farce, flashy pantomime, pilferings from the current French drama, and revivals of old English plays. Current English drama was hopelessly divorced from literature: in an age when the Englishman's poetry was being written by Browning, Tennyson, and Swinburne; his novels by Meredith, George Eliot, and Hardy; his essays by Arnold, Ruskin, and Carlyle—his plays were being written by such mediocrities as Tom Taylor, H. J. Byron, W. G. Wills, and James Albery. To Jones and Pinero belong great credit for the ushering in of a new dramatic movement which was destined in a generation's time to produce a dramatic literature second only to that of the Elizabethan age. In this renaissance Pinero was the channel for those new currents which had already shaken the Continental theater out of its lethargy, whereas Jones was relatively unaffected by foreign influences and led the fight for a mature and civilized indigenous drama.

Henry Arthur Jones was born in 1851, the son of a Buckinghamshire farmer. Although his formal schooling was meager, he possessed excellent substitutes for a college education—an insatiable curiosity about life, a great love of reading, an enormous capacity for learning, and a busy and varied career that brought him into intimate contact with people in all walks of life. After his boyhood on the farm, he worked in a draper's shop, was later traveling salesman for several years in the west of England, and by 1878, when his first play was produced, he was a clerk in a London office. He learned the craft of playwriting in the theater itself, which he visited nightly. His first success came with *The Silver King* (1882), considered the best melodrama of the nineteenth century. He devoted himself to the cause of the new drama with evangelical fervor. He wrote and lectured tirelessly for fifty years as a propagandist for a freer theater, abolition of the censorship, copyright reform, revival of the old practice of printing plays, recognition of the drama as literature. He was the knight errant of the dramatic renaissance, a "Cyrano in Whiskers" a comic journal described him. He wrote exactly one hundred plays. He was at the height of his fame and influence in the eighties and the early years of this century before the success of a counter-movement was to deliver the theater into the hands of the new intellectuals—Shaw, Barker, Galsworthy, Maugham, and their followers. Jones died in 1929.

Most of his plays seem hopelessly old-fashioned to-day. At his best perhaps only an embryonic artist, he is an important foundation stone in the structure of the modern drama. To him is due in no small part the impetus that brought literature again into the theater, and with Pinero he served as a pioneer to prepare the way for the greater dramatists of the period. *Saints and Sinners* (1884) was the first modern English play with a social significance; *The Case of Rebellious Susan* (1894), *The Liars* (1897), *White-washing Julia* (1903), *Dolly Reforming Herself* (1908), and *Mary Goes First* (1913) helped restore to popularity the comedy of manners, one of the glories of English drama; *Michael and His Lost Angel* (1896), *Mrs. Dane's Defence* (1900), *The Hypocrites* (1906), and *The Lie* (1914) are notable examples of the "strong" drama popular a generation ago.

Jones's best work is with the comedy of manners. *The Liars* is generally regarded as

the finest high comedy of its century—brilliant and witty, mirroring faithfully the manners of its age. Although it ran for a year in London, *Dolly Reforming Herself* is less widely known. It is, however, more consistently comic in tone, successfully avoiding the pitfall of sentimentality which weakens most of the old comedies. The clock-like construction may be a bit too precise, but the characters are convincing, the dialogue bright, and the ending free from sentimental concessions. An excellent scene is the quarrel between the Telfers, a duologue which has often been compared to the similar quarrel in *The School for Scandal*. C E Montague says of the scene that “like a true squall it has variety, the winds of wrath frequently changing their direction and velocity and the rain doing its office with much fidelity to nature. The people talk, too, as people do in rages, abruptly, slangily, without thought of how each sentence will end.” Professor Sturgess, Jones drew from life—from his friend Herbert Spencer.

DOLLY REFORMING HERSELF

ACT I

SCENE.—*Drawing-room at HARRY TELFER'S, The Gables, Crookbury Green, Surrey. A well-furnished room in a modern red brick country house. At the back, a little to the right, is a door leading into the hall with backing of a door. All along the right side is a glass partition, showing a conservatory which is entered by glass doors, one up stage, the other down. On the left side is a large fireplace. At the back, in the center, is a handsome writing-desk with a shut down flap lid. Above the fireplace, facing the audience, is a large sofa. To the right of sofa, and below it in the left center of the room, is a small table, and near to it an easy chair. Right center down stage is a larger table.*

TIME.—*The afternoon of 1st January, 1907*

Discover at writing-table, back to audience, DOLLY TELFER, a bright little woman about thirty, busied with bills and papers. Bending over her, back to audience, is her father, MATT BARON, a pleasant-looking, easy-going cymc of sixty. HARRY TELFER, DOLLY'S husband, an ordinary good-natured, weakish, impulsive Englishman about thirty-five, is standing with his back to the fire. Sitting on arm-chair, reading a scientific book, is PROFESSOR STURGESS, a hard, dry, narrow, fattish scientific man about forty-five. At the table, right, reading a French novel, is RENIE STURGESS, the Professor's wife, a tall, dark, handsome woman about twenty-seven.

HARRY. No, I can't say that I pay very much attention to sermons as a rule, but Pilcher gave us a regular, downright, no-mistake-about it, rouser at the Watch-night Service last night.

MATT [*turning around*]. I wonder what precise difference this rousing sermon will make in the conduct of any person who heard it.

HARRY. Well, it's going to make a lot of

difference in my conduct. At least, I won't say a lot of difference, because I don't call myself a very bad sort of fellow, do you?

MATT. N-o—no—

HARRY. At any rate, I'm a thundering good husband, ain't I, Dolly? [*DOLLY takes no notice.*] And I've got no flagrant vices. But I've got a heap of—well, a heap of selfish little habits, such as temper, and so on, and for the coming year I'm going to knock them all off.

MATT. That will be a score for Pilcher—that is, if you do knock them off.

HARRY. Oh, I'm thoroughly resolved! I promised Dolly last night, didn't I, Dolly? [*DOLLY takes no notice*] Dolly too! Dolly was awfully impressed by the sermon, weren't you, Dolly?

MATT [*looking round at DOLLY'S back*]. Dolly was awfully impressed?

HARRY. Yes. Before we went to bed she gave me her word, that if I'd give her a little help, she'd pay off all her bills, and live within her allowance for the future, didn't you, Dolly?

MATT. Well, that will be another score for Pilcher—that is, if Dolly does live within her allowance.

HARRY. Oh, Dolly means it this time, don't you, Dolly?

DOLLY [*turns round on her stool, bills in hand*]. I think it's disgraceful!

MATT. What?

DOLLY. These tradespeople! [*Comes down to MATT.*] I'm almost sure I've paid this bill once—if not twice. Then there's a mistake of thirty shillings in the addition—you're good at figures, Dad. Do add that up for me. My head is so muddled.

[*Giving the bill to MATT.*]

HARRY. Aren't you glad, Doll, that you made that resolution not to have any more bills?

DOLLY. It will be heavenly! To go about all day with the blessed thought that I don't owe a farthing to anybody. It's awful!

[*Crunching a bill in her hand, and throwing it on to the writing-table.*]

HARRY. Cheer up, little woman! You

don't owe such a very alarming amount, do you?

DOLLY. Oh no! Oh no! And if you'll only help me as you promised—

HARRY. We'll go thoroughly into it by and by. In fact, I did mean to give you a pleasant little Christmas surprise, and pay off all your debts.

DOLLY. Oh, you angel! But why didn't you do it?

HARRY. I've done it so often! You remember the last time?

DOLLY [*making a wry face*]. Yes, I remember the last time

HARRY. And here we are again!

DOLLY. Oh, don't talk like a clown!

HARRY. But, my dear Dolly, here we are again.

DOLLY. Well, I haven't got the money sense! I simply haven't got it! I was born without it!

MATT [*handing her the bill*]. The addition was quite correct.

DOLLY [*taking the bill*]. You're sure? Then I'm convinced I've paid it! [*Looking at bill*.] Yes! Thirty-four, seven, six. Professor Sturgess—

PROF. [*looks up from his book*]. Yes?

DOLLY. You understand all about psychology and the way our brains work.

PROF. I've given my entire life to their study, but I cannot claim that I understand them

DOLLY. But wouldn't you say—

PROF. What?

DOLLY. I'm morally certain I've paid this bill.

MATT. Have you got the receipt?

DOLLY. No! I must have mislaid it.

MATT. When, and where did you pay it?

DOLLY. I cannot recall the exact circumstances. And now—

MATT. And now—?

DOLLY. Fulks and Garner have sent me a most impertinent note requesting immediate payment.

PROF. What is the particular brain process that you wish me to explain?

DOLLY. How do you account for my having the most vivid impression that I've paid it—so vivid that I cannot shake it off?

PROF. Well—a—

MATT. Isn't it an instance of that obscure operation of the feminine mind whereby the merest wish becomes an accomplished fact?

DOLLY. My dear Dad, I actually remember the exact amount: thirty-four,

seven, six. Thirty-four, seven, six. I shall never enter Fulks and Garner's shop again!

[*Enter CRIDDLE*]

CRIDDLE [*announcing*]. Captain Wentworth!

[*Enter CAPTAIN LUCAS WENT-*

WORTH, a good-looking smart young army man about thirty He is in riding clothes. Exit CRIDDLE. At CAPTAIN WENTWORTH'S entrance RENIE shows keen interest, throws him a secret glance as he goes to shake hands with DOLLY]

DOLLY. Ah, Lu! What, over again! Happy New Year once more!

LUCAS. Same to you. [*Shaking hands*.] Happy New Year, everybody! Good afternoon, Harry!

HARRY. Ditto, Lu.

LUCAS. Ah, Uncle Matt! Happy New Year!

MATT. Happy New Year, Lucas!

LUCAS. Good afternoon, Mrs. Sturgess.

RENIE. Good afternoon.

LUCAS. None the worse for your outing last night, I hope?

RENIE. Oh no, I'm sure Mr. Pilcher's sermon ought to make us all very much better.

DOLLY. May I introduce you to Professor Sturgess—my cousin Captain Wentworth.

LUCAS. How d'ye do?

PROF. How d'ye do?

MATT. So you came over to the Watch-night Service, I hear?

LUCAS. Yes! I'd nothing much better to do, and Dolly was cracking up this new parson of yours, so I thought I'd jog over and sample him.

MATT. A dozen miles over here at midnight; an hour's service in a cold church; and a dozen miles back to Aldershot, in the sleet and snow. I hope the sermon thoroughly braced you up!

LUCAS. It did. It made me feel just as good as I knew how to be.

MATT. Here's another score for Pilcher!

DOLLY. Dad, I think it's shocking bad taste of you to keep on sneering at Mr. Pilcher!

MATT. I'm not sneering. I'm only curious to follow up this wonderful sermon, and trace its results on all of you.

DOLLY. Well, you can see its results. [*LUCAS has got near to RENIE, stands with his back to her, takes out a letter from his coat-tail pocket, holds it out for her to take. She takes it, pops it into her novel, and goes on reading. He moves away from her.*] Take only our own family.

Harry and I have both turned over a new leaf Renie, you said Mr. Pilcher had set you thinking deeply—

RENIE Yes, dear, very deeply

DOLLY. Lu, you said the sermon had done you a lot of good

LUCAS. Heaps! I won't say I'm going to set up for a saint straight off, because—well—I'm not so sure I could bring it off, even if I tried—

MATT. That's what holds me back, my wretched nervous fear that I shouldn't bring it off. Still, in justice to Pilcher, I hope you're not going to let his sermon be wasted.

LUCAS. Oh, no! My first spare five minutes I'm going to brisk about, and do a bit of New Year's tidying up

[*He is standing over RENIE, who has opened his letter in her novel; he again exchanges a secret look of understanding with her, and makes a sign to her to go into the conservatory.*]

[*Enter CRIDDLE.*]

CRIDDLE [*announcing*]. Mr. Pilcher!

[*Enter the REVEREND JAMES PILCHER, a big, strong, bright, genial, manly, hearty English parson about forty. Exit CRIDDLE*]

DOLLY. How d'ye do?

[*Shaking hands.*]

PILCHER. How d'ye do? Happy New Year, once more! Happy New Year, Mr. Barron!

MATT [*shaking hands*]. A happy New Year!

PILCHER. How d'ye do again, Telfer?

HARRY. How are you?

PILCHER. Good morning, Mrs. Sturgess.

RENIE. Good morning.

[*At PILCHER'S entrance she has hidden her French novel behind her in the chair. In shaking hands with PILCHER it drops to the floor and LUCAS'S letter drops out. LUCAS goes to pick it up, PILCHER is before him, picks up the novel and letter, looks at title of book, and hands them to RENIE. In taking them she shows some confusion*]

PILCHER [*genially*]. Improving the New Year by getting a thorough knowledge of Parisian life and manners, I see.

RENIE [*confused*]. No!—I had begun the book a week ago and so I thought—a—'d better finish it.

LUCAS. Good afternoon, Mr. Pilcher.

PILCHER. Good afternoon.

LUCAS. Rattling good sermon you gave us last night.

PILCHER. I'm glad you thought it worth coming so far to hear

LUCAS. Not at all. Jolly well worth coming twice as far for, eh, Mrs. Sturgess?

RENIE I thoroughly enjoyed it!

PILCHER [*a little surprised*]. Enjoyed it! Now I meant to make you all very uncomfortable!

DOLLY. Oh, you gave us a good shaking up, and we deserved it! I don't think you've met Professor Sturgess?

PILCHER. No, but I've read his book, "Man, the Automaton"

PROF. [*bowing*]. Not with disapproval, I trust?

PILCHER [*shaking hands very cordially*]. With the most profound disapproval, with boundless, uncompromising dissent and antagonism!

PROF. I'm sorry!

PILCHER. Why, you deny that man has any vestige of free will!

PROF. Certainly. The longer I live, the more I'm convinced that free will is a purely subjective illusion.

DOLLY. Do you mean that when I will to do a certain thing I can't do it? Oh, that's absurd. For instance, I will to go and touch that chair! [*She goes and touches it.*] There! [*Triumphantly.*] I've done it! That shows I've got free will. [*The PROFESSOR shakes his head.*] Well, then, how did I do it?

PROF. I affirm that your willing to touch that chair or not to touch it, your actual touching it, or not touching it; your possession or non-possession of a criminal impulse—

DOLLY. I haven't any criminal impulses—

PROF. [*shakes his head and goes on*]. Your yielding to that criminal impulse or your not yielding to it—all these states of consciousness are entirely dependent upon the condition, quantity and arrangement of certain atoms in the gray matter of your brain. You think, you will, you act according as that gray matter works. You did not cause or make that condition of the atoms of your gray matter; therefore you are not responsible for thinking or acting in this way or that, seeing that your thoughts, and your actions, and that direction of your impulses which you call your will, are all precisely determined and regulated by the condition and arrangement of these minute atoms of your gray matter!

DOLLY [*has at first listened with great attention, but has grown bewildered as the PROFESSOR goes on*]. I don't care any-

thing about my gray matter! I've quite made up my mind I won't have any more bills!

PILCHER. Does Mrs Sturgess agree with the Professor's doctrine?

RENIE. No, indeed! To say that we're mere machines—it's horrid

PROF. The question is not whether it's horrid, but whether it's true

PILCHER. What do you think, Mr. Barron?

MATT. It's a very nutty and knotty problem I'm watching to see Dolly and Harry solve it!

DOLLY. See us solve it! How?

MATT. You and Harry heard a most thrilling, soul-stirring sermon last night

PILCHER. You had good hearsay accounts of my sermon?

MATT. Excellent! I should have heard it myself, but I've reached an age when it would be dangerous to give up any of my old and cherished bad habits So in place of going to church and selfishly reforming myself, I must be content with watching Dolly and Harry reform themselves.

DOLLY. Don't take any notice of him, Mr Pilcher; he's the most cynical, hardened reprobate! I have to blush for him a hundred times a day.

[*RENIE strolls casually into conservatory by lower door LUCAS casually follows her.*]

MATT. And in order to settle once and for all this vexed question of free will and moral responsibility, I'll bet you, Harry, a simple fiver, and I'll bet you, Dolly, a new Parisian hat and a half a dozen pairs of gloves, that you won't live up to your good resolutions, and that on next New Year's Day you'll neither of you be one ha-penny the better for all the wise counsels Mr. Pilcher gave you last night.

HARRY. A fiver! Done!

DOLLY. I'll take you, too! In fact, I'll double it; two new Parisian hats, and a dozen pairs of gloves!

MATT. Done, my dear!

PILCHER. I hope I sha'n't be accused of talking shop if I venture to recall that betting was one of the bad habits I especially warned my congregation against, last night!

HARRY. By Jove, yes—I'd forgotten all about that! Of course, if you wish us to cry off—

PILCHER. Well, not exactly. I might perhaps suggest an alternative plan which was tried with great success in my late parish—

DOLLY. What was that?

PILCHER. A very capital good fellow—an auctioneer and land surveyor, my churchwarden in fact, by name Jobling—found that in spite of constant good resolutions, certain small vices were gradually creeping upon him There was an occasional outburst of temper to his clerks, an occasional half glass too much; and on one lamentable market day, he actually discovered himself using bad language to Mrs Jobling—

DOLLY [*looking at HARRY*]. Oh! Ah!

MATT. Jobling's gray matter can't have been in good working order.

PILCHER. We corrected that! We got his gray matter under control.

DOLLY. How?

PILCHER. My Christmas Blanket Club happened to be on the road to bankruptcy. By the way, our Blanket Club here is in low water. Well, I gave Jobling a small box with a hole at the top sufficiently large to admit a half crown. And I suggested that whenever he was betrayed into one of these little slips, he should fine himself for the benefit of my Blanket Club—

HARRY. Good business! Dolly, where's that collecting-box they sent us from the Hospital for Incurables?

DOLLY. In the cupboard in the next room

HARRY. Right-o! No time like the present!

[*Exit.*]

MATT. And how did you get out of this dilemma?

PILCHER. Dilemma?

MATT. Did your Blanket Club remain in bankruptcy, or what must have been an even more distressing alternative to you, did Jobling continue to use bad language to his wife?

PILCHER. We struck a happy medium. My Blanket Club balance was considerably augmented, and Jobling's behavior considerably improved under the stress of the fines.

[*Re-enter HARRY with an old, dusty collecting-box on which is printed in large letters, "County Hospital for Incurables."*]

HARRY [*placing the box on the table*]. There! My name's Jobling for the present! By Jove! that was a very neat idea of yours.

PILCHER. Ah, by the way, I didn't give you Jobling's tariff—

HARRY. Tariff?

PILCHER. Jobling's tariff for a mild little profanity like "By Jove," was a mere sixpence

HARRY. Oh! [*Feels in his pocket.*]

PILCHER Of course you needn't adopt Jobling's scale.

HARRY Oh yes! I'll toe the mark! [*Takes sixpence out of his pocket and puts it in his box*] I'm determined I'll cure myself of all these bad little tricks—

MATT [*to DOLLY, pointing to the money-box*]. Are you going to contribute?

DOLLY [*snappishly*]. Perhaps, when I've paid off my bills

MATT [*to PILCHER*]. Will you kindly let my daughter have your lowest tariff for ladies?

DOLLY Oh, please don't be in such a hurry. What about your own contribution? Mr. Pilcher, I hope you don't intend to let my father escape.

PILCHER. I understood Mr. Barron was prepared to risk a five-pound note that you and Mr. Telfer will not carry your New Year resolutions into practice?

MATT. With the almost certain chance of drawing a five-pound note from Harry and a new hat from Dolly

PILCHER. I'm afraid I can't hold out those inducements. But I can offer you the very pleasing alternatives of chuckling over your daughter's and Mr. Telfer's lapses, or of contributing five pounds to an excellent charity!

MATT. H'm! Well, I'll do my best to oblige you, Mr. Pilcher! Let me see!

[*Looking round, his eye falls on RENIE and LUCAS who, at the beginning of the above conversation have gone into conservatory at lower door, and now come out again at upper door. She has a hot-house flower in her hand, and they are eagerly absorbed in their conversation. The PROFESSOR is reading and not noticing*]

RENIE [*becoming aware that MATT is watching them*]. Yes, that arrangement of the stamens is quite unusual. It's what the gardener calls a "sport"—

LUCAS [*examining the flower*]. Jolly good sport, too!

MATT. I'm not so sure we haven't even better sport here—

RENIE [*coming to him*]. Sport? What sport? Can we join?

MATT. That's just what I was going to propose. There are four of you here, who heard Mr. Pilcher's excellent discourse last night. And you are all determined to turn over a new leaf this year. Isn't that so?

DOLLY. Yes!

HARRY. I know I am.

MATT. Mrs. Sturgess?

RENIE. Yes, indeed!

MATT. Lucas, you?

LUCAS. Yes, Uncle

MATT. On the first of January next, I am prepared to put a sovereign in this money-box for every one of you who can honestly declare that he has broken himself or herself of his bad habits during the year.

LUCAS. I say, not all our bad habits?

MATT. H'm. I don't wish to be exacting—I've no doubt each of you has his own little failing or weakness. Well, come to me and say on your honor that you've conquered this or that pet special weakness—and in goes my sovereign

LUCAS. You don't really mean it?

MATT. Indeed I do. I hope you won't stand out and—spoil sport, eh?

LUCAS. Oh, I don't mind coming in—just for the lark of the thing.

MATT. Then you all agree?

DOLLY. Oh yes

HARRY Certainly.

MATT. Mrs. Sturgess?

RENIE. We don't know where we may be next Christmas.

DOLLY. You'll be here with us. I invite you on the spot. You accept?

RENIE. Yes, delighted, if my husband—

PROF. Very pleased.

MATT. Well, Mr. Pilcher, I think I've made your Blanket Club a very handsome offer.

PILCHER. Very handsome. [*Taking out watch*]. I hope our friends will cordially respond, for the sake of my poor parishioners.

DOLLY. You'll stay for a cup of tea?

PILCHER. I've heaps of New Year's calls to make. I'm afraid I must be going; good afternoon, Professor!

PROF. Good afternoon.

PILCHER. Good afternoon, Telfer.

HARRY. Good afternoon.

PILCHER. Good-bye, Mrs. Sturgess.

RENIE. Good-bye. So many thanks for your eloquent sermon.

PILCHER. Now, was I eloquent? I suppose I was, since I've produced such an invigorating New Year atmosphere.

[*RENIE moves her French novel.*]

MATT. And brought Lucas over from Aldershot in the snow!

LUCAS. Rather! I shall come again next year.

PILCHER. Do. And then we shall be able to estimate the effect of my eloquence.

MATT [*tapping the money-box*]. We shall!

PILCHER. Good-bye, Mrs. Telfer.

DOLLY. Good-bye. [*Rings bell.*]

PILCHER. Good-bye, Mr. Barron.

MATT Good-bye.

PILCHER. You might be inclined to risk a sovereign on yourself for the Blanket Club?

MATT. I daren't I can't trust my gray matter—I should make a dreadful fiasco

PILCHER. Mrs. Telfer, I leave him in your hands. *[Exit PILCHER]*

MATT. Dolly, now that the parson's gone, I don't mind having that new Parisian hat on with you

DOLLY. Done! I don't mind how much I punish you.

PROF. *[taking out his watch]*. Half-past three, my dear.

RENIE. I don't think I'll go out this afternoon

PROF. Oh, you'd better take your little constitutional. You missed it yesterday. I'm sure your restlessness is due to your not taking regular exercise.

RENIE. Which way are you going?

[Yawning.]

PROF. My usual round, up to the White House and back by the fish-pond.

RENIE. Perhaps I'll join you at the fish-pond

PROF *[to MATT]*. Nothing like living by rule and measure.

MATT. I shouldn't wonder. I've never tried it.

PROF. I ascribe my constant good health and contentment to my unvarying routine of work and diet and exercise.

[Exit]

MATT. Then where do my constant good health and contentment come from?

LUCAS. Dolly, I left my evening kit here. Could you put me up for the night?

DOLLY. Delighted! You'll make up our rubber.

LUCAS. Right!

MATT. Not going to ride back to Alder-shot again to-night?

LUCAS. Not to-night, thank you

MATT Just a shade too bracing, eh?

LUCAS. Just a shade! Dolly, I haven't seen your new fish-pond. Is anybody going to meet the Professor?

[Glancing at RENIE]

MATT. I am. *[Linking his arm in LUCAS'S]* We'll get into an unvarying routine of exercise for the next hour. Come along!

[Takes LUCAS off as he is exchanging a look with RENIE. RENIE makes to follow them, stops at door, turns back a little, stops, takes out LUCAS'S letter from her French novel, goes to fire and reads it. Meanwhile the following

scene takes place between DOLLY and HARRY.]

HARRY Now, Dolly, we can go through your bills. *[Going to her writing-desk.]*

DOLLY. Yes. Hadn't I better sort them out first?

HARRY *[taking up bills]* Oh, I'll help you sort them out—

DOLLY. Take care! You'll muddle all my papers *[Taking bills out of his hands, and closing down the writing-desk]* I want to have a little talk with Renie—you'd better join them at the fish-pond.

HARRY Well, so long as you do get them sorted, and squared up. What about after tea?

DOLLY. All right. After tea.

HARRY. After tea We'll have a nice cosy half-hour and sweep them all out of our minds. *[With a gesture. Exit HARRY briskly She repeats his gesture]*

Sweep them all out of our minds. *[Opening desk and regarding the bills with dismay]* Oh, don't I wish I could! Oh, Renie!

[RENIE is busy with her letter at the fire]

RENIE *[puts letter into pocket]*. What is it?

DOLLY *[has taken up one or two bills]*. These bills! These awful bills! These vampires!

RENIE. Yes, dear! I suppose it's rather dreadful, but it must be sweet to have a dear kind husband who'll pay them all off.

DOLLY Harry? He made a dreadful fuss last time. And then I didn't show him all.

RENIE. Well, dear, after all, it's only bills—

DOLLY. Only bills! Only? Well, I'm going to show him every one this time. And what a lesson it shall be to me! That's why I'm so grateful to Mr. Pilcher.

RENIE. Why?

DOLLY. Yesterday afternoon I thought I'd screw up my courage to go through the bills just to see where I was My dear, I was paralyzed! I had the most appalling time! Well, Mr. Pilcher's sermon came just in the nick of time. I thought "what an idiot I must be to endure all this misery just for want of a little resolution."

RENIE Mr. Pilcher's sermon came just in the nick of time for me, too.

DOLLY. Did it?

RENIE I had an awful afternoon yesterday!

DOLLY. You? You haven't any bills?

RENIE No! *[Sighs.]* I almost wish I had.

DOLLY Wish you had?!

RENIE I almost envy you the delicious experience of having to confess——

DOLLY. Yes, dear, you always were fond of scenes, but I'm not!

RENIE. And then the heavenly feeling of being forgiven, and taken in the arms of the man you love!

DOLLY. Yes, that part of it is all right. It's what comes before——

[*With a little shudder*]

RENIE After all, your husband isn't a machine He is a human being!

DOLLY. Oh, Harry's a perfect dear in most things, but he has got a temper!

RENIE. My husband never even swears at me! Oh, Dolly, you are lucky!

DOLLY Hum!

RENIE. Oh, Dolly——

[*Sighs and goes away.*]

DOLLY. Is anything the matter?

RENIE No dear. Nothing, except——oh, life is so hard! So hard!

DOLLY. Renie, if you're in trouble——

RENIE. Thank you, dear. I knew you'd help me

DOLLY. Yes, so long as it isn't money. And even then I'd help you, only I can't.

RENIE It isn't money. [*Looking at DOLLY curiously.*] I wonder if you would understand.

DOLLY. I'll do my best.

RENIE. It's such a strange story. [*Moving away. DOLLY makes a little dubious grimace behind her back.*] Dolly, I will trust you. You know I thoroughly admire and honor my husband?

DOLLY. Yes. When you were engaged you called him "This great protagonist of science."

RENIE That was how he appeared to my foolish girl's imagination. But now——

DOLLY. Now?

RENIE You know that, however tempted, nothing could induce me to wrong him for a moment

DOLLY. No, but is there anybody——Renie, who is it?

RENIE. Give me your sacred promise you'll never breathe a word to any living soul?

DOLLY. Not a word—who is it?

RENIE Not even to your husband?

DOLLY. Not even to my husband. Who is it?

RENIE. Well, dear, you know what my life has been. Few women have met with so little real sympathy as I. Few women have suffered——

DOLLY. No, dear. Who is it? Do I know him?

RENIE. Your cousin Lucas has a deep and sincere admiration for me.

DOLLY. Lu! Of course! I might have known he'd never ride a dozen miles in the snow for a sermon! It's disgraceful of him!

RENIE. No, dear, he's not to blame. We are neither of us to blame

DOLLY [*contemptuously*]. Oh! Why, you haven't known him a month, have you?

RENIE. I met him for the first time in this room three weeks ago last Thursday afternoon.

DOLLY. It's a great pity the Professor didn't come down with you.

RENIE. That would have made no difference. It had to be!

DOLLY. What had to be? Renie, how far has this gone? You've been meeting him alone——

RENIE. Once or twice But, however often I may have met him, he has offered me nothing but the most chivalrous attention. He has always respected me——

DOLLY. Well, then, he mustn't respect you any more It must be stopped.

RENIE. Dolly, I didn't expect you to take up this attitude.

DOLLY. You don't suppose I'm going to have this sort of thing in my own house, do you?

RENIE. What sort of thing?

DOLLY. Do you remember the awful row I got into at school when your boy's love letter was discovered in the Banbury cakes you'd persuaded me to take in for you?

RENIE But you received Banbury cakes of your own!

DOLLY Not since I've been married. Of course before your marriage your outrageous flirting didn't much matter——

RENIE. Outrageous flirting?— If I seemed to flirt——

DOLLY. Seemed?!

RENIE. It was only in the vain hope of meeting with one who could offer me the perfect homage that I have always felt would one day be mine

DOLLY. Well, he mustn't offer it here! I shall tell him so very plainly. He'd better not stay to dinner.

RENIE There is no reason Captain Wentworth should not stay to dinner He has given me the one absolutely blameless unselfish devotion of his life. I've accepted it on that distinct understanding I've trusted you with my secret, a secret honorable alike to Captain Wentworth and myself. You've promised not to breathe a

word to any living soul. You surely don't mean to break your word?

DOLLY. I don't mean to stand the racket of your Banbury cakes.

RENIE. I didn't expect you to be so unsympathetic. You promised to help me!

DOLLY. Help you! How did you expect me to help you?

RENIE. My husband has to go to Edinburgh next week to give a course of lectures there.

DOLLY. Well?

RENIE. He wants me to go with him. Dearest, it would be perfectly sweet of you to ask me to stay on another fortnight here.

DOLLY. I see!

RENIE. There could be no possible harm in it now that you know our attachment is quite innocent and that you can look after me every moment. Dearest, you might oblige me in a tiny little matter like this.

DOLLY [after a pause]. I'll think it over—

RENIE. Thank you so much.

DOLLY. Renie, you said Mr. Pilcher's sermon came just in the nick of time—

RENIE. So it did.

DOLLY. You don't call this the "nick of time"?!?

RENIE. Yes, indeed. I went to church in a perfect fever. I didn't know what to do. Well, as I listened to Mr. Pilcher everything became quite clear to me. I resolved I would accept Captain Wentworth's pure unselfish devotion and make it a lever to raise all my ideals and aspirations!

DOLLY. But there wasn't anything in Mr. Pilcher's sermon about—

RENIE. Oh yes, there was a lot about ideals and aspirations.

DOLLY. Yes, but not the sort of aspirations you have for Lucas. I suppose you know he makes love to every woman he comes across.

RENIE. He told me he had been led into one or two unworthy attachments.

DOLLY. Yes! That's quite right. So he has! One or two!

RENIE. That was before he met me.

DOLLY. Yes, and this will be before he meets the next lady.

RENIE. My dear Dolly, with your light frivolous nature it is impossible for you to understand a pure and exalted attachment like ours. Listen! [Taking out a letter.] This will show you his fine nature, his fine feelings—"From the first moment I saw you—"

[MATT enters.]

RENIE [putting letter in pocket]. Well, have you had a pleasant walk?

MATT. Very pleasant—and instructive. The Professor asked me to remind you that he's waiting for you at the fish-pond.

RENIE. I'd better go. I shall get a little lecture all to myself if I don't. [Going off, to DOLLY.] Thank you, dear, so much for your kind invitation to stay on!

DOLLY. Don't mention it!

RENIE. I shall try to manage it.

[Exit.]

DOLLY. Yes, I'm sure you will.

MATT. Mrs. Sturgess going to stay on?

DOLLY. She wants me to invite her. But I won't if I can help it. [Goes to him suddenly.] Dad!

MATT. Well?

DOLLY. That wretched Lucas!

MATT. What about him?

DOLLY. No, I've promised her not to breathe a word. So you must guess. [Pause.] Have you guessed?

MATT [after a pause]. Yes, Well, I— [Begins to chuckle.] So Lucas is up to his old games!

DOLLY. My own guest! Under my own roof! It's too horrid of him!

MATT [chuckling]. It is! It's too bad! The rascal!

DOLLY. Oh, it's more than half her fault! It's just like her. What are you laughing at?

MATT. I've just left— [Chuckling.] I've just left the Professor down at the fish-pond explaining to Lucas all about his gray matter, and—

DOLLY. I don't see anything to laugh at.

MATT. Twelve mules in the snow—I say, Doll, we're making a splendid start for the New Year! [Laughing.]

DOLLY. Dad! Will you please leave off? [Shaking his shoulder.] Will you be serious?

MATT. Yes, my dear! [Pulling himself together and straightening his features.] Yes, I will. After all, it's a serious matter.

DOLLY. It's very serious for me, in a neighborhood like this!

MATT. It's serious for me, as I was Lucas's guardian. And it's serious for him. If he goes and plays the fool, it may spoil his career—the young ass!

DOLLY. Very well, then, will you please treat it seriously and set to work and help me?

MATT. How far have matters gone?

DOLLY. Oh, there's no real harm done at present.

MATT. How do you know?

DOLLY. Oh, Lucas is writing her silly letters and she's talking about his pure and exalted devotion, and making it a lever to raise all her ideals and aspirations

MATT. That looks bad! That looks very dangerous for her

DOLLY. Oh, no; she knows how to take care of herself. But it's dangerous for me!

MATT. How, dangerous for you?!

DOLLY. If there's the least bit of scandal she'll contrive to drag me into it! I know her so well.

MATT [*walking about, cogitating*]. Yes, and we mustn't let Lucas make a mess of it.

DOLLY. What can we do?

MATT. When I was over at Aldershot last week Sir John said something about giving Lucas an A.D.C. in India. I'll drive over to-morrow and ask Sir John to pack Lucas out of the country for a year or two!

DOLLY. That's a good idea. But it may take some time?

MATT. A week or so, perhaps more.

DOLLY. But if they find out they're going to be parted, it's just this next week when there will be all the danger.

MATT. That's true.

DOLLY. They ought to be parted to-night.

MATT. They ought! They ought! Not a doubt about it! Not a shadow of doubt! They ought to be parted to-night!

DOLLY. Dad! I believe I can frighten Renie out of it.

MATT. Frighten her?

DOLLY. I'll try! And you must take Lucas in hand—

MATT. H'm! Isn't Harry the right person—?

DOLLY. No, I sha'n't tell Harry. Harry would only get into a temper and muddle it. No, you must get Lucas to take himself off.

MATT. Take himself off!

DOLLY. I won't have him here. You can tell him so. [*H'm.*] Be very severe with him.

MATT [*dubious*]. H'm!

DOLLY. Take a very high tone.

MATT. I'm not sure that taking a high tone is quite in my line.

DOLLY. Then please try it. Dad, you do realize how very serious this is, don't you?

MATT Yes, of course. Very well, I'll tackle Lucas. We'll see what a high tone will do with him.

DOLLY. Hush!

[*LUCAS and HARRY enter. LUCAS looks round for RENIE. DOLLY and*

MATT talk in whispers as if settling a plan. HARRY goes up to the collecting-box, takes out his knife and begins to scrape off the label]

DOLLY [*in a very severe tone to LUCAS, who is peeping into conservatory*]. Are you looking for anything?

LUCAS I was wondering whether there was any tea going

DOLLY. The tea is not in the conservatory.

LUCAS. No, but I thought it might be getting on to the time—

DOLLY. The tea will be served in due course.

LUCAS [*surprised at her tone*]. Is anything the matter?

[*DOLLY looks at him severely, says nothing, turns to MATT. LUCAS looks puzzled, goes away, and again looks furtively into conservatory for RENIE.*]

HARRY [*scraping away at the collecting-box*]. Don't forget, Doll—our cosy half hour after tea—

[*Nodding at the writing-desk.*]

DOLLY. I won't forget.

MATT [*has come up behind HARRY, touches the arm he is scraping with*]. Hospital for Incurables! I shouldn't scrape that off at present.

CURTAIN

(*Four or five hours pass between Acts I and II.*)

ACT II

SCENE.—*The same, on the same evening, after dinner Enter RENIE, much distressed and agitated. DOLLY follows quickly, closes the door cautiously and mysteriously.*

RENIE. But I don't understand. Captain Wentworth and I have been so little together—

DOLLY. Well, my dear, there it is! My father is the last man to pry into other people's affairs, but you see it has been forced upon his notice. And from the tone he took—

RENIE. What tone?

DOLLY. He was very severe.

RENIE [*alarmed*]. But what did he say he had seen?

DOLLY. He wouldn't go into particulars. He seemed very much upset—

RENIE. Upset?!

DOLLY. Perhaps I ought to say shocked
 RENIE. Shocked?!

DOLLY. And when my father is shocked
 it must be something very glaring—
 RENIE [*more and more alarmed*]. But
 there hasn't been anything glaring—
 DOLLY. Well, dear, of course, you
 know.
 RENIE. But I cannot imagine— [*Sud-*
denly.] It must have been that day at the
 stile!

DOLLY. Perhaps. What happened? No,
 I don't wish to hear—
 RENIE. Captain Wentworth assisted me
 over the stile—
 DOLLY. Well?—
 RENIE. That's all. He may have taken
 a little longer about it than was quite
 necessary, and I may have leaned a little
 heavier than the circumstances required.
 But it was all done in perfectly good taste.
 DOLLY [*shakes her head*]. It can't have
 been the stile.
 RENIE. Then what?— [*Cudgels her*
brains] The dairy!

DOLLY. Very likely. Was that very—no,
 don't tell me—
 RENIE. There's nothing to tell. The
 woman at the farm, Mrs.—
 DOLLY. Biggs—
 RENIE. Biggs, asked me to go over her
 model dairy.
 DOLLY. Did she ask Lucas?
 RENIE. He came. Mrs. Biggs insisted
 on our tasting her mince pies—
 DOLLY. Mince pies— Yes?
 RENIE. While she went to get one—
 DOLLY. Get one—
 RENIE. She wasn't out of the dairy
 ten seconds—
 DOLLY. No—and then?
 RENIE. Captain Wentworth—a—
 DOLLY. Respected you!
 RENIE [*firming up*]. He is always most
 respectful! In the most delicate, exquisitely
 chivalrous way, he implored me for one
 first and only kiss, and just as I was re-
 fusing him, somebody passed the dairy
 windows—
 DOLLY. My father often strolls that
 way—
 RENIE. But I was quite cold and cor-
 rect— [*Very anxiously*.] Dolly, tell me ex-
 actly what Mr. Barron said?
 DOLLY. At first he was going to speak
 to you himself, but I said, "No, that's my
 duty! I'm her oldest friend; I'll talk to
 her!"
 RENIE. Ye—es?
 DOLLY. So, at last he consented, and
 said: "Very well. Be very firm with her,

because this sort of thing taking place
 under my very nose and under my daugh-
 ter's roof is what I cannot, and will not,
 tolerate for one moment!"

RENIE. He must have passed the dairy
 windows!
 DOLLY. Yes.
 RENIE. And jumped to a wrong con-
 clusion.
 DOLLY. Yes. And that isn't the
 worst—
 RENIE [*freshly alarmed*]. Not the
 worst?!

DOLLY. Now, don't be alarmed,
 dear—
 RENIE. About what?
 DOLLY. Didn't you notice something
 strange in your husband's manner at din-
 ner?
 RENIE. No. What makes you
 think—?
 DOLLY. My dear, if my father noticed
 it, why not your husband? Suppose all this
 time the Professor has been quietly,
 stealthily watching you and Lucas.
 RENIE [*alarmed*]. Dolly!
 DOLLY. And waiting his time—
 RENIE. Oh, Dolly!
 DOLLY. Didn't you notice how he in-
 sisted on your going to the fish-pond?
 RENIE. Yes, he did!
 DOLLY. Didn't it strike you there was
 something in that?
 RENIE. No, and he hasn't said any-
 thing—
 DOLLY. Of course not. Naturally he
 would hide his suspicions from you till the
 right moment.
 RENIE. Right moment?
 DOLLY. Now, dear, you see how serious
 things are. You mustn't run any more risks.
 This must be broken off to-night.
 RENIE. To-night?!

DOLLY. Now, what can I do to help
 you?
 RENIE. You might tell Mr. Barron
 there was nothing in the dairy windows.
 DOLLY. Of course I'll tell him, but if
 he saw—
 RENIE. But there was nothing. Abso-
 lutely nothing—
 DOLLY. No, dear. What else can I do?
 RENIE. Could you find out exactly how
 much he has seen and heard, and—a—
 pump him a little?
 DOLLY. I don't like pumping people—
 still— What else?
 RENIE [*breaking down*]. Oh, Dolly,
 this blow could not have fallen at a more
 cruel moment.
 DOLLY. No, dear.

RENIE It came just when I had lost all the illusions of girlhood, when all my woman's nature began to cry out—

DOLLY. Yes— [*Listens*] Hush!
[*Creeps up to door, listens, opens it, looks out, closes it again*]

RENIE. What was it?

DOLLY. Hush! Voices! I thought it might be Lucas and the Professor quarreling

RENIE. I really don't think my husband suspects—

DOLLY No, I daresay it's only my imagination.

RENIE. And if he did— Dolly, is there one man living, except my husband, who would condemn me for being the object of a noble, single-hearted devotion like Captain Wentworth's?

DOLLY No, dear, perhaps not. But, you see, as husbands they take quite a different view of things from what they do merely as men.

RENIE. Tell me candidly, Dolly, you see nothing wrong in it, do you?

DOLLY. Well, dear, when you say wrong—

RENIE. But I assure you there isn't— nothing could be farther from my thoughts.

DOLLY. No, dear—still, people are so full of prejudice—now what can I do?

RENIE. Oh, Dolly, you can help me so much.

DOLLY [*a little alarmed*]. Can I? Tell me—

RENIE. If Lucas and I am parted— [*Breaks down.*] I can't bear it! I can't bear it!

DOLLY. Try, dear! Try!

RENIE [*sobbing*]. I will And if at any time I long to hear how he bears our separation, you won't mind receiving a letter, and sending it on to me?

DOLLY. I'm afraid I couldn't do that, dear You see, I'm so careless, and if I left the letter about, and Harry found it— no, dear—

RENIE. You won't help me?

DOLLY. Yes, dear, I'll do anything in my power! [*Suddenly.*] I'll tell you what I can do!

RENIE. Yes?

DOLLY. My father is telling Lucas he must leave to-night. Well, I can spare you all the pain and misery of saying "Good-bye," and take one last message to him.

RENIE [*curtly*]. No, thank you. It's most unkind of you to send him away like this. I must see him alone before he goes.

DOLLY [*shaking her head*]. My father

insists, and suppose Lucas feels that he owes it to your reputation to go quietly—

RENIE. Without seeing me?!

DOLLY. And suppose the Professor is really watching you—

[*RENIE shows great perplexity. DOLLY is watching her.*]

DOLLY. If you don't see Lucas, what message shall I take him?

RENIE. Tell him how proud I am of his noble, unselfish devotion; tell him I shall always look upon it as the one supreme happiness of my life to have known him— tell him that—

[*The PROFESSOR and MATTHEW enter. The PROFESSOR has diagrams and illustrations in his hand. Following the PROFESSOR and MATT are HARRY and LUCAS. LUCAS, after a little time, comes up to DOLLY and RENIE, who are seated on sofa. The PROFESSOR is speaking to MATT as he enters, and is showing him an illustration.*]

PROF. [*in his hard, metallic voice*] Observe that woman's facial angle— [*pointing*]—the peculiar curve of the lip, and the irregular formation of the nose.

MATT. I have seen sweeter things in ladies' lips and noses

PROF. Can you be surprised at her history?

MATT. Who was she?

PROF. Jane Sweetman, the notorious trigamist. Looking at that woman's cranium I maintain it was impossible for her to avoid—

MATT. Committing trigamy?

PROF. Well, some species of grave moral delinquency.

[*DOLLY clutches RENIE'S wrist significantly. The PROFESSOR hands the illustration to HARRY, who examines it. MATT moves away a step and unobtrusively feels his own nose and forehead*]

HARRY [*has examined the illustration*].

By Jove, yes—anybody can see she was bound to come a moral cropper, eh?

[*He hands the illustration to DOLLY, who passes it to RENIE, with a very significant glance, pointing out something on the paper. LUCAS leans over the back of the sofa between RENIE and DOLLY to look at the illustration. As he leans on the back of the sofa, DOLLY draws herself up very indignantly, gives him a severe look; moves a little away from him, sits and looks very severely in front of her. He*

cannot understand her attitude, draws back a little and looks puzzled]

PROF. [*bringing out another illustration, offering it to MATT*] Now look at this

MATT Somebody's brains!

PROF. Tell me if you notice anything peculiar.

[*HARRY leans over MATT'S shoulder, and looks at the illustration LUCAS again leans over the sofa, between DOLLY and RENIE DOLLY again moves a little farther away from him with another indignant look. LUCAS is again puzzled, but bends and looks over the illustration in RENIE'S hands.*]

LUCAS. So that's Jane Sweetman! Well, if Jane was bound to come a moral cropper, I'm very glad I wasn't bound to come a moral cropper with Jane, eh, Dolly?

[*Very pleasantly*]

DOLLY [*very severely*] I should scarcely have thought you troubled whom you came a moral cropper with!

[*Looks at him severely, goes up to writing-desk, seats herself and writes letter. He feels himself snubbed, and moves a step or two back, stands and looks puzzled. PROFESSOR has been critically regarding MATT and HARRY, who have been looking at the illustration*]

PROF. Well, does anything strike you?

MATT. No. [*Holding it out*] Looks rather pulpy—rather—a—squashy—

PROF. Exactly! Observe the soft, almost watery condition of that gray matter. What is the inevitable consequence?

MATT. I couldn't quite say—whom did that gray matter belong to?

PROF. Harriet Poy.

MATT I don't remember Harriet—

PROF. The Pyromaniac. At the age of four set fire to her mother's bed. At twelve was found saturating blankets with petroleum; at sixteen fired three hayricks, for which she was sentenced to six months' imprisonment.

MATT. Poor Harriet! But of course if her gray matter went and got watery—

PROF. Just so! I maintain that with her gray matter in that condition it was a stupid crime to send her to prison.

DOLLY. But what are we to do with people whose gray matter goes wrong?

PROF. I propose to deal with that question at Edinburgh. [*To MATT.*] You might, perhaps, care to run down to Edinburgh for my lectures—

MATT. I should love it above all things;

but the fact is, I'm so thoroughly of your opinion—

PROF. Are you?! I'm delighted I've convinced you.

MATT. Completely. All my life I've been doing things I should never have dreamed of doing if my gray matter had done its duty and not got watery.

HARRY. Yes, when you come to think of all the rotten things you find yourself doing, you feel, by Jove—

[*Suddenly recalls that he has said "by Jove," pulls sixpence out of his pocket and drops it in the box*]

MATT Bravo, Harry! [*Patting him.*]

HARRY. Oh, I mean it!—Professor, isn't it time for our hundred up?

PROF. [*taking out his watch*]. In two minutes

HARRY. I'll go and get the table ready. [*Going up to door.*] Doll—[*taps the writing-desk*—you put it off after tea—by-and-by, you know!

DOLLY [*she has finished letter, has risen, and closed writing-desk*]. By-and-by.

HARRY. Before we go to bed—don't forget.

DOLLY. Oh, I sha'n't forget.

[*Makes a wry face. Exit HARRY.*]

PROF. Renie, you were complaining of headache. It would be wise to take a short stroll in the cool air.

RENIE. Oh, very well.

PROF. Wrap up thoroughly. Ten minutes, not longer

[*Exit DOLLY, unseen by RENIE and LUCAS, slips the note she has been writing into MATT'S hands. He takes it down stage right, and reads it. RENIE and LUCAS have been talking, apart; they move towards the door to get out, but DOLLY is standing in the way of their exit.*]

DOLLY. Oh, Renie! I'll put on my things, and come with you.

RENIE. But Captain Wentworth has offered—

DOLLY. I've a splitting headache—I must get a little air. And Dad wants to have a talk with Lucas, don't you?

MATT. If he can spare five minutes.

LUCAS. Won't by-and-by be just as convenient?

DOLLY [*facing LUCAS, speaking firmly*]. No, by-and-by will not be just as convenient. Now, Renie, we'll leave them together.

LUCAS. I say, Doll, what's up? [*Follows her off.*] What's the matter?

MATT [*reading DOLLY'S note*]. "Be very severe with him. Make a great point

of the dairy windows. He'll understand "Dairy windows?"

[*Puts the note in his pocket, as LUCAS re-enters, puzzled and disappointed*]

LUCAS I can't think what's the matter with Dolly. She has done nothing but snub me all evening.

MATT [*looking at him sternly*]. So I should imagine!

LUCAS [*startled by his manner*] I say, have I done anything?

MATT Done anything! I'm a man of the world! Nobody can accuse me of being strait-laced, and therefore I suppose you think you can come here and set at defiance all the—it's disgraceful!

LUCAS. Would you mind telling me what you're hinting at?

MATT I'm not hinting! I'm going to speak out very plainly, and I tell you that I look upon your conduct as something—something atrocious!

LUCAS. I say, Uncle, what's all this about?

MATT. What's it about? What's it about? It's about the dairy windows!

LUCAS. Then it was you—phew!—so it was you?

MATT. Well, after the dairy windows, can you stand there and tell me you aren't thoroughly, completely, heartily ashamed of yourself?

LUCAS. Well, I suppose I am. But, after all, it wasn't so very bad—

MATT. Not bad?!

LUCAS. Well, not so damned awful.

MATT [*regards him for a few moments*] Well, I'm astonished! If you don't consider your behavior damned awful, will you please find me some word that will describe it?

LUCAS. You know you're putting a much worse construction on this than the necessities of the case demand.

MATT. What?!

LUCAS. I've nothing to reproach myself with. Mrs. Biggs wasn't out of the dairy three minutes, and you were hanging about the windows all the time.

MATT. I was hanging about the windows?

LUCAS. Yes, and I must say that when you saw two people engaged in an interesting conversation the least you could do was to pass on and take no notice.

MATT. "Interesting conversation"?!

LUCAS Well, what did you call it? If it comes to that, what do you accuse me of?

MATT. Well, here you are, on the first day of the year, after listening to a most

eloquent sermon, after making a solemn resolution to give up all your bad habits—

LUCAS. Excuse me, I expressly stated that I didn't mean to give up *all* my bad habits. And I don't call this a bad habit.

MATT. You don't call making love to a married woman a bad habit?!

LUCAS Of course in one sense it is a bad habit. But it isn't a bad habit in the sense that other bad habits are bad habits. Look at all the decent chaps who've been led into it!

MATT. That doesn't excuse you. And if you think that I'm going to countenance your conduct, you are very much mistaken in your estimate of my character.

LUCAS [*very quietly*]. May I ask you one simple question?

MATT. Well?

LUCAS When you were my age, if you found yourself alone in a dairy with a good-looking woman, and she was good for a dozen kisses or so, wouldn't you have taken advantage of it?

MATT. No—no—

LUCAS Well, what would you have done?

MATT. I should have summoned all my resolution—

LUCAS. Oh, that be hanged! Come, Uncle, no humbug! Man to man!

MATT. Well, I don't say that at your age I might not have been tempted—and of course we must all go through a certain amount of experience, or how should we be able to advise you youngsters?

LUCAS I say, no confounded nonsense—your uncle Archie—

MATT. Dear old chap!

LUCAS. What use did you make of his advice?

MATT. Well, I remember his talking to me very seriously—I suppose I was about your age—did I ever tell you, Lucas [*taking LUCAS'S arm affectionately*] about a very remarkable auburn-haired girl, Madge Seaforth?

LUCAS. No.

MATT. And my racing her across Salisbury Plain at night?

LUCAS. No.

MATT. Forty-eight miles one glorious May night! I let her beat me! God bless her! I let her beat me! And just as the sun rose we caught sight of Salisbury spire.

LUCAS. Sounds rather jolly!

MATT. Jolly? Jolly? It was romance! It was poetry! Ah! Lu, my boy, you may say what you like, there's nothing like it

on this side heaven I told you about Mrs—never mind her name—dressing up as a widow

LUCAS No?

MATT. Well, I bet the little hussy a fiver—I can see her face, as she stepped out of the cupboard Come, come, Lucas! This won't do! This will never do! Now to get back to this business of yours—

LUCAS. Well—

MATT. When I was your guardian I let you have a pretty good flung?

LUCAS You did!

MATT The pace was rather scorching, wasn't it?

LUCAS. Rather!

MATT. I never pulled you up, did I?

LUCAS. No, and I'm grateful.

MATT. That's all right. Now, old chap, you've got to pull up!

LUCAS. Pull up?

MATT Short This Mrs. Sturgess—Dolly says there's a lot of nonsense going on, gushing letters and so on—damned silly thing writing letters, Lu—

LUCAS. Yes, I know.

MATT Well, what do you do it for?

LUCAS. I don't know

MATT. You're seeing her every day If you must carry on this tomfoolery, why not do it by word of mouth? Why write it down, to show what an ass you've been?

LUCAS I'm sure I don't know.

MATT. Do you know why you're carrying on with her at all?

LUCAS Well, she's a good-looking woman, and naturally a chap—naturally—

MATT. You're either in love with her, or you aren't?

LUCAS. I can't say I'm exactly in love with her—

MATT. Then why are you making love to her?

LUCAS. Well, naturally a chap—naturally—I don't know that I ain't a bit in love with her.

MATT. Well, it doesn't much matter. If you aren't in love with her you're a fool to risk a scandal. If you are in love you'll most likely do some silly jackass thing that will knock your career on the head, eh?

LUCAS. Well, when you look at it that way—

MATT. Look at it that way! Anyhow, she's a married woman, and you're here as a guest—it isn't the right thing to do, is it?

LUCAS. No, it isn't.

MATT. Very well, then, don't do it. Don't do it! Cut it! You will?

LUCAS I've got to, I suppose.

MATT. Yes, you've got to You can tell Doll I gave it to you hot and strong, and you're going to clear out, and not see Mrs Sturgess again—

LUCAS. Not see her again?

MATT. Isn't that what you mean to do?

LUCAS. Yes, I suppose I say, what did you see at the dairy windows?

MATT. I didn't see anything at all!

LUCAS. Nothing at all?

MATT. I wasn't there!

LUCAS. Then how—?

MATT. Dolly put me up to it.

[Laughs at him]

LUCAS. Dolly?

[DOLLY enters with a cloak which she throws on chair.]

MATT Ah, Doll—

DOLLY [looking severely at LUCAS] Have you spoken to him?

MATT Yes, very seriously, extra seriously, and he's going to do the right thing and clear out, aren't you, Lucas?

LUCAS [a little unwillingly]. Yes.

MATT. Good chap! Good chap!

DOLLY [still a little severe] I'm pleased to hear it. [To LUCAS.] You've behaved in the most scandalous—

MATT. He has. I've told him all that And he sees it quite plainly, don't you?

DOLLY. Then it's quite broken off?

MATT Quite! Isn't it, Lu?

LUCAS. Yes, I suppose. I should like to say—

DOLLY. Yes?

LUCAS. That nothing has taken place which, if rightly looked at, could reflect discredit either upon the lady, or, I hope, upon myself. And secondly, whatever fault there may have been, is entirely mine

MATT. That's satisfactory! It always ought to be the man's fault Heaven forbid it should ever be theirs Dolly, he's behaving splendidly Now, Lu, good night!

[DOLLY rings bell.]

LUCAS [surprised]. Good night?!

DOLLY. Good night, and good-bye!

[Holding out her hand]

LUCAS You aren't going to turn me out to-night!

DOLLY You said it was quite broken off.

LUCAS. Yes, but—[turns to MATT with appealing gesture]—Uncle, you didn't mean to pack me off like this—

MATT. Yes, my boy! Remember the occasion First day of the New Year. Take time by the forelock. Off you go!

[*Taking him by the shoulder and trying to get him off*]

LUCAS [*resisting*]. Oh no! I don't see it in that light at all.

[*Sinks comfortably into armchair*]

[*CRIDDLE appears at door.*]

DOLLY. Criddle, please have Captain Wentworth's portmanteau taken to the billiard-room.

CRIDDLE. Yes, ma'am.

DOLLY. He wishes to change there, and please send to the Red Lion and ask them to have Captain Wentworth's horse saddled.

CRIDDLE. Yes, ma'am.

LUCAS. Criddle, what's the weather like?

CRIDDLE. It's a bit colder, sir. Looks as if we were going to have another heavy fall of snow.

LUCAS. I don't think I'll go to-night, Criddle. If I want the gee saddled, I'll go and tell them myself.

CRIDDLE. Yes, sir. [*Exit.*]

LUCAS [*in armchair*]. I say, Dolly, you don't really expect me to go careering over that heath at this ungodly hour?

DOLLY. You can't stay here. Renie is very much upset; she has had hysterics. So I've put her in the spare room.

LUCAS. Well, you can give me a shake-down somewhere—in the billiard-room.

DOLLY [*shakes her head*]. I can't ask the servants to make up impossible beds in impossible places at this hour.

LUCAS. I call this beastly unfair of you, Doll.

DOLLY. Unfair?

LUCAS. Just as I'd summoned up all my resolution to do the right thing, and avoid ructions for your sake, you pounce down on me, and order me off the premises, and —

DOLLY [*getting angry*]. If you don't behave yourself and go off quietly, I shall have to order you off the premises.

[*Makes an appeal by gesture to MATT to get him off.*]

MATT. Now, my hero! [*Lifting him out of the armchair.*] Buckle on your armor! Sally forth! Once more unto the breach!

[*With some difficulty he raises LUCAS out of the chair*]

LUCAS. Well, I'll go and have a look at the weather. [*Goes sulkily up to door.*] Mind you, if you turn me out I won't be responsible if there's a flare-up —

DOLLY. Very well, so long as we don't have a flare-up here. Oh!

[*Rings the bell again. Exit LUCAS.*]

DOLLY. It would serve them both right if there was to be a flare-up—only I'm sure she'd drag me into it somehow. [*CRIDDLE appears at door.*] Please send and ask them at the Red Lion to saddle Captain Wentworth's horse and send it here at once.

CRIDDLE. Yes, ma'am. [*Exit.*]

DOLLY. Lucas is going to behave as badly over this as he did over the governess, Dad —!

MATT. Well?

DOLLY. Of course, Lucas is in the army, but surely he—he isn't a fair sample?

MATT. Oh no, oh no! Lucas is very exceptional—quite exceptional.

DOLLY. I thought so! They can't all be —

MATT. Oh no! I'm glad to say —

DOLLY. I'm determined he shall go to-night. [*LUCAS re-enters.*]

LUCAS. I say, Dolly, I wish you'd come and look at the weather.

DOLLY. What for?

LUCAS. There's a great black cloud—it's going to come down!

DOLLY. I don't care if the heavens come down! You're going back to Alder-shot to-night.

LUCAS. But I tell you—[*Appeals to MATT.*] It's simply impossible for me to ride across that heath —

MATT. But you rode across it last night in a howling snowstorm —

LUCAS. Yes, I did! Last night! And never again, thank you! No! I don't mind shaking down anywhere to oblige —

[*He is about to drop again into the armchair, but MATT gently pushes him aside and drops into the chair himself.*]

LUCAS. Anywhere to oblige!

[*Drops comfortably on to the sofa.*]

DOLLY. Lucas, this is abominable! I suppose you think because we treated you so leniently over that wretched governess —

LUCAS. Well, I thought you were pretty deuced hard down on us —

DOLLY. What?! Oh!

[*Appeals to MATT.*]

LUCAS. I didn't mind your slanging me, but you might have had a little consideration for her feelings, because, after all, she was one of your own sex!

DOLLY. My own sex! The minx!

LUCAS. And an orphan!

DOLLY. Orphan! [*To MATT.*] Go and speak to him! Go and speak to him!

MATT. Come, Lu. You're not playin'

the game! You promised to take yourself off.

LUCAS [*comfortably seated*]. Well, I will take myself off, only let me take myself off in my own way.

DOLLY. It's useless your staying! Renie won't see you again.

LUCAS. Won't she?

DOLLY. No. She gave me a last message for you —

LUCAS. Did she? Why didn't you give it to me?

DOLLY. If I tell you, will you take yourself off?

LUCAS. Yes, of course. What was her last message?

DOLLY. She said, "She should always value your noble devotion, and be proud that she had known you; but you must see how hopeless it was, and that she trusted you would go away at once and leave her to respect you, as you had always respected her!"

MATT. A very pretty, touching little adieu! Does her great credit. Now, Lu! Cut it! Come, my boy!

[*Lifts him up off sofa. LUCAS gets up very reluctantly.*]

LUCAS. Well, if I must go—good night!

MATT. Good night. [*Shaking hands.*] I may see you to-morrow afternoon.

LUCAS. Where?

MATT. I'm driving over to Aldershot to see Sir John. I shall look you up —

LUCAS. I may not be there in the afternoon —

DOLLY. Lucas, you're coming over here —

LUCAS. No—no; I'm not. You shouldn't suspect me like that.

DOLLY. It won't be the least use your coming —

LUCAS. I know that. Well, good-bye, Doll —

DOLLY. Good-bye. [*Shaking hands*]

LUCAS [*is going up to door slowly and reluctantly, turns*]. I suppose if I were to give you my solemn promise I wouldn't see her, I couldn't shake down on that sofa.

DOLLY [*sternly and decisively*] No!

LUCAS [*goes a few more steps towards door, turns*]. I suppose I couldn't see Mrs. Sturgess? [*DOLLY looks indignant*] Only to say good-bye.

DOLLY. No! She was nearly undressed when I left her. She's asleep by now!

[*Enter RENIE fully dressed, looking very interesting and tearful. Through-*

out the scene she preserves the air of a martyr.]

DOLLY [*indignantly*]. Renie, you promised me you wouldn't come downstairs again!

RENIE. Yes, dear, but I felt I couldn't rest under your father's unjust suspicions [*Goes to MATT, seizes his hand sympathetically*] Dolly tells me you have been watching the friendship that all unconsciously has sprung up between Captain Wentworth and myself —

MATT [*uncomfortable*]. Not exactly watching —

RENIE. I feel you may have seen, or guessed something, that has given you a wrong impression.

MATT. No, no! I assure you —

RENIE. If you have, I beg you to speak out and give us a chance of defending ourselves. Tell us exactly what you have seen, and what you suspect —

MATT. My dear Mrs. Sturgess, I haven't seen anything, and I don't suspect anything.

RENIE. You really mean that?

MATT. Yes—yes —

RENIE [*clasping his hand eagerly*]. Thank you so much. Friendship between a man and a woman is so misunderstood.

MATT. It is.

DOLLY. Yes, Lucas had a friendship with a governess here which we all misunderstood—till afterwards.

LUCAS. I say, Dolly, don't you —

RENIE. Now that there is no chance of your misjudging our friendship, I don't mind saying— [*Shows signs of breaking down.*] You won't misunderstand me?

[*Clinging to his hand.*]

MATT. No, no!

RENIE. My life has not been altogether a happy one

MATT. I'm sure it hasn't!

RENIE. Under other circumstances—let that pass! [*Wrings MATT's hands*] Thank you, thank you! Captain Wentworth, I shall always be proud to have known you.

DOLLY. I've told him all that!

[*MATT hushes DOLLY with a gesture*]

RENIE. I shall always cherish the memory of our friendship, but it might be misunderstood, and so [*breaking down, but bearing up with an effort*], you will behave like the gallant gentleman I know you to be, and say good-bye to me forever!

MATT. Nobly spoken! Very nobly spoken indeed!

LUCAS. Well, if you insist —

RENIE I do! Good-bye forever!
 LUCAS. Good-bye.
 [They have a long hand-shake]
 RENIE. Good-bye
 [Tears herself away from him and tragically throws herself on sofa LUCAS follows her up]
 LUCAS. I say, Mrs Sturgess—
 RENIE [moans]. Go, go! In pity's name don't make it harder for me!
 MATT. In pity's name don't make it harder for her.
 DOLLY [looking off at door] They'll be coming out of the billiard-room directly
 MATT. Now, Lucas—
 [CRIDDLE appears at door.]
 CRIDDLE. Your horse is waiting for you, sir.
 LUCAS. My horse? !
 CRIDDLE. Yes, sir, just outside.
 LUCAS. What on earth do they mean? A valuable horse like that—standing about on a night like this—who told them?
 DOLLY. I did. The horse is waiting to take you back to Aldershot.
 LUCAS. I can't go back to Aldershot in this kit. [Pointing to his dress-clothes] Tell them to take it back to the Red Lion!
 DOLLY. And Criddle, give the man Captain Wentworth's portmanteau to take to the Red Lion at the same time; and send Peters to me at once.
 CRIDDLE. Yes, ma'am. [Exit.]
 LUCAS. Well, of all— Good-bye, Mrs. Sturgess.
 DOLLY. You've said good-bye—
 RENIE [still tragic on sofa] Farewell—forever!
 LUCAS. Good night, Dolly!
 DOLLY. Farewell—for a good long time.
 LUCAS. Good night, Uncle.
 MATT. Good night, Lucas.
 LUCAS [turns at door]. Happen to have your cigar-case handy?
 [MATT takes out cigar-case, offers it.]
 LUCAS. Could you spare two?
 MATT. Certainly!
 LUCAS. I've got a jolly long ride, I'll take three if you don't mind.
 MATT. Do!
 LUCAS. Thank'ee Well, good night, everybody.
 [MATT gets LUCAS off, closes door after him]
 RENIE [rouses herself from sofa]. Has he gone? Is it all over?
 DOLLY. I hope so
 RENIE [goes to MATT impulsively—

and seizes his hand]. At least this bitter experience has gained me one true friend

MATT [embarrassed] Yes—
 RENIE [wrings his hand in gratitude]. Thank you so much—
 [He gets away from her and shows relief; takes out cigar and prepares to light it.]
 RENIE [standing in the middle of the room pitying herself]. That's where we get the worst of it, we women who have hearts! We must feel, we must show our feelings, and then we get trampled down in the fight. Oh, Dolly, how I envy you your nature!

DOLLY [very chilly]. Are you going into the spare room, dear?

RENIE. Anywhere! Anywhere! Yes, the spare room!

[PETERS appears at door.]

DOLLY. Peters, will you bank up the fire in the spare room and make everything comfortable for Mrs. Sturgess?

PETERS. Yes, ma'am. [Exit.]

RENIE [still in the middle of the room, pitying herself]. So my poor little tragedy is ended!

MATT. Yes Well, let's be thankful no bones are broken!

RENIE. No bones, but how about hearts? Well, I must bear it [With a weary smile] Mustn't I?

MATT. I'm afraid you must.

RENIE. Good night! [Wrings his hand with gratitude] Good night!

MATT. Good night.

[Gets away from her, and busies himself with his cigar, lights it.]

RENIE. Good night, Dolly!

DOLLY. I'll come up with you, and stay till you're quite comfortable.

RENIE. Shall I ever be comfortable again? Will things ever be the same? I wonder!

[Goes off mournfully and tragically.]

MATT creeps up and closes door.]

DOLLY. I know she'll be here next Christmas! [Marches down enraged to MATT and repeats in an angry, aggrieved way, emphasizing each word] I know that woman will be here next Christmas!

MATT [seats comfortably with his cigar and paper] I daresay she will—

[DOLLY marches indignantly and decisively to door and exit.]

CURTAIN

(Half an hour passes between Acts II and III.)

ACT III

SCENE.—*The same Discover MATT in the same seat and attitude, with paper and cigar. DOLLY enters.*

MATT. Well?

DOLLY. I've had an awful time with her—

MATT. How?

DOLLY. First she had another fit of hysterics—then she longed to go out into the night air to cool her fevered brow—then she moaned out something about her noble Lucas—

MATT. And now?

DOLLY. I've persuaded her to let Peters undress her. I've got her off my hands at last.

MATT. That's a comfort.

DOLLY. Dad!

MATT. Yes.

DOLLY. I won't have her here next Christmas.

MATT. No, I wouldn't.

DOLLY [*repeats in a slow, aggrieved, enraged way, emphasizing each syllable*]. Whatever happens, I will not have that woman in my house next Christmas. You hear that?

MATT. Yes. You won't have her here next Christmas!

DOLLY. I mean it, this time. And I won't have Lucas here again for a very long time.

MATT. I wouldn't.

DOLLY. Dad, please put away that paper. You're going over to Aldershot tomorrow to try to get Lucas exchanged?

MATT. I'll try.

[*PETERS appears at door*]

DOLLY. Well, Peters, have you made Mrs. Sturgess comfortable?

PETERS. I'm trying to, ma'am.

DOLLY. Is she in bed yet?

PETERS. No, ma'am.

DOLLY. Not in bed!

PETERS. No, ma'am, but she seems rather quieter.

DOLLY. She let you undress her, I suppose?

PETERS. I'm just going to, ma'am. She says her brain is still throbbing.

DOLLY. Throbbing!

PETERS. And could you lend her your hop-pillow?

DOLLY. You'll find it in my wardrobe.

PETERS. Yes, ma'am.

DOLLY. Peters, pat up the hop-pillow for her, and insist on undressing her—

PETERS. Yes, ma'am.

DOLLY. Don't leave her till you've seen her comfortably in bed.

PETERS. No, ma'am.

[*Exit. A gust of wind and a little rattle of hail on the conservatory window.*]

MATT. Whew! The New Year means business!

DOLLY. And so do I, as Lucas will find out

MATT. He is finding it out, on that heath!

DOLLY. Yes! [*With a little laugh. A louder gust and rattle of hail.*] Listen! Ha! And he might have been here playing a comfortable rubber by the fire—if he'd simply behaved himself!

MATT. If he'd "simply behaved" himself! What we all miss through not "simply behaving" ourselves. [*Another gust.*]

DOLLY. Ah! He's catching it! I shall insist on Renie driving out with me tomorrow afternoon.

MATT. Yes.

DOLLY. Then she can't meet Lucas. That will be another sell for him—[*Another furious gust and rattle*] Listen! Ha! ha! I wonder how far Lucas has got!

[*A noise of something being knocked over in the conservatory, which is lighted*]

MATT [*goes to the conservatory door, looks in; is startled*] Hillo! hillo!

[*LUCAS enters from the upper conservatory door in riding-clothes of first Act.*]

DOLLY. Lucas! How dare you?

LUCAS. It's all right—don't make a fuss!

DOLLY [*furiously*]. Why aren't you on the way to Aldershot?

LUCAS. I didn't like the look of the weather! I didn't like the look of it one little bit! So I got them to give me a shake-down at the Red Lion—

DOLLY. Shake-down at the Red Lion!

LUCAS. Yes, on their sofa! You needn't look so black! I asked you first, to let me have a shake-down here—on that sofa—

DOLLY. But why have you come back here?

LUCAS. Well, I must have dropped those cigars Uncle Matt gave me. I put them carefully in my side pocket, and when I got down to the Red Lion, lo and behold, they weren't there!

DOLLY. You could have got a cigar at the Red Lion—

LUCAS [*turns to MATT for sympathy*]. I could have got a cigar at the Red Lion! [*To DOLLY*] No, thank you! So I

thought I'd just stroll up here in the hope—

DOLLY In the hope of seeing Mrs. Sturgess! But she's safely in bed this time, and there's no possible chance of your seeing her

LUCAS. In the hope of getting Harry to give me a decent smoke Well, I came into the Hall and not wishing to rile you by my hated presence—I slipped into the conservatory—

[Enter HARRY.]

HARRY [surprised at the riding-clothes]. Hello, Lu, going back to Alder-shot to-night?

LUCAS. No, not unless the weather takes a turn. No, Dolly said that as the spare room was occupied, would I mind getting a shake-down at the Red Lion. So I did, and as I've got nothing to smoke, may I cadge a cigar?

HARRY. Yes, old fellow.

[Taking out cigar-case.]

DOLLY [intercepting]. You said I should take charge of your cigars, in case you should be tempted to smoke more than two a day—

HARRY. By Jove, I forgot all about two a day—I've been smoking all day. Here, Lu! [About to throw cigar-case to LUCAS.] You'd better take the lot and keep me out of temptation!

DOLLY. No! I'll take charge of that, please.

[Takes the cigar-case, goes to writing-desk, puts it in. PETERS appears at door.]

PETERS Beg pardon, ma'am, Mrs. Sturgess—

DOLLY. What about her?

PETERS. When I got back with the hop-pillow she wasn't there I've looked all over the house, and I can't find her anywhere

[RENIE enters, fully dressed from conservatory, very languidly, with handkerchief and smelling-salts. PETERS goes off.]

DOLLY. Renie!

[Looks at MATT, who is inclined to laugh, checks it, shrugs his shoulders and goes over to fire.]

RENIE. My head was racking, I had to rush out—I've been pacing up and down under the veranda, up and down, up and down, up and down—[DOLLY makes a little grimace of angry incredulity.] It's a little easier now, so I'll take advantage of the lull, and try to get some sleep.

DOLLY. Yes, I would.

RENIE. Good night, dear.

DOLLY [severely]. Good night 'once more.

RENIE. Good night, Mr. Telfer.

[Offering hand.]

HARRY. Good night, I'm awfully sorry—

RENIE [with her weary smile]. Oh, it's only a headache. I can bear it. Thank you for your sympathy. Good night, Mr. Barron.

MATT. Good night. I hope we sha'n't have any more little tragedies, eh?

RENIE. I hope not, oh, I hope not! [To LUCAS, very casually and distantly.] Good night, Captain Wentworth

LUCAS. Good night, Mrs. Sturgess.

[Exit RENIE PETERS is seen to join her in the hall. A little pause.]

LUCAS Well, I'll be toddling back to the Red Lion. Good night, Dolly. Good night, Harry.

HARRY. Good night, Lu. Seems a pity for you to turn out on a night like this. Dolly, can't we give him a shake-down—?

DOLLY. No!

[HARRY shows surprise at her tone. A little pause of embarrassment.]

LUCAS. Good night, Uncle Matt.

MATT [comes up to him, in a low voice]. Cut it, my dear lad. Cut it! That's understood?

LUCAS. Yes, of course Well, good night, Dolly, once more [She doesn't reply.] Oh well, if you're going on the rampage—[Goes off muttering.] Infernal nuisance—might like this— [Exit.]

HARRY. Is anything the matter?

DOLLY. Lucas has offended me very much. I don't wish to speak of it

[The PROFESSOR enters at back.]

MATT. Well, who was the victor?

HARRY The Professor won all four games.

PROF. I ascribe the increased accuracy of my stroke at billiards to my increased nerve force, now I have made Pableine my staple article of diet in place of meat.

MATT. Flies to the gray matter, eh?

PROF Instantaneously.

MATT. Good stuff!

PROF. I hope you'll try it. Shall I send a tin to your room?

MATT. Will you? That will be kind!

[CRIDDLE appears at door.]

CRIDDLE. I've put the spirits in the hall, sir.

HARRY. You can take them away, Criddle. In the future we sha'n't require spirits at night, only soda water and tea

CRIDDLE. Yes, sir. [Exit.]

DOLLY [*who has been sitting wearily on sofa, rises*]. Well, I'm going to bed

HARRY. You forget, dear.

DOLLY. What? [*HARRY taps the writing-desk*]. Oh, my dear Harry, we won't go into them to-night

HARRY. Yes, my dear, if you please [*Very firmly. DOLLY makes an impatient gesture and pouts*]. Please don't look like that. If I'm to help you in paying off these bills, it must be to-night, or not at all.

DOLLY. Oh, very well, but —

[*Sits down wearily*]

PROF. [*taking out watch*]. Five minutes past my usual hour

DOLLY. Renie has one of her bad headaches, so I've put her in the spare room.

PROF. Thank you. I'm afraid she's a little wilful. I can never get her to see that life can yield us no real satisfaction unless we regulate all our actions to the most minute point. Good night.

DOLLY. Good night!

PROF. Good night, Telfer.

HARRY. Good night.

MATT. Good night, Harry.

HARRY. Good night, Dad.

MATT [*to DOLLY*]. Night-night, dear.

DOLLY. Night-night, Dad.

[*Kissing him*]

PROF. [*has been waiting at door*]. I might perhaps show you the precise way of mixing the Pableine.

MATT. If you don't mind! What's the dose?

PROF. Two teaspoonfuls. On certain occasions I have taken as much as four tablespoonfuls.

MATT. Wasn't that rather—going it?

PROF. No. It's quite tasteless, except for a very slight beany flavor.

MATT. Sounds just the thing for a New Year's drink, to brace up good resolutions. Come along! I'll have a regular night-cap of it.

[*Exeunt MATT and PROFESSOR.*]

HARRY. Now we can have our cosy half-hour.

DOLLY. Ye-es. I've had an awful evening with Lucas. Don't you think —?

HARRY. No, my darling. You put it off after tea —

DOLLY. But our heads will be so much clearer in the morning —

HARRY. My darling, remember what Pilcher said about procrastination. And remember our resolutions last night. If we break them on the first night of the year, where shall we be on the thirty-first of December?

DOLLY. I'm horribly fagged.

HARRY. Conquer it! Think how delightful it will be to put your head on the pillow to-night, without a single anxiety without a single thought —

DOLLY. Except my gratitude to you!

HARRY. Come, dear, no time like the present!

DOLLY [*jumps up very briskly*]. No time like the present! Oh, Harry, what a dear, kind, good husband you've always been to me!

HARRY. Have I, my darling? [*Modestly*]. I've done my best —

DOLLY. How I must have tried you!

HARRY. No, dear—at least a little sometimes.

DOLLY. When I think what patience you've had with me, and never reproached me —

HARRY. Well, not often. We've had our little tiffs— That day at Goodwood—eh?

DOLLY. Don't speak of it! I was to blame —

HARRY. No, dear, I can't let you accuse yourself. I was quite in the wrong

DOLLY. No, dear, it was my fault entirely!

HARRY. Well, we won't quarrel about that. Now these bills —

DOLLY. And what good pals we've been!

HARRY. And always shall be.

[*Kissing her.*]

DOLLY [*hugging him*]. Oh, you dear!

HARRY. Now, business, business!

DOLLY [*going up to writing-desk*]. What a lucky woman I am!

HARRY [*seated at table*]. Bring them all.

DOLLY [*has opened desk and taken up some bills—she looks round dubiously at HARRY*]. What a splendid thing it must be to be a husband and have it in your power to make your wife adore you, by simply paying a few bills.

HARRY. Yes—bring them all. [*She comes down with a bundle of about fifteen, hands them to him.*] Is this all?

DOLLY. All, of any importance.

HARRY. I want to see them all.

DOLLY. So you shall, but we'll go through these first, because [*lamely*] if you want to ask any questions we can settle them on the spot, can't we?

HARRY [*reading from the bill*]. Maison Récamier, Court and artistic millinery By Jove!

[*Looks up*]

DOLLY. What!

HARRY. One, two, three four five, six, seven, eight, nine—nine hats!

DOLLY. Different kinds of hats.

HARRY. Yedda straw, four guineas, ostrich feather ruffle, twelve pounds ten —

DOLLY. That was the one—you remember—when I came into the room you said, "Stay there! Just as you are! I must kiss you!"

HARRY. Yes, but twelve pounds ten—Moss green chip hat, four, fourteen, six. Heliotrope velvet toque —

DOLLY. That's the dear little toque you admire so much!

HARRY. Do I? Six guineas! Dear little toque! Hat in white Tegal with plumes of Nattier Bleu—fifteen guineas—Fifteen guineas?

DOLLY. Oh, the woman's a fearful swindler! But what are you to do with such people?

HARRY [*with bill*]. Total, sixty-four, seven, six. And I get my one silk topper a year, at a guinea, and three and six for doing it up. Total for me, one, four, six. Total for you —

DOLLY. My dear Harry, don't make absurd comparisons!

HARRY [*taking another bill*]. John Spearman, artistic gown maker, ball gowns, reception gowns, race gowns—Good heavens!

DOLLY. What's the matter?

HARRY. Total, five hundred and fifty-six pounds—that can't be right!

DOLLY [*frightened*]. No, it can't be! Add it up!

HARRY [*reading*]. Tea gown of chiffon taffeta —

DOLLY. The one I took to Folkestone, you remember?

[*With a little attempt at a kiss.*]

HARRY [*gently repulsing her*]. No, I don't [*She puts her arms round his neck; he gently pushes her aside*] Business first, please. [*Reads*] Gown of white cloth with Postillon coat of Rose du Barri silk, motifs of silver, forty-five guineas —

DOLLY. You won't grumble at that, for when I first put it on, you stood and looked at me and said, "I want to know how it is, Doll, that the moment a dress gets on to your shoulders, it seems to brisk up, and be as cocky and proud of itself —"

[*Again attempting to embrace him*]

HARRY [*again repulsing her*]. Yes, well now I do know! Jolly proud and cocky your dresses ought to feel at this price! [*Reads*] "Evening cloak of strawberry satin charmeuse, trimmed silk passementerie, motifs and fringe stoles of dull gold

embroidery, thirty-five guineas" What's a motif?

DOLLY. It's a trimming—a lot of little touches—a sort of—a—a—[*making a little descriptive gesture*] a suggestion—a motif —

HARRY. And Mr. John Spearman's motif is that I should pay him five hundred and fifty-six pounds. Well, I don't like Mr. John Spearman's motifs, and I'm not going to fall in with them [*Puts the bill on the table rather angrily, takes up another, reads*] "Artistic lingerie!" I wonder why all these people call themselves artists! "Underwear of daintiness and distinction." DOLLY. Well, you've always praised —

HARRY. Yes. In future, I'm going to be very careful what articles of your dress I praise "Three pairs of blue silk garters, forty-five shillings." [*She has settled herself in the armchair, looking a little sulky and obstinate, leaning back and pettishly swinging one leg over the other.*] What have you got to say to that?

DOLLY. Garters are necessary.

HARRY. Yes, but why three? And why blue silk? Why don't you speak?

DOLLY. The garters can speak for themselves!

HARRY. Very well. Garters that can speak for themselves can pay for themselves! [*Dashes the bill on the table, takes up another. Reading.*] Three bottles Coeur de Janette—three bottles Souffle de Marguerite—fifteen pounds for scent—and I have to smoke sixpenny cigars! And sometimes only fourpenny!

DOLLY. Well, if you will smoke those horrid strong things you can't wonder I have to disinfect the house for you.

HARRY. Disinfect the house for me! You'll very soon disinfect the house of me! [*Glances through the remaining bills, groans, puts them on the table, and walks about in despair. DOLLY rises and is going off.*] Where are you going?

DOLLY. To bed

HARRY [*stopping her*]. No! Now we've begun, we'll go through to the bitter end, if you please. I want you to explain —

DOLLY. My dear Harry, it will be quite useless for me to try to explain in your present state —

HARRY [*getting furious*]. In my present state —

DOLLY. Dancing about the room and shouting! —

HARRY. I'm not shouting!

DOLLY. You're not shouting?!

HARRY No, and if I am, isn't it enough to make a man shout when his wife—

[*MATT appears at the door in his dressing-gown and slippers*]

MATT. Excuse my interrupting. But you know my room is just above this, and if you could manage to pitch your voices in rather a softer key—

HARRY. By Jove! I'd forgotten! We were getting a little noisy. I'm awfully sorry.

MATT Don't mention it! The Professor gave me a rather stiff go of his Pableine, and I fancy it hasn't agreed with me [*tapping his chest*] for I can't get a wink of sleep Is there a spoonful of whisky about?

HARRY. On the sideboard in the dining-room.

MATT. Thankee. [*Tapping his chest*] Harry, when you get over fifty, don't change your night-cap, or any of your other bad habits.

HARRY. I won't. Now, Dolly—

MATT [*anxiously*]. You won't perhaps be very long now?

DOLLY. No, we'd nearly finished—

MATT. Nothing serious, I hope?

DOLLY. Harry doesn't approve of my using scent.

HARRY. Not in pailfuls. Certainly not.

DOLLY. I had three small bottles—

MATT. Montaigne says that the sweetest perfume a woman can have, is to have none at all. [*Exit.*]

HARRY. Now, my darling, we shall best arrive at an understanding if we avoid all temper, and discuss it in a calm, business-like way.

DOLLY [*a little frightened*]. Ye-es—

HARRY. Very well then, come and sit down and let us go into it, figure by figure, item by item, and see how we stand.

DOLLY. Ye-es Harry, you aren't going to be as business-like as all that?

HARRY. As all what?

DOLLY. I can't discuss it while you keep me at a distance! [*Suddenly rushes at him, seats herself on his knee, puts his arm round her waist, kisses him.*] There! now I feel I can discuss it thoroughly.

HARRY. Very well [*kisses her*], so long as we do discuss it thoroughly.

DOLLY. I began to get quite frightened of you, Mr. Jobling.

HARRY. Jobling?

DOLLY. The man Mr. Pilcher had to get a money-box for, because he swore at his wife!

HARRY. Oh, yes

DOLLY You got so angry—and shouted—

HARRY. Well, there was no reason for that, especially as getting out of temper is the one thing I'm quite resolved to conquer this New Year—

DOLLY [*kissing him*]. Don't forget that!

HARRY [*kisses her*]. Now, business, business! [*Takes up a bill.*] What have we here? Carchet, gantier et bonnetier, artiste—Hillo, here's another artist! In stockings this time [*Suddenly.*] I say!

DOLLY [*frightened*]. Eh?

HARRY [*points to an item in bill*]. Come now, Dolly—this is really too bad—this really is too bad!

DOLLY [*frightened*]. What?!

[*Getting off his knee*]

HARRY. One dozen pairs best silk hose, with clocks—

DOLLY. Yes—how much does that come to?

HARRY. Eleven pounds two—

DOLLY. It does seem rather a high price, but—

[*Drawing up her dress and showing an inch or two of silk stocking.*]

HARRY. You're wearing them about the house?

DOLLY. I can't go about the house without stockings And I put them on for your especial benefit. [*He utters a contemptuous exclamation.*] They're a lovely quality—

[*Drawing up her dress an inch or two higher.*]

HARRY. I daresay. [*Turning away*] I'm not going to admire your stockings, or your ostrich ruffles, or your blue silk garters, or your motifs, or anything that is yours! It's too expensive!

DOLLY [*dress an inch higher, looking down at her stockings*]. It's the clocks you have to pay for—

HARRY. I beg your pardon, it's the clocks I haven't got to pay for! And I don't mean to—if I can help it. Idiotic thing to go and put clocks on stockings— [*muttering*—damned silly idiotic—

DOLLY Ah! [*Goes to table, brings the hospital box and puts it in front of him.*] Double fine this time.

HARRY. What for?

DOLLY. Naughty swear word, and getting out of temper.

HARRY. Oh well— [*fumbling in his pocket*—I did say d—, but I didn't get out of temper!

DOLLY You didn't get out of temper?

HARRY Not at all I'm quite calm [*Subtly puts a shilling in the box*] There! [*Sits himself at table*] Now we'll go.

quietly and methodically through the remainder—[*taking up a bill, looks at it, exclaims*]—good heavens!

DOLLY. Good heavens what?

HARRY [*in a low exhausted tone with groans*]. Good heavens! Good heavens! It's absolutely useless— Good heavens!

DOLLY. But what is it?

[*Coming up, looking over*]

HARRY [*points to bill*]. Four more here. Thirteen hats!

DOLLY. No, one was a toque.

HARRY. But can you explain?

DOLLY. Yes. You said yourself that Madame Recamier was horribly expensive, so I left her and went to Jacquelin's—just to save your pocket—

HARRY. Never save my pocket again, please.

DOLLY. Very well, I won't.

HARRY. No, I daresay you won't, but I shall! I shall draw the strings very tightly in future. Save my pocket. [*He is walking about distractedly.*] Save my pocket. [*Groans.*]

DOLLY. Now, Harry, it's useless to take it in this way—you knew when you married me I hadn't got the money sense—

HARRY [*groans*]. I hadn't got any sense at all!

DOLLY. Very likely not. But try and have a little now. What have I done? Run a little into debt, solely to please you.

HARRY. Yes; well, now run out of it, and I shall be better pleased still.

DOLLY. After all, running into debt is a positive virtue beside the things that some wives do!

HARRY. Oh, it's a positive virtue, is it?

DOLLY. A husband is very lucky when his wife spends most of her time running up a few bills. It keeps her out of mischief. I'm sure you ought to feel very glad that I'm a little extravagant!

HARRY. Oh, I am! I am! I'm delighted!

[*He sits at table, takes out a pencil, hurriedly puts down the amounts of the various bills—she creeps up behind him.*]

DOLLY. What are you doing?

HARRY. I'm totting up to see how lucky I am! Forty-one, one, six—[*groans.*] Ninety-four—

DOLLY [*has crept up behind him, puts her arms round his neck*]. Now, Harry, will you take my advice—?

HARRY. No.

DOLLY. It's past eleven.

[*Trying to take the pencil out of his hand.*]

HARRY [*disengaging her arms, speaking very sternly*]. Will you have the goodness to let me have all your bills, so that I may know what help I shall need from my banker?

DOLLY. Harry, you don't mean that? Oh, that's absurd with our income!

HARRY. Will you have the goodness to do as I say, and at once, please? [*He is dotting down figures. She stands still in the middle of the room.*] Did you hear me?

[*She bursts into tears. He turns round and shows symptoms of relenting toward her, but steels himself and turns to the bills. She bursts into renewed tears. He goes on figuring.*]

DOLLY [*piteously*]. Harry! Harry! [*Goes up to him and plucks his sleeve*] Harry!

HARRY. Well?

[*He turns and looks at her, is about to yield, but resists, turns away from her, settles resolutely to his figures.*]

DOLLY. And on the first night of the New Year, too! Just as we were going to be so happy! Harry! [*Holds out her arms appealingly*] Harry! [*HARRY suddenly turns round and clasps her*] How could you be so unkind to me?

HARRY. Was I? I didn't mean to be. Now! Dry your tears, and help me reckon this up—

DOLLY. Ye-es.

HARRY. But first of all let me have the remainder of the bills—

DOLLY. Yes.

HARRY. At once, my darling—it's getting late.

DOLLY. Yes. [*Goes up to desk*] You won't reproach me?

HARRY. Of course I won't.

DOLLY. I can bear anything except your reproaches. Promise you won't reproach me.

HARRY. I won't, unless—

DOLLY. Unless what?

HARRY. It's something too awful.

DOLLY. Oh, it isn't. Not at all. Not at all. [*Goes up to the desk, brings down about ten more bills with great affected cheerfulness.*] There! You see, it's nothing.

HARRY [*hastily looking at the totals*]. Nothing? You call these nothing!!!?

DOLLY. Nothing to speak about—nothing awful!

HARRY. Good heavens! How any woman with the least care for her husband, or her home—[*looking at one total after another*]—how any woman with the least self-respect—[*DOLLY goes to him, puts her arms round him, tries to embrace—he*

repulses her.] No, please. I've had enough of that old dodge.

DOLLY. Dodge!

HARRY. I remember that last two hundred pounds and how you sweedled me out of it.

DOLLY. Sweedled?

HARRY. Yes, sweedled!

DOLLY. There's no such word!

HARRY. No, but there's the thing! As most husbands know. [*Referring to one bill after another, picking out items*] Lace coat, hand-made! En-tout-cas, studded cabochons of lapis lazuli—studded cabochons—studded cabochons!

DOLLY [*has quietly seated herself, and is looking at the ceiling*]. Couldn't you manage to pitch your voice in rather a softer key?

HARRY [*comes angrily down to her, bills in hand, speaks in a whisper, very rapidly and fiercely*]. Yes! And I say that a woman who goes and runs up bills like these [*dashing the back of one hand against the bills in the other*] while her husband is smoking threepenny cigars, will very soon bring herself and him to one of those new palatial workhouses where, thank heaven, the cuisine and appointments are now organized with a view of providing persons of your tastes with every luxury at the ratepayers' expense. [*Returns angrily to the bills, turns them over*] Irish lace bolero! [*Turns to another.*] Fur motor coat, fifty-five guineas—

DOLLY [*calmly gazing at the ceiling*]. You told me to look as smart as Mrs. Colefield.

HARRY. Not at that price! If I'd known what that motor tour would cost, by Jove! I'd—

DOLLY. You're getting noisy again. You'll wake my father.

HARRY. He ought to be waked! He ought to know what his daughter is saddling me with.

DOLLY. Very well, if you don't care how shabby I look—

HARRY. Shabby! [*Referring to bills.*] Lace demi-toilette! Point de Venise lace Directoire coat! Shabby?

DOLLY. My dear Harry, do you suppose we shall ever agree as to what constitutes shabbiness?

HARRY. No, I'm hanged if we ever shall!

DOLLY. Then suppose we drop the subject. For the future I shall endeavor to please you entirely.

HARRY. Oh, you will?

DOLLY. By dressing so that you'll be

ashamed to be seen in the same street with me. I shall make myself a perfect fright—a perfect dowdy—a perfect draggletail!

HARRY. Then I shall not be seen in the same street with you

DOLLY. You won't?

HARRY. No, my dear. Make no mistake about that!

DOLLY. You'll be seen with somebody else, perhaps?

HARRY. Very likely

DOLLY. Have you met Miss Smithson again?

HARRY. Not since the last time.

DOLLY. Have you seen her since we were at Folkestone?

HARRY. What's that to do with your bills?

DOLLY. A great deal. That night at dinner she told you her dress allowance was a hundred and twenty a year, and you said you wished she'd give me a few lessons in economy.

HARRY. I did not.

DOLLY. Pardon me, you did!

HARRY. Pardon me, I did not. I said she might give some women a lesson in economy.

DOLLY. You did not! I heard every word of your conversation, and you distinctly asked her to give me, your wife, a few lessons in economy.

HARRY. I'll swear I didn't!

DOLLY. Ask my father! He was there

HARRY. Very well! I'll ask him the first thing in the morning.

DOLLY. No, to-night! You've accused me of deliberately saying what isn't true, and I—

HARRY. I have not!

DOLLY. Yes, you have. And I insist on having it cleared up to-night! I don't suppose he's asleep! Fetch him down!

HARRY. Very well! I will fetch him down!

[*Exit*]

DOLLY [*paces furiously up and down*]. Me! Lessons in economy! Lessons in economy! Me! Lessons in economy! And from Miss Smithson! From that creature! Lessons in economy! [*Re-enter HARRY.*]

HARRY. He'll be down in a minute! Meantime [*very angry*] I want to know what any woman in this world wants with two dozen cache corsets?

[*Banging his free hand on the bills.*]

DOLLY. We'll clear up Miss Smithson: first—

HARRY. No, we will not clear up Miss Smithson—

DOLLY. Because you can't clear up Miss Smithson—

HARRY. I can clear up Miss Smithson—

DOLLY. You cannot clear up Miss Smithson—[*MATT appears at door in dressing-gown, rubbing his eyes and looking very sleepy*] Dad, you remember Miss Smithson—

MATT [*coming in, very sleepy*] Smithson?

DOLLY. The girl at the hotel at Folkestone, that Harry paid so much attention to.

HARRY. I paid no more attention to Miss Smithson than was absolutely necessary. Did I, Mr. Barron?

DOLLY. Oh! Oh! Dad, you remember—

MATT. Not for the moment—

DOLLY. Not the disgraceful way Harry—there's no other word—carried on!

HARRY. I did not carry on—Mr. Barron, I appeal to you.

DOLLY. Dad!

MATT. My dear, I certainly did not notice—

DOLLY. No, he was far too careful to let anyone notice it, except his own wife!

HARRY. You lay your life when I do carry on my wife will be the last person I shall allow to notice it!

DOLLY. I daresay! Dad, did you hear that?

MATT. Yes. [*Rousing himself a little*] Now, Harry, what about Miss Smithson?

HARRY. That's what I want to know!

MATT. Who is Miss Smithson?

DOLLY. Surely you remember that lanky girl—

HARRY. Miss Smithson is not lanky—

DOLLY. Not lanky? Not lanky! You can't have any eyes—!

HARRY. That's what I've often thought—

DOLLY. Oh! Oh! Dad!

MATT. Come, Harry, let's clear this up. [*Suddenly.*] Smithson? Oh yes! The girl who sat on your left at your dinner party—

DOLLY. That's the one!

MATT. I should call her a trifle lanky, Harry.

DOLLY. A trifle? Well, never mind! You remember that dinner party—

MATT [*cautiously*]. Ye-es.

DOLLY. You remember how she waited for a lull in the talk, and then she said with that silly, simpering, appealing look—

HARRY. Miss Smithson's look is not silly or simpering.

DOLLY. Well, it's appealing, isn't it?
HARRY [*with a little chuckle*]. Oh, yes, it's appealing.

DOLLY. Oh! Dad!

MATT [*quiets her*]. Shush!—What did she say?

DOLLY. She said with a very marked glance at me, "My dress allowance is a hundred and twenty a year, and I don't understand how any reasonable woman can wish for more!" What do you think of that?

MATT. Well, if she did say that, and if she glanced at you, it—

DOLLY. Yes?

MATT. It wasn't very nice of her.

DOLLY. Nice? It was an insult! A direct, intentional, abominable insult, wasn't it?

MATT. Yes, yes, decidedly, under the circumstances—

DOLLY. And Harry ought to have resented it?

MATT. At his own dinner table he couldn't, could he?

DOLLY. Yes! At least, if he couldn't resent it, he ought to have *shown* that he resented it. Instead of that, he actually asked her to give me a few lessons in economy!

HARRY. I did not!

DOLLY. Pardon me, you did! Me! his wife! Lessons in economy!

HARRY. And a thundering good thing if she had given you a few before you ran up these bills!

[*Dashes his hand on to the bills*]

DOLLY. There! You hear?

MATT. Come, Harry, you oughtn't to have asked another woman to give your wife lessons in economy.

HARRY. I didn't!

DOLLY. Dad! You were there—

MATT. Yes, but I don't quite remember—

DOLLY. You don't remember? Sure! you can remember a simple thing like that when your own daughter tells you it was so!

MATT. Now, Harry, what did you really say to Miss Smithson?

HARRY. I said she might give *some* women a lesson in economy.

MATT. Not meaning Dolly?

HARRY. No-o.

DOLLY. Then whom did he mean? Lessons in economy? Whom *could* he mean if he didn't mean me?

HARRY. Just so!

DOLLY. Ah! There! You see, he owns it!

MATT. No, no, I'm sure he doesn't mean it! Did you, Harry?

DOLLY Then will he please say what he really does mean?

MATT. Now, Harry, what do you really mean?

HARRY. Well, you remember that night of the dinner party at Folkestone?

MATT [*cautiously*]. Ye-es—

HARRY. After they'd all gone you and I went into the smoking-room, didn't we?

MATT [*cautiously*]. Ye-es.

HARRY. And you said, "Doll's in one of her high gales again!"

DOLLY. High gales?! Father! You didn't say that?

MATT. No, no, my dear—

HARRY. Excuse me, those were your exact words High gales!

MATT. I don't remember.

DOLLY. No, you don't remember anything.

HARRY. You said, "What on earth was up between her and Miss Smithson at dinner?"

DOLLY. You see! That proves exactly what I said!

HARRY. No, by Jove, it proves that your father noticed what a confounded, cussed—

DOLLY. Go on! Go on! Say it!

MATT. Shush! Shush! Well, Harry, what did you say?

HARRY. Well, not wishing to give Dolly away—

DOLLY. Ha! ha! Not wishing to give me away!

HARRY. Not then! But, by Jove, if any decent chap were to come along now—

DOLLY [*exploding*]. There! There! [*To MATT*]. And you sit there and hear my own husband insult me in my own house!

MATT. No! No!

DOLLY. But there you sit! There you sit!

MATT [*jumps up fiercely*]. Now, Harry!

HARRY [*fiercely*]. Well, now, Mr. Barron—

DOLLY. Why don't you defend me? Why don't you demand an apology?

MATT. What for?

DOLLY. For everything! For to-night! For that night at Folkestone!

HARRY. That night at Folkestone! Why, your father was quite on my side—

MATT. What?

DOLLY. He wasn't; were you, Dad?

MATT. N-no.

HARRY. What? [*Fiercely*]. Do you re-

member exactly what passed between us in the smoking-room, Mr. Barron?

MATT. No.

HARRY. Then I'll tell you—

MATT [*retreating towards door*]. No—no—I don't want to know—

HARRY [*following him up, shouting a little*]. You said, "I know what she's like in her high gales! I remember what the little devil was like at home."

DOLLY [*pursuing him up to door*]. Father! You didn't say that!

MATT. No—no, my darling—quite a mistake—quite a mistake—altogether a mistake.

[*Gets thankfully off at back.*]

DOLLY [*calls after him*]. Then why don't you stay and tell him so!

HARRY [*shouts after MATT*]. It's not a mistake!

DOLLY [*calls after MATT*]. It's cowardly of you to leave me here to be insulted!

HARRY [*goes up to door, shouts*]. It's not a mistake! You patted me on the back and said, "Poor chap! Poor chap!" You know you did! [*Closes the door, comes fiercely down to DOLLY*]. It's not a mistake! He could see you had insulted Miss Smithson

DOLLY. I had not insulted her! I was far too civil to her, considering that the next evening you took her out on the Leas, when you ought to have been at billiards—

HARRY. I took her out on the Leas!

DOLLY. Yes! You weren't in the billiard-room! So where were you? Where were you?

HARRY. I jolly well don't know, and I—

DOLLY. Say it! Say it!

HARRY. I damned well don't care!

DOLLY. Ah! [*She seizes the box, brings it up to him, puts it irritatingly in front of him; he seizes it, they struggle for it, trying to take it out of each other's hands; she screams, he tries to get it; there is a scuffle round the room; he tries to rub her knuckles, she makes a feint to bite him; in the struggle the box drops on the floor a little below the table, right.*] Jobling! Jobling!

HARRY. Now, for the last time, have I all your bills?

DOLLY. Jobling! Jobling! Jobling!

HARRY. Have I all your bills?

DOLLY. Jobling! Jobling! Jobling!

HARRY. Once more, madam, have I all your bills?

ACT IV

DOLLY. No, you haven't!
HARRY Then please hand them over to me this instant, so that I may take proceedings

DOLLY [*laughing*] Proceedings! Ha! Take your proceedings!

HARRY By Jove I will take proceedings!

DOLLY Take them! Take them!

HARRY [*walking about furiously with the bills*]. So this is the way the money goes! [*Banging the bills*] While I have to smoke twopenny cigars! And can't get a decent dinner!

DOLLY You can't get a decent dinner?

HARRY. No! Look at those messes last night They weren't fit for a cook-shop.

DOLLY. Oh! Oh! Oh! Get a housekeeper! Get a housekeeper!

HARRY By Jove! that's what I mean to do!

DOLLY. Have Miss Smithson! Send for her to-morrow morning! I'll hand her over the keys!

HARRY [*shouting*] And please hand me over the rest of your bills! The rest of your bills!

[*DOLLY marches up to desk. MATT appears at door in dressing-gown.*]

MATT. I can't get a wink of sleep—

[*DOLLY takes out about twenty more bills*]

HARRY. I insist on seeing the whole lot! So there!

DOLLY [*flourishing the bills, strewing them on the floor*]. Well there! And there! And there! Now you've got the whole lot! And I hope you're satisfied! I'm going into Renie's room! [*Exit*]

HARRY. You're not going into Renie's room. I insist on your going through these bills—

[*Following her off. Their voices are heard retreating upstairs, DOLLY saying, "Go through the bills! Send for Miss Smithson! Have her here to-morrow morning! Take your proceedings." HARRY saying, "I insist on going through the bills to-night! Do you hear, madam, I insist! Will you come down and go through these bills," etc*]

MATT [*sees the box on floor, picks it up, carefully places it on table*] We're making a splendid start for the New Year! [*Exit.*]

CURTAIN

(*A year passes between Acts III and IV.*)

SCENE—*The same. The sofa now fronts the fireplace The armchair is below the sofa, a little to its right The other furniture remains the same.*

TIME.—*Afternoon of January 1, 1908.*

[*Enter LUCAS, followed by CRIDDLE. LUCAS has his left collar-bone broken, and his arm is strapped across his breast; his coat is buttoned loosely over the arm, the left sleeve hanging down*]

LUCAS They've gone to meet me?

CRIDDLE Yes, sir

LUCAS By the road?

CRIDDLE Yes, sir.

LUCAS That's how I've missed them. My car broke down the other side of the clump, and so I walked over the fields.

CRIDDLE. Yes, sir I beg pardon, I hope the arm isn't serious.

LUCAS. No, Criddle Just serious enough to get me a couple of months' leave, so that I could spend the New Year in England

CRIDDLE. You had it very hot in India, I suppose, sir?

LUCAS Blazing!

CRIDDLE We've got the same old weather here, you see, sir.

LUCAS. Same old weather! Had any visitors for Christmas, Criddle?

CRIDDLE. Mr Barron, of course, and Professor and Mrs Sturgess.

LUCAS Same old visitors—same visitors, I should say. Mr. Pilcher still Vicar here, I suppose?

CRIDDLE. Yes, sir He gave us a wonderful sermon at the old year's service last night.

LUCAS. Same old sermon!

CRIDDLE. No, sir. Not exactly the same sermon, though it had similar points to last year Ah! You came over for the old year's service last year?

LUCAS Yes, and a rattling good sermon it was!

CRIDDLE. Very powerful and persuading, wasn't it, sir? It even touched me up a bit.

LUCAS In what way, Criddle?

CRIDDLE. I used to have my ten bob on any horse as I fancied, but I never put a farthing on anything—not even on Sulky Susan for the Oaks.

LUCAS You didn't?

CRIDDLE. No, and thank God, in a manner of speaking, that I didn't, for she

never pulled it off. I owe that to Mr. Pilcher. No, I never touched a thing till the Leger. That reminds me——

LUCAS. What, Criddle?

CRIDDLE. Why, last year, after Mr. Pilcher's sermon, the master had a collecting box, and when he found himself going a bit off the straight he used to put in a shilling or half-a-crown for Mr Pilcher's Blanket fund——

LUCAS. Yes, of course! And Uncle Matt promised him a sovereign for each of us if we had carried out our good resolutions. Is that coming off, Criddle?

CRIDDLE. I expect it is, sir. Mr Pilcher is coming here this afternoon, and the master told me to be sure and find the box before he gets here.

LUCAS. Find the box?

CRIDDLE. Nobody has seen anything of it for some months. Excuse me, sir, I must look for it.

[Exit CRIDDLE. LUCAS takes out letter from an unsealed envelope, glances through it, sits at table, takes out pencil, adds a short note, puts letter in envelope, seals it up, puts it in his tail pocket, goes to conservatory, looks in. RENIE enters at door behind him. She starts, as he turns round]

RENIE [in a whisper]. You're here already?

LUCAS. Yes——

RENIE. Your wound?

LUCAS. Much better. Nearly well.

RENIE. I'm so glad——

LUCAS. I'm not. I shall have to cut it back to India directly. Why didn't you answer my last letter?

RENIE. I did—and tore it up

LUCAS. Tore it up?

RENIE. What's the use? I told you last year we could never be anything to each other!

LUCAS. But you didn't mean it!

[He seizes her hand and kisses it several times]

RENIE [feebly attempting to withdraw it]. Yes—yes, I did. Hush!

LUCAS. I want you to read this.

[Shows her the letter.]

MATT [heard through the door which is open a few inches]. Have you found the box, Criddle?

CRIDDLE. No, sir. I've hunted everywhere.

MATT. Have another look. We must have it ready for Mr. Pilcher.

[MATT enters. Meantime RENIE has crept to upper conservatory door and gone off signing to LUCAS to keep

silence. He has taken the letter out of his pocket and held it up for her to see, putting it back before MATT enters]

MATT. Ah, Lucas. So you've got here. Happy New Year!

LUCAS. Happy New Year, Uncle Matt. [Cordially shaking hands.]

MATT. Glad to see you back in England

LUCAS. Glad to be back!

MATT. How's the arm?

LUCAS. Splendid—nearly well. Dolly and Harry all right?

MATT. First rate. They'll be here directly.

LUCAS. The Sturgesses are here again, Criddle tells me.

MATT. Ye-es

LUCAS. Gray matter still going strong?

MATT. Booming

LUCAS. How's Mrs. Sturgess?

MATT. As usual. Lucas——

LUCAS. Well?

MATT. You're quite cured, eh?

LUCAS. Cured?

MATT. Of your infatuation for her.

LUCAS. Infatuation? Well, I admired her, and perhaps it was lucky I was ordered out to India——

MATT. I managed that for you, my boy.

LUCAS. You did?

MATT. Sir John wanted a smart A.D.C., so I drove over to Aldershot, cracked you up, and got you the job.

LUCAS. So that was why I was packed off. It was you who——

MATT. Aren't you thankful I did?

LUCAS. Yes, much obliged to you, much obliged!

MATT. So you ought to be. And so's the lady

LUCAS. Is she?

MATT. Yes. When we got your wire yesterday saying you'd motor down to-day, Dolly had a long talk with her, and the result was she thanked Dolly and me for getting you out of the way and saving her from you.

LUCAS. Did she?

MATT. Yes, for twenty minutes. She kissed Dolly, and I think she would have kissed me, only I didn't feel myself quite worthy.

LUCAS. Oh, so that's all settled!

MATT. That's all settled. At least, let's hope so.

LUCAS. What do you mean?

MATT. Well, you won't come——

LUCAS. What?

MATT. The same old game

LUCAS What same old game?

MATT Why, *the* same old game!

LUCAS. You must be judging me by yourself, when you were young

MATT My dear boy, that's just what I am doing Lucas, there's not going to be any repetition—

LUCAS. No—no

MATT. Because it isn't the right thing to do, is it?

LUCAS No.

MATT. Very well then, don't do it!

LUCAS I won't [*Listening*] Ah! [*DOLLY and HARRY'S voices heard in hall*] Dolly and Harry!

[*DOLLY and HARRY enter very lovingly*]

LUCAS Hillo, Doll, old girl! Happy New Year!

DOLLY. Happy New Year, Lu!

LUCAS Harry, old brick, how goes it?

HARRY. Splendid!

LUCAS Happy New Year!

HARRY. Happy New Year! [*Looking lovingly at DOLLY*] By Jove, Doll, you can foot it. [*To LUCAS*] Doll and I have just raced up from the farm She licked me! bless her!

DOLLY. Yes, because you encouraged me!

HARRY [*looking at her lovingly and admiringly, kisses her heartily*]. There aren't many things this little woman can't do.

DOLLY. When you encourage me!

HARRY. Oh, I'll encourage you!

[*He again kisses her heartily.*]

HARRY. Well, Lu, old boy, glad to see you home again. Arm pretty bad?

LUCAS. No, nearly well, unfortunately

DOLLY. Down for the day?

LUCAS. Well, now my car has broken down, I was wondering if you'd put me up—

DOLLY [*firmly*]. No We shall be pleased for you to stay to dinner.

HARRY. There's the spare room, Doll.

DOLLY [*firmly*]. No. That may be wanted for Renie, or myself.

HARRY [*half aside to her*] I say, not for you, old girl!

LUCAS. Oh, well, I shall have to get a shake-down at the Red Lion.

[*Enter RENIE at back, still in outdoor clothes.*]

RENIE [*feigning a little surprise*]. Captain Wentworth! A Happy New Year!

LUCAS. Happy New Year, Mrs. Stur-gess. [*Shaking hands.*]

RENIE. So sorry to hear of your wound!

LUCAS Oh, it's healed, thank you.

RENIE I'm so glad Shall you be making a long stay in England?

LUCAS I fear only a few days longer.

RENIE I'm sorry your visit will be so short

[*CRIDDLE enters triumphantly with the hospital box, which is very moldy and dusty—he has also duster in his hand*]

CRIDDLE I've found him, sir.

[*Begins to dust the box carefully.*]

MATT Looks well for your household discipline here, Harry.

HARRY. How?

MATT You've had no occasion to use him lately.

CRIDDLE [*displaying the box, having carefully dusted it*]. There he is, sir, Hospital for Incurables! Nearly as good as new.

MATT. Where did you find him?

CRIDDLE. In the wine-cellar, of all places! I was getting out a bottle of the sixty-eight port for New Year's night, and happening to put my hand behind, there he was!

HARRY [*has a sudden gesture of remembrance*]. Yes, I remember!

MATT. What should incurables be doing in the wine-cellar? [*Holds out his hand to CRIDDLE for the box. CRIDDLE, who has been holding it carefully, gives it to MATT. Exit CRIDDLE. MATT gives the box a shake. It rattles as if half full of coins. He shakes it again, more violently; it rattles again.*] Internal organs sound healthy How did he get into the wine-cellar, Harry?

HARRY. Well, Dolly and I had been having a little tiff one morning—nothing serious—

MATT. No When was that?

HARRY. March, wasn't it?

DOLLY. May, I think—

HARRY No, it wasn't that one—well, never mind, I got so riled at Dolly always poking this box in front of me whenever I happened to—so I thought the wine-cellar would be the safest place for it.

MATT [*gives it another rattle*]. Well, here he is, turned up just at the right moment! And here you all are, Dolly, Harry, Lucas, Mrs Sturgess—all clamoring for me to redeem my promise and put in a sovereign for each of you.

[*CRIDDLE appears at door announcing MR. PILCHER PILCHER enters with four oblong brown paper parcels of equal size. Exit CRIDDLE.*]

PILCHER Happy New Year to you all! Excuse me. [*Depositing his parcels.*] My

New Year's gifts to a few of my parishioners!

DOLLY. New Year's gifts!

PILCHER. To those who need them [*Shaking hands with her.*] Happy New Year, Mr. Barron!

MATT. Happy New Year!

PILCHER. How do you do this morning, Telfer! [*HARRY nods*] My dear Mrs. Sturgess!

RENIE. Happy New Year! What a lovely sermon you gave us again last night!

PILCHER. Lovely! Well, say healthy, bracing

HARRY. A jolly good rouser again. Made me feel—Well—

PILCHER. Ah, Captain Wentworth, Happy New Year!

LUCAS. Happy New Year!

PILCHER. I heard you were wounded—

LUCAS. Oh, that's done with.

MATT. We were just talking about our New Year's inquest—

PILCHER. Inquest?

MATT. Into the characters of Dolly and Harry and—

[*Glancing at RENIE and LUCAS*]

DOLLY. Oh, please don't talk about inquests. Nobody's character is dead here.

MATT. I hope not! We shall see—

LUCAS. Uncle, you don't really mean to carry out this ridiculous idea of yours?

MATT. It was a bona-fide bargain on my side, but if you wish to avoid any awkward little exposures, or if Mr. Pilcher will kindly waive his claims to my contributions—

PILCHER. I'm afraid I can't. I've come here for the express purpose of bearing away my trophy—Ah! [*Seeing box, takes it, gives it a shake; his features assume a pleasant smile.*] It seems to have proved a very wholesome household regulator.

HARRY. Yes, by Jove! It hadn't been in the house twenty-four hours before I put in a sovereign.

PILCHER. A sovereign?

HARRY. The first night of last year Dolly and I had a little tiff—nothing serious—and so the next morning I made it up and—didn't I, Dolly?—

DOLLY. You did! And paid my bills like a lamb, you dear!

PILCHER. And put in a sovereign? [*Rattles the box again*] I won't say "Don't have any more household tiffs," but I will say "Don't omit to liquidate them."

[*PROFESSOR STURGESS enters at*

back, with the proofs of his book in his hand.]

PROF. How do you do?

PILCHER. How do you do? Happy New Year!

PROF. Happy New Year to you! [*To LUCAS*] How d'ye do?

LUCAS. First rate. Happy New Year!

PROF. Thank you. An accident?

LUCAS. Bit of one. Getting over it.

PROF. If I might recommend the constant use of Pableme

LUCAS. Oh, thanks, it's quite well—

PROF. Try Pableme. It's a wonderful restorative [*Looking round*]

PILCHER. We were just about to settle the question Mr. Barron raised last New Year's day—

PROF. Oh yes! I remember! Curiously enough I have only this morning received the proofs of my new volume, "Free Will, the Illusion."

[*Showing the proofs to PILCHER.*]

PILCHER. Very interesting. I should like to discuss the matter with you, but [*taking out watch*] I've so many New Year's calls to make. [*Looking at MATT*] Perhaps we ought to get on with the—

MATT. Inquest.

PILCHER. Vindication.

MATT. [*accepting the correction*]. Vindication.

PILCHER. Can you remember the exact terms?

MATT. I am to pay a sovereign for every one of your hearers who has so far benefited by the wise admonitions of your last year's sermon as to have broken off his bad habits, or some especial bad habit—

LUCAS. We aren't bound to say what the bad habit is that we've broken off?

MATT. I don't wish to be inquisitive, but if you don't mention the particular bad habit, you'll have to give me some assurance that you've conquered it [*Putting down proofs on table, taking up the money-box, giving it a shake.*] Now, who'll be the first to step into the confessional?

[*Looking round*]

DOLLY. I will, as I've nothing to confess.

MATT. Nothing?

DOLLY. No. I had what some husbands might think a bad habit, but—

HARRY. No bills this Christmas, eh Doll?

DOLLY. No.

HARRY. You're sure now, my darling?

DOLLY. Well, you must have some bills

—they grow up before you know—you can't settle them all on the spur of the moment, but I've nothing of importance. So please put in your sovereign for me.

MATT. Then you've absolutely broken off your bad habit of running up bills?

DOLLY. Yes.

MATT. Entirely?

DOLLY. Yes. You said you wouldn't be inquisitive.

PILCHER. Mrs Telfer has given her word. I think I may claim one victory for free will [*nodding victoriously at the PROFESSOR, who shakes his head*], and one sovereign for the Blanket Club.

MATT. Hum! [*Draws a sovereign out of his pocket and very reluctantly drops it into the box, shakes his head at DOLLY, who looks a little uncomfortable.*] Who volunteers next? Harry?

HARRY. Oh well, here goes! I'm going to make a clean breast. The fact is I've made a thundering mess of it.

MATT. Ah!

HARRY. I did begin all right except for a little tiff with Dolly—and then I kept on pretty well for some time, and then—well I don't know—I seemed to go all to pieces and—[*MATT rattles the money-box*] However, better luck this year! But it's so jolly hard to keep it up. And I'd got pretty slack till you woke us up last night—I say, that was a rouser again!

PILCHER. It wasn't a bad sermon, was it?

MATT. No victory for free will and the Blanket Club, this time. Game and game. Now which of you two—

[*Looking at RENIE and LUCAS*]

RENIE. I'll be your first victim. [*Coming into the middle of the room, and posing*] It's so strange that what you started as a jest—

MATT. Oh, no, in deadly earnest, I assure you.

RENIE. In this life who knows what is jest and what is earnest? The least little innocent thing may turn into a tragedy—

MATT. Surely you haven't had any little tragedies?

RENIE. No, last year a mere little circumstance might have turned to a tragedy—honestly I wasn't to blame, but perhaps I was a little careless, and two dear friends came to me with their counsel, and what might have been a tragedy was turned to a comedy.

PROF. My dear, may I ask what "circumstance" you are alluding to?

MATT. We said we wouldn't be inquisitive—

PROF. No, but I cannot recall anything in my wife's life during the last twelve months that even approached a tragedy—

RENIE. I said the affair was quite unimportant—

PROF. Then I wish, my dear, you wouldn't magnify everything, and I wish you would read some solid scientific works in place of rubbishy French novels.

MATT. Meantime [*to RENIE*] may we be confident your little tragedy is ended—

RENIE. Oh, yes, quite.

PILCHER. Another victory.

MATT [*looks searchingly at her, drops a sovereign in the box*]. Lucas?

LUCAS [*coming cheerfully forward*]. My turn for the thumbscrew!

MATT. You seem very cheerful about it.

LUCAS. Yes, I'm going to make a jolly good show.

MATT. What particular bad habit have you conquered during the past year?

LUCAS. I don't know that I've conquered any one in particular, but I've had a regular good go in all round, so altogether I can pat myself on the back.

MATT. But I want to know one particular habit conquered—for instance, you weren't very careful what ladies you made love to, or how many of them at the same time—

LUCAS. I say, Uncle Matt, drop this—

MATT. And a year or two ago you went just a little bit off the straight—

LUCAS. Oh no, I didn't.

MATT. I want to know—

LUCAS. Thank you, no more thumbscrew. I'm out of this before it goes any farther.

MATT. It isn't going any farther. [*Putting his hand on LUCAS'S shoulder.*] Give me your word.

LUCAS. It wasn't a very bad case, and—I summoned all my resolution, and there the matter ended.

PILCHER. I think I may claim a victory here.

LUCAS. So please put in your sovereign.

MATT [*very seriously*]. Then I may take it, Lu, you've really broken off?

LUCAS. Yes, yes, of course I have.

[*MATT puts in a sovereign, hands the box to PILCHER.*]

PILCHER. Three victories and one draw out of four. Most satisfactory [*Taking out watch.*] I must hurry off to the White

House [*Rattling the box*] Excellent results! So excellent that I think I'm justified in making you a little New Year's gift.

[*Going to his heap of brown-paper parcels.*]

DOLLY A New Year's gift! How kind of you! To me?

PILCHER [*opening his parcel*] To you and your husband To your husband in particular, because, although he may have fallen a little short of perfection during the last year—like some of the rest of us—yet I feel sure that during this coming year—[*They have all been watching him curiously; he has now opened the parcel and displays a very bright brand-new collecting-box, with Crookbury Blanket Club painted on it, in large letters. It is much larger than the hospital box*] My household regulator!

[*Giving it to DOLLY*]

DOLLY [*who has shown considerable disappointment on the opening of the parcel*] Crookbury Blanket Club! Thank you so much, for Harry's sake. Harry! For you, dear.

[*She gives the box to HARRY, who places it on the same table*]

PILCHER Well, I must be getting on. [*Shaking hands*] Good-bye, Professor.

PROF. I should like to make that point clear with regard to free will—

PILCHER. When you have an hour, or shall I say a year, to spare, we might argue it out—

PROF. You're going to the White House? If I might accompany you—

PILCHER Delighted!

PROF. Renie, you've had your restless fits again. You'd better come with us—

RENIE. But I've already been walking—

PROF. My dear, this bracing country air is just what you need. Keep out in it all the day long—

RENIE. Oh, very well—the White House, and the fish-pond as usual, I suppose?

PROF. As usual. Come along.

[*Exit. RENIE slightly shrugs her shoulder, very slightly glances at LUCAS and exit after PROFESSOR.*]

LUCAS. The dear old fish-pond! We might all take a stroll there!

MATT. Good idea! The dear old fish-pond! We might all take a stroll there!

[*Linking his arm with LUCAS.*]

LUCAS [*suspicious, holding back*]. I don't know that I care—we went there last year—

MATT. We did! Same old game, eh? Come along.

[*Drags LUCAS off*]

PILCHER [*has been gathering up his parcels*]. Well, good-bye! Good-bye! [*Rattles the hospital box vigorously.*] Three splendid victories for free will and moral resolution!

[*Exit, rattling the box*]

HARRY. Doll, you really haven't got any bills this year?

DOLLY. No, no! Only a few little oddments that no woman can prevent.

HARRY. You might let me see the little oddments—

DOLLY. I will [*Suddenly*] Oh Harry, I quite forgot! Do forgive me!

HARRY. What?

DOLLY. I never wrote the geyser bath people!

HARRY. Never mind the geyser bath

DOLLY. And only this morning you rowed me because I hadn't got it ready for the New Year! Where did you put their address?

HARRY. I don't know! Somewhere upstairs among my papers

DOLLY [*gently pushing him off*] I can just catch to-night's post! Make haste and get it! Quick! There's a dear! And then we can get the bath fixed up for you next week.

HARRY. Ye—es. I say, Doll, I mean to get those oddments fixed up to-night

[*Taps the writing-case significantly and exit. DOLLY looks frightened, sees him off, goes up to writing-desk, takes out bills, looks at them, throws up her arms in despair, groans, slams down the writing-desk, looks at the chair she has touched in first act, shows great resolution, marches up and touches it*]

DOLLY. Yes! Yes! I have got free will. [*Goes back from it, again looks at it, again marches up to it, touches it*] Then why do I keep on having bills?

[*RENIE enters in great agitation and distress.*]

RENIE. Oh, Dolly!

DOLLY. What's the matter?

RENIE. Oh, Dolly!

DOLLY. What is it?

RENIE [*throws her arms round DOLLY affectionately*]. You've always been such a true friend to me—

DOLLY. Yes, dear

RENIE. More like a sister. And I know I may trust you now.

DOLLY [*a little suspicious*]. Yes. Has anything happened?

RENIE. Yes. Oh, Dolly—

DOLLY. Tell me!

RENIE. As we were going out at the

garden gate, Captain Wentworth held out a letter behind his back for me to take —

DOLLY. What?!

RENIE. But now his arm is wounded he couldn't manage it properly, and he dropped it. I hurried to pick it up, and then my husband noticed and insisted on reading it —

DOLLY. What was in the letter?

RENIE. It wasn't so very bad, but my husband has chosen to jump to a wrong conclusion, and—oh, Dolly, you can help me!

DOLLY [*coldly, relaxing her embrace*]. How?

RENIE. If you'd only let me tell my husband that I was receiving it for you —

DOLLY. What?!

RENIE. There is no address, and fortunately it proved that you weren't really guilty

DOLLY. Oh! I wasn't really guilty?

RENIE. In fact, it proves your complete innocence.

DOLLY. I'm glad of that.

RENIE. Then you'll let me say it was you?

DOLLY. No! You can't suppose I should let my own cousin make love to me in my own house?!

RENIE. You won't help me?

DOLLY. Yes, any way but that! How could you be so foolish?

RENIE. I don't know. When I heard yesterday he was coming, I quite made up my mind I'd have nothing to say to him! Dolly, free will must be an illusion, or else why do I always—oh, what shall I do?

DOLLY. As you are completely innocent, you'd better ask your husband to forgive you

RENIE. Ye—es. No! As it is a perfectly pure and exalted attachment I shall take that ground—at any rate at first, and see what he says. You'll help me all you can?

DOLLY. Yes, but promise me you'll have nothing to do with Lucas in future!

RENIE. No, indeed! if I once get out of this.

DOLLY. Very well! I'll see what I can do—hush!

[*The PROFESSOR enters with a letter in his hand, MATT soothing him*]

PROF. [*very angry*]. Not a word more, if you please. Mrs. Telfer, you have doubtless heard —

DOLLY. Yes —?

PROF. I leave for London to-night to consult my lawyer. Mrs. Sturgess will, I trust, return to her friends until —

MATT. Perhaps Mrs. Sturgess may be able to explain —

PROF. What explanation can be offered of language like this? [*Reading from letter*] "From the first moment I saw you, I felt that you were entirely different from any woman I have ever met—" A monstrously inexact statement to start with. And a woman who is capable of practicing such deceit —

[*RENIE bursts into tears.*]

MATT. I think you ought to hear what Mrs. Sturgess has to say —

RENIE [*through her tears*]. What would be the use? With such a nature as his he could never begin to understand the loyal and exalted devotion which Captain Wentworth feels for me! No, all my life I have been misunderstood, misjudged, condemned! Let it be so till the end! Dolly, come and help me pack!

[*Exit. MATT goes up to table and takes up proofs of PROFESSOR'S book and looks through them*]

DOLLY. You're really too severe with poor Renie —

PROF. I am not severe. I simply register the inevitable sentence of the husband upon the wife who misconducts herself!

DOLLY. Misconducts herself! She has merely had a little harmless flirtation —

PROF. In my wife a flirtation of this character [*pointing to letter in his hand*] constitutes grave misconduct.

DOLLY. But that's perfectly ridiculous! Why, it might happen to any woman! Dad, explain to him —

MATT. Professor, you're taking altogether a wrong view of this. Now this case you were pointing out to me in your own book—[*pointing to proofs*]—Number forty-nine, Mrs. Conway. Remarkably handsome woman too!—[*Reading*]. "The injustice and cruelty of condemning this poor lady must be apparent to all." My dear Professor, before publishing this book you'll have to modify your theory.

PROF. I cannot modify my theory. I have spent ten years in collecting facts which prove it.

MATT. Then, pardon me, you must really look over Mrs. Sturgess's little indiscretion.

PROF. That is equally impossible —

MATT. But you say her action in receiving my nephew's letter was entirely due to the activity of certain atoms in the gray matter of her brain.

PROF. Undoubtedly that is so.

DOLLY. Very well then, if her gray matter keeps on working wrong, what's

the use of blaming her? You say yourself there's no such thing as free will—

PROF. Precisely, but I have always allowed that in the present low moral and intellectual condition of the herd of mankind, free will is a plausible working hypothesis.

DOLLY. But it doesn't work! Free will won't work at all! Look at my own case! Do you suppose I should go on all my life having bills if I could help myself? [*Catching MATT'S eye, who looks at her gravely and holds up his finger*] Never mind my bills! Do make him see how wrong and absurd it is to punish poor Renie when there's no such thing as free will!

MATT. Dolly's right! She's only saying what you have so admirably laid down here. My dear Professor, you cannot possibly publish this book!

PROF. But it has been announced! I must publish it.

MATT. You cannot. Read that [*Giving the PROFESSOR the book and pointing out passage*] Surely after that you cannot condemn Mrs. Sturgess.

PROF. [*taking book, glancing at the passage*]. Really, it's most annoying when one's own wife upsets—

MATT. Oh! they're always making hay of our theories one way or the other.

PROF. Of course, if one presses the matter home to first principles—

DOLLY. Yes! Yes! Well, why not act on your own first principles! You ought to be very sorry for poor Renie, considering all she has suffered.

PROF. Suffered?

DOLLY. Yes, poor dear! You don't know what an awful struggle she has gone through between this unfortunate flirtation and her admiration for you.

PROF. Her admiration for me!

DOLLY. Yes! She always speaks of you as her great protagonist of science

PROF. [*mollified*]. Does she? Does she?

DOLLY. Yes. If I were you I should go upstairs, and be very sweet to her, and above all don't reproach her. We women can endure anything except reproaches—

PROF. [*looking at his proofs*]. I must publish my book. And after all, as you say, it is useless to blame them when—a—

MATT. When, bless them, they can't help themselves

PROF. I will hear what she has to say—

DOLLY. No! Go straight to her, and

forgive her, and don't say another word. And then I'm sure her gray matter will soon be all right. And what a triumph that will be for you!

PROF. It does offer a way out of the difficulty. [*Exit*]

DOLLY. Dad, I won't have her here next Christmas.

MATT. No, my dear, I wouldn't.

DOLLY. That wretched Lucas!

MATT. What is to be done with him?

DOLLY. Pack him off! Pack him off at once!

[*LUCAS cautiously looks in from upper conservatory door.*]

LUCAS. I say, how's the old bird seem to take it?

DOLLY. Old bird!

LUCAS. He isn't going to make a shindy over a trifle like this?

DOLLY. Trifle! He's threatening to divorce her and expose you!

LUCAS. You don't say so. I'm awfully sorry!

DOLLY. Sorry!

LUCAS. I am, indeed! And any reparation I can make—

DOLLY. Reparation?!

LUCAS. Such as an apology—

[*DOLLY utters a contemptuous exclamation.*]

MATT. Will you give me your word of honor never to see Mrs. Sturgess again?

LUCAS. Yes.

MATT. Or write to her?

LUCAS. Yes.

MATT. The word of honor of an English gentleman used to mean something, Lu.

LUCAS. It does now, Uncle Matt!

MATT [*shakes hands with him heartily*]. Then I'll take it. Now be off as quickly as you can and let us make the best of it for you and her.

LUCAS. Thanks. Good-bye!

MATT. Good-bye!

[*LUCAS crosses to DOLLY, offers his hand*]

DOLLY. No, Lu. If Renie gets out of this safely and if you behave yourself, I'll shake hands with you when you come back from India.

LUCAS. You're taking this too seriously—you're taking it far too seriously!

[*Exit.*]

MATT. We're making a splendid start again for the New Year!

DOLLY. I hope this will be a lesson for Renie!

MATT. I hope so How about yourself?

DOLLY. What do you mean?

MATT. I put the sovereign in, but—
you've got a few more bills, eh?

DOLLY. Just a few oddments

MATT. How much?

DOLLY. I don't know. Dad——

MATT. Well?

DOLLY. Now that South Africans have gone up at last, and you won that splendid coup on them last week——

MATT. Well?

DOLLY. You couldn't lend me—a few hundreds—till my allowance comes due? Just a few hundreds? [*Lastens.*] There's Harry! You will help me, Dad—you will?

MATT. I'll see what I can do.

[*HARRY enters cheerfully*]

HARRY. That's all right, Doll! There's the address. [*Giving a slip of paper*]

DOLLY. Thanks, dear

HARRY. And now about these mere oddments?

DOLLY. Not now, dear

HARRY. Yes, dear, now. [*Very severely*] This instant!

DOLLY. Harry, you're going to lose your temper——

HARRY. No I'm going to keep a firm guard on it, but [*very severely*] let me see those bills.

DOLLY [*creeps frightened up to the desk*]. I'm sure you're going to lose your temper. [*Opens the desk*]

HARRY [*firmly*]. No. I'm quite calm. Whose bill is that? [*She hands him one timorously*] Fulks and Garner! Artist Furriers! More artists!—[*looks at total*]—one hundred and twenty-four pounds. Well, I'm——

DOLLY. Ah, Jobling!

HARRY. I should think I am Jobling. And you said you'd never enter their shop again!

DOLLY. I never meant to, but this time it was absolutely necessary——

HARRY. Necessary?

DOLLY. Yes—you see the chief item——

HARRY [*reads*]. Chinchilla toque, coat, muff and boa—eighty guineas—eighty guineas——

DOLLY. I got them as a surprise for you when we go South next week.

HARRY. Surprise! Great heavens! What in the name of all——

MATT. Shush, Harry! Her motive was a good one. She got it to please you!

DOLLY. You haven't seen it yet, it's

just outside— I've got a great mind to give you a great New Year's treat and let you see it on!

HARRY. I'm not going to be sweedled——

MATT. Hush! Harry! Let her put it on! Let's have a look at it, and see whether it's worth the money. Put it on, Doll.

[*Exit DOLLY.*]

HARRY [*calls after her*]. I tell you I'm not going to be sweedled!——

MATT. What is sweedled?

HARRY. Sweedling is sweedling! It's part swindling and part wheedling! It's what every damned good-natured husband like me has to go through, when he's fool enough to put up with it!

MATT. Well, old boy, you'll have to pay, you know; it will come to that in the end.

HARRY. I'm not going to be sweedled——

MATT. And if Dolly has been a little extravagant I must help her out with it to-morrow morning!

HARRY. No, we'll go into it thoroughly to-night

MATT. No, Harry, we won't. My room is just above here. Besides, the cook is going to give us a special New Year dinner, and I want to enjoy it. This New Year we'll start with a comfortable evening, please!

[*DOLLY enters at back in a very handsome chinchilla coat. HARRY looks a little sulky. She stands in the middle of the room and displays it.*]

DOLLY. Well? [*He looks at it rather sulkily, walks away; she follows him.*]

Well? [*Walking after him*] Well? Well? [*He turns, looks at her, she stands and holds out her arms*]

HARRY. Oh, hang it all! [*Takes her in his arms and kisses her.*] There!

DOLLY [*kissing him heartily*]. And there! [*Another kiss.*] And there! [*Another kiss.*] And there! [*Catches sight of the collecting-box, goes to it, furiously sweeps it off its table on to the floor.*] And there!

CURTAIN

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What Every Woman Knows, Sir James Barrie
Penelope, Somerset Maugham

THE LAST OF THE DE MULLINS

(1907)

BY

ST. JOHN HANKIN

CHARACTERS

HUGO DE MULLIN
JANE DE MULLIN, *his wife*
MRS. CLOUSTON, *his sister*
JANET DE MULLIN (*Mrs. Seagrave*), *Hugo's eldest daughter*
JOHNNY SEAGRAVE, *her son*
HESTER DE MULLIN, *her sister*
BERTHA ALDENHAM
MONTY BULSTEAD
DR. ROLT, *the local doctor*
MR. BROWN, *the curate*
MISS DEANES
ELLEN, *maid at the De Mullins'*

The action takes place at Brendon Underwood in Dorset, Acts One and Three at the Manor House, the De Mullins' house in the village, Act Two on the borders of Brendon Forest. Three days pass between Acts One and Two, and five between Acts Two and Three.

ST. JOHN HANKIN

WHEREAS the plays of Jones and Pinero were written unreservedly for the commercial theater, there were at the turn of the century a number of playwrights devoted primarily to the betterment of the theater through the creation and production of a more intellectual type of drama. Although Jones and Pinero were desirous of reuniting drama and literature, which had been ignominiously separated for more than a century, they were willing to make vast concessions to the box-office and to the puerile tastes of the playgoers of their day. The founding of the Irish National Theatre Society, of the Stage Society, and of numerous Sunday production groups, and such ventures as the Birmingham Repertory Theatre and as the management of the Court Theatre in London by Granville-Barker delivered a much needed assault on the pernicious long-run system, and made possible public performance of plays by Shaw, Lady Gregory, Synge, Houghton, Hankin, and other playwrights whom the commercial manager had ignored. One of the obstacles to the satisfactory development of an adult national drama in England and America has been the persistence of the long-run system, although since the war stage societies and provincial repertory theaters in England and such experimental groups as the Theater Guild and the Le Gallienne Repertory Theatre in New York have aroused an increasing interest in the literary drama

One of the most distinguished dramatists of this early "theater of ideas" was St John Hankin, whose untimely death occurred just when his exercise of a limited but exquisite talent was rapidly becoming more sure and deft. St. John Emile Clavering Hankin was born in 1860 in Southampton, and was educated at Malvern and at Merton College, Oxford. He became a successful journalist in London, serving on the staffs of the *Times* and *Punch*. As he was a man possessed of some means as well as an artistic conscience, he did not write plays designed to arouse a wide popularity. His comedies were first produced by Granville-Barker at the Court Theatre and soon won him a gratifying reputation among the small nucleus of intelligent playgoers who were destined to act as a civilizing leaven in the commercial theater. During the seven years preceding his death in 1909 he wrote his plays: five of full length, two of one act, and one longer play which he left unfinished. The total output was slight but a valuable contribution to the pre-modern drama. *The Two Mr Wetherbys* (1902) concerns the assorted discomforts attendant upon living up to a good but undeserved reputation, *The Return of the Prodigal* (1904) is a satire on middle-class ideals of social and material success; *The Charity that Began at Home* (1905), like Henry Arthur Jones's *Crusaders*, is a satire on ill-advised philanthropy; *The Cassilis Engagement* (1905), long a favorite among amateur dramatic groups, is a twentieth-century version of *Caste*, with a cynical ending; *The Last of the De Mullins* (1907) was the last completed long play.

The Last of the De Mullins differs from its predecessors in its greater seriousness and naturalness and in an emotional quality missing in the earlier brilliant and hard comedies. He endows Janet, an emancipated heroine of the Ibsen-Sudermann-Shaw type, with genuine feeling as well as reason. In all the plays there is one completely rational and un-hypocritical character placed among a group of conventional, genteel people (a favorite situation also in the plays of Ibsen, Wilde, and Shaw). This character, however, is not the *raisonneur* of the Jones and Pinero type, for Hankin is artist enough to write objec-

tively and invest each character with individual plausibility. In *The Last of the De Mullins* Janet turns the merciless light of her experiences and reason upon the absurdities and perils of an obsolete feudalism, in addition she challenges the despotism of conventional morality and makes the eternal demand of the individualist to live one's own life as one sees fit. Although Janet's tirades almost become rant, they never descend into mere rhetoric, for the feeling back of them is genuine. In spite of Hankin's cynicism and contempt of sentimentality, he wisely allows a measure of pity for the father to insure a finer dramatic balance.

The faults of Hankin's plays are the lack of genuine human interest and emotional momentum, the rather mechanical plots with practically no suspense, a brilliant surface sparkle with little depth, a general lack of robustness. The virtues are more numerous: an engaging literary style, intellectual honesty, excellent dry humor, truthful endings, clear and pungent characterizations, fresh and sparkling dialogue. With no great fecundity of dramatic invention he was a valuable pioneer in the revolt against the crudities of the commercial Victorian and Edwardian drama. With his keen and humorous perception of current social imbecilities and hypocrisies and his predilection for ideas rather than for situation and event he gives to his plays an intellectual content not common in pre-war drama; and with a fine discipline of language (as John Drinkwater defines "style") he fashions his plays into literature.

THE LAST OF THE DE MULLINS

ACT I

SCENE.—*The Inner Hall at the Manor House in Brendon-Underwood village. An old-fashioned, white-paneled room. At the back is a big stone-mullioned Tudor window looking out on to the garden. On the left of this is a bay in which is a smaller window. A door in the bay leads out into the garden. People entering by this door pass the window before they appear. The furniture is oak, mostly Jacobean or older. The right-hand wall of the room is mainly occupied by a great Tudor fireplace, over which the De Mullin coat-of-arms is carved in stone. Above this a door leads to the outer hall and front door. A door on the opposite side of the room leads to the staircase and the rest of the house. The walls are hung with a long succession of family portraits of all periods in all stages of dinginess as to both canvas and frame. When the curtain rises the stage is empty. Then HESTER is seen to pass the window at the back, followed by MR. BROWN. A moment later they enter. MR. BROWN is a stout, rather unwholesome-looking curate, HESTER a lean, angular girl of twenty-eight, very plainly and unattractively dressed in somber tight-fitting clothes. She has a cape over her shoulders and a black hat on. BROWN wears seedy clerical garments, huge boots and a squashy hat. The time is twelve o'clock in the morning of a fine day in September.*

HESTER Come in, Mr. Brown I'll tell mother you're here. I expect she's upstairs with father.

[*Going towards door.*]

BROWN Don't disturb Mrs De Mullin, please. I didn't mean to come in

HESTER You'll sit down now you are here?

BROWN Thank you. [*Does so awkwardly.*] I'm so glad to hear Mr. De Mullin is better. The Vicar will be glad too.

HESTER Yes Doctor Rolt thinks he will do all right now.

BROWN You must have been very anxious when he was first taken ill.

HESTER We were terribly anxious.

[*HESTER takes off her hat and cape and puts them down on the window seat.*]

BROWN I suppose there's no doubt it was some sort of stroke?

HESTER Doctor Rolt says no doubt.

BROWN How did it happen?

HESTER We don't know. He had just gone out of the room when we heard a fall. Mother ran out into the hall and found him lying by the door quite unconscious. She was dreadfully frightened. So were we all

BROWN Had he been complaining of feeling unwell?

HESTER Not especially. He complained of the heat a little. And he had a headache. But Father's not strong, you know. None of the De Mullins are, Aunt Harriet says.

BROWN Mrs. Clouston is with you now, isn't she?

HESTER Yes. For a month. She generally stays with us for a month in the summer

BROWN I suppose she's very fond of Brendon?

HESTER All the De Mullins are fond of Brendon, Mr. Brown.

BROWN Naturally You have been here so long

HESTER Since the time of King Stephen

BROWN Not in this house?

HESTER [*smiling*]. Not in this house, of course It's not old enough for that.

BROWN Still, it must be very old The oldest house in the village, isn't it?

HESTER Only about four hundred years The date is 1603. The mill is older, of course

BROWN You still own the mill, don't you?

HESTER Yes. Father would never part with it He thinks everything of the mill We get our name from it, you know. De Mullin. Du Moulin. "Of the Mill."

BROWN Were the original De Mullins millers then?

HESTER [*rather shocked at such a suggestion*]. Oh no!

BROWN. I thought they couldn't have been.

HESTER. No De Mullin has ever been in trade of *any* kind! But in the old days to own a mill was a feudal privilege. Only lords of manors and the great abbays had them. The farmers had to bring all their corn to them to be ground.

BROWN. I see

HESTER. There were constant disputes about it all through the Middle Ages.

BROWN. Why was that?

HESTER. The farmers would rather have ground their corn for themselves, I suppose.

BROWN. Why? If the De Mullins were willing to do it for them?

HESTER. They had to pay for having it ground, of course.

BROWN [*venturing on a small joke*]. Then the De Mullins were millers, after all, in a sense

HESTER. You mustn't let Father hear you say so!

BROWN. The mill is never used now, is it?

HESTER. No. When people gave up growing corn round here and all the land was turned into pasture it fell into decay, and now it's almost ruinous.

BROWN. What a pity!

HESTER. Yes Father says England has never been the same since the repeal of the Corn Laws. [*Enter MRS. DE MULLIN and MRS. CLOUSTON by the door on the left, followed by DR. ROLT*] Here is Mother—and Aunt Harriet.

[*MRS. DE MULLIN, poor lady, is a crushed, timid creature of fifty-eight or so, entirely dominated by the DE MULLIN feish and quite unable to hold her own against either her husband or her sister-in-law, a hard-mouthed, resolute woman of sixty. Even HESTER she finds almost too much for her. For the rest a gentle, kindly lady, rather charming in her extreme helplessness. ROLT is the average country doctor, brisk, sensible, neither a fool nor a genius.*]

ROLT [*as they enter the room*]. He's better. Distinctly better. A little weak and depressed of course. That's only to be expected. Good morning.

[*Shakes hands with HESTER. Nods to BROWN.*]

MRS. DE MULLIN. Mr De Mullin is always nervous about himself.

ROLT. Yes. Constitutional, no doubt.

But he'll pick up in a few days. Keep him as quiet as you can. That's really all he needs now.

MRS. DE MULLIN. You don't think he ought to stay in his room? . . . Good morning, Mr. Brown. Are you waiting to see me?

[*BROWN shakes hands with both ladies*]

BROWN [*awkwardly*]. Not specially. I walked over from the church with Miss De Mullin.

HESTER. Is Father coming downstairs, Mother?

MRS. DE MULLIN. Yes, Hester. He insisted on getting up. You know he always hates staying in his room.

HESTER. Oh, Doctor Rolt, do you think he *should*?

ROLT. I don't think it will do him any harm. He can rest quietly in a chair or on the sofa . . . Well, I must be off. Good-bye, Mrs. De Mullin.

[*Shakes hands briskly with every one*]

BROWN [*rising ponderously*]. I must be going too. [*Shakes hands with MRS. DE MULLIN.*] You'll tell Mr. De Mullin I inquired after him? Good-bye, Mrs Clouston. [*Shakes hands.*] And you're coming to help with Harvest Decorations on Saturday, aren't you, Miss De Mullin?

HESTER [*shaking hands*]. Of course.

[*BROWN and ROLT go out.*]

MRS. CLOUSTON [*seating herself and beginning to knit resolutely*]. What singularly unattractive curates the Vicar seems to get hold of, Jane!

MRS. DE MULLIN [*meekly*]. Do you think so, Harriet?

MRS. CLOUSTON. Quite remarkably. This Mr. Brown, for instance. He has the most enormous feet! And his boots; I've never seen such boots!

HESTER [*flushing*]. We needn't sneer if Mr Brown doesn't wear fine clothes, Aunt Harriet.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Of course not, Hester. Still, I think he goes to the opposite extreme. And he really is quite abnormally plain. Then there was that Mr. Snood, who was curate when I was down last year. The man with the very red hands. [*These acid comments are too much for HESTER, who flounces out angrily.* MRS. CLOUSTON looks up for a moment, wondering what is the meaning of this sudden disappearance. Then continues unmoved] I'm afraid the clergy aren't what they were in *our* young days, Jane.

MRS. DE MULLIN. I don't think I've noticed any falling off.

MRS CLOUSTON It is there all the same I'm sure Hugo would agree with me. Of course, curates are paid next to nothing. Still, I think the Vicar might be more happy in his choice.

MRS. DE MULLIN. I believe the poor like him.

MRS. CLOUSTON [*to whom this seems of small importance compared with his shocking social disabilities*] Very likely . . . Do please keep still, Jane, and don't fidget with that book What *is* the matter with you?

MRS DE MULLIN. I'm a little nervous this morning Hugo's illness . . .

MRS. CLOUSTON. Hugo's almost well now.

MRS. DE MULLIN. Still, the anxiety . . .

MRS CLOUSTON. Nonsense, Jane. Anxiety is not at all a thing to give way to, especially when there's no longer anything to be anxious about Hugo's practically well now. Doctor Rolt seems to have frightened us all quite unnecessarily.

MRS. DE MULLIN. I suppose it's difficult to tell

MRS CLOUSTON. Of course it's difficult. Otherwise no one would send for a doctor. What are doctors for if they can't tell when a case is serious and when it is not?

MRS DE MULLIN. But if he didn't know?

MRS CLOUSTON. Then he *ought* to have known. Next time Hugo is ill you'd better send to Bridport. [*MRS DE MULLIN drops book on table with a clatter.*] Really, Jane, what *are* you doing? Throwing books about like that!

MRS. DE MULLIN. It slipped out of my hand.

[*Rises and goes up to window restlessly*]

MRS. CLOUSTON. Is anything wrong?

MRS. DE MULLIN [*hesitating*]. Well, the truth is I've done something, Harriet, and now I'm not sure whether I ought to have done it.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Done what?

MRS DE MULLIN [*dolorously*]. I'm afraid you won't approve.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Perhaps you'd better tell me what it is. Then we shall know.

MRS. DE MULLIN. The fact is some one is coming here this morning, Harriet—to see Hugo.

MRS. CLOUSTON. To see Hugo? Who is it?

MRS. DE MULLIN. Janet.

MRS CLOUSTON [*with horror*]. Janet?

MRS DE MULLIN. Yes.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Janet! She wouldn't *dare*!

MRS. DE MULLIN [*dolorously*]. I sent for her, Harriet

MRS. CLOUSTON. You *sent* for her?

MRS DE MULLIN Yes When Hugo was first taken ill and Doctor Rolt seemed to think the attack was so serious . . .

MRS. CLOUSTON. Doctor Rolt was a fool.

MRS. DE MULLIN. Very likely, Harriet. But he said Hugo might die And he said if there was any one Hugo would like to see . . .

MRS CLOUSTON. But would Hugo wish to see Janet?

MRS DE MULLIN. I thought he might. After all, Janet *is* his daughter

MRS CLOUSTON. I thought he said he would never see her again?

MRS DE MULLIN. He did *say* that, of course. But that was eight years ago. And, of course, he wasn't ill then

MRS CLOUSTON. When did you send for her?

MRS DE MULLIN Three days ago.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Why didn't she come *then*, if she was coming at all?

MRS DE MULLIN She was away from home. That was so unfortunate. If she had come when Hugo was ill in bed it might have been all right. But now that he's almost well again . . .

MRS. CLOUSTON When did you hear she was coming?

MRS DE MULLIN. Only this morning. Here is what she says

[*Produces telegram from pocket.*]

MRS. CLOUSTON [*reads*]. "Telegram delayed. Arrive midday. Seagrave" Seagrave?

MRS. DE MULLIN. Yes She calls herself Mrs. Seagrave now.

MRS. CLOUSTON [*nods*]. On account of the child, I suppose

MRS DE MULLIN. I suppose so.

MRS. CLOUSTON. I never could understand how Janet came to go wrong. [*MRS. DE MULLIN sighs.*] None of the *De Mullins* have ever done such a thing before

MRS. DE MULLIN [*plaintively*]. I'm sure she doesn't get it from *my* family.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Well, she must have got it from somewhere. She's not in the least like a *De Mullin*.

MRS. DE MULLIN [*lamentably*]. I believe it was all through bicycling.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Bicycling?

MRS. DE MULLIN. Yes. When girls aren't to scour about the country as they do now these things didn't happen.

MRS. CLOUSTON [*severely*]. I never approved of Janet's bicycling, you remember, Jane.

MRS. DE MULLIN. Nor did I, Harriet. But it was no use Janet only laughed. Janet never would do what she was told about things even when she was quite a child. She was so very obstinate. She was always getting some idea or other into her head. And when she did, nothing would prevent her from carrying it out. At one time she wanted to *teach*.

MRS. CLOUSTON. I remember.

MRS. DE MULLIN. She said girls ought to go out and earn their own living like boys.

MRS. CLOUSTON. What nonsense!

MRS. DE MULLIN. So Hugo said. But Janet wouldn't listen. Finally we had to let her go over and teach the Aldenham girls French three times a week, just to keep her amused.

MRS. CLOUSTON [*thoughtfully*]. It was strange you never could find out who the father was.

MRS. DE MULLIN [*sighs*]. Yes. She wouldn't tell us.

MRS. CLOUSTON. You should have made her tell you. Hugo should have insisted on it.

MRS. DE MULLIN. Hugo did insist. He was terribly angry with her. He sent her to her room and said she was not to come down till she told us. But it was no use. Janet just stayed in her room till we had all gone to bed and then took the train to London.

MRS. CLOUSTON. You should have locked her door.

MRS. DE MULLIN. We did. She got out of the window.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Got out of the window! The girl might have been killed.

MRS. DE MULLIN. Yes. But Janet was fond of climbing. And she was never afraid of anything.

MRS. CLOUSTON. But there's no late train to London.

MRS. DE MULLIN. She caught the mail at Weymouth, I suppose.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Do you mean to say she *walked* all the way to Weymouth in the middle of the night? Why, it's twelve miles.

MRS. DE MULLIN. She had her bicycle, as I said.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Tck! . . . How did you know she went to London?

MRS. DE MULLIN. She wrote from there for her things.

MRS. CLOUSTON. I wonder she wasn't ashamed.

MRS. DE MULLIN. So Hugo said. However, he said I might send them. But he made me send a letter with the things to say that he would have nothing more to do with her and that she was not to write again. For a time she didn't write. Nearly five months. Then, when her baby was born, she wrote to tell me. That was how I knew she had taken the name of Seagrave. She mentioned it.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Did you show the letter to Hugo?

MRS. DE MULLIN. Yes.

MRS. CLOUSTON. What did he say?

MRS. DE MULLIN. Nothing. He just read it and gave it back to me without a word.

MRS. CLOUSTON. That's the last you've heard of her, I suppose?

MRS. DE MULLIN. Oh no, Harriet.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Do you mean to say she goes *on* writing? And you allow her? When Hugo said she *was* not to?

MRS. DE MULLIN [*meeekly*]. Yes. Not often, Harriet. Only occasionally.

MRS. CLOUSTON. She has no business to write at all.

MRS. DE MULLIN. Her letters are quite short. Sometimes I wish they were longer. They really tell one nothing about herself, though I often ask her.

MRS. CLOUSTON. You *ask* her! Then you write too!

MRS. DE MULLIN. I answer her letters, of course. Otherwise she wouldn't go on writing.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Really, Jane, I'm surprised at you. So you've actually been corresponding with Janet all these years—and never told *me*! I think you've behaved very badly.

MRS. DE MULLIN. I didn't like to, Harriet.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Didn't like to!

MRS. DE MULLIN. And as you don't think I *ought* to hear from her . . .

MRS. CLOUSTON. I don't think you ought to hear from her, of course. But as you hear naturally I should like to have seen the letters.

MRS. DE MULLIN. I didn't know that, Harriet. In fact, I thought you would rather not. When a dreadful thing like this happens in a family it seems best not to write about it or speak of it either, doesn't it? Hugo and I never speak of it.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Does Hugo know you hear from her?

MRS. DE MULLIN. I think not. I have never told him. Nor Hester. I'm sure Hester would disapprove

MRS. CLOUSTON. My dear Jane, what can it matter whether Hester approves or not? Hester knows nothing about such things *At her age!*

MRS. DE MULLIN. Hester is twenty-eight

MRS. CLOUSTON. Exactly. A girl like that.

MRS. DE MULLIN [*sighs*]. Girls have such very strong opinions nowadays

MRS. CLOUSTON. What does Janet live on? Teaching?

MRS. DE MULLIN. I suppose so. She had her Aunt Miriam's legacy, of course.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Only four hundred pounds.

MRS. DE MULLIN. Yes

MRS. CLOUSTON. I never approved of that legacy, Jane. Girls oughtn't to have money left them. It makes them too independent.

MRS. DE MULLIN. Aunt Miriam was always so fond of Janet.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Then she should have left the money to Hugo. Fathers are the proper people to leave money to

MRS. DE MULLIN. Hugo did have the *management* of the money—till Janet was twenty-one.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Why only till she was twenty-one?

MRS. DE MULLIN. It was so in Aunt Miriam's will. Of course, Hugo would have gone on managing it for her. It was very little trouble as it was all in Consols. But Janet said she would rather look after it for herself.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Ridiculous! As if girls could possibly manage money!

MRS. DE MULLIN. So Hugo said. But Janet insisted. So she got her way.

MRS. CLOUSTON. What did she do with it? Spend it?

MRS. DE MULLIN. No. Put it into a railway, she said

MRS. CLOUSTON. A railway! How dangerous!

MRS. DE MULLIN. She said she would prefer it. She said railways sometimes went up. Consols never.

MRS. CLOUSTON. She lost it all, of course?

MRS. DE MULLIN. I don't know, Harriet.

MRS. CLOUSTON. You don't know?

MRS. DE MULLIN. No. I never liked

to ask Hugo was rather hurt about the whole thing, so the subject was never referred to

MRS. CLOUSTON. Let me see. The child must be eight years old by now

MRS. DE MULLIN. Just eight. It will be nine years next March since Janet went away.

MRS. CLOUSTON. What did she call him?

MRS. DE MULLIN. Johnny

MRS. CLOUSTON. Johnny! None of the De Mullins have ever been called *Johnny*

MRS. DE MULLIN. Perhaps it was his father's name.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Perhaps so.

[*Pause.*]

MRS. DE MULLIN. Do you think I ought to tell Hugo about Janet's coming?

MRS. CLOUSTON. Certainly

MRS. DE MULLIN. I thought perhaps . . .

MRS. CLOUSTON. Nonsense, Jane. Of course he must be told. You ought to have told him from the very beginning.

MRS. DE MULLIN. Do you mean when I sent the telegram? But Hugo was unconscious.

MRS. CLOUSTON. As soon as he recovered consciousness then.

MRS. DE MULLIN. I did mean to. But he seemed so weak, and Doctor Rolt said any excitement . . .

MRS. CLOUSTON. Doctor Rolt!

MRS. DE MULLIN [*goaded*]. Well, I couldn't tell that Doctor Rolt knew so little about Hugo's illness, could I? And I was afraid of the shock.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Still, he should have been told at once. It was the only chance.

MRS. DE MULLIN. Yes, I see that now. But I was afraid of the shock, as I said. So I put it off. And then, when I didn't hear from Janet, I thought I would wait.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Why?

MRS. DE MULLIN. You see I didn't know whether she was coming. And if she didn't come, of course there was no necessity for telling Hugo anything about it. I'm afraid he'll be very angry.

MRS. CLOUSTON. At any rate, you must tell him now. The sooner the better.

MRS. DE MULLIN [*meekly*]. Very well, Harriet. If you think so.

MRS. CLOUSTON. You had better go up to him at once.

[*MRS. DE MULLIN goes to the door on the left, opens it, then draws back hastily.*]

MRS DE MULLIN. Here *is* Hugo. He's just coming across the hall With Hester. How unlucky.

MRS. CLOUSTON. I don't see that it matters

MRS DE MULLIN. I'd rather not have told him before Hester

[MRS. CLOUSTON shrugs her shoulders A moment later HUGO enters.

He leans on a stick and HESTER'S arm. He looks weak and pale and altogether extremely sorry for himself, obviously a nervous and a very tire-some patient]

HESTER. Carefully, Father That's right Will you lie on the sofa?

DE MULLIN [*fretfully*] No, put me in the armchair. I'm tired of lying down

HESTER. Very well. Let me help you There. Wait a minute. I'll fetch you some pillows.

[*Props him up on pillows in an arm-chair*]

DE MULLIN Thank you

[*Lies back exhausted and closes his eyes*]

MRS. DE MULLIN [*going to him*]. How are you feeling now, Hugo?

DE MULLIN Very weak.

MRS. DE MULLIN. I wonder if you ought to have come down?

DE MULLIN. It won't make any difference. Nothing will make any difference any more, Jane. I sha'n't last much longer. I'm worn out.

HESTER. Father!

DE MULLIN. Yes, Hester. Worn out. [*With a sort of melancholy pride.*] None of the De Mullins have been strong I'm the last of them. The last of the De Mullins.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Come, Hugo, you mustn't talk in that morbid way.

DE MULLIN. I'm not morbid, Harriet But I feel tired, tired.

MRS. DE MULLIN. You'll be better in a day or two.

DE MULLIN No, Jane I shall never be better. Never in *this* world. [*Pause.*]

MRS. DE MULLIN [*nervously*] Hugo . . . there's something . . . something I have to tell you . . .

DE MULLIN. What is it, Jane? [*Fretfully.*] What have you been keeping from me?

MRS. DE MULLIN I ought to have told you before Only I didn't like . . .

DE MULLIN. Is it something about my illness?

MRS. DE MULLIN. Oh no, Hugo.

DE MULLIN [*relieved*]. I thought Doctor Rolt might have said something.

MRS. DE MULLIN. It's nothing of that kind

DE MULLIN [*peevishly*]. Well, well, what is it?

MRS DE MULLIN. Hugo, some one is coming here to-day, to see *you*

DE MULLIN. To see *me*? Who?

MRS DE MULLIN. You won't be angry, Hugo?

DE MULLIN [*testily*]. How can I possibly say that, Jane, when I don't know who it is?

MRS. DE MULLIN. Hugo, it's . . . [*Bell rings loudly.*] Harriet, there's the bell! I wonder if it's she? Do you think it is?

[*All look toward the door on the right expectantly*]

DE MULLIN [*querulously*]. Well, Jane? Am I to hear who this visitor is or am I not?

ELLEN [*showing in a lady leading a little boy by the hand*] Mrs Seagrave

[*Enter JANET and JOHNNY. JANET is a very handsome woman of six-and-thirty. She is admirably dressed, but her clothes are quiet and in excellent taste, dark in color and plain in cut but expensive Her hat is particularly tasteful, but also quiet Her clothes are in marked contrast to those of her mother and sister, which are of the homeliest description and were probably made in the village. JOHNNY is a well-grown youngster of eight in a sailor suit.*]

HESTER [*shocked*]. Mother!

DE MULLIN. Janet, my dear!

[*Cry of welcome.*]

JANET. Father! [*Drops JOHNNY'S hand, comes rapidly to him, falls on one knee and kisses him impulsively, patting his left hand with her right*] How are you? Better? [*Holding out her left hand to her mother, but still kneeling.*] How do you do, Mother dear? [*MRS DE MULLIN takes it. Puts her other hand on JANET'S shoulder.*] I should have come before, Father, directly you sent for me. But your telegram was delayed. I was away from home.

DE MULLIN [*nods*] I see.

JANET. Have you been very ill, Father? And did you frighten them all dreadfully? How naughty of you!

DE MULLIN. Silly Janet! Let me look at you, my dear. [*Looks at her face as she holds it up.*] You're not much changed, Janet

JANET. Nor are you, Father.

DE MULLIN. A little grayer, perhaps.

JANET. No! Not a hair!

DE MULLIN. Well, my dear, I'm glad you've come. We parted in anger, but that's all over now. Forgotten and forgiven. Eh?

JANET. Yes. Forgotten and forgiven [Rises] How are you, Aunt Harriet? I didn't see you. [Eagerly] Hester!

[Goes to her impulsively, holding out her hand. HESTER takes it coldly JANET tries to draw her towards her. HESTER resists. She drops her hand and HESTER turns away.]

DE MULLIN. Who is that?

[Pointing to JOHNNY]

JANET [turning to him]. That is Johnny. My son.

DE MULLIN. My grandson?

JANET. Yes. I had to bring him, Father. We were away from home and there was no one to leave him with.

DE MULLIN. I'm glad you brought him. Come here, Johnny. Don't be afraid.

JOHNNY [in his confident treble]. I'm not afraid. Why should I be afraid?

[Goes to him.]

DE MULLIN [taking his hand]. Say "How do you do, Grandfather?"

JOHNNY. How do you do, Grandfather?

DE MULLIN. Will you give me a kiss, Johnny?

JOHNNY. If you like, Grandfather.

[Kisses him]

DE MULLIN. That's a good boy.

JANET. Kiss your grandmother too, Johnny.

[MRS DE MULLIN snatches him up and kisses him passionately. Then holds him a little way off and looks at him admiringly.]

MRS DE MULLIN. What a fine little fellow, Janet!

JANET [proudly]. Isn't he, Mother? And so strong and healthy! He's hardly had a day's illness since he was born.

JOHNNY [who has been staring at the pictures on the walls, holding his grandmother by one hand]. Who are all these old men, Grandfather?

DE MULLIN. Your ancestors, my boy.

JOHNNY. What's ancestors?

DE MULLIN. Your forefathers. Your mother's forefathers.

JOHNNY. Is that old man in a wig an ancestor?

DE MULLIN. Yes. That is Anthony De Mullin, your great-great-grandfather.

JOHNNY. What was he?

DE MULLIN [puzzled]. What was he?

I don't know that he was anything in particular. He was just a gentleman.

JOHNNY [disappointed]. Is that all?

DE MULLIN. Don't make a mistake, my boy. It's a great thing to be descended from gentlepeople, a thing to be proud of and to be thankful for.

JOHNNY. Mother says that the great thing is for every one to be of some use in the world. Are gentlepeople of more use in the world than other people, Grandfather?

DE MULLIN. Certainly.

JOHNNY. And were all these old men gentlepeople?

DE MULLIN. All of them. And you must grow up like them.

JOHNNY. They're very ugly, Grandfather [Pause] What did they do?

DE MULLIN. They lived down here at Brendon.

JOHNNY. Nothing else?

DE MULLIN. They looked after their land.

JOHNNY. Had they much land?

DE MULLIN. A great deal. At one time the De Mullins owned all the land about here.

JOHNNY. How much do they own now?

DE MULLIN [sighs]. Not very much, I'm afraid.

JOHNNY. Then they can't have looked after it very well, can they, Grandfather?

MRS DE MULLIN [feeling the strain of this conversation]. Now, Hugo, do you think you ought to talk any more? Why not go upstairs for a little and lie down?

DE MULLIN. Perhaps I will, Jane. I am a little tired.

HESTER. Shall I go with Father?

MRS DE MULLIN. No. I will. Come, Hugo. [Helps him up]

DE MULLIN. Will you come with me, Johnny?

MRS. DE MULLIN [hastily]. No, Hugo. He will only disturb you. Stay down here, Johnny, with your mother. Now then. Carefully.

[Leads DE MULLIN off by the door on the left. There is a pause, during which the remaining occupants of the room obviously have nothing in particular to say to each other. At last MRS. CLOUSTON speaks.]

MRS. CLOUSTON. Well, Janet, how have you been all these years?

JANET [nonchalantly]. All right, Aunt Harriet. And you?

MRS. CLOUSTON. Pretty well, thanks.

JANET. Are you still living down at Bath?

MRS. CLOUSTON. Yes. You live in London, Jane tells me

JANET. Yes

MRS. CLOUSTON. What do you do there? Teach?

JANET. Oh no. Why should I be teaching?

MRS. CLOUSTON. Jane said you wanted to teach at one time.

JANET. That was years ago. Before I left Brendon. I soon gave up that idea. No. I keep a shop

MRS. CLOUSTON. A shop!

JANET. Yes. A hat-shop

MRS. CLOUSTON. Good heavens! A De Mullin in a hat-shop!

JANET [*a little maliciously*]. Not a De Mullin, Aunt Harriet. A Seagrave.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Did Mr. Seagrave keep a hat-shop?

JANET. Mr. Seagrave? . . . Oh, I see. No. It's not a man's hat-shop. It's a ladies'. [*Takes off hat*] This is one of ours. What do you think of it, Hester?

HESTER [*frostily*]. It looks very expensive.

JANET [*looking at it critically*]. Yes, I own I'm rather pleased with it.

MRS. CLOUSTON [*acidly*]. You seem to be able to *dress* very well altogether, in spite of the shop.

JANET [*correcting her*]. Because of it, Aunt Harriet. That's the advantage of being what is called "in trade." If I were a school teacher or a governess or something genteel of that kind I could only afford to dress like a pauper. But as I keep a shop I can dress like a lady. Clothes are a question of money, after all, aren't they?

MRS. CLOUSTON [*contemptuously*]. If one is in a shop it doesn't matter *how* one dresses.

JANET. On the contrary, if one is in a shop it matters a great deal. A girl in a shop *must* dress well. The business demands it. If you ever start a hat-shop, Aunt Harriet, you'll have to dress very differently. Otherwise nobody will buy your hats.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Indeed? Fortunately I've no intention of starting a shop of any kind.

JANET [*blandly*]. No? Well, I expect you're wise. I doubt if you'd make a success of it. [*Loud ring heard off.*]

MRS. CLOUSTON [*rather flustered, gasps*]. Hester! I hope that's not a visitor. [*JANET stares. Then laughs good-humoredly.*] AUNT HARRIET'S nervous desire to

keep her out of the way of visitors strikes her as amusing] What are you laughing at, Janet?

JANET [*shrugs*]. Nothing, Aunt Harriet. ELLEN [*announces*]. Miss Deanes. Mr. Brown.

[*MISS DEANES is a bulky, red-faced, short-sighted woman of forty-two, very jussy and absurd in manner, who talks very fast. BROWN carries a book.*]

MISS DEANES. How do you do, Mrs. Clouston? *Such* a piece of news! I felt I *must* tell you I brought Mr. Brown with me. He was just leaving a book for you, Hester, so I made him come in.

[*Shakes hands with HESTER*]

BROWN. Here it is, Miss De Mullin. It's the one you wanted to borrow. "Blone on the Creeds."

HESTER. Thank you

MISS DEANES [*seeing JANET for the first time*]. Janet! Is that you?

JANET. Yes, Miss Deanes. How are you? [*Shakes hands*]

MISS DEANES. Good gracious, child, when did you come? Why, you've not been down to Brendon for years.

JANET. It is a long time, isn't it?

MISS DEANES. And who is this young gentleman?

[*Noticing JOHNNY, who is holding JANET'S hand and staring at MISS DEANES*]

JANET [*calmly*]. That is my son. Shake hands with Miss Deanes, Johnny.

MISS DEANES [*astonished*]. Your son! There now! And I never knew you were even married!

JANET [*quite at her ease*]. Didn't you?

MISS DEANES. No.

MRS. CLOUSTON [*nervously*]. I forgot I haven't introduced you. Mr. Brown—Mrs. Seagrave.

BROWN [*bows*]. How do you do?

MRS. CLOUSTON [*turning to MISS DEANES again*]. And now what is your piece of news, Miss Deanes?

MISS DEANES [*volubly*]. Oh yes. I *must* tell you. You'd never guess. Somebody *else* is engaged to be married. [*To JANET*] Who do you think?

JANET. I have no idea.

MISS DEANES. Bertha Aldenham—to Mr. Bulstead.

JANET [*starts*]. Mr. Bulstead?

MISS DEANES. Yes. But I forgot. You wouldn't know *them*. They didn't come here until long after you went away. They bought Brendon Park from the Malcolms three years ago. You remember the Malcolms, Janet?

JANET [*whose attention has wandered*]
Eh? Oh yes, of course.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Which Mr Bulstead is it? The eldest?

MISS DEANES. Yes, Montague

JANET [*under her breath*] Monty Bulstead! Engaged!

MRS. CLOUSTON. Are the Aldenham pleased?

MISS DEANES. Very, I expect. The Bulsteads are so rich, you see.

JANET. Does he live down here; this Mr Montague Bulstead, I mean?

MISS DEANES. Oh no. He's here on leave. He's in the army. He only got back three months ago. [*With a little giggle.*] He and Bertha haven't taken long to settle things, have they?

JANET. No, they haven't taken long.

MISS DEANES. But I dare say he *will* live here when he's married, as the Bulsteads are so rich. The father makes frilling and lace and so on. All those things people used to make so much better by hand. And Bertha may not care about Army life. I know I shouldn't. [*JANET smiles discreetly.*] It's not always very nice, is it?

BROWN [*to JOHNNY, who has been staring at him round-eyed across the room, with heavy geniality.*] Well, young man, who are you staring at, eh? Do you want to talk to me?

JOHNNY [*quite simply, in his high piping treble*]. No, thank you.

JANET. Sh! Johnny! You don't mean that Go to Mr. Brown when he speaks to you.

JOHNNY. Very well, Mummie

[*Does so slowly.*]

BROWN [*taking his hand*]. Now then, what shall we talk about, you and I?

JOHNNY. I don't know

BROWN. Don't you? Suppose we see if you can say your catechism, then? Would you like that?

JOHNNY. What's catechism?

BROWN. Come, Johnny, I'm sure your mother has taught you your catechism. Can you repeat your "Duty towards your Neighbor"? [*JOHNNY shakes his head emphatically*] Try—"MY duty towards my neighbor . . ."

JOHNNY. Mother says it's every one's duty to be healthy and to be happy Is that what you mean?

BROWN [*scandalized*]. No! No!

JOHNNY. Well, that's what Mother taught me.

JANET [*coming to the rescue*]. I'm afraid he doesn't know his catechism yet, Mr. Brown. You see, he's only eight.

[*BROWN bows stiffly*] Run away, Johnny, and play in the garden for a little.

[*Leads him to the door in the bay.*]

JOHNNY. All right, Mummie.

[*JOHNNY runs out into the garden A certain relief is perceptible on his departure It is felt that his interview with MR. BROWN has not been a success*]

MISS DEANES [*who feels that a change of subject will be only tactful*]. There now, Hester! I do believe you've never asked after Dicky! He'll be so offended!

HESTER [*smiling*] Has Dicky been ill again? I thought you said he was better yesterday.

MISS DEANES. He was. But he had a relapse, poor *darling*. I had to sit up all last night with him

JANET. What had been the matter with him?

MISS DEANES. Some sort of chill, Doctor Rolt said I was *dreadfully* anxious.

JANET. What a pity! Colds are such troublesome things for children.

MISS DEANES [*puzzled*]. Children?

JANET. Yes. You were speaking of a child, weren't you?

MISS DEANES. Oh no. Dicky is my *cockatoo*. He's the *sweetest* bird Talks quite like a human being. And never a coarse expression That's so unusual with cockatoos

JANET. Indeed?

MISS DEANES. Yes. The voyage, you see. They come all the way from South America, and generally they pick up the most dreadful language, poor lambs—from the sailors. But Dicky didn't. He has such a pure mind. [*Rising*] And now I really must be going. I have all kinds of people I want to tell about Mr. Bulstead's engagement.

[*Shaking hands with MRS. CLOUSTON and JANET*]

BROWN. I must be off too Wait one moment, Miss Deanes. Good-bye, Mrs. Clouston [*Shakes hands with MRS. CLOUSTON and bows stiffly to JANET. He has not yet forgiven JOHNNY for not knowing his catechism. To HESTER.*] Good-bye, Miss De Mullin. Shall I see you at Evensong?

[*Shakes hands with HESTER.*]

HESTER. I expect so.

[*BROWN and MISS DEANES go out*]

JANET. Poof!

MRS. CLOUSTON. Janet!

JANET. What a fool Miss Deanes is!

MRS. CLOUSTON [*indifferently*]. She always was, wasn't she?

JANET. I suppose so. Going on in that way about a ridiculous cockatoo! And that *hideous* little curate!

HESTER. I don't see why you should sneer at all my friends

JANET. Are they your friends, Hester? Then I won't sneer at them. But you can't call Mr. Brown *handsome*, can you?

HESTER. Mr. Brown is a very good man and works very hard among the poor. That's better than handsome

JANET. Yes. But less agreeable, isn't it? However, if you like him there's an end of it. But he needn't have begun asking Johnny his catechism the very first time he met him. I don't call it good manners.

HESTER. How was he to know the poor child was being brought up to be a little heathen?

[*Takes up her hat and cape and begins putting them on.*]

JANET [*shrugs*]. How, indeed!

MRS. CLOUSTON. Are you going out, Hester? Lunch will be ready in half an hour.

HESTER. Only to take Mrs. Wason her soup, Aunt Harriet.

JANET [*looking curiously at HESTER*]. Do you want to marry Mr. Brown, Hester?

MRS. CLOUSTON. My dear Janet!

JANET. Well, Aunt Harriet, there's nothing to be ashamed of if she does. Do you, Hester?

HESTER. Why do you ask such a question?

JANET. Never mind. Only answer it [*Pause*]. You do like him, don't you?

HESTER. I've a great respect for Mr. Brown.

JANET. Don't blush, my dear. I dare say that's much the same thing.

HESTER. I won't talk to you about it. You only sneer.

JANET. I wasn't sneering. Come, Hester, don't be cross. Why shouldn't we be friends? I might help you.

HESTER. How could you help me?

JANET [*looking quizzically at poor HESTER'S head-gear*]. I might make you a hat, my dear.

HESTER. Mr. Brown doesn't notice those things, Hester.

JANET. All men notice those things, Hester.

HESTER [*with a sneer*]. I suppose that's why you wear such fine clothes.

JANET [*quite good-humored*]. That's it. Fine feathers make fine birds

HESTER. Well, I call it shameless.

JANET. My dear Hester, you're always

being ashamed of things. You always were, I remember. What is there to be ashamed of in that? What on earth were women given pretty faces and pretty figures for if not make men admire them and want to marry them?

HESTER [*acidly*]. Well, your plan hasn't been very successful so far, anyhow!

JANET [*quietly*]. Nor has yours, Hester [*HESTER makes exclamation of impatience and seems about to reply angrily. Then thinks better of it and goes out without a word. JANET follows her retreat with her eyes and smiles half-cynically, half-compassionately. The curtain falls*]

ACT II

SCENE—*On the edge of Brendon Forest.*

Time, three days later. A road runs along the back of the stage, from which it is separated by a fence and high hedge. In this but somewhat to the right is a stile and also a gate. Round the trunk of a large tree to the left is a rough wooden seat. The stage is empty when the curtain rises. Then enter MRS. DE MULLIN, JANET and JOHNNY. They approach stile from the left and come through gate. There is an exit on the right of the stage through the Forest.

JANET. I don't think I'll come any farther, Mother

MRS. DE MULLIN. You won't come up to the house?

JANET. No, thanks. [*Rather grimly*] I don't want to see Mrs. Bulstead. And I'm sure Mrs. Bulstead doesn't want to see me.

MRS. DE MULLIN. I wish Hester could have come.

JANET. Why couldn't she?

MRS. DE MULLIN. She's at the church putting up decorations. It's the Harvest Thanksgiving to-morrow.

JANET [*laughing*]. Mr. Brown!

MRS. DE MULLIN. Janet, I told you you weren't to laugh at Hester about Mr. Brown. It's not kind

JANET [*lightly*]. It's all right, Mother. Hester's not here.

MRS. DE MULLIN. Still, I don't like it, dear. It's not quite . . .

JANET [*soothing her*]. Not quite *nice*. I know, Mother. Not the way really refined and ladylike young women talk. But I'm only quite a common person who sells

hats. You can't expect all these refinements from me!

[MRS. DE MULLIN sighs.]

MRS. DE MULLIN. Are you going to turn back?

JANET. Not at once. I'll wait for you here a little with Johnny, in case they're out. Why, they've put a seat here

[She sits on the side farthest from the road.]

MRS. DE MULLIN. Usen't there to be one?

JANET. No. Nor a gate in my time. Only a stile

MRS. DE MULLIN. Very likely, dear. I don't remember I don't often come this way

JANET [nods]. I often used to come along it in the old days.

MRS. DE MULLIN. I dare say. Well, I must be getting on to my call or I shall be late. You're sure you won't come?

JANET. Quite, Mother. Good-bye.

[MRS. DE MULLIN goes off through the forest.]

JOHNNY. Where's Grandmother going, Mummie?

JANET. Up to the big house.

JOHNNY. What big house?

JANET. Brendon Park.

JOHNNY. Mayn't I go up to the big house too?

JANET. No, dear. You're to stay with Mother.

JOHNNY. Who lives at the big house?

JANET. Nobody you know, dear.

JOHNNY. That's why I asked, Mummie.

JANET. Well, don't ask any more, Sonny. Mother's rather tired. Run away and play, there's a good boy.

[Kisses him.]

JOHNNY. Very well, Mummie

[JOHNNY disappears into the wood.]

JANET falls into a brown study.

Presently a footstep is heard coming along the road, but she seems to notice nothing. Then a young man climbs over the stile. He starts as he sees her and draws back, then advances eagerly, holding out his hand.]

JANET. Monty!

MONTY. Janet! Is that you?

JANET [smiling]. Yes, Monty.

MONTY [astonished]. Janet! Here!

JANET. Yes, Monty.

MONTY [nodding over his shoulder]. Our stile, Janet!

JANET. Our stile.

MONTY [nods]. The stile where you and I first met.

JANET [relapsing for a moment into

something like sentiment] Yes, I thought I must see it again—for the sake of old times

MONTY. How long ago it all seems!

JANET [matter-of-fact]. It is a longish time, you know

MONTY [thoughtfully]. I believe that was the happiest month of my life, Janet.

JANET. Was it, Monty?

MONTY. Yes [Pause.] I say, when did you come down? You don't live at home any longer, do you?

JANET. No. I came down only three days ago.

MONTY. By Jove, it is good to see you again! Why, it's eight years since we used to be together, you and I.

JANET. Nearly nine

MONTY. Yes . . . You're not coming to live down here again, are you?

JANET. No. Why?

MONTY. I thought perhaps . . .

JANET [cynically]. Would you dislike it very much if I did, Monty?

MONTY. Of course not

JANET. Confess. You *did* feel it would be rather awkward?

MONTY. Well, of course . . .

JANET. However, you can set your mind at rest. I'm not.

[His relief at this intelligence enables him to realize the pleasure he is getting from seeing her again.]

MONTY. I say, Janet, how well you're looking! I believe you're handsomer than ever.

JANET [smiling]. Am I?

MONTY. You know you are.

[Pause. He looks at her admiringly. She turns away with a little smile.]

JANET [feeling that they are getting on dangerous ground]. Well, Monty, where have you been these eight years?

MONTY. Abroad with my regiment. We've been ordered all over the place. I've been home on leave, of course. But not for the last three years. Not since Father bought the Park. I've never been at Brendon since . . . [Pause.]

JANET. Since we were here? Don't blush. Monty [He nods shamefacedly.] How did he come to buy the place?

MONTY. It was just a chance. He saw it advertised, came and looked at it, and bought it. He's no idea I was ever at Brendon before [Rather bitter laugh.] None of them have. I have to pretend not to know my way about.

JANET. Why?

MONTY. It seems safer. [JANET nods.] Sometimes I almost forget to keep it up.

I'm such a duffer about things But I've managed hitherto And now, of course, it's all right, as I've been here three months. I may be supposed to know the beastly place by this time

JANET. Beastly! You're not very polite.

[*MONTY laughs shamefacedly*]

MONTY. You got my note, didn't you?

JANET. What note? . . . Oh, eight years ago, you mean? Yes

MONTY. I left it with the woman at the lodgings As you were coming over that afternoon, I thought it safer than sending a message And of course I daren't telegraph. [*JANET nods*] I was awfully sick at having to go away like that All in a moment. Without even saying good-bye. But I had to.

JANET. Of course Was your mother badly hurt?

MONTY. No. Only stunned That was such rot. If people get chucked out of a carriage they must expect to get stunned. But of course they couldn't know The telegram just said, "Mother hurt. Carriage accident. Come at once." It got to me at the lodgings a couple of hours before you were coming I just had time to chuck my things into a bag and catch the train. I wanted to come back after the mater was all right again. But I couldn't very well, could I?

JANET. Why not?

MONTY. Well, the regiment was to sail in less than three weeks, and the mater would have thought it rather rough if I had gone away again I'd been away six weeks as it was.

JANET. Oh yes. Of course

MONTY [*with half a sigh*] To think if I hadn't happened to be riding along that road and seen you at the stile and asked my way, you and I might never have met What a chance life is!

JANET [*nods*]. Just a chance [*Pause.*]

MONTY. Why did you go away, Janet? You weren't going the last time I saw you.

JANET. Wasn't I?

MONTY. No. At least you said nothing about it.

JANET. I didn't know I was going then. Not for certain.

MONTY. Why did you go?

JANET [*quietly*]. I had to, Monty.

MONTY [*puzzled*]. You had to?

[*JANET nods*] But why?

JANET. Mother found out.

MONTY. About us?

JANET. Yes. And she told Father.

MONTY [*genuinely distressed*]. Oh, Janet, I'm so sorry!

JANET [*shrugs*]. It couldn't be helped

MONTY. Does he know who it was?

JANET. Who you were? No.

MONTY. You didn't tell him?

JANET. Monty! As if I should.

MONTY. I don't know. Girls generally do.

JANET. I didn't.

MONTY. No. I suppose you wouldn't. But you're different from most guls Do you know there was always something rather splendid about you, Janet?

JANET [*curtsies*]. Thank you.

MONTY. I wonder he didn't *make* you tell.

JANET. He did try, of course. That was why I ran away.

MONTY. I see Where did you go?

JANET. London.

MONTY. To London? All alone?

[*JANET nods*] Why did you do that? And why didn't you let me know?

JANET [*shrugs*]. You were out of England by that time

MONTY. But why London?

JANET. I had to go somewhere. And it seemed better to go where I shouldn't be known Besides, it's easier to be lost sight of in a crowd.

MONTY. But what did you do when you got there?

JANET [*calmly*]. I got a place in a shop, Monty.

MONTY. A shop? You!

JANET. Yes, a hat-shop, in Regent Street. My dear Monty, don't gape like that. Hat-shops are perfectly respectable places Almost too respectable to judge by the fuss two of them made about employing me.

MONTY. What do you mean?

JANET. Well, when I applied to them for work they naturally asked if I had ever worked in a hat-shop before. And when I said "No" they naturally asked why I wanted to begin. In the innocence of my heart I told them. Whereupon they at once refused to employ me—not in the politest terms.

MONTY. Poor Janet. What beastly luck! Still . . . [*Hesitates.*]

JANET. Yes, Monty.

MONTY. I mean, naturally they couldn't be expected . . .

JANET. Monty!

MONTY [*flustered*]. At least I don't mean that exactly Only . . . [*Stops*]

JANET. My dear Monty, I quite understand what you mean. You needn't trouble to be explicit. Naturally they couldn't be expected to employ an abandoned person

like me to trim hats. That was exactly their view.

MONTY. But I thought you said you *did* get a job in a shop?

JANET. Yes, but not in one of *those* shops. They were *far* too virtuous.

MONTY. How did you do it?

JANET. Told lies, Monty. I believe that's how most women get employment.

MONTY. Told lies?

JANET. Yes I invented a husband, recently deceased, bought several yards of crape and a wedding ring. This is the ring.

[Takes off glove.]

MONTY. Oh, Janet, how beastly for you!

[JANET shrugs.]

JANET [laughing]. Everything seems to be "beastly" to you, Monty. Brendon and telling lies and lots of other things. Luckily I'm less superfine.

MONTY. Didn't they find out?

JANET. No. That was why I decided to be a widow. It made inquiries more difficult.

MONTY. I should have thought it made them easier.

JANET. On the contrary. You can't cross-question a widow about a recent bereavement. If you do she cries I always used to look tearful directly my husband's name was mentioned. So they gave up mentioning it. Women are so boring when they will cry.

MONTY. They might have inquired from other people.

JANET. Why should they? Besides there was no one to inquire from. I called him Seagrave—and drowned him at sea. You can't ask questions of the sharks.

MONTY. Oh, Janet, how can you joke about it?

JANET. I couldn't—then. I wanted work too badly. But I can now—with your kind permission, I mean.

MONTY. And have you been in the shop ever since?

JANET. Not *that* shop I was only there about six months—till baby was born, in fact . . .

MONTY [horried]. Janet, there was a baby!

JANET. Of course there was a baby.

MONTY. Oh, Janet! And you never wrote! Why didn't you write?

JANET. I did think of it. But on the whole I thought I wouldn't. It would have been no good.

MONTY. No good?

JANET. Not then. You were in India. I was in England.

MONTY. You ought to have written at once—directly your mother found out.

JANET. One week after you sailed, Monty? [Defiantly] Besides, why should I write?

MONTY. Why? I could have married you, of course.

JANET. If I'd asked you, you mean? Thank you, my dear Monty.

MONTY. No, I don't. Of course I should have married you. I *must* have married you.

JANET [looking at him thoughtfully]. I wonder if you would.

MONTY. Certainly I should. I should have been bound in honor.

JANET. I see. Then I'm glad I never wrote

MONTY. You're *glad*? Now?

JANET. Yes. I've done some foolish things in my life, Monty, but none so foolish as that. To marry a schoolboy, not because he loves you or wants to marry you but because he thinks he's "bound in honor" No, thank you.

MONTY. I don't mean that. You know I don't, Janet. I loved you, of course. That goes without saying. I'd have married you like a shot before, only the Governor would have made such a fuss. The Governor was so strait-laced about this sort of thing. When I was sent away from Eton he made the most ghastly fuss.

JANET. Were you sent away from Eton for "this sort of thing"?

MONTY. Yes—at least I don't mean that either. But it was about a girl there. He was frightfully wild. He threatened to cut me off if I ever did such a thing again. Such rot! As if no one had ever been sent away from school before!

JANET [reflectively]. I didn't know you had been sent away from Eton.

MONTY. Didn't you? I suppose I didn't like to tell you for fear of what you'd think [bitterly]. I seem to have been afraid of everything in those days.

JANET. Not *everything*, Monty.

MONTY. Oh, you know what I mean. I was awfully afraid of the Governor, I remember. I suppose all boys are if their parents rag them too much. But I would have married you, Janet, if I had known. I would honestly.

JANET [blandly]. What is the pay of a British subaltern, Monty?

MONTY. The Governor would have had to stump up, of course.

JANET. Poor Mr. Bulstead! He'd have *liked* that, I suppose? And what about

your poor unhappy colonel? And all the other little subalterns?

MONTY [*obstinately*] Still, you ought to have written.

JANET [*quietly*]. You never wrote

MONTY. I couldn't You know that You never would let me That was why I couldn't send that note to tell you that I was going away. You said my letters would be noticed.

JANET Yes I forgot that. That's the result of having a father who is what is called old-fashioned

MONTY. What do you mean?

JANET All letters to the Manor House are delivered locked in a bag They always have been since the Flood, I believe, or at least since the invention of the postal service And of course Father won't have it altered So every morning there's the ritual of unlocking this absurd bag. No one is allowed to do that but Father—unless he's ill. Then Mother has the privilege And of course he scrutinizes the outside of every letter and directly it's opened asks who it's from and what's inside it. Your letters would have been noticed at once

MONTY How beastly!

JANET. The penalty of having nothing to do, Monty.

MONTY. I know What a mess the whole thing is!

JANET. Just so. No. There was no way out of it except the hat-shop.

MONTY [*remorsefully*] It's awfully rough on you, Janet.

JANET. Never mind. I dare say I wasn't cut out for the wife of a subaltern, Monty; whereas I make excellent hats.

MONTY [*savagely*] You're still making the damned things?

JANET. Yes. Only at another shop. The Regent Street place had no room for me when I was well enough to go back to work. But the woman who kept it gave me a recommendation to a friend who was starting up in Hanover Street. A most superior quarter for a hat-shop, Monty In fact *the* superior quarter. Claude et Cie was the name.

MONTY [*rather shocked*]. A French shop?

JANET. No more French than you are, Monty. It was kept by a Miss Hicks, one of the most thoroughly British people you can imagine But we called ourselves Claude et Cie in order to be able to charge people more for their hats. You can always charge fashionable women more for their clothes if you pretend to be French. It's one of the imbecilities of commerce. So

poor dear Miss Hicks became Madame Claude and none of our hats cost less than seven guineas

MONTY Do people buy hats at such a price?

JANET. Oh yes Everybody in Society bought them Claude et Cie was quite the rage that season Nobody who was anybody went anywhere else

MONTY She must have made a great deal of money.

JANET. On the contrary. She made nothing at all and narrowly escaped bankruptcy

MONTY. But I don't understand If her hats were so dear and everybody bought them?

JANET. Everybody *bought* them but nobody *paid* for them In the highest circles, I believe, people never do pay for anything—certainly not for their clothes At least, nobody paid Miss Hicks, and at the end of six months she owed £1,200 and hadn't a penny to pay her rent.

MONTY. Why didn't she *make* them pay?

JANET She did dun them, of course, but they only ordered more hats to keep her quiet, which didn't help matters much And when she went on dunning them they said they would withdraw their custom. In fact, she was in a dilemma If she let her bills run on she couldn't pay her rent. And if she asked her customers to pay their bills they ceased to be customers

MONTY. How beastly!

JANET. Not again, Monty?

MONTY What *did* she do?

JANET. She didn't do anything. She was too depressed. She used to sit in the back room where the hats were trimmed and weep over the materials, regardless of expense Finally things came to a crisis The landlord threatened to distrain for his rent But just as it looked as if it was all over with Claude et Cie a capitalist came to the rescue. I was the capitalist.

MONTY. You?

JANET. Yes. I'd an old aunt once who was fond of me and left me a legacy when I was seventeen. Four hundred pounds.

MONTY. That wouldn't go very far.

JANET. Four hundred pounds goes a longish way towards setting up a shop Besides, it was nearly five hundred by that time My shares had gone up. Well, I and my five hundred pounds came to the rescue I paid the rent and the most clamorous of the creditors, and Miss Hicks and I became partners.

MONTY. But what was the good of that if the business was worth nothing?

JANET. It was worth several hundred pounds to any one who had the pluck to sue half the British aristocracy. I sued them. It was tremendous fun. They were simply furious. They talked as if they'd never been sued before! As for Miss Hicks, she wept more than ever and said I'd ruined the business.

MONTY. Hadn't you?

JANET. That business. Yes. But with the £1,200—or as much of it as we could recover—we started a new one. A cheap hat-shop. Relatively cheap that is—for Hanover Street. We charged two guineas a hat instead of seven, 100 per cent profit instead of . . . You can work it out for yourself. But then our terms were strictly cash, so we made no bad debts. That was my idea.

MONTY. But you said nobody ever paid for their hats.

JANET. Not in the highest social circles. But we drew our customers from the middle classes who live in South Kensington and Bayswater, and are not too haughty to pay for a hat if they see a cheap one.

MONTY. But wasn't it a frightful risk?

JANET [*cheerfully*]. It was a risk, of course. But everything in life is a risk, isn't it? And it succeeded, as I felt sure it would. We're quite a prosperous concern nowadays, and I go over to Paris four times a year to see the latest fashions. That, my dear Monty, is the history of Claude et Cie.

[*Pause.*]

MONTY. And you've never married, Janet?

JANET. No.

MONTY [*hesitates*]. Janet . . . is it because? . . .

JANET. Because?

MONTY. Because you still care for *me*?

JANET. Monty, don't be vain.

MONTY [*repelled*]. I didn't mean it like that. Janet, don't laugh. Of course, I'm glad if you don't care any more. At least, I suppose I ought to be glad. It would have been dreadful if you had gone on caring all these years and I not known. But did you?

JANET. No, Monty. You may set your mind at rest. I didn't.

MONTY. You're sure?

JANET. Quite. I had too many other things to think of.

MONTY. Do you mean that beastly shop?

JANET [*quietly*]. I meant my baby.

MONTY. *Our* baby. Is it alive?

JANET. Of course. What do you mean, Monty?

MONTY. I thought, as you didn't say . . . [*Thoughtfully*]. Poor little beast! [*JANET makes gesture of protest*] Well, it's rough luck on the little beggar, isn't it? What's become of him, Janet?

JANET. What's *become* of him? He's quite alive, as I said, particularly thriving.

MONTY. Do you mean he's *living* with you? . . . But, of course, I forgot, you're supposed to be married.

JANET [*correcting him*]. A widow, Monty. An inconsolable widow!

MONTY. Where is he? In London?

JANET. No. As a matter of fact he's probably not fifty yards away. Over there.

[*Points toward the wood*]

MONTY [*jumping up*]. Janet!

[*Nervously looking round*]

JANET [*rallying him*]. Frightened, Monty?

MONTY. Of course not [*Shamefacedly*]

JANET. Just a little?

MONTY [*regaining courage*]. Janet, let me see him.

JANET [*amused*]. Would you like to?

MONTY. Of course I should. He's my baby as well as yours, if it comes to that. Do call him, Janet.

JANET. All right. [*Calls*]. Johnny! [*Pause*]. John—ny! [*To Monty*] You mustn't tell him, you know.

MONTY. Of course not.

JOHNNY [*off*]. Yes, Mummie.

JANET. Come here for a minute. Mother wants to speak to you.

JOHNNY [*off*]. Very well, Mummie. [*Enters*]. Oh, Mummie, I've found such a lot of rabbits. You must come and see them. [*Seeing MONTY for the first time, stares at him*]. Oh!

MONTY. Come here, youngster. Come and let me look at you. [*JOHNNY goes to him slowly. MONTY, grasping both hands, draws him to him, looking at him long and keenly*]. He's like you, Janet.

JANET. Is he?

MONTY. Yes. He has your eyes. So your name's Johnny, young man?

JOHNNY. Yes.

MONTY. Well, Johnny, will you give me a kiss? [*MONTY leans forward. He does so*]. That's right.

JOHNNY. And now, Mummie, come and look at my rabbits.

JANET. Not yet, dear. Mother's busy just now.

JOHNNY. May I go back to them, then?

JANET. Yes.

MONTY. Suppose I won't let you go?

JOHNNY. I'll make you—and so will Mummie.

MONTY. Plucky little chap. Off with you.

[*Kisses him again, then releases his hands.*

JOHNNY trots off again. MONTY follows him with his eyes. *Pause*]

JANET. Well, Monty, what do you think of him?

MONTY [*enthusiastic*]. I think he's splendid.

JANET [*proudly*]. Isn't he? And such a sturdy little boy. He weighed ten pounds before he was a month old

MONTY [*shyly*]. I say, Janet.

JANET. Yes?

MONTY [*hesitates*]. You'll let me kiss you once more, won't you? For the last time? . . . [*She hesitates.*] You don't mind?

JANET [*heartily*]. Of course not, Monty. You're not married yet, you know.

MONTY. Janet! My dear, dear Janet!

[*Seizes her and kisses her fiercely.*]

JANET [*releasing herself gently*]. That's enough, Monty

MONTY [*remorsefully*]. I'm afraid I behaved like an awful brute to you, Janet.

JANET [*lightly*]. Oh, no.

MONTY. Yes, I did. I ought to have married you. I ought to marry you still. On account of the boy.

JANET [*quite matter-of-fact*]. Oh, well, you can't do that now in any case, can you—as you're engaged to Bertha Aldenham?

MONTY. You've heard about that? Who told you?

JANET. A worthy lady called Miss Deanes.

MONTY. I know. A regular sickener.

JANET. My dear Monty!

MONTY. Sorry.

JANET. She brought the good news. The very day I arrived as it happened. We've hardly talked of anything else at the Manor House since—except Father's illness, of course.

MONTY. Why?

JANET. What else is there to talk about—in Brendon?

MONTY. That's true. Isn't it . . . [*Stops himself, looks at watch. Whistles.*] Whew!

[*Rises.*]

JANET. What it is, Monty?

MONTY. I say, Janet, I wonder if you'd mind going now?

JANET. Why? [*She rises too.*]

MONTY [*awkwardly*]. Well, the fact is I'm expecting some one here directly. I . . .

JANET. Bertha?

MONTY. Yes. I was to meet her here at the stile at six.

JANET. *Our stile, Monty?*

MONTY. Yes . . . You don't mind, do you—about my asking you to go, I mean?

JANET [*sitting again*]. Not in the least.

MONTY. But you're not going?

JANET. Why should I go?

MONTY. Oh, well, I thought . . .

JANET. That it wouldn't be quite suitable for us to meet?

MONTY. I didn't mean that, of course. But I thought you mightn't like—I mean it might be painful. [*Sits again.*]

JANET. For me to see her? On the contrary, I'm dying to see her.

MONTY. Janet, sometimes I think you're not quite human.

JANET. My dear boy, I'm extremely human—and therefore curious. [*Pause*] What's she like, Monty? Now, I mean. She promised to be pretty.

MONTY. She is pretty, I suppose. [*Pause*] I wonder if Bertha and I will ever have a son like Johnny!

JANET. Let's hope so, Monty. For Bertha's sake.

MONTY. Isn't that some one coming? [*Pause, listens*] I expect it's she. [*Rising hastily and advancing towards stile*] Is that you, Bertha?

BERTHA [*at stile*]. Oh! There you are. Yes. Isn't it hot? [*Entering the gate, which he opens for her.*] Am I punctual? [*With a cry*] Janet! When did you come home?

[*Goes to her eagerly*]

JANET [*shaking hands*]. Only three days ago. [*BERTHA kisses her*]

BERTHA. Only three days! And you've never been up to see us

JANET. I know. But with father ill . . .

BERTHA. Of course. I understand. I was only joking. How is Mr. De Mullin?

JANET. Much better. Not well yet, of course. But he gets stronger every day.

BERTHA. I'm so glad. I say, Janet, do you remember when you used to teach us French?

JANET. Yes.

BERTHA. I was awfully troublesome, I remember.

MONTY. I expect you were an awful duffer at it, too, Bertha.

BERTHA. What cheek!

MONTY. Wasn't she, Ja—[*pulls himself up*—Miss De Mullin?

[*JANET smiles nervously.*]

BERTHA. I didn't know you'd met Janet, Monty?

MONTY. Oh, yes.

BERTHA. Why didn't you tell us?

[*Quite unsuspecting of anything wrong. Merely curious.*]

MONTY It was some time ago

BERTHA [*surprised*] Not at Brendon? You've never been at Brendon before.

MONTY No. It was at Weymouth I was there getting over typhoid years ago.

BERTHA I remember, you told me. Eight or nine years ago, wasn't it?

MONTY. Yes [*Looks at watch*] I say, Bertha, we must be off if we're not to be late

BERTHA. Give me two minutes to rest. The weather's simply stifling.

MONTY. Rot! It's quite cool

BERTHA. Then you must have been sitting here a long time I've been walking along a dusty road and I'm not going to start yet Besides, I want to know all about you two meeting Were you staying at Weymouth, Janet?

JANET. Oh, no. I just bicycled over. Mr. Bulstead ran into me.

MONTY. I like that. She ran into me.

BERTHA. Anyhow, my front wheel buckled and he had to help me to put it right

BERTHA What gallantry!

MONTY It was The beastly thing took about half an hour By the time it was over we seemed to have known each other for a lifetime. [*Looks at watch*] Two minutes is up. Time to start, Bertha.

BERTHA It isn't

MONTY. It is. You'll be late dressing to a certainty if you don't go.

BERTHA I like that. I can dress as quickly as you if it comes to that

MONTY. Oh, no. I can dress in ten minutes I'll give you a quarter of an hour's start and be down in the drawing-room five minutes before you're ready. Is it a bet?

BERTHA. Done. In sixpences [*To JANET*] I'm staying at the Park for a few days longer, Janet. Come up and see me, won't you?

JANET [*uncomfortably*] I'm afraid I can't promise On account of Father.

BERTHA Well, after I've gone home then Mother will want to see you. And so will Helen And now, I suppose, I really must go Come along, Monty

MONTY. Not I. I needn't go for a quarter of an hour. You have a quarter of an hour's start

BERTHA. All right. Good-bye, Janet. [*Kisses her*] You won't forget about coming as soon as you can? I go back home on Thursday.

JANET. I won't forget [*BERTHA goes*

off through the wood JANET watches her go, and there is a pause.] Yes, she is pretty, Monty Very pretty

MONTY [*nods*] You don't mind?

JANET Her being pretty? Of course not It's a justification.

MONTY. A justification?

JANET For forgetting me.

MONTY [*impulsively, seizing her hands*] Janet, I've never done that. You know I haven't

JANET [*drawing back*]. No, Monty. Not again [*Pause.*]

MONTY. I say, I as nearly as possible called you Janet right out before Bertha.

JANET So I saw. You did call me Miss De Mullin, by the way—which wasn't very clever of you.

MONTY Did I? What an ass I am! But I don't suppose she noticed.

JANET. I dare say not. [*A shrill cry comes from the wood on the right. Then silence. JANET starts up*] What was that?

MONTY. I don't know.

JANET. It sounded like a child. Where did it come from? Over here, didn't it?

MONTY. I think so

JANET [*alarmed*]. I hope Johnny . . . I must go and see . . . [*A moment later JOHNNY runs in sobbing, followed by MRS. DE MULLIN and BERTHA*] Johnny! What is it, my sweetheart?

[*Runs to him.*]

JOHNNY Oh, Mummie, Mummie, I was running after rabbits and I tripped over some nettles and they stung me.

MRS DE MULLIN He put his foot in a hole, Janet. He fell just as I met Bertha. [*Shakes hands with MONTY.*] How do you do, Mr. Bulstead?

JANET There! There! my pet. Did it hurt very much? Mother shall kiss it and make it well. [*Does so.*]

JOHNNY [*sobs*]. Oh-h-h—

BERTHA. Is he your son?

JANET. Yes. Don't cry any more, dear Brave boys don't cry, you know.

JOHNNY [*gasps*] It h-hurts so.

JANET. I know But crying won't make it hurt less, will it? So you must dry your eyes Come now

JOHNNY. All right, Mummie.

[*Still sobs gradually.*]

BERTHA [*astonished*]. I'd no idea you were married, Janet

JANET. Hadn't you?

BERTHA No. When was it?

JANET Eight years ago. Nearly nine To Mr. Seagrave.

BERTHA. Is he down here with you?

JANET. No. My husband died soon after our marriage.

BERTHA. Poor Janet. I'm so sorry. [*Pause.*] And it was before your marriage that Monty met you?

JANET. How do you know?

BERTHA [*quite unsuspecting*]. He called you Miss De Mullin.

JANET. Of course

MRS. DE MULLIN [*pricking up her ears suspiciously at this*]. I didn't know you had met my daughter before, Mr. Bulstead.

BERTHA. Nor did I. They met down at Weymouth quite by chance eight or nine years ago.

MRS. DE MULLIN [*gravely*]. Indeed?

MONTY. Yes . . . I say, Bertha, excuse my interrupting you, but we really must be off now if we're not to be late.

BERTHA. You want to win that bet!

MONTY. The bet's off. There's no time to give you any start. I must come, too, or I shan't be in time myself, and the Governor will simply curse.

BERTHA. Is Mr. Bulstead *very* fierce if people are late for dinner?

MONTY. Simply beastly.

BERTHA. How very unpleasant! I wonder if I'm wise to marry into the family?

[*Shaking hands with MRS. DE MULLIN and JANET. Then goes off laughing merrily.*]

MONTY [*sardonically*]. I wonder. [*Shakes hands with MRS. DE MULLIN and JANET.*] Will you give me a kiss, old chap?

[*To JOHNNY.*]

JOHNNY. That's three times.

[*MONTY nods. MONTY follows BERTHA off. A long pause. MRS. DE MULLIN looks fixedly at JANET. JANET looks at the ground.*]

MRS. DE MULLIN [*slowly*]. Mr. Montague Bulstead seems unusually fond of children, Janet.

JANET. Does he, Mother?

[*She does not look up.*]

MRS. DE MULLIN. Yes. Johnny is rather old to be kissed by strangers.

JANET. I suppose he kissed him because he was brave about being stung.

MRS. DE MULLIN. He seems to have kissed him before. Twice.

JANET. I dare say I didn't notice.

MRS. DE MULLIN. Johnny did, apparently.

JANET. Well, it doesn't matter anyway, does it? [*Looks up defiantly. Meets her mother's eye full on her.*] Why do you look at me like that, Mother?

MRS. DE MULLIN. Send Johnny away for a little, Janet. I want to speak to you.

JANET. I'd rather not, Mother. He might hurt himself again.

MRS. DE MULLIN. He will be quite safe. Run away, Johnny. But don't go too far

JOHNNY. All right, Grandmother.

[*JOHNNY trots off into the wood.*]

[*Pause.*]

JANET [*defiantly*]. Well, Mother?

MRS. DE MULLIN. Janet, why did you never tell us you had met Mr. Bulstead before?

JANET. When?

MRS. DE MULLIN. Any time during the last three days when we were speaking of his engagement.

JANET. I'd forgotten all about it, Mother.

MRS. DE MULLIN. Indeed? And why didn't you tell us eight years ago, when you met him at Weymouth, when you were still "Miss De Mullin"?

JANET. Mother, don't badger me like this. If you want to ask me anything ask it.

MRS. DE MULLIN. Janet, Mr. Bulstead is Johnny's father.

JANET. Mr. Bulstead? Absurd!

MRS. DE MULLIN. Then why did you pretend not to have met him? Why did you conceal the fact of your meeting him from us eight years ago? And why has he concealed the fact from Bertha and the Bulsteads? [*Pause.*]

JANET [*resignedly*]. Very well, Mother, if you're determined to know you must know. Yes, he's Johnny's father.

MRS. DE MULLIN. Oh, Janet!

JANET [*irritably*]. Well, Mother, if you didn't want to know you shouldn't have asked. I told you not to worry me. [*MRS. DE MULLIN begins to cry. Remorsefully.*] There, there, Mother! Don't cry. I'm sorry I was cross to you. Don't let's talk any more about it.

MRS. DE MULLIN [*snuffing*]. No, Janet, we *must* talk about it. There's no use trying to hide things any longer. You must tell me the truth.

JANET. Much better not, Mother. It won't give you any pleasure to hear.

MRS. DE MULLIN. Still, I'd rather know, Janet.

JANET [*shrugs*]. As you please. What do you want me to tell you?

MRS. DE MULLIN. Everything. How did you come to be at Weymouth? I don't remember you staying at Weymouth eight years ago.

JANET. I wasn't staying there. But Monty was

MRS DE MULLIN [*shocked*] Monty!

JANET. Mr. Bulstead Oh, what *does* it matter now? He'd had typhoid and was there to recruit I'd ridden over on my bicycle . . .

MRS DE MULLIN [*lamentably*] Bicycle! I always said it was all through bicycling.

JANET [*another shrug*] He ran into me, or I ran into him I was rather shaken, and he asked me to come in and rest. It happened close to the house where he was lodging.

MRS DE MULLIN You went in! To his lodging! A man you had never met before!

JANET. My dear Mother, when you have been thrown off a bicycle, ordinary conventions cease to apply Besides, as a matter of fact, we *had* met once before—the day before, in fact.

MRS DE MULLIN. Where?

JANET Here. By this very stile. Monty was riding past and he asked me the way to somewhere—Thoresby, I think I was standing by the stile. Next day I happened to ride to Weymouth We collided—and the rest you know

MRS. DE MULLIN [*sternly*] Were those the *only* times you met him, Janet?

JANET. Of course not, Mother. After Weymouth collision we met constantly, nearly every day. We used to meet out riding, and I had tea with him lots of times in his rooms.

MRS. DE MULLIN [*horrificed*]. How long did this go on?

JANET. More than a month—till he left Weymouth, in fact Now, Mother, is that all you want to know? Because if so, we'll drop the subject.

MRS DE MULLIN Oh, Janet, what *will* your father say?

JANET Father? He won't know.

MRS. DE MULLIN. Won't know? But I must tell him

JANET. Good heavens! Why?

MRS. DE MULLIN. In order that Mr. Bulstead may marry you, of course. Your father will insist on his marrying you

JANET. If Father attempts to do that, Mother, I shall deny the whole story. And Monty will back me up.

MRS. DE MULLIN. He would never be so wicked.

JANET. He would have to if I ask him. It's the least he could do

MRS. DE MULLIN. Johnny is there to prove it.

JANET. There's nothing to prove that Monty is Johnny's father. Nothing whatever.

MRS DE MULLIN. But, Janet, *why* won't you marry him?

JANET [*impatiently*]. My dear Mother, because I don't want to, of course.

MRS. DE MULLIN. You don't *want* to?

JANET Great heavens, no! Why should I? Monty Bulstead isn't at all the sort of man I should care to *marry*.

MRS DE MULLIN. Why not?

JANET Frankly, Mother, because he's not interesting enough Monty's a very nice fellow and I like him very much, but I don't want to pass the remainder of my life with him If I'm to marry anybody—and I don't think I shall—it will have to be a rather more remarkable person than Monty Bulstead

MRS. DE MULLIN. Yet you *did* love him, Janet. You must have loved him . . . then

JANET Oh, yes Then. But that was ages ago, before Johnny was born After that I didn't care for anybody any more except Johnny.

MRS. DE MULLIN. But, Janet, you *ought* to marry him, for Johnny's sake.

JANET Too late, Mother. That should have been eight years ago to be any use.

MRS. DE MULLIN. Better too late than not at all.

JANET. Better not at all than too late.

MRS. DE MULLIN. He seduced you, Janet.

JANET [*thoughtfully*]. Did he? I was twenty-seven He was twenty. If either of us was to blame, wasn't I?

MRS. DE MULLIN. Janet, you're trying to screen him.

JANET Dearest Mother, you talk like a sentimental novel

MRS. DE MULLIN [*indignantly*]. And he's to be allowed to marry Bertha Aldenham, just as if this had never happened?

JANET. Why not? It's not *her* fault, is it? And girls find it difficult enough to get married nowadays, goodness knows.

MRS. DE MULLIN. Still, she *ought* to be told, Janet. I think she must be told.

JANET. My dear Mother, if *she* knows everybody will know, and the scandal will make all the dead and gone De Mullins turn in their graves. As for Father, it would simply kill him out of hand.

MRS. DE MULLIN [*sadly*]. Poor Father!

JANET [*briskly*]. So, on the whole, I don't think we'll tell any one. Come, Mother, it's time we started [*More*

kindly.] Poor Mother. Don't fret. Perhaps Hester will have some news to cheer you you when we get home

MRS DE MULLIN. Hester?

JANET [*rallying*] An engagement, Mother. Hester's engagement Hester and Mr. Brown have been decorating the church for the last four hours. What an opportunity for a declaration! Or don't people propose in church?

MRS DE MULLIN Janet, how can you laugh after what has happened?

JANET. Laugh? Of course I can laugh. What else is there to do? Let's go home. Johnny! Johnny!

[*Calls* *By this time twilight is falling
A full moon has begun to rise, lighting
up the scene*]

JOHNNY [*off*]. Yes, Mummie.

JANET Come along, dear. Mother's going to start.

JOHNNY [*off*]. All right, Mummie. [*Entering.*] Oh, Mummie, you've not seen my rabbits yet!

JANET. No. It's too dark to-night. Mother must come and see them another time.

JOHNNY. You won't forget, will you, Mummie? [*Looking at MRS. DE MULLIN.*] Grandmother, you've been crying Is that because I stung myself with a nettle?

JANET. Little egoist! Of course it is Give your grandmother a kiss and we'll all walk home together.

[*MRS. DE MULLIN stoops and kisses
JOHNNY passionately. They go off
through the gate and the curtain falls.*]

ACT III

Five days have passed since Act II.

SCENE.—*As in Act I. Time, late afternoon
When the curtain rises MRS CLOUSTON,
MRS. DE MULLIN and
JANET are on the stage. The nervous
tension of the last few days has clearly
told on JANET, who looks feverish
and irritable.*

MRS. DE MULLIN [*speaking off into
the outer hall*]. Good-bye! Good-bye!

JANET [*who is standing in the middle
of the hall, scornfully*]. Good-bye! Good-bye!

MRS. CLOUSTON [*shocked*] Janet!

JANET [*fiercely*]. How many times a week does that Bulstead woman think it necessary to call on us?

MRS CLOUSTON [*sitting*] She doesn't call very often

JANET She's been three times this week

MRS. DE MULLIN [*closing door*]. Naturally she wants to hear how your father is, dear

JANET [*irritably*] My dear Mother, what *can* it matter to Mrs Bulstead whether Father lives or dies?

MRS DE MULLIN. Janet!

JANET [*exasperated*] Well, Mother, do you seriously believe she cares? Or Miss Deanes? Or Miss Rolt? Or any of these people? They only call because they've nothing better to do It's sheer mental vacuity on their part. Besides, Father's perfectly well now. They know that. But they go on *calling, calling!* I wonder Miss Deanes doesn't bring her cockatoo to inquire.

[*Tramps to and fro impatiently*]

MRS CLOUSTON. Really, Janet, I can't think what's the matter with you Do sit down and try and exercise some self-control

JANET. I've no self-control where these Brendon people are concerned They get on my nerves, every one of them . . . Where's Johnny?

MRS DE MULLIN. In the garden, I think.

JANET. Sensible boy! He's had enough of visitors for one day, I'll be bound. I'll go out and join him [*Goes out angrily*]

MRS CLOUSTON. I can't think what's come to Janet the last day or two. Her temper gets worse and worse.

MRS DE MULLIN. Perhaps it's only the hot weather. No De Mullin—

MRS CLOUSTON. Nonsense, Jane, don't be foolish. We can't have Janet giving way to that sort of thing at her age.

MRS. DE MULLIN. I'm afraid she is rather irritable just now. She flew out quite savagely at Hester to-day just after luncheon.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Why was that?

MRS DE MULLIN Because of something she had been teaching Johnny. The Athanasian Creed I think it was. Yes, it must have been that because Johnny asked Janet what was meant by three Incomprehensibles Janet asked him where he had heard all that, and Johnny said Aunt Hester had taught it to him. Janet was very angry and forbade Hester ever to teach him anything again. Hester was quite hurt about it.

MRS CLOUSTON. Naturally. Still, I do think Hester might have chosen something else to teach him.

MRS DE MULLIN. That was what Janet said

MRS CLOUSTON But that's no reason why she shouldn't behave herself when visitors are here She was quite rude to Mrs Bulstead What they think of her in London when she goes on like this I can't imagine

MRS DE MULLIN Perhaps she isn't like this in London.

MRS. CLOUSTON Of course she is, Jane. Worse. Here she has the restraining influences of home life Whereas in London, living alone as she does .

MRS. DE MULLIN She has Johnny!

MRS CLOUSTON She has Johnny, of course. But that's not enough She ought to have a husband to look after her.

MRS. DE MULLIN [*sighs*]. Yes.

[*Sets herself slowly beside her sister.*]

MRS. CLOUSTON Where's Hester?

MRS. DE MULLIN. At church, I expect

MRS. CLOUSTON. Church! Why, the girl's always at church

MRS DE MULLIN It's a Wednesday. And it does no harm, I think

MRS. CLOUSTON. Let us hope not, Jane.

[*DE MULLIN enters by the door on the left. He has evidently got over his recent attack and looks comparatively hale and vigorous*]

MRS. DE MULLIN Have you had your nap, Hugo?

DE MULLIN. Yes. The sunset woke me, I suppose It was shining full on my face.

MRS. DE MULLIN. What a pity it woke you.

DE MULLIN. It didn't matter. I've slept enough . . . [*Wanders towards sofa.*]

Where's Johnny?

MRS. DE MULLIN. In the garden, I think, with Janet.

DE MULLIN [*wanders to window and looks out*] Yes. There he is He's playing hide-and-seek with Ellen . Now she's caught him No, he's got away Bravo, Johnny! [*Stands watching intently for a while. Then turns and comes down.*]

What a fine little fellow it is! A true De Mullin!

MRS. DE MULLIN. Do you think so, Hugo?

DE MULLIN. Every inch of him!

[*Pause, sits, half to himself.*] If only Janet had been married!

MRS. DE MULLIN [*sighs*]. Yes.

DE MULLIN [*musings*]. I wonder who the father really was. [*Looking up.*] She has never told you, Jane, I suppose?

MRS. DE MULLIN [*steadily, without looking up*]. No, Hugo

MRS CLOUSTON. And never will. Nobody was ever so obstinate as Janet

DE MULLIN [*nods sadly*]. Janet always had plenty of will

MRS CLOUSTON. Far too much!

[*Pause.*]

MRS DE MULLIN. You'll quite miss Johnny when he goes away from us, won't you, Hugo?

DE MULLIN. Yes I never thought I could grow so fond of a child. The house will seem empty without him.

MRS. DE MULLIN. I shall miss him too.

DE MULLIN. We shall all miss him. [*Pause Thoughtfully*] I wonder if Janet would leave him with us when she goes back to London?

MRS. DE MULLIN. Leave him with us? Altogether, you mean?

DE MULLIN. Yes

MRS. DE MULLIN I'm afraid not, Hugo In fact, I'm quite sure she would not. She's so fond of Johnny.

DE MULLIN. I suppose she wouldn't. [*Pause*] I was greatly shocked at what you told me about her the other day, Harriet

MRS. CLOUSTON. About her keeping a shop, you mean?

DE MULLIN. Yes And going into partnership with a Miss Higgs or Hicks. It all sounds most discreditable

MRS CLOUSTON Deplorable.

MRS DE MULLIN [*meekly*]. She had to do something to keep herself, Hugo

DE MULLIN. No doubt. Still, it can't be considered a proper sort of position for my daughter. I think she must give it up at once.

MRS DE MULLIN. She would only have to take to something else.

DE MULLIN. Not necessarily She might come back here to live with us . . . with Johnny, of course.

MRS. DE MULLIN [*astomished*]. Live with us?

DE MULLIN. Why not, Jane?

MRS DE MULLIN. Well, of course, if you think so, Hugo

MRS CLOUSTON. Are you sure you will like to have Janet living at home again, Hugo?

DE MULLIN I think it might be the best arrangement And I shall like to have Johnny here He's our only descendant, Harriet, the last of the De Mullins. If you or Jane had had a son it would be different.

MRS. CLOUSTON [*sighs*]. Yes.

DE MULLIN. As it is, I don't see how we can do anything better than have them both down here—as Jane doesn't think Janet would part with Johnny It would be better for Janet, too It would take her away from her present unsatisfactory surroundings It would give her a position and independence—everything she now lacks.

MRS. DE MULLIN. I should have thought she was *independent* now, Hugo.

DE MULLIN [*irritably*]. My dear Jane, how can a woman possibly be independent whose income comes out of selling hats? The only form of independence that is possible or desirable for a woman is that she shall be dependent upon her husband or, if she is unmarried, on her nearest male relative. I am sure *you* agree with me, Harriet?

MRS. CLOUSTON. Quite, Hugo.

DE MULLIN. Very well. I will speak to her about it at once.

MRS. DE MULLIN [*nervously*]. I hardly think I would say anything about it to-day, Hugo.

DE MULLIN. Why not, Jane?

MRS. DE MULLIN. Well, she seems nervous and irritable to-day. I think I should put it off for a day or two.

DE MULLIN [*testily*]. My dear Jane, you are always procrastinating. If such arrangement is to be made the sooner it is made the better. [*Goes to window and calls.*] Janet, my dear! Janet!

[*Pause Then JANET appears at center window*]

JANET. Did you call me, Father?

DE MULLIN. Yes. Come to me for a moment I want to speak to you. [*DE MULLIN wanders undecidedly to the fireplace. A moment later JANET enters from the garden.*] Is Johnny with you?

JANET. No. He's having tea with Ellen. I said he might.

[*Pause JANET comes down.*]

DE MULLIN. Janet, your mother and I have been talking over your future.

JANET. Have you, Father?

[*With a quick glance at her mother.*]
MRS. DE MULLIN, however, makes no sign.]

DE MULLIN. Yes. We have come to the conclusion that it would be better for you to come back here to live.

[*JANET faces round towards her father*]

JANET. But what would become of the business?

DE MULLIN. You will have to give up

the business, of course. So much the better You never ought to have gone into it. It was not at all a suitable occupation for you.

JANET. But I like it, Father.

MRS. CLOUSTON. *Like it!* A De Mullin *like* keeping a shop! Impossible.

JANET [*firmly*]. Yes, Aunt Harriet, I like it And I'm proud of it

DE MULLIN [*sharply*]. Nonsense, Janet. Nobody can possibly be proud of keeping a shop.

JANET. I am. I made it, you see It's my child, like Johnny.

DE MULLIN [*amazed*]. Janet! Do you understand what you're doing? I offer you the chance of returning to Brendon to live as my daughter.

JANET [*indifferently*]. I quite understand, Father. And I'm much obliged for the offer Only I decline it That's all.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Really!

DE MULLIN [*with dignity*]. The question is, are you to be allowed to decline it, in Johnny's interests if not your own?

JANET. Johnny's?

DE MULLIN. Yes. Johnny's. As long as he was a child it made little difference where he was brought up. Relatively little that is Now he is getting to an age when early associations are all-important. Living here at Brendon in the home of his ancestors he will grow up worthy of the race from which he is descended. He will be a true De Mullin.

JANET [*quietly*]. Perhaps I don't want him to be a true De Mullin, Father.

DE MULLIN. What do you mean?

JANET. My dear Father, you're infatuated about your De Mullins. Who are the De Mullins after all? Mere country squires who lived on here down at Brendon generation after generation. What have they ever done that I should want Johnny to be like them? Nothing There's not one of them who has ever distinguished himself in the smallest degree or made his name known outside his native village. The De Mullins are, and have always been, nobodies. Look at their portraits. Is there a single one of them that is worth a second glance? Why, they never even had the brains to be painted by a decent artist. With the result that they aren't worth the canvas they're painted on. Or is it board? I'd make a bonfire of them if they were mine.

MRS. DE MULLIN. Janet!

JANET [*impatiently*]. I would You seem to think there's some peculiar virtue about always living in the same place. I

believe in people uprooting themselves with their lives. What was the good of the De Mullins going on living down here century after century, always a little poorer, and a little poorer, selling a farm here, mortgaging another there, instead of going out into the world to seek their fortunes? We've stayed too long in one place, we De Mullins. We shall never be worth anything sleeping away our lives down at Brendon.

DE MULLIN [*sharply*]. Janet, you are talking foolishly. What you say only makes it clearer to me that you cannot be allowed to live by yourself in London any longer. Such a life is demoralizing to you. You must come back to Brendon.

JANET. I shall not come back to Brendon, Father. On that I am quite determined.

DE MULLIN [*with dignity*]. My dear, this is not a matter that rests with you. My mind is made up. Hitherto I have asked you to return. Do not force me to command you.

JANET [*fiercely*]. Command? By what right do you command?

DE MULLIN. By the right of a father, Janet. By that right I insist on your obedience.

JANET [*Losing her temper*]. Obedience! Obedience! I owe no one obedience. I am of full age and can order my life as I please. Is a woman never to be considered old enough to manage her own affairs? Is she to go down to her grave everlastingly under tutelage? Is she always to be obeying a father when she's not obeying a husband? Well, I for one will not submit to such nonsense. I'm sick of this everlasting obedience.

DE MULLIN [*fiercely*]. Janet! . . . [*Door opens on the left. ELLEN enters with the lamp. There is a considerable pause, during which ELLEN puts the lamp down, turns it up, pulls down the blind and begins to draw the curtains. In the middle of the last process DE MULLIN intervenes, irritably.*] You can leave the curtains, Ellen.

ELLEN. Very well, sir.

[*Exit ELLEN with maddening deliberation. Pause*]

JANET. Father, I'm sorry if what I said vexed you. Perhaps I spoke too strongly.

DE MULLIN [*with great dignity*]. Very well, Janet. You will remain with us.

JANET. No, Father, that's not possible. For Johnny's sake, as well as my own, it would be madness for us to live down here.

DE MULLIN. For Johnny's sake?

JANET. Yes, Johnny's. In London we're

not known, he and I. There he's simply Johnny Seagrave, the son of a respectable widow who keeps a hat-shop. Here he is the son of Janet De Mullin who ran away from home one night eight years ago and whose name was never mentioned again by her parents until one fine day she turned up with an eight-year-old boy and said she was married. How long would they take to see through that story down here, do you think?

MRS. CLOUSTON [*tartly*]. Whose fault is that?

JANET. Never mind whose fault it is, Aunt Harriet. The question is, will they see through it or will they not? Of course they *know* nothing so far, but I've no doubt they suspect. What else have people to do down here but suspect other people? Miss Deanes murmurs her doubts to Mrs. Bulstead and Mrs. Bulstead shakes her head to Miss Deanes. Mrs. Bulstead! What right has *she* to look down that huge nose of hers at *me*? She's had *ten* children!

MRS. DE MULLIN. Janet! She's married.

JANET. To Mr. Bulstead! That vulgar animal! You don't ask me to consider that a *merit*, do you? No, Mrs. Bulstead shan't have the chance of sneering at Johnny if I can help it. Or at me either.

MRS. DE MULLIN. Janet, listen to me. You don't understand how your father feels about this or how much it means to him. Johnny is his only grandchild—our only descendant. He would adopt him and call him De Mullin, and then the name would not die out. You know how much your father thinks of that and how sorry he has always been that I never had a son.

JANET [*more gently*]. I know, Mother. But when Hester marries . . .

DE MULLIN. Hester?

JANET. Yes.

DE MULLIN [*turning angrily to his wife*]. But whom is Hester going to marry? Is she going to marry? I have heard nothing about this. What's this, Jane? Has something been kept from me?

MRS. DE MULLIN. No, no, Hugo. Nothing has been kept from you. It's only some fancy of Janet's. She thinks Mr. Brown is going to propose to Hester. There's nothing in it, really.

DE MULLIN. Mr. Brown! Impossible!

MRS. CLOUSTON. Quite impossible!

JANET [*calmly*]. Why impossible, Father?

DE MULLIN. He would never dare to do such a thing. *Mr. Brown* to have the audacity to propose to *my* daughter!

JANET [*quietly*]. Why not, Father?

DE MULLIN [*bubbling with rage*]. Because he is not of a suitable position. Because the *De Mullins* cannot be expected to marry people of *that* class. Because

JANET [*shrugs*]. I dare say Mr. Brown won't think of a'l that. Anyhow, I hope he won't. I hope he'll propose to Hester and she'll accept him, and then when they've a whole herd of little Browns you can select one of them and make a De Mullin of him, poor little wretch.

[*At this moment HESTER enters from the garden. An uncomfortable silence falls.*]

MRS. DE MULLIN. Hush, hush, Janet. Here is Hester. Is that you, Hester? Have you come from church?

HESTER. Yes, Mother.

[*She comes down, her face looking pale and drawn, and stands by her mother.*]

MRS. DE MULLIN. You're very late, dear.

HESTER. A little. I stayed on after service was over.

MRS. CLOUSTON. How very eccentric of you!

HESTER [*quietly*]. I suppose saying one's prayers does seem eccentric to you, Aunt Harriet.

MRS. CLOUSTON. My dear Hester, considering you'd only just finished *one* service . . .

JANET [*who has not noticed the look on her sister's face*]. Well, Aunt Harriet, who was right?

MRS. DE MULLIN. Hush, Janet!

JANET [*gaily*]. My dear Mother, what on earth is there to "hush" about? And what on earth is there to keep Hester in church half an hour after service is over, if it's not what I told you?

HESTER. What do you mean?

JANET. Nothing, dear. Come and give me a kiss. [*Pulling her towards her.*]

HESTER [*repulsing her roughly*]. I won't. Leave me alone, Janet. What has she been saying about me, Mother? I insist on knowing.

MRS. DE MULLIN. Nothing, dear. Only some nonsense about you and Mr. Brown. Janet is always talking nonsense.

JANET. Yes, Hester. About you and Mr. Brown. *Your* Mr. Brown. Confess he has asked you to marry him, as I said?

HESTER [*slowly*]. Mr. Brown is engaged to be married to Agatha Bulstead. He to'd me this evening after service.

JANET. He told you!

HESTER. Yes. He asked me to congratulate him.

JANET. The little wretch!

MRS. DE MULLIN. To Agatha Bulstead? That's the plain one, isn't it?

HESTER. The third one. Yes.

JANET. The plain one! Good heavens, it oughtn't to be allowed. The children will be little monsters.

MRS. CLOUSTON. So that's why you were so long at church?

HESTER. Yes. I was praying they might be happy.

JANET. Poor Hester!

MRS. DE MULLIN. Are you disappointed, dear?

HESTER. I'd rather not talk about it if you don't mind, Mother.

MRS. DE MULLIN. Your father would never have given his consent.

HESTER. So Mr. Brown said.

JANET. The little *worm*.

MRS. DE MULLIN. My dear!

JANET. Well, Mother, isn't it too contemptible?

DE MULLIN. I'm bound to say Mr. Brown seems to have behaved in a very fitting manner.

JANET. You think so, Father?

DE MULLIN. Certainly. He saw what my objections would be and recognized that they were reasonable. Nothing could be more proper.

JANET. Well, Father, I don't know what you want. Ten minutes ago you were supposed to be wanting a grandson to adopt. Here's Hester going the right way to provide one, and you don't like that either.

HESTER. What is all this about, Father? What have you all been discussing while I've been out?

MRS. DE MULLIN. It was nothing about you, Hester.

HESTER. I'm not sure of that, Mother. Anyhow, I should like to hear what it was.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Hester, that is not at all a proper tone to use in speaking to your mother.

HESTER [*fiercely*]. Please don't interfere, Aunt Harriet. I suppose I can be trusted to speak to my mother properly by this time.

MRS. CLOUSTON. You certainly ought to, my dear. You are quite old enough.

HESTER. Very well, then. Perhaps you will be good enough not to dictate to me in the future. What was it you were discussing, Father?

JANET. I'll tell you, Hester. Father wanted to adopt Johnny. He wanted me to come down here to live altogether.

HESTER. Indeed? Well, Father, understand, please, that if Janet comes down here to live, I go!

MRS DE MULLIN. Hester!

HESTER. I will not live in the same house with Janet. Nothing shall induce me. I would rather beg my bread.

JANET. That settles it then. Thanks, Hester. I'm glad you had the pluck to say that. You are right. Quite right.

HESTER. I can do without *your* approval, Janet.

JANET [*recklessly*]. Of course you can. But you can have it all the same. You never wanted me down here. You always disapproved of my being sent for. I ought never to have come. I wish I hadn't come. My coming has only done harm to Hester, as she knew it would.

DE MULLIN. How harm?

JANET. Mr. Brown would have asked Hester to marry him if I hadn't come. He meant to; I'm sure of it.

MRS. DE MULLIN. But he said . . .

JANET. I know. But that was only an excuse. Young men aren't so considerate of their future fathers-in-law as all that nowadays. No. Mr. Brown heard some story about me from Miss Deanes. Or perhaps the Vicar put him on his guard. Isn't it so, Hester? [*HESTER nods.*]

MRS. DE MULLIN. But as your father would never have consented, dear . . .

HESTER [*slowly*]. Still, I'd rather he had asked me, Mother.

JANET. Quite right, Hester! I'm glad you've got some wholesome feminine vanity left in your composition. And you'd have said "yes," like a sensible woman.

HESTER. Oh, you're always sneering!

JANET. Yes. But I'm *going*, Hester, *going*! That's the great thing. Keep your eyes fixed steadily on that and you'll be able to bear anything else. That reminds me. [*Goes to door and calls loudly into the hall.*] Johnny! Johnny!

MRS. CLOUSTON. Really, Janet!

JANET. Oh, I forgot. It's not genteel to call into the passage, is it? I ought to have rung. I apologize, Aunt Harriet. [*Calls again*] Johnny!

MRS. DE MULLIN. Why are you calling Johnny?

JANET. To tell him to put on his hat and coat, Mother, dear. I'm going to the station.

DE MULLIN. You're going to-night?

JANET. Yes, Father, to-night. I've done harm enough down here. I'm going away.

JOHNNY [*entering*]. Do you want me, Mummie?

JANET. Yes. Run and put on your things and say good-bye to Cook and Ellen and tell Robert to put in the pony. Mother's going back to London.

JOHNNY. Are we going now, Mummie?

JANET [*nods*]. As fast as the train can carry us. And tell Ellen to lock my trunk for me and give you the key. Run along. [*Exit JOHNNY*]

DE MULLIN. Lock your trunk! But you've not *packed*?

JANET. Oh, yes, I have. Everything's packed, down to my last shoelace. I don't know how often I haven't packed and unpacked during the last five days.

MRS. DE MULLIN [*astonished and hurt*]. You meant to leave us then, Janet? You've been *wanting* to leave us all the time?

JANET. Yes, Mother. I've been wanting to leave you. I can't stay here any longer. Brendon stifles me. It has too many ghosts. I suppose it's your ridiculous De Mullins.

DE MULLIN. Janet!

JANET. I know, Father. That's blasphemy, isn't it? But I can't help it. I must go. I've been meaning to tell you every day for the last four days, but somehow I always put it off.

DE MULLIN. Understand me, Janet. If you leave this house to-night you leave it for ever.

JANET [*cheerfully*]. All right, Father.

DE MULLIN [*growing angrier*]. Understand, too, that if you leave it you are never to hold communication with me or with any one in it henceforward. You are cut off from the family. I will never see you or recognize you in any way, or speak to you again as long as I live.

JANET [*astonished*]. My dear Father, why are you so angry? Is there anything so dreadful in my wanting to live in London instead of in the country?

DE MULLIN [*getting more and more excited*]. Why am I angry? Why am I? . . .

MRS. DE MULLIN. Sh! Hugo! You mustn't excite yourself. You know the doctor said . . .

DE MULLIN. Be quiet, Jane! [*Turning furiously to JANET.*] Why am I angry? You disgrace the family. You have a child, that poor fatherless boy . . .

JANET [*quietly*]. Oh come, I could have got along quite well without a father, if it comes to that. And so could Hester.

MRS. DE MULLIN. Janet!

JANET. Well, Mother, what has Father ever done for Hester or me except try and prevent us from doing something we

wanted to do? Hester wanted to marry Mr. Brown. Father wouldn't have allowed her. He's not genteel enough to marry a De Mullin I want to go back to my shop. Father objects to that. That's not genteel enough for a De Mullin either. Well, hang all the De Mullins, say I!

DE MULLIN [*furious*] I forbid you speak of your family in that way—of *my* family I forbid it! It is an outrage. Your ancestors were honorable men and pure women. They did their duty in the position in which they were born, and handed on their name untarnished to their children. Hitherto our honor has been unsullied. You have sullied it. You have brought shame upon your parents and shame upon your son, and that shame you can never wipe out. If you had a spark of human feeling, if you were not worthless and heartless, you would blush to look me in the face or your child in the face. But you are utterly hardened. I ought never to have offered to receive you back into this house. I ought never to have consented to see you again. I was wrong. I regret it. You are unfit for the society of decent people. Go back to London. Take up the wretched trade you practise there. It is what you are fit for.

JANET. That's exactly what I think, Father. As we agree about it why make such a fuss?

DE MULLIN [*furious*] Janet . . .

HESTER. Father, don't argue with her. It's no use. [*Solemnly*.] Leave her to God.

JANET. Hester, Hester, don't deceive yourself. In your heart you envy me my baby, and you know it.

HESTER [*indignant*]. I do not.

JANET. You do. Time is running on with you, my dear. You're twenty-eight. Just the age that I was when I met my lover. Yes, my lover. In a few years you will be too old for love, too old to have children. So soon it passeth away and we are gone. Your best years are slipping by and you are growing faded and cross and peevish. Already the lines are hardening about your mouth and the hollows coming under your eyes. You will be an old woman before your time unless you marry and have children. And what will you do then? Keep a lap-dog, I suppose, or sit up at night with a sick cockatoo like Miss Deanes. Miss Deanes! Even she has a heart somewhere about her. Do you imagine she wouldn't rather give it to her babies than snivel over *poultry*? No, Hester, make good use of your youth, my dear. It won't last always. And once gone

it is gone forever. [*HESTER bursts into tears*.] There, there, Hester! I'm sorry. I oughtn't to have spoken like that. It wasn't kind. Forgive me. [*HESTER weeps more and more violently*.] Hester, don't cry like that I can't bear to hear you. I was angry and said more than I should. I didn't mean to vex you. Come, dear, you mustn't give way like that or you will make yourself ill. Dry your eyes and let me see you smile. [*Caressing her*. *HESTER, who has begun by resisting her feebly, gradually allows herself to be soothed*.] That's better! My dear, what a sight you have made of yourself! But all women are hideous when they've been crying. It makes their noses red, and that's dreadfully unbecoming. [*HESTER sob, out a laugh*.] No. You mustn't begin to cry again or I shall scold you. I shall, really.

HESTER [*half laughing, half crying hysterically*]. You seem to think that every woman ought to behave as shamelessly as you did.

JANET [*grimly*]. No, Hester. I don't think that. To do as I did needs pluck and brains—and five hundred pounds. Everything most women haven't got, poor things. So they must marry or remain childless. You must marry—the next curate. I suppose the Bulsteads will buy Mr. Brown a living as he's marrying the plainest of their daughters. It's the least they can do. But that's no reason why I should marry unless I choose.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Well, I've never heard of anything so disgraceful. I thought Janet at least had the grace to be ashamed of what she did!

JANET [*genuinely astonished*]. Ashamed? Ashamed of wanting to have a child? What on earth were women created for, Aunt Harriet, if not to have children?

MRS. CLOUSTON. To marry and have children.

JANET [*with relentless logic*]. My dear Aunt Harriet, women had children thousands of years before marriage was invented. I dare say they will go on doing so thousands of years after it has ceased to exist.

MRS. DE MULLIN. Janet!

JANET. Well, Mother, that's how I feel. And I believe it's how all wholesome women feel if they would only acknowledge it. I *wanted* to have a child. I always did from the time when I got too old to play with dolls. Not an adopted child or a child of some one else's, but a baby of my very own. Of course I wanted to marry.

That's the ordinary way a woman wants to be a mother nowadays, I suppose. But time went on and nobody came forward, and I saw myself getting old and my chance slipping away. Then I met—never mind. And I fell in love with him. Or, perhaps, I only fell in love with love I don't know. It was so splendid to find some one at last who really cared for me as women should be cared for! Not to talk to because I was clever or to play tennis with because I was strong, but to kiss me and to make love to me! Yes! To make love to me!

DE MULLIN [*solemnly*]. Listen to me, my girl. You say that now, and I dare say you believe it. But when you are older, when Johnny is grown up, you will bitterly repent having brought into the world a child who can call no man father.

JANET [*passionately*]. Never! Never! That I'm sure of. Whatever happens, even if Johnny should come to hate me for what I did, I shall always be glad to have been his mother. At least I shall have lived. These poor women who go through life listless and dull, who have never felt the joys and pains a mother feels, how they would envy me if they knew! If they knew! To know that a child is your very own, is a part of you. That you have faced sickness and pain and death itself for it. That it is yours and nothing can take it from you because no one can understand its wants as you do. To feel its soft breath on your cheek, to soothe it when it is fretful and still it when it cries, that is motherhood and that is glorious!

[*JOHNNY runs in by the door on the left. He is obviously in the highest spirits at the thought of going home.*]

JOHNNY. The trap is round, Mummie, and the luggage is in.

JANET. That's right. Good-bye, Father.

[*He does not move.*] Say good-bye to your grandfather, Johnny. You won't see him again. [*DE MULLIN kisses JOHNNY.*]

MRS DE MULLIN. Janet!

JANET. No, Mother. It's best not [*Kisses her*] It would only be painful for Father. Good-bye, Aunt Harnet. Good-bye, Hester.

[*Looks at HESTER doubtfully. HESTER rises, goes to her slowly and kisses her*]

HESTER. Good-bye.

[*Exeunt JOHNNY and JANET by the door on the right*]

DE MULLIN [*his gray head bowed on his chest as MRS DE MULLIN timidly lays her hand on his shoulder*]. The last of the De Mullins! The last of the De Mullins! [*The curtain falls.*]

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- Magda*, Hermann Sudermann
Hindle Wakes, Stanley Houghton
The Barretts of Wimpole Street, Rudolph Besier
A Family Man, John Galsworthy
The House of Connelly, Paul Green

JOHN FERGUSON

(1915)

BY

ST. JOHN ERVINE

CHARACTERS

JOHN FERGUSON, *a farmer*
SARAH FERGUSON, *his wife*
ANDREW FERGUSON, *his son*
HANNAH FERGUSON, *his daughter*
JAMES CAESAR, *a grocer*
HENRY WITHEROW, *a farmer and miller*
"CLUTIE"¹ JOHN MAGRATH, *a beggar*
SAM MAWHINNEY, *a postman*
SERGEANT KERNAGHAN, *R.I.C.*
Two Constables
A Crowd of Men and Women, Boys and Girls

¹"Clutie" is a slang expression meaning "left-handed."

*The action takes place in the kitchen of a farm-house in County
Down, Ireland, in the late summer of the year 1885*

ST. JOHN ERVINE

IN 1898, William Butler Yeats and Lady Gregory laid the plans for a national Irish Literary Theatre, which was almost inevitable in the animated Irish literary revival of the time. The theater was to be uncommercial and devoted entirely to the furtherance of a national Irish drama of literary value. No doubt the undertaking was suggested in part by the Independent Theater of London, which had earlier in the decade produced some Irish plays of the new movement. The Abbey Theater in Dublin became one of the *vita'* drama centers of the world and has so remained, through various stormy crises, to this day. Upon the enlistment of John Millington Synge in the project and the production of his semi-poetic dramas of peasant life, the success of the Irish Theater was established. It was the intention of the founders to limit its productions to folk plays and dramas founded on Irish legends, but under some managements the Abbey Theater expanded into a repertory theater producing plays by Sudermann, Maeterlinck, Strindberg, Evreinov, Sierra, Chekhov, O'Neill, and other outsiders. The most typical playwrights of the Irish Renaissance to have their work performed were Yeats, Synge, Lady Gregory, Lord Dunsany, Colum, and Hyde. Of the recent authors, T. C. Murray and Sean O'Casey are most unflinchingly Irish, whereas St. John Ervine, long a Londoner, George Shiels, for some time a resident of America, and Lennox Robinson seem less indubitably Irish. Many of Bernard Shaw's plays have been produced in the Abbey Theater, but he has had no connection with the Irish Literary Revival, and his works belong to English literature like those of his brilliant predecessors in the field of comedy, Goldsmith, Sheridan, and Wilde.

Although an English resident for many years, St. John Ervine to some extent is identified with the Irish movement. At one time he was manager of the Abbey Theater, and some of his best plays were first produced there. In late years, however, he has grown more and more English. The setting of most of his recent plays has been in England; and although *The Ship* has an Irish locale, the flavor is no more Irish than English or Norwegian. Ervine was born in Belfast (in the Protestant section of Ireland) in 1883. When a young man he went to London, where he secured employment with an insurance company. After joining the Fabian Society and coming under the influence of Shaw and the blossoming repertory-theater movement, he returned to journalism and dramatic criticism. He also wrote short stories, novels and plays.

His first play to be performed was *Mixed Marriage* (1911), which aroused considerable controversy upon its production at the Abbey Theater. It combined the popular theme of the "revolt of youth" with the more ticklish one of religious prejudice. *Jane Clegg* (1913) is a drab, realistic example of the soul-corroding aspects of lower middle-class life in an industrial community. The play is excellent of its kind; its sincerity and veracity compensate for its complete lack of humor, dramatic vigor, and beauty. *The Ship* (1921) is a less deftly constructed play, a little less sincere; it is obtrusively didactic but moving and dramatic. *Mary, Mary, Quite Contrary* (1923) is a wholly joyous comedy. Although its story is unconvincing, *The First Mrs Fraser* (1928) has proved to be Ervine's most popular play; this successful imitation of Maugham, however, is less significant than the more original *Jane Clegg* and *John Ferguson*. In addition, Ervine has written a half-dozen novels, numerous short stories, two biographies, and much criticism. During the latter

part of the World War he served as an officer in the Royal Dublin Fusiliers, until May, 1918, when he was seriously wounded. In recent years he has contributed a weekly article on the drama to the *Observer* and has assumed the leadership of modern dramatic critics of authority. His lively, reminiscent study *The Theatre in my Time*, often provocative and warmly controversial, should be read by all students interested in the modern British drama. Such recent plays as *Robert's Wife* and *Boyd's Shop* seem pallid alongside sturdy *Jane Clegg* and *John Ferguson*.

John Ferguson was produced at the Abbey Theater in 1915 during Ervine's management, and by the New York Theatre Guild in 1919, the first successful venture of this invaluable organization. It is undoubtedly Ervine's best play, and one of the best of all modern plays. It is a tragedy of middle-class life among the Protestant rural folk in the North of Ireland. The central interest of the play lies in the character of John Ferguson, a deeply and sincerely religious man who undergoes the adversities of Job, but who at the end is not miraculously rewarded for his steadfastness as was the Biblical hero. Over the play broods the atmosphere of a Greek tragedy—or a novel by Hardy—a sense of the helplessness of man in the hands of blind chance. After a life of impeccable rectitude, toil, religious devotion, and the practice of Christian virtue, in his last days come sorrow and defeat: to meet them he has a greater armor than his faith, which has been ineffectual and comfortless in the great crisis; he has nobility of soul. He is a unique character in English drama, a living individual, far removed from the "type" characters of inferior plays.

JOHN FERGUSON

ACT I

It is the afternoon of a warm day in the late summer of the year 1885, and soft sunlight enters the kitchen of JOHN FERGUSON'S farm through the windows and the open door. The kitchen is comfortably furnished, although the FERGUSONS are no longer prosperous, for MRS. FERGUSON, who is now sitting by the door, mending socks, takes great pride in maintaining the appearance of fortune. She is a short, stout, healthy woman, pleasant and agreeable even when she is as harassed as she now is, and her mind is molded in the kindness of an Ulster woman. She is not a very intelligent woman, and so her sympathies are sometimes flattened by her lack of perception, but, within her limitations, she is an excellent wife and a very good mother.

Her husband, JOHN FERGUSON, is sitting in front of the turf fire, with a rug wrapped round his legs. He is reading a large Bible to himself, and his lips move as if he were silently pronouncing each word. He is an elderly, tired, delicate-looking man, and his dark beard is turning gray. His eyes are set deeply in his head, and they are full of a dark, glowing color. His voice is slow but very firm, although his words are gentle. He looks like a portrait of Moses—not that Moses who led the Israelites out of Egypt and was a great captain of hosts, but the Moses who surveyed the Promised Land from Mount Nebo in the Plains of Moab.

The furniture of the kitchen is good and substantial, and of the sort that one sees in a decent homestead. The door leading to the loaning ("loame") or lane in front of the house is in the wall at the back of the scene. A person entering the kitchen from the loanie would have a large window on his right hand in the same wall as the door, and a staircase on his left hand. Beyond the staircase, near the front of the scene, is a door leading to other

rooms and also to the scullery and the back of the farm. The fireplace is in the wall opposite that in which the staircase is set. Under the window is a large sofa. A dresser is set between the foot of the staircase and the door leading to the yard. A large table sits in the center of the room. JOHN FERGUSON'S chair now stands against one end of this table, so that he can place his Bible on it easily when he is tired of holding it. The ornaments are those customary in such a house. Over the fireplace a gun is suspended.

SARAH FERGUSON I wonder where Hannah is. I haven't seen her for an hour past.

JOHN FERGUSON [*without looking up*]. She's mebbe in the fields with Andrew. Listen to this, Sarah! [*He raises his voice as he reads from the thirtieth of the Psalms of David*] "I will extol thee, O Lord, for thou hast lifted me up, and hast not made my foes to rejoice over me. O Lord, my God, I cried unto thee, and thou hast healed me. O Lord, thou hast brought up my soul from the grave: thou has kept me alive, that I should not go down into the pit. Sing unto the Lord, O ye saints of his, and give thanks at the remembrance of his holiness [*He emphasizes what follows*] For his anger endureth but a moment; in his favour is life: weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning." [*He turns to his wife*] Do you hear that, Sarah? There's great comfort for you!

SARAH FERGUSON. Well, indeed, I hope it will, for we have need of joy in this house. We've bore enough trouble. Here's the farm mortgaged up to the hilt, and you sick and not able to do no work this long while, and Henry Witherow bothering you for the money you owe him! . . .

JOHN FERGUSON [*holding up the Bible so that she can see it*]. "Weeping may endure for a night," Sarah, "but joy cometh in the morning." Them's grand words! Don't be complaining now, for sure God

never deserts His own people. We have His word for that, Sarah. We're tried a while, and then we're given our reward

SARAH FERGUSON Well, we've earned ours, anyway! It's a great pity Andrew's such a poor hand on the farm.

JOHN FERGUSON. The lad was never meant for the land, Sarah You know rightly I dedicated him to the ministry the day he was born. It was a sore blow to the lad when I told him it couldn't be managed, but it was a sorer blow to me

SARAH FERGUSON Ay, indeed, it was, John You were always quaren set on Andrew

JOHN FERGUSON [*proudly*] He's my son! I have great hopes of Andrew.

SARAH FERGUSON. Well, you would have done better, mebbe, to let him go on with his learning, for he's no use at all on the farm I hope to my goodness his uncle Andrew'll send the money to pay the mortgage. It's quare him not writing this long while.

JOHN FERGUSON. He's mebbe had bother He'll write if he has the money by him. You may be sure of that.

SARAH FERGUSON He never was much of a one for giving anything away, your brother Andrew, and mebbe he'll disappoint you the same as he's disappointed many another person.

JOHN FERGUSON. I know he's near with money, but all the same I think he'll be willing to lend me the price of the mortgage. Him and me was born in this house, and we played here together as wee lads. Our da was born here too, and his da before him. Andrew couldn't let the farm go out of the family after all them generations.

SARAH FERGUSON. I trust, indeed, he'll not, but it's a quare poor look-out when you think he's never answered your letters to him this long time, and him knowing well you were sick and helpless Dear knows what'll become of us all if he doesn't send the money! Henry Witherow's a hard man, John, and he'll not be willing to wait long. [*She rises and looks out of the door.*] Here's Hannah now! I wonder is the mail in yet!

JOHN FERGUSON. We'll know in a wee while.

[*He takes up the Bible again and resumes his reading.* HANNAH FERGUSON, a beautiful girl of twenty, enters the kitchen from the "loanie." Her thick black hair is uncovered.]

SARAH FERGUSON. Is the mail in yet?

HANNAH FERGUSON [*wearily*]. The long-car only went by a minute or two ago. I met Clutie John at the end of the loanie, and he said the mail would be late the day [*She goes to the window-seat and sits down.*] It's like Sam Mawhinney to be late the time we want him to be early.

JOHN FERGUSON [*with gentle rebuke in his voice*] Hannah, child! You don't know what trouble the man may have had. It might not be his fault the mail's late. Sometimes there's a storm at sea, and that keeps the boats back Mebbe the train was delayed. Many's a thing might have happened. You shouldn't be blaming Sam for what's mebbe not his fault.

HANNAH FERGUSON [*going to her father, and putting her arms round his neck*]. Da, dear, aren't you the quare one for making excuses for people!

SARAH FERGUSON. Well, sure, a lot of them needs it.

[*She has resumed her seat by the door and is again busy with her work of mending socks.*]

HANNAH FERGUSON. How're you now, Da? Are you better nor you were a while ago?

JOHN FERGUSON [*cheerfully*]. Ah, boys-a-boys, Hannah, what did you mind me of it for? I was near forgetting I was sick at all. That shows I'm better in myself, doesn't it now?

HANNAH FERGUSON [*looking anxiously at him*]. You're not letting on, are you, Da?

SARAH FERGUSON. Letting on, indeed! Did you ever know your da to let on about anything?

JOHN FERGUSON. Indeed, now, and I let on many's a time! There's whiles, when I'm sitting here before the fire, or mebbe there in front of the door when the days is warm, I pretend to myself I'm better again and can go out and do a day's work in the fields with any man. [*His voice drops into complaint*] I haven't been in the fields this long time

SARAH FERGUSON [*sharply*]. Now, don't be going and making yourself unhappy, John.

JOHN FERGUSON. No, woman, I won't. But it's hard for a man to be sitting here with a rug wrapped round his legs, and him not able to do a hand's turn for his wife and family.

HANNAH FERGUSON [*fondling him*]. Ah, Da, dear!

JOHN FERGUSON [*complaint now controlling his voice*]. And me the man that was always active! There wasn't a

one in the place could beat me at the reaping, not one . . . [*He remembers the consolations of his faith, although his voice falters as he speaks the next sentence.*] But it's the will of God! [*He pauses for a moment, and then his mind wanders again to his illness*] Sometimes, when I hear the men in the fields cutting the corn and gathering the harvest, and them shouting to one another and laughing hearty together, I near cry. Me not able to go out and help them to bring in the harvest . . . tied here like a wee child! . . .

HANNAH FERGUSON [*tearfully*]. Da, Da, don't go on that way!

SARAH FERGUSON [*impatiently*]. Ah, quit, the two of you! Hannah, I'm surprised at you coming in and upsetting your da, and him keeping his heart up all day!

HANNAH FERGUSON. I don't mean to bother you, Da.

JOHN FERGUSON [*patting her hair*]. No, daughter, you didn't. I know that rightly. [*Stirring himself and speaking more briskly*] Ah, well! "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning." God always has a word to comfort you when your heart's down. Mebbe there's a letter in Sam Mawhinney's bag this minute that'll cheer us all up. I'm a poor, mealy man to be complaining like that, Hannah, when there's many is worse off nor me . . . only I can't help it sometimes. It's when the men are coming down the loanie in the evening with their scythes over their shoulders, and them tired and sweating and hungry for their supper! . . . Well, God knows His own ways best, and there's many in the world has a harder time nor I have.

HANNAH FERGUSON [*trying to take his mind off his illness*]. I was letting on too, Da!

SARAH FERGUSON. Well, indeed, you might have employed your time to better advantage, Hannah. You can let on till you're tired, but you'll never alter anything that way.

JOHN FERGUSON. What were you letting on, daughter?

HANNAH FERGUSON. I was letting on that my uncle Andrew had sent you all the money you need!

SARAH FERGUSON. Well, I hope your pretence will come true, for if he doesn't, we'll have to flit out of this. It'll break your da's heart to go, and it'll break my heart too. [*She rises and puts her work on the dresser.*] I come here as a young girl, no older nor yourself, Hannah, to be married on your da, and I've lived here

ever since. I'll never be happy nowhere else.

JOHN FERGUSON [*ruminatingly*]. Ay, it'll be hard to go.

SARAH FERGUSON. There's no sense or purpose in it, God forgive me for saying it!

JOHN FERGUSON. There's a meaning in it, whatever happens. I can't see God's purpose, but I know well there is one. His hand never makes a mistake.

HANNAH FERGUSON [*bitterly*]. It's square and hard to see what purpose there is in misfortune and trouble for people that never done nothing to deserve it!

SARAH FERGUSON. Ah, quit it, Hannah! If God was to hear you saying the like of that, he'd mebbe strike you dead.

JOHN FERGUSON. Daughter, dear, you're a young slip of a girl, or you'd never talk that way. [*Sternly*] Do you think God doesn't know how to look after His own world? [*The severity of his voice relaxes.*] Everything that happens is made to happen, and everything in the world, the commonest wee fly in the bushes before the door there, has a purpose and a meaning. There's things hid from you and me because we're not fit to know them, but the more we fill ourselves with the glory of God, the better we get to understand the world. It's people that's full of sin, Hannah, that can't see or understand. That's sin—not knowing or understanding! Ignorance is sin. Keeping your mind shut is sin. Not letting the sun and the air and the warmth of God into your heart—that's sin, Hannah!

[*He sinks back in his chair, fatigued by his outburst*]

SARAH FERGUSON. There now, you've made yourself tired.

JOHN FERGUSON [*weakly*]. I'm all right, woman!

HANNAH FERGUSON [*going towards the door*]. I wish to my goodness that man Mawhinney would come with the letters!

JOHN FERGUSON. He'll soon be here now.

HANNAH FERGUSON [*looking out*]. He's never in sight yet! [*She speaks the next sentence petulantly, returning to her seat on the sofa as she does so.*] Och, here's that man, Jimmy Caesar! I wonder what he wants!

SARAH FERGUSON. I wouldn't be surprised but it's you he's after! This isn't the first time he's been here lately, nor yet the second.

HANNAH FERGUSON [*crossly*]. Och,

Ma, quit talking! I wouldn't marry him if he was the last man in the world

SARAH FERGUSON. Well, dear bless us, if he was the last man in the world and I wanted him for myself, I wouldn't like to run the risk of making you an offer of him! Sure, what's wrong with the man?

HANNAH FERGUSON [*contemptuously*]. He's an old collie, that's what he is! He has no spirit in him at all! Look at the way he goes on about Henry Witherow and what he'll do to him when he gets the chance! He's had many a chance, but he's done nothing

SARAH FERGUSON. Would you have him kill the man?

HANNAH FERGUSON He shouldn't go about the place threatening to have Witherow's life when he doesn't mean to take it.

JOHN FERGUSON Daughter, dear, I don't like to hear you speak so bitterly. It's foolish of Jimmy Caesar to talk in the wild way he does, though, dear knows, he's had great provocation. But he doesn't mean the half he says!

HANNAH FERGUSON. Well, he shouldn't say it then!

SARAH FERGUSON. Ah, now, Hannah, if we were all to say just what we meant, more nor half of us would be struck dumb

JOHN FERGUSON Ay, you're right, woman! You are, indeed! Henry Witherow's a hard man, and he put many an indignity on Jimmy Caesar's family. If you knew all he's had to bear, Hannah, you'd pity him, and not be saying hard words against him.

SARAH FERGUSON. Ay, indeed, John! Witherow'll not be soft on us if we can't pay him what we owe him, and then, Hannah, you'll mebbe understand what Jimmy Caesar's feelings are.

HANNAH FERGUSON. I'll never understand the feelings of a collie. I like a man to have a spirit and do what he's said he'd do, or else keep his tongue quiet in his head.

SARAH FERGUSON. Now, it's brave and hard to be having a spirit in these times. Sure, the man must have some pluck in him to turn round and make a good business for himself after him losing near every halfpenny he had, and that man Witherow near bankrupting him, and killing his old da and ma with grief. That's not a poor, paltry spirit, is it?

JOHN FERGUSON. You'd better quit talking about him now. He'll step in the

door any minute. Where was he when you saw him, Hannah?

HANNAH FERGUSON He was at the foot of the "loane"

SARAH FERGUSON It's a credit to him the way he's slaved and saved. I dare say he has a big bit of money saved up in the Ulster Bank [*She goes to the door and looks out*] Ay, here he's coming! [*She calls out to CAESAR*] Is that you, Jimmy? [*CAESAR is heard to shout in response*] If Hannah was to marry him, the way he wants her . . .

HANNAH FERGUSON. I wouldn't marry him if he was rolling in riches and had gallons of gold!

SARAH FERGUSON [*returning to the kitchen*] Och, wheesht with you! Sure, the man's right enough, and anyway one man's no worse nor another!

[*JAMES CAESAR comes to the door. He is a mean-looking man, about thirty-five years of age, and his look of meanness is not mitigated by his air of prosperity. His movements are awkward, and his speech is nervous. He is very eager to please HANNAH, whom he pretends not to see*]

JAMES CAESAR. Good day to you all!

JOHN FERGUSON Good day to you, Jimmy!

JAMES CAESAR [*hesitating at the door*] Can I come in?

SARAH FERGUSON. Sure, do! You know you're always welcome here, Jimmy!

JAMES CAESAR [*entering*] It's kind of you to say that! [*He puts his hat on the dresser.*] It's a brave day!

SARAH FERGUSON It's not so bad.

JAMES CAESAR It'll do good to harvest. [*Pretending to see HANNAH for the first time*] Is that you, Hannah? I didn't see you when I come in first. I hope you're keeping your health?

HANNAH FERGUSON [*coldly*]. I'm bravely, thank you!

JAMES CAESAR. I didn't see you this while back, and I was wondering to myself were you not well or something. I'm glad to see you looking so fine on it [*To JOHN FERGUSON.*] Did you hear from your brother Andrew, John?

SARAH FERGUSON Sam Mawhinney's not got this length yet. Did you see him as you were coming up?

JAMES CAESAR. I did not. Are you keeping well, John?

JOHN FERGUSON. I'm as well as can be expected, Jimmy.

JAMES CAESAR. That's good. I'm glad

to hear it. It'll be a great blow to you if you have to leave the farm.

JOHN FERGUSON. It will!

JAMES CAESAR [*bitterness growing into his voice*]. Ay, it's a quare blow to any man to have to leave the house he was born and reared in, the way I had to do. It's Witherow has your mortgage, isn't it?

JOHN FERGUSON. Ay.

JAMES CAESAR. God curse him!

JOHN FERGUSON [*reproachfully*]. Jimmy, Jimmy!

JAMES CAESAR. Ah, you're a forgiving man, John Ferguson, but I'm not, and never will be. Look at the way he treated me and mine. I've never forgot that, and I never will if I live to be a hundred years old [*Violently*]. I'll choke the life out of him one of these days!

HANNAH FERGUSON [*turning away scornfully*]. Ah, quit, for dear sake. You're always talking, Jimmy Caesar!

JAMES CAESAR [*ashamedly*]. Ah, I'm always talking, Hannah, and never doing! 'Deed and you're right! When I think of the things he done to me, I go near distracted with shame for taking it as quiet as I have done. I go out sometimes, demented mad, swearing to have his life—and I come home again, afraid to lay a finger on him. He's big and powerful, and he can take a holt of me and do what he likes with me. I'm heartsoe at my weakness! That's the God's truth! You do well, Hannah, to be making little of me for a poor-natured man, but it's not for want of desire I don't do an injury to him. I haven't the strength—or the courage.

JOHN FERGUSON. What way is that to be talking, Jimmy Caesar? Would you sin your soul with a murder? Man, man, mind what you're saying and thinking! You're in God's grief already for the thoughts you have in your head. Them that has bad thoughts are no better in His eyes nor them that does bad deeds.

SARAH FERGUSON. Ah, sure, you can't help having thoughts, whatever kind of a mind you have!

JOHN FERGUSON. You can help brooding on them. What call has Jimmy to be wasting his mind on thinking bad about Henry Witherow? Your life isn't your own to do what you like with. It's God's life, and no one else's. And so is Henry Witherow's. If you take his life or any man's life, no matter why you do it, you're robbing God.

SARAH FERGUSON. Ah, for dear sake, quit talking about murders. You'll have me out of my mind with fear. Sure, no-

body wants to kill anybody these times, what with civilization and all them things.

HANNAH FERGUSON [*sneeringly*]. Och, Ma, don't disturb yourself! Sure, you know it's only talk!

JAMES CAESAR. Hannah!

HANNAH FERGUSON. What?

JAMES CAESAR. I wanted to have a talk with you, and I was wondering would you be coming down the town the night?

HANNAH FERGUSON [*decisively*]. I'm not.

SARAH FERGUSON. Ah, now, Hannah, you can just go down and get a few things from Jimmy's shop that I'm wanting. I was thinking of going myself, but sure you can just step that length and bring them back with you; and while you're on the way, Jimmy can say what he wants to say.

HANNAH FERGUSON [*sullenly*]. You don't need the things till the morning, Ma, and if you give Jimmy the order now, he can send them up the morrow.

JAMES CAESAR. Hannah, I want to speak to you particular. Will you not come out with me for a wee while?

HANNAH FERGUSON. I'm not in the way of going out again the night, thank you!

SARAH FERGUSON. Now, you've nothing to do, Hannah, and you can go along with him rightly.

HANNAH FERGUSON. I've plenty to do.

[HENRY WITHEROW *passes the window.*]

SARAH FERGUSON. Lord save us, there's Witherow.

[JAMES CAESAR *instinctively goes into the corner of the room farthest from the door.* HENRY WITHEROW, *a tall, heavy, coarse-looking man, with a thick, brutal jaw, comes into the kitchen. He has a look of great and ruthless strength, and all his movements are those of a man of decision and assurance. He does not ask if he may enter the kitchen and sit down; he assumes that he may do so.*]

HENRY WITHEROW [*sitting down*]. Well, how're you all the day?

SARAH FERGUSON [*nervously*]. We're rightly, thank God, Mr. Witherow!

HENRY WITHEROW. I'm glad to hear it. I was just passing, John, and I thought I'd drop in and hear how you were getting on.

JOHN FERGUSON. That was thoughtful of you, Henry.

HENRY WITHEROW. How're you,

Hannah! [*He looks closely at her.*] Boys, but you're getting to be a fine-looking girl, Hannah! [*He turns to MRS. FERGUSON*] You'll be having all the boys after her! Faith, I wouldn't mind going after her myself.

JAMES CAESAR [*pale with anger*]. Keep your talk to yourself, Henry Witherow!

HENRY WITHEROW [*contemptuously*] Ah, you're there, are you? You haven't a notion of him, have you, Hannah?

HANNAH FERGUSON. Your manners could be better, Mr. Witherow.

HENRY WITHEROW [*laughing*]. Could they, now? And who would improve them, eh? Mr. James Caesar, Esquire, mebbe?

JAMES CAESAR. We want no discourse with you, Henry Witherow. Your presence in this house is not welcome! . . .

HENRY WITHEROW. Oh, indeed! Have you bought the house? I've heard nothing about the sale, and I think I should have heard something about it. I hold the mortgage, you know . . .

JOHN FERGUSON. There's no need for bitter talk, Henry. Jimmy forgot himself.

HENRY WITHEROW. Ah, well, as long as he admits it and says he's sorry!

JAMES CAESAR. I'm not sorry.

HENRY WITHEROW. God help you, your tongue's the strongest part of you. [*To JOHN FERGUSON.*] Now that I'm here, John, perhaps we could discuss a wee matter of business. I don't suppose you want to talk about your affairs before all the neighbors, and so if Mr. James Caesar will attend to his shop . . .

SARAH FERGUSON [*to HANNAH*]. You can go down to the shop with him now, daughter, and leave your da and me to talk to Mr. Witherow. [*She speaks quietly to HANNAH.*] For God's sake, Hannah, have him if he asks you. Witherow'll not spare us, and mebbe Jimmy'll pay the mortgage.

HENRY WITHEROW [*to JOHN FERGUSON*]. I suppose you haven't had any word from Andrew yet?

JOHN FERGUSON. Not yet, Henry.

HENRY WITHEROW. H'm, that's bad! [*SAM MAWHINNEY, the postman, goes past the window and then past the door*]

SARAH FERGUSON. Lord bless us, there's Sam Mawhinney away past the door. [*She runs to the door.*] Hi, Sam, are you going past without giving us our letter?

SAM MAWHINNEY [*coming to the door*] What letter, Mrs. Ferguson?

SARAH FERGUSON [*anxiously*]. Haven't you one for us?

SAM MAWHINNEY I have not.

HANNAH FERGUSON. You haven't!

SARAH FERGUSON Oh, God save us, he hasn't written after all!

HANNAH FERGUSON. Isn't the American mail in yet, Sam?

SAM MAWHINNEY. It's in right enough I left a letter at Bramel's from their daughter over in Boston. Were you expecting one?

JOHN FERGUSON [*desolation in his voice*] Ay, Sam, we were thinking there might be one, but it doesn't matter. We'll not keep you from your work

SAM MAWHINNEY I hope you're not put out by it. It's a quare disappointment not to get a letter and you expecting it.

JOHN FERGUSON. Ay, Sam, it is.

SAM MAWHINNEY. Well, good evening to you!

JOHN FERGUSON. Good evening to you, Sam!

[*The postman quits the door. SARAH FERGUSON sits down in a chair near the dresser and begins to cry. HANNAH stands at the window looking out with hard, set eyes JIMMY CAESAR stands near her, twisting his cap awkwardly in his hands. JOHN FERGUSON lies back in his chair in silence. They are quiet for a few moments, during which HENRY WITHEROW glances about him, taking in the situation with satisfaction.*]

HENRY WITHEROW. I suppose that means you can't get the money to pay off the mortgage, John?

JOHN FERGUSON. I'm afeard so, Henry.

HENRY WITHEROW [*rising*]. Well, I'm sorry for you. I have a great respect for you, John, and I'd do more for you nor for any one, but money's very close at present, and I need every penny I can put my hands on. I'll have to stand by my bargain. I'm sorry for you all!

JAMES CAESAR. That's a lie, Henry Witherow, and you know well it is! You're sorry for John Ferguson when you would do anything to get him out of this If you were sorry for him, what did you call in your money for when you knew he couldn't pay it? You know rightly you've had your heart set on the farm these years past, and you're afeard of your life he'll mebbe pay the mortgage. . . .

HENRY WITHEROW [*going to him and shaking him roughly*] I've stood enough of your back-chat, Caesar, and I'll stand no more of it

JAMES CAESAR [*feebly*]. Let me go, will you?

HENRY WITHEROW. I'll let you go when I've done with you

HANNAH FERGUSON [*going to WITHEROW and striking him in the face*] Go out of this house, Henry Witherow. It's not yours yet, and till it is, there's the door to you!

HENRY WITHEROW [*throwing CAESAR from him so that he falls on the floor, where he lies moaning and shivering*]. Heth, Hannah, you're a fine woman! You are, in sang! It's a pity to waste you on a lad like that! [*He pushes CAESAR with his foot.*] You ought to marry a man, Hannah, and not an old Jenny-Jo! [*He turns to JOHN FERGUSON.*] John, I'll have to have a serious talk with you in a wee while, but it's no good stopping to have it now with all this disturbance. I'll go and see M'Conkey, the lawyer, first.

JOHN FERGUSON. Very well, Henry.

HENRY WITHEROW. I'm sorry for you, but I must look after myself.

JOHN FERGUSON. Ay, so you must. It's a hard thing to have to leave the home you're used to, but it can't be helped. I'm getting an old man, and I haven't much longer here. I'd like to end my days where they were begun, but . . .

HANNAH FERGUSON [*going to her father*]. Don't take on, Da! There'll mebbe be a way out of it all. [*To WITHEROW*] Mr. Witherow, will you not let the mortgage go on for a while longer? We've had a great deal of trouble lately, and my brother Andrew's not accustomed to the farm yet. If you were to give us more time, mebbe my uncle'll send the money later on . . .

HENRY WITHEROW. Ay, and mebbe he'll not. Your uncle Andrew's not over-anxious to part with anything as far as I can see. I'm sorry, Hannah, but I can't ruin myself to oblige other people.

JOHN FERGUSON. It was to be. You can foreclose, Henry.

SARAH FERGUSON. Andrew's a poor brother to you, John, to let you be brought to this bother and you sick and sore.

JOHN FERGUSON. Poor Andrew, he must be heart-scalded at not being able to send the money. He'd have sent it if he had had it by him. I know he would. I can picture him there, not writing because he

hasn't the heart to tell us he can't send the money.

[*CAESAR, who has risen from the floor, comes to JOHN FERGUSON and speaks almost hysterically*]

JAMES CAESAR. John, I know rightly that Witherow has set his heart on your farm. I know he has, and he's an old hypocrite if he says he's sorry for you! But I'll spite him yet, I will! I'm willing to pay off the mortgage for you if it costs me every penny I have . . .

SARAH FERGUSON [*rising and embracing him*]. Oh, God reward you, Jimmy!

JAMES CAESAR [*putting her aside*]. If Hannah'll listen to me . . .

HENRY WITHEROW. Ay, if Hannah'll listen to you! Huh! You'd make a bargain on your ma's coffin, Jimmy Caesar!

JAMES CAESAR [*weakly*]. I don't want nothing more to say to you, Henry Witherow. Anything that passes between you and me now will come through a solicitor.

HENRY WITHEROW. Ay, you're mighty fond of the law. You'll get your fill of it one of these days [*To HANNAH*]. Well, my bold girl, are you going to take the fine offer's been made for you here by Mr. James Caesar, Esquire? Because I'd like to know what the position is before I go. There's no good in me going to M'Conkey and incurring expense needlessly!

HANNAH FERGUSON. I bid you go before, Mr. Witherow. Will you have me bid you go again?

HENRY WITHEROW. Ah, now, quit talking!

HANNAH FERGUSON. It's well for you my da's sick, and there's no man in the house to chastise you the way you deserve. I can't put you out myself, so you must stay if you won't go.

HENRY WITHEROW [*disconcerted, and beginning to bluster*]. Oh, come now, Hannah, there's no need to go on like that.

HANNAH FERGUSON [*resuming her seat on the sofa*]. I've said all I've got to say, Mr. Witherow. A decent man wouldn't be standing there after what I've said to you.

[*The sound of a tin whistle is heard outside.*]

JAMES CAESAR. Mebbe you'll go now, Witherow!

HENRY WITHEROW. If I go, it'll not be because you ask me! [*To HANNAH*]. You've a sharp tongue in your head, Hannah! I'd like to cut a bit of it off for you! [*To JOHN FERGUSON*]. Well, John, you'll mebbe let me know later on what

course you'll take about the mortgage I'll be up at the mill the rest of the day Good morning to you all! [He goes out]

JAMES CAESAR Hell to him!

[The whistling which has persisted all this time stops suddenly, and HENRY WITHEROW is heard outside shouting, "Get out of my road, damn you!" and then CLUTIE JOHN MAGRATH, the half-wit, is heard crying, "Ah, don't strike me, MR. WITHEROW."]

SARAH FERGUSON [going to the door]. Ah, dear save us, he's coup'd Clutie John into the hedge!

JAMES CAESAR That's all he can do—strike weak lads like myself, and beat poor fellows that's away in the mind like Clutie John!

SARAH FERGUSON [returning to the kitchen]. Ah, well, he's not much hut anyway!

[Her eyes are still wet with tears, and she wipes them as she sits down The tin whistle is heard again, and continues to be heard until CLUTIE JOHN appears at the door.]

JAMES CAESAR [to JOHN FERGUSON]. You heard what I said, John?

JOHN FERGUSON [picking up his Bible and preparing to read it again] Ay, Jimmy, I heard you You have a heart of corn! [He reads] "For his anger endureth not for a moment; in his favour is life. weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the mornng." [To his wife, who still weeps silently] What are you crying for, Sarah? Do you not hear this from God's Word? "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning" That's a promise, isn't it? Dry your eyes, woman! God's got everything planned, and He knows what's best to be done. Don't be affronting Him with tears!

JAMES CAESAR [touching him]. John, did you not hear me? I was saying I would pay the mortgage if Hannah would only listen to me . . .

JOHN FERGUSON. Ay, Jimmy, I heard you right enough, and I'm thankful to you. It's kind and neighborly of you, but Hannah has to decide them things for herself with the help of God, not with mine. There's no good in a man and a woman marrying if they have no kindly feeling for each other. I would rather Henry Witherow foreclosed nor let Hannah do anything she didn't want to do

HANNAH FERGUSON. Da!

[She kneels beside him.]

JOHN FERGUSON [drawing her close to him]. Ay, daughter?

HANNAH FERGUSON [struggling to speak] Da, I . . . I . . .

JAMES CAESAR [eagerly]. I wouldn't make a hard bargain with you, John! Do you hear me, Hannah? Your da and ma could live on the place where he was born

SARAH FERGUSON. God'll reward you, Jimmy!

[HANNAH FERGUSON gets up from her place by her father's side. She looks at the old man for a few moments He takes her hand and presses it warmly, and then smiles at her]

JOHN FERGUSON. Whatever you think will be right, Hannah!

HANNAH FERGUSON. Ay, Da. [To JAMES CAESAR] I thank you for your offer, Jimmy! I'll . . . I'll have you!

JOHN FERGUSON [hoarsely]. Hannah?

HANNAH FERGUSON. I'll have him, Da!

SARAH FERGUSON [embracing her]. Oh, thank God, Hannah, thank God!

JAMES CAESAR [uncertainly] I can't tell you all I feel, Hannah, but I'll be a good man to you.

JOHN FERGUSON. May God bless the two of you!

[The sound of the tin whistle grows louder. CLUTIE JOHN MAGRATH appears at the door. He is a half-wit and his age is about thirty.]

CLUTIE JOHN. I see you're all there! SARAH FERGUSON. Och, away on with you, Clutie! We don't want you here with your whistle!

CLUTIE JOHN [entering the kitchen]. Ah, now, Mrs. Ferguson, what harm does my whistle do to you? [To JAMES CAESAR.] Good evening to you, Mr. Caesar!

JAMES CAESAR [sharply]. I have nothing for you!

CLUTIE JOHN. That's a quare pity, Mr. Caesar! I was thinking to myself as I was coming along, "Clutie John, if you were to meet Mr. Caesar now, he'd mebbe give you the lend of a halfpenny!"

JAMES CAESAR. Well, you were thinking wrong, then, and you can just march on out of this as quick as you like There's no money here for you.

CLUTIE JOHN. Ah, well, the Lord will send relief, though you won't be the honored instrument Sure, I'll just play a tune to you for the pleasure of the thing. [He puts the whistle to his lips, and then takes it away again.] You didn't kill Mr With-erow yet, Mr. Caesar?

JAMES CAESAR [*furiously*]. Go 'long to hell out of this, will you?

[*He is about to strike CLUTIE JOHN, but MRS FERGUSON prevents him from doing so*]

SARAH FERGUSON Ah, don't hurt the poor soul, Jimmy! Sure, you know rightly he's astray in the mind.

CLUTIE JOHN. Ay, that's true, Mrs. Ferguson! That's true enough. I'm away in the head, and I ought to be locked up in the asylum! And I would be if I was worse nor I am! It's a quare pity of a man that's not distracted enough to be put in the madhouse and not wise enough to be let do what the rest of you do. It's a hard thing now that a man as harmless as myself can't be let play his whistle in peace

JAMES CAESAR. Why don't you do some work?

CLUTIE JOHN. Sure, didn't I tell you I'm astray in the mind!

JAMES CAESAR. It's a nice thing when a big lump of a man like yourself goes tramping about the country playing tunes on an old whistle instead of turning your hand to something usefule. You can work well enough if you like.

CLUTIE JOHN [*regarding his whistle affectionately*]. I would rather be whistling. There's plenty can work, but few can whistle.

HANNAH FERGUSON. What do you want, Clutie?

CLUTIE JOHN I want many's a thing that I'll never get Did you ever hear me whistling "Willie Reilly and His Colleen Bawn"? That's a grand tune, for all it's a Catholic tune!

JAMES CAESAR. We heard it many's a time, and we don't want to hear it again. Quit out of the place!

JOHN FERGUSON. Come here, Clutie! [*CLUTIE JOHN goes to him*] Did you want anything to eat?

CLUTIE JOHN. I always want something to eat.

JOHN FERGUSON Hannah, give him a sup of sweet milk and a piece of soda bread. Poor lad, his belly is empty many's a time.

[*HANNAH goes to get the bread and milk for CLUTIE.*]

JAMES CAESAR. It's a nice thing for her to be attending on the like of him.

JOHN FERGUSON. Why shouldn't she serve him? We're all children of the one Father, and we're serving Him when we're serving each other

CLUTIE JOHN Will I whistle a tune to you, Mr Ferguson?

[*He does not wait for permission, but begins to play "Willie Reilly and His Colleen Bawn"*]

SARAH FERGUSON. Ah, quit it, will you? You'll have me deafened with your noise!

CLUTIE JOHN Do you not like my whistle, Mrs Ferguson? It's grand music. You should see the wee childher running after me when I play it. "Play us a tune, Clutie John!" they shout when I go by, and sure I just play one to them They're quare and fond of my whistle It's only people with bitter minds that doesn't like to hear it. [*HANNAH brings the bread and milk to him, and he puts down his whistle in order to take them from her*] Ah, God love you, Hannah, for your kind heart!

HANNAH FERGUSON Did Henry Witherow hurt you, Clutie, when he couped you in the hedge?

CLUTIE JOHN He did, in sang! He couped me head over heels, and me doing nothing at a l to him That's a bitter man, Hannah, that would take the bite out of your mouth if it would bring a happorth of profit to him He never was known to give anything to anybody, that man! It's a poor and hungry house he has I was there one day, when he was at his dinner, and he never as much as asked me had I a mouth on me at all.

JAMES CAESAR. Ay, you're right there! You are, indeed! There's no charity or loving-kindness about him.

CLUTIE JOHN Well, he's not the only one in the world that's like that!

JAMES CAESAR There's people says he sold his soul to the devil.

CLUTIE JOHN. Ah, why would the devil be buying souls when he can get millions of them for nothing? [*To JOHN FERGUSON*] Did your brother Andrew send the money to pay off the mortgage, Mr. Ferguson?

JAMES CAESAR. What do you know about his brother Andrew?

CLUTIE JOHN I know many's a thing! I can tell you where a kingfisher has his nest this minute I saw a golden eagle once! It was in the West I saw it when I was whistling in Connacht. It was a great big bird with a beak on it that would tear the life out of you if it was that way inclined. [*He finishes the milk.*] This is the grand sweet milk! And the fine new bread, too! Isn't it grand now to have plenty of that? Will you not let me play a tune to

you to reward you? Sure, I'll not ask you to give me the lend of a halfpenny for it, though you can if you like! I'll do it just for the pleasure of it.

JOHN FERGUSON. No, Clutie, we can't have you playing your whistle here the night. You must go home now. We have something important to talk about

SARAH FERGUSON. Go on, Clutie John! Away home with you now! We've had enough of your chat for one night. You can finish with your bread in the loanie.

JAMES CAESAR. I'm going now, Hannah. Will you walk a piece of the road with me? I've not had you a minute to myself yet with all these interruptions!

HANNAH FERGUSON [*submissively*]. Very well, Jimmy.

CLUTIE JOHN [*astonished*]. Are you going to marry him, Hannah?

HANNAH FERGUSON. Ay, Clutie.

CLUTIE JOHN [*incredulously*]. Ah, you're coddling!

JAMES CAESAR. Come on, Hannah, and not be wasting your time talking to him. [*He goes to the door*] Here's Andrew coming across the fields. We'd better wait and tell him.

CLUTIE JOHN. It'll be a great surprise for him.

SARAH FERGUSON. Ay, and great joy to him when he knows we'll not have to quit the farm aft. all.

[*ANDREW FERGUSON enters. He is a slight, delicate-looking lad of nineteen, nearer in looks to his father than his mother. He is very tired after his work in the fields, and he carelessly throws down the bridle he is carrying into a corner of the kitchen as if he were too fatigued to put it in its proper place*]

ANDREW FERGUSON. Good evening to you, Jimmy!

JAMES CAESAR. Good evening, Andrew! You're looking tired on it!

ANDREW FERGUSON [*sitting down heavily*]. I am tired. How're you, Da?

JOHN FERGUSON. I'm rightly, son!

ANDREW FERGUSON. Ma, can I have a drop of sweet milk to drink? I'm nearly dead with the drouth.

[*MRS. FERGUSON goes to crock to get the milk for him*]

JAMES CAESAR. Andrew, I've great news for you. Me and your sister's going to be married on it.

ANDREW FERGUSON [*starting up*]. You're what? [*His mother puts a cup of milk into his hands.*] Thank you, Ma!

JAMES CAESAR. Ay, we're going to be married, Andrew. Hannah's just settled it

SARAH FERGUSON. And we'll not have to quit out of the farm after all, Andrew! Jimmy says he'll pay the mortgage off!

ANDREW FERGUSON [*vaguely*]. But I thought! . . . [*He turns to HANNAH*] HANNAH FERGUSON [*quickly*]. It's kind of Jimmy, isn't it, Andrew?

ANDREW FERGUSON [*after a pause*]. Ay . . . it's kind!

JAMES CAESAR. We just stopped to tell the news to you, Andrew, to hearten you up after your day's work, and now Hannah and me's going for a bit of a dandher together. We haven't had a chance of a word by ourselves yet, and you know the way a couple likes to be by their lone, don't you? Are you ready, Hannah?

HANNAH FERGUSON. Ay.

JAMES CAESAR. Well, come on! Good night to you all!

ALL. Good night, Jimmy!

CLUTIE JOHN. God reward you, Mr. Caesar.

JAMES CAESAR [*contemptuously*]. Och, you!

[*He goes out. HANNAH follows him to the door.*]

HANNAH FERGUSON. I won't be long before I'm back. [*She goes out.*]

ANDREW FERGUSON. Da, is it true about Hannah and Jimmy?

JOHN FERGUSON. Ay, son, it's true. You saw them going out together

ANDREW FERGUSON. But . . . did she do it of her own free will?

JOHN FERGUSON. Would I force her to it, Andrew?

ANDREW FERGUSON. No . . . only . . . I suppose my uncle Andrew didn't write, then?

JOHN FERGUSON. No.

ANDREW FERGUSON. I wonder what made her . . . It's a quare set-out, this!

CLUTIE JOHN. Did you never hear the story of the girl that killed herself over the head of love? It's a quare sad story.

SARAH FERGUSON. Ah, wheesht with you, Clutie! Didn't I tell you before to quit out of this?

CLUTIE JOHN [*coaxingly*]. Let me stay a wee while longer here by the fire, Mrs. Ferguson. I'll not be disturbing you.

SARAH FERGUSON. Well, close the door, then, and don't be talking so much! [*CLUTIE JOHN does as she bids him.*] Go up there now by the fire, and content yourself.

[CLUTIE sits down in a corner of the fireplace. MRS. FERGUSON seats herself on the sofa.]

ANDREW FERGUSON. I saw Witherow going down the loanie. I suppose he was in here about the mortgage?

JOHN FERGUSON. Ay, he was. He knows about Hannah and Jimmy.

SARAH FERGUSON. There was a row between Witherow and Jimmy, and they had a bit of a scuffle. Witherow caught a holt of Jimmy and knocked him down, and then Hannah went forward and struck Witherow flat in the face. You could have knocked me down with a feather when she did it.

ANDREW FERGUSON. That was a queer thing for her to do. Mebbe she's changed her mind about him. She could hardly find a word hard enough for him one time. I suppose it's all right. It's a load off my mind anyway to hear that the farm's safe, though God knows I'm a poor hand at working it.

JOHN FERGUSON. You'll get into the way of it in a wee while, son, and mebbe I'll be able to give you more help, now my mind's at ease. It's hard on you that was reared for the ministry to have to turn your hand to farming and you not used to it!

ANDREW FERGUSON. I daresay it'll do me some sort of good.

CLUTIE JOHN. Listen! The girl I was telling you about, the one that killed herself, it was because her boy fell out with her. That was the cause of it! She cried her eyes out to him, but it made no differs, and so she threw herself off a hill and was killed dead.

ANDREW FERGUSON. Wheesht, Clutie!

SARAH FERGUSON. Dear only knows where you get all them stories from that you're always telling, Clutie!

CLUTIE JOHN. I hear them in my travels.

SARAH FERGUSON. Do you never hear no comic ones?

CLUTIE JOHN. Ah, I can't mind the comic ones. I just mind the sad ones. Them's the easiest to mind. They say the man was sorry afterwards when he heard tell she'd killed herself, but sure it was no use being sorry then. He should have been sorry before. It was a great leap she took.

ANDREW FERGUSON. What's Jimmy going to do about the mortgage? Is he going to take it on himself or what?

JOHN FERGUSON. I suppose so. We haven't settled anything. He said I could

stay on here, your ma and me, with you to manage the farm.

SARAH FERGUSON. It's brave and kind of him to do the like.

ANDREW FERGUSON. I don't see where the kindness comes in if he gets Hannah to marry him over it! I hope to God she's not doing it just to save the farm.

JOHN FERGUSON. It was her own choice, Andrew, son. I said to her I would rather go into the Poorhouse nor have her do anything against her will. I'm not saying I'm not glad she's consented to have Jimmy, for that would be a lie. I am glad . . .

ANDREW FERGUSON. Because the farm's safe, Da?

JOHN FERGUSON. Ay, Andrew! [They are silent for a few moments.] What are you thinking, son? Are you thinking I'm letting her marry Jimmy against her will just to save the farm? Is that what you're thinking?

ANDREW FERGUSON [evasively]. I don't know what to think, Da.

JOHN FERGUSON. I left her to her own choice. Didn't I, Sarah?

SARAH FERGUSON. Ay, John, you did, and sure what does it matter anyway? She's a young slip of a girl with wayward fancies in her head, mebbe, but Jimmy's as good and substantial a man as she's like to get, and he'll be a good husband to her. It's a great thing for a girl to get a comfortable home to go to when she leaves the one she was reared in. There's plenty of young women does be running after this and running after that, but sure there's nothing in the end to beat a kind man and a good home where the money is easy and regular.

ANDREW FERGUSON. It's easy to be saying that, Ma, when you're past your desires.

SARAH FERGUSON. I got my desire, Andrew, when I got your da. I never desired no one else but him.

ANDREW FERGUSON. Would you like to have married Jimmy Caesar if he'd been your match when you were Hannah's age?

SARAH FERGUSON. There was never no question of me marrying any one but your da . . .

ANDREW FERGUSON. But if there had—if your da's farm had been mortgaged like this one? . . .

SARAH FERGUSON. Ah, what's the good of if-ing and supposing? There's a deal too much of that goes on in this

house. And, anyway, we can't let your da be turned out of his home.

ANDREW FERGUSON Then that is the reason! Hannah's marrying Jimmy Caesar for our sakes, not for her own!

JOHN FERGUSON No, no, Andrew, son, that's not it. I tell you she took him of her own free will. I wouldn't put no compulsion on her . . .

ANDREW FERGUSON No, Da, I know you wouldn't; but are you sure you're not ready to believe she's taking him of her own free will just because she says she is?

SARAH FERGUSON Sure, what else can he do?

JOHN FERGUSON. God knows, Andrew, it'll hurt me sore to leave this house, but I'd go gladly out of it sooner nor cause Hannah a moment's unhappiness. I'm trying hard to do what's right I don't think I'm acting hypocritically, and I'm not deceiving myself . . .

[The door opens suddenly, and HANNAH enters in a state of agitation. She closes the door behind her, and then stands with her face to it. She begins to sob without restraint.]

JOHN FERGUSON *[rising from his chair]* What is it, daughter?

ANDREW FERGUSON *[going to her]*. Hannah!

SARAH FERGUSON. Don't bother her! *[Going to her and drawing her into her arms.]* There, Hannah, dear, don't disturb yourself, daughter. *[To the others]* She's overwrought with the excitement. That's what it is. *[To HANNAH]* Come and sit down, dear!

[She draws HANNAH towards the sofa, where they both sit down HANNAH buries her face in her mother's shoulder and sobs bitterly.]

SARAH FERGUSON. Control yourself, daughter! You're all right now. No one'll harm you here!

JOHN FERGUSON. Are you not well, Hannah?

ANDREW FERGUSON *[coming close to his mother and sister]*. Hannah, do you not want to marry Jimmy Caesar?

SARAH FERGUSON Ah, wheesht with you, Andrew, and not be putting notions into her head! It's just overwrought she is. You know well she's been as anxious about the farm as any of us, and about your da, too, and she bore the bother well, but now that it's all settled, she's had to give way. Sure, that's natural! There, daughter, dear, just cry away till you're better.

[She soothes HANNAH as she speaks to her.]

JOHN FERGUSON *[shaking the rug from his legs and going unsteadily to his wife and daughter]*. Hannah! *[HANNAH, still sobbing, does not reply]* Hannah, daughter, do you hear me?

HANNAH FERGUSON *[without raising her head]*. Ay, Da

JOHN FERGUSON Listen to me a while! *[He tries to raise her face to his]* Look up at me, daughter! *[She turns towards him]* Don't cry, Hannah! I can't bear to see you crying, dear! *[He makes her stand up and then he clasps her to him]* Listen to me, Hannah! I've never deceived you nor been unjust to you, have I, daughter?

HANNAH FERGUSON No, Da

JOHN FERGUSON. And you know I'd beg my bread from door to door sooner nor hurt you, don't you? Isn't that true?

HANNAH FERGUSON Ay, Da, it is.

JOHN FERGUSON Well, don't be afraid to say what's in your mind, then! What is it that's upsetting you?

HANNAH FERGUSON *[putting her arms about his neck, and drawing herself closer to him]*. Oh, Da, I can't . . . I can't!

SARAH FERGUSON. You can't what?

JOHN FERGUSON Do you not want to marry Jimmy?

HANNAH FERGUSON *[sobbing anew]*. I can't thole him, Da! . . .

JOHN FERGUSON Very well, daughter! That'll be all right! Don't annoy yourself no more about him, dear. It'll be all right.

HANNAH FERGUSON I tried hard to want him, Da, but I couldn't, and when he bid me good night and tried to kiss me out in the loanie, I near died! . . .

JOHN FERGUSON I know, daughter.

SARAH FERGUSON *[starting up in fear and anger]*. But you promised him, Hannah! John, you're never going to let her break her word to the man? . . .

JOHN FERGUSON Wheesht, woman!

SARAH FERGUSON *[to her son]*. Andrew! *[She sees that ANDREW'S sympathies are with HANNAH]* Hannah think shame of yourself!

HANNAH FERGUSON. I can't take him, Ma. I can't!

SARAH FERGUSON Do you want to see your da turned out of the home he was born in, and him o'd and sick and not able to help himself?

JOHN FERGUSON *[angrily]*. Quit it woman, when I tell you!

SARAH FERGUSON. What's wrong with the man that she won't take him? There isn't a decenter, quieter fellow in the place, and him never took drink nor played devil's cards in his life. There's plenty of girls would give the two eyes out of their head to have the chance of him Martha M'Clurg and Ann Close and Maggie M'Conkey, the whole lot of them, would jump with joy if he was to give a word to them [*she turns on HANNAH*], and what call have you to be setting yourself up when a decent, quiet man offers for you, and you knowing all that depends on it?

ANDREW FERGUSON. Ma, that's no way to talk to her!

SARAH FERGUSON. I'll say what I want to say.

ANDREW FERGUSON. You'll say no more. If I hear you speaking another word to her like that, I'll walk out of the door and never come back again.

SARAH FERGUSON [*sitting down and weeping helplessly*]. Oh, you're all agam' me, your da and Hannah and you! I'll have to quit the house I was brought to when I was a young girl, and mebbe live in a wee house in the town or go into the Union!

JOHN FERGUSON [*putting HANNAH into his chair*]. Sit down, daughter, and quieten yourself. [*To his wife*]. If we have to go into the Poorhouse, Sarah, we'll have to go. [*To his son*]. Put on your top-coat, Andrew, and go up to Witherow's and tell him he can take the farm . . .

HANNAH FERGUSON [*recovering herself slightly*]. No, Da, no. I'm all right again. I'll marry Jimmy! I'm ashamed of the way I went on just now. My ma was right. It was just the upset that made me like it.

SARAH FERGUSON. Ay, daughter, that was it.

JOHN FERGUSON. Wheesht, Sarah. Go on, Andrew.

ANDREW FERGUSON. All right, Da.

SARAH FERGUSON [*angrily*]. Let her go herself and finish her work! The lad's wore out with tiredness . . .

ANDREW FERGUSON. I'm not that tired, Ma.

HANNAH FERGUSON [*firmly*]. I'll go, Andrew. It'll quieten me down to have the walk. [*To her father*]. Jimmy doesn't know yet, Da. I didn't tell him, and he's coming up here the night after he shuts his shop. Mebbe you'll tell him before I come back?

JOHN FERGUSON. All right, daughter,

I will. [*To ANDREW*]. Hannah'll go, Andrew. She doesn't want to be here when Jimmy comes. [*To HANNAH*]. Put a shawl over your head, daughter, and wrap yourself well from the night air.

HANNAH FERGUSON. Ay, Da!

[*She goes upstairs to make herself ready to go out. CLUTIE JOHN makes a faint sound on his whistle*].

JOHN FERGUSON. Ah, are you still there, Clutie John? I'd near forgot about you.

CLUTIE JOHN. Will I play "Willie Reilly and His Colleen Bawn" to you?

JOHN FERGUSON. No, boy, not the night. Just keep quiet there in the heat of the fire.

CLUTIE JOHN. It's a brave warm fire. It's well to be them that has a good fire whenever they want it.

[*HANNAH, wearing a shawl over her head, comes downstairs and goes across the kitchen to the door*].

JOHN FERGUSON. You'll not be long, Hannah?

HANNAH FERGUSON. No, Da.

[*She opens the door and goes out, closing it behind her*].

JOHN FERGUSON. I wonder will Witherow let the farm to some one else or will he till it himself?

ANDREW FERGUSON. He'll mebbe till it himself.

SARAH FERGUSON. I'd better be laying the supper for you all. Is Clutie John to have his here?

JOHN FERGUSON. Ay, let him have a bite to eat. We'll mebbe not be able to . . . [*He breaks off suddenly and turns to his son*]. Light the lamp, Andrew, and draw the blinds.

[*He seats himself again in his chair*].

ANDREW FERGUSON. Draw the blinds, Clutie.

[*He lights the lamp while CLUTIE draws the blinds and MRS. FERGUSON lays the table for supper*].

ANDREW FERGUSON. I wonder what time Jimmy'll come.

JOHN FERGUSON. I hope he'll come soon so that he won't be here when Hannah comes back.

ANDREW FERGUSON. Ay. Will I set the lamp near your elbow, Da?

JOHN FERGUSON. Ay, son, and reach the Bible to me, if you please. [*ANDREW hands the Bible to him*]. Thank you, son.

ACT II

It is more than an hour later, and it is quite dark outside. JOHN FERGUSON and his wife and son are sitting at the table, eating their supper. CLUTIE JOHN MCGRATH is still seated in the corner of the fireplace. He has laid his whistle aside and is engaged in eating the supper given to him by MRS. FERGUSON.

SARAH FERGUSON. Hannah's gey and long in getting back from Witherow's.

JOHN FERGUSON. Ay.

SARAH FERGUSON. I wonder did she change her mind about Jimmy and go to the shop instead of going to Witherow's. It's quare him not coming before this!

ANDREW FERGUSON. Ah, I don't think she'd do that. Hannah's not the sort to change sudden.

SARAH FERGUSON. Well, she changed sudden enough the night!

ANDREW FERGUSON. Ah, that was because she was doing something she didn't want to do.

SARAH FERGUSON. Well, if she hasn't changed her mind, and Jimmy comes now, we'll have to give him his supper, and then Hannah'll mebbe be here before he goes away again. It'll be quare and awkward for us all.

ANDREW FERGUSON. Well, sure, you can tell him when he comes, and then he'll not be wanting to stop to his supper.

SARAH FERGUSON. Och, we'd have to offer the man something to eat anyway! It's only neighborly to do that much. [*She turns to CLUTIE JOHN.*] Will you have some more tea, Clutie?

CLUTIE JOHN. Ay, if you please, Mrs. Ferguson. It's quare nice tea I don't often get the like of that any place I go.

ANDREW FERGUSON. It's a quare thing to me the way Jimmy runs after Hannah and her showing him plain enough that she never had any regard for him.

CLUTIE JOHN. 'Deed, Andrew, there's many a thing in the world is quarer nor that. It's a quare thing now for a man to be blowing wind into a bit of a pipe and it to be making tunes for him That's quare if you like!

SARAH FERGUSON. Ah, you're daft about that old whistle of yours! [*She hands a cup of tea to him.*] Here, drink up that, and don't talk so much! I suppose I'll have to let you sleep in the loft the night?

CLUTIE JOHN. Sure, that'll be a grand bed for me, lying on the hay.

SARAH FERGUSON. I do believe you're not such a fool as you make out. Clutie! You've the fine knack of getting into people's houses and making them give you your meals and a bed without them meaning to do it!

CLUTIE JOHN. I don't try to make them do it, Mrs. Ferguson. I just come in the house and sit down. That's all I do.

SARAH FERGUSON. Ay, that's all you do. If you did any more, they'd mebbe have to keep you for the rest of your life! Once you're settled down, it's hard to persuade you to get up again.

CLUTIE JOHN. You're letting on you're vexed with me, Mrs. Ferguson, but sure I know rightly you're not. A woman that has as kind a heart as you have . . .

SARAH FERGUSON. Ah, wheesht with your talk! Will I cut another piece for you?

CLUTIE JOHN. Ay, if you please!

[*She cuts a piece of bread and gives it to him.*]

ANDREW FERGUSON. I wonder, Da, would you be willing to go up to Belfast to live? I think I could mebbe get a place in a linen office there, and I daresay Hannah might get work in a wareroom or a shop. Between the two of us, we could keep my ma and you rightly.

JOHN FERGUSON. I'd be as willing to go there as anywhere, son, if I have to quit out of this.

ANDREW FERGUSON. When I was thinking of going into the ministry, I got acquainted with a young fellow named M'Kinstry that was very well connected. His da kept a linen mill in Belfast, and I daresay he'd be willing to put a word in for me if I was to ask him.

JOHN FERGUSON. Ay.

ANDREW FERGUSON. I think I'll go up to Belfast on Saturday and see young M'Kinstry. I'll write a letter to him the night to tell him I'm coming, and I'll just let him know the position of things so that he can tell his da about me.

SARAH FERGUSON [*to ANDREW*]. Will I pour you out a wee drop more tea, son?

ANDREW FERGUSON. Thank you, Ma.

[*She takes his cup and fills it, and then passes it back to him.*]

JOHN FERGUSON. Who knows but my health will be better in Belfast nor it has been here? I'm not sure, when I think of it, but the mists that lie on the hills at

night are bad for me. They say there's a fine air in Belfast blowing up the Lough from the sea.

[*There is a knock at the door*]

SARAH FERGUSON There's some one at the door now It'll either be Hannah or Jimmy. Clutie John, away and open it, will you?

[*CLUTIE JOHN goes to the door and opens it. JAMES CAESAR steps in. The assured manner which he assumed when HANNAH accepted him has become more pronounced*]

JAMES CAESAR I'm later nor I expected to be. [*He turns to CLUTIE.*] Here, Clutie, help me off with my coat, will you? [*CLUTIE JOHN helps him to take off his overcoat*] It's turned a bit cold the night! [*To CLUTIE*] Hang it up there on the rack, Clutie. [*CLUTIE does as he is bid, and then goes to his seat by the fire.*] I thought it would be as well to wear my top-coat, for you get quare and damp coming up the loanie in the mist! [*He goes to the fire and rubs his hands in the warmth.*] Where's Hannah?

SARAH FERGUSON She's out, Jimmy!

JAMES CAESAR. Out, is she? It's very late for her to be out! She'll have to keep better hours nor this when she's married, eh? [*His attempt to be jovial falls heavy.*] Has she not had her supper yet?

SARAH FERGUSON. No, not yet. We're expecting her in every while.

JAMES CAESAR. I hope she'll not be long. I want to discuss the wedding with her.

SARAH FERGUSON The wedding!

JAMES CAESAR. Ay, Sure, there's no sense in our waiting long, is there? If people's able to get married, they ought to get the ceremony over quick. That's what I think, Mrs. Ferguson. Och, listen to me calling you Mrs. Ferguson, just like a stranger! I ought to start calling you "Ma" to get into the way of it, or would you rather I called you "Mother"?

SARAH FERGUSON [*nervously*]. I'm not particular, Jimmy.

JAMES CAESAR. Some people's quare and particular about a thing like that. They think it's common to say "Ma" and "Da," and they never let their children call them anything but "Father" and "Mother." I knew a family once up in Belfast that always called their parents "Papa" and "Mamma" It was quare and conceited of them—just as if they were English or anything like that.

JOHN FERGUSON. Jimmy, I want to say something to you!

JAMES CAESAR. Ay, John! [*Jovially*] I can't start calling you "Da" or "Papa" or anything else but John, can I? [*To MRS. FERGUSON.*] Do you know I'm near dead of the drouth! If you could spare me a wee drop of tea! . . .

SARAH FERGUSON [*rising and speaking hurriedly*]. Of course, Jimmy, I will. I don't know what I'm thinking about not to ask you to sit down to your supper. [*She goes to the dresser for a cup and saucer*] Draw a chair up to the table, will you, and sit down!

JAMES CAESAR. Ah, now, I don't want to be putting you to any inconvenience.

SARAH FERGUSON. Sure, it's no bother at all. Just come and content yourself. I'm all thorough with the ups and downs we've had this day, and my manners is all shattered over the head of it. Sit down here.

JAMES CAESAR [*taking his place at the table*]. Thank you, Ma.

SARAH FERGUSON Will you have soda-bread or wheaten?

JAMES CAESAR. Wheaten, if you please!

[*ANDREW FERGUSON rises from the table and goes to the side of the fire opposite to that on which CLUTIE JOHN is seated*]

SARAH FERGUSON. Help yourself to anything you want

JAMES CAESAR. Thank you! [*He bows his head.*] Thank God for this meal, Amen! [*To JOHN FERGUSON.*] I've been making plans in my head, John, about the future of the farm.

JOHN FERGUSON. Jimmy, I want to say something to you! . . .

JAMES CAESAR [*slightly impatient*]. Ay, but wait till I tell you about my plans! Now, how would it be if you were to let the land by itself, and you and the rest of you stay on in the house? Me and Hannah'll be getting married in a wee while, and there'll only be the three of you left . . .

JOHN FERGUSON. Jimmy! . . .

JAMES CAESAR. Now, let me get it all out before I forget any of it. Andrew could mebbe resume his studies for the ministry. I might be able to advance him the money for it.

ANDREW FERGUSON. That's a kindly thought, Jimmy!

JAMES CAESAR. Ah, I've often thought I would like to be related to a minister. It looks well to be able to say the Reverend Mr. So-and-So is your

brother-in-law, particular if he's a well-known man such as you might be yourself, Andrew. Or I was thinking if you didn't fancy the ministry any more, mebbe you'd come into the shop and learn the grocery! The fact is, betwixt ourselves, I'm thinking seriously of opening a branch establishment over at Ballymaclurg, and if I had you trained under me, Andrew, you'd do rightly as the manager of it.

JOHN FERGUSON Jimmy, I'll never be able to thank you sufficient for your kindness . . .

JAMES CAESAR Ah, don't mention it! Sure, it's a pleasure, and anyway it's in the family, you might say! I wonder what's keeping Hannah! Where is she at all?

JOHN FERGUSON. Jimmy . . . Hannah's changed her mind!

JAMES CAESAR Changed her mind! What do you mean?

JOHN FERGUSON. She's changed her mind, Jimmy!

JAMES CAESAR [*getting up and going to him: the assured manner has dropped from him*]. Do you mean she doesn't want to marry me no more?

JOHN FERGUSON. Ay, that's what I mean

JAMES CAESAR. But! . . . Ah, quit your coddling, for dear sake! [*He goes back to his seat and begins to eat again.*] You've been letting Clutie John put you up to this—trying to scare me I wouldn't wonder but Hannah's upstairs all the while, splitting her sides . . . [*He gets up and goes to the foot of the staircase and calls up it*] Hi, Hannah, are you there?

CLUTIE JOHN I never put them up to anything, Mr Caesar. It's not my nature to do a thing like that.

JAMES CAESAR [*calling up the stairs*]. Come on down out of that, Hannah, and not be tormenting me!

JOHN FERGUSON. She's not there, Jimmy.

JAMES CAESAR [*coming back to the table*]. Are you in earnest, John?

JOHN FERGUSON. I am, Jimmy. I'm square and sorry for you . . .

JAMES CAESAR. But she gave her promise to me an hour ago! you heard her yourself!

JOHN FERGUSON I know, but she's changed her mind since.

JAMES CAESAR. What's come over her?

JOHN FERGUSON. I can't tell you, Jimmy. She just didn't feel that she could

go on with the match. It's a thing that you can't explain, Jimmy.

JAMES CAESAR. But . . . the farm . . . and the mortgage!

JOHN FERGUSON. When I saw the way her mind was set, I told her to go up to Witherow's and tell him to foreclose!

JAMES CAESAR. But, man alive!

JOHN FERGUSON That's the way of it, Jimmy I'm heartsore about it, but it can't be helped, can it?

JAMES CAESAR [*angrily*]. Do you mean to sit there and tell me you're going to let her treat me like dirt beneath her feet after the way I've offered to help you?

JOHN FERGUSON. I can't force her to do things against her will, Jimmy No good would come of the like of that either to her or to you.

JAMES CAESAR I suppose you never thought of my position, John Ferguson? I've told all my neighbors already that Hannah and me are to be married, and now I'll have to tell them that she won't have me!

ANDREW FERGUSON My da can't help it, can he, if Hannah doesn't want to marry you?

JAMES CAESAR What'll Witherow say when he hears about it? My God, he'll be the first to know! [*He becomes wild with rage as this idea expands in his mind*] Had you no consideration at all, the whole pack of you? I was willing to cripple myself to get you out of your difficulty, and then you turn on me and affront me before the man I hate most in the world! That's kindness for you! That's the reward a man gets for being neighborly!

JOHN FERGUSON. Ay, you may well complain, Jimmy! I'm not denying your right to do so I'd have spared you from this if I could

JAMES CAESAR. Can't you make her keep her promise to me? A man has the right to be respected by his own child, and if she doesn't obey you and do what you tell her, you should make her

ANDREW FERGUSON. Would you marry a woman that doesn't want you?

JAMES CAESAR [*fiercely*]. I want her, don't I? What does it matter to me whether she wants me or not so long as I'm married to her? My heart's hungry for her! [*His ferocity passes into complaint.*] Don't I know rightly she doesn't want me? But what does that matter to me? I've loved her since she was a wee child, and I'd be happy with her if she was never to give me a kind look Many and many a time,

when the shop was closed, I went and sat out there in the fields and imagined her and me married together and living happy, and them growing up fine and strong. I could see her them times walking about in a fine silk dress, and looking grand on it, and all the neighbors nudging each other and saying the fine woman she was and the well we must be getting on in the world for her to be able to dress herself that nice! I could hardly bear it when I used to meet her afterwards, and she hadn't hardly a civil word for me, but I couldn't keep out of her way for all that; and many's a time I run quick and dodged round corners so's I should meet her again and have the pleasure of looking at her. When she said she'd have me, I could feel big lumps rolling off me, and I was light-hearted and happy for all I knew she was only consenting to have me to save your farm, John. I had my heart's desire, and I never felt so like a man before! . . . And now! . . .

[He rests his head on the table and begins to sob.]

SARAH FERGUSON *[in anguish]*. I can't bear to see a man crying! *[She goes to JIMMY]* Quit, Jimmy, son! It'll mebbe be all right in the end. Don't disturb yourself so much, man!

ANDREW FERGUSON *[contemptuously]* There's no sense in going on that way!

JOHN FERGUSON. Don't speak to him, Andrew! Leave the man to his grief!

JAMES CAESAR *[looking up, and addressing ANDREW]*. I know rightly I'm making a poor show of myself, but I can't help it. Wouldn't anybody that's had the life that I've had do the same as me? You're right and fine, Andrew, and full of your talk, but wait till you've had to bear what I have, and you'll see then what you'll do when something good that you've longed for all your life comes to you and then is taken from you. *[He rises from the table, trying to recover himself and speak in an ordinary voice.]* I'm sorry I bothered you all! I'll not trouble you with my company any longer. It'll be better for me to be going nor to be here when she comes back. *[He moves towards the door.]* I said some harsh words to you, John! . . .

JOHN FERGUSON. I'm not minding them, Jimmy. I know well the state you're in.

JAMES CAESAR. I'm sorry I said them

to you, all the same. It was in anger I said them.

[CLUTIE JOHN starts up from his seat in the corner, and holds up his hand for silence.]

CLUTIE JOHN. Wheesht!

SARAH FERGUSON. What is it, Clutie?

CLUTIE JOHN. Wheesht, wheesht!

[He goes to the door and opens, while the others stand staring at him. He listens for a moment or two, and then he darts swiftly into the darkness.]

SARAH FERGUSON. In the name of God, what ails the fellow?

ANDREW FERGUSON *[going to the door]*. He's heard something.

SARAH FERGUSON *[drawing a blind and peering out]*. Oh, what is it?

ANDREW FERGUSON *[looking out]*. I can't see anything . . . Wait! *[He pauses a moment.]* There's some one coming up the loante. I hear shoes . . .

JAMES CAESAR *[coming to his side and listening]*. It's some one running!

ANDREW FERGUSON. Ay! . . . It's Hannah! *[He shouts to his sister.]* What ails you, Hannah?

JAMES CAESAR. I hope nothing's happened to her.

SARAH FERGUSON. She must have been scared or something. *[She goes to the door and stands beside CAESAR. ANDREW FERGUSON is heard outside speaking inquiries to his sister. Then CAESAR and MRS. FERGUSON come away from the door into the kitchen, and HANNAH, in a state of terrible agitation, appears in the doorway. She pauses wildly for a moment, glancing round the room without seeing anything because of the sudden change from darkness to light.]* Hannah, what ails you, dear?

[HANNAH goes quickly to her father and throws herself against his knees.]

HANNAH FERGUSON. Da, Da!

JOHN FERGUSON. What is it, daughter? What is it?

[ANDREW FERGUSON, followed by CLUTIE JOHN, returns to the kitchen. He closes the door.]

ANDREW FERGUSON. What ails her? Has she hurt herself?

JOHN FERGUSON. Hannah! *[He tries to lift her face to his, but she resists him]* Hannah, what is it? Tell me, daughter!

HANNAH FERGUSON *[brokenly]*. Da, Da, I can't! . . .

JOHN FERGUSON. You can't what, Hannah?

HANNAH FERGUSON It's . . . it's fearful, Da!

JAMES CAESAR. Has any one harmed her? Hannah, has any one harmed you? [To JOHN FERGUSON] She was at Witherow's, wasn't she? [Turning to the others] That's where she was—at Witherow's! [To HANNAH] Hannah, do you hear me, girl? Has any one harmed you? Was it Witherow?

HANNAH FERGUSON. I can't . . . can't . . .

JAMES CAESAR. You must tell us. [Looking wildly about him]. My God, I'll go mad if any harm's happened to her!

ANDREW FERGUSON [taking hold of his arm and leading him away from HANNAH] Quieten yourself, Jimmy She'll tell us in a minute when she's herself again.

JOHN FERGUSON. Hannah, dear! Come closer to me, daughter! [He lifts her head from his knees and draws her up so that her face rests against his] Just keep quiet, daughter! No one'll harm you here Keep quite quiet! [To JAMES CAESAR] She was always a wee bit afeard of the dark, for she has a great imagination, and she mebbe thought she saw something fearful in the night. Get her a wee sup of sweet milk, one of you! [MRS FERGU-SON goes to get the milk for her.] It's mebbe nothing but fright. I've seen her as startled as this once before when she was a child [HANNAH gives a great sob, and starts a little] There, daughter, you needn't be scared! You're safe here from any harm. [MRS. FERGUSON brings a cup of milk to him.] Thank you, Sarah! Here, Hannah, drink a wee sup of this! It'll do you good!

HANNAH FERGUSON [clinging closer to him]. No, Da, no!

JOHN FERGUSON Ay, daughter, it'll help to steady you! [He puts the cup to her lips, and she drinks some of the milk.] That's right! That's right! You'll have a wee drop more, now! [She averts her head.] Ay, daughter, just have some more, and then you'll mebbe be quieter in yourself. [He compels her to drink some more of the milk, and then he puts the cup away.] That'll do you a power of good! [He draws her head down to his breast.] Just rest your head on me, daughter, and keep still!

CLUTIE JOHN She was crying bitter out there. She was running up the loanie when I found her, and she let a screech out of her when I touched her arm, and then she run that hard I couldn't keep pace

with her. It must have been a fearful thing that scared her that way!

SARAH FERGUSON. I hope to my goodness it's no more sorrow for us. We've had more nor our share already.

JOHN FERGUSON. Wheesht, wheesht, woman Wheesht!

JAMES CAESAR. If Witherow's harmed her, I'll kill him I will, so help me, God!

JOHN FERGUSON. Quit, quit! [To HANNAH] Are you better now, Hannah? [She still sobs a little, but her agitation has subsided, and she is now able to speak more or less coherently.] Just tell me, daughter. What happened you?

HANNAH FERGUSON. Da, I'm ashamed! . . .

JOHN FERGUSON. Ashamed, daughter!

SARAH FERGUSON She said she was ashamed! Oh, my God!

JOHN FERGUSON. What are you ashamed of, daughter?

HANNAH FERGUSON. I . . . [She relapses] I can't tell you, Da, I can't tell you!

JAMES CAESAR. Was it Witherow, Hannah?

JOHN FERGUSON. Don't bother her, Jimmy!

JAMES CAESAR. I know it was Witherow, I know it was him!

JOHN FERGUSON. Hannah! Look up, daughter!

HANNAH FERGUSON. Yes, Da!

JOHN FERGUSON. Tell me about it!

HANNAH FERGUSON [making an effort to control herself, now and then speaking brokenly]. I went up to Witherow's farm, the way you told me, and there were two people waiting to talk to him.

JOHN FERGUSON. Ay.

HANNAH FERGUSON He kept me waiting till after he had done with them I told him we couldn't pay the money and he was to foreclose, and then he began laughing at me and making a mock of . . . of Jimmy . . .

[She looks up and sees CAESAR and hesitates to finish her sentence.]

JAMES CAESAR. Was it me he made a mock of? [To JOHN FERGUSON.] Ah, didn't I tell you what he would do? Didn't I, now? [He turns to the others.] Didn't I, Mrs. Ferguson? . . .

JOHN FERGUSON. Go on, daughter!

HANNAH FERGUSON. He said he supposed it couldn't be helped, and I was just coming away when he said he would walk the length of the loanie with me, and I waited for him [Her voice grows feeble.]

We were walking along, talking about one thing and another . . .

JOHN FERGUSON [*nervously*]. Ay, ay!

HANNAH FERGUSON And he begun telling me what a fine girl I am, and wishing he could kiss me! . . .

JAMES CAESAR. God starve him!

HANNAH FERGUSON And then he tried to kiss me, but I wouldn't let him. We were going over Musgrave's meadow together, and all of a sudden he put his arms round me and threw me down! . . . Oh, Da, Da!

[*Her grief overcomes her again, and she buries her head against his breast and is unable to speak further*]

JAMES CAESAR. What did she say, John? What was it she said?

JOHN FERGUSON [*brokenly*]. I can't speak. Jimmy—I can't speak. Hannah, dear!

[*He tries to comfort her.*]

JAMES CAESAR Did he wrong her? That's what I want to know!

SARAH FERGUSON Oh, will we never have comfort in the world! John, does she mean that he harmed her . . . *harmed* her? [*Wildly to the others*] One of you do something! Andrew! Jimmy!!

JAMES CAESAR I've swore many's a time to have his life and never done it. I was a poor, trembling creature, but I'll tremble no more! [*He goes to the door.*] Good night to you all!

JOHN FERGUSON. Where are you going, Jimmy?

JAMES CAESAR. I'm going—some-where!

JOHN FERGUSON. Sit down, Jimmy

JAMES CAESAR. It's no good you talking to me, John!

[*He opens the door violently and goes out.*]

JOHN FERGUSON. Andrew, go after him and bring him back There's enough harm done already. Go and stop him, son!

[*ANDREW goes unwillingly to the door. He stands there looking up the dark loamie.*]

ANDREW FERGUSON I can't see him!

JOHN FERGUSON You must be able to see him He can't be that far! Go after him, man, and bring him back here.

ANDREW FERGUSON No, Da, I won't [*He shuts the door and returns to his seat.*] The man has a right to be left to himself.

JOHN FERGUSON. Andrew! [*He tries*

to get up from his chair, but HANNAH'S weight prevents him.] Here, Sarah, take Hannah and put her to bed. Get up, daughter!

HANNAH FERGUSON [*clinging to him*]. Da, Da!

JOHN FERGUSON. Ay, daughter, ay! God's scourged us hard, and it isn't easy to bear We must just . . . just try and be patient [*Kissing her*] Go to your ma, dear, and let her take care of you!

SARAH FERGUSON. Come to your bed, Hannah!

[*HANNAH'S anguish unbalances her, and she becomes hysterical, and stands clinging to her father and weeping bitterly.*]

JOHN FERGUSON [*comforting her*]. You must control yourself, daughter. Go with your ma, now, like a good girl. Take her, Sarah!

[*MRS FERGUSON leads her daughter towards the stairs. They go out.*]

ANDREW FERGUSON. I hope Jimmy'll kill him

JOHN FERGUSON [*weakly*]. Son, son, don't talk that way!

ANDREW FERGUSON I can't help it, Da. He ought to be killed. He's not fit to live.

JOHN FERGUSON. Are you setting yourself up to judge God's work?

ANDREW FERGUSON. An eye for an eye, Da, and a tooth for a tooth!

JOHN FERGUSON That's not the spirit that lives now, son! That's the spirit that was destroyed on the Cross. If a man does an injury to you, and you injure him back, you're as bad as he is. You have your own work to do in the world, and you must leave God to do His; it's His work to judge, not ours! [*His utterance exhausts him a little, and he staggers back into his chair His voice changes to a pleading note*] Ah, Andrew, son, don't never talk that way again! I meant you for the ministry, to teach people how to live for God! You can't go into the ministry now, son, but you can teach people just the same. Just the same! I would rather you were dead nor hear you speak about Jimmy Caesar the way you're doing . . . [*He gets up from his chair and goes to his son, taking him by the shoulder*] Will you not go out and look for him, son? He has suffered enough, poor man, without him damning his soul!

ANDREW FERGUSON. He can bear God's strokes as well as we can!

JOHN FERGUSON. Your heart's bitter, son! I wish I could go! [*He stuggers*

towards the door] I haven't the strength I used to have . . . Andrew, will you not do as I bid you?

ANDREW FERGUSON No, Da, I won't interfere between them.

JOHN FERGUSON I must go myself, then I must try and find him .

[MRS. FERGUSON comes down the stairs into the kitchen]

SARAH FERGUSON. John!

JOHN FERGUSON Ay, woman!

SARAH FERGUSON. Hannah wants you. She'll not be quiet without you near her.

JOHN FERGUSON. I can't go up to her yet, Sarah I'm going out to look for Jimmy Caesar. I can't let him be wandering about wild in the night. If he finds Witherow he'll mebbe do him an injury. [He turns towards the door again.] Andrew won't go, so I must I can't let the man destroy himself

SARAH FERGUSON What way's that to be talking and you the sick you are? Is it your death you're wanting? And no coat on or nothing [To her son.] Andrew, think shame of yourself to be letting your da go out in the dark and damp! [To her husband] You must come to Hannah. She won't keep still without you! [To ANDREW] You go and look for Jimmy, Andrew The poor creature's near distracted mad, and dear knows in that state he might do something fearful.

ANDREW FERGUSON [sullenly]. I'm not going, Ma. I've told my da that already.

SARAH FERGUSON. Ah, aren't you headstrong? [To her husband] Come up to Hannah first, John!

JOHN FERGUSON. She must wait till I come back It's Jimmy Caesar that's in the greatest danger now. I'll come to her when I get back, tell her!

SARAH FERGUSON. You'll rue this night, the pair of you, but you must have your own way, I suppose!

JOHN FERGUSON. Give me my coat, woman! [MRS. FERGUSON goes to get his coat for him.] Andrew, will you not come with me and help me to find him?

ANDREW FERGUSON. I'll not budge out of the door, Da. I wouldn't lift a finger to stop him from doing anything he wants to do. [MRS. FERGUSON returns to the kitchen carrying a jacket, a top-coat, and a muffler.] It's no business of mine to interfere between them.

SARAH FERGUSON [helping her husband into his coat]. Muffle yourself up well, John. It's cold the night

JOHN FERGUSON. Ay, Sarah, thank you.

[He puts the muffler round his throat.]

ANDREW FERGUSON. I only hope Jimmy'll have the manhood to kill Witherow!

JOHN FERGUSON [in pain] Wheesht, wheesht, son! Wheesht, adcar! [He recovers himself, and turns to his wife] Tell Hannah where I'm gone, Sarah! That'll mebbe keep her quiet till I get back! [He opens the door] I'll come as soon as I can!

[He goes out, closing the door behind him]

SARAH FERGUSON It'll kill him, this night's work! Andrew, how can you stand there and see your da going out in the wet and dark, and you knowing well the sick and feeble he is!

ANDREW FERGUSON. I can't stop him from going, can I?

SARAH FERGUSON You could have gone yourself

ANDREW FERGUSON [turning to her and speaking fiercely] I tell you I don't want to stop Jimmy from killing Witherow if he's going to do it. It's right that he should kill him The man's bad from head to foot Everything about him shows that! It isn't only the way he's treated us, but others too. You've told me yourself many's a time, and my da's told me too, of the cuts and insults Jimmy's had to bear from him! Isn't this greater nor the lot of them put together? Hasn't Jimmy a right to turn on him now if he never had the right before? I don't care what my da says! Jimmy has the right to turn on him and kill him if he can

SARAH FERGUSON [bewildered by the catastrophe in which she is involved]. I'm all moidhered by it. I don't understand what's happening. Your da says it's the will of God, but I . . . I can't make it out . . . [She goes towards the stairs] I'll mebbe not come down again, Andrew Good night, son!

ANDREW FERGUSON. Good night, Ma!

[MRS. FERGUSON goes upstairs. ANDREW walks across the room and opens the door. He looks out for a moment or two. Then he shuts the door and walks back to the fireplace.]

CLUTIE JOHN. Your da's a forgiving man, Andrew!

ANDREW FERGUSON [absently]. Eh?

CLUTIE JOHN. I say, your da's a forgiving man!

ANDREW FERGUSON [*carelessly*] Oh, ay Ay!

[*He walks across the room and back again*]

CLUTIE JOHN. You're not a forgiving man, are you, Andrew?

[*ANDREW sits down at the table He does not reply to CLUTIE JOHN*]

CLUTIE JOHN. You're not a forgiving man, are you, Andrew? [*He gets up and comes to the table*] You wouldn't forgive till seventy times seven, would you?

ANDREW FERGUSON [*impatently*]. Ah, quit!

CLUTIE JOHN. Your da has a quare good nature. He always says you should turn the other cheek to the man that harms you That's a great spirit to have, that, isn't it?

ANDREW FERGUSON [*who has not been listening*] Eh? What's that you say?

CLUTIE JOHN. I was talking about your da, Andrew, and him having the great fine spirit of forgiveness in him.

ANDREW FERGUSON [*indifferently*]. Oh, ay! Ay!

CLUTIE JOHN. I could never be as forgiving as your da if I lived to be a thousand years old. [*He pauses for a moment, and then says, eagerly*] Will I play something to you? [*ANDREW does not make any movement.*] Are you not listening to me?

ANDREW FERGUSON [*crossly*]. Ah, what is it? What's the matter with you?

CLUTIE JOHN. Will I not play something to you? It's a great comfort when you're in trouble to hear a man playing a tune . . .

ANDREW FERGUSON [*sharply*]. Quit blethering!

CLUTIE JOHN [*going back to his seat at the fire*] I was only wondering could I do anything to please you, Andrew? But I'll keep still and quiet. I'll not disturb you at all.

[*They sit in silence for a few moments.*]

CLUTIE JOHN. He's a bad man, that man Witherow! That's what he is! He has a sour nature in him. Whenever he meets me he makes a mock of me and says, "When are they going to put you in the asylum, Clutie?" Sometimes he hits me with his stick or a whip mebbe. He done that the day there fornt your own door, Andrew! He couped me into the hedge and near broke my whistle on me That shows the bad-natured man he is to be hurting a poor fellow like myse!f that has to beg his bread from door to door!

ANDREW FERGUSON. Hold your tongue, will you?

CLUTIE JOHN [*meehly*]. All right, Andrew! I was only saying what he done to me, but, sure, it doesn't matter what he does to the like of me, a poor senseless fellow that wanders the world with a whistle! It's quare and different, Andrew, when he does harm to a girl like Hannah . . .

ANDREW FERGUSON [*turning to him and speaking quickly*] Ay, it is different, Clutie! You're right there My sister is the finest girl in the County Down . . .

CLUTIE JOHN [*eagerly*] Ay, she is, Andrew. She is in sang. There isn't her equal in the province of Ulster. There is not. I've oftentimes heard people talking about her, and saying what a fine match she'll make for some man, and one time I tried to make up a song about her to be singing on the roads, but I couldn't do it with any satisfaction to myself I'm no hand at making up poetry. She's a fine young girl and a great companion she'll be to any one.

ANDREW FERGUSON It's only a fine man that's fit for her

CLUTIE JOHN That's true! [*He gets up and comes to the table and leans across it.*] It would never have done if she'd married Jimmy Caesar. The mountains can never consort with the hills.

ANDREW FERGUSON. No! No! I wasn't pleased about the match when I heard of it.

CLUTIE JOHN. He's not much of a man, Jimmy Caesar!

ANDREW FERGUSON. No, he isn't, indeed!

CLUTIE JOHN. He's a poor-natured man, that's what he is He'd be worse nor Witherow if he had the pluck. Mebbe he is worse nor him, for he has no pluck at all. He's a mean man.

ANDREW FERGUSON. I daresay you're right.

[*He goes to the fire and stands with his back to it.*]

CLUTIE JOHN. Ay, I am. He'd beat you on the ground that lad would, but he would run away from you if you were to stand up to him. That's the kind he is.

ANDREW FERGUSON. Ah, well, he's had a poor life of it.

CLUTIE JOHN. He'd have been mean-natured whatever kind of a life he had, Andrew! I've seen men like him before in my time. They think I'm a fool and see nothing, but when I'm playing my whistle Andrew, I see them when they're not think-

ing I'm looking at them—and there's plenty of them, high up and low down, that are crawling when they're at your feet and are ready to crawl when they're standing up. That's the way of them. A man like Jimmy Caesar would be a poor defender for Hannah!

ANDREW FERGUSON. Mebbe he would!

CLUTIE JOHN. I'd be afeard to trust myself to him if I was in need of a person to take care of me. I would so.

ANDREW FERGUSON. Ah, you can take care of yourself! Quit talking now, or if you can't keep quiet, go out to the hayloft and talk to yourself.

[*He goes half-way across the room and then returns to the fire. He stands with his face to it*]

CLUTIE JOHN [*after a pause*]. I wonder will Jimmy Caesar kill Witherow!

ANDREW FERGUSON. What makes you wonder that?

CLUTIE JOHN I was just wondering! [*He turns towards the door.*] I'd better be going to my bed. It was kind of your ma to give me leave to sleep in the loft. It'll be nice and comfortable to stretch myself out on the hay.

ANDREW FERGUSON. Ay Good night.

CLUTIE JOHN. Good night to you, Andrew [*He looks back to his seat*] Ah, dear bless us, I was near forgetting my whistle! [*He goes to his seat and picks up the whistle.*] It's not a great deal to look at, but it can play a grand tune! [*He puts it in his pocket*] I wouldn't be surprised but Caesar doesn't do it!

ANDREW FERGUSON [*abstractedly*]. Doesn't do what?

CLUTIE JOHN Kill Witherow.

ANDREW FERGUSON. What makes you think that?

CLUTIE JOHN. It's the way of him to be talking and not doing.

ANDREW FERGUSON. Ah, man, but this is different.

CLUTIE JOHN. You can't help your nature, Andrew. No one can. Jimmy Caesar's always been afeard of Henry Witherow, and it's likely he always will be. He can't help it, God be good to him!

ANDREW FERGUSON [*thinking this over for a second, and then turning away contemptuously*]. Ah, you don't know what you're talking about!

CLUTIE JOHN. No. No, Andrew, that's true! I have no sense in my head at all. I've oftentimes been told that. Good night again to you, Andrew!

ANDREW FERGUSON. Good night!

CLUTIE JOHN [*before he reaches the door*] Mind you, Jimmy Caesar'll mean to kill him! I daresay he will. And mebbe he would have killed him if he had been standing fornt him that minute, with his back turned, but . . . he had to go out and find him, Andrew! It's a good step from here to Witherow's farm, and he had to get a gun . . . or something. You have time to think when you're going that length.

ANDREW FERGUSON. Ay.

CLUTIE JOHN I wouldn't doubt but he went home. I daresay he's lying huddled up in his bed this minute, Andrew, and your poor old da hunting for him in the dark, and your sister up there weeping her eyes out . . .

ANDREW FERGUSON. Ah, quit, man. quit! You're tormenting me with your talk.

CLUTIE JOHN A fine girl like Hannah to be depending on Jimmy Caesar for a man . . .

ANDREW FERGUSON. Go on with you, go on!

CLUTIE JOHN. And him mebbe at home all the time, snuggled up in his bed!

ANDREW FERGUSON. What do you mean, Clutie? What are you trying to prove?

CLUTIE JOHN. Prove? Me? Sure, I couldn't prove anything if I was paid to do it. I'm no hand at proving things. That's why I haven't got any sense.

ANDREW FERGUSON [*going to him and taking hold of his shoulder*]. What's all this talk about Jimmy Caesar mean? You have some meaning in your mind!

CLUTIE JOHN. I wish I had, but sure I'll never be right, never. I'll always be quare

ANDREW FERGUSON [*turning away from him in disgust*]. Och, away with you! [*He goes back to the fire, standing with his face to it*] You have as much talk as Jimmy Caesar himself!

[*CLUTIE JOHN stands still for a few moments. Then he steps lightly across the floor to where ANDREW is sitting and taps him on the shoulder.*]

CLUTIE JOHN. Andrew!

ANDREW FERGUSON. What ails you now?

CLUTIE JOHN. Supposing Jimmy Caesar doesn't kill Witherow?

ANDREW FERGUSON. Well? Well, well?

CLUTIE JOHN. That 'u'd be fearful, wouldn't it? Can't you picture Witherow

sitting up there in his hungry house laughing to himself . . .

ANDREW FERGUSON. My God, Clutie!

CLUTIE JOHN. And mebbe saying he'll look out for Hannah again!

ANDREW FERGUSON. Aw, my God, my God!

CLUTIE JOHN. And making a mock of Jimmy Caesar, the way he always does, and calling him an old Jenny-Jo that'll stand by and let another man do harm to his girl . . .

ANDREW FERGUSON. Ah, wheesht with you, wheesht!

CLUTIE JOHN. And telling people about it! Ay, telling people about it! You can see him with his great jaw hanging down and him roaring with laughter and telling them all in Jefferson public-house on the fair-day!

ANDREW FERGUSON. Ay, indeed, that's what he'd do!

CLUTIE JOHN. That's what he done over the head of Martha Foley that had the chuld to him. Didn't I hear him myself, telling them all about it, and them splitting their sides and calling him the great lad and the gallous boy and the terrible man for women? . . . And then mebbe him to be telling them how your da, that's near his death, went out to try and stop Jimmy from killing him, and all the while your da was tumbling over the dark fields Jimmy was lying trembling with fright in his bed, afeard to move . . .

ANDREW FERGUSON. He'd never be such a collie as that, Clutie. He couldn't for shame.

CLUTIE JOHN [*coming nearer to him*]. If I was Hannah's brother I'd make sure!

ANDREW FERGUSON. Make sure! What do you mean?

CLUTIE JOHN. Ah, what do I mean? Sure, I don't know what I'm saying half my time! I'm all throughother. I don't know what I mean, Andrew; I don't know God reward you, and I'll bid you good night. I'll go up to the loft and play a while to myself. Sure, I'll disturb no one there but the cows mebbe in the byre, and God knows the poor beasts'll not complain if a poor fellow like myself has a small diversion. And when I lie down and stretch myself in the hay, I can be thinking, mebbe Jimmy Caesar is lying in a fine warm bed, and be pitying your da that's out looking for him, and be cursing Henry Witherow that's mebbe laughing now and making up great stories to be telling on the fair-day . . .

ANDREW FERGUSON. Are you trying to diive me demented?

CLUTIE JOHN. Wheesht, wheesht!

[*MRS FERGUSON comes down the stairs*]

SARAH FERGUSON. Will you not keep quiet, the pair of you? I'm trying hard to get Hannah asleep, but the clatter you're making would wake the dead! Is your da not back yet, Andrew?

ANDREW FERGUSON. No, Ma, not yet!

SARAH FERGUSON [*picking up JIMMY CAESAR'S coat*]. Dear bless us, Jimmy left his coat behind him. He'll be sure to get his death of cold, for he always had a delicate chest [*She puts the coat aside*] I wish you'd go and find your da, Andrew, and bring him home. It's no time of the night for him to be wandering about in the cold air. Hannah'll never rest without him near her. Will you not go now and find him, son?

ANDREW FERGUSON. All right, Ma!

SARAH FERGUSON. That's a good son. Tell him to come home as quick as he can. Clutie John'll stay here while you look for him [*She listens for a moment*]. That's Hannah crying again! I can't leave her for a minute but she begins lamenting . . .

[*She goes hurriedly upstairs again. ANDREW goes to the door and looks out.*

He is followed by CLUTIE JOHN]

CLUTIE JOHN. Look, Andrew, there's a light in Witherow's window. Do you see it over there on the side of the hill? It shines down the valley a long way. Do you see it, Andrew?

ANDREW FERGUSON. Ay.

CLUTIE JOHN. It doesn't look as if Jimmy'd got there, does it? The light's still shining.

ANDREW FERGUSON. He might be there for all that.

CLUTIE JOHN. Mebbe! Ay, mebbe! Well, I'll away on now to my bed. The night's turned sharp, and I feel tired and sleepy. [*He stands in the doorway, gazing up at the sky*]. There's a lot of wee stars out the night, Andrew, but no moon.

ANDREW FERGUSON. Ay.

CLUTIE JOHN. I oftentimes think it must be quare and lonely up in the sky. Good night to you, Andrew!

ANDREW FERGUSON. Good night, Clutie

[*CLUTIE JOHN goes out. ANDREW FERGUSON stands still, watching the light in WITHEROW'S window. Then a great anger goes over him. He mutters something to himself, and turns*

suddenly into the kitchen. He takes down the gun and after examining it to see if it is loaded, he goes out. In a few minutes SARAH FERGUSON is heard calling to him from the top of the stairs.]

SARAH FERGUSON Andrew! Andrew!! Are you there? [*She comes down part of the staircase and looks over the banisters.*] Aie you there, Andrew? Clutie! [*She comes into the kitchen and looks about her*] Clutie! [*She goes to the foot of the stairs and calls up to HANNAH.*] It's all right, Hannah, dear! Andrew's away to fetch your da!

[*She goes to the door and looks out for a few moments. Then she closes the door and goes up the stairs again.*]

ACT III

It is early in the morning of the following day. The room is bright and cheery because a fine sunshine pours in at the window and open door. There is nothing in the appearance of the kitchen to indicate that any unusual thing has happened; the gun is again suspended over the fireplace. MRS. FERGUSON is bending over the fire, settling a kettle on the coals and turf, when her husband comes into the kitchen from the staircase.

SARAH FERGUSON. Is that you, John?

JOHN FERGUSON. Ay. [*He seats himself by the fire.*] Where's Andrew?

SARAH FERGUSON. He's away out to the byre. Will I call him?

JOHN FERGUSON. Ay, do!

[*MRS. FERGUSON goes to the door and calls out "Andrew! Andrew!"*]

ANDREW is heard to shout, "What do you want, Ma?" and MRS. FERGUSON replies, "Your da wants you a minute!" ANDREW shouts back, "I'll be in in a wee while." MRS. FERGUSON returns to the fire.]

SARAH FERGUSON. He says he'll be in in a minute. Did you get your rest, John?

JOHN FERGUSON. I couldn't sleep at all; I lay still and closed my eyes, but my mind was working all the time. I kept on wondering where Jimmy went to last night. I suppose no one has come up the loamie with news?

SARAH FERGUSON. There's been no one next or near this place this morning

but ourselves and Clutie John I gave him his breakfast and sent him packing. He was in a quare wild mood, that lad, and could hardly contain himself for excitement.

JOHN FERGUSON. I daresay he was greatly disturbed in his mind after what happened yesterday. Them people is quare and easily excited. I wish Andrew would come! Is Hannah up yet?

SARAH FERGUSON. Indeed I don't know I didn't call her this morning. She was a long while getting her sleep, and so I just let her lie on. She'll be all the better for the rest.

JOHN FERGUSON. Ay. I can't make out where Jimmy went to last night. I thought mebbe he'd go straight to Witherow from here, and so I went there first, but I didn't see him.

SARAH FERGUSON. Did you see Witherow?

JOHN FERGUSON. Ay I warned him about Jimmy.

SARAH FERGUSON. You warned him?

JOHN FERGUSON. Ay.

SARAH FERGUSON. And you never laid a finger on him?

JOHN FERGUSON. No.

SARAH FERGUSON. Well, indeed, I can't make you out, John! There's a man's harmed your daughter, and you didn't as much as lift your hand to him! You went and warned him about Jimmy! . . . Oh, John, I can't understand you! It doesn't seem right somehow to be acting like that!

JOHN FERGUSON. God's Word says I must love my enemies, Sarah. That is my guide in all I do. It's hard to obey that commandment, and when I was standing there in front of Witherow, I was tempted to take a ho'd of him and do him an injury . . . but I resisted the temptation, and I did what God bid me. I wasn't able to love him, but I warned him I could do no more than that . . . but God'll mebbe understand!

SARAH FERGUSON [*sighing*]. Ah, well! It's a quare way to look at things. If any one was to hurt me, I'd do my best to hurt them back, and hurt them harder nor they hurt me. That would learn them!

JOHN FERGUSON. Would it? Men's been hitting back since the beginning of the world, but hitting back has learned no one anything but hatred and bitterness.

SARAH FERGUSON. What did you do after you saw Witherow?

JOHN FERGUSON. I went down to Jimmy's shop, but he wasn't there. I dundhered on the door, but I could get no answer. Matt Kerr put his head out of his

window, but he couldn't tell me a thing about Jimmy. I didn't know what to do after that! I wandered about in the dark for a while, and then I went back to the shop, but he still wasn't there! I was feeling tired, and I sat down for a wee while, thinking maybe Jimmy would turn up while I was waiting, but he didn't, and so I came home.

SARAH FERGUSON. You might have got your death of cold sitting there in the damp. It's a wonder to me you never knocked against Andrew!

JOHN FERGUSON. Ay, it is, but sure it's easy to miss people when it isn't light.

[ANDREW FERGUSON enters by the door. There is a somber look on his face. It is not the darkness of a man who is horrified by his own deed, but the darkness of a man who has set himself willingly to do some desperate work that must be done.]

ANDREW FERGUSON. You were wanting me, Da?

JOHN FERGUSON. Ay, Andrew! [Regarding his son closely.] You're looking tired, son!

ANDREW FERGUSON. I am tired, but sure we all are. Da, you ought not to have got up this morning. You're not strong, and you must nearly be worn out.

JOHN FERGUSON. I couldn't rest, son. Andrew, I want you to go and inquire about Jimmy Caesar. I'll not be easy in my mind till I see him safe and sound. I feel my own responsibility, son. I'll admit to you I was hoping Hannah'd marry him, and I d.dn't discourage her from saying "yes" to him when he asked her, for all I knew she was only doing it for the farm. I knew the girl couldn't bear him, but I pretended to myself it would all come right in the end. I . . . I love this house, Andrew! That's the excuse I have for not being honest with Hannah . . .

SARAH FERGUSON. Ah, sure, you left it to her own free will

JOHN FERGUSON. Ay, I tried to salve my conscience that way, but I said it in a way that showed plain what my desire was. If I had been firm, there would have been none of this bother now. You understand me, son, don't you? I feel I won't be happy till I see Jimmy safe and sound from harm, because I put him in danger. God knows what would happen if he was to meet Witherow in the temper he was in last night.

ANDREW FERGUSON. I daresay he's all right, Da!

JOHN FERGUSON. I'd be glad if you'd

go all the same and search for him, Andrew.

SARAH FERGUSON. Just go to please him, Andrew. His mind's upset about Jimmy, and there'll be no contenting him till he sees him.

ANDREW FERGUSON. It'll put the work on the farm behind, Da . . .

JOHN FERGUSON. That doesn't matter, son

ANDREW FERGUSON. . . . but I'll go to please you!

JOHN FERGUSON. Thank you, son!

ANDREW FERGUSON. There's no need for you to be uneasy about him, though. You may be sure Jimmy's come to no harm. We all know rightly the kind he is. Maybe he's lying snug in his bed this minute, moaning and groaning, and saying what he'd do to Witherow one of these days, but you know as well as you're living he'll never do it.

JOHN FERGUSON. I'd leifer he was a collie a thousand times over nor have him take a man's life.

ANDREW FERGUSON. Even after what Witherow's done?

JOHN FERGUSON. Ay, son. Witherow will have to make his answer to God, and God will deal justly with him. We can't do that. No one can do justice to a man that's done an injury to them. We'd be thinking all the time of our trouble and wanting revenge. We wouldn't be striving hard, the way God would, to understand everything.

ANDREW FERGUSON. There's no need to be striving to understand everything, Da. It's a plain matter that a child can understand. The man done wrong, and he has a right to suffer for it.

JOHN FERGUSON. Ay, son, he'll suffer for it, but that's the work of his Maker, and not the work of Jimmy Caesar or you or me or any man. You're wrong, Andrew, when you say there's nothing to understand. There's everything to understand. There's the man himself to understand. Do you think that Jimmy Caesar can judge Henry Witherow when he doesn't know him as God knows him?

ANDREW FERGUSON [impatiently]. I've no time or patience for that kind of talk. If Jimmy Caesar . . . killed him . . . he was right to kill him . . . only I don't suppose he did.

JOHN FERGUSON. Don't you see now, Andrew, that you're not fit to judge Henry Witherow either? You can't judge a man if you have anger in your heart against

him. You must love him before you can do justly by him.

ANDREW FERGUSON. Och, quit, Da!

JOHN FERGUSON. And that's what God does, Andrew! God's something that sees inside you and knows every bit of you and never has no spite against you. Do you understand me, son? He judges you, but He doesn't punish you. He just gives knowledge to you so that you see yourself as He sees you, and that's your punishment, Andrew, if you've done wrong. It's knowing yourself as God knows you that hurts you harder nor anything else in the world. Do you think Henry Witherow'll be happy when he sees himself with God's eyes? I wouldn't be that man on the last day for the wealth of the world! . . . I'm all moidhered, Andrew, and I'm a poor hand at saying what's in my mind, but I know well that if Henry Witherow wronged me a thousand times more nor he has, I'd be doing God's will if I knelt down and kissed his feet.

ANDREW FERGUSON. I don't understand that kind of religion.

SARAH FERGUSON. Here's some one coming up the loanie. I can hear their steps. [*She goes to the door as she speaks.*] It's Jimmy!

JOHN FERGUSON. Jimmy Caesar?

SARAH FERGUSON. Ay.

JOHN FERGUSON. Oh, thank God, thank God, he's come at last!

[*JAMES CAESAR enters. The look of assurance has completely gone, and so, too, has some of the meanness. He has the look of a man who has suffered great shame and humiliation, and although he feels mean, he does not look so mean as he did at the beginning of the play.*]

SARAH FERGUSON. Come in, Jimmy, come in! Sure, we're all right and glad to see you again!

JOHN FERGUSON [*going to him and wringing his hand*]. Ay, Jimmy, we are, indeed. I'm glad this minute to see you safe from harm. Sit down, man! [*He leads CAESAR to a chair, and CAESAR sits down.*] You must be worn out. [*JAMES CAESAR glances about the room for a moment. Then he bows his head on the table and begins to cry hysterically.*] Ay, man, you'll want to cry after the trouble you've had.

ANDREW FERGUSON [*contemptuously*]. My God, what a man!

JOHN FERGUSON. It's the reaction, son, that's what it is. He can't help himself. Nobody could.

SARAH FERGUSON. A drink of tea'll do him a world of good. The kettle's on, and I'll have the tea wet in no time at all. [*She goes to CAESAR and pats him on the back*] There, there, Jimmy, keep your heart up! Sure, we all know the troubles you've had to bear. Just put a good face on it, and you'll be as happy as you like.

JAMES CAESAR. I'm a disgraced man!

JOHN FERGUSON. No, no, no, Jimmy!

JAMES CAESAR [*raising his head*]. Ay, I am, John. I'm a disgraced man! I heard what Andrew said to you a minute ago, and he was right. "My God," he said, "what a man!"

SARAH FERGUSON. Ah, sure, Andrew didn't mean it, Jimmy. Don't be paying no heed to him.

ANDREW FERGUSON [*angrily*]. I did mean it.

JOHN FERGUSON. That's poor comfort, Andrew, to be offering to a broken man I'd be ashamed to say that to any one.

JAMES CAESAR [*as if eager to make little of himself*]. But it's true, John, for all that. I've failed another time.

JOHN FERGUSON. It was God that checked you, Jimmy.

JAMES CAESAR. I went out of this house last night with my mind set on killing Witherow. If I'd met him in the loane I'd 'a' throttled him there and then . . .

JOHN FERGUSON. I'm thankful you didn't meet him!

JAMES CAESAR [*rambling on*]. . . . I was near demented with rage, and I hardly knew what I was doing. I started off for his farm. I could see the light in his front room shining down the glen, and it drew me towards it. I was that mad I didn't care what I done. I scrambled through the hedges and tore my hands and face with the thorns. Look at the cuts on my hands!

[*He holds out his hands for inspection.*]

JOHN FERGUSON. Ay, ay.

JAMES CAESAR. But I didn't care what happened to me. I felt nothing but the desire to get Witherow dead. I went across the fields, tumbling over stooks of corn, and slipping in puddles and drains till I come near the farm, and then I remembered I had nothing to kill him with . . .

ANDREW FERGUSON [*sneering*]. Ha!

JAMES CAESAR [*turning to ANDREW*]. I'm no match for him, Andrew, and if I'd gone into the house then, he'd have thrown me into the yard before I could have lifted a finger to him. [*Insist-*

ing on his weakness.] I haven't the strength, Andrew, and I've a poor spirit. It wouldn't have been a fair fight if I'd gone in then and me with no weapon, would it, Andrew? Would it, John? I hadn't even a sally rod in my hands

SARAH FERGUSON. He's stronger nor you by a good piece, Jimmy.

JAMES CAESAR. Yes, Mrs. Ferguson! That's what I said to myself. I said, "I'll have no chance against him if I go without a weapon!" That's what I said to myself. I made up my mind I'd go back to the shop to get my gun, and then I'd come back again to the farm and I'd shoot him dead

JOHN FERGUSON. Aw, horrible, horrible.

ANDREW FERGUSON. And why didn't you go back again?

JAMES CAESAR [*miserably*]. You've guessed right, Andrew. I never went near the place again. I got to the shop and I went in quietly and got my gun, and then I come out again. I had hardly got across the doorstep when I began to feel afeard, and I could feel the gun shaking in my hands as I gripped it. I went a bit of the way along the road, and I kept thinking some one was watching me, and then all of a sudden I started to run, and I run and I run till I come to the planting. I went in among the trees, and before I knew where I was I tripped over something on the ground and the gun went off in my hands. I was scared of my life for fear any one would hear it, and I got up and left the gun on the ground, and I run on through the trees like a wild thing till I could run no more. Then I crawled in under a whin-bush and I hid there till this morning. I lay there cursing myself for a collic, and trying to stir myself up to go and kill him in the daylight . . . but I couldn't do it. I kept on making excuses. That's the sort of me, John! I'm always imagining myself doing grand things, and seeing people clapping me and making speeches about me, and printing things in the papers because of my greatness and my gallantry; but if a cow was to make a run at me in the fields, I'd be near scared to death of it. It's bad enough, Andrew, to know that other people are ashamed of you, but it's hell to be ashamed of yourself, the way I am this minute, and it's hell to have dreams of yourself doing big things, and you knowing rightly you'll never have the pluck to do a wee thing, let alone a big one

JOHN FERGUSON. There's many a

thing that a lad like Andrew might think was big, but it's quare and small

JAMES CAESAR. It's kind of you to talk the way you do, John, but it's poor comfort to a man that knows he's as poor-spirited as myself. If Hannah was married on me now, I feel I would leave her in the lurch if she needed my help any time. That's the way of me, and I knew it well last night when I was hiding under the whin-bush. I'm not like you, John Ferguson, that has no hatred in your heart, and can forgive a man that does an injury to you. I'm full of hate, and I want to hurt them that hurts me, but I haven't the courage to do it.

ANDREW FERGUSON. Well, there's no use in sitting here talking about it.

JAMES CAESAR. No, Andrew, there isn't. I come here this morning to excuse myself to Hannah and all of you. I thought that was the least I could do.

JOHN FERGUSON. No, no, Jimmy, no, no! I'm right and glad you didn't harm Witherow. I'd have been sore-hearted if you had.

SARAH FERGUSON. He went out to search for you last night, Jimmy.

JAMES CAESAR. Who? John?

SARAH FERGUSON. Ay.

ANDREW FERGUSON. He searched the place for you. A sick man went out to try and prevent a strong, able-bodied man from doing what he ought to have done; and while the sick man was wearing himself out with the search, the strong man was hiding underneath a whin-bush in mortal fear of his life!

[*ANDREW'S voice grows in anger and contempt as he speaks.*]

JAMES CAESAR [*miserably*]. Oh, my God, my God!

JOHN FERGUSON. Wheesht, Andrew, wheesht! Jimmy, man, it's not like the thing for you to give way in that fashion! Control yourself, man! I'm as happy this minute as ever I've been in my life because I know God's saved you from sinning your soul with a murder. I'm proud to think you wouldn't kill Witherow . . .

JAMES CAESAR [*in a misery of self-abasement*]. But I'm not saved from sin, John. I didn't leave Witherow alone because I didn't want to kill him. I did want to kill him. I left him alone because I was afeard to touch him. My mind's the same now as it was when I went out of this house last night with murder in my heart. I want Witherow to be dead. I'd be glad this minute if some one came in the door

there and told me he was dead. But I'd be afeard to lay a finger on him myself That's the cowardliest thing of all, to want to commit a sin and not have the courage to do it. Do you think God'll be gratified when he thinks I didn't kill Witherow because I was too big a collie to do it?

SARAH FERGUSON Well, quit talking about it, anyway. Make yourself content while I get you a bite to eat.

JAMES CAESAR. I couldn't taste it. It'd choke me.

SARAH FERGUSON. Now, a drop of tea never choked no one The kettle's boiling, and it'll not take me a minute to make a cup of good warm tea for you. You must be perished with the cold, and you lying out on the damp grass all night. Just content yourself while I spread the table

[*She sets about preparing the meal.*]

JAMES CAESAR [*in whom confession has now grown to something like a craving*]. I know rightly you have contempt for me, Andrew [*ANDREW stands at the window with his back to the others He does not answer*] I know you have Anybody would. [*To JOHN FERGUSON*] Hannah'll have the quare contempt for me, too. There'll be plenty will, and they'll be pointing at me and making remarks about me. It'll be quare and hard for me to hold up my head again after this. It will, in sang [*His voice changes its note slightly as he begins to speculate on his conduct.*] You know, it's quare the way things turn out! Yesterday, after Hannah said she'd have me, I was having the great notions of myself and her I imagined myself prospering greatly, and Andrew here doing well in the branch I was going to open at Ballymaclurg, and then I thought to myself I'd mebbe get made a magistrate

ANDREW FERGUSON [*scornfully*]. Ha! Ha, ha!

JAMES CAESAR. Well, Andrew, there's many that's not so well reared as myself that are made magistrates this day, and can send fellows like Clute John to jail for a month and more for being without visible means of subsistence . . .

ANDREW FERGUSON. Ay, indeed, that sort of a job would suit you rightly! You could be doing an injury to other people without running any risk yourself! By my sang, Jimmy, you ought to be a magistrate! Mebbe, if you were one now, you'd fine Witherow forty shillings for what he done to Hannah! [*In great fury*] Ah, you make me feel sick! I'll go out in

the air a while and be quit of you. I'm near stifled in here!

[*He goes out violently*]

JAMES CAESAR There you are, John! That's the kind of contempt I'll have to thole from people after this. Hannah's tongue is bitterer nor Andrew's and she'll be harder to bear nor him.

SARAH FERGUSON [*completing the arrangements for the meal*] Well, indeed, it's easy enough to bear the weight of a person's tongue. You'll come to small harm, Jimmy Caesar, if that's all the trouble you have Sit up, now, and take your breakfast!

JAMES CAESAR [*drawing his chair closer to the table*]. It's kind and thoughtful of you, Mrs Ferguson, but I've no appetite at all.

SARAH FERGUSON. Ah, wheesht with you!

JAMES CAESAR. I'll only take the tea.

[*He begins to eat his breakfast.*]

SARAH FERGUSON. Draw up, John, to the table! I wonder ought I to call Andrew in or let him have his after a wee while.

JOHN FERGUSON [*coming to the table*] Leave him for the present. His mind's disturbed.

SARAH FERGUSON Very well. [*She goes to the foot of the stairs.*] Hannah! [*She pauses, and then calls agam.*] Hannah!

JAMES CAESAR. You're not bringing her down, are you?

SARAH FERGUSON. She has to have her food the same as yourself. [*She calls again*] Are you up yet, Hannah!

HANNAH FERGUSON [*upstairs*]. Ay, Ma

SARAH FERGUSON. Well, come down and have your breakfast.

[*She returns to the table and sits down*]

JOHN FERGUSON. Mebbe she'd better have hers upstairs.

SARAH FERGUSON No, indeed, she won't have it upstairs There's no good of her sitting up there crying her eyes out The world has to go on just the same as ever, no matter what happens. What'll you have, Jimmy? A piece of soda or a piece of wheaten farl? I baked the soda yesterday.

JAMES CAESAR. Ah, I couldn't touch it.

SARAH FERGUSON [*putting bread on his plate*]. Well, just take it on your plate anyway, and if you have a fancy for it after a while it'll be convenient to you. John, what'll you have? [*HANNAH descends the stairs.*] Ah, is that you at last,

Hannah? Come on in here and have your breakfast! Do you see Jimmy Caesar?

HANNAH FERGUSON. Ay, Ma. Good morning, Jimmy!

[*She sits down beside her father*]

JAMES CAESAR Good morning to you, Hannah

JOHN FERGUSON [*kissing HANNAH affectionately*]. How're you, daughter?

JAMES CAESAR Hannah, I've come here this morning to make a confession to you!

SARAH FERGUSON. Well, eat your breakfast first.

JAMES CAESAR I must tell her, Mrs. Ferguson, before I take another bite. Hannah, I went out last night to kill Henry Witherow, but when I was getting ready to kill him, I got afeard and I run away and hid myself. I come here this morning to tell you the poor sort of man I am. I daresay you're thankful you broke your word to me, for I'm not much of a support to any woman

HANNAH FERGUSON. I don't want you to make no confession to me

JAMES CAESAR Ah, but I must. Sure, I must tell people the way I feel. That's the only thing that's left to me now. Hannah, will you forgive me for not killing Witherow?

HANNAH FERGUSON. I didn't ask you to kill him. I had no call to ask you.

JAMES CAESAR [*on whom the mean manner has gradually been gaining control*]. If you're not angry with me, Hannah, then I'm glad I didn't do an injury to him. If I had killed him, mebbe it would have done no good! I daresay your da's right! Sure, if I'd done anything to Witherow I'd 'a' been put in jail, and my business that I've built up this long would 'a' been sold on me and mebbe I'd be hanged, and there'd be no good in that at all. I wonder now is it not better to forget and forgive! Of course, if a man does wrong he ought to be made to suffer for it. That's only right, and if Witherow was brought before the magistrates . . .

[*HANNAH gets up suddenly in distress.*]

HANNAH FERGUSON. Oh, quit talking about it, quit talking!

[*She goes to the sofa and throws herself prone on it.*]

SARAH FERGUSON [*going to her*]. There, there, Hannah, don't be upsetting yourself!

[*She comforts HANNAH.*]

JAMES CAESAR. That's the way of me again, John! I'm always raking things up! I wish now I had killed Witherow. There'd

be some satisfaction in that! Do you think Hannah'd marry me if I was to ask her again? I'd be willing to marry her just the same! [*He turns to HANNAH*] Hi, Hannah, do you hear that? I'm willing to marry you just the same if you'll have me! Will you?

[*HANNAH, still sobbing, does not reply.*]

SARAH FERGUSON Hannah, dear, do you not hear Jimmy speaking to you?

JAMES CAESAR [*getting up and going to HANNAH*]. Listen, Hannah! I was thinking as I was coming along that mebbe you'd have a poor opinion of me when you heard the way I'd behaved, but mebbe after all things has turned out for the best, and if you'll marry me I daresay we'll be as happy as any one [*To MRS. FERGUSON.*] Dear bless us, Mrs. Ferguson, it's quare the way my mind alters every wee minute or so! I think one time I ought to have killed Witherow, and then I think another time I was right not to kill him, and one minute I'm ashamed of myself and another minute I'm near satisfied [*To HANNAH.*] Are you listening to me, Hannah?

JOHN FERGUSON. Don't trouble her now, Jimmy! Come and finish your breakfast.

JAMES CAESAR. Well, we can discuss it later [*He returns to the table and begins his meal again*]. When I come in here this morning I felt as if I could never put another bite of food in my mouth, and now I'm eating my breakfast as easy as anything. How would you account for the like of that, John?

JOHN FERGUSON. I can account for nothing, Jimmy, outside God's will

JAMES CAESAR [*unctuously*]. Ah, that's true "God moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform."

[*CLUTIE JOHN enters in a state of great excitement*]

CLUTIE JOHN. Mr. Ferguson! Mr. Ferguson!!

SARAH FERGUSON [*starting up in alarm*]. Ah, Clutie John, go 'long with you! You near startled me out of my wits! What do you want to come running in like that for? Go 'long with you, man! We don't want you here the day again!

CLUTIE JOHN [*tensely*]. I must tell you, I must tell you! Mr. Ferguson! . . . [*He sees JAMES CAESAR.*] Oh, there's Mr. Caesar!

JAMES CAESAR. Have you never seen me before, you great gumph you, that

you're standing there gaping at me like that?

JOHN FERGUSON. What is it, Clutie? [To JAMES CAESAR.] Don't be harsh with him, Jimmy! He's greatly upset after what happened yesterday.

JAMES CAESAR. All right!

[He goes on with his meal.]

CLUTIE JOHN. I've fearful news for you, Mr. Ferguson! It's quare Mr. Caesar should be here!

JAMES CAESAR. What's quare about it?

CLUTIE JOHN [looking at him in an odd manner]. Didn't you kill Mr Witherow?

JAMES CAESAR [rising in a fury]. Quit out of the place, damn you . . .

CLUTIE JOHN [shrinking from CAESAR and running to JOHN FERGUSON] Don't let him strike me, Mr. Ferguson! I'm afeard of my life of him!

JOHN FERGUSON [quieting him]. He'll not harm you, Clutie. Sit down somewhere and control yourself! And don't be talking about killing anybody!

CLUTIE JOHN. But he's dead, Mr Ferguson!

JOHN FERGUSON. Dead!

SARAH FERGUSON. Who's dead?

CLUTIE JOHN. Henry Witherow!

JOHN FERGUSON. My God!

CLUTIE JOHN. He was found this morning in the farmyard shot through the heart.

JOHN FERGUSON. Shot!

CLUTIE JOHN. Ay, shot he was! The peelers is up at the farm now. Sergeant Kernaghan and two constables is there . . .

SARAH FERGUSON. Aw, it's not true, it's not true! The poor creature's demented and doesn't know what he's saying!

HANNAH FERGUSON. Clutie, are you sure? . . .

CLUTIE JOHN. Ay, Hannah. I am. Certain sure! [To MRS FERGUSON.] It is true. It is indeed, and 'deed and doubles! I wouldn't tell you a lie for the world. I saw his corpse myself, stretched out in the yard. It was quare to think of him lying there, and me could hit him if I liked and him couldn't hit back!

JAMES CAESAR. But . . . but who killed him? [JOHN FERGUSON turns to look at him, and JAMES CAESAR sees accusation in his eyes.] I didn't do it, John! It wasn't me that killed him! I swear to God it wasn't me! I'll take my oath on the Bible! . . .

JOHN FERGUSON. Jimmy! . . .

JAMES CAESAR. I tell you I didn't do

it. How do you know he's dead? You only have Clutie John's word for it, and you know rightly he's away in the mind!

HANNAH FERGUSON. Oh, he's dead, thank God, he's dead!

JAMES CAESAR [turning to her]. It's mebbe not true, Hannah . . .

CLUTIE JOHN. It's as true as death, Hannah! I tell you I saw him myself, and the peelers were asking a wheen of questions . . .

JAMES CAESAR [in a panic]. Did they ask anything about me, Clutie? [He does not wait for an answer, but, sitting down at the table, buries his face in his hands.] Oh, my God, they'll be blaming me for it, and I never did it at all! [He gets up and goes to JOHN FERGUSON, plucking his arm.] John, listen to me! You know the sort I am, don't you? You know rightly I couldn't have done it myself! I came here this morning and told you I was afeard to do it! Oh, my God, won't you believe me?

HANNAH FERGUSON. Jimmy!

JAMES CAESAR [miserably]. Ay, Hannah.

HANNAH FERGUSON. Don't deny it if you did it.

JAMES CAESAR. I wouldn't deny it! [He goes to HANNAH.] Hannah, make your da believe me! Tell him you don't think I did it. You don't, do you?

HANNAH FERGUSON. You say you didn't, Jimmy!

JAMES CAESAR. But you think I did do it! I know you do! I can see it in your eyes!

HANNAH FERGUSON. I'd be proud if you had done it, Jimmy!

JAMES CAESAR [miserably]. Every one'll think I did it, the peelers and every one!

[He subsides again at the table.]

CLUTIE JOHN. It's a fearful thing to take a man's life. It is, in sang! There was many a song made up in Ireland about the like of a thing of that sort. I wonder, now, could I make up a song about Henry Witherow to be sung on the fair-days!

SARAH FERGUSON. Wheesh! with you, Clutie!

JAMES CAESAR [starting up and addressing CLUTIE JOHN]. What sort of questions were the peelers asking, Clutie? Did they make any mention of me, did you hear?

CLUTIE JOHN. I couldn't hear a word they were saying, Mr. Caesar, but whatever questions they were asking, they were putting the answers down in their wee books.

JAMES CAESAR. If they get to know I had a grudge against Witherow over the head of Hannah, they'll be after me. They know rightly I never cared for him any time of my life, but then I never done any harm to him for all my talk, and if they didn't know about Hannah, mebbe they'd never think of me [*Going to JOHN FERGUSON*] John, you'll never let on anything, will you? [*He turns, without waiting for an answer, and speaks to MRS. FERGUSON and HANNAH.*] You two won't either, will you? And Clutie John? I'm sorry, Clutie, for all I said to you I wasn't thinking, that's why I said it. And if you'll not let on to the peelers about me, I'll give you something for yourself.

CLUTIE JOHN. What'll you give me, Mr Caesar?

JAMES CAESAR. I don't know yet. I'll give you something. I'll give you your dinner whenever you want it, and I'll let you sleep in my loft. [*To JOHN FERGUSON.*] John, make him promise not to clash on me! You have more influence over him nor any one. Where's Andrew? We must make him promise too! Call him in, Mrs. Ferguson, and bid him promise he won't tell!

JOHN FERGUSON. We can't make any promises, Jimmy.

JAMES CAESAR. You'll not promise! Oh, you'll never go and tell the peelers, will you, and have them suspecting me, and me didn't do it?

JOHN FERGUSON. You must answer to the law, Jimmy . . .

JAMES CAESAR. But I didn't do it, I tell you! I'll take my oath I didn't. Where's the Bible? I'll swear on the Bible!

[*ANDREW FERGUSON enters from the door.*]

ANDREW FERGUSON. What ails you all?

JOHN FERGUSON. Henry Witherow's dead!

[*ANDREW pauses for a few moments before he replies. When he speaks his voice is very strained.*]

ANDREW FERGUSON. Oh!

JOHN FERGUSON. He was found in his yard this morning, shot!

ANDREW FERGUSON. Shot!

JOHN FERGUSON. Ay!

ANDREW FERGUSON. That's . . .
quare!

JAMES CAESAR [*wildly*]. Your da thinks it was me that shot him, Andrew, and so does your ma and Hannah, but I

tell you I didn't. You know me, Andrew, don't you? You guessed that I wouldn't have the courage to kill Witherow, didn't you? . . .

ANDREW FERGUSON [*turning away from him*]. Ay.

JAMES CAESAR. There, you hear what your son says, John Ferguson! You hear him, don't you? Andrew doesn't be'leve I did it. I feel happier in my mind now. Mebbe the peelers'll believe me when I tell them I didn't do it. Sergeant Kernaghan knows me well. Him and me was at the same school together . . .

ANDREW FERGUSON. You ought to try and get away, Jimmy . . .

JAMES CAESAR. Get away! . . . Do you not believe me either, Andrew? Do you think I killed him?

ANDREW FERGUSON. No, I don't believe you did, but it's likely other people'll think it.

JOHN FERGUSON. Jimmy, why don't you ease your mind? There's no boundary to the love of God, and if you confess your sin, He'll forgive you for it.

JAMES CAESAR. Will I never satisfy you, John? Will you never believe I didn't do it?

JOHN FERGUSON. I wish I could believe you.

ANDREW FERGUSON. If you can prove where you were . . .

JAMES CAESAR. How can I prove it when no one seen me?

[*CLUTIE JOHN goes to the door and looks down the loanie.*]

CLUTIE JOHN. Here's the peelers coming!

JAMES CAESAR [*in terror*]. Oh, my God!

CLUTIE JOHN. There's the sergeant and the constables and a crowd of people running after them!

JAMES CAESAR. They're coming for me! I know rightly they are! They'll take me up . . . John, for the love of God, help me to hide somewhere!

JOHN FERGUSON. I can't, Jimmy, I can't. If you've broke the law, the law must have its reckoning.

ANDREW FERGUSON. Have you changed your mind, then, Da! You were all for love and forgiveness awhile ago.

JOHN FERGUSON. Ay, son, I was, and I am still, but Jimmy must redeem himself. A man should submit to punishment of his own free will, not be dragged to it. I know I'm not thinking clear, but I'm certain that Jimmy should submit to the

law, whether he killed Witherow or not. It'll tell again' him if he runs away.

[*The noise of the approaching crowd is heard*]

JAMES CAESAR I must hide, I must hide! I can't face them! [*He gazes wildly round the room*] Hannah, tell your da to let me hide!

JOHN FERGUSON There's no use in hiding, Jimmy. You can't hide from yourself, can you?

JAMES CAESAR. Hide me, Hannah, and God'll reward you!

HANNAH FERGUSON [*appealingly*]. Da!

JOHN FERGUSON. I can't, daughter. He must submit himself to the will of God. There's no other way for a man to save himself.

[*The crowd comes to the door. SERGEANT KERNAGHAN and the two constables step inside the kitchen. The Sergeant advances while the constables keep back the murmuring crowd which surges round the door*]

SERGEANT KERNAGHAN. I'm sorry to put you to any bother. [*He sees JAMES CAESAR.*] Ah, James Caesar, I arrest you on the suspicion of murdering Henry Witherow, and I warn you that anything you say will be taken down in writing and used as evidence against you!

JAMES CAESAR [*shrinking*]. I didn't do it! I tell you I didn't do it! Sergeant, for the love of God don't take me up! You and me attended the same school together . . .

SERGEANT KERNAGHAN. I'm heart-sore at having to do it, Jimmy, but I can't help myself.

[*He beckons to the constables, who come forward and put handcuffs on CAESAR'S wrists. The crowd penetrates into the room, and the Sergeant goes and pushes it back.*]

JAMES CAESAR [*more calmly*]. I meant to kill him. I admit that. [*The crowd tosses this admission from lip to lip.*] But I didn't do it. If I should never speak again, that's the God's truth! I'm not sorry he's dead, but it wasn't me that killed him.

SERGEANT KERNAGHAN. Come along, now.

JAMES CAESAR. Good-bye to you all!

JOHN FERGUSON. God give you peace, Jimmy!

HANNAH FERGUSON [*going to CAESAR and touching his arm*]. Good-bye, Jimmy!

JAMES CAESAR. I wish for your sake I had killed him, I'd be a happier man nor I am.

SERGEANT KERNAGHAN. I must ask you to come along now [*To the constables*]. Just clear the crowd away from the door!

[*The constables push the people away from the door, and then they and the Sergeant close about JIMMY CAESAR and take him away. The crowd surges round them and slowly disappears, murmuring loudly as it goes. HANNAH closes the door behind them and then goes and sits down on the sofa beside her mother, who is weeping. There is silence for a moment*]

JOHN FERGUSON. God knows His own ways best!

[*ANDREW stands staring in front of him. Then he goes to the door and opens it, and stands gazing down the loanie after the retreating crowd. CLUTIE JOHN sits down on the seat in the fireplace and takes out his whistle. He begins to play "Willie Reilly and His Colleen Bawn"*]

ANDREW FERGUSON [*fiercely*]. Quit that damned whistle, will you?

[*CLUTIE JOHN looks up at him questioningly, and then puts the whistle away. ANDREW stands still for a moment longer. Then he closes the door and walks towards the fire and holds his hands in front of the blaze*]

ANDREW FERGUSON. It's colder the day nor it was yesterday!

JOHN FERGUSON. Ay, son!

ACT IV

It is the late afternoon of a day a fortnight later. JOHN FERGUSON, who has become feebler in the interval, but at the same time more deeply religious, is sitting in the attitude in which he was seen at the beginning of the play. His chair is drawn up to the fire, and he has his Bible open in his hands. He is reading the eighteenth chapter of the second book of Samuel. It is clear from his look of fragility that he is dying. MRS. FERGUSON is standing at the door, looking down the loanie.

JOHN FERGUSON [*reading aloud*]. "And the king said, Is the young man Absalom safe? And Ahimaaz answered, When Joab sent the king's servant, and me thy servant, I saw a great tumult, but I

knew not what it was And the king said unto him, Turn aside and stand there, And he turned aside and stood still And, behold, Cushî came, and Cushî said, Tidings, my lord, the king for the Lord hath avenged thee this day of all them that rose up against thee. And the king said unto Cushî, Is the young man Absalom safe? . . .”

SARAH FERGUSON Here's Hannah, now, John! She's just turned the corner of the loane.

JOHN FERGUSON [*looking up from his Bible*]. Ay, wife, it'll be about her time.

SARAH FERGUSON [*entering the kitchen and setting a kettle on the fire*]. I don't know how she can bear to go and see Jimmy the way she does when she minds everything If it hadn't been for her changing her mind, Witherow would be living now!

JOHN FERGUSON [*putting the Bible down on the table beside him, and turning to his wife*]. You must never say the like of that to her, Sarah! The girl couldn't see in front of her. No one could

SARAH FERGUSON. She would have nothing to do with him before he killed Witherow, and now she goes to see him whenever they'll let her in the jail! You would near think she was in love with him over the head of the crime, though I don't believe she is myself for all she visits him. [*She sits down on the sofa and takes up some darning on which she begins to work.*] There's been a quare change in her this last fortnight! She's quieter on it, and not so headstrong and set on herself as she used to be. Indeed, sometimes I near think she's in a decline

JOHN FERGUSON [*sighing as he speaks*]. Ay, she's been through a mort of sorrow, that girl! She's young to be feeling the weight of the world already

SARAH FERGUSON. Ay, indeed! And there's Andrew hasn't a word to say to any one since it happened Sometimes I try to talk to him about Jimmy, but sure I might as well hold my tongue. All I can get out of him is "Ay, Ma!" or "No," or mebbe he'll just nod his head [*She sighs.*] Ah, dear, our children seem to be slipping away from us, John!

JOHN FERGUSON. Mebbe they're going past us, Sarah. It's natural, that! You and your children can't keep pace with each other all your life. They must get ahead of you some time. It hurts you when you feel them outstripping you, but it's the way God works, and sure He doesn't leave you without a consolation

of some sort God never hits you with both hands at the one time, Sarah, and if we're losing our children, we're finding ourselves. You and me's drawing closer to one another, woman!

[*He holds out his hand to her*]

SARAH FERGUSON [*taking his hand*]. Ay, John, we are We were always good comrades since ever we were married, you and me, for all the trouble we've had.

JOHN FERGUSON. Ay, wife, ay!

[*He takes up the Bible again and reads it to himself. As he does so, HANNAH enters the kitchen. Her manner is more restrained than it was when the play began, and she seems to be older in manner Her actions appear to be independent of her thoughts.*]

SARAH FERGUSON You're back again, Hannah?

HANNAH FERGUSON. Ay, Ma!

[*She takes off her outdoor garments and lays them aside.*]

JOHN FERGUSON. Well, Hannah, how is Jimmy the day?

HANNAH FERGUSON. He seemed quieter in his mind, Da.

JOHN FERGUSON. Has he confessed the truth yet?

HANNAH FERGUSON. No. I didn't like to mention it to him, and he didn't say anything to me. But I know he hasn't confessed, because I went to Mulhern, the solicitor, afterwards, and he told me Jimmy still makes out that he didn't do it.

[*She comes and sits at the table, facing the audience.*]

JOHN FERGUSON. I wish he'd unburden his mind. It's no good keeping it up like that. What does Mulhern say about it?

HANNAH FERGUSON. He doesn't know what to think. He says that when he's by himself he feels sure Jimmy did it, but when he's with Jimmy he begins to be doubtful.

JOHN FERGUSON. Doubtful.

HANNAH FERGUSON. Ay. There's something about the way Jimmy denies it that near makes you believe him. All the same, Mulhern thinks he did it, and he says that if he was to confess, it would be better for him There are extenuating circumstances . . .

JOHN FERGUSON. Nothing can extenuate a murder, Hannah! God's Word is clear. "But I say unto you which hear, Love your enemies, do good to them that hate you. Bless them that curse you, and pray for them that despitefully use you. And unto him that smiteth thee on the one

cheek, offer also the other; and him that taketh away thy cloak, forbid him not to take thy coat also." Them words is plain enough You can't twist them out of their meaning. There can be no excuse, Hannah, for a bad deed: there can only be repentance and forgiveness.

HANNAH FERGUSON. We all have our natures, Da!

JOHN FERGUSON. Ay, daughter, we have, but there's the one duty for the whole of us.

HANNAH FERGUSON. I met John Comber on the road, and he's set on getting up a petition for Jimmy. He says the judge is sure to sentence him to death . . .

SARAH FERGUSON. God save us!

HANNAH FERGUSON. . . and so we'd better be prepared to do all that's needful.

SARAH FERGUSON. Ah, sure, they'll never hang him when they know all the facts. It wouldn't be honest or fair, and there's many says Witherow should have been shot long ago They'll mebbe give Jimmy penal servitude for life.

HANNAH FERGUSON. That's worse nor hanging. They take your life, but they don't give you death.

SARAH FERGUSON [*sighing*]. Ah, I daresay you're right! Dear knows, when you think of what they do to you, you'd wonder anybody ever killed a person at all.

[*SAM MAWHINNEY, the postman, comes to the door.*]

SAM MAWHINNEY. I'm not empty-handed this time, Mrs Ferguson. I've a letter for you the day.

SARAH FERGUSON. A letter?

SAM MAWHINNEY. Ay, from America. The mail's in the day!

SARAH FERGUSON [*going to him and taking the letter from him*]. A letter from America!

SAM MAWHINNEY. Ay! Don't you mind the last time the mail come in you were expecting a letter from America, and you were quare and cut up because you didn't get it? I declare to my goodness it was the very day Witherow was shot. A fortnight the day! I never thought of that now!

SARAH FERGUSON [*absently*]. Thank you, Sam!

SAM MAWHINNEY. Ah, not at all. I only hope it's good news for you. Are you keeping your health, Mr. Ferguson?

JOHN FERGUSON. I'm bravely, thank you, Sam!

SAM MAWHINNEY. That's right. Good evening to you, Hannah! Well, I must be going Good night to you all!

SARAH FERGUSON. Good night to you, Sam!

[*SAM MAWHINNEY goes off.*]

SARAH FERGUSON [*standing in the center of the kitchen gazing vacantly at the letter*]. It's from Andrew, John! Will I open it?

JOHN FERGUSON. Ay!

[*She opens the envelope and takes out the letter and an order for money which are inside*]

SARAH FERGUSON. Oh, he's sent the money to pay the mortgage!

[*She holds the order in her fingers and gazes stupidly at it for a few moments. They are all silent for a while*]

HANNAH FERGUSON [*bitterly*]. God's late, Da!

JOHN FERGUSON [*feeling the blow to his faith*]. Don't, daughter, don't

HANNAH FERGUSON [*getting up and going to the window*]. Oh, it's wicked, it's wicked!

SARAH FERGUSON. If it had only come by the last mail!

JOHN FERGUSON. There *must* be some meaning in it There *must* be! God doesn't make mistakes.

SARAH FERGUSON. Will I read the letter to you, John?

JOHN FERGUSON. Ay! Ay, do!

SARAH FERGUSON [*sitting down at the table*]. There's not much in it. [*She peers at the letter*] I can't understand his writing without my specs!

HANNAH FERGUSON [*coming to her and taking the letter from her*]. I'll read it, Ma! [*She, too, sits down at the table, and she reads the letter aloud.*] "Dear Brother, I received your letter safe, and am sorry to hear about your trouble, but am glad to see that you are better in yourself and that Sarah and Andrew and Hannah are keeping their health as I am, too, thank God. It is a great deal of money to send, and I have had a lot of bother to raise it, but I could not let the farm go out of the family without making an effort, so I send the money to you with this letter. If I am well-spared I will mebbe come home and see you all I am getting tired of America. It is no place for an old man that wasn't born here. Remember me to all my friends and acquaintances, and with my best love and respect to all at home. I am, your affectionate brother, Andrew. P. S. Write soon." [*She turns the letter*

over.] There's a piece on the other side. "P. S.—I am sorry I missed the mail yesterday I made a mistake in the day, but I daresay this will reach you in time.—Andrew."

[*She puts the letter down. They sit in silence. Then HANNAH begins to laugh hysterically.*]

HANNAH FERGUSON. Isn't it quare and funny, Da? Isn't it funny? . . .

SARAH FERGUSON [*going to her and shaking her*]. Hannah, Hannah, for dear sake, control yourself!

HANNAH FERGUSON [*lapsing from laughter to tears*]. Where's the right in it, Da? Where's the right in it? It's not just! It's not fair!

SARAH FERGUSON. Ah, quit, Hannah!

HANNAH FERGUSON. There would have been none of this if he hadn't forgotten the right day, none of it. . . . Oh, Da, Da!

[*ANDREW FERGUSON enters.*]

ANDREW FERGUSON. Is anything the matter?

HANNAH FERGUSON. No, no, Andrew! Nothing's the matter! Nothing! Your uncle Andrew forgot the mail-day, that's all! . . .

ANDREW FERGUSON [*to his father*]. What's up, Da?

JOHN FERGUSON [*feebly*]. It's . . . it's your uncle . . .

[*He becomes incoherent.*]

SARAH FERGUSON. Your uncle Andrew's sent the money to pay the mortgage, son. He forgot the mail-day, and just missed it. If he hadn't forgot, the money would have been here before . . . before Jimmy killed Witherow!

HANNAH FERGUSON. Ay! Ay! Before—before Jimmy killed Witherow! And then my da says it was all planned! . . .

ANDREW FERGUSON [*with a queer wrinkled smile on his face, as he takes up the letter and fingers it*]. Huh! Uncle Andrew never had a good memory, had he? [*No one speaks.*] Well, the farm's safe anyway.

HANNAH FERGUSON. Ay, the farm's safe!

JOHN FERGUSON. We can't understand everything. It's no good trying to puzzle it all out. We must just have faith . . . that's all! Just have faith!

HANNAH FERGUSON. One man's dead and another's in jail in danger of his life because my uncle Andrew forgot the mail-day.

ANDREW FERGUSON. It's . . . it's a quare set-out!

JOHN FERGUSON. Ay! [*Sighing heavily*] Ay!

ANDREW FERGUSON [*hysterically*]. Ha! Ha, ha! Ha, ha, ha! . . .

JOHN FERGUSON. Andrew, Andrew, son, don't you give way, too! Set an example to your sister of self-control!

ANDREW FERGUSON [*recovering himself*]. Ay! Ay, Da, I will.

[*He sits down.*]

SARAH FERGUSON. Hannah's just come back from seeing Jimmy, Andrew!

ANDREW FERGUSON. Oh! Oh! Oh, yes, I remember, she was going to see him the day, wasn't she? [*His voice is very hard and strained*] What was he like, Hannah? [*HANNAH does not answer*]

SARAH FERGUSON. She says he was quieter in his mind . . .

ANDREW FERGUSON. That's good. It's good to be quiet in your mind! It's well for him.

JOHN FERGUSON. It's not well for him, Andrew. He still denies that he killed Witherow . . .

ANDREW FERGUSON. Mebbe he didn't kill him, Da!

JOHN FERGUSON. I would like to believe that, but I can't.

ANDREW FERGUSON. He ought to have killed him. [*More emphatically*] He ought to have killed him . . . but he didn't.

JOHN FERGUSON. Ah, son, what's the good of talking that way. You and Hannah's overstrung, and you hardly know what you're saying or doing, the pair of you. I've noticed how quiet you've been lately, and I believe you've been brooding over Jimmy till now you can't think clearly about him.

ANDREW FERGUSON. He didn't kill Witherow, Da. He hadn't the pluck to kill him. It was me that done it!

SARAH FERGUSON [*starting up*]. You!

JOHN FERGUSON [*quietly*]. Sit down. Sarah! The lad's beside himself. [*MRS. FERGUSON resumes her seat.*] Andrew, you must not give way to your fancies like that! [*He rises and faces him.*] Come to bed, son, and rest yourself. You look tired and exhausted.

[*He takes hold of ANDREW'S arm and tries to lead him to the stairs.*]

ANDREW FERGUSON [*eluding his father's grasp*]. No, Da, I'm not away in the mind, as you think. I know rightly

what I'm saying. It was me that killed Witherow!

[*Now that he has confessed his deed, his voice becomes quite calm.*]

JOHN FERGUSON You're demented, son!

ANDREW FERGUSON No, Da, I'm not I killed him. With that gun there.

[*He points to the gun over the mantel-shelf.*]

SARAH FERGUSON [*in terrible alarm*]. Son-a-dear, do you know what you're saying?

ANDREW FERGUSON. I know rightly, Ma.

SARAH FERGUSON. It's not true, it's not true.

[*JOHN FERGUSON has been standing gaping at his son as if he cannot understand what he is saying. Then, as comprehension comes to him, he goes to ANDREW and grips him by the shoulder.*]

JOHN FERGUSON [*almost harshly*]. Andrew!

ANDREW FERGUSON [*quietly*]. Ay, Da!

JOHN FERGUSON. Do you mean . . . do you mean you killed Witherow?

ANDREW FERGUSON. I do, Da!

JOHN FERGUSON [*releasing his grip and staggering back a little*]. Oh, my God, my God!

SARAH FERGUSON. It's not true, John, it's not true. The poor lad's mind is turned with trouble.

ANDREW FERGUSON. It is true. I knew that Jimmy wouldn't kill him, so I made up my mind I'd kill him myself . . .

JOHN FERGUSON [*wildly*]. Quit, quit, quit! I must think . . . I must think!

[*He goes back to his chair and sinks into it. As he does so, his hand touches his Bible. He pushes it away from him.*]

HANNAH FERGUSON [*going to her brother and putting her arms about him*]. Andrew, dear!

ANDREW FERGUSON. I'm not sorry I killed him, Hannah!

HANNAH FERGUSON. No, Andrew, I know you're not.

ANDREW FERGUSON. But I'm ashamed to think I let Jimmy bear the blame for it. That's as bad as him hiding under the whin-bush when he should have been killing Witherow himself. It's been on my mind ever since the peelers took him up. That's the only thing that disturbs me. I lie awake at night, and I say to myself, "You took Jimmy's place of your

own free will, but you made him take your place against his will!" Mind you, I felt no more remorse when I killed Witherow nor a terrier feels when it kills a rat.

HANNAH FERGUSON No, Andrew, why would you?

ANDREW FERGUSON. I went up to his farm, and when I got there the dog begun to bark, and Witherow come to the door "Is that you, Jimmy Caesar?" he shouted "Have you come to kill me?" He let a big coarse laugh out of him when he said that, and I could feel my heart jumping mad inside me "It's not Jimmy Caesar!" I shouted back at him; "it's me!" I could see him straining to look at me, and his features was puzzled. Then I put my gun up to my shoulder, and I took aim at him. "Away home out of that!" he shouted. And then I pulled the trigger, and he let a yell out of him and fell in a lump on the ground. The dog was barking and straining at its chain . . .

HANNAH FERGUSON. Poor beast!

ANDREW FERGUSON. But I didn't mind that. I shouted at it to lie down, and then I come straight home I mind when I was half-way home, I said to myself, "Mebbe you've not killed him," and I was near turning back to make sure But I just didn't . . . There was no one in the kitchen when I come in, and I put the gun back where I found it, and no one knew . . . except me. It never entered no one's mind that it was me killed him. I was safe enough, and at first I didn't care whether Jimmy got hung or not. I said to myself it would serve him right if he was hung for being a collie. And then I tried to comfort myself by saying he wouldn't be hung at all when the people knew the way he'd been provoked. But it wasn't any good. I got more and more ashamed, and I couldn't sit still in the house with you all, and my da saying Jimmy ought to confess. I couldn't rest nowhere. The only consolation I had was to go into the fields and listen to Clutie playing his whistle He knew it was me done it, for all he didn't say anything . . .

[*JOHN FERGUSON rouses himself from the lethargy into which he sank when he heard his son's confession. He gets up from his chair and takes hold of ANDREW as if he were protecting him from some danger.*]

JOHN FERGUSON. We must hide him somewhere That's what we must do. We'll send you to America, Andrew, to live with your uncle. Ay, ay! That's what the money was for! You may be certain sure that

was what it come for! You'll be safe when you're out of the country, son! No one'll harm you in America! [*To his wife*] Stir yourself, Sarah, woman, stir yourself! We've no time to lose. The peelers might hear it and come any minute. [*To ANDREW*] Come on, son, and get ready! You must quit the place the night . . .

ANDREW FERGUSON. No, Da . . .

JOHN FERGUSON. Ay, son, you must! You can go up to Belfast by the next tram, and we'll send the money to you there. You'd better change your name, son! . . . [*He puts his hands to his head as if he were dazed*] I'm all moidhered! Sarah, Sarah, woman!

SARAH FERGUSON. Ay, John?

JOHN FERGUSON. We must hide him the night. Do you understand me? Mebbe some one heard him telling us about it. You never know who's listening, and the world's full of clash-bags! . . .

ANDREW FERGUSON. I can't go, Da, and leave Jimmy in the wrong.

JOHN FERGUSON. Yes, yes, son! That'll be all right! We'll think about Jimmy afterwards. Come and get ready now, son!

[*He tries to lead ANDREW to the staircase, but ANDREW resists him.*]

SARAH FERGUSON. Go with your da, son, and get ready!

ANDREW FERGUSON [*freeing himself from them and sitting down again*]. I must do right by Jimmy for my peace' sake.

JOHN FERGUSON. No, son, you must save yourself first.

ANDREW FERGUSON. You're asking me to do what you wouldn't let Jimmy do for all he begged you!

JOHN FERGUSON [*fiercely*]. You're my son, Andrew, and Jimmy's not! He always meant to kill Witherow. Many's a time you all heard him say he would do it! Didn't you? You mocked him yourselves over the head of it. He killed the man many's a while in his mind, and the Bible says if you think a sin you commit a sin. [*He takes hold of ANDREW again.*] Come away, son! Hannah, persuade him . . .

HANNAH FERGUSON. I can't, Da. Andrew knows what's best for himself

SARAH FERGUSON. Do you want your brother hanged, Hannah? Is that what you want?

HANNAH FERGUSON. What peace will Andrew have if Jimmy suffers for him?

ANDREW FERGUSON. That's what I

say to myself, many's a time, Hannah! You see that yourself, Da, don't you?

JOHN FERGUSON [*feebly going to his chair*] I've suffered enough! I've suffered enough, Andrew! It's not just or right to put more trouble on me now. I've lost my health . . . and then there was the mortgage . . . and . . . Hannah . . . and Jimmy . . . and now! . . . Oh, I've bore enough, and it's not fair to ask me to bear any more

HANNAH FERGUSON. We all have to make our own peace, Da. We can't have it made for us. You used always to say that.

ANDREW FERGUSON. Hannah's right, Da. There'll be no content for me till I content myself [*He rises*] I'll go down now to the barracks and tell the sergeant.

JOHN FERGUSON [*turning on him and speaking brokenly*]. Son, Son! . . .

SARAH FERGUSON. I'll not have him made suffer! [*Going to ANDREW and holding him tightly.*] I'll not let you go, Andrew, I'll not let you go!

ANDREW FERGUSON. I must go, Ma, for my peace' sake. Every minute that Jimmy's locked in jail is a burden on my mind. I've mocked the man times and times for a coward, though he couldn't help his nature, but I'm worse nor him a hundred times.

SARAH FERGUSON. Be wheesht with you, son, be wheesht!

ANDREW FERGUSON. Eating the heart out of me, it is. Gnawing and gnawing! . . . I never get the picture of Jimmy out of my mind! I run for miles this morning to try and tire myself out so's I could sleep and rest myself, but I can't get content nohow. That's the way of it, Ma. You understand me, Da, don't you?

JOHN FERGUSON. Ay, son, I understand you.

SARAH FERGUSON. You can go to America, Andrew, the way your da said you could, and when you're safe you can send home a confession to save Jimmy. That would do, wouldn't it?

JOHN FERGUSON [*eagerly clutching at the straw*]. Ay, ay, that would do, Andrew.

SARAH FERGUSON. Or we could go ourselves and tell the peelers when you were safely out of it.

HANNAH FERGUSON. They might think it was a made-up thing . . .

SARAH FERGUSON [*rounding on her*]. Quit, you! It doesn't become you, Hannah, to be telling your brother what to do when it's your fault he's in the trouble he is.

HANNAH FERGUSON. Ma, Ma, don't say it . . .

SARAH FERGUSON. Ay, you can cry well enough, but that'll not save you from the blame. If you'd taken Jimmy at the start . . .

JOHN FERGUSON. Sarah, woman, don't . . . don't talk to her that way!

SARAH FERGUSON. I will talk to her. It was her that killed Witherow, and no one else. It's her that ought to be hanged . . .

ANDREW FERGUSON [*standing up and shouting at his mother*] Ma!

SARAH FERGUSON [*collapsing*] Am I to see my own son sent to the gallows? Am I to sit still and let you hang him between you? John, are you going to let Hannah drive Andrew to the jail? . . .

ANDREW FERGUSON. She's not driving me, Ma. No one could.

SARAH FERGUSON [*ignoring her son*]. John, will you be content to let her . . .

JOHN FERGUSON [*patiently*]. I'm trying to discover God's will, Sarah

SARAH FERGUSON [*passionately*] I don't want God's will! I want my son! It's nothing to me what he done—he's my son! I don't care if he killed a hundred men—he's my son! I'll not let him go to the jail. I'll take him away myself to some place where he'll be safe. [*She goes over to ANDREW.*] Get ready, Andrew, and we'll go away together the night Your da wanted you to go a minute since. [*She tries to draw him away from his seat*] Come with me, son, and don't be heeding Hannah.

ANDREW FERGUSON [*resisting her*]. Don't, Ma [*He turns to his father.*] Da!

JOHN FERGUSON I can't advise you, son. Don't ask me I was weak a minute ago. I forgot God's will. Mebbe you're right, son . . . but don't ask me to advise you. I'm getting old, and I haven't the strength of mind I had one time . . .

SARAH FERGUSON You'll never let him go and give himself up, will you? Oh, have you no nature at all, none of you? I thought you took pride in him, John! . . .

JOHN FERGUSON. I did take pride in him, but I take no pride in anything now. I must have sinned bitterly against God to be punished this way. It must have been something I done that's brought calamity on us. I'd be willing to pay whatever price was demanded of me . . . but Andrew!

ANDREW FERGUSON Da, a man must clean himself, mustn't he?

JOHN FERGUSON. Ay, Ay, son!

ANDREW FERGUSON. It's no good other people doing things for him. He must do them himself.

JOHN FERGUSON. Yes, yes.

ANDREW FERGUSON. And it's no good any one doing anything for me. I must do it myself, Da. Jimmy can't pay for me. He can only pay for himself.

SARAH FERGUSON. I won't let you go, son!

ANDREW FERGUSON. If they were to hang Jimmy, Ma, or to keep him in jail for the rest of his life, do you think would I be happy?

SARAH FERGUSON. Ah, but you could forget, son, in a new place. We'd go where no one knew anything about us and begin all over again.

ANDREW FERGUSON. We'd know, Ma. Oh, don't you mind what my da said to Jimmy. "You can't hide from yourself"? There's nothing truer nor that.

SARAH FERGUSON [*beating her breast*]. Oh, will no one help me to keep my son safe? Will you all take him from me?

[*ANDREW goes to her and kisses her hair*]

ANDREW FERGUSON. It's best this way, Ma. You'll see that yourself some day.

[*MRS FERGUSON clutches him to her.*]

SARAH FERGUSON. Don't leave me, son.

ANDREW FERGUSON. I must, Ma, for my peace' sake! [*He kisses her and then releases himself from her embrace. She buries her face on the table and sobs without restraint.*] Will you come to the barracks with me, Da?

[*JOHN FERGUSON looks up piteously at his son. His will fails him, and he puts out his hands in supplication to ANDREW, and then, recovering himself, draws them in again*]

JOHN FERGUSON. Don't ask me, son; I couldn't bear it.

ANDREW FERGUSON. It'll be lonely going there by myself. Will you come, Hannah?

HANNAH FERGUSON [*quietly*]. Ay, Andrew.

ANDREW FERGUSON. Thank you, Hannah.

[*He puts on his coat and cap. HANNAH picks up the garments which she threw aside when she first came into the kitchen, and puts them on. There is silence, save for MRS. FERGUSON'S sobs, while they do so.*]

ANDREW FERGUSON. Good night
Da!

JOHN FERGUSON [*without looking up*]. Good night, Andrew!

[*ANDREW bends down to kiss his father, who draws him close to him*]

JOHN FERGUSON [*brokenly*]. My son,
my son!

ANDREW FERGUSON [*chokingly*].
Da!

[*He releases himself and goes to his mother*]

ANDREW FERGUSON. Good night,
Ma!

SARAH FERGUSON [*starting up and clinging to him*]. No, no, Andrew, no!

ANDREW FERGUSON [*firmly*]. Good
night, Ma!

[*He kisses her, and then gently releases himself from her clasp and puts her back into her chair.*]

ANDREW FERGUSON [*to his father*].
I think John Luke'll be able to take care
of the farm for a day or two, but I
wouldn't trust him longer, Da. He's bone
idle, that man, and you'd better get some
one else as soon as you can. If you were
to get some one that understood manage-
ment, he would do rightly as a labourer
if he was watched well. Arthur Cairnduff
heard of a suitable person a while ago
that might do.

JOHN FERGUSON. Ay, son, ay.

ANDREW FERGUSON. And Kerr, the
butcher, 'll give you a good price for the
bullock. [*To HANNAH.*] Are you ready,
Hannah?

HANNAH FERGUSON. Ay, Andrew!

ANDREW FERGUSON [*vaguely*]. Well,
I'll bid you all good night.

JOHN FERGUSON. Good night, son.

ANDREW FERGUSON. I'll . . . I'll
mebbe see you again . . . some day!

[*He pauses for a moment, but his father does not reply. HANNAH opens the door and ANDREW goes out.*]

ANDREW FERGUSON [*in the door-
way*]. The air's turned cold.

HANNAH FERGUSON [*to her father*].
I'll be back as soon as I can, Da!

[*She goes out, closing the door behind her. The sound rouses MRS. FERGUSON, who sits up and gazes dazedly about her*]

SARAH FERGUSON. Where are they?
They're not gone?

JOHN FERGUSON. Ay, they've gone.
Sit down, wife.

SARAH FERGUSON. Oh, why did you
let them go? I can't let him go, John, I
can't let him go!

JOHN FERGUSON. You must, Sarah.
God has some purpose with us, and there's
no use in holding out against God, for He
knows, and we don't.

SARAH FERGUSON. I won't let him
go! [*She goes to the door and opens it.*]
I'll bring him back!

[*She goes out, shouting "Andrew! Andrew!" and leaves the door open.*]

JOHN FERGUSON sits brooding be-
fore the fire for a few moments. Then
he gets up, moving feebly, and goes
across the room and shuts the door.
When he has done so he stands for a
moment or two gazing helplessly about
the room. Then he goes back to his
seat. As he sits down, his hand comes
in contact with the open Bible. Al-
most mechanically he picks it up and
begins to read where he left off when
the Act began. His lips move as he
reads to himself. Then he slowly reads
aloud.]

JOHN FERGUSON. "And the king said
unto Cush, Is the young man Absalom
safe? . . ."

[*The door opens, and MRS. FERGU-
SON, weeping, enters.*]

SARAH FERGUSON. They've gone!
They wouldn't come back! It's not right
to be sending him away like that! He's my
only son, and I'm an old woman. You
had no call to be sending him away.

JOHN FERGUSON. Isn't he the only
son I have too? Is it any easier for a
father to give up his son nor it is for a
mother? Has a man no pride in his child,
and no grief when it dies or does wrong?
Is it women only that can feel hurt?
Woman, woman, your sorrow is no more
nor mine, and mine is no more nor yours.
We're just stricken together. Come here,
Sarah! [*She comes to him.*] Sit down,
woman, here by the side of me, and give
me a hold of your hand. [*She sits down on
the stool beside him.*] We've been married
a long while, Sarah, and shared our good
fortune and our bad. We've had our pride
and our humiliation. God's been good to
us, and He's been bitter hard. But what-
ever it was, we've bore it together, haven't
we?

SARAH FERGUSON. Ay, John.

JOHN FERGUSON. And we'll bear this
together too, woman, won't we?

SARAH FERGUSON. It's a hard thing
for any one to bear. Your own son to be
taken from you . . .

JOHN FERGUSON. Ay, wife, it is, but
we must just bear it, for God knows bet-

ter nor we do what's right to be done.
 [*He takes up the Bible again*] Listen to
 God's Word, Sarah, and that'll strengthen
 you. [*He continues his reading.*] "And the
 king said unto Cush, Is the young man
 Absalom safe? And Cush answered, The
 enemies of my lord the king, and all that
 rise against thee to do thee hurt, be as that
 young man is. And the king was much
 moved, and went up to the chamber over
 the gate, and wept: and as he went [*his
 voice beginning to break*] thus he said, O
 my son Absalom, my son, my son Absa-
 lom! Would God I had died for thee, O
 Absalom, my son . . . my son "

[*His voice ends in a sob. The Bible falls
 from his hands on to his lap. He sits
 staring into the fire. There is a low
 moan from his wife.*]

THE END

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JOURNEY'S END

(1928)

BY

R. C. SHERRIFF

CHARACTERS

CAPTAIN HARDY
LIEUT. OSBORNE
PRIVATE MASON
2ND LIEUT. RALEIGH
CAPTAIN STANHOPE
2ND LIEUT. HIBBERT
COMPANY SERGEANT-MAJOR
THE COLONEL
2ND LIEUT. TROTTER
GERMAN SOLDIER

THE SCENE—*A dug-out in the British trenches before St. Quentin.*

A few rough steps lead into the trench above, through a low doorway. A table occupies a good space of the dug-out floor. A wooden frame, covered with wire netting, stands against the left wall and serves the double purpose of a bed and a seat for the table. A wooden bench against the back wall makes another seat, and two boxes serve for the other sides. Another wire-covered bed is fixed in the right corner beyond the doorway.

Gloomy tunnels lead out of the dug-out to left and right.

Except for the table, beds, and seats, there is no furniture save the bottles holding the candles, and a few tattered magazine pictures pinned to the wall of girls in flimsy costumes.

The earth walls deaden the sounds of war, making them faint and far away, although the front line is only fifty yards ahead. The flames of the candles that burn day and night are steady in the still, damp air.

ACT ONE: Evening on Monday, the 18th March, 1918

ACT TWO.

Scene I: Tuesday morning

Scene II: Tuesday afternoon

ACT THREE.

Scene I: Wednesday afternoon

Scene II: Wednesday night

Scene III: Thursday, towards dawn

R. C. SHERRIFF

ROBERT CEDRIC SHERRIFF, the author of *Journey's End*, was born in Buckinghamshire in 1896 and was educated at Kingston Grammar School and at New College, Oxford. Just before the outbreak of the war he joined the staff of the Sun Insurance Company. During the war he served with the British forces, attaining the rank of captain in 1917 (Stanhope in *Journey's End* also was a captain at the age of twenty-one). After the war he re-entered the insurance offices as an obscure clerk, with the normal English devotion to sports (not "athletics") to offset the tedium of his prosaic occupation. He also had another hobby—amateur playwriting for various school and civic organizations. For the members of a Rowing Club who were seeking a play with no women characters he wrote *Journey's End*, drawing upon his most vivid memories of the war ten years past. He afterwards sent the manuscript to every commercial London manager, whose obliquity of judgment was unanimous. He also sent the play to Bernard Shaw, who replied, enigmatically, that "there is no need to burn his house down to roast his dinner." Finally, a fairy godfather of non-commercial drama, Maurice Browne, undertook the production of the play, which was publicly performed for the first time in January, 1929.

The play was an immediate and overwhelming success; it was played all over the world—at one time fifty-four companies were performing the tragedy. The New York production was undertaken with some misgiving: it was a war play with a depressing finale; it lacked romance and love interest; and it was radically British in language, characterization, and humor. But it won both critical and popular acclaim in New York as elsewhere. The temptation to compare it with *What Price Glory* is irresistible—but rather pointless: one might as well compare Times Square with a Bloomsbury square. *Journey's End* is as British as *What Price Glory* is American, but both have generic interest and faithfully illuminate life as it was lived on the French front in the convulsive years of the war. *Journey's End* is an account of the last two days of a small group of British officers in a dug-out, its plot turning on hero worship; *What Price Glory* is a virile comedy growing out of violent personal animosity. The American play has a faster rhythm, more sparkle, and a sharper irony; the English play achieves its effects without resorting to an Elizabethan virility of language. Yet through the quiet and beauty and common humanity of *Journey's End* there penetrates even more ominously the atmosphere of a world gone mad.

The humor is quiet and unforced, and arises from the amazing anomalies of trench life as well as from character. There are harrowing scenes of painful suffering; the protagonist is no conventional hero but a creature of passions and nerves and cowardly lapses; yet the tragedy serves the Aristotelean end of *Katharsis*, for it is, finally, uplifting and refining. There is no finer character in literature than Lieutenant Osborne, who devotes his last moments to his pipe and brave, comforting small-talk with the callow Raleigh. Above the reek of candles, whisky, rancid bacon, violent stews, sardines, and stale tobacco; above the deadly monotony, meanness, and savagery of war, rises the eternal mystery of man's incredible nobility—his contempt of danger, of life itself. Yet there is no false note, no spurious sentiment—no suggestion of theatricality, no unusual stagecraft, no apparent purpose except to piece together a series of true incidents in the lives of ten men.

Sherriff said in a newspaper interview: "In a writer the two things that matter above

everything else are that he should be keenly, hungrily, interested in his fellows, and that he should have the common experiences of his time . . . What tremendous experiences I have, for example, traveling in a tube train! Wondering what people there are behind those faces. Following my fellow passengers to their work, their play, and their homes! But if I had not had the experiences of the war, if I had not met all sorts of men when they were stripped of all disguise, I should not have had the key. On the other hand, if I had not been a quite ordinary man, I should have got *Journey's End* all wrong."

Sherriff also is the author of *Badger's Green* (1930), a rolly comedy which would prove a bit puzzling to American audiences, as it concerns the stubborn fight of a suburban community against the vulgar intrusion of the "realtor" and his "developments." He has also used the story and characters of *Journey's End* in a novel by the same title. In 1930 he collaborated with Jeanne de Casalis in writing *St Helena*, a play about Napoleon's last days. This period of anti-climax to an exciting career is in itself undramatic, and Sherriff's characteristic method of understatement results in a temperate and intelligent study which is too static for the theatre. In recent years he has been busy writing for the movies, but has found time for a spirited novel, *The Hopkins Manuscript*, which contains more liveliness and fancy than one would expect from the author of *Journey's End*.

JOURNEY'S END

ACT I

The evening of a March day A pale glimmer of moonlight shines down the narrow steps into one corner of the dug-out. Warm yellow candle-flames light the other corner from the necks of two bottles on the table. Through the doorway can be seen the misty gray parapet of a trench and a narrow strip of starlit sky. A bottle of whisky, a jar of water, and a mug stand on the table among a litter of papers and magazines. An officer's equipment hangs in a jumbled mass from a nail in the wall.

CAPTAIN HARDY, a red-faced, cheerful-looking man, is sitting on a box by the table, intently drying a sock over a candle-flame. He wears a heavy trench-boot on his left leg, and his right foot, which is naked, is held above the damp floor by resting it on his left knee. His right boot stands on the floor beside him. As he carefully turns the sock this way and that—feeling it against his face to see if it is dry—he half sings, half hums a song—humming when he is not quite sure of the words, and marking time with the toes of his right foot.

HARDY. "One and Two it's with Maud and Lou;

Three and Four, two girls more;

Five and Six it's with—hm—hm—hm—
Seven, Eight, Clara and Caroline——"

[He lapses into an indefinite humming, and finishes with a lively burst.]

"Tick!—Tock!—wind up the clock,
And we'll start the day over again."

[A man's legs appear in the moonlit trench above, and a tall, thin man comes slowly down the dug-out steps, stooping low to avoid the roof. He takes his helmet off and reveals a fine head, with close-cropped, iron-gray hair. He looks about forty-five—physically as hard as nails.]

HARDY *[looking round]* Hullo, Osborne! Your fellows arriving?

OSBORNE *[hitching off his pack and*

dropping it in a corner]. Yes. They're just coming in.

HARDY. Splendid! Have a drink.

OSBORNE Thanks.

[He crosses and sits on the left-hand bed]

HARDY *[passing the whisky and a mug]*. Don't have too much water. It's rather strong to-day.

OSBORNE *[slowly mixing a drink]*. I wonder what it is they put in the water.

HARDY. Some sort of disinfectant, I suppose

OSBORNE. I'd rather have the microbes, wouldn't you?

HARDY. I would—yes——

OSBORNE. Well, cheero.

HARDY. Cheero. Excuse my sock, won't you?

OSBORNE. Certainly. It's a nice-looking sock.

HARDY. It is rather, isn't it? Guaranteed to keep the feet dry. Trouble is, it gets so wet doing it.

OSBORNE. Stanhope asked me to come and take over. He's looking after the men coming in

HARDY. Splendid! You know, I'm awfully glad you've come.

OSBORNE. I heard it was a quiet bit of line up here.

HARDY. Well, yes—in a way. But you never know. Sometimes nothing happens for hours on end; then—all of a sudden—"over she comes!"—rifle grenades—Minnies—and those horrid little things like pineapples—you know.

OSBORNE. I know.

HARDY. Swish—swish—swish—swish—bang!

OSBORNE. All right—all right—I know.

HARDY. They simply blew us to bits yesterday. Minnies—enormous ones; about twenty. Three bang in the trench. I really am glad you've come; I'm not simply being polite

OSBORNE. Do much damage?

HARDY. Awful. A dug-out got blown up and came down in the men's tea. They were frightfully annoyed.

OSBORNE. I know. There's nothing worse than dirt in your tea.

HARDY. By the way, you know the big German attack's expected any day now?

OSBORNE. It's been expected for the last month.

HARDY. Yes, but it's very near now; there's funny things happening over in the Boche country. I've been out listening at night when it's quiet. There's more transport than usual coming up—you can hear it rattling over the *pavé* all night; more trains in the distance—puffing up and going away again, one after another, bringing up loads and loads of men—

OSBORNE. Yes. It's coming—pretty soon now.

HARDY. Are you here for six days?

OSBORNE. Yes.

HARDY. Then I should think you'll get it—right in the neck.

OSBORNE. Well, you won't be far away. Come along, let's do this handing over. Where's the map?

HARDY. Here we are. [*He gropes among the papers on the table and finds a tattered map*] We hold about two hundred yards of front line. We've got a Lewis gun just here—and one here, in this little sap. Sentry posts where the crosses are—

OSBORNE. Where do the men sleep?

HARDY. I don't know. The sergeant-major sees to that [*He points off to the left*]. The servants and signallers sleep in there. Two officers in here, and three in there. [*He points to the right hand tunnel*] That is, if you've got five officers.

OSBORNE. We've only got four at present, but a new man's coming up to-night. He arrived at transport lines a day or two ago.

HARDY. I hope you get better luck than I did with *my* last officer. He got lumbago the first night and went home. Now he's got a job lecturing young officers on "Life in the Front Line"

OSBORNE. Yes. They do send some funny people over here nowadays. I hope we're lucky and get a youngster straight from school. They're the kind that do best.

HARDY. I suppose they are, really.

OSBORNE. Five beds, you say? [*He examines the one he is sitting on*] Is this the best one?

HARDY. Oh, no. [*He points to the bed in the right corner*.] *That's* mine. The ones in the other dug-out haven't got any bottoms to them. You keep yourself in by hanging your arms and legs over the sides.

Mustn't hang your legs too low, or the rats gnaw your boots

OSBORNE. You got many rats here?

HARDY. I should say—roughly—about two million; but then, of course, I don't see them all. [*He begins to put on his sock and draw on his boot*.] Well, there's nothing else you want to know, is there?

OSBORNE. You haven't told me anything yet.

HARDY. What else do you *want* to know?

OSBORNE. Well, what about trench stores?

HARDY. You *are* a fussy old man. Anybody'd think you were in the army [*He finds a tattered piece of paper*] Here you are. 115 rifle grenades—I shouldn't use them if I were you; they upset Jerry and make him offensive. Besides, they are rusty, in any case. Then there's 500 Mills bombs, 34 gum boots—

OSBORNE. That's seventeen pairs—

HARDY. Oh, no; twenty-five right leg, and nine left leg. But everything's down here [*He hands the list to OSBORNE*]

OSBORNE. Did you check it when you took over?

HARDY. No. I think the sergeant-major did. It's quite all right.

OSBORNE. I expect Stanhope would like to see you before you go. He always likes a word with the company commander he's relieving.

HARDY. How is the dear young boy? Drinking like a fish, as usual?

OSBORNE. Why do you say that?

HARDY. Well, damn it, it's just the natural thing to ask about Stanhope. [*He pauses, and looks curiously at OSBORNE*] Poor old man. It must be pretty rotten for you, being his second in command, and you such a quiet, sober old thing.

OSBORNE. He's a long way the best company commander we've got.

HARDY. Oh, he's a good chap, I know. But I never *did* see a youngster put away the whisky he does. D'you know, the last time we were out resting at Valennes he came to supper with us and drank a whole bottle in one hour fourteen minutes—*we* timed him.

OSBORNE. I suppose it amused everybody; I suppose everybody cheered him on, and said what a splendid achievement it was.

HARDY. He didn't want any "cheering" on—

OSBORNE. No, but everybody thought it was a big thing to do. [*There is a pause*.] Didn't they?

HARDY. Well, you can't help, somehow, *admiring* a fellow who can do that—and then pick out his own hat all by himself and walk home—

OSBORNE. When a boy like Stanhope gets a reputation out here for drinking, he turns into a kind of freak show exhibit. People pay with a bottle of whisky for the morbid curiosity of seeing him drink it.

HARDY. Well, naturally, you're biased. You have to put him to bed when he gets home.

OSBORNE. It rather reminds you of bear-baiting—or cock-fighting—to sit and watch a boy drink himself unconscious.

HARDY. Well, damn it, it's pretty dull without *something* to liven people up I mean, after all—Stanhope really *is* a sort of freak; I mean it *is* jolly fascinating to see a fellow drink like he does—glass after glass. He didn't go home on his last leave, did he?

OSBORNE. No.

HARDY. I suppose he didn't think he was fit to meet papa. [*A pause.*] You know his father's vicar of a country village?

OSBORNE. I know.

HARDY [*laughing*]. Imagine Stanhope spending his leave in a country vicarage sipping tea! He spent his last leave in Paris, didn't he?

OSBORNE. Yes.

HARDY. I bet it was *some* leave!

OSBORNE. Do you know how long he's been out here?

HARDY. A good time, I know.

OSBORNE. Nearly three years. He came out straight from school—when he was eighteen. He's commanded this company for a year—in and out of the front line. He's never had a rest. Other men come over here and go home ill, and young Stanhope goes on sticking it, month in and month out.

HARDY. Oh, I know he's a jolly good fellow—

OSBORNE. I've seen him on his back all day with trench fever—then on duty all night—

HARDY. Oh, I know; he's a splendid chap!

OSBORNE. And because he's stuck it till his nerves have got battered to bits, he's called a drunkard.

HARDY. Not a drunkard; just a—just a hard drinker; but you're quite right about his nerves. They *are* all to blazes. Last time out resting we were playing bridge and something happened—I don't

remember what it was; some silly little argument—and all of a sudden he jumped up and knocked all the glasses off the table! Lost control of himself; and then he—sort of—came to—and cried—

OSBORNE. Yes, I know.

HARDY. You heard about it?

OSBORNE. He told me.

HARDY. Did he? We tried to hush it up. It just shows the state he's in. [*He rises and puts on his pack. There is a pause.*] You know, Osborne, you ought to be commanding this company.

OSBORNE. Rubbish!

HARDY. Of course you ought. It sticks out a mile. I know he's got pluck and all that, but, damn it, man, you're twice his age—and think what a dear, level-headed old thing you are.

OSBORNE. Don't be an ass. He was out here before I joined up. His experience alone makes him worth a dozen people like me.

HARDY. You know as well as I do, you ought to be in command.

OSBORNE. There isn't a man to touch him as a commander of men. He'll command the battalion one day if—

HARDY. Yes, if! [*He laughs.*]

OSBORNE. You don't know him as I do; I love that fellow. I'd go to hell with him.

HARDY. Oh, you sweet, sentimental old darling!

OSBORNE. Come along. Finish handing over and stop blithering.

HARDY. There's nothing else to do.

OSBORNE. What about the log-book?

HARDY. God! you are a worker. Oh, well. Here we are [*He finds a tattered little book among the papers on the table.*] Written right up to date; here's my last entry: "5 p.m. to 8 p.m. All quiet. German airman flew over trenches. Shot a rat."

OSBORNE. Did he?

HARDY. No. I shot the rat, you ass. Well, finish up your whisky. I want to pack my mug. I'll leave you that drop in the bottle.

OSBORNE. Thanks.

[*He drinks up his whisky and hands*

HARDY the mug.]

HARDY [*tucking the mug into his pack*]. I'll be off.

OSBORNE. Aren't you going to wait and see Stanhope?

HARDY. Well, no, I don't special'y want to see him. He's so fussy about the trenches. I expect they *are* rather dirty. He'll talk for hours if he catches me. [*He*

hitches his pack over his shoulders, hangs on his gas satchel, map-case, binoculars, compass-case, until he looks like a traveling peddler. As he dresses.] Well, I hope you have a nice six days. Don't forget to change your clothes if you get wet.

OSBORNE. No, Papa.

HARDY. And don't forget about the big attack.

OSBORNE. Oh, Lord, no, I mustn't miss that; I'll make a note in my diary.

HARDY [*fully dressed*]. There we are! Do I look every inch a soldier?

OSBORNE. Yes. I should get quite a fright if I were a German and met you coming round a corner.

HARDY. I should bloody well hope you would.

OSBORNE. Shouldn't be able to run away for laughing.

HARDY. Now, don't be rude. [*He leans over to light a cigarette from a candle, and looks down on the table*] Well, I'm damned. Still at it!

OSBORNE. What is it?

HARDY. Why, that little cockroach. It's been running round and round that candle since tea-time; must have done a mile.

OSBORNE. I shouldn't hang about here if I were a cockroach.

HARDY. Nor should I. I'd go home. Ever had cockroach races?

OSBORNE. No.

HARDY. Great fun. We've had 'em every evening.

OSBORNE. What are the rules?

HARDY. Oh, you each have a cockroach, and start 'em in a line. On the word "Go" you dig your cockroach in the ribs and steer him with a match across the table. I won ten francs last night—had a splendid cockroach. I'll give you a tip.

OSBORNE. Yes?

HARDY. Promise not to let it go any farther?

OSBORNE. Yes.

HARDY. Well, if you want to get the best pace out of a cockroach, dip it in whisky—makes 'em go like hell!

OSBORNE. Right. Thanks awfully.

HARDY. Well, I must be off. Cheero!

OSBORNE. Cheero!

HARDY [*goes up the narrow steps into the trench above, singing softly and happily to himself*].

"One and Two, it's with Maud and Lou; Three and Four, two girls more——"

[*The words trail away into the night.*

OSBORNE rises and takes his pack from the floor to the bed by the

table. While he undoes it a SOLDIER SERVANT comes out of the tunnel from the left with a tablecloth over his arm and a plate with half a loaf of bread on it.]

MASON. Excuse me, sir. Can I lay supper?

OSBORNE. Yes, do.

[*He shuffles up the papers from the table and puts them on the bed*]

MASON. Thank you, sir.

[*He lays the table*]

OSBORNE. What are you going to tempt us with to-night, Mason?

MASON. Soup, sir—cutlets—and pineapple.

OSBORNE [*suspiciously*]. Cutlets?

MASON. Well, sir—well, yes, sir!—cutlets.

OSBORNE. What sort of cutlets?

MASON. Now, sir, you've got me. I shouldn't like to commit meself too deep, sir.

OSBORNE. Ordinary ration meat?

MASON. Yes, sir. Ordinary ration meat, but a noo shape, sir. Smells like liver, sir, but it 'asn't got that smooth, wet look that liver's got.

[*MASON leaves the dug-out. OSBORNE sits up to the table and examines the map. Voices come from the trench above; a gruff voice says.*] "This is 'C' Company 'eadquarters, sir."

[*A boyish voice replies*] "Oh, thanks."

[*There is a pause, then the gruff voice says:*] "Better go down, sir"

[*The boyish voice replies*] "Yes. Righto."

[*An OFFICER comes groping down the steps and stands in the candle-light. He looks round, a little bewildered. He is a well-built, healthy-looking boy of about eighteen, with the very new uniform of a 2nd lieutenant. OSBORNE looks up from the trench map, surprised and interested to see a stranger.*]

OSBORNE. Hullo!

RALEIGH. Good evening [*he notices OSBORNE'S gray hair and adds*] sir.

OSBORNE. You the new officer?

RALEIGH. Er—yes. I've been to Battalion Headquarters. They told me to report here.

OSBORNE. Good. We've been expecting you. Sit down, won't you.

RALEIGH. Thanks.

[*He sits gingerly on the box opposite OSBORNE*]

OSBORNE. I should take your pack off.

RALEIGH. Oh, right

[*He slips his pack from his shoulders.*]

OSBORNE Will you have a drink?

RALEIGH. Er—well—

OSBORNE. You don't drink whisky?

RALEIGH [*hastily*] Oh, yes—er—just a small one, sir.

OSBORNE [*pouring out a small whisky and adding water*] Whisky takes away the taste of the water—

RALEIGH Oh, yes?

[*He pauses, and laughs nervously*]

OSBORNE—and the water takes away the taste of the whisky. [*He hands RALEIGH the drink*] Just out from England?

RALEIGH. Yes, I landed a week ago.

OSBORNE Boulogne?

RALEIGH. Yes [*A pause, then he self-consciously holds up his drink.*] Well, here's luck, sir.

OSBORNE [*taking a drink himself*]. Good luck [*He takes out a cigarette case*] Cigarette?

RALEIGH. Thanks.

OSBORNE [*holding a bottle across so that RALEIGH can light his cigarette from the candle in it*]. Ever been up in the line before?

RALEIGH. Oh, no. You see, I only left school at the end of last summer term.

OSBORNE I expect you find it a bit strange.

RALEIGH [*laughing*] Yes—I do—a bit—

OSBORNE. My name's Osborne. I'm second in command of the company. You only call me "sir" in front of the men.

RALEIGH. I see. Thanks.

OSBORNE You'll find the other officers call me "Uncle."

RALEIGH. Oh, yes? [*He smiles*]

OSBORNE What's your name?

RALEIGH. Raleigh.

OSBORNE. I knew a Raleigh. A master at Rugby.

RALEIGH Oh? He may be a relation. I don't know I've got lots of uncles and—and things like that.

OSBORNE. We've only just moved into these trenches. Captain Stanhope commands the company.

RALEIGH [*suddenly brightening up*]. I know. It's a frightful bit of luck

OSBORNE. Why? D'you know him?

RALEIGH. Yes, rather! We were at school together—at least—of course—I was only a kid and he was one of the big fellows; he's three years older than I am.

[*There is a pause; OSBORNE seems to*

be waiting for RALEIGH to go on, then suddenly he says:]

OSBORNE. He's up in the front line at present, looking after the relief. [*Another pause*] He's a splendid chap

RALEIGH. Isn't he? He was skipper of football at Barford, and kept wicket for the eleven. A jolly good bat, too.

OSBORNE. Did you play football—and cricket?

RALEIGH. Oh, yes. Of course; I wasn't in the same class as Dennis—I say, I suppose I ought to call him Captain Stanhope?

OSBORNE. Just "Stanhope."

RALEIGH. I see. Thanks

OSBORNE. Did you get your colors?

RALEIGH. I did for football. Not cricket.

OSBORNE. Football and cricket seem a long way from here.

RALEIGH [*laughing*]. They do, rather.

OSBORNE. We play a bit when we're out of the line.

RALEIGH Good!

OSBORNE [*thoughtfully*]. So you were at school with Stanhope. [*Pause*] I wonder if he'll remember you? I expect you've grown in the last three years.

RALEIGH Oh, I think he'll remember me. [*He stops, and goes on rather awkwardly.*] You see, it wasn't only that we were just at school together; our fathers were friends, and Dennis used to come and stay with us in the holidays. Of course, at school I didn't see much of him, but in the holidays we were terrific pals.

OSBORNE. He's a fine company commander

RALEIGH I bet he is. Last time he was on leave he came down to school; he'd just got his M.C. and been made a captain. He looked splendid! It sort of—made me feel—

OSBORNE. —keen?

RALEIGH. Yes. Keen to get out here. I was frightfully keen to get into Dennis's regiment I thought, perhaps, with a bit of luck I might get to the same battalion.

OSBORNE. It's a big fluke to have got to the same company.

RALEIGH. I know. It's an amazing bit of luck. When I was at the base I did an awful thing. You see, my uncle's at the base—he has to detail officers to regiments—

OSBORNE. General Raleigh?

RALEIGH. Yes. I went to see him on the quiet and asked him if he could get me into this battalion. He bit my head

off, and said I'd got to be treated like everybody else—

OSBORNE Yes?

RALEIGH. —and next day I was told I was coming to this battalion. Funny, wasn't it?

OSBORNE. Extraordinary coincidence!

RALEIGH. And when I got to Battalion Headquarters, and the colonel told me to report to "C" Company, I could have cheered. I expect Dennis'll be frightfully surprised to see me. I've got a message for him.

OSBORNE. From the colonel?

RALEIGH. No. From my sister.

OSBORNE. Your sister?

RALEIGH. Yes. You see, Dennis used to stay with us, and naturally my sister [*he hesitates*]—well—perhaps I ought not—

OSBORNE. That's all right. I didn't actually know that Stanhope—

RALEIGH. They're not—er—officially engaged—

OSBORNE. No?

RALEIGH. She'll be awfully glad I'm with him here; I can write and tell her about him. He doesn't say much in his letters; can we write often?

OSBORNE. Oh, yes. Letters are collected every day. [*There is a pause*]

RALEIGH. You don't think Dennis'll mind my—sort of—forcing myself into his company? I never thought of that, I was so keen.

OSBORNE. No, of course he won't. [*Pause.*] You say it's—it's a good time since you last saw him?

RALEIGH. Let's see. It was in the summer last year—nearly a year ago.

OSBORNE. You know, Raleigh, you mustn't expect to find him—quite the same.

RALEIGH. Oh?

OSBORNE. You see, he's been out here a long time. It—it tells on a man—rather badly—

RALEIGH [*thinking*]. Yes, of course, I suppose it does.

OSBORNE. You may find he's—he's a little bit quick-tempered.

RALEIGH [*laughing*]. Oh, I know old Dennis's temper! I remember once at school he caught some chaps in a study with a bottle of whisky. Lord! the roof nearly blew off. He gave them a dozen each with a cricket stump [*OSBORNE laughs*] He was so keen on the fellows in the house keeping fit. He was frightfully down on smoking—and that sort of thing

OSBORNE You must remember he's

commanded this company for a long time—through all sorts of rotten times. It's—it's a big strain on a man.

RALEIGH Oh, it must be.

OSBORNE. If you notice a—difference in Stanhope—you'll know it's only the strain—

RALEIGH. Oh, yes.

[*OSBORNE rouses himself and speaks briskly*]

OSBORNE. Now, let's see. We've got five beds here—one each. Two in here and three in that dug-out there. I'm afraid you'll have to wait until the others come and pick the beds they want.

RALEIGH. Righto!

OSBORNE. Have you got a blanket?

RALEIGH. Yes, in my pack.

[*He rises to get it.*]

OSBORNE. Better wait and unpack when you know where you're sleeping.

RALEIGH. Righto!

[*He sits down again*]

OSBORNE. We never undress when we're in the line. You can take your boots off now and then in the daytime, but it's better to keep pretty well dressed always.

RALEIGH. I see. Thanks.

OSBORNE. I expect we shall each do about three hours on duty at a time and then six off. We all go on duty at stand-to. That's at dawn and dusk.

RALEIGH. Yes.

OSBORNE. I expect Stanhope'll send you on duty with one of us at first—till you get used to it.

[*There is a pause. RALEIGH turns, and looks curiously up the steps into the night*]

RALEIGH. Are we in the front line here?

OSBORNE. No. That's the support line outside. The front line's about fifty yards farther on.

RALEIGH. How frightfully quiet it is!

OSBORNE. It's often quiet—like this.

RALEIGH. I thought there would be an awful row here—all the time.

OSBORNE. Most people think that.

[*Pause.*]

RALEIGH. I've never known anything so quiet as those trenches we came by; just now and then I heard rifle firing, like the range at Bisley, and a sort of rumble in the distance.

OSBORNE. Those are the guns up north—up Wipers way. The guns are always going up there; it's never quiet like this. [*Pause.*] I expect it's all very strange to you?

RALEIGH. It's—it's not exactly what

I thought. It's just this—this quiet that seems so funny.

OSBORNE A hundred yards from here the Germans are sitting in *their* dug-outs, thinking how quiet it is

RALEIGH Are they as near as that?

OSBORNE About a hundred yards.

RALEIGH. It seems—uncanny. It makes me feel we're—we're all just waiting for something.

OSBORNE. We are, generally, just waiting for something. When anything happens, it happens quickly. Then we just start waiting again.

RALEIGH I never thought it was like that.

OSBORNE. You thought it was fighting all the time?

RALEIGH [*laughing*]. Well, yes, in a way.

OSBORNE [*after puffing at his pipe in silence for a while*]. Did you come up by trench to-night—or over the top?

RALEIGH. By trench. An amazing trench—turning and twisting for miles, over a sort of plain.

OSBORNE. Lancer's Alley it's called.

RALEIGH. Is it? It's funny the way it begins—in that ruined village, a few steps down into the cellar of a house—then right under the house and through a little garden—and then under the garden wall—then alongside an enormous ruined factory place—then miles and miles of plains, with those green lights bobbing up and down ahead—all along the front as far as you can see.

OSBORNE. Those are the Very lights. Both sides fire them over No Man's Land—to watch for raids and patrols.

RALEIGH. I knew they fired lights. [*Pause*] I didn't expect so many—and to see them so far away.

OSBORNE I know [*He puffs at his pipe*] There's something rather romantic about it all

RALEIGH [*eagerly*]. Yes, I thought that, too.

OSBORNE You must always think of it like that if you can. Think of it all as—as romantic. It helps.

[*MASON comes in with more dinner utensils.*]

MASON. D'you expect the captain soon, sir? The soup's 'ot.

OSBORNE. He ought to be here very soon now. This is Mr Raleigh, Mason.

MASON. Good evening, sir.

RALEIGH. Good evening.

MASON [*to OSBORNE*]. I've 'ad rather a unpleasant surprise, sir.

OSBORNE. What's happened?

MASON. You know that tin o' pineapple chunks I got, sir?

OSBORNE. Yes?

MASON. Well, sir, I'm sorry to say it's apricots.

OSBORNE. Good heavens! It must have given you a turn

MASON. I distinctly said "pineapple chunks" at the canteen.

OSBORNE. Wasn't there a label on the tin?

MASON. No, sir. I pointed that out to the man. I said was 'e *certain* it was pineapple chunks?

OSBORNE. I suppose he said he was

MASON. Yes, sir. 'E said a leopard can't change its spots, sir.

OSBORNE. What have leopards got to do with pineapple?

MASON. That's just what I thought, sir. Made me *think* there was something fishy about it. You see, sir, I know the captain can't stand the sight of apricots. 'E said next time we 'ad them 'e'd wring my neck.

OSBORNE. Haven't you anything else?

MASON. There's a pink blancmange I've made, sir. But it ain't anywhere near stiff yet.

OSBORNE. Never mind. We must have the apricots and chance it.

MASON. Only I thought I'd tell you, sir, so as the captain wouldn't blame me.

OSBORNE. All right, Mason [*Voices are heard in the trench above.*] That sounds like the captain coming now.

MASON [*hastening away*]. I'll go and dish out the soup, sir.

[*The voices grow nearer; two figures appear in the trench above and grope down the steps—the leading figure tall and thin, the other short and fat. The tall figure is CAPTAIN STANHOPE. At the bottom of the steps he straightens himself, pulls off his pack and drops it on the floor. Then he takes off his helmet and throws it on the right-hand bed. Despite his stars of rank he is no more than a boy; tall, slimly built, but broad-shouldered. His dark hair is carefully brushed; his uniform, though old and war-stained, is well cut and cared for. He is good-looking, rather from attractive features than the healthy good looks of RALEIGH. Although tanned by months in the open air, there is a pallor under his skin and dark shadows under his eyes. His short and fat companion—2ND LIEUTENANT*]

TROTTER—is middle-aged and homely-looking His face is red, fat, and round; apparently he has put on weight during his war service, for his tunic appears to be on the verge of bursting at the waist He carries an extra pack belonging to the officer left on duty in the line]

STANHOPE [as he takes off his pack, gas satchel, and belt] Has Hardy gone?

OSBORNE. Yes. He cleared off a few minutes ago

STANHOPE. Lucky for him he did I had a few words to say to Master Hardy. You never saw the blasted mess those fellows left the trenches in Dug-outs smell like cess-pits, rusty bombs; damp rifle grenades, it's perfectly foul. Where are the servants?

OSBORNE. In there.

STANHOPE [calling into MASON'S dug-out]. Hi! Mason!

MASON [outside] Coming, sir! Just bringing the soup, sir

STANHOPE [taking a cigarette from his case and lighting it.] Damn the soup! Bring some whisky!

OSBORNE Here's a new officer, Stanhope—just arrived.

STANHOPE. Oh, sorry. [He turns and peers into the dim corner where RALEIGH stands smiling awkwardly.] I didn't see you in this miserable light

[He stops short at the sight of RALEIGH. There is silence.]

RALEIGH Hullo, Stanhope!

[STANHOPE stares at RALEIGH as though dazed. RALEIGH takes a step forward, half raises his hand, then lets it drop to his side.]

STANHOPE [in a low voice]. How did you—get here?

RALEIGH. I was told to report to your company, Stanhope.

STANHOPE. Oh I see. Rather a coincidence.

RALEIGH [with a nervous laugh]. Yes. [There is a silence for a moment, broken by OSBORNE in a matter-of-fact voice.]

OSBORNE. I say, Stanhope, it's a terrible business. We thought we'd got a tin of pineapple chunks; it turns out to be apricots.

TROTTER. Ha! Give me apricots every time! I 'ate pineapple chunks, too bloom-in' sickly for me!

RALEIGH. I'm awfully glad I got to your company, Stanhope

STANHOPE. When did you get here?

RALEIGH. Well, I've only just come.

OSBORNE. He came up with the transport while you were taking over

STANHOPE I see

[MASON brings in a bottle of whisky, a mug, and two plates of soup—so precariously that OSBORNE has to help with the soup plates on to the table]

STANHOPE [with sudden forced gaiety]. Come along, Uncle! Come and sit here [He waves towards the box on the right of the table.] You better sit there, Raleigh.

RALEIGH. Right!

TROTTER [taking a pair of pince-nez from his tunic pocket, putting them on, and looking curiously at RALEIGH]. You Raleigh?

RALEIGH Yes.

[Pause]

TROTTER I'm Trotter.

RALEIGH Oh, yes?

[Pause]

TROTTER How are you?

RALEIGH Oh, all right, thanks.

TROTTER Been out 'ere before?

RALEIGH. No.

TROTTER. Feel a bit odd, I s'pose?

RALEIGH. Yes. A bit.

TROTTER [getting a box to sit on] Oh, well, you'll soon get used to it; you'll feel you've been 'ere a year in about an hour's time.

[He puts the box on its side and sits on it. It is too low for the table, and he puts it on its end. It is then too high He tries the other side, which is too low; he finally contrives to make himself comfortable by sitting on his pack, placed on the side of the box. MASON arrives with two more plates of soup]

OSBORNE What kind of soup is this, Mason?

MASON. It's yellow soup, sir.

OSBORNE It's got a very deep yellow flavor.

TROTTER [taking a melodious sip]. It wants some pepper; bring some pepper, Mason.

MASON [anxiously]. I'm very sorry, sir. When the mess box was packed the pepper was omitted, sir.

TROTTER [throwing his spoon with a clatter into the plate]. Oh, I say, but damn it!

OSBORNE. We must have pepper. It's a disinfectant.

TROTTER. You must have pepper in soup!

STANHOPE [quietly]. Why wasn't it packed, Mason?

MASON. It—it was missed, sir.

STANHOPE. Why?

MASON [*miserably*]. Well, sir, I left it to—

STANHOPE Then I advise you never to leave it to any one else again—unless you want to rejoin your platoon out there

[*He points into the moonlit trench*]

MASON I'm—I'm very sorry, sir

STANHOPE Send one of the signalers.

MASON Yes, sir. [*He hastens to the tunnel entrance and calls*] Bert, you're wanted!

[*A SOLDIER appears, with a rifle slung over his shoulder He stands stiffly to attention.*]

STANHOPE Do you know "A" Company Headquarters?

SOLDIER Yes, sir.

STANHOPE. Go there at once and ask Captain Willis, with my compliments, if he can lend me a little pepper.

SOLDIER. Very good, sir

[*He turns smartly and goes up the steps, MASON stopping him for a moment to say confidentially: "A screw of pepper you ask for."*]

OSBORNE We must have pepper.

TROTTER. I mean—after all—war's had enough with pepper—[*noisy sip*]—but war without pepper—it's—it's bloody awful!

OSBORNE What's it like outside?

TROTTER. Quiet as an empty 'ouse. There's a nasty noise going on up north.

OSBORNE. Wipers, I expect. I believe there's trouble up there. I wish we knew more of what's going on.

TROTTER So do I. Still, my wife reads the papers every morning and writes and tells me.

OSBORNE. Hardy says they had a lively time here yesterday. Three big Minnies right in the trench.

TROTTER. I know. And they left the bloomin' 'oles for us to fill in. [*MASON arrives with cutlets on enamel plates.*] What's this?

MASON. Meat, sir.

TROTTER. I know that. What sort?

MASON Sort of cutlet, sir

TROTTER. Sort of cutlet, is it? You know, Mason, there's cutlets and cutlets.

MASON. I know, sir; that one's a cutlet.

TROTTER. Well, it won't let me cut it.

MASON No, sir?

TROTTER. That's a joke.

MASON. Oh. Right, sir [*He goes out.*]

OSBORNE [*studying the map*] There's a sort of ruin marked on this map—just

in front of here, in No Man's Land—called Beauvais Farm.

TROTTER That's what we saw sticking up, skipper I wondered what it was

STANHOPE Better go out and look at it to-night

TROTTER I 'ate ruins in No Man's Land, too bloomin' creepy for me

OSBORNE. There's only about sixty yards of No Man's Land, according to this map—narrower on the left, from the head of this sap; only about fifty.

TROTTER [*who has been looking curiously at STANHOPE, eating his meal with lowered head*]. Cheer up, skipper You do look glum!

STANHOPE. I'm tired.

OSBORNE. I should turn in and get some sleep after supper.

STANHOPE. I've got hours of work before I sleep.

OSBORNE I'll do the duty roll and see the sergeant-major—and all that

STANHOPE. That's all right, Uncle I'll see to it. [*He turns to RALEIGH for the first time.*] Trotter goes on duty directly he's had supper You better go on with him—to learn.

RALEIGH Oh, right.

TROTTER. Look 'ere, skipper, it's nearly eight now, couldn't we make it 'alf-past?

STANHOPE. No. I told Hibbert he'd be relieved at eight. Will you take from eleven till two, Uncle?

OSBORNE Right

STANHOPE Hibbert can do from two till four, and I'll go on from then till stand-to. That'll be at six.

TROTTER Well, boys! 'Ere we are for six days agam. Six bloomin' eternal days. [*He makes a calculation on the table*] That's a hundred and forty-four hours, eight thousand six 'undred and forty minutes That doesn't sound so bad, we've done twenty of 'em already. I've got an idea! I'm going to draw a hundred and forty-four little circles on a bit o' paper, and every hour I'm going to black one in; that'll make the time go all right.

STANHOPE It's five to eight now. You better go and relieve Hibbert. Then you can come back at eleven o'clock and black in three of your bloody little circles

TROTTER. I 'aven't 'ad my apricots yet!

STANHOPE. We'll keep your apricots till you come back

TROTTER. I never knew anything like a war for upsetting meals. I'm always down for dooty in the middle of one.

STANHOPE. That's because you never stop eating

TROTTER. Any'ow, let's 'ave some coffee. Hi! Mason! Coffee!

MASON. Coming, sir!

TROTTER [*getting up*]. Well, I'll get dressed. Come on, Raleigh.

RALEIGH [*rising quickly*]. Right!

TROTTER Just wear your belt with revolver case on it. Must have your revolver to shoot rats And your gas mask—come here—I'll show you [*He helps RALEIGH*] You wear it sort of tucked up under your chin like a serviette.

RALEIGH. Yes. I was shown the way at home.

TROTTER Now your hat That's right. You don't want a walking-stick It gets in your way if you have to run fast

RALEIGH Why—er—do you have to run fast?

TROTTER Oh, Lord, yes, often! If you see a Minnie coming—that's a big trench-mortar shell, you know—short for *Minniewerfer*—you see 'em coming right out of the Boche trenches, right up in the air, then down, down, down, and you have to judge it and run like stink sometimes

[*MASON comes in with two cups of coffee*]

MASON Coffee, sir?

TROTTER Thanks.

[*He takes the cup and drinks standing up.*]

RALEIGH Thanks.

TROTTER. You might leave my apricots out, Mason Put 'em on a separate plate and keep 'em in there

[*He points to MASON'S dug-out*]

MASON Very good, sir

TROTTER. If you bring 'em in 'ere you never know *what* might 'appen to 'em

MASON No, sir.

TROTTER. "B" Company on our right, aren't they, skipper?

STANHOPE. Yes. There's fifty yards of undefended area in between. You bet-ter patrol that a good deal.

TROTTER. Aye, aye, sir.

STANHOPE. Have a look at that Lewis gun position on the left See what field of fire they've got.

TROTTER. Aye, aye, sir You don't want me to go out and look at that blinkin' ruin?

STANHOPE. I'll see to that.

TROTTER. Good. I don't fancy crawl-
ing about on my belly after that cutlet.

[*To RALEIGH.*] Well, come on, my lad, let's go and see about this 'ere war.

[*The two go up the steps, leaving STANHOPE and OSBORNE alone.*]

[*MASON appears at his dug-out door.*]

MASON Will you take apricots, sir?

STANHOPE. No, thanks.

MASON. Mr. Osborne?

OSBORNE No, thanks

MASON. I'm sorry about them being apricots, sir. I explained to Mr. Os-
borne —

STANHOPE [*curtly*]. That's all right, Mason—thank you.

MASON Very good, sir. [*He goes out*]

OSBORNE [*lover by the right-hand bed*]. Will you sleep here? This was Hardy's bed.

STANHOPE. No. You sleep there I'd rather sleep by the table here. I can get up and work without disturbing you.

OSBORNE This is a better one

STANHOPE. You take it Must have a little comfort in your old age, Uncle

OSBORNE I wish you'd turn in and sleep for a bit.

STANHOPE. Sleep?—I can't sleep. [*He takes a whisky and water. A man appears in the trench and comes down the steps—a small, slightly built man in the early twenties, with a little mustache and a pallid face. Looking hard at the new-comer.*] Well, Hibbert?

HIBBERT Everything's fairly quiet. Bit of sniping somewhere to our left; some rifles grenades coming over just on our right.

STANHOPE. I see. Mason's got your supper.

HIBBERT [*gently rubbing his forehead*]. I don't think I can manage any supper to-night, Stanhope. It's this beastly neuralgia It seems to be right inside this eye. The beastly pain gets worse every day.

STANHOPE. Some hot soup and a good tough chop'll put that right.

HIBBERT. I'm afraid the pain rather takes my appetite away. I'm damn sorry to keep on talking about it, Stanhope, only I thought you'd wonder why I don't eat anything much.

STANHOPE. Try and forget about it

HIBBERT [*with a little laugh*]. Well—I wish I could.

STANHOPE Get tight.

HIBBERT. I think I'll turn straight in for a rest—and try and get some sleep.

STANHOPE All right. Turn in. You're in that dug-out there. Here's your pack

[*He picks up the pack that TROTTER brought down*] You go on duty at two. I take over from you at four. I'll tell Mason to call you.

HIBBERT [*faintly*]. Oh, right—thanks, Stanhope—cheero

STANHOPE. Cheero.

[*He watches HIBBERT go down the tunnel into the dark*]

HIBBERT [*returning*]. Can I have a candle?

STANHOPE [*taking one from the table*]. Here you are.

HIBBERT. Thanks.

[*He goes out again. There is silence.*]

STANHOPE *turns to OSBORNE.*

STANHOPE. Another little worm trying to wriggle home.

OSBORNE [*filling his pipe*]. I wonder if he really is bad. He looks rotten.

STANHOPE. Pure bloody funk, that's all. He could eat if he wanted to; he's starving himself purposely. Artful little swine! Neuralgia's a splendid idea. No proof as far as I can see.

OSBORNE. You can't help feeling sorry for him. I think he's tried hard.

STANHOPE. How long's he been out here? Three months, I suppose. Now he's decided he's done his bit. He's decided to go home and spend the rest of the war in comfortable nerve hospitals. Well, he's mistaken. I let Warren get away like that, but no more.

OSBORNE. I don't see how you can prevent a fellow going sick.

STANHOPE. I'll have a quiet word with the doctor before he does. He thinks he's going to wriggle off before the attack. We'll just see about that. No man of mine's going sick before the attack. They're going to take an equal chance—together.

OSBORNE. Raleigh looks a nice chap.

STANHOPE [*looking hard at OSBORNE before replying*]. Yes.

OSBORNE. Good-looking youngster. At school with you, wasn't he?

STANHOPE. Has he been talking already?

OSBORNE. He just mentioned it. It was a natural thing to tell me when he knew you were in command. [STANHOPE is lounging at the table with his back to the wall. OSBORNE, sitting on the right-hand bed, begins to puff clouds of smoke into the air as he lights his pipe.] He's awfully pleased to get into your company. [STANHOPE makes no reply. He picks up a pencil and scribbles on the back of a magazine.] He seems to think a lot of you.

STANHOPE [*looking up quickly at OSBORNE and laughing*]. Yes, I'm his hero.

OSBORNE. It's quite natural.

STANHOPE. You think so?

OSBORNE. Small boys at school generally have their heroes.

STANHOPE. Yes. Small boys at school do.

OSBORNE. Often it goes on as long as—

STANHOPE —as long as the hero's a hero.

OSBORNE. It often goes on all through life.

STANHOPE. I wonder. How many battalions are there in France?

OSBORNE. Why?

STANHOPE. We'll say fifty divisions. That's a hundred and fifty brigades—four hundred and fifty battalions. That's one thousand eight hundred companies.

[*He looks up at OSBORNE from his calculations on the magazine cover*] There are one thousand eight hundred companies in France, Uncle. Raleigh might have been sent to any one of those, and, my God! he comes to mine.

OSBORNE. You ought to be glad. He's a good-looking youngster. I like him.

STANHOPE. I knew you'd like him. Personality, isn't it? [*He takes a worn leather case from his breast pocket and hands a small photograph to OSBORNE.*] I've never shown you that, have I?

OSBORNE [*looking at the photograph*]. No. [*Pause.*] Raleigh's sister, isn't it?

STANHOPE. How did you know?

OSBORNE. There's a strong likeness.

STANHOPE. I suppose there is.

OSBORNE [*intent on the picture*]. She's an awfully nice-looking girl.

STANHOPE. A photo doesn't show much, really. Just a face.

OSBORNE. She looks awfully nice. [*There is silence. STANHOPE lights a cigarette. OSBORNE hands the photo back.*] You're a lucky chap.

STANHOPE [*putting the photo back into his case*]. I don't know why I keep it, really.

OSBORNE. Why? Isn't she—I thought—

STANHOPE. What did you think?

OSBORNE. Well, I thought that perhaps she was waiting for you.

STANHOPE. Yes. She is waiting for me—and she doesn't know. She thinks I'm a wonderful chap—commanding a company. [*He turns to OSBORNE and points up the steps into the line.*] She doesn't

know that if I went up those steps into the front line—without being doped with whisky—I'd go mad with fright

[*There is a pause OSBORNE stirs himself to speak*]

OSBORNE. Look here, old man I've meant to say it for a long time, but it sounds like damnec impudence. You've done longer out here than any man in the battalion. It's time you went away for a rest It's due to you

STANHOPE. You suggest that I go sick, like that little worm in there—neuralgia in the eye?

[*He laughs and takes a drink*]

OSBORNE. No Not that. The colonel would have sent you down long ago, only —

STANHOPE. Only—what?

OSBORNE. Only he can't spare you.

STANHOPE [*laughing*]. Oh, rot!

OSBORNE He told me.

STANHOPE. He thinks I'm in such a state I want a rest, is that it?

OSBORNE. No. He thinks it's due to you.

STANHOPE. It's all right, Uncle. I'll stick it out now It may not be much longer now. I've had my share of luck—more than my share. There's not a man left who was here when I came But it's rather damnable for that boy—of all the boys in the world—to have come to *me*. I might at least have been spared that.

OSBORNE. You're looking at things in rather a black sort of way

STANHOPE I've just told you. That boy's a hero-worshiper. I'm three years older than he is. You know what that means at school. I was skipper of football and all that sort of thing. It doesn't sound much to a man out here—but it does at school with a kid of fourteen Damn it, Uncle, you're a schoolmaster; you know.

OSBORNE. I've just told you what I think of hero-worship

STANHOPE. Raleigh's father knew mine, and I was told to keep an eye on the kid I rather liked the idea of looking after him. I made him keen on the right things—and all that. His people asked me to stay with them one summer. I met his sister then —

OSBORNE Yes?

STANHOPE At first I thought of her as another kid like Raleigh. It was just before I came out here for the first time that I realized what a topping girl she was. Funny how you realize it suddenly. I just prayed to come through the war—and—

and *do* things—and keep absolutely fit for her

OSBORNE You've done pretty well An MC and a company

STANHOPE [*taking another whisky*] It was all right at first. When I went home on leave after the first six months it was jolly fine to feel I'd done a little to make her pleased [*He takes a gulp of his drink*] It was after I came back here—in that awful affair on Vimy Ridge I knew I'd go mad if I didn't break the strain. I couldn't bear being fully conscious all the time—you've felt that, Uncle, haven't you?

OSBORNE. Yes, often.

STANHOPE. There were only two ways of breaking the strain One was pretending I was ill—and going home, the other was this. [*He holds up his glass*] Which would you pick, Uncle?

OSBORNE. I haven't been through as much as you. I don't know yet.

STANHOPE. I thought it all out. It's a slimy thing to go home if you're not really ill, isn't it?

OSBORNE I think it is.

STANHOPE. Well, then. [*He holds his glass up to OSBORNE*] Cheero, and long live the men who go home with neuralgia [*He puts his glass down*] I didn't go home on my last leave. I couldn't bear to meet her, in case she realized —

OSBORNE. When the war's over—and the strain's gone—you'll soon be as fit as ever, at your age.

STANHOPE. I've hoped that all the time. I'd go away for months and live in the open air—and get fit—and then go back to her.

OSBORNE. And so you can.

STANHOPE. If Raleigh had gone to one of those other one thousand eight hundred companies.

OSBORNE I don't see why you should think —

STANHOPE. Oh, for Lord's sake, don't be a damn fool. *You* know! You know he'll write and tell her I reek of whisky all day.

OSBORNE. Why should he? He's not a —

STANHOPE. Exactly. He's not a damned little swine who'd deceive his sister.

OSBORNE He's very young; he's got hundreds of strange things to learn; he'll realize that men are—different—out here

STANHOPE. It's no good, Uncle Didn't you see him sitting there at supper?—staring at me?—and wondering? He's up

in those trenches now—still wondering—and beginning to understand. All these months he's wanted to be with me out here. Poor little devil!

OSBORNE. I believe Raleigh'll go on liking you—and looking up to you—through everything. There's something very deep and rather fine about hero-worship.

STANHOPE. Hero-worship be damned! [*He pauses, then goes on, in a strange, high-pitched voice.*] You know, Uncle, I'm an awful fool. I'm captain of this company. What's that bloody little prig of a boy matter? D'you see? He's a little prig. Wants to write home and tell Madge all about me. Well, he won't; d'you see, Uncle? He won't write. Censorship! I censor his letters—cross out all he says about me.

OSBORNE. You can't read his letters!

STANHOPE [*dreamily*]. Cross out all he says about me. Then we all go west in the big attack—and she goes on thinking I'm a fine fellow forever—and ever—and ever.

[*He pours out a drink, murmuring "Ever—and ever—and ever."*]

OSBORNE [*rising from his bed*]. It's not as bad as all that. Turn in and have a sleep.

STANHOPE. Sleep! Catch me wasting my time with sleep.

OSBORNE [*picking up STANHOPE'S pack and pulling out the blanket*]. Come along, old chap. You come and lie down here.

[*He puts the pack as a pillow on STANHOPE'S bed, and spreads out the blanket.*]

STANHOPE [*with his chin in his hands*]. Little prig—that's what he is. Did I ask him to force his way into my company? No! I didn't. Very well, he'll pay for his damn cheek. [*OSBORNE lays his hand gently on STANHOPE'S shoulder to persuade him to lie down.*] Go away! [*He shakes OSBORNE'S hand off*] What the hell are you trying to do?

OSBORNE. Come and lie down and go to sleep.

STANHOPE. Go sleep y'self. I censor his letters, d'you see, Uncle? You watch and see he doesn't smuggle any letters away.

OSBORNE. Righto. Now come and lie down. You've had a hard day of it.

STANHOPE [*looking up suddenly*]. Where's Hardy? D'you say he's gone?

OSBORNE. Yes. He's gone.

STANHOPE. Gone, has he? Y'know, I

had a word to say to Master Hardy. He would go, the swine! Dirty trenches—everything dirty—I wanner tell him to keep his trenches clean.

OSBORNE [*standing beside STANHOPE and putting his hand gently on his shoulder again*]. We'll clean them up tomorrow.

[*STANHOPE looks up at OSBORNE and laughs gaily*]

STANHOPE. Dear old Uncle! Clean trenches up—with little dust pan and brush [*He laughs*] Make you a little apron—with lace on it.

OSBORNE. That'll be fine. Now then, come along, old chap. I'll see you get called at two o'clock. [*He firmly takes STANHOPE by the arm and draws him over to the bed*] You must be tired.

STANHOPE [*in a dull voice*]. God, I'm bloody tired; ache—all over—feel sick—

[*OSBORNE helps him on to the bed, takes the blanket and puts it over him.*]

OSBORNE. You'll feel all right in a minute. How's that? Comfortable?

STANHOPE. Yes. Comfortable. [*He looks up into OSBORNE'S face and laughs again*] Dear old Uncle. Tuck me up.

[*OSBORNE fumbles the blankets round STANHOPE*]

OSBORNE. There we are.

STANHOPE. Kiss me, Uncle.

OSBORNE. Kiss you be blowed! You go to sleep.

STANHOPE [*closing his eyes*]. Yes—I go sleep.

[*He turns slowly on to his side with his face to the earth wall. OSBORNE stands watching for a while, then blows out the candle by STANHOPE'S bed. STANHOPE gives a deep sigh, and begins to breathe heavily. OSBORNE crosses to the servant's dug-out and calls softly.*]

OSBORNE. Mason!

MASON. [*appearing with unbuttoned tunic at the tunnel entrance*]. Yessir?

OSBORNE. Will you call me at ten minutes to eleven—and Mr. Hibbert at ten minutes to two? I'm going to turn in for a little while.

MASON. Very good, sir. [*Pause.*] The pepper's come, sir.

OSBORNE. Oh, good.

MASON. I'm very sorry about the pepper, sir.

OSBORNE. That's all right, Mason.

MASON. Good night, sir.

OSBORNE. Good night.

[*MASON leaves the dug-out. OS-*

BORNE turns, and looks up the narrow steps into the night, where the Very lights rise and fade against the starlit sky. He glances once more at STANHOPE, then crosses to his own bed, takes out from his tunic a large, old-fashioned watch, and quietly winds it up. Through the stillness comes the low rumble of distant guns.]

THE CURTAIN FALLS

ACT II

SCENE I.—*Early next morning.*

A pale shaft of sunlight shines down the steps, but candles still burn in the dark corner where OSBORNE and RALEIGH are at breakfast MASON has put a large plate of bacon before each, and turns to go as TROTTER comes down the steps, whistling gaily and rubbing his hands.

TROTTER What a lovely smell of bacon!

MASON. Yes, sir. I reckon there's enough smell of bacon in 'ere to last for dinner.

TROTTER. Well, there's nothing like a good fat bacon rasher when you're as empty as I am.

MASON. I'm glad you like it fat, sir.

TROTTER. Well, I like a bit o' lean, too.

MASON. There was a bit of lean in the middle of yours, sir, but it's kind of shrunk up in the cooking.

TROTTER. Bad cooking, that's all. Any porridge?

MASON. Oh, yes, sir. There's porridge.

TROTTER. Lumpy, I s'pose?

MASON. Yes, sir. Quite nice and lumpy.

TROTTER. Well, take all the lumps out o' mine.

MASON. And just bring you the gravy, sir? Very good, sir.

[MASON goes out. TROTTER looks after him suspiciously.]

TROTTER. You know, that man's getting familiar

OSBORNE. He's not a bad cook.

[TROTTER has picked up his coffee mug, and is smelling it.]

TROTTER. I say, d'you realize he's washed out his dish-cloth?

OSBORNE. I know. I told him about it.

TROTTER. Did you really? You've got some pluck. 'Ow did you go about it?

OSBORNE. I wrote and asked my wife for a packet of Lux. Then I gave it to Mason and suggested he try it on something

TROTTER. Good man. No, he's not a bad cook. Might be a lot worse. When I was in the ranks we 'ad a prize cook—used to be a plumber before the war. Ought to 'ave seen the stew 'e made. Thin! Thin wasn't the word. Put a bucketful of 'is stew in a bath and pull the plug, and the whole lot would go down in a couple of gurgles.

[MASON brings TROTTER'S porridge.]

MASON. I've took the lumps out.

TROTTER. Good. Keep 'em and use 'em for dumplings next time we 'ave boiled beef.

MASON. Very good, sir. *[He goes out.]*

TROTTER. Yes. That plumber was a prize cook, 'e was. Lucky for us one day 'e set 'imself on fire making the tea. 'E went 'ome pretty well fried. Did Mason get that pepper?

OSBORNE. Yes.

TROTTER. Good. Must 'ave pepper.

OSBORNE. I thought you were on duty now.

TROTTER. I'm supposed to be. Stanhope sent me down to get my breakfast. He's looking after things till I finish.

OSBORNE.—He's got a long job then.

TROTTER. Oh, no. I'm a quick eater. Hi! Mason! Bacon!

MASON *[outside]*. Coming, sir!

OSBORNE. It's a wonderful morning.

TROTTER. Isn't it lovely? Makes you feel sort of young and 'opeful. I was up in that old trench under the brick wall just now, and damned if a bloomin' little bird didn't start singing! Didn't 'arf sound funny. Sign of spring, I s'pose. *[MASON arrives with TROTTER'S bacon.]* That looks all right.

MASON. If you look down straight on it from above, you can see a bit o' lean quite clear.

TROTTER. Good Lord, yes! That's it, isn't it?

MASON. No, sir, that's a bit o' rust off the pan.

TROTTER. Ah! *That's* it, then!

MASON. You've got it, sir.

[He goes out.]

TROTTER. Cut us a chunk of bread, Uncle.

[OSBORNE cuts him off a chunk.]

OSBORNE. How are things going up there?

TROTTER. I don't like the look of things a bit.

OSBORNE. You mean—the quiet?

TROTTER. Yes. Standing up there in the dark last night there didn't seem a thing in the world alive—except the rats squeaking and my stomach grumbling about that cutlet.

OSBORNE. It's quiet even now.

TROTTER. Too damn quiet. You can bet your boots the Boche is up to something. The big attack soon, I reckon. I don't like it, Uncle. Pass the jam.

OSBORNE. It's strawberry.

TROTTER. Is it? I'm glad we got rid o' that raspberry jam. Can't stand raspberry jam. Paps get be'ind your plate.

OSBORNE. Did Stanhope tell you he wants two wiring parties out to-night?

TROTTER. Yes. He's fixing it up now. [*He pauses, and goes on in a low voice*] My goodness, Uncle, doesn't he look ill!

OSBORNE. I'm afraid he's not well.

TROTTER. Nobody'd be well who went on like he does [*There is another pause*] You know when you came up to relieve me last night?

OSBORNE. Yes?

TROTTER. Well, Raleigh and me came back here, and there was Stanhope sitting on that bed drinking a whisky. He looked as white as a sheet. God, he looked awful; he'd drunk a bottle since dinner. I said "Ullo!" and he didn't seem to know who I was. Uncanny, wasn't it, Raleigh?

RALEIGH [*with lowered head*]. Yes.

TROTTER. He just said, "Better go to bed, Raleigh"—just as if Raleigh'd been a school kid.

OSBORNE. Did he? [*There is a pause*] Look at the sun. It'll be quite warm soon.

[*They look at the pale square of sunlight on the floor*]

TROTTER. It's warm now. You can feel it on your face outside if you stand in it. First time this year. 'Ope we 'ave an 'ot summer.

OSBORNE. So do I.

TROTTER. Funny about that bird. Made me feel quite braced up. Sort of made me think about my garden of an evening—walking round in me slippers after supper, smoking me pipe.

OSBORNE. You keen on gardening?

TROTTER. Oh, I used to do a bit of an evening. I 'ad a decent little grass plot in front, with flower-borders—geraniums, lobelia, and calsalaria—you know, red,

white, and blue. Looked rather nice in the summer.

OSBORNE. Yes.

TROTTER. 'Ad some fine 'olly'ocks out the back. One year I 'd one eight feet 'igh. Took a photer of it. [*He fumbles in his pocket case.*] Like to look at it?

OSBORNE. I would. [*He looks at the photo.*] By Jove, it's a beauty.

TROTTER [*looking over OSBORNE'S shoulder*]. You see that, just there?

OSBORNE. Yes?

TROTTER. That's the roof of the summer-'ouse.

OSBORNE. Is it really!

TROTTER. Just shows the 'ite of the 'olly'ock.

OSBORNE. It does. [*He shows the photo to RALEIGH.*] A beauty, isn't it?

RALEIGH. Rather!

TROTTER. It never wanted no stick to keep it straight, neether [*There is a pause.*] You keen on gardening?

OSBORNE. Yes. A bit. I made a rockery when I was home on leave. I used to cycle out to the woods and get primroses and things like that, and try and get 'em to grow in my garden.

TROTTER. I don't suppose they would!

OSBORNE. They would if you pressed a bit of moss round them—

TROTTER. —to make 'em feel at 'ome, eh? [*He laughs.*]

OSBORNE. They'll be coming out again soon if they've got this sun at home.

TROTTER. I reckon they will. I remember one morning last spring—we was coming out of the salient. Just when it was getting light in the morning—it was at the time when the Boche was sending over a lot of that gas that smells like pear-drops, you know?

OSBORNE. I know. Phosgene.

TROTTER. That's it. We were scared to hell of it. All of a sudden we smelt that funny sweet smell, and a fellow shouted "Gas!"—and we put on our masks; and then I spotted what it was.

OSBORNE. What was it?

TROTTER. Why, a blinkin' may-tree! All out in bloom, growing beside the path! We did feel a lot of silly poops—putting on gas masks because of a damn may-tree! [*He stretches himself and tries to button his tunic.*] Lord! I must get my fat down. [*He gets up.*] Well, I better go and relieve Stanhope. He'll curse like hell if I don't. I bet he's got a red-hot liver this morning.

OSBORNE. I relieve you at eleven.

TROTTER. That's right. I don't like

this time of day in the line The old Boche 'as just 'ad 'is breakfast, and sends over a few whizz-bangs and rifle grenades to show 'e ain't forgotten us. Still, I'd rather 'ave a bang or two than this damn quiet. [*He puts on his helmet and gas mask saichel and goes up the steps*] Cheerio!

OSBORNE. Cheerio!

RALEIGH. Cheerio!

OSBORNE [*to RALEIGH*]. I expect Stanhope'll let you go on duty alone now.

RALEIGH. Will he? About what time?

OSBORNE. Well, after me, I expect.

From about two till four.

RALEIGH. I see.

[*There is a pause Then OSBORNE looks at RALEIGH and laughs.*]

OSBORNE. What do you think about it all?

RALEIGH. Oh, all right, thanks [*He laughs*] I feel I've been here ages.

OSBORNE [*filling his pipe*]. I expect you do. The time passes, though.

RALEIGH. Are we here for six days?

OSBORNE. Yes. Seems a long time, doesn't it?

RALEIGH [*laughing shortly*]. It does rather. I can't imagine—the end of six days here—

OSBORNE. Anyway, we've done twelve hours already. It's fine when you are relieved and go down the line to billets, and have a good hot bath, and sit and read under trees.

RALEIGH. Good Lord, I feel I haven't seen a tree for ages—not a real tree with leaves and branches—and yet I've only been here twelve hours.

OSBORNE. How did you feel—in the front line?

RALEIGH. Oh, all right. It seemed so frightfully quiet and uncanny—everybody creeping about and talking in low voices. I suppose you've got to talk quietly when you're so near the German front line—only about seventy yards, isn't it?

OSBORNE. Yes. About the breadth of a football field.

RALEIGH. It's funny to think of it like that.

OSBORNE. I always measure distances like that out here. Keeps them in proportion.

RALEIGH. Did you play football?

OSBORNE. Yes. But mostly reffing at school in the last few years.

RALEIGH. Are you a schoolmaster, then?

OSBORNE. Yes. I must apologize.

RALEIGH. Oh, I don't mind school-

masters [*Hastily*] I—I mean, I never met one outside a school.

OSBORNE. They do get out sometimes.

RALEIGH [*laughing*]. Who did you play for?

OSBORNE. The Harlequins.

RALEIGH. I say, really!

OSBORNE. I played for the English team on one great occasion.

RALEIGH. What! For *England*!

OSBORNE. I was awfully lucky to get the chance. It's a long time ago now.

RALEIGH [*with awe*]. Oh, but, good Lord! that must have been simply topping. Where did you play?

OSBORNE. Wing three.

RALEIGH. I say, I—I never realized—you'd played for England?

OSBORNE. Tuppence to talk to me now! Anyhow, don't breeze it about.

RALEIGH. Don't the others know?

OSBORNE. We never talk about football.

RALEIGH. They ought to know. It'd make them feel jolly bucked.

OSBORNE [*laughing*]. It doesn't make much difference out here!

RALEIGH. It must be awfully thrilling, playing in front of a huge crowd—all shouting and cheering—

OSBORNE. You don't notice it when the game begins.

RALEIGH. You're too taken up with the game?

OSBORNE. Yes.

RALEIGH. I used to get wind up playing at school with only a few kids looking on.

OSBORNE. You feel it more when there are only a few [*He has picked up a slip of paper from the table; suddenly he laughs.*] Look at this!

RALEIGH [*looking curiously at it*]. What is it?

OSBORNE. Trotter's plan to make the time pass quickly. One hundred and forty-four little circles—one for each hour of six days. He's blacked in six already. He's six hours behind.

RALEIGH. It's rather a good idea. I like Trotter.

OSBORNE. He's a good chap.

RALEIGH. He makes things feel—natural.

OSBORNE. He's a genuine sort of chap.

RALEIGH. That's it. He's genuine. [*There is a pause. He has been filling a new pipe OSBORNE is puffing at his old one.*] How topping—to have played for England!

OSBORNE. It was rather fun.

[*There is a pause.*]

RALEIGH. The Germans are really quite decent, aren't they? I mean, outside the newspapers?

OSBORNE. Yes. [*Pause*] I remember up at Wipers we had a man shot when he was out on patrol. Just at dawn. We couldn't get him in that night. He lay out there groaning all day. Next night three of our men crawled out to get him in. It was so near the German trenches that they could have shot our fellows one by one. But, when our men began dragging the wounded man back over the rough ground, a big German officer stood up in their trenches and called out "Carry him!"—and our fellows stood up and carried the man back, and the German officer fired some lights for them to see by.

RALEIGH. How topping!

OSBORNE. Next day we blew each other's trenches to blazes.

RALEIGH. It all seems rather—*silly*, doesn't it?

OSBORNE. It does, rather.

[*There is silence for a while*]

RALEIGH. I started a letter when I came off duty last night. How do we send letters?

OSBORNE. The quartermaster-sergeant takes them down after he brings rations up in the evenings.

[*STANHOPE is coming slowly down the steps. RALEIGH rises.*]

RALEIGH. I think I'll go and finish it now—if I go on duty soon.

OSBORNE. Come and write in here. It's more cheery.

RALEIGH. It's all right, thanks; I'm quite comfortable in there. I've rigged up a sort of little table beside my bed.

OSBORNE. Righto.

[*RALEIGH goes into his dug-out.*]

[*STANHOPE is slowly taking off his equipment*]

STANHOPE. What a foul smell of bacon.

OSBORNE. Yes. We've got bacon for breakfast.

STANHOPE. So I gather. Have you told Raleigh about rifle inspection?

OSBORNE. No.

STANHOPE [*at the entrance to RALEIGH'S dug-out*]. Raleigh!

RALEIGH [*appearing*]. Yes?

STANHOPE. You inspect your platoon's rifles at nine o'clock.

RALEIGH. Oh, righto, Stanhope.

[*He goes again.*]

STANHOPE [*sitting at the table*]. I've

arranged two wiring parties to begin at eight o'clock to-night—Corporal Burt with two men and Sergeant Smith with two. I want them to strengthen the wire all along the front.

OSBORNE. It's very weak at present.

STANHOPE. Every company leaves it for the next one to do. There're great holes blown out weeks ago.

OSBORNE. I know.

STANHOPE. Next night we'll start putting a belt of wire down both sides of us.

OSBORNE. Down the sides?

STANHOPE. Yes. We'll wire ourselves right in. If this attack comes, I'm not going to trust the companies on our sides to hold their ground.

[*MASON has come in, and stands diffidently in the background.*]

MASON. Would you like a nice bit o' bacon, sir?

STANHOPE. No thanks. I'll have a cup of tea.

MASON. Right, sir.

[*He goes out.*]

STANHOPE. I've been having a good look round. We've got a strong position here—if we wire ourselves right in. The colonel's been talking to me up there.

OSBORNE. Oh. Has he been round?

STANHOPE. Yes. He says a German prisoner gave the day of attack as the 21st.

OSBORNE. That's Thursday?

STANHOPE. Yes. To-day's Tuesday.

OSBORNE. That means about dawn the day after to-morrow.

STANHOPE. The second dawn from now.

[*There is a pause*]

OSBORNE. Then it'll come while we're here.

STANHOPE. Yes. It'll come while we're here. And we shall be in the front seats.

OSBORNE. Oh, well—

[*In the silence that follows, MASON enters with a cup of tea.*]

MASON. Would you like a nice plate of sardines, sir?

STANHOPE. I should loathe it.

MASON. Very good, sir.

[*He goes out.*]

OSBORNE. Did the colonel have much to say?

STANHOPE. Only that when the attack comes we can't expect any help from behind. We're not to move from here. We've got to stick it.

OSBORNE. I see.

STANHOPE. We'll wire ourselves in as strongly as possible. I've got to arrange

battle positions for each platoon and section this afternoon

OSBORNE Well, I'm glad it's coming at last. I'm sick of waiting

STANHOPE [*looking at TROTTER'S chart*]. What's this extraordinary affair?

OSBORNE Trotter's plan to make the time pass by. A hundred and forty-four circles—one for each hour of the six days

STANHOPE. How many hours are there till dawn on the 21st?

OSBORNE. Goodness knows. Not many, I hope.

STANHOPE. Nearly nine o'clock now. Twenty-four till nine to-morrow; twelve till nine at night—that's thirty-six; nine till six next morning; that's forty-five altogether.

[*He begins to count off forty-five circles on TROTTER'S chart*]

OSBORNE. What are you going to do?

STANHOPE At the end of the forty-fifth circle I'm going to draw a picture of Trotter being blown up in four pieces.

OSBORNE Don't spoil his chart. It took him an hour to make that.

STANHOPE He won't see the point. He's no imagination

OSBORNE. I don't suppose he has.

STANHOPE. Funny not to have any imagination. Must be rather nice.

OSBORNE. A bit dull, I should think.

STANHOPE It must be, rather. I suppose all his life Trotter feels like you and I do when we're drowsily drunk.

OSBORNE. Poor chap!

STANHOPE I suppose if Trotter looks at that wall he just sees a brown surface. He doesn't see into the earth beyond—the worms wandering about round the stones and roots of trees. I wonder how a worm knows when it's going up or down

OSBORNE. When it's going down I suppose the blood runs into its head and makes it throb.

STANHOPE. Worms haven't got any blood.

OSBORNE Then I don't suppose it ever does know

STANHOPE. Rotten if it didn't—and went on going down when it thought it was coming up.

OSBORNE. Yes, I expect that's the one thing worms dread.

STANHOPE. D'you think this life sharpens the imagination?

OSBORNE. It must.

STANHOPE. Whenever I look at anything nowadays I see right through it. Looking at you now there's your uniform

—your jersey—shirt—vest—then beyond that—

OSBORNE. Let's talk about something else—croquet, or the war.

STANHOPE [*laughing*]. Sorry! It's a habit that's grown on me lately—to look right through things, and on and on—till I get frightened and stop.

OSBORNE. I suppose everybody out here—*feels* more keenly.

STANHOPE. I hope so I wondered if there was anything wrong with me D'you ever get a sudden feeling that everything's going farther and farther away—till you're the only thing in the world—and then the world begins going away—until you're the only thing in—in the universe—and you struggle to get back—and can't?

OSBORNE. Bit of nerve strain, that's all.

STANHOPE. You don't think I'm going potty?

OSBORNE Oh, Lord, no!

STANHOPE [*throwing back his head and laughing*]. Dear old Uncle! you don't really know, do you? You just pretend you do, to make me feel all right.

OSBORNE. When people are going potty they never talk about it; they keep it to themselves.

STANHOPE. Oh, well, that's all right, then. [*There is silence for a while*] I had that feeling this morning, standing out there in the line while the sun was rising. By the way, did you see the sunrise? Wasn't it gorgeous?

OSBORNE. Splendid—this morning.

STANHOPE. I was looking across at the Boche trenches and right beyond—not a sound or a soul; just an enormous plain, all churned up like a sea that's got muddier and muddier till it's so stiff that it can't move. You could have heard a pin drop in the quiet; yet you knew thousands of guns were hidden there, all ready, cleaned and oiled—millions of bullets lying in pouches—thousands of Germans, waiting and thinking. Then, gradually, that feeling came—

OSBORNE. I never knew the sun could rise in so many ways till I came out here. Green, and pink, and red, and blue, and gray. Extraordinary, isn't it?

STANHOPE. Yes. Hi! Mason!

MASON [*outside*] Yessir!

STANHOPE. Bring some mugs and a bottle of whisky.

MASON. Yessir

OSBORNE [*smiling*]. So early in the morning?

STANHOPE. Just a spot. It's damned cold in here.

OSBORNE [*turning over the pages of a magazine*]. This show at the Hippodrome has been running a long time.

STANHOPE. What? *Zig-zag*?

OSBORNE. Yes. George Robey's in it.

STANHOPE. Harper saw it on leave. Says it's damn good. Robey's pricelessly funny.

[*MASON brings whisky and mugs and water.*]

OSBORNE. Wish I'd seen a show on leave.

STANHOPE. D'you mean to say you didn't go to any shows?

OSBORNE [*laughing*]. No. I spent all the time in the garden, making a rockery. In the evenings I used to sit and smoke and read—and my wife used to knit socks and play the piano a bit. We pretended there wasn't any war at all—till my two youngsters made me help in a tin-soldier battle on the floor.

STANHOPE. Poor old Uncle! You can't get away from it, can you?

OSBORNE. I wish I knew how to fight a battle like those boys of mine. You ought to have seen the way they lured my men under the sofa and mowed them down.

STANHOPE [*laughing and helping himself to a drink*]. You going to have one?

OSBORNE. Not now, thanks.

STANHOPE. You go on duty at eleven, don't you?

OSBORNE. Yes. I relieve Trotter.

STANHOPE. Raleigh better go on at one o'clock and stay with you for an hour. Then he can stay on alone till four. Hibbert relieves him at four.

OSBORNE. Righto.

STANHOPE. What's Raleigh doing now?

OSBORNE. Finishing a letter.

STANHOPE. Did you tell him?

OSBORNE. About what?

STANHOPE. Censorship.

OSBORNE. You don't mean that seriously?

STANHOPE. Mean it? Of course I mean it.

OSBORNE. You can't do that.

STANHOPE. Officially I'm supposed to read all your letters. Damn it all, Uncle! Imagine yourself in my place—a letter going away from here—from that boy—

OSBORNE. He'll say nothing—rotten—about you.

STANHOPE. You think so? [*There is*

a pause] I heard you go on duty last night. After you'd gone, I got up. I was feeling bad. I forgot Raleigh was out there with Trotter. I'd forgotten all about him. I was sleepy. I just knew something beastly had happened. Then he came in with Trotter—and looked at me. After coming in out of the night air, this place must have reeked of cand'le-grease, and rats—and whisky. One thing a boy like that can't stand is a smell that isn't fresh. He looked at me as if I'd hit him between the eyes—as if I'd spat on him—

OSBORNE. You imagine things.

STANHOPE [*laughing*]. Imagine things! No need to imagine!

OSBORNE. Why can't you treat him like any other youngster?

[*RALEIGH comes in from his dug-out with a letter in his hand. He stops short as he notices the abrupt silence that follows his entry.*]

RALEIGH. I'm sorry.

OSBORNE. It's all right, Raleigh. Going to inspect rifles?

RALEIGH. Yes.

OSBORNE. You needn't bother if the wood's a bit dirty—just the barrels and magazines and all the metal parts.

RALEIGH. Righto.

OSBORNE. See there's plenty of oil on it. And look at the ammunition in the men's pouches.

RALEIGH. Right. [*He crosses towards the door and turns*] Where do we put the letters to be collected?

OSBORNE. Oh, just on the table.

RALEIGH. Thanks.

[*He begins to lick the flap of the envelope*]

STANHOPE [*in a quiet voice*]. You leave it open.

RALEIGH [*surprised*]. Open?

STANHOPE. Yes. I have to censor all letters.

RALEIGH [*stammering*]. Oh, but—I haven't said anything about—where we are—

STANHOPE. It's the rule that letters must be read.

RALEIGH [*nervously*]. Oh, I—I didn't realize that. [*He stands embarrassed; then gives a short laugh.*] I—I think—I'll just leave it, then.

[*He unbuttons his tunic pocket to put the letter away. STANHOPE rises, crosses slowly and faces RALEIGH.*]

STANHOPE. Give me that letter!

RALEIGH [*astounded*]. But—Den-
nis—

STANHOPE [*trembling*] Give me that letter!

RALEIGH. But it's—it's private. I didn't know—

STANHOPE. D'you understand an order? Give me that letter!

RALEIGH. But I tell you—there's nothing— [*STANHOPE clutches RALEIGH'S wrist and tears the letter from his hand*] Dennis—I'm—

STANHOPE. Don't "Dennis" me! Stanhope's my name! You're not at school! Go and inspect your rifles.

[*RALEIGH stands in amazement at the foot of the steps.*]

STANHOPE [*shouting*]. D'you understand an order?

• [*For a moment RALEIGH stares wide-eyed at STANHOPE, who is trembling and breathing heavily, then almost in a whisper he says: "Right," and goes quietly up the narrow steps. STANHOPE turns toward the table.*]

OSBORNE. Good heavens, Stanhope!

STANHOPE [*wheeling furiously on OSBORNE*]. Look here, Osborne, I'm commanding this company. I ask for advice when I want it!

OSBORNE. Very well.

[*STANHOPE snks down at the table with the letter in his hand. There is silence for a moment. Then he throws the letter on the table and rests his head between his hands.*]

STANHOPE. Oh, God! I don't want to read the blasted thing!

OSBORNE. You'll let it go then?

STANHOPE. I don't care.

[*There is a pause.*]

OSBORNE. Shall I glance through it—for you?

STANHOPE. If you like.

OSBORNE. I don't want to.

STANHOPE. You better. I can't.

[*OSBORNE takes the letter from the table and opens it. STANHOPE sits with his head in his hand, digging a magazine with a pencil. After a while, OSBORNE glances up at STANHOPE.*]

OSBORNE. D'you want to hear?

STANHOPE. I suppose I better know.

OSBORNE. He begins with a description of his getting here—he doesn't mention the names of any places.

STANHOPE. What does he say then?

OSBORNE. The last piece is about you.

STANHOPE. Go on.

OSBORNE [*reading*]. He says: "And now I come to the great news. I reported at Battalion Headquarters, and the colonel

looked in a little book, and said, 'You report to "C" Company—Captain Stanhope.' Can't you imagine what I felt? I was taken along some trenches and shown a dug-out. There was an awfully nice officer there—quite old—with gray hair"—[*OSBORNE clears his throat*]"—and then later Dennis came in. He looked tired, but that's because he works so frightfully hard, and because of the responsibility. Then I went on duty in the front line, and a sergeant told me all about Dennis. He said that Dennis is the finest officer in the battalion, and the men simply love him. He hardly ever sleeps in the dug-out; he's always up in the front line with the men, cheering them on with jokes, and making them keen about things, like he did the kids at school. I'm awfully proud to think he's my friend." [*There is silence. STANHOPE has not moved while OSBORNE has read*] That's all. [*Pause.*] Shall I stick it down?

[*STANHOPE sits with lowered head.*]

He murmurs something that sounds like "Yes, please" He rises heavily and crosses to the shadows by OSBORNE'S bed. The sun is shining quite brightly in the trench outside.

THE CURTAIN FALLS

SCENE II—*Afternoon on the same day. The sunlight has gone from the dug-out floor, but still shines brightly in the trench.*

STANHOPE is lying on his bed reading by the light of a candle on the table beside him. A burly FIGURE comes groping down the steps and stands blinking in the shadows of the dug-out. A huge man, with a heavy black mustache, a fat red face, and massive chin.

STANHOPE puts the magazine down, rises and sits up to the table.

STANHOPE. I want to talk with you, sergeant-major.

S.-M. [*standing stolidly by the steps*]. Yes, sir?

STANHOPE. Sit down. Have a whisky?

S.-M. [*a suspicion of brightness in his voice*]. Thank you, sir.

[*The SERGEANT-MAJOR diffidently takes a small tot.*]

STANHOPE. I say. You won't taste that. Take a proper one.

S.-M. Well—sir. [*STANHOPE reaches over, helps the SERGEANT-MAJOR to a large tot, and takes one himself.*] Turning

chilly again, sir Quite warm this morning

STANHOPE Yes.

S.-M. Well, here's your very good health, sir. [*He raises his glass and drinks*]

STANHOPE Cheero [*He puts down his glass and abruptly changes his tone*] Now, look here, sergeant-major We must expect this attack on Thursday morning at dawn. That's the second dawn from now.

[*The SERGEANT-MAJOR takes a very dirty little notebook from his pocket and jots down notes with a very small stub of a pencil*]

S.-M. Thursday morning. Very good, sir

STANHOPE. We're to hold these trenches, and no man's to move from here.

S.-M. Very good, sir.

STANHOPE It may happen that companies on our sides will give way, leaving our flanks exposed; so I want a screen of wire in the support line

S.-M. [*writing hurriedly*]. Both flanks—yes, sir.

STANHOPE. When the attack begins, I shall take charge of the left, and Mr. Osborne the right. You will be with Mr. Osborne, and Sergeant Baker with me; 9 and 10 Platoons will move over here [*He points out the position on the trench map*]. 11 and 12 Platoons to the left.

S.-M. I see, sir.

STANHOPE Is there anything you're not clear about?

S.-M. [*Looking at his notes*] Seems all clear, sir.

STANHOPE Anything you want to know?

S.-M. Well, sir [*clears his throat*—when the attack comes, of course, we beat 'em off—but what if they keep on attacking?

STANHOPE. Then we keep on beating them off.

S.-M. Yes, sir. But what I mean is—they're bound to make a big thing of it.

STANHOPE [*cheerily*]. Oh, I think they will!

S.-M. Well, then, sir. If they don't get through the first day they'll attack the next day and the next—

STANHOPE. They're bound to.

S.-M. Then oughtn't we to fix up something about, well [*he gropes for the right words*—er—falling back?

STANHOPE. There's no need to—you see, this company's a lot better than "A" and "B" Companies on either side of us.

S.-M. Quite, sir.

STANHOPE. Well, then, if anyone breaks. "A" and "B" will break before we do. As long as we stick here when the other companies have given way, we can fire into the Boche as they try and get through the gaps on our sides—we'll make a hell of a mess of them. We might delay the advance a whole day.

S.-M. [*diffidently*] Yes, sir, but what 'appens when the Boche 'as all got round the back of us?

STANHOPE Then we advance and win the war.

S.-M. [*pretending to make a note*]. Win the war Very good, sir.

STANHOPE. But you understand exactly what I mean, sergeant-major. Our orders are to stick here If you're told to stick where you are you don't make plans to retire.

S.-M. Quite, sir.

[*OSBORNE'S voice is calling down the steps SERGEANT-MAJOR rises.*]

OSBORNE Are you there, Stanhope?

STANHOPE [*rising quickly*]. Yes. What's the matter?

OSBORNE. The colonel's up here. Wants to see you—

STANHOPE. Oh, right, I'll come up.

COLONEL [*from above*] All right, Stanhope—I'll come down.

S.-M. [*who has risen*]. Anything more, sir?

STANHOPE. I don't think so. I'll see you at stand-to this evening.

S.-M. Very good, sir.

[*He stands back a pace and salutes*

STANHOPE smartly. STANHOPE'S eye falls on the SERGEANT-MAJOR'S nearly finished drink on the table. He points to it.]

STANHOPE. Hoy! What about that?

S.-M. Thank you, sir

[*He finishes the drink. The COLONEL comes down the steps.*]

COLONEL. Good morning, sergeant-major.

S.-M. Good morning, sir.

[*The SERGEANT-MAJOR goes up the steps.*]

STANHOPE. Hullo, sir!

COLONEL. Hullo, Stanhope! [*He sniffs.*] Strong smell of bacon.

STANHOPE. Yes, sir. We had some bacon for breakfast.

COLONEL. Hangs about, doesn't it?

STANHOPE. Yes, sir. Clings to the walls

COLONEL. Lovely day.

STANHOPE. Splendid, sir.

COLONEL. Spring's coming. [*There is*

a pause.] I'm glad you're alone. I've got some rather serious news

STANHOPE. I'm sorry to hear that, sir. Will you have a drink?

COLONEL. Well, thanks—just a spot. [STANHOPE mixes a drink for the COLONEL and himself.] Here's luck.

STANHOPE. Cheero, sir. [Bringing forward a box.] Sit down, sir.

COLONEL. Thanks.

STANHOPE. What's the news, sir?

COLONEL. The brigadier came to see me this morning. [He pauses.] It seems almost certain the attack's to come on Thursday morning. They've got information from more than one source—but they don't know where it's going to fall the hardest. The Boche began relieving his front-line troops yesterday. They're bound to put in certain regiments where they intend to make the hardest push—

STANHOPE. Naturally—

COLONEL. And the general wants us to make a raid to find out who's come into the line opposite here.

[There is a pause.]

STANHOPE. I see. When?

COLONEL. As soon as possible. He said to-night.

STANHOPE. Oh, but that's absurd!

COLONEL. I told him so. I said the earliest would be to-morrow afternoon. A surprise daylight raid under a smoke screen from the trench-mortar people. I think daylight best. There's not much moon now, and it's vitally important to get hold of a Boche or two.

STANHOPE. Quite.

COLONEL. I suggest sending two officers and ten men. Quite enough for the purpose. Just opposite here there's only seventy yards of No Man's Land. To-night the trench-mortars can blow a hole in the Boche wire and you can cut a hole in yours. Harrison of the trench-mortars is coming in to dinner with me this evening to discuss everything. I'd like you to come too. Eight o'clock suit you?

STANHOPE. Very good, sir.

COLONEL. I'll leave you to select the men

STANHOPE. You want me to go with them, sir?

COLONEL. Oh, no, Stanhope. I—I can't let you go. No. I want one officer to direct the raid and one to make the dash in and collar some Boche.

STANHOPE. Who do you suggest, sir?

COLONEL. Well, I suggest Osborne, for one. He's a very level-headed chap. He can direct it.

STANHOPE. And who else?

COLONEL. Well, there's Trotter—but he's a bit fat, isn't he? Not much good at dashing in?

STANHOPE. No. D'you suggest Hibbert?

COLONEL. Well, what do you think of Hibbert?

STANHOPE. I don't think so.

COLONEL. No. [There is a pause.]

STANHOPE. Why not send a good sergeant, sir?

COLONEL. No. I don't think a sergeant. The men expect officers to lead a raid

STANHOPE. Yes. There is that.

COLONEL. As a matter of fact, Stanhope, I'm thinking of that youngster I sent up to you last night.

STANHOPE. Raleigh?

COLONEL. Yes. Just the type. Plenty of guts—

STANHOPE. He's awfully new to it all—

COLONEL. All to the good. His nerves are sound

STANHOPE. It's rotten to send a fellow who's only just arrived.

COLONEL. Well, who else is there? I could send an officer from another company—

STANHOPE [quickly]. Oh, Lord, no. We'll do it.

COLONEL. Then I suggest Osborne to lead the raid and Raleigh to make the dash—with ten good men. We'll meet Harrison at supper and arrange the smoke bombs—and blowing a hole in the wire. You select the men and talk to Osborne and Raleigh about it in the meantime.

STANHOPE. Very well, sir.

COLONEL. Better send Osborne and Raleigh down to me in the morning to talk things over. Or, better still—I'll come up here first thing to-morrow morning.

STANHOPE. Right, sir.

COLONEL. It's all a damn nuisance; but, after all—it's necessary.

STANHOPE. I suppose it is.

COLONEL. Well, so long, Stanhope. I'll see you at eight o'clock. Do you like fish?

STANHOPE. Fish, sir?

COLONEL. Yes. We've had some fresh fish sent up from railhead for supper to-night.

STANHOPE. Splendid, sir!

COLONEL. Whiting, I think it is.

STANHOPE. Good!

COLONEL. Well, bye-bye.

[The COLONEL goes up the steps.

STANHOPE stands watching for a

moment, then turns and walks slowly to the table. HIBBERT comes quietly into the dug-out from the tunnel leading from his sleeping quarters]

STANHOPE. Hullo! I thought you were asleep

HIBBERT. I just wanted a word with you, Stanhope

STANHOPE. Fire away.

HIBBERT This neuralgia of mine I'm awfully sorry. I'm afraid I can't stick it any longer—

STANHOPE. I know. It's rotten, isn't it? I've got it like hell—

HIBBERT [*taken aback*]. You have?

STANHOPE. Had it for weeks.

HIBBERT. Well, I'm sorry, Stanhope. It's no good. I've tried damned hard; but I must go down—

STANHOPE. Go down—where?

HIBBERT. Why, go sick—go down the line I must go into hospital and have some kind of treatment. [*There is a silence for a moment. STANHOPE is looking at HIBBERT—till HIBBERT turns away and walks towards his dug-out*] I'll go right along now, I think

STANHOPE [*quietly*]. You're going to stay here.

HIBBERT. I'm going down to see the doctor. He'll send me to hospital when he understands—

STANHOPE I've seen the doctor. I saw him this morning. He won't send you to hospital, Hibbert; he'll send you back here. He promised me he would [*There is silence*] So you can save yourself a walk

HIBBERT [*fiercely*]. What the hell—!

STANHOPE. Stop that!

HIBBERT. I've a perfect right to go sick if I want to. The men can—why can't an officer?

STANHOPE. No man's sent down unless he's very ill. There's nothing wrong with you, Hibbert. The German attack's on Thursday; almost for certain. You're going to stay here and see it through with the rest of us.

HIBBERT [*hysterically*]. I tell you, I can't—the pain's nearly sending me mad. I'm going! I've got all my stuff packed. I'm going now—you can't stop me!

[*He goes excitedly into the dug-out. STANHOPE walks slowly towards the steps, turns, and undoes the flap of his revolver holster. He takes out his revolver, and stands casually examining it. HIBBERT returns with his pack slung on his back and a walk-*

ing-stick in his hand. He pauses at the sight of STANHOPE by the steps.]

HIBBERT. Let's get by, Stanhope.

STANHOPE. You're going to stay here and do your job.

HIBBERT. Haven't I *told* you? I *can't*! Don't you understand? Let—let me get by.

STANHOPE. Now look here, Hibbert. I've got a lot of work to do and no time to waste. Once and for all, you're going to stay here and see it through with the rest of us

HIBBERT. I shall die of this pain if I don't go!

STANHOPE. Better die of pain than be shot for deserting.

HIBBERT [*in a low voice*]. What do you mean?

STANHOPE. You know what I mean—

HIBBERT. I've a right to see the doctor!

STANHOPE. Good God! Don't you understand!—he'll send you back here. Doctor Preston's never let a shirker pass him yet—and he's not going to start now—two days before the attack—

HIBBERT [*pleadingly*]. Stanhope—if you only *knew* how awful I feel— Please do let me go by—

[*He walks slowly round behind STANHOPE. STANHOPE turns and thrusts him roughly back. With a lightning movement HIBBERT raises his stick and strikes blindly at STANHOPE, who catches the stick, tears it from HIBBERT'S hands, smashes it across his knee, and throws it on the ground.*]

STANHOPE. God!—you little swine. You know what that means—don't you? Striking a superior officer! [*There is silence. STANHOPE takes hold of his revolver as it swings from its lanyard. HIBBERT stands quivering in front of STANHOPE*] Never mind, though. I won't have you shot for that—

HIBBERT. Let me go—

STANHOPE. If you went, I'd have you shot—for deserting. It's a hell of a disgrace—to die like that. I'd rather spare you the disgrace. I give you half a minute to think. You either stay here and try and be a man—or you try to get out of that door—to desert. If you do that, there's going to be an accident. D'you understand? I'm fiddling with my revolver, d'you see?—cleaning it—and it's going off by accident. It often happens out here. It's going off, and it's going to shoot you between the eyes.

HIBBERT [*in a whisper*]. You daren't—

STANHOPE. You don't deserve to be shot by accident—but I'd save you the disgrace of the other way—I give you half a minute to decide. [*He holds up his wrist to look at his watch.*] Half a minute from now—

[*There is silence; a few seconds go by. Suddenly HIBBERT bursts into a high-pitched laugh*]

HIBBERT. Go on, then, shoot! You won't let me go to the hospital I swear I'll never go into those trenches again. Shoot!—and thank God—

STANHOPE [*with his eyes on his watch*]. Fifteen more seconds—

HIBBERT. Go on! I'm ready—

STANHOPE. Ten. [*He looks up at HIBBERT who has closed his eyes*] Five.

[*Again STANHOPE looks up. After a moment he quietly drops his revolver into its holster and steps towards HIBBERT, who stands with lowered head and eyes tightly screwed up, his arms stretched stiffly by his sides, his hands tightly clutching the edges of his tunic. Gently STANHOPE places his hands on HIBBERT'S shoulders. HIBBERT starts violently and gives a little cry. He opens his eyes and stares vacantly into STANHOPE'S face. STANHOPE is smiling*]

STANHOPE. Good man, Hibbert. I liked the way you stuck that.

HIBBERT [*hoarsely*]. Why didn't you shoot?

STANHOPE. Stay here, old chap—and see it through—

[*HIBBERT stands trembling, trying to speak. Suddenly he breaks down and cries. STANHOPE takes his hands from his shoulders and turns away*]

HIBBERT. Stanhope! I've tried like hell—I swear I have. Ever since I came out here I've hated and loathed it. Every sound up there makes me all—cold and sick I'm different to—to the others—you don't understand. It's got worse and worse, and now I can't bear it any longer. I'll never go up those steps again—into the line—with the men looking at me—and knowing—I'd rather die here.

[*He is sitting on STANHOPE'S bed, crying without an effort to restrain himself.*]

STANHOPE [*pouring out a whisky*]. Try a drop of this, old chap—

HIBBERT. No, thanks.

STANHOPE. Go on. Drink it. [*HIB-*

BERT takes the mug and drinks STANHOPE sits down beside HIBBERT and puts an arm round his shoulder] I know what you feel, Hibbert. I've known all along—

HIBBERT How can you know?

STANHOPE Because I feel the same—exactly the same! Every little noise up there makes me feel—just as you feel. Why didn't you tell me instead of talking about neuralgia? We all feel like you do sometimes, if you only knew. I hate and loathe it all Sometimes I feel I could just lie down on this bed and pretend I was paralyzed or something—and couldn't move—and just lie there till I died—or was dragged away.

HIBBERT. I can't bear to go up into those awful trenches again

STANHOPE. When are you due to go on?

HIBBERT Quite soon. At four

STANHOPE. Shall we go on together? We know how we both feel now. Shall we see if we can stick it together?

HIBBERT I can't—

STANHOPE Supposing I said I can't—supposing we all say we can't—what would happen then?

HIBBERT. I don't care. What does it matter? It's all so—so beastly—nothing matters—

STANHOPE. Supposing the worst happened—supposing we were knocked right out. Think of all the chaps who've gone already. It can't be very lonely there—with all those fellows. Sometimes I think it's lonelier here. [*He pauses. HIBBERT is sitting quietly now, his eyes roving vacantly in front of him.*] Just go and have a quiet rest. Then we'll go out together.

HIBBERT. Do please let me go, Stanhope—

STANHOPE. If you went—and left Osborne and Trotter and Raleigh and all those men up there to do your work—could you ever look a man straight in the face again—in all your life? [*There is silence again.*] You may be wounded. Then you can go home and feel proud—and if you're killed, you—you won't have to stand this hell any more. I might have fired just now. If I had you would have been dead now. But you're still alive—with a straight fighting chance of coming through. Take the chance, old chap, and stand in with Osborne and Trotter and Raleigh. Don't you think it worth standing in with men like that?—when you know they all feel like you do—in their hearts—and just go on sticking it because

they know it's—it's the only thing a decent man can do. [*Again there is silence*] What about it?

HIBBERT I'll—I'll try ——

STANHOPE Good man!

HIBBERT You—you won't say anything, Stanhope—about this?

STANHOPE. If you promise not to tell any one what a blasted funk I am

HIBBERT [*with a little laugh*]. No.

STANHOPE. Splendid! Now go and have ten minutes' rest and a smoke—then we'll go up together and hold each other's hands—and jump every time a rat squeaks. [*HIBBERT rises and blows his nose*]

We've all got a good fighting chance. I mean to come through—don't you think?

HIBBERT. Yes. Rather. [*He goes timidly towards his dug-out, and turns at the doorway*] It's awfully decent of you, Stanhope— [*STANHOPE is pouring himself out a whisky*] And thanks most awfully for ——

STANHOPE. That's all right.

[*HIBBERT goes away STANHOPE takes a drink and sits down at the table to write. MASON comes in*]

MASON. Will you have a nice cup of tea, sir?

STANHOPE. Can you guarantee it's nice?

MASON. Well, sir—it's a bit oniony, but that's only because of the saucepan.

STANHOPE. In other words, it's onion soup with tea-leaves in it?

MASON Not till dinner-time, sir.

STANHOPE. All right, Mason Bring two cups of onion tea. One for Mr. Hibbert.

MASON. Very good, sir. [*Going towards the door, he meets OSBORNE coming in.*]

Will you have a nice cup of tea, sir?

OSBORNE Please, Mason—and plenty of bread and butter and strawberry jam.

MASON Very good, sir

STANHOPE. Well, Uncle—how are things going on up there?

OSBORNE. Two lonely rifle grenades came over just now.

STANHOPE. I heard them. Where did they pitch?

OSBORNE. Just over the front line on the left. Otherwise nothing doing. [*Pause.*]

STANHOPE. The colonel's been talking to me.

OSBORNE. About the attack?

STANHOPE. Partly. We've got to make a raid, Uncle.

OSBORNE. Oh? When?

STANHOPE. To-morrow afternoon. Un-

der a smoke screen. Two officers and ten men.

OSBORNE Who's going?

STANHOPE You and Raleigh.

OSBORNE Oh! [*Pause.*] [*There is another pause*] Why Raleigh?

STANHOPE. The colonel picked you to direct and Raleigh to dash in.

OSBORNE. I see.

STANHOPE The brigade wants to know who's opposite here.

OSBORNE To-morrow? What time?

STANHOPE. I suggest about five o'clock. A little before dusk ——

OSBORNE I see

STANHOPE I'm damn sorry.

OSBORNE. That's all right, old chap.

STANHOPE. I'm dining with the colonel to arrange everything Then I'll come back and go through it with you.

OSBORNE. Where do we raid from?

STANHOPE. Out of the sap on our left. Straight across

OSBORNE. Where's the map?

STANHOPE. Here we are. Look. Straight across to this sentry post of the Boche. Sixty yards. To-night we'll lay out a guiding tape as far as possible After dark the torch-emmas are going to break the Boche wire and we'll cut a passage in ours.

OSBORNE. Will you fix up the men who are to go?

STANHOPE. Are you keen on any special men?

OSBORNE Can I take a corporal?

STANHOPE. Sure.

OSBORNE May I have young Crooks?

STANHOPE. Righto.

OSBORNE. You'll ask for volunteers, I suppose?

STANHOPE. Yes. I'll see the sergeant-major and get him to go round for names.

[*He crosses to the doorway as MASON comes in with the tea*]

MASON. Your tea, sir!

STANHOPE. Keep it hot, Mason.

MASON. Will you take this cup, Mr. Osborne?

STANHOPE. Take the other in to Mr. Hibbert, in there.

MASON. Very good, sir.

[*He goes in to HIBBERT'S dug-out.*]

STANHOPE. Shan't be long, Uncle.

[*He goes up the steps.*]

OSBORNE Righto. [*MASON returns.*]

MASON. Will you have cut bread and butter—or shall I bring the loaf, sir?

OSBORNE. Cut it, Mason, please.

MASON. Just bringing the jam separately?

OSBORNE. Yes.

MASON. Very good, sir.

[MASON goes out. OSBORNE takes a small leather bound book from his pocket, opens it at a marker, and begins to read. TROTTER appears from the sleeping dug-out looking very sleepy.]

TROTTER. Tea ready?

OSBORNE. Yes.

TROTTER. Why's Hibbert got his tea in there?

OSBORNE. I don't know.

TROTTER [rubbing his eyes]. Oh, Lord, I do feel frowsy. 'Ad a fine sleep, though.

[MASON brings more tea and a pot of jam.]

MASON. Bread just coming, sir. 'Ere's the strawberry jam, sir.

TROTTER [reciting]. "Tell me, Mother, what is that

That looks like strawberry jam?"

'Hush, hush, my dear; 'tis only Pa

Run over by a tram——"

OSBORNE. The colonel came here while you were asleep.

TROTTER. Oh?

OSBORNE. We've got to make a raid to-morrow afternoon.

TROTTER. Oh, Lord! What—all of us?

OSBORNE. Two officers and ten men.

TROTTER. Who's got to do it?

OSBORNE. Raleigh and I.

TROTTER. Raleigh!

OSBORNE. Yes.

TROTTER. But 'e's only just come!

OSBORNE. Apparently that's the reason.

TROTTER. And you're going too?

OSBORNE. Yes.

TROTTER. Let's 'ear all about it.

OSBORNE. I know nothing yet. Except that it's got to be done.

TROTTER. What a damn nuisance!

OSBORNE. It is, rather.

TROTTER. I reckon the Boche are all ready waiting for it. Did you 'ear about the raid just south of 'ere the other night?

OSBORNE. Nothing much.

TROTTER. The trench-mortars go and knock an 'ole in the Boche wire to let our fellers through—and in the night the Boche went out and tied bits o' red rag on each side of the 'ole.

OSBORNE. Yes. I heard about that.

TROTTER. And even then our fellers 'ad to make the raid. It was murder. Doesn't this tea taste of onions?

OSBORNE. It does a bit.

TROTTER. Pity Mason don't clean 'is pots better. [MASON brings some bread on a plate.] This tea tastes of onions

MASON. I'm sorry, sir. Onions do 'ave such a way of cropping up again

TROTTER. Yes, but we 'aven't 'ad onions for days!

MASON. I know, sir. That's what makes it so funny.

TROTTER. Well, you better do something about it.

MASON. I'll look into it, sir.

[He goes out]
[OSBORNE and TROTTER prepare themselves slices of bread and jam]

TROTTER. Joking apart. It's damn ridiculous making a raid when the Boche are expecting it.

OSBORNE. We're not doing it for fun.

TROTTER. I know.

OSBORNE. You might avoid talking to Raleigh about it.

TROTTER. Why? How do you mean?

OSBORNE. There's no need to tell him it's murder——

TROTTER. Oh! Lord! no. [He pauses.] I'm sorry 'e's got to go 'E's a nice young feller— [OSBORNE turns to his book. There is silence.] What are you reading?

OSBORNE [wearily]. Oh, just a book.

TROTTER. What's the title?

OSBORNE [showing him the cover]. Ever read it?

TROTTER [leaning over and reading the cover]. *Alce's Adventures in Wonderland*—why, that's a kid's book!

OSBORNE. Yes.

TROTTER. You aren't reading it?

OSBORNE. Yes.

TROTTER. What—a kid's book?

OSBORNE. Haven't you read it?

TROTTER [scornfully]. No!

OSBORNE. You ought to. [Reads.]

"How doth the little crocodile

Improve his shining tail,

And pour the waters of the Nile

On every golden scale?"

"How cheerfully he seems to grin

And neatly spread his claws,

And welcomes little fishes in

With gently smiling jaws!"

TROTTER [after a moment's thought]. I don't see no point in that.

OSBORNE [wearily]. Exactly. That's just the point.

TROTTER [looking curiously at OSBORNE]. You are a funny chap!

[STANHOPE returns.]

STANHOPE. The sergeant-major's getting volunteers.

OSBORNE. Good!

TROTTER. Sorry to 'ear about the raid, skipper

STANHOPE [*shortly*]. So am I. What do you make the time?

TROTTER. Just on four.

[*MASON brings in more tea.*]

STANHOPE [*taking the mug of tea*]. Was Hibbert asleep when you came out of there?

TROTTER. No. 'E was just lying on 'is bed, smoking.

STANHOPE [*going to the sleeping dug-out*]. Hibbert!

HIBBERT [*coming out*]. I'm ready, Stanhope.

STANHOPE. Had some tea?

HIBBERT. Yes, thanks.

TROTTER. I reckon Raleigh'll be glad to be relieved. Rotten being on dooty for the first time alone.

OSBORNE. I don't think he minds.

STANHOPE. I shall be up there some time, Uncle.

OSBORNE. I say, why don't you have a rest—you've been on the go all day.

STANHOPE. There's too much to do. This raid's going to upset the arrangements of the wiring party to-night. Can't have men out there while the toc-emas are blowing holes in the Boche wire [*He drinks up his tea.*] Ready, Hibbert? Come on, my lad.

[*STANHOPE and HIBBERT leave the dug-out together. TROTTER looks after them curiously, and turns to OSBORNE.*]

TROTTER. Can't understand that little feller, can you?

OSBORNE. Who?

TROTTER. Why, 'Ibbert. D'you see, 's eyes? All red. 'E told me in there 'e'd got 'ay-fever.

OSBORNE. Rotten thing, hay-fever.

TROTTER. If you ask me, 'e's been crying—

[*OSBORNE is writing at the table.*]

OSBORNE. Maybe.

TROTTER. Funny little bloke, isn't 'e?

OSBORNE. Yes. I say—d'you mind? I just want to get a letter off.

TROTTER. Oh, sorry. They 'aven't collected the letters yet, then?

OSBORNE. Not yet.

TROTTER. I'll get one off to my old lady [*He goes towards his dug-out*] She's wrote and asked if I've got fleas.

OSBORNE. Have you?

TROTTER [*gently rotating his shoulders*]. I wish it was fleas.

[*TROTTER goes into his dug-out; OSBORNE continues his letter. RALEIGH comes down the steps from the trench*]

RALEIGH [*excitedly*]. I say, Stanhope's told me about the raid.

OSBORNE. Has he?

RALEIGH. Just you and me, isn't it—and ten men?

OSBORNE. Yes, to-morrow. Just before dusk. Under a smoke cloud.

RALEIGH. I say—it's most frightfully exciting!

OSBORNE. We shall know more about it after Stanhope sees the colonel to-night.

RALEIGH. Were you and I picked—specially?

OSBORNE. Yes.

RALEIGH. I—say!

THE CURTAIN FALLS

ACT III

SCENE I.—*The following day, towards sunset. The earth wall of the trench outside glows with a light that slowly fades with the sinking sun.*

STANHOPE is alone, wandering to and fro across the dug-out. He looks up the steps for a moment, crosses to the table, and glances down at the map. He looks anxiously at his watch, and, going to the servants' dug-out, calls:

STANHOPE. Mason!

MASON [*outside*]. Yessir!

STANHOPE. Are you making the coffee?

MASON. Yessir!

STANHOPE. Make it hot and strong. Ready in five minutes. I'll call when it's wanted.

MASON. Very good, sir.

[*Again STANHOPE wanders restlessly to and fro. The COLONEL comes down the steps.*]

COLONEL. Everything ready?

STANHOPE. Yes, sir. [*There is silence.*] You've no news, then?

COLONEL. I'm afraid not. It's got to be done.

STANHOPE [*after a pause*]. I see.

COLONEL. The brigadier says the Boche did the same thing just south of here the other day.

STANHOPE. I know, but didn't you suggest we altered our plans and made a

surprise raid farther up the line after dark?

COLONEL. Yes. I suggested that.

STANHOPE. What did he say?

COLONEL. He said the present arrangements have got to stand.

STANHOPE. But surely he must realize—

COLONEL [*impatiently breaking in*]. Look here, Stanhope, I've done all I can, but my report's got to be at headquarters by seven this evening. If we wait till it's dark we shall be too late.

STANHOPE. Why seven?

COLONEL. They've got some conference to arrange the placing of reserves.

STANHOPE. They can't have it later because of dinner, I suppose.

COLONEL. Lots of raids have taken place along the line to-day. With the attack to-morrow morning, headquarters naturally want all the information they can get as early as possible.

STANHOPE. Meanwhile the Boche are sitting over there with a dozen machine-guns trained on that hole—waiting for our fellows to come.

COLONEL. Well, I can't disobey orders.

STANHOPE. Why didn't the trench-mortars blow a dozen holes in different places—so the Boche wouldn't know which we were going to use?

COLONEL. It took three hours to blow that one. How could they blow a dozen in the time? It's no good worrying about that now. It's too late. Where's Osborne and Raleigh?

STANHOPE. They're up in the sap, having a last look around. What d'you make the time, sir?

COLONEL. Exactly nineteen minutes to

STANHOPE. I'm thirty seconds behind you.

COLONEL. Funny. We checked this morning.

STANHOPE. Still, it's near enough. We shan't go till the smoke blows across.

COLONEL. The smoke ought to blow across nicely. The wind's just right. I called on the trench-mortars on the way up. Everything's ready. They'll drop the bombs thirty yards to the right.

STANHOPE. Are you going to stay here?

COLONEL. I'll watch from the trench just above, I think. Bring the prisoners straight back here. We'll question them right away.

STANHOPE. Why not take them straight down to your quarters?

COLONEL. Well, the Boche are bound to shell pretty heavily. I don't want the risk of the prisoners being knocked out before we've talked to them.

STANHOPE. All right. I'll have them brought back here.

[*There is a pause. The COLONEL sucks hard at his pipe. STANHOPE roves restlessly about, smoking a cigarette.*]

COLONEL. It's no good getting depressed. After all, it's only sixty yards. The Boche'll be firing into a blank fog. Osborne's a cool, level-headed chap, and Raleigh's the very man to dash in. You've picked good men to follow them?

STANHOPE. The best. All youngsters. Strong, keen chaps.

COLONEL. Good. [*Another pause.*] You know quite well I'd give anything to cancel the beastly affair.

STANHOPE. I know you would, sir.

COLONEL. Have these red rags on the wire upset the men at all?

STANHOPE. It's hard to tell. They naturally take it as a joke. They say the rags are just what they want to show them the way through the gap.

COLONEL. That's the spirit, Stanhope. [*OSBORNE and RALEIGH come down the steps.*] Well, Osborne. Everything ready?

OSBORNE. Yes, I think we're all ready, sir. I make it just a quarter to.

COLONEL. That's right.

OSBORNE. The men are going to stand by at three minutes to.

COLONEL. The smoke bombs drop exactly on the hour. You'll give the word to go when the smoke's thick enough?

OSBORNE. That's right, sir.

STANHOPE [*at the servants' dug-out*]. Mason!

MASON. Coming, sir!

STANHOPE. Were the men having their rum, Uncle?

OSBORNE. Yes. Just as we left. It gives it a quarter of an hour to soak in.

COLONEL. That's right. Are they cheerful?

OSBORNE. Yes. Quite.

[*MASON brings in two cups of coffee and puts them on the table.*]

STANHOPE. Would you like to go up and speak to them, sir?

COLONEL. Well, don't you think they'd rather be left alone?

STANHOPE. I think they would appreciate a word or two.

COLONEL. All right. If you think they would.

OSBORNE They're all in the center dug-out, sir.

COLONEL. Right. You coming, Stanhope?

STANHOPE. Yes. I'll come, sir.

[*The COLONEL lingers a moment. There is an awkward pause. Then the COLONEL clears his throat and speaks.*]

COLONEL. Well, good luck, Osborne. I'm certain you'll put up a good show

OSBORNE [*taking the COLONEL'S hand*]. Thank you, sir.

COLONEL And, Raleigh, just go in like blazes. Grab hold of the first Boche you see and bundle him across here. One'll do, but bring more if you see any handy

RALEIGH [*taking the COLONEL'S offered hand*]. Right, sir.

COLONEL. And, if you succeed, I'll recommend you both for the M.C. [OSBORNE and RALEIGH murmur their thanks.] Remember, a great deal may depend on bringing in a German. It may mean the winning of the whole war. You never know. [*Another pause.*] Well, good luck to you both.

[*Again OSBORNE and RALEIGH murmur their thanks. The COLONEL and STANHOPE go towards the door*]

COLONEL [*over his shoulder*]. Don't forget to empty your pockets of papers and things.

RALEIGH. Oh, no.

[*He goes into his dug-out, taking letters and papers from his pockets STANHOPE is about to follow the COLONEL up the steps when OSBORNE calls him back.*]

OSBORNE Er—Stanhope—just a moment.

STANHOPE [*returning*]. Hullo!

OSBORNE. I say, don't think I'm being morbid, or anything like that, but would you mind taking these?

STANHOPE. Sure. Until you come back, old man.

OSBORNE. It's only just in case— [*He takes his watch and a letter from his tunic pocket and puts them on the table. Then he pulls off his ring*] If anything should happen, would you send these along to my wife?

[*He pauses, and gives an awkward little laugh*]

STANHOPE [*putting the articles together on the table*]. You're coming back, old man. Damn it! what on earth should I do without you?

OSBORNE [*laughing*]. Goodness knows!

STANHOPE. Must have somebody to tuck me up in bed. [*There is a pause*] Well, I'll see you up in the sap, before you go. Just have a spot of rum in that coffee.

OSBORNE Righto

[*STANHOPE goes to the steps and lingers for a moment*]

STANHOPE. Cheero!

[*For a second their eyes meet; they laugh STANHOPE goes slowly up the steps. There is silence in the dug-out. OSBORNE has been filling his pipe, and stands lighting it as RALEIGH returns*]

OSBORNE. Just time for a small pipe.

RALEIGH. Good. I'll have a cigarette, I think.

[*He feels in his pocket.*]

OSBORNE. Here you are

[*He offers his case to RALEIGH*]

RALEIGH. I say, I'm always smoking yours.

OSBORNE. That's all right. [*Pause.*] What about this coffee?

RALEIGH. Sure

[*They sit at the table.*]

OSBORNE Are you going to have a drop of rum in it?

RALEIGH. Don't you think it might make us a— a bit muzzy?

OSBORNE. I'm just having the coffee as it is

RALEIGH I think I will, too.

OSBORNE. We'll have the rum afterwards—to celebrate.

RALEIGH. That's a much better idea. [*They stir their coffee in silence. OSBORNE'S eyes meet RALEIGH'S. He smiles.*]

OSBORNE How d'you feel?

RALEIGH. All right.

OSBORNE. I've got a sort of empty feeling inside.

RALEIGH That's just what I've got!

OSBORNE Wind up!

RALEIGH I keep wanting to yawn

OSBORNE. That's it. Wind up. I keep wanting to yawn too. It'll pass off directly we start.

RALEIGH [*taking a deep breath*]. I wish we could go now.

OSBORNE [*looking at his watch on the table*]. We've got eight minutes yet.

RALEIGH. Oh, Lord!

OSBORNE. Let's just have a last look at the map. [*He picks up the map and spreads it out.*] Directly the smoke's thick enough, I'll give the word. You run straight for this point here—

RALEIGH. When I get to the Boche wire I lie down and wait for you.

OSBORNE. Don't forget to throw your bombs

RALEIGH [*patting his pocket*]. No I've got them here.

OSBORNE. When I shout "Righto!"—in you go with your eight men. I shall lie on the Boche parapet, and blow my whistle now and then to show you where I am. Pounce on the first Boche you see and bundle him out to me.

RALEIGH. Righto.

OSBORNE. Then we come back like blazes.

RALEIGH. The whole thing'll be over quite quickly?

OSBORNE. I reckon with luck we shall be back in three minutes.

RALEIGH. As quick as that?

OSBORNE. I think so [*He folds up the map.*] And now let's forget all about it for—[*he looks at his watch*—for six minutes.

RALEIGH. Oh, Lord, I can't!

OSBORNE. You must.

RALEIGH. How topping if we both get the M.C.!

OSBORNE. Yes. [*Pause.*] Your coffee sweet enough?

RALEIGH. Yes, thanks. It's jolly good coffee. [*Pause.*] I wonder what the Boche are doing over there now?

OSBORNE. I don't know. D'you like coffee better than tea?

RALEIGH. I do for breakfast. [*Pause.*] Do these smoke bombs make much row when they burst?

OSBORNE. Not much [*Pause*] Personally, I like cocoa for breakfast

RALEIGH [*laughing*]. I'm sorry!

OSBORNE. Why sorry? Why shouldn't I have cocoa for breakfast?

RALEIGH. I don't mean that I—mean—I'm sorry to keep talking about the raid. It's so difficult to—to talk about anything else. I was just wondering—will the Boche retaliate in any way after the raid?

OSBORNE. Bound to—a bit.

RALEIGH. Shelling?

OSBORNE. "The time has come," the Walrus said,

'To talk of many things:
Of shoes—and ships—and sealing-wax—
Of cabbages—and kings!'

RALEIGH. "And why the sea is boiling hot—

And whether pigs have wings?'

OSBORNE. Now we're off! Quick, let's talk about pigs! Black pigs or white pigs?

RALEIGH. Black pigs. In the New Forest you find them, quite wild

OSBORNE. You know the New Forest?

RALEIGH. Rather! My home's down there. A little place called Allum Green just outside Lyndhurst

OSBORNE. I know Lyndhurst well

RALEIGH. It's rather nice down there.

OSBORNE. I like it more than any place I know.

RALEIGH. I think I do, too. Of course, it's different when you've always lived in a place.

OSBORNE. You like it in a different way

RALEIGH. Yes. Just behind our house there's a stream called the Highland; it runs for miles—right through the middle of the forest. Dennis and I followed it once as far as we could.

OSBORNE. I used to walk a lot round Lyndhurst.

RALEIGH. I wish we'd known each other then. You could have come with Dennis and me.

OSBORNE. I wish I had. I used to walk alone.

RALEIGH. You must come and stay with us one day.

OSBORNE. I should like to—awfully

RALEIGH. I can show you places in the forest that nobody knows about except Dennis and me. It gets thicker and darker and cooler, and you stir up all kinds of funny wild animals.

OSBORNE. They say there are ruins, somewhere in the forest, of villages that William the Conqueror pulled down to let the forest grow.

RALEIGH. I know. We often used to look for them, but we haven't found them yet. [*Pause.*] You must come and help look one day.

OSBORNE. I'll find them all right!

RALEIGH. Then you can write to the papers "Dramatic Discovery of Professor Osborne!" [*OSBORNE laughs.*]

OSBORNE. I did go exploring once—digging up Roman remains

RALEIGH. Where was that?

OSBORNE. Near my home in Sussex there's a Roman road called Stane Street; it runs as straight as a line from the coast to London

RALEIGH. I know it.

OSBORNE. Near where I live the road runs over Bignor Hill, but in recent times a new road's been cut round the foot of the hill, meeting the old road again farther on. The old road over the hill hasn't been used for years and years—and it's all

grown over with grass, and bushes and trees grow in the middle of it.

RALEIGH. Can you still see where it runs?

OSBORNE. Quite easily, in places.

RALEIGH. Did you dig a bit of it up, then?

OSBORNE. Yes. We got permission to dig out a section. It was in wonderful condition.

RALEIGH. Did you find anything?

OSBORNE. We found a horseshoe—and a Roman penny.

RALEIGH [*laughing*]. Splendid!

OSBORNE. It's awfully fascinating, digging like that

RALEIGH. It must be. [*OSBORNE glances at his watch.*] Is it time yet?

OSBORNE. Two minutes. Then we must go up. I wish we had a good hot bath waiting for us when we get back

RALEIGH. So do I. [*Pause*] We're having something special for dinner, aren't we?

OSBORNE. How did you know? It's supposed to be a secret

RALEIGH. Mason dropped a hint.

OSBORNE. Well, we've a fresh chicken sent up from Noyelle Farm.

RALEIGH I say!

OSBORNE. And a most awful luxury—two bottles of champagne and a half-dozen cigars! One each, and one spare one in case one explodes.

RALEIGH. I've never smoked a cigar.

OSBORNE. It's bound to make you sick.

[*RALEIGH notices OSBORNE'S ring on the table; he picks it up*]

RALEIGH I say, here's your ring.

OSBORNE. Yes I'm—I'm leaving it here. I don't want to risk losing it.

RALEIGH Oh!

[*There is silence. He puts the ring slowly down*]

OSBORNE [*rising*]. Well, I think perhaps we ought to get ready.

RALEIGH. Yes. Righto.

[*He also rises.*]

OSBORNE. I'm not going to wear a belt—just my revolver, with the lanyard round my neck.

RALEIGH. I see. [*He puts his lanyard round his neck and grips his revolver.*] I feel better with this in my hand, don't you?

OSBORNE. Yes. Something to hold. Loaded all right?

RALEIGH. Yes.

[*They put on their helmets. OSBORNE*

takes his pipe from his mouth and lays it carefully on the table]

OSBORNE. I do hate leaving a pipe when it's got a nice glow on the top like that.

RALEIGH [*with a short laugh*]. What a pity!

[*There is another pause. OSBORNE glances at his watch as it lies on the table*]

OSBORNE. Three minutes to. I think we'd better go

RALEIGH. Righto.

[*Their eyes meet as OSBORNE turns from the table.*]

OSBORNE. I'm glad it's you and I—together, Raleigh

RALEIGH [*eagerly*]. Are you—really?

OSBORNE. Yes

RALEIGH. So am I—awfully.

OSBORNE. We must put up a good show.

RALEIGH. Yes. Rather!

[*There is a short pause.*]

OSBORNE. Let's go along, shall we?

RALEIGH. Righto.

[*They go towards the steps MASON comes to the entrance of his dug-out as they pass.*]

MASON. Good luck, sir.

OSBORNE. Thanks, Mason

MASON. It's a lovely chicken for dinner, sir.

OSBORNE [*slowly going up the steps*]. Splendid!

MASON. Good luck, Mr. Raleigh.

RALEIGH. Thanks.

[*OSBORNE and RALEIGH go up together into the pale evening sun. MASON tidies the papers on the table; picks up the two coffee mugs, and goes away. There is silence in the trenches above the deserted dug-out. Then, suddenly, there comes the dull "crush" of bursting smoke bombs, followed in a second by the vicious rattle of machine-guns. The red and green glow of German alarm rockets comes faintly through the dug-out door. Then comes the thin whistle and crash of falling shells; first one by itself, then two, almost together. Quicker and quicker they come, till the noise mingles together in confused turmoil. Yet the noise is deadened by the earth walls of the tiny dug-out, and comes quite softly till the whine of one shell rises above the others to a shriek and a crash. A dark funnel of earth leaps up beyond the parapet of the trench outside; earth falls and rattles down*

the steps, and a black cloud of smoke rises slowly out of sight. Gradually the noise dies away—there is a longer pause between the crash of each bursting shell. The machine-guns stop—rattle again and stop—rattle for the last time—and stop. Voices are calling in the trench outside; STANHOPE'S voice is heard.]

STANHOPE. All right, sir. Come down quickly!

COLONEL. How many?

STANHOPE. Only one. [*Another shell whines and shrieks and crashes near by. There is silence for a moment, then STANHOPE speaks again.*] Hurt, sir?

COLONEL. No. It's all right

[*STANHOPE, pale and haggard, comes down the steps, followed by the COLONEL.*]

STANHOPE [*calling up the steps*]. Bring him down, sergeant-major.

S.-M. [*above*]. Coming, sir.

STANHOPE [*to the COLONEL*]. You won't want me, will you?

COLONEL. Well—er—

STANHOPE. I want to go and see those men.

COLONEL. Oh, all right.

[*STANHOPE goes to the door, making way for the SERGEANT-MAJOR to come down, followed by a bare-headed GERMAN BOY, in field gray, sobbing bitterly. Behind come two SOLDIERS with fixed bayonets. STANHOPE goes up the steps. The SERGEANT-MAJOR takes the GERMAN BOY by the arm and draws him into the center of the dug-out to face the COLONEL, who has seated himself at the table. The two SOLDIERS stand behind.*]

S.-M. [*soothingly to the GERMAN BOY*]. All right, sonny, we ain't going to hurt you.

[*Suddenly the BOY falls on his knees and sobs out some words in broken English.*]

GERMAN. Mercy—mister—mercy!

S.-M. Come on, lad, get up.

[*With a huge fist he takes the BOY by the collar and draws him to his feet. The BOY sobs hysterically. The COLONEL clears his throat and begins in somewhat poor German.*]

COLONEL. Was ist Sein Regiment?

GERMAN. Württembergisches.

COLONEL. Was ist der Nummer von Sein Regiment?

GERMAN. Zwanzig.

COLONEL [*making a note*]. Twentieth

Württembergers [*He looks up again*]. Wann kommen Sie hier?

GERMAN. Gestern abend

COLONEL [*making a note and looking up again*]. Wo kommen Sie her?

GERMAN [*after a moment's thought*]. Mein Geburtsort?

COLONEL [*forgetting himself for a moment*]. What's that?

GERMAN [*in halting English*]. You—wish—to know—where I was—born?

COLONEL. No! What town did you come up to the line from?

GERMAN [*after a little hesitation*]. I—do not tell you.

COLONEL. Oh, well, that's all right [*To the SERGEANT-MAJOR*]. Search him

[*The SERGEANT-MAJOR'S big fist grope over the BOY'S pockets. He produces a small book.*]

S.-M. [*giving it to the COLONEL*]. Looks like 'is pay-book, sir.

COLONEL [*looking eagerly into the book*]. Good

[*The SERGEANT-MAJOR has found a pocket-book; the GERMAN BOY clutches at it impulsively.*]

S.-M. 'Ere, stop that!

GERMAN. Lass mich! [*He pauses.*]
Let—me—please—keep—that

S.-M. [*very embarrassed*]. You let go [*He wrenches the case away and gives it to the COLONEL.*]

COLONEL [*glancing at the papers in the case*]. Look like letters. May be useful. Is that all, sergeant-major?

S.-M. [*looking at a few articles in his hands*]. 'Ere's a few oddments, sir—bit o' string, sir; little box o' fruit drops; pocket-knife; bit o' cedar pencil—and a stick o' chocolate, sir.

COLONEL. Let him have those back, except the pocket-knife.

S.-M. Very good, sir. [*He turns to the GERMAN BOY with a smile*]. 'Ere you are, sonny.

[*The GERMAN BOY takes back the oddments.*]

COLONEL. All right, sergeant-major. Send him straight back to my headquarters. I'll question him again there.

S.-M. Very good, sir. [*He turns to the GERMAN.*]. Come on, sonny, up you go.

[*He points up the steps.*]

[*The GERMAN BOY, calm now, bows stiffly to the COLONEL and goes away, followed by the two SOLDIERS and the SERGEANT-MAJOR. The COLONEL is deeply absorbed in the GERMAN'S bay-book. He mutters*

"Splendid!" to himself, then looks at his watch and rises quickly. STANHOPE comes slowly down the steps]

COLONEL [excitedly] Splendid, Stanhope! We've got all we wanted—20th Wurttembergers! His regiment came into the line last night I must go right away and 'phone the brigadier. He'll be very pleased about it. It's a feather in our cap, Stanhope

[STANHOPE has given one look of astonishment at the COLONEL and strolled past him He turns at the table and speaks in a dead voice]

STANHOPE How awfully nice—if the brigadier's pleased.

[The COLONEL stares at STANHOPE and suddenly collects himself]

COLONEL. Oh—er—what about the raiding-party—are they all safely back?

STANHOPE Did you expect them to be all safely back, sir?

COLONEL Oh—er—what—er—

STANHOPE Four men and Raleigh came safely back, sir

COLONEL. Oh, I say, I'm sorry! That's—er—six men and—er—Osborne?

STANHOPE. Yes, sir.

COLONEL. I'm very sorry. Poor Osborne!

STANHOPE. Still it'll be awfully nice if the brigadier's pleased

COLONEL. Don't be silly, Stanhope. Do you know—er—what happened to Osborne?

STANHOPE. A hand grenade—while he was waiting for Raleigh.

COLONEL. I'm very sorry. And the six men?

STANHOPE. Machine-gun bullets, I suppose.

COLONEL. Yes I was afraid—er— [His words trail away; he fidgets uneasily as STANHOPE looks at him with a pale, expressionless face. RALEIGH comes slowly down the steps, walking as though he were asleep; his hands are bleeding. The COLONEL turns to the boy with enthusiasm] Very well done, Raleigh. Well done, my boy I'll get you a Military Cross for this! Splendid! [RALEIGH looks at the COLONEL and tries to speak. He raises his hand to his forehead and sways The COLONEL takes him by the arm] Sit down here, my boy. [RALEIGH sits on the edge of OSBORNE'S bed.] Have a good rest. Well, I must be off. [He moves towards the steps, and turns once more to RALEIGH as he leaves] Very well done.

[With a quick glance at STANHOPE,

the COLONEL goes away There is silence now in the trenches outside; the last shell has whistled over and crashed Dusk is beginning to fall over the German lines The glow of Very lights begins to rise and fade against the evening sky. STANHOPE is staring dumbly at the table—at OSBORNE'S watch and ring Presently he turns his haggard face towards RALEIGH, who sits with lowered head, looking at the palms of his hands. STANHOPE moves slowly across towards the doorway, and pauses to look down at RALEIGH RALEIGH looks up into STANHOPE'S face, and their eyes meet. When STANHOPE speaks, his voice is still expressionless and dead]

STANHOPE. Must you sit on Osborne's bed?

[He turns and goes slowly up the steps. RALEIGH rises unsteadily, murmurs "sorry"—and stands with lowered head Heavy guns are booming miles away.]

THE CURTAIN FALLS

SCENE II—Late evening on the same day. The dug-out is lit quite festively by an unusual number of candles Two champagne bottles stand prominently on the table. Dinner is over.

STANHOPE, with a cigar between his teeth, lounges across the table, one elbow among the plates and mugs His hair is ruffled; there is a bright red flush on his cheeks He has just made a remark which has sent HIBBERT and TROTTER into uproarious laughter; he listens with a smile. TROTTER is sitting on the box to the right of the table, leaning back against the wall. A cigar is embedded in his podgy fingers; his face is a shiny scarlet, with deep red patches below the ears. The three bottom buttons of his tunic are undone, and now and then his hand steals gently over his distended stomach. HIBBERT sits on the bed to the left, his thin white fingers nervously twitching the ash from his cigar. His pale face is shiny with sweat from the heat of the candles; his laugh is high-pitched and excited. TROTTER speaks in a husky voice as the laughter dies away.

TROTTER. And what did she say to that?

STANHOPE She said, "Not in these trousers"—in French.

[TROTTER and HIBBERT burst into laughter again.]

TROTTER [coughing and wheezing]. Oh—dear-o-dear!

STANHOPE. I simply drew myself up and said, "Very well, mam'sel, have it your own way."

TROTTER. And she did?

STANHOPE. No. She didn't.

[Again the others laugh TROTTER wipes a tear from his eye.]

TROTTER. Oh, skipper, you are a scream—and no mistake!

HIBBERT. I never forget picking up a couple of tarts one night and taking 'em out to dinner.

TROTTER [winking at STANHOPE]. 'E's orf again.

HIBBERT. We drank enough bubbly to sink a battleship—

STANHOPE. To float a battleship.

HIBBERT. Well—to float a battleship. Then I took 'em for a joy-ride out to Maidenhead—did sixty all the way. We danced a bit at Skindles, and drank a lot of port and muck. Then damned if I didn't lose the way coming back—got landed miles from anywhere. And those tarts began cursing me like hell—said I'd done it on purpose. I said if they didn't damn well shut up I'd chuck 'em both out in the road and leave 'em.

STANHOPE [ironically]. Hurrah! That's the idea! Treat 'em rough!

HIBBERT [giggling]. That shut 'em up all right! Then I started doing about sixty down all sorts of roads—I went round a corner on two wheels with those girls' hair on end—didn't have any more trouble from them!

[He chuckles at the memory, and takes an unsteady gulp of champagne.]

STANHOPE You're the sort of fellow who makes girls hard to please.

TROTTER [heavily]. Well, I never 'ad no motorcar, my old lady and me used to walk; legs is good enough for me.

STANHOPE. You satisfied with legs?

TROTTER. I am—yes!

STANHOPE. Much cheaper.

HIBBERT [laughing delightedly]. That's damn good!

STANHOPE [raising his mug]. Well, here's to a toast to legs—God bless 'em!

HIBBERT [raising his mug]. Good old legs!

TROTTER [raising his mug]. Shank's mare.

STANHOPE. Shank's what?

TROTTER. Shank's mare, they call 'em.

STANHOPE Call what?

TROTTER. Why—legs.

HIBBERT [almost screaming with delight]. Oh, Trotter! you're a dream!

TROTTER [turning a baleful eye on HIBBERT]. You've 'ad too much champagne, you 'ave.

[HIBBERT takes a leather case from his pocket and produces some picture post-cards.]

HIBBERT I say, I've never shown you these, have I?

[He hands them one by one to STANHOPE, smiling up into STANHOPE'S face for approval.]

STANHOPE. Where did you get these from?

HIBBERT. In Bethune. [He hands up a card.] She's all right, isn't she?

STANHOPE. Too fat.

HIBBERT [looking over STANHOPE'S shoulder]. Oh, I don't know.

STANHOPE. Much too fat. [He hands the card to TROTTER.] What do you think, Trotter?

[TROTTER takes a pair of pince-nez from his pocket, balances them on his fat nose, and looks at the picture.]

HIBBERT. All right, isn't she?

TROTTER. Well, I don't know. If you ask me I'd rather 'ave a decent picture of Margate Pier.

HIBBERT [impatiently]. Oh, you don't understand art. [He hands another card to STANHOPE.] There's a nice pair of legs for you.

STANHOPE Too thin—aren't they. Trotter? [He hands TROTTER the card.]

TROTTER [after some thought]. Scraggy, I call 'em.

HIBBERT [handing STANHOPE another card]. That's the one I like best.

STANHOPE Not bad.

HIBBERT. Glorious bedroom eyes.

STANHOPE. She's all right.

HIBBERT. Ever seen that show Zip at the Hippodrome? Couple of damn fine girls in that—twins. Did you see 'em, skipper?

STANHOPE [wearily]. I don't know—seen stacks of shows—can't remember them all. [He brightens up.] Now then, swallow up that bubbly! Hi! Mason!

MASON. Yessir! [MASON appears.]

STANHOPE Bring some whisky.

MASON. Yessir. [He disappears.]

TROTTER. What? Whisky on top of champagne?

STANHOPE. Why not? It's all right.

TROTTER. Well, I don't know; doesn't

sound right to me. I feel as if somebody's blown me up with a bicycle pump.

STANHOPE. You look it, too.

TROTTER [*blowing a stream of cigar smoke up to the dark ceiling*]. Any'ow, it was a jolly bit o' chicken—and I'd go a mile any day for a chunk o' that jam pudding.

[*MASON brings a bottle of whisky.*]

STANHOPE. Your pudding's made Mr. Trotter feel all blown out, Mason.

MASON I'm sorry, sir; it wasn't meant, sir.

TROTTER It was all right, Mason, take it from me. I know a decent bit o' pudden when I see it.

MASON. It was only boiled ration biscuits and jam, sir. [*He turns to STANHOPE.*] I thought I better tell you, sir—this is the last bottle.

STANHOPE. The last bottle! Why, damn it, we brought six!

MASON. I know, sir. But five's gone.

STANHOPE. Where the devil's it gone to?

MASON. Well, sir, you remember there was one on the first night—and then one—

STANHOPE. Oh, for Lord's sake don't go through them one by one; this'll last till sunrise. [*He turns to TROTTER and HIBBERT*] Sunrise to-morrow, my lads!

TROTTER. Oh, forget that.

STANHOPE. You bet we will! Now then! Who's for a spot of whisky?

TROTTER. I reckon I'm about full up. I'd like a nice cup o' tea, Mason.

MASON. Very good, sir. [*He goes out.*]

STANHOPE. Tea!

TROTTER. Yes. That's what I want. Decent cup o' tea. Still, I'll just have about a spoonful o' whisky—got a touch of palpitations.

STANHOPE. Here you are—say when!

TROTTER. Wo! That's enough!

STANHOPE. You'll have a decent spot, won't you, Hibbert?

HIBBERT. Yes I'm game!

TROTTER [*stifling a hiccup*]. Just a cup o' tea—then I'll go and relieve young Raleigh. Pity 'e didn't come down to supper.

STANHOPE. I told him to. I told him to come down for an hour and let the sergeant-major take over.

TROTTER. I wonder why 'e didn't come.

HIBBERT. That lad's too keen on his "duty." He told me he liked being up there with the men better than down here with us

STANHOPE [*quietly*] He said that?

HIBBERT. Yes, I told him about the chicken and champagne and cigars—and he stared at me and said, "You're not having that, are you?"—just as if he thought we were going to chuck it away!

TROTTER. I reckon that raid shook 'im up more'n we thought. I like that youngster. 'E's got pluck. Strong lad, too—the way he came back through the smoke after that raid, carrying that Boche under 'is arm like a baby.

HIBBERT Did you see him afterwards, though? He came into that dug-out and never said a word—didn't seem to know where he was.

TROTTER Well, 'e's only a lad.

STANHOPE [*to HIBBERT*]. He actually told you he preferred being up with the men better than down here?

HIBBERT That's what he said

TROTTER. Well, I 'ope 'e gets the M.C., that's all; 'e's just the kid I'd like if I ever 'ave a kid—strong and plucky.

STANHOPE. Oh, for God's sake forget that bloody raid! Think I want to talk about it?

TROTTER [*surprised*]. No—but, after all—

STANHOPE. Well—shut up!

TROTTER [*uneasily*]. All right—all right.

STANHOPE. We were having a jolly decent evening till you started blabbing about the war.

TROTTER I didn't start it.

STANHOPE. You did.

TROTTER. You began it about—

STANHOPE. Well, for God's sake stop it, then!

TROTTER. All right—all right

HIBBERT. Did I ever tell you the story about the girl I met in Soho?

STANHOPE. I don't know—I expect you did

HIBBERT [*undismayed*]. It'll amuse you. I'd been to a dance, and I was coming home quite late—

STANHOPE. Yes, and it's late now. You go on duty at eleven. You better go and get some sleep

HIBBERT It's all right. I'm as fresh as a daisy.

STANHOPE. You may be. But go to bed.

HIBBERT. What?

STANHOPE [*louder*]. I said, "Go to bed!"

HIBBERT. I say, that's a nice end to a jolly evening!

STANHOPE. I'm sorry. I'm tired.

HIBBERT [*perky*]. Well, you better go to bed!

[*There is silence STANHOPE looks at HIBBERT, who suggests*]

STANHOPE. What was that you said?

HIBBERT I was only joking.

STANHOPE. I asked what you said

HIBBERT. I said, "You better go to bed."

[*STANHOPE'S flushed face is looking full into HIBBERT'S. HIBBERT gives the ghost of a snigger*]

STANHOPE Clear out of here!

HIBBERT [*rising unsteadily*]. What—d'you mean?

STANHOPE. Get out of here, for God's sake!

HIBBERT [*blustering*]. I say—look here—

STANHOPE. Get out of my sight! [*With a frightened glance at STANHOPE, HIBBERT sneaks quietly away into his dug-out. There is silence, and the guns can be heard—deep and ominous*] Little worm gets on my nerves.

TROTTER. Poor little bloke. Never seen 'im so cheerful before out 'ere.

STANHOPE. Doesn't he nearly drive you mad?

TROTTER. I reckon 'e only wanted to keep cheerful.

STANHOPE. Doesn't his repulsive little mind make you sick? [*MASON brings TROTTER'S mug of tea and goes away*] I envy you, Trotter. Nothing upsets you, does it? You're always the same.

TROTTER. Always the same, am I? [*He sighs.*] Little you know—

STANHOPE. You never get sick to death of everything, or so happy you want to sing.

TROTTER. I don't know—I whistle sometimes.

STANHOPE. But you always *feel* the same.

TROTTER. I feel all blown out now. [*There is a pause. TROTTER sips his tea and STANHOPE takes a whisky*] 'Ere's 'Ibbert's post-cards. Funny a bloke carrying pictures like this about. Satisfies 'is lust, I s'pose—poor little feller. [*He rises.*] Well, I'll go and relieve young Raleigh. Pity 'e didn't come down to supper.

[*He tries to button his tunic, without success. He buckles his webbing belt over his unbuttoned tunic, puts on his helmet, and slings his respirator over his shoulder.*] Well, cheero!

STANHOPE. You realize you're my second-in-command now, don't you?

TROTTER Well, you 'adn't said nothing about it, but—

STANHOPE. Well, you are

TROTTER Righto, skipper. [*He pauses*] Thanks [*He goes towards the door*] I won't let you down.

STANHOPE After your duty, have a decent sleep. We must be up at half-past five.

TROTTER Righto, skipper Well, I'll be going up. Give me a chance to cool off up there It's as 'ot as 'ell in 'ere, with all them damn candles burning.

STANHOPE. I suppose it is My head's nearly splitting.

[*He blows out three of the candles, leaving the dim light of one.*]

TROTTER [*half up the steps*]. There's a bit of a mist rising.

STANHOPE [*dully*]. Is there? [*TROTTER disappears into the night STANHOPE broods over the table*] Mason!

MASON [*outside*]. Yessir!

STANHOPE. You can bring Mr. Raleigh's dinner.

MASON. Very good, sir.

[*MASON brings a plate of steaming food, gathering up and taking away some of the used crockery. Presently RALEIGH comes slowly down the steps. He pauses at the bottom, takes off his helmet, and hesitates STANHOPE is sitting at the table puffing at the remains of his cigar. There is silence except for the rumble of the guns.*]

STANHOPE I thought I told you to come down to dinner at eight o'clock?

RALEIGH Oh, I'm sorry. I didn't think you—er—

STANHOPE. Well? You didn't think I—er—what?

RALEIGH I didn't think you'd—you'd mind—if I didn't.

STANHOPE. I see. And why do you think I asked you—if I didn't mind?

RALEIGH. I'm sorry.

STANHOPE. Well, we've kept your dinner. It's ready for you here.

RALEIGH Oh, it's awfully good of you to have kept it for me, but I—I had something to eat up there.

STANHOPE You—had something to eat up there? What do you mean, exactly?

RALEIGH. They brought the tea around while I was on duty I had a cup, and some bread and cheese.

STANHOPE. Are you telling me—you've been feeding with the men?

RALEIGH. Well, Sergeant Baker suggested—

STANHOPE. So you take your orders from Sergeant Baker, do you?

RALEIGH. No, but—

STANHOPE. You eat the men's rations when there's barely enough for each man?

RALEIGH. They asked me to share.

STANHOPE. Now, look here I know you're new to this, but I thought you'd have the common sense to leave the men alone to their meals. Do you think they want an officer prowling round eating their rations, and sucking up to them like that? My officers are here to be respected—not laughed at.

RALEIGH. Why did they ask me—if they didn't mean it?

STANHOPE. Don't you realize they were making a fool of you?

RALEIGH. Why should they?

STANHOPE. So you know more about my men than I do?

[*There is silence RALEIGH is facing STANHOPE squarely*]

RALEIGH. I'm sorry then—if I was wrong.

STANHOPE. Sit down.

RALEIGH. It's all right, thanks.

STANHOPE [*suddenly shouting*]. Sit down! [*RALEIGH sits on the box to the right of the table STANHOPE speaks quietly again*] I understand you prefer being up there with the men than being down here with us?

RALEIGH. I don't see what you mean.

STANHOPE. What did you tell Hibbert?

RALEIGH. Hibbert? I—I didn't say

STANHOPE. Don't lie.

RALEIGH [*rising*]. I'm not lying! Why should I—lie?

STANHOPE. Then why didn't you come down to supper when I told you to?

RALEIGH. I—I wasn't hungry. I had rather a headache. It's cooler up there.

STANHOPE. You insulted Trotter and Hibbert by not coming. You realize that, I suppose?

RALEIGH. I didn't mean to do anything like that.

STANHOPE. Well, you did. You know now—don't you? [*RALEIGH makes no reply. He is trying to understand why STANHOPE'S temper has risen to a trembling fury. STANHOPE can scarcely control his voice. Loudly*] I say—you know now, don't you?

RALEIGH. Yes. I'm sorry.

STANHOPE. My officers work together. I'll have no damn prigs.

RALEIGH. I'll speak to Trotter and Hibbert I didn't realize—

[*STANHOPE raises his cigar. His hand trembles so violently that he can scarcely take the cigar between his teeth. RALEIGH looks at STANHOPE, fascinated and horrified.*]

STANHOPE. What are you looking at?

RALEIGH [*lowering his head*]. Nothing.

STANHOPE. Anything—funny about me?

RALEIGH. No [*After a moment's silence RALEIGH speaks in a low, halting voice.*] I'm awfully sorry, Dennis, if—I annoyed you by coming to your company.

STANHOPE. What on earth are you talking about? What do you mean?

RALEIGH. You resent my being here.

STANHOPE. Resent you being here?

RALEIGH. Ever since I came—

STANHOPE. I don't know what you mean. I resent you being a damn fool, that's all. [*There is a pause.*] Better eat your dinner before it's cold.

RALEIGH. I'm not hungry, thanks.

STANHOPE. Oh, for God's sake, sit down and eat it like a man!

RALEIGH. I can't eat it, thanks.

STANHOPE [*shouting*]. Are you going to eat your dinner?

RALEIGH. Oh! Good God! Don't you understand? How can I sit down and eat that—when—[*his voice is nearly breaking*]
—when Osborne's—lying—out there—

[*STANHOPE rises slowly. His eyes are wide and staring; he is fighting for breath, and his words come brokenly.*]

STANHOPE. My God! You bloody little swine! You think I don't care—you think you're the only soul that cares!

RALEIGH. And yet you can sit there and drink champagne—and smoke cigars

STANHOPE. The one man I could trust—my best friend—the one man I could talk to as man to man—who understood everything—and you think I don't care

RALEIGH. But how can you when—?

STANHOPE. To forget, you little fool—to forget! D'you understand? To forget! You think there's no limit to what a man can bear?

[*He turns quickly from RALEIGH and goes to the dark corner by OSBORNE'S bed. He stands with his*

face towards the wall, his shoulders heaving as he fights for breath]

RALEIGH. I'm awfully sorry, Dennis.
I—I didn't understand [STANHOPE makes no reply] You don't know how—
I—

STANHOPE. Go away, please—leave me alone.

RALEIGH. Can't I—
[STANHOPE turns wildly upon RALEIGH]

STANHOPE. Oh, get out! For God's sake, get out!

[RALEIGH goes away into his dug-out, and STANHOPE is alone. The Very lights rise and fall outside, softly breaking the darkness with their glow—sometimes steel-blue, sometimes gray. Through the night there comes the impatient grumble of gunfire that never dies away.]

THE CURTAIN FALLS

SCENE III—Towards dawn. The candles are no longer burning. The intense darkness of the dug-out is softened by the glow of the Very lights in the sky beyond the doorway. There is no sound except the distant mutter of the guns. A MAN comes from the servants' dug-out; for a moment his head and shoulders stand out black against the glowing sky, then he passes on into the darkness by the table. There comes the rasp of a striking match—a tiny flame—and a candle gleams. MASON blinks in the light and turns to STANHOPE'S bed. STANHOPE lies huddled with his blanket drawn tightly round him.

MASON [softly]. Sir— [STANHOPE does not move; MASON shakes him gently by the knee. A little louder.]
Sir—

STANHOPE. Yes? [There is a pause.]
That you, Mason?

MASON. 'Arf-past five, sir.

STANHOPE. Oh, right. [He raises himself on his elbow] I was only half asleep I keep on waking up. It's so frightfully cold in here.

MASON. It's a cold dug-out, this one, sir. I've made some 'ot tea.

STANHOPE. Good. You might bring me some.

MASON. Right you are, sir.

STANHOPE. And take some to the officers in there—and wake them up.

MASON. Very good, sir

[MASON goes to his dug-out. STANHOPE rises stiffly from his bed, shudders from the cold, and slowly begins putting his equipment on. TROTTER wanders in from his dug-out vigorously lathering his face. He is dressed, except for his collar]

TROTTER. Wash and brush-up, tuppence!

STANHOPE [looking up, surprised].
Hullo! I thought you were asleep.

TROTTER. I 'ad a decent sleep when I came off dooty. What's the time?

STANHOPE. Half-past five. It'll be getting light soon. You better buck up.

TROTTER. All right. I shan't be long. Sounds quiet enough out there.

STANHOPE. Yes

[MASON brings four mugs of tea]

TROTTER. Ah! that's what I want. A decent cup of tea

MASON [putting a mug on the table for STANHOPE]. Nice and 'ot, sir. I've cut a packet of sambridge for each gentleman, sir.

STANHOPE. Good.

[MASON takes the other mugs of tea into the right-hand dug-out. TROTTER follows, lathering with gusto]

STANHOPE. You might give Hibbert and Raleigh a call.

TROTTER. I woke 'em up, skipper. They're getting their things on

[MASON returns.]

STANHOPE. When you've cleared up your kitchen, you must dress and join your platoon in the line

MASON. Very good, sir.

STANHOPE. If things are going well at eleven o'clock, come down here and do your best to get some lunch for us. We shall come down in turn as we can

MASON. Very good, sir.

[STANHOPE sits at the table and begins to write a short report. The first sign of dawn is beginning to gleam in the dark sky. STANHOPE calls "Runner!" as he writes. A SOLDIER comes from the servants' dug-out]

STANHOPE. [folding the note]. Take this to Battalion Headquarters. There's no reply.

SOLDIER. Yessir.

[The SOLDIER salutes and goes up the steps. A plaintive noise comes from the other dug-out. TROTTER is singing "There's a long, long trail a-winding." STANHOPE listens for a moment, then rises, takes a few small

comes from his pocket, and throws them into TROTTER'S dug-out. The singing stops abruptly. After a moment TROTTER'S voice comes.]

TROTTER Thank you kindly, gov'nor! [The SERGEANT-MAJOR comes down the steps.]

STANHOPE Morning, sergeant-major. S-M. Morning, sir. Wiring parties are just in, sir. Made a decent job of it—right down to the support line.

STANHOPE. Good Everything quiet?

S-M. It's all right opposite 'ere, sir, but the guns are goin' 'ard down south 'Eavy bombardment Not sure if it ain't spreading up this way, sir.

STANHOPE. Very likely it is. The officers are coming up in a minute. They'll stand by with their platoons I must stay here awhile in case of messages. I shall come up directly things begin to happen.

S-M. Very good, sir.

STANHOPE. Are the men having their tea?

S-M. Yessir.

STANHOPE. Let 'em have a decent drop of rum.

S-M. About 'arf again, sir?

STANHOPE. Yes.

S-M. If the attack don't come, sir, 'ow long are we to stand-to?

STANHOPE We must expect the attack any time up till midday. After then I don't think it'll come till to-morrow.

S-M. Very good, sir.

STANHOPE. We must naturally make our plans to meet things as they happen.

S-M. Quite, sir

STANHOPE All right, sergeant-major. I'll see you up there soon.

S-M. Yes, sir.

[He salutes and goes away. MASON brings in four little packets of sandwiches, and puts one packet on the table for STANHOPE.]

MASON. Your sambridges, sir. 'Arf bully beef and 'arf sardine. Sardine on top, sir.

STANHOPE. How delicious. No *pâté de foie gras*?

MASON No what, sir?

STANHOPE. No *pâté de foie gras*?

MASON. No, sir. The milkman 'asn't been yet.

[MASON takes the other parcels to the left-hand dug-out. STANHOPE pours a little whisky into his tea and the remainder of the contents of the bottle into his flask. MASON returns.]

STANHOPE. Get dressed as soon as you can

MASON Yessir.

[MASON goes out. TROTTER comes in, fully dressed for the line.]

TROTTER. All ready, skipper. Want me to go up?

STANHOPE Yes I think so. Go right round the line and see everything's all right. I'll be up soon.

[Suddenly there comes the faint whistle and thud of falling shells—a few seconds between each STANHOPE and TROTTER listen intently, four shells fall, then silence.]

TROTTER. 'Ullo, 'ullo

[STANHOPE strides to the doorway, goes up a few steps, and looks out into the night. He comes slowly back.]

STANHOPE Over on Lancer's Alley—somewhere by the reserve line.

[There comes the louder thud of three more shells.]

TROTTER That's nearer.

STANHOPE. Better go up, Trotter. Call the others.

TROTTER [at the left-hand dug-out]. 'Ibbert! Raleigh! come on! [He lights a cigarette over the candle—lingers a moment, and slowly goes up the steps.]

Cheero, skipper. See you later.

STANHOPE. Send your runner down to tell me how things are going.

TROTTER. Righto.

[TROTTER disappears into the dark. A vague white line of dawn is broadening above the dark trench wall outside. STANHOPE sits at the table and sips his tea. He takes a cigarette and lights it with a quivering hand. RALEIGH comes from his dug-out. STANHOPE lowers his head and writes in his note-book.]

RALEIGH Do you want me to go up?

STANHOPE [without looking up]. Yes. Trotter's gone.

RALEIGH. Right. [He goes to the steps and turns shyly.] Cheero—Stanhope.

STANHOPE [still writing with lowered head]. Cheero, Raleigh. I shall be coming up soon [RALEIGH goes up the steps. STANHOPE stops writing, raises his head, and listens. The shells are falling steadily now. He glances towards the left-hand dug-out and calls.] Hibbert! [There is no reply. He slowly rises and goes to the left-hand dug-out doorway. He calls again—louder.] Hibbert!! [He looks into the

doorway and says:] What are you doing? [HIBBERT appears He is very pale; he moves as if half asleep.] Come along, man!

HIBBERT You want me to go up now?

STANHOPE. Of course I do The others have gone.

HIBBERT. Got a drop of water?

STANHOPE. What d'you want water for?

HIBBERT. I'm so frightfully thirsty All that champagne and stuff—dried my mouth up.

[STANHOPE pours a drop of water into a mug and gives it to HIBBERT.]

STANHOPE Here you are. Didn't you have tea?

HIBBERT Yes. It was a bit sweet, though.

[The shelling is steadily increasing, and now, above the lighter "crush" of the smaller shells, there comes the deep, resounding "boom" of Minenwerfer. HIBBERT sips his water very slowly, rinsing his mouth deliberately with each sip. STANHOPE is by the doorway, looking up into the trench. He has just turned away as a sonorous drawn-out call comes floating through the dawn: "Stretcher bear—ers!" STANHOPE half turns, then faces HIBBERT.]

STANHOPE Come on. Buck up.

HIBBERT. There's no appalling hurry, is there?

STANHOPE. No hurry! Why d'you think the others have gone up?

HIBBERT [slowly]. What? Trotter and Raleigh?

STANHOPE [sharply]. Wake up, man! What the devil's the matter with you?

HIBBERT [slowly putting down his mug]. Champagne dries the mouth up so. Makes the tongue feel like a bit of paper.

[There is a slight pause.]

STANHOPE. The longer you say here, the harder it'll be to go up.

HIBBERT. Good Lord! You don't think I'm—

STANHOPE. You're just wasting as much time as you can.

HIBBERT. Well, damn it, it's no good going up till I feel fit. Let's just have another spot of water.

[HIBBERT takes the jug and pours out a little more water. He is the picture of misery. STANHOPE stands im-

patiently beside him MASON appears from his dug-out, fully dressed for the line, his rifle slung over his shoulder.]

MASON. I'll go right along sir. I've made up the fire to last a good three hours—if you don't mind me popping down about nine o'clock to 'ave a look at it.

STANHOPE. All right, Mason. Mr. Hibbert's coming up now. You can go along with him.

MASON [to HIBBERT]. I'd like to come along of you if you don't mind, sir. I ain't bin up in this part of the front line Don't want to get lorst

STANHOPE. Mr Hibbert'll show you the way up [He turns to HIBBERT.] Keep your men against the back wall of the trench as long as the shells are dropping behind. Cheero! [HIBBERT looks at STANHOPE for a moment, then with a slight smile, he goes slowly up the steps and into the trench, MASON following behind A dark figure stands out against the pale sky; comes hurrying down the steps—a PRIVATE SOLDIER, out of breath and excited.] Yes?

SOLDIER Message from Mr. Trotter, sir. Shells falling mostly behind support line Minnies along front line.

STANHOPE Who's just been hit?

SOLDIER. Corporal Ross, I think it was, sir. Minnie dropped in the trench at the corner—just as I come away.

[The SERGEANT-MAJOR comes down the steps very much out of breath.]

STANHOPE [to the SOLDIER]. All right, thanks.

[The SOLDIER salutes, and goes up the steps slower than he came down.]

S.-M. Beginning to get 'ot, sir.

STANHOPE Corporal Ross hit?

S.-M. Yessir.

STANHOPE. Badly?

S.-M. Pretty badly, sir.

STANHOPE. Most of the shelling's going over, isn't it?

S.-M Most of the shells is be'ind, sir, but there's Minnies and rifle grenades along the front line. Pretty 'ot it's getting, sir. They're attacking down south—there's rifle fire.

STANHOPE. All right, sergeant-major; thanks.

S.-M. What I come to ask, sir—what about the wounded—getting 'em down, sir? The shelling's pretty thick over Lancaster's Alley.

STANHOPE. What about Fosse Way?

S-M Pretty bad there, too, sir.

STANHOPE. Don't try then. Take any one badly hit down into the big dug-out on the right. Let the stretcher-bearers do what they can there.

S-M Very good, sir.

STANHOPE. Only Corporal Ross hit?

S-M. That's all, sir—

[*Again there comes the drawn-out call—several times as it passed from man to man: "Stretcher bear—ers!" The SERGEANT-MAJOR'S eyes meet STANHOPE'S. He turns and goes up the steps. STANHOPE is alone. Flying fragments of shell whistle and hiss and moan overhead. The sharp "crack" of the rifle grenades, the thud of the shells, and the boom of the Minenwerfer mangle together in a muffled roar. STANHOPE takes his belt from the table and buckles it on, puts his revolver lanyard round his neck, and drops his flask and sandwiches into his pocket. The SERGEANT-MAJOR reappears and comes hurrying down the steps.*]

STANHOPE [*turning quickly*]. What is it, sergeant-major?

S-M Mr. Raleigh, sir—

STANHOPE. What!

S-M. Mr. Raleigh's been 'it, sir. Bit of shell's got 'im in the back.

STANHOPE. Badly?

S-M. 'Fraid it's broke 'is spine, sir; can't move 'is legs.

STANHOPE. Bring him down here.

S-M. Down 'ere, sir?

STANHOPE [*shouting*]. Yes! Down here—quickly!

[*The SERGEANT-MAJOR hurries up the steps. A shell screams and bursts very near. The SERGEANT-MAJOR shrinks back and throws his hand across his face, as though a human hand could ward off the hot flying pieces. He stumbles on again into the trench, and hurriedly away. STANHOPE is by OSBORNE'S bed, fumbling a blanket over it. He takes a trench coat off the wall and rolls it for a pillow. He goes to his own bed, takes up his blanket, and turns as the SERGEANT-MAJOR comes carefully down the steps carrying RALEIGH like a child in his huge arms*]

STANHOPE [*with blanket ready*]. Lay him down there.

S-M. 'E's fainted, sir. 'E was conscious when I picked 'im up.

[*The SERGEANT-MAJOR lays the boy*

gently on the bed; he draws away his hands, looks furtively at the palms, and wipes the blood on the sides of his trousers. STANHOPE covers RALEIGH with his blanket, looks intently at the boy, and turns to the SERGEANT-MAJOR]

STANHOPE. Have they dressed the wound?

S-M. They've just put a pad on it, sir. Can't do no more.

STANHOPE. Go at once and bring two men with a stretcher.

S-M. We'll never get 'im down, sir, with them shells falling on Lancer's Alley.

STANHOPE. Did you hear what I said? Go and get two men with a stretcher.

S-M. [*after a moment's hesitation*]. Very good, sir.

[*The SERGEANT-MAJOR goes slowly away. STANHOPE turns to RALEIGH once more, then goes to the table, pushes his handkerchief into the water-jug, and brings it, wringing wet, to RALEIGH'S bed. He bathes the boy's face. Presently RALEIGH gives a little moan, opens his eyes, and turns his head*]

RALEIGH. Hullo—Dennis—

STANHOPE. Well, Jimmy—[*he smiles*]
—you got one quickly.

[*There is silence for a while. STANHOPE is sitting on a box beside RALEIGH. Presently RALEIGH speaks again—in a wondering voice.*]

RALEIGH. Why—how did I get down here?

STANHOPE. Sergeant-major brought you down.

[*RALEIGH speaks again, vaguely, trying to recollect.*]

RALEIGH. Something—hit me in the back—knocked me clean over—sort of—winded me—I'm all right now.

[*He tries to rise.*]

STANHOPE. Steady, old boy. Just lie there quietly for a bit.

RALEIGH. I'll be better if I get up and walk about. It happened once before—I got kicked in just the same place at football; it—it soon wore off. It—it just numbs you a bit. [*There is a pause.*]
What's that rumbling noise?

STANHOPE. The guns are making a bit of a row.

RALEIGH. Our guns?

STANHOPE. No. Mostly theirs.

[*Again there is silence in the dug-out. A very faint rose light is beginning to glow in the dawn sky. RALEIGH speaks again—uneasily.*]

RALEIGH I say—Dennis—

STANHOPE. Yes, old boy?

RALEIGH. It—it hasn't gone through, has it? It only just hit me?—and knocked me down?

STANHOPE. It's just gone through a bit, Jimmy.

RALEIGH. I won't have to—go on lying here?

STANHOPE. I'm going to have you taken away.

RALEIGH. Away? Where?

STANHOPE. Down to the dressing-station—then hospital—then home. [*He smiles.*] You've got a Blighty one, Jimmy.

RALEIGH. But I—I can't go home just for—for a lock in the back. [*He stirs restlessly.*] I'm certain I'll be better if—I get up [*He tries to raise himself, and gives a sudden cry.*] Oh—God! It does hurt!

STANHOPE. It's bound to hurt, Jimmy.

RALEIGH. What's—on my legs? Something holding them down—

STANHOPE. It's all right, old chap; it's just the shock—numbed them.

[*Again there is a pause. When RALEIGH speaks there is a different note in his voice.*]

RALEIGH. It's awfully decent of you to bother, Dennis. I feel rotten lying here—everybody else—up there.

STANHOPE. It's not your fault, Jimmy.

RALEIGH. So—damn—silly—getting hit. [*Pause.*] Is there—just a drop of water?

STANHOPE [*rising quickly*]. Sure. I've got some here. [*He pours some water into the mug and brings it to RALEIGH. Cheerfully.*] Got some tea-leaves in it. D'you mind?

RALEIGH. No. That's all right—thanks— [*STANHOPE holds the mug to RALEIGH'S lips, and the boy drinks.*] I say, Dennis, don't you wait—if—if you want to be getting on.

STANHOPE. It's quite all right, Jimmy.

RALEIGH. Can you stay for a bit?

STANHOPE. Of course I can.

RALEIGH [*faintly*]. Thanks awfully. [*There is quiet in the dug-out for a long time. STANHOPE sits with one hand on RALEIGH'S arm, and RALEIGH lies very still. Presently he speaks again—hardly above a whisper.*] Dennis—

STANHOPE. Yes, old boy?

RALEIGH. Could we have a light? It's—it's so frightfully dark and cold.

STANHOPE [*rising*]. Sure! I'll bring a

candle and get another blanket. [*STANHOPE goes to the left-hand dug-out, and RALEIGH is alone, very still and quiet, on OSBORNE'S bed. The faint rosy glow of the dawn is deepening to an angry red. The gray night sky is dissolving, and the stars begin to go. A tiny sound comes from where RALEIGH is lying—something between a sob and a moan. STANHOPE comes back with a blanket. He takes a candle from the table and carries it to RALEIGH'S bed. He puts it on the box beside RALEIGH and speaks cheerfully.*] Is that better, Jimmy? [*RALEIGH makes no sign.*] Jimmy—

[*Still RALEIGH is quiet. STANHOPE gently takes his hand. There is a long silence. STANHOPE lowers RALEIGH'S hand to the bed, rises, and takes the candle back to the table. He sits on the bench behind the table with his back to the wall, and stares listlessly across at the boy on OSBORNE'S bed. The solitary candle-flame throws up the lines of his pale, drawn face, and the dark shadows under his tired eyes. The thudding of the shells rises and falls like an angry sea. A PRIVATE SOLDIER comes scrambling down the steps, his round, red face wet with perspiration, his chest heaving for breath.*]

SOLDIER. Message from Mr Trotter, sir—will you come at once [*STANHOPE gazes round at the SOLDIER—and makes no other sign.*] Mr. Trotter, sir—says will you come at once!

[*STANHOPE rises stiffly and takes his helmet from the table.*]

STANHOPE. All right, Broughton, I'm coming.

[*The SOLDIER turns and goes away. STANHOPE pauses for a moment by OSBORNE'S bed and lightly runs his fingers over RALEIGH'S tousled hair. He goes stiffly up the steps, his tall figure black against the dawn sky. The shelling has risen to a great fury. The solitary candle burns with a steady flame, and RALEIGH lies in the shadows. The whine of a shell rises to a shriek and bursts on the dug-out roof. The shock stabs out the candle-flame; the timber props of the door cave slowly in, sandbags fall and block the passage to the open air. There is darkness in the dug-out. Here and there the red dawn glows through the jagged holes of the broken doorway.*]

*Very faintly there come the dull rattle
of machine-guns and the fevered spat-
ter of rifle fire]*

THE PLAY ENDS

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The Conquering Hero, Allan Monkhouse

THE FAR-OFF HILLS
(1928)
BY
LENNOX ROBINSON

CHARACTERS

PATRICK CLANCY
MARIAN
DOROTHEA ("DUCKY") } *his daughters*
ANNA ("PET") }
DICK DELANY
OLIVER O'SHAUGHNESSY
HAROLD MAHONY
SUSIE TYNAN
PIERCE HEGARTY
ELLEN NOLAN

The first and third acts take place in the Clancys' dining-room, the second act in the girls'—DUCKY'S and PET'S—bedroom. No time elapses between the first and second acts, but several weeks elapse between the second and third

LENNOX ROBINSON

ONE of the horrors of the commercial theater is the Irish play written by an Englishman or American who knows little or nothing of Irish life, speech, and character, and who perpetuates, to the delight of sentimental audiences, conventional but utterly absurd notions of Ireland and its people. Ravished for centuries by internecine political strife and frequent famines, the stormy little island could hardly develop as its typical inhabitant the mythical stage Irishman—a laughing, carefree sentimentalist, very quaint, kindly, philanthropic, brilliantly witty, bursting periodically into rollicking song. In farces, melodramas, and romances, in vaudeville, in sentimental song, and finally in moving pictures the myth continues, falsifying both character and speech. Such locutions as “top o’ the morning” and “a froth of a boy” belong to this stage Irishman. To find the flavor of real Irish talk one should read the short comedies of Lady Gregory, or the peasant plays of Synge, who made a painstaking study of the genuine idiom.

For authentic Irish comedy one should turn to the work of Synge, Lady Gregory, Shiels, Robinson, Colum, and Fitzmaurice. Irish humor is largely intellectual, as opposed to sentimental; the comedies of Sir James M. Barrie, for example, have never succeeded in the Irish theater. Even the comedies of the expatriated Irishmen—Sheridan, Wilde, Shaw, Ervine—are far removed from the drama of sensibility. The bold juxtaposition of rich comedy and bitter, ironic tragedy in the strange plays of Sean O’Casey is perhaps faithful to Irish life as O’Casey views it, but it is sometimes confusing to foreign audiences. Good Irish comedies which rise above the level of farce are surprisingly few, when one considers the strong literary movement of the past generation and at the same time the superb materials for a native comedy. Irish wit and repartee are not altogether mythical, and the love of pungent metaphor is perhaps not so strong in any other people.

No modern comedies are more joyous than those of Lennox Robinson, whose earlier plays, however, ranged from grim melodrama to political tragedy—the latter a popular Irish subject always. Robinson was born in 1886 near Cork, the son of a Church of Ireland clergyman. His formal education was inconsiderable, although he was a voracious if haphazard reader. His devotion to the theater dates from his first visit to a playhouse at the age of sixteen. In an article he wrote for *T P’s and Cassell’s Weekly* for February 6, 1926, he says: “. . . one hot summer afternoon I saw a performance by the Abbey Theater Company. A little later I turned a story of my sister’s into a one-act play and sent it to that theater; amazingly it was accepted . . . a longer play was written and played six months later; and, being the first realistic Irish peasant play, made a small stir.” He was sent by Yeats to London to observe the management and direction of a notable repertory theater producing plays by Shaw, Galsworthy, Barrie, and Barker, and after a period of practical training he returned to the Abbey Theater as its manager and producer. For many years he has been almost continuously associated with the Abbey Theater, either as manager or director. He is a novelist as well as playwright.

Under Robinson’s management the Abbey Theater has more and more come to resemble the English Repertory Theater, largely because he belongs to that Irish group whose spiritual home is in England. He is closer to Barker and Shaw than to Yeats and Synge, although not so “emancipated” as St. John Ervine and Shaw. He is a genuine realist, unconcerned with Irish fairy tales and folk-lore. His better plays are *Harvest* (1910), a

thesis play dealing with rural education; *Patriots* (1912), a poignant tragedy of political life, *The Whiteheaded Boy* (1916), his most popular play, a good-humored satire, *Crabbed Age and Youth* (1922), a masterpiece of high comedy, declared by some critics to be the best one-act play of our age; *The Big House* (1926), a serious, searching study of the fate in the new Ireland of the professional and land-owning classes. *The Far-off Hills* (1928) is a successful attempt to recapture the tang and verve of *The Whiteheaded Boy*, and has been a great favorite with English and American audiences on the Abbey Players' recent tours. *Is Life Worth Living* (1933) is an amusing comedy showing the devastating—even suicidal—effects a summer repertoire of grim Scandinavian plays has on a small Irish community.

The Far-off Hills is a sunny comedy which through sheer exuberance constantly threatens to topple over into farce. But it is a comedy of character; in fact, the plot is almost too light to be called a plot, but it moves quietly with amusing dialogue and no forcing of the comic pace. *The Far-off Hills* belongs more to the theater than to the library. To appreciate its fine tang and glow one must hear Susie's infectious laughter, watch the three old cronies badgered by the genteel Marian, feel the rush of Pierce, and observe those unforgettable Dickensian *misérables*, Ellen and Harold, lugubriously at ease in their slough of despond. This simple comedy without thesis or problem has by its sheer gaiety and intelligent humor found a permanent place in the growing repertoire of fine Irish plays. It is refreshingly free from the euphuistic artiness which oppresses too many Irish plays.

THE FAR-OFF HILLS

ACT I

The dining-room at the CLANCYS' A comfortable, unpretentious room. It is Sunday night, after supper; the three CLANCY girls are clearing the table, their father, PATRICK, is still sitting at it. The eldest girl, MARIAN, is about twenty-two years old, her dress is markedly plain and dark, DOROTHEA—just past seventeen—and ANNA—a year younger—are quite gaily dressed. Their father is a man of fifty.

MARIAN [*directing operations*]. Those spoons are clean, they can go on the sideboard . . . That's Father's glass, he'll want that

PATRICK. I've dropped my handkerchief. Could you find it for me, Pet?

PET [*otherwise ANNA*]. Here it is.

MARIAN. Take those flowers out, Anna, they're withered. And put on a kettle of water. I suppose Ellen isn't in yet.

PET. Not likely. She's a date with Donough to-night.

[*She goes out with the flowers.*]

PATRICK. Are you there, Ducky?

DUCKY [*otherwise DOROTHEA*]. Yes, Daddy

PATRICK. Get me my stick, like a good child.

DUCKY. Here you are.

MARIAN [*having completed piling a tray*]. Take that to the kitchen, Dorothea . . . Gently! Goodness' sake, you'll drop the whole thing. I'll open the door. [*She gets DUCKY safely out, shuts the door, takes whatever remains on the table—napkins, clean silver, etc., and puts them on the sideboard. Then, to her father.*] Come, dear, I'll get you to the fire.

PATRICK. All right. [*He rises, groping with his stick. MARIAN slips her arm into his.*] Don't bother, I can manage. I know the way by this time.

MARIAN. Better be sure than sorry. [*She guides him across the room and to a comfortable chair by the fire. He settles into it and sighs deeply.*] [*Folding up the table-cloth.*] Such a sigh! What ails you?

There's not a word out of you the whole evening.

PATRICK. I'm feeling a bit low in my mind, Marian, and that's the truth.

MARIAN. Why so?

PATRICK. Coming out of Mass this morning I was speaking to Oliver O'Shaughnessy; telling me he was of a man he met yesterday who had a cataract for fifteen years and it's not ripe to operate on yet. Fifteen years! That's a terrible long time, Marian. Mine's only seven or eight years old—only three since I knew it was a cataract—but it seems a lifetime.

MARIAN. Well, indeed I wish Oliver would keep such news to himself. Sure, didn't Doctor O'Grady say you were going on grandly, and that you could be operated on in another six or eight months?

PATRICK. He did, but them cataracts are terribly uncertain. It might be that the operation would be a failure and I'd go blind altogether. Do you remember that awful bit in the papers a week or two ago about the man who blew his brains out on account of losing his sight? Dick was reading it to me. It's making me feel an old man, this groping about in dimness and darkness, and it's on my mind all the time the way I'm standing in your way and tying you down here. Sometimes I think I'd be better dead, better by lying along with your mother in Kilmore.

MARIAN [*laughing*]. Such ulagoning! To hear you any one would think I was trying to get a husband and losing my looks on account of you. Thank God they don't care at the convent how I look, and anyway, if you had the eyes of a hawk itself I couldn't go in there till the children are educated, and that won't be for another year or so.

PATRICK. You're a good girl, Marian; what would we do without you? Dick Delany was saying to-day what an awful hardship it was on you not to have gone into the convent years ago.

MARIAN. Well, you can tell Dick Delany to mind his own business. [*She comes and sits near him.*] And now look, Father. I want to speak seriously to you. In a

year's time, with the blessing of God, you'll be seeing as well as you ever saw and I'll be free to take my vows. You'll be here in the house with the two children, they'll be nearly grown up, they'll be maybe thinking of marriage, and you must be very careful what class of people you let come into the house. Do you see?

PATRICK You mean I must encourage likely young fellows?

MARIAN. I don't want you to encourage any one in particular, but there's some I want to discourage. You mustn't let the riff-raff of the town be here day in day out.

PATRICK. Riff-raff?

MARIAN. Oliver O'Shaughnessy and Dick Delany.

PATRICK [*a little indignantly*]. They're not riff-raff. They're old friends of mine, two decent, honest men.

MARIAN They never did a day's work in their lives.

PATRICK. Sure why should they? Haven't they, each of them, their little bit of property?

MARIAN. They're always drinking.

PATRICK No one ever saw them drunk.

MARIAN. They're forever at races and coursing matches and reading low papers and telling bad stories.

PATRICK. Ah, what harm? They wouldn't hurt a fly.

MARIAN. Father, you can't really think they're fit company for two young girls like Dorothea and Anna?

PATRICK. Well, the children have a great grah for them. And they're not likely to want to marry either of them. Two old bachelors!

MARIAN But they'll give this house a low name. They mustn't come here so often, Father, I've made up my mind to that.

PATRICK. They're about the only company I have now.

MARIAN. Well, you must have them less often or have them outside. Sometimes when I think how this house is likely to go to pieces when I'm out of it, I feel that maybe God wants me to stay and look after it.

PATRICK. No, no. I wouldn't for anything in the world stand between you and the convent. I'll try and behave myself. I'll give Oliver and Dick a hint not to come here so often. I mustn't do anything that might spoil the chances of Pet and Ducky.

MARIAN. You and your Pets and

Duckys! I suppose you'll never remember, Father, that they were christened Anna and Dorothea?

PATRICK. A pair of damned consequential names.

MARIAN. The names of two saints, Father. Saint Anna—she was the mother of the Blessed Virgin, and Saint Dorothea—she was a virgin martyr and her tomb is in Rome.

PATRICK. Anna was named after your mother's mother, a malignant old woman. And Dorothea after an aunt of my own in the hopes she'd leave her the bit of money. But it all went in masses, bad luck to her.

MARIAN. You shouldn't say a thing like that, Father. . . . I wish to goodness you'd called *me* by a saint's name.

PATRICK. You were called after a woman your mother took a great fancy to, a woman in a book. Your mother used to be reading it the months before you were born "Marian Halcombe," it's often she repeated the name, and the book was "The Woman in White."

MARIAN. Well, I'll have a new name, a saint's name, when I'm a nun. And now I'll read to you a bit. But you won't forget about giving Oliver and Dick the cold shoulder?

PATRICK. I'll remember.

MARIAN. It's for your good I'm speaking—and for the children's good. I'll get the paper.

[*She rises and goes to a side-table*]

PATRICK. Ah, don't bother about the reading.

MARIAN No bother at all. It wouldn't be Sunday night if you hadn't your reading, and Harold, I suppose, will be here soon, so the quicker we begin the better [*She comes back with the Observer*]. What would you like to hear about?

PATRICK. What paper have you?

MARIAN The *Observer*, of course.

[*PATRICK sighs*]

MARIAN Isn't it a wonder, Father, you never heard of the *Observer*, till I started to get it for you.

PATRICK Oh, I had heard of it.

MARIAN There's this Mr. Squire writing about Doctor Johnson—the man who wrote the dictionary, you know—that ought to be very interesting. Will I begin with that? You can stop me if you don't like it.

PATRICK. Oh yes, anything at all.

MARIAN. "The Great Lexicographer"—that's what it's called.

PATRICK. Lexicographer? What the hell is that?

MARIAN. We'll find out as we go along That's what I like about the *Observer*, we always learn something from it. [*Starting to read*] "The Great Lexicographer" —

[*A knock on the hall door is heard*]

MARIAN Who can that be? It's a bit early for Harold.

PATRICK [*a little cheerfully*] It mightn't be Harold, it might be —

MARIAN Who?

PATRICK I dunno.

MARIAN Ellen isn't in yet, I'll make the children open the door and send Harold into the garden for half an hour. [*She goes to the door, opens it and listens*] Oh, they've opened the door. I declare it sounds like Oliver O'Shaughnessy's voice. Isn't that a great bother now? Perhaps I'd better see him The children might let him in.

PATRICK. But—but he might have an important message for me

MARIAN What message could Oliver have? That's Dick Delany's voice with him. I'll hunt them.

PATRICK. But—but, Marian, I think they want to see me.

MARIAN. I've no doubt they do. But they won't. Sunday night and all.

PATRICK. Marian, it will be awful to turn them from the door.

MARIAN. What's awful about it? 'Tisn't as if you had asked them up.

PATRICK. Well, in a way I did

MARIAN. You did?

PATRICK. At Mass this morning —

MARIAN Oh, this comes of letting you go to late Mass with Anna and Dorothea.

PATRICK. I didn't exactly ask them, but—and you hadn't told me then that you were so set against them

MARIAN. You've known this long time what I think of them. But I suppose they must come in since you've asked them and they're here.

PATRICK. We could go into my little room. We'd be no trouble to any one there.

MARIAN. You'll stay here. What a botheration. And we were going to have such a nice evening over the paper

PATRICK [*cheerfully*]. Yes, but that's all off now. And—and Marian, what about a little drop of something to drink?

MARIAN. There's whisky in the decanter and plenty of soda and glasses.

PATRICK. How much whisky, Marian?

MARIAN Enough.

PATRICK. I see.

MARIAN. They're coming.

[*She goes to the side-board and brings to the table a decanter, syphon, and glasses. OLIVER O'SHAUGHNESSY and DICK DELANY come in, followed by DUCKY and PET. All have been laughing and talking The two men are hearty middle-aged men, a little younger than PATRICK OLIVER is a stronger person than DICK*] OLIVER and DICK. Good evening, Marian.

MARIAN. Good evening

OLIVER. Here we are, Paddy.

DICK. We took you at your word.

PATRICK I'm delighted you've come, boys. Sit down

OLIVER [*going to sit the other side of the fire*] Am I taking your chair, Marian?

MARIAN No.

DICK [*sitting beside PATRICK*]. I'll camp here.

OLIVER. I've been making Ducky and Pet laugh at the story of how old Mossy Burke found himself engaged to the widow.

DUCKY. It's a killing story, Daddy.

PET. I split my sides laughing. Poor old Mossy!

MARIAN [*to PET*]. What about your practising, dear?

PET. I'm sick practising.

MARIAN. You'd better do twenty minutes' scales. Sister Mary Bridget says your scales are terribly weak

PET Oh, Marian!

OLIVER. Sunday night, too!

MARIAN. Yes, the poor child. Isn't it hard on her? Run along, Anna. [*ANNA is going.*] It's very important for her to get that scholarship. And this poor child has to work at her book-keeping. Come along, Dorothea. [*She links her arm in DUCKY'S and is going out.*] I'll be back in a few minutes, Father. [*The three girls go*]

PATRICK [*in a whisper*]. Is she gone?

OLIVER. She is.

PATRICK [*with relief*]. Ah! Now tell me, did they find the body?

OLIVER They did.

DICK. Cut up into small pieces and in the governess's trunk.

PATRICK. For goodness' sake! Is that a fact?

DICK. True as gospel.

OLIVER. When he was arrested he turned very pale —

DICK. But protested that he was innocent, and the sergeant —

PATRICK. When who was arrested?

OLIVER Huntingdon.

DICK. The rabbit-farmer. Surely to God, man, you know that much

PATRICK. I know nothing. Not a thing since you gave me the news on Friday I got Ducky to search the *Observer* this afternoon, but there wasn't a word about it in the whole bloody paper.

OLIVER. And do you mean to say you don't know about the Luton mystery? That's better again than the governess thing.

PATRICK. Not a syllable.

DICK. Oh, the Luton thing is grand. A double-murder. Have you the paper on you, Oliver?

OLIVER. I have [*He pulls out a disreputable Sunday newspaper*] There's a picture of Huntingdon and a map of the rabbit-farm. The cross marks where the knife was found.

PATRICK. I wish I could see it. Before we begin, boys, help yourselves. Marian left the drunk on the table, I think.

DICK. Right. [*He goes to the table, his face falls when he sees the contents of the decanter*] Hm!

PATRICK. Isn't it there?

DICK. Oh yes, it is there. Singular number.

PATRICK. What do you mean? Hurry up or she'll be back.

DICK [*fetching decanter and glass*]. How much will you have?

PATRICK. A stiff one. Talking of murders always makes me a bit dry. [*DICK gives him a good glass of whisky, which empties the decanter*] . . . I get you, Dick. You mean there's not enough drink for the three of us. But Marian swore there was. She—what'll I do?

DICK. Don't worry, Paddy I brought a drop with me—in case. Sure we all know Marian's a bit strait with the liquor.

PATRICK [*very distressed*]. You make me feel ashamed. And when I think of the old days before I got so blind and helpless—

OLIVER. Ay, indeed, those were the times. But don't fret yourself. In a short while, please God, you'll be walking round as brisk as a bee and as keen as a hawk.

PATRICK. I wouldn't mind if she wasn't such a damned good girl. Think of the way she's looked after us since the poor mother died. Sure, she's been mother herself to Ducky and Pet and never a rumble out of her, though her heart's away the whole time with the nuns at Mount Vincent.

DICK [*who has taken a large flask out of his pocket and is now distributing drinks*]. Well, sure Pet and Ducky are nearly grown up now, she can skip off with

herself to Mount Vincent before the end of the year.

PATRICK. She swears she won't leave me till the operation is well over, and God knows that might be years away.

OLIVER. Heaven forbid! Here's to you, Paddy! [*He drinks*.] I often thought it a pity Marian wouldn't get married. I mean, if she had some fine young fellow breaking his heart about her and she breaking her heart for him, I bet you she'd throw you and the children overboard, and you'd all then have an easier life. But of course the Church will wait, there's no fear of the Church jilting her—God forgive me if I'm saying anything disrespectful. Poor Marian, she's a grand girl really, 'tis a pity she takes everything so seriously.

DICK. Yes, indeed. God forgive me, but I hate to think of her a nun. I'd like to see her well married.

PATRICK. She's never looked at a boy. Since she's been a child she's been all for the nuns. And the only man who might want to marry her is Harold Mahony—and what good is he?

OLIVER. Oh, devil a bit. I think it's the blessing of Providence to have him this way he is—tied up to a wife in the asylum. 'Twould be awful to have the like of him free to marry again and maybe rear up a long family as lugubrious as himself.

PATRICK. God help him, 'tis enough to make any man dismal to have his wife go mad on him on the honeymoon.

OLIVER. Ah, it's eight years ago. He should be over it by this. Talking of honeymoons, did you see the queer case in to-day's paper?

DICK. The poor fellow that was drowned at Aberystwyth?

OLIVER. Drowned? My dear man, don't you believe it. That clothes-on-the-shore trick is an old game. Believe you me, the honeymoon wasn't all it ought to have been and he decided to cut his losses.

PATRICK. For goodness' sake!

DICK. I think 'twas just a common drowning.

OLIVER. Then who was the strange man seen boarding the train at midnight at a little station two miles out from Aberystwyth? Answer me that.

PATRICK. Whisht! There's voices. She's coming back. We'll try and slip away to my little room. And listen, boys, you mustn't stay too long to-night—I'll tell you why later. Hide the paper.

OLIVER. Right, right.

[*He clumsily stuffs the paper into his pocket. MARIAN comes in with*

SUSIE TYNAN and PIERCE HEGARTY. SUSIE is a pleasant-looking woman of about forty, PIERCE an energetic young man of twenty-two.]

MARIAN Here's Susie, Father, and she's brought her nephew with her.

SUSIE. My poor sister Francey's son. You remember Francey, Patrick, who married Hegarty the cattleman in Cork?

PATRICK. I do, of course.

SUSIE. And I think you saw Pierce once before when he was a baby. Shake hands with him, Pierce

PATRICK [*shaking hands*] How do you do? You'll excuse me not getting up. He seems a fine young man, Susie. There's a good grip in his hand.

SUSIE. He is a fine young man, Patrick, and a clever one into the bargain. And, Pierce, that's Mr O'Shaughnessy, and that's Dick Delany—two of the biggest ruffians in the town

OLIVER. You're very hard on us, Susie

SUSIE. I know you. You can't throw dust in my eyes

PIERCE. I've met both these gentlemen before.

SUSIE. Where?

PIERCE. Mallow Races, Shelbourne Park, The Maze, and Delahunty's bar here two nights ago

SUSIE. The villains!

MARIAN. Sit down, Susie. Won't you take a chair, Mr. Hegarty?

PIERCE. Thank you, Miss Clancy.

[*They all sit.*]

SUSIE. You know, Patrick, it makes me feel an old woman to have a grown-up nephew.

PATRICK. Indeed you're not old, Susie; sure your sister was years older than you.

SUSIE. She was, of course. All the same—

OLIVER. Your aunt is one of the ornaments of our little town

SUSIE. Go on out of that! Praise from you is a great compliment indeed. Where are the girls, Marian?

MARIAN. Dorothea is working at her book-keeping and Anna is practising

SUSIE. Practising? I thought I heard a jingling of scales as you let us in the front door. Sure it's hardly Christian to be playing scales on a Sunday evening. Fetch them down, for goodness' sake. I want them to meet Pierce

MARIAN. I think they should be left to their work, Susie.

SUSIE. Ah, nonsense! Pierce is dying to see them. Aren't you, Pierce?

PIERCE. Sure.

SUSIE. If you won't get them, I'll get them myself.

MARIAN. Very well

[*She goes out. PIERCE politely opens the door for her.*]

PATRICK. Will you excuse us, Susie, if we go into my little room? We'll only be a check on the young people if we stay here and—and we've a bit of business to talk over, haven't we, O'iver?

OLIVER. To be sure. About that—about that little matter.

DICK. And it's very important to get it settled to-night.

SUSIE. Oh, off with you. [*The men start to go, OLIVER guiding PATRICK.*] Don't forget your flask, Dick. [*He retrieves it from the chair he has left it on.*] You'd better take the syphon with you, it will be a great assistance to you in settling that little "bit of business" I see, Oliver, you've that low Sunday rag in your pocket.

OLIVER. How well you recognize it.

SUSIE. Oh, Pierce was reading it to me all the afternoon. Don't spill the precious liquor, Dick. Well, you're the pretty trio! [*She gets them out of the room and shuts the door.*] Those are the two nicest, idlest men in Glencarrig

PIERCE. And Mr. Clancy?

SUSIE. Oh, Paddy has a heart of gold. He's the best friend I have in the town. Poor man, 'tis the wretched life he has now, nearly blind and Marian is a little tight with him. But she's a good girl, maybe too good. Here are the other girls now.

[*MARIAN, DUCKY, and PET come in.*]

SUSIE. This is Ducky and this is Pet. [*They shake hands*] Didn't I tell you, Pierce, that there was no lack of pretty girls in this town? And isn't he a fine young man, girls, though he is my nephew?

PIERCE. I take after you, Aunt Susie.

MARIAN. Sit down, all of you. Where's Father?

SUSIE. Oh, need you ask? Gone into his little room with his cronies and tumblers of whisky and newspapers full of murders. They'll be there all night talking gossip and slander—God bless them.

MARIAN. I hate those two being so much around the place.

SUSIE. Ay, my dear, they're your father's old friends, and God knows he couldn't have too many friends just now.

MARIAN. But they're—ah well, never mind. . . . Are you making a long stay, Mr. Hegarty?

PIERCE. I hope so, Miss Clancy.

SUSIE It's a great secret, girls, but he's going to set up for himself here. Since my poor sister Francey died he's got no one, and so he's coming to live with me.

PET Oh, isn't that lovely!

DUCKY. Susie's got the nicest house in the town and a grand garden.

PET. And a tennis-ground

DUCKY And a conservatory

PET. It's a lovely house for a dance.

PIERCE. Do you like dancing?

PET. Oh, I dote on it! But we're very backward here. I don't know all the new steps.

PIERCE. Will you let me teach you?

PET. Oh, will you? You'd be a dote if you did

MARIAN. Are you setting up in business here, Mr. Hegarty?

PIERCE. Sure. A garage, taxis, char-a-bancs, 'buses.

MARIAN. The people are very quiet here. Though we're not forty miles from Dublin we're quite off the track. I'm afraid you won't do much business.

PIERCE. They won't be quiet long. I'm a rouser. I've bought Boland's place. Bought it at ten o'clock last night

MARIAN. Bought Boland's, that big place? How long are you here?

PIERCE. Since Thursday night I'm afraid I'm a bit of a rusher, but I always know my own mind and Boland's suits me Ar. I'm going to run up a picture-theater in the vacant lot beside it.

PET [*with a sigh of ecstasy*]. Oh!

DUCKY. Won't that be grand!

PET. We're blue-moldy here, Mr. Hegarty.

PIERCE. You don't look it.

PET. We are. The people here have ivy growing on them.

MARIAN. I don't agree with you, Anna. We have a lot of entertainments, Mr. Hegarty—of a quiet kind. We have a Shakespeare Society: not many towns in Ireland the size of Glencarrig have a Shakespeare Society; and we have a public reading once a year in the Assembly Rooms—not in costume, of course.

PIERCE. Good. I'll get up plays. I've done a lot of that. You'll all have to act.

[*DUCKY and PET groan with delight*]

PIERCE. I think it's a fascinating little town, it only wants stirring up

MARIAN. It's a very pretty town, don't you think? The river—and the spire of the chapel—have you noticed them?

PIERCE. Surely.

SUSIE They look lovely from your garden, Marian.

MARIAN Yes, we've one of the nicest views in the place

PIERCE. I wish you'd show it to me

MARIAN I will some time.

PIERCE. Why not now?

MARIAN Now?

PIERCE. Yes

MARIAN It's getting rather dark.

PIERCE. The spire will look stunning against the sunset.

MARIAN. Ah, it lies to the east

PIERCE. Exactly. The light will just fall on it.

MARIAN You could see it to-morrow.

PIERCE I may be dead to-morrow.

MARIAN Very well. Excuse me for five minutes, Susie. Will you come, Mr. Hegarty?

PIERCE Sure.

[*He opens the door for her.*]

MARIAN [*as she goes out*] The garden is rather a mass of weeds, I'm afraid, but you see my father's health—

[*They disappear*]

SUSIE. Well, girls, what do you think of him?

PET. He's a dote, Susie

DUCKY. And not a trace of a Cork accent.

PET. I hate the Cork accent, 'tis very low.

SUSIE I'd like to see any nephew of mine attempting to have a Cork accent. As a matter of fact, he's lived there very little.

PET. Where's he been?

SUSIE. All over the place. My brother-in-law died when he was only fifteen—that's seven years ago—and there he was left to look after his mother. Well, he knuckled to, did this thing and that, and everything he touched turned to gold. He ran a cinema, he ran a chocolate factory, he ran greyhounds. Greyhounds and chocolates—everything was first past the post. He's enough money now to buy Boland's, and he has a couple of thousand in the bank besides. He's like an American—in-deed he was in the States for eight months.

PET. And his mother's dead?

SUSIE. He's a bird-alone. But I think he'll settle down here now. He'll love getting hold of a quiet little town like this and making it hum.

PET. You know when he said that just now about the picture-house—I thought maybe he'd have me to play the piano in it.

DUCKY. And I could be his secretary. He'd want a secretary, wouldn't he, Susie?

SUSIE. Of course he would. But I thought, Pet, you were going to win scholarships and be a first-class piano-player?

PET. Oh, that's all Marian and her plans God bless you, Susie, for delivering me from them scales to-night

DUCKY. You shouldn't say "them," it's "those."

PET. Ah, shut up. Does this suit you better? "Those damned scales."

SUSIE Pet!

DUCKY. It's no use shouting at us, Susie. We're fed up. Marian's making life hell.

SUSIE. Ducky! Such language!

DUCKY. I'm not cursing and swearing. There is a place called hell.

PET. And this house is it.

SUSIE. You must make allowances for Marian.

DUCKY and PET. We do.

SUSIE. And that she's very fond of you and your father.

PET. We know all that, but it's come to this that we can't bear her being fond of us any longer, and we've a great plan—I will I tell her, Ducky?

DUCKY. Yes.

PET. Well, maybe you'll think us very interfering, Susie, and of course it's—well, in a way, it's your own business entirely, and we wouldn't make the suggestion only we love you terribly and we love father, too and—and—you tell her, Ducky.

DUCKY. Well, you see it's like this. Now you mustn't be surprised at what I'm going to say or angry or anything like that. But—but you see mother died more than ten years ago.

PET. We were only little children; we hardly remember her.

DUCKY. And—and you see Marian ought to go into the convent, and she won't go as long as father is the way he is and—and—tell her, Pet.

PET. Well—well—you see how it is, Susie

SUSIE I don't.

PET. We love you terribly.

DUCKY. You've said that before.

PET. I know I have. Tell her yourself.

DUCKY [*desperately and rapidly*] We think 'twould be grand if you'd marry Father. There!

[*SUSIE goes into a fit of laughter.*]

PET. It's nothing to laugh about

DUCKY. Maybe you don't like him, but you go on about him as if you did.

SUSIE. So it's a stepmother you want?

DUCKY. Yes

SUSIE. Well, I've often heard of girls hating the idea of a stepmother, this is the first time I've heard of girls begging for one.

DUCKY. Maybe the other girls hadn't a

sister like Marian or a stepmother like yourself.

PET. Go on, be a dote, marry him.

DUCKY. You'll never regret it

PET. He's terribly easy to get on with.

DUCKY. He's very little in the house.

PET. You wouldn't see him from breakfast to dark

DUCKY. He doesn't drink—just a glass now and again with Oliver and Dick

PET. He doesn't bet or gamble, an odd game of whist is all he ever plays.

DUCKY. For ha'penny points.

SUSIE [*laughing*]. Stop, for goodness' sake, or I'll split my sides. Are you serious in this?

PET and DUCKY. We are.

SUSIE. Well, I'll be serious too. I'm very fond of your father, and I think he's fond of me—in fact I know he is.

DUCKY. How do you know?

SUSIE. Something he began to say one time, three years ago, we were walking up the Rocky Road, then Marian came round the corner—

PET. She would.

SUSIE. And he broke off, but I knew he'd return to the subject again if he got the chance.

PET. And didn't he get the chance?

SUSIE. My dears, the very next day was the first time he went to Doctor O'Grady's about his eyes, and of course once he knew he was in for cataract it was good-bye to love-making.

DUCKY. Why so?

SUSIE. Well, Ducky, your father is a very scrupulous man. I don't think he'd consider it fair to ask any one to marry him in his present condition

PET. Would you marry him the way he is?

SUSIE. I would.

PET. Couldn't you ask him to marry you?

SUSIE. Pet! Such a suggestion!

PET. Well, you could sort of lead him on, you know.

SUSIE. I don't.

PET. Oh, Susie!

DUCKY. Will I speak to him for you?

SUSIE. You'll do nothing of the kind

DUCKY. What'll we do then? We must do something

SUSIE. Let things take their course. Leave it to God

PET. Sure we've been leaving it to Him these years and years.

SUSIE. Ssh! Isn't that a knock?

PET. It's sure to be Harold. If it is, for goodness' sake come out into the garden,

Susie, and we'll send Marian in to him Run and open the door, Ducky [*DUCKY goes*] Isn't it awful to have that Harold coming here every Sunday night with his long face and his sort of tombstone manner?

SUSIE Poor Haro'd Coming here to chat with Marian is about the only diversion he has.

PET. He spoils every Sunday night His being here drives me to bed before my time.

SUSIE He has a great feeling for Marian.

PET. Well, I wish her joy of him He's a lovely beau for any girl to have. I'm not surprised his wife went mad. Any girl would have to be a bit cracked to marry him. Here he is.

[*HAROLD comes in. Indeed he is a sad young man.*]

HAROLD [*shaking hands*]. Good evening, Miss Tynan

SUSIE. Good evening, Harold.

HAROLD [*shaking hands*]. Good evening, Pet.

PET. 'Evening.

SUSIE. Won't you sit down, Harold? [*He sits*] Lovely weather, isn't it?

HAROLD Yes, but the evenings are closing in, we're drawing very near the winter.

SUSIE. Oh come! We're only just into September.

HAROLD. The twelfth—no, to-day's the thirteenth. Yes, the thirteenth of September. A few more weeks and winter is with us again.

SUSIE. I often think the nicest weather of the year comes in October.

HAROLD. Do you? Yes, sometimes we used to have a fine October, long ago

SUSIE. The *Mail* says we're going to have grand weather next month

HAROLD. I wouldn't believe in that.

PET. What did you do with Ducky?

HAROLD. She went into the garden to tell Marian I had come

PET [*to SUSIE*] Look at her, trying to steal a march on me. Come on, Susie We're going into the garden, Haro'd There's a grand new young man there, Susie's nephew.

HAROLD. I met him yesterday.

SUSIE. Isn't he a fine young man, Harold?

HAROLD. He seemed very lively.

SUSIE. Well, he's young

HAROLD. Yes, let him enjoy it while he can

PET. We'll hurry Marian in to you Come, Susie

[*They go out HAROLD, left alone, sighs a little and wanders about the room He notes the empty decanter, shakes his head sadly and murmurs, "He's drinking again."*] MARIAN. I hope I haven't kept you waiting, Harold? [*She shakes hands*] Sit down

HAROLD. I can't stay long. The cob is lame . . . It's too damp for you to be in the garden at this hour, the mist from the river is dangerous.

MARIAN. It's a lovely evening.

HAROLD. Yes. One doesn't notice the dampness, but next day—rheumatism, neuralgia, bronchitis perhaps.

MARIAN. I was showing Mr. Hegarty the view across the river.

HAROLD. That's Miss Tynan's nephew? Do you like him?

MARIAN. No. A horrid young man. All push and hustle.

HAROLD. Yes. That was the opinion I formed of him. [*A silence*]

MARIAN. Well, is there any news? I haven't seen you since last Sunday

HAROLD. No news, I think. Except that my orchard was robbed.

MARIAN. Well, isn't that a shame?

HAROLD. It always is—every year. Except last year.

MARIAN. All the orchards in the place are robbed. You were lucky to escape last year.

HAROLD. But I had no apples last year. My whole place is going to rack and ruin, the house is filthy.

MARIAN. I don't think it's as bad as you make out. Mary Hennessy looks after you pretty well.

HAROLD. Ah, no, it's not like a home—but how could it be? I sit alone there in the evenings over an empty grate or a dying fire and it gets darker and darker, darker and darker

MARIAN. Well, of course it does

HAROLD. And I think of my ruined life and—and I think of you, Marian

MARIAN. Now, Harold, I've told you often enough to put thoughts like that out of your head. Apart from everything else it isn't right, it's a sin. You're a married man still, it's a sin for you to be thinking of any other woman.

HAROLD. I know, but I can't help it

MARIAN. Oh yes you can

HAROLD. And I know, too, that you don't care a bit for me

MARIAN. I'm very fond of you, Harold, but not that way.

HAROLD. You're a sort of a saint

Marian I don't think it can be much of a sin to be in love with a saint

MARIAN Oh, I'm not quite a saint yet Let's talk of something else How's the farm? Have you your oats saved?

HAROLD. Yes

MARIAN. That's good

HAROLD. But such a light crop, hardly worth the saving.

MARIAN. Oats are light everywhere this year, there'll be a good price for it.

HAROLD. So I've been told, but I doubt it. I was wondering would you and your father come out some day this week—Wednesday, say

MARIAN. We would, to be sure. Father always enjoys the little drive.

HAROLD. I'd send the trap for you, but I'm sure the cob will be dead lame by Wednesday.

MARIAN. Oh, we'll borrow a car.

HAROLD. Come about tea-time. [*He hiccups.*] Excuse me.

MARIAN. And ask Mary Hennessy to make those lovely little hot cakes. They're delicious.

HAROLD. Do you really like them? I always think she puts in too much soda—so indigestible. [*He hiccups.*] There—I've a hiccup. I knew I felt something coming on. I'd better go.

MARIAN. Sure you've only just come. Stay and have a cup of tea. Don't mind the hiccup, I know you're liable to them. Hold your breath

HAROLD. I'd better go. Really I only came in to fix up about Wednesday. With the lameness of the cob I suppose we'll take the best part of an hour getting home, and Dan Mulcahy's driving. He'll want to get back to his supper and his wife and children.

[*From now till he goes he hiccups from time to time very gently*]

MARIAN. Oh, let Dan wait for once.

HAROLD I couldn't, Marian. I think I ought to go. [*He rises*]

MARIAN. Well, I know you're the most obstinate man once you make up your mind to a thing. Won't you even see Father before you go?

HAROLD. Where is he?

MARIAN. In the little room with Oliver and Dick.

HAROLD. Oliver and Dick? Ah, no. How are the eyes?

MARIAN. Worse. Of course we must expect that. The quicker the sight goes the sooner the operation.

HAROLD. As long as it doesn't go too

quickly. Ah well, I hope the operation will turn out well, I hope it will

[*PIERCE comes in*]

PIERCE I have to fly, Miss Clancy I've a lot to do to-night, estimates to draw up and all that sort of thing. Aunt Susie is staying behind. Good evening, Mr. Mahony.

HAROLD. Good evening.

PIERCE Ripping weather, isn't it? Well, good night, Miss Clancy, I hope I'll see you soon again

MARIAN. Good night.

HAROLD. Good night, Marian. Don't forget Wednesday if it's fine—but it looks like a change.

MARIAN. We'll come wet or fine, I warn you. Good night.

PIERCE. Are you buzzing, too? You're very short and sweet.

HAROLD. Am I?

PIERCE. Even shorter and sweeter than I am. [*HAROLD stalks out*] I say, did I get his goat saying that?

MARIAN. You mean—offend him?

PIERCE. Yes

MARIAN. He never takes offense He's very gentle.

PIERCE. He's not exactly a natural comic, is he? Still, that hiccup's rather pct. But it takes all sorts, as they say. Do you know, Miss Clancy, I'm going to love this place, "dote" on it—isn't that Pet's word? Aunt Susie's a topper, the people seem all decent and nice, I bought Boland's for a song—there's only one fly in the ointment.

MARIAN. What is that?

PIERCE. Your sisters tell me you're going to be a nun.

MARIAN. What difference on earth can that make to you?

PIERCE. Oh, one pretty girl less in a small place like Glencarrig is a very serious matter.

MARIAN. Well—really—

PIERCE. Shouldn't I have said that? I'm sorry. I'd better evaporate before I say something worse. Good night. See you soon.

[*And he dashes out*]

MARIAN. Goodness gracious. How I hate that sort of young man.

[*But she drifts to a mirror and does something to her hair. She hears voices outside and stops. The door opens, OLIVER and DICK are guiding PATRICK back; she is behind the door and they don't see her.*]

OLIVER. Are you all right now?

PATRICK. I'm as right as rain, boys.

DICK. Good night.

PATRICK Good night. It was kind of you to look in.

OLIVER Not at all The inquest's to-morrow There'll probably be a good account of it in Tuesday's *Mail*.

PATRICK Will you come up Tuesday night so?

OLIVER and DICK. We will.

PATRICK And bring the paper.

DICK Certainly.

OLIVER. I bet there'll be a lot of developments in that Luton case, too. We'll be off Come, Dick. *[They go.]*

MARIAN *[coming forward]*. I'm here, Father Take my arm.

[She steers him to his chair.]

PATRICK. I hunted them, Marian, I hunted them. I remembered what you said and I hunted them

MARIAN. But I heard you asking them for Tuesday.

PATRICK. Oh, did you?

MARIAN. I might as well say nothing, for all you care.

PATRICK. That's not true.

MARIAN You pay no attention to me, I'm only wasting my breath.

PATRICK. I can't give up my old friends altogether

MARIAN. I'll speak to them myself

PATRICK. You'll do nothing of the sort

MARIAN. I will. You can't stop me.

[There is an obstinate silence MARIAN lights a lamp]

MARIAN Will I read to you?

PATRICK. No.

MARIAN. I'd like to. That bit about Doctor Johnson—

PATRICK. I don't care a thraneen about Doctor Johnson. An old bags, that's all he was.

[Another silence SUSIE and the girls come back]

SUSIE. Pierce had to go, Marian Did he see you before he went? I suppose I should be pushing off, too.

PATRICK. You'll not go yet. For the love of God, Susie, sit down and talk to me for a bit.

MARIAN. Yes, do It's time you were thinking of bed, girls.

PET. Sure it's not half-past nine

MARIAN. Twenty to ten. And you'll have to be up at seven, as you missed your book-keeping and your scales to-night Off with you.

DUCKY Oh, Marian!

MARIAN. No delaying now. And no reading in bed, mind.

DUCKY. Good night, Daddy.

[She kisses him.]

PATRICK Good night, Ducky.

PET. Good night, Daddy.

[She kisses him.]

PATRICK. Sleep well, Pet.

DUCKY. 'Night, Susie. You see it is hell.

PET. Don't forget what we said, Susie. And there's no time like the present.

[They kiss her and go out followed by MARIAN]

PATRICK *[after a pause]*. I'm annoyed, Susie, I'm annoyed.

SUSIE Why so?

PATRICK. My house had always a name on it for hospitality, hadn't it?

SUSIE To be sure.

PATRICK. It was a place where my friends would always find a welcome and a good drop of liquor and a good cigar, wasn't it?

SUSIE It was.

PATRICK. There are no cigars now because Marian says a blind man can't get enjoyment out of tobacco, there's never more than a weeshy drain of whisky so that my friends come to see me with flasks in their pockets, there's no welcome for them, they feel intruders. I was forced to ask Oliver and Dick to go away to-night before they'd been half an hour in the house I was disgraced here to-night, Susie.

SUSIE. Ah, not at all.

PATRICK. I felt near crying when Dick whipped out his flask.

SUSIE What matter?

PATRICK. It does matter, Susie. It hurts me more than I can say. And now she threatens to talk to them herself, forbid them the house

SUSIE. I think it's preying more and more on her mind that she can't go and be a nun.

PATRICK. I wish the nuns joy of her. She's trying to make this place a sort of convent. She's giving Ducky and Pet the hell of a life.

SUSIE. That's the very word they used to me to-night.

PATRICK. Did they? Dear, dear! And they're the best little girls that ever stepped. She's breaking their spirit.

SUSIE. I wouldn't say it's altogether broken yet. Still they'd be happier if she was out of it.

PATRICK. But how can she go? Sure I'm getting more helpless every day.

SUSIE. If you had a—a housekeeper.

PATRICK. I couldn't bear a strange woman around me.

SUSIE. Oh well, she needn't be altogether a stranger.

PATRICK. You're thinking of some old one like Nellie Daly?

SUSIE. I wasn't exactly thinking of Nellie.

PATRICK. Who have you in your mind then?

SUSIE. Oh, there's others besides Nellie.

PATRICK. I don't know who they are. Katie Burke? You wouldn't want me to have the like of her.

SUSIE. I wouldn't let her inside the house . . . the girls were telling me of the walk they had this afternoon.

PATRICK. Were they?

SUSIE. Yes. They walked up the Rocky Road.

PATRICK. Did they.

SUSIE. I don't know when I was that way last—not for ages.

PATRICK. I can tell you one time you were there. A May evening along with myself.

SUSIE. Was I?

PATRICK. Have you forgotten?

SUSIE. I think—I'm beginning to remember.

PATRICK. Do you remember Marian coming round the corner?

SUSIE. I think I do.

PATRICK. Ah, Susie, if she hadn't—

SUSIE. Yes, Paddy?

PATRICK. If she hadn't—oh, never mind.

SUSIE. If Marian hadn't come—what, Paddy?

PATRICK. Nothing.

SUSIE. We're such old friends, Paddy, that I'll tell you what would have happened if Marian hadn't come round the corner. You'd have asked me to marry you.

PATRICK [*in a low voice*]. I would.

SUSIE. And I'd have said yes.

PATRICK. Would you, Susie, would you? I'm glad to know that, though it's too late now. Maybe God sent Marian that day. If he hadn't, you'd been tied up now with a blind old man.

SUSIE. I'm going to be tied up in a week or ten days.

PATRICK. What? What are you saying?

SUSIE. I'm going to be married.

PATRICK. You're—? Who is it? Who's the damned—? Who is he?

SUSIE. Yourself, Paddy. [*He is too astonished to speak.*] Of course, if you've changed your mind since that day on the Rocky Road, say so and that's an end to it.

PATRICK [*feebly protesting*]. I'm old, I'm nearly blind, if the operation goes against me I'll be stone-blind.

SUSIE. You're only pushing fifty, I'll be forty next month. There's not a deal to choose between us in age.

PATRICK. You're ready to marry a blind man?

SUSIE. I'm ready to marry you.

PATRICK. Susie, my dear. Susie. Oh, God bless you, Susie, I could cry.

SUSIE. You're a dreadful foolish man, Paddy.

PATRICK. Give me your hand, Susie my dear. I suppose I'm too old for kissing and romancing, but I'll do this anyway.

[*He gropes for her hand, finds it and kisses it courteously.*]

SUSIE [*half crying*]. Don't, Paddy, don't. It's as if—as if you were making out I'm something wonderful, and I'm not. It's you that are wonderful.

[*She strokes his hand*]

PATRICK. We'll have the grand times, won't we, Susie?

SUSIE. We will.

PATRICK. And you'll look after me till I get my sight, and Marian will be free to go into the convent?

SUSIE. Yes.

PATRICK. But the children—what will they say?

SUSIE. What can they say?

PATRICK. It will be a great blow to them, a stepmother coming in on top of them. I'll have to break it to them very gently.

SUSIE. I think maybe I'd better do that.

PATRICK. Do you think they'd take it better from you? It'll be a terrible surprise to them.

SUSIE. It will. Leave them to me, Paddy. You tell Marian.

PATRICK. All right. But break it to them very gently. One good thing is, Marian will be delighted; we're pleasing one person besides ourselves, thank God.

[*MARIAN comes in with three cups of tea on a tray.*]

MARIAN. I made you a cup of tea, Susie.

SUSIE. Thank you, dear.

[*She takes it and spills a little.*]

MARIAN. Your hand is shaking. What ails you, Susie?

SUSIE. Oh, nothing. Nothing at all.

MARIAN. You're looking funny. Are you not feeling well?

SUSIE. I'm feeling grand.

MARIAN. Here's your tea, Father.

PATRICK. Leave it on the table. I'll have it later.

SUSIE. I think—I think I'll run up to the children for a minute. There's a little bit of news I want to give them. You

know what it is, Patrick, you can be telling Marian.

[*She goes out quickly, leaving the door open.*]

MARIAN [*getting up to shut it*]. Wisha, poor old Susie. It's a pity she never got married, isn't it, Father?

PATRICK. Ay.

MARIAN She's quite settling down into an old maid. Her nephew makes her seem quite an old woman.

PATRICK. Does he? The jackanapes

MARIAN. What was her news anyway?

PATRICK. Sit down beside me, I'll tell you.

MARIAN [*sitting*]. Well? You seem very solemn over it.

PATRICK. It's good news, Marian, the best you could hear. It's—Susie and I—we're—going to—be married!

[*Before MARIAN can recover from her astonishment and speak, the curtain falls.*]

ACT II

The girls' bedroom. A simple, pretty room with two beds in it. The beds lie side by side, their ends towards the audience. A small table is between them and a chair. There is a lighted lamp on the table, and by its light DUCKY is lying in bed reading. PET, before a mirror in her nightdress, is brushing her hair.

PET. Once Marian goes into the convent, I'm going up to Dublin to get a real Eton crop.

DUCKY [*deep in her book*]. H'm!

PET. And I'm going into pajamas—biscuit-colored ones. I hate these stuffy nightdresses.

DUCKY. I'm going to stick to nightdresses and I'm going to let my hair grow. You must look ahead.

PET. I don't believe long hair is coming back as quick as that.

DUCKY. Sure, God alone knows what the fashions will be by the time Marian is out of this. Maybe we'll be back to skirts with trails and leg-of-mutton sleeves.

PET. I have hopes of Susie.

DUCKY. I haven't.

PET. I felt to-night there was something in the air. I think Daddy is a bit fed up with things I wouldn't be a bit surprised if he asked her to-night to marry him. Didn't you hear him asking her to stay and talk to him?

DUCKY. There's nothing in that. Susie's

a wash-out. All this silly wait-til-you're-asked business!

PET. She's the only one who stands up to Marian . . . Did you see the beastly way Marian collared Pierce to-night and made him go off with her to the garden?

DUCKY. I saw it. Rotten. I know he'd far rather have stayed and talked to us. But that's her game, always. A spoil-sport, that's what she is.

PET. And of course, as she's going to be a nun, the men feel completely safe. It's really an awful handicap to us to have a sister going into a convent. We never get a look-in. Look at Charlie and Willy and Maurice O'Callaghan—they stick to Marian all the time, we can't get in a word edge-ways.

DUCKY. True for you. If she doesn't go into the convent soon, we'll die old maids.

PET. It's awful. And the dear Lord knows what they see in her; she's got a decent sort of a skin, not too bad a figure and nice hair, but that's about all. And the way she dresses—! She looks half a nun already.

DUCKY. Oliver O'Shaughnessy took my breath away the other day saying how nice-looking she was. I think the man's demented.

PET. And Dick raving another time about her cleverness. I'd like him to be living in the same house with her for a month and he'd change his tune. [*She gazes in the mirror.*] I wish to God I had a different class of a nose!

DUCKY. What sort do you want?

PET. I'm not sure. Any sort would be better than this . . . Ah sure, forget it, child, forget it!

[*She blows out the candles on the dressing-table, kicks off her slippers and makes for bed.*]

DUCKY. Have you said your prayers?

PET. Mind your own business. [*She settles into bed*] I do think he's rather attractive.

DUCKY. Who?

PET. The cat.

DUCKY. I suppose you mean Mr. Hegarty.

PET. I mean Pierce. He was calling me "Pet" before he'd finished. Did he call you "Ducky"?

DUCKY. No.

PET. Ah-ha!

DUCKY. You're welcome to him.

PET. Sour grapes.

DUCKY. Go to sleep. I want to read.

PET. Marian will catch you. What's the old book?

DUCKY. Never mind

PET. Some cheap, romantical nonsense, I'll be bound

DUCKY. It's not. It's "The First Violin," by Jessie Fothergill

PET. I know it. Tripe!

DUCKY. It's not.

PET. Put it up against "The Long Long Trail" and where is it?

DUCKY. All right. No one's asking you to read it.

[A silence. PET starts to laugh.]

DUCKY. What ails you?

PET. Mossy Burke and the widow.

DUCKY. Oh, wasn't it killing?

PET. Could she have him up for breach? Will he really have to marry her?

DUCKY. Oliver said he would

PET. The unfortunate poor man!

[They both laugh until the beds shake.]

DUCKY. Ssh! There's a step. [They listen] It's Ellen going up to her room. Let's have her in. I'm dying to know how she got on this evening.

PET. Oh yes. Let's call her.

PET and DUCKY [chanting in chorus].

Ellen! Ellen! Ellen! Ellen!

[ELLEN appears. A buxom servant, not in her first bloom. She is dressed for out-of-doors.]

ELLEN. What do you want?

DUCKY. Come in a minute. [ELLEN does so.] Shut the door. [She shuts it.]

ELLEN. What is it?

DUCKY. How did you get on to-night?

[ELLEN is silent.] Ah, go on. Tell us.

ELLEN. Too curious you are.

PET. Go on. You always tell us. Sit down here. Did Donough turn up? Did you meet him?

ELLEN. I did

[But she doesn't enlarge on the subject.]

PET. After Benediction, I suppose?

ELLEN. Yes.

DUCKY. Did you walk up the river as you said you would?

ELLEN. We did

PET. Ah, for goodness' sake, Ellen, don't be so close in yourself. Sit down and tell us. What sort of an evening had you?

ELLEN [with a sniff]. I've a toothache.

PET [sitting up in bed]. Ducky, she's done it again! Oh, Ellen, Ellen, after all we said to you!

ELLEN [half crying]. I know, I know.

PET. Who is it this time?

ELLEN. A grand young fellow I saw in the Chapel—Mrs. Moriarty's nephew's cousin I believe he is—Clarence his name

is. Isn't that a grand name? And what was Donough compared to him?

PET. So you chucked Donough?

ELLEN. At the waterfall I gave him the push, and we've parted forever.

DUCKY. Oh, Ellen! Isn't that the thing since Christmas?

ELLEN. It is.

DUCKY. You've a right to be ashamed of yourself

ELLEN. I know, I know.

PET. Did you give him back the ring?

ELLEN. Of course.

PET. Tch, tch! And we warned you, and we told you to be careful. And Donough was so steady and so nice, and a day will come, Ellen, when you'll have run through all the men in the town, and you'll be getting old and you'll think then of all the chances you've thrown away and of our warnings. But 'twill be too late!

ELLEN [desperately]. I know, I know. But what can I do? I was wild about Donough till I got engaged to him—I was wild about all the others. If I could only get married quick 'twould be all right, but while I'm waiting to be married some one else sails across my path and I think what a fool I'd be to tie myself for life to the man at my side. And oh, if you could see Clarence! He's lovely, and a couple of years younger than Donough.

DUCKY. Have you spoken to him?

ELLEN. Not yet. But I'm promised an intro' for to-morrow night.

PET. Tch, tch! You're hopeless, Ellen. There's no use talking to you

ELLEN. Not the least good in the world. It's what my poor father used to be saying—" 'Tis the far-off hills are green."

DUCKY. And I suppose Clarence is the greenest yet?

ELLEN. He is so.

PET. You'll be engaged to him in a week and you'll jilt him in favor of some other will-o'-the-wisp.

ELLEN. I suppose so.

DUCKY. And you're getting quicker and quicker. A year or two ago you'd stick to one man for six months or more. But now—three men since Christmas! I don't know what's going to become of you

ELLEN. I'm awful. I know I am.

[She puts her hand to her cheek.]

PET. Don't expect us to pity you for the toothache. It's your own fault.

ELLEN. I don't know how it is, but love always flies to me teeth. Every tooth in my head is aching. I won't sleep a wink to-night.

DUCKY. Serve you right. Look here

make it up with Donough to-morrow and let Clarence go his road

ELLEN. I couldn't If you could see him! He was dressed in dark navy, and that lovely sort of sleek shiny hair

DUCKY. He sounds awful common.

ELLEN. He's grand. Wonderful! Romantic!

PET. Ah, nonsense.

ELLEN. With a sort of sad, far-away look in his eyes.

PET. Oh, Ellen.

ELLEN. And a little halt in his step I suppose he did wonders in some war or other . . . I'll go and take off my hat now and make a sup of tea for the master and Miss Marian.

DUCKY. Aren't you ashamed of yourself?

ELLEN. I am. I wish I was dead—only for Clarence. Good night to you.

[*She goes out.*]

PET. Wasn't she a caution?

DUCKY [*meditatively*]. "The far-off hills are green." I suppose there's something in that saying. Things seem grand—until we have them.

PET. How do you mean?

DUCKY. Maybe when Marian goes into the convent things won't be as good for us as we think they'll be, and maybe the convent won't be all Marian expects.

PET. Ah, give over your sermonizing. I'm going to sleep.

DUCKY. Good night so.

PET. If Marian sees the light of that lamp she'll have your life.

DUCKY. Let her. I don't care Ellen's disturbed me. I couldn't sleep. And I'm just at the bit in the book when everything's going wrong.

PET. Skip on to the last page and see if they marry.

DUCKY. No, no. I couldn't do that.

[*There is a tap at the door.*]

PET. There's Marian. Now you're caught.

DUCKY. I don't care. Come in.

SUSIE [*putting her head in*]. Are you asleep, girls?

PET. Not a bit of us. Come in, Susie.

SUSIE [*coming in*]. I didn't want to go home without having a word with you.

PET. Sit in here between us. Wait, I'll move the lamp.

[*She puts it on the dressing-table. SUSIE sits between the two beds.*]

DUCKY. What's happening below, Susie?

SUSIE. Marian's talking to your father!

PET. Any fear of her coming up?

SUSIE. Not a bit, I think.

PET. Thank God . . . Well, Susie?

SUSIE. Well what?

PET. You know. Anything doing? Any news?

SUSIE. Oh! [*She begins to laugh.*]

DUCKY. What are you laughing at?

[*SUSIE goes on laughing*]

PET [*in excitement*]. She's done it, Ducky! I believe she's done it!

DUCKY. Have you, Susie? Have you?

SUSIE. I—

[*She goes off again into a fit of laughter*]

PET [*jumping till the bed shakes*]. She's done it! she's done it! she's done it!

DUCKY. She has! She has! She has!

Oh, have you, Susie?

SUSIE. I've come up to break something to you

DUCKY. Break? Merciful God, Pet, she's after refusing him!

PET. Not at all. She'd never dare face us if she had.

SUSIE. Your father says I must break it to you.

PET. Ah, give over your breaks. Tell us first, yes or no, are you going to marry him?

SUSIE. I am.

PET. Susie! You're a dote!

[*She flings herself out of bed and embraces her*]

DUCKY [*hopping out of bed too*]. Oh, Susie!

SUSIE. Into bed the two of you. You'll get your deaths.

PET. Not a death. She's going to marry my father! She's going to marry my father! [*She pirouettes round the room*]

SUSIE. Have conduct, Pet. Suppose Marian was to come in.

PET. Ah, let her.

[*But the girls get back into their beds*]

DUCKY. It seems too good to be true. How did you bring it about?

SUSIE. Oh, I did nothing to bring it about

PET. You were saying you'd leave it to God. Did you, Susie?

SUSIE. Yes.

DUCKY. I don't believe it.

PET. Did you sort of lead him on the way I advised you?

SUSIE. Not at all. He took the bit between his teeth; there was no holding him.

DUCKY and PET. Glory! Imagine Father!

DUCKY. How does he feel over it? Is he wild out with delight?

SUSIE. He's very pleased with himself. But he's thinking maybe you two will take it badly.

DUCKY Badly?

PET. The creature!

SUSIE I'm here to break the news very gently to you and to ask you to forgive him.

PET. Tch, tch! Well, aren't men very simple?

SUSIE. Much you know about them.

PET. I know that much . . . Oh, Susie, I'd love to have heard it. I suppose you'll never tell us what really happened?

SUSIE Never.

DUCKY. When'll you be married, Susie?

SUSIE I don't know. We didn't get on to that. Marian came in with tea.

PET Is he telling her now?

SUSIE I suppose so.

DUCKY She'll be dying down with delight.

PET. She can go off to Mount Vincent now, there's nothing to stop her. Oh, Susie, you will be married soon, won't you?

SUSIE. The sooner the better as far as I'm concerned

PET. Will you have bridesmaids, Susie?

SUSIE. At my age? Have sense, Pet.

DUCKY. Oh, for God's sake, don't go in for one of them quiet weddings. Sure, what's the use of a wedding unless it's plastered over with bridesmaids and rice and champagne and jollification?

PET. We could be bridesmaids and Pierce could be the best man.

DUCKY. And you could leave for the honeymoon in Pierce's motor-car to catch the boat at Dun Laoghaire "The honeymoon will be spent on the Continent"—that always reads well.

PET. What sort of a going-away dress will you have?

DUCKY. Pale brown, Susie, and a small rose-colored hat. I adore rose and brown.

SUSIE. Do you know, girls, I've not given one of those things a thought yet.

PET. You haven't!

SUSIE. No.

PET. Glory! Isn't that extraordinary? I suppose you're thinking—you're just thinking of Daddy?

SUSIE. Yes.

PET [*sobered*]. Well!

DUCKY [*sobered*]. I'm awfully glad about this, Susie. I am indeed. There's nothing I'd like better.

PET. Nor I.

SUSIE. I know, I know. You're two darling girls. I'll try and be good to you, I'll do my best by you.

PET. We're easy to manage, Susie, we are indeed. But we must be led, not driven.

SUSIE. I see.

DUCKY. We want a bit of humoring. I mean, there's times when I'm not inclined for book-keeping and shorthand and all that, and then it's no use forcing me.

SUSIE. I see

PET. And you mustn't be always at me about scales.

SUSIE. Sure I don't care if I never hear another scale in my life.

PET. That's the best news yet. You're a dote, Susie.

SUSIE Whisht! That's the tap of your daddy's stick.

[*They are silent. PATRICK and MARIAN come in, PATRICK is rather solemn. MARIAN a little exalted.*]

SUSIE. Sit here, Patrick.

[*He sits between the beds.*]

PATRICK. My dear children! Susie has told you?

PET and DUCKY She has.

PATRICK You'll have to forgive me. I know that no one can ever again be the same to you as your poor mother, but in a little while you'll be out in the world, and Marian, of course, will be gone from us and I'd be very lonely. Susie and I have been good friends this many and a long year and—you'll have to forgive your selfish old father.

PET and DUCKY. We do

PATRICK Of course I know all this is a terrible surprise to you, the last thing in the world you could ever expect to happen.

DUCKY. It took my breath away.

PET. You could have knocked me down with a feather when Susie broke the news

PATRICK. I know . . . I know. You're good little girls to take it so well. One grand thing is, it'll free Marian. I won't be standing between her and the convent any longer.

DUCKY. Isn't that splendid!

PET Aren't you delighted, Marian?

MARIAN. I am indeed. But I feel sort of bewildered at the suddenness of it all I haven't kissed you, Susie; I haven't wished you all the happiness in the world. [*She rises, goes to her and kisses her.*] God bless you, Susie May the two of you be very happy.

SUSIE. Thank you, Marian.

[*MARIAN goes back to her place.*]

PATRICK. To-morrow you could go and see the Mother Superior in Mount Vincent, couldn't you, Marian?

MARIAN. The Mother Superior?

PATRICK She'd tell you how soon you'd be likely to be able to begin.

PET. I suppose you could be off in a week or ten days

MARIAN Week or ten days? [*Smiling sedately.*] I can hardly get off as quick as that. Of course I'll have to wait and see Father's operation well over.

PET. What?

DUCKY. Marian!

PATRICK Sure, won't Susie be able to look after that job?

MARIAN It wouldn't be nice, Father, to expect her to do the like of that before she was married to you.

PATRICK. But—but—sure, Susie, you'll marry me, won't you, without waiting for the operation?

SUSIE. I will, to be sure, Patrick. I'll marry you next week if you like.

PET. Hurrah!

MARIAN. Oh . . . I didn't understand that. I thought, of course, the whole thing depended on how the operation turned out.

PATRICK. Not at all.

DUCKY Susie doesn't mind a little thing like that, do you, Susie?

SUSIE Not a bit in the world.

MARIAN. I see . . . I see . . . That's very good of you, Susie. But I don't think it's fair to ask it of you.

SUSIE. Why not?

MARIAN Well, I'd like Father to get married with his eyes open.

SUSIE That's rather a queer thing to say, Marian.

MARIAN. I don't mean it in any queer way. When I'm in the convent there isn't any one in the world I'd prefer before yourself to be with Father. All I mean is, that I don't like that idea of your marrying him and he half blind. What will people say?

PATRICK. Well then, I don't care a damn what people say. I want to marry Susie and she's ready to marry me, blind and all, and that's all that matters.

MARIAN. I see . . . I think it's rash.

PATRICK. Of course it is. All marriages are rash.

PET. They'd be no fun if they weren't.

MARIAN. And then it's so awkward your nephew being with you now.

SUSIE. What's awkward about it?

MARIAN. Of course you'll live at your place, won't you, till the children are educated and I'm out of this?

SUSIE, PET and DUCKY. What? What? What d'you mean?

PATRICK. What are you talking about, Marian?

MARIAN. There's so little room here, Father, and Susie, of course, will like to

have a house to herself. She's been accustomed to that for years. This place won't be a real home for the two of you till the children and I are out of it.

PATRICK. But won't the nuns take you in at once?

MARIAN. I suppose they would. But I must think of the children. I couldn't go till they're educated and out in the world.

PET. Till we're educated?

DUCKY. Do you mean to say you're not going into the convent right away?

MARIAN. How can I?

PET. What's stopping you?

MARIAN. You—and Dorothea.

PET. How am I stopping you?

MARIAN. Your practising. Who's to look after that if I'm not here? Susie hates the sound of a piano.

SUSIE. I do not. But I hate scales.

MARIAN. And Anna's scales are the important thing at the moment. Sister Mary Bridget says that if she doesn't—

PET. Oh, shut up about Sister Mary Bridget. Look, I will, Marian, I promise

I'll practise two hours every day; I will, Marian, I will indeed.

MARIAN [*smiling maternally*]. I couldn't trust you . . . And Dorothea's book-keeping!

DUCKY. I'll work my fingers to the bone. I'll take correspondence classes.

[*MARIAN, smiling, shakes her head.*]

PATRICK. We'd all help to keep their nose to the grindstone, Marian.

MARIAN. I'm sure you would at first, Father, but it wouldn't last long. You're too soft with them. And I must think of the children before everything, before the convent even. But if you're really set on marrying Susie at once, maybe Susie could take you in at her place—if her nephew wasn't too much in the way.

SUSIE. Oh, it's a big house. Pierce would be no bother.

MARIAN. 'Twould be only for a year or two, Susie.

DUCKY. A year or two!

[*PET groans.*]

SUSIE. What do you say, Patrick?

PATRICK. I'd be very content at your place, Susie. You've a grand lovely house. After all, I've no feeling for this house; we're only in it a matter of five years.

SUSIE. Very well so. I think that's a good idea of yours, Marian. Your father and I will get married as soon as can be—very quietly—and he'll come up and live at my place. I'll be able to make him very comfortable up there.

PET [*with a wail*]. Susie, are you deserting us?

SUSIE. Not at all I'll only be the other end of the road.

DUCKY You're thinking of nothing in the world but your own happiness

PET And after all you owe us

SUSIE I don't owe you a thing.

PET Oh, Susie! And it was our idea.

SUSIE What was?

DUCKY. If we hadn't told you to lead him on—

PET And not to go on leaving it to God—

SUSIE. Shut your mouths the pair of you. Don't mind them, Patrick. They're getting a little too free and easy in themselves Marian's right, they want a firmer hand over them than yours or mine.

PATRICK. I don't know in the world what they're saying

SUSIE. It's as well you shouldn't.

PET [*to DUCKY*] She's deserted us. She's gone over to the other side—lock, stock, and barrel.

DUCKY. She has. God forgive you, Susie.

SUSIE He will.

MARIAN. Well, is all that settled, Father? You'll marry Susie whenever you like and go up to her place, and I'll stay on here with the girls?

PATRICK. That suits me all right.

SUSIE. A most satisfactory conclusion. I don't think anything could have turned out better.

PET [*wildly*]. No, no, no! It's wicked of us to be standing between Marian and her vocation; it's not fair to us to ask us to do such a thing, is it, Ducky?

DUCKY [*solemnly*]. I couldn't endure it, Father, I could never endure it It would come between me and my work I'd never get a long tot right knowing that I was keeping Marian from Mount Vincent!

PATRICK. Dear, dear. I don't know what to say, 'tis difficult to please every one. I want to do what's right by you all, I don't want to think too much of what I want myself. I think it's for Marian to decide, she has the clearest head of any one here.

MARIAN. Well, I'm content with the arrangement. I wouldn't like, Father, to go away yet, not till the children are out in the world. It's as if God had laid a task on me when mother died, and it would be shirking it to throw it up until it was finished. A few years more in this house—what are they?—not so very much I'll stay, I'll look after the children, I'll do

my duty by them. That's settled now and no more words about it

[*PET and DUCKY groan*]

PATRICK. You're a good girl, Marian. God bless you

SUSIE. I wouldn't doubt you.

MARIAN I'm sure I'm doing the right thing. It's as if—as if God wasn't ready for me yet

[*There is a knock at the door*]

MARIAN Who can that be? Come in

ELLEN [*putting her head in*]. Mr. Mahony's back again!

MARIAN Harold? What for?

ELLEN I dunno. But he's wanting to see you—very particularly.

MARIAN I'll go down. Is he in the dining-room?

ELLEN. I left him in the hall.

MARIAN Bring him into the dining-room and make some more tea.

ELLEN. I will not. I'm going to bed. Me teeth are raging. [*She goes*]

MARIAN. What on earth can Harold want at this hour? I'll have to go down

SUSIE. We'll all go. [*She rises*] Good night, girls

PET I'll never forgive you.

SUSIE. That won't come between me and my night's rest.

MARIAN. Come, Father.

PATRICK [*rising*]. Good night, children. I've got you the best stepmother in the world.

DUCKY. So you think.

[*There is a knock at the door.*]

MARIAN. Come in.

HAROLD [*outside, not opening the door*] It's me—Harold!

MARIAN. I know. Come in.

HAROLD [*opening a crack of the door*]. Ellen told me to come up. I've—I've got something to tell you.

MARIAN [*going to the door and opening it wide*]. For goodness' sake, don't be so shy, Harold. The children are in bed, but what matter?

HAROLD [*coming in unwillingly*]. I have some news for you.

MARIAN. And we have some for you. Most exciting news. We'll have it with our tea

HAROLD I don't want any tea. I'd rather tell you now.

MARIAN. Yes. What is it?

[*He doesn't speak.*]

PATRICK. Has anything happened, Harold?

SUSIE. Is it bad news?

HAROLD. Driving out of town—I met Doctor O'Grady—

MARIAN Yes—yes——?

HAROLD. He was looking for me, to give me a message.

MARIAN. Who from?

HAROLD. The—asylum!

SUSIE. About your wife?

HAROLD. Yes, about Molly—poor Molly. [*He stops, unable to go on.*]

PATRICK. I hope it was good news he brought you, Harold.

HAROLD. Maybe the best, the best for Molly, anyway. She's—she died this afternoon, quite suddenly; the doctor at the asylum telephoned to Doctor O'Grady and asked him to give me the message; being Sunday there were no telegrams.

MARIAN. Oh, Harold!

PATRICK. God rest her soul!

SUSIE. The poor creature!

HAROLD. I thought I'd like you to know at once, you're the best friends I have I'll—I'll go home now. My poor little Molly.

[*He breaks down; he stumbles toward the door.*]

MARIAN [*going to him*]. Harold!

[*They both go out.*]

SUSIE. Well, well, isn't that a terrible thing? Poor Molly Molloy! I remember well the day she got married and how gay she was, and to think that it was all to end like this.

PATRICK. The poor little girl! And how pretty she was. But there was always a mad streak in those Molloyes from Ballysilla.

SUSIE. There was. Her own father warned Harold against it. Eight long years she's been shut up.

PATRICK. And I believe never a chance of her getting better. Look at it how you will, 'tis a merciful release.

SUSIE. Harold will feel strange now, free after all these years. God knows 'twas an unnatural way for him to be, married and yet single as it were.

PATRICK. God help him, you'd have to pity him.

SUSIE. Maybe I'd better go after him. Perhaps he'd spend the night at my place instead of going out to his own lonely house.

PATRICK. Yes, indeed. 'Twould be kind of you, Susie, to make him spend the night in town.

SUSIE. Pierce would be company for him—he's very cheery. I'll go. Good night, children.

PET and DUCKY Good night

PATRICK. Give me a hand to my room, Susie.

SUSIE. Come on.

[*She guides him to the door.*]

PATRICK Good night, girls.

PET and DUCKY. Good night, Daddy

[*PATRICK and SUSIE go out*]

DUCKY. My God, isn't that an awful thing?

PET. The poor man! Didn't he look deathly pale?

DUCKY. Marriage is a great lottery after all.

PET. It is indeed. I don't think I could ever venture. Ah, I could, I suppose.

DUCKY. Do you think there's any fear of this scaring Daddy and Susie?

PET. Why should it?

DUCKY. Suppose Susie went mad on the honeymoon.

PET. Not a fear of it. Didn't you hear her saying there was always a mad streak in those Molloyes? There was never a wild strain in the Tynans.

DUCKY. I hope you're right. Anyway, as far as we're concerned, what good is the marriage?

PET. Oh, no good at all. We're worse off than we were before. As long as Father was here there was some one to stand between us and Marian; now we've nothing.

DUCKY. How long was this she said?

PET. A year or two.

DUCKY. A year or two! That's a lifetime!

PET. I'll run away.

DUCKY. You'll be caught.

PET. I won't. I'll change my name. I'll live in Dublin or New York. I'll become very famous.

DUCKY. How?

PET. I'm not sure.

DUCKY. Where'll you get the money?

PET. I have some saved and I'm certain I could coax a pound out of Daddy. Maybe I'll win the sweep at the convent bazaar—I dreamed I had the winning number—then I'd be independent for life.

DUCKY. I'll stick on here; sure I don't want to live anywhere but here. I'd be content if only Marian was out of it. Ssh! Some one's coming.

MARIAN [*opening the door*]. Father! Oh, where is he?

PET. Gone to his bed. He got Susie to give him a hand to his door.

MARIAN. How early he's gone.

PET. I think he's worn out. Getting engaged at his age must be very trying.

DUCKY. Has Harold gone?

MARIAN. Yes, with Susie.

DUCKY. Such a night as it's been all round!

PET. Marriages—

DUCKY. And deaths—

PET. Daddy engaged—

DUCKY. Poor Molly Mahony dead—

PET. Susie's nephew arrived—

DUCKY. Ellen's engagement off—ah, Marian, isn't life a checkered patchwork after all? I often lie here and wonder is it worth going on with.

MARIAN [*busying herself tidying the room, putting the girls' clothes away*]. What nonsense, Ducky. Too many romantic novels you're reading. There's nothing much to grieve about in Molly Mahony's death. She was a burden to herself and a burden to poor Harold. Now he's a free man.

PET. Yes indeed, free to marry again.

MARIAN. Marry again? Oh, he'll hardly do that.

PET. Why not?

MARIAN. Well—indeed, as you say, why not?

DUCKY. I'd never have the nerve.

PET. The nerve for what? Marry Harold?

DUCKY. I mean, if I was Harold and one wife went mad on me I'd never chance another.

PET. If I was passionately in love I'd chance anything.

MARIAN. Her going mad had nothing to do with Harold.

DUCKY. I wonder!

PET. Sure he's enough to drive any one daft.

MARIAN. You're two silly little girls and don't know what you're talking about. Harold Mahony's a most intelligent young man and comes of most respectable people; his family have been in the place for generations; his uncle on the mother's side was a bishop.

PET. A bishop? I never heard that.

MARIAN. In America—but he's dead. The Mahonys themselves were always great people for the Church, there are two cousins and an uncle priests in Connaught.

PET. 'Tis a pity Harold himself didn't go for a priest.

DUCKY. He'd preach grand dismal sermons.

MARIAN. Well, he was the only son and he had the place to look forward to, a nice farm just the right size, neither too big nor too small. The house is old, to be sure, but it's large and well-built—none of your modern ramshackle things—and the garden is grand, if he'd only put a few strands of barbed wire on the walls. I

don't think Harold's likely to marry again, but if the fancy took him no young woman could afford to turn him down lightly.

PET. Maybe you're right . . . You can have him, Ducky, I'll stick to my old love—Pierce!

MARIAN. That same Pierce is no addition to the place, I wish he'd settled anywhere but here. But, girls, I don't like you to be forever talking of men and marriage. You are too young entirely for that sort of thing. You shouldn't have a thought beyond your lessons. There'll be plenty of time later on for thinking of marriage and the like. Do you see?

PET and DUCKY [*meehly*]. We see.

MARIAN. That's right. It's only for your good I'm talking. Good night now; I'll put out the lamp.

DUCKY. Leave it for five minutes. I'll put it out in five minutes, Marian, I swear I will. But I couldn't sleep for a bit; I feel all in a whirl after the night's doings.

MARIAN. Very well. Now I trust you are not to keep it lighting long.

DUCKY. You have my word for it.

[*MARIAN is going*]

PET. Now that I come to think of it, Kate Moriarty always had a soft spot in her heart for Harold.

MARIAN [*stopping at the door*]. Kate Moriarty? Nonsense!

PET. It's no nonsense at all. Do you remember that party at Susie's, Ducky, a month or two ago? We were all making game of him and she said he wasn't so bad.

DUCKY. I remember. And she got as red as red and tried to pass it off with a laugh.

MARIAN. Poor Kate! What nonsense! I don't mean it's nonsense for her to have a good word for Harold, but it's nonsense to think he'd ever look at her or consider her for a minute in the light of a wife.

PET. Why wouldn't he? They're about the one age.

DUCKY. And she's due to get her aunt's money, and it's well known the aunt's failing; she'll hardly see Christmas.

MARIAN [*laughing*]. Kate Moriarty! Such an idea!

DUCKY. She's a good manager, too; she'd run the farm in great style.

MARIAN. Would she indeed? I grant you she can manage a few hens in a backyard, but I'd be sorry to see her turned loose on Harold's fine farm; she'd bankrupt him in two years. But we're talking rubbish. I know Harold better than any one in the town, and I know that he

wouldn't have Kate Moriarty if she was the last woman on earth. Good night now.

[*She goes*]

DUCKY [*with a sigh*]. It's very hard to please Marian. Crosser and crosser she's getting. The way she took you up about Kate and Harold!

PET. Of course in a way she's right, she does know Harold better than any one else; he comes to see her every week and talks to her for hours, and she—Ducky, I've just thought of something awful!

DUCKY. What is it?

PET. We all know that Harold's been dying down about Marian these years and years?

DUCKY. Well, what of it?

PET. What's to hinder him marrying her now?

DUCKY. Sure, isn't she going to be a nun?

PET. She might sacrifice herself.

DUCKY. Sacrifice? What do you mean?

PET. The way she sacrificed herself for us to-night. If he got sort of passionate about her and she took it into her head that it was her duty to look after him—

DUCKY. And save him from Kate Moriarty—

PET. Marian'd love to look after a big place like his.

DUCKY. And put barbed wire on the garden wall.

PET. Yes. Isn't she always talking about her duty? It's come across me like a flash that she'll think it's her duty to marry him and bring him in here on the top of us.

DUCKY. Oh, wouldn't that be terrible? Harold as a brother-in-law! Goodness knows we've suffered enough as it is. God would never do the like of that to us.

PET. He might.

DUCKY. Harold wouldn't come and live here, anyway.

PET. No, I've thought of something worse. The two of us would be carted out to his ugly old house and we'd be stuck there in the country never seeing a soul or having a bit of life, not a sound from morning to night, only the horses neighing and the calves roaring and the ducks quacking—

DUCKY. Accompanied by your scales and the scrape of my pen hour after hour. Ah, 'tis an impossible thought. Marian couldn't swing around like that.

PET. I don't feel I can trust her, not after the way she went on about Kate to-night.

DUCKY. If she could only become a

nun before Harold begins to look around for another wife. We must pray hard for her to become a nun quick. I'll make a novena about it.

PET. I'll make two.

DUCKY. You're terrible, Pet, the things you think of.

PET. Mark my words, that's what'll happen. I've sort of second sight.

DUCKY [*contemptuously*]. You haven't.

PET. Well, mark my words, wait and see. I'm going to quench the light.

[*She does so*]

DUCKY. I won't close an eye to-night after what you've said . . . Ah, it's impossible. She couldn't give up the convent, she couldn't, not for all the Harolds in the world.

PET. Mark my words. Good night.

DUCKY. Good night.

CURTAIN

ACT III

A few weeks later. The dining-room again, about six o'clock in the evening. The table is laid for an elaborate tea, there are six places at it. The side-table has dishes of meat and sweets on it. MARIAN and the two girls—the girls very smartly dressed but with aprons: MARIAN as plainly dressed as ever—are putting the final touches to the table. They are pulling out chairs when the curtain rises.

MARIAN [*directing, as usual*]. Father will sit here with Susie on his right. I'll sit at the other side of Father. Which of you wants to sit next Susie?

PET. Where does Pierce sit?

MARIAN. Oh . . . I suppose he'll have to go beside me.

PET. Couldn't he sit between Ducky and me?

DUCKY. Yes, let's put him there.

MARIAN. No, 'twouldn't be manners to put him anywhere but beside me—goodness knows, I don't want him. You can sit the other side of him, Ducky, you're the elder, and then Pet between you and Susie. That will be right.

DUCKY. I can't imagine why you don't like him, Marian.

MARIAN. I can't imagine why you do.

PET. Every one in the town likes him.

MARIAN. Then I don't think much of the town's taste.

DUCKY What have you against him?

MARIAN I just don't like him and I never will, and that's all about it. How Susie ever came to have such a nephew—! However, I can be civil to him for one night.

PET Will I strike up the Wedding March when they come in?

MARIAN. Indeed you won't—making a show of us all.

PET. I'd love to, and I know it off.

DUCKY. I'm sick hearing you play it. What time is it, Marian?

MARIAN Just gone six.

DUCKY. Pierce swore he'd have them here on the stroke of six.

PET Don't you know very well that once Susie gets her nose into Grafton Street she'll be there till the shops shut?

MARIAN. What on earth could she want to buy after the stacks of things she got for her wedding?

PET Sure she needn't buy anything, just look around and turn things over.

MARIAN [*surveying the table*]. Everything's right now, I think I suppose Ellen has the kettle on?

DUCKY. I think so, but she's very low in her mind. She's after having a coolness with Clarence.

MARIAN Clarence? Who's Clarence?

DUCKY. Her latest boy.

MARIAN Ellen and her boys! They're none of your business, Ducky. I wish you wouldn't be talking to Ellen about things like that.

DUCKY. Sure I love hearing how Ellen's campaigns are getting on. The last fella sounds like a killing chap.

MARIAN. Ducky! "Fellas" and "chaps"! I wish you wouldn't be so vulgar.

DUCKY. Well, we're not all going into convents like you.

MARIAN. Run upstairs, both of you, and take off your aprons and wash your hands and tidy your hairs.

PET. Right-o!

[*They start for the door and meet OLIVER and DICK coming in.*]

DICK and OLIVER. Good evening, Marian. Good evening, girls.

MARIAN [*not at all glad to see them*]. Good evening.

DUCKY and PET [*delighted*]. Good evening, Oliver; good evening, Dick.

DICK. Has he come yet?

MARIAN. No. Off with you, girls.

[*The girls go.*]

OLIVER. We thought we'd just drop in to give him a bit of a welcome.

MARIAN. I see. They maybe won't be

here for quite a good while. Pierce took his motor to Dublin to meet them and bring them back. Goodness knows when that will be, it's not like a train.

OLIVER. I know, I know. Ah, sure, we don't mind waiting. [*He sits*]

DICK For a wonder I've nothing to do this evening. [*He sits*]

MARIAN. They'll be dead tired, I'm sure. Not up for much talk or anything.

OLIVER. Now don't mind us, Marian. I know what's on your mind is that we'll stay to supper and upset all your nice little arrangements, but I promise you we won't. If Dick attempts to stay I'll take him by the scruff of the neck and throw him out.

DICK. Oh you will, will you?

MARIAN I don't like to seem unfriendly, but the table's so small—just holds six.

OLIVER. I know, I know. My sister's the same. She'll make a meal for twenty people and think nothing of it, but if I chance to bring twenty-one, I don't hear the end of it for a week.

DICK. All women are like that. My mother's ditto. But she has to know the name, age, and pedigree of every one I bring to the house—and she wants a full three days' notice of their coming.

OLIVER. Does she get it?

DICK. Never.

MARIAN. Oh, I know you men think meals make themselves—like in the fairy stories. Ah, Oliver, like a good man, don't smoke your pipe in here.

OLIVER. Sorry, Marian.

[*He puts it away.*]

DICK. Harold Mahony is back. I saw him in the street a few minutes ago.

MARIAN. Oh, is he? I haven't seen him. How is he?

DICK. Well, I wasn't speaking to him, but he didn't look much cheered up. I don't think his little trip did him any good.

OLIVER. Sure Harold would hate to cheer up.

DICK. He's a free man now, and I don't think a little smile would do him any great harm.

OLIVER. I'll give you five bob the first day he smiles.

DICK. Is that a bet?

OLIVER. It is.

DICK. I'll hold you to it.

MARIAN. Poor Harold! he's gone through a deal. Doctor O'Grady was saying after the funeral that he should "

away for a month at least. But he couldn't find any one to go away with him.

OLIVER. I'm not surprised at that. [*HAROLD comes in*] Oh, talk of the devil!

DICK. I was just saying that I saw you were back.

HAROLD. Yes, I arrived this morning good evening, Marian. [*He shakes hands.*]

MARIAN. How are you, Harold?

HAROLD. Good evening, Mr Delany; good evening, Mr O'Shaughnessy.

OLIVER and DICK. Evening, Harold.

MARIAN. Sit down, Harold [*He sits.*] Well, how are you?

HAROLD [*gloomily*] Oh, I'm all right. A touch of neuritis, but I suppose one must expect that

MARIAN. That'll wear off now that you're home again.

HAROLD. I doubt it.

OLIVER. Where were you, Harold?

HAROLD. I've been in Connemara for the last fortnight.

OLIVER. D'you like it?

HAROLD. It's beautifully desolate.

DICK. I suppose it rained? Connemara's the devil for rain.

HAROLD. Yes, it rained every day. I didn't mind.

DICK. No, you wouldn't. Were you fishing?

HAROLD. Oh no. I never fish.

OLIVER. The nearest I ever got to Connemara was Galway Races—of course you were too late for them.

HAROLD. Was I? . . . I hear your father's married, Marian.

MARIAN. Yes, indeed, and went off for ten days of a honeymoon. But we're expecting them back to-night, any minute now. They're to have tea here and then go to Susie's place. They're to live there, you know.

HAROLD. So I heard. Where did they go for the honeymoon?

MARIAN. The Isle of Man.

HAROLD [*with a sigh*]. Ah!

DICK. 'Tis a pity you didn't go to some place the like of that, Harold, some place that would have cheered you up a bit. Them old bogs and mountains aren't the thing for you at all. A bit of a band and a jolly crowd and nigger minstrels—that's what you want. A touch of Black-pool would have done you all the good in the world.

HAROLD. Would it?

OLIVER. I got a killing card from Patrick last night—was I showing it to you, Dick?

DICK. You were. 'Tis one of the best I ever seen.

OLIVER [*fishes it out of his pocket*]. Look, Harold, 'twill make you die laughing.

HAROLD [*examining it*]. I don't understand it

OLIVER. Don't you see, that enormous porpoise of a woman—that's his wife—and the scraggy old thing, that's his mother-in-law, and—

HAROLD. I understand it now [*No smile lights his face.*] It's very vulgar.

[*He returns it*]

OLIVER. I suppose it is vulgar in a way but— Here, Marian, you look at it.

[*He hands it to her*]

HAROLD. Don't bother with it, Marian. It's very low.

MARIAN. Oh, I must see it now that you've all seen it. [*She looks at it*] Yes, it is vulgar—but it's awfully funny.

[*And she starts to laugh, DICK and OLIVER joining in. HAROLD sits mute*]

DICK. Let's have another squint at it. [*He gets it.*]

OLIVER. Isn't it a terrible thing that poor Patrick can't have seen it? Susie must have chosen it for him. Did you get any cards from them, Marian?

MARIAN. Lots. But they were all scenery.

OLIVER. Oh, sure scenery's no good.

MARIAN. How did you find things when you got home, Harold?

HAROLD. Oh, just as usual. The house is filthy.

MARIAN. Tch, tch!

HAROLD. And while I was away the cat had kittens—that's the third time since Christmas.

MARIAN. I hope they're nice kittens.

HAROLD. Horrid.

OLIVER. Was I ever telling you, Dick, of the cat that— Oh, well, maybe it's not a story to tell before Marian. Come into the garden and have a smoke, I'm famished for a pipe. We'll wait there, Marian, till your father comes.

MARIAN. Very well.

OLIVER. Come on, Dick, We'll see you later, Harold. [*They start to go OLIVER, as they go through the door.*] Well, as I was going to tell you, there was an old fellow one time had a big tom-cat, and—

[*The door closes on the rest of the story.*]

HAROLD. I should be going. I don't want to intrude on your party. I only came in to let you know that I was back.

MARIAN. You wouldn't be intruding, Harold. Father is always glad to see you making merry I won't be any addition to your party.

MARIAN. Don't say that, Harold

HAROLD. It's the truth I'm a sort of wet blanket, Marian; I know I am.

MARIAN. You should try and cheer up, Harold, and put all that's past behind you. Poor Molly's at peace now and that's all over and done with, and there's no use fretting over what can't be helped.

HAROLD. I know. But I keep on fretting all the same.

MARIAN. You mustn't. You must start a new life for yourself now.

HAROLD. What have I to live for? Memories of poor Molly, dreams of you.

MARIAN. Put me out of your head.

HAROLD. I can't. It's just part of the bad luck that has dogged me all my life that I should find myself in love with a girl who's going to be a nun.

MARIAN. Oh, but I'm not going to be a nun, Harold.

HAROLD. What? What are you saying, Marian?

MARIAN. I'm not going to be a nun.

HAROLD. You're not—? What's happened? Has your father stopped you? Is it on account of his marriage? Or is it the children?

MARIAN. No one has stopped me—except my own common-sense.

HAROLD. I don't understand. What do you mean?

MARIAN. I mean, my eyes have been opened. I see now that what I called my vocation was all girlish romantical non-sense. A month in the convent would have knocked sense into me, but I don't even need that now. I pretended to myself that I was eating my heart out to be away in Mount Vincent, but I wasn't. The truth is I love managing a house and contriving and planning and making people do this thing and that thing. Sometimes I used to get a half-suspicion that life would be very dull in the convent, but then I'd think of Saint Teresa and the grand time she had reforming everything. Then there came the surprise of Father's marriage and the way was clear for me. I was miserable until I remembered the children and that I must stay and look after them. But that was only a make-up. The truth was that I couldn't bear to be anywhere that I wasn't my own mistress—and as to Saint Teresa, sure she was a great saint

and a woman in a million. All I am is a driving, managing, worldly woman.

HAROLD. I'm dumbfounded! I can't believe it! How can you go back on everything now?

MARIAN. I must. I'll look a fool, I suppose, but what matter? Better late than never, as they say.

HAROLD. What does your father think of this?

MARIAN. He doesn't know. No one knows yet, only you. I'm afraid of what the children will say; they hate me—no, they don't, but they don't like me for driving them so hard. I thought it didn't matter what they thought of me, as I'd be out of it soon and they'd live to thank me. But now, if I'm not going away—I declare I don't know what's best to be done.

HAROLD. It's a terrible upset.

MARIAN. It is indeed. Ah, well, I've always you to fall back on.

HAROLD. Me?

MARIAN. I'm very fond of you, Harold.

HAROLD. You always told me you never cared for me—that way.

MARIAN. Nor do I. But I might.

HAROLD. I see . . . I think you shouldn't be in too big a hurry to give up the convent.

MARIAN. Do you?

HAROLD. Take your time. I expect this is a little idea of yours that will pass away—a thing of nothing.

MARIAN. If you knew how contented I feel. It's as if I had had a sort of little toothache at the back of my mind all these years and now I've had the tooth out.

HAROLD. I see . . .

MARIAN. It's grand to feel free to think of—other things.

HAROLD. Ay . . . ay . . .

[*He gets up and walks unhappily about the room. MARIAN watches him with secret amusement.*]

MARIAN [*playing with him*]. Sometimes I think that the best thing I could do is marry you at once.

HAROLD [*really startled*]. What?

MARIAN. I like you very much and they say the surest love is the sort that comes after marriage.

HAROLD. But—but I couldn't marry a woman who didn't love me.

MARIAN. Well, maybe I do love you. It's very hard to tell the difference between love and like.

HAROLD. It isn't. They're two entirely

different things. You'd be terribly unhappy if you married me just liking me

MARIAN I can't imagine being unhappy married to you, Harold

HAROLD. I've—I've not a great deal of money. I couldn't give you the life you're used to; the farming went to pieces this year.

MARIAN. Yes, you want a capable woman at your back

HAROLD. You've no idea how bad-tempered and cantankerous I am—and I get terrible black moods of depression, Marian

MARIAN. I know—from living alone.

HAROLD. And of course, we couldn't get married for ages, it wouldn't be respectful to poor Molly

MARIAN. That's a pity. What I'd love would be a run-away marriage

HAROLD Marian!

MARIAN [*bursting out laughing*] You're an old silly, Harold. You're as romantic and nonsensical about me as I was about the convent. I never believed you were as broken-hearted about me as you made out to be, and I was right For now when there's a chance of your mending your poor heart you won't take it.

HAROLD. That's unfair. I'm surprised, upset. That's all.

MARIAN. You wanted me as long as you couldn't get me. "The far-off hills are green"

HAROLD. I'm very fond of you.

MARIAN. Of course you are, but you don't want to marry me.

HAROLD. You've no right to say that [*He hiccups.*] Damn! Excuse me.

MARIAN Ah, be honest, Harold Tell yourself the truth. I've had courage enough to give up the convent; let you have the courage to jilt me.

HAROLD [*hiccuping gently from time to time*]. I don't like the way you're putting it.

MARIAN. That's because you're so romantic. Would you rather I refused you? I will if you like. Then you can tell every one and have a broken heart for the rest of your life

HAROLD. You're laughing at me!

MARIAN. Of course I am. I wish to goodness I could make you laugh a bit at yourself. I've been laughing at myself for the last ten days, and I feel a different woman.

HAROLD. Maybe I've been a bit of a fool.

MARIAN [*cheerfully*]. Of course you have. A big bit.

HAROLD. But look at all I've been through! There was poor Molly, and you were so kind, the only friend I had And I used to look at you and think and dream . . . and then go back to my lonely house—

MARIAN. I know, and your dying fire, and the evenings getting darker and darker You're slipping into the old thing again . . . Come on, Harold; propose to me

HAROLD. No

MARIAN Go on.

HAROLD I won't.

MARIAN I promise I'll refuse you.

HAROLD I wonder!

MARIAN. Honor bright.

HAROLD. I couldn't trust you.

MARIAN. There! Out of your own mouth you're condemned. Ah, go home, Harold, and get some sense.

HAROLD You're very unkind.

MARIAN. You're a young man, the world's before you You've a nice house and a good farm—you haven't a care in the world

HAROLD Oh! Such a cruel thing to say, Marian.

MARIAN. I know what I'll do I'll make Oliver and Dick adopt you. Three months' horse-racing and gambling and knocking about would do you all the good in the world.

HAROLD [*with dignity in spite of hiccup*]. I'll go home. There's no use talking to you while you're in this mood.

MARIAN You'll never find me in any other I'm sick of shams.

HAROLD [*holding out his hand*]. Good night.

MARIAN [*taking it*]. Good night.

HAROLD. In spite of everything, Marian, I'll always think of you as the only woman that—

MARIAN [*dropping his hand*]. Now, now; there you're off again. And I won't have that silly hand-pressing business.

HAROLD. I didn't.

MARIAN. Oh, indeed you did. Force of habit, I suppose, and I'll forgive you. But you must break yourself of it. For it's dangerous. I might get so moved that I'd suddenly throw my arms round your neck and kiss you, and then you'd have to marry me.

HAROLD. Oh!

[*With a last disgusted hiccup, he goes.*]

MARIAN [*laughing*]. Poor Harold! [*She straightens a chair or two, goes to the door and calls.*] Pet! Ducky! Are you ready?

PET'S VOICE. We're coming
[A motor-horn is heard, tooting comically.]

DUCKY'S VOICE They've come!
they've come! That's Pierce's horn.

[A rush to the hall door, a confusion of voices MARIAN stands at the dining-room door waiting PATRICK and SUSIE appear]

MARIAN [kissing him] Father darling!
PATRICK Well, Marian!

SUSIE [kissing her] Well, Marian, I brought him back safe and sound

MARIAN He's looking splendid [Helping him out of his coat] Did you enjoy yourself, Father?

PATRICK Ay, I had a splendid time, the best for years.

SUSIE He went round like a two-year-old

MARIAN I wouldn't doubt him.

SUSIE. And I declare, Marian, he danced!

MARIAN Danced! Father!

PATRICK. I did, Marian, God forgive me She made me

SUSIE. I taught him a few steps And the sight doesn't matter dancing, it's enough if one of the two sees The first night in Douglas looking at the flappers going around with their eyes tight shut and their noses stuck into the fellows' chests, says I to myself, "What's to prevent Paddy and I doing the same thing?" So we did I steered him.

PATRICK. She did indeed. All the same, I felt a bit ashamed, Marian, at my age.

SUSIE. Ah, nonsense! You and your age.

MARIAN. I don't see why you shouldn't, Father, if you like it.

PATRICK. I'm glad to hear you say that, Marian I thought you'd be wild with me

MARIAN. As long as you enjoyed yourself, what else matters?

PATRICK Marian?

MARIAN [laughing]. Oh, Father, there's a lot happened since you went away.

PIERCE [appearing with the girls]. I left all the bags in the car; you don't want any of them left here, do you?

SUSIE. No, Pierce. I have a few little things for the girls, but they'll do later.

PET. Oh, have you, Susie? What?

DUCKY. What d'you bring me?

SUSIE. I brought you a lovely what-d'you-call-it.

DUCKY A what?

SUSIE. Like this, you know. [She makes

a vague gesture.] And I brought Pet the same sort of thing, only different

PET Like what?

SUSIE. Oh, you know—a thing—well, you put it like that—and it's like this

[She makes vague gestures]

PET. You are a tease, Susie.

DUCKY We'll be up to your place to-night to root them out. I won't sleep till I've seen them. Did you bring us anything, Daddy?

PATRICK Yes—Douglas Rock!

DUCKY. Ugh!

SUSIE What's the box in your hand, Pierce?

PIERCE Just something I got in Dublin. I'll leave it here for the present.

MARIAN. Are you longing for your tea?

SUSIE. Parched I'm tired, tramping the streets of Dublin all day.

DUCKY What did you buy?

SUSIE. Nothing, except a religious picture for you, Marian; I didn't see anything in Douglas that would suit you, but this is just your style.

MARIAN You're very good I'll make Ellen wet the tea

SUSIE. Give me a few minutes, Marian, to wash my hands. I'm a mask of dust.

MARIAN. Take Susie upstairs, girls Oh, Father, did you see Oliver and Dick?

PATRICK. No. Where are they? Are they here?

MARIAN. They called up to see you. They went to have a smoke in the garden. Maybe they didn't hear the car come.

PATRICK. I'd like well to see them.

MARIAN Would you step into the garden while Susie is tidying herself?

PATRICK. I'd like to.

MARIAN Very well. But, Father, don't ask them to stay to tea; there isn't room.

PATRICK. I understand.

MARIAN. Give him a hand, Pet.

PET [taking his arm]. Here you are, Daddy.

DUCKY. Come on, Susie. I have hot water and all. [The four go out.]

MARIAN. They're both looking grand, aren't they?

PIERCE. Yes . . . [He abruptly takes up the parcel and hands it to MARIAN.] That's for you.

MARIAN. For me? What is it? Where did it come from?

PIERCE From Dublin.

MARIAN. Dublin? Is it Susie's religious picture?

PIERCE. No. Something I got. For you.

MARIAN. I didn't ask you to get me anything.

PIERCE. I know. But I got it.

MARIAN. Well, I declare! What is it?

PIERCE. A dress.

MARIAN. A dress? Who for?

PIERCE. Yourself. Who else?

MARIAN [*putting down the parcel*]

Well, I think you've got great impertinence to go buy a dress for me, and great impertinence to think for a minute that I'd take it from you. You can bring it back to the shop.

PIERCE. You mean you won't take it?

MARIAN. That's exactly what I mean.

PIERCE. Or even look at it?

MARIAN. Or even look at it.

PIERCE [*chucking the parcel across the room*]. Then it can go to hell!

MARIAN. Please don't use language like that here.

PIERCE. Oh, rot!

MARIAN. Whatever made you think of such a thing, buying a dress for me?

PIERCE. I hate to see you going around all dull and dowdy—like Adam's aunt. You're the prettiest girl in the town.

MARIAN. Nonsense!

PIERCE. You are, if you gave yourself half a chance. You dress frowsily because you think you're going into a convent. But that's all nonsense—you're not. You're going to marry me.

MARIAN. What?

PIERCE. I fell for you the first minute I saw you. I'm crazy about you. Say you love me, go on.

MARIAN. I hate you!

PIERCE. Rot! Go on, say you love me.

MARIAN. I think you're mad.

PIERCE. Yes, mad about you. And you are about me.

MARIAN. I hate you. I've hated you from the first minute I saw you.

PIERCE. Liar! You fell for me that first Sunday night.

MARIAN. I didn't.

PIERCE. You did. Look at me.

MARIAN [*trying to meet his eyes*]. I don't want—

PIERCE. You do, you do.

[*He kisses her; he has run a cinema, remember.*]

MARIAN. You mustn't, you mustn't.

PIERCE. I must.

[*He kisses her again.*]

MARIAN. The others will be back.

PIERCE. Let 'em. I want to tell the world.

MARIAN. We're dreaming, aren't we?

PIERCE. Not on your life. I'm real. Pinch me.

MARIAN. How could you?

PIERCE. What?

MARIAN. Ever care for me?

PIERCE. Why not? I knew at once

MARIAN. I'm plain and dull and dowdy

PIERCE. Try a touch of Grafton Street. It's there, in that box.

MARIAN. It's not only clothes.

PIERCE. But they make a hell of a difference. Go on, be a sport, slip it on. I spent an hour choosing it.

MARIAN [*breaking away from him*]. No, I can't. I can't marry you, Pierce, it's too ridiculous.

PIERCE. Most sensible thing you've done in your life. You're the cleverest woman in the place; I'm the smartest man. Between us, we'll run the town.

MARIAN. Run the town!

PIERCE. You're made for bigger things than chivvying Pet and Ducky. Wait till you've your hands on the garage and the cinema.

MARIAN [*her future dawning on her*]. Oh! . . . I hear some one coming. What'll I do?

PIERCE [*rescuing the parcel and giving it to her*]. Hop upstairs and get into this.

MARIAN. If I come down in it, what will they say?

PIERCE. They'll tumble to the fact that you're not going to be a nun, that you're going to marry me.

MARIAN. I made up my mind a week ago that I wasn't going to be a nun.

PIERCE. I know. You fell for me the first minute you saw me.

MARIAN. I didn't

PIERCE. Then why did you bring me out to look at the sunset? . . . They're coming. Fly!

MARIAN. Pierce, be a darling, tell them before I come down. I'd never have the courage.

PIERCE. I'll tell them, of course; nothing easier.

[*She seizes the box and makes for the door and meets SUSIE and the girls coming in*]

SUSIE. Where are you off to, Marian?

MARIAN. To hurry up tea [*She goes.*]

PET. Well, Pierce, such goings-on you never heard.

PIERCE. Where? Here?

PET. Nothing ever happens here. In Douglas.

PIERCE. I wouldn't doubt Aunt Susie

SUSIE We didn't do anything so out of the way.

PET. Oh, didn't you? What about the evening on the esplanade, and the two men from Manchester?

SUSIE Ah, shut up about that and tell me how you got on while we were away.

PET. Not so bad, then Marian wasn't as bad as I expected. But the awful thing is she can't stand Pierce.

SUSIE. Can't she?

PIERCE Are you sure?

PET. Now, Pierce, there's no use shutting your eyes to the fact that she can't bear a bone in your body. I must say it shows her rotten taste, but there it is. Surely you must have noticed it yourself?

PIERCE. Something like it.

PET. Of course. Look, Susie, he'd be coming up every day to see Ducky and me, and he wouldn't be here three minutes before Marian would be in to hunt him.

SUSIE Well, I'm surprised at Marian. I can't imagine any one not liking you, Pierce.

PET. Ah, of course, Pierce isn't her style at all; they're like oil and water, they'd never mix.

PIERCE. I wouldn't go so far as to say that.

PET. He asked us out in the motor twice, Susie, and Marian wouldn't let us go.

SUSIE. She went herself, maybe?

PET. Catch her! She'd rather be seen dead than with Pierce.

PIERCE. Well now, Pet, just to show that you're not as wise as you think you are, I have the pleasure to inform you that Marian and I—

[*PATRICK and OLIVER and DICK come in*]

DICK. Here we are, Susie.

PATRICK. They wouldn't go till they'd shaken your hand, Susie.

SUSIE. I'm glad to see them.

OLIVER. How are you, Susie. Tip-top?

SUSIE [*shaking hands*]. First-class, Oliver.

DICK [*shaking hands*]. You've knocked ten years off yourself, Susie. And sure Patrick looks about twenty years old.

PATRICK. That's all I'm feeling, Dick.

OLIVER. Well, marriage is a wonder. By the Lord, Dick, we must think of getting married one of these days.

SUSIE. There's little chance of that happening.

OLIVER. Oh, I wouldn't say so.

DICK I'm not so dead set against it as all that.

SUSIE. I mean, I can't imagine any one who would take you—either of you

DICK Susie!

OLIVER. You never appreciated us, Susie.

SUSIE I never took you at your own valuation, you mean. . . . How are the murders getting on, Oliver?

OLIVER. Wisha, there's little stirring, Susie, little stirring. A terrible slackness in crime at the present moment. I don't know what's come to every one. No one seems to want to do anything out of the common.

DICK. Ah, well, there was a decent little suicide in yesterday's paper—that case at Mulligar.

OLIVER. Ph! I wouldn't think much of that. A common bankrupt.

DICK. I think there was more in it than bankruptcy. Did you see what the aunt said when they cut down the body?

OLIVER. A thing of nothing. Mark my words, a thing of nothing. Ah, but please goodness in a week or two things will freshen up. With the end of the holidays there's generally something doing. Fellas coming back stoney-broke, you know, and taking it out on their wives and the like—meaning nothing personal, Patrick.

PATRICK. Douglas left me without a stiver—but I'm not sure that I'm going to avenge it on Susie.

SUSIE. I'd like to see you try.

DICK. Do you remember that double murder at Wolverhampton? Holidays were at the back of that, nothing else.

PIERCE. Let's talk of something more cheerful. I've a little bit of news for you.

SUSIE. What's that, Pierce?

PIERCE. Oh, it's nothing very much. [*To his own astonishment he gets suddenly shy*] It's only that Marian—I mean it's just that I—Marian—

ELLEN [*putting her head in through the door—her head is swathed in a bandage*]. I'm off to me bed. You can tell Miss Marian.

PET. Bed? Ellen! not before you've brought up the tea?

ELLEN. You can fetch your own tea. Me teeth are raging.

PET. You've done it again!

ELLEN [*sniffing*]. He came—Clarence—to the back door five minutes ago, and I gave him the push for good 'n' all.

PET. And who is it this time?

ELLEN. Don't ask me. My heart's broken. [*And she goes.*]

PET. Well, isn't she a terror? I'll have to go and give Ducky a hand

[*She goes*]

OLIVER. That Ellen woman's a sort of a public scandal. There'll be no peace in the town until she's married. Come, Dick, we should be off.

PATRICK. Indeed, you'll do nothing of the kind. You'll wait and have a cup of tea at least. I can't see what's on the table, but I'm sure there's a good spread.

SUSIE. Oh, there's lashings, Patrick.

PATRICK. There you are!

OLIVER. Ah no, I promised Marian I wouldn't stay. As she says herself, the table only holds six.

PATRICK. Six? Many a time in the old days I saw it hold ten and more.

OLIVER. These aren't the old days. Come, Dick.

PATRICK. No, no, boys. Don't go. My first night home and all.

DICK. We sort of pledged our word we wouldn't stay.

OLIVER. We promised.

PATRICK. Wisha, break your promise.

OLIVER. I'll tell you what—we'll drop up to Susie's place later, in a couple of hours' time. Will that suit you? Will you be there by then?

PATRICK. We will.

OLIVER. Any objection, Susie?

SUSIE. Not the least in the world.

PATRICK. Is there anything for them to drink, Susie?

SUSIE. Two bottles of J J and a bottle of port—unless Pierce has made away with them when my back was turned.

PIERCE. I didn't touch them.

SUSIE. Very well. Don't insult me by bringing your flask, Dick. You'll be up too, Pierce?

PIERCE. I don't think so. I'll stay here.

SUSIE. With the girls? Marian will hunt you.

PIERCE. I don't think so. You see the fact is—

[*He hesitates*]

OLIVER. We'll be off so.

SUSIE. Don't go for a minute. I've a letter I want you to post; I've been carrying it around all day. I left it in my bag up in Marian's room. I'll get it. I won't keep you a minute.

[*She goes out*]

PATRICK. Sit down again, boys. A woman in a thousand, that's what she is.

OLIVER. You struck gold all right, Paddy.

PATRICK. I did. And what did I ever do to deserve it? Pierce!

PIERCE. Yes?

PATRICK. I'm saying your aunt's a

woman in a thousand. You should pray to God that you have the luck to marry a woman the like of her.

PIERCE. Yes. I'd say Marian is a bit like her.

OLIVER. Marian? Yerra, not at all.

DICK. Marian's a born old maid.

OLIVER. A born nun.

PATRICK. Yet, boys, I wish—God forgive me—that she wasn't going into the convent.

PIERCE. As a matter of fact—she—that is, this evening, I—

[*The girls interrupt him by coming in with trays on which are a teapot, toast, eggs, hot cakes, etc. PIERCE helps them to put them on the table.*]

DUCKY. Marian wasn't there to give us a hand; we had to do everything. And Ellen's gone to bed with the toothache.

PET. Isn't love a terrible thing, Pierce?

PIERCE. You've hit it, Pet.

DUCKY. The kettle was nearly boiled dry and the toast's as hard as a rock. You'd better call Marian, Pet.

[*The three men are talking in low tones among themselves. PIERCE makes a desperate effort to get their attention.*]

PIERCE. Don't go for a minute, Pet. Before Marian comes—I want— Mr. Clancy, sir, I have something to tell you.

OLIVER [*coming to the end of some story*]. Did you ever hear better than that?

PATRICK. Well, that beats Banagher!

PIERCE. Mr. Clancy, Mr. Clancy.

PATRICK. Yes, yes. What is it, Pierce?

PIERCE. It's only to tell you that Marian—this evening—

[*He stops.*]

PATRICK [*impatently*]. What's all this about Marian?

PIERCE. Well, only that she—

[*Susie comes in in some agitation*]

SUSIE. Such a queer thing!

OLIVER. What? You've lost the letter, I suppose.

SUSIE. I haven't. I can't get at my bag. I don't know what's come to Marian, Patrick; she's locked herself into her room and she says she's not coming down to tea.

PATRICK. Not coming to tea?

SUSIE. So she told me. Through the door.

OLIVER. Maybe it's because we're here. Did you tell her we're on the wing?

SUSIE. I did. It's nothing to do with you.

PET. She must be in love, like Ellen!

DUCKY. Did she say she had the toothache?

[*They both laugh.*]

SUSIE. Stop your laughing I don't like it, Patrick. Something strange is up. Her voice sounded queer

PIERCE. I'll fetch her down

[*He makes for the door*]

SUSIE Stop, Pierce She hates the sight of you; she won't listen to you and the door's locked

PIERCE. I'll get her out

[*He is gone, leaving the door open.*]

PATRICK Susie, is anything wrong? Are you scared?

SUSIE No, Patrick, just a bit puzzled. There can't be anything wrong She was all right when I was speaking to her here a while ago. Hush! Listen!

[*They all listen PIERCE'S voice can be dimly heard, but not exactly what he is saying. When any one speaks in the room they speak in whispers*]

DUCKY He's begging her to come out . . . what use is that?

PET. Telling her she's done nothing to be ashamed of . . .

SUSIE. What can that mean? . . .

DUCKY. He's ordering her to come out! . . .

PET Such a way to speak to her! . . .

SUSIE He's losing his temper No, he's not He's speaking so low now I can't hear what he's saying.

OLIVER. Ssh! . . . It sounds like "darling"!

DUCKY and PET. Darling?

SUSIE. Ah, nonsense. You're losing the use of your ears.

OLIVER. Ssh! . . . "Darling" it is! . . . There it goes again!

DICK. And "sweetheart," and "baby," and—glory be to God!

SUSIE [*after a tense moment of listening, sinking into a chair*]. Oh, merciful heavens!

PATRICK. What was it, Susie?

PET, DUCKY and DICK. What?

OLIVER. I couldn't catch it.

SUSIE. "When we're married," he says . . .

PET and DUCKY. Susie, he didn't!

OLIVER. He must be raving.

SUSIE. Those were his words.

[*Every one is aghast with surprise.*]

PIERCE'S VOICE [*loudly—he has suddenly lost his temper*]. Come out! Come out at once, I tell you! You won't? I'll give you till I count three, then I smash the door One—

ALL [*under their breath*]. One—

PIERCE. Two—

ALL. Two—

PIERCE Are you coming? [*A pause.*] Three!

ALL Three! [*An instant's silence, then a fearful crash*] Oh!

PATRICK [*after a pause*]. Glory be to God!

OLIVER [*in awe*] It's like something you'd read of in the papers.

DICK. Do you think is there any fear he'd strike her or that she'd throw vitriol in his face?

OLIVER. Sure where would she get vitriol?

SUSIE It's grand . . . grand! I wouldn't doubt Pierce. Ssh! there's a step. They're coming!

[*They wait in silence. MARIAN and PIERCE come in. She is dressed in her new dress, she looks very pretty—PIERCE has excellent taste—but she is overwhelmed with shyness. She makes straight for her father and flings her arms round him.*]

MARIAN. Daddy, I'm sorry, but I couldn't—and—and—

[*She begins to cry*]

PATRICK. There, there, darling, don't cry. What's the matter? Did he frighten you? I won't let any one frighten my little girl

MARIAN. I'm so happy, Daddy. So terribly happy.

PATRICK. That's all right, darling; that's all right.

PIERCE [*considerably ruffled as regards hair and temper*]. We're going to get married, sir. That's all the trouble.

PATRICK [*stroking her hand*]. I see, I see. That's all right, doaty. There's nothing to cry about in that.

MARIAN. Oh, Daddy, Daddy!

PATRICK. Ssh, ssh!

PET [*to DUCKY*]. Where did she get the lovely dress? I wouldn't know her.

DUCKY. And look what she's done to her hair.

PIERCE. I got that dress. Hold your tongues, and leave your sister alone.

PET. Mind your own business. I was never so glad of anything, Marian.

[*And she kisses her.*]

DUCKY [*following suit*]. It's simply grand.

MARIAN. Thank you. You're dears.

SUSIE [*to PIERCE*]. You're a nice one

PIERCE. I am.

OLIVER. The young fellows going now don't lose much time.

DICK. They're rapid. Terrible rapid.

PET. Won't it be lovely to have Pierce living here and helping to educate us?

PIERCE. Not on your life, we'll have a house of our own, thank you.

DUCKY. But our education?

PIERCE. It can go to the dickens; we have more important things to think of than your silly book-keeping and scales.

DUCKY and PET. Oh! Pierce!

PET. Marian, do you hear what he says?

MARIAN. Yes. He's quite right. I don't care if you never get educated.

PET. Marian!

SUSIE. And meantime, the tea is getting blacker and blacker.

MARIAN. Yes. I'm so sorry. It's all my fault. Come, Daddy.

OLIVER. We'll be off. Give me your hand, Marian. The best of luck to you. No, dang it all, I've known you since you were a baby. I'll have a kiss.

DICK. Well, so long as Pierce doesn't smash me in as he smashed in the door——! [*Kissing her.*]

MARIAN. You must neither of you think of going. Sit down.

OLIVER. There won't be room at the table.

MARIAN. There'll be lots of room. Get two more chairs, girls.

DICK. I think now we should drink a health to the engaged couple, and I chance to have a drop with me, and all.

SUSIE. I wouldn't doubt you.

MARIAN. You can keep it.

[*She produces a brimming decanter.*]

OLIVER. That's a sight for sore eyes.

DICK. Will I hand it round?

MARIAN. Yes. Don't spare it.

DICK. I won't. Trust me.

[*And he busies himself with the glasses.*]

MARIAN. And that's a little present for you, Daddy.

[*She puts a box into his hand.*]

PATRICK [*feeling it*]. It's—it's cigars! Is it, Marian?

MARIAN. Yes.

[*She sits beside PIERCE.*]

PATRICK. God bless you.

DICK. And now that we've something in our glasses, here's looking at you, Marian, and you too, Pierce, and may you both be——

[*The door opens. HAROLD sticks his head in.*]

HAROLD. You'll forgive the intrusion, Marian, but my umbrella—I forgot it and there's big banks of black clouds gathering in the west.

DICK [*jumping up and going to him, his glass in his hand*]. You're in the nick of time, Harold. Take that in your hand and drink to the engaged couple.

[*He goes back to the table and fills another glass for himself*]

HAROLD. The engaged couple?

SUSIE. Marian and Pierce. They're going to be married.

HAROLD. Marian and . . . ! Marian going to be married? I'm delighted. I'm simply delighted.

[*A smile of relief has begun to spread over his face, it grows broader and broader.*]

DICK. By the holy, he's smiling. I've won the bet! Five shillings, Oliver, five shillings!

OLIVER. It's worth it.

PATRICK. This little room is as full of happiness as an egg is full of meat. Marian, dear, Pierce . . . good luck, God bless you both.

[*He has risen, his glass in hand. All rise except MARIAN and PIERCE. PIERCE has his arm around her, and as the curtain falls he kisses her*]

THE END

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The Playboy of the Western World, J. M. Synge
The Workhouse Ward, Lady Gregory
Turn of the Road, Rutherford Mayme

PRIVATE LIVES

(1930)

BY

NOEL COWARD

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

AMANDA PRYNNE
VICTOR PRYNNE, *her husband*
LOUISE, *a maid*
SIBYL CHASE
ELYOT CHASE, *her husband*

ACT I· The Terrace of a Hotel in France. Summer evening.

ACT II AMANDA'S flat in Paris. A few days later Evening.

ACT III: The same The next morning

TIME—The Present

NOEL COWARD

IN THE epilogue of *Fanny's First Play* Bernard Shaw has some London critics reciting all the traditional weaknesses of Shaw's plays. At the beginning of the second act of *Design for Living* Noel Coward has a successful playwright interviewed by a reporter from a London tabloid, and Coward takes advantage of this opportunity to travesty the stereotyped criticism of his own plays, to fling back the stream of adjectives which invariably greet each new play—"dexterous," "slick," "thin," "artificial," "impudent," "witty," "brittle," etc. Although these two scenes of literary bantering are vastly amusing, neither Shaw nor Coward confutes his critics, who are, for the most part, sound in their opinions of these playwrights. Coward, however, is still a young man, and shows signs of versatility that may force radical revisions of judgment.

Noel Coward was born at Teddington, near London, in 1899, and was educated at Croydon. He first appeared on the stage at the age of eleven, and has been connected with the theater almost continuously since then, except for a brief period of military service near the end of the World War, when he was just old enough to enlist. He wrote his first play, *I'll Leave It to You*, when he was twenty-one, and soon afterwards his first revue, *London Calling*, which ran a year. *The Young Idea* (1923) has some lively satire but a well-worn plot. It was *The Vortex* (1924) which first attracted critical attention; the almost hysterical nervousness of the play, its brutal wit, and its vulgarity were decried, but Coward was recognized as the leader of the post-war group of young playwrights. In the next two years he wrote six plays, only one of which, *Hay Fever*, showed any advance in merit. His popularity declined, and objections to the vulgarity and salacity of some unimportant comedies became almost violent. He then turned to operetta and musical comedy, winning reputation again and a fortune as well with *This Year of Grace*, a sophisticated revue, and *Bitter Sweet*, an operetta. Coward has written the books, lyrics, and music for his seven musical plays. In 1930 he entered the third phase of his career, and has so far written two farcical high comedies and two serious plays. *Private Lives* and *Design for Living* are the best English farces since *The Importance of Being Earnest*. *Design for Living* (1933), written especially to display the bravura of his friends Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne and himself, is an insanely funny comedy of impossible people in impossible situations. *Post Mortem* (1930), as yet unacted, is an ironic, bitter tragedy, frankly didactic, which attempts to show that the Great Peace has been as futile and vile as the Great War itself. *Cavalcade* (1931) is a sentimental and stirring account of English history from the Boer War to the present as it touched the life of one London family. *Cavalcade* appeared at the correct psychological moment—at a time of resurgent nationalism—and made Coward a very popular and patriotic figure; it is a safe assumption, however, that the author wrote at least part of this chauvinistic drama with his tongue in his cheek.

After pondering over his plots for months, he writes the plays hurriedly—sometimes in a few days. *Private Lives* he wrote in a hotel bedroom in Shanghai while he was acting in a theatrical company presenting *Journey's End* in China. *Private Lives*, Coward's masterpiece, is lunatic comedy at its best. Charles Lamb once said of the characters in Restoration comedies that they live in an imaginary world subject only to the laws of that world, and that consequently we should not pass moral judgments upon them. One

is tempted to regard with equal indulgence the incredible characters of *Easy Virtue*, *Hay Fever*, *Private Lives*, and *Design for Living*, who are no more representative of the twentieth-century human beings than were the men and women of *The Country Wife* representative of the seventeenth century. *Private Lives* is essentially a farce, and its irresponsible, unconforming, witty, slightly hysterical characters do not interest us for what they are, but by what they say and do. The author's world is a limited one—too limited—the smart set in which nearly every one is as smart as Noel Coward. There is much of the Restoration here: virtuous people are bores; the moral world is upside down. The talk is almost unfalteringly funny—impudent, often inconsequential, sometimes mad, sometimes wise. The comedy bristles with small audacities, with snips and jabs of dialogue. Coward is at his vulgar best in the scenes of abuse and contumely, the magnificent cataracts of invective almost always leading to blows.

His comedies have crust, but there is very little beneath. An occasional bit of gloomy and sophomoric philosophy, or a nasty comment on civilization, or a semi-defense of flippancy constitutes the only deflections from the comedic temper. Such a passage as the following is typical:

AMANDA Darling, I believe you are talking nonsense.

ELYOT So is every one else in the long run. Let's be superficial and pity the poor Philosophers. Let's blow trumpets and squeakers and enjoy the party as much as we can, like very small, quite idiotic school-children. Let's savor the delight of the moment. Come and kiss me, darling, before your body rots, and worms pop in and out of your eye sockets.

St John Ervine professes to find a serious purpose in *Design for Living*, the eternal plea of the individualist to live his own life in his own way. At any rate the author of *Hay Fever*, *Post Mortem*, and *Cavalcade* can not be neatly pigeonholed as a mere disciple of the flippant school of Oscar Wilde.

Recent long plays such as *Conversation Piece* and *Point Valaine* are inferior to his gay farces, but his nine one-act plays *Tonight at 8:30* (1935), including comedies, fantasies, and tragedies, are excellent and lead some critics to assert that Coward-in-brief is preferable to Coward-unconfined. His witty and frank autobiography, *Present Indicative* (1937), is not only a highly entertaining success-story; it is also an illuminating study of a member of the "lost generation" in that hectic period between two wars when old values were being questioned and old taboos discarded, when a feverish search for excitement and a widespread feeling of disillusion created a sense of uncertainty and instability almost unknown in the placid early years of the century. At the outbreak of the war in 1939 Coward was first reported serving in the navy, later in the Ministry of Information (Propaganda). Among other things he is credited with the authorship of various propaganda leaflets scattered over Germany by the millions.

PRIVATE LIVES

ACT I

The Scene is the terrace of a hotel in France There are two French windows at the back opening on to two separate suites The terrace space is divided by a line of small trees in tubs, and, downstage, running parallel with the footlights, there is a low stone balustrade. Upon each side of the line of tree tubs is a set of suitable terrace furniture, a swinging seat, two or three chairs, and a table There are orange and white awnings shading the windows, as it is summer When the curtain rises, it is about eight o'clock in the evening There is an orchestra playing not very far off
SIBYL CHASE opens the windows on the Right, and steps out on to the terrace. She is very pretty and blonde, and smartly dressed in traveling clothes She comes downstage, stretches her arms wide with a little sigh of satisfaction, and regards the view with an ecstatic expression.

SIBYL [*calling*]. Elli, E'li dear, do come out. It's so lovely

ELYOT [*inside*]. Just a minute

[*After a pause ELYOT comes out He is about thirty, quite slim and pleasant looking, and also in traveling clothes. He walks right down to the balustrade and looks thoughtfully at the view. SIBYL stands beside him, and slips her arm through his.*]

ELYOT. Not so bad

SIBYL. It's heavenly. Look at the lights of that yacht reflected in the water. Oh dear, I'm so happy.

ELYOT [*smiling*]. Are you?

SIBYL. Aren't you?

ELYOT. Of course I am Tremendously happy.

SIBYL. Just to think, here we are, you and I, married!

ELYOT. Yes, things have come to a pretty pass.

SIBYL. Don't laugh at me, you mustn't be blasé about honeymoons just because this is your second.

ELYOT [*frowning*]. That's silly.

SIBYL. Have I annoyed you by saying that?

ELYOT. Just a little.

SIBYL. Oh, darling, I'm so sorry. [*She holds her face up to his*] Kiss me

ELYOT [*doing so*]. There

SIBYL. Ummm, not so very enthusiastic.

ELYOT [*kissing her again*]. That better?

SIBYL. Three times, please, I'm superstitious.

ELYOT [*kissing her*]. You really are very sweet.

SIBYL. Are you glad you married me?

ELYOT. Of course I am.

SIBYL. How glad?

ELYOT. Incredibly, magnificently glad.

SIBYL. How lovely.

ELYOT. We ought to go in and dress.

SIBYL. Gladder than before?

ELYOT. Why do you keep harping on that?

SIBYL. It's in my mind, and yours too, I expect.

ELYOT. It isn't anything of the sort.

SIBYL. She was pretty, wasn't she? Amanda?

ELYOT. Very pretty.

SIBYL. Prettier than I am?

ELYOT. Much.

SIBYL. Elyot!

ELYOT. She was pretty and sleek, and her hands were long and slim, and her legs were long and slim, and she danced like an angel. You dance very poorly, by the way.

SIBYL. Could she play the piano as well as I can?

ELYOT. She couldn't play the piano at all.

SIBYL [*triumphantly*]. Aha! Had she my talent for organization?

ELYOT. No, but she hadn't your mother either.

SIBYL. I don't believe you like Mother.

ELYOT. Like her! I can't bear her.

SIBYL. Elyot! She's a darling, underneath.

ELYOT. I never got underneath.

SIBYL. It makes me unhappy to think you don't like Mother.

ELYOT Nonsense. I believe the only reason you married me was to get away from her

SIBYL. I married you because I loved you.

ELYOT. Oh dear, oh dear, oh dear, oh dear!

SIBYL. I love you far more than Amanda loved you. I'd never make you miserable like she did.

ELYOT. We made each other miserable.

SIBYL. It was all her fault, you know it was.

ELYOT [*with vehemence*]. Yes, it was. Entirely her fault.

SIBYL. She was a fool to lose you.

ELYOT. We lost each other

SIBYL. She lost you, with her violent tempers and carryings on.

ELYOT. Will you stop talking about Amanda?

SIBYL. But I'm very glad, because if she hadn't been uncontrolled, and wicked, and unfaithful, we shouldn't be here now.

ELYOT. She wasn't unfaithful.

SIBYL. How do you know? I bet she was I bet she was unfaithful every five minutes.

ELYOT. It would take a far more concentrated woman than Amanda to be unfaithful every five minutes.

SIBYL [*anxiously*]. You do hate her, don't you?

ELYOT. No, I don't hate her. I think I despise her.

SIBYL [*with satisfaction*]. That's much worse.

ELYOT. And yet I'm sorry for her.

SIBYL. Why?

ELYOT. Because she's marked for tragedy; she's bound to make a mess of everything.

SIBYL. If it's all her fault, I don't see that it matters much.

ELYOT. She has some very good qualities.

SIBYL. Considering what a hell she made of your life, I think you are very nice about her. Most men would be vindictive.

ELYOT. What's the use of that? It's all over now, such a long time ago.

SIBYL. Five years isn't very long.

ELYOT [*seriously*]. Yes it is.

SIBYL. Do you think you could ever love her again?

ELYOT. Now then, Sibyl.

SIBYL. But could you?

ELYOT. Of course not, I love you.

SIBYL. Yes, but you love me differently; I know that.

ELYOT. More wisely perhaps

SIBYL. I'm glad. I'd rather have that sort of love.

ELYOT. You're right. Love is no use unless it's wise and kind and undramatic. Something steady and sweet, to smooth out your nerves when you're tired. Something tremendously cosy, and unfurried by scenes and jealousies. That's what I want, what I've always wanted, really. Oh my dear, I do hope it's not going to be dull for you.

SIBYL. Sweetheart, as though you could ever be dull.

ELYOT. I'm much older than you.

SIBYL. Not so very much.

ELYOT. Seven years.

SIBYL [*smuggling up to him*]. The music has stopped now and you can hear the sea.

ELYOT. We'll bathe to-morrow morning.

SIBYL. I mustn't get sunburnt.

ELYOT. Why not?

SIBYL. I hate it on women.

ELYOT. Very well, you shan't then. I hope you don't hate it on men.

SIBYL. Of course I don't. It's suitable to men.

ELYOT. You're a completely feminine little creature, aren't you?

SIBYL. Why do you say that?

ELYOT. Everything in its place.

SIBYL. What do you mean?

ELYOT. If you feel you'd like me to smoke a pipe, I'll try and master it.

SIBYL. I like a man to be a man, if that's what you mean.

ELYOT. Are you going to understand me, and manage me?

SIBYL. I'm going to try to understand you.

ELYOT. Run me without my knowing it?

SIBYL [*withdrawing slightly*]. I think you're being a little unkind

ELYOT. No, I don't mean to be. I was only wondering

SIBYL. Well?

ELYOT. I was wondering what was going on inside your mind, what your plans are really?

SIBYL. Plans? Oh, Elli!

ELYOT. Apart from loving me and all that, you must have plans.

SIBYL. I haven't the faintest idea what you're talking about.

ELYOT. Perhaps it's subconscious then, age-old instincts working away deep down,

mincing up little bits of experience for future use, watching me carefully like a little sharp-eyed, blonde kitten

SIBYL. How can you be so horrid.

ELYOT. I said Kitten, not Cat.

SIBYL. Kittens grow into cats

ELYOT. Let that be a warning to you.

SIBYL [*slipping her arm through his again*]. What's the matter, darling; are you hungry?

ELYOT. Not a bit.

SIBYL. You're very strange all of a sudden, and rather cruel. Just because I'm feminine. It doesn't mean that I'm crafty and calculating

ELYOT. I didn't say you were either of those things.

SIBYL. I hate these half-masculine women who go banging about.

ELYOT. I hate anybody who goes banging about.

SIBYL. I should think you needed a little quiet womanliness after Amanda.

ELYOT. Why will you keep on talking about her?

SIBYL. It's natural enough, isn't it?

ELYOT. What do you want to find out?

SIBYL. Why did you really let her divorce you?

ELYOT. She divorced me for cruelty, and flagrant infidelity. I spent a whole week-end at Brighton with a lady called Vera Williams. She had the nastiest-looking hair brush I have ever seen.

SIBYL. Misplaced chivalry, I call it. Why didn't you divorce her?

ELYOT. It would not have been the action of a gentleman, whatever that may mean.

SIBYL. I think she got off very lightly.

ELYOT. Once and for all, will you stop talking about her?

SIBYL. Yes, Elli dear.

ELYOT. I don't wish to see her again or hear her name mentioned.

SIBYL. Very well, darling.

ELYOT. Is that understood?

SIBYL. Yes, darling. Where did you spend your honeymoon?

ELYOT. St. Moritz. Be quiet.

SIBYL. I hate St. Moritz.

ELYOT. So do I, bitterly.

SIBYL. Was she good on skis?

ELYOT. Do you want to dine downstairs here, or at the Casino?

SIBYL. I love you, I love you, I love you.

ELYOT. Good, let's go in and dress.

SIBYL. Kiss me first.

ELYOT [*kissing her*]. Casino?

SIBYL. Yes. Are you a gambler? You never told me.

ELYOT. Every now and then.

SIBYL. I shall come and sit just behind your chair and bring you luck.

ELYOT. That will be fatal.

[*They go off into their suite. There is a slight pause and then VICTOR PRYNNE enters from the Left suite. He is quite nice-looking, about thirty or thirty-five. He is dressed in a light traveling suit. He sniffs the air, looks at the view, and then turns back to the window*]

VICTOR [*calling*]. Mandy.

AMANDA [*inside*]. What?

VICTOR. Come outside, the view is wonderful

AMANDA. I'm still damp from the bath. Wait a minute— [*VICTOR lights a cigarette. Presently AMANDA comes out on to the terrace. She is quite exquisite with a gay face and a perfect figure. At the moment she is wearing a negligee*]. I shall catch pneumonia, that's what I shall catch.

VICTOR [*looking at her*]. God!

AMANDA. I beg your pardon?

VICTOR. You look wonderful.

AMANDA. Thank you, darling.

VICTOR. Like a beautiful advertisement for something.

AMANDA. Nothing peculiar, I hope.

VICTOR. I can hardly believe it's true. You and I, here alone together, married!

AMANDA [*rubbing her face on his shoulder*]. That stuff's very rough

VICTOR. Don't you like it?

AMANDA. A bit hearty, isn't it?

VICTOR. Do you love me?

AMANDA. Of course, that's why I'm here.

VICTOR. More than—

AMANDA. Now then, none of that.

VICTOR. No, but do you love me more than you loved Elyot?

AMANDA. I don't remember, it's such a long time ago.

VICTOR. Not so very long.

AMANDA [*flinging out her arms*]. All my life ago.

VICTOR. I'd like to break his damned neck.

AMANDA [*laughing*]. Why?

VICTOR. For making you unhappy.

AMANDA. It was mutual

VICTOR. Rubbish! It was all his fault, you know it was.

AMANDA. Yes, it was, now I come to think about it.

VICTOR. Swine!

AMANDA Don't be so vehement, darling.

VICTOR I'll never treat you like that.

AMANDA That's right

VICTOR I love you too much.

AMANDA So did he

VICTOR Fine sort of love that is. He struck you once, didn't he?

AMANDA More than once.

VICTOR Where?

AMANDA Several places.

VICTOR. What a cad.

AMANDA. I struck him, too. Once I broke four gramophone records over his head. It was very satisfying.

VICTOR. You must have been driven to distraction

AMANDA. Yes, I was, but don't let's talk about it, please. After all, it's a dreary subject for our honeymoon night.

VICTOR. He didn't know when he was well off.

AMANDA. Look at the lights of that yacht reflected in the water. I wonder whose it is.

VICTOR. We must bathe to-morrow.

AMANDA. Yes. I want to get a nice sunburn.

VICTOR [*reproachfully*] Mandy!

AMANDA. Why, what's the matter?

VICTOR. I hate sunburnt women.

AMANDA. Why?

VICTOR. It's somehow, well, unsuitable.

AMANDA. It's awfully suitable to me, darling.

VICTOR. Of course if you really want to.

AMANDA. I'm absolutely determined. I've got masses of lovely oil to rub all over myself.

VICTOR. Your skin is so beautiful as it is.

AMANDA. Wait and see. When I'm done a nice crisp brown, you'll fall in love with me all over again.

VICTOR. I couldn't love you more than I do now.

AMANDA. Oh, dear. I did so hope our honeymoon was going to be progressive.

VICTOR. Where did you spend the last one?

AMANDA [*warningly*]. Victor.

VICTOR. I want to know.

AMANDA. St. Moritz. It was very attractive.

VICTOR. I hate St. Moritz.

AMANDA. So do I.

VICTOR. Did he start quarreling with you right away?

AMANDA. Within the first few days. I put it down to the high altitudes,

VICTOR. And you loved him?

AMANDA. Yes, Victor.

VICTOR. You poor child

AMANDA. You must try not to be pompous, dear. [*She turns away*]

VICTOR [*hurt*]. Mandy!

AMANDA. I don't believe I'm a bit like what you think I am

VICTOR. How do you mean?

AMANDA. I was never a poor child

VICTOR. Figure of speech, dear, that's all.

AMANDA. I suffered a good deal, and had my heart broken. But it wasn't an innocent girlish heart. It was jagged with sophistication. I've always been sophisticated, far too knowing. That caused many of my rows with Elyot. I irritated him because he knew I could see through him.

VICTOR. I don't mind how much you see through me.

AMANDA. Sweet. [*She kisses him.*]

VICTOR. I'm going to make you happy.

AMANDA. Are you?

VICTOR. Just by looking after you, and seeing that you're all right, you know

AMANDA [*a trifle wistfully*]. No, I don't know.

VICTOR. I think you love me quite differently from the way you loved Elyot.

AMANDA. Do stop harping on Elyot.

VICTOR. It's true, though, isn't it?

AMANDA. I love you much more calmly, if that's what you mean.

VICTOR. More lastingly?

AMANDA. I expect so.

VICTOR. Do you remember when I first met you?

AMANDA. Yes. Distinctly.

VICTOR. At Marion Vale's party.

AMANDA. Yes.

VICTOR. Wasn't it wonderful?

AMANDA. Not really, dear. It was only redeemed from the completely commonplace by the fact of my having hiccoughs.

VICTOR. I never noticed them.

AMANDA. Love at first sight.

VICTOR. Where did you first meet Elyot?

AMANDA. To hell with Elyot.

VICTOR. Mandy!

AMANDA. I forbid you to mention his name again. I'm sick of the sound of it. You must be raving mad. Here we are on the first night of our honeymoon, with the moon coming up, and the music playing, and all you can do is talk about my first husband. It's downright sacrilegious.

VICTOR. Don't be angry

AMANDA. Well, it's very annoying.

VICTOR. Will you forgive me?

AMANDA. Yes; only don't do it again.

VICTOR. I promise.

AMANDA. You'd better go and dress now, you haven't bathed yet.

VICTOR. Where shall we dine, downstairs here, or at the Casino?

AMANDA. The Casino is more fun, I think.

VICTOR. We can play Boule afterwards.

AMANDA. No, we can't, dear.

VICTOR. Don't you like dear old Boule?

AMANDA. No, I hate dear old Boule. We'll play a nice game of Chemin de fer. VICTOR [*apprehensively*]. Not at the big table?

AMANDA. Maybe at the biggest table.

VICTOR. You're not a terrible gambler, are you?

AMANDA. Inveterate. Chance rules my life.

VICTOR. What nonsense.

AMANDA. How can you say it's nonsense? It was chance meeting you. It was chance falling in love; it's chance that we're here, particularly after your driving. Everything that happens is chance.

VICTOR. You know I feel rather scared of you at close quarters.

AMANDA. That promises to be very embarrassing.

VICTOR. You're somewhat different now, wilder than I thought you were, more strained.

AMANDA. Wilder! Oh Victor, I've never felt less wild in my life. A little strained, I grant you, but that's the newly married atmosphere; you can't expect anything else. Honeymooning is a very overrated amusement.

VICTOR. You say that because you had a ghastly experience before.

AMANDA. There you go again.

VICTOR. It couldn't fail to embitter you a little.

AMANDA. The honeymoon wasn't such a ghastly experience really; it was afterwards that was so awful.

VICTOR. I intend to make you forget it all entirely.

AMANDA. You won't succeed by making constant references to it.

VICTOR. I wish I knew you better.

AMANDA. It's just as well you don't. The "woman"—in italics—should always retain a certain amount of alluring feminine mystery for the "man"—also in italics.

VICTOR. What about the man? Isn't he allowed to have any mystery?

AMANDA. Absolutely none. Transparent as glass.

VICTOR. Oh, I see.

AMANDA. Never mind, darling, it doesn't necessarily work out like that; it's only supposed to.

VICTOR. I'm glad I'm normal.

AMANDA. What an odd thing to be glad about. Why?

VICTOR. Well, aren't you?

AMANDA. I'm not so sure I'm normal.

VICTOR. Oh, Mandy, of course you are, sweetly, divinely normal.

AMANDA. I haven't any peculiar cravings for Chinamen or old boots, if that's what you mean.

VICTOR [*scandalized*]. Mandy!

AMANDA. I think very few people are completely normal really, deep down in their private lives. It all depends on a combination of circumstances. If all the various cosmic thingummys fuse at the same moment, and the right spark is struck, there's no knowing what one mightn't do. That was the trouble with Elyot and me, we were like two violent acids bubbling about in a nasty little matrimonial bottle.

VICTOR. I don't believe you're nearly as complex as you think you are.

AMANDA. I don't think I'm particularly complex, but I know I'm unreliable.

VICTOR. You're frightening me horribly. In what way unreliable?

AMANDA. I'm so apt to see things the wrong way round.

VICTOR. What sort of things?

AMANDA. Morals. What one should do and what one shouldn't.

VICTOR [*fondly*]. Darling, you're so sweet.

AMANDA. Thank you, Victor, that's most encouraging. You really must have your bath now. Come along.

VICTOR. Kiss me.

AMANDA [*doing so*]. There, dear, hurry now. I've only got to slip my dress on and then I shall be ready.

VICTOR. Give me ten minutes.

AMANDA. I'll bring the cocktails out here when they come.

VICTOR. All right.

AMANDA. Go along now, hurry.

[*They both disappear into their suite. After a moment's pause ELYOT steps carefully on to the terrace carrying a tray upon which are two champagne cocktails. He puts the tray down on the table.*]

ELYOT [*calling*]. Sibyl.

SIBYL [*inside*]. Yes

ELYOT. I've brought the cocktails out here, hurry up.

SIBYL. I can't find my lipstick.

ELYOT. Never mind, send down to the kitchen for some cochineal.

SIBYL. Don't be so silly.

ELYOT. Hurry.

[*ELYOT saunters down to the balustrade. He looks casually over on to the next terrace, and then out at the view. He looks up at the moon and sighs, then he sits down in a chair with his back towards the line of tubs, and lights a cigarette. AMANDA steps gingerly on to her terrace carrying a tray with two champagne cocktails on it. She is wearing a charmingly simple evening gown, her cloak is slung over her right shoulder. She places the tray carefully on the table, puts her cloak over the back of a chair, and sits down with her back towards ELYOT. She takes a small mirror from her handbag, and scrutinizes her face in it. The orchestra downstairs strikes up a new melody. Both ELYOT and AMANDA give a little start. After a moment, ELYOT pensively begins to hum the tune the band is playing. It is a sentimental, romantic little tune. AMANDA hears him, and clutches at her throat suddenly as though she were suffocating. Then she jumps up noiselessly, and peers over the line of tubs ELYOT, with his back to her, continues to sing obliviously. She sits down again, relaxing with a gesture almost of despair. Then she looks anxiously over her shoulder at the window in case VICTOR should be listening, and then, with a little smile, she takes up the melody herself, clearly. ELYOT stops dead and gives a gasp, then he jumps up, and stands looking at her. She continues to sing, pretending not to know that he is there. At the end of the song, she turns slowly, and faces him.*]

AMANDA. Thoughtful of them to play that, wasn't it?

ELYOT [*in a stifled voice*]. What are you doing here?

AMANDA. I'm on honeymoon.

ELYOT. How interesting, so am I.

AMANDA. I hope you're enjoying it.

ELYOT. It hasn't started yet.

AMANDA. Neither has mine.

ELYOT. Oh, my God!

AMANDA. I can't help feeling that this is a little unfortunate.

ELYOT. Are you happy?

AMANDA. Perfectly.

ELYOT. Good. That's all right, then, isn't it?

AMANDA. Are you?

ELYOT. Ecstatically.

AMANDA. I'm delighted to hear it. We shall probably meet again sometime. Au revoir! [*She turns*]

ELYOT [*firmly*]. Good-bye
[*She goes indoors without looking back.*

He stands gazing after her with an expression of horror on his face. SIBYL comes brightly on to the terrace in a very pretty evening frock.]

SIBYL. Cocktail, please [*ELYOT doesn't answer.*] Elli, what's the matter?

ELYOT. I feel very odd.

SIBYL. Odd, what do you mean, ill?

ELYOT. Yes, ill.

SIBYL [*alarmed*]. What sort of —

ELYOT. We must leave at once.

SIBYL. Leave!

ELYOT. Yes, dear. Leave immediately.

SIBYL. Eh!

ELYOT. I have a strange foreboding.

SIBYL. You must be mad.

ELYOT. Listen, darling, I want you to be very sweet, and patient, and understanding, and not be upset, or ask any questions, or anything. I have an absolute conviction that our whole future happiness depends upon our leaving here instantly.

SIBYL. Why?

ELYOT. I can't tell you why.

SIBYL. But we've only just come.

ELYOT. I know that, but it can't be helped.

SIBYL. What's happened, what has happened?

ELYOT. Nothing has happened.

SIBYL. You've gone out of your mind.

ELYOT. I haven't gone out of my mind, but I shall if we stay here another hour.

SIBYL. You're not drunk, are you?

ELYOT. Of course I'm not drunk. What time have I had to get drunk?

SIBYL. Come down and have some dinner, darling, and then you'll feel ever so much better.

ELYOT. It's no use trying to humor me. I'm serious.

SIBYL. But darling, please be reasonable. We've only just arrived; everything's unpacked. It's our first night together. We can't go away now.

ELYOT. We can have our first night together in Paris.

SIBYL. We shouldn't get there until the small hours

ELYOT [*with a great effort at calmness*]. Now, please, Sibyl, I know it sounds crazy to you, and utterly lacking in reason and sense, but I've got second sight over certain things I'm almost psychic I've got the most extraordinary sensation of impending disaster. If we stay here something appalling will happen. I know it.

SIBYL [*firmly*]. Hysterical nonsense.

ELYOT. It isn't hysterical nonsense. Presentiments are far from being nonsense. Look at the woman who cancelled her passage on the *Titanic* All because of a presentiment.

SIBYL. I don't see what that has to do with it.

ELYOT. It has everything to do with it. She obeyed her instincts, that's what she did, and saved her life. All I ask is to be allowed to obey my instincts

SIBYL. Do you mean that there's going to be an earthquake or something?

ELYOT. Very possibly, very possibly indeed, or perhaps a violent explosion.

SIBYL. They don't have earthquakes in France.

ELYOT. On the contrary, only the other day they felt a distinct shock at Toulon.

SIBYL. Yes, but that's in the South where it's hot.

ELYOT. Don't quibble, Sibyl

SIBYL. And as for explosions, there's nothing here that can explode.

ELYOT. Oho, isn't there!

SIBYL. Yes, but Elli —

ELYOT. Darling, be sweet. Bear with me I beseech you to bear with me

SIBYL. I don't understand. It's horrid of you to do this.

ELYOT. I'm not doing anything. I'm only asking you, imploring you to come away from this place.

SIBYL. But I love it here.

ELYOT. There are thousands of other places, far nicer

SIBYL. It's a pity we didn't go to one of them.

ELYOT. Now, listen, Sibyl —

SIBYL. Yes, but why are you behaving like this, why, why, why?

ELYOT. Don't ask why Just give in to me. I swear I'll never ask you to give in to me over anything again.

SIBYL [*with complete decision*]. I won't think of going to-night. It's utterly ridiculous. I've done quite enough traveling for one day, and I'm tired.

ELYOT. You're as obstinate as a mule.

SIBYL. I like that, I must say.

ELYOT [*hotly*]. You've got your nasty little feet dug into the ground, and you don't intend to budge an inch, do you?

SIBYL [*with spirit*]. No, I do not.

ELYOT. If there's one thing in the world that infuriates me, it's sheer wanton stubbornness I should like to cut off your head with a meat ax

SYBIL. How dare you talk to me like that, on our honeymoon night.

ELYOT. Damn our honeymoon night. Damn it, damn it, damn it!

SIBYL [*bursting into tears*]. Oh, Elli, Elli —

ELYOT. Stop crying. Will you or will you not come away with me to Paris?

SIBYL. I've never been so miserable in my life. You're hateful and beastly. Mother was perfectly right. She said you had shifty eyes

ELYOT. Well, she can't talk. Her's are so close together, you couldn't put a needle between them.

SIBYL. You don't love me a little bit. I wish I were dead.

ELYOT. Will you or will you not come to Paris?

SIBYL. No, no I won't.

ELYOT. Oh, my God!

[*He stamps indoors.*]

SIBYL [*following him wailing*]. Oh, Elli, Elli, Elli —

[*VICTOR comes stamping out of the French windows on the left, followed by AMANDA*]

VICTOR. You were certainly right when you said you weren't normal. You're behaving like a lunatic

AMANDA. Not at all. All I have done is to ask you a little favor.

VICTOR. Little favor indeed.

AMANDA. If we left now we could be in Paris in a few hours.

VICTOR. If we crossed Siberia by train we could be in China in a fortnight, but I don't see any reason to do it.

AMANDA. Oh, Victor darling—please, please—be sensible, just for my sake.

VICTOR. Sensible!

AMANDA. Yes, sensible. I shall be absolutely miserable if we stay here. You don't want me to be absolutely miserable all through my honeymoon, do you?

VICTOR. But why on earth didn't you think of your sister's tragedy before?

AMANDA. I forgot.

VICTOR. You couldn't forget a thing like that.

AMANDA. I got the places muddled

Then when I saw the Casino there in the moonlight, it all came back to me.

VICTOR. When did all this happen?

AMANDA. Years ago, but it might just as well have been yesterday. I can see her now lying dead, with that dreadful expression on her face. Then all that awful business of taking the body home to England. It was perfectly horrible.

VICTOR. I never knew you had a sister.

AMANDA. I haven't any more.

VICTOR. There's something behind all this.

AMANDA. Don't be silly. What could there be behind it?

VICTOR. Well, for one thing, I know you're lying.

AMANDA. Victor!

VICTOR. Be honest. Aren't you?

AMANDA. I can't think how you can be so mean and suspicious.

VICTOR [*patiently*]. You're lying, Amanda. Aren't you?

AMANDA. Yes, Victor.

VICTOR. You never had a sister, dead or alive?

AMANDA. I believe there was a still-born one in 1902.

VICTOR. What is your reason for all this?

AMANDA. I told you I was unreliable.

VICTOR. Why do you want to leave so badly?

AMANDA. You'll be angry if I tell you the truth.

VICTOR. What is it?

AMANDA. I warn you.

VICTOR. Tell me. Please tell me.

AMANDA. Elyot's here.

VICTOR. What!

AMANDA. I saw him.

VICTOR. When?

AMANDA. Just now, when you were in the bath.

VICTOR. Where was he?

AMANDA [*hesitatingly*]. Down there, in a white suit.

[*She points over the balustrade.*]

VICTOR [*skeptically*]. White suit?

AMANDA. Why not? It's summer, isn't it?

VICTOR. You're lying again.

AMANDA. I'm not. He's here. I swear he is.

VICTOR. Well, what of it?

AMANDA. I can't enjoy a honeymoon with you, with Elyot liable to bounce in at any moment.

VICTOR. Really, Mandy?

AMANDA. Can't you see how awful it

is? It's the most embarrassing thing that ever happened to me in my whole life.

VICTOR. Did he see you?

AMANDA. No, he was running.

VICTOR. What was he running for?

AMANDA. How on earth do I know? Don't be so annoying.

VICTOR. Well, as long as he didn't see you it's all right, isn't it?

AMANDA. It isn't all right at all. We must leave immediately.

VICTOR. But why?

AMANDA. How can you be so appallingly obstinate!

VICTOR. I'm not afraid of him.

AMANDA. Neither am I. It's not a question of being afraid. It's just a horrible, awkward situation.

VICTOR. I'm damned if I see why our whole honeymoon should be upset by Elyot!

AMANDA. My last one was.

VICTOR. I don't believe you at all.

AMANDA. He is here, I tell you. I saw him.

VICTOR. It was probably an optical illusion. This half light is deceptive.

AMANDA. It was no such thing.

VICTOR. I absolutely refuse to change all our plans at the last moment, just because you think you've seen Elyot. It's unreasonable and ridiculous of you to demand it. Even if he is here I can't see that it matters. He'll probably feel much more embarrassed than you, and a damned good job too; and if he annoys you in any way I'll knock him down.

AMANDA. That would be charming.

VICTOR. Now don't let's talk about it any more.

AMANDA. Do you mean to stand there seriously and imagine that the whole thing can be glossed over as easily as that?

VICTOR. I'm not going to leave. Mandy. If I start giving into you as early as this, our lives will be unbearable.

AMANDA [*outraged*]. Victor!

VICTOR [*calmly*]. You've worked yourself up into a state over a situation which really only exists in your mind.

AMANDA [*controlling herself with an effort*]. Please, Victor, please, for this last time I implore you. Let's go to Paris now, to-night. I mean it with all my heart—please—

VICTOR [*with gentle firmness*]. No, Mandy!

AMANDA. I see quite clearly that I have been foolish enough to marry a fat old gentleman in a club armchair.

VICTOR. It's no use being cross.

AMANDA. You're a pompous ass.

VICTOR [*horriſied*]. Mandy!

AMANDA [*enraged*]. Pompous ass, that's what I said, and that's what I meant. Blown out with your own importance

VICTOR. Mandy, control yourself.

AMANDA. Get away from me I can't bear to think I'm married to such rugged grandeur.

VICTOR [*with great dignity*]. I shall be in the bar. When you are ready to come down and dine, let me know.

AMANDA [*flinging herself into a chair*]. Go away, go away.

[*VICTOR stalks off at the same moment that ELYOT stamps on, on the other side, followed by SIBYL in tears*]

ELYOT. If you don't stop screaming, I'll murder you.

SIBYL. I wish to heaven I'd never seen you in my life, let alone married you. I don't wonder Amanda left you, if you behaved to her as you've behaved to me. I'm going down to have dinner by myself and you can do just what you like about it.

ELYOT. Do, and I hope it chokes you.

SIBYL. O Elli, Elli—

[*She goes wailing indoors. ELYOT stamps down to the balustrade and lights a cigarette, obviously trying to control his nerves. AMANDA sees him, and comes down, too.*]

AMANDA. Give me one for God's sake.

ELYOT [*hands her his case laconically*]. Here.

AMANDA [*taking a cigarette*]. I'm in such a rage.

ELYOT [*lighting up*]. So am I.

AMANDA. What are we to do?

ELYOT. I don't know

AMANDA. Whose yacht is that?

ELYOT. The Duke of Westminster's, I expect. It always is

AMANDA. I wish I were on it.

ELYOT. I wish you were too.

AMANDA. There's no need to be nasty.

ELYOT. Yes there is, every need. I've never in my life felt a greater urge to be nasty.

AMANDA. And you've had some urges in your time, haven't you?

ELYOT. If you start bickering with me, Amanda, I swear I'll throw you over the edge.

AMANDA. Try it, that's all, just try it.

ELYOT. You've upset everything, as usual.

AMANDA. I've upset every thing! What about you?

ELYOT. Ever since the first moment I was unlucky enough to set eyes on you, my life has been insupportable.

AMANDA. Oh do shut up, there's no sense in going on like that

ELYOT. Nothing's any use. There's no escape, ever

AMANDA. Don't be melodramatic

ELYOT. Do you want a cocktail? There are two here.

AMANDA. There are two over here as well.

ELYOT. We'll have my two first.

[*AMANDA crosses over into ELYOT'S part of the terrace. He gives her one, and keeps one himself.*]

AMANDA. Shall we get roaring screaming drunk?

ELYOT. I don't think that would help, we did it once before and it was a dismal failure

AMANDA. It was lovely at the beginning.

ELYOT. You have an immoral memory, Amanda. Here's to you.

[*They raise their glasses solemnly and drink*]

AMANDA. I tried to get away the moment after I'd seen you, but he wouldn't budge

ELYOT. What's his name?

AMANDA. Victor, Victor Prynne.

ELYOT [*toasting*]. Mr. and Mrs. Victor Prynne. [*He drinks.*] Mine wouldn't budge either.

AMANDA. What's her name?

ELYOT. Sibyl.

AMANDA [*toasting*]. Mr. and Mrs. Elyot Chase. [*She drinks*] God pity the poor girl.

ELYOT. Are you in love with him?

AMANDA. Of course.

ELYOT. How funny.

AMANDA. I don't see anything particularly funny about it. You're certainly in love with yours, aren't you?

ELYOT. Certainly.

AMANDA. There you are then.

ELYOT. There we both are then.

AMANDA. What's she like?

ELYOT. Fair, very pretty, plays the piano beautifully.

AMANDA. Very comforting.

ELYOT. How's yours?

AMANDA. I don't want to discuss him.

ELYOT. Well, it doesn't matter. He'll probably come popping out in a minute and I shall see for myself. Does he know I'm here?

AMANDA. Yes, I told him
 ELYOT [*with sarcasm*]. That's going to make things a whole lot easier.

AMANDA. You needn't be frightened; he won't hurt you.

ELYOT. If he comes near me I'll scream the place down.

AMANDA. Does Sibyl know I'm here?

ELYOT. No, I pretended I had a pre-sentiment. I tried terribly hard to persuade her to leave for Paris.

AMANDA. I tried too, it's lucky we didn't both succeed, isn't it? Otherwise we should probably all have joined up in Rouen or somewhere.

ELYOT [*laughing*]. In some frowsy little hotel.

AMANDA [*laughing too*]. Oh dear, it would have been much, much worse.

ELYOT. I can see us all sailing down in the morning for an early start.

AMANDA [*weakly*]. Lovely, oh lovely.

ELYOT. Glorious!

[*They both laugh helplessly*]

AMANDA. What's happened to yours?

ELYOT. Didn't you hear her screaming? She's downstairs in the dining-room I think.

AMANDA. Mine is being grand, in the bar.

ELYOT. It really is awfully difficult.

AMANDA. Have you known her long?

ELYOT. About four months, we met in a house party in Norfolk.

AMANDA. Very flat, Norfolk.

ELYOT. How old is dear Victor?

AMANDA. Thirty-four, or five; and Sibyl?

ELYOT. I blush to tell you, only twenty-three.

AMANDA. You've gone a mucker all right.

ELYOT. I shall reserve my opinion of your choice until I've met dear Victor.

AMANDA. I wish you wouldn't go on calling him "Dear Victor" It's extremely irritating.

ELYOT. That's how I see him. Dumpty, and fair, and very considerate, with glasses. Dear Victor.

AMANDA. As I said before I would rather not discuss him. At least I have good taste enough to refrain from making cheap gibes at Sibyl.

ELYOT. You said Norfolk was flat.

AMANDA. That was no reflection on her, unless she made it flatter.

ELYOT. Your voice takes on an acid quality whenever you mention her name.

AMANDA. I'll never mention it again.

ELYOT. Good, and I'll keep off Victor.

AMANDA [*with dignity*]. Thank you [*There is silence for a moment. The orchestra starts playing the same tune that they were singing previously*]

ELYOT. That orchestra has a remarkably small repertoire.

AMANDA. They don't seem to know anything but this, do they?

[*She sits down on the balustrade and sings it softly. Her eyes are looking out to sea, and her mind is far away. ELYOT watches her while she sings. When she turns to him at the end there are tears in her eyes. He looks away awkwardly and lights another cigarette.*]

ELYOT. You always had a sweet voice. Amanda.

AMANDA [*a little huskily*]. Thank you.

ELYOT. I'm awfully sorry about all this, really I am. I wouldn't have had it happen for all the world.

AMANDA. I know. I'm sorry too. It's just rotten luck.

ELYOT. I'll go away to-morrow whatever happens, so don't you worry.

AMANDA. That's nice of you.

ELYOT. I hope everything turns out splendidly for you and that you'll be very happy.

AMANDA. I hope the same for you, too.

[*The music, which has been playing continually through this little scene, returns persistently to the refrain. They both look at one another and laugh.*]

ELYOT. Nasty insistent little tune.

AMANDA. Extraordinary how potent cheap music is.

ELYOT. What exactly were you remembering at that moment?

AMANDA. The Palace Hotel Skating Rink in the morning, bright strong sunlight, and everybody whirling round in vivid colors, and you kneeling down to put on my skates for me.

ELYOT. You'd fallen on your fanny a few moments before.

AMANDA. It was beastly of you to laugh like that, I felt so humiliated.

ELYOT. Poor darling.

AMANDA. Do you remember waking up in the morning, and standing on the balcony, looking out across the valley?

ELYOT. Blue shadows on white snow, cleanness beyond belief, high above everything in the world. How beautiful it was.

AMANDA. It's nice to think we had a few marvelous moments.

ELYOT. A few? We had heaps really.

only they slip away into the background, and one only remembers the bad ones.

AMANDA. Yes. What fools we were to ruin it all. What utter, utter fools

ELYOT You feel like that too, do you?

AMANDA [*wearily*]. Of course

ELYOT. Why did we?

AMANDA. The whole business was too much for us.

ELYOT. We were so ridiculously over in love.

AMANDA. Funny, wasn't it?

ELYOT [*sadly*]. Horribly funny.

AMANDA. Selfishness, cruelty, hatred, possessiveness, petty jealousy. All those qualities came out in us just because we loved each other.

ELYOT. Perhaps they were there anyhow.

AMANDA. No, it's love that does it. To hell with love.

ELYOT. To hell with love.

AMANDA. And yet here we are starting afresh with two quite different people. In love all over again, aren't we? [*ELYOT doesn't answer.*] Aren't we?

ELYOT. No.

AMANDA. Elyot!

ELYOT. We're not in love all over again, and you know it. Good night, Amanda.

[*He turns abruptly and goes towards the French windows*]

AMANDA. Elyot—don't be silly—come back.

ELYOT. I must go and find Sibyl.

AMANDA. I must go and find Victor.

ELYOT [*savagely*]. Well, why don't you?

AMANDA. I don't want to.

ELYOT. It's shameful, shameful of us.

AMANDA. Don't. I feel terrible. Don't leave me for a minute—I shall go mad if you do. We won't talk about ourselves any more, we'll just talk about outside things, anything you like, only just don't leave me until I've pulled myself together.

ELYOT. Very well.

[*There is a dead silence.*]

AMANDA. What have you been doing lately? During these last years?

ELYOT. Traveling about. I went round the world, you know, after—

AMANDA [*hurriedly*]. Yes, yes, I know. How was it?

ELYOT. The world?

AMANDA. Yes.

ELYOT. Oh, highly enjoyable.

AMANDA. China must be very interesting.

ELYOT. Very big, China.

AMANDA. And Japan—

ELYOT. Very small.

AMANDA. Did you eat sharks' fins, and take your shoes off, and use chopsticks and everything?

ELYOT. Practically everything.

AMANDA. And India, the burning Ghars, or Ghats, or whatever they are, and the Taj Mahal. How was the Taj Mahal?

ELYOT [*looking at her*]. Unbelievable, a sort of dream

AMANDA. That was the moonlight I expect, you must have seen it in the moonlight

ELYOT [*never taking his eyes off her face*]. Yes, moonlight is cruelly deceptive.

AMANDA. And it didn't look like a biscuit box, did it? I've always felt that it might

ELYOT [*quietly*]. Darling, darling, I love you so

AMANDA. And I do hope you met a sacred Elephant. They're lint white I believe, and very, very sweet.

ELYOT. I've never loved any one else for an instant.

AMANDA [*raising her hand feebly in protest*]. No, no, you mustn't—Elyot—stop.

ELYOT. You love me, too, don't you? There's no doubt about it anywhere, is there?

AMANDA. No, no doubt anywhere.

ELYOT. You're looking very lovely you know, in this damned moonlight. Your skin is clear and cool, and your eyes are shining, and you're growing lovelier and lovelier every second as I look at you. You don't hold any mystery for me, darling, do you mind? There isn't a particle of you that I don't know, remember, and want.

AMANDA [*softly*]. I'm glad, my sweet.

ELYOT. More than any desire anywhere, deep down in my deepest heart I want you back again—please—

AMANDA [*putting her hand over his mouth*]. Don't say any more, you're making me cry so dreadfully.

[*He pulls her gently into his arms and they stand silently, completely oblivious to everything but the moment and each other. When finally, they separate, they sit down, rather breathlessly, on the balustrade.*]

AMANDA. What now? Oh darling, what now?

ELYOT. I don't know, I'm lost, utterly.

AMANDA. We must think quickly, oh quickly —

ELYOT. Escape?

AMANDA. Together?

ELYOT. Yes, of course, now, now!

AMANDA. We can't, we can't, you know we can't.

ELYOT. We must.

AMANDA. It would break Victor's heart.

ELYOT. And Sibyl's too probably, but they're bound to suffer anyhow. Think of the hell we'd lead them into if we stayed infinitely worse than any cruelty in the world, pretending to love them, and loving each other, so desperately.

AMANDA. We must tell them.

ELYOT. What?

AMANDA. Call them, and tell them.

ELYOT. Oh, no, no, that's impossible.

AMANDA. It's honest.

ELYOT. I can't help how honest it is, it's too horrible to think of. How should we start? What should we say?

AMANDA. We should have to trust to the inspiration of the moment.

ELYOT. It would be a moment completely devoid of inspiration. The most appalling moment imaginable. No, no, we can't, you must see that, we simply can't.

AMANDA. What do you propose to do, then? As it is they might appear at any moment.

ELYOT. We've got to decide instantly one way or another. Go away together now, or stay with them, and never see one another again, ever.

AMANDA. Don't be silly, what choice is there?

ELYOT. No choice at all, come —

[*He takes her hand*]

AMANDA. No, wait. This is sheer raving madness, something's happened to us, we're not sane.

ELYOT. We never were.

AMANDA. Where can we go?

ELYOT. Paris first, my car's in the garage, all ready.

AMANDA. They'll follow us.

ELYOT. That doesn't matter, once the thing's done.

AMANDA. I've got a flat in Paris

ELYOT. Good

AMANDA. It's in the Avenue Montaigne. I let it to Freda Lawson, but she's in Biarritz, so it's empty

ELYOT. Does Victor know?

AMANDA. No, he knows I have one but he hasn't the faintest idea where

ELYOT. Better and better.

AMANDA. We're being so bad, so terribly bad, we'll suffer for this, I know we shall.

ELYOT. Can't be helped.

AMANDA. Starting all those awful rows all over again.

ELYOT. No, no, we're older and wiser now

AMANDA. What difference does that make? The first moment either of us gets a bit nervy, off we'll go again.

ELYOT. Stop shilly-shallying, Amanda.

AMANDA. I'm trying to be sensible.

ELYOT. You're only succeeding in being completely idiotic.

AMANDA. Idiotic indeed! What about you?

ELYOT. Now look here, Amanda —

AMANDA [*stricken*]. Oh my God!

ELYOT [*rushing to her and kissing her*]. Darling, darling, I didn't mean it —

AMANDA. I won't move from here unless we have a compact, a sacred, sacred compact never to quarrel again.

ELYOT. Easy to make but difficult to keep.

AMANDA. No, no, it's the bickering that always starts it. The moment we notice we're bickering, either of us, we must promise on our honor to stop dead. We'll invent some phrase or catchword, which when either of us says it, automatically cuts off all conversation for at least five minutes.

ELYOT. Two minutes, dear, with an option of renewal.

AMANDA. Very well, what shall it be?

ELYOT [*hurriedly*]. Solomon Isaacs.

AMANDA. All right, that'll do.

ELYOT. Come on, come on.

AMANDA. What shall we do if we meet either of them on the way downstairs?

ELYOT. Run like stags.

AMANDA. What about clothes?

ELYOT. I've got a couple of bags I haven't unpacked yet

AMANDA. I've got a small trunk.

ELYOT. Send the porter up for it.

AMANDA. Oh this is terrible—terrible —

ELYOT. Come on, come on, don't waste time.

AMANDA. Oughtn't we to leave notes or something?

ELYOT. No, no, no, we'll telegraph from somewhere on the road

AMANDA. Darling, I daren't, it's too wicked of us, I simply daren't

ELYOT [*seizing her in his arms and kissing her violently*]. Now will you behave?

AMANDA. Yes, but Elyot darling —

ELYOT. Solomon Isaacs!

[*They rush off together through ELYOT'S suite. After a moment or so, VICTOR steps out on to the terrace and looks round anxiously. Then he goes back indoors again, and can be heard calling "MANDY"*. Finally he again comes out on to the terrace and comes despondently down to the balustrade. He hears SIBYL'S voice calling "ELLI" and looks round as she comes out of the French windows. She jumps slightly upon seeing him.]

VICTOR. Good evening.

SIBYL [*rather flustered*]. Good evening — I was — er — looking for my husband.

VICTOR. Really, that's funny. I was looking for my wife.

SIBYL. Quite a coincidence.

[*She laughs nervously*]

VICTOR [*after a pause*]. It's very nice here, isn't it?

SIBYL. Lovely.

VICTOR. Have you been here long?

SIBYL. No, we only arrived to-day.

VICTOR. Another coincidence. So did we.

SIBYL. How awfully funny.

VICTOR. Would you care for a cocktail?

SIBYL. Oh no, thank you — really —

VICTOR. There are two here on the table.

[*SIBYL glances at the two empty glasses on the balustrade, and tosses her head defiantly.*]

SIBYL. Thanks very much, I'd love one.

VICTOR. Good, here you are.

[*SIBYL comes over to VICTOR'S side of the terrace. He hands her one and takes one himself*]

SIBYL. Thank you.

VICTOR [*with rather forced gaiety*]. To absent friends. [*He raises his glass*]

SIBYL [*raising hers*]. To absent friends. [*They both laugh rather mirthlessly and then sit down on the balustrade, pensively sipping their cocktails and looking at the view.*] It's awfully pretty, isn't it? The moonlight, and the lights of that yacht reflected in the water —

VICTOR. I wonder who it belongs to.

ACT II

The Scene is AMANDA'S flat in Paris. A few days have elapsed since Act I. The flat is charmingly furnished, its principal features being a Stenway Grand on the Left, facing slightly up stage. Down stage center, a very large comfortable sofa, behind which is a small table. There is also another sofa somewhere about, and one or two small tables, and a gramophone. The rest can be left to the discretion and taste of the decorator.

When the curtain rises it is about ten o'clock in the evening. The windows are wide open, and the various street sounds of Paris can be heard but not very loudly as the apartment is high up.

AMANDA and ELYOT are seated opposite one another at the table. They have finished dinner and are dallying over coffee and liqueurs. AMANDA is wearing pajamas, and ELYOT a comfortable dressing-gown.

AMANDA. I'm glad we let Louise go. I am afraid she is going to have a cold.

ELYOT. Going to have a cold; she's been grunting and snorting all the evening like a whole herd of bison.

AMANDA [*thoughtfully*]. Bison never sounds right to me somehow. I have a feeling it ought to be bisons, a flock of bisons.

ELYOT. You might say a covey of bisons, or even a school of bisons.

AMANDA. Yes, lovely. The Royal London School of Bisons. Do you think Louise is happy at home?

ELYOT. No, profoundly miserable.

AMANDA. Family beastly to her?

ELYOT [*with conviction*]. Absolutely vile. Knock her about dreadfully I expect, make her eat the most disgusting food, and pull her fringe.

AMANDA [*laughing*]. Oh, poor Louise.

ELYOT. Well, you know what the French are.

AMANDA. Oh yes, indeed. I know what the Hungarians are, too.

ELYOT. What are they?

AMANDA. Very wistful. It's all those Pretzles, I shouldn't wonder.

ELYOT. And the Poostza; I always felt the Poostza was far too big, Danube or no Danube.

AMANDA. Have you ever crossed the Sahara on a Camel?

ELYOT Frequently. When I was a boy we used to do it all the time My Grandmother had a lovely seat on a camel

AMANDA. There's no doubt about it, foreign travel's the thing

ELYOT Would you like some brandy?

AMANDA. Just a little

[*He pours some into her glass and some into his own*]

ELYOT. I'm glad we didn't go out to-night.

AMANDA Or last night.

ELYOT Or the night before

AMANDA. There's no reason to, really, when we're cosy here.

ELYOT. Exactly.

AMANDA. It's nice, isn't it?

ELYOT. Strangely peaceful It's an awfully bad reflection on our characters We ought to be absolutely tortured with conscience

AMANDA We are, every now and then.

ELYOT. Not nearly enough

AMANDA. We sent Victor and Sibyl a nice note from wherever it was, what more can they want?

ELYOT. You're even more ruthless than I am

AMANDA I don't believe in crying over my bridge before I've eaten it.

ELYOT. Very sensible.

AMANDA Personally I feel grateful for a miraculous escape. I know now that I should never have been happy with Victor. I was a fool ever to consider it.

ELYOT. You did a little more than consider it.

AMANDA Well, you can't talk.

ELYOT. I wonder whether they met each other, or whether they've been suffering alone

AMANDA Oh dear, don't let's go on about it, it really does make one feel rather awful.

ELYOT. I suppose one or other or both of them will turn up here eventually

AMANDA. Bound to; it won't be very nice, will it?

ELYOT [*cheerfully*]. Perfectly horrible.

AMANDA. Do you realize that we're living in sin?

ELYOT. Not according to the Catholics; Catholics don't recognize divorce. We're married as much as ever we were.

AMANDA. Yes, dear, but we're not Catholics

ELYOT. Never mind, it's nice to think they'd sort of back us up We were married in the eyes of heaven, and we still are

AMANDA. We may be all right in the

eyes of Heaven, but we look like being in the hell of a mess socially

ELYOT Who cares?

AMANDA Are we going to marry again, after Victor and Sibyl divorce us?

ELYOT I suppose so. What do you think?

AMANDA. I feel rather scared of marriage really.

ELYOT It is a frowsy business.

AMANDA. I believe it was just the fact of our being married, and clamped together publicly, that wrecked us before.

ELYOT. That, and not knowing how to manage each other

AMANDA. Do you think we know how to manage each other now?

ELYOT. This week's been very successful. We've hardly used Solomon Isaacs at all

AMANDA Solomon Isaacs is so long; let's shorten it to Sollocks.

ELYOT All right

AMANDA Darling, you do look awfully sweet in your little dressing-gown.

ELYOT. Yes, it's pretty ravishing, isn't it?

AMANDA. Do you mind if I come round and kiss you?

ELYOT A pleasure, Lady Agatha.

[*AMANDA comes round the table, kisses him, picks up the coffee pot, and returns to her chair.*]

AMANDA What fools we were to subject ourselves to five years' unnecessary suffering.

ELYOT. Perhaps it wasn't unnecessary; perhaps it mellowed and perfected us like beautiful ripe fruit.

AMANDA When we were together, did you really think I was unfaithful to you?

ELYOT Yes, practically every day

AMANDA I thought you were too; often I used to torture myself with visions of your bouncing about on divans with awful widows.

ELYOT. Why widows?

AMANDA. I was thinking of Claire Lavenham really.

ELYOT Oh Claire.

AMANDA [*sharply*]. What did you say "Oh Claire" like that for? It sounded far too careless to me

ELYOT [*wistfully*]. What a lovely creature she was.

AMANDA. Lovely, lovely, lovely!

ELYOT [*blowing her a kiss*]. Darling!

AMANDA Did you ever have an affair with her? Afterwards I mean?

ELYOT Why do you want to know?

AMANDA Curiosity, I suppose

ELYOT. Dangerous.

AMANDA. Oh not now, not dangerous now I wouldn't expect you to have been celibate during those five years, any more than I was

ELYOT [*jumping*] What?

AMANDA. After all, Claire was undeniably attractive. A trifle over-vivacious I always thought, but that was probably because she was fundamentally stupid.

ELYOT. What do you mean about not being celibate during those five years?

AMANDA. What do you think I mean?

ELYOT. Oh God!

[*He looks down miserably.*]

AMANDA. What's the matter?

ELYOT. You know perfectly well what's the matter.

AMANDA [*gently*]. You mustn't be unreasonable, I was only trying to stamp out the memory of you. I expect your affairs well outnumbered mine, anyhow.

ELYOT. That is a little different. I'm a man.

AMANDA. Excuse me a moment while I get a caraway biscuit and change my crinoline.

ELYOT. It doesn't suit women to be promiscuous.

AMANDA. It doesn't suit men for women to be promiscuous.

ELYOT [*with sarcasm*]. Very modern, dear; really your advanced views quite startle me.

AMANDA. Don't be cross, Elyot, I haven't been so dreadfully loose actually. Five years is a long time, and even if I did nip off with some one every now and again, they were none of them very serious.

ELYOT [*rising from the table and walking away*]. Oh, do stop it please—

AMANDA. Well, what about you?

ELYOT. Do you want me to tell you?

AMANDA. No, no, I don't—I take everything back—I don't.

ELYOT [*viciously*]. I was madly in love with a woman in South Africa.

AMANDA. Did she have a ring through her nose?

ELYOT. Don't be revolting.

AMANDA. We're tormenting one another. Sit down, sweet, I'm scared.

ELYOT [*slowly*]. Very well.

[*He sits down thoughtfully.*]

AMANDA. We should have said Sollocks ages ago.

ELYOT. We're in love all right.

AMANDA. Don't say it so bitterly. Let's try to get the best out of it this time, instead of the worst.

ELYOT [*stretching his hand across the table*] Hand, please.

AMANDA [*clasping it*]. Here.

ELYOT. More comfortable?

AMANDA. Much more.

ELYOT [*after a slight pause*]. Are you engaged for this dance?

AMANDA. Funnily enough I was, but my partner was suddenly taken ill.

ELYOT [*rising and going to the gramophone*]. It's this damned smallpox epidemic.

AMANDA. No, as a matter of fact it was kidney trouble

ELYOT. You'll dance it with me I hope?

AMANDA [*rising*]. I shall be charmed.

ELYOT [*as they dance*]. Quite a good floor, isn't it?

AMANDA. Yes, I think it needs a little Borax.

ELYOT. I love Borax.

AMANDA. Is that the Grand Duchess Olga lying under the piano?

ELYOT. Yes, her husband died a few weeks ago, you know, on his way back from Pulborough. So sad.

AMANDA. What on earth was he doing in Pulborough?

ELYOT. Nobody knows exactly, but there have been the usual stories.

AMANDA. I see.

ELYOT. Delightful parties Lady Bundle always gives, doesn't she?

AMANDA. Entrancing. Such a dear old lady.

ELYOT. And so gay! Did you notice her at supper blowing all those shrimps through her ear trumpet?

[*The tune comes to an end. AMANDA sits on the edge of the sofa, pensively.*]

ELYOT. What are you thinking about?

AMANDA. Nothing in particular.

ELYOT. Come on, I know that face.

AMANDA. Poor Sibyl.

ELYOT. Sibyl?

AMANDA. Yes, I suppose she loves you terribly.

ELYOT. Not as much as all that, she didn't have a chance to get really under way.

AMANDA. I expect she's dreadfully unhappy.

ELYOT. Oh, do shut up, Amanda. We've had all that out before.

AMANDA. We've certainly been pretty busy trying to justify ourselves.

ELYOT. It isn't a question of justifying ourselves—it's the true values of the situation that are really important. The moment we saw one another again we knew

it was no use going on. We knew it instantly really, although we tried to pretend to ourselves that we didn't. What we've got to be thankful for is that we made the break straight away, and not later

AMANDA You think we should have done it anyhow?

ELYOT. Of course, and things would have been in a worse mess than they are now.

AMANDA. And what if we'd never happened to meet again? Would you have been quite happy with Sibyl?

ELYOT. I expect so.

AMANDA. Oh, Elyot!

ELYOT. You needn't look so stricken. It would have been the same with you and Victor. Life would have been smooth, and amicable, and quite charming, wouldn't it?

AMANDA. Poor dear Victor. He certainly did love me.

ELYOT. Splendid

AMANDA. When I met him I was so lonely and depressed, I felt that I was getting old, and crumbling away unwanted.

ELYOT. It certainly is horrid when one begins to crumble.

AMANDA [*wistfully*]. He used to look at me hopelessly like a lovely spaniel, and I sort of melted like snow in the sunlight.

ELYOT. That must have been an edifying spectacle.

AMANDA. Victor really had a great charm.

ELYOT. You must tell me all about it.

AMANDA. He had a positive mania for looking after me, and protecting me.

ELYOT. That would have died down in time, dear.

AMANDA. You mustn't be rude, there's no necessity to be rude.

ELYOT. I wasn't in the least rude, I merely made a perfectly rational statement.

AMANDA. Your voice was decidedly bitter.

ELYOT. Victor had glorious legs, hadn't he? And fascinating ears.

AMANDA. Don't be silly.

ELYOT. He probably looked radiant in the morning, all flushed and tumbled on the pillow.

AMANDA. I never saw him on the pillow.

ELYOT. I'm surprised to hear it.

AMANDA [*angrily*]. Elyot!

ELYOT. There's no need to be cross.

AMANDA. What did you mean by that?

ELYOT. I'm sick of listening to you yap, yap, yap, yap, yapping about Victor

AMANDA. Now listen, Elyot, once and for all—

ELYOT. Oh my dear, Sollocks! Sollocks!—two minutes—Sollocks.

AMANDA. But—

ELYOT [*firmly*]. Sollocks! [*They sit in dead silence, looking at each other. AMANDA makes a sign that she wants a cigarette. ELYOT gets up, hands her the box, and lights one for her and himself. AMANDA rises and walks over to the window, and stands there, looking out for a moment. Presently ELYOT joins her. She slips her arm through his, and they kiss lightly. They draw the curtains and then come down and sit side by side on the sofa. ELYOT looks at his watch. AMANDA raises her eyebrows at him and he nods, then they both sigh, audibly.*] That was a near thing.

AMANDA. It was my fault. I'm terribly sorry, darling.

ELYOT. I was very irritating, I know I was. I'm sure Victor was awfully nice, and you're perfectly right to be sweet about him.

AMANDA. That's downright handsome of you Sweetheart! [*She kisses him*]

ELYOT [*leaning back with her on the sofa*]. I think I love you more than ever before. Isn't it ridiculous? Put your feet up.

[*She puts her legs across his, and they snuggle back together in the corner of the sofa, his head resting on her shoulder.*]

AMANDA. Comfortable?

ELYOT. Almost, wait a moment.

[*He struggles a bit and then settles down with a sigh*]

AMANDA. How long, Oh Lord, how long?

ELYOT [*drowsily*]. What do you mean. "How long, Oh Lord, how long?"

AMANDA. This is far too perfect to last

ELYOT. You have no faith, that's what's wrong with you.

AMANDA. Absolutely none.

ELYOT. Don't you believe in—?

[*He nods upwards.*]

AMANDA. No, do you?

ELYOT [*shaking his head*]. No. What about—? [*He points downwards*]

AMANDA. Oh dear no.

ELYOT. Don't you believe in anything?

AMANDA. Oh yes, I believe in being kind to every one, and giving money to

old beggar women, and being as gay as possible.

ELYOT. What about after we're dead?

AMANDA. I think a rather gloomy merging into everything, don't you?

ELYOT. I hope not, I'm a bad merger

AMANDA. You won't know a thing about it

ELYOT. I hope for a glorious oblivion, like being under gas

AMANDA. I always dream the most peculiar things under gas.

ELYOT. Would you be young always? If you could choose?

AMANDA. No, I don't think so, not if it meant having awful bull's glands popped into me.

ELYOT. Cows for you, dear. Bulls for me.

AMANDA. We certainly live in a marvelous age.

ELYOT. Too marvelous. It's all right if you happen to be a specialist at something, then you're too concentrated to pay attention to all the other things going on. But, for the ordinary observer, it's too much.

AMANDA [*snuggling closer*] Far, far too much.

ELYOT. Take the radio for instance.

AMANDA. Oh darling, don't let's take the radio.

ELYOT. Well, aeroplanes then, and Cosmic Atoms, and Television, and those gland injections we were talking about just now.

AMANDA. It must be so nasty for the poor animals, being experimented on.

ELYOT. Not when the experiments are successful. Why, in Vienna I believe you can see whole lines of decrepit old rats carrying on like Tiller Girls.

AMANDA [*laughing*] Oh, how very, very sweet

ELYOT [*burying his face in her shoulder*]. I do love you so.

AMANDA. Don't blow, dear heart, it gives me the shivers.

ELYOT [*trying to kiss her*]. Swivel your face round a bit more.

AMANDA [*obliging*]. That better?

ELYOT [*kissing her lingeringly*]. Very nice, thank you kindly.

AMANDA [*twining her arms round his neck*] Darling, you're so terribly, terribly dear, and sweet, and attractive.

[*She pulls his head down to her again and they kiss lovingly.*]

ELYOT [*softly*]. We were raving mad, ever to part, even for an instant.

AMANDA. Utter imbeciles.

ELYOT. I realized it almost immediately, didn't you?

AMANDA. Long before we got our decree.

ELYOT. My heart broke on that damned trip round the world. I saw such beautiful things, darling Moonlight shining on old Temples, strange barbaric dances in jungle villages, scarlet flamingoes flying over deep, deep blue water. Breathlessly lovely, and completely unexciting because you weren't there to see them with me.

AMANDA [*kissing him again*]. Take me, please, take me at once, let's make up for lost time.

ELYOT. Next week?

AMANDA. To-morrow.

ELYOT. Done.

AMANDA I must see those dear flamingoes. [*There is a pause.*] Eight years all told, we've loved each other. Three married and five divorced.

ELYOT. Angel. Angel. Angel.

[*He kisses her passionately.*]

AMANDA [*struggling slightly*]. No, Elyot, stop now, stop —

ELYOT. Why should I stop? You know you adore being made love to

AMANDA [*through his kisses*] It's so soon after dinner.

ELYOT [*jumping up rather angrily*]. You really do say most awful things.

AMANDA [*tidying her hair*]. I don't see anything particularly awful about that.

ELYOT. No sense of glamour, no sense of glamour at all.

AMANDA. It's difficult to feel really glamorous with a crick in the neck.

ELYOT. Why didn't you say you had a crick in your neck?

AMANDA [*sweetly*]. It's gone now.

ELYOT. How convenient

[*He lights a cigarette.*]

AMANDA [*holding out her hand*]. I want one, please.

ELYOT [*throwing her one*]. Here.

AMANDA. Match?

ELYOT [*impatently*]. Wait a minute, can't you?

AMANDA. Chivalrous little love.

ELYOT [*throwing the matches at her*]. Here

AMANDA [*coldly*]. Thank you very much indeed.

[*There is a silence for a moment.*]

ELYOT. You really can be more irritating than any one in the world.

AMANDA. I fail to see what I've done that's so terribly irritating.

ELYOT. You have no tact.

AMANDA. Tact! You have no consideration

ELYOT [*walking up and down*]. Too soon after dinner indeed.

AMANDA. Yes, much too soon.

ELYOT That sort of remark shows rather a common sort of mind I'm afraid.

AMANDA. Oh it does, does it?

ELYOT. Very unpleasant, makes me shudder.

AMANDA. Making all this fuss just because your silly vanity is a little upset.

ELYOT. Vanity! What do you mean, vanity?

AMANDA. You can't bear the thought that there are certain moments when our chemical, what d'you call 'ems, don't fuse properly.

ELYOT [*derisively*]. Chemical what d'you call 'ems! Please try to be more explicit.

AMANDA. You know perfectly well what I mean, and don't you try to patronize me.

ELYOT [*loudly*]. Now look here, Amanda—

AMANDA [*suddenly*]. Darling! Sollocks! Oh, for God's sake, Sollocks!

ELYOT But listen—

AMANDA. Sollocks, Sollocks, Oh dear—triple Sollocks!

[They stand looking at one another in silence for a moment, then AMANDA flings herself down on the sofa and buries her face in the cushions. ELYOT looks at her, then goes over to the piano. He sits down and begins to play idly. AMANDA raises her head, screws herself round on the sofa, and lies there listening. ELYOT blows a kiss to her and goes on playing. He starts to sing softly to her, never taking his eyes off her. When he has finished the little refrain, whatever it was, he still continues to play it looking at her]

AMANDA. Big romantic stuff, darling.

ELYOT [*smiling*]. Yes, big romantic stuff.

[He wanders off into another tune.

AMANDA sits up crossed legged on the sofa, and begins to sing it, then, still singing, she comes over and perches on the piano. They sing several old refrains from dead and gone musical comedies finishing with the song that brought them together again in the first Act. Finally AMANDA comes down and sits next to him on the piano stool, they both therefore have their backs half turned to the

audience. She rests her head on his shoulder, until finally his fingers drop off the keys, and they melt into one another's arms]

ELYOT [*after a moment*]. You're the most thrilling, exciting woman that was ever born.

AMANDA [*standing up, and brushing her hand lightly over his mouth*] Dearest, dearest heart—

[He catches at her hand and kisses it, and then her arm, until he is standing up, embracing her ardently. She struggles a little, half laughing, and breaks away, but he catches her, and they finish up on the sofa again, clasped in each other's arms, both completely given up to the passions of the moment, until the telephone bell rings violently, and they both spring apart.]

ELYOT. Good God!

AMANDA. Do you think it's them?

ELYOT. I wonder.

AMANDA. Nobody knows we're here except Freda, and she wouldn't ring up.

ELYOT It must be them then.

AMANDA. What are we to do?

ELYOT [*suddenly*]. We're all right darling, aren't we—whatever happens?

AMANDA. Now and always, sweet

ELYOT. I don't care then.

[He gets up and goes defiantly over to the telephone, which has been ringing incessantly during the little preceding scene]

AMANDA. It was bound to come sooner or later.

ELYOT [*at telephone*]. Hallo—hallo—what—comment? Madame, qui? 'allo—'allo—oui, c'est ça. Oh, Madame Duvalon—oui, oui, oui. *[He puts his hand over the mouthpiece.]* It's only somebody wanting to talk to the dear Madame Duvalon.

AMANDA Who's she?

ELYOT I haven't the faintest idea. *[At telephone.]* Je regrette beaucoup, Monsieur, mais Madame Duvalon viens de partir—cette après-midi, pour Madagascar. *[He hangs up the telephone.]* Whew, that gave me a fright

AMANDA. It sent shivers up my spine
ELYOT. What shall we do if they suddenly walk in on us?

AMANDA. Behave exquisitely.

ELYOT. With the most perfect poise?

AMANDA. Certainly, I shall probably do a Court curtsy.

ELYOT [*sitting on the edge of the sofa*]. Things that ought to matter dread-

fully, don't matter at all when one's happy, do they?

AMANDA What is so horrible is that one can't stay happy

ELYOT. Darling, don't say that.

AMANDA. It's true The whole business is a very poor joke.

ELYOT. Meaning that sacred and beautiful thing, love?

AMANDA Yes, meaning just that.

ELYOT [*striding up and down the room dramatically*]. What does it all mean, that's what I ask myself in my ceaseless quest for ultimate truth Dear God, what does it all mean?

AMANDA. Don't laugh at me, I'm serious

ELYOT [*seriously*]. You mustn't be serious, my dear one, it's just what they want.

AMANDA. Who's they?

ELYOT. All the futile moralists who try to make life unbearable Laugh at them Be flippant. Laugh at everything, all their sacred shibboleths Flippancy brings out the acid in their damned sweetness and light

AMANDA If I laugh at everything, I must laugh at us too.

ELYOT. Certainly you must. We're figures of fun all right.

AMANDA. How long will it last, this ludicrous, overbearing love of ours?

ELYOT. Who knows?

AMANDA. Shall we always want to bicker and fight?

ELYOT. No, that desire will fade, along with our passion

AMANDA. Oh, dear, shall we like that?

ELYOT It all depends on how well we've played

AMANDA. What happens if one of us dies? Does the one that's left still laugh?

ELYOT. Yes, yes, with all his might

AMANDA [*wistfully clutching his hand*]. That's serious enough, isn't it?

ELYOT. No, no, it isn't Death's very laughable, such a cunning little mystery. All done with mirrors.

AMANDA. Darling, I believe you're talking nonsense.

ELYOT. So is every one else in the long run. Let's be superficial and pity the poor Philosophers. Let's blow trumpets and squeakers, and enjoy the party as much as we can, like very small, quite idiotic school-children. Let's savor the delight of the moment. Come and kiss me, darling, before your body rots, and worms pop in and out of your eye sockets

AMANDA. Elyot, worms don't pop.

ELYOT [*hissing her*]. I don't mind what you do—see? You can paint yourself bright green all over, and dance naked in the Place Vendome, and rush off madly with all the men in the world, and I shan't say a word, as long as you love me best.

AMANDA. Thank you, dear. The same applies to you, except that if I catch you so much as looking at another woman, I'll kill you

ELYOT Do you remember that awful scene we had in Venice?

AMANDA. Which particular one?

ELYOT. The one when you bought that little painted wooden snake on the Piazza, and put it on my bed

AMANDA. Oh, Charles. That was his name, Charles. He did wriggle so beautifully.

ELYOT. Horrible thing, I hated it.

AMANDA. Yes, I know you did. You threw it out of the window into the Grand Canal. I don't think I'll ever forgive you for that

ELYOT How long did the row last?

AMANDA. It went on intermittently for days.

ELYOT. The worst one was in Cannes when your curling irons burnt a hole in my new dressing-gown. [*He laughs.*]

AMANDA. It burnt my comb, too, and all the towels in the bathroom

ELYOT. That was a rouser, wasn't it?

AMANDA. That was the first time you ever hit me

ELYOT I didn't hit you very hard.

AMANDA The manager came in and found us rolling on the floor, biting and scratching like panthers. Oh dear, oh dear — [*She laughs helplessly.*]

ELYOT. I shall never forget his face.

[*They both collapse with laughter*]

AMANDA. How ridiculous, how utterly, utterly ridiculous!

ELYOT. We were very much younger then

AMANDA. And very much sillier.

ELYOT. As a matter of fact, the real cause of that row was Peter Burden.

AMANDA. You knew there was nothing in that.

ELYOT. I didn't know anything of the sort, you took presents from him.

AMANDA. Presents; only a trivial little brooch.

ELYOT. I remember it well, bristling with diamonds In the worst possible taste

AMANDA Not at all, it was very pretty. I still have it, and I wear it often

ELYOT. You went out of your way to torture me over Peter Burden

AMANDA. No, I didn't, you worked the whole thing up in your jealous imagination

ELYOT. You must admit that he was in love with you, wasn't he?

AMANDA. Just a little perhaps. Nothing serious.

ELYOT. You let him kiss you. You said you did.

AMANDA. Well, what of it?

ELYOT. What of it!

AMANDA. It gave him a lot of pleasure, and it didn't hurt me

ELYOT. What about me?

AMANDA. If you hadn't been so suspicious and nosy you'd never have known a thing about it.

ELYOT. That's a nice point of view, I must say.

AMANDA. Oh, dear, I'm bored with this conversation.

ELYOT. So am I, bored stiff. [*He goes over to the table.*] Want some brandy?

AMANDA. No, thanks.

ELYOT. I'll have a little, I think.

AMANDA. I don't see why you want it, you've already had two glasses.

ELYOT. No particular reason. Anyhow, they were very small ones.

AMANDA. It seems so silly to go on, and on, and on with a thing.

ELYOT [*pouring himself out a glass-ful*]. You can hardly call three liqueur glasses in a whole evening going on, and on, and on.

AMANDA. It's become a habit with you.

ELYOT. You needn't be so grand, just because you don't happen to want any yourself at the moment.

AMANDA. Don't be so stupid

ELYOT [*irritably*]. Really Amanda —

AMANDA. What?

ELYOT. Nothing. [*AMANDA sits down on the sofa, and, taking a small mirror from her bag, gazes at her face critically, and then uses some lipstick and powder. A trifle nastily.*] Going out somewhere, dear?

AMANDA. No, just making myself fascinating for you.

ELYOT. That reply has broken my heart.

AMANDA. The woman's job is to allure the man. Watch me a minute, will you?

ELYOT. As a matter of fact that's perfectly true.

AMANDA. Oh, no, it isn't.

ELYOT. Yes it is.

AMANDA [*snappily*]. Oh be quiet.

ELYOT. It's a pity you didn't have any more brandy; it might have made you a little less disagreeable.

AMANDA. It doesn't seem to have worked such wonders with you.

ELYOT. Snap, snap, snap; like a little adder

AMANDA. Adders don't snap, they sting.

ELYOT. Nonsense, they have a little bag of venom behind their fangs and they snap

AMANDA. They sting.

ELYOT. They snap

AMANDA [*with exasperation*]. I don't care, do you understand? I don't care. I don't mind if they bark, and roll about like hoops.

ELYOT [*after a slight pause*]. Did you see much of Peter Burden after our divorce?

AMANDA. Yes, I did, quite a lot.

ELYOT. I suppose you let him kiss you a good deal more than.

AMANDA. Mind your own business.

ELYOT. You must have had a riotous time. [*AMANDA doesn't answer, so he stalks about the room.*] No restraint at all—very enjoyable—you never had much anyhow

AMANDA. You're quite insufferable; I expect it's because you're drunk.

ELYOT. I'm not in the least drunk.

AMANDA. You always had a weak head

ELYOT. I think I mentioned once before that I have only had three minute liqueur glasses of brandy the whole evening long. A child of two couldn't get drunk on that

AMANDA. On the contrary, a child of two could get violently drunk on only one glass of brandy.

ELYOT. Very interesting. How about a child of four, and a child of six, and a child of nine?

AMANDA [*turning her head away*]. Oh do shut up.

ELYOT [*witheringly*]. We might get up a splendid little debate about that, you know, Intemperate Tots.

AMANDA. Not very funny, dear; you'd better have some more brandy.

ELYOT. Very good idea, I will.

[*He pours out another glass and gulps it down defiantly.*]

AMANDA. Ridiculous ass.

ELYOT. I beg your pardon?

AMANDA. I said ridiculous ass!

ELYOT [*with great dignity*]. Thank

you. [*There is a silence AMANDA gets up, and turns the gramophone on.*] You'd better turn that off, I think.

AMANDA [*coldly*]. Why?

ELYOT. It's very late and it will annoy the people upstairs.

AMANDA There aren't any people upstairs. It's a photographer's studio.

ELYOT. There are people downstairs, I suppose?

AMANDA. They're away in Tunis.

ELYOT. This is no time of the year for Tunis. [*He turns the gramophone off.*]

AMANDA [*icily*]. Turn it on again, please.

ELYOT. I'll do no such thing.

AMANDA. Very well, if you insist on being boorish and idiotic

[*She gets up and turns it on again.*]

ELYOT. Turn it off. It's driving me mad

AMANDA. You're far too temperamental. Try to control yourself.

ELYOT. Turn it off.

AMANDA. I won't. [*ELYOT rushes at the gramophone. AMANDA tries to ward him off. They struggle silently for a moment, then the needle screeches across the record.*] There now, you've ruined the record.

[*She takes it off and scrutinizes it.*]

ELYOT Good job, too

AMANDA. Disagreeable pig.

ELYOT [*suddenly stricken with remorse*]. Amanda darling—Sollocks.

AMANDA [*furiously*]. Sollocks yourself.

[*She breaks the record over his head.*]

ELYOT [*staggering*]. You spiteful little beast.

[*He slaps her face. She screams loudly and hurls herself sobbing with rage on to the sofa, with her face buried in the cushions.*]

AMANDA [*wailing*]. Oh, oh, oh—

ELYOT. I'm sorry, I didn't mean it—I'm sorry, darling, I swear I didn't mean it.

AMANDA. Go away, go away, I hate you.

[*ELYOT kneels on the sofa and tries to pull her round to look at him.*]

ELYOT Amanda—listen—listen—

AMANDA [*turning suddenly, and fetching him a welt across the face*] Listen indeed; I'm sick and tired of listening to you, you damned sadistic bully!

ELYOT [*with great grandeur*]. Thank you. [*He stalks towards the door, in stately silence. AMANDA throws a cushion at him, which misses him and knocks*

a lamp and a vase on the side table. ELYOT laughs falsely.] A pretty display, I must say

AMANDA [*wildly*] Stop laughing like that.

ELYOT [*continuing*]. Very amusing indeed.

AMANDA [*losing control*]. Stop—stop—stop— [*She rushes at him, he grabs her hands and they sway about the room, until he manages to twist her round by the arms so that she faces him, closely, quivering with fury.*] I hate you, do you hear? You're conceited, and overbearing, and utterly impossible!

ELYOT [*shouting her down*]. You're a vile-tempered loose-living wicked little beast, and I never want to see you again so long as I live!

[*He flings her away from him; she staggers, and falls against a chair. They stand gasping at one another in silence, for a moment.*]

AMANDA [*very quietly*]. This is the end, do you understand? The end, finally and forever.

[*She goes to the door, which opens on to the landing, and wrenches it open.*

He rushes after her and clutches her wrist]

ELYOT. You're not going like this.

AMANDA. Oh yes I am.

ELYOT. You're not.

AMANDA. I am; let go of me— [*He pulls her away from the door, and once more they struggle. This time a standard lamp crashes to the ground AMANDA, breathlessly, as they fight.*] You're a cruel fiend, and I hate and loathe you; thank God I've realized in time what you're really like; marry you again, never, never, never. . . . I'd rather die in torment—

ELYOT [*at the same time*]. Shut up; shut up. I wouldn't marry you again if you came crawling to me on your bended knees, you're a mean, evil-minded, little vampire—I hope to God I never set eyes on you again as long as I live—

[*At this point in the proceedings they trip over a piece of carpet, and fall on to the floor, rolling over and over in paroxysms of rage VICTOR and SIBYL enter quietly, through the open door, and stand staring at them in horror. Finally AMANDA breaks free and half gets up, ELYOT grabs her leg, and she falls against a table, knocking it completely over*]

AMANDA [*screaming*]. Beast; brute; swine; cad, beast; brute; brute; devil—

[*She rushes back at ELYOT who is just*

rising to his feet, and gives him a stinging blow, which knocks him over again. She rushes blindly off Left, and slams the door, at the same moment that he jumps up and rushes off Right, also slamming the door. VICTOR and SIBYL advance apprehensively into the room, and sink on to the sofa—]

THE CURTAIN FALLS

ACT III

The Scene is the same as Act II. It is the next morning. The time is about eight-thirty. VICTOR and SIBYL have drawn the two sofas across the doors Right, and Left, and are stretched on them, asleep VICTOR is in front of AMANDA'S door, and SIBYL in front of ELYOT'S. The room is in chaos, as it was left the night before. As the curtain rises, there is the rattling of a key in the lock of the front door, and LOUISE enters. She is rather a frowsy-looking girl, and carries a string bag with various bundles of eatables crammed into it, notably a long roll of bread, and a lettuce. She closes the door after her, and in the half light trips over the standard lamp lying on the floor. She puts her string bag down, and gropes her way over to the window. She draws the curtains, letting sunlight stream into the room. When she looks round, she gives a little cry of horror. Then she sees VICTOR and SIBYL sleeping peacefully, and comes over and scrutinizes each of them with care, then she shakes SIBYL by the shoulder.

SIBYL [waking]. Oh dear.

LOUISE. Bon jour, Madame.

SIBYL [bewildered]. What?—Oh—bon jour.

LOUISE. Qu'est-ce-que vous faites ici, madame?

SIBYL. What—what? Wait a moment, attendez un instant—oh dear—

VICTOR [sleepily]. What's happening? [Jumping up] Of course, I remember now. [He sees LOUISE.] Oh!

LOUISE [firmly]. Bon jour, Monsieur

VICTOR. Er—bon jour— What time is it?

LOUISE [rather dully]. Eh, Monsieur?

SIBYL [sitting up on the sofa]. Quelle heure est il s'il vous plait?

LOUISE. C'est neuf heure moins dix madame.

VICTOR. What did she say?

SIBYL I think she said nearly ten o'clock.

VICTOR [taking situation in hand]. Er—voulez—er—wake—revillez Monsieur et Madame—er—toute suite?

LOUISE [shaking her head]. Non, Monsieur Il m'est absolument defendu de les appeler jusqu'à ce qu'ils sonnent.

[She takes her bag and goes off into the kitchen. VICTOR and SIBYL look at each other helplessly]

SIBYL What are we to do?

VICTOR [with determination]. Wake them ourselves.

[He goes towards AMANDA'S door.]

SIBYL. No, no, wait a minute.

VICTOR What's the matter?

SIBYL [plaintively]. I couldn't face them yet, really, I couldn't; I feel dreadful.

VICTOR So do I [He wanders gloomily over to the window.] It's a lovely morning

SIBYL. Lovely

[She bursts into tears]

VICTOR [coming to her]. I say, don't cry.

SIBYL. I can't help it.

VICTOR Please don't, please—

SIBYL. It's all so squalid, I wish we hadn't stayed; what's the use?

VICTOR. We've got to see them before we go back to England, we must get things straightened out.

SIBYL [sinking down on to the sofa]. Oh dear, oh dear, oh dear, I wish I were dead.

VICTOR Hush, now, hush. Remember your promise. We've got to see this through together and get it settled one way or another.

SIBYL [sniffing]. I'll try to control myself, only I'm so . . . so tired, I haven't slept properly for ages.

VICTOR. Neither have I

SIBYL. If we hadn't arrived when we did, they'd have killed one another

VICTOR. They must have been drunk.

SIBYL She hit him.

VICTOR. He'd probably hit her, too, earlier on.

SIBYL. I'd no idea any one ever behaved like that; it's so disgusting, so degrading. Elli of all people—oh dear—

[She almost breaks down again, but controls herself.]

VICTOR What an escape you've had!
SIBYL What an escape we've both had!

[AMANDA opens her door and looks out. She is wearing traveling clothes, and is carrying a small suitcase. She jumps, upon seeing SIBYL and VICTOR.]

AMANDA. Oh!—good morning

VICTOR [with infinite reproach in his voice] Oh, Amanda

AMANDA. Will you please move this sofa, I can't get out.

[VICTOR moves the sofa, and she advances into the room and goes towards the door.]

VICTOR. Where are you going?

AMANDA. Away.

VICTOR You can't.

AMANDA Why not?

VICTOR. I want to talk to you.

AMANDA [wearily] What on earth is the use of that?

VICTOR. I must talk to you.

AMANDA. Well, all I can say is, it's very inconsiderate.

[She plumps the bag down by the door and comes down to VICTOR.]

VICTOR. Mandy, I—

AMANDA [gracefully determined to rise above the situation]. I suppose you're Sibyl; how do you do? [SIBYL turns her back on her.] Well, if you're going to take up that attitude, I fail to see the point of your coming here at all.

SIBYL. I came to see Elyot.

AMANDA. I've no wish to prevent you, he's in there, probably wallowing in an alcoholic stupor.

VICTOR. This is all very unpleasant, Amanda.

AMANDA. I quite agree, that's why I want to go away

VICTOR That would be shirking, this must be discussed at length

AMANDA. Very well, if you insist, but not just now, I don't feel up to it. Has Louise come yet?

VICTOR. If Louise is the maid, she's in the kitchen.

AMANDA. Thank you. You'd probably like some coffee, excuse me a moment.

[She goes off into the kitchen.]

SIBYL. Well! How dare she?

VICTOR [irritably]. How dare she what?

SIBYL. Behave so calmly, as though nothing had happened.

VICTOR. I don't see what else she could have done.

SIBYL. Insufferable, I call it.

[ELYOT opens his door and looks out]
ELYOT [seeing them]. Oh God

[He shuts the door again quickly.]

SIBYL Elyot—Elyot— [She rushes over to the door and bangs on it.] Elyot

—Elyot—Elyot—

ELYOT [inside] Go away

SIBYL [falling on to the sofa] Oh, oh, oh! [She bursts into tears again]

VICTOR Do pull yourself together, for heaven's sake.

SIBYL. I can't, I can't—oh, oh, oh—

[AMANDA reënters]

AMANDA. I've ordered some coffee and rolls, they'll be here soon. I must apologize for the room being so untidy.

[She picks up a cushion, and pats it into place on the sofa. There is a silence except for SIBYL'S sobs. AMANDA looks at her, and then at VICTOR; then she goes off into her room again, and shuts the door.]

VICTOR. It's no use crying like that, it doesn't do any good.

[After a moment, during which SIBYL makes renewed efforts to control her tears, ELYOT opens the door immediately behind her, pushes the sofa, with her on it, out of the way, and walks towards the front door. He is in traveling clothes, and carrying a small suitcase.]

SIBYL [rushing after him]. Elyot, where are you going?

ELYOT. Canada

SIBYL. You can't go like this, you can't

ELYOT. I see no point in staying.

VICTOR You owe it to Sibyl to stay.

ELYOT. How do you do? I don't think we've met before.

SIBYL. You must stay, you've got to stay.

ELYOT. Very well, if you insist. [He plumps his bag down] I'm afraid the room is in rather a mess. Have you seen the maid Louise?

VICTOR. She's in the kitchen.

ELYOT. Good. I'll order some coffee

[He makes a movement towards the kitchen.]

VICTOR [stopping him] No, your—er—my—er—Amanda has already ordered it.

ELYOT. Oh, I'm glad the old girl's up and about.

VICTOR. We've got to get things straightened out, you know.

ELYOT [looking around the room]. Yes, it's pretty awful. We'll get the concierge up from downstairs.

VICTOR. You're being purposely flip-pant, but it's no good

ELYOT. Sorry

[*He lapses into silence.*]

VICTOR [*after a pause*]. What's to be done?

ELYOT. I don't know.

SIBYL [*with spirit*]. It's all perfectly horrible. I feel smirched and unclean as though slimy things had been crawling all over me.

ELYOT. Maybe they have, that's a very old sofa.

VICTOR. If you don't stop your damned flippancy, I'll knock your head off.

ELYOT [*raising his eyebrows*]. Has it ever struck you that flippancy might cover a very real embarrassment?

VICTOR. In a situation such as this, it's in extremely bad taste.

ELYOT. No worse than bluster, and invective. As a matter of fact, as far as I know, this situation is entirely without precedent. We have no prescribed etiquette to fall back upon. I shall continue to be flippant.

SIBYL. Oh Elyot, how can you—how can you.

ELYOT. I'm awfully sorry, Sibyl.

VICTOR. It's easy enough to be sorry.

ELYOT. On the contrary. I find it exceedingly difficult. I seldom regret anything. This is a very rare and notable exception, a sort of red-letter day. We must all make the most of it.

SIBYL. I'll never forgive you, never! I wouldn't have believed any one could be so callous and cruel.

ELYOT. I absolutely see your point, and as I said before, I'm sorry.

[*There is silence for a moment. Then AMANDA comes in again. She has obviously decided to carry everything off in a high-handed manner.*]

AMANDA [*in social tones*]. What! Breakfast not ready yet? Really, these French servants are too slow for words. [*She smiles gaily.*] What a glorious morning. [*She goes to the window.*] I do love Paris, it's so genuinely gay. Those lovely trees in the Champs Elysées, and the little roundabouts for the children to play on, and those shiny red taxis. You can see Sacré Coeur quite clearly to-day; sometimes it's a bit misty, particularly in August, all the heat rising up from the pavements you know.

ELYOT [*drily*]. Yes, dear, we know.

AMANDA [*ignoring him*]. And it's heavenly being so high up. I found this

flat three years ago, quite by merest chance. I happened to be staying at the Plaza Athenée, just down the road—

ELYOT [*enthusiastically*]. Such a nice hotel, with the most enchanting courtyard with a fountain that goes plopplop-plopplopplopplopplopplopplopplop—

VICTOR. This is ridiculous, Amanda.

ELYOT [*continuing*]. Plop plop plop plop plop plop plop plop plop—

AMANDA [*overriding him*]. Now, Victor, I refuse to discuss anything in the least important until after breakfast. I couldn't concentrate now, I know I couldn't.

ELYOT [*sarcastically*]. What manner. What poise. How I envy it. To be able to carry off the most embarrassing situation with such tact, and delicacy, and above all—such subtlety Go on, Amanda, you're making everything so much easier. We shall all be playing Hunt the Slipper in a minute

AMANDA Please don't address me, I don't wish to speak to you.

ELYOT. Splendid.

AMANDA. And what's more, I never shall again as long as I live.

ELYOT. I shall endeavor to rise above it.

AMANDA. I've been brought up to believe that it's beyond the pale, for a man to strike a woman.

ELYOT. A very poor tradition. Certain women should be struck regularly, like gongs.

AMANDA. You're an unmitigated cad, and a bully.

ELYOT. And you're an ill-mannered, bad-tempered slattern.

AMANDA [*loudly*]. Slattern indeed.

ELYOT. Yes, slattern, slattern, slattern, and fishwife.

VICTOR. Keep your mouth shut, you swine.

ELYOT. Mind your own damned business.

[*They are about to fight, when SIBYL rushes between them.*]

SIBYL. Stop, stop, it's no use going on like this. Stop, please. [*To AMANDA.*] Help me, do, do, do, help me—

AMANDA. I'm not going to interfere. Let them fight if they want to, it will probably clear the air anyhow.

SIBYL. Yes but—

AMANDA. Come into my room, perhaps you'd like to wash or something.

SIBYL. No, but—

AMANDA [*firmly*]. Come along.

SIBYL. Very well.

[*She tosses her head at ELYOT, and AMANDA drags her off*]

VICTOR [*belligerently*]. Now then!

ELYOT Now then what?

VICTOR. Are you going to take back those things you said to Amanda?

ELYOT. Certainly, I'll take back anything, if only you'll stop bellowing at me.

VICTOR [*contemptuously*]. You're a coward, too.

ELYOT. They want us to fight, don't you see?

VICTOR. No, I don't; why should they?

ELYOT. Primitive feminine instincts—warring males—very enjoyable.

VICTOR. You think you're very clever, don't you?

ELYOT. I think I'm a bit cleverer than you, but apparently that's not saying much.

VICTOR [*violently*]. What?

ELYOT. Oh, do sit down.

VICTOR. I will not.

ELYOT. Well, if you'll excuse me, I will, I'm extremely tired.

[*He sits down.*]

VICTOR. Oh, for God's sake, behave like a man.

ELYOT [*patiently*]. Listen a minute, all this belligerency is very right and proper and highly traditional, but if only you'll think for a moment, you'll see that it won't get us very far.

VICTOR To hell with all that.

ELYOT. I should like to explain that if you hit me, I shall certainly hit you, probably equally hard, if not harder I'm just as strong as you I should imagine. Then you'd hit me again, and I'd hit you again, and we'd go on until one or the other was knocked out. Now if you'll explain to me satisfactorily how all that can possibly improve the situation, I'll tear off my coat, and we'll go at one another hammer and tongs, immediately.

VICTOR. It would ease my mind.

ELYOT. Only if you won.

VICTOR I should win all right.

ELYOT. Want to try?

VICTOR. Yes.

ELYOT [*jumping up*]. Here goes then —

[*He tears off his coat.*]

VICTOR. Just a moment.

ELYOT. Well?

VICTOR. What did you mean about them wanting us to fight?

ELYOT. It would be balm to their vanity.

VICTOR Do you love Amanda?

ELYOT. Is this a battle or a discus-

sion? If it's the latter I shall put on my coat again, I don't want to catch a chill.

VICTOR Answer my question, please.

ELYOT Have a cigarette?

VICTOR [*stormily*]. Answer my question.

ELYOT If you analyze it, it's rather a silly question

VICTOR Do you love Amanda?

ELYOT [*confidentially*]. Not very much this morning; to be perfectly frank, I'd like to wring her neck. Do you love her?

VICTOR. That's beside the point

ELYOT. On the contrary, it's the crux of the whole affair If you do love her still, you can forgive her, and live with her in peace and harmony until you're ninety-eight.

VICTOR. You're apparently even more of a cad than I thought you were.

ELYOT. You are completely in the right over the whole business—don't imagine I'm not perfectly conscious of that.

VICTOR. I'm glad.

ELYOT. It's all very unfortunate.

VICTOR. Unfortunate! My God!

ELYOT. It might have been worse.

VICTOR. I'm glad you think so.

ELYOT. I do wish you'd stop being so glad about everything.

VICTOR. What do you intend to do? That's what I want to know. What do you intend to do?

ELYOT [*suddenly serious*]. I don't know, I don't care.

VICTOR. I suppose you realize that you've broken that poor little woman's heart?

ELYOT. Which poor little woman?

VICTOR Sibyl, of course.

ELYOT. Oh, come now, not as bad as that. She'll get over it, and forget all about me.

VICTOR. I sincerely hope so . . . for her sake.

ELYOT. Amanda will forget all about me too. Everybody will forget all about me I might just as well lie down and die in fearful pain and suffering, nobody would care

VICTOR. Don't talk such rot.

ELYOT. You must forgive me for taking rather a gloomy view of everything but the fact is, I suddenly feel slightly depressed.

VICTOR. I intend to divorce Amanda naming you as co-respondent.

ELYOT. Very well.

VICTOR. And Sibyl will divorce you

for Amanda. It would be foolish of either of you to attempt any defense.

ELYOT. Quite.

VICTOR. And the sooner you marry Amanda again, the better.

ELYOT. I'm not going to marry Amanda

VICTOR. What?

ELYOT. She's a vile-tempered wicked woman.

VICTOR. You should have thought of that before.

ELYOT. I did think of it before.

VICTOR [*firmly*]. You've got to marry her.

ELYOT. I'd rather marry a ravening leopard.

VICTOR [*angrily*]. Now look here. I'm sick of all this shilly-shallying. You're getting off a good deal more lightly than you deserve; you can consider yourself damned lucky I didn't shoot you

ELYOT [*with sudden vehemence*]. Well, if you'd had a spark of manliness in you, you would have shot me. You're all fuss and fume, one of these cotton-wool Englishmen I despise you.

VICTOR [*through clenched teeth*]. You despise me?

ELYOT. Yes, utterly. You're nothing but a rampaging gas bag!

[*He goes off into his room and slams the door, leaving VICTOR speechless with fury, AMANDA and SIBYL reënter*]

AMANDA [*brightly*]. Well, what's happened?

VICTOR [*sullenly*]. Nothing's happened.

AMANDA. You ought to be ashamed to admit it.

SIBYL. Where's Elyot?

VICTOR. In there.

AMANDA. What's he doing?

VICTOR [*turning angrily away*]. How do I know what he's doing?

AMANDA. If you were half the man I thought you were, he'd be bandaging himself.

SIBYL [*with defiance*]. Elyot's just as strong as Victor.

AMANDA [*savagely*]. I should like it proved.

SIBYL. There's no need to be so vindictive.

AMANDA. You were abusing Elyot like a pick-pocket to me a little while ago; now you are standing up for him.

SIBYL. I'm beginning to suspect that he wasn't quite so much to blame as I thought.

AMANDA. Oh really?

SIBYL. You certainly have a very unpleasant temper

AMANDA. It's a little difficult to keep up with your rapid changes of front, but you're young and inexperienced, so I forgive you freely.

SIBYL [*heatedly*]. Seeing the depths of degradation to which age and experience have brought you, I'm glad I'm as I am!

AMANDA [*with great grandeur*]. That was exceedingly rude. I think you'd better go away somewhere.

[*She waves her hand vaguely*]

SIBYL. After all, Elyot is my husband.

AMANDA. Take him with you, by all means.

SIBYL. If you're not very careful, I will! [*She goes over to ELYOT'S door and bangs on it*] Elyot—Elyot—

ELYOT [*inside*]. What is it?

SIBYL. Let me in. Please, please, let me in; I want to speak to you!

AMANDA. Heaven preserve me from nice women!

SIBYL. Your own reputation ought to do that.

AMANDA [*irritably*]. Oh, go to hell!

[*ELYOT opens the door, and SIBYL disappears inside, AMANDA looks at VICTOR, who is standing with his back turned, staring out of the window, then she wanders about the room, making rather inadequate little attempts to tidy up. She glances at VICTOR again.*]

AMANDA. Victor.

VICTOR [*without turning*]. What?

AMANDA [*sadly*]. Nothing.

[*She begins to wrestle with one of the sofas in an effort to get it in place.*

VICTOR turns, sees her, and comes down and helps her, in silence]

VICTOR. Where does it go?

AMANDA. Over there. [*After they have placed it, AMANDA sits on the edge of it and gasps a little.*] Thank you, Victor.

VICTOR. Don't mention it.

AMANDA [*after a pause*]. What did you say to Elyot?

VICTOR. I told him he was beneath contempt

AMANDA. Good.

VICTOR. I think you must be mad, Amanda.

AMANDA. I've often thought that myself

VICTOR. I feel completely lost, completely bewildered.

AMANDA. I don't blame you. I don't feel any too cosy.

VICTOR. Had you been drinking last night?

AMANDA. Certainly not!

VICTOR. Had Elyot been drinking?

AMANDA. Yes—gallons

VICTOR. Used he to drink before? When you were married to him?

AMANDA. Yes, terribly. Night after night he'd come home roaring and hic-coughing

VICTOR. Disgusting!

AMANDA. Yes, wasn't it?

VICTOR. Did he really strike you last night?

AMANDA. Repeatedly. I'm bruised beyond recognition

VICTOR [*suspecting slight exaggeration*]. Amanda!

AMANDA [*putting her hand on his arm*]. Oh, Victor, I'm most awfully sorry to have given you so much trouble, really I am! I've behaved badly, I know, but something strange happened to me. I can't explain it, there's no excuse, but I am ashamed of having made you unhappy.

VICTOR. I can't understand it at all. I've tried to, but I can't. It all seems so unlike you.

AMANDA. It isn't really unlike me, that's the trouble. I ought never to have married you; I'm a bad lot.

VICTOR. Amanda!

AMANDA. Don't contradict me. I know I'm a bad lot.

VICTOR. I wasn't going to contradict you.

AMANDA. Victor!

VICTOR. You appal me—absolutely!

AMANDA. Go on, go on, I deserve it.

VICTOR. I didn't come here to accuse you; there's no sense in that!

AMANDA. Why did you come?

VICTOR. To find out what you want me to do.

AMANDA. Divorce me, I suppose, as soon as possible. I won't make any difficulties. I'll go away, far away, Morocco, or Tunis, or somewhere I shall probably catch some dreadful disease, and die out there, all alone—oh dear!

VICTOR. It's no use pitying yourself.

AMANDA. I seem to be the only one who does. I might just as well enjoy it. [*She sniffs*] I'm thoroughly unprincipled, Sibyl was right!

VICTOR [*irritably*]. Sibyl's an ass.

AMANDA [*brightening slightly*]. Yes, she is rather, isn't she? I can't think why Elyot ever married her.

VICTOR. Do you love him?

AMANDA. She seems so insipid, somehow—

VICTOR. Do you love him?

AMANDA. Of course she's very pretty, I suppose, in rather a shallow way, but still—

VICTOR. Amanda!

AMANDA. Yes, Victor?

VICTOR. You haven't answered my question.

AMANDA. I've forgotten what it was.

VICTOR [*turning away*]. You're hopeless—hopeless.

AMANDA. Don't be angry, it's all much too serious to be angry about.

VICTOR. You're talking utter nonsense!

AMANDA. No, I'm not, I mean it. It's ridiculous for us all to stand round arguing with one another. You'd much better go back to England and let your lawyers deal with the whole thing.

VICTOR. But what about you?

AMANDA. I'll be all right

VICTOR. I only want to know one thing, and you won't tell me.

AMANDA. What is it?

VICTOR. Do you love Elyot?

AMANDA. No, I hate him. When I saw him again suddenly at Deauville, it was an odd sort of shock. It swept me away completely. He attracted me; he always has attracted me, but only the worst part of me I see that now.

VICTOR. I can't understand why? He's so terribly trivial and superficial.

AMANDA. That sort of attraction can't be explained—it's a sort of a chemical what d'you call 'em.

VICTOR. Yes; it must be!

AMANDA. I don't expect you to understand, and I'm not going to try to excuse myself in any way. Elyot was the first love affair of my life, and in spite of all the suffering he caused me before, there must have been a little spark left smouldering, which burst into flame when I came face to face with him again. I completely lost grip of myself and behaved like a fool, for which I shall pay all right, you needn't worry about that. But perhaps one day, when all this is dead and done with, you and I might meet and be friends. That's something to hope for, anyhow. Goodbye, Victor dear

[*She holds out her hand.*]

VICTOR [*shaking her hand mechanically*]. Do you want to marry him?

AMANDA. I'd rather marry a boa constrictor.

VICTOR. I can't go away and leave

you with a man who drinks, and knocks you about

AMANDA. You needn't worry about leaving me, as though I were a sort of parcel. I can look after myself.

VICTOR. You said just now you were going away to Tunis, to die

AMANDA I've changed my mind, it's the wrong time of the year for Tunis I shall go somewhere quite different I believe Brioni is very nice in the summer.

VICTOR. Why won't you be serious for just one moment?

AMANDA. I've told you, it's no use VICTOR. If it will make things any easier for you, I won't divorce you.

AMANDA. Victor!

VICTOR. We can live apart until Sibyl has got her decree against Elyot, then, some time after that, I'll let you divorce me.

AMANDA [*turning away*]. I see you're determined to make me serious, whether I like it or not.

VICTOR. I married you because I loved you

AMANDA. Stop it, Victor! Stop it! I won't listen!

VICTOR I expect I love you still, one doesn't change all in a minute. You never loved me. I see that now, of course, so perhaps everything has turned out for the best really.

AMANDA. I thought I loved you, honestly I did.

VICTOR. Yes, I know, that's all right.

AMANDA. What an escape you've had.

VICTOR. I've said that to myself often during the last few days.

AMANDA. There's no need to rub it in.

VICTOR. Do you agree about the divorce business?

AMANDA. Yes. It's very, very generous of you.

VICTOR. It will save you some of the mud-slinging. We might persuade Sibyl not to name you.

AMANDA [*ruefully*]. Yes, we might.

VICTOR. Perhaps she'll change her mind about divorcing him

AMANDA. Perhaps She certainly went into the bedroom with a predatory look in her eye.

VICTOR. Would you be pleased if that happened?

AMANDA. Delighted.

[*She laughs suddenly. VICTOR looks at her, curiously. SIBYL and ELYOT come out of the bedroom. There is an awkward silence for a moment.*]

SIBYL [*looking at AMANDA triumphantly*]. Elyot and I have come to a decision.

AMANDA How very nice!

VICTOR What is it?

AMANDA. Don't be silly, Victor Look at their faces.

ELYOT. Feminine intuition, very difficult

AMANDA [*looking at SIBYL*]. Feminine determination, very praiseworthy.

SIBYL. I am not going to divorce Elyot for a year.

AMANDA. I congratulate you.

ELYOT [*defiantly*]. Sibyl has behaved like an angel.

AMANDA. Well, it was certainly her big moment.

[*LOUISE comes staggering in with a large tray of coffee and rolls, etc, she stands peering over the edge of it, not knowing where to put it.*]

ELYOT. Il faut le met sur la petite table là bas.

LOUISE. Oui, monsieur

[*ELYOT and VICTOR hurriedly clear the things off the side table, and LOUISE puts the tray down, and goes back into the kitchen. AMANDA and SIBYL eye one another.*]

AMANDA. It all seems very amicable.

SIBYL. It is, thank you.

AMANDA. I don't wish to depress you, but Victor isn't going to divorce me either.

ELYOT [*looking up sharply*]. What!

AMANDA. I believe I asked you once before this morning, never to speak to me again.

ELYOT. I only said "What." It was a general exclamation denoting extreme satisfaction

AMANDA [*politely to SIBYL*]. Do sit down, won't you?

SIBYL. I'm afraid I must be going now. I'm catching the Golden Arrow; it leaves at twelve.

ELYOT [*coaxingly*]. You have time for a little coffee surely?

SIBYL. No, I really must go!

ELYOT. I shan't be seeing you again for such a long time.

AMANDA [*brightly*]. Living apart? How wise!

ELYOT [*ignoring her*]. Please, Sibyl, do stay!

SIBYL [*looking at AMANDA with a glint in her eye*]. Very well, just for a little.

AMANDA. Sit down, Victor, darling. [*They all sit down in silence AMANDA smiles sweetly at SIBYL and holds up the coffee pot and milk jug.*] Half and half?

SIBYL. Yes, please.

AMANDA [*sociably*]. What would one do without one's morning coffee? That's what I often ask myself.

ELYOT. Is it?

AMANDA [*withering him with a look*]. Victor, sugar for Sibyl. [*To SIBYL*] It would be absurd for me to call you anything but Sibyl, wouldn't it?

SIBYL [*not to be undone*]. Of course, I shall call you Mandy

[*AMANDA represses a shudder.*]

ELYOT. Oh God! We're off again. What weather!

[*AMANDA hands SIBYL her coffee.*]

SIBYL. Thank you.

VICTOR. What's the time?

ELYOT. If the clock's still going after last night, it's ten-fifteen.

AMANDA [*handing VICTOR cup of coffee*]. Here, Victor dear.

VICTOR. Thanks.

AMANDA. Sibyl, sugar for Victor.

ELYOT. I should like some coffee, please.

[*AMANDA pours some out for him, and hands it to him in silence*]

AMANDA [*to VICTOR*]. Brioche?

VICTOR [*jumping*]. What?

AMANDA. Would you like a Brioche?

VICTOR. No, thank you.

ELYOT. I would. And some butter, and some jam.

[*He helps himself.*]

AMANDA [*to SIBYL*]. Have you ever been to Brioni?

SIBYL. No. It's in the Adriatic, isn't it?

VICTOR. The Baltic, I think.

SIBYL. I made sure it was in the Adriatic.

AMANDA. I had an aunt who went there once.

ELYOT [*with his mouth full*]. I once had an aunt who went to Tasmania

[*AMANDA looks at him stonily. He winks at her, and she looks away hurriedly.*]

VICTOR. Funny how the South of France has become so fashionable in the summer, isn't it?

SIBYL. Yes, awfully funny.

ELYOT. I've been laughing about it for months.

AMANDA. Personally, I think it's a bit too hot, although of course one can lie in the water all day.

SIBYL. Yes, the bathing is really divine!

VICTOR. A friend of mine has a house right on the edge of Cape Ferrat

SIBYL. Really?

VICTOR. Yes, right on the edge.

AMANDA. That must be marvelous!

VICTOR. Yes, he seems to like it very much!

[*The conversation languishes slightly.*]

AMANDA [*with great vivacity*]. Do you know, I really think I love traveling more than anything else in the world! It always gives me such a tremendous feeling of adventure. First of all, the excitement of packing, and getting your passport visa'd and everything, then the thrill of actually starting, and trundling along on trains and ships, and then the most thrilling thing of all, arriving at strange places, and seeing strange people, and eating strange foods—

ELYOT. And making strange noises afterwards

[*AMANDA chokes violently. VICTOR jumps up and tries to offer assistance, but she waves him away, and continues to choke.*]

VICTOR [*to ELYOT*]. That was a damned fool thing to do.

ELYOT. How did I know she was going to choke?

VICTOR [*to AMANDA*]. Here, drink some coffee.

AMANDA [*breathlessly gasping*]. Leave me alone I'll be all right in a minute.

VICTOR [*to ELYOT*]. You waste too much time trying to be funny.

SIBYL [*up in arms*]. It's no use talking to Elyot like that; it wasn't his fault.

VICTOR. Of course it was his fault entirely, making rotten stupid jokes—

SIBYL. I thought what Elyot said was funny.

VICTOR. Well, all I can say is, you must have a very warped sense of humor.

SIBYL. That's better than having none at all

VICTOR. I fail to see what humor there is in incessant trivial flippancy.

SIBYL. You couldn't be flippant if you tried until you were blue in the face.

VICTOR. I shouldn't dream of trying.

SIBYL. It must be very sad not to be able to see any fun in anything.

[*AMANDA stops choking, and looks at ELYOT. He winks at her again, and she smiles*]

VICTOR. Fun! I should like you to tell me what fun there is in—

SIBYL. I pity you, I really do I've been pitying you ever since we left Deauville.

VICTOR. I'm sure it's very nice of you, but quite unnecessary.

SIBYL. And I pity you more than ever now.

VICTOR. Why *now* particularly?

SIBYL. If you don't see why, I'm certainly not going to tell you.

VICTOR. I see no reason for you to try to pick a quarrel with me. I've tried my best to be pleasant to you, and comfort you.

SIBYL. You weren't very comforting when I lost my trunk.

VICTOR. I have little patience with people who go about losing luggage.

SIBYL. I don't go about losing luggage. It's the first time I've lost anything in my life.

VICTOR. I find that hard to believe.

SIBYL. Anyway, if you'd tipped the porter enough, everything would have been all right. Small economies never pay; it's absolutely no use—

VICTOR. Oh, for God's sake be quiet! [AMANDA lifts her hand as though she were going to interfere, but ELYOT grabs her wrist. They look at each other for a moment, she lets her hand rest in his.]

SIBYL [rising from the table]. How dare you speak to me like that!

VICTOR [also rising]. Because you've been irritating me for days.

SIBYL [outraged]. Oh!

VICTOR [coming down to her]. You're one of the most completely idiotic women I've ever met.

SIBYL. And you're certainly the rudest man I've ever met!

VICTOR. Well then, we're quits, aren't we?

SIBYL [shrilly]. One thing, you'll get your deserts all right.

VICTOR. What do you mean by that?

SIBYL. You know perfectly well what I mean. And it'll serve you right for being weak-minded enough to allow that woman to get round you so easily.

VICTOR. What about you? Letting that unprincipled roué persuade you to take him back again!

[AMANDA and ELYOT are laughing silently. ELYOT blows her a lingering kiss across the table.]

SIBYL. He's nothing of the sort! He's just been victimized, as you were victimized.

VICTOR. Victimized! What damned nonsense!

SIBYL [furiously]. It isn't damned non-

sense! You're very fond of swearing and blustering and threatening, but when it comes to the point you're as weak as water. Why, a blind cat could see what you've let yourself in for.

VICTOR [equally furious]. Stop making those insinuations!

SIBYL. I'm not insinuating anything. When I think of all the things you said about her, it makes me laugh, it does really; to see how completely she's got you again.

VICTOR. You can obviously speak with great authority, having had the intelligence to marry a drunkard.

SIBYL. So that's what she's been telling you. I might have known it! I suppose she said he struck her too!

VICTOR. Yes, she did, and I'm quite sure it's perfectly true.

SIBYL. I expect she omitted to tell you that she drank fourteen glasses of brandy last night straight off; and that the reason their first marriage was broken up was that she used to come home at all hours of the night, screaming and hiccupping.

VICTOR. If he told you that, he's a filthy liar!

SIBYL. He isn't—he isn't!

VICTOR. And if you believe it, you're a silly scatter-brained little fool.

SIBYL [screaming]. How dare you speak to me like that! How dare you! I've never been so insulted in my life! How dare you!

[AMANDA and ELYOT rise quietly, and go, hand in hand, towards the front door.]

VICTOR [completely giving way]. It's a tremendous relief to me to have an excuse to insult you. I've had to listen to your weeping and wailings for days. You've clacked at me, and snivelled at me until you've nearly driven me insane, and I controlled my nerves and continued to try to help you and look after you, because I was sorry for you. I always thought you were stupid from the first, but I must say I never realized that you were a malicious little vixen as well!

SIBYL [shrieking]. Stop it! Stop it! You insufferable great brute!

[She slaps his face hard, and he takes her by the shoulders and shakes her like a rat, as AMANDA and ELYOT go smilingly out of the door, with their suitcases, and—]

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The Honeymoon, Arnold Bennett
Home and Beauty, Somerset Maugham
The Vinegar Tree, Paul Osborn

THE BREADWINNER

(1930)

BY

SOMERSET MAUGHAM

CHARACTERS

CHARLES BATTLE
MARGERY, *his wife*
JUDY, *his daughter*
PATRICK, *his son*
ALFRED GRANGER
DOROTHY, *his wife*
DIANA, *his daughter*
TIMOTHY, *his son*

The action of the play is continuous and takes place in the drawing room of the Battles' house at Golders Green. In order to rest the audience the curtain is lowered twice during the performance

SOMERSET MAUGHAM

NO CONTEMPORARY author has a more loyal following than William Somerset Maugham, whose good fortune it is to please both the critical and uncritical reader alike. Among college students who read he occupies the enviable place held by Kipling a generation ago. His novels, plays, short stories, and books of travel are written with honesty and quiet straight-forwardness that preclude any suggestion of his being highbrow. Maugham is a true cosmopolite: he was born in Paris in 1874, was educated in England and Germany, maintains a home in the south of France and a flat in London, and travels almost yearly to America and the Far East. After receiving a degree at Heidelberg University, he studied surgery in London at St. Thomas Hospital; he was more interested, however, in humanity than in his profession. His first play, written in German, had been produced in Berlin, and he was ambitious of becoming a successful playwright. Abandoning, like Keats, his profession of surgery for literature, within the first few years of the new century he was established as the most popular of the younger dramatists. In the meantime he was writing an occasional novel, many short stories, and essays. During the war he served as a doctor, and later as an officer in the Intelligence Division. He was taken prisoner of war, but escaped.

Maugham's best novel, *Of Human Bondage* (1915), is autobiographical, and has already taken its place beside *The Forsyte Saga* and *Old Wives' Tale* as twentieth-century classics. His best collection of short stories is *First Person Singular* (1931); his best travel book *The Gentleman in the Parlor* (1930). His best plays are *Lady Frederick* (1907), a successful imitation of Oscar Wilde; *The Land of Promise* (1914), a dramatization in part of a Canadian adventure—the author considers this his best play; *Our Betters* (1917), a full-fledged comedy of manners, slightly unpleasant, which lashes bitterly American expatriates in London society; *The Unknown* (1920), a powerful discursive play concerning the incompatibility of war and Christianity; *The Circle* (1921), a perfectly constructed and emotionally honest comedy, usually considered his best play; *The Breadwinner* (1930); *For Services Rendered* (1932), a grim, unrelieved picture of the aftermath of war; and *Sheppey* (1933), a modern morality play, sharpened by the mordant satire which is to be found in all the dramatist's later plays.

The Breadwinner illustrates excellently the dramatist's ingenious craftsmanship, his succinct dialogue, his freedom from sentimentality and the sardonic humor of his post-war plays. After many years of Ibsen, the wheel has come full circle: the protagonist takes advantage of an opportunity to shake off domestic chains and the meaningless drudgery of a prosy occupation, to escape unbearably bright children and a fatuous spouse. But in *The Breadwinner* it is not the wife seeking "self-expression," or children agonizing under parental tyranny. It is the husband and father who defaults—and with no trace of sentimental misgiving. Even taking into consideration the intricacies of current British slang, the talk of the Bright Young People is not always convincing, and one wishes that the idiotic overtures of Dorothy and Diana did not disfigure the otherwise excellent third act. *The Breadwinner* gives Maugham ample opportunity to ridicule what he considers the annoying and priggish self-assurance of modern youth—a favorite target for his satire in recent years.

In the preface to his collected plays he speaks frankly and engagingly of his profession.

"I am not such a fool as to pretend that I am indifferent to the money I have made. Unlike some of my fellow-writers I had no other means of earning a living than my pen; I was not so fortunate as to marry a wife rich enough to support me [a thrust at Shaw?], nor had I the luck to have a father whose industry supplied me both with an income and with material for my satire . . . Without an adequate income half the possibilities of the world are cut off . . . I have always written with pleasure. Sometimes the result has pleased others and then my play has succeeded; sometimes . . . my play has failed; but so far as I am concerned it has always succeeded, for my pleasure was independent of the result . . . The aim of the drama is not instruct but to please. Its object is delight . . . art is indifferent to morals; no excellence of motive will enable you to write a good play or paint a good picture . . . A lofty purpose will not serve you so well as a competent technique . . . We no longer look upon a woman's chastity as her central virtue. I submit to my fellow dramatists that the unfaithfulness of a wife is no longer a subject for drama, but only for comedy . . . Stage directions are a confession of failure on the part of the author, for they are needful only when his dialogue does not meet the requirements of the drama." And in a newspaper interview he stated "Play-writing is a young man's job; it depends so largely on current feelings and habits, and at my age I really am not interested in the Bright Young People and their doings. I have lost touch with the modern movement. I must, of course, be intensely interested in the great subjects: life, death, war, and starvation. But the theater depends so much on the less important things of life" Maugham is too modest: certainly *The Sacred Flame*, *The Man of Honor*, *For Services Rendered*, *The Unknown*, and other fine plays deal with the "great" subjects; even his comedies are concerned principally with human character, surely not one of "the less important things of life."

Somerset Maugham declared in 1933 that *Sheppey* would be his last play, and up to the present writing (1941) he has adhered to his resolution to write only fiction. At the outbreak of the war in 1939 he again served in the Intelligence Division. Stationed in Paris, he barely escaped when the Germans swept over France in June, 1940, but managed to reach England after a series of exciting adventures more melodramatic than any in his fiction.

THE BREADWINNER

ACT I

SCENE—A well-furnished drawing-room, in the modern style but without excess, an airy, sunny room looking onto the handsome suburban garden

When the curtain rises, JUDY and PATRICK are discovered PATRICK is in flannels. He is a nice-looking boy of eighteen. He is lying on the sofa very comfortably, reading an illustrated paper; others are scattered about him on the floor. JUDY is seventeen. She is pretty, blonde, and self-possessed. She also is dressed in tennis things. She is standing at the gramophone and has just put on a new record. However brusquely PATRICK and JUDY talk, and however frank they are in expressing their opinion, they remain engaging and delightful. The same applies to their friends DIANA and TIMOTHY.

Gramophone playing

PATRICK [*without looking up from his paper*] Aren't you sick of that yet?

JUDY. My dear child, it's absolutely new. It was only written last week, and the record came out yesterday morning.

PATRICK. Rot I was weaned on it. I vividly remember Mother turning it on to get me to take the bottle quietly.

JUDY. Liar. It's rather jolly to dance to. Come on [*Pulls PAT off settee*]

PATRICK [*without moving*] Oh!

JUDY. Slacker.

PATRICK I wish Tim and Dinah would hurry up. [*Reading.*]

JUDY. What's the time? She said they'd come immediately after lunch.

PATRICK. Ring them up and tell them to hurry.

JUDY [*amiably*]. Ring them up yourself [*Back of settee Eating sweets*]

PATRICK. Lazy hound.

JUDY. Tim's going back next term after all. He wanted to go up to Cambridge with you, but Alfred said he must stay at school another year. [*Dancing*]

PATRICK. He's only seventeen.

JUDY. He'll be eighteen in December.

[*Winds gramophone.*]

PATRICK. There's all the difference between being eighteen now and eighteen in December. I should have thought that was obvious to the meanest intelligence.

JUDY [*up stage to window*]. Here they are. [*She goes to the door and opens it.*]
Dinah! [*Lifts gramophone lid.*]

DIANA [*outside*]. Hulloo!

JUDY. We're in here. Bring your rackets along.

DIANA. Right-ho [*Gramophone is turned off. Heard off stage.*] Don't talk rot, Tim.

TIMOTHY. I'm not. I tell you Tilden played exactly the same stroke over and over again.

DIANA. And if Tilden does it you can, of course!

TIMOTHY. Why not! He's not the only one.

DIANA. Your other name's Borotra, isn't it?

TIMOTHY. That isn't funny.

DIANA. No, but your tennis is.

TIMOTHY. Silly ass!

[*DIANA comes in, a dark, pretty girl of eighteen and a bit, with fine eyes and a fresh color. She has a racket in her hand. She is followed by her brother TIMOTHY. He is a year younger than she, and, as we have heard, will not be eighteen till December. He is a slim, tall, dark youth wearing a gay blazer and a muffler, and he carries two rackets. PATRICK gets up from the sofa.*]

PATRICK. Hulloo, Dinah.

DIANA. Hulloo!

PATRICK. I forget, do we kiss?

DIANA. Only at dances under the influence of claret cup.

[*Throws racket on window seat.*]

PATRICK. Hulloo, Tim. How are you?

TIMOTHY. All right. How are you?

PATRICK [*pointing to the two rackets*]. I say, what's the idea?

TIMOTHY. I've come on in my game a bit lately. One must have two rackets, you know.

PATRICK. Wimbledon. Eh, what?

DIANA. Tim is now a blood.

PATRICK I hear you're going back next term.

TIMOTHY Rotten, isn't it? Alfred's being frightfully tiresome

PATRICK. How is your respected parent?

TIMOTHY Very facetious.

DIANA. Few people know how exhausting it is to have a humorist in the family.

PATRICK. I'm thankful to say that's not one of our troubles. You'd have to get an ax to get Father to see that you're making a joke.

JUDY. Poor Daddy, no one could say that he has a sense of humor

TIMOTHY. Have you plied him with liquor?

PATRICK. It has no effect, it's constitutional

DIANA When did you get back, Pat?

PATRICK. Just before lunch

TIMOTHY. We broke up the day before yesterday.

DIANA. Are you glad to have left school?

PATRICK. Rather! I didn't have a bad time, you know. But I want to go up to Cambridge now. I think it'll be rather fun.

JUDY. I think he's grown since Easter, don't you, Dinah?

PATRICK I'm sure I have I can tell by my dinner jacket. I'm going to order some new tails to-morrow.

TIMOTHY. Who are you going to?

PATRICK. Well, I don't know. I suppose Daddy'll want me to go to his tailor, as usual.

TIMOTHY. Oh, Lord!

PATRICK. But I'm going to tell him that of course he's all right for him, but honestly he's not smart enough for me.

TIMOTHY. Quite!

DIANA [*shakes her shingled head*]. Lend me your comb, Tim.

TIMOTHY [*looking in his pocket*]. Oh, damn! I left it at home.

JUDY Pat'll lend you his.

PATRICK [*taking a comb out of his pocket*]. Here you are.

[*He gives it to her and taking a little glass from her bag she combs her hair. Then JUDY takes the comb from her and runs it through her hair.*]

TIMOTHY. Are you still going in for the Bar, Pat?

PATRICK. Oh, yes. I think so. After all, it's the only profession that really gives you a chance. It'll be rather fun coming

up to town to eat my dinners. Of course, I shall go in for politics.

DIANA. Which side?

PATRICK. Well, I haven't really made up my mind yet Daddy's always been a Liberal, but there's nothing to be got out of being a Liberal now I think the only thing now is Labour.

[*TIMOTHY goes over to JUDY. Takes comb and combs his perfectly ordered hair. Returns it to PATRICK, who mechanically does the same and then puts it back in his pocket. JUDY sits on window seat*]

DIANA. I'm Labour. I always have been.

PATRICK. They want people like us, public school and 'varsity and that sort of thing

TIMOTHY [*combing hair*]. Of course, you're lucky, you can go in for anything you like. I've got to go into Alfred's rotten old business

DIANA. You can't blame Alfred. It's an old-fashioned firm, and he wants his only son to follow in his footsteps.

TIMOTHY. Can you see me as a respectable family lawyer?

PATRICK. Perfectly, and I can see you giving me nice fat briefs.

TIMOTHY [*gives PATRICK comb*]. I'll tell you one thing, I'm not going to live at home.

PATRICK They couldn't expect you to do that I don't mind coming here during the vac for a bit when I haven't got anywhere better to go, but as soon as I settle down in London I'm going to tell Daddy that I must have a flat.

TIMOTHY. I say, we might share one

[*Sits up*]

PATRICK. That's not a bad idea. I've got rather a fancy for Albemarle Street personally. [*Lighting cigarette.*]

TIMOTHY. That would do me all right. As long as it's absolutely central, I don't care where I live

[*Lies down on seat.*]

PATRICK. It's a damned good address And one must have that.

TIMOTHY. Absolutely.

DIANA. I'm simply fed up with the suburbs.

PATRICK. So am I Fed to the teeth

JUDY. I can't imagine why they want to live out in the wilds like this.

PATRICK. Poor Mummy thinks this is such a nice neighborhood.

JUDY. It was all very well when we were children. We had to have fresh air

and all that sort of rot. But now we're grown up I can't see the point of it.

DIANA. Would you believe it, Dorothy thinks it's central! When I tell her it's the back of beyond, she says, "My dear, what are you talking about? It's only twelve minutes by tube from Piccadilly Circus"

[*ALL laugh.*]

PATRICK. One's people are really extraordinary. You know, ours haven't begun to realize that we are grown up.

JUDY. Do you know [*reading*], Mummy still wants to buy my *clothes* for me.

DIANA. No!

JUDY. I had to make the devil of a row before I could get my own dress allowance

TIMOTHY. I will say that for Alfred, he's given us an allowance ever since we were fifteen.

PATRICK. I'm expecting to have a bit of a dust-up with Father over my allowance at Cambridge. I'm going to ask for five hundred.

TIMOTHY. Do you think he'll give you that?

PATRICK. No, but I think he'll give me four. If I ask for four he'll try to get off for three-fifty.

TIMOTHY. He oughtn't to kick at that.

[*Lies down on stool.*]

PATRICK. He oughtn't to kick at anything. After all, I didn't ask to be brought into the world. He did it entirely for his own amusement, and he's had a lot of fun out of me and he must be prepared to pay for it

TIMOTHY. That's fair enough. Hey!

[*Business with racket*]

PATRICK. When I settle down in London he'll have to give me at least five hundred a year. Everybody knows that you can't earn a living at the Bar till you're thirty

TIMOTHY. If Alfred gave me the same we ought to be able to do ourselves pretty well in a flat.

[*Puts racket in cover*]

DIANA. It makes me perfectly sick when I hear you two talk of having a flat in town. I'd love to have one of my own. Wouldn't you, Judy?

JUDY. Simply love it.

DIANA. I'm sick of living at home.

PATRICK. Why don't you marry?

DIANA. Oh, I'm not going to marry for years yet. I want to marry when I'm twenty-four. I want to have a good time first.

JUDY. Oh, I think that's rather old. I want to marry when I'm twenty-one.

PATRICK. Tell Alfred that you *want* your own flat

DIANA. Can you see his face? [*Imitating her father*] I've made a jolly good home for my kiddie-widdies, old boy, and between you and me, I don't mind telling you they think there's no place like it. H'm! H'm!

[*ALL laugh.*]

PATRICK [*with smile*]. Poor Alfred.

DIANA. Alfred's all right. He means well.

TIMOTHY. Only he's so terribly hearty.

DIANA. I think it's rather pathetic sometimes, his delusion that one's really going to look upon one's parents as friends

TIMOTHY. It's so shy-making, his one-boy-to-another stunt.

DIANA. Well, you know, it's got its advantages. Call him "old bean" and you can get anything you want out of him

PATRICK. It's so damned humiliating having to play up to one's people all the time

DIANA. What else can you do? They have an idea about you in their heads and you have to live up to it. They're simply incapable of understanding that you're not in the least what they think you are.

[*ALL laugh*]

PATRICK. How is *our* respected parent these days, Judy?

JUDY. Oh, I don't know, same as usual.

DIANA. Of course you haven't seen him yet?

PATRICK. No. I suppose he'll be getting back from the city presently. I was only asking because I've been wondering if there was any chance of getting a car out of him

TIMOTHY. I say, that would be marvelous

PATRICK. Well, now I've left school I ought to have a car of my own. It's absurd that I should have to go about in the family bus. [*To JUDY.*] Have you said anything to Mummy about it?

JUDY. She says it all depends on how things are on the Stock Exchange.

PATRICK. Oh, gosh! They're all rolling on the Stock Exchange. As long as the world is full of mugs stockbrokers are bound to make money.

DIANA. You know *I* like your father, Pat.

JUDY. Very dull, poor darling

DIANA. I'm not sure that I wouldn't

rather have a dull father than a funny one.

PATRICK. Fortunately we don't see much of him except at dinner. And that's pretty ghastly, isn't it, Judy?

JUDY. Ghastly isn't the word.

PATRICK. Daddy sitting at one end of the table never opening his mouth, and Mother improving our minds with bright chat about art and literature.

DIANA. That's home life.

PATRICK. Well, I've had about enough of it, I can tell you [*Pause*] D'you think that when *we're* their age we shall be as boring as they are?

JUDY. Oh, I don't see why we should for a moment.

TIMOTHY. How old is your father, Pat?

PATRICK. I think he's forty-two, isn't he, Judy?

JUDY. Yes, he was comparatively young when he married Mummy. Twenty-three.

DIANA. One of those awful war marriages, I suppose. Like Alfred and Dorothy.

JUDY. Oh, no. They must have been married before that. Pat's eighteen.

DIANA. Well, when was the war?

[*Looks at paper.*]

TIMOTHY. Oh, don't let's talk of that old war. I'm fed to the teeth with it.

JUDY. What a bore the people are who went through it.

PATRICK. Crashing.

JUDY. When they get together and start talking about their experiences I could scream.

DIANA. I *know*. As if *any one* cared.

TIMOTHY. They were a dreary lot, that war generation.

DIANA. Well, don't forget that except for the war there would have been a lot more of them.

TIMOTHY. They don't amount to anything any more. They're finished and done with, thank God.

DIANA. Unfortunately some of them don't know it.

JUDY. Well, I'm going to make it my business to tell them whenever I have an opportunity.

PATRICK. After all, let's face it, people aren't any good after forty, are they? They're only in the way, and life can't be any pleasure to them.

DIANA. I don't suppose it is much, but what are you to do with them? You can't drown them like puppies.

TIMOTHY. It's obvious that people live much too long now.

PATRICK. If nature were properly organized they'd just drop off quietly at the age of forty.

DIANA. D'you think they'd like it?

PATRICK. I don't see why they should mind. They've had their day. They've done everything they're capable of doing. Look at all the poets and painters and so on. What on earth have they done that was worth while after they were forty? What's the good of hanging on, a burden to yourself and every one connected with you? It would be much better if they just passed out quietly, like the mayflies, when they'd had their little bit of nonsense.

JUDY. Of course, I don't expect to live till I'm forty. Fancy being thirty-six! I shall die when I'm twenty-nine.

[*Rises and goes to oak chest on stairs, gets tennis shoes and comes down, sitting on seat down stage.*]

DIANA. Have you made your will?

JUDY. No, but I've been thinking about it.

TIMOTHY. You might leave me those *jade buttons* of yours. They'd make marvelous links.

JUDY. Oh, I'm going to be buried with all my jewelry. I made up my mind about that years ago.

PATRICK. Don't talk rot. I'm being serious. In a well-regulated state at a certain age every one should be put painlessly out of existence.

DIANA. Without exception?

PATRICK. Of course.

DIANA. It would be rather a wrench when it comes to one's own people.

PATRICK. Of course it would be a wrench. But one would have to sacrifice one's private feelings to the common good. Take our case, for instance. Judy and I are quite fond of Father and Mother. Aren't we, Judy?

JUDY. Yes. We're as fond of them as any one can be of their people.

PATRICK. But we're not blind to their defects. Mummy is terribly arty and high-brow. And poor Daddy has absolutely no sense of humor.

JUDY. Absolutely.

PATRICK. They've always been very nice to us. And we've always been very decent to them. I think we've been rather a credit to them.

DIANA. On the whole.

PATRICK. But now it's quite obvious that their use is ended. They can only

hamper us in the future. We're grown up, and we want our freedom.

TIMOTHY. You're absolutely right, Patrick.

PATRICK. Of course I'm right. I'm not just talking through my hat. I've thought about this a great deal. We've arrived at an age now when we ought to be on our own. We've got the whole world before us. We can't afford to be . . . What's the word I want?

DIANA. Footled about.

JUDY. Tied.

PATRICK. Trammeled, that's it. Trammeled by domestic ties.

TIMOTHY. It is damned unfair, there's no doubt about that.

PATRICK. Unfair isn't the word. It's damned unjust. That's what it is. They've had their fling, and now they want to prevent us from having ours. After all, one must have money. And one wants it when one's young. What's the good of money to middle-aged people?

DIANA. They do spend it in the most idiotic way. One can't deny that.

PATRICK. Daddy's been on the Stock Exchange for a good many years, and he must have made a packet. It does seem a bit thick that Judy and I should have to wait for it till we're too old to spend it.

DIANA. Of course, all that's true. But it does seem rather drastic to kill the poor old things off.

JUDY. I don't believe you'd have the heart to do it, Pat!

PATRICK. I daresay when it came to the point I should hesitate. One has one's feelings. After all, it's a rotten thing having to put an old dog out of its sufferings. I don't want to be cruel. I merely said that in a well-regulated state, when people have outlived their utility, say at forty, they ought to be put out of their misery. But we don't live in a well-regulated state, and I don't suppose we ever shall.

TIMOTHY. I don't know about that. Our generation hasn't had a chance yet.

PATRICK. Personally, I'd be quite willing to compromise.

DIANA. How d'you mean?

PATRICK. Well, at forty I'd make people retire and hand over all their property to their children. If they hadn't any property the state would support them, and of course, if they had, their children would make them an allowance.

TIMOTHY. That's not a bad idea.

PATRICK. Judy and I would give our people two hundred and fifty a year. That

would be quite enough. They could have a little cottage in the country. Mother could keep chickens, and Daddy could potter about the garden. I think they'd be awfully *happy*.

JUDY. Mummy's always said that's just the sort of thing she'd love.

DIANA. Do you think two hundred and fifty would be enough?

PATRICK. Oh, quite. You see, they'd grow their own vegetables, and then there'd be the eggs.

DIANA. I say, what a lark we could have.

JUDY. [*looks out window*]. Here's Mummy!

[*JUDY and PAT rush to window. DIANA and TIM get rackets from window seat.*]

PATRICK. Oh, let's go and play tennis then.

TIMOTHY. Come on.

[*Takes racket off table.*]

JUDY. How are we going to play?

[*As they get up, TIMOTHY taking his rackets, MARGERY and DOROTHY come in from garden. MARGERY is a pretty, slightly faded blonde, and DOROTHY is dark, like her daughter, and rather alluring. They are both under forty, smartly dressed, and a good deal made up. Neither is the decrepit old creature you might have suspected from listening to their children's conversation, and neither has the slightest idea that her day is over.*]

MARGERY. You lazy people, why aren't you playing tennis?

JUDY. We're just going to, Mummy.

PATRICK. Hulloo, Aunt Dorothy.

[*JUDY on stairs. TIM at armchair R. Ties shoe-lace.*]

DOROTHY. You've grown, Pat.

MARGERY. Isn't he enormous?

[*DOROTHY kisses PATRICK on the cheek.*]

DOROTHY [*archly*]. I'm not quite sure if Alfred would approve of my kissing such a grown-up young man.

PATRICK. After all, you are my aunt.

DOROTHY. Not really, of course. Your mother and I are only first cousins.

DIANA. She means that except for Alfred you could marry.

DOROTHY. Don't be so silly, Dinah.

TIMOTHY. It's not a bad idea. If Alfred's run over by a motor-bus you shall marry Dorothy, Pat. I think you'd make me a very good father.

PATRICK. I wouldn't let you call me

by my Christian name. I should insist on you calling me Papa.

MARGERY. Run along, you idiots. Dorothy and I want to talk.

TIMOTHY. Come on, you kids.
[*Off first, followed by DIANA and PAT.*]

PATRICK [*going out*]. No rest for the weary.

[*The four young things go MARGERY and DOROTHY settle themselves down for a gossip by getting their lipsticks and mirrors out of their bags and starting to paint their lips.*]

DOROTHY. What a nice-looking boy Pat is growing. You'll have to keep an eye on him, darling. You know what women are. [*Sits L of settee.*]

MARGERY. Oh, I'm not frightened. He's absolutely innocent. And he tells me everything. [*Busy at table.*]

DOROTHY. They talk a lot of nonsense about the young nowadays. I don't believe they know half as much as we did at their age.

MARGERY. I wish they wouldn't grow up quite so quickly. When Pat came back from school this morning it gave me quite a shock.

DOROTHY. I don't care. It's not like before the war. People don't grow old like they used to. When Dinah and I go out together we're always taken for sisters.

MARGERY. I honestly don't think you look a day older than she does. But then you're dark. That gives you such an advantage. When you're blonde like me you fade.

DOROTHY. You haven't. Why, I was only thinking at dinner last night how lovely your hair looked.

MARGERY. It's several shades darker than when I was a girl. I was wondering if any one would notice if I had it touched up a little.

DOROTHY. Of course, it does make the face look harder.

MARGERY. Oh, I wouldn't have it dyed. I'd only just have a few *reflets d'or* put in. Ernest said he could do it so that not a soul would know it wasn't natural.

DOROTHY. Well, I know some one who likes you very much as you are.

MARGERY. Dorothy! As a matter of fact, I don't know what you're talking about.

DOROTHY. Come off it, Marge. Do you think I haven't got eyes in my head? Why, it was obvious last night.

MARGERY. You don't think it was, really?

DOROTHY. Well, it was obvious to me. I've been dying to know what he said to you.

MARGERY [*looks off windows and sits R. of settee*]. I suppose those children really are playing tennis?

DOROTHY. Oh, yes. I'm simply thrilled, Marge.

MARGERY. Well, he said he'd been wanting to tell me for a long time, but knowing Charlie on the Stock Exchange and all that sort of thing he hadn't liked to. But he simply couldn't help himself.

DOROTHY. During dinner, was that, or afterwards?

MARGERY. Well, he began during dinner, but not seriously you know—lightly, he didn't really get serious till afterwards when we'd been dancing.

DOROTHY. Does he dance well?

MARGERY. Divinely.

DOROTHY. He wanted to see how you'd take it. Men are rather cautious. I suppose they don't want to get snubbed. Tell me what you said to him.

MARGERY. Well, of course, I laughed. I said: "Do you realize that I have two children who are practically grown up?" He said he didn't believe it. He said he'd bet a monkey that I wasn't a day more than twenty-five. What is a monkey, darling?

DOROTHY. A thousand pounds and a pony's five hundred. I can't think why men don't say five hundred pounds when they mean five hundred pounds.

MARGERY. It does seem silly, doesn't it?

DOROTHY. Go on, dear.

MARGERY. Then I said, "I've got a girl of seventeen." I didn't say anything about Pat. I thought if he liked to think he was younger he could.

DOROTHY. I don't blame you.

MARGERY. Then he said, "Well, all I can say is you must have been married out of your cradle." So then I gave him a look and I said, "Well, I wasn't very old, I admit."

DOROTHY. I know exactly how you said it. Sweeping the floor with your eyelashes. I've seen you do it dozens of times, and it always gets them.

MARGERY. It's quite unconscious. I never mean to. Then he took my hand and said, "I wonder if you know how much more attractive it is to be a grown woman than a silly slip of a girl?"

DOROTHY. Men always say that. And

I'm sure it's true. Men don't fall in love with girls. They're not interesting enough.

MARGERY. I suppose there's something in that.

DOROTHY. And what happened next?

MARGERY. He asked me what Charlie does on Sundays. "Oh," I said, "he goes and plays golf." "Good old Charlie," he said. Then he asked me if I wouldn't go motoring with him in the country.

DOROTHY. And are you going?

MARGERY. Of course not. Why, I hardly know the man.

DOROTHY. You can't expect to get to know the man if you never see him.

MARGERY. It wouldn't be fair to the children.

DOROTHY. Charlie goes and has a good time playing golf. I don't see why you shouldn't go motoring if you want to.

MARGERY. You know what I am, Dorothy.

DOROTHY. I don't believe you're as cold as you pretend.

MARGERY. Perhaps not. But Charlie's never looked at another woman since he married me. I shouldn't like to do anything to hurt his feelings.

DOROTHY. It wouldn't hurt his feelings if *he didn't know*. I don't say go too far, but a flirtation can do no one any harm. And every one knows there's nothing like having a man pay her a little attention to make a woman look young.

MARGERY. Of course, there's something in that. [*Rises, takes cigarette.*]

DOROTHY. You know as well as I do that in all the time we've been married I've never been unfaithful to Alfred. But I've had scores of beaux. That's what's kept me fresh and alert and up-to-date.

MARGERY. It's true that one wants something to make up for married life.

DOROTHY. No one could want a better husband than Alfred, and I'm sure he's always been absolutely faithful to me, but I could never have stood his heartiness for all these years if I hadn't had my little flirtations on the side.

MARGERY. What a mercy it is that men have to go to business every day. What would one do if they were about the house all day long! [*Lights cigarette.*]

DOROTHY. How has Charlie been lately?

MARGERY. Well, you've seen him. Just the same as ever. He never changes.

DOROTHY. Of course, I've seen for ages that he rather bores you.

MARGERY. Nineteen years is a long time to be married.

DOROTHY. Too long, if you ask me.

MARGERY. I suppose I've got nothing to complain of, really. He gives me everything I want.

DOROTHY. And you never quarrel, do you?

MARGERY. Oh, never. And he never fusses. But of course he is limited.

DOROTHY. *Men are!* I've noticed that often.

MARGERY. He isn't interested in art and literature like I am. When I have intellectual people up at the house he always seems rather out of it.

DOROTHY. Yes, I've noticed that too. Of course, he's awfully nice, but he's not exactly what you'd call brilliant, is he?

MARGERY. No, I'm afraid he isn't, poor darling. I suppose one can't have everything, and he's just as much in love with me to-day as the day we were married. It's rather beastly of me to find fault with him.

DOROTHY. That's not finding fault. One can't be married to a man all those years without knowing what he is and what he isn't.

MARGERY. I shudder to think what would happen if he ever suspected that for years now I haven't cared for him, I mean really cared.

DOROTHY. That's one advantage *we* have: men don't see things.

MARGERY. Of course, I like him, you know, and I wouldn't do anything to wound him. But I am an intelligent woman, and I can't help seeing he's a bit of a bore.

DOROTHY. If you don't mind my saying so, darling, the fact is, he has no sense of humor.

MARGERY. I know. It's tragic. I'm going to say something dreadful to you, Dorothy. Have you ever asked yourself what you'd do if you were a widow?

DOROTHY. What woman hasn't?

MARGERY. Of course, I'd be dreadfully upset if anything happened to poor Charlie. I'd simply cry my eyes out, and at first I'd miss him dreadfully.

DOROTHY. That's only natural. I don't know any one who's got so much heart as you have.

MARGERY. But when once I'd got over the shock I believe I'd be very happy, you know.

DOROTHY. I'm sure you would. With your fair hair you'd look too lovely in mourning.

MARGERY. I'd never marry again. I

think every woman should marry, but once is enough.

DOROTHY. Oh, I like having a man about the house I think I'd be dreadfully lost without one.

MARGERY Well, I have so many resources in myself. It would be lovely to be able to do exactly as you liked without consulting anybody. And having your own friends. And being free to run over to Paris or down to the Riviera without thinking, of course Charlie can't get away and the poor old thing'll be so lost without me. And then there's one's own self-development. You can't really develop your personality properly when you're married.

DOROTHY. Speaking of the Riviera, have you said anything to Charlie about the summer?

MARGERY It's rather difficult. Charlie wants to go on the river like we always do, so that he can go up to the city when he wants to.

DOROTHY. Why shouldn't Alfred and Charlie go by themselves? It's so silly of husbands and wives always to take their holidays together. It's no change for either of them.

MARGERY. The Riviera would be lovely for the children.

DOROTHY. They wouldn't interfere with us at all. They'd be bathing and boating all the time, and they're too young to go into the baccarat rooms. My dear, we'd have the time of our lives.

MARGERY It sounds too divine.

DOROTHY. I saw some lovely pajamas in Bond Street the other day. You know they wear pajamas all day long in summer

MARGERY. I know. I suppose it would be frightfully expensive.

DOROTHY. What is the use of money if you don't spend it? And you can always tell Charlie it would be such an education for the children.

[PATRICK appears, followed immediately by the others.]

PATRICK. I say, Mummy, it is disgraceful, the court wasn't marked out.

MARGERY. Oh, I am sorry.

PATRICK. I've given the gardener hell. He had the damned cheek to say he hadn't had any orders.

MARGERY. How stupid of him I know I meant to tell him.

PATRICK. The moment my back is turned everything goes wrong in this house.

MARGERY. Is he doing it now?

[JUDY enters]

PATRICK. Yes, but it won't be ready for a quarter of an hour I don't know why Judy couldn't see about it. What's she there for?

JUDY. You seem to think I have nothing to do. I was fearfully busy this morning, and I forgot

[Going up to chest on stairs—changes shoes.]

PATRICK Well, you shouldn't forget

MARGERY. Don't be disagreeable the moment you get back, darling. There's lots of time

PATRICK. I don't know why we can't have a hard court It's absurd to ask people to play on grass now.

TIMOTHY. I've told Alfred that we absolutely must have one at our place. I mean, you can't expect to improve your game if you have to play on grass all the time.

PATRICK You might talk to Father, Mummy After all, if he wants us to live at home, the least he can do is to provide us with the ordinary necessities of existence.

MARGERY. It would be an awful expense.

TIMOTHY. You can get a very decent hard court for about four hundred pounds.

PATRICK. That's nothing. Daddy couldn't jib at that He hasn't got anything to do with his money except spend it on us.

MARGERY. That's true.

[A ring at the door is heard]

JUDY. Hulloo, who's that? Oh, God, I hope it's not callers!

MARGERY. I said I wasn't at home to anybody to-day.

PATRICK Fancy living in a place where people pay calls. This is the back of beyond all right.

MARGERY. Don't be so silly, Pat. There are a lot of very intelligent people who live here, and it's a treat when they drop in for a chat over a cup of tea.

ALFRED [off stage]. Is Mrs. Battle at home?

[The front door is opened, and a voice is heard asking for MRS. BATTLE.]

DOROTHY. Why, it's Alfred.

MARGERY [calls]. Alfred!

ALFRED [outside]. Hulloo, hulloo, hulloo!

MARGERY. Come in, Dorothy's here.

[ALFRED breezes in. He is a tall, well-set-up, middle-aged man, with a red

face and a hearty, blustering, jovial manner. He laughs a great deal at everything he says.]

ALFRED [taking MARGERYS hand] Hulloa, popsy-wopsy [Seeing PATRICK.] And look who's here. When did you breeze in, old bean?

[Goes over to PATRICK, pulls him up]

PATRICK. I got back just before lunch

ALFRED. Trust you for that. And I bet you wallop[ed] into the fatted calf.

[Slaps PATRICK on the back]

PATRICK [with hauteur]. I managed to swallow a morsel of cold chicken.

ALFRED. And how does it feel to have left school for good, eh, young-feller-melad?

PATRICK. Oh, all right.

ALFRED. Best days of your life, you know, old boy. And when they're gone, they're gone. Can't put the clock back if you try till doomsday. That's the way of the world. Well, it's not a bad old place if you have a front seat and take care that no one diddles you out of it.

TIMOTHY. You do talk most footling rot, Alfred.

DOROTHY. Tim, you mustn't be so rude to your father.

ALFRED. Let the little blighter say what he likes. Respect be damned. Tim and I are a couple of pals, aren't we, old boy?

TIMOTHY [link arms, go down a step into scene]. Rather. I say, old cock, what about that hard court? You said you'd think about it.

ALFRED. It's a devil of a lot of money.

TIMOTHY. It's not as if you couldn't afford it. Come on, old bean, be a sport.

ALFRED [beaming]. Well, if you put it like that I suppose I must say all right.

[ALL laugh.]

TIMOTHY. Good.

ALFRED [over to JUDY]. And how are you, Judy old gal? Bit on the quiet side to-day, aren't you?

JUDY. I don't think so.

ALFRED. Love?

JUDY. No.

ALFRED. When are you going to get married?

JUDY. I'm not thinking of getting married

ALFRED. And why not, if you please?

JUDY. Well, for one reason nobody's asked me.

ALFRED. What! Why, my little early-

girlie has three proposals a week. Don't you, Dinah?

DIANA. No, Alfred, I don't.

ALFRED. Don't you believe her. I know. And when I say I know, I know Paterfamilias. [Laughs] But we can't have little [pats her face] Judy-pudy neglected. [To TIMOTHY.] Come along, young pie-face, you propose to her, and then she can say she's turned down a blood.

TIMOTHY. I'm not going to take a chance like that, Alfred. She'll accept me.

JUDY. Owl.

DOROTHY. Why have you left your office so early, Alfred?

ALFRED. A sudden desire to see my old—old dutch.

DOROTHY. Don't be funny, Alfred.

ALFRED. I can't help it, my dear I've tried, but it's no good. It's my nature. [Slapping DOROTHY on back.] But, joking apart, as a matter of fact, I came along to see Charlie.

MARGERY. He's not here. He's in the city.

ALFRED. No, he isn't. At least, I can't get hold of him. He hasn't been at his office all day.

MARGERY. That's funny.

ALFRED. No, it isn't. To tell you the truth, I'm just a teeny-weeny bit anxious

MARGERY [surprised]. Why?

ALFRED. Hasn't he told you anything?

MARGERY. No, what? Has something happened?

ALFRED. I suppose he thought if it came out all right there was no use bothering you, and if it didn't, you'd know quite soon enough.

MARGERY. But what is it?

ALFRED. Perhaps I oughtn't to have said anything about it.

PATRICK. Father hasn't gone bust, Uncle Alfred?

ALFRED. I think you kiddie-widdies had better go out into the garden Dorothy, you stay.

PATRICK. If anything's the matter you may just as well tell us too. Mummy will anyway, the moment you've gone.

DIANA. Come along, Tim. We'll go. Shout when you're through.

[DIANA and TIMOTHY go out into the garden.]

MARGERY. This isn't another of your jokes, Alfred?

ALFRED. I wish it were. No, this is serious. Did you happen to notice that a

fellow called Tommy Avon shot himself last Friday?

MARGERY. Yes. Dreadful, wasn't it? We knew him. We went to Ascot with him last year.

PATRICK. Who was Tommy Avon?

ALFRED. He was very well known in the city. He was one of your father's clients. Good fellow and all that. One of the best. But I'm afraid he's let your governor down badly.

MARGERY. But I always thought Charles had such a high-class business. He never went in for anything speculative

ALFRED. That's why it's such tough luck on him. I flatter myself I'm about as shrewd as they make 'em, and I wouldn't have hesitated to trust Tommy Avon with a million if I'd had it.

JUDY. But what's actually *happened*?

ALFRED. You wouldn't understand if I told you. But the long and short of it is that it's *settling-day* to-day, and if your father hasn't been able to get his pals to come to the rescue he'll be *hammered*.

JUDY. What does that mean?

ALFRED. Ruin

MARGERY [*with a cry of dismay*]. Oh! What *shall* we do?

DOROTHY. Don't give way, Marge. It's not certain yet.

ALFRED. Luckily for him he's got some very good friends. Of course, his whole private fortune will have to go in. But if he's able to raise a substantial sum outside, he can weather the storm.

PATRICK. Shall we have to leave this house and give up the car?

ALFRED. I don't know about that. If he pulls through, I daresay it won't make much difference to his income. He's got a very sound business and a very good reputation.

PATRICK. Oh, then things aren't so bad as all that.

ALFRED. Except that all his *savings* are gone down the drain

MARGERY. Then if anything happened to him we'd be penniless?

PATRICK. He's as strong as a horse, Mummy. I was only telling Judy just now that I thought he'd probably live to a hundred. He'll make another fortune all right

MARGERY. But what does it depend on, his pulling through?

ALFRED. Well, to put it shortly it depends on whether Arthur Letter was willing to back him or not.

PATRICK. Who's Arthur Letter?

ALFRED. He's the chairman of your

father's bank. He was to give your father his decision last night.

MARGERY. Oh, that's why he only got in just in time to dress for dinner. We were dining at the Savoy.

ALFRED. How did he seem?

MARGERY. Just about as usual.

ALFRED. He can't have been quite the same as usual. At that moment it had just been decided whether he would have to file his petition in bankruptcy or could start with more or less of a clean slate

MARGERY. I didn't notice anything. I was afraid we'd be late for dinner

ALFRED. How about this morning?

MARGERY. I had breakfast in my room. Judy and he had breakfast together.

ALFRED. Did he seem up or down?

[*To JUDY*]

JUDY. To tell you the truth, I didn't pay any attention. I always read the *Mirror* at breakfast

ALFRED. That's a wash-out, then. He had an appointment with me at ten, but he never kept it. It was damned important too. That's what puzzles me.

JUDY. He left here about half-past nine.

MARGERY. Do you mean to say he hasn't been at his office all day?

ALFRED. No.

PATRICK [*with a gasp*]. I say.

[*Rises. They all look at PAT. The thought occurs to them simultaneously that CHARLES may have killed himself*]

MARGERY [*with agitation*]. Oh, no, no, it's impossible. He couldn't do anything so cruel to me

JUDY. I wonder if he was rather strange this morning. Oh, Uncle Alfred, it would be too awful if while we were eating kedgeree he was—[*rises*]—he was making up his mind to . . .

MARGERY. Judy, Judy! No. No. He couldn't do anything so cowardly.

PATRICK. D'you think it's possible, Uncle Alfred? I say it would be moldy.

ALFRED. Well, old boy, I don't mind telling you that *was* in my mind when I got here. I tried to be hearty like I always am, but between you and me and the gatepost it was a bit of an effort I daresay you noticed it. Charlie's the most punctilious fellow I've never known him cut a date in my life.

MARGERY [*becoming a trifle hysterical*]. No, no, no, no! I'm so frightened

DOROTHY. Darling, don't. [*Goes to settee to MARGERY.*] After all, there's

no reason why you should believe the worst at once

MARGERY. But why wasn't he at his office? On this day, when it was so essential.

ALFRED. If anything was to be saved from the wreck at all.

DOROTHY. Perhaps he was knocked down by a taxi and is lying unconscious in some hospital.

MARGERY. That wouldn't be much consolation either.

PATRICK. But can't we do something?

JUDY. I think we ought to drag the Thames.

PATRICK. You fool, one can't drag the Thames.

JUDY. Well, we can drag the ponds on the heath.

[ALFRED goes up to C. window and back]

MARGERY. Oh, don't, don't. He's so proud He's so sensitive I've got an awful fear that sooner than face us and tell us he's ruined . . . he's . . .

DOROTHY. Don't say it, Marge. It's so unlucky

PATRICK. Oughtn't we go to the police?

ALFRED. Not yet We should look such fools if he suddenly turned up

DOROTHY. I'm all for telephoning round to the hospitals.

MARGERY. We must do something I shall go mad

ALFRED. If he doesn't turn up to-night, of course, we'll get in touch with the police stations.

PATRICK. Couldn't we send out an S O S on the wireless? It's what people generally do when some one disappears.

JUDY. That wouldn't do much good if he's lying at the bottom of Whitestone Pond.

MARGERY. What a stigma on the children.

DOROTHY. Oh, darling, don't make things out worse than they are Alfred could always get the jury to bring in a verdict of temporarily insane.

PATRICK. Of course, it may be that he's only lost his memory and he'll turn up somewhere in a few days.

JUDY. Bournemouth. *That's* where they're generally found.

[ALL look at JUDY.]

DOROTHY. But, Alfred, why can't you ring up that man who was going to back him? Then we shall know if Charles had any reason to do anything desperate or not.

[PAT goes L.]

ALFRED. Arthur Letter? It's not so easy as all that to get hold of the chairman of a great London bank I don't suppose he'd tell me anything if I did

DOROTHY. Well, you can try.

MARGERY. Please, Alfred. I'm so terribly anxious

ALFRED. All right I'll see if he'll speak to me He can't eat me

[Exits off stairs L. Pause.]

MARGERY. The suspense is too awful

[PAT takes a chocolate, goes up, and comes back]

PATRICK. Did Father go out in his top-hat this morning?

MARGERY. Oh, Pat, don't be so silly. This isn't the moment to think of top-hats.

PATRICK. I don't agree with you. I particularly want to know.

JUDY. I think so I should have noticed it if he hadn't.

PATRICK. Then he can't have been meditating suicide when he left this house

MARGERY. Why not?

PATRICK. Mummy darling, no man in his senses would commit suicide in a top-hat.

JUDY. But if he was temporarily insane he wasn't in his senses

PATRICK. Don't be idiotic, Judy. What can you know about men? A chap who was going to commit suicide would naturally put on a cap or, at the outside, a bowler.

MARGERY. Oh, no, Pat, your father was always so particular He would never have gone out in a tail-coat and a cap, whatever he was going to do Never. Never.

PATRICK. That's what I say, if he went out in a topper he hasn't committed suicide

JUDY [rises and faces PAT] I don't see why not. Supposing he jumped in the river he could always leave it on the tow-path.

PATRICK. And have people come along and say, "Hulloa, what's a brand-new topper doing on the towpath?"

[Goes up and down.]

DOROTHY. What is Alfred doing?

MARGERY. Isn't it awful to think that only a few minutes ago we were all so happy. We were talking of going down to the Riviera for the summer We hadn't a care in the world. And now this terrible thing has happened.

JUDY. Life is like that.

PATRICK. Oh, Lord, you are a gloom,

Judy. If you haven't got anything cheerful to say, for heaven's sake shut up!

JUDY. I don't see any object in not facing facts. I'm psychic I'm absolutely convinced that Daddy's lying at the bottom of Whitestone Pond

[ALFRED comes in.]

ALFRED. Well, boys and girls Good news.

MARGERY Alfred!

[Rises All rise except JUDY.]

ALL. Cheers! How nice! [Etc]

ALFRED. I just mentioned my name, and they put me through to Sir Arthur at once. I didn't give anything away. Trust your Uncle Alfred for that. He told me he'd seen Charlie last night at his private house, and in consideration of Charlie's personal character he'd agreed to let him have enough money to meet all his obligations.

MARGERY. Oh, my dear, how awfully nice of him. [ALL very pleased.]

ALL. Cheers! How nice! [Etc]

ALFRED [to PAT] When old Charlie-parlie left Sir Arthur's sumptuous mansion he had a whacking fat check in his pocket.

MARGERY. What a relief!

[Sits, takes DOROTHY'S hand.]

DOROTHY. But why hasn't he been at his office to-day?

ALFRED. Oh, that's a minor point. I suppose he's been tearing round and hadn't any time. He'll tell us that when we see him The great thing is that he's weathered the storm.

PATRICK. Then we're not ruined after all! [Brightly.]

ALFRED [to PAT]. No. Your father's taken a toss, but he's in the saddle again and there's no reason why in a few years he shouldn't be where he was. [To all] Of course he'll have to work like a beaver.

JUDY. Daddy loves work. That's one thing.

ALFRED. He'll have to keep his nosy-posy to the grindstone.

PATRICK. Oh, well, there's no harm in that. At Daddy's age there's nothing much for a chap to do except work

MARGERY I used to be sorry that he had no outside interests, but as things have turned out, I daresay it's all for the best.

ALFRED. You kiddie-widdies mustn't be extravagant, you know. For some time your father won't have any spare cash to throw about.

PATRICK. I've thought of that. I'm willing to do my bit. We shall have to

make do with the family bus for a bit longer, Judy, old girl.

JUDY. It is sickening, isn't it? I suppose it can't be helped And we shan't be able to have a hard court either.

MARGERY [starts making up] Call the others in, Judy. There's no reason they should stay out any longer.

JUDY. All right [Goes to window.] Dinah, Tim! Come in.

MARGERY. And then you'd better play tennis, if you want to.

JUDY. After all this excitement I couldn't hit a ball.

ALFRED. Are you going to play tennis? I'll just nip over the garden wall and change. I don't mind showing you young things that there's life in the old dog yet. just going to have a knock up

[DIANA and TIMOTHY run in ALFRED slaps TIM on back]

JUDY. Dinah! Oh, my dear, we've had such a thrill Daddy's vanished, and we all thought he'd committed suicide And we were ruined and everything had to be sold, and now it's all right, and Daddy hasn't committed suicide after all.

DIANA. If you were going to tell us all about it, it seems hardly worth while to have turned us out of the room.

JUDY I didn't want you to go. It was grand. Mummy was in hysterics. And Pat was keeping a stiff upper lip and I was being the grave little woman

DIANA. Do you mean to say it was all a false alarm?

TIMOTHY You know Alfred and his little jokes. You oughtn't to let him get away with them. He only gets above himself.

ALFRED Now, then, young-feller-melad, not so much of your lip. We're not out of the woody-pooody yet.

PATRICK. We're ruined all right.

JUDY But the only difference it'll make is that Pat can't have a car of his own and we shall have to go on with the old court until Daddy makes some more money.

TIMOTHY I say, that's a bit thick.

PATRICK. If they can play on grass at Wimbledon, I suppose on a pinch we can too.

ALFRED That's the spirit, old bean. I'm jolly glad to see that you're taking it like a sportsman.

DIANA. And where's Uncle Charlie?

PATRICK. We don't know that.

MARGERY. We wish we did. We wish to goodness we did.

JUDY. We think he's lost his memory

and is sitting on a bench at Bournemouth in a top-hat.

PATRICK. He's much more likely to be at Southend.

MARGERY. Oh, no. Even if your poor father had lost his memory, it would never occur to him to go to Southend. [A door slams. The door is opened, and CHARLES strolls amiably in. He is a man in the early forties, quiet and of rather distinguished appearance; he is very neat in his black coat and gray striped trousers. He wears a top-hat.] Charlie!

CHARLES. Hulloo!

THE CURTAIN FALLS

ACT II

SCENE.—*The curtain rises on the scene as the curtain fell on Act I, the lines being repeated as follows:*

DIANA And where's Uncle Charlie?

PATRICK. We don't know that.

MARGERY. We wish we did. We wish to goodness we did.

JUDY We think he's lost his memory and is sitting on a bench at Bournemouth in a top-hat.

PATRICK. He's much more likely to be at Southend.

MARGERY. Oh, no. Even if your poor father had lost his memory, it would never occur to him to go to Southend. [A door slams. The door is opened, and CHARLES strolls amiably in. He is a man in the early forties, quiet and of rather distinguished appearance; he is very neat in his black coat and gray striped trousers. He wears a top-hat.] Charlie!

CHARLES. Hulloo!

[Taking off his hat.]

MARGERY [much agitated]. Where have you been? Oh, we've been so anxious. It's too bad of you.

CHARLES. What have I done?

MARGERY. The suspense has been too awful.

DOROTHY. Yes!

CHARLES [coolly]. Why, what's the matter? Hulloo, Pat! Home for the holidays?

PATRICK. Hulloo, Daddy.

CHARLES. You look all right. Had a nice time your last term at school?

PATRICK. Yes, grand.

CHARLES. How's everybody? [Goes to ALFRED.] Back from the city early, Alfred? Don't tell me you're idling.

ALFRED. I say, old boy, where the devil have you been? I've been trying to get hold of you all day long.

CHARLES. I? I've been for a walk on Hampstead Heath.

ALFRED. A walk?

[General exclamation.]

MARGERY. All day?

CHARLES. No, I found rather a jolly little pub and had lunch there. A cut off the joint and a bottle of beer. Very nice.

ALFRED. Why didn't you go to your office?

JUDY. We were sure you'd committed suicide.

PATRICK. Judy wanted to have White-stone Pond dragged.

MARGERY. We've been so frightfully anxious, Charlie.

CHARLES. I may be very dense, but I don't quite understand what you're all talking about.

ALFRED. Well, old boy, I had to tell them. You see, you didn't keep your appointment with me, and you hadn't turned up at the office.

CHARLES. Oh, I see. [Amiably.] Well, now you know, don't you?

PATRICK. We know it's all right, Daddy.

ALFRED. They were all so upset they persuaded me to call up Arthur Letter. He told me what he'd done.

CHARLES. Sporting of him, wasn't it?

JUDY. Were you absolutely broke, Daddy?

CHARLES. I couldn't comply with my bargains.

JUDY. What does that mean?

CHARLES. Well, when a broker can't comply with his bargains he's hammered.

ALFRED. And then he can't trade any more.

CHARLES. How are you, Dorothy? You've got a new hat on.

DOROTHY. D'you like it? How clever of you to notice. [Business with hat.]

ALFRED. Look here, Charlie, we must have a talk. Tim, you and Dinah had better make yourselves scarce.

TIMOTHY. All right.

PATRICK. Sorry, old man. I'm afraid tennis looks like being a washout.

TIMOTHY. Oh, that's all right. I know what these domestic upsets are.

[CHARLES looks at PAT.]

PATRICK. It's one of the penalties of having a family.

[DIANA and TIMOTHY saunter out.]

DOROTHY. Do you wish me to go too? [Half rises.]

MARGERY [*rises*]. No, stay, Dorothy I've got a presentiment that something is rotten in the state of Denmark.

ALFRED. My dear, this is no time for culture.

MARGERY I know, that's why I want Dorothy to stay. There are moments when a woman wants another woman's support.

ALFRED Where have you *been* all day, Charlie? I rang up every place I could think of.

CHARLES I told you I've been for a walk on Hampstead Heath.

ALFRED. But you had an appointment to see me at ten.

CHARLES [*smiling*]. I can't tell you how excruciatingly the idea of seeing you at ten bored me.

ALFRED. Thank you. You made the appointment yourself.

MARGERY What did you do on the Heath?

CHARLES I walked. I thought. I admired the scenery.

ALFRED. When every minute was of vital importance?

CHARLES. That too added to the charm of the prospect.

PATRICK I don't wish to cast a gloom on the party, but it sounds to me as though Father were trying to be facetious.

MARGERY. Don't be so silly, Pat. You know your father isn't like that.

ALFRED [*shrewdly*]. There's more in this than meets the eye I have no hesitation in saying that whatever.

CHARLES It was a bad blow for me, you know, when Tommy Avon shot himself

[He makes this remark conversationally, with deliberation, but not as though he attached great importance to what he was saying]

ALFRED It was the best thing he could do. If he hadn't, he'd have got fourteen years.

CHARLES. It cost me a packet.

ALFRED. And you're not the only one. A lot of my clients have been hit

CHARLES. I was proud of my firm. I took a harmless vanity in the fact that my name stood so high on the Stock Exchange. It was a great satisfaction to me to know that people pointed me out and said, good fellow, Charlie Battle, safe as the Bank of England.

ALFRED That's why Arthur Letter was willing to help you when you were up against it [*To JUDY*] Character is the best asset any man can have in the City.

CHARLES When the crash came my

first thought was to save the firm. I was prepared to sacrifice every bob I had to keep my head above water. By George, there wasn't a stone I left unturned.

ALFRED You don't have to tell me that No one could have done more.

CHARLES And last night, at the eleventh hour, you might say, I did the trick. I was saved I don't mind telling you it was a relief.

ALFRED. I'll bet it was.

CHARLES You know this is settling day. It had been a nightmare Last night I knew I could comply with my bargains. All my savings had to go down the drain, but I didn't care a damn The old firm was saved, and my reputation was all right. Funny thing, honor, isn't it? And the importance we attach to it. I suppose it's the force of habit.

JUDY. You've been rather wonderful, Daddy. No one could have guessed anything particular was happening, could they, Mummy?

MARGERY. No, dear. I never dreamt anything was wrong.

CHARLES. I'm glad of that. I was afraid I'd been a trifle disagreeable.

JUDY [*quite pleasantly*]. No, not more than usual, darling

CHARLES I was in great spirits when I left the house this morning. You'd have thought I'd made a fortune instead of lost one. I walked to the tube as I've walked every morning, more or less, since I was demobbed I nodded to one or two people I knew All going down to the city just as I was. I got to the station. There was the usual crowd hurrying in . . . Suddenly my heart sank.

JUDY. Why?

CHARLES [*rises and walks towards JUDY*]. Well, my dear, you know once or twice during these last days it looked as though I couldn't pull through. And as I lay awake at night turning things over I thought of what I'd do if I went broke. I made pretty elaborate plans. It relieved me. I didn't see why I shouldn't make the best of a bad job. Well, I weathered the storm, and I was in a position to start all over again. I could go on quite quietly to the end of my life, doing what I'd done every day for the last twelve years, going down to the City and studying the markets, buying and selling stock. Suddenly it seemed to me that for me ruin meant life and liberty—and that tube, with all those people hurrying to catch their train,

led to slavery and death So I went for a walk on Hampstead Heath

[Sits on settee]

MARGERY. But, Charlie, my dear, that was only nerves I mean, that's the sort of thing we're all liable to, since the war All of us who went through that awful experience bear its mark. I know I do.

ALFRED Charlie, you haven't done so badly You've a nice house and a car, and you've kept your wife in the sort of way your position required. You've sent your children to first-rate schools You had saved a bit of money.

CHARLES Fifty thousand pounds, roughly.

ALFRED It's true that through no fault of your own that's gone, but all the rest remains You've still got your position, and you can make more money. I don't think you've got much to complain of

CHARLES. Yes. But sometimes, I couldn't help asking myself if I was meant to spend my life so tamely.

PATRICK. I shouldn't have thought it was tame

CHARLES [looks at PAT and then looks at watch]. You've never been in the Stock Exchange, have you? Pity I didn't take you in one day It would have interested you.

JUDY. I thought strangers couldn't get in.

CHARLES No, they're not allowed, and if they're caught they must expect to be hustled a bit. They'll probably want a new hat

ALFRED. You could have smuggled him in as one of your clerks. No one would have taken any notice of him. It's an amazing sight

CHARLES. It's indescribable. There's a hell of a row, you know.

ALFRED Deafening.

CHARLES Every one's yelling at the top of his voice, and men are rushing about like mad I must say at first there's something rather exhilarating about it. That frantic activity does give you a thrilling sensation of life.

ALFRED. By Jove, it does.

CHARLES Ever heard a man hammered, Alfred?

ALFRED No, no, I haven't.

CHARLES. It's impressive At three o'clock, as the hour strikes [the clock in the drawing-room strikes three] just as that clock is striking now [looks at clock on desk], the two waiters appear on the stands and take off their hats, as if to a

corpse. They beat with a wooden mallet three times. Fellows look up, and that deafening row stops Suddenly, as though it had been cut with a knife And it's so still you really couldn't hear a pin drop. However often you've heard it, the sound of that mallet ringing through the deathly silence is frightening. The waiter at the Consol Market end reads out a notice, and the waiter at the Mining Market end repeats it. "Gentlemen, Mr. Charles Battle, trading as Wargrave, Battle & Co., is unable to comply with his bargains." There's a moment's pause, and however hardened you are there's something tragic in it. They're good fellows on the Stock Exchange, most of them, and a bit sentimental, and it gives one a pang to think some one's beaten It may have been just bad luck. It may have been that one bit off more than one could chew. If you're up you can afford to be sorry for the man who's down, and if you're shaky you wonder if it'll be your turn next. Yes, just for a moment dismay fills all those hearts, and then, before you can say Jack Robinson, as suddenly as the row stopped, the row begins again Pandemonium. Charles Laurence Battle, trading as Wargrave, Battle & Co., is forgotten. The world has passed him by

[Pause Suddenly there is a ring on the telephone in the hall]

MARGERY See who it is, Judy.

CHARLES. If it's any one for me, I'm not at home. Never mind how urgent

JUDY All right [She goes out]

ALFRED [rises and sits with CHARLES —cheerfully]. Well, old boy, I'm glad you've escaped that It's true you've lost a packet, but you'll make it again. While there's life, there's hope.

DOROTHY Alfred, please! Have you been terribly anxious all these days, Charlie?

CHARLES. I have, a bit

MARGERY. Why didn't you tell me?

CHARLES. Oh, my dear, there didn't seem any object in worrying you.

[JUDY comes in again.]

JUDY It's Mr. Turner He wants awfully to speak to you, Daddy, and when I said you were out he seemed all fussed and bothered.

CHARLES. That's nice of him. I hope you lied like my own daughter.

JUDY He asked me if I knew where he could get hold of Uncle Alfred, and I told him he was here. He's holding the line.

ALFRED. I wonder what *he* wants me for?

DOROTHY. You'd better go and see, Alfred. [ALFRED goes out.]

MARGERY. Charlie, will this interfere with our summer holiday? [Pause.]

DOROTHY. Marge and I were thinking it would be so good for the children if we went down to the Riviera for a change.

[Enter DIANA from garden]

MARGERY. I like the river, but I do realize that it would be much more of an education for the children to take them to France And every one's going to Antibes now.

JUDY. Oh, Mummy, that would be too divine.

DIANA And us too? Oh, Dorothy, it would be glorious.

DOROTHY. Well, I haven't spoken to your father about it yet. Your Aunt Margery and I have been putting our heads together.

MARGERY. Of course, before all this happened.

DOROTHY. I suppose Charlie couldn't get away, but I'm sure he wouldn't mind your going. We'd go to some cheap *pension*, and really I don't suppose it would be any more expensive than staying in England

MARGERY. Naturally, we'd have to be frightfully economical.

JUDY. Oh, Daddy, do say yes. It would be awful fun Wouldn't it, Pat?

PATRICK. Not so dusty.

[ALFRED, distraught, bursts into the room]

ALFRED. Charlie, Charlie, he says you're *hammered* [PAT rises.]

CHARLES [coolly]. Well, what of it?

ALFRED. He's frightfully upset He said he understood everything had been arranged. Charlie, it's not true, is it?

CHARLES [pauses. Sardonicly] Yes, my boy, the waiter went knocky-knocky with his little mallet, and poor old Charlie-parlie was blown sky high.

ALFRED. It's not true. Charlie, you don't know what you're saying. For God's sake, pull yourself together, old bean.

MARGERY. Oh, Charlie, what has happened?

ALFRED [emphatically]. What do you mean, Charlie?

CHARLES. Only that at the very moment that I was so dramatically describing to you what happens when a man is hammered on the Stock Exchange I was actually being hammered. Don't you re-

member, I called your attention to the clock striking three?

PATRICK. I hate these cheap theatrical effects

CHARLES. I have a simple mind. They get me every time.

JUDY. If one didn't know Daddy had no sense of humor, one would think he'd just been pulling our leg.

CHARLES. You see, as three o'clock approached and I knew what was going to happen, I felt a trifle lonely on Hampstead Heath. I suddenly craved for the society of my fellows

MARGERY. I can't believe it. It's so fantastic.

CHARLES. They say that when the dying buffalo feels his end approaching, he leaves his herd [looking round at PAT and JUDY] and retires into solitude. In that respect I am unlike the dying buffalo

ALFRED. It's not often I'm puzzled. But I am now, and I don't mind admitting it. You could have complied with your bargains perfectly well.

CHARLES. I didn't choose to.

ALFRED. And had Arthur Letter's check in your pocket.

CHARLES. I have it still [He takes a check out of his pocket and hands it to ALFRED] Perhaps you wouldn't mind sending it back to him and telling him that I made up my mind not to avail myself of his kindness.

ALFRED. There's more in this than meets the eye. I have no hesitation in saying that.

MARGERY. But then we're ruined.

DOROTHY. Oh, Margery, how awful!

ALFRED. You cut along, Dorothy.

DOROTHY. All right [To MARGERY.] I'll be in the garden in case you want me, dear. Come along, Dinah.

MARGERY. All right, dear.

[DOROTHY goes out with DIANA]

JUDY. D'you want us to go, Uncle Alfred? [Moves towards ALFRED]

CHARLES. Oh, I think you'd better stay. I have one or two things to say that a good deal concern you.

PATRICK. But if you're hammered, we're in the soup, Daddy.

CHARLES. Up to the neck, my boy.

PATRICK. I don't know what there is to be so damned cheerful about.

ALFRED. Neither do I, believe me. Your father has let himself be hammered when he actually had in his pocket the means of saving himself.

PATRICK. But what's the big idea?

ALFRED. Of course, he'd had a knock. But he isn't the only one. Why, I know brokers who've made and lost half a dozen fortunes in their time. On the Stock Exchange you have to take the rough with the smooth.

PATRICK. That's when a fellow shows his grit, when he's down and out.

CHARLES [*with a smile in his eyes*]. True, my son. You're presently going to have an opportunity of showing yours.

ALFRED. But how did you have the heart to let an old-established business like yours go to blazes?

CHARLES. Well, I don't deny that when the clock struck three just now, it gave me a funny little feeling in the pit of my stomach.

MARGERY [*emphatic*]. Your poor father was so proud of the business, Charlie. He always said there wasn't a more respectable firm in the city of London.

ALFRED. What are you going to do now?

CHARLES [*casually*]. I'm going abroad.

MARGERY [*in sudden agitation*]. Charlie, you haven't done anything dreadful? They're not going to issue a warrant?

CHARLES. No, no, my dear. However dishonorable my conduct may be, I have done nothing that the law can take exception to.

MARGERY [*helplessly*]. One never knows with brokers. It's such a funny profession.

ALFRED. My God, this is a pretty kettle of fish. For goodness' sake, explain yourself, Charlie. A man doesn't commit suicide for fun.

CHARLES. The explanation is very simple. This morning I came to the conclusion that it wasn't worth it.

ALFRED. What?

CHARLES. This life I've been leading. For twelve mortal years I've been going down to the city in the same tube, I've spent the day buying and selling shares; for twelve mortal years I've come home every evening in the same tube. And the world was rolling on and on. I'm fed up. Fed to the teeth. I'm not going to be the drudge of respectability any longer. I'm through. Look. [*He takes his glistening topper*]. Here is the badge of my office. This is the symbol of my position and my respectability. Sleek, shining, new, and rakish. Look at it. [*Showing hat to all*]. It represents the potentiality of wealth beyond the dreams of avarice. To hell with it!

[*CHARLES flings the hat down on the floor, stamps on it, and kicks it away from him*]

MARGERY. Charlie, Charlie, Charlie! And you who were always so particular about your hats. Oh, what is going to become of us now?

[*Goes up stage, picks up hat and puts it on table, then crosses CHARLES, down R. of settee*]

PATRICK. Are you obliged to be so melodramatic, Father?

CHARLES. In moments of emotion we're all apt to fall into it, my dear boy.

[*Taking cigar case out of pocket*]

JUDY. And what about us, Daddy?

CHARLES [*pause*]. I'm going to leave you. [*Coming down in front of settee*].

PATRICK. How long for?

CHARLES. For good.

PATRICK [*with the utmost surprise*]. Why?

CHARLES [*very naturally*]. Because I'm bored with you.

PATRICK. Bored with us? Bored with me and Judy?

CHARLES. Yes, bored with you and Judy. Aren't you bored with me?

[*Lights cigar*]

PATRICK. That's different. You're our father.

CHARLES. How is it different?

PATRICK. People are always rather bored with their parents. That's human nature.

CHARLES. Is it?

PATRICK. After all, they belong to a different generation. The middle-aged are naturally tedious.

CHARLES [*smiling*]. Has it never struck you that the middle-aged find the young tedious too?

PATRICK. It certainly *hasn't*.

CHARLES. They do.

PATRICK. But why? They're not tedious.

CHARLES. Oh, aren't they?

PATRICK. How can they be? They've got youth and high spirits. They're brimming over with ideas. Aren't they, Mummy?

MARGERY. Yes, darling, of course.

PATRICK. It's absurd to say that Judy and I are boring. What would this house be without us? A *mausoleum*. At meals we're the life and soul of the party. Aren't we, Judy?

JUDY. Rather.

PATRICK. Ask *any one* you like, and they'll all tell you the same thing. We've got the reputation all over Golders Green

for being *unusually* brilliant. I mean—*[hesitant pause]*—if you find us boring it can only be on account of your own *stupidity*.

MARGERY. Oh, that is rude, Pat. You mustn't talk to your father like that.

PATRICK. He asked for it, and, damn it all, what other explanation is there?

MARGERY. I don't know, darling

PATRICK. It's so ungrateful.

CHARLES. I don't suppose you're more boring than most young things of your age. I daresay it's only because I know you better than you bore me more.

PATRICK. But isn't youth enough in itself? You can't be so unintelligent as not to realize that nowadays the only thing that *counts* is youth. And it's because we've discovered that our generation is so much ahead of every other. You know what I mean, Judy, don't you?

JUDY. Of course I do. In Daddy's time, when they were young they just wanted to be older.

PATRICK. That's right. And we don't. We're young, and we want to enjoy our youth. For the first time in the world's history we've realized the *immense* value of it.

MARGERY. Of course, it's lovely to be young.

PATRICK. Your lives would be nothing without us. Think of the exhilaration we bring, and the vitality and go. I mean, to say we're boring is perfectly outrageous, I don't want to blow my own trumpet.

CHARLES. No! No!

PATRICK. But I can honestly say that's the last thing any one could call Judy, and I think I can safely say that she'd say the same about me.

JUDY. Absolutely.

CHARLES *[amiably]*. I wonder if it has ever occurred to you how tiresome the conversation of the young is to the middle-aged. Chatter, chatter, chatter, about nothing at all. Just to hear yourselves speak. And you take yourselves with such appalling seriousness. You know nothing, and you haven't the sense to hold your tongues. You utter the most obvious commonplace, with the air of having made a world-shaking discovery. You're so solemn. You're so self-satisfied. You're so *dogmatic*. You're *mane*. The only excuse for you is that you're very young. One tries to have patience with you. But, my God, don't think we find you amusing! We find you quite incredibly dull.

[JUDY gives a smothered chuckle.]

PATRICK. Shut up, Judy, this is no *laughing* matter. I can tell you this, Daddy, this is the last time I take any trouble to be gay and jolly and amusing in this house. God knows, it's been an uphill job, but I've done my best. I've just sweated my guts out. But now I'm through, definitely and absolutely through.

JUDY. But have you no affection for us, Daddy?

CHARLES. No, I haven't.

MARGERY. Oh, Charlie, what a cruel thing to say! How can you help loving your children?

CHARLES. I rather liked them when they were kids, but now they're grown up I don't find them very interesting.

PATRICK *[outraged]*. But that's simply unnatural!

CHARLES. D'you think it is? I don't. Of course, when they're small one's fond of one's children. One likes them as one likes puppies or kittens. They're dependent on you, and that's rather touching. They think you're very marvelous, and that's rather flattering. But almost before you know where you are, they're young men and women with characters of their own. They're not part of you any more. They're individuals. They're strangers. Why *should* you *care* for them? *[To MARGERY]*

PATRICK. Do you mean to say that Judy and I mean no more to you than if we were puppies or kittens?

CHARLES. No, I mean that you don't mean very much more to me than puppies mean to their father when they're grown into fine healthy young dogs.

JUDY. But you'd be sorry if we died, Daddy?

CHARLES. Wretched. I've been frightfully worried when either of you has been ill. I was devoted to you then. Perhaps it's unfortunate that on the whole you've both had robust health.

PATRICK. You can hardly expect us to have a series of illnesses just to excite your parental affection.

CHARLES. You're right, Pat. I should certainly congratulate myself on the excellent physique I was able to endow you with.

PATRICK. I should have thought you'd be so proud of us. I've always been in the first five in all my forms, and I was head of my house. I was captain of the first eleven and in the first fifteen. Any unprejudiced person would say I was rather a credit to you.

CHARLES. You know, to be proud of

one's children is really and truly only to be proud of oneself. I'm not a vain man.

PATRICK. Well, I'm dished!

CHARLES. Do you care very much for me, Pat?

MARGERY. Of course he does, Charlie. I've never known two more affectionate children.

CHARLES. Let him answer for himself.

PATRICK. I don't know what you mean. I like you as a chap naturally likes his father. You're not going about it exactly the right way to make me crazy over you.

CHARLES. I suppose if I died you'd cry a bit. That would be nice of you and very proper. But I'm all alive and kicking. Don't you find me rather a nuisance? Don't you resent having to come to me for money, and my wanting to know how you're going to spend it?

PATRICK [*rises and goes down to back of seat*] Well, naturally, any fellow of my age wants to be his own master.

CHARLES. Hasn't it ever struck you that it would be grand to have a flat of your own?

PATRICK. I don't see what that's got to do with it.

CHARLES. It doesn't suggest that you find the family circle precisely thrilling.

PATRICK. But you can't alter the facts of life. It's human nature that parents should be frightfully fond of their children. But they can't expect their children to be frightfully fond of them.

MARGERY. Oh, Pat.

CHARLES. I've come to the conclusion that two such clever and intelligent children as you are can get along quite comfortably without me. And as that suits my convenience, I'm going to give you the opportunity of doing so.

PATRICK. But how are we to live? It means that Judy will just have to go on the streets.

JUDY. Don't be so silly, Pat. You boys are so ignorant.

PATRICK. Well, if Father leaves us without a bob, there's nothing else you can do. How am I to go up to Cambridge and read for the Bar?

CHARLES. Are you still proposing to enter Parliament in the Labour interest?

PATRICK. That's the idea ultimately, of course.

CHARLES. Don't you think the Labour party are beginning to fight a trifle shy of the people like you, who only joined

them when it looked like a good thing, and now grab all the plums?

PATRICK. They want people of our class.

CHARLES. Have you ever reflected upon St Paul? He was a tentmaker, you know. He got a lot of kudos out of it.

PATRICK. Damn it all, Father, we're talking seriously now, don't bring in religion.

CHARLES. You know, I believe it would *pay* you to become a working man. A stoker, for instance, or a chimney sweep.

PATRICK. Me?

CHARLES. Get to know the proletariat from the inside, my dear boy, and when you're all fighting for the spoils of office, you'll have the bulge over the Eton boy and the Oxford graduate.

ALFRED. You're talking through your hat, Charlie. It's just when children are growing up and entering the world that they need a father's guidance. You can't leave them in the lurch like that.

CHARLES. Oh, can't I? You wait and see.

ALFRED. Penniless?

CHARLES. No, not exactly penniless. That would require more fortitude than I possess.

PATRICK. But haven't you lost everything?

MARGERY. Most brokers have something tucked away somewhere, Pat, that their creditors can't get at.

CHARLES. In order to comply with my bargains, I should have had to throw in the whole of my private fortune. But I'm hammered. I happen to have twenty thousand pounds' worth of bonds in a New York bank.

PATRICK. Oh! Have you?

[*Leans forward*]

CHARLES. I must tell you that in honor I should hand it over to my creditors. They have a moral right to it.

ALFRED. I'm afraid they have.

CHARLES. You see, my solicitor agrees with me. There is no doubt in my mind that to keep it is a most ungentlemanly proceeding. I propose, however, to do so.

ALFRED. Oh, Charlie, you can't.

CHARLES. Legally?

ALFRED. Legally, of course you can. But not morally. I mean it would be frightfully bad form. Your friends will think you a dirty dog.

CHARLES. And with justice. But after mature reflection I've come to the con-

clusion that that won't impair my appetite or disturb my night's rest.

[*JUDY again gives a little laugh*]

MARGERY [*rises*]. Don't giggle, Judy. This is frightfully serious. Your father's honor is at stake.

CHARLES. There are two courses open to me. The twenty thousand pounds I've saved from the wreck will bring in roughly about a thousand a year. I can keep that for myself and subsist modestly on the income. But I think it would be rather selfish.

MARGERY. My poor children. They can't beg their bread in the streets of London.

CHARLES. I have a very sensitive conscience, and I'm not quite sure that I should be entirely happy if at moments the thought crossed my mind that my wife and children were in want.

[*MARGERY gives a start and looks at him with perplexity and consternation.*]

MARGERY. But, Charlie . . .

CHARLES [*interrupting her*]. The other course is to hand the entire amount to them and go out into the world alone and destitute. The gesture would be romantic but to my mind absurd. I propose therefore to leave you fifteen thousand pounds and keep five thousand for myself. The income from that will always prevent me from starving.

MARGERY. But aren't I to come with you?

[*Crosses to settee*]

CHARLES. Oh, no, dear. [*PATRICK half rises. JUDY pulls him back*] That would be an awful bore for you.

MARGERY [*gasping*]. Oh! It never occurred to me for a moment you meant that.

[*Sits*]

CHARLES. Didn't it? I thought I made it quite clear.

MARGERY. It never dawned on me. Was it clear to you, Alfred?

ALFRED. Don't ask me, Margery. I don't know if I'm standing on my head or my heels.

MARGERY. But I don't understand. It's the most ridiculous thing I ever heard in my life. You can't tell your wife that you're going to leave her just like that, in the course of conversation. Without a row or a scene or anything. Like a chauffeur giving notice because he wants to better himself.

CHARLES. No, not like that. Like an old family retainer breaking it gently to his employers that advancing years oblige him to take a well-earned rest.

MARGERY. Oh, it's absurd. You've got no reason to leave me and the children.

CHARLES. I've been a husband and a father long enough. I think one should always abandon an occupation when it has ceased to be a source of pleasure and profit.

[*Looking at PATRICK and JUDY and then MARGERY*]

MARGERY. But do I bore you, Charlie?

CHARLES. A bit.

MARGERY. He's not sane, Alfred.

ALFRED. Well, that's what I've been thinking myself. My belief is, Charlie, that you're completely potty.

CHARLES. Don't you think I'd know if I were?

MARGERY. Even their nearest and dearest don't know sometimes. Thank God, it's never been in my family. [*A ring on the telephone is heard.*] Oh, bother.

CHARLES. See who it is, Pat. If it's any one for me I'm out.

[*PATRICK goes without a word*]

MARGERY. I thought you meant me to come with you. I thought your idea was that we should settle down in some place in France or Italy where we could live cheaply and play golf.

CHARLES. You'd have hated that, Margery.

MARGERY. I shouldn't have liked it, but I *am* your wife, and if I'd really thought it my duty I'd have consented. And of course we might have got to know some very nice people.

CHARLES. I would never dream of asking you to make such a sacrifice.

[*PATRICK comes in.*]

PATRICK. It's Mr. Turner. I told him you were here, and he's holding on.

CHARLES. Oh damn.

[*He goes out quickly*]

MARGERY. Oh, Alfred, what shall we do?

ALFRED. Well, my dear, I think you'd better let me have a talk to Charles alone. I'm used to dealing with matters of this sort, and my experience is that it's much better for a friend of both parties to step in before anything irreparable is said on either side.

MARGERY. I'm so flabbergasted, Alfred. I mean it's so strange that Charlie should turn after all these years.

JUDY [*rises*]. Come on, Mummy, if Uncle Alfred wants us to get out, we'd better nip before Daddy comes back.

[*Goes to MARGERY.*]

ALFRED. I'm sure it's wiser I can find out exactly how the land lies

MARGERY. If he'd made a point of my going with him I should have said to him. "Charlie, I am not only a wife, but a mother, I cannot leave my children And if you feel that I mean nothing to you any more—then you must go" And we might have arranged an amicable separation. But if he doesn't want me, the situation is entirely different.

ALFRED. At the first glance, I don't quite see how.

MARGERY. It's obvious I won't let myself be treated like that for a moment. I have my woman's dignity to think of.

ALFRED. Oh, yes, of course. I'd forgotten that Now, you popoffski, my dear.

MARGERY. Very well.

PATRICK. Of course, I think he's off his chump. I mean, to say that we're dull, why, it doesn't begin to have any sense.

[Goes out through French window]

MARGERY. I wonder if it would be wise to send for a doctor. [To JUDY.] Give me your father's hat, darling.

JUDY [picking it up from table] Here you are.

MARGERY [pressing it to her bosom]. It's like a poor little baby brutally done to death. It reminds me of those Armenian folk songs

[Goes off through alcove ALFRED alone. He goes up stage, lights cigarette, and takes check from pocket.]

ALFRED. Tch, tch, tch!

[CHARLES reënters.]

CHARLES. Hullo, where are the others?

ALFRED. I packed them off I wanted to have a word with you alone.

CHARLES. That was Bertie Turner on the 'phone.

ALFRED. What did he want?

CHARLES [with a little smile, at table]. H'm Good fellow. He and some of the lads have gone together, and they've offered to put up all the money to settle so that I can get back into the House.

ALFRED. By jingo!

CHARLES. The founder of the Christian Religion was a good judge of character, wasn't he? It's so much harder to resist kindness than brute force.

ALFRED [eagerly]. Have you accepted? [Rises.]

CHARLES. No, I couldn't. But I was so shaken I had to be a bit short with him. I told him to mind his own damned business and rang off.

ALFRED. Oh, Charlie, how could you be such a damned fool?

CHARLES. Don't nag me now, Alfred. I'm a bit shattered.

ALFRED. I'm not going to nag you, old boy But now that we're alone, let's get down to brass tacks Gloves off and cards on the table and all that sort of thing What's the little game?

CHARLES [recovering himself]. I wonder what you're talking about now, Alfred?

ALFRED [very hearty]. Go on with you, Charhe. Now you tell your uncle Alfred the truthie-puthie. There's a woman in this. Deny it if you can.

CHARLES. I do.

ALFRED. You can't throw dust in Uncle Alfred's eyes like that. Uncle Alfred wasn't born yesterday. If you've let your business go to old billy-o and you're leaving your wife and family, it's for a woman, or I'll eat my hat.

CHARLES [good-naturedly]. Eat it, then.

ALFRED. Oh, come off it, Charlie. You can trust an old friend. Uncle Alfred's a man of the world. I know you've been married nineteen years. A chap wants a change now and then I'm not going to blame you if you've got stuck on a little bit. Have your fun if you want to. Life is short, and we're dead a long time. But be reasonable about it. One doesn't break up a happy home for a little bit of fluff I mean—well, you know what I mean. The game isn't worth the candle. Don't do it, old boy, don't do it.

CHARLES. My dear Alfred, you know more about little bits of fluff than I do.

ALFRED [sits, archly, lying back]. My business brings me in contact with them now and then. And I'm human [Smiles] But I never let them interfere with my home life. No, sir.

CHARLES. Have you ever met a little bit of fluff who was prepared to share the life of a middle-aged man with two hundred and fifty pounds a year?

ALFRED. I wondered at the time if Margery hadn't hit the nail on the head when she hinted that you had a tidy little sum tucked away somewhere.

CHARLES. Not a bob.

ALFRED. Do you mean to tell me that you expect to live on five quid a week?

CHARLES. It's enough to provide me with the necessities of existence. The good thing about luxury is that when you've had it, you can so very easily do without

it If I'd never had a car I should always have hankered after one I've had one for twenty years, and now I'm perfectly willing to walk on my flat feet. But I don't want to waste my time on work whose only object is to keep body and soul together.

ALFRED. Well, if you not going off with a woman, I'm blowed if I see why you *are* going off?

CHARLES I'm not prepared to waste the rest of my life doing things that bore me for people in whom I take no interest. I hanker after my own company You see, I think I've done all that I'm called upon to do for those dependent on me; I want the future for myself.

ALFRED. What are you going to do with it?

CHARLES. I don't know. I shall see.

ALFRED. You must have *some* idea at the back of your head.

CHARLES. I have only one life, when I look back and think of all the fellows who were killed in the war, I think I'd like to make more use of it than just buying and selling shares and making or losing a fortune.

ALFRED. Oh, my dear boy, you're just talking through your hat. We hear a lot about women leading their own lives. I think it's all tommy-rot myself; but there it is, and we've got to put up with it. But whoever heard of a man leading his own life? It's not done.

CHARLES. Don't you think it's rather a pretty compliment we pay the other sex, if we sometimes take a leaf out of *their* book?

ALFRED. Do you think I don't get a bit restless sometimes? [*Sits up and looks around.*] Dorothy's the best woman in the world, but now and again she's rather tiresome. Women are, you know. And sometimes on Monday morning I don't much want to go down to the office But I say to myself: "Now, then, Alfy-palfy, this won't do, you know. Shoulder to the wheel, old boy."

CHARLES. And your reward is the esteem of your wife and the respect of your fellow citizens.

ALFRED. What do you suppose would happen to society if everybody behaved like you? I mean, it would be the end of progress and civilization and the whole bag of tricks.

CHARLES. I think it's very silly to say that you should only do the things that you think every one else should do. The

great majority are *quite* content to travel in the same old rut from the cradle to the grave. Well, let them. I don't blame them.

ALFRED. It's such *madness* to change your whole way of life and break up your home on a moment's impulse You've only thought about it for a few hours

CHARLES I've only thought about it for a few hours with my head. I've thought about it for twelve years with my belly.

ALFRED. You'll regret it You'll never stop regretting it.

CHARLES One has to take that risk. Who'd marry if he was afraid he'd regret it later?

ALFRED. You'll never be happy, you know.

CHARLES. I don't see why not I have a capacity for enjoyment, a placid disposition and few wants.

[*DOROTHY comes from staircase and looks in, comes down to table back of settee.*]

DOROTHY. I'm sorry to interrupt you, Margery wants to know what is happening

ALFRED Has Margery told you?

DOROTHY. Yes. Can she come down now?

ALFRED Charles?

CHARLES I shall be ready in a few minutes. I'm just going upstairs to change and pack [*Starts to go up.*]

DOROTHY [*taken aback*] You're not going now? [*Stops him.*]

CHARLES. Yes. When you've made up your mind to do a thing it's better to do it at once

ALFRED. But you can't go to-day, Charlie.

CHARLES. Why not? I'm only taking a handbag.

ALFRED Your affairs are in a god-awful mess. There are a thousand things to arrange.

CHARLES Nothing that I can't leave in your hands, Alfred. You're a highly competent solicitor.

ALFRED It looks so damned fishy, your running away like this I mean, there's sure to be a bit of a rumpus. It's only decent for you to stay and face the music.

CHARLES [*gaily*]. I don't agree with you at all. I think it's much more elegant to slip out quietly through the artists' entrance

[*CHARLES goes quickly and*—]

THE CURTAIN FALLS

ACT III

The curtain rises within the lines from
ALFRED.

ALFRED But you can't go to-day, Charlie

CHARLES Why not? I'm only taking a handbag

ALFRED. Your affairs are in a god-awful mess. There are a thousand things to arrange

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CHARLES [*gaily*] I don't agree with you at all. I think it's much more elegant to slip out quietly through the artists' entrance.

[*CHARLES goes quickly*]

DOROTHY. Can you make head or tail of it, Alfred?

ALFRED. I think I know a thing or two about human nature, and I'm convinced there's a woman in it

DOROTHY. Have you told him that?

ALFRED. Yes. He denies it

DOROTHY. Of course he'd do that.

ALFRED. How have he and Margery been getting on lately?

DOROTHY. Oh, a'il right, like they always have. Of course, she had her own interests, and he was in the city all day. I shouldn't call either of them very passionate people.

ALFRED. Well, just the ordinary typical married couple, I suppose. I don't see that either of them had anything to complain of.

DOROTHY. I shouldn't have thought so

ALFRED. Has he been going about with anybody?

DOROTHY. I haven't heard of it.

ALFRED. You'd better ask Margery. If a man's in love with somebody else his wife generally has *some suspicion*.

DOROTHY. I'm sure if she had she'd have told me. We tell one another everything.

ALFRED. If a fellow is prepared to chuck everything, his business and his family and the whole bag of tricks, it must be for some *reason*

DOROTHY. Oh, yes, I don't suppose he'd do it just for fun.

ALFRED. I've been a solicitor for a good many years, and my experience is that there are only two things that matter to a *normal* man. One's money and the other's women!

DOROTHY. If any one knows, you ought to, Alfred

ALFRED. Well, I mean, what else is there? [*Turning away*]

DOROTHY [*pauses*]. You don't think he might have some spiritual motive?

ALFRED. Of course, there's a possibility of that. He may not be quite right in his head.

DOROTHY. I didn't mean that exactly. I was wondering if he isn't doing this on account of some ideal

ALFRED. Come off it, popsy-wopsy. You've been reading too many novels. business men don't do things for an ideal

DOROTHY. He's never been quite normal since the war

ALFRED. He's a thundering good chap, and I hate to see him make a damned fool of himself. [*Kicks stool*]

DOROTHY. Well, what's to be done?

ALFRED. I think the only person who can do anything is Margery. Pity she isn't a bit more intelligent.

DOROTHY. It's not easy for a woman to be intelligent with a man who isn't in love with her.

ALFRED. Charlie's an emotional fellow, and, hang it all, she's a woman. She ought to be able to get round him somehow.

DOROTHY. Five o'clock in the afternoon isn't a very good time for emotion.

ALFRED. If you'd been mixed up in as many divorce cases as *I* have you wouldn't say that. Look here, you talk to her. You can give her a lead. I'll go along and send her down. It's a bit awkward for me.

DOROTHY. I'll do what I can

ALFRED. I know you will, old gal

[*ALFRED goes off upstairs. DOROTHY rises, goes to table, looks towards staircase, picks up photograph. DIANA comes in as DOROTHY lays photograph down. DOROTHY looks at it and then takes paper from round table and sits on settee.*]

DOROTHY. I wonder!

DIANA. Hulloa, Dorothy! Are you alone?

DOROTHY. Is there anything you want?

DIANA. I was looking for Uncle Charlie.

DOROTHY. Why?

DIANA I just wanted to say good-bye to him

DOROTHY Oh, are you going?

DIANA No, but I thought he was

DOROTHY. Run along, darling, I'm busy. If there's anything to tell, I'll tell you later.

[MARGERY comes in quickly, and with her first words DIANA slips out]

MARGERY. Alfred says you've got something to say to me

DOROTHY [hesitant]. He thought I'd better speak to you before you saw Charlie

MARGERY. Where is Charlie?

DOROTHY. Upstairs. He's packing.

MARGERY [dumbfounded]. Packing? He isn't really going?

DOROTHY I'm afraid so.

MARGERY. To-day?

DOROTHY. Now.

MARGERY [with a gasp]. Oh! I never thought for a moment that he meant it. I thought he was hysterical and just making a scene.

DOROTHY Don't take it too tragically, darling. He'll come back.

MARGERY. What to? He won't have any business. We shan't have anything to live on.

DOROTHY. Had you no suspicion that anything was wrong?

MARGERY. With the business? No, he never talked to me about it. He knew I hated shop.

DOROTHY No. I meant at home.

MARGERY. No, he always seemed just the same. I never paid much attention to him. Why should I?

DOROTHY. That's true.

[Turning away]

MARGERY. I think it's so frightfully selfish of him! If a man loses his money it's his duty to work hard and make some more

DOROTHY. D'you think he's in love with some one else?

MARGERY. Oh, no, I should have noticed that at once.

DOROTHY. Well, I always had an idea that Charlie hankered after something different.

MARGERY. I don't know what. I've been a perfect wife.

DOROTHY. Perhaps you didn't bring enough beauty into his life.

MARGERY Dorothy, how can you be so unkind? Oh, I think it's dreadful to say a thing like that when I'm so upset. I surrounded him with beauty. Every one

knows how much beauty means to me. Painting and books and all that sort of thing How about Czecho-Slovak peasant industries? I organized them It was a revelation of beauty. And the Armenian folk songs. Who'd heard of Armenian folk songs until I discovered them? No one's keener about beauty than I am. I'm crazy about it. I practically made beauty in Golders Green.

DOROTHY I'm dreadfully sorry, darling I didn't mean to hurt your feelings.

MARGERY. What's wrong with Charlie is that he's got no sense of humor.

DOROTHY. It's a pity Alfred can't give him some of his. Alfred has almost too much.

MARGERY. I'm in a frightful position, Dorothy. You know how spiteful people are. When a woman leaves her husband they say it's because he was a brute, but when a man leaves his wife, they say it's because she couldn't hold him. It's so frightfully humiliating.

DOROTHY. What are you going to say to him?

MARGERY. I shall just appeal to his better nature. After all, he's a reasonable man. He must see that he can't leave the children just when they're entering the world and need his help and guidance more than ever.

DOROTHY. Oh, my dear, men aren't reasonable. They're not like women. You surely know that by now. The only way you can influence them is through their emotions. I mean, the great advantage we have over them is that they're weak and sentimental. In your place I'd just be terribly pathetic. I'd cling to him and just cry like a child

MARGERY. I've never been able to cry when I wanted to. It's always been a handicap.

DOROTHY. It's no good saying that now It's the only thing that gets a man every time. You know what I mean. Flatter him, be soft and loving and tender. Oh, my dear, I could do it.

MARGERY. It's so difficult after all these years. I'm afraid he'll laugh. I almost think it would be better if you saw him first, Dorothy. I think it would be easier for you.

DOROTHY. But, darling, I can't be loving and tender for you I mean, that's the kind of thing you must do for yourself

MARGERY. Yes, I know, but you can prepare him Tell him you know for a fact that I'm frightfully in love with him.

DOROTHY Yes, I could do that.

MARGERY. I daresay you're right I suppose I haven't flattered him enough. One always forgets how vain men are.

DOROTHY. It's fatal when one does All right, I'll see what I can do I'll call him

MARGERY [*rises and goes off through French window*]. You're a brick, Dorothy I shall be in the garden.

[*MARGERY goes out through the French window, and DOROTHY goes to alcove and off stage*]

DOROTHY. Charlie! [*DIANA slips into the room and tiptoes to arch, but she hears her mother's voice and slips quickly away*] Charlie! Will you come down? I've got something to say to you!

[*She comes back into the room, powders face, looks round, sighs. The door opens and CHARLES comes in. He has changed into a lounge suit.*]

CHARLES. Here I am.

DOROTHY [*a trifle solemnly, as though she were speaking of a corpse*]. I've just been talking to Margery.

CHARLES Yes?

DOROTHY. She is dreadfully unhappy.

CHARLES [*coolly*]. Peeved and exasperated. Not unhappy.

DOROTHY. You don't know her.

CHARLES. After nineteen years of marriage? Don't be silly. I know Margery as well as it's possible for one human being to know another.

DOROTHY. She's very reserved.

CHARLES. A trifle phlegmatic even.

[*Filling cigarette case.*]

DOROTHY. What a cruel thing to say, Charlie!

CHARLES. Not at all. It's not an unpleasant trait in a wife. It makes for peace in the home.

DOROTHY. I wonder if you realize how deeply attached to you Margery really is?

CHARLES. You wouldn't say she was madly in love with me, would you?

DOROTHY. Yes, I would. I really would. She adores you.

CHARLES. Don't talk such rubbish. You know just as well as I do that Margery doesn't care two hoots for me.

DOROTHY. No, no, no! She loves you. Oh, Charlie, it's such a serious step you're taking.

CHARLES [*with a slight change of tone*]. And I'm taking it seriously Believe me, my dear, nothing that you can say is

going to have any effect on me You're only wasting your breath and my time.

[*Moves as if to go up.*]

DOROTHY [*rises and stops him*]. I should never forgive myself if I didn't do everything I could to stop you

CHARLES. Forgive me, but exactly what business is it of yours

DOROTHY [*holds his hand—with a little helpless gesture*]. Well, you see, I happen to know why you're going

CHARLES. I'm not surprised, considering that I took the greatest pains to explain it to Margery and Alfred.

DOROTHY. Oh, all that about freedom and not wanting to be a broker? You don't suppose I believe that.

CHARLES. All the same, it's the truth. DOROTHY. D'you think I haven't got eyes in my head? [*Goes to him*]

CHARLES. Very handsome ones, and you make excellent use of them. But what have they got to do with it?

DOROTHY. Well, it's me, isn't it?

CHARLES [*astounded*]. You!

DOROTHY [*with self-satisfaction*]. I thought it was.

CHARLES. Why?

DOROTHY. D'you think I haven't noticed how you looked at me? D'you remember kissing me the other night?

CHARLES. Not particularly. I've kissed you a thousand times

DOROTHY. Not like that. You may have thought you were kissing me the same as always But you weren't. I know. After all, it was me you kissed.

CHARLES. It was quite unintentional.

DOROTHY. I know. That's why it gave you away

CHARLES. My dear Dorothy . . .

DOROTHY [*interrupting*]. No, no, no, don't. Don't speak. Let me speak. I know so well what you've got to say. There's Alfred your oldest friend, and Margery my first cousin, and the children, your children and my children. Oh, it's all hopeless, hopeless. I've seen you *brooding* over the misery of it, and my heart has *bled* for you. Oh, Charlie, Charlie, you don't have to tell me I know everything.

[*Pulls him down on settee.*]

CHARLES. Look here, Dorothy, you put me in a very awkward position.

[*Tries to get up, but DOROTHY pulls him back*]

DOROTHY. And d'you think you haven't put me in an awkward position? Do you think I could sit there and know that those great, sad, tragic eyes of yours were resting upon me without being stirred

to the depths of my soul? Of course, I know that Margery never understood you Oh, my dear, my dear, I've been so sorry for you But, Charlie, we can do nothing What can we do? What can we do?

CHARLES We can talk not quite so loud. [*Hoarse whisper*]

DOROTHY Oh, there's nobody about.

CHARLES. But, in point of fact, why are you saying all this?

DOROTHY Don't you know?

CHARLES. I haven't a notion

DOROTHY. Oh, Charles, Charles, what a fool you must think me! I know you love me.

CHARLES. How?

DOROTHY. Intuition D'you think that ever fails a woman in a matter like this?

CHARLES. Ah, I'd forgotten that.

DOROTHY I've seen your face grow pale with desire when you touched my hand. I've seen you bite your tongue in order to prevent yourself from speaking. Oh, I know, of course you couldn't speak, it was so brave of you—don't think I didn't realize how brave you were—but this last moment, does it matter? I can't let you go without telling you that I know. Don't ask me to tell you that perhaps I love you too. No, no, no.

CHARLES. I don't for a moment think you do

DOROTHY. I don't know. Don't ask me Don't force me to say more than I want to. Oh, Charlie, when they came and told me you were going away, and in a flash I knew that it was on account of me—"Oh, what shall I do?" I cried to myself. It's awful that you should make such a sacrifice for me. I can't bear it! I can't bear it!

CHARLES. You know, one finds that after a time one *can* bear the sacrifices that other people make for one!

DOROTHY. I must bear it. Oh, but you don't know what bitterness it is. I know if I were a brave woman I would throw everything to the winds and come with you. Don't ask me to do that, Charlie Don't tempt me

CHARLES. No, no.

DOROTHY [*turns to CHARLES*]. You're so wonderful. It's no good pretending to be something I'm not. I haven't the courage. I know you'll despise me, but perhaps also some day you'll find room in your heart for a little pity

CHARLES. I'm sure you're very happy with Alfred.

DOROTHY. Happy! Happy! Who is happy? Oh, I think life is so sad.

CHARLES. It has *moments* when one seems justified in taking a moderately cheerful view of things

DOROTHY. Oh, you're bitter I've disappointed you. It's no good, Charlie, I can't run away with you Be sensible, old boy. What should we live on? Is it true that you'll only have five pounds a week?

CHARLES Quite true

DOROTHY It's no good, darling I know you'll think me hard and worldly I'm only being cruel to be kind. Love can't live on five pounds a week [*He looks at her*] It would be criminal to put it to such a test You do understand, don't you?

CHARLES Quite.

DOROTHY It would be different if you had a hundred thousand pounds tucked away in a Swiss bank.

CHARLES. Quite, quite.

DOROTHY. I'm not really cynical, you know. Only I am a woman, and I know what money means

CHARLES I always think that is one of the most delightful characteristics of your sex

DOROTHY Perhaps in years to come we shall meet again, in Paris or somewhere, and perhaps I shall say to you Charles, Charles, we've waited long enough, we have such a little time before us, let us accept the happiness that chance has so mysteriously thrown in our way.

[*CHARLES rises and moves, she gets up and stops him*]

CHARLES Now, I think, if you don't mind, I'll just go up and finish my packing.

DOROTHY I can't let you go without giving you something to remember me by. Charlie, kiss me on the mouth. [*CHARLES looks round the room with embarrassment; he is very nervous in case some one should come in by the door or the French window. Then he kisses DOROTHY full on the lips She flings her arms round his neck He takes her hands and releases himself*] I have given you more than my body, Charlie, I have given you my soul. Good-bye. [*Drops down.*] Good-bye forever.

[*She walks swiftly out into the garden, with heroic courage mastering her emotion. CHARLES stands for a moment, smiling wryly after her; he passes a finger round his collar, which seems rather tight for him, and then, smiling a little still, crosses to chair. DIANA enters.*]

CHARLES. Hulloo, what are you doing there? [From desk]

DIANA. I've just been hanging about till Dorothy was out of the way. I've got something I want to say to you

CHARLES. Fire away.

DIANA. Has she been trying to vamp you?

CHARLES. It would be rather late in the day for that.

DIANA. I bet she thinks you're leaving Aunt Margery on her account.

CHARLES. You've been listening, Dinah, my dear. Not a very pretty trick

DIANA. Don't be stuffy, darling. I don't have to listen at doors to know what Dorothy's saying

CHARLES. Mutual sympathy, I suppose. One of the disadvantages of a united family

DIANA. Poor Dorothy has reached the age when women think every man they meet is in love with them. It's such a bore when they get like that. It makes them so unpunctual.

CHARLES. Oh, why?

DIANA. You see, they start doing their faces, and they say "Oh, my God, my face is awful to-day," and they start agam, and they go on and on, and by the time they've given it up as a bad job they've kept you waiting for hours

CHARLES [comes down below settee with A. B. C.]. My dear, I've still got a few things to pack. What was it exactly you wanted to say to me?

DIANA. Oh, don't you like general conversation?

CHARLES. Is that what it was? I thought you were making a few tart remarks on your mother.

DIANA. I adore Dorothy. I'm sorry for her. You know, I think it's so pathetic, her gratitude when she can persuade herself she's got off with somebody

CHARLES. It's nice of you to be so sympathetic. I must bolt now. [Turns to her.] Good-bye, my dear. We've had a jolly little chat

DIANA. Oh! [Grasps him and pushes him into chair.] But I haven't started yet. I've been trying to get you alone for the last hour.

CHARLES. You know, my dear, I'm going away to-night

DIANA. Yes. Would you like me to come with you?

CHARLES. What for?

DIANA. Company.

CHARLES [looking at A. B. C.]. That's

awfully sweet of you, but I shall manage all right by myself

DIANA. Won't you be awfully lonely by yourself?

CHARLES. After being married nineteen years, I'm used to loneliness

DIANA. A girl's different from a wife, you know.

CHARLES. Quite. Even more of a nuisance

DIANA. I'd look after myself. I wouldn't be any trouble to you.

CHARLES. Whatever put such an idea into your head, Dinah?

DIANA. I'm so bored at home. After all, I'm eighteen, and the time's just flying, and I'm getting nowhere. I want to get out into the world and do something.

CHARLES. That's all right, but a *married gentleman* in the early forties is hardly the best companion for such an adventure.

DIANA. Why not?

CHARLES. My dear, ancient as I am, I'm afraid it would be difficult to persuade the people we ran across that my relation towards you was simply paternal

DIANA. I'm not a damned fool, darling. Of course, I'd come as your mistress.

[Sits facing him on rug]

CHARLES. Oh, I see. It hadn't occurred to me that you meant that.

[Putting A. B. C. down in chair.]

DIANA. I think you must be rather stupid, darling

CHARLES. To tell the truth, I don't want a mistress

DIANA. Why not? You're not so old as all that

CHARLES. I should prefer any attachments I make to be of a strictly temporary nature

DIANA. You could always chuck me if you got sick of me.

CHARLES. Women are so clinging.

DIANA. Don't you think I'm attractive?

CHARLES. Very

DIANA. And I've never had an affair with any one

CHARLES. I never thought you had

DIANA [somewhat hurt]. I don't know why. Lots of girls of my age have.

CHARLES. I think virtue is rather a pleasing trait in the young unmarried female

DIANA. That's rather middle-aged of you, darling.

CHARLES. I am rather middle-aged, my pet.

DIANA. Tim hasn't either.

CHARLES What?

DIANA. Had an affair. I think it's rather chic in a boy

CHARLES It doesn't interest me so much.

DIANA. He says he's going to wait for Potiphar's wife to make the usual advances to him, and then it'll be such a pleasant surprise for her.

CHARLES Or contrariwise. Innocence is charming in theory, but in practice experience has many advantages.

DIANA You're not going to turn me down?

CHARLES You bet your life I am.

DIANA You needn't hesitate because you're afraid I don't realize what I'm up against. I should go into it with my eyes open, you know

CHARLES I wasn't thinking of you. I was thinking entirely of myself I should be a fool to jump out of a tepid frying-pan into a red-hot fire.

DIANA. It would be *such* a lark.

CHARLES. It wouldn't really. I haven't a bean, you know. Love can't live on five pounds a week

DIANA Hullo, that sounds like Dorothy. Have you been asking her to run away with you?

[*Leans forward on his knees*]

CHARLES. Certainly not

DIANA. Swear to God?

CHARLES Cross me heart.

DIANA. All right As a matter of fact, I've thought of that. You wouldn't have any silly prejudices about my keeping you, would you? [*Folds arms on his knees*]

CHARLES. Not at all. I trust that in the well-regulated society of the future that will be the universal practice. Women, with their executive ability and natural industry, will toil from blushing dawn to dewy eve and leave men free to devote themselves to art and literature and the less violent forms of athletics

DIANA Don't talk rot. Listen to what I've thought. You know every one says I dance divinely. I can easily get up stage dancing, and then I'll get engagements at the Casinos in France and Italy

CHARLES. I don't believe there's much money in that, do you? I've always said that if I was kept by a woman I'd want to be kept in style.

DIANA. No, but wait. That's why I said I'd get engagements at Casinos. [*Gets up onto knees.*] A lot of rich men go to them, and when I see that there's one attracted to me, I can lure him on, and then, at the psychological moment, you

can come in and say: "What are you doing with my daughter?" D'you see what I mean?

CHARLES. Yes, that's all right in the pictures, but in real life it always ends you up in jug. It's no good. I'd never have the nerve for that

DIANA. I suppose that means that you don't want me at any price?

[*Looking away from him*]

CHARLES. To be frank yith you, it does [*DIANA sighs*] Oh, come on, don't sigh.

DIANA I'm so frightfully disappointed.

CHARLES. You'd be bored stiff with me in a month And where would you be then?

DIANA. I could always have left you After all, you're not the only man in the world. I don't suppose it would have lasted forever, but while it did it might have been rather lovely [*Smiling.*]

CHARLES I think in your place I'd wait till some suitable young man comes along and marry him. You can always see then, you know.

DIANA [*Goes round to him*]. I can't understand why you hesitate. I should have thought it such a snip.

[*Sits on settee*]

CHARLES. To run away with you? No, it's not my idea of a *snip* at all

DIANA. You haven't got moral scruples, have you?

[*Leaning over right arm of settee.*]

CHARLES [*goes to her—hand under her chin*]. Do you think it would be very nice of me to bolt with the daughter of an old friend, and she only just out of the schoolroom, so to speak?

DIANA. Everybody's the daughter of some one, and surely it's better to run away with a girl than with an old hag.

CHARLES. I imagine it's more agreeable

DIANA If you won't have me because you think it's dishonorable, or rot like that, I think it's simply foul of you. I mean that's just stuffy and frightfully middle-class.

CHARLES. Oh, d'you think it is?

DIANA Of course. I'd never forgive you if it was that.

CHARLES. I'm sorry.

DIANA. But if it's just that I don't appeal to you sexually, then I don't mind it a bit. I mean, it's rotten for me, of course, but that's the sort of thing you can't help, and I must lump it. Is that it?

CHARLES. My dear, that's not a very

nice thing for a man, even a middle-aged one, to say to a girl of eighteen

DIANA [*turns away from him*] Oh, shut up! It never occurred to me that you might . . . [*She stifles a little sob*]

CHARLES. Good God! What are you doing? You're not crying? What on earth are you crying for?

DIANA. You see, I'm so frightfully in love with you.

CHARLES [*with astonishment*]. With me? You never said that before.

DIANA. I didn't want to appeal to your emotions. I wanted to make it practically a business proposition. I'm simply crazy about you.

CHARLES [*angrily—sits, takes her shoulder, and turns her round*] You damned little fool, what rot is this you're talking now?

DIANA. It isn't rot. I'm madly in love with you.

CHARLES. Well, you jolly well stop it. I never heard such nonsense.

DIANA. I can't help it.

CHARLES. Yes, you can help it. You're just a silly, hysterical, sloppy schoolgirl. What you want is a thorough spanking, and by George, if I weren't in such a hurry—[*looks at watch*—I'd damned well give it you myself.

DIANA [*smiling through her tears*]. You are rather sweet, you know.

[*Arm on his shoulder.*]

CHARLES. Upon my soul! [*Puts her arm away—changing his mood and laughing*] Don't be a little idiot, Diana. Fancy falling in love with a funny old thing like me. You ought to be ashamed of yourself!

DIANA. I'm not. And I can't help it. I've got an awful thing about you. I think you're so frightfully attractive.

CHARLES. Why?

DIANA. Well, you have no sense of humor.

CHARLES. You're not going to tell me that you fell in love with me because I had no sense of humor.

DIANA. Yes, madly. You knew you had no sense of humor, didn't you?

CHARLES. I didn't, to tell you the truth.

DIANA. No. People who haven't seldom know it. Funny, isn't it? [*Moves a little nearer to him.*] You see, all my family have so much, sometimes it's almost unbearable. I love you for not having it. You can understand that, can't you?

CHARLES. Perfectly. But what a bore it would have been if you'd discovered

you'd made a mistake, when it was too late.

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CHARLES. Of course, and then I really must see about my packing!

[*She takes his hand and pulls him up. He goes to her and is about to put his arms around her. She looks at his lips, peering a little, then she passes her forefinger over them and smells it.*]

DIANA. I wish Dorothy wouldn't use such moldy lipstick. Wipe your mouth, darling. [*DIANA gives him handkerchief. He wipes lips. She throws her arm around his neck and offers him her lips, but he takes her head in his hands and kisses her good-humoredly, first on one cheek and then on the other. She sighs as he releases her.*] Lend me your comb, darling.

CHARLES. My comb? I haven't got one.

DIANA. Then what do you do when you're out somewhere and want to comb your hair? All the boys I know carry one [*Sighs*] Darling, I could have taught you so much.

CHARLES [*with a glance at his watch*]. Where do you suppose Pat and Judy are?

DIANA. Judy's in the garden.

CHARLES [*goes to French window and calls*]. Judy!

DIANA. I don't know where Pat is.

CHARLES [*to DIANA*]. I wish you'd ask Margery to come here.

DIANA. All right. I don't care if you are angry, I think you're terribly attractive.

CHARLES. Go to hell!

[*Picks up railway guide. As DIANA is going out, JUDY enters.*]

JUDY. Did you call me, Daddy?

CHARLES. Yes. I'm just going to have a little chat with your mother. I wish you'd go upstairs and see that Johnston is packing my things all right. I put everything I wanted on the bed.

JUDY. Right-ho!

CHARLES. And when the bag is ready tell her to put it in the car.

CHARLES What?

DIANA Had an affair. I think it's rather chic in a boy

CHARLES. It doesn't interest me so much.

DIANA He says he's going to wait for Potiphar's wife to make the usual advances to him, and then it'll be such a pleasant surprise for her.

CHARLES. Or contrariwise. Innocence is charming in theory, but in practice experience has many advantages.

DIANA You're not going to turn me down?

CHARLES You bet your life I am

DIANA. You needn't hesitate because you're afraid I don't realize what I'm up against. I should go into it with my eyes open, you know

CHARLES I wasn't thinking of you. I was thinking entirely of myself. I should be a fool to jump out of a tepid frying-pan into a red-hot fire.

DIANA. It would be *such* a lark.

CHARLES It wouldn't really. I haven't a bean, you know. Love can't live on five pounds a week.

DIANA Hullo, that sounds like Dorothy. Have you been asking her to run away with you?

[*Leans forward on his knees*]

CHARLES Certainly not

DIANA. Swear to God?

CHARLES Cross me heart

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DIANA [*turns away from him*]. Oh, shut up! It never occurred to me that you might . . . [*She stifles a little sob*]

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CHARLES [*with astonishment*]. With me? You never said that before

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CHARLES [*with a glance at his watch*]. Where do you suppose Pat and Judy are?

DIANA. Judy's in the garden

CHARLES [*goes to French window and calls*]. Judy!

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JUDY. Did you call me, Daddy?

CHARLES. Yes. I'm just going to have a little chat with your mother. I wish you'd go upstairs and see that Johnston is packing my things all right. I put everything I wanted on the bed.

JUDY. Right-ho!

CHARLES. And when the bag is ready tell her to put it in the car.

JUDY. D'you want me to drive you down to the station?

CHARLES. No, better let Simpson. Where's Pat?

JUDY. He's locked himself up in his room. He's eating butterscotch. He's sulking.

CHARLES. If butterscotch makes him sulk, why does he eat it?

JUDY. He isn't sulking because he's eating butterscotch, he's sulking because you said he was a bore.

CHARLES. I didn't blame him for it. I merely stated it as an interesting fact.

JUDY. You couldn't expect him to like it. I didn't either. I've been thinking it over. Do you know, I've got rather a ghastly suspicion about you, Daddy?

CHARLES. Oh, what is it?

[*Leaning back*]

JUDY. Well, I've got a *ghastly suspicion* that perhaps you've got more sense of humor than we any of us quite realized.

CHARLES. I? Oh, my dear, what makes you think that?

JUDY. I don't know. It's made me rather uneasy. I mean it would be comic if all this time you'd been laughing at us up your sleeve. Isn't it funny, I like you better now that I've ever liked you before.

CHARLES. I don't know why.

JUDY. Well, I suppose the fact is that now you're doing the dirty on us you seem so much more human.

CHARLES. H'm. You surprise me.

JUDY. You see, you don't know me, Daddy. I suppose it's impossible for a father to know his daughter.

CHARLES. Do people ever know one another?

JUDY. I think when they're in love they think they do.

CHARLES. And are never more mistaken.

JUDY. Were you in love with *Mummy* when you married her?

CHARLES. Oh, yes, crazy about her.

JUDY. I suppose love can't be expected to last forever.

CHARLES. I suppose not. I think that's the only real tragedy in life. Death? Well, one expects death. But when one's in love, one never expects love to *die*. It makes life look such a sell.

JUDY. I wonder why it *doesn't last*?

CHARLES. Habit kills it.

JUDY. Dinah and I have often discussed whether it wouldn't be better to have affairs than to marry.

CHARLES. There's not much in it. An

affair is just as tiresome and more inconvenient.

JUDY [*pause*]. Pity you're going just now. There are lots of things I should have liked to ask you.

CHARLES. Why have you never asked me before?

JUDY. One can't talk to one's father. It's only because I don't look upon you as my father any more that I can treat you as a human being. Of course parents and children bore one another. They never talk to us of the things that interest them, and we never talk to them of the things that matter to us.

CHARLES. If we ever meet again we must try to forget our unfortunate relationship. You will be an engaging young lady, I've run across by chance, and I shall be an elderly gentleman in reduced circumstances who once knew your mother.

JUDY. I daresay we shall find we have quite a lot to say to one another.

CHARLES. For my part I should like to tell you that I shall be delighted to renew the acquaintance we've so unexpectedly made. [*Rises. Business of CHARLES kissing JUDY'S hand.*] It's been charming to meet you.

JUDY. Daddy, why are you going away? It's for your soul's sake, isn't it?

CHARLES. That sounds rather pretentious and highfalutin, doesn't it?

JUDY. Does that matter? Just for once, and within these *four walls*.

CHARLES. Well, perhaps it is. I have so few years before me. It seems a pity to waste them. Have you ever had an awful lot of letters to write and only ten minutes to catch the post? You don't write the most important ones from the standpoint of eternity, but only the important ones to you. Perhaps they're quite trivial, making a date or answering an invitation, but they are all you have time for. The others must go to the devil. I only have time now to do what I urgently want to do.

JUDY. You've got your chance. You'll be a fool not to take it. I don't blame you. In your place I'd do what you're doing.

CHARLES. You're a good girl, Judy.

JUDY. You've given me my chance too. I never wanted to be a young lady. Coming out and going to parties, getting married and going to parties. [*Turns to him.*] I want to go on the stage.

CHARLES. Are you prepared to work? It isn't just doing your bit in a play and

then going to supper at the Savoy It's a whole-time job

JUDY Oh, yes I'll work

CHARLES Well, be natural, that's the chief thing

JUDY That ought to be easy

CHARLES. It isn't It's the result of infinite pains It's the final triumph of artifice And remember that society only looks upon you as a freak and, the moment you're out of fashion, drops you like a hot potato Society has killed more good actors than drink It's only your raw material. Let the footlights, at least spiritually, always hold you aloof These are the last solemn words that a father whispers to his daughter's shell-like ear, as he is about to leave her forever

JUDY Why forever? When I'm a celebrated actress with a princely salary, and you are a broken-down old reprobate, I shall always be pleased to offer you a home in my palatial flat

CHARLES That's sweet of you.

[MARGERY is seen through window]

JUDY. Here's Mummy [Rises]

CHARLES. Nip along, darling, and when my packing's finished, come and tell me

JUDY Right-ho. Bless you, Daddy. Have a good time! [They kiss]

CHARLES. Same to you, my pet [She slips out through alcove MARGERY comes in from the garden CHARLES goes towards her and takes her hand] Come and sit down, Margery.

MARGERY. Is it true you're going away to-day?

CHARLES. Yes.

MARGERY. You are deliberately breaking my heart

CHARLES My dear, for the first time in our lives we're going to have a serious talk It'll be so much easier if we say nothing that we don't mean.

MARGERY You must expect me to be a little emotional. I love you, Charlie.

CHARLES. No, dear, that's not true. If you still had for me that hungry craving of the soul they call love, I think it's possible I shouldn't have the courage to leave you. You were in love with me once, just as I was in love with you, and one doesn't forget.

MARGERY. Naturally, I'm not the same as I was nineteen years ago. It would be absurd if I were still the lovesick girl I was then.

CHARLES. And extremely tiresome.

MARGERY. Love isn't everything. I mean, there's companionship and mutual

confidence and all that. I've always had a great affection for you Why, I don't believe we've even had a squabble for ten years

CHARLES I wonder if it didn't make you a little uneasy? Doesn't it strike you that two people must be profoundly indifferent to one another if they never find occasion to disagree?

MARGERY I don't know how you can be so ungrateful Don't you realize that if we got on so well it was entirely due to my wonderful tact? Believe me, it wasn't always so easy. You were very different when you came back from the war

CHARLES We were both very different Or perhaps we weren't different at all. After five years we saw one another for the first time as we really were

MARGERY. I don't know what you mean by that I'd developed a lot during the war Most people thought I was so much improved

CHARLES Out of all recognition, my dear. We were strangers to one another We had to start making each other's acquaintance all over again from the beginning. I don't think we liked one another very much

MARGERY. I was a little disappointed in you. I don't mind admitting it. But fortunately I have imagination I remember how disgusted I was when once you dropped a piece of bread and butter on the ground and picked it up and ate it as though nothing had happened. But I said, that's the war, and I made allowances.

CHARLES It's very difficult for two people who are not in love with one another to live together. It's funny what trivial things get on their nerves.

MARGERY It wasn't trivial at all It was deeply significant of the change that had taken place in you You'd lost all your beautiful idealism Why, you weren't even patriotic any more You drank too much, and your language was filthy.

CHARLES. I suppose my nerves were a bit groggy. You were very patient with me.

MARGERY. I made up my mind that I must be When the Armistice came, the war was over for you, but I had to go on doing my bit just the same. And there were thousands of women in England like me I've been a good and faithful wife to you

CHARLES. Perhaps we've both been too good and faithful. You know, of course, that the Tasmanians, who never committed adultery, are now extinct.

MARGERY No, I don't And I'm not interested in the Tasmanians I think it's frightfully callous of you to mention them when I'm so upset.

CHARLES. You mustn't think I'm not sorry to cause you annoyance

MARGERY. Did you say annoyance?

CHARLES. I did I think your vanity is hurt by my leaving you. I don't believe your heart is much concerned.

MARGERY. What's the good of my telling you I love you if you don't believe a word I say?

CHARLES. I shall believe you if you tell the truth.

MARGERY How can I tell the truth when I'm taken by surprise like this? The whole thing has come as such a shock to me It never occurred to me that you weren't absolutely satisfied. I always looked upon ours as an ideal marriage. I don't know what more you wanted.

CHARLES. Like Queen Victoria, I was not amused [Sitting back.]

MARGERY. You can't expect marriage to be amusing If it were, the law wouldn't protect it, and the Church wouldn't sanctify it. Do you think women find marriage amusing? They've been bored stiff by it for a thousand generations Half the women I know are so bored by their husbands that they could scream at the sight of them.

CHARLES. Why do they stick it?

MARGERY. Because everybody else sticks it. Because marriage is like that. They get used to it. Because it always has been and always will be their only respectable means of livelihood And because of the children. What do you think is going to happen to Judy and Pat now?

CHARLES. They're sturdy young things. They can work.

MARGERY. Nonsense. You can't bring children into the world and then abandon them just when they need you most. I mean, that's not what we fought the Germans for.

CHARLES. Do you really think that I'm called upon to go on working indefinitely in order to provide my wife and children not with the necessities of existence, but with luxuries they can very well do without?

MARGERY. It's what one naturally expects a man to do. After all, it's no hardship to work. I mean, that's what I've always impressed on the children: "You can't be happy unless you work. Look at me," I say to them, "I'm busy all day long."

CHARLES Isn't it awful, the humbug we instil into young minds? How absurd it is to pretend that there's any value in work in itself Work is only a nuisance—at all events, the work that the great majority of us are obliged to do—its only real use is to give us leisure

MARGERY. I'm the last person to deny the value of leisure Only you can't appreciate it unless you've earned it I mean, there's so much beauty in doing your duty in that state of life in which a merciful providence has been pleased to place you And, after all, beauty is the thing that counts. There's beauty in the commonplace round of every day.

CHARLES You're a remarkable woman, Margery.

MARGERY. No, I'm not, but I'm not a fool, and no one has ever called me a prig. I daresay I've thought about these things a little more deeply than you have I'm an idealist I think it's so ugly to be selfish. It's in self-sacrifice that a man fulfils himself It's in giving all he has to those who are near and dear to him that he solves the riddle of life and makes out of his poor little existence a thing of beauty

CHARLES [pauses and chuckles] Margery, you're priceless!

[JUDY comes down L. C.]

JUDY. Daddy!

MARGERY. Run along, darling. Your father and I are talking

JUDY. I only came to say that everything was packed, Daddy. Johnston is putting your bag in the car.

CHARLES. Oh, good. Then nothing remains but for me to say good-bye.

MARGERY [rises]. But you're not going now?

CHARLES. Yes.

MARGERY. But you can't. I haven't said half the things I wanted to say I haven't begun yet. I know I could get you to stop if I could only think of the right things to say.

CHARLES My dear, you'd never think of the right things to say, because in your heart you don't want me to stay I shouldn't go with such a kindly feeling toward you if I didn't feel that there's somewhere stirring in you the thrill of a new adventure

MARGERY It's no good crying over spilt milk, is it?

CHARLES Good-bye, Margery.

[*He kisses her on the cheek. She gives it to him lustlessly, as she has done for years.*]

MARGERY. It seems so strange your going like this. I simply don't know what to make of it.

JUDY. Johnston said you didn't want your tails, but I told her to pack them.

CHARLES. Oh, why? They'll be quite useless to me.

JUDY. You never know. You might want to be a waiter.

CHARLES. Thoughtful child. That had never occurred to me

MARGERY. Charlie! you can't be a waiter.

CHARLES I have in point of fact a particular fancy to be a commercial traveler.

MARGERY. Oh, Charlie, how *infra dig*.

JUDY. What will you travel in, Daddy?

CHARLES Romance.

MARGERY. How unpractical.

JUDY. But what fun.

CHARLES. Good-bye, Judy

JUDY. Good-bye, darling. Bless you!

[*He pushes her down to her mother. He*

kisses her and goes out quickly. Door slams.]

MARGERY. Judy, where is Tasmania?

THE END

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Reading list

- The Younger Generation*, Stanley Houghton
The Ogre, Henry Arthur Jones
The Weakling, Carl Sternheim
Comrades, August Strindberg
You Never Can Tell, Bernard Shaw

THE ADMIRABLE CRICHTON
(1902)
BY
SIR JAMES MATTHEW BARRIE

CHARACTERS

THE HON ERNEST WOOLLEY
CRICHTON
LADY CATHERINE
LADY AGATHA
LADY MARY
TREHERNE
LORD BROCKLEHURST
THE EARL OF LOAM
FISHER
TWEENY
Other servants at Loam House
Naval Officer
LADY BROCKLEHURST

ACT I: Loam House, Mayfair, London.
ACT II: A desert isle in the Pacific Two months later.
ACT III: Same as Act II. Two years later.
ACT IV. Loam House, London. Several months later.

TIME—About 1900.

SIR JAMES BARRIE

THE three playwrights largely responsible in the 1890's for the renaissance of the English drama were Jones, Pinero, and Wilde. Jones and Pinero enlarged the subject matter of drama to include themes of social import, and demonstrated that the methods and aims of the new realism could be successfully applied to dramatic literature; Wilde contributed brilliant wit and literate dialogue. Three greater dramatists, all first-rate men of letters, however, were destined to assume leadership in the new movement—Bernard Shaw, John Galsworthy, and James Matthew Barrie. Not since the days of Congreve had England's foremost writers devoted their talents successfully to the stage. Shaw invented a vigorous and provocative drama of disquisition; Galsworthy wrote disturbing plays about the problems of modern man in the complexities of contemporary society; Barrie in plays definitely "modern" combined romance, fancy, and realism to illuminate human character and behavior.

Sir James Barrie, the most beloved of modern British playwrights, was born in the humble cottage of a family of Scottish weavers in 1860. He was educated (as they say) at Dumfries Academy and the University of Edinburgh. After an apprenticeship in journalism in Nottingham, he slipped into London, first contributing sketches of Scottish life to various periodicals, then turning to fiction and achieving renown with *The Little Minister* (1891) and *Sentimental Tommy* (1896). After composing a half dozen insignificant plays, he had a popular success when he dramatized *The Little Minister* (1897). Although *Quality Street* and *The Admirable Crichton* (1902), *Peter Pan* (1904), *What Every Woman Knows* (1908), *Dear Brutus* (1917), *The Old Lady Shows Her Medals* (1918), and *Mary Rose* (1920) brought him fame and wealth unsurpassed by any other modern writer, Barrie remained shy and retiring and became an almost legendary figure. In his last years, however, he emerged from his shell, and was much sought after for public addresses and after-dinner speeches. He died in London in 1937, saddened by the failure of his last play, *The Boy David*.

At least ten of his plays have a secure place in dramatic literature. *Quality Street* is a quaint and sentimental period piece with an absurdly improbable plot, but with continued flashes of sunny comedy. *Peter Pan* is the greatest of modern fantasies, a fairy play that no child and few adults fail to understand and respond to. *Peter Pan* has had a London production at Christmas every year (war or no war) since 1904. Its admirers predict that it will outlive every other modern play. St. John Ervine has told many times of an illuminating experience during a matinee performance of *Peter Pan*. Directly in front of him sat an Indian boy and an English boy. When the appeal to believe in fairies was made, the Indian, very cool and self-possessed, turned to the English boy and asked, "Do you believe in fairies?" The latter, taut and intense, could scarcely speak. "Yes," he whispered passionately. "So do I," the Indian boy answered calmly. The genius Barrie proved that at least for a moment the East and West *did* meet that December afternoon in London. *Alice-Sit-by-the-Fire* (1905) is a near farce in which Barrie pokes fun at the sentimental drama and dismal problem play. In *What Every Woman Knows* (1908) Barrie is doubly bold: he uses the tritest of themes (the triangle theme of the canny, prosy wife, the lovely siren, and the erring husband) and with success; and deliberately with a scratch of the pen he makes his heroine homely instead of beautiful, but convinces us that she has charm. *The Will* (1913)

is a surprise—a brief, concentrated tragedy, hopelessly pessimistic, deeply moving and unforgettable *Dear Brutus* (1917) illustrates the complexities of Barrie's genius, for it is at once sentimental and satirical, realistic and supernatural; and in spite of the humor and fantasy, it is disillusioned and almost cynical in its underlying theme. *Mary Rose* (1920) is an exciting dramatization of an old legend of the Hebrides, distressing to those who seek hidden meanings, but thrilling if accepted on its own terms—merely as a good yarn. Barrie's expert craftsmanship is apparent in his one-act plays. *The Twelve Pound Look* (1910) deserves its reputation as a perfect brief play. Only those who saw performances of *The Old Lady Shows Her Medals* and *A Well-Remembered Voice* during the dark days of the first World War can appreciate fully their great power and simple beauty. *Shall We Join the Ladies?* (1922) is an ingenious "first act of an unfinished play" which tantalizes and spoofs the audience.

Because of the post-war disillusion and bitterness and the growth in popularity of the realistic and naturalistic method in literature there has been a temporary decline in Barrie's reputation; moreover, men of genius seldom please the generation immediately following theirs. To such critics as George Jean Nathan (who tolerates the sentimental only in Eugene O'Neill and Sean O'Casey) Barrie is a mawkish and childish escapist. Barrie's admirers cannot entirely explain away the "whimsical" and "elusive," even though the dramatist himself protested that he was not whimsical but realistic. There are treacly passages in *A Kiss for Cinderella* and the preface to *Peter Pan*, for example, that are exasperatingly namby-pamby. Perhaps his mother-complex hampered him somewhat as a creative artist, although his deep understanding of his mother as well as his great love for her is partly responsible for the sharp portraits of Maggie, Leonora, and other heroines. It is significant that Barrie praised Thornton Wilder's novels extravagantly. On the other hand there is much to justify Barrie's contention that he is realistic. His drama is far more than the old *comédie larmoyante* plus a superficial realism. There is a vein of iron running through his best plays however much lavender and old lace on the surface. One can safely dispose of all such quibbling by admitting Barrie to the small, select group of geniuses, who defy classification and generalization. He is not only a dramatic genius, as expert a play-maker as Ibsen, Sardou, or Pinero, he is also a skillful playwright who knows the value of surprise and suspense and who does not hesitate to submit his stories to the discipline of the well-made play. He has given to our language the adjective "Barriesque," which is immediately understood by his readers and audiences, but which is not to be satisfactorily defined, for there is no synonym.

Max Beerbohm began his criticism in *The Saturday Review* of the first performance of *The Admirable Crichton* with unqualified praise. "I think *The Admirable Crichton* is quite the best thing that has happened, in my time, to the British stage," and admirers of Barrie assert that nothing has happened to the British stage in the past forty years to nullify that judgment. Unlike Barrie's other plays it presents a serious problem—a grave attack on the existing social order. It deals with the very structure of society and demands a re-defining of the term "democracy." For all the serious import of the play, its bitter irony, its near-tragic conclusion, it sparkles with comedy and constantly swerves into farce and burlesque. *The Admirable Crichton* is a fable, a parable, and like all fables and parables it must not be judged as realism. Silly Lord Loam is a figure of burlesque, not of the House of Lords; the servants belong to Dickens's, not Galsworthy's Mayfair; the plausibility or implausibility of detail in Act II is of no importance; the love story of Lady Mary and Crichton is incidental. Towering above all these details is the tremendous theme of the play, the meaning of the parable. Sentimentalists have objected to the ending, believing that Crichton never could descend again to such servility. (Did not a saddle-maker become the

first president of the German republic, and a Scottish cottager and a Welsh miner Prime Ministers of England?), but a romantic ending would destroy the meaning of the parable and the satire. Barrie wrote the last act first to be sure of getting it "right" William Lyon Phelps makes the interesting suggestion that the play is a tragedy, not only for Crichton, but also for Lord Loam and possibly others when the "change from open air, exercise, simple food, to their opposites, brings on some horrible disease of the liver."

Barrie was the last important modern dramatist to consent to the publishing of his plays To prepare reading editions, he spent months on each play preparing his famous stage directions—transmuting a bare scenario into literature Readers should note in the directions the sly humor and satire, the elaborate information often useless to actor and director but entertaining and valuable for the reader On the stage the most dramatic moments in *The Admirable Crichton* are the wordless endings of Act II and the boom of the gun in Act III; how successfully is the tenseness suggested in the text? In the cinema version (with the pious Biblical title *Male and Female*—characteristic of Hollywood) upon their return to England Lady Mary is persuaded by a friend not to marry Crichton when a horrible example of similar mismatching is dangled before her. Comment is unnecessary. What can be said for the suggestion that the fourth act be omitted? Are the characters and situation so peculiarly British that the play lacks universal significance? Keeping in mind the theme of *The Admirable Crichton*, how would you answer Aristotle's contention that slavery is justified on the ground that a certain proportion of men are born with servile manners?

THE ADMIRABLE CRICHTON

ACT I

A moment before the curtain rises, the HON. ERNEST WOOLLEY drives up to the door of Loam House in Mayfair. There is a happy smile on his pleasant, insignificant face, and this presumably means that he is thinking of himself. He is too busy over nothing, this man about town, to be always thinking of himself, but, on the other hand, he almost never thinks of any other person. Probably ERNEST'S great moment is when he wakes of a morning and realizes that he really is ERNEST, for we must all wish to be that which is our ideal. We can conceive of him springing out of bed lightly-heartedly and waiting for his man to do the rest. He is dressed in excellent taste, with just the little bit more which shows that he is not without a sense of humor: the dandiacal are often saved by carrying a smile at the whole thing in their spats, let us say. ERNEST left Cambridge the other day, a member of the Athenaeum (which he would be sorry to have you confound with a club in London by the same name). He is a bachelor, but not of the arts, no mean epigrammatist (as you shall see), and a favorite of the ladies. He is almost a celebrity in restaurants, where he dines frequently, returning to sup, and during this last year he has probably paid as much in them for the privilege of handing his hat to an attendant as the rent of a working-man's flat. He complains brightly that he is hard up, and that if somebody or other at Westminster does not look out the country will go to the dogs. He is no fool. He has the shrewdness to float with the current because it is a labor-saving process, but he has sufficient pluck to fight, if fight he must (a brief contest, for he would soon be toppled over). He has a light nature, which would enable him to bob up cheerily in new conditions and return unaltered to the old ones. His selfishness is his most endearing quality. If he has his way he will spend his life like a cat in pushing his betters

out of the soft places, and until he is old he will be fondled in the process.

He gives his hat to one footman and his cane to another, and mounts the great staircase unassisted and undirected. As a nephew of the house he need show no credentials even to CRICHTON, who is guarding a door above.

It would not be good taste to describe CRICHTON, who is only a servant; if to the scandal of all good houses he is to stand out as a figure in the play, he must do it on his own, as they say in the pantry and the boudoir. We are not going to help him. We have had misgivings ever since we found his name in the title, and we shall keep him out of his rights as long as we can. Even though we softened to him he would not be a hero in these clothes of servitude; and he loves his clothes. How to get him out of them? It would require a cataclysm. To be an indoor servant at all is to CRICHTON a badge of honor; to be a butler at thirty is the realization of his proudest ambitions. He is devotedly attached to his master, who, in his opinion, has but one fault, he is not sufficiently contemptuous of his inferiors. We are immediately to be introduced to this solitary failing of a great English peer.

This perfect butler, then, opens a door, and ushers ERNEST into a certain room. At the same moment the curtain rises on this room, and the play begins.

It is one of several reception-rooms in Loam House, not the most magnificent but quite the softest; and of a warm afternoon all that those who are anybody crave for is the softest. The larger rooms are magnificent and bare, carpetless, so that it is an accomplishment to keep one's feet on them; they are sometimes lent for charitable purposes; they are also all in use on the night of a dinner party, when you may find yourself alone in one, having taken a wrong turning; or alone, save for two others who are within hailing distance. This room, however, is comparatively small and very soft. There

are so many cushions in it that you wonder why, if you are an outsider and don't know that it needs six cushions to make one fair head comfy. The couches themselves are cushions as large as beds, and there is an art of sinking into them and of waiting to be helped out of them. There are several famous paintings on the walls, of which you may say, "Jolly thing that," without losing caste as knowing too much; and in cases there are glorious miniatures, but the daughters of the house cannot tell you of whom; "there is a catalogue somewhere." There are a thousand or so of roses in basins, several library novels, and a row of weekly illustrated newspapers lying against each other like fallen soldiers. If any one disturbs this row CRICHTON seems to know of it from afar and appears noiselessly and replaces the wanderer. One thing unexpected in such a room is a great array of tea things. ERNEST spots them with a twinkle, and has his epigram at once unsheathed. He dallies, however, before delivering the thrust.

ERNEST. I perceive, from the tea cups, Crichton, that the great function is to take place here

CRICHTON [*with a respectful sigh*]. Yes, sir.

ERNEST [*chuckling heartlessly*]. The servants' hall coming up to have tea in the drawing-room! [*With terrible sarcasm*]. No wonder you look happy, Crichton.

CRICHTON [*under the knife*]. No, sir.

ERNEST. Do you know, Crichton, I think that with an effort you might look even happier. [*CRICHTON smiles wanly*]. You don't approve of his lordship's compelling his servants to be his equals—once a month?

CRICHTON. It is not for me, sir, to disapprove of his lordship's Radical views

ERNEST. Certainly not. And, after all, it is only once a month that he is affable to you.

CRICHTON. On all other days of the month, sir, his lordship's treatment of us is everything that could be desired

ERNEST [*this is the epigram*]. Tea cups! Life, Crichton, is like a cup of tea; the more heartily we drink, the sooner we reach the dregs

CRICHTON [*obediently*]. Thank you, sir.

ERNEST [*becoming confidential, as we do when we have need of an ally*]. Crich-

ton, in case I should be asked to say a few words to the servants, I have strung together a little speech [*His hand strays to his pocket*] I was wondering where I should stand

[*He tries various places and postures, and comes to rest leaning over a high chair, whence, in dumb show, he addresses a gathering CRICHTON, with the best intentions, gives him a footstool to stand on, and departs, happily unconscious that ERNEST in some dudgeon has kicked the footstool across the room*]

ERNEST [*addressing an imaginary audience, and desirous of startling them at once*]. Suppose you were all little fishes at the bottom of the sea—

[*He is not quite satisfied with his position, though sure that the fault must be with the chair for being too high, not with him for being too short CRICHTON'S suggestion was not perhaps a bad one after all. He lifts the stool, but hastily conceals it behind him on the entrance of the LADIES CATHERINE and AGATHA, two daughters of the house. CATHERINE is twenty, and AGATHA is two years younger. They are very fashionable young women indeed, who might wake up for a dance, but they are very lazy, CATHERINE being two years lazier than AGATHA.*]

ERNEST [*uneasily jocular, because he is concealing the footstool*]. And how are my little friends today?

AGATHA [*contriving to reach a settee*]. Don't be silly, Ernest. If you want to know how we are, we are dead. Even to think of entertaining the servants is so exhausting

CATHERINE [*subsiding nearer the door*]. Besides which, we have had to decide what frocks to take with us on the yacht, and that is such a mental strain.

ERNEST. You poor over-worked things [*Evidently AGATHA is his favorite, for he helps her to put her feet on the settee, while CATHERINE has to dispose of her own feet.*] Rest your weary limbs.

CATHERINE [*perhaps in revenge*]. But why have you a footstool in your hand?

AGATHA. Yes?

ERNEST. Why? [*Brilliantly; but to be sure he has had time to think it out*] You see, as the servants are to be the guests I must be butler. I was practising. This is a tray, observe. [*Holding the footstool as a tray, he mimes across the room like an accomplished footman. The gods favor him for just here LADY MARY enters and he*

holds out the footstool to her] Tea, my lady?

[LADY MARY is a beautiful creature of twenty-two, and is of a natural hauteur which is at once the fury and the envy of her sisters. If she chooses she can make you seem so insignificant that you feel you might be swept away with the crumb-brush. She seldom chooses, because of the trouble of preening herself as she does it; she is usually content to show that you merely tire her eyes. She often seems to be about to go to sleep in the middle of a remark: there is quite a long and anxious pause, and then she continues, like a clock that hesitates, bored in the middle of its strike.]

LADY MARY [arching her brows] It is only you, Ernest; I thought there was some one here.

[And she also bestows herself on cushions.]

ERNEST [a little piqued, and deserting the footstool] Had a very tiring day also, Mary?

LADY MARY [yawning] Dreadfully. Been trying on engagement-rings all the morning.

ERNEST [who is as fond of gossip as the oldest club member] What's that? [To AGATHA.] Is it Brocklehuist? [The energetic AGATHA nods.] You have given your warm young heart to Brocky? [LADY MARY is impervious to his humor, but he continues bravely.] I don't wish to fatigue you, Mary, by insisting on a verbal answer, but if, without straining yourself, you can signify Yes or No, won't you make the effort? [She indolently flashes a ring on her most important finger, and he starts back melodramatically.] The ring! Then I am too late, too late! [Fixing LADY MARY sternly, like a prosecuting counsel.] May I ask, Mary, does Brocky know? Of course it was that terrible mother of his who pulled this through. Mother does everything for Brocky. Still, in the eyes of the law you will be, not her wife, but his, and, therefore, I hold that Brocky ought to be informed. Now — [He discovers that their languorous eyes have closed.] If you girls are shamming sleep in the expectation that I shall awaken you in the manner beloved of ladies, abandon all such hopes.

[CATHERINE and AGATHA look up without speaking.]

LADY MARY [speaking without looking up]. You impertinent boy.

ERNEST [eagerly plucking another epigram from his quiver]. I knew that was it,

though I don't know everything. Agatha, I'm not young enough to know everything.

[He looks hopefully from one to another, but though they try to grasp this, his brilliance baffles them.]

AGATHA [his secret admirer] Young enough?

ERNEST [encouragingly]. Don't you see? I'm not young enough to know everything.

AGATHA I'm sure it's awfully clever, but it's so puzzling.

[Here CRICHTON ushers in an athletic, pleasant-faced young clergyman, MR. TREHERNE, who greets the company.]

CATHERINE Ernest, say it to Mr. Treherne.

ERNEST Look here, Treherne, I'm not young enough to know everything.

TREHERNE. How do you mean, Ernest?

ERNEST [a little nettled]. I mean what I say.

LADY MARY Say it again; say it more slowly.

ERNEST I'm—not—young—enough—to—know—everything.

TREHERNE I see. What you really mean, my boy, is that you are not old enough to know everything.

ERNEST. No, I don't.

TREHERNE I assure you that's it.

LADY MARY. Of course it is.

CATHERINE Yes, Ernest, that's it.

[ERNEST, in desperation, appeals to CRICHTON.]

ERNEST I am not young enough, Crichton, to know everything.

[It is an anxious moment, but a smile is at length extorted from CRICHTON as with a corkscrew.]

CRICHTON Thank you, sir [He goes.]

ERNEST [relieved] Ah, if you had that fellow's head, Treherne, you would find something better to do with it than play cricket. I hear you bowl with your head.

TREHERNE [with proper humility] I'm afraid cricket is all I'm good for, Ernest.

CATHERINE [who thinks he has a heavenly nose] Indeed, it isn't. You are sure to get on, Mr. Treherne.

TREHERNE Thank you, Lady Catherine.

CATHERINE But it was the bishop who told me so. He said a clergyman who breaks both ways is sure to get on in England.

TREHERNE. I'm jolly glad.

[The master of the house comes in, ac-

accompanied by LORD BROCKLEHURST. The EARL OF LOAM is a widower, a philanthropist, and a peer of advanced ideas. As a widower he is at least able to interfere in the domestic concerns of his house—to rummage in the drawers, so to speak, for which he has felt an itching all his blameless life; his philanthropy has opened quite a number of other drawers to him; and his advanced ideas have blown out his figure. He takes in all the weightiest monthly reviews, and prefers those that are uncut, because he perhaps never looks better than when cutting them; but he does not read them, and save for the cutting, it would suit him as well merely to take in the covers. He writes letters to the papers, which are printed in a type to scale with himself, and he is very jealous of those other correspondents who get his type. Let laws and learning, art and commerce die, but leave the big type to an intellectual aristocracy. He is really the reformed House of Lords which will come some day.

[Young LORD BROCKLEHURST is nothing, save for his rank. You could pick him up by the handful any day in Piccadilly or Holborn, buying socks—or selling them.]

LORD LOAM [expansively]. You are here, Ernest. Feeling fit for the voyage, Treherne?

TREHERNE. Looking forward to it enormously.

LORD LOAM. That's right. [He chases his children about as if they were chickens.] Now then, Mary, up and doing, up and doing. Time we had the servants in. They enjoy it so much.

LADY MARY. They hate it.

LORD LOAM. Mary, to your duties.

[And he points severely to the tea-table.]

ERNEST [trunkling]. Congratulations, Brocky.

LORD BROCKLEHURST [Who detests humour]. Thanks.

ERNEST. Mother pleased?

LORD BROCKLEHURST [with dignity]. Mother is very pleased.

ERNEST. That's good. Do you go on the yacht with us?

LORD BROCKLEHURST. Sorry I can't. And look here, Ernest, I will not be called Brocky.

ERNEST. Mother don't like it?

LORD BROCKLEHURST. She does not.

[He leaves ERNEST, who forgives him

and begins to think about his speech.

CRICHTON enters.]

LORD LOAM [speaking as one man to another]. We are quite ready, Crichton.

[CRICHTON is distressed.]

LADY MARY [sarcastically]. How Crichton enjoys it!

LORD LOAM [frowning]. He is the only one who doesn't; pitiful creature.

CRICHTON [shuddering under his lord's displeasure]. I can't help being a Conservative, my lord.

LORD LOAM. Be a man, Crichton. You are the same flesh and blood as myself.

CRICHTON [in pain]. Oh, my lord!

LORD LOAM [sharply]. Show them in; and, by the way, they were not all here last time.

CRICHTON. All, my lord, except the merest trifles.

LORD LOAM. It must be every one. [Lowering.] And remember this, Crichton, for the time being you are my equal.

[Testily.] I shall soon show you whether you are not my equal. Do as you are told [CRICHTON departs to obey, and his lordship is now a general. He has no pity for his daughters, and uses a terrible threat.] And girls, remember, no condescension. The first who condescends recites. [This sends them scurrying to their labors.]

By the way, Brocklehurst, can you do anything?

LORD BROCKLEHURST. How do you mean?

LORD LOAM. Can you do anything—with a penny or a handkerchief, make them disappear, for instance?

LORD BROCKLEHURST. Good heavens, no.

LORD LOAM. It's a pity. Every one in our position ought to be able to do something. Ernest, I shall probably ask you to say a few words; something bright and sparkling.

ERNEST. But, my dear uncle, I have prepared nothing.

LORD LOAM. Anything impromptu will do.

ERNEST. Oh—well—if anything strikes me on the spur of the moment.

[He unostentatiously gets the footstool into position behind the chair. CRICHTON reappears to announce the guests, of whom the first is the housekeeper.]

CRICHTON [reluctantly]. Mrs. Perkins.

LORD LOAM [shaking hands]. Very delighted, Mrs. Perkins. Mary, our friend, Mrs. Perkins.

LADY MARY. How do you do, Mrs. Perkins? Won't you sit here?

LORD LOAM [*threateningly*] Agatha!
AGATHA [*hastily*] How do you do?
Won't you sit down?

LORD LOAM [*introducing*]. Lord Brocklehurst—my valued friend Mrs Perkins.

[*LORD BROCKLEHURST bows and escapes. He has to fall back on ERNEST*]

LORD BROCKLEHURST. For heaven's sake, Ernest, don't leave me for a moment; this sort of thing is utterly opposed to all my principles.

ERNEST [*airily*]. You stick to me, Brocky, and I'll pull you through.

CRICHTON Monsieur Fleury.

ERNEST. The chef

LORD LOAM [*shaking hands with the chef*]. Very charmed to see you, Monsieur Fleury

FLEURY. Thank you very much.

[*FLEURY bows to AGATHA, who is not effusive*]

LORD LOAM [*warningly*]. Agatha—recitation!

[*She tosses her head, but immediately finds a seat and tea for M. FLEURY. TREHERNE and ERNEST move about, making themselves amable. LADY MARY is presiding at the tea-tray*]

CRICHTON. Mr. Rolleston.

LORD LOAM [*shaking hands with his valet*]. How do you do, Rolleston?

[*CATHERINE looks after the wants of ROLLESTON*]

CRICHTON. Mr. Tompsett.

[*TOMPSETT, the coachman, is received with honors, from which he shrinks.*]

CRICHTON. Miss Fisher.

[*This superb creature is no less than LADY MARY'S maid, and even LORD LOAM is a little nervous*]

LORD LOAM. This is a pleasure, Miss Fisher

ERNEST [*unabashed*]. If I might venture, Miss Fisher.

[*And he takes her unto himself.*]

CRICHTON. Miss Simmons.

LORD LOAM [*to CATHERINE'S maid*]. You are always welcome, Miss Simmons.

ERNEST [*perhaps to kindle jealousy in MISS FISHER*]. At last we meet Won't you sit down?

CRICHTON. Mademoiselle Jeanne

LORD LOAM. Charmed to see you, Mademoiselle Jeanne.

[*A place is found for AGATHA'S maid, and the scene is now an animated one; but still our host thinks his girls are not*

sufficiently sociable. He frowns on LADY MARY.]

LADY MARY [*in alarm*]. Mr. Treherne, this is Fisher, my maid

LORD LOAM [*sharply*]. Your what, Mary?

LADY MARY My friend.

CRICHTON. Thomas.

LORD LOAM How do you do, Thomas? [*The first footman gives him a reluctant hand*]

CRICHTON John.

LORD LOAM. How do you do, John?

[*ERNEST signs to LORD BROCKLEHURST, who hastens to him*]

ERNEST [*introducing*]. Brocklehurst, this is John. I think you have already met on the door-step.

CRICHTON. Jane.

[*She comes, wrapping her hands miserably in her apron.*]

LORD LOAM [*doggedly*]. Give me your hand, Jane.

CRICHTON. Gladys

ERNEST. How do you do, Gladys. You know my uncle?

LORD LOAM. Your hand, Gladys.

[*He bestows her on AGATHA*]

CRICHTON. Tweeny.

[*She is a very humble and frightened kitchen-maid, of whom we are to see more*]

LORD LOAM So happy to see you.

FISHER. John, I saw you talking to Lord Brocklehurst just now; introduce me.

LORD BROCKLEHURST [*at the same moment to ERNEST*]. That's an uncommon pretty girl; if I must feed one of them, Ernest, that's the one.

[*But ERNEST tries to part him and FISHER as they are about to shake hands*]

ERNEST. No you don't, it won't do, Brocky. [*To MISS FISHER.*] You are too pretty, my dear Mother wouldn't like it.

[*Discovering TWEENY*] Here's something safer. Charming girl, Brocky, dying to know you; let me introduce you. Tweeny, Lord Brocklehurst—Lord Brocklehurst, Tweeny.

[*BROCKLEHURST accepts his fate; but he still has an eye for FISHER, and something may come of this.*]

LORD LOAM [*severely*]. They are not all here, Crichton

CRICHTON [*with a sigh*]. Odds and ends

[*A STABLE-BOY and a PAGE are shown in, and for a moment no daughter of the house advances to them*]

LORD LOAM [*with a roving eye on his children*]. Which is to recite?

[*The last of the company are, so to say, embraced*]

LORD LOAM [*to TOMPSETT, as they partake of tea together*]. And how are all at home?

TOMPSETT. Fairish, my lord, if 'tis the houses you are inquiring for?

LORD LOAM. No, no, the family How's the baby?

TOMPSETT. Blooming, your lordship.

LORD LOAM. A very fine boy I remember saying so when I saw him; nice little fellow.

TOMPSETT [*not quite knowing whether to let it pass*]. Beg pardon, my lord, it's a girl.

LORD LOAM. A girl? Aha! ha! ha! exactly what I said. I distinctly remember saying, If it's spared it will be a girl

[*CRICHTON now comes down*]

LORD LOAM. Very delighted to see you, Crichton. [*CRICHTON has to shake hands*]. Mary, you know Mr. Crichton?

[*He wanders off in search of other prey*]

LADY MARY. Milk and sugar, Crichton?

CRICHTON. I'm ashamed to be seen talking to you, my lady

LADY MARY. To such a perfect servant as you all this must be most distasteful. [*CRICHTON is too respectful to answer*] Oh, please do speak, or I shall have to recite. You do hate it, don't you?

CRICHTON. It pains me, your ladyship. It disturbs the etiquette of the servants' hall. After last month's meeting the page-boy, in a burst of equality, called me Crichton. He was dismissed.

LADY MARY. I wonder—I really do—how you can remain with us

CRICHTON. I should have felt compelled to give notice, my lady, if the master had not had a seat in the Upper House. I cling to that.

LADY MARY. Do go on speaking. Tell me, what did Mr. Ernest mean by saying that he was not young enough to know everything?

CRICHTON. I have no idea, my lady.

LADY MARY. But you laughed.

CRICHTON. My lady, he is the second son of a peer.

LADY MARY. Very proper sentiments. You are a good soul, Crichton.

LORD BROCKLEHURST [*desperately to TWEENY*]. And now tell me, have you been to the Opera? What sort of weather have you been having in the kitchen?

[*TWEENY giggles*] For heaven's sake, woman, be articulate.

CRICHTON [*still talking to LADY MARY*]. No, my lady; his lordship may compel us to be equal upstairs, but there will never be equality in the servants' hall

LORD LOAM [*overhearing this*]. What's that? No equality? Can't you see, Crichton, that our divisions into classes are artificial, that if we were to return to Nature, which is the aspiration of my life, all would be equal?

CRICHTON. If I may make so bold as to contradict your lordship—

LORD LOAM [*with an effort*]. Go on

CRICHTON. The divisions into classes, my lord, are not artificial. They are the natural outcome of a civilized society. [*To LADY MARY*] There must always be a master and servants in all civilized communities, my lady, for it is natural, and whatever is natural is right

LORD LOAM [*wincing*]. It is very unnatural for me to stand here and allow you to talk such nonsense.

CRICHTON [*eagerly*]. Yes, my lord, it is. That is what I have been striving to point out to your lordship

AGATHA [*to CATHERINE*]. What is the matter with Fisher? She is looking daggers.

CATHERINE. The tedious creature; some question of etiquette, I suppose. [*She sails across to FISHER*]. How are you, Fisher?

FISHER [*with a toss of her head*]. I am nothing, my lady, I am nothing at all.

AGATHA. Oh dear, who says so?

FISHER [*affronted*]. His lordship has asked that kitchen wench to have a second cup of tea.

CATHERINE. But why not?

FISHER. If it pleases his lordship to offer it to *her* before offering it to *me*—

AGATHA. So that is it. Do you want another cup of tea, Fisher?

FISHER. No, my lady—but my position—I should have been asked first.

AGATHA. Oh dear.

[*All this has taken some time, and by now the feeble appetites of the uncomfortable guests have been satiated. But they know there is still another ordeal to face—his lordship's monthly speech. Every one awaits it with misgiving—the servants lest they should applaud, as last time, in the wrong place, and the daughters because he may be personal about them, as the time before ERNEST is annoyed that there should be this speech at all when there is such*]

a much better one coming, and BROCKLEHURST foresees the degradation of the peerage. All are thinking of themselves alone save CRICHTON, who knows his master's weakness, and fears he may stick in the middle LORD LOAM, however, advances cheerfully to his doom. He sees ERNEST'S stool, and artfully stands on it, to his nephew's natural indignation. The three ladies knit their lips, the servants look down their noses, and the address begins.]

LORD LOAM. My friends, I am glad to see you all looking so happy. It used to be predicted by the scoffer that these meetings would prove distasteful to you. Are they distasteful? I hear you laughing at the question. [He has not heard them, but he hears them now, the wailing CRICHTON giving them a lead.] No harm in saying that among us today is one who was formerly hostile to the movement, but who today has been won over. I refer to Lord Brocklehurst, who, I am sure, will presently say to me that if the charming lady now by his side has derived as much pleasure from his company as he has derived from hers, he will be more than satisfied [All look at TWEENY, who trembles.] For the time being the artificial and unnatural—I say unnatural [glaring at CRICHTON, who bows slightly]—barriers of society are swept away. Would that they could be swept away for ever [The PAGEBOY cheers, and has the one moment of prominence in his life. He grows up, marries and has children, but is never really heard of again.] But that is entirely and utterly out of the question. And now for a few months we are to be separated. As you know, my daughters and Mr Ernest and Mr Treherne are to accompany me on my yacht, on a voyage to distant parts of the earth. In less than forty-eight hours we shall be under weigh. [But for CRICHTON'S eye the reckless PAGEBOY would repeat his success.] Do not think our life on the yacht is to be one long idle holiday. My views on the excessive luxury of the day are well known, and what I preach I am resolved to practise. I have therefore decided that my daughters, instead of having one maid each as at present, shall on this voyage have but one maid between them.

[Three maids rise; also three mistresses.]

CRICHTON. My lord!

LORD LOAM. My mind is made up.

ERNEST. I cordially agree.

LORD LOAM. And now, my friends, I should like to think that there is some piece

of advice I might give you, some thought, some noble saying over which you might ponder in my absence. In this connection I remember a proverb, which has had a great effect on my own life. I first heard it many years ago. I have never forgotten it. It constantly cheers and guides me. That proverb is—that proverb was—the proverb I speak of—

[He grows pale and taps his forehead.]

LADY MARY. Oh dear, I believe he has forgotten it.

LORD LOAM [desperately]. The proverb—that proverb to which I refer— [Alas, it has gone. The distress is general. He has not even the sense to sit down. He gropes for the proverb in the air. They try applause, but it is no help.] I have it now— [not he]

LADY MARY [with confidence]. Crichton.

[He does not fail her. As quietly as if he were in goloshes, mind as well as feet, he dismisses the domestics; they go according to precedence as they entered, yet, in a moment, they are gone. Then he signs to MR TREHERNE, and then they conduct LORD LOAM with dignity from the room. His hands are still catching flies; he still mutters, "The proverb—that proverb"; but he continues, owing to CRICHTON'S skilful treatment, to look every inch a peer. The ladies have now an opportunity to air their indignation.]

LADY MARY. One maid among three grown women!

LORD BROCKLEHURST. Mary, I think I had better go. That dreadful kitchenmaid—

LADY MARY. I can't blame you, George. [He salutes her.]

LORD BROCKLEHURST. Your father's views are shocking to me, and I am glad I am not to be one of the party on the yacht. My respect for myself, Mary, my natural anxiety as to what mother will say. I shall see you, darling, before you sail. [He bows to the others and goes.]

ERNEST. Selfish brute, only thinking of himself. What about my speech?

LADY MARY. One maid among three of us. What's to be done?

ERNEST. Pooh! You must do for yourselves, that's all.

LADY MARY. Do for ourselves. How can we know where our things are kept?

AGATHA. Are you aware that dresses button up the back?

CATHERINE. How are we to get into our shoes and be prepared for the carriage?

LADY MARY. Who is to put us to bed, and who is to get us up, and how shall we ever know it's morning if there is no one to pull up the blinds?

[CRICHTON crosses on his way out.]

ERNEST. How is his lordship now?

CRICHTON A little easier, sir

LADY MARY Crichton, send Fisher to me [He goes]

ERNEST. I have no pity for you girls, I—

LADY MARY. Ernest, go away, and don't insult the broken-hearted

ERNEST And uncommon glad I am to go. Ta-ta, all of you. He asked me to say a few words. I came here to say a few words, and I'm not at all sure that I couldn't bring an action against him.

[He departs, feeling that he has left a dart behind him. The girls are alone with their tragic thoughts]

LADY MARY [become a mother to the younger ones at last]. My poor sisters, come here. [They go to her doubtfully] We must make this draw us closer together. I shall do my best to help you in every way. Just now I cannot think of myself at all

AGATHA. But how unlike you, Mary.

LADY MARY. It is my duty to protect my sisters.

CATHERINE I never knew her so sweet before, Agatha. [Cautiously.] What do you propose to do, Mary?

LADY MARY I propose when we are on the yacht to lend Fisher to you when I don't need her myself

AGATHA. Fisher?

LADY MARY [who has the most character of the three]. Of course, as the eldest, I have decided that it is my maid we shall take with us

CATHERINE [speaking also for AGATHA]. Mary, you toad.

AGATHA. Nothing on earth would induce Fisher to lift her hand for either me or Catherine.

LADY MARY. I was afraid of it, Agatha. That is why I am so sorry for you.

[The further exchange of pleasantries is interrupted by the arrival of FISHER.]

LADY MARY. Fisher, you heard what his lordship said?

FISHER. Yes, my lady

LADY MARY [coldly, though the others would have tried blandishment]. You have given me some satisfaction of late, Fisher, and to mark my approval I have decided that you shall be the maid who accompanies us.

FISHER [acidly] I thank you, my lady.

LADY MARY. That is all; you may go.

FISHER [rapping it out]. If you please, my lady, I wish to give notice.

[CATHERINE and AGATHA gleam, but LADY MARY is of sterner stuff.]

LADY MARY [taking up a book]. Oh, certainly—you may go.

CATHERINE. But why, Fisher?

FISHER. I could not undertake, my lady, to wait upon three We don't do it. [In an indignant outburst to LADY MARY.] Oh, my lady, to think that this affront—

LADY MARY [looking up]. I thought I told you to go, Fisher.

[FISHER stands for a moment irresolute; then goes. As soon as she has gone LADY MARY puts down her book and weeps She is a pretty woman, but this is the only pretty thing we have seen her do yet]

AGATHA [succinctly] Serves you right. [CRICHTON comes.]

CATHERINE. It will be Simmons after all. Send Simmons to me.

CRICHTON [after hesitating]. My lady, might I venture to speak?

CATHERINE. What is it?

CRICHTON. I happen to know, your ladyship, that Simmons desires to give notice for the same reason as Fisher.

CATHERINE Oh!

AGATHA [triumphant] Then, Catherine, we take Jeanne

CRICHTON And Jeanne also, my lady. [LADY MARY is reading, indifferent though the heavens fall, but her sisters are not ashamed to show their despair to CRICHTON.]

AGATHA We can't blame them. Could any maid who respected herself be got to wait upon three?

LADY MARY [with languid interest]. I suppose there are such persons, Crichton?

CRICHTON [guardedly]. I have heard, my lady, that there are such.

LADY MARY [a little desperate]. Crichton, what's to be done? We sail in two days; could one be discovered in the time?

AGATHA [frankly a supplicant]. Surely you can think of some one?

CRICHTON [after hesitating]. There is in this establishment, your ladyship, a young woman—

LADY MARY. Yes?

CRICHTON. A young woman on whom I have for some time cast an eye.

CATHERINE [eagerly]. Do you mean as a possible lady's-maid?

CRICHTON I had thought of her, my lady, in another connection.

LADY MARY. Ah!

CRICHTON. But I believe she is quite the young person you require. Perhaps if you could see her, my lady—

LADY MARY I shall certainly see her. Bring her to me. [*He goes.*] You two needn't wait

CATHERINE Needn't we? We see your little game, Mary.

AGATHA We shall certainly remain and have our two-thirds of her.

[*They sit there doggedly until CRICHTON returns with TWEENY, who looks scared*]

CRICHTON. This, my lady, is the young person

CATHERINE [*frankly*] Oh dear!

[*It is evident that all three consider her quite unsuitable.*]

LADY MARY. Come here, girl. Don't be afraid

[*TWEENY looks imploringly at her idol*]

CRICHTON. Her appearance, my lady, is homely, and her manners, as you may have observed, deplorable, but she has a heart of gold

LADY MARY. What is your position downstairs?

TWEENY [*bobbing*] I'm a tweeny, your ladyship

CATHERINE A what?

CRICHTON. A tweeny; that is to say, my lady, she is not at present, strictly speaking, anything; a *between* maid; she helps the vegetable maid It is she, my lady, who conveys the dishes from the one end of the kitchen table where they are placed by the cook, to the other end, where they enter into the charge of Thomas and John.

LADY MARY. I see. And you and Crichton are—ah—keeping company?

[*CRICHTON draws himself up*]

TWEENY [*aghast*] A butler don't keep company, my lady.

LADY MARY [*indifferently*]. Does he not?

CRICHTON. No, your ladyship, we butlers may—[*he makes a gesture with his arms*]—but we do not keep company.

AGATHA I know what it is, you are engaged?

[*TWEENY looks longingly at CRICHTON*]

CRICHTON Certainly not, my lady. The utmost I can say at present is that I have cast a favorable eye.

[*Even this is much to TWEENY*]

LADY MARY As you choose. But I am afraid, Crichton, she will not suit us.

CRICHTON. My lady, beneath this sim-

ple exterior are concealed a very sweet nature and rare womanly gifts

AGATHA Unfortunately, that is not what we want.

CRICHTON. And it is she, my lady, who dresses the hair of the ladies'-maids for our evening meals

[*The ladies are interested at last.*]

LADY MARY She dresses Fisher's hair?

TWEENY Yes, my lady, and I does them up when they goes to parties

CRICHTON [*pained, but not scolding*]. Does!

TWEENY. Doos. And it's me what alters your gowns to fit them

CRICHTON. *What* alters!

TWEENY Which alters.

AGATHA. Mary?

LADY MARY. I shall certainly have her.

CATHERINE. *We* shall certainly have her. Tweeny, we have decided to make a lady's-maid of you

TWEENY. Oh lawks!

AGATHA We are doing this for you so that your position socially may be more nearly akin to that of Crichton.

CRICHTON [*gravely*]. It will undoubtedly increase the young person's chances

LADY MARY. Then if I get a good character for you from Mrs Perkins, she will make the necessary arrangements.

[*She resumes reading*]

TWEENY [*elated*]. My lady!

LADY MARY. By the way, I hope you are a good sailor.

TWEENY [*startled*]. You don't mean, my lady, that I'm to go on the ship?

LADY MARY. Certainly.

TWEENY. But— [*To CRICHTON*] You ain't going, sir?

CRICHTON No.

TWEENY [*firm at last*]. Then neither ain't I.

AGATHA. You must

TWEENY. Leave him! Not me.

LADY MARY. Girl, don't be silly Crichton will be—considered in your wages.

TWEENY. I ain't going

CRICHTON I feared this, my lady.

TWEENY. Nothing will budge me.

LADY MARY. Leave the room.

[*CRICHTON shows TWEENY out with marked politeness.*]

AGATHA Crichton, I think you might have shown more displeasure with her.

CRICHTON [*contrite*] I was touched, my lady. I see, my lady, that to part from her would be a wrench to me, though I could not well say so in her presence, not having yet decided how far I shall go with her.

[*He is about to go when LORD LOAM returns, fuming*]

LORD LOAM. The ingrate! The smug! The fop!

CATHERINE. What is it now, father?

LORD LOAM. That man of mine, Rolleston, refuses to accompany us because you are to have but one maid

AGATHA. Hurrah!

LADY MARY [*in better taste*]. Darling father, rather than you should lose Rolleston, we will consent to take all the three of them.

LORD LOAM. Pooh, nonsense! Crichton, find me a valet who can do without three maids

CRICHTON. Yes, my lord [*Troubled*]. In the time—the more suitable the party, my lord, the less willing will he be to come without the—the usual perquisites

LORD LOAM. Any one will do

CRICHTON [*shocked*]. My lord!

LORD LOAM. The ingrate! The puppy!

[*AGATHA has an idea, and whispers to LADY MARY*]

LADY MARY. I ask a favor of a servant?—never!

AGATHA. Then I will. Crichton, would it not be very distressing to you to let his lordship go, attended by a valet who might prove unworthy? It is only for three months; don't you think that you—you yourself—you— [*As CRICHTON sees what she wants he pulls himself up with noble, offended dignity, and she is appalled.*] I beg your pardon

[*He bows stiffly*]

CATHERINE [*to CRICHTON*]. But think of the joy to Tweeny

[*CRICHTON is moved, but he shakes his head*]

LADY MARY [*so much the cleverest*]. Crichton, do you think it safe to let the master you love go so far away without you while he has these dangerous views about equality?

[*CRICHTON is profoundly stirred. After a struggle he goes to his master, who has been pacing the room*]

CRICHTON. My lord, I have found a man.

LORD LOAM. Already? Who is he? [*CRICHTON presents himself with a gesture*] Yourself?

CATHERINE. Father, how good of him.

LORD LOAM [*pleased, but speaking of it as a small thing*]. Uncommon good. Thank you, Crichton. This helps me nicely out of a hole; and how it will annoy Rolleston! Come with me, and we shall tell

him. Not that I think you have lowered yourself in any way. Come along

[*He goes, and CRICHTON is to follow him, but is stopped by AGATHA impulsively offering him her hand*]

CRICHTON [*who is much shaken*]. My lady—a valet's hand!

AGATHA. I had no idea you would feel it so deeply; why did you do it?

[*CRICHTON is too respectful to reply*]

LADY MARY [*regarding him*]. Crichton, I am curious. I insist upon an answer.

CRICHTON. My lady, I am the son of a butler and a lady's-maid—perhaps the happiest of all combinations, and to me the most beautiful thing in the world is a haughty, aristocratic English house, with every one kept in his place. Though I were equal to your ladyship, where would be the pleasure to me? It would be counterbalanced by the pain of feeling that Thomas and John were equal to me.

CATHERINE. But father says if we were to return to Nature—

CRICHTON. If we did, my lady, the first thing we should do would be to elect a head. Circumstances might alter cases; the same person might not be master; the same persons might not be servants. I can't say as to that, nor should we have the deciding of it. Nature would decide for us.

LADY MARY. You seem to have thought it all out carefully, Crichton.

CRICHTON. Yes, my lady.

CATHERINE. And you have done this for us, Crichton, because you thought that—that father needed to be kept in his place?

CRICHTON. I should prefer you to say, my lady, that I have done it for the house.

AGATHA. Thank you, Crichton. Mary, be nicer to him. [*But LADY MARY has begun to read again.*] If there was any way in which we could show our gratitude.

CRICHTON. If I might venture, my lady, would you kindly show it by becoming more like Lady Mary? That disdain is what we like from our superiors. Even so do we, the upper servants, disdain the lower servants, while they take it out of the odds and ends

[*He goes, and they bury themselves in cushions*]

AGATHA. Oh dear, what a tiring day.

CATHERINE. I feel dead. Tuck in your feet, you selfish thing.

[*LADY MARY is lying reading on another couch*]

LADY MARY. I wonder what he meant by circumstances might alter cases.

AGATHA [*yawning*] Don't talk, Mary, I was nearly asleep.

LADY MARY. I wonder what he meant by the same person might not be master, and the same persons might not be servants.

CATHERINE Do be quiet, Mary, and leave it to Nature, he said Nature would decide

LADY MARY. I wonder——

[*But she does not wonder very much. She would wonder more if she knew what was coming. Her book slips unregarded to the floor. The ladies are at rest until it is time to dress.*]

END OF ACT I

ACT II

Two months have elapsed, and the scene is a desert island in the Pacific, on which our adventurers have been wrecked

The curtain rises on a sea of bamboo, which shuts out all view save the foliage of palm trees and some gaunt rocks. Occasionally CRICHTON and TREHERNE come momentarily into sight, hacking and hewing the bamboo, through which they are making a clearing between the ladies and the shore; and by and by, owing to their efforts, we shall have an unrestricted outlook on to a sullen sea that is at present hidden. Then we shall also be able to note a mast standing out of the water—all that is left, saving floating wreckage, of the ill-fated yacht the Bluebell. The beginnings of a hut will also be seen, with CRICHTON driving its walls into the ground or astride its roof of saplings, for at present he is doing more than one thing at a time. In a red shirt, with the ends of his sailor's breeches thrust into wading-boots, he looks a man for the moment; we suddenly remember some one's saying—perhaps it was ourselves—that a cataclysm would be needed to get him out of his servant's clothes, and apparently it has been forthcoming. It is no longer beneath our dignity to cast an inquiring eye on his appearance. His features are not distinguished, but he has a strong jaw and green eyes, in which a yellow light burns that we have not seen before. His dark hair, hitherto so decorously sleek, has been ruffled this way and that by wind and weather, as if they were part of the

cataclysm and wanted to help his chance. His muscles must be soft and flabby still, but though they shriek aloud to him to desist, he rains lusty blows with his axe, like one who has come upon the open for the first time in his life, and likes it. He is as yet far from being an expert woodsman—mark the blood on his hands at places where he has hit them instead of the tree; but note also that he does not waste time in bandaging them—he rubs them in the earth and goes on. His face is still of the discreet pallor that befits a butler, and he carries the smaller logs as if they were a salver; not in a day or a month will he shake off the badge of servitude, but without knowing it he has begun

But for the hatchets at work, and an occasional something horrible falling from a tree into the ladies' laps, they hear nothing save the mournful surf breaking on a coral shore

They sit or recline huddled together against a rock, and they are farther from home, in every sense of the word, than ever before. Thirty-six hours ago, they were given three minutes in which to dress, without a maid, and reach the boats, and they have not made the best of that valuable time. None of them has boots, and had they known this prickly island they would have thought first of boots. They have a sufficiency of garments, but some of them were gifts dropped into the boat—LADY MARY'S tarpaulin coat and hat, for instance, and CATHERINE'S blue jersey and red cap, which certify that the two ladies were lately before the mast. AGATHA is too gay in ERNEST'S dressing-gown, and clutches it to her person with both hands as if afraid that it may be claimed by its rightful owner. There are two pairs of bath slippers between the three of them, and their hair cries aloud and in vain for hairpins

By their side, on an inverted bucket, sits ERNEST, clothed neatly in the garments of day and night, but, alas, barefooted. He is the only cheerful member of this company of four, but his brightness is due less to a manly desire to succour the helpless than to his having been lately in the throes of composition, and to his modest satisfaction with the result. He reads to the ladies, and they listen, each with one scared eye to the things that fall from trees.

ERNEST [*who has written on the fly-leaf of the only book saved from the wreck*]. This is what I have written. "Wrecked, wrecked, wrecked" on an island in the Tropics, the following the Hon Ernest Woolley, the Rev. John Treherne, the Ladies Mary, Catherine, and Agatha Lasenby, with two servants. We are the sole survivors of Lord Loam's steam yacht *Bluebell*, which encountered a fearful gale in these seas, and soon became a total wreck. The crew behaved gallantly, putting us all into the first boat. What became of them I cannot tell, but we, after dreadful sufferings, and insufficiently clad, in whatever garments we could lay hold of in the dark —"

LADY MARY. Please don't describe our garments.

ERNEST. "succeeded in reaching this island, with the loss of only one of our party, namely, Lord Loam, who flung away his life in a gallant attempt to save a servant who had fallen overboard."

[*The ladies have wept long and sore for their father, but there is something in this last utterance that makes them look up*]

AGATHA. But, Ernest, it was Crichton who jumped overboard trying to save father.

ERNEST [*with the candor that is one of his most engaging qualities*]. Well, you know, it was rather silly of uncle to fling away his life by trying to get into the boat first; and as this document may be printed in the English papers, it struck me, an English peer, you know —

LADY MARY [*every inch an English peer's daughter*]. Ernest, that is very thoughtful of you.

ERNEST [*continuing, well pleased*]. — "By night the cries of wild cats and the hissing of snakes terrify us extremely" — [*this does not satisfy him so well, and he makes a correction*] — "terrify the ladies extremely. Against these we have no weapons except one cutlass and a hatchet. A bucket washed ashore is at present our only comfortable seat —"

LADY MARY [*with some spirit*]. And Ernest is sitting on it

ERNEST. H'sh! Oh, do be quiet — "To add to our horrors, night falls suddenly in these parts, and it is then that savage animals begin to prowl and roar"

LADY MARY. Have you said that vampire bats suck the blood from our toes as we sleep?

ERNEST. No, that's all I end up, "Rescue us or we perish. Rich reward. Signed

Ernest Woolley, in command of our little party" This is written on a leaf taken out of a book of poems that Crichton found in his pocket. Fancy Crichton being a reader of poetry. Now I shall put it into the bottle and fling it into the sea. [*He pushes the precious document into a soda-water bottle and rams the cork home. At the same moment, and without effort, he gives birth to one of his most characteristic epigrams*] The tide is going out, we mustn't miss the post.

[*They are so unhappy that they fail to grasp it, and a little petulantly he calls for CRICHTON, ever his stand-by in the hour of epigram. CRICHTON breaks through the undergrowth quickly, thinking the ladies are in danger*]

CRICHTON. Anything wrong, sir?

ERNEST [*with fine confidence*]. The tide, Crichton, is a postman who calls at our island twice a day for letters

CRICHTON [*after a pause*]. Thank you, sir.

[*He returns to his labors, however, without giving the smile which is the epigrammatist's right, and ERNEST is a little disappointed in him.*]

ERNEST. Poor Crichton! I sometimes think he is losing his sense of humor. Come along, Agatha.

[*He helps his favorite up the rocks, and they disappear gingerly from view.*]

CATHERINE. How horribly still it is.

LADY MARY [*remembering some recent sounds*]. It is best when it is still.

CATHERINE [*drawing closer to her*]. Mary, I have heard that they are always very still just before they jump.

LADY MARY. Don't.

[*A distinct chopping is heard, and they are startled*]

LADY MARY [*controlling herself*]. It is only Crichton knocking down trees.

CATHERINE [*almost imploringly*]. Mary, let us go and stand beside him.

LADY MARY [*coldly*]. Let a servant see that I am afraid!

CATHERINE. Don't, then; but remember this, dear, they often drop on one from above.

[*She moves away, nearer to the friendly sound of the axe, and LADY MARY is left alone. She is the most courageous of them as well as the haughtiest, but when something she had thought to be a stick glides toward her, she forgets her dignity and screams.*]

LADY MARY [*calling*]. Crichton, Crichton!

[*It must have been TREHERNE who was tree-jelling, for CRICHTON comes to her from the hut, drawing his cutlass*]

CRICHTON [anxious]. Did you call, my lady?

LADY MARY [*herself again, now that he is there*]. I! Why should I?

CRICHTON. I made a mistake, your ladyship. [*Hesitating*] If you are afraid of being alone, my lady—

LADY MARY. Afraid! Certainly not. [*Doggedly*]. You may go.

[*But she does not complain when he remains within eyesight cutting the bamboo. It is heavy work, and she watches him silently*]

LADY MARY. I wish, Crichton, you could work without getting so hot.

CRICHTON [*mopping his face*]. I wish I could, my lady.

[*He continues his labors*]

LADY MARY [*taking off her oilskins*]. It makes me hot to look at you.

CRICHTON. It almost makes me cool to look at your ladyship.

LADY MARY [*who perhaps thinks he is presuming*]. Anything I can do for you in that way, Crichton, I shall do with pleasure

CRICHTON [*quite humbly*]. Thank you, my lady.

[*By this time most of the bamboo has been cut, and the shore and the sea are visible, except where they are hidden by the half-completed hut. The mast rising solitary from the water adds to the desolation of the scene, and at last tears run down LADY MARY'S face*]

CRICHTON. Don't give way, my lady, things might be worse

LADY MARY. My poor father

CRICHTON. If I could have given my life for his.

LADY MARY. You did all a man could do. Indeed I thank you, Crichton [*With some admiration and more wonder*]. You are a man.

CRICHTON. Thank you, my lady

LADY MARY. But it is all so awful. Crichton, is there any hope of a ship coming?

CRICHTON [*after hesitation*]. Of course there is, my lady

LADY MARY [*facing him bravely*]. Don't treat me as a child. I have got to know the worst, and to face it. Crichton, the truth

CRICHTON [*reluctantly*]. We were driven out of our course, my lady; I fear far from the track of commerce.

LADY MARY. Thank you; I understand.

[*For a moment, however, she breaks down. Then she clenches her hands and stands erect*]

CRICHTON [*watching her, and forgetting perhaps for the moment that they are not just a man and woman*]. You're a good plucked 'un, my lady.

LADY MARY [*falling into the same error*]. I shall try to be. [*Extricating herself*]. Crichton, how dare you?

CRICHTON. I beg your ladyship's pardon; but you are. [*She smiles, as if it were a comfort to be told this even by CRICHTON*]. And until a ship comes we are three men who are going to do our best for you ladies

LADY MARY [*with a curl of the lip*]. Mr. Ernest does no work.

CRICHTON [*cheerily*]. But he will, my lady.

LADY MARY. I doubt it.

CRICHTON [*confidently, but perhaps thoughtlessly*]. No work—no dinner—will make a great change in Mr. Ernest.

LADY MARY. No work—no dinner. When did you invent that rule, Crichton?

CRICHTON [*loaded with bamboo*]. I didn't invent it, my lady. I seem to see it growing all over the island.

LADY MARY [*disquieted*]. Crichton, your manner strikes me as curious.

CRICHTON [*pained*]. I hope not, your ladyship.

LADY MARY [*determined to have it out with him*]. You are not implying anything so unnatural, I presume, as that if I and my sisters don't work there will be no dinner for us?

CRICHTON [*brightly*]. If it is unnatural, my lady, that is the end of it.

LADY MARY. If? Now I understand. The perfect servant at home holds that we are all equal now. I see.

CRICHTON [*wounded to the quick*]. My lady, can you think me so inconsistent?

LADY MARY. That was it.

CRICHTON [*earnestly*]. My lady, I disbelieved in equality at home because it was against nature, and for the same reason I as utterly disbelieve in it on an island

LADY MARY [*relieved by his obvious sincerity*]. I apologize.

CRICHTON [*continuing unfortunately*]. There must always, my lady, be one to command and others to obey.

LADY MARY [*satisfied*]. One to command, others to obey. Yes. [*Then suddenly she realizes that there may be a dire meaning in his confident words*]. Crichton!

CRICHTON [*who has intended no dire meaning*] What is it, my lady?

[*But she only stares into his face and then hurries from him Left alone he is puzzled, but being a practical man he busies himself gathering firewood, until TWEENY appears excitedly carrying cocoa-nuts in her skirt. She has made better use than the ladies of her three minutes' grace for dressing*]

TWEENY [*who can be happy even on an island if CRICHTON is with her*]. Look what I found.

CRICHTON Cocoa-nuts Bravo!

TWEENY They grow on trees

CRICHTON. Where did you think they grew?

TWEENY. I thought as how they grew in rows on top of little sticks

CRICHTON [*wrinkling his brows*]. Oh Tweeny, Tweeny!

TWEENY [*anxiously*] Have I offended of your feelings again, sir?

CRICHTON. A little.

TWEENY [*in a despairing outburst*]. I'm full o' vulgar words and ways; and though I may keep them in their holes when you are by, as soon as I'm by myself out they comes in a rush like beetles when the house is dark. I says them gloating-like, in my head—"Blooming" I says, and "All my eye," and "Ginger," and "Nothin'"; and all the time we was being wrecked I was praying to myself, "Please the Lord it may be an island as it's natural to be vulgar on" [*A shudder passes through CRICHTON, and she is abject*] That's the kind I am, sir. I'm 'opeless You'd better give me up.

[*She is a pathetic, forlorn creature, and his manhood is stirred.*]

CRICHTON [*wondering a little at himself for saying it*]. I won't give you up. It is strange that one so common should attract one so fastidious; but so it is. [*Thoughtfully.*] There is something about you, Tweeny, there is a *je ne sais quoi* about you.

TWEENY [*knowing only that he has found something in her to commend*]. Is there, is there? Oh, I am glad.

CRICHTON [*putting his hand on her shoulder like a protector*]. We shall fight your vulgarity together. [*All this time he has been arranging sticks for his fire.*] Now get some dry grass.

[*She brings him grass, and he puts it under the sticks. He produces an old lens from his pocket, and tries to focus the sun's rays.*]

TWEENY. Why, what is that?

CRICHTON [*the ingenious creature*] That's the glass from my watch and one from Mr. Treherne's, with a little water between them I am hoping to kindle a fire with it.

TWEENY [*properly impressed*] Oh sir! [*After one failure the grass takes fire, and they are blowing on it when excited cries near by bring them sharply to their feet AGATHA runs to them, white of face, followed by ERNEST*]

ERNEST Danger! Crichton, a tiger-cat! CRICHTON [*getting his cutlass*].

Where?

AGATHA It is at our heels.

ERNEST. Look out, Crichton.

CRICHTON. H'sh!

[*TREHERNE comes to his assistance, while LADY MARY and CATHERINE join AGATHA in the hut*]

ERNEST. It will be on us in a moment.

[*He seizes the hatchet and guards the hut It is pleasing to see that ERNEST is no coward*]

TREHERNE Listen!

ERNEST The grass is moving. It's coming

[*It comes But it is no tiger-cat; it is LORD LOAM crawling on his hands and knees, a very exhausted and dishevelled peer, wondrously attired in rags. The girls see him, and with glad cries rush into his arms.*]

LADY MARY. Father.

LORD LOAM Mary—Catherine—Agatha. Oh dear, my dears, my dears, oh dear!

LADY MARY. Darling.

AGATHA. Sweetest.

CATHERINE. Love.

TREHERNE. Glad to see you, sir

ERNEST Uncle, uncle, dear old uncle

[*For a time such happy cries fill the air, but presently TREHERNE is thoughtless*]

TREHERNE. Ernest thought you were a tiger-cat.

LORD LOAM [*stung somehow to the quick*] Oh, did you? I knew you at once, Ernest; I knew you by the way you ran.

[*ERNEST smiles forgivingly*]

CRICHTON [*venturing forward at last*]. My lord, I am glad.

ERNEST [*with upraised finger*]. But you are also idling, Crichton [*Making himself comfortable on the ground*] We mustn't waste time. To work, to work.

CRICHTON [*after contemplating him without rancor*]. Yes, sir.

[*He gets a pot from the hut and hangs*

it on a tripod over the fire, which is now burning brightly]

TREHERNE Ernest, you be a little more civil Crichton, let me help.

[*He is soon busy helping CRICHTON to add to the strength of the hut.*]

LORD LOAM [*gazing at the pot as ladies are said to gaze on precious stones*]. Is that—but I suppose I'm dreaming again. [*Timidly*] It isn't by any chance a pot on top of a fire, is it?

LADY MARY. Indeed, it is, dearest. It is our supper.

LORD LOAM. I have been dreaming of a pot on a fire for two days [*Quivering*] There's nothing in it, is there?

ERNEST. Sniff, uncle

[*LORD LOAM sniffs.*]

LORD LOAM [*reverently*] It smells of onions!

[*There is a sudden diversion*]

CATHERINE Father, you have boots!

LADY MARY. So he has

LORD LOAM. Of course I have.

ERNEST [*with greedy cunning*] You are actually wearing boots, uncle. It's very unsafe, you know, in this climate.

LORD LOAM. Is it?

ERNEST. We have all abandoned them, you observe. The blood, the arteries, you know

LORD LOAM. I hadn't a notion

[*He holds out his feet and ERNEST kneels*]

ERNEST. O Lord, yes

[*In another moment those boots will be his*]

LADY MARY [*quickly*] Father, he is trying to get your boots from you. There is nothing in the world we would not give for boots.

ERNEST [*rising haughtily, a proud spirit misunderstood*] I only wanted the loan of them.

AGATHA [*running her fingers along them lovingly*]. If you lend them to any one, it will be to us, won't it, father?

LORD LOAM. Certainly, my child.

ERNEST. Oh, very well. [*He is leaving these selfish ones.*] I don't want your old boots [*He gives his uncle a last chance.*] You don't think you could spare me one boot?

LORD LOAM [*tartly*]. I do not

ERNEST. Quite so. Well, all I can say is I'm sorry for you.

[*He departs to recline elsewhere.*]

LADY MARY. Father, we thought we should never see you again.

LORD LOAM. I was washed ashore, my

dear, clinging to a hencoop. How awful that first night was!

LADY MARY. Poor father.

LORD LOAM. When I woke, I wept. Then I began to feel extremely hungry. There was a large turtle on the beach I remembered from the *Swiss Family Robinson* that if you turn a turtle over he is helpless. My dears, I crawled towards him, I flung myself upon him—[*here he pauses to rub his leg*]—the nasty, spiteful brute.

LADY MARY. You didn't turn him over?

LORD LOAM [*vindictively, though he is a kindly man*]. Mary, the senseless thing wouldn't wait; I found that none of them would wait

CATHERINE. We should have been as badly off if Crichton hadn't—

LADY MARY [*quickly*]. Don't praise Crichton.

LORD LOAM. And then those beastly monkeys. I always understood that if you flung stones at them they would retaliate by flinging cocoa-nuts at you. Would you believe it, I flung a hundred stones, and not one monkey had sufficient intelligence to grasp my meaning. How I longed for Crichton.

LADY MARY [*wincing*]. For us also, father?

LORD LOAM. For you also. I tried for hours to make a fire. The authors say that when wrecked on an island you can obtain a light by rubbing two pieces of stick together. [*With feeling.*] The liars!

LADY MARY. And all this time you thought there was no one on the island but yourself?

LORD LOAM. I thought so until this morning. I was searching the pools for little fishes, which I caught in my hat, when suddenly I saw before me—on the sand—

CATHERINE. What?

LORD LOAM. A hairpin.

LADY MARY. A hairpin! It must be one of ours. Give it me, father.

AGATHA. No, it's mine.

LORD LOAM. I didn't keep it.

LADY MARY [*speaking for all three*]. Didn't keep it? Found a hairpin on an island and didn't keep it?

LORD LOAM [*humbly*]. My dears.

AGATHA [*scarcely to be placated*]. Oh father, we have returned to nature more than you bargained for.

LADY MARY. For shame, Agatha. [*She has something on her mind*] Father, there is something I want you to do at once—I

mean assert your position as the chief person on the island

[*They are all surprised*]

LORD LOAM. But who would presume to question it?

CATHERINE She must mean Ernest

LADY MARY. Must I?

AGATHA It's cruel to say anything against Ernest.

LORD LOAM [*firmly*]. If any one presumes to challenge my position, I shall make short work of him.

AGATHA. Here comes Ernest; now see if you can say these horrid things to his face

LORD LOAM I shall teach him his place at once

LADY MARY [*anxiously*] But how?

LORD LOAM [*chuckling*] I have just thought of an extremely amusing way of doing it. [*As ERNEST approaches*] Ernest.

ERNEST [*loftily*] Excuse me, uncle, I'm thinking. I'm planning out the building of this hut.

LORD LOAM. I also have been thinking.

ERNEST. That don't matter.

LORD LOAM. Eh?

ERNEST. Please, please, this is important.

LORD LOAM. I've been thinking that I ought to give you my boots.

ERNEST What!

LADY MARY. Father

LORD LOAM [*genially*] Take them, my boy. [*With a rapidity we had not thought him capable of, ERNEST becomes the wearer of the boots*] And now I dare say you want to know why I give them to you, Ernest?

ERNEST [*moving up and down in them deliciously*]. Not at all. The great thing is, "I've got 'em, I've got 'em"

LORD LOAM [*majestically, but with a knowing look at his daughters*] My reason is that, as head of our little party, you, Ernest, shall be our hunter, you shall clear the forests of those savage beasts that make them so dangerous. [*Pleasantly*] And now you know, my dear nephew, why I have given you my boots.

ERNEST This is my answer.

[*He kicks off the boots.*]

LADY MARY [*still anxious*] Father, assert yourself.

LORD LOAM. I shall now assert myself. [*But how to do it? He has a happy thought*] Call Crichton

LADY MARY. Oh father.

[*Crichton comes in answer to a summons and is followed by TREHERNE.*]

ERNEST [*wondering a little at LADY MARY'S grave face*]. Crichton, look here

LORD LOAM [*sturdily*] Silence! Crichton, I want your advice as to what I ought to do with Mr Ernest. He has defied me

ERNEST. Pooh!

CRICHTON [*after considering*]. May I speak openly, my lord?

LADY MARY [*keeping her eyes fixed on him*]. That is what we desire.

CRICHTON [*quite humbly*]. Then I may say, your lordship, that I have been considering Mr. Ernest's case at odd moments ever since we were wrecked.

ERNEST My case?

LORD LOAM [*sternly*]. Hush.

CRICHTON Since we landed on the island, my lord, it seems to me that Mr. Ernest's epigrams have been particularly brilliant

ERNEST [*gratified*]. Thank you, Crichton.

CRICHTON. But I find—I seem to find it growing wild, my lord, in the woods, that sayings which would be justly admired in England are not much use on an island I would therefore most respectfully propose that henceforth every time Mr. Ernest favors us with an epigram his head should be immersed in a bucket of cold spring water. [*There is a terrible silence.*]

LORD LOAM [*uneasily*]. Serve him right.

ERNEST I should like to see you try to do it, uncle

CRICHTON [*ever ready to come to the succour of his lordship*]. My feeling, my lord, is that at the next offence I should convey him to a retired spot, where I shall carry out the undertaking in as respectful a manner as is consistent with thorough immersion.

[*Though his manner is most respectful, he is firm; he evidently means what he says.*]

LADY MARY [*a ramrod*]. Father, you must not permit this; Ernest is your nephew

LORD LOAM [*with his hand to his brow*]. After all, he is my nephew, Crichton; and, as I am sure, he now sees that I am a strong man—

ERNEST [*foolishly in the circumstances*]. A strong man. You mean a stout man. You are one of mind to two of matter.

[*He looks round in the old way for approval. No one has smiled, and to his*

consternation he sees that CRICHTON is quietly turning up his sleeves ERNEST makes an appealing gesture to his uncle; then he turns defiantly to CRICHTON]

CRICHTON. Is it to be before the ladies, Mr. Ernest, or in the privacy of the wood? [*He fixes ERNEST with his eye ERNEST is cowed*] Come

ERNEST [*affecting bravado*] Oh, all right

CRICHTON [*succinctly*]. Bring the bucket.

[*ERNEST hesitates He then lifts the bucket and follows CRICHTON to the nearest spring*]

LORD LOAM [*rather white*] I'm sorry for him, but I had to be firm

LADY MARY. Oh, father, it wasn't you who was firm. Crichton did it himself.

LORD LOAM. Bless me, so he did.

LADY MARY. Father, be strong.

LORD LOAM [*bewildered*] You can't mean that my faithful Crichton—

LADY MARY. Yes, I do.

TREHERNE. Lady Mary, I stake my word that Crichton is incapable of acting dishonourably.

LADY MARY. I know that; I know it as well as you. Don't you see that that is what makes him so dangerous?

TREHERNE. By Jove, I—I believe I catch your meaning.

CATHERINE. He is coming back.

LORD LOAM [*who has always known himself to be a man of ideas*]. Let us all go into the hut, just to show him at once that it is our hut.

LADY MARY [*as they go*]. Father, I implore you, assert yourself now and for ever

LORD LOAM. I will

LADY MARY. And, please, don't ask him how you are to do it.

[*CRICHTON returns with sticks to mend the fire.*]

LORD LOAM [*loftily, from the door of the hut*] Have you carried out my instructions, Crichton?

CRICHTON [*deferentially*]. Yes, my lord

[*ERNEST appears, mopping his hair, which has become very wet since we last saw him. He is not bearing malice, he is too busy drying, but AGATHA is specially his champion*]

AGATHA. It's infamous, infamous.

LORD LOAM [*strongly*]. My orders, Agatha.

LADY MARY. Now, father, please

LORD LOAM [*striking an attitude*]. Be-

fore I give you any further orders, Crichton—

CRICHTON. Yes, my lord

LORD LOAM [*delighted*]. Pooh! It's all right.

LADY MARY. No. Please go on.

LORD LOAM. Well, well. This question of leadership; what do you think now, Crichton?

CRICHTON. My Lord, I feel it is a matter with which I have nothing to do.

LORD LOAM. Excellent. Ha, Mary? That settles it, I think.

LADY MARY. It seems to, but—I'm not sure.

CRICHTON. It will settle itself naturally, my lord, without any interference from us.

[*This reference to Nature gives general dissatisfaction*]

LADY MARY. Father.

LORD LOAM [*a little severely*]. It settled itself long ago, Crichton, when I was born a peer, and you, for instance, were born a servant.

CRICHTON [*acquiescing*]. Yes, my lord, that was how it all came about quite naturally in England. We had nothing to do with it there, and we shall have as little to do with it here.

TREHERNE [*relieved*]. That's all right

LADY MARY [*determined to clinch the matter*]. One moment. In short, Crichton, his lordship will continue to be our natural head.

CRICHTON. I dare say, my lady, I dare say.

CATHERINE. But you must know

CRICHTON. Asking your pardon, my lady, one can't be sure—on an island.

[*They look at each other uneasily*]

LORD LOAM [*warningly*]. Crichton, I don't like this.

CRICHTON [*harassed*]. The more I think of it, your lordship, the more uneasy I become myself. When I heard, my lord, that you had left that hairpin behind—

[*He is pained*]

LORD LOAM [*feebly*]. One hairpin among so many would only have caused dissension

CRICHTON [*very sorry to have to contradict him*]. Not so, my lord. From that hairpin we could have made a needle, with that needle we could, out of skins, have sewn trousers—of which your lordship is in need; indeed, we are all in need of them.

LADY MARY [*suddenly self-conscious*]. All?

CRICHTON. On an island, my lady.

LADY MARY. Father.

CRICHTON [*really more distressed by the prospect than she*]. My lady, if Nature does not think them necessary, you may be sure she will not ask you to wear them [*Shaking his head*] But among all this undergrowth—

LADY MARY Now you see this man in his true colors.

LORD LOAM [*violently*]. Crichton, you will either this moment say, "Down with Nature," or—

CRICHTON [*scandalized*]. My lord!

LORD LOAM [*loftily*]. Then this is my last word to you, take a month's notice

[*If the hut had a door he would now shut it to indicate that the interview is closed*]

CRICHTON [*in great distress*]. Your lord, h.p., the disgrace—

LORD LOAM [*swelling*]. Not another word you may go.

LADY MARY [*adamant*]. And don't come to me, Crichton, for a character.

ERNEST [*whose immersion has cleared his brain*]. Aren't you all forgetting that this is an island?

[*This brings them to earth with a bump*

LORD LOAM looks to his eldest daughter for the fitting response]

LADY MARY [*equal to the occasion*].

It makes only this difference—that you may go at once, Crichton, to some other part of the island.

[*The faithful servant has been true to his superiors ever since he was created, and never more true than at this moment; but his fidelity is founded on trust in Nature, and to be untrue to it would be to be untrue to them. He lets the wood he has been gathering slip to the ground, and bows his sorrowful head. He turns to obey. Then affection for these great ones wells up in him.*]

CRICHTON. My lady, let me work for you.

LADY MARY. Go.

CRICHTON. You need me so sorely; I can't desert you; I won't.

LADY MARY [*in alarm, lest the others may yield*]. Then, father, there is but one alternative, we must leave him.

[*LORD LOAM is looking yearningly at CRICHTON.*]

TREHERNE It seems a pity.

CATHERINE [*forlornly*]. You will work for us?

TREHERNE. Most willingly. But I must warn you all that, so far, Crichton has done nine-tenths of the scoring.

LADY MARY. The question is, are we to leave this man?

LORD LOAM [*wrapping himself in his dignity*]. Come, my dears

CRICHTON My lord!

LORD LOAM. Treherne—Ernest—get our things.

ERNEST We don't have any, uncle. They all belong to Crichton

TREHERNE. Everything we have he brought from the wreck—he went back to it before it sank. He risked his life.

CRICHTON My lord, anything you would care to take is yours

LADY MARY [*quickly*]. Nothing.

ERNEST Rot! If I could have your socks, Crichton—

LADY MARY. Come, father; we are ready

[*Followed by the others, she and LORD LOAM pick their way up the rocks. In their indignation they scarcely notice that daylight is coming to a sudden end*]

CRICHTON My lord, I implore you—I am not desirous of being head. Do you have a try at it, my lord?

LORD LOAM [*outraged*]. A try at it!

CRICHTON [*eagerly*]. It may be that you will prove to be the best man.

LORD LOAM. May be! My children, come

[*They disappear proudly in single file*]

TREHERNE. Crichton, I'm sorry; but of course I must go with them.

CRICHTON Certainly, sir. [*He calls to TWEENY, and she comes from behind the hut, where she has been watching breathlessly*] Will you be so kind, sir, as to take her to the others?

TREHERNE. Assuredly.

TWEENY But what do it all mean?

CRICHTON Does, Tweeny, does. [*He passes her up the rocks to TREHERNE*] We shall meet again soon, Tweeny. Good night, sir.

TREHERNE. Good night. I dare say they are not far away.

CRICHTON [*thoughtfully*]. They went westward, sir, and the wind is blowing in that direction. That may mean, sir, that Nature is already taking the matter into her own hands. They are all hungry, sir, and the pot has come a-boil. [*He takes off the lid.*] The smell will be borne westward. That pot is full of Nature, Mr. Treherne. Good night, sir.

TREHERNE. Good night.

[*He mounts the rocks with TWEENY, and they are heard for a little time after their figures are swallowed up in the fast growing darkness. CRICHTON stands motionless, the lid in his hand,*

though he has forgotten it, and his reason for taking it off the pot. He is deeply stirred, but presently is ashamed of his dejection, for it is as if he had doubted his principles. Bravely true to his faith that Nature will decide now as ever before, he proceeds manfully with his preparations for the night. He lights a ship's lantern, one of several treasures he has brought ashore, and is filling his pipe with crumbs of tobacco from various pockets, when the stealthy movements of some animal in the grass startles him. With the lantern in one hand and the cutlass in the other, he searches the ground around the hut. He returns, lights his pipe, and sits down by the fire, which casts weird moving shadows. There is a red gleam on his face; in the darkness he is a strong and perhaps rather sinister figure. In the great stillness that has fallen over the land, the wash of the surf seems to have increased in volume. The sound is indescribably mournful. Except where the fire is, desolation has fallen on the island like a pall.

Once or twice, as Nature dictates, CRICHTON leans forward to stir the pot, and the smell is borne westward. He then resumes his silent vigil.

Shadows other than those cast by the fire begin to descend the rocks. They are the adventurers returning. One by one they steal nearer to the pot until they are squatted around it, with their hands out to the blaze. LADY MARY only is absent. Presently she comes within sight of the others, then stands against a tree with her teeth clenched. One wonders, perhaps, what Nature is to make of her.]

END OF ACT II

ACT III

The scene is the hall of their island home two years later. This sturdy log-house is no mere extension of the hut we have seen in process of erection, but has been built a mile or less to the west of it, on higher ground and near a stream. When the master chose this site, the others thought that all he expected from the stream was a sufficiency of drinking water. They know better now every time they go down to the mill or turn on the electric light.

This hall is the living-room of the house, and walls and roof are of stout logs. Across the joists supporting the roof are laid many home-made implements, such as spades, saws, fishing-rods, and from hooks in the joists are suspended cured foods, of which hams are specially in evidence. Deep recesses half way up the walls contain various provender in barrels and sacks. There are some skins, trophies of the chase, on the floor, which is otherwise bare. The chairs and tables are in some cases hewn out of solid wood, and in others the result of rough but efficient carpentering. Various pieces of wreckage from the yacht have been turned to novel uses; thus the steering wheel now hangs from the centre of the roof, with electric lights attached to it encased in bladders. A lifebuoy has become the back of a chair. Two barrels have been halved and turn coyly from each other as a settee.

The farther end of the room is more strictly the kitchen, and is a great recess, which can be shut off from the hall by folding doors. There is a large open fire in it. The chimney is half of one of the boats of the yacht. On the walls of the kitchen proper are many plate-racks, containing shells; there are rows of these of one size and shape, which mark them off as dinner plates or bowls; others are as obviously tureens. They are arranged primly as in a well-conducted kitchen; indeed, neatness and cleanliness are the note struck everywhere, yet the effect of the whole is romantic and barbaric.

The outer door into this hall is a little peculiar on an island. It is covered with skins and is in four leaves, like the swing doors of fashionable restaurants, which allow you to enter without allowing the hot air to escape. During the winter season our castaways have found the contrivance useful, but CRICHTON'S brain was perhaps a little lordly when he conceived it. Another door leads by a passage to the sleeping-rooms of the house, which are all on the ground-floor, and to CRICHTON'S work-room, where he is at this moment, and whither we should like to follow him, but in a play we may not, as it is out of sight. There is a large window space without a window, which, however, can be shuttered, and through this we have a view of cattle-

sheds, fowl-pens, and a field of grain. It is a fine summer evening

TWEENEY is sitting there, very busy plucking the feathers off a bird and dropping them on a sheet placed for that purpose on the floor. She is trilling to herself in the lightness of her heart. We may remember that TWEENEY, alone among the women, had dressed wisely for an island when they fled the yacht, and her going-away gown still adheres to her, though in fragments. A score of pieces have been added here and there as necessity compelled, and these have been patched and repatched in incongruous colors; but, when all is said and done, it can still be maintained that TWEENEY wears a skirt. She is deservedly proud of her skirt, and sometimes lends it on important occasions when approached in the proper spirit.

Some one outside has been whistling to TWEENEY; the guarded whistle which, on a less savage island, is sometimes assumed to be an indication to cook that the constable is willing, if the coast be clear. TWEENEY, however, is engrossed, or perhaps she is not in the mood for a follower, so he climbs in at the window undaunted, to take her willy-nilly. He is a jolly-looking laboring man, who answers to the name of DADDY, and— But though that may be his island name, we recognize him at once. He is LORD LOAM, settled down to the new conditions, and enjoying life heartily as handyman about the happy home. He is comfortably attired in skins. He is still stout, but all the flabbiness has dropped from him; gone, too, is his pomposity; his eye is clear, brown his skin; he could leap a gate.

In his hands he carries an island-made concertina, and such is the exuberance of his spirits that, as he lights on the floor, he bursts into music and song, something about his being a chickety chickety chick chick, and will TWEENEY please to tell him whose chickety chick is she. Retribution follows sharp. We hear a whir, as if from insufficiently oiled machinery, and over the passage door appears a placard showing the one word "Silence." His lordship stops, and steals to TWEENEY on his tiptoes.

LORD LOAM. I thought the Gov. was out.

TWEENEY. Well, you see he ain't. And if he were to catch you here idling—

[LORD LOAM pales. He lays aside his musical instrument and hurriedly dons an apron. TWEENEY gives him the bird to pluck, and busies herself laying the table for dinner.]

LORD LOAM [softly]. What is he doing now?

TWEENEY. I think he's working out that plan for laying on hot and cold.

LORD LOAM [proud of his master]. And he'll manage it too. The man who could build a blacksmith's forge without tools—

TWEENEY [not less proud]. He made the tools.

LORD LOAM. Out of half a dozen rusty nails. The sawmill, Tweeny; the speaking-tube; the electric lighting; and look at the use he had made of the bits of the yacht that were washed ashore. And all in two years. He's a master. I'm proud to pluck for

[He chirps happily at his work, and she regards him curiously.]

TWEENEY. Daddy, you're of little use, but you're a bright, cheerful creature to have about the house. [He beams at this commendation.] Do you ever think of old times now? We was a bit different.

LORD LOAM [pausing]. Circumstances alter cases.

[He resumes his plucking contentedly.]

TWEENEY. But, Daddy, if the chance was to come of getting back?

LORD LOAM. I have given up bothering about it.

TWEENEY. You bothered that day long ago when we saw a ship passing the island. How we all ran like crazy folk into the water, Daddy, and screamed and held out our arms. [They are both a little agitated.] But it sailed away, and we've never seen another.

LORD LOAM. If we had had the electrical contrivance we have now we could have attracted that ship's notice. [Their eyes rest on a mysterious apparatus that fills a corner of the hall.] A touch on that lever, Tweeny, and in a few moments bonfires would be blazing all round the shore.

TWEENEY [backing from the lever as if it might spring at her]. It's the most wonderful thing he has done.

LORD LOAM [in a reverie]. And then—England—home!

TWEENEY [also seeing visions]. London of a Saturday night!

LORD LOAM. My lords, in rising once more to address this historic chamber—

TWEENY There was a little ham and beef shop off the Edgware Road —

[*The visions fade; they return to the practical*]

LORD LOAM Tweeny, do you think I could have an egg to my tea?

[*At this moment a wiry, athletic figure in skins darkens the window. He is carrying two pails, which are suspended from a pole on his shoulder, and he is ERNEST. We should say that he is ERNEST completely changed if we were of those who hold that people change. As he enters by the window he has heard LORD LOAM'S appeal, and is perhaps justifiably indignant.*]

ERNEST What is that about an egg? Why should you have an egg?

LORD LOAM [*with hauteur*]. That is my affair, sir. [*With a Parthian shot as he withdraws stiffly from the room*] The Gov. has never put my head in a bucket

ERNEST [*coming to rest on one of his buckets, and speaking with excusable pride. To TWEENY*]. Nor mine for nearly three months It was only last week, Tweeny, that he said to me, "Ernest, the water cure has worked marvels in you, and I question whether I shall require to dip you any more" [*Complacently*] Of course that sort of thing encourages a fellow

TWEENY [*who has now arranged the dinner table to her satisfaction*] I will say, Erny, I never seen a young chap more improved

ERNEST [*gratified*]. Thank you, Tweeny, that's very precious to me [*She retires to the fire to work the great bellows with her foot, and ERNEST turns to TREHERNE, who has come in looking more like a cow-boy than a clergyman He has a small box in his hand which he tries to conceal*] What have you got there, John?

TREHERNE Don't tell anybody. It is a little present for the Gov; a set of razors. One for each day in the week

ERNEST [*opening the box and examining its contents*] Shells! He'll like that. He likes sets of things.

TREHERNE [*in a guarded voice*]. Have you noticed that?

ERNEST. Rather

TREHERNE He's becoming a bit magnificent in his ideas

ERNEST [*huskily*] John, it sometimes gives me the creeps

TREHERNE [*making sure that TWEENY is out of hearing*] What do you think of that brilliant robe he got the girls to make for him?

ERNEST [*uncomfortably*]. I think he looks too regal in it

TREHERNE Regal! I sometimes fancy that that's why he's so fond of wearing it. [*Practically*] Well, I must take these down to the grindstone and put an edge on them.

ERNEST [*button-holing him*]. I say, John, I want a word with you.

TREHERNE. Well?

ERNEST [*become suddenly diffident*]. Dash it all, you know, you're a clergyman.

TREHERNE. One of the best things the Gov has done is to insist that none of you forget it

ERNEST [*taking his courage in his hands*] Then—would you, John?

TREHERNE. What?

ERNEST [*twistfully*]. Officiate at a marriage ceremony, John?

TREHERNE [*slowly*]. Now, that's really odd

ERNEST. Odd? Seems to me it's natural. And whatever is natural, John, is right.

TREHERNE. I mean that same question has been put to me today already

ERNEST [*eagerly*]. By one of the women?

TREHERNE Oh, no; they all put it to me long ago. This was by the Gov. himself

ERNEST. By Jove! [*Admiringly*]. I say, John, what an observant beggar he is

TREHERNE. Ah! You fancy he was thinking of you?

ERNEST. I do not hesitate to affirm, John, that he has seen the love-light in my eyes. You answered —

TREHERNE. I said Yes, I thought it would be my duty to officiate if called upon.

ERNEST. You're a brick

TREHERNE [*still pondering*]. But I wonder whether he was thinking of you.

ERNEST. Make your mind easy about that.

TREHERNE. Well, my best wishes Agatha is a very fine girl.

ERNEST. Agatha? What made you think it was Agatha?

TREHERNE. Man alive, you told me all about it soon after we were wrecked.

ERNEST. Pooh! Agatha's all very well in her way, John, but I'm flying after bigger game.

TREHERNE Ernest, which is it?

ERNEST. Tweeny, of course.

TREHERNE. Tweeny? [*Reprovingly*] Ernest, I hope her cooking has nothing to do with this

ERNEST [*with dignity*]. Her cooking has very little to do with it

TREHERNE. But does she return your affection?

ERNEST [*simply*] Yes, John, I believe I may say so. I am unworthy of her, but I think I have touched her heart

TREHERNE [*with a sigh*] Some people seem to have all the luck. As you know, Catherine won't look at me.

ERNEST I'm sorry, John

TREHERNE. It's my deserts; I'm a second eleven sort of chap. Well, my heartiest good wishes, Ernest.

ERNEST Thank you, John. How's the little black pig today?

TREHERNE [*departing*] He has begun to eat again.

[*After a moment's reflection ERNEST calls to TWEENY.*]

ERNEST. Are you very busy, Tweeny?

TWEENY [*coming to him good-naturedly*]. There's always work to do, but if you want me, Ernest—

ERNEST There's something I should like to say to you if you could spare me a moment

TWEENY. Willingly. What is it?

ERNEST. What an ass I used to be, Tweeny.

TWEENY [*tolerantly*] Oh, let bygones be bygones.

ERNEST [*sincerely, and at his very best*] I'm no great shakes even now. But listen to this, Tweeny; I have known many women, but until I knew you I never knew any woman

TWEENY [*to whose uneducated ears this sounds dangerously like an epigram*]. Take care—the bucket

ERNEST [*hurriedly*]. I didn't mean it in that way [*He goes chivalrously on his knees*]. Ah, Tweeny, I don't undervalue the bucket, but what I want to say now is that the sweet refinement of a dear girl has done more for me than any bucket could do.

TWEENY [*with large eyes*] Are you offering to walk out with me, Erny?

ERNEST [*passionately*] More than that. I want to build a little house for you—in the sunny glade down by Porcupine Creek. I want to make chairs for you and tables; and knives and forks, and a side-board for you.

TWEENY [*who is fond of language*]. I like to hear you. [*Eyeing him.*] Would there be any one in the house except myself, Ernest?

ERNEST [*humbly*]. Not often; but just occasionally there would be your adoring husband.

TWEENY [*decisively*]. It won't do, Ernest

ERNEST [*pleading*] It isn't as if I should be much there.

TWEENY. I know, I know; but I don't love you, Ernest. I'm that sorry.

ERNEST [*putting his case clearly*] Twice a week I should be away altogether—at the dam. On the other days you would never see me from breakfast time to supper [*With the self-abnegation of the true lover.*] If you like I'll even go fishing on Sundays

TWEENY It's no use, Erny

ERNEST [*rising manfully*] Thank you, Tweeny; it can't be helped. [*Then he remembers*] Tweeny, we shall be disappointing the Gov.

TWEENY [*with a smug*] What's that?

ERNEST He wanted us to marry.

TWEENY [*blankly*]. You and me? The Gov! [*Her head droops woefully. From without is heard the whistling of a happier spirit, and TWEENY draws herself up fiercely*] That's her, that's the thing what has stole his heart from me. [*A stalwart youth appears at the window, so handsome and tingling with vitality that, glad to depose CRICHTON, we cry thankfully, "The hero at last" But it is not the hero; it is the heroine. Thus splendid boy, clad in skins, is what Nature has done for LADY MARY. She carries bow and arrows and a blow-pipe, and over her shoulder is a fat buck, which she drops with a cry of triumph. Forgetting to enter demurely, she leaps through the window.*] [*Sourly.*] Drat you, Polly, why don't you wipe your feet?

LADY MARY [*good-naturedly*]. Come, Tweeny, be nice to me. It's a splendid buck. [*But TWEENY shakes her off, and retires to the kitchen fire.*]

ERNEST. Where did you get it?

LADY MARY [*gaily*]. I sighted a herd near Penguin's Creek, but had to creep round Silver Lake to get to windward of them. However, they spotted me and then the fun began. There was nothing for it but to try and run them down, so I singled out a fat buck and away we went down the shore of the lake, up the valley of rolling stones; he doubled into Brawling River and took to the water, but I swam after him; the river is only half a mile broad there, but it runs strong. He went spinning down the rapids, down I went in pursuit, he clambered ashore, I clambered ashore; away we tore helter-skelter up the hill and down again. I lost him in the marshes, got on his track again near Bread

Fruit Wood, and brought him down with an arrow in Firefly Grove

TWEENY [*staring at her*]. Aren't you tired?

LADY MARY Tired! It was gorgeous [*She runs up a ladder and deposits her weapons on the joists. She is whistling again*]

TWEENY [*snapping*] I can't abide a woman whistling

LADY MARY [*indifferently*] I like it.

TWEENY [*stamping her foot*] Drop it, Polly, I tell you

LADY MARY [*stung*]. I won't. I'm as good as you are.

[*They are facing each other defiantly.*]

ERNEST [*shocked*] Is this necessary? Think how it would pain him.

[*LADY MARY'S eyes take a new expression. We see them soft for the first time.*]

LADY MARY [*contritely*]. Tweeny, I beg your pardon. If my whistling annoys you, I shall try to cure myself of it [*Instead of calming TWEENY, this floods her face in tears*]. Why, how can that hurt you, Tweeny, dear?

TWEENY. Because I can't make you lose your temper

LADY MARY [*divinely*] Indeed, I often do. Would that I were nicer to everybody.

TWEENY. There you are again. [*Wistfully*] What makes you want to be so nice, Polly?

LADY MARY [*with fervor*]. Only thankfulness, Tweeny. [*She exults.*] It is such fun to be alive.

[*So also seem to think CATHERINE and AGATHA, who bounce in with fishing-rods and creel. They, too, are in manly attire*]

CATHERINE. We've got some ripping fish for the Gov.'s dinner. Are we in time? We ran all the way.

TWEENY [*tartly*]. You'll please to cook them yourself, Kitty, and look sharp about it.

[*She retires to her hearth, where AGATHA follows her*]

AGATHA [*yearning*]. Has the Gov. decided who is to wait upon him to-day?

CATHERINE [*who is cleaning her fish*]. It's my turn.

AGATHA [*hotly*]. I don't see that

TWEENY [*with bitterness*]. It's to be neither of you, Aggy; he wants Polly again.

[*LADY MARY is unable to resist a joyous whistle*]

AGATHA [*jealously*]. Polly, you toad.

[*But they cannot make LADY MARY angry.*]

TWEENY [*storming*]. How dare you look so happy?

LADY MARY [*willing to embrace her*]. I wish, Tweeny, there was anything I could do to make you happy also

TWEENY. Me! Oh, I'm happy. [*She remembers ERNEST, whom it is easy to forget on an island*] I've just had a proposal, I tell you

[*LADY MARY is shaken at last, and her sisters with her.*]

AGATHA A proposal?

CATHERINE [*going white*]. Not—not — [*She dare not say his name.*]

ERNEST [*with singular modesty*] You needn't be alarmed; it's only me

LADY MARY [*relieved*]. Oh, you!

AGATHA [*happy again*]. Ernest, you dear, I got such a shock.

CATHERINE It was only Ernest. [*Showing him her fish in thankfulness.*] They are beautifully fresh; come and help me to cook them.

ERNEST [*with simple dignity*]. Do you mind if I don't cook fish to-night? [*She does not mind in the least. They have all forgotten him. A lark is singing in three hearts*] I think you might all be a little sorry for a chap [*But they are not even sorry, and he addresses AGATHA in these winged words:*] I'm particularly disappointed in you, Aggy; seeing that I was half engaged to you, I think you might have had the good feeling to be a little more hurt.

AGATHA. Oh, bother.

ERNEST [*summing up the situation in so far as it affects himself*]. I shall now go and lie down for a bit.

[*He retires coldly but unregretted.*]

LADY MARY approaches TWEENY with her most insinuating smile.]

LADY MARY. Tweeny, as the Gov. has chosen me to wait on him, please may I have the loan of it again?

[*The reference made with such charming delicacy is evidently to TWEENY'S skirt.*]

TWEENY [*doggedly*]. No, you mayn't.

AGATHA [*supporting TWEENY*]. Don't you give it to her.

LADY MARY [*still trying sweet persuasion*]. You know quite well that he prefers to be waited on in a skirt.

TWEENY. I don't care. Get one for yourself.

LADY MARY. It is the only one on the island.

TWEENY. And it's mine.

LADY MARY [*An aristocrat after all*].
Tweeny, give me that skirt directly.

CATHERINE. Don't.

TWEENY. I won't

LADY MARY [*clearing for action*] I shall make you.

TWEENY I should like to see you try.

[*An unseemly fracas appears to be inevitable, but something happens. The whir is again heard, and the notice displayed "Dogs delight to bark and bite."*

[*Its effect is instantaneous and cheering. The ladies look at each other guiltily and immediately proceed on tiptoe to their duties. These are all concerned with the master's dinner.*

CATHERINE attends to his fish. AGATHA fills a quaint toast-rack and brings the menu, which is written on a shell. LADY MARY twists a wreath of green leaves around her head, and places a flower beside the master's plate. TWEENY signs that all is ready, and she and the younger sisters retire into the kitchen, drawing the screen that separates it from the rest of the room. LADY MARY beats a tom-tom, which is the dinner bell. She then gently works a punkah, which we have not hitherto observed, and stands at attention. No doubt she is in hopes that the Gov will enter into conversation with her, but she is too good a parlor-maid to let her hopes appear in her face. We may watch her manner with complete approval. There is not one of us who would not give her £20 a year.

The master comes in quietly, a book in his hand, still the only book on the island, for he has not thought it worth while to build a printing-press. His dress is not noticeably different from that of the others, the skins are similar, but perhaps these are a trifle more carefully cut or he carries them better. One sees somehow that he has changed for his evening meal. There is an odd suggestion of a dinner jacket about his doeskin coat. It is, perhaps, too grave a face for a man of thirty-two, as if he were over much immersed in affairs, yet there is a sunny smile left to lighten it at times and bring back its youth; perhaps too intellectual a face to pass as strictly handsome, not sufficiently suggestive of oats. His tall figure is very straight, slight rather than thick-set, but nobly muscular. His big hands, firm and hard with labor though they be, are finely shaped—note the fingers

so much more tapered, the nails better tended than those of his domestics; they are one of many indications that he is of a superior breed. Such signs, as has often been pointed out, are infallible. A romantic figure, too. One can easily see why the women-folks of this strong man's house both adore and fear him.

He does not seem to notice who is waiting on him tonight, but inclines his head slightly to whoever it is, as she takes her place at the back of his chair. LADY MARY respectfully places the menu-shell before him, and he glances at it.

CRICHTON. Clear, please.

[LADY MARY knocks on the screen, and a serving hutch in it opens, through which TWEENY offers two soup plates. LADY MARY selects the clear and the aperture is closed. She works the punkah while the master partakes of his soup.]

CRICHTON [*who always gives praise where it is due*] An excellent soup, Polly, but still a trifle too rich.

LADY MARY. Thank you.

[*The next course is the fish, and while it is being passed through the hutch we have a glimpse of three jealous women. LADY MARY'S movements are so deft and noiseless that any observant spectator can see that she was born to wait at table.*]

CRICHTON [*unbending as he eats*]. Polly, you are a very smart girl.

LADY MARY [*brindling, but naturally gratified*] La!

CRICHTON [*smiling*]. And I'm not the first you've heard it from, I'll swear.

LADY MARY [*wrizzling*]. Oh Gov!

CRICHTON. Got any followers on the island, Polly?

LADY MARY [*tossing her head*] Certainly not.

CRICHTON. I thought that perhaps John or Ernest—

LADY MARY [*tilting her nose*]. I don't say that it's for want of asking.

CRICHTON [*emphatically*]. I'm sure it isn't. [*Perhaps he thinks he has gone too far.*] You may clear.

[*Flushed with pleasure, she puts before him a bird and vegetables, sees that his beaker is filled with wine, and returns to the punkah. She would love to continue their conversation, but it is for him to decide. For a time he seems to have forgotten her.*]

CRICHTON. Did you lose any arrows to-day?

LADY MARY. Only one in Firefly Grove

CRICHTON. You were as far as that? How did you get across the Black Gorge?

LADY MARY I went across on the rope

CRICHTON. Hand over hand?

LADY MARY [*swelling at the implied praise*] I wasn't in the least dizzy.

CRICHTON [*moved*] You brave girl! [*He sits back in his chair a little agitated.*] But never do that again

LADY MARY [*pouting*] It is such fun, Gov

CRICHTON [*decisively*] I forbid it.

LADY MARY [*the little rebel*]. I shall.

CRICHTON [*surprised*] Polly! [*He signs to her sharply to step forward, but for a moment she holds back petulantly, and even when she does come it is less obediently than like a naughty, sulky child. Nevertheless, with the forbearance that is characteristic of the man, he addresses her with grave gentleness rather than severity*] You must do as I tell you, you know.

LADY MARY [*strangely passionate*] I shan't.

CRICHTON [*smiling at her fury*]. We shall see. Frown at me, Polly, there you do it at once. Clench your little fists, stamp your feet, bite your ribbons— [*A student of women, or at least of this woman, he knows that she is about to do these things, and thus she seems to do them to order.*] LADY MARY screws up her face like a baby and cries *He is immediately kind.*] You child of nature, was it cruel of me to wish to save you from harm?

LADY MARY [*drying her eyes*] I'm an ungracious wretch. Oh Gov., I don't try half hard enough to please you. I'm even wearing— [*she looks down sadly*]— when I know you prefer it

CRICHTON [*thoughtfully*]. I admit I do prefer it. Perhaps I am a little old-fashioned in these matters. [*Her tears again threaten.*] Ah, don't, Polly; that's nothing.

LADY MARY. If I could only please you, Gov.

CRICHTON [*slowly*]. You do please me, child, very much— [*he half rises*]— very much indeed. [*If he meant to say more he checks himself. He looks at his plate.*] No more, thank you

[*The simple island meal is ended, save for the walnuts and the wine, and CRICHTON is too busy a man to linger long over them. But he is a*

stickler for etiquette, and the table is cleared charmingly, though with dispatch, before they are placed before him.] LADY MARY is an artist with the crumb-brush, and there are few arts more delightful to watch. Dusk has come sharply, and she turns on the electric light. It awakens CRICHTON from a reverie in which he has been regarding her.]

CRICHTON Polly, there is only one thing about you that I don't quite like. [*She looks up, making a moue, if that can be said of one who so well knows her place.*] He explains] That action of the hands.

LADY MARY What do I do?

CRICHTON. So—like one washing them. I have noticed that the others tend to do it also. It seems odd.

LADY MARY [*archly*]. Oh Gov., have you forgotten?

CRICHTON. What?

LADY MARY. That once upon a time a certain other person did that.

CRICHTON [*groping*]. You mean myself? [*She nods, and he shudders*] Horrible!

LADY MARY [*afraid she has hurt him*]. You haven't for a very long time. Perhaps it is natural to servants.

CRICHTON That must be it [*He rises.*] Polly!

[*She looks up expectantly, but he only sighs and turns away.*]

LADY MARY [*genily*]. You sighed, Gov.

CRICHTON Did I? I was thinking. [*He paces the room and then turns to her agitatedly, yet with control over his agitation. There is some mournfulness in his voice*] I have always tried to do the right thing on this island. Above all, Polly, I want to do the right thing by you

LADY MARY [*with shunning eyes*] How we all trust you. That is your reward, Gov.

CRICHTON [*who is having a fight with himself*]. And now I want a greater reward. Is it fair to you? Am I playing the game? Bill Crichton would always like to play the game. If we were in England—

[*He pauses so long that she breaks in softly.*]

LADY MARY. We know now that we shall never see England again.

CRICHTON. I am thinking of two people whom neither of us has seen for a long time—Lady Mary Lasenby, and one Crichton, a butler.

[*He says the last word bravely, a word he once loved, though it is the most horrible of all words to him now.*]

LADY MARY. That cold, haughty, insolent girl. Gov., look around you and forget them both.

CRICHTON. I had nigh forgotten them. He has had a chance, Polly,—that butler—in these two years of becoming a man, and he has tried to take it. There have been many failures, but there has been some success, and with it I have let the past drop off me, and turned my back on it. That butler seems a far-away figure to me now, and not myself. I hail him, but we scarcely know each other. If I am to bring him back it can only be done by force, for in my soul he is abhorrent to me. But if I thought it best for you I'd haul him back; I swear as an honest man, I would bring him back with all his obsequious ways and deferential airs, and let you see the man you call your Gov. melt forever into him who was your servant.

LADY MARY [shivering]. You hurt me. You say these things, but you say them like a king. To me it is the past that was not real.

CRICHTON [*too grandly*]. A king! I sometimes feel — [*For a moment the yellow light gleams in his green eyes. We remember suddenly what TREHERNE and ERNEST said about his regal look. He checks himself.*] I say it harshly, it is so hard to say, and all the time there is another voice within me crying —

[*He stops*]

LADY MARY [*trembling but not afraid*]. If it is the voice of Nature —

CRICHTON [*strongly*]. I know it to be the voice of Nature.

LADY MARY [*in a whisper*]. Then, if you want to say it very much, Gov., please say it to Polly Lasenby.

CRICHTON [*again in the grip of an idea*]. A king! Polly, some people hold that the soul but leaves one human tenement for another, and so lives on through all the ages. I have occasionally thought of late that, in some past existence, I may have been a king. It has all come to me so naturally, not as if I had had to work it out, but—as—if—I—remembered.

“Or ever the knightly years were gone,
With the old world to the grave,
I was a king in Babylon,
And you were a Christian slave”

It may have been; you hear me, it may have been.

LADY MARY [*who is as one fascinated*]. It may have been.

CRICHTON. I am lord over all. They

are but hewers of wood and drawers of water for me. These shores are mine. Why should I hesitate; I have no longer any doubt. I do believe I am doing the right thing. Dear Polly, I have grown to love you; are you afraid to mate with me? [*She rocks her arms; no words will come from her*]

“I was a king in Babylon,

And you were a Christian slave.”

LADY MARY [*bewitched*]. You are the most wonderful man I have ever known, and I am not afraid. [*He takes her to him reverently. Presently he is seated, and she is at his feet looking up adoringly in his face. As the tension relaxes, she speaks with a smile.*] I want you to tell me—every woman likes to know—when was the first time you thought me nicer than the others?

CRICHTON [*who like all big men is simple*]. I think a year ago. We were chasing goats on the Big Slopes, and you out-distanced us all; you were the first of our party to run a goat down; I was proud of you that day.

LADY MARY [*blushing with pleasure*]. Oh Gov., I only did it to please you. Everything I have done has been out of the desire to please you. [*Suddenly anxious.*] If I thought that in taking a wife from among us you were imperilling your dignity —

CRICHTON [*perhaps a little masterful*]. Have no fear of that, dear. I have thought it all out. The wife, Polly, always takes the same position as the husband.

LADY MARY. But I am so unworthy. It was sufficient to me that I should be allowed to wait on you at that table.

CRICHTON. You shall wait on me no longer. At whatever table I sit, Polly, you shall soon sit there, also. [*Boyishly.*] Come, let us try what it will be like.

LADY MARY. As your servant at your feet.

CRICHTON. No, as my consort by my side.

[*They are sitting thus when the hatch is again opened and coffee offered. But LADY MARY is no longer there to receive it. Her sisters peep through in consternation. In vain they rattle the cup and saucer. AGATHA brings the coffee to CRICHTON*]

CRICHTON [*forgetting for the moment that it is not a month hence*]. Help your mistress first, girl. [*Three women are bereft of speech, but he does not notice it. He addresses CATHERINE vaguely.*] Are you a good girl, Kitty?

CATHERINE [*when she finds her tongue*] I try to be, Gov.

CRICHTON [*still more vaguely*] That's right.

[*He takes command of himself again, and signs to them to sit down ERNEST comes in cheerily, but finding CRICHTON here is suddenly weak He subsides on a chair, wondering what has happened.*]

CRICHTON [*surveying him*]. Ernest. [*ERNEST rises*] You are becoming a little slovenly in your dress, Ernest, I don't like it

ERNEST [*respectfully*] Thank you. [*ERNEST sits again DADDY and TREHERNE arrive*]

CRICHTON Daddy, I want you

LORD LOAM [*with a sinking*]. Is it because I forgot to clean out the dam?

CRICHTON [*encouragingly*] No, no. [*He pours some wine into a goblet.*] A glass of wine with you, Daddy

LORD LOAM [*hastily*]. Your health, Gov.

[*He is about to drink, but the master checks him*]

CRICHTON. And hers Daddy, this lady has done me the honor to promise to be my wife.

LORD LOAM [*astounded*] Polly!

CRICHTON [*a little perturbed*] I ought first to have asked your consent I deeply regret—but Nature; may I hope I have your approval?

LORD LOAM. May you, Gov.? [*De-lighted*] Rather! Polly!

[*He puts his proud arms around her*]

TREHERNE We all congratulate you, Gov, most heartily

ERNEST. Long life to you both, sir

[*There is much shaking of hands, all of which is sincere*]

TREHERNE When will it be, Gov.?

CRICHTON [*after turning to LADY MARY, who whispers to him*]. As soon as the bridal skirt can be prepared [*His manner has been most indulgent, and without the slightest sign of patronage. But he knows it is best for all that he should keep his place, and that his presence hampers them.*] My friends, I thank you for your good wishes, I thank you all. And now, perhaps you would like me to leave you to yourselves. Be joyous. Let there be song and dance tonight. Polly, I shall take my coffee in the Parlor—you understand.

[*He retires with pleasant dignity. Immediately there is a rush of two girls at LADY MARY.*]

LADY MARY. Oh, oh! Father, they are pinching me.

LORD LOAM [*taking her under his protection*] Agatha, Catherine, never presume to pinch your sister again. On the other hand, she may pinch you henceforth as much as ever she chooses

[*In the meantime TWEENY is weeping softly, and the two are not above using her as a weapon*]

CATHERINE. Poor Tweeny. It's a shame.

AGATHA After he had almost promised you

TWEENY [*loyally turning on them*]. No, he never did. He was always honorable as could be 'Twas me as was too vulgar. Don't you dare say a word agn that man.

ERNEST [*to LORD LOAM*]. You'll get a lot of tit-bits out of this, Daddy.

LORD LOAM. That's what I was thinking.

ERNEST [*plunged in thought*]. I dare say I shall have to clean out the dam now.

LORD LOAM [*heartlessly*] I dare say.

[*His gay old heart makes him again proclaim that he is a chickety chick. He seizes the concertina.*]

TREHERNE [*eagerly*]. That's the proper spirit.

[*He puts his arm round CATHERINE, and in another moment they are all dancing to Daddy's music Never were people happier on an island. A moment's pause is presently created by the return of CRICHTON wearing the wonderful robe of which we have already had dark mention. Never has he looked more regal, never perhaps felt so regal We need not grudge him the one foible of his rule, for it is all coming to an end*]

CRICHTON [*graciously, seeing them hesitate*]. No, no, I am delighted to see you all so happy Go on.

TREHERNE We don't like to before you, Gov.

CRICHTON [*his last order*]. It is my wish.

[*The merrymaking is resumed, and soon CRICHTON himself joins in the dance. It is when the fun is at its fastest and most furious that all stop abruptly as if turned to stone. They have heard the boom of a gun Presently they are alive again. ERNEST leaps to the window.*]

TREHERNE [*huskily*]. It was a ship's gun. [*They turn to CRICHTON for confirmation; even in that hour they turn to CRICHTON*] Gov.?

CRICHTON. Yes
[In another moment LADY MARY and LORD LOAM are alone.]

LADY MARY *[seeing that her father is unconcerned]*. Father, you heard.

LORD LOAM *[placidly]* Yes, my child.

LADY MARY *[alarmed by his unnatural calmness]*. But it was a gun, father.

LORD LOAM *[looking an old man now, and shuddering a little]*. Yes—a gun—I have often heard it. It's only a dream, you know; why don't we go on dancing?

[She takes his hands, which have gone cold.]

LADY MARY. Father. Don't you see, they have all rushed down to the beach? Come.

LORD LOAM. Rushed down to the beach; yes, always that—I often dream it.

LADY MARY. Come, father, come.

LORD LOAM. Only a dream, my poor girl.

[CRICHTON returns. He is pale but firm.]

CRICHTON. We can see lights within a mile of the shore—a great ship.

LORD LOAM. A ship—always a ship

LADY MARY. Father, this is no dream

LORD LOAM *[looking timidly at CRICHTON]* It's a dream, isn't it? There's no ship?

CRICHTON *[soothing him with a touch]*. You are awake, Daddy, and there is a ship.

LORD LOAM *[clutching him]* You are not deceiving me?

CRICHTON. It is the truth.

LORD LOAM *[reeling]* True?—a ship—at last!

[He goes after the others pitifully]

CRICHTON *[quietly]*. There is a small boat between it and the island; they must have sent it ashore for water

LADY MARY. Coming in?

CRICHTON. No. That gun must have been a signal to recall it. It is going back. They can't hear our cries

LADY MARY *[pressing her temples]*. Going away. So near—so near. *[Almost to herself]* I think I'm glad.

CRICHTON *[cheerily]*. Have no fear. I shall bring them back.

[He goes towards the table on which is the electrical apparatus]

LADY MARY *[standing on guard as it were between him and the table]*. What are you going to do?

CRICHTON. To fire the beacons.

LADY MARY. Stop! *[She faces him]* Don't you see what it means?

CRICHTON *[firmly]*. It means that our

life on the island has come to a natural end.

LADY MARY *[huskily]* Gov, let the ship go.

CRICHTON. The old man—you saw what it means to him

LADY MARY But I am afraid

CRICHTON *[adoringly]*. Dear Polly.

LADY MARY. Gov, let the ship go.

CRICHTON *[she clings to him, but though it is his death sentence he loosens her hold]*. Bill Crichton has got to play the game.

[He pulls the levers. Soon through the window one of the beacons is seen flaring red. There is a long pause. Shouting is heard ERNEST is the first to arrive]

ERNEST. Polly, Gov., the boat has turned back. They are English sailors; they have landed! We are rescued. I tell you, rescued!

LADY MARY *[wanly]*. Is it anything to make so great a to-do about?

ERNEST *[staring]*. Eh?

LADY MARY Have we not been happy here?

ERNEST. Happy? lord, yes.

LADY MARY *[catching hold of his sleeve]* Ernest, we must never forget all that the Gov has done for us.

ERNEST *[stoutly]*. Forget it? The man who could forget it would be a selfish wretch and a — But I say, this makes a difference!

LADY MARY *[quickly]*. No, it doesn't.

ERNEST *[his mind tottering]* A mighty difference!

[The others come running in, some weeping with joy, others boisterous. We see blue-jackets gazing through the window at the curious scene LORD LOAM comes accompanied by a naval officer, whom he is continually shaking by the hand]

LORD LOAM And here, sir, is our little home. Let me thank you again in the names of all of us, again and again.

OFFICER Very proud, my lord It is indeed an honor to have been able to assist so distinguished a gentleman as Lord Loam.

LORD LOAM. A glorious, glorious day. I shall show you our other room. Come, my pets. Come, Crichton.

[He has not meant to be cruel. He does not know he has said it. It is the old life that has come back to him. They all go. All leave CRICHTON except LADY MARY]

LADY MARY *[stretching out her arms*

to him] Dear Gov, I will never give you up

[*There is a salt smile on his face as he shakes his head to her. He lets the cloak slip to the ground. She will not take thus for an answer; again her arms go out to him. Then comes the great renunciation. By an effort of will he ceases to be an erect figure; he has the humble bearing of a servant. His hands come together as if he were washing them.*]

CRICHTON [*it is the speech of his life*]. My lady

[*She goes away. There is none to salute him now, unless we do it*]

END OF ACT III

ACT IV

Some months have elapsed, and we have again the honor of waiting upon LORD LOAM in his London home. It is the room of the first act, but with a new scheme of decoration, for on the walls are exhibited many interesting trophies from the island, such as skins, stuffed birds, and weapons of the chase, labelled "Shot by LORD LOAM," "HON ERNEST WOOLLEY'S Blow-pipe," etc. There are also two large glass cases containing other odds and ends, including, curiously enough, the bucket in which ERNEST was first dipped, but there is no label calling attention to the incident

It is not yet time to dress for dinner, and his lordship is on a couch, hastily yet furtively cutting the pages of a new book. With him are his two younger daughters and his nephew, and they also are engaged in literary pursuits; that is to say, the ladies are eagerly but furtively reading the evening papers, of which ERNEST is sitting complacently but furtively on an endless number, and doing them out as called for. Note the frequent use of the word "furtive." It implies that they do not wish to be discovered by their butler, say, at their otherwise delightful task.

AGATHA [*reading aloud, with emphasis on the wrong words*]. "In conclusion, we must heartily congratulate the Hon. Ernest Woolley. This book of his, regarding the adventures of himself and his brave companions on a desert isle, stirs the heart like a trumpet."

[*Evidently the book referred to is the one in LORD LOAM'S hands*]

ERNEST [*handing her a pink paper*]. Here is another

CATHERINE [*reading*]. "From the first to the last of Mr. Woolley's engrossing pages it is evident that he was an ideal man to be wrecked with, and a true hero." [*Large-eyed*] Ernest!

ERNEST [*calmly*]. That's how it strikes them, you know. Here's another one

AGATHA [*reading*]. "There are many kindly references to the two servants who were wrecked with the family, and Mr. Woolley pays the butler a glowing tribute in a footnote"

[*Some one coughs uncomfortably.*]

LORD LOAM [*who has been searching the index for the letter L*]. Excellent, excellent. At the same time I must say, Ernest, that the whole book is about yourself.

ERNEST [*genially*]. As the author—

LORD LOAM. Certainly, certainly. Still, you know, as a peer of the realm— [*with dignity*]—I think, Ernest, you might have given me one of your adventures

ERNEST. I say it was you who taught us how to obtain a fire by rubbing two pieces of stick together.

LORD LOAM [*beaming*]. Do you, do you? I call that very handsome. What page?

[*Here the door opens, and the well-bred CRICHTON enters with the evening papers as subscribed for by the house. Those we have already seen have perhaps been introduced by ERNEST up his waistcoat. Every one except the intruder is immediately self-conscious, and when he withdraws there is a general sigh of relief. They pounce on the new papers. ERNEST evidently gets a shock from one, which he casts contemptuously on the floor.*]

AGATHA [*more fortunate*]. Father, see page 81. "It was a tiger-cat," says Mr. Woolley, "of the largest size. Death stared Lord Loam in the face, but he never flinched"

LORD LOAM [*searching his book eagerly*]. Page 81.

AGATHA. "With presence of mind only equalled by his courage, he fixed an arrow in his bow"

LORD LOAM. Thank you, Ernest; thank you my boy

AGATHA. "Unfortunately he missed."

LORD LOAM. Eh?

AGATHA. "But by great good luck I heard his cries—"

LORD LOAM. My cries?

AGATHA. "—and rushing forward with drawn knife, I stabbed the monster to the heart."

[LORD LOAM shuts his book with a pettish slam. There might be a scene here were it not that CRICHTON reappears and goes to one of the glass cases. All are at once on the alert, and his lordship is particularly sly.]

LORD LOAM. Anything in the papers, Catherine?

CATHERINE. No, father, nothing—nothing at all.

ERNEST [It pops out as of yore] The papers! The papers are guides that tell us what we ought to do, and then we don't do it.

[CRICHTON having opened the glass case has taken out the bucket, and ERNEST, looking round for applause, sees him carrying it off and is undone. For a moment of time he forgets that he is no longer on the island, and with a sigh he is about to follow CRICHTON and the bucket to a retired spot. The door closes, and ERNEST comes to himself.]

LORD LOAM [uncomfortably]. I told him to take it away.

ERNEST. I thought — [he wipes his brow] — I shall go and dress. [He goes.]

CATHERINE. Father, it's awful having Crichton here. It's like living on tiptoe.

LORD LOAM [gloomily]. While he is here we are sitting on a volcano.

AGATHA. How mean of you! I am sure he has only stayed on with us to— to help us through. It would have looked so suspicious if he had gone at once.

CATHERINE [revelling in the worst] But suppose Lady Brocklehurst were to get at him and pump him. She's the most terrifying, suspicious old creature in England; and Crichton simply can't tell a lie.

LORD LOAM. My dear, that is the volcano to which I was referring. [He has evidently something to communicate.] It's all Mary's fault. She said to me yesterday that she would break her engagement with Brocklehurst unless I told him about—you know what.

[All conjure up the vision of CRICHTON.]

AGATHA. Is she mad?

LORD LOAM. She calls it common honesty.

CATHERINE. Father, have you told him?

LORD LOAM [heavily]. She thinks I

have, but I couldn't. She's sure to find out to-night

[Unconsciously he leans on the island concertina, which he has perhaps been lately showing to an interviewer as something he made for TWEENY. It squeaks, and they all jump.]

CATHERINE. It's like a bird of ill-omen.

LORD LOAM [vindictively]. I must have it taken away; it has done that twice.

[LADY MARY comes in. She is in evening dress. Undoubtedly she meant to sail in, but she forgets, and despite her garments it is a manly entrance. She is properly ashamed of herself. She tries again, and has an encouraging success. She indicates to her sisters that she wishes to be alone with papa.]

AGATHA. All right, but we know what it's about. Come along, Kit.

[They go. LADY MARY thoughtlessly sits like a boy, and again corrects herself. She addresses her father, but he is in a brown study, and she seeks to draw his attention by whistling. This troubles them both.]

LADY MARY. How horrid of me!

LORD LOAM [depressed]. If you would try to remember —

LADY MARY [sighing]. I do; but there are so many things to remember.

LORD LOAM [sympathetically]. There are — [in a whisper] Do you know, Mary, I constantly find myself secreting hairpins

LADY MARY. I find it so difficult to go up steps one at a time.

LORD LOAM. I was dining with half dozen members of our party last Thursday, Mary, and they were so eloquent that I couldn't help wondering all the time how many of their heads he would have put in the bucket

LADY MARY. I use so many of his phrases. And my appetite is so scandalous. Father, I usually have a chop before we sit down to dinner.

LORD LOAM. As for my clothes—[wriggling] My dear, you can't think how irksome collars are to me nowadays.

LADY MARY. They can't be half such an annoyance, father, as —

[She looks dolefully at her skirt.]

LORD LOAM [hurriedly]. Quite so—quite so. You have dressed early tonight, Mary.

LADY MARY. That reminds me; I had a note from Brocklehurst saying he would come a few minutes before his mother as—as he wanted to have a talk with me. He didn't say what about, but of course we

know. [*His lordship fidgets.*] [*With feeling.*] It was good of you to tell him, father. Oh, it is horrible to me— [*Covering her face*] It seemed so natural at the time

LORD LOAM [*petulantly*] Never again make use of that word in this house, Mary.

LADY MARY [*with an effort*] Father, Brocklehurst has been so loyal to me for these two years that I should despise myself were I to keep my—my extraordinary lapse from him. Had Brocklehurst been a little less good, then you need not have told him my strange little secret.

LORD LOAM [*weakly*] Polly—I mean Mary—it was all Crichton's fault, he—

LADY MARY [*with decision*]. No, father, no; not a word against him though. I haven't the pluck to go on with it, I can't even understand how it ever was. Father, do you not still hear the surf? Do you see the curve of the beach?

LORD LOAM I have begun to forget— [*in a low voice*] But they were happy days; there was something magical about them

LADY MARY. It was glamour. Father, I have lived Arabian nights. I have sat out a dance with the evening star. But it was all in a past existence, in the days of Babylon, and I am myself again. But he has been chivalrous always. If the slothful, indolent creature I used to be has improved in any way, I owe it all to him. I am slipping back in many ways, but I am determined not to slip back altogether—in memory of him and his island. That is why I insisted on your telling Brocklehurst. He can break our engagement if he chooses [*Proudly.*] Mary Lasenby is going to play the game.

LORD LOAM. But my dear—

[*LORD BROCKLEHURST is announced.*]

LADY MARY [*meaningly*]. Father, dear, oughtn't you to be dressing?

LORD LOAM [*very unhappy*]. The fact is—before I go—I want to say—

LORD BROCKLEHURST. Loam, if you don't mind, I wish very specially to have a word with Mary before dinner.

LORD LOAM. But—

LADY MARY. Yes, father. [*She induces him to go, and thus courageously faces LORD BROCKLEHURST to hear her fate.*] I am ready, George.

LORD BROCKLEHURST [*who is so agitated that she ought to see he is thinking not of her but of himself*]. It is a painful matter—I wish I could have spared you this, Mary.

LADY MARY. Please go on.

LORD BROCKLEHURST. In common

fairness, of course, this should be remembered, that two years had elapsed. You and I had no reason to believe that we should ever meet again.

[*Thus is more considerate than she had expected*]

LADY MARY [*softening*]. I was so lost to the world, George.

LORD BROCKLEHURST [*with a groan*]. At the same time, the thing is utterly and absolutely inexcusable.

LADY MARY [*recovering her hauteur*]. Oh!

LORD BROCKLEHURST. And so I have already said to mother.

LADY MARY [*disdaining him*]. You have told her?

LORD BROCKLEHURST. Certainly, Mary, certainly; I tell mother everything.

LADY MARY [*curling her lips*]. And what did she say?

LORD BROCKLEHURST. To tell the truth, mother rather pooh-poohed the whole affair.

LADY MARY [*uncredulous*]. Lady Brocklehurst pooh-poohed the whole affair!

LORD BROCKLEHURST. She said, "Mary and I will have a good laugh over this."

LADY MARY [*outraged*]. George, your mother is a hateful, depraved old woman.

LORD BROCKLEHURST. Mary!

LADY MARY [*turning away*]. Laugh indeed, when it will always be such a pain to me.

LORD BROCKLEHURST [*with strange humility*]. If only you would let me bear all the pain, Mary.

LADY MARY [*who is taken aback*]. George, I think you are the noblest man—

[*She is touched, and gives him both her hands. Unfortunately he simpers.*]

LORD BROCKLEHURST. She was a pretty little thing. [*She stares, but he marches to his doom*] Ah, not beautiful like you. I assure you it was the merest flirtation; there were a few letters, but we have got them back. It was all owing to the boat being so late at Calais. You see she had such large, helpless eyes.

LADY MARY [*fixing him*]. George, when you lunched with father to-day at the club—

LORD BROCKLEHURST. I didn't. He wired me that he couldn't come.

LADY MARY [*with a tremor*]. But he wrote you?

LORD BROCKLEHURST. No.

LADY MARY [*a bird singing in her breast*]. You haven't seen him since?

LORD BROCKLEHURST. No.

[*She is saved Is he to be let off also? Not at all She bears down on him like a ship of war*]

LADY MARY. George, who and what is this woman?

LORD BROCKLEHURST [*cowering*]. She was—she is—the shame of it—a lady's-maid.

LADY MARY [*properly horrified*]. A what?

LORD BROCKLEHURST. A lady's-maid. A mere servant, Mary. [*LADY MARY whirls round so that he shall not see her face*] I first met her at this house when you were entertaining the servants, so you see it was largely your father's fault.

LADY MARY [*looking him up and down*]. A lady's-maid?

LORD BROCKLEHURST [*degraded*]. Her name was Fisher.

LADY MARY. My maid!

LORD BROCKLEHURST [*with open hands*]. Can you forgive me, Mary?

LADY MARY. Oh George, George!

LORD BROCKLEHURST. Mother urged me not to tell you anything about it; but—

LADY MARY [*from her heart*]. I am so glad you told me.

LORD BROCKLEHURST. You see there was nothing wrong in it.

LADY MARY [*thinking perhaps of another incident*]. No, indeed.

LORD BROCKLEHURST [*inclined to simmer again*]. And she behaved awfully well. She quite saw that it was because the boat was late. I suppose the glamor to a girl in service of a man in high position—

LADY MARY. Glamor!—yes, yes, that was it.

LORD BROCKLEHURST. Mother says that a girl in such circumstances is to be excused if she loses her head.

LADY MARY [*impulsively*]. George, I am so sorry if I said anything against your mother. I am sure she is the dearest old thing.

LORD BROCKLEHURST [*in calm waters at last*]. Of course for women of our class she has a very different standard.

LADY MARY [*grown tiny*]. Of course.

LORD BROCKLEHURST. You see, knowing how good a woman she is herself, she was naturally anxious that I should marry some one like her. That is what has made her watch your conduct so jealously, Mary.

LADY MARY [*hurriedly thinking things out*]. I know. I—I think, George, that be-

fore your mother comes I should like to say a word to father.

LORD BROCKLEHURST [*nervously*]. About this?

LADY MARY. Oh no; I shan't tell him of this. About something else.

LORD BROCKLEHURST. And you do forgive me, Mary?

LADY MARY [*smiling on him*]. Yes, yes I—I am sure the boat was very late, George.

LORD BROCKLEHURST [*earnestly*]. It really was.

LADY MARY. I am even relieved to know that you are not quite perfect, dear [*She rests her hands on his shoulders She has a moment of contrition*]. George, when we are married, we shall try to be not an entirely frivolous couple, won't we? We must endeavour to be of some little use, dear.

LORD BROCKLEHURST [*the ass*]. *Noblesse oblige*.

LADY MARY [*haunted by the phrases of a better man*]. Mary Lasenby is determined to play the game, George.

[*Perhaps she adds to herself, "Except just this once" A kiss closes this episode of the two lovers; and soon after the departure of LADY MARY the COUNT-ESS OF BROCKLEHURST is announced. She is a very formidable old lady.*]

LADY BROCKLEHURST. Alone, George?

LORD BROCKLEHURST. Mother, I told her all; she has behaved magnificently.

LADY BROCKLEHURST [*who has not shared his fears*]. Silly boy. [*She casts a supercilious eye on the island trophies*] So these are the wonders they brought back with them. Gone away to dry her eyes I suppose?

LORD BROCKLEHURST [*proud of his mate*]. She didn't cry, mother.

LADY BROCKLEHURST. No? [*She reflects*]. You're quite right. I wouldn't have cried. Cold, icy. Yes, that was it.

LORD BROCKLEHURST [*who has not often contradicted her*]. I assure you, mother, that wasn't it at all. She forgave me at once.

LADY BROCKLEHURST [*opening her eyes sharply to the full*]. Oh!

LORD BROCKLEHURST. She was awfully nice about the boat being late; she even said she was relieved to find that I wasn't quite perfect.

LADY BROCKLEHURST [*pouncing*]. She said that?

LORD BROCKLEHURST. She really did.

LADY BROCKLEHURST. I mean I wouldn't. Now if I had said that, what would have made me say it? [*Suspiciously*] George, is Mary all we think her?

LORD BROCKLEHURST [*with unexpected spirit*]. If she wasn't, Mother, you would know it.

LADY BROCKLEHURST. Hold your tongue, boy. We don't really know what happened on that island.

LORD BROCKLEHURST. You were reading the book all the morning.

LADY BROCKLEHURST. How can I be sure that the book is true?

LORD BROCKLEHURST. They all talk of it as true.

LADY BROCKLEHURST. How do I know that they are not lying?

LORD BROCKLEHURST. Why should they lie?

LADY BROCKLEHURST. Why shouldn't they? [*She reflects again.*] If I had been wrecked on an island, I think it highly probable that I should have lied when I came back. Weren't some of the servants with them?

LORD BROCKLEHURST. Crichton, the butler. [*He is surprised to see her ring the bell.*] Why, Mother, you are not going to—

LADY BROCKLEHURST. Yes, I am. [*Pointedly*] George, watch whether Crichton begins any of his answers to my questions with "The fact is."

LORD BROCKLEHURST. Why?

LADY BROCKLEHURST. Because that is usually the beginning of a lie.

LORD BROCKLEHURST [*as CRICHTON opens the door*]. Mother, you can't do these things in other people's houses.

LADY BROCKLEHURST [*coolly, to CRICHTON*]. It was I who rang [*Surveying him through her eyeglass*] So you were one of the castaways, Crichton?

CRICHTON. Yes, my lady.

LADY BROCKLEHURST. Delightful book. Mr. Woolley has written about your adventures [*CRICHTON bows*] Don't you think so?

CRICHTON. I have not read it, my lady.

LADY BROCKLEHURST. Odd that they should not have presented you with a copy.

LORD BROCKLEHURST. Presumably Crichton is no reader.

LADY BROCKLEHURST. By the way, Crichton, were there any books on the island?

CRICHTON. I had one, my lady—Hendley's poems.

LORD BROCKLEHURST. Never heard of him [*CRICHTON again bows*].

LADY BROCKLEHURST [*who has not heard of him either*]. I think you were not the only servant wrecked?

CRICHTON. There was a young woman, my lady.

LADY BROCKLEHURST. I want to see her [*CRICHTON bows, but remains*] Fetch her up [*He goes*].

LORD BROCKLEHURST [*almost standing up to his mother*]. This is scandalous.

LADY BROCKLEHURST [*defining her position*]. I am a mother. [*CATHERINE and AGATHA enter in dazzling confections and quake in secret to find themselves practically alone with LADY BROCKLEHURST*] [*Even as she greets them*] How d'you do, Catherine—Agatha? You didn't dress like this on the island, I expect! By the way, how did you dress?

[*They have thought themselves prepared, but—*]

AGATHA. Not—so well, of course, but quite the same idea.

[*They are relieved by the arrival of TREHERNE, who is in clerical dress.*]

LADY BROCKLEHURST. How do you do, Mr. Treherne? There is not so much of you in the book as I had hoped.

TREHERNE [*modestly*]. There wasn't very much of me on the island, Lady Brocklehurst.

LADY BROCKLEHURST. How d'ye mean?

[*He shrugs his modest shoulders*].

LORD BROCKLEHURST. I hear you have got a living, Treherne. Congratulations.

TREHERNE. Thanks.

LORD BROCKLEHURST. Is it a good one?

TREHERNE. So-so. They are rather weak in bowling, but it's a good bit of turf.

[*Confidence is restored by the entrance of ERNEST, who takes in the situation promptly, and, of course, knows he is a match for any old lady*].

ERNEST [*with ease*]. How do you do, Lady Brocklehurst.

LADY BROCKLEHURST. Our brilliant author!

ERNEST [*impervious to satire*]. Oh, I don't know.

LADY BROCKLEHURST. It is as engrossing, Mr. Woolley, as if it were a work of fiction.

ERNEST [*suddenly uncomfortable*]. Thanks, awfully. [*Recovering*] The fact is —

[*He is puzzled by seeing the Brocklehurst family exchange meaning looks.*]

CATHERINE [*to the rescue*] Lady Brocklehurst, Mr. Treherne and I—we are engaged

AGATHA. And Ernest and I

LADY BROCKLEHURST [*grimly*]. I see, my dears; thought it wise to keep the island in the family.

[*An awkward moment this for the entrance of LORD LOAM and LADY MARY, who, after a private talk upstairs, are feeling happy and secure*]

LORD LOAM [*with two hands for his distinguished guest*]. Aha! ha, ha! younger than any of them, Emly

LADY BROCKLEHURST. Flatterer. [*To LADY MARY.*] You seem in high spirits, Mary.

LADY MARY [*gaily*] I am.

LADY BROCKLEHURST [*with a significant glance at LORD BROCKLEHURST*]. After —

LADY MARY. I—I mean. The fact is —

[*Again that disconcerting glance between the countess and her son*]

LORD LOAM [*humorously*]. She hears wedding bells, Emly, ha, ha!

LADY BROCKLEHURST [*coldly*]. Do you, Mary? Can't say I do; but I'm hard of hearing.

LADY MARY [*instantly her match*]. If you don't, Lady Brocklehurst, I'm sure I don't.

LORD LOAM [*nervously*]. Tut, tut. Seen our curios from the island, Emly; I should like you to examine them.

LADY BROCKLEHURST Thank you, Henry. I am glad you say that, for I have just taken the liberty of asking two of them to step upstairs.

[*There is an uncomfortable silence, which the entrance of CRICHTON and TWEENY does not seem to dissipate. CRICHTON is impenetrable, but TWEENY hangs back in fear.*]

LORD BROCKLEHURST [*stoutly*]. Loam, I have no hand in this.

LADY BROCKLEHURST [*undisturbed*]. Pooh, what have I done? You always begged me to speak to the servants, Henry, and I merely wanted to discover whether the views you used to hold about equality were adopted on the island; it seemed a splendid opportunity, but Mr. Woolley has not a word on the subject

[*All eyes turn on ERNEST.*]

ERNEST [*with confidence*]. The fact is — [*The fatal words again.*]

LORD LOAM [*not quite certain what he is to assure her of*]. I assure you, Emly —

LADY MARY [*cold as steel*]. Father, nothing whatever happened on the island of which I, for one, am ashamed, and I hope Crichton will be allowed to answer Lady Brocklehurst's questions.

LADY BROCKLEHURST To be sure. There's nothing to make a fuss about, and we're a family party [*To CRICHTON*] Now, truthfully, my man.

CRICHTON [*calmly*] I promise that, my lady.

[*Some hearts sink, the hearts that could never understand a CRICHTON*]

LADY BROCKLEHURST [*sharply*]. Well, were you all equal on the island?

CRICHTON. No, my lady I think I may say there was as little equality there as elsewhere.

LADY BROCKLEHURST. All the social distinctions were preserved?

CRICHTON. As at home, my lady.

LADY BROCKLEHURST. The servants?

CRICHTON. They had to keep their place.

LADY BROCKLEHURST. Wonderful. How was it managed? [*With an inspiration.*] You, girl, tell me that?

[*Can there be a more critical moment?*]

TWEENY [*in agony*] If you please, my lady, it was all the Gov's doing.

[*They give themselves up for lost. LORD LOAM tries to sink out of sight.*]

CRICHTON. In the regrettable slang of the servants' hall, my lady, the master is usually referred to as the Gov.

LADY BROCKLEHURST. I see. [*She turns to LORD LOAM.*] You —

LORD LOAM [*reappearing*]. Yes, I understand that is what they call me.

LADY BROCKLEHURST [*to CRICHTON*]. You didn't even take your meals with the family?

CRICHTON. No, my lady, I dined apart. [*Is all safe?*]

LADY BROCKLEHURST [*alas*]. You, girl, also? Did you dine with Crichton?

TWEENY [*scared*]. No, your ladyship.

LADY BROCKLEHURST [*fastening on her*]. With whom?

TWEENY I took my bit of supper with — with Daddy and Polly and the rest.

[*Væ victis*]

ERNEST [*leaping into the breach*]. Dear old Daddy—he was our monkey. You remember our monkey, Agatha?

AGATHA Rather! What a funny old darling he was

CATHERINE [*thus encouraged*] And don't you think Polly was the sweetest little parrot, Mary?

LADY BROCKLEHURST Ah! I understand, animals you had domesticated?

LORD LOAM [*heavily*] Quite so—quite so

LADY BROCKLEHURST. The servants' teas that used to take place here once a month—

CRICHTON. They did not seem natural on the island, my lady and were discontinued by the Gov.'s orders.

LORD BROCKLEHURST. A clear proof, Loam, that they were a mistake here

LORD LOAM [*seeing the opportunity for a diversion*]. I admit it frankly. I abandon them Emily, as the result of our experiences on the island, I think of going over to the Tories

LADY BROCKLEHURST I am delighted to hear it

LORD LOAM [*expanding*]. Thank you, Crichton, thank you; that is all

[*He motions to them to go, but the time is not yet*]

LADY BROCKLEHURST One moment. [*There is a universal but stifled groan.*] Young people, Crichton, will be young people, even on an island; now, I suppose there was a certain amount of—shall we say sentimentalizing, going on?

CRICHTON. Yes, my lady, there was.

LORD BROCKLEHURST [*ashamed*]. Mother!

LADY BROCKLEHURST [*disregarding him*]. Which gentleman? [*To TWEENY*] You, girl, tell me.

TWEENY [*confused*]. If you please, my lady—

ERNEST [*hurriedly*]. The fact is—

[*He is checked as before, and probably says "D—n" to himself, but he has saved the situation.*]

TWEENY [*gasping*]. It was him—Mr. Ernest, your ladyship.

LADY BROCKLEHURST [*counsel for the prosecution*]. With which lady?

AGATHA. I have already told you, Lady Brocklehurst, that Ernest and I—

LADY BROCKLEHURST. Yes, now; but you were two years on the island. [*Looking at LADY MARY.*] Was it this lady?

TWEENY. No, your ladyship.

LADY BROCKLEHURST. Then I don't

care which of the others it was. [*TWEENY gurgles*] Well, I suppose that will do.

LORD BROCKLEHURST. Do! I hope you are ashamed of yourself, mother [*To CRICHTON, who is going*] You are an excellent fellow, Crichton; and if, after we are married, you ever wish to change your place, come to us.

LADY MARY [*losing her head for the only time*] Oh no, impossible

LADY BROCKLEHURST [*at once suspicious*] Why impossible? [*LADY MARY cannot answer, or perhaps she is too proud*] Do you see why it should be impossible, my man?

[*He can make or mar his unworthy MARY now. Have you any doubt of him?*]

CRICHTON Yes, my lady. I had not told you, my lord, but as soon as your lordship is suited I wish to leave service.

[*They are all immensely relieved, except poor TWEENY.*]

TREHERNE [*the only curious one*]. What will you do, Crichton?

[*CRICHTON shrugs his shoulders "God knows," it may mean.*]

CRICHTON. Shall I withdraw, my lord?

[*He withdraws without a tremor, TWEENY accompanying him They can all breathe again, the thunderstorm is over*]

LADY BROCKLEHURST [*thankful to have made herself unpleasant*]. Horrid of me, wasn't it? But if one wasn't disagreeable now and again, it would be horribly tedious to be an old woman. He will soon be yours, Mary, and then—think of the opportunities you will have of being disagreeable to me. On that understanding, my dear, don't you think we might—?

[*Their cold lips meet*]

LORD LOAM [*vaguely*]. Quite so—quite so.

[*CRICHTON announces dinner, and they file out. LADY MARY stays behind a moment and impulsively holds out her hand*]

LADY MARY. To wish you every dear happiness.

CRICHTON [*an enigma to the last*]. The same to you, my lady.

LADY MARY Do you despise me, Crichton? [*The man who could never tell a lie makes no answer.*] You are the best man among us.

CRICHTON. On an island, my lady, perhaps; but in England, no.

LADY MARY. Then there's something wrong with England.

CRICHTON My lady, not even from
you can I listen to a word against England
LADY MARY. Tell me one thing you
have not lost your courage?

CRICHTON. No, my lady
[*She goes. He turns out the lights.*]

THE END

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THE SILVER BOX
(1906)
BY
JOHN GALSWORTHY

PERSONS OF THE PLAY

JOHN BARTHWICK, M. P, *a wealthy Liberal*
MRS. BARTHWICK, *his wife*
JACK BARTHWICK, *their son*
ROPER, *their solicitor*
MRS JONES, *their charwoman*
MARLOW, *their manservant*
WHEELER, *their maidservant*
JONES, *the stranger within their gates*
MRS. SEDDON, *a landlady*
SNOW, *a detective*
A POLICE MAGISTRATE
AN UNKNOWN LADY, *from beyond*
TWO LITTLE GIRLS, *homeless*
LIVENS, *their father*
A RELIEVING OFFICER
A MAGISTRATE'S CLERK
AN USHER
POLICEMEN, CLERKS, AND OTHERS

TIME: *The present* The action of the first two Acts takes place on Easter Tuesday; the action of the third on Easter Wednesday week.

ACT I: SCENE I: *Rockingham Gate. John Barthwick's dining-room.*

Scene II: The same

Scene III: The same.

ACT II SCENE I: *The Jones's lodgings, Merthyr Street.*

Scene II: John Barthwick's dining-room.

ACT III: *A London police court.*

JOHN GALSWORTHY

JOHN GALSWORTHY was born in 1867 in Surrey, England, the son of a prosperous London lawyer. Like Robert Browning, Galsworthy was fortunately born—his parents were well-to-do, humane, and intellectual, his home life and childhood were quite happy, and he never knew want and discord. He was schooled at Harrow and Oxford and trained for the law, although he disliked the profession and practised very little (In his fiction and plays, however, are many barristers and court room scenes) He traveled widely, but a sharp social conscience and an active mind prevented his drifting through life a mere traveler and a "man about town," and at the age of twenty-eight he discovered his great talent—writing. He achieved high eminence in both fiction and drama. The long series of Forsyte novels constitutes a national epic of modern England, a saga of sweeping significance as well as of deep human interest. A very successful and popular author, Galsworthy was able to give huge sums to charities; and he devoted much time to such creditable hobbies as prison reform, more humane methods of animal slaughter, *etc.* During the war he served as a masseur in a French convalescent hospital. He refused a knighthood, but accepted the Order of Merit and in 1932 received the Nobel Prize for Literature. He died in London in 1933.

Galsworthy's plays deal with the entanglement of personality in the meshes of modern society, so much so that he has been accused of being more concerned with types and social movements than with human nature. But he asserts that "to deal austere and naturalistically with the life of one's day is to find the human being so involved in environment that he cannot be dissociated." He maintains that his characters necessarily are "part of the warp and woof of a complicated society, in which the individual is as much netted-in by encircling fates as ever were the creations of Greek dramatists." His literary method in the early plays was that of the Continental naturalists—new in England. He aimed "to set before the public no cut-and-dried codes, but the phenomena of life and character, selected and combined, *but not distorted*, by the dramatist's outlook, set down without fear, favor, or prejudice, leaving the public to put down such poor moral as nature may afford. This . . . method requires a certain detachment . . ." Galsworthy's "detachment" is famous, but his impartiality is largely a myth. He tries to be scrupulously fair (note his refusal to "stack the cards" in *The Silver Box*, *Justice*, *Strife*, and *Loyalities*), but his sympathy with the underdog and his white anger at intolerance and cruelty are never concealed. Although Galsworthy was influential with Bernard Shaw and Granville-Barker in breaking down British resistance to the modern drama with "a spire of meaning," it is noteworthy that commercially the most successful of Galsworthy's plays were the less intellectual *Escape* and *Old English*.

Galsworthy served no period of apprenticeship as a dramatist: his first play, *The Silver Box* (1906), is as mature and sure as any he was to write later. *Strife* (1909) is one of the great modern tragedies—austere, ironical, static and yet exciting. Ostensibly a play concerned with capital and labor, it deals primarily with the conflict of deep human emotions and instincts. *Justice* (1910) is the most poignant and at the same time the most nearly propagandist of his plays—the painful story of the crushing of a weakling caught in the impersonal machinery of the law. As a direct result of the production of *Justice* certain prison reforms were effected in England. *The Pigeon* (1912), a tragi-comic fantasy, shows

the futility of unintelligent charity and the chilling heartlessness of an official variety, but offers no practical solution for this oldest of social problems *The Eldest Son* (1912) appeared in the same year as Stanley Houghton's celebrated *Hindle Wakes*. Both have the same cynically amusing theme—what is sauce for the goose is not always sauce for the gander. In *The Mob* (1914—significant date!) a rational and benevolent individual is destroyed by a hostile, war-crazed society. In *The Skin Game* (1920) an aristocrat is engaged in a feud with a vulgar parvenu and discovers that he is coarsened and cheapened by the fight. *Loyalties* (1922) is a dramatic answer to the question, How far should *esprit de corps* or loyalties to our group lead us to defend a wrong-doer in the group? *Old English* (1924) is an amusing character study, and *Escape* (1920), employing the technique of the motion picture, follows an escaped convict from one hiding place to another. Galsworthy was fortunate in the casting of his plays—Ethel Barrymore in *The Silver Box*, John Barrymore (before he “sold his birthright for a yacht”) in *Justice*, Leslie Howard in *Escape*, George Arliss in *Old English*, etc. Because of their slight sex interest and unromantic endings most of his plays have failed to attract the cinema industry.

The Silver Box is called by its author a “social comedy,” but it is comic only in the irony of its central theme and in the satirical portraits of the bogus Liberal, his unscrupulous wife, and his good-for-nothing son. For poor Mrs. Jones and her children it is a “social tragedy,” for in spite of complete innocence they are the victims of a horrible, within-the-law miscarriage of justice. *The Silver Box* illustrates all of Galsworthy's theories of drama. It is painstakingly fair, without heroes and villains; the real criminals are the social and judicial system, i.e., the audience—that is why the play makes its audience or reader uncomfortable. It has restraint and under-expression, both in dialogue and action. Galsworthy once wrote, “It might be said of Shaw's plays that he creates characters who express feelings which they have not got [*sic*]. It might be said of mine, that I create characters who have feelings which they cannot express.” Galsworthy knows the dramatic value of suggestion, pantomime, fragmentary remarks. The closing line of *The Silver Box* is a characteristic use of restraint and understatement, powerful in the theatre. The play marks one of the earliest successful applications of the extreme naturalistic method in English drama. The author succeeds in creating “such an illusion of actual life passing on the stage as to compel the spectator for the moment to lose all sense of artifice, to think, talk, and move with the people he sees thinking, talking, and moving in front of him.” Here, too, are his pity and indignation, his sharp vision and deep sensitiveness—his avoidance of rhetoric and turgidity. In *The Silver Box* Galsworthy the creative artist and Galsworthy the social historian are at their best, and the fusion is successful.

Note that the play begins with a soliloquy—supposedly outlawed from realistic drama. Is it plausible here? Is the crying of the child at the end of Act II a vulgar touch, a gratuitous bit of sentimentality, or is it dramatically sound and justifiable? Does the judge conduct the trial in a fair manner? (Galsworthy later took legal counsel before he wrote the trial scene in *Justice*.) Like all good plays, *The Silver Box* does not end with the final curtain. What becomes of Mrs. Jones? Does Barthwick make an attempt to help her?

THE SILVER BOX

ACT I

SCENE I—*The curtain rises on the BARTH-WICKS' dining room, large, modern, and well furnished; the window curtains drawn Electric light is burning On the large round dining table is set out a tray with whisky, a syphon, and a silver cigarette-box It is past midnight.*

A fumbling is heard outside the door. It is opened suddenly; JACK BARTH-WICK seems to fall into the room He stands holding by the doorknob, staring before him, with a beatific smile. He is in evening dress and opera hat, and carries in his hand a sky-blue velvet lady's reticule. His boyish face is freshly colored and clean-shaven. An overcoat is hanging on his arm.

JACK Hello! I've got home all ri— [*Defiantly*] Who says I sh'd never 've opened th' door without 'sistance [*He staggers in, fumbling with the reticule. A lady's handkerchief and purse of crimson silk fall out*] Serve her joll' well right—everything droppin' out Th' cat. I've scored her off—I've got her bag. [*He swings the reticule*] Serves her joll' well right [*He takes a cigarette out of the silver box and puts it in his mouth*] Never gave tha' fellow anything! [*He hunts through all his pockets and pulls a shilling out; it drops and rolls away. He looks for it*] Beastly shilling! [*He looks again*] Base ingratitude! Absolutely nothing. [*He laughs*] Mus' tell him I've got absolutely nothing.

[*He lurches through the door and down a corridor, and presently returns, followed by JONES, who is advanced in liquor. JONES, about thirty years of age, has hollow cheeks, black circles around his eyes, and rusty clothes. He looks as though he might be unemployed, and enters in a hang-dog manner.*]

JACK Sh! sh! sh! Don't you make a noise, whatever you do. Shu' the door, an' have a drink. [*Very solemnly.*] You helped me to open the door—I've got nothin' for you. This is my house. My father's name's Barthwick; he's Member of Parliament—

Liberal Member of Parliament. I've told you that before Have a drink! [*He pours out whisky and drinks it up*] I'm not drunk— [*Subsiding on a sofa.*] Tha's all right Wha's your name? My name's Barthwick, so's my father's, I'm a Liberal too—wha're you?

JONES [*in a thick, sardonic voice*]. I'm a bloomin' Conservative. My name's Jones My wife works 'ere, she's the char; sh' works 'ere.

JACK. Jones? [*He laughs.*] There's 'nother Jones at College with me I'm not a Socialist myself, I'm a Liberal—there's ve-lill difference, because of the principles of the Lib—Liberal Party. We're all equal before the law—tha's rot, tha's silly. [*Laughs.*] Wha' was I about to say? Give me some whisky [*JONES gives him the whisky he desires, together with a squirt of syphon*] Wha' I was goin' tell you was—I've had a row with her [*He waves the reticule.*] Have a drink, Jones—sh'd never have got in without you—tha's why I'm giving you a drink. Don' care who knows I've scored her off. Th' cat. [*He throws his feet up on the sofa*] Don' you make a noise, whatever you do You pour out a drink—make yourself good long, long drink—you take cigarette—you take everything you like. Sh'd never have got in without you. [*Closing his eyes.*] You're a Tory—you're a Tory Socialist. I'm a Liberal myself—have a drink—I'm an excel'nt chap

[*His head drops back. He, smiling, falls asleep, and JONES stands looking at him; then snatching up JACK'S glass, he drinks it off. He picks the reticule from off JACK'S shirt-front, holds it to the light, and smells at it.*]

JONES. Been on the tiles and brought 'ome some of yer cat's fur.

[*He stuffs it into JACK'S breast pocket*]

JACK [*murmuring*]. I've scored you off! You cat!

[*JONES looks around him furtively; he pours out whisky and drinks it. From the silver box he takes a cigarette, puffs at it, and drinks more whisky. There is no sobriety left in him.*]

JONES. Fat lot o' things they've got

'ere. [*He sees the crimson purse lying on the floor*] More cat's fur Puss, puss! [*He fingers it, drops it on the tray, and looks at JACK*] Cali! Fat cali! [*He sees his own presentment in a mirror. Lifting his hands, with fingers spread, he stares at it, then looks again at JACK, clenching his fist as if to batter in his sleeping, smiling face. Suddenly he tilts the rest of the whisky into the glass and drinks it With cunning glee he takes the silver box and purse and pockets them.*] I'll score you off too, that's wot I'll do!

[*He gives a little snarling laugh and lurches to the door. His shoulder rubs against the switch; the light goes out. There is a sound as of a closing outer door*]

THE CURTAIN FALLS

THE CURTAIN RISES AGAIN AT ONCE

ACT II

SCENE II.—*In the BARTHWICKS' dining room. JACK is still asleep; the morning light is coming through the curtains. The time is half-past eight WHEELER, brisk person, enters with a dust-pan, and MRS JONES more slowly with a scuttle*

WHEELER [*drawing the curtains*]. That precious husband of yours was round for you after you'd gone yesterday, Mrs Jones Wanted your money for drink, I suppose. He hags about the corner here half the time. I saw him outside the "Goat and Bells" when I went to the post last night. If I were you I wouldn't live with him. I wouldn't live with a man that raised his hand to me. I wouldn't put up with it. Why don't you take your children and leave him? If you put up with 'im it'll only make him worse. I never can see why, because a man's married you, he should knock you about.

MRS. JONES [*slim, dark-eyed, and dark-haired; oval-faced, and with a smooth, soft, even voice; her manner patient, her way of talking quite impersonal; she wears a blue linen dress, and boots with holes*]. It was nearly two last night before he come home, and he wasn't himself He made me get up, and he knocked me about; he didn't seem to know *what* he was saying or doing. Of course I would leave him, but I'm really afraid of what he'd do to me He's such a violent man when he's not himself

WHEELER Why don't you get him locked up? You'll never have any peace until you get him locked up If I were you I'd go to the police court to-morrow That's what I would do

MRS. JONES Of course I ought to go, because he does treat me so badly when he's not himself. But you see, Bettina, he has a very hard time—he's been out of work two months, and it preys upon his mind When he's in work he behaves himself much better It's when he's out of work that he's so violent

WHEELER Well, if you won't take any steps you'll never get rid of him.

MRS. JONES. Of course it's very wearing to me; I don't get any sleep at nights. And it's not as if I were getting help from him, because I have to do for the children and all of us. And he throws such dreadful things up at me, talks of my having men to follow me about Such a thing never happens, no man ever speaks to me. And of course it's just the other way. It's what he does that's wrong and makes me so unhappy. And then he's always threatening to cut my throat if I leave him It's all the drink, and things preying on his mind, he's not a bad man really. Sometimes he'll speak quite kind to me, but I've stood so much from him, I don't feel it in me to speak kind back, but just keep myself to myself. And he's all right with the children, too, except when he's not himself

WHEELER You mean when he's drunk, the beauty

MRS. JONES Yes. [*Without change of voice*] There's the young gentleman asleep on the sofa

[*They both look silently at JACK*]

MRS JONES [*at last, in her soft voice*]. He doesn't look quite himself.

WHEELER He's a young limb, that's what he is It's my belief he was tipsy last night, like your husband It's another kind of bein' out of work that sets *him* to drink I'll go and tell Marlow This is his job.

[*She goes*]

[*MRS. JONES, upon her knees, begins a gentle sweeping*]

JACK [*waking*] Who's there? What is it?

MRS. JONES. It's me, sir, Mrs Jones.

JACK [*sitting up and looking round*] Where is it—what—time is it?

MRS JONES. It's getting on for nine o'clock, sir

JACK. For nine! Why—what! [*Rising, and loosening his tongue; putting hand to his head, and staying hard at MRS JONES*] Look here, you, Mrs—M₁s

Jones—don't you say you caught me asleep here.

MRS. JONES No, sir, of course I won't, sir.

JACK It's quite an accident, I don't know how it happened I must have forgotten to go to bed It's a queer thing I've got a most beastly headache Mind you don't say anything, Mrs Jones

[Goes out and passes MARLOW in the doorway MARLOW is young and quiet; he is clean-shaven, and his hair is brushed high from his forehead in a coxcomb Incidentally a butler, he is first a man He looks at MRS JONES, and smiles a private smile]

MARLOW Not the first time, and won't be the last. Looked a bit dicky, eh, Mrs Jones?

MRS. JONES. He didn't look quite himself. Of course I didn't take notice

MARLOW. You're used to them How's your old man?

MRS JONES *[softly as throughout]* Well, he was very bad last night, he didn't seem to know what he was about He was very late, and he was most abusive. But now, of course, he's asleep

MARLOW. That's his way of finding a job, eh?

MRS. JONES As a rule, Mr. Marlow, he goes out early every morning looking for work, and sometimes he comes in fit to drop—and of course I can't say he doesn't try to get it, because he does. Trade's very bad *[She stands quite still, her pan and brush before her, at the beginning and the end of long vistas of experience, traversing them with her impersonal eye]* But he's not a good husband to me—last night he hit me, and he was so dreadfully abusive

MARLOW. Bank 'oliday, eh! He's too fond of the "Goat and Bells," that's what's the matter with him. I see him at the corner late every night. He hangs about.

MRS. JONES. He gets to feeling very low walking about all day after work, and being refused so often, and then when he gets a drop in him it goes to his head But he shouldn't treat his wife as he treats me. Sometimes I've had to go and walk about at night when he wouldn't let me stay in the room; but he's sorry for it afterwards. And he hangs about after me, he waits for me in the street; and I don't think he ought to, because I've always been a good wife to him. And I tell him Mrs. Barthwick wouldn't like him coming about the place. But that only makes him angry, and he says dreadful things about the

gentry Of course it was through me that he first lost his place, through his not treating me right; that's made him bitter against the gentry He had a very good place as groom in the country, but it made such a stir, because of course he didn't treat me right.

MARLOW Got the sack?

MRS JONES. Yes, his employer said he couldn't keep him, because there was a great deal of talk; and he said it was such a bad example. But it's very important for me to keep my work here; I have the three children, and I don't want him to come about after me in the streets, and make a disturbance as he sometimes does.

MARLOW *[holding up the empty de-canter]*. Not a drain! Next time he hits you get a witness and go down to the court—

MRS. JONES Yes, I think I've made up my mind I think I ought to.

MARLOW That's right. Where's the ciga—? *[He searches for the silver box; he looks at MRS. JONES, who is sweeping on her hands and knees; he checks himself and stands reflecting From the tray he picks two half-smoked cigarettes, and reads the name on them]* Nestor—where the deuce—?

[With a meditative air he looks again at MRS. JONES, and, taking up JACK'S overcoat, he searches in the pockets WHEELER, with a tray of breakfast things, comes in.]

MARLOW *[aside to WHEELER]*. Have you seen the cigarette-box?

WHEELER. No.

MARLOW Well, it's gone. I put it on the tray last night And he's been smoking. *[Showing her the ends of cigarettes]* It's not in these pockets. He can't have taken it upstairs this morning! Have a good look in his room when he comes down. Who's been in here?

WHEELER Only me and Mrs. Jones.

MRS. JONES I've finished here, shall I do the drawing-room now?

WHEELER *[looking at her doubtfully]*. Have you seen— Better do the boud-wower first

[MRS JONES goes out with pan and brush MARLOW and WHEELER look each other in the face.]

MARLOW. It'll turn up

WHEELER *[hesitating]*. You don't think she— *[Nodding at the door.]*

MARLOW *[stoutly]*. I don't—I never believes anything of anybody.

WHEELER But the master'll have to be told.

MARLOW. You wait a bit, and see if it don't turn up. Suspicion's no business of ours. I set my mind against it.

THE CURTAIN FALLS

THE CURTAIN RISES AGAIN AT ONCE

SCENE III—*BARTHWICK* and *MRS. BARTHWICK* are seated at the breakfast table. *He is a man of between fifty and sixty; quietly important, with a bald forehead, and pince-nez, and the "Times" in his hand. She is a lady of nearly fifty, well dressed, with greyish hair, good features, and a decided manner. They face each other.*

BARTHWICK [*from behind his paper*]. The Labor man has got in at the by-election for Barnside, my dear.

MRS. BARTHWICK. Another Labor? I can't think what on earth the country is about.

BARTHWICK. I predicted it. It's not a matter of vast importance.

MRS. BARTHWICK. Not? How can you take it so calmly, John? To me it's simply outrageous. And there you sit, you Liberals, and pretend to encourage these people!

BARTHWICK [*frowning*]. The representation of all parties is necessary for any proper reform, for any proper social policy.

MRS. BARTHWICK. I've no patience with your talk of reform—all that nonsense about social policy. We know perfectly well what it is they want; they want things for themselves. These Socialists and Labor men are an absolutely selfish set of people. They have no sense of patriotism, like the upper classes; they simply want what we've got.

BARTHWICK. Want what we've got! [*He stares into space.*] My dear, what are you talking about? [*With a contortion*] I'm no alarmist.

MRS. BARTHWICK. Cream? Quite uneducated men! Wait until they begin to tax our investments. I'm convinced that when they once get a chance they will tax everything—they've no feeling for the country. You Liberals and Conservatives, you're all alike; you don't see an inch before your noses. You've no imagination, not a scrap of imagination between you. You ought to join hands and nip it in the bud.

BARTHWICK. You're talking nonsense! How is it possible for Liberals and Conservatives to join hands, as you call it? That shows how absurd it is for women—

Why, the very essence of a Liberal is to trust in the people!

MRS. BARTHWICK. Now John, eat your breakfast. As if there were any real difference between you and the Conservatives. All the upper classes have the same interests to protect, and the same principles [*Calmly*] Oh! you're sitting upon a volcano, John.

BARTHWICK. What!

MRS. BARTHWICK. I read a letter in the paper yesterday. I forget the man's name, but it made the whole thing perfectly clear. You don't look things in the face.

BARTHWICK. Indeed! [*Heavily*] I am a Liberal! Drop the subject, please!

MRS. BARTHWICK. Toast? I quite agree what this man says. Education is simply ruining the lower classes. It unsettles them, and that's the worst thing for us all. I see an enormous difference in the manner of servants.

BARTHWICK [*with suspicious emphasis*]. I welcome any change that will lead to something better. [*He opens a letter*] H'm! This is that affair of Master Jack's again. "High Street, Oxford Sir, We have received Mr. John Barthwick, Senior's, draft for forty pounds!" Oh! The letter's to him! "We now enclose the cheque you cashed with us, which, as we stated in our previous letter, was not met on presentation at your bank. We are, Sir, yours obediently, Moss and Sons, Tailors." H'm! [*Staring at the cheque*] A pretty business altogether! The boy might have been prosecuted.

MRS. BARTHWICK. Come, John, you know Jack didn't mean anything; he only thought he was overdrawing. I still think his bank ought to have cashed that cheque. They must know your position.

BARTHWICK [*replacing in the envelope the letter and the cheque*]. Much good that would have done him in a court of law.

[*He stops as JACK comes in, fastening his waistcoat and stanching a razor cut upon his chin*]

JACK [*sitting down between them, and speaking with an artificial joviality*] Sorry I'm late [*He looks lugubriously at the dishes.*] Tea, please, mother. Any letters for me? [*Barthwick hands the letter to him.*] But look here, I say, this has been opened! I do wish you wouldn't—

BARTHWICK [*touching the envelope*]. I suppose I'm entitled to this name.

JACK [*sulkily*]. Well, I can't help having your name, father! [*He reads the letter, and mutters.*] Brutes!

BARTHWICK [*eyeing him*]. You don't deserve to be so well out of that.

JACK. Haven't you ragged me enough, dad?

MRS. BARTHWICK. Yes, John, let Jack have his breakfast

BARTHWICK. If you hadn't had me to come to, where would you have been? It's the merest accident—suppose you had been the son of a poor man or a clerk Obtaining money with a cheque you knew your bank could not meet. It might have ruined you for life. I can't see what's to become of you if these are your principles. I never did anything of the sort myself.

JACK. I expect you always had lots of money. If you've got plenty of money, of course—

BARTHWICK. On the contrary, I had not your advantages. My father kept me very short of money.

JACK. How much had you, dad?

BARTHWICK. It's not material. The question is, do you feel the gravity of what you did?

JACK. I don't know about the gravity. Of course, I'm very sorry if you think it was wrong. Haven't I said so! I should never have done it at all if I hadn't been so jolly hard up.

BARTHWICK. How much of that forty pounds have you got left, Jack?

JACK [*hesitating*]. I don't know—not much.

BARTHWICK. How much?

JACK [*desperately*]. I haven't got any.

BARTHWICK. What?

JACK. I know I've got the most beastly headache.

[*He leans his head on his hand.*]

MRS. BARTHWICK. Headache? My dear boy! Can't you eat any breakfast?

JACK [*drawing in his breath*]. Too jolly bad!

MRS. BARTHWICK. I'm so sorry. Come with me, dear; I'll give you something that will take it away at once.

[*They leave the room; and BARTHWICK, tearing up the letter, goes to the fireplace and puts the pieces in the fire. While he is doing this MARLOW comes in, and looking round him, is about quietly to withdraw.*]

BARTHWICK. What's that? What d' you want?

MARLOW. I was looking for Mr. John, sir.

BARTHWICK. What d' you want Mr. John for?

MARLOW [*with hesitation*]. I thought I should find him here, sir.

BARTHWICK [*suspiciously*]. Yes, but what do you want him for?

MARLOW [*offhandedly*]. There's a lady called—asked to speak to him for a minute, sir.

BARTHWICK. A lady, at this time in the morning. What sort of a lady?

MARLOW [*without expression in his voice*]. I can't tell, sir, no particular sort. She might be after charity. She might be a Sister of Mercy, I should think, sir.

BARTHWICK. Is she dressed like one?

MARLOW. No, sir, she's in plain clothes, sir.

BARTHWICK. Didn't she say what she wanted?

MARLOW. No, sir.

BARTHWICK. Where did you leave her?

MARLOW. In the hall, sir.

BARTHWICK. In the hall? How do you know she's not a thief—not got designs on the house?

MARLOW. No, sir I don't fancy so, sir.

BARTHWICK. Well, show her in here; I'll see her myself.

[*MARLOW goes out with a private gesture of dismay. He soon returns, ushering in a young pale lady with dark eyes and pretty figure, in a modish, black, but rather shabby dress, a black and white trimmed hat with a bunch of Parma violets wrongly placed, and fuzzy-spotted veil. At the sight of MR. BARTHWICK she exhibits every sign of nervousness. MARLOW goes out.*]

UNKNOWN LADY. Oh! but—I beg pardon—there's some mistake—I—

[*She turns to fly.*]

BARTHWICK. Whom did you want to see, madam?

UNKNOWN [*stopping and looking back*]. It was Mr. John Barthwick I wanted to see.

BARTHWICK. I am John Barthwick, madam. What can I have the pleasure of doing for you?

UNKNOWN. Oh! I—I don't—

[*She drops her eyes. BARTHWICK scrutinizes her, and purses his lips.*]

BARTHWICK. It was my son, perhaps, you wished to see?

UNKNOWN [*quickly*]. Yes, of course, it's your son.

BARTHWICK. May I ask whom I have the pleasure of speaking to?

UNKNOWN [*appeal and hardness upon her face*]. My name is—oh! it doesn't matter—I don't want to make any fuss. I just want to see your son for a minute. [*Boldly.*] In fact, I must see him.

BARTHWICK [*controlling his uneasiness*]. My son is not very well. If necessary, no doubt I could attend to the matter; be so kind as to let me know—

UNKNOWN Oh! but I must see him—I've come on purpose— [*She bursts out nervously*] I don't want to make any fuss, but the fact is, last—last night your son took away—he took away my— [*She stops*]

BARTHWICK [*severely*]. Yes, madam, what?

UNKNOWN. He took away my—my reticule.

BARTHWICK. Your reti—?

UNKNOWN. I don't care about the reticule; it's not *that* I want—I'm sure I don't want to make any fuss— [*her face is quivering*—but—but—all my money was in it!

BARTHWICK. In what—in what?

UNKNOWN. In my purse, in the reticule. It was a crimson silk purse. Really, I wouldn't have come—I don't want to make any fuss. But I must get my money back—mustn't I?

BARTHWICK. Do you tell me that my son—?

UNKNOWN. Oh! well, you see, he wasn't quite—I mean he was—

[*She smiles mesmerically*]

BARTHWICK. I beg your pardon.

UNKNOWN [*stamping her foot*]. Oh! don't you see—tipsy! We had a quarrel.

BARTHWICK [*scandalized*]. How? Where?

UNKNOWN [*defiantly*]. At my place. We'd had supper at the— and your son—

BARTHWICK [*pressing the bell*]. May I ask you how you knew this house? Did he give you his name and address?

UNKNOWN [*glancing sidelong*]. I got it out of his overcoat.

BARTHWICK [*sardonically*]. Oh! you got it out of his overcoat. And may I ask if my son will know you by daylight?

UNKNOWN. Know me? I should jolly— I mean, of course he will!

[*MARLOW comes in*]

BARTHWICK. Ask Mr. John to come down. [*MARLOW goes out, and BARTHWICK walks uneasily about*] And how long have you enjoyed his acquaintance-ship?

UNKNOWN. Only since—only since Good Friday.

BARTHWICK. I am at a loss—I repeat I am at a loss—

[*He glances at this unknown lady, who stands with eyes cast down, twisting her hands. And suddenly JACK ap-*

pears. He stops at seeing who is here, and the unknown lady hysterically giggles. There is a silence]

BARTHWICK [*portentously*]. This young—er—lady says that last night—I think you said it was last night, madam—you took away—

UNKNOWN [*impulsively*]. My reticule, and all my money was in a crimson silk purse.

JACK Reticule [*Looking round for any chance to get away*] I don't know anything about it.

BARTHWICK [*sharply*]. Come, do you deny seeing this young lady last night?

JACK. Deny? No, of course. [*Whispering*] Why did you give me away like this? What on earth did you come here for?

UNKNOWN [*tearfully*]. I'm sure I didn't want to—it's not likely, is it? You snatched it out of my hand—you know you did—and the purse had all my money in it. I didn't follow you last night because I didn't want to make a fuss and it was so late, and you were so—

BARTHWICK. Come, sir, don't turn your back on me—explain!

JACK [*desperately*]. I don't remember anything about it. [*In a low voice to his friend*] Why on earth couldn't you have written?

UNKNOWN [*sullenly*]. I want it now; I must have it—I've got to pay my rent to-day. [*She looks at BARTHWICK*]. They're only too glad to jump on people who are not—not *well off*.

JACK. I don't remember anything about it, really I don't remember anything about last night at all. [*He puts his hand up to his head*] It's all—cloudy, and I've got such a beastly headache.

UNKNOWN. But you *took* it; you know you did. You said you'd score me off.

JACK. Well, then, it must be here. I remember now—I remember something. Why did I take the beastly thing?

BARTHWICK. Yes, why did you take the beastly—

[*He turns abruptly to the window*]

UNKNOWN [*with her mesmeric smile*]. You weren't quite— were you?

JACK [*smiling pallidly*]. I'm awfully sorry. If there's anything I can do—

BARTHWICK. Do? You can restore this property, I suppose.

JACK. I'll go and have a look, but I really don't think I've got it.

[*He goes out hurriedly. And BARTHWICK, placing a chair, motions to the visitor to sit, then with pursed lips, he stands and eyes her fixedly. She sits,*

and steals a look at him; then turns away, and, drawing up her veil, stealthily wipes her eyes. And JACK comes back]

JACK [*triefuilly holding out the empty reticule*]. Is that the thing? I've looked all over—I can't find the purse anywhere. Are you sure it was there?

UNKNOWN [*tearfully*]. Sure? Of course I'm sure. A crimson silk purse. It was all the money I had.

JACK. I really am awfully sorry—my head's so jolly bad. I've asked the butler, but he hasn't seen it.

UNKNOWN. I *must* have my money

JACK. Oh! Of course—that'll be all right; I'll see that that's all right. How much?

UNKNOWN [*sullenly*]. Seven pounds—twelve—it's all I've got in the world.

JACK. That'll be all right—I'll send you a cheque.

UNKNOWN [*eagerly*]. No; now, please. Give me what was in my purse; I've got to pay my rent this morning. They won't give me another day; I'm a fortnight behind already.

JACK [*blankly*]. I'm awfully sorry; I really haven't got a penny in my pocket.

[*He glances stealthily at BARTHWICK*]

UNKNOWN [*excitedly*]. Come, I say you must—it's my money, and you took it. I'm not going away without it. They'll turn me out of my place.

JACK [*clasping his head*]. But I can't give you what I haven't got. Don't I tell you I haven't a beastly cent?

UNKNOWN [*tearing at her handkerchief*]. Oh! do give it to me! [*She puts her hands together in appeal; then, with sudden fierceness*]. If you don't I'll summons you. It's stealing, that's what it is!

BARTHWICK [*uneasily*]. One moment, please. As a matter of—er—principle, I shall settle this claim [*He produces money*]. Here is eight pounds; the extra will cover the value of the purse and your cab fares. I need make no comment—no thanks are necessary.

[*Touching the bell, he holds the door ajar in silence. The unknown lady stores the money in her reticule, she looks from JACK to BARTHWICK, and her face is quivering faintly with a smile. She hides it with her hand, and steals away. Behind her BARTHWICK shuts the door.*]

BARTHWICK [*with solemnity*]. H'm! This is a nice thing to happen!

JACK [*impersonally*]. What awful luck!

BARTHWICK. So this is the way that forty pounds has gone! One thing after another! Once more I should like to know where you'd have been if it hadn't been for me! You don't seem to have any principles. You—you're one of those who are a nuisance to society, you—you're dangerous! What your mother would say I don't know. Your conduct, as far as I can see, is absolutely unjustifiable. It's—it's criminal. Why, a poor man who behaved as you've done . . . d' you think he'd have any mercy shown him? What you want is a good lesson. You and your sort are—[*he speaks with feeling*].—a nuisance to the community. Don't ask me to help you next time. You're not fit to be helped.

JACK [*turning upon his side, with unexpected fierceness*]. All right, I won't then, and see how you like it. You wouldn't have helped me this time, I know, if you hadn't been scared the thing would get into the papers. Where are the cigarettes?

BARTHWICK [*regarding him uneasily*]. Well—I'll say no more about it. [*He rings the bell*]. I'll pass it over for this once, but—[*MARLOW comes in.*] You can clear away.

[*He hides his face behind the "Times"*]

JACK [*brightening*]. I say, Marlow, where are the cigarettes?

MARLOW. I put the box out with the whisky last night, sir, but this morning I can't find it anywhere.

JACK. Did you look in my room?

MARLOW. Yes, sir; I've looked all over the house. I found two Nestor ends in the tray this morning, so you must have been smokin' last night, sir. [*Hesitating*]. I'm really afraid some one's purloined the box.

JACK [*uneasily*]. Stolen it!

BARTHWICK. What's that? the cigarette-box? Is anything else missing?

MARLOW. No, sir; I've been through the plate.

BARTHWICK. Was the house all right this morning? None of the windows open?

MARLOW. No, sir. [*Quietly to JACK*]. You left your latch-key in the door last night, sir.

[*He hands it back, unseen by BARTHWICK*]

JACK. Tst!

BARTHWICK. Who's been in the room this morning?

MARLOW. Me and Wheeler, and Mrs. Jones is all, sir, as far as I know.

BARTHWICK. Have you asked Mrs. Barthwick? [*To JACK*]. Go and ask your mother if she's had it; ask her to look and see if she's missed anything else. [*JACK*

goes upon this mission.] Nothing is more disquieting than losing things like this.

MARLOW No, sir.

BARTHWICK. Have you any suspicions?

MARLOW. No, sir.

BARTHWICK. This Mrs. Jones—how long has she been working here?

MARLOW Only this last month, sir.

BARTHWICK What sort of person?

MARLOW I don't know much about her, sir; seems a very quiet, respectable woman

BARTHWICK. Who did the room this morning?

MARLOW. Wheeler and Mrs. Jones, sir.

BARTHWICK [*with his forefinger up-raised*] Now, was this Mrs. Jones in the room alone at any time?

MARLOW [*expressionless*]. Yes, sir

BARTHWICK How do you know that?

MARLOW [*reluctantly*]. I found her here, sir.

BARTHWICK. And has Wheeler been in the room alone?

MARLOW. No, sir, she's not, sir. I should say, sir, that Mrs. Jones seems a very honest—

BARTHWICK [*holding up his hand*] I want to know this Has this Mrs. Jones been here the whole morning?

MARLOW. Yes, sir—no, sir—she stepped over to the greengrocer's for cook.

BARTHWICK. H'm! Is she in the house now?

MARLOW. Yes, sir.

BARTHWICK. Very good. I shall make a point of clearing this up On principle I shall make a point of fixing the responsibility; it goes to the foundations of security. In all your interests—

MARLOW Yes, sir.

BARTHWICK. What sort of circumstances is this Mrs. Jones in? Is her husband in work?

MARLOW. I believe not, sir

BARTHWICK. Very well. Say nothing about it to any one. Tell Wheeler not to speak of it, and ask Mrs. Jones to step up here.

MARLOW. Very good, sir

[*MARLOW goes out, his face concerned; and BARTHWICK stays, his face judicial and a little pleased, as befits a man conducting an inquiry. MRS BARTHWICK and her son come in*]

BARTHWICK. Well, my dear, you've not seen it, I suppose?

MRS. BARTHWICK. No But what an extraordinary thing, John! Marlow, of

course, is out of the question. I'm certain none of the maids—as for cook!

BARTHWICK. Oh, cook!

MRS BARTHWICK. Of course! It's perfectly detestable to me to suspect anybody.

BARTHWICK. It's not a question of one's feelings. It's a question of justice. On principle—

MRS. BARTHWICK. I shouldn't be a bit surprised if the charwoman knew something about it. It was Laura who recommended her

BARTHWICK [*judicially*] I am going to have Mrs. Jones up. Leave it to me; and—er—remember that nobody is guilty until they're proven so. I shall be careful I have no intention of frightening her, I shall give her every chance. I hear she's in poor circumstances If we are not able to do much for them, we are bound to have the greatest sympathy with the poor. [*MRS. JONES comes in Pleasantly*] Oh! good morning, Mrs. Jones.

MRS. JONES [*soft, and even, unemphatic*]. Good morning, sir! Good morning, ma'am!

BARTHWICK. About your husband—he's not in work, I hear?

MRS. JONES. No, sir; of course, he's not in work just now.

BARTHWICK. Then I suppose he's earning nothing

MRS. JONES. No, sir, he's not earning anything just now, sir.

BARTHWICK. And how many children have you?

MRS. JONES. Three children; but of course they don't eat very much, sir.

[*A little silence.*]

BARTHWICK. And how old is the eldest?

MRS. JONES. Nine years old, sir

BARTHWICK. Do they go to school?

MRS JONES. Yes, sir, they all three go to school every day.

BARTHWICK [*severely*] And what about their food when you're out at work?

MRS. JONES. Well, sir, I have to give them their dinner to take with them Of course I'm not always able to, give them anything; sometimes I have to send them without; but my husband is very good about the children when he's in work But when he's not in work of course he's a very difficult man.

BARTHWICK. He drinks, I suppose?

MRS. JONES Yes, sir. Of course I can't say he doesn't drink, because he does

BARTHWICK And I suppose he takes all your money?

MRS. JONES No, sir, he's very good about my money, except when he's not himself, and then, of course, he treats me very badly

BARTHWICK. Now what is he—your husband?

MRS. JONES. By profession, sir, of course he's a groom

BARTHWICK A groom! How came he to lose his place?

MRS. JONES He lost his place a long time ago, sir, and he's never had a very long job since; and now, of course, the motor cars are against him

BARTHWICK When were you married to him, Mrs. Jones?

MRS. JONES Eight years ago, sir—that was in —

MRS. BARTHWICK [*sharply*]. Eight? You said the eldest child was nine.

MRS. JONES. Yes, ma'am; of course that was why he lost his place. He didn't treat me rightly, and of course his employer said he couldn't keep him because of the example.

BARTHWICK. You mean he—ahem —

MRS. JONES. Yes, sir; and of course after he lost his place he married me.

MRS. BARTHWICK. You actually mean to say—you were —

BARTHWICK. My dear —

MRS. BARTHWICK [*indignant*]. How disgraceful!

BARTHWICK [*hurriedly*]. And where are you living now, Mrs. Jones?

MRS. JONES. We've not got a home, sir. Of course we've been obliged to put away most of our things.

BARTHWICK. Put your things away! You mean to—er—to pawn them?

MRS. JONES. Yes, sir, to put them away. We're living in Merthyr Street—that is close by here, sir—at No. 34. We just have one room.

BARTHWICK. And what do you pay a week?

MRS. JONES. We pay six shillings a week, sir, for a furnished room.

BARTHWICK. And I suppose you are behind in the rent?

MRS. JONES. Yes, sir, we're a little behind in the rent

BARTHWICK. But *you're* in good work, aren't you?

MRS. JONES. Well, sir, I have a day in Stamford Place Thursdays And Mondays and Wednesdays and Fridays I come here. But today, of course, is a half-day, because of yesterday's Bank Holiday.

BARTHWICK. I see; four days a week, and you get half a crown a day, is that it?

MRS. JONES. Yes, sir, and my dinner; but sometimes it's only half a day, and that's eighteenpence

BARTHWICK And when your husband earns anything he spends it in drink, I suppose?

MRS. JONES Sometimes he does, sir, and sometimes he gives it to me for the children. Of course he would work if he could get it, sir, but it seems there are a great many people out of work

BARTHWICK Ah! Yes We—er—won't go into that. [*Sympathetically*] And how about your work here? Do you find it hard?

MRS. JONES. Oh! no, sir, not very hard, sir; except of course, when I don't get my sleep at night.

BARTHWICK Ah! And you help do all the rooms? And sometimes, I suppose, you go out for cook?

MRS. JONES. Yes, sir

BARTHWICK And you've been out this morning?

MRS. JONES. Yes, sir, of course I had to go to the greengrocer's

BARTHWICK Exactly So your husband earns nothing? And he's a bad character

MRS. JONES No, sir, I don't say that, sir. I think there's a great deal of good in him; though he does treat me very bad sometimes. And of course I don't like to leave him, but I think I ought to, because really I hardly know how to stay with him He often raises his hand to me. Not long ago he gave me a blow here [*touches her breast*] and I can feel it now. So I think I ought to leave him, don't *you*, sir?

BARTHWICK Ah! I can't help you there. It's a very serious thing to leave your husband. Very serious thing.

MRS. JONES Yes, sir, of course I'm afraid of what he might do to me if I were to leave him; he can be so very violent.

BARTHWICK H'm! Well, that I can't pretend to say anything about. It's the bad principle I'm speaking of —

MRS. JONES Yes, sir; I know nobody can help me. I know I must decide for myself, and of course I know that he has a very hard life. And he's fond of the children, and it's very hard for him to see them going without food

BARTHWICK [*hastily*]. Well—er—thank you, I just wanted to hear about you. I don't think I need detain you any longer Mrs.—Jones.

MRS. JONES. No, sir, thank you, sir.

BARTHWICK Good morning, then.

MRS JONES. Good morning, sir; good morning, ma'am.

BARTHWICK [*exchanging glances with his wife*]. By the way, Mrs. Jones, I think it is only fair to tell you, a silver cigarette-box—er—is missing.

MRS JONES [*looking from one face to the other*] I am very sorry, sir.

BARTHWICK. Yes, you have not seen it, I suppose?

MRS JONES [*realizing that suspicion is upon her; with an uneasy movement*] Where was it, sir; if you please, sir?

BARTHWICK [*evasively*] Where did Marlow say? Er—in this room, yes, in *this* room.

MRS. JONES. No, sir, I haven't seen it—of course if I'd seen it I would have noticed it

BARTHWICK [*giving her a rapid glance*]. You—you are sure of that?

MRS. JONES [*impassively*] Yes, sir. [*With a slow nodding of her head*]. I have not seen it, and of course I *don't* know where it is.

[*She turns and goes quietly out.*]

BARTHWICK H'm!

[*The three BARTHWICKS avoid each other's glances*]

THE CURTAIN FALLS

ACT II

SCENE I.—*The JONES'S lodgings, Merthyr Street, at half-past two o'clock.*

The bare room, with tattered oilcloth and damp, discoloured walls, has an air of tidy wretchedness. On the bed lies JONES, half-dressed; his coat is thrown across his feet, and muddy boots are lying on the floor close by. He is asleep. The door is opened and MRS. JONES comes in, dressed in a pinched black jacket and old black sailor hat; she carries a parcel wrapped up in the "Times." She puts her parcel down, unwraps an apron, half a loaf, two onions, three potatoes, and a tiny piece of bacon. Taking a teapot from the cupboard, she rinses it, shakes into it some powdered tea out of a screw of paper, puts it on the hearth, and sitting in a wooden chair quietly begins to cry.

JONES [*stirring and yawning*]. That you? What's the time?

MRS. JONES [*drying her eyes, and in her usual voice*]. Half-past two.

JONES. What you back so soon for?

MRS JONES. I had only the half day today, Jem.

JONES [*on his back, and in a drowsy voice*] Got anything for dinner?

MRS. JONES. Mrs Barthwick's cook gave me a little bit of bacon I am going to make a stew [*She prepares for cooking*]. There's fourteen shillings owing for rent, James, and of course I've got only two and fourpence They'll be coming for it today.

JONES [*turning towards her on his elbow*]. Let 'em come and find my surprise packet. I've had enough o' this trying for work. Why should I go round and round after a job like a bloomin' squirrel in a cage. "Give us a job, sir"—"Take a man on"—"Got a wife and three children" Sick of it I am! I'd sooner lie here and rot "Jones, you come and join the demonstration; come and 'old a flag and listen to the ruddy orators, and go 'ome as empty as you came" There's some that seems to like *that*—the sheep! When I go sseekin' for a job now, and see the brutes lookin' me up and down, it's like a thousand serpents in me. I'm not arskin' for any treat A man wants to sweat hussell silly and not allowed—that's a rum start, ain't it? A man wants to sweat his soul out to keep the breath in him and an't allowed—that's justice—that's freedom and all the rest of it. [*He turns his face towards the wall*]. You're so milky mild, you don't know what goes on inside o' me. I'm done with the silly game. If they want me, let 'em come for me! [*MRS JONES stops cooking and stands unmoving at the table*]. I've tried and done with it, I tell you I've never been afraid of what's before me. You mark my words—if you think they've broke my spirit, you're mistook. I'll lie and rot sooner than arsk 'em again. What makes you stand like that—you long-sufferin', Gawd-forsaken image—that's why I can't keep my hands off you. So now you know. Work! You can work, but you haven't the spirit of a louse!

MRS. JONES. [*quietly*]. You talk more wild sometimes when you're yourself, James, than when you're not. If you don't get work, how are we to go on? They won't let us stay here; they're looking to their money to-day, I know.

JONES. I see this Barthwick o' yours every day goin' down to Pawlyment snug and comfortable to talk his silly soul out; an' I see that young calf, his son, swellin' it about, and goin' on the razzle-dazzle. Wot 'ave they done that makes 'em any better than wot I am? They never did a day's work in their lives. I see 'em day after day—

MRS. JONES. And I wish you wouldn't come after me like that, and hang about the house. You don't seem able to keep away at all, and whatever you do it for I can't think, because of course they notice it.

JONES. I suppose I may go where I like. Where may I go? The other day I went to a place in the Edgware Road "Gov'nor," I says to the boss, "take me on," I says. "I 'aven't done a stroke o' work not these two months; it takes the heart out of a man," I says; "I'm one to work; I'm not afraid of anything you can give me!" "My good man," 'e says, "I've had thirty of you here this morning I took the first two," he says, "and that's all I want." "Thank you, then rot the world!" I says "Blaspheming," he says, "is not the way to get a job. Out you go, my lad!" [*He laughs sardonically*] Don't you raise your voice because you're starvin', don't yer even think of it; take it lyin' down! Take it like a sensible man, carn't you? And a little way down the street a lady says to me: [*Pinching his voice*] "D'you want to earn a few pence, my man?" and gives me her dog to 'old outside a shop—fat as a butler 'e was—tons o' meat had gone to the makin' of *him*. It did 'er good, it did, made 'er feel 'erself that *charitable*, but I see 'er lookin' at the copper standin' alongside o' me, for fear I should make off with 'er bloomin' fat dog [*He sits on the edge of the bed and puts a boot on. Then looking up*] What's in that head o' yours? [*Almost pathetically.*] Carn't you speak for once?

[*There is a knock, and MRS. SEDDON, the landlady, appears, an anxious, harassed, shabby woman in working clothes*]

MRS. SEDDON. I thought I 'eard you come in, Mrs. Jones. I've spoke to my 'usband, but he says he really can't afford to wait another day.

JONES [*with scowling jocularly*]. Never you mind what your 'usband says, you go your own way like a proper independent woman. Here, Jenny, chuck her that.

[*Producing a sovereign from his trousers pocket, he throws it to his wife, who catches it in her apron with a gasp*]
JONES resumes the lacing of his boots]

MRS. JONES [*rubbing the sovereign stealthily*]. I'm very sorry we're so late with it, and of course it's fourteen shillings, so if you've got six that will be right.

[*MRS. SEDDON takes the sovereign and fumbles for the change.*]

JONES [*with his eyes fixed on his boots*]. Bit of a surprise for yer, ain't it?

MRS. SEDDON. Thank you, and I'm sure I'm very much obliged [*She does indeed appear surprised*] I'll bring you the change.

JONES [*mockingly*]. Don't mention it.

MRS. SEDDON. Thank you, and I'm sure I'm very much obliged

[*She slides away.*]

[*MRS. JONES gazes at JONES who is still lacing up his boots.*]

JONES. I've had a bit of luck. [*Pulling out the crimson purse and some loose coins*] Picked up a purse—seven pound and more

MRS. JONES. Oh, James!

JONES. Oh, James! What about Oh, James! I picked it up I tell you. This is lost property, this is!

MRS. JONES. But isn't there a name in it, or something?

JONES. Name? No, there ain't no name. This don't belong to such as 'ave visitin' cards. This belongs to a perfec' lady. Take an' smell it. [*He pitches her the purse, which she puts gently to her nose.*] Now, you tell me what I ought to have done. You tell me that. You can always tell me what I ought to ha' done, can't yer?

MRS. JONES [*laying down the purse*]. I can't say what you ought to have done, James. Of course the money wasn't yours; you've taken somebody else's money.

JONES. Findin's keeping. I'll take it as wages for the time I've gone about the streets asking for what's my rights I'll take it for what's *overdue*, d'ye hear? [*With strange triumph.*] I've got money in my pocket, my girl. [*MRS. JONES goes on again with the preparation of the meal, JONES looking at her furtively*] Money in my pocket! And I'm not goin' to waste it. With this 'ere money I'm goin' to Canada. I'll let you have a pound. [*A silence.*] You've often talked of leavin' me. You've often told me I treat you badly—well I 'ope you'll be glad when I'm gone.

MRS. JONES [*impassively*]. You *have* treated me very badly, James, and of course I can't prevent your going; but I can't tell whether I shall be glad when you're gone.

JONES. It'll change my luck. I've 'ad nothing but bad luck since I first took up with you. [*More softly.*] And you've 'ad no bloomin' picnic.

MRS. JONES. Of course it would have been better for us if we had never met. We weren't meant for each other. But you're set against me, that's what you are, and

you *have* been for a long time And you treat me so badly, James, going after that Rosie and all You don't ever seem to think of the children that I've had to bring into the world, and of all the trouble I've had to keep them, and what'll become of them when you're gone.

JONES [*crossing the room gloomily*]. If you think I want to leave the little beggars you're bloomin' well mistaken

MRS. JONES. Of course I know you're fond of them.

JONES [*fingering the purse, half angrily*]. Well, then, you stow it, old girl. The kids'll get along better with you than when I'm here. If I'd ha' known as much as I do now, I'd never ha' had one o' them. What's the use o' bringin' 'em into a state o' things like this? It's a crime, that's what it is; but you find it out too late; that's what's the matter with this 'ere world.

[*He puts the purse back into his pocket.*]

MRS. JONES. Of course it would have been better for them, poor little things; but they're your own children, and I wonder at you talkin' like that. I should miss them dreadfully if I was to lose them.

JONES [*sullenly*]. An' you ain't the only one. If I make money out there— [*Looking up, he sees her shaking out his coat—in a changed voice*] Leave that coat alone!

[*The silver box drops from the pocket, scattering the cigarettes upon the bed. Taking up the box she stares at it; he rushes at her and snatches the box away.*]

MRS. JONES [*cowering back against the bed*]. Oh, Jem! oh, Jem!

JONES [*dropping the box onto the table*]. You mind what you're sayin'! When I go out I'll take and chuck it in the water along with that there purse. I 'ad it when I was in liquor, and for what you do when you're in liquor you're not responsible—and that's Gawd's truth as you ought to know. I don't want the thing—I won't have it. I took it out o' spite. I'm no thief, I tell you; and don't you call me one, or it'll be the worse for you

MRS. JONES [*twisting her apron strings*]. It's Mr. Barthwick's! You've taken away my reputation. Oh, Jem, whatever made you?

JONES. What d' you mean?

MRS. JONES. It's been missed; they think it's me. Oh! whatever made you do it, Jem?

JONES. I tell you I was in liquor. I don't want it; what's the good of it to me? If I were to pawn it they'd only nab me.

I'm no thief. I'm no worse than wot that young Barthwick is; he brought 'ome that purse that I picked up—a lady's purse—'ad it off 'er in a row, kept sayin' 'e'd scored 'er off. Well, I scored 'im off. T'ight as an owl 'e was! And d' you think anything'll happen to him?

MRS. JONES [*as though speaking to herself*]. Oh, Jem! it's the bread out of our mouths!

JONES. Is it then? I'll make it hot for 'em yet. What about that purse? What about young Barthwick? [*MRS. JONES comes forward to the table and tries to take the box; JONES prevents her*] What do you want with that? You drop it, I say!

MRS. JONES. I'll take it back and tell them all about it.

[*She attempts to wrest the box from him.*]

JONES. Ah, would yer?

[*He drops the box, and rushes on her with a snarl. She slips back past the bed. He follows; a chair is overturned. The door is opened; SNOW comes in, a detective in plain clothes and a bowler hat, with clipped mustaches. JONES drops his arms, MRS. JONES stands by the window gasping; SNOW, advancing swiftly to the table, puts his hand on the silver box.*]

SNOW. Doin' a bit o' skylarkin'? Fancy this is what I'm after J B, the very same. [*He gets back to the door, scrutinizing the crest and cypher on the box to MRS. JONES.*] I'm a police officer. Are you Mrs. Jones?

MRS. JONES. Yes, sir

SNOW. My instructions are to take you on a charge of stealing this box from J. Barthwick, Esquire, M. P., of 6, Rockingham Gate. Anything you say may be used against you. Well, Missis?

MRS. JONES [*in her quiet voice, still out of breath, her hand upon her breast*]. Of course I did *not* take it, sir. I never have taken anything that didn't belong to me; and of course I know nothing about it.

SNOW. You were at the house this morning; you did the room in which this box was left; you were alone in the room. I find the box 'ere. You say you didn't take it?

MRS. JONES. Yes, sir, of course I say I did *not* take it, because I did *not*.

SNOW. Then how does the box come to be here?

MRS. JONES. I would rather not say anything about it.

SNOW. Is this your husband?

MRS. JONES. Yes, sir, this is my husband, sir.

SNOW Do you wish to say anything before I take her? [*JONES remains silent, with his head bent down*] Well then, Missis. I'll just trouble you to come along with me quietly.

MRS. JONES [*twisting her hands*]. Of course I wouldn't say I hadn't taken it if I had—and I *didn't* take it, indeed I didn't. Of course I know appearances are against me, and I can't tell you what really happened. But my children are at school, and they'll be coming home—and I don't know what they'll do without me!

SNOW Your 'usband'll see to them, don't you worry.

[*He takes the woman gently by the arm*]

JONES. You drop it—she's all right! [*Sullenly*] I took the thing myself

SNOW [*eyeing him*]. There, there, it does you credit. Come along, Missis.

JONES [*passionately*]. Drop it, I say, you blooming teck. She's my wife; she's a respectable woman. Take her if you dare!

SNOW. Now, now. What's the good of this? Keep a civil tongue, and it'll be the better for all of us.

[*He puts his whistle in his mouth and draws the woman to the door*]

JONES [*with a rush*]. Drop her, and put up your 'ands, or I'll soon make yer You leave her alone, will yer! Don't I tell yer, I took the thing myself!

SNOW. [*Blowing his whistle*] Drop your hands, or I'll take you too. Ah, would you?

[*JONES, closing, deals him a blow. A Policeman in uniform appears; there is a short struggle and JONES is overpowered. MRS. JONES raises her hands and drops her face on them*]

THE CURTAIN FALLS

SCENE II.—*The BARTHWICKS' dining room the same evening. The BARTHWICKS are seated at dessert*

MRS. BARTHWICK. John! [*A silence broken by the cracking of nuts*] John!

BARTHWICK. I wish you'd speak about the nuts—they're uneatable.

[*He puts one into his mouth*]

MRS. BARTHWICK. It's not the season for them. I called on the Holyroods.

[*BARTHWICK fills his glass with port*]

JACK Crackers, please, Dad.

[*BARTHWICK passes the crackers. His demeanor is reflective.*]

MRS. BARTHWICK. Lady Holyrood

has got very stout. I've noticed it coming for a long time

BARTHWICK [*gloomily*] Stout? [*He takes up the crackers—with transparent airiness.*] The Holyroods had some trouble with their servants, didn't they?

JACK Crackers, please, Dad

BARTHWICK [*passing the crackers*]. It got into the papers. The cook, wasn't it?

MRS. BARTHWICK. No, the lady's maid. I was talking it over with Lady Holyrood. The girl used to have her young man to see her.

BARTHWICK [*uneasily*]. I am not sure they were wise —

MRS. BARTHWICK. My dear John, what are you talking about? How could there be any alternative? Think of the effect on the other servants!

BARTHWICK. Of course in principle—I wasn't thinking of that.

JACK [*maliciously*]. Crackers, please, Dad.

[*BARTHWICK is compelled to pass the crackers.*]

MRS. BARTHWICK. Lady Holyrood told me. "I had her up," she said, "I said to her, 'You'll leave my house at once; I think your conduct disgraceful. I can't tell, I don't know, and I don't wish to know, what you were doing. I send you away on principle, you need not come to me for a character.' And the girl said, 'If you don't give me my notice, my lady, I want a month's wages. I'm perfectly respectable. I've done nothing.'"—Done nothing!

BARTHWICK. H'm!

MRS. BARTHWICK. Servants have too much license. They hang together so terribly you never can tell what they're really thinking, it's as if they were all in a conspiracy to keep you in the dark. Even with Marlow, you feel that he never lets you know what's really in his mind. I hate that secretiveness; it destroys all confidence. I feel sometimes I should like to shake him.

JACK. Marlow's a most decent chap. It's simply beastly every one knowing your affairs.

BARTHWICK. The less you say about that the better!

MRS. BARTHWICK. It goes all through the lower classes. You can *not* tell when they are speaking the truth. Today when I was shopping after leaving the Holyroods, one of these unemployed came up and spoke to me. I suppose I only had twenty yards or so to walk to the carriage, but he seemed to spring up in the street.

BARTHWICK. Ah! You must be very careful whom you speak to in these days.

MRS. BARTHWICK. I didn't answer him, of course. But I could see at once that he wasn't telling the truth.

BARTHWICK [*cracking a nut*] There's one very good rule—look at their eyes.

JACK Crackers, please, Dad.

BARTHWICK [*passing the crackers*]. If their eyes are straightforward I sometimes give them sixpence. It's against my principles, but it's most difficult to refuse if you see that they're desperate, and dull, and shifty-looking, as so many of them are, it's certain to mean drink, or crime, or something unsatisfactory.

MRS. BARTHWICK This man had dreadful eyes. He looked as if he could commit a murder. "I've 'ad nothing to eat today," he said. Just like that.

BARTHWICK What was William about? He ought to have been waiting.

JACK [*raising his wine-glass to his nose*]. Is this the '63, Dad?

[BARTHWICK, *holding his wine-glass to his eye, lowers it and passes it before his nose*]

MRS. BARTHWICK. I hate people that can't speak the truth. [*Father and son exchange a look behind their port*] It's just as easy to speak the truth as not. I've always found it easy enough. It makes it impossible to tell what is genuine, one feels as if one were continually being taken in.

BARTHWICK [*sententiously*] The lower classes are their own enemies. If they would only trust us, they would get on so much better.

MRS. BARTHWICK. But even then it's so often their own fault. Look at that Mrs. Jones this morning.

BARTHWICK. I only want to do what's right in that matter. I had occasion to see Roper this afternoon. I mentioned it to him. He's coming in this evening. It all depends on what the detective says. I've had my doubts. I've been thinking it over.

MRS. BARTHWICK. The woman impressed me most unfavorably. She seemed to have no shame. That affair she was talking about—she and the man when they were young, so immoral! And before you and Jack! I could have put her out of the room!

BARTHWICK. Oh! I don't want to excuse them, but in looking at these matters one must consider—

MRS. BARTHWICK. Perhaps you'll say the man's employer was wrong in dismissing him?

BARTHWICK. Of course not. It's not there that I feel doubt. What I ask myself 's—

JACK. Port, please, Dad.

BARTHWICK [*calculating the decanter in religious imitation of the rising and setting of the sun*]. I ask myself whether we are sufficiently careful in making inquiries about people before we engage them, especially as regards moral conduct.

JACK. Pass the port, please, Mother!

MRS. BARTHWICK [*passing it*]. My dear boy, aren't you drinking too much?

[JACK fills his glass]

MARLOW [*entering*]. Detective Snow to see you, sir.

BARTHWICK [*uneasily*]. Ah! say I'll be with him in a minute.

MRS. BARTHWICK [*without turning*]. Let him come in here, Marlow.

[SNOW enters in an overcoat, his bowler hat in hand.]

BARTHWICK [*half-rising*] Oh! Good evening!

SNOW Good evening, sir; good evening, ma'am. I've called around to report what I've done, rather late, I'm afraid—another case took me away. [*He takes the silver box out of his pocket, causing a sensation in the BARTHWICK family.*] This is the identical article, I believe.

BARTHWICK Certainly, certainly.

SNOW. Havin' your crest and cypher, as you described to me, sir, I'd no hesitation in the matter.

BARTHWICK. Excellent. Will you have a glass of [*he glances at the waning port*]—er—sherry—[*pours out sherry.*] Jack, just give Mr. Snow this

[JACK rises and gives the glass to SNOW; then, *lolling in his chair, regards him indolently*]

SNOW [*drinking off wine and putting down the glass*]. After seeing you I went round to this woman's lodgings, sir. It's a low neighborhood, and I thought it as well to place a constable below—and not without 'e was wanted, as things turned out.

BARTHWICK. Indeed!

SNOW. Yes, sir, I 'ad some trouble. I asked her to account for the presence of the article. She could give me no answer, except to deny the theft; so I took her into custody; then her husband came for me, so I was obliged to take him, too, for assault. He was very violent on the way to the station—very violent—threatened you and your son, and altogether he was a handful, I can tell you.

MRS. BARTHWICK. What a ruffian he must be!

SNOW. Yes, ma'am, a rough customer.

JACK [*sipping his wine, bemused*]. Punch the beggar's head

SNOW. Given to drink, as I understand, sir.

MRS BARTHWICK It's to be hoped he will get a severe punishment

SNOW. The odd thing is, sir, that he persists in sayin' he took the box himself.

BARTHWICK. Took the box himself! [*He smiles*] What does he think to gain by that?

SNOW. He says the young gentleman was intoxicated last night— [*JACK stops the cracking of a nut and looks at SNOW. BARTHWICK losing his smile, has put his wine-glass down; there is a silence—SNOW, looking from face to face, remarks*]—took him into the house and gave him whisky; and under the influence of an empty stomach the man says he took the box.

MRS. BARTHWICK. The impudent wretch!

BARTHWICK. D'you mean that he—er—intends to put that forward tomorrow—

SNOW. That'll be his line, sir; but whether he's endeavouring to shield his wife, or whether [*he looks at JACK*] there's something in it, will be for the magistrate to say

MRS. BARTHWICK [*haughtily*] Something in what? I don't understand you. As if my son would bring a man like that into the house!

BARTHWICK [*from the fireplace, with an effort to be calm*] My son can speak for himself, no doubt—Well, Jack, what do you say?

MRS. BARTHWICK [*sharply*]. What does he say? Why, of course, he says the whole story's stuff!

JACK [*embarrassed*] Well, of course, I—of course, I don't know anything about it.

MRS. BARTHWICK. I should think not, indeed! [*To SNOW.*] The man is an audacious ruffian!

BARTHWICK [*suppressing jumps*]. But in view of my son's saying there's nothing in this—this fable—will it be necessary to proceed against the man under the circumstances?

SNOW We shall have to charge him with the assault, sir. It would be as well for your son to come down to the Court. There'll be a remand, no doubt. The queer thing is there was quite a sum of money found on him, and a crimson silk purse. [*BARTHWICK starts; JACK rises and sits down again.*] I suppose the lady hasn't missed her purse?

BARTHWICK [*hastily*] Oh, no! Oh! No!

JACK No.

MRS BARTHWICK [*dreamily*] No! [*To SNOW*] I've been inquiring of the servants. This man *does* hang about the house. I shall feel much safer if he gets a good long sentence; I do think we ought to be protected against such ruffians.

BARTHWICK. Yes, yes, of course, on principle—but in this case we have a number of things to think of. [*To SNOW*] I suppose, as you say, the man *must* be charged, eh?

SNOW No question about that, sir.

BARTHWICK [*staring gloomily at JACK*] This prosecution goes very much against the grain with me. I have great sympathy with the poor. In my position I'm bound to recognize the distress there is amongst them. The condition of the people leaves much to be desired. D'you follow me? I wish I could see my way to drop it.

MRS. BARTHWICK [*sharply*] John! It's simply not fair to other people. It's putting property at the mercy of any one who likes to take it.

BARTHWICK [*trying to make signs to her aside*] I'm not defending him, not at all. I'm trying to look at the matter broadly.

MRS. BARTHWICK. Nonsense, John, there's a time for everything

SNOW [*rather sardonically*]. I might point out, sir, that to withdraw the charge of stealing would not make much difference, because the facts must come out [*he looks significantly at JACK*] in reference to the assault; and as I said, that charge will have to go forward

BARTHWICK [*hastily*]. Yes, ah! exactly! It's entirely on the woman's account—entirely a matter of my own private feelings.

SNOW. If I were you, sir, I should let things take their course. It's not likely there'll be much difficulty. These things are very quick settled.

BARTHWICK [*doubtfully*]. You think so—you think so?

JACK [*rousing himself*]. I say, what shall I have to swear to?

SNOW. That's best known to yourself, sir [*Retreating to the door*] Better employ a solicitor, sir, in a case anything should arise. We shall have the butler prove the loss of the article. You'll excuse me going, I'm rather pressed to-night. The case may come on any time after eleven. Good evening, sir; good evening, ma'am I shall have to produce the box in court to-

morrow, so if you'll excuse me, sir, I may as well take it with me.

[*He takes the silver box and leaves them with a little bow*]

[*BARTHWICK makes a move to follow him, then dashing his hands beneath his coat-tails, speaks with desperation*]

BARTHWICK I do wish you'd leave me to manage things myself You'd put your nose into matters you know nothing of A pretty mess you've made of this!

MRS. BARTHWICK [*coldly*]. I don't in the least know what you're talking about If you can't stand up for your rights, I can I've no patience with your principles, it's such nonsense

BARTHWICK Principles! Good Heavens! What have principles to do with it, for goodness sake? Don't you know that Jack was drunk last night!

JACK. Dad!

MRS. BARTHWICK [*in horror, rising*]. Jack!

JACK. Look here, Mother—I had supper. Everybody does I mean to say—you know what I mean—it's absurd to call it being drunk. At Oxford everybody gets a bit "on" sometimes—

MRS. BARTHWICK. Well, I think it's most dreadful! If that is really what you do at Oxford—

JACK [*angrily*]. Well, why did you send me there? One must do as other fellows do It's such nonsense, I mean, to call it being drunk. Of course I'm awfully sorry. I've had such a beastly headache all day.

BARTHWICK. Tcha! If you'd only had the common decency to remember what happened when you came in. Then we should know what truth there was in what this fellow says—as it is, it's all the most confounded darkness.

JACK [*staring as though at half-formed visions*]. I just get a—and then—it's gone—

MRS. BARTHWICK. Oh, Jack! do you mean to say you were so tipsy you can't even remember—

JACK. Look here, Mother! Of course I remember I came—I must have come—

BARTHWICK [*unguardedly, and walking up and down*]. Tcha!—and that infernal purse! Good Heavens! It'll get into the papers. Who on earth could have foreseen a thing like this? Better to have lost a dozen cigarette-boxes, and said nothing about it. [*To his wife*] It's all your doing. I told you so from the first. I wish to goodness Roper would come!

MRS. BARTHWICK [*sharply*]. I don't know what you're talking about, John.

BARTHWICK [*turning on her*]. No, you—you—you don't know anything! [*Sharply*]. Where the devil is Roper? If he can see a way out of this he's a better man than I take him for. I defy any one to see a way out of it. I can't

JACK. Look here, don't excite, Dad—I can simply say I was too beastly tired, and don't remember anything except that I came in and [*in a dying voice*] went to bed the same as usual

BARTHWICK Went to bed? Who knows where you went—I've lost all confidence. For all I know you slept on the floor

JACK [*indignantly*]. I didn't. I slept on the—

BARTHWICK [*sitting on the sofa*]. Who cares where you slept; what does it matter if he mentions the—the—a perfect disgrace?

MRS. BARTHWICK What? [*A silence*]. I insist on knowing

JACK. Oh! nothing—

MRS. BARTHWICK. Nothing? What do you mean by nothing, Jack? There's your father in such a state about it—

JACK. It's only my purse.

MRS. BARTHWICK. Your purse! You know perfectly well you haven't got one.

JACK. Well it was somebody else's—it was all a joke—I didn't want the beastly thing—

MRS. BARTHWICK. Do you mean that you had another person's purse, and that this man took it too?

BARTHWICK. Tcha! Of course he took it too! A man like that Jones will make the most of it. It'll get into the papers.

MRS. BARTHWICK. I don't understand What on earth is all the fuss about? [*Bending over JACK, and softly*] Jack, now tell me, dear! Don't be afraid. What is it? Come!

JACK Oh, don't, Mother!

MRS. BARTHWICK. But don't what, dear?

JACK It was pure sport. I don't know how I got the thing. Of course I'd had a bit of a row—I didn't know what I was doing—I was—I was—well, you know—I suppose I must have pulled the bag out of her hand.

MRS. BARTHWICK Out of her hand? Whose hand? What bag—whose bag?

JACK. Oh! I don't know—her bag—it belonged to—[*in a desperate and rising voice*] a woman.

MRS. BARTHWICK. A woman. Oh! Jack! Nol

JACK [*jumping up*]. You would have

it. I didn't want to tell you. It's not my fault.

[*The door opens and MARLOW ushers in a man of middle age, inclined to corpulence, in evening dress. He has a ruddy, thin moustache, and dark, quick-moving little eyes. His eyebrows are Chinese.*]

MARLOW. Mr. Roper, sir.

[*He leaves the room.*]

ROPER [with a quick look around]. How do you do?

[*But neither JACK nor MRS. BARTHWICK make a sign.*]

BARTHWICK [hurrying]. Thank goodness you've come, Roper. You remember what I told you this afternoon, we've just had the detective here

ROPER. Got the box?

BARTHWICK. Yes, yes, but look here—it wasn't the charwoman at all; her drunken loafer of a husband took the things—he says that fellow there [*he waves his hand at JACK, who with his shoulder raised, seems trying to ward off a blow*] let him into the house last night. Can you imagine such a thing?

[*ROPER laughs*]

BARTHWICK [with excited emphasis]. It's no laughing matter, Roper I told you about that business of Jack's too—don't you see—the brute took both the things—took that infernal purse. It'll get into the papers.

ROPER [raising his eyebrows]. H'm! The purse! Depravity in high life! What does your son say?

BARTHWICK. He remembers nothing. D—n! Did you ever see such a mess? It'll get into the papers

MRS. BARTHWICK [with her hand across her eyes]. Oh! it's not that—

[*BARTHWICK and ROPER turn and look at her*]

BARTHWICK. It's the idea of that woman—she's just heard— [*ROPER nods. And MRS. BARTHWICK, setting her lips, gives a slow look at JACK, and sits down at the table.*] What on earth's to be done, Roper? A ruffian like this Jones will make all the capital he can out of that purse.

MRS. BARTHWICK. I don't believe that Jack took that purse.

BARTHWICK. What—when the woman came here for it this morning?

MRS. BARTHWICK. Here? She had the impudence? Why wasn't I told?

[*She looks round from face to face—no one answers her, there is a pause.*]

BARTHWICK [suddenly]. What's to be done, Roper?

ROPER [quietly to JACK]. I suppose you didn't leave your latch-key in the door?

JACK [sullenly]. Yes, I did.

BARTHWICK. Good heavens! What next?

MRS. BARTHWICK. I'm certain you never let that man into the house, Jack, it's a wild invention. I'm sure there's not a word of truth in it, Mr. Roper.

ROPER [very suddenly]. Where did you sleep last night?

JACK [promptly]. On the sofa, there— [*hesitating*] that is—I—

BARTHWICK. On the sofa? D'you mean to say you didn't go to bed?

JACK [sullenly]. No.

BARTHWICK. If you don't remember anything, how can you remember that?

JACK. Because I woke up there in the morning.

MRS. BARTHWICK. Oh, Jack!

BARTHWICK. Good Gracious!

JACK. And Mrs Jones saw me. I wish you wouldn't bait me so.

ROPER. Do you remember giving any one a drink?

JACK. By Jove, I do seem to remember a fellow with—a fellow with— [*He looks at ROPER.*] I say, d'you want me—?

ROPER [quick as lightning]. With a dirty face?

JACK [with illumination]. I do—I distinctly remember his—

[*BARTHWICK moves abruptly; MRS. BARTHWICK looks at ROPER angrily, and touches her son's arm*]

MRS. BARTHWICK. You don't remember, it's ridiculous! I don't believe the man was ever here at all.

BARTHWICK. You must speak the truth; if it is the truth. But if you do remember such a dirty business, I shall wash my hands of you altogether.

JACK [glaring at them]. Well, what the devil—

MRS. BARTHWICK. Jack!

JACK. Well, Mother, I—I—don't know what you do want

MRS. BARTHWICK. We want you to speak the truth and say you never let this low man into the house.

BARTHWICK. Of course if you think that you really gave this man whisky in that disgraceful way, and let him see what you'd been doing, and were in such a disgusting condition that you don't remember a word of it—

ROPER [*quick*] I've no memory myself—never had.

BARTHWICK [*desperately*] I don't know what you're to say

ROPER [*to JACK*] Say nothing at all! Don't put yourself in a false position. The man stole the things or the woman stole the things, you had nothing to do with it. You were asleep on the sofa.

MRS BARTHWICK. Your leaving the latch-key in the door was quite bad enough, there's no need to mention anything else [*Touching his forehead softly.*] My dear, how hot your head is!

JACK. But I want to know what I'm to do. [*Passionately*] I won't be badgered like this.

[*MRS BARTHWICK recoils from him*]

ROPER [*very quickly*] You forget all about it. You were asleep.

JACK. Must I go down to the Court tomorrow?

ROPER [*shaking his head*] No.

BARTHWICK [*in a relieved voice*]. Is that so?

ROPER Yes

BARTHWICK. But you'll go, Roper.

ROPER. Yes

JACK [*with wan cheerfulness*] Thanks, awfully! So long as I don't have to go. [*Putting his hand up to his head*] I think if you'll excuse me—I've had a most beastly day.

[*He looks from his father to his mother*]

MRS. BARTHWICK [*turning quickly*]. Good-night, my boy.

JACK. Good-night, Mother.

[*He goes out. MRS. BARTHWICK heaves a sigh. There is a silence.*]

BARTHWICK. He gets off too easily. But for my money that woman would have prosecuted him

ROPER. You find money useful.

BARTHWICK. I've my doubts whether we ought to hide the truth—

ROPER. There'll be a remand.

BARTHWICK. What! D' you mean he'll have to appear on the remand?

ROPER. Yes.

BARTHWICK. H'm, I thought you'd be able to— Look here, Roper, you must keep that purse out of the papers.

[*ROPER fixes his little eyes on him and nods.*]

MRS. BARTHWICK. Mr Roper, don't you think the magistrate ought to be told what sort of people these Joneses are; I mean about their immorality before they were married. I don't know if John told you.

ROPER. Afraid it's not material

MRS. BARTHWICK. Not material?

ROPER. Purely private life! May have happened to the magistrate.

BARTHWICK [*with a movement as if to shift a burden*]. Then you'll take the thing into your hands?

ROPER. If the gods are kind.

[*He holds his hand out*]

BARTHWICK [*shaking it dubiously*]. Kind—eh? What? You going?

ROPER. Yes, I've another case, something like yours—most unexpected.

[*He bows to MRS. BARTHWICK, and goes out, followed by BARTHWICK, talking to the last. MRS BARTHWICK at the table bursts into smothered sobs. BARTHWICK returns*]

BARTHWICK [*to himself*]. There'll be a scandal!

MRS. BARTHWICK [*disguising her grief at once*]. I simply can't imagine what Roper means by making a joke of a thing like that!

BARTHWICK [*staring strangely*]. You! You can't imagine anything! You've no more imagination than a fly!

MRS. BARTHWICK [*angrily*] You dare to tell me that I have no imagination.

BARTHWICK [*flustered*]. I—I'm upset. From beginning to end the whole thing has been utterly against my principles

MRS. BARTHWICK. Rubbish! You haven't any! Your principles are nothing in the world but sheer—fright!

BARTHWICK [*walking to the window*]. I've never been frightened in my life. You heard what Roper said. It's enough to upset one when a thing like this happens. Everything one says and does seems to turn in one's mouth—it's—it's uncanny. It's not the sort of thing I've been accustomed to. [*As though stifling, he throws the windows open. The faint sobbing of a child comes in*] What's that? [*They listen.*]

MRS BARTHWICK [*sharply*]. I can't stand that crying. I must send Marlow to stop it. My nerves are all on edge.

[*She rings the bell.*]

BARTHWICK. I'll shut the window; you'll hear nothing.

[*He shuts the window. There is silence.*]

MRS. BARTHWICK [*sharply*]. That's no good! It's on my nerves. Nothing upsets me like a child's crying. [*MARLOW comes in*] What's that noise of crying, Marlow? It sounds like a child.

BARTHWICK. It is a child. I can see it against the railings.

MARLOW [*opening the window, and looking out—quietly*]. It's Mrs. Jones's

little boy, ma'am, he came here after his mother.

MRS. BARTHWICK [*moving quickly to the window*]. Poor little chap! John, we oughtn't to go on with this!

BARTHWICK [*sitting heavily in a chair*]. Ah! but it's out of our hands!

[MRS BARTHWICK turns her back to the window There is an expression of distress on her face She stands motionless, compressing her lips The crying begins again. BARTHWICK covers his ears with his hands, and MARLOW shuts the window. The crying ceases.]

THE CURTAIN FALLS

ACT III

Eight days have passed, and the scene is a London Police Court at one o'clock A canopied seat of Justice is surmounted by the lion and unicorn Before the fire a worn-looking MAGISTRATE is warming his coat-tails, and staring at two little girls in faded blue and orange rags, who are placed before the dock. Close to the witness-box is a RELIEVING OFFICER in an overcoat, and a short brown beard. Beside the little girls stands a bald POLICE CONSTABLE On the front bench are sitting BARTHWICK and ROPER, and behind them JACK. In the railed enclosure are seedy-looking men and women. Some prosperous constables sit or stand about

MAGISTRATE [*in his paternal and ferocious voice, hissing his s's*]. Now let us dispose of these young ladies.

USHER. Theresa Livens, Maud Livens. [*The bald CONSTABLE indicates the little girls, who remain silent, disillusioned, inattentive.*] Relieving Officer! [*The RELIEVING OFFICER steps into the witness-box.*]

USHER. The evidence you give to the Court shall be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God! Kiss the book! [*The book is kissed.*]

RELIEVING OFFICER [*in a monotone, pausing slightly at each sentence end, that his evidence may be inscribed*]. About ten o'clock this morning, your Worship, I found these two little girls in Blue Street, Pulham, crying outside a public-house. Asked where their home was, they said they had no home. Mother had gone away. Asked about their father. Their father had

no work. Asked where they slept last night. At their aunt's. I've made inquiries, your Worship. The wife has broken up the home and gone on the streets. The husband is out of work and living in common lodging-houses. The husband's sister has eight children of her own, and says she can't afford to keep these little girls any longer.

MAGISTRATE [*returning to his seat beneath the canopy of Justice*]. Now, let me see. You say the mother is on the streets, what evidence have you of that?

RELIEVING OFFICER. I have the husband here, your Worship.

MAGISTRATE. Very well; then let us see him. [*There are cries of "LIVENS"*] The MAGISTRATE leans forward, and stares with hard compassion at the little girls. LIVENS comes in. He is quiet, with grizzled hair, and a muffler for a collar. He stands beside the witness-box. And you are their father? Now, why don't you keep your little girls at home. How is it you leave them to wander about the streets like this?

LIVENS. I've got no home, your Worship. I'm living from 'and to mouth. I've got no work, and nothin' to keep them on.

MAGISTRATE. How is that?

LIVENS [*ashamedly*]. My wife she broke my 'ome up, and pawned the things.

MAGISTRATE. But what made you let her?

LIVENS. Your Worship, I'd no chance to stop 'er; she did it when I was out lookin' for work.

MAGISTRATE. Did you ill-treat her?

LIVENS [*emphatically*]. I never raised my 'and to her in my life, your Worship.

MAGISTRATE. Then what was it—did she drink?

LIVENS. Yes, your Worship.

MAGISTRATE. Was she loose in her behaviour?

LIVENS [*in a low voice*]. Yes, your Worship.

MAGISTRATE. And where is she now?

LIVENS. I don't know, your Worship. She went off with a man, and after that I—

MAGISTRATE. Yes, yes. Who knows anything of her? [*To the bald CONSTABLE.*] Is she known here?

RELIEVING OFFICER. Not in this district, your Worship; but I have ascertained that she is well known—

MAGISTRATE. Yes—yes; we'll stop at that. Now [*to the Father*] you say that she has broken up your home, and left these little girls. What provision can you make for them? You look a strong man.

LIVENS So I am, your Worship I'm willin' enough to work, but for the life of me I can't get anything to do.

MAGISTRATE. But have you tried?

LIVENS. I've tried everything, your Worship—I've tried my 'ardest

MAGISTRATE Well, well—

[*There is a silence.*]

RELIEVING OFFICER. If your Worship thinks it's a case, my people are willing to take them.

MAGISTRATE. Yes, yes, I know; but I've no evidence that this man is not the proper guardian for his children.

[*He rises and goes back to the fire*]

RELIEVING OFFICER. The mother, your Worship, is able to get access to them.

MAGISTRATE. Yes, yes; the mother, of course, is an improper person to have anything to do with them. [*To the Father*] Well, now what do you say?

LIVENS. Your Worship, I can only say that if I could get work I should be only too willing to provide for them. But what can I do, your Worship? Here I am obliged to live from 'and to mouth in these 'ere common lodging-houses I'm a strong man—I'm willing to work—I'm half as alive again as some of 'em—but you see, your Worship, my 'air's turned a bit, owing to the fever—[*touches his hair*]—and that's against me; and I don't seem to get a chance anyhow.

MAGISTRATE. Yes—yes [*Slowly.*] Well, I think it's a case [*Staring his hardest at the little girls*] Now, are you willing that these little girls should be sent to a home?

LIVENS. Yes, your Worship, I should be very willing

MAGISTRATE. Well, I'll remand them for a week. Bring them again to-day week; if I see no reason against it then, I'll make an order

RELIEVING OFFICER. To-day week, your Worship.

[*The bald CONSTABLE takes the little girls out by the shoulders. The father follows them. The MAGISTRATE, returning to his seat, bends over and talks to his CLERK inaudibly.*]

BARTHWICK [*speaking behind his hand*]. A painful case, Roper; very distressing state of things.

ROPER. Hundreds like this in the Police Courts.

BARTHWICK. Most distressing! The more I see of it, the more important this question of the condition of the people seems to become. I shall certainly make a

point of taking up the cudgels in the House. I shall move—

[*The MAGISTRATE ceases talking to his CLERK*]

CLERK. Remands!

[*BARTHWICK stops abruptly. There is a stir and MRS. JONES comes in by the public door; JONES, ushered by policemen, comes from the prisoner's door. They file into the dock.*]

CLERK. James Jones, Jane Jones.

USHER. Jane Jones!

BARTHWICK [*in a whisper*]. The purse—the purse *must* be kept out of it, Roper. Whatever happens, you must keep that out of the papers [*ROPER nods*]

BALD CONSTABLE. Hush!

[*MRS. JONES, dressed in her thin, black, wispy dress and black straw hat, stands motionless with hands crossed on the front rail of the dock. JONES leans against the back rail of the dock, and keeps half turning, glancing defiantly about him. He is haggard and unshaven.*]

CLERK [*consulting with his papers*]. This is the case remanded from last Wednesday, sir. Theft of a silver cigarette-box and assault on the police; the two charges were taken together. Jane Jones! James Jones!

MAGISTRATE [*staring*]. Yes, yes; I remember

CLERK. Jane Jones.

MRS. JONES. Yes, sir.

CLERK. Do you admit stealing a silver cigarette-box valued at five pounds, ten shillings, from the house of John Barthwick, M. P., between the hours of 11 P. M. on Easter Monday and 8 45 A. M. on Easter Tuesday last? Yes, or no?

MRS. JONES [*in a low voice*]. No, sir, I do not, sir

CLERK. James Jones? Do you admit stealing a silver cigarette-box valued at five pounds, ten shillings, from the house of John Barthwick, M. P., between the hours of 11 P. M. on Easter Monday and 8 45 A. M. on Easter Tuesday last? And further making an assault on the police when in the execution of their duty at 3 P. M. on Easter Tuesday? Yes, or no?

JONES [*sullenly*]. Yes, but I've got a lot to say about it.

MAGISTRATE [*to the CLERK*]. Yes—Yes. But how comes it that these two people are charged with the same offense? Are they husband and wife?

CLERK. Yes, sir. You remember you ordered a remand for further evidence as to the story of the male prisoner.

MAGISTRATE Have they been in custody since?

CLERK. You released the woman on her own recognisances, sir

MAGISTRATE Yes, yes, this is the case of the silver box; I remember now. Well?

CLERK. Thomas Marlow.

[*The cry of "THOMAS MARLOW" is repeated. MARLOW comes in, and steps into the witness-box*]

USHER. The evidence you give to the court shall be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God. Kiss the book.

[*The book is kissed. The silver box is handed up, and placed on the rail.*]

CLERK [*reading from his papers*]. Your name is Thomas Marlow? Are you butler to John Barthwick, M. P., of 6, Rockingham Gate?

MARLOW. Yes, sir.

CLERK. Is that the box?

MARLOW. Yes, sir.

CLERK. And did you miss the same at 8.45 on the following morning, on going to remove the tray?

MARLOW. Yes, sir.

CLERK. Is the female prisoner known to you? [*MARLOW nods.*] Is she the charwoman employed at 6, Rockingham Gate? [*Again MARLOW nods.*] Did you at the time of your missing the box find her in the room alone?

MARLOW. Yes, sir.

CLERK. Did you afterwards communicate the loss to your employer, and did he send you to the police station?

MARLOW. Yes, sir.

CLERK [*to MRS. JONES*]. Have you anything to ask him?

MRS. JONES. No, sir, nothing, thank you, sir.

CLERK [*to JONES*]. James Jones, have you anything to ask this witness?

JONES. I don't know 'im

MAGISTRATE Are you sure you put the box in the place you say at the time you say?

MARLOW. Yes, your Worship.

MAGISTRATE. Very well; then now let us have the officer.

[*MARLOW leaves the box, and SNOW goes into it.*]

USHER. The evidence you give to the court shall be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God

[*The book is kissed*]

CLERK [*reading from his papers*]. Your name is Robert Snow? You are a detective in the X. B. division of the Metropolitan police force? According to instruc-

tions received did you on Easter Tuesday last proceed to the prisoner's lodgings at 34, Merthyr Street, St Soames's? And did you on entering see the box produced, lying on the table?

SNOW. Yes, sir.

CLERK. Is that the box?

SNOW [*fingering the box*] Yes, sir.

CLERK. And did you thereupon take possession of it, and charge the female prisoner with theft of the box from 6, Rockingham Gate? And did she deny the same?

SNOW. Yes, sir.

CLERK. Did you take her into custody?

SNOW. Yes, sir.

MAGISTRATE. What was her behaviour?

SNOW. Perfectly quiet, your Worship. She persisted in the denial. That's all.

MAGISTRATE. Do you know her?

SNOW. No, your Worship.

MAGISTRATE. Is she known here?

BALD CONSTABLE. No, your Worship, they're nether of them known, we've nothing against them at all.

CLERK [*to MRS. JONES*]. Have you anything to ask the officer?

MRS. JONES. No, sir, thank you, I've nothing to ask him.

MAGISTRATE. Very well then—go on.

CLERK [*reading from his papers*]. And while you were taking the female prisoner did the male prisoner interpose, and endeavour to hinder you in the execution of your duty, and did he strike you a blow?

SNOW. Yes, sir

CLERK. And did he say, "You let her go, I took the box myself"?

SNOW. He did

CLERK. And did you blow your whistle and obtain the assistance of another constable, and take him into custody?

SNOW. I did.

CLERK. Was he violent on the way to the station, and did he use bad language, and did he several times repeat that he had taken the box himself? [*SNOW nods.*] Did you thereupon ask him in what manner he had stolen the box? And did you understand him to say he had entered the house at the invitation of young Mr. Barthwick [*BARTHWICK, turning in his seat, frowns at ROPER.*] after midnight on Easter Monday, and partaken of whisky, and that under the influence of the whisky he had taken the box?

SNOW. I did, sir.

CLERK. And was his demeanor throughout very violent?

SNOW. It was very violent.

JONES [*breaking in*]. Violent—of

course it was! You put your 'ands on my wife when I kept tellin' you I took the thing myself

MAGISTRATE [*hissing, with protruded neck*]. Now—you will have your chance of saying what you want to say presently Have you anything to ask the officer?

JONES [*sullenly*] No.

MAGISTRATE. Very well then Now let us hear what the female prisoner has to say first.

MRS. JONES. Well, your Worship, of course I can only say what I've said all along, that I didn't take the box.

MAGISTRATE. Yes, but did you know that it was taken?

MRS. JONES. No, your Worship. And, of course, to what my husband says, your Worship, I can't speak of my own knowledge. Of course, I know that he came home very late on the Monday night It was past one o'clock when he came in, and he was not himself at all.

MAGISTRATE. Had he been drinking?

MRS. JONES. Yes, your Worship.

MAGISTRATE. And was he drunk?

MRS. JONES. Yes, your Worship, he was almost quite drunk

MAGISTRATE. And did he say anything to you?

MRS. JONES. No, your Worship, only to call me names. And of course in the morning when I got up and went to work he was asleep. And I don't know anything more about it until I came home again. Except that Mr Barthwick—that's my employer—your Worship—told me the box was missing

MAGISTRATE. Yes, yes.

MRS. JONES. But of course when I was shaking out my husband's coat the cigarette-box fell out and all the cigarettes were scattered on the bed.

MAGISTRATE. You say all the cigarettes were scattered on the bed? [*To SNOW.*] Did you see the cigarettes scattered on the bed?

SNOW. No, your Worship, I did not.

MAGISTRATE. You see he says he didn't see them.

JONES. Well, they were there for all that.

SNOW. I can't say, your Worship, that I had the opportunity of going round the room; I had all my work cut out with the male prisoner.

MAGISTRATE [*to MRS. JONES*]. Well, what more have you to say?

MRS. JONES. Of course when I saw the box, your Worship, I was dreadfully upset, and I couldn't think why he had done such

a thing, when the officer came we were having words about it, because it is ruin to me, your Worship, in my profession, and I have three little children dependent on me

MAGISTRATE [*protruding his neck*]. Yes—yes—but what did he say to you?

MRS. JONES. I asked him whatever came over him to do such a thing—and he said it was the drink. He said he had had too much to drink, and something came over him. And of course, your Worship, he had had very little to eat all day, and the drink does go to the head when you have not had enough to eat. Your Worship may not know, but it is the truth. And I would like to say that all through his married life, I have never known him to do such a thing before, though we have passed through great hardships and [*speaking with soft emphasis*] I am quite sure he would not have done it if he had been himself at the time.

MAGISTRATE. Yes, yes But don't you know that that is no excuse?

MRS. JONES. Yes, your Worship. I know that it is no excuse.

[*The MAGISTRATE leans over and parlays with his CLERK.*]

JACK [*leaning over from his seat behind*] I say, Dad—

BARTHWICK. Tsst! [*Sheltering his mouth he speaks to ROPER.*] Roper, you had better get up now and say that considering the circumstances and the poverty of the prisoners, we have no wish to proceed any further, and if the magistrate would deal with the case as one of disorder only on the part of—

BALD CONSTABLE Hssshh!

[*ROPER shakes his head*]

MAGISTRATE. Now, supposing what you say and what your husband says is true, what I have to consider is—how did he obtain access to this house, and were you in any way a party to his obtaining access? You are the charwoman employed at the house?

MRS. JONES. Yes, your Worship, and of course if I had let him into the house it would have been very wrong of me; and I have never done such a thirig in any of the houses where I have been employed.

MAGISTRATE. Well—so you say. Now let us hear what story the male prisoner makes of it.

JONES [*who leans with his arms on the dock behind, speaks in a slow, sullen voice*]. Wot I say is wot my wife says. I've never been 'ad up in a police court before, an' I can prove I took it when in liquor. I told

her, and she can tell you the same, that I was goin' to throw the thing into the water sooner than 'ave it on my mind.

MAGISTRATE. But how did you get into the house?

JONES. I was passin'. I was goin' 'ome from the "Goat and Bells"

MAGISTRATE. The "Goat and Bells,"—what is that? A public-house?

JONES. Yes, at the corner. It was Bank 'oliday, an' I'd a drop to drink I see this young Mr Barthwick tryin' to find the keyhole on the wrong side of the door.

MAGISTRATE. Well?

JONES [*slowly and with many pauses*]. Well—I 'elped 'im to find it—drunk as a lord 'e was. He goes on, an' comes back again, and says, I've got nothin' for you, 'e says, but come in an' 'ave a drink. So I went in just as you might 'ave done yourself. We 'ad a drink o' whisky just as you might have 'ad, 'nd young Mr. Barthwick says to me, "Take a drink 'nd a smoke. Take anything you like, 'e says" And then he went to sleep on the sofa. I 'ad some more whisky—an' I 'ad a smoke—and I 'ad some more whisky—an' I can't tell yer what 'appened after that.

MAGISTRATE. Do you mean to say that you were so drunk that you can remember nothing?

JACK [*softly to his father*]. I say, that's exactly what—

BARTHWICK. Tssh!

JONES. That's what I do mean.

MAGISTRATE. And yet you say you stole the box?

JONES. I never stole the box I took it

MAGISTRATE [*hissing with protruded neck*]. You did not steal it—you took it. Did it belong to you—what is that but stealing?

JONES. I took it.

MAGISTRATE. You took it—you took it away from their house and you took it to your house—

JONES [*sullenly brèaking in*]. I ain't got a house.

MAGISTRATE. Very well, let us hear what this young man Mr.—Mr. Barthwick—has to say to your story.

[*SNOW leaves the witness-box. The BALD CONSTABLE beckons JACK, who clutching his hat, goes into the witness-box. ROPER moves to the table set apart for his profession.*]

SWEARING CLERK. The evidence you give to the court shall be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God. Kiss the book.

[*The book is kissed.*]

ROPER [*examining*]. What is your name?

JACK [*in a low voice*]. John Barthwick, Junior [*The CLERK writes it down.*]

ROPER. Where do you live?

JACK. At 6, Rockingham Gate

[*All his answers are recorded by the CLERK*]

ROPER. You are the son of the owner?

JACK [*in a very low voice*]. Yes

ROPER. Speak up, please. Do you know the prisoners?

JACK [*looking at the JONESES, in a low voice*]. I've seen Mrs Jones. I [*in a loud voice*] don't know the man.

JONES. Well, I know you!

BALD CONSTABLE. Hssh!

ROPER. Now, did you come in late on the night of Easter Monday?

JACK. Yes.

ROPER. And did you by mistake leave your latch-key in the door?

JACK. Yes

MAGISTRATE. Oh! You left your latch-key in the door?

ROPER. And is that all you can remember about your coming in?

JACK [*in a loud voice*]. Yes, it is

MAGISTRATE. Now, you have heard the male prisoner's story, what do you say to that?

JACK [*turning to the MAGISTRATE, speaks suddenly in a confident, straightforward voice*]. The fact of the matter is, sir, that I'd been out to the theatre that night, and had supper afterwards, and I came in late.

MAGISTRATE. Do you remember this man being outside when you came in?

JACK. No, sir. [*He hesitates*] I don't think I do

MAGISTRATE [*somewhat puzzled*]. Well, did he help you to open the door, as he says? Did any one help you to open the door?

JACK. No, sir—I don't think so, sir—I don't know.

MAGISTRATE. You don't know? But you must know. It isn't a usual thing for you to have the door opened for you, is it?

JACK [*with a shamefaced smile*]. No.

MAGISTRATE. Very well, then—

JACK [*desperately*]. The fact of the matter is, sir, I'm afraid I'd had too much champagne that night.

MAGISTRATE [*smiling*]. Oh! you'd had too much champagne?

JONES. May I ask the gentleman a question?

MAGISTRATE. Yes—yes—you may ask him what questions you like.

JONES. Don't you remember you said you was a Liberal, same as your father, and you asked me wot I was?

JACK [*with his hand against his brow*]. I seem to remember—

JONES. And I said to you, "I'm a bloomin' Conservative," I said; an' you said to me, "You look more like one of these 'ere Socialists. Take wotever you like," you said.

JACK [*with sudden resolution*]. No, I don't. I don't remember anything of the sort.

JONES. Well, I do, an' my word's as good as yours I've never been had up in a police court before. Look 'ere, don't you remember you had a sky-blue bag in your 'and—

[*BARTHWICK jumps*]

ROPER. I submit to your Worship that these questions are hardly to the point, the prisoner having admitted that he himself does not remember anything [*There is a smile on the face of Justice*]. It is a case of the blind leading the blind.

JONES [*violently*]. I've done no more than wot he 'as. I'm a poor man; I've got no money an' no friends—he's a toff—he can do wot I can't.

MAGISTRATE. Now, now! All this won't help you—you must be quiet. You say you took this box? Now, what made you take it? Were you pressed for money?

JONES. I'm always pressed for money.

MAGISTRATE. Was that the reason you took it?

JONES. No.

MAGISTRATE [*to SNOW*]. Was anything found on him?

SNOW. Yes, your Worship. There was six pounds twelve shillin's found on him, and this purse.

[*The red silk purse is handed to the MAGISTRATE BARTHWICK rises in his seat, but hastily sits down again.*]

MAGISTRATE [*staring at the purse*]. Yes, yes—let me see—

[*There is a silence*]. No, no, I've nothing before me as to the purse. How did you come by all that money?

JONES [*after a long pause, suddenly*]. I declines to say.

MAGISTRATE. But if you had all that money, what made you take this box?

JONES. I took it out of spite.

MAGISTRATE [*hissing, with protruded neck*]. You took it out of spite? Well, now, that's something! But do you imagine you can go about the town taking things out of spite?

JONES. If you had my life, if you'd been out of work—

MAGISTRATE. Yes, yes; I know—because you're out of work you think it's an excuse for everything.

JONES [*pointing at JACK*]. You ask 'im wot made 'im take the—

ROPER [*quietly*]. Does your Worship require this witness in the box any longer?

MAGISTRATE [*ironically*]. I think not; he is hardly profitable.

[*JACK leaves the witness-box, and hanging his head, resumes his seat*]

JONES. You ask 'im wot made 'im take the lady's—

[*But the BALD CONSTABLE catches him by the sleeve*]

BALD CONSTABLE. Sssh!

MAGISTRATE [*emphatically*]. Now listen to me I've nothing to do with what he may or may not have taken. Why did you resist the police in the execution of their duty?

JONES. It warn't their duty to take my wife, a respectable woman, that 'adn't done nothing.

MAGISTRATE. But I say it was. What made you strike the officer a blow?

JONES. Any man would a struck 'im a blow. I'd strike 'im again, I would.

MAGISTRATE. You are not making your case any better by violence. How do you suppose we could get on if everybody behaved like you?

JONES [*learning forward, earnestly*]. Well, wot about 'er; who's to make up to 'er for this? Who's to give 'er back 'er good name?

MRS. JONES. Your Worship, it's the children that's preying on his mind, because of course I've lost my work. And I've had to find another room owing to the scandal.

MAGISTRATE. Yes, yes, I know—but if he hadn't acted like this nobody would have suffered.

JONES [*glaring round at JACK*]. I've done no worse than wot 'e 'as. Wot I want to know is wot's goin' to be done to 'im.

[*The BALD CONSTABLE again says "Hssh!"*]

ROPER. Mr. Barthwick wishes it known, your Worship, that considering the poverty of the prisoners he does not press the charge as to the box. Perhaps your Worship would deal with the case as one of disorder.

JONES. I don't want it smothered up, I want it all dealt with fair—I want my rights—

MAGISTRATE [*rapping his desk*]. Now you have said all you have to say, and

you will be quiet [*There is a silence; the MAGISTRATE bends over and parleys with his CLERK.*] Yes, I think I may discharge the woman [*In a kindly voice he addresses MRS JONES, who stands unmoving with her hands crossed on the rail*] It is very unfortunate for you that this man has behaved as he has. It is not the consequences to him but the consequences to you. You have been brought here twice, you have lost your work — [*He glares at JONES*] — and this is what always happens. Now you may go away, and I am very sorry it was necessary to bring you here at all

MRS JONES [*softly*]. Thank you very much, your Worship.

[*She leaves the dock, and looking back at JONES, twists her fingers and is still.*]

MAGISTRATE. Yes, yes, but I can't pass it over. Go away, there's a good woman. [*MRS. JONES stands back. The MAGISTRATE leans his head on his hand; then raising it he speaks to JONES*] Now, listen to me. Do you wish the case to be settled here, or do you wish it to go before a jury?

JONES [*muttering*]. I don't want no jury.

MAGISTRATE. Very well then, I will deal with it here. [*After a pause*] You have pleaded guilty to stealing this box —

JONES. Not to stealin' —

BALD CONSTABLE. Hssshh!

MAGISTRATE. And to assaulting the police —

JONES. Any man as was a man —

MAGISTRATE. Your conduct here has been most improper. You give the excuse that you were drunk when you stole the box. I tell you that is no excuse. If you choose to get drunk and break the law, afterwards you must take the consequences. And let me tell you that men like you, who get drunk and give way to your spite or whatever it is that's in you, are — are a nuisance to the community.

JACK [*leaning from his seat*]. Dad, that's what you said to me!

BARTHWICK. Tsst!

[*There is a silence, while the MAGISTRATE consults his CLERK; JONES leans forward waiting*]

MAGISTRATE. This is your first offence, and I am going to give you a light

sentence [*Speaking sharply, but without expression*] One month with hard labour

[*He bends, and parleys with his CLERK.*]

The BALD CONSTABLE and another help JONES from the dock]

JONES [*stopping and twisting round*]. Call this justice? What about 'im? 'E got drunk! 'E took the purse — 'e took the purse but [*in a muffled shout*] it's 'is money got 'im off — Justice!

[*The prisoner's door is shut on JONES, and from the seedy-looking men and women comes a hoarse and whispering moan*]

MAGISTRATE. We will now adjourn for lunch! [*He rises from his seat*]

[*The Court is in a stir. ROPER gets up and speaks to the reporter. JACK, throwing up his head, walks with a swagger through the corridor; BARTHWICK follows*]

MRS. JONES [*turning to him with a humble gesture*]. Oh! sir! —

[*BARTHWICK hesitates, then yielding to his nerves, he makes a shame-faced gesture of refusal, and hurries out of court. MRS. JONES stands looking after him.*]

THE CURTAIN FALLS

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