



OUT YONDER.

BY

ISAAC HENDERSON.



Class PS1919

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OUT YONDER.

A PLAY IN FOUR ACTS,
BY
ISAAC HENDERSON.

(Time, the Present.)



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CHARACTERS.

PS 1919
H37668

RODNEY TRASK.

RICHARD FENTON.

JOHN KENYON.

LORD ANSON.

WILLIAM FINCH, a Servant.

GIBBONS, a Servant.

MARGARET NOËL.

PHYLLIS TRASK.

LADY CLARE RICHMOND.

ROSE HILDRED.

MISS TRASK [AUNT ANN].

Guests and Tenantry.

ACT FIRST.—Brentley Hall, near London.

ACT SECOND.—Mrs. Noël's house in Mayfair.

ACTS THIRD AND FOURTH.—A house with a garden
in Chelsea.

Between Acts I and II six weeks elapse.

Between Acts II and III three weeks elapse.

Between Acts III and IV there is an interval of
one night.

OUT YONDER.

ACT I.

SCENE: *An interior with terrace leading to lawn. Flowers and palms decorate the room, which is rich in tone, is panelled in old oak and has the general character of a living room. There is an appearance of Spring-time outside. There are guests both in the room and on the terrace.*

Just before the rise of the curtain we hear the murmur of voices gradually increasing then apparently very near, and a voice shouts, "Three cheers for Mr. Rodney!" during which the curtain rises, and RODNEY TRASK is discovered standing among those guests who are on the terrace. His manner is gay, and as the cheers continue he bows once or twice.

He is turned in a three-quarters position to the audience, and is evidently facing a gathering below him. He has a cigarette between his fingers.

RODNEY. My dear friends. [*Takes whiff of cigarette; then throws it away.*] It's awfully good of you all to come here to-day to wish me luck on coming into my inheritance, and I hope you've had

a pleasant day, and that presently you'll have a jolly good dance. We've been associated so many years I feel I'm—well, a sort of patchwork and you've sewn in the patches. [*Seats himself informally on balustrated side-saddle-wise.*] There's old Judson over there—why, nearly the first thing I can remember is old Jud, waving his spade like a magic wand over the bare earth and causing flowers to appear such as my astonished eyes had never beheld outside my Aunt Ann's best bonnet. [*Glances towards a dignified gray-haired lady who stands in the doorway listening. Laughter.*] I'm sure some of you women remember that bonnet [*female cries of assent off*], and the two rosebuds that hung down over her left ear! [*Female cries of joyful assent.*] They disappeared, those two buds; did you ever hear what became of them? [*Laughter, and voice* "Twas said you planted them, Sir."] That's true; I plucked them and planted them in Jud's garden to get the benefit of his magic wand. [*Laughter.*] That's just what Jud did—he laughed; but if I remember correctly, my aunt did *not* laugh. [*Looks again with twinkling eyes toward his AUNT, who shows responsive amusement.*] Then there's my hunting patch—that was your work, Bill Ruggles. Do you remember putting me astride my first mount? It seemed a mile to the solid earth.

RUGGLES [*Off*]. You've done me credit since, sir, [*Cheers and cries of* "That's so! Right you are Bill!" *etc.*]

RODNEY. Small credit to me!—I was bullied into it. The first time I went for a five-bar gate old Rug sung out, “Go for it, Master Roddy, and if you funk it, chuck ridin’ and take to croquet!” You knew after that I’d take that gate or break my neck—you old rascal! And my first pheasant! Shall I ever forget it? Many a delightful hour you’ve stood behind me, Paxton, but none so thrilling as that first one. And I must thank old Finch for the devotion he’s shown my sister and me during all these years. [*Glances towards a white-haired servant within the room whose face beams with importance.*] Good old Finch! Transplanted with us from South Africa, he’s more than a devoted servant—he’s become a cherished old friend. [*Rises.*] And now a word of one known to you all as a loyal friend, and a kind mistress. [*Interruption of cheers and a voice, “Three cheers for Miss Trask!”—enthusiastic cheers.*] I would assure my dear aunt on behalf of my sister and myself of our deep gratitude for her loving care during these past eighteen years. We owe to her all the joy of our lives. It is she who has given us love and home and friends. Do you wonder that my mind is full of her to-day? [*Cheers.*] And now, good friends all, I hope that in the future,—which seems to-day so wonderfully unclouded,—we may grow closer together year by year, giving to each other the support of good-will and friendly esteem. I thank you once again,—thank you with all my heart. [*Bows*

amid cheers and comes within room, all pressing round him and congratulating him.]

FENTON. Well done, Rodney!

A LADY [*Clapping her hands*]. Bravo! Bravo!

LORD ANSON. Quite an eloquent peroration, my boy!

A GUEST. Good old Rodney!

ANOTHER GUEST. Not half bad, old chap.

PHYLLIS. All aboard for the House of Commons! Rodney Express! No stops!

AUNT ANN. Really, Rodney—how did you think of that bonnet?

RODNEY [*Throwing his arm around her shoulder and giving her an impulsive little hug*]. Who could forget the garden of Eden? [*Joins LADY CLARE who shyly awaits him.*]

LADY CLARE. You talked to them in just the right way.

RODNEY [*Lightly*]. I talked to them just as I felt. [*Significantly.*] And now I want to talk to you—just as I feel.

LADY CLARE. But I haven't sewn in a patch.

RODNEY. I think you have—and a very big one.

LADY CLARE [*With happy eyes*]. I don't quite follow you.

RODNEY [*With tenderness*]. I don't want you to follow me—I want you right by my side.

LADY CLARE. That's more mysterious still.

RODNEY. Well, meet me here after all these people have gone. I'm going to the station with them

and then I'll come back and try to make you understand. Will you meet me here?

LADY CLARE. If you're not too long, perhaps—and I'll ask Phyl to come too, and help me puzzle it out.

RODNEY. I think I can make you understand. If not, we can call in Phyl later.

LADY CLARE [*After a pause—seriously*]. Very well Rodney, I'll come. [*Goes up. RODNEY joins a group. GUESTS are beginning to leave, and are seen making their adieus to MISS TRASK and PHYLLIS up stage. As a departing GUEST leaves FENTON, LORD ANSON joins him.*]

LORD ANSON. It's hard to realize that Rodney is really grown up and launched upon life. How quickly the years pass!

FENTON. To me, my lord, he seems mature for his years.

LORD ANSON. And so he is, but I've watched him grow up and that makes all the difference. You see, he and Phyllis and my daughter Clare played together as soon as they could walk, and they've been inseparable ever since. Indeed, I almost feel as if Rodney and Phyl belong to me as much as Clare herself, and I believe I'm nearly as fond of them.

FENTON. Rodney owes much to your friendship. [*They sit.*]

LORD ANSON. That was an odd provision, by the

way, that Rodney should not inherit till he was twenty-five.

FENTON. Well, you see, the bulk of his fortune is in South Africa, and Rodney will have to look after it, and I imagine his father wanted him to come down from Oxford and shape into place a bit before taking it over.

LORD ANSON. You're probably right—but I'm suspicious of everything that man did regarding his children. He was so cold-blooded about them.

FENTON. You mean parting with them after he lost his wife.

LORD ANSON. No; I can understand his sending his children to be brought up in England, but what I can't understand is his never having come to see them—not once, Mr. Fenton, in all the years before he died.

FENTON. You knew him well, I suppose?

LORD ANSON. In a sense, yes. We were at Eton together and later at Oxford, but his pace grew a bit too rapid for me; then he quarrelled with his father, and the next thing I heard of him had gone to South Africa, married and settled down there. So I never saw him again. His wife was, I understand, a very charming woman. You knew her, perhaps?

FENTON. No, I never knew her; indeed I only knew Mr. Trask the last years of his life, and I was never more surprised than when he sent for me during his last illness and begged me to be his executor.

Then, later, as you know, I was appointed trustee for his children. But I never knew their mother.

LORD ANSON. It must be from her they get their warm, generous natures.

FENTON. She was, I believe, an impulsive, warm-hearted young creature; too much so, indeed.

FENTON *noting the departure from room of last GUESTS, accompanied by MISS TRASK and PHYLLIS, draws from his pocket a cigarette case, offering it first to LORD ANSON, then helping himself. This business takes place during the following words.*

LORD ANSON. You mean she suffered in consequence.

FENTON. Undoubtedly.

LORD ANSON. Poor lady!—and she was little more than a girl when she died.

FENTON [*Striking a match, which he hands to LORD ANSON*]. Who told you of her death, my Lord?

LORD ANSON [*Lighting his cigarette*]. Let me see—it was more than twenty years ago—but I think—yes, it must have been Miss Trask. Who else could it have been?

FENTON [*After lighting his own cigarette*]. Quite so.

LORD ANSON. I hope you're enjoying your visit to the old country?

FENTON. That goes without saying. I've passed most of it here.

LORD ANSON. You've not overstayed your welcome. Clare tells me they hope to persuade you to stay over the summer.

FENTON. I'm afraid another month is all I can give myself.

LORD ANSON. Perhaps something will turn up to detain you longer, who knows?

FENTON. What sort of thing do you suggest?

LORD ANSON. Well, the evident attachment between Rodney and my daughter. I imagine he has only been waiting for this day to draw the bond closer.

FENTON. May I take it the event would not be unwelcome to you, my lord?

LORD ANSON. To be frank, I should be most happy. Rodney is a fine fellow, and his family in all essentials is above reproach.

So I think you'll have to stay over the summer if Rodney has his way.

RODNEY [*Coming down*]. Over the summer!

To the end of his natural life, if Rodney has his way. Lord Anson, Clare says you needn't wait for her this evening. We young people are going to watch the tenants dance for awhile, and then after dinner, we'll all walk over to the castle with her.

LORD ANSON. Oh, very well.

RODNEY. You're sure you won't stay, too? have a quiet dinner with us and see the fun?

LORD ANSON [*Rising*]. No, I'm better not out at night. I don't want a rheumatic touch as a sou-

venir of this happy day—but you must come in with Clare and tell me about it—so it's only au revoir. [*Goes up. Exits.*]

PHYLLIS [*Appearing up*]. Come, Rodney, every one's going.

RODNEY. I'm coming. [*To FENTON*] Wish me luck, old man. I hope to have news for you later.

FENTON. What's up?

RODNEY. About Clare, of course.

FENTON. You mean——?

RODNEY. I'm going to clinch matters presently.

FENTON. No, no, Rodney! You mustn't. See me first.

RODNEY. Why? What do you mean?

FENTON. I must see you. I'll wait here.

PHYLLIS. Come, Hamlet! This is your brief hour; you're wanted.

RODNEY. I'm coming. [*To FENTON*] What's it about?

FENTON. Never mind now. Come back, will you?

RODNEY. Since you insist—but it's devilish odd. [*Exits.*]

AUNT ANN [*Who comes down as RODNEY passes out*]. What is it? What made him look like that?

FENTON. He's going to propose to Lady Clare—and I asked him to see me first.

AUNT ANN. But why?

FENTON. He must be told about his mother.

AUNT ANN. His mother? What has she to do with it?

FENTON. Does Lord Anson know about the scandal?

AUNT ANN. What difference does it make? The scandal's forgotten, and everyone thinks she's dead. She *is* dead to all of us, and the earl approves of the match as much as I do.

FENTON. Rodney must be told the truth about his mother.

AUNT ANN [*Aghast*]. You mean——?

FENTON. I must give him certain letters which will tell him everything.

AUNT ANN. You must do nothing of the sort. They believe she's dead, I tell you; and it would be wicked and cruel to undeceive them.

FENTON. These letters are not mine. I'm bound to hand them over.

AUNT ANN. But surely not to-day; let us talk it over first.

FENTON. He must know before he speaks to Lady Clare.

AUNT ANN. Just the contrary. I'll never forgive you if you tell him.

FENTON. He'll never forgive me if I don't. No honourable man would.

AUNT ANN. Mr. Fenton, listen to *me*; listen to reason! This scandal has been dead for years—these children I've brought up—they're practically mine; I've some rights in this affair and I forbid your telling them.

FENTON. God knows I don't *want* to tell them;

but outside my duty, is it wise or kind to keep the truth from Rodney? It affects the honour of his name.

AUNT ANN. But it doesn't; his mother took another name.

FENTON. But she remains his mother, and her disgrace is her children's.

AUNT ANN. But his *father* was an honourable man, and Rodney bears *his* name.

FENTON. Which name the mother besmirched. When Rodney knows this, what then?

AUNT ANN. Nothing. Clare doesn't marry the mother—will never see her, or hear of her—unless through you.

FENTON. But Rodney's honour is involved. An alliance with him might not be thought honourable by Lord Anson. If so, Rodney would be in a false position and have us to thank for it; but if Rodney knows—and Lady Clare and her father accept him with full knowledge—things are as they should be. To hide the truth might be disastrous. Rodney has a right to know, and I mean to tell him.

AUNT ANN. But it may upset everything and break his heart.

FENTON. Better his heart than his spirit.

AUNT ANN. Oh, how hard you men are with your sense of so-called honour! If there were any need of bringing this thing up again I'd be the first to favour it. But now everyone's to be made wretched and nothing served but this silly sense

of honour! It's monstrous, and mawkish, and absolutely wicked! I can't understand you men! And I'm thankful I can't! And what's more I'm *awfully* disappointed in you.

FENTON. Believe me, Miss Trask, it's hard to have to hit you all like this—for I've grown very fond of you all——

AUNT ANN [*Grimly*]. It looks so!

FENTON. Of you and Rodney—and Phyllis. [*Breaks out*] To think of having to hit *her*; to hurt little Phyl!

AUNT ANN. Phyl? Surely Phyl isn't to know?

FENTON. She's bound to know, sooner or later.

AUNT ANN. She must *not* know—she must never know! She worships her mother's memory—literally worships it. It would simply crush her. Whatever you do about Rodney you shall not tell Phyl.

FENTON. But suppose she finds it out—suppose she should—without being prepared? What an awful shock!

AUNT ANN. But she won't find it out. How can she if you and Rodney keep it to yourselves? It's been kept a secret all these years, why not now?

FENTON. That must depend on Rodney.

AUNT ANN. Not at all! You must make him promise. Insist upon it. There must be no doubt about it. And you must promise too, for Phyl's sake; won't you?

FENTON. Well—I'll say this—I see no *present* need of telling her.

AUNT ANN. You must *never* tell her.

FENTON. That I can't promise.

AUNT ANN. Oh, you men! you men! But you'll promise not to tell her *now*—that at least; and then we'll see.

FENTON. Yes, I promise that.

AUNT ANN [*Extending hand*]. At least, that's something!—and remember that I trust you.

[*They strike hands as Enter PHYL.*]

PHYLLIS. Ahem! Ahem! If any person here present knows any reason why this man should not hold this woman's hand let him now speak, etc., etc.

FENTON. We're congratulating ourselves that our responsibility for such a madcap is this day legally ended.

PHYLLIS. That's all very well, but personal abuse doesn't alter facts. [*Plants herself on chair.*] Until my brother comes I must insist upon chaperoning this giddy old lady. Will you wear white, Aunt, or be married in travelling costume?

AUNT ANN [*Entering into PHYL'S spirit*]. It's all so sudden, Phyl—I haven't decided details.

PHYLLIS. May I be bridesmaid?—and kiss the bridegroom?

FENTON. Not if *I* can help it!

PHYLLIS. You'll do as you're told, if she brings you up as she has us.

AUNT ANN. Where did you leave Rodney?

PHYLLIS. Dawdling outside with Clare. But it seems I escaped from the frying pan to plump into the fire. It's instructive, but a trifle lonely—for a young girl with a warm heart and a willing hand.

AUNT ANN [*Moving up stage*]. When they come in, dear, take Clare to your room. Mr. Fenton wishes to speak to Rodney.

PHYLLIS. To propose a double wedding, I suppose—and share expenses. I'll look about me, perhaps I can chip in.

[*Exit AUNT ANN.*]

[*To FENTON*] Why, oh, why, didn't you fall in love with me?

FENTON. I'm sure I don't know—old age is capable of almost any folly.

PHYLLIS. I suppose now it's too late?

FENTON. I think, myself, if it were going to happen it would have happened.

PHYLLIS. Why, oh, why, didn't it happen?

FENTON. I haven't said it didn't.

PHYLLIS. Then why not jilt Auntie and propose to me? I'm longing for an experience.

FENTON. I'll do this for you—I'll consider the proposition.

PHYLLIS. And I'll do this for you—I'll promise not to jump at you.

FENTON. I shouldn't like to risk it.

PHYLLIS. Why not? If I accept you I'll make a devoted wife, and I know I can make you happy.

FENTON. It's possible, of course—I require very little.

PHYLLIS. And if I refuse you, you still have Auntie up your sleeve.

FENTON. Joking apart—we *are* great friends, aren't we?

PHYLLIS. I decline to answer leading questions.

FENTON. But it *is* a fact, isn't it?

PHYLLIS. I decline to commit myself to anything—some day you might taunt me with it.

FENTON. You mean——

PHYLLIS. After we're married. I believe it's usual—when he's out of temper.

FENTON. I wish I might have the chance.

PHYLLIS [*Snapping him up*]. May I take it that's a proposal?

FENTON. Suppose it were? Suppose I should make it stronger? Shall I venture?

PHYLLIS. That's for you to say. I'm not doing the courting.

FENTON. You're keeping up your end pretty well.

PHYLLIS [*Piously*]. I'm not! I always follow the golden rule—doing as I'd be done by.

FENTON. See here, Phyl! You may do too much. You may throw dust into my eyes until I rush on blindly—recklessly—too far to retrace my steps!

PHYLLIS. Ah, this is better. This seems much more like it. Yes? Well?

FENTON. Oh you little torturer! But playing with fire is a dangerous game, Phyl.

PHYLLIS. Two and two make four, Dick.

FENTON. You mean you know what you're doing? Oh, I know better. You're just a tease—a thoughtless little tease.

PHYLLIS. And you, sir?

FENTON. I'm a maniac—old enough to be your father.

PHYLLIS. And wise enough—do you think, sir?

FENTON. No, child, no! There never was such a fool as I.

PHYLLIS. Stop, sir! I'll not permit you to abuse a friend.

FENTON. Your *friend!*—Do you then care for your friend?—a little bit?

PHYLLIS. I haven't said I don't.

FENTON. But do you—just a little bit?

PHYLLIS. Would you care?

FENTON [*Ardently*]. Would I?

PHYLLIS. How awfully well you do it! Any one seeing you then would have sworn you meant it. You must have practised a good deal.

FENTON [*Pulling himself together*]. Oh yes, of course—and in another second I'd have rattled off my usual speech.

PHYLLIS. How does it run? Can you remember it?

FENTON. I think so. I think I should have said—well, something like this: [*Becoming serious*] But I'm afraid to tell you for fear of frightening you and losing even the friendship which is so much

to me, for I believe we're *friends*, Phyl; right good chums, too. Although I'm so much older than you, I believe you know me better than anyone else does. Think of the talks we've had—hour upon hour, in every mood. Yes—just as I am, you know me. With you I've forgotten difference of age—for you're a womanly little person, Phyl, and under your gay spirits is a nature so rich and true that any man who probes it must honour it and love it. And I love it, Phyl. But I've nothing to offer you—and I'm wise enough to know it—and to try to rest satisfied with friendship. Yes, I'll be your trusted friend, to whom you'll turn in any trouble that may come to you—as it may, who knows?—when you'll find, perhaps, some help in one who knows you and cares for you as I do. [*Feigning light mood again*] There! that's the speech, brought up to date and trimmed to suit the circumstances. It's not a bad speech, you know, as speeches go—and a girl less clever than you might be taken in by it. [*Serious again*] But, if I had been younger, and more worthy of you—who knows?

PHYLLIS [*Seriously*]. No—I'm not going to chaff about it—for I believe you meant it—for I do know you—and I—I know you now better than ever. I hadn't an idea you really cared. I, somehow, hadn't thought about it. What must you think of me!—the way I've been talking? I only wish [*with quivering lip*]
—I only wish—[*breaking away*]. But never mind!—only you're not half so wise as

you seem to think you are—or perhaps you are, and it's I who am stupid. You've nearly taken my breath away! But you want to talk to Rodney—I'll find him and tell him you're waiting for him. And—and I hope you don't think I'm simply a silly girl who wants to dance through life—but I know you don't—you said so, and I'm glad of that. I'm glad you told me that—and that you think of us as chums—for that's more than friends and—I'm glad you feel towards me like that. Ah, there they are! Goodbye—and—and—goodbye. [*Looks at him longingly, waves hand and exits.* FENTON *sinks into an armchair wonderingly.* Enter RODNEY *briskly.*]

RODNEY. Hello!—having a nap?

FENTON. I think I *was* dreaming a bit.

RODNEY [*Throwing himself into a chair*]. Now fire away, for I've an appointment with Clare presently.

FENTON. I want to speak of some letters, Rodney; written eighteen years ago to your father by your mother.

RODNEY. Is that all? Then what was the hurry? And what was all your mystery about?

FENTON. I thought you ought to know their contents before speaking to Lady Clare.

RODNEY. What *are* you driving at?

FENTON. Every family has its skeleton, you know; and yours is no exception.

RODNEY. How on earth can that affect Clare?

FENTON. Your father, I fear, led a pretty gay life before his marriage—and after it, too, and he neglected your mother.

RODNEY [*Constrainedly*]. Even if he did, why need I know of it?

FENTON. Your mother was young, and proud, and resented your father's neglect.

RODNEY. Well—what's your point?

FENTON. You know the danger of such conditions. There's always someone about ready to console a neglected wife.

RODNEY. Oh, I see. She drifted into some foolishness—is that it?

FENTON. Yes, with an Englishman named Kenyon—John Kenyon—a married man who was passing the winter in Kimberley without his wife. I understand he and his wife didn't hit it off very well, and that he fell madly in love with your mother—who seems to have been equally attracted to him.

RODNEY. I'm sorry to hear of it, of course,—very; but how does it all affect Clare and me?—I'm not likely to neglect her, and she doesn't go in for flirting—if that's what worries you.

FENTON. Your mother, I'm sorry to say, seems to have lost her head—completely, and things became serious—very.

RODNEY. That's all right, old man; but I don't think I care to hear any more. It can't do any good raking up an old affair like that, so you'd better

destroy those letters. It ended all right—that's all I care to know.

FENTON. Unfortunately—it didn't end all right.

RODNEY. How was that?

FENTON. Your mother became estranged from your father and came to England, and—well—she wrote these letters then—and they explain everything.

RODNEY. Oh, blow the letters! How did it end? How long did she stay away from Kimberley?

FENTON. She never returned again.

RODNEY. Never returned! My dear Fenton! My mother *died* at Kimberley—we know all the details. My aunt went out there after my mother's death, and because my father decided to break up the home. She brought Finch back with us, and he has told us all about our mother—what a lovely woman she was, and what a beautiful death she died, and how heartbroken my father was—everything—every detail. And now you tell me this cock-and-bull story! Really, my dear chap, if you don't mind my saying it—you're talking quite in the air.

FENTON. I fear not, Rodney. I fear that Finch—all honour to his kind heart—has been using his imagination rather than the facts, which he knew only too well.

RODNEY. But there's my aunt! She says the same thing—every word of it.

FENTON. Are you sure?—or has she simply not

contradicted Finch? As a fact, I've just been talking to your aunt about it.

RODNEY. Well?

FENTON. Miss Trask has never seen your mother—but after your mother's flight——

RODNEY. "Flight"?——my mother ran away?

FENTON. Yes, she ran away, and then your father wrote to his sister begging her to come out and help him in regard to you and Phyl, who was quite a baby at the time; and your aunt went out to Kimberley, and it ended in her bringing you both back with her, and that's the whole story, so far as that part is concerned. The other part is here [*indicating letters*].

RODNEY. What other part is there?

FENTON. Rodney, old man, I'd give ten years of my life to get out of telling you. But someone must—and I've made up my mind to do it.

RODNEY [*Strainedly*]. All right, Fenton, if you've got to hit me harder, do it, and be done with it.

FENTON. The fact is your mother did not go away alone.

RODNEY. I understand, of course;—she ran away with that fellow you spoke of?

FENTON. Kenyon.

RODNEY. And came to England.

FENTON. Yes.

RODNEY. And never went back.

FENTON. Never.

RODNEY. And died here.

FENTON. No.

RODNEY. Well, somewhere!—she died.

FENTON. No.

RODNEY. No? [*Pause — blinking and wiping brow with handkerchief as if faint and dazed.*] Well?—out with it!

FENTON. Your poor mother, Rodney, is not dead. They are living together now.

RODNEY. Wait a moment, Fenton!—Just wait a moment. I—I need to get things straight a bit. I don't seem to be able quite—to—to get clear in my mind what you're saying. What's that again about my mother?

FENTON. She is alive—in London—under the protection of the man Kenyon, with whom she ran away.

RODNEY. I see!—so that's it. She's not dead—my mother's not dead—she is living now—my mother is alive—and with that—damned man!—Ugh! [*Pauses—tries to collect himself then speaks as steadily as possible.*] Is he still with her?

FENTON. He lives with his wife, but your mother is under his protection. [*RODNEY winces.*]

RODNEY. Can you tell me where to find her?

FENTON. Why?

RODNEY. I don't know.

FENTON. Will you reckon with the man?

RODNEY. I don't know.

FENTON. Take time, Rodney, speak with me again.

RODNEY. Is there anything *more* to tell?

FENTON. You know everything.

RODNEY. Then we'll not speak of it again, just yet—if you don't mind. I'll thrash it out alone. I'd rather. Of course Phyl mustn't know yet. [*Nearly overcome.*] Poor, poor little Phyl!

FENTON. Perhaps there will be no need of telling her at all.

RODNEY [*Collecting himself*]. I must think it all out. I can't decide things now. I'm afraid I'm not feeling quite up to it.

FENTON. You think I was right in telling you?

RODNEY. Dead right. And it's been hard, I'm sure, and I'm grateful to you. It ends everything—everything; but I had to know and you were dead right in telling me in time. [*Lip trembles, but he recovers himself*] I'm expecting Clare, you know, and I'd like to pull myself together a bit. You understand?

FENTON. My dear Rodney! [*Going—pauses*] If I can help you—you'll let me, won't you?

RODNEY [*Extending his hand which FENTON clasps*]. That's all right.

Exit FENTON, as RODNEY sinks into chair and looks with strained eyes straight out. Then as if fighting his tears he rises and walks back and forth across the room, literally stamping back his tears.

Enter LADY CLARE, back. She watches him in an amused way. Then he suddenly flings out his arms with a deep groan. Amazed and terrified she comes down quickly to him.

LADY CLARE. Rodney! What is it? What's the matter?

He turns to her with agonised yearning in his face, half stretches out his arms to her—then as she instinctively half raises her arms with an answering look of love, he pulls himself together and forcing a change of expression and a smile says, as conventionally as possible.

RODNEY. Oh—oh, it's you, Clare?

LADY CLARE. What is it? Aren't you well?

RODNEY. Well? [*Laughing*] I'm the soundest chap alive, and longing for the dance—dancing's the thing—where are the others? Why don't they come?

LADY CLARE. I—I came early as I promised.

RODNEY. Yes—of course—I—I—asked you to come, because—because on a jolly day like this, one doesn't want to be alone—one wants to keep the pot a-boiling.

LADY CLARE. RODNEY!

RODNEY [*Collecting himself*]. Clare, I've startled you—forgive me—since I saw you my whole life is changed. Fenton has just told me something that

changes everything. I've got to think things out, but of one thing I'm sure now—I can't say to you to-night what I had hoped to say—you know what it was—but it's got to rest there. Don't tell anyone I'm in trouble for I want to keep it from Phyl—at least for the moment. I need time to think—but help me to get through the festivities for I'm a bit upset. I simply *must* forget it or I'll spoil everything. Help me to keep up, Clare! Help me to keep from thinking. [*With return to previous manner as Enter FINCH who switches on lights*] That's right, Finch, switch on the lights—every blessed one of them. That's far jollier.

During the foregoing speech, the grounds outside have suddenly been illuminated with coloured lights. During RODNEY'S talk with FENTON, sunlight has changed to sunset, and afterwards to early twilight, so that outside it is just a little grey with distant red streaks in the sky when the illuminations are turned on. In the room it is darker. Music is heard outside, growing nearer as the Band approaches. With it, as it draws nearer, comes the murmur of happy, laughing voices. The tenants' dance evidently begins on the lawn.

FINCH. You're in gay spirits to-night, sir.

RODNEY. Spirits, Finch! Why shouldn't I be in spirits?

FINCH. It's been a great day, sir.

RODNEY. This day, Finch? This is the day we've talked of for years, Finch, for years! When I should come into my own. The happiest day of my life, Finch! [*Laughs bitterly and hysterically.*]

FINCH. There's a happier one to come, sir.

RODNEY. And when is that? To-morrow? [*Laughs bitterly.*]

FINCH. The sooner the better, sir, say I; and the wedding bells shall ring out . . .

RODNEY [*Rushing on*]. Listen to him, Clare. The old beggar's turning sentimental! He wants to chain me down again just as I'm free. No, Finch, no! My life begins to-morrow. *To-morrow!* But I'm for to-day—to-night—this moment! Where are the others? Why *don't* they come? Ah, here they are! Let's join the dance, Clare! [*Music has been growing faster and madder. To PHYL and FENTON who enter with MISS TRASK*] Come on! Come on! Everyone! [*To CLARE*] Come, Clare. We'll lead the way. [*Seizes her hand*] We'll show them what dancing's like! Come! [*Seizes her and they rush to terrace and off, she laughing and he shouting*] Play faster, there! faster! [*Music quickens*] That's more like it! Faster! Faster! Faster! [*Music still quicker. Exit RODNEY and CLARE*] Keep it up. Keep it up! Faster! Faster! [*Shouts of merriment and excitement. Swirling music.*]

[*As FENTON and AUNT ANN, on entering, see RODNEY'S excitement, they exchange*

a glance of understanding, and FENTON, to back him up and to throw dust in PHYL'S eyes, responds to RODNEY'S apparent mood, and seizing her hand, swirls her off after RODNEY and CLARE. AUNT ANN goes to balustrade of terrace and looks after them anxiously.]

QUICK CURTAIN.

Between Acts I and II six weeks pass.

ACT II.

[*Six weeks later.*]

SCENE: *A room in the house of MARGARET NOËL. It is luxuriously furnished. There is a door right. A low tea-table on which is a silver tea-service laid on a lace-bordered cloth is slightly to left of centre. Near by is a comfortable chair. Various signs of culture are in evidence. MARGARET is discovered standing near a table, U. C., reading a note; she finishes it, bends and smells some flowers—France roses and mignonette—on the table, then goes to a secretary and takes out another note and glances through it. While she is reading the second note, Enter GIBBONS.*

GIBBONS [*Announcing*]. Mrs. Hildred.

[MARGARET slips note inside of a book on table and turning, greets guest.]

MARGARET. Oh, Rose.

ROSE [*Advancing*]. Good morning, dear [*embraces MARGARET*].

MARGARET [*Leading her towards sofa*]. Well, how did my little dinner go off?

[*Takes her own chair near tea-table.*]

ROSE. Delightfully! I enjoyed myself so much. How nice Mr. Reynolds is.

MARGARET [*Warmly*]. Isn't he a charming boy?

ROSE. I liked his friend, Mr. Fenton, too.

MARGARET. He terrifies me, rather; he's so utterly sane.

ROSE. That's more than you can say for the boy; he's quite mad—so far as you're concerned.

MARGARET. Nonsense! I'm old enough to be his mother.

ROSE. But you're young enough to be fascinating. I couldn't keep my eyes away from you any more than the boy could. What's come over the demure Mrs. Noël?—flirting in her old age—and with a boy?

MARGARET. Don't talk like that; you know I'd not flirt with a boy or anyone.

ROSE. I thought I knew it—until lately.

MARGARET. Can't you understand the friendship—even affection—of a boy for an elder woman, and her accepting it as it's meant?

ROSE. Not when the little boy is twenty-five, and old for his age—and the old lady looks as young as you do.

MARGARET. Then take my word for it—he and I understand each other perfectly.

ROSE. And you accept his devotion as it's meant, eh?

MARGARET. Precisely.

ROSE. How *is* it meant?—that's the *point*. Has he ever told you?

MARGARET. He doesn't need to; I understand.

ROSE. And he loves you like a mother?

MARGARET. Well——

ROSE. Or perhaps a grandmother?—there's no telling in a bucolic attachment of this sort.

MARGARET. Don't be tiresome.

ROSE. I think I'll set my cap for Mr. Fenton; he may be longing for a great-aunt; who knows?

MARGARET. Jeer, if you like.

ROSE. How long have you known Mr. Reynolds?

MARGARET. Friendship's not a matter of the calendar.

ROSE. That's the talk of a schoolgirl—not of his grandmother.

MARGARET. Really, Rose, aren't you going a bit far?

ROSE. I don't care if I am. I happen to be fond of you, and you seem to have lost your head. I see trouble before you, and I don't like it.

MARGARET. You dear thing! Of course, I know you're speaking in friendship—but you don't understand. Believe me, I've not lost my head—so don't worry. This charming boy and I do really understand each other. I don't hope to persuade you of it—but I feel it, and I know it. He's the most charming, high-minded, fascinating boy I've ever known; he appeals to me in an extraordinary way; but to suggest flirtation, or anything unworthy of this friendship, is to misunderstand it; for it's the sweetest sentiment that's ever come into my life. I feel, somehow, that it has a touch of sacredness in it—and it hurts me to hear you speak lightly of it. So don't do it, please.

ROSE. I hope you're not deceiving yourself—and what am I to say to others? Everyone we know is talking about it. I can't tell people he wants you to be a grandmother to him.

MARGARET. Let them talk, I don't care. [*Impressively*] At least they shan't interfere. No one shall do that!

ROSE. I fear you're laying up trouble for yourself.

MARGARET. Why?

ROSE. Well—what does John Kenyon think of it?

MARGARET. He doesn't think of it. I've written him about Mr. Reynolds, of course, but he's never even referred to him.

ROSE. Have you seen Mr. Kenyon this morning?

MARGARET. He's in Scotland; he's been there for weeks,—I thought you knew.

ROSE. But he's come back.

MARGARET. No; he's to be there another fortnight.

ROSE. I met Colonel Rogers this morning and he told me they came up together by the Night Express.

MARGARET. They did?—how odd he didn't let me know.

ROSE. It seems he doesn't half like your friendship with Mr. Reynolds.

MARGARET. Who says so?

ROSE. Colonel Rogers.

MARGARET. Then Colonel Rogers is mistaken.

ROSE. I only repeat what he said.

MARGARET. Colonel Rogers is mistaken. I think I know John Kenyon, and he knows *me*.

ROSE. He's a man, and men are——

MARGARET [*Interrupting*]. Not John Kenyon,—and surely not of a boy.

ROSE. Let us hope not.

MARGARET. If it were true I'd never forgive him.

ROSE. There you are!—there's trouble at once.

MARGARET. There'll be no trouble. He'll be awfully ashamed of himself.

ROSE. Why?—because he doesn't believe in grandmothers?

MARGARET. Rose, that's offensive after what I said.

ROSE. I can't help it; you're so fatuous about this thing. You, of all women!—head and shoulders above any other woman I've ever known;—you, *my* Margaret Noël, suddenly descend to the level of the brainless, sentimental creatures we've so often talked about; and, for the sake of a boy, become the biggest fool of them all.

MARGARET [*Interrupting*]. But——

ROSE. No; hear me out! You must stop this folly. You owe it to yourself—and even to me, who have looked up to you so. If you fail me, Margaret, what's the use of anyone believing in anyone?

MARGARET. I'm not going to fail you. You simply don't understand.

ROSE. What *is* there to understand? Isn't it the

old story of platonic affection, which is merely love peptonised for feeble digestions? Are you going to feed John Kenyon that stuff?—If so, I, for one, won't blame him for not swallowing it.

MARGARET. Rose, there *is* something to understand, I'm sure of it—and yet I'm *not* sure of it. I'll tell you something—something very, very intimate—and perhaps you'll be able to advise me. I'm very troubled about something—and yet there may be nothing in it. Any way, I'll tell you everything and you shall judge. The beginning you know: How Lord Keam brought Mr. Reynolds to our box that night of the “Meistersinger.” The next day Mr. Reynolds sent me some flowers—France roses and mignonette—and this note—[*Takes book into which she had thrust notes on ROSE'S entrance*]—a strange, little note. [*Reads*] “I send you these flowers because I want them to carry you a message. They spring from nature as does their message. Rodney Reynolds.”—Rodney! How that name struck me and clung to me. I kept repeating it to myself all that day, and the next, and the next.

ROSE. But why?

MARGARET [*With a slightly perceptible break in voice*]. It was my little son's name.

ROSE. And the message?

MARGARET. I couldn't guess it, try as I would.—You know what friends we've become, but he has sent me no more flowers until to-day. While I was

at breakfast these came, and with them this book and this note. [*Reads*] "I send you again France roses and mignonette, my mother's favourite flowers. Rodney."

ROSE. They're *your* favourite flowers, too, aren't they?

MARGARET. Yes. It's a strange coincidence rather——

ROSE. Very—and the book? [MARGARET *extends book which ROSE takes*] Poetry,—page turned down,—some lines marked.

MARGARET. I'll read them to you. [ROSE *hands her the book and MARGARET reads poem.*]

*"Oh Mother, my love, if you'll give me your hand
And go where I ask you to wander,
I will lead you away to a beautiful land:—
The Dreamland that's waiting out yonder.

We'll walk in a sweet posy garden out there
Where moonlight and starlight are streaming,
And the flowers and the birds are filling the air
With the fragrance and music of dreaming.

So Mother, my love, let me take your dear hand,
And away through the starlight we'll wander—
Away through the mist to the beautiful land,
The dreamland that's waiting—out yonder."

*Eugene Field.

ROSE. Margaret!

MARGARET. You understand better now?

ROSE. Yes.—Much better.

MARGARET. Still it may be mere coincidence.—He may be some other Rodney of the same age as mine—[*bitterly*] and we'll have a good laugh about it afterwards.

ROSE [*Quietly—impressively*]. I doubt there being much to laugh at—afterwards. When will he come again?

MARGARET. This afternoon. [*Looks at clock*] He's due now. But supposing it's all true, you don't seem a bit glad about it.

ROSE. It means so much to all of us—even to me.

MARGARET. What do you mean?

ROSE [*Breaking out*]. Why, Margaret, dear, don't you see ahead?—don't you realise——

[*Door opens.*]

MARGARET. Hush!

[*Enter SERVANT.*]

SERVANT. Mr. Reynolds.

[*Enter RODNEY TRASK.*]

[*They are all under great constraint, which is shown by an ultra conventional manner and tone of voice.*]

MARGARET. Thank you so much for the lovely flowers.

RODNEY. If they have given you pleasure I must thank them. [*Bowing stiffly to MRS. HILDRED*] How do you do?

ROSE. And good-bye, for I must be running away.

RODNEY. I'm afraid I've interrupted a tête-à-tête.

ROSE. No, I was just going. [*To MARGARET*] Good-bye, dear. [*Kisses her. RODNEY straightens up slightly, as if the act grated on him. MARGARET touches an electric bell on table near her and RODNEY opens door for ROSE.*]

ROSE. Thank you. [*Exits. RODNEY closes door, and turning, he and MARGARET regard each other long and fixedly. Then the assurance in MARGARET'S mind becomes greater, then absolute, and she half raises her arms towards him, and he cries out.*]

RODNEY. Mother! [*As he would seize her in his arms, she suddenly pauses and recoils.*]

MARGARET. But you know?

RODNEY. Everything.

MARGARET. That I——

RODNEY. Don't mother—speak only of the future.

MARGARET. You don't loathe me?

RODNEY. Loathe my mother! [*She goes into his arms.*]

MARGARET [*Presently, looking up*]. You can really care for me?

RODNEY. I love you as only a mother can be loved.

MARGARET. Rodney! My own Rodney! [*Sinks again into his embrace*] To think that we belong to each other; we're part of each other; you're my child—my own, own son. [*Tremulously*] I re-

member so well the morning you were born—and the thrill of the first time your little cheek touched mine—and it's you—actually you—that baby's you, and you're my very, very own! [*Sobs once or twice and adds brokenly*] I can't help being a baby myself, I'm so happy.

RODNEY. Mother—Ah, mother, my love!

MARGARET [*Notices one of his hands*]. You've *my* hands, [*looking at him critically*] and your eyes and the shape of your head are like your grandfather's—on my side—I'm glad of that. Your voice, too, is like his. Altogether you're just as I would have you. And what is Phyllis like?—like me at all?

RODNEY. Oh, Phyl's all right; in fact, she's rather pretty. But she's not your type, she's rather the perky sort; but she's a dear!

MARGARET. And you and she are great friends?

RODNEY. We're great chums.

MARGARET. Dear little Phyllis! Does she ever speak of—of her mother?

RODNEY. She has been taught to believe that you are dead, and she has raised an altar to you in her heart and placed your image on it. You are her guardian angel. She dreams of you, talks of you and tries to be worthy of you——

MARGARET. Don't—don't. Don't tell me any more—talk to me of yourself. Tell me that you love me—tell me what you like about me—just as I am—just as you see me.

RODNEY. The first time I saw you I fell in love with you. I love your personality, your eyes, your smile, the very way your hair falls over your forehead, the poise of your head, and best of all, your voice! Oh, that just makes my heart jump! To think—to think you're really mine, and I'm never to lose you again!

MARGARET. Don't let's think of the future—let's just revel in the present.

RODNEY. But the future means always being together. It means day after day like this.

MARGARET. All the same I don't want to think—
[*Laying her cheek against his shoulder*] I only want to dream.

RODNEY [*Very tenderly and significantly*].

“Mother, my love, if you'll give me your hand
And go where I ask you to wander,
I'll lead you away to a beautiful land,
The Dreamland that's waiting out yonder.”

[*Pauses sufficiently to mark end of poetry.*]

A land of rest, mother dear, where the day-dreams bring no sadness and love has no regret. There you shall dream to your heart's content.

MARGARET. Ah, how sweet it sounds.

RODNEY. I've prepared a little home. Shall I tell you of it?

MARGARET. Yes.

RODNEY. The house in itself isn't much, but the garden is charming, with flowers, plenty of them, and some fine old trees, and a lawn with turf like velvet, and here and there a bench to loll upon—just the place for afternoon tea together; and there's a tennis court for Phyl, and you shall be head gardener—that is—[*deliberate, slight pause*]—if *Finch* permits.

MARGARET [*Starting*]. Finch?—surely not——

RODNEY. The same old Finch; of course grown older and very white. He's brought us up, Phyllie and me, and now he's in the home to welcome you.

MARGARET. But——

RODNEY. He's talked of you all our lives, and Phyl's ideal is what he's told her of you.

MARGARET [*Slowly*]. Oh, how good of him!

RODNEY. He regards me as his personal asset—and *I'm* afraid of him; but Phyl bullies him right and left, and she's the apple of his eye.

MARGARET. Dear little Phyl! Do you think—would she ever——

RODNEY. She'll love you with all her heart.

MARGARET. If I could hope for that, I'd try—Oh, how I'd try—to satisfy her; but those terrible ideals of hers—they would paralyse me.

RODNEY. The real mother will embody those ideals.

MARGARET. It's too late.

RODNEY. The future is your own.

MARGARET. But the Past?

RODNEY. She needn't know the Past—all of it. She need only know that being unhappy, you left your home and have lived here ever since.

MARGARET. But there's so much to explain—and in the end she's sure to learn the truth, and young girls are so pitiless.

RODNEY. When once she knows you as I do—she will love you in spite of everything.

MARGARET. I know my sex.

RODNEY. And I know Phyl.

MARGARET. You've all the splendid confidence of youth; I wish I could share it.

RODNEY. I've the confidence of one who knows Phyl—and you *will* share it.

MARGARET. Where is this charming home?—in England?

RODNEY [*After slight pause*]. In London.

MARGARET. London——?

RODNEY [*Feeling his way more and more*]. Yes, why not? We're going to live forwards, not backwards, and we shall have nothing to hide—[*risking it*]—and no one to hide from.

MARGARET [*Pause—then starting away*]. RODNEY!—RODNEY! [*She stands aghast, realising realities, he watching her with eager intensity—presently the cry breaks from her*] It's no use—it's no use—dreaming's not for me! [*She starts and changes expression at sound of voice off.*]

KENYON [*Off*]. Announce me?—certainly not! —Were those your orders?

MARGARET. Oh!

GIBBONS [*Off*]. Oh, no, sir, only I thought, sir——

KENYON [*Interrupting*]. Quite so. That will do. [*Door opens quickly and enter KENYON. RODNEY on hearing voice has listened intently—he stiffens himself as under sudden intense emotion, then stands, watching entrance of KENYON.*]

MARGARET [*With trepidation*]. Oh, John—John—what do you think?—My—son—has come—he's here——

KENYON. So you're her son, eh?—That explains things. Rumour had brought me everything but that. May I ask why you're here?

RODNEY [*Who has stood looking steadily at KENYON breaks into laughter*]. Well—I like that!—Why am I here! [*seats himself sideways on arm of chair near tea-table—assumes amusement*]—Well, let me see; Why *am* I here?—Why, to enjoy a chat with our charming hostess—and a cup of her good tea, and—and a crumpet. The crumpets here are really excellent. Now what brings you—the same attractions?

KENYON [*Firmly*]. Kindly answer my question.

RODNEY [*Rising*]. I'll ring for tea, mother—and the crumpets.

KENYON [*Sternly*]. Stop! [*RODNEY pauses.*]

RODNEY [*Turning and looking quizzically speaks to MARGARET, as if aside*]. Who is our eccentric guest? I failed to catch his name.

MARGARET. It is Mr. Kenyon.

RODNEY. Kenyon—Kenyon? I don't remember meeting him before. Who *is* the insistent Mr. Kenyon?

KENYON. Come, come, sir! I want a plain answer to a plain question. Why are you here?

MARGARET. He's my son——

KENYON [*Interrupting*]. Don't interfere.

RODNEY [*Amiably*]. Yes, I'm this lady's son.

KENYON. Be serious, sir!

RODNEY. I *am* serious. [*Leans across chair and takes lump of sugar from table—nibbles it—swings foot slightly*] I'm her son.—Her *only* son.—Her only son and *heir*.

KENYON. What does this buffoonery mean?

RODNEY [*To MARGARET, as though perplexed*]. May I ask this gentleman's standing in your house?

MARGARET [*Showing distress*]. He—why—Oh, surely you know.

RODNEY. Kenyon—Kenyon—I fear you must explain further.

KENYON. I'll explain! I'm this lady's protector against all intruders—even her son!

MARGARET. Oh, John!

RODNEY [*A note of hardness creeping through buffoonery*]. My mother's "protector"? That's a strange office in my mother's house. Oh! [*With return to previous voice*] You mean you're her bailiff.

KENYON. I mean just what I say. So state your business here.

MARGARET. Remember that you speak to my son.

RODNEY. There, didn't I tell you so? Now perhaps you'll believe me. By the bye, your name comes back to me. There was a chap named Kenyon out home. I've heard my friend Fenton tell about him. He was pals with my father. But he turned out a bad lot. Would you believe it! One day when father was away from home this chap Kenyon found something he coveted in the house and made off with it. Fancy!—the man my father trusted, and made a friend of and believed to be a man of honour, turning out a common thief—and of a low sort at that.

KENYON. What was "stolen" as you call it was something your father hadn't the sense to value, and he deserved to lose it.

RODNEY. Of course you don't mean that, Bailiff—or we'd have to keep an eye on our spoons, mother and I.

KENYON. Son or no son, have a care!

MARGARET. John, he *is* my son and you must not forget it.

KENYON. I see! You count on your mother to protect you.

RODNEY [*Throwing off buffoonery—sternly*]. From you? I haven't been thinking of you. I've been thinking of my mother; watching for the working of her natural instinct.

KENYON [*Sarcastically*]. Indeed. Then if you're quite ready, perhaps you'll honour *me* with your attention.

RODNEY. I'm quite ready.

KENYON. Then be good enough to tell me what brings you here?

RODNEY. I've come to take my mother away.

KENYON [*Looking at MARGARET*]. And does she wish to go?

MARGARET. John!

KENYON [*Turns with triumphant smile to RODNEY*]. Well?

RODNEY. She *will* go.

KENYON. She *will not* go. No one shall take her from me.

RODNEY. Yes: I shall take her from you.

KENYON. It can't be *done*.

RODNEY. It *is* done.

KENYON. Done? What do you mean?

RODNEY. Her life with you is ended.

KENYON. You're mad! She does not wish to go.

RODNEY. She *will* go. [*Rises commandingly*]
John Kenyon, this matter is beyond you, or me, or even her. You may find the instinct of a mother for her child benumbed, but killed—never! Arouse it and she herself can't stand against it;—it sweeps her beyond love of man, or thing, or even self. This divine madness is stirred within this woman. I know it! I am from her and of her, and I tell you she will go. Nothing human can prevent it!

KENYON. *I shall prevent it! You talk of instinct—what about her heart? Does she owe nothing to herself?—to me?—but all to you?*

RODNEY. What she owed her children you robbed them of; what she owes to you I will reckon for her; as for herself she owes much she has not paid, and I am here to help her.

KENYON. She needs no help from you. She knows what she owes herself. *I taught her years ago. And let me tell you, her future is her own and mine. So leave her in peace—and go!*

RODNEY. You ask a son to leave his mother in dishonour?

KENYON. What dishonour is there in living with the man she loves?

RODNEY. Ugh! Don't class her with the "affinity" brigade. One respects more an *honest* sinner. What if you found *your* mother under such conditions as these——?

KENYON. Leave my mother out of it.

RODNEY. Why?

KENYON. I prefer it.

RODNEY. I merely suggested your mother's name for mine.

KENYON. And I object.

RODNEY. You object to my saying that if someone kept your mother as a pet in a pretty cage——?

KENYON. Be silent!

RODNEY. —to serve his pleasure at ample wages——?

KENYON [*Advancing*]. Stop or I'll——

RODNEY [*Ironically eye to eye with him*].
Why? . . . I'm supposing they loved each other—
then where's the dishonour in it?

KENYON [*Pulling himself together*]. Why split
hairs with you. We've a right to take happiness
where we find it. That's been *our* motto, and
we've little fault to find with it.

RODNEY. So you think she's been happy, do you?

KENYON. Happy? Ask her! [KENYON *turns to*
MARGARET *confidently*.]

MARGARET. You know I've been happy.

KENYON. Do you believe it now?

RODNEY. Do you? . . . If her nature had been
coarse wouldn't you have sickened of her long ago?
with a nature like hers—sensitive to its atmosphere
as a flower, unused to indignity or slight—think
what she must have suffered under the contempt
and scorn of the life you led her to! Loving com-
panionship as she does, think of her driven to soli-
tude except for the companionship of *déclassée*
women, or the degrading patronage of some titled
cocotte; with nothing for consolation but your pu-
trid affinity creed. And this has been her life—
year after year—with no hope before her until time
should benumb her suffering. How? By *brutal-*
ising her! And you tell me she's been happy!
[*Rushes on*] *Is* she not a woman?—has she not
longed for children's voices, and the patter of little
feet? Yet who would be the mother of bastards?

[KENYON *protests.*] That's what the world still calls them no matter what affinity may say. Then where must her heart have turned? Somewhere!—somewhere! Then where? I believe she has stretched out her arms to us—a hundred—a thousand times; to us—the children she had borne and turned her back upon. [*Turning suddenly*] If you doubt it, look at her! . . . And you tell me she's been happy! Happy!—starving for love!

KENYON. She had *my* love.

RODNEY. She couldn't trust it.

MARGARET [*Quickly*]. No, no, that's false——

RODNEY [*Gently*]. Is it? Then look into your heart, mother, and tell me this: Have you never feared the future? Never been conscious of a vague dread that there might come a day when he, on whom you had staked everything, might find you less engaging?—that your hold on him might weaken?—your life become more empty—until, springing to your mirror, you have gazed through it and beyond it into the future; then turned away, with an ominous sense that the best was already behind you?

MARGARET. That comes to every woman.

RODNEY. Not as it has to you, mother. The honest wife accepts it with a sigh, perhaps, but never with a moan; but the gambler in life who has staked everything on chance, borrowing of the future to keep in the game to-day, such a player can't afford to lose, and when she sees what she has

slipping from her, she has reason for the fever in her blood and the sob in her heart. God help her! Could it be otherwise? *You* know, tell us *what* you know!

KENYON [*To* MARGARET]. But surely you could trust *my* love?

RODNEY [*Sternly*]. Trust a love which made of her an outcast? Trust a love which has thrust this moment on her? Think of it! Here am I, her own son, arraigning her, torturing her, stripping her heart bare that you may see your handiwork.

KENYON. Is it a higher love that tortures her like this?

RODNEY. If I have made her realise what she owes to *you*—if I have voiced the cry of her true self—then I have not been cruel.

MARGARET. But, Rodney, in spite of all you say, I've been happier than in the old life; that, at least, is true.

RODNEY. No, mother, even that cannot be true. You fled from duty hoping to find happiness elsewhere, but you can't have found it. There's no such favoured corner of life. You were but fleeing from the presence of God out into His wilderness;—exchanging the bread and bitter herbs for the herbs only. Mother, mother, if only you could see that life's not a game of chance! Its very essence is law, and you can't get away from it! We're born to duty; it's a common debt, and each must pay his

part—sooner or later—somehow—somewhere—for so it is written!

KENYON. I deny it! If life has a law it's this: "Be just to yourself before you're generous to others." She was bound to think of herself; only fools bankrupt themselves for others.

RODNEY. Then all who have sacrificed themselves for others have been wrong. Duty is an empty word—there are no heroes and no martyrs. . . . They who have gone down with their ships or stood to their guns were but fools—fools all, these men and women we have honoured. . . . She was wiser than they—she who thought only of herself. The world is wrong and she was right—she and that other mother who flung her children to the wolves that she might save herself!

MARGARET [*Shrinking as if struck and covering her face*]. Ugh!

[*As MARGARET utters this exclamation of horror and contrition, KENYON, stung and aghast, and sympathetic, starts towards her impulsively.*]

KENYON. It's false—a lie! Margaret!

RODNEY [*Intercepting him*]. No!

KENYON. Stand aside! [*With threatening gesture.*]

RODNEY. You shall not!

KENYON. She's mine!

[*RODNEY with savage cry springs for him.*]

MARGARET [*Intervening*]. Rodney!—John!—
[*They just catch themselves.*] For my sake!

RODNEY [*Gradually controlling himself*]. Yes—
yes—for—your sake. But he—must go—or we.
The sight of him there maddens me!

MARGARET. Remember that I love him.

RODNEY. And do you remember that—I—hate—
him! [*Turns away up stage.*]

[*There is a slight pause then. MARGARET
goes to KENYON and lays hand upon his
arm.*]

MARGARET. John, dear, I know my son is bitter—
—terribly bitter, but can you blame him—you
who would not have your mother mentioned in this
matter, while his mother has been debated like a
slave in the market-place; her very soul stripped
bare for discussion. But he has spoken as a son
should, and as a mother I love him for it. . . Yet
what it has been to me no one can ever know;
there can't be a torture in hell more hideous than
I've passed through. Every feeling and faculty
seems racked and torn—no human being could
come through it and be the same—and I'm not—
I'm conscious of being different—things seem dif-
ferent—I feel them in another way. . . There's no
use talking of the past—you've been tender—and
kind—and faithful, and I shall never, never cease
to be grateful to you or to love you with all my
heart.

KENYON. But surely, you're not weakening! You're not thinking—what *are* you thinking?

MARGARET. It couldn't ever be the same, dear, after to-day; you must feel that, too. Something's gone out of it, or something's shattered it—I don't quite know. . . . I only know it's different; I feel a sort of strange consciousness regarding you—almost as if you were someone else.

KENYON. But I'm not—I'm the same, and always will be.

MARGARET. No—there's somehow a difference—that makes *all* the difference.

KENYON. You're upset—overstrung—that's all it is.

MARGARET. No, dear—that's not all it is. A mist has come between you and me—you seem further away.

KENYON. No, no, Margaret!—don't say that.

MARGARET. Yes,—yet I never needed help and strength as I do now. I feel as if my sight were failing me—and I need to be led.

KENYON [*Stretching out his hand*]. Margaret!

MARGARET. I can't, John. It's not *your* help I'm groping for—I feel—— Oh, John, try to forgive me! I feel I need to be led *away* from you.

KENYON. Margaret—you don't know what you're saying.

MARGARET [*With abandon*]. *Don't I*—when it breaks my heart?

KENYON [*Tenderly, and stretching out his arms*]. Margaret!

MARGARET. No!... No!... [*After struggle and pause, decisively*] No!! [KENYON, *sinking on sofa, stares at her, speechless. RODNEY has been coming down step by step, from the time she said she wished to be led away from KENYON. He now goes to her as she stands swaying, and when she is conscious of him she spontaneously shelters herself in his arms. Whereupon KENYON buries his face in his hands with a moan.*]

RODNEY [*Sotto voce*]. Mother!

Presently MARGARET opens her eyes and turns her head towards KENYON.

She regards him with intense sympathy and then, drawing away from her son, indicates KENYON by a gesture, and then motions RODNEY to withdraw. He, comprehending her wish, nods sympathetically, and then kisses her on forehead and going unhesitatingly to door, Exits.

She watches him tenderly until he disappears and then gazes a moment at KENYON, to whom presently she goes, silently sinking on the sofa. He realises her presence, and after brief pause reaches out his hand for hers and they sit, with clasped hands, side by side.

SLOW CURTAIN.

Between Acts II and III three weeks pass.

ACT III.

TIME: *Three weeks later.*

SCENE: *A fresh, dainty sitting room in a house in Chelsea. Main entrance to room up right, another door left, lower down. Two large French windows lead to garden as described by RODNEY in Act Second. They stand wide open. RODNEY is discovered lounging in a long wicker chair under a tree on lawn, glancing through a document. MARGARET'S voice, occasionally breaking into laughter, is heard in distance. The laughter increases, RODNEY looks up and smiles, then returns to his document, then, as laughter becomes more and more uncontrolled, he becomes affected by it, until he joins in with it through mere contagion. MARGARET comes nearer and presently RODNEY calls out to her in the midst of his laughter.*

RODNEY. What on earth are you laughing at?

MARGARET [*Out of sight, laughing as she speaks*]. Finch has been telling me some of Phyllis's pranks and yours when you were little tots. They're the funniest things I ever heard.

RODNEY. What wonderful children all you mothers have. I wonder what becomes of them?

MARGARET. But these stories *really are* funny beyond words.

RODNEY. Try them on some other mother and see.

MARGARET. Well, anyway, Finch and I think they're funny.

RODNEY. Then that settles it.

MARGARET [*To FINCH*]. I think we've flowers enough, Finch. Oh, you might get me that branch of honeysuckle. What a beauty!

FINCH [*Out of sight*]. 'Tis a fine one, mum.

MARGARET [*Still out of sight*]. Now get the vases. [*She appears.*]

FINCH. Yes, madam. [*FINCH passes window as if entering by an unseen door into house.*]

MARGARET *wears a simple, fresh-looking dress. A garden apron is fastened round her waist, the ends of it gathered up in one hand. In the other hand she has a pair of garden scissors. She saunters towards RODNEY, and pausing at his side, lowers apron and displays flowers.*

MARGARET. Aren't they lovely? I do love a garden! And the rain has made everything so beautiful!

RODNEY [*Looking up tenderly and quoting*]. "The winter is past, the rain is over and gone."

She bends down and kisses his hair, and passes on to the house with radiant face.

Enter FINCH with vases on tray.

MARGARET. Put them here [*moving some books on table to make room for tray*]. I dare say their Aunt Ann took such pranks hardly [*dumps flowers onto tray*], not being their own mother, you know. [*Unfastens her apron and walks up stage to left corner where she tosses apron over back of sofa near a garden hat which has been thrown onto a sofa pillow. During the following conversation between MARGARET and FINCH, MARGARET is arranging the flowers in vases with the assistance of FINCH, who places the vases in different parts of room, MARGARET herself placing one or two.*]

FINCH. Lor' bless you, no, mum. Miss Trask loved their pranks, and she used to laugh till she cried when she told about them.

MARGARET. And probably spoiled the children—which is just as bad.

FINCH. Oh, no, mum, when she spoke before the children she was very solemn, oh, very, mum, although it was hard for her sometimes, I could see that.

MARGARET. Oh, yes, I dare say she was very wise,—most people are with other people's children. Tell me some more of their pranks.

FINCH. Have I ever told you, mum, about their running away and pretending they was wild Injuns from Buffalo Bill's?

MARGARET. You mean the time they made a cave of coal bricks in the cellar and built a fire in it?

FINCH. Oh, no, mum; that's another. The Injun story was when they and Lady Clare, and two friends of Mr. Rodney's, who was passin' the day with 'im, saddled the ponies and the spare carriage 'osses while Miss Trask was payin' visits.

MARGARET. That's a new one [*placing a vase*].

FINCH. They stripped the feather dusters for their headgear, smeared their faces with strawberry jam for to look gory, armed theirselves with spears an' shields from the armoury, and mountin' their 'osses set out for scalps before any of us knew what mischief they was up to. The first thing they saw was the dairyman drivin' towards town. Whoopin' and shoutin' like young Belsebubs they started after 'im. Lord! The poor man was that frightened he thought 'is end was come, and that the devil had got 'im sure. And he lashed 'is 'oss and said 'is prayers for all he was worth. But the Injuns came a swoopin' down behind 'im—nearer and nearer, Mr. Rodney whoopin' somethin' awful and whirlin' 'is spear over 'is 'ead, when all of a sudden—just as Mr. Rodney was a catching of 'im—and the man was nearly daft and 'is 'oss was nearly dead—who should 'eave in sigh but——

RODNEY [*Who has entered during end of speech and stood back unperceived, gives awful whoop*].
Who—o—o—o—o—o—o—o—o!

FINCH [*Starting in terror—then smiling*]. Lord bless my soul, Mr. Rodney, but you do do it natural.

RODNEY. You garrulous old tattler! If anything

is sacred to you let it be the degrading sequel of that hour.

FINCH [*To MARGARET*]. The poor children, mum, was cut off jam—but it was only official, mum, for I smuggled it to the nursery inside an extra milk jug. [MARGARET *laughs heartily.*]

RODNEY. You silly old Finch!—If I catch you again telling tales out of school, I'll—scalp you! [FINCH *laughs delightedly, and continues placing vases about the room.*] Here's the transfer, mother, ready to be signed, and then this little home is yours, and you can turn me out as soon as you're tired of me.

MARGARET. What difference does it make which of us is its legal owner?

RODNEY. The difference between standing a tub right side up or not. The parent should be boss. I like the feeling that the home belongs to you. So by signing the transfer you're pleasing me. See?

MARGARET [*Tenderly*]. Very well, since you wish it. Shall I sign now?

RODNEY. If you don't mind;—and Finch, just witness our signatures, will you?

FINCH. Beg pardon, sir?

RODNEY. Watch your mistress and me write our names on this document, and then sign your name here as witness of our signatures.

FINCH [*Dubiously*]. Very well, sir—if you wish it.

[RODNEY *signs and then gives MARGARET pen and points.*]

RODNEY. Sign here. [*She signs.*] Now, Finch—write your name here—your full name. [FINCH *looks about.*] Here's the pen.

FINCH. Yes, sir,—but I was looking—I don't see the Bible, sir.

RODNEY. You don't need the Bible for this operation.

FINCH. Oh, don't I, sir? [*Raises hand and closes eyes*] I hereby declare that I, William Finch, will tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

RODNEY. That's right, Finch. Now begin your new resolution by attesting that you saw my mother and me write our names upon this document.

FINCH [*Dubiously*]. I suppose it's all right, sir, if you ask it of me——

RODNEY. Oh, I see. You want to know what you're signing—well, I'll read it to you [*Pretending eo read*] “I, Rodney Trask, of London, County Middlesex, hereby state and solemnly declare, regarding one William Finch, who has been in my service since I was born, that I do now legally transfer that service to my dear mother—charging her to reduce his wages to their commercial value—his beer to one imperial pint per day—and to so guide and instruct him that he may own up to his breakages, and never again shirk his work, or shift any portion thereof to the shoulders of his fellow servants; nor sample the wine of the upper table;

nor loiter in idle gossip with the cook, or the Bobby on duty, or the coachman in waiting; *et al.*”

FINCH. Et who, sir?

RODNEY. Al.

FINCH. I think the coachman's name is John, sir.

RODNEY. Al—or Albert is the legal name for all coachmen, as is Bobby for policemen—or Tommy for soldiers. Didn't you know that?

FINCH. Yes, sir, only I—I—forgot, sir—for the moment—for the *moment*, sir.

RODNEY. “Agreeing to all of which and sundry, the said William Finch is hereby exhorted to sign his name in full. *Ex anima, ex cathedra!*” Is that all right?

FINCH. Quite so, sir. I don't mind so much about the wages, sir—but that imperial pint——

MARGARET [*Laughing*]. Finch, Mr. Rodney is only having his little joke. This is simply a paper in which he is making me a present of this charming home, and as for you, you are the best present of all, and you shall have all the beer you want, and talk to whom you please, so long as you talk to me about Mr. Rodney and Miss Phyl. I'm very cross with Mr. Rodney for playing such a joke upon you.

FINCH [*Sheepishly*]. I ought to know Mr. Rodney by this time, mum, but these lawyer people do write such stuff one never knows when one's to

laugh and when one's not; that's what deceived me, mum, thanking you very much.

RODNEY. All the same, William Finch, you didn't deny anything I said, rascal!

FINCH. I thought it was written by a legal gent, sir, what was paid to take away my character.

RODNEY. That's all right,—now sign here. [FINCH *signs*.] You haven't forgotten that Mr. Fenton is lunching with us?

FINCH. No, sir; I've laid a third place. [*Takes tray with débris of flowers*.] Is that all, sir?

RODNEY. That's all.

FINCH. Thank you, sir. [*Exits*.]

MARGARET. I'm always glad when Mr. Fenton comes. I've grown to like him so much.

RODNEY. Dick's a good sort.

MARGARET. From what you tell me I gather that Phyl thinks so, too; doesn't she?

RODNEY [*Laughing*]. I know what's behind that innocent little question!

MARGARET. Well, I can't help wondering—and wishing too, a little bit; he's such a fine fellow.

RODNEY. But years older than Phyllie. She seems a mere child to him, I suppose.

MARGARET. How does she treat him?—frankly and naturally—or how?

RODNEY. Queens it over him, just as she does over me, and seems to think he exists only for her convenience, and he loves it—just as I do, dear old Phyllie.

MARGARET. She must be a charming little thing.

RODNEY. You never think about her charm—any more than you think about her looks—as you do with some girls. Phyl is simply Phyl, good to look at and good to have about—and that's all you think about it.

MARGARET. That's all her brother thinks about it—I should like to hear Mr. Fenton's testimony. [*Pause—she busies herself straightening books displaced by tray, and otherwise tidying things.*] You say you don't notice Phyllis's looks especially, as you do those of other girls?

RODNEY [*Affectionately*]. Now her mother's pride is up and I'm going to catch it.

MARGARET [*Smiling*]. Not at all—for I don't believe *you* notice women's looks—unless they're old enough to be your mother.

RODNEY. Oh, don't I?

MARGARET. Well, are any of Phyl's friends prettier than she is?

RODNEY. Yes, Lady Clare Richmond, her most intimate friend, is far prettier—Phyl isn't in the running with her.

MARGARET. I might not agree with you.

RODNEY. You couldn't help it. She's quite lovely—everyone admits it.

MARGARET. Has she any brains?

RODNEY. Brains?—I'd rather talk to her than to most *men* I know.

MARGARET. I suppose she's gentle, and sweet, and nice—or *Phyl* wouldn't care for her?

RODNEY. Clare?—[*He collects himself and adds indifferently*] Yes; oh, she's a nice girl—very nice, indeed.

MARGARET. Has *Phyl* known her long?

RODNEY [*Lightly*]. They've grown up together—her father, Lord Anson, is our next neighbour.

MARGARET. And you—approve of the friendship?

RODNEY [*Judicially*]. Yes—oh, yes—why not?

MARGARET. I'm glad *Phyl* has such a friend. What is she like? What is her type?

RODNEY. I'm not much good at describing people. Don't forget, dear, lunch is at one; oughtn't you be getting ready?

MARGARET. Yes, I must go at once. [*Making a move, then pausing*]—Why have you never spoken of this lovely girl before?

RODNEY. Oh, I don't know. I've—well—we've had so many other things to talk about, haven't we?

MARGARET. But she's your friend as well as *Phyl's*, isn't she? You—like her?

RODNEY [*Indifferently*]. Oh, we're good friends enough—Clare and I—I like her very much—very much indeed.

MARGARET. You must tell me about her, I like to hear about your friends.

RODNEY. There's really nothing to tell. We're all good friends and that's all there is to it.

MARGARET. That so often happens with young people who grow up together. They're the best of friends—and that ends it.

RODNEY. Yes—that's how it is—they become the best of friends—and that ends it. But you'll be late, little woman, Fenton's due now.

MARGARET [*With sudden feeling, laying her hands on his shoulders and gazing into his eyes, then stroking his hair with one hand*]. God help us all, dear! [*Then breaks away and exits hurriedly by door right.*]

[*Enter FENTON.*]

FENTON. How are you?

RODNEY. Been making a fool of myself.

FENTON. What's up?

RODNEY. Betraying myself to the mother about Clare.

FENTON. How was that?

RODNEY. Forgot myself—and practically told her—idiot that I am.

FENTON. Duplicity is not in your line. How has the mother been?

RODNEY. She's making a brave fight and Kenyon's still playing fair—I'll give him credit for that. But, Dick, what if he should waver? I'm dreading it every hour of every day—for she loves him and she's a woman.

FENTON. But she loves you—and she's a mother.

RODNEY. All the more reason why Phyl should be here doing *her* part.

FENTON. Then why not tell Phyl, as I've said fifty times? Not everything all at once, but the general facts. You'll regret it if you don't.

RODNEY. Mother dreads it so.

FENTON. Rodney, old man, the strain has told on you a bit. It's not like you to lack the courage of your convictions. Phyl *should* be here, and she'd be the first to say so if she knew; besides it's safer to risk telling her than not telling her—for with all your effort to hide things, it's long odds against you; and the wonder is your luck has served you until now. But don't risk it any longer. Act on your own judgment—the mother will be grateful in the end.

RODNEY. Of course I know you're right, Dick. I know it's risking too much and I'll tell the mother so, after lunch, and what's more, I'll see Phyl this very day, and have it over.

FENTON. That's like your old self. It's all very well having your address at your Chambers, but more and more people will come to know of your home here—and some day it would reach Phyl's ears and then all the fat be in the fire. That's how things happen nine times in ten. so why gamble on the odd chance?

RODNEY. The blow to Phyl will be awful.

FENTON. Could Lady Clare help you?—does she know about it?

RODNEY. Nothing; I simply couldn't tell her. She's got her idea of our mother from Phyl, natur-

ally enough, and I couldn't bring myself destroy it.
[*Looks at watch*] By Jove!—it's nearly one.
[*Starts to exit.*]

FENTON. Have I time for a cigarette in the garden?

RODNEY. Ten minutes. I'll join you there.
[*Exits left.*]

FENTON *takes cigarette from box, lights it and strolls to garden and disappears.*

A pause—then door opens and FINCH ushers in PHYL, with nose in air—and CLARE.

PHYLLIS. Upon my word, Willie Finch, I don't understand this. Why on earth has my brother taken this house? Has he given up his Albany Chambers?

FINCH. Given them up, miss? Yes, miss, yes.—you see Mr. Rodney found them so—so inconvenient,—there wasn't any garden.

PHYLLIS. Garden? What does he need a garden for—in business?

FINCH. I don't know, miss, now that you put it to me, I really don't know [*brightly*] except it was the doctor's orders, miss.

PHYLLIS. Why?—is my brother ill?

FINCH. No, miss,—he isn't exactly ill;—it was to keep him from being ill. That's why he needed a garden.

PHYLLIS. Its very odd. He's never said a word about this house.

FINCH. Very likely not, miss. He wouldn't wish to worry the family.

PHYLLIS. And the garden has evidently done its work, for he is able to be up and about.

FINCH. Quite so, miss. As I told you, Mr. Rodney's gone out for the day, and he said I was not to expect him till dinner—and even then he might be a bit late. And he will be that disappointed, miss, when he hears he's missed you—you and Milady.

PHYLLIS. No doubt; but you must break it to him gently.

Does *Mr. Fenton* come here often?

FINCH. Mr. who, miss?—begging your pardon?

PHYLLIS. Mr. Fenton.

FINCH. Mr. Fenton?

PHYLLIS. Yes. [*Spells with slow emphasis*]
F-e-n-t-o-n, *Fenton*.

FINCH. Oh, Mr. *Fenton*! Well, I think I *have* seen Mr. Fenton here now that you ask me,—yes, I'm almost *sure* I have.

PHYLLIS. Does he come to lunch sometimes?

FINCH. Ye-es, I think that he *has* been here to lunch.

PHYLLIS. Is he coming to-day?

FINCH. To-day, miss?

PHYLLIS [*Spells*]. T-o to, d-a-y, to-day. Do you grasp it, Willie Finch?

FINCH. The fact is, Miss Phyl, I'm a bit flustered. [*She shows mock surprise.*] You see, Miss Phyl, I've an errand to do for Mr. Rodney—and I ought to be off this very minute, and I don't like to hurry you, miss, you and Milady—and it flusters me a bit.

PHYLLIS. How long will this important errand take?

FINCH. I fear I can't get back before tea-time, miss.

PHYLLIS. Then who will serve us lunch?

FINCH. Lunch, miss?

PHYLLIS. Lunch.

FINCH. Lunch?

PHYLLIS. Well, luncheon, if you prefer the more formal word for a light repast,—and not so light either, for I'm famished.

FINCH. Then you've come up from the country this morning, miss?

PHYLLIS. Of course, for shopping,—and I sent a telegram to Mr. Rodney to say we would lunch with him at his chambers.

FINCH. But perhaps he's expecting you there, you might try, miss.

PHYLLIS. Thank you, but we've been there;—no one answered the bell, and at the porter's lodge they said *you* have the *key*!

FINCH. That's right, Miss Phyl, that's right. [*Unctuously*] Whenever I lock the door *I always*

take the key. But it couldn't have been the porter who gave you this address, miss?

PHYLLIS. No, he knew nothing—or pretended not to—so I thought of Mr. Fenton, and looked him up.

FINCH [*Quickly*]. Did you find him, miss?

PHYLLIS. No, but his valet, Turley, was fortunately there, and we got the address from *him*.

FINCH [*Fiercely*]. From Turley? [*Blandly*] I wonder how Turley happened to know it?

PHYLLIS. He didn't at first—no one seems to know anything about this house—but when I told him it was necessary for me to find Mr. Fenton, he remembered a note which *you* had brought *Mr. Fenton* this morning, and he ventured to consult it and then told me that *his master was lunching with Mr. Rodney at this address to-day*. So now what have you got to say for yourself, Willie Finch?

FINCH. Oh; THAT explains everything, Miss Phyl. Mr. Fenton *is* lunching with Mr. Rodney—that's quite right—but they have gone to Mr. Rodney's club;—you know Mr. Rodney is taking all his meals at his club—there isn't so much as a bit of cheese in this place, more's the pity.

CLARE *has been looking about and has seen and raised the garden apron and hat with evident pain. She covers it as best she can.*

LADY CLARE. Phyl, don't let us wait here. It's no use.

FINCH. That's what I've been saying, Milady.
[*Begins to move towards door.*]

PHYLLIS. You must take me for a fool, Willie Finch. I'm going to understand things before I leave this house. Why has Mr. Rodney taken it? What's all this nonsense about the doctor? And why have you been lying like a trooper, William Finch?—You hoary-headed old sinner!

LADY CLARE. Oh, don't stop asking questions, Phyl! Really, I feel the need of something.

PHYLLIS. You poor thing! You're as white as a sheet. Here, Finch, get a glass of wine at once.

LADY CLARE [*Impetuously*]. No, no! I don't want it—I won't take anything here! Come—come away! I'll be all right in the fresh air. [*Starts for door, FINCH hurries to open it*] Do come, Phyl, won't you?

PHYL *hesitates, then turns to follow, when door opens and MARGARET comes in. PHYL gazes amazed. FINCH turns and sees.*

FINCH [*Impulsively*]. Oh, dear! oh, dear! What damned luck! [*Exits.*]

PHYLLIS [*To MARGARET*]. May I ask who you are, and what you are doing in my brother's house?

MARGARET. *Your brother! You are his sister!*

PHYLLIS. I am Mr. Trask's sister—and you?

LADY CLARE [*Intervening*]. Phyl—Phyl, dear—let us go.

PHYLLIS [*To MARGARET*]. You seem to be at home here, madam; what does it mean?

CLARE *moves up stage to window, as if for air; at MARGARET'S next words she turns towards speakers and listens intently.*

MARGARET. I—knew your brother when he was a child. I—I am a relation of his—and—yours. I, too, come from Kimberley.

PHYLLIS. Oh! I beg your pardon. I hadn't heard—I haven't seen my brother for several days. Are you staying here?

MARGARET. Staying here? Oh, yes. This house is mine.

PHYLLIS. Yours? Finch seemed to think it was my brother's.

MARGARET. He knew better.

PHYLLIS. But why is Finch here?

MARGARET. He knew me out in Kimberley—once served in my family; so when your brother took this house for me he kindly put Finch into it.

PHYLLIS. Oh, I see. Lent him to you. But why has my brother never spoken of all this?

MARGARET. I asked him to wait; I have been under a great strain and felt unable to—to meet anyone.

PHYLLIS. But what relation *are* you to us?

MARGARET [*After momentary hesitation*]. I—er—inside your locket is a portrait of your mother. I remember it well. She gave it to her husband

soon after they were married. Do you see no resemblance between her and me?

PHYLLIS. That's it! I was trying to think where I'd seen you—your face seemed so familiar to me. You really are very like—except that *you're* older. You knew my mother! Tell me about her—everything—every single thing you can recall. [*Leads MARGARET to sofa and waits eagerly.*]

MARGARET [*Indicating locket*]. You always wear this?

PHYLLIS. Always. Day and night.

MARGARET [*Tenderly*]. Do you? You love her so much?

PHYLLIS. Far more than I love anyone, even Rodney.

MARGARET. Faults and all—

PHYLLIS. I can't imagine her having faults—though, of course, she must have had. But tell me of her—you knew her *well*? [*MARGARET nods.*] What relation were you—cousins?

MARGARET. Even closer than that.

PHYLLIS [*Eagerly*]. You—you don't mean sister—? My mother had a sister? [*She looks at medallion again.*] But why have you not come before?

MARGARET. It was not possible.

PHYLLIS. But why have they never told us about you?

MARGARET. That—that your brother will explain.

PHYLLIS. Tell me about my mother—everything you can remember.

MARGARET. Ah, that would be a long story.

RODNEY *and* FENTON *appear together outside coming towards door. They are dismayed at sight of CLARE—then of MARGARET and PHYL. RODNEY, touching CLARE on the shoulder, beckons her to come outside. She follows him and all disappear.*

PHYLLIS [*Showing miniature*]. Is this like her?—was she as lovely as this? What beautiful eyes, what a saintly face! Is it really like her?

MARGARET. It was thought to be at the time. I don't suppose you remember her at all? You were so tiny when she—passed out of your life.

PHYLLIS. Sometimes I think I *do*—a *little*, but I can't be sure. You see, I heard so much of her from Finch and my Aunt Ann—and I've had this picture since I can remember—and have grown up thinking about her always—always—and she's so real to me that I can't be sure whether I really remember her or only think I do. Oh, if only she had lived!—it would have been so much to me!

MARGARET. But surely your aunt has taken your mother's place in your heart.

PHYLLIS. No, no!—You don't understand. I love Aunt Ann dearly, but not in the same way.

MARGARET [*Eagerly*]. Your mother has a special place—above everyone else—even Rodney?

PHYLLIS. Quite different. She's my ideal. She has a place apart. And I—well—I may tell you, her sister,—I pray to her always to help me and guide me and keep me from doing anything unworthy of her.

MARGARET [*Impulsively, with anguish*]. Oh, my child! my child!

PHYLLIS. Does it shock you? Do you think it foolish?—even wrong?

MARGARET. No, no—not that—not that.

PHYLLIS. Why shouldn't I pray to her? She's a saint—and I believe she sees me and loves me and watches over me. Why shouldn't she—a mother and her child! If I ceased to believe that I'd lose faith in everything.

MARGARET. But you musn't forget she was human—and had her temptations and failings like other people. No one is perfect, you know.

PHYLLIS. Her faults can't have been serious with that face. Besides, Finch has told us all about her.

MARGARET. But suppose—just suppose—that things you'd heard of her had been less kind. Suppose—let us say—that you had heard she was selfish and weak and—well—quite different from what you describe her, I wonder would your love have stood a test like that?

PHYLLIS. Of course, I can't tell, but I'm grateful it wasn't so.

MARGARET. But even if it had been, you—you would have loved her just the same—wouldn't you?

—for she would still be your mother. You'd have made allowance for her, wouldn't you?—and not despised her—and turned from her? I'm sure you would—if you knew how she had loved you and longed for you all the time and tried her best to be forgiven and taken back.

PHYLLIS. Taken back? What *are* you imagining?

MARGARET. I'm—I'm imagining that she wasn't—well—for instance—happy in her home. And that things got to such a pass she couldn't stand it—and went away—ran away. But when she got away——

PHYLLIS [*With sharp note of pain*]. Stop! Please *stop!* I don't like it.

MARGARET. But I want to test your love. You love her as a saint, but that's easy. Had she been a sinner, what then? Would you still love her could she come back to earth a human being, with human faults, and perhaps a human story—even a story needing pity and forgiveness?

PHYLLIS. No, no! Please don't!—had she been different—she'd have been another woman. Let's talk of her as she was. To think that you're her sister! I'm *awfully* ashamed of the way I spoke to you at first.

MARGARET. Oh, I ought to have let him tell you!

PHYLLIS. I can't understand your not having let Aunt Ann know you were here—aren't you friends?

MARGARET. I doubt her caring for me much.

PHYLLIS. That's a pity; but I'll soon make *that* right.

MARGARET. I suppose you're great chums—you and your Aunt Ann—it would be only natural.

PHYLLIS. She's a dear!

MARGARET [*Coldly*]. So Rodney says.

PHYLLIS. I don't know what we should have done without her! She's been as devoted as if she were our own mother. Her first thought is for us, never for herself. She's the sweetest, kindest, most unselfish woman ever born—except, of course, my *real* mother.

MARGARET. Yes—no doubt. She must be quite perfect. But if you never knew your mother how can you compare them?

PHYLLIS. But I do know my mother. Finch has told me all about her a thousand times. [*Looks at miniature*] Finch says she was like an angel on earth—with an angel's loveliness, and beauty of nature and purity. Oh, when I think that that's my mother——!

MARGARET [*Breaking in*]. Oh, child, child! What can I say to you? It's useless! hopeless! You've got to have a cruel disappointment—an awful awakening! And—God help me—it's I who must strike the blow!

PHYLLIS. Awakening——?

MARGARET. And you'll loathe and hate me!

PHYLLIS. Hate—you?

MARGARET. You don't know—you don't realise. I've deceived you—but I was trying to break it to you.

PHYLLIS [*With dismay*]. Break what to me?

MARGARET. Something too sad—too cruel for words. [*PHYL sits at attention.*]

MARGARET. Phyllis, my dear little Phyllis, sometimes we call them dead who have passed out of our lives.

PHYLLIS [*Nervously*]. Yes——?

MARGARET [*With great emotion*]. Sometimes it would be better were they really dead!

PHYLLIS. Yes——?

MARGARET. I'm like that—an unhappy, wretched soul come back from the dead!

PHYLLIS [*Quite bewildered*]. I—I don't understand.

MARGARET. When I was young—like you—I married. I had my ideals and loved my husband. But my ideals and my love were shaken—then shattered. Yet I was only a girl even then,—but little older than you. Try—just try to imagine yourself a young wife—neglected and shamed and disillusioned—with life all black and nothing but blackness ahead—nothing! You're human—you need sympathy and love like other people—at least a *little* of it—a *little* of the sunshine of life. You feel that you've a right to it—grow to feel that you *must* have it at any *cost*—at *any* cost! Have it or go mad! And when it came into my life—I strug-

gled, yes—but then seized it—and for a time revelled in it. But I was never happy—*really* happy, for then I learned the depth of my mother love. I would have given anything—*anything*—to be taken back to my children.

PHYLLIS. You had left your *children!*

MARGARET. Abandoned everything in my mad folly.

PHYLLIS. How could you?

MARGARET. That's life. That's where the curse of youth comes in.

PHYLLIS. I can't believe that.

MARGARET. You haven't been tempted.

PHYLLIS. I'd never abandon my own.

MARGARET. [*Eagerly*]. Wouldn't you? Are you *sure?* Can you be *sure?*

PHYLLIS. I don't think I could do *that*.

MARGARET. Wait a moment! Suppose—well, let us say, Rodney—should disgrace himself—utterly disgrace himself—in your eyes, and the world should turn its back upon him—what then?

PHYLLIS. He would still be my brother.

MARGARET. And you'd *forgive* him, and even *love* him, just the same!

PHYLLIS. I couldn't give up loving him—I shouldn't *abandon* him.

MARGARET. Nor drive him away?

PHYLLIS. Nor drive him away.

MARGARET. No matter *what* he'd done?

PHYLLIS [*Anxiously*]. This thing that you have to break to me—it isn't of Rodney?

MARGARET. No—not Rodney.

PHYLLIS. Oh, I'm *glad* of that—I *am* so glad of that! But then why don't you tell me what it is?

[RODNEY, FENTON *and* CLARE *come into sight, RODNEY coming to threshold of door, the others pausing a little behind. RODNEY advances a few steps—the others following.*]

MARGARET [*In even, strained voice*]. I have to speak of your mother.

PHYLLIS. *My mother?* [*Raises her hand to locket.*]

MARGARET. Do you remember what I said—sometimes we call them dead who have passed from our lives?

PHYLLIS [*Breathlessly*]. Yes—well——?

MARGARET. Sometimes it would be better—were —— [*Rises with abandon*]. Oh, I can't do it—I can't do it! [*Turns up stage and both see RODNEY and FENTON.*] Tell her the truth! Tell her everything!

[*RODNEY takes her sobbing in his arms.*]

PHYLLIS [*Going up a little towards FENTON, who comes down*]. I don't understand, Dick—you tell me. Whatever it is I'd rather hear it from you.

FENTON. Phyl, my poor little Phyl, would to God those who love you could bear this thing for

you—but you've got to face it—and fight your own way through it. There's no other way!

[CLARE moves instinctively towards PHYL, and unobtrusively follows the scene with deep sympathy.]

PHYLLIS. Tell me, straight out. It will be easier for me—and for you.

FENTON. Very well—here it is—straight out—just as you ask. No one has seen your mother's grave—have they?

PHYLLIS. Stop! Why do you speak of *her*?

FENTON. It is of her I have to speak.

PHYLLIS. Oh, be careful—you're telling—of—someone—who isn't dead—isn't that so?

FENTON. Yes, dear, yes.

PHYLLIS [*With glazed eyes, parted lips, staring at him and speaking with great effort*]. Go on.

FENTON. Suppose I should tell you that your mother—who you have always believed to be dead—wasn't really——

PHYLLIS. Wait—wait! . . . She—isn't—dead? Quick!—my head's spinning—I want to hear——

FENTON. But don't forget——

PHYLLIS. Forget——?

FENTON. The other thing. "It might be better were"——

PHYLLIS [*With wild joy*]. Then she's alive—is she? Is that it? Is that it?

FENTON. Yes, she is alive.

[PHYL reels a little and grasps back of chair.]

PHYLLIS. Alive! . . . Alive! . . . Clare, do you hear?—my mother's alive! . . . [*Turning again to FENTON—anxiously*] You mean, Dick,—she's not there—[*looking up*] but here again?

FENTON. Your mother is not dead.

LADY CLARE. You see, darling, she never died.

PHYLLIS [*Repeating vaguely*]. Never died.

LADY CLARE. She's been away, that's all.

PHYLLIS. Been away?

LADY CLARE. Think of it this way, dear,—as though she'd been at Kimberley all these years, and you'd been here, but writing to each other all the time.

PHYLLIS [*Joyfully*]. Yes—yes—I see——

LADY CLARE. And meantime you've grown up and she's become a little older, too, but she's your very own mother just the same, and longs to take you in her arms and never lose you again.

PHYLLIS [*Excitedly*]. Where is she? Where is she! Why doesn't she come! Why don't you take me to her? You know how I love her—how I've longed for her!

MARGARET [*With anguish*]. Oh, why won't you tell her the truth.

PHYLLIS [*Bewildered*]. Haven't you told me the truth, Dick? [*Looking around on all*] Oh, you're not going to take it all away again? . . . Why do you all look so?

FENTON [*Very tenderly—taking her hand*].

Phyllis, it's awful to have to kill such joy, but afterwards the blow would be worse than if given now.

PHYLLIS. The "blow"? What do you mean?

FENTON. Don't you wonder why she's been away so long?

PHYLLIS. Well——?

FENTON. Why have other mothers left their children and their homes?

PHYLLIS [*Slowly*]. Wasn't she happy?—Wasn't my father kind to her?

FENTON. There was someone she thought she would find kinder, and with whom she thought she could be happier.

PHYLLIS. Some—someone—else?

FENTON. One who had been your father's friend.

PHYLLIS. A man?

FENTON. Yes.

PHYLLIS [*With drawn face, and colourless voice*]. You mean—she——

FENTON. Ran away with him.

PHYLLIS [*Moans softly*]. Ugh! Ugh! Ugh! She's a woman who ran away! [*As of heavy breathing*] Oh! Oh! Oh! [*Pause of some length—then in conventional voice*] Would you mind getting me a glass of water? I'm thirsty. [*CLARE comes nearer sympathetically, but without caressing her. FENTON returns with water. She sips it, then hands glass back to him and makes marked effort to speak conventionally*] Thank you, thank you very much. [*FENTON goes up, depositing glass*

on a table near door, PHYL rises and addresses CLARE] I'm ready to go, Clare, when you are.

RODNEY [*Coming down*]. I'm terribly sorry, Phyl—I meant it to come to you so differently.

[CLARE has moved up—RODNEY and PHYL are well down.]

PHYLLIS. Then it's all true?

RODNEY. Yes, dear.

PHYLLIS [*Laying her hands on RODNEY'S shoulders and looking into his eyes*]. Oh, Rodney—Rodney!

RODNEY [*Putting his arm around her*]. Our mother has been away—there's no use thinking why—there's no happiness in that for any of us. She's ours, Phyl, and we're hers. We must live in the present and the future, forgetting everything except that she's our mother.

PHYLLIS [*Turning her head as she stands beside him and looking up into his eyes*]. I can't grasp it. I can't seem to realize it. [*Her lips tremble, but she maintains her self-control.*]

RODNEY. Suppose you could see her and speak to her?

PHYLLIS [*Shuddering and drawing away from him*]. No, no! I couldn't.

RODNEY. She loves you with her whole heart, and longs for you, and she *is* your mother.

PHYLLIS. I couldn't do it. It would be disloyal to my real mother,—the one I've known all my life.

RODNEY. That was only a dream mother, but to-

day your real mother holds out her arms to you. You'll not repulse her!

PHYLLIS. Call her a dream mother if you like, but she is the mother who has helped me and guided me and been always near me—the realest thing in my life. And what has this stranger done for me? By what right does she hold out her arms to me? *This woman who ran away!*

MARGARET. [*Up stage*]. Ugh! [PHYLL and RODNEY *turn*.] Phyllis! My little Phyllis!

PHYLLIS [*After a pause—amazed*]. You!

RODNEY. Go to her, dear. Ah, go to her! She needs you, don't deny her! Go to her, forgetting everything except that she's our mother.

PHYLLIS [*Stands regarding MARGARET with undiminished amazement—then appears for a moment to hesitate—she takes a step or two forward, standing eye to eye with her mother, whose face is full of pleading, then recoils with horror, and says in a veiled half voice, as though to herself, unconscious of others*]. I can't—I can't do it! *I can't touch a woman like that!*

[*All exclaim.*]

RODNEY. Phyl! Phyl! Oh, Phyl!

[MARGARET *seems turned to stone; her eyes follow PHYLL with a dull sort of anguish as the latter moves unsteadily towards door. Suddenly she realizes that in another moment her child will be gone; terror seizes her; all her mother's*

love rushes over her, and, with a cry of grief, she swiftly intercepts PHYL.]

MARGARET. You can't mean it—you can't—it isn't human. I *am* your mother—and you can't mean it! Oh, Phyl—Phyl!... I want you so... Don't despise me! I was so young and wretched—I wouldn't do it now. I'm not really bad, Phyl, I never have been... I know I did wrong—and I'm so sorry! I've longed for you so all these years. Ah, don't turn away from me, dear—you needn't touch me—only don't despise me. Oh, Phyllie, Phyllie, I love you so—I love you so! Have a little mercy—try to have a little mercy—a little mercy! [*Sinks down with covered face, sobbing bitterly.*]

PHYLLIS [*In a dull, stunned way*]. I'm very sorry for you, madam. I'll do anything I can for you—but I can't—I simply can't pretend that you're my mother.

[Suddenly realizes — pauses — removes from neck chain and locket, which slip from her hand to floor, then turns away broken-hearted, crying in utter desolation as she starts to exit.]

I—I have no mother!

Runs blindly from room. FENTON follows her hastily.

MARGARET *stands transfixed with grief—looking straight out. RODNEY going to her from behind puts his arms around her—but she starts away—still looking out.*

CLARE turning from watching PHYL'S exit L. regards MARGARET with intense sympathy and goes slowly towards her, a little to her left.

As MARGARET starts away from RODNEY CLARE comes down further and gets within MARGARET'S line of vision. MARGARET suddenly catches sight of her, turns her head sharply towards her, a frightened look coming into her face, as if fearing another blow. CLARE half lifts her arms, her sympathy showing in her face. Then MARGARET'S face relaxes, gradually taking on an intensely wistful expression, and at this response CLARE holds out her arms and simultaneously they are drawn towards each other—MARGARET sobbing in CLARE'S arms like a heart-broken child.]

SLOW CURTAIN.

ACT IV.

TIME: *The next day.*

SCENE: *The same as in Act III.*

[*Enter CLARE, who glances around room till her eye lights on her hat and gloves which she takes, approaching mirror with her hat half raised as RODNEY, looking drawn and pale, enters.*]

LADY CLARE [*Lightly*]. Oh, Rodney, here you are. I'm afraid I must be going now.

RODNEY. How can I ever thank you! What should I have done without you yesterday?

LADY CLARE. Nonsense!

RODNEY. No, it's not nonsense; you gave her the only thing that counted with her, at the moment—a woman's sympathy. But how tired you must be. Did you manage to get any rest last night?

LADY CLARE. Of what consequence is that! I'm so thankful to have been of some comfort to her.

RODNEY. Where is she?—where have you left her?

LADY CLARE. In the garden with a friend.

RODNEY [*Going to window*]. Mrs. Hildred! What is she doing here?

LADY CLARE. I think your mother sent for her.

RODNEY. I don't like the look of it!

LADY CLARE. [*Compassionately*]. Don't be discouraged, Rodney.

RODNEY. I *am*, *clean* discouraged. Phyl's knocked the bottom out of things.

LADY CLARE. It wasn't the real Phyl who spoke yesterday. You'll see. But why didn't you tell me before—why didn't you trust me?

RODNEY. That first night I couldn't think—and afterwards I couldn't speak—I couldn't destroy your ideal of her.

LADY CLARE. I understand. But I'm sorry, for I might have helped you. At least I might have prepared Phyl a little.

RODNEY. I didn't know you then—well as I as I thought I knew you.

LADY CLARE. You must let me help you now, at any rate.

RODNEY. It won't do, Clare—if for no other reason than that your father wouldn't like it. The story is bound to get about—and friends are not for my mother and me; we realize that—we have no illusions about anything now.

LADY CLARE [*Tenderly*]. Poor dear Rodney! [*Lightly*] and poor foolish Rodney!

RODNEY. Foolish?

LADY CLARE. Isn't it foolish to suppose I'm going to give up a friend just because you say so? Let me remind you I'm an only child—and a bit spoilt, and I won't be dictated to by any one. So there! I'm coming back to see your mother this very day.

RODNEY. No, Clare! Really you *must* consider the world.

LADY CLARE. Before myself? You don't know me.

RODNEY. Come, Clare! Be serious. Believe me, my mother and I won't be hurt but will always be grateful for what you've done.

LADY CLARE. Rodney—Rodney—what can you think of me! Do you honestly think I'd turn my back on an old friend like you and affront your mother and Phyl's? Not if every man, woman and child in this big London should howl a protest at my coming here! My father will back me up, let me tell you—for I know what sort *he* is. So I'm coming back this afternoon, and you'd better pocket your pride and make up your mind to be civil to me.

RODNEY. Clare! You—you *are* Clare! God bless you!

LADY CLARE [*Seating herself on an arm of chair*]. I want you to let me tell papa everything. He's very fond of you and Phyl, as, of course, you know, and he'll feel just as I do about things, and he'll want to come and see you when he may. You don't mind my telling him, do you?

RODNEY. Tell him everything,—but promise not to influence him in any way and to obey his wishes whatever they may be. Is that agreed?

LADY CLARE. Quite—which shows how sure I am of him.

RODNEY. Clare, you put new life into me!

LADY CLARE. Poor, foolish Rodney! *Why* didn't you let me share your trouble?

RODNEY. I'll have more courage for the future.

LADY CLARE [*Archly*]. Of course I don't want to force your confidence. [*Punishingly*] Besides, I'm going abroad for awhile.

RODNEY. Going away! [*Recovering himself*] I hadn't heard. When do you start?

LADY CLARE. Almost at once. I shall be away at least a year and then come back to be married.

RODNEY. Married! May I ask who the happy man is?

LADY CLARE. I don't believe you know him, but he's a man of suitable age, not bad-looking, and I've known him all my life, and I see no reason why I shouldn't be very happy.

RODNEY. I didn't know there was any one—any friend of yours like that—whom you were fond of. I congratulate you both, and I hope with all my heart that you'll be very happy.

LADY CLARE. To be quite frank, I'm not going to say that he's not without his flaws. In the first place, he doesn't understand me very well; I think he underrates me.

RODNEY. Yet he's known you all your life?

LADY CLARE. I know. It's strange. But he seems to regard a wife as anything but a helpmate. You'd think he'd bring his trials and sorrows and hopes to me. Not at all. He keeps them from me

as though I were a stranger, and that's disappointing, isn't it?

RODNEY. Still, that will come when he knows you as you are.

LADY CLARE. You wouldn't have treated me like that, would you?

RODNEY. Ah, but I've known you so very well.

LADY CLARE. But he says the same thing, in absolutely the same words—yet that's how he treats me.

RODNEY. Don't worry about it. That's sure to come unless he's blind and deaf.

LADY CLARE. Then there's another thing. He's afflicted with false pride. He's got some notion in his head about his family—or some member of it—whom he thinks I wouldn't like, and he doesn't seem to see that if he and I are one his people will be mine, and that whatever he has in life—sorrow as well as joy—he should share with me. How could I look askance at my husband's people? I think that very odd of him, don't you?

RODNEY. He doesn't quite know you yet—but that, too, will come.

LADY CLARE. But can you imagine loving a girl and mistrusting her like that?

RODNEY. But all girls aren't like you, Clare.

LADY CLARE. But he ought to know me better than that—I'm sure you wouldn't have hurt my feelings so.

RODNEY. Not if I had been in his shoes, perhaps—knowing you as I do.

LADY CLARE. You musn't misunderstand my being so frank with you—we're such old friends—and it's a comfort to talk things over. But do you know, while I'm sure he loves me—he's strangely distant with me—I can *see* his love, but that's all—he never speaks of it by any chance. Now, what do you make of that?

RODNEY. And yet you say you're engaged?

LADY CLARE. Oh, no, we're not engaged—I didn't say we were engaged.

RODNEY. Didn't you tell me you were going to marry him?

LADY CLARE. That! Oh, yes, but we're not engaged.

RODNEY. There's only an understanding between you, then?

LADY CLARE. No—he doesn't know I'm going to marry him, but I am.

RODNEY. Clare—what *do* you mean?

LADY CLARE [*With change to deep tenderness, leaning forward, resting her arm along the table next her, and looking up at him*]. I mean that the man I love is in trouble and that he must give himself to it for a time. His interests mustn't be divided—I see that plainly, so I'm going away until he's felt his feet, and then I'm coming back and I shall go to him and tell him what you've said to me—that knowing me as you do you couldn't

keep your trials and sorrows and hopes from me—you would regard me as your helpmate—that you wouldn't have false pride about your people, or doubt my loyalty to you or them—you couldn't do me that injustice and hurt my feelings so—and I shall tell him, too, that the only man I'll marry is a man who trusts me like that.

RODNEY. Clare—do you mean——?

LADY CLARE [*Rising*]. I mean, Rodney, that I thought I loved you once. I fancied you—I liked you, but now I know I did not love you.

RODNEY. Oh!

LADY CLARE. It might have come. I only know it hadn't. [*With deep feeling*] What a woman craves in a man and loves with a love that *knows*, is that thing of which heroes are made—that thing that makes him master not only of her but her soul; that force which lifts him above her into another realm; that strength which places duty higher than love or her—that is a woman's hero—that is the man who, calling her, must lift her. Then, Rodney, when *you call me*, I'll stretch up my arms to you. Here I am, dear—wholly and only yours—*when you call to me*. And when that hour comes, I'll envy no woman on earth.

RODNEY. Clare!! [*Recovering himself.*]

Oh, but you don't realize!

LADY CLARE [*Very slowly, and taking his face between her hands*]. I should be *your wife!*

RODNEY [*Seizes her hands as they slip from his*

face—holds them close for an instant—recovers himself]. But your father?

LADY CLARE. What would any parent think of such a son? Could he condemn him, do you think? You shall see! Until then we're simply friends as before. [*They clasp hands and stand gazing into each other's eyes for a moment, then he stoops and kisses her hands; she, bending slightly over him, lightly brushes his hair with her lips. Then they break away from each other as though unable to maintain self-control, and CLARE says lightly—half hysterically*] Come—put me into a cab, and then go on to the Albany for your letters, it'll do you good. [*She takes up her hat and stands putting it on before the mirror, as Enter FENTON, ushered in by FINCH, who follows, bearing salver with letter on it.*]

RODNEY. Hello, old man—what's up—any news?

FENTON. Of a sort, yes. I've a letter from Phyl for your mother. [*Grimly*] Glad to see you so cheery.

RODNEY [*To FINCH*]. You'll find my mother in the garden.

FINCH. Thank you, sir. [*Exit FINCH.*]

FENTON. Phyl's coming to see her, if she may.

LADY CLARE [*To RODNEY*]. What did I tell you?

RODNEY. In what mood is she coming?

FENTON. She's willing to take up her duty here—though I can't say she's ecstatic about it.

LADY CLARE. Still it's the entering wedge.

RODNEY. Is she coming to-day?

FENTON. I'm to meet her at the station at eleven-thirty and give her your mother's answer.

RODNEY. I was just going out, but perhaps I'd better not go.

FENTON. Better let her see her mother first—meeting you might upset her.

LADY CLARE. I think he's right.

RODNEY. Very well, then I'll go on to the Albany, and by the time I get back the ice will be broken. I wonder what will come of it?

FENTON. I think it'll be all right—but we mustn't expect too much.

LADY CLARE. It's much for Phyl that she comes so soon.

RODNEY. It's more than I dared hope for. [*To CLARE*] We must be off.

LADY CLARE [*Extending her hand to FENTON*]. Good-bye.

[*Exeunt.*]

[*Slight pause, then enter MARGARET from garden with MRS. HILDRED. MARGARET holds open letter in hand. There is marked evidence in her appearance of what she has been through, but there is none of the conventional presentation of sorrow about her. Sadly she comes, with a heart that is breaking, but she comes as the Mother who can stand by the Cross.*]

MARGARET. Of course you know what's in this?

FENTON. Yes, I don't pretend that it's ideal, but it's a step in the right direction.

MARGARET. Indeed it is, poor child!—when you think what those words must have cost her I think it's splendid. But I can't accept her sacrifice.

FENTON. Why not?

MARGARET. It's loveless, and couldn't be sadder for her than the sight of it would be for me.

FENTON. What's the alternative?

MARGARET. I'm going away.

FENTON. Where?

MARGARET. Out of England, somewhere.

FENTON. Alone?

MARGARET [*Turning to ROSE*]. Not if Mrs. Hildred will go with me.

ROSE. Leave England—you and I——?

MARGARET. Why not? Perhaps we could find some corner of the world where we could——

ROSE [*Interrupting*]. Try the "begin again" sort of thing? No, thanks! it wouldn't work—trust your good woman for that! We could go away together—yes—but there's no use in deceiving ourselves about the result.

MARGARET. Well, *I've* no choice.

ROSE. I can't see that—and your son won't listen to it for an instant.

MARGARET. I hope so. I hope to convince him that I would be far happier to go away.

FENTON. How long do you propose to be gone?

MARGARET. Indefinitely.

FENTON. How long is "indefinitely"?

MARGARET. Permanently.

FENTON. May I give you a piece of advice?—you know I'm a practical man.

MARGARET. Well?

FENTON. Don't bother to go abroad. Save your time and money and go straight back to Kenyon.

MARGARET. Mr. Fenton!

FENTON. That's where you'll end, so why have any nonsense about it?

MARGARET. How can you think that of me!—that's all over—quite—quite past.

ROSE. Then I for one know less of human nature than I thought I did.

MARGARET. If you're doubtful, all the more reason to come with me.

ROSE [*Breaking out*]. Why, Margaret, I couldn't hold you if John Kenyon beckoned! No one could, unless of your own flesh and blood. Margaret, *don't* go away from your son—it's your only chance of keeping things as they are—and they're far better this way, dear, and in the end you'll be far happier. So stick to it, dear, and don't take chances. Don't go away from your son.

MARGARET. You belittle me, Rose, and my purpose, and the sacrifice I've made.

FENTON. What *is* your purpose?

MARGARET. *You* ought to know. Certainly not to make my children suffer needlessly. Rodney loves

me and would suffer less than Phyllis were I here, yet at best I should embarrass his life—but the greatest factor is Phyllis. Could I still hope for her love, then I don't know—but as things are my path is plainly marked.

FENTON. Must you have a miracle! Can't you let nature have its normal way? Oh, you women! you women!—what ruin you've wrought by your impatience!

MARGARET. If I could believe she'd *ever* love me——

FENTON. Even then you'd fidget or you wouldn't be a woman.

MARGARET. Oh, you don't understand. She's a young girl and she's pitiless—and will be until she realizes what temptation is.

FENTON. She may never realize—she may scorn you to the end; she may have no instinct—no womanhood, but you can't know it yet. You can't foretell it! Give her a chance. Give yourself a chance. Come—courage! Take what the gods have sent you and hope for the best. You've set your hand to the plough—attend to your furrow; *your* furrow, I say. Your *own*; not Rodney's—not Phyl's—but your own. As for them—they're only like other folk—why should they be exempt from what's given them to do? They may prefer to play at life—most of us would—but they've been called to something more worth while—leave them to it. They'll both be happier in the end, for it's only your sniv-

eller, and shirker, and la-de-da trifier who misses the true joy of living. Let them do their part, and you do yours.

MARGARET. But it's not fair! It's not right to blight their young lives.

FENTON. Oh Lord! Oh Lord! Oh Lord! Here we swing 'round the circle again. Well, I can only advise you.

MARGARET. You're not angry with me?

FENTON. No, I'm only dizzy—swinging 'round your circle. But I must get to the station. What's the answer to the letter? Will you see your daughter?

MARGARET. Yes.

How I dread her eyes. I can't forget them.

FENTON. Her eyes will be softer to-day. I know her well and can be sponsor for her. How light will come to her I can't foretell, but when it comes, she'll follow it. [*Exit.*]

ROSE. I suppose this idea of going away comes from that precious daughter of yours.

MARGARET. Don't speak of her in that way. She's very sorry about yesterday. Here's her letter—read it. [*Hands letter. ROSE reads to herself.*]

ROSE. The idea is right enough, but it's the smug way she puts it. [*Reads aloud*] “Moreover, Mr. Fenton has shown me so strongly my duty in the circumstances, that I feel it incumbent upon me to take it up.” Good gracious! that's like a legal document. It's evidently a phrase she's got from him.

MARGARET. But the spirit of it's the thing.

ROSE. And listen to this—"I cannot pretend of course to the affection I should have felt under other circumstances, but I can bring to you loyalty and a sincere desire to add to your happiness." The little prig!—"and I trust that in the future——"

MARGARET. No, no! Don't read any more, you're not fair to her. [*Reaches out for the letter*] What if it is a little stilted?

ROSE. *A little stilted!* My first parental act would be to box her ears!

MARGARET. You don't understand her at all. You don't know what a high-souled girl she is;—and as for me, I love her for her loyalty to the mother she's treasured all these years—and if I'm not that mother it's my own fault, and I'm justly punished, Rose, I'm justly punished.

ROSE [*Fairly exasperated*]. Don't for mercy's sake exalt that girl at your own expense! She's lived in the clouds and because we're not all angels, like her, she flaps her wings in our faces and spreads out her feathers like a glorified peacock. It gets on my nerves! *I'd* like a word with her. I'd only ask two little minutes—just *two little minutes!*

MARGARET. But can't you see it from her side at all? Can't you realize——

[*Enter FINCH.*]

Well, what is it?

FINCH. A gentleman to see Mr. Rodney by appointment.

MARGARET. What is his name?

FINCH. He didn't give it, Madam, but I seem to have seen——

[*Enter KENYON. Advances to MARGARET quickly.*]

MARGARET. You? [*To FINCH*] You may go, Finch. [*Exit FINCH.*]

KENYON. I had to see you, Margaret.

[*ROSE sinks sideways in chair and keeps her gaze fixed on them; KENYON speaks ardently.*]

It's no use, I can't keep my promise. I think of you every minute and seem to be waiting for you. I can't get used to it. Don't stay away from me, dear—no one needs you as I do. Your children can get on without you. They've done it—but I can't . . . Don't doom me to such misery. It can't be your duty to do that . . . Come back to me, dear, come back to me. Don't you love me any more? Don't you care that I'm unhappy? [*She turns away with a groan.*] Margaret, my Margaret, you're not changed?—you haven't been taken from me? You love me—say you love me!

MARGARET. Oh, why did you come?—why did you come!—and just to-day!

KENYON. Why? Because I love you! I love you! I love you!

MARGARET [*Catching her breath happily*]. Ah!——

KENYON [*Springing forward*]. My darling!

MARGARET [*Recoiling*]. No, no!— Don't touch me! If you love me don't tempt me!

KENYON. Throw these scruples to the winds! They're not real. Nothing's real except our love— then let's live for it and let everything else go.

MARGARET. No, no!— That's what we've done—just what we've done, and now I'm a tainted thing like a leper.

KENYON. No, no! It's false. You're a woman and I'm a man, loving each other and loyal to our love!

MARGARET [*Wildly*]. Don't tempt me! Don't tempt me!

ROSE [*Springing forward*]. Margaret! Margaret!

MARGARET [*Defiantly*]. Well?

ROSE. Remember your son—Rodney—all he's said to you—his loyalty—remember even me, dear—don't fail us, you said you wouldn't—you promised me, don't you remember? Margaret—Margaret—take care, take care; remember what—

MARGARET. Hush!

[*Enter FINCH—all stand expectant.*]

FINCH. Miss Phyl has come, Madam.

ROSE [*Instantly*]. Show her in at once. Do you hear?—at once!

FINCH [*Surprised, then comprehending*]. Yes, Madam, at once. [*Exit FINCH hastily.*]

KENYON [*Indicating garden*]. Come with me, Margaret. Out here. Let me speak to you.

ROSE. No, Margaret, no!

MARGARET. I'll go with you to the gate—why not?

KENYON [*Percmptorily*]. Come, then! [*Exits.*]

MARGARET [*To ROSE*]. Receive her. I'll only be a minute.

ROSE. Margaret!

MARGARET [*Turning*]. Well?

ROSE. *Is it over? Is it past? Do you know yourself?*

KENYON [*Off*]. Come, Margaret, come!

MARGARET [*Turning*]. I'm coming. [*Exits.*]

ROSE [*Shaking her finger towards door by which PHYL is to enter*]. And we owe this to you, you little *Cat!*

[*Enter PHYLLIS. She hesitates and shows surprise on seeing a stranger.*]

ROSE [*Shortly*]. Mrs. Trask will be delayed for a few moments. [*PHYL bows coldly and turns away. ROSE goes to table and fingers books, etc., excitedly, then presently wheels around upon PHYL.*] How dared you treat your mother so? It was shameful! [*PHYL turns with a flash of indignation. ROSE collecting herself presently, adds more gently*] You *can't* be purer than she was at your age—no girl *could* be. She didn't want to blunder. She didn't deserve to. But she married and had bad luck. [*PHYL turns away again.*] Let me tell you few wives have anything else. Some pull through and remain good—some don't,—and when your turn comes, if luck's against you, you

may pull through—but then again you mayn't. It's a mere matter of luck and red blood!

PHYLLIS [*Stiffly*]. I fear you're a biassed witness.

ROSE. Sneering's easy, but it doesn't change facts. It doesn't blot out what we're been through, she and I, and many another young wife. Some people haven't a drop of red blood in them. They can't know temptation. They're not normal. But they're just the sort that hound down those who are—those of us who feel—and suffer—and fall. No, I don't wonder that you sneer. It's what you bloodless creatures always do, and it would be *funny*—if it weren't so DEVILISH!

[*During this last speech RODNEY enters unnoticed and works gradually down stage, during following speech by PHYL.*]

PHYLLIS [*Letting loose*]. Oh, I see! To women like you honour is funny and principle devilish! There's nothing in it but luck and red blood. The normal woman is one who, finding her husband neither a saint nor a cavalier, snivels at her luck and snaps her finger at her marriage vow. To such as you [*RODNEY makes gesture of protest*] the wife who clings to honour and duty is a thing without blood, lacking even the sense to know that she's unhappy—and innocents like me are what we are only because we've lacked the chance of being—well—the sort of creature you admit yourself to be.

ROSE. Oh, you little brute! How dare you grind another woman under your heel like that!

RODNEY. Virtue has its claims, Phyl, but so has charity. [*PHYL and ROSE turn with a start.*] She's down. Don't trample on her.

PHYLLIS. It's she who is trampling—on everything I've honoured all my life.

RODNEY. But——

[*Enter MARGARET from garden, pausing in doorway unobserved by others.*]

PHYLLIS [*Rushing on*]. No, keep your advice for her. Tell her what she and her kind should know—that the unfaithful wife remains just that and nothing less than that for better or for worse—and the shame of it can't be shaken off—like a marriage vow!

RODNEY. Phyl! Phyl!

MARGARET [*Quietly*]. Every word she says is true. [*All turn aghast.*] I'm what I am for better or for worse. There's no escape. No hope.

RODNEY [*As if stung with a lash*]. Have you no mercy for your mother? Would you drive her away to struggle on alone? You'd have more pity for an outcast dog. [*Breaking out indignantly*] Tie a stone to her neck and cast her into the sea—that would be mercy,—but to fling your stone at her—to wound her and drive her out of your sight is brutal and it shan't be done!

PHYLLIS. Here I am, and I've offered to stay.

RODNEY. I know—I've heard.

PHYLLIS. Well?

RODNEY. Is that enough?—your mother's in the quicksand—stretching out her hands to you—stretching out her hands to be lifted out. Do you do it? Do you throw your heart into it and do it? Not you! With your eyes towards Heaven you hold out the tip of your finger to her. You say she had no right to stumble and plunge into the quicksand,—but, all the same, here's your dainty finger tip for her! I've no patience left for you! I grant you she deserted us—that she sinned; but who are you to judge her? How dare *you* condemn her? Are you above temptation? Are you stronger?—wiser?—of finer clay? Oh, you untempted women! You self-complacent virgins! Saints have sprung from sinners but never from you Pharisees! Pass by on the other side. Go your own way—your mother and I will go ours.

PHYLLIS [*As if struck*]. Oh!

RODNEY. We know what we've got to face;—you've taught us that—you whom I'd counted on to help us.

PHYLLIS [*Breaking down completely—piteously*]. Rodney! Rodney!

MARGARET [*Impulsively going to her, then refraining from touching her but holding her hands near PHYL'S body*]. Oh, don't!—don't cry—my dear—my dear! He loves you. I know how much he loves you, and I won't let him leave you. I'll never take him from you—I promise you. And a

young girl like you can't be expected to see things as he does, I understand that and I'll try to make him see it too. There—there—don't grieve about it any more. It's my fault. I've brought it on you. I'll go out of your life, my little Phyl, I'll go out of your life.

ROSE [*In desperation—losing all self-control*]. That's it! We're rats in a pit! Give one of us a chance to escape there's always someone to thrust us back! [*Pointing to MARGARET*] She's only human vermin, thrust her back—fling her back into the pit. *That's* the way [*to PHYLLIS*]*—that's your way—and I hate you for it!*

MARGARET. Rose! Rose! [*Makes as if she would shelter PHYLLIS who stands looking with fascinated horror-struck eyes at ROSE.*]

ROSE [*Rushing on*]. May you be tempted and fall! May you be lashed by scorn!—*your pride* ground into the dust! And may I live to see *you* flung down into the pit amongst the rest of us!! May mercy be shown *you* as you've shown mercy!

PHYLLIS [*Recoiling—aghast*]. No!—No! [*Turns helplessly—looking about as if for refuge—and then INTUITIVELY shelters herself in her mother's arms.*] How horrible!—Oh, how horrible! It's like a curse!—Ugh!

MARGARET. She doesn't mean it. She can't.—Oh, Rose! Rose!

PHYLLIS [*Awe-stricken*]. She *wants* me tempted—*wants* me to fall!

MARGARET. My darling! My darling!

PHYLLIS. *To think I've made another woman feel like that!!*

MARGARET. But she didn't mean it. [*Breaking out.*] *Rose*, why DON'T you speak?

ROSE. Your mother's right. . . I couldn't really mean it. . . I couldn't wish another woman that. . . But I'm not made of stone and I——

PHYLLIS. I know. I drove you to it.

MARGARET. Phyllie—my little Phyllie, your future will have no shadow such as that. Try to blot it from your mind—with to-day and yesterday. Try to forget everything. Even me. I've no place in your life. I've no right to it. . . But I'm not going back to the "rat pit." I've been lifted out of that. [*Very tenderly*] I'm going to live in a dreamland—dreaming of Rodney and you—*living* for you. You've lived with a dream-mother all your life, you'll understand what I mean and how real it will be—and what a consolation and a help. . . So good-bye, little Phyl, little daughter—good-bye. . .

ROSE [*Breaking in with pleading voice*]. If only you knew her as I do! If only you could know her!

PHYLLIS. I do! I do! [*To MARGARET*] Oh, I do know you now! . . . You're tender and loving as I knew my mother would be! . . . You *won't* go away! you *won't* leave me? I need you so—I need you so——

MARGARET. Phyllie! Phyllie!

PHYLLIS. You *are* my mother—my own true

mother, and I can't let you go—I can't lose you now. . . The other's gone—the dream-mother. . . [*As if with some sudden comprehension; with awe, and very tenderly*] She took your place—kept it for you—trained me to love you—but now you're come she's gone! [*During last words PHYL extends her arms. MARGARET, greatly moved, stands hesitating.*]

PHYLLIS. Can't you forgive me? Won't you take me? [*With a cry of joy MARGARET clasps PHYL in her arms. . . ROSE gives a little hysterical gasp of delight, then nodding good-bye to RODNEY, moves unobserved by MARGARET and PHYL to garden entrance. RODNEY joins her and they exit together into garden, passing out of sight, in the direction that MARGARET passed with KENYON. As MARGARET presently loosens her arms from about PHYL and is leading her towards sofa, the door from corridor is opened by FINCH and FENTON enters, followed by MISS TRASK.*]

FENTON [*As he enters*]. May we come in? [*MARGARET starts and her face takes on an anxious, questioning expression.*]

MISS TRASK [*Coming quickly forward with hands outstretched*]. I'm Aunt Ann.

MARGARET [*After half perceptible pause, taking her hands and for a moment looking earnestly into her eyes*]. How can I ever thank you!

MISS TRASK [*Brightly*]. By sharing them with me sometimes.

RODNEY [*As he re-enters with glad surprise*].
Aunt Ann! [*Embraces her affectionately.*]

MISS TRASK [*Continuing to MARGARET*]. And you must begin at once——

RODNEY [*Interrupting with exuberance of spirits*]. What is this wilful old lady demanding?

MISS TRASK. For one thing, that you *assume* a semblance of respect for her, if you don't *feel* it—and next [*laying her hand on MARGARET'S*] that you bring my dear sister down to Brentley—not one of your flying week-ends, understand! It must be a real visit. Now, when will you come? [*While MISS TRASK has been speaking RODNEY has been directing their steps up towards a sofa near garden entrance. FINCH having followed FENTON and MISS TRASK into room for no sufficient reason, has been making pretence of busying himself over trifles, while he steals glances first at one and then another with beaming face. During the greetings between AUNT ANN and MARGARET, FENTON has joined PHYL, who looks up into his face with luminous eyes. His eyes respond sympathetically and he gives her hand a little, understanding squeeze. A few words pass between them in pantomime, then she turns to rejoin her mother. In doing so she catches the beaming gaze of FINCH fixed upon her, and pauses.*]

PHYLLIS [*Tartly*]. William Finch!

FINCH [*With alacrity*]. Yes, miss.

PHYLLIS. Come here! [FINCH *comes down.*] You may lay another plate at table hereafter.

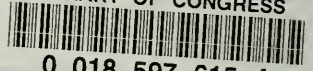
FINCH [*Delighted*]. For *you*, Miss Phyl?

PHYLLIS. For Mr. Rodney! . . . *He's not having his meals at his club after to-day!*

FINCH [*Disconcertedly*]. Yes—miss. [*Pause. Then brightly, but blandly*] You see, Miss Phyl—the fact is—the TRUTH is——

QUICK CURTAIN.

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