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*COUSIN KATE*



# COUSIN KATE

A COMEDY

*In Three Acts*

By HUBERT HENRY DAVIES  
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# COUSIN KATE

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CHARLES FROHMAN, EMPIRE THEATRE, NEW YORK.



CAST OF CHARACTERS

HEATH DESMOND	. . .	<i>An artist</i>
REV. JAMES BARTLETT	. . .	<i>A clergyman</i>
BOBBY SPENCER	. . .	<i>A schoolboy</i>
MRS. SPENCER	. . .	<i>A widow</i>
AMY SPENCER	. . .	<i>A girl</i>
JANE	. . . . .	<i>A servant</i>
	<i>and</i>	
COUSIN KATE	. . . . .	<i>A novelist</i>

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ACT I.	. . .	<i>At Mrs. Spencer's</i>
ACT II.	. . .	<i>The empty house</i>
ACT III.	. . .	<i>At Mrs. Spencer's</i>

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*The action takes place in a rural district of England, at the present day, and covers a period of about five hours.*



*This play was first acted at the Haymarket Theatre, London, on Thursday evening, June 18th, 1903, under the management of Messrs. Frederick Harrison and Cyril Maude. Below is a copy of the original programme.*

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# Cousin Kate

*A NEW COMEDY IN THREE ACTS*

By HUBERT HENRY DAVIES

*Performed for the first time on Thursday evening, June 18th, 1903.*

HEATH DESMOND . . .	<i>Mr. Cyril Maude</i>
REV. JAMES BARTLETT . . .	<i>Mr. Rudge Harding</i>
BOBBY SPENCER . . .	<i>Master Cyril Smith</i>
MRS. SPENCER . . . . .	<i>Miss Carlotta Addison</i>
AMY SPENCER . . . . .	<i>Miss Beatrice Ferrar</i>
JANE . . . . .	<i>Miss Pamela Gaythorne</i>
KATE CURTIS . . . . .	<i>Miss Ellis Jeffreys</i>

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*The action takes place in a rural district of England, and covers a period of about five hours.*

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ACTS I. and III. Drawing-room at Mrs. Spencer's,  
*Walter Hann.*

ACT II. The sitting-room at "Owlscot,"  
*Walter Hann.*



# COUSIN KATE

## THE FIRST ACT

SCENE:— *A drawing-room at MRS. SPENCER'S.*

*There is a door on the left-hand side and a French window opposite the audience. It is a cheerful room, used as a general sitting-room, with simple and rather old-fashioned furniture. The window is wide open and shows a pretty country garden in mid-summer. There is a large oval table near the centre, with books and a bowl of flowers upon it. A writing-table against the wall near the door. A sofa, several chairs and other suitable furniture to complete scene; pictures and brackets on the wall. A picture over the writing-table represents a girl feeding pigeons.*

MRS. SPENCER *is seated on the sofa, sewing, with a capacious work-basket by her side. She is a middle-aged widow, a gentlewoman who has always lived in the country and is unsophisticated in the ways of the world. By nature she is soft and affectionate, tactless, and with no force of character. She is well, but not stylishly, dressed.*

AMY SPENCER, her daughter, is seated in an arm-chair doing nothing. She is a pretty girl of twenty, well, but plainly, dressed. She is a serious girl, practical and without imagination or humour; very honestly trying to do her duty — always very sincere and unaffected.

BOBBY SPENCER, Amy's brother, a boy of fourteen, is seated at the table reading; his book and elbows are on the table and his head clasped between his hands. He wears a flannel shirt and trousers, a dark coat and canvas shoes.

From the serious demeanour of the Spencers when the curtain rises, it is evident that something is weighing heavily upon them. AMY listlessly turns her engagement ring round on her finger, then takes it off and examines it, without noticing the others. When she takes it off, MRS. SPENCER watches her furtively over her work, and BOBBY steals a glance at her. AMY replaces the ring. MRS. SPENCER and BOBBY continue sewing and reading. AMY rises, goes to the window and looks off. As soon as AMY'S back is turned, MRS. SPENCER drops her work and watches her. BOBBY also looks up from his book and watches her; then MRS. SPENCER and BOBBY look at each other. AMY turns from the window and glances at the others, who continue sewing and reading and pretend not to be watching her. AMY goes out and closes the

door. As soon as she has gone, MRS. SPENCER lays her work down beside her, takes out her handkerchief and dries her eyes. BOBBY pushes his book away and leans back in his chair.

MRS. SPENCER.

Poor Amy!

BOBBY.

I'd like to kill him.

MRS. SPENCER.

He may have had some good reason for going away. I try to believe so.

BOBBY.

But wouldn't he have told her if he had, instead of leaving her like this without a word? He's had two days to tell her in. We may as well make up our minds that he's gone for good.

MRS. SPENCER.

[*With a fresh burst of tears.*] Oh, it's terrible to see her going about the house so pale and quiet. If she'd only talk about it, but she won't. She feels the humiliation so. [*Wipes her eyes.*]

BOBBY.

I can't help thinking *I* ought to do something!

MRS. SPENCER.

[*Sorrowfully.*] What could *you* do?

BOBBY.

If I knew where he was, I might go for him. Of course, he could lick me, but I might land him a punch or two on his beastly jaw first — and that 'ud be somethin'! [*Gloomily.*] It's sittin' still and doin' nothin' that's so awful. I ought to be doin' somethin' — because — well — I'm the only man in our family.

[*There is a knock on the door; MRS. SPENCER quickly resumes her work, trying to look composed.*

MRS. SPENCER.

Come in.

[*JANE, a country servant maid, with a perpetual grin, enters with a parcel.*

JANE.

Is Miss Amy 'ere?

MRS. SPENCER.

She just went out. What have you there, Jane?

JANE.

I think it's another wedding present, mum. Miss 'Orner left it.

MRS. SPENCER.

Miss Horner?



JANE.

The 'ousemaid at Darbisher's, mum.

MRS. SPENCER.

Oh, from Mrs. Darbisher. Please put it on the table.

JANE.

Yes, mum. [*Lays the parcel on the table.*]

MRS. SPENCER.

[*As JANE goes to the door.*] Don't disturb Miss Amy. I'll tell her.

JANE.

Yes, mum.

[*JANE goes out; MRS. SPENCER goes to the table, takes up the parcel and looks at it.*]

MRS. SPENCER.

I'd better put it where Amy won't see it. [*Puts the parcel in a drawer of the writing-table.*] I don't think Jane knows yet that there's anything the matter.

BOBBY.

[*Watching his mother.*] We might as well tell everybody. He won't come back, and it might stop the presents comin'. [*Nearly crying.*] I can't bear it when the presents come. [*Turns quickly to window to hide his emotion.* MRS.

SPENCER *goes back to the sofa and resumes her sewing.*]

MRS. SPENCER.

It'll be better when Cousin Kate comes.

BOBBY.

What can *she* do?

MRS. SPENCER.

I don't know, but I always have a feeling that things will be better when Cousin Kate comes.

BOBBY.

[*Going nearer to the window as if he sees someone approaching.*] Here's Mr. Bartlett. [*Turns to his mother.*] Shall I go and say you won't see him?

MRS. SPENCER.

[*Dropping her work.*] No, I asked him to call.

BOBBY.

Are you goin' to tell him?

MRS. SPENCER.

Yes, I must. You see, he's going on with the arrangements at the church. [*There is a knock at the door.*] Come in.

[JANE enters.]

JANE.

Mr. Bartlett, mum.

[MRS. SPENCER places her work and basket on the table. THE REV. JAMES BARTLETT, a serious young Anglican clergyman, enters. He is about thirty-five, rather stiff, and pompous, and always very much in earnest. His oratorical and platitudinous style of talking has become natural through habit. He quite sincerely does what he thinks is right but he can't see through himself. He always employs a genial manner in greeting people but geniality is not natural to him.]

BARTLETT.

Good afternoon, Mrs. Spencer. [*He shakes hands with her.*]

[JANE goes out. BOBBY shakes hands with MR. BARTLETT.]

BOBBY.

[*Lugubriously.*] How d'you do, Mr. Bartlett?

BARTLETT.

[*In his genial manner — patting BOBBY on the back.*] Well, Robert, how are the holiday tasks going?

BOBBY.

Not very well.

BARTLETT.

Too much cricket, eh?

BOBBY.

[*With a sigh.*] No — it isn't that. [*Turns away.*]

[MR. BARTLETT *seats himself in an arm-chair and addresses* MRS. SPENCER.

BARTLETT.

We've just been practicing the wedding hymn. The boys really give a capital rendering of "The Voice that breathed o'er Eden."

MRS. SPENCER.

[*Embarrassed, trying to control her emotion; BOBBY watching her.*] Mr. Bartlett, we are in great trouble. [*She pauses, BARTLETT instantly drops the genial manner and leans forward in the attitude of professional sympathiser.*] Amy will not be married the day after to-morrow. [*Beginning to weep.*] Mr. Desmond has gone away. [*She pauses to wipe her eyes before proceeding.*]

BARTLETT.

[*Not quite understanding.*] Gone away?

BOBBY.

[*Bitterly.*] He's jilted her — the cad.

BARTLETT.

[*Sincerely, but professionally to* MRS. SPENCER.] May I say that I sympathise with you most deeply in this visitation?

MRS. SPENCER.

[*Recovering herself.*] Thank you. I was sure you would. I don't know what to think of it all. Mr. Desmond was here as usual on Sunday evening, and he said nothing about going away, but when Bobby went round to his lodgings on Monday morning, they told him he had packed his things and gone.

BARTLETT.

He sent you no explanation?

MRS. SPENCER.

No — and he left no address.

BARTLETT.

Have you taken any steps to find out where he went?

MRS. SPENCER.

No. I thought it would hardly become us to go after him if he wishes to leave us. Perhaps I was wrong. I don't know what to do. I'm afraid we are rather a helpless little family; but we've never had to face anything like this before. (*Dries her eyes again.*)

BARTLETT.

Let us hope that though your way now seems so dark it may ultimately prove to be all for the best.

MRS. SPENCER.

Yes, but two days before the wedding — [*Weeps again.*]

BOBBY.

[*Sorrowfully.*] She's got her dress and veil and everythin' and the cake came this morning.

MRS. SPENCER.

Their home is almost ready for them. He wouldn't go away now if he meant to marry Amy.

BARTLETT.

It's very lamentable — *very* lamentable.

MRS. SPENCER.

[*Cheering up a bit.*] It will be better when Cousin Kate comes.

BOBBY.

Mr. Bartlett doesn't know who Cousin Kate is, mother.

MRS. SPENCER.

My cousin, Miss Curtis. She is coming on a visit. She was coming to the wedding. She doesn't know yet — of course. We are all very fond of her, and she's seen us through many a trouble. When my dear husband died, and Amy and I were prostrate with grief, she came and did everything for us. I don't know what we should do without Cousin Kate.

BOBBY.

She lives in London. She writes novels.

MRS. SPENCER.

I think you told me that you had read some of her books.

BARTLETT.

[*Stiffening with disapprobation.*] I have.

MRS. SPENCER.

[*Simply.*] She isn't at all like her books. She's very nice.

BOBBY.

Yes, she's jolly. She used to play cricket with me when I was a kid.

MRS. SPENCER.

She's been like an elder sister to these children — and to me too. [*Observing BARTLETT's stiff attitude.*] I'm afraid you don't approve of her books, by your face.

BARTLETT.

I found her cynical attitude towards love and marriage very distressing.

MRS. SPENCER.

I don't pretend to be a critic, and I couldn't make head or tail of Kate's last book, but no one

could help loving *her*. She is so unselfish and affectionate — wayward and impulsive, too. When she was younger I was afraid she might do something imprudent. I could so easily imagine her eloping or going upon the stage. But she'll be a great help now. [AMY *enters*.] She's devoted to Amy. [Sees AMY.] Oh, Amy dear, here's Mr. Bartlett.

[AMY *goes to MR. BARTLETT who rises and shakes hands with her. MRS. SPENCER and BOBBY both watch her anxiously. She is very composed.*

AMY.

Bobby, I think it's time you went to meet Cousin Kate.

BOBBY.

[*Looking sorrowfully at AMY.*] Yes, I'll go. [BOBBY *goes out.*

AMY.

[*To MRS. SPENCER.*] Aren't you going to the Mothers' Meeting?

MRS. SPENCER.

[*Rising.*] Perhaps I'd better. I suppose they'd wonder if I didn't come.

AMY.

I think there is no need for us to neglect our duties.



MRS. SPENCER.

No, dear, I'll just go and put in an appearance, any way, and if Cousin Kate comes before I'm back you can look after her — can't you? You'll excuse me, won't you, Mr. Bartlett?

[MR. BARTLETT *opens the door for* MRS. SPENCER. *She looks at AMY, hesitates, then goes to her and kisses her emotionally. AMY receives the kiss kindly but undemonstratively. MRS. SPENCER goes out, wiping her eyes. MR. BARTLETT closes the door after her.*

BARTLETT.

[*Impressively.*] Oh, if only there were more Christian women like you, Miss Spencer.

AMY.

[*Turns to him a little surprised.*] Like me?

BARTLETT.

More who place their duties before their pleasures or — what is even rarer, before their griefs.

AMY.

I want to do my duty, but sometimes it is very hard even to know what it is.

BARTLETT.

Be patient, and be assured that everything will be made plain.

AMY.

I *am* patient, but everything is *not* made plain. I know it is rebellious of me to speak so, but I think you understand a Christian's difficulties better than most people do. Our own vicar is very good, of course — but he is so old, I suppose he can't understand a young person's temptations very well, and since you came here to take his place, you have so often helped me. You say things that seem to be meant specially for me.

BARTLETT.

I am very grateful if I have been the instrument chosen to bring the truth home to you.

AMY.

You preached two Sundays ago against the danger of yoking ourselves with unbelievers. Did you mean wicked people — like atheists — or just flighty people — like — like —

BARTLETT.

The Irish. [AMY *drops her eyes.*] I am afraid there is not a very wide difference between the two states. Flightiness is the forerunner of crime.

AMY.

Oh, but with a person to whom crime is out of the question — a person who doesn't trouble much about going to church, but who is always good and kind.

BARTLETT.

That is not a very easy question to decide off-hand.

AMY.

It is a question *I* have to decide. I know I am weak and inexperienced, but I do want to do what is right, and I want to do right by other people, too. It isn't always easy to do both.

BARTLETT.

Do you find it impossible to fulfil your duties towards others, and at the same time to follow the dictates of your own conscience?

AMY.

[*Simply.*] I don't know till I try. I suppose I ought to be wise enough to settle my own difficulties, but you see I'm not. [*Sits on the sofa.*]

BARTLETT.

[*Speaking more earnestly than he has yet done.*] If you were free from all obligations, would you be able to perform your duties better singly, or yoked with one whose aims were the same as your own, whose loving interest would support not hinder you, in your life's work? [*Sits beside her.*]

AMY.

[*Looking on the ground.*] I think I could do

more good with someone to guide me. [*Looks up at him.*] I suppose that's very weak?

BARTLETT.

No, no. [*He looks into her eyes. She turns them away embarrassed.*] It is a divine ordinance that each should have a loving helpmeet to assist and cheer him on this earthly pilgrimage. [*He bends towards her, speaking like a lover.*] Miss Spencer — Amy —

[*There is a knock on the door. AMY rises abruptly. JANE bursts in.*

JANE.

[*Excitedly.*] She's coming.

AMY.

[*To MR. BARTLETT.*] It's Cousin Kate.

JANE.

She's not here yet, Miss, but I see the cab go round the corner, and it's *her* box — the same she had last time.

[*JANE goes out.*

AMY.

[*Constrained as she turns to MR. BARTLETT.*] Will you stay and meet her?

BARTLETT.

I think not. May I come and renew this conversation another time?

AMY.

We shall be very pleased to see you if you care to come [*pauses, then says hurriedly*] to supper this evening.

BARTLETT.

Thank you. I will come.

[*MR. BARTLETT goes out.*]

[*Enter COUSIN KATE. She is a charming, humourous, high-spirited, affectionate woman of twenty-nine. She knows the world, and her experience has only matured, not embittered her. She is devoted to the Spencers; their simplicity appeals to her heart, and she feels as if she were their guardian — a position they very willingly grant her. She is charmingly dressed. She carries a small bag in one hand, an umbrella and sunshade closed in the other, and a light dust-coat over one arm. As she is passing the window she sees AMY, stops, and enters by the window.*]

KATE.

Here you are. [*Swoops upon AMY, embraces her with her arms full, and kisses her on each cheek.*] I'm so glad to see you. [*She turns to deposit her things on the table; AMY helps her.*] Oh, my dear, I've had such an adventure in the train.

AMY.

[*Apprehensively.*] What — an accident?

KATE.

No — a man.

AMY.

Did he speak to you?

KATE.

[*Demurely as she draws off her gloves.*] Yes — he spoke to me.

AMY.

How dreadful! It's getting worse and worse on this line. Florrie Cutler told me the most awful experience she had the other day. I think the man put his feet up and whistled, — and when she looked at him he *winked*. [*Looks at KATE, who is wrestling with her gloves.*] I can see you are all in a flutter. [*KATE smiles at her.*] Did he go far?

KATE.

All the way.

[*AMY opens her mouth and eyes in surprise.*]

KATE.

Yes. He got out at this station.

AMY.

[*Relieved.*] Oh, I meant did he do more than just speak?

KATE.

He laughed and — [*AMY looks horrified.*]

KATE *smiles at her as she throws her gloves on the table.*] My dear, he was perfectly charming.

AMY.

[*Shocked.*] Oh, Cousin Kate!

KATE.

[*Demurely.*] How's your mother?

AMY.

She's quite well. But how did you get into conversation with him?

KATE.

The usual way. He asked me if I'd like the window up or down. I said "up" . . . or was it "down"? Anyhow I said I'd have it the way it wasn't. You know he wasn't at all like a man in a train. Generally I accept the window up or down and refuse the newspaper, but he offered his so charmingly — a little shyly, but not at all clumsily. He was so nice.

AMY.

[*Thoughtfully.*] I suppose there is no harm in accepting a newspaper from a fellow traveller.

KATE.

Of course not.

AMY.

If one isn't a very young woman.

KATE.

[*Turns suddenly on AMY, protesting good-humouredly.*] Oh, Amy, you demon!

AMY.

[*Afraid she has hurt KATE's feelings.*] Oh, I don't mean —

KATE.

You mean *me*. [*Smiling.*] But I don't mind, because a *very* young woman wouldn't know the sort of man she has to snub from the sort it's safe to be nice to. [*Folds her hands in mock resignation.*] Old age has its compensations.

AMY.

Of course you merely returned his paper with a word of thanks.

KATE.

Er — er — How's Bobby? [*She wanders about looking at things.*]

AMY.

He went to the station to meet you.

KATE.

Did he? I didn't see him. But I was in such a state.



AMY.

[*Innocently.*] Were you? Why?

KATE.

Oh, with my luggage, of course. I leapt into a cab and flew up here without saying good-bye.

AMY.

Good-bye? Who came with you?

KATE.

[*Darting an impatient look at AMY.*] Oh, Amy! [*Stops in front of the picture.*] What a pretty picture! It's new since I was here. [*Goes closer to it as if to examine it carefully.*] A girl feeding pigeons — very nice.

AMY.

[*Puzzling.*] Oh, I see — without saying good-bye to the man who lent you the newspaper. Who was he?

KATE.

[*Still regarding the picture.*] I don't know. I never saw him before. [*Slowly — almost with a sigh.*] I shall never see him again. [*Pauses, gazing in front of her, but not at the picture. Blinks her eyes and turns round quickly, speaking more to herself than AMY.*] Of course I shall never see him again. What am I thinking of?

AMY.

But you say he got out here.

KATE.

If I happened to meet him — I daresay I might — bow to him. I suppose I could do that without behaving like a servant?

AMY.

I wonder if I know him. I know everyone about here by sight. What was he like?

KATE.

Sunshine.

AMY.

Tall or short?

KATE.

Just right — not too anything.

AMY.

What was it that attracted you so greatly to him?

KATE.

I don't know; he wasn't much to look at.

AMY.

Ugly?

KATE.

No! or I shouldn't have asked him to share lunch.

AMY.

[*Amazed.*] Share lunch?

KATE.

[*Embarrassed; laughs and comes quickly towards AMY.*] Oh, I forgot. I didn't tell you that. You see, Amy, it's a long journey from town — so I had a lunch-basket — and he hadn't one, and I was sure he must be getting hungry — and they give you so much in those lunch-baskets — I never can eat it all, can you? And — Well, Amy, you wouldn't put a whole chicken leg under the seat if you saw a starving man opposite, would you?

AMY.

So you —?

KATE.

So we nursed the lunch-basket between us.

AMY.

[*Horried.*] Nursed it!

KATE.

It was the easiest way. Would you have us put it on the seat and eat sideways like this? [*She illustrates how awkward it would be.*] Very awkward.

AMY.

[*Thoughtfully.*] I wonder who he was?

KATE.

[*Seriously.*] You see, I never thought he'd get out here — at such a little station. ,

AMY.

What sort of eyes had he?

KATE.

[*With enthusiasm.*] Oh, nice eyes.

AMY.

But what colour?

KATE.

[*Speaks slowly, not looking at AMY.*] First I thought they were grey — then when he came nearer I saw they were deep blue, and when he leaned over — [*AMY looks shocked*] over the lunch-basket and talked, they looked almost black — wonderful eyes. [*Slowly and softly as if her thoughts had gone far.*] Wonderful eyes.

AMY.

[*Watching her.*] Cousin Kate, I believe you're in love with him.

KATE.

[*Brought back suddenly; rises, really a little annoyed.*] Now, how ridiculous. Just because he happened to be civil in a train — a man I've never seen before. I wish you wouldn't say such silly things, Amy.

AMY.

[*Trying to conciliate her.*] I beg your pardon  
— I didn't mean to —

KATE.

I'm sorry I told you now; I didn't mean to tell anyone. Not that there was the least reason to keep it secret. But I did think that being in love yourself, you'd be able to understand how one may be a little excited by meeting a man — and want to tell everyone about it — without being at all in love.

AMY.

But I always thought that being excited and wanting to talk about him — was a sign —

KATE.

Now, Amy, you'll make me quite angry if you keep on like that. I did think you'd have more sense when you are just going to be married.

AMY.

But I'm not going to be married.

KATE.

[*Electrified.*] What? You don't mean to tell me it's broken off?

AMY.

[*Quietly.*] He has left me.

KATE.

[*In a rush of pity and affection sits beside AMY and puts her arms about her.*] Oh, you poor, dear child. And I've just been so horrid and cross to you. I'm sure you are well rid of him. But we'll get him back for you, someway or other. He shan't go away and leave you. How dare he — the monster?

AMY.

[*Distressed.*] No — don't say that. It was *my* fault.

KATE.

Your fault?

AMY.

Yes. The others don't know that, and they are all saying such hard things about him, and I feel so guilty.

[*KATE watches her a moment before she speaks.*]

KATE.

Well, whatever you did, he'd no right to run away just before the wedding and upset everything so. I don't think he's a nice man.

AMY.

Oh, but it *was* my fault.

KATE.

Not at all. You couldn't have quarrelled unless he'd quarrelled, too. I've no patience with the

way men go on now. They think they can do anything they like because there are so many of us. I'll teach one of them a lesson one of these days.

AMY.

But Heath wasn't like that.

KATE.

I don't know what he was like. I'm thankful to say I never saw him.

AMY.

I'll tell you how it was. You know Heath is an artist.

KATE.

That's no excuse.

AMY.

And he says artists can't take life seriously all the time.

KATE.

[*Pleased and impressed with this remark.*] He's quite right. [*Annoyed to find herself pleased with anything he said.*] I suppose he read that in a book.

AMY.

It has often troubled me that he couldn't take life as seriously as I do. The other evening I spoke to him about it. I began by telling him the way I should like us to keep Sunday after we are married. He paints on Sundays.

KATE.

[*Unimpressed.*] Does he?

AMY.

Yes, and I don't think it's right. And he is often flippant in a way I don't like. I spoke about that, too.

KATE.

[*Looking away from AMY, speaks half to herself.*] I'm beginning to feel rather sorry for poor Heath.

AMY.

And when he laughed at me I lost my temper. It is hard to be made fun of when you are trying to do what's right — isn't it?

KATE.

Yes, I think it was nasty of him to make fun of you. What did he say?

AMY.

When I said I didn't like him to paint on Sunday — he said he'd only paint religious subjects.

KATE.

[*Amused.*] He's nice, isn't he?

AMY.

[*Gravely.*] But he said it to make fun. He wouldn't see that I was in earnest.



KATE.

But he really is in love with you, isn't he?

AMY.

[*Smiles.*] Oh, yes, I'm sure he's very much in love with me. But don't you think I was right to speak out?

KATE.

Well, you know, Amy, it seems to me that if a man was nice and witty, and in love with me — I'd let him paint devils on Sunday if he wanted to. But still, I don't think that was any reason for his going away without a word. You must have said more than that.

AMY.

Well — Yes. He seemed to think he had only to give me a kiss and we could go on laughing and talking as if nothing had happened. But it was the last Sunday before our marriage and I couldn't help realising how serious it all was. I think so many people become selfish when they marry. They live only for each other and forget their higher duties. And I said I wanted ours to be an *ideal* marriage, and to make it that we ought to eliminate passion as much as possible.

KATE.

[*Very gravely.*] Oh! What did he say to that?

AMY.

He said I didn't know what I was talking about. Then I grew very angry, and I said rather more than I intended. I told him I couldn't marry him unless he changed.

KATE.

[*As before.*] Oh!!

AMY.

And he just walked out of the room. I haven't seen him since. I thought he'd come back. But he didn't.

[*MRS. SPENCER enters in her bonnet; goes to KATE and greets her affectionately.*

MRS. SPENCER.

Oh, Kate! I'm so glad you've come. Forgive me for not being here to welcome you, but I had to go to the Mothers' Meeting.

KATE.

You good little thing.

AMY.

I'll go and tell them to take your trunk upstairs. [*Takes the bag, dustcloak and umbrella from the table.*]

KATE.

Oh, thank you. [*Produces a key from her*

*pocket.*] Here's the key. [*As she gives it to AMY she speaks aside to her with a glance to MRS. SPENCER, who has seated herself on the sofa and is drawing off her gloves.*] Don't tell anyone about the man in the train.

[*AMY goes out.*

MRS. SPENCER.

Has Amy told you?

KATE.

Yes. I'm so sorry.

MRS. SPENCER.

Oh, Kate, it's breaking my heart. I never felt so much in need of you as I do now. You will help us, won't you, dear?

KATE.

If I can — of course — but — tell me — Do people know?

MRS. SPENCER.

Only Mr. Bartlett.

KATE.

Who's he?

MRS. SPENCER.

A young clergyman who is taking our vicar's duty while he is abroad.

KATE.

And what does *he* say?

MRS. SPENCER.

He says it may be all for the best.

KATE.

[*Irritated.*] Oh! Now, isn't that just like a curate?

MRS. SPENCER.

He isn't exactly a curate, dear. He's a *locum tenens*.

KATE.

Well, then — isn't that just the sort of thing a *locum tenens* would say? Do any *real* people know?

MRS. SPENCER.

Only Bobby — and he only says he'd like to *kill* Heath.

KATE.

[*Affectionately.*] Oh, how sweet of Bobby.

MRS. SPENCER.

[*Despondently.*] But I suppose we can't do anything till we know where Heath is.

KATE.

Do you want him back?

MRS. SPENCER.

Oh, I don't know, I never had a word to say against him before — but what can I think of him now?

KATE.

Everything I have heard of him is so charming.

MRS. SPENCER.

[*With enthusiasm.*] Oh, he *was* so charming — and *so* amusing; he used to get me quite hysterical every Sunday night at supper. [*Laughs.*] You must get him to tell you that story about Miss Murphy and the Banshee. [*They both laugh.*] And he was so kind to us all, so attentive to me and so nice with Bobby — and his devotion to Amy was beautiful.

KATE.

It was a good match for Amy, wasn't it?

MRS. SPENCER.

Yes — You never thought me — a scheming woman, did you, Kate?

KATE.

[*Gravely.*] No, never.

MRS. SPENCER.

No, but still Heath happens to have a very good income, and he's very clever. They say

he's sure to be made an R. A. some day. And he took such a pretty old house near here — you know I wrote and told you about it.

KATE.

Oh, yes, of course.

MRS. SPENCER.

And how beautifully he was furnishing it — It's called Owlscot. [*Pronounce like "Ascot."*]

KATE.

Owlscot?

MRS. SPENCER.

Yes, because of the owls. Owls' cot, you know.

KATE.

[*Delighted.*] Oh, are there owls in the garden?

MRS. SPENCER.

No, there aren't any, but Heath says it looks as if there ought to be, so he called it Owls' Cot. He said perhaps the owls would come if they saw it on the gate-posts.

KATE.

[*Laughing.*] I'm sure I should like Heath.

MRS. SPENCER.

Amy thought people would think the name

silly, so he said she could call it Owlscot, which isn't a bad sounding name for a house, do you think?

KATE.

No, I think it's delightful.

MRS. SPENCER.

Heath's full of funny little fancies like that, but he's kind and thoughtful, too. When I said I couldn't afford to send Bobby to a public school he asked if he might help with the expenses — and he did it so nicely.

KATE.

[*With decision.*] Amy mustn't lose such a nice man as that. We'll get him back for her somehow.

MRS. SPENCER.

[*Cheering up considerably.*] Oh, Kate, I knew it would be better when you came.

KATE.

Ah, but we haven't got him back yet. [*She reflects before she speaks.*] When did Amy become so good?

MRS. SPENCER.

[*Simply.*] She's always been good.

KATE.

Yes — but not as bad as this.

MRS. SPENCER.

I fancy Mr. Bartlett has made her think more deeply. He's a very earnest man.

KATE.

[*Slaps her hands together.*] Then that *locum tenens* is at the bottom of it all.

MRS. SPENCER.

[*Looks up, surprised.*] All what?

KATE.

Has he been preaching sermons about the selfishness of married couples, and the elimination of passion?

MRS. SPENCER.

[*Still more surprised.*] He gave us a very powerful sermon on that subject a few Sundays ago.

KATE.

[*Nods her head.*] That's where she got it from. I knew she didn't think of that herself. Sarah, that *locum tenens* is a bad man. Don't you let him come near the place again.

[*JANE enters.*

JANE.

Mr. Bartlett, mum.

[*MRS. SPENCER and KATE are both startled.* MR. BARTLETT *enters, carrying his*



*hat.* KATE is perfectly composed. MRS. SPENCER is exceedingly embarrassed.

MRS. SPENCER.

[*Confused.*] Oh, Mr. Bartlett, this is Cousin Kate. [*Indicating KATE.*] Miss Cousin Kate, I ought to say, I mean Miss —

KATE.

[*Prompting her.*] Curtis, dear, Curtis.

MRS. SPENCER.

Yes. I couldn't remember your name for an instant. This is Mr. — [*Confused.*] Now I've forgotten yours.

KATE.

[*Comes to the rescue by cordially extending her hand to MR. BARTLETT, as she says sweetly.*] We were just speaking of you as you came in, Mr. Bartlett.

MRS. SPENCER.

[*Trying to make things smooth.*] Yes, and Mr. Bartlett has read some of your books, Kate.

[*MR. BARTLETT looks embarrassed.*]

MRS. SPENCER.

[*Seeing his embarrassment, becomes embarrassed herself.*] Oh!

KATE.

[*Sweetly to MR. BARTLETT.*] You didn't like them, did you? A bishop once told me they ought to be publicly burnt.

MRS. SPENCER.

Oh, I don't think they are as bad as that.

KATE.

[*Quaintly to MRS. SPENCER.*] Thank you, Sarah.

MRS. SPENCER.

But then, I don't know what they are about half the time.

[*KATE laughs and moves away.*]

BARTLETT.

[*Places his hat on the table, pausing to give importance to his speech.*] I have called to tell you that Mr. Heath Desmond has come home.

MRS. SPENCER.

[*Joyfully.*] Oh, that is good news. Oh, Kate, he's come back. [*To MR. BARTLETT.*] Have you seen him?

BARTLETT.

Yes, I have spoken to him.

[*He pauses and looks deliberately at KATE, who supposes she isn't wanted.*]

KATE.

[To MRS. SPENCER as she goes towards the door.] I'll go and take my things off.

MRS. SPENCER.

Don't go, dear. [KATE stops; MRS. SPENCER turns to BARTLETT.] You can say anything before her. Now, tell us all about it. [Sitting on the sofa.] Sit down, Kate.

[KATE sits down, watching Mr. BARTLETT narrowly as he speaks. He sits rather reluctantly, addressing himself exclusively to MRS. SPENCER.]

BARTLETT.

I saw him enter his rooms, so I called, and taking the prerogative of the clergyman of the parish, I taxed him with his unaccountable disappearance.

[A shade of irritation crosses KATE'S face, Mr. BARTLETT pauses and looks at her. She returns his look, smiles, betraying no feeling of any sort.]

MRS. SPENCER.

And what did he say?

BARTLETT.

He said he would rather not discuss his affairs with me.

[KATE looks pleased. MR. BARTLETT pauses as before and looks at KATE. She returns his look as before.]

MRS. SPENCER.

And so you —

BARTLETT.

I had a duty to perform, and so I was not abashed by his rebuff. [KATE titters. MR. BARTLETT glares at her. She clears her throat and looks away.] I sketched briefly the distress he had caused in this household. Then I asked him if he intended to return.

MRS. SPENCER.

Yes, yes?

BARTLETT.

He says he considers himself free, unless your daughter sends for him at once.

MRS. SPENCER.

[Looks from one to the other.] Why?

BARTLETT.

I promised to convey a message from her or from you.

MRS. SPENCER.

Well, Amy must write to him. I'll go and tell her. [Rises and goes towards the door.]

[KATE rises, prepared to follow MRS. SPENCER.]

BARTLETT.

[*Rising.*] Excuse me. [MRS. SPENCER stops. *He speaks importantly.*] Have you decided what message to send?

MRS. SPENCER.

He must have a note asking him to come, if that's what he's waiting for.

KATE.

Of course.

BARTLETT.

Is there not a wiser alternative?

[BARTLETT looks at KATE, hoping she will go. KATE deliberately sits down, showing she intends to stay.]

MRS. SPENCER.

[Comes towards MR. BARTLETT.] I don't think I quite grasp your meaning.

BARTLETT.

Well, then, is Mr. Desmond the man to trust your daughter to? I do not wish to say anything against his character, but he has always seemed to me a—a—frivolous man. And is not his present conduct a sign of inconstancy?

Your daughter is on the eve of taking perhaps the most important step in her life. Is it not well to pause while there is yet time?

MRS. SPENCER.

[*Much perturbed; appeals to KATE.*] What do *you* think, Kate?

KATE.

[*Coldly.*] Does it matter what *anybody* thinks except Amy?

MRS. SPENCER.

But of course it *was* very funny of Heath to run away like that, and he might do it again.

KATE.

Oh, Sarah!

BARTLETT.

After I have delivered her message, it may be too late for her to retreat from her promise — with honour.

MRS. SPENCER.

[*Looks at KATE, who makes no movement, then turns to BARTLETT.*] Perhaps you had better see Amy yourself. [*KATE tries to attract the attention of MRS. SPENCER in order to stop her saying this. MRS. SPENCER doesn't notice KATE's movement.*] You may be able to put it — more — forcefully than I can.

BARTLETT.

[*Readily.*] I will most willingly interview her, if you wish, but before doing so I have something to say to you which — it is impossible to say — before — a third person. [*Stares at KATE. KATE rises, smiles at MRS. SPENCER, and goes out by the window without looking round. MR. BARTLETT approaches MRS. SPENCER.*]

BARTLETT.

If Mr. Desmond deserts your daughter now, she will naturally feel humiliated.

MRS. SPENCER.

[*Sorrowfully.*] Oh, yes — can't you see?

BARTLETT.

And as — I wish — to save her all the pain I can, and as I find her essential to my own happiness, I desire to tell her that if she releases herself from this engagement — she need not be humiliated — for I would then come forward and offer her — myself.

MRS. SPENCER.

That wouldn't be quite the same thing — would it?

BARTLETT.

I think that she should know that she has this alternative before she communicates with Mr. Desmond.

MRS. SPENCER.

[*Dubiously.*] I wish you'd let me see what Kate says.

[*He looks momentarily uneasy, then recovers himself.*]

BARTLETT.

She is a stranger to me.

MRS. SPENCER.

Yes, yes — I see.

BARTLETT.

As your daughter is so young and her present situation so delicate — I thought it was my duty to ask your permission before speaking to her.

MRS. SPENCER.

[*Troubled.*] I don't know whether I ought to let you see her or not.

BARTLETT.

It cannot do her any harm to hear me.

MRS. SPENCER.

[*Impressed by this remark.*] No. She isn't obliged to accept you, is she?

BARTLETT.

Certainly not.



MRS. SPENCER.

I suppose you'd better speak to her. If you'll wait here I'll send her to you.

[MRS. SPENCER goes out. KATE enters with her hat in her hand. Both she and BARTLETT feel constrained when they find themselves alone. They look at each other in turns before speaking. KATE places her hat on the table.]

KATE.

[Pleasantly.] What very pleasant weather we are having.

BARTLETT.

I beg your pardon.

KATE.

[Clears her throat and speaks more distinctly.]  
What very pleasant weather we are having.

BARTLETT.

Oh, yes — but I think there'll be rain soon.

KATE.

[Pleasantly.] Possibly storms. [Smiles sweetly at him.]

[She sits down, not looking at him. He looks at her uneasily before he speaks.]

BARTLETT.

[*Takes his hat.*] Will you kindly tell Miss Spencer I will await her in the garden?

KATE.

[*Pleasantly.*] Yes — I'll tell her.

BARTLETT.

Thank you.

[*He goes out by the window. As soon as he is out of sight, KATE jumps up, goes towards the window and glances in the direction he has gone. MRS. SPENCER enters. KATE comes quickly towards her as she speaks.*

KATE.

He's gone into the garden. Are you going to let him see her?

MRS. SPENCER.

I've just told Amy.

KATE.

Is he going to ask her to marry him?

MRS. SPENCER.

Kate — you've been listening?

KATE.

No, I haven't.

MRS. SPENCER.

How else could you know? It's miraculous.

KATE.

Don't you think it's very dangerous to let her see him now? Heath has hurt her pride; she's smarting. *Can't* you remember how it felt at her age? I'm so afraid she'll sacrifice the future to save the present.

MRS. SPENCER.

[*Perturbed.*] But I've told Mr. Bartlett I'd send Amy to him.

KATE.

Send her to me first.

[*AMY enters.*]

MRS. SPENCER.

But how can I explain it to him?

KATE.

[*Glances at AMY, then says rapidly to MRS. SPENCER.*] Don't explain it. Go and show him the nasturtiums or the lobelias or whatever's out.

[*Pushes MRS. SPENCER out at the window.*]

MRS. SPENCER *disappears.*

AMY.

Mother said Mr. Bartlett wanted to see me.

KATE.

Yes. He's waiting for you in the garden. He brought a message for you.

AMY.

From Heath — mother told me.

KATE.

What reply are you going to send?

AMY.

I don't know yet.

KATE.

Hadn't you better make up your mind before you go and see Mr. Bartlett?

AMY.

Mother said he had something very important to say to me. I think I had better hear what it is first. [*Going towards the window.*]

KATE.

Your reply to Heath is more important. [*AMY hesitates.*] You want to do what's right, don't you?

AMY.

[*Hesitatingly.*] Yes. [*With conviction.*] Yes — I do. Do you think I ought to forgive Heath?

KATE.

[*Quietly.*] I thought he had to forgive you?

AMY.

[*After a pause, during which KATE watches her closely.*] What message do you think I ought to send him?

KATE.

I think I should write and say you are sorry for what you said to him, and that you see now that it was a little piece of presumption for a young girl to talk that way to a grown-up man. [AMY *turns and stares at KATE.*] And ask him to forgive you because you are so young and inexperienced — and he will, because you are so pretty.

AMY.

But that is putting myself entirely in the wrong?

KATE.

Weren't you?

AMY.

No. I blame myself very much for losing my temper with him. But I can't take back what I said before. It isn't a question of what *I* wish — but of right and wrong.

KATE.

And are you sure that a young girl who has never been anywhere much or seen anything par-

ticular is the proper judge of what is right and wrong for a man ten years older than herself? And is all his goodness to go for nothing? Amy, dear, you'd be a fool to let that man go — and just think — he chose *you* — who bring him nothing but your little self — out of the whole world.

AMY.

Am I to thank him for loving me?

KATE.

Yes. You would if you realised how many girls there are who would make good wives and how few men who would make good husbands.

AMY.

But I can't give up my principles. I'm prepared to suffer for them.

KATE.

Well, don't be like most people who suffer for their principles, and make everybody else suffer for them too. If we want to marry we must be prepared to make compromises —

AMY.

It may be that I shall do my duty better singly.

KATE.

I'm sure you'll get into Heaven sooner by doing

your duty to your neighbour, than by being very good all by yourself. I mustn't urge you. I only want to save you from making the same mistake I made. I wouldn't make compromises, I demanded the perfect man. Now I know there isn't one. So I've had disappointment after disappointment, till I have to face the worst one of all — for our lives are empty if we aren't loved. A woman's life is so meaningless by itself. And I have a great deal in my life. I have a profession, I'm successful, I'm invited and welcomed everywhere — but I'm lonely, Amy, — desperately lonely. I'd give it all up for a real home with a husband and children. And look how much worse it is for women with no object in life — no work and no children. I only want you to be happy, and not disappointed, like me.

AMY.

[*Kisses KATE softly on the cheek.*] I think I'd better write to him — and ask him to come back. Oh, Cousin Kate, you make me feel so small.

[*KATE puts her arms about AMY, who falls on her shoulder, weeping a little.*]

KATE.

[*Pets her, a little overcome with emotion.*] I'm not very wise myself, dear, but I've knocked about so much I want you to be taken care of. Oh, it must be so beautiful to be taken care of.

[AMY goes to the writing-desk and sits, drying her eyes.]

AMY.

I think I'll just write and tell Heath I don't know much. [*Takes a sheet of paper and begins to write a note.*]

KATE.

Amy — Amy! Perhaps you had better go and see Mr. Bartlett before you write that letter.

AMY.

No, I'd rather not. I'm sure I'm doing right to ask Heath to forgive me. [AMY writes the letter. When she has finished it she turns to KATE.] Will this do? [*She holds out the letter. KATE comes towards her, takes it and reads it as AMY addresses the envelope.*]

KATE.

That's very sweet. [*Gives it back to AMY, who puts it in envelope.*] Now lick it up. [AMY fastens it, then rises.] Mr. Bartlett said he would take your answer to Heath. Shall we go and give it to him?

AMY.

[*Shyly giving letter to KATE.*] You give it to him. I don't think I'll see him now.

[AMY goes out. KATE marches towards



*the window, waving the letter triumphantly till she meets MRS. SPENCER coming in from the garden.*

MRS. SPENCER.

Where's Amy? Isn't she coming?

[*Enter MR. BARTLETT, following MRS. SPENCER.*

KATE.

No. [*Showing the letter.*] This is her reply to Mr. Desmond. [*Turns to BARTLETT.*] Which you so kindly offered to convey. [*Gives the letter to MR. BARTLETT.*]

MRS. SPENCER.

But isn't she going to see Mr. Bartlett?

KATE.

She asked me to deliver her letter for her.

MRS. SPENCER.

Oh! [*She turns to BARTLETT with an embarrassed smile.*]

BARTLETT.

I will take this to Mr. Desmond.

KATE.

Thank you. [*BARTLETT goes out. KATE turns to MRS. SPENCER.*] She's asked him to come back.

MRS. SPENCER.

[*Sinks comfortably on a chair.*] Oh, I'm so relieved. Mr. Bartlett *has* been upsetting me so. He got me so that I didn't know whether I wanted Heath back or not.

KATE.

[*Apprehensively.*] I suppose he'll take the letter at once. You see we've wasted a lot of time already, and Heath considers himself free unless he hears *at once*.

MRS. SPENCER.

Mr. Bartlett knows that.

KATE.

[*Reassured.*] But he doesn't know what is in the letter. He'll be in a hurry to find out.

MRS. SPENCER.

[*Smiling comfortably.*] So we shall have the wedding on Friday after all.

KATE.

[*Brightly.*] And Amy will be the bride, and you'll give her away, and Bobby will be best man. [*Half humorously, half sadly.*] And I shall just be one of the guests and throw rice.

MRS. SPENCER.

[*Laughing.*] Oh, Kate, you are so funny. [*Seriously.*] What did you say to Amy?

KATE.

I told her the best thing a woman could have was a home with a husband and a baby.

MRS. SPENCER.

[*Mildly surprised.*] Why, Kate, that isn't at all the way you write in those books of yours.

KATE.

[*Half-laughing, half in earnest.*] I shan't write any more of those silly books. I thought I was being so clever, but I was showing my ignorance all the time. My next book shall be all about love; my hero and heroine shall be married and go and live in a dingy little house — but it will be a palace to them.

MRS. SPENCER.

[*Looks penetratingly at KATE.*] Kate, I believe you have something to tell me. [*Goes towards her.*]

KATE.

[*Moving away in agitation.*] No, I haven't.

MRS. SPENCER.

I've been so absorbed in Amy's trouble I haven't had time to think of you. But now you've come and made it all right for us. [*Goes towards her again, speaking emotionally.*] Oh, Cousin Kate, what should we do without you?

[Takes KATE'S hand. KATE hangs her head. MRS. SPENCER speaks coaxingly.] Now, do tell me — are you in love?

KATE.

Oh, I don't know. I think I must be. Yes, I am. I know I am. [Breaks away from MRS. SPENCER.]

MRS. SPENCER.

Do tell me.

KATE.

No, no, I can't. Besides — there's nothing to tell.

[AMY enters.]

AMY.

Mother, don't you think someone should go over to Owlscot? The drawing-room hasn't been aired for two days, and the piano is there.

MRS. SPENCER.

How thoughtful you are, Amy. Whom shall we send?

KATE.

I'll go.

AMY.

[Surprised.] You?

KATE.

Yes, I need a walk and some fresh air.

AMY.

I'll go with you.

KATE.

No. You must stay in case Heath comes —

MRS. SPENCER.

Then I'll go.

KATE.

No. [*Gets her hat.*] You have to hurry on with Amy's trousseau. [*They look at her; she becomes more agitated, then goes to* MRS. SPENCER.] Can't you see I want to go alone? I shall have hysterics if I'm opposed. [*Puts on her hat and gloves, and takes her sunshade, through the following scene. To* AMY.] Tell me the way, please.

AMY.

You keep along the high road.

KATE.

Yes.

AMY.

Till you come to a pond covered with green slime.

MRS. SPENCER.

It's shorter across the fields.

AMY.

But she'll lose her way.

KATE.

What do I do when I come to the pond covered with green slime?

AMY.

Take the second turning to the left.

MRS. SPENCER.

Isn't it the third turning?

AMY.

No, the second.

MRS. SPENCER.

[*Murmuring to herself.*] Oh, yes. The third is a private road.

KATE.

Second to the left.

AMY.

Then you walk along till you come to our house. It's a white cottage with a gable and a lot of fir-trees in the garden; you can't miss it. The name is on the gate-post: "Owlscot."

MRS. SPENCER.

Owl's cot, you know.

KATE.

I'll find it. [*Goes towards the window.*]

MRS. SPENCER.

[*Crossing to the writing-desk.*] Wait a minute. You'll want the key. [*Opens a drawer and takes out a large front-door key.*]

AMY.

Someone else will have to go to light the fire.

KATE.

[*Taking the key.*] I'll do that.

AMY.

Oh, will you? Only in the drawing-room because of the piano.

KATE.

Yes, yes, I'll attend to everything.

[*As she goes out of the window* MRS. SPENCER and AMY both follow her, speaking together.

MRS. SPENCER.

You'd better take an umbrella. It's going to rain. It looks very cloudy.

AMY.

Don't forget to fasten the windows, and the ones upstairs as well. [COUSIN KATE *disappears in the garden.*]

MRS. SPENCER.

[*Turning to AMY.*] What a jewel Cousin Kate is. I knew things would be better when *she* came.

AMY.

Yes, I was so undecided before, but I feel content now. I know I've done right.

MRS. SPENCER.

[*Embracing AMY.*] My good little girl!  
[*Kisses her with a sigh of satisfaction.*] Now I must finish marking your night-dresses.

AMY.

I'll go and get them out.

[*AMY goes out. BOBBY enters whistling from the garden.*]

MRS. SPENCER.

Hullo, how was it you didn't meet Cousin Kate?

BOBBY.

I hid in the waitin' room till she'd gone, because she got out of the same carriage with Heath.

MRS. SPENCER.

The same carriage with Heath! How funny! Did you speak to Heath?



BOBBY.

Not then, but I've just been to his lodgin's.

MRS. SPENCER.

Had he got Amy's letter?

BOBBY.

No. He said he'd been waitin' and waitin' for it, and when I said she'd been in the house all day, he said he supposed she wasn't goin' to send it.

MRS. SPENCER.

[*Concerned.*] Well, what's Mr. Bartlett been doing?

BOBBY.

When I was comin' away, I saw Mr. Bartlett go and leave a letter at Heath's door — about two minutes ago.

MRS. SPENCER.

He took long enough about it. [*Smiling.*] Heath must have read it by now.

BOBBY.

But when Mr. Bartlett left the letter Heath had gone away again.

MRS. SPENCER.

[*Dismayed.*] Gone away! Gone away *again* without getting Amy's letter. Oh, dear!

BOBBY.

He was only goin' to Owlscot.

MRS. SPENCER.

[*Cheerfully.*] Oh, Cousin Kate will be able to explain it all to him. *She's* just gone to Owlscot.

CURTAIN.

## THE SECOND ACT

SCENE: — *A sitting-room at Owlscot. It is an old room with panelled walls and beams across the ceiling. Opposite the audience there is a wide casement with diamond panes. There is a door in the wall on the left-hand side of the audience, and a deep fireplace opposite the door. Beside the fireplace is an old oak settle, facing the audience. A piano stands against the wall beside the door, nearer the audience than the door; nearer still to the audience beside the piano stands a chair. Over this chair there is a stag's head with antlers. There is a round table near the centre of the stage and a small table between the fireplace and the window, with a big brass candlestick upon it; several oak chairs, etc. Curtains are drawn across the casement so that when the curtain rises the scene is very dimly lighted.*

*The stage is empty at first. Then a door is heard to shut with a bang. Footsteps are heard approaching over bare wooden floors.*

*[Enter KATE, dressed as in Act I, with the front-door key in her hand. She*

*closes the door, and looks around the room.*

KATE.

*[In a sepulchral tone as she looks about her.] All alone in an empty house. [She sniffs twice as if the room were close.] Oh! how stuffy. [Places the key, with her gloves and parasol, on the table, also her coat, goes to the window and draws the curtains. She throws the casement open wide, letting in the daylight. As she turns from the window she sees the piano.] What a grand chance to try my voice! [Opens the piano, plays a scale, standing, then hums a tune in a light voice. Lets out her voice in an arpeggio scale. Strikes several notes on the piano till she finds the top note of her arpeggio. Speaks disappointedly.] Only E. [Plays an arpeggio scale in F on the piano again, takes a breath and begins to sing her arpeggio scale, but funks the high note.]*

*[A man's voice sings the scale without. KATE starts violently and shuts the piano with a bang.*

*[HEATH DESMOND hoists himself on to the window-sill without and leans into the room. He is a man about thirty, though it is difficult to guess his age from his appearance. He looks young. His temperament is far more Latin than British. He is gay and whimsical, and his mind is rapid and fanciful. He is*

*so extraordinarily frank and direct in his approach that it is impossible to feel a stranger in his presence. He is immensely daring, but so tactful that he is never impertinent. He wears flannels and a straw hat.*

KATE.

[*Concerned.*] What are you doing here?

HEATH.

[*Unconcerned.*] What are you doing here?

KATE.

Never mind, you shouldn't have followed me.

HEATH.

[*Pleasantly.*] If you *will* choose a house with nobody in it, —

KATE.

[*Interrupting him indignantly.*] I hope you don't think I came here to give you an opportunity.

HEATH.

I thought I wouldn't miss one. [*He swings into the room.*]

KATE.

[*Betraying a little alarm.*] You mustn't come in.

HEATH.

Why not? Is this *your* house? [*Takes his hat off.*]

KATE.

[*Faltering.*] No — but —

HEATH.

Then it's neutral ground — like the train.

KATE.

[*Goes a little towards him and speaks persuasively and seriously.*] But if I ask you to go —

HEATH.

[*Looks at her, smiling.*] You'd be as rude as if you asked me to get out of the railway carriage.

KATE.

Then I must go myself.

[*She turns to the table and is about to gather up her sunshade and gloves, etc. He goes towards her as he speaks.*]

HEATH.

That's as rude as if you got out of the railway carriage because I got in.

KATE.

[*Hesitates, still trying to be haughty and indig-*

*nant.*] You *know* you've no right to come in here.

HEATH.

What right have you? [*She holds the key up to shew him. He bends over it, examines it curiously, not touching it.*] How on earth did you get it?

KATE.

I am here at the request of the owner of this house.

HEATH.

[*To himself; turning away.*] Oh — a friend of my landlord.

KATE.

Do you still dispute my right to be here?

HEATH.

[*Turning to her.*] No, I only wish to establish my own.

KATE.

You can't.

HEATH.

[*With frank good humour which weakens her dignity.*] I could if you asked me to stay. I'll be very good.

KATE.

[*Hesitating.*] But you know we oughtn't to stay here together.

HEATH.

Why not, if we want to?

KATE.

I didn't say I wanted to.

HEATH.

To say you oughtn't to is about the same as to say you'd like to. If you really don't want to, it's so much easier —

KATE.

[*A broad smile overspreads her face and she turns to him good-humouredly.*] Oh, stop! [*She means "Stop your rigmarole."*]

HEATH.

Didn't we have fun in the train?

KATE.

[*Looks at him brightly.*] Yes. [*Remembering she ought to be strict with him.*] But now you've turned our fun into indiscretion.

HEATH.

[*Half-sitting on the edge of the table, speaks with enthusiasm, not noticing her seriousness.*] How we flew through the woods and over the towns!

KATE.

You've made me feel ashamed, and I didn't want to.



HEATH.

[*Carrying on his former speech.*] Like a god and a goddess dropped from two planets. You said so yourself as we crossed the viaduct. I was Mars — you Venus —

KATE.

[*Interrupting him indignantly.*] I never said I was Venus.

HEATH.

[*Making her a profound bow.*] Permit me to complete the simile.

KATE.

[*Forgetting herself for a moment, takes his vein of mock gallantry and drops him a deep curtsy.*] Oh — h — h! [*Suddenly remembering herself, she recovers her seriousness.*] I think it's time you flew back to your planet.

[*Both the next speeches are spoken at the same time. KATE is seriously trying to impress HEATH; he begins his speech in a low voice after she has begun hers, and speaks faster, and louder as he goes on — trying to talk her down.*

KATE.

I hoped there was no harm in strangers confiding in each other as we did. I thought we had risen above convention, but by coming here you remind me that we sank below it. I see now

that we were not two souls impelled to mutual utterance, but just two people who gossiped together before they were introduced. We ought never to have met again.

HEATH.

And I was wondering how you would look without your hat. It became quite an obsession with me. It is still. I should so like to see you without your hat. It wouldn't be much trouble. There's a looking-glass just behind you. I think you might take your hat off. [*They have come towards each other as they speak, each trying to talk the other down. KATE, seeing how absurd the situation is, stops and laughs. HEATH says plaintively.*] Won't you please take your hat off?

KATE.

[*Half-exasperated, half-amused, takes her hat off.*] There!

HEATH.

[*Surveying her with admiration.*] Jolly!

KATE.

[*Really pleased, but appearing supercilious.*] Thank you. [*Turns to the looking-glass, preparing to put her hat on again.*]

HEATH.

No, don't. [*She turns to him.*] Don't put it on again.

KATE.

Why?

HEATH.

I don't want you to go just yet.

KATE.

[Laughs.] Oh, but I must.

HEATH.

Well, let me have a proper look at the hat first.  
It's quite the prettiest one I've seen this season.

KATE.

[Pleased, holding out the hat towards him.]  
I'm glad you like it; I trimmed it myself.

[HEATH pretends to examine the hat, and while he does so he takes it from her. She yields it without suspicion. He marches away with it.]

KATE.

Well—you really have more assurance!

[He mounts the chair beside the piano and hangs the hat on the antlers above it. She watches him amazed and concerned.]

KATE.

What are you putting it there for?

HEATH.

[*Turns to her on the chair, smiling.*] To make assurance doubly sure. [*Steps off the chair.*]

KATE.

Do you think I can't get up there and get it?

HEATH.

You can get up and get it.

[*KATE moves as if to get the hat.* HEATH sits in the chair beneath it, crosses his legs and folds his arms. KATE visibly annoyed, then turns to him and says seriously without betraying any temper.

KATE.

Don't you think you're rather taking advantage of me by coming here?

HEATH.

[*Smiling.*] No, no — I don't. For as I so pithily remarked a moment ago, this is neutral ground. We are the same as in the train — only — we aren't getting along quite so fast. [*KATE sits in a chair at some distance, turning it till it has its back to him, expressing disapproval in every attitude. There is a short silence; HEATH sighs heavily. She does not smile.*] Shall we play and sing? [*This amuses her. She smiles unseen by him, then frowns.* HEATH rises and

*comes towards her, speaking naturally and sincerely.]* I say, you know — I don't want to —

KATE.

*[Rises haughtily and moves away.]* I don't think it is very polite of you to detain me here against my wish.

*[He thinks she is going to get her hat, so he rushes back to his chair and sits.]*

HEATH.

I wish you wouldn't pose so.

KATE.

*[Loftily.]* Pose!

HEATH.

Yes. You were so jolly and natural in the train. Now you are behaving just like any *real lady* would.

KATE.

I am sorry if I didn't behave like one then.

HEATH.

Oh, one doesn't think about whether Andromache, or Sarah Siddons, or Saint Cecilia were real ladies. I had you up among them. *[She smiles, pleased with his compliment. He comes towards her as he speaks. Her manner stiffens as he approaches her.]* Whatever you do is sure to be all right.

KATE.

I'm not aware that I committed any unusual breach in speaking to a fellow traveller. [*She moves off with an air, and looks off from the window.*]

[*He puts his hands in his pockets and watches her a little wistfully.*]

HEATH.

You *do* disappoint me!

KATE.

It isn't *my* fault if you formed a wrong opinion of me.

HEATH.

[*Judging the effect of his remark upon her.*] But I didn't think you were the kind of woman who'd talk about her soul and love to *any* man.

KATE.

[*As he supposes, turns to him indignantly.*] I'm not.

HEATH.

[*Meets her with a smile.*] Of course you're not. I know you from her as well as I know you from this real lady with all her spikes out. [*KATE moves away, pretending not to listen.*] Women are such frightful cowards. They are always clamouring for emancipation and then — when the deliverer comes — they take fright and run.

KATE.

[*Mockingly.*] How true — how true!!!

HEATH.

You know we agreed before, how absurd it was to have all these conventions keeping men and women apart — but I never saw anyone more conventional than you are now. I *would* be more consistent. [*Turns away from her.*]

KATE.

[*After a moment's reflection.*] Suppose I do consent to stay — [*he turns to her quickly*] — just the fraction of a second longer — [*She does not know how to finish her sentence.*]

HEATH.

Well — we could talk.

KATE.

That *would* be thrilling.

HEATH.

[*Laughs.*] Don't be nasty about it. We might have tea, too.

KATE.

[*Surprised into a laugh.*] Here?

HEATH.

Yes. We have to light a fire anyway, to air the room.

KATE.

[*Surprised into seriousness.*] How do you know that?

HEATH.

Well — haven't we?

KATE.

Yes, but — it strikes me as quite weird that you should know.

HEATH.

[*Going nearer, looks at her and speaks insinuatingly.*] When two people are thoroughly sympathetic they often divine each other's thoughts.

KATE.

[*Embarrassed under his gaze, but trying to carry it off lightly.*] Do they?

HEATH.

And since I know we have to light a fire to air —

KATE.

[*Interrupting him.*] You needn't be so proud of your divinations. That's the only thought of mine you ever divined.

HEATH.

[*Prolonging the word.*] Oh!!!!



KATE.

[*Faces him, defiantly.*] Well?

HEATH.

Shall I tell you some of the others?

KATE.

[*Quickly.*] No, thank you!

HEATH.

Do let me. I am deeply interested in occultism.

KATE.

[*Raising her voice and speaking quickly to stop him speaking.*] Well, I'm not. I think it's a nasty, creepy subject, and if you think you read any more of my thoughts — You didn't — [*Breaks off suddenly to say.*] Dear me, how I am shouting.

HEATH.

As I was saying, when you so rudely interrupted me, we have to light a fire here, anyway — on account of the piano.

KATE.

[*Turns round to him quickly.*] How do you know about the piano? Oh! [*Goes towards him, and asks in some anxiety.*] Do you know who I am?

HEATH.

No. Do you know who *I* am?

KATE.

No.

HEATH.

Would you like to?

KATE.

No. [*Moves away.*]

HEATH.

It *would* rather interrupt our romance to exchange cards, wouldn't it?

KATE.

Yes, — no, that is, — we aren't having a romance.

HEATH.

Not yet, but when we get cosy over our tea-cups we ought to feel quite romantic.

KATE.

[*Turns to him.*] You talk as if this were *our* house.

HEATH.

We are Silverlocks and this is the house the three bears lived in.

KATE.

[*Ignoring his remark.*] Besides — how do you know there is any tea here?

HEATH.

Silverlocks didn't know she would find any soup.

KATE.

What *are* you talking about?

HEATH.

[*In a tone of serious reproach.*] Do you mean to say you don't remember the story of Silverlocks and the three bears?

KATE.

No.

HEATH.

You ought to be ashamed of yourself. [*She shrugs her shoulders and turns to the fireplace.*] Remembering nursery stories is one of the chief signs of election. It shows you are still a child; that you haven't forgotten the days of games and dreams, when your spirit was too sportive to be satisfied with a world of facts, so made its own world of fancies. That's the kingdom of the children. Nearly everyone leaves it afterwards. But the elect always hold their places there. They never forget the games and the dreams. That's what gives distinction to their humour

and imagination; a charm to the point of view; the signs by which their scattered spirits beckon each other after they are grown up. And how could they hold their places in the kingdom if they forgot exactly how it felt to be a child? And how could they remember that, if they forgot anything so important as the nursery stories?

KATE.

[*Charmed with his speech, sits amiably on the settle.*] Tell me about Silverlocks and the three bears.

HEATH.

Well — she went for a walk one day, Silverlocks did, and she came to a little house in a wood where the three bears lived, but they were all out. So first she drank their soup — at least she only tasted the father and mother bears' soup, but she drank the little one's all up. There's a picture of her drinking it out of a blue bowl.

KATE.

[*Suddenly.*] Oh, yes. She had a yellow dress on.

HEATH.

[*Delighted.*] Yes. You *do* remember her? [*Drops beside KATE on the settle.*] I knew you must be one of us when I found you singing grand opera all by yourself. That's one of the signs.

KATE.

[*Amused.*] I never met anyone like you in my life.

HEATH.

[*Sentimentally.*] I've been looking for *you* a long time.

KATE.

[*Embarrassed.*] Hadn't we better — [*Rises.*]

HEATH.

[*Jumping up cheerfully.*] Make tea — yes. We must hurry up and light a fire. The three bears ought to have done that before they went out. We want some paper first, then some chips, then some coal.

KATE.

[*Protesting a little at his instructions.*] I know how to lay a fire.

HEATH.

[*Taking a newspaper from his pocket.*] Oh! [*Goes towards her.*] Then will you crumple that up in the grate? [*She takes the paper from him mechanically.*] While I go and look for coal and stuff. [*He goes out quickly, leaving the door open. KATE crosses to the fireplace, stands still a moment, then throws the paper on the floor.*]

KATE.

[*With decision.*] No, Kate, it won't do.

*[She crosses to the chair by the piano, mounts it and takes her hat from the antlers, steps off the chair, puts her hat on hastily, takes her sunshade and gloves and coat from the table, goes to the door, pushes it to, then goes to the window, looks round at the door, then pulls up her skirts and prepares to mount the windowsill. As she steps on to the windowsill, HEATH enters with a kettle in his right hand and a coal-box with coal and wood in his left.]*

HEATH.

*[Pauses on the threshold and looks at her.]*  
Hullo!

KATE.

*[Screams.]* Oh!

*[She quickly lets her skirt down and looks round. HEATH deposits the kettle and the coal-box on the floor, then goes towards her.]*

HEATH.

Why?

KATE.

I'd better.

HEATH.

Where's the harm? We could be so jolly together. You might trust me. I'm really nice. I'm not dangerous.

KATE.

Dangerous men aren't half as dangerous as nice ones.

HEATH.

You'll feel all right about staying to tea — when you've had tea.

KATE.

But — I'd better not.

HEATH.

You know you'll wish you had if you don't.

KATE.

It'll be better to wish I had than to wish I hadn't.

HEATH.

I never met anyone I could get on with quite so well, but of course if you want to be prudish and think we ought to throw away such a good chance of being just our natural selves —

*[Wanders towards the piano, opens the top lid and peers among the wires with one eye on KATE. KATE remains standing on the window-seat in a state of indecision, thinking she ought to go, but longing to stay. Deciding not to go yet, she slowly lets fall her coat, her gloves,*

*and her sunshade, one by one on the window-seat beside her. She glances at HEATH. He appears to be taking no notice of her. She steps off the window-seat and stands still a moment, not quite knowing how to proceed. At last, receiving no help from HEATH, she boldly seizes the kettle, hurries with it to the hearth, and kneels in front of the fireplace.*

KATE.

Now the chips.

[HEATH brings her the coal-box with the wood, etc.]

HEATH.

Here they are, and the paper. [*She lays the fire as she speaks.*]

KATE.

By the way, wasn't it Silverlocks who had to look after the fire?

HEATH.

[*Giving her a match.*] No, that was Cinderella.

KATE.

Oh, yes, with the ugly sisters.

HEATH.

And the Prince — she fell in love with him.



KATE.

[Looks at him.] Oh — [Lights the fire.]

HEATH.

Yes. And she married him.

KATE.

Yes — but I wish you wouldn't talk so much when you see I'm busy.

[He goes towards the door while she watches the fire.]

HEATH.

I'll go and look for cups and things. [Hesitates near the door.] I say, you won't go away while I'm out, will you?

KATE.

What do you say?

HEATH.

You won't go away while I'm out?

[She takes off her hat and lays it on the settle for response, then turns to the fire again, stooping on the hearth and poking chips between the bars, before she puts the kettle on. He watches her, then tiptoes to the seat, takes her hat and tiptoes out with it, half-running]

*and glancing back at her as he goes. KATE sits on the hearth with a sigh of pleasure.*

KATE.

*[Talking aloud to herself.]* Oh, Kate, why not for once in a way? It's good experience for you, and it may do to put in your next novel. If he gets too — *[She rises and stands on the hearth.]* You can make a few queenly gestures and sweep out. *[Turns to the settle.]* Where's my hat?

*[HEATH enters. He has a common teapot and two cups hanging from the fingers of his right hand. In the same hand he carries some knives and spoons and two saucers and a butter-dish. In his left hand a bread trencher with KATE'S hat on it. Half a loaf squeezed under one arm, and a milk-jug pressed against his side with the other. A small paper bag in his mouth.]*

HEATH.

*[Speaking with the bag in his mouth.]* This is the tea in this bag.

*[KATE laughs when he enters, goes to him and helps him to deposit the things on the table. She now abandons herself to the spirit of the picnic.]*

HEATH.

*[With the bag in his mouth.]* Take the tea.

KATE.

Give me the cups. Now the knives. Oh, be careful — now the teapot — now the tea —  
[*Takes the bag from his mouth and lays it down.*]

HEATH.

Here's the milk. And here's the bread.

KATE.

Now, you watch the kettle while I lay the table.  
[*He goes to the hearth, while she quickly arranges the things on the table, and puts tea in the teapot.*]

HEATH.

I hope the three bears won't come home before we've finished.

KATE.

What happened to Silverlocks when they came home?

HEATH.

“ ‘We'll kill the child and eat her for our dinner,’  
The Father growled; but said the Mother: ‘No,  
For supper she shall be, and I will skin her.’ ”

KATE.

[*In a little squeaky voice.*] “ ‘No,’ said the  
Little Cub, ‘we'll let her go.’ ” [*They both  
laugh as she pushes a loaf and knife towards*

HEATH, *who joins her at the table.*] You cut, I'll butter.

HEATH.

I'm awfully hungry — aren't you? We didn't have much lunch, did we? Only one between us.

KATE.

I suppose you mean I didn't divide the chicken fairly.

*[She smiles at him. He laughs with pleasure, and goes on cutting bread as he speaks.]*

HEATH.

I never thought when we finished our last meal that we'd be having the next together. I wish — *[Giving her a slice of bread as he says, sentimentally.]* I wish we could have all our meals —

KATE.

*[To interrupt him.]* I'm sure that kettle must be boiling. *[Goes over to the hearth. HEATH smiles to himself and wags his head, knowingly, when her back is turned. She looks at the kettle, then turns to him.]* What does a kettle do when it boils? Does it just smoke?

HEATH.

I think it spits.

KATE.

It's beginning to growl a little. Does that mean anything?

HEATH.

[*Goes towards the kettle, a little anxiously.*] I don't know. But I'm sure the lid comes off when it boils over. [*Bends down and peers at the kettle, then says, humourously.*] I wish we'd brought a cookery-book. [KATE *laughs and kneels down in front of the kettle. He stands behind her, looking down at her.*] I say. D'ye know, your hair's a little ruffled?

KATE.

[*Amiably.*] Is it — where?

HEATH.

In that place it's so difficult for you to get at yourself. [*Touches her hair.*]

KATE.

[*Loftily.*] Oh. [*Rises and moves slowly to the window, where she stands and looks out.*]

HEATH.

[*Watching her.*] The girl rose from the fender and fixing him with a haughty glance swept across the apartment with the air of a queen. She stood gazing wistfully across the park —

[KATE *laughs and turns from the window.*]

KATE.

It's no use pretending with you.

HEATH.

[*Smiling frankly.*] Not the slightest. But of course it's all right for you to keep your spikes out for a little while. I don't see how a really nice woman could do anything else.

KATE.

[*Comes towards him protesting.*] I'm not a really nice woman, I mean — I'm an individual like you. [*He looks up at her, smiles knowingly; she becomes embarrassed.*] Oh, the kettle. [*Goes quickly to the fire.*]

HEATH.

Spikes!

KATE.

[*Anxiously looking at the kettle.*] No — but it's — it's —

HEATH.

[*Excitedly, looking at the kettle.*] It's spitting.

KATE.

Yes. Catch hold.

HEATH.

It'll burn me.

KATE.

[*Gives him her handkerchief.*] Wrap this round.

[*He wraps the handkerchief round his left*

*hand, takes the kettle off the fire and hurries to the table with it.*

HEATH.

Ah! Oh! [*Yells as he pours the water into the teapot.*]

KATE.

[*Anxiously, as she comes to him.*] Did you burn yourself?

HEATH.

[*Howls as he holds out his left hand to her with the handkerchief round it.*] I think so. I think so.

[*She unwinds the handkerchief carefully and examines his hand. He grimaces when she looks at his face, and smiles when she looks at his hand.*]

KATE.

[*Taking her handkerchief and dropping his hand.*] No, you didn't. [HEATH *laughs, and puts the kettle back in the fender. She turns to the table smiling.*] Let's eat. [*They sit opposite each other at the table. KATE makes the tea.*]

HEATH.

I like mine strong with lots of sugar.

KATE.

You'll have to wait till it mixes.

HEATH.

Brews is the word.

[KATE laughs, then regards him steadily across the table.]

KATE.

I don't know what you are.

HEATH.

I'm Dublin.

KATE.

Is that why you're so unpractical?

HEATH.

I had to tell *you* what a kettle does when it's ready.

KATE.

We must both be artists.

HEATH.

We might be just a rich lady and gentleman who've always been too grand to work.

KATE.

Oh, no. They never enjoy themselves as much as this. [*She pours out two cups of tea. When she puts the teapot down their eyes meet.*]

HEATH.

[*Slowly.*] Well, at any rate we — are — opposite each other again.



[KATE drops her eyes. Pushes one cup over to HEATH. Takes her own. There is a short, embarrassed silence.]

KATE.

Is your tea all right?

HEATH.

[Drinks; then says, seriously.] Yes, thank you. [Then mocking the constraint of the situation.] It's a charming afternoon, is it not?

[KATE laughs.]

KATE.

What possible connection can you have with a workaday world?

HEATH.

I'm only rotting now so that I won't tell the truth. [Leans across the table.] Were you ever in love?

KATE.

[Smiles thoughtfully.] I'm twenty-nine.

HEATH.

[Confidentially.] Tell me about the first time.

KATE.

I can't remember which it was.

HEATH.

As many as that?

KATE.

[*Simply.*] My world has been filled with two kinds of men: the men I loved and the men who loved me. They were never the same. [*Leans back.*] Now I've told you the story of my life.

HEATH.

Then you've never met *him*.

KATE.

I'm *only* twenty-nine.

HEATH.

You will meet *him*.

KATE.

I don't intend to die until I do.

[*They laugh. They both drink and HEATH watches her over his cup all the time. KATE meets HEATH'S eyes, puts her cup down, looks into it and stirs the dregs round with her spoon. She looks up again, meeting his eyes. She gives a nervous half-laugh and drops her eyes. HEATH puts his cup down, watching her steadily. KATE grows more uneasy.*

HEATH.

Do you believe in love at first sight?

KATE.

Yes — no — that is — I don't know.

HEATH.

It's the only *real* love, isn't it?

KATE.

Yes.

HEATH.

You see someone pass, and all of a sudden, you get such a funny feeling in your throat.

KATE.

[*Putting her hand to her heart.*] Yes — and here.

HEATH.

Yes, and here. [*Rubs his knee.*] Doesn't love at first sight catch you in your knees? [*With enthusiasm.*] And isn't it all grand and exciting and the only thing worth living for?

KATE.

[*Sadly.*] And isn't it soon over?

HEATH.

It always *is*, but don't you feel that it needn't

be, and that when you meet the perfect companion — it won't be?

KATE.

[*Responding earnestly.*] Yes —

HEATH.

[*Pauses before he says, simply.*] I'm in love with you.

KATE.

[*Disconcerted and troubled.*] Please — don't.

HEATH.

You must have seen it.

KATE.

But — how can you — yet?

HEATH.

It takes no time to fall in love.

KATE.

You've spoilt everything by saying that — now.

HEATH.

I shall never be more sure than now.

KATE.

But it's beginning at the wrong end to be lovers before you know if you can be friends.

HEATH.

Oh, no. If we are lovers we shall be friends. We can if we try. But we might be the best of friends, we couldn't become lovers with trying. So it's beginning at the right end to be lovers first.

KATE.

[*After a moment's reflection.*] I'm sure that's not sound logic.

HEATH.

Love isn't logical.

KATE.

[*Turns to him slowly.*] But if you were in love with a woman you hardly knew, as you say you are now — [*Pauses.*]

HEATH.

[*Sincerely.*] I shouldn't care how wicked or married she was. I should leave everything to follow her.

KATE.

[*With enthusiasm.*] That's the way to love, isn't it?

HEATH.

[*Leaning towards her.*] It's the way I love you. [*She looks away from him.*] Would you have to know everything about a man before you could care for him?

KATE.

[*Looking straight before her.*] No. If I loved him I could forgive him everything. But — [*Her voice breaks with emotion.*] I never thought anyone would love *me* like that. [*He puts his hand over hers which she rests on the table. She rises, half-afraid, looking at him and withdrawing her hand.*] Oh, but you don't mean it. [*He rises and goes towards her. She moves a little away, putting out her hands, imploring him not to approach her.*] Please, please. [*He goes slowly to the window and looks out.*]

HEATH.

It's going to rain.

[*The stage has gradually grown darker as if heavy thunder-clouds were gathering.*]

KATE.

[*Hurriedly.*] I must go. [*She goes to get her hat and sunshade. A distant rumble of thunder is heard.*]

HEATH.

There's going to be a storm. [*Turns to her.*] You can't go till it passes.

KATE.

[*Nervously; taking her hat in her hand.*] I don't mind walking in the rain, thank you.

HEATH.

[*Going towards her; speaking as a lover.*] The storm might be rough and hurt you. I can't bear to think of the rain falling on you, or the wind blowing your face too hard.

KATE.

[*Looks at him with gratitude and wonder as she lays her hat down again, then says slowly.*] Do you care like that?

HEATH.

How can I help caring? Doesn't everyone love you? [*Takes her hand.*]

KATE.

[*Slowly, with a faint smile.*] Yes. But I don't think there's anyone else who'd think it mattered if I got caught in the rain.

HEATH.

[*Close to her, bends over her as he speaks, taking her hands in his. She looks at him half-charmed and half-afraid.*] I'll take care of you. I'll shelter you.

KATE.

[*Hurriedly.*] No, no. We mustn't.

HEATH.

[*Speaking in his soft lover's voice as his arms*

*close round her.] I want to shelter you always. [Drawing her closer and turning her towards him.] I love you!*

KATE.

*[Breathlessly, alarmed, but yielding gradually to his fascination.] Oh — but — what are we doing?*

*[He folds his arms fast round her. His face is close to hers. He looks in her eyes. He kisses her slowly on the mouth. She yields herself to him entirely. A peal of thunder surprises them. She draws herself away from him at the sound of it. She sinks into a chair, bursts into tears, buries her face on her arms and sobs. HEATH goes quietly to the window, closes it, and comes back to KATE. She is sobbing bitterly. HEATH takes her hand in his and holds it.]*

KATE.

*No, no, you don't mean it. [She rises to her feet and moves away from him, speaking excitedly.] You're making love to me to see me yield. And then you'll despise me — and laugh at me. [He turns from her, looking very troubled.] You're laughing now. [He turns his troubled face towards her. She softens instantly.] Oh! [She becomes penitent.] Forgive me, please, please forgive me. [He puts his arms about her; she looks in his face.] I could*



love you so much. [*Slowly pushing him from her.*] If I thought — [*Dubiously, as she looks searchingly at him.*] If I was sure — [*Pauses. He looks at her before he speaks gently and earnestly.*]

HEATH.

I feel you are sincere because I've looked into your eyes. That's the only way lovers can ever know.

KATE.

[*Turns to him responsively, then stops doubtfully.*] But you say that as if you'd had a great deal of experience.

HEATH.

I'll tell you the truth. Once for a long time I thought I was in love, but now I know that I never loved anyone but you.

KATE.

[*Joyfully looking in his face, draws suddenly back from him, doubtful again.*] Oh, but they always say that. [*With a miserable little laugh.*] I'm not quite so simple as — as not to know that there are men who make love out of curiosity. Who try to kiss a woman, not because they want to, but to see if she will or she won't. [*Moves away from him.*]

HEATH.

I say, you know, it's not fair of you to take it

for granted that I don't mean what I say, because — I do.

KATE.

[*Comes impulsively towards him, putting her hands on his arms.*] I want you all to myself. [*Holding him.*] You'll never kiss another woman, will you?

HEATH.

[*Smiling.*] Never.

KATE.

[*Impulsively.*] You won't even speak to one, or look at one.

HEATH.

No, dear, no.

KATE.

[*Breaking away from him.*] Oh, how do I know you won't?

[*He holds her firmly by the wrist, not letting her move away.*

HEATH.

[*Almost sternly.*] You don't know. You've got to trust me.

KATE.

[*Turns to him, arrested by his authority, becomes submissive.*] Yes, I will. I'm not usually an angry woman, but I'm so afraid of losing you and I think I'm a little excited. [*There is another flash of lightning, followed by a peal of*

*thunder. She puts her hands over her eyes.]*  
Oh, that lightning. It makes me so nervous.

*[He goes quietly towards the window. She draws her hands from her eyes. Starts with alarm at seeing he is not at her side, then turns towards him excitedly.]*

KATE.

What are you doing?

HEATH.

I'm going to draw the curtains so that you won't see the lightning.

*[He draws the curtains. KATE looks at him suspiciously. She quickly lights the candles.]*

HEATH.

*[As he turns from the window and sees her lighting the candles.]* Yes, that's a good idea. Now we shan't see it so much. *[She looks at him suspiciously, her face strongly illuminated by the light of the candles.]* What is it?

KATE.

I thought you were going to make the room dark so that you could slip out and leave me. *[He turns from her, puzzled what to do. She starts towards him when he turns from her, more excited than ever.]* Why do you turn away? You're tired of me already. *[He turns towards*

*her imploringly. She draws back.]* No, no. You only turn to me because I ask you. Oh, why did you follow me? You forced yourself on me. I'd have been strong another time—but I couldn't to-day—I couldn't— [*Sobs hysterically, and sinks upon the settle. HEATH watches her gravely till her sobs subside a little. She becomes gradually calm as he speaks to her gently and firmly.*]

HEATH.

I shan't force myself upon you any more. But I'll never leave you while you let me stay. You must take my promise for that. If I'd known you for years I couldn't give you more now. You and I both know the real man and woman from the sham. We were quick to recognize each other. I believe in you forever. You must do the same for me if you want our love to last.

*[She rises and comes towards him, submissively. He holds out his hand to her.*

KATE.

How you must hate me for giving way like this.

HEATH.

*[Gently, as he takes her hands.]* No, dear, I understand.

KATE.

Do you, *really?*

HEATH.

I love you for giving way, because by that I know I was the first.

KATE.

[*Looking in his face.*] Yes. You were. [*Fondling his hand in both hers as she speaks.*] And, after all, I suppose you really might fall in love with me at first sight. I did with you.

HEATH.

[*Smiling.*] I loved you the minute I got in the railway carriage — no, before — when I put my toe on the step to get in.

KATE.

[*Smiling.*] I was the first. I saw you coming down the platform, slantways through the window. Oh! I *was* so afraid you'd go past me.

HEATH.

And I was *so* afraid you wouldn't be in the train.

KATE.

How could you be? You didn't know me.

HEATH.

But I've always been looking out for you. Whenever I start on a journey, or even walking down the street, I scan the people's faces and

wonder if one of them is yours. Sometimes I think I see you. She has a little way of inclining as she walks, or tilting her chin, or saying something, or generally of laughing — which makes me think she must be you. I watch my chances and pursue her. But very soon I find out that she isn't you at all. But to-day she *was* you. Oh, I've found you at last. [*He takes her in his arms.*]

KATE.

And you won't go away?

HEATH.

Never.

*[He kisses her slowly and tenderly, then with their arms about each other they move slowly towards the settle. KATE sits down there, HEATH on a stool at her feet. They settle themselves comfortably, leaning against each other, with hands clasped.]*

KATE.

Yes, like this.

HEATH.

*[Dreamily.]* We'll pretend we are sitting at home by our own fire. We'll often sit like this — won't we — and listen to the rain? Only it'll be a little house in a wood, like the one the three bears lived in. I'll make it out of branches.

KATE.

[*Softly.*] Could we really live in a little house like that?

HEATH.

Yes. We'll live all by ourselves. Would you like that?

KATE.

Yes. But I'm afraid you'd get tired with only me.

HEATH.

No, dear, I wouldn't. If we wanted a little gaiety we could go and call on Mr. and Mrs. Squirrel, or ask Miss Weasel to tea.

KATE.

And where would we get our food?

HEATH.

We'd ask Mrs. Squirrel the best place to go for nuts, and there'd be a little stream running past our front door where we'd fish in the mornings.

KATE.

[*Very softly.*] Can't we go to it now?

HEATH.

[*Closing his eyes.*] Yes — as soon as the rain stops.

[*He leans against her with closed eyes as if he were going to sleep.* KATE looks

*dreamily in the fire. They are silent.  
A clock outside strikes six.*

KATE.

[*Starts, as if coming out of a dream.*] Six.  
[*Uneasily.*] I'd forgotten about clocks.

HEATH.

[*Without opening his eyes.*] There'll be no  
clocks in the wood.

KATE.

We mustn't talk any more nonsense.

HEATH.

[*Looking up at her.*] We are talking sense.  
That's nonsense all the other people talk—  
[*Pointing to window.*] Out there in their big,  
noisy world. They don't know about our little  
world. [*Sits beside her on the seat, his arm  
about her.*]

KATE.

[*Troubled; looking away from him.*] This  
isn't the world.

HEATH.

No, dear — it's Paradise.

KATE.

But we aren't ready for Paradise yet. [*Rises.*]  
We must go back. Back to life. This isn't life,



by a dim light and a drowsy fire: [*She goes to the window and draws the curtain. A pale, white light comes from the window and takes away all the warmth from the candle light and firelight. She turns to him, pointing from the window as she speaks.*] There! That's life out in the storm. If our love is real it will weather the wind and the rain.

HEATH.

But let it sit a little longer by the fire first.

KATE.

[*Takes his hands.*] No. I must go away. But we'll take it with us wherever we go. It's going to be an ennobling love to help us when we work, so that we shan't feel ashamed of it when it's time to draw our blinds and light our lamps. It must spend good days to earn its pleasant evenings. Then we'll let it dream a little.

HEATH.

[*He kisses her hand.*] And you'll meet me very soon?

KATE.

Yes.

HEATH.

When?

KATE.

A month from to-day?

HEATH.

[*Protesting.*] A month!

KATE.

Well — a fortnight.

HEATH.

That's too long.

KATE.

A week.

HEATH.

To-morrow.

KATE.

To-morrow at three o'clock.

HEATH.

I can't wait so long as that.

KATE.

Then make it half-past two.

[*They both laugh. There is a ring at the front-door bell. They look at each other and become very serious.*]

HEATH.

Shall I go and see?

KATE.

[*Considers a moment.*] No, I'll go.

[KATE goes out, leaving the door ajar.  
HEATH goes to the door and listens.

AMY.

[*Heard outside.*] Here you are. I've brought you an umbrella.

HEATH.

[*Greatly disconcerted.*] Amy! How awkward! What shall I say to her?

[*He takes his hat quickly from the table and goes to the window, is about to open it when AMY opens the door. He slips behind the window curtain.*

[AMY enters in her bicycling costume, carrying an umbrella. KATE follows her, trying to conceal her embarrassment.

AMY.

What a time the storm lasted.

KATE.

Yes — didn't it? [*Looking about furtively, says to herself.*] I wonder where he went.

AMY.

Mother thought I'd better come over and see if you were all right, so as soon as it stopped pouring, I got on my bicycle and brought this. [*Lays the umbrella against the seat.*]

KATE.

[*To herself.*] His hat's gone.

AMY.

You must have been awfully dull here by yourself.

KATE.

Oh, no, it wasn't so dull.

AMY.

[*Noticing the tea things.*] I see you found some tea things.

KATE.

Yes. [*Glancing at the window.*] He must have gone the way he came.

AMY.

It looks as if two people had had tea.

KATE.

[*Staring at the table.*] Does it?

AMY.

[*Pointing.*] Two cups.

KATE.

Yes, I had two cups. [*Humourously, pointing to cups.*] That's my first cup, and that's my second.

AMY.

[*Laughing.*] Don't be silly.

KATE.

Tell me — has Heath been to see you?

AMY.

Not yet. Hasn't he been here? [*Goes to the fire.*]

KATE.

No. [*Starts suddenly, unperceived by AMY, suspecting the truth. After a momentary look of alarm she becomes composed.*]

AMY.

[*Looking at the fire, says innocently.*] Bobby went to Heath's lodgings and they said he'd come here. I suppose he hadn't got my letter. He ought to have it by now. Let's lock up and go. Did you look and see if the upstairs windows were fastened? [*KATE doesn't heed her; AMY smiles.*] I knew you'd forget. You might just fasten that one [*indicating the window as she goes towards the door*] while I go upstairs: [*Turns at the door, smiling.*] Oh, I've found out who your charming young man in the train was. Can't you guess?

KATE.

[*Trying to conceal her fears.*] No.

AMY.

Try.

KATE.

I'd rather not.

AMY.

Heath.

[AMY goes out laughing. KATE stands motionless. HEATH comes slowly from behind the curtain and faces her.]

HEATH.

[With intense earnestness.] I'm not — I'm not what you think. She doesn't love me. She drove me away before. It'll soon be all right. I meant every word I said. I'm yours absolutely. I must be your husband and you must be my wife.

[He approaches her with his arms out. She holds up her hand sternly, forbidding him to touch her.]

KATE.

No!

HEATH.

[Dropping his hands by his sides.] I mean it. I mean every word I said. You *must* believe me.

KATE.

[Deliberately.] You were not playing with me?

HEATH.

No — on my soul, no! I'll tell her now, before you.

KATE.

You say you were not playing?

HEATH.

No — no!

KATE.

[*Looks him steadily in the face before she says.*] But I was.

[*He steps back, dumbfounded and horrified.*]

HEATH.

Ah, no!

KATE.

Yes, of course. You don't suppose for a moment I thought you were in earnest.

[*AMY enters. She stops on the threshold, surprised and pleased to see HEATH.*]

AMY.

Heath! [*Coming towards him.*] Have you just come? Did you get my letter?

HEATH.

[*Whose attitude to AMY is quiet and gentle.*]  
No.

AMY.

[*Simply and penitently.*] I wrote to tell you

how sorry I was, and to ask you to forgive me. Will you? [*She holds out her hand to him. He takes it mechanically. She thinks they are reconciled.*] Thank you. [*AMY looks towards KATE a little embarrassed.*] You know Cousin Kate already, I think.

HEATH.

[*Hurriedly.*] Yes, yes. I'll come and see you this evening and explain everything.

AMY.

[*Turning to HEATH, says innocently.*] We can do that now. It won't take long.

HEATH.

[*Looking at KATE.*] Not here — not yet.

AMY.

[*Following the direction of his eyes.*] Oh, I see. You are shy before Cousin Kate.

HEATH.

Yes. Wait till this evening. I'll come — this evening.

AMY.

[*Pleasantly.*] Very well. Go home and get the letter and then come and see me.

HEATH.

[*Hurriedly.*] Yes. I'll do that.

[*HEATH goes out right without looking back.*



AMY.

[*Looking after HEATH.*] Poor Heath. I suppose he feels rather guilty, too. [*With a smile and a sigh of relief.*] Oh, well; it's all right now. Put on your hat, Cousin Kate, while I put these things away.

[*Takes up some of the cups, etc., from the table and carries them out.* KATE sits forlornly on the settle.

KATE.

Oh, Kate, Kate! You poor old fool!

CURTAIN.

## THE THIRD ACT

SCENE:— *The same as Act I. About half an hour has elapsed since Act II. The storm being followed by a fine sunset. It grows gradually dusk during the act.*

MRS. SPENCER *sits sewing on the sofa. BOBBY is standing at the window. Both are dressed as in Act I.*

BOBBY.

[*Calls from the window.*] Hullo, Amy!

MRS. SPENCER.

[*Putting down her work.*] At last.

BOBBY.

[*Calling from the window.*] You'd better hurry up. You'll be late for supper. [*Turns to his mother.*] It's Amy by herself, on her bicycle.

[*AMY enters dressed as in Act II. She looks very happy and smiling.*

MRS. SPENCER.

Where's Cousin Kate?

AMY.

She's coming. I left her to walk. I was in such a hurry to tell you. I've seen Heath.

MRS. SPENCER.

[*In cheerful anticipation.*] Oh, well?

AMY.

He came to Owlscot while I was there. He's coming here this evening.

MRS. SPENCER.

And how did he seem?

AMY.

I think he was rather embarrassed.

MRS. SPENCER.

Well, that's no wonder.

AMY.

No, and with Cousin Kate there we couldn't say very much, but he said he'd come this evening.

MRS. SPENCER.

Dear Amy. [*Embraces her.*] I had a feeling it would all come right when Cousin Kate came.

[*AMY turns smiling from MRS. SPENCER to BOBBY.*]

BOBBY.

[*Awkwardly.*] I say, I'm beastly glad.

AMY.

Oh, Bobby!

[*AMY pounces on BOBBY and kisses him on the brow. He pushes her away disgusted.*

BOBBY.

Oh, don't, Amy.

MRS. SPENCER.

Now we can open Mrs. Darbisher's present. [*Goes to the drawer where she put the parcel in Act I, getting it out as she speaks.*] It came about three o'clock, but I didn't tell you. I thought it would only upset you. [*Gives the parcel to AMY, who sits down and unpacks it. MRS. SPENCER stands beside her, her eyes glistening with curiosity as she watches her.*] It's sure to be something handsome from Mrs. Darbisher. It may be an ostrich feather fan, with real tortoise shell sticks. [*Under the brown paper AMY finds a square cardboard box. She takes off the lid, takes out a fat parcel wrapped in white tissue-paper.*] Oh, it's something squashy — lace — a roll of priceless point de venise. [*AMY takes off the tissue-paper, and holds up a padded satin handkerchief case, elaborately trimmed with lace and four long ribbon ends. MRS. SPENCER'S face betrays the keenest disappointment when the present is exposed.*]

AMY.

A handkerchief case.

MRS. SPENCER.

She ought to be ashamed to send a home-made thing like that.

AMY.

Oh, mother, it's very pretty.

MRS. SPENCER.

For a bazaar, yes — but not for a wedding present.

AMY.

I think it was very kind of her to remember me at all.

MRS. SPENCER.

That's nonsense, Amy. I expected fish carvers at least from Mrs. Darbisher. But I've noticed that rich people often give the scrubbiest presents.

AMY.

Oh, mother!

BOBBY.

Let's have a look at it. [*Taking it very carefully in his hands.*] For pocket-handkerchiefs?

MRS. SPENCER.

I suppose that's what she meant it for. [*Fingers it contemptuously.*] It's hard to tell. Such a puffy looking thing.

BOBBY.

I'll tell you what it's for. It's to put on your head when you dust. [*He puts it on his head. AMY makes a grab at him. He jumps away from her. MRS. SPENCER and AMY laugh at him. He ties two of the ribbons under his chin.*] These are the strings. [*Tosses the other two over his shoulders.*] And these two are the tails. [*MRS. SPENCER is convulsed with laughter. AMY goes towards him to take it from him. He dodges her.*]

AMY.

Don't, Bobby, you'll crush it.

BOBBY.

[*Taking his handkerchief from his pocket, he pretends to dust a chair.*] You see you go about in it to do your mornin' dustin' like this. It keeps the dust out of your hair.

AMY.

[*Follows him laughing, but a little alarmed for the safety of the present.*] Take it off. [*He runs away from her behind the sofa.*] Catch him, mother. [*They chase BOBBY round the furniture, all three laughing merrily.*]

[*KATE appears at the window dressed as before. She looks pale and dejected. She watches them without smiling before they see her. MRS. SPENCER sees her first.*]

MRS. SPENCER.

Oh, there's Cousin Kate.

[*They stop the chase. KATE comes forward trying to smile.*

MRS. SPENCER.

[*Out of breath.*] What children you must think us, all romping like this, but we're so happy. [BOBBY *throws the handkerchief case over to AMY, who catches it.* MRS. SPENCER *jumps with fright as it passes her.*] Oh, dear!

AMY.

[*Smiling, as she comes towards KATE.*] We're in rather better spirits than when you came, aren't we?

MRS. SPENCER.

We were laughing over one of Amy's wedding presents. [*To AMY.*] Just show Kate that thing Mrs. Darbisher sent you.

AMY.

No, mother, dear. You've said quite enough things about it.

[*AMY sits on the sofa and packs up the present.*

KATE.

How d'you do, Bobby! I haven't seen you.

BOBBY.

How d'you do, Cousin Kate! I saw *you* when you didn't see *me*.

KATE.

Did you? Where?

BOBBY.

Gettin' out of the train with Heath.

MRS. SPENCER.

How funny you and Heath should travel together, and you'd no idea who he was?

KATE.

No. You never told me he was an Irishman.

MRS. SPENCER.

I thought everyone knew. [KATE *smiles wearily and lays her sunshade down.*] Kate, you look tired.

KATE.

I am rather tired.

MRS. SPENCER.

You ought to have rested after your journey.

KATE.

[*Wistfully.*] It would have been wiser.



AMY.

[*Smiles.*] Such an exciting journey, too.  
[*Rises, with the parcel.*]

KATE.

[*Smiling at AMY.*] Yes.

MRS. SPENCER.

You'll feel better after supper.

AMY.

Come along, Bobby. We'll put Mrs. Darbisher's present among the rest.

MRS. SPENCER.

Yes. *That* ought to make her feel ashamed.

[*AMY and BOBBY go out. MRS. SPENCER looks after them, smiling affectionately.*]

MRS. SPENCER.

Dear Amy. She's so happy again. You know I *said* it would be all right when *you* came.

KATE.

[*Earnestly.*] I hope it will.

[*MRS. SPENCER impressed by her earnest tone looks hard at her.*]

MRS. SPENCER.

Tell me, Kate. Is this something really serious?

KATE.

What?

MRS. SPENCER.

What you told me before you went to Owlscot. You said you were in love.

KATE.

It's all over now.

MRS. SPENCER.

Already? I thought it was only just beginning from the way you carried on.

KATE.

I lost my head a little, I suppose, but I soon saw it couldn't come to anything.

MRS. SPENCER.

I should have thought you'd be the last person in the world to lose your head about a man, with all your experience.

KATE.

[*Trying to speak lightly at the beginning of her speech, but carried away by the intensity of her emotion as she proceeds.*] And boasting. I who have written a score of love-scenes to show you how a woman can turn a man round her little finger. I who knew exactly how close the moth dare fly to the flame. It's so easy to be wise about

love, if you aren't in love. But when you've given yourself body and soul, you don't stop to think of the effect you are making — you lose yourself — you only see him, him — [*Seeing MRS. SPENCER watching her narrowly, she checks her emotion and says weakly.*] — I should think.

MRS. SPENCER.

I hoped you'd fallen in love with someone nice that you could marry.

KATE.

[*Gravely.*] I shall never marry. [*Trying to laugh at herself.*] I know they always say that [*gravely*], but I *really* shan't.

MRS. SPENCER.

Why not?

KATE.

There are reasons.

MRS. SPENCER.

Do you know something against him?

KATE.

Oh, no — nothing.

MRS. SPENCER.

[*With sympathetic curiosity.*] Perhaps he isn't in your own position or can't afford to support you?

KATE.

Oh, that wouldn't matter. Don't let us talk about it. It's a shame to bother you with *my* troubles when you are all so happy.

MRS. SPENCER.

But I want you to be happy, too. I should so like to see you well married. I often think you must be lonely living all by yourself.

KATE.

[*Dejectedly.*] I have my work.

MRS. SPENCER.

I suppose that's it. You won't give up your work for him. I don't see why you can't have both. You could easily arrange to take three or four mornings off a week to write in.

KATE.

My dear funny Sarah, don't say any more about it, or you'll make me laugh. [*Cries and turns away from* MRS. SPENCER, *wiping her eyes.*]

MRS. SPENCER.

[*Affectionately.*] Never mind, dear, I daresay it will all work out right. We shall soon be having another wedding.

KATE.

[*Through her tears.*] I shall never have a wedding.

MRS. SPENCER.

Is he married?

KATE.

No.

MRS. SPENCER.

Engaged?

KATE.

Yes — he's engaged.

MRS. SPENCER.

Then he must break it off.

KATE.

But what about *her*?

MRS. SPENCER.

I'm sure she wouldn't make him half as good a wife as you would.

KATE.

You can talk like that about her if she's someone you never saw or heard of, but not if she's an alive person — that you love.

MRS. SPENCER.

That makes a difference, doesn't it? It wouldn't

matter if she was just Miss Jones or Miss Smith, but — if it were Amy for instance.

KATE.

[*Sighing.*] Yes, — if — it were Amy.

MRS. SPENCER.

Poor Kate.

KATE.

[*Bravely blinking back her tears.*] Oh, well, I'm not the first woman who gave her heart to the wrong man. I shan't die of it. [*Breaking down.*] I wish I could.

[*AMY and BOBBY enter. KATE goes out quickly without noticing them. BOBBY closes the door after her.*]

BOBBY and AMY.

[*Looking after KATE.*] What's the matter with Cousin Kate?

MRS. SPENCER.

She's caught a chill. [*To AMY.*] What time is Heath coming?

AMY.

He didn't say. I suppose he'll come as soon as he has changed his things.

MRS. SPENCER.

He may not come till after supper if we don't ask him. Bobby, run round to Heath's lodgings

and say we expect him to supper. We'll put it half an hour later to give him time.

BOBBY.

All right. [*Goes out at the window.*]

MRS. SPENCER.

We must give Heath a rousing welcome. I'll put on my black silk, and you can wear your new christaline muslin. I hope the fowl will go round. [*Her attention is attracted by something outside.*] Oh, there's Mr. Bartlett coming round the corner. I wonder where he's going. [*Goes to the window.*]

AMY.

[*Embarrassed.*] I expect he's coming here.

MRS. SPENCER.

He wouldn't come here at supper time.

AMY.

Yes, I asked him — a long time ago — before Cousin Kate came.

[*MRS. SPENCER turns to AMY, visibly annoyed.*]

MRS. SPENCER.

Oh, Amy! And I thought we were going to have such a nice little supper all by ourselves, and now — with Mr. Bartlett here — we can't laugh.

AMY.

It can't be helped now.

MRS. SPENCER.

It could have been helped before.

AMY.

Shall I tell Jane to excuse us?

MRS. SPENCER.

[*Wavering.*] I wonder. Do you think we could? [*Bows and smiles amiably from the window.*] Good evening, Mr. Bartlett. [*Turns gloomily to AMY.*] It's too late now. I suppose there's nothing for it but to look as if we were expecting him. [*Sits down, looking very cross.*] The fowl won't go round.

AMY.

[*Looking anxiously at her mother.*] Do say something pleasant and put him at his ease.

[*JANE enters.*

JANE.

Mr. Bartlett!

[*MR. BARTLETT enters. MRS. SPENCER rises and greets him with cordiality, shakes his hand. JANE goes out.*

MRS. SPENCER.

Well, Mr. Bartlett, this is a pleasant surprise.



AMY.

Not a surprise, mother.

MRS. SPENCER.

Oh, no — [*with a look at AMY*]. No, of course not. We've been waiting a long time.

BARTLETT.

I'm afraid I'm late.

MRS. SPENCER.

[*Confused.*] Oh, no, but —

AMY.

[*Coming to the rescue.*] She means Heath. He's coming to supper. That is our pleasant surprise.

[*BARTLETT looks gravely at AMY. She returns his look, then turns away.*]

MRS. SPENCER.

[*To AMY.*] Yes. [*To BARTLETT.*] I didn't mean *you* were a pleasant surprise.

[*AMY and MRS. SPENCER give an awkward laugh.*]

AMY.

Oh, mother. [*Hurriedly to MRS. SPENCER.*] I'll tell Jane to set two extra places.

[*AMY goes out. MRS. SPENCER and MR. BARTLETT sit down together.*]

BARTLETT.

[*Impressively.*] I presume I am correct in surmising that Mr. Desmond's escapade is forgiven?

MRS. SPENCER.

Well, yes. Amy saw him this afternoon at Owlscoot and they seem to have made it up.

BARTLETT.

Does she know about that conversation you and I had before she sent her letter to him?

MRS. SPENCER.

[*Smiling uneasily.*] Well, no. You see the engagement was never really broken off, so I couldn't very well say anything — could I? No.

BARTLETT.

There was a distinct understanding between us that she should be given her choice.

MRS. SPENCER.

I suppose there was — in a way. [*JANE enters, with a lamp turned low, which she sets on the table. MRS. SPENCER, relieved by this interruption, exclaims chèerfully.*] Oh, here's Jane with the lamp. [*Springs up.*] Now, Mr. Bartlett, perhaps you would like to smoke while we are dressing. You do smoke, don't you?

BARTLETT.

[*In his genial manner, because of JANE'S presence.*] I occasionally indulge in a weed.

MRS. SPENCER.

We allow smoking — in the summer house.

[BARTLETT goes out by the window, taking a cigar from his pocket. JANE is absorbed, turning up the lamp, peering closely at it. KATE enters in the same dress, but without her hat.]

KATE.

I think I left my sunshade here.

MRS. SPENCER.

Did you, dear?

[MRS. SPENCER goes out.]

KATE.

Have you seen it, Jane?

JANE.

[*Taking the sunshade from the desk.*] Here it is, Miss.

KATE.

[*Taking it from JANE.*] Thank you.

JANE.

[*Grinning.*] I thought it didn't look like one

of *ours*. We always get a sight of the fashions when *you* come. [KATE is about to go to the door and stops when JANE speaks.] We shall be quite a party at supper, Miss.

KATE.

Why? Who's coming?

JANE.

There's Mr. Bartlett, and Mr. 'eath —

KATE.

[*Aside.*] Heath. [*To JANE.*] Come to my room and tell me as soon as he comes.

JANE.

Yes, miss. [*The front door bell rings.*] I expect that's him now.

KATE.

[*Giving her sunshade to JANE.*] Please put this in the hall.

[JANE takes the sunshade and goes out.]

KATE.

[*Talking to herself to control herself.*] Keep your head, Kate — be brave, dear; he mustn't think you care. Don't cry — for goodness' sake, don't cry.

[HEATH enters. *He now wears a blue serge suit.*

HEATH.

Ah! Now we have a chance to explain ourselves while they are dressing.

KATE.

[*Controlling her emotion successfully during the early part of the scene.*] I have explained myself.

HEATH.

No, you haven't.

KATE.

I only want to add that I feel very much ashamed; I should never have done what I did if I'd known you were engaged to Amy. I waited here now to ask you what you are going to say to her.

HEATH.

That depends on *you*.

KATE.

[*Alarmed, but trying to hide it.*] You must keep me out of your reckoning altogether.

HEATH.

I can't. I've been thinking it all over this last half-hour, and I see that you must have been in earnest. No one could act love like that. It wouldn't be worth while.

KATE.

[*Assuming flippancy.*] Except to a novelist getting copy.

HEATH.

Please don't talk that way about it.

KATE.

[*Facing him.*] We must understand each other now.

HEATH.

You mean you were just dissecting emotion, analysing passion — for experience — to put in a book?

KATE.

[*Uneasily.*] Yes — that was it.

HEATH.

If you meant to amuse yourself, making a fool of me —

KATE.

[*Interrupting.*] I'm sorry I hurt you.

HEATH.

Yes, but why did you try to stop me coming in the house — why did you keep me at arm's length for ever so long?

KATE.

[*Uneasily; assuming flippancy.*] It's part of the game to seem reluctant at first.

HEATH.

[*Abruptly.*] Why did you tremble so when I touched your hand?

KATE.

[*Taken aback by his abrupt question.*] Did I?

HEATH.

Yes, and you stammered and flushed.

KATE.

I had to keep saying to myself — “Now what would a woman who really felt it all do here?” She’d tremble and stammer — she’d —

HEATH.

[*Watching her calmly.*] That’s silly.

KATE.

It’s my explanation. [*Sits down, looking away from him.*]

HEATH.

She might tremble and stammer intentionally, but she couldn’t flush unless she felt. No one can. You were afraid then, *really* afraid. You started to go, but you didn’t go — you stayed. Oh, no, you weren’t playing then.

KATE.

One must be a little bit in earnest or there’s no excitement in a flirtation.

HEATH.

If ours was a flirtation, what is there left for love?

KATE.

Did I flirt so well you couldn't tell the difference?

HEATH.

You didn't flirt fair. Flirtation is a game with rules, and you cheated.

KATE.

I've told you I'm ashamed. Won't you accept my apology?

HEATH.

*[Hardens his face and his voice, going a step to her as he speaks.]* Shall I tell you what I think of a woman who deliberately sets to work to steal a man's love — without pity or passion, just to try her power and satisfy her vanity?

KATE.

*[Falteringly.]* You can if you like. I daresay I've deserved it.

*[HEATH looks at her in silence; then his face relaxes. He speaks with a sudden burst of genuine emotion.]*

HEATH.

Oh, I — I don't believe it of you. I've only to look at you to see you aren't a fraud. [KATE



*keyed up to hear him denounce her is thrown off her guard by his unexpected speech. She looks up at him gratefully. He kneels beside her speaking with increasing emotion.]* I know you love me. I never opened my heart to anyone as I did to you. It seems so natural to say everything to you, just as I think of it. I'd be ashamed to talk such foolishness to anybody else — [*smiling at her*] — about Silverlocks and the squirrels and our little house in the wood.

KATE.

[*Puts out her hand as if to stop him speaking.*] Listen. Let me tell you. When I found out that you were Amy's lover, I was so afraid. I thought I'd taken you from her. So I pretended I'd only been flirting. I thought it was the only way to end it. But I can't do it any more. [*She rises, moving about as she speaks. He rises, too, watching her.*] We might have known it would come to no good, beginning like that.

HEATH.

[*Half-sitting on the edge of the table in the same attitude and speaking with the same tone of enthusiasm as he spoke a similar speech near the beginning of Act II, that he recalls, now unconsciously, reproducing the same effect.*] It began so perfectly, didn't it? How we flew through the woods and over the towns — a god and a goddess dropped from two planets, do you remember?

KATE.

[*Very seriously, facing him.*] But now we've facts to face, not romances.

HEATH.

[*With enthusiasm.*] The beauty of it is that you and I can turn facts into romances. A third-class railway carriage becomes a royal chariot when we ride in it together. I think our meeting was the greatest thing that ever happened in this world.

KATE.

To us, but only to us. The world didn't cry for joy when we met. It was only you and I.

HEATH.

[*Quietly.*] You know Amy did tell me she couldn't marry me unless I changed.

KATE.

Be patient with her. She's young yet, and she's sorry. She's getting all ready for her wedding. You can't leave her now.

HEATH.

It isn't that I don't care what becomes of Amy. I've tried very hard to be fair to her—I gave her a chance to call me back if she wanted me.

KATE.

She did call you back.

HEATH.

Not for a long time. I waited more than an hour.

KATE.

An hour! That's not long in a lifetime.

HEATH.

It's long in the crisis of a lifetime. If I'd told you I considered myself free if you didn't call me back at once, you wouldn't have kept me waiting a whole hour before you sent. You'd have come yourself — wouldn't you?

*[Comes close to her.]*

KATE.

*[Firmly.]* I can't marry you.

HEATH.

*[With sudden alarm.]* You're not engaged?

KATE.

No.

HEATH.

*[Relieved.]* Ah! You gave me such a start for a moment.

KATE.

But I can't take you from her. You don't

know how this little family trust me. They said things would be better when I came. And just now, after Amy had seen you, they were all so happy again. All their clouds had gone and they said Cousin Kate had rolled them away, so how could I be the one to take you from them?

HEATH.

But there's you and I, too, with long lives to live. Think what they'll be if we live them together. Think what they'll be if we don't. I want to do the straight thing. I'm sure it's more honest to tell Amy the truth. [MR. BARTLETT *slowly passes the window without, smoking.*] There's Bartlett, I'll ask him. [*Goes to the window.*]

KATE.

[*Alarmed.*] No.

HEATH.

Why not? I won't mention your name, of course.

KATE.

But you and I don't go by what *he* says.

HEATH.

No, but *they* do. [*Goes to the window and calls.*] Bartlett! [MR. BARTLETT *throws end of cigar away and enters by the window.*] I've got rather a hard nut to crack, and I want to ask you what you think. You know about me going

away, and — it wasn't all my fault, but after I went — well, the fact is I've fallen in love with somebody else and I want to know what you think I ought to do?

BARTLETT.

[*Impressively.*] This is a most grievous state of affairs.

HEATH.

Yes, but there isn't time for all that. I must meet Amy in a minute. I think I ought to tell her the truth, and — [*indicating KATE*] she thinks I ought not to. What do *you* think?

BARTLETT.

I think a man should speak the truth at all seasons.

HEATH.

Now, that makes me hesitate. When I see my duty and inclination looking the same, I always begin to suspect myself.

BARTLETT.

Before I knew what your inclination was I thought it advisable to break off this engagement. I said so when I brought your message.

HEATH.

Did you tell Amy so?

BARTLETT.

I was prepared to do so, but I was not allowed.

HEATH.

Why?

BARTLETT.

[*Indicating* KATE.] This lady can tell you. She was with Miss Spencer when she wrote that letter I brought you.

HEATH.

[*To* KATE.] Did you urge her to write it?

KATE.

I only put the case plainly before her. She made her own choice.

BARTLETT.

[*With repressed resentment.*] You took great pains to prevent me seeing her.

KATE.

[*Answering him in the same tone.*] Because you were trying to take an unfair advantage of her.

BARTLETT.

Really, I must take exception —

KATE.

[*Interrupting him.*] There's no time to mince

matters. The happiness of this whole family is at stake — more than that — their faith in all human nature through us three. I can't stand seeing their hearts broken by our selfishness.

BARTLETT.

[*Solemnly.*] I am not actuated by selfishness in the discharge of my duties.

KATE.

[*Turning on him indignantly.*] You don't see through yourself. You are so sure of your own goodness you never search your motives. You smother them up with long words and tell yourself you are doing the Will of Heaven — because it suits you. You're not honest with yourself —

MRS. SPENCER.

[*Calling off stage.*] Amy!

KATE.

[*Imploringly to HEATH.*] She's coming.

AMY.

[*Calling off stage.*] I'm coming.

BARTLETT.

[*Going close to HEATH.*] If you wish to break your engagement now, I am ready to propose to her myself.

HEATH.

You want to strike a bargain with me. No, I'm — no. I won't — [*To KATE.*] You are right; I'll keep my promise to Amy. [*Enter MRS. SPENCER in her black silk, followed by AMY in her new dress, then BOBBY, in an Eton suit. They all smile with embarrassment and come in a procession towards HEATH. BOBBY closes the door.*]

MRS. SPENCER.

[*Holding out her hand to HEATH.*] Welcome home.

BARTLETT.

[*Standing behind a chair, speaks with serious formality so that they all turn to him.*] Mrs. Spencer, Miss Spencer, all of you. It will soon be my solemn task to say to the congregation, "If any man can show any just cause why these two persons may not lawfully be joined together, let him now speak or else hereafter forever hold his peace."

MRS. SPENCER.

What do you mean?

BARTLETT.

Mr. Desmond has just made me a confession. If he will not repeat it, the painful duty devolves upon me.

AMY.

[*Stepping forward.*] No, I don't want to hear



it. If Heath has done anything he's ashamed of, he'll tell me and I'll forgive him. He has plenty of things to forgive me, I'll gladly forgive him one.

[MR. BARTLETT turns and goes slowly into the garden. KATE comes towards AMY and embraces her.]

KATE.

[Brokenly.] Bless you, Amy.

MRS. SPENCER.

[Taking her cue from KATE, presses HEATH'S hand.] Bless you, Heath. Mr. Bartlett always upsets me so. He has no tact. [Turns to AMY.] I suppose he'll still stay to supper.

[Goes out. BOBBY follows her.]

AMY.

[Smiling at KATE.] Congratulate Heath, too.

[KATE and HEATH grasp hands, looking steadily at each other for a moment. Then KATE withdraws her hand and goes out.]

AMY.

[Crossing to the sofa.] Heath! [HEATH sits on the sofa with AMY.] Before you confess to me, I think I had better confess to you. I have been guilty of a very grave offence since you went away.

HEATH.

[*Dejectedly.*] I seem to have been born to make trouble.

AMY.

It was in the midst of my uncertainty — not knowing if you would come back or not — someone came and spoke to me in a way I ought not to have allowed, because I was still engaged to you. [*Faltering.*] And I let him go on.

HEATH.

Do you mean he asked you to marry him?

AMY.

He was beginning to. Then Cousin Kate came.

HEATH.

So he didn't finish?

AMY.

No.

HEATH.

Then what have I got to blame you for?

AMY.

My wicked thoughts. [*HEATH gives a quaint tired look away from her.*] If Cousin Kate hadn't come he would have finished.

HEATH.

And would you have accepted him?

AMY.

[*Hanging her head.*] Yes.

HEATH.

[*Distressed.*] To think I should almost have driven you to marry a man you didn't love.

AMY.

[*In mild reproach.*] Oh, Heath! I should never sink so low as that.

HEATH.

[*Taken aback, smiles, and turns to look at her.*] Do you love him?

AMY.

I felt as if I could then, but now—I have succeeded in banishing him completely from my mind.

HEATH.

Am I standing between you and him?

AMY.

No, Heath. There is no question of that. He had no right to speak to me, and I had no right to listen. I shall never so forget myself again. I am quite ready to become your wife.

HEATH.

But I don't want you to sacrifice yourself.

AMY.

I am sure you will do everything to make me happy.

HEATH.

But if he could make you happier—

AMY.

Oh, Heath, I don't want to spoil your life.

HEATH.

Thank you very much. And of course I don't want to spoil yours. You know you haven't been quite satisfied with me. You wanted me to change.

AMY.

I see now that it was presumption for a girl like me to speak so to a man like you. You are so good and clever and I've never been anywhere particular. You know we must expect to make compromises when we marry. I am prepared to do this.

HEATH.

Yes, but ought you to?

AMY.

I think I shall get into Heaven sooner by keep-

ing my promises to you than by thinking only of my own soul. Oh, you needn't be afraid that I shall take my promise back now.

HEATH.

Suppose I release you from it—suppose that you'd never made it—and that I and this other man came and offered you marriage. Which of us would you choose?

AMY.

[*Hanging her head.*] I haven't thought.

HEATH.

[*Smiles.*] Do think. It's really rather important.

AMY.

I know it's very wrong to feel as I do.

HEATH.

[*Kindly.*] No, it isn't. We can't any of us help feeling as we do.

AMY.

You see, it's this way. I think perhaps I'm more cut out for a clergyman's wife—than an artist's.

HEATH.

Is the clergyman more cut out for you than the artist is? That's what I want to get at.

AMY.

I can't help feeling that he and I have more in common than you and I have.

HEATH.

Yes, but if you were free now — would he finish what he was saying when Cousin Kate came?

AMY.

I think so.

HEATH.

You are free if you wish it.

AMY.

[*Relieved.*] Oh, Heath, how generous you are! [*He smiles at her and takes her hand as a friend. She looks at him seriously.*] It doesn't seem to hurt you as much as I feared.

HEATH.

[*Gravely and kindly.*] Isn't it better for neither of us to have anything to reproach the other with?

AMY.

[*Awkwardly.*] Yes — thank you — [*Draws her hand away.*] Thank you.

HEATH.

[*Embarrassed.*] Not at all. [*He wanders*

*away and sits at some distance from AMY.]*  
*[A gong sounds.]*

AMY.

That's for supper.

MRS. SPENCER.

*[Heard off.]* Now, then, you two, I'm coming.  
*[Poking her head in playfully at the door, before she enters, expecting to surprise them in an affectionate attitude. She is greatly surprised to find them seated far apart.]* Well! That's a new-fashioned way for an engaged couple to sit.  
*[HEATH and AMY rise, embarrassed.]*

*[Enter MRS. SPENCER and BOBBY, followed by KATE. MR. BARTLETT enters at the window.]*

AMY.

*[Awkwardly.]* We are not an engaged couple.

MRS. SPENCER.

*[Amazed.]* What!

HEATH.

Amy finds she isn't cut out for an artist's wife.

AMY.

So Heath has very kindly released me from my engagement — Y-es —

*[There is an uncomfortable pause. Then*

AMY hastens into the garden. MR. BARTLETT, after a circular glance at the others, follows her.

MRS. SPENCER.

[With her back to AMY and MR. BARTLETT, as they go out.] Whose fault is it? Mr. Bartlett's, I suppose. Oh, Mr. Bartlett, I forgot you were here. [Looks round the room.] Where is he?

BOBBY.

Out in the garden with Amy.

[MRS. SPENCER marches straight towards the window.]

HEATH.

[Preventing her from going out.] Don't interrupt them. They love each other. She told me so a moment ago.

MRS. SPENCER.

Oh, Kate! What shall we do?

KATE.

Leave them.

MRS. SPENCER.

You know you can't bear him.

KATE.

That's no reason why Amy shouldn't love him.



He's a good man. I haven't the least doubt that he is held in the highest esteem all over the parish. She'll love, honour and obey him and never see through him — and then, he's her choice.

[AMY and BARTLETT enter at the window.

AMY.

[Comes towards MRS. SPENCER.] Mother, James has something to say to you.

MRS. SPENCER.

[Severely.] Who's James? [AMY indicates BARTLETT, who stands smiling in an embarrassed manner in the background. MRS. SPENCER takes AMY on one side.] But, Amy, it looks so fast for you to be engaged to one man one moment and another one the next. I don't like it.

[JANE bursts in.

JANE.

Please, mum, the fowl's growing cold.

MRS. SPENCER.

We're coming. [JANE goes out, leaving the door open. MRS. SPENCER turns to MR. BARTLETT.] Will you take Amy in to supper — James? [HEATH and KATE both give a smothered laugh. BARTLETT smiles at AMY. MRS. SPENCER says sympathetically to HEATH.] Heath, will it be too painful for you to remain?

HEATH.

[*Smiling.*] I'll try to bear it.

MRS. SPENCER.

Then please bring Cousin Kate. [*Turns to BOBBY.*] The fowl will *have* to go round.

[*MRS. SPENCER goes out with BOBBY.*  
MR. BARTLETT *smilingly offers his arm to AMY. They go out together, leaving HEATH and KATE alone, facing each other.*

HEATH.

Now, will you marry me?

KATE.

Shure, and I will.

[*They go out arm in arm.*

CURTAIN.





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