# Complete Plays of John Galsworthy eBook

## Complete Plays of John Galsworthy by John Galsworthy

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## FIRST SERIES:

**THE SILVER BOX JOY STRIFE**

## THE SILVER BOX

**A COMEDY IN THREE ACTS**

## PERSONS OF THE PLAY

*John Barthwick*, M.P., a wealthy Liberal
*Mrs*. *Barthwick*, his wife
*Jack Barthwick*, their son
*Roper*, their solicitor
*Mrs*. *Jones*, their charwoman
*Marlow*, their manservant
*Wheeler*, their maidservant
*Jones*, the stranger within their gates
*Mrs*. *Seddon*, a landlady
*snow*, a detective
A *police magistrate*
*an unknown lady*, from beyond
*two little girls*, homeless
*Livens*, their father
A *relieving officer*
A *magistrate's clerk*
*an usher*
*policemen*, *clerks*, *and others*

*Time*: The present. The action of the first two Acts takes place on Easter Tuesday; the action of the third on Easter Wednesday week.

*Act* I.
*Scene* I. Rockingham Gate. John Barthwick's dining-room.
*Scene* II. The same.
*Scene* III. The same.

*Act* II.
*Scene* I. The Jones's lodgings, Merthyr Street.
*Scene* II. John Barthwick's dining-room.

*Act* III. A London police court.

# ACT I

## SCENE I

The curtain rises on the *Barthwick's* dining-room, large, modern, and well furnished; the window curtains drawn. Electric light is burning. On the large round dining-table is set out a tray with whisky, a syphon, and a silver cigarette-box. It is past midnight.A fumbling is heard outside the door. It is opened suddenly; *Jack Barthwick* seems to fall into the room. He stands holding by the door knob, staring before him, with a beatific smile. He is in evening dress and opera hat, and carries in his hand a sky-blue velvet lady's reticule. His boyish face is freshly coloured and clean-shaven. An overcoat is hanging on his arm.

*Jack*. Hello! I've got home all ri——[Defiantly.] Who says I sh'd never 've opened th' door without 'sistance. [He staggers in, fumbling with the reticule. A lady's handkerchief and purse of crimson silk fall out.] Serve her joll' well right—everything droppin' out. Th' cat. I 've scored her off—I 've got her bag. [He swings the reticule.] Serves her joly' well right. [He takes a cigarette out of the silver box and puts it in his mouth.] Never gave tha' fellow anything! [He hunts through all his pockets and pulls a shilling out; it drops and rolls away. He looks for it.] Beastly shilling! [He looks again.] Base ingratitude! Absolutely nothing. [He laughs.] Mus' tell him I've got absolutely nothing.

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[He lurches through the door and down a corridor, and presently returns, followed by *Jones*, who is advanced in liquor. *Jones*, about thirty years of age, has hollow cheeks, black circles round his eyes, and rusty clothes: He looks as though he might be unemployed, and enters in a hang-dog manner.]

*Jack*. Sh! sh! sh! Don't you make a noise, whatever you do. Shu' the door, an' have a drink. [Very solemnly.] You helped me to open the door—I 've got nothin, for you. This is my house. My father's name's Barthwick; he's Member of Parliament—Liberal Member of Parliament: I've told you that before. Have a drink! [He pours out whisky and drinks it up.] I'm not drunk [Subsiding on a sofa.] Tha's all right. Wha's your name? My name's Barthwick, so's my father's; I'm a Liberal too—wha're you?

*Jones*. [In a thick, sardonic voice.] I'm a bloomin' Conservative. My name's Jones! My wife works 'ere; she's the char; she works 'ere.

*Jack*. Jones? [He laughs.] There's 'nother Jones at College with me. I'm not a Socialist myself; I'm a Liberal—there's ve—lill difference, because of the principles of the Lib—-Liberal Party. We're all equal before the law—tha's rot, tha's silly. [Laughs.] Wha' was I about to say? Give me some whisky.

> [*Jones* gives him the whisky he desires, together with a squirt of syphon.]

Wha' I was goin' tell you was—I 've had a row with her. [He waves the reticule.] Have a drink, Jonessh 'd never have got in without you—tha 's why I 'm giving you a drink. Don' care who knows I've scored her off. Th' cat! [He throws his feet up on the sofa.] Don' you make a noise, whatever you do. You pour out a drink—you make yourself good long, long drink—you take cigarette—you take anything you like. Sh'd never have got in without you. [Closing his eyes.] You're a Tory—you're a Tory Socialist. I'm Liberal myself—have a drink—I 'm an excel'nt chap.

[His head drops back. He, smiling, falls asleep, and *Jones* stands looking at him; then, snatching up JACK's glass, he drinks it off. He picks the reticule from off *Jack's* shirt-front, holds it to the light, and smells at it.]

*Jones*. Been on the tiles and brought 'ome some of yer cat's fur. [He stuffs it into JACK's breast pocket.]

*Jack*. [Murmuring.] I 've scored you off! You cat!

> [*Jones* looks around him furtively; he pours out whisky and drinks it. From the silver box he takes a cigarette, puffs at it, and drinks more whisky. There is no sobriety left in him.]

*Jones*. Fat lot o' things they've got 'ere! [He sees the crimson purse lying on the floor.] More cat's fur. Puss, puss! [He fingers it, drops it on the tray, and looks at *Jack*.] Calf! Fat calf! [He sees his own presentment in a mirror. Lifting his hands, with fingers spread, he stares at it; then looks again at *Jack*, clenching his fist as if to batter in his sleeping, smiling face. Suddenly he tilts the rest o f the whisky into the glass and drinks it. With cunning glee he takes the silver box and purse and pockets them.] I 'll score you off too, that 's wot I 'll do!

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[He gives a little snarling laugh and lurches to the door. His shoulder rubs against the switch; the light goes out. There is a sound as of a closing outer door.]

The curtain falls.

The curtain rises again at once.

## SCENE II

In the *Barthwick's* dining-room. *Jack* is still asleep; the morning light is coming through the curtains. The time is half-past eight. *Wheeler*, brisk person enters with a dust-pan, and *Mrs*. *Jones* more slowly with a scuttle.

Wheeler. [Drawing the curtains.] That precious husband of yours was round for you after you'd gone yesterday, Mrs. Jones. Wanted your money for drink, I suppose. He hangs about the corner here half the time. I saw him outside the "Goat and Bells" when I went to the post last night. If I were you I would n't live with him. I would n't live with a man that raised his hand to me. I wouldn't put up with it. Why don't you take your children and leave him? If you put up with 'im it'll only make him worse. I never can see why, because a man's married you, he should knock you about.

*Mrs*. *Jones*. [Slim, dark-eyed, and dark-haired; oval-faced, and with a smooth, soft, even voice; her manner patient, her way of talking quite impersonal; she wears a blue linen dress, and boots with holes.] It was nearly two last night before he come home, and he wasn't himself. He made me get up, and he knocked me about; he didn't seem to know what he was saying or doing. Of course I would leave him, but I'm really afraid of what he'd do to me. He 's such a violent man when he's not himself.

*Wheeler*. Why don't you get him locked up? You'll never have any peace until you get him locked up. If I were you I'd go to the police court tomorrow. That's what I would do.

*Mrs*. *Jones*. Of course I ought to go, because he does treat me so badly when he's not himself. But you see, Bettina, he has a very hard time—he 's been out of work two months, and it preys upon his mind. When he's in work he behaves himself much better. It's when he's out of work that he's so violent.

*Wheeler*. Well, if you won't take any steps you 'll never get rid of him.

*Mrs*. *Jones*. Of course it's very wearing to me; I don't get my sleep at nights. And it 's not as if I were getting help from him, because I have to do for the children and all of us. And he throws such dreadful things up at me, talks of my having men to follow me about. Such a thing never happens; no man ever speaks to me. And of course, it's just the other way. It's what he does that's wrong and makes me so unhappy. And then he

‘s always threatenin’ to cut my throat if I leave him.  It’s all the drink, and things preying on his mind; he ’s not a bad man really.  Sometimes he’ll speak quite kind to me, but I’ve stood so much from him, I don’t feel it in me to speak kind back, but just keep myself to myself.  And he’s all right with the children too, except when he’s not himself.

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*Wheeler*. You mean when he's drunk, the beauty.

*Mrs*. *Jones*. Yes. [Without change of voice] There's the young gentleman asleep on the sofa.

[They both look silently at Jack.]

*Mrs*. *Jones*. [At last, in her soft voice.] He does n't look quite himself.

*Wheeler*. He's a young limb, that's what he is. It 's my belief he was tipsy last night, like your husband. It 's another kind of bein' out of work that sets him to drink. I 'll go and tell Marlow. This is his job.

[She goes.]

[Mrs. Jones, upon her knees, begins a gentle sweeping.]

*Jack*. [Waking.] Who's there? What is it?

*Mrs*. *Jones*. It's me, sir, Mrs. Jones.

*Jack*. [Sitting up and looking round.] Where is it—what—what time is it?

*Mrs*. *Jones*. It's getting on for nine o'clock, sir.

*Jack*. For nine! Why—what! [Rising, and loosening his tongue; putting hands to his head, and staring hard at Mrs. Jones.] Look here, you, Mrs.——Mrs. Jones—don't you say you caught me asleep here.

*Mrs*. *Jones*. No, sir, of course I won't sir.

*Jack*. It's quite an accident; I don't know how it happened. I must have forgotten to go to bed. It's a queer thing. I 've got a most beastly headache. Mind you don't say anything, Mrs. Jones.

[Goes out and passes *Marlow* in the doorway. *Marlow* is young and quiet; he is cleanshaven, and his hair is brushed high from his forehead in a coxcomb. Incidentally a butler, he is first a man. He looks at *Mrs*. *Jones*, and smiles a private smile.]

*Marlow*. Not the first time, and won't be the last. Looked a bit dicky, eh, Mrs. Jones?

*Mrs*. *Jones*. He did n't look quite himself. Of course I did n't take notice.

*Marlow*. You're used to them. How's your old man?

*Mrs*. *Jones*. [Softly as throughout.] Well, he was very bad last night; he did n't seem to know what he was about. He was very late, and he was most abusive. But now, of course, he's asleep.

*Marlow*. That's his way of finding a job, eh?

*Mrs*. *Jones*. As a rule, Mr. Marlow, he goes out early every morning looking for work, and sometimes he comes in fit to drop—and of course I can't say he does n't try to get it, because he does. Trade's very bad. [She stands quite still, her fan and brush before her, at the beginning and the end of long vistas of experience, traversing them with her impersonal eye.] But he's not a good husband to me—last night he hit me, and he was so dreadfully abusive.

*Marlow*. Bank 'oliday, eh! He 's too fond of the "Goat and Bells," that's what's the matter with him. I see him at the corner late every night. He hangs about.

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*Mrs*. *Jones*. He gets to feeling very low walking about all day after work, and being refused so often, and then when he gets a drop in him it goes to his head. But he shouldn't treat his wife as he treats me. Sometimes I 've had to go and walk about at night, when he wouldn't let me stay in the room; but he's sorry for it afterwards. And he hangs about after me, he waits for me in the street; and I don't think he ought to, because I 've always been a good wife to him. And I tell him Mrs. Barthwick wouldn't like him coming about the place. But that only makes him angry, and he says dreadful things about the gentry. Of course it was through me that he first lost his place, through his not treating me right; and that's made him bitter against the gentry. He had a very good place as groom in the country; but it made such a stir, because of course he did n't treat me right.

*Marlow*. Got the sack?

*Mrs*. *Jones*. Yes; his employer said he couldn't keep him, because there was a great deal of talk; and he said it was such a bad example. But it's very important for me to keep my work here; I have the three children, and I don't want him to come about after me in the streets, and make a disturbance as he sometimes does.

*Marlow*. [Holding up the empty decanter.] Not a drain! Next time he hits you get a witness and go down to the court——

*Mrs*. *Jones*. Yes, I think I 've made up my mind. I think I ought to.

*Marlow*. That's right. Where's the ciga——?

[He searches for the silver box; he looks at *Mrs*. *Jones*, who is sweeping on her hands and knees; he checks himself and stands reflecting. From the tray he picks two half-smoked cigarettes, and reads the name on them.]

Nestor—where the deuce——?

> [With a meditative air he looks again at *Mrs*. *Jones*, and, taking up *Jack's* overcoat, he searches in the pockets. *Wheeler*, with a tray of breakfast things, comes in.]

*Marlow*. [Aside to *Wheeler*.] Have you seen the cigarette-box?

*Wheeler*. No.

*Marlow*. Well, it's gone. I put it on the tray last night. And he's been smoking. [Showing her the ends of cigarettes.] It's not in these pockets. He can't have taken it upstairs this morning! Have a good look in his room when he comes down. Who's been in here?

*Wheeler*. Only me and Mrs. Jones.

*Mrs*. *Jones*.  I ’ve finished here; shall I do the drawing-room now?

*Wheeler*. [Looking at her doubtfully.] Have you seen——Better do the boudwower first.

[*Mrs*. *Jones* goes out with pan and brush.  *Marlow* and *Wheeler* look each other in the face.]

*Marlow*.  It’ll turn up.

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*Wheeler*. [Hesitating.] You don't think she——
[Nodding at the door.]

*Marlow*. [Stoutly.] I don't——I never believes anything of anybody.

*Wheeler*. But the master'll have to be told.

*Marlow*. You wait a bit, and see if it don't turn up. Suspicion's no business of ours. I set my mind against it.

The curtain falls.

The curtain rises again at once.

## SCENE III

*Barthwick* and *Mrs*. *Barthwick* are seated at the breakfast table. He is a man between fifty and sixty; quietly important, with a bald forehead, and pince-nez, and the "Times" in his hand. She is a lady of nearly fifty, well dressed, with greyish hair, good features, and a decided manner. They face each other.

Barthwick. [From behind his paper.] The Labour man has got in at the by-election for Barnside, my dear.

*Mrs*. *Barthwick*. Another Labour? I can't think what on earth the country is about.

*Barthwick*. I predicted it. It's not a matter of vast importance.

*Mrs*. *Barthwick*. Not? How can you take it so calmly, John? To me it's simply outrageous. And there you sit, you Liberals, and pretend to encourage these people!

*Barthwick*. [Frowning.] The representation of all parties is necessary for any proper reform, for any proper social policy.

*Mrs*. *Barthwick*. I've no patience with your talk of reform—all that nonsense about social policy. We know perfectly well what it is they want; they want things for themselves. Those Socialists and Labour men are an absolutely selfish set of people. They have no sense of patriotism, like the upper classes; they simply want what we've got.

*Barthwick*. Want what we've got! [He stares into space.] My dear, what are you talking about? [With a contortion.] I 'm no alarmist.

*Mrs*. *Barthwick*. Cream? Quite uneducated men! Wait until they begin to tax our investments. I 'm convinced that when they once get a chance they will tax everything

—they ’ve no feeling for the country.  You Liberals and Conservatives, you ’re all alike; you don’t see an inch before your noses.  You’ve no imagination, not a scrap of imagination between you.  You ought to join hands and nip it in the bud.

*Barthwick*.  You ’re talking nonsense!  How is it possible for Liberals and Conservatives to join hands, as you call it?  That shows how absurd it is for women——Why, the very essence of a Liberal is to trust in the people!

*Mrs*. *Barthwick*.  Now, John, eat your breakfast.  As if there were any real difference between you and the Conservatives.  All the upper classes have the same interests to protect, and the same principles. [Calmly.] Oh! you’re sitting upon a volcano, John.

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*Barthwick*. What!

*Mrs*. *Barthwick*. I read a letter in the paper yesterday. I forget the man's name, but it made the whole thing perfectly clear. You don't look things in the face.

*Barthwick*. Indeed! [Heavily.] I am a Liberal! Drop the subject, please!

*Mrs*. *Barthwick*. Toast? I quite agree with what this man says: Education is simply ruining the lower classes. It unsettles them, and that's the worst thing for us all. I see an enormous difference in the manner of servants.

*Barthwick*, [With suspicious emphasis.] I welcome any change that will lead to something better. [He opens a letter.] H'm! This is that affair of Master Jack's again. "High Street, Oxford. Sir, We have received Mr. John Barthwick, Senior's, draft for forty pounds!" Oh! the letter's to him! "We now enclose the cheque you cashed with us, which, as we stated in our previous letter, was not met on presentation at your bank. We are, Sir, yours obediently, Moss and Sons, Tailors." H 'm! [Staring at the cheque.] A pretty business altogether! The boy might have been prosecuted.

*Mrs*. *Barthwick*. Come, John, you know Jack did n't mean anything; he only thought he was overdrawing. I still think his bank ought to have cashed that cheque. They must know your position.

*Barthwick*. [Replacing in the envelope the letter and the cheque.] Much good that would have done him in a court of law.

> [He stops as *Jack* comes in, fastening his waistcoat and staunching a razor cut upon his chin.]

*Jack*. [Sitting down between them, and speaking with an artificial joviality.] Sorry I 'm late. [He looks lugubriously at the dishes.] Tea, please, mother. Any letters for me? [*Barthwick* hands the letter to him.] But look here, I say, this has been opened! I do wish you would n't——

*Barthwick*. [Touching the envelope.] I suppose I 'm entitled to this name.

*Jack*. [Sulkily.] Well, I can't help having your name, father! [He reads the letter, and mutters.] Brutes!

*Barthwick*. [Eyeing him.] You don't deserve to be so well out of that.

*Jack*. Haven't you ragged me enough, dad?

*Mrs*. *Barthwick*. Yes, John, let Jack have his breakfast.

*Barthwick*. If you hadn't had me to come to, where would you have been? It's the merest accident—suppose you had been the son of a poor man or a clerk. Obtaining money with a cheque you knew your bank could not meet. It might have ruined you for life. I can't see what's to become of you if these are your principles. I never did anything of the sort myself.

*Jack*. I expect you always had lots of money. If you've got plenty of money, of course ——

*Barthwick*. On the contrary, I had not your advantages. My father kept me very short of money.

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*Jack*. How much had you, dad?

*Barthwick*. It's not material. The question is, do you feel the gravity of what you did?

*Jack*. I don't know about the gravity. Of course, I 'm very sorry if you think it was wrong. Have n't I said so! I should never have done it at all if I had n't been so jolly hard up.

*Barthwick*. How much of that forty pounds have you got left, Jack?

*Jack*. [Hesitating.] I don't know—not much.

*Barthwick*. How much?

*Jack*. [Desperately.] I have n't got any.

*Barthwick*. What?

*Jack*. I know I 've got the most beastly headache.

[He leans his head on his hand.]

*Mrs*. *Barthwick*. Headache? My dear boy! Can't you eat any breakfast?

*Jack*. [Drawing in his breath.] Too jolly bad!

*Mrs*. *Barthwick*. I'm so sorry. Come with me; dear; I'll give you something that will take it away at once.

[They leave the room; and *Barthwick*, tearing up the letter, goes to the fireplace and puts the pieces in the fire. While he is doing this *Marlow* comes in, and looking round him, is about quietly to withdraw.]

*Barthwick*. What's that? What d 'you want?

*Marlow*. I was looking for Mr. John, sir.

*Barthwick*. What d' you want Mr. John for?

*Marlow*. [With hesitation.] I thought I should find him here, sir.

*Barthwick*. [Suspiciously.] Yes, but what do you want him for?

*Marlow*. [Offhandedly.] There's a lady called—asked to speak to him for a minute, sir.

*Barthwick*. A lady, at this time in the morning. What sort of a lady?

*Marlow*. [Without expression in his voice.] I can't tell, sir; no particular sort. She might be after charity. She might be a Sister of Mercy, I should think, sir.

*Barthwick*. Is she dressed like one?

*Marlow*. No, sir, she's in plain clothes, sir.

*Barthwick*. Did n't she say what she wanted?

*Marlow*. No sir.

*Barthwick*. Where did you leave her?

*Marlow*. In the hall, sir.

*Barthwick*. In the hall? How do you know she's not a thief—not got designs on the house?

*Marlow*. No, sir, I don't fancy so, sir.

*Barthwick*. Well, show her in here; I'll see her myself.

[*Marlow* goes out with a private gesture of dismay. He soon returns, ushering in a young pale lady with dark eyes and pretty figure, in a modish, black, but rather shabby dress, a black and white trimmed hat with a bunch of Parma violets wrongly placed, and fuzzy-spotted veil. At the Sight of *Mr*. *Barthwick* she exhibits every sign of nervousness. *Marlow* goes out.]

*Unknown lady*. Oh! but—I beg pardon there's some mistake—I [She turns to fly.]

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*Barthwick*. Whom did you want to see, madam?

*Unknown*. [Stopping and looking back.] It was Mr. John Barthwick I wanted to see.

*Barthwick*. I am John Barthwick, madam. What can I have the pleasure of doing for you?

*Unknown*. Oh! I—I don't [She drops her eyes. *Barthwick* scrutinises her, and purses his lips.]

*Barthwick*. It was my son, perhaps, you wished to see?

*Unknown*. [Quickly.] Yes, of course, it's your son.

*Barthwick*. May I ask whom I have the pleasure of speaking to?

*Unknown*. [Appeal and hardiness upon her face.] My name is——oh! it does n't matter—I don't want to make any fuss. I just want to see your son for a minute. [Boldly.] In fact, I must see him.

*Barthwick*. [Controlling his uneasiness.] My son is not very well. If necessary, no doubt I could attend to the matter; be so kind as to let me know——

*Unknown*. Oh! but I must see him—I 've come on purpose—[She bursts out nervously.] I don't want to make any fuss, but the fact is, last—last night your son took away—he took away my [She stops.]

*Barthwick*. [Severely.] Yes, madam, what?

*Unknown*. He took away my—my reticule.

*Barthwick*. Your reti——?

*Unknown*. I don't care about the reticule; it's not that I want—I 'm sure I don't want to make any fuss—[her face is quivering]—but —but—all my money was in it!

*Barthwick*. In what—in what?

*Unknown*. In my purse, in the reticule. It was a crimson silk purse. Really, I wouldn't have come—I don't want to make any fuss. But I must get my money back—mustn't I?

*Barthwick*. Do you tell me that my son——?

*Unknown*. Oh! well, you see, he was n't quite I mean he was

[She smiles mesmerically.]

*Barthwick*. I beg your pardon.

*Unknown*. [Stamping her foot.] Oh! don't you see—tipsy! We had a quarrel.

*Barthwick*. [Scandalised.] How? Where?

*Unknown*. [Defiantly.] At my place. We'd had supper at the——and your son——

*Barthwick*. [Pressing the bell.] May I ask how you knew this house?
Did he give you his name and address?

*Unknown*. [Glancing sidelong.] I got it out of his overcoat.

*Barthwick*. [Sardonically.] Oh! you got it out of his overcoat.
And may I ask if my son will know you by daylight?

*Unknown*. Know me? I should jolly—I mean, of course he will!
[*Marlow* comes in.]

*Barthwick*. Ask Mr. John to come down.

[*Marlow* goes out, and *Barthwick* walks uneasily about.]

And how long have you enjoyed his acquaintanceship?

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*Unknown*. Only since—only since Good Friday.

*Barthwick*. I am at a loss—I repeat I am at a——

[He glances at this unknown lady, who stands with eyes cast down, twisting her hands And suddenly Jack appears. He stops on seeing who is here, and the unknown lady hysterically giggles. There is a silence.]

*Barthwick*. [Portentously.] This young—er—lady says that last night—I think you said last night madam—you took away——

*Unknown*. [Impulsively.] My reticule, and all my money was in a crimson silk purse.

*Jack*. Reticule. [Looking round for any chance to get away.] I don't know anything about it.

*Barthwick*. [Sharply.] Come, do you deny seeing this young lady last night?

*Jack*. Deny? No, of course. [Whispering.] Why did you give me away like this? What on earth did you come here for?

*Unknown*. [Tearfully.] I'm sure I didn't want to—it's not likely, is it? You snatched it out of my hand—you know you did—and the purse had all my money in it. I did n't follow you last night because I did n't want to make a fuss and it was so late, and you were so——

*Barthwick*. Come, sir, don't turn your back on me—explain!

*Jack*. [Desperately.] I don't remember anything about it. [In a low voice to his friend.] Why on earth could n't you have written?

*Unknown*. [Sullenly.] I want it now; I must have, it—I 've got to pay my rent to-day. [She looks at *Barthwick*.] They're only too glad to jump on people who are not—not well off.

*Jack*. I don't remember anything about it, really. I don't remember anything about last night at all. [He puts his hand up to his head.] It's all—cloudy, and I 've got such a beastly headache.

*Unknown*. But you took it; you know you did. You said you'd score me off.

*Jack*. Well, then, it must be here. I remember now—I remember something. Why did I take the beastly thing?

*Barthwick*. Yes, why did you take the beastly——[He turns abruptly to the window.]

*Unknown*. [With her mesmeric smile.] You were n't quite were you?

*Jack*. [Smiling pallidly.] I'm awfully sorry. If there's anything I can do——

*Barthwick*. Do? You can restore this property, I suppose.

*Jack*. I'll go and have a look, but I really don't think I 've got it.

[He goes out hurriedly. And *Barthwick*, placing a chair, motions to the visitor to sit; then, with pursed lips, he stands and eyes her fixedly. She sits, and steals a look at him; then turns away, and, drawing up her veil, stealthily wipes her eyes. And Jack comes back.]

*Jack*. [Ruefully holding out the empty reticule.] Is that the thing? I 've looked all over—I can't find the purse anywhere. Are you sure it was there?

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*Unknown*. [Tearfully.] Sure? Of course I'm sure. A crimson silk purse. It was all the money I had.

*Jack*. I really am awfully sorry—my head's so jolly bad. I 've asked the butler, but he has n't seen it.

*Unknown*. I must have my money——

*Jack*. Oh! Of course—that'll be all right; I'll see that that's all right. How much?

*Unknown*. [Sullenly.] Seven pounds-twelve—it's all I 've got in the world.

*Jack*. That'll be all right; I'll—send you a cheque.

*Unknown*. [Eagerly.] No; now, please. Give me what was in my purse; I've got to pay my rent this morning. They won't' give me another day; I'm a fortnight behind already.

*Jack*. [Blankly.] I'm awfully sorry; I really have n't a penny in my pocket.

[He glances stealthily at *Barthwick*.]

*Unknown*. [Excitedly.] Come I say you must—it's my money, and you took it. I 'm not going away without it. They 'll turn me out of my place.

*Jack*. [Clasping his head.] But I can't give you what I have n't got. Don't I tell you I have n't a beastly cent.

*Unknown*. [Tearing at her handkerchief.] Oh! do give it me! [She puts her hands together in appeal; then, with sudden fierceness.] If you don't I'll summons you. It's stealing, that's what it is!

*Barthwick*. [Uneasily.] One moment, please. As a matter of——er —principle, I shall settle this claim. [He produces money.] Here is eight pounds; the extra will cover the value of the purse and your cab fares. I need make no comment—no thanks are necessary.

[Touching the bell, he holds the door ajar in silence. The unknown lady stores the money in her reticule, she looks from *Jack* to *Barthwick*, and her face is quivering faintly with a smile. She hides it with her hand, and steals away. Behind her *Barthwick* shuts the door.]

*Barthwick*. [With solemnity.] H'm! This is nice thing to happen!

*Jack*. [Impersonally.] What awful luck!

*Barthwick*. So this is the way that forty pounds has gone! One thing after another! Once more I should like to know where you ’d have been if it had n’t been for me! You don’t seem to have any principles. You—you’re one of those who are a nuisance to society; you—you’re dangerous! What your mother would say I don’t know. Your conduct, as far as I can see, is absolutely unjustifiable. It’s—it’s criminal. Why, a poor man who behaved as you’ve done —d’ you think he’d have any mercy shown him? What you want is a good lesson. You and your sort are—[he speaks with feeling]—a nuisance to the community. Don’t ask me to help you next time. You’re not fit to be helped.

*Jack*. [Turning upon his sire, with unexpected fierceness.] All right, I won’t then, and see how you like it. You would n’t have helped me this time, I know, if you had n’t been scared the thing would get into the papers. Where are the cigarettes?

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*Barthwick*. [Regarding him uneasily.] Well I ’ll say no more about it. [He rings the bell.] I ’ll pass it over for this once, but—— [*Marlow* Comes in.] You can clear away.

[He hides his face behind the “Times.”]

*Jack*. [Brightening.] I say, Marlow, where are the cigarettes?

*Marlow*. I put the box out with the whisky last night, sir, but this morning I can’t find it anywhere.

*Jack*. Did you look in my room?

*Marlow*. Yes, sir; I’ve looked all over the house. I found two Nestor ends in the tray this morning, so you must have been smokin’ last night, sir. [Hesitating.] I ’m really afraid some one’s purloined the box.

*Jack*. [Uneasily.] Stolen it!

*Barthwick*. What’s that? The cigarette-box! Is anything else missing?

*Marlow*. No, sir; I ’ve been through the plate.

*Barthwick*. Was the house all right this morning? None of the windows open?

*Marlow*. No, sir. [Quietly to *Jack*.] You left your latch-key in the door last night, sir.

[He hands it back, unseen by *Barthwick*]

*Jack*. Tst!

*Barthwick*. Who’s been in the room this morning?

*Marlow*. Me and Wheeler, and Mrs. Jones is all, sir, as far as I know.

*Barthwick*. Have you asked Mrs. Barthwick?

[To *Jack*.] Go and ask your mother if she’s had it; ask her to look and see if she’s missed anything else.

[*Jack* goes upon this mission.]

Nothing is more disquieting than losing things like this.

*Marlow*. No, sir.

*Barthwick*. Have you any suspicions?

*Marlow*, No, sir.

*Barthwick*. This Mrs. Jones—how long has she been working here?

*Marlow*. Only this last month, sir.

*Barthwick*. What sort of person?

*Marlow*. I don't know much about her, sir; seems a very quiet, respectable woman.

*Barthwick*. Who did the room this morning?

*Marlow*. Wheeler and Mrs. Jones, Sir.

*Barthwick*. [With his forefinger upraised.] Now, was this Mrs. Jones in the room alone at any time?

*Marlow*. [Expressionless.] Yes, Sir.

*Barthwick*. How do you know that?

*Marlow*. [Reluctantly.] I found her here, sir.

*Barthwick*. And has Wheeler been in the room alone?

*Marlow*. No, sir, she's not, sir. I should say, sir, that Mrs. Jones seems a very honest——

*Barthwick*. [Holding up his hand.] I want to know this: Has this Mrs. Jones been here the whole morning?

*Marlow*. Yes, sir—no, sir—she stepped over to the greengrocer's for cook.

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*Barthwick*. H'm! Is she in the house now?

*Marlow*. Yes, Sir.

*Barthwick*. Very good. I shall make a point of clearing this up. On principle I shall make a point of fixing the responsibility; it goes to the foundations of security. In all your interests——

*Marlow*. Yes, Sir.

*Barthwick*. What sort of circumstances is this Mrs. Jones in? Is her husband in work?

*Marlow*. I believe not, sir.

*Barthwick*. Very well. Say nothing about it to any one. Tell Wheeler not to speak of it, and ask Mrs. Jones to step up here.

*Marlow*. Very good, sir.

[*Marlow* goes out, his face concerned; and *Barthwick* stays, his face judicial and a little pleased, as befits a man conducting an inquiry. *Mrs*. *Barthwick* and hey son come in.]

*Barthwick*. Well, my dear, you've not seen it, I suppose?

*Mrs*. *Barthwick*. No. But what an extraordinary thing, John! Marlow, of course, is out of the question. I 'm certain none of the maids as for cook!

*Barthwick*. Oh, cook!

*Mrs*. *Barthwick*. Of course! It's perfectly detestable to me to suspect anybody.

*Barthwick*. It is not a question of one's feelings. It's a question of justice. On principle ——

*Mrs*. *Barthwick*. I should n't be a bit surprised if the charwoman knew something about it. It was Laura who recommended her.

*Barthwick*. [Judicially.] I am going to have Mrs. Jones up. Leave it to me; and—er—-remember that nobody is guilty until they're proved so. I shall be careful. I have no intention of frightening her; I shall give her every chance. I hear she's in poor circumstances. If we are not able to do much for them we are bound to have the greatest sympathy with the poor. [*Mrs*. *Jones* comes in.] [Pleasantly.] Oh! good morning, Mrs. Jones.

*Mrs*. *Jones*. [Soft, and even, unemphatic.] Good morning, sir!  Good morning, ma'am!

*Barthwick*.  About your husband—he's not in work, I hear?

*Mrs*. *Jones*.  No, sir; of course he's not in work just now.

*Barthwick*.  Then I suppose he's earning nothing.

*Mrs*. *Jones*.  No, sir, he's not earning anything just now, sir.

*Barthwick*.  And how many children have you?

*Mrs*. *Jones*.  Three children; but of course they don't eat very much sir. [A little silence.]

*Barthwick*.  And how old is the eldest?

*Mrs*. *Jones*.  Nine years old, sir.

*Barthwick*.  Do they go to school?

*Mrs*. *Jones*, Yes, sir, they all three go to school every day.

*Barthwick*. [Severely.] And what about their food when you're out at work?

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*Mrs. Jones*. Well, Sir, I have to give them their dinner to take with them. Of course I 'm not always able to give them anything; sometimes I have to send them without; but my husband is very good about the children when he's in work. But when he's not in work of course he's a very difficult man.

*Barthwick*. He drinks, I suppose?

*Mrs. Jones*. Yes, Sir. Of course I can't say he does n't drink, because he does.

*Barthwick*. And I suppose he takes all your money?

*Mrs. Jones*. No, sir, he's very good about my money, except when he's not himself, and then, of course, he treats me very badly.

*Barthwick*. Now what is he—your husband?

*Mrs. Jones*. By profession, sir, of course he's a groom.

*Barthwick*. A groom! How came he to lose his place?

*Mrs. Jones*. He lost his place a long time ago, sir, and he's never had a very long job since; and now, of course, the motor-cars are against him.

*Barthwick*. When were you married to him, Mrs. Jones?

*Mrs. Jones*. Eight years ago, sir that was in——

*Mrs. Barthwick*. [Sharply.] Eight? You said the eldest child was nine.

*Mrs. Jones*. Yes, ma'am; of course that was why he lost his place. He did n't treat me rightly, and of course his employer said he couldn't keep him because of the example.

*Barthwick*. You mean he—ahem——

*Mrs. Jones*. Yes, sir; and of course after he lost his place he married me.

*Mrs. Barthwick*. You actually mean to say you—you were——

*Barthwick*. My dear——

*Mrs. Barthwick*. [Indignantly.] How disgraceful!

*Barthwick*. [Hurriedly.] And where are you living now, Mrs. Jones?

*Mrs. Jones*. We've not got a home, sir. Of course we've been obliged to put away most of our things.

*Barthwick*. Put your things away! You mean to—to—er—to pawn them?

*Mrs*. *Jones*. Yes, sir, to put them away. We're living in Merthyr Street—that is close by here, sir—at No. 34. We just have the one room.

*Barthwick*. And what do you pay a week?

*Mrs*. *Jones*. We pay six shillings a week, sir, for a furnished room.

*Barthwick*. And I suppose you're behind in the rent?

*Mrs*. *Jones*. Yes, sir, we're a little behind in the rent.

*Barthwick*. But you're in good work, aren't you?

*Mrs*. *Jones*. Well, Sir, I have a day in Stamford Place Thursdays. And Mondays and Wednesdays and Fridays I come here. But to-day, of course, is a half-day, because of yesterday's Bank Holiday.

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*Barthwick*. I see; four days a week, and you get half a crown a day, is that it?

*Mrs*. *Jones*. Yes, sir, and my dinner; but sometimes it's only half a day, and that's eighteen pence.

*Barthwick*. And when your husband earns anything he spends it in drink, I suppose?

*Mrs*. *Jones*. Sometimes he does, sir, and sometimes he gives it to me for the children. Of course he would work if he could get it, sir, but it seems there are a great many people out of work.

*Barthwick*. Ah! Yes. We—er—won't go into that. [Sympathetically.] And how about your work here? Do you find it hard?

*Mrs*. *Jones*. Oh! no, sir, not very hard, sir; except of course, when I don't get my sleep at night.

*Barthwick*. Ah! And you help do all the rooms? And sometimes, I suppose, you go out for cook?

*Mrs*. *Jones*. Yes, Sir.

*Barthwick*. And you 've been out this morning?

*Mrs*. *Jones*. Yes, sir, of course I had to go to the greengrocer's.

*Barthwick*. Exactly. So your husband earns nothing? And he's a bad character.

*Mrs*. *Jones*. No, Sir, I don't say that, sir. I think there's a great deal of good in him; though he does treat me very bad sometimes. And of course I don't like to leave him, but I think I ought to, because really I hardly know how to stay with him. He often raises his hand to me. Not long ago he gave me a blow here [touches her breast] and I can feel it now. So I think I ought to leave him, don't you, sir?

*Barthwick*. Ah! I can't help you there. It's a very serious thing to leave your husband. Very serious thing.

*Mrs*. *Jones*. Yes, sir, of course I 'm afraid of what he might do to me if I were to leave him; he can be so very violent.

*Barthwick*. H'm! Well, that I can't pretend to say anything about. It's the bad principle I'm speaking of——

*Mrs*. *Jones*. Yes, Sir; I know nobody can help me. I know I must decide for myself, and of course I know that he has a very hard life. And he's fond of the children, and its very hard for him to see them going without food.

*Barthwick*. [Hastily.] Well—er—thank you, I just wanted to hear about you. I don't think I need detain you any longer, Mrs. Jones.

*Mrs*. *Jones*. No, sir, thank you, sir.

*Barthwick*. Good morning, then.

*Mrs*. *Jones*. Good morning, sir; good morning, ma'am.

*Barthwick*. [Exchanging glances with his wife.] By the way, Mrs. Jones—I think it is only fair to tell you, a silver cigarette-box —er—is missing.

*Mrs*. *Jones*. [Looking from one face to the other.] I am very sorry, sir.

*Barthwick*. Yes; you have not seen it, I suppose?

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*Mrs*. *Jones*. [Realising that suspicion is upon her; with an uneasy movement.] Where was it, sir; if you please, sir?

*Barthwick*. [Evasively.] Where did Marlow say? Er—in this room, yes, in this room.

*Mrs*. *Jones*. No, Sir, I have n't seen it—of course if I 'd seen it I should have noticed it.

*Barthwick*. [Giving hey a rapid glance.] You—you are sure of that?

*Mrs*. *Jones*. [Impassively.] Yes, Sir. [With a slow nodding of her head.] I have not seen it, and of course I don't know where it is.

[She turns and goes quietly out.]

*Barthwick*. H'm!

[The three BARTHWICKS avoid each other's glances.]

The curtain falls.

## ACT II

### SCENE I

The JONES's lodgings, Merthyr Street, at half-past two o'clock.

The bare room, with tattered oilcloth and damp, distempered walls, has an air of tidy wretchedness. On the bed lies *Jones*, half-dressed; his coat is thrown across his feet, and muddy boots are lying on the floor close by. He is asleep. The door is opened and *Mrs*. *Jones* comes in, dressed in a pinched black jacket and old black sailor hat; she carries a parcel wrapped up in the "Times." She puts her parcel down, unwraps an apron, half a loaf, two onions, three potatoes, and a tiny piece of bacon. Taking a teapot from the cupboard, she rinses it, shakes into it some powdered tea out of a screw of paper, puts it on the hearth, and sitting in a wooden chair quietly begins to cry.

*Jones*. [Stirring and yawning.] That you? What's the time?

*Mrs*. *Jones*. [Drying her eyes, and in her usual voice.] Half-past two.

*Jones*. What you back so soon for?

*Mrs*. *Jones*. I only had the half day to-day, Jem.

*Jones*. [On his back, and in a drowsy voice.] Got anything for dinner?

*Mrs*. *Jones*.  Mrs. BARTHWICK's cook gave me a little bit of bacon.  I'm going to make a stew. [She prepares for cooking.] There's fourteen shillings owing for rent, James, and of course I 've only got two and fourpence.  They'll be coming for it to-day.

*Jones*. [Turning towards her on his elbow.] Let 'em come and find my surprise packet. I've had enough o' this tryin' for work.  Why should I go round and round after a job like a bloomin' squirrel in a cage.  "Give us a job, sir"—"Take a man on"—"Got a wife and three children."  Sick of it I am!  I 'd sooner lie here and rot.  "Jones, you come and join the demonstration; come and 'old a flag, and listen to the ruddy orators, and go 'ome as empty as you came."  There's some that seems to like that—the sheep!  When I go seekin' for a job now, and see the brutes lookin' me up an' down, it's

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like a thousand serpents in me. I 'm not arskin' for any treat. A man wants to sweat hisself silly and not allowed that's a rum start, ain't it? A man wants to sweat his soul out to keep the breath in him and ain't allowed—that's justice that's freedom and all the rest of it! [He turns his face towards the wall.] You're so milky mild; you don't know what goes on inside o' me. I'm done with the silly game. If they want me, let 'em come for me!

[*Mrs*. *Jones* stops cooking and stands unmoving at the table.]

I've tried and done with it, I tell you. I've never been afraid of what 's before me. You mark my words—if you think they've broke my spirit, you're mistook. I 'll lie and rot sooner than ask 'em again. What makes you stand like that—you long-sufferin', Gawd-forsaken image—that's why I can't keep my hands off you. So now you know. Work! You can work, but you have n't the spirit of a louse!

*Mrs*. *Jones*. [Quietly.] You talk more wild sometimes when you're yourself, James, than when you 're not. If you don't get work, how are we to go on? They won't let us stay here; they're looking to their money to-day, I know.

*Jones*. I see this *Barthwick* o' yours every day goin' down to Pawlyment snug and comfortable to talk his silly soul out; an' I see that young calf, his son, swellin' it about, and goin' on the razzle-dazzle. Wot 'ave they done that makes 'em any better than wot I am? They never did a day's work in their lives. I see 'em day after day.

*Mrs*. *Jones*. And I wish you wouldn't come after me like that, and hang about the house. You don't seem able to keep away at all, and whatever you do it for I can't think, because of course they notice it.

*Jones*. I suppose I may go where I like. Where may I go? The other day I went to a place in the Edgware Road. "Gov'nor," I says to the boss, "take me on," I says. "I 'aven't done a stroke o' work not these two months; it takes the heart out of a man," I says; "I 'm one to work; I 'm not afraid of anything you can give me!" "My good man," 'e says, "I 've had thirty of you here this morning. I took the first two," he says, "and that's all I want." "Thank you, then rot the world!" I says. "Blasphemin'," he says, "is not the way to get a job. Out you go, my lad!" [He laughs sardonically.] Don't you raise your voice because you're starvin'; don't yer even think of it; take it lyin' down! Take it like a sensible man, carn't you? And a little way down the street a lady says to me: [Pinching his voice] "D' you want to earn a few pence, my man?" and gives me her dog to 'old outside a shop-fat as a butler 'e was—tons o' meat had gone to the makin' of him. It did 'er good, it did, made 'er feel 'erself that charitable, but I see 'er lookin' at the copper standin' alongside o' me, for fear I should make off with 'er bloomin' fat dog. [He sits on

the edge of the bed and puts a boot on.  Then looking up.] What's in that head o' yours? [Almost pathetically.] Carn't you speak for once?

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[There is a knock, and *Mrs*. *Seddon*, the landlady, appears, an anxious, harassed, shabby woman in working clothes.]

*Mrs*. *Seddon*. I thought I 'eard you come in, Mrs. Jones. I 've spoke to my 'usband, but he says he really can't afford to wait another day.

*Jones*. [With scowling jocularity.] Never you mind what your 'usband says, you go your own way like a proper independent woman. Here, jenny, chuck her that.

[Producing a sovereign from his trousers pocket, he throws it to his wife, who catches it in her apron with a gasp. *Jones* resumes the lacing of his boots.]

*Mrs*. *Jones*. [Rubbing the sovereign stealthily.] I'm very sorry we're so late with it, and of course it's fourteen shillings, so if you've got six that will be right.

[*Mrs*. *Seddon* takes the sovereign and fumbles for the change.]

*Jones*. [With his eyes fixed on his boots.] Bit of a surprise for yer, ain't it?

*Mrs*. *Seddon*. Thank you, and I'm sure I'm very much obliged. [She does indeed appear surprised.] I 'll bring you the change.

*Jones*. [Mockingly.] Don't mention it.

*Mrs*. *Seddon*. Thank you, and I'm sure I'm very much obliged. [She slides away.]

[*Mrs*. *Jones* gazes at *Jones* who is still lacing up his boots.]

*Jones*. I 've had a bit of luck. [Pulling out the crimson purse and some loose coins.] Picked up a purse—seven pound and more.

*Mrs*. *Jones*. Oh, James!

*Jones*. Oh, James! What about Oh, James! I picked it up I tell you. This is lost property, this is!

*Mrs*. *Jones*. But is n't there a name in it, or something?

*Jones*. Name? No, there ain't no name. This don't belong to such as 'ave visitin' cards. This belongs to a perfec' lidy. Tike an' smell it. [He pitches her the purse, which she puts gently to her nose.] Now, you tell me what I ought to have done. You tell me that. You can always tell me what I ought to ha' done, can't yer?

*Mrs*. *Jones*. [Laying down the purse.] I can't say what you ought to have done, James. Of course the money was n't yours; you've taken somebody else's money.

*Jones*. Finding's keeping. I 'll take it as wages for the time I 've gone about the streets asking for what's my rights. I'll take it for what's overdue, d' ye hear? [With strange triumph.] I've got money in my pocket, my girl.

[*Mrs*. *Jones* goes on again with the preparation of the meal, *Jones* looking at her furtively.]

Money in my pocket! And I 'm not goin' to waste it. With this 'ere money I'm goin' to Canada. I'll let you have a pound.

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[A silence.]

You've often talked of leavin' me. You 've often told me I treat you badly—well I 'ope you 'll be glad when I 'm gone.

*Mrs*. *Jones*. [Impassively.] You have, treated me very badly, James, and of course I can't prevent your going; but I can't tell whether I shall be glad when you're gone.

*Jones*. It'll change my luck. I 've 'ad nothing but bad luck since I first took up with you. [More softly.] And you've 'ad no bloomin' picnic.

*Mrs*. *Jones*. Of course it would have been better for us if we had never met. We were n't meant for each other. But you're set against me, that's what you are, and you have been for a long time. And you treat me so badly, James, going after that Rosie and all. You don't ever seem to think of the children that I 've had to bring into the world, and of all the trouble I 've had to keep them, and what 'll become of them when you're gone.

*Jones*. [Crossing the room gloomily.] If you think I want to leave the little beggars you're bloomin' well mistaken.

*Mrs*. *Jones*. Of course I know you're fond of them.

*Jones*. [Fingering the purse, half angrily.] Well, then, you stow it, old girl. The kids 'll get along better with you than when I 'm here. If I 'd ha' known as much as I do now, I 'd never ha' had one o' them. What's the use o' bringin' 'em into a state o' things like this? It's a crime, that's what it is; but you find it out too late; that's what's the matter with this 'ere world.

[He puts the purse back in his pocket.]

*Mrs*. *Jones*. Of course it would have been better for them, poor little things; but they're your own children, and I wonder at you talkin' like that. I should miss them dreadfully if I was to lose them.

*Jones*. [Sullenly.] An' you ain't the only one. If I make money out there—[Looking up, he sees her shaking out his coat—in a changed voice.] Leave that coat alone!

[The silver box drops from the pocket, scattering the cigarettes upon the bed. Taking up the box she stares at it; he rushes at her and snatches the box away.]

*Mrs*. *Jones*. [Cowering back against the bed.] Oh, Jem! oh, Jem!

*Jones*. [Dropping the box onto the table.] You mind what you're sayin'! When I go out I 'll take and chuck it in the water along with that there purse. I 'ad it when I was in liquor,

and for what you do when you ’re in liquor you’re not responsible-and that’s Gawd’s truth as you ought to know.  I don’t want the thing—I won’t have it.  I took it out o’ spite. I ’m no thief, I tell you; and don’t you call me one, or it’ll be the worse for you.

*Mrs*. *Jones*. [Twisting her apron strings.] It’s Mr. Barthwick’s!  You’ve taken away my reputation.  Oh, Jem, whatever made you?

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*Jones*. What d' you mean?

*Mrs*. *Jones*. It's been missed; they think it's me. Oh! whatever made you do it, Jem?

*Jones*. I tell you I was in liquor. I don't want it; what's the good of it to me? If I were to pawn it they'd only nab me. I 'm no thief. I 'm no worse than wot that young Barthwick is; he brought 'ome that purse that I picked up—a lady's purse—'ad it off 'er in a row, kept sayin' 'e 'd scored 'er off. Well, I scored 'im off. Tight as an owl 'e was! And d' you think anything'll happen to him?

*Mrs*. *Jones*. [As though speaking to herself.] Oh, Jem! it's the bread out of our mouths!

*Jones*. Is it then? I'll make it hot for 'em yet. What about that purse? What about young *Barthwick*?

[*Mrs*. *Jones* comes forward to the table and tries to take the box; *Jones* prevents her.] What do you want with that? You drop it, I say!

*Mrs*. *Jones*. I 'll take it back and tell them all about it. [She attempts to wrest the box from him.]

*Jones*. Ah, would yer?

[He drops the box, and rushes on her with a snarl. She slips back past the bed. He follows; a chair is overturned. The door is opened; Snow comes in, a detective in plain clothes and bowler hat, with clipped moustaches. *Jones* drops his arms, *Mrs*. *Jones* stands by the window gasping; *snow*, advancing swiftly to the table, puts his hand on the silver box.]

*Snow*. Doin' a bit o' skylarkin'? Fancy this is what I 'm after. J. B., the very same. [He gets back to the door, scrutinising the crest and cypher on the box. To *Mrs*. *Jones*.] I'm a police officer. Are you Mrs. Jones?

*Mrs*. *Jones*. Yes, Sir.

*Snow*. My instructions are to take you on a charge of stealing this box from J. *Barthwick*, Esquire, M.P., of 6, Rockingham Gate. Anything you say may be used against you. Well, Missis?

*Mrs*. *Jones*. [In her quiet voice, still out of breath, her hand upon her breast.] Of course I did not take it, sir. I never have taken anything that did n't belong to me; and of course I know nothing about it.

*Snow*. You were at the house this morning; you did the room in which the box was left; you were alone in the room. I find the box 'ere. You say you did n't take it?

*Mrs*. *Jones*. Yes, sir, of course I say I did not take it, because I did not.

*Snow*. Then how does the box come to be here?

*Mrs*. *Jones*. I would rather not say anything about it.

*Snow*. Is this your husband?

*Mrs*. *Jones*. Yes, sir, this is my husband, sir.

*Snow*. Do you wish to say anything before I take her?

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[*Jones* remains silent, with his head bend down.]

Well then, Missis.  I ’ll just trouble you to come along with me quietly.

*Mrs*. *Jones*. [Twisting her hands.] Of course I would n’t say I had n’t taken it if I had—-and I did n’t take it, indeed I did n’t.  Of course I know appearances are against me, and I can’t tell you what really happened:  But my children are at school, and they’ll be coming home—and I don’t know what they’ll do without me.

*Snow*.  Your ’usband’ll see to them, don’t you worry. [He takes the woman gently by the arm.]

*Jones*.  You drop it—she’s all right! [Sullenly.] I took the thing myself.

*Snow*. [Eyeing him] There, there, it does you credit.  Come along, Missis.

*Jones*. [Passionately.] Drop it, I say, you blooming teck.  She’s my wife; she ’s a respectable woman.  Take her if you dare!

*Snow*.  Now, now.  What’s the good of this?  Keep a civil tongue, and it’ll be the better for all of us.

[He puts his whistle in his mouth and draws the woman to the door.]

*Jones*. [With a rush.] Drop her, and put up your ’ands, or I ’ll soon make yer.  You leave her alone, will yer!  Don’t I tell yer, I took the thing myself.

*Snow*. [Blowing his whistle.] Drop your hands, or I ’ll take you too.  Ah, would you?

[*Jones*, closing, deals him a blow.  A Policeman in uniform appears; there is a short struggle and *Jones* is overpowered. *Mrs*. *Jones* raises her hands avid drops her face on them.]

The curtain falls.

## SCENE II

The BARTHWICKS’ dining-room the same evening.  The BARTHWICKS are seated at dessert.

Mrs. Barthwick.  John! [A silence broken by the cracking of nuts.] John!

*Barthwick*. I wish you'd speak about the nuts they're uneatable. [He puts one in his mouth.]

*Mrs*. *Barthwick*. It's not the season for them. I called on the Holyroods.

[*Barthwick* fills his glass with port.]

*Jack*. Crackers, please, Dad.

[*Barthwick* passes the crackers. His demeanour is reflective.]

*Mrs*. *Barthwick*. Lady Holyrood has got very stout. I 've noticed it coming for a long time.

*Barthwick*. [Gloomily.] Stout? [He takes up the crackers—with transparent airiness.] The Holyroods had some trouble with their servants, had n't they?

*Jack*. Crackers, please, Dad.

*Barthwick*. [Passing the crackers.] It got into the papers. The cook, was n't it?

*Mrs*. *Barthwick*. No, the lady's maid. I was talking it over with Lady Holyrood. The girl used to have her young man to see her.

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*Barthwick*. [Uneasily.] I'm not sure they were wise——

*Mrs*. *Barthwick*. My dear John, what are you talking about? How could there be any alternative? Think of the effect on the other servants!

*Barthwick*. Of course in principle—I wasn't thinking of that.

*Jack*. [Maliciously.] Crackers, please, Dad.

[*Barthwick* is compelled to pass the crackers.]

*Mrs*. *Barthwick*. Lady Holyrood told me: "I had her up," she said; "I said to her, 'You'll leave my house at once; I think your conduct disgraceful. I can't tell, I don't know, and I don't wish to know, what you were doing. I send you away on principle; you need not come to me for a character.' And the girl said: 'If you don't give me my notice, my lady, I want a month's wages. I'm perfectly respectable. I've done nothing.'"'—Done nothing!

*Barthwick*. H'm!

*Mrs*. *Barthwick*. Servants have too much license. They hang together so terribly you never can tell what they're really thinking; it's as if they were all in a conspiracy to keep you in the dark. Even with Marlow, you feel that he never lets you know what's really in his mind. I hate that secretiveness; it destroys all confidence. I feel sometimes I should like to shake him.

*Jack*. Marlow's a most decent chap. It's simply beastly every one knowing your affairs.

*Barthwick*. The less you say about that the better!

*Mrs*. *Barthwick*. It goes all through the lower classes. You can not tell when they are speaking the truth. To-day when I was shopping after leaving the Holyroods, one of these unemployed came up and spoke to me. I suppose I only had twenty yards or so to walk to the carnage, but he seemed to spring up in the street.

*Barthwick*. Ah! You must be very careful whom you speak to in these days.

*Mrs*. *Barthwick*. I did n't answer him, of course. But I could see at once that he wasn't telling the truth.

*Barthwick*. [Cracking a nut.] There's one very good rule—look at their eyes.

*Jack*. Crackers, please, Dad.

*Barthwick*. [Passing the crackers.] If their eyes are straight-forward I sometimes give them sixpence. It 's against my principles, but it's most difficult to refuse. If you see that

they're desperate, and dull, and shifty-looking, as so many of them are, it's certain to mean drink, or crime, or something unsatisfactory.

*Mrs*. *Barthwick*. This man had dreadful eyes. He looked as if he could commit a murder. "I 've 'ad nothing to eat to-day," he said. Just like that.

*Barthwick*. What was William about? He ought to have been waiting.

*Jack*. [Raising his wine-glass to his nose.] Is this the '63, Dad?

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[*Barthwick*, holding his wine-glass to his eye, lowers it and passes it before his nose.]

*Mrs*. *Barthwick*. I hate people that can't speak the truth. [Father and son exchange a look behind their port.] It 's just as easy to speak the truth as not. I've always found it easy enough. It makes it impossible to tell what is genuine; one feels as if one were continually being taken in.

*Barthwick*. [Sententiously.] The lower classes are their own enemies. If they would only trust us, they would get on so much better.

*Mrs*. *Barthwick*. But even then it's so often their own fault. Look at that Mrs. Jones this morning.

*Barthwick*. I only want to do what's right in that matter. I had occasion to see Roper this afternoon. I mentioned it to him. He's coming in this evening. It all depends on what the detective says. I've had my doubts. I've been thinking it over.

*Mrs*. *Barthwick*. The woman impressed me most unfavourably. She seemed to have no shame. That affair she was talking about—she and the man when they were young, so immoral! And before you and Jack! I could have put her out of the room!

*Barthwick*. Oh! I don't want to excuse them, but in looking at these matters one must consider——

*Mrs*. *Barthwick*. Perhaps you'll say the man's employer was wrong in dismissing him?

*Barthwick*. Of course not. It's not there that I feel doubt. What I ask myself is——

*Jack*. Port, please, Dad.

*Barthwick*. [Circulating the decanter in religious imitation of the rising and setting of the sun.] I ask myself whether we are sufficiently careful in making inquiries about people before we engage them, especially as regards moral conduct.

*Jack*. Pass the-port, please, Mother!

*Mrs*. *Barthwick*. [Passing it.] My dear boy, are n't you drinking too much?

[*Jack* fills his glass.]

*Marlow*. [Entering.] Detective Snow to see you, Sir.

*Barthwick*. [Uneasily.] Ah! say I'll be with him in a minute.

*Mrs*. *Barthwick*. [Without turning.] Let him come in here, Marlow.

[*Snow* enters in an overcoat, his bowler hat in hand.]

*Barthwick*. [Half-rising.] Oh!  Good evening!

*Snow*.  Good evening, sir; good evening, ma'am.  I 've called round to report what I 've done, rather late, I 'm afraid—another case took me away. [He takes the silver box out o f his pocket, causing a sensation in the *Barthwick* family.] This is the identical article, I believe.

*Barthwick*.  Certainly, certainly.

*Snow*.  Havin' your crest and cypher, as you described to me, sir, I 'd no hesitation in the matter.

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*Barthwick*. Excellent. Will you have a glass of [he glances at the waning port]—er—-sherry-[pours out sherry]. Jack, just give Mr. Snow this.

[*Jack* rises and gives the glass to *snow*; then, lolling in his chair, regards him indolently.]

*Snow*. [Drinking off wine and putting down the glass.] After seeing you I went round to this woman's lodgings, sir. It's a low neighborhood, and I thought it as well to place a constable below —and not without 'e was wanted, as things turned out.

*Barthwick*. Indeed!

*Snow*. Yes, Sir, I 'ad some trouble. I asked her to account for the presence of the article. She could give me no answer, except to deny the theft; so I took her into custody; then her husband came for me, so I was obliged to take him, too, for assault. He was very violent on the way to the station—very violent—threatened you and your son, and altogether he was a handful, I can till you.

*Mrs*. *Barthwick*. What a ruffian he must be!

*Snow*. Yes, ma'am, a rough customer.

*Jack*. [Sipping his mine, bemused.] Punch the beggar's head.

*Snow*. Given to drink, as I understand, sir.

*Mrs*. *Barthwick*. It's to be hoped he will get a severe punishment.

*Snow*. The odd thing is, sir, that he persists in sayin' he took the box himself.

*Barthwick*. Took the box himself! [He smiles.] What does he think to gain by that?

*Snow*. He says the young gentleman was intoxicated last night

[*Jack* stops the cracking of a nut, and looks at *snow*.]

[*Barthwick*, losing his smile, has put his wine-glass down; there is a silence—*snow*, looking from face to face, remarks]

—took him into the house and gave him whisky; and under the influence of an empty stomach the man says he took the box.

*Mrs*. *Barthwick*. The impudent wretch!

*Barthwick*. D' you mean that he—er—intends to put this forward to-morrow?

*Snow*. That'll be his line, sir; but whether he's endeavouring to shield his wife, or whether [he looks at *Jack*] there's something in it, will be for the magistrate to say.

*Mrs*. *Barthwick*. [Haughtily.] Something in what? I don't understand you. As if my son would bring a man like that into the house!

*Barthwick*. [From the fireplace, with an effort to be calm.] My son can speak for himself, no doubt. Well, Jack, what do you say?

*Mrs*. *Barthwick*. [Sharply.] What does he say? Why, of course, he says the whole story's stuff!

*Jack*. [Embarrassed.] Well, of course, I—of course, I don't know anything about it.

*Mrs*. *Barthwick*. I should think not, indeed! [To Snow.] The man is an audacious ruffian!

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*Barthwick*. [Suppressing jumps.] But in view of my son's saying there's nothing in this—-this fable—will it be necessary to proceed against the man under the circumstances?

*Snow*. We shall have to charge him with the assault, sir. It would be as well for your son to come down to the Court. There'll be a remand, no doubt. The queer thing is there was quite a sum of money found on him, and a crimson silk purse.

[*Barthwick* starts; *Jack* rises and sits dozen again.]

I suppose the lady has n't missed her purse?

*Barthwick*. [Hastily.] Oh, no! Oh! No!

*Jack*. No!

*Mrs*. *Barthwick*. [Dreamily.] No! [To *snow*.] I 've been inquiring of the servants. This man does hang about the house. I shall feel much safer if he gets a good long sentence; I do think we ought to be protected against such ruffians.

*Barthwick*. Yes, yes, of course, on principle but in this case we have a number of things to think of. [To *snow*.] I suppose, as you say, the man must be charged, eh?

*Snow*. No question about that, sir.

*Barthwick*. [Staring gloomily at *Jack*.] This prosecution goes very much against the grain with me. I have great sympathy with the poor. In my position I 'm bound to recognise the distress there is amongst them. The condition of the people leaves much to be desired. D' you follow me? I wish I could see my way to drop it.

*Mrs*. *Barthwick*. [Sharply.] John! it's simply not fair to other people. It's putting property at the mercy of any one who likes to take it.

*Barthwick*. [Trying to make signs to her aside.] I 'm not defending him, not at all. I'm trying to look at the matter broadly.

*Mrs*. *Barthwick*. Nonsense, John, there's a time for everything.

*Snow*. [Rather sardonically.] I might point out, sir, that to withdraw the charge of stealing would not make much difference, because the facts must come out [he looks significantly at *Jack*] in reference to the assault; and as I said that charge will have to go forward.

*Barthwick*. [Hastily.] Yes, oh! exactly! It's entirely on the woman's account—entirely a matter of my own private feelings.

*Snow*. If I were you, sir, I should let things take their course. It's not likely there'll be much difficulty. These things are very quick settled.

*Barthwick*. [Doubtfully.] You think so—you think so?

*Jack*. [Rousing himself.] I say, what shall I have to swear to?

*Snow*. That's best known to yourself, sir. [Retreating to the door.] Better employ a solicitor, sir, in case anything should arise. We shall have the butler to prove the loss of the article. You'll excuse me going, I 'm rather pressed to-night. The case may come on any time after eleven. Good evening, sir; good evening, ma'am. I shall have to produce the box in court to-morrow, so if you'll excuse me, sir, I may as well take it with me.

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[He takes the silver box and leaves them with a little bow.]

[*Barthwick* makes a move to follow him, then dashing his hands beneath his coat tails, speaks with desperation.]

*Barthwick*. I do wish you'd leave me to manage things myself. You will put your nose into matters you know nothing of. A pretty mess you've made of this!

*Mrs*. *Barthwick*. [Coldly.] I don't in the least know what you're talking about. If you can't stand up for your rights, I can. I 've no patience with your principles, it's such nonsense.

*Barthwick*. Principles! Good Heavens! What have principles to do with it for goodness sake? Don't you know that Jack was drunk last night!

*Jack*. Dad!

*Mrs*. *Barthwick*. [In horror rising.] Jack!

*Jack*. Look here, Mother—I had supper. Everybody does. I mean to say—you know what I mean—it's absurd to call it being drunk. At Oxford everybody gets a bit "on" sometimes——

*Mrs*. *Barthwick*. Well, I think it's most dreadful! If that is really what you do at Oxford?

*Jack*. [Angrily.] Well, why did you send me there? One must do as other fellows do. It's such nonsense, I mean, to call it being drunk. Of course I 'm awfully sorry. I 've had such a beastly headache all day.

*Barthwick*. Tcha! If you'd only had the common decency to remember what happened when you came in. Then we should know what truth there was in what this fellow says —as it is, it's all the most confounded darkness.

*Jack*. [Staring as though at half-formed visions.] I just get a— and then—it 's gone——

*Mrs*. *Barthwick*. Oh, Jack! do you mean to say you were so tipsy you can't even remember——

*Jack*. Look here, Mother! Of course I remember I came—I must have come——

*Barthwick*. [Unguardedly, and walking up and down.] Tcha!—and that infernal purse! Good Heavens! It'll get into the papers. Who on earth could have foreseen a thing like this? Better to have lost a dozen cigarette-boxes, and said nothing about it. [To his wife.] It's all your doing. I told you so from the first. I wish to goodness Roper would come!

*Mrs*. *Barthwick*. [Sharply.] I don't know what you're talking about, John.

*Barthwick*. [Turning on her.] No, you—you—you don't know anything! [Sharply.] Where the devil is Roper? If he can see a way out of this he's a better man than I take him for. I defy any one to see a way out of it. I can't.

*Jack*. Look here, don't excite Dad—I can simply say I was too beastly tired, and don't remember anything except that I came in and [in a dying voice] went to bed the same as usual.

*Barthwick*. Went to bed? Who knows where you went—I 've lost all confidence. For all I know you slept on the floor.

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*Jack*. [Indignantly.] I did n't, I slept on the——

*Barthwick*. [Sitting on the sofa.] Who cares where you slept; what does it matter if he mentions the—the—a perfect disgrace?

*Mrs*. *Barthwick*. What? [A silence.] I insist on knowing.

*Jack*. Oh! nothing.

*Mrs*. *Barthwick*. Nothing? What do you mean by nothing, Jack?
There's your father in such a state about it!

*Jack*. It's only my purse.

*Mrs*. *Barthwick*. Your purse! You know perfectly well you have n't got one.

*Jack*. Well, it was somebody else's—it was all a joke—I did n't want the beastly thing.

*Mrs*. *Barthwick*. Do you mean that you had another person's purse, and that this man took it too?

*Barthwick*. Tcha! Of course he took it too! A man like that Jones will make the most of it. It'll get into the papers.

*Mrs*. *Barthwick*. I don't understand. What on earth is all the fuss about? [Bending over *Jack*, and softly.] Jack now, tell me dear! Don't be afraid. What is it? Come!

*Jack*. Oh, don't Mother!

*Mrs*. *Barthwick*. But don't what, dear?

*Jack*. It was pure sport. I don't know how I got the thing. Of course I 'd had a bit of a row—I did n't know what I was doing—I was—I Was—well, you know—I suppose I must have pulled the bag out of her hand.

*Mrs*. *Barthwick*. Out of her hand? Whose hand? What bag—whose bag?

*Jack*. Oh! I don't know—her bag—it belonged to—[in a desperate and rising voice] a woman.

*Mrs*. *Barthwick*. A woman? Oh! Jack! No!

*Jack*. [Jumping up.] You would have it. I did n't want to tell you. It's not my fault.

[The door opens and *Marlow* ushers in a man of middle age, inclined to corpulence, in evening dress. He has a ruddy, thin moustache, and dark, quick-moving little eyes. His eyebrows aye Chinese.]

*Marlow*. Mr. Roper, Sir. [He leaves the room.]

*Roper*. [With a quick look round.] How do you do?

[But neither *Jack* nor *Mrs*. *Barthwick* make a sign.]

*Barthwick*. [Hurrying.] Thank goodness you've come, Roper. You remember what I told you this afternoon; we've just had the detective here.

*Roper*. Got the box?

*Barthwick*. Yes, yes, but look here—it was n't the charwoman at all; her drunken loafer of a husband took the things—he says that fellow there [he waves his hand at *Jack*, who with his shoulder raised, seems trying to ward off a blow] let him into the house last night. Can you imagine such a thing.

[Roper laughs. ]

*Barthwick*. [With excited emphasis.]. It's no laughing matter, Roper. I told you about that business of Jack's too—don't you see the brute took both the things—took that infernal purse. It'll get into the papers.

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*Roper*. [Raising his eyebrows.] H'm! The purse! Depravity in high life! What does your son say?

*Barthwick*. He remembers nothing. D—n! Did you ever see such a mess? It 'll get into the papers.

*Mrs*. *Barthwick*. [With her hand across hey eyes.] Oh! it's not that——

[*Barthwick* and *Roper* turn and look at her.]

*Barthwick*. It's the idea of that woman—she's just heard——

[*Roper* nods. And *Mrs*. *Barthwick*, setting her lips, gives a slow look at *Jack*, and sits down at the table.]

What on earth's to be done, Roper? A ruffian like this Jones will make all the capital he can out of that purse.

*Mrs*. *Barthwick*. I don't believe that Jack took that purse.

*Barthwick*. What—when the woman came here for it this morning?

*Mrs*. *Barthwick*. Here? She had the impudence? Why was n't I told?

[She looks round from face to face—no one answers hey, there is a pause.]

*Barthwick*. [Suddenly.] What's to be done, Roper?

*Roper*. [Quietly to *Jack*.] I suppose you did n't leave your latch-key in the door?

*Jack*. [Sullenly.] Yes, I did.

*Barthwick*. Good heavens! What next?

*Mrs*. *Barthwick*. I 'm certain you never let that man into the house, Jack, it's a wild invention. I'm sure there's not a word of truth in it, Mr. Roper.

*Roper*. [Very suddenly.] Where did you sleep last night?

*Jack*. [Promptly.] On the sofa, there—[hesitating]—that is—I——

*Barthwick*. On the sofa? D' you mean to say you did n't go to bed?

*Jack*.[Sullenly.] No.

*Barthwick*. If you don't remember anything, how can you remember that?

*Jack*. Because I woke up there in the morning.

*Mrs*. *Barthwick*. Oh, Jack!

*Barthwick*. Good Gracious!

*Jack*. And Mrs. Jones saw me. I wish you would n't bait me so.

*Roper*. Do you remember giving any one a drink?

*Jack*. By Jove, I do seem to remember a fellow with—a fellow with [He looks at Roper.] I say, d' you want me——?

*Roper*. [Quick as lightning.] With a dirty face?

*Jack*. [With illumination.] I do—I distinctly remember his——

[*Barthwick* moves abruptly; *Mrs*. *Barthwick* looks at *Roper* angrily, and touches her son's arm.]

*Mrs*. *Barthwick*. You don't remember, it's ridiculous! I don't believe the man was ever here at all.

*Barthwick*. You must speak the truth, if it is the truth. But if you do remember such a dirty business, I shall wash my hands of you altogether.

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*Jack*. [Glaring at them.] Well, what the devil——

*Mrs*. *Barthwick*. Jack!

*Jack*. Well, Mother, I—I don't know what you do want.

*Mrs*. *Barthwick*. We want you to speak the truth and say you never let this low man into the house.

*Barthwick*. Of course if you think that you really gave this man whisky in that disgraceful way, and let him see what you'd been doing, and were in such a disgusting condition that you don't remember a word of it——

*Roper*. [Quick.] I've no memory myself—never had.

*Barthwick*. [Desperately.] I don't know what you're to say.

*Roper*. [To *Jack*.] Say nothing at all! Don't put yourself in a false position. The man stole the things or the woman stole the things, you had nothing to do with it. You were asleep on the sofa.

*Mrs*. *Barthwick*. Your leaving the latch-key in the door was quite bad enough, there's no need to mention anything else. [Touching his forehead softly.] My dear, how hot your head is!

*Jack*. But I want to know what I 'm to do. [Passionately.] I won't be badgered like this.

[*Mrs*. *Barthwick* recoils from him.]

*Roper*. [Very quickly.] You forget all about it. You were asleep.

*Jack*. Must I go down to the Court to-morrow?

*Roper*. [Shaking his head.] No.

*Barthwick*. [In a relieved voice.] Is that so?

*Roper*. Yes.

*Barthwick*. But you'll go, Roper.

*Roper*. Yes.

*Jack*. [With wan cheerfulness.] Thanks, awfully! So long as I don't have to go. [Putting his hand up to his head.] I think if you'll excuse me—I've had a most beastly day. [He looks from his father to his mother.]

*Mrs*. *Barthwick*. [Turning quickly.] Goodnight, my boy.

*Jack*. Good-night, Mother.

[He goes out. *Mrs*. *Barthwick* heaves a sigh. There is a silence.]

*Barthwick*. He gets off too easily. But for my money that woman would have prosecuted him.

*Roper*. You find money useful.

*Barthwick*. I've my doubts whether we ought to hide the truth——

*Roper*. There'll be a remand.

*Barthwick*. What! D' you mean he'll have to appear on the remand.

*Roper*. Yes.

*Barthwick*. H'm, I thought you'd be able to——Look here, Roper, you must keep that purse out of the papers.

[*Roper* fixes his little eyes on him and nods.]

*Mrs*. *Barthwick*. Mr. Roper, don't you think the magistrate ought to be told what sort of people these Jones's are; I mean about their immorality before they were married. I don't know if John told you.

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*Roper*. Afraid it's not material.

*Mrs*. *Barthwick*. Not material?

*Roper*. Purely private life! May have happened to the magistrate.

*Barthwick*. [With a movement as if to shift a burden.] Then you'll take the thing into your hands?

*Roper*. If the gods are kind. [He holds his hand out.]

*Barthwick*. [Shaking it dubiously.] Kind eh? What? You going?

*Roper*. Yes. I've another case, something like yours—most unexpected.

[He bows to *Mrs*. *Barthwick*, and goes out, followed by *Barthwick*, talking to the last. *Mrs*. *Barthwick* at the table bursts into smothered sobs. *Barthwick* returns.]

*Barthwick*. [To himself.] There'll be a scandal!

*Mrs*. *Barthwick*. [Disguising her grief at once.] I simply can't imagine what Roper means by making a joke of a thing like that!

*Barthwick*. [Staring strangely.] You! You can't imagine anything! You've no more imagination than a fly!

*Mrs*. *Barthwick*. [Angrily.] You dare to tell me that I have no imagination.

*Barthwick*. [Flustered.] I—I 'm upset. From beginning to end, the whole thing has been utterly against my principles.

*Mrs*. *Barthwick*. Rubbish! You have n't any! Your principles are nothing in the world but sheer fright!

*Barthwick*. [Walking to the window.] I've never been frightened in my life. You heard what Roper said. It's enough to upset one when a thing like this happens. Everything one says and does seems to turn in one's mouth—it's—it's uncanny. It's not the sort of thing I've been accustomed to. [As though stifling, he throws the window open. The faint sobbing of a child comes in.] What's that?

[They listen.]

*Mrs*. *Barthwick*. [Sharply.] I can't stand that crying. I must send Marlow to stop it. My nerves are all on edge. [She rings the bell.]

*Barthwick*. I'll shut the window; you'll hear nothing. [He shuts the window. There is silence.]

*Mrs*. *Barthwick*. [Sharply.] That's no good! It's on my nerves. Nothing upsets me like a child's crying.

[*Marlow* comes in.]

What's that noise of crying, Marlow? It sounds like a child.

*Barthwick*. It is a child. I can see it against the railings.

*Marlow*. [Opening the window, and looking out quietly.] It's Mrs. Jones's little boy, ma'am; he came here after his mother.

*Mrs*. *Barthwick*. [Moving quickly to the window.] Poor little chap! John, we ought n't to go on with this!

*Barthwick*. [Sitting heavily in a chair.] Ah! but it's out of our hands!

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[*Mrs*. *Barthwick* turns her back to the window. There is an expression of distress on hey face. She stands motionless, compressing her lips. The crying begins again. *Barthwick* coveys his ears with his hands, and *Marlow* shuts the window. The crying ceases.]

The curtain falls.

## ACT III

Eight days have passed, and the scene is a London Police Court at one o'clock. A canopied seat of Justice is surmounted by the lion and unicorn. Before the fire a worn-looking magistrate is warming his coat-tails, and staring at two little girls in faded blue and orange rags, who are placed before the dock. Close to the witness-box is a *relieving officer* in an overcoat, and a short brown beard. Beside the little girls stands a bald *police constable*. On the front bench are sitting Barthwick and *Roper*, and behind them *Jack*. In the railed enclosure are seedy-looking men and women. Some prosperous constables sit or stand about.

Magistrate. [In his paternal and ferocious voice, hissing his s's.] Now let us dispose of these young ladies.

*Usher*. Theresa Livens, Maud Livens.

[The bald *constable* indicates the little girls, who remain silent, disillusioned, inattentive.]

Relieving Officer!

[The *relieving officer* Steps into the witness-box.]

*Usher*. The evidence you give to the Court shall be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God! Kiss the book!

[The book is kissed.]

*Relieving officer*. [In a monotone, pausing slightly at each sentence end, that his evidence may be inscribed.] About ten o'clock this morning, your Worship, I found these two little girls in Blue Street, Fulham, crying outside a public-house. Asked where their home was, they said they had no home. Mother had gone away. Asked about their father. Their father had no work. Asked where they slept last night. At their aunt's. I 've made inquiries, your Worship. The wife has broken up the home and gone on the streets. The husband is out of work and living in common lodging-houses. The husband's sister has eight children of her own, and says she can't afford to keep these little girls any longer.

*Magistrate*. [Returning to his seat beneath the canopy of justice.] Now, let me see. You say the mother is on the streets; what evidence have you of that?

*Relieving officer*. I have the husband here, your Worship.

*Magistrate*. Very well; then let us see him.

[There are cries of "*Livens*." The *magistrate* leans forward, and stares with hard compassion at the little girls. *Livens* comes in. He is quiet, with grizzled hair, and a muffler for a collar. He stands beside the witness-box.]

And you, are their father? Now, why don't you keep your little girls at home. How is it you leave them to wander about the streets like this?

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*Livens*. I've got no home, your Worship. I'm living from 'and to mouth. I 've got no work; and nothin' to keep them on.

*Magistrate*. How is that?

*Livens*. [Ashamedly.] My wife, she broke my 'ome up, and pawned the things.

*Magistrate*. But what made you let her?

*Levins*. Your Worship, I'd no chance to stop 'er, she did it when I was out lookin' for work.

*Magistrate*. Did you ill-treat her?

*Livens*. [Emphatically.] I never raised my 'and to her in my life, your Worship.

*Magistrate*. Then what was it—did she drink?

*Livens*. Yes, your Worship.

*Magistrate*. Was she loose in her behaviour?

*Livens*. [In a low voice.] Yes, your Worship.

*Magistrate*. And where is she now?

*Livens*. I don't know your Worship. She went off with a man, and after that I——

*Magistrate*. Yes, yes. Who knows anything of her? [To the bald *constable*.] Is she known here?

*Relieving officer*. Not in this district, your Worship; but I have ascertained that she is well known——

*Magistrate*. Yes—yes; we'll stop at that. Now [To the Father] you say that she has broken up your home, and left these little girls. What provision can you make for them? You look a strong man.

*Livens*. So I am, your Worship. I'm willin' enough to work, but for the life of me I can't get anything to do.

*Magistrate*. But have you tried?

*Livens*. I've tried everything, your Worship—I 've tried my 'ardest.

*Magistrate*. Well, well—— [There is a silence.]

*Relieving officer*. If your Worship thinks it's a case, my people are willing to take them.

*Magistrate*. Yes, yes, I know; but I've no evidence that this man is not the proper guardian for his children.

[He rises oval goes back to the fire.]

*Relieving officer*. The mother, your Worship, is able to get access to them.

*Magistrate*. Yes, yes; the mother, of course, is an improper person to have anything to do with them. [To the Father.] Well, now what do you say?

*Livens*. Your Worship, I can only say that if I could get work I should be only too willing to provide for them. But what can I do, your Worship? Here I am obliged to live from 'and to mouth in these 'ere common lodging-houses. I 'm a strong man—I'm willing to work —I'm half as alive again as some of 'em—but you see, your Worship, my 'airs' turned a bit, owing to the fever—[Touches his hair]—and that's against me; and I don't seem to get a chance anyhow.

*Magistrate*. Yes-yes. [Slowly.] Well, I think it 's a case. [Staring his hardest at the little girls.] Now, are you willing that these little girls should be sent to a home.

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*Livens*. Yes, your Worship, I should be very willing.

*Magistrate*. Well, I'll remand them for a week. Bring them again to-day week; if I see no reason against it then, I 'll make an order.

*Relieving officer*. To-day week, your Worship.

[The bald *constable* takes the little girls out by the shoulders. The father follows them. The *magistrate*, returning to his seat, bends over and talks to his *clerk* inaudibly.]

*Barthwick*. [Speaking behind his hand.] A painful case, Roper; very distressing state of things.

*Roper*. Hundreds like this in the Police Courts.

*Barthwick*. Most distressing! The more I see of it, the more important this question of the condition of the people seems to become. I shall certainly make a point of taking up the cudgels in the House. I shall move——

[The *magistrate* ceases talking to his *clerk*.]

*Clerk*. Remands!

[*Barthwick* stops abruptly. There is a stir and *Mrs*. *Jones* comes in by the public door; *Jones*, ushered by policemen, comes from the prisoner's door. They file into the dock.]

*Clerk*. James Jones, Jane Jones.

*Usher*. Jane Jones!

*Barthwick*. [In a whisper.] The purse—the purse must be kept out of it, Roper. Whatever happens you must keep that out of the papers.

[*Roper* nods.]

*Bald constable*. Hush!

[*Mrs*. *Jones*, dressed in hey thin, black, wispy dress, and black straw hat, stands motionless with hands crossed on the front rail of the dock. *Jones* leans against the back rail of the dock, and keeps half turning, glancing defiantly about him. He is haggard and unshaven.]

*Clerk*. [Consulting with his papers.] This is the case remanded from last Wednesday, Sir. Theft of a silver cigarette-box and assault on the police; the two charges were taken together. Jane Jones! James Jones!

*Magistrate*. [Staring.] Yes, yes; I remember.

*Clerk*. Jane Jones.

*Mrs*. *Jones*. Yes, Sir.

*Clerk*. Do you admit stealing a silver cigarette-box valued at five pounds, ten shillings, from the house of John *Barthwick*, M.P., between the hours of 11 p.m. on Easter Monday and 8.45 a.m. on Easter Tuesday last? Yes, or no?

*Mrs*. *Jones*. [In a logy voice.] No, Sir, I do not, sir.

*Clerk*. James Jones? Do you admit stealing a silver cigarette-box valued at five pounds, ten shillings, from the house of John *Barthwick*, M.P., between the hours of 11 p.m. on Easter Monday and 8.45 A.M. on Easter Tuesday last. And further making an assault on the police when in the execution of their duty at 3 p.m. on Easter Tuesday? Yes or no?

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*Jones*. [Sullenly.] Yes, but I've got a lot to say about it.

*Magistrate*. [To the *clerk*.] Yes—yes. But how comes it that these two people are charged with the same offence? Are they husband and wife?

*Clerk*. Yes, Sir. You remember you ordered a remand for further evidence as to the story of the male prisoner.

*Magistrate*. Have they been in custody since?

*Clerk*. You released the woman on her own recognisances, sir.

*Magistrate*. Yes, yes, this is the case of the silver box; I remember now. Well?

*Clerk*. Thomas Marlow.

[The cry of "*Thomas Marlow*" is repeated *Marlow* comes in, and steps into the witness-box.]

*Usher*. The evidence you give to the court shall be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God. Kiss the book.

[The book is kissed. The silver box is handed up, and placed on the rail.]

*Clerk*. [Reading from his papers.] Your name is Thomas Marlow? Are you, butler to John *Barthwick*, M.P., of 6, Rockingham Gate?

*Marlow*. Yes, Sir.

*Clerk*. Is that the box?

*Marlow*. Yes Sir.

*Clerk*. And did you miss the same at 8.45 on the following morning, on going to remove the tray?

*Marlow*. Yes, Sir.

*Clerk*. Is the female prisoner known to you?

[*Marlow* nods.]

Is she the charwoman employed at 6, Rockingham Gate?

[Again *Marlow* nods.]

Did you at the time of your missing the box find her in the room alone?

*Marlow*. Yes, Sir.

*Clerk*. Did you afterwards communicate the loss to your employer, and did he send you to the police station?

*Marlow*. Yes, Sir.

*Clerk*. [To *Mrs*. *Jones*.] Have you anything to ask him?

*Mrs*. *Jones*. No, sir, nothing, thank you, sir.

*Clerk*. [To *Jones*.] James Jones, have you anything to ask this witness?

*Jones*. I don't know 'im.

*Magistrate*. Are you sure you put the box in the place you say at the time you say?

*Marlow*. Yes, your Worship.

*Magistrate*. Very well; then now let us have the officer.

[*Marlow* leaves the box, and Snow goes into it.]

*Usher*. The evidence you give to the court shall be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God. [The book is kissed.]

*Clerk*. [Reading from his papers.] Your name is Robert Allow? You are a detective in the X. B. division of the Metropolitan police force? According to instructions received did you on Easter Tuesday last proceed to the prisoner's lodgings at 34, Merthyr Street, St. Soames's? And did you on entering see the box produced, lying on the table?

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*Snow*.  Yes, Sir.

*Clerk*.  Is that the box?

Snow. [Fingering the box.] Yes, Sir.

*Clerk*.  And did you thereupon take possession of it, and charge the female prisoner with theft of the box from 6, Rockingham Gate?  And did she deny the same?

*Snow*.  Yes, Sir.

*Clerk*.  Did you take her into custody?

Snow.  Yes, Sir.

*Magistrate*.  What was her behaviour?

*Snow*.  Perfectly quiet, your Worship.  She persisted in the denial.
That's all.

*Magistrate*.  *Do* you know her?

*Snow*.  No, your Worship.

*Magistrate*.  Is she known here?

*Bald constable*.  No, your Worship, they're neither of them known, we 've nothing against them at all.

*Clerk*. [To *Mrs*. *Jones*.] Have you anything to ask the officer?

*Mrs*. *Jones*.  No, sir, thank you, I 've nothing to ask him.

*Magistrate*.  Very well then—go on.

*Clerk*. [Reading from his papers.] And while you were taking the female prisoner did the male prisoner interpose, and endeavour to hinder you in the execution of your duty, and did he strike you a blow?

*Snow*.  Yes, Sir.

*Clerk*.  And did he say, "You, let her go, I took the box myself"?

*Snow*.  He did.

*Clerk*. And did you blow your whistle and obtain the assistance of another constable, and take him into custody?

*Snow*. I did.

*Clerk*. Was he violent on the way to the station, and did he use bad language, and did he several times repeat that he had taken the box himself?

[Snow nods.]

Did you thereupon ask him in what manner he had stolen the box? And did you understand him to say he had entered the house at the invitation of young Mr. *Barthwick*

[*Barthwick*, turning in his seat, frowns at *Roper*.]

after midnight on Easter Monday, and partaken of whisky, and that under the influence of the whisky he had taken the box?

*Snow*. I did, sir.

*Clerk*. And was his demeanour throughout very violent?

*Snow*. It was very violent.

*Jones*. [Breaking in.] Violent——of course it was! You put your ‘ands on my wife when I kept tellin’ you I took the thing myself.

*Magistrate*. [Hissing, with protruded neck.] Now—you will have your chance of saying what you want to say presently. Have you anything to ask the officer?

*Jones*. [Sullenly.] No.

*Magistrate*. Very well then. Now let us hear what the female prisoner has to say first.

*Mrs*. *Jones*. Well, your Worship, of course I can only say what I ’ve said all along, that I did n’t take the box.

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*Magistrate*. Yes, but did you know that it was taken?

*Mrs*. *Jones*. No, your Worship. And, of course, to what my husband says, your Worship, I can't speak of my own knowledge. Of course, I know that he came home very late on the Monday night. It was past one o'clock when he came in, and he was not himself at all.

*Magistrate*. Had he been drinking?

*Mrs*. *Jones*. Yes, your Worship.

*Magistrate*. And was he drunk?

*Mrs*. *Jones*. Yes, your Worship, he was almost quite drunk.

*Magistrate*. And did he say anything to you?

*Mrs*. *Jones*. No, your Worship, only to call me names. And of course in the morning when I got up and went to work he was asleep. And I don't know anything more about it until I came home again. Except that Mr. *Barthwick*—that 's my employer, your Worship—told me the box was missing.

*Magistrate*. Yes, yes.

*Mrs*. *Jones*. But of course when I was shaking out my husband's coat the cigarette-box fell out and all the cigarettes were scattered on the bed.

*Magistrate*. You say all the cigarettes were scattered on the bed? [To *snow*.] Did you see the cigarettes scattered on the bed?

*Snow*. No, your Worship, I did not.

*Magistrate*. You see he says he did n't see them.

*Jones*. Well, they were there for all that.

*Snow*. I can't say, your Worship, that I had the opportunity of going round the room; I had all my work cut out with the male prisoner.

*Magistrate*. [To *Mrs*. *Jones*.] Well, what more have you to say?

*Mrs*. *Jones*. Of course when I saw the box, your Worship, I was dreadfully upset, and I could n't think why he had done such a thing; when the officer came we were having words about it, because it is ruin to me, your Worship, in my profession, and I have three little children dependent on me.

*Magistrate*. [Protruding his neck]. Yes—yes—but what did he say to you?

*Mrs*. *Jones*. I asked him whatever came over him to do such a thing —and he said it was the drink. He said he had had too much to drink, and something came over him. And of course, your Worship, he had had very little to eat all day, and the drink does go to the head when you have not had enough to eat. Your Worship may not know, but it is the truth. And I would like to say that all through his married life, I have never known him to do such a thing before, though we have passed through great hardships and [speaking with soft emphasis] I am quite sure he would not have done it if he had been himself at the time.

*Magistrate*. Yes, yes. But don't you know that that is no excuse?

*Mrs*. *Jones*. Yes, your Worship. I know that it is no excuse.

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[The *magistrate* leans over and parleys with his *clerk*.]

*Jack*. [Leaning over from his seat behind.] I say, Dad——

*Barthwick*. Tsst! [Sheltering his mouth he speaks to *Roper*.] Roper, you had better get up now and say that considering the circumstances and the poverty of the prisoners, we have no wish to proceed any further, and if the magistrate would deal with the case as one of disorder only on the part of——

*Bald constable*. HSSShh!

[*Roper* shakes his head.]

*Magistrate*. Now, supposing what you say and what your husband says is true, what I have to consider is—how did he obtain access to this house, and were you in any way a party to his obtaining access? You are the charwoman employed at the house?

*Mrs*. *Jones*. Yes, your Worship, and of course if I had let him into the house it would have been very wrong of me; and I have never done such a thing in any of the houses where I have been employed.

*Magistrate*. Well—so you say. Now let us hear what story the male prisoner makes of it.

*Jones*. [Who leans with his arms on the dock behind, speaks in a slow, sullen voice.] Wot I say is wot my wife says. I ’ve never been ‘ad up in a police court before, an’ I can prove I took it when in liquor. I told her, and she can tell you the same, that I was goin’ to throw the thing into the water sooner then ’ave it on my mind.

*Magistrate*. But how did you get into the *house*?

*Jones*. I was passin’. I was goin’ ’ome from the “Goat and Bells.”

*Magistrate*. The “Goat and Bells,”—what is that? A public-house?

*Jones*. Yes, at the corner. It was Bank ‘oliday, an’ I’d ’ad a drop to drink. I see this young Mr. *Barthwick* tryin’ to find the keyhole on the wrong side of the door.

*Magistrate*. Well?

*Jones*. [Slowly and with many pauses.] Well——I ’elped ’im to find it—drunk as a lord ‘e was. He goes on, an’ comes back again, and says, I ‘ve got nothin’ for you, ‘e says, but come in an’ ’ave a drink. So I went in just as you might ’ave done yourself. We ’ad a drink o’ whisky just as you might have ’ad, ’nd young Mr. *Barthwick* says to me, “Take a drink ’nd a smoke. Take anything you like, ’e says.” And then he went to sleep on the

sofa.  I ’ad some more whisky—an’ I ’ad a smoke—and I ‘ad some more whisky—an’ I carn’t tell yer what ’appened after that.

*Magistrate*.  Do you mean to say that you were so drunk that you can remember nothing?

*Jack*. [Softly to his father.] I say, that’s exactly what——

*Barthwick*.  TSSh!

*Jones*.  That’s what I do mean.

*Magistrate*.  And yet you say you stole the box?

*Jones*.  I never stole the box.  I took it.

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*Magistrate*. [Hissing with protruded neck.] You did not steal it— you took it. Did it belong to you—what is that but stealing?

*Jones*. I took it.

*Magistrate*. You took it—you took it away from their house and you took it to your house ——

*Jones*. [Sullenly breaking in.] I ain't got a house.

*Magistrate*. Very well, let us hear what this young man Mr.—Mr. *Barthwick* has to say to your story.

[*Snow* leaves the witness-box. The *bald constable* beckons *Jack*, who, clutching his hat, goes into the witness-box. *Roper* moves to the table set apart for his profession.]

*Swearing clerk*. The evidence you give to the court shall be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God. Kiss the book.

[The book is kissed.]

*Roper*. [Examining.] What is your name?

*Jack*. [In a low voice.] John *Barthwick*, Junior.

[The *clerk* writes it down.]

*Roper*. Where do you live?

*Jack*. At 6, Rockingham Gate.

[All his answers are recorded by the Clerk.]

*Roper*. You are the son of the owner?

*Jack*. [In a very low voice.] Yes.

*Roper*. Speak up, please. Do you know the prisoners?

*Jack*. [Looking at the *Joneses*, in a low voice.] I 've seen Mrs. Jones. I [in a loud voice] don't know the man.

*Jones*. Well, I know you!

*Bald constable*. HSSh!

*Roper*. Now, did you come in late on the night of Easter Monday?

*Jack*. Yes.

*Roper*. And did you by mistake leave your latch key in the door?

*Jack*. Yes.

*Magistrate*. Oh! You left your latch-key in the door?

*Roper*. And is that all you can remember about your coming in?

*Jack*. [In a loud voice.] Yes, it is.

*Magistrate*. Now, you have heard the male prisoner's story, what do you say to that?

*Jack*. [Turning to the *magistrate*, speaks suddenly in a confident, straight-forward voice.] The fact of the matter is, sir, that I 'd been out to the theatre that night, and had supper afterwards, and I came in late.

*Magistrate*. Do you remember this man being outside when you came in?

*Jack*. No, Sir. [He hesitates.] I don't think I do.

*Magistrate*. [Somewhat puzzled.] Well, did he help you to open the door, as he says? Did any one help you to open the door?

*Jack*. No, sir—I don't think so, sir—I don't know.

*Magistrate*. You don't know? But you must know. It is n't a usual thing for you to have the door opened for you, is it?

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*Jack*. [With a shamefaced smile.] No.

*Magistrate*. Very well, then——

*Jack*. [Desperately.] The fact of the matter is, sir, I'm afraid
I'd had too much champagne that night.

*Magistrate*. [Smiling.] Oh! you'd had too much champagne?

*Jones*. May I ask the gentleman a question?

*Magistrate*. Yes—yes—you may ask him what questions you like.

*Jones*. Don't you remember you said you was a Liberal, same as your father, and you asked me wot I was?

*Jack*. [With his hand against his brow.] I seem to remember——

*Jones*. And I said to you, "I'm a bloomin' Conservative," I said; an' you said to me, "You look more like one of these 'ere Socialists. Take wotever you like," you said.

*Jack*. [With sudden resolution.] No, I don't. I don't remember anything of the sort.

*Jones*. Well, I do, an' my word's as good as yours. I 've never been had up in a police court before. Look 'ere, don't you remember you had a sky-blue bag in your 'and [*Barthwick* jumps.]

*Roper*. I submit to your worship that these questions are hardly to the point, the prisoner having admitted that he himself does not remember anything. [There is a smile on the face of Justice.] It is a case of the blind leading the blind.

*Jones*. [Violently.] I've done no more than wot he 'as. I'm a poor man; I've got no money an' no friends—he 's a toff—he can do wot I can't.

*Magistrate*: Now, now? All this won't help you—you must be quiet. You say you took this box? Now, what made you take it? Were you pressed for money?

*Jones*. I'm always pressed for money.

*Magistrate*. Was that the reason you took it?

*Jones*. No.

*Magistrate*. [To *snow*.] Was anything found on him?

*Snow*. Yes, your worship. There was six pounds twelve shillin's found on him, and this purse.

[The red silk purse is handed to the *magistrate*. *Barthwick* rises his seat, but hastily sits down again.]

*Magistrate*. [Staring at the purse.] Yes, yes—let me see [There is a silence.] No, no, I 've nothing before me as to the purse. How did you come by all that money?

*Jones*. [After a long pause, suddenly.] I declines to say.

*Magistrate*. But if you had all that money, what made you take this box?

*Jones*. I took it out of spite.

*Magistrate*. [Hissing, with protruded neck.] You took it out of spite? Well now, that's something! But do you imagine you can go about the town taking things out of spite?

*Jones*. If you had my life, if you'd been out of work——

*Magistrate*. Yes, yes; I know—because you're out of work you think it's an excuse for everything.

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*Jones*. [Pointing at *Jack*.] You ask ’im wot made ’im take the——

*Roper*. [Quietly.] Does your Worship require this witness in the box any longer?

*Magistrate*. [Ironically.] I think not; he is hardly profitable.

[*Jack* leaves the witness-box, and hanging his head, resumes his seat.]

*Jones*. You ask ’im wot made ’im take the lady’s——

[But the *bald constable* catches him by the sleeve.]

*Bald constable*. SSSh!

*Magistrate*. [Emphatically.] Now listen to me.

I ’ve nothing to do with what he may or may not have taken. Why did you resist the police in the execution of their duty?

*Jones*. It war n’t their duty to take my wife, a respectable woman, that ’ad n’t done nothing.

*Magistrate*. But I say it was. What made you strike the officer a blow?

*Jones*. Any man would a struck ’im a blow. I’d strike ’im again, I would.

*Magistrate*. You are not making your case any better by violence. How do you suppose we could get on if everybody behaved like you?

*Jones*. [Leaning forward, earnestly.] Well, wot, about ’er; who’s to make up to ’er for this? Who’s to give ’er back ’er good name?

*Mrs*. *Jones*. Your Worship, it’s the children that’s preying on his mind, because of course I ’ve lost my work. And I’ve had to find another room owing to the scandal.

*Magistrate*. Yes, yes, I know—but if he had n’t acted like this nobody would have suffered.

*Jones*. [Glaring round at *Jack*.] I ’ve done no worse than wot ’e ’as. Wot I want to know is wot ‘s goin’ to be done to ’im.

[The *bald constable* again says “HSSh”]

*Roper*. Mr. *Barthwick* wishes it known, your Worship, that considering the poverty of the prisoners, he does not press the charge as to the box. Perhaps your Worship would deal with the case as one of disorder.

*Jones*. I don't want it smothered up, I want it all dealt with fair —I want my rights——

*Magistrate*. [Rapping his desk.] Now you have said all you have to say, and you will be quiet.

> [There is a silence; the *magistrate* bends over and parleys with his *clerk*.]

Yes, I think I may discharge the woman. [In a kindly voice he addresses *Mrs*. *Jones*, who stands unmoving with her hands crossed on the rail.] It is very unfortunate for you that this man has behaved as he has. It is not the consequences to him but the consequences to you. You have been brought here twice, you have lost your work—[He glares at *Jones*]—and this is what always happens. Now you may go away, and I am very sorry it was necessary to bring you here at all.

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*Mrs*. *Jones*. [Softly.] Thank you very much, your Worship.

[She leaves the dock, and looking back at *Jones*, twists her fingers and is still.]

*Magistrate*. Yes, yes, but I can't pass it over. Go away, there's a good woman.

[*Mrs*. *Jones* stands back. The *magistrate* leans his head on his hand; then raising it he speaks to *Jones*.]

Now, listen to me. Do you wish the case to be settled here, or do you wish it to go before a jury?

*Jones*. [Muttering.] I don't want no jury.

*Magistrate*. Very well then, I will deal with it here. [After a pause.] You have pleaded guilty to stealing this box——

*Jones*. Not to stealin'——

*Bald constable*. HSSShh!

*Magistrate*. And to assaulting the police——

*Jones*. Any man as was a man——

*Magistrate*. Your conduct here has been most improper. You give the excuse that you were drunk when you stole the box. I tell you that is no excuse. If you choose to get drunk and break the law afterwards you must take the consequences. And let me tell you that men like you, who get drunk and give way to your spite or whatever it is that's in you, are—are—a nuisance to the community.

*Jack*. [Leaning from his seat.] Dad! that's what you said to me!

*Barthwick*. TSSt!

[There is a silence, while the *magistrate* consults his *clerk*; *Jones* leans forward waiting.]

*Magistrate*. This is your first offence, and I am going to give you a light sentence. [Speaking sharply, but without expression.] One month with hard labour.

[He bends, and parleys with his *clerk*. The *bald constable* and another help *Jones* from the dock.]

*Jones*. [Stopping and twisting round.] Call this justice? What about ’im? ’E got drunk! ’E took the purse—’e took the purse but [in a muffled shout] it’s ’is money got ’im off—-*justice*!

[The prisoner’s door is shut on *Jones*, and from the seedy-looking men and women comes a hoarse and whispering groan.]

*Magistrate*. We will now adjourn for lunch! [He rises from his seat.]

[The Court is in a stir. *Roper* gets up and speaks to the reporter. *Jack*, throwing up his head, walks with a swagger to the corridor; *Barthwick* follows.]

*Mrs*. *Jones*. [Turning to him zenith a humble gesture.] Oh! sir!

[*Barthwick* hesitates, then yielding to his nerves, he makes a shame-faced gesture of refusal, and hurries out of court. *Mrs*. *Jones* stands looking after him.]

The curtain falls.

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## JOY

A *play on the letter* "I"

## IN THREE ACTS

### PERSONS OF THE PLAY

*Colonel hope*, R.A., retired
*Mrs*. *Hope*, his wife
*miss beech*, their old governess
*Letty*, their daughter
*Ernest blunt*, her husband
*Mrs*. *Gwyn*, their niece
*joy*, her daughter
*Dick Merton*, their young friend
*Hon*. *Maurice lever*, their guest
*rose*, their parlour-maid

*Time*: The present. The action passes throughout midsummer day on the lawn of Colonel Hope's house, near the Thames above Oxford.

## ACT I

The time is morning, and the scene a level lawn, beyond which the river is running amongst fields. A huge old beech tree overshadows everything, in the darkness of whose hollow many things are hidden. A rustic seat encircles it. A low wall clothed in creepers, with two openings, divides this lawn from the flowery approaches to the house. Close to the wall there is a swing. The sky is clear and sunny. *Colonel hope* is seated in a garden-chair, reading a newspaper through pince-nez. He is fifty-five and bald, with drooping grey moustaches and a weather-darkened face. He wears a flannel suit and a hat from Panama; a tennis racquet leans against his chair. *Mrs*. *Hope* comes quickly through the opening of the wall, with roses in her hands. She is going grey; she wears tan gauntlets, and no hat. Her manner is decided, her voice emphatic, as though aware that there is no nonsense in its owner's composition. Screened from sight, *miss beech* is seated behind the hollow tree; and *joy* is perched on a lower branch hidden by foliage.

Mrs. Hope. I told Molly in my letter that she'd have to walk up, Tom.

*Colonel*. Walk up in this heat? My dear, why didn't you order Benson's fly?

*Mrs*. *Hope*. Expense for nothing! Bob can bring up her things in the barrow. I've told Joy I won't have her going down to meet the train. She's so excited about her mother's coming there's no doing anything with her.

*Colonel*. No wonder, after two months.

*Mrs*. *Hope*. Well, she's going home to-morrow; she must just keep herself fresh for the dancing tonight. I'm not going to get people in to dance, and have Joy worn out before they begin.

*Colonel*. [Dropping his paper.] I don't like Molly's walking up.

*Mrs*. *Hope*. A great strong woman like Molly Gwyn! It isn't half a mile.

*Colonel*. I don't like it, Nell; it's not hospitable.

*Mrs*. *Hope*. Rubbish! If you want to throw away money, you must just find some better investment than those wretched 3 per cents. of yours. The greenflies are in my roses already! Did you ever see anything so disgusting? [They bend over the roses they have grown, and lose all sense of everything.] Where's the syringe? I saw you mooning about with it last night, Tom.

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*Colonel*. [Uneasily.] Mooning!

[He retires behind his paper. *Mrs*. *Hope* enters the hollow of the tree.]

There's an account of that West Australian swindle. Set of ruffians! Listen to this, Nell! "It is understood that amongst the share-holders are large numbers of women, clergymen, and Army officers." How people can be such fools!

[Becoming aware that his absorption is unobserved, he drops his glasses, and reverses his chair towards the tree.]

*Mrs*. *Hope*. [Reappearing with a garden syringe.] I simply won't have Dick keep his fishing things in the tree; there's a whole potful of disgusting worms. I can't touch them. You must go and take 'em out, Tom.

[In his turn the *colonel* enters the hollow of the tree.]

*Mrs*. *Hope*. [Personally.] What on earth's the pleasure of it? I can't see! He never catches anything worth eating.

[The *colonel* reappears with a paint pot full of worms; he holds them out abstractedly.]

*Mrs*. *Hope*. [Jumping.] Don't put them near me!

*Miss beech*. [From behind the tree.] Don't hurt the poor creatures.

*Colonel*. [Turning.] Hallo, Peachey? What are you doing round there?

[He puts the worms down on the seat.]

*Mrs*. *Hope*. Tom, take the worms off that seat at once!

*Colonel*. [Somewhat flurried.] Good gad! I don't know what to do with the beastly worms!

*Mrs*. *Hope*. It's not my business to look after Dick's worms. Don't put them on the ground. I won't have them anywhere where they can crawl about. [She flicks some greenflies off her roses.]

*Colonel*. [Looking into the pot as though the worms could tell him where to put them.] Dash!

*Miss beech*. Give them to me.

*Mrs*. *Hope*. [Relieved.] Yes, give them to Peachey.

[There comes from round the tree Miss *beech*, old-fashioned, barrel-shaped, balloony in the skirts. She takes the paint pot, and sits beside it on the rustic seat.]

*Miss beech*. Poor creatures!

*Mrs*. *Hope*. Well, it's beyond me how you can make pets of worms-wriggling, crawling, horrible things!

[*Rose*, who is young and comely, in a pale print frock, comes from the house and places letters before her on a silver salver.]

[Taking the letters.]

What about Miss joy's frock, Rose?

*Rose*. Please, 'm, I can't get on with the back without Miss Joy.

*Mrs*. *Hope*. Well, then you must just find her. I don't know where she is.

*Rose*. [In a slow, sidelong manner.] If you please, Mum, I think Miss Joy's up in the——

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[She stops, seeing Miss *beech* signing to her with both hands.]

*Mrs*. *Hope*. [Sharply.] What is it, Peachey?

*Miss beech*. [Selecting a finger.] Pricked meself!

*Mrs*. *Hope*. Let's look!

[She bends to look, but Miss *beech* places the finger in her mouth.]

*Rose*. [Glancing askance at the *colonel*.] If you please, Mum, it's below the waist; I think I can manage with the dummy.

*Mrs*. *Hope*. Well, you can try. [Opening her letter as *rose* retires.] Here's Molly about her train.

*Miss beech*. Is there a letter for me?

*Mrs*. *Hope*. No, Peachey.

*Miss beech*. There never is.

*Colonel*. What's that? You got four by the first post.

*Miss beech*. Exceptions!

*Colonel*. [Looking over his glasses.] Why! You know, you get 'em every day!

*Mrs*. *Hope*. Molly says she'll be down by the eleven thirty. [In an injured voice.] She'll be here in half an hour! [Reading with disapproval from the letter.] "*Maurice lever* is coming down by the same train to see Mr. Henty about the Tocopala Gold Mine. Could you give him a bed for the night?"

[Silence, slight but ominous.]

*Colonel*. [Calling into his aid his sacred hospitality.] Of course we must give him a bed!

*Mrs*. *Hope*. Just like a man! What room I should like to know!

*Colonel*. Pink.

*Mrs*. *Hope*. As if Molly wouldn't have the pink!

*Colonel*. [Ruefully.] I thought she'd have the blue!

*Mrs*. *Hope*. You know perfectly well it's full of earwigs, Tom. I killed ten there yesterday morning.

*Miss beech*. Poor creatures!

*Mrs*. *Hope*. I don't know that I approve of this Mr. Lever's dancing attendance. Molly's only thirty-six.

*Colonel*. [In a high voice.] You can't refuse him a bed; I never heard of such a thing.

*Mrs*. *Hope*. [Reading from the letter.] "This gold mine seems to be a splendid chance. [She glances at the *colonel*.] I've put all my spare cash into it. They're issuing some Preference shares now; if Uncle Tom wants an investment"—[She pauses, then in a changed, decided voice ]—Well, I suppose I shall have to screw him in somehow.

*Colonel*. What's that about gold mines? Gambling nonsense! Molly ought to know my views.

*Mrs*. *Hope*. [Folding the letter away out of her consciousness.] Oh! your views! This may be a specially good chance.

*Miss beech*. Ahem! Special case!

*Mrs*. *Hope*. [Paying no attention.] I 'm sick of these 3 per cent. dividends. When you've only got so little money, to put it all into that India Stock, when it might be earning 6 per cent. at least, quite safely! There are ever so many things I want.

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*Colonel*. There you go!

*Mrs*. *Hope*. As to Molly, I think it's high time her husband came home to look after her, instead of sticking out there in that hot place. In fact

[Miss *beech* looks up at the tree and exhibits cerebral excitement]

I don't know what Geoff's about; why doesn't he find something in England, where they could live together.

*Colonel*. Don't say anything against Molly, Nell!

*Mrs*. *Hope*. Well, I don't believe in husband and wife being separated. That's not my idea of married life.

[The *colonel* whistles quizzically.]

Ah, yes, she's your niece, not mime! Molly's very——

*Miss beech*. Ouch! [She sucks her finger.]

*Mrs*. *Hope*. Well, if I couldn't sew at your age, Peachey, without pricking my fingers! Tom, if I have Mr. Lever here, you'll just attend to what I say and look into that mine!

*Colonel*. Look into your grandmother! I have n't made a study of geology for nothing. For every ounce you take out of a gold mine, you put an ounce and a half in. Any fool knows that, eh, Peachey?

*Miss beech*. I hate your horrid mines, with all the poor creatures underground.

*Mrs*. *Hope*. Nonsense, Peachey! As if they'd go there if they did n't want to!

*Colonel*. Why don't you read your paper, then you'd see what a lot of wild-cat things there are about.

*Mrs*. *Hope*. [Abstractedly.] I can't put Ernest and Letty in the blue room, there's only the single bed. Suppose I put Mr. Lever there, and say nothing about the earwigs. I daresay he'll never notice.

*Colonel*. Treat a guest like that!

*Mrs*. *Hope*. Then where am I to put him for goodness sake?

*Colonel*. Put him in my dressing-room, I'll turn out.

*Mrs*. *Hope*. Rubbish, Tom, I won't have you turned out, that's flat. He can have Joy's room, and she can sleep with the earwigs.

*Joy*. [From her hiding-place upon a lower branch of the hollow tree.] I won't.

[*Mrs*. *Hope* and the *colonel* jump.]

*Colonel*. God bless my soul!

*Mrs*. *Hope*. You wretched girl! I told you never to climb that tree again. Did you know, Peachey? [Miss *beech* smiles.] She's always up there, spoiling all her frocks. Come down now, Joy; there's a good child!

*Joy*. I don't want to sleep with earwigs, Aunt Nell.

*Miss beech*. I'll sleep with the poor creatures.

*Mrs*. *Hope*, [After a pause.] Well, it would be a mercy if you would for once, Peachey.

*Colonel*. Nonsense, I won't have Peachey——

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*Mrs*. *Hope*.  Well, who is to sleep there then?

*Joy*. [Coaxingly.] Let me sleep with Mother, Aunt Nell, do!

*Mrs*. *Hope*.  Litter her up with a great girl like you, as if we'd only one spare room!  Tom, see that she comes down—I can't stay here, I must manage something. [She goes away towards the house.]

*Colonel*. [Moving to the tree, and looking up.] You heard what your aunt said?

*Joy*. [Softly.] Oh, Uncle Tom!

*Colonel*.  I shall have to come up after you.

*Joy*.  Oh, do, and Peachey too!

*Colonel*. [Trying to restrain a smile.] Peachey, you talk to her. [Without waiting for *miss beech*, however, he proceeds.] What'll your aunt say to me if I don't get you down?

*Miss beech*.  Poor creature!

*Joy*.  I don't want to be worried about my frock.

*Colonel*. [Scratching his bald head.] Well, I shall catch it.

*Joy*.  Oh, Uncle Tom, your head is so beautiful from here! [Leaning over, she fans it with a leafy twig.]

*Miss beech*.  Disrespectful little toad!

*Colonel*. [Quickly putting on his hat.] You'll fall out, and a pretty mess that'll make on—-[he looks uneasily at the ground]—my lawn!

[A voice is heard calling "Colonel!  Colonel!]"

*Joy*.  There's Dick calling you, Uncle Tom.

[She disappears.]

*Dick*. [Appearing in the opening of the wall.] Ernie's waiting to play you that single, Colonel!

[He disappears.]

*Joy*.  Quick, Uncle Tom!  Oh! do go, before he finds I 'm up here.

*Miss*. *Beech*. Secret little creature!

[The *colonel* picks up his racquet, shakes his fist, and goes away.]

*Joy*. [Calmly.] I'm coming down now, Peachey.

[Climbing down.]

Look out! I'm dropping on your head.

*Miss beech*. [Unmoved.] Don't hurt yourself!

[Joy drops on the rustic seat and rubs her shin. Told you so!]

[She hunts in a little bag for plaster.]

Let's see!

*Joy*. [Seeing the worms.] Ugh!

*Miss beech*. What's the matter with the poor creatures?

*Joy*. They're so wriggly!

[She backs away and sits down in the swing. She is just seventeen, light and slim, brown-haired, fresh-coloured, and grey-eyed; her white frock reaches to her ankles, she wears a sunbonnet.] Peachey, how long were you Mother's governess.

*Miss beech*. Five years.

*Joy*. Was she as bad to teach as me?

*Miss beech*. Worse!

[Joy claps her hands.]

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She was the worst girl I ever taught.

*Joy*. Then you weren't fond of her?

*Miss beech*. Oh! yes, I was.

*Joy*. Fonder than of me?

*Miss beech*. Don't you ask such a lot of questions.

*Joy*. Peachey, duckie, what was Mother's worst fault?

*Miss beech*. Doing what she knew she oughtn't.

*Joy*. Was she ever sorry?

*Miss beech*. Yes, but she always went on doin' it.

*Joy*. I think being sorry 's stupid!

*Miss beech*. Oh, do you?

*Joy*. It isn't any good. Was Mother revengeful, like me?

*Miss beech*. Ah! Wasn't she?

*Joy*. And jealous?

*Miss beech*. The most jealous girl I ever saw.

*Joy*. [Nodding.] I like to be like her.

*Miss beech*. [Regarding her intently.] Yes! you've got all your troubles before you.

*Joy*. Mother was married at eighteen, wasn't she, Peachey? Was she— was she much in love with Father then?

*Miss beech*. [With a sniff.] About as much as usual. [She takes the paint pot, and walking round begins to release the worms.]

*Joy*. [Indifferently.] They don't get on now, you know.

*Miss beech*. What d'you mean by that, disrespectful little creature?

*Joy*. [In a hard voice.] They haven't ever since I've known them. *Miss beech*. [Looks at her, and turns away again.] Don't talk about such things.

*Joy*. I suppose you don't know Mr. Lever? [Bitterly.] He's such a cool beast. He never loses his temper.

*Miss beech*. Is that why you don't like him?

*Joy*. [Frowning.] No—yes—I don't know.

*Miss beech*. Oh! perhaps you do like him?

*Joy*. I don't; I hate him.

*Miss beech*. [Standing still.] Fie! Naughty Temper!

*Joy*. Well, so would you! He takes up all Mother's time.

*Miss beech*. [In a peculiar voice.] Oh! does he?

*Joy*. When he comes I might just as well go to bed. [Passionately.] And now he's chosen to-day to come down here, when I haven't seen her for two months! Why couldn't he come when Mother and I'd gone home. It's simply brutal!

*Miss beech*. But your mother likes him?

*Joy*. [Sullenly.] I don't want her to like him.

*Miss beech*. [With a long look at Joy.] I see!

*Joy*. What are you doing, Peachey?

*Miss beech*. [Releasing a worm.] Letting the poor creatures go.

*Joy*. If I tell Dick he'll never forgive you.

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*Miss beech*. [Sidling behind the swing and plucking off Joy's sunbonnet. With devilry.] Ah-h-h! You've done your hair up; so that's why you wouldn't come down!

*Joy*. [Springing up, anal pouting.] I didn't want any one to see before Mother. You are a pig, Peachey!

*Miss beech*. I thought there was something!

*Joy*. [Twisting round.] How does it look?

*Miss beech*. I've seen better.

*Joy*. You tell any one before Mother comes, and see what I do!

*Miss beech*. Well, don't you tell about my worms, then!

*Joy*. Give me my hat! [Backing hastily towards the tree, and putting her finger to her lips.] Look out! Dick!

*Miss beech*. Oh! dear!

[She sits down on the swing, concealing the paint pot with her feet and skirts.]

*Joy*. [On the rustic seat, and in a violent whisper.] I hope the worms will crawl up your legs!

[*Dick*, in flannels and a hard straw hat comes in. He is a quiet and cheerful boy of twenty. His eyes are always fixed on joy.]

*Dick*. [Grimacing.] The Colonel's getting licked. Hallo! Peachey, in the swing?

*Joy*. [Chuckling.] Swing her, Dick!

*Miss beech*. [Quivering with emotion.] Little creature!

*Joy*. Swing her!

[*Dick* takes the ropes.]

*Miss beech*. [Quietly.] It makes me sick, young man.

*Dick*. [Patting her gently on the back.] All right, Peachey.

*Miss beech*. [Maliciously.] Could you get me my sewing from the seat? Just behind Joy.

*Joy*. [Leaning her head against the tree.] If you do, I won't dance with you to-night.

[*Dick* stands paralysed. Miss *beech* gets off the swing, picks up the paint pot, and stands concealing it behind her.]

*Joy*. Look what she's got behind her, sly old thing!

*Miss beech*. Oh! dear!

*Joy*. Dance with her, Dick!

*Miss beech*. If he dare!

*Joy*. Dance with her, or I won't dance with you to-night. [She whistles a waltz.]

*Dick*. [Desperately.] Come on then, Peachey. We must.

*Joy*. Dance, dance!

[*Dick* seizes Miss *beech* by the waist. She drops the paint pot. They revolve.] [Convulsed.]

Oh, Peachey, Oh!

[Miss *beech* is dropped upon the rustic seat. *Dick* seizes joy's hands and drags her up.]

No, no! I won't!

*Miss beech*. [Panting.] Dance, dance with the poor young man! [She moves her hands.] La la-la-la la-la la la!

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[*Dick* and *joy* dance.]

*Dick*. By Jove, Joy! You've done your hair up. I say, how jolly! You do look——

*Joy*. [Throwing her hands up to her hair.] I did n't mean you to see!

*Dick*. [In a hurt voice.] Oh! didn't you? I'm awfully sorry!

*Joy*. [Flashing round.] Oh, you old Peachey!

[She looks at the ground, and then again at *Dick*.]

*Miss beech*. [Sidling round the tree.] Oh! dear!

*Joy*. [Whispering.] She's been letting out your worms. [Miss *beech* disappears from view.] Look!

*Dick*. [Quickly.] Hang the worms! Joy, promise me the second and fourth and sixth and eighth and tenth and supper, to-night. Promise! Do!

[Joy shakes her head.]

It's not much to ask.

*Joy*. I won't promise anything.

*Dick*. Why not?

*Joy*. Because Mother's coming. I won't make any arrangements.

*Dick*. [Tragically.] It's our last night.

*Joy*. [Scornfully.] You don't understand! [Dancing and clasping her hands.] Mother's coming, Mother's coming!

*Dick*. [Violently.] I wish——Promise, Joy!

*Joy*. [Looking over her shoulder.] Sly old thing! If you'll pay
Peachey out, I'll promise you supper!

*Miss beech*. [From behind the tree.] I hear you.

*Joy*. [Whispering.] Pay her out, pay her out! She's let out all your worms!

*Dick*. [Looking moodily at the paint pot.] I say, is it true that Maurice Lever's coming with your mother? I've met him playing cricket, he's rather a good sort.

*Joy*. [Flashing out.] I hate him.

*Dick*. [Troubled.] Do you? Why? I thought—I didn't know—if I'd known of course, I'd have——

[He is going to say "hated him too!" But the voices of *Ernest blunt* and the *colonel* are heard approaching, in dispute.]

*Joy*. Oh! Dick, hide me, I don't want my hair seen till Mother comes.

[She springs into the hollow tree. The *colonel* and *Ernest* appear in the opening of the wall.]

*Ernest*. The ball was out, Colonel.

*Colonel*. Nothing of the sort.

*Ernest*. A good foot out.

*Colonel*. It was not, sir. I saw the chalk fly.

[*Ernest* is twenty-eight, with a little moustache, and the positive cool voice of a young man who knows that he knows everything. He is perfectly calm.]

*Ernest*. I was nearer to it than you.

*Colonel*. [In a high, hot voice.] I don't care where you were, I hate a fellow who can't keep cool.

*Miss beech*. [From behind the hollow tree.] Fie! Fie!

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*Ernest*. We're two to one, Letty says the ball was out.

*Colonel*. Letty's your wife, she'd say anything.

*Ernest*. Well, look here, Colonel, I'll show you the very place it pitched.

*Colonel*. Gammon! You've lost your temper, you don't know what you're talking about.

*Ernest*. [coolly.] I suppose you'll admit the rule that one umpires one's own court.

*Colonel*. [Hotly.] Certainly not, in this case!

*Miss beech*. [From behind the hollow tree.] Special case!

*Ernest*. [Moving chin in collar—very coolly.] Well, of course if you won't play the game!

*Colonel*. [In a towering passion.] If you lose your temper like this, I 'll never play with you again.

[To *Letty*, a pretty soul in a linen suit, approaching through the wall.]

Do you mean to say that ball was out, Letty?

*Letty*. Of course it was, Father.

*Colonel*. You say that because he's your husband. [He sits on the rustic seat.] If your mother'd been there she'd have backed me up!

*Letty*. Mother wants Joy, Dick, about her frock.

*Dick*. I—I don't know where she is.

*Miss beech*. [From behind the hollow tree.] Ahem!

*Letty*. What's the matter, Peachey?

*Miss beech*. Swallowed a fly. Poor creature!

*Ernest*. [Returning to his point.] Why I know the ball was out, Colonel, was because it pitched in a line with that arbutus tree.

*Colonel*. [Rising.] Arbutus tree! [To his daughter.] Where's your mother?

*Letty*. In the blue room, Father.

*Ernest*. The ball was a good foot out; at the height it was coming when it passed me.

*Colonel*. [Staring at him.] You're a—you're aa theorist! From where you were you could n't see the ball at all. [To *Letty*.] Where's your mother?

*Letty*. [Emphatically.] In the blue room, Father!

[The *colonel* glares confusedly, and goes away towards the blue room.]

*Ernest*. [In the swing, and with a smile.] Your old Dad'll never be a sportsman!

*Letty*. [Indignantly.] I wish you wouldn't call Father old, Ernie! What time's Molly coming, Peachey?

[*Rose* has come from the house, and stands waiting for a chance to speak.]

*Ernest*. [Breaking in.] Your old Dad's only got one fault: he can't take an impersonal view of things.

*Miss beech*. Can you find me any one who can?

*Ernest*. [With a smile.] Well, Peachey!

*Miss beech*. [Ironically.] Oh! of course, there's you!

*Ernest*. I don't know about that! But——

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*Rose*. [To *Letty*,] Please, Miss, the Missis says will you and Mr. Ernest please to move your things into Miss Peachey's room.

*Ernest*. [Vexed.] Deuce of a nuisance havin' to turn out for this fellow Lever. What did Molly want to bring him for?

*Miss beech*. Course you've no personal feeling in the matter!

*Rose*. [Speaking to Miss *beech*.] The Missis says you're to please move your things into the blue room, please Miss.

*Letty*. Aha, Peachey! That settles you! Come on, Ernie!

[She goes towards the house. *Ernest*, rising from the swing, turns to Miss *beech*, who follows.]

*Ernest*. [Smiling, faintly superior.] Personal, not a bit! I only think while Molly 's out at grass, she oughtn't to——

*Miss beech*. [Sharply.] Oh! do you?

[She hustles *Ernest* out through the wall, but his voice is heard faintly from the distance: "I think it's jolly thin."]

*Rose*. [To *Dick*.] The Missis says you're to take all your worms and things, Sir, and put them where they won't be seen.

*Dick*. [Shortly.] Have n't got any!

*Rose*. The Missis says she'll be very angry if you don't put your worms away; and would you come and help kill earwigs in the blue——?

*Dick*. Hang! [He goes, and *rose* is left alone.]

*Rose*. [Looking straight before her.] Please, Miss Joy, the Missis says will you go to her about your frock.

[There is a little pause, then from the hollow tree joy's voice is heard.]

*Joy*. No-o!

*Rose*. If you did n't come, I was to tell you she was going to put you in the blue.

[Joy looks out of the tree.]

[Immovable, but smiling.]

Oh, Miss joy, you've done your hair up! [Joy retires into the tree.] Please, Miss, what shall I tell the Missis?

*Joy*. [Joy's voice is heard.] Anything you like.

*Rose*. [Over her shoulder.] I shall be drove to tell her a story,
Miss.

*Joy*. All right! Tell it.

[*Rose* goes away, and *joy* comes out. She sits on the rustic seat and waits. *Dick*, coming softly from the house, approaches her.]

*Dick*. [Looking at her intently.] Joy! I wanted to say something

[Joy does not look at him, but twists her fingers.]

I shan't see you again you know after to-morrow till I come up for the 'Varsity match.

*Joy*. [Smiling.] But that's next week.

*Dick*. Must you go home to-morrow?

[Joy nods three times.]

[Coming closer.]

I shall miss you so awfully. You don't know how I——

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[Joy shakes her head.]

Do look at me! [*Joy* steals a look.] Oh! Joy!

[Again joy shakes her head.]

*Joy*. [Suddenly.] Don't!

*Dick*. [Seizing her hand.] Oh, Joy! Can't you——

*Joy*. [Drawing the hand away.] Oh! don't.

*Dick*. [Bending his head.] It's—it's—so——

*Joy*. [Quietly.] Don't, Dick!

*Dick*. But I can't help it! It's too much for me, Joy, I must tell you——

[*Mrs*. *Gwyn* is seen approaching towards the house.]

*Joy*. [Spinning round.] It's Mother—oh, Mother!
[She rushes at her.]

[*Mrs*. *Gwyn* is a handsome creature of thirty-six, dressed in a muslin frock. She twists her daughter round, and kisses her.]

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. How sweet you look with your hair up, Joy! Who 's this? [Glancing with a smile at *Dick*.]

*Joy*. Dick Merton—in my letters you know.

[She looks at *Dick* as though she wished him gone.]

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. How do you do?

*Dick*. [Shaking hands.] How d 'you do? I think if you'll excuse me
—I'll go in.

[He goes uncertainly.]

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. What's the matter with him?

*Joy*. Oh, nothing! [Hugging her.] Mother! You do look such a duck.
Why did you come by the towing-path, was n't it cooking?

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. [Avoiding her eyes.] Mr. Lever wanted to go into Mr. Henty's.

[Her manner is rather artificially composed.]

*Joy*. [Dully.] Oh! Is he-is he really coming here, Mother?

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. [Whose voice has hardened just a little.] If Aunt Nell's got a room for him—-of course—why not?

*Joy*. [Digging her chin into her mother's shoulder.]

[Why couldn't he choose some day when we'd gone? I wanted you all to myself.]

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. You are a quaint child—when I was your age——

*Joy*. [Suddenly looking up.] Oh! Mother, you must have been a chook!

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. Well, I was about twice as old as you, I know that.

*Joy*. Had you any—any other offers before you were married, Mother?

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. [Smilingly.] Heaps!

*Joy*. [Reflectively.] Oh!

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. Why? Have you been having any?

*Joy*. [Glancing at *Mrs*. *Gwyn*, and then down.] N-o, of course not!

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. Where are they all? Where's Peachey?

*Joy*. Fussing about somewhere; don't let's hurry! Oh! you duckie— duckie! Aren't there any letters from Dad?

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. [In a harder voice.] Yes, one or two.

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*Joy*. [Hesitating.] Can't I see?

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. I didn't bring them. [Changing the subject obviously.] Help me to tidy—I'm so hot I don't know what to do.

[She takes out a powder-puff bag, with a tiny looking-glass.]

*Joy*. How lovely it'll be to-morrow-going home!

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. [With an uneasy look.] London's dreadfully stuffy, Joy. You 'll only get knocked up again.

*Joy*. [With consternation.] Oh! but Mother, I must come.

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. (Forcing a smile.) Oh, well, if you must, you must!

[Joy makes a dash at her.]

Don't rumple me again. Here's Uncle Tom.

*Joy*. [Quickly.] Mother, we're going to dance tonight; promise to dance with me—there are three more girls than men, at least—and don't dance too much with—with—you know—because I'm—[dropping her voice and very still]—jealous.

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. [Forcing a laugh.] You are funny!

*Joy*. [Very quickly.] I haven't made any engagements because of you.

[The *colonel* approaches through the wall.]

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. Well, Uncle Tom?

*Colonel*. [Genially.] Why, Molly! [He kisses her.] What made you come by the towing-path?

*Joy*. Because it's so much cooler, of course.

*Colonel*. Hallo! What's the matter with you? Phew! you've got your hair up! Go and tell your aunt your mother's on the lawn. Cut along!

[Joy goes, blowing a kiss.]

Cracked about you, Molly! Simply cracked! We shall miss her when you take her off to-morrow. [He places a chair for her.] Sit down, sit down, you must be tired in this heat. I 've sent Bob for your things with the wheelbarrow; what have you got?—only a bag, I suppose.

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. [Sitting, with a smile.] That's all, Uncle Tom, except— my trunk and hat-box.

*Colonel*. Phew! And what's-his-name brought a bag, I suppose?

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. They're all together. I hope it's not too much, Uncle Tom.

*Colonel*. [Dubiously.] Oh! Bob'll manage! I suppose you see a good deal of—of—-Lever. That's his brother in the Guards, isn't it?

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. Yes.

*Colonel*. Now what does this chap do?

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. What should he do, Uncle Tom? He's a Director.

*Colonel*. Guinea-pig! [Dubiously.] Your bringing him down was a good idea.

[*Mrs*. *Gwyn*, looking at him sidelong, bites her lips.]

I should like to have a look at him. But, I say, you know, Molly— mines, mines! There are a lot of these chaps about, whose business is to cook their own dinners. Your aunt thinks——

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*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. Oh! Uncle Tom, don't tell me what Aunt Nell thinks!

*Colonel*. Well-well! Look here, old girl! It's my experience never to—what I mean is—-never to trust too much to a man who has to do with mining. I've always refused to have anything to do with mines. If your husband were in England, of course, I'd say nothing.

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. [Very still.] We'd better keep him out of the question, had n't we?

*Colonel*. Of course, if you wish it, my dear.

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. Unfortunately, I do.

*Colonel*. [Nervously.] Ah! yes, I know; but look here, Molly, your aunt thinks you're in a very delicate position-in fact, she thinks you see too much of young Lever.

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. [Stretching herself like an angry cat.] Does she? And what do you think?

*Colonel*. I? I make a point of not thinking. I only know that here he is, and I don't want you to go burning your fingers, eh?

[*Mrs*. *Gwyn* sits with a vindictive smile.]

A gold mine's a gold mine. I don't mean he deliberately—but they take in women and parsons, and—and all sorts of fools. [Looking down.] And then, you know, I can't tell your feelings, my dear, and I don't want to; but a man about town 'll compromise a woman as soon as he'll look at her, and [softly shaking his head] I don't like that, Molly! It 's not the thing!

[*Mrs*. *Gwyn* sits unmoved, smiling the same smile, and the *colonel* gives her a nervous look.]

If—if you were any other woman I should n't care—and if—if you were a plain woman, damme, you might do what you liked! I know you and Geoff don't get on; but here's this child of yours, devoted to you, and—and don't you see, old girl? Eh?

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. [With a little hard laugh.] Thanks! Perfectly! I suppose as you don't think, Uncle Tom, it never occurred to you that I have rather a lonely time of it.

*Colonel*. [With compunction.] Oh! my dear, yes, of course I know it must be beastly.

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. [Stonily.] It is.

*Colonel*. Yes, yes! [Speaking in a surprised voice.] I don't know what I 'm talking like this for! It's your aunt! She goes on at me till she gets on my nerves. What d' you think she wants me to do now? Put money into this gold mine! Did you ever hear such folly?

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. [Breaking into laughter.] Oh! Uncle Tom!

*Colonel*. All very well for you to laugh, Molly!

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. [Calmly.] And how much are you going to put in?

*Colonel*. Not a farthing! Why, I've got nothing but my pension and three thousand India stock!

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. Only ninety pounds a year, besides your pension! D' you mean to say that's all you've got, Uncle Tom? I never knew that before. What a shame!

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*Colonel*. [Feelingly.] It is a, d—d shame! I don't suppose there's another case in the army of a man being treated as I've been.

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. But how on earth do you manage here on so little?

*Colonel*. [Brooding.] Your aunt's very funny. She's a born manager. She 'd manage the hind leg off a donkey; but if I want five shillings for a charity or what not, I have to whistle for it. And then all of a sudden, Molly, she'll take it into her head to spend goodness knows what on some trumpery or other and come to me for the money. If I have n't got it to give her, out she flies about 3 per cent., and worries me to invest in some wild-cat or other, like your friend's thing, the Jaco what is it? I don't pay the slightest attention to her.

*Mrs*. *Hope*. [From the direction of the house.] Tom!

*Colonel*. [Rising.] Yes, dear! [Then dropping his voice.] I say, Molly, don't you mind what I said about young Lever. I don't want you to imagine that I think harm of people—you know I don't—but so many women come to grief, and—[hotly]—I can't stand men about town; not that he of course——

*Mrs*. *Hope*, [Peremptorily.] Tom!

*Colonel*. [In hasty confidence.] I find it best to let your aunt run on. If she says anything ——

*Mrs*. *Hope*. To-om!

*Colonel*. Yes, dear!

[He goes hastily. *Mrs*. *Gwyn* sits drawing circles on the ground with her charming parasol. Suddenly she springs to her feet, and stands waiting like an animal at bay. The *colonel* and *Mrs*. *Hope* approach her talking.]

*Mrs*. *Hope*. Well, how was I to know?

*Colonel*. Did n't Joy come and tell you?

*Mrs*. *Hope*. I don't know what's the matter with that child? Well, Molly, so here you are. You're before your time—that train's always late.

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. [With faint irony.] I'm sorry, Aunt Nell!

[They bob, seem to take fright, and kiss each other gingerly.]

*Mrs*. *Hope*. What have you done with Mr. Lever? I shall have to put him in Peachey's room. Tom's got no champagne.

*Colonel*. They've a very decent brand down at the George, Molly, I'll send Bob over ——

*Mrs*. *Hope*. Rubbish, Tom! He'll just have to put up with what he can get!

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. Of course! He's not a snob! For goodness sake, Aunt Nell, don't put yourself out! I'm sorry I suggested his coming.

*Colonel*. My dear, we ought to have champagne in the house—in case of accident.

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. [Shaking him gently by the coat.] No, please, Uncle Tom!

*Mrs*. *Hope*. [Suddenly.] Now, I've told your uncle, Molly, that he's not to go in for this gold mine without making certain it's a good thing. Mind, I think you've been very rash. I'm going to give you a good talking to; and that's not all—you ought n't to go about like this with a young man; he's not at all bad looking. I remember him perfectly well at the Fleming's dance.

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[On *Mrs*. GWYN's lips there comes a little mocking smile.]

*Colonel*. [Pulling his wife's sleeve.] Nell!

*Mrs*. *Hope*. No, Tom, I'm going to talk to Molly; she's old enough to know better.

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. Yes?

*Mrs*. *Hope*. Yes, and you'll get yourself into a mess; I don't approve of it, and when I see a thing I don't approve of——

*Colonel*. [Walking about, and pulling his moustache.] Nell, I won't have it, I simply won't have it.

*Mrs*. *Hope*. What rate of interest are these Preference shares to pay?

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. [Still smiling.] Ten per cent.

*Mrs*. *Hope*. What did I tell you, Tom? And are they safe?

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. You'd better ask Maurice.

*Mrs*. *Hope*. There, you see, you call him Maurice! Now supposing your uncle went in for some of them——

*Colonel*. [Taking off his hat-in a high, hot voice] I'm not going in for anything of the sort.

*Mrs*. *Hope*. Don't swing your hat by the brim! Go and look if you can see him coming!

[The *colonel* goes.]

[In a lower voice.] Your uncle's getting very bald. I 've only shoulder of lamb for lunch, and a salad. It's lucky it's too hot to eat.

[*Miss beech* has appeared while she is speaking.]

Here she is, Peachey!

*Miss beech*. I see her. [She kisses *Mrs*. *Gwyn*, and looks at her intently.]

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. [Shrugging her shoulders.] Well, Peachey! What d 'you make of me?

*Colonel*. [Returning from his search.] There's a white hat crossing the second stile. Is that your friend, Molly?

[*Mrs*. *Gwyn* nods.]

*Mrs*. *Hope*. Oh! before I forget, Peachey—Letty and Ernest can move their things back again. I'm going to put Mr. Lever in your room. [Catching sight o f the paint pot on the ground.] There's that disgusting paint pot! Take it up at once, Tom, and put it in the tree.

[The *colonel* picks up the pot and bears it to the hollow tree followed by *Mrs*. *Hope*; he enters.]

*Mrs*. *Hope*. [Speaking into the tree.] Not there!

*Colonel*. [From within.] Well, where then?

*Mrs*. *Hope*. Why—up—oh! gracious!

[*Mrs*. *Gwyn*, standing alone, is smiling. *Lever* approaches from the towing-path. He is a man like a fencer's wrist, supple and steely. A man whose age is difficult to tell, with a quick, good-looking face, and a line between his brows; his darkish hair is flecked with grey. He gives the feeling that he has always had to spurt to keep pace with his own life.]

*Mrs*. *Hope*. [Also entering the hollow tree.] No-oh!

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*Colonel*. [From the depths, in a high voice.] Well, dash it then!
What do you want?

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. Peachey, may I introduce Mr. Lever to you? Miss Beech, my old governess.

[They shake each other by the hand.]

*Lever*. How do you do? [His voice is pleasant, his manner easy.]

*Miss beech*. Pleased to meet you.

[Her manner is that of one who is not pleased. She watches.]

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. [Pointing to the tree-maliciously.] This is my uncle and my aunt. They're taking exercise, I think.

[The *colonel* and *Mrs*. *Hope* emerge convulsively. They are very hot. *Lever* and *Mrs*. *Gwyn* are very cool.]

*Mrs*. *Hope*. [Shaking hands with him.] So you 've got here! Are n't you very hot?—Tom!

*Colonel*. Brought a splendid day with you! Splendid!

[As he speaks, Joy comes running with a bunch of roses; seeing *lever*, she stops and stands quite rigid.]

*Miss beech*. [Sitting in the swing.] Thunder!

*Colonel*. Thunder? Nonsense, Peachey, you're always imagining something. Look at the sky!

*Miss beech*. Thunder!

[*Mrs*. GWYN's smile has faded. ]

*Mrs*. *Hope*. [Turning.] Joy, don't you see Mr. Lever?

[Joy, turning to her mother, gives her the roses. With a forced smile, *lever* advances, holding out his hand.]

*Lever*. How are you, Joy? Have n't seen you for an age!

*Joy*. [Without expression.] I am very well, thank you.

[She raises her hand, and just touches his. *Mrs*. *Gwyn's* eyes are fixed on her daughter. Miss *beech* is watching them intently. *Mrs*. *Hope* is buttoning the *colonel's* coat.]

The curtain falls.

## ACT II

It is afternoon, and at a garden-table placed beneath the hollow tree, the *colonel* is poring over plans. Astride of a garden-chair, *lever* is smoking cigarettes. *Dick* is hanging Chinese lanterns to the hollow tree.

Lever. Of course, if this level [pointing with his cigarette] peters out to the West we shall be in a tightish place; you know what a mine is at this stage, Colonel Hope.

*Colonel*. [Absently.] Yes, yes. [Tracing a line.] What is there to prevent its running out here to the East?

*Lever*. Well, nothing, except that as a matter of fact it doesn't.

*Colonel*. [With some excitement.] I'm very glad you showed me these papers, very glad! I say that it's a most astonishing thing if the ore suddenly stops there. [A gleam of humour visits *lever's* face.] I'm not an expert, but you ought to prove that ground to the East more thoroughly.

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*Lever*. [Quizzically.] Of course, sir, if you advise that——

*Colonel*. If it were mine, I'd no more sit down under the belief that the ore stopped there than I 'd——There's a harmony in these things.

*Never*. I can only tell you what our experts say.

*Colonel*. Ah! Experts! No faith in them—never had! Miners, lawyers, theologians, cowardly lot—pays them to be cowardly. When they have n't their own axes to grind, they've got their theories; a theory's a dangerous thing. [He loses himself in contemplation of the papers.] Now my theory is, you 're in strata here of what we call the Triassic Age.

*Lever*. [Smiling faintly.] Ah!

*Colonel*. You've struck a fault, that's what's happened. The ore may be as much as thirty or forty yards out; but it 's there, depend on it.

*Lever*. Would you back that opinion, sir?

*Colonel*. [With dignity.] I never give an opinion that I'm not prepared to back. I want to get to the bottom of this. What's to prevent the gold going down indefinitely?

*Lever*. Nothing, so far as I know.

*Colonel*. [With suspicion.] Eh!

*Lever*. All I can tell you is: This is as far as we've got, and we want more money before we can get any farther.

*Colonel*. [Absently.] Yes, yes; that's very usual.

*Lever*. If you ask my personal opinion I think it's very doubtful that the gold does go down.

*Colonel*. [Smiling.] Oh! a personal opinion a matter of this sort!

*Lever*. [As though about to take the papers.] Perhaps we'd better close the sitting, sir; sorry to have bored you.

*Colonel*. Now, now! Don't be so touchy! If I'm to put money in, I'm bound to look at it all round.

*Lever*. [With lifted brows.] Please don't imagine that I want you to put money in.

*Colonel*. Confound it, sir! D 'you suppose I take you for a Company promoter?

*Lever*. Thank you!

*Colonel*. [Looking at him doubtfully.] You've got Irish blood in you—um? You're so hasty!

*Lever*. If you 're really thinking of taking shares—my advice to you is, don't!

*Colonel*. [Regretfully.] If this were an ordinary gold mine, I wouldn't dream of looking at it, I want you to understand that. Nobody has a greater objection to gold mines than I.

*Lever*. [Looks down at his host with half-closed eyes.] But it is a gold mine, Colonel Hope.

*Colonel*. I know, I know; but I 've been into it for myself; I've formed my opinion personally. Now, what 's the reason you don't want me to invest?

*Lever*. Well, if it doesn't turn out as you expect, you'll say it's my doing. I know what investors are.

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*Colonel*. [Dubiously.] If it were a Westralian or a Kaffir I would n't touch it with a pair of tongs! It 's not as if I were going to put much in! [He suddenly bends above the papers as though magnetically attracted.] I like these Triassic formations!

[*Dick*, who has hung the last lantern, moodily departs.]

*Lever*. [Looking after him.] That young man seems depressed.

*Colonel*. [As though remembering his principles.] I don't like mines, never have! [Suddenly absorbed again.] I tell you what, Lever—this thing's got tremendous possibilities. You don't seem to believe in it enough. No mine's any good without faith; until I see for myself, however, I shan't commit myself beyond a thousand.

*Lever*. Are you serious, sir?

*Colonel*. Certainly! I've been thinking it over ever since you told me Henty had fought shy. I 've a poor opinion of Henty. He's one of those fellows that says one thing and does another. An opportunist!

*Lever*. [Slowly.] I'm afraid we're all that, more or less. [He sits beneath the hollow tree.]

*Colonel*. A man never knows what he is himself. There 's my wife. She thinks she 's ——By the way, don't say anything to her about this, please. And, Lever [nervously], I don't think, you know, this is quite the sort of thing for my niece.

*Lever*. [Quietly.] I agree. I mean to get her out of it.

*Colonel*. [A little taken aback.] Ah! You know, she—she's in a very delicate position, living by herself in London. [*Lever* looks at him ironically.] You [very nervously] see a good deal of her? If it had n't been for Joy growing so fast, we shouldn't have had the child down here. Her mother ought to have her with her. Eh! Don't you think so?

*Lever*. [Forcing a smile.] Mrs. Gwyn always seems to me to get on all right.

*Colonel*. [As though making a discovery.] You know, I've found that when a woman's living alone and unprotected, the very least thing will set a lot of hags and jackanapes talking. [Hotly.] The more unprotected and helpless a woman is, the more they revel in it. If there's anything I hate in this world, it's those wretched creatures who babble about their neighbours' affairs.

*Lever*. I agree with you.

*Colonel*. One ought to be very careful not to give them—that is—— [checks himself confused; then hurrying on]—I suppose you and Joy get on all right?

*Lever*. [Coolly.] Pretty well, thanks.  I'm not exactly in Joy's line; have n't seen very much of her, in fact.

[Miss *beech* and *joy* have been approaching from the house.  But seeing *lever*, *joy* turns abruptly, hesitates a moment, and with an angry gesture goes away.]

*Colonel* [Unconscious.] Wonderfully affectionate little thing!  Well, she'll be going home to-morrow!

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*Miss beech*. [Who has been gazing after *joy*.] Talkin' business, poor creatures?

*Lever*. Oh, no! If you'll excuse me, I'll wash my hands before tea.

[He glances at the *colonel* poring over papers, and, shrugging his shoulders, strolls away.]

*Miss beech*. [Sitting in the swing.] I see your horrid papers.

*Colonel*. Be quiet, Peachey!

*Miss beech*. On a beautiful summer's day, too.

*Colonel*. That'll do now.

*Miss beech*. [Unmoved.] For every ounce you take out of a gold mine you put two in.

*Colonel*. Who told you that rubbish?

*Miss beech*. [With devilry.] You did!

*Colonel*. This is n't an ordinary gold mine.

*Miss beech*. Oh! quite a special thing.

[*Colonel* stares at her, but subsiding at hey impassivity, he pores again over the papers.]

[Rosy has approached with a tea cloth.]

*Rose*. If you please, sir, the Missis told me to lay the tea.

*Colonel*. Go away! Ten fives fifty. Ten 5 16ths, Peachey?

*Miss beech*. I hate your nasty sums!

[*Rose* goes away. The *colonel* Writes. *Mrs*. *Hope's* voice is heard, "Now then, bring those chairs, you two. Not that one, Ernest." *Ernest* and *Letty* appear through the openings of the wall, each with a chair.]

*Colonel*. [With dull exasperation.] What do you want?

*Letty*. Tea, Father.

[She places her chair and goes away.]

*Ernest*. That Johnny-bird Lever is too cocksure for me, Colonel. Those South American things are no good at all. I know all about them from young Scrotton. There's not one that's worth a red cent. If you want a flutter——

*Colonel*. [Explosively.] Flutter! I'm not a gambler, sir!

*Ernest*. Well, Colonel [with a smile], I only don't want you to chuck your money away on a stiff 'un. If you want anything good you should go to Mexico.

*Colonel*. [Jumping up and holding out the map.] Go to [He stops in time.] What d'you call that, eh? M-E-X——

*Ernest*. [Not to be embarrassed.] It all depend on what part.

*Colonel*. You think you know everything—you think nothing's right unless it's your own idea! Be good enough to keep your advice to yourself.

*Ernest*. [Moving with his chair, and stopping with a smile.] If you ask me, I should say it wasn't playing the game to put Molly into a thing like that.

*Colonel*. What do you mean, sir?

*Ernest*. Any Juggins can see that she's a bit gone on our friend.

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*Colonel*. [Freezingly.] Indeed!

*Ernest*. He's not at all the sort of Johnny that appeals to me.

*Colonel*. Really?

*Ernest*. [Unmoved.] If I were you, Colonel, I should tip her the wink. He was hanging about her at Ascot all the time. It 's a bit thick!

[*Mrs*. *Hope* followed by *rose* appears from the house.]

*Colonel*. [Stammering with passion.] Jackanapes!

*Mrs*. *Hope*. Don't stand there, Tom; clear those papers, and let Rose lay the table. Now, Ernest, go and get another chair.

[The *colonel* looks wildly round and sits beneath the hollow tree, with his head held in his hands. *Rose* lays the cloth.]

*Mrs*. *Beech*. [Sitting beside the *colonel*.] Poor creature!

*Ernest*. [Carrying his chair about with him.] Ask any Johnny in the City, he 'll tell you Mexico's a very tricky country—the people are awful rotters

*Mrs*. *Hope*. Put that chair down, Ernest.

[*Ernest* looks at the chair, puts it down, opens his mouth, and goes away. *Rose* follows him.]

What's he been talking about? You oughtn't to get so excited, Tom; is your head bad, old man? Here, take these papers! [She hands the papers to the *colonel*.] Peachey, go in and tell them tea 'll be ready in a minute, there 's a good soul? Oh! and on my dressing table you'll find a bottle of Eau de Cologne.

*Mrs*. *Beech*. Don't let him get in a temper again. That 's three times to-day!

[She goes towards the house. ]

*Colonel*. Never met such a fellow in my life, the most opinionated, narrow-minded—-thinks he knows everything. Whatever Letty could see in him I can't think. Pragmatical beggar!

*Mrs*. *Hope*. Now Tom! What have you been up to, to get into a state like this?

*Colonel*. [Avoiding her eyes.] I shall lose my temper with him one of these days. He's got that confounded habit of thinking nobody can be right but himself.

*Mrs*. *Hope*. That's enough! I want to talk to you seriously! Dick's in love. I'm perfectly certain of it.

*Colonel*. Love! Who's he in love with—Peachey?

*Mrs*. *Hope*. You can see it all over him. If I saw any signs of Joy's breaking out, I'd send them both away. I simply won't have it.

*Colonel*. Why, she's a child!

*Mrs*. *Hope*. [Pursuing her own thoughts.] But she isn't—not yet. I've been watching her very carefully. She's more in love with her Mother than any one, follows her about like a dog! She's been quite rude to Mr. Lever.

*Colonel*. [Pursuing his own thoughts.] I don't believe a word of it.

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[He rises and walks about]

*Mrs*. *Hope*. Don't believe a word of what?

[The *colonel* is Silent.]

[Pursuing his thoughts with her own.]

If I thought there was anything between Molly and Mr. Lever, d 'you suppose I'd have him in the house?

[The *colonel* stops, and gives a sort of grunt.]

He's a very nice fellow; and I want you to pump him well, Tom, and see what there is in this mine.

*Colonel*. [Uneasily.] Pump!

*Mrs*. *Hope*. [Looking at him curiously.] Yes, you 've been up to something! Now what is it?

*Colonel*. Pump my own guest! I never heard of such a thing!

*Mrs*. *Hope*. There you are on your high horse! I do wish you had a little common-sense, Tom!

*Colonel*. I'd as soon you asked me to sneak about eavesdropping! Pump!

*Mrs*. *Hope*. Well, what were you looking at these papers for? It does drive me so wild the way you throw away all the chances you have of making a little money. I've got you this opportunity, and you do nothing but rave up and down, and talk nonsense!

*Colonel*. [In a high voice] Much you know about it! I 've taken a thousand shares in this mine

[He stops dead. There is a silence. ]

*Mrs*. *Hope*. You 've—*what*? Without consulting me? Well, then, you 'll just go and take them out again!

*Colonel*. You want me to——?

*Mrs*. *Hope*. The idea! As if you could trust your judgment in a thing like that! You 'll just go at once and say there was a mistake; then we 'll talk it over calmly.

*Colonel*. [Drawing himself up.] Go back on what I ’ve said? Not if I lose every penny! First you worry me to take the shares, and then you worry me not—I won’t have it, Nell, I won’t have it!

*Mrs*. *Hope*. Well, if I’d thought you’d have forgotten what you said this morning and turned about like this, d’you suppose I’d have spoken to you at all? Now, do you?

*Colonel*. Rubbish! If you can’t see that this is a special opportunity!

[He walks away followed by *Mrs*. *Hope*, who endeavors to make him see her point of view. *Ernest* and *Letty* are now returning from the house armed with a third chair.]

*Letty*. What’s the matter with everybody? Is it the heat?

*Ernest*. [Preoccupied and sitting in the swing.] That sportsman, Lever, you know, ought to be warned off.

*Letty*. [Signing to *Ernest*.] Where’s Miss Joy, Rose?

*Rose*. Don’t know, Miss.

[Putting down the tray, she goes.]

[*Rose*, has followed with the tea tray.]

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*Letty*. Ernie, be careful, you never know where Joy is.

*Ernest*. [Preoccupied with his reflections.] Your old Dad 's as mad as a hatter with me.

*Letty*. Why?

*Ernest*. Well, I merely said what I thought, that Molly ought to look out what's she's doing, and he dropped on me like a cartload of bricks.

*Letty*. The Dad's very fond of Molly.

*Ernest*. But look here, d'you mean to tell me that she and Lever are n't——

*Letty*. Don't! Suppose they are! If joy were to hear it'd be simply awful. I like Molly. I 'm not going to believe anything against her. I don't see the use of it. If it is, it is, and if it is n't, it is n't.

*Ernest*. Well, all I know is that when I told her the mine was probably a frost she went for me like steam.

*Letty*. Well, so should I. She was only sticking up for her friends.

*Ernest*. Ask the old Peachey-bird. She knows a thing or two. Look here, I don't mind a man's being a bit of a sportsman, but I think Molly's bringin' him down here is too thick. Your old Dad's got one of his notions that because this Josser's his guest, he must keep him in a glass case, and take shares in his mine, and all the rest of it.

*Letty*. I do think people are horrible, always thinking things. It's not as if Molly were a stranger. She's my own cousin. I 'm not going to believe anything about my own cousin. I simply won't.

*Ernest*. [Reluctantly realising the difference that this makes.] I suppose it does make a difference, her bein' your cousin.

*Letty*. Of course it does! I only hope to goodness no one will make Joy suspect——

[She stops and buts her finger to her lips, for *joy* is coming towards them, as the tea-bell sounds. She is followed by *Dick* and *miss beech* with the Eau de Cologne. The *colonel* and *Mrs*. *Hope* are also coming back, discussing still each other's point of view.]

*Joy*. Where 's Mother? Isn't she here?

*Mrs*. *Hope*. Now Joy, come and sit down; your mother's been told tea's ready; if she lets it get cold it's her lookout.

*Dick*. [Producing a rug, and spreading it beneath the tree.] Plenty of room, Joy.

*Joy*. I don't believe Mother knows, Aunt Nell.

[*Mrs*. *Gwyn* and *lever* appear in the opening of the wall.]

*Letty*. [Touching ERNEST's arm.] Look, Ernie! Four couples and Peachey——

*Ernest*. [Preoccupied.] What couples?

*Joy*. Oh! Mums, here you are!

[Seizing her, she turns her back on *lever*. They sit in various seats, and *Mrs*. *Hope* pours out the tea.]

*Mrs*. *Hope*. Hand the sandwiches to Mr. Lever, Peachey. It's our own jam, Mr. Lever.

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*Lever*.  Thanks. [He takes a bite.] It's splendid!

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. [With forced gaiety.] It's the first time I've ever seen you eat jam.

*Lever*. [Smiling a forced smile.] Really!  But I love it.

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. [With a little bow.] You always refuse mine.

*Joy*. [Who has been staring at her enemy, suddenly.] I'm all burnt up!  Are n't you simply boiled, Mother?

[She touches her Mother's forehead.]

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*.  Ugh!  You're quite clammy, Joy.

*Joy*.  It's enough to make any one clammy.

[Her eyes go back to *lever's* face as though to stab him.]

*Ernest*. [From the swing.] I say, you know, the glass is going down.

*Lever*. [Suavely.] The glass in the hall's steady enough.

*Ernest*. Oh, I never go by that; that's a rotten old glass.

*Colonel*.  Oh! is it?

*Ernest*. [Paying no attention.] I've got a little ripper—never puts you in the cart.  Bet you what you like we have thunder before tomorrow night.

*Miss beech*. [Removing her gaze from *joy* to *lever*.] You don't think we shall have it before to-night, do you?

*Lever*. [Suavely.] I beg your pardon; did you speak to me?

*Miss beech*.  I said, you don't think we shall have the thunder before to-night, do you?

[She resumes her watch on joy.]

*Lever*. [Blandly.] Really, I don't see any signs of it.

[Joy, crossing to the rug, flings herself down.  And *Dick* sits cross-legged, with his eyes fast fixed on her.]

*Miss beech*. [Eating.] People don't often see what they don't want to, do they?

[*Lever* only lifts his brows.]

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. [Quickly breaking ivy.] What are you talking about? The weather's perfect.

*Miss beech*. Isn't it?

*Mrs*. *Hope*. You'd better make a good tea, Peachey; nobody'll get anything till eight, and then only cold shoulder. You must just put up with no hot dinner, Mr. Lever.

*Lever*. [Bowing.] Whatever is good enough for Miss Beech is good enough for me.

*Miss beech*. [Sardonically-taking another sandwich.] So you think!

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. [With forced gaiety.] Don't be so absurd, Peachey.

[*Miss beech*, grunts slightly.]

*Colonel*. [Once more busy with his papers.] I see the name of your engineer is Rodriguez—Italian, eh?

*Lever*. Portuguese.

*Colonel*. Don't like that!

*Lever*. I believe he was born in England.

*Colonel*. [Reassured.] Oh, was he? Ah!

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*Ernest*. Awful rotters, those Portuguese!

*Colonel*. There you go!

*Letty*. Well, Father, Ernie only said what you said.

*Mrs*. *Hope*. Now I want to ask you, Mr. Lever, is this gold mine safe? If it isn't—I simply won't allow Tom to take these shares; he can't afford it.

*Lever*. It rather depends on what you call safe, Mrs. Hope.

*Mrs*. *Hope*. I don't want anything extravagant, of course; if they're going to pay their 10 per cent, regularly, and Tom can have his money out at any time—[There is a faint whistle from the swing.] I only want to know that it's a thoroughly genuine thing.

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. [Indignantly.] As if Maurice would be a Director if it was n't?

*Mrs*. *Hope*. Now Molly, I'm simply asking——

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. Yes, you are!

*Colonel*. [Rising.] I'll take two thousand of those shares, Lever.
To have my wife talk like that—I 'm quite ashamed.

*Lever*. Oh, come, sir, Mrs. Hope only meant——

[*Mrs*. *Gwyn* looks eagerly at *lever*.]

*Dick*. [Quietly.] Let's go on the river, Joy.

[*Joy* rises, and goes to her Mother's chair.]

*Mrs*. *Hope*. Of course! What rubbish, Tom! As if any one ever invested money without making sure!

*Lever*. [Ironically.] It seems a little difficult to make sure in this case. There isn't the smallest necessity for Colonel Hope to take any shares, and it looks to me as if he'd better not.

[He lights a cigarette.]

*Mrs*. *Hope*. Now, Mr. Lever, don't be offended! I'm very anxious for Tom to take the shares if you say the thing's so good.

*Lever*. I 'm afraid I must ask to be left out, please.

*Joy*. [Whispering.] Mother, if you've finished, do come, I want to show you my room.

*Mrs*. *Hope*. I would n't say a word, only Tom's so easily taken in.

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. [Fiercely.] Aunt Nell, how can't you? [Joy gives a little savage laugh.]

*Letty*. [Hastily.] Ernie, will you play Dick and me? Come on, Dick!

[All three go out towards the lawn.]

*Mrs*. *Hope*. You ought to know your Uncle by this time, Molly. He's just like a child. He'd be a pauper to-morrow if I did n't see to things.

*Colonel*. Understand once for all that I shall take two thousand shares in this mine. I 'm —I 'm humiliated. [He turns and goes towards the house.]

*Mrs*. *Hope*. Well, what on earth have I said?

[She hurries after him. ]

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. [In a low voice as she passes.] You need n't insult my friends!

[*Lever*, shrugging his shoulders, has strolled aside. *Joy*, with a passionate movement seen only by Miss *beech*, goes off towards the house. *Miss beech* and *Mrs*. *Gwyn* aye left alone beside the remnants of the feast.]

*Miss beech*. Molly!

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[*Mrs*. *Gwyn* looks up startled.]

Take care, Molly, take care! The child! Can't you see? [Apostrophising *lever*.] Take care, Molly, take care!

*Lever*. [Coming back.] Awfully hot, is n't it?

*Miss beech*. Ah! and it'll be hotter if we don't mind.

*Lever*. [Suavely.] Do we control these things?

[*Miss beech* looking from face to face, nods her head repeatedly; then gathering her skirts she walks towards the house. *Mrs*. *Gwyn* sits motionless, staying before her.]

Extraordinary old lady! [He pitches away his cigarette.] What's the matter with her, Molly?

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*, [With an effort.] Oh! Peachey's a character!

*Lever*. [Frowning.] So I see! [There is a silence.]

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. Maurice!

*Lever*. Yes.

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. Aunt Nell's hopeless, you mustn't mind her.

*Lever*. [In a dubious and ironic voice.] My dear girl, I 've too much to bother me to mind trifles like that.

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. [Going to him suddenly.] Tell me, won't you?

[*Lever* shrugs his shoulders.]

A month ago you'd have told me soon enough!

*Lever*. Now, Molly!

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. Ah! [With a bitter smile.] The Spring's soon over.

*Lever*. It 's always Spring between us.

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. Is it?

*Lever*. You did n't tell me what you were thinking about just now when you sat there like stone.

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. It does n't do for a woman to say too much.

*Lever*. Have I been so bad to you that you need feel like that,
Molly?

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. [With a little warm squeeze of his arm.] Oh! my dear, it's only that I'm so——

[She stops.]

*Lever*. [Gently]. So what?

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. [In a low voice.] It's hateful here.

*Lever*. I didn't want to come. I don't understand why you suggested it. [*Mrs*. *Gwyn* is silent.] It's been a mistake.

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. [Her eyes fixed on the ground.] Joy comes home to-morrow. I thought if I brought you here—I should know——

*Lever*. [Vexedly.] Um!

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. [Losing her control.] Can't you *see*? It haunts me? How are we to go on? I must know—I must know!

*Lever*. I don't see that my coming——

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. I thought I should have more confidence; I thought I should be able to face it better in London, if you came down here openly—and now—I feel I must n't speak or look at you.

*Lever*. You don't think your Aunt——

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*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. [Scornfully.] She!  It's only Joy I care about.

*Lever*. [Frowning.] We must be more careful, that's all.  We mustn't give ourselves away again, as we were doing just now.

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*.  When any one says anything horrid to you, I can't help it.

[She puts her hand on the label of his coat.]

*Lever*.  My dear child, take care!

[*Mrs*. *Gwyn* drops her hand.  She throws her head back, and her throat is seen to work as though she were gulping down a bitter draught.  She moves away.]

[Following hastily.] Don't dear, don't!  I only meant—Come, Molly, let's be sensible.  I want to tell you something about the mine.

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. [With a quavering smile.] Yes-let 's talk sensibly, and walk properly in this sensible, proper place.

[*Lever* is seen trying to soothe her, and yet to walk properly.  As they disappear, they are viewed by *joy*, who, like the shadow parted from its figure, has come to join it again. She stands now, foiled, a carnation in her hand; then flings herself on a chair, and leans her elbows on the table.]

*Joy*.  I hate him!  Pig!

*Rose*. [Who has come to clear the tea things.] Did you call, Miss?

*Joy*.  Not you!

*Rose*. [Motionless.] No, Miss!

*Joy*. [Leaning back and tearing the flower.] Oh! do hurry up, Rose!

*Rose*. [Collects the tea things.] Mr. Dick's coming down the path! Aren't I going to get you to do your frock, Miss Joy?

*Joy*.  No.

*Rose*.  What will the Missis say?

*Joy*.  Oh, don't be so stuck, Rose!

[*Rose* goes, but *Dick* has come.]

*Dick*. Come on the river, Joy, just for half an hour, as far as the kingfishers—do! [Joy shakes her head.] Why not? It 'll be so jolly and cool. I'm most awfully sorry if I worried you this morning. I didn't mean to. I won't again, I promise. [Joy slides a look at him, and from that look he gains a little courage.] Do come! It'll be the last time. I feel it awfully, Joy.

*Joy*. There's nothing to hurt you!

*Dick*. [Gloomily.] Isn't there—when you're like this?

*Joy*. [In a hard voice.] If you don't like me, why do you follow me about?

*Dick*. What is the matter?

*Joy*. [Looking up, as if for want of air.] Oh! Don't!

*Dick*. Oh, Joy, what is the matter? Is it the heat?

*Joy*. [With a little laugh.] Yes.

*Dick*. Have some Eau de Cologne. I 'll make you a bandage. [He takes the Eau de Cologne, and makes a bandage with his handkerchief.] It's quite clean.

*Joy*. Oh, Dick, you are so funny!

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*Dick*. [Bandaging her forehead.] I can't bear you to feel bad; it puts me off completely. I mean I don't generally make a fuss about people, but when it 's you——

*Joy*. [Suddenly.] I'm all right.

*Dick*. Is that comfy?

*Joy*. [With her chin up, and her eyes fast closed.] Quite.

*Dick*. I'm not going to stay and worry you. You ought to rest. Only, Joy! Look here! If you want me to do anything for you, any time——

*Joy*. [Half opening her eyes.] Only to go away.

[*Dick* bites his lips and walks away.]

Dick—[softly]—Dick!

[*Dick* stops.]

I didn't mean that; will you get me some water-irises for this evening?

*Dick*. Won't I? [He goes to the hollow tree and from its darkness takes a bucket and a boat-hook.] I know where there are some rippers!

[*Joy* stays unmoving with her eyes half closed.]

Are you sure you 're all right. Joy? You 'll just rest here in the shade, won't you, till I come back?—it 'll do you no end of good. I shan't be twenty minutes.

[He goes, but cannot help returning softly, to make sure.]

You're quite sure you 're all right?

[*Joy* nods. He goes away towards the river. But there is no rest for *joy*. The voices of *Mrs*. *Gwyn* and *lever* are heard returning.]

*Joy*. [With a gesture of anger.] Hateful! Hateful!

[She runs away.]

[*Mrs*. *Gwyn* and *lever* are seen approaching; they pass the tree, in conversation.]

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. But I don't see why, Maurice.

*Lever*. We mean to sell the mine; we must do some more work on it, and for that we must have money.

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. If you only want a little, I should have thought you could have got it in a minute in the City.

*Lever*. [Shaking his head.] No, no; we must get it privately.

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. [Doubtfully.] Oh! [She slowly adds.] Then it isn't such a good thing!

[And she does not look at him.]

*Lever*. Well, we mean to sell it.

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. What about the people who buy?

*Lever*. [Dubiously regarding her.] My dear girl, they've just as much chance as we had. It 's not my business to think of them. There's *your* thousand pounds——

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. [Softly.] Don't bother about my money, Maurice. I don't want you to do anything not quite——

*Lever*. [Evasively.] Oh! There's my brother's and my sister's too. I 'm not going to let any of you run any risk. When we all went in for it the thing looked splendid; it 's only the last month that we 've had doubts. What bothers me now is your Uncle. I don't want him to take these shares. It looks as if I'd come here on purpose.

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*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. Oh! he mustn't take them!

*Lever*. That 's all very well; but it 's not so simple.

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. [Shyly.] But, Maurice, have you told him about the selling?

*Lever*. [Gloomily, under the hollow tree.] It 's a Board secret.
I'd no business to tell even you.

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. But he thinks he's taking shares in a good—a permanent thing.

*Lever*. You can't go into a mining venture without some risk.

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. Oh yes, I know—but—but Uncle Tom is such a dear!

*Lever*. [Stubbornly.] I can't help his being the sort of man he is. I did n't want him to take these shares; I told him so in so many words. Put yourself in my place, Molly: how can I go to him and say, "This thing may turn out rotten," when he knows I got you to put your money into it?

[But *joy*, the lost shadow, has come back. She moves forward resolutely. They are divided from her by the hollow tree; she is unseen. She stops.]

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. I think he ought to be told about the selling; it 's not fair.

*Lever*. What on earth made him rush at the thing like that? I don't understand that kind of man.

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. [Impulsively.] I must tell him, Maurice; I can't let him take the shares without ——

[She puts her hand on his arm.]

[Joy turns, as if to go back whence she came, but stops once more.]

*Lever*. [Slowly and very quietly.] I did n't think you'd give me away, Molly.

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. I don't think I quite understand.

*Lever*. If you tell the Colonel about this sale the poor old chap will think me a man that you ought to have nothing to do with. Do you want that?

[*Mrs*. *Gwyn*, giving her lover a long look, touches his sleeve. *Joy*, slipping behind the hollow tree, has gone.]

You can't act in a case like this as if you 'd only a principle to consider. It 's the—the special circumstances.

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. [With a faint smile.] But you'll be glad to get the money won't you?

*Lever*. By George! if you're going to take it like this, Molly

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. Don't!

*Lever*. We may not sell after all, dear, we may find it turn out trumps.

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. [With a shiver.] I don't want to hear any more. I know women don't understand. [Impulsively.] It's only that I can't bear any one should think that you——

*Lever*. [Distressed.] For goodness sake don't look like that, Molly! Of course, I'll speak to your Uncle. I'll stop him somehow, even if I have to make a fool of myself. I 'll do anything you want——

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*Mrs*. *Gwyn*.  I feel as if I were being smothered here.

*Lever*.  It 's only for one day.

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. [With sudden tenderness.] It's not your fault, dear.  I ought to have known how it would be.  Well, let's go in!

[She sets her lips, and walks towards the house with *lever* following.  But no sooner has she disappeared than *joy* comes running after; she stops, as though throwing down a challenge.  Her cheeks and ears are burning.]

*Joy*.  Mother!

[After a moment *Mrs*. *Gwyn* reappears in the opening of the wall.]

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*.  Oh! here you are!

*Joy*. [Breathlessly.] Yes.

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. [Uncertainly.] Where—have you been?  You look dreadfully hot; have you been running?

*Joy*.  Yes——no.

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. [Looking at her fixedly.] What's the matter—you 're trembling! [Softly.] Are n't you well, dear?

*Joy*.  Yes—I don't know.

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*.  What is it, darling?

*Joy*. [Suddenly clinging to her.] Oh!  Mother!

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*.  I don't understand.

*Joy*. [Breathlessly.] Oh, Mother, let me go back home with you now at once—— *Mrs*. *Gwyn*. [Her face hardening.] Why?  What on earth——

*Joy*.  I can't stay here.

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*.  But why?

*Joy*.  I want to be with you—Oh!  Mother, don't you love me?

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. [With a faint smile.] Of course I love you, Joy.

*Joy*. Ah! but you love him more.

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. Love him—whom?

*Joy*. Oh! Mother, I did n't—[She tries to take her Mother's hand, but fails.] Oh! don't.

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. You'd better explain what you mean, I think.

*Joy*. I want to get you to—he—he 's—he 'snot——!

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. [Frigidly.] Really, Joy!

*Joy*. [Passionately.] I'll fight against him, and I know there's something wrong about——

[She stops.]

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. About what?

*Joy*. Let's tell Uncle Tom, Mother, and go away.

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. Tell Uncle—Tom—what?

*Joy*. [Looking down and almost whispering.] About—about—the mine.

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. What about the mine? What do you mean? [Fiercely.]
Have you been spying on me?

*Joy*. [Shrinking.] No! oh, no!

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. Where were you?

*Joy*. [Just above her breath.] I—I heard something.

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. [Bitterly.] But you were not spying?

*Joy*. I was n't—I wasn't! I didn't want—to hear. I only heard a little. I couldn't help listening, Mother.

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*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. [With a little laugh.] Couldn't help listening?

*Joy*. [Through her teeth.] I hate him. I didn't mean to listen, but
I hate him.

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. I see. Why do you hate him?

[There is a silence.]

*Joy*. He—he——[She stops.]

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. Yes?

*Joy*. [With a sort of despair.] I don't know. Oh! I don't know!
But I feel——

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. I can't reason with you. As to what you heard, it 's— ridiculous.

*Joy*. It 's not that. It 's—it 's you!

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. [Stonily.] I don't know what you mean.

*Joy*. [Passionately.] I wish Dad were here!

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. Do you love your Father as much as me?

*Joy*. Oh! Mother, no-you know I don't.

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. [Resentfully.] Then why do you want him?

*Joy*. [Almost under her breath.] Because of that man.

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. Indeed!

*Joy*. I will never—never make friends with him.

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. [Cuttingly.] I have not asked you to.

*Joy*. [With a blind movement of her hand.] Oh, Mother!

[*Mrs*. *Gwyn* half turns away.]

Mother—won't you? Let's tell Uncle Tom and go away from him?

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. If you were not, a child, Joy, you wouldn't say such things.

*Joy*. [Eagerly.] I'm not a child, I'm—I'm a woman. I am.

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. No! You—are—not a woman, Joy.

[She sees joy throw up her arms as though warding off a blow, and turning finds that *lever* is standing in the opening of the wall.]

*Lever*. [Looking from face to face.] What's the matter? [There is no answer.] What is it, Joy?

*Joy*. [Passionately.] I heard you, I don't care who knows. I'd listen again.

*Lever*. [Impassively.] Ah! and what did I say that was so very dreadful?

*Joy*. You're a—a—you 're a—coward!

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. [With a sort of groan.] Joy!

*Lever*. [Stepping up to *joy*, and standing with his hands behind him— in a low voice.] Now hit me in the face—hit me—hit me as hard as you can. Go on, Joy, it'll do you good.

[Joy raises her clenched hand, but drops it, and hides her face.]

Why don't you? I'm not pretending!

[Joy makes no sign.]

Come, joy; you'll make yourself ill, and that won't help, will it?

[But joy still makes no sign.]

[With determination.] What's the matter? now come—tell me!

*Joy*. [In a stifled, sullen voice.] Will you leave my mother alone?

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*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. Oh! my dear Joy, don't be silly!

*Joy*. [Wincing; then with sudden passion.] I defy you—I defy you! [She rushes from their sight.]

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. [With a movement of distress.] Oh!

*Lever*. [Turning to *Mrs*. *Gwyn* with a protecting gesture.] Never mind, dear! It'll be—it'll be all right!

[But the expression of his face is not the expression of his words.]

The curtain falls.

## ACT III

It is evening; a full yellow moon is shining through the branches of the hollow tree. The Chinese lanterns are alight. There is dancing in the house; the music sounds now loud, now soft. *Miss beech* is sitting on the rustic seat in a black bunchy evening dress, whose inconspicuous opening is inlaid with white. She slowly fans herself.

Dick comes from the house in evening dress. He does not see Miss *beech*.

Dick. Curse! [A short silence.] Curse!

*Miss beech*. Poor young man!

*Dick*. [With a start.] Well, Peachey, I can't help it [He fumbles off his gloves.]

*Miss beech*. Did you ever know any one that could?

*Dick*. [Earnestly.] It's such awfully hard lines on Joy. I can't get her out of my head, lying there with that beastly headache while everybody's jigging round.

*Miss beech*. Oh! you don't mind about yourself—noble young man!

*Dick*. I should be a brute if I did n't mind more for her.

*Miss beech*. So you think it's a headache, do you?

*Dick*. Did n't you hear what Mrs. Gwyn said at dinner about the sun? [With inspiration.] I say, Peachey, could n't you—could n't you just go up and give her a message from me, and find out if there 's anything she wants, and say how brutal it is that she 's seedy; it

would be most awfully decent of you. And tell her the dancing's no good without her. Do, Peachey, now do! Ah! and look here!

[He dives into the hollow of the tree, and brings from out of it
a pail of water in which are placed two bottles of champagne,
and some yellow irises—he takes the irises.]

You might give her these. I got them specially for her, and I have n't had a chance.

*Miss beech*. [Lifting a bottle.] What 's this?

*Dick*. Fizz. The Colonel brought it from the George. It 's for supper; he put it in here because of—[Smiling faintly]—Mrs. Hope, I think. Peachey, do take her those irises.

*Miss*. *Beech*. D' you think they'll do her any good?

*Dick*. [Crestfallen.] I thought she'd like—I don't want to worry her—you might try.

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[*Miss beech* shakes her head.]

Why not?

*Miss beech*. The poor little creature won't let me in.

*Dick*. You've been up then!

*Miss beech*. [Sharply.] Of course I've been up. I've not got a stone for my heart, young man!

*Dick*. All right! I suppose I shall just have to get along somehow.

*Miss beech*. [With devilry.] That's what we've all got to do.

*Dick*. [Gloomily.] But this is too brutal for anything!

*Miss beech*. Worse than ever happened to any one!

*Dick*. I swear I'm not thinking of myself.

*Miss beech*. Did y' ever know anybody that swore they were?

*Dick*. Oh! shut up!

*Miss beech*. You'd better go in and get yourself a partner.

*Dick*. [With pale desperation.] Look here, Peachey, I simply loathe all those girls.

*Miss beech*. Ah-h! [Ironically.] Poor lot, are n't they?

*Dick*. All right; chaff away, it's good fun, isn't it? It makes me sick to dance when Joy's lying there. Her last night, too!

*Miss beech*. [Sidling to him.] You're a good young man, and you 've got a good heart.

[She takes his hand, and puts it to her cheek.]

*Dick*. Peachey—I say, Peachey d' you think there 's—I mean d' you think there'll ever be any chance for me?

*Miss beech*. I thought that was coming! I don't approve of your making love at your time of life; don't you think I 'm going to encourage you.

*Dick*. But I shall be of age in a year; my money's my own, it's not as if I had to ask any one's leave; and I mean, I do know my own mind.

*Miss beech*. Of course you do. Nobody else would at your age, but you do.

*Dick*. I would n't ask her to promise, it would n't be fair when she 's so young, but I do want her to know that I shall never change.

*Miss beech*. And suppose—only suppose—she's fond of you, and says she'll never change.

*Dick*. Oh! Peachey! D' you think there's a chance of that—do you?

*Miss beech*. A-h-h!

*Dick*. I wouldn't let her bind herself, I swear I wouldn't. [Solemnly.] I'm not such a selfish brute as you seem to think.

*Miss beech*. [Sidling close to him and in a violent whisper.] Well— have a go!

*Dick*. Really? You are a brick, Peachey!

[He kisses her.]

*Miss beach*. [Yielding pleasurably; then remembering her principles.] Don't you ever say I said so! You're too young, both of you.

*Dick*. But it is exceptional—I mean in my case, is n't it?

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[The *colonel* and *Mrs*. *Gwyn* are coming down the lawn.]

*Miss beech*. Oh! very!

[She sits beneath the tree and fans herself.]

*Colonel*. The girls are all sitting out, Dick! I've been obliged to dance myself. Phew!

[He mops his brow.]

[*Dick* swinging round goes rushing off towards the house.]

[Looking after him.] Hallo! What's the matter with him? Cooling your heels, Peachey? By George! it's hot. Fancy the poor devils in London on a night like this, what? [He sees the moon.] It's a full moon. You're lucky to be down here, Molly.

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. [In a low voice.] Very!

*Miss beech*. Oh! so you think she's lucky, do you?

*Colonel*. [Expanding his nostrils.] Delicious scent to-night! Hay and roses—delicious.

[He seats himself between them.]

A shame that poor child has knocked up like this. Don't think it was the sun myself—-more likely neuralgic—she 's subject to neuralgia, Molly.

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. [Motionless.] I know.

*Colonel*. Got too excited about your coming. I told Nell not to keep worrying her about her frock, and this is the result. But your Aunt —you know—she can't let a thing alone!

*Miss beech*. Ah! 't isn't neuralgia.

[*Mrs*. *Gwyn* looks at her quickly and averts her eyes.]

*Colonel*. Excitable little thing. You don't understand her, Peachey.

*Miss beech*. Don't I?

*Colonel*. She's all affection. Eh, Molly? I remember what I was like at her age, a poor affectionate little rat, and now look at me!

*Miss beech*. [Fanning herself.] I see you.

*Colonel*. [A little sadly.] We forget what we were like when we were young. She's been looking forward to to-night ever since you wrote; and now to have to go to bed and miss the, dancing. Too bad!

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. Don't, Uncle Tom!

*Colonel*. [Patting her hand.] There, there, old girl, don't think about it. She'll be all right tomorrow.

*Miss beech*. If I were her mother I'd soon have her up.

*Colonel*. Have her up with that headache! What are you talking about, Peachey?

*Miss beech*. I know a remedy.

*Colonel*. Well, out with it.

*Miss beech*. Oh! Molly knows it too!

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. [Staring at the ground.] It's easy to advise.

*Colonel*. [Fidgetting.] Well, if you're thinking of morphia for her, don't have anything to do with it. I've always set my face against morphia; the only time I took it was in Burmah. I'd raging neuralgia for two days. I went to our old doctor, and I made him give me some. "Look here, doctor," I said, "I hate the idea of morphia, I 've never taken it, and I never want to."

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*Miss beech*. [Looking at *Mrs*. *Gwyn*.] When a tooth hurts, you should have it out. It 's only puttin' off the evil day.

*Colonel*. You say that because it was n't your own.

*Miss beech*. Well, it was hollow, and you broke your principles!

*Colonel*. Hollow yourself, Peachey; you're as bad as any one!

*Miss beech* [With devilry.] Well, I know that! [She turns to *Mrs*. *Gwyn*.] He should have had it out! Shouldn't he, Molly?

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. I—don't—judge for other people.

[She gets up suddenly, as though deprived of air.]

*Colonel*. [Alarmed.] Hallo, Molly! Are n't you feeling the thing, old girl?

*Miss beech*. Let her get some air, poor creature!

*Colonel*. [Who follows anxiously.] Your Aunt's got some first-rate sal volatile.

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. It's all right, Uncle Tom. I felt giddy, it's nothing, now.

*Colonel*. That's the dancing. [He taps his forehead.] I know what it is when you're not used to it.

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. [With a sudden bitter outburst.] I suppose you think I 'm a very bad mother to be amusing myself while joy's suffering.

*Colonel*. My dear girl, whatever put such a thought into your head? We all know if there were anything you could do, you'd do it at once, would n't she, Peachey?

[*Miss beech* turns a slow look on *Mrs*. *Gwyn*.]

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. Ah! you see, Peachey knows me better.

*Colonel*. [Following up his thoughts.] I always think women are wonderful. There's your Aunt, she's very funny, but if there's anything the matter with me, she'll sit up all night; but when she's ill herself, and you try to do anything for her, out she raps at once.

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. [In a low voice.] There's always one that a woman will do anything for.

*Colonel*. Exactly what I say. With your Aunt it's me, and by George! Molly, sometimes I wish it was n't.

*Miss beech*, [With meaning.] But is it ever for another woman!

*Colonel*. You old cynic! D' you mean to say Joy wouldn't do anything on earth for her Mother, or Molly for Joy? You don't know human nature. What a wonderful night! Have n't seen such a moon for years, she's like a great, great lamp!

[*Mrs*. *Gwyn* hiding from Miss BEECH's eyes, rises and slips her arm through his; they stand together looking at the moon.]

Don't like these Chinese lanterns, with that moon-tawdry! eh! By Jove, Molly, I sometimes think we humans are a rubbishy lot—each of us talking and thinking of nothing but our own petty little affairs; and when you see a great thing like that up there —[Sighs.] But there's your Aunt, if I were to say a thing like that to her she 'd— she'd think me a lunatic; and yet, you know, she 's a very good woman.

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*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. [Half clinging to him.] Do you think me very selfish, Uncle Tom?

*Colonel*. My dear—what a fancy! Think you selfish—of course I don't; why should I?

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. [Dully.] I don't know.

*Colonel*. [Changing the subject nervously.] I like your friend, Lever, Molly. He came to me before dinner quite distressed about your Aunt, beggin' me not to take those shares. She 'll be the first to worry me, but he made such a point of it, poor chap—in the end I was obliged to say I wouldn't. I thought it showed very' nice feeling. [Ruefully.] It's a pretty tight fit to make two ends meet on my income—I've missed a good thing, all owing to your Aunt. [Dropping his voice.] I don't mind telling you, Molly, I think they've got a much finer mine there than they've any idea of.

[*Mrs*. *Gwyn* gives way to laughter that is very near to sobs.]

[With dignity.] I can't see what there is to laugh at.

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. I don't know what's the matter with me this evening.

*Miss beech*. [In a low voice.] I do.

*Colonel*. There, there! Give me a kiss, old girl! [He kisses her on the brow.] Why, your forehead's as hot as fire. I know—I know-you 're fretting about Joy. Never mind—-come! [He draws her hand beneath his arm.] Let's go and have a look at the moon on the river. We all get upset at times; eh! [Lifting his hand as if he had been stung.] Why, you 're not crying, Molly! I say! Don't do that, old girl, it makes me wretched. Look here, Peachey. [Holding out the hand on which the tear has dropped.] This is dreadful!

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. [With a violent effort.] It's all right, Uncle Tom!

[*Miss beech* wipes her own eyes stealthily. From the house is heard the voice of *Mrs*. *Hope*, calling "Tom."]

*Miss beech*. Some one calling you.

*Colonel*. There, there, my dear, you just stay here, and cool yourself—I 'll come back—-shan't be a minute. [He turns to go.]

[*Mrs*. *Hope's* voice sounds nearer.]

[Turning back.] And Molly, old girl, don't you mind anything I said. I don't remember what it was—it must have been something, I suppose.

[He hastily retreats.]

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. [In a fierce low voice.] Why do you torture me?

*Miss beech*. [Sadly.] I don't want to torture you.

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*, But you do.  D' you think I haven't seen this coming—all these weeks.  I knew she must find out some time!  But even a day counts——

*Miss beech*.  I don't understand why you brought him down here.

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. [After staring at her, bitterly.] When day after day and night after night you've thought of nothing but how to keep them both, you might a little want to prove that it was possible, mightn't you?  But you don't understand—how should you?  You've never been a mother! [And fiercely.] You've never had a lov——

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[*Miss beech* raises her face-it is all puckered.]

[Impulsively.] Oh, I did n't mean that, Peachey!

*Miss beech*. All right, my dear.

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. I'm so dragged in two! [She sinks into a chair.] I knew it must come.

*Miss beech*. Does she know everything, Molly?

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. She guesses.

*Miss beech*. [Mournfully.] It's either him or her then, my dear; one or the other you 'll have to give up.

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. [Motionless.] Life's very hard on women!

*Miss beech*. Life's only just beginning for that child, Molly.

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. You don't care if it ends for me!

*Miss beech*. Is it as bad as that?

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. Yes.

*Miss beech*. [Rocking hey body.] Poor things! Poor things!

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. Are you still fond of me?

*Miss beech*. Yes, yes, my dear, of course I am.

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. In spite of my-wickedness?

[She laughs.]

*Miss beech*. Who am I to tell what's wicked and what is n't? God knows you're both like daughters to me!

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. [Abruptly.] I can't.

*Miss beech*. Molly.

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. You don't know what you're asking.

*Miss beech*. If I could save you suffering, my dear, I would. I hate suffering, if it 's only a fly, I hate it.

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. [Turning away from her.] Life is n't fair. Peachey, go in and leave me alone.

[She leans back motionless.]

[Miss *beech* gets off her seat, and stroking *Mrs*. GWYN's arm in passing goes silently away. In the opening of the wall she meets *lever* who is looking for his partner. They make way for each other.]

*Lever*. [Going up to *Mrs*. *Gwyn*—gravely.] The next is our dance, Molly.

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. [Unmoving.] Let's sit it out here, then.

[*Lever* sits down.]

*Lever*. I've made it all right with your Uncle.

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. [Dully.] Oh?

*Lever*. I spoke to him about the shares before dinner.

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. Yes, he told me, thank you.

*Lever*. There 's nothing to worry over, dear.

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. [Passionately.] What does it matter about the wretched shares now? I 'm stifling.

[She throws her scarf off.]

*Lever*. I don't understand what you mean by "now."

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. Don't you?

*Lever*. We were n't—Joy can't know—why should she? I don't believe for a minute ——

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*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. Because you don't want to.

*Lever*. Do you mean she does?

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. Her heart knows.

[*Lever* makes a movement of discomfiture; suddenly *Mrs*. *Gwyn* looks at him as though to read his soul.]

I seem to bring you nothing but worry, Maurice. Are you tired of me?

*Lever*. [Meeting her eyes.] No, I am not.

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. Ah, but would you tell me if you were?

*Lever*. [Softly.] Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.

[*Mrs*. *Gwyn* struggles to look at him, then covers her face with her hands.]

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. If I were to give you up, you'd forget me in a month.

*Lever*. Why do you say such things?

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. If only I could believe I was necessary to you!

*Lever*. [Forcing the fervour of his voice.] But you are!

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. Am I? [With the ghost of a smile.] Midsummer day!

[She gives a laugh that breaks into a sob.]

[The music o f a waltz sounds from the house.]

*Lever*. For God's sake, don't, Molly—I don't believe in going to meet trouble.

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. It's staring me in the face.

*Lever*. Let the future take care of itself!

[*Mrs*. *Gwyn* has turned away her face, covering it with her hands.]

Don't, Molly! [Trying to pull her hands away.] Don't!

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. Oh! what shall I do?

[There is a silence; the music of the waltz sounds louder from the house.]

[Starting up.] Listen! One can't sit it out and dance it too. Which is it to be, Maurice, dancing—or sitting out? It must be one or the other, must n't it?

*Lever*. Molly! Molly!

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. Ah, my dear! [Standing away from him as though to show herself.] How long shall I keep you? This is all that 's left of me. It 's time I joined the wallflowers. [Smiling faintly.] It's time I played the mother, is n't it? [In a whisper.] It'll be all sitting out then.

*Lever*. Don't! Let's go and dance, it'll do you good.

[He puts his hands on her arms, and in a gust of passion kisses her lips and throat.]

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. I can't give you up—I can't. Love me, oh! love me!

[For a moment they stand so; then, with sudden remembrance of where they are, they move apart.]

*Lever*. Are you all right now, darling?

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. [Trying to smile.] Yes, dear—quite.

*Lever*. Then let 's go, and dance. [They go.]

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[For a few seconds the hollow tree stands alone; then from the house *rose* comes and enters it. She takes out a bottle of champagne, wipes it, and carries it away; but seeing *Mrs*. GWYN's scarf lying across the chair, she fingers it, and stops, listening to the waltz. Suddenly draping it round her shoulders, she seizes the bottle of champagne, and waltzes with abandon to the music, as though avenging a long starvation of her instincts. Thus dancing, she is surprised by *Dick*, who has come to smoke a cigarette and think, at the spot where he was told to "have a go." *Rose*, startled, stops and hugs the bottle.]

*Dick*. It's not claret, Rose, I should n't warm it.

[*Rose*, taking off the scarf, replaces it on the chair; then with the half-warmed bottle, she retreats. *Dick*, in the swing, sits thinking of his fate. Suddenly from behind the hollow tree he sees Joy darting forward in her day dress with her hair about her neck, and her skirt all torn. As he springs towards her, she turns at bay.]

*Dick*. Joy!

*Joy*. I want Uncle Tom.

*Dick*. [In consternation.] But ought you to have got up—I thought you were ill in bed; oughtn't you to be lying down?

*Joy*. If have n't been in bed. Where's Uncle Tom?

*Dick*. But where have you been?-your dress is all torn. Look! [He touches the torn skirt.]

*Joy*. [Tearing it away.] In the fields. Where's Uncle Tom?

*Dick*. Are n't you really ill then?

[Joy shakes her head.]

*Dick*, [showing her the irises.] Look at these. They were the best I could get.

*Joy*. Don't! I want Uncle Tom!

*Dick*. Won't you take them?

*Joy*. I 've got something else to do.

*Dick*. [With sudden resolution.] What do you want the Colonel for?

*Joy*. I want him.

*Dick*. Alone?

*Joy*. Yes.

*Dick*. Joy, what is the matter?

*Joy*. I ’ve got something to tell him.

*Dick*. What? [With sudden inspiration.] Is it about Lever?

*Joy*. [In a low voice.] The mine.

*Dick*. The mine?

*Joy*. It ’s not—not a proper one.

*Dick*. How do you mean, Joy?

*Joy*. I overheard. I don’t care, I listened. I would n’t if it had been anybody else, but I hate him.

*Dick*. [Gravely.] What did you hear?

*Joy*. He ’s keeping back something Uncle Tom ought to know.

*Dick*. Are you sure?

[Joy makes a rush to pass him.]

[Barring the way.] No, wait a minute—you must! Was it something that really matters? —I don’t want to know what.

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*Joy*. Yes, it was.

*Dick*. What a beastly thing—are you quite certain, Joy?

*Joy*. [Between her teeth.] Yes.

*Dick*. Then you must tell him, of course, even if you did overhear. You can't stand by and see the Colonel swindled. Whom was he talking to?

*Joy*. I won't tell you.

*Dick*. [Taking her wrist.] Was it was it your Mother?

[Joy bends her head.]

But if it was your Mother, why does n't she——

*Joy*. Let me go!

*Dick*. [Still holding her.] I mean I can't see what——

*Joy*. [Passionately.] Let me go!

*Dick*. [Releasing her.] I'm thinking of your Mother, Joy. She would never——

*Joy*. [Covering her face.] That man!

*Dick*. But joy, just think! There must be some mistake. It 's so queer—it 's quite impossible!

*Joy*. He won't let her.

*Dick*. Won't let her—won't let her? But [Stopping dead, and in a very different voice.] Oh!

*Joy*. [Passionately.] Why d' you look at me like that? Why can't you speak?

[She waits for him to speak, but he does not.]

I'm going to show what he is, so that Mother shan't speak to him again. I can—can't I—if I tell Uncle Tom?—can't I——?

*Dick*. But Joy—if your Mother knows a thing like—that——

*Joy*. She wanted to tell—she begged him—and he would n't.

*Dick*. But, joy, dear, it means——

*Joy*. I hate him, I want to make her hate him, and I will.

*Dick*. But, Joy, dear, don't you see—if your Mother knows a thing like that, and does n't speak of it, it means that she—it means that you can't make her hate him—it means ——If it were anybody else— but, well, you can't give your own Mother away!

*Joy*. How dare you! How dare you! [Turning to the hollow tree.] It is n't true—Oh! it is n't true!

*Dick*. [In deep distress.] Joy, dear, I never meant, I didn't really!

[He tries to pull her hands down from her face.]

*Joy*. [Suddenly.] Oh! go away, go away!

[*Mrs*. *Gwyn* is seen coming back. *Joy* springs into the tree. *Dick* quickly steals away. *Mrs*. *Gwyn* goes up to the chair and takes the scarf that she has come for, and is going again when *joy* steals out to her.]

Mother!

[*Mrs*. *Gwyn* stands looking at her with her teeth set on her lower lip.]

Oh! Mother, it is n't true?

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. [Very still.] What is n't true?

*Joy*. That you and he are——

[Searching her Mother's face, which is deadly still. In a whisper.]

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Then it is true.  Oh!

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*.  That's enough, Joy!  What I am is my affair—not yours— do you understand?

*Joy*. [Low and fierce.] Yes, I do.

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*.  You don't.  You're only a child.

*Joy*. [Passionately.] I understand that you've hurt [She stops.]

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*.  Do you mean your Father?

*Joy*. [Bowing her head.] Yes, and—and me. [She covers her face.] I'm—I'm ashamed.

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*.  I brought you into the world, and you say that to me? Have I been a bad mother to you?

*Joy*. [In a smothered voice.] Oh!  Mother!

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*.  Ashamed?  Am I to live all my life like a dead woman because you're ashamed?  Am I to live like the dead because you 're a child that knows nothing of life? Listen, Joy, you 'd better understand this once for all.  Your Father has no right over me and he knows it.  We 've been hateful to each other for years.  Can you understand that?  Don't cover your face like a child—look at me.

> [Joy drops her hands, and lifts her face.  *Mrs*. *Gwyn* looks back at her, her lips are quivering; she goes on speaking with stammering rapidity.]

D' you think—because I suffered when you were born and because I 've suffered since with every ache you ever had, that that gives you the right to dictate to me now? [In a dead voice.] I've been unhappy enough and I shall be unhappy enough in the time to come. [Meeting the hard wonder in Joy's face.] Oh! you untouched things, you're as hard and cold as iron!

*Joy*.  I would do anything for you, Mother.

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*.  Except—let me live, Joy.  That's the only thing you won't do for me, I quite understand.

*Joy*.  Oh!  Mother, you don't understand—I want you so; and I seem to be nothing to you now.

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*.  Nothing to me? [She smiles.]

*Joy*.  Mother, darling, if you're so unhappy let's forget it all, let's go away and I 'll be everything to you, I promise.

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. [With the ghost of a laugh.] Ah, Joy!

*Joy*.  I would try so hard.

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. [With the same quivering smile.] My darling, I know you would, until you fell in love yourself.

*Joy*.  Oh, Mother, I wouldn't, I never would, I swear it.

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*.  There has never been a woman, joy, that did not fall in love.

*Joy*. [In a despairing whisper.] But it 's wrong of you it's wicked!

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*.  If it's wicked, I shall pay for it, not you!

*Joy*.  But I want to save you, Mother!

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*.  Save me? [Breaking into laughter.]

*Joy*.  I can't bear it that you—if you 'll only—I'll never leave you.  You think I don't know what I 'm saying, but I do, because even now I—I half love somebody.  Oh, Mother! [Pressing her breast.] I feel—I feel so awful—as if everybody knew.

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*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. You think I'm a monster to hurt you. Ah! yes! You'll understand better some day.

*Joy*. [In a sudden outburst of excited fear.] I won't believe it—
I—I—can't—you're deserting me, Mother.

*Mrs*. *Gwyn*. Oh, you untouched things! You——

[Joy' looks up suddenly, sees her face, and sinks down on her knees.]

*Joy*. Mother—it 's for me!

*Gwyn*. Ask for my life, *joy*—don't be afraid.

[Joy turns her face away. *Mrs*. *Gwyn* bends suddenly and touches her daughter's hair; *joy* shrinks from that touch.]

[Recoiling as though she had been stung.] I forgot—I 'm deserting you.

[And swiftly without looking back she goes away. Joy, left alone under the hollow tree, crouches lower, and her shoulders shake. Here *Dick* finds her, when he hears no longer any sound o f voices. He falls on his knees beside her.]

*Dick*. Oh! Joy; dear, don't cry. It's so dreadful to see you! I 'd do anything not to see you cry! Say something.

[Joy is still for a moment, then the shaking of the shoulders begins again.]

Joy, darling! It's so awful, you 'll make yourself ill, and it is n't worth it, really. I 'd do anything to save you pain—won't you stop just for a minute?

[Joy is still again.]

Nothing in the world 's worth your crying, Joy. Give me just a little look!

*Joy*. [Looking; in a smothered voice.] Don't!

*Dick*. You do look so sweet! Oh, Joy, I'll comfort you, I'll take it all on myself. I know all about it.

[Joy gives a sobbing laugh]

I do. I 've had trouble too, I swear I have. It gets better, it does really.

*Joy*. You don't know—it's—it's——

*Dick*. Don't think about it! No, no, no! I know exactly what it's like. [He strokes her arm.]

*Joy*. [Shrinking, in a whisper.] You mustn't.

[The music of a waltz is heard again.]

*Dick*. Look here, joy! It's no good, we must talk it over calmly.

*Joy*. You don't see! It's the—it 's the disgrace——

*Dick*. Oh! as to disgrace—she's your Mother, whatever she does; I'd like to see anybody say anything about her—[viciously]—I'd punch his head.

*Joy*. [Gulping her tears.] That does n't help.

*Dick*. But if she doesn't love your Father——

*Joy*. But she's married to him!

*Dick*. [Hastily.] Yes, of course, I know, marriage is awfully important; but a man understands these things.

[Joy looks at him. Seeing the impression he has made, he tries again.]

I mean, he understands better than a woman. I've often argued about moral questions with men up at Oxford.

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*Joy*. [Catching at a straw.] But there's nothing to argue about.

*Dick*. [Hastily.] Of course, I believe in morals.

[They stare solemnly at each other.]

Some men don't. But I can't help seeing marriage is awfully important.

*Joy*. [Solemnly.] It's sacred.

*Dick*. Yes, I know, but there must be exceptions, Joy.

Joy. [Losing herself a little in the stress of this discussion.]
How can there be exceptions if a thing 's sacred?

*Dick*. [Earnestly.] All rules have exceptions; that's true, you know; it's a proverb.

*Joy*. It can't be true about marriage—how can it when——?

*Dick*. [With intense earnestness.] But look here, Joy, I know a really clever man—an author. He says that if marriage is a failure people ought to be perfectly free; it isn't everybody who believes that marriage is everything. Of course, I believe it 's sacred, but if it's a failure, I do think it seems awful—don't you?

*Joy*. I don't know—yes—if—[Suddenly] But it's my own Mother!

*Dick*. [Gravely.] I know, of course. I can't expect you to see it in your own case like this. [With desperation.] But look here, Joy, this'll show you! If a person loves a person, they have to decide, have n't they? Well, then, you see, that 's what your Mother's done.

*Joy*. But that does n't show me anything!

*Dick*. But it does. The thing is to look at it as if it was n't yourself. If it had been you and me in love, Joy, and it was wrong, like them, of course [ruefully] I know you'd have decided right. [Fiercely.] But I swear I should have decided wrong. [Triumphantly.] That 's why I feel I understand your Mother.

*Joy*. [Brushing her sleeve across her eyes.] Oh, Dick, you are so sweet—and—and—-funny!

*Dick*. [Sliding his arm about her.] I love you, Joy, that 's why, and I 'll love you till you don't feel it any more. I will. I'll love you all day and every day; you shan't miss anything, I swear it. It 's such a beautiful night—it 's on purpose. Look' [*joy* looks; he looks at her.] But it 's not so beautiful as you.

*Joy*. [Bending her head.] You mustn't.  I don't know—what's coming?

*Dick*. [Sidling closer.] Are n't your knees tired, darling?  I—I can't get near you properly.

*Joy*. [With a sob.] Oh!  Dick, you are a funny—comfort!

*Dick*.  We'll stick together, Joy, always; nothing'll matter then.

[They struggle to their feet-the waltz sounds louder.]

You're missing it all!  I can't bear you to miss the dancing.  It seems so queer!  Couldn't we?  Just a little turn?

*Joy*.  No, no?

*Dick*.  Oh! try!

[He takes her gently by the waist, she shrinks back.]

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*Joy*. [Brokenly.] No-no!  Oh!  Dick-to-morrow ’ll be so awful.

*Dick*.  To-morrow shan’t hurt you, Joy; nothing shall ever hurt you again.

[She looks at him, and her face changes; suddenly she buries it against his shoulder.]

[They stand so just a moment in the moon light; then turning to the river move slowly out of sight.  Again the hollow tree is left alone.  The music of the waltz has stopped.  The voices of *miss beech* and the *colonel* are heard approaching from the house.  They appear in the opening of the wall.  The *colonel* carries a pair of field glasses with which to look at the Moon.]

*Colonel*.  Charming to see Molly dance with Lever, their steps go so well together!  I can always tell when a woman’s enjoying herself, Peachey.

*Miss beech*. [Sharply.] Can you?  You’re very clever.

*Colonel*.  Wonderful, that moon!  I’m going to have a look at her!  Splendid glasses these, Peachy [he screws them out], not a better pair in England.  I remember in Burmah with these glasses I used to be able to tell a man from a woman at two miles and a quarter.  And that’s no joke, I can tell you. [But on his way to the moon, he has taken a survey of the earth to the right along the river.  In a low but excited voice] I say, I say—is it one of the maids—the baggage!  Why!  It’s Dick!  By George, she’s got her hair down, Peachey!  It’s Joy!

[*Miss beech* goes to look.  He makes as though to hand the glasses to her, but puts them to his own eyes instead—excitedly.]

It is!  What about her headache?  By George, they’re kissing.  I say, Peachey!  I shall have to tell Nell!

*Miss beech*.  Are you sure they’re kissing?  Well, that’s some comfort.

*Colonel*.  They’re at the stile now.  Oughtn’t I to stop them, eh? [He stands on tiptoe.] We must n’t spy on them, dash it all. [He drops the glasses.] They’re out of sight now.

*Miss beech*. [To herself.] He said he wouldn’t let her.

*Colonel*.  What! have you been encouraging them!

*Miss beech*.  Don’t be in such a hurry!

[She moves towards the hollow tree.]

*Colonel*. [Abstractedly.] By George, Peachey, to think that Nell and I were once—Poor Nell!  I remember just such a night as this

[He stops, and stares before him, sighing.]

*Miss beech*, [Impressively.] It's a comfort she's got that good young man.  She's found out that her mother and this Mr. Lever are—you know.

*Colonel*. [Losing all traces of his fussiness, and drawing himself up as though he were on parade.] You tell me that my niece?

*Miss beech*.  Out of her own mouth!

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*Colonel*. [Bowing his head.] I never would have believed she'd have forgotten herself.

*Miss beech*. [Very solemnly.] Ah, my dear! We're all the same; we're all as hollow as that tree! When it's ourselves it's always a special case!

[The *colonel* makes a movement of distress, and Miss *beech* goes to him.]

Don't you take it so to heart, my dear!

[A silence.]

*Colonel*. [Shaking his head.] I couldn't have believed Molly would forget that child.

*Miss beech*. [Sadly.] They must go their own ways, poor things! She can't put herself in the child's place, and the child can't put herself in Molly's. A woman and a girl—there's the tree of life between them!

*Colonel*. [Staring into the tree to see indeed if that were the tree alluded to.] It's a grief to me, Peachey, it's a grief! [He sinks into a chair, stroking his long moustaches. Then to avenge his hurt.] Shan't tell Nell—dashed if I do anything to make the trouble worse!

*Miss beech*. [Nodding.] There's suffering enough, without adding to it with our trumpery judgments! If only things would last between them!

*Colonel*. [Fiercely.] Last! By George, they'd better——

[He stops, and looking up with a queer sorry look.]

I say, Peachey Life's very funny!

*Miss beech*. Men and women are! [Touching his forehead tenderly.] There, there—take care of your poor, dear head! Tsst! The blessed innocents!

[She pulls the *colonel's* sleeve. They slip away towards the house, as *joy* and *Dick* come back. They are still linked together, and stop by the hollow tree.]

*Joy*. [In a whisper.] Dick, is love always like this?

*Dick*. [Putting his arms around her, with conviction.] It's never been like this before. It's you and me!

[He kisses her on the lips.]

The curtain falls.

# STRIFE

### A DRAMA IN THREE ACTS

## PERSONS OF THE PLAY

*John Anthony*, Chairman of the Trenartha Tin Plate Works
*Edgar Anthony*, his Son

*Frederic* H. *Wilder*, |
*William Scantlebury*,| Directors Of the same
*Oliver Wanklin*, |

*Henry Tench*, Secretary of the same
*Francis Underwood*, C.E., Manager of the same
*Simon Harness*, a Trades Union official

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*David Roberts,* |
*James green,* |
*John Bulgin,* | the workmen's committee
*Henry Thomas,* |
*George Rous,* |
*Henry Rous,* |
*Lewis,* |
*Jago,* |
*Evans,* | workman at the Trenartha Tin Plate Works
A *blacksmith,* |
*Davies,* |
A *red-haired youth.* |
*Brown* |

*Frost*, valet to John Anthony
*Enid Underwood*, Wife of Francis Underwood, daughter of John Anthony
*Annie Roberts*, wife of David Roberts
*Madge Thomas*, daughter of Henry Thomas
*Mrs*. *Rous*, mother of George and Henry Rous
*Mrs*. *Bulgin*, wife of John Bulgin
*Mrs*. *Yeo*, wife of a workman
A *parlourmaid* to the Underwoods
*Jan*, Madge's brother, a boy of ten
A *crowd of men on strike*

*Act* I. The dining-room of the Manager's house.

*Act* II,
*scene* I. The kitchen of the Roberts's cottage near the works.
*Scene* II. A space outside the works.

*Act* III. The drawing-room of the Manager's house.

The action takes place on February 7th between the hours of noon and six in the afternoon, close to the Trenartha Tin Plate Works, on the borders of England and Wales, where a strike has been in progress throughout the winter.

## ACT I

It is noon. In the Underwoods' dining-room a bright fire is burning. On one side of the fireplace are double-doors leading to the drawing-room, on the other side a door leading to the hall. In the centre of the room a long dining-table without a cloth is set out as a

Board table. At the head of it, in the Chairman's seat, sits *John Anthony*, an old man, big, clean-shaven, and high-coloured, with thick white hair, and thick dark eyebrows. His movements are rather slow and feeble, but his eyes are very much alive. There is a glass of water by his side. On his right sits his son *Edgar*, an earnest-looking man of thirty, reading a newspaper. Next him *Wanklin*, a man with jutting eyebrows, and silver-streaked light hair, is bending over transfer papers. *Tench*, the Secretary, a short and rather humble, nervous man, with side whiskers, stands helping him. On WANKLIN'S right sits *Underwood*, the Manager, a quiet man, with along, stiff jaw, and steady eyes. Back to the fire is *Scantlebury*, a very large, pale, sleepy man, with grey hair, rather bald. Between him and the Chairman are two empty chairs.

Wilder. [Who is lean, cadaverous, and complaining, with drooping grey moustaches, stands before the fire.] I say, this fire's the devil! Can I have a screen, Tench?

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*Scantlebury*. A screen, ah!

*Tench*. Certainly, Mr. Wilder. [He looks at *Underwood*.] That is— perhaps the Manager —perhaps Mr. Underwood——

*Scantlebury*. These fireplaces of yours, Underwood——

*Underwood*. [Roused from studying some papers.] A screen? Rather! I'm sorry. [He goes to the door with a little smile.] We're not accustomed to complaints of too much fire down here just now.

[He speaks as though he holds a pipe between his teeth, slowly, ironically.]

*Wilder*. [In an injured voice.] You mean the men. H'm!

[*Underwood* goes out.]

*Scantlebury*. Poor devils!

*Wilder*. It's their own fault, Scantlebury.

*Edgar*. [Holding out his paper.] There's great distress among them, according to the Trenartha News.

*Wilder*. Oh, that rag! Give it to Wanklin. Suit his Radical views. They call us monsters, I suppose. The editor of that rubbish ought to be shot.

*Edgar*. [Reading.] "If the Board of worthy gentlemen who control the Trenartha Tin Plate Works from their arm-chairs in London would condescend to come and see for themselves the conditions prevailing amongst their work-people during this strike——"

*Wilder*. Well, we have come.

*Edgar*. [Continuing.] "We cannot believe that even their leg-of-mutton hearts would remain untouched."

[*Wanklin* takes the paper from him.]

*Wilder*. Ruffian! I remember that fellow when he had n't a penny to his name; little snivel of a chap that's made his way by black-guarding everybody who takes a different view to himself.

[*Anthony* says something that is not heard.]

*Wilder*. What does your father say?

*Edgar*. He says “The kettle and the pot.”

*Wilder*. H’m!

[He sits down next to *Scantlebury*.]

*Scantlebury*. [Blowing out his cheeks.] I shall boil if I don’t get that screen.

[*Underwood* and *Enid* enter with a screen, which they place before the fire. *Enid* is tall; she has a small, decided face, and is twenty-eight years old.]

*Enid*. Put it closer, Frank. Will that do, Mr. Wilder? It’s the highest we’ve got.

*Wilder*. Thanks, capitally.

*Scantlebury*. [Turning, with a sigh of pleasure.] Ah! Merci, Madame!

*Enid*. Is there anything else you want, Father? [*Anthony* shakes his head.] Edgar—-anything?

*Edgar*. You might give me a “J” nib, old girl.

*Enid*. There are some down there by Mr. Scantlebury.

*Scantlebury*. [Handing a little box of nibs.] Ah! your brother uses “J’s.” What does the manager use? [With expansive politeness.] What does your husband use, Mrs. Underwood?

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*Underwood*. A quill!

*Scantlebury*. The homely product of the goose. [He holds out quills.]

*Underwood*. [Drily.] Thanks, if you can spare me one. [He takes a quill.] What about lunch, Enid?

*Enid*. [Stopping at the double-doors and looking back.] We're going to have lunch here, in the drawing-room, so you need n't hurry with your meeting.

[*Wanklin* and *Wilder* bow, and she goes out.]

*Scantlebury*. [Rousing himself, suddenly.] Ah! Lunch! That hotel— Dreadful! Did you try the whitebait last night? Fried fat!

*Wilder*. Past twelve! Are n't you going to read the minutes, Tench?

*Tench*. [Looking for the *Chairman's* assent, reads in a rapid and monotonous voice.] "At a Board Meeting held the 31st of January at the Company's Offices, 512, Cannon Street, E.C. Present—Mr. Anthony in the chair, Messrs. F. H. Wilder, William Scantlebury, Oliver Wanklin, and Edgar Anthony. Read letters from the Manager dated January 20th, 23d, 25th, 28th, relative to the strike at the Company's Works. Read letters to the Manager of January 21st, 24th, 26th, 29th. Read letter from Mr. Simon Harness, of the Central Union, asking for an interview with the Board. Read letter from the Men's Committee, signed David Roberts, James Green, John Bulgin, Henry Thomas, George Rous, desiring conference with the Board; and it was resolved that a special Board Meeting be called for February 7th at the house of the Manager, for the purpose of discussing the situation with Mr. Simon Harness and the Men's Committee on the spot. Passed twelve transfers, signed and sealed nine certificates and one balance certificate."

[He pushes the book over to the *chairman*.]

*Anthony*. [With a heavy sigh.] If it's your pleasure, sign the same.

[He signs, moving the pen with difficulty. ]

*Wanklin*. What's the Union's game, Tench? They have n't made up their split with the men. What does Harness want this interview for?

*Tench*. Hoping we shall come to a compromise, I think, sir; he's having a meeting with the men this afternoon.

*Wilder*. Harness! Ah! He's one of those cold-blooded, cool-headed chaps. I distrust them. I don't know that we didn't make a mistake to come down. What time'll the men be here?

*Underwood*. Any time now.

*Wilder*. Well, if we're not ready, they'll have to wait—won't do them any harm to cool their heels a bit.

*Scantlebury*. [Slowly.] Poor devils! It's snowing. What weather!

*Underwood*. [With meaning slowness.] This house'll be the warmest place they've been in this winter.

*Wilder*. Well, I hope we're going to settle this business in time for me to catch the 6.30. I've got to take my wife to Spain to-morrow. [Chattily.] My old father had a strike at his works in '69; just such a February as this. They wanted to shoot him.

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*Wanklin*. What! In the close season?

*Wilder*. By George, there was no close season for employers then! He used to go down to his office with a pistol in his pocket.

*Scantlebury*. [Faintly alarmed.] Not seriously?

*Wilder*. [With finality.] Ended in his shootin' one of 'em in the legs.

*Scantlebury*. [Unavoidably feeling his thigh.] No? Which?

*Anthony*. [Lifting the agenda paper.] To consider the policy of the Board in relation to the strike. [There is a silence.]

*Wilder*. It's this infernal three-cornered duel—the Union, the men, and ourselves.

*Wanklin*. We need n't consider the Union.

*Wilder*. It's my experience that you've always got to, consider the Union, confound them! If the Union were going to withdraw their support from the men, as they've done, why did they ever allow them to strike at all?

*Edgar*. We've had that over a dozen times.

*Wilder*. Well, I've never understood it! It's beyond me. They talk of the engineers' and furnace-men's demands being excessive—so they are—but that's not enough to make the Union withdraw their support. What's behind it?

*Underwood*. Fear of strikes at Harper's and Tinewell's.

*Wilder*. [With triumph.] Afraid of other strikes—now, that's a reason! Why could n't we have been told that before?

*Underwood*. You were.

*Tench*. You were absent from the Board that day, sir.

*Scantlebury*. The men must have seen they had no chance when the Union gave them up. It's madness.

*Underwood*. It's Roberts!

*Wilder*. Just our luck, the men finding a fanatical firebrand like Roberts for leader. [A pause.]

*Wanklin*. [Looking at *Anthony*.] Well?

*Wilder*. [Breaking in fussily.] It's a regular mess. I don't like the position we're in; I don't like it; I've said so for a long time. [Looking at *Wanklin*.] When Wanklin and I came down here before Christmas it looked as if the men must collapse. You thought so too, Underwood.

*Underwood*. Yes.

*Wilder*. Well, they haven't! Here we are, going from bad to worse losing our customers —shares going down!

*Scantlebury*. [Shaking his head.] M'm! M'm!

*Wanklin*. What loss have we made by this strike, Tench?

*Tench*. Over fifty thousand, sir!

*Scantlebury*, [Pained.] You don't say!

*Wilder*. We shall never got it back.

*Tench*. No, sir.

*Wilder*. Who'd have supposed the men were going to stick out like this—nobody suggested that. [Looking angrily at *Tench*.]

*Scantlebury*. [Shaking his head.] I've never liked a fight—never shall.

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*Anthony*. No surrender! [All look at him.]

*Wilder*. Who wants to surrender? [*Anthony* looks at him.] I—I want to act reasonably. When the men sent Roberts up to the Board in December—then was the time. We ought to have humoured him; instead of that the Chairman—[Dropping his eyes before *Anthony's*]—er—we snapped his head off. We could have got them in then by a little tact.

*Anthony*. No compromise!

*Wilder*. There we are! This strike's been going on now since October, and as far as I can see it may last another six months. Pretty mess we shall be in by then. The only comfort is, the men'll be in a worse!

*Edgar*. [To *Underwood*.] What sort of state are they really in,
Frank?

*Underwood*. [Without expression.] Damnable!

*Wilder*. Well, who on earth would have thought they'd have held on like this without support!

*Underwood*. Those who know them.

*Wilder*. I defy any one to know them! And what about tin? Price going up daily. When we do get started we shall have to work off our contracts at the top of the market.

*Wanklin*. What do you say to that, Chairman?

*Anthony*. Can't be helped!

*Wilder*. Shan't pay a dividend till goodness knows when!

*Scantlebury*. [With emphasis.] We ought to think of the shareholders. [Turning heavily.] Chairman, I say we ought to think of the shareholders. [*Anthony* mutters.]

*Scantlebury*. What's that?

*Tench*. The Chairman says he is thinking of you, sir.

*Scantlebury*. [Sinking back into torpor.] Cynic!

*Wilder*. It's past a joke. I don't want to go without a dividend for years if the Chairman does. We can't go on playing ducks and drakes with the Company's prosperity.

*Edgar*. [Rather ashamedly.] I think we ought to consider the men.

[All but *Anthony* fidget in their seats.]

*Scantlebury*. [With a sigh.] We must n't think of our private feelings, young man. That'll never do.

*Edgar*. [Ironically.] I'm not thinking of our feelings. I'm thinking of the men's.

*Wilder*. As to that—we're men of business.

*Wanklin*. That is the little trouble.

*Edgar*. There's no necessity for pushing things so far in the face of all this suffering—-it's—it's cruel.

[No one speaks, as though *Edgar* had uncovered something whose existence no man prizing his self-respect could afford to recognise.]

*Wanklin*. [With an ironical smile.] I'm afraid we must n't base our policy on luxuries like sentiment.

*Edgar*. I detest this state of things.

*Anthony*. We did n't seek the quarrel.

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*Edgar*. I know that sir, but surely we've gone far enough.

*Anthony*. No. [All look at one another.]

*Wanklin*. Luxuries apart, Chairman, we must look out what we're doing.

*Anthony*. Give way to the men once and there'll be no end to it.

*Wanklin*. I quite agree, but——

[*Anthony* Shakes his head]

You make it a question of bedrock principle?

[*Anthony* nods.]

Luxuries again, Chairman! The shares are below par.

*Wilder*. Yes, and they'll drop to a half when we pass the next dividend.

*Scantlebury*. [With alarm.] Come, come! Not so bad as that.

*Wilder*. [Grimly.] You'll see! [Craning forward to catch *Anthony's* speech.] I didn't catch ——

*Tench*. [Hesitating.] The Chairman says, sir, "Fais que—que—devra."

*Edgar*. [Sharply.] My father says: "Do what we ought—and let things rip."

*Wilder*. Tcha!

*Scantlebury*. [Throwing up his hands.] The Chairman's a Stoic—I always said the Chairman was a Stoic.

*Wilder*. Much good that'll do us.

*Wanklin*. [Suavely.] Seriously, Chairman, are you going to let the ship sink under you, for the sake of—a principle?

*Anthony*. She won't sink.

*Scantlebury*. [With alarm.] Not while I'm on the Board I hope.

*Anthony*. [With a twinkle.] Better rat, Scantlebury.

*Scantlebury*. What a man!

*Anthony*. I've always fought them; I've never been beaten yet.

*Wanklin*. We're with you in theory, Chairman. But we're not all made of cast-iron.

*Anthony*. We've only to hold on.

*Wilder*. [Rising and going to the fire.] And go to the devil as fast as we can!

*Anthony*. Better go to the devil than give in!

*Wilder*. [Fretfully.] That may suit you, sir, but it does n't suit me, or any one else I should think.

[*Anthony* looks him in the face-a silence.]

*Edgar*. I don't see how we can get over it that to go on like this means starvation to the men's wives and families.

[*Wilder* turns abruptly to the fire, and *Scantlebury* puts out a hand to push the idea away.]

*Wanklin*. I'm afraid again that sounds a little sentimental.

*Edgar*. Men of business are excused from decency, you think?

*Wilder*. Nobody's more sorry for the men than I am, but if they [lashing himself] choose to be such a pig-headed lot, it's nothing to do with us; we've quite enough on our hands to think of ourselves and the shareholders.

*Edgar*. [Irritably.] It won't kill the shareholders to miss a dividend or two; I don't see that that's reason enough for knuckling under.

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*Scantlebury*. [With grave discomfort.] You talk very lightly of your dividends, young man; I don't know where we are.

*Wilder*. There's only one sound way of looking at it. We can't go on ruining ourselves with this strike.

*Anthony*. No caving in!

*Scantlebury*. [With a gesture of despair.] Look at him!

[*Anthony's* leaning back in his chair. They do look at him.]

*Wilder*. [Returning to his seat.] Well, all I can say is, if that's the Chairman's view, I don't know what we've come down here for.

*Anthony*. To tell the men that we've got nothing for them—— [Grimly.] They won't believe it till they hear it spoken in plain English.

*Wilder*. H'm! Shouldn't be a bit surprised if that brute Roberts had n't got us down here with the very same idea. I hate a man with a grievance.

*Edgar*. [Resentfully.] We didn't pay him enough for his discovery. I always said that at the time.

*Wilder*. We paid him five hundred and a bonus of two hundred three years later. If that's not enough! What does he want, for goodness' sake?

*Tench*. [Complainingly.] Company made a hundred thousand out of his brains, and paid him seven hundred—that's the way he goes on, sir.

*Wilder*. The man's a rank agitator! Look here, I hate the Unions. But now we've got Harness here let's get him to settle the whole thing.

*Anthony*. No! [Again they look at him.]

*Underwood*. Roberts won't let the men assent to that.

*Scantlebury*. Fanatic! Fanatic!

*Wilder*. [Looking at *Anthony*.] And not the only one! [*Frost* enters from the hall.]

*Frost*. [To *Anthony*.] Mr. Harness from the Union, waiting, sir. The men are here too, sir.

[*Anthony* nods. *Underwood* goes to the door, returning with *Harness*, a pale, clean-shaven man with hollow cheeks, quick eyes, and lantern jaw—*frost* has retired.]

*Underwood*. [Pointing to TENCH'S chair.] Sit there next the Chairman, Harness, won't you?

[At HARNESS'S appearance, the Board have drawn together, as it were, and turned a little to him, like cattle at a dog.]

*Harness*. [With a sharp look round, and a bow.] Thanks! [He sits—— his accent is slightly nasal.] Well, gentlemen, we're going to do business at last, I hope.

*Wilder*. Depends on what you call business, Harness. Why don't you make the men come in?

*Harness*. [Sardonically.] The men are far more in the right than you are. The question with us is whether we shan't begin to support them again.

[He ignores them all, except *Anthony*, to whom he turns in speaking.]

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*Anthony*. Support them if you like; we'll put in free labour and have done with it.

*Harness*. That won't do, Mr. Anthony. You can't get free labour, and you know it.

*Anthony*. We shall see that.

*Harness*. I'm quite frank with you. We were forced to withhold our support from your men because some of their demands are in excess of current rates. I expect to make them withdraw those demands to-day: if they do, take it straight from me, gentlemen, we shall back them again at once. Now, I want to see something fixed upon before I go back to-night. Can't we have done with this old-fashioned tug-of-war business? What good's it doing you? Why don't you recognise once for all that these people are men like yourselves, and want what's good for them just as you want what's good for you [Bitterly.] Your motor-cars, and champagne, and eight-course dinners.

*Anthony*. If the men will come in, we'll do something for them.

*Harness*. [Ironically.] Is that your opinion too, sir—and yours— and yours? [The Directors do not answer.] Well, all I can say is: It's a kind of high and mighty aristocratic tone I thought we'd grown out of—seems I was mistaken.

*Anthony*. It's the tone the men use. Remains to be seen which can hold out longest—-they without us, or we without them.

*Harness*. As business men, I wonder you're not ashamed of this waste of force, gentlemen. You know what it'll all end in.

*Anthony*. What?

*Harness*. Compromise—it always does.

*Scantlebury*. Can't you persuade the men that their interests are the same as ours?

*Harness*. [Turning, ironically.] I could persuade them of that, sir, if they were.

*Wilder*. Come, Harness, you're a clever man, you don't believe all the Socialistic claptrap that's talked nowadays. There 's no real difference between their interests and ours.

*Harness*. There's just one very simple question I'd like to put to you. Will you pay your men one penny more than they force you to pay them?

[*Wilder* is silent.]

*Wanklin*. [Chiming in.] I humbly thought that not to pay more than was necessary was the A B C of commerce.

*Harness*. [With irony.] Yes, that seems to be the A B C of commerce, sir; and the A B C of commerce is between your interests and the men's.

*Scantlebury*. [Whispering.] We ought to arrange something.

*Harness*. [Drily.] Am I to understand then, gentlemen, that your Board is going to make no concessions?

[*Wanklin* and *Wilder* bend forward as if to speak, but stop.]

*Anthony*. [Nodding.] None.

[*Wanklin* and *Wilder* again bend forward, and *Scantlebury* gives an unexpected grunt.]

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*Harness*. You were about to say something, I believe?

[But *Scantlebury* says nothing.]

*Edgar*. [Looking up suddenly.] We're sorry for the state of the men.

*Harness*. [Icily.] The men have no use for your pity, sir. What they want is justice.

*Anthony*. Then let them be just.

*Harness*. For that word "just" read "humble," Mr. Anthony. Why should they be humble? Barring the accident of money, are n't they as good men as you?

*Anthony*. Cant!

*Harness*. Well, I've been five years in America. It colours a man's notions.

*Scantlebury*. [Suddenly, as though avenging his uncompleted grunt.] Let's have the men in and hear what they've got to say!

[*Anthony* nods, and *Underwood* goes out by the single door.]

*Harness*. [Drily.] As I'm to have an interview with them this afternoon, gentlemen, I 'll ask you to postpone your final decision till that's over.

[Again *Anthony* nods, and taking up his glass drinks.]

[*Underwood* comes in again, followed by *Roberts*, *green*, *Bulgin*, *Thomas*, *Rous*. They file in, hat in hand, and stand silent in a row. *Roberts* is lean, of middle height, with a slight stoop. He has a little rat-gnawn, brown-grey beard, moustaches, high cheek-bones, hollow cheeks, small fiery eyes. He wears an old and grease-stained blue serge suit, and carries an old bowler hat. He stands nearest the Chairman. *Green*, next to him, has a clean, worn face, with a small grey goatee beard and drooping moustaches, iron spectacles, and mild, straightforward eyes. He wears an overcoat, green with age, and a linen collar. Next to him is *Bulgin*, a tall, strong man, with a dark moustache, and fighting jaw, wearing a red muffler, who keeps changing his cap from one hand to the other. Next to him is *Thomas*, an old man with a grey moustache, full beard, and weatherbeaten, bony face, whose overcoat discloses a lean, plucked-looking neck. On his right, *Rous*, the youngest of the five, looks like a soldier; he has a glitter in his eyes.]

*Underwood*. [Pointing.] There are some chairs there against the wall, Roberts; won't you draw them up and sit down?

*Roberts*. Thank you, Mr. Underwood—we'll stand in the presence of the Board. [He speaks in a biting and staccato voice, rolling his r's, pronouncing his a's like an Italian a,

and his consonants short and crisp.] How are you, Mr. Harness? Did n't expect t' have the pleasure of seeing you till this afternoon.

*Harness*. [Steadily.] We shall meet again then, Roberts.

*Roberts*. Glad to hear that; we shall have some news for you to take to your people.

*Anthony*. What do the men want?

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*Roberts*. [Acidly.] Beg pardon, I don't quite catch the Chairman's remark.

*Tench*. [From behind the Chairman's chair.] The Chairman wishes to know what the men have to say.

*Roberts*. It's what the Board has to say we've come to hear. It's for the Board to speak first.

*Anthony*. The Board has nothing to say.

*Roberts*. [Looking along the line of men.] In that case we're wasting the Directors' time. We'll be taking our feet off this pretty carpet.

[He turns, the men move slowly, as though hypnotically influenced.]

*Wanklin*: [Suavely.] Come, Roberts, you did n't give us this long cold journey for the pleasure of saying that.

*Thomas*. [A pure Welshman.] No, sir, an' what I say iss——

*Roberts*.[Bitingly.] Go on, Henry Thomas, go on. You 're better able to speak to the—-Directors than me. [*Thomas* is silent.]

*Tench*. The Chairman means, Roberts, that it was the men who asked for the conference, the Board wish to hear what they have to say.

*Roberts*. Gad! If I was to begin to tell ye all they have to say, I wouldn't be finished to-day. And there'd be some that'd wish they'd never left their London palaces.

*Harness*. What's your proposition, man? Be reasonable.

*Roberts*. You want reason Mr. Harness? Take a look round this afternoon before the meeting. [He looks at the men; no sound escapes them.] You'll see some very pretty scenery.

*Harness*. All right my friend; you won't put me off.

*Roberts*. [To the men.] We shan't put Mr. Harness off. Have some champagne with your lunch, Mr. Harness; you'll want it, sir.

*Harness*. Come, get to business, man!

*Thomas*. What we're asking, look you, is just simple justice.

*Roberts*. [Venomously.] Justice from London? What are you talking about, Henry Thomas? Have you gone silly? [*Thomas* is silent.] We know very well what we are—-discontented dogs—never satisfied. What did the Chairman tell me up in London? That I did n't know what I was talking about. I was a foolish, uneducated man, that knew nothing of the wants of the men I spoke for,

*Edgar*. Do please keep to the point.

*Anthony*. [Holding up his hand.] There can only be one master, Roberts.

*Roberts*. Then, be Gad, it'll be us.

[There is a silence; *Anthony* and *Roberts* stare at one another.]

*Underwood*. If you've nothing to say to the Directors, Roberts, perhaps you 'll let Green or Thomas speak for the men.

[*Green* and *Thomas* look anxiously at *Roberts*, at each other, and the other men.]

*Green*. [An Englishman.] If I'd been listened to, gentlemen——

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*Thomas*. What I'fe got to say iss what we'fe all got to say——

*Roberts*. Speak for yourself, Henry Thomas.

*Scantlebury*. [With a gesture of deep spiritual discomfort.] Let the poor men call their souls their own!

*Roberts*. Aye, they shall keep their souls, for it's not much body that you've left them, Mr. [with biting emphasis, as though the word were an offence] Scantlebury! [To the men.] Well, will you speak, or shall I speak for you?

*Rous*. [Suddenly.] Speak out, Roberts, or leave it to others.

*Roberts*. [Ironically.] Thank you, George Rous. [Addressing himself to *Anthony*.] The Chairman and Board of Directors have honoured us by leaving London and coming all this way to hear what we've got to say; it would not be polite to keep them any longer waiting.

*Wilder*. Well, thank God for that!

*Roberts*. Ye will not dare to thank Him when I have done, Mr. Wilder, for all your piety. May be your God up in London has no time to listen to the working man. I'm told He is a wealthy God; but if he listens to what I tell Him, He will know more than ever He learned in Kensington.

*Harness*. Come, Roberts, you have your own God. Respect the God of other men.

*Roberts*. That's right, sir. We have another God down here; I doubt He is rather different to Mr. Wilder's. Ask Henry Thomas; he will tell you whether his God and Mr. Wilder's are the same.

[*Thomas* lifts his hand, and cranes his head as though to prophesy.]

*Wanklin*. For goodness' sake, let 's keep to the point, Roberts.

*Roberts*. I rather think it is the point, Mr. Wanklin. If you can get the God of Capital to walk through the streets of Labour, and pay attention to what he sees, you're a brighter man than I take you for, for all that you're a Radical.

*Anthony*. Attend to me, Roberts! [Roberts is silent.] You are here to speak for the men, as I am here to speak for the Board.

[He looks slowly round.]

[*Wilder*, *Wanklin*, and *Scantlebury* make movements of uneasiness, and *Edgar* gazes at the floor. A faint smile comes on HARNESS'S face.]

Now then, what is it?

*Roberts*. Right, Sir!

[Throughout all that follows, he and *Anthony* look fixedly upon each other. Men and Directors show in their various ways suppressed uneasiness, as though listening to words that they themselves would not have spoken.]

The men can't afford to travel up to London; and they don't trust you to believe what they say in black and white. They know what the post is [he darts a look at *Underwood* and *Tench*], and what Directors' meetings are: "Refer it to the manager—let the manager advise us on the men's condition. Can we squeeze them a little more?"

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*Underwood*. [In a low voice.] Don't hit below the belt, Roberts!

*Roberts*. Is it below the belt, Mr. Underwood? The men know. When I came up to London, I told you the position straight. An' what came of it? I was told I did n't know what I was talkin' about. I can't afford to travel up to London to be told that again.

*Anthony*. What have you to say for the men?

*Roberts*. I have this to say—and first as to their condition. Ye shall 'ave no need to go and ask your manager. Ye can't squeeze them any more. Every man of us is well-nigh starving. [A surprised murmur rises from the men. *Roberts* looks round.] Ye wonder why I tell ye that? Every man of us is going short. We can't be no worse off than we've been these weeks past. Ye need n't think that by waiting yell drive us to come in. We'll die first, the whole lot of us. The men have sent for ye to know, once and for all, whether ye are going to grant them their demands. I see the sheet of paper in the Secretary's hand. [*Tench* moves nervously.] That's it, I think, Mr. Tench. It's not very large.

*Tench*. [Nodding.] Yes.

*Roberts*. There's not one sentence of writing on that paper that we can do without.

[A movement amongst the men. *Roberts* turns on them sharply.]

Isn't that so?

[The men assent reluctantly. *Anthony* takes from *Tench* the paper and peruses it.]

Not one single sentence. All those demands are fair. We have not. asked anything that we are not entitled to ask. What I said up in London, I say again now: there is not anything on that piece of paper that a just man should not ask, and a just man give.

[A pause.]

*Anthony*. There is not one single demand on this paper that we will grant.

[In the stir that follows on these words, *Roberts* watches the Directors and *Anthony* the men. *Wilder* gets up abruptly and goes over to the fire.]

*Roberts*. D' ye mean that?

*Anthony*. I do.

[*Wilder* at the fire makes an emphatic movement of disgust.]

*Roberts*. [Noting it, with dry intensity.] Ye best know whether the condition of the Company is any better than the condition of the men. [Scanning the Directors' faces.] Ye best know whether ye can afford your tyranny—but this I tell ye: If ye think the men will give way the least part of an inch, ye're making the worst mistake ye ever made. [He fixes his eyes on *Scantlebury*.] Ye think because the Union is not supporting us—more shame to it!—that we'll be coming on our knees to you one fine morning. Ye think because the men have got their wives an' families to think of—that it's just a question of a week or two——

*Anthony*. It would be better if you did not speculate so much on what we think.

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*Roberts*. Aye! It's not much profit to us! I will say this for you, Mr. Anthony—ye know your own mind! [Staying at *Anthony*.] I can reckon on ye!

*Anthony*. [Ironically.] I am obliged to you!

*Roberts*. And I know mine. I tell ye this: The men will send their wives and families where the country will have to keep them; an' they will starve sooner than give way. I advise ye, Mr. Anthony, to prepare yourself for the worst that can happen to your Company. We are not so ignorant as you might suppose. We know the way the cat is jumping. Your position is not all that it might be—not exactly!

*Anthony*. Be good enough to allow us to judge of our position for ourselves. Go back, and reconsider your own.

*Roberts*. [Stepping forward.] Mr. Anthony, you are not a young man now; from the time I remember anything ye have been an enemy to every man that has come into your works. I don't say that ye're a mean man, or a cruel man, but ye've grudged them the say of any word in their own fate. Ye've fought them down four times. I've heard ye say ye love a fight—mark my words—ye're fighting the last fight ye'll ever fight!

[*Tench* touches *Roberts's* sleeve.]

*Underwood*. Roberts! Roberts!

*Roberts*. Roberts! Roberts! I must n't speak my mind to the Chairman, but the Chairman may speak his mind to me!

*Wilder*. What are things coming to?

*Anthony*, [With a grim smile at *Wilder*.] Go on, Roberts; say what you like!

*Roberts*. [After a pause.] I have no more to say.

*Anthony*. The meeting stands adjourned to five o'clock.

*Wanklin*. [In a low voice to *Underwood*.] We shall never settle anything like this.

*Roberts*. [Bitingly.] We thank the Chairman and Board of Directors for their gracious hearing.

[He moves towards the door; the men cluster together stupefied; then *Rous*, throwing up his head, passes *Roberts* and goes out. The others follow.]

*Roberts*. [With his hand on the door—maliciously.] Good day, gentlemen! [He goes out.]

*Harness*. [Ironically.] I congratulate you on the conciliatory spirit that's been displayed. With your permission, gentlemen, I'll be with you again at half-past five. Good morning!

[He bows slightly, rests his eyes on *Anthony*, who returns his stare unmoved, and, followed by *Underwood*, goes out. There is a moment of uneasy silence. *Underwood* reappears in the doorway.]

*Wilder*. [With emphatic disgust.] Well!

[The double-doors are opened.]

*Enid*. [Standing in the doorway.] Lunch is ready.

[*Edgar*, getting up abruptly, walks out past his sister.]

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*Wilder*. Coming to lunch, Scantlebury?

*Scantlebury*. [Rising heavily.] I suppose so, I suppose so. It's the only thing we can do.

[They go out through the double-doors.]

*Wanklin*. [In a low voice.] Do you really mean to fight to a finish, Chairman?

[*Anthony* nods.]

*Wanklin*. Take care! The essence of things is to know when to stop.

[*Anthony* does not answer.]

*Wanklin*. [Very gravely.] This way disaster lies. The ancient Trojans were fools to your father, Mrs. Underwood. [He goes out through the double-doors.]

*Enid*. I want to speak to father, Frank.

[*Underwood* follows *Wanklin* Out. *Tench*, passing round the table, is restoring order to the scattered pens and papers.]

*Enid*. Are n't you coming, Dad?

[*Anthony* Shakes his head. *Enid* looks meaningly at *Tench*.]

*Enid*. Won't you go and have some lunch, Mr. Tench?

*Tench*. [With papers in his hand.] Thank you, ma'am, thank you! [He goes slowly, looking back.]

*Enid*. [Shutting the doors.] I do hope it's settled, Father!

*Anthony*. No!

*Enid*. [Very disappointed.] Oh! Have n't you done anything!

[*Anthony* shakes his head.]

*Enid*. Frank says they all want to come to a compromise, really, except that man Roberts.

*Anthony*. I don't.

*Enid*. It's such a horrid position for us. If you were the wife of the manager, and lived down here, and saw it all. You can't realise, Dad!

*Anthony*. Indeed?

*Enid*. We see all the distress. You remember my maid Annie, who married Roberts? [*Anthony* nods.] It's so wretched, her heart's weak; since the strike began, she has n't even been getting proper food. I know it for a fact, Father.

*Anthony*. Give her what she wants, poor woman!

*Enid*. Roberts won't let her take anything from us.

*Anthony*. [Staring before him.] I can't be answerable for the men's obstinacy.

*Enid*. They're all suffering. Father! Do stop it, for my sake!

*Anthony*. [With a keen look at her.] You don't understand, my dear.

*Enid*. If I were on the Board, I'd do something.

*Anthony*. What would you do?

*Enid*. It's because you can't bear to give way. It's so——

*Anthony*. Well?

*Enid*. So unnecessary.

*Anthony*. What do you know about necessity? Read your novels, play your music, talk your talk, but don't try and tell me what's at the bottom of a struggle like this.

*Enid*. I live down here, and see it.

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*Anthony*. What d' you imagine stands between you and your class and these men that you're so sorry for?

*Enid*. [Coldly.] I don't know what you mean, Father.

*Anthony*. In a few years you and your children would be down in the condition they're in, but for those who have the eyes to see things as they are and the backbone to stand up for themselves.

*Enid*. You don't know the state the men are in.

*Anthony*. I know it well enough.

*Enid*. You don't, Father; if you did, you would n't

*Anthony*. It's you who don't know the simple facts of the position. What sort of mercy do you suppose you'd get if no one stood between you and the continual demands of labour? This sort of mercy— [He puts his hand up to his throat and squeezes it.] First would go your sentiments, my dear; then your culture, and your comforts would be going all the time!

*Enid*. I don't believe in barriers between classes.

*Anthony*. You—don't—believe—in—barriers—between the classes?

*Enid*. [Coldly.] And I don't know what that has to do with this question.

*Anthony*. It will take a generation or two for you to understand.

*Enid*. It's only you and Roberts, Father, and you know it!

[*Anthony* thrusts out his lower lip.]

It'll ruin the Company.

*Anthony*. Allow me to judge of that.

*Enid*. [Resentfully.] I won't stand by and let poor Annie Roberts suffer like this! And think of the children, Father! I warn you.

*Anthony*. [With a grim smile.] What do you propose to do?

*Enid*. That's my affair.

[*Anthony* only looks at her.]

*Enid*. [In a changed voice, stroking his sleeve.] Father, you know you oughtn't to have this strain on you—you know what Dr. Fisher said!

*Anthony*. No old man can afford to listen to old women.

*Enid*. But you have done enough, even if it really is such a matter of principle with you.

*Anthony*. You think so?

*Enid*. Don't Dad! [Her face works.] You—you might think of us!

*Anthony*. I am.

*Enid*. It'll break you down.

*Anthony*. [Slowly.] My dear, I am not going to funk; on that you may rely.

[Re-enter *Tench* with papers; he glances at them, then plucking up courage.]

*Tench*. Beg pardon, Madam, I think I'd rather see these papers were disposed of before I get my lunch.

[*Enid*, after an impatient glance at him, looks at her father, turns suddenly, and goes into the drawing-room.]

*Tench*. [Holding the papers and a pen to *Anthony*, very nervously.] Would you sign these for me, please sir?

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[*Anthony* takes the pen and signs.]

*Tench*. [Standing with a sheet of blotting-paper behind EDGAR'S chair, begins speaking nervously.] I owe my position to you, sir.

*Anthony*. Well?

*Tench*. I'm obliged to see everything that's going on, sir; I—I depend upon the Company entirely. If anything were to happen to it, it'd be disastrous for me. [*Anthony* nods.] And, of course, my wife's just had another; and so it makes me doubly anxious just now. And the rates are really terrible down our way.

*Anthony*. [With grim amusement.] Not more terrible than they are up mine.

*Tench*. No, Sir? [Very nervously.] I know the Company means a great deal to you, sir.

*Anthony*. It does; I founded it.

*Tench*. Yes, Sir. If the strike goes on it'll be very serious. I think the Directors are beginning to realise that, sir.

*Anthony*. [Ironically.] Indeed?

*Tench*. I know you hold very strong views, sir, and it's always your habit to look things in the face; but I don't think the Directors— like it, sir, now they—they see it.

*Anthony*. [Grimly.] Nor you, it seems.

*Tench*. [With the ghost of a smile.] No, sir; of course I've got my children, and my wife's delicate; in my position I have to think of these things.

[*Anthony* nods.]

It was n't that I was going to say, sir, if you'll excuse me—— [hesitates]

*Anthony*. Out with it, then!

*Tench*. I know—from my own father, sir, that when you get on in life you do feel things dreadfully——

*Anthony*. [Almost paternally.] Come, out with it, Trench!

*Tench*. I don't like to say it, sir.

*Anthony*. [Stonily.] You Must.

*Tench*. [After a pause, desperately bolting it out.] I think the Directors are going to throw you over, sir.

*Anthony*. [Sits in silence.] Ring the bell!

[*Tench* nervously rings the bell and stands by the fire.]

*Tench*. Excuse me for saying such a thing. I was only thinking of you, sir.

[*Frost* enters from the hall, he comes to the foot of the table, and looks at *Anthony*; *Tench* coveys his nervousness by arranging papers.]

*Anthony*. Bring me a whiskey and soda.

*Frost*. Anything to eat, sir?

[*Anthony* shakes his head. *Frost* goes to the sideboard, and prepares the drink.]

*Tench*. [In a low voice, almost supplicating.] If you could see your way, sir, it would be a great relief to my mind, it would indeed. [He looks up at *Anthony*, who has not moved.] It does make me so very anxious. I haven't slept properly for weeks, sir, and that's a fact.

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[*Anthony* looks in his face, then slowly shakes his head.]

[Disheartened.] No, Sir? [He goes on arranging papers.]

[*Frost* places the whiskey and salver and puts it down by *Anthony's* right hand. He stands away, looking gravely at *Anthony*.]

*Frost*. Nothing I can get you, sir?

[*Anthony* shakes his head.]

You're aware, sir, of what the doctor said, sir?

*Anthony*. I am.

[A pause. *Frost* suddenly moves closer to him, and speaks in a low voice.]

*Frost*. This strike, sir; puttin' all this strain on you. Excuse me, sir, is it—is it worth it, sir?

[*Anthony* mutters some words that are inaudible.]

Very good, sir!

[He turns and goes out into the hall. *Tench* makes two attempts to speak; but meeting his Chairman's gaze he drops his eyes, and, turning dismally, he too goes out. *Anthony* is left alone. He grips the glass, tilts it, and drinks deeply; then sets it down with a deep and rumbling sigh, and leans back in his chair.]

The curtain falls.

## ACT II

### SCENE I

It is half-past three. In the kitchen of Roberts's cottage a meagre little fire is burning. The room is clean and tidy, very barely furnished, with a brick floor and white-washed walls, much stained with smoke. There is a kettle on the fire. A door opposite the fireplace opens inward from a snowy street. On the wooden table are a cup and saucer, a teapot, knife, and plate of bread and cheese. Close to the fireplace in an old arm-chair, wrapped in a rug, sits *Mrs*. *Roberts*, a thin and dark-haired woman about thirty-five, with patient eyes. Her hair is not done up, but tied back with a piece of ribbon. By the fire, too, is *Mrs*. *Yeo*; a red-haired, broad-faced person. Sitting near the table is *Mrs*.

*Rous*, an old lady, ashen-white, with silver hair; by the door, standing, as if about to go, is *Mrs*. *Bulgin*, a little pale, pinched-up woman. In a chair, with her elbows resting on the table, avid her face resting in her hands, sits *Madge Thomas*, a good-looking girl, of twenty-two, with high cheekbones, deep-set eyes, and dark untidy hair. She is listening to the talk, but she neither speaks nor moves.

*Mrs*. *Yeo*. So he give me a sixpence, and that's the first bit o' money I seen this week. There an't much 'eat to this fire. Come and warm yerself Mrs. Rous, you're lookin' as white as the snow, you are.

*Mrs*. *Rous*. [Shivering—placidly.] Ah! but the winter my old man was took was the proper winter. Seventy-nine that was, when none of you was hardly born—not Madge Thomas, nor Sue Bulgin. [Looking at them in turn.] Annie Roberts, 'ow old were you, dear?

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*Mrs Roberts*. Seven, Mrs. Rous.

*Mrs*. *Rous*. Seven—well, there! A tiny little thing!

*Mrs*. *Yeo*. [Aggressively.] Well, I was ten myself, I remembers it.

*Mrs*. Rous. [Placidly.] The Company hadn't been started three years. Father was workin' on the acid, that's 'ow he got 'is pisoned-leg. I kep' sayin' to 'im, "Father, you've got a pisoned leg." "Well," 'e said, "Mother, pison or no pison, I can't afford to go a-layin' up." An' two days after, he was on 'is back, and never got up again. It was Providence! There was n't none o' these Compensation Acts then.

*Mrs*. *Yeo*. Ye had n't no strike that winter! [With grim humour.] This winter's 'ard enough for me. Mrs. Roberts, you don't want no 'arder winter, do you? Wouldn't seem natural to 'ave a dinner, would it, Mrs. Bulgin?

*Mrs*. *Bulgin*. We've had bread and tea last four days.

*Mrs*. *Yeo*. You got that Friday's laundry job?

*Mrs*. *Bulgin*. [Dispiritedly.] They said they'd give it me, but when
I went last Friday, they were full up. I got to go again next week.

*Mrs*. *Yeo*. Ah! There's too many after that. I send Yeo out on the ice to put on the gentry's skates an' pick up what 'e can. Stops 'im from broodin' about the 'ouse.

*Mrs*. *Bulgin*. [In a desolate, matter-of-fact voice.] Leavin' out the men—it's bad enough with the children. I keep 'em in bed, they don't get so hungry when they're not running about; but they're that restless in bed they worry your life out.

*Mrs*. *Yeo*. You're lucky they're all so small. It 's the goin' to school that makes 'em 'ungry. Don't Bulgin give you anythin'?

*Mrs*. *Bulgin*. [Shakes her head, then, as though by afterthought.] Would if he could, I s'pose.

*Mrs*. *Yeo*. [Sardonically.] What! 'Ave n't 'e got no shares in the Company?

*Mrs*. *Rous*. [Rising with tremulous cheerfulness.] Well, good-bye, Annie Roberts, I'm going along home.

*Mrs*. *Roberts*. Stay an' have a cup of tea, Mrs. Rous?

*Mrs*. *Rous*. [With the faintest smile.] Roberts 'll want 'is tea when he comes in. I'll just go an' get to bed; it's warmer there than anywhere.

[She moves very shakily towards the door.]

*Mrs*. *Yeo*. [Rising and giving her an arm.] Come on, Mother, take my arm; we're all going' the same way.

*Mrs*. *Rous*. [Taking the arm.]Thank you, my dearies!

[*They* go out, followed by *Mrs*. *Bulgin*.]

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*Madge*. [Moving for the first time.] There, Annie, you see that! I told George Rous, "Don't think to have my company till you've made an end of all this trouble. You ought to be ashamed," I said, "with your own mother looking like a ghost, and not a stick to put on the fire. So long as you're able to fill your pipes, you'll let us starve." "I 'll take my oath, Madge," he said, "I 've not had smoke nor drink these three weeks!" "Well, then, why do you go on with it?" "I can't go back on Roberts!" . . . That's it! Roberts, always Roberts! They'd all drop it but for him. When he talks it's the devil that comes into them.

[A silence. *Mrs*. *Roberts* makes a movement of pain.]

Ah! You don't want him beaten! He's your man. With everybody like their own shadows! [She makes a gesture towards *Mrs*. *Roberts*.] If *Rous* wants me he must give up Roberts. If he gave him up—they all would. They're only waiting for a lead. Father's against him— they're all against him in their hearts.

*Mrs*. *Roberts*. You won't beat Roberts!

[They look silently at each other.]

*Madge*. Won't I? The cowards—when their own mothers and their own children don't know where to turn.

*Mrs*. *Roberts*. Madge!

*Madge*. [Looking searchingly at *Mrs*. *Roberts*.] I wonder he can look you in the face. [She squats before the fire, with her hands out to the flame.] Harness is here again. They'll have to make up their minds to-day.

*Mrs*. *Roberts*. [In a soft, slow voice, with a slight West-country burr.] Roberts will never give up the furnace-men and engineers. 'T wouldn't be right.

*Madge*. You can't deceive me. It's just his pride.

[A tapping at the door is heard, the women turn as *Enid* enters. She wears a round fur cap, and a jacket of squirrel's fur. She closes the door behind her.]

*Enid*. Can I come in, Annie?

*Mrs*. *Roberts*. [Flinching.] Miss Enid! Give Mrs. Underwood a chair, Madge!

[*Madge* gives *Enid* the chair she has been sitting on.]

*Enid*. Thank you!

*Enid*. Are you any better?

*Mrs*. *Roberts*. Yes, M'm; thank you, M'm.

*Enid*. [Looking at the sullen *Madge* as though requesting her departure.] Why did you send back the jelly? I call that really wicked of you!

*Mrs*. *Roberts*. Thank you, M'm, I'd no need for it.

*Enid*. Of course! It was Roberts's doing, wasn't it? How can he let all this suffering go on amongst you?

*Madge*. [Suddenly.] What suffering?

*Enid*. [Surprised.] I beg your pardon!

*Madge*. Who said there was suffering?

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*Mrs*. *Roberts*. Madge!

*Madge*. [Throwing her shawl over her head.] Please to let us keep ourselves to ourselves. We don't want you coming here and spying on us.

*Enid*. [Confronting her, but without rising.] I did n't speak to you.

*Madge*. [In a low, fierce voice.] Keep your kind feelings to yourself. You think you can come amongst us, but you're mistaken. Go back and tell the Manager that.

*Enid*. [Stonily.] This is not your house.

*Madge*. [Turning to the door.] No, it is not my house; keep clear of my house, Mrs. Underwood.

[She goes out. *Enid* taps her fingers on the table.]

*Mrs*. *Roberts*. Please to forgive Madge Thomas, M'm; she's a bit upset to-day.

[A pause.]

*Enid*. [Looking at her.] Oh, I think they're so stupid, all of them.

*Mrs*. *Roberts*. [With a faint smile]. Yes, M'm.

*Enid*. Is Roberts out?

*Mrs*. *Roberts*. Yes, M'm.

*Enid*. It is his doing, that they don't come to an agreement. Now is n't it, Annie?

*Mrs*. *Roberts*. [Softly, with her eyes on *Enid*, and moving the fingers of one hand continually on her breast.] They do say that your father, M'm——

*Enid*. My father's getting an old man, and you know what old men are.

*Mrs*. *Roberts*. I am sorry, M'm.

*Enid*. [More softly.] I don't expect you to feel sorry, Annie. I know it's his fault as well as Roberts's.

*Mrs*. *Roberts*. I'm sorry for any one that gets old, M'm; it 's dreadful to get old, and Mr. Anthony was such a fine old man, I always used to think.

*Enid*. [Impulsively.] He always liked you, don't you remember? Look here, Annie, what can I do? I do so want to know. You don't get what you ought to have. [Going to the

fire, she takes the kettle off, and looks for coals.] And you're so naughty sending back the soup and things.

*Mrs*. *Roberts*. [With a faint smile.] Yes, M'm?

*Enid*. [Resentfully.] Why, you have n't even got coals?

*Mrs*. *Roberts*. If you please, M'm, to put the kettle on again; Roberts won't have long for his tea when he comes in. He's got to meet the men at four.

*Enid*. [Putting the kettle on.] That means he'll lash them into a fury again. Can't you stop his going, Annie?

[*Mrs*. *Roberts* smiles ironically.]

Have you tried?

[A silence.]

Does he know how ill you are?

*Mrs*. *Roberts*. It's only my weak 'eard, M'm.

*Enid*. You used to be so well when you were with us.

*Mrs*. *Roberts*. [Stiffening.] Roberts is always good to me.

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*Enid*. But you ought to have everything you want, and you have nothing!

*Mrs*. *Roberts*. [Appealingly.] They tell me I don't look like a dyin' woman?

*Enid*. Of course you don't; if you could only have proper—— Will you see my doctor if I send him to you? I'm sure he'd do you good.

*Mrs*. *Roberts*. [With faint questioning.] Yes, M'm.

*Enid*. Madge Thomas ought n't to come here; she only excites you. As if I did n't know what suffering there is amongst the men! I do feel for them dreadfully, but you know they have gone too far.

*Mrs*. *Roberts*. [Continually moving her fingers.] They say there's no other way to get better wages, M'm.

*Enid*. [Earnestly.] But, Annie, that's why the Union won't help them. My husband's very sympathetic with the men, but he says they are not underpaid.

*Mrs*. *Roberts*. No, M'm?

*Enid*. They never think how the Company could go on if we paid the wages they want.

*Mrs*. *Roberts*. [With an effort.] But the dividends having been so big, M'm.

*Enid*. [Takes aback.] You all seem to think the shareholders are rich men, but they're not —most of them are really no better off than working men.

[*Mrs*. *Roberts* smiles.]

They have to keep up appearances.

*Mrs*. *Roberts*. Yes, M'm?

*Enid*. You don't have to pay rates and taxes, and a hundred other things that they do. If the men did n't spend such a lot in drink and betting they'd be quite well off!

*Mrs*. *Roberts*. They say, workin' so hard, they must have some pleasure.

*Enid*. But surely not low pleasure like that.

*Mrs*. *Roberts*. [A little resentfully.] Roberts never touches a drop; and he's never had a bet in his life.

*Enid*. Oh! but he's not a com——I mean he's an engineer—— a superior man.

*Mrs*. *Roberts*. Yes, M'm. Roberts says they've no chance of other pleasures.

*Enid*. [Musing.] Of course, I know it's hard.

*Mrs*. *Roberts*. [With a spice of malice.] And they say gentlefolk's just as bad.

*Enid*. [With a smile.] I go as far as most people, Annie, but you know, yourself, that's nonsense.

*Mrs*. *Roberts*. [With painful effort.] A lot 'o the men never go near the Public; but even they don't save but very little, and that goes if there's illness.

*Enid*. But they've got their clubs, have n't they?

*Mrs*. *Roberts*. The clubs only give up to eighteen shillin's a week, M'm, and it's not much amongst a family. Roberts says workin' folk have always lived from hand to mouth. Sixpence to-day is worth more than a shillin' to-morrow, that's what they say.

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*Enid*. But that's the spirit of gambling.

*Mrs*. *Roberts*. [With a sort of excitement.] Roberts says a working man's life is all a gamble, from the time 'e 's born to the time 'e dies.

[*Enid* leans forward, interested. *Mrs*. *Roberts* goes on with a growing excitement that culminates in the personal feeling of the last words.]

He says, M'm, that when a working man's baby is born, it's a toss-up from breath to breath whether it ever draws another, and so on all 'is life; an' when he comes to be old, it's the workhouse or the grave. He says that without a man is very near, and pinches and stints 'imself and 'is children to save, there can't be neither surplus nor security. That's why he wouldn't have no children [she sinks back], not though I wanted them.

*Enid*. Yes, yes, I know!

*Mrs*. *Roberts*. No you don't, M'm. You've got your children, and you'll never need to trouble for them.

*Enid*. [Gently.] You oughtn't to be talking so much, Annie. [Then, in spite of herself.] But Roberts was paid a lot of money, was n't he, for discovering that process?

*Mrs*. *Roberts*. [On the defensive.] All Roberts's savin's have gone. He 's always looked forward to this strike. He says he's no right to a farthing when the others are suffering. 'T is n't so with all o' them! Some don't seem to care no more than that—so long as they get their own.

*Enid*. I don't see how they can be expected to when they 're suffering like this. [In a changed voice.] But Roberts ought to think of you! It's all terrible——! The kettle's boiling. Shall I make the tea? [She takes the teapot and, seeing tea there, pours water into it.] Won't you have a cup?

*Mrs*. *Roberts*. No, thank you, M'm. [She is listening, as though for footsteps.] I'd—-sooner you did n't see Roberts, M'm, he gets so wild.

*Enid*. Oh! but I must, Annie; I'll be quite calm, I promise.

*Mrs*. *Roberts*. It's life an' death to him, M'm.

*Enid*. [Very gently.] I'll get him to talk to me outside, we won't excite you.

*Mrs*. *Roberts*. [Faintly.] No, M'm.

[She gives a violent start. *Roberts* has come in, unseen.]

*Roberts*. [Removing his hat—with subtle mockery.] Beg pardon for coming in; you're engaged with a lady, I see.

*Enid*. Can I speak to you, Mr. Roberts?

*Roberts*. Whom have I the pleasure of addressing, Ma'am?

*Enid*. But surely you know me! I 'm Mrs. Underwood.

*Roberts*. [With a bow of malice.] The daughter of our Chairman.

*Enid*. [Earnestly.] I've come on purpose to speak to you; will you come outside a minute?

[She looks at *Mrs*. *Roberts*.]

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*Roberts*. [Hanging up his hat.] I have nothing to say, Ma'am.

*Enid*. But I must speak to you, please.

[She moves towards the door.]

*Roberts*. [With sudden venom.] I have not the time to listen!

*Mrs*. *Roberts*. David!

*Enid*. Mr. Roberts, please!

*Roberts*. [Taking off his overcoat.] I am sorry to disoblige a lady
—Mr. Anthony's daughter.

*Enid*. [Wavering, then with sudden decision.] Mr. Roberts, I know you've another meeting of the men.

[*Roberts* bows.]

I came to appeal to you. Please, please, try to come to some compromise; give way a little, if it's only for your own sakes!

*Roberts*. [Speaking to himself.] The daughter of Mr. Anthony begs me to give way a little, if it's only for our own sakes!

*Enid*. For everybody's sake; for your wife's sake.

*Roberts*. For my wife's sake, for everybody's sake—for the sake of
Mr. Anthony.

*Enid*. Why are you so bitter against my father? He has never done anything to you.

*Roberts*. Has he not?

*Enid*. He can't help his views, any more than you can help yours.

*Roberts*. I really did n't know that I had a right to views!

*Enid*. He's an old man, and you——

[Seeing his eyes fixed on her, she stops.]

*Roberts*. [Without raising his voice.] If I saw Mr. Anthony going to die, and I could save him by lifting my hand, I would not lift the little finger of it.

*Enid*. You—you——[She stops again, biting her lips.]

*Roberts*. I would not, and that's flat!

*Enid*. [Coldly.] You don't mean what you say, and you know it!

*Roberts*. I mean every word of it.

*Enid*. But why?

*Roberts*. [With a flash.] Mr. Anthony stands for tyranny! That's why!

*Enid*. Nonsense!

[*Mrs*. *Roberts* makes a movement as if to rise, but sinks back in her chair.]

*Enid*. [With an impetuous movement.] Annie!

*Roberts*. Please not to touch my wife!

*Enid*. [Recoiling with a sort of horror.] I believe—you are mad.

*Roberts*. The house of a madman then is not the fit place for a lady.

*Enid*. I 'm not afraid of you.

*Roberts*. [Bowing.] I would not expect the daughter of Mr. Anthony to be afraid. Mr. Anthony is not a coward like the rest of them.

*Enid*. [Suddenly.] I suppose you think it brave, then, to go on with the struggle.

*Roberts*. Does Mr. Anthony think it brave to fight against women and children? Mr. Anthony is a rich man, I believe; does he think it brave to fight against those who have n't a penny? Does he think it brave to set children crying with hunger, an' women shivering with cold?

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*Enid*. [Putting up her hand, as though warding off a blow.] My father is acting on his principles, and you know it!

*Roberts*. And so am I!

*Enid*. You hate us; and you can't bear to be beaten!

*Roberts*. Neither can Mr. Anthony, for all that he may say.

*Enid*. At any rate you might have pity on your wife.

[*Mrs*. *Roberts* who has her hand pressed to her heart, takes it away, and tries to calm her breathing.]

*Roberts*. Madam, I have no more to say.

[He takes up the loaf. There is a knock at the door, and *Underwood* comes in. He stands looking at them, *Enid* turns to him, then seems undecided.]

*Underwood*. Enid!

*Roberts*. [Ironically.] Ye were not needing to come for your wife, Mr. Underwood. We are not rowdies.

*Underwood*. I know that, Roberts. I hope Mrs. Roberts is better.

[*Roberts* turns away without answering. Come, Enid!]

*Enid*. I make one more appeal to you, Mr. Roberts, for the sake of your wife.

*Roberts*. [With polite malice.] If I might advise ye, Ma'am—make it for the sake of your husband and your father.

[*Enid*, suppressing a retort, goes out. *Underwood* opens the door for her and follows. *Roberts*, going to the fire, holds out his hands to the dying glow.]

*Roberts*. How goes it, my girl? Feeling better, are you?

[*Mrs*. *Roberts* smiles faintly. He brings his overcoat and wraps it round her.]

[Looking at his watch.] Ten minutes to four! [As though inspired.] I've seen their faces, there's no fight in them, except for that one old robber.

*Mrs*. *Roberts*. Won't you stop and eat, David? You've 'ad nothing all day!

*Roberts*. [Putting his hand to his throat.] Can't swallow till those old sharks are out o' the town: [He walks up and down.] I shall have a bother with the men—there's no heart in them, the cowards. Blind as bats, they are—can't see a day before their noses.

*Mrs*. *Roberts*. It's the women, David.

*Roberts*. Ah! So they say! They can remember the women when their own bellies speak! The women never stop them from the drink; but from a little suffering to themselves in a sacred cause, the women stop them fast enough.

*Mrs*. *Roberts*. But think o' the children, David.

*Roberts*. Ah! If they will go breeding themselves for slaves, without a thought o' the future o' them they breed——

*Mrs*. *Roberts*. [Gasping.] That's enough, David; don't begin to talk of that—I won't—I can't——

*Roberts*. [Staring at her.] Now, now, my girl!

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*Mrs*. *Roberts*. [Breathlessly.] No, no, David—I won't!

*Roberts*. There, there! Come, come! That's right! [Bitterly.] Not one penny will they put by for a day like this. Not they! Hand to mouth—Gad!—I know them! They've broke my heart. There was no holdin' them at the start, but now the pinch 'as come.

*Mrs*. *Roberts*. How can you expect it, David? They're not made of iron.

*Roberts*. Expect it? Wouldn't I expect what I would do meself? Wouldn't I starve an' rot rather than give in? What one man can do, another can.

*Mrs*. *Roberts*. And the women?

*Roberts*. This is not women's work.

*Mrs*. *Roberts*. [With a flash of malice.] No, the women may die for all you care. That's their work.

*Roberts*. [Averting his eyes.] Who talks of dying? No one will die till we have beaten these——

[He meets her eyes again, and again turns his away. Excitedly.]

This is what I've been waiting for all these months. To get the old robbers down, and send them home again without a farthin's worth o' change. I 've seen their faces, I tell you, in the valley of the shadow of defeat.

[He goes to the peg and takes down his hat.]

*Mrs*. *Roberts*. [Following with her eyes-softly.] Take your overcoat, David; it must be bitter cold.

*Roberts*. [Coming up to her-his eyes are furtive.] No, no! There, there, stay quiet and warm. I won't be long, my girl.

*Mrs*. *Roberts*. [With soft bitterness.] You'd better take it.

[She lifts the coat. But *Roberts* puts it back, and wraps it round her. He tries to meet her eyes, but cannot. *Mrs*. *Roberts* stays huddled in the coat, her eyes, that follow him about, are half malicious, half yearning. He looks at his watch again, and turns to go. In the doorway he meets *Jan Thomas*, a boy of ten in clothes too big for him, carrying a penny whistle.]

*Roberts*. Hallo, boy!

[He goes. *Jan* stops within a yard of *Mrs*. *Roberts*, and stares at her without a word.]

*Mrs*. *Roberts*. Well, Jan!

*Jan*. Father 's coming; sister Madge is coming.

[He sits at the table, and fidgets with his whistle; he blows three vague notes; then imitates a cuckoo.]

[There is a tap on the door. Old *Thomas* comes in.]

*Thomas*. A very coot tay to you, Ma'am. It is petter that you are.

*Mrs*. *Roberts*. Thank you, Mr. Thomas.

*Thomas*. [Nervously.] Roberts in?

*Mrs*. *Roberts*. Just gone on to the meeting, Mr. Thomas.

*Thomas*. [With relief, becoming talkative.] This is fery unfortunate, look you! I came to tell him that we must make terms with London. It is a fery great pity he is gone to the meeting. He will be kicking against the pricks, I am thinking.

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*Mrs*. *Roberts*. [Half rising.] He'll never give in, Mr. Thomas.

*Thomas*. You must not be fretting, that is very pat for you. Look you, there iss hartly any mans for supporting him now, but the engineers and George Rous. [Solemnly.] This strike is no longer Going with Chapel, look you! I have listened carefully, an' I have talked with her.

[*Jan* blows.]

Sst! I don't care what th' others say, I say that Chapel means us to be stopping the trouple, that is what I make of her; and it is my opinion that this is the fery best thing for all of us. If it was n't my opinion, I ton't say but it is my opinion, look you.

*Mrs*. *Roberts*. [Trying to suppress her excitement.] I don't know what'll come to Roberts, if you give in.

*Thomas*. It iss no disgrace whateffer! All that a mortal man coult do he hass tone. It iss against Human Nature he hass gone; fery natural any man may do that; but Chapel has spoken and he must not go against her.

[*Jan* imitates the cuckoo.]

Ton't make that squeaking! [Going to the door.] Here iss my daughter come to sit with you. A fery goot day, Ma'am—no fretting —rememper!

[*Madge* comes in and stands at the open door, watching the street.]

*Madge*. You'll be late, Father; they're beginning. [She catches him by the sleeve.] For the love of God, stand up to him, Father—this time!

*Thomas*. [Detaching his sleeve with dignity.] Leave me to do what's proper, girl!

[He goes out. *Madge*, in the centre of the open doorway, slowly moves in, as though before the approach of some one.]

*Rous*. [Appearing in the doorway.] Madge!

[*Madge* stands with her back to *Mrs*. *Roberts*, staring at him with her head up and her hands behind her.]

*Rous*. [Who has a fierce distracted look.] Madge! I'm going to the meeting.

[*Madge*, without moving, smiles contemptuously.]

D' ye hear me?

[They speak in quick low voices.]

*Madge*. I hear! Go, and kill your own mother, if you must.

[*Rous* seizes her by both her arms. She stands rigid, with her head bent back. He releases her, and he too stands motionless.]

*Rous*. I swore to stand by Roberts. I swore that! Ye want me to go back on what I've sworn.

*Madge*. [With slow soft mockery.] You are a pretty lover!

*Rous*. Madge!

*Madge*. [Smiling.] I've heard that lovers do what their girls ask them—

[*Jan* sounds the cuckoo's notes]

—but that's not true, it seems!

*Rous*. You'd make a blackleg of me!

*Madge*. [With her eyes half-closed.] Do it for me!

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*Rous*. [Dashing his hand across his brow.] Damn!  I can't!

*Madge*. [Swiftly.] Do it for me!

*Rous*. [Through his teeth.] Don't play the wanton with me!

*Madge*. [With a movement of her hand towards *Jan*—quick and low.]
I would be that for the children's sake!

*Rous*. [In a fierce whisper.] Madge!  Oh, Madge!

*Madge*. [With soft mockery.] But you can't break your word for me!

*Rous*. [With a choke.] Then, Begod, I can!

[He turns and rushes off.]

[*Madge* Stands, with a faint smile on her face, looking after him.  She turns to *Mrs*. *Roberts*.]

*Madge*.  I have done for Roberts!

*Mrs*. *Roberts*. [Scornfully.] Done for my man, with that——! [She sinks back.]

*Madge*. [Running to her, and feeling her hands.] You're as cold as a stone!  You want a drop of brandy.  Jan, run to the "Lion"; say, I sent you for Mrs. Roberts.

*Mrs*. *Roberts*. [With a feeble movement.] I'll just sit quiet, Madge.  Give Jan—his—tea.

*Madge*. [Giving *Jan* a slice of bread.] There, ye little rascal.  Hold your piping. [Going to the fire, she kneels.] It's going out.

*Mrs*. *Roberts*. [With a faint smile.] 'T is all the same!

[*Jan* begins to blow his whistle.]

*Madge*.  Tsht!  Tsht!—you

[*Jan* Stops.]

*Mrs*. *Roberts*. [Smiling.] Let 'im play, Madge.

*Madge*. [On her knees at the fire, listening.] Waiting an' waiting.  I've no patience with it; waiting an' waiting—that's what a woman has to do!  Can you hear them at it—I can!

[*Jan* begins again to play his whistle; *Madge* gets up; half tenderly she ruffles his hair; then, sitting, leans her elbows on the table, and her chin on her hands. Behind her, on *Mrs*. *Roberts's* face the smile has changed to horrified surprise. She makes a sudden movement, sitting forward, pressing her hands against her breast. Then slowly she sinks' back; slowly her face loses the look of pain, the smile returns. She fixes her eyes again on *Jan*, and moves her lips and finger to the tune.]

The curtain falls.

## SCENE II

It is past four. In a grey, failing light, an open muddy space is crowded with workmen. Beyond, divided from it by a barbed-wire fence, is the raised towing-path of a canal, on which is moored a barge. In the distance are marshes and snow-covered hills. The "Works" high wall runs from the canal across the open space, and ivy the angle of this wall is a rude platform of barrels and boards. On it, *Harness* is standing. *Roberts*, a little apart from the crowd, leans his back against the wall. On the raised towing-path two bargemen lounge and smoke indifferently.

Harness. [Holding out his hand.] Well, I've spoken to you straight. If I speak till to-morrow I can't say more.

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*Jago*. [A dark, sallow, Spanish-looking man with a short, thin beard.] Mister, want to ask you! Can they get blacklegs?

*Bulgin*. [Menacing.] Let 'em try.

[There are savage murmurs from the crowd.]

*Brown*. [A round-faced man.] Where could they get 'em then?

*Evans*. [A small, restless, harassed man, with a fighting face.] There's always blacklegs; it's the nature of 'em. There's always men that'll save their own skins.

[Another savage murmur. There is a movement, and old *Thomas*, joining the crowd, takes his stand in front.]

*Harness*. [Holding up his hand.] They can't get them. But that won't help you. Now men, be reasonable. Your demands would have brought on us the burden of a dozen strikes at a time when we were not prepared for them. The Unions live by justice, not to one, but all. Any fair man will tell you—you were ill-advised! I don't say you go too far for that which you're entitled to, but you're going too far for the moment; you've dug a pit for yourselves. Are you to stay there, or are you to climb out? Come!

*Lewis*. [A clean-cut Welshman with a dark moustache.] You've hit it, Mister! Which is it to be?

[Another movement in the crowd, and *Rous*, coming quickly, takes his stand next *Thomas*.]

*Harness*. Cut your demands to the right pattern, and we 'll see you through; refuse, and don't expect me to waste my time coming down here again. I 'm not the sort that speaks at random, as you ought to know by this time. If you're the sound men I take you for—no matter who advises you against it—[he fixes his eyes on *Roberts*] you 'll make up your minds to come in, and trust to us to get your terms. Which is it to be? Hands together, and victory—or—the starvation you've got now?

[A prolonged murmur from the crowd.]

*Jago*. [Sullenly.] Talk about what you know.

*Harness*. [Lifting his voice above the murmur.] Know? [With cold passion.] All that you've been through, my friend, I 've been through—I was through it when I was no bigger than [pointing to a youth] that shaver there; the Unions then were n't what they are now. What's made them strong? It's hands together that 's made them strong. I 've been through it all, I tell you, the brand's on my soul yet. I know what you 've suffered

—there's nothing you can tell me that I don't know; but the whole is greater than the part, and you are only the part. Stand by us, and we will stand by you.

[Quartering them with his eyes, he waits. The murmuring swells; the men form little groups. *Green*, *Bulgin*, and *Lewis* talk together.]

*Lewis*. Speaks very sensible, the Union chap.

*Green*. [Quietly.] Ah! if I 'd a been listened to, you'd 'ave 'eard sense these two months past.

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[The bargemen are seen laughing. ]

*Lewis*. [Pointing.] Look at those two blanks over the fence there!

*Bulgin*. [With gloomy violence.] They'd best stop their cackle, or I 'll break their jaws.

*Jago*. [Suddenly.] You say the furnace men's paid enough?

*Harness*. I did not say they were paid enough; I said they were paid as much as the furnace men in similar works elsewhere.

*Evans*. That's a lie! [Hubbub.] What about Harper's?

*Harness*. [With cold irony.] You may look at home for lies, my man.
Harper's shifts are longer, the pay works out the same.

*Henry Rous*. [A dark edition of his brother George.] Will ye support us in double pay overtime Saturdays?

*Harness*. Yes, we will.

*Jago*. What have ye done with our subscriptions?

*Harness*. [Coldly.] I have told you what we will do with them.

*Evans*. Ah! will, it's always will! Ye'd have our mates desert us. [Hubbub.]

*Bulgin*. [Shouting.] Hold your row!

[*Evans* looks round angrily.]

*Harness*. [Lifting his voice.] Those who know their right hands from their lefts know that the Unions are neither thieves nor traitors. I 've said my say. Figure it out, my lads; when you want me you know where I shall be.

[He jumps down, the crowd gives way, he passes through them, and goes away. A *bargeman* looks after him jerking his pipe with a derisive gesture. The men close up in groups, and many looks are cast at *Roberts*, who stands alone against the wall.]

*Evans*. He wants ye to turn blacklegs, that's what he wants. He wants ye to go back on us. Sooner than turn blackleg—I 'd starve, I would.

*Bulgin*. Who's talkin' o' blacklegs—mind what you're saying, will you?

*Blacksmith*. [A youth with yellow hair and huge arms.] What about the women?

*Evans*. They can stand what we can stand, I suppose, can't they?

*Blacksmith*. Ye've no wife?

*Evans*. An' don't want one!

*Thomas*. [Raising his voice.] Aye! Give us the power to come to terms with London, lads.

*Davies*. [A dark, slow-fly, gloomy man.] Go up the platform, if you got anything to say, go up an' say it.

[There are cries of "Thomas!" He is pushed towards the platform; he ascends it with difficulty, and bares his head, waiting for silence. A hush.]

*Red-haired youth*. [suddenly.] Coot old Thomas!

[A hoarse laugh; the bargemen exchange remarks; a hush again, and *Thomas* begins speaking.]

*Thomas*. We are all in the tepth together, and it iss Nature that has put us there.

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*Henry Rous*. It's London put us there!

*Evans*. It's the Union.

*Thomas*. It iss not Lonton; nor it iss not the Union—it iss Nature. It iss no disgrace whateffer to a potty to give in to Nature. For this Nature iss a fery pig thing; it is pigger than what a man is. There iss more years to my hett than to the hett of any one here. It is fery pat, look you, this Going against Nature. It is pat to make other potties suffer, when there is nothing to pe cot py it.

[A laugh. *Thomas* angrily goes on.]

What are ye laughing at? It is pat, I say! We are fighting for a principle; there is no potty that shall say I am not a peliever in principle. Putt when Nature says "No further," then it is no coot snapping your fingers in her face.

[A laugh from *Roberts*, and murmurs of approval.]

This Nature must pe humort. It is a man's pisiness to pe pure, honest, just, and merciful. That's what Chapel tells you. [To *Roberts*, angrily.] And, look you, David Roberts, Chapel tells you ye can do that without Going against Nature.

*Jago*. What about the Union?

*Thomas*. I ton't trust the Union; they haf treated us like tirt. "Do what we tell you," said they. I haf peen captain of the furnace-men twenty years, and I say to the Union—-[excitedly]—"Can you tell me then, as well as I can tell you, what iss the right wages for the work that these men do?" For fife and twenty years I haf paid my moneys to the Union and—[with great excitement]—for nothings! What iss that but roguery, for all that this Mr. Harness says!

*Evans*. Hear, hear.

*Henry Rous*. Get on with you! Cut on with it then!

*Thomas*. Look you, if a man toes not trust me, am I going to trust him?

*Jago*. That's right.

*Thomas*. Let them alone for rogues, and act for ourselves.

[Murmurs.]

*Blacksmith*. That's what we been doin', haven't we?

*Thomas*. [With increased excitement.] I wass brought up to do for meself. I wass brought up to go without a thing, if I hat not moneys to puy it. There iss too much, look you, of doing things with other people's moneys. We haf fought fair, and if we haf peen beaten, it iss no fault of ours. Gif us the power to make terms with London for ourself; if we ton't succeed, I say it iss petter to take our peating like men, than to tie like togs, or hang on to others' coat-tails to make them do our pisiness for us!

*Evans*. [Muttering.] Who wants to?

*Thomas*. [Craning.] What's that? If I stand up to a potty, and he knocks me town, I am not to go hollering to other potties to help me; I am to stand up again; and if he knocks me town properly, I am to stay there, is n't that right?

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[Laughter.]

*Jago*. No Union!

*Henry Rous*. Union!

[Murmurs.]

[Others take up the shout.]

*Evans*. Blacklegs!

[*Bulgin* and the *blacksmith* shake their fists at *Evans*.]

*Thomas*. [With a gesture.] I am an olt man, look you.

[A sudden silence, then murmurs again.]

*Lewis*. Olt fool, with his “No Union!”

*Bulgin*. Them furnace chaps! For twopence I ‘d smash the faces o’ the lot of them.

*Green*. If I’d a been listened to at the first!

*Thomas*. [Wiping his brow.] I’m comin’ now to what I was going to say——

*Davies*. [Muttering.] An’ time too!

*Thomas*. [Solemnly.] Chapel says: Ton’t carry on this strife! Put an end to it!

*Jago*. That’s a lie! Chapel says go on!

*Thomas*. [Scornfully.] Inteet! I haf ears to my head.

*Red-haired youth*. Ah! long ones!

[A laugh.]

*Jago*. Your ears have misbeled you then.

*Thomas*. [Excitedly.] Ye cannot be right if I am, ye cannot haf it both ways.

*Red-haired youth*. Chapel can though!

["The Shaver” laughs; there are murmurs from the crowd.]

*Thomas*. [Fixing his eyes on “The Shaver.”] Ah! ye ’re Going the roat to tamnation. An’ so I say to all of you. If ye co against Chapel I will not pe with you, nor will any other Got-fearing man.

[He steps down from the platform. *Jago* makes his way towards it. There are cries of “Don’t let ’im go up!”]

*Jago*. Don’t let him go up? That’s free speech, that is. [He goes up.] I ain’t got much to say to you. Look at the matter plain; ye ’ve come the road this far, and now you want to chuck the journey. We’ve all been in one boat; and now you want to pull in two. We engineers have stood by you; ye ’re ready now, are ye, to give us the go-by? If we’d aknown that before, we’d not a-started out with you so early one bright morning! That’s all I ’ve got to say. Old man Thomas a’n’t got his Bible lesson right. If you give up to London, or to Harness, now, it’s givin’ us the chuck—to save your skins—you won’t get over that, my boys; it’s a dirty thing to do.

[He gets down; during his little speech, which is ironically spoken, there is a restless discomfort in the crowd. *Rous*, stepping forward, jumps on the platform. He has an air of fierce distraction. Sullen murmurs of disapproval from the crowd.]

*Rous*. [Speaking with great excitement.] I’m no blanky orator, mates, but wot I say is drove from me. What I say is yuman nature. Can a man set an’ see ’is mother starve? Can ’e now?

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*Roberts*. [Starting forward.] Rous!

*Rous*. [Staring at him fiercely.] Sim ’Arness said fair!  I’ve changed my mind!

*Roberts*.  Ah!  Turned your coat you mean!

[The crowd manifests a great surprise.]

*Lewis*. [Apostrophising Rous.] Hallo!  What’s turned him round?

*Rous*. [Speaking with intense excitement.] ’E said fair.  “Stand by us,” ’e said, “and we’ll stand by you.”  That’s where we’ve been makin’ our mistake this long time past; and who’s to blame fort? [He points at *Roberts*] That man there!  “No,” ’e said, “fight the robbers,” ‘e said, “squeeze the breath out o’ them!” But it’s not the breath out o’ them that’s being squeezed; it’s the breath out of us and ours, and that’s the book of truth. I’m no orator, mates, it’s the flesh and blood in me that’s speakin’, it’s the heart o’ me. [With a menacing, yet half-ashamed movement towards *Roberts*.] He’ll speak to you again, mark my words, but don’t ye listen. [The crowd groans.] It’s hell fire that’s on that man’s tongue. [*Roberts* is seen laughing.] Sim ’Arness is right.  What are we without the Union—handful o’ parched leaves—a puff o’ smoke.  I’m no orator, but I say:  Chuck it up!  Chuck it up!  Sooner than go on starving the women and the children.

[The murmurs of acquiescence almost drown the murmurs of dissent.]

*Evans*.  What’s turned you to blacklegging?

*Rous*. [With a furious look.] Sim ’Arness knows what he’s talking about.  Give us power to come to terms with London; I’m no orator, but I say—have done wi’ this black misery!

[He gives his muter a twist, jerks his head back, and jumps off the platform.  The crowd applauds and surges forward.  Amid cries of “That’s enough!” “Up Union!” “Up Harness!” *Roberts* quietly ascends the platform.  There is a moment of silence.]

*Blacksmith*.  We don’t want to hear you.  Shut it!

*Henry* Rous.  Get down!

[Amid such cries they surge towards the platform.]

*Evans*. [Fiercely.] Let ’im speak!  Roberts!  Roberts!

*Bulgin*. [Muttering.] He’d better look out that I don’t crack his skull.

[*Roberts* faces the crowd, probing them with his eyes till they gradually become silent. He begins speaking. One of the bargemen rises and stands.]

*Roberts*. You don't want to hear me, then? You'll listen to Rous and to that old man, but not to me. You'll listen to Sim Harness of the Union that's treated you so fair; maybe you'll listen to those men from London? Ah! You groan! What for? You love their feet on your necks, don't you? [Then as *Bulgin* elbows his way towards the platform, with calm bathos.] You'd like to break my jaw, John Bulgin. Let me speak, then do your smashing,

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if it gives you pleasure. [*Bulgin* Stands motionless and sullen.] Am I a liar, a coward, a traitor? If only I were, ye'd listen to me, I'm sure. [The murmurings cease, and there is now dead silence.] Is there a man of you here that has less to gain by striking? Is there a man of you that had more to lose? Is there a man of you that has given up eight hundred pounds since this trouble here began? Come now, is there? How much has Thomas given up—ten pounds or five, or what? You listened to him, and what had he to say? "None can pretend," he said, "that I'm not a believer in principle—[with biting irony]—but when Nature says: 'No further, 't es going agenst Nature.'" I tell you if a man cannot say to Nature: "Budge me from this if ye can!"— [with a sort of exaltation]his principles are but his belly. "Oh, but," Thomas says, "a man can be pure and honest, just and merciful, and take off his hat to Nature!" I tell you Nature's neither pure nor honest, just nor merciful. You chaps that live over the hill, an' go home dead beat in the dark on a snowy night—don't ye fight your way every inch of it? Do ye go lyin' down an' trustin' to the tender mercies of this merciful Nature? Try it and you'll soon know with what ye've got to deal. 'T es only by that—[he strikes a blow with his clenched fist]—in Nature's face that a man can be a man. "Give in," says Thomas, "go down on your knees; throw up your foolish fight, an' perhaps," he said, "perhaps your enemy will chuck you down a crust."

*Jago*. Never!

*Evans*. Curse them!

*Thomas*. I nefer said that.

*Roberts*. [Bitingly.] If ye did not say it, man, ye meant it. An' what did ye say about Chapel? "Chapel's against it," ye said. "She 's against it!" Well, if Chapel and Nature go hand in hand, it's the first I've ever heard of it. That young man there— [pointing to *Rous*]—said I 'ad 'ell fire on my tongue. If I had I would use it all to scorch and wither this talking of surrender. Surrendering 's the work of cowards and traitors.

*Henry Rous*. [As *George Rous* moves forward.] Go for him, George— don't stand his lip!

*Roberts*. [Flinging out his finger.] Stop there, George Rous, it's no time this to settle personal matters. [*Rous* stops.] But there was one other spoke to you—Mr. Simon Harness. We have not much to thank Mr. Harness and the Union for. They said to us "Desert your mates, or we'll desert you." An' they did desert us.

*Evans*. They did.

*Roberts*. Mr. Simon Harness is a clever man, but he has come too late. [With intense conviction.] For all that Mr. Simon Harness says, for all that Thomas, Rous, for all that any man present here can say—We've won the fight!

[The crowd sags nearer, looking eagerly up.]

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[With withering scorn.] You've felt the pinch o't in your bellies. You've forgotten what that fight 'as been; many times I have told you; I will tell you now this once again. The fight o' the country's body and blood against a blood-sucker. The fight of those that spend themselves with every blow they strike and every breath they draw, against a thing that fattens on them, and grows and grows by the law of merciful Nature. That thing is Capital! A thing that buys the sweat o' men's brows, and the tortures o' their brains, at its own price. Don't I know that? Wasn't the work o' my brains bought for seven hundred pounds, and has n't one hundred thousand pounds been gained them by that seven hundred without the stirring of a finger. It is a thing that will take as much and give you as little as it can. That's Capital! A thing that will say—"I'm very sorry for you, poor fellows—you have a cruel time of it, I know," but will not give one sixpence of its dividends to help you have a better time. That's Capital! Tell me, for all their talk, is there one of them that will consent to another penny on the Income Tax to help the poor? That's Capital! A white-faced, stony-hearted monster! Ye have got it on its knees; are ye to give up at the last minute to save your miserable bodies pain? When I went this morning to those old men from London, I looked into their very 'earts. One of them was sitting there—Mr. Scantlebury, a mass of flesh nourished on us: sittin' there for all the world like the shareholders in this Company, that sit not moving tongue nor finger, takin' dividends a great dumb ox that can only be roused when its food is threatened. I looked into his eyes and I saw he was afraid—afraid for himself and his dividends; afraid for his fees, afraid of the very shareholders he stands for; and all but one of them's afraid—like children that get into a wood at night, and start at every rustle of the leaves. I ask you, men—[he pauses, holding out his hand till there is utter silence]—give me a free hand to tell them: "Go you back to London. The men have nothing for you!" [A murmuring.] Give me that, an' I swear to you, within a week you shall have from London all you want.

*Evans*, *Jago*, and *others*. A free hand! Give him a free hand! Bravo —bravo!

*Roberts*. 'T is not for this little moment of time we're fighting [the murmuring dies], not for ourselves, our own little bodies, and their wants, 't is for all those that come after throughout all time. [With intense sadness.] Oh! men—for the love o' them, don't roll up another stone upon their heads, don't help to blacken the sky, an' let the bitter sea in over them. They're welcome to the worst that can happen to me, to the worst that can happen to us all, are n't they—are n't they? If we can shake [passionately] that white-faced monster with the bloody lips, that has sucked the life out of ourselves, our wives, and children, since the world began. [Dropping the note of passion but with the utmost weight and intensity.] If we have not the hearts of men to stand against it breast to breast, and eye to eye, and force it backward till it cry for mercy, it will go on sucking life; and we shall stay forever what we are [in almost a whisper], less than the very dogs.

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[An utter stillness, and *Roberts* stands rocking his body slightly, with his eyes burning the faces of the crowd.]

*Evans* and *Jago*. [Suddenly.] Roberts! [The shout is taken up.]

[There is a slight movement in the crowd, and *Madge* passing below the towing-path, stops by the platform, looking up at *Roberts*. A sudden doubting silence.]

*Roberts*. "Nature," says that old man, "give in to Nature." I tell you, strike your blow in Nature's face—an' let it do its worst!

[He catches sight of *Madge*, his brows contract, he looks away.]

*Madge*. [In a low voice-close to the platform.] Your wife's dying!

[*Roberts* glares at her as if torn from some pinnacle of exaltation.]

*Roberts*. [Trying to stammer on.] I say to you—answer them—answer them——

[He is drowned by the murmur in the crowd.]

*Thomas*. [Stepping forward.] Ton't you hear her, then?

*Roberts*. What is it? [A dead silence.]

*Thomas*. Your wife, man!

[*Roberts* hesitates, then with a gesture, he leaps down, and goes away below the towing-path, the men making way for him. The standing bargeman opens and prepares to light a lantern. Daylight is fast failing.]

*Madge*. He need n't have hurried! Annie Roberts is dead. [Then in the silence, passionately.] You pack of blinded hounds! How many more women are you going to let to die?

[The crowd shrinks back from her, and breaks up in groups, with a confused, uneasy movement. *Madge* goes quickly away below the towing-path. There is a hush as they look after her.]

*Lewis*. There's a spitfire, for ye!

*Bulgin*. [Growling.] I'll smash 'er jaw.

*Green*. If I'd a-been listened to, that poor woman——

*Thomas*. It's a judgment on him for going against Chapel. I tolt him how 't would be!

*Evans*. All the more reason for sticking by 'im. [A cheer.] Are you goin' to desert him now 'e 's down? Are you going to chuck him over, now 'e 's lost 'is wife?

[The crowd is murmuring and cheering all at once.]

*Rous*. [Stepping in front of platform.] Lost his wife! Aye! Can't ye see? Look at home, look at your own wives! What's to save them? Ye'll have the same in all your houses before long!

*Lewis*. Aye, aye!

*Henry Rous*. Right! George, right!

[There are murmurs of assent.]

*Rous*. It's not us that's blind, it's Roberts. How long will ye put up with 'im!

*Henry*, *Rous*, *Bulgin*, *Davies*. Give 'im the chuck!

[The cry is taken up.]

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*Evans*. [Fiercely.] Kick a man that's down?  Down?

*Henry Rous*.  Stop his jaw there!

[*Evans* throws up his arm at a threat from *Bulgin*.  The bargeman, who has lighted the lantern, holds it high above his head.]

*Rous*. [Springing on to the platform.] What brought him down then, but 'is own black obstinacy?  Are ye goin' to follow a man that can't see better than that where he's goin'?

*Evans*.  He's lost 'is wife.

*Rous*.  An' who's fault's that but his own.  'Ave done with 'im, I say, before he's killed your own wives and mothers.

*Davies*.  Down 'im!

*Henry Rous*.  He's finished!

*Brown*.  We've had enough of 'im!

*Blacksmith*.  Too much!

[The crowd takes up these cries, excepting only *Evans*, *Jago*, and *green*, who is seen to argue mildly with the *blacksmith*.]

*Rous*. [Above the hubbub.] We'll make terms with the Union, lads.

[Cheers.]

*Evans*. [Fiercely.] Ye blacklegs!

*Bulgin*. [Savagely-squaring up to him.] Who are ye callin' blacklegs, Rat?

[*Evans* throws up his fists, parries the blow, and returns it.  They fight.  The bargemen are seen holding up the lantern and enjoying the sight.  Old *Thomas* steps forward and holds out his hands.]

*Thomas*.  Shame on your strife!

[The *blacksmith*, *brown*, *Lewis*, and the *red-haired youth* pull *Evans* and *Bulgin* apart.  The stage is almost dark.]

The curtain falls.

# ACT III

It is five o'clock. In the *Underwoods*' drawing-room, which is artistically furnished, *Enid* is sitting on the sofa working at a baby's frock. *Edgar*, by a little spindle-legged table in the centre of the room, is fingering a china-box. His eyes are fixed on the double-doors that lead into the dining-room.

Edgar. [Putting down the china-box, and glancing at his watch.] Just on five, they're all in there waiting, except Frank. Where's he?

*Enid*. He's had to go down to Gasgoyne's about a contract. Will you want him?

*Edgar*. He can't help us. This is a director's job. [Motioning towards a single door half hidden by a curtain.] Father in his room?

*Enid*. Yes.

*Edgar*. I wish he'd stay there, Enid.

[*Enid* looks up at him. This is a beastly business, old girl?]

[He takes up the little box again and turns it over and over.]

*Enid*. I went to the Roberts's this afternoon, Ted.

*Edgar*. That was n't very wise.

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*Enid*. He's simply killing his wife.

*Edgar*. We are you mean.

*Enid*. [Suddenly.] Roberts ought to give way!

*Edgar*. There's a lot to be said on the men's side.

*Enid*. I don't feel half so sympathetic with them as I did before I went. They just set up class feeling against you. Poor Annie was looking dread fully bad—fire going out, and nothing fit for her to eat.

[*Edgar* walks to and fro.]

But she would stand up for Roberts. When you see all this wretchedness going on and feel you can do nothing, you have to shut your eyes to the whole thing.

*Edgar*. If you can.

*Enid*. When I went I was all on their side, but as soon as I got there I began to feel quite different at once. People talk about sympathy with the working classes, they don't know what it means to try and put it into practice. It seems hopeless.

*Edgar*. Ah! well.

*Enid*. It's dreadful going on with the men in this state. I do hope the Dad will make concessions.

*Edgar*. He won't. [Gloomily.] It's a sort of religion with him. Curse it! I know what's coming! He'll be voted down.

*Enid*. They would n't dare!

*Edgar*. They will—they're in a funk.

*Enid*. [Indignantly.] He'd never stand it!

*Edgar*. [With a shrug.] My dear girl, if you're beaten in a vote, you've got to stand it.

*Enid*. Oh! [She gets up in alarm.] But would he resign?

*Edgar*. Of course! It goes to the roots of his beliefs.

*Enid*. But he's so wrapped up in this company, Ted! There'd be nothing left for him! It'd be dreadful!

[*Edgar* shrugs his shoulders.]

Oh, Ted, he's so old now! You must n't let them!

*Edgar*. [Hiding his feelings in an outburst.] My sympathies in this strike are all on the side of the men.

*Enid*. He's been Chairman for more than thirty years! He made the whole thing! And think of the bad times they've had; it's always been he who pulled them through. Oh, Ted, you must!

*Edgar*. What is it you want? You said just now you hoped he'd make concessions. Now you want me to back him in not making them. This is n't a game, Enid!

*Enid*. [Hotly.] It is n't a game to me that the Dad's in danger of losing all he cares about in life. If he won't give way, and he's beaten, it'll simply break him down!

*Edgar*. Did n't you say it was dreadful going on with the men in this state?

*Enid*. But can't you see, Ted, Father'll never get over it! You must stop them somehow. The others are afraid of him. If you back him up——

*Edgar*. [Putting his hand to his head.] Against my convictions— against yours! The moment it begins to pinch one personally——

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*Enid*. It is n't personal, it's the Dad!

*Edgar*. Your family or yourself, and over goes the show!

*Enid*. [Resentfully.] If you don't take it seriously, I do.

*Edgar*. I am as fond of him as you are; that's nothing to do with it.

*Enid*. We can't tell about the men; it's all guess-work. But we know the Dad might have a stroke any day. D' you mean to say that he isn't more to you than——

*Edgar*. Of course he is.

*Enid*. I don't understand you then.

*Edgar*. H'm!

*Enid*. If it were for oneself it would be different, but for our own Father! You don't seem to realise.

*Edgar*. I realise perfectly.

*Enid*. It's your first duty to save him.

*Edgar*. I wonder.

*Enid*. [Imploring.] Oh, Ted? It's the only interest he's got left; it'll be like a death-blow to him!

*Edgar*. [Restraining his emotion.] I know.

*Enid*. Promise!

*Edgar*. I'll do what I can.

[He turns to the double-doors.]

[The curtained door is opened, and *Anthony* appears. *Edgar* opens the double-doors, and passes through.]

[SCANTLEBURY'S voice is faintly heard: "Past five; we shall never get through—have to eat another dinner at that hotel!" The doors are shut. *Anthony* walks forward.]

*Anthony*. You've been seeing Roberts, I hear.

*Enid*. Yes.

*Anthony*. Do you know what trying to bridge such a gulf as this is like?

[*Enid* puts her work on the little table, and faces him.]

Filling a sieve with sand!

*Enid*. Don't!

*Anthony*. You think with your gloved hands you can cure the trouble of the century.

[He passes on. ]

*Enid*. Father!

[*Anthony* Stops at the double doors.]

I'm only thinking of you!

*Anthony*. [More softly.] I can take care of myself, my dear.

*Enid*. Have you thought what'll happen if you're beaten— [she points]—in there?

*Anthony*. I don't mean to be.

*Enid*. Oh! Father, don't give them a chance. You're not well; need you go to the meeting at all?

*Anthony*. [With a grim smile.] Cut and run?

*Enid*. But they'll out-vote you!

*Anthony*. [Putting his hand on the doors.] We shall see!

*Enid*. I beg you, Dad! Won't you?

[*Anthony* looks at her softly.]

[*Anthony* shakes his head. He opens the doors. A buzz of voices comes in.]

*Scantlebury*. Can one get dinner on that 6.30 train up?

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*Tench*. No, Sir, I believe not, sir.

*Wilder*. Well, I shall speak out; I've had enough of this.

*Edgar*. [Sharply.] What?

[It ceases instantly. *Anthony* passes through, closing the doors behind him. *Enid* springs to them with a gesture of dismay. She puts her hand on the knob, and begins turning it; then goes to the fireplace, and taps her foot on the fender. Suddenly she rings the bell. *Frost* comes in by the door that leads into the hall.]

*Frost*. Yes, M'm?

*Enid*. When the men come, Frost, please show them in here; the hall 's cold.

*Frost*. I could put them in the pantry, M'm.

*Enid*. No. I don't want to—to offend them; they're so touchy.

*Frost*. Yes, M'm. [Pause.] Excuse me, Mr. Anthony's 'ad nothing to eat all day.

*Enid*. I know Frost.

*Frost*. Nothin' but two whiskies and sodas, M'm.

*Enid*. Oh! you oughtn't to have let him have those.

*Frost*. [Gravely.] Mr. Anthony is a little difficult, M'm. It's not as if he were a younger man, an' knew what was good for 'im; he will have his own way.

*Enid*. I suppose we all want that.

*Frost*. Yes, M'm. [Quietly.] Excuse me speakin' about the strike. I'm sure if the other gentlemen were to give up to Mr. Anthony, and quietly let the men 'ave what they want, afterwards, that'd be the best way. I find that very useful with him at times, M'm.

[*Enid* shakes hey head.]

If he's crossed, it makes him violent. [with an air of discovery], and I've noticed in my own case, when I'm violent I'm always sorry for it afterwards.

*Enid*. [With a smile.] Are you ever violent, Frost?

*Frost*. Yes, M'm; oh! sometimes very violent.

*Enid*. I've never seen you.

*Frost*. [Impersonally.] No, M'm; that is so.

[*Enid* fidgets towards the back of the door.]

[With feeling.] Bein' with Mr. Anthony, as you know, M'm, ever since I was fifteen, it worries me to see him crossed like this at his age. I've taken the liberty to speak to Mr. Wanklin [dropping his voice]— seems to be the most sensible of the gentlemen—but 'e said to me: "That's all very well, Frost, but this strike's a very serious thing," 'e said. "Serious for all parties, no doubt," I said, "but yumour 'im, sir," I said, "yumour 'im. It's like this, if a man comes to a stone wall, 'e does n't drive 'is 'ead against it, 'e gets over it." "Yes," 'e said, "you'd better tell your master that." [*Frost* looks at his nails.] That's where it is, M'm. I said to Mr. Anthony this morning: "Is it worth it, sir?" "Damn it," he said to me, "Frost! Mind your own business, or take a month's notice!" Beg pardon, M'm, for using such a word.

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*Enid*. [Moving to the double-doors, and listening.] Do you know that man Roberts, Frost?

*Frost*. Yes, M'm; that's to say, not to speak to. But to look at 'im you can tell what he's like.

*Enid*. [Stopping.] Yes?

*Frost*. He's not one of these 'ere ordinary 'armless Socialists. 'E's violent; got a fire inside 'im. What I call "personal." A man may 'ave what opinions 'e likes, so long as 'e 's not personal; when 'e 's that 'e 's not safe.

*Enid*. I think that's what my father feels about Roberts.

*Frost*. No doubt, M'm, Mr. Anthony has a feeling against him.

[*Enid* glances at him sharply, but finding him in perfect earnest, stands biting her lips, and looking at the double-doors.]

It 's, a regular right down struggle between the two. I've no patience with this Roberts, from what I 'ear he's just an ordinary workin' man like the rest of 'em. If he did invent a thing he's no worse off than 'undreds of others. My brother invented a new kind o' dumb-waiter—nobody gave him anything for it, an' there it is, bein' used all over the place.

[*Enid* moves closer to the double-doors.]

There's a kind o' man that never forgives the world, because 'e wasn't born a gentleman. What I say is—no man that's a gentleman looks down on another because 'e 'appens to be a class or two above 'im, no more than if 'e 'appens to be a class or two below.

*Enid*. [With slight impatience.] Yes, I know, Frost, of course. Will you please go in and ask if they'll have some tea; say I sent you.

*Frost*. Yes, M'm.

[He opens the doors gently and goes in. There is a momentary sound of earnest, gather angry talk.]

*Wilder*. I don't agree with you.

*Wanklin*. We've had this over a dozen times.

*Edgar*. [Impatiently.] Well, what's the proposition?

*Scantlebury*. Yes, what does your father say? Tea? Not for me, not for me!

*Wanklin*. What I understand the Chairman to say is this——

[*Frost* re-enters closing the door behind him.]

*Enid*. [Moving from the door.] Won't they have any tea, Frost?

[She goes to the little table, and remains motionless, looking at the baby's frock.]

[A parlourmaid enters from the hall.]

PARLOURMAID. A Miss Thomas, M'm

*Enid*. [Raising her head.] Thomas? What Miss Thomas—d' you mean a——?

PARLOURMAID. Yes, M'm.

*Enid*. [Blankly.] Oh! Where is she?

PARLOURMAID. In the porch.

*Enid*. I don't want——[She hesitates.]

*Frost*. Shall I dispose of her, M'm?

*Enid*. I 'll come out. No, show her in here, Ellen.

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[The *parlour maid* and *frost* go out. *Enid* pursing her lips, sits at the little table, taking up the baby's frock. The *parlourmaid* ushers in *Madge Thomas* and goes out; *Madge* stands by the door.]

*Enid*. Come in. What is it. What have you come for, please?

*Madge*. Brought a message from Mrs. Roberts.

*Enid*. A message? Yes.

*Madge*. She asks you to look after her mother.

*Enid*. I don't understand.

*Madge*. [Sullenly.] That's the message.

*Enid*. But—what—why?

*Madge*. Annie Roberts is dead.

[There is a silence.]

*Enid*. [Horrified.] But it's only a little more than an hour since I saw her.

*Madge*. Of cold and hunger.

*Enid*. [Rising.] Oh! that's not true! the poor thing's heart——
What makes you look at me like that? I tried to help her.

*Madge*. [With suppressed savagery.] I thought you'd like to know.

*Enid*. [Passionately.] It's so unjust! Can't you see that I want to help you all?

*Madge*. I never harmed any one that had n't harmed me first.

*Enid*. [Coldly.] What harm have I done you? Why do you speak to me like that?

*Madge*. [With the bitterest intensity.] You come out of your comfort to spy on us! A week of hunger, that's what you want!

*Enid*. [Standing her ground.] Don't talk nonsense!

*Madge*. I saw her die; her hands were blue with the cold.

*Enid*. [With a movement of grief.] Oh! why wouldn't she let me help her? It's such senseless pride!

*Madge*. Pride's better than nothing to keep your body warm.

*Enid*. [Passionately.] I won't talk to you! How can you tell what I feel? It's not my fault that I was born better off than you.

*Madge*. We don't want your money.

*Enid*. You don't understand, and you don't want to; please to go away!

*Madge*. [Balefully.] You've killed her, for all your soft words, you and your father!

*Enid*. [With rage and emotion.] That's wicked! My father is suffering himself through this wretched strike.

*Madge*. [With sombre triumph.] Then tell him Mrs. Roberts is dead! That 'll make him better.

*Enid*. Go away!

*Madge*. When a person hurts us we get it back on them.

[She makes a sudden and swift movement towards *Enid*, fixing her eyes on the child's frock lying across the little table. *Enid* snatches the frock up, as though it were the child itself. They stand a yard apart, crossing glances.]

*Madge*. [Pointing to the frock with a little smile.] Ah! You felt that! Lucky it's her mother —not her children—you've to look after, is n't it. She won't trouble you long!

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*Enid*. Go away!

*Madge*. I've given you the message.

[She turns and goes out into the hall. *Enid*, motionless till she has gone, sinks down at the table, bending her head over the frock, which she is still clutching to her. The double-doors are opened, and *Anthony* comes slowly in; he passes his daughter, and lowers himself into an arm-chair. He is very flushed.]

*Enid*. [Hiding her emotion-anxiously.] What is it, Dad?

[*Anthony* makes a gesture, but does not speak.]

Who was it?

[*Anthony* does not answer. *Enid* going to the double-doors meets *Edgar* Coming in. They speak together in low tones.]

What is it, Ted?

*Edgar*. That fellow Wilder! Taken to personalities! He was downright insulting.

*Enid*. What did he say?

*Edgar*. Said, Father was too old and feeble to know what he was doing! The Dad's worth six of him!

*Enid*. Of course he is.

[They look at *Anthony*.]

[The doors open wider, *Wanklin* appears With *Scantlebury*.]

*Scantlebury*. [Sotto voce.] I don't like the look of this!

*Wanklin*. [Going forward.] Come, Chairman! Wilder sends you his apologies. A man can't do more.

[*Wilder*, followed by *Tench*, comes in, and goes to *Anthony*.]

*Wilder*. [Glumly.] I withdraw my words, sir. I'm sorry.

[*Anthony* nods to him.]

*Enid*. You have n't come to a decision, Mr. Wanklin?

[*Wanklin* shakes his head.]

*Wanklin*. We're all here, Chairman; what do you say? Shall we get on with the business, or shall we go back to the other room?

*Scantlebury*. Yes, yes; let's get on. We must settle something.

[He turns from a small chair, and settles himself suddenly in the largest chair with a sigh of comfort.]

[*Wilder* and *Wanklin* also sit; and *Tench*, drawing up a straight-backed chair close to his Chairman, sits on the edge of it with the minute-book and a stylographic pen.]

*Enid*. [Whispering.] I want to speak to you a minute, Ted.

[They go out through the double-doors.]

*Wanklin*. Really, Chairman, it's no use soothing ourselves with a sense of false security. If this strike's not brought to an end before the General Meeting, the shareholders will certainly haul us over the coals.

*Scantlebury*. [Stirring.] What—what's that?

*Wanklin*. I know it for a fact.

*Anthony*. Let them!

*Wilder*. And get turned out?

*Wanklin*. [To *Anthony*.] I don't mind martyrdom for a policy in which I believe, but I object to being burnt for some one else's principles.

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*Scantlebury*. Very reasonable—you must see that, Chairman.

*Anthony*. We owe it to other employers to stand firm.

*Wanklin*. There's a limit to that.

*Anthony*. You were all full of fight at the start.

*Scantlebury*. [With a sort of groan.] We thought the men would give in, but they-have n't!

*Anthony*. They will!

*Wilder*. [Rising and pacing up and down.] I can't have my reputation as a man of business destroyed for the satisfaction of starving the men out. [Almost in tears.] I can't have it! How can we meet the shareholders with things in the state they are?

*Scantlebury*. Hear, hear—hear, hear!

*Wilder*. [Lashing himself.] If any one expects me to say to them I've lost you fifty thousand pounds and sooner than put my pride in my pocket I'll lose you another. [Glancing at *Anthony*.] It's—it's unnatural! I don't want to go against you, sir.

*Wanklin*. [Persuasively.] Come Chairman, we 're not free agents. We're part of a machine. Our only business is to see the Company earns as much profit as it safely can. If you blame me for want of principle: I say that we're Trustees. Reason tells us we shall never get back in the saving of wages what we shall lose if we continue this struggle—really, Chairman, we must bring it to an end, on the best terms we can make.

*Anthony*. No.

[There is a pause of general dismay.]

*Wilder*. It's a deadlock then. [Letting his hands drop with a sort of despair.] Now I shall never get off to Spain!

*Wanklin*. [Retaining a trace of irony.] You hear the consequences of your victory, Chairman?

*Wilder*. [With a burst of feeling.] My wife's ill!

*Scantlebury*. Dear, dear! You don't say so.

*Wilder*. If I don't get her out of this cold, I won't answer for the consequences.

[Through the double-doors *Edgar* comes in looking very grave.]

*Edgar*. [To his Father.] Have you heard this, sir? Mrs. Roberts is dead!

[Every one stages at him, as if trying to gauge the importance of this news.]

Enid saw her this afternoon, she had no coals, or food, or anything. It's enough!

[There is a silence, every one avoiding the other's eyes, except *Anthony*, who stares hard at his son.]

*Scantlebury*. You don't suggest that we could have helped the poor thing?

*Wilder*. [Flustered.] The woman was in bad health. Nobody can say there's any responsibility on us. At least—not on me.

*Edgar*. [Hotly.] I say that we are responsible.

*Anthony*. War is war!

*Edgar*. Not on women!

*Wanklin*. It not infrequently happens that women are the greatest sufferers.

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*Edgar*. If we knew that, all the more responsibility rests on us.

*Anthony*. This is no matter for amateurs.

*Edgar*. Call me what you like, sir. It's sickened me. We had no right to carry things to such a length.

*Wilder*. I don't like this business a bit—that Radical rag will twist it to their own ends; see if they don't! They'll get up some cock and bull story about the poor woman's dying from starvation. I wash my hands of it.

*Edgar*. You can't. None of us can.

*Scantlebury*. [Striking his fist on the arm of his chair.] But I protest against this!

*Edgar*. Protest as you like, Mr. Scantlebury, it won't alter facts.

*Anthony*. That's enough.

*Edgar*. [Facing him angrily.] No, sir. I tell you exactly what I think. If we pretend the men are not suffering, it's humbug; and if they're suffering, we know enough of human nature to know the women are suffering more, and as to the children—well—it's damnable!

[*Scantlebury* rises from his chair.]

I don't say that we meant to be cruel, I don't say anything of the sort; but I do say it's criminal to shut our eyes to the facts. We employ these men, and we can't get out of it. I don't care so much about the men, but I'd sooner resign my position on the Board than go on starving women in this way.

[All except *Anthony* are now upon their feet, *Anthony* sits grasping the arms of his chair and staring at his son.]

*Scantlebury*. I don't—I don't like the way you're putting it, young sir.

*Wanklin*. You're rather overshooting the mark.

*Wilder*. I should think so indeed!

*Edgar*. [Losing control.] It's no use blinking things! If you want to have the death of women on your hands—I don't!

*Scantlebury*. Now, now, young man!

*Wilder*. On our hands? Not on mine, I won't have it!

*Edgar*. We are five members of this Board; if we were four against it, why did we let it drift till it came to this? You know perfectly well why—because we hoped we should starve the men out. Well, all we've done is to starve one woman out!

*Scantlebury*. [Almost hysterically.] I protest, I protest! I'm a humane man—we're all humane men!

*Edgar*. [Scornfully.] There's nothing wrong with our humanity. It's our imaginations, Mr. Scantlebury.

*Wilder*. Nonsense! My imagination's as good as yours.

*Edgar*. If so, it is n't good enough.

*Wilder*. I foresaw this!

*Edgar*. Then why didn't you put your foot down!

*Wilder*. Much good that would have done.

[He looks at *Anthony*.]

*Edgar*. If you, and I, and each one of us here who say that our imaginations are so good—

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*Scantlebury*. [Flurried.] I never said so.

*Edgar*. [Paying no attention.]—had put our feet down, the thing would have been ended long ago, and this poor woman's life wouldn't have been crushed out of her like this. For all we can tell there may be a dozen other starving women.

*Scantlebury*. For God's sake, sir, don't use that word at a—at a Board meeting; it's—it's monstrous.

*Edgar*. I will use it, Mr. Scantlebury.

*Scantlebury*. Then I shall not listen to you. I shall not listen! It's painful to me.

[He covers his ears.]

*Wanklin*. None of us are opposed to a settlement, except your Father.

*Edgar*. I'm certain that if the shareholders knew——

*Wanklin*. I don't think you'll find their imaginations are any better than ours. Because a woman happens to have a weak heart——

*Edgar*. A struggle like this finds out the weak spots in everybody. Any child knows that. If it hadn't been for this cut-throat policy, she need n't have died like this; and there would n't be all this misery that any one who is n't a fool can see is going on.

[Throughout the foregoing *Anthony* has eyed his son; he now moves as though to rise, but stops as *Edgar* speaks again.]

I don't defend the men, or myself, or anybody.

*Wanklin*. You may have to! A coroner's jury of disinterested sympathisers may say some very nasty things. We mustn't lose sight of our position.

*Scantlebury*. [Without uncovering his ears.] Coroner's jury! No, no, it's not a case for that!

*Edgar*. I 've had enough of cowardice.

*Wanklin*. Cowardice is an unpleasant word, Mr. Edgar Anthony. It will look very like cowardice if we suddenly concede the men's demands when a thing like this happens; we must be careful!

*Wilder*. Of course we must. We've no knowledge of this matter, except a rumour. The proper course is to put the whole thing into the hands of Harness to settle for us; that's natural, that's what we should have come to any way.

*Scantlebury*. [With dignity.] Exactly! [Turning to *Edgar*.] And as to you, young sir, I can't sufficiently express my—my distaste for the way you've treated the whole matter. You ought to withdraw! Talking of starvation, talking of cowardice! Considering what our views are! Except your own is—is one of goodwill—it's most irregular, it's most improper, and all I can say is it's—it's given me pain——

[He places his hand over his heart.]

*Edgar*. [Stubbornly.] I withdraw nothing.

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[He is about to say mote when *Scantlebury* once more coveys up his ears. *Tench* suddenly makes a demonstration with the minute-book. A sense of having been engaged in the unusual comes over all of them, and one by one they resume their seats. *Edgar* alone remains on his feet.]

*Wilder*. [With an air of trying to wipe something out.] I pay no attention to what young Mr. Anthony has said. Coroner's jury! The idea's preposterous. I—I move this amendment to the Chairman's Motion: That the dispute be placed at once in the hands of Mr. Simon Harness for settlement, on the lines indicated by him this morning. Any one second that?

[*Tench* writes in his book.]

*Wanklin*. I do.

*Wilder*. Very well, then; I ask the Chairman to put it to the Board.

*Anthony*. [With a great sigh-slowly.] We have been made the subject of an attack. [Looking round at *Wilder* and *Scantlebury* with ironical contempt.] I take it on my shoulders. I am seventy-six years old. I have been Chairman of this Company since its inception two-and-thirty years ago. I have seen it pass through good and evil report. My connection with it began in the year that this young man was born.

[*Edgar* bows his head. *Anthony*, gripping his chair, goes on.]

I have had do to with "men" for fifty years; I've always stood up to them; I have never been beaten yet. I have fought the men of this Company four times, and four times I have beaten them. It has been said that I am not the man I was. [He looks at Wilder.] However that may be, I am man enough to stand to my guns.

[His voice grows stronger. The double-doors are opened. *Enid* slips in, followed by *Underwood*, who restrains her.]

The men have been treated justly, they have had fair wages, we have always been ready to listen to complaints. It has been said that times have changed; if they have, I have not changed with them. Neither will I. It has been said that masters and men are equal! Cant! There can only be one master in a house! Where two men meet the better man will rule. It has been said that Capital and Labour have the same interests. Cant! Their interests are as wide asunder as the poles. It has been said that the Board is only part of a machine. Cant! We are the machine; its brains and sinews; it is for us to lead and to determine what is to be done, and to do it without fear or favour. Fear of the men! Fear of the shareholders! Fear of our own shadows! Before I am like that, I hope to die.

[He pauses, and meeting his son's eyes, goes on.]

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There is only one way of treating “men”—with the iron hand. This half and half business, the half and half manners of this generation, has brought all this upon us. Sentiment and softness, and what this young man, no doubt, would call his social policy. You can’t eat cake and have it! This middle-class sentiment, or socialism, or whatever it may be, is rotten. Masters are masters, men are men! Yield one demand, and they will make it six. They are [he smiles grimly] like Oliver Twist, asking for more. If I were in their place I should be the same. But I am not in their place. Mark my words: one fine morning, when you have given way here, and given way there—you will find you have parted with the ground beneath your feet, and are deep in the bog of bankruptcy; and with you, floundering in that bog, will be the very men you have given way to. I have been accused of being a domineering tyrant, thinking only of my pride—I am thinking of the future of this country, threatened with the black waters of confusion, threatened with mob government, threatened with what I cannot see. If by any conduct of mine I help to bring this on us, I shall be ashamed to look my fellows in the face.

[*Anthony* stares before him, at what he cannot see, and there is perfect stillness. *Frost* comes in from the hall, and all but *Anthony* look round at him uneasily.]

*Frost*. [To his master.] The men are here, sir. [*Anthony* makes a gesture of dismissal.] Shall I bring them in, sir?

*Anthony*. Wait!

[*Frost* goes out, *Anthony* turns to face his son.]

I come to the attack that has been made upon me.

[*Edgar*, with a gesture of deprecation, remains motionless with his head a little bowed.]

A woman has died. I am told that her blood is on my hands; I am told that on my hands is the starvation and the suffering of other women and of children.

*Edgar*. I said “on our hands,” sir.

*Anthony*. It is the same. [His voice grows stronger and stronger, his feeling is more and more made manifest.] I am not aware that if my adversary suffer in a fair fight not sought by me, it is my fault. If I fall under his feet—as fall I may—I shall not complain. That will be my look-out—and this is—his. I cannot separate, as I would, these men from their women and children. A fair fight is a fair fight! Let them learn to think before they pick a quarrel!

*Edgar*. [In a low voice.] But is it a fair fight, Father? Look at them, and look at us! They’ve only this one weapon!

*Anthony*. [Grimly.] And you're weak-kneed enough to teach them how to use it! It seems the fashion nowadays for men to take their enemy's side. I have not learnt that art. Is it my fault that they quarrelled with their Union too?

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*Edgar*. There is such a thing as Mercy.

*Anthony*. And justice comes before it.

*Edgar*. What seems just to one man, sir, is injustice to another.

*Anthony*. [With suppressed passion.] You accuse me of injustice—of what amounts to inhumanity—of cruelty?

[*Edgar* makes a gesture of horror—a general frightened movement.]

*Wanklin*. Come, come, Chairman.

*Anthony*. [In a grim voice.] These are the words of my own son. They are the words of a generation that I don't understand; the words of a soft breed.

[A general murmur. With a violent effort *Anthony* recovers his control.]

*Edgar*. [Quietly.] I said it of myself, too, Father.

[A long look is exchanged between them, and *Anthony* puts out his hand with a gesture as if to sweep the personalities away; then places it against his brow, swaying as though from giddiness. There is a movement towards him. He moves them back.]

*Anthony*. Before I put this amendment to the Board, I have one more word to say. [He looks from face to face.] If it is carried, it means that we shall fail in what we set ourselves to do. It means that we shall fail in the duty that we owe to all Capital. It means that we shall fail in the duty that we owe ourselves. It means that we shall be open to constant attack to which we as constantly shall have to yield. Be under no misapprehension—run this time, and you will never make a stand again! You will have to fly like curs before the whips of your own men. If that is the lot you wish for, you will vote for this amendment.

[He looks again, from face to face, finally resting his gaze on *Edgar*; all sit with their eyes on the ground. *Anthony* makes a gesture, and *Tench* hands him the book. He reads.]

"Moved by Mr. Wilder, and seconded by Mr. Wanklin: 'That the men's demands be placed at once in the hands of Mr. Simon Harness for settlement on the lines indicated by him this morning.'" [With sudden vigour.] Those in favour: Signify the same in the usual way!

[For a minute no one moves; then hastily, just as *Anthony* is about to speak, WILDER's hand and WANKLIN'S are held up, then SCANTLEBURY'S, and last EDGAR'S who does not lift his head.]

[*Anthony* lifts his own hand.]

[In a clear voice.] The amendment is carried. I resign my position on this Board.

[*Enid* gasps, and there is dead silence. *Anthony* sits motionless, his head slowly drooping; suddenly he heaves as though the whole of his life had risen up within him.]

Contrary?

Fifty years! You have disgraced me, gentlemen. Bring in the men!

[He sits motionless, staring before him. The Board draws hurriedly together, and forms a group. *Tench* in a frightened manner speaks into the hall. *Underwood* almost forces *Enid* from the room.]

*Wilder*. [Hurriedly.] What's to be said to them? Why isn't Harness here? Ought we to see the men before he comes? I don't——

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*Tench*. Will you come in, please?

[Enter *Thomas*, *green*, *Bulgin*, and *Rous*, who file up in a row past the little table. *Tench* sits down and writes. All eyes are foxed on *Anthony*, who makes no sign.]

*Wanklin*. [Stepping up to the little table, with nervous cordiality.] Well, Thomas, how's it to be? What's the result of your meeting?

*Rous*. Sim Harness has our answer. He'll tell you what it is. We're waiting for him. He'll speak for us.

*Wanklin*. Is that so, Thomas?

*Thomas*. [Sullenly.] Yes. Roberts will not pe coming, his wife is dead.

*Scantlebury*. Yes, yes! Poor woman! Yes! Yes!

*Frost*. [Entering from the hall.] Mr. Harness, Sir!

[As *Harness* enters he retires.]

[*Harness* has a piece of paper in his hand, he bows to the Directors, nods towards the men, and takes his stand behind the little table in the very centre of the room.]

*Harness*. Good evening, gentlemen.

[*Tench*, with the paper he has been writing, joins him, they speak together in low tones.]

*Wilder*. We've been waiting for you, Harness. Hope we shall come to some——

*Frost*. [Entering from the hall.] Roberts!

[He goes.]

[*Roberts* comes hastily in, and stands staring at *Anthony*. His face is drawn and old.]

*Roberts*. Mr. Anthony, I am afraid I am a little late, I would have been here in time but for something that—has happened. [To the men.] Has anything been said?

*Thomas*. No! But, man, what made ye come?

*Roberts*. Ye told us this morning, gentlemen, to go away and reconsider our position. We have reconsidered it; we are here to bring you the men's answer. [To *Anthony*.] Go ye back to London. We have nothing for you. By no jot or tittle do we abate our demands, nor will we until the whole of those demands are yielded.

[*Anthony* looks at him but does not speak. There is a movement amongst the men as though they were bewildered.]

*Harness*. Roberts!

*Roberts*. [Glancing fiercely at him, and back to *Anthony*.] Is that clear enough for ye? Is it short enough and to the point? Ye made a mistake to think that we would come to heel. Ye may break the body, but ye cannot break the spirit. Get back to London, the men have nothing for ye?

[Pausing uneasily he takes a step towards the unmoving *Anthony*.]

*Edgar*. We're all sorry for you, Roberts, but——

*Roberts*. Keep your sorrow, young man. Let your father speak!

*Harness*. [With the sheet of paper in his hand, speaking from behind the little table.] Roberts!

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*Robert*. [*To Anthony*, with passionate intensity.] Why don't ye answer?

*Harness*. Roberts!

*Roberts*. [Turning sharply.] What is it?

*Harness*. [Gravely.] You're talking without the book; things have travelled past you.

[He makes a sign to *Tench*, who beckons the Directors. They quickly sign his copy of the terms.]

Look at this, man! [Holding up his sheet of paper.] "Demands conceded, with the exception of those relating to the engineers and furnace-men. Double wages for Saturday's overtime. Night-shifts as they are." These terms have been agreed. The men go back to work again to-morrow. The strike is at an end.

*Roberts*. [Reading the paper, and turning on the men. They shrink back from him, all but *Rous*, who stands his ground. With deadly stillness.] Ye have gone back on me? I stood by ye to the death; ye waited for that to throw me over!

[The men answer, all speaking together.]

*Rous*. It's a lie!

*Thomas*. Ye were past endurance, man.

*Green*. If ye'd listen to me!

*Bulgin*. (Under his breath.) Hold your jaw!

*Roberts*. Ye waited for that!

*Harness*. [Taking the Director's copy of the terms, and handing his own to *Tench*.] That's enough, men. You had better go.

[The men shuffle slowly, awkwardly away.]

*Wilder*. [In a low, nervous voice.] There's nothing to stay for now, I suppose. [He follows to the door.] I shall have a try for that train! Coming, Scantlebury?

*Scantlebury*. [Following with *Wanklin*.] Yes, yes; wait for me. [He stops as *Roberts* speaks.]

*Roberts*. [To *Anthony*.] But ye have not signed them terms! They can't make terms without their Chairman! Ye would never sign them terms! [*Anthony* looks at him without

speaking.] Don't tell me ye have! for the love o' God! [With passionate appeal.] I reckoned on ye!

*Harness*. [Holding out the Director's copy of the teems.] The Board has signed!

[*Roberts* looks dully at the signatures—dashes the paper from him, and covers up his eyes.]

*Scantlebury*. [Behind his hand to *Tench*.] Look after the Chairman! He's not well; he's not well—he had no lunch. If there's any fund started for the women and children, put me down for—for twenty pounds.

[He goes out into the hall, in cumbrous haste; and *Wanklin*, who has been staring at *Roberts* and *Anthony* With twitchings of his face, follows. *Edgar* remains seated on the sofa, looking at the ground; *Tench*, returning to the bureau, writes in his minute— book. *Harness* stands by the little table, gravely watching *Roberts*.]

*Roberts*. Then you're no longer Chairman of this Company! [Breaking into half-mad laughter.] Ah! ha-ah, ha, ha! They've thrown ye over thrown over their Chairman: Ah-ha-ha! [With a sudden dreadful calm.] So—they've done us both down, Mr. Anthony?

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[*Enid*, hurrying through the double-doors, comes quickly to her father.]

*Anthony*. Both broken men, my friend Roberts!

*Harness*. [Coming down and laying his hands on *Roberts's* sleeve.] For shame, Roberts! Go home quietly, man; go home!

*Roberts*. [Tearing his arm away.] Home? [Shrinking together—in a whisper.] Home!

*Enid*. [Quietly to her father.] Come away, dear! Come to your room

[*Anthony* rises with an effort. He turns to *Roberts* who looks at him. They stand several seconds, gazing at each other fixedly; *Anthony* lifts his hand, as though to salute, but lets it fall. The expression of *Roberts's* face changes from hostility to wonder. They bend their heads in token of respect. *Anthony* turns, and slowly walks towards the curtained door. Suddenly he sways as though about to fall, recovers himself, and is assisted out by *Edgar* and *Enid*; *Underwood* follows, but stops at the door. *Roberts* remains motionless for several seconds, staring intently after *Anthony*, then goes out into the hall.]

*Tench*. [Approaching *Harness*.] It's a great weight off my mind, Mr. Harness! But what a painful scene, sir! [He wipes his brow.]

[*Harness*, pale and resolute, regards with a grim half-smile the quavering.]

*Tench*. It's all been so violent! What did he mean by: "Done us both down?" If he has lost his wife, poor fellow, he oughtn't to have spoken to the Chairman like that!

*Harness*. A woman dead; and the two best men both broken!

*Tench*. [Staring at him-suddenly excited.] D'you know, sir—these terms, they're the very same we drew up together, you and I, and put to both sides before the fight began? All this—all this—and—and what for?

*Harness*. [In a slow grim voice.] That's where the fun comes in!

[*Underwood* without turning from the door makes a gesture of assent.]

The curtain falls.

# THE END

**GALSWORTHY PLAYS—SECOND SERIES—NO. 1**

Contents:



# THE ELDEST SON

**BY JOHN GALSWORTHY**

# PERSONS OF THE PLAY

*Sir William Cheshire*, a baronet
*lady Cheshire*, his wife
*bill*, their eldest son
*Harold*, their second son
*Ronald Keith*(in the Lancers), their son-in-law
*Christine* (his wife), their eldest daughter
*Dot*, their second daughter
*Joan*, their third daughter

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*Mabel Lanfarne*, their guest
*the reverend John latter*, engaged to Joan
*old Studdenham*, the head-keeper
*Freda Studdenham*, the lady's-maid
*young Dunning*, the under-keeper
*rose Taylor*, a village girl
*Jackson*, the butler
*Charles*, a footman

*Time*: The present. The action passes on December 7 and 8 at the Cheshires' country house, in one of the shires.

*Act* I *scene* I. The hall; before dinner.
*Scene* II. The hall; after dinner.

*Act* II. Lady Cheshire's morning room; after breakfast.

*Act* III. The smoking-room; tea-time.

A night elapses between Acts I. and II.

*Act*I

## SCENE I

The scene is a well-lighted, and large, oak-panelled hall, with an air of being lived in, and a broad, oak staircase. The dining-room, drawing-room, billiard-room, all open into it; and under the staircase a door leads to the servants' quarters. In a huge fireplace a log fire is burning. There are tiger-skins on the floor, horns on the walls; and a writing-table against the wall opposite the fireplace. *Freda Studdenham*, a pretty, pale girl with dark eyes, in the black dress of a lady's-maid, is standing at the foot of the staircase with a bunch of white roses in one hand, and a bunch of yellow roses in the other. A door closes above, and *sir William Cheshire*, in evening dress, comes downstairs. He is perhaps fifty-eight, of strong build, rather bull-necked, with grey eyes, and a well-coloured face, whose choleric autocracy is veiled by a thin urbanity. He speaks before he reaches the bottom.

Sir William. Well, Freda! Nice roses. Who are they for?

*Freda*. My lady told me to give the yellow to Mrs. Keith, Sir William, and the white to Miss Lanfarne, for their first evening.

*Sir William*. Capital. [Passing on towards the drawing-room] Your father coming up to-night?

*Freda*. Yes.

*Sir William*. Be good enough to tell him I specially want to see him here after dinner, will you?

*Freda*. Yes, Sir William.

*Sir William*. By the way, just ask him to bring the game-book in, if he's got it.

He goes out into the drawing-room; and *Freda* stands restlessly tapping her foot against the bottom stair. With a flutter of skirts *Christine Keith* comes rapidly down. She is a nice-looking, fresh-coloured young woman in a low-necked dress.

*Christine*. Hullo, Freda! How are *you*?

*Freda*. Quite well, thank you, Miss Christine—Mrs. Keith, I mean.
My lady told me to give you these.

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*Christine*. [Taking the roses] Oh! Thanks! How sweet of mother!

*Freda*. [In a quick, toneless voice] The others are for Miss Lanfarne. My lady thought white would suit her better.

*Christine*. They suit you in that black dress.

[*Freda* lowers the roses quickly.]

What do you think of Joan's engagement?

*Freda*. It's very nice for her.

*Christine*. I say, Freda, have they been going hard at rehearsals?

*Freda*. Every day. Miss Dot gets very cross, stage-managing.

*Christine*. I do hate learning a part. Thanks awfully for unpacking. Any news?

*Freda*. [In the same quick, dull voice] The under-keeper, Dunning, won't marry Rose Taylor, after all.

*Christine*. What a shame! But I say that's serious. I thought there was—she was—I mean——

*Freda*. He's taken up with another girl, they say.

*Christine*. Too bad! [Pinning the roses] D'you know if Mr. Bill's come?

*Freda*. [With a swift upward look] Yes, by the six-forty.

*Ronald Keith* comes slowly down, a weathered firm-lipped man, in evening dress, with eyelids half drawn over his keen eyes, and the air of a horseman.

*Keith*. Hallo! Roses in December. I say, Freda, your father missed a wigging this morning when they drew blank at Warnham's spinney. Where's that litter of little foxes?

*Freda*. [Smiling faintly] I expect father knows, Captain Keith.

*Keith*. You bet he does. Emigration? Or thin air? What?

*Christine*. Studdenham'd never shoot a fox, Ronny. He's been here since the flood.

*Keith*. There's more ways of killing a cat—eh, Freda?

*Christine*. [Moving with her husband towards the drawing-room] Young Dunning won't marry that girl, Ronny.

*Keith*. Phew! Wouldn't be in his shoes, then! Sir William'll never keep a servant who's made a scandal in the village, old girl. Bill come?

As they disappear from the hall, *John latter* in a clergyman's evening dress, comes sedately downstairs, a tall, rather pale young man, with something in him, as it were, both of heaven, and a drawing-room. He passes *Freda* with a formal little nod. *Harold*, a fresh-cheeked, cheery-looking youth, comes down, three steps at a time.

*Harold*. Hallo, Freda! Patience on the monument. Let's have a sniff! For Miss Lanfarne? Bill come down yet?

*Freda*. No, Mr. Harold.

*Harold* crosses the hall, whistling, and follows *latter* into the drawing-room. There is the sound of a scuffle above, and a voice crying: "Shut up, Dot!" And *Joan* comes down screwing her head back. She is pretty and small, with large clinging eyes.

*Joan*. Am I all right behind, Freda? That beast, Dot!

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*Freda*. Quite, Miss Joan.

DOT's face, like a full moon, appears over the upper banisters. She too comes running down, a frank figure, with the face of a rebel.

*Dot*. You little being!

*Joan*. [Flying towards the drawing-roam, is overtaken at the door] Oh! Dot! You're pinching!

As they disappear into the drawing-room, *Mabel Lanfarne*, a tall girl with a rather charming Irish face, comes slowly down. And at sight of her FREDA's whole figure becomes set and meaningfull.

*Freda*. For you, Miss Lanfarne, from my lady.

*Mabel*. [In whose speech is a touch of wilful Irishry] How sweet! [Fastening the roses] And how are you, Freda?

*Freda*. Very well, thank you.

*Mabel*. And your father? Hope he's going to let me come out with the guns again.

*Freda*. [Stolidly] He'll be delighted, I'm sure.

*Mabel*. Ye-es! I haven't forgotten his face-last time.

*Freda*. You stood with Mr. Bill. He's better to stand with than Mr. Harold, or Captain Keith?

*Mabel*. He didn't touch a feather, that day.

*Freda*. People don't when they're anxious to do their best.

A gong sounds. And *Mabel Lanfarne*, giving *Freda* a rather inquisitive stare, moves on to the drawing-room. Left alone without the roses, *Freda* still lingers. At the slamming of a door above, and hasty footsteps, she shrinks back against the stairs. *Bill* runs down, and comes on her suddenly. He is a tall, good-looking edition of his father, with the same stubborn look of veiled choler.

*Bill*. Freda! [And as she shrinks still further back] what's the matter? [Then at some sound he looks round uneasily and draws away from her] Aren't you glad to see me?

*Freda*. I've something to say to you, Mr. Bill. After dinner.

*Bill*. Mister——?

She passes him, and rushes away upstairs. And *bill*, who stands frowning and looking after her, recovers himself sharply as the drawing-room door is opened, and *sir William* and *miss Lanfarne* come forth, followed by *Keith*, *Dot*, *Harold*, *Christine*, *latter*, and *Joan*, all leaning across each other, and talking. By herself, behind them, comes *lady Cheshire*, a refined-looking woman of fifty, with silvery dark hair, and an expression at once gentle, and ironic. They move across the hall towards the dining-room.

*Sir William*. Ah! Bill.

*Mabel*. How do you do?

*Keith*. How are you, old chap?

*Dot*. [gloomily] Do you know your part?

*Harold*. Hallo, old man!

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*Christine* gives her brother a flying kiss. *Joan* and *latter* pause and look at him shyly without speech.

*Bill*. [Putting his hand on JOAN's shoulder] Good luck, you two!
Well mother?

*Lady Cheshire*. Well, my dear boy! Nice to see you at last. What a long time!

She draws his arm through hers, and they move towards the dining-room.

The curtain falls.

The curtain rises again at once.

## SCENE II

*Christine*, *lady Cheshire*, *Dot*, *Mabel Lanfarne*, and *Joan*, are returning to the hall after dinner.

Christine. [in a low voice] Mother, is it true about young Dunning and Rose Taylor?

*Lady Cheshire*. I'm afraid so, dear.

*Christine*. But can't they be——

*Dot*. Ah! ah-h! [*Christine* and her mother are silent.] My child, I'm not the young person.

*Christine*. No, of course not—only—[nodding towards *Joan* and Mable].

*Dot*. Look here! This is just an instance of what I hate.

*Lady Cheshire*. My dear? Another one?

*Dot*. Yes, mother, and don't you pretend you don't understand, because you know you do.

*Christine*. Instance? Of what?

*Joan* and *Mabel* have ceased talking, and listen, still at the fire.

*Dot*. Humbug, of course. Why should you want them to marry, if he's tired of her?

*Christine*. [Ironically] Well! If your imagination doesn't carry you as far as that!

*Dot*. When people marry, do you believe they ought to be in love with each other?

*Christine*. [With a shrug] That's not the point.

*Dot*. Oh? Were you in love with Ronny?

*Christine*. Don't be idiotic!

*Dot*. Would you have married him if you hadn't been?

*Christine*. Of course not!

*Joan*. Dot! You are!——

*Dot*. Hallo! my little snipe!

*Lady Cheshire*. Dot, dear!

*Dot*. Don't shut me up, mother! [To *Joan*.] Are you in love with John? [*Joan* turns hurriedly to the fire.] Would you be going to marry him if you were not?

*Christine*. You are a brute, Dot.

*Dot*. Is Mabel in love with—whoever she is in love with?

*Mabel*. And I wonder who that is.

*Dot*. Well, would you marry him if you weren't?

*Mabel*. No, I would not.

*Dot*. Now, mother; did you love father?

*Christine*. Dot, you really are awful.

*Dot*. [Rueful and detached] Well, it is a bit too thick, perhaps.

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*Joan*. Dot!

*Dot*. Well, mother, did you—I mean quite calmly?

*Lady Cheshire*. Yes, dear, quite calmly.

*Dot*. Would you have married him if you hadn't? [*Lady Cheshire* shakes her head] Then we're all agreed!

*Mabel*. Except yourself.

*Dot*. [Grimly] Even if I loved him, he might think himself lucky if I married him.

*Mabel*. Indeed, and I'm not so sure.

*Dot*. [Making a face at her] What I was going to——

*Lady Cheshire*. But don't you think, dear, you'd better not?

*Dot*. Well, I won't say what I was going to say, but what I do say is—Why the devil——

*Lady Cheshire*. Quite so, Dot!

*Dot*. [A little disconcerted.] If they're tired of each other, they ought not to marry, and if father's going to make them——

*Christine*. You don't understand in the least. It's for the sake of the——

*Dot*. Out with it, Old Sweetness! The approaching infant! God bless it!

There is a sudden silence, for *Keith* and *latter* are seen coming from the dining-room.

*Latter*. That must be so, Ronny.

*Keith*. No, John; not a bit of it!

*Latter*. You don't think!

*Keith*. Good Gad, who wants to think after dinner!

*Dot*. Come on! Let's play pool. [She turns at the billiard-room door.] Look here! Rehearsal to-morrow is directly after breakfast; from "Eccles enters breathless" to the end.

*Mabel*. Whatever made you choose "Caste," *Dot*? You know it's awfully difficult.

*Dot*. Because it's the only play that's not too advanced. [The girls all go into the billiard-room.]

*Lady Cheshire*. Where's Bill, Ronny?

*Keith*. [With a grimace] I rather think Sir William and he are in Committee of Supply—Mem-Sahib.

*Lady Cheshire*. Oh!

She looks uneasily at the dining-room; then follows the girls out.

*Latter*. [In the tone of one resuming an argument] There can't be two opinions about it, Ronny. Young Dunning's refusal is simply indefensible.

*Keith*. I don't agree a bit, John.

*Latter*. Of course, if you won't listen.

*Keith*. [Clipping a cigar] Draw it mild, my dear chap. We've had the whole thing over twice at least.

*Latter*. My point is this——

*Keith*. [Regarding *latter* quizzically with his halfclosed eyes] I know—I know—but the point is, how far your point is simply professional.

*Latter*. If a man wrongs a woman, he ought to right her again. There's no answer to that.

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*Keith*. It all depends.

*Latter*. That's rank opportunism.

*Keith*. Rats! Look here—Oh! hang it, John, one can't argue this out with a parson.

*Latter*. [Frigidly] Why not?

*Harold*. [Who has entered from the dining-room] Pull devil, pull baker!

*Keith*. Shut up, Harold!

*Latter*. "To play the game" is the religion even of the Army.

*Keith*. Exactly, but what is the game?

*Latter*. What else can it be in this case?

*Keith*. You're too puritanical, young John. You can't help it—line of country laid down for you. All drag-huntin'! What!

*Latter*. [With concentration] Look here!

*Harold*. [Imitating the action of a man pulling at a horse's head]
'Come hup, I say, you hugly beast!'

*Keith*. [To *latter*] You're not going to draw me, old chap. You don't see where you'd land us all. [He smokes calmly]

*Latter*. How do you imagine vice takes its rise? From precisely this sort of thing of young Dunning's.

*Keith*. From human nature, I should have thought, John. I admit that I don't like a fellow's leavin' a girl in the lurch; but I don't see the use in drawin' hard and fast rules. You only have to break 'em. Sir William and you would just tie Dunning and the girl up together, willy-nilly, to save appearances, and ten to one but there'll be the deuce to pay in a year's time. You can take a horse to the water, you can't make him drink.

*Latter*. I entirely and absolutely disagree with you.

*Harold*. Good old John!

*Latter*. At all events we know where your principles take you.

*Keith*. [Rather dangerously] Where, please? [*Harold* turns up his eyes, and points downwards] Dry up, Harold!

*Latter*. Did you ever hear the story of Faust?

*Keith*. Now look here, John; with all due respect to your cloth, and all the politeness in the world, you may go to-blazes.

*Latter*. Well, I must say, Ronny—of all the rude boors——[He turns towards the billiard-room.]

*Keith*. Sorry I smashed the glass, old chap.

> *Latter* passes out. There comes a mingled sound through the opened door, of female voices, laughter, and the click of billiard balls, dipped of by the sudden closing of the door.

*Keith*. [Impersonally] Deuced odd, the way a parson puts one's back up! Because you know I agree with him really; young Dunning ought to play the game; and I hope Sir William'll make him.

The butler *Jackson* has entered from the door under the stairs followed by the keeper *Studdenham*, a man between fifty and sixty, in a full-skirted coat with big pockets, cord breeches, and gaiters; he has a steady self respecting weathered face, with blue eyes and a short grey beard, which has obviously once been red.

*Keith*. Hullo! Studdenham!

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*Studdenham*. [Touching his forehead] Evenin', Captain Keith.

*Jackson*. Sir William still in the dining-room with Mr. Bill, sir?

*Harold*. [With a grimace] He is, Jackson.

*Jackson* goes out to the dining-room.

*Keith*. You've shot no pheasants yet, Studdenham?

*Studdenham*. No, Sir. Only birds. We'll be doin' the spinneys and the home covert while you're down.

*Keith*. I say, talkin' of spinneys——

He breaks off sharply, and goes out with *Harold* into the billiard-room. *Sir William* enters from the dining-room, applying a gold toothpick to his front teeth.

*Sir William*. Ah! Studdenham. Bad business this, about young Dunning!

*Studdenham*. Yes, Sir William.

*Sir William*. He definitely refuses to marry her?

*Studdenham*. He does that.

*Sir William*. That won't do, you know. What reason does he give?

*Studdenham*. Won't say other than that he don't want no more to do with her.

*Sir William*. God bless me! That's not a reason. I can't have a keeper of mine playing fast and loose in the village like this. [Turning to *lady Cheshire*, who has come in from the billiard-room] That affair of young Dunning's, my dear.

*Lady Cheshire*. Oh! Yes! I'm so sorry, Studdenham. The poor girl!

*Studdenham*. [Respectfully] Fancy he's got a feeling she's not his equal, now, my lady.

*Lady Cheshire*. [To herself] Yes, I suppose he has made her his superior.

*Sir William*. What? Eh! Quite! Quite! I was just telling Studdenham the fellow must set the matter straight. We can't have open scandals in the village. If he wants to keep his place he must marry her at once.

*Lady Cheshire*. [To her husband in a low voice] Is it right to force them? Do you know what the girl wishes, Studdenham?

*Studdenham*. Shows a spirit, my lady—says she'll have him—willin' or not.

*Lady Cheshire*. A spirit? I see. If they marry like that they're sure to be miserable.

*Sir William*. What! Doesn't follow at all. Besides, my dear, you ought to know by this time, there's an unwritten law in these matters. They're perfectly well aware that when there are consequences, they have to take them.

*Studdenham*. Some o' these young people, my lady, they don't put two and two together no more than an old cock pheasant.

*Sir William*. I'll give him till to-morrow. If he remains obstinate, he'll have to go; he'll get no character, Studdenham. Let him know what I've said. I like the fellow, he's a good keeper. I don't want to lose him. But this sort of thing I won't have. He must toe the mark or take himself off. Is he up here to-night?

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*Studdenham*. Hangin' partridges, Sir William. Will you have him in?

*Sir William*. [Hesitating] Yes—yes. I'll see him.

*Studdenham*. Good-night to you, my lady.

*Lady Cheshire*. Freda's not looking well, Studdenham.

*Studdenham*. She's a bit pernickitty with her food, that's where it is.

*Lady Cheshire*. I must try and make her eat.

*Sir William*. Oh! Studdenham. We'll shoot the home covert first.
What did we get last year?

*Studdenham*. [Producing the game-book; but without reference to it] Two hundred and fifty-three pheasants, eleven hares, fifty-two rabbits, three woodcock, sundry.

*Sir William*. Sundry? Didn't include a fox did it? [Gravely] I was seriously upset this morning at Warnham's spinney——

SUDDENHAM. [Very gravely] You don't say, Sir William; that four-year-old he du look a handful!

*Sir William*. [With a sharp look] You know well enough what I mean.

*Studdenham*. [Unmoved] Shall I send young Dunning, Sir William?

> *Sir William* gives a short, sharp nod, and *Studdenham* retires by the door under the stairs.

*Sir William*. Old fox!

*Lady Cheshire*. Don't be too hard on Dunning. He's very young.

*Sir William*. [Patting her arm] My dear, you don't understand young fellows, how should you?

*Lady Cheshire*. [With her faint irony] A husband and two sons not counting. [Then as the door under the stairs is opened] Bill, now do——

*Sir William*. I'll be gentle with him. [Sharply] Come in!

*Lady Cheshire* retires to the billiard-room. She gives a look back and a half smile at young *Dunning*, a fair young man dressed in broom cords and leggings, and holding his cap in his hand; then goes out.

*Sir William*. Evenin', Dunning.

*Dunning*. [Twisting his cap] Evenin', Sir William.

*Sir William*. Studdenham's told you what I want to see you about?

*Dunning*. Yes, Sir.

*Sir William*. The thing's in your hands. Take it or leave it. I don't put pressure on you. I simply won't have this sort of thing on my estate.

*Dunning*. I'd like to say, Sir William, that she [He stops].

*Sir William*. Yes, I daresay-Six of one and half a dozen of the other. Can't go into that.

*Dunning*. No, Sir William.

*Sir William*. I'm quite mild with you. This is your first place. If you leave here you'll get no character.

*Dunning*. I never meant any harm, sir.

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*Sir William*. My good fellow, you know the custom of the country.

*Dunning*. Yes, Sir William, but——

*Sir William*. You should have looked before you leaped. I'm not forcing you. If you refuse you must go, that's all.

*Dunning*. Yes. Sir William.

*Sir William*. Well, now go along and take a day to think it over.

*Bill*, who has sauntered moody from the diningroom, stands by the stairs listening. Catching sight of him, *Dunning* raises his hand to his forelock.

*Dunning*. Very good, Sir William. [He turns, fumbles, and turns again] My old mother's dependent on me——

*Sir William*. Now, Dunning, I've no more to say.
[Dunning goes sadly away under the stairs.]

*Sir William*. [Following] And look here! Just understand this
[He too goes out....]

*Bill*, lighting a cigarette, has approached the writing-table. He looks very glum. The billiard-room door is flung open. *Mabel Lanfarne* appears, and makes him a little curtsey.

*Mabel*. Against my will I am bidden to bring you in to pool.

*Bill*. Sorry! I've got letters.

*Mabel*. You seem to have become very conscientious.

*Bill*. Oh! I don't know.

*Mabel*. Do you remember the last day of the covert shooting?

*Bits*. I do.

*Mabel*. [Suddenly] What a pretty girl Freda Studdenham's grown!

*Bill*. Has she?

*Mabel*. "She walks in beauty."

*Bill*. Really? Hadn't noticed.

*Mabel*. Have you been taking lessons in conversation?

*Bill*. Don't think so.

*Mabel*. Oh! [There is a silence] Mr. Cheshire!

*Bill*. Miss Lanfarne!

*Mabel*. What's the matter with you? Aren't you rather queer, considering that I don't bite, and was rather a pal!

*Bill*. [Stolidly] I'm sorry.

Then seeing that his mother has came in from the billiard-room, he sits down at the writing-table.

*Lady Cheshire*. Mabel, dear, do take my cue. Won't you play too, Bill, and try and stop Ronny, he's too terrible?

*Bill*. Thanks. I've got these letters.

*Mabel* taking the cue passes back into the billiard-room, whence comes out the sound of talk and laughter.

*Lady Cheshire*. [Going over and standing behind her son's chair] Anything wrong, darling?

*Bill*. Nothing, thanks. [Suddenly] I say, I wish you hadn't asked that girl here.

*Lady Cheshire*. Mabel! Why? She's wanted for rehearsals. I thought you got on so well with her last Christmas.

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*Bill*. [With a sort of sullen exasperation.] A year ago.

*Lady Cheshire*. The girls like her, so does your father; personally I must say I think she's rather nice and Irish.

*Bill*. She's all right, I daresay.

He looks round as if to show his mother that he wishes to be left alone. But *lady Cheshire*, having seen that he is about to look at her, is not looking at him.

*Lady Cheshire*. I'm afraid your father's been talking to you, Bill.

*Bill*. He has.

*Lady Cheshire*. Debts? Do try and make allowances. [With a faint smile] Of course he is a little——

*Bill*. He is.

*Lady Cheshire*. I wish I could——

*Bill*. Oh, Lord! Don't you get mixed up in it!

*Lady Cheshire*. It seems almost a pity that you told him.

*Bill*. He wrote and asked me point blank what I owed.

*Lady Cheshire*. Oh! [Forcing herself to speak in a casual voice] I happen to have a little money, Bill—I think it would be simpler if——

*Bill*. Now look here, mother, you've tried that before. I can't help spending money, I never shall be able, unless I go to the Colonies, or something of the kind.

*Lady Cheshire*. Don't talk like that, dear!

*Bill*. I would, for two straws!

*Lady Cheshire*. It's only because your father thinks such a lot of the place, and the name, and your career. The Cheshires are all like that. They've been here so long; they're all—root.

*Bill*. Deuced funny business my career will be, I expect!

*Lady Cheshire*. [Fluttering, but restraining herself lest he should see] But, Bill, why must you spend more than your allowance?

*Bill*. Why—anything? I didn't make myself.

*Lady Cheshire*. I'm afraid we did that. It was inconsiderate, perhaps.

*Bill*. Yes, you'd better have left me out.

*Lady Cheshire*. But why are you so—Only a little fuss about money!

*Bill*. Ye-es.

*Lady Cheshire*. You're not keeping anything from me, are you?

*Bill*. [Facing her] No. [He then turns very deliberately to the writing things, and takes up a pen] I must write these letters, please.

*Lady Cheshire*. Bill, if there's any real trouble, you will tell me, won't you?

*Bill*. There's nothing whatever.

He suddenly gets up and walks about. *Lady Cheshire*, too, moves over to the fireplace, and after an uneasy look at him, turns to the fire. Then, as if trying to switch of his mood, she changes the subject abruptly.

*Lady Cheshire*. Isn't it a pity about young Dunning? I'm so sorry for Rose Taylor.

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There is a silence. Stealthily under the staircase *Freda* has entered, and seeing only *bill*, advances to speak to him.

*Bill*. [Suddenly] Oh! well,—you can't help these things in the country.

As he speaks, *Freda* stops dead, perceiving that he is not alone; *bill*, too, catching sight of her, starts.

*Lady Cheshire*. [Still speaking to the fire] It seems dreadful to force him. I do so believe in people doing things of their own accord. [Then seeing *Freda* standing so uncertainly by the stairs] Do you want me, Freda?

*Freda*. Only your cloak, my lady. Shall I—begin it?

At this moment *sir William* enters from the drawing-room.

*Lady Cheshire*. Yes, yes.

*Sir William*. [Genially] Can you give me another five minutes, Bill? [Pointing to the billiard-room] We'll come directly, my dear.

*Freda*, with a look at *bill*, has gone back whence she came; and *lady Cheshire* goes reluctantly away into the billiard-room.

*Sir William*. I shall give young Dunning short shrift. [He moves over to the fireplace and divides hip coat-tails] Now, about you, Bill! I don't want to bully you the moment you come down, but you know, this can't go on. I've paid your debts twice. Shan't pay them this time unless I see a disposition to change your mode of life. [A pause] You get your extravagance from your mother. She's very queer—[A pause]—All the Winterleighs are like that about money....

*Bill*. Mother's particularly generous, if that's what you mean.

*Sir William*. [Drily] We will put it that way. [A pause] At the present moment you owe, as I understand it, eleven hundred pounds.

*Bill*. About that.

*Sir William*. Mere flea-bite. [A pause] I've a proposition to make.

*Bill*. Won't it do to-morrow, sir?

*Sir William*. "To-morrow" appears to be your motto in life.

*Bill*. Thanks!

*Sir William*. I'm anxious to change it to-day. [*Bill* looks at him in silence] It's time you took your position seriously, instead of hanging about town, racing, and playing polo, and what not.

*Bill*. Go ahead!

At something dangerous in his voice, *sir William* modifies his attitude.

*Sir*, *William*. The proposition's very simple. I can't suppose anything so rational and to your advantage will appeal to you, but [drily] I mention it. Marry a nice girl, settle down, and stand for the division; you can have the Dower House and fifteen hundred a year, and I'll pay your debts into the bargain. If you're elected I'll make it two thousand. Plenty

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of time to work up the constituency before we kick out these infernal Rads. Carpetbagger against you; if you go hard at it in the summer, it'll be odd if you don't manage to get in your three days a week, next season. You can take Rocketer and that four-year-old—he's well up to your weight, fully eight and a half inches of bone. You'll only want one other. And if Miss—if your wife means to hunt——

*Bill*. You've chosen my wife, then?

*Sir William*. [With a quick look] I imagine, you've some girl in your mind.

*Bill*. Ah!

*Sir William*: Used not to be unnatural at your age. I married your mother at twenty-eight. Here you are, eldest son of a family that stands for something. The more I see of the times the more I'm convinced that everybody who is anybody has got to buckle to, and save the landmarks left. Unless we're true to our caste, and prepared to work for it, the landed classes are going to go under to this infernal democratic spirit in the air. The outlook's very serious. We're threatened in a hundred ways. If you mean business, you'll want a wife. When I came into the property I should have been lost without your mother.

*Bill*. I thought this was coming.

*Sir William*. [With a certain geniality] My dear fellow, I don't want to put a pistol to your head. You've had a slack rein so far. I've never objected to your sowing a few wild oats-so long as you —er—[Unseen by *sir William*, *bill* makes a sudden movement] Short of that—at all events, I've not inquired into your affairs. I can only judge by the—-er—pecuniary evidence you've been good enough to afford me from time to time. I imagine you've lived like a good many young men in your position—I'm not blaming you, but there's a time for all things.

*Bill*. Why don't you say outright that you want me to marry Mabel Lanfarne?

*Sits William*. Well, I do. Girl's a nice one. Good family—got a little money—rides well. Isn't she good-looking enough for you, or what?

*Bill*. Quite, thanks.

*Sir William*. I understood from your mother that you and she were on good terms.

*Bill*. Please don't drag mother into it.

*Sir William*. [With dangerous politeness] Perhaps you'll be good enough to state your objections.

*Bill*. Must we go on with this?

*Sir William*. I've never asked you to do anything for me before; I expect you to pay attention now. I've no wish to dragoon you into this particular marriage. If you don't care for Miss Lanfarne, marry a girl you're fond of.

*Bill*. I refuse.

*Sir William*. In that case you know what to look out for. [With a sudden rush of choler] You young.... [He checks himself and stands glaring at *bill*, who glares back at him] This means, I suppose, that you've got some entanglement or other.

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*Bill*. Suppose what you like, sir.

*Sits William*. I warn you, if you play the blackguard——

*Bill*. You can't force me like young Dunning.

Hearing the raised voices *lady Cheshire* has come back from the billiard-room.

*Lady Cheshire*. [Closing the door] What is it?

*Sir William*. You deliberately refuse! Go away, Dorothy.

*Lady Cheshire*. [Resolutely] I haven't seen Bill for two months.

*Sir William*. What! [Hesitating] Well—we must talk it over again.

*Lady Cheshire*. Come to the billiard-room, both of you! Bill, do finish those letters!

With a deft movement she draws *sir William* toward the billiard-room, and glances back at *bill* before going out, but he has turned to the writing-table. When the door is closed, *bill* looks into the drawing-room, them opens the door under the stairs; and backing away towards the writing-table, sits down there, and takes up a pen. *Freda* who has evidently been waiting, comes in and stands by the table.

*Bill*. I say, this is dangerous, you know.

*Freda*. Yes—but I must.

*Bill*. Well, then—[With natural recklessness] Aren't you going to kiss me?

Without moving she looks at him with a sort of miserable inquiry.

*Bill*. Do you know you haven't seen me for eight weeks?

*Freda*. Quite—long enough—for you to have forgotten.

*Bill*. Forgotten! I don't forget people so soon.

*Freda*. No?

*Bill*. What's the matter with you, Freda?

*Freda*. [After a long look] It'll never be as it was.

*Bill*. [Jumping up] How d'you mean?

*Freda*. I've got something for you. [She takes a diamond ring out of her dress and holds it out to him] I've not worn it since Cromer.

*Bill*. Now, look here

*Freda*. I've had my holiday; I shan't get another in a hurry.

*Bill*. Freda!

*Freda*. You'll be glad to be free. That fortnight's all you really loved me in.

*Bill*. [Putting his hands on her arms] I swear——

*Freda*. [Between her teeth] Miss Lanfarne need never know about me.

*Bill*. So that's it! I've told you a dozen times—nothing's changed.
[*Freda* looks at him and smiles.]

*Bill*. Oh! very well! If you will make yourself miserable.

*Freda*. Everybody will be pleased.

*Bill*. At what?

*Freda*. When you marry her.

*Bill*. This is too bad.

*Freda*. It's what always happens—even when it's not a—gentleman.

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*Bill*. That's enough.

*Freda*. But I'm not like that girl down in the village. You needn't be afraid I'll say anything when—it comes. That's what I had to tell you.

*Bill*. What!

*Freda*. I can keep a secret.

*Bill*. Do you mean this? [She bows her head.]

*Bill*. Good God!

*Freda*. Father brought me up not to whine. Like the puppies when they hold them up by their tails. [With a sudden break in her voice] Oh! Bill!

*Bill*. [With his head down, seizing her hands] Freda! [He breaks away from her towards the fire] Good God!

She stands looking at him, then quietly slips away by the door under the staircase. *Bill* turns to speak to her, and sees that she has gone. He walks up to the fireplace, and grips the mantelpiece.

*Bill*. By Jove! This is——!

The curtain falls.

*Act*II

The scene is *lady* CHESHIRE's morning room, at ten o'clock on the following day. It is a pretty room, with white panelled walls; and chrysanthemums and carmine lilies in bowls. A large bow window overlooks the park under a sou'-westerly sky. A piano stands open; a fire is burning; and the morning's correspondence is scattered on a writing-table. Doors opposite each other lead to the maid's workroom, and to a corridor. *Lady Cheshire* is standing in the middle of the room, looking at an opera cloak, which *Freda* is holding out.

*Lady Cheshire*. Well, Freda, suppose you just give it up!

*Freda*. I don't like to be beaten.

*Lady Cheshire*. You're not to worry over your work. And by the way,
I promised your father to make you eat more. [*Freda* smiles.]

*Lady Cheshire*. It's all very well to smile. You want bracing up. Now don't be naughty. I shall give you a tonic. And I think you had better put that cloak away.

*Freda*. I'd rather have one more try, my lady.

*Lady Cheshire*. [Sitting doom at her writing-table] Very well.

*Freda* goes out into her workroom, as *Jackson* comes in from the corridor.

*Jackson*. Excuse me, my lady. There's a young woman from the village, says you wanted to see her.

*Lady Cheshire*. Rose Taylor? Ask her to come in. Oh! and Jackson the car for the meet please at half-past ten.

*Jackson* having bowed and withdrawn, *lady Cheshire* rises with worked signs of nervousness, which she has only just suppressed, when *rose Taylor*, a stolid country girl, comes in and stands waiting by the door.

*Lady Cheshire*. Well, Rose. Do come in!
[*Rose* advances perhaps a couple of steps.]

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*Lady Cheshire*. I just wondered whether you'd like to ask my advice. Your engagement with Dunning's broken off, isn't it?

*Rose*. Yes—but I've told him he's got to marry me.

*Lady Cheshire*. I see! And you think that'll be the wisest thing?

*Rose*. [Stolidly] I don't know, my lady. He's got to.

*Lady Cheshire*. I do hope you're a little fond of him still.

*Rose*. I'm not. He don't deserve it.

*Lady Cheshire*: And—do you think he's quite lost his affection for you?

*Rose*. I suppose so, else he wouldn't treat me as he's done. He's after that—that—He didn't ought to treat me as if I was dead.

*Lady Cheshire*. No, no—of course. But you will think it all well over, won't you?

*Rose*. I've a—got nothing to think over, except what I know of.

*Lady Cheshire*. But for you both t0 marry in that spirit! You know it's for life, Rose. [Looking into her face] I'm always ready to help you.

*Rose*. [Dropping a very slight curtsey] Thank you, my lady, but I think he ought to marry me. I've told him he ought.

*Lady Cheshire*. [Sighing] Well, that's all I wanted to say. It's a question of your self-respect; I can't give you any real advice. But just remember that if you want a friend ——

*Rose*. [With a gulp] I'm not so 'ard, really. I only want him to do what's right by me.

*Lady Cheshire*. [With a little lift of her eyebrow—gently] Yes, yes—I see.

*Rose*. [Glancing back at the door] I don't like meeting the servants.

*Lady Cheshire*. Come along, I'll take you out another way. [As they reach the door, *Dot* comes in.]

*Dot*. [With a glance at *rose*] Can we have this room for the mouldy rehearsal, Mother?

*Lady Cheshire*. Yes, dear, you can air it here.

Holding the door open for *rose* she follows her out. And *Dot*, with a book of "Caste" in her hand, arranges the room according to a diagram.

*Dot*. Chair—chair—table—chair—Dash! Table—piano—fire—window! [Producing a pocket comb] Comb for Eccles. Cradle?—Cradle—[She viciously dumps a waste-paper basket down, and drops a footstool into it] Brat! [Then reading from the book gloomily] "Enter Eccles breathless. Esther and Polly rise-Esther puts on lid of bandbox." Bandbox!

Searching for something to represent a bandbox, she opens the workroom door.

*Dot*. Freda?

*Freda* comes in.

*Dot*. I say, Freda. Anything the matter? You seem awfully down.
[*Freda* does not answer.]

*Dot*. You haven't looked anything of a lollipop lately.

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*Freda*. I'm quite all right, thank you, Miss Dot.

*Dot*. Has Mother been givin' you a tonic?

*Freda*. [Smiling a little] Not yet.

*Dot*. That doesn't account for it then. [With a sudden warm impulse] What is it, Freda?

*Freda*. Nothing.

*Dot*. [Switching of on a different line of thought] Are you very busy this morning?

*Freda*. Only this cloak for my lady.

*Dot*. Oh! that can wait. I may have to get you in to prompt, if I can't keep 'em straight. [Gloomily] They stray so. Would you mind?

*Freda*. [Stolidly] I shall be very glad, Miss Dot.

*Dot*. [Eyeing her dubiously] All right. Let's see—what did I want?

*Joan* has come in.

*Joan*. Look here, Dot; about the baby in this scene. I'm sure I ought to make more of it.

*Dot*. Romantic little beast! [She plucks the footstool out by one ear, and holds it forth] Let's see you try!

*Joan*. [Recoiling] But, Dot, what are we really going to have for the baby? I can't rehearse with that thing. Can't you suggest something, Freda?

*Freda*. Borrow a real one, Miss Joan. There are some that don't count much.

*Joan*. Freda, how horrible!

*Dot*. [Dropping the footstool back into the basket] You'll just put up with what you're given.

Then as *Christine* and *Mabel Lanfarne* Come in, *Freda* turns abruptly and goes out.

*Dot*. Buck up! Where are Bill and Harold? [To *Joan*] Go and find them, mouse-cat.

But *bill* and *Harold*, followed by *latter*, are already in the doorway. They come in, and *latter*, stumbling over the waste-paper basket, takes it up to improve its position.

*Dot*. Drop that cradle, John! [As he picks the footstool out of it] Leave the baby in! Now then! Bill, you enter there! [She points to the workroom door where *bill* and *Mabel* range themselves close to the piano; while *Harold* goes to the window] John! get off the stage! Now then, "Eccles enters breathless, Esther and Polly rise." Wait a minute. I know now. [She opens the workroom door] Freda, I wanted a bandbox.

*Harold*. [Cheerfully] I hate beginning to rehearse, you know, you feel such a fool.

*Dot*. [With her bandbox-gloomily] You'll feel more of a fool when you have begun. [To *bill*, who is staring into the workroom] Shut the door. Now. [*Bill* shuts the door.]

*Latter*. [Advancing] Look here! I want to clear up a point of psychology before we start.

*Dot*. Good Lord!

*Latter*. When I bring in the milk—ought I to bring it in seriously— as if I were accustomed—I mean, I maintain that if I'm——

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*Joan*. Oh! John, but I don't think it's meant that you should——

*Dot*. Shut up! Go back, John! Blow the milk! Begin, begin, begin! Bill!

*Latter*. [Turning round and again advancing] But I think you underrate the importance of my entrance altogether.

*Mabel*. Oh! no, Mr. Latter!

*Latter*. I don't in the least want to destroy the balance of the scene, but I do want to be clear about the spirit. What is the spirit?

*Dot*. [With gloom] Rollicking!

*Latter*. Well, I don't think so. We shall run a great risk, with this play, if we rollick.

*Dot*. Shall we? Now look here——!

*Mabel*. [Softly to *bill*] Mr. Cheshire!

*Bill*. [Desperately] Let's get on!

*Dot*. [Waving *latter* back] Begin, begin! At last!
[But *Jackson* has came in.]

*Jackson*. [To *Christine*] Studdenham says, Mm, if the young ladies want to see the spaniel pups, he's brought 'em round.

*Joan*. [Starting up] Oh! come 'on, John!
[She flies towards the door, followed by *latter*.]

*Dot*. [Gesticulating with her book] Stop! You——
[*Christine* and *Harold* also rush past.]

*Dot*. [Despairingly] First pick! [Tearing her hair] Pigs! Devils!
[She rushes after them. *Bill* and *Mabel* are left alone.]

*Mabel*. [Mockingly] And don't you want one of the spaniel pups?

*Bill*. [Painfully reserved and sullen, and conscious of the workroom door] Can't keep a dog in town. You can have one, if you like. The breeding's all right.

*Mabel*. Sixth Pick?

*Bill*. The girls'll give you one of theirs. They only fancy they want 'em.

Mann. [Moving nearer to him, with her hands clasped behind her] You know, you remind me awfully of your father. Except that you're not nearly so polite. I don't understand you English-lords of the soil. The way you have of disposing of your females. [With a sudden change of voice] What was the matter with you last night? [Softly] Won't you tell me?

*Bill*. Nothing to tell.

*Mabel*. Ah! no, Mr. Bill.

*Bill*. [Almost succumbing to her voice—then sullenly] Worried, I suppose.

*Mabel*. [Returning to her mocking] Quite got over it?

*Bill*. Don't chaff me, please.

*Mabel*. You really are rather formidable.

*Bill*. Thanks.

*Mabel*, But, you know, I love to cross a field where there's a bull.

*Bill*. Really! Very interesting.

*Mabel*. The way of their only seeing one thing at a time. [She moves back as he advances] And overturning people on the journey.

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*Bill*. Hadn't you better be a little careful?

*Mabel*. And never to see the hedge until they're stuck in it. And then straight from that hedge into the opposite one.

*Bill*. [Savagely] What makes you bait me this morning of all mornings?

*Mabel*. The beautiful morning! [Suddenly] It must be dull for poor Freda working in there with all this fun going on?

*Bill*. [Glancing at the door] Fun you call it?

*Mabel*, To go back to you,—now—Mr. Cheshire.

*Bill*. No.

*Mabel*, You always make me feel so Irish. Is it because you're so English, d'you think? Ah! I can see him moving his ears. Now he's pawing the ground—He's started!

*Bill*. Miss Lanfarne!

*Mabel*. [Still backing away from him, and drawing him on with her eyes and smile] You can't help coming after me! [Then with a sudden change to a sort of sierra gravity] Can you? You'll feel that when I've gone.

They stand quite still, looking into each other's eyes and *Freda*, who has opened the door of the workroom stares at them.

*Mabel*. [Seeing her] Here's the stile. Adieu, Monsieur le taureau!

She puts her hand behind her, opens the door, and slips through, leaving *bill* to turn, following the direction of her eyes, and see *Freda* with the cloak still in her hand.

*Bill*. [Slowly walking towards her] I haven't slept all night.

*Freda*. No?

*Bill*. Have you been thinking it over?
[*Freda* gives a bitter little laugh.]

*Bill*. Don't! We must make a plan. I'll get you away. I won't let you suffer. I swear I won't.

*Freda*. That will be clever.

*Bill*. I wish to Heaven my affairs weren't in such a mess.

*Freda*. I shall be—all—right, thank you.

*Bill*. You must think me a blackguard. [She shakes her head] Abuse me—say something! Don't look like that!

*Freda*. Were you ever really fond of me?

*Bill*. Of course I was, I am now. Give me your hands.

She looks at him, then drags her hands from his, and covers her face.

*Bill*. [Clenching his fists] Look here! I'll prove it. [Then as she suddenly flings her arms round his neck and clings to him] There, there!

There is a click of a door handle. They start away from each other, and see *lady Cheshire* regarding them.

*Lady Cheshire*. [Without irony] I beg your pardon.

She makes as if to withdraw from an unwarranted intrusion, but suddenly turning, stands, with lips pressed together, waiting.

*Lady Cheshire*. Yes?

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*Freda* has muffled her face. But *bill* turns and confronts his mother.

*Bill*. Don't say anything against her!

*Lady Cheshire*. [Tries to speak to him and fails—then to *Freda*] Please-go!

*Bill*. [Taking FREDA's arm] No.

*Lady Cheshire*, after a moment's hesitation, herself moves towards the door.

*Bill*. Stop, mother!

*Lady Cheshire*. I think perhaps not.

*Bill*. [Looking at *Freda*, who is cowering as though from a blow] It's a d——d shame!

*Lady Cheshire*. It is.

*Bill*. [With sudden resolution] It's not as you think. I'm engaged to be married to her.

[*Freda* gives him a wild stare, and turns away.]

*Lady Cheshire*. [Looking from one to the other] I don't think I—quite—understand.

*Bill*. [With the brutality of his mortification] What I said was plain enough.

*Lady Cheshire*. Bill!

*Bill*. I tell you I am going to marry her.

*Lady Cheshire*. [To *Freda*] Is that true?

[*Freda* gulps and remains silent.]

*Bill*. If you want to say anything, say it to me, mother.

*Lady Cheshire*. [Gripping the edge of a little table] Give me a chair, please. [*Bill* gives her a chair.]

*Lady Cheshire*. [To *Freda*] Please sit down too.

*Freda* sits on the piano stool, still turning her face away.

*Lady Cheshire*. [Fixing her eyes on *Freda*] Now!

*Bill*. I fell in love with her. And she with me.

*Lady Cheshire*. When?

*Bill*. In the summer.

*Lady Cheshire*. Ah!

*Bill*. It wasn't her fault.

*Lady Cheshire*. No?

*Bill*. [With a sort of menace] Mother!

*Lady Cheshire*. Forgive me, I am not quite used to the idea. You say that you—are engaged?

*Bill*. Yes.

*Lady Cheshire*. The reasons against such an engagement have occurred to you, I suppose? [With a sudden change of tone] Bill! what does it mean?

*Bill*. If you think she's trapped me into this——

*Lady Cheshire*. I do not. Neither do I think she has been trapped.
I think nothing. I understand nothing.

*Bill*. [Grimly] Good!

*Lady Cheshire*. How long has this-engagement lasted?

*Bill*. [After a silence] Two months.

*Lady Cheshire*. [Suddenly] This is-this is quite impossible.

*Bill*. You'll find it isn't.

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*Lady Cheshire*. It's simple misery.

*Bill*. [Pointing to the workroom] Go and wait in there, Freda.

*Lady Cheshire*. [Quickly] And are you still in love with her?

*Freda*, moving towards the workroom, smothers a sob.

*Bill*. Of course I am.

*Freda* has gone, and as she goes, *lady Cheshire* rises suddenly, forced by the intense feeling she has been keeping in hand.

*Lady Cheshire*. Bill! Oh, Bill! What does it all mean? [*Bill*, looking from side to aide, only shrugs his shoulders] You are not in love with her now. It's no good telling me you are.

*Bill*. I am.

*Lady Cheshire*. That's not exactly how you would speak if you were.

*Bill*. She's in love with me.

*Lady Cheshire*. [Bitterly] I suppose so.

*Bill*. I mean to see that nobody runs her down.

*Lady Cheshire*. [With difficulty] Bill! Am I a hard, or mean woman?

*Bill*. Mother!

*Lady Cheshire*. It's all your life—and—your father's—and—all of us. I want to understand—I must understand. Have you realised what an awful thins this would be for us all? It's quite impossible that it should go on.

*Bill*. I'm always in hot water with the Governor, as it is. She and I'll take good care not to be in the way.

*Lady Cheshire*. Tell me everything!

*Bill*. I have.

*Lady Cheshire*. I'm your mother, Bill.

*Bill*. What's the good of these questions?

*Lady Cheshire*. You won't give her away—I see!

*Bill*. I've told you all there is to tell. We're engaged, we shall be married quietly, and—-and—go to Canada.

*Lady Cheshire*. If there weren't more than that to tell you'd be in love with her now.

*Bill*. I've told you that I am.

*Lady Cheshire*. You are not. [Almost fiercely] I know—I know there's more behind.

*Bill*. There—is—nothing.

*Lady Cheshire*. [Baffled, but unconvinced] Do you mean that your love for her has been just what it might have been for a lady?

*Bill*. [Bitterly] Why not?

*Lady Cheshire*. [With painful irony] It is not so as a rule.

*Bill*. Up to now I've never heard you or the girls say a word against Freda. This isn't the moment to begin, please.

*Lady Cheshire*. [Solemnly] All such marriages end in wretchedness. You haven't a taste or tradition in common. You don't know what marriage is. Day after day, year after year. It's no use being sentimental—for people brought up as we are to have different manners is worse than to have different souls. Besides, it's poverty. Your father will never forgive you, and I've practically nothing. What can you do? You have no profession. How are you going to stand it; with a woman who—? It's the little things.

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*Bill*. I know all that, thanks.

*Lady Cheshire*. Nobody does till they've been through it. Marriage is hard enough when people are of the same class. [With a sudden movement towards him] Oh! my dear-before it's too late!

*Bill*. [After a struggle] It's no good.

*Lady Cheshire*. It's not fair to her. It can only end in her misery.

*Bill*. Leave that to me, please.

*Lady Cheshire*. [With an almost angry vehemence] Only the very finest can do such things. And you don't even know what trouble's like.

*Bill*. Drop it, please, mother.

*Lady Cheshire*. Bill, on your word of honour, are you acting of your own free will?

*Bill*. [Breaking away from her] I can't stand any more.
[He goes out into the workroom.]

*Lady Cheshire*. What in God's name shall I do?

In her distress she walks up and doom the room, then goes to the workroom door, and opens it.

*Lady Cheshire*. Come in here, please, Freda.

After a seconds pause, *Freda*, white and trembling, appears in the doorway, followed by *bill*.

*Lady Cheshire*. No, Bill. I want to speak to her alone.

*Bill*, does not move.

*Lady Cheshire*. [Icily] I must ask you to leave us.

*Bill* hesitates; then shrugging his shoulders, he touches FREDA's arms, and goes back into the workroom, closing the door. There is silence.

*Lady Cheshire*. How did it come about?

*Freda*. I don't know, my lady.

*Lady Cheshire*. For heaven's sake, child, don't call me that again, whatever happens. [She walks to the window, and speaks from there] I know well enough how love comes. I don't blame you. Don't cry. But, you see, it's my eldest son. [*Freda* puts her hand to her breast] Yes, I know. Women always get the worst of these things. That's natural. But it's not only you is it? Does any one guess?

*Freda*. No.

*Lady Cheshire*. Not even your father? [*Freda* shakes her head] There's nothing more dreadful than for a woman to hang like a stone round a man's neck. How far has it gone? Tell me!

*Freda*. I can't.

*Lady Cheshire*. Come!

*Freda*. I—won't.

*Lady Cheshire*. [Smiling painfully]. Won't give him away? Both of you the same. What's the use of that with me? Look at me! Wasn't he with you when you went for your holiday this summer?

*Freda*. He's—always—behaved—like—a—gentleman.

*Lady Cheshire*. Like a man you mean!

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*Freda*. It hasn't been his fault! I love him so.

*Lady Cheshire* turns abruptly, and begins to walk up and down the room. Then stopping, she looks intently at *Freda*.

*Lady Cheshire*. I don't know what to say to you. It's simple madness! It can't, and shan't go on.

*Freda*. [Sullenly] I know I'm not his equal, but I am—somebody.

*Lady Cheshire*. [Answering this first assertion of rights with a sudden steeliness] Does he love you now?

*Freda*. That's not fair—it's not fair.

*Lady Cheshire*. If men are like gunpowder, Freda, women are not. If you've lost him it's been your own fault.

*Freda*. But he does love me, he must. It's only four months.

*Lady Cheshire*. [Looking down, and speaking rapidly] Listen to me. I love my son, but I know him—I know all his kind of man. I've lived with one for thirty years. I know the way their senses work. When they want a thing they must have it, and then—they're sorry.

*Freda*. [Sullenly] He's not sorry.

*Lady Cheshire*. Is his love big enough to carry you both over everything?.... You know it isn't.

*Freda*. If I were a lady, you wouldn't talk like that.

*Lady Cheshire*. If you were a lady there'd be no trouble before either of you. You'll make him hate you.

*Freda*. I won't believe it. I could make him happy—out there.

*Lady Cheshire*. I don't want to be so odious as to say all the things you must know. I only ask you to try and put yourself in our position.

*Freda*. Ah, yes!

*Lady Cheshire*. You ought to know me better than to think I'm purely selfish.

*Freda*. Would you like to put yourself in my position?

*Lady Cheshire*. What!

*Freda*. Yes. Just like Rose.

*Lady Cheshire*. [In a low, horror-stricken voice] Oh!

There is a dead silence, then going swiftly up to her, she looks straight into FREDA's eyes.

*Freda*. [Meeting her gaze] Oh! Yes—it's the truth. [Then to Bill who has come in from the workroom, she gasps out] I never meant to tell.

*Bill*. Well, are you satisfied?

*Lady Cheshire*. [Below her breath] This is terrible!

*Bill*. The Governor had better know.

*Lady Cheshire*. Oh! no; not yet!

*Bill*. Waiting won't cure it!

The door from the corridor is thrown open; *Christine* and *Dot* run in with their copies of the play in their hands; seeing that something is wrong, they stand still. After a look at his mother, *bill* turns abruptly, and goes back into the workroom. *Lady Cheshire* moves towards the window.

*Joan*. [Following her sisters] The car's round. What's the matter?

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*Dot*. Shut up!

*Sir William's* voice is heard from the corridor calling "Dorothy!" As *lady Cheshire*, passing her handkerchief over her face, turns round, he enters. He is in full hunting dress: well-weathered pink, buckskins, and mahogany tops.

*Sir William*. Just off, my dear. [To his daughters, genially] Rehearsin'? What! [He goes up to *Freda* holding out his gloved right hand] Button that for me, Freda, would you? It's a bit stiff!

*Freda* buttons the glove: *Lady Cheshire* and the girls watching in hypnotic silence.

*Sir William*. Thank you! "Balmy as May"; scent ought to be first-rate. [To *lady Cheshire*] Good-bye, my dear! Sampson's Gorse —best day of the whole year. [He pats *Joan* on the shoulder] Wish you were cumin' out, Joan.

He goes out, leaving the door open, and as his footsteps and the chink of his spurs die away, *Freda* turns and rushes into the workroom.

*Christine*. Mother! What——?

But *lady Cheshire* waves the question aside, passes her daughter, and goes out into the corridor. The sound of a motor car is heard.

*Joan*. [Running to the window] They've started—! Chris! What is it? Dot?

*Dot*. Bill, and her!

*Joan*. But what?

*Dot*. [Gloomily] Heaven knows! Go away, you're not fit for this.

*Joan*. [Aghast] I am fit.

*Dot*. I think not.

*Joan*. Chris?

*Christine*. [In a hard voice] Mother ought to have told us.

*Joan*. It can't be very awful. Freda's so good.

*Dot*. Call yourself in love, you milk-and-water-kitten!

*Christine*. It's horrible, not knowing anything! I wish Runny hadn't gone.

*Joan*. Shall I fetch John?

*Dot*. John!

*Christine*. Perhaps Harold knows.

*Joan*. He went out with Studdenham.

*Dot*. It's always like this, women kept in blinkers. Rose-leaves and humbug! That awful old man!

*Joan*. Dot!

*Christine*. Don't talk of father like that!

*Dot*. Well, he is! And Bill will be just like him at fifty! Heaven help Freda, whatever she's done! I'd sooner be a private in a German regiment than a woman.

*Joan*. Dot, you're awful.

*Dot*. You-mouse-hearted-linnet!

*Christine*. Don't talk that nonsense about women!

*Dot*. You're married and out of it; and Ronny's not one of these terrific John Bulls. [To *Joan* who has opened the door] Looking for John? No good, my dear; lath and plaster.

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*Joan*. [From the door, in a frightened whisper] Here's Mabel!

*Dot*. Heavens, and the waters under the earth!

*Christine*. If we only knew!

*Mabel* comes in, the three girls are silent, with their eyes fixed on their books.

*Mabel*. The silent company.

*Dot*. [Looking straight at her] We're chucking it for to-day.

*Mabel*. What's the matter?

*Christine*. Oh! nothing.

*Dot*. Something's happened.

*Mabel*. Really! I am sorry. [Hesitating] Is it bad enough for me to go?

*Christine*. Oh! no, Mabel!

*Dot*. [Sardonically] I should think very likely.

While she is looking from face to face, *bill* comes in from the workroom. He starts to walk across the room, but stops, and looks stolidly at the four girls.

*Bill*. Exactly! Fact of the matter is, Miss Lanfarne, I'm engaged to my mother's maid.

No one moves or speaks. Suddenly *Mabel Lanfarne* goes towards him, holding out her hand. *Bill* does not take her hand, but bows. Then after a swift glance at the girls' faces *Mabel* goes out into the corridor, and the three girls are left staring at their brother.

*Bill*. [Coolly] Thought you might like to know.
[He, too, goes out into the corridor.]

*Christine*. Great heavens!

*Joan*. How awful!

*Christine*. I never thought of anything as bad as that.

*Joan*. Oh! Chris! Something must be done!

*Dot*. [Suddenly to herself] Ha!  When Father went up to have his glove buttoned!

There is a sound, *Jackson* has came in from the corridor.

*Jackson*. [To Dot] If you please, Miss, Studdenham's brought up the other two pups. He's just outside.  Will you kindly take a look at them, he says?

There is silence.

*Dot*. [Suddenly] We can't.

*Christine*.  Not just now, Jackson.

*Jackson*.  Is Studdenham and the pups to wait, Mm?

*Dot* shakes her head violently.  But *Studdenham* is seen already standing in the doorway, with a spaniel puppy in either side-pocket.  He comes in, and *Jackson* stands waiting behind him.

*Studdenham*.  This fellow's the best, Miss *Dot*. [He protrudes the right-hand pocket] I was keeping him for my girl—a, proper greedy one—takes after his father.

The girls stare at him in silence.

*Dot*. [Hastily] Thanks, Studdenham, I see.

*Studdenham*.  I won't take 'em out in here.  They're rather bold yet.

*Christine*. [Desperately] No, no, of course.

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*Studdenham*. Then you think you'd like him, Miss *Dot*? The other's got a white chest; she's a lady.

[He protrudes the left-hand pocket.]

*Dot*. Oh, yes! Studdenham; thanks, thanks awfully.

*Studdenham*. Wonderful faithful creatures; follow you like a woman. You can't shake 'em off anyhow. [He protrudes the right-hand pocket] My girl, she'd set her heart on him, but she'll just have to do without.

*Dot*. [As though galvanised] Oh! no, I can't take it away from her.

*Studdenham*. Bless you, she won't mind! That's settled, then. [He turns to the door. To the *puppy*] Ah! would you! Tryin' to wriggle out of it! Regular young limb! [He goes out, followed by *Jackson*.]

*Christine*. How ghastly!

*Dot*. [Suddenly catching sight of the book in her hand] "Caste!"
[She gives vent to a short sharp laugh.]

The curtain falls.

*Act* III

It is five o'clock of the same day. The scene is the smoking-room, with walls of Leander red, covered by old steeplechase and hunting prints. Armchairs encircle a high ferulered hearth, in which a fire is burning. The curtains are not yet drawn across mullioned windows, but electric light is burning. There are two doors, leading, the one to the billiard-room, the other to a corridor. *Bill* is pacing up and doom; *Harold*, at the fireplace, stands looking at him with commiseration.

*Bill*. What's the time?

*Harold*. Nearly five. They won't be in yet, if that's any consolation. Always a tough meet—[softly] as the tiger said when he ate the man.

*Bill*. By Jove! You're the only person I can stand within a mile of me, Harold.

*Harold*. Old boy! Do you seriously think you're going to make it any better by marrying her?

[Bill shrugs his shoulders, still pacing the room.]

*Bill*. Look here! I'm not the sort that finds it easy to say things.

*Harold*. No, old man.

*Bill*. But I've got a kind of self-respect though you wouldn't think it!

*Harold*. My dear old chap!

*Bill*. This is about as low-down a thing as one could have done, I suppose—one's own mother's maid; we've known her since she was so high. I see it now that—I've got over the attack.

*Harold*. But, heavens! if you're no longer keen on her, Bill! Do apply your reason, old boy.

There is silence; while *bill* again paces up and dozen.

*Bill*. If you think I care two straws about the morality of the thing.

*Harold*. Oh! my dear old man! Of course not!

*Bill*. It's simply that I shall feel such a d——d skunk, if I leave her in the lurch, with everybody knowing. Try it yourself; you'd soon see!

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*Harold*. Poor old chap!

*Bill*. It's not as if she'd tried to force me into it. And she's a soft little thing. Why I ever made such a sickening ass of myself, I can't think. I never meant——

*Harold*. No, I know! But, don't do anything rash, Bill; keep your head, old man!

*Bill*. I don't see what loss I should be, if I did clear out of the country. [The sound of cannoning billiard balls is heard] Who's that knocking the balls about?

*Harold*. John, I expect. [The sound ceases.]

*Bill*. He's coming in here. Can't stand that!

As *latter* appears from the billiard-room, he goes hurriedly out.

*Latter*. Was that Bill?

*Harold*. Yes.

*Latter*. Well?

*Harold*. [Pacing up and down in his turn] Rat in a cage is a fool to him. This is the sort of thing you read of in books, John! What price your argument with Runny now? Well, it's not too late for you luckily.

*Latter*. What do you mean?

*Harold*. You needn't connect yourself with this eccentric family!

*Latter*. I'm not a bounder, Harold.

*Harold*. Good!

*Latter*. It's terrible for your sisters.

*Harold*. Deuced lucky we haven't a lot of people staying here! Poor mother! John, I feel awfully bad about this. If something isn't done, pretty mess I shall be in.

*Latter*. How?

*Harold*. There's no entail. If the Governor cuts Bill off, it'll all come to me.

*Latter*. Oh!

*Harold*. Poor old Bill! I say, the play! Nemesis! What? Moral! Caste don't matter. Got us fairly on the hop.

*Latter*. It's too bad of Bill. It really is. He's behaved disgracefully.

*Harold*. [Warningly] Well! There are thousands of fellows who'd never dream of sticking to the girl, considering what it means.

*Latter*. Perfectly disgusting!

*Harold*. Hang you, John! Haven't you any human sympathy? Don't you know how these things come about? It's like a spark in a straw-yard.

*Latter*. One doesn't take lighted pipes into strawyards unless one's an idiot, or worse.

*Harold*. H'm! [With a grin] You're not allowed tobacco. In the good old days no one would hive thought anything of this. My great-grandfather——

*Latter*. Spare me your great-grandfather.

*Harold*. I could tell you of at least a dozen men I know who've been through this same business, and got off scot-free; and now because Bill's going to play the game, it'll smash him up.

*Latter*. Why didn't he play the game at the beginning?

*Harold*. I can't stand your sort, John. When a thing like this happens, all you can do is to cry out: Why didn't he—? Why didn't she—? What's to be done—that's the point!

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*Latter*. Of course he'll have to——.

*Harold*. Ha!

*Latter*. What do you mean by—that?

*Harold*. Look here, John! You feel in your bones that a marriage'll be hopeless, just as I do, knowing Bill and the girl and everything! Now don't you?

*Latter*. The whole thing is—is most unfortunate.

*Harold*. By Jove! I should think it was!

As he speaks *Christine* and *Keith* Come in from the billiard-room. He is still in splashed hunting clothes, and looks exceptionally weathered, thin-lipped, reticent. He lights a cigarette and sinks into an armchair. Behind them *Dot* and *Joan* have come stealing in.

*Christine*. I've told Ronny.

*Joan*. This waiting for father to be told is awful.

*Harold*. [To *Keith*] Where did you leave the old man?

*Keith*. Clackenham. He'll be home in ten minutes.

*Dot*. Mabel's going. [They all stir, as if at fresh consciousness of discomfiture]. She walked into Gracely and sent herself a telegram.

*Harold*. Phew!

*Dot*. And we shall say good-bye, as if nothing had happened.

*Harold*. It's up to you, Ronny.

> *Keith*, looking at *Joan*, slowly emits smoke; and *latter* passing his arm through *Joan's*, draws her away with him into the billiard-room.

*Keith*. Dot?

*Dot*. I'm not a squeamy squirrel.

*Keith*. Anybody seen the girl since?

*Dot*. Yes.

*Harold*. Well?

*Dot*. She's just sitting there.

*Christine*. [In a hard voice] As we're all doing.

*Dot*. She's so soft, that's what's so horrible. If one could only feel——!

*Keith*. She's got to face the music like the rest of us.

*Dot*. Music! Squeaks! Ugh! The whole thing's like a concertina, and some one jigging it!

They all turn as the door opens, and a *footman* enters with a tray of whiskey, gin, lemons, and soda water. In dead silence the *footman* puts the tray down.

*Harold*. [Forcing his voice] Did you get a run, Ronny? [As *Keith* nods] What point?

*Keith*. Eight mile.

*Footman*. Will you take tea, sir?

*Keith*. No, thanks, Charles!

In dead silence again the *footman* goes out, and they all look after him.

*Harold*. [Below his breath] Good Gad! That's a squeeze of it!

*Keith*. What's our line of country to be?

*Christine*. All depends on father.

*Keith*. Sir William's between the devil and the deep sea, as it strikes me.

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*Christine*. He'll simply forbid it utterly, of course.

*Keith*. H'm! Hard case! Man who reads family prayers, and lessons on Sunday forbids son to——

*Christine*, Ronny!

*Keith*. Great Scott! I'm not saying Bill ought to marry her. She's got to stand the racket. But your Dad will have a tough job to take up that position.

*Dot*. Awfully funny!

*Christine*. What on earth d'you mean, Dot?

*Dot*. Morality in one eye, and your title in the other!

*Christine*. Rubbish!

*Harold*. You're all reckoning without your Bill.

*Keith*. Ye-es. Sir William can cut him off; no mortal power can help the title going down, if Bill chooses to be such a——
[He draws in his breath with a sharp hiss.]

*Harold*. I won't take what Bill ought to have; nor would any of you girls, I should think.

*Christine* and *Dot*. Of course not!

*Keith*. [Patting his wife's arm] Hardly the point, is it?

*Dot*. If it wasn't for mother! Freda's just as much of a lady as most girls. Why shouldn't he marry her, and go to Canada? It's what he's really fit for.

*Harold*. Steady on, Dot!

*Dot*. Well, imagine him in Parliament! That's what he'll come to, if he stays here—jolly for the country!

*Christine*. Don't be cynical! We must find a way of stopping Bill.

*Dot*. Me cynical!

*Christine*. Let's go and beg him, Ronny!

*Keith*. No earthly! The only hope is in the girl.

*Dot*. She hasn't the stuff in her!

*Harold*. I say! What price young Dunning! Right about face! Poor old Dad!

*Christine*. It's past joking, Harold!

*Dot*. [Gloomily] Old Studdenham's better than most relations by marriage!

*Keith*. Thanks!

*Christine*. It's ridiculous—monstrous! It's fantastic!

*Harold*. [Holding up his hand] There's his horse going round. He's in!

They turn from listening to the sound, to see *lady Cheshire* coming from the billiard-room. She is very pale. They all rise and *Dot* puts an arm round her; while *Keith* pushes forward his chair. *Joan* and *latter* too have come stealing back.

*Lady Cheshire*. Thank you, Ronny!
[She sits down.]

*Dot*. Mother, you're shivering! Shall I get you a fur?

*Lady Cheshire*. No, thanks, dear!

*Dot*. [In a low voice] Play up, mother darling!

*Lady Cheshire*. [Straightening herself] What sort of a run, Ronny?

*Keith*. Quite fair, M'm. Brazier's to Caffyn's Dyke, good straight line.

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*Lady Cheshire*. And the young horse?

*Keith*. Carries his ears in your mouth a bit, that's all. [Putting his hand on her shoulder] Cheer up, Mem-Sahib!

*Christine*. Mother, must anything be said to father? Ronny thinks it all depends on her. Can't you use your influence? [*Lady Cheshire* shakes her head.]

*Christine*. But, mother, it's desperate.

*Dot*. Shut up, Chris! Of course mother can't. We simply couldn't beg her to let us off!

*Christine*. There must be some way. What do you think in your heart, mother?

*Dot*. Leave mother alone!

*Christine*. It must be faced, now or never.

*Dot*. [In a low voice] Haven't you any self-respect?

*Christine*. We shall be the laughing-stock of the whole county. Oh! mother do speak to her! You know it'll be misery for both of them. [*Lady Cheshire* bows her head] Well, then? [*Lady Cheshire* shakes her head.]

*Christine*. Not even for Bill's sake?

*Dot*. Chris!

*Christine*. Well, for heaven's sake, speak to Bill again, mother! We ought all to go on our knees to him.

*Lady Cheshire*. He's with your father now.

*Harold*. Poor old Bill!

*Christine*. [Passionately] He didn't think of us! That wretched girl!

*Lady Cheshire*. Chris!

*Christine*. There are limits!

*Lady Cheshire*. Not to self-control.

*Christine*. No, mother! I can't I never shall—Something must be done! You know what Bill is. He rushes at things so, when he gets his head down. Oh! do try! It's only fair to her, and all of us!

*Lady Cheshire*. [Painfully] There are things one can't do.

*Christine*. But it's Bill! I know you can make her give him up, if you'll only say all you can. And, after all, what's coming won't affect her as if she'd been a lady. Only you can do it, mother: Do back me up, all of you! It's the only way!

Hypnotised by their private longing for what *Christine* has been urging they have all fixed their eyes on *lady Cheshire*, who looks from, face to face, and moves her hands as if in physical pain.

*Christine*. [Softly] Mother!

*Lady Cheshire* suddenly rises, looking towards the billiard-room door, listening. They all follow her eyes. She sits down again, passing her hand over her lips, as *sir William* enters. His hunting clothes are splashed; his face very grim and set. He walks to the fore without a glance at any one, and stands looking down into it. Very quietly, every one but *lady Cheshire* steals away.

*Lady Cheshire*. What have you done?

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*Sir William*. You there!

*Lady Cheshire*. Don't keep me in suspense!

*Sir William*. The fool! My God! Dorothy! I didn't think I had a blackguard for a son, who was a fool into the bargain.

*Lady Cheshire*. [Rising] If he were a blackguard he would not be what you call a fool.

*Sir William*. [After staring angrily, makes her a slight bow] Very well!

*Lady Cheshire*. [In a low voice] Bill, don't be harsh. It's all too terrible.

*Sir William*. Sit down, my dear.
[She resumes her seat, and he turns back to the fire.]

*Sir William*. In all my life I've never been face to face with a thing like this. [Gripping the mantelpiece so hard that his hands and arms are seen shaking] You ask me to be calm. I am trying to be. Be good enough in turn not to take his part against me.

*Lady Cheshire*. Bill!

*Sir William*. I am trying to think. I understand that you've known this—piece of news since this morning. I've known it ten minutes. Give me a little time, please. [Then, after a silence] Where's the girl?

*Lady Cheshire*. In the workroom.

*Sir William*. [Raising his clenched fist] What in God's name is he about?

*Lady Cheshire*. What have you said to him?

*Sir William*. Nothing-by a miracle. [He breaks away from the fire and walks up and down] My family goes back to the thirteenth century. Nowadays they laugh at that! I don't! Nowadays they laugh at everything—they even laugh at the word lady. I married you, and I don't .... Married his mother's maid! By George! Dorothy! I don't know what we've done to deserve this; it's a death blow! I'm not prepared to sit down and wait for it. By Gad! I am not. [With sudden fierceness] There are plenty in these days who'll be glad enough for this to happen; plenty of these d——d Socialists and Radicals, who'll laugh their souls out over what they haven't the bowels to sees a—tragedy. I say it would be a tragedy; for you, and me, and all of us. You and I were brought up, and we've brought the children up, with certain beliefs, and wants, and habits. A man's past—his traditions—he can't get rid of them. They're—they're himself! [Suddenly] It shan't go on.

*Lady Cheshire*. What's to prevent it?

*Sir William*. I utterly forbid this piece of madness. I'll stop it.

*Lady Cheshire*. But the thing we can't stop.

*Sir William*. Provision must be made.

*Lady Cheshire*. The unwritten law!

*Sir William*. What! [Suddenly perceiving what she is alluding to] You're thinking of young—young——[Shortly] I don't see the connection.

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*Lady Cheshire*. What's so awful, is that the boy's trying to do what's loyal—and we—his father and mother——!

*Sir William*. I'm not going to see my eldest son ruin his life. I must think this out.

*Lady Cheshire*. [Beneath her breath] I've tried that—it doesn't help.

*Sir William*. This girl, who was born on the estate, had the run of the house—brought up with money earned from me—nothing but kindness from all of us; she's broken the common rules of gratitude and decency—she lured him on, I haven't a doubt!

*Lady Cheshire*. [To herself] In a way, I suppose.

*Sir William*. What! It's ruin. We've always been here. Who the deuce are we if we leave this place? D'you think we could stay? Go out and meet everybody just as if nothing had happened? Good-bye to any prestige, political, social, or anything! This is the sort of business nothing can get over. I've seen it before. As to that other matter—-it's soon forgotten—constantly happening—Why, my own grandfather——!

*Lady Cheshire*. Does he help?

*Sir William*. [Stares before him in silence-suddenly] You must go to the girl. She's soft. She'll never hold out against you.

*Lady Cheshire*. I did before I knew what was in front of her—I said all I could. I can't go again now. I can't do it, Bill.

*Sir William*. What are you going to do, then—fold your hands? [Then as *lady Cheshire* makes a move of distress.] If he marries her, I've done with him. As far as I'm concerned he'll cease to exist. The title—I can't help. My God! Does that meet your wishes?

*Lady Cheshire*. [With sudden fire] You've no right to put such an alternative to me. I'd give ten years of my life to prevent this marriage. I'll go to Bill. I'll beg him on my knees.

*Sir William*. Then why can't you go to the girl? She deserves no consideration. It's not a question of morality: Morality be d——d!

*Lady Cheshire*. But not self-respect....

*Sir William*. What! You're his mother!

*Lady Cheshire*. I've tried; I [putting her hand to her throat] can't get it out.

*Sir William*. [Staring at her] You won't go to her? It's the only chance. [*Lady Cheshire* turns away.]

*Sir William*. In the whole course of our married life, Dorothy, I've never known you set yourself up against me. I resent this, I warn you—I resent it. Send the girl to me. I'll do it myself.

With a look back at him *lady Cheshire* goes out into the corridor.

*Sir William*. This is a nice end to my day!

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He takes a small china cup from of the mantel-piece; it breaks with the pressure of his hand, and falls into the fireplace. While he stands looking at it blankly, there is a knock.

*Sir William*. Come in!

*Freda* enters from the corridor.

*Sir William*. I've asked you to be good enough to come, in order that—[pointing to chair]—You may sit down.

But though she advances two or three steps, she does not sit down.

*Sir William*. This is a sad business.

*Freda*. [Below her breath] Yes, Sir William.

*Sir William*. [Becoming conscious of the depths of feeling before him] I—er—are you attached to my son?

*Freda*. [In a whisper] Yes.

*Sir William*. It's very painful to me to have to do this. [He turns away from her and speaks to the fire.] I sent for you—to—ask— [quickly] How old are you?

*Freda*. Twenty-two.

*Sir William*. [More resolutely] Do you expect me to sanction such a mad idea as a marriage?

*Freda*. I don't expect anything.

*Sir William*. You know—you haven't earned the right to be considered.

*Freda*. Not yet!

*Sir William*. What! That oughtn't to help you! On the contrary. Now brace yourself up, and listen to me!

She stands waiting to hear her sentence. *Sir William* looks at her; and his glance gradually wavers.

*Sir William*. I've not a word to say for my son. He's behaved like a scamp.

*Freda*. Oh! no!

*Sir William*. [With a silencing gesture] At the same, time—What made you forget yourself? You've no excuse, you know.

*Freda*. No.

*Sir William*. You'll deserve all you'll get. Confound it! To expect me to—It's intolerable! Do you know where my son is?

*Freda*. [Faintly] I think he's in the billiard-room with my lady.

*Sir William*. [With renewed resolution] I wanted to—to put it to you—as a—as a—what! [Seeing her stand so absolutely motionless, looking at him, he turns abruptly, and opens the billiard-room door] I'll speak to him first. Come in here, please! [To *Freda*] Go in, and wait!

*Lady Cheshire* and *bill* Come in, and *Freda* passing them, goes into the billiard-room to wait.

*Sir William*. [Speaking with a pause between each sentence] Your mother and I have spoken of this—calamity. I imagine that even you have some dim perception of the monstrous nature of it. I must tell you this: If you do this mad thing, you fend for yourself. You'll receive nothing from me now or hereafter. I consider that only due to the position our family has always held here. Your brother will take your place. We shall—get on as best we can without you. [There is a dead silence till he adds sharply] Well!

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*Bill*. I shall marry her.

*Lady Cheshire*. Oh! Bill! Without love-without anything!

*Bill*. All right, mother! [To *sir William*] you've mistaken your man, sir. Because I'm a rotter in one way, I'm not necessarily a rotter in all. You put the butt end of the pistol to Dunning's head yesterday, you put the other end to mine to-day. Well! [He turns round to go out] Let the d——d thing off!

*Lady Cheshire*. Bill!

*Bill*. [Turning to her] I'm not going to leave her in the lurch.

*Sir William*. Do me the justice to admit that I have not attempted to persuade you to.

*Bill*. No! you've chucked me out. I don't see what else you could have done under the circumstances. It's quite all right. But if you wanted me to throw her over, father, you went the wrong way to work, that's all; neither you nor I are very good at seeing consequences.

*Sir William*. Do you realise your position?

*Bilk*. [Grimly] I've a fair notion of it.

*Sir William*. [With a sudden outburst] You have none—not the faintest, brought up as you've been.

*Bill*. I didn't bring myself up.

*Sir William*. [With a movement of uncontrolled anger, to which his son responds] You—-ungrateful young dog!

*Lady Cheshire*. How can you—both?
[They drop their eyes, and stand silent.]

*Sir William*. [With grimly suppressed emotion] I am speaking under the stress of very great pain—some consideration is due to me. This is a disaster which I never expected to have to face. It is a matter which I naturally can never hope to forget. I shall carry this down to my death. We shall all of us do that. I have had the misfortune all my life to believe in our position here—to believe that we counted for something—that the country wanted us. I have tried to do my duty by that position. I find in one moment that it is gone— smoke—gone. My philosophy is not equal to that. To countenance this marriage would be unnatural.

*Bill*. I know. I'm sorry. I've got her into this—I don't see any other way out. It's a bad business for me, father, as well as for you——

He stops, seeing that *Jackson* has route in, and is standing there waiting.

*Jackson*. Will you speak to Studdenham, Sir William? It's about young Dunning.

After a moment of dead silence, *sir William* nods, and the butler withdraws.

*Bill*. [Stolidly] He'd better be told.

*Sir William*. He shall be.

*Studdenham* enters, and touches his forehead to them all with a comprehensive gesture.

*Studdenham*. Good evenin', my lady! Evenin', Sir William!

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*Studdenham*. Glad to be able to tell you, the young man's to do the proper thing. Asked me to let you know, Sir William. Banns'll be up next Sunday. [Struck by the silence, he looks round at all three in turn, and suddenly seeing that *lady Cheshire* is shivering] Beg pardon, my lady, you're shakin' like a leaf!

*Bill*. [Blurting it out] I've a painful piece of news for you, Studdenham; I'm engaged to your daughter. We're to be married at once.

*Studdenham*. I—don't—understand you—sir.

*Bill*. The fact is, I've behaved badly; but I mean to put it straight.

*Studdenham*. I'm a little deaf. Did you say—my daughter?

*Sir William*. There's no use mincing matters, Studdenham. It's a thunderbolt—young Dunning's case over again.

*Studdenham*. I don't rightly follow. She's—You've—! I must see my daughter. Have the goodness to send for her, m'lady.

> *Lady Cheshire* goes to the billiard-room, and calls: "*Freda*, come here, please."

*Studdenham*. [*To sir William*] *you* tell me that my daughter's in the position of that girl owing to your son? Men ha' been shot for less.

*Bill*. If you like to have a pot at me, Studdenham you're welcome.

*Studdenham*. [Averting his eyes from *bill* at the sheer idiocy of this sequel to his words] I've been in your service five and twenty years, Sir William; but this is man to man—this is!

*Sir William*. I don't deny that, Studdenham.

*Studdenham*. [With eyes shifting in sheer anger] No—'twouldn't be very easy. Did I understand him to say that he offers her marriage?

*Sir William*. You did.

*Studdenham*. [Into his beard] Well—that's something! [Moving his hands as if wringing the neck of a bird] I'm tryin' to see the rights o' this.

*Sir William*. [Bitterly] You've all your work cut out for you, Studdenham.

Again *Studdenham* makes the unconscious wringing movement with his hands.

*Lady Cheshire*. [Turning from it with a sort of horror] Don't, Studdenham! Please!

*Studdenham*. What's that, m'lady?

*Lady Cheshire*. [Under her breath] Your—your—hands.

While *Studdenham* is still staring at her, *Freda* is seen standing in the doorway, like a black ghost.

*Studdenham*. Come here! You! [*Freda* moves a few steps towards her father] When did you start this?

*Freda*. [Almost inaudibly] In the summer, father.

*Lady Cheshire*. Don't be harsh to her!

*Studdenham*. Harsh! [His eyes again move from side to side as if pain and anger had bewildered them. Then looking sideways at *Freda*, but in a gentler voice] And when did you tell him about—what's come to you?

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*Freda*. Last night.

*Studdenham*. Oh! [With sudden menace] You young—! [He makes a convulsive movement of one hand; then, in the silence, seems to lose grip of his thoughts, and pits his hand up to his head] I want to clear me mind a bit—I don't see it plain at all. [Without looking at *bill*] 'Tis said there's been an offer of marriage?

*Bill*. I've made it, I stick to it.

*Studdenham*. Oh! [With slow, puzzled anger] I want time to get the pith o' this. You don't say anything, Sir William?

*Sir William*. The facts are all before you.

*Studdenham*. [Scarcely moving his lips] M'lady?

*Lady Cheshire* is silent.

*Studdenham*. [Stammering] My girl was—was good enough for any man. It's not for him that's—that's to look down on her. [To *Freda*] You hear the handsome offer that's been made you? Well? [*Freda* moistens her lips and tries to speak, but cannot] If nobody's to speak a word, we won't get much forrarder. I'd like for you to say what's in your mind, Sir William.

*Sir William*. I—If my son marries her he'll have to make his own way.

*Studdenham*. [Savagely] I'm not puttin' thought to that.

*Sir William*. I didn't suppose you were, Studdenham. It appears to rest with your daughter. [He suddenly takes out his handkerchief, and puts it to his forehead] Infernal fires they make up here!

*Lady Cheshire*, who is again shivering desperately, as if with intense cold, makes a violent attempt to control her shuddering.

*Studdenham*. [Suddenly] There's luxuries that's got to be paid for. [To *Freda*] Speak up, now.

*Freda* turns slowly and looks up at *sir William*; he involuntarily raises his hand to his mouth. Her eyes travel on to *lady Cheshire*, who faces her, but so deadly pale that she looks as if she were going to faint. The girl's gaze passes on to *bill*, standing rigid, with his jaw set.

*Freda*. I want—[Then flinging her arm up over her eyes, she turns from him] No!

*Sir William*. Ah!

At that sound of profound relief, *Studdenham*, whose eyes have been following his daughter's, moves towards *sir William*, all his emotion turned into sheer angry pride.

*Studdenham*. Don't be afraid, Sir William! We want none of you! She'll not force herself where she's not welcome. She may ha' slipped her good name, but she'll keep her proper pride. I'll have no charity marriage in my family.

*Sir William*. Steady, Studdenham!

*Studdenham*. If the young gentleman has tired of her in three months, as a blind man can see by the looks of him—she's not for him!

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*Bill*. [Stepping forward] I'm ready to make it up to her.

*Studdenham*. Keep back, there? [He takes hold of *Freda*, and looks around him] Well! She's not the first this has happened to since the world began, an' she won't be the last. Come away, now, come away!

Taking *Freda* by the shoulders, he guides her towards the door.

*Sir William*. D——n 'it, Studdenham! Give us credit for something!

*Studdenham*. [Turning his face and eyes lighted up by a sort of smiling snarl] Ah! I do that, Sir William. But there's things that can't be undone!

He follows *Freda* Out. As the door closes, *sir William's* Calm gives way. He staggers past his wife, and sinks heavily, as though exhausted, into a chair by the fire. *Bill*, following *Freda* and *Studdenham*, has stopped at the shut door. *Lady Cheshire* moves swiftly close to him. The door of the billiard-room is opened, and *Dot* appears. With a glance round, she crosses quickly to her mother.

*Dot*. [In a low voice] Mabel's just going, mother! [Almost whispering] Where's Freda? Is it—Has she really had the pluck?

*Lady Cheshire* bending her head for "Yes," goes out into the billiard-room. *Dot* clasps her hands together, and standing there in the middle of the room, looks from her brother to her father, from her father to her brother. A quaint little pitying smile comes on her lips. She gives a faint shrug of her shoulders.

The curtain falls.

## THE LITTLE DREAM

An Allegory in six scenes

## CHARACTERS

*Seelchen*, a mountain girl
*Lamond*, a climber
*Felsman*, a glide

# CHARACTERS IN THE DREAM

*The great horn* |
the cow horn | mountains
the wine horn |

The edelweiss |
the ALPENROSE | flowers
the gentian |
the mountain dandelion |

## VOICES AND FIGURES IN THE DREAM

*Cowbells*
*mountain air*
*far view of Italy*
*distant Flume of steam*
*things in books*
*moth children*
*three dancing youths*
*three dancing girls*
*the forms of workers*
*the forms of what is made by work*
*death by slumber*
*death by drowning*
*flower children*
*goatherd*
*goat boys*
*goat god*
*the forms of sleep*

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## SCENE I

It is just after sunset of an August evening. The scene is a room in a mountain hut, furnished only with a table, benches. and a low broad window seat. Through this window three rocky peaks are seen by the light of a moon which is slowly whitening the last hues of sunset. An oil lamp is burning. *Seelchen*, a mountain girl, eighteen years old, is humming a folk-song, and putting away in a cupboard freshly washed soup-bowls and glasses. She is dressed in a tight-fitting black velvet bodice. square-cut at the neck and partly filled in with a gay handkerchief, coloured rose-pink, blue, and golden, like the alpen-rose, the gentian, and the mountain dandelion; alabaster beads, pale as edelweiss, are round her throat; her stiffened. white linen sleeves finish at the elbow; and her full well-worn skirt is of gentian blue. The two thick plaits of her hair are crossed, and turned round her head. As she puts away the last bowl, there is a knock; and *Lamond* opens the outer door. He is young, tanned, and good-looking, dressed like a climber, and carries a plaid, a ruck-sack, and an ice-axe.

Lamond. Good evening!

*Seelchen*. Good evening, gentle Sir!

*Lamond*. My name is Lamond. I'm very late I fear.

*Seelchen*. Do you wish to sleep here?

*Lamond*. Please.

*Seelchen*. All the beds are full—it is a pity. I will call Mother.

*Lamond*. I've come to go up the Great Horn at sunrise.

*Seelchen*. [Awed] The Great Horn! But he is impossible.

*Lamond*. I am going to try that.

*Seelchen*. There is the Wine Horn, and the Cow Horn.

*Lamond*. I have climbed them.

*Seelchen*. But he is so dangerous—it is perhaps—death.

*Lamond*. Oh! that's all right! One must take one's chance.

*Seelchen*. And father has hurt his foot. For guide, there is only Mans Felsman.

*Lamond*. The celebrated Felsman?

*Seelchen*. [Nodding; then looking at him with admiration] Are you that Herr Lamond who has climbed all our little mountains this year?

*Lamond*. All but that big fellow.

*Seelchen*. We have heard of you. Will you not wait a day for father's foot?

*Lamond*. Ah! no. I must go back home to-morrow.

*Seelchen*. The gracious Sir is in a hurry.

*Lamond*. [Looking at her intently] Alas!

*Seelchen*. Are you from London? Is it very big?

*Lamond*. Six million souls.

*Seelchen*. Oh! [After a little pause] I have seen Cortina twice.

*Lamond*. Do you live here all the year?

*Seelchen*. In winter in the valley.

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*Lamond*. And don't you want to see the world?

*Seelchen*. Sometimes. [Going to a door, she calls softly] Hans! [Then pointing to another door] There are seven German gentlemen asleep in there!

*Lamond*. Oh God!

*Seelchen*. Please? They are here to see the sunrise. [She picks up a little book that has dropped from LAMOND'S pocket] I have read several books.

*Lamond*. This is by the great English poet. Do you never make poetry here, and dream dreams, among your mountains?

*Seelchen*. [Slowly shaking her head] See! It is the full moon.

While they stand at the window looking at the moon, there enters a lean, well-built, taciturn young man dressed in Loden.

*Seelchen*. Hans!

*Felsman*. [In a deep voice] The gentleman wishes me?

*Seelchen*. [Awed] The Great Horn for to-morrow! [Whispering to him] It is the celebrated London one.

*Felsman*. The Great Horn is not possible.

*Lamond*. You say that? And you're the famous Felsman?

*Felsman*. [Grimly] We start at dawn.

*Seelchen*. It is the first time for years!

*Lamond*. [Placing his plaid and rucksack on the window bench] Can I sleep here?

*Seelchen*. I will see; perhaps—

[She runs out up some stairs]

*Felsman*. [Taking blankets from the cupboard and spreading them on the window seat] So!

As he goes out into the air. *Seelchen* comes slipping in again with a lighted candle.

*Seelchen*. There is still one bed. This is too hard for you.

*Lamond*. Oh! thanks; but that's all right.

*Seelchen*. To please me!

*Lamond*. May I ask your name?

*Seelchen*. Seelchen.

*Lamond*. Little soul, that means—doesn't it? To please you I would sleep with seven German gentlemen.

*Seelchen*. Oh! no; it is not necessary.

*Lamond*. [With. a grave bow] At your service, then.
[He prepares to go]

*Seelchen*. Is it very nice in towns, in the World, where you come from?

*Lamond*. When I'm there I would be here; but when I'm here I would be there.

*Seelchen*. [Clasping her hands] That is like me but I am always here.

*Lamond*. Ah! yes; there is no one like you in towns.

*Seelchen*. In two places one cannot be. [Suddenly] In the towns there are theatres, and there is beautiful fine work, and—dancing, and—churches—and trains—and all the things in books—and—

*Lamond*. Misery.

*Seelchen*. But there is life.

*Lamond*. And there is death.

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*Seelchen*. To-morrow, when you have climbed—will you not come back?

*Lamond*. No.

*Seelchen*. You have all the world; and I have nothing.

*Lamond*. Except Felsman, and the mountains.

*Seelchen*. It is not good to eat only bread.

*Lamond*. [Looking at her hard] I would like to eat you!

*Seelchen*. But I am not nice; I am full of big wants—like the cheese with holes.

*Lamond*. I shall come again.

*Seelchen*. There will be no more hard mountains left to climb. And if it is not exciting, you do not care.

*Lamond*. O wise little soul!

*Seelchen*. No. I am not wise. In here it is always aching.

*Lamond*. For the moon?

*Seelchen*. Yes. [Then suddenly] From the big world you will remember?

*Lamond*. [Taking her hand] There is nothing in the big world so sweet as this.

*Seelchen*. [Wisely] But there is the big world itself.

*Lamond*. May I kiss you, for good-night?

She puts her face forward; and he kisses her cheek, and, suddenly, her lips. Then as she draws away.

*Lamond*. I am sorry, little soul.

*Seelchen*. That's all right!

*Lamond*. [Taking the candle] Dream well! Goodnight!

*Seelchen*. [Softly] Good-night!

*Felsman*. [Coming in from the air, and eyeing them] It is cold—it will be fine.

*Lamond* still looking back goes up the stairs; and *Felsman* waits for him to pass.

*Seelchen*. [From the window seat] It was hard for him here. I thought.

He goes up to her, stays a moment looking down then bends and kisses her hungrily.

*Seelchen*. Art thou angry?

He does not answer, but turning out the lamp, goes into an inner room.

*Seelchen* sits gazing through the window at the peaks bathed in full moonlight. Then, drawing the blankets about her, she snuggles doom on the window seat.

*Seelchen*. [In a sleepy voice] They kissed me—both. [She sleeps]

The scene falls quite dark

## SCENE II

The scene is slowly illumined as by dawn. *Seelchen* is still lying on the window seat. She sits up, freeing her face and hands from the blankets, changing the swathings of deep sleep for the filmy coverings of a dream. The wall of the hut has vanished; there is nothing between her and the three mountains veiled in mist, save a through of darkness. There, as the peaks of the mountains brighten, they are seen to have great faces.

Seelchen. Oh! They have faces!

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The face of *the wine horn* is the profile of a beardless youth.  The face of *the cow horn* is that of a mountain shepherd. solemn, and broom, with fierce black eyes, and a black beard.  Between them *the great horn*, whose hair is of snow, has a high. beardless visage, as of carved bronze, like a male sphinx, serene, without cruelty.  Far down below the faces of the peaks. above the trough of darkness, are peeping out the four little heads of the flowers of *edelweiss*, and *gentian*, *mountain dandelion*, and ALPENROSE; on their heads are crowns made of their several flowers, all powdered with dewdrops; and when *the flowers* lift their child-faces little tinkling bells ring.

All around the peaks there is nothing but blue sky.

*Edelweiss*. [In a tiny voice] Would you?  Would you?  Would you?
Ah! ha!

*Gentian*, M. *Dandelion*, ALPENROSE [With their bells ranging enviously] Oo-oo-oo!

From behind the Cow *horn* are heard the voices of *Cowbells* and *mountain air*:

“Clinkel-clink!  Clinkel-clink!”
“Mountain air!  Mountain air!”

From behind *the wine horn* rise the rival voices Of *view of Italy*, *Flume of steam*, and *things in books*:

“I am Italy!  Italy!”

“See me—steam in the distance!”

“O remember the things in books!”

And all call out together, very softly, with *the flowers* ringing their bells.  Then far away like an echo comes a sighing:

“Mountain air!  Mountain air!”

And suddenly the Peak of *the cow horn* speaks in a voice as of one unaccustomed.

*The cow horn*.  Amongst kine and my black-brown sheep I Live; I am silence, and monotony; I am the solemn hills.  I am fierceness, and the mountain wind; clean pasture, and wild rest.  Look in my eyes. love me alone!

*Seelchen*. [Breathless] The Cow Horn!  He is speaking for Felsman and the mountains. It is the half of my heart!

*Theflowers* laugh happily.

*The cow horn*.  I stalk the eternal hills—I drink the mountain snows.  My eyes are the colour of burned wine; in them lives melancholy.  The lowing of the kine, the wind, the sound of falling rocks, the running of the torrents; no other talk know I. Thoughts simple, and blood hot, strength huge—the cloak of gravity.

*Seelchen*.  Yes. yes!  I want him.  He is strong!

The voices of *Cowbells* and *mountain air* cry out together:

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"Clinkel-clink!  Clinkel-clink!"

"Mountain air!  Mountain air!"

*The cow horn*.  Little soul!  Hold to me!  Love me!  Live with me under the stars!

*Seelchen*. [Below her breath] I am afraid.

And suddenly the Peak of *the wine horn* speaks in a youth's voice.

*The wine horn*.  I am the will o' the wisp that dances thro' the streets; I am the cooing dove of Towns, from the plane trees and the chestnuts' shade.  From day to day all changes, where I burn my incense to my thousand little gods.  In white palaces I dwell, and passionate dark alleys.  The life of men in crowds is mine—of lamplight in the streets at dawn. [Softly] I have a thousand loves. and never one too long; for I am nimbler than your heifers playing in the sunshine.

*Theflowers*, ringing in alarm, cry:

"We know them!"

*The wine horn*.  I hear the rustlings of the birth and death of pleasure; and the rattling of swift wheels.  I hear the hungry oaths of men; and love kisses in the airless night.  Without me, little soul, you starve and die,

*Seelchen*.  He is speaking for the gentle Sir, and the big world of the Town.  It pulls my heart.

*The wine horn*.  My thoughts surpass in number the flowers in your meadows; they fly more swiftly than your eagles on the wind.  I drink the wine of aspiration, and the drug of disillusion.  Thus am I never dull!

The voices of *view of Italy*, *Flume of steam*, and *things in books* are heard calling out together:

"I am Italy, Italy!"

"See me—steam in the distance!"

"O remember, remember!"

*The wine horn*.  Love me, little soul!  I paint life fifty colours.  I make a thousand pretty things!  I twine about your heart!

*Seelchen*. He is honey!

*Theflowers* ring their bells jealously and cry:

"Bitter! Bitter!"

*The cow horn*. Stay with me, Seelchen! I wake thee with the crystal air.

The voices of *Cowbells* and *mountain air* tiny out far away:

"Clinkel-clink! Clinkel-clink!"

"Mountain air! Mountain air!"

And *the flowers* laugh happily.

*The wine horn*. Come with me, Seelchen! My fan, Variety, shall wake you!

The voices of *view of Italy*, *Flume of steam* and *things in books* chant softly:

"I am Italy! Italy!"

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"See me—steam in the distance!"

"O remember, remember!"

And *the flowers* moan.

*Seelchen*. [In grief] My heart! It is torn!

*The wine horn*. With me, little soul, you shall race in the streets. and peep at all secrets. We will hold hands, and fly like the thistle-down.

M. *Dandelion*. My puff-balls fly faster!

*The wine horn*. I will show you the sea.

*Gentian*. My blue is deeper!

*The wine horn*. I will shower on you blushes.

ALPENROSE. I can blush redder!

*The wine horn*. Little soul, listen! My Jewels! Silk! Velvet!

*Edelweiss*. I am softer than velvet!

*The wine horn*. [Proudly] My wonderful rags!

*The flowers*. [Moaning] Of those we have none.

*Seelchen*. He has all things.

*The cow horn*. Mine are the clouds with the dark silvered wings; mine are the rocks on fire with the sun; and the dewdrops cooler than pearls. Away from my breath of snow and sweet grass, thou wilt droop, little soul.

*The wine horn*. The dark Clove is my fragrance!

*Theflowers* ring eagerly, and turning up their faces, cry:

"We too, smell sweet."

But the voices of *view of Italy*, *Flume of steam*, and *things in books* cry out:

"I am Italy! Italy!"

"See me—steam in the distance!"

"O remember! remember!"

*Seelchen*. [Distracted] Oh! it is hard!

*The cow horn*. I will never desert thee.

*The wine horn*. A hundred times I will desert you, a hundred times come back, and kiss you.

*Seelchen*. [Whispering] Peace for my heart!

*The cow horn*. With me thou shalt lie on the warm wild thyme.

*Theflowers* laugh happily.

*The wine horn*. With me you shall lie on a bed of dove's feathers.

*Theflowers* moan.

*The wine horn*. I will give you old wine.

*The cow horn*. I will give thee new milk.

*The wine horn*. Hear my song!

From far away comes the sound as of mandolins.

*Seelchen*. [Clasping her breast] My heart—it is leaving me!

*The cow horn*. Hear my song!

From the distance floats the piping of a Shepherd's reed.

*Seelchen*. [Curving her hand at her ears] The piping! Ah!

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*The cow horn*. Stay with me, Seelchen!

*The wine horn*. Come with me, Seelchen!

*The cow horn*. I give thee certainty!

*The wine horn*. I give you chance!

*The cow horn*. I give thee peace.

*The wine horn*. I give you change.

*The cow horn*. I give thee stillness.

*The wine horn*. I give you voice.

*The cow horn*. I give thee one love.

*The wine horn*. I give you many.

*Seelchen*. [As if the words were torn from her heart] Both, both—I will love!

And suddenly the Peak of *the great horn* speaks.

*The great horn*. And both thou shalt love, little soul! Thou shalt lie on the hills with Silence; and dance in the cities with Knowledge. Both shall possess thee! The sun and the moon on the mountains shall burn thee; the lamps of the town singe thy wings. small Moth! Each shall seem all the world to thee, each shall seem as thy grave! Thy heart is a feather blown from one mouth to the other. But be not afraid! For the life of a man is for all loves in turn. 'Tis a little raft moored, then sailing out into the blue; a tune caught in a hush, then whispering on; a new-born babe, half courage and half sleep. There is a hidden rhythm. Change. Quietude. Chance. Certainty. The One. The Many. Burn on—thou pretty flame, trying to eat the world! Thou shaft come to me at last, my little soul!

*The voices* and *the flower-bells* peal out.

*Seelchen*, enraptured, stretches her arms to embrace the sight and sound, but all fades slowly into dark sleep.

## SCENE III

The dark scene again becomes glamorous. *Seelchen* is seen with her hand stretched out towards the Piazza of a little town, with a plane tree on one side, a wall on the other,

and from the open doorway of an Inn a pale path of light. Over the Inn hangs a full golden moon. Against the wall, under the glimmer of a lamp, leans a youth with the face of *the wine horn*, in a crimson dock, thrumming a mandolin, and singing:

> "Little star soul
> Through the frost fields of night
> Roaming alone, disconsolate—
> From out the cold
> I call thee in
> Striking my dark mandolin
> Beneath this moon of gold."

From the Inn comes a burst of laughter, and the sound of dancing.

*Seelchen*: [Whispering] It is the big world!

The Youth of *the wine horn* sings On:

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"Pretty grey moth,
Where the strange candles shine,
Seeking for warmth, so desperate—
Ah! fluttering dove
I bid thee win
Striking my dark mandolin
The crimson flame of love."

*Seelchen*. [Gazing enraptured at the Inn] They are dancing!

As *she* speaks, from either side come moth-children, meeting and fluttering up the path of light to the Inn doorway; then wheeling aside, they form again, and again flutter forward.

*Seelchen*. [Holding out her hands] They are real! Their wings are windy.

The Youth of *the wine horn* sings on;

"Lips of my song,
To the white maiden's heart
Go ye, and whisper, passionate.
These words that burn
'O listening one!
Love that flieth past is gone
Nor ever may return!'"

*Seelchen* runs towards him—but the light above him fades; he has become shadow. She turns bewildered to the dancing moth-children —but they vanish before her. At the door of the Inn stands *Lamond* in a dark cloak.

*Seelchen*. It is you!

*Lamond*. Without my little soul I am cold. Come! [He holds out his arms to her]

*Seelchen*. Shall I be safe?

*Lamond*. What is safety? Are you safe in your mountains?

*Seelchen*. Where am I, here?

*Lamond*. The Town.

Smiling, he points to the doorway. And silent as shadows there come dancing out, two by two, two girls and two youths. The first girl is dressed in white satin and jewels; and

the first youth in black velvet.  The second girl is in rags, and a shawl; and the second youth in shirt and corduroys.  They dance gravely, each couple as if in a world apart.

*Seelchen*. [Whispering] In the mountains all dance together.  Do they never change partners?

*Lamond*.  How could they, little one?  Those are rich, these poor.
But see!

A *Corybantic couple* come dancing forth.  The girl has bare limbs. a flame-coloured shift, and hair bound with red flowers; the youth wears a panther-skin.  They pursue not only each other. but the other girls and youths.  For a moment all is a furious medley. Then the Corybantic Couple vanish into the Inn, and the first two couples are left, slowly, solemnly dancing, apart from each other as before.

*Seelchen*. [Shuddering] Shall I one day dance like that?

The Youth of *the wine horn* appears again beneath the lamp.  He strikes a loud chord; then as *Seelchen* moves towards that sound the lamp goes out; there is again only blue shadow; but the couples have disappeared into the Inn, and the doorway has grown dark.

*Seelchen*.  Ah!  What I do not like, he will not let me see.

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*Lamond*. Will you not come, then, little soul?

*Seelchen*. Always to dance?

*Lamond*: Not so!

*The shutters* of the houses are suddenly thrown wide. In a lighted room on one aide of the Inn are seen two pale men and a woman, amongst many clicking machines. On the other side of the Inn, in a forge, are visible two women and a man, but half clothed, making chains.

*Seelchen*. [Recoiling from both sights, in turn] How sad they look —all! What are they making?

In the dark doorway of the Inn a light shines out, and in it is seen a figure, visible only from the waist up, clad in gold-cloth studded with jewels, with a flushed complacent face, holding in one hand a glass of golden wine.

*Seelchen*. It is beautiful. What is it?

*Lamond*. Luxury.

*Seelchen*. What is it standing on? I cannot see.

Unseen, *the wine* HORN'S mandolin twangs out.

*Lamond*. For that do not look, little soul.

*Seelchen*. Can it not walk? [He shakes his head] Is that all they make here with their sadness?

But again the mandolin twangs out; the shutters fall over the houses; the door of the Inn grows dark.

*Lamond*. What is it, then, you would have? Is it learning? There are books here, that, piled on each other, would reach to the stars! [But *Seelchen* shakes her head] There is religion so deep that no man knows what it means. [But *Seelchen* shakes her head] There is religion so shallow, you may have it by turning a handle. We have everything.

*Seelchen*. Is God here?

*Lamond*. Who knows? Is God with your goats? [But *Seelchen* shakes her head] What then do you want?

*Seelchen*. Life.

The mandolin twangs out.

*Lamond*. [Pointing to his breast] There is but one road to life.

*Seelchen*. Ah! but I do not love.

*Lamond*. When a feather dies, is it not loving the wind—the unknown? When the day brings not new things, we are children of sorrow. If darkness and light did not change, could we breathe? Child! To live is to love, to love is to live-seeking for wonder. [And as she draws nearer] See! To love is to peer over the edge, and, spying the little grey flower, to climb down! It has wings; it has flown—again you must climb; it shivers, 'tis but air in your hand—you must crawl, you must cling, you must leap, and still it is there and not there—for the grey flower flits like a moth, and the wind of its wings is all you shall catch. But your eyes shall be shining, your cheeks shall be burning, your breast shall be panting—Ah! little heart! [The scene falls darker] And when the night comes—-there it is still, thistledown blown on the dark, and your white hands will reach for it, and your honey breath waft it, and never, never, shall you grasp that wanton thing—but life shall be lovely. [His voice dies to a whisper. He stretches out his arms]

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*Seelchen*. [Touching his breast] I will come.

*Lamond*. [Drawing her to the dark doorway] Love me!

*Seelchen*. I love!

The mandolin twangs out, the doorway for a moment is all glamorous; and they pass through. Illumined by the glimmer of the lamp the Youth of *the wine* Hour is seen again. And slowly to the chords of his mandolin he begins to sing:

> "The windy hours through darkness fly
> Canst hear them little heart?
> New loves are born, and old loves die,
> And kissing lips must part.

"The dusky bees of passing years
Canst see them, soul of mine—
From flower and flower supping tears,
And pale sweet honey wine?

[His voice grown strange and passionate]

> "O flame that treads the marsh of time.
> Flitting for ever low.
> Where, through the black enchanted slime.
> We, desperate, following go
> Untimely fire, we bid thee stay!
> Into dark air above.
> The golden gipsy thins away—
> So has it been with love!"

While he is singing, the moon grows pale, and dies. It falls dark, save for the glimmer of the lamp beneath which he stands. But as his song ends, the dawn breaks over the houses, the lamp goes out—*the wine horn* becomes shadow. Then from the doorway of the Inn, in the shrill grey light *Seelchen* comes forth. She is pale, as if wan with living; her eyes like pitch against the powdery whiteness of her face.

*Seelchen*. My heart is old.

> But as she speaks, from far away is heard a faint chiming of *Cowbells*; and while she stands listening, *Lamond* appears in the doorway of the Inn.

*Lamond*. Little soul!

*Seelchen*. You! Always you!

*Lamond*. I have new wonders.

*Seelchen*. [Mournfully] No.

*Lamond*. I swear it! You have not tired of me, that am never the same? It cannot be.

*Seelchen*. Listen!

The chime of *the Cowbells* is heard again.

*Lamond*. [Jealously] The music' of dull sleep! Has life, then, with me been sorrow?

*Seelchen*. I do not regret.

*Lamond*. Come!

*Seelchen*. [Pointing-to her breast] The bird is tired with flying. [Touching her lips] The flowers have no dew.

*Lamond*. Would you leave me?

*Seelchen*. See!

There, in a streak of the dawn, against the plane tree is seen
the Shepherd of *the cow horn*, standing wrapped in his mountain
cloak.

*Lamond*. What is it?

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*Seelchen*. He!

*Lamond*. There is nothing. [He holds her fast] I have shown you the marvels of my town —the gay, the bitter wonders. We have known life. If with you I may no longer live, then let us die! See! Here are sweet Deaths by Slumber and by Drowning!

The mandolin twangs out, and from the dim doorway of the Inn come forth the shadowy forms. *Death by slumber*, and *death by drowning*. who to a ghostly twanging of mandolins dance slowly towards *Seelchen*. stand smiling at her, and as slowly dance away.

*Seelchen*. [Following] Yes. They are good and sweet.

While she moves towards the Inn. LAMOND'S face becomes transfigured with joy. But just as she reaches the doorway. there is a distant chiming of bells and blowing of pipes, and the Shepherd of *the cow horn* sings:

> "To the wild grass come, and the dull far roar
> Of the falling rock; to the flowery meads
> Of thy mountain home, where the eagles soar,
> And the grizzled flock in the sunshine feeds.
> To the Alp, where I, in the pale light crowned
> With the moon's thin horns, to my pasture roam;
> To the silent sky, and the wistful sound
> Of the rosy dawns——my daughter, come!"

While *he* sings, the sun has risen; and *Seelchen* has turned. with parted lips, and hands stretched out; and the forms of death have vanished.

*Seelchen*. I come.

*Lamond*. [Clasping her knees] Little soul! Must I then die, like a gnat when the sun goes down? Without you I am nothing.

*Seelchen*. [Releasing herself] Poor heart—I am gone!

*Lamond*. It is dark. [He covers his face with his cloak].

Then as *Seelchen* reaches the Shepherd of *the cow horn*, there is blown a long note of a pipe; the scene falls back; and there rises a far, continual, mingled sound of Cowbells, and Flower Bells, and Pipes.

## SCENE IV

The scene slowly brightens with the misty flush of dawn. Seelchen stands on a green alp, with all around, nothing but blue sky. A slip of a crescent moon is lying on her back. On a low rock sits a brown faced *goatherd* blowing on a pipe, and the four Flower-children are dancing in their shifts of grey white. and blue, rose-pink, and burnt-gold. Their bells are ringing. as they pelt each other with flowers of their own colours; and each in turn, wheeling, flings one flower at *Seelchen*, who puts them to her lips and eyes.

Seelchen. The dew! [She moves towards the rock] Goatherd!

> But *the flowers* encircle him; and when they wheel away he has vanished. She turns to *the flowers*, but they too vanish. The veils of mist are rising.

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*Seelchen*. Gone! [She rubs her eyes; then turning once more to the rock, sees *Felsman* standing there, with his arms folded] Thou!

*Felsman*. So thou hast come—like a sick heifer to be healed. Was it good in the Town —that kept thee so long?

*Seelchen*. I do not regret.

*Felsman*. Why then return?

*Seelchen*. I was tired.

*Felsman*. Never again shalt thou go from me!

*Seelchen*. [Mocking] With what wilt thou keep me?

*Felsman*. [Grasping her] Thus.

*Seelchen*. I have known Change—I am no timid maid.

*Felsman*. [Moodily] Aye, thou art different. Thine eyes are hollow —thou art white-faced.

*Seelchen*. [Still mocking] Then what hast thou here that shall keep me?

*Felsman*. The sun.

*Seelchen*. To burn me.

*Felsman*. The air.

There is a faint wailing of wind.

*Seelchen*. To freeze me.

*Felsman*. The silence.

The noise of the wind dies away.

*Seelchen*. Yes, it is lonely.

*Felsman*. Wait! And the flowers shall dance to thee.

And to a ringing of their bells. *The flowers* come dancing; till, one by one, they cease, and sink down, nodding, falling asleep.

*Seelchen*. See! Even they grow sleepy here!

*Felsman*. I will call the goats to wake them.

*The goatherd* is seen again sitting upright on his rock and piping. And there come four little brown, wild-eyed, naked Boys, with Goat's legs and feet, who dance gravely in and out of The Sleeping Flowers; and *the flowers* wake, spring up, and fly. Till each Goat, catching his flower has vanished, and *the goatherd* has ceased to pipe, and lies motionless again on his rock.

*Felsman*. Love me!

*Seelchen*. Thou art rude!

*Felsman*. Love me!

*Seelchen*. Thou art grim!

*Felsman*. Aye. I have no silver tongue. Listen! This is my voice. [Sweeping his arm round all the still alp] It is quiet. From dawn to the first star all is fast. [Laying his hand on her heart] And the wings of the birds shall be still.

*Seelchen*. [Touching his eyes] Thine eyes are fierce. In them I see the wild beasts crouching. In them I see the distance. Are they always fierce?

*Felsman*. Never—to look on thee, my flower.

*Seelchen*. [Touching his hands] Thy hands are rough to pluck flowers. [She breaks away from him to the rock where *the goatherd* is lying] See! Nothing moves! The very day stands still. Boy! [But *the goatherd* neither stirs nor answers] He is lost in the blue. [Passionately] Boy! He will not answer me. No one will answer me here.

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*Felsman*. [With fierce longing] Am I then no one?

*Seelchen*. Thou?

[The scene darkens with evening]

See! Sleep has stolen the day! It is night already.

There come the female shadow forms of *sleep*, in grey cobweb garments, waving their arms drowsily, wheeling round her.

*Seelchen*. Are you Sleep? Dear Sleep!

Smiling, she holds out her arms to *Felsman*. He takes her swaying form. They vanish, encircled by the forms of *sleep*. It is dark, save for the light of the thin horned moon suddenly grown bright. Then on his rock, to a faint gaping *the goatherd* sings:

"My goat, my little speckled one.
My yellow-eyed, sweet-smelling.
Let moon and wind and golden sun
And stars beyond all telling
Make, every day, a sweeter grass.
And multiply thy leaping!
And may the mountain foxes pass
And never scent thee sleeping!
Oh! Let my pipe be clear and far.
And let me find sweet water!
No hawk nor udder-seeking jar
Come near thee, little daughter!
May fiery rocks defend, at noon,
Thy tender feet from slipping!
Oh! hear my prayer beneath the moon—
Great Master, Goat-God—skipping!"

There passes in the thin moonlight the Goat-Good Pan; and with a long wail of the pipe *the goatherd boy* is silent. Then the moon fades, and all is black; till, in the faint grisly light of the false dawn creeping up, *Seelchen* is seen rising from the side of the sleeping *Felsman*. *The goatherd boy* has gone; but by the rock stands the Shepherd of *the cow horn* in his dock.

*Seelchen*. Years, years I have slept. My spirit is hungry. [Then as she sees the Shepherd of *the cow horn* standing there] I know thee now—Life of the earth—the smell of thee, the sight of thee, the taste of thee, and all thy music. I have passed thee and gone by. [She moves away]

*Felsman*. [Waking] Where wouldst thou go?

*Seelchen*. To the edge of the world.

*Felsman*. [Rising and trying to stay her] Thou shalt not leave me!

[But against her smiling gesture he struggles as though against solidity]

*Seelchen*. Friend! The time is on me.

*Felsman*. Were my kisses, then, too rude? Was I too dull?

*Seelchen*. I do not regret.

The Youth of *the wine horn* is seen suddenly standing opposite the motionless Shepherd of *the cow horn*; and his mandolin twangs out.

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*Felsman*. The cursed music of the Town! Is it back to him thou wilt go? [Groping for sight of the hated figure] I cannot see.

*Seelchen*. Fear not! I go ever onward.

*Felsman*. Do not leave me to the wind in the rocks! Without thee love is dead, and I must die.

*Seelchen*. Poor heart! I am gone.

*Felsman*. [Crouching against the rock] It is cold.

At the blowing of the Shepherd's pipe, *the cow horn* stretches forth his hand to her. The mandolin twangs out, and *the wine horn* holds out his hand. She stands unmoving.

*Seelchen*. Companions. I must go. In a moment it will be dawn.

In Silence *the cow horn* and *the wine horn*, cover their faces. The false dawn dies. It falls quite dark.

## SCENE V

Then a faint glow stealing up, lights the snowy head of *the* great horn, and streams forth on *Seelchen*. To either aide of that path of light, like shadows. *The cow horn* and *the wine* horn stand with cloaked heads.

Seelchen. Great One! I come!

The Peak of *the great horn* speaks in a far-away voice, growing, with the light, clearer and stronger.

Wandering flame, thou restless fever
Burning all things, regretting none;
The winds of fate are stilled for ever—
Thy little generous life is done.
And all its wistful wonderings cease!
Thou traveller to the tideless sea,
Where light and dark, and change and peace,
Are One—Come, little soul, to *mystery*!

*Seelchen* falling on her knees, bows her head to the ground. The glow slowly fades till the scene is black.

## SCENE VI

Then as the blackness lifts, in the dim light of the false dawn filtering through the window of the mountain hut. *Lamond* and *Felsman* are seen standing beside *Seelchen* looking down at her asleep on the window seat.

*Felsman*. [Putting out his hand to wake her] In a moment it will be dawn.

She stirs, and her lips move, murmuring.

*Lamond*. Let her sleep. She's dreaming.

*Felsman* raises a lantern, till its light falls on her face.
Then the two men move stealthily towards the door, and, as she speaks, pass out.

*Seelchen*. [Rising to her knees, and stretching out her hands with ecstasy] Great One. I come! [Waking, she looks around, and struggles to her feet] My little dream!

Through the open door, the first flush of dawn shows in the sky.
There is a sound of goat-bells passing.

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The curtain falls.

## JUSTICE

**PERSONS OF THE PLAY**

*James how*, solicitor
*Walter how*, solicitor
*Robert Cokeson*, their managing clerk
*William Falder*, their junior clerk
*Sweedle*, their office-boy
*Wister*, a detective
*Cowley*, a cashier
*Mr*. *Justice Floyd*, a judge
*Harold Cleaver*, an old advocate
*Hector frome*, a young advocate
*captain Danson*, V.C., a prison governor
*the Rev*. *Hugh Miller*, a prison chaplain
*Edward Clement*, a prison doctor
*Wooder*, a chief warder
*Moaney*, convict
*Clifton*, convict
O'CLEARY, convict
*Ruth Honeywill*, a woman
A *number of barristers*, SOLICITERS, *spectators*, *ushers*, *reporters*, *jurymen*, *warders*, *and prisoners*

*Time*: The Present.

*Act* I. The office of James and Walter How. Morning. July.

*Act* II. Assizes. Afternoon. October.

*Act* III. A prison. December.
*Scene* I. The Governor's office.
*Scene* II. A corridor.
*Scene* III. A cell.

*Act* IV. The office of James and Walter How. Morning.
March, two years later.

# CAST OF THE FIRST PRODUCTION

### AT THE DUKE OF YORK'S THEATRE, FEBRUARY 21, 1910

James How *Mr*. *Sydney Valentine*
Walter How *Mr*. *Charles Maude*
Cokeson *Mr*. *Edmund Gwenn*
Falder *Mr*. *Dennis Eadie*
The Office-boy *Mr*. *George* HERSEE
The Detective *Mr*. *Leslie Carter*
The Cashier *Mr*. C. E. *Vernon*
The Judge *Mr*. *Dion boucicault*
The Old Advocate *Mr*. *Oscar* ADYE
The Young Advocate *Mr*. *Charles Bryant*
The Prison Governor *Mr*. GRENDON *Bentley*
The Prison Chaplain *Mr*. *Hubert Harben*
The Prison Doctor *Mr*. *Lewis Casson*
Wooder *Mr*. *Frederick Lloyd*
Moaney *Mr*. *Robert* PATEMAN
Clipton *Mr*. O. P. *Heggie*
O'Cleary *Mr*. *Whitford Kane*
Ruth Honeywill Miss *Edyth Olive*

# ACT I

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The scene is the managing clerk's room, at the offices of James and Walter How, on a July morning. The room is old fashioned, furnished with well-worn mahogany and leather, and lined with tin boxes and estate plans. It has three doors. Two of them are close together in the centre of a wall. One of these two doors leads to the outer office, which is only divided from the managing clerk's room by a partition of wood and clear glass; and when the door into this outer office is opened there can be seen the wide outer door leading out on to the stone stairway of the building. The other of these two centre doors leads to the junior clerk's room. The third door is that leading to the partners' room.The managing clerk, *Cokeson*, is sitting at his table adding up figures in a pass-book, and murmuring their numbers to himself. He is a man of sixty, wearing spectacles; rather short, with a bald head, and an honest, pugdog face. He is dressed in a well-worn black frock-coat and pepper-and-salt trousers.

Cokeson. And five's twelve, and three—fifteen, nineteen, twenty-three, thirty-two, forty-one-and carry four. [He ticks the page, and goes on murmuring] Five, seven, twelve, seventeen, twenty-four and nine, thirty-three, thirteen and carry one.

He again makes a tick. The outer office door is opened, and *Sweedle*, the office-boy, appears, closing the door behind him. He is a pale youth of sixteen, with spiky hair.

*Cokeson*. [With grumpy expectation] And carry one.

*Sweedle*. There's a party wants to see Falder, Mr. Cokeson.

*Cokeson*. Five, nine, sixteen, twenty-one, twenty-nine—and carry two. Send him to Morris's. What name?

*Sweedle*. Honeywill.

*Cokeson*. What's his business?

*Sweedle*. It's a woman.

*Cokeson*. A lady?

*Sweedle*. No, a person.

*Cokeson*. Ask her in. Take this pass-book to Mr. James. [He closes the pass-book.]

*Sweedle*. [Reopening the door] Will you come in, please?

*Ruth Honeywill* comes in. She is a tall woman, twenty-six years old, unpretentiously dressed, with black hair and eyes, and an ivory-white, clear-cut face. She stands very still, having a natural dignity of pose and gesture.

*Sweedle* goes out into the partners' room with the pass-book.

*Cokeson*. [Looking round at *Ruth*] The young man's out. [Suspiciously] State your business, please.

*Ruth*. [Who speaks in a matter-of-fact voice, and with a slight West-Country accent] It's a personal matter, sir.

*Cokeson*. We don't allow private callers here. Will you leave a message?

*Ruth*. I'd rather see him, please.

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She narrows her dark eyes and gives him a honeyed look.

*Cokeson*. [Expanding] It's all against the rules. Suppose I had my friends here to see me! It'd never do!

*Ruth*. No, sir.

*Cokeson*. [A little taken aback] Exactly! And here you are wanting to see a junior clerk!

*Ruth*. Yes, sir; I must see him.

*Cokeson*. [Turning full round to her with a sort of outraged interest] But this is a lawyer's office. Go to his private address.

*Ruth*. He's not there.

*Cokeson*. [Uneasy] Are you related to the party?

*Ruth*. No, sir.

*Cokeson*. [In real embarrassment] I don't know what to say. It's no affair of the office.

*Ruth*. But what am I to do?

*Cokeson*. Dear me! I can't tell you that.

*Sweedle* comes back. He crosses to the outer office and passes through into it, with a quizzical look at Cokeson, carefully leaving the door an inch or two open.

*Cokeson*. [Fortified by this look] This won't do, you know, this won't do at all. Suppose one of the partners came in!

An incoherent knocking and chuckling is heard from the outer door of the outer office.

*Sweedle*. [Putting his head in] There's some children outside here.

*Ruth*. They're mine, please.

*Sweedle*. Shall I hold them in check?

*Ruth*. They're quite small, sir. [She takes a step towards *Cokeson*]

*Cokeson*. You mustn't take up his time in office hours; we're a clerk short as it is.

*Ruth*. It's a matter of life and death.

*Cokeson*. [Again outraged] Life and death!

*Sweedle*. Here is Falder.

*Falder* has entered through the outer office. He is a pale, good-looking young man, with quick, rather scared eyes. He moves towards the door of the clerks' office, and stands there irresolute.

*Cokeson*. Well, I'll give you a minute. It's not regular.

Taking up a bundle of papers, he goes out into the partners' room.

*Ruth*. [In a low, hurried voice] He's on the drink again, Will. He tried to cut my throat last night. I came out with the children before he was awake. I went round to you.

*Falder*. I've changed my digs.

*Ruth*. Is it all ready for to-night?

*Falder*. I've got the tickets. Meet me 11.45 at the booking office. For God's sake don't forget we're man and wife! [Looking at her with tragic intensity] Ruth!

*Ruth*. You're not afraid of going, are you?

*Falder*. Have you got your things, and the children's?

*Ruth*. Had to leave them, for fear of waking Honeywill, all but one bag. I can't go near home again.

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*Falder*. [Wincing] All that money gone for nothing.
How much must you have?

*Ruth*. Six pounds—I could do with that, I think.

*Falder*. Don't give away where we're going. [As if to himself] When
I get out there I mean to forget it all.

*Ruth*. If you're sorry, say so. I'd sooner he killed me than take you against your will.

*Falder*. [With a queer smile] We've got to go. I don't care; I'll have you.

*Ruth*. You've just to say; it's not too late.

*Falder*. It is too late. Here's seven pounds. Booking office 11.45 to-night. If you weren't what you are to me, Ruth——!

*Ruth*. Kiss me!

They cling together passionately, there fly apart just as *Cokeson* re-enters the room. *Ruth* turns and goes out through the outer office. *Cokeson* advances deliberately to his chair and seats himself.

*Cokeson*. This isn't right, Falder.

*Falder*. It shan't occur again, sir.

*Cokeson*. It's an improper use of these premises.

*Falder*. Yes, sir.

*Cokeson*. You quite understand-the party was in some distress; and, having children with her, I allowed my feelings——[He opens a drawer and produces from it a tract] Just take this! "Purity in the Home." It's a well-written thing.

*Falder*. [Taking it, with a peculiar expression] Thank you, sir.

*Cokeson*. And look here, Falder, before Mr. Walter comes, have you finished up that cataloguing Davis had in hand before he left?

*Falder*. I shall have done with it to-morrow, sir—for good.

*Cokeson*. It's over a week since Davis went. Now it won't do, Falder. You're neglecting your work for private life. I shan't mention about the party having called, but——

*Falder*. [Passing into his room] Thank you, sir.

*Cokeson* stares at the door through which *Falder* has gone out; then shakes his head, and is just settling down to write, when *Walter* How comes in through the outer Office. He is a rather refined-looking man of thirty-five, with a pleasant, almost apologetic voice.

*Walter*. Good-morning, Cokeson.

*Cokeson*. Morning, Mr. Walter.

*Walter*. My father here?

*Cokeson*. [Always with a certain patronage as to a young man who might be doing better] Mr. James has been here since eleven o'clock.

*Walter*. I've been in to see the pictures, at the Guildhall.

*Cokeson*. [Looking at him as though this were exactly what was to be expected] Have you now—ye—es. This lease of Boulter's—am I to send it to counsel?

*Walter*. What does my father say?

*Cokeson*. 'Aven't bothered him.

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*Walter*. Well, we can't be too careful.

*Cokeson*. It's such a little thing—hardly worth the fees. I thought you'd do it yourself.

*Walter*. Send it, please. I don't want the responsibility.

*Cokeson*. [With an indescribable air of compassion] Just as you like. This "right-of-way" case—we've got 'em on the deeds.

*Walter*. I know; but the intention was obviously to exclude that bit of common ground.

*Cokeson*. We needn't worry about that. We're the right side of the law.

*Walter*. I don't like it,

*Cokeson*. [With an indulgent smile] We shan't want to set ourselves up against the law. Your father wouldn't waste his time doing that.

As he speaks *James* How comes in from the partners' room. He is a shortish man, with white side-whiskers, plentiful grey hair, shrewd eyes, and gold pince-nez.

*James*. Morning, Walter.

*Walter*. How are you, father?

*Cokeson*. [Looking down his nose at the papers in his hand as though deprecating their size] I'll just take Boulter's lease in to young Falder to draft the instructions. [He goes out into *Falder's* room.]

*Walter*. About that right-of-way case?

*James*. Oh, well, we must go forward there. I thought you told me yesterday the firm's balance was over four hundred.

*Walter*. So it is.

*James*. [Holding out the pass-book to his son] Three—five—one, no recent cheques. Just get me out the cheque-book.

*Walter* goes to a cupboard, unlocks a drawer and produces a cheque-book.

*James*. Tick the pounds in the counterfoils. Five, fifty-four, seven, five, twenty-eight, twenty, ninety, eleven, fifty-two, seventy-one. Tally?

*Walter*. [Nodding] Can't understand. Made sure it was over four hundred.

*James*. Give me the cheque-book. [He takes the check-book and cons the counterfoils] What's this ninety?

*Walter*. Who drew it?

*James*. You.

*Walter*. [Taking the cheque-book] July 7th? That's the day I went down to look over the Trenton Estate—last Friday week; I came back on the Tuesday, you remember. But look here, father, it was nine I drew a cheque for. Five guineas to Smithers and my expenses. It just covered all but half a crown.

*James*. [Gravely] Let's look at that ninety cheque. [He sorts the cheque out from the bundle in the pocket of the pass-book] Seems all right. There's no nine here. This is bad. Who cashed that nine-pound cheque?

*Walter*. [Puzzled and pained] Let's see! I was finishing Mrs. Reddy's will—only just had time; yes—I gave it to Cokeson.

*James*. Look at that 't' 'y': that yours?

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*Walter*. [After consideration] My y's curl back a little; this doesn't.

*James*. [As *Cokeson* re-enters from *Falder's* room] We must ask him. Just come here and carry your mind back a bit, Cokeson. D'you remember cashing a cheque for Mr. Walter last Friday week—the day he went to Trenton?

*Cokeson*. Ye-es. Nine pounds.

*James*. Look at this. [Handing him the cheque.]

*Cokeson*. No! Nine pounds. My lunch was just coming in; and of course I like it hot; I gave the cheque to Davis to run round to the bank. He brought it back, all gold—you remember, Mr. Walter, you wanted some silver to pay your cab. [With a certain contemptuous compassion] Here, let me see. You've got the wrong cheque.

He takes cheque-book and pass-book from *Walter*.

*Walter*. Afraid not.

*Cokeson*. [Having seen for himself] It's funny.

*James*. You gave it to Davis, and Davis sailed for Australia on Monday. Looks black, Cokeson.

*Cokeson*. [Puzzled and upset] why this'd be a felony! No, no! there's some mistake.

*James*. I hope so.

*Cokeson*. There's never been anything of that sort in the office the twenty-nine years I've been here.

*James*. [Looking at cheque and counterfoil] This is a very clever bit of work; a warning to you not to leave space after your figures, Walter.

*Walter*. [Vexed] Yes, I know—I was in such a tearing hurry that afternoon.

*Cokeson*. [Suddenly] This has upset me.

*James*. The counterfoil altered too—very deliberate piece of swindling. What was Davis's ship?

*Walter*. 'City of Rangoon'.

*James*. We ought to wire and have him arrested at Naples; he can't be there yet.

*Cokeson*. His poor young wife. I liked the young man. Dear, oh dear! In this office!

*Walter*. Shall I go to the bank and ask the cashier?

*James*. [Grimly] Bring him round here. And ring up Scotland Yard.

*Walter*. Really?

He goes out through the outer office. *James* paces the room. He stops and looks at *Cokeson*, who is disconsolately rubbing the knees of his trousers.

*James*. Well, Cokeson! There's something in character, isn't there?

*Cokeson*. [Looking at him over his spectacles] I don't quite take you, sir.

*James*. Your story, would sound d——d thin to any one who didn't know you.

*Cokeson*. Ye-es! [He laughs. Then with a sudden gravity] I'm sorry for that young man. I feel it as if it was my own son, Mr. James.

*James*. A nasty business!

*Cokeson*. It unsettles you. All goes on regular, and then a thing like this happens. Shan't relish my lunch to-day.

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*James*. As bad as that, Cokeson?

*Cokeson*. It makes you think. [Confidentially] He must have had temptation.

*James*. Not so fast. We haven't convicted him yet.

*Cokeson*. I'd sooner have lost a month's salary than had this happen.
[He broods.]

*James*. I hope that fellow will hurry up.

*Cokeson*. [Keeping things pleasant for the cashier] It isn't fifty yards, Mr. James. He won't be a minute.

*James*. The idea of dishonesty about this office it hits me hard,
Cokeson.

He goes towards the door of the partners' room.

*Sweedle*. [Entering quietly, to *Cokeson* in a low voice] She's popped up again, sir-something she forgot to say to Falder.

*Cokeson*. [Roused from his abstraction] Eh? Impossible. Send her away!

*James*. What's that?

*Cokeson*. Nothing, Mr. James. A private matter. Here, I'll come myself. [He goes into the outer office as *James* passes into the partners' room] Now, you really mustn't—we can't have anybody just now.

*Ruth*. Not for a minute, sir?

*Cokeson*. Reely! Reely! I can't have it. If you want him, wait about; he'll be going out for his lunch directly.

*Ruth*. Yes, sir.

*Walter*, entering with the cashier, passes *Ruth* as she leaves the outer office.

*Cokeson*. [To the cashier, who resembles a sedentary dragoon] Good-morning. [To *Walter*] Your father's in there.

*Walter* crosses and goes into the partners' room.

*Cokeson*. It's a nahsty, unpleasant little matter, Mr. Cowley. I'm quite ashamed to have to trouble you.

*Cowley*. I remember the cheque quite well. [As if it were a liver] Seemed in perfect order.

*Cokeson*. Sit down, won't you? I'm not a sensitive man, but a thing like this about the place—it's not nice. I like people to be open and jolly together.

*Cowley*. Quite so.

*Cokeson*. [Buttonholing him, and glancing toward the partners' room] Of course he's a young man. I've told him about it before now— leaving space after his figures, but he will do it.

*Cowley*. I should remember the person's face—quite a youth.

*Cokeson*. I don't think we shall be able to show him to you, as a matter of fact.

*James* and *Walter* have come back from the partners' room.

*James*. Good-morning, Mr. Cowley. You've seen my son and myself, you've seen Mr. Cokeson, and you've seen Sweedle, my office-boy. It was none of us, I take it.

The cashier shakes his head with a smile.

*James*. Be so good as to sit there. Cokeson, engage Mr. Cowley in conversation, will you?

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He goes toward *Falder's* room.

*Cokeson*. Just a word, Mr. James.

*James*. Well?

*Cokeson*. You don't want to upset the young man in there, do you? He's a nervous young feller.

*James*. This must be thoroughly cleared up, Cokeson, for the sake of Falder's name, to say nothing of yours.

*Cokeson*. [With Some dignity] That'll look after itself, sir. He's been upset once this morning; I don't want him startled again.

*James*. It's a matter of form; but I can't stand upon niceness over a thing like this—too serious. Just talk to Mr. Cowley.

He opens the door of *Falder's* room.

*James*. Bring in the papers in Boulter's lease, will you, Falder?

*Cokeson*. [Bursting into voice] Do you keep dogs?

The cashier, with his eyes fixed on the door, does not answer.

*Cokeson*. You haven't such a thing as a bulldog pup you could spare me, I suppose?

At the look on the cashier's face his jaw drops, and he turns to see *Falder* standing in the doorway, with his eyes fixed on *Cowley*, like the eyes of a rabbit fastened on a snake.

*Falder*. [Advancing with the papers] Here they are, sir!

*James*. [Taking them] Thank you.

*Falder*. Do you want me, sir?

*James*. No, thanks!

*Falder* turns and goes back into his own room. As he shuts the door *James* gives the cashier an interrogative look, and the cashier nods.

*James*. Sure? This isn't as we suspected.

*Cowley*. Quite. He knew me. I suppose he can't slip out of that room?

*Cokeson*. [Gloomily] There's only the window—a whole floor and a basement.

The door of *Falder's* room is quietly opened, and *Falder*, with his hat in his hand, moves towards the door of the outer office.

*James*. [Quietly] Where are you going, Falder?

*Falder*. To have my lunch, sir.

*James*. Wait a few minutes, would you? I want to speak to you about this lease.

*Falder*. Yes, sir. [He goes back into his room.]

*Cowley*. If I'm wanted, I can swear that's the young man who cashed the cheque. It was the last cheque I handled that morning before my lunch. These are the numbers of the notes he had. [He puts a slip of paper on the table; then, brushing his hat round] Good-morning!

*James*. Good-morning, Mr. Cowley!

*Cowley*. [To *Cokeson*] Good-morning.

*Cokeson*. [With Stupefaction] Good-morning.

The cashier goes out through the outer office. *Cokeson* sits down in his chair, as though it were the only place left in the morass of his feelings.

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*Walter*. What are you going to do?

*James*. Have him in. Give me the cheque and the counterfoil.

*Cokeson*. I don't understand. I thought young Davis——

*James*. We shall see.

*Walter*. One moment, father: have you thought it out?

*James*. Call him in!

*Cokeson*. [Rising with difficulty and opening *Falder's* door; hoarsely] Step in here a minute.

*Falder*. [Impassively] Yes, sir?

*James*. [Turning to him suddenly with the cheque held out] You know this cheque, Falder?

*Falder*. No, sir.

*Jades*. Look at it. You cashed it last Friday week.

*Falder*. Oh! yes, sir; that one—Davis gave it me.

*James*. I know. And you gave Davis the cash?

*Falder*. Yes, sir.

*James*. When Davis gave you the cheque was it exactly like this?

*Falder*. Yes, I think so, sir.

*James*. You know that Mr. Walter drew that cheque for nine pounds?

*Falder*. No, sir—ninety.

*James*. Nine, Falder.

*Falder*. [Faintly] I don't understand, sir.

*James*. The suggestion, of course, is that the cheque was altered; whether by you or Davis is the question.

# FALDER. I—I

*Cokeson*. Take your time, take your time.

*Falder*. [Regaining his impassivity] Not by me, sir.

*James*. The cheque was handed to—Cokeson by Mr. Walter at one o'clock; we know that because Mr. Cokeson's lunch had just arrived.

*Cokeson*. I couldn't leave it.

*James*. Exactly; he therefore gave the cheque to Davis. It was cashed by you at 1.15. We know that because the cashier recollects it for the last cheque he handled before his lunch.

*Falder*. Yes, sir, Davis gave it to me because some friends were giving him a farewell luncheon.

*James*. [Puzzled] You accuse Davis, then?

*Falder*. I don't know, sir—it's very funny.

*Walter*, who has come close to his father, says something to him in a low voice.

*James*. Davis was not here again after that Saturday, was he?

*Cokeson*. [Anxious to be of assistance to the young man, and seeing faint signs of their all being jolly once more] No, he sailed on the Monday.

*James*. Was he, Falder?

*Falder*. [Very faintly] No, sir.

*James*. Very well, then, how do you account for the fact that this nought was added to the nine in the counterfoil on or after Tuesday?

*Cokeson*. [Surprised] How's that?

*Falder* gives a sort of lurch; he tries to pull himself together, but he has gone all to pieces.

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*James*. [Very grimly] Out, I'm afraid, Cokeson. The cheque-book remained in Mr. Walter's pocket till he came back from Trenton on Tuesday morning. In the face of this, Falder, do you still deny that you altered both cheque and counterfoil?

*Falder*. No, sir—no, Mr. How. I did it, sir; I did it.

*Cokeson*. [Succumbing to his feelings] Dear, dear! what a thing to do!

*Falder*. I wanted the money so badly, sir. I didn't know what I was doing.

*Cokeson*. However such a thing could have come into your head!

*Falder*. [Grasping at the words] I can't think, sir, really! It was just a minute of madness.

*James*. A long minute, Falder. [Tapping the counterfoil] Four days at least.

*Falder*. Sir, I swear I didn't know what I'd done till afterwards, and then I hadn't the pluck. Oh! Sir, look over it! I'll pay the money back—I will, I promise.

*James*. Go into your room.

*Falder*, with a swift imploring look, goes back into his room.
There is silence.

*James*. About as bad a case as there could be.

*Cokeson*. To break the law like that-in here!

*Walter*. What's to be done?

*James*. Nothing for it. Prosecute.

*Walter*. It's his first offence.

*James*. [Shaking his head] I've grave doubts of that. Too neat a piece of swindling altogether.

*Cokeson*. I shouldn't be surprised if he was tempted.

*James*. Life's one long temptation, Cokeson.

*Cokeson*. Ye-es, but I'm speaking of the flesh and the devil, Mr. James. There was a woman come to see him this morning.

*Walter*. The woman we passed as we came in just now. Is it his wife?

*Cokeson*. No, no relation. [Restraining what in jollier circumstances would have been a wink] A married person, though.

*Walter*. How do you know?

*Cokeson*. Brought her children. [Scandalised] There they were outside the office.

*James*. A real bad egg.

*Walter*. I should like to give him a chance.

*James*. I can't forgive him for the sneaky way he went to work— counting on our suspecting young Davis if the matter came to light. It was the merest accident the cheque-book stayed in your pocket.

*Walter*. It must have been the temptation of a moment. He hadn't time.

*James*. A man doesn't succumb like that in a moment, if he's a clean mind and habits. He's rotten; got the eyes of a man who can't keep his hands off when there's money about.

*Walter*. [Dryly] We hadn't noticed that before.

*James*. [Brushing the remark aside] I've seen lots of those fellows in my time. No doing anything with them except to keep 'em out of harm's way. They've got a blind spat.

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*Walter*. It's penal servitude.

*Cokeson*. They're nahsty places-prisons.

*James*. [Hesitating] I don't see how it's possible to spare him. Out of the question to keep him in this office—honesty's the 'sine qua non'.

*Cokeson*. [Hypnotised] Of course it is.

*James*. Equally out of the question to send him out amongst people who've no knowledge of his character. One must think of society.

*Walter*. But to brand him like this?

*James*. If it had been a straightforward case I'd give him another chance. It's far from that. He has dissolute habits.

*Cokeson*. I didn't say that—extenuating circumstances.

*James*. Same thing. He's gone to work in the most cold-blooded way to defraud his employers, and cast the blame on an innocent man. If that's not a case for the law to take its course, I don't know what is.

*Walter*. For the sake of his future, though.

*James*. [Sarcastically] According to you, no one would ever prosecute.

*Walter*. [Nettled] I hate the idea of it.

*Cokeson*. That's rather 'ex parte', Mr. Walter! We must have protection.

*James*. This is degenerating into talk.

He moves towards the partners' room.

*Walter*. Put yourself in his place, father.

*James*. You ask too much of me.

*Walter*. We can't possibly tell the pressure there was on him.

*James*. You may depend on it, my boy, if a man is going to do this sort of thing he'll do it, pressure or no pressure; if he isn't nothing'll make him.

*Walter*. He'll never do it again.

*Cokeson*. [Fatuously] S'pose I were to have a talk with him. We don't want to be hard on the young man.

*James*. That'll do, Cokeson. I've made up my mind. [He passes into the partners' room.]

*Cokeson*. [After a doubtful moment] We must excuse your father. I don't want to go against your father; if he thinks it right.

*Walter*. Confound it, Cokeson! why don't you back me up? You know you feel——

*Cokeson*. [On his dignity] I really can't say what I feel.

*Walter*. We shall regret it.

*Cokeson*. He must have known what he was doing.

*Walter*. [Bitterly] "The quality of mercy is not strained."

*Cokeson*. [Looking at him askance] Come, come, Mr. Walter. We must try and see it sensible.

*Sweedle*. [Entering with a tray] Your lunch, sir.

*Cokeson*. Put it down!

While *Sweedle* is putting it down on COKESON's table, the detective, *Wister*, enters the outer office, and, finding no one there, comes to the inner doorway. He is a square, medium-sized man, clean-shaved, in a serviceable blue serge suit and strong boots.

*Cokeson*. [Hoarsely] Here! Here! What are we doing?

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*Wister*. [To *Walter*] From Scotland Yard, sir. Detective-Sergeant Blister.

*Walter*. [Askance] Very well! I'll speak to my father.

He goes into the partners' room. *James* enters.

*James*. Morning! [In answer to an appealing gesture from *Cokeson*] I'm sorry; I'd stop short of this if I felt I could. Open that door. [*Sweedle*, wondering and scared, opens it] Come here, Mr. Falder.

As *Falder* comes shrinkingly out, the detective in obedience to a sign from *James*, slips his hand out and grasps his arm.

*Falder*. [Recoiling] Oh! no,—oh! no!

*Walter*. Come, come, there's a good lad.

*James*. I charge him with felony.

*Falter*. Oh, sir! There's some one—I did it for her. Let me be till to-morrow.

*James* motions with his hand. At that sign of hardness, *Falder* becomes rigid. Then, turning, he goes out quietly in the detective's grip. *James* follows, stiff and erect. *Sweedle*, rushing to the door with open mouth, pursues them through the outer office into the corridor. When they have all disappeared *Cokeson* spins completely round and makes a rush for the outer office.

*Cokeson*: [Hoarsely] Here! What are we doing?

There is silence. He takes out his handkerchief and mops the sweat from his face. Going back blindly to his table, sits down, and stares blankly at his lunch.

The curtain falls.

## ACT II

A Court of Justice, on a foggy October afternoon crowded with barristers, solicitors, reporters, ushers, and jurymen. Sitting in the large, solid dock is *Falder*, with a warder on either side of him, placed there for his safe custody, but seemingly indifferent to and unconscious of his presence. *Falder* is sitting exactly opposite to the *judge*, who, raised above the clamour of the court, also seems unconscious of and indifferent to everything. *Harold Cleaver*, the counsel for the Crown, is a dried, yellowish man, of

more than middle age, in a wig worn almost to the colour of his face. *Hector frome*, the counsel for the defence, is a young, tall man, clean shaved, in a very white wig. Among the spectators, having already given their evidence, are *James* and *Walter how*, and *Cowley*, the cashier. *Wister*, the detective, is just leaving the witness-box.

*Cleaver*. That is the case for the Crown, me lud!

Gathering his robes together, he sits down.

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*Frome*. [Rising and bowing to the *judge*] If it please your lordship and gentlemen of the jury. I am not going to dispute the fact that the prisoner altered this cheque, but I am going to put before you evidence as to the condition of his mind, and to submit that you would not be justified in finding that he was responsible for his actions at the time. I am going to show you, in fact, that he did this in a moment of aberration, amounting to temporary insanity, caused by the violent distress under which he was labouring. Gentlemen, the prisoner is only twenty-three years old. I shall call before you a woman from whom you will learn the events that led up to this act. You will hear from her own lips the tragic circumstances of her life, the still more tragic infatuation with which she has inspired the prisoner. This woman, gentlemen, has been leading a miserable existence with a husband who habitually ill-uses her, from whom she actually goes in terror of her life. I am not, of course, saying that it's either right or desirable for a young man to fall in love with a married woman, or that it's his business to rescue her from an ogre-like husband. I'm not saying anything of the sort. But we all know the power of the passion of love; and I would ask you to remember, gentlemen, in listening to her evidence, that, married to a drunken and violent husband, she has no power to get rid of him; for, as you know, another offence besides violence is necessary to enable a woman to obtain a divorce; and of this offence it does not appear that her husband is guilty.

*Judge*. Is this relevant, Mr. Frome?

*Frome*. My lord, I submit, extremely—I shall be able to show your lordship that directly.

*Judge*. Very well.

*Frome*. In these circumstances, what alternatives were left to her? She could either go on living with this drunkard, in terror of her life; or she could apply to the Court for a separation order. Well, gentlemen, my experience of such cases assures me that this would have given her very insufficient protection from the violence of such a man; and even if effectual would very likely have reduced her either to the workhouse or the streets—for it's not easy, as she is now finding, for an unskilled woman without means of livelihood to support herself and her children without resorting either to the Poor Law or—to speak quite plainly—to the sale of her body.

*Judge*. You are ranging rather far, Mr. Frome.

*Frome*. I shall fire point-blank in a minute, my lord.

*Judge*. Let us hope so.

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*Frome*. Now, gentlemen, mark—and this is what I have been leading up to—this woman will tell you, and the prisoner will confirm her, that, confronted with such alternatives, she set her whole hopes on himself, knowing the feeling with which she had inspired him. She saw a way out of her misery by going with him to a new country, where they would both be unknown, and might pass as husband and wife. This was a desperate and, as my friend Mr. Cleaver will no doubt call it, an immoral resolution; but, as a fact, the minds of both of them were constantly turned towards it. One wrong is no excuse for another, and those who are never likely to be faced by such a situation possibly have the right to hold up their hands—as to that I prefer to say nothing. But whatever view you take, gentlemen, of this part of the prisoner's story—whatever opinion you form of the right of these two young people under such circumstances to take the law into their own hands—the fact remains that this young woman in her distress, and this young man, little more than a boy, who was so devotedly attached to her, did conceive this—if you like— reprehensible design of going away together. Now, for that, of course, they required money, and—they had none. As to the actual events of the morning of July 7th, on which this cheque was altered, the events on which I rely to prove the defendant's irresponsibility —I shall allow those events to speak for themselves, through the lips of my witness. Robert Cokeson. [He turns, looks round, takes up a sheet of paper, and waits.]

*Cokeson* is summoned into court, and goes into the witness-box, holding his hat before him. The oath is administered to him.

*Frome*. What is your name?

*Cokeson*. Robert Cokeson.

*Frome*. Are you managing clerk to the firm of solicitors who employ the prisoner?

*Cokeson*. Ye-es.

*Frome*. How long had the prisoner been in their employ?

*Cokeson*. Two years. No, I'm wrong there—all but seventeen days.

*Frome*. Had you him under your eye all that time?

*Cokeson*. Except Sundays and holidays.

*Frome*. Quite so. Let us hear, please, what you have to say about his general character during those two years.

*Cokeson*. [Confidentially to the jury, and as if a little surprised at being asked] He was a nice, pleasant-spoken young man. I'd no fault to find with him—quite the contrary. It was a great surprise to me when he did a thing like that.

*Frome*. Did he ever give you reason to suspect his honesty?

*Cokeson*. No! To have dishonesty in our office, that'd never do.

*Frome*. I'm sure the jury fully appreciate that, Mr. Cokeson.

*Cokeson*. Every man of business knows that honesty's 'the sign qua non'.

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*Frome*. Do you give him a good character all round, or do you not?

*Cokeson*. [Turning to the *judge*] Certainly. We were all very jolly and pleasant together, until this happened. Quite upset me.

*Frome*. Now, coming to the morning of the 7th of July, the morning on which the cheque was altered. What have you to say about his demeanour that morning?

*Cokeson*. [To the jury] If you ask me, I don't think he was quite compos when he did it.

*The judge*. [Sharply] Are you suggesting that he was insane?

*Cokeson*. Not compos.

*The judge*. A little more precision, please.

*Frome*. [Smoothly] Just tell us, Mr. Cokeson.

*Cokeson*. [Somewhat outraged] Well, in my opinion—[looking at the *judge*]—such as it is—he was jumpy at the time. The jury will understand my meaning.

*Frome*. Will you tell us how you came to that conclusion?

*Cokeson*. Ye-es, I will. I have my lunch in from the restaurant, a chop and a potato—-saves time. That day it happened to come just as Mr. Walter How handed me the cheque. Well, I like it hot; so I went into the clerks' office and I handed the cheque to Davis, the other clerk, and told him to get change. I noticed young Falder walking up and down. I said to him: "This is not the Zoological Gardens, Falder."

*Frome*. Do you remember what he answered?

*Cokeson*. Ye-es: "I wish to God it were!" Struck me as funny.

*Frome*. Did you notice anything else peculiar?

*Cokeson*. I did.

*Frome*. What was that?

*Cokeson*. His collar was unbuttoned. Now, I like a young man to be neat. I said to him: "Your collar's unbuttoned."

*Frome*. And what did he answer?

*Cokeson*. Stared at me. It wasn't nice.

*The judge*. Stared at you? Isn't that a very common practice?

*Cokeson*. Ye-es, but it was the look in his eyes. I can't explain my meaning—it was funny.

*Frome*. Had you ever seen such a look in his eyes before?

*Cokeson*. No. If I had I should have spoken to the partners. We can't have anything eccentric in our profession.

*The judge*. Did you speak to them on that occasion?

*Cokeson*. [Confidentially] Well, I didn't like to trouble them about prime facey evidence.

*Frome*. But it made a very distinct impression on your mind?

*Cokeson*. Ye-es. The clerk Davis could have told you the same.

*Frome*. Quite so. It's very unfortunate that we've not got him here. Now can you tell me of the morning on which the discovery of the forgery was made? That would be the 18th. Did anything happen that morning?

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*Cokeson*. [With his hand to his ear] I'm a little deaf.

*Frome*. Was there anything in the course of that morning—I mean before the discovery—that caught your attention?

*Cokeson*. Ye-es—a woman.

*The judge*. How is this relevant, Mr. Frome?

*Frome*. I am trying to establish the state of mind in which the prisoner committed this act, my lord.

*The judge*. I quite appreciate that. But this was long after the act.

*Frome*. Yes, my lord, but it contributes to my contention.

*The judge*. Well!

*Frome*. You say a woman. Do you mean that she came to the office?

*Cokeson*. Ye-es.

*Frome*. What for?

*Cokeson*. Asked to see young Falder; he was out at the moment.

*Frome*. Did you see her?

*Cokeson*. I did.

*Frome*. Did she come alone?

*Cokeson*. [Confidentially] Well, there you put me in a difficulty.
I mustn't tell you what the office-boy told me.

*Frome*. Quite so, Mr. Cokeson, quite so——

*Cokeson*. [Breaking in with an air of "You are young—leave it to me"] But I think we can get round it. In answer to a question put to her by a third party the woman said to me: "They're mine, sir."

*The judge*. What are? What were?

*Cokeson*. Her children. They were outside.

*The judge*. *How* do you know?

*Cokeson*. Your lordship mustn't ask me that, or I shall have to tell you what I was told —and that'd never do.

*The judge*. [Smiling] The office-boy made a statement.

*Cokeson*. Egg-zactly.

*Frome*. What I want to ask you, Mr. Cokeson, is this. In the course of her appeal to see Falder, did the woman say anything that you specially remember?

*Cokeson*. [Looking at him as if to encourage him to complete the sentence] A leetle more, sir.

*Frome*. Or did she not?

*Cokeson*. She did. I shouldn't like you to have led me to the answer.

*Frome*. [With an irritated smile] Will you tell the jury what it was?

*Cokeson*. "It's a matter of life and death."

*Foreman of the jury*. Do you mean the woman said that?

*Cokeson*. [Nodding] It's not the sort of thing you like to have said to you.

*Frome*. [A little impatiently] Did Falder come in while she was there? [*Cokeson* nods] And she saw him, and went away?

*Cokeson*. Ah! there I can't follow you. I didn't see her go.

*Frome*. Well, is she there now?

*Cokeson*. [With an indulgent smile] No!

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*Frome*. Thank you, Mr. Cokeson. [He sits down.]

*Cleaver*. [Rising] You say that on the morning of the forgery the prisoner was jumpy. Well, now, sir, what precisely do you mean by that word?

*Cokeson*. [Indulgently] I want you to understand. Have you ever seen a dog that's lost its master? He was kind of everywhere at once with his eyes.

*Cleaver*. Thank you; I was coming to his eyes. You called them "funny." What are we to understand by that? Strange, or what?

*Cokeson*. Ye-es, funny.

*Cokeson*. [Sharply] Yes, sir, but what may be funny to you may not be funny to me, or to the jury. Did they look frightened, or shy, or fierce, or what?

*Cokeson*. You make it very hard for me. I give you the word, and you want me to give you another.

*Cleaver*. [Rapping his desk] Does "funny" mean mad?

*Cleaver*. Not mad, fun——

*Cleaver*. Very well! Now you say he had his collar unbuttoned? Was it a hot day?

*Cokeson*. Ye-es; I think it was.

*Cleaver*. And did he button it when you called his attention to it?

*Cokeson*. Ye-es, I think he did.

*Cleaver*. Would you say that that denoted insanity?

He sits downs. *Cokeson*, who has opened his mouth to reply, is left gaping.

*Frome*. [Rising hastily] Have you ever caught him in that dishevelled state before?

*Cokeson*. No! He was always clean and quiet.

*Frome*. That will do, thank you.

*Cokeson* turns blandly to the *judge*, as though to rebuke counsel for not remembering that the *judge* might wish to have a chance; arriving at the conclusion that he is to be asked nothing further, he turns and descends from the box, and sits down next to *James* and *Walter*.

*Frome*. Ruth Honeywill.

*Ruth* comes into court, and takes her stand stoically in the witness-box. She is sworn.

*Frome*. What is your name, please?

*Ruth*. Ruth Honeywill.

*Frome*. How old are you?

*Ruth*. Twenty-six.

*Frome*. You are a married woman, living with your husband? A little louder.

*Ruth*. No, sir; not since July.

*Frome*. Have you any children?

*Ruth*. Yes, sir, two.

*Frome*. Are they living with you?

*Ruth*. Yes, sir.

*Frome*. You know the prisoner?

*Ruth*. [Looking at him] Yes.

*Frome*. What was the nature of your relations with him?

*Ruth*. We were friends.

*The judge*. Friends?

*Ruth*. [Simply] Lovers, sir.

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*The judge*. [Sharply] In what sense do you use that word?

*Ruth*. We love each other.

*The judge*. Yes, but——

*Ruth*. [Shaking her head] No, your lordship—not yet.

*The judge*. 'Not yet! H'm! [He looks from *Ruth* to *Falder*] Well!

*Frome*. What is your husband?

*Ruth*. Traveller.

*Frome*. And what was the nature of your married life?

*Ruth*. [Shaking her head] It don't bear talking about.

*Frome*. Did he ill-treat you, or what?

*Ruth*. Ever since my first was born.

*Frome*. In what way?

*Ruth*. I'd rather not say. All sorts of ways.

*The judge*. I am afraid I must stop this, you know.

*Ruth*. [Pointing to *Falder*] He offered to take me out of it, sir.
We were going to South America.

*Frome*. [Hastily] Yes, quite—and what prevented you?

*Ruth*. I was outside his office when he was taken away. It nearly broke my heart.

*Frome*. You knew, then, that he had been arrested?

*Ruth*. Yes, sir. I called at his office afterwards, and [pointing to *Cokeson*] that gentleman told me all about it.

*Frome*. Now, do you remember the morning of Friday, July 7th?

*Ruth*. Yes.

*Frome*. Why?

*Ruth*. My husband nearly strangled me that morning.

*The judge*. Nearly strangled you!

*Ruth*. [Bowing her head] Yes, my lord.

*Frome*. With his hands, or——?

*Ruth*. Yes, I just managed to get away from him. I went straight to my friend. It was eight o'clock.

*The judge*. In the morning? Your husband was not under the influence of liquor then?

*Ruth*. It wasn't always that.

*Frome*. In what condition were you?

*Ruth*. In very bad condition, sir. My dress was torn, and I was half choking.

*Frome*. Did you tell your friend what had happened?

*Ruth*. Yes. I wish I never had.

*Frome*. It upset him?

*Ruth*. Dreadfully.

*Frome*. Did he ever speak to you about a cheque?

*Ruth*. Never.

*Froze*. Did he ever give you any money?

*Ruth*. Yes.

*Frome*. When was that?

*Ruth*. On Saturday.

*Frome*. The 8th?

*Ruth*. To buy an outfit for me and the children, and get all ready to start.

*Frome*. Did that surprise you, or not?

*Ruth*. What, sir?

*Frome*. That he had money to give you.

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Ring. Yes, because on the morning when my husband nearly killed me my friend cried because he hadn't the money to get me away. He told me afterwards he'd come into a windfall.

*Frome*. And when did you last see him?

*Ruth*. The day he was taken away, sir. It was the day we were to have started.

*Frome*. Oh, yes, the morning of the arrest. Well, did you see him at all between the Friday and that morning? [*Ruth* nods] What was his manner then?

*Ruth*. Dumb—like—sometimes he didn't seem able to say a word.

*Frome*. As if something unusual had happened to him?

*Ruth*. Yes.

*Frome*. Painful, or pleasant, or what?

*Ruth*. Like a fate hanging over him.

*Frome*. [Hesitating] Tell me, did you love the prisoner very much?

*Ruth*. [Bowing her head] Yes.

*Frome*. And had he a very great affection for you?

*Ruth*. [Looking at *Falder*] Yes, sir.

*Frome*. Now, ma'am, do you or do you not think that your danger and unhappiness would seriously affect his balance, his control over his actions?

*Ruth*. Yes.

*Frome*. His reason, even?

*Ruth*. For a moment like, I think it would.

*Frome*. Was he very much upset that Friday morning, or was he fairly calm?

*Ruth*. Dreadfully upset. I could hardly bear to let him go from me.

*Frome*. Do you still love him?

*Ruth*. [With her eyes on *Falder*] He's ruined himself for me.

*Frome*. Thank you.

He sits down. *Ruth* remains stoically upright in the witness-box.

*Cleaver*. [In a considerate voice] When you left him on the morning of Friday the 7th you would not say that he was out of his mind, I suppose?

*Ruth*. No, sir.

*Cleaver*. Thank you; I've no further questions to ask you.

*Ruth*. [Bending a little forward to the jury] I would have done the same for him; I would indeed.

*The judge*. Please, please! You say your married life is an unhappy one? Faults on both sides?

*Ruth*. Only that I never bowed down to him. I don't see why I should, sir, not to a man like that.

*The judge*. You refused to obey him?

*Ruth*. [Avoiding the question] I've always studied him to keep things nice.

*The judge*. Until you met the prisoner—was that it?

*Ruth*. No; even after that.

*The judge*. I ask, you know, because you seem to me to glory in this affection of yours for the prisoner.

*Ruth*. [Hesitating] I—I do. It's the only thing in my life now.

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*The judge*. [Staring at her hard] Well, step down, please.

*Ruth* looks at *Falder*, then passes quietly down and takes her seat among the witnesses.

*Frome*. I call the prisoner, my lord.

*Falder* leaves the dock; goes into the witness-box, and is duly sworn.

*Frome*. What is your name?

*Falder*. William Falder.

*Frome*. And age?

*Falder*. Twenty-three.

*Frome*. You are not married?

*Falder* shakes his head

*Frome*. How long have you known the last witness?

*Falder*. Six months.

*Frome*. Is her account of the relationship between you a correct one?

*Falder*. Yes.

*Frome*. You became devotedly attached to her, however?

*Falder*. Yes.

*The judge*. Though you knew she was a married woman?

*Falder*. I couldn't help it, your lordship.

*The judge*. Couldn't help it?

*Falder*. I didn't seem able to.

The *judge* slightly shrugs his shoulders.

*Frome*. How did you come to know her?

*Falder*. Through my married sister.

*Frome*. Did you know whether she was happy with her husband?

*Falder*. It was trouble all the time.

*Frome*. You knew her husband?

*Falder*. Only through her—he's a brute.

*The judge*. I can't allow indiscriminate abuse of a person not present.

*Frome*. [Bowing] If your lordship pleases. [To *Falder*] You admit altering this cheque?

*Falder* bows his head.

*Frome*. Carry your mind, please, to the morning of Friday, July the 7th, and tell the jury what happened.

*Falder*. [Turning to the jury] I was having my breakfast when she came. Her dress was all torn, and she was gasping and couldn't seem to get her breath at all; there were the marks of his fingers round her throat; her arm was bruised, and the blood had got into her eyes dreadfully. It frightened me, and then when she told me, I felt—I felt—well—it was too much for me! [Hardening suddenly] If you'd seen it, having the feelings for her that I had, you'd have felt the same, I know.

*Frome*. Yes?

*Falder*. When she left me—because I had to go to the office—I was out of my senses for fear that he'd do it again, and thinking what I could do. I couldn't work—all the morning I was like that—simply couldn't fix my mind on anything. I couldn't think at all. I seemed to have to keep moving. When Davis—the other clerk—gave me the cheque—he said: "It'll do you good, Will, to have a run with this. You

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seem half off your chump this morning." Then when I had it in my hand—I don't know how it came, but it just flashed across me that if I put the 'ty' and the nought there would be the money to get her away. It just came and went—I never thought of it again. Then Davis went out to his luncheon, and I don't really remember what I did till I'd pushed the cheque through to the cashier under the rail. I remember his saying "Gold or notes?" Then I suppose I knew what I'd done. Anyway, when I got outside I wanted to chuck myself under a bus; I wanted to throw the money away; but it seemed I was in for it, so I thought at any rate I'd save her. Of course the tickets I took for the passage and the little I gave her's been wasted, and all, except what I was obliged to spend myself, I've restored. I keep thinking over and over however it was I came to do it, and how I can't have it all again to do differently!

*Falder* is silent, twisting his hands before him.

*Frome*. How far is it from your office to the bank?

*Falder*. Not more than fifty yards, sir.

*Frome*. From the time Davis went out to lunch to the time you cashed the cheque, how long do you say it must have been?

*Falder*. It couldn't have been four minutes, sir, because I ran all the way.

*Frome*. During those four minutes you say you remember nothing?

*Falder*. No, sir; only that I ran.

*Frome*. Not even adding the 'ty' and the nought?'

*Falder*. No, sir. I don't really.

*Frome* sits down, and *Cleaver* rises.

*Cleaver*. But you remember running, do you?

*Falder*. I was all out of breath when I got to the bank.

*Cleaver*. And you don't remember altering the cheque?

*Falder*. [Faintly] No, sir.

*Cleaver*. Divested of the romantic glamour which my friend is casting over the case, is this anything but an ordinary forgery? Come.

*Falder*. I was half frantic all that morning, sir.

*Cleaver*. Now, now! You don't deny that the 'ty' and the nought were so like the rest of the handwriting as to thoroughly deceive the cashier?

*Falder*. It was an accident.

*Cleaver*. [Cheerfully] Queer sort of accident, wasn't it? On which day did you alter the counterfoil?

*Falder*. [Hanging his head] On the Wednesday morning.

*Cleaver*. Was that an accident too?

*Falder*. [Faintly] No.

*Cleaver*. To do that you had to watch your opportunity, I suppose?

*Falder*. [Almost inaudibly] Yes.

*Cleaver*. You don't suggest that you were suffering under great excitement when you did that?

*Falder*. I was haunted.

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*Cleaver*. With the fear of being found out?

*Falder*. [Very low] Yes.

*The judge*. Didn't it occur to you that the only thing for you to do was to confess to your employers, and restore the money?

*Falder*. I was afraid. [There is silence]

*Cleaver*. You desired, too, no doubt, to complete your design of taking this woman away?

*Falder*. When I found I'd done a thing like that, to do it for nothing seemed so dreadful. I might just as well have chucked myself into the river.

*Cleaver*. You knew that the clerk Davis was about to leave England —didn't it occur to you when you altered this cheque that suspicion would fall on him?

*Falder*. It was all done in a moment. I thought of it afterwards.

*Cleaver*. And that didn't lead you to avow what you'd done?

*Falder*. [Sullenly] I meant to write when I got out there—I would have repaid the money.

*The judge*. But in the meantime your innocent fellow clerk might have been prosecuted.

*Falder*. I knew he was a long way off, your lordship. I thought there'd be time. I didn't think they'd find it out so soon.

*Frome*. I might remind your lordship that as Mr. Walter How had the cheque-book in his pocket till after Davis had sailed, if the discovery had been made only one day later Falder himself would have left, and suspicion would have attached to him, and not to Davis, from the beginning.

*The judge*. The question is whether the prisoner knew that suspicion would light on himself, and not on Davis. [To *Falder* sharply] Did you know that Mr. Walter How had the cheque-book till after Davis had sailed?

*Falder*. I—I—thought—he——

*The judge*. Now speak the truth-yes or no!

*Falder*. [Very low] No, my lord. I had no means of knowing.

*The judge*. That disposes of your point, Mr. Frome.

[*Frome* bows to the *judge*]

*Cleaver*. Has any aberration of this nature ever attacked you before?

*Falder*. [Faintly] No, sir.

*Cleaver*. You had recovered sufficiently to go back to your work that afternoon?

*Falder*. Yes, I had to take the money back.

*Cleaver*. You mean the nine pounds. Your wits were sufficiently keen for you to remember that? And you still persist in saying you don't remember altering this cheque. [He sits down]

*Falder*. If I hadn't been mad I should never have had the courage.

*Frome*. [Rising] Did you have your lunch before going back?

*Falder*. I never ate a thing all day; and at night I couldn't sleep.

*Frome*. Now, as to the four minutes that elapsed between Davis's going out and your cashing the cheque: do you say that you recollect nothing during those four minutes?

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*Falder*. [After a moment] I remember thinking of Mr. Cokeson's face.

*Frome*. Of Mr. Cokeson's face! Had that any connection with what you were doing?

*Falder*. No, Sir.

*Frome*. Was that in the office, before you ran out?

*Falder*. Yes, and while I was running.

*Frome*. And that lasted till the cashier said: "Will you have gold or notes?"

*Falder*. Yes, and then I seemed to come to myself—and it was too late.

*Frome*. Thank you. That closes the evidence for the defence, my lord.

The *judge* nods, and *Falder* goes back to his seat in the dock.

*Frome*. [Gathering up notes] If it please your lordship—Gentlemen of the Jury,—My friend in cross-examination has shown a disposition to sneer at the defence which has been set up in this case, and I am free to admit that nothing I can say will move you, if the evidence has not already convinced you that the prisoner committed this act in a moment when to all practical intents and purposes he was not responsible for his actions; a moment of such mental and moral vacuity, arising from the violent emotional agitation under which he had been suffering, as to amount to temporary madness. My friend has alluded to the "romantic glamour" with which I have sought to invest this case. Gentlemen, I have done nothing of the kind. I have merely shown you the background of "life"—that palpitating life which, believe me—whatever my friend may say—always lies behind the commission of a crime. Now gentlemen, we live in a highly, civilized age, and the sight of brutal violence disturbs us in a very strange way, even when we have no personal interest in the matter. But when we see it inflicted on a woman whom we love—what then? Just think of what your own feelings would have been, each of you, at the prisoner's age; and then look at him. Well! he is hardly the comfortable, shall we say bucolic, person likely to contemplate with equanimity marks of gross violence on a woman to whom he was devotedly attached. Yes, gentlemen, look at him! He has not a strong face; but neither has he a vicious face. He is just the sort of man who would easily become the prey of his emotions. You have heard the description of his eyes. My friend may laugh at the word "funny"—I think it better describes the peculiar uncanny look of those who are strained to breaking-point than any other word which could have been used. I don't pretend, mind you, that his mental irresponsibility—was more than a flash of darkness, in which all sense of proportion became lost; but to contend, that, just as a man who destroys himself at such a moment may be, and often is, absolved from the stigma attaching to the crime of self-murder, so

he may, and frequently does, commit other crimes while in this irresponsible condition, and that he may as justly be acquitted of criminal

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intent and treated as a patient. I admit that this is a plea which might well be abused. It is a matter for discretion. But here you have a case in which there is every reason to give the benefit of the doubt. You heard me ask the prisoner what he thought of during those four fatal minutes. What was his answer? "I thought of Mr. Cokeson's face!" Gentlemen, no man could invent an answer like that; it is absolutely stamped with truth. You have seen the great affection [legitimate or not] existing between him and this woman, who came here to give evidence for him at the risk of her life. It is impossible for you to doubt his distress on the morning when he committed this act. We well know what terrible havoc such distress can make in weak and highly nervous people. It was all the work of a moment. The rest has followed, as death follows a stab to the heart, or water drops if you hold up a jug to empty it. Believe me, gentlemen, there is nothing more tragic in life than the utter impossibility of changing what you have done. Once this cheque was altered and presented, the work of four minutes—four mad minutes —-the rest has been silence. But in those four minutes the boy before you has slipped through a door, hardly opened, into that great cage which never again quite lets a man go—the cage of the Law. His further acts, his failure to confess, the alteration of the counterfoil, his preparations for flight, are all evidence—not of deliberate and guilty intention when he committed the prime act from which these subsequent acts arose; no —they are merely evidence of the weak character which is clearly enough his misfortune. But is a man to be lost because he is bred and born with a weak character? Gentlemen, men like the prisoner are destroyed daily under our law for want of that human insight which sees them as they are, patients, and not criminals. If the prisoner be found guilty, and treated as though he were a criminal type, he will, as all experience shows, in all probability become one. I beg you not to return a verdict that may thrust him back into prison and brand him for ever. Gentlemen, Justice is a machine that, when some one has once given it the starting push, rolls on of itself. Is this young man to be ground to pieces under this machine for an act which at the worst was one of weakness? Is he to become a member of the luckless crews that man those dark, ill-starred ships called prisons? Is that to be his voyage-from which so few return? Or is he to have another chance, to be still looked on as one who has gone a little astray, but who will come back? I urge you, gentlemen, do not ruin this young man! For, as a result of those four minutes, ruin, utter and irretrievable, stares him in the face. He can be saved now. Imprison him as a criminal, and I affirm to you that he will be lost. He has neither the face nor the manner of one who can survive that terrible ordeal. Weigh in the scales

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his criminality and the suffering he has undergone. The latter is ten times heavier already. He has lain in prison under this charge for more than two months. Is he likely ever to forget that? Imagine the anguish of his mind during that time. He has had his punishment, gentlemen, you may depend. The rolling of the chariot-wheels of Justice over this boy began when it was decided to prosecute him. We are now already at the second stage. If you permit it to go on to the third I would not give—that for him.

> He holds up finger and thumb in the form of a circle, drops his hand, and sits dozen.

The jury stir, and consult each other's faces; then they turn towards the counsel for the Crown, who rises, and, fixing his eyes on a spot that seems to give him satisfaction, slides them every now and then towards the jury.

*Cleaver*. May it please your lordship—[Rising on his toes] Gentlemen of the Jury,—The facts in this case are not disputed, and the defence, if my friend will allow me to say so, is so thin that I don't propose to waste the time of the Court by taking you over the evidence. The plea is one of temporary insanity. Well, gentlemen, I daresay it is clearer to me than it is to you why this rather—what shall we call it?—bizarre defence has been set up. The alternative would have been to plead guilty. Now, gentlemen, if the prisoner had pleaded guilty my friend would have had to rely on a simple appeal to his lordship. Instead of that, he has gone into the byways and hedges and found this—er—peculiar plea, which has enabled him to show you the proverbial woman, to put her in the box—-to give, in fact, a romantic glow to this affair. I compliment my friend; I think it highly ingenious of him. By these means, he has—to a certain extent—got round the Law. He has brought the whole story of motive and stress out in court, at first hand, in a way that he would not otherwise have been able to do. But when you have once grasped that fact, gentlemen, you have grasped everything. [With good-humoured contempt] For look at this plea of insanity; we can't put it lower than that. You have heard the woman. She has every reason to favour the prisoner, but what did she say? She said that the prisoner was not insane when she left him in the morning. If he were going out of his mind through distress, that was obviously the moment when insanity would have shown itself. You have heard the managing clerk, another witness for the defence. With some difficulty I elicited from him the admission that the prisoner, though jumpy [a word that he seemed to think you would understand, gentlemen, and I'm sure I hope you do], was not mad when the cheque was handed to Davis. I agree with my friend that it's unfortunate that we have not got Davis here, but the prisoner has told you the words with which Davis in turn handed him the cheque; he obviously, therefore, was not mad when he received it, or he would

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not have remembered those words. The cashier has told you that he was certainly in his senses when he cashed it. We have therefore the plea that a man who is sane at ten minutes past one, and sane at fifteen minutes past, may, for the purposes of avoiding the consequences of a crime, call himself insane between those points of time. Really, gentlemen, this is so peculiar a proposition that I am not disposed to weary you with further argument. You will form your own opinion of its value. My friend has adopted this way of saying a great deal to you—and very eloquently—on the score of youth, temptation, and the like. I might point out, however, that the offence with which the prisoner is charged is one of the most serious known to our law; and there are certain features in this case, such as the suspicion which he allowed to rest on his innocent fellow-clerk, and his relations with this married woman, which will render it difficult for you to attach too much importance to such pleading. I ask you, in short, gentlemen, for that verdict of guilty which, in the circumstances, I regard you as, unfortunately, bound to record.

Letting his eyes travel from the *judge* and the jury to *frome*, he sits down.

*The judge*. [Bending a little towards the jury, and speaking in a business-like voice] Gentlemen, you have heard the evidence, and the comments on it. My only business is to make clear to you the issues you have to try. The facts are admitted, so far as the alteration of this cheque and counterfoil by the prisoner. The defence set up is that he was not in a responsible condition when he committed the crime. Well, you have heard the prisoner's story, and the evidence of the other witnesses—so far as it bears on the point of insanity. If you think that what you have heard establishes the fact that the prisoner was insane at the time of the forgery, you will find him guilty, but insane. If, on the other hand, you conclude from what you have seen and heard that the prisoner was sane—and nothing short of insanity will count—you will find him guilty. In reviewing the testimony as to his mental condition you must bear in mind very carefully the evidence as to his demeanour and conduct both before and after the act of forgery—the evidence of the prisoner himself, of the woman, of the witness—er—*Cokeson*, and—er—of the cashier. And in regard to that I especially direct your attention to the prisoner's admission that the idea of adding the 'ty' and the nought did come into his mind at the moment when the cheque was handed to him; and also to the alteration of the counterfoil, and to his subsequent conduct generally. The bearing of all this on the question of premeditation [and premeditation will imply sanity] is very obvious. You must not allow any considerations of age or temptation to weigh with you in the finding of your verdict. Before you can come to a verdict of guilty but insane you must be well and thoroughly convinced that the condition of his mind was such as would have qualified him at the moment for a lunatic asylum. [He pauses, then, seeing that the jury are doubtful whether to retire or no, adds:] You may retire, gentlemen, if you wish to do so.

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The jury retire by a door behind the *judge*. The *judge* bends over his notes. *Falder*, leaning from the dock, speaks excitedly to his solicitor, pointing dawn at *Ruth*. The solicitor in turn speaks to *frome*.

*Frome*. [Rising] My lord. The prisoner is very anxious that I should ask you if your lordship would kindly request the reporters not to disclose the name of the woman witness in the Press reports of these proceedings. Your lordship will understand that the consequences might be extremely serious to her.

*The judge*. [Pointedly—with the suspicion of a smile] well, Mr. Frome, you deliberately took this course which involved bringing her here.

*Frome*. [With an ironic bow] If your lordship thinks I could have brought out the full facts in any other way?

*The judge*. H'm! Well.

*Frome*. There is very real danger to her, your lordship.

*The judge*. You see, I have to take your word for all that.

*Frome*. If your lordship would be so kind. I can assure your lordship that I am not exaggerating.

*The judge*. It goes very much against the grain with me that the name of a witness should ever be suppressed. [With a glance at *Falder*, who is gripping and clasping his hands before him, and then at *Ruth*, who is sitting perfectly rigid with her eyes fixed on *Falder*] I'll consider your application. It must depend. I have to remember that she may have come here to commit perjury on the prisoner's behalf.

*Frome*. Your lordship, I really——

*The judge*. Yes, yes—I don't suggest anything of the sort, Mr. Frome. Leave it at that for the moment.

As he finishes speaking, the jury return, and file back into the box.

*Clerk* of *assize*. Gentlemen, are you agreed on your verdict?

*Foreman*. We are.

*Clerk* of *assize*. Is it Guilty, or Guilty but insane?

*Foreman*. Guilty.

The *judge* nods; then, gathering up his notes, sits looking at *Falder*, who stands motionless.

*Frome*. [Rising] If your lordship would allow me to address you in mitigation of sentence. I don't know if your lordship thinks I can add anything to what I have said to the jury on the score of the prisoner's youth, and the great stress under which he acted.

*The judge*. I don't think you can, Mr. Frome.

*Frome*. If your lordship says so—I do most earnestly beg your lordship to give the utmost weight to my plea. [He sits down.]

*The judge*. [To the *clerk*] Call upon him.

*The clerk*. Prisoner at the bar, you stand convicted of felony. Have you anything to say for yourself, why the Court should not give you judgment according to law? [*Falder* shakes his head]

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*The judge*. William Falder, you have been given fair trial and found guilty, in my opinion rightly found guilty, of forgery. [He pauses; then, consulting his notes, goes on] The defence was set up that you were not responsible for your actions at the moment of committing this crime. There is no, doubt, I think, that this was a device to bring out at first hand the nature of the temptation to which you succumbed. For throughout the trial your counsel was in reality making an appeal for mercy. The setting up of this defence of course enabled him to put in some evidence that might weigh in that direction. Whether he was well advised to so is another matter. He claimed that you should be treated rather as a patient than as a criminal. And this plea of his, which in the end amounted to a passionate appeal, he based in effect on an indictment of the march of Justice, which he practically accused of confirming and completing the process of criminality. Now, in considering how far I should allow weight to his appeal; I have a number of factors to take into account. I have to consider on the one hand the grave nature of your offence, the deliberate way in which you subsequently altered the counterfoil, the danger you caused to an innocent man—and that, to my mind, is a very grave point—and finally I have to consider the necessity of deterring others from following your example. On the other hand, I have to bear in mind that you are young, that you have hitherto borne a good character, that you were, if I am to believe your evidence and that of your witnesses, in a state of some emotional excitement when you committed this crime. I have every wish, consistently with my duty—not only to you, but to the community—to treat you with leniency. And this brings me to what are the determining factors in my mind in my consideration of your case. You are a clerk in a lawyer's office—that is a very serious element in this case; there can be no possible excuse made for you on the ground that you were not fully conversant with the nature of the crime you were committing, and the penalties that attach to it. It is said, however, that you were carried away by your emotions. The story has been told here to-day of your relations with this—er—Mrs. Honeywill; on that story both the defence and the plea for mercy were in effect based. Now what is that story? It is that you, a young man, and she, a young woman, unhappily married, had formed an attachment, which you both say—with what truth I am unable to gauge —had not yet resulted in immoral relations, but which you both admit was about to result in such relationship. Your counsel has made an attempt to palliate this, on the ground that the woman is in what he describes, I think, as "a hopeless position." As to that I can express no opinion. She is a married woman, and the fact is patent that you committed this crime with the view of furthering an immoral design. Now, however

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I might wish, I am not able to justify to my conscience a plea for mercy which has a basis inimical to morality. It is vitiated 'ab initio', and would, if successful, free you for the completion of this immoral project. Your counsel has made an attempt to trace your offence back to what he seems to suggest is a defect in the marriage law; he has made an attempt also to show that to punish you with further imprisonment would be unjust. I do not follow him in these flights. The Law is what it is—a majestic edifice, sheltering all of us, each stone of which rests on another. I am concerned only with its administration. The crime you have committed is a very serious one. I cannot feel it in accordance with my duty to Society to exercise the powers I have in your favour. You will go to penal servitude for three years.
*Falder*, who throughout the JUDGE'S speech has looked at him steadily, lets his head fall forward on his breast. *Ruth* starts up from her seat as he is taken out by the warders. There is a bustle in court.

*The judge*. [Speaking to the reporters] Gentlemen of the Press, I think that the name of the female witness should not be reported.

The reporters bow their acquiescence. *The judge*. [To *Ruth*, who is staring in the direction in which *Falder* has disappeared] Do you understand, your name will not be mentioned?

*Cokeson*. [Pulling her sleeve] The judge is speaking to you.

*Ruth* turns, stares at the *judge*, and turns away.

*The judge*. I shall sit rather late to-day. Call the next case.

*Clerk* of *assize*. [To a warder] Put up John Booley.

To cries of "Witnesses in the case of Booley":

The curtain falls.

## ACT III

### SCENE I

A prison. A plainly furnished room, with two large barred windows, overlooking the prisoners' exercise yard, where men, in yellow clothes marked with arrows, and yellow brimless caps, are seen in single file at a distance of four yards from each other, walking rapidly on serpentine white lines marked on the concrete floor of the yard. Two warders in blue uniforms, with peaked caps and swords, are stationed amongst them. The room has distempered walls, a bookcase with numerous official-looking books, a cupboard

between the windows, a plan of the prison on the wall, a writing-table covered with documents.  It is Christmas Eve.The *governor*, a neat, grave-looking man, with a trim, fair moustache, the eyes of a theorist, and grizzled hair, receding from the temples, is standing close to this writing-table looking at a sort of rough saw made out of a piece of metal.  The hand in which he holds it is gloved, for two fingers are missing.  The chief warder, *Wooder*, a tall, thin, military-looking man of sixty, with grey moustache and melancholy, monkey-like eyes, stands very upright two paces from him.

*The governor*. [With a faint, abstracted smile] Queer-looking affair, Mr. Wooder!  Where did you find it?

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*Wooder*. In his mattress, sir. Haven't come across such a thing for two years now.

*The governor*. [With curiosity] Had he any set plan?

*Wooder*. He'd sawed his window-bar about that much. [He holds up his thumb and finger a quarter of an inch apart]

*The governor*. I'll see him this afternoon. What's his name? Moaney! An old hand, I think?

*Wooder*. Yes, sir-fourth spell of penal. You'd think an old lag like him would have had more sense by now. [With pitying contempt] Occupied his mind, he said. Breaking in and breaking out—that's all they think about.

*The governor*. Who's next him?

*Wooder*. O'Cleary, sir.

*The governor*. The Irishman.

*Wooder*. Next him again there's that young fellow, Falder—star class—and next him old Clipton.

*The governor*. Ah, yes! "The philosopher." I want to see him about his eyes.

*Wooder*. Curious thing, sir: they seem to know when there's one of these tries at escape going on. It makes them restive—there's a regular wave going through them just now.

*The governor*. [Meditatively] Odd things—those waves. [Turning to look at the prisoners exercising] Seem quiet enough out here!

*Wooder*. That Irishman, O'Cleary, began banging on his door this morning. Little thing like that's quite enough to upset the whole lot. They're just like dumb animals at times.

*The governor*. I've seen it with horses before thunder—it'll run right through cavalry lines.

> The prison *chaplain* has entered. He is a dark-haired, ascetic man, in clerical undress, with a peculiarly steady, tight-lipped face and slow, cultured speech.

*The governor*. [Holding up the saw] Seen this, Miller?

*The chaplain*. Useful-looking specimen.

*The governor*. Do for the Museum, eh! [He goes to the cupboard and opens it, displaying to view a number of quaint ropes, hooks, and metal tools with labels tied on them] That'll do, thanks, Mr. Wooder.

*Wooder*. [Saluting] Thank you, sir. [He goes out]

*The governor*. Account for the state of the men last day or two, Miller? Seems going through the whole place.

*The chaplain*. No. I don't know of anything.

*The governor*. By the way, will you dine with us on Christmas Day?

*The chaplain*. To-morrow. Thanks very much.

*The governor*. Worries me to feel the men discontented. [Gazing at the saw] Have to punish this poor devil. Can't help liking a man who tries to escape. [He places the saw in his pocket and locks the cupboard again]

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*The chaplain*. Extraordinary perverted will-power—some of them.
Nothing to be done till it's broken.

*The governor*. And not much afterwards, I'm afraid. Ground too hard for golf?

*Wooder* comes in again.

*Wooder*. Visitor who's been seeing Q 3007 asks to speak to you, sir. I told him it wasn't usual.

*The governor*. What about?

*Wooder*. Shall I put him off, sir?

*The governor*. [Resignedly] No, no. Let's see him. Don't go,
Miller.

*Wooder* motions to some one without, and as the visitor comes in withdraws.

The visitor is *Cokeson*, who is attired in a thick overcoat to the knees, woollen gloves, and carries a top hat.

*Cokeson*. I'm sorry to trouble you. I've been talking to the young man.

*The governor*. We have a good many here.

*Cokeson*. Name of Falder, forgery. [Producing a card, and handing it to the *governor*]
Firm of James and Walter How. Well known in the law.

*The governor*. [Receiving the card-with a faint smile] What do you want to see me about, sir?

*Cokeson*. [Suddenly seeing the prisoners at exercise] Why! what a sight!

*The governor*. Yes, we have that privilege from here; my office is being done up. [Sitting down at his table] Now, please!

*Cokeson*. [Dragging his eyes with difficulty from the window] I wanted to say a word to you; I shan't keep you long. [Confidentially] Fact is, I oughtn't to be here by rights. His sister came to me—he's got no father and mother—and she was in some distress. "My husband won't let me go and see him," she said; "says he's disgraced the family. And his other sister," she said, "is an invalid." And she asked me to come. Well, I take an interest in him. He was our junior—I go to the same chapel—and I didn't like to refuse. And what I wanted to tell you was, he seems lonely here.

*The governor*. Not unnaturally.

*Cokeson*. I'm afraid it'll prey on my mind. I see a lot of them about working together.

*The governor*. Those are local prisoners. The convicts serve their three months here in separate confinement, sir.

*Cokeson*. But we don't want to be unreasonable. He's quite downhearted. I wanted to ask you to let him run about with the others.

*The governor*. [With faint amusement] Ring the bell-would you, Miller? [To *Cokeson*] You'd like to hear what the doctor says about him, perhaps.

*The chaplain*. [Ringing the bell] You are not accustomed to prisons, it would seem, sir.

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*Cokeson*. No. But it's a pitiful sight. He's quite a young fellow. I said to him: "Before a month's up" I said, "you'll be out and about with the others; it'll be a nice change for you." "A month!" he said —like that! "Come!" I said, "we mustn't exaggerate. What's a month? Why, it's nothing!" "A day," he said, "shut up in your cell thinking and brooding as I do, it's longer than a year outside. I can't help it," he said; "I try—but I'm built that way, Mr. *Cokeson*." And, he held his hand up to his face. I could see the tears trickling through his fingers. It wasn't nice.

*The chaplain*. He's a young man with large, rather peculiar eyes, isn't he? Not Church of England, I think?

*Cokeson*. No.

*The chaplain*. I know.

*The governor*. [To *Wooder*, who has come in] Ask the doctor to be good enough to come here for a minute. [*Wooder* salutes, and goes out] Let's see, he's not married?

*Cokeson*. No. [Confidentially] But there's a party he's very much attached to, not altogether com-il-fa. It's a sad story.

*The chaplain*. If it wasn't for drink and women, sir, this prison might be closed.

*Cokeson*. [Looking at the *chaplain* over his spectacles] Ye-es, but I wanted to tell you about that, special. He had hopes they'd have let her come and see him, but they haven't. Of course he asked me questions. I did my best, but I couldn't tell the poor young fellow a lie, with him in here—seemed like hitting him. But I'm afraid it's made him worse.

*The governor*. What was this news then?

*Cokeson*. Like this. The woman had a nahsty, spiteful feller for a husband, and she'd left him. Fact is, she was going away with our young friend. It's not nice—but I've looked over it. Well, when he was put in here she said she'd earn her living apart, and wait for him to come out. That was a great consolation to him. But after a month she came to me—I don't know her personally—and she said: "I can't earn the children's living, let alone my own—I've got no friends. I'm obliged to keep out of everybody's way, else my husband'd get to know where I was. I'm very much reduced," she said. And she has lost flesh. "I'll have to go in the workhouse!" It's a painful story. I said to her: "No," I said, "not that! I've got a wife an' family, but sooner than you should do that I'll spare you a little myself." "Really," she said—she's a nice creature—"I don't like to take it from you. I think I'd better go back to my husband." Well, I know he's a nahsty, spiteful feller—drinks—but I didn't like to persuade her not to.

*The chaplain*. Surely, no.

*Cokeson*. Ye-es, but I'm sorry now; it's upset the poor young fellow dreadfully. And what I wanted to say was: He's got his three years to serve. I want things to be pleasant for him.

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*The chaplain*. [With a touch of impatience] The Law hardly shares your view, I'm afraid.

*Cokeson*. But I can't help thinking that to shut him up there by himself'll turn him silly. And nobody wants that, I s'pose. I don't like to see a man cry.

*The chaplain*. It's a very rare thing for them to give way like that.

*Cokeson*. [Looking at him-in a tone of sudden dogged hostility] I keep dogs.

*The chaplain*. Indeed?

*Cokeson*. Ye-es. And I say this: I wouldn't shut one of them up all by himself, month after month, not if he'd bit me all over.

*The chaplain*. Unfortunately, the criminal is not a dog; he has a sense of right and wrong.

*Cokeson*. But that's not the way to make him feel it.

*The chaplain*. Ah! there I'm afraid we must differ.

*Cokeson*. It's the same with dogs. If you treat 'em with kindness they'll do anything for you; but to shut 'em up alone, it only makes 'em savage.

*The chaplain*. Surely you should allow those who have had a little more experience than yourself to know what is best for prisoners.

*Cokeson*. [Doggedly] I know this young feller, I've watched him for years. He's eurotic—got no stamina. His father died of consumption. I'm thinking of his future. If he's to be kept there shut up by himself, without a cat to keep him company, it'll do him harm. I said to him: "Where do you feel it?" "I can't tell you, Mr. *Cokeson*," he said, "but sometimes I could beat my head against the wall." It's not nice.

During this speech the *doctor* has entered. He is a
medium-Sized, rather good-looking man, with a quick eye.
He stands leaning against the window.

*The governor*. This gentleman thinks the separate is telling on Q 3007—Falder, young thin fellow, star class. What do you say, Doctor Clements?

*The doctor*. He doesn't like it, but it's not doing him any harm.

*Cokeson*. But he's told me.

*The doctor*. Of course he'd say so, but we can always tell. He's lost no weight since he's been here.

*Cokeson*. It's his state of mind I'm speaking of.

*The doctor*. His mind's all right so far. He's nervous, rather melancholy. I don't see signs of anything more. I'm watching him carefully.

*Cokeson*. [Nonplussed] I'm glad to hear you say that.

*The chaplain*. [More suavely] It's just at this period that we are able to make some impression on them, sir. I am speaking from my special standpoint.

*Cokeson*. [Turning bewildered to the *governor*] I don't want to be unpleasant, but having given him this news, I do feel it's awkward.

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*The governor*. I'll make a point of seeing him to-day.

*Cokeson*. I'm much obliged to you. I thought perhaps seeing him every day you wouldn't notice it.

*The governor*. [Rather sharply] If any sign of injury to his health shows itself his case will be reported at once. That's fully provided for. [He rises]

*Cokeson*. [Following his own thoughts] Of course, what you don't see doesn't trouble you; but having seen him, I don't want to have him on my mind.

*The governor*. I think you may safely leave it to us, sir.

*Cokeson*. [Mollified and apologetic] I thought you'd understand me. I'm a plain man—-never set myself up against authority. [Expanding to the *chaplain*] Nothing personal meant. Good-morning.

As he goes out the three officials do not look at each other, but their faces wear peculiar expressions.

*The chaplain*. Our friend seems to think that prison is a hospital.

*Cokeson*. [Returning suddenly with an apologetic air] There's just one little thing. This woman—I suppose I mustn't ask you to let him see her. It'd be a rare treat for them both. He's thinking about her all the time. Of course she's not his wife. But he's quite safe in here. They're a pitiful couple. You couldn't make an exception?

*The governor*. [Wearily] As you say, my dear sir, I couldn't make an exception; he won't be allowed another visit of any sort till he goes to a convict prison.

*Cokeson*. I see. [Rather coldly] Sorry to have troubled you. [He again goes out]

*The chaplain*. [Shrugging his shoulders] The plain man indeed, poor fellow. Come and have some lunch, Clements?

He and the *doctor* go out talking.

The *governor*, with a sigh, sits down at his table and takes up a pen.

The curtain falls.

## SCENE II

Part of the ground corridor of the prison. The walls are coloured with greenish distemper up to a stripe of deeper green about the height of a man's shoulder, and above this line are whitewashed. The floor is of blackened stones. Daylight is filtering through a heavily barred window at the end. The doors of four cells are visible. Each cell door has a little round peep-hole at the level of a man's eye, covered by a little round disc, which, raised upwards, affords a view o f the cell. On the wall, close to each cell door, hangs a little square board with the prisoner's name, number, and record.

Overhead can be seen the iron structures of the first-floor and second-floor corridors.

The *warder instructor*, a bearded man in blue uniform, with an apron, and some dangling keys, is just emerging from one of the cells.

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*Instructor*. [Speaking from the door into the cell] I'll have another bit for you when that's finished.

O'CLEARY. [Unseen—in an Irish voice] Little doubt o' that, sirr.

*Instructor*. [Gossiping] Well, you'd rather have it than nothing, I s'pose.

O'CLEARY. An' that's the blessed truth.

Sounds are heard of a cell door being closed and locked, and of approaching footsteps.

*Instructor*. [In a sharp, changed voice] Look alive over it!

He shuts the cell door, and stands at attention.

The *governor* comes walking down the corridor, followed by *Wooder*.

*The governor*. Anything to report?

*Instructor*. [Saluting] Q 3007 [he points to a cell] is behind with his work, sir. He'll lose marks to-day.

The *governor* nods and passes on to the end cell. The *instructor* goes away.

*The governor*. This is our maker of saws, isn't it?

He takes the saw from his pocket as *Wooder* throws open the door of the cell. The convict *Moaney* is seen lying on his bed, athwart the cell, with his cap on. He springs up and stands in the middle of the cell. He is a raw-boned fellow, about fifty-six years old, with outstanding bat's ears and fierce, staring, steel-coloured eyes.

*Wooder*. Cap off! [*Moaney* removes his cap] Out here! [*Moaney* Comes to the door]

*The governor*. [Beckoning him out into the corridor, and holding up the saw—with the manner of an officer speaking to a private] Anything to say about this, my man? [*Moaney* is silent] Come!

*Moaney*. It passed the time.

*The governor*. [Pointing into the cell] Not enough to do, eh?

*Moaney*. It don't occupy your mind.

*The governor*. [Tapping the saw] You might find a better way than this.

*Moaney*. [Sullenly] Well! What way? I must keep my hand in against the time I get out. What's the good of anything else to me at my time of life? [With a gradual change to civility, as his tongue warms] Ye know that, sir. I'll be in again within a year or two, after I've done this lot. I don't want to disgrace meself when I'm out. You've got your pride keeping the prison smart; well, I've got mine. [Seeing that the *governor* is listening with interest, he goes on, pointing to the saw] I must be doin' a little o' this. It's no harm to any one. I was five weeks makin' that saw—a, bit of all right it is, too; now I'll get cells, I suppose, or seven days' bread and water. You can't help it, sir, I know that—I quite put meself in your place.

*The governor*. Now, look here, Moaney, if I pass it over will you give me your word not to try it on again? Think! [He goes into the cell, walks to the end of it, mounts the stool, and tries the window-bars]

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*The governor*. [Returning] Well?

*Moaney*. [Who has been reflecting] I've got another six weeks to do in here, alone. I can't do it and think o' nothing. I must have something to interest me. You've made me a sporting offer, sir, but I can't pass my word about it. I shouldn't like to deceive a gentleman. [Pointing into the cell] Another four hours' steady work would have done it.

*The governor*. Yes, and what then? Caught, brought back, punishment. Five weeks' hard work to make this, and cells at the end of it, while they put anew bar to your window. Is it worth it, Moaney?

*Moaney*. [With a sort of fierceness] Yes, it is.

*The governor*. [Putting his hand to his brow] Oh, well! Two days' cells-bread and water.

*Moaney*. Thank 'e, sir.

He turns quickly like an animal and slips into his cell.

The *governor* looks after him and shakes his head as *Wooder* closes and locks the cell door.

*The governor*. Open Clipton's cell.

*Wooder* opens the door of *Clipton's* cell. *Clipton* is sitting on a stool just inside the door, at work on a pair of trousers. He is a small, thick, oldish man, with an almost shaven head, and smouldering little dark eyes behind smoked spectacles. He gets up and stands motionless in the doorway, peering at his visitors.

*The governor*. [Beckoning] Come out here a minute, Clipton.

*Clipton*, with a sort of dreadful quietness, comes into the corridor, the needle and thread in his hand. The *governor* signs to *Wooder*, who goes into the cell and inspects it carefully.

*The governor*. How are your eyes?

*Clifton*. I don't complain of them. I don't see the sun here. [He makes a stealthy movement, protruding his neck a little] There's just one thing, Mr. Governor, as you're speaking to me. I wish you'd ask the cove next door here to keep a bit quieter.

*The governor*. What's the matter? I don't want any tales, Clipton.

*Clipton*. He keeps me awake. I don't know who he is. [With contempt] One of this star class, I expect. Oughtn't to be here with us.

*The governor*. [Quietly] Quite right, Clipton. He'll be moved when there's a cell vacant.

*Clipton*. He knocks about like a wild beast in the early morning. I'm not used to it—-stops me getting my sleep out. In the evening too. It's not fair, Mr. Governor, as you're speaking to me. Sleep's the comfort I've got here; I'm entitled to take it out full.

*Wooder* comes out of the cell, and instantly, as though extinguished, *Clipton* moves with stealthy suddenness back into his cell.

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*Wooder*. All right, sir.

*The governor* nods. The door is closed and locked.

*The governor*. Which is the man who banged on his door this morning?

*Wooder*. [Going towards O'CLEARY'S cell] This one, sir; O'Cleary.

He lifts the disc and glances through the peephole.

*The governor*. Open.

*Wooder* throws open the door. O'CLEARY, who is seated at a little table by the door as if listening, springs up and stands at attention jest inside the doorway. He is a broad-faced, middle-aged man, with a wide, thin, flexible mouth, and little holes under his high cheek-bones.

*The governor*. Where's the joke, O'Cleary?

O'CLEARY. The joke, your honour? I've not seen one for a long time.

*The governor*. Banging on your door?

O'CLEARY. Oh! that!

*The governor*. It's womanish.

O'CLEARY. An' it's that I'm becoming this two months past.

*The governor*. Anything to complain of?

O'CLEARY. *No*, Sirr.

*The governor*. You're an old hand; you ought to know better.

O'CLEARY. Yes, I've been through it all.

*The governor*. You've got a youngster next door; you'll upset him.

O'CLEARY. It cam' over me, your honour. I can't always be the same steady man.

*The governor*. Work all right?

O'CLEARY. [Taking up a rush mat he is making] Oh! I can do it on me head. It's the miserablest stuff—don't take the brains of a mouse. [Working his mouth] It's here I feel it —the want of a little noise —a terrible little wud ease me.

*The governor*. You know as well as I do that if you were out in the shops you wouldn't be allowed to talk.

O'CLEARY. [With a look of profound meaning] Not with my mouth.

*The governor*. Well, then?

O'CLEARY. But it's the great conversation I'd have.

*The governor*. [With a smile] Well, no more conversation on your door.

O'CLEARY. No, sirr, I wud not have the little wit to repeat meself.

*The governor*. [Turning] Good-night.

O'CLEARY. Good-night, your honour.

He turns into his cell. The *governor* shuts the door.

*The governor*. [Looking at the record card] Can't help liking the poor blackguard.

*Wooder*. He's an amiable man, sir.

*The governor*. [Pointing down the corridor] Ask the doctor to come here, Mr. Wooder.

*Wooder* salutes and goes away down the corridor.

The *governor* goes to the door of *Falder's* cell. He raises his uninjured hand to uncover the peep-hole; but, without uncovering it, shakes his head and drops his hand; then, after scrutinising the record board, he opens the cell door. *Falder*, who is standing against it, lurches forward.

*The governor*. [Beckoning him out] Now tell me: can't you settle down, Falder?

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*Falder*. [In a breathless voice] Yes, sir.

*The governor*. You know what I mean? It's no good running your head against a stone wall, is it?

*Falder*. No, sir.

*The governor*. Well, come.

*Falder*. I try, sir.

*The governor*. Can't you sleep?

*Falder*. Very little. Between two o'clock and getting up's the worst time.

*The governor*. How's that?

*Falder*. [His lips twitch with a sort of smile] I don't know, sir. I was always nervous. [Suddenly voluble] Everything seems to get such a size then. I feel I'll never get out as long as I live.

*The governor*. That's morbid, my lad. Pull yourself together.

*Falder*. [With an equally sudden dogged resentment] Yes—I've got to.

*The governor*. Think of all these other fellows?

*Falder*. They're used to it.

*The governor*. They all had to go through it once for the first time, just as you're doing now.

*Falder*. Yes, sir, I shall get to be like them in time, I suppose.

*The governor*. [Rather taken aback] H'm! Well! That rests with you. Now come. Set your mind to it, like a good fellow. You're still quite young. A man can make himself what he likes.

*Falder*. [Wistfully] Yes, sir.

*The governor*. Take a good hold of yourself. Do you read?

*Falder*. I don't take the words in. [Hanging his head] I know it's no good; but I can't help thinking of what's going on outside. In my cell I can't see out at all. It's thick glass, sir.

*The governor*. You've had a visitor. Bad news?

*Falder*. Yes.

*The governor*. You mustn't think about it.

*Falder*. [Looking back at his cell] How can I help it, sir?

He suddenly becomes motionless as *Wooder* and the *doctor* approach. The *governor* motions to him to go back into his cell.

*Falder*. [Quick and low] I'm quite right in my head, sir. [He goes back into his cell.]

*The governor*. [To the *doctor*] Just go in and see him, Clements.

The *doctor* goes into the cell. The *governor* pushes the door to, nearly closing it, and walks towards the window.

*Wooder*. [Following] Sorry you should be troubled like this, sir. Very contented lot of men, on the whole.

*The governor*. [Shortly] You think so?

*Wooder*. Yes, sir. It's Christmas doing it, in my opinion.

*The governor*. [To himself] Queer, that!

*Wooder*. Beg pardon, sir?

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*The governor*. Christmas!

He turns towards the window, leaving *Wooder* looking at him with a sort of pained anxiety.

*Wooder*. [Suddenly] Do you think we make show enough, sir? If you'd like us to have more holly?

*The governor*. Not at all, Mr. Wooder.

*Wooder*. Very good, sir.

The *doctor* has come out of FALDER's Cell, and the *governor* beckons to him.

*The governor*. Well?

*The doctor*. I can't make anything much of him. He's nervous, of course.

*The governor*. Is there any sort of case to report? Quite frankly, Doctor.

*The doctor*. Well, I don't think the separates doing him any good; but then I could say the same of a lot of them—they'd get on better in the shops, there's no doubt.

*The governor*. You mean you'd have to recommend others?

*The doctor*. A dozen at least. It's on his nerves. There's nothing tangible. That fellow there [pointing to O'CLEARY'S cell], for instance—feels it just as much, in his way. If I once get away from physical facts—I shan't know where I am. Conscientiously, sir, I don't know how to differentiate him. He hasn't lost weight. Nothing wrong with his eyes. His pulse is good. Talks all right.

*The governor*. It doesn't amount to melancholia?

*The doctor*. [Shaking his head] I can report on him if you like; but if I do I ought to report on others.

*The governor*. I see. [Looking towards *Falder's* cell] The poor devil must just stick it then.

As he says thin he looks absently at *Wooder*.

*Wooder*. Beg pardon, sir?

For answer the *governor* stares at him, turns on his heel, and walks away. There is a sound as of beating on metal.

*The governor*. [Stopping] Mr. Wooder?

*Wooder*. Banging on his door, sir. I thought we should have more of that.

He hurries forward, passing the *governor*, who follows closely.

The curtain falls.

## SCENE III

FALDER's cell, a whitewashed space thirteen feet broad by seven deep, and nine feet high, with a rounded ceiling. The floor is of shiny blackened bricks. The barred window of opaque glass, with a ventilator, is high up in the middle of the end wall. In the middle of the opposite end wall is the narrow door. In a corner are the mattress and bedding rolled up [two blankets, two sheets, and a coverlet]. Above them is a quarter-circular wooden shelf, on which is a Bible and several little devotional books, piled in a symmetrical pyramid; there are also a black hair brush, tooth-brush,

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and a bit of soap.  In another corner is the wooden frame of a bed, standing on end.  There is a dark ventilator under the window, and another over the door.  Falder's work [a shirt to which he is putting buttonholes] is hung to a nail on the wall over a small wooden table, on which the novel "Lorna Doone" lies open.  Low down in the corner by the door is a thick glass screen, about a foot square, covering the gas-jet let into the wall.  There is also a wooden stool, and a pair of shoes beneath it.  Three bright round tins are set under the window.In fast-failing daylight, *Falder*, in his stockings, is seen standing motionless, with his head inclined towards the door, listening.  He moves a little closer to the door, his stockinged feet making no noise.  He stops at the door.  He is trying harder and harder to hear something, any little thing that is going on outside.  He springs suddenly upright—as if at a sound-and remains perfectly motionless.  Then, with a heavy sigh, he moves to his work, and stands looking at it, with his head doom; he does a stitch or two, having the air of a man so lost in sadness that each stitch is, as it were, a coming to life.  Then turning abruptly, he begins pacing the cell, moving his head, like an animal pacing its cage.  He stops again at the door, listens, and, placing the palms of hip hands against it with his fingers spread out, leans his forehead against the iron.  Turning from it, presently, he moves slowly back towards the window, tracing his way with his finger along the top line of the distemper that runs round the wall.  He stops under the window, and, picking up the lid of one of the tins, peers into it.  It has grown very nearly dark.  Suddenly the lid falls out of his hand with a clatter—the only sound that has broken the silence—and he stands staring intently at the wall where the stuff of the shirt is hanging rather white in the darkness—he seems to be seeing somebody or something there.  There is a sharp tap and click; the cell light behind the glass screen has been turned up.  The cell is brightly lighted.  *Falder* is seen gasping for breath.A sound from far away, as of distant, dull beating on thick metal, is suddenly audible.  *Falder* shrinks back, not able to bear this sudden clamour.  But the sound grows, as though some great tumbril were rolling towards the cell.  And gradually it seems to hypnotise him.  He begins creeping inch by inch nearer to the door.  The banging sound, travelling from cell to cell, draws closer and closer; *Falder's* hands are seen moving as if his spirit had already joined in this beating, and the sound swells till it seems to have entered the very cell.  He suddenly raises his clenched fists.  Panting violently, he flings himself at his door, and beats on it.

The curtain falls.

**ACT IV**

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The scene is again *Cokeson's* room, at a few minutes to ten of a March morning, two years later. The doors are all open. *Sweedle*, now blessed with a sprouting moustache, is getting the offices ready. He arranges papers on *Cokeson's* table; then goes to a covered washstand, raises the lid, and looks at himself in the mirror. While he is gazing his full *Ruth Honeywill* comes in through the outer office and stands in the doorway. There seems a kind of exultation and excitement behind her habitual impassivity.

*Sweedle*. [Suddenly seeing her, and dropping the lid of the washstand with a bang] Hello! It's you!

*Ruth*. Yes.

*Sweedle*. There's only me here! They don't waste their time hurrying down in the morning. Why, it must be two years since we had the pleasure of seeing you. [Nervously] What have you been doing with yourself?

*Ruth*. [Sardonically] Living.

*Sweedle*. [Impressed] If you want to see him [he points to *Cokeson's* chair], he'll be here directly—never misses—not much. [Delicately] I hope our friend's back from the country. His time's been up these three months, if I remember. [*Ruth* nods] I was awful sorry about that. The governor made a mistake—if you ask me.

*Ruth*. He did.

*Sweedle*. He ought to have given him a chanst. And, I say, the judge ought to ha' let him go after that. They've forgot what human nature's like. Whereas we know. [*Ruth* gives him a honeyed smile]

*Sweedle*. They come down on you like a cartload of bricks, flatten you out, and when you don't swell up again they complain of it. I know 'em—seen a lot of that sort of thing in my time. [He shakes his head in the plenitude of wisdom] Why, only the other day the governor——

But *Cokeson* has come in through the outer office; brisk with east wind, and decidedly greyer.

*Cokeson*. [Drawing off his coat and gloves] Why! it's you! [Then motioning *Sweedle* out, and closing the door] Quite a stranger! Must be two years. D'you want to see me? I can give you a minute. Sit down! Family well?

*Ruth*. Yes. I'm not living where I was.

*Cokeson*. [Eyeing her askance] I hope things are more comfortable at home.

*Ruth*. I couldn't stay with Honeywill, after all.

*Cokeson*. You haven't done anything rash, I hope. I should be sorry if you'd done anything rash.

*Ruth*. I've kept the children with me.

*Cokeson*. [Beginning to feel that things are not so jolly as ha had hoped] Well, I'm glad to have seen you. You've not heard from the young man, I suppose, since he came out?

*Ruth*. Yes, I ran across him yesterday.

*Cokeson*. I hope he's well.

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*Ruth*. [With sudden fierceness] He can't get anything to do. It's dreadful to see him. He's just skin and bone.

*Cokeson*. [With genuine concern] Dear me! I'm sorry to hear that. [On his guard again] Didn't they find him a place when his time was up?

*Ruth*. He was only there three weeks. It got out.

*Cokeson*. I'm sure I don't know what I can do for you. I don't like to be snubby.

*Ruth*. I can't bear his being like that.

*Cokeson*. [Scanning her not unprosperous figure] I know his relations aren't very forthy about him. Perhaps you can do something for him, till he finds his feet.

*Ruth*. Not now. I could have—but not now.

*Cokeson*. I don't understand.

*Ruth*. [Proudly] I've seen him again—that's all over.

*Cokeson*. [Staring at her—disturbed] I'm a family man—I don't want to hear anything unpleasant. Excuse me—I'm very busy.

*Ruth*. I'd have gone home to my people in the country long ago, but they've never got over me marrying Honeywill. I never was waywise, Mr. Cokeson, but I'm proud. I was only a girl, you see, when I married him. I thought the world of him, of course . . . he used to come travelling to our farm.

*Cokeson*. [Regretfully] I did hope you'd have got on better, after you saw me.

*Ruth*. He used me worse than ever. He couldn't break my nerve, but I lost my health; and then he began knocking the children about. I couldn't stand that. I wouldn't go back now, if he were dying.

*Cokeson*. [Who has risen and is shifting about as though dodging a stream of lava] We mustn't be violent, must we?

*Ruth*. [Smouldering] A man that can't behave better than that— [There is silence]

*Cokeson*. [Fascinated in spite of himself] Then there you were! And what did you do then?

*Ruth*. [With a shrug] Tried the same as when I left him before..., making skirts... cheap things. It was the best I could get, but I never made more than ten shillings a week,

buying my own cotton and working all day; I hardly ever got to bed till past twelve. I kept at it for nine months. [Fiercely] Well, I'm not fit for that; I wasn't made for it. I'd rather die.

*Cokeson*. My dear woman! We mustn't talk like that.

*Ruth*. It was starvation for the children too—after what they'd always had. I soon got not to care. I used to be too tired. [She is silent]

*Cokeson*. [With fearful curiosity] Why, what happened then?

*Ruth*. [With a laugh] My employer happened then—he's happened ever since.

*Cokeson*. Dear! Oh dear! I never came across a thing like this.

*Ruth*. [Dully] He's treated me all right. But I've done with that. [Suddenly her lips begin to quiver, and she hides them with the back of her hand] I never thought I'd see him again, you see. It was just a chance I met him by Hyde Park. We went in there and sat down, and he told me all about himself. Oh! Mr. Cokeson, give him another chance.

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*Cokeson*. [Greatly disturbed] Then you've both lost your livings! What a horrible position!

*Ruth*. If he could only get here—where there's nothing to find out about him!

*Cokeson*. We can't have anything derogative to the firm.

*Ruth*. I've no one else to go to.

*Cokeson*. I'll speak to the partners, but I don't think they'll take him, under the circumstances. I don't really.

*Ruth*. He came with me; he's down there in the street. [She points to the window.]

*Cokeson*. [On his dignity] He shouldn't have done that until he's sent for. [Then softening at the look on her face] We've got a vacancy, as it happens, but I can't promise anything.

*Ruth*. It would be the saving of him.

*Cokeson*. Well, I'll do what I can, but I'm not sanguine. Now tell him that I don't want him till I see how things are. Leave your address? [Repeating her] 83 Mullingar Street? [He notes it on blotting-paper] Good-morning.

*Ruth*. Thank you.

She moves towards the door, turns as if to speak, but does not, and goes away.

*Cokeson*. [Wiping his head and forehead with a large white cotton handkerchief] What a business! [Then looking amongst his papers, he sounds his bell. *Sweedle* answers it]

*Cokeson*. Was that young Richards coming here to-day after the clerk's place?

*Sweedle*. Yes.

*Cokeson*. Well, keep him in the air; I don't want to see him yet.

*Sweedle*. What shall I tell him, sir?

*Cokeson*. [With asperity] invent something. Use your brains. Don't stump him off altogether.

*Sweedle*. Shall I tell him that we've got illness, sir?

*Cokeson*. No! Nothing untrue. Say I'm not here to-day.

*Sweedle*. Yes, sir. Keep him hankering?

*Cokeson*. Exactly. And look here. You remember Falder? I may be having him round to see me. Now, treat him like you'd have him treat you in a similar position.

*Sweedle*. I naturally should do.

*Cokeson*. That's right. When a man's down never hit 'im. 'Tisn't necessary. Give him a hand up. That's a metaphor I recommend to you in life. It's sound policy.

*Sweedle*. Do you think the governors will take him on again, sir?

*Cokeson*. Can't say anything about that. [At the sound of some one having entered the outer office] Who's there?

*Sweedle*. [Going to the door and looking] It's Falder, sir.

*Cokeson*. [Vexed] Dear me! That's very naughty of her. Tell him to call again. I don't want——

He breaks off as *Falder* comes in. *Falder* is thin, pale, older, his eyes have grown more restless. His clothes are very worn and loose.

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*Sweedle*, nodding cheerfully, withdraws.

*Cokeson*. Glad to see you. You're rather previous. [Trying to keep things pleasant] Shake hands! She's striking while the iron's hot. [He wipes his forehead] I don't blame her. She's anxious.

*Falder* timidly takes COKESON's hand and glances towards the partners' door.

*Cokeson*. No—not yet! Sit down! [*Falder* sits in the chair at the aide of COKESON's table, on which he places his cap] Now you are here I'd like you to give me a little account of yourself. [Looking at him over his spectacles] How's your health?

*Falder*. I'm alive, Mr. Cokeson.

*Cokeson*. [Preoccupied] I'm glad to hear that. About this matter. I don't like doing anything out of the ordinary; it's not my habit. I'm a plain man, and I want everything smooth and straight. But I promised your friend to speak to the partners, and I always keep my word.

*Falder*. I just want a chance, Mr. Cokeson. I've paid for that job a thousand times and more. I have, sir. No one knows. They say I weighed more when I came out than when I went in. They couldn't weigh me here [he touches his head] or here [he touches —his heart, and gives a sort of laugh]. Till last night I'd have thought there was nothing in here at all.

*Cokeson*. [Concerned] You've not got heart disease?

*Falder*. Oh! they passed me sound enough.

*Cokeson*. But they got you a place, didn't they?

*Falser*. Yes; very good people, knew all about it—very kind to me. I thought I was going to get on first rate. But one day, all of a sudden, the other clerks got wind of it.... I couldn't stick it, Mr. *Cokeson*, I couldn't, sir.

*Cokeson*. Easy, my dear fellow, easy!

*Falder*. I had one small job after that, but it didn't last.

*Cokeson*. How was that?

*Falder*. It's no good deceiving you, Mr. Cokeson. The fact is, I seem to be struggling against a thing that's all round me. I can't explain it: it's as if I was in a net; as fast as I cut it here, it grows up there. I didn't act as I ought to have, about references; but what

are you to do? You must have them. And that made me afraid, and I left. In fact, I'm—-I'm afraid all the time now.

He bows his head and leans dejectedly silent over the table.

*Cokeson*. I feel for you—I do really. Aren't your sisters going to do anything for you?

*Falder*. One's in consumption. And the other——

*Cokeson*. Ye...es. She told me her husband wasn't quite pleased with you.

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*Falder*. When I went there—they were at supper—my sister wanted to give me a kiss—I know. But he just looked at her, and said: "What have you come for?" Well, I pocketed my pride and I said: "Aren't you going to give me your hand, Jim? Cis is, I know," I said. "Look here!" he said, "that's all very well, but we'd better come to an understanding. I've been expecting you, and I've made up my mind. I'll give you fifteen pounds to go to Canada with." "I see," I said—"good riddance! No, thanks; keep your fifteen pounds." Friendship's a queer thing when you've been where I have.

*Cokeson*. I understand. Will you take the fifteen pound from me? [Flustered, as *Falder* regards him with a queer smile] Quite without prejudice; I meant it kindly.

*Falder*. I'm not allowed to leave the country.

*Cokeson*. Oh! ye...es—ticket-of-leave? You aren't looking the thing.

*Falder*. I've slept in the Park three nights this week. The dawns aren't all poetry there. But meeting her—I feel a different man this morning. I've often thought the being fond of hers the best thing about me; it's sacred, somehow—and yet it did for me. That's queer, isn't it?

*Cokeson*. I'm sure we're all very sorry for you.

*Falder*. That's what I've found, Mr. Cokeson. Awfully sorry for me. [With quiet bitterness] But it doesn't do to associate with criminals!

*Cokeson*. Come, come, it's no use calling yourself names. That never did a man any good. Put a face on it.

*Falder*. It's easy enough to put a face on it, sir, when you're independent. Try it when you're down like me. They talk about giving you your deserts. Well, I think I've had just a bit over.

*Cokeson*. [Eyeing him askance over his spectacles] I hope they haven't made a Socialist of you.

> *Falder* is suddenly still, as if brooding over his past self; he utters a peculiar laugh.

*Cokeson*. You must give them credit for the best intentions. Really you must. Nobody wishes you harm, I'm sure.

*Falder*. I believe that, Mr. Cokeson. Nobody wishes you harm, but they down you all the same. This feeling—[He stares round him, as though at something closing in] It's crushing me. [With sudden impersonality] I know it is.

*Cokeson*. [Horribly disturbed] There's nothing there! We must try and take it quiet. I'm sure I've often had you in my prayers. Now leave it to me. I'll use my gumption and take 'em when they're jolly. [As he speaks the two partners come in]

*Cokeson* [Rather disconcerted, but trying to put them all at ease] I didn't expect you quite so soon. I've just been having a talk with this young man. I think you'll remember him.

*James*. [With a grave, keen look] Quite well. How are you, Falder?

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*Walter*. [Holding out his hand almost timidly] Very glad to see you again, Falder.

*Falder*. [Who has recovered his self-control, takes the hand] Thank you, sir.

*Cokeson*. Just a word, Mr. James. [To *Falder*, pointing to the clerks' office] You might go in there a minute. You know your way. Our junior won't be coming this morning. His wife's just had a little family.

*Falder*, goes uncertainly out into the clerks' office.

*Cokeson*. [Confidentially] I'm bound to tell you all about it. He's quite penitent. But there's a prejudice against him. And you're not seeing him to advantage this morning; he's under-nourished. It's very trying to go without your dinner.

*James*. Is that so, *Cokeson*?

*Cokeson*. I wanted to ask you. He's had his lesson. Now we know all about him, and we want a clerk. There is a young fellow applying, but I'm keeping him in the air.

*James*. A gaol-bird in the office, *Cokeson*? I don't see it.

*Walter*. "The rolling of the chariot-wheels of Justice!" I've never got that out of my head.

*James*. I've nothing to reproach myself with in this affair. What's he been doing since he came out?

*Cokeson*. He's had one or two places, but he hasn't kept them. He's sensitive—quite natural. Seems to fancy everybody's down on him.

*James*. Bad sign. Don't like the fellow—never did from the first. "Weak character"'s written all over him.

*Walter*. I think we owe him a leg up.

*James*. He brought it all on himself.

*Walter*. The doctrine of full responsibility doesn't quite hold in these days.

*James*. [Rather grimly] You'll find it safer to hold it for all that, my boy.

*Walter*. For oneself, yes—not for other people, thanks.

*James*. Well! I don't want to be hard.

*Cokeson*. I'm glad to hear you say that. He seems to see something [spreading his arms] round him. 'Tisn't healthy.

*James*. What about that woman he was mixed up with? I saw some one uncommonly like her outside as we came in.

*Cokeson*. That! Well, I can't keep anything from you. He has met her.

*James*. Is she with her husband?

*Cokeson*. No.

*James*. Falder living with her, I suppose?

*Cokeson*. [Desperately trying to retain the new-found jollity] I don't know that of my own knowledge. 'Tisn't my business.

*James*. It's our business, if we're going to engage him, *Cokeson*.

*Cokeson*. [Reluctantly] I ought to tell you, perhaps. I've had the party here this morning.

*James*. I thought so. [To *Walter*] No, my dear boy, it won't do. Too shady altogether!

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*Cokeson*. The two things together make it very awkward for you—I see that.

*Walter*. [Tentatively] I don't quite know what we have to do with his private life.

*James*. No, no! He must make a clean sheet of it, or he can't come here.

*Walter*. Poor devil!

*Cokeson*. Will you—have him in? [And as *James* nods] I think I can get him to see reason.

*James*. [Grimly] You can leave that to me, *Cokeson*.

*Walter*. [To *James*, in a low voice, while *Cokeson* is summoning *Falder*] His whole future may depend on what we do, dad.

*Falder* comes in. He has pulled himself together, and presents a steady front.

*James*. Now look here, Falder. My son and I want to give you another chance; but there are two things I must say to you. In the first place: It's no good coming here as a victim. If you've any notion that you've been unjustly treated—get rid of it. You can't play fast and loose with morality and hope to go scot-free. If Society didn't take care of itself, nobody would—the sooner you realise that the better.

*Falder*. Yes, sir; but—may I say something?

*James*. Well?

*Falder*. I had a lot of time to think it over in prison. [He stops]

*Cokeson*. [Encouraging him] I'm sure you did.

*Falder*. There were all sorts there. And what I mean, sir, is, that if we'd been treated differently the first time, and put under somebody that could look after us a bit, and not put in prison, not a quarter of us would ever have got there.

*James*. [Shaking his head] I'm afraid I've very grave doubts of that, Falder.

*Falder*. [With a gleam of malice] Yes, sir, so I found.

*James*. My good fellow, don't forget that you began it.

*Falder*. I never wanted to do wrong.

*James*. Perhaps not. But you did.

*Falder*. [With all the bitterness of his past suffering] It's knocked me out of time. [Pulling himself up] That is, I mean, I'm not what I was.

*James*. This isn't encouraging for us, Falder.

*Cokeson*. He's putting it awkwardly, Mr. James.

*Falder*. [Throwing over his caution from the intensity of his feeling] I mean it, Mr. Cokeson.

*James*. Now, lay aside all those thoughts, Falder, and look to the future.

*Falder*. [Almost eagerly] Yes, sir, but you don't understand what prison is. It's here it gets you.

He grips his chest.

*Cokeson*. [In a whisper to James] I told you he wanted nourishment.

*Walter*. Yes, but, my dear fellow, that'll pass away. Time's merciful.

*Falder*. [With his face twitching] I hope so, sir.

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*James*. [Much more gently] Now, my boy, what you've got to do is to put all the past behind you and build yourself up a steady reputation. And that brings me to the second thing. This woman you were mixed up with you must give us your word, you know, to have done with that. There's no chance of your keeping straight if you're going to begin your future with such a relationship.

*Falder*. [Looking from one to the other with a hunted expression] But sir . . . but sir . . . it's the one thing I looked forward to all that time. And she too . . . I couldn't find her before last night.

During this and what follows *Cokeson* becomes more and more uneasy.

*James*. This is painful, Falder. But you must see for yourself that it's impossible for a firm like this to close its eyes to everything. Give us this proof of your resolve to keep straight, and you can come back—not otherwise.

*Falder*. [After staring at *James*, suddenly stiffens himself] I couldn't give her up. I couldn't! Oh, sir!

I'm all she's got to look to. And I'm sure she's all I've got.

*James*. I'm very sorry, Falder, but I must be firm. It's for the benefit of you both in the long run. No good can come of this connection. It was the cause of all your disaster.

*Falder*. But sir, it means-having gone through all that-getting broken up—my nerves are in an awful state—for nothing. I did it for her.

*James*. Come! If she's anything of a woman she'll see it for herself. She won't want to drag you down further. If there were a prospect of your being able to marry her—it might be another thing.

*Falder*. It's not my fault, sir, that she couldn't get rid of him —she would have if she could. That's been the whole trouble from the beginning. [Looking suddenly at *Walter*] . . . If anybody would help her! It's only money wants now, I'm sure.

*Cokeson*. [Breaking in, as *Walter* hesitates, and is about to speak] I don't think we need consider that—it's rather far-fetched.

*Falder*. [To *Walter*, appealing] He must have given her full cause since; she could prove that he drove her to leave him.

*Walter*. I'm inclined to do what you say, Falder, if it can be managed.

*Falder*. Oh, sir!

He goes to the window and looks down into the street.

*Cokeson*. [Hurriedly] You don't take me, Mr. Walter. I have my reasons.

*Falder*. [From the window] She's down there, sir. Will you see her?
I can beckon to her from here.

*Walter* hesitates, and looks from *Cokeson* to *James*.

*James*. [With a sharp nod] Yes, let her come.

*Falder* beckons from the window.

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*Cokeson*. [In a low fluster to *James* and *Walter*] No, Mr. James. She's not been quite what she ought to ha' been, while this young man's been away. She's lost her chance. We can't consult how to swindle the Law.

*Falder* has come from the window. The three men look at him in a sort of awed silence.

*Falder*. [With instinctive apprehension of some change—looking from one to the other] There's been nothing between us, sir, to prevent it . . . . What I said at the trial was true. And last night we only just sat in the Park.

*Sweedle* comes in from the outer office.

*Cokeson*. What is it?

*Sweedle*. Mrs. Honeywill. [There is silence]

*James*. Show her in.

*Ruth* comes slowly in, and stands stoically with *Falder* on one side and the three men on the other. No one speaks. *Cokeson* turns to his table, bending over his papers as though the burden of the situation were forcing him back into his accustomed groove.

*James*. [Sharply] Shut the door there. [*Sweedle* shuts the door] We've asked you to come up because there are certain facts to be faced in this matter. I understand you have only just met Falder again.

*Ruth*. Yes—only yesterday.

*James*. He's told us about himself, and we're very sorry for him. I've promised to take him back here if he'll make a fresh start. [Looking steadily at *Ruth*] This is a matter that requires courage, ma'am.

*Ruth*, who is looking at *Falder*, begins to twist her hands in front of her as though prescient of disaster.

*Falder*. Mr. Walter How is good enough to say that he'll help us to get you a divorce.

*Ruth* flashes a startled glance at *James* and *Walter*.

*James*. I don't think that's practicable, Falder.

*Falder*. But, Sir——!

*James*. [Steadily] Now, Mrs. Honeywill. You're fond of him.

*Ruth*. Yes, Sir; I love him.

She looks miserably at *Falder*.

*James*. Then you don't want to stand in his way, do you?

*Ruth*. [In a faint voice] I could take care of him.

*James*. The best way you can take care of him will be to give him up.

*Falder*. Nothing shall make me give you up. You can get a divorce. There's been nothing between us, has there?

*Ruth*. [Mournfully shaking her head-without looking at him] No.

*Falder*. We'll keep apart till it's over, sir; if you'll only help us—we promise.

*James*. [To *Ruth*] You see the thing plainly, don't you? You see what I mean?

*Ruth*. [Just above a whisper] Yes.

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*Cokeson*. [To himself] There's a dear woman.

*James*. The situation is impossible.

*Ruth*. Must I, Sir?

*James*. [Forcing himself to look at her] I put it to you, ma'am. His future is in your hands.

*Ruth*. [Miserably] I want to do the best for him.

*James*. [A little huskily] That's right, that's right!

*Falder*. I don't understand. You're not going to give me up—after all this? There's something—[Starting forward to *James*] Sir, I swear solemnly there's been nothing between us.

*James*. I believe you, Falder. Come, my lad, be as plucky as she is.

*Falder*. Just now you were going to help us. [He starts at *Ruth*, who is standing absolutely still; his face and hands twitch and quiver as the truth dawns on him] What is it? You've not been—

*Walter*. Father!

*James*. [Hurriedly] There, there! That'll do, that'll do! I'll give you your chance, Falder. Don't let me know what you do with yourselves, that's all.

*Falder*. [As if he has not heard] Ruth?

*Ruth* looks at him; and *Falder* covers his face with his hands.
There is silence.

*Cokeson*. [Suddenly] There's some one out there. [To *Ruth*] Go in here. You'll feel better by yourself for a minute.

He points to the clerks' room and moves towards the outer office. *Falder* does not move. *Ruth* puts out her hand timidly. He shrinks back from the touch. She turns and goes miserably into the clerks' room. With a brusque movement he follows, seizing her by the shoulder just inside the doorway. *Cokeson* shuts the door.

*James*. [Pointing to the outer office] Get rid of that, whoever it is.

*Sweedle*. [Opening the office door, in a scared voice]
Detective-Sergeant blister.

The detective enters, and closes the door behind him.

*Wister*. Sorry to disturb you, sir. A clerk you had here, two years and a half ago: I arrested him in, this room.

*James*. What about him?

*Wister*. I thought perhaps I might get his whereabouts from you. [There is an awkward silence]

*Cokeson*. [Pleasantly, coming to the rescue] We're not responsible for his movements; you know that.

*James*. What do you want with him?

*Wister*. He's failed to report himself this last four weeks.

*Walter*. How d'you mean?

*Wister*. Ticket-of-leave won't be up for another six months, sir.

*Walter*. Has he to keep in touch with the police till then?

*Wister*. We're bound to know where he sleeps every night. I dare say we shouldn't interfere, sir, even though he hasn't reported himself. But we've just heard there's a serious matter of obtaining employment with a forged reference. What with the two things together—we must have him.

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Again there is silence. *Walter* and *Cokeson* steal glances at *James*, who stands staring steadily at the detective.

*Cokeson*. [Expansively] We're very busy at the moment. If you could make it convenient to call again we might be able to tell you then.

*James*. [Decisively] I'm a servant of the Law, but I dislike peaching. In fact, I can't do such a thing. If you want him you must find him without us.

As he speaks his eye falls on *Falder's* cap, still lying on the table, and his face contracts.

*Wister*. [Noting the gesture—quietly] Very good, sir. I ought to warn you that, having broken the terms of his licence, he's still a convict, and sheltering a convict.

*James*. I shelter no one. But you mustn't come here and ask questions which it's not my business to answer.

*Wister*. [Dryly] I won't trouble you further then, gentlemen.

*Cokeson*. I'm sorry we couldn't give you the information. You quite understand, don't you? Good-morning!

*Wister* turns to go, but instead of going to the door of the outer office he goes to the door of the clerks' room.

*Cokeson*. The other door.... the other door!

*Wister* opens the clerks' door. RUTHS's voice is heard: "Oh, do!" and *Falder's*: "I can't!" There is a little pause; then, with sharp fright, *Ruth* says: "Who's that?"

*Wister* has gone in.

The three men look aghast at the door.

*Wister* [From within] Keep back, please!

He comes swiftly out with his arm twisted in *Falder's*. The latter gives a white, staring look at the three men.

*Walter*. Let him go this time, for God's sake!

*Wister*. I couldn't take the responsibility, sir.

*Falder*. [With a queer, desperate laugh] Good!

Flinging a look back at *Ruth*, he throws up his head, and goes out through the outer office, half dragging *Wister* after him.

*Walter*. [With despair] That finishes him. It'll go on for ever now.

*Sweedle* can be seen staring through the outer door. There are sounds of footsteps descending the stone stairs; suddenly a dull thud, a faint "My God!" in WISTER's voice.

*James*. What's that?

*Sweedle* dashes forward. The door swings to behind him. There is dead silence.

*Walter*. [Starting forward to the inner room] The woman-she's fainting!

He and *Cokeson* support the fainting *Ruth* from the doorway of the clerks' room.

*Cokeson*. [Distracted] Here, my dear! There, there!

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*Walter*. Have you any brandy?

*Cokeson*. I've got sherry.

*Walter*. Get it, then. Quick!

He places *Ruth* in a chair—which *James* has dragged forward.

*Cokeson*. [With sherry] Here! It's good strong sherry. [They try to force the sherry between her lips.]

There is the sound of feet, and they stop to listen.

The outer door is reopened—*Wister* and *Sweedle* are seen carrying some burden.

*James*. [Hurrying forward] What is it?

They lay the burden doom in the outer office, out of sight, and all but *Ruth* cluster round it, speaking in hushed voices.

*Wister*. He jumped—neck's broken.

*Walter*. Good God!

*Wister*. He must have been mad to think he could give me the slip like that. And what was it—just a few months!

*Walter*. [Bitterly] Was that all?

*James*. What a desperate thing! [Then, in a voice unlike his own] Run for a doctor—-you! [*Sweedle* rushes from the outer office] An ambulance!

*Wister* goes out. On RUTH's face an expression of fear and horror has been seen growing, as if she dared not turn towards the voices. She now rises and steals towards them.

*Walter*. [Turning suddenly] Look!

The three men shrink back out of her way, one by one, into *Cokeson's* room. *Ruth* drops on her knees by the body.

*Ruth*. [In a whisper] What is it? He's not breathing. [She crouches over him] My dear! My pretty!

In the outer office doorway the figures of men am seen standing.

*Ruth*. [Leaping to her feet] No, no!  No, no!  He's dead!

[The figures of the men shrink back]

*Cokeson*. [Stealing forward.  In a hoarse voice] There, there, poor dear woman!

At the sound behind her *Ruth* faces round at him.

*Cokeson*.  No one'll touch him now!  Never again!  He's safe with gentle Jesus!

*Ruth* stands as though turned to stone in the doorway staring at *Cokeson*, who, bending humbly before her, holds out his hand as one would to a lost dog.

The curtain falls.

# GALSWORTHY PLAYS—SERIES 3

**Contents:  The Fugitive The Pigeon The Mob**

# THE FUGITIVE

A Play in Four Acts

# PERSONS OF THE PLAY

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*George Dedmond*, a civilian
*Clare*, his wife
*general sir Charles Dedmond*, K.C.B., his father.
*Lady Dedmond*, his mother
*Reginald Huntingdon*, Clare's brother
*Edward Fullarton*, her friend
*Dorothy Fullarton*, her friend
*Paynter*, a manservant
*Burney*, a maid
*Twisden*, a solicitor
*Haywood*, a tobacconist
*Malise*, a writer
*Mrs*. *Miler*, his caretaker
*the Porter* at his lodgings
A *boy* messenger
*Arnaud*, a waiter at "The Gascony"
*Mr*. *Varley*, manager of "The Gascony"
*Two ladies with large hats*, A *lady and gentleman*, A *languid lord*,
*his companion*, A *young man*, A *blond gentleman*, A *dark gentleman*.

*Act* I. George Dedmond's Flat. Evening.

*Act* II. The rooms of Malise. Morning.

*Act* III. *Scene* I. The rooms of Malice. Late afternoon.

*Scene*II. The rooms of Malise. Early Afternoon.

*Act* IV. A small supper room at "The Gascony."

Between Acts I and II three nights elapse.

Between Acts II and Act III, Scene I, three months.

Between Act III, Scene I, and Act III, Scene II, three months.

Between Act III, Scene II, and Act IV, six months.

"With a hey-ho chivy
Hark forrard, hark forrard, tantivy!"

# ACT I

The *scene* is the pretty drawing-room of a flat. There are two doors, one open into the hall, the other shut and curtained. Through a large bay window, the curtains of which are not yet drawn, the towers of Westminster can be seen darkening in a summer sunset; a grand piano stands across one corner. The man-servant *Paynter*, clean-shaven and discreet, is arranging two tables for Bridge.Burney, the maid, a girl with one of those flowery Botticellian faces only met with in England, comes in through the curtained door, which she leaves open, disclosing the glimpse of a white wall. *Paynter* looks up at her; she shakes her head, with an expression of concern.

Paynter. Where's she gone?

*Burney*. Just walks about, I fancy.

*Paynter*. She and the Governor don't hit it! One of these days she'll flit—you'll see. I like her—she's a lady; but these thoroughbred 'uns—it's their skin and their mouths. They'll go till they drop if they like the job, and if they don't, it's nothing but jib—jib—jib. How was it down there before she married him?

*Burney*. Oh! Quiet, of course.

*Paynter*. Country homes—I know 'em. What's her father, the old Rector, like?

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*Burney*. Oh! very steady old man. The mother dead long before I took the place.

*Paynter*. Not a penny, I suppose?

*Burney*. [Shaking her head] No; and seven of them.

*Paynter*. [At sound of the hall door] The Governor!

*Burney* withdraws through the curtained door.

*George Dedmond* enters from the hall. He is in evening dress, opera hat, and overcoat; his face is broad, comely, glossily shaved, but with neat moustaches. His eyes, clear, small, and blue-grey, have little speculation. His hair is well brushed.

*George*. [Handing *Paynter* his coat and hat] Look here, Paynter! When I send up from the Club for my dress things, always put in a black waistcoat as well.

*Paynter*. I asked the mistress, sir.

*George*. In future—see?

*Paynter*. Yes, sir. [Signing towards the window] Shall I leave the sunset, sir?

But *George* has crossed to the curtained door; he opens it and says: "Clare!" Receiving no answer, he goes in. *Paynter* switches up the electric light. His face, turned towards the curtained door, is apprehensive.

*George*. [Re-entering] Where's Mrs. Dedmond?

*Paynter*. I hardly know, sir.

*George*. Dined in?

*Paynter*. She had a mere nothing at seven, sir.

*George*. Has she gone out, since?

*Paynter*. Yes, sir—that is, yes. The—er—mistress was not dressed at all. A little matter of fresh air, I think; sir.

*George*. What time did my mother say they'd be here for Bridge?

*Paynter*. Sir Charles and Lady Dedmond were coming at half-past nine; and Captain Huntingdon, too—Mr. and Mrs. Fullarton might be a bit late, sir.

*George*. It's that now. Your mistress said nothing?

*Paynter*. Not to me, sir.

*George*. Send Burney.

*Paynter*. Very good, sir. [He withdraws.]

*George* stares gloomily at the card tables. *Burney* comes in front the hall.

*George*. Did your mistress say anything before she went out?

*Burney*. Yes, sir.

*George*. Well?

*Burney*. I don't think she meant it, sir.

*George*. I don't want to know what you don't think, I want the fact.

*Burney*. Yes, sir. The mistress said: "I hope it'll be a pleasant evening, Burney!"

*George*. Oh!—Thanks.

*Burney*. I've put out the mistress's things, sir.

*George*. Ah!

*Burney*. Thank you, sir. [She withdraws.]

*George*. Damn!

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He again goes to the curtained door, and passes through. *Paynter*, coming in from the hall, announces: "General Sir Charles and Lady Dedmond." *Sir Charles* is an upright, well-groomed, grey-moustached, red-faced man of sixty-seven, with a keen eye for molehills, and none at all for mountains. *Lady Dedmond* has a firm, thin face, full of capability and decision, not without kindliness; and faintly weathered, as if she had faced many situations in many parts of the world. She is fifty five.

*Paynter* withdraws.

*Sir Charles*. Hullo! Where are they? H'm!

As he speaks, *George* re-enters.

*Lady Dedmond*. [Kissing her son] Well, George. Where's Clare?

*George*. Afraid she's late.

*Lady Dedmond*. Are we early?

*George*. As a matter of fact, she's not in.

*Lady Dedmond*. Oh?

*Sir Charles*. H'm! Not—not had a rumpus?

*George*. Not particularly. [With the first real sign of feeling]
What I can't stand is being made a fool of before other people.
Ordinary friction one can put up with. But that——

*Sir Charles*. Gone out on purpose? What!

*Lady Dedmond*. What was the trouble?

*George*. I told her this morning you were coming in to Bridge.
Appears she'd asked that fellow Malise, for music.

*Lady Dedmond*. Without letting you know?

*George*. I believe she did tell me.

*Lady Dedmond*. But surely——

*George*. I don't want to discuss it. There's never anything in particular. We're all anyhow, as you know.

*Lady Dedmond*. I see. [She looks shrewdly at her son] My dear, I should be rather careful about him, I think.

*Sir Charles*. Who's that?

*Lady Dedmond*. That Mr. Malise.

*Sir Charles*. Oh! That chap!

*George*. Clare isn't that sort.

*Lady Dedmond*. I know. But she catches up notions very easily. I think it's a great pity you ever came across him.

*Sir Charles*. Where did you pick him up?

*George*. Italy—this Spring—some place or other where they couldn't speak English.

*Sir Charles*. Um! That's the worst of travellin'.

*Lady Dedmond*. I think you ought to have dropped him. These literary people——- [Quietly] From exchanging ideas to something else, isn't very far, George.

*Sir Charles*. We'll make him play Bridge. Do him good, if he's that sort of fellow.

*Lady Dedmond*. Is anyone else coming?

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*George*. Reggie Huntingdon, and the Fullartons.

*Lady Dedmond*. [Softly] You know, my dear boy, I've been meaning to speak to you for a long time. It is such a pity you and Clare—What is it?

*George*. God knows! I try, and I believe she does.

*Sir Charles*. It's distressin'—for us, you know, my dear fellow— distressin'.

*Lady Dedmond*. I know it's been going on for a long time.

*George*. Oh! leave it alone, mother.

*Lady Dedmond*. But, George, I'm afraid this man has brought it to a point—put ideas into her head.

*George*. You can't dislike him more than I do. But there's nothing one can object to.

*Lady Dedmond*. Could Reggie Huntingdon do anything, now he's home? Brothers sometimes——

*George*. I can't bear my affairs being messed about——

*Lady Dedmond*. Well! it would be better for you and Clare to be supposed to be out together, than for her to be out alone. Go quietly into the dining-room and wait for her.

*Sir Charles*. Good! Leave your mother to make up something. She'll do it!

*Lady Dedmond*. That may be he. Quick!

[A bell sounds.]

*George* goes out into the hall, leaving the door open in his haste. *Lady Dedmond*, following, calls "Paynter!" *Paynter* enters.

*Lady Dedmond*. Don't say anything about your master and mistress being out. I'll explain.

*Paynter*. The master, my lady?

*Lady Dedmond*. Yes, I know. But you needn't say so. Do you understand?

*Paynter*. [In polite dudgeon] Just so, my lady.

[He goes out.]

*Sir Charles*. By Jove! That fellow smells a rat!

*Lady Dedmond*. Be careful, Charles!

*Sir Charles*. I should think so.

*Lady Dedmond*. I shall simply say they're dining out, and that we're not to wait Bridge for them.

*Sir Charles*. [Listening] He's having a palaver with that man of George's.

*Paynter*, reappearing, announces: "Captain Huntingdon." *Sir Charles* and *lady Dedmond* turn to him with relief.

*Lady Dedmond*. Ah! It's you, Reginald!

*Huntingdon*. [A tall, fair soldier, of thirty] How d'you do? How are you, sir? What's the matter with their man?

*She Charles*. What!

*Huntingdon*. I was going into the dining-room to get rid of my cigar; and he said: "Not in there, sir. The master's there, but my instructions are to the effect that he's not."

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*She Charles*. I knew that fellow——

*Lady Dedmond*. The fact is, Reginald, Clare's out, and George is waiting for her. It's so important people shouldn't——

*Huntingdon*. Rather!

They draw together, as people do, discussing the misfortunes of members of their families.

*Lady Dedmond*. It's getting serious, Reginald. I don't know what's to become of them. You don't think the Rector—you don't think your father would speak to Clare?

*Huntingdon*. Afraid the Governor's hardly well enough. He takes anything of that sort to heart so—especially Clare.

*Sir Charles*. Can't you put in a word yourself?

*Huntingdon*. Don't know where the mischief lies.

*Sir Charles*. I'm sure George doesn't gallop her on the road. Very steady-goin' fellow, old George.

*Huntingdon*. Oh, yes; George is all right, sir.

*Lady Dedmond*. They ought to have had children.

*Huntingdon*. Expect they're pretty glad now they haven't. I really don't know what to say, ma'am.

*Sir Charles*. Saving your presence, you know, Reginald, I've often noticed parsons' daughters grow up queer. Get too much morality and rice puddin'.

*Lady Dedmond*. [With a clear look] Charles!

*Sir Charles*. What was she like when you were kids?

*Huntingdon*. Oh, all right. Could be rather a little devil, of course, when her monkey was up.

*Sir Charles*. I'm fond of her. Nothing she wants that she hasn't got, is there?

*Huntingdon*. Never heard her say so.

*Sir Charles*. [Dimly] I don't know whether old George is a bit too matter of fact for her. H'm?

[A short silence.]

*Lady Dedmond*. There's a Mr. Malise coming here to-night. I forget if you know him.

*Huntingdon*. Yes. Rather a thorough-bred mongrel.

*Lady Dedmond*. He's literary. [With hesitation] You—you don't think he—puts—er—-ideas into her head?

*Huntingdon*. I asked Greyman, the novelist, about him; seems he's a bit of an Ishmaelite, even among those fellows. Can't see Clare——

*Lady Dedmond*. No. Only, the great thing is that she shouldn't be encouraged. Listen! —It is her-coming in. I can hear their voices. Gone to her room. What a blessing that man isn't here yet! [The door bell rings] Tt! There he is, I expect.

*Sir Charles*. What are we goin' to say?

*Huntingdon*. Say they're dining out, and we're not to wait Bridge for them.

*Sir Charles*. Good!

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The door is opened, and *Paynter* announces “Mr. Kenneth Malise.” *Malise* enters. He is a tall man, about thirty-five, with a strongly marked, dark, irregular, ironic face, and eyes which seem to have needles in their pupils. His thick hair is rather untidy, and his dress clothes not too new.

*Lady Dedmond*. How do you do? My son and daughter-in-law are so very sorry. They’ll be here directly.

[*Malise* bows with a queer, curly smile.]

*Sir Charles*. [Shaking hands] How d’you do, sir?

*Huntingdon*. We’ve met, I think.

He gives *Malise* that peculiar smiling stare, which seems to warn the person bowed to of the sort of person he is. MALISE’S eyes sparkle.

*Lady Dedmond*. Clare will be so grieved. One of those invitations

*Malise*. On the spur of the moment.

*Sir Charles*. You play Bridge, sir?

*Malise*. Afraid not!

*Sir Charles*. Don’t mean that? Then we shall have to wait for ’em.

*Lady Dedmond*. I forget, Mr. Malise—you write, don’t you?

*Malise*. Such is my weakness.

*Lady Dedmond*. Delightful profession.

*Sir Charles*. Doesn’t tie you! What!

*Malise*. Only by the head.

*Sir Charles*. I’m always thinkin’ of writin’ my experiences.

*Malise*. Indeed!

[There is the sound of a door banged.]

*Sir Charles*. [Hastily] You smoke, Mr. *Malise*?

*Malise*. Too much.

*Sir Charles*. Ah! Must smoke when you think a lot.

*Malise*. Or think when you smoke a lot.

*Sir Charles*. [Genially] Don't know that I find that.

*Lady Dedmond*. [With her clear look at him] Charles!

The door is opened. *Clare Dedmond* in a cream-coloured evening frock comes in from the hall, followed by *George*. She is rather pale, of middle height, with a beautiful figure, wavy brown hair, full, smiling lips, and large grey mesmeric eyes, one of those women all vibration, iced over with a trained stoicism of voice and manner.

*Lady Dedmond*. Well, my dear!

*Sir Charles*. Ah! George. Good dinner?

*George*. [Giving his hand to *Malise*] How are you? Clare! Mr. *Malise*!

*Clare*. [Smiling-in a clear voice with the faintest possible lisp] Yes, we met on the door-mat. [Pause.]

*Sir Charles*. Deuce you did! [An awkward pause.]

*Lady Dedmond*. [Acidly] Mr. Malise doesn't play Bridge, it appears. Afraid we shall be rather in the way of music.

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*Sir Charles*. What! Aren't we goin' to get a game? [*Paynter* has entered with a tray.]

*George*. Paynter! Take that table into the dining room.

*Paynter*. [Putting down the tray on a table behind the door] Yes, sir.

*Malise*. Let me give you a hand.

*Paynter* and *Malise* carry one of the Bridge tables out, *George* making a half-hearted attempt to relieve *Malise*.

*Sir Charles*. Very fine sunset!

Quite softly *Clare* begins to laugh. All look at her first with surprise, then with offence, then almost with horror. *George* is about to go up to her, but *Huntingdon* heads him off.

*Huntingdon*. Bring the tray along, old man.

*George* takes up the tray, stops to look at *Clare*, then allows *Huntingdon* to shepherd him out.

*Lady Dedmond*. [Without looking at *Clare*] Well, if we're going to play, Charles? [She jerks his sleeve.]

*Sir Charles*. What? [He marches out.]

*Lady Dedmond*. [Meeting *Malise* in the doorway] Now you will be able to have your music.

[She follows the *general* out]

[*Clare* stands perfectly still, with her eyes closed.]

*Malise*. Delicious!

*Clare*. [In her level, clipped voice] Perfectly beastly of me! I'm so sorry. I simply can't help running amok to-night.

*Malise*. Never apologize for being fey. It's much too rare.

*Clare*. On the door-mat! And they'd whitewashed me so beautifully! Poor dears! I wonder if I ought——[She looks towards the door.]

*Malise*. Don't spoil it!

*Clare*. I'd been walking up and down the Embankment for about three hours. One does get desperate sometimes.

*Malise*. Thank God for that!

*Clare*. Only makes it worse afterwards. It seems so frightful to them, too.

*Malise*. [Softly and suddenly, but with a difficulty in finding the right words] Blessed be the respectable! May they dream of—me! And blessed be all men of the world! May they perish of a surfeit of—good form!

*Clare*. I like that. Oh, won't there be a row! [With a faint movement of her shoulders] And the usual reconciliation.

*Malise*. Mrs. Dedmond, there's a whole world outside yours. Why don't you spread your wings?

*Clare*. My dear father's a saint, and he's getting old and frail; and I've got a sister engaged; and three little sisters to whom I'm supposed to set a good example. Then, I've no money, and I can't do anything for a living, except serve in a shop. I shouldn't be free, either; so what's the good? Besides, I oughtn't to have married if I wasn't going to be happy. You see, I'm not a bit misunderstood or ill-treated. It's only——

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*Malise*. Prison. Break out!

*Clare*. [Turning to the window] Did you see the sunset? That white cloud trying to fly up?

[She holds up her bare arms, with a motion of flight.]

*Malise*. [Admiring her] Ah-h-h! [Then, as she drops her arms suddenly] Play me something.

*Clare*. [Going to the piano] I'm awfully grateful to you. You don't make me feel just an attractive female. I wanted somebody like that. [Letting her hands rest on the notes] All the same, I'm glad not to be ugly.

*Malise*. Thank God for beauty!

*Paynter*. [Opening the door] Mr. and Mrs. Fullarton.

*Malise*. Who are they?

*Clare*. [Rising] She's my chief pal. He was in the Navy.

She goes forward. *Mrs*. *Fullerton* is a rather tall woman, with dark hair and a quick eye. He, one of those clean-shaven naval men of good presence who have retired from the sea, but not from their susceptibility.

*Mrs*. *Fullarton*. [Kissing *Clare*, and taking in both *Malise* and her husband's look at *Clare*] We've only come for a minute.

*Clare*. They're playing Bridge in the dining-room. Mr. Malise doesn't play. Mr. Malise —Mrs. Fullarton, Mr. Fullarton.

[They greet.]

*Fullarton*. Most awfully jolly dress, Mrs. Dedmond.

*Mrs*. *Fullarton*. Yes, lovely, Clare. [*Fullarton* abases eyes which mechanically readjust themselves] We can't stay for Bridge, my dear; I just wanted to see you a minute, that's all. [Seeing *Huntingdon* coming in she speaks in a low voice to her husband] Edward, I want to speak to Clare. How d'you do, Captain Huntingdon?

*Malise*. I'll say good-night.

He shakes hands with *Clare*, bows to *Mrs*. *Fullarton*, and makes his way out. *Huntingdon* and *Fullerton* foregather in the doorway.

*Mrs*. *Fullarton*. How are things, Clare? [*Clare* just moves her shoulders] Have you done what I suggested? Your room?

*Clare*. No.

*Mrs*. *Fullarton*. Why not?

*Clare*. I don't want to torture him. If I strike—I'll go clean. I expect I shall strike.

*Mrs*. *Fullarton*. My dear! You'll have the whole world against you.

*Clare*. Even you won't back me, Dolly?

*Mrs*. *Fullarton*. Of course I'll back you, all that's possible, but I can't invent things.

*Clare*. You wouldn't let me come to you for a bit, till I could find my feet?

*Mrs*. *Fullarton*, taken aback, cannot refrain from her glance at *Fullarton* automatically gazing at *Clare* while he talks with *Huntingdon*.

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*Mrs*. *Fullarton*. Of course—the only thing is that——

*Clare*. [With a faint smile] It's all right, Dolly. I'm not coming.

*Mrs*. *Fullarton*. Oh! don't do anything desperate, Clare—you are so desperate sometimes. You ought to make terms—not tracks.

*Clare*. Haggle? [She shakes her head] What have I got to make terms with? What he still wants is just what I hate giving.

*Mrs*. *Fullarton*. But, Clare——

*Clare*. No, Dolly; even you don't understand. All day and every day —just as far apart as we can be—and still—Jolly, isn't it? If you've got a soul at all.

*Mrs*. *Fullarton*. It's awful, really.

*Clare*. I suppose there are lots of women who feel as I do, and go on with it; only, you see, I happen to have something in me that—comes to an end. Can't endure beyond a certain time, ever.

She has taken a flower from her dress, and suddenly tears it to bits. It is the only sign of emotion she has given.

*Mrs*. *Fullarton*. [Watching] Look here, my child; this won't do. You must get a rest. Can't Reggie take you with him to India for a bit?

*Clare*. [Shaking her head] Reggie lives on his pay.

*Mrs*. *Fullarton*. [With one of her quick looks] That was Mr. Malise, then?

*Fullarton*. [Coming towards them] I say, Mrs. Dedmond, you wouldn't sing me that little song you sang the other night, [He hums] "If I might be the falling bee and kiss thee all the day"? Remember?

*Mrs*. *Fullarton*. "The falling dew," Edward. We simply must go, Clare. Good-night. [She kisses her.]

*Fullarton*. [Taking half-cover between his wife and *Clare*] It suits you down to the ground-that dress.

*Clare*. Good-night.

*Huntingdon* sees them out. Left alone *Clare* clenches her hands, moves swiftly across to the window, and stands looking out.

*Huntingdon*. [Returning] Look here, Clare!

*Clare*. Well, Reggie?

*Huntingdon*. This is working up for a mess, old girl. You can't do this kind of thing with impunity. No man'll put up with it. If you've got anything against George, better tell me. [*Clare* shakes her head] You ought to know I should stick by you. What is it? Come?

*Clare*. Get married, and find out after a year that she's the wrong person; so wrong that you can't exchange a single real thought; that your blood runs cold when she kisses you —then you'll know.

*Huntingdon*. My dear old girl, I don't want to be a brute; but it's a bit difficult to believe in that, except in novels.

*Clare*. Yes, incredible, when you haven't tried.

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*Huntingdon*. I mean, you—you chose him yourself. No one forced you to marry him.

*Clare*. It does seem monstrous, doesn't it?

*Huntingdon*. My dear child, do give us a reason.

*Clare*. Look! [She points out at the night and the darkening towers] If George saw that for the first time he'd just say, "Ah, Westminster! Clock Tower! Can you see the time by it?" As if one cared where or what it was—beautiful like that! Apply that to every —every —everything.

*Huntingdon*. [Staring] George may be a bit prosaic. But, my dear old girl, if that's all ——

*Clare*. It's not all—it's nothing. I can't explain, Reggie—it's not reason, at all; it's—it's like being underground in a damp cell; it's like knowing you'll never get out. Nothing coming—never anything coming again-never anything.

*Huntingdon*. [Moved and puzzled] My dear old thing; you mustn't get into fantods like this. If it's like that, don't think about it.

*Clare*. When every day and every night!—Oh! I know it's my fault for having married him, but that doesn't help.

*Huntingdon*. Look here! It's not as if George wasn't quite a decent chap. And it's no use blinking things; you are absolutely dependent on him. At home they've got every bit as much as they can do to keep going.

*Clare*. I know.

*Huntingdon*. And you've got to think of the girls. Any trouble would be very beastly for them. And the poor old Governor would feel it awfully.

*Clare*. If I didn't know all that, Reggie, I should have gone home long ago.

*Huntingdon*. Well, what's to be done? If my pay would run to it—but it simply won't.

*Clare*. Thanks, old boy, of course not.

*Huntingdon*. Can't you try to see George's side of it a bit?

*Clare*. I do. Oh! don't let's talk about it.

*Huntingdon*. Well, my child, there's just one thing you won't go sailing near the wind, will you? I mean, there are fellows always on the lookout.

*Clare*. “That chap, Malise, you’d better avoid him!” Why?

*Huntingdon*. Well! I don’t know him. He may be all right, but he’s not our sort. And you’re too pretty to go on the tack of the New Woman and that kind of thing—haven’t been brought up to it.

*Clare*. British home-made summer goods, light and attractive—don’t wear long. [At the sound of voices in the hall] They seem ’to be going, Reggie.

[*Huntingdon* looks at her, vexed, unhappy.]

*Huntingdon*. Don’t head for trouble, old girl. Take a pull. Bless you! Good-night.

*Clare* kisses him, and when he has gone turns away from the door, holding herself in, refusing to give rein to some outburst of emotion. Suddenly she sits down at the untouched Bridge table, leaning her bare elbows on it and her chin on her hands, quite calm. *George* is coming in. *Paynter* follows him.

*Clare*. Nothing more wanted, thank you, Paynter. You can go home, and the maids can go to bed.

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*Paynter*. We are much obliged, ma'am.

*Clare*. I ran over a dog, and had to get it seen to.

*Paynter*. Naturally, ma'am!

*Clare*. Good-night.

*Paynter*. I couldn't get you a little anything, ma'am?

*Clare*. No, thank you.

*Paynter*. No, ma'am. Good-night, ma'am.

[He withdraws.]

*George*. You needn't have gone out of your way to tell a lie that wouldn't deceive a guinea-pig. [Going up to her] Pleased with yourself to-night? [*Clare* shakes her head] Before that fellow *Malise*; as if our own people weren't enough!

*Clare*. Is it worth while to rag me? I know I've behaved badly, but
I couldn't help it, really!

*George*. Couldn't help behaving like a shop-girl? My God! You were brought up as well as I was.

*Clare*. Alas!

*George*. To let everybody see that we don't get on—there's only one word for it—-Disgusting!

*Clare*. I know.

*George*. Then why do you do it? I've always kept my end up. Why in heaven's name do you behave in this crazy way?

*Clare*. I'm sorry.

*George*. [With intense feeling] You like making a fool of me!

*Clare*. No—Really! Only—I must break out sometimes.

*George*. There are things one does not do.

*Clare*. I came in because I was sorry.

*George*. And at once began to do it again! It seems to me you delight in rows.

*Clare*. You'd miss your—reconciliations.

*George*. For God's sake, Clare, drop cynicism!

*Clare*. And truth?

*George*. You are my wife, I suppose.

*Clare*. And they twain shall be one—spirit.

*George*. Don't talk wild nonsense!

[There is silence.]

*Clare*. [Softly] I don't give satisfaction. Please give me notice!

*George*. Pish!

*Clare*. Five years, and four of them like this! I'm sure we've served our time. Don't you really think we might get on better together—if I went away?

*George*. I've told you I won't stand a separation for no real reason, and have your name bandied about all over London. I have some primitive sense of honour.

*Clare*. You mean your name, don't you?

*George*. Look here. Did that fellow Malise put all this into your head?

*Clare*. No; my own evil nature.

*George*. I wish the deuce we'd never met him. Comes of picking up people you know nothing of. I distrust him—and his looks—and his infernal satiric way. He can't even 'dress decently. He's not—good form.

*Clare*. [With a touch of rapture] Ah-h!

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*George*. Why do you let him come? What d'you find interesting in him?

*Clare*. A mind.

*George*. Deuced funny one! To have a mind—as you call it—it's not necessary to talk about Art and Literature.

*Clare*. We don't.

*George*. Then what do you talk about—your minds? [*Clare* looks at him] Will you answer a straight question? Is he falling in love with you?

*Clare*. You had better ask him.

*George*. I tell you plainly, as a man of the world, I don't believe in the guide, philosopher and friend business.

*Clare*. Thank you.

A silence. *Clare* suddenly clasps her hands behind her head.

*Clare*. Let me go! You'd be much happier with any other woman.

*George*. Clare!

*Clare*. I believe—I'm sure I could earn my living. Quite serious.

*George*. Are you mad?

*Clare*. It has been done.

*George*. It will never be done by you—understand that!

*Clare*. It really is time we parted. I'd go clean out of your life. I don't want your support unless I'm giving you something for your money.

*George*. Once for all, I don't mean to allow you to make fools of us both.

*Clare*. But if we are already! Look at us. We go on, and on. We're a spectacle!

*George*. That's not my opinion; nor the opinion of anyone, so long as you behave yourself.

*Clare*. That is—behave as you think right.

*George*. Clare, you're pretty riling.

*Clare*. I don't want to be horrid. But I am in earnest this time.

*George*. So am I.

[*Clare* turns to the curtained door.]

*George*. Look here! I'm sorry. God knows I don't want to be a brute. I know you're not happy.

*Clare*. And you—are you happy?

*George*. I don't say I am. But why can't we be?

*Clare*. I see no reason, except that you are you, and I am I.

*George*. We can try.

*Clare*. I *have*—haven't you?

*George*. We used——

*Clare*. I wonder!

*George*. You know we did.

*Clare*. Too long ago—if ever.

*George* [Coming closer] I—still——

*Clare*. [Making a barrier of her hand] You know that's only cupboard love.

*George*. We've got to face the facts.

*Clare*. I thought I was.

*George*. The facts are that we're married—for better or worse, and certain things are expected of us. It's suicide for you, and folly for me, in my position, to ignore that. You have all you can reasonably want; and I don't—don't wish for any change. If you could bring anything against me—if I drank, or knocked about town, or expected too much of you. I'm not unreasonable in any way, that I can see.

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*Clare*. Well, I think we've talked enough.

[She again moves towards the curtained door.]

*George*. Look here, Clare; you don't mean you're expecting me to put up with the position of a man who's neither married nor unmarried? That's simple purgatory. You ought to know.

*Clare*. Yes. I haven't yet, have I?

*George*. Don't go like that! Do you suppose we're the only couple who've found things aren't what they thought, and have to put up with each other and make the best of it.

*Clare*. Not by thousands.

*George*. Well, why do you imagine they do it?

*Clare*. I don't know.

*George*. From a common sense of decency.

*Clare*. Very!

*George*. By Jove! You can be the most maddening thing in all the world! [Taking up a pack of cards, he lets them fall with a long slithering flutter] After behaving as you have this evening, you might try to make some amends, I should think.

*Clare* moves her head from side to side, as if in sight of something she could not avoid. He puts his hand on her arm.

*Clare*. No, no—no!

*George*. [Dropping his hand] Can't you make it up?

*Clare*. I don't feel very Christian.

She opens the door, passes through, and closes it behind her. *George* steps quickly towards it, stops, and turns back into the room. He goes to the window and stands looking out; shuts it with a bang, and again contemplates the door. Moving forward, he rests his hand on the deserted card table, clutching its edge, and muttering. Then he crosses to the door into the hall and switches off the light. He opens the door to go out, then stands again irresolute in the darkness and heaves a heavy sigh. Suddenly he mutters: "No!" Crosses resolutely back to the curtained door, and opens it. In the gleam of light *Clare* is standing, unhooking a necklet.

He goes in, shutting the door behind him with a thud.

*Curtain*.

## ACT II

The scene is a large, whitewashed, disordered room, whose outer door opens on to a corridor and stairway. Doors on either side lead to other rooms. On the walls are unframed reproductions of fine pictures, secured with tintacks. An old wine-coloured armchair of low and comfortable appearance, near the centre of the room, is surrounded by a litter of manuscripts, books, ink, pens and newspapers, as though some one had already been up to his neck in labour, though by a grandfather's clock it is only eleven. On a smallish table close by, are sheets of paper, cigarette ends, and two claret bottles. There are many books on shelves, and on the floor, an overflowing pile, whereon rests a soft hat,

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and a black knobby stick. *Malise* sits in his armchair, garbed in trousers, dressing-gown, and slippers, unshaved and uncollared, writing. He pauses, smiles, lights a cigarette, and tries the rhythm of the last sentence, holding up a sheet of quarto *Ms*.

Malise. "Not a word, not a whisper of Liberty from all those excellent frock-coated gentlemen—not a sign, not a grimace. Only the monumental silence of their profound deference before triumphant Tyranny."

While he speaks, a substantial woman, a little over middle-age, in old dark clothes and a black straw hat, enters from the corridor. She goes to a cupboard, brings out from it an apron and a Bissell broom. Her movements are slow and imperturbable, as if she had much time before her. Her face is broad and dark, with Chinese eyebrows.

*Malise*. Wait, Mrs. Miller!

*Mrs*. *Miler*. I'm gettin' be'ind'and, sir.

She comes and stands before him. *Malise* writes.

*Mrs*. *Miler*. There's a man 'angin' about below.

*Malise* looks up; seeing that she has roused his attention, she stops. But as soon as he is about to write again, goes on.

*Mrs*. *Miler*. I see him first yesterday afternoon. I'd just been out to get meself a pennyworth o' soda, an' as I come in I passed 'im on the second floor, lookin' at me with an air of suspicion. I thought to meself at the time, I thought: You're a'andy sort of 'ang-dog man.

*Malise*. Well?

*Mrs*. *Miler*. Well-peekin' down through the balusters, I see 'im lookin' at a photograft. That's a funny place, I thinks, to look at pictures—it's so dark there, ye 'ave to use yer eyesight. So I giv' a scrape with me 'eel [She illustrates] an' he pops it in his pocket, and puts up 'is 'and to knock at number three. I goes down an' I says: "You know there's no one lives there, don't yer?" "Ah!" 'e says with an air of innercence, "I wants the name of Smithers." "Oh!" I says, "try round the corner, number ten." "Ah!" 'e says tactful, "much obliged." "Yes," I says, "you'll find 'im in at this time o' day. Good evenin'!" And I thinks to meself [She closes one eye] Rats! There's a good many corners hereabouts.

*Malise*. [With detached appreciation] Very good, Mrs. Miler.

*Mrs*. *Miler*. So this mornin', there e' was again on the first floor with 'is 'and raised, pretendin' to knock at number two. "Oh! you're still lookin' for 'im?" I says, lettin' him see I was 'is grandmother. "Ah!" 'e says, affable, "you misdirected me; it's here I've got my business." "That's lucky," I says, "cos nobody lives there neither. Good mornin'!" And I come straight up. If you want to see 'im at work you've only to go downstairs, 'e'll be on the ground floor by now, pretendin' to knock at number one. Wonderful resource!

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*Malise*. What's he like, this gentleman?

*Mrs*. *Miler*. Just like the men you see on the front page o' the daily papers. Nasty, smooth-lookin' feller, with one o' them billycock hats you can't abide.

*Malise*. Isn't he a dun?

*Mrs*. *Miler*. They don't be'ave like that; you ought to know, sir. He's after no good. [Then, after a little pause] Ain't he to be put a stop to? If I took me time I could get 'im, innercent-like, with a jug o' water.

[*Malise*, smiling, shakes his head.]

*Malise*. You can get on now; I'm going to shave.

He looks at the clock, and passes out into the inner room. *Mrs*. *Miler*, gazes round her, pins up her skirt, sits down in the armchair, takes off her hat and puts it on the table, and slowly rolls up her sleeves; then with her hands on her knees she rests. There is a soft knock on the door. She gets up leisurely and moves flat-footed towards it. The door being opened *Clare* is revealed.

*Clare*. Is Mr. Malise in?

*Mrs*. *Miler*. Yes. But 'e's dressin'.

*Clare*. Oh.

*Mrs*. *Miler*. Won't take 'im long. What name?

*Clare*. Would you say—a lady.

*Mrs*. *Miler*. It's against the rules. But if you'll sit down a moment I'll see what I can do. [She brings forward a chair and rubs it with her apron. Then goes to the door of the inner room and speaks through it] A lady to see you. [Returning she removes some cigarette ends] This is my hour. I shan't make much dust. [Noting CLARE's eyebrows raised at the debris round the armchair] I'm particular about not disturbin' things.

*Clare*. I'm sure you are.

*Mrs*. *Miler*. He likes 'is 'abits regular.

Making a perfunctory pass with the Bissell broom, she runs it to the cupboard, comes back to the table, takes up a bottle and holds it to the light; finding it empty, she turns it upside down and drops it into the wastepaper basket; then, holding up the other bottle, and finding it not empty, she corks it and drops it into the fold of her skirt.

*Mrs*. *Miler*. He takes his claret fresh-opened—not like these ’ere bawgwars.

*Clare*. [Rising] I think I’ll come back later.

*Mrs*. *Miler*. Mr. Malise is not in my confidence. We keep each other to ourselves. Perhaps you’d like to read the paper; he has it fresh every mornin’—the Westminister.

She plucks that journal from out of the armchair and hands it to *Clare*, who sits doom again unhappily to brood. *Mrs*. *Miler* makes a pass or two with a very dirty duster, then stands still. No longer hearing sounds, *Clare* looks up.

*Mrs*. *Miler*. I wouldn’t interrupt yer with my workin,’ but ’e likes things clean. [At a sound from the inner room] That’s ’im; ’e’s cut ’isself! I’ll just take ’im the tobaccer!

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She lifts a green paper screw of tobacco from the debris round the armchair and taps on the door. It opens. *Clare* moves restlessly across the room.

*Mrs*. *Miler*. [Speaking into the room] The tobaccer. The lady's waitin'.

*Clare* has stopped before a reproduction of Titian's picture "Sacred and Profane Love." *Mrs*. *Miler* stands regarding her with a Chinese smile. *Malise* enters, a thread of tobacco still hanging to his cheek.

*Malise*. [Taking *Mrs*. MILER's hat off the table and handing it to her] Do the other room.

[Enigmatically she goes.]

*Malise*. Jolly of you to come. Can I do anything?

*Clare*. I want advice-badly.

*Malise*. What! Spreading your wings?

*Clare*. Yes.

*Malise*. Ah! Proud to have given you that advice. When?

*Clare*. The morning after you gave it me . . .

*Malise*. Well?

*Clare*. I went down to my people. I knew it would hurt my Dad frightfully, but somehow I thought I could make him see. No good. He was awfully sweet, only—he couldn't.

*Malise*. [Softly] We English love liberty in those who don't belong to us. Yes.

*Clare*. It was horrible. There were the children—and my old nurse. I could never live at home now. They'd think I was——. Impossible —utterly! I'd made up my mind to go back to my owner—And then— he came down himself. I couldn't d it. To be hauled back and begin all over again; I simply couldn't. I watched for a chance; and ran to the station, and came up to an hotel.

*Malise*. Bravo!

*Clare*. I don't know—no pluck this morning! You see, I've got to earn my living—no money; only a few things I can sell. All yesterday I was walking about, looking at the women. How does anyone ever get a chance?

*Malise*. Sooner than you should hurt his dignity by working, your husband would pension you off.

*Clare*. If I don't go back to him I couldn't take it.

*Malise*. Good!

*Clare*. I've thought of nursing, but it's a long training, and I do so hate watching pain. The fact is, I'm pretty hopeless; can't even do art work. I came to ask you about the stage.

*Malise*. Have you ever acted? [*Clare* shakes her head] You mightn't think so, but I've heard there's a prejudice in favour of training. There's Chorus—I don't recommend it. How about your brother?

*Clare*. My brother's got nothing to spare, and he wants to get married; and he's going back to India in September. The only friend I should care to bother is Mrs. Fullarton, and she's—got a husband.

*Malise*. I remember the gentleman.

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*Clare*. Besides, I should be besieged day and night to go back. I must lie doggo somehow.

*Malise*. It makes my blood boil to think of women like you. God help all ladies without money.

*Clare*. I expect I shall have to go back.

*Malise*. No, no! We shall find something. Keep your soul alive at all costs. What! let him hang on to you till you're nothing but— emptiness and ache, till you lose even the power to ache. Sit in his drawing-room, pay calls, play Bridge, go out with him to dinners, return to—duty; and feel less and less, and be less and less, and so grow old and—die!

[The bell rings.]

*Malise*. [Looking at the door in doubt] By the wayhe'd no means of tracing you?

[She shakes her head.]

[The bell rings again.]

*Malise*. Was there a man on the stairs as you came up?

*Clare*. Yes. Why?

*Malise*. He's begun to haunt them, I'm told.

*Clare*. Oh! But that would mean they thought I—oh! no!

*Malise*. Confidence in me is not excessive.

*Clare*. Spying!

*Malise*. Will you go in there for a minute? Or shall we let them ring—or—what? It may not be anything, of course.

*Clare*. I'm not going to hide.

[The bell rings a third time.]

*Malise*. [Opening the door of the inner room] Mrs. Miler, just see who it is; and then go, for the present.

*Mrs*. *Miler* comes out with her hat on, passes enigmatically to the door, and opens it. A man's voice says: "Mr. Malise? Would you give him these cards?"

*Mrs*. *Miler*. [Re-entering] The cards.

*Malise*. Mr. Robert Twisden. Sir Charles and Lady Dedmond. [He looks at *Clare*.]

*Clare*. [Her face scornful and unmoved] Let them come.

*Malise*. [*To Mrs*. *Miler*] Show them in!

*Twisden* enters-a clean-shaved, shrewd-looking man, with a fighting underlip, followed by *sir Charles* and *lady Dedmond*. *Mrs*. *Miler* goes. There are no greetings.

*Twisden*. Mr. Malise? How do you do, Mrs. Dedmond? Had the pleasure of meeting you at your wedding. [*Clare* inclines her head] I am Mr. George Dedmond's solicitor, sir. I wonder if you would be so very kind as to let us have a few words with Mrs. Dedmond alone?

At a nod from *Clare*, *Malise* passes into the inner room, and shuts the door. A silence.

*Sir Charles*. [Suddenly] What!

*Lady Dedmond*. Mr. Twisden, will you——?

*Twisden*. [Uneasy] Mrs. Dedmond I must apologize, but you—you hardly gave us an alternative, did you? [He pauses for an answer, and, not getting one, goes on] Your disappearance has given your husband great anxiety. Really, my dear madam, you must forgive us for this—attempt to get into communication.

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*Clare*. Why did you spy, *here*?

*Sir Charles*. No, no! Nobody's spied on you. What!

*Twisden*. I'm afraid the answer is that we appear to have been justified. [At the expression on *Clare's* face he goes on hastily] Now, Mrs. Dedmond, I'm a lawyer and I know that appearances are misleading. Don't think I'm unfriendly; I wish you well. [*Clare* raises her eyes. Moved by that look, which is exactly as if she had said: "I have no friends," he hurries on] What we want to say to you is this: Don't let this split go on! Don't commit yourself to what you'll bitterly regret. Just tell us what's the matter. I'm sure it can be put straight.

*Clare*. I have nothing against my husband—it was quite unreasonable to leave him.

*Twisden*. Come, that's good.

*Clare*. Unfortunately, there's something stronger than reason.

*Twisden*. I don't know it, Mrs. Dedmond.

*Clare*. No?

*Twisden*. [Disconcerted] Are you—you oughtn't to take a step without advice, in your position.

*Clare*. Nor with it?

*Twisden*. [Approaching her] Come, now; isn't there anything you feel you'd like to say—-that might help to put matters straight?

*Clare*. I don't think so, thank you.

*Lady Dedmond*. You must see, Clare, that——

*Twisden*. In your position, Mrs. Dedmond—a beautiful young woman without money. I'm quite blunt. This is a hard world. Should be awfully sorry if anything goes wrong.

*Clare*. And if I go back?

*Twisden*. Of two evils, if it be so—choose the least!

*Clare*. I am twenty-six; he is thirty-two. We can't reasonably expect to die for fifty years.

*Lady Desmond*. That's morbid, Clare.

*Twisden*. What's open to you if you don't go back? Come, what's your position? Neither fish, flesh, nor fowl; fair game for everybody. Believe me, Mrs. Dedmond, for a pretty woman to strike, as it appears you're doing, simply because the spirit of her marriage has taken flight, is madness. You must know that no one pays attention to anything but facts. If now—excuse me—you—you had a lover, [His eyes travel round the room and again rest on her] you would, at all events, have some ground under your feet, some sort of protection, but [He pauses] as you have not—you've none.

*Clare*. Except what I make myself.

*Sir Charles*. Good God!

*Twisden*. Yes! Mrs. Dedmond! There's the bedrock difficulty. As you haven't money, you should never have been pretty. You're up against the world, and you'll get no mercy from it. We lawyers see too much of that. I'm putting it brutally, as a man of the world.

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*Clare*. Thank you. Do you think you quite grasp the alternative?

*Twisden*. [Taken aback] But, my dear young lady, there are two sides to every contract. After all, your husband's fulfilled his.

*Clare*. So have I up till now. I shan't ask anything from him— nothing—do you understand?

*Lady Dedmond*. But, my dear, you must live.

*Twisden*. Have you ever done any sort of work?

*Clare*. Not yet.

*Twisden*. Any conception of the competition nowadays?

*Clare*. I can try.

[*Twisden*, looking at her, shrugs his shoulders]

*Clare*. [Her composure a little broken by that look] It's real to me—this—you see!

*Sir Charles*. But, my dear girl, what the devil's to become of George?

*Clare*. He can do what he likes—it's nothing to me.

*Twisden*. Mrs. Dedmond, I say without hesitation you've no notion of what you're faced with, brought up to a sheltered life as you've been. Do realize that you stand at the parting of the ways, and one leads into the wilderness.

*Clare*. Which?

*Twisden*. [Glancing at the door through which *Malise* has gone] Of course, if you want to play at wild asses there are plenty who will help you.

*Sir Charles*. By Gad! Yes!

*Clare*. I only want to breathe.

*Twisden*. Mrs. Dedmond, go back! You can now. It will be too late soon. There are lots of wolves about. [Again he looks at the door]

*Clare*. But not where you think. You say I need advice. I came here for it.

*Twisden*. [With a curiously expressive shrug] In that case I don't know that I can usefully stay.

[He goes to the outer door.]

*Clare*. Please don't have me followed when I leave here. Please!

*Lady Dedmond*. George is outside, Clare.

*Clare*. I don't wish to see him. By what right have you come here? [She goes to the door through which *Malise* has passed, opens it, and says] Please come in, Mr. Malise.

[*Malise* enters.]

*Twisden*. I am sorry. [Glancing at *Malise*, he inclines his head] I am sorry. Good morning. [He goes]

*Lady Dedmond*. Mr. Malise, I'm sure, will see——

*Clare*. Mr. Malise will stay here, please, in his own room.

[*Malise* bows]

*Sir Charles*. My dear girl, 'pon my soul, you know, I can't grasp your line of thought at all!

*Clare*. No?

*Lady Dedmond*. George is most willing to take up things just as they were before you left.

*Clare*. Ah!

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*Lady Dedmond*. Quite frankly—what is it you want?

*Clare*. To be left alone. Quite frankly, he made a mistake to have me spied on.

*Lady Dedmond*. But, my good girl, if you'd let us know where you were, like a reasonable being. You can't possibly be left to yourself without money or position of any kind. Heaven knows what you'd be driven to!

*Malise*. [Softly] Delicious!

*Sir Charles*. You will be good enough to repeat that out loud, sir.

*Lady Dedmond*. Charles! Clare, you must know this is all a fit of spleen; your duty and your interest—marriage is sacred, Clare.

*Clare*. Marriage! My marriage has become the—the reconciliation—of two animals—-one of them unwilling. That's all the sanctity there is about it.

*Sir Charles*. What!

[She looks at *Malise*]

*Lady Dedmond*. You ought to be horribly ashamed. *Clare*. Of the fact-I am.

*Lady Dedmond*. [Darting a glance at *Malise*] If we are to talk this out, it must be in private.

*Malise*. [To *Clare*] Do you wish me to go?

*Clare*. No.

*Lady Dedmond*. [At *Malise*] I should have thought ordinary decent feeling—Good heavens, girl! Can't you see that you're being played with?

*Clare*. If you insinuate anything against Mr. Malise, you lie.

*Lady Dedmond*. If you will do these things—come to a man's rooms——

*Clare*. I came to Mr. Malise because he's the only person I know with imagination enough to see what my position is; I came to him a quarter of an hour ago, for the first time, for definite advice, and you instantly suspect him. That is disgusting.

*Lady Dedmond*. [Frigidly] Is this the natural place for me to find my son's wife?

*Clare*. His woman.

*Lady Dedmond*. Will you listen to Reginald?

*Clare*. I have.

*Lady Dedmond*. Haven't you any religious sense at all, Clare?

*Clare*. None, if it's religion to live as we do.

*Lady Dedmond*. It's terrible—this state of mind! It's really terrible!

*Clare* breaks into the soft laugh of the other evening. As if galvanized by the sound, *sir Charles* comes to life out of the transfixed bewilderment with which he has been listening.

*Sir Charles*. For God's sake don't laugh like that!

[*Clare* Stops]

*Lady Dedmond*. [With real feeling] For the sake of the simple right, Clare!

*Clare*. Right? Whatever else is right—our life is not. [She puts her hand on her heart] I swear before God that I've tried and tried. I swear before God, that if I believed we could ever again love each other only a little tiny bit, I'd go back. I swear before God that I don't want to hurt anybody.

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*Lady Dedmond*. But you are hurting everybody. Do—do be reasonable!

*Clare*. [Losing control] Can't you see that I'm fighting for all my life to come—not to be buried alive—not to be slowly smothered. Look at me! I'm not wax—I'm flesh and blood. And you want to prison me for ever—body and soul.

[They stare at her]

*Sir Charles*. [Suddenly] By Jove! I don't know, I don't know! What!

*Lady Dedmond*. [To *Malise*] If you have any decency left, sir, you will allow my son, at all events, to speak to his wife alone. [Beckoning to her husband] We'll wait below.

*Sir Charles*. I—I want to speak. [To *Clare*] My dear, if you feel like this, I can only say—-as a—as a gentleman——

*Lady Dedmond*. Charles!

*Sir Charles*. Let me alone! I can only say that—damme, I don't know that I can say anything!

He looks at her very grieved, then turns and marches out, followed by *lady Dedmond*, whose voice is heard without, answered by his: "What!" In the doorway, as they pass, *George* is standing; he comes in.

*George*. [Going up to *Clare*, who has recovered all her self-control] Will you come outside and speak to me?

*Clare*. No.

*George* glances at *Malise*, who is leaning against the wall with folded arms.

*George*. [In a low voice] Clare!

*Clare*. Well!

*George*. You try me pretty high, don't you, forcing me to come here, and speak before this fellow? Most men would think the worst, finding you like this.

*Clare*. You need not have come—or thought at all.

*George*. Did you imagine I was going to let you vanish without an effort——

*Clare*. To save me?

*George*. For God's sake be just! I've come here to say certain things. If you force me to say them before him—on your head be it! Will you appoint somewhere else?

*Clare*. No.

*George*. Why not?

*Clare*. I know all those "certain things." "You must come back. It is your duty. You have no money. Your friends won't help you. You can't earn your living. You are making a scandal." You might even say for the moment: "Your room shall be respected."

*George*. Well, it's true and you've no answer.

*Clare*. Oh! [Suddenly] Our life's a lie. It's stupid; it's disgusting. I'm tired of it! Please leave me alone!

*George*. You rather miss the point, I'm afraid. I didn't come here to tell you what you know perfectly well when you're sane. I came here to say this: Anyone in her senses could see the game your friend here is playing. It wouldn't take a baby in. If you think that a gentleman like that [His stare travels round the dishevelled room till it rests on *Malise*] champions a pretty woman for nothing, you make a fairly bad mistake.

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*Clare*. Take care.

But *Malise*, after one convulsive movement of his hands, has again become rigid.

*George*. I don't pretend to be subtle or that kind of thing; but I have ordinary common sense. I don't attempt to be superior to plain facts——

*Clare*. [Under her breath] Facts!

*George*. Oh! for goodness' sake drop that hifalutin' tone. It doesn't suit you. Look here! If you like to go abroad with one of your young sisters until the autumn, I'll let the flat and go to the Club.

*Clare*. Put the fire out with a penny hose. [Slowly] I am not coming back to you, George. The farce is over.

*George*. [Taken aback for a moment by the finality of her tone, suddenly fronts *Malise*] Then there is something between you and this fellow.

*Malise*. [Dangerously, but without moving] I beg your pardon!

*Clare*. There—is—nothing.

*George*. [Looking from one to the other] At all events, I won't—I won't see a woman who once—[*Clare* makes a sudden effacing movement with her hands] I won't see her go to certain ruin without lifting a finger.

*Clare*. That is noble.

*George*. [With intensity] I don't know that you deserve anything of me. But on my honour, as a gentleman, I came here this morning for your sake, to warn you of what you're doing. [He turns suddenly on *Malise*] And I tell this precious friend of yours plainly what I think of him, and that I'm not going to play into his hands.

[*Malise*, without stirring from the wall, looks at *Clare*, and his lips move.]

*Clare*. [Shakes her head at him—then to *George*] Will you go, please?

*George*. I will go when you do.

*Malise*. A man of the world should know better than that.

*George*. Are you coming?

*Malise*. That is inconceivable.

*George*. I'm not speaking to you, sir.

*Malise*. You are right. Your words and mine will never kiss each other.

*George*. Will you come? [*Clare* shakes her head]

*George*. [With fury] D'you mean to stay in this pigsty with that rhapsodical swine?

*Malise*. [Transformed] By God, if you don't go, I'll kill you.

*George*. [As suddenly calm] That remains to be seen.

*Malise*. [With most deadly quietness] Yes, I will kill you.

He goes stealthily along the wall, takes up from where it lies on the pile of books the great black knobby stick, and stealthily approaches *George*, his face quite fiendish.

*Clare*. [With a swift movement, grasping the stick] Please.

*Malise* resigns the stick, and the two men, perfectly still, glare at each other. *Clare*, letting the stick fall, puts her foot on it. Then slowly she takes off her hat and lays it on the table.

*Clare*. Now will you go! [There is silence]

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*George*. [Staring at her hat] You mad little fool! Understand this; if you've not returned home by three o'clock I'll divorce you, and you may roll in the gutter with this high-souled friend of yours. And mind this, you sir—I won't spare you—by God! Your pocket shall suffer. That's the only thing that touches fellows like you.

Turning, he goes out, and slams the door. *Clare* and *Malise* remain face to face. Her lips have begun to quiver.

*Clare*. Horrible!

She turns away, shuddering, and sits down on the edge of the armchair, covering her eyes with the backs of her hands. *Malise* picks up the stick, and fingers it lovingly. Then putting it down, he moves so that he can see her face. She is sitting quite still, staring straight before her.

*Malise*. Nothing could be better.

*Clare*. I don't know what to do! I don't know what to do!

*Malise*. Thank the stars for your good fortune.

*Clare*. He means to have revenge on you! And it's all my fault.

*Malise*. Let him. Let him go for his divorce. Get rid of him. Have done with him—-somehow.

She gets up and stands with face averted. Then swiftly turning to him.

*Clare*. If I must bring you harm—let me pay you back! I can't bear it otherwise! Make some use of me, if you don't mind!

*Malise*. My God!

[She puts up her face to be kissed, shutting her eyes.]

*Malise*. You poor——

He clasps and kisses her, then, drawing back, looks in her face. She has not moved, her eyes are still closed; but she is shivering; her lips are tightly pressed together; her hands twitching.

*Malise*. [Very quietly] No, no! This is not the house of a "gentleman."

*Clare*. [Letting her head fall, and almost in a whisper] I'm sorry.

*Malise*. I understand.

*Clare*. I don't feel. And without—I can't, can't.

*Malise*. [Bitterly] Quite right. You've had enough of that.

There is a long silence. Without looking at him she takes up her hat, and puts it on.

*Malise*. Not going?

[*Clare* nods]

*Malise*. You don't trust me?

*Clare*. I do! But I can't take when I'm not giving.

*Malise*. I beg—I beg you! What does it matter? Use me! Get free somehow.

*Clare*. Mr. Malise, I know what I ought to be to you, if I let you in for all this. I know what you want—or will want. Of course—why not?

*Malise*. I give you my solemn word——

*Clare*. No! if I can't be that to you—it's not real. And I can't. It isn't to be manufactured, is it?

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*Malise*. It is not.

*Clare*. To make use of you in such a way! No.

[She moves towards the door]

*Malise*. Where are you going?

*Clare* does not answer. She is breathing rapidly. There is a change in her, a sort of excitement beneath her calmness.

*Malise*. Not back to him? [*Clare* shakes her head] Thank God! But where? To your people again?

*Clare*. No.

*Malise*. Nothing—desperate?

*Clare*. Oh! no.

*Malise*. Then what—tell me—come!

*Clare*. I don't know. Women manage somehow.

*Malise*. But you—poor dainty thing!

*Clare*. It's all right! Don't be unhappy! Please!

*Malise*. [Seizing her arm] D'you imagine they'll let you off, out there—you with your face? Come, trust me trust me! You must!

*Clare*. [Holding out her hand] Good-bye!

*Malise*. [Not taking that hand] This great damned world, and—you! Listen! [The sound of the traffic far down below is audible in the stillness] Into that! alone—helpless—-without money. The men who work with you; the men you make friends of—d'you think they'll let you be? The men in the streets, staring at you, stopping you—pudgy, bull-necked brutes; devils with hard eyes; senile swine; and the "chivalrous" men, like me, who don't mean you harm, but can't help seeing you're made for love! Or suppose you don't take covert but struggle on in the open. Society! The respectable! The pious! Even those who love you! Will they let you be? Hue and cry! The hunt was joined the moment you broke away! It will never let up! Covert to covert—till they've run you down, and you're back in the cart, and God pity you!

*Clare*. Well, I'll die running!

*Malise*. No, no! Let me shelter you! Let me!

*Clare*. [Shaking her head and smiling] I'm going to seek my fortune. Wish me luck!

*Malise*. I can't let you go.

*Clare*. You must.

He looks into her face; then, realizing that she means it, suddenly bends down to her fingers, and puts his lips to them.

*Malise*. Good luck, then! Good luck!

He releases her hand. Just touching his bent head with her other hand, *Clare* turns and goes. *Malise* remains with bowed head, listening to the sound of her receding footsteps. They die away. He raises himself, and strikes out into the air with his clenched fist.

*Curtain*.

# ACT III

MALISE'S sitting-room. An afternoon, three months later. On the table are an open bottle of claret, his hat, and some tea-things. Down in the hearth is a kettle on a lighted spirit-stand. Near the door stands *Haywood*, a short, round-faced man, with a tobacco-coloured moustache; *Malise*, by the table, is contemplating a piece of blue paper.

Haywood. Sorry to press an old customer, sir, but a year and an 'alf without any return on your money——

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*Malise*. Your tobacco is too good, Mr. Haywood. I wish I could see my way to smoking another.

*Haywood*. Well, sir—that's a funny remedy.

With a knock on the half-opened door, a Boy appears.

*Malise*. Yes. What is it?

*Boy*. Your copy for "The Watchfire," please, sir.

*Malise*. [Motioning him out] Yes. Wait!

The Boy withdraws. *Malise* goes up to the pile of books, turns them over, and takes up some volumes.

*Malise*. This is a very fine unexpurgated translation of Boccaccio's "Decameron," Mr. Haywood illustrated. I should say you would get more than the amount of your bill for them.

*Haywood*. [Shaking his head] Them books worth three pound seven!

*Malise*. It's scarce, and highly improper. Will you take them in discharge?

*Haywood*. [Torn between emotions] Well, I 'ardly know what to say— No, Sir, I don't think I'd like to 'ave to do with that.

*Malise*. You could read them first, you know?

*Haywood*. [Dubiously] I've got my wife at 'ome.

*Malise*. You could both read them.

*Haywood*. [Brought to his bearings] No, Sir, I couldn't.

*Malise*. Very well; I'll sell them myself, and you shall have the result.

*Haywood*. Well, thank you, sir. I'm sure I didn't want to trouble you.

*Malise*. Not at all, Mr. Haywood. It's for me to apologize.

*Haywood*. So long as I give satisfaction.

*Malise*. [Holding the door for him] Certainly. Good evening.

*Haywood*. Good evenin', sir; no offence, I hope.

*Malise*. On the contrary.

Doubtfully *Haywood* goes. And *Malise* stands scratching his head; then slipping the bill into one of the volumes to remind him, he replaces them at the top of the pile. The Boy again advances into the doorway.

*Malise*. Yes, now for you.

He goes to the table and takes some sheets of *Ms*. from an old portfolio. But the door is again timidly pushed open, and *Haywood* reappears.

*Malise*. Yes, Mr. Haywood?

*Haywood*. About that little matter, sir. If—if it's any convenience to you—I've—thought of a place where I could——

*Malise*. Read them? You'll enjoy them thoroughly.

*Haywood*. No, sir, no! Where I can dispose of them.

*Malise*. [Holding out the volumes] It might be as well. [*Haywood* takes the books gingerly] I congratulate you, Mr. Haywood; it's a classic.

*Haywood*. Oh, indeed—yes, sir. In the event of there being any——

*Malise*. Anything over? Carry it to my credit. Your bill—[He hands over the blue paper] Send me the receipt. Good evening!

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*Haywood*, nonplussed, and trying to hide the books in an evening paper, fumbles out. “Good evenin’, sir!” and departs. *Malise* again takes up the sheets of *Ms*. and cons a sentence over to himself, gazing blankly at the stolid *boy*.

*Malise*. “Man of the world—good form your god! Poor buttoned-up philosopher” [the Boy shifts his feet] “inbred to the point of cretinism, and founded to the bone on fear of ridicule [the Boy breathes heavily]—you are the slave of facts!”

[There is a knock on the door]

*Malise*. Who is it?

The door is pushed open, and *Reginald Huntingdon* stands there.

*Huntingdon*. I apologize, sir; can I come in a minute?

[*Malise* bows with ironical hostility]

*Huntingdon*. I don’t know if you remember me—Clare Dedmond’s brother.

*Malise*. I remember you.

[He motions to the stolid Boy to go outside again]

*Huntingdon*. I’ve come to you, sir, as a gentleman——

*Malise*. Some mistake. There is one, I believe, on the first floor.

*Huntingdon*. It’s about my sister.

*Malise*. D—n you! Don’t you know that I’ve been shadowed these last three months? Ask your detectives for any information you want.

*Huntingdon*. We know that you haven’t seen her, or even known where she is.

*Malise*. Indeed! You’ve found that out? Brilliant!

*Huntingdon*. We know it from my sister.

*Malise*. Oh! So you’ve tracked her down?

*Huntingdon*. Mrs. Fullarton came across her yesterday in one of those big shops—-selling gloves.

*Malise*. Mrs. Fullarton the lady with the husband. Well! you’ve got her. Clap her back into prison.

*Huntingdon*. We have not got her. She left at once, and we don't know where she's gone.

*Malise*. Bravo!

*Huntingdon*. [Taking hold of his bit] Look here, Mr. Malise, in a way I share your feeling, but I'm fond of my sister, and it's damnable to have to go back to India knowing she must be all adrift, without protection, going through God knows what! Mrs. Fullarton says she's looking awfully pale and down.

*Malise*. [Struggling between resentment and sympathy] Why do you come to me?

*Huntingdon*. We thought——

*Malise*. Who?

*Huntingdon*. My—my father and myself.

*Malise*. Go on.

*Huntingdon*. We thought there was just a chance that, having lost that job, she might come to you again for advice. If she does, it would be really generous of you if you'd put my father in touch with her. He's getting old, and he feels this very much. [He hands *Malise* a card] This is his address.

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*Malise*. [Twisting the card] Let there be no mistake, sir; I do nothing that will help give her back to her husband. She's out to save her soul alive, and I don't join the hue and cry that's after her. On the contrary—if I had the power. If your father wants to shelter her, that's another matter. But she'd her own ideas about that.

*Huntingdon*. Perhaps you don't realize how unfit my sister is for rough and tumble. She's not one of this new sort of woman. She's always been looked after, and had things done for her. Pluck she's got, but that's all, and she's bound to come to grief.

*Malise*. Very likely—the first birds do. But if she drops half-way it's better than if she'd never flown. Your sister, sir, is trying the wings of her spirit, out of the old slave market. For women as for men, there's more than one kind of dishonour, Captain Huntingdon, and worse things than being dead, as you may know in your profession.

*Huntingdon*. Admitted—but——

*Malise*. We each have our own views as to what they are. But they all come to—death of our spirits, for the sake of our carcases. Anything more?

*Huntingdon*. My leave's up. I sail to-morrow. If you do see my sister I trust you to give her my love and say I begged she would see my father.

*Malise*. If I have the chance—yes.

He makes a gesture of salute, to which *Huntingdon* responds.
Then the latter turns and goes out.

*Malise*. Poor fugitive! Where are you running now?

He stands at the window, through which the evening sunlight is powdering the room with smoky gold. The stolid Boy has again come in. *Malise* stares at him, then goes back to the table, takes up the *Ms*., and booms it at him; he receives the charge, breathing hard.

*Malise*. "Man of the world—product of a material age; incapable of perceiving reality in motions of the spirit; having 'no use,' as you would say, for 'sentimental nonsense'; accustomed to believe yourself the national spine—your position is unassailable. You will remain the idol of the country—arbiter of law, parson in mufti, darling of the playwright and the novelist—God bless you!—while waters lap these shores."

He places the sheets of *Ms*. in an envelope, and hands them to
the Boy.

*Malise*. You're going straight back to "The Watchfire"?

*Boy*. [Stolidly] Yes, sir.

*Malise*. [Staring at him] You're a masterpiece.  D'you know that?

*Boy*.  No, sir.

*Malise*.  Get out, then.

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He lifts the portfolio from the table, and takes it into the inner room. The Boy, putting his thumb stolidly to his nose, turns to go. In the doorway he shies violently at the figure of *Clare*, standing there in a dark-coloured dress, skids past her and goes. *Clare* comes into the gleam of sunlight, her white face alive with emotion or excitement. She looks round her, smiles, sighs; goes swiftly to the door, closes it, and comes back to the table. There she stands, fingering the papers on the table, smoothing MALISE's hat wistfully, eagerly, waiting.

*Malise*. [Returning] You!

*Clare*. [With a faint smile] Not very glorious, is it?

He goes towards her, and checks himself, then slews the armchair round.

*Malise*. Come! Sit down, sit down! [*Clare*, heaving a long sigh, sinks down into the chair] Tea's nearly ready.

He places a cushion for her, and prepares tea; she looks up at him softly, but as he finishes and turns to her, she drops that glance.

*Clare*. Do you think me an awful coward for coming? [She has taken a little plain cigarette case from her dress] Would you mind if I smoked?

*Malise* shakes his head, then draws back from her again, as if afraid to be too close. And again, unseen, she looks at him.

*Malise*. So you've lost your job?

*Clare*. How did you——?

*Malise*. Your brother. You only just missed him. [*Clare* starts up] They had an idea you'd come. He's sailing to-morrow—he wants you to see your father.

*Clare*. Is father ill?

*Mali*$E. Anxious about you.

*Clare*. I've written to him every week. [Excited] They're still hunting me!

*Malise*. [Touching her shoulder gently] It's all right—all right.

She sinks again into the chair, and again he withdraws. And once more she gives him that soft eager look, and once more averts it as he turns to her.

*Clare*. My nerves have gone funny lately. It's being always on one's guard, and stuffy air, and feeling people look and talk about you, and dislike your being there.

*Malise*. Yes; that wants pluck.

*Clare*. [Shaking her head] I curl up all the time. The only thing I know for certain is, that I shall never go back to him. The more I've hated what I've been doing, the more sure I've been. I might come to anything—but not that.

*Malise*. Had a very bad time?

*Clare*. [Nodding] I'm spoilt. It's a curse to be a lady when you have to earn your living. It's not really been so hard, I suppose; I've been selling things, and living about twice as well as most shop girls.

*Malise*. Were they decent to you?

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*Clare*. Lots of the girls are really nice. But somehow they don't want me, can't help thinking I've got airs or something; and in here [She touches her breast] I don't want them!

*Malise*. I know.

*Clare*. Mrs. Fullarton and I used to belong to a society for helping reduced gentlewomen to get work. I know now what they want: enough money not to work—-that's all! [Suddenly looking up at him] Don't think me worse than I am-please! It's working under people; it's having to do it, being driven. I have tried, I've not been altogether a coward, really! But every morning getting there the same time; every day the same stale "dinner," as they call it; every evening the same "Good evening, Miss Clare," "Good evening, Miss Simpson," "Good evening, Miss Hart," "Good evening, Miss Clare." And the same walk home, or the same 'bus; and the same men that you mustn't look at, for fear they'll follow you. [She rises] Oh! and the feeling-always, always—that there's no sun, or life, or hope, or anything. It was just like being ill, the way I've wanted to ride and dance and get out into the country. [Her excitement dies away into the old clipped composure, and she sits down again] Don't think too badly of me—it really is pretty ghastly!

*Malise*. [Gruffly] H'm! Why a shop?

*Clare*. References. I didn't want to tell more lies than I could help; a married woman on strike can't tell the truth, you know. And I can't typewrite or do shorthand yet. And chorus—I thought—you wouldn't like.

*Malise*. I? What have I——? [He checks himself ] Have men been brutes?

*Clare*. [Stealing a look at him] One followed me a lot. He caught hold of my arm one evening. I just took this out [She draws out her hatpin and holds it like a dagger, her lip drawn back as the lips of a dog going to bite] and said: "Will you leave me alone, please?" And he did. It was rather nice. And there was one quite decent little man in the shop—I was sorry for him—such a humble little man!

*Malise*. Poor devil—it's hard not to wish for the moon.

At the tone of his voice *Clare* looks up at him; his face is turned away.

*Clare*. [Softly] How have you been? Working very hard?

*Malise*. As hard as God will let me.

*Clare*. [Stealing another look] Have you any typewriting I could do? I could learn, and I've still got a brooch I could sell. Which is the best kind?

*Malise*. I had a catalogue of them somewhere.

He goes into the inner room. The moment he is gone, *Clare* stands up, her hands pressed to her cheeks as if she felt them flaming. Then, with hands clasped, she stands waiting. He comes back with the old portfolio.

*Malise*. Can you typewrite where you are?

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*Clare*. I have to find a new room anyway. I'm changing—to be safe. [She takes a luggage ticket from her glove] I took my things to Charing Cross—only a bag and one trunk. [Then, with that queer expression on her face which prefaces her desperations] You don't want me now, I suppose.

*Malise*. What?

*Clare*. [Hardly above a whisper] Because—if you still wanted me—
I do—now.

> [Etext editors note: In the 1924 revision, 11 years after this 1913 edition: "I do—now" is changed to "I could—now"—a significant change in meaning. D.W.]

*Malise*. [Staring hard into her face that is quivering and smiling]
You mean it? You do? You care——?

*Clare*. I've thought of you—so much! But only—if you're sure.

> He clasps her and kisses her closed eyes; and so they stand for a moment, till the sound of a latchkey in the door sends them apart.

*Malise*. It's the housekeeper. Give me that ticket; I'll send for your things.

> Obediently she gives him the ticket, smiles, and goes quietly into the inner room. *Mrs*. *Miler* has entered; her face, more Chinese than ever, shows no sign of having seen.

*Malise*. That lady will stay here, Mrs. Miler. Kindly go with this ticket to the cloak-room at Charing Cross station, and bring back her luggage in a cab. Have you money?

*Mrs*. *Miler*. 'Arf a crown. [She takes the ticket—then impassively] In case you don't know—there's two o' them men about the stairs now.

The moment she is gone *Malise* makes a gesture of maniacal fury. He steals on tiptoe to the outer door, and listens. Then, placing his hand on the knob, he turns it without noise, and wrenches back the door. Transfigured in the last sunlight streaming down the corridor are two men, close together, listening and consulting secretly. They start back.

*Malise*. [With strange, almost noiseless ferocity] You've run her to earth; your job's done. Kennel up, hounds! [And in their faces he slams the door]

*Curtain*.

# SCENE II

*Scene* II—The same, early on a winter afternoon, three months later. The room has now a certain daintiness. There are curtains over the doors, a couch, under the window, all the books are arranged on shelves. In small vases, over the fireplace, are a few violets and chrysanthemums. *Malise* sits huddled in his armchair drawn close to the fore, paper on knee, pen in hand. He looks rather grey and drawn, and round his chair is the usual litter. At the table, now nearer to the window, *Clare* sits working a typewriter. She finishes a line, puts sheets of paper together, makes a note on a card—adds some figures, and marks the total.

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*Clare*. Kenneth, when this is paid, I shall have made two pound seventeen in the three months, and saved you about three pounds. One hundred and seventeen shillings at tenpence a thousand is one hundred and forty thousand words at fourteen hundred words an hour. It's only just over an hour a day. Can't you get me more?

*Malise* lifts the hand that holds his pen and lets it fall again.
*Clare* puts the cover on the typewriter, and straps it.

*Clare*. I'm quite packed. Shall I pack for you? [He nods] Can't we have more than three days at the sea? [He shakes his head. Going up to him] You did sleep last night.

*Malise*. Yes, I slept.

*Clare*. Bad head? [*Malise* nods] By this time the day after to-morrow the case will be heard and done with. You're not worrying for me? Except for my poor old Dad, I don't care a bit.

*Malise* heaves himself out of the chair, and begins pacing up and down.

*Clare*. Kenneth, do you understand why he doesn't claim damages, after what he said that day-here? [Looking suddenly at him] It is true that he doesn't?

*Malise*. It is not.

*Clare*. But you told me yourself

*Malise*. I lied.

*Clare*. Why?

*Malise*. [Shrugging] No use lying any longer—you'd know it tomorrow.

*Clare*. How much am I valued at?

*Malise*. Two thousand. [Grimly] He'll settle it on you. [He laughs] Masterly! By one stroke, destroys his enemy, avenges his "honour," and gilds his name with generosity!

*Clare*. Will you have to pay?

*Malise*. Stones yield no blood.

*Clare*. Can't you borrow?

*Malise*. I couldn't even get the costs.

*Clare*. Will they make you bankrupt, then? [*Malise* nods] But that doesn't mean that you won't have your income, does it? [*Malise* laughs] What is your income, Kenneth? [He is silent] A hundred and fifty from "The Watchfire," I know. What else?

*Malise*. Out of five books I have made the sum of forty pounds.

*Clare*. What else? Tell me.

*Malise*. Fifty to a hundred pounds a year. Leave me to gnaw my way out, child.

> *Clare* stands looking at him in distress, then goes quickly into the room behind her. *Malise* takes up his paper and pen. The paper is quite blank.

*Malise*. [Feeling his head] Full of smoke.

He drops paper and pen, and crossing to the room on the left goes in. *Clare* re-enters with a small leather box. She puts it down on her typing table as *Malise* returns followed by *Mrs*. *Miler*, wearing her hat, and carrying His overcoat.

*Mrs*. *Miler*. Put your coat on. It's a bitter wind.

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[He puts on the coat]

*Clare*. Where are you going?

*Malise*. To “The Watchfire.”

The door closes behind him, and *Mrs*. *Miler* goes up to *Clare* holding out a little blue bottle with a red label, nearly full.

*Mrs*. *Miler*. You know he’s takin’ this [She makes a little motion towards her mouth] to make ’im sleep?

*Clare*. [Reading the label] Where was it?

*Mrs*. *Miler*. In the bathroom chest o’ drawers, where ’e keeps ’is odds and ends. I was lookin’ for ’is garters.

*Clare*. Give it to me!

*Mrs*. *Miler*. He took it once before. He must get his sleep.

*Clare*. Give it to me!

*Mrs*. *Miler* resigns it, *Clare* takes the cork out, smells, then tastes it from her finger. *Mrs*. *Miler*, twisting her apron in her hands, speaks.

MILS. *Miler*. I’ve ’ad it on my mind a long time to speak to yer. Your comin’ ’ere’s not done ‘im a bit o’ good.

*Clare*. Don’t!

*Mrs*. *Miler*. I don’t want to, but what with the worry o’ this ’ere divorce suit, an’ you bein’ a lady an’ ‘im havin’ to be so careful of yer, and tryin’ to save, not smokin’ all day like ‘e used, an’ not gettin’ ‘is two bottles of claret regular; an’ losin’ his sleep, an’ takin’ that stuff for it; and now this ’ere last business. I’ve seen ‘im sometimes holdin’ ’is ‘ead as if it was comin’ off. [Seeing *Clare* wince, she goes on with a sort of compassion in her Chinese face] I can see yer fond of him; an’ I’ve nothin’ against yer you don’t trouble me a bit; but I’ve been with ’im eight years—we’re used to each other, and I can’t bear to see ’im not ’imself, really I can’t.

She gives a sadden sniff. Then her emotion passes, leaving her as Chinese as ever.

*Clare*. This last business—what do you mean by that?

*Mrs*. *Miler*. If ’e a’n’t told yer, I don’t know that I’ve any call to.

*Clare*. Please.

*Mrs*. *Miler*. [Her hands twisting very fast] Well, it’s to do with this ‘ere “Watchfire.” One of the men that sees to the writin’ of it ’e’s an old friend of Mr. Malise, ’e come ‘ere this mornin’ when you was out. I was doin’ my work in there [She points to the room on the right] an’ the door open, so I ’earl ’em. Now you’ve ’ung them curtains, you can’t ’elp it.

*Clare*. Yes?

*Mrs*. *Miler*. It’s about your divorce case. This ’ere “Watchfire,” ye see, belongs to some fellers that won’t ‘ave their men gettin’ into the papers. So this ’ere friend of Mr. Malise—very nice ’e spoke about it: “If it comes into Court,” ’e says, “you’ll ’ave to go,” ’e says. “These beggars, these dogs, these dogs,” ’e says, “they’ll ’oof you out,” ‘e says. An’ I could tell by the sound of his voice, ’e meant it—proper upset ’e was. So that’s that!

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*Clare*. It's inhuman!

*Mrs*. *Miler*. That's what I thinks; but it don't 'elp, do it? "'Tain't the circulation," 'e says, "it's the principle," 'e says; and then 'e starts in swearin' horrible. 'E's a very nice man. And Mr. Malise, 'e says: "Well, that about does for me!" 'e says.

*Clare*. Thank you, Mrs. Miler—I'm glad to know.

*Mrs*. *Miler*. Yes; I don't know as I ought to 'ave told you. [Desperately uncomfortable] You see, I don't take notice of Mr. *Malise*, but I know 'im very well. 'E's a good 'arted gentleman, very funny, that'll do things to help others, and what's more, keep on doin' 'em, when they hurt 'im; very obstinate 'e is. Now, when you first come 'ere, three months ago, I says to meself: "He'll enjoy this 'ere for a bit, but she's too much of a lady for 'im." What 'e wants about 'im permanent is a woman that thinks an' talks about all them things he talks about. And sometimes I fancy 'e don't want nothin' permanent about 'im at all.

*Clare*. Don't!

*Mrs*. *Miler*. [With another sudden sniff] Gawd knows I don't want to upset ye. You're situated very hard; an' women's got no business to 'urt one another—that's what I thinks.

*Clare*. Will you go out and do something for me? [*Mrs*. *Miler* nods]

[*Clare* takes up the sheaf of papers and from the leather box a note and an emerald pendant]

Take this with the note to that address—it's quite close. He'll give you thirty pounds for it. Please pay these bills and bring me back the receipts, and what's over.

*Mrs*. *Miler*. [Taking the pendant and note] It's a pretty thing.

*Clare*. Yes. It was my mother's.

*Mrs*. *Miler*. It's a pity to part with it; ain't you got another?

*Clare*. Nothing more, Mrs. Miler, not even a wedding ring.

*Mrs*. *Miler*. [Without expression] You make my 'eart ache sometimes.

[She wraps pendant and note into her handkerchief and goes out to the door.]

*Mrs*. *Miler*. [From the door] There's a lady and gentleman out here. Mrs. Fuller—wants you, not Mr. Malise.

*Clare*. Mrs. Fullarton? [*Mrs*. *Miler* nods] Ask them to come in.

*Mrs*. *Miler* opens the door wide, says "Come in," and goes. *Mrs*. *Fullarton* is accompanied not by *Fullarton*, but by the lawyer, TWISDON. They come in.

*Mrs*. *Fullarton*. Clare! My dear! How are you after all this time?

*Clare*. [Her eyes fixed on *Twisden*] Yes?

*Mrs*. *Fullarton*. [Disconcerted by the strange greeting] I brought Mr. Twisden to tell you something. May I stay?

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*Clare*. Yes. [She points to the chair at the same table: *Mrs*. *Fullarton* sits down] Now!

[*Twisden* comes forward]

*Twisden*. As you're not defending this case, Mrs. Dedmond, there is nobody but yourself for me to apply to.

*Clare*. Please tell me quickly, what you've come for.

*Twisden*. [Bowing slightly] I am instructed by Mr. Dedmond to say that if you will leave your present companion and undertake not to see him again, he will withdraw the suit and settle three hundred a year on you. [At CLARE's movement of abhorrence] Don't misunderstand me, please—it is not—it could hardly be, a request that you should go back. Mr. Dedmond is not prepared to receive you again. The proposal—forgive my saying so—remarkably Quixotic—is made to save the scandal to his family and your own. It binds you to nothing but the abandonment of your present companion, with certain conditions of the same nature as to the future. In other words, it assures you a position—so long as you live quietly by yourself.

*Clare*. I see. Will you please thank Mr. Dedmond, and say that I refuse?

*Mrs*. *Fullarton*. Clare, Clare! For God's sake don't be desperate.

[*Clare*, deathly still, just looks at her]

*Twisden*. Mrs. Dedmond, I am bound to put the position to you in its naked brutality. You know there's a claim for damages?

*Clare*. I have just learnt it.

*Twisden*. You realize what the result of this suit must be: You will be left dependent on an undischarged bankrupt. To put it another way, you'll be a stone round the neck of a drowning man.

*Clare*. You are cowards.

*Mrs*. *Fullarton*. Clare, Clare! [To *Twisden*] She doesn't mean it; please be patient.

*Clare*. I do mean it. You ruin him because of me. You get him down, and kick him to intimidate me.

*Mrs*. *Fullarton*. My dear girl! Mr. Twisden is not personally concerned. How can you?

*Clare*. If I were dying, and it would save me, I wouldn't take a penny from my husband.

*Twisden*. Nothing could be more bitter than those words. Do you really wish me to take them back to him?

*Clare*. Yes. [She turns from them to the fire]

*Mrs*. *Fullarton*. [In a low voice to *Twisden*] Please leave me alone with her, don't say anything to Mr. Dedmond yet.

*Twisden*. Mrs. Dedmond, I told you once that I wished you well. Though you have called me a coward, I still do that. For God's sake, think—before it's too late.

*Clare*. [Putting out her hand blindly] I'm sorry I called you a coward. It's the whole thing, I meant.

*Twisden*. Never mind that. Think!

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With the curious little movement of one who sees something he does not like to see, he goes. *Clare* is leaning her forehead against the mantel-shelf, seemingly unconscious that she is not alone. *Mrs*. *Fullarton* approaches quietly till she can see *Clare's* face.

*Mrs*. *Fullarton*. My dear sweet thing, don't be cross with met [*Clare* turns from her. It is all the time as if she were trying to get away from words and people to something going on within herself] How can I help wanting to see you saved from all this ghastliness?

*Clare*. Please don't, Dolly! Let me be!

*Mrs*. *Fullarton*. I must speak, Clare! I do think you're hard on George. It's generous of him to offer to withdraw the suit— considering. You do owe it to us to try and spare your father and your sisters and—and all of us who care for you.

*Clare*. [Facing her] You say George is generous! If he wanted to be that he'd never have claimed these damages. It's revenge he wants—I heard him here. You think I've done him an injury. So I did—when I married him. I don't know what I shall come to, Dolly, but I shan't fall so low as to take money from him. That's as certain as that I shall die.

*Mrs*. *Fullarton*. Do you know, Clare, I think it's awful about you! You're too fine, and not fine enough, to put up with things; you're too sensitive to take help, and you're not strong enough to do without it. It's simply tragic. At any rate, you might go home to your people.

*Clare*. After this!

*Mrs*. *Fullarton*. To us, then?

*Clare*. "If I could be the falling bee, and kiss thee all the day!"
No, Dolly!

> *Mrs*. *Fullarton* turns from her ashamed and baffled, but her quick eyes take in the room, trying to seize on some new point of attack.

*Mrs*. *Fullarton*. You can't be—you aren't-happy, here?

*Clare*. Aren't I?

*Mrs*. *Fullarton*. Oh! Clare! Save yourself—and all of us!

*Clare*. [Very still] You see, I love him.

*Mrs*. *Fullarton*. You used to say you'd never love; did not want it— would never want it.

*Clare*. Did I? How funny!

*Mrs*. *Fullarton*. Oh! my dear! Don't look like that, or you'll make me cry.

*Clare*. One doesn't always know the future, does one? [Desperately]
I love him! I love him!

*Mrs*. *Fullarton*. [Suddenly] If you love him, what will it be like for you, knowing you've ruined him?

*Clare*. Go away! Go away!

*Mrs*. *Fullarton*. Love!—you said!

*Clare*. [Quivering at that stab-suddenly] I must—I will keep him.
He's all I've got.

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*Mrs. Fullarton*. Can you—can you keep him?

*Clare*. Go!

*Mrs. Fullarton*. I'm going. But, men are hard to keep, even when you've not been the ruin of them. You know whether the love this man gives you is really love. If not—God help you! [She turns at the door, and says mournfully] Good-bye, my child! If you can ——

Then goes. *Clare*, almost in a whisper, repeats the words: "Love! you said!" At the sound of a latchkey she runs as if to escape into the bedroom, but changes her mind and stands blotted against the curtain of the door. *Malise* enters. For a moment he does not see her standing there against the curtain that is much the same colour as her dress. His face is that of a man in the grip of a rage that he feels to be impotent. Then, seeing her, he pulls himself together, walks to his armchair, and sits down there in his hat and coat.

*Clare*. Well? "The Watchfire?" You may as well tell me.

*Malise*. Nothing to tell you, child.

At that touch of tenderness she goes up to his chair and kneels down beside it. Mechanically *Malise* takes off his hat.

*Clare*. Then you are to lose that, too? [*Malise* stares at her] I know about it—never mind how.

*Malise*. Sanctimonious dogs!

*Clare*. [Very low] There are other things to be got, aren't there?

*Malise*. Thick as blackberries. I just go out and cry, "*Malise*, unsuccessful author, too honest journalist, freethinker, co-respondent, bankrupt," and they tumble!

*Clare*. [Quietly] Kenneth, do you care for me? [*Malise* stares at her] Am I anything to you but just prettiness?

*Malise*. Now, now! This isn't the time to brood! Rouse up and fight.

*Clare*. Yes.

*Malise*. We're not going to let them down us, are we? [She rubs her cheek against his hand, that still rests on her shoulder] Life on sufferance, breath at the pleasure of the enemy! And some day in the fullness of his mercy to be made a present of the right to

eat and drink and breathe again. [His gesture sums up the rage within him] Fine! [He puts his hat on and rises] That's the last groan they get from me.

*Class*. Are you going out again? [He nods] Where?

*Malise*. Blackberrying! Our train's not till six.

He goes into the bedroom. *Clare* gets up and stands by the fire, looking round in a dazed way. She puts her hand up and mechanically gathers together the violets in the little vase. Suddenly she twists them to a buttonhole, and sinks down into the armchair, which he must pass. There she sits, the violets in her hand. *Malise* comes out and crosses towards the outer door. She puts the violets up to him. He stares at them, shrugs his shoulders, and passes on. For just a moment *Clare* sits motionless.

*Clare*. [Quietly] Give me a kiss!

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He turns and kisses her. But his lips, after that kiss, have the furtive bitterness one sees on the lips of those who have done what does not suit their mood. He goes out. She is left motionless by the armchair, her throat working. Then, feverishly, she goes to the little table, seizes a sheet of paper, and writes. Looking up suddenly she sees that *Mrs*. *Miler* has let herself in with her latchkey.

*Mrs*. *Miler*. I've settled the baker, the milk, the washin' an' the groceries—this 'ere's what's left.

She counts down a five-pound note, four sovereigns, and two shillings on to the little table. *Clare* folds the letter into an envelope, then takes up the five-pound note and puts it into her dress.

*Clare*. [Pointing to the money on the table] Take your wages; and give him this when he comes in. I'm going away.

*Mrs*. *Miler*. Without him? When'll you be comin' back?

*Clare*. [Rising] I shan't be coming back. [Gazing at *Mrs*. MILER'S hands, which are plaiting at her dress] I'm leaving Mr. Malise, and shan't see him again. And the suit against us will be withdrawn—the divorce suit—you understand?

*Mrs*. *Miler*. [Her face all broken up] I never meant to say anything to yer.

*Clare*. It's not you. I can see for myself. Don't make it harder; help me. Get a cab.

*Mrs*. *Miler*. [Disturbed to the heart] The porter's outside, cleanin' the landin' winder.

*Clare*. Tell him to come for my trunk. It is packed. [She goes into the bedroom]

*Mrs*. *Miler*. [Opening the door-desolately] Come 'ere!

[The *Porter* appears in shirt-sleeves at the door]

*Mrs*. *Miler*. The lady wants a cab. Wait and carry 'er trunk down.

*Clare* comes from the bedroom in her hat and coat.

*Mrs*. *Miler*. [*To* the *Porter*] Now.

They go into the bedroom to get the trunk. *Clare* picks up from the floor the bunch of violets, her fingers play with it as if they did not quite know what it was; and she stands by the armchair very still, while *Mrs*. *Miler* and the *Porter* pass her with trunk and bag. And even after the *Porter* has shouldered the trunk outside, and marched away, and *Mrs*. *Miler* has come back into the room, *Clare* still stands there.

*Mrs*. *Miler*. [Pointing to the typewriter] D'you want this 'ere, too?

*Clare*. Yes.

*Mrs*. *Miler* carries it out. Then, from the doorway, gazing at *Clare* taking her last look, she sobs, suddenly. At sound of that sob *Clare* throws up her head.

*Clare*. Don't! It's all right. Good-bye!

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She walks out and away, not looking back. *Mrs*. *Miler* chokes her sobbing into the black stuff of her thick old jacket.

*Curtain*

## ACT IV

Supper-time in a small room at “The Gascony” on Derby Day. Through the windows of a broad corridor, out of which the door opens, is seen the dark blue of a summer night. The walls are of apricot-gold; the carpets, curtains, lamp-shades, and gilded chairs, of red; the wood-work and screens white; the palms in gilded tubs. A doorway that has no door leads to another small room. One little table behind a screen, and one little table in the open, are set for two persons each. On a service-table, above which hangs a speaking-tube, are some dishes of hors d’ouvres, a basket of peaches, two bottles of champagne in ice-pails, and a small barrel of oysters in a gilded tub. *Arnaud*, the waiter, slim, dark, quick, his face seamed with a quiet, soft irony, is opening oysters and listening to the robust joy of a distant supper-party, where a man is playing the last bars of: “Do ye ken John Peel” on a horn. As the sound dies away, he murmurs: “Tres Joli!” and opens another oyster. Two Ladies with bare shoulders and large hats pass down the corridor. Their talk is faintly wafted in: “Well, I never like Derby night! The boys do get so bobbish!” “That horn—vulgar, I call it!”ARNAUD’S eyebrows rise, the corners of his mouth droop. A Lady with bare shoulders, and crimson roses in her hair, comes along the corridor, and stops for a second at the window, for a man to join her. They come through into the room. *Arnaud* has sprung to attention, but with: “Let’s go in here, shall we?” they pass through into the further room. The *manager*, a gentleman with neat moustaches, and buttoned into a frock-coat, has appeared, brisk, noiseless, his eyes everywhere; he inspects the peaches.

Manager. Four shillin’ apiece to-night, see?

*Arnaud*. Yes, Sare.

From the inner room a young man and his partner have come in. She is dark, almost Spanish-looking; he fair, languid, pale, clean-shaved, slackly smiling, with half-closed eyes-one of those who are bred and dissipated to the point of having lost all save the capacity for hiding their emotions. He speaks in a——

*Languid voice*. Awful row they’re kickin’ up in there, Mr. Varley. A fellow with a horn.

*Manager*. [Blandly] Gaddesdon Hunt, my lord—always have their supper with us, Derby night. Quiet corner here, my lord. Arnaud!

*Arnaud* is already at the table, between screen and palm. And, there ensconced, the couple take their seats. Seeing them safely landed, the *manager*, brisk and noiseless,

moves away. In the corridor a lady in black, with a cloak falling open, seems uncertain whether to come in. She advances into the doorway. It is *Clare*.

*Arnaud*. [Pointing to the other table as he flies with dishes] Nice table, Madame.

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*Clare* moves to the corner of it. An artist in observation of his clients, *Arnaud* takes in her face—very pale under her wavy, simply-dressed hair; shadowy beneath the eyes; not powdered; her lips not reddened; without a single ornament; takes in her black dress, finely cut, her arms and neck beautifully white, and at her breast three gardenias. And as he nears her, she lifts her eyes. It is very much the look of something lost, appealing for guidance.

*Arnaud*. Madame is waiting for some one? [She shakes her head] Then Madame will be veree well here—veree well. I take Madame's cloak?

He takes the cloak gently and lays it on the back of the chair fronting the room, that she may put it round her when she wishes. She sits down.

*Languid voice*. [From the corner] Waiter!

*Arnaud*. Milord!

*Languid voice*. The Roederer.

*Arnaud*. At once, Milord.

*Clare* sits tracing a pattern with her finger on the cloth, her eyes lowered. Once she raises them, and follows ARNAUD's dark rapid figure.

*Arnaud*. [Returning] Madame feels the 'eat? [He scans her with increased curiosity] You wish something, Madame?

*Clare*. [Again giving him that look] Must I order?

*Arnaud*. Non, Madame, it is not necessary. A glass of water. [He pours it out] I have not the pleasure of knowing Madame's face.

*Clare*. [Faintly smiling] No.

*Arnaud*. Madame will find it veree good 'ere, veree quiet.

*Languid voice*. Waiter!

*Arnaud*. Pardon! [He goes]

The bare-necked ladies with large hats again pass down the corridor outside, and again their voices are wafted in: "Tottie! Not she! Oh! my goodness, she has got a pride on

her!" "Bobbie'll never stick it!" "Look here, dear——" Galvanized by those sounds, *Clare* has caught her cloak and half-risen; they die away and she subsides.

*Arnaud*. [Back at her table, with a quaint shrug towards the corridor] It is not rowdy here, Madame, as a rule—not as in some places. To-night a little noise. Madame is fond of flowers? [He whisks out, and returns almost at once with a bowl of carnations from some table in the next room] These smell good!

*Clare*. You are very kind.

*Arnaud*. [With courtesy] Not at all, Madame; a pleasure. [He bows]

A young man, tall, thin, hard, straight, with close-cropped, sandyish hair and moustache, a face tanned very red, and one of those small, long, lean heads that only grow in Britain; clad in a thin dark overcoat thrown open, an opera hat pushed back, a white waistcoat round his lean middle, he comes in from the corridor. He looks round, glances at *Clare*, passes her table

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towards the further room, stops in the doorway, and looks back at her. Her eyes have just been lifted, and are at once cast down again. The young man wavers, catches ARNAUD's eye, jerks his head to summon him, and passes into the further room. *Arnaud* takes up the vase that has been superseded, and follows him out. And *Clare* sits alone in silence, broken by the murmurs of the languid lord and his partner, behind the screen. She is breathing as if she had been running hard. She lifts her eyes. The tall young man, divested of hat and coat, is standing by her table, holding out his hand with a sort of bashful hardiness.

*Young man*. How d'you do? Didn't recognize you at first. So sorry —awfully rude of me.

*Clare's* eyes seem to fly from him, to appeal to him, to resign herself all at once. Something in the *young man* responds. He drops his hand.

*Clare*. [Faintly] How d'you do?

*Young man*. [Stammering] You—you been down there to-day?

*Clare*. Where?

*Young man*. [With a smile] The Derby. What? Don't you generally go down? [He touches the other chair] May I?

*Clare*. [Almost in a whisper] Yes.

As he sits down, *Arnaud* returns and stands before them.

*Arnaud*. The plovers' eggs veree good to-night, Sare. Veree good, Madame. A peach or two, after. Veree good peaches. The Roederer, Sare—not bad at all. Madame likes it frappe, but not too cold—yes?

[He is away again to his service-table.]

*Young man*. [Burying his face in the carnations] I say—these are jolly, aren't they? They do you pretty well here.

*Clare*. Do they?

*Young man*. You've never been here? [*Clare* shakes her head] By Jove! I thought I didn't know your face. [*Clare* looks full at him. Again something moves in the *young man*, and he stammers] I mean—not——

*Clare*. It doesn't matter.

*Young man*. [Respectfully] Of course, if I—if you were waiting for anybody, or anything—I——

[He half rises]

*Clare*. It's all right, thank you.

The *young man* sits down again, uncomfortable, nonplussed. There is silence, broken by the inaudible words of the languid lord, and the distant merriment of the supper-party. *Arnaud* brings the plovers' eggs.

*Young man*. The wine, quick.

*Arnaud*. At once, Sare.

*Young man*. [Abruptly] Don't you ever go racing, then?

*Clare*. No.

[*Arnaud* pours out champagne]

*Young man*. I remember awfully well my first day. It was pretty thick—lost every blessed bob, and my watch and chain, playin' three cards on the way home.

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*Clare*. Everything has a beginning, hasn't it?

[She drinks. The *young man* stares at her]

*Young man*. [Floundering in these waters deeper than he had bargained for] I say—-about things having beginnings—did you mean anything?

[*Clare* nods]

*Young man*. What! D'you mean it's really the first——?

*Clare* nods. The champagne has flicked her courage.

*Young man*. By George! [He leans back] I've often wondered.

*Arnaud*. [Again filling the glasses] Monsieur finds——

*Young man*. [Abruptly] It's all right.

He drains his glass, then sits bolt upright. Chivalry and the camaraderie of class have begun to stir in him.

*Young man*. Of course I can see that you're not—I mean, that you're a—a lady. [*Clare* smiles] And I say, you know—if you have to— because you're in a hole—I should feel a cad. Let me lend you——?

*Clare*. [Holding up her glass] 'Le vin est tire, il faut le boire'!

She drinks. The French words, which he does not too well understand, completing his conviction that she is a lady, he remains quite silent, frowning. As *Clare* held up her glass, two gentlemen have entered. The first is blond, of good height and a comely insolence. His crisp, fair hair, and fair brushed-up moustache are just going grey; an eyeglass is fixed in one of two eyes that lord it over every woman they see; his face is broad, and coloured with air and wine. His companion is a tall, thin, dark bird of the night, with sly, roving eyes, and hollow cheeks. They stand looking round, then pass into the further room; but in passing, they have stared unreservedly at *Clare*.

*Young man*. [Seeing her wince] Look here! I'm afraid you must feel me rather a brute, you know.

*Clare*. No, I don't; really.

*Young man*. Are you absolute stoney? [*Clare* nods] But [Looking at her frock and cloak] you're so awfully well——

*Clare*. I had the sense to keep them.

*Young man*. [More and more disturbed] I say, you know—I wish you'd let me lend you something. I had quite a good day down there.

*Clare*. [Again tracing her pattern on the cloth—then looking up at him full] I can't take, for nothing.

*Young man*. By Jove! I don't know-really, I don't—this makes me feel pretty rotten. I mean, it's your being a lady.

*Clare*. [Smiling] That's not your fault, is it? You see, I've been beaten all along the line. And I really don't care what happens to me. [She has that peculiar fey look on her face now] I really don't; except that I don't take charity. It's lucky for me it's you, and not some——

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The supper-party is getting still more boisterous, and there comes a long view holloa, and a blast of the horn.

*Young man*. But I say, what about your people? You must have people of some sort.

He is fast becoming fascinated, for her cheeks have begun to flush and her eyes to shine.

*Clare*. Oh, yes; I've had people, and a husband, and—everything—— And here I am! Queer, isn't it? [She touches her glass] This is going to my head! Do you mind? I sha'n't sing songs and get up and dance, and I won't cry, I promise you!

*Young man*. [Between fascination and chivalry] By George! One simply can't believe in this happening to a lady.

*Clare*. Have you got sisters? [Breaking into her soft laughter] My brother's in India. I sha'n't meet him, anyway.

*Young man*. No, but—I say-are you really quite cut off from everybody? [*Clare* nods] Something rather awful must have happened?

She smiles. The two gentlemen have returned. The blond one is again staring fixedly at *Clare*. This time she looks back at him, flaming; and, with a little laugh, he passes with his friend into the corridor.

*Clare*. Who are those two?

*Young man*. Don't know—not been much about town yet. I'm just back from India myself. You said your brother was there; what's his regiment?

*Clare*. [Shaking her head] You're not going to find out my name. I haven't got one—-nothing.

She leans her bare elbows on the table, and her face on her hands.

*Clare*. First of June! This day last year I broke covert—I've been running ever since.

*Young man*. I don't understand a bit. You—must have had a—a—some one——

But there is such a change in her face, such rigidity of her whole body, that he stops and averts his eyes. When he looks again she is drinking. She puts the glass down, and gives a little laugh.

*Young man*. [With a sort of awe] Anyway it must have been like riding at a pretty stiff fence, for you to come here to-night.

*Clare*. Yes. What's the other side?

The *young man* puts out his hand and touches her arm. It is meant for sympathy, but she takes it for attraction.

*Clare*. [Shaking her head] Not yet please! I'm enjoying this. May I have a cigarette?

[He takes out his case, and gives her one]

*Clare*. [Letting the smoke slowly forth] Yes, I'm enjoying it. Had a pretty poor time lately; not enough to eat, sometimes.

*Young man*. Not really! How damnable! I say—do have something more substantial.

*Clare* gives a sudden gasp, as if going off into hysterical laughter, but she stifles it, and shakes her head.

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*Young man*. A peach?

[*Arnaud* brings peaches to the table]

*Clare*. [Smiling] Thank you.

[He fills their glasses and retreats]

*Clare*. [Raising her glass] Eat and drink, for tomorrow we—Listen!

From the supper-party comes the sound of an abortive chorus:
"With a hey ho, chivy, hark forrard, hark forrard, tantivy!"
Jarring out into a discordant whoop, it sinks.

*Clare*. "This day a stag must die." Jolly old song!

*Young man*. Rowdy lot! [Suddenly] I say—I admire your pluck.

*Clare*. [Shaking her head] Haven't kept my end up. Lots of women do! You see: I'm too fine, and not fine enough! My best friend said that. Too fine, and not fine enough. [She laughs] I couldn't be a saint and martyr, and I wouldn't be a soulless doll. Neither one thing nor the other—that's the tragedy.

*Young man*. You must have had awful luck!

*Clare*. I did try. [Fiercely] But what's the good—when there's nothing before you?—Do I look ill?

*Young man*. No; simply awfully pretty.

*Clare*. [With a laugh] A man once said to me: "As you haven't money, you should never have been pretty!" But, you see, it is some good. If I hadn't been, I couldn't have risked coming here, could I? Don't you think it was rather sporting of me to buy these [She touches the gardenias] with the last shilling over from my cab fare?

*Young man*. Did you really? D——d sporting!

*Clare*. It's no use doing things by halves, is it? I'm—in for it— wish me luck! [She drinks, and puts her glass down with a smile] In for it—deep! [She flings up her hands above her smiling face] Down, down, till they're just above water, and then—down, down, down, and —all over! Are you sorry now you came and spoke to me?

*Young man*. By Jove, no! It may be caddish, but I'm not.

*Clare*. Thank God for beauty! I hope I shall die pretty! Do you think I shall do well?

*Young man*. I say—don't talk like that!

*Clare*. I want to know. Do you?

*Young man*. Well, then—yes, I do.

*Clare*. That's splendid. Those poor women in the streets would give their eyes, wouldn't they?—that have to go up and down, up and down! Do you think I—shall——

The *young man*, half-rising, puts his hand on her arm.

*Young man*. I think you're getting much too excited. You look all— Won't you eat your peach? [She shakes her head] Do! Have something else, then—some grapes, or something?

*Clare*. No, thanks.

[She has become quite calm again]

*Young man*. Well, then, what d'you think? It's awfully hot in here, isn't it? Wouldn't it be jollier drivin'? Shall we—shall we make a move?

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*Clare*. Yes.

The *young man* turns to look for the waiter, but *Arnaud* is not in the room. He gets up.

*Young man*. [Feverishly] D——n that waiter! Wait half a minute, if you don't mind, while I pay the bill.

As he goes out into the corridor, the two gentlemen re-appear. *Clare* is sitting motionless, looking straight before her.

*Dark one*. A fiver you don't get her to!

*Blond one*. Done!

He advances to her table with his inimitable insolence, and taking the cigar from his mouth, bends his stare on her, and says: "Charmed to see you lookin' so well! Will you have supper with me here to-morrow night?" Startled out of her reverie, *Clare* looks up. She sees those eyes, she sees beyond him the eyes of his companion-sly, malevolent, amused-watching; and she just sits gazing, without a word. At that regard, so clear, the *blond one* does not wince. But rather suddenly he says: "That's arranged then. Half-past eleven. So good of you. Good-night!" He replaces his cigar and strolls back to his companion, and in a low voice says: "Pay up!" Then at a languid "Hullo, Charles!" they turn to greet the two in their nook behind the screen. *Clare* has not moved, nor changed the direction of her gaze. Suddenly she thrusts her hand into the, pocket of the cloak that hangs behind her, and brings out the little blue bottle which, six months ago, she took from *Malise*. She pulls out the cork and pours the whole contents into her champagne. She lifts the glass, holds it before her—smiling, as if to call a toast, then puts it to her lips and drinks. Still smiling, she sets the empty glass down, and lays the gardenia flowers against her face. Slowly she droops back in her chair, the drowsy smile still on her lips; the gardenias drop into her lap; her arms relax, her head falls forward on her breast. And the voices behind the screen talk on, and the sounds of joy from the supper-party wax and wane.The waiter, *Arnaud*, returning from the corridor, passes to his service-table with a tall, beribboned basket of fruit. Putting it down, he goes towards the table behind the screen, and sees. He runs up to *Clare*.

*Arnaud*. Madame! Madame! [He listens for her breathing; then suddenly catching sight of the little bottle, smells at it] Bon Dieu!

[At that queer sound they come from behind the screen—all four, and look. The dark night bird says: "Hallo; fainted!" *Arnaud* holds out the bottle.]

*Languid lord*. [Taking it, and smelling] Good God! [The woman bends over *Clare*, and lifts her hands; *Arnaud* rushes to his service-table, and speaks into his tube]

*Arnaud*. The boss. Quick! [Looking up he sees the *young man*, returning] 'Monsieur, elle a fui! Elle est morte'!

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*Languid lord*. [To the *young man* standing there aghast] What's this? Friend of yours?

*Young man*. My God! She was a lady. That's all I know about her.

*Languid lord*. A lady!

[The blond and dark gentlemen have slipped from the room; and out of the supper-party's distant laughter comes suddenly a long, shrill: "Gone away!" And the sound of the horn playing the seven last notes of the old song: "This day a stag must die!" From the last note of all the sound flies up to an octave higher, sweet and thin, like a spirit passing, till it is drowned once more in laughter. The *young man* has covered his eyes with his hands; *Arnaud* is crossing himself fervently; the *languid lord* stands gazing, with one of the dropped gardenias twisted in his fingers; and the woman, bending over *Clare*, kisses her forehead.]

## CURTAIN.

**THE PIGEON**

A Fantasy in Three Acts

## PERSONS OF THE PLAY

*Christopher Wellwyn*, an artist
*Ann*, his daughter
*Guinevere Megan*, a flower-seller
*Rory Megan*, her husband
*Ferrand*, an alien
*Timson*, once a cabman
*Edward Bertley*, a Canon
*Alfred Calway*, a Professor
*sir Thomas Hoxton*, a Justice of the Peace
Also a police constable, three humble-men, and some curious persons

The action passes in Wellwyn's Studio, and the street outside.

*Act* I. Christmas Eve.

*Act* II. New Year's Day.

*Act* III. The First of April.

# ACT I

It is the night of Christmas Eve, the *scene* is a Studio, flush with the street, having a skylight darkened by a fall of snow. There is no one in the room, the walls of which are whitewashed, above a floor of bare dark boards. A fire is cheerfully burning. On a model's platform stands an easel and canvas. There are busts and pictures; a screen, a little stool, two arm. chairs, and a long old-fashioned settle under the window. A door in one wall leads to the house, a door in the opposite wall to the model's dressing-room, and the street door is in the centre of the wall between. On a low table a Russian samovar is hissing, and beside it on a tray stands a teapot, with glasses, lemon, sugar, and a decanter of rum. Through a huge uncurtained window close to the street door the snowy lamplit street can be seen, and beyond it the river and a night of stars.The sound of a latchkey turned in the lock of the street door, and *Ann Wellwyn* enters, a girl of seventeen, with hair tied in a ribbon

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and covered by a scarf. Leaving the door open, she turns up the electric light and goes to the fire. She throws of her scarf and long red cloak. She is dressed in a high evening frock of some soft white material. Her movements are quick and substantial. Her face, full of no nonsense, is decided and sincere, with deep-set eyes, and a capable, well-shaped forehead. Shredding of her gloves she warms her hands.In the doorway appear the figures of two men. The first is rather short and slight, with a soft short beard, bright soft eyes, and a crumply face. Under his squash hat his hair is rather plentiful and rather grey. He wears an old brown ulster and woollen gloves, and is puffing at a hand-made cigarette. He is ANN'S father, *Wellwyn*, the artist. His companion is a well-wrapped clergyman of medium height and stoutish build, with a pleasant, rosy face, rather shining eyes, and rather chubby clean-shaped lips; in appearance, indeed, a grown-up boy. He is the Vicar of the parish—*Canon Bertley*.

Bertley. My dear Wellwyn, the whole question of reform is full of difficulty. When you have two men like Professor Calway and Sir Thomas Hoxton taking diametrically opposite points of view, as we've seen to-night, I confess, I——

*Wellwyn*. Come in, Vicar, and have some grog.

*Bertley*. Not to-night, thanks! Christmas tomorrow! Great temptation, though, this room! Goodnight, Wellwyn; good-night, Ann!

*Ann*. [Coming from the fire towards the tea-table.] Good-night, Canon Bertley.

[He goes out, and *Wellwyn*, shutting the door after him, approaches the fire.]

*Ann*. [Sitting on the little stool, with her back to the fire, and making tea.] Daddy!

*Wellwyn*. My dear?

*Ann*. You say you liked Professor Calway's lecture. Is it going to do you any good, that's the question?

*Wellwyn*. I—I hope so, Ann.

*Ann*. I took you on purpose. Your charity's getting simply awful.
Those two this morning cleared out all my housekeeping money.

*Wellwyn*. Um! Um! I quite understand your feeling.

*Ann*. They both had your card, so I couldn't refuse—didn't know what you'd said to them. Why don't you make it a rule never to give your card to anyone except really decent people, and—picture dealers, of course.

*Wellwyn*. My dear, I have—often.

*Ann*. Then why don't you keep it? It's a frightful habit. You are naughty, Daddy. One of these days you'll get yourself into most fearful complications.

*Wellwyn*. My dear, when they—when they look at you?

*Ann*. You know the house wants all sorts of things. Why do you speak to them at all?

*Wellwyn*. I don't—they speak to me.

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[He takes of his ulster and hangs it over the back of an arm-chair.]

*Ann*. They see you coming. Anybody can see you coming, Daddy. That's why you ought to be so careful. I shall make you wear a hard hat. Those squashy hats of yours are hopelessly inefficient.

*Wellwyn*. [Gazing at his hat.] Calway wears one.

*Ann*. As if anyone would beg of Professor Calway.

*Wellwyn*. Well-perhaps not. You know, Ann, I admire that fellow. Wonderful power of-of-theory! How a man can be so absolutely tidy in his mind! It's most exciting.

*Ann*. Has any one begged of you to-day?

*Wellwyn*. [Doubtfully.] No—no.

*Ann*. [After a long, severe look.] Will you have rum in your tea?

*Wellwyn*. [Crestfallen.] Yes, my dear—a good deal.

*Ann*. [Pouring out the rum, and handing him the glass.] Well, who was it?

*Wellwyn*. He didn't beg of me. [Losing himself in recollection.] Interesting old creature, Ann—real type. Old cabman.

*Ann*. Where?

*Wellwyn*. Just on the Embankment.

*Ann*. Of course! Daddy, you know the Embankment ones are always rotters.

*Wellwyn*. Yes, my dear; but this wasn't.

*Ann*. Did you give him your card?

*Wellwyn*. I—I—don't

*Ann*. Did you, Daddy?

*Wellwyn*. I'm rather afraid I may have!

*Ann*. May have! It's simply immoral.

*Wellwyn*. Well, the old fellow was so awfully human, Ann. Besides, I didn't give him any money—hadn't got any.

*Ann*. Look here, Daddy! Did you ever ask anybody for anything? You know you never did, you'd starve first. So would anybody decent. Then, why won't you see that people who beg are rotters?

*Wellwyn*. But, my dear, we're not all the same. They wouldn't do it if it wasn't natural to them. One likes to be friendly. What's the use of being alive if one isn't?

*Ann*. Daddy, you're hopeless.

*Wellwyn*. But, look here, Ann, the whole thing's so jolly complicated. According to Calway, we're to give the State all we can spare, to make the undeserving deserving. He's a Professor; he ought to know. But old Hoxton's always dinning it into me that we ought to support private organisations for helping the deserving, and damn the undeserving. Well, that's just the opposite. And he's a J.P. Tremendous experience. And the Vicar seems to be for a little bit of both. Well, what the devil——? My trouble is, whichever I'm with, he always converts me. [Ruefully.] And there's no fun in any of them.

*Ann*. [Rising.] Oh! Daddy, you are so—don't you know that you're the despair of all social reformers? [She envelops him.] There's a tear in the left knee of your trousers. You're not to wear them again.

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*Wellwyn*. Am I likely to?

*Ann*. I shouldn't be a bit surprised if it isn't your only pair.
D'you know what I live in terror of?

[*Wellwyn* gives her a queer and apprehensive look.]

*Ann*. That you'll take them off some day, and give them away in the street. Have you got any money? [She feels in his coat, and he his trousers—they find nothing.] Do you know that your pockets are one enormous hole?

*Wellwyn*. No!

*Ann*. Spiritually.

*Wellwyn*. Oh! Ah! H'm!

*Ann*. [Severely.] Now, look here, Daddy! [She takes him by his lapels.] Don't imagine that it isn't the most disgusting luxury on your part to go on giving away things as you do! You know what you really are, I suppose—a sickly sentimentalist!

*Wellwyn*. [Breaking away from her, disturbed.] It isn't sentiment. It's simply that they seem to me so—so—jolly. If I'm to give up feeling sort of—nice in here [he touches his chest] about people—it doesn't matter who they are—then I don't know what I'm to do. I shall have to sit with my head in a bag.

*Ann*. I think you ought to.

*Wellwyn*. I suppose they see I like them—then they tell me things.
After that, of course you can't help doing what you can.

*Ann*. Well, if you will love them up!

*Wellwyn*. My dear, I don't want to. It isn't them especially—why, I feel it even with old Calway sometimes. It's only Providence that he doesn't want anything of me—except to make me like himself—confound him!

*Ann*. [Moving towards the door into the house—impressively.] What you don't see is that other people aren't a bit like you.

*Wellwyn*. Well, thank God!

*Ann*. It's so old-fashioned too! I'm going to bed—I just leave you to your conscience.

*Wellwyn*. Oh!

*Ann*. [Opening the door-severely.] Good-night—[with a certain weakening] you old—-Daddy!

[She jumps at him, gives him a hug, and goes out.]

[*Wellwyn* stands perfectly still. He first gazes up at the skylight, then down at the floor. Slowly he begins to shake his head, and mutter, as he moves towards the fire.]

*Wellwyn*. Bad lot. . . . Low type—no backbone, no stability!

[There comes a fluttering knock on the outer door. As the sound slowly enters his consciousness, he begins to wince, as though he knew, but would not admit its significance. Then he sits down, covering his ears. The knocking does not cease. *Wellwyn* drops first one, then both hands, rises, and begins to sidle towards the door. The knocking becomes louder.]

*Wellwyn*. Ah dear! Tt! Tt! Tt!

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[After a look in the direction of ANN's disappearance, he opens the street door a very little way. By the light of the lamp there can be seen a young girl in dark clothes, huddled in a shawl to which the snow is clinging. She has on her arm a basket covered with a bit of sacking.]

*Wellwyn*. I can't, you know; it's impossible.

[The girl says nothing, but looks at him with dark eyes.]

*Wellwyn*. [Wincing.] Let's see—I don't know you—do I?

[The girl, speaking in a soft, hoarse voice, with a faint accent of reproach: "Mrs. Megan—you give me this——" She holds out a dirty visiting card.]

*Wellwyn*. [Recoiling from the card.] Oh! Did I? Ah! When?

*Mrs*. *Megan*. You 'ad some vi'lets off of me larst spring. You give me 'arf a crown.

[A smile tries to visit her face.]

*Wellwyn*. [Looking stealthily round.] Ah! Well, come in—just for a minute—it's very cold—and tell us what it is.

[She comes in stolidly, a Sphinx-like figure, with her pretty tragic little face.]

*Wellwyn*. I don't remember you. [Looking closer.] Yes, I do. Only— you weren't the same-were you?

*Mrs*. *Megan*. [Dully.] I seen trouble since.

*Wellwyn*. Trouble! Have some tea?

[He looks anxiously at the door into the house, then goes quickly to the table, and pours out a glass of tea, putting rum into it.]

*Wellwyn*. [Handing her the tea.] Keeps the cold out! Drink it off!

[*Mrs*. *Megan* drinks it of, chokes a little, and almost immediately seems to get a size larger. *Wellwyn* watches her with his head held on one side, and a smile broadening on his face.]

*Wellwyn*. Cure for all evils, um?

*Mrs*. *Megan*.  It warms you. [She smiles.]

*Wellwyn*. [Smiling back, and catching himself out.] Well!  You know, I oughtn't.

*Mrs*. *Megan*. [Conscious of the disruption of his personality, and withdrawing into her tragic abyss.] I wouldn't 'a come, but you told me if I wanted an 'and——

*Wellwyn*. [Gradually losing himself in his own nature.] Let me see—corner of Flight Street, wasn't it?

*Mrs*. *Megan*. [With faint eagerness.] Yes, sir, an' I told you about me vi'lets—it was a luvly spring-day.

*Wellwyn*.  Beautiful!  Beautiful!  Birds singing, and the trees, &c.!  We had quite a talk. You had a baby with you.

*Mrs*. *Megan*.  Yes.  I got married since then.

*Wellwyn*.  Oh!  Ah!  Yes! [Cheerfully.] And how's the baby?

*Mrs*. *Megan*. [Turning to stone.] I lost her.

*Wellwyn*.  Oh! poor—— Um!

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*Mrs*. *Megan*. [Impassive.] You said something abaht makin' a picture of me. [With faint eagerness.] So I thought I might come, in case you'd forgotten.

*Wellwyn*. [Looking at, her intently.] Things going badly?

*Mrs*. *Megan*. [Stripping the sacking off her basket.] I keep 'em covered up, but the cold gets to 'em. Thruppence—that's all I've took.

*Wellwyn*. Ho! Tt! Tt! [He looks into the basket.] Christmas, too!

*Mrs*. *Megan*. They're dead.

*Wellwyn*. [Drawing in his breath.] Got a good husband?

*Mrs*. *Megan*. He plays cards.

*Wellwyn*. Oh, Lord! And what are you doing out—with a cold like that? [He taps his chest.]

*Mrs*. *Megan*. We was sold up this morning—he's gone off with 'is mates. Haven't took enough yet for a night's lodgin'.

*Wellwyn*. [Correcting a spasmodic dive into his pockets.] But who buys flowers at this time of night?

[*Mrs*. *Megan* looks at him, and faintly smiles.]

*Wellwyn*. [Rumpling his hair.] Saints above us! Here! Come to the fire!

[She follows him to the fire. He shuts the street door.]

*Wellwyn*. Are your feet wet? [She nods.] Well, sit down here, and take them off. That's right.

[She sits on the stool. And after a slow look up at him, which has in it a deeper knowledge than belongs of right to her years, begins taking off her shoes and stockings. *Wellwyn* goes to the door into the house, opens it, and listens with a sort of stealthy casualness. He returns whistling, but not out loud. The girl has finished taking off her stockings, and turned her bare toes to the flames. She shuffles them back under her skirt.]

*Wellwyn*. How old are you, my child?

*Mrs*. *Megan*. Nineteen, come Candlemas.

*Wellwyn*. And what's your name?

*Mrs*. *Megan*. Guinevere.

*Wellwyn*. What? Welsh?

*Mrs*. *Megan*. Yes—from Battersea.

*Wellwyn*. And your husband?

*Mrs*. *Megan*. No. Irish, ’e is. Notting Dale, ’e comes from.

*Wellwyn*. Roman Catholic?

*Mrs*. *Megan*. Yes. My ’usband’s an atheist as well.

*Wellwyn*. I see. [Abstractedly.] How jolly! And how old is he—this young man of yours?

*Mrs*. *Megan*. ’E’ll be twenty soon.

*Wellwyn*. Babes in the wood! Does he treat you badly?

*Mrs*. *Megan*. No.

*Wellwyn*. Nor drink?

*Mrs*. *Megan*. No. He’s not a bad one. Only he gets playin’ cards then ’e’ll fly the kite.

*Wellwyn*. I see. And when he’s not flying it, what does he do?

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*Mrs*. *Megan*. [Touching her basket.] Same as me.  Other jobs tires ’im.

*Wellwyn*.  That’s very nice! [He checks himself.] Well, what am I to do with you?

*Mrs*. *Megan*.  Of course, I could get me night’s lodging if I like to do—the same as some of them.

*Wellwyn*.  No! no!  Never, my child!  Never!

*Mrs*. *Megan*.  It’s easy that way.

*Wellwyn*.  Heavens!  But your husband!  Um?

*Mrs*. *Megan*. [With stoical vindictiveness.] He’s after one I know of.

*Wellwyn*.  Tt!  What a pickle!

*Mrs*. *Megan*.  I’ll ’ave to walk about the streets.

*Wellwyn*. [To himself.] Now how can I?

[*Mrs*. *Megan* looks up and smiles at him, as if she had already discovered that he is peculiar.]

*Wellwyn*.  You see, the fact is, I mustn’t give you anything—because —well, for one thing I haven’t got it.  There are other reasons, but that’s the—real one.  But, now, there’s a little room where my models dress.  I wonder if you could sleep there.  Come, and see.

[The Girl gets up lingeringly, loth to leave the warmth.  She takes up her wet stockings.]

*Mrs*. *Megan*.  Shall I put them on again?

*Wellwyn*.  No, no; there’s a nice warm pair of slippers. [Seeing the steam rising from her.] Why, you’re wet all over.  Here, wait a little!

[He crosses to the door into the house, and after stealthy listening, steps through.  The Girl, like a cat, steals back to the warmth of the fire.  *Wellwyn* returns with a candle, a canary-coloured bath gown, and two blankets.]

*Wellwyn*.  Now then! [He precedes her towards the door of the model’s room.] Hsssh! [He opens the door and holds up the candle to show her the room.] Will it do?  There’s a couch.  You’ll find some washing things.  Make yourself quite at home.  See!

[The Girl, perfectly dumb, passes through with her basket—and her shoes and stockings. *Wellwyn* hands her the candle, blankets, and bath gown.]

*Wellwyn*. Have a good sleep, child! Forget that you're alive! [He closes the door, mournfully.] Done it again! [He goes to the table, cuts a large slice of cake, knocks on the door, and hands it in.] Chow-chow! [Then, as he walks away, he sights the opposite door.] Well—damn it, what could I have done? Not a farthing on me! [He goes to the street door to shut it, but first opens it wide to confirm himself in his hospitality.] Night like this!

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[A sputter of snow is blown in his face. A voice says: "Monsieur, pardon!" *Wellwyn* recoils spasmodically. A figure moves from the lamp-post to the doorway. He is seen to be young and to have ragged clothes. He speaks again: "You do not remember me, Monsieur? My name is Ferrand—it was in Paris, in the Champs-Elysees—by the fountain . . . . When you came to the door, Monsieur—I am not made of iron . . . . Tenez, here is your card I have never lost it." He holds out to *Wellwyn* an old and dirty wing card. As inch by inch he has advanced into the doorway, the light from within falls on him, a tall gaunt young pagan with fair hair and reddish golden stubble of beard, a long ironical nose a little to one side, and large, grey, rather prominent eyes. There is a certain grace in his figure and movements; his clothes are nearly dropping off him.]

*Wellwyn*. [Yielding to a pleasant memory.] Ah! yes. By the fountain. I was sitting there, and you came and ate a roll, and drank the water.

*Ferrand*. [With faint eagerness.] My breakfast. I was in poverty— veree bad off. You gave me ten francs. I thought I had a little the right [*Wellwyn* makes a movement of disconcertion] seeing you said that if I came to England——

*Wellwyn*. Um! And so you've come?

*Ferrand*. It was time that I consolidated my fortunes, Monsieur.

*Wellwyn*. And you—have——

[He stops embarrassed.]

*Ferrand*. [Shrugging his ragged shoulders.] One is not yet Rothschild.

*Wellwyn*. [Sympathetically.] No. [Yielding to memory.] We talked philosophy.

*Ferrand*. I have not yet changed my opinion. We other vagabonds, we are exploited by the bourgeois. This is always my idea, Monsieur.

*Wellwyn*. Yes—not quite the general view, perhaps! Well—— [Heartily.] Come in! Very glad to see you again.

*Ferrand*. [Brushing his arms over his eyes.] Pardon, Monsieur—your goodness—I am a little weak. [He opens his coat, and shows a belt drawn very tight over his ragged shirt.] I tighten him one hole for each meal, during two days now. That gives you courage.

*Wellwyn*. [With cooing sounds, pouring out tea, and adding rum.] Have some of this. It'll buck you up. [He watches the young man drink.]

*Ferrand*. [Becoming a size larger.] Sometimes I think that I will never succeed to dominate my life, Monsieur—though I have no vices, except that I guard always the

aspiration to achieve success. But I will not roll myself under the machine of existence to gain a nothing every day. I must find with what to fly a little.

*Wellwyn*. [Delicately.] Yes; yes—I remember, you found it difficult to stay long in any particular—yes.

*Ferrand*. [Proudly.] In one little corner? No—Monsieur—never! That is not in my character. I must see life.

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*Wellwyn*. Quite, quite! Have some cake?

[He cuts cake.]

*Ferrand*. In your country they say you cannot eat the cake and have it. But one must always try, Monsieur; one must never be content. [Refusing the cake.] 'Grand merci', but for the moment I have no stomach—I have lost my stomach now for two days. If I could smoke, Monsieur! [He makes the gesture of smoking.]

*Wellwyn*. Rather! [Handing his tobacco pouch.] Roll yourself one.

*Ferrand*. [Rapidly rolling a cigarette.] If I had not found you, Monsieur—I would have been a little hole in the river to-night— I was so discouraged. [He inhales and puffs a long luxurious whif of smoke. Very bitterly.] Life! [He disperses the puff of smoke with his finger, and stares before him.] And to think that in a few minutes *he* will be born! Monsieur! [He gazes intently at *Wellwyn*.] The world would reproach you for your goodness to me.

*Wellwyn*. [Looking uneasily at the door into the house.] You think so? Ah!

*Ferrand*. Monsieur, if *he* himself were on earth now, there would be a little heap of gentlemen writing to the journals every day to call Him sloppee sentimentalist! And what is veree funny, these gentlemen they would all be most strong Christians. [He regards *Wellwyn* deeply.] But that will not trouble you, Monsieur; I saw well from the first that you are no Christian. You have so kind a face.

*Wellwyn*. Oh! Indeed!

*Ferrand*. You have not enough the Pharisee in your character. You do not judge, and you are judged.

[He stretches his limbs as if in pain.]

*Wellwyn*. Are you in pain?

*Ferrand*. I 'ave a little the rheumatism.

*Wellwyn*. Wet through, of course! [Glancing towards the house.] Wait a bit! I wonder if you'd like these trousers; they've—er—they're not quite——

[He passes through the door into the house. *Ferrand* stands at the fire, with his limbs spread as it were to embrace it, smoking with abandonment. *Wellwyn* returns stealthily, dressed in a Jaeger dressing-gown, and bearing a pair of drawers, his trousers, a pair of slippers, and a sweater.]

*Wellwyn*. [Speaking in a low voice, for the door is still open.] Can you make these do for the moment?

*Ferrand*. 'Je vous remercie', Monsieur. [Pointing to the screen.] May I retire?

*Wellwyn*. Yes, yes.

[*Ferrand* goes behind the screen. *Wellwyn* closes the door into the house, then goes to the window to draw the curtains. He suddenly recoils and stands petrified with doubt.]

*Wellwyn*. Good Lord!

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[There is the sound of tapping on glass. Against the window-pane is pressed the face of a man. *Wellwyn* motions to him to go away. He does not go, but continues tapping. *Wellwyn* opens the door. There enters a square old man, with a red, pendulous jawed, shaking face under a snow besprinkled bowler hat. He is holding out a visiting card with tremulous hand.]

*Wellwyn*. Who's that? Who are you?

*Timson*. [In a thick, hoarse, shaking voice.] 'Appy to see you, sir; we 'ad a talk this morning. Timson—I give you me name. You invited of me, if ye remember.

*Wellwyn*. It's a little late, really.

*Timson*. Well, ye see, I never expected to 'ave to call on yer. I was 'itched up all right when I spoke to yer this mornin', but bein' Christmas, things 'ave took a turn with me to-day. [He speaks with increasing thickness.] I'm reg'lar disgusted—not got the price of a bed abaht me. Thought you wouldn't like me to be delicate—not at my age.

*Wellwyn*. [With a mechanical and distracted dive of his hands into his pockets.] The fact is, it so happens I haven't a copper on me.

*Timson*. [Evidently taking this for professional refusal.] Wouldn't arsk you if I could 'elp it. 'Ad to do with 'orses all me life. It's this 'ere cold I'm frightened of. I'm afraid I'll go to sleep.

*Wellwyn*. Well, really, I——

*Timson*. To be froze to death—I mean—it's awkward.

*Wellwyn*. [Puzzled and unhappy.] Well—come in a moment, and let's— think it out. Have some tea!

> [He pours out the remains of the tea, and finding there is not very much, adds rum rather liberally. *Timson*, who walks a little wide at the knees, steadying his gait, has followed.]

*Timson*. [Receiving the drink.] Yer 'ealth. 'Ere's—soberiety! [He applies the drink to his lips with shaking hand. Agreeably surprised.] Blimey! Thish yer tea's foreign, ain't it?

*Ferrand*. [Reappearing from behind the screen in his new clothes of which the trousers stop too soon.] With a needle, Monsieur, I would soon have with what to make face against the world.

*Wellwyn*. Too short! Ah!

[He goes to the dais on which stands ANN's workbasket, and takes from it a needle and cotton.]

[While he is so engaged *Ferrand* is sizing up old *Timson*, as one dog will another. The old man, glass in hand, seems to have lapsed into coma.]

*Ferrand*. [Indicating *Timson*] Monsieur!

[He makes the gesture of one drinking, and shakes his head.]

*Wellwyn*. [Handing him the needle and cotton.] Um! Afraid so!

[They approach *Timson*, who takes no notice.]

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*Ferrand*. [Gently.] It is an old cabby, is it not, Monsieur? 'Ceux sont tous des buveurs'.

*Wellwyn*. [Concerned at the old man's stupefaction.] Now, my old friend, sit down a moment. [They manoeuvre *Timson* to the settle.] Will you smoke?

*Timson*. [In a drowsy voice.] Thank 'ee-smoke pipe of 'baccer. Old 'orse—standin' abaht in th' cold.

[He relapses into coma.]

*Ferrand*. [With a click of his tongue.] 'Il est parti'.

*Wellwyn*. [Doubtfully.] He hasn't really left a horse outside, do you think?

*Ferrand*. Non, non, Monsieur—no 'orse. He is dreaming. I know very well that state of him—that catches you sometimes. It is the warmth sudden on the stomach. He will speak no more sense to-night. At the most, drink, and fly a little in his past.

*Wellwyn*. Poor old buffer!

*Ferrand*. Touching, is it not, Monsieur? There are many brave gents among the old cabbies—they have philosophy—that comes from 'orses, and from sitting still.

*Wellwyn*. [Touching TIMSON's shoulder.] Drenched!

*Ferrand*. That will do 'im no 'arm, Monsieur-no 'arm at all. He is well wet inside, remember—it is Christmas to-morrow. Put him a rug, if you will, he will soon steam.

[*Wellwyn* takes up ANN's long red cloak, and wraps it round the old man.]

*Timson*. [Faintly roused.] Tha's right. Put—the rug on th' old 'orse.

[He makes a strange noise, and works his head and tongue.]

*Wellwyn*. [Alarmed.] What's the matter with him?

*Ferrand*. It is nothing, Monsieur; for the moment he thinks 'imself a 'orse. 'Il joue "cache-cache,"' 'ide and seek, with what you call— 'is bitt.

*Wellwyn*. But what's to be done with him? One can't turn him out in this state.

*Ferrand*. If you wish to leave him 'ere, Monsieur, have no fear. I charge myself with him.

*Wellwyn*. Oh! [Dubiously.] You—er—I really don't know, I—hadn't contemplated—You think you could manage if I—if I went to bed?

*Ferrand*. But certainly, Monsieur.

*Wellwyn*. [Still dubiously.] You—you're sure you've everything you want?

*Ferrand*. [Bowing.] 'Mais oui, Monsieur'.

*Wellwyn*. I don't know what I can do by staying.

*Ferrand*. There is nothing you can do, Monsieur. Have confidence in me.

*Wellwyn*. Well-keep the fire up quietly—very quietly. You'd better take this coat of mine, too. You'll find it precious cold, I expect, about three o'clock. [He hands *Ferrand* his Ulster.]

*Ferrand*. [Taking it.] I shall sleep in praying for you, Monsieur.

*Wellwyn*. Ah! Yes! Thanks! Well-good-night! By the way, I shall be down rather early. Have to think of my household a bit, you know.

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*Ferrand*. ‘Tres bien, Monsieur’. I comprehend. One must well be regular in this life.

*Wellwyn*. [With a start.] Lord! [He looks at the door of the model’s room.] I’d forgotten ——

*Ferrand*. Can I undertake anything, Monsieur?

*Wellwyn*. No, no! [He goes to the electric light switch by the outer door.] You won’t want this, will you?

*Ferrand*. ‘Merci, Monsieur’.

[*Wellwyn* switches off the light.]

*Ferrand*. ‘Bon soir, Monsieur’!

*Wellwyn*. The devil! Er—good-night!

[He hesitates, rumples his hair, and passes rather suddenly away.]

*Ferrand*. [To himself.] Poor pigeon! [Looking long at old *Timson*] ‘Especе de type anglais!’

[He sits down in the firelight, curls up a foot on his knee, and taking out a knife, rips the stitching of a turned-up end of trouser, pinches the cloth double, and puts in the preliminary stitch of a new hem—all with the swiftness of one well-accustomed. Then, as if hearing a sound behind him, he gets up quickly and slips behind the screen. *Mrs*. *Megan*, attracted by the cessation of voices, has opened the door, and is creeping from the model’s room towards the fire. She has almost reached it before she takes in the torpid crimson figure of old *Timson*. She halts and puts her hand to her chest—a queer figure in the firelight, garbed in the canary-coloured bath gown and rabbit’s-wool slippers, her black matted hair straggling down on her neck. Having quite digested the fact that the old man is in a sort of stupor, *Mrs*. *Megan* goes close to the fire, and sits on the little stool, smiling sideways at old *Timson*. *Ferrand*, coming quietly up behind, examines her from above, drooping his long nose as if enquiring with it as to her condition in life; then he steps back a yard or two.]

*Ferrand*. [Gently.] ‘Pardon, Ma’moiselle’.

*Mrs*. *Megan*. [Springing to her feet.] Oh!

*Ferrand*. All right, all right! We are brave gents!

*Timson*. [Faintly roused.] ’Old up, there!

*Ferrand*. Trust in me, Ma'moiselle!

[*Mrs*. *Megan* responds by drawing away.]

*Ferrand*. [Gently.] We must be good comrades. This asylum—it is better than a doss-'ouse.

[He pushes the stool over towards her, and seats himself. Somewhat reassured, *Mrs*. *Megan* again sits down.]

*Mrs*. *Megan*. You frightened me.

*Timson*. [Unexpectedly-in a drowsy tone.] Purple foreigners!

*Ferrand*. Pay no attention, Ma'moiselle. He is a philosopher.

*Mrs*. *Megan*. Oh! I thought 'e was boozed.

[They both look at *Timson*]

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*Ferrand*. It is the same-veree ’armless.

*Mrs*. *Megan*. What’s that he’s got on ’im?

*Ferrand*. It is a coronation robe. Have no fear, Ma’moiselle. Veree docile potentate.

*Mrs*. *Megan*. I wouldn’t be afraid of him. [Challenging *Ferrand*.] I’m afraid o’ you.

*Ferrand*. It is because you do not know me, Ma’moiselle. You are wrong, it is always the unknown you should love.

*Mrs*. *Megan*. I don’t like the way you-speaks to me.

*Ferrand*. Ah! You are a Princess in disguise?

*Mrs*. *Megan*. No fear!

*Ferrand*. No? What is it then you do to make face against the necessities of life? A living?

*Mrs*. *Megan*. Sells flowers.

*Ferrand*. [Rolling his eyes.] It is not a career.

*Mrs*. *Megan*. [With a touch of devilry.] You don’t know what I do.

*Ferrand*. Ma’moiselle, whatever you do is charming.

[*Mrs*. *Megan* looks at him, and slowly smiles.]

*Mrs*. *Megan*. You’re a foreigner.

*Ferrand*. It is true.

*Mrs*. *Megan*. What do you do for a livin’?

*Ferrand*. I am an interpreter.

*Mrs*. *Megan*. You ain’t very busy, are you?

*Ferrand*. [With dignity.] At present I am resting.

*Mrs*. *Megan*. [Looking at him and smiling.] How did you and ’im come here?

*Ferrand*. Ma’moiselle, we would ask you the same question.

*Mrs*. *Megan*. The gentleman let me. ’E’s funny.

*Ferrand*. ‘C’est un ange’ [At *Mrs*. MEGAN’s blank stare he interprets.] An angel!

*Mrs*. *Megan*. Me luck’s out-that’s why I come.

*Ferrand*. [Rising.] Ah! Ma’moiselle! Luck! There is the little God who dominates us all. Look at this old! [He points to *Timson*.] He is finished. In his day that old would be doing good business. He could afford himself—[He maker a sign of drinking.]—Then come the motor cars. All goes—he has nothing left, only ’is ’abits of a ‘cocher’! Luck!

*Timson*. [With a vague gesture—drowsily.] Kick the foreign beggars out.

*Ferrand*. A real Englishman . . . . And look at me! My father was merchant of ostrich feathers in Brussels. If I had been content to go in his business, I would ’ave been rich. But I was born to roll—“rolling stone"to voyage is stronger than myself. Luck! . . And you, Ma’moiselle, shall I tell your fortune? [He looks in her face.] You were born for ’la joie de vivre’—to drink the wines of life. ‘Et vous voila’! Luck!

[Though she does not in the least understand what he has said,
her expression changes to a sort of glee.]

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*Ferrand*. Yes. You were born loving pleasure. Is it not? You see, you cannot say, No. All of us, we have our fates. Give me your hand. [He kneels down and takes her hand.] In each of us there is that against which we cannot struggle. Yes, yes!

[He holds her hand, and turns it over between his own.
*Mrs*. *Megan* remains stolid, half fascinated, half-reluctant.]

*Timson*. [Flickering into consciousness.] Be'ave yourselves! Yer crimson canary birds!

[*Mrs*. *Megan* would withdraw her hand, but cannot.]

*Ferrand*. Pay no attention, Ma'moiselle. He is a Puritan.

[*Timson* relapses into comatosity, upsetting his glass, which
falls with a crash.]

*Mrs*. *Megan*. Let go my hand, please!

*Ferrand*. [Relinquishing it, and staring into the fore gravely.] There is one thing I have never done—'urt a woman—that is hardly in my character. [Then, drawing a little closer, he looks into her face.] Tell me, Ma'moiselle, what is it you think of all day long?

*Mrs*. *Megan*. I dunno—lots, I thinks of.

*Ferrand*. Shall I tell you? [Her eyes remain fixed on his, the strangeness of him preventing her from telling him to "get along." He goes on in his ironic voice.] It is of the streets—the lights— the faces—it is of all which moves, and is warm—it is of colour—it is [he brings his face quite close to hers] of Love. That is for you what the road is for me. That is for you what the rum is for that old—[He jerks his thumb back at *Timson*. Then bending swiftly forward to the girl.] See! I kiss you—Ah!

[He draws her forward off the stool. There is a little struggle, then she resigns her lips. The little stool, overturned, falls with a clatter. They spring up, and move apart. The door opens and *Ann* enters from the house in a blue dressing-gown, with her hair loose, and a candle held high above her head. Taking in the strange half-circle round the stove, she recoils. Then, standing her ground, calls in a voice sharpened by fright: "Daddy—Daddy!"]

*Timson*. [Stirring uneasily, and struggling to his feet.] All right! I'm comin'!

*Ferrand*. Have no fear, Madame!

[In the silence that follows, a clock begins loudly striking twelve. *Ann* remains, as if carved in atone, her eyes fastened on the strangers. There is the sound of someone falling downstairs, and *Wellwyn* appears, also holding a candle above his head.]

*Ann*. Look!

*Wellwyn*. Yes, yes, my dear! It—it happened.

*Ann*. [With a sort of groan.] Oh! Daddy!

[In the renewed silence, the church clock ceases to chime.]

*Ferrand*. [Softly, in his ironic voice.] *He* is come, Monsieur! 'Appy Christmas! Bon Noel!

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[There is a sudden chime of bells. The Stage is blotted dark.]

Curtain.

## ACT II

It is four o'clock in the afternoon of New Year's Day. On the raised dais *Mrs*. *Megan* is standing, in her rags; with bare feet and ankles, her dark hair as if blown about, her lips parted, holding out a dishevelled bunch of violets. Before his easel, *Wellwyn* is painting her. Behind him, at a table between the cupboard and the door to the model's room, *Timson* is washing brushes, with the movements of one employed upon relief works. The samovar is hissing on the table by the stove, the tea things are set out.

*Wellwyn*. Open your mouth.

[*Mrs*. *Megan* opens her mouth.]

*Ann*. [In hat and coat, entering from the house.] Daddy!

[*Wellwyn* goes to her; and, released from restraint, *Mrs*. *Megan* looks round at *Timson* and grimaces.]

*Wellwyn*. Well, my dear?

[They speak in low voices.]

*Ann*. [Holding out a note.] This note from Canon Bentley. He's going to bring her husband here this afternoon. [She looks at *Mrs*. *Megan*.]

*Wellwyn*. Oh! [He also looks at *Mrs*. *Megan*.]

*Ann*. And I met Sir Thomas Hoxton at church this morning, and spoke to him about Timson.

*Wellwyn*. Um!

[They look at *Timson*. Then *Ann* goes back to the door, and *Wellwyn* follows her.]

*Ann*. [Turning.] I'm going round now, Daddy, to ask Professor Calway what we're to do with that Ferrand.

*Wellwyn*. Oh! One each! I wonder if they'll like it.

*Ann*. They'll have to lump it.

[She goes out into the house.]

*Wellwyn*. [Back at his easel.] You can shut your mouth now.

[*Mrs*. *Megan* shuts her mouth, but opens it immediately to smile.]

*Wellwyn*. [Spasmodically.] Ah! Now that's what I want. [He dabs furiously at the canvas. Then standing back, runs his hands through his hair and turns a painter's glance towards the skylight.] Dash! Light's gone! Off you get, child—don't tempt me!

[*Mrs*. *Megan* descends. Passing towards the door of the model's room she stops, and stealthily looks at the picture.]

*Timson*. Ah! Would yer!

*Wellwyn*. [Wheeling round.] Want to have a look? Well—come on!

[He takes her by the arm, and they stand before the canvas. After a stolid moment, she giggles.]

*Wellwyn*. Oh! You think so?

*Mrs*. *Megan*. [Who has lost her hoarseness.] It's not like my picture that I had on the pier.

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*Wellwyn*. No-it wouldn't be.

*Mrs*. *Megan*. [Timidly.] If I had an 'at on, I'd look better.

*Wellwyn*. With feathers?

*Mrs*. *Megan*. Yes.

*Wellwyn*. Well, you can't! I don't like hats, and I don't like feathers.

[*Mrs*. *Megan* timidly tugs his sleeve. *Timson*, screened as he thinks by the picture, has drawn from his bulky pocket a bottle and is taking a stealthy swig.]

*Wellwyn*. [To *Mrs*. *Megan*, affecting not to notice.] How much do I owe you?

*Mrs*. *Megan*. [A little surprised.] You paid me for to-day-all 'cept a penny.

*Wellwyn*. Well! Here it is. [He gives her a coin.] Go and get your feet on!

*Mrs*. *Megan*. You've give me 'arf a crown.

*Wellwyn*. Cut away now!

[*Mrs*. *Megan*, smiling at the coin, goes towards the model's room. She looks back at *Wellwyn*, as if to draw his eyes to her, but he is gazing at the picture; then, catching old *Timson's* sour glance, she grimaces at him, kicking up her feet with a little squeal. But when *Wellwyn* turns to the sound, she is demurely passing through the doorway.]

*Timson*. [In his voice of dubious sobriety.] I've finished these yer brushes, sir. It's not a man's work. I've been thinkin' if you'd keep an 'orse, I could give yer satisfaction.

*Wellwyn*. Would the horse, Timson?

*Timson*. [Looking him up and down.] I knows of one that would just suit yer. Reel 'orse, you'd like 'im.

*Wellwyn*. [Shaking his head.] Afraid not, Timson! Awfully sorry, though, to have nothing better for you than this, at present.

*Timson*. [Faintly waving the brushes.] Of course, if you can't afford it, I don't press you—it's only that I feel I'm not doing meself justice. [Confidentially.] There's just one thing, sir; I can't bear to see a gen'leman imposed on. That foreigner—'e's not the sort to 'ave about the place. Talk? Oh! ah! But 'e'll never do any good with 'imself. He's a alien.

*Wellwyn*. Terrible misfortune to a fellow, Timson.

*Timson*. Don't you believe it, sir; it's his fault I says to the young lady yesterday: Miss Ann, your father's a gen'leman [with a sudden accent of hoarse sincerity], and so you are—I don't mind sayin' it—but, I said, he's too easy-goin'.

*Wellwyn*. Indeed!

*Timson*. Well, see that girl now! [He shakes his head.] I never did believe in goin' behind a person's back—I'm an Englishman—but [lowering his voice] she's a bad hat, sir. Why, look at the street she comes from!

*Wellwyn*. Oh! you know it.

*Timson*. Lived there meself larst three years. See the difference a few days' corn's made in her. She's that saucy you can't touch 'er head.

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*Wellwyn*. Is there any necessity, Timson?

*Timson*. Artful too. Full o' vice, I call'er. Where's 'er 'usband?

*Wellwyn*. [Gravely.] Come, Timson! You wouldn't like her to——

*Timson*. [With dignity, so that the bottle in his pocket is plainly visible.] I'm a man as always beared inspection.

*Wellwyn*. [With a well-directed smile.] So I see.

*Timson*. [Curving himself round the bottle.] It's not for me to say nothing—but I can tell a gen'leman as quick as ever I can tell an 'orse.

*Wellwyn*. [Painting.] I find it safest to assume that every man is a gentleman, and every woman a lady. Saves no end of self-contempt. Give me the little brush.

*Timson*. [Handing him the brush—after a considerable introspective pause.] Would yer like me to stay and wash it for yer again? [With great resolution.] I will—I'll do it for you—never grudged workin' for a gen'leman.

*Wellwyn*. [With sincerity.] Thank you, Timson—very good of you, I'm sure. [He hands him back the brush.] Just lend us a hand with this. [Assisted by *Timson* he pushes back the dais.] Let's see! What do I owe you?

*Timson*. [Reluctantly.] It so 'appens, you advanced me to-day's yesterday.

*Wellwyn*. Then I suppose you want to-morrow's?

*Timson*. Well, I 'ad to spend it, lookin' for a permanent job. When you've got to do with 'orses, you can't neglect the publics, or you might as well be dead.

*Wellwyn*. Quite so!

*Timson*. It mounts up in the course o' the year.

*Wellwyn*. It would. [Passing him a coin.] This is for an exceptional purpose—Timson—-see. Not——

*Timson*. [Touching his forehead.] Certainly, sir. I quite understand. I'm not that sort, as I think I've proved to yer, comin' here regular day after day, all the week. There's one thing, I ought to warn you perhaps—I might 'ave to give this job up any day.

[He makes a faint demonstration with the little brush, then puts it, absent-mindedly, into his pocket.]

*Wellwyn*. [Gravely.] I'd never stand in the way of your bettering yourself, Timson. And, by the way, my daughter spoke to a friend about you to-day. I think something may come of it.

*Timson*. Oh! Oh! She did! Well, it might do me a bit o' good. [He makes for the outer door, but stops.] That foreigner! 'E sticks in my gizzard. It's not as if there wasn't plenty o' pigeons for 'im to pluck in 'is own Gawd-forsaken country. Reg-lar jay, that's what I calls 'im. I could tell yer something——

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[He has opened the door, and suddenly sees that *Ferrand* himself is standing there. Sticking out his lower lip, *Timson* gives a roll of his jaw and lurches forth into the street. Owing to a slight miscalculation, his face and raised arms are plainly visible through the window, as he fortifies himself from his battle against the cold. *Ferrand*, having closed the door, stands with his thumb acting as pointer towards this spectacle. He is now remarkably dressed in an artist's squashy green hat, a frock coat too small for him, a bright blue tie of knitted silk, the grey trousers that were torn, well-worn brown boots, and a tan waistcoat.]

*Wellwyn*. What luck to-day?

*Ferrand*. [With a shrug.] Again I have beaten all London, Monsieur —not one bite. [Contemplating himself.] I think perhaps, that, for the bourgeoisie, there is a little too much colour in my costume.

*Wellwyn*. [Contemplating him.] Let's see—I believe I've an old top hat somewhere.

*Ferrand*. Ah! Monsieur, 'merci', but that I could not. It is scarcely in my character.

*Wellwyn*. True!

*Ferrand*. I have been to merchants of wine, of tabac, to hotels, to Leicester Square. I have been to a Society for spreading Christian knowledge—I thought there I would have a chance perhaps as interpreter. 'Toujours meme chose', we regret, we have no situation for you—same thing everywhere. It seems there is nothing doing in this town.

*Wellwyn*. I've noticed, there never is.

*Ferrand*. I was thinking, Monsieur, that in aviation there might be a career for me—but it seems one must be trained.

*Wellwyn*. Afraid so, Ferrand.

*Ferrand*. [Approaching the picture.] Ah! You are always working at this. You will have something of very good there, Monsieur. You wish to fix the type of wild savage existing ever amongst our high civilisation. 'C'est tres chic ca'! [*Wellwyn* manifests the quiet delight of an English artist actually understood.] In the figures of these good citizens, to whom she offers her flower, you would give the idea of all the cage doors open to catch and make tame the wild bird, that will surely die within. 'Tres gentil'! Believe me, Monsieur, you have there the greatest comedy of life! How anxious are the tame birds to do the wild birds good. [His voice changes.] For the wild birds it is not funny. There is in some human souls, Monsieur, what cannot be made tame.

*Wellwyn*. I believe you, Ferrand.

[The face of a young man appears at the window, unseen. Suddenly *Ann* opens the door leading to the house.]

*Ann*. Daddy—I want you.

*Wellwyn*. [To *Ferrand*.] Excuse me a minute!

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[He goes to his daughter, and they pass out. *Ferrand* remains at the picture. *Mrs*. *Megan* dressed in some of ANN's discarded garments, has come out of the model's room. She steals up behind *Ferrand* like a cat, reaches an arm up, and curls it round his mouth. He turns, and tries to seize her; she disingenuously slips away. He follows. The chase circles the tea table. He catches her, lifts her up, swings round with her, so that her feet fly out; kisses her bent-back face, and sets her down. She stands there smiling. The face at the window darkens.]

*Ferrand*. La Valse!

[He takes her with both hands by the waist, she puts her hands against his shoulders to push him of—and suddenly they are whirling. As they whirl, they bob together once or twice, and kiss. Then, with a warning motion towards the door, she wrenches herself free, and stops beside the picture, trying desperately to appear demure. *Wellwyn* and *Ann* have entered. The face has vanished.]

*Ferrand*. [Pointing to the picture.] One does not comprehend all this, Monsieur, without well studying. I was in train to interpret for Ma'moiselle the chiaroscuro.

*Wellwyn*. [With a queer look.] Don't take it too seriously, Ferrand.

*Ferrand*. It is a masterpiece.

*Wellwyn*. My daughter's just spoken to a friend, Professor Calway.
He'd like to meet you. Could you come back a little later?

*Ferrand*. Certainly, Ma'moiselle. That will be an opening for me, I trust. [He goes to the street door.]

*Ann*. [Paying no attention to him.] Mrs. Megan, will you too come back in half an hour?

*Ferrand*. 'Tres bien, Ma'moiselle'! I will see that she does. We will take a little promenade together. That will do us good.

> [He motions towards the door; *Mrs*. *Megan*, all eyes, follows him out.]

*Ann*. Oh! Daddy, they are rotters. Couldn't you see they were having the most high jinks?

*Wellwyn*. [At his picture.] I seemed to have noticed something.

*Ann*. [Preparing for tea.] They were kissing.

*Wellwyn*. Tt! Tt!

*Ann*. They're hopeless, all three—especially her. Wish I hadn't given her my clothes now.

*Wellwyn*. [Absorbed.] Something of wild-savage.

*Ann*. Thank goodness it's the Vicar's business to see that married people live together in his parish.

*Wellwyn*. Oh! [Dubiously.] The Megans are Roman Catholic-Atheists, Ann.

*Ann*. [With heat.] Then they're all the more bound. [*Wellwyn* gives a sudden and alarmed whistle.]

*Ann*. What's the matter?

*Wellwyn*. Didn't you say you spoke to Sir Thomas, too. Suppose he comes in while the Professor's here. They're cat and dog.

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*Ann*. [Blankly.] Oh! [As *Wellwyn* strikes a match.] The samovar is lighted. [Taking up the nearly empty decanter of rum and going to the cupboard.] It's all right. He won't.

*Wellwyn*. We'll hope not.

[He turns back to his picture.]

*Ann*. [At the cupboard.] Daddy!

*Wellwyn*. Hi!

*Ann*. There were three bottles.

*Wellwyn*. Oh!

*Ann*. Well! Now there aren't any.

*Wellwyn*. [Abstracted.] That'll be Timson.

*Ann*. [With real horror.] But it's awful!

*Wellwyn*. It is, my dear.

*Ann*. In seven days. To say nothing of the stealing.

*Wellwyn*. [Vexed.] I blame myself-very much. Ought to have kept it locked up.

*Ann*. You ought to keep him locked up!

[There is heard a mild but authoritative knock.]

*Wellwyn*. Here's the Vicar!

*Ann*. What are you going to do about the rum?

*Wellwyn*. [Opening the door to *Canon Bertley*.] Come in, Vicar!
Happy New Year!

*Bertley*. Same to you! Ah! Ann! I've got into touch with her young husband—he's coming round.

*Ann*. [Still a little out of her plate.] Thank Go——Moses!

*Bertley*. [Faintly surprised.] From what I hear he's not really a bad youth. Afraid he bets on horses. The great thing, *Wellwyn*, with those poor fellows is to put your finger on the weak spot.

*Ann*. [To herself-gloomily.] That's not difficult. What would you do, Canon Bertley, with a man who's been drinking father's rum?

*Bertley*. Remove the temptation, of course.

*Wellwyn*. He's done that.

*Bertley*. Ah! Then—[*Wellwyn* and *Ann* hang on his words] then I should—er—

*Ann*. [Abruptly.] Remove him.

*Bertley*. Before I say that, Ann, I must certainly see the individual.

*Wellwyn*. [Pointing to the window.] There he is!

[In the failing light *Timson's* face is indeed to be seen pressed against the window pane.]

*Ann*. Daddy, I do wish you'd have thick glass put in. It's so disgusting to be spied at! [*Wellwyn* going quickly to the door, has opened it.] What do you want? [*Timson* enters with dignity. He is fuddled.]

*Timson*. [Slowly.] Arskin' yer pardon-thought it me duty to come back-found thish yer little brishel on me. [He produces the little paint brush.]

*Ann*. [In a deadly voice.] Nothing else?

[*Timson* accords her a glassy stare.]

*Wellwyn*. [Taking the brush hastily.] That'll do, Timson, thanks!

*Timson*. As I am 'ere, can I do anything for yer?

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*Ann*. Yes, you can sweep out that little room. [She points to the model's room.] There's a broom in there.

*Timson*. [Disagreeably surprised.] Certainly; never make bones about a little extra—-never 'ave in all me life. Do it at onsh, I will. [He moves across to the model's room at that peculiar broad gait so perfectly adjusted to his habits.] You quite understand me —-couldn't bear to 'ave anything on me that wasn't mine.

[He passes out.]

*Ann*. Old fraud!

*Wellwyn*. "In" and "on." Mark my words, he'll restore the—bottles.

*Bertley*. But, my dear *Wellwyn*, that is stealing.

*Wellwyn*. We all have our discrepancies, Vicar.

*Ann*. Daddy! Discrepancies!

*Wellwyn*. Well, Ann, my theory is that as regards solids Timson's an Individualist, but as regards liquids he's a Socialist . . . or 'vice versa', according to taste.

*Bertley*. No, no, we mustn't joke about it. [Gravely.] I do think he should be spoken to.

*Wellwyn*. Yes, but not by me.

*Bertley*. Surely you're the proper person.

*Wellwyn*. [Shaking his head.] It was my rum, Vicar. Look so personal.

[There sound a number of little tat-tat knocks.]

*Wellwyn*. Isn't that the Professor's knock?

[While Ann sits down to make tea, he goes to the door and opens it. There, dressed in an ulster, stands a thin, clean-shaved man, with a little hollow sucked into either cheek, who, taking off a grey squash hat, discloses a majestically bald forehead, which completely dominates all that comes below it.]

*Wellwyn*. Come in, Professor! So awfully good of you! You know Canon Bentley, I think?

*Calway*. Ah! How d'you do?

*Wellwyn*. Your opinion will be invaluable, Professor.

*Ann*. Tea, Professor Calway?

[They have assembled round the tea table.]

*Calway*. Thank you; no tea; milk.

*Wellwyn*. Rum?

[He pours rum into CALWAY's milk.]

*Calway*. A little-thanks! [Turning to *Ann*.] You were going to show me some one you're trying to rescue, or something, I think.

*Ann*. Oh! Yes. He'll be here directly—simply perfect rotter.

*Calway*. [Smiling.] Really! Ah! I think you said he was a congenital?

*Wellwyn*. [With great interest.] What!

*Ann*. [Low.] Daddy! [To *Calway*.] Yes; I—I think that's what you call him.

*Calway*. Not old?

*Ann*. No; and quite healthy—a vagabond.

*Calway*. [Sipping.] I see! Yes. Is it, do you think chronic unemployment with a vagrant tendency? Or would it be nearer the mark to say: Vagrancy——

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*Wellwyn*. Pure! Oh! pure! Professor. Awfully human.

*Calway*. [With a smile of knowledge.] Quite! And—er——

*Ann*. [Breaking in.] Before he comes, there's another——

*Bertley*. [Blandly.] Yes, when you came in, we were discussing what should be done with a man who drinks rum—[*Calway* pauses in the act of drinking]—that doesn't belong to him.

*Calway*. Really! Dipsomaniac?

*Bertley*. Well—perhaps you could tell us—drink certainly changing thine to mine. The Professor could see him, *Wellwyn*?

*Ann*. [Rising.] Yes, do come and look at him, Professor *Calway*.
He's in there.

> [She points towards the model's room. *Calway* smiles deprecatingly.]

*Ann*. No, really; we needn't open the door. You can see him through the glass. He's more than half——

*Calway*. Well, I hardly——

*Ann*. Oh! Do! Come on, Professor *Calway*! We must know what to do with him. [*Calway* rises.] You can stand on a chair. It's all science.

[She draws *Calway* to the model's room, which is lighted by a glass panel in the top of the high door. *Canon Bertley* also rises and stands watching. *Wellwyn* hovers, torn between respect for science and dislike of espionage.]

*Ann*. [Drawing up a chair.] Come on!

*Calway*. Do you seriously wish me to?

*Ann*. Rather! It's quite safe; he can't see you.

*Calway*. But he might come out.

> [*Ann* puts her back against the door. *Calway* mounts the chair dubiously, and raises his head cautiously, bending it more and more downwards.]

*Ann*. Well?

*Calway*. He appears to be——sitting on the floor.

*Wellwyn*. Yes, that's all right!

[*Bertley* covers his lips.]

*Calway*. [To *Ann*—descending.] By the look of his face, as far as one can see it, I should say there was a leaning towards mania. I know the treatment.

[There come three loud knocks on the door. *Wellwyn* and *Ann* exchange a glance of consternation.]

*Ann*. Who's that?

*Wellwyn*. It sounds like Sir Thomas.

*Calway*. Sir Thomas Hoxton?

*Wellwyn*. [Nodding.] Awfully sorry, Professor. You see, we——

*Calway*. Not at all. Only, I must decline to be involved in argument with him, please.

*Bertley*. He has experience. We might get his opinion, don't you think?

*Calway*. On a point of reform? A J.P.!

*Bertley*. [Deprecating.] My dear Sir—we needn't take it.

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[The three knocks resound with extraordinary fury.]

*Ann*. You'd better open the door, Daddy.

[*Wellwyn* opens the door. *Sir*, *Thomas Hoxton* is disclosed in a fur overcoat and top hat. His square, well-coloured face is remarkable for a massive jaw, dominating all that comes above it. His Voice is resolute.]

*Hoxton*. Afraid I didn't make myself heard.

*Wellwyn*. So good of you to come, Sir Thomas. Canon Bertley! [They greet.] Professor *Calway* you know, I think.

*Hoxton*. [Ominously.] I do.

[They almost greet. An awkward pause.]

*Ann*. [Blurting it out.] That old cabman I told you of's been drinking father's rum.

*Bertley*. We were just discussing what's to be done with him, Sir Thomas. One wants to do the very best, of course. The question of reform is always delicate.

*Calway*. I beg your pardon. There is no question here.

*Hoxton*. [Abruptly.] Oh! Is he in the house?

*Ann*. In there.

*Hoxton*. Works for you, eh?

*Wellwyn*. Er—yes.

*Hoxton*. Let's have a look at him!

[An embarrassed pause.]

*Bertley*. Well—the fact is, Sir Thomas——

*Calway*. When last under observation——

*Ann*. He was sitting on the floor.

*Wellwyn*. I don't want the old fellow to feel he's being made a show of. Disgusting to be spied at, Ann.

*Ann*. You can't, Daddy! He's drunk.

*Hoxton*. Never mind, Miss *Wellwyn*. Hundreds of these fellows before me in my time. [At *Calway*.] The only thing is a sharp lesson!

*Calway*. I disagree. I've seen the man; what he requires is steady control, and the bobbins treatment.

[*Wellwyn* approaches them with fearful interest.]

*Hoxton*. Not a bit of it! He wants one for his knob! Brace 'em up! It's the only thing.

*Bertley*. Personally, I think that if he were spoken to seriously

*Calway*. I cannot walk arm in arm with a crab!

*Hoxton*. [Approaching *Calway*.] I beg your pardon?

*Calway*. [Moving back a little.] You're moving backwards, Sir Thomas. I've told you before, convinced reactionaryism, in these days——

[There comes a single knock on the street door.]

*Bertley*. [Looking at his watch.] D'you know, I'm rather afraid this may be our young husband, *Wellwyn*. I told him half-past four.

*Wellwyn*. Oh! Ah! Yes. [Going towards the two reformers.] Shall we go into the house, Professor, and settle the question quietly while the Vicar sees a young man?

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*Calway*. [Pale with uncompleted statement, and gravitating insensibly in the direction indicated.] The merest sense of continuity—a simple instinct for order——

*Hoxton*. [Following.] The only way to get order, sir, is to bring the disorderly up with a round turn. [*Calway* turns to him in the doorway.] You people without practical experience——

*Calway*. If you'll listen to me a minute.

*Hoxton*. I can show you in a mo——

[They vanish through the door.]

*Wellwyn*. I was afraid of it.

*Bertley*. The two points of view. Pleasant to see such keenness.
I may want you, *Wellwyn*. And Ann perhaps had better not be present.

*Wellwyn*. [Relieved.] Quite so! My dear!

[*Ann* goes reluctantly. *Wellwyn* opens the street door. The lamp outside has just been lighted, and, by its gleam, is seen the figure of *Rory Megan*, thin, pale, youthful. *Ann* turning at the door into the house gives him a long, inquisitive look, then goes.]

*Wellwyn*. Is that Megan?

*Megan*. Yus.

*Wellwyn*. Come in.

[*Megan* comes in. There follows an awkward silence, during which *Wellwyn* turns up the light, then goes to the tea table and pours out a glass of tea and rum.]

*Bertley*. [Kindly.] Now, my boy, how is it that you and your wife are living apart like this?

*Megan*. I dunno.

*Bertley*. Well, if you don't, none of us are very likely to, are we?

*Megan*. That's what I thought, as I was comin' along.

*Wellwyn*. [Twinkling.] Have some tea, Megan? [Handing him the glass.] What d'you think of her picture? 'Tisn't quite finished.

*Megan*. [After scrutiny.] I seen her look like it—once.

*Wellwyn*. Good! When was that?

*Megan*. [Stoically.] When she ’ad the measles.

[He drinks.]

*Wellwyn*. [Ruminating.] I see—yes. I quite see feverish!

*Bertley*. My dear *Wellwyn*, let me—[To, *Megan*.] Now, I hope you’re willing to come together again, and to maintain her?

*Megan*. If she’ll maintain me.

*Bertley*. Oh! but—I see, you mean you’re in the same line of business?

*Megan*. Yus.

*Bertley*. And lean on each other. Quite so!

*Megan*. I leans on ’er mostly—with ’er looks.

*Bertley*. Indeed! Very interesting—that!

*Megan*. Yus. Sometimes she’ll take ’arf a crown off of a toff. [He looks at *Wellwyn*.]

*Wellwyn*. [Twinkling.] I apologise to you, Megan.

*Megan*. [With a faint smile.] I could do with a bit more of it.

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*Bertley*. [Dubiously.] Yes!  Yes!  Now, my boy, I've heard you bet on horses.

*Megan*.  No, I don't.

*Bertley*.  Play cards, then?  Come!  Don't be afraid to acknowledge it.

*Megan*.  When I'm 'ard up—yus.

*Bertley*.  But don't you know that's ruination?

*Megan*.  Depends.  Sometimes I wins a lot.

*Bertley*.  You know that's not at all what I mean.  Come, promise me to give it up.

*Megan*.  I dunno abaht that.

*Bertley*.  Now, there's a good fellow.  Make a big effort and throw the habit off!

*Megan*.  Comes over me—same as it might over you.

*Bertley*.  Over me!  How do you mean, my boy?

*Megan*. [With a look up.] To tork!

[*Wellwyn*, turning to the picture, makes a funny little noise.]

*Bertley*. [Maintaining his good humour.] A hit!  But you forget, you know, to talk's my business.  It's not yours to gamble.

*Megan*.  You try sellin' flowers.  If that ain't a—gamble

*Bertley*.  I'm afraid we're wandering a little from the point.  Husband and wife should be together.  You were brought up to that.  Your father and mother——

*Megan*.  Never was.

*Wellwyn*. [Turning from the picture.] The question is, Megan:  Will you take your wife home?  She's a good little soul.

*Megan*.  She never let me know it.

[There is a feeble knock on the door.]

*Wellwyn*.  Well, now come.  Here she is!

[He points to the door, and stands regarding *Megan* with his friendly smile.]

*Megan*. [With a gleam of responsiveness.] I might, perhaps, to please you, sir.

*Bertley*. [Appropriating the gesture.] Capital, I thought we should get on in time.

*Megan*. Yus.

[*Wellwyn* opens the door. *Mrs*. *Megan* and *Ferrand* are revealed. They are about to enter, but catching sight of *Megan*, hesitate.]

*Bertley*. Come in! Come in!

[*Mrs*. *Megan* enters stolidly. *Ferrand*, following, stands apart with an air of extreme detachment. *Megan*, after a quick glance at them both, remains unmoved. No one has noticed that the door of the model's room has been opened, and that the unsteady figure of old *Timson* is standing there.]

*Bertley*. [A little awkward in the presence of *Ferrand*—to the *Megans*.] This begins a new chapter. We won't improve the occasion. No need.

[*Megan*, turning towards his wife, makes her a gesture as if to say: "Here! let's get out of this!"]

*Bentley*. Yes, yes, you'll like to get home at once—I know. [He holds up his hand mechanically.]

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*Timson*. I forbids the banns.

*Bertley*, [Startled.] Gracious!

*Timson*. [Extremely unsteady.] Just cause and impejiment. There ’e stands. [He points to *Ferrand*.] The crimson foreigner! The mockin’ jay!

*Wellwyn*. Timson!

*Timson*. You’re a gen’leman—I’m aweer o’ that but I must speak the truth—[he waves his hand] an’ shame the devil!

*Bertley*. Is this the rum—?

*Timson*. [Struck by the word.] I’m a teetotaler.

*Wellwyn*. Timson, Timson!

*Timson*. Seein’ as there’s ladies present, I won’t be conspicuous. [Moving away, and making for the door, he strikes against the dais, and mounts upon it.] But what I do say, is: He’s no better than ’er and she’s worse.

*Bertley*. This is distressing.

*Ferrand*. [Calmly.] On my honour, Monsieur!

[*Timson* growls.]

*Wellwyn*. Now, now, Timson!

*Timson*. That’s all right. You’re a gen’leman, an’ I’m a gen’leman, but he ain’t an’ she ain’t.

*Wellwyn*. We shall not believe you.

*Bertley*. No, no; we shall not believe you.

*Timson*. [Heavily.] Very well, you doubts my word. Will it make any difference, Guv’nor, if I speaks the truth?

*Bertley*. No, certainly not—that is—of course, it will.

*Timson*. Well, then, I see ’em plainer than I see [pointing at *Bertley*] the two of you.

*Wellwyn*. Be quiet, Timson!

*Bertley*. Not even her husband believes you.

*Megan*. [Suddenly.] Don't I!

*Wellwyn*. Come, Megan, you can see the old fellow's in Paradise.

*Bertley*. Do you credit such a—such an object?

[He points at *Timson*, who seems falling asleep.]

*Megan*. Naow!

[Unseen by anybody, *Ann* has returned.]

*Bertley*. Well, then, my boy?

*Megan*. I seen 'em meself.

*Bertley*. Gracious! But just now you were will——

*Megan*. [Sardonically.] There wasn't nothing against me honour, then. Now you've took it away between you, cumin' aht with it like this. I don't want no more of 'er, and I'll want a good deal more of 'im; as 'e'll soon find.

[He jerks his chin at *Ferrand*, turns slowly on his heel, and goes out into the street.]

[There follows a profound silence.]

*Ann*. What did I say, Daddy? Utter! All three.

[Suddenly alive to her presence, they all turn.]

*Timson*. [Waking up and looking round him.] Well, p'raps I'd better go.

[Assisted by *Wellwyn* he lurches gingerly off the dais towards the door, which *Wellwyn* holds open for him.]

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*Timson*. [Mechanically.] Where to, sir?

[Receiving no answer he passes out, touching his hat; and the door is closed.]

*Wellwyn*. Ann!

[*Ann* goes back whence she came.]

[*Bertley*, steadily regarding *Mrs*. *Megan*, who has put her arm up in front of her face, beckons to *Ferrand*, and the young man comes gravely forward.]

*Bertley*. Young people, this is very dreadful. [*Mrs*. *Megan* lowers her arm a little, and looks at him over it.] Very sad!

*Mrs*. *Megan*. [Dropping her arm.] Megan's no better than what I am.

*Bertley*. Come, come! Here's your home broken up! [*Mrs*. *Megan* Smiles. Shaking his head gravely.] Surely-surely-you mustn't smile. [*Mrs*. *Megan* becomes tragic.] That's better. Now, what is to be done?

*Ferrand*. Believe me, Monsieur, I greatly regret.

*Bertley*. I'm glad to hear it.

*Ferrand*. If I had foreseen this disaster.

*Bertley*. Is that your only reason for regret?

*Ferrand*. [With a little bow.] Any reason that you wish, Monsieur. I will do my possible.

*Mrs*. *Megan*. I could get an unfurnished room if [she slides her eyes round at *Wellwyn*] I 'ad the money to furnish it.

*Bertley*. But suppose I can induce your husband to forgive you, and take you back?

*Mrs*. *Megan*. [Shaking her head.] 'E'd 'it me.

*Bertley*. I said to forgive.

*Mrs*. *Megan*. That wouldn't make no difference. [With a flash at *Bertley*.] An' I ain't forgiven him!

*Bertley*. That is sinful.

*Mrs*. *Megan*. I'm a Catholic.

*Bertley*. My good child, what difference does that make?

*Ferrand*. Monsieur, if I might interpret for her.

[*Bertley* silences him with a gesture.]

*Mrs*. *Megan*. [Sliding her eyes towards *Wellwyn*.] If I 'ad the money to buy some fresh stock.

*Bertley*. Yes; yes; never mind the money. What I want to find in you both, is repentance.

*Mrs*. *Megan*. [With a flash up at him.] I can't get me livin' off of repentin'.

*Bertley*. Now, now! Never say what you know to be wrong.

*Ferrand*. Monsieur, her soul is very simple.

*Bertley*. [Severely.] I do not know, sir, that we shall get any great assistance from your views. In fact, one thing is clear to me, she must discontinue your acquaintanceship at once.

*Ferrand*. Certainly, Monsieur. We have no serious intentions.

*Bertley*. All the more shame to you, then!

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*Ferrand*. Monsieur, I see perfectly your point of view. It is very natural. [He bows and is silent.]

*Mrs*. *Megan*. I don't want'im hurt'cos o' me. Megan'll get his mates to belt him—bein' foreign like he is.

*Bertley*. Yes, never mind that. It's you I'm thinking of.

*Mrs*. *Megan*. I'd sooner they'd hit me.

*Wellwyn*. [Suddenly.] Well said, my child!

*Mrs*. *Megan*. 'Twasn't his fault.

*Ferrand*. [Without irony—to *Wellwyn*.] I cannot accept that Monsieur. The blame—it is all mine.

*Ann*. [Entering suddenly from the house.] Daddy, they're having an awful——!

[The voices of *professor Calway* and *sir Thomas Hoxton* are distinctly heard.]

*Calway*. The question is a much wider one, Sir Thomas.

*Hoxton*. As wide as you like, you'll never——

[*Wellwyn* pushes *Ann* back into the house and closes the door behind her. The voices are still faintly heard arguing on the threshold.]

*Bertley*. Let me go in here a minute, Wellyn. I must finish speaking to her. [He motions *Mrs*. *Megan* towards the model's room.] We can't leave the matter thus.

*Ferrand*. [Suavely.] Do you desire my company, Monsieur?

[*Bertley*, with a prohibitive gesture of his hand, shepherds the reluctant *Mrs*. *Megan* into the model's room.]

*Wellwyn*. [Sorrowfully.] You shouldn't have done this, Ferrand. It wasn't the square thing.

*Ferrand*. [With dignity.] Monsieur, I feel that I am in the wrong. It was stronger than me.

[As he speaks, *sir Thomas Hoxton* and *professor Calway* enter from the house. In the dim light, and the full cry of argument, they do not notice the figures at the fire. *Sir Thomas Hoxton* leads towards the street door.]

*Hoxton*. No, Sir, I repeat, if the country once commits itself to your views of reform, it's as good as doomed.

*Calway*. I seem to have heard that before, Sir Thomas. And let me say at once that your hitty-missy cart-load of bricks regime——

*Hoxton*. Is a deuced sight better, sir, than your grand-motherly methods. What the old fellow wants is a shock! With all this socialistic molly-coddling, you're losing sight of the individual.

*Calway*. [Swiftly.] You, sir, with your "devil take the hindmost," have never even seen him.

[*Sir Thomas Hoxton*, throwing back a gesture of disgust, steps out into the night, and falls heavily *professor Calway*, hastening to his rescue, falls more heavily still.]

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[*Timson*, momentarily roused from slumber on the doorstep, sits up.]

*Hoxton*. [Struggling to his knees.] Damnation!

*Calway*. [Sitting.] How simultaneous!

[*Wellwyn* and *Ferrand* approach hastily.]

*Ferrand*. [Pointing to *Timson*.] Monsieur, it was true, it seems. They had lost sight of the individual.

[A Policeman has appeared under the street lamp. He picks up *Hoxton's* hat.]

*Constable*. Anything wrong, sir?

*Hoxton*. [Recovering his feet.] Wrong? Great Scott! Constable! Why do you let things lie about in the street like this? Look here, Wellyn!

[They all scrutinize *Timson*.]

*Wellwyn*. It's only the old fellow whose reform you were discussing.

*Hoxton*. How did he come here?

*Constable*. Drunk, sir. [Ascertaining *Timson* to be in the street.] Just off the premises, by good luck. Come along, father.

*Timson*. [Assisted to his feet-drowsily.] Cert'nly, by no means; take my arm.

[They move from the doorway. *Hoxton* and *Calway* re-enter, and go towards the fire.]

*Ann*. [Entering from the house.] What's happened?

*Calway*. Might we have a brush?

*Hoxton*. [Testily.] Let it dry!

[He moves to the fire and stands before it. *Professor Calway* following stands a little behind him. *Ann* returning begins to brush the PROFESSOR's sleeve.]

*Wellwyn*. [Turning from the door, where he has stood looking after the receding *Timson*.] Poor old Timson!

*Ferrand*. [Softly.] Must be philosopher, Monsieur! They will but run him in a little.

[From the model's room *Mrs*. *Megan* has come out, shepherded by *Canon Bertley*.]

*Bertley*. Let's see, your Christian name is——.

*Mrs*. *Megan*. Guinevere.

*Bertley*. Oh! Ah! Ah! Ann, take Gui—take our little friend into the study a minute: I am going to put her into service. We shall make a new woman of her, yet.

*Ann*. [Handing *Canon Bertley* the brush, and turning to *Mrs*. *Megan*.] Come on!

[She leads into the house, and *Mrs*. *Megan* follows Stolidly.]

*Bertley*. [Brushing *Calway's* back.] Have you fallen?

*Calway*. Yes.

*Bertley*. Dear me! How was that?

*Hoxton*. That old ruffian drunk on the doorstep. Hope they'll give him a sharp dose! These rag-tags!

[He looks round, and his angry eyes light by chance on *Ferrand*.]

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*Ferrand*. [With his eyes on *Hoxton*—softly.] Monsieur, something tells me it is time I took the road again.

*Wellwyn*. [Fumbling out a sovereign.] Take this, then!

*Ferrand*. [Refusing the coin.] Non, Monsieur. To abuse ’ospitality is not in my character.

*Bertley*. We must not despair of anyone.

*Hoxton*. Who talked of despairing? Treat him, as I say, and you’ll see!

*Calway*. The interest of the State——

*Hoxton*. The interest of the individual citizen sir——

*Bertley*. Come! A little of both, a little of both!

[They resume their brushing.]

*Ferrand*. You are now debarrassed of us three, Monsieur. I leave you instead—these sirs. [He points.] ‘Au revoir, Monsieur’! [Motioning towards the fire.] ’Appy New Year!

[He slips quietly out. *Wellwyn*, turning, contemplates the three reformers. They are all now brushing away, scratching each other’s backs, and gravely hissing. As he approaches them, they speak with a certain unanimity.]

*Hoxton*. My theory——!

*Calway*. My theory——!

*Bertley*. My theory——!

[They stop surprised. *Wellwyn* makes a gesture of discomfort, as they speak again with still more unanimity.]

*Hoxton*. My——! *Calway*. My——! *Bertley*. My——!

[They stop in greater surprise. The stage is blotted dark.]

Curtain.

## ACT III

It is the first of April—a white spring day of gleams and driving showers. The street door of WELLWYN’s studio stands wide open, and, past it, in the street, the wind is whirling

bits of straw and paper bags. Through the door can be seen the butt end of a stationary furniture van with its flap let down. To this van three humble-men in shirt sleeves and aprons, are carrying out the contents of the studio. The hissing samovar, the tea-pot, the sugar, and the nearly empty decanter of rum stand on the low round table in the fast-being-gutted room. *Wellwyn* in his ulster and soft hat, is squatting on the little stool in front of the blazing fire, staring into it, and smoking a hand-made cigarette. He has a moulting air. Behind him the humble-men pass, embracing busts and other articles of vertu.

*Chief* H'MAN. [Stopping, and standing in the attitude of expectation.] We've about pinched this little lot, sir. Shall we take the—reservoir?

[He indicates the samovar.]

*Wellwyn*. Ah! [Abstractedly feeling in his pockets, and finding coins.] Thanks—thanks—heavy work, I'm afraid.

H'MAN. [Receiving the coins—a little surprised and a good deal pleased.] Thank'ee, sir. Much obliged, I'm sure. We'll 'ave to come back for this. [He gives the dais a vigorous push with his foot.] Not a fixture, as I understand. Perhaps you'd like us to leave these 'ere for a bit. [He indicates the tea things.]

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*Wellwyn*. Ah! do.

[The humble-men go out. There is the sound of horses being started, and the butt end of the van disappears. *Wellwyn* stays on his stool, smoking and brooding over the fare. The open doorway is darkened by a figure. *Canon Bertley* is standing there.]

*Bertley*. *Wellwyn*! [*Wellwyn* turns and rises.] It's ages since I saw you. No idea you were moving. This is very dreadful.

*Wellwyn*. Yes, Ann found this—too exposed. That tall house in Flight Street—we're going there. Seventh floor.

*Bertley*. Lift?

[*Wellwyn* shakes his head.]

*Bertley*. Dear me! No lift? Fine view, no doubt. [*Wellwyn* nods.] You'll be greatly missed.

*Wellwyn*. So Ann thinks. Vicar, what's become of that little flower-seller I was painting at Christmas? You took her into service.

*Bertley*. Not we—exactly! Some dear friends of ours. Painful subject!

*Wellwyn*. Oh!

*Bertley*. Yes. She got the footman into trouble.

*Wellwyn*. Did she, now?

*Bertley*. Disappointing. I consulted with *Calway*, and he advised me to try a certain institution. We got her safely in—excellent place; but, d'you know, she broke out three weeks ago. And since— I've heard [he holds his hands up] hopeless, I'm afraid—quite!

*Wellwyn*. I thought I saw her last night. You can't tell me her address, I suppose?

*Bertley*. [Shaking his head.] The husband too has quite passed out of my ken. He betted on horses, you remember. I'm sometimes tempted to believe there's nothing for some of these poor folk but to pray for death.

[*Ann* has entered from the house. Her hair hangs from under a knitted cap. She wears a white wool jersey, and a loose silk scarf.]

*Bertley*. Ah! Ann. I was telling your father of that poor little Mrs. Megan.

*Ann*. Is she dead?

*Bertley*. Worse I fear. By the way—what became of her accomplice?

*Ann*. We haven't seen him since. [She looks searchingly at *Wellwyn*.] At least—have you—Daddy?

*Wellwyn*. [Rather hurt.] No, my dear; I have not.

*Bertley*. And the—old gentleman who drank the rum?

*Ann*. He got fourteen days. It was the fifth time.

*Bertley*. Dear me!

*Ann*. When he came out he got more drunk than ever. Rather a score for Professor Calway, wasn't it?

*Bertley*. I remember. He and Sir Thomas took a kindly interest in the old fellow.

*Ann*. Yes, they fell over him. The Professor got him into an Institution.

*Bertley*. Indeed!

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*Ann*. He was perfectly sober all the time he was there.

*Wellwyn*. My dear, they only allow them milk.

*Ann*. Well, anyway, he was reformed.

*Wellwyn*. Ye-yes!

*Ann*. [Terribly.] Daddy! You've been seeing him!

*Wellwyn*. [With dignity.] My dear, I have not.

*Ann*. How do you know, then?

*Wellwyn*. Came across Sir Thomas on the Embankment yesterday; told me old Timso —had been had up again for sitting down in front of a brewer's dray.

*Ann*. Why?

*Wellwyn*. Well, you see, as soon as he came out of the what d'you call 'em, he got drunk for a week, and it left him in low spirits.

*Bertley*. Do you mean he deliberately sat down, with the intention—of—er?

*Wellwyn*. Said he was tired of life, but they didn't believe him.

*Ann*. Rather a score for Sir Thomas! I suppose he'd told the Professor? What did he say?

*Wellwyn*. Well, the Professor said [with a quick glance at *Bertley*] he felt there was nothing for some of these poor devils but a lethal chamber.

*Bertley*. [Shocked.] Did he really!

[He has not yet caught *Wellwyn*' s glance.]

*Wellwyn*. And Sir Thomas agreed. Historic occasion. And you, Vicar H'm!

[*Bertley* winces.]

*Ann*. [To herself.] Well, there isn't.

*Bertley*. And yet! Some good in the old fellow, no doubt, if one could put one's finger on it. [Preparing to go.] You'll let us know, then, when you're settled. What was the address? [*Wellwyn* takes out and hands him a card.] Ah! yes. Good-bye, Ann. Good-

bye, Wellyn. [The wind blows his hat along the street.] What a wind! [He goes, pursuing.]

*Ann*. [Who has eyed the card askance.] Daddy, have you told those other two where we're going?

*Wellwyn*. Which other two, my dear?

*Ann*. The Professor and Sir Thomas.

*Wellwyn*. Well, Ann, naturally I——

*Ann*. [Jumping on to the dais with disgust.] Oh, dear! When I'm trying to get you away from all this atmosphere. I don't so much mind the Vicar knowing, because he's got a weak heart——

[She jumps off again. ]

*Wellwyn*. [To himself.] Seventh floor! I felt there was something.

*Ann*. [Preparing to go.] I'm going round now. But you must stay here till the van comes back. And don't forget you tipped the men after the first load.

*Wellwyn*. Oh! Yes, yes. [Uneasily.] Good sorts they look, those fellows!

*Ann*. [Scrutinising him.] What have you done?

*Wellwyn*. Nothing, my dear, really——!

*Ann*. What?

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*Wellwyn*. I—I rather think I may have tipped them twice.

*Ann*. [Drily.] Daddy! If it is the first of April, it's not necessary to make a fool of oneself. That's the last time you ever do these ridiculous things. [*Wellwyn* eyes her askance.] I'm going to see that you spend your money on yourself. You needn't look at me like that! I mean to. As soon as I've got you away from here, and all—these——

*Wellwyn*. Don't rub it in, Ann!

*Ann*. [Giving him a sudden hug—then going to the door—with a sort of triumph.] Deeds, not words, Daddy!

[She goes out, and the wind catching her scarf blows it out beneath her firm young chin. *Wellwyn* returning to the fire, stands brooding, and gazing at his extinct cigarette.]

*Wellwyn*. [To himself.] Bad lot—low type! No method! No theory!

[In the open doorway appear *Ferrand* and *Mrs*. *Megan*. They stand, unseen, looking at him. *Ferrand* is more ragged, if possible, than on Christmas Eve. His chin and cheeks are clothed in a reddish golden beard. *Mrs*. MEGAN's dress is not so woe-begone, but her face is white, her eyes dark-circled. They whisper. She slips back into the shadow of the doorway. *Wellwyn* turns at the sound, and stares at *Ferrand* in amazement.]

*Ferrand*. [Advancing.] Enchanted to see you, Monsieur. [He looks round the empty room.] You are leaving?

*Wellwyn*. [Nodding—then taking the young man's hand.] How goes it?

*Ferrand*. [Displaying himself, simply.] As you see, Monsieur. I have done of my best. It still flies from me.

*Wellwyn*. [Sadly—as if against his will.] Ferrand, it will always fly.

[The young foreigner shivers suddenly from head to foot; then controls himself with a great effort.]

*Ferrand*. Don't say that, Monsieur! It is too much the echo of my heart.

*Wellwyn*. Forgive me! I didn't mean to pain you.

*Ferrand*. [Drawing nearer the fire.] That old cabby, Monsieur, you remember—they tell me, he nearly succeeded to gain happiness the other day.

[*Wellwyn* nods.]

*Ferrand*. And those Sirs, so interested in him, with their theories? He has worn them out? [*Wellwyn* nods.] That goes without saying. And now they wish for him the lethal chamber.

*Wellwyn*. [Startled.] How did you know that?

[There is silence.]

*Ferrand*. [Staring into the fire.] Monsieur, while I was on the road this time I fell ill of a fever. It seemed to me in my illness that I saw the truth—how I was wasting in this world—I would never be good for any one—nor any one for me—all would go by, and I never of it—fame, and fortune, and peace, even the necessities of life, ever mocking me.

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[He draws closer to the fire, spreading his fingers to the flame. And while he is speaking, through the doorway *Mrs*. *Megan* creeps in to listen.]

*Ferrand*. [Speaking on into the fire.] And I saw, Monsieur, so plain, that I should be vagabond all my days, and my days short, I dying in the end the death of a dog. I saw it all in my fever— clear as that flame—there was nothing for us others, but the herb of death. [*Wellwyn* takes his arm and presses it.] And so, Monsieur, I wished to die. I told no one of my fever. I lay out on the ground—it was verree cold. But they would not let me die on the roads of their parishes—they took me to an Institution, Monsieur, I looked in their eyes while I lay there, and I saw more clear than the blue heaven that they thought it best that I should die, although they would not let me. Then Monsieur, naturally my spirit rose, and I said: "So much the worse for you. I will live a little more." One is made like that! Life is sweet, Monsieur.

*Wellwyn*. Yes, Ferrand; Life is sweet.

*Ferrand*. That little girl you had here, Monsieur [*Wellwyn* nods.] in her too there is something of wild-savage. She must have joy of life. I have seen her since I came back. She has embraced the life of joy. It is not quite the same thing. [He lowers his voice.] She is lost, Monsieur, as a stone that sinks in water. I can see, if she cannot. [As *Wellwyn* makes a movement of distress.] Oh! I am not to blame for that, Monsieur. It had well begun before I knew her.

*Wellwyn*. Yes, yes—I was afraid of it, at the time.

[*Mrs*. *Megan* turns silently, and slips away.]

FEERRAND. I do my best for her, Monsieur, but look at me! Besides, I am not good for her—it is not good for simple souls to be with those who see things clear. For the great part of mankind, to see anything—is fatal.

*Wellwyn*. Even for you, it seems.

*Ferrand*. No, Monsieur. To be so near to death has done me good; I shall not lack courage any more till the wind blows on my grave. Since I saw you, Monsieur, I have been in three Institutions. They are palaces. One may eat upon the floor—though it is true—for Kings—they eat too much of skilly there. One little thing they lack—those palaces. It is understanding of the 'uman heart. In them tame birds pluck wild birds naked.

*Wellwyn*. They mean well.

*Ferrand*. Ah! Monsieur, I am loafer, waster—what you like—for all that [bitterly] poverty is my only crime. If I were rich, should I not be simply veree original, 'ighly respected,

with soul above commerce, travelling to see the world? And that young girl, would she not be “that charming ladee,” “veree chic, you know!” And the old Tims—good old-fashioned gentleman—drinking his liquor well. Eh! bien—what are we now? Dark beasts, despised by all. That is life, Monsieur. [He stares into the fire.]

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*Wellwyn*. We're our own enemies, Ferrand. I can afford it—you can't. Quite true!

*Ferrand*. [Earnestly.] Monsieur, do you know this? You are the sole being that can do us good—we hopeless ones.

*Wellwyn*. [Shaking his head.] Not a bit of it; I'm hopeless too.

*Ferrand*. [Eagerly.] Monsieur, it is just that. You understand. When we are with you we feel something—here—[he touches his heart.] If I had one prayer to make, it would be, Good God, give me to understand! Those sirs, with their theories, they can clean our skins and chain our 'abits—that soothes for them the aesthetic sense; it gives them too their good little importance. But our spirits they cannot touch, for they nevare understand. Without that, Monsieur, all is dry as a parched skin of orange.

*Wellwyn*. Don't be so bitter. Think of all the work they do!

*Ferrand*. Monsieur, of their industry I say nothing. They do a good work while they attend with their theories to the sick and the tame old, and the good unfortunate deserving. Above all to the little children. But, Monsieur, when all is done, there are always us hopeless ones. What can they do with me, Monsieur, with that girl, or with that old man? Ah! Monsieur, we, too, 'ave our qualities, we others—it wants you courage to undertake a career like mine, or like that young girl's. We wild ones—we know a thousand times more of life than ever will those sirs. They waste their time trying to make rooks white. Be kind to us if you will, or let us alone like Mees Ann, but do not try to change our skins. Leave us to live, or leave us to die when we like in the free air. If you do not wish of us, you have but to shut your pockets and—your doors—-we shall die the faster.

*Wellwyn*. [With agitation.] But that, you know—we can't do—now can we?

*Ferrand*. If you cannot, how is it our fault? The harm we do to others—is it so much? If I am criminal, dangerous—shut me up! I would not pity myself—nevare. But we in whom something moves— like that flame, Monsieur, that cannot keep still—we others—we are not many—that must have motion in our lives, do not let them make us prisoners, with their theories, because we are not like them—it is life itself they would enclose! [He draws up his tattered figure, then bending over the fire again.] I ask your pardon; I am talking. If I could smoke, Monsieur!

> [*Wellwyn* hands him a tobacco pouch; and he rolls a cigarette with his yellow-Stained fingers.]

*Ferrand*. The good God made me so that I would rather walk a whole month of nights, hungry, with the stars, than sit one single day making round business on an office stool! It is not to my advantage. I cannot help it that I am a vagabond. What would you

have?  It is stronger than me. [He looks suddenly at *Wellwyn*.] Monsieur, I say to you things I have never said.

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*Wellwyn*. [Quietly.] Go on, go on. [There is silence.]

*Ferrand*. [Suddenly.] Monsieur! Are you really English? The English are so civilised.

*Wellwyn*. And am I not?

*Ferrand*. You treat me like a brother.

[*Wellwyn* has turned towards the street door at a sound of feet, and the clamour of voices.]

*Timson*. [From the street.] Take her in 'ere. I knows 'im.

[Through the open doorway come a *police constable* and a *loafer*, bearing between them the limp white faced form of *Mrs*. *Megan*, hatless and with drowned hair, enveloped in the policeman's waterproof. Some curious persons bring up the rear, jostling in the doorway, among whom is *Timson* carrying in his hands the policeman's dripping waterproof leg pieces.]

*Ferrand*. [Starting forward.] Monsieur, it is that little girl!

*Wellwyn*. What's happened? Constable! What's happened!

[The *constable* and *loafer* have laid the body down on the dais; with *Wellwyn* and *Ferrand* they stand bending over her.]

*Constable*. 'Tempted sooicide, sir; but she hadn't been in the water 'arf a minute when I got hold of her. [He bends lower.] Can't understand her collapsin' like this.

*Wellwyn*. [Feeling her heart.] I don't feel anything.

*Ferrand*. [In a voice sharpened by emotion.] Let me try, Monsieur.

*Constable*. [Touching his arm.] You keep off, my lad.

*Wellwyn*. No, constable—let him. He's her friend.

*Constable*. [Releasing *Ferrand*—to the *loafer*.] Here you! Cut off for a doctor-sharp now! [He pushes back the curious persons.] Now then, stand away there, please—we can't have you round the body. Keep back—Clear out, now!

[He slowly moves them back, and at last shepherds them through the door and shuts it on them, *Timson* being last.]

*Ferrand*. The rum!

[*Wellwyn* fetches the decanter. With the little there is left *Ferrand* chafes the girl's hands and forehead, and pours some between her lips. But there is no response from the inert body.]

*Ferrand*. Her soul is still away, Monsieur!

[*Wellwyn*, seizing the decanter, pours into it tea and boiling water.]

*Constable*. It's never drownin', sir—her head was hardly under; I was on to her like knife.

*Ferrand*. [Rubbing her feet.] She has not yet her philosophy, Monsieur; at the beginning they often try. If she is dead! [In a voice of awed rapture.] What fortune!

*Constable*. [With puzzled sadness.] True enough, sir—that! We'd just begun to know 'er. If she 'as been taken—her best friends couldn't wish 'er better.

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*Wellwyn*. [Applying the decanter to her dips.] Poor little thing!  I'll try this hot tea.

*Ferrand*. [Whispering.] 'La mort—le grand ami!'

*Wellwyn*.  Look!  Look at her!  She's coming round!

[A faint tremor passes over *Mrs*. MEGAN's body.  He again applies the hot drink to her mouth.  She stirs and gulps.]

*Constable*. [With intense relief.] That's brave!  Good lass! She'll pick up now, sir.

[Then, seeing that *Timson* and the curious persons have again opened the door, he drives them out, and stands with his back against it.  *Mrs*. *Megan* comes to herself.]

*Wellwyn*. [Sitting on the dais and supporting her—as if to a child.] There you are, my dear.  There, there—better now!  That's right.  Drink a little more of this tea.

[*Mrs*. *Megan* drinks from the decanter.]

*Ferrand*. [Rising.] Bring her to the fire, Monsieur.

[They take her to the fire and seat her on the little stool.  From the moment of her restored animation *Ferrand* has resumed his air of cynical detachment, and now stands apart with arms folded, watching.]

*Wellwyn*.  Feeling better, my child?

*Mrs*. *Megan*.  Yes.

*Wellwyn*.  That's good.  That's good.  Now, how was it?  Um?

*Mrs*. *Megan*.  I dunno. [She shivers.] I was standin' here just now when you was talkin', and when I heard 'im, it cam' over me to do it—like.

*Wellwyn*.  Ah, yes I know.

*Mrs*. *Megan*.  I didn't seem no good to meself nor any one.  But when I got in the water, I didn't want to any more.  It was cold in there.

*Wellwyn*.  Have you been having such a bad time of it?

*Mrs*. *Megan*.  Yes.  And listenin' to him upset me. [She signs with her head at *Ferrand*.] I feel better now I've been in the water. [She smiles and shivers.]

*Wellwyn*. There, there! Shivery? Like to walk up and down a little?

[They begin walking together up and down.]

*Wellwyn*. Beastly when your head goes under?

*Mrs*. *Megan*. Yes. It frightened me. I thought I wouldn't come up again.

*Wellwyn*. I know—sort of world without end, wasn't it? What did you think of, um?

*Mrs*. *Megan*. I wished I 'adn't jumped—an' I thought of my baby— that died—and—[in a rather surprised voice] and I thought of d-dancin'.

[Her mouth quivers, her face puckers, she gives a choke and a little sob.]

*Wellwyn*. [Stopping and stroking her.] There, there—there!

[For a moment her face is buried in his sleeve, then she recovers herself.]

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*Mrs*. *Megan*. Then ‘e got hold o’ me, an’ pulled me out.

*Wellwyn*. Ah! what a comfort—um?

*Mrs*. *Megan*. Yes. The water got into me mouth.

[They walk again.] I wouldn’t have gone to do it but for him.
[She looks towards *Ferrand*.] His talk made me feel all funny,
as if people wanted me to.

*Wellwyn*. My dear child! Don’t think such things! As if anyone would——!

*Mrs*. *Megan*. [Stolidly.] I thought they did. They used to look at me so sometimes, where I was before I ran away—I couldn’t stop there, you know.

*Wellwyn*. Too cooped-up?

*Mrs*. *Megan*. Yes. No life at all, it wasn’t—not after sellin’ flowers, I’d rather be doin’ what I am.

*Wellwyn*. Ah! Well-it’s all over, now! How d’you feel—eh? Better?

*Mrs*. *Megan*. Yes. I feels all right now.

[She sits up again on the little stool before the fire.]

*Wellwyn*. No shivers, and no aches; quite comfy?

*Mrs*. *Megan*. Yes.

*Wellwyn*. That’s a blessing. All well, now, Constable—thank you!

*Constable*. [Who has remained discreetly apart at the door-cordially.] First rate, sir! That’s capital! [He approaches and scrutinises *Mrs*. *Megan*.] Right as rain, eh, my girl?

*Mrs*. *Megan*. [Shrinking a little.] Yes.

*Constable*. That’s fine. Then I think perhaps, for ’er sake, sir, the sooner we move on and get her a change o’ clothin’, the better.

*Wellwyn*. Oh! don’t bother about that—I’ll send round for my daughter—we’ll manage for her here.

*Constable*. Very kind of you, I’m sure, sir. But [with embarrassment] she seems all right. She’ll get every attention at the station.

*Wellwyn*. But I assure you, we don't mind at all; we'll take the greatest care of her.

*Constable*. [Still more embarrassed.] Well, sir, of course, I'm thinkin' of—I'm afraid I can't depart from the usual course.

*Wellwyn*. [Sharply.] What! But-oh! No! No! That'll be all right, Constable! That'll be all right! I assure you.

*Constable*. [With more decision.] I'll have to charge her, sir.

*Wellwyn*. Good God! You don't mean to say the poor little thing has got to be——

*Constable*. [Consulting with him.] Well, sir, we can't get over the facts, can we? There it is! You know what sooicide amounts to— it's an awkward job.

*Wellwyn*. [Calming himself with an effort.] But look here, Constable, as a reasonable man—This poor wretched little girl—you know what that life means better than anyone! Why! It's to her credit to try and jump out of it!

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[The *constable* shakes his head.]

*Wellwyn*. You said yourself her best friends couldn't wish her better! [Dropping his voice still more.] Everybody feels it! The Vicar was here a few minutes ago saying the very same thing—the Vicar, Constable! [The *constable* shakes his head.] Ah! now, look here, I know something of her. Nothing can be done with her. We all admit it. Don't you see? Well, then hang it—you needn't go and make fools of us all by——

*Ferrand*. Monsieur, it is the first of April.

*Constable*. [With a sharp glance at him.] Can't neglect me duty, sir; that's impossible.

*Wellwyn*. Look here! She—slipped. She's been telling me. Come, Constable, there's a good fellow. May be the making of her, this.

*Constable*. I quite appreciate your good 'eart, sir, an' you make it very 'ard for me—but, come now! I put it to you as a gentleman, would you go back on yer duty if you was me?

[*Wellwyn* raises his hat, and plunges his fingers through and through his hair.]

*Wellwyn*. Well! God in heaven! Of all the d——d topsy—turvy—! Not a soul in the world wants her alive—and now she's to be prosecuted for trying to be where everyone wishes her.

*Constable*. Come, sir, come! Be a man!

[Throughout all this *Mrs*. *Megan* has sat stolidly before the fire, but as *Ferrand* suddenly steps forward she looks up at him.]

*Ferrand*. Do not grieve, Monsieur! This will give her courage. There is nothing that gives more courage than to see the irony of things. [He touches *Mrs*. *Megan's* shoulder.] Go, my child; it will do you good.

[*Mrs*. *Megan* rises, and looks at him dazedly.]

*Constable*. [Coming forward, and taking her by the hand.] That's my good lass. Come along! We won't hurt you.

*Mrs*. *Megan*. I don't want to go. They'll stare at me.

*Constable*. [Comforting.] Not they! I'll see to that.

*Wellwyn*. [Very upset.] Take her in a cab, Constable, if you must —for God's sake! [He pulls out a shilling.] Here!

*Constable*. [Taking the shilling.] I will, sir, certainly. Don't think I want to——

*Wellwyn*. No, no, I know. You're a good sort.

*Constable*. [Comfortable.] Don't you take on, sir. It's her first try; they won't be hard on 'er. Like as not only bind 'er over in her own recogs. not to do it again. Come, my dear.

*Mrs*. *Megan*. [Trying to free herself from the policeman's cloak.] I want to take this off. It looks so funny.

[As she speaks the door is opened by *Ann*; behind whom is dimly seen the form of old *Timson*, still heading the curious persons.]

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*Ann*. [Looking from one to the other in amazement.] What is it? What's happened? Daddy!

*Ferrand*. [Out of the silence.] It is nothing, Ma'moiselle! She has failed to drown herself. They run her in a little.

*Wellwyn*. Lend her your jacket, my dear; she'll catch her death.

[*Ann*, feeling *Mrs*. MEGAN's arm, strips of her jacket, and helps her into it without a word.]

*Constable*. [Donning his cloak.] Thank you. Miss—very good of you, I'm sure.

*Mrs*. *Megan*. [Mazed.] It's warm!

[She gives them all a last half-smiling look, and Passes with the *constable* through the doorway.]

*Ferrand*. That makes the third of us, Monsieur. We are not in luck. To wish us dead, it seems, is easier than to let us die.

[He looks at *Ann*, who is standing with her eyes fixed on her father. *Wellwyn* has taken from his pocket a visiting card.]

*Wellwyn*. [To *Ferrand*.] Here quick; take this, run after her! When they've done with her tell her to come to us.

*Ferrand*. [Taking the card, and reading the address.] "No. 7, Haven House, Flight Street!" Rely on me, Monsieur—I will bring her myself to call on you. 'Au revoir, mon bon Monsieur'!

[He bends over WELLWYN's hand; then, with a bow to *Ann* goes out; his tattered figure can be seen through the window, passing in the wind. *Wellwyn* turns back to the fire. The figure of *Timson* advances into the doorway, no longer holding in either hand a waterproof leg-piece.]

*Timson*. [In a croaky voice.] Sir!

*Wellwyn*. What—you, Timson?

*Timson*. On me larst legs, sir. 'Ere! You can see 'em for yerself! Shawn't trouble yer long....

*Wellwyn*. [After a long and desperate stare.] Not now—*Timson* not now! Take this! [He takes out another card, and hands it to *Timson*] Some other time.

*Timson*. [Taking the card.] Yer new address! You are a gen'leman. [He lurches slowly away.]

[*Ann* shuts the street door and sets her back against it. The rumble of the approaching van is heard outside. It ceases.]

*Ann*. [In a fateful voice.] Daddy! [They stare at each other.] Do you know what you've done? Given your card to those six rotters.

*Wellwyn*. [With a blank stare.] Six?

*Ann*. [Staring round the naked room.] What was the good of this?

*Wellwyn*. [Following her eyes——very gravely.] Ann! It is stronger than me.

[Without a word *Ann* opens the door, and walks straight out. With a heavy sigh, *Wellwyn* sinks down on the little stool before the fire. The three humble-men come in.]

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*Chief humble-man*. [In an attitude of expectation.] This is the larst of it, sir.

*Wellwyn*. Oh! Ah! yes!

[He gives them money; then something seems to strike him, and he exhibits certain signs of vexation. Suddenly he recovers, looks from one to the other, and then at the tea things. A faint smile comes on his face.]

*Wellwyn*. You can finish the decanter.

[He goes out in haste.]

*Chief humble-man*. [Clinking the coins.] Third time of arskin'! April fool! Not 'arf! Good old pigeon!

*Second humble-man*. 'Uman being, I call 'im.

*Chief humble-man*. [Taking the three glasses from the last packing-case, and pouring very equally into them.] That's right. Tell you wot, I'd never 'a touched this unless 'e'd told me to, I wouldn't—not with 'im.

*Second humble-man*. Ditto to that! This is a bit of orl right! [Raising his glass.] Good luck!

*Third humble-man*. Same 'ere!

[Simultaneously they place their lips smartly against the liquor, and at once let fall their faces and their glasses.]

*Chief humble-man*. [With great solemnity.] Crikey! Bill! Tea! .....'E's got us!

[The stage is blotted dark.]

Curtain.

## THE END

### THE MOB

A Play in Four Acts

# PERSONS OF THE PLAY

*Stephen more*, Member of Parliament
*Katherine*, his wife
*Olive*, their little daughter
*the Dean of stour*, Katherine's uncle
*general sir John Julian*, her father
*captain Hubert Julian*, her brother
*Helen*, his wife
*Edward Mendip*, editor of "The Parthenon"
*Alan steel*, More's secretary
*James home*, architect |
*Charles Shelder*, Solicitor |A deputation of More's
*mark wace*, bookseller |constituents
*William Banning*, manufacturer |
*nurse Wreford*
*Wreford* (her son), Hubert's orderly
*his sweetheart*
*the footman Henry*
A *doorkeeper*
*some black-coated gentlemen*
A *Student*
A *girl*

A *mob*

*Act* I. The dining-room of More's town house, evening.

*Act* II. The same, morning.

*Act* III. *Scene* I. An alley at the back of a suburban theatre.
*Scene* II. Katherine's bedroom.

*Act* IV. The dining-room of More's house, late afternoon.

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*Aftermath*. The corner of a square, at dawn.

Between *acts* I and II some days elapse.
Between *acts* II and III three months.
Between *act* III *scene* I and *act* III *scene* II no time.
Between *acts* III and IV a few hours.
Between *acts* IV and *aftermath* an indefinite period.

## ACT I

It is half-past nine of a July evening. In a dining-room lighted by sconces, and apparelled in wall-paper, carpet, and curtains of deep vivid blue, the large French windows between two columns are open on to a wide terrace, beyond which are seen trees in darkness, and distant shapes of lighted houses. On one side is a bay window, over which curtains are partly drawn. Opposite to this window is a door leading into the hall. At an oval rosewood table, set with silver, flowers, fruit, and wine, six people are seated after dinner. Back to the bay window is Stephen more, the host, a man of forty, with a fine-cut face, a rather charming smile, and the eyes of an idealist; to his right, *sir*, *John Julian*, an old soldier, with thin brown features, and grey moustaches; to *sir* JOHN's right, his brother, the *Dean of stour*, a tall, dark, ascetic-looking Churchman: to his right *Katherine* is leaning forward, her elbows on the table, and her chin on her hands, staring across at her husband; to her right sits *Edward Mendip*, a pale man of forty-five, very bald, with a fine forehead, and on his clear-cut lips a smile that shows his teeth; between him and *more* is *Helen Julian*, a pretty dark-haired young woman, absorbed in thoughts of her own. The voices are tuned to the pitch of heated discussion, as the curtain rises.

The Dean. I disagree with you, Stephen; absolutely, entirely disagree.

*More*. I can't help it.

*Mendip*. Remember a certain war, Stephen! Were your chivalrous notions any good, then? And, what was winked at in an obscure young Member is anathema for an Under Secretary of State. You can't afford——

*More*. To follow my conscience? That's new, Mendip.

*Mendip*. Idealism can be out of place, my friend.

*The Dean*. The Government is dealing here with a wild lawless race, on whom I must say I think sentiment is rather wasted.

*More*. God made them, Dean.

*Mendip*. I have my doubts.

*The Dean*. They have proved themselves faithless. We have the right to chastise.

*More*. If I hit a little man in the eye, and he hits me back, have I the right to chastise him?

*Sir John*. We didn't begin this business.

*More*. What! With our missionaries and our trading?

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*The Dean*. It is news indeed that the work of civilization may be justifiably met by murder. Have you forgotten Glaive and Morlinson?

*Sir John*. Yes. And that poor fellow Groome and his wife?

*More*. They went into a wild country, against the feeling of the tribes, on their own business. What has the nation to do with the mishaps of gamblers?

*Sir John*. We can't stand by and see our own flesh and blood ill-treated!

*The Dean*. Does our rule bring blessing—or does it not, Stephen?

*More*. Sometimes; but with all my soul I deny the fantastic superstition that our rule can benefit a people like this, a nation of one race, as different from ourselves as dark from light—in colour, religion, every mortal thing. We can only pervert their natural instincts.

*The Dean*. That to me is an unintelligible point of view.

*Mendip*. Go into that philosophy of yours a little deeper, Stephen— it spells stagnation. There are no fixed stars on this earth. Nations can't let each other alone.

*More*. Big ones could let little ones alone.

*Mendip*. If they could there'd be no big ones. My dear fellow, we know little nations are your hobby, but surely office should have toned you down.

*Sir John*. I've served my country fifty years, and I say she is not in the wrong.

*More*. I hope to serve her fifty, Sir John, and I say she is.

*Mendip*. There are moments when such things can't be said, More.

*More*. They'll be said by me to-night, Mendip.

*Mendip*. In the House?

[*More* nods.]

*Katherine*. Stephen!

*Mendip*. Mrs. More, you mustn't let him. It's madness.

*More*. [Rising] You can tell people that to-morrow, Mendip. Give it a leader in 'The Parthenon'.

*Mendip*. Political lunacy! No man in your position has a right to fly out like this at the eleventh hour.

*More*. I've made no secret of my feelings all along. I'm against this war, and against the annexation we all know it will lead to.

*Mendip*. My dear fellow! Don't be so Quixotic! We shall have war within the next twenty-four hours, and nothing you can do will stop it.

*Helen*. Oh! No!

*Mendip*. I'm afraid so, Mrs. Hubert.

*Sir John*. Not a doubt of it, Helen.

*Mendip*. [*To more*] And you mean to charge the windmill?

[*More* nods.]

*Mendip*. 'C'est magnifique'!

*More*. I'm not out for advertisement.

*Mendip*. You will get it!

*More*. Must speak the truth sometimes, even at that risk.

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*Sir John*. It is not the truth.

*Mendip*. The greater the truth the greater the libel, and the greater the resentment of the person libelled.

*The Dean*. [Trying to bring matters to a blander level] My dear Stephen, even if you were right—which I deny—about the initial merits, there surely comes a point where the individual conscience must resign it self to the country's feeling. This has become a question of national honour.

*Sir John*. Well said, James!

*More*. Nations are bad judges of their honour, Dean.

*The Dean*. I shall not follow you there.

*More*. No. It's an awkward word.

*Katherine*. [Stopping *the Dean*] Uncle James! Please!

[*More* looks at her intently.]

*Sir John*. So you're going to put yourself at the head of the cranks, ruin your career, and make me ashamed that you're my son-in-law?

*More*. Is a man only to hold beliefs when they're popular? You've stood up to be shot at often enough, Sir John.

*Sir John*. Never by my country! Your speech will be in all the foreign press-trust 'em for seizing on anything against us. A show-up before other countries——!

*More*. You admit the show-up?

*Sir John*. I do not, sir.

*The Dean*. The position has become impossible. The state of things out there must be put an end to once for all! Come, Katherine, back us up!

*More*. My country, right or wrong! Guilty—still my country!

*Mendip*. That begs the question.

[*Katherine* rises. *The Dean*, too, stands up.]

*The Dean*. [In a low voice] 'Quem Deus volt perdere'——!

*Sir John*. Unpatriotic!

*More*. I'll have no truck with tyranny.

*Katherine*. Father doesn't admit tyranny. Nor do any of us, Stephen.

*Hubert Julian*, a tall Soldier-like man, has come in.

*Helen*. Hubert!

[She gets up and goes to him, and they talk together near the door.]

*Sir John*. What in God's name is your idea? We've forborne long enough, in all conscience.

*More*. Sir John, we great Powers have got to change our ways in dealing with weaker nations. The very dogs can give us lessons— watch a big dog with a little one.

*Mendip*. No, no, these things are not so simple as all that.

*More*. There's no reason in the world, Mendip, why the rules of chivalry should not apply to nations at least as well as to——dogs.

*Mendip*. My dear friend, are you to become that hapless kind of outcast, a champion of lost causes?

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*More*. This cause is not lost.

*Mendip*. Right or wrong, as lost as ever was cause in all this world. There was never a time when the word "patriotism" stirred mob sentiment as it does now. 'Ware "Mob," Stephen——'ware "Mob"!

*More*. Because general sentiment's against me, I—a public man—am to deny my faith? The point is not whether I'm right or wrong, Mendip, but whether I'm to sneak out of my conviction because it's unpopular.

*The Dean*. I'm afraid I must go. [To *Katherine*] Good-night, my dear! Ah! Hubert! [He greets *Hubert*] Mr. Mendip, I go your way. Can I drop you?

*Mendip*. Thank you. Good-night, Mrs. More. Stop him! It's perdition.

[He and *the Dean* go out. *Katherine* puts her arm in *Helen's*, and takes her out of the room. *Hubert* remains standing by the door]

*Sir John*. I knew your views were extreme in many ways, Stephen, but I never thought the husband of my daughter would be a Peace-at-any-price man!

*More*. I am not! But I prefer to fight some one my own size.

*Sir John*. Well! I can only hope to God you'll come to your senses before you commit the folly of this speech. I must get back to the War Office. Good-night, Hubert.

*Hubert*. Good-night, Father.

[*Sir John* goes out. *Hubert* stands motionless, dejected.]

*Hubert*. We've got our orders.

*More*. What? When d'you sail?

*Hubert*. At once.

*More*. Poor Helen!

*Hubert*. Not married a year; pretty bad luck! [*More* touches his arm in sympathy] Well! We've got to put feelings in our pockets. Look here, Stephen—don't make that speech! Think of Katherine—with the Dad at the War Office, and me going out, and Ralph and old George out there already! You can't trust your tongue when you're hot about a thing.

*More*. I must speak, Hubert.

*Hubert*. No, no! Bottle yourself up for to-night. The next few hours ’ll see it begin. [*More* turns from him] If you don’t care whether you mess up your own career—don’t tear Katherine in two!

*More*. You’re not shirking your duty because of your wife.

*Hubert*. Well! You’re riding for a fall, and a godless mucker it’ll be. This’ll be no picnic. We shall get some nasty knocks out there. Wait and see the feeling here when we’ve had a force or two cut up in those mountains. It’s awful country. Those fellows have got modern arms, and are jolly good fighters. Do drop it, Stephen!

*More*. Must risk something, sometimes, Hubert—even in my profession!

[As he speaks, *Katherine* comes in.]

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*Hubert*. But it's hopeless, my dear chap—absolutely.

> [*More* turns to the window, *Hubert* to his sister—then with a gesture towards *more*, as though to leave the matter to her, he goes out.]

*Katherine*. Stephen! Are you really going to speak? [He nods] I ask you not.

*More*. You know my feeling.

*Katherine*. But it's our own country. We can't stand apart from it. You won't stop anything—only make people hate you. I can't bear that.

*More*. I tell you, Kit, some one must raise a voice. Two or three reverses—certain to come—and the whole country will go wild. And one more little nation will cease to live.

*Katherine*. If you believe in your country, you must believe that the more land and power she has, the better for the world.

*More*. Is that your faith?

*Katherine*. Yes.

*More*. I respect it; I even understand it; but—I can't hold it.

*Katherine*. But, Stephen, your speech will be a rallying cry to all the cranks, and every one who has a spite against the country. They'll make you their figurehead. [*More* smiles] They will. Your chance of the Cabinet will go—you may even have to resign your seat.

*More*. Dogs will bark. These things soon blow over.

*Katherine*. No, no! If you once begin a thing, you always go on; and what earthly good?

*More*. History won't say: "And this they did without a single protest from their public men!"

*Katherine*. There are plenty who——

*More*. Poets?

*Katherine*. Do you remember that day on our honeymoon, going up Ben Lawers? You were lying on your face in the heather; you said it was like kissing a loved woman. There was a lark singing—you said that was the voice of one's worship. The hills were

very blue; that's why we had blue here, because it was the best dress of our country. You do love her.

*More*. Love her!

*Katherine*. You'd have done this for me—then.

*More*. Would you have asked me—then, Kit?

*Katherine*. Yes. The country's our country! Oh! Stephen, think what it'll be like for me—with Hubert and the other boys out there. And poor Helen, and Father! I beg you not to make this speech.

*More*. Kit! This isn't fair. Do you want me to feel myself a cur?

*Katherine*. [Breathless] I—I—almost feel you'll be a cur to do it [She looks at him, frightened by her own words. Then, as the footman *Henry* has come in to clear the table—very low] I ask you not!

[He does not answer, and she goes out.]

*More* [To the servant] Later, please, Henry, later!

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The servant retires. *More* still stands looking down at the dining-table; then putting his hand to his throat, as if to free it from the grip of his collar, he pours out a glass of water, and drinks it of. In the street, outside the bay window, two street musicians, a harp and a violin, have taken up their stand, and after some twangs and scrapes, break into music. *More* goes towards the sound, and draws aside one curtain. After a moment, he returns to the table, and takes up the notes of the speech. He is in an agony of indecision.

*More*. A cur!

He seems about to tear his notes across. Then, changing his mind, turns them over and over, muttering. His voice gradually grows louder, till he is declaiming to the empty room the peroration of his speech.

*More*. . . . We have arrogated to our land the title Champion of Freedom, Foe of Oppression. Is that indeed a bygone glory? Is it not worth some sacrifice of our pettier dignity, to avoid laying another stone upon its grave; to avoid placing before the searchlight eyes of History the spectacle of yet one more piece of national cynicism? We are about to force our will and our dominion on a race that has always been free, that loves its country, and its independence, as much as ever we love ours. I cannot sit silent to-night and see this begin. As we are tender of our own land, so we should be of the lands of others. I love my country. It is because I love my country that I raise my voice. Warlike in spirit these people may be—but they have no chance against ourselves. And war on such, however agreeable to the blind moment, is odious to the future. The great heart of mankind ever beats in sense and sympathy with the weaker. It is against this great heart of mankind that we are going. In the name of Justice and Civilization we pursue this policy; but by Justice we shall hereafter be judged, and by Civilization—condemned.

While he is speaking, a little figure has flown along the terrace outside, in the direction of the music, but has stopped at the sound of his voice, and stands in the open window, listening—a dark-haired, dark-eyed child, in a blue dressing-gown caught up in her hand. The street musicians, having reached the end of a tune, are silent.

> In the intensity of *mores* feeling, a wine-glass, gripped too strongly, breaks and falls in pieces onto a finger-bowl. The child starts forward into the room.

*More*. Olive!

*Olive*. Who were you speaking to, Daddy?

*More*. [Staring at her] The wind, sweetheart!

*Olive*. There isn't any!

*More*. What blew you down, then?

*Olive*. [Mysteriously] The music. Did the wind break the wine-glass, or did it come in two in your hand?

*More*. Now my sprite! Upstairs again, before Nurse catches you.
Fly! Fly!

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*Olive*. Oh! no, Daddy! [With confidential fervour] It feels like things to-night!

*More*. You're right there!

*Olive*. [Pulling him down to her, and whispering] I must get back again in secret. H'sh!

She suddenly runs and wraps herself into one of the curtains of the bay window. A young man enters, with a note in his hand.

*More*. Hello, Steel!

[The street musicians have again begun to play.]

*Steel*. From Sir John—by special messenger from the War Office.

*More*. [Reading the note] "The ball is opened."

He stands brooding over the note, and *steel* looks at him anxiously. He is a dark, sallow, thin-faced young man, with the eyes of one who can attach himself to people, and suffer with them.

*Steel*. I'm glad it's begun, sir. It would have been an awful pity to have made that speech.

*More*. You too, Steel!

*Steel*. I mean, if it's actually started——

*More*. [Tearing tie note across] Yes. Keep that to yourself.

*Steel*. Do you want me any more?

*More* takes from his breast pocket some papers, and pitches them down on the bureau.

*More*. Answer these.

*Steel*. [Going to the bureau] Fetherby was simply sickening. [He begins to write. Struggle has begun again in *more*] Not the faintest recognition that there are two sides to it.

*More* gives him a quick look, goes quietly to the dining-table and picks up his sheaf of notes. Hiding them with his sleeve, he goes back to the window, where he again stands hesitating.

*Steel*. Chief gem: [Imitating] “We must show Impudence at last that Dignity is not asleep!”

*More*. [Moving out on to the terrace] Nice quiet night!

*Steel*. This to the Cottage Hospital—shall I say you will preside?

*More*. No.

*Steel* writes; then looking up and seeing that *more* is no longer there, he goes to the window, looks to right and left, returns to the bureau, and is about to sit down again when a thought seems to strike him with consternation. He goes again to the window. Then snatching up his hat, he passes hurriedly out along the terrace. As he vanishes, *Katherine* comes in from the hall. After looking out on to the terrace she goes to the bay window; stands there listening; then comes restlessly back into the room. *Olive*, creeping quietly from behind the curtain, clasps her round the waist.

*Katherine*. O my darling! How you startled me! What are you doing down here, you wicked little sinner!

*Olive*. I explained all that to Daddy. We needn’t go into it again, need we?

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*Katherine*. Where is Daddy?

*Olive*. Gone.

*Katherine*. When?

*Olive*. Oh! only just, and Mr. Steel went after him like a rabbit. [The music stops] They haven't been paid, you know.

*Katherine*. Now, go up at once. I can't think how you got down here.

*Olive*. I can. [Wheedling] If you pay them, Mummy, they're sure to play another.

*Katherine*. Well, give them that! One more only.

She gives *Olive* a coin, who runs with it to the bay window, opens the aide casement, and calls to the musicians.

*Olive*. Catch, please! And would you play just one more?

She returns from the window, and seeing her mother lost in thought, rubs herself against her.

*Olive*. Have you got an ache?

*Katharine*. Right through me, darling!

*Olive*. Oh!

[The musicians strike up a dance.]

*Olive*. Oh! Mummy! I must just dance!

She kicks off her lisle blue shoes, and begins dancing. While she is capering *Hubert* comes in from the hall. He stands watching his little niece for a minute, and *Katherine* looks at him.

*Hubert*. Stephen gone!

*Katherine*. Yes—stop, Olive!

*Olive*. Are you good at my sort of dancing, Uncle?

*Hubert*. Yes, chick—awfully!

*Katherine*. Now, Olive!

The musicians have suddenly broken off in the middle of a bar. From the street comes the noise of distant shouting.

*Olive*. Listen, Uncle! Isn't it a particular noise?

*Hubert* and *Katherine* listen with all their might, and *Olive* stares at their faces. *Hubert* goes to the window. The sound comes nearer. The shouted words are faintly heard: "Pyper—— war——our force crosses frontier—sharp fightin'——pyper."

*Katherine*. [Breathless] Yes! It is.

The street cry is heard again in two distant voices coming from different directions: "War—pyper—sharp fightin' on the frontier—pyper."

*Katherine*. Shut out those ghouls!

As *Hubert* closes the window, *nurse Wreford* comes in from the hall. She is an elderly woman endowed with a motherly grimness. She fixes *Olive* with her eye, then suddenly becomes conscious of the street cry.

*Nurse*. Oh! don't say it's begun.

[*Hubert* comes from the window.]

*Nurse*. Is the regiment to go, Mr. Hubert?

*Hubert*. Yes, Nanny.

*Nurse*. Oh, dear! My boy!

*Katherine*. [Signing to where *Olive* stands with wide eyes] Nurse!

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*Hubert*. I'll look after him, Nurse.

*Nurse*. And him keepin' company. And you not married a year. Ah! Mr. Hubert, now do 'ee take care; you and him's both so rash.

*Hubert*. Not I, Nurse!

*Nurse* looks long into his face, then lifts her finger, and beckons *Olive*.

*Olive*. [Perceiving new sensations before her, goes quietly] Good-night, Uncle! Nanny, d'you know why I was obliged to come down? [In a fervent whisper] It's a secret!

[As she passes with *nurse* out into the hall, her voice is heard saying, "Do tell me all about the war."]

*Hubert*. [Smothering emotion under a blunt manner] We sail on Friday, Kit. Be good to Helen, old girl.

*Katherine*. Oh! I wish——! Why—can't—women—fight?

*Hubert*. Yes, it's bad for you, with Stephen taking it like this. But he'll come round now it's once begun.

*Katherine* shakes her head, then goes suddenly up to him, and throws her arms round his neck. It is as if all the feeling pent up in her were finding vent in this hug.

The door from the hall is opened, and *sir john's* voice is heard outside: "All right, I'll find her."

*Katherine*. Father!

[*Sir John* comes in.]

*Sir John*. Stephen get my note? I sent it over the moment I got to the War Office.

*Katherine*. I expect so. [Seeing the torn note on the table] Yes.

*Sir John*. They're shouting the news now. Thank God, I stopped that crazy speech of his in time.

*Katherine*. Have you stopped it?

*Sir John*. What! He wouldn't be such a sublime donkey?

*Katherine*. I think that is just what he might be. [Going to the window] We shall know soon.

[*Sir John*, after staring at her, goes up to *Hubert*.]

*Sir John*. Keep a good heart, my boy. The country's first. [They exchange a hand-squeeze.]

*Katherine* backs away from the window. *Steel* has appeared there from the terrace, breathless from running.

*Steel*. Mr. More back?

*Katherine*. No. Has he spoken?

*Steel*. Yes.

*Katherine*. Against?

*Steel*. Yes.

*Sir John*. What? After!

*Sir*, *John* stands rigid, then turns and marches straight out into the hall. At a sign from *Katherine*, *Hubert* follows him.

*Katherine*. Yes, Mr. Steel?

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*Steel*. [Still breathless and agitated] We were here—he slipped away from me somehow. He must have gone straight down to the House. I ran over, but when I got in under the Gallery he was speaking already. They expected something—I never heard it so still there. He gripped them from the first word—deadly—every syllable. It got some of those fellows. But all the time, under the silence you could feel a—sort of—of—-current going round. And then Sherratt—I think it was—began it, and you saw the anger rising in them; but he kept them down—his quietness! The feeling! I've never seen anything like it there.

Then there was a whisper all over the House that fighting had begun. And the whole thing broke out—regular riot—as if they could have killed him. Some one tried to drag him down by the coat-tails, but he shook him off, and went on. Then he stopped dead and walked out, and the noise dropped like a stone. The whole thing didn't last five minutes. It was fine, Mrs. More; like—like lava; he was the only cool person there. I wouldn't have missed it for anything—it was grand!

*More* has appeared on the terrace, behind *steel*.

*Katherine*. Good-night, Mr. Steel.

*Steel*. [Startled] Oh!—Good-night!

He goes out into the hall. *Katherine* picks up *olive's* shoes, and stands clasping them to her breast. *More* comes in.

*Katherine*. You've cleared your conscience, then! I didn't think you'd hurt me so.

*More* does not answer, still living in the scene he has gone through, and *Katherine* goes a little nearer to him.

*Katherine*. I'm with the country, heart and soul, Stephen. I warn you.

While they stand in silence, facing each other, the footman, *Henry*, enters from the hall.

*Footman*. These notes, sir, from the House of Commons.

*Katherine*. [Taking them] You can have the room directly.

[The *footman* goes out.]

*More*. Open them!

*Katherine* opens one after the other, and lets them fall on the table.

*More*. Well?

*Katherine*. What you might expect. Three of your best friends. It's begun.

*More*. 'Ware Mob! [He gives a laugh] I must write to the Chief.

*Katherine* makes an impulsive movement towards him; then quietly goes to the bureau, sits down and takes up a pen.

*Katherine*. Let me make the rough draft. [She waits] Yes?

*More*. [Dictating]

"July 15th.

"*Dear sir Charles*, After my speech to-night, embodying my most unalterable convictions [*Katherine* turns and looks up at him, but he is staring straight before him, and with a little movement of despair she goes on writing] I have no alternative but to place the resignation of my Under-Secretaryship in your hands. My view, my faith in this matter may be wrong—but I am surely right to keep the flag of my faith flying. I imagine I need not enlarge on the reasons——"

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*The curtain falls*.

## ACT. II

Before noon a few days later. The open windows of the dining-room let in the sunlight. On the table a number of newspapers are littered. *Helen* is sitting there, staring straight before her. A newspaper boy runs by outside calling out his wares. At the sound she gets up anti goes out on to the terrace. *Hubert* enters from the hall. He goes at once to the terrace, and draws *Helen* into the room.

Helen. Is it true—what they're shouting?

*Hubert*. Yes. Worse than we thought. They got our men all crumpled up in the Pass—-guns helpless. Ghastly beginning.

*Helen*. Oh, Hubert!

*Hubert*. My dearest girl!

*Helen* puts her face up to his. He kisses her. Then she turns quickly into the bay window. The door from the hall has been opened, and the footman, *Henry*, comes in, preceding *Wreford* and his sweetheart.

*Henry*. Just wait here, will you, while I let Mrs. More know. [Catching sight of *Hubert*] Beg pardon, sir!

*Hubert*. All right, Henry. [Off-hand] Ah! Wreford! [The *footman* withdraws] So you've brought her round. That's good! My sister'll look after her—don't you worry! Got everything packed? Three o'clock sharp.

*Wreford*. [A broad faced soldier, dressed in khaki with a certain look of dry humour, now dimmed-speaking with a West Country burr] That's right, zurr; all's ready.

> *Helen* has come out of the window, and is quietly looking at *Wreford* and the girl standing there so awkwardly.

*Helen*. [Quietly] Take care of him, Wreford.

*Hubert*. We'll take care of each other, won't we, Wreford?

*Helen*. How long have you been engaged?

*The girl*. [A pretty, indeterminate young woman] Six months. [She sobs suddenly.]

*Helen*. Ah! He'll soon be safe back.

*Wreford*. I'll owe 'em for this. [In a lacy voice to her] Don't 'ee now! Don't 'ee!

*Helen*. No! Don't cry, please!

She stands struggling with her own lips, then goes out on to the terrace, *Hubert* following. *Wreford* and his girl remain where they were, strange and awkward, she muffling her sobs.

*Wreford*. Don't 'ee go on like that, Nance; I'll 'ave to take you 'ome. That's silly, now we've a-come. I might be dead and buried by the fuss you're makin'. You've a-drove the lady away. See!

She regains control of herself as the door is opened and *Katherine* appears, accompanied by *Olive*, who regards *Wreford* with awe and curiosity, and by *nurse*, whose eyes are red, but whose manner is composed.

*Katherine*. My brother told me; so glad you've brought her.

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*Wreford*. Ye—as, M'. She feels me goin', a bit.

*Katherine*. Yes, yes! Still, it's for the country, isn't it?

*The girl*. That's what Wreford keeps tellin' me. He've got to go—so it's no use upsettin' 'im. And of course I keep tellin' him I shall be all right.

*Nurse*. [Whose eyes never leave her son's face] And so you will.

*The girl*. Wreford thought it'd comfort him to know you were interested in me. 'E's so 'ot-headed I'm sure somethin'll come to 'im.

*Katherine*. We've all got some one going. Are you coming to the docks? We must send them off in good spirits, you know.

*Olive*. Perhaps he'll get a medal.

*Katherine*. Olive!

*Nurse*. You wouldn't like for him to be hanging back, one of them anti-patriot, stop-the-war ones.

*Katherine*. [Quickly] Let me see—I have your address. [Holding out her hand to *Wreford*] We'll look after her.

*Olive*. [In a loud whisper] Shall I lend him my toffee?

*Katherine*. If you like, dear. [To *Wreford*] Now take care of my brother and yourself, and we'll take care of her.

*Wreford*. Ye—as, M'.

He then looks rather wretchedly at his girl, as if the interview had not done so much for him as he had hoped. She drops a little curtsey. *Wreford* salutes.

*Olive*. [Who has taken from the bureau a packet, places it in his hand] It's very nourishing!

*Wreford*. Thank you, miss.

Then, nudging each other, and entangled in their feelings and the conventions, they pass out, shepherded by *nurse*.

*Katherine*. Poor things!

*Olive*. What is an anti-patriot, stop-the-war one, Mummy?

*Katherine*. [Taking up a newspaper] Just a stupid name, dear—don't chatter!

*Olive*. But tell me just one weeny thing!

*Katherine*. Well?

*Olive*. Is Daddy one?

*Katherine*. Olive! How much do you know about this war?

*Olive*. They won't obey us properly. So we have to beat them, and take away their country. We shall, shan't we?

*Katherine*. Yes. But Daddy doesn't want us to; he doesn't think it fair, and he's been saying so. People are very angry with him.

*Olive*. Why isn't it fair? I suppose we're littler than them.

*Katherine*. No.

*Olive*. Oh! in history we always are. And we always win. That's why I like history. Which are you for, Mummy—us or them?

*Katherine*. Us.

*Olive*. Then I shall have to be. It's a pity we're not on the same side as Daddy. [*Katherine* shudders] Will they hurt him for not taking our side?

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*Katherine*. I expect they will, Olive.

*Olive*. Then we shall have to be extra nice to him.

*Katherine*. If we can.

*Olive*. I can; I feel like it.

*Helen* and *Hubert* have returned along the terrace. Seeing *Katherine* and the child, *Helen* passes on, but *Hubert* comes in at the French window.

*Olive*. [Catching sight of him-softly] Is Uncle Hubert going to the front to-day? [*Katherine* nods] But not grandfather?

*Katherine*. No, dear.

*Olive*. That's lucky for them, isn't it?

*Hubert* comes in. The presence of the child give him self-control.

*Hubert*. Well, old girl, it's good-bye. [To *Olive*] What shall I bring you back, chick?

*Olive*. Are there shops at the front? I thought it was dangerous.

*Hubert*. Not a bit.

*Olive*. [Disillusioned] Oh!

*Katherine*. Now, darling, give Uncle a good hug.

[Under cover of OLIVE's hug, *Katherine* repairs her courage.]

*Katherine*. The Dad and I'll be with you all in spirit. Good-bye, old boy!

They do not dare to kiss, and *Hubert* goes out very stiff and straight, in the doorway passing *steel*, of whom he takes no notice. *Steel* hesitates, and would go away.

*Katherine*. Come in, Mr. Steel.

*Steel*. The deputation from Toulmin ought to be here, Mrs. More. It's twelve.

*Olive*. [Having made a little ball of newspaper-slyly] Mr. Steel, catch!

[She throws, and *steel* catches it in silence.]

*Katherine*. Go upstairs, won't you, darling?

*Olive*. Mayn't I read in the window, Mummy? Then I shall see if any soldiers pass.

*Katherine*. No. You can go out on the terrace a little, and then you must go up.

[*Olive* goes reluctantly out on to the terrace.]

*Steel*. Awful news this morning of that Pass! And have you seen these? [Reading from the newspaper] "We will have no truck with the jargon of the degenerate who vilifies his country at such a moment. The Member for Toulmin has earned for himself the contempt of all virile patriots." [He takes up a second journal] "There is a certain type of public man who, even at his own expense, cannot resist the itch to advertise himself. We would, at moments of national crisis, muzzle such persons, as we muzzle dogs that we suspect of incipient rabies . . . ." They're in full cry after him!

*Katherine*. I mind much more all the creatures who are always flinging mud at the country making him their hero suddenly! You know what's in his mind?

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*Steel*. Oh! We must get him to give up that idea of lecturing everywhere against the war, Mrs. More; we simply must.

*Katherine*. [Listening] The deputation's come. Go and fetch him, Mr. Steel. He'll be in his room, at the House.

[*Steel* goes out, and *Katherine* Stands at bay. In a moment he opens the door again, to usher in the deputation; then retires. The four gentlemen have entered as if conscious of grave issues. The first and most picturesque is *James home*, a thin, tall, grey-bearded man, with plentiful hair, contradictious eyebrows, and the half-shy, half-bold manners, alternately rude and over polite, of one not accustomed to Society, yet secretly much taken with himself. He is dressed in rough tweeds, with a red silk tie slung through a ring, and is closely followed by *mark wace*, a waxy, round-faced man of middle-age, with sleek dark hair, traces of whisker, and a smooth way of continually rubbing his hands together, as if selling something to an esteemed customer. He is rather stout, wears dark clothes, with a large gold chain. Following him comes *Charles Shelder*, a lawyer of fifty, with a bald egg-shaped head, and gold pince-nez. He has little side whiskers, a leathery, yellowish skin, a rather kind but watchful and dubious face, and when he speaks seems to have a plum in his mouth, which arises from the preponderance of his shaven upper lip. Last of the deputation comes *William Banning*, an energetic-looking, square-shouldered, self-made country-man, between fifty and sixty, with grey moustaches, ruddy face, and lively brown eyes.]

*Katherine*. How do you do, Mr. Home?

*Home*. [Bowing rather extravagantly over her hand, as if to show his independence of women's influence] Mrs. More! We hardly expected— This is an honour.

*Wace*. How do you do, Ma'am?

*Katherine*. And you, Mr. Wace?

*Wace*. Thank you, Ma'am, well indeed!

*Shelder*. How d'you do, Mrs. More?

*Katherine*. Very well, thank you, Mr. Shelder.

*Banning*. [Speaking with a rather broad country accent] This is but a poor occasion, Ma'am.

*Katherine*. Yes, Mr. Banning. Do sit down, gentlemen.

Seeing that they will not settle down while she is standing, she sits at the table. They gradually take their seats. Each member of the deputation in his own way is severely

hanging back from any mention of the subject in hand; and *Katherine* as intent on drawing them to it.

*Katherine*. My husband will be here in two minutes. He's only over at the House.

*Shelder*. [Who is of higher standing and education than the others] Charming position —this, Mrs. More! So near the—er—Centre of— Gravity um?

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*Katherine*. I read the account of your second meeting at Toulmin.

*Banning*. It's bad, Mrs. More—bad. There's no disguising it. That speech was moon-summer madness—Ah! it was! Take a lot of explaining away. Why did you let him, now? Why did you? Not your views, I'm sure!

[He looks at her, but for answer she only compresses her lips.]

*Banning*. I tell you what hit me—what's hit the whole constituency— and that's his knowing we were over the frontier, fighting already, when he made it.

*Katherine*. What difference does it make if he did know?

*Home*. Hitting below the belt—I should have thought—you'll pardon me!

*Banning*. Till war's begun, Mrs. More, you're entitled to say what you like, no doubt—-but after! That's going against your country. Ah! his speech was strong, you know—his speech was strong.

*Katherine*. He had made up his mind to speak. It was just an accident the news coming then.

[A silence.]

*Banning*. Well, that's true, I suppose. What we really want is to make sure he won't break out again.

*Home*. Very high-minded, his views of course—but, some consideration for the common herd. You'll pardon me!

*Shelder*. We've come with the friendliest feelings, Mrs. More—but, you know, it won't do, this sort of thing!

*Wace*. We shall be able to smooth him down. Oh! surely.

*Banning*. We'd be best perhaps not to mention about his knowing that fighting had begun.

[As he speaks, *more* enters through the French windows. They all rise.]

*More*. Good-morning, gentlemen.

[He comes down to the table, but does not offer to shake hands.]

*Banning*. Well, Mr. More? You've made a woeful mistake, sir; I tell you to your face.

*More*. As everybody else does, Banning. Sit down again, please.

[They gradually resume their seats, and *more* sits in KATHERINE's chair. She alone remains standing leaning against the corner of the bay window, watching their faces.]

*Banning*. You've seen the morning's telegrams? I tell you, Mr. More—another reverse like that, and the flood will sweep you clean away. And I'll not blame it. It's only flesh and blood.

*More*, Allow for the flesh and blood in me, too, please. When I spoke the other night it was not without a certain feeling here. [He touches his heart.]

*Banning*. But your attitude's so sudden—you'd not been going that length when you were down with us in May.

*More*. Do me the justice to remember that even then I was against our policy. It cost me three weeks' hard struggle to make up my mind to that speech. One comes slowly to these things, Banning.

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*Shelder*. Case of conscience?

*More*. Such things have happened, Shelder, even in politics.

*Shelder*. You see, our ideals are naturally low—how different from yours!

[*More* smiles.]

*Katherine*, who has drawn near her husband, moves back again, as if relieved at this gleam of geniality. *Wace* rubs his hands.

*Banning*. There's one thing you forget, sir. We send you to Parliament, representing us; but you couldn't find six men in the whole constituency that would have bidden you to make that speech.

*More*. I'm sorry; but I can't help my convictions, Banning.

*Shelder*. What was it the prophet was without in his own country?

*Banning*. Ah! but we're not funning, Mr. More. I've never known feeling run so high. The sentiment of both meetings was dead against you. We've had showers of letters to headquarters. Some from very good men—very warm friends of yours.

*Shelder*. Come now! It's not too late. Let's go back and tell them you won't do it again.

*More*. Muzzling order?

*Banning*. [Bluntly] That's about it.

*More*. Give up my principles to save my Parliamentary skin. Then, indeed, they might call me a degenerate! [He touches the newspapers on the table.]

*Katherine* makes an abrupt and painful movement, then remains as still as before, leaning against the corner of the window-seat.

*Banning*. Well, Well! I know. But we don't ask you to take your words back—we only want discretion in the future.

*More*. Conspiracy of silence! And have it said that a mob of newspapers have hounded me to it.

*Banning*. They won't say that of you.

*Shelder*. My dear More, aren't you rather dropping to our level? With your principles you ought not to care two straws what people say.

*More*. But I do. I can't betray the dignity and courage of public men. If popular opinion is to control the utterances of her politicians, then good-bye indeed to this country!

*Banning*. Come now! I won't say that your views weren't sound enough before the fighting began. I've never liked our policy out there. But our blood's being spilled; and that makes all the difference. I don't suppose they'd want me exactly, but I'd be ready to go myself. We'd all of us be ready. And we can't have the man that represents us talking wild, until we've licked these fellows. That's it in a nutshell.

*More*. I understand your feeling, Banning. I tender you my resignation. I can't and won't hold on where I'm not wanted.

*Banning*. No, no, no! Don't do that! [His accent broader and broader] You've 'ad your say, and there it is. Coom now! You've been our Member nine years, in rain and shine.

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*Shelder*. We want to keep you, More. Come! Give us your promise —that's a good man!

*More*. I don't make cheap promises. You ask too much.

[There is silence, and they all look at *more*.]

*Shelder*. There are very excellent reasons for the Government's policy.

*More*. There are always excellent reasons for having your way with the weak.

*Shelder*. My dear More, how can you get up any enthusiasm for those cattle-lifting ruffians?

*More*. Better lift cattle than lift freedom.

*Shelder*. Well, all we'll ask is that you shouldn't go about the country, saying so.

*More*. But that is just what I must do.

[Again they all look at *more* in consternation.]

*Home*. Not down our way, you'll pardon me.

*Wace*. Really—really, sir——

*Shelder*. The time of crusades is past, More.

*More*. Is it?

*Banning*. Ah! no, but we don't want to part with you, Mr. More. It's a bitter thing, this, after three elections. Look at the 'uman side of it! To speak ill of your country when there's been a disaster like this terrible business in the Pass. There's your own wife. I see her brother's regiment's to start this very afternoon. Come now—how must she feel?

*More* breaks away to the bay window. The *deputation* exchange glances.

*More*. [Turning] To try to muzzle me like this—is going too far.

*Banning*. We just want to put you out of temptation.

*More*. I've held my seat with you in all weathers for nine years. You've all been bricks to me. My heart's in my work, Banning; I'm not eager to undergo political eclipse at forty.

*Shelder*. Just so—we don't want to see you in that quandary.

*Banning*. It'd be no friendliness to give you a wrong impression of the state of feeling. Silence—till the bitterness is overpast; there's naught else for it, Mr. More, while you feel as you do. That tongue of yours! Come! You owe us something. You're a big man; it's the big view you ought to take.

*More*. I am trying to.

*Home*. And what precisely is your view—you'll pardon my asking?

*More*. [Turning on him] Mr. Home a great country such as ours—is trustee for the highest sentiments of mankind. Do these few outrages justify us in stealing the freedom of this little people?

*Banning*. Steal—their freedom! That's rather running before the hounds.

*More*. Ah, Banning! now we come to it. In your hearts you're none of you for that—-neither by force nor fraud. And yet you all know that we've gone in there to stay, as we've gone into other lands—as all we big Powers go into other lands, when they're little and weak. The Prime Minister's words the other night were these: "If we are forced to spend this blood and money now, we must never again be forced." What does that mean but swallowing this country?

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*Shelder*. Well, and quite frankly, it'd be no bad thing.

*Home*. We don't want their wretched country—we're forced.

*More*. We are not forced.

*Shelder*. My dear More, what is civilization but the logical, inevitable swallowing up of the lower by the higher types of man? And what else will it be here?

*More*. We shall not agree there, Shelder; and we might argue it all day. But the point is, not whether you or I are right—the point is: What is a man who holds a faith with all his heart to do? Please tell me.

[There is a silence.]

*Banning*. [Simply] I was just thinkin' of those poor fellows in the Pass.

*More*. I can see them, as well as you, Banning. But, imagine! Up in our own country—the Black Valley—twelve hundred foreign devils dead and dying—the crows busy over them—in our own country, our own valley—ours—ours—violated. Would you care about "the poor fellows" in that Pass?—Invading, stealing dogs! Kill them—kill them! You would, and I would, too!

The passion of those words touches and grips as no arguments could; and they are silent.

*More*. Well! What's the difference out there? I'm not so inhuman as not to want to see this disaster in the Pass wiped out. But once that's done, in spite of my affection for you; my ambitions, and they're not few; [Very low] in spite of my own wife's feeling, I must be free to raise my voice against this war.

*Banning*. [Speaking slowly, consulting the others, as it were, with his eyes] Mr. More, there's no man I respect more than yourself. I can't tell what they'll say down there when we go back; but I, for one, don't feel it in me to take a hand in pressing you farther against your faith.

*Shelder*. We don't deny that—that you have a case of sorts.

*Wace*. No—surely.

*Shelder*. A—man should be free, I suppose, to hold his own opinions.

*More*. Thank you, Shelder.

*Banning*. Well! well! We must take you as you are; but it's a rare pity; there'll be a lot of trouble——

His eyes light on Honk who is leaning forward with hand raised to his ear, listening. Very faint, from far in the distance, there is heard a skirling sound. All become conscious of it, all listen.

*Home*. [Suddenly] Bagpipes!

The figure of *Olive* flies past the window, out on the terrace. *Katherine* turns, as if to follow her.

*Shelder*. Highlanders!

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[He rises. *Katherine* goes quickly out on to the terrace. One by one they all follow to the window. One by one go out on to the terrace, till *more* is left alone. He turns to the bay window. The music is swelling, coming nearer. *More* leaves the window—his face distorted by the strafe of his emotions. He paces the room, taking, in some sort, the rhythm of the march.]

[Slowly the music dies away in the distance to a drum-tap and the tramp of a company. *More* stops at the table, covering his eyes with his hands.]

[The *deputation* troop back across the terrace, and come in at the French windows. Their faces and manners have quite changed. *Katherine* follows them as far as the window.]

*Home*. [In a strange, almost threatening voice] It won't do, Mr. More. Give us your word, to hold your peace!

*Shelder*. Come! More.

*Wace*. Yes, indeed—indeed!

*Banning*. We must have it.

*More*. [Without lifting his head] I—I——

The drum-tap of a regiment marching is heard.

*Banning*. Can you hear that go by, man—when your country's just been struck?

Now comes the scale and mutter of a following crowd.

*More*. I give you——

Then, sharp and clear above all other sounds, the words: "Give the beggars hell, boys!" "Wipe your feet on their dirty country!" "Don't leave 'em a gory acre!" And a burst of hoarse cheering.

*More*. [Flinging up his head] That's reality! By Heaven! No!

*Katherine*. Oh!

*Shelder*. In that case, we'll go.

*Banning*. You mean it? You lose us, then!

[*More* bows.]

*Home*. Good riddance! [Venomously—his eyes darting between *more* and *Katherine*] Go and stump the country! Find out what they think of you! You'll pardon me!

One by one, without a word, only *Banning* looking back, they pass out into the hall. *More* sits down at the table before the pile of newspapers. *Katherine*, in the window, never moves. *Olive* comes along the terrace to her mother.

*Olive*. They were nice ones! Such a lot of dirty people following, and some quite clean, Mummy. [Conscious from her mother's face that something is very wrong, she looks at her father, and then steals up to his side] Uncle Hubert's gone, Daddy; and Auntie Helen's crying. And—look at Mummy!

[*More* raises his head and looks.]

*Olive*. Do be on our side! Do!

She rubs her cheek against his. Feeling that he does not rub his cheek against hers, *Olive* stands away, and looks from him to her mother in wonder.

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*The curtain falls*

## ACT III

### SCENE I

A cobble-stoned alley, without pavement, behind a suburban theatre. The tall, blind, dingy-yellowish wall of the building is plastered with the tattered remnants of old entertainment bills, and the words: "To Let," and with several torn, and one still virgin placard, containing this announcement: "Stop-the- War Meeting, October 1st. Addresses by *Stephen more*, Esq., and others." The alley is plentifully strewn with refuse and scraps of paper. Three stone steps, inset, lead to the stage door. It is a dark night, and a street lamp close to the wall throws all the light there is. A faint, confused murmur, as of distant hooting is heard. Suddenly a boy comes running, then two rough girls hurry past in the direction of the sound; and the alley is again deserted. The stage door opens, and a doorkeeper, poking his head out, looks up and down. He withdraws, but in a second reappears, preceding three black-coated gentlemen.

*Doorkeeper*. It's all clear. You can get away down here, gentlemen. Keep to the left, then sharp to the right, round the corner.

*The three*. [Dusting themselves, and settling their ties] Thanks, very much! Thanks!

*First black-coated gentleman*. Where's More? Isn't he coming?

They are joined by a fourth black-coated *gentleman*.

*Fourth black-coated gentleman*. Just behind. [*To* the *doorkeeper*] Thanks.

They hurry away. The *doorkeeper* retires. Another boy runs past. Then the door opens again. *Steel* and *more* come out.

*More* stands hesitating on the steps; then turns as if to go back.

*Steel*. Come along, sir, come!

*More*. It sticks in my gizzard, Steel.

*Steel*. [Running his arm through *More's*, and almost dragging him down the steps] You owe it to the theatre people. [*More* still hesitates] We might be penned in there another hour; you told Mrs. More half-past ten; it'll only make her anxious. And she hasn't seen you for six weeks.

*More*. All right; don't dislocate my arm.

They move down the steps, and away to the left, as a boy comes running down the alley. Sighting *more*, he stops dead, spins round, and crying shrilly: "'Ere 'e is! That's 'im! 'Ere 'e is!" he bolts back in the direction whence he came.

*Steel*. Quick, Sir, quick!

*More*. That is the end of the limit, as the foreign ambassador remarked.

*Steel*. [Pulling him back towards the door] Well! come inside again, anyway!

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A number of men and boys, and a few young girls, are trooping quickly from the left. A motley crew, out for excitement; loafers, artisans, navvies; girls, rough or dubious. All in the mood of hunters, and having tasted blood. They gather round the steps displaying the momentary irresolution and curiosity that follows on a new development of any chase. *More*, on the bottom step, turns and eyes them.

A *girl*. [At the edge] Which is 'im! The old 'un or the young?

[*More* turns, and mounts the remaining steps.]

*Tall youth*. [With lank black hair under a bowler hat] You blasted traitor!

*More* faces round at the volley of jeering that follows; the chorus of booing swells, then gradually dies, as if they realized that they were spoiling their own sport.

A *rough girl*. Don't frighten the poor feller!

[A girl beside her utters a shrill laugh.]

*Steel*. [Tugging at MORE's arm] Come along, sir.

*More*. [Shaking his arm free—to the crowd] Well, what do you want?

A *voice*. Speech.

*More*. Indeed! That's new.

*Rough voice*. [At the back of the crowd] Look at his white liver. You can see it in his face.

A *big Navy*. [In front] Shut it! Give 'im a chanst!

*Tall youth*. Silence for the blasted traitor?

A youth plays the concertina; there is laughter, then an abrupt silence.

*More*. You shall have it in a nutshell!

A SHOPBOY. [Flinging a walnut-shell which strikes *more* on the shoulder] Here y'are!

*More*. Go home, and think! If foreigners invaded us, wouldn't you be fighting tooth and nail like those tribesmen, out there?

*Tall youth*. Treacherous dogs! Why don't they come out in the open?

*More*. They fight the best way they can.

[A burst of hooting is led by a soldier in khaki on the outskirt.]

*More*. My friend there in khaki led that hooting. I've never said a word against our soldiers. It's the Government I condemn for putting them to this, and the Press for hounding on the Government, and all of you for being led by the nose to do what none of you would do, left to yourselves.

The *tall youth* leads a somewhat unspontaneous burst of execration.

*More*. I say not one of you would go for a weaker man.

*Voices in the crowd*.

*Rough voice*. Tork sense!

*Girl's voice*. He's gittin' at you!

*Tall youth's voice*. Shiny skunk!

A *navvy*. [Suddenly shouldering forward] Look 'ere, Mister! Don't you come gaflin' to those who've got mates out there, or it'll be the worse for you-you go 'ome!

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*Cockney voice*. And git your wife to put cottonwool in yer ears.

[A spurt of laughter.]

A *friendly voice*. [From the outskirts] Shame! there! Bravo, More! Keep it up!

[A scuffle drowns this cry.]

*More*. [With vehemence] Stop that! Stop that! You——!

*Tall youth*. Traitor!

*An artisan*. Who black-legged?

*Middle-aged man*. Ought to be shot-backin' his country's enemies!

*More*. Those tribesmen are defending their homes.

*Two voices*. Hear! hear!

[They are hustled into silence.]

*Tall youth*. Wind-bag!

*More*. [With sudden passion] Defending their homes! Not mobbing unarmed men!

[*Steel* again pulls at his arm.]

*Rough*. Shut it, or we'll do you in!

*More*. [Recovering his coolness] Ah! Do me in by all means! You'd deal such a blow at cowardly mobs as wouldn't be forgotten in your time.

*Steel*. For God's sake, sir!

*More*. [Shaking off his touch] Well!

There is an ugly rush, checked by the fall of the foremost figures, thrown too suddenly against the bottom step. The crowd recoils.

There is a momentary lull, and *more* stares steadily down at them.

*Cockney voice*. Don't 'e speak well! What eloquence!

Two or three nutshells and a piece of orange-peel strike *more* across the face. He takes no notice.

*Rough voice*. That's it! Give 'im some encouragement.

The jeering laughter is changed to anger by the contemptuous smile on *More's* face.

A *tall youth*. Traitor!

A *voice*. Don't stand there like a stuck pig.

A *rough*. Let's 'ave 'im dahn off that!

Under cover of the applause that greets this, he strikes *more* across the legs with a belt. *Steel* starts forward. *More*, flinging out his arm, turns him back, and resumes his tranquil staring at the crowd, in whom the sense of being foiled by this silence is fast turning to rage.

*The crowd*. Speak up, or get down! Get off! Get away, there—or we'll make you! Go on!

[*More* remains immovable.]

A *youth*. [In a lull of disconcertion] I'll make 'im speak! See!

He darts forward and spits, defiling *mores* hand. *More* jerks it up as if it had been stung, then stands as still as ever. A spurt of laughter dies into a shiver of repugnance at the action. The shame is fanned again to fury by the sight of *mores* scornful face.

*Tall youth*. [Out of murmuring] Shift! or you'll get it!

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A *voice*. Enough of your ugly mug!

A *rough*. Give ’im one!

Two flung stones strike *more*. He staggers and nearly falls, then rights himself.

A *girl’s voice*. Shame!

*Friendly voice*. Bravo, More! Stick to it!

A *rough*. Give ’im another!

A *voice*. No!

A *girl’s voice*. Let ’im alone! Come on, Billy, this ain’t no fun!

Still looking up at *more*, the whole crowd falls into an uneasy silence, broken only by the shuffling of feet. Then the *big navvy* in the front rank turns and elbows his way out to the edge of the crowd.

*The navvy*. Let ’im be!

With half-sullen and half-shamefaced acquiescence the crowd breaks up and drifts back whence it came, till the alley is nearly empty.

*More*. [As if coming to, out of a trance-wiping his hand and dusting his coat] Well, Steel!

And followed by *steel*, he descends the steps and moves away. Two policemen pass glancing up at the broken glass. One of them stops and makes a note.

*The curtain falls*.

## SCENE II

The window-end of *Katherine’s* bedroom, panelled in cream-coloured wood. The light from four candles is falling on *Katherine*, who is sitting before the silver mirror of an old oak dressing-table, brushing her hair. A door, on the left, stands ajar. An oak chair against the wall close to a recessed window is all the other furniture. Through this window the blue night is seen, where a mist is rolled out flat amongst trees, so that only dark clumps of boughs show here and there, beneath a moonlit sky. As the curtain rises, *Katherine*, with brush arrested, is listening. She begins again brushing her hair,

then stops, and taking a packet of letters from a drawer of her dressing-table, reads. Through the just open door behind her comes the voice of *Olive*.

*Olive*. Mummy! I'm awake!

But *Katherine* goes on reading; and *Olive* steals into the room in her nightgown.

*Olive*. [At *Katherine's* elbow—examining her watch on its stand] It's fourteen minutes to eleven.

*Katherine*. Olive, Olive!

*Olive*. I just wanted to see the time. I never can go to sleep if I try—it's quite helpless, you know. Is there a victory yet? [*Katherine*, shakes her head] Oh! I prayed extra special for one in the evening papers. [Straying round her mother] Hasn't Daddy come?

*Katherine*. Not yet.

*Olive*. Are you waiting for him? [Burying her face in her mother's hair] Your hair is nice, Mummy. It's particular to-night.

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*Katherine* lets fall her brush, and looks at her almost in alarm.

*Olive*. How long has Daddy been away?

*Katherine*. Six weeks.

*Olive*. It seems about a hundred years, doesn't it? Has he been making speeches all the time?

*Katherine*. Yes.

*Olive*. To-night, too?

*Katherine*. Yes.

*Olive*. The night that man was here whose head's too bald for anything—oh! Mummy, you know—the one who cleans his teeth so termendously—I heard Daddy making a speech to the wind. It broke a wine-glass. His speeches must be good ones, mustn't they!

*Katherine*. Very.

*Olive*. It felt funny; you couldn't see any wind, you know.

*Katherine*. Talking to the wind is an expression, Olive.

*Olive*. Does Daddy often?

*Katherine*. Yes, nowadays.

*Olive*. What does it mean?

*Katherine*. Speaking to people who won't listen.

*Olive*. What do they do, then?

*Katherine*. Just a few people go to hear him, and then a great crowd comes and breaks in; or they wait for him outside, and throw things, and hoot.

*Olive*. Poor Daddy! Is it people on our side who throw things?

*Katherine*. Yes, but only rough people.

*Olive*. Why does he go on doing it? I shouldn't.

*Katherine*. He thinks it is his duty.

*Olive*. To your neighbour, or only to God?

*Katherine*. To both.

*Olive*. Oh! Are those his letters?

*Katherine*. Yes.

*Olive*. [Reading from the letter] “My dear Heart.” Does he always call you his dear heart, Mummy? It’s rather jolly, isn’t it? “I shall be home about half-past ten to-morrow night. For a few hours the fires of p-u-r-g-a-t-or-y will cease to burn—” What are the fires of p-u-r-g-a-t-o-r-y?

*Katherine*. [Putting away the letters] Come, Olive!

*Olive*. But what are they?

*Katherine*. Daddy means that he’s been very unhappy.

*Olive*. Have you, too?

*Katherine*. Yes.

*Olive*. [Cheerfully] So have I. May I open the window?

*Katherine*. No; you’ll let the mist in.

*Olive*. Isn’t it a funny mist-all flat!

*Katherine*. Now, come along, frog!

*Olive*. [Making time] Mummy, when is Uncle Hubert coming back?

*Katherine*. We don’t know, dear.

*Olive*. I suppose Auntie Helen’ll stay with us till he does.

*Katherine*. Yes.

*Olive*. That’s something, isn’t it?

*Katherine*. [Picking her up] Now then!

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*Olive*. [Deliciously limp] Had I better put in the duty to your neighbour if there isn't a victory soon? [As they pass through the door] You're tickling under my knee! [Little gurgles of pleasure follow. Then silence. Then a drowsy voice] I must keep awake for Daddy.

*Katherine* comes back. She is about to leave the door a little open, when she hears a knock on the other door. It is opened a few inches, and *nurse's* voice says: "Can I come in, Ma'am?" The *nurse* comes in.

*Katherine*. [Shutting OLIVE's door, and going up to her] What is it, Nurse?

*Nurse*. [Speaking in a low voice] I've been meaning to—I'll never do it in the daytime. I'm giving you notice.

*Katherine*. Nurse! You too!

She looks towards *olive's* room with dismay. The *nurse* smudges a slow tear away from her cheek.

*Nurse*. I want to go right away at once.

*Katherine*. Leave Olive! That is the sins of the fathers with a vengeance.

*Nurse*. I've had another letter from my son. No, Miss Katherine, while the master goes on upholdin' these murderin' outlandish creatures, I can't live in this house, not now he's coming back.

*Katherine*. But, Nurse——!

*Nurse*. It's not like them [With an ineffable gesture] downstairs, because I'm frightened of the mob, or of the window's bein' broke again, or mind what the boys in the street say. I should think not— no! It's my heart. I'm sore night and day thinkin' of my son, and him lying out there at night without a rag of dry clothing, and water that the bullocks won't drink, and maggots in the meat; and every day one of his friends laid out stark and cold, and one day—'imself perhaps. If anything were to 'appen to him. I'd never forgive meself—here. Ah! Miss Katherine, I wonder how you bear it—bad news comin' every day—And Sir John's face so sad—And all the time the master speaking against us, as it might be Jonah 'imself.

*Katherine*. But, Nurse, how can you leave us, you?

*Nurse*. [Smudging at her cheeks] There's that tells me it's encouragin' something to happen, if I stay here; and Mr. More coming back to-night. You can't serve God and Mammon, the Bible says.

*Katherine*. Don't you know what it's costing him?

*Nurse*. Ah! Cost him his seat, and his reputation; and more than that it'll cost him, to go against the country.

*Katherine*. He's following his conscience.

*Nurse*. And others must follow theirs, too. No, Miss Katherine, for you to let him—you, with your three brothers out there, and your father fair wasting away with grief. Sufferin' too as you've been these three months past. What'll you feel if anything happens to my three young gentlemen out there, to my dear Mr. Hubert that I nursed myself, when your precious mother couldn't? What would she have said —with you in the camp of his enemies?

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*Katherine*. Nurse, Nurse!

*Nurse*. In my paper they say he's encouraging these heathens and makin' the foreigners talk about us; and every day longer the war lasts, there's our blood on this house.

*Katherine*. [Turning away] Nurse, I can't—I won't listen.

*Nurse*. [Looking at her intently] Ah! You'll move him to leave off! I see your heart, my dear. But if you don't, then go I must!

She nods her head gravely, goes to the door of *olive's* room, opens it gently, stands looking for a-moment, then with the words "My Lamb!" she goes in noiselessly and closes the door.

*Katherine* turns back to her glass, puts back her hair, and smooths her lips and eyes. The door from the corridor is opened, and HELEN's voice says: "Kit! You're not in bed?"

*Katherine*. No.

*Helen* too is in a wrapper, with a piece of lace thrown over her head. Her face is scared and miserable, and she runs into KATHERINE's arms.

*Katherine*. My dear, what is it?

*Helen*. I've seen—a vision!

*Katherine*. Hssh! You'll wake Olive!

*Helen*. [Staring before her] I'd just fallen asleep, and I saw a plain that seemed to run into the sky—like—that fog. And on it there were—dark things. One grew into a body without a head, and a gun by its side. And one was a man sitting huddled up, nursing a wounded leg. He had the face of Hubert's servant, Wreford. And then I saw—Hubert. His face was all dark and thin; and he had—a wound, an awful wound here [She touches her breast]. The blood was running from it, and he kept trying to stop it—oh! Kit—by kissing it [She pauses, stifled by emotion]. Then I heard Wreford laugh, and say vultures didn't touch live bodies. And there came a voice, from somewhere, calling out: "Oh! God! I'm dying!" And Wreford began to swear at it, and I heard Hubert say: "Don't, Wreford; let the poor fellow be!" But the voice went on and on, moaning and crying out: "I'll lie here all night dying—and then I'll die!" And Wreford dragged himself along the ground; his face all devilish, like a man who's going to kill.

*Katherine*. My dear! *How* ghastly!

*Helen*. Still that voice went on, and I saw Wreford take up the dead man's gun. Then Hubert got upon his feet, and went tottering along, so feebly, so dreadfully—but before he could reach and stop him, Wreford fired at the man who was crying. And Hubert called out: "You brute!" and fell right down. And when Wreford saw him lying there, he began to moan and sob, but Hubert never stirred. Then it all got black again—and I could see a dark woman—thing creeping, first to the man without a head; then to Wreford; then to Hubert, and it touched him, and sprang away. And it cried out: "A-ai-ah!" [Pointing out at the mist] Look! Out there! The dark things!

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*Katherine*. [Putting her arms round her] Yes, dear, yes! You must have been looking at the mist.

*Helen*. [Strangely calm] He's dead!

*Katherine*. It was only a dream.

*Helen*. You didn't hear that cry. [She listens] That's Stephen. Forgive me, Kit; I oughtn't to have upset you, but I couldn't help coming.

She goes out, *Katherine*, into whom her emotion seems to have passed, turns feverishly to the window, throws it open and leans out. *More* comes in.

*More*. Kit!

Catching sight of her figure in the window, he goes quickly to her.

*Katherine*. Ah! [She has mastered her emotion.]

*More*. Let me look at you!

He draws her from the window to the candle-light, and looks long at her.

*More*. What have you done to your hair?

*Katherine*. Nothing.

*More*. It's wonderful to-night.

[He takes it greedily and buries his face in it.]

*Katherine*. [Drawing her hair away] Well?

*More*. At last!

*Katherine*. [Pointing to OLIVE's room] Hssh!

*More*. How is she?

*Katherine*. All right.

*More*. And you?

[*Katherine* shrugs her shoulders.]

*More*. Six weeks!

*Katherine*. Why have you come?

*More*. Why!

*Katherine*. You begin again the day after tomorrow. Was it worth while?

*More*. Kit!

*Katherine*. It makes it harder for me, that's all.

*More*. [Staring at her] What's come to you?

*Katherine*. Six weeks is a long time to sit and read about your meetings.

*More*. Put that away to-night. [He touches her] This is what travellers feel when they come out of the desert to-water.

*Katherine*. [Suddenly noticing the cut on his forehead] Your forehead! It's cut.

*More*. It's nothing.

*Katherine*. Oh! Let me bathe it!

*More*. No, dear! It's all right.

*Katherine*. [Turning away] Helen has just been telling me a dream she's had of Hubert's death.

*More*. Poor child!

*Katherine*. Dream bad dreams, and wait, and hide oneself—there's been nothing else to do. Nothing, Stephen—nothing!

*More*. Hide? Because of me?

[*Katherine* nods.]

*More*. [With a movement of distress] I see. I thought from your letters you were coming to feel——. Kit! You look so lovely!

[Suddenly he sees that she is crying, and goes quickly to her.]

*More*. My dear, don't cry! God knows I don't want to make things worse for you. I'll go away.

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She draws away from him a little, and after looking long at her, he sits down at the dressing-table and begins turning over the brushes and articles of toilet, trying to find words.

*More*. Never look forward. After the time I've had—I thought— tonight—it would be summer—I thought it would be you—and everything!

While he is speaking *Katherine* has stolen closer. She suddenly drops on her knees by his side and wraps his hand in her hair. He turns and clasps her.

*More*. Kit!

*Katherine*. Ah! yes! But-to-morrow it begins again. Oh! Stephen! How long—how long am I to be torn in two? [Drawing back in his arms] I can't—can't bear it.

*More*. My darling!

*Katherine*. Give it up! For my sake! Give it up! [Pressing closer to him] It shall be me—and everything——

*More*. God!

*Katherine*. It shall be—if—if——

*More*. [Aghast] You're not making terms? Bargaining? For God's sake, Kit!

*Katherine*. For God's sake, Stephen!

*More*. You!—of all people—you!

*Katherine*. Stephen!

[For a moment *more* yields utterly, then shrinks back.]

*More*. A bargain! It's selling my soul!

He struggles out of her arms, gets up, and stands without speaking, staring at her, and wiping the sweat from his forehead. *Katherine* remains some seconds on her knees, gazing up at him, not realizing. Then her head droops; she too gets up and stands apart, with her wrapper drawn close round her. It is as if a cold and deadly shame had come to them both. Quite suddenly *more* turns, and, without looking back, feebly makes his way out of the room. When he is gone *Katherine* drops on her knees and remains there motionless, huddled in her hair.

*Thecurtain falls*

# ACT IV

It is between lights, the following day, in the dining-room of MORE's house. The windows are closed, but curtains are not drawn. *Steel* is seated at the bureau, writing a letter from MORE's dictation.

Steel. [Reading over the letter] "No doubt we shall have trouble. But, if the town authorities at the last minute forbid the use of the hall, we'll hold the meeting in the open. Let bills be got out, and an audience will collect in any case."

*More*. They will.

*Steel*. "Yours truly"; I've signed for you.

[*More* nods.]

*Steel*. [Blotting and enveloping the letter] You know the servants have all given notice—-except Henry.

*More*. Poor Henry!

*Steel*. It's partly nerves, of course—the windows have been broken twice—but it's partly ——

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*More*. Patriotism. Quite! they'll do the next smashing themselves. That reminds me—-to-morrow you begin holiday, Steel.

*Steel*. Oh, no!

*More*. My dear fellow—yes. Last night ended your sulphur cure.
Truly sorry ever to have let you in for it.

*Steel*. Some one must do the work. You're half dead as it is.

*More*. There's lots of kick in me.

*Steel*. Give it up, sir. The odds are too great. It isn't worth it.

*More*. To fight to a finish; knowing you must be beaten—is anything better worth it?

*Steel*. Well, then, I'm not going.

*More*. This is my private hell, Steel; you don't roast in it any longer. Believe me, it's a great comfort to hurt no one but yourself.

*Steel*. I can't leave you, sir.

*More*. My dear boy, you're a brick—but we've got off by a miracle so far, and I can't have the responsibility of you any longer. Hand me over that correspondence about to-morrow's meeting.

*Steel* takes some papers from his pocket, but does not hand them.

*More*. Come! [He stretches out his hand for the papers. As *steel* still draws back, he says more sharply] Give them to me, Steel! [*Steel* hands them over] Now, that ends it, d'you see?

They stand looking at each other; then *steel*, very much upset, turns and goes out of the room. *More*, who has watched him with a sorry smile, puts the papers into a dispatch-case. As he is closing the bureau, the footman *Henry* enters, announcing: "Mr. Mendip, sir." *Mendip* comes in, and the *footman* withdraws. *More* turns to his visitor, but does not hold out his hand.

*Mendip*. [Taking *More's* hand] Give me credit for a little philosophy, my friend. Mrs. More told me you'd be back to-day. Have you heard?

*More*. What?

*Mendip*. There's been a victory.

*More*. Thank God!

*Mendip*. Ah! So you actually are flesh and blood.

*More*. Yes!

*Mendip*. Take off the martyr's shirt, Stephen. You're only flouting human nature.

*More*. So—even you defend the mob!

*Mendip*. My dear fellow, you're up against the strongest common instinct in the world. What do you expect? That the man in the street should be a Quixote? That his love of country should express itself in philosophic altruism? What on earth do you expect? Men are very simple creatures; and Mob is just conglomerate essence of simple men.

*More*. Conglomerate excrescence. Mud of street and market-place gathered in a torrent—This blind howling "patriotism"—what each man feels in here? [He touches his breast] No!

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*Mendip*. You think men go beyond instinct—they don't. All they know is that something's hurting that image of themselves that they call country. They just feel something big and religious, and go it blind.

*More*. This used to be the country of free speech. It used to be the country where a man was expected to hold to his faith.

*Mendip*. There are limits to human nature, Stephen.

*More*. Let no man stand to his guns in face of popular attack. Still your advice, is it?

*Mendip*. My advice is: Get out of town at once. The torrent you speak of will be let loose the moment this news is out. Come, my dear fellow, don't stay here!

*More*. Thanks! I'll see that Katherine and Olive go.

*Mendip*. Go with them! If your cause is lost, that's no reason why you should be.

*More*. There's the comfort of not running away. And—I want comfort.

*Mendip*. This is bad, Stephen; bad, foolish—foolish. Well! I'm going to the House. This way?

*More*. Down the steps, and through the gate. Good-bye?

*Katherine* has come in followed by *nurse*, hatted and cloaked, with a small bag in her hand. *Katherine* takes from the bureau a cheque which she hands to the *nurse*. *More* comes in from the terrace.

*More*. You're wise to go, Nurse.

*Nurse*. You've treated my poor dear badly, sir. Where's your heart?

*More*. In full use.

*Nurse*. On those heathens. Don't your own hearth and home come first? Your wife, that was born in time of war, with her own father fighting, and her grandfather killed for his country. A bitter thing, to have the windows of her house broken, and be pointed at by the boys in the street.

[*More* stands silent under this attack, looking at his wife.]

*Katherine*. Nurse!

*Nurse*. It's unnatural, sir—what you're doing! To think more of those savages than of your own wife! Look at her! Did you ever see her look like that? Take care, sir, before it's too late!

*More*. Enough, please!

*Nurse* stands for a moment doubtful; looks long at *Katherine*; then goes.

*More*. [Quietly] There has been a victory.

[He goes out. *Katherine* is breathing fast, listening to the distant hum and stir rising in the street. She runs to the window as the footman, *Henry*, entering, says: "Sir John Julian, Ma'am!" *Sir John* comes in, a newspaper in his hand.]

*Katherine*. At last! A victory!

*Sir John*. Thank God! [He hands her the paper.]

*Katherine*. Oh, Dad!

[She tears the paper open, and feverishly reads.]

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*Katherine*. At last!

The distant hum in the street is rising steadily. But *sir John*, after the one exultant moment when he handed her the paper, stares dumbly at the floor.

*Katherine*. [Suddenly conscious of his gravity] Father!

*Sir John*. There is other news.

*Katherine*. One of the boys? Hubert?

[*Sir John* bows his head.]

*Katherine*. Killed?

[*Sir John* again bows his head.]

*Katherine*. The dream! [She covers her face] Poor Helen!

They stand for a few seconds silent, then *sir John* raises his head, and putting up a hand, touches her wet cheek.

*Sir John*. [Huskily] Whom the gods love——

*Katherine*. Hubert!

*Sir John*. And hulks like me go on living!

*Katherine*. Dear Dad!

*Sir John*. But we shall drive the ruffians now! We shall break them. Stephen back?

*Katherine*. Last night.

*Sir John*. Has he finished his blasphemous speech-making at last? [*Katherine* shakes her head] Not?

[Then, seeing that *Katherine* is quivering with emotion, he strokes her hand.]

*Sir John*. My dear! Death is in many houses!

*Katherine*. I must go to Helen. Tell Stephen, Father. I can't.

*Sir John*. If you wish, child.

[She goes out, leaving *sir John* to his grave, puzzled grief, and in a few seconds *more* comes in.]

*More*. Yes, Sir John. You wanted me?

*Sir John*. Hubert is killed.

*More*. Hubert!

*Sir John*. By these—whom you uphold. Katherine asked me to let you know. She's gone to Helen. I understand you only came back last night from your——No word I can use would give what I feel about that. I don't know how things stand now between you and Katherine; but I tell you this, Stephen: you've tried her these last two months beyond what any woman ought to bear!

[*More* makes a gesture of pain.]

*Sir John*. When you chose your course——

*More*. Chose!

*Sir John*. You placed yourself in opposition to every feeling in her.
You knew this might come. It may come again with another of my sons.

*More*. I would willingly change places with any one of them.

*Sir John*. Yes—I can believe in your unhappiness. I cannot conceive of greater misery than to be arrayed against your country. If I could have Hubert back, I would not have him at such a price—no, nor all my sons. 'Pro patri mori'—My boy, at all events, is happy!

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*More*. Yes!

*Sir John*. Yet you can go on doing what you are! What devil of pride has got into you, Stephen?

*More*. Do you imagine I think myself better than the humblest private fighting out there? Not for a minute.

*Sir John*. I don't understand you. I always thought you devoted to Katherine.

*More*. Sir John, you believe that country comes before wife and child?

*Sir John*. I do.

*More*. So do I.

*Sir John*. [Bewildered] Whatever my country does or leaves undone, I no more presume to judge her than I presume to judge my God. [With all the exaltation of the suffering he has undergone for her] My country!

*More*. I would give all I have—for that creed.

*Sir John*. [Puzzled] Stephen, I've never looked on you as a crank;
I always believed you sane and honest. But this is—visionary mania.

*More*. Vision of what might be.

*Sir John*. Why can't you be content with what the grandest nation— the grandest men on earth—have found good enough for them? I've known them, I've seen what they could suffer, for our country.

*More*. Sir John, imagine what the last two months have been to me! To see people turn away in the street—old friends pass me as if I were a wall! To dread the post! To go to bed every night with the sound of hooting in my ears! To know that my name is never referred to without contempt——

*Sir John*. You have your new friends. Plenty of them, I understand.

*More*. Does that make up for being spat at as I was last night? Your battles are fool's play to it.

The stir and rustle of the crowd in the street grows louder.
*Sir John* turns his head towards it.

*Sir John*. You've heard there's been a victory. Do you carry your unnatural feeling so far as to be sorry for that? [*More* shakes his head] That's something! For God's sake, Stephen, stop before it's gone past mending. Don't ruin your life with Katherine. Hubert was her favourite brother; you are backing those who killed him. Think what that means to her! Drop this—mad Quixotism—idealism—whatever you call it. Take Katherine away. Leave the country till the thing's over—this country of yours that you're opposing, and—and— traducing. Take her away! Come! What good are you doing? What earthly good? Come, my boy! Before you're utterly undone.

*More*. Sir John! Our men are dying out there for, the faith that's in them! I believe my faith the higher, the better for mankind—Am I to slink away? Since I began this campaign I've found hundreds who've thanked me for taking this stand. They look on me now as their leader. Am I to desert them? When you led your forlorn hope— did you ask yourself what good you were doing, or, whether you'd come through alive? It's my forlorn hope not to betray those who are following me; and not to help let die a fire —a fire that's sacred— not only now in this country, but in all countries, for all time.

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*Sir John*. [After a long stare] I give you credit for believing what you say. But let me tell you whatever that fire you talk of—I'm too old-fashioned to grasp—one fire you are letting die—your wife's love. By God! This crew of your new friends, this crew of cranks and jays, if they can make up to you for the loss of her love—of your career, of all those who used to like and respect you—so much the better for you. But if you find yourself bankrupt of affection— alone as the last man on earth; if this business ends in your utter ruin and destruction—as it must—I shall not pity—I cannot pity you. Good-night!

He marches to the door, opens it, and goes out. *More* is left standing perfectly still. The stir and murmur of the street is growing all the time, and slowly forces itself on his consciousness. He goes to the bay window and looks out; then rings the bell. It is not answered, and, after turning up the lights, he rings again. *Katherine* comes in. She is wearing a black hat, and black outdoor coat. She speaks coldly without looking up.

*Katherine*. You rang!

*More*. For them to shut this room up.

*Katherine*. The servants have gone out. They're afraid of the house being set on fire.

*More*. I see.

*Katherine*. They have not your ideals to sustain them. [*More* winces]
I am going with Helen and Olive to Father's.

*More*. [Trying to take in the exact sense of her words] Good! You prefer that to an hotel? [*Katherine* nods. Gently] Will you let me say, Kit, how terribly I feel for you—-Hubert's——

*Katherine*. Don't. I ought to have made what I meant plainer. I am not coming back.

*More*. Not? Not while the house——

*Katherine*. Not—at all.

*More*. Kit!

*Katherine*. I warned you from the first. You've gone too far!

*More*. [Terribly moved] Do you understand what this means? After ten years—and all—-our love!

*Katherine*. Was it love? How could you ever have loved one so unheroic as myself!

*More*. This is madness, Kit—Kit!

*Katherine*. Last night I was ready. You couldn't. If you couldn't then, you never can. You are very exalted, Stephen. I don't like living—I won't live, with one whose equal I am not. This has been coming ever since you made that speech. I told you that night what the end would be.

*More*. [Trying to put his arms round her] Don't be so terribly cruel!

*Katherine*. No! Let's have the truth! People so wide apart don't love! Let me go!

*More*. In God's name, how can I help the difference in our faiths?

*Katherine*. Last night you used the word—bargain. Quite right. I meant to buy you. I meant to kill your faith. You showed me what I was doing. I don't like to be shown up as a driver of bargains, Stephen.

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*More*. God knows—I never meant——

*Katherine*. If I'm not yours in spirit—I don't choose to be your— mistress.

*More*, as if lashed by a whip, has thrown up his hands in an attitude of defence.

*Katherine*. Yes, that's cruel! It shows the heights you live on. I won't drag you down.

*More*. For God's sake, put your pride away, and see! I'm fighting for the faith that's in me. What else can a man do? What else? Ah! Kit! Do see!

*Katherine*. I'm strangled here! Doing nothing—sitting silent—when my brothers are fighting, and being killed. I shall try to go out nursing. Helen will come with me. I have my faith, too; my poor common love of country. I can't stay here with you. I spent last night on the floor—thinking—and I know!

*More*. And Olive?

*Katherine*. I shall leave her at Father's, with Nurse; unless you forbid me to take her. You can.

*More*. [Icily] That I shall not do—you know very well. You are free to go, and to take her.

*Katherine*. [Very low] Thank you! [Suddenly she turns to him, and draws his eyes on her. Without a sound, she puts her whole strength into that look] Stephen! Give it up! Come down to me!

The festive sounds from the street grow louder. There can be heard the blowing of whistles, and bladders, and all the sounds of joy.

*More*. And drown in—that?

*Katherine* turns swiftly to the door. There she stands and again looks at him. Her face is mysterious, from the conflicting currents of her emotions.

*More*. So—you're going?

*Katherine*. [In a whisper] Yes.

She bends her head, opens the door, and goes. *More* starts forward as if to follow her, but *Olive* has appeared in the doorway. She has on a straight little white coat and a round white cap.

*Olive*. Aren't you coming with us, Daddy?

[*More* shakes his head.]

*Olive*. Why not?

*More*. Never mind, my dicky bird.

*Olive*. The motor'll have to go very slow. There are such a lot of people in the street. Are you staying to stop them setting the house on fire? [*More* nods] May I stay a little, too? [*More* shakes his head] Why?

*More*. [Putting his hand on her head] Go along, my pretty!

*Olive*. Oh! love me up, Daddy!

[*More* takes and loves her up]

*Olive*. Oo-o!

*More*. Trot, my soul!

[She goes, looks back at him, turns suddenly, and vanishes.]

*More* follows her to the door, but stops there. Then, as full realization begins to dawn on him, he runs to the bay window, craning his head to catch sight of the front door. There is the sound of a vehicle starting, and the continual hooting of its horn as it makes its way among the crowd. He turns from the window.

*More*. Alone as the last man on earth!

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[Suddenly a voice rises clear out of the hurly-burly in the street.]

*Voice*. There ’e is! That’s ’im! More! Traitor! More!

A shower of nutshells, orange-peel, and harmless missiles begins to rattle against the glass of the window. Many voices take up the groaning: “More! Traitor! Black-leg! More!” And through the window can be seen waving flags and lighted Chinese lanterns, swinging high on long bamboos. The din of execration swells. *More* stands unheeding, still gazing after the cab. Then, with a sharp crack, a flung stone crashes through one of the panes. It is followed by a hoarse shout of laughter, and a hearty groan. A second stone crashes through the glass. *More* turns for a moment, with a contemptuous look, towards the street, and the flare of the Chinese lanterns lights up his face. Then, as if forgetting all about the din outside, he moves back into the room, looks round him, and lets his head droop. The din rises louder and louder; a third stone crashes through. *More* raises his head again, and, clasping his hands, looks straight before him. The footman, *Henry*, entering, hastens to the French windows.

*More*. Ah! Henry, I thought you’d gone.

*Footman*. I came back, sir.

*More*. Good fellow!

*Footman*. They’re trying to force the terrace gate, sir. They’ve no business coming on to private property—no matter what!

In the surging entrance of the mob the footman, *Henry*, who shows fight, is overwhelmed, hustled out into the crowd on the terrace, and no more seen. The *mob* is a mixed crowd of revellers of both sexes, medical students, clerks, shop men and girls, and a Boy Scout or two. Many have exchanged hats—Some wear masks, or false noses, some carry feathers or tin whistles. Some, with bamboos and Chinese lanterns, swing them up outside on the terrace. The medley of noises is very great. Such ringleaders as exist in the confusion are a *group of students*, the chief of whom, conspicuous because unadorned, is an athletic, hatless young man with a projecting underjaw, and heavy coal-black moustache, who seems with the swing of his huge arms and shoulders to sway the currents of motion. When the first surge of noise and movement subsides, he calls out: “To him, boys! Chair the hero!” *The students* rush at the impassive *more*, swing him roughly on to their shoulders and bear him round the room. When they have twice circled the table to the music of their confused singing, groans and whistling, *the chief of the students* calls out: “Put him down!” Obediently they set him down on the table which has been forced into the bay window, and stand gaping up at him.

*Chief Student*. Speech! Speech!

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[The noise ebbs, and *more* looks round him.]

*Chief Student*. Now then, you, sir.

*More*. [In a quiet voice] Very well. You are here by the law that governs the action of all mobs—the law of Force. By that law, you can do what you like to this body of mine.

A *voice*. And we will, too.

*More*. I don't doubt it. But before that, I've a word to say.

A *voice*. You've always that.

[*Another voice* raises a donkey's braying.]

*More*. You—Mob—are the most contemptible thing under the sun. When you walk the street—God goes in.

*Chief Student*. Be careful, you—sir.

*Voices*. Down him! Down with the beggar!

*More*. [Above the murmurs] My fine friends, I'm not afraid of you. You've forced your way into my house, and you've asked me to speak. Put up with the truth for once! [His words rush out] You are the thing that pelts the weak; kicks women; howls down free speech. This to-day, and that to-morrow. Brain—you have none. Spirit—not the ghost of it! If you're not meanness, there's no such thing. If you're not cowardice, there is no cowardice [Above the growing fierceness of the hubbub] Patriotism—there are two kinds—that of our soldiers, and this of mine. You have neither!

*Chief Student*. [Checking a dangerous rush] Hold on! Hold on! [To *more*] Swear to utter no more blasphemy against your country: Swear it!

*Crowd*. Ah! Ay! Ah!

*More*. My country is not yours. Mine is that great country which shall never take toll from the weakness of others. [Above the groaning] Ah! you can break my head and my windows; but don't think that you can break my faith. You could never break or shake it, if you were a million to one.

A girl with dark eyes and hair all wild, leaps out from the crowd and shakes her fist at him.

*Girl*. You're friends with them that killed my lad! [*More* smiles down at her, and she swiftly plucks the knife from the belt of a Boy Scout beside her] Smile, you—cur!

A violent rush and heave from behind flings *more* forward on to the steel. He reels, staggers back, and falls down amongst the crowd. A scream, a sway, a rush, a hubbub of cries. The *chief Student* shouts above the riot: "Steady!" Another: "My God! He's got it!"

*Chief Student*. Give him air!

The crowd falls back, and two *students*, bending over *more*, lift his arms and head, but they fall like lead. Desperately they test him for life.

*Chief Student*. By the Lord, it's over!

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Then begins a scared swaying out towards the window.  Some one turns out the lights, and in the darkness the crowd fast melts away.  The body of *more* lies in the gleam from a single Chinese lantern.  Muttering the words:  “Poor devil!  He kept his end up anyway!” the *chief Student* picks from the floor a little abandoned Union Jack and lays it on MORE’s breast.  Then he, too, turns, and rushes out.

And the body of *more* lies in the streak of light; and flee
noises in the street continue to rise.

*Thecurtain falls*, *but rises again almost at once*.

*Aftermath*

A late Spring dawn is just breaking.  Against trees in leaf and blossom, with the houses of a London Square beyond, suffused by the spreading glow, is seen a dark life-size statue on a granite pedestal.  In front is the broad, dust-dim pavement.  The light grows till the central words around the pedestal can be clearly read:

*Erected*
To the Memory
of
*Stephen more*
“Faithful to his ideal”

High above, the face of *more* looks straight before him with a faint smile.  On one shoulder and on his bare head two sparrows have perched, and from the gardens, behind, comes the twittering and singing of birds.

## THE CURTAIN FALLS.

**The End**

## PLAYS in the FOURTH SERIES

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# SCENE: A VILLAGE OF THE WEST

The Action passes on Ascension Day.

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*Act* II. Evening

*Scene* I. The Village Inn.
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*Act* III. Evening

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## A BIT O' LOVE

### ACT I

It is Ascension Day in a village of the West. In the low panelled hall-sittingroom of the *Burlacombe's* farmhouse on the village green, *Michael Strangway*, a clerical collar round his throat and a dark Norfolk jacket on his back, is playing the flute before a very large framed photograph of a woman, which is the only picture on the walls. His age is about thirty-five his figure thin and very upright and his clean-shorn face thin, upright, narrow, with long and rather pointed ears; his dark hair is brushed in a coxcomb off his forehead. A faint smile hovers about his lips that Nature has made rather full and he has made thin, as though keeping a hard secret; but his bright grey eyes, dark round the rim, look out and upwards almost as if he were being crucified. There is something about the whole of him that makes him seen not quite present. A gentle creature, burnt within.A low broad window above a window-seat forms the background to his figure; and through its lattice panes are seen the outer gate and yew-trees of a churchyard and the porch of a church, bathed in May sunlight. The front door at right angles to the window-seat, leads to the village green, and a door on the left into the house.It is the third movement of Veracini's violin sonata that *Strangway* plays. His back is turned to the door into the house, and he does not hear when it is opened, and *ivy Burlacombe*, the farmer's daughter, a girl of fourteen, small and quiet as a mouse, comes in, a prayer-book in one hand, and in the other a gloss of water, with wild orchis and a bit of deep pink hawthorn. She sits down on the window-seat, and having opened her book, sniffs at the flowers. Coming to the end of the movement *Strangway* stops, and looking up at the face on the wall, heaves a long sigh.

*Ivy*. [From the seat] I picked these for yu, Mr. Strangway.

*Strangway*. [Turning with a start] Ah! Ivy. Thank you. [He puts his flute down on a chair against the far wall] Where are the others?

As he speaks, *Gladys Freman*, a dark gipsyish girl, and *Connie Trustaford*, a fair, stolid, blue-eyed Saxon, both about sixteen, come in through the front door, behind which they have evidently been listening. They too have prayer-books in their hands. They sidle past Ivy, and also sit down under the window.

*Gladys*. Mercy's comin', Mr. Strangway.

*Strangway*. Good morning, Gladys; good morning, Connie.

He turns to a book-case on a table against the far wall, and taking out a book, finds his place in it. While he stands thus with his back to the girls, *mercy Jarland* comes in from the green. She also is about sixteen, with fair hair and china-blue eyes. She glides in

quickly, hiding something behind her, and sits down on the seat next the door.  And at once there is a whispering.

*Strangway*. [Turning to them] Good morning, Mercy.

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*Mercy*. Good morning, Mr. Strangway.

*Strangway*. Now, yesterday I was telling you what our Lord's coming meant to the world. I want you to understand that before He came there wasn't really love, as we know it. I don't mean to say that there weren't many good people; but there wasn't love for the sake of loving. D'you think you understand what I mean?

*Mercy* fidgets. GLADYS'S eyes are following a fly.

*Ivy*. Yes, Mr. Strangway.

*Strangway*. It isn't enough to love people because they're good to you, or because in some way or other you're going to get something by it. We have to love because we love loving. That's the great thing —without that we're nothing but Pagans.

*Gladys*. Please, what is Pagans?

*Strangway*. That's what the first Christians called the people who lived in the villages and were not yet Christians, Gladys.

*Mercy*. We live in a village, but we're Christians.

*Strangway*. [With a smile] Yes, Mercy; and what is a Christian?

*Mercy* kicks afoot, sideways against her neighbour, frowns over her china-blare eyes, is silent; then, as his question passes on, makes a quick little face, wriggles, and looks behind her.

*Strangway*. Ivy?

*Ivy*. 'Tis a man—whu—whu——

*Strangway*. Yes?—Connie?

*Connie*. [Who speaks rather thickly, as if she had a permanent slight cold] Please, Mr. Strangway, 'tis a man what goes to church.

*Gladys*. He 'as to be baptised—and confirmed; and—and—buried.

*Ivy*. 'Tis a man whu—whu's gude and——

*Gladys*. He don't drink, an' he don't beat his horses, an' he don't hit back.

*Mercy*. [Whispering] 'Tisn't your turn. [To *Strangway*] 'Tis a man like us.

*Ivy*. I know what Mrs. Strangway said it was, ’cause I asked her once, before she went away.

*Strangway*. [Startled] Yes?

*Ivy*. She said it was a man whu forgave everything.

*Strangway*. Ah!

The note of a cuckoo comes travelling. The girls are gazing at *Strangway*, who seems to have gone of into a dream. They begin to fidget and whisper.

*Connie*. Please, Mr. Strangway, father says if yu hit a man and he don’t hit yu back, he’s no gude at all.

*Mercy*. When Tommy Morse wouldn’t fight, us pinched him—he did squeal! [She giggles] Made me laugh!

*Strangway*. Did I ever tell you about St. Francis of Assisi?

*Ivy*. [Clasping her hands] No.

*Strangway*. Well, he was the best Christian, I think, that ever lived—simply full of love and joy.

*Ivy*. I expect he’s dead.

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*Strangway*. About seven hundred years, Ivy.

*Ivy*. [Softly] Oh!

*Strangway*. Everything to him was brother or sister—the sun and the moon, and all that was poor and weak and sad, and animals and birds, so that they even used to follow him about.

*Mercy*. I know! He had crumbs in his pocket.

*Strangway*. No; he had love in his eyes.

*Ivy*. 'Tis like about Orpheus, that yu told us.

*Strangway*. Ah! But St. Francis was a Christian, and Orpheus was a Pagan.

*Ivy*. Oh!

*Strangway*. Orpheus drew everything after him with music; St. Francis by love.

*Ivy*. Perhaps it was the same, really.

*Strangway*. [looking at his flute] Perhaps it was, Ivy.

*Gladys*. Did 'e 'ave a flute like yu?

*Ivy*. The flowers smell sweeter when they 'ear music; they du.

[She holds up the glass of flowers.]

*Strangway*. [Touching one of the orchis] What's the name of this one?

[The girls cluster; save *mercy*, who is taking a stealthy interest in what she has behind her.]

*Connie*. We call it a cuckoo, Mr. Strangway.

*Gladys*. 'Tis awful common down by the streams. We've got one medder where 'tis so thick almost as the goldie cups.

*Strangway*. Odd! I've never noticed it.

*Ivy*. Please, Mr. Strangway, yu don't notice when yu're walkin'; yu go along like this.

[She holds up her face as one looking at the sky.]

*Strangway*. Bad as that, Ivy?

*Ivy*. Mrs. Strangway often used to pick it last spring.

*Strangway*. Did she? Did she?

[He has gone off again into a kind of dream.]

*Mercy*. I like being confirmed.

*Strangway*. Ah! Yes. Now——What's that behind you, Mercy?

*Mercy*. [Engagingly producing a cage a little bigger than a mouse-trap, containing a skylark] My skylark.

*Strangway*. What!

*Mercy*. It can fly; but we're goin' to clip its wings. Bobbie caught it.

*Strangway*. How long ago?

*Mercy*. [Conscious of impending disaster] Yesterday.

*Strangway*. [White hot] Give me the cage!

*Mercy*. [Puckering] I want my skylark. [As he steps up to her and takes the cage—-thoroughly alarmed] I gave Bobbie thrippence for it!

*Strangway*. [Producing a sixpence] There!

*Mercy*. [Throwing it down-passionately] I want my skylark!

*Strangway*. God made this poor bird for the sky and the grass. And you put it in that! Never cage any wild thing! Never!

*Mercy*. [Faint and sullen] I want my skylark.

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*Strangway*. [Taking the cage to the door] No! [He holds up the cage and opens it] Off you go, poor thing!

[The bird flies out and away. The girls watch with round eyes the fling up of his arm, and the freed bird flying away.]

*Ivy*. I'm glad!

[*Mercy* kicks her viciously and sobs. *Strangway* comes from the door, looks at *mercy* sobbing, and suddenly clasps his head. The girls watch him with a queer mixture of wonder, alarm, and disapproval.]

*Gladys*. [Whispering] Don't cry, Mercy. Bobbie'll soon catch yu another.

[*Strangway* has dropped his hands, and is looking again at *mercy*. *Ivy* sits with hands clasped, gazing at *Strangway*. *Mercy* continues her artificial sobbing.]

*Strangway*. [Quietly] The class is over for to-day.

[He goes up to *mercy*, and holds out his hand. She does not take it, and runs out knuckling her eyes. *Strangway* turns on his heel and goes into the house.]

*Connie*. 'Twasn't his bird.

*Ivy*. Skylarks belong to the sky. Mr. Strangway said so.

*Gladys*. Not when they'm caught, they don't.

*Ivy*. They du.

*Connie*. 'Twas her bird.

*Ivy*. He gave her sixpence for it.

*Gladys*. She didn't take it.

*Connie*. There it is on the ground.

*Ivy*. She might have.

*Gladys*. He'll p'raps take my squirrel, tu.

*Ivy*. The bird sang—I 'eard it! Right up in the sky. It wouldn't have sanged if it weren't glad.

*Gladys*. Well, Mercy cried.

*Ivy*. I don't care.

*Gladys*. 'Tis a shame! And I know something. Mrs. Strangway's at Durford.

*Connie*. She's—never!

*Gladys*. I saw her yesterday. An' if she's there she ought to be here. I told mother, an' she said: "Yu mind yer business." An' when she goes in to market to-morrow she'm goin' to see. An' if she's really there, mother says, 'tis a fine tu-du an' a praaper scandal. So I know a lot more'n yu du.

[Ivy stares at her.]

*Connie*. Mrs. Strangway told mother she was goin' to France for the winter because her mother was ill.

*Gladys*. 'Tisn't, winter now—Ascension Day. I saw her cumin' out o' Dr. Desert's house. I know 'twas her because she had on a blue dress an' a proud luke. Mother says the doctor come over here tu often before Mrs. Strangway went away, just afore Christmas. They was old sweethearts before she married Mr. Strangway. [To Ivy] 'Twas yure mother told mother that.

[Ivy gazes at them more and more wide-eyed.]

*Connie*. Father says if Mrs. Bradmere an' the old Rector knew about the doctor, they wouldn't 'ave Mr. Strangway 'ere for curate any longer; because mother says it takes more'n a year for a gude wife to leave her 'usband, an' 'e so fond of her. But 'tisn't no business of ours, father says.

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*Gladys*. Mother says so tu. She's praaper set against gossip. She'll know all about it to-morrow after market.

*Ivy*. [Stamping her foot] I don't want to 'ear nothin' at all; I don't, an' I won't.

[A rather shame faced silence falls on the girls.]

*Gladys*. [In a quick whisper] 'Ere's Mrs. Burlacombe.

[There enters fawn the house a stout motherly woman with a round grey eye and very red cheeks.]

*Mrs*. *Burlacombe*. Ivy, take Mr. Strangway his ink, or we'll never 'eve no sermon to-night. He'm in his thinkin' box, but 'tis not a bit o' yuse 'im thinkin' without 'is ink. [She hands her daughter an inkpot and blotting-pad. Ivy Takes them and goes out] What ever's this? [She picks up the little bird-cage.]

*Gladys*. 'Tis Mercy Jarland's. Mr. Strangway let her skylark go.

*Mrs*. *Burlacombe*. Aw! Did 'e now? Serve 'er right, bringin' an 'eathen bird to confirmation class.

*Connie*. I'll take it to her.

*Mrs*. *Burlacombe*. No. Yu leave it there, an' let Mr. Strangway du what 'e likes with it. Bringin' a bird like that! Well 'I never!

[The girls, perceiving that they have lighted on stony soil, look at each other and slide towards the door.]

*Mrs*. *Burlacombe*. Yes, yu just be off, an' think on what yu've been told in class, an' be'ave like Christians, that's gude maids. An' don't yu come no more in the 'avenin's dancin' them 'eathen dances in my barn, naighther, till after yu'm confirmed—'tisn't right. I've told Ivy I won't 'ave it.

*Connie*. Mr. Strangway don't mind—he likes us to; 'twas Mrs. Strangway began teachin' us. He's goin' to give a prize.

*Mrs*. *Burlacombe*. Yu just du what I tell yu an' never mind Mr. Strangway—he'm tu kind to everyone. D'yu think I don't know how gells oughter be'ave before confirmation? Yu be'ave like I did! Now, goo ahn! Shoo!

[She hustles them out, rather as she might hustle her chickens, and begins tidying the room. There comes a wandering figure to the open window. It is that of a man of about thirty-five, of feeble gait, leaning the weight of all one side of him on a stick. His dark

face, with black hair, one lock of which has gone white, was evidently once that of an ardent man.  Now it is slack, weakly smiling, and the brown eyes are lost, and seem always to be asking something to which there is no answer.]

*Mrs*. *Burlacombe*. [With that forced cheerfulness always assumed in the face of too great misfortune] Well, Jim! better? [At the faint brightening of the smile] That's right! Yu'm gettin' on bravely.  Want Parson?

*Jim*. [Nodding and smiling, and speaking slowly] I want to tell 'un about my cat.

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[His face loses its smile.]

*Mrs. Burlacombe*. Why! what's she been duin' then? Mr. Strangway's busy. Won't I du?

*Jim*. [Shaking his head] No. I want to tell him.

*Mrs. Burlacombe*. Whatever she been duin'? Havin' kittens?

*Jim*. No. She'm lost.

*Mrs. Burlacombe*. Dearie me! Aw! she'm not lost. Cats be like maids; they must get out a bit.

*Jim*. She'm lost. Maybe he'll know where she'll be.

*Mrs. Burlacombe*. Well, well. I'll go an' find 'im.

*Jim*. He's a gude man. He's very gude.

*Mrs. Burlacombe*. That's certain zure.

*Strangway*. [Entering from the house] Mrs. Burlacombe, I can't think where I've put my book on St. Francis—the large, squarish pale-blue one?

*Mrs. Burlacombe*. Aw! there now! I knu there was somethin' on me mind. Miss Willis she came in yesterday afternune when yu was out, to borrow it. Oh! yes—I said—I'm zure Mr. Strangway'll lend it 'ee. Now think o' that!

*Strangway*. Of course, Mrs. Burlacombe; very glad she's got it.

*Mrs. Burlacombe*. Aw! but that's not all. When I tuk it up there come out a whole flutter o' little bits o' paper wi' little rhymes on 'em, same as I see yu writin'. Aw! my gudeness! I says to meself, Mr. Strangway widn' want no one seein' them.

*Strangway*. Dear me! No; certainly not!

*Mrs. Burlacombe*. An' so I putt 'em in your secretary.

*Strangway*. My-ah! Yes. Thank you; yes.

*Mrs. Burlacombe*. But I'll goo over an' get the buke for yu.
'T won't take me 'alf a minit.

[She goes out on to the green. *Jim Bere* has come in.]

*Strangway*. [Gently] Well, Jim?

*Jim*. My cat's lost.

*Strangway*. Lost?

*Jim*. Day before yesterday. She'm not come back. They've shot 'er, I think; or she'm caught in one o' they rabbit-traps.

*Strangway*. Oh! no; my dear fellow, she'll come back. I'll speak to Sir Herbert's keepers.

*Jim*. Yes, zurr. I feel lonesome without 'er.

*Strangway*. [With a faint smile—more to himself than to Jim] Lonesome! Yes! That's bad, Jim! That's bad!

*Jim*. I miss 'er when I sits than in the avenin'.

*Strangway*. The evenings——They're the worst——and when the blackbirds sing in the morning.

*Jim*. She used to lie on my bed, ye know, zurr.

[*Strangway* turns his face away, contracted with pain]

She'm like a Christian.

*Strangway*. The beasts are.

*Jim*. There's plenty folk ain't 'alf as Christian as 'er be.

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*Strangway*. Well, dear Jim, I'll do my very best. And any time you're lonely, come up, and I'll play the flute to you.

*Jim*. [Wriggling slightly] No, zurr. Thank 'ee, zurr.

*Strangway*. What—don't you like music?

*Jim*. Ye-es, zurr. [A figure passes the window. Seeing it he says with his slow smile] "'Ere's Mrs. Bradmere, comin' from the Rectory." [With queer malice] She don't like cats. But she'm a cat 'erself, I think.

*Strangway*. [With his smile] Jim!

*Jim*. She'm always tellin' me I'm lukin' better. I'm not better, zurr.

*Strangway*. That's her kindness.

*Jim*. I don't think it is. 'Tis laziness, an' 'avin' 'er own way.
She'm very fond of 'er own way.

[A knock on the door cuts off his speech. Following closely on the knock, as though no doors were licensed to be closed against her, a grey-haired lady enters; a capable, broad-faced woman of seventy, whose every tone and movement exhales authority. With a nod and a "good morning" to *Strangway* she turns at face to *Jim Bere*.]

*Mrs*. *Bradmere* Ah! Jim; you're looking better.

> [*Jim Bere* shakes his head. *Mrs*. *Bradmere*. Oh! yes, you are. Getting on splendidly. And now, I just want to speak to Mr. Strangway.]
>
> [*Jim Bere* touches his forelock, and slowly, leaning on his stick, goes out.]

*Mrs*. *Bradmere*. [Waiting for the door to close] You know how that came on him? Caught the girl he was engaged to, one night, with another man, the rage broke something here. [She touches her forehead] Four years ago.

*Strangway*. Poor fellow!

*Mrs*. *Bradmere*. [Looking at him sharply] Is your wife back?

*Strangway*. [Starting] No.

*Mrs*. *Bradmere*. By the way, poor Mrs. Cremer—is she any better?

*Strangway*. No; going fast: Wonderful—so patient.

*Mrs*. *Bradmere*. [With gruff sympathy] Um! Yes. They know how to die! [Wide another sharp look at him] D'you expect your wife soon?

*Strangway*. I I—hope so.

*Mrs*. *Bradmere*: So do I. The sooner the better.

*Strangway*. [Shrinking] I trust the Rector's not suffering so much this morning?

*Mrs*. *Bradmere*. Thank you! His foot's very bad.

[As she speaks Mrs. *Burlacombe* returns with a large pale-blue book in her bared.]

*Mrs*. *Burlacombe*. Good day, M'm! [Taking the book across to *Strangway*] Miss Willie, she says she'm very sorry, zurr.

*Strangway*. She was very welcome, Mrs. Burlacombe. [To *Mrs*. *Burlacombe*] Forgive me—my sermon.

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[He goes into the house. The two women graze after him. Then, at once, as it were, draw into themselves, as if preparing for an encounter, and yet seem to expand as if losing the need for restraint.]

*Mrs*. *Bradmere*. [Abruptly] He misses his wife very much, I'm afraid.

*Mrs*. *Burlacombe*. Ah! Don't he? Poor dear man; he keeps a terrible tight 'and over 'imself, but 'tis suthin' cruel the way he walks about at night. He'm just like a cow when its calf's weaned. 'T'as gone to me 'eart truly to see 'im these months past. T'other day when I went up to du his rume, I yeard a noise like this [she sniffs]; an' ther' 'e was at the wardrobe, snuffin' at 'er things. I did never think a man cud care for a woman so much as that.

*Mrs*. *Bradmere*. H'm!

*Mrs*. *Burlacombe*. 'Tis funny rest an' 'e comin' 'ere for quiet after that tearin' great London parish! 'E'm terrible absent-minded tu —don't take no interest in 'is fude. Yesterday, goin' on for one o'clock, 'e says to me, "I expect 'tis nearly breakfast-time, Mrs. Burlacombe!" 'E'd 'ad it twice already!

*Mrs*. *Bradmere*. Twice! Nonsense!

*Mrs*. *Burlacombe*. Zurely! I give 'im a nummit afore 'e gets up; an' 'e 'as 'is brekjus reg'lar at nine. Must feed un up. He'm on 'is feet all day, gain' to zee folk that widden want to zee an angel, they're that busy; an' when 'e comes in 'e'll play 'is flute there. Hem wastin' away for want of 'is wife. That's what 'tis. An' 'im so sweet-spoken, tu, 'tes a pleasure to year 'im—Never says a word!

*Mrs*. *Bradmere*. Yes, that's the kind of man who gets treated badly.
I'm afraid she's not worthy of him, Mrs. Burlacombe.

*Mrs*. *Burlacombe*. [Plaiting her apron] 'Tesn't for me to zay that.
She'm a very pleasant lady.

*Mrs*. *Bradmere* Too pleasant. What's this story about her being seen in Durford?

*Mrs*. *Burlacombe*. Aw! I du never year no gossip, m'm.

*Mrs*. *Bradmere*. [Drily] Of course not! But you see the Rector wishes to know.

*Mrs*. *Burlacombe*. [Flustered] Well—folk will talk! But, as I says to Burlacombe—"'Tes paltry," I says; and they only married eighteen months, and Mr. Strangway so devoted-like. 'Tes nothing but love, with 'im.

*Mrs*. *Bradmere*. Come!

*Mrs*. *Burlacombe*. There's puzzivantin' folk as'll set an' gossip the feathers off an angel. But I du never listen.

*Mrs*. *Bradmere* Now then, Mrs. Burlacombe?

*Mrs*. *Burlacombe*. Well, they du say as how Dr. Desart over to Durford and Mrs. Strangway was sweethearts afore she wer' married.

*Mrs*. *Bradmere*. I knew that. Who was it saw her coming out of Dr. Desart's house yesterday?

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*Mrs. Burlacombe*. In a manner of spakin' 'tes Mrs. Freman that says 'er Gladys seen her.

*Mrs. Bradmere*. That child's got an eye like a hawk.

*Mrs. Burlacombe*. 'Tes wonderful how things du spread. 'Tesn't as if us gossiped. Du seem to grow-like in the naight.

*Mrs. Bradmere* [To herself] I never lied her. That Riviera excuse, Mrs. Burlacombe—-Very convenient things, sick mothers. Mr. Strangway doesn't know?

*Mrs. Burlacombe*. The Lord forbid! 'Twid send un crazy, I think. For all he'm so moony an' gentlelike, I think he'm a terrible passionate man inside. He've a-got a saint in 'im, for zure; but 'tes only 'alf-baked, in a manner of spakin'.

*Mrs. Bradmere*. I shall go and see Mrs. Freman. There's been too much of this gossip all the winter.

*Mrs. Burlacombe*. 'Tes unfortunate-like 'tes the Fremans. Freman he'm a gipsy sort of a feller; and he've never forgiven Mr. Strangway for spakin' to 'im about the way he trates 'is 'orses.

*Mrs. Bradmere*. Ah! I'm afraid Mr. Strangway's not too discreet when his feelings are touched.

*Mrs. Burlacombe*. 'E've a-got an 'eart so big as the full mune. But 'tes no yuse espectin' tu much o' this world. 'Tes a funny place, after that.

*Mrs. Bradmere*. Yes, Mrs. Burlacombe; and I shall give some of these good people a rare rap over the knuckles for their want of charity. For all they look as if butter wouldn't melt in their mouths, they're an un-Christian lot. [Looking very directly at Mrs. *Burlacombe*] It's lucky we've some hold over the village. I'm not going to have scandal. I shall speak to Sir Herbert, and he and the Rector will take steps.

*Mrs. Burlacombe*. [With covert malice] Aw! I du hope 'twon't upset the Rector, an' 'is fute so poptious!

*Mrs. Bradmere*. [Grimly] His foot'll be sound enough to come down sharp. By the way, will you send me a duck up to the Rectory?

*Mrs. Burlacombe*. [Glad to get away] Zurely, m'm; at once. I've some luv'ly fat birds.

[She goes into the house.]

*Mrs. Bradmere*. Old puss-cat!

[She turns to go, and in the doorway encounters a very little, red-cheeked girl in a peacock-blue cap, and pink frock, who curtsies stolidly.]

*Mrs*. *Bradmere*. Well, Tibby Jarland, what do you want here? Always sucking something, aren't you?

[Getting no reply from Tibby *Jarland*, she passes out. Tibby comes in, looks round, takes a large sweet out of her mouth, contemplates it, and puts it back again. Then, in a perfunctory and very stolid fashion, she looks about the floor, as if she had been told to find something. While she is finding nothing and sucking her sweet, her sister *mercy* comes in furtively, still frowning and vindictive.]

*Mercy*. What! Haven't you found it, Tibby? Get along with 'ee, then!

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[She accelerates the stolid Tissy's departure with a smack, searches under the seat, finds and picks up the deserted sixpence. Then very quickly she goes to the door: But it is opened before she reaches it, and, finding herself caught, she slips behind the chintz window-curtain. A woman has entered, who is clearly the original of the large photograph. She is not strictly pretty, but there is charm in her pale, resolute face, with its mocking lips, flexible brows, and greenish eyes, whose lids, square above them, have short, dark lashes. She is dressed in blue, and her fair hair is coiled up under a cap and motor-veil. She comes in swiftly, and closes the door behind her; becomes irresolute; then, suddenly deciding, moves towards the door into the house. *Mercy* slips from behind her curtain to make off, but at that moment the door into the house is opened, and she has at once to slip back again into covert. It is Ivy who has appeared.]

*Ivy*. [Amazed] Oh! Mrs. Strangway!

[Evidently disconcerted by this appearance, *Beatrice Strangway* pulls herself together and confronts the child with a smile.]

*Beatrice*. Well, Ivy—you've grown! You didn't expect me, did you?

*Ivy*. No, Mrs. Strangway; but I hoped yu'd be comin' soon.

*Beatrice*. Ah! Yes. Is Mr. Strangway in?

*Ivy*. [Hypnotized by those faintly smiling lips] Yes—oh, yes! He's writin' his sermon in the little room. He will be glad!

*Beatrice*. [Going a little closer, and never taking her eyes off the child] Yes. Now, Ivy; will you do something for me?

*Ivy*. [Fluttering] Oh, yes, Mrs. Strangway.

*Beatrice*. Quite sure?

*Ivy*. Oh, yes!

*Beatrice*. Are you old enough to keep a secret?

*Ivy*. [Nodding] I'm fourteen now.

*Beatrice*. Well, then—, I don't want anybody but Mr. Strangway to know I've been here; nobody, not even your mother. D'you understand?

*Ivy*. [Troubled] No. Only, I can keep a secret.

*Beatrice*. Mind, if anybody hears, it will hurt Mr. Strangway.

*Ivy*. Oh! I wouldn't—hurt—him. Must yu go away again? [Trembling towards her] I wish yu wer goin' to stay. And perhaps some one has seen yu—They——

*Beatrice*. [Hastily] No, no one. I came motoring; like this. [She moves her veil to show how it can conceal her face] And I came straight down the little lane, and through the barn, across the yard.

*Ivy*. [Timidly] People du see a lot.

*Beatrice*. [Still with that hovering smile] I know, but——Now go and tell him quickly and quietly.

*Ivy*. [Stopping at the door] Mother's pluckin' a duck. Only, please, Mrs. Strangway, if she comes in even after yu've gone, she'll know, because—because yu always have that particular nice scent.

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*Beatrice*. Thank you, my child. I'll see to that.

[Ivy looks at her as if she would speak again, then turns suddenly, and goes out. BEATRICE'S face darkens; she shivers. Taking out a little cigarette case, she lights a cigarette, and watches the puff's of smoke wreathe shout her and die away. The frightened *mercy* peers out, spying for a chance, to escape. Then from the house *Strangway* comes in. All his dreaminess is gone.]

*Strangway*. Thank God! [He stops at the look on her face] I don't understand, though. I thought you were still out there.

*Beatrice*. [Letting her cigarette fall, and putting her foot on it] No.

*Strangway*: You're staying? Oh! Beatrice; come! We'll get away from here at once—-as far, as far—anywhere you like. Oh! my darling —only come! If you knew——

*Beatrice*. It's no good, Michael; I've tried and tried.

*Strangway*. Not! Then, why—? Beatrice! You said, when you were right away—I've waited——

*Beatrice*. I know. It's cruel—it's horrible. But I told you not to hope, Michael. I've done my best. All these months at Mentone, I've been wondering why I ever let you marry me—when that feeling wasn't dead!

*Strangway*. You can't have come back just to leave me again?

*Beatrice*. When you let me go out there with mother I thought—I did think I would be able; and I had begun—and then—spring came!

*Strangway*. Spring came here too! Never so—aching! Beatrice, can't you?

*Beatrice*. I've something to say.

*Strangway*. No! No! No!

*Beatrice*. You see—I've—fallen.

*Strangway*. Ah! [In a twice sharpened by pain] Why, in the name of mercy, come here to tell me that? Was he out there, then?

*Beatrice*. I came straight back to him.

*Strangway*. To Durford?

*Beatrice*. To the Crossway Hotel, miles out—in my own name. They don't know me there. I told you not to hope, Michael. I've done my best; I swear it.

*Strangway*. My God!

*Beatrice*. It was your God that brought us to live near him!

*Strangway*. Why have you come to me like this?

*Beatrice*. To know what you're going to do. Are you going to divorce me? We're in your power. Don't divorce me—Doctor and patient—you must know—it ruins him. He'll lose everything. He'd be disqualified, and he hasn't a penny without his work.

*Strangway*. Why should I spare him?

*Beatrice*. Michael; I came to beg. It's hard.

*Strangway*. No; don't beg! I can't stand it.

[She shakes her head.]

*Beatrice*. [Recovering her pride] What are you going to do, then? Keep us apart by the threat of a divorce? Starve us and prison us? Cage me up here with you? I'm not brute enough to ruin him.

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*Strangway*. Heaven!

*Beatrice*. I never really stopped loving him. I never—loved you, Michael.

*Strangway*. [Stunned] Is that true? [*Beatrice* bends her head] Never loved me? Not—that night—on the river—not——?

*Beatrice*. [Under her breath] No.

*Strangway*. Were you lying to me, then? Kissing me, and—hating me?

*Beatrice*. One doesn't hate men like you; but it wasn't love.

*Strangway*. Why did you tell me it was?

*Beatrice*. Yes. That was the worst thing I've ever done.

*Strangway*. Do you think I would have married you? I would have burned first! I never dreamed you didn't. I swear it!

*Beatrice*. [Very low] Forget it!

*Strangway*. Did he try to get you away from me? [*Beatrice* gives him a swift look] Tell me the truth!

*Beatrice*. No. It was—I—alone. But—he loves me.

*Strangway*. One does not easily know love, it seems.

[But her smile, faint, mysterious, pitying, is enough, and he turns away from her.]

*Beatrice*. It was cruel to come, I know. For me, too. But I couldn't write. I had to know.

*Strangway*. Never loved me? Never loved me? That night at Tregaron? [At the look on her face] You might have told me before you went away! Why keep me all these——

*Beatrice*. I meant to forget him again. I did mean to. I thought I could get back to what I was, when I married you; but, you see, what a girl can do, a woman that's been married—can't.

*Strangway*. Then it was I—my kisses that——! [He laughs] How did you stand them? [His eyes dart at her face] Imagination helped you, perhaps!

*Beatrice*. Michael, don't, don't! And—oh! don't make a public thing of it! You needn't be afraid I shall have too good a time!

[He stays quite still and silent, and that which is writhing in him makes his face so strange that *Beatrice* stands aghast. At last she goes stumbling on in speech]

If ever you want to marry some one else—then, of course—that's only fair, ruin or not. But till then—till then——He's leaving Durford, going to Brighton. No one need know. And you—this isn't the only parish in the world.

*Strangway*. [Quietly] You ask me to help you live in secret with another man?

*Beatrice*. I ask for mercy.

*Strangway*. [As to himself] What am I to do?

*Beatrice*. What you feel in the bottom of your heart.

*Strangway*. You ask me to help you live in sin?

*Beatrice*. To let me go out of your life. You've only to do— nothing. [He goes, slowly, close to her.]

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*Strangway*. I want you. Come back to me! Beatrice, come back!

*Beatrice*. It would be torture, now.

*Strangway*. [Writhing] Oh!

*Beatrice*. Whatever's in your heart—do!

*Strangway*. You'd come back to me sooner than ruin him? Would you?

*Beatrice*. I can't bring him harm.

*Strangway*. [Turning away] God!—if there be one help me! [He stands leaning his forehead against the window. Suddenly his glance falls on the little bird cage, still lying on the window-seat] Never cage any wild thing! [He gives a laugh that is half a sob; then, turning to the door, says in a low voice] Go! Go please, quickly! Do what you will. I won't hurt you—can't——But—go! [He opens the door.]

*Beatrice*. [Greatly moved] Thank you!

[She passes him with her head down, and goes out quickly. *Strangway* stands unconsciously tearing at the little bird-cage. And while he tears at it he utters a moaning sound. The terrified *mercy*, peering from behind the curtain, and watching her chance, slips to the still open door; but in her haste and fright she knocks against it, and *Strangway* sees her. Before he can stop her she has fled out on to the green and away.]

> [While he stands there, paralysed, the door from the house is opened, and *Mrs*. *Burlacombe* approaches him in a queer, hushed way.]

*Mrs*. *Burlacombe*. [Her eyes mechanically fixed on the twisted bird-cage in his hands] 'Tis poor Sue Cremer, zurr, I didn't 'ardly think she'd last thru the mornin'. An' zure enough she'm passed away! [Seeing that he has not taken in her words] Mr. Strangway — yu'm feelin' giddy?

*Strangway*. No, no! What was it? You said——

*Mrs*. *Burlacombe*. 'Tes Jack Cremer. His wife's gone. 'E'm in a terrible way. 'Tes only yu, 'e ses, can du 'im any gude. He'm in the kitchen.

*Strangway*. Cremer? Yes! Of course. Let him——

*Mrs*. *Burlacombe*. [Still staring at the twisted cage] Yu ain't wantin' that—'tes all twizzled. [She takes it from him] Sure yu'm not feelin' yer 'ead?

*Strangway*. [With a resolute effort] No!

*Mrs*. *Burlacombe*. [Doubtfully] I'll send 'im in, then. [She goes. When she is gone, Strangway passes his handkerchief across his forehead, and his lips move fast. He is standing motionless when *Cremer*, a big man in labourer's clothes, with a thick, broad face, and tragic, faithful eyes, comes in, and stands a little in from the closed door, quite dumb.]

*Strangway*. [After a moment's silence—going up to him and laying a hand on his shoulder] Jack! Don't give way. If we give way—we're done.

*Cremer*. Yes, zurr. [A quiver passes over his face.]

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*Strangway*. She didn't. Your wife was a brave woman. A dear woman.

*Cremer*. I never thought to luse 'er. She never told me 'ow bad she was, afore she tuk to 'er bed. 'Tis a dreadful thing to luse a wife, zurr.

*Strangway*. [Tightening his lips, that tremble] Yes. But don't give way! Bear up, Jack!

*Cremer*. Seems funny 'er goin' blue-bell time, an' the sun shinin' so warm. I picked up an 'orse-shu yesterday. I can't never 'ave 'er back, zurr.

[His face quivers again.]

*Strangway*. Some day you'll join her. Think! Some lose their wives for ever.

*Cremer*. I don't believe as there's a future life, zurr. I think we goo to sleep like the beasts.

*Strangway*. We're told otherwise. But come here! [Drawing him to the window] Look! Listen! To sleep in that! Even if we do, it won't be so bad, Jack, will it?

*Cremer*. She wer' a gude wife to me—no man didn't 'ave no better wife.

*Strangway*. [Putting his hand out] Take hold—hard—harder! I want yours as much as you want mine. Pray for me, Jack, and I'll pray for you. And we won't give way, will we?

*Cremer*. [To whom the strangeness of these words has given some relief] No, zurr; thank 'ee, zurr. 'Tes no gude, I expect. Only, I'll miss 'er. Thank 'ee, zurr; kindly.

[He lifts his hand to his head, turns, and uncertainly goes out to the kitchen. And *Strangway* stays where he is, not knowing what to do. They blindly he takes up his flute, and hatless, hurries out into the air.]

## ACT II

### SCENE I

About seven o'clock in the taproom of the village inn. The bar, with the appurtenances thereof, stretches across one end, and opposite is the porch door on to the green. The wall between is nearly all window, with leaded panes, one wide-open casement whereof lets in the last of the sunlight. A narrow bench runs under this broad window. And this is all the furniture, save three spittoons: *Godleigh*, the innkeeper, a smallish man with thick ruffled hair, a loquacious nose, and apple-red cheeks above a reddish-brown moustache; is reading the paper. To him enters *Tibby Jarland* with a shilling in her mouth.

*Godleigh*. Well, *Tibby Jarland*, what've yu come for, then? Glass o' beer?

[*Tibby* takes the shilling from her mouth and smiles stolidly.]

*Godleigh*. [Twinkling] I shid zay glass o' 'arf an' 'arf's about yure form. [*Tibby* smiles more broadly] Yu'm a praaper masterpiece. Well! 'Ave sister Mercy borrowed yure tongue? [*Tibby* shakes her head] Aw, she 'aven't. Well, maid?

*Tibby*. Father wants six clay pipes, please.

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*Godleigh*. ’E du, du ’ee? Yu tell yure father ’e can’t ’ave more’n one, not this avenin’. And ’ere ‘tis. Hand up yure shillin’.

[*Tibby* reaches up her hand, parts with the shilling, and receives a long clay pipe and eleven pennies. In order to secure the coins in her pinafore she places the clay pipe in her mouth. While she is still thus engaged, *Mrs*. *Bradmere* enters the porch and comes in. *Tibby* curtsies stolidly.]

*Mrs*. *Bradmere*. Gracious, child! What are you doing here? And what have you got in your mouth? Who is it? Tibby Jarland? [*Tibby* curtsies again] Take that thing out. And tell your father from me that if I ever see you at the inn again I shall tread on his toes hard. Godleigh, you know the law about children?

*Godleigh*. [Cocking his eye, and not at all abashed] Surely, m’m. But she will come. Go away, my dear.

> [*Tibby*, never taking her eyes off *Mrs*. *Bradmere*, or the pipe
> from her mouth, has backed stolidly to the door, and vanished.]

*Mrs*. *Bradmere*. [Eyeing *Godleigh*] Now, Godleigh, I’ve come to talk to you. Half the scandal that goes about the village begins here. [She holds up her finger to check expostulation] No, no—its no good. You know the value of scandal to your business far too well.

*Godleigh*. Wi’ all respect, m’m, I knows the vally of it to yourn, tu.

*Mrs*. *Bradmere*. What do you mean by that?

*Godleigh*. If there weren’t no Rector’s lady there widden’ be no notice taken o’ scandal; an’ if there weren’t no notice taken, twidden be scandal, to my thinkin’.

*Mrs*. *Bradmere*. [Winking out a grim little smile] Very well! You’ve given me your views. Now for mine. There’s a piece of scandal going about that’s got to be stopped, Godleigh. You turn the tap of it off here, or we’ll turn your tap off. You know me. See?

*Godleigh*. I shouldn’ never presume, m’m, to know a lady.

*Mrs*. *Bradmere*. The Rector’s quite determined, so is Sir Herbert. Ordinary scandal’s bad enough, but this touches the Church. While Mr. Strangway remains curate here, there must be no talk about him and his affairs.

*Godleigh*. [Cocking his eye] I was just thinkin’ how to du it, m’m. ’Twid be a brave notion to putt the men in chokey, and slit the women’s tongues-like, same as they du in outlandish places, as I’m told.

*Mrs*. *Bradmere*. Don't talk nonsense, Godleigh; and mind what I say, because I mean it.

*Godleigh*. Make yure mind aisy, m'm there'll be no scandal-monkeyin' here wi' my permission.

[*Mrs*. *Bradmere* gives him a keen stare, but seeing him perfectly grave, nods her head with approval.]

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*Mrs*. *Bradmere*. Good! You know what's being said, of course?

*Godleigh*. [With respectful gravity] Yu'll pardon me, m'm, but ef an' in case yu was goin' to tell me, there's a rule in this 'ouse: "No scandal 'ere!"

*Mrs*. *Bradmere*. [Twinkling grimly] You're too smart by half, my man.

*Godleigh*. Aw fegs, no, m'm—child in yure 'ands.

*Mrs*. *Bradmere*. I wouldn't trust you a yard. Once more, Godleigh! This is a Christian village, and we mean it to remain so. You look out for yourself.

[The door opens to admit the farmers *Trustaford* and *Burlacombe*. They doff their hats to *Mrs*. *Bradmere*, who, after one more sharp look at *Godleigh*, moves towards the door.]

*Mrs*. *Bradmere*. Evening, Mr. Trustaford. [To *Burlacombe*] Burlacombe, tell your wife that duck she sent up was in hard training.

[With one of her grim winks, and a nod, she goes.]

*Trustaford*. [Replacing a hat which is black, hard, and not very new, on his long head, above a long face, clean-shaved but for little whiskers] What's the old grey mare want, then? [With a horse-laugh] 'Er's lukin' awful wise!

*Godleigh*. [Enigmatically] Ah!

*Trustaford*. [Sitting on the bench dose to the bar] Drop o' whisky, an' potash.

*Burlacombe*. [A taciturn, alien, yellowish man, in a worn soft hat] What's wise, Godleigh? Drop o' cider.

*Godleigh*. Nuse? There's never no nuse in this 'ouse. Aw, no! Not wi' my permission. [In imitation] This is a Christian village.

*Trustaford*. Thought the old grey mare seemed mighty busy. [To *Burlacombe*] 'Tes rather quare about the curate's wife a-cumin' motorin' this mornin'. Passed me wi' her face all smothered up in a veil, goggles an' all. Haw, haw!

*Burlacombe*. Aye!

*Trustaford*. Off again she was in 'alf an hour. 'Er didn't give poor old curate much of a chance, after six months.

*Godleigh*. Havin' an engagement elsewhere—No scandal, please, gentlemen.

*Burlacombe*. [Acidly] Never asked to see my missis. Passed me in the yard like a stone.

*Trustaford*. 'Tes a little bit rumoursome lately about 'er doctor.

*Godleigh*. Ah! he's the favourite. But 'tes a dead secret; Mr. Trustaford. Don't yu never repate it—there's not a cat don't know it already!

*Burlacombe* frowns, and *Trustaford* utters his laugh. The door is opened and *Freman*, a dark gipsyish man in the dress of a farmer, comes in.

*Godleigh*. Don't yu never tell Will Freman what 'e told me!

*Freman*. Avenin'!

*Trustaford*. Avenin', Will; what's yure glass o' trouble?

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*Freman*. Drop o' eider, clove, an' dash o' gin. There's blood in the sky to-night.

*Burlacombe*. Ah! We'll 'ave fine weather now, with the full o' the mune.

*Freman*. Dust o' wind an' a drop or tu, virst, I reckon. 'Earl t' nuse about curate an' 'is wife?

*Godleigh*. No, indeed; an' don't yu tell us. We'm Christians 'ere in this village.

*Freman*. 'Tain't no very Christian nuse, neither. He's sent 'er off to th' doctor. "Go an' live with un," 'e says; "my blessin' on ye." If 'er'd a-been mine, I'd 'a tuk the whip to 'er. Tam Jarland's maid, she yeard it all. Christian, indeed! That's brave Christianity! "Goo an' live with un!" 'e told 'er.

*Burlacombe*. No, no; that's, not sense—a man to say that. I'll not 'ear that against a man that bides in my 'ouse.

*Freman*. 'Tes sure, I tell 'ee. The maid was hid-up, scared-like, behind the curtain. At it they went, and parson 'e says: "Go," 'e says, "I won't kape 'ee from 'im," 'e says, "an' I won't divorce 'ee, as yu don't wish it!" They was 'is words, same as Jarland's maid told my maid, an' my maid told my missis. If that's parson's talk, 'tes funny work goin' to church.

*Trustaford*. [Brooding] 'Tes wonderful quare, zurely.

*Freman*. Tam Jarland's fair mad wi' curate for makin' free wi' his maid's skylark. Parson or no parson, 'e've no call to meddle wi' other people's praperty. He cam' pokin' 'is nose into my affairs. I told un I knew a sight more 'bout 'orses than 'e ever would!

*Trustaford*. He'm a bit crazy 'bout bastes an' birds.

[They have been so absorbed that they bane not noticed the entrance of *Clyst*, a youth with tousled hair, and a bright, quick, Celtic eye, who stands listening, with a bit of paper in his hand.]

*Clyst*. Ah! he'm that zurely, Mr. Trustaford.

[He chuckles.]

*Godleigh*. Now, Tim Clyst, if an' in case yu've a-got some scandal on yer tongue, don't yu never unship it here. Yu go up to Rectory where 'twill be more relished-like.

*Clyst*. [Waving the paper] Will y' give me a drink for this, Mr. Godleigh? 'Tes rale funny. Aw! 'tes somethin' swats. Butiful readin'. Poetry. Rale spice. Yu've a luv'ly voice for readin', Mr. Godleigh.

*Godleigh*. [All ears and twinkle] Aw, what is it then?

*Clyst*. Ah!  Yu want t'know tu much.

[Putting the paper in his pocket.]

[While he is speaking, *Jim Bere* has entered quietly, with his feeble step and smile, and sits down.]

*Clyst*. [Kindly] Hello, Jim!  Cat come 'ome?

*Jim Bere*.  No.

[All nod, and speak to him kindly.  And *Jim Bere* smiles at them, and his eyes ask of them the question, to which there is no answer.  And after that he sits motionless and silent, and they talk as if he were not there.]

*Godleigh*.  What's all this, now—no scandal in my 'ouse!

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*Clyst*.  'Tes awful peculiar—like a drame.  Mr. Burlacombe 'e don't like to hear tell about drames.  A guess a won't tell 'ee, arter that.

*Freman*.  Out wi' it, Tim.

*Clyst*.  'Tes powerful thirsty to-day, Mr. Godleigh.

*Godleigh*. [Drawing him some cider] Yu're all wild cat's talk, Tim; yu've a-got no tale at all.

*Clyst*. [Moving for the cider] Aw, indade!

*Godleigh*.  No tale, no cider!

*Clyst*. Did ye ever year tell of Orphus?

*Trustaford*.  What?  The old vet. up to Drayleigh?

*Clyst*. Fegs, no; Orphus that lived in th' old time, an' drawed the bastes after un wi' his music, same as curate was tellin' the maids.

*Freman*.  I've 'eard as a gipsy over to Vellacott could du that wi' 'is viddle.

*Clyst*.  'Twas no gipsy I see'd this arternune; 'twee Orphus, down to Mr. Burlacombe's long medder; settin' there all dark on a stone among the dimsy-white flowers an' the cowflops, wi' a bird upon 'is 'ead, playin' his whistle to the ponies.

*Freman*. [Excitedly] Yu did never zee a man wi' a bird on 'is 'ead.

*Clyst*. Didn' I?

*Freman*.  What sort o' bird, then?  Yu tell me that.

*Trustaford*.  Praaper old barndoor cock.  Haw, haw!

*Godleigh*. [Soothingly] 'Tes a vairy-tale; us mustn't be tu partic'lar.

*Burlacombe*:  In my long medder?  Where were yu, then, Tim Clyst?

*Clyst*. Passin' down the lane on my bike.  Wonderful sorrowful-fine music 'e played.  The ponies they did come round 'e—yu cud zee the tears rennin' down their chakes; 'twas powerful sad.  'E 'adn't no 'at on.

*Freman*. [Jeering] No; 'e 'ad a bird on 'is 'ead.

*Clyst*. [With a silencing grin] He went on playin' an' playin'. The ponies they never muved. An' all the dimsy-white flowers they waved and waved, an' the wind it went over 'em. Gav' me a funny feelin'.

*Godleigh*. Clyst, yu take the cherry bun!

*Clyst*. Where's that cider, Mr. Godleigh?

*Godleigh*. [Bending over the cider] Yu've a— 'ad tu much already, Tim.

[The door is opened, and *Tam Jarland* appears. He walks rather unsteadily; a man with a hearty jowl, and sullen, strange; epileptic-looking eyes.]

*Clyst*. [Pointing to *Jarland*] 'Tis Tam Jarland there 'as the cargo aboard.

*Jarland*. Avenin', all! [To *Godleigh*] Pinto' beer. [To *Jim Bere*] Avenin', Jim.

[*Jim Bere* looks at him and smiles.]

*Godleigh*. [Serving him after a moment's hesitation] 'Ere y'are, Tam. [To *Clyst*, who has taken out his paper again] Where'd yu get thiccy paper?

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*Clyst*. [Putting down his cider-mug empty] Yure tongue du watter, don't it, Mr. Godleigh? [Holding out his mug] No zider, no poetry. 'Tis amazin' sorrowful; Shakespeare over again. "The boy stude on the burnin' deck."

*Freman*. Yu and yer yap!

*Clyst*. Ah! Yu wait a bit. When I come back down t'lane again, Orphus 'e was vanished away; there was naught in the field but the ponies, an' a praaper old magpie, a-top o' the hedge. I zee somethin' white in the beak o' the fowl, so I giv' a "Whisht," an' 'e drops it smart, an' off 'e go. I gets over bank an' picks un up, and here't be.

[He holds out his mug.]

*Burlacombe*. [Tartly] Here, give 'im 'is cider. Rade it yureself, ye young teasewings.

[*Clyst*, having secured his cider, drinks it o$. Holding up the paper to the light, he makes as if to begin, then slides his eye round, tantalizing.]

*Clyst*. 'Tes a pity I bain't dressed in a white gown, an' flowers in me 'air.

*Freman*. Read it, or we'll 'aye yu out o' this.

*Clyst*. Aw, don't 'ee shake my nerve, now!

[He begins reading with mock heroism, in his soft, high, burring voice. Thus, in his rustic accent, go the lines]

God lighted the zun in 'eaven far.
Lighted the virefly an' the star.
My 'eart 'E lighted not!

God lighted the vields fur lambs to play,
Lighted the bright strames, 'an the may.
My 'eart 'E lighted not!

God lighted the mune, the Arab's way,
He lights to-morrer, an' to-day.
My 'eart 'E 'ath vorgot!

[When he has finished, there is silence. Then *Trustaford*, scratching his head, speaks:]

TAUSTAFORD. 'Tes amazin' funny stuff.

*Freman*. [Looking over *Clyst's* shoulder] Be danged!  'Tes the curate's 'andwritin'.  'Twas curate wi' the ponies, after that.

*Clyst*. Fancy, now!  Aw, Will Freman, an't yu bright!

*Freman*.  But 'e 'adn't no bird on 'is 'ead.

*Clyst*. Ya-as, 'e 'ad.

*Jarland*. [In a dull, threatening voice] 'E 'ad my maid's bird, this arternune.  'Ead or no, and parson or no, I'll gie 'im one for that.

*Freman*.  Ah!  And 'e meddled wi' my 'orses.

*Trustaford*.  I'm thinkin' 'twas an old cuckoo bird 'e 'ad on 'is 'ead.  Haw, haw!

*Godleigh*.  "His 'eart She 'ath Vorgot!"

*Freman*.  'E's a fine one to be tachin' our maids convirmation.

*Godleigh*.  Would ye 'ave it the old Rector then?  Wi' 'is gouty shoe?
Rackon the maids wid rather 'twas curate; eh, Mr. Burlacombe?

*Burlacombe*. [Abruptly] Curate's a gude man.

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*Jarland*. [With the comatose ferocity of drink] I'll be even wi' un.

*Freman*. [Excitedly] Tell 'ee one thing—'tes not a proper man o' God to 'ave about, wi' 'is luse goin's on. Out vrom 'ere he oughter go.

*Burlacombe*. You med go further an' fare worse.

*Freman*. What's 'e duin', then, lettin' 'is wife runoff?

*Trustaford*. [Scratching his head] If an' in case 'e can't kape 'er, 'tes a funny way o' duin' things not to divorce 'er, after that. If a parson's not to du the Christian thing, whu is, then?

*Burlacombe*. 'Tes a bit immoral-like to pass over a thing like that.
Tes funny if women's gain's on's to be encouraged.

*Freman*. Act of a coward, I zay.

*Burlacombe*. The curate ain't no coward.

*Freman*. He bides in yure house; 'tes natural for yu to stand up for un; I'll wager Mrs. Burlacombe don't, though. My missis was fair shocked. "Will," she says, "if yu ever make vur to let me go like that, I widden never stay wi' yu," she says.

*Trustaford*. 'Tes settin' a bad example, for zure.

*Burlacombe*. 'Tes all very airy talkin'; what shude 'e du, then?

*Freman*. [Excitedly] Go over to Durford and say to that doctor: "Yu come about my missis, an' zee what I'll du to 'ee." An' take 'er 'ome an' zee she don't misbe'ave again.

*Clyst*. 'E can't take 'er ef 'er don' want t' come—I've 'eard lawyer, that lodged wi' us, say that.

*Freman*. All right then, 'e ought to 'ave the law of 'er and 'er doctor; an' zee 'er goin's on don't prosper; 'e'd get damages, tu. But this way 'tes a nice example he'm settin' folks. Parson indade! My missis an' the maids they won't goo near the church to-night, an' I wager no one else won't, neither.

*Jarland*. [Lurching with his pewter up to *Godleigh*] The beggar! I'll be even wi' un.

*Godleigh*. [Looking at him in doubt] 'Tes the last, then, Tam.

[Having received his beer, *Jarland* stands, leaning against the bar, drinking.]

*Burlacombe*. [Suddenly] I don' goo with what curate's duin—'tes tiff soft 'earted; he'm a muney kind o' man altogether, wi' 'is flute an' 'is poetry; but he've a-lodged in my 'ouse this year an' mare, and always 'ad an 'elpin' 'and for every one. I've got a likin' for him an' there's an end of it.

*Jarland*. The coward!

*Trustaford*. I don' trouble nothin' about that, Tam Jarland. [Turning to *Burlacombe*] What gits me is 'e don't seem to 'ave no zense o' what's his own praperty.

*Jarland*. Take other folk's property fast enough!

[He saws the air with his empty. The others have all turned to him, drawn by the fascination that a man in liquor has for his fellow-men. The bell for church has begun to rang, the sun is down, and it is getting dusk.]

He wants one on his crop, an' one in 'is belly; 'e wants a man to take an' gie un a gude hidin zame as he oughter give 'is fly-be-night of a wife.

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[*Strangway* in his dark clothes has entered, and stands by the door, his lips compressed to a colourless line, his thin, darkish face grey-white]

Zame as a man wid ha' gi'en the doctor, for takin' what isn't his'n.

All but *Jarland* have seen *Strangway*. He steps forward, *Jarland* sees him now; his jaw drops a little, and he is silent.

*Strangway*. I came for a little brandy, Mr. Godleigh—feeling rather faint. Afraid I mightn't get through the service.

*Godleigh*. [With professional composure] Marteil's Three Star, zurr, or 'Ennessy's?

*Strangway*. [Looking at *Jarland*] Thank you; I believe I can do without, now. [He turns to go.]

[In the deadly silence, *Godleigh* touches the arm of *Jarland*, who, leaning against the bar with the pewter in his hand, is staring with his strange lowering eyes straight at *Strangway*.]

*Jarland*. [Galvanized by the touch into drunken rage] Lave me be —I'll talk to un-parson or no. I'll tache un to meddle wi' my maid's bird. I'll tache un to kape 'is thievin' 'ands to 'imself.

[*Strangway* turns again.]

*Clyst*. Be quiet, Tam.

*Jarland*. [Never loosing *Strangway* with his eyes—like a bull-dog who sees red] That's for one chake; zee un turn t'other, the white-livered buty! Whu lets another man 'ave 'is wife, an' never the sperit to go vor un!

*Burlacombe*. Shame, Jarland; quiet, man!

[They are all looking at *Strangway*, who, under *Jarland's* drunken insults is standing rigid, with his eyes closed, and his hands hard clenched. The church bell has stopped slow ringing, and begun its five minutes' hurrying note.]

*Trustaford*. [Rising, and trying to hook his arm into *Jarland's*] Come away, Tam; yu've a-'ad to much, man.

*Jarland*. [Shaking him off] Zee, 'e darsen't touch me; I might 'it un in the vase an' 'e darsen't; 'e's afraid—like 'e was o' the doctor.

[He raises the pewter as though to fling it, but it is seized by *Godleigh* from behind, and falls clattering to the floor. *Strangway* has not moved.]

*Jarland*. [Shaking his fist almost in his face] Luke at un, Luke at un! A man wi' a slut for a wife——

[As he utters the word "wife" *Strangway* seizes the outstretched fist, and with a jujitsu movement, draws him into his clutch, helpless. And as they sway and struggle in the open window, with the false strength of fury he forces *Jarland* through. There is a crash of broken glass from outside. At the sound *Strangway* comes to himself. A look of agony passes over his face. His eyes light on *Jim Bere*, who has suddenly risen, and stands feebly clapping his hands. *Strangway* rushes out.]

[Excitedly gathering at the window, they all speak at once.]

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*Clyst*. Tam's hatchin' of yure cucumbers, Mr. Godleigh.

*Trustaford*. 'E did crash; haw, haw!

*Freman*. 'Twas a brave throw, zurely. Whu wid a' thought it?

*Clyst*. Tam's crawlin' out. [Leaning through window] Hello, Tam— 'ow's t' base, old man?

*Freman*. [Excitedly] They'm all comin' up from churchyard to zee.

*Trustaford*. Tam du luke wonderful aztonished; haw, haw! Poor old Tam!

*Clyst*. Can yu zee curate? Reckon 'e'm gone into church. Aw, yes; gettin' a bit dimsy-service time. [A moment's hush.]

*Trustaford*. Well, I'm jiggered. In 'alf an hour he'm got to prache.

*Godleigh*. 'Tes a Christian village, boys.

> [Feebly, quietly, *Jim Bere* laughs. There is silence; but the bell is heard still ranging.]

*Curtain*.

## SCENE II

The same-in daylight dying fast. A lamp is burning on the bar. A chair has been placed in the centre of the room, facing the bench under the window, on which are seated from right to left, Godleigh, Sol Potter the village shopman, *Trustaford*, Burlacombe, Freman, Jim Bere, and *Morse* the blacksmith. *Clyst* is squatting on a stool by the bar, and at the other end Jarland, sobered and lowering, leans against the lintel of the porch leading to the door, round which are gathered five or six sturdy fellows, dumb as fishes. No one sits in the chair. In the unnatural silence that reigns, the distant sound of the wheezy church organ and voices singing can be heard.

TAUSTAFORD. [After a prolonged clearing of his throat] What I mean to zay is that 'tes no yuse, not a bit o' yuse in the world, not duin' of things properly. If an' in case we'm to carry a resolution disapprovin' o' curate, it must all be done so as no one can't, zay nothin'.

*Sol Potter*. That's what I zay, Mr. Trustaford; ef so be as 'tis to be a village meetin', then it must be all done proper.

*Freman*. That's right, Sot Potter. I purpose Mr. Sot Potter into the chair. Whu seconds that?

[A silence. Voices from among the dumb-as-fishes: "I du."]

*Clyst*. [Excitedly] Yu can't putt that to the meetin'. Only a chairman can putt it to the meetin'. I purpose that Mr. Burlacombe— bein as how he's chairman o' the Parish Council—take the chair.

*Freman*. Ef so be as I can't putt it, yu can't putt that neither.

*Trustaford*. 'Tes not a bit o' yuse; us can't 'ave no meetin' without a chairman.

*Godleigh*. Us can't 'ave no chairman without a meetin' to elect un, that's zure. [A silence.]

*Morse*. [Heavily] To my way o' thinkin', Mr. Godleigh speaks zense; us must 'ave a meetin' before us can 'ave a chairman.

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*Clyst*. Then what we got to du's to elect a meetin'.

*Burlacombe*. [Sourly] Yu'll not find no procedure far that.

[Voices from among the dumb-as fishes: "Mr. Burlacombe 'e oughter know."]

*Sol Potter*. [Scratching his head—with heavy solemnity] 'Tes my belief there's no other way to du, but to elect a chairman to call a meetin'; an' then for that meetin' to elect a chairman.

*Clyst*. I purpose Mr. Burlacombe as chairman to call a meetin'.

*Freman*. I purpose Sol Potter.

*Godleigh*. Can't 'ave tu propositions together before a meetin'; that's apple-pie zure vur zurtain.

[Voice from among the dumb-as fishes: "There ain't no meetin' yet, Sol Potter zays."]

*Trustaford*. Us must get the rights of it zettled some'ow. 'Tes like the darned old chicken an' the egg—meetin' or chairman—which come virst?

*Sol Potter*. [Conciliating] To my thinkin' there shid be another way o' duin' it, to get round it like with a circumbendibus. 'T'all comes from takin' different vuse, in a manner o' spakin'.

*Freman*. Vu goo an' zet in that chair.

*Sol Potter*. [With a glance at *Burlacombe* modestly] I shid'n never like fur to du that, with Mr. Burlacombe zettin' there.

*Burlacombe*. [Rising] 'Tes all darned fulishness.

[Amidst an uneasy shufflement of feet he moves to the door, and goes out into the darkness.]

*Clyst*. [Seeing his candidate thus depart] Rackon curate's pretty well thru by now, I'm goin' to zee. [As he passes *Jarland*] 'Ow's to base, old man?

[He goes out. One of the dumb-as-fishes moves from the door and fills the apace left on the bench by *Burlacombe's* departure.]

*Jarland*. Darn all this puzzivantin'! [To *Sol Potter*] Got an' zet in that chair.

*Sol Potter*. [Rising and going to the chair; there he stands, changing from one to the other of his short broad feet and sweating from modesty and worth] 'Tes my duty now, gentlemen, to call a meetin' of the parishioners of this parish. I beg therefore to declare that this is a meetin' in accordance with my duty as chairman of this meetin' which elected me chairman to call this meetin'. And I purceed to vacate the chair so that this meetin' may now purceed to elect a chairman.

[He gets up from the chair, and wiping the sweat from his brow, goes back to his seat.]

*Freman*. Mr. Chairman, I rise on a point of order.

*Godleigh*. There ain't no chairman.

*Freman*. I don't give a darn for that. I rise on a point of order.

*Godleigh*. 'Tes a chairman that decides points of order. 'Tes certain yu can't rise on no points whatever till there's a chairman.

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*Trustaford*. ‘Tes no yuse yure risin’, not the least bit in the world, till there’s some one to set yu down again. Haw, haw!

[Voice from the dumb-as-Etches: “Mr. Trustaford ’e’s right.”]

*Freman*. What I zay is the chairman ought never to ’ave vacated the chair till I’d risen on my point of order. I purpose that he goo and zet down again.

*Godleigh*. Yu can’t purpose that to this meetin’; yu can only purpose that to the old meetin’ that’s not zettin’ any longer.

*Freman*. [Excitedly] I didn’ care what old meetin’ ’tis that’s zettin’. I purpose that Sol Potter goo an’ zet in that chair again, while I rise on my point of order.

*Trustaford*. [Scratching his head] ’Tesn’t regular but I guess yu’ve got to goo, Sol, or us shan’t ’ave no peace.

[*Sol Potter*, still wiping his brow, goes back to the chair.]

*Morse*. [Stolidly-to *Freman*] Zet down, Will Freman. [He pulls at him with a blacksmith’s arm.]

*Freman*. [Remaining erect with an effort] I’m not a-goin’ to zet down till I’ve arisen.

*Jarland*. Now then, there ’e is in the chair. What’s yore point of order?

*Freman*. [Darting his eyes here and there, and flinging his hand up to his gipsy-like head] ‘Twas—’twas—Darned ef y’ ’aven’t putt it clean out o’ my ’ead.

*Jarland*. We can’t wait for yore points of order. Come out o’ that chair. Sol Potter.

[*Sol Potter* rises and is about to vacate the chair.]

*Freman*. I know! There ought to ’a been minutes taken. Yu can’t ‘ave no meetin’ without minutes. When us comes to electin’ a chairman o’ the next meetin’, ’e won’t ’ave no minutes to read.

*Sol Potter*. ’Twas only to putt down that I was elected chairman to elect a meetin’ to elect a chairman to preside over a meetin’ to pass a resolution dalin’ wi’ the curate. That’s aisy set down, that is.

*Freman*. [Mollified] We’ll ’ave that zet down, then, while we’re electin’ the chairman o’ the next meetin’.

[A silence. ]

*Trustaford*. Well then, seein' this is the praaper old meetin' for carryin' the resolution about the curate, I purpose Mr. Sol Potter take the chair.

*Freman*. I purpose Mr. Trustaford. I 'aven't a-got nothin' against Sol Potter, but seein' that he elected the meetin' that's to elect 'im, it might be said that 'e was electin' of himzelf in a manner of spakin'. Us don't want that said.

*Morse*. [Amid meditative grunts from the dumb-as-fishes] There's some-at in that. One o' they tu purposals must be putt to the meetin'.

*Freman*. Second must be putt virst, fur zure.

*Trustaford*. I dunno as I wants to zet in that chair. To hiss the curate, 'tis a ticklish sort of a job after that. Vurst comes afore second, Will Freeman.

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*Freman*. Second is amendment to virst. 'Tes the amendments is putt virst.

*Trustaford*. 'Ow's that, Mr. Godleigh? I'm not particular eggzac'ly to a dilly zort of a point like that.

*Sol Potter*. [Scratching his, head] 'Tes a very nice point, for zure.

*Godleigh*. 'Tes undoubtedly for the chairman to decide.

[Voice from the dumb-as fishes: "But there ain't no chairman yet."]

*Jarland*. Sol Potter's chairman.

*Freman*. No, 'e ain't.

*Morse*. Yes, 'e is—'e's chairman till this second old meetin' gets on the go.

*Freman*. I deny that. What du yu say, Mr. Trustaford?

*Trustaford*. I can't 'ardly tell. It du zeem a darned long-sufferin' sort of a business altogether.

[A silence.]

*Morse*. [Slowly] Tell 'ee what 'tis, us shan't du no gude like this.

*Godleigh*. 'Tes for Mr. Freman or Mr. Trustaford, one or t'other to withdraw their motions.

*Trustaford*. [After a pause, with cautious generosity] I've no objections to withdrawin' mine, if Will Freman'll withdraw his'n.

*Freman*. I won't never be be'indhand. If Mr. Trustaford withdraws, I withdraws mine.

*Morse*. [With relief] That's zensible. Putt the motion to the meetin'.

*Sol Potter*. There ain't no motion left to putt.

[Silence of consternation.]

[In the confusion Jim *Bere* is seen to stand up.]

*Godleigh*. Jim Bere to spike. Silence for Jim!

*Voices*. Aye! Silence for Jim!

*Sol Potter*. Well, Jim?

*Jim*. [Smiling and slow] Nothin' duin'.

*Trustaford*. Bravo, Jim! Yu'm right. Best zense yet!

[Applause from the dumb-as-fishes.]

[With his smile brightening, *Jim* resumes his seat.]

*Sol Potter*. [Wiping his brow] Du seem to me, gentlemen, seem' as we'm got into a bit of a tangle in a manner of spakin', 'twid be the most zimplest and vairest way to begin all over vrom the beginnin', so's t'ave it all vair an' square for every one.

[In the uproar Of "Aye" and "No," it is noticed that *Tibby Jarland* is standing in front of her father with her finger, for want of something better, in her mouth.]

*Tibby*. [In her stolid voice] Please, sister Mercy says, curate 'ave got to "Lastly." [*Jarland* picks her up, and there is silence.] An' please to come quick.

*Jarland*. Come on, mates; quietly now!

[He goes out, and all begin to follow him.]

*Morse*. [Slowest, save for *Sol Potter*] 'Tes rare lucky us was all agreed to hiss the curate afore us began the botherin' old meetin', or us widn' 'ardly 'ave 'ad time to settle what to du.

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*Sol Potter*. [Scratching his head] Aye, 'tes rare lucky; but I dunno if 'tes altogether reg'lar.

*Curtain*.

## SCENE III

The village green before the churchyard and the yew-trees at the gate. Into the pitch dark under the yews, light comes out through the half-open church door. Figures are lurking, or moving stealthily—people waiting and listening to the sound of a voice speaking in the church words that are inaudible. Excited whispering and faint giggles come from the deepest yew-tree shade, made ghostly by the white faces and the frocks of young girls continually flitting up and back in the blackness. A girl's figure comes flying out from the porch, down the path of light, and joins the stealthy group.

Whispering voice of *mercy*. Where's 'e got to now, Gladys?

*Whispering voice of Gladys*. 'E've just finished.

*Voice of Connie*. Whu pushed t'door open?

*Voice of Gladys*. Tim Clyst I giv' it a little push, meself.

*Voice of Connie*. Oh!

*Voice* of *Gladys*. Tim Clyst's gone in!

*Another voice*. O-o-o-h!

*Voice* of *mercy*. Whu else is there, tu?

*Voice of Gladys*. Ivy's there, an' Old Mrs. Potter, an' tu o' the maids from th'Hall; that's all as ever.

*Voice* of *Connie*. Not the old grey mare?

*Voice* of *Gladys*. No. She ain't ther'. 'Twill just be th'ymn now, an' the Blessin'. Tibby gone for 'em?

*Voice of mercy*. Yes.

*Voice* of *Connie*. Mr. Burlacombe's gone in home, I saw 'im pass by just now—'e don' like it. Father don't like it neither.

*Voice* of *mercy*. Mr. Strangway shoudn' 'ave taken my skylark, an' thrown father out o' winder. 'Tis goin' to be awful fun! Oh!

[She jumps up and dawn in the darkness. And a voice from far in the shadow says: "Hsssh! Quiet, yu maids!" The voice has ceased speaking in the church. There is a moment's dead silence. The voice speaks again; then from the wheezy little organ come the first faint chords of a hymn.]

*Gladys*. "Nearer, my God, to Thee!"

*Voice* of *mercy*. 'Twill be funny, with no one 'ardly singin'.

[The sound of the old hymn sung by just six voices comes out to them rather sweet and clear.]

*Gladys*. [Softly] 'Tis pretty, tu. Why! They're only singin' one verse!

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[A moment's silence, and the voice speaks, uplifted, pronouncing the Blessing: "The peace of God——" As the last words die away, dark figures from the inn approach over the grass, till quite a crowd seems standing there without a word spoken. Then from out of the church porch come the congregation. *Tim Clyst* first, hastily lost among the waiting figures in the dark; old Mrs. Potter, a half blind old lady groping her way and perceiving nothing out of the ordinary; the two maids from the Hall, self-conscious and scared, scuttling along. Last, *ivy Burlacombe* quickly, and starting back at the dim, half-hidden crowd.]

*Voice* of *Gladys*. [Whispering] Ivy! Here, quick!

[Ivy sways, darts off towards the voice, and is lost in the shadow.]

*Voice of Freman*. [Low] Wait, boys, till I give signal.

[Two or three squirks and giggles; Tim *Clyst's* voice: "Ya-as! Don't 'ee tread on my toe!" A soft, frightened "O-o-h!" from a girl. Some quick, excited whisperings: "Luke!" "Zee there!" "He's comin'!" And then a perfectly dead silence. The figure of *Strangway* is seen in his dark clothes, passing from the vestry to the church porch. He stands plainly visible in the lighted porch, locking the door, then steps forward. Just as he reaches the edge of the porch, a low hiss breaks the silence. It swells very gradually into a long, hissing groan. *Strangway* stands motionless, his hand over his eyes, staring into the darkness. A girl's figure can be seen to break out of the darkness and rush away. When at last the groaning has died into sheer expectancy, *Strangway* drops his hand.]

*Strangway*. [In a loco voice] Yes! I'm glad. Is Jarland there?

*Freman*. He's 'ere-no thanks to yu! Hsss!

[The hiss breaks out again, then dies away.]

*Jarland's voice*. [Threatening] Try if yu can du it again.

*Strangway*. No, Jarland, no! I ask you to forgive me. Humbly!

[A hesitating silence, broken by muttering.]

*Clyst's voice*. Bravo!

A *voice*. That's vair.

A *voice*. 'E's afraid o' the sack—that's what 'tis.

A *voice*. [Groaning] 'E's a praaper coward.

A *voice*. Whu funked the doctor?

*Clyst's voice*. Shame on 'ee, therr!

*Strangway*. You're right—all of you! I'm not fit! An uneasy and excited mustering and whispering dies away into renewed silence.

*Strangway*. What I did to Tam Jarland is not the real cause of what you're doing, is it? I understand. But don't be troubled. It's all over. I'm going—you'll get some one better. Forgive me, Jarland. I can't see your face—it's very dark.

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FREMAN'S Voice. [Mocking] Wait for the full mune.

*Godleigh*. [Very low] "My 'eart 'E lighted not!"

*Strangway*. [starting at the sound of his own words thus mysteriously given him out of the darkness] Whoever found that, please tear it up! [After a moment's silence] Many of you have been very kind to me. You won't see me again—Good-bye, all!

[He stands for a second motionless, then moves resolutely down into the darkness so peopled with shadows.]

*Uncertain voices as he passes*. Good-bye, zurr!
Good luck, zurr! [He has gone.]

*Clyst's voice*. Three cheers for Mr. Strangway!

[And a queer, strangled cheer, with groans still threading it, arises.]

*Curtain*.

## ACT III

### SCENE I

In the BURLACOMBES' hall-sitting-room the curtains are drawn, a lamp burns, and the door stands open. *Burlacombe* and his wife are hovering there, listening to the sound of mingled cheers and groaning.

*Mrs*. *Burlacombe*. Aw! my gudeness—what a thing t'appen! I'd saner 'a lost all me ducks. [She makes towards the inner door] I can't never face 'im.

*Burlacombe*. 'E can't expect nothin' else, if 'e act like that.

*Mrs*. *Burlacombe*. 'Tes only duin' as 'e'd be done by.

*Burlacombe*. Aw! Yu can't go on forgivin' 'ere, an' forgivin' there.
'Tesn't nat'ral.

*Mrs*. *Burlacombe*. 'Tes the mischief 'e'm a parson. 'Tes 'im bein' a lamb o' God—or 'twidden be so quare for 'im to be forgivin'.

*Burlacombe*. Yu goo an' make un a gude 'ot drink.

*Mrs*. *Burlacombe*. Poor soul! What'll 'e du now, I wonder? [Under her breath] 'E's cumin'!

[She goes hurriedly. *Burlacombe*, with a startled look back, wavers and makes to follow her, but stops undecided in the inner doorway. *Strangway* comes in from the darkness. He turns to the window and drops overcoat and hat and the church key on the windowseat, looking about him as men do when too hard driven, and never fixing his eyes long enough on anything to see it. *Burlacombe*, closing the door into the house, advances a step. At the sound *Strangway* faces round.]

*Burlacombe*. I wanted for yu to know, zurr, that me an' mine 'adn't nothin' to du wi' that darned fulishness, just now.

*Strangway*. [With a ghost of a smile] Thank you, Burlacombe. It doesn't matter. It doesn't matter a bit.

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*Burlacombe*. I ‘ope yu won’t take no notice of it. Like a lot o’ silly bees they get. [After an uneasy pause] Yu’ll excuse me spakin’ of this mornin’, an’ what ’appened. ’Tes a brave pity it cam’ on yu so sudden-like before yu ’ad time to think. ’Tes a sort o’ thing a man shude zet an’ chew upon. Certainly ‘tes not a bit o’ yuse goin’ against human nature. Ef yu don’t stand up for yureself there’s no one else not goin’ to. ’Tes yure not ‘avin’ done that ’as made ’em so rampageous. [Stealing another look at *Strangway*] Yu’ll excuse me, zurr, spakin’ of it, but ‘tes amazin’ sad to zee a man let go his own, without a word o’ darin’. ’Tea as ef ’e ’ad no passions like.

*Strangway*. Look at me, Burlacombe.

[*Burlacombe* looks up, trying hard to keep his eyes on *Strangway’s*, that seem to burn in his thin face.]

*Strangway*. Do I look like that? Please, please! [He touches his breast] I’ve too much here. Please!

*Burlacombe*. [With a sort of startled respect] Well, zurr, ’tes not for me to zay nothin’, certainly.

[He turns and after a slow look back at *Strangway* goes out.]

*Strangway*. [To himself] Passions! No passions! Ha!

[The outer door is opened and *ivy Burlacombe* appears, and, seeing him, stops. Then, coming softly towards him, she speaks timidly.]

*Ivy*. Oh! Mr. Strangway, Mrs. Bradmere’s cumin’ from the Rectory. I ran an’ told ’em. Oh! ’twas awful.

[*Strangway* starts, stares at her, and turning on his heel, goes into the house. Ivy’s face is all puckered, as if she were on the point of tears. There is a gentle scratching at the door, which has not been quite closed.]

*Voice of Gladys*. [Whispering] Ivy! Come on Ivy. I won’t.

*Voice of mercy*. Yu must. Us can’t du without Yu.

Ivy. [Going to the door] I don’t want to.

*Voice* of *Gladys*. “Naughty maid, she won’t come out,” Ah! du ’ee!

*Voice of Cremer*. Tim Clyst an’ Bobbie’s cumin’; us’ll only be six anyway. Us can’t dance “figure of eight” without yu.

Ivy. [Stamping her foot] I don't want to dance at all!  I don't.

*Mercy*.  Aw!  She's temper.  Yu can bang on tambourine, then!

*Gladys*. [Running in] Quick, Ivy!  Here's the old grey mare cumin' down the green. Quick.

[With whispering and scuffling; gurgling and squeaking, the reluctant Ivy's hand is caught and she is jerked away.  In their haste they have left the door open behind them.]

*Voice* of *Mrs*. *Bradmere*. [Outside] Who's that?

[She knocks loudly, and rings a bell; then, without waiting, comes in through the open door.]

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[Noting the overcoat and hat on the window-sill she moves across to ring the bell. But as she does so, *Mrs*. *Burlacombe*, followed by *Burlacombe*, comes in from the house.]

*Mrs*. *Bradmere* This disgraceful business! Where's Mr. Strangway? I see he's in.

*Mrs*. *Burlacombe*. Yes, m'm, he'm in—but—but Burlacombe du zay he'm terrible upset.

*Mrs*. *Bradmere*. I should think so. I must see him—at once.

*Mrs*. *Burlacombe*. I doubt bed's the best place for 'un, an' gude 'ot drink. Burlacombe zays he'm like a man standin' on the edge of a cliff; and the lasts tipsy o' wind might throw un over.

*Mrs*. *Bradmere*. [To *Burlacombe*] You've seen him, then?

*Burlacombe*. Yeas; an' I don't like the luke of un—not a little bit, I don't.

*Mrs*. *Burlacombe*. [Almost to herself] Poor soul; 'e've a-'ad to much to try un this yer long time past. I've a-seen 'tis sperrit cumin' thru 'is body, as yu might zay. He's torn to bits, that's what 'tis.

*Burlacombe*. 'Twas a praaper cowardly thing to hiss a man when he's down. But 'twas natural tu, in a manner of spakin'. But 'tesn't that troublin' 'im. 'Tes in here [touching his forehead], along of his wife, to my thinkin'. They zay 'e've a-known about 'er a-fore she went away. Think of what 'e've 'ad to kape in all this time. 'Tes enough to drive a man silly after that. I've a-locked my gun up. I see a man like—like that once before—an' sure enough 'e was dead in the mornin'!

*Mrs*. *Bradmere*. Nonsense, Burlacombe! [To *Mrs*. *Burlacombe*] Go and tell him I want to see him—must see him. [*Mrs*. *Burlacombe* goes into the house] And look here, Burlacombe; if we catch any one, man or woman, talking of this outside the village, it'll be the end of their tenancy, whoever they may be. Let them all know that. I'm glad he threw that drunken fellow out of the window, though it was a little——

*Burlacombe*. Aye! The nuspapers would be praaper glad of that, for a tiddy bit o' nuse.

*Mrs*. *Bradmere*. My goodness! Yes! The men are all up at the inn. Go and tell them what I said—it's not to get about. Go at once, Burlacombe.

*Burlacombe*. Must be a turrable job for 'im, every one's knowin' about 'is wife like this. He'm a proud man tu, I think. 'Tes a funny business altogether!

*Mrs*. *Bradmere*. Horrible! Poor fellow! Now, come! Do your best, Burlacombe!

[*Burlacombe* touches his forelock and goes. *Mrs*. *Bradmere* stands quite still, thinking. Then going to the photograph, she stares up at it.]

*Mrs*. *Bradmere*. You baggage!

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[*Strangway* has come in noiselessly, and is standing just behind her. She turns, and sees him. There is something so still, so startlingly still in his figure and white face, that she cannot for the moment fond her voice.]

*Mrs*. *Bradmere*. [At last] This is most distressing. I'm deeply sorry. [Then, as he does not answer, she goes a step closer] I'm an old woman; and old women must take liberties, you know, or they couldn't get on at all. Come now! Let's try and talk it over calmly and see if we can't put things right.

*Strangway*. You were very good to come; but I would rather not.

*Mrs*. *Bradmere*. I know you're in as grievous trouble as a man can be.

*Strangway*. Yes.

*Mrs*. *Bradmere*. [With a little sound of sympathy] What are you— thirty-five? I'm sixty-eight if I'm a day—old enough to be your mother. I can feel what you must have been through all these months, I can indeed. But you know you've gone the wrong way to work. We aren't angels down here below! And a son of the Church can't act as if for himself alone. The eyes of every one are on him.

*Strangway*. [Taking the church key from the window.] Take this, please.

*Mrs*. *Bradmere*. No, no, no! Jarland deserved all he got. You had great provocation.

*Strangway*. It's not Jarland. [Holding out the key] Please take it to the Rector. I beg his forgiveness. [Touching his breast] There's too much I can't speak of—can't make plain. Take it to him, please.

*Mrs*. *Bradmere*. Mr. Strangway—I don't accept this. I am sure my husband—the Church—will never accept——

*Strangway*. Take it!

*Mrs*. *Bradmere*. [Almost unconsciously taking it] Mind! We don't accept it. You must come and talk to the Rector to-morrow. You're overwrought. You'll see it all in another light, then.

*Strangway*. [With a strange smile] Perhaps. [Lifting the blind] Beautiful night! Couldn't be more beautiful!

*Mrs*. *Bradmere*. [Startled-softly] Don't turn sway from these who want to help you! I'm a grumpy old woman, but I can feel for you. Don't try and keep it all back, like this! A woman would cry, and it would all seem clearer at once. Now won't you let me——?

*Strangway*. No one can help, thank you.

*Mrs*. *Bradmere*. Come! Things haven't gone beyond mending, really, if you'll face them. [Pointing to the photograph] You know what I mean. We dare not foster immorality.

*Strangway*. [Quivering as at a jabbed nerve] Don't speak of that!

*Mrs*. *Bradmere*. But think what you've done, Mr. Strangway! If you can't take your wife back, surely you must divorce her. You can never help her to go on like this in secret sin.

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*Strangway*. Torture her—one way or the other?

*Mrs*. *Bradmere*. No, no; I want you to do as the Church—as all Christian society would wish. Come! You can't let this go on. My dear man, do your duty at all costs!

*Strangway*. Break her heart?

*Mrs*. *Bradmere*. Then you love that woman—more than God!

*Strangway*. [His face quivering] Love!

*Mrs*. *Bradmere*. They told me——Yes, and I can see you're is a bad way. Come, pull yourself together! You can't defend what you're doing.

*Strangway*. I do not try.

*Mrs*. *Bradmere*. I must get you to see! My father was a clergyman; I'm married to one; I've two sons in the Church. I know what I'm talking about. It's a priest's business to guide the people's lives.

*Strangway*. [Very low] But not mine! No more!

*Mrs*. *Bradmere*. [Looking at him shrewdly] There's something very queer about you to-night. You ought to see doctor.

*Strangway*. [A smile awning and going on his lips] If I am not better soon——

*Mrs*. *Bradmere*. I know it must be terrible to feel that everybody——

[A convulsive shiver passes over *Strangway*, and he shrinks against the door]

But come! Live it down!

[With anger growing at his silence]

Live it down, man! You can't desert your post—and let these villagers do what they like with us? Do you realize that you're letting a woman, who has treated you abominably; —yes, abominably —go scot-free, to live comfortably with another man? What an example!

*Strangway*. Will you, please, not speak of that!

*Mrs*. *Bradmere*. I must! This great Church of ours is based on the rightful condemnation of wrongdoing. There are times when forgiveness is a sin, Michael Strangway. You must keep the whip hand. You must fight!

*Strangway*. Fight! [Touching his heart] My fight is here. Have you ever been in hell? For months and months—burned and longed; hoped against hope; killed a man in thought day by day? Never rested, for love and hate? I—condemn! I—judge! No! It's rest I have to find—somewhere—somehow-rest! And how—how can I find rest?

*Mrs*. *Bradmere*. [Who has listened to his outburst in a soft of coma] You are a strange man! One of these days you'll go off your head if you don't take care.

*Strangway*. [Smiling] One of these days the flowers will grow out of me; and I shall sleep.

> [*Mrs*. *Bradmere* stares at his smiling face a long moment in silence, then with a little sound, half sniff, half snort, she goes to the door. There she halts.]

*Mrs*. *Bradmere*. And you mean to let all this go on——Your wife——

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*Strangway*. Go! Please go!

*Mrs*. *Bradmere*. Men like you have been buried at cross-roads before now! Take care! God punishes!

*Strangway*. Is there a God?

*Mrs*. *Bradmere*. Ah! [With finality] You must see a doctor.

[Seeing that the look on his face does not change, she opens the door, and hurries away into the moonlight.]

[*Strangway* crosses the room to where his wife's picture hangs, and stands before it, his hands grasping the frame. Then he takes it from the wall, and lays it face upwards on the window seat.]

*Strangway*. [To himself] Gone! What is there, now?

[The sound of an owl's hooting is floating in, and of voices from the green outside the inn.]

*Strangway*. [To himself] Gone! Taken faith—hope—life!

[*Jim Bere* comes wandering into the open doorway.]

*Jim Bere*. Gude avenin', zurr.

[At his slow gait, with his feeble smile, he comes in, and standing by the window-seat beside the long dark coat that still lies there, he looks down at *Strangway* with his lost eyes.]

*Jim*. Yu threw un out of winder. I cud 'ave, once, I cud.

[*Strangway* neither moves nor speaks; and *Jim Bere* goes on with his unimaginably slow speech]

They'm laughin' at yu, zurr. An' so I come to tell 'ee how to du. 'Twas full mune—when I caught 'em, him an' my girl. I caught 'em. [With a strange and awful flash of fire] I did; an' I tuk un [He taken up *Strangway's* coat and grips it with his trembling hands, as a man grips another's neck] like that—I tuk un. As the coat falls, like a body out of which the breath has been squeezed, *Strangway*, rising, catches it.

*Strangway*. [Gripping the coat] And he fell!

[He lets the coat fall on the floor, and puts his foot on it.
Then, staggering back, he leans against the window.]

*Jim*. Yu see, I loved ’er—I did. [The lost look comes back to his eyes] Then somethin’—I dunno—and—and——[He lifts his hand and passes it up and down his side] Twas like this for ever.

[They gaze at each other in silence.]

*Jim*. [At last] I come to tell yu. They’m all laughin’ at yu. But yu’m strong—yu go over to Durford to that doctor man, an’ take un like I did. [He tries again to make the sign of squeezing a man’s neck] They can’t laugh at yu no more, then. Tha’s what I come to tell yu. Tha’s the way for a Christian man to du. Gude naight, zurr. I come to tell yee.

[*Strangway* motions to him in silence. And, very slowly, *Jim Bere* passes out.]

[The voices of men coming down the green are heard.]

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*Voices*. Gude night, Tam. Glide naight, old Jim!

*Voices*. Gude might, Mr. Trustaford. 'Tes a wonderful fine mune.

*Voice of Trustaford*. Ah! 'Tes a brave mune for th' poor old curate!

*Voice*. "My 'eart 'E lighted not!"

[TRUSTAFORD'S laugh, and the rattling, fainter and fainter, of wheels. A spasm seizes on *Strangway's* face, as he stands there by the open door, his hand grips his throat; he looks from side to side, as if seeking a way of escape.]

*Curtain*.

## SCENE II

The BURLACOMBES' high and nearly empty barn. A lantern is hung by a rope that lifts the bales of straw, to a long ladder leaning against a rafter. This gives all the light there is, save for a slender track of moonlight, slanting in from the end, where the two great doors are not quite closed. On a rude bench in front of a few remaining, stacked, square-cut bundles of last year's hay, sits *Tibby Jarland*, a bit of apple in her mouth, sleepily beating on a tambourine. With stockinged feet *Gladys*, ivy, Connie, and *mercy*, *Tim Clyst*, and *Bobbie Jarland*, a boy of fifteen, are dancing a truncated "Figure of Eight"; and their shadow are dancing alongside on the walls. Shoes and some apples have been thrown down close to the side door through which they have come in. Now and then *ivy*, the smallest and best of the dancers, ejaculates words of direction, and one of the youths grunts or breathes loudly out of the confusion of his mind. Save for this and the dumb beat and jingle of the sleepy tambourine, there is no sound. The dance comes to its end, but the drowsy *Tibby* goes on beating.

Mercy. That'll du, Tibby; we're finished. Ate yore apple. [The stolid *Tibby* eats her apple.]

*Clyst*. [In his teasing, excitable voice] Yu maids don't dance 'elf's well as us du. Bobbie 'e's a great dancer. 'E dance vine. I'm a gude dancer, meself.

*Gladys*. A'n't yu conceited just?

*Clyst*. Aw! Ah! Yu'll give me kiss for that. [He chases, but cannot catch that slippery white figure] Can't she glimmer!

*Mercy*. Gladys! Up ladder!

*Clyst*. Yu go up ladder; I'll catch 'ee then.  Naw, yu maids, don't yu give her succour. That's not vair [Catching hold of *mercy*, who gives a little squeal.]

*Connie*.  Mercy, don't!  Mrs. Burlacombe'll hear.  Ivy, go an' peek.

[Ivy goes to flee side door and peers through.]

*Clyst*. [Abandoning the chase and picking up an apple—they all have the joyous irresponsibility that attends forbidden doings] Ya-as, this is a gude apple.  Luke at Tibby!

[*Tibby*, overcome by drowsiness, has fallen back into the hay, asleep.  *Gladys*, leaning against the hay breaks into humming:]

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"There cam' three dukes a-ridin', a-ridin', a-ridin',
There cam' three dukes a ridin'
With a ransy-tansy tay!"

*Clyst*. Us 'as got on vine; us'll get prize for our dancin'.

*Connie*. There won't be no prize if Mr. Strangway goes away. 'Tes funny 'twas Mrs. Strangway start us.

*Ivy*. [From the door] 'Twas wicked to hiss him.

[A moment's hush.]

*Clyst*. Twasn't I.

*Bobbie*. I never did.

*Gladys*. Oh! Bobbie, yu did! Yu blew in my ear.

*Clyst*. 'Twas the praaper old wind in the trees. Did make a brave noise, zurely.

*Mercy*. 'E shuld'n' 'a let my skylark go.

*Clyst*. [Out of sheer contradictoriness] Ya-as, 'e shude, then.
What du yu want with th' birds of the air? They'm no gude to yu.

*Ivy*. [Mournfully] And now he's goin' away.

*Clyst*. Ya-as; 'tes a pity. He's the best man I ever seen since I was comin' from my mother. He's a gude man. He'em got a zad face, sure enough, though.

*Ivy*. Gude folk always 'ave zad faces.

*Clyst*. I knu a gude man—'e sold pigs—very gude man: 'e 'ad a budiful bright vase like the mane. [Touching his stomach] I was sad, meself, once. 'Twas a funny scrabblin'—-like feelin'.

*Gladys*. If 'e go away, whu's goin' to finish us for confirmation?

*Connie*. The Rector and the old grey mare.

*Mercy*. I don' want no more finishin'; I'm confirmed enough.

*Clyst*. Ya-as; yu'm a buty.

*Gladys*. Suppose we all went an' asked 'im not to go?

*Ivy*. ’Twouldn’t be no gude.

*Connie*. Where’s ‘e goin’?

*Mercy*. He’ll go to London, of course.

*Ivy*. He’s so gentle; I think ’e’ll go to an island, where there’s nothin’ but birds and beasts and flowers.

*Clyst*. Aye! He’m awful fond o’ the dumb things.

*Ivy*. They’re kind and peaceful; that’s why.

*Clyst*. Aw! Yu see tu praaper old tom cats; they’m not to peaceful, after that, nor kind naighther.

*Bobbie*. [Surprisingly] If ’e’s sad, per’aps ’e’ll go to ’Eaven.

*Ivy*. Oh! not yet, Bobbie. He’s tu young.

*Clyst*. [Following his own thoughts] Ya-as. ’Tes a funny place, tu, nowadays, judgin’ from the papers.

*Gladys*. Wonder if there’s dancin’ in ’Eaven?

*Ivy*. There’s beasts, and flowers, and waters, and ’e told us.

*Clyst*. Naw! There’s no dumb things in ’Eaven. Jim Bere ’e says there is! ’E thinks ’is old cat’s there.

*Ivy*. Yes. [Dreamily] There’s stars, an’ owls, an’ a man playin’ on the flute. Where ’tes gude, there must be music.

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*Clyst*. Old brass band, shuldn' wonder, like th' Salvation Army.

*Ivy*. [Putting up her hands to an imaginary pipe] No; 'tis a boy that goes so; an' all the dumb things an' all the people goo after 'im—like this.

[She marches slowly, playing her imaginary pipe, and one by one they all fall in behind her, padding round the barn in their stockinged feet. Passing the big doors, *ivy* throws them open.]

An' 'tes all like that in 'Eaven.

[She stands there gazing out, still playing on her imaginary pipe. And they all stand a moment silent, staring into the moonlight.]

*Clyst*. 'Tes a glory-be full mune to-night!

*Ivy*. A goldie-cup—a big one. An' millions o' little goldie-cups on the floor of 'Eaven.

*Mercy*. Oh! Bother 'Eaven! Let's dance "Clapperclaws"! Wake up, Tibby!

*Gladys*. Clapperelaws, clapperclaws! Come on, Bobbie—make circle!

*Clyst*. Clapperclaws! I dance that one fine.

*Ivy*. [Taking the tambourine] See, Tibby; like this. She hums and beats gently, then restores the tambourine to the sleepy *Tibby*, who, waking, has placed a piece of apple in her mouth.

*Connie*. 'Tes awful difficult, this one.

*Ivy*. [Illustrating] No; yu just jump, an' clap yore 'ands. Lovely, lovely!

*Clyst*. Like ringin' bells! Come ahn!

[*Tibby* begins her drowsy beating, *ivy* hums the tune; they dance, and their shadows dance again upon the walls. When she has beaten but a few moments on the tambourine, *Tibby* is overcome once more by sleep and falls back again into her nest of hay, with her little shoed feet just visible over the edge of the bench. Ivy catches up the tambourine, and to her beating and humming the dancers dance on.]

[Suddenly *Gladys* stops like a wild animal surprised, and cranes her neck towards the aide door.]

*Connie*. [Whispering] What is it?

*Gladys*. [Whispering] I hear—some one comin' across the yard.

[She leads a noiseless scamper towards the shoes. *Bobbie Jarland* shins up the ladder and seizes the lantern. Ivy drops the tambourine. They all fly to the big doors, and vanish into the moonlight, pulling the door nearly to again after them.][There is the sound of scrabbling at the hitch of the side door, and *Strangway* comes into the nearly dark barn. Out in the night the owl is still hooting. He closes the door, and that sound is lost. Like a man walking in his sleep, he goes up to the ladder, takes the rope in his hand, and makes a noose. He can be heard breathing, and in the darkness the motions of his hands are dimly seen, freeing his throat and putting the noose round his neck.

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He stands swaying to and fro at the foot of the ladder; then, with a sigh, sets his foot on it to mount. One of the big doors creaks and opens in the wind, letting in a broad path of moonlight.]

[*Strangway* stops; freeing his neck from the noose, he walks quickly up the track of moonlight, whitened from head to foot, to close the doors.]

[The sound of his boots on the bare floor has awakened *Tibby Jarland*. Struggling out of her hay nest she stands staring at his whitened figure, and bursts suddenly into a wail.]

*Tibby*. O-oh! Mercy! Where are yu? I'm frightened! I'm frightened! O-oooo!

*Strangway*. [Turning—startled] Who's that? Who is it?

*Tibby*. O-oh! A ghosty! Oo-ooo!

*Strangway*. [Going to her quickly] It's me, Tibby—Tib only me!

*Tibby*. I seed a ghosty.

*Strangway*. [Taking her up] No, no, my bird, you didn't! It was me.

*Tibby*. [Burying her face against him] I'm frighted. It was a big one. [She gives tongue again] O-o-oh!

*Strangway*. There, there! It's nothing but me. Look!

*Tibby*. No. [She peeps out all the same.]

*Strangway*. See! It's the moonlight made me all white. See! You're a brave girl now?

*Tibby*. [Cautiously] I want my apple.

[She points towards her nest. *Strangway* carries her there, picks up an apple, and gives it her. *Tibby* takes a bite.]

*Tibby*. I want any tambourine.

*Strangway*. [Giving her the tambourine, and carrying her back into the' track of moonlight] Now we're both ghosties! Isn't it funny?

*Tabby*. [Doubtfully] Yes.

*Strangway*. See! The moon's laughing at us! See? Laugh then!

[*Tabby*, tambourine in one hand and apple in the other, smiles stolidly. He sets her down on the ladder, and stands, holding her level With him.]

*Tabby*. [Solemnly] I'se still frightened.

*Strangway*. No! Full moon, Tibby! Shall we wish for it?

*Tabby*. Full mune.

*Strangway*. Moon! We're wishing for you. Moon, moon!

*Tibby*. Mune, we're wishin' for yu!

*Strangway*. What do, you wish it to be?

*Tibby*. Bright new shillin'!

*Strangway*. A face.

*Tibby*. Shillin', a shillin'!

*Strangway*. [Taking out a shilling and spinning it so that it falls into her pinafore] See! Your wish comes true.

*Tibby*. Oh! [Putting the shilling in her mouth] Mune's still there!

*Strangway*. Wish for me, Tibby!

*Tibby*. Mune. I'm wishin' for yu!

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*Strangway*. Not yet!

*Tibby*. Shall I shake my tambouline?

*Strangway*. Yes, shake your tambouline.

*Tibby*. [Shaking her tambourine] Mune, I'm shaken' at yu.

[*Strangway* lays his hand suddenly on the rope, and swings it up on to the beam.]

*Tibby*. What d'yu du that for?

*Strangway*. To put it out of reach. It's better——

*Tibby*. Why is it better? [She stares up at him.]

*Strangway*. Come along, Tibby! [He carries her to the big doors, and sets her down] See! All asleep! The birds, and the fields, and the moon!

*Tibby*. Mune, mune, we're wishing for yu!

*Strangway*. Send her your love, and say good-night.

*Tibby*. [Blowing a kiss] Good-night, mune!

[From the barn roof a little white dove's feather comes floating down in the wind. *Tibby* follows it with her hand, catches it, and holds it up to him.]

*Tibby*. [Chuckling] Luke. The mune's sent a bit o' love!

*Strangway*. [Taking the feather] Thank you, Tibby! I want that bit o' love. [Very faint, comes the sound of music] Listen!

*Tibby*. It's Miss Willis, playin' on the pianny!

*Strangway*. No; it's Love; walking and talking in the world.

*Tibby*. [Dubiously] Is it?

*Strangway*. [Pointing] See! Everything coming out to listen! See them, Tibby! All the little things with pointed ears, children, and birds, and flowers, and bunnies; and the bright rocks, and—men! Hear their hearts beating! And the wind listening!

*Tibby*. I can't hear—nor I can't see!

*Strangway*. Beyond——[To himself] They are—they must be; I swear they are! [Then, catching sight of TIBBY'S amazed eyes] And now say good-bye to me.

*Tibby*. Where yu goin'?

*Strangway*. I don't know, Tibby.

*Voice of mercy*. [Distant and cautious] Tibby! Tibby! Where are yu?

*Strangway*. Mercy calling; run to her!

[*Tibby* starts off, turns back and lifts her face. He bends to kiss her, and flinging her arms round his neck, she gives him a good hug. Then, knuckling the sleep out of her eyes, she runs.]

[*Strangway* stands, uncertain. There is a sound of heavy footsteps; a man clears his throat, close by.]

*Strangway*. Who's that?

*Cremer*. Jack Cremer. [The big man's figure appears out of the shadow of the barn] That yu, zurr?

*Strangway*. Yes, Jack. How goes it?

*Cremer*. 'Tes empty, zurr. But I'll get on some'ow.

*Strangway*. You put me to shame.

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*Cremer*. No, zurr. I'd be killin' meself, if I didn' feel I must stick it, like yu zaid.

[They stand gazing at each other in the moonlight.]

*Strangway*. [Very low] I honour you.

*Cremer*. What's that? [Then, as *Strangway* does not answer] I'll just be walkin'—I won' be gain' 'ome to-night. 'Tes the full mune— lucky.

*Strangway*. [Suddenly] Wait for me at the crossroads, Jack. I'll come with you. Will you have me, brother?

*Cremer*. Sure!

*Strangway*. Wait, then.

*Cremer*. Aye, zurr.

[With his heavy tread *Cremer* passes on. And *Strangway* leans against the lintel of the door, looking at the moon, that, quite full and golden, hangs not far above the straight horizon, where the trees stand small, in a row.]

*Strangway*. [Lifting his hand in the gesture of prayer] God, of the moon and the sun; of joy and beauty, of loneliness and sorrow—give me strength to go on, till I love every living thing!

[He moves away, following *Jack Cremer*. The full moon shines;
the owl hoots; and some one is shaking TIBBY'S tambourine.]

## THE FOUNDATIONS

(*An extravagant play*)

## PERSONS OF THE PLAY

*Lord William Dromondy*, M.P.
*Lady William Dromondy*
*little Anne*
*miss Stokes*
*Mr. Poulder*
*James*
*Henry*
*Thomas*

*Charles*
*the press*
*Lemmy*
*old Mrs*. *Lemmy*
*little Aida*
*the Duke of Exeter*

Some *anti-sweaters*; Some *sweated workers*; and a *crowd*

## SCENES

*Scene* I. The cellar at *lord William* DROMONDY'S in Park Lane.

*Scene* II. The room of old *Mrs*. *Lemmy* in Bethnal Green.

*Scene* III. Ante-room of the hall at *lord William* DROMONDY'S

The Action passes continuously between 8 and 10.30 of a summer evening, some years after the Great War.

## ACT I

Lord William DROMONDY'S mansion in Park Lane. Eight o'clock of the evening. *Little Anne Dromondy* and the large footman, *James*, gaunt and grin, discovered in the wine cellar, by light of gas. *James*, in plush breeches, is selecting wine.

L. *Anne*: James, are you really James?

*James*. No, my proper name's John.

L. *Anne*. Oh! [A pause] And is Charles's an improper name too?

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*James*. His proper name's Mark.

L. *Anne*. Then is Thomas Matthew?

*James*. Miss Anne, stand clear o' that bin. You'll put your foot through one o' those 'ock bottles.

L. *Anne*. No, but James—Henry might be Luke, really?

*James*. Now shut it, Miss Anne!

L. *Anne*. Who gave you those names? Not your godfathers and godmothers?

*James*. Poulder. Butlers think they're the Almighty. [Gloomily]
But his name's Bartholomew.

L. *Anne*. Bartholomew Poulder? It's rather jolly.

*James*. It's hidjeous.

L. *Anne*. Which do you like to be called—John or James?

*James*. I don't give a darn.

L. *Anne*. What is a darn?

*James*. 'Tain't in the dictionary.

L. *Anne*. Do you like my name? Anne Dromondy? It's old, you know.
But it's funny, isn't it?

*James*. [Indifferently] It'll pass.

L. *Anne*. How many bottles have you got to pick out?

*James*. Thirty-four.

L. *Anne*. Are they all for the dinner, or for the people who come in to the Anti-Sweating Meeting afterwards?

*James*. All for the dinner. They give the Sweated—tea.

L. *Anne*. All for the dinner? They'll drink too much, won't they?

*James*. We've got to be on the safe side.

L. *Anne*. Will it be safer if they drink too much?

[*James* pauses in the act of dusting a bottle to look at her, as if suspecting irony.]

[Sniffing] Isn't the smell delicious here-like the taste of cherries when they've gone bad—[She sniffs again] and mushrooms; and boot blacking.

*James*. That's the escape of gas.

L. *Anne*. Has the plumber's man been?

*James*. Yes.

L. *Anne*. Which one?

*James*. Little blighter I've never seen before.

L. *Anne*. What is a little blighter? Can I see?

*James*. He's just gone.

L. *Anne*. [Straying] Oh! . . . James, are these really the foundations?

*James*. You might 'arf say so. There's a lot under a woppin' big house like this; you can't hardly get to the bottom of it.

L. *Anne*. Everything's built on something, isn't it? And what's *that* built on?

*James*. Ask another.

L. *Anne*. If you wanted to blow it up, though, you'd have to begin from here, wouldn't you?

*James*. Who'd want to blow it up?

L. *Anne*. It would make a mess in Park Lane.

*James*. I've seen a lot bigger messes than this'd make, out in the war.

L. *Anne*. Oh! but that's years ago! Was it like this in the trenches, James?

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*James*. [Grimly] Ah!  'Cept that you couldn't lay your 'and on a bottle o' port when you wanted one.

L. *Anne*.  Do you, when you want it, here?

*James*. [On guard] I only suggest it's possible.

L. *Anne*.  Perhaps Poulder does.

*James*. [Icily] I say nothin' about that.

L. *Anne*.  Oh!  Do say something!

*James*.  I'm ashamed of you, Miss Anne, pumpin' me!

L. *Anne*. [Reproachfully] I'm not pumpin'!  I only want to make
Poulder jump when I ask him.

*James*. [Grinning] Try it on your own responsibility, then; don't bring me in!

L. *Anne*. [Switching off] James, do you think there's going to be a bloody revolution?

*James*. [Shocked] I shouldn't use that word, at your age.

L. *Anne*.  Why not?  Daddy used it this morning to Mother. [Imitating] "The country's in an awful state, darling; there's going to be a bloody revolution, and we shall all be blown sky-high."  Do you like Daddy?

*James*. [Taken aback] Like Lord William?  What do you think?  We chaps would ha' done anything for him out there in the war.

L. *Anne*.  He never says that he always says he'd have done anything for you!

*James*.  Well—that's the same thing.

L. *Anne*.  It isn't—it's the opposite.  What is class hatred, James?

*James*. [Wisely] Ah!  A lot o' people thought when the war was over there'd be no more o' that. [He sniggers] Used to amuse me to read in the papers about the wonderful unity that was comin'.  I could ha' told 'em different.

L. *Anne*.  Why should people hate?  I like everybody.

*James*.  You know such a lot o' people, don't you?

L. *Anne*. Well, Daddy likes everybody, and Mother likes everybody, except the people who don't like Daddy. I bar Miss Stokes, of course; but then, who wouldn't?

*James*. [With a touch of philosophy] That's right—we all bars them that tries to get something out of us.

L. *Anne*. Who do you bar, James?

*James*. Well—[Enjoying the luxury of thought]—Speaking generally, I bar everybody that looks down their noses at me. Out there in the trenches, there'd come a shell, and orf'd go some orficer's head, an' I'd think: That might ha' been me—we're all equal in the sight o' the stars. But when I got home again among the torfs, I says to meself: Out there, ye know, you filled a hole as well as me; but here you've put it on again, with mufti.

L. *Anne*. James, are your breeches made of mufti?

*James*. [Contemplating his legs with a certain contempt] Ah! Footmen were to ha' been off; but Lord William was scared we wouldn't get jobs in the rush. We're on his conscience, and it's on my conscience that I've been on his long enough—so, now I've saved a bit, I'm goin' to take meself orf it.

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L. *Anne*. Oh! Are you going? Where?

*James*. [Assembling the last bottles] Out o' Blighty!

L. *Anne*. Is a little blighter a little Englishman?

*James*. [Embarrassed] Well-'e can be.

L. *Anne* [Mining] James—we're quite safe down here, aren't we, in a revolution? Only, we wouldn't have fun. Which would you rather—be safe, or have fun?

*James*. [Grimly] Well, I had my bit o' fun in the war.

L. *Anne*. I like fun that happens when you're not looking.

*James*. Do you? You'd ha' been just suited.

L. *Anne*. James, is there a future life? Miss Stokes says so.

*James*. It's a belief, in the middle classes.

L. *Anne*. What are the middle classes?

*James*. Anything from two 'undred a year to supertax.

L. *Anne*. Mother says they're terrible. Is Miss Stokes middle class?

*James*. Yes.

L. *Anne*. Then I expect they are terrible. She's awfully virtuous, though, isn't she?

*James*. 'Tisn't so much the bein' virtuous, as the lookin' it, that's awful.

L. *Anne*. Are all the middle classes virtuous? Is Poulder?

*James*. [Dubiously] Well. Ask him!

L. *Anne*. Yes, I will. Look!

[From an empty bin on the ground level she picks up a lighted taper,—burnt almost to the end.]

*James*. [Contemplating it] Careless!

L. Ate. Oh! And look! [She paints to a rounded metal object lying in the bin, close to where the taper was] It's a bomb!

She is about to pick it up when *James* takes her by the waist and puts her aside.

*James*. [Sternly] You stand back, there!  I don't like the look o' that!

L. *Anne*. [With intense interest] Is it really a bomb?  What fun!

*James*.  Go and fetch Poulder while I keep an eye on it.

L. *Anne*. [On tiptoe of excitement] If only I can make him jump!  Oh, James! we needn't put the light out, need we?

*James*.  No.  Clear off and get him, and don't you come back.

L. *Anne*.  Oh! but I must!  I found it!

*James*.  Cut along.

L. *Anne*.  Shall we bring a bucket?

*James*.  Yes. [*Anne* flies off.]

[Gazing at the object] Near go!  Thought I'd seen enough o'them to last my time.  That little gas blighter!  He looked a rum 'un, too—one o' these 'ere Bolshies.

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[In the presence of this grim object the habits of the past are too much for him. He sits on the ground, leaning against one of the bottle baskets, keeping his eyes on the bomb, his large, lean, gorgeous body spread, one elbow on his plush knee. Taking out an empty pipe, he places it mechanically, bowl down, between his dips. There enter, behind him, as from a communication trench, *Poulder*, in swallow-tails, with *little Anne* behind him.]

L. *Anne*. [Peering round him—ecstatic] Hurrah! Not gone off yet!
It can't—can it—while James is sitting on it?

*Poulder*. [Very broad and stout, with square shoulders,—a large ruddy face, and a small mouth] No noise, Miss.—James.

*James*. Hallo!

*Poulder*. What's all this?

*James*. Bomb!

*Poulder*. Miss Anne, off you go, and don't you——

L. *Anne*. Come back again! I know! [She flies.]

*James*. [Extending his hand with the pipe in it] See!

*Poulder*. [Severely] You've been at it again! Look here, you're not in the trenches now. Get up! What are your breeches goin' to be like? You might break a bottle any moment!

*James*. [Rising with a jerk to a sort of "Attention!"] Look here, you starched antiquity, you and I and that bomb are here in the sight of the stars. If you don't look out I'll stamp on it and blow us all to glory! Drop your civilian swank!

*Poulder*. [Seeing red] Ho! Because you had the privilege of fightin' for your country you still think you can put it on, do you? Take up your wine! 'Pon my word, you fellers have got no nerve left!

> [*James* makes a sudden swoop, lifts the bomb and poises it in both hands. *Poulder* recoils against a bin and gazes, at the object.]

*James*. Put up your hands!

*Poulder*. I defy you to make me ridiculous.

*James*. [Fiercely] Up with ’em!

[*Poulder’s* hands go up in an uncontrollable spasm, which he subdues almost instantly, pulling them down again.]

*James*. Very good. [He lowers the bomb.]

*Poulder*. [Surprised] I never lifted ’em.

*James*. You’d have made a first-class Boche, Poulder. Take the bomb yourself; you’re in charge of this section.

*Poulder*. [Pouting] It’s no part of my duty to carry menial objects; if you’re afraid of it I’ll send ’Enry.

*James*. Afraid! You ‘Op o’ me thumb!

[From the “communication trench” appears *little Anne*, followed by a thin, sharp, sallow-faced man of thirty-five or so, and another *footman*, carrying a wine-cooler.]

L. *Anne*. I’ve brought the bucket, and the Press.

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*Press*. [In front of *Poulder's* round eyes and mouth] Ah, major domo, I was just taking the names of the Anti-Sweating dinner. [He catches sight of the bomb in *James's* hand] By George! What A.1. irony! [He brings out a note-book and writes] "Highest class dining to relieve distress of lowest class-bombed by same!" Tipping! [He rubs his hands].

*Poulder*. [Drawing himself up] Sir? This is present! [He indicates *Anne* with the flat of his hand.]

L. *Anne*. I found the bomb.

*Press*. [Absorbed] By Jove! This is a piece of luck! [He writes.]

*Poulder*. [Observing him] This won't do—it won't do at all!

*Press*. [Writing-absorbed] "Beginning of the British Revolution!"

*Poulder*. [To *James*] Put it in the cooler. 'Enry, 'old up the cooler. Gently! Miss Anne, get be'ind the Press.

*James*. [Grimly—holding the bomb above the cooler] It won't be the Press that'll stop Miss Anne's goin' to 'Eaven if one o' this sort goes off. Look out! I'm goin' to drop it.

[*All* recoil. *Henry* puts the cooler down and backs away.]

L. *Anne*. [Dancing forward] Oh! Let me see! I missed all the war, you know!

[*James* lowers the bomb into the cooler.]

*Poulder*. [Regaining courage—to *the press*, who is scribbling in his note-book] If you mention this before the police lay their hands on it, it'll be contempt o' Court.

*Press*. [Struck] I say, major domo, don't call in the police! That's the last resort. Let me do the Sherlocking for you. Who's been down here?

L. *Anne*. The plumber's man about the gas——a little blighter we'd never seen before.

*James*. Lives close by, in Royal Court Mews—No. 3. I had a word with him before he came down. Lemmy his name is.

*Press*. "Lemmy!" [Noting the address] Right-o!

L. *Anne*. Oh! Do let me come with you!

*Poulder*. [Barring the way] I've got to lay it all before Lord William.

*Press*. Ah! What's he like?

*Poulder*. [With dignity] A gentleman, sir.

*Press*. Then he won't want the police in.

*Poulder*. Nor the Press, if I may go so far, as to say so.

*Press*. One to you! But I defy you to keep this from the Press, major domo: This is the most significant thing that has happened in our time. Guy Fawkes is nothing to it. The foundations of Society reeling! By George, it's a second Bethlehem!

[He writes.]

*Poulder*. [To *James*] Take up your wine and follow me. 'Enry, bring the cooler. Miss Anne, precede us. [To *the press*] You defy me? Very well; I'm goin' to lock you up here.

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*Press*. [Uneasy] I say this is medieval.

[He attempts to pass.]

*Poulder*. [Barring the way] Not so! James, put him up in that empty ’ock bin. We can’t have dinner disturbed in any way.

*James*. [Putting his hands on *the Press’s* shoulders] Look here—go quiet! I’ve had a grudge against you yellow newspaper boys ever since the war—frothin’ up your daily hate, an’ makin’ the Huns desperate. You nearly took my life five hundred times out there. If you squeal, I’m gain’ to take yours once—and that’ll be enough.

*Press*. That’s awfully unjust. Im not yellow!

*James*. Well, you look it. Hup.

*Press*. Little Lady-Anne, haven’t you any authority with these fellows?

L. *Anne*. [Resisting Poulard’s pressure] I won’t go! I simply must see James put him up!

*Press*. Now, I warn you all plainly—there’ll be a leader on this.

[He tries to bolt but is seized by *James*.]

*James*. [Ironically] Ho!

*Press*. My paper has the biggest influence

*James*. That’s the one! Git up in that ’ock bin, and mind your feet among the claret.

*Press*. This is an outrage on the Press.

*James*. Then it’ll wipe out one by the Press on the Public—an’ leave just a million over! Hup!

*Poulder*. ’Enry, give ’im an ’and.

[*The press* mounts, assisted by *James* and *Henry*.]

L. *Anne*. [Ecstatic] It’s lovely!

*Poulder*. [Nervously] Mind the ’87! Mind!

*James*. Mind your feet in Mr. Poulder’s favourite wine!

[A *woman's* voice is heard, as from the depths of a cave, calling "Anne! Anne!"]

L. *Anne*. [Aghast] Miss Stokes—I must hide!

[She gets behind *Poulder*. The three Servants achieve dignified positions in front of the bins. The voice comes nearer. *The press* sits dangling his feet, grinning. *Miss Stokes* appears. She is woman of forty-five and terribly good manners. Her greyish hair is rolled back off her forehead. She is in a high evening dress, and in the dim light radiates a startled composure.]

*Miss Stokes*. Poulder, where is Miss Anne?

[*Anne* lays hold of the backs of his legs.]

*Poulder*. [Wincing] I am not in a position to inform you, Miss.

*Miss* S. They told me she was down here. And what is all this about a bomb?

*Poulder*. [Lifting his hand in a calming manner] The crisis is past; we have it in ice, Miss. 'Enry, show Miss Stokes! [*Henry* indicates the cooler.]

*Miss* S. Good gracious! Does Lord William know?

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*Poulder*. Not at present, Miss.

*Miss* S. But he ought to, at once.

*Poulder*. We ’ave ’ad complications.

*Miss* S. [Catching sight of the legs of *the press*] Dear me! What are those?

*James*. [Gloomily] The complications.

[*Miss Stokes* pins up her glasses and stares at them.]

*Press*. [Cheerfully] Miss Stokes, would you kindly tell Lord William
I’m here from the Press, and would like to speak to him?

*Miss* S. But—er—why are you up there?

*James*. ‘E got up out o’ remorse, Miss.

*Miss* S. What do you mean, James?

*Press*. [Warmly] Miss Stokes, I appeal to you. Is it fair to attribute responsibility to an unsigned journalist—for what he has to say?

*James*. [Sepulchrally] Yes, when you’ve got ’im in a nice dark place.

*Miss*. S. James, be more respectful! We owe the Press a very great debt.

*James*. I’m goin’ to pay it, Miss.

*Miss* S. [At a loss] Poulder, this is really most——

*Poulder*. I’m bound to keep the Press out of temptation, miss, till I’ve laid it all before Lord William. ’Enry, take up the cooler. James, watch ’im till we get clear, then bring on the rest of the wine and lock up. Now, Miss.

*Miss* S. But where is Anne?

*Press*. Miss Stokes, as a lady——!

*Miss* S. I shall go and fetch Lord William!

*Poulder*. We will all go, Miss.

L. *Anne*. [Rushing out from behind his legs] No—me!

[She eludes *miss Stokes* and vanishes, followed by that distracted but still well-mannered lady.]

*Poulder*. [Looking at his watch] ’Enry, leave the cooler, and take up the wine; tell Thomas to lay it out; get the champagne into ice, and ’ave Charles ’andy in the ’all in case some literary bounder comes punctual.

[*Henry* takes up the wine and goes.]

*Press*. [Above his head] I say, let me down. This is a bit undignified, you know. My paper’s a great organ.

*Poulder*. [After a moment’s hesitation] Well—take ’im down, James; he’ll do some mischief among the bottles.

*James*. ’Op off your base, and trust to me.

[*The*, *press* slides off the bin’s edge, is received by *James*, and not landed gently.]

*Poulder*. [Contemplating him] The incident’s closed; no ill-feeling, I hope?

*Press*. No-o.

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*Poulder*. That's right. [Clearing his throat] While we're waitin' for Lord William—if you're interested in wine—[Philosophically] you can read the history of the times in this cellar. Take 'ock: [He points to a bin] Not a bottle gone. German product, of course. Now, that 'ock is 'sa 'avin' the time of its life—maturin' grandly; got a wonderful chance. About the time we're bringin' ourselves to drink it, we shall be havin' the next great war. With luck that 'ock may lie there another quarter of a century, and a sweet pretty wine it'll be. I only hope I may be here to drink it. Ah! [He shakes his head]—but look at claret! Times are hard on claret. We're givin' it an awful doin'. Now, there's a Ponty Canny [He points to a bin]- if we weren't so 'opelessly allied with France, that wine would have a reasonable future. As it is—none! We drink it up and up; not more than sixty dozen left. And where's its equal to come from for a dinner wine—ah! I ask you? On the other hand, port is steady; made in a little country, all but the cobwebs and the old boot flavour; guaranteed by the British Nary; we may 'ope for the best with port. Do you drink it?

*Press*. When I get the chance.

*Poulder*. Ah! [Clears his throat] I've often wanted to ask: What do they pay you—if it's not indelicate?

[*The press* shrugs his shoulders.]

Can you do it at the money?

[*The press* shakes his head.] Still—it's an easy life! I've regretted sometimes that I didn't have a shot at it myself; influencin' other people without disclosin' your identity—-something very attractive about that. [Lowering his voice] Between man and man, now-what do you think of the situation of the country—these processions of the unemployed—the Red Flag an' the Marsillaisy in the streets—all this talk about an upheaval?

*Press*. Well, speaking as a Socialist——

*Poulder*. [Astounded] Why; I thought your paper was Tory!

*Press*. So it is. That's nothing!

*Poulder*. [Open-mouthed] Dear me! [Pointing to the bomb] Do you really think there's something in this?

*James*. [Sepulchrally] 'Igh explosive.

*Press*. [Taking out his note-book] Too much, anyway, to let it drop.

[A pleasant voice calls "Poulder! Hallo!".]

*Poulder*. [Forming a trumpet with his hand] Me Lord!

[As *lord William* appears, *James*, overcome by reminiscences; salutes, and is mechanically answered. *Lord William* has “charm.” His hair and moustache are crisp and just beginning to grizzle. His bearing is free, easy, and only faintly armoured. He will go far to meet you any day. He is in full evening dress.]

*Lord* W. [Cheerfully] I say, Poulder, what have you and James been doing to the Press? Liberty of the Press—it isn’t what it was, but there is a limit. Where is he?

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[He turns to Jams between whom and himself there is still the freemasonry of the trenches.]

*James*. [Pointing to *Poulder*] Be'ind the parapet, me Lord.

[*The press* mopes out from where he has involuntarily been. screened by *Poulder*, who looks at *James* severely. *Lord William* hides a smile.]

*Press*. Very glad to meet you, Lord William. My presence down here is quite involuntary.

*Lord* W. [With a charming smile] I know. The Press has to put its— er—to go to the bottom of everything. Where's this bomb, Poulder? Ah!

[He looks into the wine cooler.]

*Press*. [Taking out his note-book] Could I have a word with you on the crisis, before dinner, Lord William?

*Lord* W. It's time you and James were up, Poulder. [Indicating the cooler] Look after this; tell Lady William I'll be there in a minute.

*Poulder*. Very good, me Lord.

[He goes, followed by *James* carrying the cooler.]

[As *the press* turns to look after them, *lord William* catches sight of his back.]

*Lord* W. I must apologise, sir. Can I brush you?

*Press*. [Dusting himself] Thanks; it's only behind. [He opens his note-book] Now, Lord William, if you'd kindly outline your views on the national situation; after such a narrow escape from death, I feel they might have a moral effect. My paper, as you know, is concerned with—the deeper aspect of things. By the way, what do you value your house and collection at?

*Lord* W. [Twisting his little mustache] Really: I can't! Really!

*Press*. Might I say a quarter of a million-lifted in two seconds and a half-hundred thousand to the second. It brings it home, you know.

*Lord* W. No, no; dash it! No!

*Press*. [Disappointed] I see—not draw attention to your property in the present excited state of public feeling? Well, suppose we approach it from the viewpoint of the Anti-Sweating dinner. I have the list of guests—very weighty!

*Lord* W. Taken some lifting-wouldn't they?

*Press*. [Seriously] May I say that you designed the dinner to soften the tension, at this crisis? You saw that case, I suppose, this morning, of the woman dying of starvation in Bethnal Green?

*Lord* W. [Desperately] Yes-yes! I've been horribly affected. I always knew this slump would come after the war, sooner or later.

*Press*. [Writing] ". . . had predicted slump."

*Lord* W. You see, I've been an Anti-Sweating man for years, and I thought if only we could come together now . . . .

*Press*. [Nodding] I see—I see! Get Society interested in the Sweated, through the dinner. I have the menu here. [He produces it.]

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*Lord* W. Good God, man—more than that! I want to show the people that we stand side by side with them, as we did in the trenches. The whole thing's too jolly awful. I lie awake over it.

[He walks up and down.]

*Press*. [Scribbling] One moment, please. I'll just get that down— "Too jolly awful—lies awake over it. Was wearing a white waistcoat with pearl buttons." [At a sign of resentment from his victim.] I want the human touch, Lord William—it's everything in my paper. What do you say about this attempt to bomb you?

*Lord* W. Well, in a way I think it's d——d natural

*Press*. [Scribbling] "Lord William thought it d——d natural."

*Lord* W. [Overhearing] No, no; don't put that down. What I mean is, I should like to get hold of those fellows that are singing the Marseillaise about the streets—fellows that have been in the war— real sports they are, you know—thorough good chaps at bottom—and say to them: "Have a feeling heart, boys; put yourself in my position." I don't believe a bit they'd want to bomb me then.

[He walks up and down.]

*Press*. [Scribbling and muttering] "The idea, of brotherhood—" D'you mind my saying that? Word brotherhood—always effective—always——

[He writes.]

*Lord* E. [Bewildered] "Brotherhood!" Well, it's pure accident that I'm here and they're there. All the same, I can't pretend to be starving. Can't go out into Hyde Park and stand on a tub, can I? But if I could only show them what I feel—they're such good chaps— poor devils.

*Press*. I quite appreciate! [He writes] "Camel and needle's eye." You were at Eton and Oxford? Your constituency I know. Clubs? But I can get all that. Is it your view that Christianity is on the up-grade, Lord William?

*Lord* W. [Dubious] What d'you mean by Christianity—loving—kindness and that? Of course I think that dogma's got the knock.

[He walks.]

*Press*. [Writing] "Lord William thought dogma had got the knock." I should like you just to develop your definition of Christianity. "Loving—kindness" strikes rather a new note.

*Lord* W. New? What about the Sermon on the Mount?

*Press*. [Writing] “Refers to Sermon on Mount.” I take it you don’t belong to any Church, Lord William?

*Lord* W. [Exasperated] Well, really—I’ve been baptised and that sort of thing. But look here——

*Press*. Oh! you can trust me—I shan’t say anything that you’ll regret. Now, do you consider that a religious revival would help to quiet the country?

*Lord* W. Well, I think it would be a deuced, good thing if everybody were a bit more kind.

*Press*. Ah! [Musing] I feel that your views are strikingly original, Lord William. If you could just open out on them a little more? How far would you apply kindness in practice?

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*Lord* W. Can you apply it in theory?

*Press*. I believe it is done. But would you allow yourself to be blown up with impunity?

*Lord* W. Well, that's a bit extreme. But I quite sympathise with this chap. Imagine yourself in his shoes. He sees a huge house, all these bottles; us swilling them down; perhaps he's got a starving wife, or consumptive kids.

*Press*. [Writing and murmuring] Um-m! "Kids."

*Lord* W. He thinks: "But for the grace of God, there swill I. Why should that blighter have everything and I nothing?" and all that.

*Press*. [Writing] "And all that." [Eagerly] Yes?

*Lord* W. And gradually—you see—this contrast—becomes an obsession with him. "There's got to be an example made," he thinks; and—er— he makes it, don't you know?

*Press*. [Writing] Ye-es? And—when you're the example?

*Lord* W. Well, you feel a bit blue, of course. But my point is that you quite see it.

*Press*. From the other world. Do you believe in a future life, Lord William? The public took a lot of interest in the question, if you remember, at the time of the war. It might revive at any moment, if there's to be a revolution.

*Lord* W. The wish is always father to the thought, isn't it?

*Press*. Yes! But—er—doesn't the question of a future life rather bear on your point about kindness? If there isn't one—why be kind?

*Lord* W. Well, I should say one oughtn't to be kind for any motive— that's self-interest; but just because one feels it, don't you know.

*Press*. [Writing vigorously] That's very new—very new!

*Lord* W. [Simply] You chaps are wonderful.

*Press*. [Doubtfully] You mean we're—we're——

*Lord* W. No, really. You have such a d——d hard time. It must be perfectly beastly to interview fellows like me.

*Press*. Oh! Not at all, Lord William. Not at all. I assure you compared with a literary man, it's—it's almost heavenly.

*Lord* W. You must have a wonderful knowledge of things.

*Press*. [Bridling a little] Well—I shouldn't say that.

*Lord* W. I don't see how you can avoid it.  You turn your hands to everything.

*Press*. [Modestly] Well—yes, Yes.

*Lord* W. I say:  Is there really going to be a revolution, or are you making it up, you Press?

*Press*.  We don't know.  We never know whether we come before the event, or it comes before us.

*Lord* W. That's—very deep—very dip.  D'you mind lending me your note-book a moment.  I'd like to stick that down.  All right, I'll use the other end. [*The press* hands it hypnotically.]

*Lord* W. [Jotting] Thanks awfully.  Now what's your real opinion of the situation?

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*Press*. As a man or a Press man?

*Lord* W. Is there any difference?

*Press*. Is there any connection?

*Lord* W. Well, as a man.

*Press*. As a man, I think it's rotten.

*Lord* W. [Jotting] "Rotten." And as a pressman?

*Press*. [Smiling] Prime.

*Lord* W. What! Like a Stilton cheese. Ha, ha!

[He is about to write.]

*Press*. My stunt, Lord William. You said that.

[He jots it on his cuff.]

*Lord* W. But look here! Would you say that a strong press movement would help to quiet the country?

*Press*. Well, as you ask me, Lord William, I'll tell you. No newspapers for a month would do the trick.

*Lord* W. [Jotting] By Jove! That's brilliant.

*Press*. Yes, but I should starve. [He suddenly looks up, and his eyes, like gimlets, bore their way into *lord William's* pleasant, troubled face] Lord William, you could do me a real kindness. Authorise me to go and interview the fellow who left the bomb here; I've got his address. I promise you to do it most discreetly. Fact is—well—I'm in low water. Since the war we simply can't get sensation enough for the new taste. Now, if I could have an article headed: "Bombed and Bomber"—sort of double interview, you know, it'd very likely set me on my legs again. [Very earnestly] Look! [He holds out his frayed wristbands.]

*Lord* W. [Grasping his hand] My dear chap, certainly. Go and interview this blighter, and then bring him round here. You can do that for one. I'd very much like to see him, as a matter of fact.

*Press*. Thanks awfully; I shall never forget it. Oh! might I have my note-book?

[*Lord William* hands it back.]

*Lord* W. And look here, if there's anything—when a fellow's fortunate and another's not ——

[He puts his hand into his breast pocket.]

*Press*. Oh, thank you! But you see, I shall have to write you up a bit, Lord William. The old aristocracy—you know what the public still expects; if you were to lend me money, you might feel——

*Lord* W. By Jove! Never should have dreamt——

*Press*. No! But it wouldn't do. Have you a photograph of yourself.

*Lord* W. Not on me.

*Press*. Pity! By the way, has it occurred to you that there may be another bomb on the premises?

*Lord* W. Phew! I'll have a look.

> [He looks at his watch, and begins hurriedly searching the bins, bending down and going on his knees. *The press* reverses the notebook again and sketches him.]

*Press*. [To himself] Ah! That'll do. "Lord William examines the foundations of his house."

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[A voice calls “Bill!” *The press* snaps the note-book to, and looks up. There, where the “communication trench” runs in, stands a tall and elegant woman in the extreme of evening dress.]

[With presence of mind] Lady William? You’ll find Lord William —Oh! Have you a photograph of him?

*Lady* W. Not on me.

*Press*. [Eyeing her] Er—no—I suppose not—no. Excuse me! [He sidles past her and is gone.]

*Lady* W. [With lifted eyebrows] Bill!

*Lord* W. [Emerging, dusting his knees] Hallo, Nell! I was just making sure there wasn’t another bomb.

*Lady* W. Yes; that’s why I came dawn: Who was that person?

*Lord* W. Press.

*Lady* W. He looked awfully yellow. I hope you haven’t been giving yourself away.

*Lord* W. [Dubiously] Well, I don’t know. They’re like corkscrews.

*Lady* W. What did he ask you?

*Lord* W. What didn’t he?

*Lady* W. Well, what did you tell him?

*Lord* W. That I’d been baptised—but he promised not to put it down.

*Lady* W. Bill, you are absurd.

[She gives a light tittle laugh.]

*Lord* W. I don’t remember anything else, except that it was quite natural we should be bombed, don’t you know.

*Lady* W. Why, what harm have we done?

*Lord* W. Been born, my dear. [Suddenly serious] I say, Nell, how am I to tell what this fellow felt when he left that bomb here?

*Lady* W. Why do you want to?

*Lord* W. Out there one used to know what one's men felt.

*Lady* W. [Staring] My dear boy, I really don't think you ought to see the Press; it always upsets you.

*Lord* W. Well! Why should you and I be going to eat ourselves silly to improve the condition of the sweated, when——

*Lady* W. [Calmly] When they're going to "improve" ours, if we don't look out. We've got to get in first, Bill.

*Lord* W. [Gloomily] I know. It's all fear. That's it! Here we are, and here we shall stay—as if there'd never been a war.

*Lady* W. Well, thank heaven there's no "front" to a revolution. You and I can go to glory together this time. Compact! Anything that's on, I'm to abate in.

*Lord* W. Well, in reason.

*Lady* W. No, in rhyme, too.

*Lord* W. I say, your dress!

*Lady* W. Yes, Poulder tried to stop me, but I wasn't going to have you blown up without me.

*Lord* W. You duck. You do look stunning. Give us a kiss!

*Lady* W. [Starting back] Oh, Bill! Don't touch me—your hands!

*Lord* W. Never mind, my mouth's clean.

They stand about a yard apart, and banding their faces towards each other, kiss on the lips.

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L. *Anne*. [Appearing suddenly from the “communication trench,” and tip-toeing silently between them] Oh, Mum! You and Daddy *are* wasting time! Dinner’s ready, you know!

*Curtain*

## ACT II

The single room of old *Mrs*. *Lemmy*, in a small grey house in Bethnal Green, the room of one cumbered by little save age, and the crockery debris of the past. A bed, a cupboard, a coloured portrait of Queen Victoria, and—of all things—a fiddle, hanging on the wall. By the side of old *Mrs*. *Lemmy* in her chair is a pile of corduroy trousers, her day’s sweated sewing, and a small table. She sits with her back to the window, through which, in the last of the light, the opposite side of the little grey street is visible under the evening sky, where hangs one white cloud shaped like a horned beast. She is still sewing, and her lips move. Being old, and lonely, she has that habit of talking to herself, distressing to those who cannot overhear. From the smack of her tongue she was once a West Country cottage woman; from the look of her creased, parchmenty face, she was once a pretty girl with black eyes, in which there is still much vitality. The door is opened with difficulty and a little girl enters, carrying a pile of unfinished corduroy trousers nearly as large as herself. She puts them down against the wall, and advances. She is eleven or twelve years old; large-eyed, dark haired, and sallow. Half a woman of this and half of another world, except when as now, she is as irresponsible a bit of life as a little flowering weed growing out of a wall. She stands looking at *Mrs*. *Lemmy* with dancing eyes.

L. Aida. I’ve brought yer to-morrer’s trahsers. Y’nt yer finished wiv to-dy’s? I want to tyke ’em.

*Mrs*. L. No, me dear. Drat this last one—me old fengers!

L. *Aida*. I learnt some poytry to-dy—I did.

*Mrs*. L. Well, I never!

L. *Aida*. [Reciting with unction]

> “Little lamb who myde thee?
> Dost thou know who myde thee,
> Gyve thee life and byde thee feed
> By the stream and oer the mead;
> Gyve the clothing of delight,
> Softest clothing, woolly, bright;
> Gyve thee such a tender voice,
> Myking all the vyles rejoice.

Little lamb who myde thee?
Dost thou know who myde thee?”

*Mrs*. L.  ’Tes wonderful what things they tache ya nowadays.

L. *Aida*.  When I grow up I’m goin’ to ‘ave a revolver an’ shoot the people that steals my jools.

*Mrs*. L. Deary-me, wherever du yu get yore notions?

L. *Aida*.  An’ I’m goin’ to ride on as ‘orse be’ind a man; an’ I’m goin’ to ryce trynes in my motor car.

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*Mrs*. L. [Dryly] Ah!—Yu'um gwine to be very busy, that's sartin.
Can you sew?

L. *Aida*. [With a Smile] Nao.

*Mrs*. L. Don' they tache Yu that, there?

L. *Aida*. [Blending contempt and a lingering curiosity] Nao.

*Mrs*. L.  'Tes wonderful genteel.

L. *Aida*.  I can sing, though.

*Mrs*. L. Let's 'ear yu, then.

L. *Aida*. [Shaking her head] I can ply the pianner.  I can ply a tune.

*Mrs*. L. Whose pianner?

L. *Aida*.  Mrs. Brahn's when she's gone aht.

*Mrs*. L. Well, yu are gettin' edjucation!  Du they tache yu to love yore neighbours?

L. *Aida*. [Ineffably] Nao. [Straying to the window] Mrs. Lemmy, what's the moon?

*Mrs*. L. The mune?  Us used to zay 'twas made o' crame cheese.

L. *Aida*.  I can see it.

*Mrs*. L. Ah!  Don' yu never go wishin' for it, me dear.

L. *Aida*.  I daon't.

*Mrs*. L. Folks as wish for the mune never du no gude.

L. *Aida*. [Craning out, brilliant] I'm goin' dahn in the street.
I'll come back for yer trahsers.

*Mrs*. L. Well; go yu, then, and get a breath o' fresh air in yore chakes.  I'll sune 'a feneshed.

L. *Aida*. [Solemnly] I'm goin' to be a dancer, I am.

She rushes suddenly to the door, pulls it open, and is gone.

*Mrs*. L. [Looking after her, and talking to herself.] Ah! 'Er've a-got all 'er troubles before 'er! "Little lamb, a made'ee?" [Cackling] 'Tes a funny world, tu! [She sings to herself.]

"There is a green 'ill far away
Without a city wall,
Where our dear-Lord was crucified,
'U died to save us all."

The door is opened, and *Lemmy* comes in; a little man with a stubble of dark moustache and spiky dark hair; large, peculiar eyes he has, and a look of laying his ears back, a look of doubting, of perversity with laughter up the sleeve, that grows on those who have to do with gas and water. He shuts the door.

*Mrs*. L. Well, Bob, I 'aven't a-seen yu this tu weeks.

*Lemmy* comes up to his mother, and sits down on a stool, sets a tool-bag between his knees, and speaks in a cockney voice.

*Lemmy*. Well, old lydy o' leisure! Wot would y' 'ave for supper, if yer could choose—-salmon wivaht the tin, an' tipsy cyke?

*Mrs*. L. [Shaking her head and smiling blandly] That's showy. Toad in the 'ole I'd 'ave—-and a glass o' port wine.

*Lemmy*. Providential. [He opens a tool-bag] Wot dyer think I've got yer?

*Mrs*. L. I 'ope yu've a-got yureself a job, my son!

*Lemmy*. [With his peculiar smile] Yus, or I couldn't 'ave afforded yer this. [He takes out a bottle] Not 'arf! This'll put the blood into yer. Pork wine—once in the cellars of the gryte. We'll drink the ryyal family in this.

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[He apostrophises the portrait of Queen Victoria.]

*Mrs*. L. Ah!  She was a praaper gude queen.  I see 'er once, when 'er was bein' burried.

*Lemmy*.  Ryalties—I got nothin' to sy agynst 'em in this country.  But the STYTE 'as got to 'ave its pipes seen to.  The 'ole show's goin' up pop.  Yer'll wyke up one o' these dyes, old lydy, and find yerself on the roof, wiv nuffin' between yer an' the grahnd.

*Mrs*. L. I can't tell what yu'm talkin' about.

*Lemmy*.  We're goin' to 'ave a triumpherat in this country Liberty, Equality, Fraternity; an' if yer arsk me, they won't be in power six months before they've cut each other's throats.  But I don't care—I want to see the blood flow! (Dispassionately) I don' care 'oose blood it is.  I want to see it flow!

*Mrs*. L. [Indulgently] Yu'm a funny boy, that's sartin.

*Lemmy*. [Carving at the cork with a knife] This 'ere cork is like Sasiety—rotten; it's old—-old an' moulderin'. [He holds up a bit of cork on the point of the knife] Crumblin' under the wax, it is.  In goes the screw an' out comes the cork. [With unction]—an' the blood flows. [Tipping the bottle, he lets a drop fall into the middle of his hand, and licks it up. Gazing with queer and doubting commiseration at has mother] Well, old dear, wot shall we 'ave it aht of—the gold loving-cup, or—what?  'Ave yer supper fust, though, or it'll go to yer 'ead! [He goes to the cupboard and taken out a disk in which a little bread is sopped in a little' milk] Cold pap!  'Ow can yer?  'Yn't yer got a kipper in the 'ouse?

*Mrs*. L. [Admiring the bottle] Port wine!  'Tis a brave treat!  I'll 'ave it out of the "Present from Margitt," Bob.  I tuk 'ee therr by excursion when yu was six months.  Yu 'ad a shrimp an' it choked yu praaperly.  Yu was always a squeamy little feller.  I can't never think 'ow yu managed in the war-time, makin' they shells.

> *Lemmy*, who has brought to the table two mugs and blown the duet
> out of; them, fills them with port, and hands one to his mother,
> who is eating her bread and milk.

*Lemmy*.  Ah!  Nothin' worried me, 'cept the want o' soap.

*Mrs*. L. [Cackling gently] So it du still, then!  Luke at yore face.  Yu never was a clean boy, like Jim.

> [She puts out a thin finger and touches his cheek, whereon is a
> black smudge.]

*Lemmy*. [Scrubbing his cheek with his sleeve.] All right!  Y'see, I come stryte 'ere, to get rid o' this.

[He drinks.]

*Mrs*. L. [Eating her bread and milk] Tes a pity yu'm not got a wife to see't yu wash yureself.

*Lemmy*. [Goggling] Wife! Not me—I daon't want ter myke no food for pahder. Wot oh! —they said, time o' the war—ye're fightin' for yer children's 'eritage. Well; wot's the 'eritage like, now we've got it? Empty as a shell before yer put the 'igh explosive in. Wot's it like? [Warming to his theme] Like a prophecy in the pypers—not a bit more substantial.

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*Mrs*. L. [Slightly hypnotised] How ’e du talk!  The gas goes to yore ’ead, I think!

*Lemmy*.  I did the gas to-dy in the cellars of an ’ouse where the wine was mountains ’igh.  A regiment couldn’t ’a drunk it.  Marble pillars in the ‘all, butler broad as an observytion balloon, an’ four conscientious khaki footmen.  When the guns was roarin’ the talk was all for no more o’ them glorious weeds-style an’ luxury was orf.  See wot it is naow.  You’ve got a bare crust in the cupboard ’ere, I works from ‘and to mouth in a glutted market—an’ there they stand abaht agyne in their britches in the ‘oases o’ the gryte.  I was reg’lar overcome by it.  I left a thing in that cellar—I left a thing . . . .  It’ll be a bit ork’ard for me to-mower. [Drinks from his mug.]

*Mrs*. L. [Placidly, feeling the warmth of the little she has drunk] What thing?

*Lemmy*.  Wot thing?  Old lydy, ye’re like a winkle afore yer opens ’er—I never see anything so peaceful.  ’Ow dyer manage it?

*Mrs*. L. Settin’ ‘ere and thenkin’.

*Lea*.  Wot abaht?

*Mrs*. L. We-el—Money, an’ the works o’ God.

*Lemmy*.  Ah!  So yer give me a thought sometimes.

*Mrs*. L. [Lofting her mug] Yu ought never to ha’ spent yore money on this, Bob!

*Lemmy*.  I thought that meself.

*Mrs*. L. Last time I ‘ad a glass o’ port wine was the day yore brother Jim went to Ameriky. [Smacking her lips] For a teetotal drink, it du warm ’ee!

*Lemmy*. [Raising his mug] Well, ’ere’s to the British revolution!
’Ere’s to the conflygrytion in the sky!

*Mrs*. L. [Comfortably] So as to kape up therr, ’twon’t du no ’arm.

*Lemmy* goes to the window and unhooks his fiddle; he stands with it halfway to his shoulder.  Suddenly he opens the window and leans out.  A confused murmur of voices is heard; and a snatch of the Marseillaise, sung by a girl.  Then the shuffling tramp of feet, and figures are passing in the street.

*Lemmy*. [Turning—excited] Wot’d I tell yer, old lydy?  There it is —there it is!

*Mrs*. L. [Placidly] What is?

*Lemmy*. The revolution. [He cranes out] They've got it on a barrer. Cheerio!

*Voice*. [Answering] Cheerio!

*Lemmy*. [Leaning out] I sy—you 'yn't tykin' the body, are yer?

*Voice*. Nao.

*Lemmy*. Did she die o' starvytion O.K.?

*Voice*. She bloomin' well did; I know 'er brother.

*Lemmy*. Ah! That'll do us a bit o' good!

*Voice*. Cheerio!

*Lemmy*. So long!

*Voice*. So long!

[The girl's voice is heard again in the distance singing the Marseillaise. The door is flung open and *little Aida* comes running in again.]

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*Lemmy*. ’Allo, little Aida!

L. *Aida*. ‘Allo, I been follerin’ the corfin. It’s better than an ’orse dahn!

*Mrs*. L. What coffin?

L. *Aida*. Why, ‘er’s wot died o’ starvytion up the street. They’re goin’ to tyke it to ’Yde Pawk, and ’oller.

*Mrs*. L. Well, never yu mind wot they’m goin’ to du: Yu wait an’ take my trousers like a gude gell.

[She puts her mug aside and takes up her unfinished pair of trousers. But the wine has entered her fingers, and strength to push the needle through is lacking.]

*Lemmy*. [Tuning his fiddle] Wot’ll yer ’ave, little Aida? “Dead March in Saul” or “When the fields was white wiv dysies”?

L. *Aida*. [With a hop and a brilliant smile] Aoh yus! “When the fields”——

*Mrs*. L. [With a gesture of despair] Deary me! I ’aven’t a-got the strength!

*Lemmy*. Leave ’em alone, old dear! No one’ll be goin’ aht wivaht trahsers to-night ’cos yer leaves that one undone. Little Aida, fold ’em up!

[*Little Aida* methodically folds the five finished pairs of trousers into a pile. *Lemmy* begins playing. A smile comes on the face of *Mrs*. L, who is rubbing her fingers. *Little Aida*, trousers over arm, goes and stares at *Lemmy* playing.]

*Lemmy*. [Stopping] Little Aida, one o’ vese dyes yer’ll myke an actress. I can see it in yer fyce!

[*Little Aida* looks at him wide-eyed.]

*Mrs*. L. Don’t ’ee putt things into ’er ’ead, Bob!

*Lemmy*. ’Tyn’t ’er ’ead, old lydy—it’s lower. She wants feedin’— feed ‘er an’ she’ll rise. [He strikes into the “Machichi”] Look at ’er naow. I tell yer there’s a fortune in ’er.

[*Little Aida* has put out her tongue.]

*Mrs*. L. I’d saner there was a gude ’eart in ’er than any fortune.

L. *Aida*. [Hugging her pile of trousers] It's thirteen pence three farthin's I've got to bring yer, an' a penny aht for me, mykes twelve three farthin's: [With the same little hop and sudden smile] I'm goin' to ride back on a bus, I am.

*Lemmy*. Well, you myke the most of it up there; it's the nearest you'll ever git to 'eaven.

*Mrs*. L. Don' yu discourage 'er, Bob; she'm a gude little thing, an't yu, dear?

L. *Aida*. [Simply] Yus.

*Lemmy*. Not 'arf. Wot c'her do wiv yesterdy's penny?

L. *Aida*. Movies.

*Lemmy*. An' the dy before?

L. *Aida*. Movies.

*Lemmy*. Wot'd I tell yer, old lydy—she's got vicious tystes, she'll finish in the theayter yep Tyke my tip, little Aida; you put every penny into yer foundytions, yer'll get on the boards quicker that wy.

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*Mrs*. L. Don' yu pay no 'eed to his talk.

L. *Aida*. I daon't.

Ice. Would yer like a sip aht o' my mug?

L. *Aida*. [Brilliant] Yus.

*Mrs*. L. Not at yore age, me dear, though it is teetotal.

[*Little Aida* puts her head on one side, like a dog trying to understand.]

*Lemmy*. Well, 'ave one o' my gum-drops.

[Holds out a paper.]

[*Little Aida* brilliant, takes a flat, dark substance from it, and puts it in her mouth.]

Give me a kiss, an' I'll give yer a penny.

[*Little Aida* shakes her head, and leans out of window.]

Movver, she daon't know the valyer of money.

*Mrs*. L. Never mind 'im, me dear.

L. *Aida*. [Sucking the gum-drop—with difficulty] There's a taxi-cab at the corner.

[*Little Aida* runs to the door. A figure stands in the doorway; she skids round him and out. *The press* comes in.]

*Lemmy*. [Dubiously] Wat-oh!

*Press*. Mr. Lemmy?

*Lemmy*. The syme.

*Press*. I'm from the Press.

*Lemmy*. Blimy.

*Press*. They told me at your place you wens very likely here.

*Lemmy*. Yus I left Downin' Street a bit early to-dy! [He twangs the feddle-strings pompously.]

*Press*. [Taking out his note-book and writing] "Fiddles while Rome is burning!" Mr. Lemmy, it's my business at this very critical time to find out what the nation's thinking. Now, as a representative working man—

*Lemmy*. That's me.

*Press*. You can help me. What are your views?

*Lemmy*. [Putting down fiddle] Voos? Sit dahn!

[*The press* sits on the stool which *Lemmy* has vacated.]

The Press—my Muvver. Seventy-seven. She's a wonder; 'yn't yer, old dear?

*Press*. Very happy to make your acquaintance, Ma'am. [He writes] "Mrs. Lemmy, one of the veterans of industry——" By the way, I've jest passed a lot of people following a coffin.

*Lemmy*. Centre o' the cyclone—cyse o' starvytion; you 'ad 'er in the pyper this mornin'.

*Press*. Ah! yes! Tragic occurrence. [Looking at the trousers.] Hub of the Sweated Industries just here. I especially want to get at the heart——

*Mrs*. L. 'Twasn't the 'eart, 'twas the stomach.

*Press*. [Writing] "Mrs. Lemmy goes straight to the point."

*Lemmy*. Mister, is it my voos or Muvver's yer want?

*Press*. Both.

*Lemmy*. 'Cos if yer get Muvver's, yer won't 'ave time for mine. I tell yer stryte [Confidentially] she's get a glawss a' port wine in 'er. Naow, mind yer, I'm not anxious to be intervooed. On the other 'and, anyfink I might 'eve to sy of valyer——There is a clawss o' politician that 'as nuffn to sy—Aoh! an' daon't 'e sy it just! I dunno wot pyper yer represent.

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*Press*. [Smiling] Well, Mr. Lemmy, it has the biggest influ——

*Lemmy*. They all 'as that; dylies, weeklies, evenin's, Sundyes; but it's of no consequence—my voos are open and aboveboard. Naow, wot shall we begin abaht?

*Press*. Yourself, if you please. And I'd like you to know at once that my paper wants the human note, the real heart-beat of things.

*Lemmy*. I see; sensytion! Well; 'ere am I—a fustclawss plumber's. assistant—in a job to-dy an' out tomorrer. There's a 'eart-beat in that, I tell yer. 'Oo knows wot the mower 'as for me!

*Press*. [Writing]. "The great human issue—Mr. Lemmy touches it at once."

*Lemmy*. I sy keep my nyme aht o' this; I don' go in fer self-advertisement.

*Press*. [Writing] "True working-man—modest as usual."

*Lemmy*. I daon't want to embarrass the Gover'ment. They're so ticklish ever since they got the 'abit, war-time, o' mindin' wot people said.

*Press*. Right-o!

*Lemmy*. For instance, suppose there's goin' to be a revolution—— [*the press* writes with energy.] 'Ow does it touch me? Like this: I my go up—I cawn't come dahn; no more can Muvver.

*Mrs*. L. [Surprisingly] Us all goes down into the grave.

*Press*. "Mrs. Lemmy interjects the deeper note."

*Lemmy*. Naow, the gryte—they can come dahn, but they cawn't go up! See! Put two an' two together, an' that's 'ow it touches me. [He utters a throaty laugh] 'Ave yer got that?

*Press*. [Quizzical] Not go up? What about bombs, Mr. Lemmy?

*Lemmy*. [Dubious] Wot abaht 'em? I s'pose ye're on the comic pypers? 'Ave yer noticed wot a weakness they 'ave for the 'orrible?

*Press*. [Writing] "A grim humour peeped out here and there through the earnestness of his talk."

[He sketches *Lemmy's* profile.]

*Lemmy*. We ‘ad an explosion in my factory time o’ the war, that would just ha’ done for you comics. [He meditates] Lord! They was after it too,—they an’ the Sundyes; but the Censor did ’em. Strike me, I could tell yer things!

*Press*. That’s what I want, Mr. Lemmy; tell me things!

*Lemmy*. [Musing] It’s a funny world, ’yn’t it? ’Ow we did blow each other up! [Getting up to admire] I sy, I shall be syfe there. That won’t betry me anonymiety. Why! I looks like the Prime Minister!

*Press*. [Rather hurt] You were going to tell me things.

*Lemmy*. Yus, an’ they’ll be the troof, too.

*Press*. I hope so; we don’t——

*Lemmy*. Wot oh!

*Press*. [A little confused.] We always try to verify——

*Lemmy*. Yer leave it at tryin’, daon’t yer? Never, mind, ye’re a gryte institootion. Blimy, yer do have jokes, wiv it, spinnin’ rahnd on yer own tyles, denyin’ to-dy wot ye’re goin’ to print to-morrer. Ah, well! Ye’re like all of us below the line o’ comfort—live dyngerously —ever’ dy yer last. That’s wy I’m interested in the future.

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*Press*. Well now—the future. [Writing] “He prophesies.”

*Lemmy*. It’s syfer, ’yn’t it? [He winks] No one never looks back on prophecies. I remembers an editor spring o’ 1916 stykin’ his reputytion the war’d be over in the follerin’ October. Increased ’is circulytion abaht ‘arf a million by it. 1917 an’ war still on —’ad ’is readers gone back on ‘im? Nao! They was increasin’ like rabbits. Prophesy wot people want to believe, an’ ye’re syfe. Naow, I’ll styke my reputation on somethin’, you tyke it dahn word for word. This country’s goin’ to the dawgs—Naow, ’ere’s the sensytion—unless we gets a new religion.

*Press*. Ah! Now for it—yes?

*Lemmy*. In one word: “Kindness.” Daon’t mistyke me, nao sickly sentiment and nao patronizin’. Me as kind to the millionaire as ’im to me. [Fills his mug and drinks.]

*Press*. [Struck] That’s queer! Kindness! [Writing] “Extremes meet. Bombed and bomber breathing the same music.”

*Lemmy*. But ‘ere’s the interestin’ pynt. Can it be done wivaht blood?

*Press*. [Writing] “He doubts.”

*Lemmy*. No dabt wotever. It cawn’t! Blood-and-kindness! Spill the blood o’ them that aren’t kind—an’ there ye are!

*Press*. But pardon me, how are you to tell?

*Lemmy*. Blimy, they leaps to the heye!

*Press*. [Laying down-his note-book] I say, let me talk to you as man to man for a moment.

*Lemmy*. Orl right. Give it a rest!

*Press*. Your sentiments are familiar to me. I’ve got a friend on the Press who’s very keen on Christ and kindness; and wants to strangle the last king with the—hamstrings of the last priest.

*Lemmy*. [Greatly intrigued] Not ’arf! Does ’e?

*Press*. Yes. But have you thought it out? Because he hasn’t.

*Lemmy*. The difficulty is—where to stop.

*Press*. Where to begin.

*Lemmy*. Lawd! I could begin almost anywhere. Why, every month abaht, there's a cove turns me aht of a job 'cos I daon't do just wot 'e likes. They'd 'ave to go. I tell yer stryte—the Temple wants cleanin' up.

*Press*. Ye-es. If I wrote what I thought, I should get the sack as quick as you. D'you say that justifies me in shedding the blood of my boss?

*Lemmy*. The yaller Press 'as got no blood—'as it? You shed their ile an' vinegar—that's wot you've got to do. Stryte—do yer believe in the noble mission o' the Press?

*Press*. [Enigmatically] Mr. Lemmy, I'm a Pressman.

*Lemmy*. [Goggling] I see. Not much! [Gently jogging his mother's elbow] Wyke up, old lydy!

[For Mrs. *Lemmy* who has been sipping placidly at her port, is nodding. The evening has drawn in. *Lemmy* strikes a match on his trousers and lights a candle.]

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Blood an' kindness-that's what's wanted—'specially blood! The 'istory o' me an' my family'll show yer that. Tyke my bruver Fred —crushed by burycrats. Tyke Muvver 'erself. Talk o' the wrongs o' the people! I tell yer the foundytions is rotten. [He empties the bottle into his mother's mug] Daon't mind the mud at the bottom, old lydy—it's all strengthenin'! You tell the Press, Muvver. She can talk abaht the pawst.

*Press*. [Taking up his note-book, and becoming, again his professional self] Yes, Mrs. Lemmy? "Age and Youth—Past and Present—"

*Mrs*. L. Were yu talkin' about Fred? [The port has warmed her veins, the colour in her eyes and cheeks has deepened] My son Fred was always a gude boy—never did nothin' before 'e married. I can see Fred [She bends forward a little in her chair, looking straight before her] acomin' in wi' a pheasant 'e'd found—terrible 'e was at findin' pheasants. When father died, an' yu was cumin', Bob, Fred 'e said to me: "Don't yu never cry, Mother, I'll look after 'ee." An' so 'e did, till 'e married that day six months an' take to the drink in sower. 'E wasn't never 'the same boy again—not Fred. An' now 'e's in That. I can see poor Fred——

[She slowly wipes a tear out of the corner of an eye with the back of her finger.]

*Press*. [Puzzled] In—That?

*Lemmy*. [Sotto voce] Come orf it! Prison! 'S wot she calls it.

*Mrs*. L. [Cheerful] They say life's a vale o' sorrows. Well, so 'tes, but don' du to let yureself thenk so.

*Press*. And so you came to London, Mrs. Lemmy?

*Mrs*. L. Same year as father died. With the four o' them—that's my son Fred, an' my son Jim, an' my son Tom, an' Alice. Bob there, 'e was born in London—an' a praaper time I 'ad of et.

*Press*. [Writing] "Her heroic struggles with poverty——"

*Mrs*. L. Worked in a laundry, I ded, at fifteen shellin's a week, an' brought 'em all up on et till Alice 'ad the gallopin' consumption. I can see poor Alice wi' the little red spots is 'er cheeks——an' I not knowin' wot to du wi' 'her—but I always kept up their buryin' money. Funerals is very dear; Mr. Lemmy was six pound, ten.

*Press*. "High price of Mr. Lemmy."

*Mrs*. L. I've a-got the money for when my time come; never touch et, no matter 'ow things are. Better a little goin' short here below, an' enter the kingdom of 'eaven independent:

*Press*. [Writing] "Death before dishonour—heroine of the slums. Dickens—Betty Higden."

*Mrs*. L. No, sir. Mary Lemmy. I've seen a-many die, I 'ave; an' not one grievin'. I often says to meself: [With a little laugh] "Me dear, when yu go, yu go 'appy. Don' yu never fret about that," I says. An' so I will; I'll go 'appy.

[She stays quite still a moment, and behind her *Lemmy* draws one finger across his face.]

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[Smiling] “Yore old fengers’ll ‘ave a rest.  Think o’ that!” I says.  “‘Twill be a brave change.”  I can see myself lyin’ there an’ duin’ nothin’.

[Again a pause, while *Mrs*. *Lemmy* sees herself doing nothing.]

*Lemmy*.  Tell abaht Jim; old lydy.

*Mrs*. L. My son Jim ‘ad a family o’ seven in six years.  “I don’ know ’ow ’tes, Mother,” ’e used to say to me; “they just sim to come!” That was Jim—never knu from day to day what was cumin’.  “Therr’s another of ’em dead,” ’e used to say, “’tes funny, tu” “Well,” I used to say to ‘im; “no wonder, poor little things, livin’ in they model dwellin’s.  Therr’s no air for ’em,” I used to say.  “Well,” ’e used to say, “what can I du, Mother?  Can’t afford to live in Park Lane:”  An’ ‘e take an’ went to Ameriky. [Her voice for the first time is truly doleful] An’ never came back.  Fine feller.  So that’s my four sons—One’s dead, an’ one’s in—That, an’ one’s in Ameriky, an’ Bob ’ere, poor boy, ’e always was a talker.

[*Lemmy*, who has re-seated himself in the window and taken up his fiddle, twangs the strings.]

*Press*.  And now a few words about your work, Mrs. Lemmy?

*Mrs*. L. Well, I sews.

*Press*. [Writing] “Sews.”  Yes?

*Mrs*. L. [Holding up her unfinished pair of trousers] I putt in the button’oles, I stretches the flies, I lines the crutch, I putt on this bindin’, [She holds up the calico that binds the top] I sews on the buttons, I press the seams—Tuppence three farthin’s the pair.

*Press*.  Twopence three farthings a pair!  Worse than a penny a line!

*Mrs*. L. In a gude day I gets thru four pairs, but they’m gettin’ plaguey ’ard for my old fengers.

*Press*. [Writing] “A monumental figure, on whose labour is built the mighty edifice of our industrialism.”

*Lemmy*.  I sy—that’s good.  Yer’ll keep that, won’t yet?

*Mrs*. L. I finds me own cotton, tuppence three farthin’s, and other expension is a penny three farthin’s.

*Press*.  And are you an exception, Mrs. Lemmy?

*Mrs*. L. What’s that?

*Lemmy*. Wot price the uvvers, old lydy? Is there a lot of yer sewin' yer fingers orf at tuppence 'ypenny the pair?

*Mrs*. L. I can't tell yu that. I never sees nothin' in 'ere. I pays a penny to that little gell to bring me a dozen pair an' fetch 'em back. Poor little thing, she'm 'ardly strong enough to carry 'em. Feel! They'm very 'eavy!

*Press*. On the conscience of Society!

*Lemmy*. I sy put that dahn, won't yer?

*Press*. Have things changed much since the war, Mrs. Lemmy?

*Mrs*. L. Cotton's a lot dearer.

*Press*. All round, I mean.

*Mrs*. L. Aw! Yu don' never get no change, not in my profession. [She oscillates the trousers] I've a-been in trousers fifteen year; ever since I got to old for laundry.

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*Press*. [Writing] “For fifteen years sewn trousers.” What would a good week be, Mrs. Lemmy?

*Mrs*. L. ’Tes a very gude week, five shellin’s.

*Lemmy*. [From the window] Bloomin’ millionairess, Muvver. She’s lookin’ forward to ’eaven, where vey don’t wear no trahsers.

*Mrs*. L. [With spirit] ‘Tidn for me to zay whether they du. An’ ’tes on’y when I’m a bit low-sperrity-like as I wants to go therr. What I am a-lukin’ forward to, though, ’tes a day in the country. I’ve not a-had one since before the war. A kind lady brought me in that bit of ’eather; ’tes wonderful sweet stuff when the ’oney’s in et. When I was a little gell I used to zet in the ‘eather gatherin’ the whorts, an’ me little mouth all black wi’ eatin’ them. ’Twas in the ‘eather I used to zet, Sundays, courtin’. All flesh is grass— an’ ’tesn’t no bad thing—grass.

*Press*. [Writing] “The old paganism of the country.” What is your view of life, Mrs. Lemmy?

*Lemmy*. [Suddenly] Wot is ’er voo of life? Shall I tell yer mine? Life’s a disease—a blinkin’ oak-apple! Daon’t myke no mistyke. An’ ’umen life’s a yumourous disease; that’s all the difference. Why— wot else can it be? See the bloomin’ promise an’ the blighted performance—different as a ’eadline to the noos inside. But yer couldn’t myke Muvver see vat—not if yer talked to ’er for a wok. Muvver still believes in fings. She’s a country gell; at a ’undred and fifty she’ll be a country gell, won’t yer, old lydy?

*Mrs*. L. Well, ’tesn’t never been ’ome to me in London. I lived in the country forty year —I did my lovin’ there; I burried father therr. Therr bain’t nothin’ in life, yu know, but a bit o’ lovin’— all said an’ done; bit o’ lovin’, with the wind, an’ the stars out.

*Lemmy*. [In a loud apologetic whisper] She ’yn’t often like this. I told yer she’d got a glawss o’ port in ’er.

*Mrs*. L. ‘Tes a brave pleasure, is lovin’. I likes to zee et in young folk. I likes to zee ’em kissin’; shows the ’eart in ’em. ’Tes the ’eart makes the world go round; ‘tesn’t nothin’ else, in my opinion.

*Press*. [Writing] “—sings the swan song of the heart.”——

*Mrs*. L. [Overhearing] No, I never yeard a swan sing—never! But I tell ’ee what I ’eve ‘eard; the Bells singin’ in th’ orchard ‘angin’ up the clothes to dry, an’ the cuckoos callin’ back to ’em. [Smiling] There’s a-many songs in the country-the ’eart is freelike in th’ country!

*Lemmy*. [Soto voce] Gi’ me the Strand at ar’ past nine.

*Press*. [Writing] “Town and country——”

*Mrs*. L.  ’Tidn’t like that in London; one day’s jest like another.
Not but what therr’s a ‘eap o’ kind’eartedness ’ere.

*Lemmy*. [Gloomily] Kind-’eartedness!  I daon’t fink “Boys an’ Gells come out to play.”

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[He plays the old tune on his fiddle.]

*Mrs*. L. [Singing] “Boys an’ Gells come out to play. The mune is shinin’ bright as day.” [She laughs] I used to sing like a lark when I was a gell.

[*Little Aida* enters.]

L. *Aida*. There’s ‘undreds follerin’ the corfin. ‘Yn’t you goin’, Mr. Lemmy—it’s dahn your wy!

*Lemmy*. [Dubiously] Well yus—I s’pose they’ll miss me.

L. *Aida*. Aoh! Tyke me!

*Press*. What’s this?

*Lemmy*. The revolution in ’Yde Pawk.

*Press*. [Struck] In Hyde Park? The very thing. I’ll take you down.
My taxi’s waiting.

L. *Aida*. Yus; it’s breathin’ ’ard, at the corner.

*Press*. [Looking at his watch] Ah! and Mrs. Lemmy. There’s an Anti-Sweating Meeting going on at a house in Park Lane. We can get there in twenty minutes if we shove along. I want you to tell them about the trouser-making. You’ll be a sensation!

*Lemmy*. [To himself] Sensytion! ’E cawn’t keep orf it!

*Mrs*. L. Anti-Sweat. Poor fellers! I ’ad one come to see we before the war, an’ they’m still goin’ on? Wonderful, an’t it?

*Press*. Come, Mrs. Lemmy; drive in a taxi, beautiful moonlit night; and they’ll give you a splendid cup of tea.

*Mrs*. L. [Unmoved] Ah! I cudn’t never du without my tea. There’s not an avenin’ but I thinks to meself: Now, me dear, yu’ve a-got one more to fennish, an’ then yu’ll ‘eve yore cup o’ tea. Thank you for callin’, all the same.

*Lemmy*. Better siccumb to the temptytion, old lydy; joyride wiv the Press; marble floors, pillars o’ gold; conscientious footmen; lovely lydies; scuppers runnin’ tea! An’ the revolution goin’ on across the wy. ’Eaven’s nuffink to Pawk Lyne.

*Press*. Come along, Mrs. Lemmy!

*Mrs*. L. [Seraphically] Thank yu,—I'm a-feelin' very comfortable.
'Tes wonderful what a drop o' wine'll du for the stomach.

*Press*. A taxi-ride!

*Mrs*. L. [Placidly] Ah! I know'em. They'm very busy things.

*Lemmy*. Muvver shuns notority. [Sotto voce to *the press*] But you watch me! I'll rouse 'er.

[He takes up his fiddle and sits on the window seat. Above the little houses on the opposite side of the street, the moon has risen in the dark blue sky, so that the cloud shaped like a beast seems leaping over it. *Lemmy* plays the first notes of the Marseillaise. A black cat on the window-sill outside looks in, hunching its back. *Little Aida* barks at her. *Mrs*. *Lemmy* struggles to her feet, sweeping the empty dish and spoon to the floor in the effort.]

The dish ran awy wiv the spoon! That's right, old lydy! [He stops playing.]

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*Mrs*. L. [Smiling, and moving her hands] I like a bit o' music. It du that move 'ee.

*Press*. Bravo, Mrs. Lemmy. Come on!

*Lemmy*. Come on, old dear! We'll be in time for the revolution yet.

*Mrs*. L. 'Tes 'earin' the Old 'Undred again!

*Lemmy*. [To *the press*] She 'yn't been aht these two years. [To his mother, who has put up her hands to her head] Nao, never mind yer 'at. [To *the press*] She 'yn't got none! [Aloud] No West-End lydy wears anyfink at all in the evenin'!

*Mrs*. L. 'Ow'm I lukin', Bob?

*Lemmy*. First-clawss; yer've got a colour fit to toast by. We'll show 'em yer've got a kick in yer. [He takes her arm] Little Aida, ketch 'old o' the sensytions.

> [He indicates the trousers *the press* takes *Mrs*. *Lemmy's* other arm.]

*Mrs*. L. [With an excited little laugh] Quite like a gell!

And, smiling between her son and *the press*, she passes out; *little Aida*, with a fling of her heels and a wave of the trousers, follows.

*Curtain*

## ACT III

An octagon ante-room of the hall at *lord William* DROMONDY'S. A shining room lighted by gold candelabra, with gold-curtained pillars, through which the shining hall and a little of the grand stairway are visible. A small table with a gold-coloured cloth occupies the very centre of the room, which has a polished parquet floor and high white walls. Gold-coloured doors on the left. Opposite these doors a window with gold-coloured curtains looks out on Park Lane. *Lady William* standing restlessly between the double doors and the arch which leads to the hall. James is stationary by the double doors, from behind which come sounds of speech and applause.

Poulder. [Entering from the hall] His Grace the Duke of Exeter, my lady.

> [His *grace* enters. He is old, and youthful, with a high colour and a short rough white beard. *Lady William* advances to meet him. *Poulder* stands by.]

*Lady* W. Oh!  Father, you *are* late.

*His* G. Awful crowd in the streets, Nell.  They've got a coffin— couldn't get by.

*Lady* W. Coin?  Whose?

*His* G. The Government's I should think-no flowers, by request.  I say, have I got to speak?

*Lady* W. Oh! no, dear.

*His* G. H'm!  That's unlucky.  I've got it here. [He looks down his cuff] Found something I said in 1914—just have done.

*Lady* W. Oh!  If you've got it—James, ask Lord William to come to me for a moment. [*James* vanishes through the door.  To *the Duke*] Go in, Grand-dad; they'll be so awfully pleased to see you.  I'll tell Bill.

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*His* G. Where's Anne?

*Lady* W. In bed, of course.

*His* G. I got her this—rather nice?

[He has taken from his breast-pocket one of those street toy-men that jump head over heels on your hand; he puts it through its paces.]

*Lady* W. [Much interested] Oh! no, but how sweet! She'll simply love it.

*Poulder*. If I might suggest to Your Grace to take it in and operate it. It's sweated, Your Grace. They-er-make them in those places.

*His* G. By Jove! D'you know the price, Poulder?

*Poulder*. [Interrogatively] A penny, is it? Something paltry, Your Grace!

*His* G. Where's that woman who knows everything; Miss Munday?

*Lady* W. Oh! She'll be in there, somewhere.

[His *grace* moves on, and passes through the doors. The sound of applause is heard.]

*Poulder*. [Discreetly] would you care to see the bomb, my lady?

*Lady* W. Of course—first quiet moment.

*Poulder*. I'll bring it up, and have a watch put on it here, my lady.

[*Lord William* comes through the double doom followed by *James*. *Poulder* retires.]

*Lord* W. Can't you come, Nell?

*Lady* W. Oh! Bill, your Dad wants to speak.

*Lord* W. The deuce he does—that's bad.

*Lady* W. Yes, of course, but you must let him; he's found something he said in 1914.

*Lord* W. I knew it. That's what they'll say. Standing stock still, while hell's on the jump around us.

*Lady* W. Never mind that; it'll please him; and he's got a lovely little sweated toy that turns head over heels at one penny.

*Lord* W. H'm! Well, come on.

*Lady* W. No, I must wait for stragglers. There's sure to be an editor in a hurry.

*Poulder*. [Announcing] Mis-ter Gold-rum!

*Lady* W. [Sotto voce] And there he is! [She advances to meet a thin, straggling man in eyeglasses, who is smiling absently] How good of you!

*Mr*. G. Thanks awfully. I just er—and then I'm afraid I must—er— Things look very——-Thanks——Thanks so much.

[He straggles through the doors, and is enclosed by *James*.]

*Poulder*. Miss Mun-day.

*Lord* W. There! I thought she was in—She really is the most unexpected woman! How do you do? How awfully sweet of you!

*Miss* M. [An elderly female schoolboy] How do you do? There's a spiffing crowd. I believe things are really going Bolshy. How do you do, Lord William? Have you got any of our people to show? I told one or two, in case—they do so simply love an outing.

*James*. There are three old chips in the lobby, my Lord.

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*Lord* W. What?  Oh!  I say!  Bring them in at once.  Why—they're the hub of the whole thing.

*James*. [Going] Very good, my Lord.

*Lady* W. I am sorry.  I'd no notion; and they're such dears always.

*Miss* M. I must tell you what one of them said to me.  I'd told him not to use such bad language to his wife.  "Don't you worry, Ma!" he said, "I expert you can do a bit of that yourself!"

*Lady* W. How awfully nice!  It's *so* like them.

*Miss* M. Yes.  They're wonderful.

*Lord* W. I say, why do we always call them they?

*Lady* W. [Puzzled] Well, why not?

*Lord* W. *They*!

*Miss* M. [Struck] Quite right, Lord William!  Quite right!  Another species.  They!  I must remember that.  *They*! [She passes on.]

*Lady* W. [About to follow] Well, I don't see; aren't they?

*Lord* W. Never mind, old girl; follow on.  They'll come in with me.

[*Miss Munday* and *lady William* pass through the double doors.]

*Poulder*. [Announcing] Some sweated workers, my Lord.

[There enter a tall, thin, oldish woman; a short, thin, very lame man, her husband; and a stoutish middle-aged woman with a rolling eye and gait, all very poorly dressed, with lined and heated faces.]

*Lord* W. [Shaking hands] How d'you do!  Delighted to see you all.
It's awfully good of you to have come.

*Lame* M. Mr. and Mrs. Tomson.  We 'ad some trouble to find it.  You see, I've never been in these parts.  We 'ad to come in the oven; and the bus-bloke put us dahn wrong.  Are you the proprietor?

*Lord* W. [Modestly] Yes, I—er—

*Lame* M. You've got a nice plyce.  I says to the missis, I says:
"'E's got a nice plyce 'ere," I says; "there's room to turn rahnd."

*Lord* W. Yes—shall we—?

*Lame* M. An' Mrs. Annaway she says:  "Shouldn't mind livin 'ere meself," she says; "but it must cost'im a tidy penny," she says.

*Lord* W. It does—it does; much too tidy.  Shall we—?

*Mrs*. *Ann*. [Rolling her eye] I'm very pleased to 'ave come.  I've often said to 'em:  "Any time you want me," I've said, "I'd be pleased to come."

*Lord* W. Not so pleased as we are to see you.

*Mrs*. *Ann*.  I'm sure you're very kind.

*James*. [From the double doors, through which he has received a message] Wanted for your speech, my Lord.

*Lord* W. Oh!  God!  Poulder, bring these ladies and gentleman in, and put them where everybody can—where they can see everybody, don't you know.

[He goes out hurriedly through the double doors.]

*Lame* M. Is 'e a lord?

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*Poulder*. He is. Follow me.

[He moves towards the doors, the three workers follow.]

*Mrs*. *Ann*. [Stopping before *James*] You ’yn’t one, I suppose? [*James* stirs no muscle.]

*Poulder*. Now please. [He opens the doors. The Voice of *lord William* speaking is heard] Pass in.

[*The three workers* pass in, *Poulder* and *James* follow them. The doors are not closed, and through this aperture comes the voice of *lord William*, punctuated and supported by decorous applause.]

[*Little Anne* runs in, and listens at the window to the confused and distant murmurs of a crowd.]

*Voice of lord* W. We propose to move for a further advance in the chain-making and—er—er—match-box industries. [Applause.]

[*Little Anne* runs across to the door, to listen.]

[On rising voice] I would conclude with some general remarks. Ladies and gentlemen, the great natural, but—er—artificial expansion which trade experienced the first years after the war has— er—collapsed. These are hard times. We who are fortunate feel more than ever—er—responsible—[He stammers, loses the thread of his thoughts.]—-[Applause]—er—responsible—[The thread still eludes him]—er——

L. *Anne*. [Poignantly] Oh, Daddy!

*Lord* W. [Desperately] In fact—er—you know how—er—responsible we feel.

L. *Anne*. Hooray! [Applause.]

[There float in through the windows the hoarse and distant sounds of the Marseillaise, as sung by London voices.]

*Lord* W. There is a feeling in the air—that I for one should say deliberately was—er—a feeling in the air—er—a feeling in the air——

L. *Anne*. [Agonised] Oh, Daddy! Stop!

[Jane enters, and closes the door behind him. *James*. Look here! ’Ave I got to report you to Miss Stokes?]

L. *Anne*. No-o-o!

*James*. Well, I'm goin' to.

L. *Anne*. Oh, James, be a friend to me! I've seen nothing yet.

*James*. No; but you've eaten a good bit, on the stairs. What price that Peach Melba?

L. *Anne*. I can't go to bed till I've digested it can I? There's such a lovely crowd in the street!

*James*. Lovely? Ho!

L. *Anne*. [Wheedling] James, you couldn't tell Miss Stokes! It isn't in you, is it?

*James*. [Grinning] That's right.

L. *Anne*. So-I'll just get under here. [She gets under the table]
Do I show?

*James*. [Stooping] Not 'arf!

[*Poulder* enters from the hall.]

*Poulder*. What are you doin' there?

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*James*. [Between him and the table—raising himself] Thinkin'.

[*Poulder* purses his mouth to repress his feedings.]

*Poulder*. My orders are to fetch the bomb up here for Lady William to inspect. Take care no more writers stray in.

*James*. How shall I know 'em?

*Poulder*. Well—either very bald or very hairy.

*James*. Right-o! [He goes.]

[*Poulder*, with his back to the table, busies himself with the set of his collar.]

*Poulder*. [Addressing an imaginary audience—in a low but important voice] The—ah—-situation is seerious. It is up to us of the—ah— leisured classes——

[The face of *little Anne* is poked out close to his legs, and tilts upwards in wonder towards the bow of his waistcoat.]

to—ah—keep the people down. The olla polloi are clamourin'——

[Miss *Stokes* appears from the hall, between the pillars.]

Miss S. Poulder!

*Poulder*. [Making a volte face towards the table] Miss?

*Miss* S. Where is Anne?

*Poulder*. [Vexed at the disturbance of his speech] Excuse me, Miss— to keep track of Miss Anne is fortunately no part of my dooties.

[Miss S. She really is naughty.]

*Poulder*. She is. If she was mine, I'd spank her.

[The smiling face of *little Anne* becomes visible again close to his legs.]

*Miss* S. Not a nice word.

*Poulder*. No; but a pleasant haction. Miss Anne's the limit. In fact, Lord and Lady William are much too kind 'earted all round. Take these sweated workers; that class o'

people are quite ’opeless.  Treatin’ them as your equals, shakin ’ands with ’em, givin ’em tea— it only puffs ’em out.  Leave it to the Church, I say.

*Miss* S. The Church is too busy, Poulder.

*Poulder*.  Ah!  That “Purity an’ Future o’ the Race Campaign.”  I’ll tell you what I thinks the danger o’ that, Miss.  So much purity that there won’t be a future race. [Expanding] Purity of ’eart’s an excellent thing, no doubt, but there’s a want of nature about it.  Same with this Anti-Sweating.  Unless you’re anxious to come down, you must not put the lower classes up.

*Miss* S. I don’t agree with you at all, Poulder.

*Poulder*.  Ah!  You want it both ways, Miss.  I should imagine you’re a Liberal.

*Miss* S. [Horrified] Oh, no!  I certainly am not.

*Poulder*.  Well, I judged from your takin’ cocoa.  Funny thing that, about cocoa-how it still runs through the Liberal Party!  It’s virtuous, I suppose.  Wine, beer, tea, coffee-all of ’em vices.  But cocoa you might drink a gallon a day and annoy no one but yourself! There’s a lot o’ deep things in life, Miss!

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Miss S. Quite so.  But I must find Anne.

[She recedes. ]

*Poulder*. [Suavely] Well, I wish you every success; and I hope you'll spank her.  This modern education—there's no fruitiness in it.

L. *Anne*. [From under the table] Poulder, are you virtuous?

*Poulder*. [Jumping] Good Ged!

L. *Anne*.  D'you mind my asking?  I promised James I would.

*Poulder*.  Miss Anne, come out!

[The four footmen appear in the hall, *Henry* carrying the wine cooler.]

*James*.  Form fours-by your right-quick march!

[They enter, marching down right of table.]

Right incline—Mark time!  Left turn!  'Alt!  'Enry, set the bomb! Stand easy!

[*Henry* places the wine cooler on the table and covers it with a blue embroidered Chinese mat, which has occupied the centre of the tablecloth.]

*Poulder*.  Ah!  You will 'ave your game!  Thomas, take the door there!  James, the 'all! Admit titles an' bishops.  No literary or Labour people.  Charles and 'Enry, 'op it and 'ang about!

[*Charles* and *Henry* go out, the other too move to their stations.]

[*Poulder*, stands by the table looking at the covered bomb.  The hoarse and distant sounds of the Marseillaise float in again from Park Lane.]

[Moved by some deep feeling] And this house an 'orspital in the war!  I ask you—what was the good of all our sacrifices for the country?  No town 'ouse for four seasons—-rustygettin' in the shires, not a soul but two boys under me.  Lord William at the front, Lady William at the back.  And all for this! [He points sadly at the cooler] It comes of meddlin' on the Continent.  I had my prognostications at the time. [To *James*] You

remember my sayin' to you just before you joined up: "Mark my words—we shall see eight per cent. for our money before this is over!"

*James*. [Sepulchrally] I see the eight per cent., but not the money.

*Poulder*. Hark at that!

[The sounds of the Marseillaise grow louder. He shakes his head.]

I'd read the Riot Act. They'll be lootin' this house next!

*James*. We'll put up a fight over your body: "Bartholomew Poulder, faithful unto death!" Have you insured your life?

*Poulder*. Against a revolution?

*James*. Act o' God! Why not?

*Poulder*. It's not an act o' God.

*James*. It is; and I sympathise with it.

*Poulder*. You—what?

*James*. I do—only—hands off the gov'nor.

*Poulder*. Oh! Really! Well, that's something. I'm glad to see you stand behind him, at all events.

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*James*. I stand in front of ’im when the scrap begins!

*Poulder*. Do you insinuate that my heart’s not in the right place?

*James*. Well, look at it! It’s been creepin’ down ever since I knew you. Talk of your sacrifices in the war—they put you on your honour, and you got stout on it. Rations—-not ’arf.

*Poulder*. [Staring at him] For independence, I’ve never seen your equal, James. You might be an Australian.

*James*. [Suavely] Keep a civil tongue, or I’ll throw you to the crowd! [He comes forward to the table] Shall I tell you why I favour the gov’nor? Because, with all his pomp, he’s a gentleman, as much as I am. Never asks you to do what he wouldn’t do himself. What’s more, he never comes it over you. If you get drunk, or—well, you understand me, Poulder—he’ll just say: “Yes, yes; I know, James!” till he makes you feel he’s done it himself. [Sinking his voice mysteriously] I’ve had experience with him, in the war and out. Why he didn’t even hate the Huns, not as he ought. I tell you he’s no Christian.

*Poulder*. Well, for irreverence——!

*James*. [Obstinately] And he’ll never be. He’s got too soft a heart.

L. *Anne*. [Beneath the table-shrilly] Hurrah!

*Poulder*. [Jumping] Come out, Miss Anne!

*James*. Let ’er alone!

*Poulder*. In there, under the bomb?

*James*. [Contemptuously] Silly ass! You should take ’em lying down!

*Poulder*. Look here, James! I can’t go on in this revolutionary spirit; either you or I resign.

*James*. Crisis in the Cabinet!

*Poulder*. I give you your marchin’ orders.

*James*. [Ineffably] What’s that you give me?

*Poulder*. Thomas, remove James!

[*Thomas* grins.]

L. *Anne*. [Who, with open mouth, has crept out to see the fun] Oh! Do remove James, Thomas!

*Poulder*. Go on, Thomas.

[*Thomas* takes one step towards *James*, who lays a hand on the Chinese mat covering the bomb.]

*James*. [Grimly] If I lose control of meself.

L. *Anne*. [Clapping her hands] Oh! James! Do lose control! Then I shall see it go off!

*James*. [To *Poulder*] Well, I'll merely empty the pail over you!

*Poulder*. This is not becomin'!

[He walks out into the hall.]

*James*. Another strategic victory! What a Boche he'd have made. As you were, Tommy!

[*Thomas* returns to the door. The sound of prolonged applause cornea from within.]

That's a bishop.

L. *Anne*. Why?

*James*. By the way he's drawin'. It's the fine fightin' spirit in 'em. They were the backbone o' the war. I see there's a bit o' the old stuff left in you, Tommy.

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L. *Anne*. [Scrutinizing the widely—grinning *Thom*] Where? Is it in his mouth?

*James*. You've still got a sense of your superiors. Didn't you notice how you moved to Poulder's orders, me boy; an' when he was gone, to mine?

L. *Anne*. [To *Thomas*] March!

[The grinning *Thomas* remains immovable.]

He doesn't, James!

*James*. Look here, Miss Anne—your lights ought to be out before ten. Close in, Tommy!

[He and *Thomas* move towards her.]

L. *Anne*. [Dodging] Oh, no! Oh, no! Look!

[The footmen stop and turn. There between the pillars, stands *little Aida* with the trousers, her face brilliant With surprise.]

*James*. Good Lord! What's this?

[Seeing L. *Anne*, *little Aida* approaches, fascinated, and the two children sniff at each other as it were like two little dogs walking round and round.]

L. *Anne*. [Suddenly] My name's Anne; what's yours?

L. *Aida*. Aida.

L. *Anne*. Are you lost?

L. *Aida*. Nao.

L. *Anne*. Are those trousers?

L. *Aida*. Yus.

L. Arms. Whose?

L. *Aida*. Mrs. Lemmy's.

L. *Anne*. Does she wear them?

[*Little Aida* smiles brilliantly.]

L. *Aida*. Nao. She sews 'em.

L. *Anne*. [Touching the trousers] They are hard. James's are much softer; aren't they, James? [*James* deigns no reply] What shall we do? Would you like to see my bedroom?

L. *Aida*. [With a hop] Aoh, yus!

*James*. No.

L. *Anne*. Why not?

*James*. Have some sense of what's fittin'.

L. *Anne*. Why isn't it fittin'? [To *little Aida*] Do you like me?

L. *Aida*. Yus-s.

L. *Anne*. So do I. Come on!

[She takes *little Aida's* hand.]

*James*. [Between the pillars] Tommy, ketch 'em!

[*Thomas* retains them by the skirts.]

L. *Anne*. [Feigning indifference] All right, then! [To *little Aida*] Have you ever seen a bomb?

L. *Aida*. Nao.

L. *Anne*. [Going to the table and lifting a corner of the cover] Look!

L. *Aida*. [Looking] What's it for?

L. *Anne*. To blow up this house.

L. *Aida*. I daon't fink!

L. *Anne*. Why not?

L. *Aida*. It's a beautiful big 'Ouse.

L. *Anne*. That's why. Isn't it, James?

L. *Aida*. You give the fing to me; I'll blow up our 'ouse—it's an ugly little 'ouse.

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L. *Anne* [Struck] Let's all blow up our own; then we can start fair.
Daddy would like that.

L. *Aida*. Yus. [Suddenly brilliant] I've 'ad a ride in a taxi, an' we're goin' 'ome in it agyne!

L. *Anne*. Were you sick?

*Little Aida*. [Brilliant] Nao.

L. *Anne* I was; when I first went in one, but I was quite young then.
James, could you get her a Peche Melba? There was one.

*James*. No.

L. *Anne*. Have you seen the revolution?

L. *Aida*. Wot's that?

L. *Anne*. It's made of people.

L. *Aida*. I've seen the corfin, it's myde o' wood.

L. *Anne*. Do you hate the rich?

L. *Aida*. [Ineffably] Nao. I hates the poor.

L. *Anne*. Why?

L. *Aida*. 'Cos they 'yn't got nuffin'.

L. *Anne*. I love the poor. They're such dears.

L. *Aida*. [Shaking her head with a broad smile] Nao.

L. *Anne*. Why not?

L. *Aida*. I'd tyke and lose the lot, I would.

L. *Anne*. Where?

L. *Aida*. In the water.

L. *Anne*. Like puppies?

L. *Aida*. Yus.

L. *Anne*. Why?

L. *Aida*. Then I'd be shut of 'em.

L. *Anne*. [Puzzled] Oh!

[The voice of *the press* is heard in the hall. "Where's the little girl?"]

*James*. That's you. Come 'ere!

[He puts a hand behind *little Aida's* back and propels her towards the hall. *The press* enters with old *Mrs*. *Lemmy*.]

*Press*. Oh! Here she is, major domo. I'm going to take this old lady to the meeting; they want her on the platform. Look after our friend, Mr. Lemmy here; Lord William wants to see him presently.

L. *Anne*. [In an awed whisper] James, it's the little blighter!

[She dives again under the table. *Lemmy* enters.]

*Lemmy*. 'Ere! 'Arf a mo'! Yer said yer'd drop me at my plyce. Well, I tell yer candid—this 'yn't my plyce.

*Press*. That's all right, Mr. Lemmy. [He grins] They'll make you wonderfully comfortable, won't you, major domo?

[He passes on through the room, to the door, ushering old *Mrs*. *Lemmy* and *little Aida*.]

[*Poulder* blocks *Lemmy's* way, with *Charles* and *Henry* behind him.]

*Poulder*. James, watch it; I'll report.

[He moves away, following *the press* through the door. *James* between table and window. *Thomas* has gone to the door. *Henry* and *Charles* remain at the entrances to the hall. *Lemmy* looks dubiously around, his cockney assurrance gradually returns.]

*Lemmy*. I think I knows the gas 'ere. This is where I came to-dy, 'yn't it? Excuse my hesitytion—these little 'ouses *is* so much the syme.

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*James*. [Gloomily] They are!

*Lemmy*. [Looking at the four immovable footmen, till he concentrates on *James*] Ah! I 'ad a word wiv you, 'adn't I? You're the four conscientious ones wot's wyin' on your gov'nor's chest. 'Twas you I spoke to, wasn't it? [His eyes travel over them again] Ye're so monotonous. Well, ye're busy now, I see. I won't wyste yer time.

[He turns towards the hall, but *Charles* and *Henry* bar the way in silence.]

[Skidding a little, and regarding the four immovables once more]

I never see such pytient men? Compared wiv yer, mountains is restless.

[He goes to the table. *James* watches him. *Anne* barks from underneath.]

[Skidding again] Why! There's a dawg under there. [Noting the grin on THOMAS'S face] Glad it amooses yer. Yer want it, daon't yer, wiv a fyce like that? Is this a ply wivaht words? 'Ave I got into the movies by mistyke? Turn aht, an' let's 'ave six penn'orth o' darkness.

L. *Anne*. [From beneath the cable] No, no! Not dark!

*Lemmy*. [Musingly] The dawg talks anywy. Come aht, Fido!

[*Little Anne* emerges, and regards him with burning curiosity.]

I sy: Is this the lytest fashion o' receivin' guests?

L. *Anne*. Mother always wants people to feel at home. What shall we do? Would you like to hear the speeches? Thomas, open the door a little, do!

*James*. 'Umour 'er a couple o' inches, Tommy!

[*Thomas* draws the door back stealthily an inch or so.]

L. *Anne*. [After applying her eye-in a loud whisper] There's the old lady. Daddy's looking at her trousers. Listen!

[For *Mrs*. *Lemmy's* voice is floating faintly through: "I putt in the buttonholes, I stretches the flies; I 'ems the bottoms; I lines the crutch; I putt on this bindin'; I sews on the buttons; I presses the seams—Tuppence three farthin's the pair."]

*Lemmy*. [In a hoarse whisper] That's it, old lydy: give it 'em!

L. *Anne*. Listen!

*Voice of lord* W. We are indebted to our friends the Press for giving us the pleasure—er—pleasure of hearing from her own lips—the pleasure——

L. *Anne*. Oh! Daddy!

[*Thomas* abruptly closes the doors.]

*Lemmy*. [To *Anne*] Now yer've done it. See wot comes o' bein' impytient. We was just gettin' to the marrer.

L. *Anne*. What can we do for you now?

*Lemmy*. [Pointing to *Anne*, and addressing *James*] Wot is this one, anywy?

*James*. [Sepulchrally] Daughter o' the house.

*Lemmy*. Is she insured agynst 'er own curiosity?

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L. *Anne*. Why?

*Lemmy*. As I daon't believe in a life beyond the gryve, I might be tempted to send yer there.

L. *Anne*. What is the gryve?

*Lemmy*. Where little gells goes to.

L. *Anne*. Oh, when?

*Lemmy*. [Pretending to look at a match, which is not there] Well, I dunno if I've got time to finish yer this minute. Sy to-mower at. 'arf past.

L. *Anne*. Half past what?

*Lemmy*. [Despairingly] 'Arf past wot!

[The sound of applause is heard.]

*James*. That's 'is Grace. 'E's gettin' wickets, too.

[*Poulder* entering from the door.]

*Poulder*. Lord William is slippin' in.

[He makes a cabalistic sign with his head. Jeers crosses to the door. *Lemmy* looks dubiously at *Poulder*.]

*Lemmy*. [Suddenly—as to himself] Wot oh! I am the portly one!

*Poulder*. [Severely] Any such allusion aggeravates your offence.

*Lemmy*. Oh, ah! Look 'ere, it was a corked bottle. Now, tyke care, tyke care, 'aughty! Daon't curl yer lip! I shall myke a clean breast o' my betryal when the time comes!

[There is a alight movement of the door. *Anne* makes a dive towards the table but is arrested by *Poulder* grasping her waistband. *Lord William* slips in, followed by *the press*, on whom *James* and *Thomas* close the door too soon.]

*Half of the press*. [Indignantly] Look out!

*James*. Do you want him in or out, me Lord?

*Lemmy*. I sy, you've divided the Press; 'e was unanimous.

[The *footmen* let *the press* through.]

*Lord* W. [To *the press*] I'm so sorry.

*Lemmy*. Would yer like me to see to 'is gas?

*Lord* W. So you're my friend of the cellars?

*Lemmy*. [Uneasy] I daon't deny it.

[*Poulder* begins removing *little Anne*.]

L. *Anne*. Let me stay, Daddy; I haven't seen anything yet! If I go, I shall only have to come down again when they loot the house. Listen!

[The hoarse strains of the Marseillaise are again heard from the distance.]

*Lord* W. [Blandly] Take her up, Poulder!

L. *Anne*. Well, I'm coming down again—and next time I shan't have any clothes on, you know.

[They vanish between the pillars. *Lord William* makes a sign of dismissal. The *footman* file out.]

*Lemmy*. [Admiringly] Luv'ly pyces!

*Lord* W. [Pleasantly] Now then; let's have our talk, Mr.——

*Lemmy*. Lemmy.

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*Press*. [Who has slipped his note-book out] “Bombed and Bomber face to face——”

*Lemmy*. [Uneasy] I didn’t come ’ere agyne on me own, yer know. The Press betryed me.

*Lord* W. Is that old lady your mother?

*Lemmy*. The syme. I tell yer stryte, it was for ’er I took that old bottle o’ port. It was orful old.

*Lord* W. Ah! Port? Probably the ’83. Hope you both enjoyed it.

*Lemmy*. So far-yus. Muvver’ll suffer a bit tomower, I expect.

*Lord* W. I should like to do something for your mother, if you’ll allow me.

*Lemmy*. Oh! I’ll allow yer. But I dunno wot she’ll sy.

*Lord* W. I can see she’s a fine independent old lady! But suppose you were to pay her ten bob a week, and keep my name out of it?

*Lemmy*. Well, that’s one wy o’ *you* doin’ somefink, ’yn’t it?

*Lord* W. I giving you the money, of course.

*Press*. [Writing] “Lord William, with kingly generosity——”

*Lemmy*. [Drawing attention to *the press* with his thumb] I sy—
I daon’t mind, meself—if you daon’t——

*Lord* W. He won’t write anything to annoy me.

*Press*. This is the big thing, Lord William; it’ll get the public bang in the throat.

*Lemmy*. [Confidentially] Bit dyngerous, ‘yn’t it? trustin’ the Press? Their right ’ands never knows wot their left ’ands is writin’. [To *the press*] ‘Yn’t that true, speakin’ as a man?

*Press*. Mr. Lemmy, even the Press is capable of gratitude.

*Lemmy*. Is it? I should ha’ thought it was too important for a little thing like that. [To *lord William*] But ye’re quite right; we couldn’t do wivaht the Press—there wouldn’t be no distress, no coffin, no revolution—’cos nobody’d know nuffin’ abaht it. Why! There wouldn’t be no life at all on Earf in these dyes, wivaht the Press! It’s them wot says: “Let there be Light—an’ there is Light.”

*Lord* W. Umm!  That's rather a new thought to me. [Writes on his cuff.]

*Lemmy*.  But abaht Muvver, I'll tell yer 'ow we can arrynge.  You send 'er the ten bob a week wivaht syin' anyfink, an' she'll fink it comes from Gawd or the Gover'ment yer cawn't tell one from t'other in Befnal Green.

*Lord* W. All right; we'll' do that.

*Lemmy*.  Will yer reely?  I'd like to shyke yer 'and.

[*Lord William* puts out his hand, which *Lemmy* grasps.]

*Press*. [Writing] "The heartbeat of humanity was in that grasp between the son of toil and the son of leisure."

*Lemmy*. [Already ashamed of his emotion] 'Ere, 'arf a mo'!  Which is which?  Daon't forget I'm aht o' wori; Lord William, if that's 'is nyme, is workin 'ard at 'is Anti-Sweats! Wish I could get a job like vat—jist suit me!

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*Lord* W. That hits hard, Mr. Lemmy.

*Lemmy*. Daon't worry! Yer cawn't 'elp bein' born in the purple!

*Lord* W. Ah! Tell me, what would you do in my place?

*Lemmy*. Why—as the nobleman said in 'is well-known wy: "Sit in me Club winder an' watch it ryne on the dam people!" That's if I was a average nobleman! If I was a bit more noble, I might be tempted to come the kind'earted on twenty thou' a year. Some prefers yachts, or ryce 'orses. But philanthropy on the 'ole is syfer, in these dyes.

*Lord* W. So you think one takes to it as a sort of insurance, Mr. Lemmy? Is that quite fair?

*Lemmy*. Well, we've all got a weakness towards bein' kind, somewhere abaht us. But the moment wealf comes in, we 'yn't wot I call single-'earted. If yer went into the foundytions of your wealf—would yer feel like 'avin' any? It all comes from uvver people's 'ard, unpleasant lybour—it's all built on Muvver as yer might sy. An' if yer daon't get rid o' some of it in bein' kind—yer daon't feel syfe nor comfy.

*Lord* W. [Twisting his moustache] Your philosophy is very pessimistic.

*Lemmy*. Well, I calls meself an optimist; I sees the worst of everyfink. Never disappynted, can afford to 'ave me smile under the blackest sky. When deaf is squeezin' of me windpipe, I shall 'ave a laugh in it! Fact is, if yer've 'ad to do wiv gas an' water pipes, yer can fyce anyfing. [The distant Marseillaise blares up] 'Ark at the revolution!

*Lord* W. [Rather desperately] I know—hunger and all the rest of it! And here am I, a rich man, and don't know what the deuce to do.

*Lemmy*. Well, I'll tell yer. Throw yer cellars open, an' while the populyce is gettin' drunk, sell all yer 'ave an' go an' live in Ireland; they've got the millennium chronic over there.

> [*Lord William* utters a short, vexed laugh, and begins to walk about.]

That's speakin' as a practical man. Speakin' as a synt "Bruvvers, all I 'ave is yours. To-morrer I'm goin' dahn to the Lybour Exchynge to git put on the wytin' list, syme as you!"

*Lord* W. But, d——it, man, there we should be, all together! Would that help?

*Lemmy*. Nao; but it'd syve a lot o' blood.

[*Lord William* stops abruptly, and looks first at *Lemmy*, then at the cooler, still cohered with the Chinese mat.]

Yer thought the Englishman could be taught to shed blood wiv syfety. Not ’im! Once yer git ’im into an ’abit, yer cawn’t git ’im out of it agyne. ‘E’ll go on sheddin’ blood mechanical—Conservative by nyture. An’ ‘e won’t myke nuffin’ o’ yours. Not even the Press wiv ’is ’oneyed words’ll sty ’is ’and.

*Lord* W. And what do you suggest we could have done, to avoid trouble?

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*Lemmy*. [Warming to his theme] I'll tell yer. If all you wealfy nobs wiv kepitel 'ad come it kind from the start after the war yer'd never 'a been 'earin' the Marseillaisy naow. Lord! 'Ow you did talk abaht Unity and a noo spirit in the Country. Noo spirit! Why, soon as ever there was no dynger from outside, yer stawted to myke it inside, wiv an iron'and. Naow, you've been in the war an' it's given yer a feelin' 'eart; but most of the nobs wiv kepitel was too old or too important to fight. They weren't born agyne. So naow that bad times is come, we're 'owlin' for their blood.

*Lord* W. I quite agree; I quite agree. I've often said much the same thing.

*Lemmy*. Voice cryin' in the wilderness—I daon't sy we was yngels— there was faults on bofe sides. [He looks at *the press*] The Press could ha' helped yer a lot. Shall I tell yer wot the Press did? "It's vital," said the Press, "that the country should be united, or it will never recover." Nao strikes, nao 'omen nature, nao nuffink. Kepitel an' Lybour like the Siamese twins. And, fust dispute that come along, the Press orfs wiv its coat an' goes at it bald'eaded. An' wot abaht since? Sich a riot o' nymes called, in Press—and Pawlyement. Unpatriotic an' outrygeous demands o' lybour. Blood-suckin' tyranny o' Kepitel; thieves an' dawgs an 'owlin Jackybines—gents throwin' books at each other; all the resources of edjucytion exhausted! If I'd bin Prime Minister I'd 'ave 'ad the Press's gas cut 'orf at the meter. Puffect liberty, of course, nao Censorship; just sy wot yer like —an' never be 'eard of no more.

> [Turning suddenly to *the press*, who has been scribbling in pace with this harangue, and now has developed a touch of writer's cramp.]

Why! 'Is 'end's out o' breath! Fink o' vet!

*Lord* W. Great tribute to your eloquence, Mr. Lemmy!

[A sudden stir of applause and scraping of chairs is heard; the meeting is evidently breaking up. *Lady William* comes in, followed by *Mrs*. *Lemmy* with her trousers, and *little Aida*. *Lemmy* stares fixedly at this sudden, radiant apparition. His gaze becomes as that of a rabbit regarding a snake. And suddenly he puts up his hand and wipes his brow.]

> [*Lady William*, going to the table, lifts one end of the Chinese mat, and looks at *Lemmy*. Then she turns to *lord William*.]

*Lady* W. Bill!

*Lemmy*. [To his mother—in a hoarse whisper] She calls 'im Bill. 'Ow! 'Yn't she *it*?

*Lady* W. [Apart] Have you—spoken to him?

[*Lord William* shakes his head.]

Not? What have you been saying, then?

*Lord* W. Nothing, he's talked all the time.

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*Lady* W. [Very low] What a little caution!

*Lord* W. Steady, old girl!  He's got his eye on you!

[*Lady William* looks at *Lemmy*, whose eyes are still fixed on her.]

*Lady* W. [With resolution] Well, I'm going to tackle him.

[She moves towards *Lemmy*, who again wipes his brow, and wrings out his hand.]

*Mrs*. *Lemmy*.  Don't 'ee du that, Bob.  Yu must forgive'im, Ma'am; it's 'is admiration.  'E was always one for the ladies, and he'm not used to seein' so much of 'em.

*Lady* W. Don't you think you owe us an explanation?

*Mrs*. *Lemmy*.  Speak up, Bob.

[But *Lemmy* only shifts his feet.]

My gudeness!  'E've a-lost 'is tongue.  I never knu that 'appen to 'e before.

*Lord* W. [Trying to break the embarrassment] No ill-feeling, you know, Lemmy.

[But *Lemmy* still only rolls his eyes.]

*Lady* W. Don't you think it was rather—inconsiderate of you?

*Lemmy*.  Muvver, tyke me aht, I'm feelin' fynte!

[Spurts of the Marseillaise and the mutter of the crowd have been coming nearer; and suddenly a knocking is heard.  *Poulder* and *James* appear between the pillars.]

*Poulder*.  The populace, me Lord!

*Lady* W. What!

*Lord* W. Where've you put 'em, Poulder?

*Poulder*.  They've put theirselves in the portico, me Lord.

*Lord* W. [Suddenly wiping his brow] Phew!  I say, this is awful, Nell!  Two speeches in one evening.  Nothing else for it, I suppose. Open the window, Poulder!

*Poulder*. [Crossing to the window] We are prepared for any sacrifice, me Lord.

[He opens the window.]

*Press*. [Writing furiously] “Lady William stood like a statue at bay.”

*Lord* W. Got one of those lozenges on you, Nell?

[But *lady William* has almost nothing on her.]

*Lemmy*. [Producing a paper from his pocket] ‘Ave one o’ my gum drops?

[He passes it to *lord William*.]

*Lord* W. [Unable to refuse, takes a large, flat gum drop from the paper, and looks at it in embarrassment.] Ah! thanks!  Thanks awfully!

[*Lemmy* turns to *little Aida*, and puts a gum drop in her mouth.
A burst of murmurs from the crowd.]

*James*. [Towering above the wine cooler] If they get saucy, me Lord, I can always give ’em their own back.

*Lord* W. Steady, James; steady!

[He puts the gum drop absently in his mouth, and turns up to the
open window.]

*Voice*. [Outside] ’Ere they are—the bally plutocrats.

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[Voices in chorus: "Bread! Bread!"]

*Lord* W. Poulder, go and tell the chef to send out anything there is in the house—nicely, as if it came from nowhere in particular.

*Poulder*. Very good, me Lord. [Sotto voce] Any wine? If I might suggest—German—-'ock?

*Lord* W. What you like.

*Poulder*. Very good, me Lord. [He goes.]

*Lord* W. I say, dash it, Nell, my teeth are stuck! [He works his finger in his mouth.]

*Lady* W. Take it out, darling.

*Lord* W. [Taking out the gum drop and looking at it] What the deuce did I put it in for?

*Press*. ['Writing] "With inimitable coolness Lord William prepared to address the crowd."

[Voices in chorea: "Bread! Bread!"]

*Lord* W. Stand by to prompt, old girl. Now for it. This ghastly gum drop!

[*Lord William* takes it from his agitated hand, and flips it through the window.]

*Voice*. Dahn with the aristo——[Chokes.]

*Lady* W. Oh! Bill——oh! It's gone into a mouth!

*Lord* W. Good God!

*Voice*. Wet's this? Throwin' things? Mind aht, or we'll smash yer winders!

[As the voices in chorus chant: "Bread! Bread!" *Little Anne*, night-gowned, darts in from the hall. She is followed by *miss Stokes*. They stand listening.]

*Lord* W. [To the Crowd] My friends, you've come to the wrong shop. There's nobody in London more sympathetic with you. [The crowd laughs hoarsely.] [Whispering] Look out, old girl; they can see your shoulders. [*Lord William* moves back a step.] If I were a speaker, I could make you feel——

*Voice*. Look at his white weskit! Blood-suckers—fattened on the people!

[*James* dives his hand at the wine cooler.]

*Lord* W. I've always said the Government ought to take immediate steps——

*Voice*. To shoot us dahn.

*Lord* W. Not a bit. To relieve the—er——

*Lady* W. [Prompting] Distress.

*Lady* W. Distress, and ensure—er—ensure

*Lady* W. [Prompting] Quiet.

*Lord* W. [To her] No, no. To ensure—ensure——

L. *Anne*. [Agonized] Oh, Daddy!

*Voice*. 'E wants to syve 'is dirty great 'ouse.

*Lord* W. [Roused] D——if I do!

[Rude and hoarse laughter from the crowd.]

*James*. [With fury] Me Lord, let me blow 'em to glory!

[He raises the cooler and advances towards the window.]

*Lord* W. [Turning sharply on him] Drop it, James; drop it!

*Press*. [Jumping] No, no; don't drop it!

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[*James* retires crestfallen to the table, where he replaces the cooler.]

*Lord* W. [Catching hold of his bit] Look here, I must have fought alongside some of you fellows in the war. Weren't we jolly well like brothers?

A *voice*. Not so much bloomin' "Kamerad"; hand over yer 'Ouse.

*Lord* W. I was born with this beastly great house, and money, and goodness knows what other entanglements—a wife and family——

*Voice*. Born with a wife and family!

[Jeers and laughter.]

*Lord* W. I feel we're all in the same boat, and I want to pull my weight. If you can show me the way, I'll take it fast enough.

A *deep voice*. Step dahn then, an' we'll step up.

*Another voice*. 'Ear, 'Ear!

[A fierce little cheer.]

*Lord* W. [To *lady William*—in despair] By George! I can't get in anywhere!

*Lady* W. [Calmly] Then shut the window, Bill.

*Lemmy*. [Who has been moving towards them slowly] Lemme sy a word to 'em.

[All stare at him. *Lemmy* approaches the window, followed by *little Aida*. *Poulder* re-enters with the three other footmen.]

[At the window] Cheerio! Cockies!

[The silence of surprise falls on the crowd.]

I'm one of yer. Gas an' water I am. Got more grievances an' out of employment than any of yer. I want to see their blood flow, syme as you.

*Press*. [writing] "Born orator—ready cockney wit—saves situation."

*Lemmy*. Wot I sy is: Dahn wiv the country, dahn wiv everyfing. Begin agyne from the foundytions. [Nodding his head back at the room] But we've got to keep one or two o' these 'ere under glawss, to show our future generytions. An' this one is 'armless. His pipes is sahnd, 'is 'eart is good; 'is 'ead is not strong. Is 'ouse will myke a charmin'

palace o' varieties where our children can come an' see 'ow they did it in the good old dyes. Yer never see rich waxworks as 'is butler and 'is four conscientious khaki footmen. Why—wot dyer think 'e 'as 'em for—fear they might be out o'-works like you an' me. Nao! Keep this one; 'e's a Flower. 'Arf a mo'! I'll show yer my Muvver. Come 'ere, old lydy; and bring yer trahsers. [*Mrs*. *Lemmy* comes forward to the window] Tell abaht yer speech to the meetin'.

*Mrs*. *Lemmy*. [Bridling] Oh dear! Well, I cam' in with me trousers, an' they putt me up on the pedestory at once, so I tole 'em. [Holding up the trousers] "I putt in the button'oles, I stretches the flies; I lines the crutch; I putt on this bindin', I presses the seams—-Tuppence three farthin's a pair."

[A groan from tote crowd, ]

*Lemmy*. [Showing her off] Seventy-seven! Wot's 'er income? Twelve bob a week; seven from the Gover'ment an' five from the sweat of 'er brow. Look at 'er! 'Yn't she a tight old dear to keep it goin'! No workus for 'er, nao fear! The gryve rather!

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[Murmurs from the crowd, at Whom *Mrs*. *Lemmy* is blandly smiling.]

You cawn't git below 'er—impossible! She's the foundytions of the country—an' rocky 'yn't the word for 'em. Worked 'ard all 'er life, brought up a family and buried 'em on it. Twelve bob a week, an' given when 'er fingers goes, which is very near. Well, naow, this torf 'ere comes to me an' says: "I'd like to do somefin' for yer muvver. 'Ow's ten bob a week?" 'e says. Naobody arst 'im—quite on 'is own. That's the sort 'e is. [Sinking his voice confidentially] Sorft. You bring yer muvvers 'ere, 'e'll do the syme for them. I giv yer the 'int.

*Voice*. [From the crowd] What's 'is nyme?

*Lemmy*. They calls 'im Bill.

*Voice*. Bill What?

L. *Anne*. Dromondy.

*Lady* W. Anne!

*Lemmy*. Dromedary 'is nyme is.

*Voice*. [From the crowd] Three cheers for Bill Dromedary.

*Lemmy*. I sy, there's veal an' 'am, an' pork wine at the back for them as wants it; I 'eard the word passed. An' look 'ere, if yer want a flag for the revolution, tyke muvver's trahsers an' tie 'em to the corfin. Yer cawn't 'ave no more inspirin' banner. Ketch! [He throws the trousers out] Give Bill a double-barrel fast, to show there's no ill-feelin'. Ip, 'ip!

[The crowd cheers, then slowly passes away, singing at a hoarse version of the Marseillaise, till all that is heard is a faint murmuring and a distant barrel-organ playing the same tune.]

*Press*. [Writing] "And far up in the clear summer air the larks were singing."

*Lord* W. [Passing his heard over his hair, and blinking his eyes] James! Ready?

*James*. Me Lord!

L. *Anne*. Daddy!

*Lady* W. [Taking his arm] Bill! It's all right, old man—all right!

*Lord* W. [Blinking] Those infernal larks! Thought we were on the Somme again! Ah! Mr. Lemmy, [Still rather dreamy] no end obliged to you; you're so decent. Now, why did you want to blow us up before dinner?

*Lemmy*. Blow yer up? [Passing his hand over his hair in travesty]
"Is it a dream? Then wykin' would be pyne."

*Mrs*. *Lemmy*. Bo-ob! Not so saucy, my boy!

*Lemmy*. Blow yet up? Wot abaht it?

*Lady* W. [Indicating the bomb] This, Mr. Lemmy!

[*Lemmy* looks at it, and his eyes roll and goggle.]

*Lord* W. Come, all's forgiven! But why did you?

*Lemmy*. Orl right! I'm goin' to tyke it awy; it'd a-been a bit ork'ard for me. I'll want it to-mower.

*Lord* W. What! To leave somewhere else?

*Lemmy*. 'Yus, of course!

*Lord* W. No, no; dash it! Tell us what's it filled with?

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*Lemmy*. Filled wiv? Nuffin'. Wot did yet expect? Toof-pahder?
It's got a bit o' my lead soldered on to it. That's why it's 'eavy!

*Lord* W. But what is it?

*Lemmy*. Wot is it? [His eyes are fearfully fixed on *lady William*] I fought everybody knew 'em.

*Lady* W. Mr. Lemmy, you must clear this up, please.

*Lemmy*. [*To lord William*, With his eyes still held On *lady William*— mysteriously] Wiv lydies present? 'Adn't I better tell the Press?

*Lord* W. All right; tell someone—anyone!

[*Lemmy* goes down to *the press*, who is reading over his last note. Everyone watches and listens with the utmost discretion, while he whispers into the ear of *the press*; who shakes his head violently.]

*Press*. No, no; it's too horrible. It destroys my whole——

*Lemmy*. Well, I tell yer it is.

[Whispers again violently.]

*Press*. No, no; I can't have it. All my article! All my article!
It can't be—no——

*Lemmy*. I never see sick an obstinate thick-head! Yer 'yn't worvy of yet tryde.

[He whispers still more violently and makes cabalistic signs.]

[*Lady William* lifts the bomb from the cooler into the sight of all. *Lord William*, seeing it for the first time in full light, bends double in silent laughter, and whispers to his wife. *Lady William* drops the bomb and gives way too. Hearing the sound, *Lemmy* turns, and his goggling eyes pan them all in review. *Lord* and *lady William* in fits of laughter, *little Anne* stamping her feet, for *miss Stokes*, red, but composed, has her hands placed firmly over her pupil's eyes and ears; *little Aida* smiling brilliantly, *Mrs*. *Lemmy* blandly in sympathy, neither knowing why; the *four footman* in a row, smothering little explosions. *Poulder*, extremely grave and red, *the press* perfectly haggard, gnawing at his nails.]

*Lemmy*. [Turning to *the press*] Blimy! It amooses 'em, all but the genteel ones. Cheer oh! Press! Yer can always myke somefin' out o' nufun'? It's not the fust thing as 'as existed in yer imaginytion only.

*Press*. No, d——it; I'll keep it a bomb!

*Lemmy*. [Soothingly] Ah! Keep the sensytion. Wot's the troof compared wiv that? Come on, Muvver! Come on, Little Aida! Time we was goin' dahn to 'Earf.

[He goes up to the table, and still skidding a little at *lady William*, takes the late bomb from the cooler, placing it under his arm.]

*Mrs*. *Lemmy*. Gude naight, sir; gude naight, ma'am; thank yu for my cup o' tea, an' all yore kindness.

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[She shakes hands with *lord* and *lady William*, drops the curtsey of her youth before Mr. *Poulder*, and goes out followed by *little Aida*, who is looking back at *little Anne*.]

*Lemmy*. [Turning suddenly] Aoh! An' jist one frog! Next time yer build an 'ouse, daon't forget—it's the foundytions as bears the wyte.

[With a wink that gives way, to a last fascinated look at *lady William*, he passes out. All gaze after them, except *the press*, who is tragically consulting his spiflicated notes.]

L. *Anne*. [Breaking away from Miss *Stokes* and rushing forward] Oh! Mum! what was it?

## CURTAIN

**THE SKIN GAME**

(A *tragi-comedy*)

"Who touches pitch shall be defiled"

## CHARACTERS

*Hillcrist* .....A Country Gentleman
Amy .....His Wife
Jill .....His Daughter
Dawker .....His Agent
Hornblower .....A Man Newly-Rich
Charles .....His Elder Son
Chloe .....Wife to Charles
Rolf .....His Younger Son
fellows .....Hillcrist's Butler
Anna .....Chloe's Maid
the Jackmans .....Man and Wife

An auctioneer
A *solicitor*
*two strangers*

# ACT I. HILLCRIST'S Study

*Act* II.
*Scene* I. A month later. An Auction Room.
*Scene* II. The same evening. *Chloe's* Boudoir.

# ACT III

*Scene* I. The following day. *Hillcrist's* Study. Morning.
Scene II. The Same. Evening.

### ACT I

*Hillcrist's* study. A pleasant room, with books in calf bindings, and signs that the *Hillcrist's* have travelled, such as a large photograph of the Taj Mahal, of Table Mountain, and the Pyramids of Egypt. A large bureau [stage Right], devoted to the business of a country estate. Two foxes' masks. Flowers in bowls. Deep armchairs. A large French window open [at Back], with a lovely view of a slight rise of fields and trees in August sunlight. A fine stone fireplace [stage Left]. A door [Left]. A door opposite [Right]. General colour effect—stone, and cigar-leaf brown, with spots of bright colour. [*Hillcrist* sits in a swivel chair at the bureau, busy with papers. He has gout, and his left foot is encased accord: He is a thin, dried-up man of about fifty-five, with a rather refined, rather kindly, and rather cranky countenance. Close to him stands his very upstanding nineteen-year-old daughter *Jill*, with clubbed hair round a pretty, manly face.]

*Jill*. You know, Dodo, it's all pretty good rot in these days.

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*Hillcrist*. Cads are cads, Jill, even in these days.

*Jill*. What is a cad?

*Hillcrist*. A self-assertive fellow, without a sense of other people.

*Jill*. Well, Old Hornblower I'll give you.

*Hillcrist*. I wouldn't take him.

*Jill*. Well, you've got him. Now, Charlie—Chearlie—I say—the importance of not being Charlie——

*Hillcrist*. Good heavens! do you know their Christian names?

*Jill*. My dear father, they've been here seven years.

*Hillcrist*. In old days we only knew their Christian names from their tombstones.

*Jill*. Charlie Hornblower isn't really half a bad sport.

*Hillcrist*. About a quarter of a bad sport I've always thought out hunting.

*Jill*. [Pulling his hair] Now, his wife—Chloe——

*Hillcrist*. [Whimsical] Gad! your mother'd have a fit if she knew you called her Chloe.

*Jill*. It's a ripping name.

*Hillcrist*. Chloe! H'm! I had a spaniel once——

*Jill*. Dodo, you're narrow. Buck up, old darling, it won't do.
Chloe has seen life, I'm pretty sure; *that's* attractive, anyway.
No, mother's not in the room; don't turn your uneasy eyes.

*Hillcrist*. Really, my dear, you are getting——

*Jill*. The limit. Now, Rolf——

*Hillcrist*. What's Rolf? Another dog?

*Jill*. Rolf Hornblower's a topper; he really is a nice boy.

*Hillcrist*. [With a sharp look] Oh! He's a nice boy?

*Jill*. Yes, darling. You know what a nice boy is, don't you?

*Hillcrist*. Not in these days.

*Jill*. Well, I'll tell you. In the first place, he's not amorous.

*Hillcrist*. What! Well, that's some comfort.

*Jill*. Just a jolly good companion.

*Hillcrist*. To whom?

*Jill*. Well, to anyone—me.

*Hillcrist*. Where?

*Jill*. Anywhere. You don't suppose I confine myself to the home paddocks, do you? I'm naturally rangey, Father.

*Hillcrist*. [Ironically] You don't say so!

*Jill*. In the second place, he doesn't like discipline.

*Hillcrist*. Jupiter! He does seem attractive.

*Jill*. In the third place, he bars his father.

*Hillcrist*. Is that essential to nice girls too?

*Jill*. [With a twirl of his hair] Fish not! Fourthly, he's got ideas.

*Hillcrist*. I knew it!

*Jill*. For instance, he thinks—as I do——

*Hillcrist*. Ah! Good ideas.

*Jill*. [Pulling gently] Careful! He thinks old people run the show too much. He says they oughtn't to, because they're so damtouchy. Are you damtouchy, darling?

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*Hillcrist*. Well, I'm——! I don't know about touchy.

*Jill*. He says there'll be no world fit to live in till we get rid of the old. We must make them climb a tall tree, and shake them off it.

*Hillcrist*. [Drily] Oh! he says that!

*Jill*. Otherwise, with the way they stand on each other's rights, they'll spoil the garden for the young.

*Hillcrist*. Does his father agree?

*Jill*. Oh! Rolf doesn't talk to him, his mouth's too large. Have you ever seen it, Dodo?

*Hillcrist*. Of course.

*Jill*. It's considerable, isn't it? Now yours is—reticent, darling. [Rumpling his hair.]

*Hillcrist*. It won't be in a minute. Do you realise that I've got gout?

*Jill*. Poor ducky! How long have we been here, Dodo?

*Hillcrist*. Since Elizabeth, anyway.

*Jill*. [Looking at his foot] It has its drawbacks. D'you think Hornblower had a father? I believe he was spontaneous. But, Dodo, why all this—this attitude to the Hornblowers?

[She purses her lips and makes a gesture as of pushing persons away.]

*Hillcrist*. Because they're pushing.

*Jill*. That's only because we are, as mother would say, and they're not—yet. But why not let them be?

*Hillcrist*. You can't.

*Jill*. Why?

*Hillcrist*. It takes generations to learn to live and let live,
Jill. People like that take an ell when you give them an inch.

*Jill*. But if you gave them the ell, they wouldn't want the inch.
Why should it all be such a skin game?

*Hillcrist*. Skin game? Where do you get your lingo?

*Jill*. Keep to the point, Dodo.

*Hillcrist*. Well, Jill, all life's a struggle between people at different stages of development, in different positions, with different amounts of social influence and property. And the only thing is to have rules of the game and keep them. New people like the Hornblowers haven't learnt those rules; their only rule is to get all they can.

*Jill*. Darling, don't prose. They're not half as bad as you think.

*Hillcrist*. Well, when I sold Hornblower Longmeadow and the cottages, I certainly found him all right. All the same, he's got the cloven hoof. [Warming up] His influence in Deepwater is thoroughly bad; those potteries of his are demoralising—the whole atmosphere of the place is changing. It was a thousand pities he ever came here and discovered that clay. He's brought in the modern cutthroat spirit.

*Jill*. Cut our throat spirit, you mean. What's your definition of a gentleman, Dodo?

*Hillcrist*. [Uneasily] Can't describe—only feel it.

*Jill*. Oh! Try!

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*Hillcrist*. Well—er—I suppose you might say—a man who keeps his form and doesn't let life scupper him out of his standards.

*Jill*. But suppose his standards are low?

*Hillcrist*. [With some earnestness] I assume, of course, that he's honest and tolerant, gentle to the weak, and not self-seeking.

*Jill*. Ah! self-seeking? But aren't we all, Dodo? I am.

*Hillcrist*. [With a smile] You!

*Jill*. [Scornfully] Oh! yes—too young to know.

*Hillcrist*. Nobody knows till they're under pretty heavy fire, Jill.

*Jill*. Except, of course, mother.

*Hillcrist*. How do you mean—mother?

*Jill*. Mother reminds me of England according to herself—always right whatever she does.

*Hillcrist*. Ye-es. Your mother it perhaps—the perfect woman.

*Jill*. That's what I was saying. Now, no one could call you perfect, Dodo. Besides, you've got gout.

*Hillcrist*. Yes; and I want Fellows. Ring that bell.

*Jill*. [Crossing to the bell] Shall I tell you my definition of a gentleman? A man who gives the Hornblower his due. [She rings the bell] And I think mother ought to call on them. Rolf says old Hornblower resents it fearfully that she's never made a sign to Chloe the three years she's been here.

*Hillcrist*. I don't interfere with your mother in such matters. She may go and call on the devil himself if she likes.

*Jill*. I know you're ever so much better than she is.

*Hillcrist*. That's respectful.

*Jill*. You do keep your prejudices out of your phiz. But mother literally looks down her nose. And she never forgives an "h." They'd get the "hell" from her if they took the "hinch."

*Hillcrist*. Jill-your language!

*Jill*. Don't slime out of it, Dodo. I say, mother ought to call on the Hornblowers. [No answer.] Well?

*Hillcrist*. My dear, I always let people have the last word. It makes them—feel funny. Ugh! My foot![Enter *fellows*, Left.] Fellows, send into the village and get another bottle of this stuff.

*Jill*. I'll go, darling.

[She blow him a kiss, and goes out at the window.]

*Hillcrist*. And tell cook I've got to go on slops. This foot's worse.

*Fellows*. [Sympathetic] Indeed, sir.

*Hillcrist*. My third go this year, Fellows.

*Fellows*. Very annoying, sir.

*Hillcrist*. Ye-es. Ever had it?

*Fellows*. I fancy I have had a twinge, sir.

*Hillcrist*. [Brightening] Have you? Where?

*Fellows*. In my cork wrist, sir.

*Hillcrist*. Your what?

*Fellows*. The wrist I draw corks with.

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*Hillcrist*. [With a cackle] You'd have had more than a twinge if you'd lived with my father. H'm!

*Fellows*. Excuse me, sir—Vichy water corks, in my experience, are worse than any wine.

*Hillcrist*. [Ironically] Ah! The country's not what it was, is it,
Fellows?

*Fellows*. Getting very new, sir.

*Hillcrist*. [Feelingly] You're right. Has Dawker come?

*Fellows*. Not yet, sir. The Jackmans would like to see you, sir.

*Hillcrist*. What about?

*Fellows*. I don't know, sir.

*Hillcrist*. Well, show them in.

*Fellows*. [Going] Yes, sir.

[*Hillcrist* turns his swivel chair round. The *Jackmans* come in. He, a big fellow about fifty, in a labourer's dress, with eyes which have more in then than his tongue can express; she, a little woman with a worn face, a bright, quick glance, and a tongue to match.]

*Hillcrist*. Good morning, Mrs. Jackman! Morning, Jackman! Haven't seen you for a long time. What can I do?

[He draws in foot, and breath, with a sharp hiss.]

*Hillcrist*. [In a down-hearted voice] We've had notice to quit, sir.

*Hillcrist*. [With emphasis] What!

*Jackman*. Got to be out this week.

*Mrs*. J. Yes, sir, indeed.

*Hillcrist*. Well, but when I sold Longmeadow and the cottages, it was on the express understanding that there was to be no disturbance of tenancies:

*Mrs*. J. Yes, sir; but we've all got to go. Mrs. 'Arvey, and the Drews, an' us, and there isn't another cottage to be had anywhere in Deepwater.

*Hillcrist*. I know; I want one for my cowman. This won't do at all. Where do you get it from?

*Jackman*. Mr. 'Ornblower, 'imself, air. Just an hour ago. He come round and said: "I'm sorry; I want the cottages, and you've got to clear."

*Mrs*. J. [Bitterly] He's no gentleman, sir; he put it so brisk. We been there thirty years, and now we don't know what to do. So I hope you'll excuse us coming round, sir.

*Hillcrist*. I should think so, indeed! H'm! [He rises and limps across to the fireplace on his stick. To himself] The cloven hoof. By George! this is a breach of faith. I'll write to him, Jackman. Confound it! I'd certainly never have sold if I'd known he was going to do this.

*Mrs*. J. No, sir, I'm sure, sir. They do say it's to do with the potteries. He wants the cottages for his workmen.

*Hillcrist*. [Sharply] That's all very well, but he shouldn't have led me to suppose that he would make no change.

*Jackman*. [Heavily] They talk about his havin' bought the Centry to gut up more chimneys there, and that's why he wants the cottages.

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*Hint*. The Centry! Impossible!

[Mrs. J. Yes, air; it's such a pretty spot-looks beautiful from here. [She looks out through the window] Loveliest spot in all Deepwater, I always say. And your father owned it, and his father before 'im. It's a pity they ever sold it, sir, beggin' your pardon.]

*Hillcrist*. The Centry! [He rings the bell.]

Mrs. J. [Who has brightened up] I'm glad you're goin' to stop it, sir. It does put us about. We don't know where to go. I said to Mr. Hornblower, I said, "I'm sure Mr. Hillcrist would never 'eve turned us out." An' 'e said: "Mr. Hillcrist be——" beggin' your pardon, sir. "Make no mistake," 'e said, "you must go, missis." He don't even know our name; an' to come it like this over us! He's a dreadful new man, I think, with his overridin notions. And sich a heavyfooted man, to look at. [With a sort of indulgent contempt] But he's from the North, they say.

[*Fellows* has entered, Left.]

*Hillcrist*. Ask Mrs. Hillcrist if she'll come.

*Fellows*. Very good, sir.

*Hillcrist*. Is Dawker here?

*Fellows*. Not yet, sir.

*Hillcrist*. I want to see him at once.

[*Fellows* retires.]

*Jackman*. Mr. Hornblower said he was comin' on to see you, sir. So we thought we'd step along first.

*Hillcrist*. Quite right, Jackman.

*Mrs*. J. I said to Jackman: "Mr. Hillcrist'll stand up for us, I know. He's a gentleman," I said. "This man," I said, "don't care for the neighbourhood, or the people; he don't care for anything so long as he makes his money, and has his importance. You can't expect it, I suppose," I said; [Bitterly] "havin' got rich so sudden." The gentry don't do things like that.

*Hillcrist*. [Abstracted] Quite, Mrs. Jackman, quite!
[To himself] The Centry! No!

[*Mrs*. *Hillcrist* enters. A well-dressed woman, with a firm, clear-cut face.]

Oh! Amy! Mr. and Mrs. Jackman turned out of their cottage, and Mrs. Harvey, and the Drews. When I sold to Hornblower, I stipulated that they shouldn't be.

*Mrs*. J. Our week's up on Saturday, ma'am, and I'm sure I don't know where we shall turn, because of course Jackman must be near his work, and I shall lose me washin' if we have to go far.

*Hillcrist*. [With decision] You leave it to me, Mrs. Jackman. Good morning! Morning, Jackman! Sorry I can't move with this gout.

*Mrs*. J. [For them both] I'm sure we're very sorry, sir. Good morning, sir. Good morning, ma'am; and thank you kindly. [They go out.]

*Hillcrist*. Turning people out that have been there thirty years. I won't have it. It's a breach of faith.

*Mrs*. H. Do you suppose this Hornblower will care two straws about that Jack?

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*Hillcrist*. He must, when it's put to him, if he's got any decent feeling.

*Mrs*. H. He hasn't.

*Hillcrist*. [Suddenly] The Jackmans talk of his having bought the Centry to put up more chimneys.

*Mrs*. H. Never! [At the window, looking out] Impossible! It would ruin the place utterly; besides cutting us off from the Duke's. Oh, no! Miss Mullins would never sell behind our backs.

*Hillcrist*. Anyway I must stop his turning these people out.

Mrs. H. [With a little smile, almost contemptuous] You might have known he'd do something of the sort. You will imagine people are like yourself, Jack. You always ought to make Dawker have things in black and white.

*Hillcrist*. I said quite distinctly: "Of course you won't want to disturb the tenancies; there's a great shortage of cottages." Hornblower told me as distinctly that he wouldn't. What more do you want?

Mrs. H. A man like that thinks of nothing but the short cut to his own way. [Looking out of the window towards the rise] If he buys the Centry and puts up chimneys, we simply couldn't stop here.

*Hillcrist*. My father would turn in his grave.

*Mrs*. H. It would have been more useful if he'd not dipped the estate, and sold the Centry. This Hornblower hates us; he thinks we turn up our noses at him.

*Hillcrist*. As we do, Amy.

*Mrs*. H. Who wouldn't? A man without traditions, who believes in nothing but money and push.

*Hillcrist*. Suppose he won't budge, can we do anything for the Jackmans?

*Mrs*. H. There are the two rooms Beaver used to have, over the stables.

*Fellows*. Mr. Dawker, sir.

> [DAWKERS is a short, square, rather red-faced terrier of a man, in riding clothes and gaiters.]

*Hillcrist*. Ah! Dawker, I've got gout again.

*Dawker*. Very sorry, sir. How de do, ma'am?

*Hillcrist*. Did you meet the Jackmans?

DAWKERS. Yeh.

[He hardly ever quite finishes a word, seeming to snap of their tails.]

*Hillcrist*. Then you heard?

*Dawker*. [Nodding] Smart man, Hornblower; never lets grass grow.

*Hillcrist*. Smart?

*Dawker*. [Grinning] Don't do to underrate your neighbours.

*Mrs*. H. A cad—I call him.

*Dawker*. That's it, ma'am-got all the advantage.

*Hillcrist*. Heard anything about the Centry, Dawker?

*Dawker*. Hornblower wants to buy.

*Hillcrist*. Miss Mullins would never sell, would she?

*Dawker*. She wants to.

*Hillcrist*. The deuce she does!

*Dawker*. He won't stick at the price either.

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*Mrs*. H. What's it worth, Dawker?

*Dawker*. Depends on what you want it for.

*Mrs*. H. He wants it for spite; we want it for sentiment.

*Dawker*. [Grinning] Worth what you like to give, then; but he's a rich man.

*Mrs*. H. Intolerable!

*Dawker*. [To *Hillcrist*] Give me your figure, sir. I'll try the old lady before he gets at her.

*Hillcrist*. [Pondering] I don't want to buy, unless there's nothing else for it. I should have to raise the money on the estate; it won't stand much more. I can't believe the fellow would be such a barbarian. Chimneys within three hundred yards, right in front of this house! It's a nightmare.

*Mrs*. H. You'd much better let Dawker make sure, Jack.

*Hillcrist*. [Uncomfortable] Jackman says Hornblower's coming round to see me. I shall put it to him.

*Dawker*. Make him keener than ever. Better get in first.

*Hillcrist*. Ape his methods!—Ugh! Confound this gout! [He gets back to his chair with difficulty] Look here, Dawker, I wanted to see you about gates——

*Fellows*. [Entering] Mr. Hornblower.

[*Hornblower* enters-a man of medium, height, thoroughly broadened, blown out, as it were, by success. He has thick, coarse, dark hair, just grizzled, wry bushy eyebrow, a wide mouth. He wears quite ordinary clothes, as if that department were in charge of someone who knew about such, things. He has a small rose in his buttonhole, and carries a Homburg hat, which one suspects will look too small on his head.]

*Hornblower*. Good morning! good morning! How are ye, Dawker? Fine morning! Lovely weather!

> [His voice has a curious blend in its tone of brass and oil,
> and an accent not quite Scotch nor quite North country.]

Haven't seen ye for a long time, Hillcrist.

*Hillcrist*. [Who has risen] Not since I sold you Longmeadow and those cottages, I believe.

*Hornblower*. Dear me, now! that's what I came about.

*Hillcrist*. [Subsiding again into his chair] Forgive me! Won't you sit down?

*Hornblower*. [Not sitting] Have ye got gout? That's unfortunate. I never get it. I've no disposition that way. Had no ancestors, you see. Just me own drinkin' to answer for.

*Hillcrist*. You're lucky.

*Hornblower*. I wonder if Mrs. Hillcrist thinks that! Am I lucky to have no past, ma'am? Just the future?

*Mrs*. H. You're sure you have the future, Mr. Hornblower?

*Hornblower*. [With a laugh] That's your aristocratic rapier thrust. You aristocrats are very hard people underneath your manners. Ye love to lay a body out. But I've got the future all right.

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*Hillcrist*. [Meaningly] I've had the Dackmans here, Mr. Hornblower.

*Hornblower*. Who are they—man with the little spitfire wife?

*Hillcrist*. They're very excellent, good people, and they've been in that cottage quietly thirty years.

*Hornblower*. [Throwing out his forefinger—a favourite gesture] Ah! ye've wanted me to stir ye up a bit. Deepwater needs a bit o' go put into it. There's generally some go where I am. I daresay you wish there'd been no "come." [He laughs].

*Mrs*. H. We certainly like people to keep their word, Mr. Hornblower.

*Hillcrist*. Amy!

*Hornblower*. Never mind, Hillcrist; takes more than that to upset me.

> [*Mrs*. *Hillcrist* exchanges a look with *Dawker* who slips out unobserved.]

*Hillcrist*. You promised me, you know, not to change the tenancies.

*Hornblower*. Well, I've come to tell ye that I have. I wasn't expecting to have the need when I bought. Thought the Duke would sell me a bit down there; but devil a bit he will; and now I must have those cottages for my workmen. I've got important works, ye know.

*Hillcrist*. [Getting heated] The Jackmans have their importance too, sir. Their heart's in that cottage.

*Hornblower*. Have a sense of proportion, man. My works supply thousands of people, and my, heart's in them. What's more, they make my fortune. I've got ambitions—I'm a serious man. Suppose I were to consider this and that, and every little potty objection — where should I get to?—nowhere!

*Hillcrist*. All the same, this sort of thing isn't done, you know.

*Hornblower*. Not by you because ye've got no need to do it. Here ye are, quite content on what your fathers made for ye. Ye've no ambitions; and ye want other people to have none. How d'ye think your fathers got your land?

*Hillcrist*. [Who has risen] Not by breaking their word.

*Hornblower*. [Throwing out his, finger] Don't ye believe it. They got it by breaking their word and turnin' out Jackmans, if that's their name, all over the place.

*Mrs*. H. That's an insult, Mr. Hornblower.

*Hornblower*. No; it's a repartee. If ye think so much of these Jackmans, build them a cottage yourselves; ye've got the space.

*Hillcrist*. That's beside the point. You promised me, and I sold on that understanding.

*Hornblower*. And I bought on the understandin' that I'd get some more land from the Duke.

*Hillcrist*. That's nothing to do with me.

*Hornblower*. Ye'll find it has; because I'm going to have those cottages.

*Hillcrist*. Well, I call it simply——

[He checks himself.]

*Hornblower*. Look here, Hillcrist, ye've not had occasion to understand men like me. I've got the guts, and I've got the money; and I don't sit still on it. I'm going ahead because I believe in meself. I've no use for sentiment and that sort of thing. Forty of your Jackmans aren't worth me little finger.

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*Hillcrist*. [Angry] Of all the blatant things I ever heard said!

*Hornblower*. Well, as we're speaking plainly, I've been thinkin'. Ye want the village run your oldfashioned way, and I want it run mine. I fancy there's not room for the two of us here.

*Mrs*. H. When are you going?

*Hornblower*. Never fear, I'm not going.

*Hillcrist*. Look here, Mr. Hornblower—this infernal gout makes me irritable—puts me at a disadvantage. But I should be glad if you'd kindly explain yourself.

*Hornblower*. [With a great smile] Ca' canny; I'm fra' the North.

*Hillcrist*. I'm told you wish to buy the Centry and put more of your chimneys up there, regardless of the fact [He Points through the window] that it would utterly ruin the house we've had for generations, and all our pleasure here.

*Hornblower*. How the man talks! Why! Ye'd think he owned the sky, because his fathers built him a house with a pretty view, where he's nothing to do but live. It's sheer want of something to do that gives ye your fine sentiments, Hillcrist.

*Hillcrist*. Have the goodness not to charge me with idleness. Dawker—where is he? ——[He shows the bureau] When you do the drudgery of your works as thoroughly as I do that of my estate—— Is it true about the Centry?

*Hornblower*. Gospel true. If ye want to know, my son Chearlie is buyin' it this very minute.

*Mrs*. H. [Turning with a start] What do you say?

*Hornblower*. Ay, he's with the old lady she wants to sell, an' she'll get her price, whatever it is.

*Hillcrist*. [With deep anger] If that isn't a skin game, Mr. Hornblower, I don't know what is.

*Hornblower*. Ah! Ye've got a very nice expression there. "Skin game!" Well, bad words break no bones, an' they're wonderful for hardenin' the heart. If it wasn't for a lady's presence, I could give ye a specimen or two.

*Mrs*. H. Oh! Mr. Hornblower, that need not stop you, I'm sure.

*Hornblower*. Well, and I don't know that it need. Ye're an obstruction—the like of you—ye're in my path. And anyone in my path doesn't stay there long; or, if he does, he stays there on my terms. And my terms are chimneys in the Centry where I need 'em. It'll do ye a power of good, too, to know that ye're not almighty.

*Hillcrist*. And that's being neighbourly!

*Hornblower*. And how have ye tried bein' neighbourly to me? If I haven't a wife, I've got a daughter-in-law. Have Ye celled on her, ma'am? I'm new, and ye're an old family. Ye don't like me, ye think I'm a pushin' man. I go to chapel, an' ye don't like that. I make things and I sell them, and ye don't like that. I buy land, and ye don't like that. It threatens the view from your windies. Well, I don't lie you, and I'm not goin' to put up with your attitude. Ye've had things your own way too long, and now ye're not going to have them any longer.

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*Hillcrist*. Will you hold to your word over those cottages?

*Hornblower*. I'm goin' to have the cottages. I need them, and more besides, now I'm to put up me new works.

*Hillcrist*. That's a declaration of war.

*Hornblower*. Ye never said a truer word. It's one or the other of us, and I rather think it's goin' to be me. I'm the risin' and you're the settin' sun, as the poet says.

*Hillcrist*. [Touching the bell] We shall see if you can ride rough-shod like this. We used to have decent ways of going about things here. You want to change all that. Well, we shall do our damnedest to stop you. [To *fellows* at the door] Are the Jackmans still in the house? Ask them to be good enough to come in.

*Hornblower*. [With the first sign of uneasiness] I've seen these people. I've nothing more to say to them. I told 'em I'd give 'em five pounds to cover their moving.

*Hillcrist*. It doesn't occur to you that people, however humble, like to have some say in their own fate?

*Hornblower*. I never had any say in mine till I had the brass, and nobody ever will. It's all hypocrisy. You county folk are fair awful hypocrites. Ye talk about good form and all that sort o' thing. It's just the comfortable doctrine of the man in the saddle; sentimental varnish. Ye're every bit as hard as I am, underneath.

*Mrs*. H. [Who had been standing very still all this time] You flatter us.

*Hornblower*. Not at all. God helps those who 'elp themselves— that's at the bottom of all religion. I'm goin' to help meself, and God's going to help me.

*Mrs*. H. I admire your knowledge.

*Hillcrist*. We are in the right, and God helps——

*Hornblower*. Don't ye believe it; ye 'aven't got the energy.

*Mrs*. H. Nor perhaps the conceit.

*Hornblower*. [Throwing out his forefinger] No, no; 'tisn't conceit to believe in yourself when ye've got reason to. [The JACKMAN'S have entered.]

*Hillcrist*. I'm very sorry, Mrs. Jackman, but I just wanted you to realise that I've done my best with this gentleman.

*Mrs*. J. [Doubtfully] Yes, sir.  I thought if you spoke for us, he'd feel different-like.

*Hornblower*.  One cottage is the same as another, missis.  I made ye a fair offer of five pounds for the moving.

*Jackman*. [Slowly] We wouldn't take fifty to go out of that 'ouse.  We brought up three children there, an' buried two from it.

*Mrs*. J. [To *Mrs*. *Hillcrist*] We're attached to it like, ma'am.

*Hillcrist*. [To *Hornblower*.] How would you like being turned out of a place you were fond of?

*Hornblower*.  Not a bit.  But little considerations have to give way to big ones.  Now, missis, I'll make it ten pounds, and I'll send a wagon to shift your things.  If that isn't fair —!  Ye'd better accept, I shan't keep it open.

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[The *Jackmans* look at each other; their faces show deep anger—and the question they ask each other is which will speak.]

*Mrs*. J. We won't take it; eh, George?

*Jackman*. Not a farden. We come there when we was married.

*Hornblower*. [Throwing out his finger] Ye're very improvident folk.

*Hillcrist*. Don't lecture them, Mr. Hornblower; they come out of this miles above you.

*Hornblower*. [Angry] Well, I was going to give ye another week, but ye'll go out next Saturday; and take care ye're not late, or your things'll be put out in the rain.

*Mrs*. H. [To *Mrs*. *Jackman*] We'll send down for your things, and you can come to us for the time being.

[*Mrs*. *Jackman* drops a curtsey; her eyes stab *Hornblowers*.]

*Jackman*. [Heavily, clenching his fists] You're no gentleman! Don't put temptation in my way, that's all,

*Hillcrist*. [In a low voice] Jackman!

*Hornblower*. [Triumphantly] Ye hear that? That's your protegee! Keep out o' my way, me man, or I'll put the police on to ye for utterin' threats.

*Hillcrist*. You'd better go now, Jackman.

[The *Jackmans* move to the door.]

*Mrs*. J. [Turning] Maybe you'll repent it some day, sir.

[They go out, *Mrs*. *Hillcrist* following.]

*Hornblower*. We-ell, I'm sorry they're such unreasonable folk. I never met people with less notion of which side their bread was buttered.

*Hillcrist*. And I never met anyone so pachydermatous.

*Hornblower*. What's that, in Heaven's name? Ye needn' wrap it up in long words now your good lady's gone.

*Hillcrist*. [With dignity] I'm not going in for a slanging match. I resent your conduct much too deeply.

*Hornblower*. Look here, Hillcrist, I don't object to you personally; ye seem to me a poor creature that's bound to get left with your gout and your dignity; but of course ye can make yourself very disagreeable before ye're done. Now I want to be the movin' spirit here. I'm full of plans. I'm goin' to stand for Parliament; I'm goin' to make this a prosperous place. I'm a good-matured man if you'll treat me as such. Now, you take me on as a neighbour and all that, and I'll manage without chimneys on the Centry. Is it a bargain? [He holds out his hand.]

*Hillcrist*. [Ignoring it] I thought you said you didn't keep your word when it suited you to break it?

*Hornblower*. Now, don't get on the high horse. You and me could be very good friends; but I can be a very nasty enemy. The chimneys will not look nice from that windie, ye know.

*Hillcrist*. [Deeply angry] Mr. Hornblower, if you think I'll take your hand after this Jackman business, you're greatly mistaken. You are proposing that I shall stand in with you while you tyrannise over the neighbourhood. Please realise that unless you leave those tenancies undisturbed as you said you would, we don't know each other.

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*Hornblower*. Well, that won't trouble me much. Now, ye'd better think it over; ye've got gout and that makes ye hasty. I tell ye again: I'm not the man to make an enemy of. Unless ye're friendly, sure as I stand here I'll ruin the look of your place.

[The toot of a car is heard.]

There's my car. I sent Chearlie and his wife in it to buy the Centry. And make no mistake—he's got it in his packet. It's your last chance, Hillcrist. I'm not averse to you as a man; I think ye're the best of the fossils round here; at least, I think ye can do me the most harm socially. Come now!

[He holds out his hand again.]

*Hillcrist*. Not if you'd bought the Centry ten times over. Your ways are not mine, and I'll have nothing to do with you.

*Hornblower*. [Very angry] Really! Is that so? Very well. Now ye're goin' to learn something, an' it's time ye did. D'ye realise that I'm 'very nearly round ye? [He draws a circle slowly in the air] I'm at Uphill, the works are here, here's Longmeadow, here's the Centry that I've just bought, there's only the Common left to give ye touch with the world. Now between you and the Common there's the high road.

I come out on the high road here to your north, and I shall come out on it there to your west. When I've got me new works up on the Centry, I shall be makin' a trolley track between the works up to the road at both ends, so any goods will be running right round ye. How'll ye like that for a country place?

[For answer *Hillcrist*, who is angry beyond the power of speech, walks, forgetting to use his stick, up to the French window. While he stands there, with his back to *Hornblower*, the door L. is flung open, and Jim enters, preceding *Charles*, his wife *Chloe*, and *Rolf*. *Charles* is a goodish-looking, moustached young man of about twenty-eight, with a white rim to the collar of his waistcoat, and spats. He has his hand behind *Chloe's* back, as if to prevent her turning tail. She is rather a handsome young woman, with dark eyes, full red lips, and a suspicion of powder, a little under-dressed for the country. *Rolf*, mho brings up the rear, is about twenty, with an open face and stiffish butter-coloured hair. *Jill* runs over to her father at the window. She has a bottle.]

*Jill*. [Sotto voce] Look, Dodo, I've brought the lot! Isn't it a treat, dear Papa? And here's the stuff. Hallo!

[The exclamation is induced by the apprehension that there has been a row. *Hillcrist* gives a stiff little bow, remaining where he is in the window. *Jill*, stays close to him, staring from one to the other, then blocks him off and engages him in conversation. *Charles* has gone up to his father, who has remained maliciously still, where he

delivered his last speech. *Chloe* and *Rolf* stand awkwardly waiting between the fireplace and the door.]

*Hornblower*. Well, Chearlie?

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*Charles*. Not got it.

*Hornblower*. Not!

*Charles*. I'd practically got her to say she'd sell at three thousand five hundred, when that fellow Dawker turned up.

*Hornblower*. That bull-terrier of a chap! Why, he was here a while ago. Oh—ho! So that's it!

*Charles*. I heard him gallop up. He came straight for the old lady, and got her away. What he said I don't know; but she came back looking wiser than an owl; said she'd think it over, thought she had other views.

*Hornblower*. Did ye tell her she might have her price?

*Charles*. Practically I did.

*Hornblower*. Well?

*Charles*. She thought it would be fairer to put it up to auction. There were other enquiries. Oh! She's a leery old bird—reminds me of one of those pictures of Fate, don't you know.

*Hornblower*. Auction! Well, if it's not gone we'll get it yet.
That damned little Dawker! I've had a row with Hillcrist.

*Charles*. I thought so.

[They are turning cautiously to look at *Hillcrist*, when *Jill* steps forward.]

*Jill*. [Flushed and determined] That's not a bit sporting of you,
Mr. Hornblower.

[At her words *role* comes forward too.]

*Hornblower*. Ye should hear both sides before ye say that, missy.

*Jill*. There isn't another side to turning out the Jackmans after you'd promised.

*Hornblower*. Oh! dear me, yes. They don't matter a row of gingerbread to the schemes I've got for betterin' this neighbourhood.

*Jill*. I had been standing up for you; now I won't.

HOUNBLOWER. Dear, dear! What'll become of me?

*Jill*. I won't say anything about the other thing because I think it's beneath, dignity to notice it. But to turn poor people out of their cottages is a shame.

*Hornblower*. Hoity me!

*Rolf*. [Suddenly] You haven't been doing that, father?

*Charles*. Shut up, Rolf!

*Hornblower*. [Turning on *Rolf*] Ha! Here's a league o' Youth! My young whipper-snapper, keep your mouth shut and leave it to your elders to know what's right.

[Under the weight of this rejoinder *Rolf* stands biting his lips. Then he throws his head up.]

*Rolf*. I hate it!

*Hornblower*. [With real venom] Oh! Ye hate it? Ye can get out of my house, then.

*Jill*. Free speech, Mr. Hornblower; don't be violent.

*Hornblower*. Ye're right, young lady. Ye can stay in my house, Rolf, and learn manners. Come, Chearlie!

*Jill*. [Quite softly] Mr. Hornblower!

*Hillcrist*. [From the window] Jill!

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*Jill*. [Impatiently] Well, what's the good of it? Life's too short for rows, and too jolly!

*Rolf*. Bravo!

*Hornblower*. [Who has shown a sign of weakening] Now, look here! I will not have revolt in my family. Ye'll just have to learn that a man who's worked as I have, who's risen as I have, and who knows the world, is the proper judge of what's right and wrong. I'll answer to God for me actions, and not to you young people.

*Jill*. Poor God!

*Hornblower*. [Genuinely shocked] Ye blasphemous young thing! [To *Rolf*] And ye're just as bad, ye young freethinker. I won't have it.

*Hillcrist*. [Who has come down, Right] Jill, I wish you would kindly not talk.

*Jill*. I can't help it.

*Charles*. [Putting his arm through *Hornblower's*] Come along, father! Deeds, not words.

*Hornblower*. Ay! Deeds!

[*Mrs*. *Hillcrist* and DAWKERS have entered by the French window.]

*Mrs*. H. Quite right!

[They all turn and look at her.]

*Hornblower*. Ah! So ye put your dog on to it. [He throws out his finger at DAWKERS] Very smart, that—I give ye credit.

*Mrs*. H. [Pointing to *Chloe*, who has stood by herself, forgotten and uncomfortable throughout the scene] May I ask who this lady is?

[*Chloe* turns round startled, and her vanity bag slips down her dress to the floor.]

*Hornblower*. No, ma'am, ye may not, for ye know perfectly well.

*Jill*. I brought her in, mother [She moves to CHLOE's side.]

*Mrs*. H. Will you take her out again, then.

*Hillcrist*. Amy, have the goodness to remember——

*Mrs*. H. That this is my house so far as ladies are concerned.

*Jill*. Mother!

[She looks astonished at *Chloe*, who, about to speak, does not, passing her eyes, with a queer, half-scarred expression, from *Mrs*. *Hillcrist* to *Dawker*.]

[To *Chloe*] I'm awfully sorry. Come on!

[They go out, Left. *Rolf* hurries after them.]

*Charles*. You've insulted my wife. Why? What do you mean by it?

[*Mrs*. *Hillcrist* simply smiles.]

*Hillcrist*. I apologise. I regret extremely. There is no reason why the ladies of your family or of mine should be involved in our quarrel. For Heaven's sake, let's fight like gentlemen.

*Hornblower*. Catchwords—sneers! No; we'll play what ye call a skin game, Hillcrist, without gloves on; we won't spare each other. Ye look out for yourselves, for, begod, after this morning I mean business. And as for you, Dawker, ye sly dog, ye think yourself very clever; but I'll have the Centry yet. Come, Chearlie!

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[They go out, passing *Jill*, who is coming in again, in the doorway.]

*Hillcrist*. Well, Dawker?

*Dawker*. [Grinning] Safe for the moment. The old lady'll put it up to auction. Couldn't get her to budge from that. Says she don't want to be unneighbourly to either. But, if you ask me, it's money she smells!

*Jill*. [Advancing] Now, mother

*Mrs*. H. Well?

*Jill*. Why did you insult her?

*Mrs*. H. I think I only asked you to take her out.

*Jill*. Why? Even if she is Old Combustion's daughter-in-law?

*Mrs*. H. My dear Jill, allow me to judge the sort of acquaintances I wish to make. [She looks at *Dawker*.]

*Jill*. She's all right. Lots of women powder and touch up their lips nowadays. I think she's rather a good sort; she was awfully upset.

*Mrs*. H. Too upset.

*Jill*. Oh! don't be so mysterious, mother. If you know something, do spit it out!

*Mrs*. H. Do you wish me to—er—"spit it out," Jack?

*Hillcrist*. Dawker, if you don't mind——

[*Dawker*, with a nod, passes away out of the French window.]

Jill, be respectful, and don't talk like a bargee.

*Jill*. It's no good, Dodo. It made me ashamed. It's just as—as caddish to insult people who haven't said a word, in your own house, as it is to be—old Hornblower.

*Mrs*. H. You don't know what you're talking about.

*Hillcrist*. What's the matter with young Mrs. Hornblower?

*Mrs*. H. Excuse me, I shall keep my thoughts to myself at present.

[She looks coldly at *Jill*, and goes out through the French window.]

*Hillcrist*. You've thoroughly upset your mother, Jill.

*Jill*. It's something Dawker's told her; I saw them. I don't like Dawker, father, he's so common.

*Hillcrist*. My dear, we can't all be uncommon. He's got lots of go, You must apologise to your mother.

*Jill*. [Shaking-her clubbed hair] They'll make you do things you don't approve of, Dodo, if you don't look out. Mother's fearfully bitter when she gets her knife in. If old Hornblower's disgusting, it's no reason we should be.

*Hillcrist*. So you think I'm capable—that's nice, Jill!

*Jill*. No, no, darling! I only want to warn you solemnly that mother'll tell you you're fighting fair, no matter what she and Dawker do.

*Hillcrist*. [Smiling] Jill, I don't think I ever saw you so serious.

*Jill*. No. Because—[She swallows a lump in her throat] Well—I was just beginning to enjoy, myself; and now—everything's going to be bitter and beastly, with mother in that mood. That horrible old man! Oh, Dodo! Don't let them make you horrid! You're such a darling. How's your gout, ducky?

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*Hillcrist*. Better; lot better.

*Jill*. There, you see! That shows! It's going to be half-interesting for you, but not for—-us.

*Hillcrist*. Look here, Jill—is there anything between you and young what's-his-name—-Rolf?

*Jill*. [Biting her lip] No. But—now it's all spoiled.

*Hillcrist*. You can't expect me to regret that.

*Jill*. I don't mean any tosh about love's young dream; but I do like being friends. I want to enjoy things, Dodo, and you can't do that when everybody's on the hate. You're going to wallow in it, and so shall I—oh! I know I shall!—we shall all wallow, and think of nothing but "one for his nob."

*Hillcrist*. Aren't you fond of your home?

*Jill*. Of course. I love it.

*Hillcrist*. Well, you won't be able to live in it unless we stop that ruffian. Chimneys and smoke, the trees cut down, piles of pots. Every kind of abomination. There! [He points] Imagine! [He points through the French window, as if he could see those chimneys rising and marring the beauty of the fields] I was born here, and my father, and his, and his, and his. They loved those fields, and those old trees. And this barbarian, with his "improvement" schemes, forsooth! I learned to ride in the Centry meadows—prettiest spring meadows in the world; I've climbed every tree there. Why my father ever sold ——! But who could have imagined this? And come at a bad moment, when money's scarce.

*Jill*. [Cuddling his arm] Dodo!

*Hillcrist*. Yes. But you don't love the place as I do, Jill. You youngsters don't love anything, I sometimes think.

*Jill*. I do, Dodo, I do!

*Hillcrist*. You've got it all before you. But you may live your life and never find anything so good and so beautiful as this old home. I'm not going to have it spoiled without a fight.

[Conscious of batting betrayed Sentiment, he walks out at the French window, passing away to the right. *Jill* following to the window, looks. Then throwing back her head, she clasps her hands behind it.]

*Jill*. Oh—oh-oh!

[A voice behind her says, "*Jill*!" She turns and starts back, leaning against the right lintel of the window. *Rolf* appears outside the window from Left.]

Who goes there?

*Role*. [Buttressed against the Left lintel] Enemy—after Chloe's bag.

*Jill*. Pass, enemy! And all's ill!

[*Rolf* passes through the window, and retrieves the vanity bag from the floor where *Chloe* dropped it, then again takes his stand against the Left lintel of the French window.]

*Rolf*. It's not going to make any difference, is it?

*Jill*. You know it is.

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*Rolf*. Sins of the fathers.

*Jill*. Unto the third and fourth generations. What sin has my father committed?

*Rolf*. None, in a way; only, I've often told you I don't see why you should treat us as outsiders. We don't like it.

*Jill*. Well, you shouldn't be, then; I mean, he shouldn't be.

*Rolf*. Father's just as human as your father; he's wrapped up in us, and all his "getting on" is for us. Would you like to be treated as your mother treated Chloe? Your mother's set the stroke for the other big-wigs about here; nobody calls on Chloe. And why not? Why not? I think it's contemptible to bar people just because they're new, as you call it, and have to make their position instead of having it left them.

*Jill*. It's not because they're new, it's because—if your father behaved like a gentleman, he'd be treated like one.

*Rolf*. Would he? I don't believe it. My father's a very able man; he thinks he's entitled to have influence here. Well, everybody tries to keep him down. Oh! yes, they do. That makes him mad and more determined than ever to get his way. You ought to be just, Jill.

*Jill*. I am just.

*Rolf*. No, you're not. Besides, what's it got to do with Charlie and Chloe? Chloe's particularly harmless. It's pretty sickening for her. Father didn't expect people to call until Charlie married, but since——

*Jill*. I think it's all very petty.

*Rolf*. It is—a dog-in-the-manger business; I did think you were above it.

*Jill*. How would you like to have your home spoiled?

*Role*. I'm not going to argue. Only things don't stand still.
Homes aren't any more proof against change than anything else.

*Jill*. All right! You come and try and take ours.

*Rolf*. We don't want to take your home.

*Jill*. Like the Jackmans'?

*Rolf*. All right. I see you're hopelessly prejudiced.

[He turns to go.]

*Jill*. [Just as he is vanishing—softly] Enemy?

*Rolf*. [Turning] Yes, enemy.

*Jill*. Before the battle—let's shake hands.

[They move from the lintels and grasp each other's hands in the centre of the French window.]

*Curtain*

# ACT II

## SCENE I

A billiard room in a provincial hotel, where things are bought and sold. The scene is set well forward, and is not very broad; it represents the auctioneer's end of the room, having, rather to stage Left, a narrow table with two chairs facing the audience, where the auctioneer will sit and stand. The table, which is set forward to the footlights, is littered with

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green-covered particulars of sale. The audience are in effect public and bidders. There is a door on the Left, level with the table. Along the back wall, behind the table, are two raised benches with two steps up to them, such as billiard rooms often have, divided by a door in the middle of a wall, which is panelled in oak. Late September sunlight is coming from a skylight (not visible) on to these seats. The stage is empty when the curtain goes up, but DAWKERS, and *Mrs*. *Hillcrist* are just entering through the door at the back.

*Dawker*. Be out of their way here, ma'am. See old Hornblower with Chearlie?

[He points down to the audience.]

*Mrs*. H. It begins at three, doesn't it?

*Dawker*. They won't be over-punctual; there's only the Centry selling. There's young Mrs. Hornblower with the other boy— [Pointing] over at the entrance. I've got that chap I told you of down from town.

*Mrs*. H. Ah! make sure quite of her, Dawker. Any mistake would be fatal.

*Dawker*. [Nodding] That's right, ma'am. Lot of peopled—always spare time to watch an auction—ever remark that? The Duke's agent's here; shouldn't be surprised if he chipped in.

*Mrs*. H. Where did you leave my husband?

*Dawker*. With Miss Jill, in the courtyard. He's coming to you. In case I miss him; tell him when I reach his limit to blow his nose if he wants me to go on; when he blows it a second time, I'll stop for good. Hope we shan't get to that. Old Hornblower doesn't throw his money away.

*Mrs*. H. What limit did you settle?

*Dawker*. Six thousand!

*Mrs*. H. That's a fearful price. Well, good luck to you, Dawker!

*Dawker*. Good luck, ma'am. I'll go and see to that little matter of Mrs. Chloe. Never fear, we'll do them is somehow.

[He winks, lays his finger on the side of his nose, and goes out at the door.]

[*Mrs*. *Hillcrist* mounts the two steps, sits down Right of the door, and puts up a pair of long-handled glasses. Through the door behind her come *Chloe* and *Rolf*. She makes a sign for him to go, and shuts the door.]

*Chloe*. [At the foot of the steps in the gangway—with a slightly common accent] Mrs. Hillcrist!

*Mrs*. H. [Not quite starting] I beg your pardon?

*Chloe*. [Again] Mrs. Hillcrist——

*Mrs*. H. Well?

*Chloe*. I never did you any harm.

*Mrs*. H. Did I ever say you did?

*Chloe*. No; but you act as if I had.

*Mrs*. H. I'm not aware that I've acted at all—as yet. You are nothing to me, except as one of your family.

*Chloe*. 'Tisn't I that wants to spoil your home.

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*Mrs*. H. Stop them then.  I see your husband down there with his father.

*Chloe*.  I—I have tried.

*Mrs*. H. [Looking at her] Oh!  I suppose such men don't pay attention to what women ask them.

*Chloe*. [With a flash of spirit] I'm fond of my husband.  I——

*Mrs*. H. [Looking at her steadily] I don't quite know why you spoke to me.

*Chloe*. [With a sort of pathetic sullenness] I only thought perhaps you'd like to treat me as a human being.

*Mrs*. H. Really, if you don't mind, I should like to be left alone just now.

*Chloe*. [Unhappily acquiescent] Certainly!  I'll go to the other end.

[She moves to the Left, mounts the steps and sits down.]

[*Rolf*, looking in through the door, and seeing where she is, joins her.  *Mrs*. *Hillcrist* resettles herself a little further in on the Right.]

*Rolf*. [Bending over to *Chloe*, after a glance at *Mrs*. *Hillcrist*.] Are you all right?

*Chloe*.  It's awfully hot.

[She fans herself wide the particulars of sale.]

*Rolf*.  There's Dawker.  I hate that chap!

*Chloe*.  Where?

*Rolf*.  Down there; see?

[He points down to stage Right of the room.]

*Chloe*. [Drawing back in her seat with a little gasp] Oh!

*Rolf*. [Not noticing] Who's that next him, looking up here?

*Chloe*.  I don't know.

[She has raised her auction programme suddenly, and sits fanning herself, carefully screening her face.]

*Role*. [Looking at her] Don't you feel well? Shall I get you some water? [He gets up at her nod.]

[As he reaches the door, *Hillcrist* and *Jill* come in. *Hillcrist* passes him abstractedly with a nod, and sits down beside his wife.]

*Jill*. [To *Rolf*] Come to see us turned out?

*Rolf*. [Emphatically] No. I'm looking after Chloe; she's not well.

*Jill*. [Glancing at her] Sorry. She needn't have come, I suppose?
[RALF deigns no answer, and goes out.]

[*Jill* glances at *Chloe*, then at her parents talking in low voices, and sits down next her father, who makes room for her.]

*Mrs*. H. Can Dawker see you there, Jack?

[*Hillcrist* nods.]

What's the time?

*Hillcrist*. Three minutes to three.

*Jill*. Don't you feel beastly all down the backs of your legs. Dodo?

*Hillcrist*. Yes.

*Jill*. Do you, mother?

*Mrs*. H. No.

*Jill*. A wagon of old Hornblower's pots passed while we were in the yard. It's an omen.

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*Mrs*. H. Don't be foolish, Jill.

*Jill*. Look at the old brute! Dodo, hold my hand.

*Mrs*. H. Make sure you've got a handkerchief, Jack.

*Hillcrist*. I can't go beyond the six thousand; I shall have to raise every penny on mortgage as it is. The estate simply won't stand more, Amy.

[He feels in his breast pocket, and pulls up the edge of his handkerchief.]

*Jill*. Oh! Look! There's Miss Mullins, at the back; just come in. Isn't she a spidery old chip?

*Mrs*. H. Come to gloat. Really, I think her not accepting your offer is disgusting. Her impartiality is all humbug.

*Hillcrist*. Can't blame her for getting what she can—it's human nature. Phew! I used to feel like this before a 'viva voce'. Who's that next to Dawker?

*Jill*. What a fish!

*Mrs*. H. [To herself] Ah! yes.

[Her eyes slide round at *Chloe*, silting motionless and rather sunk in her seat, slowly fanning herself with they particulars of the sale. Jack, go and offer her my smelling salts.]

*Hillcrist*. [Taking the salts] Thank God for a human touch!

*Mrs*. H. [Taken aback] Oh!

*Jill*. [With a quick look at her mother, snatching the salts] I will. [She goes over to *Chloe* with the salts] Have a sniff; you look awfully white.

*Chloe*. [Looking up, startled] Oh! no thanks. I'm all right.

*Jill*. No, do! You must. [*Chloe* takes them.]

*Jill*. D'you mind letting me see that a minute?

[She takes the particulars of the sale and studies it, but *Chloe* has buried the lower part of her face in her hand and the smelling salts bottle.]

Beastly hot, isn't it?  You'd better keep that.

*Chloe*. [Her dark eyes wandering and uneasy] Rolf's getting me some water.

*Jill*.  Why do you stay?  You didn't want to come, did you?

[*Chloe* shakes her head.]

All right!  Here's your water.

[She hands back the particulars and slides over to her seat, passing *Rolf* in the gangway, with her chin well up.]

[*Mrs*. *Hillcrist*, who has watched *Chloe* and *Jill* and *Dawker*, and his friend, makes an enquiring movement with her hand, but gets a disappointing answer.]

*Jill*.  What's the time, Dodo?

*Hillcrist*. [Looking at his watch] Three minutes past.

*Jill*. [Sighing] Oh, hell!

*Hillcrist*. Jill!

*Jill*.  Sorry, Dodo.  I was only thinking.  Look!  Here he is! Phew!—isn't he——?

*Mrs*. H.  'Sh!

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The *auctioneer* comes in Left and goes to the table. He is a square, short, brown-faced, common looking man, with clipped grey hair fitting him like a cap, and a clipped grey moustache. His lids come down over his quick eyes, till he can see you very sharply, and you can hardly see that he can see you. He can break into a smile at any moment, which has no connection with him, as it were. By a certain hurt look, however, when bidding is slow, he discloses that he is not merely an auctioneer, but has in him elements of the human being. He can wink with anyone, and is dressed in a snug-brown suit, with a perfectly unbuttoned waistcoat, a low, turned down collar, and small black and white sailor knot tie. While he is settling his papers, the *Hillcrists* settle themselves tensely. *Chloe* has drunk her water and leaned back again, with the smelling salts to her nose. *Rolf* leans forward in the seat beside her, looking sideways at *Jill*. A *solicitor*, with a grey beard, has joined the *auctioneer*, at his table.

*Auctioneer*. [Tapping the table] Sorry to disappoint you, gentlemen, but I've only one property to offer you to-day, No. 1, The Centry, Deepwater. The second on the particulars has been withdrawn. The third that's Bidcot, desirable freehold mansion and farmlands in the Parish of Kenway—we shall have to deal with next week. I shall be happy to sell it you then with out reservation. [He looks again through the particulars in his hand, giving the audience time to readjust themselves to his statements] Now, gen'lemen, as I say, I've only the one property to sell. Freehold No. 1—all that very desirable corn and stock-rearing and parklike residential land known as the Centry, Deepwater, unique property an A.1. chance to an A.1. audience. [With his smile] Ought to make the price of the three we thought we had. Now you won't mind listening to the conditions of sale; Mr. Blinkard'll read 'em, and they won't wirry you, they're very short.

[He sits down and gives two little tape on the table.]

[The *solicitor* rises and reads the conditions of sale in a voice which no one practically can hear. Just as he begins to read these conditions of sale, *Charles Hornblower* enters at back. He stands a moment, glancing round at the *Hillcrist* and twirling his moustache, then moves along to his wife and touches her.]

*Charles*. Chloe, aren't you well?

[In the start which she gives, her face is fully revealed to the audience.]

*Charles*. Come along, out of the way of these people.

[He jerks his head towards the *Hillcrists*. *Chloe* gives a swift look down to the stage Right of the audience.]

*Chloe*. No; I'm all right; it's hotter there.

*Charles*. [To *Rolf*] Well, look after her—I must go back.

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[*Rolf* node. *Charles*, slides bank to the door, with a glance at the *Hillcrists*, of whom *Mrs*. *Hillcrist* has been watching like a lynx. He goes out, just as the *solicitor*, finishing, sits down.]

*Auctioneer*. [Rising and tapping] Now, gen'lemen, it's not often a piece of land like this comes into the market. What's that? [To a friend in front of him] No better land in Deepwater—that's right, Mr. Spicer. I know the village well, and a charming place it is; perfect locality, to be sure. Now I don't want to wirry you by singing the praises of this property; there it is—well-watered, nicely timbered—no reservation of the timber, gen'lemen—no tenancy to hold you up; free to do what you like with it to-morrow. You've got a jewel of a site there, too; perfect position for a house. It lies between the Duke's and Squire Hillcrist's—an emerald isle. [With his smile] No allusion to Ireland, gen'lemen—perfect peace in the Centry. Nothing like it in the county—a gen'leman's site, and you don't get that offered you every day. [He looks down towards *Hornblower*, stage Left] Carries the mineral rights, and as you know, perhaps, there's the very valuable Deepwater clay there. What am I to start it at? Can I say three thousand? Well, anything you like to give me. I'm sot particular. Come now, you've got more time than me, I expect. Two hundred acres of first-rate grazin' and cornland, with a site for a residence unequalled in the county; and all the possibilities! Well, what shall I say?

[Bid from *Spicer*.]

Two thousand? [With his smile] That won't hurt you, Mr. Spicer. Why, it's worth that to overlook the Duke. For two thousand?

[Bid from *Hornblower*, stage Left.]

And five. Thank you, sir. Two thousand five hundred bid.

[To a friend just below him.]

Come, Mr. Sandy, don't scratch your head over it.

[Bid from *Dawker*, Stage Right.]

And five. Three thousand bid for this desirable property. Why, you'd think it wasn't desirable. Come along, gen'lemen. A little spirit.

[A alight pause.]

*Jill*. Why can't I see the bids, Dodo?

*Hillcrist*. The last was Dawker's.

*Auctioneer*. For three thousand. [*Hornblower*] Three thousand five hundred? May I say —four? [A bid from the centre] No, I'm not particular; I'll take hundreds. Three thousand six hundred bid. [*Hornblower*] And seven. Three thousand seven hundred, and——

[He pauses, quartering the audience.]

*Jill*. Who was that, Dodo?

*Hillcrist*. Hornblower. It's the Duke in the centre.

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*Auctioneer*. Come, gen'lemen, don't keep me all day. Four thousand may I say? [*Dawker*] Thank you. We're beginning. And one? [A bid from the centre] Four thousand one hundred. [*Hornblower*] Four thousand two hundred. May I have yours, sir? [To *Dawker*] And three. Four thousand three hundred bid. No such site in the county, gen'lemen. I'm going to sell this land for what it's worth. You can't bid too much for me. [He smiles] [*Hornblower*] Four thousand five hundred bid. [Bid from the centre] And six. [*Dawker*] And seven. [*Hornblower*] And eight. Nine, may I say? [But the centre has dried up] [*Dawker*] And nine. [*Hornblower*] Five thousand. Five thousand bid. That's better; there's some spirit in it. For five thousand.

[He pauses while he speak& to the *solicitor*]

*Hillcrist*. It's a duel now.

*Auctioneer*. Now, gen'lemen, I'm not going to give this property away. Five thousand bid. [*Dawker*] And one. [*Hornblower*] And two. [*Dawker*] And three. Five thousand three hundred bid. And five, did you say, sir? [*Hornblower*] Five thousand five hundred bid.

[He looks at hip particulars.]

*Jill*. [Rather agonised] Enemy, Dodo.

*Auctioneer*. This chance may never come again.

"How you'll regret it
If you don't get it,"

as the poet says. May I say five thousand six hundred, sir? [*Dawker*] Five thousand six hundred bid. [*Hornblower*] And seven. [*Dawker*] And eight. For five thousand eight hundred pounds. We're gettin' on, but we haven't got the value yet.

[A slight pause, while he wipes his brow at the success of his own efforts.]

*Jill*. Us, Dodo?

[*Hillcrist* nods. *Jill* looks over at *Rolf*, whose face is grimly set. *Chloe* has never moved. *Mrs*. *Hillcrist* whispers to her husband.]

*Auctioneer*. Five thousand eight hundred bid. For five thousand eight hundred. Come along, gen'lemen, come along. We're not beaten. Thank you, sir. [*Hornblower*] Five thousand nine hundred. And—? [*Dawker*] Six thousand. Six thousand bid. Six thousand bid. For six thousand! The Centry—most desirable spot in the county—going for the low price of six thousand.

*Hillcrist*. [Muttering] Low!  Heavens!

*Auctioneer*.  Any advance on six thousand?  Come, gen'lemen, we haven't dried up?  A little spirit.  Six thousand?  For six thousand?  For six thousand pounds?  Very well, I'm selling.  For six thousand once—[He taps] For six thousand twice—[He taps].

*Jill*. [Low] Oh! we've got it!

*Auctioneer*.  And one, sir? [*Hornblower*] Six thousand one hundred bid.

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[The *solicitor* touches his arm and says something, to which the *auctioneer* responds with a nod.]

*Mrs*. H. Blow your nose, Jack.

[*Hillcrist* blows his nose.]

*Auctioneer*. For six thousand one hundred. [*Dawker*] And two. Thank you. [*Hornblower*] And three. For six thousand three hundred. [*Dawker*] And four. For six thousand four hundred pounds. This coveted property. For six thousand four hundred pounds. Why, it's giving it away, gen'lemen. [A pause.]

*Mrs*. H. Giving!

*Auctioneer*. Six thousand four hundred bid. [*Hornblower*] And five. [*Dawker*] And six. [*Hornblower*] And seven. [*Dawker*] And eight.

[A pause, during which, through the door Left, someone beckons to the *solicitor*, who rises and confers.]

*Hillcrist*. [Muttering] I've done if that doesn't get it.

*Auctioneer*. For six thousand eight hundred. For six thousand eight hundred-once—-[He taps] twice—[He tape] For the last time. This dominating site. [*Hornblower*] And nine. Thank you. For six thousand nine hundred.

[*Hillcrist* has taken out his handkerchief.]

*Jill*. Oh! Dodo!

*Mrs*. H. [Quivering] Don't give in!

*Auctioneer*. Seven thousand may I say? [*Dawker*] Seven thousand.

*Mrs*. H. [Whispers] Keep it down; don't show him.

*Auctioneer*. For seven-thousand—going for seven thousand—once— [Taps] twice [Taps] [*Hornblower*] And one. Thank you, sir.

[*Hillcrist* blows his nose. *Jill*, with a choke, leans back in her seat and folds her arms tightly on her chest. *Mrs*. *Hillcrist* passes her handkerchief over her lips, sitting perfectly still. *Hillcrist*, too, is motionless.]

[The *auctioneer*, has paused, and is talking to the *solicitor*, who has returned to his seat.]

*Mrs*. H. Oh!  Jack.

*Jill*.  Stick it, Dodo; stick it!

*Auctioneer*.  Now, gen'lemen, I have a bid of seven thousand one hundred for the Centry.  And I'm instructed to sell if I can't get more.  It's a fair price, but not a big price. [To his friend *Mr*. *Spicer*] A thumpin' price? [With his smile] Well, you're a judge of thumpin', I admit.  Now, who'll give me seven thousand two hundred?  What, no one? Well, I can't make you, gen'lemen.  For seven thousand one hundred.  Once—[Taps] Twice—[Taps].

[*Jill* utters a little groan.]

*Hillcrist*. [Suddenly, in a queer voice] Two.

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*Auctioneer*. [Turning with surprise and looking up to receive *Hillcrist's* nod] Thank you, sir. And two. Seven thousand two hundred. [He screws himself round so as to command both *Hillcrist* and *Hornblower*] May I have yours, sir? [*Hornblower*] And three. [*Hillcrist*] And four. Seven thousand four hundred. For seven thousand four hundred. [*Hornblower*] Five. [*Hillcrist*] Six. For seven thousand six hundred. [A pause] Well, gen'lemen, this is. better, but a record property shid fetch a record price. The possibilities are enormous. [*Hornblower*] Eight thousand did you say, sir? Eight thousand. Going for eight thousand pounds. [*Hillcrist*] And one. [*Hornblower*] And two. [*Hillcrist*] And three. [*Hornblower*] And four. [*Hillcrist*] And five. For eight thousand five hundred. A wonderful property for eight thousand five hundred.

[He wipes his brow.]

*Jill*. [Whispering] Oh, Dodo!

*Mrs*. H. That's enough, Jack, we must stop some time.

*Auctioneer*. For eight thousand five hundred. Once—[Taps]—twice— [Taps] [*Hornblower*] Six hundred. [*Hillcrist*] Seven. May I have yours, sir? [*Hornblower*] Eight.

*Hillcrist*. Nine thousand.

> [*Mrs*. *Hillcrist* looks at him, biting her lips, but he is quite absorbed.]

*Auctioneer*. Nine thousand for this astounding property. Why, the Duke would pay that if he realised he'd be overlooked. Now, Sir? [To *Hornblower*. No response]. Just a little raise on that. [No response.] For nine thousand. The Centry, Deepwater, for nine thousand. Once—[Taps] Twice——[Taps].

*Jill*. [Under her breath] Ours!

A *voice*. [From far back in the centre] And five hundred.

*Auctioneer*. [Surprised and throwing out his arms towards the voice] And five hundred. For nine thousand five hundred. May I have yours, sir? [He looks at *Hornblower*. No response.]

> [The *solicitor* speaks to him. *Mrs*. H. [Whispering] It must be the Duke again.]

*Hillcrist*. [Passing his hand over his brow] That's stopped him, anyway.

*Auctioneer*. [Looking at *Hillcrist*] For nine thousand five hundred? [*Hillcrist* shakes his head.] Once more. The Centry, Deepwater, for nine thousand five hundred. Once—-

[Taps] Twice—[Taps] [He pauses and looks again at *Hornblower* and *Hillcrist*] For the last time—at nine thousand five hundred. [Taps] [With a look towards the bidder] Mr. Smalley. Well! [With great satisfaction] That's that! No more to-day, gen'lemen.

[The *auctioneer* and *solicitor* busy themselves. The room begins to empty.]

*Mrs*. H. Smalley? Smalley? Is that the Duke's agent? Jack!

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*Hillcrist*. [Coming out of a sort of coma, after the excitement he has been going through] What! What!

*Jill*. Oh, Dodo! How splendidly you stuck it!

*Hillcrist*. Phew! What a squeak! I was clean out of my depth. A mercy the Duke chipped in again.

*Mrs*. H. [Looking at *Rolf* and *Chloe*, who are standing up as if about to go] Take care; they can hear you. Find *Dawker*, Jack.

> [Below, the *auctioneer* and *solicitor* take up their papers, and move out Left.]
>
> [*Hillcrist* stretches himself, standing up, as if to throw off the strain. The door behind is opened, and *Hornblower* appears.]

*Hornblower*. Ye ran me up a pretty price. Ye bid very pluckily, Hillcrist. But ye didn't quite get my measure.

*Hillcrist*. Oh! It was my nine thousand the Duke capped. Thank God, the Centry's gone to a gentleman!

*Hornblower*. The Duke? [He laughs] No, the Gentry's not gone to a gentleman, nor to a fool. It's gone to me.

*Hillcrist*. What!

HOUNBLOWER. I'm sorry for ye; ye're not fit to manage these things. Well, it's a monstrous price, and I've had to pay it because of your obstinacy. I shan't forget that when I come to build.

*Hillcrist*. D'you mean to say that bid was for you?

*Hornblower*. Of course I do. I told ye I was a bad man to be up against. Perhaps ye'll believe me now.

*Hillcrist*. A dastardly trick!

*Hornblower*. [With venom] What did ye call it—a skin game? Remember we're playin' a skin game, Hillcrist.

*Hillcrist*. [Clenching his fists] If we were younger men——

*Hornblower*. Ay! 'Twouldn't Look pretty for us to be at fisticuffs. We'll leave the fightin' to the young ones. [He glances at *Rolf* and *Jill*; suddenly throwing out his finger at *Rolf*] No makin' up to that young woman! I've watched ye. And as for you, missy, you leave my boy alone.

*Jill*. [With suppressed passion] Dodo, may I spit in his eye or something?

*Hillcrist*. Sit down.

[*Jill* sits down. He stands between her and *Hornblower*.]

[Yu've won this round, sir, by a foul blow. We shall see whether you can take any advantage of it. I believe the law can stop you ruining my property.]

*Hornblower*. Make your mind easy; it can't. I've got ye in a noose, and I'm goin' to hang ye.

*Mrs*. H. [Suddenly] Mr. Hornblower, as you fight foul—so shall we.

*Hillcrist*. Amy!

*Mrs*. H. [Paying no attention] And it will not be foul play towards you and yours. You are outside the pale.

*Hornblower*. That's just where I am, outside your pale all round ye. Ye're not long for Deepwater, ma'am. Make your dispositions to go; ye'll be out in six months, I prophesy. And good riddance to the neighbourhood. [They are all down on the level now.]

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*Chloe*. [Suddenly coming closer to *Mrs*. *Hillcrist*] Here are your salts, thank you. Father, can't you——?

*Hornblower*. [Surprised] Can't I what?

*Chloe*. Can't you come to an arrangement?

*Mrs*. H. Just so, Mr. Hornblower. Can't you?

*Hornblower*. [Looking from one to the other] As we're speakin' out, ma'am, it's your behaviour to my daughter-in-law—who's as good as you—and better, to my thinking—-that's more than half the reason why I've bought this property. Ye've fair got my dander up. Now it's no use to bandy words. It's very forgivin' of ye, Chloe, but come along!

*Mrs*. H. Quite seriously, Mr. Hornblower, you had better come to an arrangement.

*Hornblower*. Mrs. Hillcrist, ladies should keep to their own business.

*Mrs*. H. I will.

*Hillcrist*. Amy, do leave it to us men. You young man [He speaks to *Rolf*] do you support your father's trick this afternoon?

[*Jill* looks round at *Rolf*, who tries to speak, when *Hornblower* breaks in.]

*Hornblower*. My trick? And what dye call it, to try and put me own son against me?

*Jill*. [To *Rolf*] Well?

*Rolf*. I don't, but——

*Hornblower*. Trick? Ye young cub, be quiet. Mr. Hillcrist had an agent bid for him—I had an agent bid for me. Only his agent bid at the beginnin', an' mine bid at the end. What's the trick in that?

[He laughs.]

*Hillcrist*. Hopeless; we're in different worlds.

*Hornblower*. I wish to God we were! Come you, Chloe. And you, Rolf, you follow. In six months I'll have those chimneys up, and me lorries runnin' round ye.

*Mrs*. H. Mr. Hornblower, if you build——

*Hornblower*. [Looking at *Mrs*. *Hillcrist*] Ye know—it's laughable. Ye make me pay nine thousand five hundred for a bit o' land not worth four, and ye think I'm not to get back on ye. I'm goin' on with as little consideration as if ye were a family of blackbeetles. Good afternoon!

*Rolf*. Father!

*Jill*. Oh, Dodo! He's obscene.

*Hillcrist*. Mr. Hornblower, my compliments.

[*Hornblower* with a stare at *Hillcrist's* half-smiling face, takes *Chloe's* arm, and half drags her towards the door on the Left. But there, in the opened doorway, are standing *Dawker* and a *stranger*. They move just out of the way of the exit, looking at *Chloe*, who sways and very nearly falls.]

*Hornblower*. Why! Chloe! What's the matter?

*Chloe*. I don't know; I'm not well to-day.

[She pulls herself together with a great, effort.]

*Mrs*. H. [Who has exchanged a nod with *Dawker* and the *stranger*] Mr. Hornblower, you build at your peril. I warn you.

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*Hornblower*. [Turning round to speak] Ye think yourself very cool and very smart. But I doubt this is the first time ye've been up against realities. Now, I've been up against them all my life. Don't talk to me, ma'am, about peril and that sort of nonsense; it makes no impression. Your husband called me pachydermatous. I don't know Greek, and Latin, and all that, but I've looked it out in the dictionary, and I find it means thick-skinned. And I'm none the worse for that when I have to deal with folk like you. Good afternoon.

[He draws *Chloe* forward, and they pass through the door, followed quickly by *Rolf*.]

*Mrs*. H. Thank you; Dawker.

[She moves up to *Dawker* and the *stranger*, Left, and they talk.]

*Jill*. Dodo! It's awful!

*Hillcrist*. Well, there's nothing for it now but to smile and pay up. Poor old home! It shall be his wash-pot. Over the Centry will he cast his shoe. By Gad, Jill, I could cry!

*Jill*. [Pointing] Look! Chloe's sitting down. She nearly fainted just now. It's something to do with Dawker, Dodo, and that man with him. Look at mother! Ask them!

*Hillcrist*. Dawker!

[*Dawker* comes to him, followed by *Mrs*. *Hillcrist*.]

What's the mystery about young Mrs. Hornblower?

*Dawker*. No mystery.

*Hillcrist*. Well, what is it?

*Mrs*. H. You'd better not ask.

*Hillcrist*. I wish to know.

*Mrs*. H. Jill, go out and wait for us.

*Jill*. Nonsense, mother!

*Mrs*. H. It's not for a girl to hear.

*Jill*. Bosh! I read the papers every day.

*Dawker*. It's nothin' worse than you get there, anyway.

*Mrs*. H. Do you wish your daughter——

*Jill*. It's ridiculous, Dodo; you'd think I was mother at my age.

*Mrs*. H. I was not so proud of my knowledge.

*Jill*. No, but you had it, dear.

*Hillcrist*. What is it——what is it? Come over here, Dawker.

[*Dawker* goes to him, Right, and speaks in a low voice.]

What! [Again *Dawker* speaks in, a low voice.]

Good God!

*Mrs*. H. Exactly!

*Jill*. Poor thing—whatever it is!

*Mrs*. H. Poor thing?

*Jill*. What went before, mother?

*Mrs*. H. It's what's coming after that matters; luckily.

*Hillcrist*. How do you know this?

*Dawker*. My friend here [He points to the *stranger*] was one of the agents.

*Hillcrist*. It's shocking. I'm sorry I heard it.

*Mrs*. H. I told you not to.

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*Hillcrist*. Ask your friend to come here.

[*Dawker* beckons, and the *stranger* joins the group.]

Are you sure of what you've said, sir?

*Stranger*. Perfectly. I remember her quite well; her name then was——

*Hillcrist*. I don't want to know, thank you. I'm truly sorry. I wouldn't wish the knowledge of that about his womenfolk to my worst enemy. This mustn't be spoken of. [*Jill* hugs his arm.]

*Mrs*. H. It will not be if Mr. Hornblower is wise. If he is not wise, it must be spoken of.

*Hillcrist*. I say no, Amy. I won't have it. It's a dirty weapon. Who touches pitch shall be defiled.

*Mrs*. H. Well, what weapons does he use against us? Don't be quixotic. For all we can tell, they know it quite well already, and if they don't they ought to. Anyway, to know this is our salvation, and we must use it.

*Jill*: [Sotto voce] Pitch! Dodo! Pitch!

*Dawker*. The threat's enough! J.P.—Chapel—Future member for the constituency——.

*Hillcrist*. [A little more doubtfully] To use a piece of knowledge about a woman—it's repugnant. I—I won't do it.

[Mrs. H. If you had a son tricked into marrying such a woman,
would you wish to remain ignorant of it?]

*Hillcrist*. [Struck] I don't know—I don't know.

*Mrs*. H. At least, you'd like to be in a position to help him, if you thought it necessary?

*Hillcrist*. Well—that perhaps.

*Mrs*. H. Then you agree that Mr. Hornblower at least should be told.
What he does with the knowledge is not our affair.

*Hillcrist*. [Half to the *stranger* and half to *Dawker*] Do you realise that an imputation of that kind may be ground for a criminal libel action?

*Stranger*. Quite. But there's no shadow of doubt; not the faintest.
You saw her just now?

*Hillcrist*. I did. [Revolting again] No; I don't like it.

[*Dawker* has drawn the *stranger* a step or two away, and they talk together.]

*Mrs*. H. [In a low voice] And the ruin of our home? You're betraying your fathers, Jack.

*Hillcrist*. I can't bear bringing a woman into it.

*Mrs*. H. We don't. If anyone brings her in; it will be Hornblower himself.

*Hillcrist*. We use her secret as a lever.

*Mrs*. H. I tell you quite plainly: I will only consent to holding my tongue about her, if you agree to Hornblower being told. It's a scandal to have a woman like that in the neighbourhood.

*Jill*. Mother means that, father.

*Hillcrist*. Jill, keep quiet. This is a very bitter position. I can't tell what to do.

*Mrs*. H. You must use this knowledge. You owe it to me—to us all. You'll see that when you've thought it over.

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*Jill*. [Softly] Pitch, Dodo, pitch!

*Mrs*. H. [Furiously] Jill, be quiet!

*Hillcrist*. I was brought up never to hurt a woman. I can't do it, Amy—I can't do it. I should never feel like a gentleman again.

*Mrs*. H. [Coldly] Oh! Very well.

*Hillcrist*. What d'you mean by that?

*Mrs*. H. I shall use the knowledge in my own way.

*Hillcrist*. [Staring at her] You would—against my wishes?

*Mrs*. H. I consider it my duty.

*Hillcrist*. If I agree to Hornblower being told——

*Mrs*. H. That's all I want.

*Hillcrist*. It's the utmost I'll consent to, Amy; and don't let's have any humbug about its being, morally necessary. We do it to save our skins.

*Mrs*. H. I don't know what you mean by humbug?

*Jill*. He means humbug; mother.

*Hillcrist*. It must stop at old Hornblower. Do you quite understand?

*Mrs*. H. Quite.

*Jill*. Will it stop?

*Mrs*. H. Jill, if you can't keep your impertinence to yourself——

*Hillcrist*. Jill, come with me.

[He turns towards door, Back.]

*Jill*. I'm sorry, mother. Only it is a skin game, isn't it?

*Mrs*. H. You pride yourself on plain speech, Jill. I pride myself on plain thought. You will thank me afterwards that I can see realities. I know we are better people than these Hornblowers. Here we are going to stay, and they—are not.

*Jill*. [Looking at her with a sort of unwilling admiration] Mother, you're wonderful!

*Hillcrist*. Jill!

*Jill*. Coming, Dodo.

[She turns and runs to the door. They go out.]

[*Mrs*. *Hillcrist*, with a long sigh, draws herself up, fine and proud.]

*Mrs*. H. Dawker! [He comes to her.]

[I shall send him a note to-night, and word it so that he will be bound to come and see us to-marrow morning. Will you be in the study just before eleven o'clock, with this gentleman?]

*Dawker*. [Nodding] We're going to wire for his partner. I'll bring him too. Can't make too sure.

[She goes firmly up the steps and out.]

*Dawker*. [To the *stranger*, with a wink] The Squire's squeamish—too much of a gentleman. But he don't count. The grey mare's all right. You wire to Henry. I'm off to our solicitors. We'll make that old rhinoceros sell us back the Centry at a decent price. These Hornblowers—[Laying his finger on his nose] We've got 'em!

*Curtain*

## SCENE II

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CHLOE's boudoir at half-past seven the same evening. A pretty room. No pictures on the walls, but two mirrors. A screen and a luxurious couch an the fireplace side, stage Left. A door rather Right of Centre Back; opening inwards. A French window, Right forward: A writing table, Right Back. Electric light burning.Chloe, in a tea-gown, is standing by the forward end of the sofa, very still, and very pale. Her lips are parted, and her large eyes stare straight before them as if seeing ghosts: The door is opened noiselessly and a *woman's* face is seen. It peers at *Chloe*, vanishes, and the door is closed. *Chloe* raises her hands, covers her eyes with them, drops them with a quick gesture, and looks round her. A knock. With a swift movement she slides on to the sofa, and lies prostrate, with eyes closed.

Chloe. [Feebly] Come in!

[Her Maid enters; a trim, contained figure of uncertain years, in a black dress, with the face which was peering in.]

Yes, Anna?

*Anna*. Aren't you going in to dinner, ma'am?

*Chloe*. [With closed eyes] No.

*Anna*. Will you take anything here, ma'am?

*Chloe*. I'd like a biscuit and a glass of champagne.

[The *maid*, who is standing between sofa and door, smiles. *Chloe*, with a swift look, catches the smile.]

Why do you smile?

*Anna*. Was I, ma'am?

*Chloe*. You know you were. [Fiercely] Are you paid to smile at me?

*Anna*. [Immovable] No, ma'am, Would you like some eau de Cologne on your forehead?

*Chloe*. Yes.—No.—What's the good? [Clasping her forehead] My headache won't go.

*Anna*. To keep lying down's the best thing for it.

*Chloe*. I have been—hours.

*Anna*. [With the smile] Yes, ma'am.

*Chloe*. [Gathering herself up on the sofa] Anna! Why do you do it?

*Anna*. Do what, ma'am?

*Chloe*. Spy on me.

*Anna*. I—never! I——!

*Chloe*. To spy! You're a fool, too. What is there to spy on?

*Anna*. Nothing, ma'am. Of course, if you're not satisfied with me, I must give notice. Only—if I were spying, I should expect to have notice given me. I've been accustomed to ladies who wouldn't stand such a thing for a minute.

*Chloe*: [Intently] Well, you'll take a month's wages and go tomorrow. And that's all, now.

[*Anna* inclines her head and goes out.]

[*Chloe*, with a sort of moan, turns over and buries her face in the cushion.]

*Chloe*. [Sitting up] If I could see that man—if only—or Dawker——

[She springs up and goes to the door, but hesitates, and comes back to the head of the sofa, as *Rolf* comes in. During this scene the door is again opened stealthily, an inch or too.]

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*Rolf*. How's the head?

*Chloe*. Beastly, thanks. I'm not going into dinner.

*Rolf*. Is there anything I can do for you?

*Chloe*. No, dear boy. [Suddenly looking at him] You don't want this quarrel with the Hillcrists to go on, do you, Rolf?

*Rolf*. No; I hate it.

*Chloe*. Well, I think I might be able to stop it. Will you slip round to Dawker's—it's not five minutes—and ask him to come and see me.

*Rolf*. Father and Charlie wouldn't——

*Chloe*. I know. But if he comes to the window here while you're at dinner, I'll let him in, and out, and nobody'd know.

*Rolf*. [Astonished] Yes, but what I mean how——

*Chloe*. Don't ask me. It's worth the shot that's all. [Looking at her wrist-watch] To this window at eight o'clock exactly. First long window on the terrace, tell him.

*Rolf*. It's nothing Charlie would mind?

*Chloe*. No; only I can't tell him—he and father are so mad about it all.

*Rolf*. If there's a real chance——

*Chloe*. [Going to the window and opening it] This way, Rolf. If you don't come back I shall know he's coming. Put your watch by mine. [Looking at his watch] It's a minute fast, see!

*Rolf*. Look here, Chloe

*Chloe*. Don't wait; go on.

[She almost pushes him out through the window, closes it after him, draws the curtains again, stands a minute, thinking hard; goes to the bell and rings it; then, crossing to the writing table, Right Back, she takes out a chemist's prescription.]

[*Anna* comes in.]

*Chloe*. I don't want that champagne. Take this to the chemist and get him to make up some of these cachets quick, and bring them back yourself.

*Anna*. Yes, ma'am; but you have some.

*Chloe*. They're too old; I've taken two—the strength's out of them.
Quick, please; I can't stand this head.

*Anna*. [Taking the prescription—with her smile] Yes, ma'am. It'll take some time—you don't want me?

*Chloe*. No; I want the cachets.

[*Anna* goes out.]

[*Chloe* looks at her wrist-watch, goes to the writing-table, which is old-fashioned, with a secret drawer, looks round her, dives at the secret drawer, takes out a roll of notes and a tissue paper parcel. She counts the notes: "Three hundred." Slips them into her breast and unwraps the little parcel. It contains pears. She slips them, too, into her dress, looks round startled, replaces the drawer, and regains her place on the sofa, lying prostrate as the door opens, and *Hornblower* comes in. She does not open her ages, and he stands looking at her a moment before speaking.]

*Hornblower*. [Almost softly] How are ye feelin'. Chloe?

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*Chloe*. Awful head!

*Hornblower*: Can ye attend a moment? I've had a note from that woman.

[*Chloe* sits up.]

*Hornblower*. [Reading] "I have something of the utmost importance to tell you in regard to your daughter-in-law. I shall be waiting to see you at eleven o'clock to-morrow morning. The matter is so utterly vital to the happiness of all your family, that I cannot imagine you will fail to come." Now, what's the meaning of it? Is it sheer impudence, or lunacy, or what?

*Chloe*. I don't know.

*Hornblower*. [Not unkindly] Chloe, if there's anything—ye'd better tell me. Forewarned's forearmed.

*Chloe*. There's nothing; unless it's—[With a quick took at him,]— Unless it's that my father was a—a bankrupt.

*Hornblower*. Hech! Many a man's been that. Ye've never told us much about your family.

*Chloe*. I wasn't very proud of him.

*Hornblower*. Well, ye're not responsible for your father. If that's all, it's a relief. The bitter snobs! I'll remember it in the account I've got with them.

*Chloe*. Father, don't say anything to Charlie; it'll only worry him for nothing.

*Hornblower*. No, no, I'll not. If I went bankrupt, it'd upset Chearlie, I've not a doubt. [He laugh. Looking at her shrewdly] There's nothing else, before I answer her?

[*Chloe* shakes her head.]

Ye're sure?

*Chloe*. [With an efort] She may invent things, of course.

*Hornblower*. [Lost in his feud feeling] Ah! but there's such a thing as the laws o' slander. If they play pranks, I'll have them up for it.

*Chloe*. [Timidly] Couldn't you stop this quarrel; father? You said it was on my account. But I don't want to know them. And they do love their old home. I like the girl. You don't really need to build just there, do you? Couldn't you stop it? Do!

*Hornblower*. Stop it? Now I've bought? Na, no! The snobs defied me, and I'm going to show them. I hate the lot of them, and I hate that little Dawker worst of all.

*Chloe*. He's only their agent.

*Hornblower*. He's a part of the whole dog-in-the-manger system that stands in my way. Ye're a woman, and ye don't understand these things. Ye wouldn't believe the struggle I've had to make my money and get my position. These county folk talk soft sawder, but to get anything from them's like gettin' butter out of a dog's mouth. If they could drive me out of here by fair means or foul, would they hesitate a moment? Not they! See what they've made me pay; and look at this letter. Selfish, mean lot o' hypocrites!

*Chloe*. But they didn't begin the quarrel.

*Hornblower*. Not openly; but underneath they did—that's their way. They began it by thwartin' me here and there and everywhere, just because I've come into me own a bit later than they did. I gave 'em their chance, and they wouldn't take it. Well, I'll show 'em what a man like me can do when he sets his mind to it. I'll not leave much skin on them.

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[In the intensity of his feeling he has lost sight of her face, alive with a sort of agony of doubt, whether to plead with him further, or what to do. Then, with a swift glance at her wristwatch, she falls back on the sofa and closes her eyes.]

It'll give me a power of enjoyment seein' me chimneys go up in front of their windies. That was a bonnie thought—that last bid o' mine. He'd got that roused up, I believe, he, never would a' stopped. [Looking at her] I forgot your head. Well, well, ye'll be best tryin' quiet. [The gong sounds.] Shall we send ye something in from dinner?

*Chloe*. No; I'll try to sleep. Please tell them I don't want to be disturbed.

*Hornblower*. All right. I'll just answer this note.

[He sits down at her writing-table.]

[*Chloe* starts up from the sofa feverishly, looking at her watch, at the window, at her watch; then softly crosses to the window and opens it.]

*Hornblower*. [Finishing] Listen! [He turns round towards the sofa] Hallo! Where are ye?

*Chloe*. [At the window] It's so hot.

*Hornblower*. Here's what I've said:

"*Madam*,—You can tell me nothing of my daughter-in-law which can affect the happiness of my family. I regard your note as an impertinence, and I shall not be with you at eleven o'clock to-morrow morning.

"Yours truly——"

*Chloe*. [With a suffering movement of her head] Oh!—Well!—[The gong is touched a second time.]

*Hornblower*. [Crossing to the door] Lie ye down, and get a sleep. I'll tell them not to disturb ye; and I hope ye'll be all right to-morrow. Good-night, Chloe.

*Chloe*. Good-night. [He goes out.]

[After a feverish turn or two, *Chloe* returns to the open window and waits there, half screened by the curtains. The door is opened inch by inch, and ANNA'S head peers round. Seeing where *Chloe* is, she slips in and passes behind the screen, Left. Suddenly *Chloe* backs in from the window.]

*Chloe*. [In a low voice] Come in.

[She darts to the door and locks it.]

[*Dawker* has come in through the window and stands regarding her with a half smile.]

*Dawker*. Well, young woman, what do you want of me?

[In the presence of this man of her own class, there comes a distinct change in *Chloe's* voice and manner; a sort of frank commonness, adapted to the man she is dealing with, but she keeps her voice low.]

*Chloe*. You're making a mistake, you know.

*Dawker*. [With a broad grin] No. I've got a memory for faces.

*Chloe*. I say you are.

*Dawker*. [Turning to go] If that's all, you needn't have troubled me to come.

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*Chloe*. No. Don't go! [With a faint smile] You are playing a game with me. Aren't you ashamed? What harm have I done you? Do you call this cricket?

*Dawker*. No, my girl—business.

*Chloe*. [Bitterly] What have I to do with this quarrel? I couldn't help their falling out.

*Dawker*. That's your misfortune.

*Chloe*. [Clasping her hands] You're a cruel fellow if you can spoil a woman's life who never did you an ounce of harm.

*Dawker*. So they don't know about you. That's all right. Now, look here, I serve my employer. But I'm flesh and blood, too, and I always give as good as I get. I hate this family of yours. There's no name too bad for 'em to call me this last month, and no looks too black to give me. I tell you frankly, I hate.

*Chloe*. There's good in them same as in you.

*Dawker*. [With a grin] There's no good Hornblower but a dead Hornblower.

*Chloe*. But—but Im not one.

*Dawker*. You'll be the mother of some, I shouldn't wonder.

*Chloe*. [Stretching out her hand-pathetically] Oh! leave me alone, do! I'm happy here. Be a sport! Be a sport!

*Dawker*. [Disconcerted for a second] You can't get at me, so don't try it on.

*Chloe*. I had such a bad time in old days.

> [*Dawker* shakes his head; his grin has disappeared and his face is like wood.]

*Chloe*. [Panting] Ah! do! You might! You've been fond of some woman, I suppose. Think of her!

*Dawker*. [Decisively] It won't do, Mrs. Chloe. You're a pawn in the game, and I'm going to use you.

*Chloe*. [Despairingly] What is it to you? [With a sudden touch of the tigress] Look here! Don't you make an enemy, of me. I haven't dragged through hell for nothing. Women like me can bite, I tell you.

*Dawker*. That's better. I'd rather have a woman threaten than whine, any day. Threaten away! You'll let 'em know that you met me in the Promenade one night. Of course you'll let 'em know that, won't you?—or that——

*Chloe*. Be quiet! Oh! Be quiet! [Taking from her bosom the notes and the pearls] Look! There's my savings—there's all I've got! The pearls'll fetch nearly a thousand. [Holding it out to him] Take it, and drop me out—won't you? Won't you?

*Dawker*. [Passing his tongue over his lips with a hard little laugh] You mistake your man, missis. I'm a plain dog, if you like, but I'm faithful, and I hold fast. Don't try those games on me.

*Chloe*. [Losing control] You're a beast!—a beast! a cruel, cowardly beast! And how dare you bribe that woman here to spy on me? Oh! yes, you do; you know you do. If you drove me mad, you wouldn't care. You beast!

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*Dawker*. Now, don't carry on! That won't help you.

*Chloe*. What d'you call it—to dog a woman down like this, just because you happen to have a quarrel with a man?

*Dawker*. Who made the quarrel? Not me, missis. You ought to know that in a row it's the weak and helpless—we won't say the innocent —that get it in the neck. That can't be helped.

*Chloe*. [Regarding him intently] I hope your mother or your sister, if you've got any, may go through what I'm going through ever since you got on my track. I hope they'll know what fear means. I hope they'll love and find out that it's hanging on a thread, and—and — Oh! you coward, you persecuting coward! Call yourself a man!

*Dawker*. [With his grin] Ah! You look quite pretty like that. By George! you're a handsome woman when you're roused.

[*Chloe's* passion fades out as quickly as it blazed up. She sinks down on the sofa, shudders, looks here and there, and then for a moment up at him.]

*Chloe*. Is there anything you'll take, not to spoil my life? [Clasping her hands on her breast; under her breath] Me?

*Dawker*. [Wiping his brow] By God! That's an offer. [He recoils towards the window] You —you touched me there. Look here! I've got to use you and I'm going to use you, but I'll do my best to let you down as easy as I can. No, I don't want anything you can give me—that is—[He wipes his brow again] I'd like it—but I won't take it.

[*Chloe* buries her face in her hands.]

There! Keep your pecker up; don't cry. Good-night! [He goes through the window.]

*Chloe*. [Springing up] Ugh! Rat in a trap! Rat——!

[She stands listening; flies to the door, unlocks it, and, going back to the sofa, lies down and doses her eyes. *Charles* comes in very quietly and stands over her, looking to see if she is asleep. She opens her eyes.]

*Charles*. Well, Clo! Had a sleep, old girl?

*Chloe*. Ye-es.

*Charles*. [Sitting on the arm of the sofa and caressing her] Feel better, dear?

*Chloe*. Yes, better, Charlie.

*Charles*. That's right. Would you like some soup?

*Chloe*. [With a shudder] No.

*Charles*. I say-what gives you these heads? You've been very on and off all this last month.

*Chloe*. I don't know. Except that—except that I am going to have a child, Charlie.

*Charles*. After all! By Jove! Sure?

*Chloe*. [Nodding] Are you glad?

*Charles*. Well—I suppose I am. The guv'nor will be mighty pleased, anyway.

*Chloe*. Don't tell him—yet.

*Charles*. All right! [Bending over and drawing her to him] My poor girl, I'm so sorry you're seedy. Give us a kiss.

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[*Chloe* puts up her face and kisses him passionately.]

I say, you're like fire. You're not feverish?

*Chloe*. [With a laugh] It's a wonder if I'm not. Charlie, are you happy with me?

*Charles*. What do you think?

*Chloe*. [Leaning against him] You wouldn't easily believe things against me, would you?

*Charles*. What! Thinking of those Hillcrists? What the hell that woman means by her attitude towards you—When I saw her there to-day, I had all my work cut out not to go up and give her a bit of my mind.

*Chloe*. [Watching him stealthily] It's not good for me, now I'm like this. It's upsetting me, Charlie.

*Charles*. Yes; and we won't forget. We'll make 'em pay for it.

*Chloe*. It's wretched in a little place like this. I say, must you go on spoiling their home?

*Charles*. The woman cuts you and insults you. That's enough for me.

*Chloe*. [Timidly] Let her. I don't care; I can't bear feeling enemies about, Charlie, I—get nervous—I——

*Charles*. My dear girl! What is it?

[He looks at her intently.]

*Chloe*. I suppose it's—being like this. [Suddenly] But, Charlie, do stop it for my sake. Do, do!

*Charles*. [Patting her arm] Come, come; I say, Chloe! You're making mountains. See things in proportion. Father's paid nine thousand five hundred to get the better of those people, and you want him to chuck it away to save a woman who's insulted you. That's not sense, and it's not business. Have some pride.

*Chloe*. [Breathless] I've got no pride, Charlie. I want to be quiet—that's all.

*Charles*. Well, if the row gets on your nerves, I can take you to the sea. But you ought to enjoy a fight with people like that.

*Chloe*. [With calculated bitterness] No, it's nothing, of course— what I want.

*Charles*. Hello! Hello! You are on the jump!

*Chloe*. If you want me to be a good wife to you, make father stop it.

*Charles*. [Standing up] Now, look here, Chloe, what's behind this?

*Chloe*. [Faintly] Behind?

*Charles*. You're carrying on as if—as if you were really scared! We've got these people: We'll have them out of Deepwater in six months. It's absolute ruination to their beastly old house; we'll put the chimneys on the very edge, not three hundred yards off, and our smoke'll be drifting over them half the time. You won't have this confounded stuck-up woman here much longer. And then we can really go ahead and take our proper place. So long as she's here, we shall never do that. We've only to drive on now as fast as we can.

*Chloe*. [With a gesture] I see.

*Charles*. [Again looking at her] If you go on like this, you know,
I shall begin to think there's something you——

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*Chloe* [softly] Charlie! [He comes to her.] Love me!

*Charles*. [Embracing her] There, old girl! I know women are funny at these times. You want a good night, that's all.

*Chloe*. You haven't finished dinner, have you? Go back, and I'll go to bed quite soon. Charlie, don't stop loving me.

*Charles*. Stop? Not much.

[While he is again embracing her, *Anna* steals from behind the screen to the door, opens it noiselessly, and passes through, but it clicks as she shuts it.]

*Chloe*. [Starting violently] Oh-h!

[He comes to her.]

*Charles*. What is it? What is it? You are nervy, my dear.

*Chloe*. [Looking round with a little laugh] I don't know. Go on, Charlie. I'll be all right when this head's gone.

*Charles*. [Stroking her forehead and, looking at her doubtfully] You go to bed; I won't be late coming up.

[He turn, and goes, blowing a kiss from the doorway. When he is gone, *Chloe* gets up and stands in precisely the attitude in which she stood at the beginning of the Act, thinking, and thinking. And the door is opened, and the face of the *maid* peers round at her.]

*Curtain*

## ACT III

### SCENE I

*Hillcrist's*study next morning.

*Jill* coming from Left, looks in at the open French window.

*Jill*. [Speaking to *Rolf*, invisible] Come in here. There's no one.

[She goes in. *Rolf* joins her, coming from the garden.]

*Rolf*. Jill, I just wanted to say—Need we?

[*Jill*. nodes.]

Seeing you yesterday—it did seem rotten.

*Jill*. We didn't begin it.

*Rolf*. No; but you don't understand. If you'd made yourself, as father has——

*Jill*. I hope I should be sorry.

*Rolf*. [Reproachfully] That isn't like you. Really he can't help thinking he's a public benefactor.

*Jill*. And we can't help thinking he's a pig. Sorry!

*Rolf*. If the survival of the fittest is right——

*Jill*. He may be fitter, but he's not going to survive.

*Rolf*. [Distracted] It looks like it, though.

*Jill*. Is that all you came to say?

*Rolf*. Suppose we joined, couldn't we stop it?

*Jill*. I don't feel like joining.

*Rolf*. We did shake hands.

*Jill*. One can't fight and not grow bitter.

*Rolf*. I don't feel bitter.

*Jill*. Wait; you'll feel it soon enough.

*Rolf*. Why? [Attentively] About Chloe? I do think your mother's manner to her is——

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*Jill*. Well?

*Rolf*. Snobbish. [*Jill* laughs.]
She may not be your class; and that's just why it's
snobbish.

*Jill*. I think you'd better shut up.

*Rolf*. What my father said was true; your mother's rudeness to her that day she came here, has made both him and Charlie ever so much more bitter.

[*Jill* whistles the Habanera from "Carmen."]

[Staring at her, rather angrily]

Is it a whistling matter?

*Jill*. No.

*Rolf*. I suppose you want me to go?

*Jill*. Yes.

*Rolf*. All right. Aren't we ever going to be friends again?

*Jill*. [Looking steadily at him] I don't expect so.

*Rolf*. That's very-horrible.

*Jill*. Lots of horrible things in the world.

*Rolf*. It's our business to make them fewer, Jill.

*Jill*. [Fiercely] Don't be moral.

*Rolf*. [Hurt] That's the last thing I want to be.—I only want to be friendly.

*Jill*. Better be real first.

*Rolf*. From the big point of view——

*Jill*. There isn't any. We're all out, for our own. And why not?

*Rolf*. By jove, you have got——

*Jill*. Cynical? Your father's motto—"Every man for himself." That's the winner—hands down. Goodbye!

*Rolf*. Jill! Jill!

*Jill*. [Putting her hands behind her back, hums]—
"If auld acquaintance be forgot
And days of auld lang syne"——

*Rolf*. Don't!

[With a pained gesture he goes out towards Left, through the French window.]

[*Jill*, who has broken off the song, stands with her hands clenched and her lips quivering.]

[*Fellows* enters Left.]

*Fellows*. Mr. Dawker, Miss, and two gentlemen.

*Jill*. Let the three gentlemen in, and me out.

[She passes him and goes out Left. And immediately. *Dawker* and the two *strangers* come in.]

*Fellows*. I'll inform Mrs. Hillcrist, sir. The Squire is on his rounds. [He goes out Left.]

[The *three men* gather in a discreet knot at the big bureau, having glanced at the two doors and the open French window.]

*Dawker*. Now this may come into Court, you know. If there's a screw loose anywhere, better mention it. [To *second strange*] You knew her personally?

*Second* S. What do you think? I don't, take girls on trust for that sort of job. She came to us highly recommended, too; and did her work very well. It was a double stunt—to make sure—wasn't it, George?

*First* S. Yes; we paid her for the two visits.

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*Second* S. I should know her in a minute; striking looking girl; had something in her face. Daresay she'd seen hard times.

*First* S. We don't want publicity.

*Dawker*. Not Likely. The threat'll do it; but the stakes are heavy —and the man's a slugger; we must be able to push it home. If you can both swear to her, it'll do the trick.

*Second* S. And about—I mean, we're losing time, you know, coming down here.

*Dawker*. [With a nod at *first stranger*] George here knows me. That'll be all right. I'll guarantee it well worth your while.

*Second* S. I don't want to do the girl harm, if she's married.

*Dawker*. No, no; nobody wants to hurt her. We just want a cinch on this fellow till he squeals.

[They separate a little as *Mrs*. *Hillcrist* enters from Right.]

*Dawker*. Good morning, ma'am. My friend's partner. Hornblower coming?

*Mrs*. H. At eleven. I had to send up a second note, Dawker.

*Dawker*. Squire not in?

*Mrs*. H. I haven't told him.

*Dawker*. [Nodding] Our friends might go in here [Pointing Right] and we can use 'em as the want 'em.

*Mrs*. H. [To the *strangers*] Will you make yourselves comfortable?

[She holds the door open, and they pass her into the room, Right.]

*Dawker*. [Showing document] I've had this drawn and engrossed. Pretty sharp work. Conveys the Centry, and Longmeadow; to the Squire at four thousand five hundred: Now, ma'am, suppose Hornblower puts his hand to that, hell have been done in the eye, and six thousand all told out o' pocket.—You'll have a very nasty neighbour here.

*Mrs*. H. But we shall still have the power to disclose that secret at any time.

*Dawker*. Yeh! But things might happen here you could never bring home to him. You can't trust a man like that. He isn't goin' to forgive me, I know.

*Mrs*. H. [Regarding him keenly] But if he signs, we couldn't honourably——

*Dawker*. No, ma'am, you couldn't; and I'm sure I don't want to do that girl a hurt. I just mention it because, of course, you can't guarantee that it doesn't get out.

*Mrs*. H. Not absolutely, I suppose.

[A look passes between them, which neither of them has quite sanctioned.]

[There's his car. It always seems to make more noise than any other.]

*Dawker*. He'll kick and flounder—but you leave him to ask what you want, ma'am; don't mention this [He puts the deed back into his pocket]. The Centry's no mortal good to him if he's not going to put up works; I should say he'd be glad to save what he can.

[*Mrs*. *Hillcrist* inclines her head. *Fellows* enters Left.]

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*Fellows*. [Apologetically] Mr. Hornblower, ma'am; by appointment, he says.

*Mrs*. H. Quite right, Fellows.

[*Hornblower* comes in, and *fellows* goes out.]

*Hornblower*. [Without salutation] I've come to ask ye point bleak what ye mean by writing me these letters. [He takes out two letters.] And we'll discus it in the presence of nobody, if ye, please.

*Mrs*. H. Mr. Dawker knows all that I know, and more.

*Hornblower*. Does he? Very well! Your second note says that my daughter-in-law has lied to me. Well, I've brought her, and what ye've got to say—if it's not just a trick to see me again—ye'll say to her face. [He takes a step towards the window.]

*Mrs*. H. Mr. Hornblower, you had better, decide that after hearing what it is—we shall be quite ready to repeat it in her presence; but we want to do as little harm as possible.

*Hornblower*. [Stopping] Oh! ye do! Well, what lies have ye been hearin'? Or what have ye made up? You and Mr. Dawker? Of course ye know there's a law of libel and slander. I'm, not the man to stop at that.

*Mrs*. H. [Calmly] Are you familiar with the law of divorce, Mr. Hornblower?

*Hornblower*. [Taken aback] No, I'm not. That is-----.

*Mrs*. H. Well, you know that misconduct is required. And I suppose you've heard that cases are arranged.

*Hornblower*. I know it's all very shocking—what about it?

*Mrs*. H. When cases are arranged, Mr. Hornblower, the man who is to be divorced often visits an hotel with a strange woman. I am extremely sorry to say that your daughter-in-law, before her marriage, was in the habit of being employed as such a woman.

*Hornblower*. Ye dreadful creature!

*Dawker*. [Quickly] All proved, up to the hilt!

*Hornblower*. I don't believe a word of it. Ye're lyin' to save your skins. How dare ye tell me such monstrosities? Dawker, I'll have ye in a criminal court.

*Dawker*. Rats! You saw a gent with me yesterday? Well, he's employed her.

*Hornblower*. A put-up job! Conspiracy!

*Mrs*. H. Go and get your daughter-in-law.

*Hornblower*. [With the first sensation of being in a net] It's a foul shame—a lying slander!

*Mrs*. H. If so, it's easily disproved. Go and fetch her.

*Hornblower*. [Seeing them unmoved] I will. I don't believe a word of it.

*Mrs*. H. I hope you are right.

[*Hornblower* goes out by the French window, *Dawker* slips to the door Right, opens it, and speaks to those within. *Mrs*. *Hillcrist* stands moistening her lips, and passim her handkerchief over them. *Hornblower* returns, preceding *Chloe*, strung up to hardness and defiance.]

*Hornblower*. Now then, let's have this impudent story torn to rags.

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*Chloe*. What story?

*Hornblower*. That you, my dear, were a woman—it's too shockin—I don't know how to tell ye——

*Chloe*. Go on!

*Hornblower*. Were a woman that went with men, to get them their divorce.

*Chloe*. Who says that?

*Hornblower*. That lady [Sneering] there, and her bull-terrier here.

*Chloe*. [Facing *Mrs*. *Hillcrist*] That's a charitable thing to say, isn't it?

*Mrs*. H. Is it true?

*Chloe*. No.

*Hornblower*. [Furiously] There! I'll have ye both on your knees to her!

*Dawker*. [Opening the door, Right] Come in.

[The *first stranger* comes in. *Chloe*, with a visible effort, turns to face him.]

*First* S. How do you do, Mrs. Vane?

*Chloe*. I don't know you.

*First* S. Your memory is bad, ma'am: You knew me yesterday well enough. One day is not a long time, nor are three years.

*Chloe*. Who are you?

*First* S. Come, ma'am, come! The Caster case.

*Chloe*. I don't know you, I say. [To *Mrs*. *Hillcrist*] How can you be so vile?

*First* S. Let me refresh your memory, ma'am. [Producing a notebook] Just on three years ago; "Oct.3. To fee and expenses Mrs. Vane with Mr. C——, Hotel Beaulieu, Twenty pounds. Oct. 10, Do., Twenty pounds." [To *Hornblower*] Would you like to glance at this book, sir? You'll see they're genuine entries.

[*Hornblower* makes a motion to do so, but checks himself and looks at *Chloe*.]

*Chloe*. [Hysterically] It's all lies—lies!

*First* S. Come, ma'am, we wish you no harm.

*Chloe*. Take me away. I won't be treated like this.

*Mrs*. H. [In a low voice] Confess.

*Chloe*. Lies!

*Hornblower*. Were ye ever called Vane?

*Chloe*. No, never.

[She makes a movement towards the window, but *Dawker* is in the way, and she halts. *First* S. [Opening the door, Right] Henry.]

[The *second stranger* comes in quickly. At sight of him *Chloe* throws up her hands, gasps, breaks down, stage Left, and stands covering her face with her hands. It is so complete a confession that *Hornblower* stands staggered; and, taking out a coloured handkerchief, wipes his brow.]

*Dawker*. Are you convinced?

*Hornblower*. Take those men away.

*Dawker*. If you're not satisfied, we can get other evidence; plenty.

*Hornblower*. [Looking at *Chloe*] That's enough. Take them out. Leave me alone with her.

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[*Dawker* takes them out Right. *Mrs*. *Hillcrist* passes *Hornblower* and goes out at the window. *Hornblower* moves down a step or two towards *Chloe*.]

*Hornblower*. My God!

*Chloe*. [With an outburst] Don't tell Charlie! Don't tell Charlie!

*Hornblower*. Chearlie! So, that was your manner of life.

[*Chloe* utters a moaning sound.]

So that's what ye got out of by marryin' into my family! Shame on ye, ye Godless thing!

*Chloe*. Don't tell Charlie!

*Hornblower*. And that's all ye can say for the wreck ye've wrought. My family, my works, my future! How dared ye!

*Chloe*. If you'd been me!——

*Hornblower*. An' these Hillcrists. The skin game of it!

*Chloe*. [Breathless] Father!

*Hornblower*. Don't call me that, woman!

*Chloe*. [Desperate] I'm going to have a child.

*Hornblower*. God! Ye are!

*Chloe*. Your grandchild. For the sake of it, do what these people want; and don't tell anyone—*don't tell Charlie*!

*Hornblower*. [Again wiping his forehead] A secret between us. I don't know that I can keep it. It's horrible. Poor Chearlie!

*Chloe*. [Suddenly fierce] You must keep it, you shall! I won't have him told. Don't make me desperate! I can be—I didn't live that life for nothing.

*Hornblower*. [Staring at her resealed in a new light] Ay; ye look a strange, wild woman, as I see ye. And we thought the world of ye!

*Chloe*. I love Charlie; I'm faithful to him. I can't live without him. You'll never forgive me, I know; but Charlie——! [Stretching out her hands.]

[*Hornblower* makes a bewildered gesture with his large hands.]

*Hornblower*. I'm all at sea here. Go out to the car and wait for me.

[*Chloe* passes him and goes out, Left.]

[Muttering to himself] So I'm down! Me enemies put their heels upon me head! Ah! but we'll see yet!

[He goes up to the window and beckons towards the Right.]

[*Mrs*. *Hillcrist* comes in.]

What d'ye want for this secret?

*Mrs*. H. Nothing.

*Hornblower*. Indeed! Wonderful!—the trouble ye've taken for— nothing.

*Mrs*. H. If you harm us we shall harm you. Any use whatever of the Centry.

*Hornblower*. For which ye made me pay nine thousand five hundred pounds.

*Mrs*. H. We will buy it from you.

*Hornblower*. At what price?

*Mrs*. H. The Centry at the price Miss Muffins would have taken at first, and Longmeadow at the price you—gave us—four thousand five hundred altogether.

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*Hornblower*. A fine price, and me six thousand out of pocket. Na, no! I'll keep it and hold it over ye. Ye daren't tell this secret so long as I've got it.

*Mrs*. H. No, Mr. Hornblower. On second thoughts, you must sell. You broke your word over the Jackmans. We can't trust you. We would rather have our place here ruined at once, than leave you the power to ruin it as and when you like. You will sell us the Centry and Longmeadow now, or you know what will happen.

*Hornblower*. [Writhing] I'll not. It's blackmail.

*Mrs*. H. Very well then! Go your own way and we'll go ours. There is no witness to this conversation.

*Hornblower*. [Venomously] By heaven, ye're a clever woman. Will ye swear by Almighty God that you and your family, and that agent of yours, won't breathe a word of this shockin' thing to mortal soul.

*Mrs*. H. Yes, if you sell.

*Hornblower*. Where's Dawker?

*Mrs*. H. [Going to the door, Right] Mr. Dawker

[*Dawker* comes in.]

*Hornblower*. I suppose ye've got your iniquity ready.

[*Dawker* grins and produces the document.]

It's mighty near conspiracy, this. Have ye got a Testament?

*Mrs*. H. My word will be enough, Mr. Hornblower.

*Hornblower*. Ye'll pardon me—I can't make it solemn enough for you.

*Mrs*. H. Very well; here is a Bible.

[She takes a small Bible from the bookshelf.]

*Dawker*. [Spreading document on bureau] This is a short conveyance of the Centry and Longmeadow—recites sale to you by Miss Mulling, of the first, John Hillcrist of the second, and whereas you have agreed for the sale to said John Hillcrist, for the sum of four thousand five hundred pounds, in consideration of the said sum, receipt whereof, you hereby acknowledge you do convey all that, *etc*. Sign here. I'll witness.

*Hornblower* [To *Mrs*. *Hillcrist*] Take that Book in your hand, and swear first. I swear by Almighty God never to breathe a word of what I know concerning Chloe Hornblower to any living soul.

*Mrs*. H. No, Mr. Hornblower; you will please sign first. We are not in the habit of breaking our word.

[*Hornblower* after a furious look at them, seizes a pen, runs his eye again over the deed, and signs, *Dawker* witnessing.]

To that oath, Mr. Hornblower, we shall add the words, “So long as the Hornblower family do us no harm.”

*Hornblower*. [With a snarl] Take it in your hands, both of ye, and together swear.

*Mrs*. H. [Taking the Book] I swear that I will breathe no word of what I know concerning Chloe Hornblower to any living soul, so long as the Hornblower family do us no harm.

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*Dawker*. I swear that too.

*Mrs*. H. I engage for my husband.

*Hornblower*. Where are those two fellows?

*Dawker*. Gone. It's no business of theirs.

*Hornblower*. It's no business of any of ye what has happened to a woman in the past. Ye know that. Good-day!

[He gives them a deadly look, and goes out, left, followed by *Dawker*.]

*Mrs*. H. [With her hand on the Deed] Safe!

[*Hillcrist* enters at the French window, followed by *Jill*.]

[Holding up the Deed] Look! He's just gone! I told you it was only necessary to use the threat. He caved in and signed this; we are sworn to say nothing. We've beaten him.

[*Hillcrist* studies the Deed.]

*Jill*. [Awed] We saw Chloe in the car. How did she take it, mother?

*Mrs*. H. Denied, then broke down when she saw our witnesses. I'm glad you were not here, Jack.

*Jill*. [Suddenly] I shall go and see her.

*Mrs*. H. Jill, you will not; you don't know what she's done.

*Jill*. I shall. She must be in an awful state.

*Hillcrist*. My dear, you can do her no good.

*Jill*. I think I can, Dodo.

*Mrs*. H. You don't understand human nature. We're enemies for life with those people. You're a little donkey if you think anything else.

*Jill*. I'm going, all the same.

*Mrs*. H. Jack, forbid her.

*Hillcrist*. [Lifting an eyebrow] Jill, be reasonable.

*Jill*. Suppose I'd taken a knock like that, Dodo, I'd be glad of friendliness from someone.

*Mrs*. H. You never could take a knock like that.

*Jill*. You don't know what you can do till you try, mother.

*Hillcrist*. Let her go, Amy. Im sorry for that young woman.

*Mrs*. H. You'd be sorry for a man who picked your pocket, I believe.

*Hillcrist*. I certainly should! Deuced little he'd get out of it, when I've paid for the Centry.

*Mrs*. H. [Bitterly] Much gratitude I get for saving you both our home!

*Jill*. [Disarmed] Oh! Mother, we are grateful. Dodo, show your gratitude.

*Hillcrist*. Well, my dear, it's an intense relief. I'm not good at showing my feelings, as you know. What d'you want me to do? Stand on one leg and crow?

*Jill*. Yes, Dodo, yes! Mother, hold him while I [Suddenly she stops, and all the fun goes out of her] No! I can't—I can't help thinking of her.

*Curtain* falls for a minute.

## SCENE II

When it rises again, the room is empty and dark, same for moonlight coming in through the French window, which is open.

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The figure of *Chloe*, in a black cloak, appears outside in the moonlight; she peers in, moves past, comes bank, hesitatingly enters. The cloak, fallen back, reveals a white evening dress; and that magpie figure stands poised watchfully in the dim light, then flaps unhappily Left and Right, as if she could not keep still. Suddenly she stands listening.

Rolf's voice. [Outside] Chloe! Chloe!

[He appears]

*Chloe*. [Going to the window] What are you doing here?

*Rolf*. What are you? I only followed you.

*Chloe*. Go away.

*Rolf*. What's the matter? Tell me!

*Chloe*. Go away, and don't say anything. Oh! The roses! [She has put her nose into some roses in a bowl on a big stand close to the window] Don't they smell lovely?

*Rolf*. What did Jill want this afternoon?

*Chloe*. I'll tell you nothing. Go away!

*Rolf*. I don't like leaving you here in this state.

*Chloe*. What state? I'm all right. Wait for me down in the drive, if you want to.

[*Rolf* starts to go, stops, looks at her, and does go. *Chloe*, with a little moaning sound, flutters again, magpie-like, up and down, then stands by the window listening. Voices are heard, Left. She darts out of the window and away to the Right, as *Hillcrist* and *Jill* come in. They have turned up the electric light, and come down in frond of the fireplace, where *Hillcrist* sits in an armchair, and *Jill* on the arm of it. They are in undress evening attire.]

*Hillcrist*. Now, tell me.

*Jill*. There isn't much, Dodo. I was in an awful funk for fear I should meet any of the others, and of course I did meet Rolf, but I told him some lie, and he took me to her room-boudoir, they call it —isn't boudoir a "dug-out" word?

*Hillcrist*. [Meditatively] The sulking room. Well?

*Jill*. She was sitting like this. [She buries her chin in her hands, wide her elbows on her knees] And she said in a sort of fierce way: "What do you want?" And I said: "I'm awfully sorry, but I thought you might like it."

*Hillcrist*. Well?

*Jill*. She looked at me hard, and said: "I suppose you know all about it." And I Said: "Only vaguely," because of course I don't. And she said: "Well, it was decent of you to come." Dodo, she looks like a lost soul. What has she done?

*Hillcrist*. She committed her real crime when she married young Hornblower without telling him. She came out of a certain world to do it.

*Jill*. Oh! [Staring in front of her] Is it very awful in that world, Dodo?

*Hillcrist*. [Uneasy] I don't know, Jill. Some can stand it, I suppose; some can't. I don't know which sort she is.

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*Jill*. One thing I'm sure of: she's awfully fond of Chearlie.

*Hillcrist*. That's bad; that's very bad.

*Jill*. And she's frightened, horribly. I think she's desperate.

*Hillcrist*. Women like that are pretty tough, Jill; don't judge her too much by your own feelings.

*Jill*. No; only——Oh! it was beastly; and of course I dried up.

*Hillcrist*. [Feelingly] H'm! One always does. But perhaps it was as well; you'd have been blundering in a dark passage.

*Jill*. I just said: "Father and I feel awfully sorry; if there's anything we can do——"

*Hillcrist*. That was risky, Jill.

*Jill*. (Disconsolately) I had to say something. I'm glad I went, anyway. I feel more human.

*Hillcrist*. We had to fight for our home. I should have felt like a traitor if I hadn't.

*Jill*. I'm not enjoying home tonight, Dodo.

*Hillcrist*. I never could hate proper; it's a confounded nuisance.

*Jill*. Mother's fearfully' bucked, and Dawker's simply oozing triumph. I don't trust him. Dodo; he's too—not pugilistic—the other one with a pug-naceous.

*Hillcrist*. He is rather.

*Jill*. I'm sure he wouldn't care tuppence if Chloe committed suicide.

*Hillcrist*. [Rising uneasily] Nonsense! Nonsense!

*Jill*. I wonder if mother would.

*Hillcrist*. [Turning his face towards the window] What's that? I thought I heard—[Louder] —Is these anybody out there?

[No answer. *Jill*, springs up and runs to the window.]

*Jill*. You!

[She dives through to the Right, and returns, holding *Chloe's* hand and drawing her forward]

Come in! It's only us! [To *Hillcrist*] Dodo!

*Hillcrist*. [Flustered, but making a show of courtesy] Good evening! Won't you sit down?

*Jill*. Sit down; you're all shaky.

[She makes *Chloe* sit down in the armchair, out of which they have risen, then locks the door, and closing the windows, draws the curtains hastily over them.]

*Hillcrist*. [Awkward and expectant] Can I do anything for you?

*Chloe*. I couldn't bear it he's coming to ask you——

*Hillcrist*. Who?

*Chloe*. My husband. [She draws in her breath with a long shudder, then seem to seize her courage in her hands] I've got to be quick. He keeps on asking—he knows there's something.

*Hillcrist*. Make your mind easy. We shan't tell him.

*Chloe*. [Appealing] Oh! that's not enough. Can't you tell him something to put him back to thinking it's all right? I've done him such a wrong. I didn't realise till after—I thought meeting him was just a piece of wonderful good luck, after what I'd been through. I'm not such a bad lot—not really.

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[She stops from the over-quivering of her lips. *Jill*, standing beside the chair, strokes her shoulder. *Hillcrist* stands very still, painfully biting at a finger.]

You see, my father went bankrupt, and I was in a shop——

*Hillcrist*. [Soothingly, and to prevent disclosures] Yes, yes; Yes, yes!

*Chloe*. I never gave a man away or did anything I was ashamed of—at least—I mean, I had to make my living in all sorts of ways, and then I met Charlie.

[Again she stopped from the quivering of her lips.]

*Jill*. It's all right.

*Chloe*. He thought I was respectable, and that was such a relief, you can't think, so—so I let him.

*Jill*. Dodo! It's awful

*Hillcrist*. It is!

*Chloe*. And after I married him, you see, I fell in love. If I had before, perhaps I wouldn't have dared only, I don't know—you never know, do you? When there's a straw going, you catch at it.

*Jill*. Of course you do.

*Chloe*. And now, you see, I'm going to have a child.

*Jill*. [Aghast] Oh! Are you?

*Hillcrist*. Good God!

*Chloe*. [Dully] I've been on hot bricks all this month, ever since that day here. I knew it was in the wind. What gets in the wind never gets out. [She rises and throws out her arms] Never! It just blows here and there [Desolately] and then—blows home. [Her voice changes to resentment] But I've paid for being a fool— 'tisn't fun, that sort of life, I can tell you. I'm not ashamed and repentant, and all that. If it wasn't for him! I'm afraid he'll never forgive me; it's such a disgrace for him—and then, to have his child! Being fond of him, I feel it much worse than anything I ever felt, and that's saying a good bit. It is.

*Jill*. [Energetically] Look here! He simply mustn't find out.

*Chloe*. That's it; but it's started, and he's bound to keep on because he knows there's something. A man isn't going to be satisfied when there's something he suspects about his wife, Charlie wouldn't never. He's clever, and he's jealous; and he's coming here.

[She stops, and looks round wildly, listening.]

*Jill*. Dodo, what can we say to put him clean off the scent?

*Hillcrist*. Anything—in reason.

*Chloe*. [Catching at this straw] You will! You see, I don't know what I'll do. I've got soft, being looked after—he does love me. And if he throws me off, I'll go under—that's all.

*Hillcrist*. Have you any suggestion?

*Chloe*. [Eagerly] The only thing is to tell him something positive, something he'll believe, that's not too bad—like my having been a lady clerk with those people who came here, and having been dismissed on suspicion of taking money. I could get him to believe that wasn't true.

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*Jill*. Yes; and it isn't—that's splendid! You'd be able to put such conviction into it. Don't you think so, Dodo?

*Hillcrist*. Anything I can. I'm deeply sorry.

*Chloe*. Thank you. And don't say I've been here, will you? He's very suspicious. You see, he knows that his father has re-sold that land to you; that's what he can't make out—that, and my coming here this morning; he knows something's being kept from him; and he noticed that man with Dawker yesterday. And my maid's been spying on me. It's in the air. He puts two and two together. But I've told him there's nothing he need worry about; nothing that's true.

*Hillcrist*. What a coil!

*Chloe*. I'm very honest and careful about money. So he won't believe that about me, and the old man wants to keep it from Charlie, I know.

*Hillcrist*. That does seem the best way out.

*Chloe*. [With a touch of defiance] I'm a true wife to him.

*Chloe*. Of course we know that.

*Hillcrist*. It's all unspeakably sad. Deception's horribly against the grain—but——

*Chloe*. [Eagerly] When I deceived him, I'd have deceived God Himself—I was so desperate. You've never been right down in the mud. You can't understand what I've been through.

*Hillcrist*. Yes, Yes. I daresay I'd have done the same. I should be the last to judge.

[*Chloe* covers her eyes with her hands.]

There, there! Cheer up! [He puts his hand on her arm.]

*Chloe*. [To herself] Darling Dodo!

*Chloe*. [Starting] There's somebody at the door. I must go; I must go.

[She runs to the window and slips through the curtains.]

[The handle of the door is again turned.]

*Jill*. [Dismayed] Oh! It's locked—I forgot.

[She spring to the door, unlocks and opens it, while *Hillcrist* goes to the bureau and sits down.]

It's all right, Fellows; I was only saying something rather important.

*Fellows*. [Coming in a step or two and closing the door behind him] Certainly, Miss. Mr. Charles 'Ornblower is in the hall. Wants to see you, sir, or Mrs. Hillcrist.

*Jill*. What a bore! Can you see him, Dodo?

*Hillcrist*. Er—yes. I suppose so. Show him in here, Fellows.

[As *fellows* goes out, *Jill* runs to the window, but has no time to do more than adjust the curtains and spring over to stand by her father, before *Charles* comes in. Though in evening clothes, he is white and disheveled for so spruce a young mean.]

*Charles*. Is my wife here?

*Hillcrist*. No, sir.

*Charles*. Has she been?

*Hillcrist*. This morning, I believe, Jill?

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*Jill*. Yes, she came this morning.

*Charles*. [staring at her] I know that—now, I mean?

*Jill*. No.

[*Hillcrist* shakes has head.]

*Charles*. Tell me what was said this morning.

*Hillcrist*. I was not here this morning.

*Charles*. Don't try to put me off. I know too much. [To *Jill*]
You.

*Jill*. Shall I, Dodo?

*Hillcrist*. No; I will. Won't you sit down?

*Charles*. No. Go on.

*Hillcrist*. [Moistening his lips] It appears, Mr. Hornblower, that my agent, Mr. Dawker—

[*Charles*, who is breathing hard, utters a sound of anger.]

—that my agent happens to know a firm, who in old days employed your wife. I should greatly prefer not to say any more, especially as we don't believe the story.

*Jill*. No; we don't.

*Charles*. Go on!

*Hillcrist*. [Getting up] Come! If I were you, I should refuse to listen to anything against my wife.

*Charles*. Go on, I tell you.

*Hillcrist*. You insist? Well, they say there was some question about the accounts, and your wife left them under a cloud. As I told you, we don't believe it.

*Charles*. [Passionately] Liars!

[He makes a rush for the door.]

*Hillcrist*. [Starting] What did you say?

*Jill*. [Catching his arm] Dodo! [Sotto voce] We are, you know.

*Charles*. [Turning back to them] Why do you tell me that lie? When I've just had the truth out of that little scoundrel! My wife's been here; she put you up to it.

[The face of *Chloe* is seen transfixed between the curtains, parted by her hands.]

She—she put you up to it. Liar that she is—a living lie. For three years a living lie!

[*Hillcrist* whose face alone is turned towards the curtains, sees that listening face. His hand goes up from uncontrollable emotion.]

And hasn't now the pluck to tell me. I've done with her. I won't own a child by such a woman.

[With a little sighing sound *Chloe* drops the curtain and vanishes.]

*Hillcrist*. For God's sake, man, think of what you're saying. She's in great distress.

*Charles*. And what am I?

*Jill*. She loves you, you know.

*Charles*. Pretty love! That scoundrel Dawker told me—told me—Horrible! Horrible!

*Hillcrist*. I deeply regret that our quarrel should have brought this about.

*Charles*. [With intense bitterness] Yes, you've smashed my life.

[Unseen by them, *Mrs*. *Hillcrist* has entered and stands by the door, Left.]

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*Mrs*. H. Would you have wished to live on in ignorance? [They all turn to look at her.]

*Charles*. [With a writhing movement] I don't know. But—you—you did it.

*Mrs*. H. You shouldn't have attacked us.

*Charles*. What did we do to you—compared with this?

*Mrs*. H. All you could.

*Hillcrist*. Enough, enough! What can we do to help you?

*Charles*. Tell me where my wife is.

[*Jill* draws the curtains apart—the window is open—*Jill* looks out. They wait in silence.]

*Jill*. We don't know.

*Charles*. Then she was here?

*Hillcrist*. Yes, sir; and she heard you.

*Charles*. All the better if she did. She knows how I feel.

*Hillcrist*. Brace up; be gentle with her.

*Charles*. Gentle? A woman who—who——

*Hillcrist*. A most unhappy creature. Come!

*Charles*. Damn your sympathy!

[He goes out into the moonlight, passing away.]

*Jill*. Dodo, we ought to look for her; I'm awfully afraid.

*Hillcrist*. I saw her there—listening. With child! Who knows where things end when they and begin? To the gravel pit, Jill; I'll go to the pond. No, we'll go together. [They go out.]

[*Mrs*. *Hillcrist* comes down to the fireplace, rings the bell and stands there, thinking. *Fellows* enters.]

*Mrs*. H. I want someone to go down to Mr. Dawker's.

*Fellows*. Mr. Dawker is here, ma'am, waitin' to see you.

*Mrs*. H. Ask him to come in. Oh! and Fellows, you can tell the Jackmans that they can go back to their cottage.

*Fellows*. Very good, ma'am. [He goes out.]

[*Mrs*. *Hillcrist* searches at the bureau, finds and takes out the deed. DAWKERS comes in; he has the appearance of a man whose temper has been badly ruffled.]

*Mrs*. H. Charles Hornblower—how did it happen?

*Dawker*. He came to me. I said I knew nothing. He wouldn't take it; went for me, abused me up hill and down dale; said he knew everything, and then he began to threaten me. Well, I lost my temper, and I told him.

*Mrs*. H. That's very serious, Dawker, after our promise. My husband is most upset.

*Dawker*. [Sullenly] It's not my fault, ma'am; he shouldn't have threatened and goaded me on. Besides, it's got out that there's a scandal; common talk in the village—not the facts, but quite enough to cook their goose here. They'll have to go. Better have done with it, anyway, than have enemies at your door.

*Mrs*. H. Perhaps; but—Oh! Dawker, take charge of this. [She hands him the deed] These people are desperate—and—I'm sot sure of my husband when his feelings are worked on.

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[The sound of a car stopping.]

*Dawker*. [At the window, looking to the Left] Hornblower's, I think. Yes, he's getting out.

*Mrs*. H. [Bracing herself] You'd better wait, then.

*Dawker*. He mustn't give me any of his sauce; I've had enough.

[The door is opened and *Hornblower* enters, pressing so on the heels of *fellows* that the announcement of his name is lost.]

*Hornblower*. Give me that deed! Ye got it out of me by false pretences and treachery. Ye swore that nothing should be heard of this. Why! me own servants know.

*Mrs*. H. That has nothing to do with us. Your son came and wrenched the knowledge out of Mr. *Dawker* by abuse and threats; that is all. You will kindly behave yourself here, or I shall ask that you be shown out.

*Hornblower*. Give me that deed, I say! [He suddenly turns on *Dawker*] Ye little ruffian, I see it in your pocket.

[The end indeed is projecting from *Dawker's* breast pocket.]

*Dawker*. [Seeing red] Now, look 'ere, 'Ornblower, I stood a deal from your son, and I'll stand no more.

*Hornblower*. [To *Mrs*. *Hillcrist*] I'll ruin your place yet! [To *Dawker*] Ye give me that deed, or I'll throttle ye.

[He closes on *Dawker*, and makes a snatch at the deed. *Dawker*, springs at him, and the two stand swaying, trying for a grip at each other's throats. *Mrs*. *Hillcrist* tries to cross and reach the bell, but is shut off by their swaying struggle.][Suddenly *Rolf* appears in the window, looks wildly at the struggle, and seizes *Dawker's* hands, which have reached *Hornblower's* throat. *Jill*, who is following, rushes up to him and clutches his arm.]

*Jill*. Rolf! All of you! Stop! Look!

[*Dawker's* hand relaxes, and he is swung round. *Hornblower* staggers and recovers himself, gasping for breath. All turn to the window, outside which in the moonlight *Hillcrist* and *Charles Hornblower* have *Chloe's* motionless body in their arms.]

In the gravel pit. She's just breathing; that's all.

*Mrs*. H. Bring her in. The brandy, Jill!

*Hornblower*. No. Take her to the car. Stand back, young woman! I want no help from any of ye. Rolf—Chearlie—take her up.

[They lift and bear her away, Left. *Jill* follows.]

Hillcrist, ye've got me beaten and disgraced hereabouts, ye've destroyed my son's married life, and ye've killed my grandchild. I'm not staying in this cursed spot, but if ever I can do you or yours a hurt, I will.

*Dawker*. [Muttering] That's right. Squeal and threaten. You began it.

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*Hillcrist*. Dawker, have the goodness!  Hornblower, in the presence of what may be death, with all my heart I'm sorry.

*Hornblower*.  Ye hypocrite!

[He passes them with a certain dignity, and goes out at the window, following to his car.]

[*Hillcrist* who has stood for a moment stock-still, goes slowly forward and sits in his swivel chair.]

*Mrs*. H. Dawker, please tell Fellows to telephone to Dr. Robinson to go round to the Hornblowers at once.

[*Dawker*, fingering the deed, and with a noise that sounds like "The cur!" goes out, Left.]

[At the fireplace]

Jack!  Do you blame me?

*Hillcrist*. [Motionless] No.

*Mrs*. H. Or Dawker?  He's done his best.

*Hillcrist*. No.

*Mrs*. H. [Approaching] What is it?

*Hillcrist*. Hypocrite!

[*Jill* comes running in at the window.]

*Jill*.  Dodo, she's moved; she's spoken.  It may not be so bad.

*Hillcrist*. Thank God for that!

[*Fellows* enters, Left.]

*Fellows*.  The Jackmans, ma'am.

*Hillcrist*. Who?  What's this?

[The *Jackmans* have entered, standing close to the door.]

*Mrs*. J. We're so glad we can go back, sir—ma'am, we just wanted to thank you.

[There is a silence. They see that they are not welcome.]

Thank you kindly, sir. Good night, ma'am.

[They shuffle out. ]

*Hillcrist*. I'd forgotten their existence. [He gets up] What is it that gets loose when you begin a fight, and makes you what you think you're not? What blinding evil! Begin as you may, it ends in this —skin game! Skin game!

*Jill*. [Rushing to him] It's not you, Dodo; it's not you, beloved Dodo.

*Hillcrist*. It is me. For I am, or should be, master in this house!

*Mrs*. H. I don't understand.

*Hillcrist*. When we began this fight, we had clean hands—are they clean' now? What's gentility worth if it can't stand fire?

# CURTAIN

**FROM THE SERIES OF SIX SHORT PLAYS**

# Contents:



# THE FIRST AND THE LAST

**A DRAMA IN THREE SCENES**

# PERSONS OF THE PLAY

*Keith Darrant*, K.C.
*Larry Darrant*, His Brother.
*Wanda*.

*Scene* I. *Keith's* Study.

*Scene* II. WANDA's Room.

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*Scene* III.  The Same.

Between *scene* I. and *scene* II.—Thirty hours.
Between *scene* II. and *scene* III.—Two months.

## SCENE I

It is six o'clock of a November evening, in *Keith* DARRANT'S study.  A large, dark-curtained room where the light from a single reading-lamp falling on Turkey carpet, on books beside a large armchair, on the deep blue-and-gold coffee service, makes a sort of oasis before a log fire.  In red Turkish slippers and an old brown velvet coat, *Keith Darrant* sits asleep.  He has a dark, clean-cut, clean-shaven face, dark grizzling hair, dark twisting eyebrows.

[The curtained door away out in the dim part of the room behind him is opened so softly that he does not wake.  *Larry Darrant* enters and stands half lost in the curtain over the door.  A thin figure, with a worn, high cheek-boned face, deep-sunk blue eyes and wavy hair all ruffled—a face which still has a certain beauty.  He moves inwards along the wall, stands still again and utters a gasping sigh.  *Keith* stirs in his chair.]

*Keith*.  Who's there?

*Larry*. [In a stifled voice] Only I—Larry.

*Keith*. [Half-waked] Come in!  I was asleep. [He does not turn his head, staring sleepily at the fire.]

The sound of LARRY's breathing can be heard.

[Turning his head a little] Well, Larry, what is it?

*Larry* comes skirting along the wall, as if craving its support,
outside the radius of the light.

[Staring] Are you ill?

*Larry* stands still again and heaves a deep sigh.

*Keith*. [Rising, with his back to the fire, and staring at his brother] What is it, man? [Then with a brutality born of nerves suddenly ruffled] Have you committed a murder that you stand there like a fish?

*Larry*. [In a whisper] Yes, Keith.

*Keith*. [With vigorous disgust] By Jove! Drunk again! [In a voice changed by sudden apprehension] What do you mean by coming here in this state? I told you—— If you weren't my brother——! Come here, where I can we you! What's the matter with you, Larry?

[With a lurch *Larry* leaves the shelter of the wall and sinks into a chair in the circle of light.]

*Larry*. It's true.

[*Keith* steps quickly forward and stares down into his brother's eyes, where is a horrified wonder, as if they would never again get on terms with his face.]

*Keith*. [Angry, bewildered-in a low voice] What in God's name is this nonsense?

[He goes quickly over to the door and draws the curtain aside, to see that it is shut, then comes back to *Larry*, who is huddling over the fire.]

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Come, Larry!  Pull yourself together and drop exaggeration!  What on earth do you mean?

*Larry*. [In a shrill outburst] It's true, I tell you; I've killed a man.

*Keith*. [Bracing himself; coldly] Be quiet!

*Larry* lifts his hands and wrings them.

[Utterly taken aback] Why come here and tell me this?

*Larry*.  Whom should I tell, Keith?  I came to ask what I'm to do— give myself up, or what?

*Keith*.  When—when—what——?

*Larry*.  Last night.

*Keith*.  Good God!  How?  Where?  You'd better tell me quietly from the beginning. Here, drink this coffee; it'll clear your head.

He pours out and hands him a cup of coffee.  *Larry* drinks it off.

*Larry*.  My head!  Yes!  It's like this, Keith—there's a girl——

*Keith*.  Women!  Always women, with you!  Well?

*Larry*.  A Polish girl.  She—her father died over here when she was sixteen, and left her all alone.  There was a mongrel living in the same house who married her—or pretended to.  She's very pretty, Keith.  He left her with a baby coming.  She lost it, and nearly starved.  Then another fellow took her on, and she lived with him two years, till that brute turned up again and made her go back to him.  He used to beat her black and blue.  He'd left her again when—I met her.  She was taking anybody then. [He stops, passes his hand over his lips, looks up at *Keith*, and goes on defiantly] I never met a sweeter woman, or a truer, that I swear.  Woman!  She's only twenty now!  When I went to her last night, that devil had found her out again.  He came for me—a bullying, great, hulking brute.  Look! [He touches a dark mark on his forehead] I took his ugly throat, and when I let go—[He stops and his hands drop.]

*Keith*.  Yes?

*Larry*. [In a smothered voice] Dead, Keith.  I never knew till afterwards that she was hanging on to him—to h-help me. [Again he wrings his hands.]

*Keith*. [In a hard, dry voice] What did you do then?

*Larry*. We—we sat by it a long time.

*Keith*. Well?

*Larry*. Then I carried it on my back down the street, round a corner, to an archway.

*Keith*. How far?

*Larry*. About fifty yards.

*Keith*. Was—did anyone see?

*Larry*. No.

*Keith*. What time?

*Larry*. Three in the morning.

*Keith*. And then?

*Larry*. Went back to her.

*Keith*. Why—in heaven's name?

*Larry*. She way lonely and afraid. So was I, Keith.

*Keith*. Where is this place?

*Larry*. Forty-two Borrow Square, Soho.

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*Keith*. And the archway?

*Larry*. Corner of Glove Lane.

*Keith*. Good God! Why, I saw it in the paper this morning. They were talking of it in the Courts! [He snatches the evening paper from his armchair, and runs it over anal reads] Here it is again. "Body of a man was found this morning under an archway in Glove Lane. From marks about the throat grave suspicion of foul play are entertained. The body had apparently been robbed." My God! [Suddenly he turns] You saw this in the paper and dreamed it. D'you understand, Larry?—you dreamed it.

*Larry*. [Wistfully] If only I had, Keith!

[*Keith* makes a movement of his hands almost like his brother's.]

*Keith*. Did you take anything from the-body?

*Larry*. [Drawing au envelope from his pocket] This dropped out while we were struggling.

*Keith*. [Snatching it and reading] "Patrick Walenn"—Was that his name? "Simon's Hotel, Farrier Street, London." [Stooping, he puts it in the fire] No!—that makes me——[He bends to pluck it out, stays his hand, and stamps it suddenly further in with his foot] What in God's name made you come here and tell me? Don't you know I'm—I'm within an ace of a Judgeship?

*Larry*. [Simply] Yes. You must know what I ought to do. I didn't, mean to kill him, Keith. I love the girl—I love her. What shall I do?

*Keith*. Love!

*Larry*. [In a flash] Love!—That swinish brute! A million creatures die every day, and not one of them deserves death as he did. But but I feel it here. [Touching his heart] Such an awful clutch, Keith. Help me if you can, old man. I may be no good, but I've never hurt a fly if I could help it. [He buries his face in his hands.]

*Keith*. Steady, Larry! Let's think it out. You weren't seen, you say?

*Larry*. It's a dark place, and dead night.

*Keith*. When did you leave the girl again?

*Larry*. About seven.

*Keith*. Where did you go?

*Larry*. To my rooms.

*Keith*. To Fitzroy Street?

*Larry*. Yes.

*Keith*. What have you done since?

*Larry*. Sat there—thinking.

*Keith*. Not been out?

*Larry*. No.

*Keith*. Not seen the girl?

[*Larry* shakes his head.]

Will she give you away?

*Larry*. Never.

*Keith*. Or herself hysteria?

*Larry*. No.

*Keith*. Who knows of your relations with her?

*Larry*. No one.

*Keith*. No one?

*Larry*. I don't know who should, Keith.

*Keith*. Did anyone see you go in last night, when you first went to her?

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*Larry*. No. She lives on the ground floor. I've got keys.

*Keith*. Give them to me.

*Larry* takes two keys from his pocket and hands them to his brother.

*Larry*. [Rising] I can't be cut off from her!

*Keith*. What! A girl like that?

*Larry*. [With a flash] Yes, a girl like that.

*Keith*. [Moving his hand to put down old emotion] What else have you that connects you with her?

*Larry*. Nothing.

*Keith*. In your rooms?

[*Larry* shakes his head.]

Photographs? Letters?

*Larry*. No.

*Keith*. Sure?

*Larry*. Nothing.

*Keith*. No one saw you going back to her?

[*Larry* shakes his head. ] Nor leave in the morning? You can't be certain.

*Larry*. I am.

*Keith*. You were fortunate. Sit down again, man. I must think.

He turns to the fire and leans his elbows on the mantelpiece and his head on his hands. *Larry* Sits down again obediently.

*Keith*. It's all too unlikely. It's monstrous!

*Larry*. [Sighing it out] Yes.

*Keith*. This Walenn—was it his first reappearance after an absence?

*Larry*. Yes.

*Keith*. How did he find out where she was?

*Larry*. I don't know.

*Keith*. [Brutally] How drunk were you?

*Larry*. I was not drunk.

*Keith*. How much had you drunk, then?

*Larry*. A little claret—nothing!

*Keith*. You say you didn't mean to kill him.

*Larry*. God knows.

*Keith*. That's something.

*Larry*. He hit me. [He holds up his hands] I didn't know I was so strong.

*Keith*. She was hanging on to him, you say?—That's ugly.

*Larry*. She was scared for me.

*Keith*. D'you mean she—loves you?

*Larry*. [Simply] Yes, Keith.

*Keith*. [Brutally] Can a woman like that love?

*Larry*. [Flashing out] By God, you are a stony devil! Why not?

*Keith*. [Dryly] I'm trying to get at truth. If you want me to help,
I must know everything. What makes you think she's fond of you?

*Larry*. [With a crazy laugh] Oh, you lawyer! Were you never in a woman's arms?

*Keith*. I'm talking of love.

*Larry*. [Fiercely] So am I. I tell you she's devoted. Did you ever pick up a lost dog? Well, she has the lost dog's love for me. And I for her; we picked each other up. I've never felt for another woman what I feel for her—she's been the saving of me!

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*Keith*. [With a shrug] What made you choose that archway?

*Larry*. It was the first dark place.

*Keith*. Did his face look as if he'd been strangled?

*Larry*. Don't!

*Keith*. Did it?

[*Larry* bows his head.]

Very disfigured?

*Larry*. Yes.

*Keith*. Did you look to see if his clothes were marked?

*Larry*. No.

*Keith*. Why not?

*Larry*. [In an outburst] I'm not made of iron, like you. Why not?
If you had done it——!

*Keith*. [Holding up his hand] You say he was disfigured. Would he be recognisable?

*Larry*. [Wearily] I don't know.

*Keith*. When she lived with him last—where was that?

*Larry*. In Pimlico, I think.

*Keith*. Not Soho?

[*Larry* shakes his head.]

How long has she been at this Soho place?

*Larry*. Nearly a year.

*Keith*. Living this life?

*Larry*. Till she met me.

*Keith*. Till, she met you? And you believe——?

*Larry*. [Starting up] Keith!

*Keith*. [Again raising his hand] Always in the same rooms?

*Larry*. [Subsiding] Yes.

*Keith*. What was he? A professional bully?

[*Larry* nods.]

Spending most of his time abroad, I suppose.

*Larry*. I think so.

*Keith*. Can you say if he was known to the police?

*Larry*. I've never heard.

*Keith* turns away and walks up and down; then, stopping at LARRY's chair, he speaks.

*Keith*. Now listen, Larry. When you leave here, go straight home, and stay there till I give you leave to go out again. Promise.

*Larry*. I promise.

*Keith*. Is your promise worth anything?

*Larry*. [With one of his flashes] "Unstable as water, he shall not excel!"

*Keith*. Exactly. But if I'm to help you, you must do as I say.
I must have time to think this out. Have you got money?

*Larry*. Very little.

*Keith*. [Grimly] Half-quarter day—yes, your quarter's always spent by then. If you're to get away—never mind, I can manage the money.

*Larry*. [Humbly] You're very good, Keith; you've always been very good to me—I don't know why.

*Keith*. [Sardonically] Privilege of A brother. As it happens, I'm thinking of myself and our family. You can't indulge yourself in killing without bringing ruin. My God! I suppose you realise that you've made me an accessory after the fact—me, King's counsel—-sworn to the service of the Law, who, in a year or two, will have the trying of cases like yours! By heaven, Larry, you've surpassed yourself!

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*Larry*. [Bringing out a little box] I'd better have done with it.

KErra.  You fool!  Give that to me.

*Larry*. [With a strange smite] No. [He holds up a tabloid between finger and thumb] White magic, Keith!  Just one—and they may do what they like to you, and you won't know it.  Snap your fingers at all the tortures.  It's a great comfort!  Have one to keep by you?

*Keith*.  Come, Larry!  Hand it over.

*Larry*. [Replacing the box] Not quite!  You've never killed a man, you see. [He gives that crazy laugh.] D'you remember that hammer when we were boys and you riled me, up in the long room?  I had luck then.  I had luck in Naples once.  I nearly killed a driver for beating his poor brute of a horse.  But now—!  My God! [He covers his face.]

*Keith* touched, goes up and lays a hand on his shoulder.

*Keith*.  Come, Larry!  Courage!

*Larry* looks up at him.

*Larry*.  All right, Keith; I'll try.

*Keith*.  Don't go out.  Don't drink.  Don't talk.  Pull yourself together!

*Larry*. [Moving towards the door] Don't keep me longer than you can help, Keith.

*Keith*.  No, no.  Courage!

*Larry* reaches the door, turns as if to say something-finds no words, and goes.

[To the fire] Courage!  My God!  I shall need it!

*Curtain*

## SCENE II

At out eleven o'clock the following night an WANDA'S room on the ground floor in Soho.  In the light from one close-shaded electric bulb the room is but dimly visible.  A dying fire burns on the left.  A curtained window in the centre of the back wall.  A door on the right.  The furniture is plush-covered and commonplace, with a kind of shabby smartness.  A couch, without back or arms, stands aslant, between window and fire.[On

this *Wanda* is sitting, her knees drawn up under her, staring at the embers. She has on only her nightgown and a wrapper over it; her bare feet are thrust into slippers. Her hands are crossed and pressed over her breast. She starts and looks up, listening. Her eyes are candid and startled, her face alabaster pale, and its pale brown hair, short and square-cut, curls towards her bare neck. The startled dark eyes and the faint rose of her lips are like colour-staining on a white mask.][Footsteps as of a policeman, very measured, pass on the pavement outside, and die away. She gets up and steals to the window, draws one curtain aside so that a chink of the night is seen. She opens the curtain wider, till the shape of a bare, witch-like tree becomes visible in the open space of the little Square on the far side of the road. The footsteps are heard once more coming nearer. *Wanda*

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closes the curtains and cranes back. They pass and die again. She moves away and looking down at the floor between door and couch, as though seeing something there; shudders; covers her eyes; goes back to the couch and down again just as before, to stare at the embers. Again she is startled by noise of the outer door being opened. She springs up, runs and turns the light by a switch close to the door. By the glimmer of the fire she can just be seen standing by the dark window-curtains, listening. There comes the sound of subdued knocking on her door. She stands in breathless terror. The knocking is repeated. The sound of a latchkey in the door is heard. Her terror leaves her. The door opens; a man enters in a dark, fur overcoat.]

Wanda. [In a voice of breathless relief, with a rather foreign accent] Oh! it's you, Larry! Why did you knock? I was so frightened. Come in! [She crosses quickly, and flings her arms round his neck] [Recoiling—in a terror-stricken whisper] Oh! Who is it?

*Keith*. [In a smothered voice] A friend of Larry's. Don't be frightened.

She has recoiled again to the window; and when he finds the switch and turns the light up, she is seen standing there holding her dark wrapper up to her throat, so that her face has an uncanny look of being detached from the body.

[Gently] You needn't be afraid. I haven't come to do you harm— quite the contrary. [Holding up the keys] Larry wouldn't have given me these, would he, if he hadn't trusted me?

*Wanda* does not move, staring like a spirit startled out of the flesh.

[After looking round him] I'm sorry to have startled you.

*Wanda*. [In a whisper] Who are you, please?

*Keith*. Larry's brother.

*Wanda*, with a sigh of utter relief, steals forward to the couch and sinks down. *Keith* goes up to her.

He'd told me.

*Wanda*. [Clasping her hands round her knees.] Yes?

*Keith*. An awful business!

*Wanda*. Yes; oh, yes! Awful—it is awful!

*Keith*. [Staring round him again.] In this room?

*Wanda*. Just where you are standing. I see him now, always falling.

*Keith*. [Moved by the gentle despair in her voice] You—look very young. What's your name?

*Wanda*. Wanda.

*Keith*. Are you fond of Larry?

*Wanda*. I would die for him!

[A moment's silence.]

*Keith*. I—I've come to see what you can do to save him.

*Wanda*, [Wistfully] You would not deceive me. You are really his brother?

*Keith*. I swear it.

*Wanda*. [Clasping her hands] If I can save him! Won't you sit down?

*Keith*. [Drawing up a chair and sitting] This, man, your—your husband, before he came here the night before last—how long since you saw him?

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*Wanda*. Eighteen month.

*Keith*. Does anyone about here know you are his wife?

*Wanda*. No. I came here to live a bad life. Nobody know me. I am quite alone.

*Keith*. They've discovered who he was—you know that?

*Wanda*. No; I have not dared to go out.

*Keith*: Well, they have; and they'll look for anyone connected with him, of course.

*Wanda*. He never let people think I was married to him. I don't know if I was—really. We went to an office and signed our names; but he was a wicked man. He treated many, I think, like me.

*Keith*. Did my brother ever see him before?

*Wanda*. Never! And that man first went for him.

*Keith*. Yes. I saw the mark. Have you a servant?

*Wanda*. No. A woman come at nine in the morning for an hour.

*Keith*. Does she know Larry?

*Wanda*. No. He is always gone.

*Keith*. Friends—acquaintances?

*Wanda*. No; I am verree quiet. Since I know your brother, I see no one, sare.

*Keith*. [Sharply] Do you mean that?

*Wanda*. Oh, yes! I love him. Nobody come here but him for a long time now.

*Keith*. How long?

*Wanda*. Five month.

*Keith*. So you have not been out since——?

[*Wanda* shakes her head.]

What have you been doing?

*Wanda*. [Simply] Crying. [Pressing her hands to her breast] He is in danger because of me. I am so afraid for him.

*Keith*. [Checking her emotion] Look at me.

[She looks at him.]

If the worst comes, and this man is traced to you, can you trust yourself not to give Larry away?

*Wanda*. [Rising and pointing to the fire] Look! I have burned all the things he have given me—even his picture. Now I have nothing from him.

*Keith*. [Who has risen too] Good! One more question. Do the police know you—-because—of your life?

[She looks at him intently, and shakes her, head.]

You know where Larry lives?

*Wanda*. Yes.

*Keith*. You mustn't go there, and he mustn't come to you.

[She bows her head; then, suddenly comes close to him.]

*Wanda*. Please do not take him from me altogether. I will be so careful. I will not do anything to hurt him. But if I cannot see him sometimes, I shall die. Please do not take him from me.

[She catches his hand and presses it desperately between her own.]

*Keith*. Leave that to me. I'm going to do all I can.

*Wanda*. [Looking up into his face] But you will be kind?

Suddenly she bends and kisses his hand. *Keith* draws his hand away, and she recoils a little humbly, looking up at him again. Suddenly she stands rigid, listening.

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[In a whisper] Listen!  Someone—out there!

She darts past him and turns out the light.  There is a knock on the door.  They are now close together between door and window.

[Whispering] Oh!  Who is it?

*Keith*. [Under his breath] You said no one comes but Larry.

*Wanda*.  Yes, and you have his keys.  Oh! if it is Larry!  I must open!

*Keith* shrinks back against the wall.  *Wanda* goes to the door.

[Opening the door an inch] Yes?  Please?  Who?

A thin streak of light from a bull's-eye lantern outside plays over the wall.  A Policeman's voice says:  "All right, Miss.  Your outer door's open.  You ought to keep it shut after dark, you know."

*Wanda*.  Thank you, air.

[The sound of retreating footsteps, of the outer door closing. *Wanda* shuts the door.]

A policeman!

*Keith*. [Moving from the wall] Curse!  I must have left that door. [Suddenly-turning up the light] You told me they didn't know you.

*Wanda*. [Sighing] I did not think they did, sir.  It is so long I was not out in the town; not since I had Larry.

*Keith* gives her an intent look, then crosses to the fire.  He stands there a moment, looking down, then turns to the girl, who has crept back to the couch.

*Keith*. [Half to himself] After your life, who can believe——?  Look here!  You drifted together and you'll drift apart, you know.  Better for him to get away and make a clean cut of it.

*Wanda*. [Uttering a little moaning sound] Oh, sir!  May I not love, because I have been bad?  I was only sixteen when that man spoiled me.  If you knew——

*Keith*. I'm thinking of Larry. With you, his danger is much greater. There's a good chance as things are going. You may wreck it. And for what? Just a few months more of—well—you know.

*Wanda*. [Standing at the head of the couch and touching her eyes with her hands] Oh, sir! Look! It is true. He is my life. Don't take him away from me.

*Keith*. [Moved and restless] You must know what Larry is. He'll never stick to you.

*Wanda*. [Simply] He will, sir.

*Keith*. [Energetically] The last man on earth to stick to anything! But for the sake of a whim he'll risk his life and the honour of all his family. I know him.

*Wanda*. No, no, you do not. It is I who know him.

*Keith*. Now, now! At any moment they may find out your connection with that man. So long as Larry goes on with you, he's tied to this murder, don't you see?

*Wanda*. [Coming close to him] But he love me. Oh, sir! he love me!

*Keith*. Larry has loved dozens of women.

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*Wanda*. Yes, but——[Her face quivers].

*Keith*. [Brusquely] Don't cry! If I give you money, will you disappear, for his sake?

*Wanda*. [With a moan] It will be in the water, then. There will be no cruel men there.

*Keith*. Ah! First Larry, then you! Come now. It's better for you both. A few months, and you'll forget you ever met.

*Wanda*. [Looking wildly up] I will go if Larry say I must. But not to live. No! [Simply] I could not, sir.

[*Keith*, moved, is silent.]

I could not live without Larry. What is left for a girl like me— when she once love? It is finish.

*Keith*. I don't want you to go back to that life.

*Wanda*. No; you do not care what I do. Why should you? I tell you I will go if Larry say I must.

*Keith*. That's not enough. You know that. You must take it out of his hands. He will never give up his present for the sake of his future. If you're as fond of him as you say, you'll help to save him.

*Wanda*. [Below her breath] Yes! Oh, yes! But do not keep him long from me—I beg! [She sinks to the floor and clasps his knees.]

*Keith*. Well, well! Get up.

[There is a tap on the window-pane]

Listen!

[A faint, peculiar whistle. ]

*Wanda*. [Springing up] Larry! Oh, thank God!

[She runs to the door, opens it, and goes out to bring him in.
*Keith* stands waiting, facing the open doorway.]

[*Larry* entering with *Wanda* just behind him.]

*Larry*. Keith!

*Keith*. [Grimly] So much for your promise not to go out!

*Larry*. I've been waiting in for you all day. I couldn't stand it any longer.

*Keith*. Exactly!

*Larry*. Well, what's the sentence, brother? Transportation for life and then to be fined forty pounds'?

*Keith*. So you can joke, can you?

*Larry*. Must.

*Keith*. A boat leaves for the Argentine the day after to-morrow; you must go by it.

*Larry*. [Putting his arms round *Wanda*, who is standing motionless with her eyes fixed on him] Together, Keith?

*Keith*. You can't go together. I'll send her by the next boat.

*Larry*. Swear?

*Keith*. Yes. You're lucky they're on a false scent.

*Larry*. What?

*Keith*. You haven't seen it?

*Larry*. I've seen nothing, not even a paper.

*Keith*. They've taken up a vagabond who robbed the body. He pawned a snake-shaped ring, and they identified this Walenn by it. I've been down and seen him charged myself.

*Larry*. With murder?

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*Wanda*. [Faintly] Larry!

*Keith*. He's in no danger. They always get the wrong man first. It'll do him no harm to be locked up a bit—hyena like that. Better in prison, anyway, than sleeping out under archways in this weather.

*Larry*. What was he like, Keith?

*Keith*. A little yellow, ragged, lame, unshaven scarecrow of a chap.
They were fools to think he could have had the strength.

*Larry*. What! [In an awed voice] Why, I saw him—after I left you last night.

*Keith*. You? Where?

*Larry*. By the archway.

*Keith*. You went back there?

*Larry*. It draws you, Keith.

KErra. You're mad, I think.

*Larry*. I talked to him, and he said, "Thank you for this little chat. It's worth more than money when you're down." Little grey man like a shaggy animal. And a newspaper boy came up and said: "That's right, guv'nors! 'Ere's where they found the body—very spot. They 'yn't got 'im yet."

[He laughs; and the terrified girl presses herself against him.]

An innocent man!

*Keith*. He's in no danger, I tell you. He could never have strangled——Why, he hadn't the strength of a kitten. Now, Larry! I'll take your berth to-morrow. Here's money [He brings out a pile of notes and puts them on the couch] You can make a new life of it out there together presently, in the sun.

*Larry*. [In a whisper] In the sun! "A cup of wine and thou." [Suddenly] How can I, Keith? I must see how it goes with that poor devil.

*Keith*. Bosh! Dismiss it from your mind; there's not nearly enough evidence.

*Larry*. Not?

*Keith*. No. You've got your chance. Take it like a man.

*Larry*. [With a strange smile—to the girl] Shall we, Wanda?

*Wanda*. Oh, Larry!

*Larry*. [Picking the notes up from the couch] Take them back, Keith.

*Keith*. What! I tell you no jury would convict; and if they did, no judge would hang. A ghoul who can rob a dead body, ought to be in prison. He did worse than you.

*Larry*. It won't do, Keith. I must see it out.

*Keith*. Don't be a fool!

*Larry*. I've still got some kind of honour. If I clear out before I know, I shall have none —nor peace. Take them, Keith, or I'll put them in the fire.

*Keith*. [Taking back the notes; bitterly] I suppose I may ask you not to be entirely oblivious of our name. Or is that unworthy of your honour?

*Larry*. [Hanging his head] I'm awfully sorry, Keith; awfully sorry, old man.

*Keith*. [sternly] You owe it to me—to our name—to our dead mother —to do nothing anyway till we see what happens.

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*Larry*. I know. I'll do nothing without you, Keith.

*Keith*. [Taking up his hat] Can I trust you? [He stares hard at his brother.]

*Larry*. You can trust me.

*Keith*. Swear?

*Larry*. I swear.

*Keith*. Remember, nothing! Good night!

*Larry*. Good night!

*Keith* goes. *Larry* Sits down on the couch sand stares at the fire. The girl steals up and slips her arms about him.

*Larry*. An innocent man!

*Wanda*. Oh, Larry! But so are you. What did we want—to kill that man? Never! Oh! kiss me!

[*Larry* turns his face. She kisses his lips.]

I have suffered so—not seein' you. Don't leave me again—don't! Stay here. Isn't it good to be together?—Oh! Poor Larry! How tired you look!—Stay with me. I am so frightened all alone. So frightened they will take you from me.

*Larry*. Poor child!

*Wanda*. No, no! Don't look like that!

*Larry*. You're shivering.

*Wanda*. I will make up the fire. Love me, Larry! I want to forget.

*Larry*. The poorest little wretch on God's earth—locked up—for me! A little wild animal, locked up. There he goes, up and down, up and down—in his cage—don't you see him?—looking for a place to gnaw his way through—little grey rat. [He gets up and roams about.]

*Wanda*. No, no! I can't bear it! Don't frighten me more!

[He comes back and takes her in his arms.]

*Larry*. There, there! [He kisses her closed eyes.]

*Wanda*. [Without moving] If we could sleep a little—wouldn't it be nice?

*Larry*. Sleep?

*Wanda*. [Raising herself] Promise to stay with me—to stay here for good, Larry. I will cook for you; I will make you so comfortable. They will find him innocent. And then—-Oh, Larry! in the sun-right away—far from this horrible country. How lovely! [Trying to get him to look at her] Larry!

*Larry*. [With a movement to free 'himself] To the edge of the world-and——over!

*Wanda*. No, no! No, no! You don't want me to die, Larry, do you? I shall if you leave me. Let us be happy! Love me!

*Larry*. [With a laugh] Ah! Let's be happy and shut out the sight of him. Who cares? Millions suffer for no mortal reason. Let's be strong, like Keith. No! I won't leave you, Wanda. Let's forget everything except ourselves. [Suddenly] There he goes-up and down!

*Wanda*. [Moaning] No, no! See! I will pray to the Virgin. She will pity us!

She falls on her knees and clasps her hands, praying. Her lips move. *Larry* stands motionless, with arms crossed, and on his face are yearning and mockery, love and despair.

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*Larry*. [Whispering] Pray for us! Bravo! Pray away!

[Suddenly the girl stretches out her arms and lifts her face with a look of ecstasy.]

What?

*Wanda*. She is smiling! We shall be happy soon.

*Larry*. [Bending down over her] Poor child! When we die, Wanda, let's go together. We should keep each other warm out in the dark.

*Wanda*. [Raising her hands to his face] Yes! oh, yes! If you die I could not—I could not go on living!

*Curtain*

## SCENE III.

**TWO MONTHS LATER**

WANDA'S room. Daylight is just beginning to fail of a January afternoon. The table is laid for supper, with decanters of wine.

*Wanda* is standing at the window looking out at the wintry trees of the Square beyond the pavement. A newspaper Boy's voice is heard coming nearer.

*Voice*. Pyper! Glove Lyne murder! Trial and verdict! [Receding] Verdict! Pyper!

*Wanda* throws up the window as if to call to him, checks herself, closes it and runs to the door. She opens it, but recoils into the room. *Keith* is standing there. He comes in.

*Keith*. Where's Larry?

*Wanda*. He went to the trial. I could not keep him from it. The trial—Oh! what has happened, sir?

*Keith*. [Savagely] Guilty! Sentence of death! Fools!—idiots!

*Wanda*. Of death! [For a moment she seems about to swoon.]

*Keith*. Girl! girl! It may all depend on you. Larry's still living here?

*Wanda*. Yes.

*Keith*. I must wait for him.

*Wanda*. Will you sit down, please?

*Keith*. [Shaking his head] Are you ready to go away at any time?

*Wanda*. Yes, yes; always I am ready.

*Keith*. And he?

*Wanda*. Yes—but now! What will he do? That poor man!

*Keith*. A graveyard thief—a ghoul!

*Wanda*. Perhaps he was hungry. I have been hungry: you do things then that you would not. Larry has thought of him in prison so much all these weeks. Oh! what shall we do now?

*Keith*. Listen! Help me. Don't let Larry out of your sight. I must see how things go. They'll never hang this wretch. [He grips her arms] Now, we must stop Larry from giving himself up. He's fool enough. D'you understand?

*Wanda*. Yes. But why has he not come in? Oh! If he have, already!

*Keith*. [Letting go her arms] My God! If the police come—find me here—[He moves to the door] No, he wouldn't without seeing you first. He's sure to come. Watch him like a lynx. Don't let him go without you.

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*Wanda*. [Clasping her hands on her breast] I will try, sir.

*Keith*. Listen!

[A key is heard in the lock.]

It's he!

*Larry* enters. He is holding a great bunch of pink lilies and white narcissus. His face tells nothing. *Keith* looks from him to the girl, who stands motionless.

*Larry*. Keith! So you've seen?

*Keith*. The thing can't stand. I'll stop it somehow. But you must give me time, Larry.

*Larry*. [Calmly] Still looking after your honour, *Keith*!

*Keith*. [Grimly] Think my reasons what you like.

*Wanda*. [Softly] Larry!

[*Larry* puts his arm round her.]

*Larry*. Sorry, old man.

*Keith*. This man can and shall get off. I want your solemn promise that you won't give yourself up, nor even go out till I've seen you again.

*Larry*. I give it.

*Keith*. [Looking from one to the other] By the memory of our mother, swear that.

*Larry*. [With a smile] I swear.

*Keith*. I have your oath—both of you—both of you. I'm going at once to see what can be done.

*Larry*. [Softly] Good luck, brother.

*Keith* goes out.

*Wanda*. [Putting her hands on LARRY's breast] What does it mean?

*Larry*. Supper, child—I've had nothing all day. Put these lilies in water.

[She takes the lilies and obediently puts them into a vase.
*Larry* pours wine into a deep-coloured glass and drinks it off.]

We've had a good time, Wanda. Best time I ever had, these last two months; and nothing but the bill to pay.

*Wanda*. [Clasping him desperately] Oh, Larry! Larry!

*Larry*. [Holding her away to look at her.] Take off those things and put on a bridal garment.

*Wanda*. Promise me—wherever you go, I go too. Promise! Larry, you think I haven't seen, all these weeks. But I have seen everything; all in your heart, always. You cannot hide from me. I knew—I knew! Oh, if we might go away into the sun! Oh! Larry—couldn't we? [She searches his eyes with hers—then shuddering] Well! If it must be dark—I don't care, if I may go in your arms. In prison we could not be together. I am ready. Only love me first. Don't let me cry before I go. Oh! Larry, will there be much pain?

*Larry*. [In a choked voice] No pain, my pretty.

*Wanda*. [With a little sigh] It is a pity.

*Larry*. If you had seen him, as I have, all day, being tortured. Wanda,—we shall be out of it. [The wine mounting to his head] We shall be free in the dark; free of their cursed inhumanities. I hate this world—I loathe it! I hate its God-forsaken savagery; its pride and smugness! Keith's world—all righteous will-power and success. We're no good here, you and I—we were cast out at birth—soft, will-less—better dead. No fear, Keith! I'm staying indoors. [He pours wine into two glasses] Drink it up!

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[Obediently *Wanda* drinks, and he also.]

Now go and make yourself beautiful.

*Wanda*. [Seizing him in her arms] Oh, Larry!

*Larry*. [Touching her face and hair] Hanged by the neck until he's dead—for what I did.

[*Wanda* takes a long look at his face, slips her arms from him, and goes out through the curtains below the fireplace.]

[*Larry* feels in his pocket, brings out the little box, opens it, fingers the white tabloids.]

*Larry*. Two each—after food. [He laughs and puts back the box] Oh! my girl!

[The sound of a piano playing a faint festive tune is heard afar off. He mutters, staring at the fire.]

[Flames-flame, and flicker-ashes.]

"No more, no more, the moon is dead, And all the people in it."

[He sits on the couch with a piece of paper on his knees, adding a few words with a stylo pen to what is already written.]

[The *girl*, in a silk wrapper, coming back through the curtains, watches him.]

*Larry*. [Looking up] It's all here—I've confessed. [Reading]

"Please bury us together."
"*Laurence Darrant*.
"January 28th, about six p.m."

They'll find us in the morning. Come and have supper, my dear love.

[The girl creeps forward. He rises, puts his arm round her, and with her arm twined round him, smiling into each other's faces, they go to the table and sit down.]

The curtain falls for a few seconds to indicate the passage of three hours. When it rises again, the lovers are lying on the couch, in each other's arms, the lilies stream about them. The girl's bare arm is round *Larry's* neck. Her eyes are closed; his are open and sightless. There is no light but fire-light.A knocking on the door and the sound of a key

turned in the lock. *Keith* enters. He stands a moment bewildered by the half-light, then calls sharply: "Larry!" and turns up the light. Seeing the forms on the couch, he recoils a moment. Then, glancing at the table and empty decanters, goes up to the couch.

*Keith*. [Muttering] Asleep! Drunk! Ugh!

[Suddenly he bends, touches *Larry*, and springs back.]

What! [He bends again, shakes him and calls] Larry! Larry!

[Then, motionless, he stares down at his brother's open, sightless eyes. Suddenly he wets his finger and holds it to the girl's lips, then to *Larry's*.]

[He bends and listens at their hearts; catches sight of the little box lying between them and takes it up.]

My God!

[Then, raising himself, he closes his brother's eyes, and as he does so, catches sight of a paper pinned to the couch; detaches it and reads:]

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“I, Lawrence Darrant, about to die by my own hand confess that I——”

[He reads on silently, in horror; finishes, letting the paper drop, and recoils from the couch on to a chair at the dishevelled supper table. Aghast, he sits there. Suddenly he mutters:]

If I leave that there—my name—my whole future!

[He springs up, takes up the paper again, and again reads.]

My God! It’s ruin!

[He makes as if to tear it across, stops, and looks down at those two; covers his eyes with his hand; drops the paper and rushes to the door. But he stops there and comes back, magnetised, as it were, by that paper. He takes it up once more and thrusts it into his pocket.][The footsteps of a Policeman pass, slow and regular, outside. His face crisps and quivers; he stands listening till they die away. Then he snatches the paper from his pocket, and goes past the foot of the couch to the fore.]

All my——No! Let him hang!

[He thrusts the paper into the fire, stamps it down with his foot, watches it writhe and blacken. Then suddenly clutching his head, he turns to the bodies on the couch. Panting and like a man demented, he recoils past the head of the couch, and rushing to the window, draws the curtains and throws the window up for air. Out in the darkness rises the witch-like skeleton tree, where a dark shape seems hanging. *Keith* starts back.]

What’s that? What——!

[He shuts the window and draws the dark curtains across it again.]

Fool! Nothing!

[Clenching his fists, he draws himself up, steadying himself with all his might. Then slowly he moves to the door, stands a second like a carved figure, his face hard as stone.]

[Deliberately he turns out the light, opens the door, and goes.]

[The still bodies lie there before the fire which is licking at the last blackened wafer.]

# CURTAIN

**THE LITTLE MAN**

# A FARCICAL MORALITY IN THREE SCENES

**CHARACTERS**

*The little man*.
*The American*.
*The Englishman*.
*The* ENGLISHWOMAN.
*The German*.
*The Dutch boy*.
*The mother*.
*The baby*.
*The waiter*.
*The station official*.
*The policeman*.
*The Porter*.

# SCENE I

Afternoon, on the departure platform of an Austrian railway station. At several little tables outside the buffet persons are taking refreshment, served by a pale young waiter. On a seat against the wall of the buffet a woman of lowly station is sitting beside two large bundles, on one of which she has placed her baby, swathed in a black shawl.

Waiter. [Approaching a table whereat sit an English traveller and his wife] Two coffee?

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*Englishman*. [Paying] Thanks. [To his wife, in an Oxford voice] Sugar?

ENGLISHWOMAN. [In a Cambridge voice] One.

*American traveller*. [With field-glasses and a pocket camera from another table] Waiter, I'd like to have you get my eggs. I've been sitting here quite a while.

*Waiter*. Yes, sare.

*German traveller*. 'Kellner, bezahlen'! [His voice is, like his moustache, stiff and brushed up at the ends. His figure also is stiff and his hair a little grey; clearly once, if not now, a colonel.]

*Waiter*. 'Komm' gleich'!

[The baby on the bundle wails. The mother takes it up to soothe it. A young, red-cheeked Dutchman at the fourth table stops eating and laughs.]

*American*. My eggs! Get a wiggle on you!

*Waiter*. Yes, sare. [He rapidly recedes.]

[A *little man* in a soft hat is seen to the right of tables. He stands a moment looking after the hurrying waiter, then seats himself at the fifth table.]

*Englishman*. [Looking at his watch] Ten minutes more.

ENGLISHWOMAN. Bother!

*American*. [Addressing them] 'Pears as if they'd a prejudice against eggs here, anyway.

[The *English* look at him, but do not speak. ]

*German*. [In creditable English] In these places man can get nothing.

[The *waiter* comes flying back with a compote for the *Dutch youth*, who pays.]

*German*. 'Kellner, bezahlen'!

*Waiter*. 'Eine Krone sechzig'.

[The *German* pays.]

*American*. [Rising, and taking out his watch—blandly] See here. If I don't get my eggs before this watch ticks twenty, there'll be another waiter in heaven.

*Waiter*. [Flying] 'Komm' gleich'!

*American*. [Seeking sympathy] I'm gettin' kind of mad!

[The *Englishman* halves his newspaper and hands the advertisement half to his wife. The *baby* wails. The *mother* rocks it.]

[The *Dutch youth* stops eating and laughs. The *German* lights a cigarette. The *little man* sits motionless, nursing his hat. The *waiter* comes flying back with the eggs and places them before the *American*.]

*American*. [Putting away his watch] Good! I don't like trouble. How much?

[He pays and eats. The *waiter* stands a moment at the edge of the platform and passes his hand across his brow. The *little man* eyes him and speaks gently.]

*Little man*. Herr Ober!

[The *waiter* turns.]

Might I have a glass of beer?

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*Waiter*. Yes, sare.

*Little man*. Thank you very much.

[The *waiter* goes.]

*American*. [Pausing in the deglutition of his eggs—affably] Pardon me, sir; I'd like to have you tell me why you called that little bit of a feller "Herr Ober." Reckon you would know what that means? Mr. Head Waiter.

*Little man*. Yes, yes.

*American*. I smile.

*Little man*. Oughtn't I to call him that?

*German*. [Abruptly] 'Nein—Kellner'.

*American*. Why, yes! Just "waiter."

[The ENGLISHWOMAN looks round her paper for a second. The *Dutch youth* stops eating and laughs. The *little man* gazes from face to face and nurses his hat.]

*Little man*. I didn't want to hurt his feelings.

*German*. Gott!

*American*. In my country we're very democratic—but that's quite a proposition.

*Englishman*. [Handling coffee-pot, to his wife] More?

ENGLISHWOMAN. No, thanks.

*German*. [Abruptly] These fellows—if you treat them in this manner, at once they take liberties. You see, you will not get your beer.

[As he speaks the *waiter* returns, bringing the *little man's* beer, then retires.]

*American*. That 'pears to be one up to democracy. [To the *little man*] I judge you go in for brotherhood?

*Little man*. [Startled] Oh, no!

*American*. I take considerable stock in Leo Tolstoi myself. Grand man—grand-souled apparatus. But I guess you've got to pinch those waiters some to make 'em skip. [To the *English*, who have carelessly looked his way for a moment] You'll appreciate that, the way he acted about my eggs.

[The *English* make faint motions with their chins and avert their eyes.]

[To the *waiter*, who is standing at the door of the buffet]

Waiter! Flash of beer—jump, now!

*Waiter*. 'Komm' gleich'!

*German*. 'Cigarren'!

*Waiter*. 'Schon'!

[He disappears.]

*American*. [Affably—to the *little man*] Now, if I don't get that flash of beer quicker'n you got yours, I shall admire.

*German*. [Abruptly] Tolstoi is nothing 'nichts'! No good! Ha?

*American*. [Relishing the approach of argument] Well, that is a matter of temperament. Now, I'm all for equality. See that poor woman there—very humble woman—there she sits among us with her baby. Perhaps you'd like to locate her somewhere else?

*German*. [Shrugging]. Tolstoi is 'sentimentalisch'. Nietzsche is the true philosopher, the only one.

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*American*. Well, that's quite in the prospectus—very stimulating party—old Nietch—-virgin mind. But give me Leo! [He turns to the red-cheeked *youth*] What do you opine, sir? I guess by your labels you'll be Dutch. Do they read Tolstoi in your country?

[The *Dutch youth* laughs.]

*American*. That is a very luminous answer.

*German*. Tolstoi is nothing. Man should himself express. He must push—he must be strong.

*American*. That is so. In America we believe in virility; we like a man to expand. But we believe in brotherhood too. We draw the line at niggers; but we aspire. Social barriers and distinctions we've not much use for.

*Englishman*. Do you feel a draught?

ENGLISHWOMAN. [With a shiver of her shoulder toward the *American*] I do—rather.

*German*. Wait! You are a young people.

*American*. That is so; there are no flies on us. [To the *little man*, who has been gazing eagerly from face to face] Say! I'd like to have you give us your sentiments in relation to the duty of man.

[The *little man*, fidgets, and is about to opens his mouth.]

*American*. For example—is it your opinion that we should kill off the weak and diseased, and all that can't jump around?

*German*. [Nodding] 'Ja, ja'! That is coming.

*Little man*. [Looking from face to face] They might be me.

[The *Dutch youth* laughs.]

*American*. [Reproving him with a look] That's true humility. 'Tisn't grammar. Now, here's a proposition that brings it nearer the bone: Would you step out of your way to help them when it was liable to bring you trouble?

*German*. 'Nein, nein'! That is stupid.

*Little man*. [Eager but wistful] I'm afraid not. Of course one wants to—There was St Francis d'Assisi and St Julien L'Hospitalier, and——

*American*. Very lofty dispositions. Guess they died of them. [He rises] Shake hands, sir—my name is—[He hands a card] I am an ice-machine maker. [He shakes the *little* MAN's hand] I like your sentiments—I feel kind of brotherly. [Catching sight of the *waiter* appearing in the doorway] Waiter; where to h-ll is that glass of beer?

*German*. Cigarren!

*Waiter*. 'Komm' gleich'!

*Englishman*. [Consulting watch] Train's late.

ENGLISHWOMAN. Really! Nuisance!

> [A station *policeman*, very square and uniformed, passes and repasses.]

*American*. [Resuming his seat—to the *German*] Now, we don't have so much of that in America. Guess we feel more to trust in human nature.

*German*. Ah! ha! you will bresently find there is nothing in him but self.

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*Little man*. [Wistfully] Don't you believe in human nature?

*American*. Very stimulating question.

[He looks round for opinions. The *Dutch youth* laughs.]

*Englishman*. [Holding out his half of the paper to his wife] Swap!

[His wife swaps.]

*German*. In human nature I believe so far as I can see him—no more.

*American*. Now that 'pears to me kind o' blasphemy. I believe in heroism. I opine there's not one of us settin' around here that's not a hero—give him the occasion.

*Little man*. Oh! Do you believe that?

*American*. Well! I judge a hero is just a person that'll help another at the expense of himself. Take that poor woman there. Well, now, she's a heroine, I guess. She would die for her baby any old time.

*German*. Animals will die for their babies. That is nothing.

*American*. I carry it further. I postulate we would all die for that baby if a locomotive was to trundle up right here and try to handle it. [To the *German*] I guess you don't know how good you are. [As the *German* is twisting up the ends of his moustache—to the ENGLISHWOMAN] I should like to have you express an opinion, ma'am.

ENGLISHWOMAN. I beg your pardon.

*American*. The English are very humanitarian; they have a very high sense of duty. So have the Germans, so have the Americans. [To the *Dutch youth*] I judge even in your little country they have that. This is an epoch of equality and high-toned ideals. [To the *little man*] What is your nationality, sir?

*Little man*. I'm afraid I'm nothing particular. My father was half-English and half-American, and my mother half-German and half-Dutch.

*American*. My! That's a bit streaky, any old way. [The *policeman* passes again] Now, I don't believe we've much use any more for those gentlemen in buttons. We've grown kind of mild—we don't think of self as we used to do.

[The *waiter* has appeared in the doorway.]

*German*. [In a voice of thunder] 'Cigarren! Donnerwetter'!

*American*. [Shaking his fist at the vanishing *waiter*] That flash of beer!

*Waiter*. 'Komm' gleich'!

*American*. A little more, and he will join George Washington! I was about to remark when he intruded: In this year of grace 1913 the kingdom of Christ is quite a going concern. We are mighty near universal brotherhood. The colonel here [He indicates the *German*] is a man of blood and iron, but give him an opportunity to be magnanimous, and he'll be right there. Oh, sir! yep!

> [The *German*, with a profound mixture of pleasure and cynicism, brushes up the ends of his moustache.]

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*Little man*. I wonder. One wants to, but somehow—[He shakes his head.]

*American*. You seem kind of skeery about that. You've had experience, maybe. I'm an optimist—I think we're bound to make the devil hum in the near future. I opine we shall occasion a good deal of trouble to that old party. There's about to be a holocaust of selfish interests. The colonel there with old-man Nietch he won't know himself. There's going to be a very sacred opportunity.

[As he speaks, the voice of a *railway official* is heard an the distance calling out in German. It approaches, and the words become audible.]

*German*. [Startled] 'Der Teufel'! [He gets up, and seizes the bag beside him.]

[The *station official* has appeared; he stands for a moment casting his commands at the seated group. The *Dutch youth* also rises, and takes his coat and hat. The *official* turns on his heel and retires still issuing directions.]

*Englishman*. What does he say?

*German*. Our drain has come in, de oder platform; only one minute we haf.

[All, have risen in a fluster.]

*American*. Now, that's very provoking. I won't get that flash of beer.

[There is a general scurry to gather coats and hats and wraps, during which the lowly *woman* is seen making desperate attempts to deal with her baby and the two large bundles. Quite defeated, she suddenly puts all down, wrings her hands, and cries out: "Herr Jesu! Hilfe!" The flying procession turn their heads at that strange cry.]

*American*. What's that? Help?

[He continues to run. The *little man* spins round, rushes back, picks up baby and bundle on which it was seated.]

*Little man*. Come along, good woman, come along!

[The *woman* picks up the other bundle and they run.]

[The *waiter*, appearing in the doorway with the bottle of beer, watches with his tired smile.]

*Curtain*

## SCENE II

A second-class compartment of a corridor carriage, in motion. In it are seated the *Englishman* and his *wife*, opposite each other at the corridor end, she with her face to the engine, he with his back. Both are somewhat protected from the rest of the travellers by newspapers. Next to her sits the *German*, and opposite him sits the *American*; next the *American* in one window corner is seated the *Dutch youth*; the other window corner is taken by the *German's* bag. The silence is only broken by the slight rushing noise of the train's progression and the crackling of the English newspapers.

American. [Turning to the *Dutch youth*] Guess I'd like that window raised; it's kind of chilly after that old run they gave us.

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[The *Dutch youth* laughs, and goes through the motions of raising the window. The *English* regard the operation with uneasy irritation. The *German* opens his bag, which reposes on the corner seat next him, and takes out a book.]

*American*. The Germans are great readers. Very stimulating practice. I read most anything myself!

[The *German* holds up the book so that the title may be read.]

"Don Quixote"—fine book. We Americans take considerable stock in old man Quixote. Bit of a wild-cat—but we don't laugh at him.

*German*. He is dead. Dead as a sheep. A good thing, too.

*American*. In America we have still quite an amount of chivalry.

*German*. Chivalry is nothing 'sentimentalisch'. In modern days—no good. A man must push, he must pull.

*American*. So you say. But I judge your form of chivalry is sacrifice to the state. We allow more freedom to the individual soul. Where there's something little and weak, we feel it kind of noble to give up to it. That way we feel elevated.

[As he speaks there is seen in the corridor doorway the *little man*, with the *woman's baby* still on his arm and the bundle held in the other hand. He peers in anxiously. The *English*, acutely conscious, try to dissociate themselves from his presence with their papers. The *Dutch youth* laughs.]

*German*. 'Ach'! So!

*American*. Dear me!

*Little man*. Is there room? I can't find a seat.

*American*. Why, yes! There's a seat for one.

*Little man*. [Depositing bundle outside, and heaving *baby*] May I?

*American*. Come right in!

[The *German* sulkily moves his bag. The *little man* comes in and seats himself gingerly.]

*American*. Where's the mother?

*Little man*. [Ruefully] Afraid she got left behind.

[The *Dutch youth* laughs. The *English* unconsciously emerge from their newspapers.]

*American*. My! That would appear to be quite a domestic incident.

[The *Englishman* suddenly utters a profound “Ha, Ha!” and disappears behind his paper. And that paper and the one opposite are seen to shake, and little sguirls and squeaks emerge.]

*German*. And you haf got her bundle, and her baby. Ha! [He cackles drily.]

*American*. [Gravely] I smile. I guess Providence has played it pretty low down on you. It’s sure acted real mean.

[The *baby* wails, and the *little man* jigs it with a sort of gentle desperation, looking apologetically from face to face. His wistful glance renews the fore of merriment wherever it alights. The *American* alone preserves a gravity which seems incapable of being broken.]

*American*. Maybe you’d better get off right smart and restore that baby. There’s nothing can act madder than a mother.

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*Little man*. Poor thing, yes! What she must be suffering!

[A gale of laughter shakes the carriage. The *English* for a moment drop their papers, the better to indulge. The *little man* smiles a wintry smile.]

*American*. [In a lull] How did it eventuate?

*Little man*. We got there just as the train was going to start; and I jumped, thinking I could help her up. But it moved too quickly, and—and left her.

[The gale of laughter blows up again.]

*American*. Guess I'd have thrown the baby out to her.

*Little man*. I was afraid the poor little thing might break.

[The Baby wails; the *little man* heaves it; the gale of laughter blows.]

*American*. [Gravely] It's highly entertaining—not for the baby. What kind of an old baby is it, anyway? [He sniff's] I judge it's a bit—niffy.

*Little man*. Afraid I've hardly looked at it yet.

*American*. Which end up is it?

*Little Mam*. Oh! I think the right end. Yes, yes, it is.

*American*. Well, that's something. Maybe you should hold it out of window a bit. Very excitable things, babies!

ENGLISHWOMAN. [Galvanized] No, no!

*Englishman*. [Touching her knee] My dear!

*American*. You are right, ma'am. I opine there's a draught out there. This baby is precious. We've all of us got stock in this baby in a manner of speaking. This is a little bit of universal brotherhood. Is it a woman baby?

*Little man*. I—I can only see the top of its head.

*American*. You can't always tell from that. It looks kind of over-wrapped up. Maybe it had better be unbound.

*German*. 'Nein, nein, nein'!

*American*. I think you are very likely right, colonel. It might be a pity to unbind that baby. I guess the lady should be consulted in this matter.

ENGLISHWOMAN. Yes, yes, of course——!

*Englishman*. [Touching her] Let it be! Little beggar seems all right.

*American*. That would seem only known to Providence at this moment.
I judge it might be due to humanity to look at its face.

*Little man*. [Gladly] It's sucking my' finger. There, there—nice little thing—there!

*American*. I would surmise in your leisure moments you have created babies, sir?

*Little man*. Oh! no—indeed, no.

*American*. Dear me!—That is a loss. [Addressing himself to the carriage at large] I think we may esteem ourselves fortunate to have this little stranger right here with us. Demonstrates what a hold the little and weak have upon us nowadays. The colonel here—a man of blood and iron—there he sits quite calm next door to it. [He sniffs] Now, this baby is rather chastening—that is a sign of grace, in the colonel—that is true heroism.

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*Little man*. [Faintly] I—I can see its face a little now.

[All bend forward.]

*American*. What sort of a physiognomy has it, anyway?

*Little man*. [Still faintly] I don't see anything but—but spots.

*German*. Oh! Ha! Pfui!

[The *Dutch youth* laughs.]

*American*. I am told that is not uncommon amongst babies. Perhaps we could have you inform us, ma'am.

ENGLISHWOMAN. Yes, of course—only what sort of——

*Little man*. They seem all over its——[At the slight recoil of everyone] I feel sure it's—-it's quite a good baby underneath.

*American*. That will be rather difficult to come at. I'm just a bit sensitive. I've very little use for affections of the epidermis.

*German*. Pfui! [He has edged away as far as he can get, and is lighting a big cigar]

[The *Dutch youth* draws his legs back.]

*American*. [Also taking out a cigar] I guess it would be well to fumigate this carriage. Does it suffer, do you think?

*Little man*. [Peering] Really, I don't—I'm not sure—I know so little about babies. I think it would have a nice expression—if—if it showed.

*American*. Is it kind of boiled looking?

*Little man*. Yes—yes, it is.

*American*. [Looking gravely round] I judge this baby has the measles.

[The *German* screws himself spasmodically against the arm of the ENGLISHWOMAN'S seat.]

ENGLISHWOMAN. Poor little thing! Shall I——?

[She half rises.]

*Englishman*. [Touching her] No, no——Dash it!

*American*. I honour your emotion, ma'am. It does credit to us all. But I sympathize with your husband too. The measles is a very important pestilence in connection with a grown woman.

*Little man*. It likes my finger awfully. Really, it's rather a sweet baby.

*American*. [Sniffing] Well, that would appear to be quite a question. About them spots, now? Are they rosy?

*Little man*. No-o; they're dark, almost black.

*German*. Gott! Typhus! [He bounds up on to the arm of the ENGLISHWOMAN'S Seat.]

*American*. Typhus! That's quite an indisposition!

[The *Dutch youth* rises suddenly, and bolts out into the corridor. He is followed by the *German*, puffing clouds of smoke. The *English* and *American* sit a moment longer without speaking. The ENGLISHWOMAN'S face is turned with a curious expression—-half pity, half fear—towards the *little man*. Then the *Englishman* gets up.]

*Englishman*. Bit stuffy for you here, dear, isn't it?

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[He puts his arm through hers, raises her, and almost pushes her through the doorway. She goes, still looking back.]

*American*. [Gravely] There's nothing I admire more'n courage. Guess I'll go and smoke in the corridor.

[As he goes out the *little man* looks very wistfully after him. Screwing up his mouth and nose, he holds the *baby* away from him and wavers; then rising, he puts it on the seat opposite and goes through the motions of letting down the window. Having done so he looks at the *baby*, who has begun to wail. Suddenly he raises his hands and clasps them, like a child praying. Since, however, the *baby* does not stop wailing, he hovers over it in indecision; then, picking it up, sits down again to dandle it, with his face turned toward the open window. Finding that it still wails, he begins to sing to it in a cracked little voice. It is charmed at once. While he is singing, the *American* appears in the corridor. Letting down the passage window, he stands there in the doorway with the draught blowing his hair and the smoke of his cigar all about him. The *little man* stops singing and shifts the shawl higher to protect the *baby's* head from the draught.]

*American*. [Gravely] This is the most sublime spectacle I have ever envisaged. There ought to be a record of this.

[The *little man* looks at him, wondering. You are typical, sir, of the sentiments of modern Christianity. You illustrate the deepest feelings in the heart of every man.]

[The *little man* rises with the *baby* and a movement of approach.]

Guess I'm wanted in the dining-car.

[He vanishes. The *little man* sits down again, but back to the engine, away from the draught, and looks out of the window, patiently jogging the *baby* On his knee.]

*Curtain*

## SCENE III

An arrival platform. The *little man*, with the *baby* and the bundle, is standing disconsolate, while travellers pass and luggage is being carried by. A *station official*, accompanied by a policeman, appears from a doorway, behind him.

Official. [Consulting telegram in his hand] 'Das ist der Herr'.

[They advance to the *little man*.]

*Official*. ‘Sie haben einen Buben gestohlen’?

*Little man*. I only speak English and American.

*Official*. ‘Dies ist nicht Ihr Bube’?

[He touches the Baby.]

*Little man*. [Shaking his head] Take care—it’s ill.

[The man does not understand.]

Ill—the baby——

*Official*. [Shaking his head] ‘Verstehe nicht’. Dis is nod your baby? No?

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*Little man*. [Shaking his head violently] No, it is not.  No.

*Official*. [Tapping the telegram] Gut!  You are 'rested. [He signs to the *policeman*, who takes the *little* MAN's arm.]

*Little man*.  Why?  I don't want the poor baby.

*Official*. [Lifting the bundle] 'Dies ist nicht Ihr Gepack'—pag?

*Little* Mary.  No.

*Official*.  Gut!  You are 'rested.

*Little man*.  I only took it for the poor woman.  I'm not a thief—
I'm—I'm——

*Official*. [Shaking head] Verstehe nicht.

[The *little man* tries to tear his hair.  The disturbed *baby* wails.]

*Little man*. [Dandling it as best he can] There, there—poor, poor!

*Official*.  Halt still!  You are 'rested.  It is all right.

*Little man*.  Where is the mother?

*Official*.  She comet by next drain.  Das telegram say:  'Halt einen Herren mit schwarzem Buben and schwarzem Gepack'.  'Rest gentleman mit black baby and black —pag.

[The *little man* turns up his eyes to heaven.]

*Official*.  'Komm mit us'.

[They take the *little man* toward the door from which they have come.  A voice stops them.]

*American*. [Speaking from as far away as may be] Just a moment!

[The *official* stops; the *little man* also stops and sits down on a bench against the wall. The *policeman* stands stolidly beside him.  The *American* approaches a step or two, beckoning; the *official* goes up to him.]

*American*.  Guess you've got an angel from heaven there!  What's the gentleman in buttons for?

*Official*. ‘Was ist das’?

*American*. Is there anybody here that can understand American?

*Official*. ‘Verstehe nicht’.

*American*. Well, just watch my gestures. I was saying [He points to the *little man*, then makes gestures of flying] you have an angel from heaven there. You have there a man in whom Gawd [He points upward] takes quite an amount of stock. You have no call to arrest him. [He makes the gesture of arrest] No, Sir. Providence has acted pretty mean, loading off that baby on him. [He makes the motion of dandling] The little man has a heart of gold. [He points to his heart, and takes out a gold coin.]

*Official*. [Thinking he is about to be bribed] ’Aber, das ist zu viel’!

*American*. Now, don’t rattle me! [Pointing to the *little man*] Man [Pointing to his heart] ‘Herz’ [Pointing to the coin] ‘von’ Gold. This is a flower of the field—he don’t want no gentleman in buttons to pluck him up.

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[A little crowd is gathering, including the Two *English*, the *German*, and the *Dutch youth*.]

*Official*. 'Verstehe absolut nichts'. [He taps the telegram] 'Ich muss mein' duty do.

*American*. But I'm telling you. This is a white man. This is probably the whitest man on Gawd's earth.

*Official*. 'Das macht nichts'—gut or no gut, I muss mein duty do. [He turns to go toward the *little man*.]

*American*. Oh! Very well, arrest him; do your duty. This baby has typhus.

[At the word "typhus" the *official* stops.]

*American*. [Making gestures] First-class typhus, black typhus, schwarzen typhus. Now you have it. I'm kind o' sorry for you and the gentleman in buttons. Do your duty!

*Official*. Typhus? Der Bub—die baby hat typhus?

*American*. I'm telling you.

*Official*. Gott im Himmel!

*American*. [Spotting the *German* in the little throng] here's a gentleman will corroborate me.

*Official*. [Much disturbed, and signing to the *policeman* to stand clear] Typhus! 'Aber das ist grasslich'!

*American*. I kind o' thought you'd feel like that.

*Official*. 'Die Sanitatsmachine! Gleich'!

[A *Porter* goes to get it. From either side the broken half-moon of persons stand gazing at the *little man*, who sits unhappily dandling the *baby* in the centre.]

*Official*. [Raising his hands] 'Was zu thun'?

*American*. Guess you'd better isolate the baby.

[A silence, during which the *little man* is heard faintly whistling and clucking to the *baby*.]

*Official*. [Referring once more to his telegram]

“’Rest gentleman mit black baby.” [Shaking his head] Wir must de gentleman hold. [To the *German*] ’Bitte, mein Herr, sagen Sie ihm, den Buben zu niedersetzen’. [He makes the gesture of deposit.]

*German*. [To the *little man*] He say:  Put down the baby.

[The *little man* shakes his head, and continues to dandle the *baby*.]

*Official*.  You must.

[The *little man* glowers, in silence.]

*Englishman*. [In background—muttering] Good man!

*German*.  His spirit ever denies.

*Official*. [Again making his gesture] ‘Aber er muss’!

[The *little man* makes a face at him.]

‘Sag’ Ihm’:  Instantly put down baby, and komm’ mit us.

[The *baby* wails.]

*Little man*.  Leave the poor ill baby here alone?  Be—be—be d——d to you!

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*American*. [Jumping on to a trunk—with enthusiasm] Bully!

[The *English* clap their hands; the *Dutch youth* laughs. The *official* is muttering, greatly incensed.]

*American*. What does that body-snatcher say?

*German*. He say this man use the baby to save himself from arrest. Very smart he say.

*American*. I judge you do him an injustice. [Showing off the *little man* with a sweep of his arm.] This is a white man. He's got a black baby, and he won' leave it in the lurch. Guess we would all act noble that way, give us the chance.

[The *little man* rises, holding out the *baby*, and advances a step or two. The half-moon at once gives, increasing its size; the *American* climbs on to a higher trunk. The *little man* retires and again sits down.]

*American*. [Addressing the *official*] Guess you'd better go out of business and wait for the mother.

*Official*. [Stamping his foot] Die Mutter sall 'rested be for taking out baby mit typhus. Ha! [To the *little man*] Put ze baby down!

[The *little man* smiles.]

Do you 'ear?

*American*. [Addressing the *official*] Now, see here. 'Pears to me you don't suspicion just how beautiful this is. Here we have a man giving his life for that old baby that's got no claim on him. This is not a baby of his own making. No, sir, this is a very Christ-like proposition in the gentleman.

*Official*. Put ze baby down, or ich will goummand someone it to do.

*American*. That will be very interesting to watch.

*Official*. [To *policeman*] Dake it vrom him.

[The *policeman* mutters, but does not.]

*American*. [To the German] Guess I lost that.

*German*. He say he is not his officier.

*American*. That just tickles me to death.

*Official*. [Looking round] Vill nobody dake ze Bub'?

ENGLISHWOMAN. [Moving a step faintly] Yes—I——

*Englishman*. [Grasping her arm]. By Jove! Will you!

*Official*. [Gathering himself for a great effort to take the *baby*, and advancing two steps] Zen I goummand you—[He stops and his voice dies away] Zit dere!

*American*. My! That's wonderful. What a man this is! What a sublime sense of duty!

[The *Dutch youth* laughs. The *official* turns on him, but as he does so the *mother* of the Busy is seen hurrying.]

*Mother*. 'Ach! Ach! Mei' Bubi'!

[Her face is illumined; she is about to rush to the *little man*.]

*Official*. [To the *policeman*] 'Nimm die Frau'!

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[The *policeman* catches hold of the *woman*.]

*Official*. [To the frightened *woman*] 'Warum haben Sie einen Buben mit Typhus mit ausgebracht'?

*American*. [Eagerly, from his perch] What was that? I don't want to miss any.

*German*. He say: Why did you a baby with typhus with you bring out?

*American*. Well, that's quite a question.

[He takes out the field-glasses slung around him and adjusts them on the *baby*.]

*Mother*. [Bewildered] Mei' Bubi—Typhus—aber Typhus? [She shakes her head violently] 'Nein, nein, nein! Typhus'!

*Official*. Er hat Typhus.

*Mother*. [Shaking her head] 'Nein, nein, nein'!

*American*. [Looking through his glasses] Guess she's kind of right! I judge the typhus is where the baby' slobbered on the shawl, and it's come off on him.

[The *Dutch youth* laughs.]

*Official*. [Turning on him furiously] Er hat Typhus.

*American*. Now, that's where you slop over. Come right here.

[The *official* mounts, and looks through the glasses.]

*American*. [To the *little man*] Skin out the baby's leg. If we don't locate spots on that, it'll be good enough for me.

[The *little man* fumbles Out the *baby's* little white foot.]

*Mother*. Mei' Bubi! [She tries to break away.]

*American*. White as a banana. [To the *official*—affably] Guess you've made kind of a fool of us with your old typhus.

*Official*. Lass die Frau!

[The *policeman* lets her go, and she rushes to her *baby*.]

*Mother*. Mei' Bubi!

[The *baby*, exchanging the warmth of the *little man* for the momentary chill of its *mother*, wails.]

*Official*. [Descending and beckoning to the *policeman*] 'Sie wollen den Herrn accusiren'?

[The *policeman* takes the *little* MAN's arm.]

*American*. What's that? They goin' to pitch him after all?

[The *mother*, still hugging her *baby*, who has stopped crying, gazes at the *little man*, who sits dazedly looking up. Suddenly she drops on her knees, and with her free hand lifts his booted foot and kisses it.]

*American*. [Waving his hat] Ra! Ra! [He descends swiftly, goes up to the *little man*, whose arm the *policeman* has dropped, and takes his hand] Brother; I am proud to know you. This is one of the greatest moments I have ever experienced. [Displaying the *little man* to the assembled company] I think I sense the situation when I say that we all esteem it an honour to breathe the rather

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inferior atmosphere of this station here Along with our little friend.  I guess we shall all go home and treasure the memory of his face as the whitest thing in our museum of recollections.  And perhaps this good woman will also go home and wash the face of our little brother here.  I am inspired with a new faith in mankind.  Ladies and gentlemen, I wish to present to you a sure-enough saint—only wants a halo, to be transfigured. [To the *little man*] Stand right up.
[The *little man* stands up bewildered.  They come about him.  The *official* bows to him, the *policeman* salutes him.  The *Dutch youth* shakes his head and laughs.  The *German* draws himself up very straight, and bows quickly twice.  The *Englishman* and his *wife* approach at least two steps, then, thinking better of it, turn to each other and recede.  The *mother* kisses his hand.  The *Porter* returning with the Sanitatsmachine, turns it on from behind, and its pinkish shower, goldened by a ray of sunlight, falls around the *little* MAN's head, transfiguring it as he stands with eyes upraised to see whence the portent comes.]

*American*. [Rushing forward and dropping on his knees] Hold on just a minute!  Guess I'll take a snapshot of the miracle. [He adjusts his pocket camera] This ought to look bully!

## CURTAIN

**FROM THE SERIES OF SIX SHORT PLAYS**

## Four of the SIX SHORT PLAYS

**CONTENTS:**



## HALL-MARKED

**A SATIRIC TRIFLE**

## CHARACTERS

*Herself*.
*Lady Ella*.

*The Squire*.
*The maid*.
*Maud*.
*The Rector*.
*The doctor*.
*The cabman*.
*Hannibal* and *Edward*

## HALL-MARKED

The scene is the sitting-room and verandah of *her* bungalow.

The room is pleasant, and along the back, where the verandah runs, it seems all window, both French and casement. There is a door right and a door left. The day is bright; the time morning.[Herself, dripping wet, comes running along the verandah, through the French window, with a wet Scotch terrier in her arms. She vanishes through the door left. A little pause, and lady Ella comes running, dry, thin, refined, and agitated. She halts where the tracks of water cease at the door left. A little pause, and *Maud* comes running, fairly dry, stolid, breathless, and dragging a bull-dog, wet, breathless, and stout, by the crutch end of her 'en-tout-cas'].

Lady Ella. Don't bring Hannibal in till I know where she's put Edward!

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*Maud*. [Brutally, to *Hannibal*] Bad dog!  Bad dog!

[*Hannibal* snuffles.]

*Lady Ella*.  Maud, do take him out!  Tie him up.  Here! [She takes out a lace handkerchief ] No—something stronger!  Poor darling Edward! [To *Hannibal*] You are a bad dog!

[*Hannibal* snuffles.]

*Maud*.  Edward began it, Ella. [To *Hannibal*] Bad dog!  Bad dog!

[*Hannibal* snuffles.]

*Lady Ella*.  Tie him up outside.  Here, take my scarf.  Where is my poor treasure? [She removes her scarf] Catch!  His ear's torn; I saw it.

*Maud*. [Taking the scarf, to *Hannibal*] Now!

[*Hannibal* snuffles.]

[She ties the scarf to his collar]

He smells horrible.  Bad dog—getting into ponds to fight!

*Lady Ella*.  Tie him up, Maud.  I must try in here.

[Their husbands, *the Squire* and *the Rector*, come hastening along the verandah.]

*Maud*. [To *the Rector*] Smell him, Bertie! [To *the Squire*] You might have that pond drained, Squire!

[She takes *Hannibal* out, and ties him to the verandah.  *The Squire* and *Rector* Come in.  *Lady Ella* is knocking on the door left.]

*Her voice*.  All right!  I've bound him up!

*Lady Ella*.  May I come in?

*Her voice*.  Just a second!  I've got nothing on.

[*Lady Ella* recoils.  *The Squire* and *Rector* make an involuntary movement of approach.]

*Lady Ella*. Oh! There you are!

*The Rector*. [Doubtfully] I was just going to wade in——

*Lady Ella*. Hannibal would have killed him, if she hadn't rushed in!

*The Squire*. Done him good, little beast!

*Lady Ella*. Why didn't you go in, Tommy?

*The Squire*. Well, I would—only she——

*Lady Ella*. I can't think how she got Edward out of Hannibal's awful mouth!

*Maud*. [Without—to *Hannibal*, who is snuffling on the verandah and straining at the scarf] Bad dog!

*Lady Ella*. We must simply thank her tremendously! I shall never forget the way she ran in, with her skirts up to her waist!

*The Squire*. By Jove! No. It was topping.

*Lady Ella*. Her clothes must be ruined. That pond—ugh! [She wrinkles her nose] Tommy, do have it drained.

*The Rector*. [Dreamily] I don't remember her face in church.

*The Squire*. Ah! Yes. Who is she? Pretty woman!

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*Lady Ella*. I must get the Vet. to Edward. [To *the Squire*] Tommy, do exert yourself!

[*Maud* re-enters.]

*The Squire*. All right! [Exerting himself] Here's a bell!

*Her voice*. [Through the door] The bleeding's stopped. Shall I send him in to you?

*Lady Ella*. Oh, please! Poor darling!

[They listen.]

[*Lady Ella*, prepares to receive *Edward*. *The Squire* and *Rector* stand transfixed. The door opens, and a bare arm gently pushes *Edward* forth. He is bandaged with a smooth towel. There is a snuffle—*Hannibal* has broken the scarf, outside.]

*Lady Ella*. [Aghast] Look! Hannibal's loose! Maud—Tommy. [To *the Rector*] You!

[The *three* rush to prevent *Hannibal* from re-entering.]

*Lady Ella*. [To *Edward*] Yes, I know—you'd like to! You *shall* bite him when it's safe. Oh! my darling, you *do*——[She sniffs].

[*Maud* and *the Squire* re-enter.]

Have you tied him properly this time?

*Maud*. With Bertie's braces.

*Lady Ella*. Oh! but——

*Maud*. It's all right; they're almost leather.

[*The Rector* re-enters, with a slight look of insecurity.]

*Lady Ella*. Rector, are you sure it's safe?

*The Rector*. [Hitching at his trousers] No, indeed, *lady* Ella—I——

*Lady Ella*. Tommy, do lend a hand!

*The Squire*. All right, Ella; all right! He doesn't mean what you mean!

*Lady Ella*. [Transferring *Edward* to *the Squire*] Hold him, Tommy.
He's sure to smell out Hannibal!

*The Squire*. [Taking *Edward* by the collar, and holding his own nose] Jove! Clever if he can smell anything but himself. Phew! She ought to have the Victoria Cross for goin' in that pond.

[The door opens, and *herself* appears; a fine, frank, handsome woman, in a man's orange-coloured motor-coat, hastily thrown on over the substrata of costume.]

*She*. So very sorry—had to have a bath, and change, of course!

*Lady Ella*. We're so awfully grateful to you. It was splendid.

*Maud*. Quite.

*The Rector*. [Rather holding himself together] Heroic! I was just myself about to——

*The Squire*. [Restraining *Edward*] Little beast will fight—must apologise—you were too quick for me——

[He looks up at her. She is smiling, and regarding the wounded dog, her head benevolently on one side.]

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*She*. Poor dears! They thought they were so safe in that nice pond!

*Lady Ella*. Is he very badly torn?

*She*. Rather nasty. There ought to be a stitch or two put in his ear.

*Lady Ella*. I thought so. Tommy, do——

*The Squire*. All right. Am I to let him go?

*Lady Ella*. No.

*Maud*. The fly's outside. Bertie, run and tell Jarvis to drive in for the Vet.

*The Rector*. [Gentle and embarrassed] Run? Well, Maud—I——

*She*. The doctor would sew it up. My maid can go round.

[*Hannibal*. appears at the open casement with the broken braces dangling from his collar.]

*Lady Ella*. Look! Catch him! Rector!

*Maud*. Bertie! Catch him!

[*The Rector* seizes *Hannibal*, but is seen to be in difficulties with his garments. *Herself*, who has gone out left, returns, with a leather strop in one hand and a pair of braces in the other.]

*She*. Take this strop—he can't break that. And would these be any good to you?

[*She* hands the braces to *Maud* and goes out on to the verandah and hastily away. *Maud*, transferring the braces to the *Rector*, goes out, draws *Hannibal* from the casement window, and secures him with the strap. *The Rector* sits suddenly with the braces in his hands. There is a moment's peace.]

*Lady Ella*. Splendid, isn't she? I do admire her.

*The Squire*. She's all there.

*The Rector*. [Feelingly] Most kind.

[He looks ruefully at the braces and at *lady Ella*. A silence. *Maud* reappears at the door and stands gazing at the braces.]

*The Squire*. [Suddenly] Eh?

*Maud*. Yes.

*The Squire*. [Looking at his wife] Ah!

*Lady Ella*. [Absorbed in *Edward*] Poor darling!

*The Squire*. [Bluntly] Ella, the Rector wants to get up!

*The Rector*. [Gently] Perhaps—just for a moment——

*Lady Ella*. Oh! [She turns to the wall.]

[*The Rector*, screened by his *wife*, retires on to the verandah to adjust his garments.]

*The Squire*. [Meditating] So she's married!

*Lady Ella*. [Absorbed in *Edward*] Why?

*The Squire*. Braces.

*Lady Ella*. Oh! Yes. We ought to ask them to dinner, Tommy.

*The Squire*. Ah! Yes. Wonder who they are?

[*The Rector* and *Maud* reappear.]

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*The Rector*. Really very good of her to lend her husband's—I was— er—quite——

*Maud*. That'll do, Bertie.

[*They* see *her* returning along the verandah, followed by a sandy, red-faced gentleman in leather leggings, with a needle and cotton in his hand.]

*Herself*. Caught the doctor just starting, So lucky!

*Lady Ella*. Oh! Thank goodness!

*Doctor*. How do, Lady Ella? How do, Squire?—how do, Rector? [To *Maud*] How de do? This the beastie? I see. Quite! Who'll hold him for me?

*Lady Ella*. Oh! I!

*Herself*. D'you know, I think I'd better. It's so dreadful when it's your own, isn't it? Shall we go in here, doctor? Come along, pretty boy!

[She takes *Edward*, and they pass into the room, left.]

*Lady Ella*. I dreaded it. She is splendid!

*The Squire*. Dogs take to her. That's a sure sign.

*The Rector*. Little things—one can always tell.

*The Squire*. Something very attractive about her—what! Fine build of woman.

*Maud*. I shall get hold of her for parish work.

*The Rector*. Ah! Excellent—excellent! Do!

*The Squire*. Wonder if her husband shoots? She seems quite-er—quite——

*Lady Ella*. [Watching the door] Quite! Altogether charming; one of the nicest faces I ever saw.

[*The doctor* comes out alone.]

Oh! Doctor—have you? is it——?

*Doctor*. Right as rain! She held him like an angel—he just licked her, and never made a sound.

*Lady Ella*. Poor darling! Can I——

[She signs toward the door.]

*Doctor*. Better leave 'em a minute. She's moppin' 'im off. [He wrinkles his nose] Wonderful clever hands!

*The Squire*. I say—who is she?

*Doctor*. [Looking from face to face with a dubious and rather quizzical expression] Who? Well—there you have me! All I know is she's a first-rate nurse—been helpin' me with a case in Ditch Lane. Nice woman, too—thorough good sort! Quite an acquisition here. H'm! [Again that quizzical glance] Excuse me hurryin' off—very late. Good-bye, Rector. Good-bye, Lady Ella. Good-bye!

[He goes. A silence.]

*The Squire*. H'm! I suppose we ought to be a bit careful.

[*Jarvis*, flyman of the old school, has appeared on the verandah.]

*Jarvis*. [To *the Rector*] Beg pardon, sir. Is the little dog all right?

*Maud*. Yes.

*Jarvis*. [Touching his hat] Seein' you've missed your train, m'm, shall I wait, and take you 'ome again?

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*Maud*. No.

*Jarvis*. Cert'nly, m'm. [He touches his hat with a circular gesture, and is about to withdraw.]

*Lady Ella*. Oh, Jarvis—what's the name of the people here?

*Jarvis*. Challenger's the name I've driven 'em in, my lady.

*The Squire*. Challenger? Sounds like a hound. What's he like?

*Jarvis*. [Scratching his head] Wears a soft 'at, sir.

*The Squire*. H'm! Ah!

*Jarvis*. Very nice gentleman, very nice lady. 'Elped me with my old mare when she 'ad the 'ighsteria last week—couldn't 'a' been kinder if they'd 'a' been angels from 'eaven. Wonderful fond o' dumb animals, the two of 'em. I don't pay no attention to gossip, meself.

*Maud*. Gossip? What gossip?

*Jarvis*. [Backing] Did I make use of the word, m'm? You'll excuse me, I'm sure. There's always talk where there's newcomers. I takes people as I finds 'em.

*The Rector*. Yes, yes, Jarvis—quite—quite right!

*Jarvis*. Yes, sir. I've—I've got a 'abit that way at my time o' life.

*Maud*. [Sharply] How long have they been here, Jarvis?

*Jarvis*. Well——er—a matter of three weeks, m'm.

[A slight involuntary stir.]

[Apologetic] Of course, in my profession I can't afford to take notice of whether there's the trifle of a ring between 'em, as the sayin' is. 'Tisn't 'ardly my business like.

[A silence.]

*Lady Ella*. [Suddenly] Er—thank you, Jarvis; you needn't wait.

*Jarvis*. No, m'lady. Your service, sir—service, m'm.

[He goes. A silence.]

*The Squire*. [Drawing a little closer] Three weeks? I say—er— wasn't there a book?

*The Rector*. [Abstracted] Three weeks——I certainly haven't seen them in church.

*Maud*. A trifle of a ring!

*Lady Ella*. [Impulsively] Oh, bother! I'm sure she's all right.
And if she isn't, I don't care. She's been much too splendid.

*The Squire*. Must think of the village. Didn't quite like the doctor's way of puttin' us off.

*Lady Ella*. The poor darling owes his life to her.

*The Squire*. H'm! Dash it! Yes! Can't forget the way she ran into that stinkin' pond.

*Maud*. Had she a wedding-ring on?

[They look at each other, but no one knows.]

*Lady Ella*. Well, I'm not going to be ungrateful.

*The Squire*. It'd be dashed awkward—mustn't take a false step, Ella.

*The Rector*. And I've got his braces! [He puts his hand to his waist.]

*Maud*. [Warningly] Bertie!

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*The Squire*. That's all right, Rector—we're goin' to be perfectly polite, and—and—thank her, and all that.

*Lady Ella*. We can see she's a good sort. What does it matter?

*Maud*. My dear Ella! "What does it matter!" We've got to know.

*The Rector*. We do want light.

*The Squire*. I'll ring the bell. [He rings.]

[They look at each other aghast.]

*Lady Ella*. What did you ring for, Tommy?

*The Squire*. [Flabbergasted] God knows!

*Maud*. Somebody'll come.

*The Squire*. Rector—you—you've got to——

*Maud*. Yes, Bertie.

*The Rector*. Dear me! But—er—what—er——How?

*The Squire*. [Deeply-to himself] The whole thing's damn delicate.

[The door right is opened and a *maid* appears. She is a determined-looking female. They face her in silence.]

*The Rector*. Er—er——your master is not in?

*The maid*. No. 'E's gone up to London.

*The Rector*. Er——Mr Challenger, I think?

*The maid*. Yes.

*The Rector*. Yes! Er——quite so

*The maid*. [Eyeing them] D'you want—Mrs Challenger?

*The Rector*. Ah! Not precisely——

*The Squire*. [To him in a low, determined voice] Go on.

*The Rector*. [Desperately] I asked because there was a—a—Mr. Challenger I used to know in the ’nineties, and I thought—you wouldn’t happen to know how long they’ve been married? My friend marr——

*The maid*. Three weeks.

*The Rector*. Quite so—quite so! I shall hope it will turn out to be——Er—thank you—-Ha!

*Lady Ella*. Our dog has been fighting with the Rector’s, and Mrs Challenger rescued him; she’s bathing his ear. We’re waiting to thank her. You needn’t——

*The maid*. [Eyeing them] No.

[She turns and goes out.]

*The Squire*. Phew! What a gorgon! I say, Rector, did you really know a Challenger in the ’nineties?

*The Rector*. [Wiping his brow] No.

*The Squire*. Ha! Jolly good!

*Lady Ella*. Well, you see!—it’s all right.

*The Rector*. Yes, indeed. A great relief!

*Lady Ella*. [Moving to the door] I must go in now.

*The Squire*. Hold on! You goin’ to ask ’em to—to—anything?

*Lady Ella*. Yes.

*Maud*. I shouldn’t.

*Lady Ella*. Why not? We all like the look of her.

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*The Rector*. I think we should punish ourselves for entertaining that uncharitable thought.

*Lady Ella*. Yes. It's horrible not having the courage to take people as they are.

*The Squire*. As they are? H'm! How can you till you know?

*Lady Ella*. Trust our instincts, of course.

*The Squire*. And supposing she'd turned out not married—eh!

*Lady Ella*! She'd still be herself, wouldn't she?

*Maud*. Ella!

*The Squire*. H'm! Don't know about that.

*Lady Ella*. Of course she would, Tommy.

*The Rector*. [His hand stealing to his waist] Well! It's a great weight off my——!

*Lady Ella*. There's the poor darling snuffling. I must go in.

[She knocks on the door. It is opened, and *Edward* comes out briskly, with a neat little white pointed ear-cap on one ear.]

*Lady Ella*. Precious!

[*She herself* Comes out, now properly dressed in flax-blue linen.]

*Lady Ella*. How perfectly sweet of you to make him that!

*She*. He's such a dear. And the other poor dog?

*Maud*. Quite safe, thanks to your strop.

[*Hannibal* appears at the window, with the broken strop dangling. Following her gaze, they turn and see him.]

*Maud*. Oh! There, he's broken it. Bertie!

*She*. Let me! [She seizes *Hannibal*.]

*The Squire*. We're really most tremendously obliged to you. Afraid we've been an awful nuisance.

*She*. Not a bit. I love dogs.

*The Squire*. Hope to make the acquaintance of Mr——of your husband.

*Lady Ella*. [To *Edward*, who is straining]

[Gently, darling! Tommy, take him.]

[*The Squire* does so.]

*Maud*. [Approaching *Hannibal*.] Is he behaving?

[She stops short, and her face suddenly shoots forward at *her* hands that are holding *Hannibal's* neck.]

*She*. Oh! yes—he's a love.

*Maud*. [Regaining her upright position, and pursing her lips; in a peculiar voice] Bertie, take Hannibal.

*The Rector* takes him.

*Lady Ella*. [Producing a card] I can't be too grateful for all you've done for my poor darling. This is where we live. Do come— and see——

[*Maud*, whose eyes have never left those hands, tweaks *lady* ELLA's dress.]

*Lady Ella*. That is—I'm—I——

[*Herself* looks at *lady Ella* in surprise.]

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*The Squire*. I don't know if your husband shoots, but if——

[*Maud*, catching his eye, taps the third finger of her left hand.]

—er—he—does—er—er——

[*Herself* looks at *the Squire* surprised.]

*Maud*. [Turning to her husband, repeats the gesture with the low and simple word] Look!

*The Rector*. [With round eyes, severely] Hannibal! [He lifts him bodily and carries him away.]

*Maud*. Don't squeeze him, Bertie!

[She follows through the French window.]

*The Squire*. [Abruptly—of the unoffending *Edward*] That dog'll be forgettin' himself in a minute.

[He picks up *Edward* and takes him out.]

[*Lady Ella* is left staring.]

*Lady Ella*. [At last] You mustn't think, I——You mustn't think, we ——Oh! I must just see they—don't let Edward get at Hannibal.

[She skims away.]

[*Herself* is left staring after *lady Ella*, in surprise.]

*She*. What is the matter with them?

[The door is opened.]

*The maid*. [Entering and holding out a wedding-ring—severely] You left this, m'm, in the bathroom.

*She*. [Looking, startled, at her finger] Oh! [Taking it] I hadn't missed it. Thank you, Martha.

[*The maid* goes.]

[A hand, slipping in at the casement window, softly lays a pair of braces on the windowsill. *She* looks at the braces, then at the ring. *Her* lip curls.]

Sue. [Murmuring deeply] Ah!

*Curtain*

# DEFEAT

**A TINY DRAMA**

# CHARACTERS

*The officer*.
*The girl*.

# DEFEAT

During the Great War. Evening.

An empty room. The curtains drawn and gas turned low. The furniture and walls give a colour-impression as of greens and beetroot. There is a prevalence of plush. A fireplace on the Left, a sofa, a small table; the curtained window is at the back. On the table, in a common pot, stands a little plant of maidenhair fern, fresh and green.Enter from the door on the Right, a *girl* and a *young officer* in khaki. The *girl* wears a discreet dark dress, hat, and veil, and stained yellow gloves. The *young officer* is tall, with a fresh open face, and kindly eager blue eyes; he is a little lame. The girl, who is evidently at home, moves towards the gas jet to turn it up, then changes her mind, and going to the curtains, draws them apart and throws up the window. Bright moonlight comes flooding in. Outside are seen the trees of a little Square. She stands gazing out, suddenly turns inward with a shiver.

Young off. I say; what's the matter? You were crying when I spoke to you.

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*Girl*. [With a movement of recovery] Oh! nothing. The beautiful evening-that's all.

*Young off*. [Looking at her] Cheer up!

*Girl*. [Taking of hat and veil; her hair is yellowish and crinkly] Cheer up! You are not lonelee, like me.

*Young off*. [Limping to the window—doubtfully] I say, how did you how did you get into this? Isn't it an awfully hopeless sort of life?

*Girl*. Yees, it ees. You haf been wounded?

*Young off*. Just out of hospital to-day.

*Girl*. The horrible war—all the misery is because of the war. When will it end?

*Young off*. [Leaning against the window-sill, looking at her attentively] I say, what nationality are you?

*Girl*. [With a quick look and away] Rooshian.

*Young off*. Really! I never met a Russian girl. [The *girl* gives him another quick look] I say, is it as bad as they make out?

*Girl*. [Slipping her hand through his arm] Not when I haf anyone as ni-ice as you; I never haf had, though. [She smiles, and her smile, like her speech, is slow and confining] You stopped because I was sad, others stop because I am gay. I am not fond of men at all. When you know—you are not fond of them.

*Young off*. Well, you hardly know them at their best, do you? You should see them in the trenches. By George! They're simply splendid—officers and men, every blessed soul. There's never been anything like it—just one long bit of jolly fine self-sacrifice; it's perfectly amazing.

*Girl*. [Turning her blue-grey eyes on him] I expect you are not the last at that. You see in them what you haf in yourself, I think.

*Young off*. Oh, not a bit; you're quite out! I assure you when we made the attack where I got wounded there wasn't a single man in my regiment who wasn't an absolute hero. The way they went in—never thinking of themselves—it was simply ripping.

*Girl*. [In a queer voice] It is the same too, perhaps, with—the enemy.

*Young off*. Oh, yes! I know that.

*Girl*. Ah! You are not a mean man. How I hate mean men!

*Young off*. Oh! they're not mean really—they simply don't understand.

*Girl*. Oh! You are a babee—a good babee aren't you?

[The *young officer* doesn't like this, and frowns. The *girl* looks a little scared.]

*Girl*. [Clingingly] But I li-ke you for it. It is so good to find a ni-ice man.

*Young off*. [Abruptly] About being lonely? Haven't you any Russian friends?

*Girl*. [Blankly] Rooshian? No. [Quickly] The town is so beeg. Were you at the concert before you spoke to me?

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*Young off*. Yes.

*Girl*. I too. I lofe music.

*Young off*. I suppose all Russians do.

*Girl*. [With another quick look tat him] I go there always when I haf the money.

*Young off*. What! Are you as badly on the rocks as that?

*Girl*. Well, I haf just one shilling now!

[She laughs bitterly. The laugh upsets him; he sits on the window-sill, and leans forward towards her.]

*Young off*. I say, what's your name?

*Girl*. May. Well, I call myself that. It is no good asking yours.

*Young off*. [With a laugh] You're a distrustful little soul; aren't you?

*Girl*. I haf reason to be, don't you think?

*Young off*. Yes. I suppose you're bound to think us all brutes.

*Girl*. [Sitting on a chair close to the window where the moonlight falls on one powdered cheek] Well, I haf a lot of reasons to be afraid all my time. I am dreadfully nervous now; I am not trusding anybody. I suppose you haf been killing lots of Germans?

*Young off*. We never know, unless it happens to be hand to hand; I haven't come in for that yet.

*Girl*. But you would be very glad if you had killed some.

*Young off*. Oh, glad? I don't think so. We're all in the same boat, so far as that's concerned. We're not glad to kill each other—not most of us. We do our job—that's all.

*Girl*. Oh! It is frightful. I expect I haf my brothers killed.

*Young off*. Don't you get any news ever?

*Girl*. News? No indeed, no news of anybody in my country. I might not haf a country; all that I ever knew is gone; fader, moder, sisters, broders, all; never any more I shall see them, I suppose, now. The war it breaks and breaks, it breaks hearts. [She gives a little snarl] Do you know what I was thinking when you came up to me? I was thinking

of my native town, and the river in the moonlight. If I could see it again I would be glad. Were you ever homeseeck?

*Young off*. Yes, I have been—in the trenches. But one's ashamed with all the others.

*Girl*. Ah! Yees! Yees! You are all comrades there. What is it like for me here, do you think, where everybody hates and despises me, and would catch me and put me in prison, perhaps. [Her breast heaves.]

*Young off*. [Leaning forward and patting her knee] Sorry—sorry.

*Girl*. [In a smothered voice] You are the first who has been kind to me for so long! I will tell you the truth—I am not Rooshian at all —I am German.

*Young off*. [Staring] My dear girl, who cares. We aren't fighting against women.

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*Girl*. [Peering at him] Another man said that to me. But he was thinkin' of his fun. You are a veree ni-ice boy; I am so glad I met you. You see the good in people, don't you? That is the first thing in the world—because—there is really not much good in people, you know.

*Young off*. [Smiling] You are a dreadful little cynic! But of course you are!

*Girl*. Cyneec? How long do you think I would live if I was not a cyneec? I should drown myself to-morrow. Perhaps there are good people, but, you see, I don't know them.

*Young off*. I know lots.

*Girl*. [Leaning towards him] Well now—see, ni-ice boy—you haf never been in a hole, haf you?

*Young off*. I suppose not a real hole.

*Girl*. No, I should think not, with your face. Well, suppose I am still a good girl, as I was once, you know; and you took me to your mother and your sisters and you said: "Here is a little German girl that has no work, and no money, and no friends." They will say: "Oh! how sad! A German girl!" And they will go and wash their hands.

[The *officer*, is silent, staring at her.]

*Girl*. You see.

*Young off*. [Muttering] I'm sure there are people.

*Girl*. No. They would not take a German, even if she was good. Besides, I don't want to be good any more—I am not a humbug; I have learned to be bad. Aren't you going to kees me, ni-ice boy?

She puts her face close to his. Her eyes trouble him; he draws back.

*Young off*. Don't. I'd rather not, if you don't mind. [She looks at him fixedly, with a curious inquiring stare] It's stupid. I don't know—but you see, out there, and in hospital, life's different. It's—it's—it isn't mean, you know. Don't come too close.

*Girl*. Oh! You are fun——[She stops] Eesn't it light. No Zeps to-night. When they burn—what a 'orrble death! And all the people cheer. It is natural. Do you hate us veree much?

*Young off*. [Turning sharply] Hate? I don't know.

*Girl*. I don't hate even the English—I despise them. I despise my people too; even more, because they began this war. Oh! I know that. I despise all the peoples. Why haf they made the world so miserable —why haf they killed all our lives—hundreds and thousands and millions of lives—all for noting? They haf made a bad world—everybody hating, and looking for the worst everywhere. They haf made me bad, I know. I believe no more in anything. What is there to believe in? Is there a God? No! Once I was teaching little English children their prayers—isn't that funnee? I was reading to them about Christ and love. I believed all those things. Now I believe noting at all—no one who is not a fool or a liar can believe. I would

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like to work in a ’ospital; I would like to go and ’elp poor boys like you. Because I am a German they would throw me out a ’undred times, even if I was good. It is the same in Germany, in France, in Russia, everywhere. But do you think I will believe in Love and Christ and God and all that—Not I! I think we are animals —that’s all! Oh, yes! you fancy it is because my life has spoiled me. It is not that at all—that is not the worst thing in life. The men I take are not ni-ice, like you, but it’s their nature; and—they help me to live, which is something for me, anyway. No, it is the men who think themselves great and good and make the war with their talk and their hate, killing us all—killing all the boys like you, and keeping poor People in prison, and telling us to go on hating; and all these dreadful cold-blood creatures who write in the papers —the same in my country —just the same; it is because of all of them that I think we are only animals.

[The *young officer* gets up, acutely miserable.]

[She follows him with her eyes.]

*Girl*. Don’t mind me talkin’, ni-ice boy. I don’t know anyone to talk to. If you don’t like it, I can be quiet as a mouse.

*Young off*. Oh, go on! Talk away; I’m not obliged to believe you, and I don’t.

[She, too, is on her feet now, leaning against the wall; her dark dress and white face just touched by the slanting moonlight. Her voice comes again, slow and soft and bitter.]

*Girl*. Well, look here, ni-ice boy, what sort of world is it, where millions are being tortured, for no fault of theirs, at all? A beautiful world, isn’t it? ’Umbog! Silly rot, as you boys call it. You say it is all “Comrades” and braveness out there at the front, and people don’t think of themselves. Well, I don’t think of myself veree much. What does it matter? I am lost now, anyway. But I think of my people at ’ome; how they suffer and grieve. I think of all the poor people there, and here, how lose those they love, and all the poor prisoners. Am I not to think of them? And if I do, how am I to believe it a beautiful world, ni-ice boy?

[He stands very still, staring at her.]

*Girl*. Look here! We haf one life each, and soon it is over. Well, I think that is lucky.

*Young off*. No! There’s more than that.

*Girl*. [Softly] Ah! You think the war is fought for the future; you are giving your lives for a better world, aren’t you?

*Young off*. We must fight till we win.

*Girl*. Till you win. My people think that too. All the peoples think that if they win the world will be better. But it will not, you know; it will be much worse, anyway.

[He turns away from her, and catches up his cap. Her voice follows him.]

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*Girl*. I don't care which win. I don't care if my country is beaten. I despise them all—-animals—animals. Ah! Don't go, ni-ice boy; I will be quiet now.

[He has taken some notes from his tunic pocket; he puts then on the table and goes up to her.]

*Young off*. Good-night.

*Girl*. [Plaintively] Are you really going? Don't you like me enough?

*Young off*. Yes, I like you.

*Girl*. It is because I am German, then?

*Young off*. No.

*Girl*. Then why won't you stay?

*Young off*. [With a shrug] If you must know—because you upset me.

*Girl*. Won't you kees me once?

[He bends, puts his lips to her forehead. But as he takes them away she throws her head back, presses her mouth to his, and clings to him.]

*Young off*. [Sitting down suddenly] Don't! I don't want to feel a brute.

*Girl*. [Laughing] You are a funny boy; but you are veree good. Talk to me a little, then. No one talks to me. Tell me, haf you seen many German prisoners?

*Young off*. [Sighing] A good many.

*Girl*. Any from the Rhine?

*Young off*. Yes, I think so.

*Girl*. Were they veree sad?

*Young off*. Some were; some were quite glad to be taken.

*Girl*. Did you ever see the Rhine? It will be wonderful to-night. The moonlight will be the same there, and in Rooshia too, and France, everywhere; and the trees will look the same as here, and people will meet under them and make love just as here. Oh! isn't it stupid, the war? As if it were not good to be alive!

*Young off*. You can't tell how good it is to be alive till you're facing death. You don't live till then. And when a whole lot of you feel like that—and are ready to give their lives for each other, it's worth all the rest of life put together.

[He stops, ashamed of such, sentiment before this girl, who believes in nothing.]

*Girl*. [Softly] How were you wounded, ni-ice boy?

*Young off*. Attacking across open ground: four machine bullets got me at one go off.

*Girl*. Weren't you veree frightened when they ordered you to attack?

[He shakes his head and laughs.]

*Young off*. It was great. We did laugh that morning. They got me much too soon, though—a swindle.

*Girl*. [Staring at him] You laughed?

*Young off*. Yes. And what do you think was the first thing I was conscious of next morning? My old Colonel bending over me and giving me a squeeze of lemon. If you knew my Colonel you'd still believe in things. There is something, you know, behind all this evil. After all, you can only die once, and, if it's for your country—all the better!

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[Her face, in the moonlight, with, intent eyes touched up with black, has a most strange, other-world look.]

*Girl*. No; I believe in nothing, not even in my country. My heart is dead.

*Young off*. Yes; you think so, but it isn't, you know, or you wouldn't have 'been crying when I met you.

*Girl*. If it were not dead, do you think I could live my life-walking the streets every night, pretending to like strange men; never hearing a kind word; never talking, for fear I will be known for a German? Soon I shall take to drinking; then I shall be "Kaput" veree quick. You see, I am practical; I see things clear. To-night I am a little emotional; the moon is funny, you know. But I live for myself only, now. I don't care for anything or anybody.

*Young off*. All the same; just now you were pitying your folk at home, and prisoners and that.

*Girl*. Yees; because they suffer. Those who suffer are like me—I pity myself, that's all; I am different from your English women. I see what I am doing; I do not let my mind become a turnip just because I am no longer moral.

*Young off*. Nor your heart either, for all you say.

*Girl*. Ni-ice boy, you are veree obstinate. But all that about love is 'umbog. We love ourselves, noting more.

At that intense soft bitterness in her voice, he gets up, feeling stifled, and stands at the window. A newspaper boy some way off is calling his wares. The GIRL's fingers slip between his own, and stay unmoving. He looks round into her face. In spite of make-up it has a queer, unholy, touching beauty.

*Young off*. [With an outburst] No; we don't only love ourselves; there is more. I can't explain, but there's something great; there's kindness--and--and-----

[The shouting of newspaper boys grows louder and their cries, passionately vehement, clash into each other and obscure each word. His head goes up to listen; her hand tightens within his arm—she too is listening. The cries come nearer, hoarser, more shrill and clamorous; the empty moonlight outside seems suddenly crowded with figures, footsteps, voices, and a fierce distant cheering. "Great victory—great victory! Official! British! 'Eavy defeat of the 'Uns! Many thousand prisoners! 'Eavy defeat!" It speeds by, intoxicating, filling him with a fearful joy; he leans far out, waving his cap and cheering like a madman; the night seems to flutter and vibrate and answer. He turns to rush down into the street, strikes against something soft, and recoils. The *girl* stands with hands clenched, and face convulsed, panting. All confused with the desire to do

something, he stoops to kiss her hand.  She snatches away her fingers, sweeps up the notes he has put down, and holds them out to him.]

*Girl*.  Take them—I will not haf your English money—take them.

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Suddenly she tears them across, twice, thrice, lets the bits. flutter to the floor, and turns her back on him. He stands looking at her leaning against the plush-covered table, her head down, a dark figure in a dark room, with the moonlight sharpening her outline. Hardly a moment he stays, then makes for the door. When he is gone, she still stands there, her chin on her breast, with the sound in her ears of cheering, of hurrying feet, and voices crying: "'Eavy Defeat!" stands, in the centre of a pattern made by the fragments of the torn-up notes, staring out unto the moonlight, seeing not this hated room and the hated Square outside, but a German orchard, and herself, a little girl, plucking apples, a big dog beside her; and a hundred other pictures, such as the drowning see. Then she sinks down on the floor, lays her forehead on the dusty carpet, and presses her body to it. Mechanically, she sweeps together the scattered fragments of notes, assembling them with the dust into a little pile, as of fallen leaves, and dabbling in it with her fingers, while the tears run down her cheeks.

*Girl*. Defeat! Der Vaterland! Defeat!. . . . One shillin'!

> [Then suddenly, in the moonlight, she sits up, and begins to sing with all her might "Die Wacht am Rhein." And outside men pass, singing: "Rule, Britannia!"]

*Curtain*

## THE SUN

**A SCENE**

## CHARACTERS

*The girl*.
*The man*.
*The soldier*.

## THE SUN

A Girl, sits crouched over her knees on a stile close to a river. A *man* with a silver badge stands beside her, clutching the worn top plank. *The girl's* level brows are drawn together; her eyes see her memories. *The* MAN's eyes see *the girl*; he has a dark, twisted face. The bright sun shines; the quiet river flows; the Cuckoo is calling; the mayflower is in bloom along the hedge that ends in the stile on the towing-path.

The girl. God knows what 'e'll say, Jim.

*The man*. Let ’im. ’E’s come too late, that’s all.

*The girl*. He couldn’t come before. I’m frightened. ‘E was fond o’ me.

*The man*. And aren’t I fond of you?

*The girl*. I ought to ’a waited, Jim; with ‘im in the fightin’.

*The man*. [Passionately] And what about me? Aren’t I been in the fightin’—earned all I could get?

*The girl*. [Touching him] Ah!

*The man*. Did you—? [He cannot speak the words.]

*The girl*. Not like you, Jim—not like you.

*The man*. Have a spirit, then.

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*The girl*.  I promised him.

*The man*.  One man's luck's another's poison.

*The girl*.  I ought to 'a waited.  I never thought he'd come back from the fightin'.

*The man*. [Grimly] Maybe 'e'd better not 'ave.

*The girl*. [Looking back along the tow-path] What'll he be like, I wonder?

*The man*. [Gripping her shoulder] Daisy, don't you never go back on me, or I should kill you, and 'im too.

[*The girl* looks at him, shivers, and puts her lips to his.]

*The girl*.  I never could.

*The man*.  Will you run for it?  'E'd never find us!

[*The girl* shakes her head.]

*The man* [Dully] What's the good o' stayin'?  The world's wide.

*The girl*.  I'd rather have it off me mind, with him home.

*The man*. [Clenching his hands] It's temptin' Providence.

*The girl*.  What's the time, Jim?

*The man*. [Glancing at the sun] 'Alf past four.

*The girl*. [Looking along the towing-path] He said four o'clock.
Jim, you better go.

*The man*.  Not I. I've not got the wind up.  I've seen as much of hell as he has, any day. What like is he?

*The girl*. [Dully] I dunno, just.  I've not seen him these three years.  I dunno no more, since I've known you.

*The man*.  Big or little chap?

*The girl*.  'Bout your size.  Oh!  Jim, go along!

*The man*.  No fear!  What's a blighter like that to old Fritz's shells?  We didn't shift when they was comin'.  If you'll go, I'll go; not else.

[Again she shakes her head.]

*The girl*. Jim, do you love me true?

[For answer *the man* takes her avidly in his arms.]

I ain't ashamed—I ain't ashamed. If 'e could see me 'eart.

*The man*. Daisy! If I'd known you out there, I never could 'a stuck it. They'd 'a got me for a deserter. That's how I love you!

*The girl*. Jim, don't lift your hand to 'im! Promise!

*The man*. That's according.

*The girl*. Promise!

*The man*. If 'e keeps quiet, I won't. But I'm not accountable—not always, I tell you straight—not since I've been through that.

*The girl*. [With a shiver] Nor p'raps he isn't.

*The man*. Like as not. It takes the lynch pins out, I tell you.

*The girl*. God 'elp us!

*The man*. [Grimly] Ah! We said that a bit too often. What we want we take, now; there's no one else to give it us, and there's no fear'll stop us; we seen the bottom of things.

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*The girl*. P'raps he'll say that too.

*The man*. Then it'll be 'im or me.

*The girl*. I'm frightened:

*The man*. [Tenderly] No, Daisy, no! The river's handy. One more or less. 'E shan't 'arm you; nor me neither. [He takes out a knife.]

*The girl*. [Seizing his hand] Oh, no! Give it to me, Jim!

*The man*. [Smiling] No fear! [He puts it away] Shan't 'ave no need for it like as not. All right, little Daisy; you can't be expected to see things like what we do. What's life, anyway? I've seen a thousand lives taken in five minutes. I've seen dead men on the wires like flies on a flypaper. I've been as good as dead meself a hundred times. I've killed a dozen men. It's nothin'. He's safe, if 'e don't get my blood up. If he does, nobody's safe; not 'im, nor anybody else; not even you. I'm speakin' sober.

*The girl*. [Softly] Jim, you won't go fightin' in the sun, with the birds all callin'?

*The man*. That depends on 'im. I'm not lookin' for it. Daisy, I love you. I love your hair. I love your eyes. I love you.

*The girl*. And I love you, Jim. I don't want nothin' more than you in all the world.

*The man*. Amen to that, my dear. Kiss me close!

The sound of a voice singing breaks in on their embrace. *The girl* starts from his arms, and looks behind her along the towing-path. *The man* draws back against, the hedge, fingering his side, where the knife is hidden. The song comes nearer.

> "I'll be right there to-night,
> Where the fields are snowy white;
> Banjos ringing, darkies singing,
> All the world seems bright."

*The girl*. It's him!

*The man*. Don't get the wind up, Daisy. I'm here!

[The singing stops. A man's voice says "Christ! It's Daisy; it's little Daisy 'erself!" *The girl* stands rigid. The figure of a soldier appears on the other side of the stile. His cap is tucked into his belt, his hair is bright in the sunshine; he is lean, wasted, brown, and laughing.]

*Soldier*. Daisy! Daisy! Hallo, old pretty girl!

[*The girl* does not move, barring the way, as it were.]

*The girl*. Hallo, Jack! [Softly] I got things to tell you!

*Soldier*. What sort o' things, this lovely day? Why, I got things that'd take me years to tell. Have you missed me, Daisy?

*The girl*. You been so long.

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*Soldier*. So I ’ave. My Gawd! It’s a way they ’ave in the Army. I said when I got out of it I’d laugh. Like as the sun itself I used to think of you, Daisy, when the trumps was comin’ over, and the wind was up. D’you remember that last night in the wood? “Come back and marry me quick, Jack.” Well, here I am—got me pass to heaven. No more fightin’, no more drillin’, no more sleepin’ rough. We can get married now, Daisy. We can live soft an’ ’appy. Give us a kiss, my dear.

*The girl*. [Drawing back] No.

*Soldier*. [Blankly] Why not?

[*The man*, with a swift movement steps along the hedge to *the girl’s* side.]

*The man*. That’s why, soldier.

*Soldier*. [Leaping over the stile] ’Oo are you, Pompey? The sun don’t shine in your inside, do it? ’Oo is he, Daisy?

*The girl*. My man.

*Soldier*. Your-man! Lummy! “Taffy was a Welshman, Taffy was a thief!” Well, mate! So you’ve been through it, too. I’m laughin’ this mornin’ as luck will ’ave it. Ah! I can see your knife.

*The man*. [Who has half drawn his knife] Don’t laugh at me, I tell you.

*Soldier*. Not at you, not at you. [He looks from one to the other] I’m laughin’ at things in general. Where did you get it, mate?

*The man*. [Watchfully] Through the lung.

*Soldier*. Think o’ that! An’ I never was touched. Four years an’ never was touched. An’ so you’ve come an’ took my girl! Nothin’ doin’! Ha! [Again he looks from one to the other-then away] Well! The world’s before me! [He laughs] I’ll give you Daisy for a lung protector.

*The man*. [Fiercely] You won’t. I’ve took her.

*Soldier*. That’s all right, then. You keep ’er. I’ve got a laugh in me you can’t put out, black as you look! Good-bye, little Daisy!

[*The girl* makes a movement towards him.]

*The man*. Don’t touch ’im!

[*The girl* stands hesitating, and suddenly bursts into tears.]

*Soldier*. Look ’ere, mate; shake ’ands! I don’t want to see a girl cry, this day of all, with the sun shinin’. I seen too much of sorrer. You and me’ve been at the back of it. We’ve ’ad our whack. Shake!

*The man*. Who are you kiddin’? You never loved ’er!

*Soldier*. [After a long moment’s pause] Oh! I thought I did.

*The man*. I’ll fight you for her.

[He drops his knife. ]

*Soldier*. [Slowly] Mate, you done your bit, an’ I done mine. It’s took us two ways, seemin’ly.

*The girl*. [Pleading] Jim!

*The man*. [With clenched fists] I don’t want ’is charity. I only want what I can take.

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*Soldier*. Daisy, which of us will you ’ave?

*The girl*. [Covering her face] Oh! Him!

*Soldier*. You see, mate! Put your ‘ands down. There’s nothin’ for it but a laugh. You an’ me know that. Laugh, mate!

*The man*. You blarsted——!

[*The girl* springs to him and stops his mouth.]

*Soldier*. It’s no use, mate. I can’t do it. I said I’d laugh to-day, and laugh I will. I’ve come through that, an’ all the stink of it; I’ve come through sorrer. Never again! Cheerio, mate! The sun’s a-shinin’! He turns away.

*The girl*. Jack, don’t think too ’ard of me!

*Soldier*. [Looking back] No fear, my dear! Enjoy your fancy! So long! Gawd bless you both!

He sings, and goes along the path, and the song fades away.

“I’ll be right there to-night
Where the fields are snowy white;
Banjos ringing, darkies singing
All the world seems bright!”

*The man*. ’E’s mad!

*The girl*. [Looking down the path with her hands clasped] The sun has touched ’im, Jim!

*Curtain*

## PUNCH AND GO

### A LITTLE COMEDY

“Orpheus with his lute made trees
And the mountain tope that freeze.....”

# PERSONS OF THE PLAY

*James* G. *Frust* .....The Boss
E. Blewitt Vane .....The Producer
Mr. Foreson .....The Stage Manager
“Electrics".....The Electrician
“Props” .....The Property Man
Herbert .....The Call Boy

### OF THE PLAY WITHIN THE PLAY

*Guy Toone* .....The Professor
*Vanessa Hellgrove* .....The Wife
*George Fleetway* .....Orpheus
*Maude Hopkins* .....The Faun

*Scene*: The Stage of a Theatre.

Action continuous, though the curtain is momentarily lowered according to that action.

# PUNCH AND GO

The Scene is the stage of the theatre set for the dress rehearsal of the little play: “Orpheus with his Lute.” The curtain is up and the audience, though present, is not supposed to be. The set scene represents the end section of a room, with wide French windows, Back Centre, fully opened on to an apple orchard in bloom. The Back Wall with these French windows, is set only about ten feet from the footlights, and the rest of the stage is orchard. What is visible of the room would indicate the study of a writing man of culture. ( Note.—If found advantageous for scenic purposes, this section of room can be changed to a broad verandah

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or porch with pillars supporting its roof.) In the wall, Stage Left, is a curtained opening, across which the curtain is half drawn. Stage Right of the French windows is a large armchair turned rather towards the window, with a book rest attached, on which is a volume of the Encyclopedia Britannica, while on a stool alongside are writing materials such as a man requires when he writes with a pad on his knees. On a little table close by is a reading-lamp with a dark green shade. A crude light from the floats makes the stage stare; the only person on it is *Mr Foreson*, the stage manager, who is standing in the centre looking upwards as if waiting for someone to speak. He is a short, broad man, rather blank, and fatal. From the back of the auditorium, or from an empty box, whichever is most convenient, the producer, *Mr Blewitt Vane*, a man of about thirty four, with his hair brushed back, speaks.

Vane. Mr Foreson?

*Foreson*. Sir?

*Vane*. We'll do that lighting again.

[*Foreson* walks straight of the Stage into the wings Right.]

[A pause.]

Mr Foreson! [Crescendo] Mr Foreson.

[*Foreson* walks on again from Right and shades his eyes.]

*Vane*. For goodness sake, stand by! We'll do that lighting again. Check your floats.

*Foreson*. [Speaking up into the prompt wings] Electrics!

*Voice of electrics*. Hallo!

*Foreson*. Give it us again. Check your floats.

[The floats go down, and there is a sudden blinding glare of blue lights, in which *Foreson* looks particularly ghastly.]

*Vane*. Great Scott! What the blazes! Mr Foreson!

[*Foreson* walks straight out into the wings Left. Crescendo.]

Mr Foreson!

*Foreson*. [Re-appearing] Sir?

*Vane*. Tell Miller to come down.

*Foreson*. Electrics! Mr Blewitt Vane wants to speak to you. Come down!

*Vane*. Tell Herbert to sit in that chair.

[*Foreson* walks straight out into the Right wings.]

Mr Foreson!

*Foreson*. [Re-appearing] Sir?

*Vane*. Don't go off the stage. [*Foreson* mutters.]

[*Electrics* appears from the wings, Stage Left. He is a dark, thin-faced man with rather spikey hair.]

*Electrics*. Yes, Mr Vane?

*Vane*. Look!

*Electrics*. That's what I'd got marked, Mr Vane.

*Vane*. Once for all, what I want is the orchard in full moonlight, and the room dark except for the reading lamp. Cut off your front battens.

[*Electrics* withdraws Left. *Foreson* walks off the Stage into the Right wings.]

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Mr Foreson!

*Foreson*. [Re-appearing] Sir?

*Vane*. See this marked right. Now, come on with it! I want to get some beauty into this!

[While he is speaking, *Herbert*, the call boy, appears from the wings Right, a mercurial youth of about sixteen with a wide mouth.]

*Foreson*. [Maliciously] Here you are, then, Mr Vane. Herbert, sit in that chair.

[*Herbert* sits an the armchair, with an air of perfect peace.]

*Vane*. Now! [All the lights go out. In a wail] Great Scott!

[A throaty chuckle from *Foreson* in the darkness. The light dances up, flickers, shifts, grows steady, falling on the orchard outside. The reading lamp darts alight and a piercing little glare from it strikes into the auditorium away from *Herbert*.]

[In a terrible voice] Mr Foreson.

*Foreson*. Sir?

*Vane*. Look—at—that—shade!

[*Foreson* mutters, walks up to it and turns it round so that the light shines on *Herbert's* legs.]

On his face, on his face!

[*Foreson* turns the light accordingly.]

*Foreson*. Is that what you want, Mr Vane?

*Vane*. Yes. Now, mark that!

*Foreson*. [Up into wings Right] Electrics!

*Electrics*. Hallo!

*Foreson*. Mark that!

*Vane*. My God!

[The blue suddenly becomes amber.]

[The blue returns. All is steady. *Herbert* is seen diverting himself with an imaginary cigar.]

Mr Foreson.

*Foreson*. Sir?

*Vane*. Ask him if he's got that?

*Foreson*. Have you got that?

*Electrics*. Yes.

*Vane*. Now pass to the change. Take your floats off altogether.

*Foreson*. [Calling up] Floats out. [They go out.]

*Vane*. Cut off that lamp. [The lamp goes out] Put a little amber in your back batten. Mark that! Now pass to the end. Mr Foreson!

*Foreson*. Sir?

*Vane*. Black out

*Foreson*. [Calling up] Black out!

[The lights go out.]

*Vane*. Give us your first lighting-lamp on. And then the two changes. Quick as you can. Put some pep into it. Mr Foreson!

*Foreson*. Sir?

*Vane*. Stand for me where Miss Hellgrove comes in. *Foreson* crosses to the window. No, no!—by the curtain.

[*Foreson* takes his stand by the curtain; and suddenly the three lighting effects are rendered quickly and with miraculous exactness.]

Good! Leave it at that. We'll begin. Mr Foreson, send up to Mr Frust.

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[He moves from the auditorium and ascends on to the Stage, by some steps Stage Right.]

*Foreson*. Herb! Call the boss, and tell beginners to stand by. Sharp, now!

[*Herbert* gets out of the chair, and goes off Right.]

[*Foreson* is going off Left as *Vane* mounts the Stage.]

*Vane*. Mr Foreson.

*Foreson*. [Re-appearing] Sir?

*Vane*. I want “Props.”

*Foreson*. [In a stentorian voice] “Props!”

[Another moth-eaten man appears through the French windows.]

*Vane*. Is that boulder firm?

*Props*. [Going to where, in front of the back-cloth, and apparently among its apple trees, lies the counterfeitment of a mossy boulder; he puts his foot on it] If, you don’t put too much weight on it, sir.

*Vane*. It won’t creak?

*Props*. Nao. [He mounts on it, and a dolorous creaking arises.]

*Vane*. Make that right. Let me see that lute.

[*Props* produces a property lute. While they scrutinize it, a broad man with broad leathery clean-shaven face and small mouth, occupied by the butt end of a cigar, has come on to the stage from Stage Left, and stands waiting to be noticed.]

*Props*. [Attracted by the scent of the cigar] The Boss, Sir.

*Vane*. [Turning to “*Props*”] That’ll do, then.

["*Props*” goes out through the French windows.]

*Vane*. [To *Frust*] Now, sir, we’re all ready for rehearsal of “Orpheus with his Lute.”

*Frust*. [In a cosmopolitan voice] “Orphoos with his loot!” That his loot, Mr Vane? Why didn’t he pinch something more precious? Has this high-brow curtain-raiser of yours got any “pep” in it?

*Vane*. It has charm.

*Frust*. I’d thought of “Pop goes the Weasel” with little Miggs. We kind of want a cock-tail before “Louisa loses,” Mr Vane.

*Vane*. Well, sir, you’ll see.

*Frust*. This your lighting? It’s a bit on the spiritool side. I’ve left my glass. Guess I’ll sit in the front row. Ha’f a minute. Who plays this Orphoos?

*Vane*. George Fleetway.

*Frust*. Has he got punch?

*Vane*. It’s a very small part.

*Frust*. Who are the others?

*Vane*. Guy Toone plays the Professor; Vanessa Hellgrove his wife;
Maude Hopkins the faun.

*Frust*. H’m! Names don’t draw.

*Vane*. They’re not expensive, any of them. Miss Hellgrove’s a find,
I think.

*Frust*. Pretty?

*Vane*. Quite.

*Frust*. Arty?

*Vane*. [Doubtfully] No. [With resolution] Look here, Mr *Frust*, it’s no use your expecting another “Pop goes the Weasel.”

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*Frust*. We-ell, if it's got punch and go, that'll be enough for me. Let's get to it!

[He extinguishes his cigar and descends the steps and sits in the centre of the front row of the stalls.]

*Vane*. Mr Foreson?

*Foreson*. [Appearing through curtain, Right] Sir?

*Vane*. Beginners. Take your curtain down.

[He descends the steps and seats himself next to *Frust*. The curtain goes down.]

[A woman's voice is heard singing very beautifully Sullivan's song: "Orpheus with his lute, with his lute made trees and the mountain tops that freeze'." *etc*.]

*Frust*. Some voice!

The curtain rises. In the armchair the *professor* is yawning, tall, thin, abstracted, and slightly grizzled in the hair. He has a pad of paper over his knee, ink on the stool to his right and the Encyclopedia volume on the stand to his left-barricaded in fact by the article he is writing. He is reading a page over to himself, but the words are drowned in the sound of the song his *wife* is singing in the next room, partly screened off by the curtain. She finishes, and stops. His voice can then be heard conning the words of his article.

*Prof*. "Orpheus symbolized the voice of Beauty, the call of life, luring us mortals with his song back from the graves we dig for ourselves. Probably the ancients realized this neither more nor less than we moderns. Mankind has not changed. The civilized being still hides the faun and the dryad within its broadcloth and its silk. And yet"—[He stops, with a dried-up air-rather impatiently] Go on, my dear! It helps the atmosphere.

[The voice of his *wife* begins again, gets as far as "made them sing" and stops dead, just as the PROFESSOR's pen is beginning to scratch. And suddenly, drawing the curtain further aside]

[*She* appears. Much younger than the *professor*, pale, very pretty, of a Botticellian type in face, figure, and in her clinging cream-coloured frock. She gazes at her abstracted husband; then swiftly moves to the lintel of the open window, and stands looking out.]

*The wife*. God! What beauty!

*Prof*. [Looking Up] Umm?

*The wife*. I said: God! What beauty!

*Prof*. Aha!

*The wife*. [Looking at him] Do you know that I have to repeat everything to you nowadays?

*Prof*. What?

*The wife*. That I have to repeat——

*Prof*. Yes; I heard. I'm sorry. I get absorbed.

*The wife*. In all but me.

*Prof*. [Startled] My dear, your song was helping me like anything to get the mood. This paper is the very deuce—to balance between the historical and the natural.

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*The wife*. Who wants the natural?

*Prof*. [Grumbling] Umm! Wish I thought that! Modern taste! History may go hang; they're all for tuppence-coloured sentiment nowadays.

*The wife*. [As if to herself] Is the Spring sentiment?

*Prof*. I beg your pardon, my dear; I didn't catch.

*Wife*. [As if against her will—urged by some pent-up force] Beauty, beauty!

*Prof*. That's what I'm, trying to say here. The Orpheus legend symbolizes to this day the call of Beauty! [He takes up his pen, while she continues to stare out at the moonlight. Yawning] Dash it! I get so sleepy; I wish you'd tell them to make the after-dinner coffee twice as strong.

*Wife*. I will.

*Prof*. How does this strike you? [Conning] "Many Renaissance pictures, especially those of Botticelli, Francesca and Piero di Cosimo were inspired by such legends as that of Orpheus, and we owe a tiny gem—like Raphael 'Apollo and Marsyas' to the same Pagan inspiration."

*Wife*. We owe it more than that—rebellion against the dry-as-dust.

*Prof*. Quite. I might develop that: "We owe it our revolt against the academic; or our disgust at 'big business,' and all the grossness of commercial success. We owe——". [His voice peters out.]

*Wife*. It—love.

*Prof*. [Abstracted] Eh!

*Wife*. I said: We owe it love.

*Prof*. [Rather startled] Possibly. But—er [With a dry smile]
I mustn't say that here—hardly!

*Wife*. [To herself and the moonlight] Orpheus with his lute!

*Prof*. Most people think a lute is a sort of flute. [Yawning heavily] My dear, if you're not going to sing again, d'you mind sitting down? I want to concentrate.

*Wife*. I'm going out.

*Prof*. Mind the dew!

*Wife*. The Christian virtues and the dew.

*Prof*. [With a little dry laugh] Not bad! Not bad! The Christian virtues and the dew. [His hand takes up his pen, his face droops over his paper, while his wife looks at him with a very strange face] “How far we can trace the modern resurgence against the Christian virtues to the symbolic figures of Orpheus, Pan, Apollo, and Bacchus might be difficult to estimate, but——”

> [During those words his *wife* has passed through the window into the moonlight, and her voice rises, singing as she goes: “Orpheus with his lute, with his lute made trees . . .”]

*Prof*. [Suddenly aware of something] She’ll get her throat bad. [He is silent as the voice swells in the distance] Sounds queer at night-H’m! [He is silent—Yawning. The voice dies away. Suddenly his head nods; he fights his drowsiness; writes a word or two, nods again, and in twenty seconds is asleep.]

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[The Stage is darkened by a black-out. FRUST's voice is heard speaking.]

*Frust*. What's that girl's name?

*Vane*. Vanessa Hellgrove.

*Frust*. Aha!

[The Stage is lighted up again. Moonlight bright on the orchard; the room in darkness where the *professor's* figure is just visible sleeping in the chair, and screwed a little more round towards the window. From behind the mossy boulder a faun-like figure uncurls itself and peeps over with ears standing up and elbows leaning on the stone, playing a rustic pipe; and there are seen two rabbits and a fox sitting up and listening. A shiver of wind passes, blowing petals from the apple-trees.][The *faun* darts his head towards where, from Right, comes slowly the figure of a Greek youth, holding a lute or lyre which his fingers strike, lifting out little wandering strains as of wind whinnying in funnels and odd corners. The *faun* darts down behind the stone, and the youth stands by the boulder playing his lute. Slowly while he plays the whitened trunk of an apple-tree is seen, to dissolve into the body of a girl with bare arms and feet, her dark hair unbound, and the face of the *professor's wife*. Hypnotized, she slowly sways towards him, their eyes fixed on each other, till she is quite close. Her arms go out to him, cling round his neck and, their lips meet. But as they meet there comes a gasp and the *professor* with rumpled hair is seen starting from his chair, his hands thrown up; and at his horrified "Oh!" the Stage is darkened with a black-out.]

[The voice of *Frust* is heard speaking.]

*Frust*. Gee!

The Stage is lighted up again, as in the opening scene. The *professor* is seen in his chair, with spilt sheets of paper round him, waking from a dream. He shakes himself, pinches his leg, stares heavily round into the moonlight, rises.

*Prof*. Phew! Beastly dream! Boof! H'm! [He moves to the window and calls.] Blanche! Blanche! [To himself] Made trees-made trees! [Calling] Blanche!

WIFE's *voice*. Yes.

*Prof*. Where are you?

*Wife*. [Appearing by the stone with her hair down] Here!

*Prof*. I say—I——I've been asleep—had a dream. Come in. I'll tell you.

[She comes, and they stand in the window.]

*Prof*. I dreamed I saw a-faun on that boulder blowing on a pipe. [He looks nervously at the stone] With two damned little rabbits and a fox sitting up and listening. And then from out there came our friend Orpheus playing on his confounded lute, till he actually turned that tree there into you. And gradually he-he drew you like a snake till you—er—put your arms round his neck and—er—kissed him. Boof! I woke up. Most unpleasant. Why! Your hair's down!

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*Wife*. Yes.

*Prof*. Why?

*Wife*. It was no dream. He was bringing me to life.

*Prof*. What on earth?

*Wife*. Do you suppose I am alive? I'm as dead as Euridice.

*Prof*. Good heavens, Blanche, what's the matter with you to-night?

*Wife*. [Pointing to the litter of papers] Why don't we live, instead of writing of it? [She points out unto the moonlight] What do we get out of life? Money, fame, fashion, talk, learning? Yes. And what good are they? I want to live!

*Prof*. [Helplessly] My dear, I really don't know what you mean.

*Wife*. [Pointing out into the moonlight] Look! Orpheus with his lute, and nobody can see him. Beauty, beauty, beauty—we let it go. [With sudden passion] Beauty, love, the spring. They should be in us, and they're all outside.

*Prof*. My dear, this is—this is—awful. [He tries to embrace her.]

*Wife*. [Avoiding him—an a stilly voice] Oh! Go on with your writing!

*Prof*. I'm—I'm upset. I've never known you so—so——

*Wife*. Hysterical? Well! It's over. I'll go and sing.

*Prof*. [Soothingly] There, there! I'm sorry, darling; I really am.
You're kipped—you're kipped. [He gives and she accepts a kiss]
Better?

[He gravitates towards his papers.]

All right, now?

*Wife*. [Standing still and looking at him] Quite!

*Prof*. Well, I'll try and finish this to-night; then, to-morrow we might have a jaunt. How about a theatre? There's a thing—they say —called "Chinese Chops," that's been running years.

*Wife*. [Softly to herself as he settles down into his chair] Oh!
God!

[While he takes up a sheet of paper and adjusts himself, she stands at the window staring with all her might at the boulder, till from behind it the faun's head and shoulders emerge once more.]

*Prof*. Very queer the power suggestion has over the mind. Very queer! There's nothing really in animism, you know, except the curious shapes rocks, trees and things take in certain lights—effect they have on our imagination. [He looks up] What's the matter now?

*Wife*. [Startled] Nothing! Nothing!

[Her eyes waver to him again, and the *faun* vanishes. She turns again to look at the boulder; there is nothing there; a little shiver of wind blows some petals off the trees. She catches one of them, and turning quickly, goes out through the curtain.]

*Prof*. [Coming to himself and writing] "The Orpheus legend is the— er—apotheosis of animism. Can we accept——" [His voice is lost in the sound of his *wife's* voice beginning again: "Orpheus with his lute—with his lute made trees——" It dies in a sob. The *professor* looks up startled, as the curtain falls].

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*Frust*. Fine!  Fine!

*Vane*.  Take up the curtain.  Mr Foreson?

[The curtain goes up.]

*Foreson*.  Sir?

*Vane*.  Everybody on.

[He and *Frust* leave their seats and ascend on to the Stage, on which are collecting the four Players.]

*Vane*.  Give us some light.

*Foreson*.  Electrics!  Turn up your floats!

[The footlights go up, and the blue goes out; the light is crude as at the beginning.]

*Frust*. I'd like to meet Miss Hellgrove. [She comes forward eagerly and timidly.  He grasps her hand] Miss Hellgrove, I want to say I thought that fine—fine. [Her evident emotion and pleasure warm him so that he increases his grasp and commendation] Fine.  It quite got my soft spots.  Emotional.  Fine!

*Miss* H. Oh!  Mr Frust; it means so much to me.  Thank you!

*Frust*. [A little balder in the eye, and losing warmth] Er—fine! [His eye wanders] Where's Mr Flatway?

*Vane*.  Fleetway.

[*Fleetway* comes up.]

*Frust*. Mr Fleetway, I want to say I thought your Orphoos very remarkable.  Fine.

*Fleetway*.  Thank you, sir, indeed—so glad you liked it.

*Frust*. [A little balder in the eye] There wasn't much to it, but what there was was fine. Mr Toone.

[*Fleetway* melts out and *Toone* is precipitated.]

Mr Toone, I was very pleased with your Professor—quite a character-study. [*Toone* bows and murmurs] Yes, sir!  I thought it fine. [His eye grows bald] Who plays the goat?

*Miss* HOPK. [Appearing suddenly between the windows] I play the faun, Mr Frost.

*Foreson*. [Introducing] Miss Maude ’Opkins.

*Frust*. Miss Hopkins, I guess your fawn was fine.

*Miss* HOPK. Oh! Thank you, Mr Frost. How nice of you to say so. I do so enjoy playing him.

*Frust*. [His eye growing bald] Mr Foreson, I thought the way you fixed that tree was very cunning; I certainly did. Got a match?

[He takes a match from *Foreson*, and lighting a very long cigar, walks up Stage through the French windows followed by *Foreson*, and examines the apple-tree.]

[The two Actors depart, but Miss *Hellgrove* runs from where she has been lingering, by the curtain, to *Vane*, Stage Right.]

*Miss* H. Oh! Mr Vane—do you think? He seemed quite—Oh! Mr Vane [ecstatically] If only——

*Vane*. [Pleased and happy] Yes, yes. All right—you were splendid. He liked it. He quite ——

*Miss* H. [Clasping her hand] How wonderful Oh, Mr Vane, thank you!

[She clasps his hands; but suddenly, seeing that *Frust* is coming back, fits across into the curtain and vanishes.]

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[The Stage, in the crude light, as empty now save for *Frust*, who, in the French windows, Centre, is mumbling his cigar; and *Vane*, Stage Right, who is looking up into the wings, Stage Left.]

*Vane*. [Calling up] That lighting's just right now, Miller. Got it marked carefully?

*Electrics*. Yes, Mr Vane.

*Vane*. Good. [To *Frust* who as coming down] Well, sir? So glad——

*Frust*. Mr Vane, we got little Miggs on contract?

*Vane*. Yes.

*Frust*. Well, I liked that little pocket piece fine. But I'm blamed if I know what it's all about.

*Vane*. [A little staggered] Why! Of course it's a little allegory. The tragedy of civilization—all real feeling for Beauty and Nature kept out, or pent up even in the cultured.

*Frust*. Ye-ep. [Meditatively] Little Miggs'd be fine in "Pop goes the Weasel."

*Vane*. Yes, he'd be all right, but——

*Frust*. Get him on the 'phone, and put it into rehearsal right now.

*Vane*. What! But this piece—I—I——!

*Frust*. Guess we can't take liberties with our public, Mr Vane. They want pep.

*Vane*. [Distressed] But it'll break that girl's heart. I—really—I can't——

*Frust*. Give her the part of the 'tweeny in "Pop goes".

*Vane*. Mr Frust, I—I beg. I've taken a lot of trouble with this little play. It's good. It's that girl's chance—and I——

*Frust*. We-ell! I certainly thought she was fine. Now, you 'phone up Miggs, and get right along with it. I've only one rule, sir! Give the Public what it wants; and what the Public wants is punch and go. They've got no use for Beauty, Allegory, all that high-brow racket. I know 'em as I know my hand.

> [During this speech *miss Hellgrove* is seen listening by the French window, in distress, unnoticed by either of them.]

*Vane*. Mr Frost, the Public would take this, I'm sure they would; I'm convinced of it. You underrate them.

*Frust*. Now, see here, Mr Blewitt Vane, is this my theatre? I tell you, I can't afford luxuries.

*Vane*. But it—it moved you, sir; I saw it. I was watching.

*Frust*. [With unmoved finality] Mr Vane, I judge I'm not the average man. Before "Louisa Loses" the Public'll want a stimulant. "Pop goes the Weasel" will suit us fine. So—get right along with it. I'll go get some lunch.

> [As he vanishes into the wings, Left, *miss Hellgrove* covers her face with her hands. A little sob escaping her attracts *vane's* attention. He takes a step towards her, but she flies.]

*Vane*. [Dashing his hands through his hair till it stands up] Damnation!

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[*Foreson* walks on from the wings, Right.]

*Foreson*. Sir?

*Vane*. “Punch and go!” That superstition!

[*Foreson* walks straight out into the wings, Left.]

*Vane*. Mr Foreson!

*Foreson*. [Re-appearing] Sir?

*Vane*. This is scrapped. [With savagery] Tell ’em to set the first act of “Louisa Loses,” and put some pep into it.

[He goes out through the French windows with the wind still in his hair.]

*Foreson*. [In the centre of the Stage] Electrics!

*Electrics*. Hallo!

*Foreson*. Where’s Charlie?

*Electrics*. Gone to his dinner.

*Foreson*. Anybody on the curtain?

A *voice*. Yes, Mr Foreson.

*Foreson*. Put your curtain down.

[He stands in the centre of the Stage with eyes uplifted as the curtain descends.]

## THE END

**FIFTH SERIES**

## CONTENTS:

# A FAMILY MAN

From the 5th Series Plays

By John Galsworthy

# CHARACTERS

*John builder*..... of the firm of Builder & Builder
Julia..... His Wife
Athene..... His elder Daughter
Maud..... His younger Daughter
Ralph builder..... His Brother, and Partner
Guy Herringhame..... A Flying Man
Annie..... A Young Person in Blue
Camille..... Mrs Builder's French Maid
topping..... Builder's Manservant
the Mayor..... Of Breconridge
Harris..... His Secretary
Francis Chantrey..... J.P.
Moon..... A Constable
Martin..... A Police Sergeant
A journalist..... From The Comet
the figure of A poacher
the voices and faces of small boys

The action passes in the town of Breconridge, the Midlands.

*Act* I.
*Scene* I. *Builder's* Study. After breakfast.
*Scene* II. A Studio.

*Act* II. *Builder's* Study. Lunchtime.

*Act* III.
*Scene* I. *The mayor's* Study. 10am the following day.
*Scene* II. *Builder's* Study. The same. Noon.
*Scene* III. *Builder's* Study. The same. Evening.

# ACT I

**SCENE I**

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The study of *John builder* in the provincial town of Breconridge. A panelled room wherein nothing is ever studied, except perhaps *Builder's* face in the mirror over the fireplace. It is, however, comfortable, and has large leather chairs and a writing table in the centre, on which is a typewriter, and many papers. At the back is a large window with French outside shutters, overlooking the street, for the house is an old one, built in an age when the homes of doctors, lawyers and so forth were part of a provincial town, and not yet suburban. There are two or three fine old prints on the walls, Right and Left; and a fine, old fireplace, Left, with a fender on which one can sit. A door, Left back, leads into the dining-room, and a door, Right forward, into the hall.*John builder* is sitting in his after-breakfast chair before the fire with The Times in his hands. He has breakfasted well, and is in that condition of first-pipe serenity in which the affairs of the. nation seem almost bearable. He is a tallish, square, personable man of forty-seven, with a well-coloured, jowly, fullish face, marked under the eyes, which have very small pupils and a good deal of light in them. His bearing has force and importance, as of a man accustomed to rising and ownerships, sure in his opinions, and not lacking in geniality when things go his way. Essentially a Midlander. His wife, a woman of forty-one, of ivory tint, with a thin, trim figure and a face so strangely composed as to be almost like a mask (essentially from Jersey) is putting a nib into a pen-holder, and filling an inkpot at the writing-table.As the curtain rises *Camille* enters with a rather broken-down cardboard box containing flowers. She is a young woman with a good figure, a pale face, the warm brown eyes and complete poise of a Frenchwoman. She takes the box to *Mrs builder*.

*Mrs builder*. The blue vase, please, Camille.

*Camille* fetches a vase. *Mrs builder* puts the flowers into the vase. *Camille* gathers up the debris; and with a glance at *builder* goes out.

*Builder*. Glorious October! I ought to have a damned good day's shooting with Chantrey tomorrow.

*Mrs builder*. [Arranging the flowers] Aren't you going to the office this morning?

*Builder*. Well, no, I was going to take a couple of days off. If you feel at the top of your form, take a rest—then you go on feeling at the top. [He looks at her, as if calculating] What do you say to looking up Athene?

*Mrs builder*. [Palpably astonished] Athene? But you said you'd done with her?

*Builder*. [Smiling] Six weeks ago; but, dash it, one can't have done with one's own daughter. That's the weakness of an Englishman; he can't keep up his resentments. In a town like this it doesn't do to have her living by herself. One of these days it'll get out we've had a row. That wouldn't do me any good.

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*Mrs builder*. I see.

*Builder*. Besides, I miss her. Maud's so self-absorbed. It makes a big hole in the family, Julia. You've got her address, haven't you?

*Mrs builder*. Yes. [Very still] But do you think it's dignified, John?

*Builder*. [Genially] Oh, hang dignity! I rather pride myself on knowing when to stand on my dignity and when to sit on it. If she's still crazy about Art, she can live at home, and go out to study.

*Mrs builder*. Her craze was for liberty.

*Builder*. A few weeks' discomfort soon cures that. She can't live on her pittance. She'll have found that out by now. Get your things on and come with me at twelve o'clock.

*Mrs builder*. I think you'll regret it. She'll refuse.

*Builder*. Not if I'm nice to her. A child could play with me to-day. Shall I tell you a secret, Julia?

*Mrs builder*. It would be pleasant for a change.

*Builder*. The Mayor's coming round at eleven, and I know perfectly well what he's coming for.

*Mrs builder*. Well?

*Builder*. I'm to be nominated for Mayor next month. Harris tipped me the wink at the last Council meeting. Not so bad at forty-seven—h'm? I can make a thundering good Mayor. I can do things for this town that nobody else can.

*Mrs builder*. Now I understand about Athene.

*Builder*. [Good-humouredly] Well, it's partly that. But [more seriously] it's more the feeling I get that I'm not doing my duty by her. Goodness knows whom she may be picking up with! Artists are a loose lot. And young people in these days are the limit. I quite believe in moving with the times, but one's either born a Conservative, or one isn't. So you be ready at twelve, see. By the way, that French maid of yours, Julia—

*Mrs builder*. What about her?

*Builder*. Is she—er—is she all right? We don't want any trouble with Topping.

*Mrs builder*. There will be none with—Topping.
[She opens the door Left.]

*Builder*. I don't know; she strikes me as—very French.

*Mrs builder* smiles and passes out.

*Builder* fills his second pipe. He is just taking up the paper again when the door from the hall is opened, and the manservant *topping*, dried, dark, sub-humorous, in a black cut-away, announces:

*Topping*. The Mayor, Sir, and Mr Harris!

*The Mayor* of Breconridge enters, He is clean-shaven, red-faced, light-eyed, about sixty, shrewd, poll-parroty, naturally jovial, dressed with the indefinable wrongness of a burgher; he is followed by his Secretary *Harris*, a man all eyes and cleverness. *Topping* retires.

*Builder*. [Rising] Hallo, Mayor! What brings you so early? Glad to see you. Morning, Harris!

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*Mayor*. Morning, Builder, morning.

*Harris*. Good-morning, Sir.

*Builder*. Sit down-sit down! Have a cigar!

The *Mayor* takes a cigar *Harris* a cigarette from his own case.

*Builder*. Well, Mayor, what's gone wrong with the works?

He and *Harris* exchange a look.

*Mayor*. [With his first puff] After you left the Council the other day, Builder, we came to a decision.

*Builder*. Deuce you did! Shall I agree with it?

*Mayor*. We shall see. We want to nominate you for Mayor. You willin' to stand?

*Builder*. [Stolid] That requires consideration.

*Mayor*. The only alternative is Chantrey; but he's a light weight, and rather too much County. What's your objection?

*Builder*. It's a bit unexpected, Mayor. [Looks at *Harris*] Am I the right man? Following you, you know. I'm shooting with Chantrey to-morrow. What does he feel about it?

*Mayor*. What do you say, 'Arris?

*Harris*. Mr Chantrey's a public school and University man, Sir; he's not what I call ambitious.

*Builder*. Nor am I, Harris.

*Harris*. No, sir; of course you've a high sense of duty. Mr Chantrey's rather dilettante.

*Mayor*. We want a solid man.

*Builder*. I'm very busy, you know, Mayor.

*Mayor*. But you've got all the qualifications—big business, family man, live in the town, church-goer, experience on the Council and the Bench. Better say "yes," Builder.

*Builder*. It's a lot of extra work. I don't take things up lightly.

*Mayor*. Dangerous times, these. Authority questioned all over the place. We want a man that feels his responsibilities, and we think we've got him in you.

*Builder*. Very good of you, Mayor. I don't know, I'm sure. I must think of the good of the town.

*Harris*. I shouldn't worry about that, sir.

*Mayor*. The name John Builder carries weight. You're looked up to as a man who can manage his own affairs. Madam and the young ladies well?

*Builder*. First-rate.

*Mayor*. [Rises] That's right. Well, if you'd like to talk it over with Chantrey to-morrow. With all this extremism, we want a man of principle and common sense.

*Harris*. We want a man that'll grasp the nettle, sir—and that's you.

*Builder*. Hm! I've got a temper, you know.

*Mayor*. [Chuckling] We do—we do! You'll say "yes," I see. No false modesty! Come along, 'Arris, we must go.

*Builder*. Well, Mayor, I'll think it over, and let you have an answer. You know my faults, and you know my qualities, such as they are. I'm just a plain Englishman.

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*Mayor*. We don't want anything better than that. I always say the great point about an Englishman is that he's got bottom; you may knock him off his pins, but you find him on 'em again before you can say "Jack Robinson." He may have his moments of aberration, but he's a sticker. Morning, Builder, morning! Hope you'll say "yes."

He shakes hands and goes out, followed by *Harris*.

When the door is dosed *builder* stands a moment quite still with a gratified smile on his face; then turns and scrutinises himself in the glass over the hearth. While he is doing so the door from the dining-room is opened quietly and *Camille* comes in. *Builder*, suddenly seeing her reflected in the mirror, turns.

*Builder*. What is it, Camille?

*Camille*. Madame send me for a letter she say you have, Monsieur, from the dyer and cleaner, with a bill.

*Builder*. [Feeling in his pockets] Yes—no. It's on the table.

*Camille* goes to the writing-table and looks. That blue thing.

*Camille*. [Taking it up] Non, Monsieur, this is from the gas.

*Builder*. Oh! Ah!
[He moves up to the table and turns over papers. *Camille* stands motionless close by with her eyes fixed on him.]
Here it is!
[He looks up, sees her looking at him, drops his own gaze, and hands her the letter. Their hands touch. Putting his hands in his pockets]
What made you come to England?

*Camille*. [Demure] It is better pay, Monsieur, and [With a smile] the English are so amiable.

*Builder*. Deuce they are! They haven't got that reputation.

*Camille*. Oh! I admire Englishmen. They are so strong and kind.

*Builder*. [Bluffly flattered] H'm! We've no manners.

*Camille*. The Frenchman is more polite, but not in the 'eart.

*Builder*. Yes. I suppose we're pretty sound at heart.

*Camille*. And the Englishman have his life in the family—the Frenchman have his life outside.

*Builder*. [With discomfort] H'm!

*Camille*. [With a look] Too mooch in the family—like a rabbit in a 'utch.

*Builder*. Oh! So that's your view of us! [His eyes rest on her, attracted but resentful].

*Camille*. Pardon, Monsieur, my tongue run away with me.

*Builder*. [Half conscious of being led on] Are you from Paris?

*Camille*. [Clasping her hands] Yes. What a town for pleasure—Paris!

*Builder*. I suppose so. Loose place, Paris.

*Camille*. Loose? What is that, Monsieur?

*Builder*. The opposite of strict.

*Camille*. Strict! Oh! certainly we like life, we other French. It is not like England. I take this to Madame, Monsieur. [She turns as if to go] Excuse me.

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*Builder*. I thought you Frenchwomen all married young.

*Camille*. I ’ave been married; my ’usband did die—en Afrique.

*Builder*. You wear no ring.

*Camille*. [Smiling] I prefare to be mademoiselle, Monsieur.

*Builder*. [Dubiously] Well, it’s all the same to us. [He takes a letter up from the table] You might take this to Mrs Builder too. [Again their fingers touch, and there is a suspicion of encounter between their eyes.]

*Camille* goes out.

*Builder*. [Turning to his chair] Don’t know about that woman—she’s a tantalizer.

He compresses his lips, and is settling back into his chair, when the door from the hall is opened and his daughter *Maud* comes in; a pretty girl, rather pale, with fine eyes. Though her face has a determined cast her manner at this moment is by no means decisive. She has a letter in her hand, and advances rather as if she were stalking her father, who, after a “Hallo, Maud!” has begun to read his paper.

*Maud*. [Getting as far as the table] Father.

*Builder*. [Not lowering the paper] Well? I know that tone. What do you want—money?

*Maud*. I always want money, of course; but—but—

*Builder*. [Pulling out a note-abstractedly] Here’s five pounds for you.

*Maud*, advancing, takes it, then seems to find what she has come for more on her chest than ever.

*Builder*. [Unconscious] Will you take a letter for me?

*Maud* sits down Left of table and prepares to take down the letter.

[Dictating] “Dear Mr Mayor,—Referring to your call this morning, I have —er—given the matter very careful consideration, and though somewhat reluctant—”

*Maud*. Are you really reluctant, father?

*Builder*. Go on—“To assume greater responsibilities, I feel it my duty to come forward in accordance with your wish. The—er—honour is one of which I hardly feel myself worthy, but you may rest assured—”

*Maud*. Worthy. But you do, you know.

*Builder*. Look here! Are you trying to get a rise out of me?—because you won't succeed this morning.

*Maud*. I thought you were trying to get one out of me.

*Builder*. Well, how would you express it?

*Maud*. "I know I'm the best man for the place, and so do you—"

*Builder*. The disrespect of you young people is something extraordinary. And that reminds me where do you go every evening now after tea?

*Maud*. I—I don't know.

*Builder*. Come now, that won't do—you're never in the house from six to seven.

*Maud*. Well! It has to do with my education.

*Builder*. Why, you finished that two years ago!

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*Maud*. Well, call it a hobby, if you like, then, father.

She takes up the letter she brought in and seems on the point of broaching it.

*Builder*. Hobby? Well, what is it?

*Maud*. I don't want to irritate you, father.

*Builder*. You can't irritate me more than by having secrets. See what that led to in your sister's case. And, by the way, I'm going to put an end to that this morning. You'll be glad to have her back, won't you?

*Maud*. [Startled] What!

*Builder*. Your mother and I are going round to Athene at twelve o'clock. I shall make it up with her. She must come back here.

*Maud*. [Aghast, but hiding it] Oh! It's—it's no good, father. She won't.

*Builder*. We shall see that. I've quite got over my tantrum, and I expect she has.

*Maud*. [Earnestly] Father! I do really assure you she won't; it's only wasting your time, and making you eat humble pie.

*Builder*. Well, I can eat a good deal this morning. It's all nonsense! A family's a family.

*Maud*. [More and more disturbed, but hiding it] Father, if I were you, I wouldn't-really! It's not-dignified.

*Builder*. You can leave me to judge of that. It's not dignified for the Mayor of this town to have an unmarried daughter as young as Athene living by herself away from home. This idea that she's on a visit won't wash any longer. Now finish that letter—"worthy, but you may rest assured that I shall do my best to sustain the—er—dignity of the office." [*Maud* types desperately.] Got that? "And—er—preserve the tradition so worthily—" No— "so staunchly"—er—er—

*Maud*. Upheld.

*Builder*. Ah! "—upheld by yourself.—Faithfully yours."

*Maud*. [Finishing] Father, you thought Athene went off in a huff. It wasn't that a bit. She always meant to go. She just got you into a rage to make it easier. She hated living at home.

*Builder*. Nonsense! Why on earth should she?

*Maud*. Well, she did! And so do— [Checking herself] And so you see it'll only make you ridiculous to go.

*Builder*. [Rises] Now what's behind this, Maud?

*Maud*. Behind—Oh! nothing!

*Builder*. The fact is, you girls have been spoiled, and you enjoy twisting my tail; but you can't make me roar this morning. I'm too pleased with things. You'll see, it'll be all right with Athene.

*Maud*. [Very suddenly] Father!

*Builder*. [Grimly humorous] Well! Get it off your chest. What's that letter about?

*Maud*. [Failing again and crumpling the letter behind her back]
Oh! nothing.

*Builder*. Everything's nothing this morning. Do you know what sort of people Athene associates with now—I suppose you see her?

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*Maud*. Sometimes.

*Builder*. Well?

*Maud*. Nobody much. There isn't anybody here to associate with. It's all hopelessly behind the times.

*Builder*. Oh! you think so! That's the inflammatory fiction you pick up. I tell you what, young woman—the sooner you and your sister get rid of your silly notions about not living at home, and making your own way, the sooner you'll both get married and make it. Men don't like the new spirit in women—they may say they do, but they don't.

*Maud*. You don't, father, I know.

*Builder*. Well, I'm very ordinary. If you keep your eyes open, you'll soon see that.

*Maud*. Men don't like freedom for anybody but themselves.

*Builder*. That's not the way to put it. [Tapping out his pipe] Women in your class have never had to face realities.

*Maud*. No, but we want to.

*Builder*. [Good-humouredly] Well, I'll bet you what you like, Athene's dose of reality will have cured her.

*Maud*. And I'll bet you—No, I won't!

*Builder*. You'd better not. Athene will come home, and only too glad to do it. Ring for Topping and order the car at twelve.

As he opens the door to pass out, *Maud* starts forward, but checks herself.

*Maud*. [Looking at her watch] Half-past eleven! Good heavens!

She goes to the bell and rings. Then goes back to the table, and writes an address on a bit of paper.

*Topping* enters Right.

*Topping*. Did you ring, Miss?

*Maud*. [With the paper] Yes. Look here, Topping! Can you manage— on your bicycle —now at once? I want to send a message to Miss Athene —awfully important. It's just this: "Look out! Father is coming." [Holding out the paper] Here's her address. You

must get there and away again by twelve. Father and mother want the car then to go there. Order it before you go. It won't take you twenty minutes on your bicycle. It's down by the river near the ferry. But you mustn't be seen by them either going or coming.

*Topping*. If I should fall into their hands, Miss, shall I eat the despatch?

*Maud*. Rather! You're a brick, Topping. Hurry up!

*Topping*. Nothing more precise, Miss?

*Maud*. M—m—No.

*Topping*. Very good, Miss Maud. [Conning the address] "Briary Studio, River Road. Look out! Father is coming!" I'll go out the back way. Any answer?

*Maud*. No.

*Topping* nods his head and goes out.

*Maud*. [To herself] Well, it's all I can do.

She stands, considering, as the *curtain* falls.

## SCENE II

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The Studio, to which are attached living rooms, might be rented at eighty pounds a year —some painting and gear indeed, but an air of life rather than of work. Things strewn about. Bare walls, a sloping skylight, no windows; no fireplace visible; a bedroom door, stage Right; a kitchen door, stage Left. A door, Centre back, into the street. The door knocker is going.

From the kitchen door, Left, comes the very young person, *Annie*, in blotting-paper blue linen, with a white Dutch cap. She is pretty, her cheeks rosy, and her forehead puckered. She opens the street door. Standing outside is *topping*. He steps in a pace or two.

*Topping*. Miss Builder live here?

*Annie*. Oh! no, sir; Mrs Herringhame.

*Topping*. Mrs Herringhame? Oh! young lady with dark hair and large expressive eyes?

*Annie*. Oh! yes, sir.

*Topping*. With an “A. B.” on her linen? [Moves to table].

*Annie*. Yes, sir.

*Topping*. And “Athene Builder” on her drawings?

*Annie*. [Looking at one] Yes, sir.

*Topping*. Let’s see. [He examines the drawing] Mrs Herringhame, you said?

*Annie*. Oh! yes, Sir.

*Topping*. Wot oh!

*Annie*. Did you want anything, sir?

*Topping*. Drop the “sir,” my dear; I’m the Builders’ man.
Mr Herringhame in?

*Annie*. Oh! no, Sir.

*Topping*. Take a message. I can’t wait. From Miss Maud Builder. “Look out! Father is coming.” Now, whichever of ’em comes in first—that’s the message, and don’t you forget it.

*Annie*. Oh! no, Sir.

*Topping*. So they're married?

*Annie*. Oh! I don't know, sir.

*Topping*. I see. Well, it ain't known to Builder, J.P., either. That's why there's a message. See?

*Annie*. Oh! yes, Sir.

*Topping*. Keep your head. I must hop it. From Miss Maud Builder. "Look out! Father is coming."

He nods, turns and goes, pulling the door to behind him. *Annie* stands "baff" for a moment.

*Annie*. Ah!

She goes across to the bedroom on the Right, and soon returns with a suit of pyjamas, a toothbrush, a pair of slippers and a case of razors, which she puts on the table, and disappears into the kitchen. She reappears with a bread pan, which she deposits in the centre of the room; then crosses again to the bedroom, and once more reappears with a clothes brush, two hair brushes, and a Norfolk jacket. As she stuffs all these into the bread pan and bears it back into the kitchen, there is the sound of a car driving up and stopping. *Annie* reappears at the kitchen door just as the knocker sounds.

*Annie*. Vexin' and provokin'! [Knocker again. She opens the door] Oh!

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*Mr* and *Mrs builder* enter.

*Builder*. Mr and Mrs Builder. My daughter in?

*Annie*. [Confounded] Oh! Sir, no, sir.

*Builder*. My good girl, not “Oh! Sir, no, sir.” Simply: No, Sir. See?

*Annie*. Oh! Sir, yes, Sir.

*Builder*. Where is she?

*Annie*. Oh! Sir, I don’t know, Sir.

*Builder*. [Fixing her as though he suspected her of banter] Will she be back soon?

*Annie*. No, Sir.

*Builder*. How do you know?

*Annie*. I d—don’t, sir.

*Builder*. They why do you say so? [About to mutter “She’s an idiot!” he looks at her blushing face and panting figure, pats her on the shoulder and says] Never mind; don’t be nervous.

*Annie*. Oh! yes, sir. Is that all, please, sir?

*Mrs builder*. [With a side look at her husband and a faint smile] Yes; you can go.

*Annie*. Thank you, ma’am.

She turns and hurries out into the kitchen, Left. *Builder* gazes after her, and *Mrs builder* gazes at *builder* with her faint smile.

*Builder*. [After the girl is gone] Quaint and Dutch—pretty little figure! [Staring round] H’m! Extraordinary girls are! Fancy Athene preferring this to home. What?

*Mrs builder*. I didn’t say anything.

*Builder*. [Placing a chair for his wife, and sitting down himself] Well, we must wait, I suppose. Confound that Nixon legacy! If Athene hadn’t had that potty little legacy left her, she couldn’t have done this. Well, I daresay it’s all spent by now. I made a mistake to lose my temper with her.

*Mrs builder*. Isn’t it always a mistake to lose one’s temper?

*Builder*. That's very nice and placid; sort of thing you women who live sheltered lives can say. I often wonder if you women realise the strain on a business man.

*Mrs builder*. [In her softly ironical voice] It seems a shame to add the strain of family life.

*Builder*. You've always been so passive. When I want a thing, I've got to have it.

*Mrs builder*. I've noticed that.

*Builder*. [With a short laugh] Odd if you hadn't, in twenty-three years. [Touching a canvas standing against the chair with his toe] Art! Just a pretext. We shall be having Maud wanting to cut loose next. She's very restive. Still, I oughtn't to have had that scene with Athene. I ought to have put quiet pressure.

*Mrs builder* Smiles.

*Builder*. What are you smiling at?

*Mrs builder* shrugs her shoulders.

Look at this—Cigarettes! [He examines the brand on the box] Strong, very—and not good! [He opens the door] Kitchen! [He shuts it, crosses, and opens the door, Right] Bedroom!

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*Mrs builder*. [To his disappearing form] Do you think you ought, John?

He has disappeared, and she ends with an expressive movement of her hands, a long sigh, and a closing of her eyes. *Builder's* peremptory voice is heard: "Julia!"

What now?

She follows into the bedroom. The maid *Annie* puts her head out of the kitchen door; she comes out a step as if to fly; then, at *Builder's* voice, shrinks back into the kitchen.

*Builder*, reappearing with a razor strop in one hand and a shaving-brush in the other, is followed by *Mrs builder*.

*Builder*. Explain these! My God! Where's that girl?

*Mrs builder*. John! Don't! [Getting between him and the kitchen door] It's not dignified.

*Builder*. I don't care a damn.

*Mrs builder*. John, you mustn't. Athene has the tiny beginning of a moustache, you know.

*Builder*. What! I shall stay and clear this up if I have to wait a week. Men who let their daughters—! This age is the limit. [He makes a vicious movement with the strop, as though laying it across someone's back.]

*Mrs builder*. She would never stand that. Even wives object, nowadays.

*Builder*. [Grimly] The war's upset everything. Women are utterly out of hand. Why the deuce doesn't she come?

*Mrs builder*. Suppose you leave me here to see her.

*Builder*. [Ominously] This is my job.

*Mrs builder*. I think it's more mine.

*Builder*. Don't stand there opposing everything I say! I'll go and have another look—- [He is going towards the bedroom when the sound of a latchkey in the outer door arrests him. He puts the strop and brush behind his back, and adds in a low voice] Here she is!

*Mrs builder* has approached him, and they have both turned towards the opening door. *Guy Herringhame* comes in. They are a little out of his line of sight, and he has shut the door before he sees them. When he does, his mouth falls open, and his hand on to the knob of the door. He is a comely young man in Harris tweeds. Moreover, he is smoking. He would speak if he could, but his surprise is too excessive. *Builder*. Well, sir?

*Guy*. [Recovering a little] I was about to say the same to you, sir.

*Builder*. [Very red from repression] These rooms are not yours, are they?

*Guy*. Nor yours, sir?

*Builder*. May I ask if you know whose they are?

*Guy*. My sister's.

*Builder*. Your—you—!

*Mrs builder*. John!

*Builder*. Will you kindly tell me why your sister signs her drawings by the name of my daughter, Athene Builder—and has a photograph of my wife hanging there?

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The *young man* looks at *Mrs builder* and winces, but recovers himself.

*Guy*. [Boldly] As a matter of fact this is my sister's studio; she's in France—and has a friend staying here.

*Builder*. Oh! And you have a key?

*Guy*. My sister's.

*Builder*. Does your sister shave?

*Guy*. I—I don't think so.

*Builder*. No. Then perhaps you'll tell me what these mean? [He takes out the strop and shaving stick].

*Guy*. Oh! Ah! Those things?

*Builder*. Yes. Now then?

*Guy*. [Addressing *Mrs builder*] Need we go into this in your presence, ma'am? It seems rather delicate.

*Builder*. What explanation have you got?

*Guy*. Well, you see—

*Builder*. No lies; out with it!

*Guy*. [With decision] I prefer to say nothing.

*Builder*. What's your name?

*Guy*. Guy Herringhame.

*Builder*. Do you live here?

Guy makes no sign.

*Mrs builder*. [To Guy] I think you had better go.

*Builder*. Julia, will you leave me to manage this?

*Mrs builder*. [To Guy] When do you expect my daughter in?

*Guy*. Now—directly.

*Mrs builder*. [Quietly] Are you married to her?

*Guy*. Yes. That is—no—o; not altogether, I mean.

*Builder*. What's that? Say that again!

*Guy*. [Folding his arms] I'm not going to say another word.

*Builder*. I am.

*Mrs builder*. John—please!

*Builder*. Don't put your oar in! I've had wonderful patience so far. [He puts his boot through a drawing] Art! This is what comes of it! Are you an artist?

*Guy*. No; a flying man. The truth is—

*Builder*. I don't want to hear you speak the truth. I'll wait for my daughter.

*Guy*. If you do, I hope you'll be so very good as to be gentle. If you get angry I might too, and that would be awfully ugly.

*Builder*. Well, I'm damned!

*Guy*. I quite understand that, sir. But, as a man of the world, I hope you'll take a pull before she comes, if you mean to stay.

*Builder*. If we mean to stay! That's good!

*Guy*. Will you have a cigarette?

*Builder*. I—I can't express—

*Guy*. [Soothingly] Don't try, sir. [He jerks up his chin, listening] I think that's her. [Goes to the door] Yes. Now, please! [He opens the door] Your father and mother, Athene.

*Athene* enters. She is flushed and graceful. Twenty-two, with a short upper lip, a straight nose, dark hair, and glowing eyes. She wears bright colours, and has a slow, musical voice, with a slight lisp.

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*Athene*. Oh! How are you, mother dear? This is rather a surprise. Father always keeps his word, so I certainly didn't expect him. [She looks steadfastly at *builder*, but does not approach].

*Builder*. [Controlling himself with an effort] Now, Athene, what's this?

*Athene*. What's what?

*Builder*. [The strop held out] Are you married to this—this—?

*Athene*. [Quietly] To all intents and purposes.

*Builder*. In law?

*Athene*. No.

*Builder*. My God! You—you—!

*Athene*. Father, don't call names, please.

*Builder*. Why aren't you married to him?

*Athene*. Do you want a lot of reasons, or the real one?

*Builder*. This is maddening! [Goes up stage].

*Athene*. Mother dear, will you go into the other room with Guy? [She points to the door Right].

*Builder*. Why?

*Athene*. Because I would rather she didn't hear the reason.

*Guy*. [To *Athene*, sotto voce] He's not safe.

*Athene*. Oh! yes; go on.

Guy follows *Mrs builder*, and after hesitation at the door they go out into the bedroom.

*Builder*. Now then!

*Athene*. Well, father, if you want to know the real reason, it's—you.

*Builder*. What on earth do you mean?

*Athene*. Guy wants to marry me. In fact, we—But I had such a stunner of marriage from watching you at home, that I—

*Builder*. Don't be impudent! My patience is at breaking-point, I warn you.

*Athene*. I'm perfectly serious, Father. I tell you, we meant to marry, but so far I haven't been able to bring myself to it. You never noticed how we children have watched you.

*Builder*. Me?

*Athene*. Yes. You and mother, and other things; all sorts of things—

*Builder*. [Taking out a handkerchief and wiping his brow] I really think you're mad.

*Athene*. I'm sure you must, dear.

*Builder*. Don't "dear" me! What have you noticed? D'you mean I'm not a good husband and father?

*Athene*. Look at mother. I suppose you can't, now; you're too used to her.

*Builder*. Of course I'm used to her. What else is marrying for?

*Athene*. That; and the production of such as me. And it isn't good enough, father. You shouldn't have set us such a perfect example.

*Builder*. You're talking the most arrant nonsense I ever heard. [He lifts his hands] I've a good mind to shake it out of you.

*Athene*. Shall I call Guy?

He drops his hands.

Confess that being a good husband and father has tried you terribly. It has us, you know.

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*Builder*. [Taking refuge in sarcasm] When you've quite done being funny, perhaps you'll tell me why you've behaved like a common street flapper.

*Athene*. [Simply] I couldn't bear to think of Guy as a family man. That's all—absolutely. It's not his fault; he's been awfully anxious to be one.

*Builder*. You've disgraced us, then; that's what it comes to.

*Athene*. I don't want to be unkind, but you've brought it on yourself.

*Builder*. [Genuinely distracted] I can't even get a glimmer of what you mean. I've never been anything but firm. Impatient, perhaps. I'm not an angel; no ordinary healthy man is. I've never grudged you girls any comfort, or pleasure.

*Athene*. Except wills of our own.

*Builder*. What do you want with wills of your own till you're married?

*Athene*. You forget mother!

*Builder*. What about her?

*Athene*. She's very married. Has she a will of her own?

*Builder*. [Sullenly] She's learnt to know when I'm in the right.

*Athene*. I don't ever mean to learn to know when Guy's in the right.
Mother's forty-one, and twenty-three years of that she's been your wife.
It's a long time, father. Don't you ever look at her face?

*Builder*. [Troubled in a remote way] Rubbish!

*Athene*. I didn't want my face to get like that.

*Builder*. With such views about marriage, what business had you to go near a man? Come, now!

*Athene*. Because I fell in love.

*Builder*. Love leads to marriage—and to nothing else, but the streets.
What an example to your sister!

*Athene*. You don't know Maud any more than you knew me. She's got a will of her own too, I can tell you.

*Builder*. Now, look here, Athene. It's always been my way to face accomplished facts. What's done can't be undone; but it can be remedied. You must marry this young——at once, before it gets out. He's behaved like a ruffian: but, by your own confession, you've behaved worse. You've been bitten by this modern disease, this—this, utter lack of common decency. There's an eternal order in certain things, and marriage is one of them; in fact, it's the chief. Come, now. Give me a promise, and I'll try my utmost to forget the whole thing.

*Athene*. When we quarrelled, father, you said you didn't care what became of me.

*Builder*. I was angry.

*Athene*. So you are now.

*Builder*. Come, Athene, don't be childish! Promise me!

*Athene*. [With a little shudder] No! We were on the edge of it. But now I've seen you again—Poor mother!

*Builder*. [Very angry] This is simply blasphemous. What do you mean by harping on your mother? If you think that—that—she doesn't—that she isn't—

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*Athene*. Now, father!

*Builder*. I'm damned if I'll sit down under this injustice. Your mother is—is pretty irritating, I can tell you. She—she—Everything suppressed. And—and no—blood in her!

*Athene*. I knew it!

*Builder*. [Aware that he has confirmed some thought in her that he had no intention of confirming] What's that?

*Athene*. Don't you ever look at your own face, father? When you shave, for instance.

*Builder*. Of course I do.

*Athene*. It isn't satisfied, is it?

*Builder*. I don't know what on earth you mean.

*Athene*. You can't help it, but you'd be ever so much happier if you were a Mohammedan, and two or three, instead of one, had—had learned to know when you were in the right.

*Builder*. 'Pon my soul! This is outrageous!

*Athene*. Truth often is.

*Builder*. Will you be quiet?

*Athene*. I don't ever want to feel sorry for Guy in that way.

*Builder*. I think you're the most immodest—I'm ashamed that you're my daughter. If your another had ever carried on as you are now—

*Athene*. Would you have been firm with her?

*Builder*. [Really sick at heart at this unwonted mockery which meets him at every turn] Be quiet, you——!

*Athene*. Has mother never turned?

*Builder*. You're an unnatural girl! Go your own way to hell!

*Athene*. I am not coming back home, father.

*Builder*. [Wrenching open the door, Right] Julia! Come! We can't stay here.

*Mrs builder* comes forth, followed by *Guy*.

As for you, sir, if you start by allowing a woman to impose her crazy ideas about marriage on you, all I can say is—I despise you. [He crosses to the outer door, followed by his wife. To *Athene*] I've done with you!

He goes out.

*Mrs builder*, who has so far seemed to accompany him, shuts the door quickly and remains in the studio. She stands there with that faint smile on her face, looking at the two young people.

*Athene*. Awfully sorry, mother; but don't you see what a stunner father's given me?

*Mrs builder*. My dear, all men are not alike.

*Guy*. I've always told her that, ma'am.

*Athene*. [Softly] Oh! mother, I'm so sorry for you.

The handle of the door is rattled, a fist is beaten on it.

[She stamps, and covers her ears] Disgusting!

*Guy*. Shall I—?

*Mrs builder*. [Shaking her head] I'm going in a moment. [To *Athene*] You owe it to me, Athene.

*Athene*. Oh! if somebody would give him a lesson!

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BUILDER's voice: "Julia!"

Have you ever tried, mother?

*Mrs builder* looks at the *young man*, who turns away out of hearing.

*Mrs builder*. Athene, you're mistaken. I've always stood up to him in my own way.

*Athene*. Oh! but, mother—listen!

The beating and rattling have recommenced, and the voice: "Are you coming?"

[Passionately] And that's family life! Father was all right before he married, I expect. And now it's like this. How you survive—!

*Mrs builder*. He's only in a passion, my dear.

*Athene*. It's wicked.

*Mrs builder*. It doesn't work otherwise, Athene.

A single loud bang on the door.

*Athene*. If he beats on that door again, I shall scream.

*Mrs builder* smiles, shakes her head, and turns to the door.

*Mrs builder*. Now, my dear, you're going to be sensible, to please me. It's really best. If I say so, it must be. It's all comedy, Athene.

*Athene*. Tragedy!

*Guy*. [Turning to them] Look here! Shall I shift him?

*Mrs builder* shakes her head and opens the door. *Builder* stands there, a furious figure.

*Builder*. Will you come, and leave that baggage and her cad?

*Mrs builder* steps quickly out and the door is closed. Guy makes an angry movement towards it.

*Athene*. Guy!

*Guy*. [Turning to her] That puts the top hat on. So persuasive! [He takes out of his pocket a wedding ring, and a marriage licence] Well! What's to be done with these pretty things, now?

*Athene*. Burn them!

*Guy*. [Slowly] Not quite. You can't imagine I should ever be like that, Athene?

*Athene*. Marriage does wonders.

*Guy*. Thanks.

*Athene*. Oh! Guy, don't be horrid. I feel awfully bad.

*Guy*. Well, what do you think I feel? "Cad!"

They turn to see *Annie* in hat and coat, with a suit-case in her hand, coming from the door Left.

*Annie*. Oh! ma'am, please, Miss, I want to go home.

*Guy*. [Exasperated!] She wants to go home—she wants to go home!

*Athene*. Guy! All right, Annie.

*Annie*. Oh! thank you, Miss. [She moves across in front of them].

*Athene*. [Suddenly] Annie!

*Annie* stops and turns to her.

What are you afraid of?

*Annie*. [With comparative boldness] I—I might catch it, Miss.

*Athene*. From your people?

*Annie*. Oh! no, Miss; from you. You see, I've got a young man that wants to marry me. And if I don't let him, I might get into trouble meself.

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*Athene*. What sort of father and mother have you got, Annie?

*Annie*. I never thought, Miss. And of course I don't want to begin.

*Athene*. D'you mean you've never noticed how they treat each other?

*Annie*. I don't think they do, Miss.

*Athene*. Exactly.

*Annie*. They haven't time. Father's an engine driver.

*Guy*. And what's your young man, Annie?

*Annie*. [Embarrassed] Somethin' like you, sir. But very respectable.

*Athene*. And suppose you marry him, and he treats you like a piece of furniture?

*Annie*. I—I could treat him the same, Miss.

*Athene*. Don't you believe that, Annie!

*Annie*. He's very mild.

*Athene*. That's because he wants you. You wait till he doesn't.

*Annie* looks at *Guy*.

*Guy*. Don't you believe her, Annie; if he's decent—

*Annie*. Oh! yes, sir.

*Athene*. [Suppressing a smile] Of course—but the point is, Annie, that marriage makes all the difference.

*Annie*. Yes, Miss; that's what I thought.

*Athene*. You don't see. What I mean is that when once he's sure of you, he may change completely.

*Annie*. [Slowly, looking at her thumb] Oh! I don't—think—he'll hammer me, Miss. Of course, I know you can't tell till you've found out.

*Athene*. Well, I've no right to influence you.

*Annie*. Oh! no, Miss; that's what I've been thinking.

-*Guy*. You're quite right, Annie=-this is no place for you.

*Annie*. You see, we can't be married; sir, till he gets his rise. So it'll be a continual temptation to me.

*Athene*. Well, all right, Annie. I hope you'll never regret it.

*Annie*. Oh! no, Miss.

*Guy*. I say, Annie, don't go away thinking evil of us; we didn't realise you knew we weren't married.

*Athene*. We certainly did not.

*Annie*. Oh! I didn't think it right to take notice.

*Guy*. We beg your pardon.

*Annie*. Oh! no, sir. Only, seein' Mr and Mrs Builder so upset, brought it 'ome like. And father can be 'andy with a strap.

*Athene*. There you are! Force majeure!

*Annie*. Oh! yes, Miss.

*Athene*. Well, good-bye, Annie. What are you going to say to your people?

*Annie*. Oh! I shan't say I've been livin' in a family that wasn't a family, Miss. It wouldn't do no good.

*Athene*. Well, here are your wages.

*Annie*. Oh! I'm puttin' you out, Miss. [She takes the money].

*Athene*. Nonsense, Annie. And here's your fare home.

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*Annie*. Oh! thank you, Miss. I'm very sorry. Of course if you was to change your mind —[She stops, embarrassed].

*Athene*. I don't think—

*Guy*. [Abruptly] Good-bye, Annie. Here's five bob for the movies.

*Annie*. Oh! good-bye, sir, and thank you. I was goin' there now with my young man. He's just round the corner.

*Guy*. Be very careful of him.

*Annie*. Oh! yes, sir, I will. Good-bye, sir. Goodbye, Miss.

She goes.

*Guy*. So her father has a firm hand too. But it takes her back to the nest. How's that, Athene?

*Athene*. [Playing with a leathern button on his coat] If you'd watched it ever since you could watch anything, seen it kill out all—It's having power that does it. I know Father's got awfully good points.

*Guy*. Well, they don't stick out.

*Athene*. He works fearfully hard; he's upright, and plucky. He's not stingy. But he's smothered his animal nature-and that's done it. I don't want to see you smother anything, Guy.

*Guy*. [Gloomily] I suppose one never knows what one's got under the lid. If he hadn't come here to-day—[He spins the wedding ring] He certainly gives one pause. Used he to whack you?

*Athene*. Yes.

*Guy*. Brute!

*Athene*. With the best intentions. You see, he's a Town Councillor, and a magistrate. I suppose they have to be "firm." Maud and I sneaked in once to listen to him. There was a woman who came for protection from her husband. If he'd known we were there, he'd have had a fit.

*Guy*. Did he give her the protection?

*Athene*. Yes; he gave her back to the husband. Wasn't it—English?

*Guy*. [With a grunt] Hang it!  We're not all like that.

*Athene*. [Twisting his button] I think it's really a sense of property so deep that they don't know they've got it.  Father can talk about freedom like a—politician.

*Guy*. [Fitting the wedding ring on her finger] Well!  Let's see how it looks, anyway.

*Athene*.  Don't play with fire, Guy.

*Guy*.  There's something in atavism, darling; there really is.  I like it —I do.

A knock on the door.

*Athene*.  That sounds like Annie again.  Just see.

*Guy*. [Opening the door] It is.  Come in, Annie.  What's wrong now?

*Annie*. [Entering in confusion] Oh! sir, please, sir—I've told my young man.

*Athene*.  Well, what does he say?

*Annie*.  'E was 'orrified, Miss.

*Guy*.  The deuce he was!  At our conduct?

*Annie*.  Oh! no, sir—at mine.

*Athene*.  But you did your best; you left us.

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*Annie*. Oh! yes, Miss; that's why 'e's horrified.

*Guy*. Good for your young man.

*Annie*. [Flattered] Yes, sir. 'E said I 'ad no strength of mind.

*Athene*. So you want to come back?

*Annie*. Oh! yes, Miss.

*Athene*. All right.

*Guy*. But what about catching it?

*Annie*. Oh, sir, 'e said there was nothing like Epsom salts.

*Guy*. He's a wag, your young man.

*Annie*. He was in the Army, sir.

*Guy*. You said he was respectable.

*Annie*. Oh! yes, sir; but not so respectable as that.

*Athene*. Well, Annie, get your things off, and lay lunch.

*Annie*. Oh! yes, Miss.

She makes a little curtsey and passes through into the kitchen.

*Guy*. Strength of mind! Have a little, Athene won't you? [He holds out the marriage licence before her].

*Athene*. I don't know—I don't know! If—it turned out—

*Guy*. It won't. Come on. Must take chances in this life.

*Athene*. [Looking up into his face] Guy, promise me—solemnly that you'll never let me stand in your way, or stand in mine!

*Guy*. Right! That's a bargain. [They embrace.]

*Athene* quivers towards him. They embrace fervently as *Annie* enters with the bread pan. They spring apart.

*Annie*. Oh!

*Guy*. It's all right, Annie. There's only one more day's infection before you. We're to be married to-morrow morning.

*Annie*. Oh! yes, sir. Won't Mr Builder be pleased?

*Guy*. H'm! That's not exactly our reason.

*Annie*. [Right] Oh! no, sir. Of course you can't be a family without, can you?

*Guy*. What have you got in that thing?

*Annie* is moving across with the bread pan. She halts at the bedroom door.

*Annie*. Oh! please, ma'am, I was to give you a message—very important— from Miss Maud Builder "Lookout! Father is coming!"

She goes out.

The *curtain* falls.

# ACT II

*Builder's*study. At the table, *Maud* has just put a sheet of paper into a typewriter. She sits facing the audience, with her hands stretched over the keys.

Maud. [To herself] I must get that expression.

Her face assumes a furtive, listening look. Then she gets up, whisks to the mirror over the fireplace, scrutinises the expression in it, and going back to the table, sits down again with hands outstretched above the keys, and an accentuation of the expression. The door up Left is opened, and *topping* appears. He looks at *Maud*, who just turns her eyes.

*Topping*. Lunch has been ready some time, Miss Maud.

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*Maud*. I don't want any lunch. Did you give it?

*Topping*. Miss Athene was out. I gave the message to a young party. She looked a bit green, Miss. I hope nothing'll go wrong with the works. Shall I keep lunch back?

*Maud*. If something's gone wrong, they won't have any appetite, Topping.

*Topping*. If you think I might risk it, Miss, I'd like to slip round to my dentist. [He lays a finger on his cheek].

*Maud*. [Smiling] Oh! What race is being run this afternoon, then,
Topping?

*Topping*. [Twinkling, and shifting his finger to the side of his nose] Well, I don't suppose you've 'eard of it, Miss; but as a matter of fact it's the Cesarwitch.

*Maud*. Got anything on?

*Topping*. Only my shirt, Miss.

*Maud*. Is it a good thing, then?

*Topping*. I've seen worse roll up. [With a touch of enthusiasm] Dark horse, Miss Maud, at twenty to one.

*Maud*. Put me ten bob on, Topping. I want all the money I can get, just now.

*Topping*. You're not the first, Miss.

*Maud*. I say, Topping, do you know anything about the film?

*Topping*. [Nodding] Rather a specialty of mine, Miss.

*Maud*. Well, just stand there, and give me your opinion of this.

*Topping* moves down Left. She crouches over the typewriter, lets her hands play on the keys; stops; assumes that listening, furtive look; listens again, and lets her head go slowly round, preceded by her eyes; breaks it off, and says:

What should you say I was?

*Topping*. Guilty, Miss.

*Maud*. [With triumph] There! Then you think I've got it?

*Topping*. Well, of course, I couldn't say just what sort of a crime you'd committed, but I should think pretty 'ot stuff.

*Maud*. Yes; I've got them here. [She pats her chest].

*Topping*. Really, Miss.

*Maud*. Yes. There's just one point, Topping; it's psychological.

*Topping*. Indeed, Miss?

*Maud*. Should I naturally put my hand on them; or would there be a reaction quick enough to stop me? You see, I'm alone—and the point is whether the fear of being seen would stop me although I knew I couldn't be seen. It's rather subtle.

*Topping*. I think there's be a rehaction, Miss.

*Maud*. So do I. To touch them [She clasps her chest] is a bit obvious, isn't it?

*Topping*. If the haudience knows you've got 'em there.

*Maud*. Oh! yes, it's seen me put them. Look here, I'll show you that too.

She opens an imaginary drawer, takes out some bits of sealing-wax, and with every circumstance of stealth in face and hands, conceals them in her bosom.

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All right?

*Topping*. [Nodding] Fine, Miss.  You have got a film face.  What are they, if I may ask?

*Maud*. [Reproducing the sealing-wax] The Fanshawe diamonds.  There's just one thing here too, Topping.

In real life, which should I naturally do—put them in here [She touches her chest] or in my bag?

*Topping*. [Touching his waistcoat—earnestly] Well!  To put 'em in here, Miss, I should say is more—more pishchological.

*Maud*. [Subduing her lips] Yes; but—

*Topping*.  You see, then you've got 'em on you.

*Maud*.  But that's just the point.  Shouldn't I naturally think:  Safer in my bag; then I can pretend somebody put them there.  You see, nobody could put them on me.

*Topping*.  Well, I should say that depends on your character.  Of course I don't know what your character is.

*Maud*.  No; that's the beastly part of it—the author doesn't, either.  It's all left to me.

*Topping*.  In that case, I should please myself, Miss.  To put 'em in 'ere's warmer.

*Maud*.  Yes, I think you're right.  It's more human.

*Topping*.  I didn't know you 'ad a taste this way, Miss Maud.

*Maud*.  More than a taste, Topping—a talent.

*Topping*.  Well, in my belief, we all have a vice about us somewhere.  But if I were you, Miss, I wouldn't touch bettin', not with this other on you.  You might get to feel a bit crowded.

*Maud*.  Well, then, only put the ten bob on if you're sure he's going to win.  You can post the money on after me.  I'll send you an address, Topping, because I shan't be here.

*Topping*. [Disturbed] What!  You're not going, too, Miss Maud?

*Maud*.  To seek my fortune.

*Topping*.  Oh!  Hang it all, Miss, think of what you'll leave behind.  Miss Athene's leavin' home has made it pretty steep, but this'll touch bottom—this will.

*Maud*. Yes; I expect you'll find it rather difficult for a bit when I'm gone. Miss Baldini, you know. I've been studying with her. She's got me this chance with the movie people. I'm going on trial as the guilty typist in "The Heartache of Miranda."

*Topping*. [Surprised out of politeness] Well, I never! That does sound like 'em! Are you goin' to tell the guv'nor, Miss?

*Maud* nods. In that case, I think I'll be gettin' off to my dentist before the band plays.

*Maud*. All right, Topping; hope you won't lose a tooth.

*Topping*. [With a grin] It's on the knees of the gods, Miss, as they say in the headlines.

He goes. *Maud* stretches herself and listens.

*Maud*. I believe that's them. Shivery funky.

She runs off up Left.

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*Builder*. [Entering from the hall and crossing to the fireplace] Monstrous! Really monstrous!

*Camille* enters from the hall. She has a little collecting book in her hand.

*Builder*. Well, Camille?

*Camille*. A sistare from the Sacred 'Eart, Monsieur—her little book for the orphan children.

*Builder*. I can't be bothered—What is it?

*Camille*. Orphan, Monsieur.

*Builder*. H'm! Well! [Feeling in his breast pocket] Give her that.

He hands her a five-pound note.

*Camille*. I am sure she will be veree grateful for the poor little beggars. Madame says she will not be coming to lunch, Monsieur.

*Builder*. I don't want any, either. Tell Topping I'll have some coffee.

*Camille*. Topping has gone to the dentist, Monsieur; 'e 'as the toothache.

*Builder*. Toothache—poor devil! H'm! I'm expecting my brother, but I don't know that I can see him.

*Camille*. No, Monsieur?

*Builder*. Ask your mistress to come here.

He looks up, and catching her eye, looks away.

*Camille*. Yes, Monsieur.

As she turns he looks swiftly at her, sweeping her up and down. She turns her head and catches his glance, which is swiftly dropped. Will Monsieur not 'ave anything to eat?

*Builder*. [Shaking his head-abruptly] No. Bring the coffee!

*Camille*. Is Monsieur not well?

*Builder*. Yes—quite well.

*Camille*. [Sweetening her eyes] A cutlet soubise? No?

*Builder*. [With a faint response in his eyes, instantly subdued] Nothing! nothing!

*Camille*. And Madame nothing too—Tt! Tt! With her hand on the door she looks back, again catches his eyes in an engagement instantly broken off, and goes out.

*Builder*. [Stock-still, and staring at the door] That girl's a continual irritation to me! She's dangerous! What a life! I believe that girl—

The door Left is opened and *Mrs builder* comes in.

*Builder*. There's some coffee coming; do your head good. Look here, Julia. I'm sorry I beat on that door. I apologize. I was in a towering passion. I wish I didn't get into these rages. But—dash it all—! I couldn't walk away and leave you there.

*Mrs builder*. Why not?

*Builder*. You keep everything to yourself, so; I never have any notion what you're thinking. What did you say to her?

*Mrs builder*. Told her it would never work.

*Builder*. Well, that's something. She's crazy. D'you suppose she was telling the truth about that young blackguard wanting to marry her?

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*Mrs builder*. I'm sure of it.

*Builder*. When you think of how she's been brought up. You would have thought that religion alone—

*Mrs builder*. The girls haven't wanted to go to church for years. They've always said they didn't see why they should go to keep up your position. I don't know if you remember that you once caned them for running off on a Sunday morning.

*Builder*. Well?

*Mrs builder*. They've never had any religion since.

*Builder*. H'm! [He takes a short turn up the room] What's to be done about Athene?

*Mrs builder*. You said you had done with her.

*Builder*. You know I didn't mean that. I might just as well have said I'd done with you! Apply your wits, Julia! At any moment this thing may come out. In a little town like this you can keep nothing dark. How can I take this nomination for Mayor?

*Mrs builder*. Perhaps Ralph could help.

*Builder*. What? His daughters have never done anything disgraceful, and his wife's a pattern.

*Mrs builder*. Yes; Ralph isn't at all a family man.

*Builder*. [Staring at her] I do wish you wouldn't turn things upside down in that ironical way. It isn't—English.

*Mrs builder*. I can't help having been born in Jersey.

*Builder*. No; I suppose it's in your blood. The French— [He stops short].

*Mrs builder*. Yes?

*Builder*. Very irritating sometimes to a plain Englishman—that's all.

*Mrs builder*. Shall I get rid of Camille?

*Builder*. [Staring at her, then dropping his glance] Camille? What's she got to do with it?

*Mrs builder*. I thought perhaps you found her irritating.

*Builder*. Why should I?

*Camille* comes in from the dining-room with the coffee.

Put it there. I want some brandy, please.

*Camille*. I bring it, Monsieur.

She goes back demurely into the dining-room.

*Builder*. Topping's got toothache, poor chap! [Pouring out the coffee] Can't you suggest any way of making Athene see reason? Think of the example! Maud will be kicking over next. I shan't be able to hold my head up here.

*Mrs builder*. I'm afraid I can't do that for you.

*Builder*. [Exasperated] Look here, Julia! That wretched girl said something to me about our life together. What—what's the matter with that?

*Mrs builder*. It is irritating.

*Builder*. Be explicit.

*Mrs builder*. We have lived together twenty-three years, John. No talk will change such things.

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*Builder*. Is it a question of money? You can always have more. You know that. [*Mrs builder* smiles] Oh! don't smile like that; it makes me feel quite sick!

*Camille* enters with a decanter and little glasses, from the dining-room.

*Camille*. The brandy, sir. Monsieur Ralph Builder has just come.

*Mrs builder*. Ask him in, Camille.

*Camille*. Yes, Madame.

She goes through the doorway into the hall. *Mrs builder*, following towards the door, meets *Ralph builder*, a man rather older than *builder* and of opposite build and manner. He has a pleasant, whimsical face and grizzled hair.

*Mrs builder*. John wants to consult you, Ralph.

*Ralph*. That's very gratifying.

She passes him and goes out, leaving the two brothers eyeing one another.

About the Welsh contract?

*Builder*. No. Fact is, Ralph, something very horrible's happened.

*Ralph*. Athene gone and got married?

*Builder*. No. It's—it's that she's gone and—and not got married.

*Ralph* utters a sympathetic whistle.

Jolly, isn't it?

*Ralph*. To whom?

*Builder*. A young flying bounder.

*Ralph*. And why?

*Builder*. Some crazy rubbish about family life, of all things.

*Ralph*. Athene's a most interesting girl. All these young people are so queer and delightful.

*Builder*. By George, Ralph, you may thank your stars you haven't got a delightful daughter. Yours are good, decent girls.

*Ralph*. Athene's tremendously good and decent, John. I'd bet any money she's doing this on the highest principles.

*Builder*. Behaving like a—

*Ralph*. Don't say what you'll regret, old man! Athene always took things seriously—-bless her!

*Builder*. Julia thinks you might help. You never seem to have any domestic troubles.

*Ralph*. No—o. I don't think we do.

*Builder*. How d'you account for it?

*Ralph*. I must ask at home.

*Builder*. Dash it! You must know!

*Ralph*. We're all fond of each other.

*Builder*. Well, I'm fond of my girls too; I suppose I'm not amiable enough. H'm?

*Ralph*. Well, old man, you do get blood to the head. But what's Athene's point, exactly?

*Builder*. Family life isn't idyllic, so she thinks she and the young man oughtn't to have one.

*Ralph*. I see. Home experience?

*Builder*. Hang it all, a family's a family! There must be a head.

*Ralph*. But no tail, old chap.

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*Builder*. You don't let your women folk do just as they like?

*Ralph*. Always.

*Builder*. What happens if one of your girls wants to do an improper thing? [*Ralph* shrugs his shoulders]. You don't stop her?

*Ralph*. Do you?

*Builder*. I try to.

*Ralph*. Exactly. And she does it. I don't and she doesn't.

*Builder*. [With a short laugh] Good Lord! I suppose you'd have me eat humble pie and tell Athene she can go on living in sin and offending society, and have my blessing to round it off.

*Ralph*. I think if you did she'd probably marry him.

*Builder*. You've never tested your theory, I'll bet.

*Ralph*. Not yet.

*Builder*. There you are.

*Ralph*. The 'suaviter in modo' pays, John. The times are not what they were.

*Builder*. Look here! I want to get to the bottom of this. Do you tell me I'm any stricter than nine out of ten men?

*Ralph*. Only in practice.

*Builder*. [Puzzled] How do you mean?

*Ralph*. Well, you profess the principles of liberty, but you practise the principles of government.

*Builder*. H'm! [Taking up the decanter] Have some?

*Ralph*. No, thank you.

*Builder* fills and raises his glass.

*Camille*. [Entering] Madame left her coffee.

She comes forward, holds out a cup for *builder* to pour into, takes it and goes out. *Builder's* glass remains suspended. He drinks the brandy off as she shuts the door.

*Builder*. Life isn't all roses, Ralph.

*Ralph*. Sorry, old man.

*Builder*. I sometimes think I try myself too high. Well, about that Welsh contract?

*Ralph*. Let's take it.

*Builder*. If you'll attend to it. Frankly, I'm too upset.

As they go towards the door into the hall, *Maud* comes in from the dining-room, in hat and coat.

*Ralph*. [Catching sight of her] Hallo! All well in your cosmogony, Maud?

*Maud*. What is a cosmogony, Uncle?

*Ralph*. My dear, I—I don't know.

He goes out, followed by *builder*. *Maud* goes quickly to the table, sits down and rests her elbows on it, her chin on her hands, looking at the door.

*Builder*. [Re-entering] Well, Maud! You'd have won your bet!

*Maud*. Oh! father, I—I've got some news for you.

*Builder*. [Staring at her] News—what?

*Maud*. I'm awfully sorry, but I-I've got a job.

*Builder*. Now, don't go saying you're going in for Art, too, because I won't have it.

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*Maud*. Art? Oh! no! It's the—[With a jerk]—the Movies.

*Builder*. who has taken up a pipe to fill, puts it down.

*Builder*. [Impressively] I'm not in a joking mood.

*Maud*. I'm not joking, father.

*Builder*. Then what are you talking about?

*Maud*. You see, I—I've got a film face, and—

*Builder*. You've what? [Going up to his daughter, he takes hold of her chin] Don't talk nonsense! Your sister has just tried me to the limit.

*Maud*. [Removing his hand from her chin] Don't oppose it, father, please!
I've always wanted to earn my own living.

*Builder*. Living! Living!

*Maud*. [Gathering determination] You can't stop me, father, because I shan't need support. I've got quite good terms.

*Builder*. [Almost choking, but mastering himself] Do you mean to say you've gone as far as that?

*Maud*. Yes. It's all settled.

*Builder*. Who put you up to this?

*Maud*. No one. I've been meaning to, ever so long. I'm twenty-one, you know.

*Builder*. A film face! Good God! Now, look here! I will not have a daughter of mine mixed up with the stage. I've spent goodness knows what on your education—both of you.

*Maud*. I don't want to be ungrateful; but I—I can't go on living at home.

*Builder*. You can't—! Why? You've every indulgence.

*Maud*. [Clearly and coldly] I can remember occasions when your indulgence hurt, father. [She wriggles her shoulders and back] We never forgot or forgave that.

*Builder*. [Uneasily] That! You were just kids.

*Maud*. Perhaps you'd like to begin again?

*Builder*. Don't twist my tail, Maud. I had the most painful scene with Athene this morning. Now come! Give up this silly notion! It's really too childish!

*Maud*. [Looking at him curiously] I've heard you say ever so many times that no man was any good who couldn't make his own way, father. Well, women are the same as men, now. It's the law of the country. I only want to make my own way.

*Builder*. [Trying to subdue his anger] Now, Maud, don't be foolish. Consider my position here—a Town Councillor, a Magistrate, and Mayor next year. With one daughter living with a man she isn't married to—

*Maud*. [With lively interest] Oh! So you did catch them out?

*Builder*. D'you mean to say you knew?

*Maud*. Of course.

*Builder*. My God! I thought we were a Christian family.

*Maud*. Oh! father.

*Builder*. Don't sneer at Christianity!

*Maud*. There's only one thing wrong with Christians—they aren't!

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*Builder* Seizes her by the shoulders and shakes her vigorously. When he drops her shoulders, she gets up, gives him a vicious look, and suddenly stamps her foot on his toe with all her might.

*Builder*. [With a yowl of pain] You little devil!

*Maud*. [Who has put the table between them] I won't stand being shaken.

*Builder*. [Staring at her across the table] You've got my temper up and you'll take the consequences. I'll make you toe the line.

*Maud*. If you knew what a Prussian expression you've got!

> *Builder* passes his hand across his face uneasily, as if to wipe something off.

No! It's too deep!

*Builder*. Are you my daughter or are you not?

*Maud*. I certainly never wanted to be. I've always disliked you, father, ever since I was so high. I've seen through you. Do you remember when you used to come into the nursery because Jenny was pretty? You think we didn't notice that, but we did. And in the schoolroom—Miss Tipton. And d'you remember knocking our heads together? No, you don't; but we do. And—

*Builder*. You disrespectful monkey! Will you be quiet?

*Maud*. No; you've got to hear things. You don't really love anybody but yourself, father. What's good for you has to be good for everybody. I've often heard you talk about independence, but it's a limited company and you've got all the shares.

*Builder*. Rot; only people who can support themselves have a right to independence.

*Maud*. That's why you don't want me to support myself.

*Builder*. You can't! Film, indeed! You'd be in the gutter in a year.
Athene's got her pittance, but you—you've got nothing.

*Maud*. Except my face.

*Builder*. It's the face that brings women to ruin, my girl.

*Maud*. Well, when I'm there I won't come to you to rescue me.

*Builder*. Now, mind—if you leave my house, I've done with you.

*Maud*. I'd rather scrub floors now, than stay.

*Builder*. [Almost pathetically] Well, I'm damned! Look here, Maud— all this has been temper. You got my monkey up. I'm sorry I shook you; you've had your revenge on my toes. Now, come! Don't make things worse for me than they are. You've all the liberty you can reasonably want till you marry.

*Maud*. He can't see it—he absolutely can't!

*Builder*. See what?

*Maud*. That I want to live a life of my own.

He edges nearer to her, and she edges to keep her distance.

*Builder*. I don't know what's bitten you.

*Maud*. The microbe of freedom; it's in the air.

*Builder*. Yes, and there it'll stay—that's the first sensible word you've uttered. Now, come! Take your hat off, and let's be friends!

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*Maud* looks at him and slowly takes off her hat.

*Builder*. [Relaxing his attitude, with a sigh of relief] That's right! [Crosses to fireplace].

*Maud*. [Springing to the door leading to the hall] Good-bye, father!

*Builder*. [Following her] Monkey!

At the sound of a bolt shot, *builder* goes up to the window. There is a fumbling at the door, and *Camille* appears.

*Builder*. What's the matter with that door? *Camille*. It was bolted, Monsieur.

*Builder*. Who bolted it?

*Camille*. [Shrugging her shoulders] I can't tell, Monsieur.

She collects the cups, and halts close to him. [Softly] Monsieur is not 'appy.

*Builder*. [Surprised] What? No! Who'd be happy in a household like mine?

*Camille*. But so strong a man—I wish I was a strong man, not a weak woman.

*Builder*. [Regarding her with reluctant admiration] Why, what's the matter with you?

*Camille*. Will Monsieur have another glass of brandy before I take it?

*Builder*. No! Yes—I will.

She pours it out, and he drinks it, hands her the glass and sits down suddenly in an armchair. *Camille* puts the glass on a tray, and looks for a box of matches from the mantelshelf.

*Camille*. A light, Monsieur?

*Builder*. Please.

*Camille*. [She trips over his feet and sinks on to his knee] Oh! Monsieur!

*Builder* flames up and catches her in his arms

Oh! Monsieur—

*Builder*. You little devil!

She suddenly kisses him, and he returns the kiss. While they are engaged in this entrancing occupation, *Mrs builder* opens the door from the hall, watches unseen for a few seconds, and quietly goes out again.

*Builder*. [Pushing her back from him, whether at the sound of the door or of a still small voice] What am I doing?

*Camille*. Kissing.

*Builder*. I—I forgot myself.

They rise.

*Camille*. It was na-ice.

*Builder*. I didn't mean to. You go away—go away!

*Camille*. Oh! Monsieur, that spoil it.

*Builder*. [Regarding her fixedly] It's my opinion you're a temptation of the devil. You know you sat down on purpose.

*Camille*. Well, perhaps.

*Builder*. What business had you to? I'm a family man.

*Camille*. Yes. What a pity! But does it matter?

*Builder*. [Much beset] Look here, you know! This won't do! It won't do! I—I've got my reputation to think of!

*Camille*. So 'ave I! But there is lots of time to think of it in between.

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*Builder*. I knew you were dangerous. I always knew it.

*Camille*. What a thing to say of a little woman!

*Builder*. We're not in Paris.

*Camille*. [Clasping her hands] Oh! 'Ow I wish we was!

*Builder*. Look here—I can't stand this; you've got to go. Out with you!
I've always kept a firm hand on myself, and I'm not going to—

*Camille*. But I admire you so!

*Builder*. Suppose my wife had come in?

*Camille*. Oh! Don't suppose any such a disagreeable thing! If you were not so strict, you would feel much 'appier.

*Builder*. [Staring at her] You're a temptress!

*Camille*. I lofe pleasure, and I don't get any. And you 'ave such a duty, you don't get any sport. Well, I am 'ere!

She stretches herself, and *builder* utters a deep sound.

*Builder*. [On the edge of succumbing] It's all against my—I won't do it! It's—it's wrong!

*Camille*. Oh! La, la!

*Builder*. [Suddenly revolting] No! If you thought it a sin—I—might.
But you don't; you're nothing but a—a little heathen.

*Camille*. Why should it be better if I thought it a sin?

*Builder*. Then—then I should know where I was. As it is—

*Camille*. The English 'ave no idea of pleasure. They make it all so coarse and virtuous.

*Builder*. Now, out you go before I—! Go on!

He goes over to the door and opens it. His wife is outside in a hat and coat. She comes in.

[Stammering] Oh! Here you are—I wanted you.

*Camille*, taking up the tray, goes out Left, swinging her hips a very little.

*Builder*. Going out?

*Mrs builder*. Obviously.

*Builder*. Where?

*Mrs builder*. I don't know at present.

*Builder*. I wanted to talk to you about Maud.

*Mrs builder*. It must wait.

*Builder*. She's-she's actually gone and—

*Mrs builder*. I must tell you that I happened to look in a minute ago.

*Builder*. [In absolute dismay] You! You what?

*Mrs builder*. Yes. I will put no obstacle in the way of your pleasures.

*Builder*. [Aghast] Put no obstacle? What do you mean? Julia, how can you say a thing like that? Why, I've only just—

*Mrs builder*. Don't! I saw.

*Builder*. The girl fell on my knees. Julia, she did. She's—she's a little devil. I—I resisted her. I give you my word there's been nothing beyond a kiss, under great provocation. I—I apologise.

*Mrs builder*. [Bows her head] Thank you! I quite understand. But you must forgive my feeling it impossible to remain a wet blanket any longer.

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*Builder*. What! Because of a little thing like that—all over in two minutes, and I doing my utmost.

*Mrs builder*. My dear John, the fact that you had to do your utmost is quite enough. I feel continually humiliated in your house, and I want to leave it—quite quietly, without fuss of any kind.

*Builder*. But—my God! Julia, this is awful—it's absurd! How can you? I'm your husband. Really—your saying you don't mind what I do—it's not right; it's immoral!

*Mrs builder*. I'm afraid you don't see what goes on in those who live with you. So, I'll just go. Don't bother!

*Builder*. Now, look here, Julia, you can't mean this seriously. You can't! Think of my position! You've never set yourself up against me before.

*Mrs builder*. But I do now.

*Builder*. [After staring at her] I've given you no real reason. I'll send the girl away. You ought to thank me for resisting a temptation that most men would have yielded to. After twenty-three years of married life, to kick up like this—you ought to be ashamed of yourself.

*Mrs builder*. I'm sure you must think so.

*Builder*. Oh! for heaven's sake don't be sarcastic! You're my wife, and there's an end of it; you've no legal excuse. Don't be absurd!

*Mrs builder*. Good-bye!

*Builder*. D'you realise that you're encouraging me to go wrong? That's a pretty thing for a wife to do. You ought to keep your husband straight.

*Mrs builder*. How beautifully put!

*Builder*. [Almost pathetically] Don't rile me Julia! I've had an awful day. First Athene—-then Maud—then that girl—and now you! All at once like this! Like a swarm of bees about one's head. [Pleading] Come, now, Julia, don't be so—so im practicable! You'll make us the laughing-stock of the whole town. A man in my position, and can't keep his own family; it's preposterous!

*Mrs builder*. Your own family have lives and thoughts and feelings of their own.

*Builder*. Oh! This damned Woman's business! I knew how it would be when we gave you the vote. You and I are married, and our daughters are our daughters. Come,

Julia. Where's your commonsense? After twenty-three years! You know I can't do without you!

*Mrs builder*. You could—quite easily. You can tell people what you like.

*Builder*. My God! I never heard anything so immoral in all my life from the mother of two grownup girls. No wonder they've turned out as they have! What is it you want, for goodness sake?

*Mrs builder*. We just want to be away from you, that's all. I assure you it's best. When you've shown some consideration for our feelings and some real sign that we exist apart from you—we could be friends again— perhaps—I don't know.

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*Builder*. Friends! Good heavens! With one's own wife and daughters! [With great earnestness] Now, look here, Julia, you haven't lived with me all this time without knowing that I'm a man of strong passions; I've been a faithful husband to you—yes, I have. And that means resisting all sorts of temptations you know nothing of. If you withdraw from my society I won't answer for the consequences. In fact, I can't have you withdrawing. I'm not going to see myself going to the devil and losing the good opinion of everybody round me. A bargain's a bargain. And until I've broken my side of it, and I tell you I haven't—you've no business to break yours. That's flat. So now, put all that out of your head.

*Mrs builder*. No.

*Builder*. [Intently] D'you realise that I've supported you in luxury and comfort?

*Mrs builder*. I think I've earned it.

*Builder*. And how do you propose to live? I shan't give you a penny. Come, Julia, don't be such an idiot! Fancy letting a kiss which no man could have helped, upset you like this!

*Mrs builder*. The Camille, and the last straw!

*Builder*. [Sharply] I won't have it. So now you know.

But *Mrs builder* has very swiftly gone.

Julia, I tell you— [The outer door is heard being closed] Damnation!
I will not have it! They're all mad! Here—where's my hat?

He looks distractedly round him, wrenches open the door, and a
moment later the street door is heard to shut with a bang.

*Curtain*.

## ACT III

### SCENE I

Ten o'clock the following morning, in the study of the Mayor of Breconridge, a panelled room with no window visible, a door Left back and a door Right forward. The entire back wall is furnished with books from floor to ceiling; the other walls are panelled and bare. Before the fireplace, Left, are two armchairs, and other chairs are against the walls. On the Right is a writing-bureau at right angles to the footlights, with a chair behind it. At its back corner stands *Harris*, telephoning.

*Harris*. What—[Pause] Well, it's infernally awkward, Sergeant. . . . The Mayor's in a regular stew. . . . [Listens] New constable? I should think so! Young fool! Look here, Martin, the only thing to do is to hear the charge here at once. I've sent for Mr Chantrey; he's on his way. Bring Mr Builder and the witnesses round sharp. See? And, I say, for God's sake keep it dark. Don't let the Press get on to it. Why you didn't let him go home—! Black eye? The constable? Well, serve him right. Blundering young ass! I mean, it's undermining all authority. . . . Well, you oughtn't—at least, I . . . Damn it all!—it's a nine days' wonder if it gets out—! All right! As soon as you can. [He hangs up the receiver, puts a second chair behind the bureau, and other chairs facing it.] [To himself] Here's a mess! Johnny Builder, of all men! What price Mayors!

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The telephone rings.

Hallo? . . . Poaching charge? Well, bring him too; only, I say, keep him back till the other's over. By the way, Mr Chantrey's going shooting. He'll want to get off by eleven. What? . . Righto !

As he hangs up the receiver the *Mayor* enters. He looks worried, and is still dressed with the indefinable wrongness of a burgher.

*Mayor*. Well, 'Arris?

*Harris*. They'll be over in five minutes, Mr Mayor.

*Mayor*. Mr Chantrey?

*Harris*. On his way, sir.

*Mayor*. I've had some awkward things to deal with in my time, 'Arris, but this is just about the [Sniffs] limit.

*Harris*. Most uncomfortable, Sir; most uncomfortable!

*Mayor*. Put a book on the chair, 'Arris; I like to sit 'igh.

*Harris* puts a volume of Eneyclopaedia on the Mayor's chair behind the bureau.

[Deeply] Our fellow-magistrate! A family man! In my shoes next year. I suppose he won't be, now. You can't keep these things dark.

*Harris*. I've warned Martin, sir, to use the utmost discretion. Here's Mr Chantrey.

By the door Left, a pleasant and comely gentleman has entered, dressed with indefinable rightness in shooting clothes.

*Mayor*. Ah, Chantrey!

*Chantrey*. How de do, Mr Mayor? [Nodding to *Harris*] This is extraordinarily unpleasant.

The *Mayor* nods.

What on earth's he been doing?

*Harris*. Assaulting one of his own daughters with a stick; and resisting the police.

*Chantrey*. [With a low whistle] Daughter! Charity begins at home.

*Harris*. There's a black eye.

*Mayor*. Whose?

*Harris*. The constable's.

*Chantrey*. How did the police come into it?

*Harris*. I don't know, sir. The worst of it is he's been at the police station since four o'clock yesterday. The Superintendent's away, and Martin never will take responsibility.

*Chantrey*. By George! he will be mad. John Builder's a choleric fellow.

*Mayor*. [Nodding] He is. 'Ot temper, and an 'igh sense of duty.

*Harris*. There's one other charge, Mr Mayor—poaching. I told them to keep that back till after.

*Chantrey*. Oh, well, we'll make short work of that. I want to get off by eleven, Harris. I shall be late for the first drive anyway. John Builder! I say, Mayor—but for the grace of God, there go we!

*Mayor*. Harris, go out and bring them in yourself; don't let the servants—

*Harris* goes out Left. The *Mayor* takes the upper chair behind the bureau, sitting rather higher because of the book than *Chantrey*, who takes the lower. Now that they are in the seats of justice, a sort of reticence falls on them, as if they were afraid of giving away their attitudes of mind to some unseen presence.

*Mayor*. [Suddenly] H'm!

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*Chantrey*. Touch of frost. Birds ought to come well to the guns—no wind. I like these October days.

*Mayor*. I think I 'ear them. H'm.

*Chantrey* drops his eyeglass and puts on a pair of "grandfather" spectacles. The *Mayor* clears his throat and takes up a pen. They neither of them look up as the door is opened and a little procession files in. First *Harris*; then *Ralph builder*, *Athene*, *Herringhame*, *Maud*, *Mrs builder*, *Sergeant Martin*, carrying a heavy Malacca cane with a silver knob; *John builder* and the *constable moon*, a young man with one black eye. No funeral was ever attended by mutes so solemn and dejected. They stand in a sort of row.

*Mayor*. [Without looking up] Sit down, ladies; sit down.

*Harris* and *Herringhame* succeed in placing the three women in chairs. *Ralph builder* also sits. *Herringhame* stands behind. *John builder* remains standing between the two *policemen*. His face is unshaved and menacing, but he stands erect staring straight at the *Mayor*. *Harris* goes to the side of the bureau, Back, to take down the evidence.

*Mayor*. Charges!

*Sergeant*. John Builder, of The Cornerways, Breconridge, Contractor and Justice of the Peace, charged with assaulting his daughter Maud Builder by striking her with a stick in the presence of Constable Moon and two other persons; also with resisting Constable Moon in the execution of his duty, and injuring his eye. Constable Moon!

*Moon*. [Stepping forward-one, two—like an automaton, and saluting] In River Road yesterday afternoon, Your Worship, about three-thirty p.m., I was attracted by a young woman callin' "Constable" outside a courtyard. On hearing the words "Follow me, quick," I followed her to a painter's studio inside the courtyard, where I found three persons in the act of disagreement. No sooner 'ad I appeared than the defendant, who was engaged in draggin' a woman towards the door, turns to the young woman who accompanied me, with violence. "You dare, father," she says; whereupon he hit her twice with the stick the same which is produced, in the presence of myself and the two other persons, which I'm given to understand is his wife and other daughter.

*Mayor*. Yes; never mind what you're given to understand.

*Moon*. No, sir. The party struck turns to me and says, "Come in. I give this man in charge for assault." I moves accordingly with the words: "I saw you. Come along with me." The defendant turns to me sharp and says: "You stupid lout—I'm a magistrate." "Come off it," I says to the best of my recollection. "You struck this woman in my presence," I says, "and you come along!" We were then at close quarters. The

defendant gave me a push with the words:  “Get out, you idiot!” “Not at all,” I replies, and took ’old of his arm.  A struggle ensues, in the course of which I receives the black eye which I herewith produce. [He touches his eye with awful solemnity.]

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The *Mayor* clears his throat; *Chantrey's* eyes goggle; *Harris* bends over and writes rapidly.

During the struggle, Your Worship, a young man has appeared on the scene, and at the instigation of the young woman, the same who was assaulted, assists me in securing the prisoner, whose language and resistance was violent in the extreme. We placed him in a cab which we found outside, and I conveyed him to the station.

*Chantrey*. What was his—er—conduct in the—er—cab?

*Moon*. He sat quiet.

*Chantrey*. That seems—

*Moon*. Seein' I had his further arm twisted behind him.

*Mayor* [Looking at *builder*] Any questions to ask him?

*Builder* makes not the faintest sign, and the *Mayor* drops his glance.

*Mayor*. Sergeant?

*Moon* steps back two paces, and the *Sergeant* steps two paces forward.

*Sergeant*. At ten minutes to four, Your Worship, yesterday afternoon, Constable Moon brought the defendant to the station in a four-wheeled cab. On his recounting the circumstances of the assault, they were taken down and read over to the defendant with the usual warning. The defendant said nothing. In view of the double assault and the condition of the constable's eye, and in the absence of the Superintendent, I thought it my duty to retain the defendant for the night.

*Mayor*. The defendant said nothing?

*Sergeant*. He 'as not opened his lips to my knowledge, Your Worship, from that hour to this.

*Mayor*. Any questions to ask the Sergeant?

*Builder* continues to stare at the *Mayor* without a word.

*Mayor*. Very well!

The *Mayor* and *Chantrey* now consult each other inaudibly, and the Mayor nods.

*Mayor*. Miss Maud Builder, will you tell us what you know of this—er— occurrence?

*Maud*. [Rising; with eyes turning here and there] Must I?

*Mayor*. I'm afraid you must.

*Maud*. [After a look at her father, who never turns his eyes from the MAYOR's face] I—I wish to withdraw the charge of striking me, please. I—I never meant to make it. I was in a temper—I saw red.

*Mayor*. I see. A—a domestic disagreement. Very well, that charge is withdrawn. You do not appear to have been hurt, and that seems to me quite proper. Now, tell me what you know of the assault on the constable. Is his account correct?

*Maud*. [Timidly] Ye-yes. Only—

*Mayor*. Yes? Tell us the truth.

*Maud*. [Resolutely] Only, I don't think my father hit the constable.
I think the stick did that.

*Mayor*. Oh, the stick? But—er—the stick was in 'is 'and, wasn't it?

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*Maud*. Yes; but I mean, my father saw red, and the constable saw red, and the stick flew up between them and hit him in the eye.

*Chantrey*. And then he saw black?

*Mayor*. [With corrective severity] But did ’e ’it ’im with the stick?

*Maud*. No—no. I don’t think he did.

*Mayor*. Then who supplied the—er—momentum?

*Maud*. I think there was a struggle for the cane, and it flew up.

*Mayor*. Hand up the cane.

The *Sergeant* hands up the cane. The *Mayor* and *Chantrey* examine it.
*Mayor*. Which end—do you suggest—inflicted this injury?

*Maud*. Oh! the knob end, sir.

*Mayor*. What do you say to that, constable?

*Moon*. [Stepping the mechanical two paces] I don’t deny there was a struggle, Your Worship, but it’s my impression I was ’it.

*Chantrey*. Of course you were bit; we can see that. But with the cane or with the fist?

*Moon*. [A little flurried] I—I—with the fist, sir.

*Mayor*. Be careful. Will you swear to that?

*Moon*. [With that sudden uncertainty which comes over the most honest in such circumstances] Not—not so to speak in black and white, Your Worship; but that was my idea at the time.

*Mayor*. You won’t swear to it?

*Moon*. I’ll swear he called me an idiot and a lout; the words made a deep impression on me.

*Chantrey*. [To himself] Mort aux vaches!

*Mayor*. Eh? That’ll do, constable; stand back. Now, who else saw the struggle? Mrs Builder. You’re not obliged to say anything unless you like. That’s your privilege as his wife.

While he is speaking the door has been opened, and *Harris* has gone swiftly to it, spoken to someone and returned. He leans forward to the *Mayor*.

Eh? Wait a minute. Mrs Builder, do you wish to give evidence?

*Mrs builder*. [Rising] No, Mr Mayor.

*Mrs builder* Sits.

*Mayor*. Very good. [To *Harris*] Now then, what is it?

*Harris* says something in a low and concerned voice. The *mayor's* face lengthens. He leans to his right and consults *Chantrey*, who gives a faint and deprecating shrug. A moment's silence.

*Mayor*. This is an open Court. The Press have the right to attend if they wish.

*Harris* goes to the door and admits a young man in glasses, of a pleasant appearance, and indicates to him a chair at the back. At this untimely happening BUILDER's eyes have moved from side to side, but now he regains his intent and bull-like stare at his fellow-justices.

*Mayor*. [To Maud] You can sit down, Miss Builder.

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*Maud* resumes her seat.

Miss Athene Builder, you were present, I think?

*Athene*. [Rising] Yes, Sir.

*Mayor*. What do you say to this matter?

*Athene*. I didn't see anything very clearly, but I think my sister's account is correct, sir.

*Mayor*. Is it your impression that the cane inflicted the injury?

*Athene*. [In a low voice] Yes.

*Mayor*. With or without deliberate intent?

*Athene*. Oh! without.

*Builder* looks at her.

*Mayor*. But you were not in a position to see very well?

*Athene*. No, Sir.

*Mayor*. Your sister having withdrawn her charge, we needn't go into that. Very good!

He motions her to sit down. *Athene*, turning her eyes on her Father's impassive figure, sits.

*Mayor*. Now, there was a young man. [Pointing to *Herringhame*] Is this the young man?

*Moon*. Yes, Your Worship.

*Mayor*. What's your name?

*Guy*. Guy Herringhame.

*Mayor*. Address?

*Guy*. Er—the Aerodrome, Sir. *Mayor*. Private, I mean?

The moment is one of considerable tension.

*Guy*. [With an effort] At the moment, sir, I haven't one. I've just left my diggings, and haven't yet got any others.

*Mayor*. H'm! The Aerodrome. How did you come to be present?

*Guy*. I—er

BUILDER's eyes go round and rest on him for a moment.

It's in my sister's studio that Miss Athene Builder is at present working, sir. I just happened to—to turn up.

*Mayor*. Did you appear on the scene, as the constable says, during the struggle?

*Guy*. Yes, sir.

*Mayor*. Did he summon you to his aid?

*Guy*. Yes—No, sir. Miss Maud Builder did that.

*Mayor*. What do you say to this blow?

*Guy*. [Jerking his chin up a little] Oh! I saw that clearly.

*Mayor*. Well, let us hear.

*Guy*. The constable's arm struck the cane violently and it flew up and landed him in the eye.

*Mayor*. [With a little grunt] You are sure of that?

*Guy*. Quite sure, sir.

*Mayor*. Did you hear any language?

*Guy*. Nothing out of the ordinary, sir. One or two damns and blasts.

*Mayor*. You call that ordinary?

*Guy*. Well, he's a—magistrate, sir.

The *Mayor* utters a profound grunt. *Chantrey* smiles. There is a silence. Then the *Mayor* leans over to *Chantrey* for a short colloquy.

*Chantrey*. Did you witness any particular violence other than a resistance to arrest?

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*Guy*. No, sir.

*Mayor*. [With a gesture of dismissal] Very well, That seems to be the evidence. Defendant John Builder—what do you say to all this?

*Builder*. [In a voice different from any we have heard from him] Say! What business had he to touch me, a magistrate? I gave my daughter two taps with a cane in a private house, for interfering with me for taking my wife home—

*Mayor*. That charge is not pressed, and we can't go into the circumstances. What do you wish to say about your conduct towards the constable?

*Builder*. [In his throat] Not a damned thing!

*Mayor*. [Embarrassed] I—I didn't catch.

*Chantrey*. Nothing—nothing, he said, Mr Mayor.

*Mayor*. [Clearing his throat] I understand, then, that you do not wish to offer any explanation?

*Builder*. I consider myself abominably treated, and I refuse to say another word.

*Mayor*. [Drily] Very good. Miss Maud Builder.

*Maud* stands up.

*Mayor*. When you spoke of the defendant seeing red, what exactly did you mean?

*Maud*. I mean that my father was so angry that he didn't know what he was doing.

*Chantrey*. Would you say as angry as he—er—is now?

*Maud*. [With a faint smile] Oh! much more angry.

*Ralph builder* stands up.

*Ralph*. Would you allow me to say a word, Mr Mayor?

*Mayor*. Speaking of your own knowledge, Mr Builder?

*Ralph*. In regard to the state of my brother's mind—yes, Mr Mayor. He was undoubtedly under great strain yesterday; certain circumstances, domestic and otherwise—

*Mayor*. You mean that he might have been, as one might say, beside himself?

*Ralph*. Exactly, Sir.

*Mayor*. Had you seen your brother?

*Ralph*. I had seen him shortly before this unhappy business.

The *Mayor* nods and makes a gesture, so that *Maud* and *Ralph* sit down; then, leaning over, he confers in a low voice with *Chantrey*. The rest all sit or stand exactly as if each was the only person in the room, except the *journalist*, who is writing busily and rather obviously making a sketch of *builder*.

*Mayor*. Miss Athene Builder.

*Athene* stands up.

This young man, Mr Herringhame, I take it, is a friend of the family's?

A moment of some tension.

*Athene*. N—no, Mr Mayor, not of my father or mother.

*Chantrey*. An acquaintance of yours?

*Athene*. Yes.

*Mayor*. Very good. [He clears his throat] As the defendant, wrongly, we think, refuses to offer his explanation of this matter, the Bench has to decide on the evidence as given. There seems to be some discrepancy as to the blow which the constable undoubtedly received. In view of this, we incline to take the testimony of Mr—

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*Harris* prompts him.

Mr ’Erringhame—as the party least implicated personally in the affair, and most likely to ’ave a cool and impartial view. That evidence is to the effect that the blow was accidental. There is no doubt, however, that the defendant used reprehensible language, and offered some resistance to the constable in the execution of his duty. Evidence ’as been offered that he was in an excited state of mind; and it is possible —I don’t say that this is any palliation—but it is possible that he may have thought his position as magistrate made him—er—

*Chantrey*. [Prompting] Caesar’s wife.

*Mayor*. Eh? We think, considering all the circumstances, and the fact that he has spent a night in a cell, that justice will be met by—er— discharging him with a caution.

*Builder*. [With a deeply muttered] The devil you do!

Walks out of the room. The *journalist*, grabbing his pad, starts up and follows. The *builders* rise and huddle, and, with *Herringhame*, are ushered out by *Harris*.

*Mayor*. [Pulling out a large handkerchief and wiping his forehead] My Aunt!

*Chantrey*. These new constables, Mayor! I say, Builder’ll have to go! Damn the Press, how they nose everything out! The Great Unpaid!— We shall get it again! [He suddenly goes off into a fit of laughter] “Come off it,” I says, “to the best of my recollection.” Oh! Oh! I shan’t hit a bird all day! That poor devil Builder! It’s no joke for him. You did it well, Mayor; you did it well. British justice is safe in your hands. He blacked the fellow’s eye all right. “Which I herewith produce.” Oh! my golly! It beats the band!

His uncontrollable laughter and the *mayor’s* rueful appreciation are exchanged with lightning rapidity for a preternatural solemnity, as the door opens, admitting *Sergeant Martin* and the lugubrious object of their next attentions.

*Mayor*. Charges.

*Sergeant* steps forward to read the charge as

The *curtain* falls.

## SCENE II

Noon the same day.

Builder's study. *Topping* is standing by the open window, looking up and down the street. A newspaper boy's voice is heard calling the first edition of his wares. It approaches from the Right.

Topping. Here!

*Boy's voice*. Right, guv'nor! Johnny Builder up before the beaks! [A paper is pushed up].

*Topping*. [Extending a penny] What's that you're sayin'? You take care!

*Boy's voice*. It's all 'ere. Johnny Builder—beatin' his wife! Dischawged.

*Topping*. Stop it, you young limb!

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*Boy's voice*. 'Allo! What's the matter wiv you? Why, it's Johnny Builder's house! [Gives a cat-call] 'Ere, buy anuvver! 'E'll want to read about 'isself. [Appealing] Buy anuvver, guv'nor!

*Topping*. Move on!

He retreats from the window, opening the paper.

*Boy's voice*. [Receding] Payper! First edition! J.P. chawged! Payper!

*Topping*. [To himself as he reads] Crimes! Phew! That accounts for them bein' away all night.

While he is reading, *Camille* enters from the hall. Here! Have you seen this, Camel—in the Stop Press?

*Camille*. No.

They read eagerly side by side.

*Topping*. [Finishing aloud] "Tried to prevent her father from forcing her mother to return home with him, and he struck her for so doing. She did not press the charge. The arrested gentleman, who said he acted under great provocation, was discharged with a caution." Well, I'm blowed! He has gone and done it!

*Camille*. A black eye!

*Topping*. [Gazing at her] Have you had any hand in this? I've seen you making your lovely black eyes at him. You foreigners—you're a loose lot!

*Camille*. You are drunk!

*Topping*. Not yet, my dear. [Reverting to the paper; philosophically] Well, this little lot's bust up! The favourites will fall down. Johnny Builder! Who'd have thought it?

*Camille*. He is an obstinate man.

*Topping*. Ah! He's right up against it now. Comes of not knowin' when to stop bein' firm. If you meet a wall with your 'ead, it's any odds on the wall, Camel. Though, if you listened to some, you wouldn't think it. What'll he do now, I wonder? Any news of the mistress?

*Camille*. [Shaking her head] I have pack her tr-runks.

*Topping*. Why?

*Camille*. Because she take her jewels yesterday.

*Topping*. Deuce she did! They generally leave ’em. Take back yer gifts! She throws the baubles at ’is ’ead. [Again staring at her] You’re a deep one, you know!

There is the sound of a cab stopping.

Wonder if that’s him! [He goes towards the hall. *Camille* watchfully shifts towards the diningroom door. *Maud* enters.]

*Maud*. Is my father back, Topping?

*Topping*. Not yet, Miss.

*Maud*. I’ve come for mother’s things.

*Camille*. They are r-ready.

*Maud*. [Eyeing her] Topping, get them down, please.

*Topping*, after a look at them both, goes out into the hall.

Very clever of you to have got them ready.

*Camille*. I am clevare.

*Maud*. [Almost to herself] Yes—father may, and he may not.

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*Camille*. Look! If you think I am a designing woman, you are mistook.
I know when things are too ’ot. I am not sorry to go.

*Maud*. Oh! you are going?

*Camille*. Yes, I am going. How can I stay when there is no lady in the ’ouse?

*Maud*. Not even if you’re asked to?

*Camille*. Who will ask me?

*Maud*. That we shall see.

*Camille*. Well, you will see I have an opinion of my own.

*Maud*. Oh! yes, you’re clear-headed enough.

*Camille*. I am not arguing. Good-morning!

Exits up Left.

*Maud* regards her stolidly as she goes out into the dining-room, then takes up the paper and reads.

*Maud*. Horrible!

*Topping* re-enters from the hall.

*Topping*. I’ve got ’em on the cab, Miss. I didn’t put your ten bob on yesterday, because the animal finished last. You cant depend on horses.

*Maud*. [Touching the newspaper] This is a frightful business, Topping.

*Topping*. Ah! However did it happen, Miss Maud?

*Maud*. [Tapping the newspaper] It’s all true. He came after my mother to Miss Athene’s, and I—I couldn’t stand it. I did what it says here; and now I’m sorry. Mother’s dreadfully upset. You know father as well as anyone, Topping; what do you think he’ll do now?

*Topping*. [Sucking in his cheeks] Well, you see, Miss, it’s like this: Up to now Mr Builder’s always had the respect of everybody—

*Maud* moves her head impatiently.

outside his own house, of course. Well, now he hasn’t got it. Pishchologically that’s bound to touch him.

*Maud*. Of course; but which way? Will he throw up the sponge, or try and stick it out here?

*Topping*. He won't throw up the sponge, Miss; more likely to squeeze it down the back of their necks.

*Maud*. He'll be asked to resign, of course.

> The *newspaper boy's voice* is heard again approaching: "First edition! Great sensation! Local magistrate before the Bench! Pay-per!"

Oh, dear! I wish I hadn't! But I couldn't see mother being—

*Topping*. Don't you fret, Miss; he'll come through. His jaw's above his brow, as you might say.

*Maud*. What?

*Topping*. [Nodding] Phreenology, Miss. I rather follow that. When the jaw's big and the brow is small, it's a sign of character. I always think the master might have been a Scotchman, except for his fishionomy.

*Maud*. A Scotsman?

*Topping*. So down on anything soft, Miss. Haven't you noticed whenever one of these 'Umanitarians writes to the papers, there's always a Scotchman after him next morning. Seems to be a fact of 'uman nature, like introducin' rabbits into a new country and then weasels to get rid of 'em. And then something to keep down the weasels. But I never can see what could keep down a Scotchman! You seem to reach the hapex there!

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*Maud*. Miss Athene was married this morning, Topping. We've just come from the Registrar's.

*Topping*. [Immovably] Indeed, Miss. I thought perhaps she was about to be.

*Maud*. Oh!

*Topping*. Comin' events. I saw the shadder yesterday.

*Maud*. Well, it's all right. She's coming on here with my uncle.

A cab is heard driving up.

That's them, I expect. We all feel awful about father.

*Topping*. Ah! I shouldn't be surprised if he feels awful about you, Miss.

*Maud*. [At the window] It is them.

*Topping* goes out into the hall; *Athene* and *Ralph* enter Right.

*Maud*. Where's father, Uncle Ralph?

*Ralph*. With his solicitor.

*Athene*. We left Guy with mother at the studio. She still thinks she ought to come. She keeps on saying she must, now father's in a hole.

*Maud*. I've got her things on the cab; she ought to be perfectly free to choose.

*Ralph*. You've got freedom on the brain, Maud.

*Maud*. So would you, Uncle Ralph, if you had father about.

*Ralph*. I'm his partner, my dear.

*Maud*. Yes; how do you manage him?

*Ralph*. I've never yet given him in charge.

*Athene*. What do you do, Uncle Ralph?

*Ralph*. Undermine him when I can.

*Maud*. And when you can't?

*Ralph*. Undermine the other fellow. You can't go to those movie people now, Maud. They'd star you as the celebrated Maud Builder who gave her father into custody. Come to us instead, and have perfect freedom, till all this blows over.

*Maud*. Oh! what will father be like now?

*Athene*. It's so queer you and he being brothers, Uncle Ralph.

*Ralph*. There are two sides to every coin, my dear. John's the head-and I'm the tail. He has the sterling qualities. Now, you girls have got to smooth him down, and make up to him. You've tried him pretty high.

*Maud*. [Stubbornly] I never wanted him for a father, Uncle.

*Ralph*. They do wonderful things nowadays with inherited trouble. Come, are you going to be nice to him, both of you?

*Athene*. We're going to try.

*Ralph*. Good! I don't even now understand how it happened.

*Maud*. When you went out with Guy, it wasn't three minutes before he came. Mother had just told us about—well, about something beastly. Father wanted us to go, and we agreed to go out for five minutes while he talked to mother. We went, and when we came back he told me to get a cab to take mother home. Poor mother stood there looking like a ghost, and he began hunting and hauling her towards the door. I saw red, and instead of a cab I fetched that policeman. Of course father did black his eye. Guy was splendid.

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*Athene*. You gave him the lead.

*Maud*. I couldn't help it, seeing father standing there all dumb.

*Athene*. It was awful! Uncle, why didn't you come back with Guy?

*Maud*. Oh, yes! why didn't you, Uncle?

*Athene*. When Maud had gone for the cab, I warned him not to use force. I told him it was against the law, but he only said: "The law be damned!"

*Ralph*. Well, it all sounds pretty undignified.

*Maud*. Yes; everybody saw red.

They have not seen the door opened from the hall, and *builder* standing there. He is still unshaven, a little sunken in the face, with a glum, glowering expression. He has a document in his hand. He advances a step or two and they see him.

*Athene* and *Maud*. [Aghast] Father!

*Builder*. Ralph, oblige me! See them off the premises!

*Ralph*. Steady, John!

*Builder*. Go!

*Maud*. [Proudly] All right! We thought you might like to know that Athene's married, and that I've given up the movies. Now we'll go.

> *Builder* turns his back on them, and, sitting down at his writing-table, writes.
>
> After a moment's whispered conversation with their Uncle, the two girls go out.
>
> *Ralph builder* stands gazing with whimsical commiseration at his brother's back. As *builder* finishes writing, he goes up and puts his hand on his brother's shoulder.

*Ralph*. This is an awful jar, old man!

*Builder*. Here's what I've said to that fellow: "*Mr Mayor*,—You had the effrontery to-day to discharge me with a caution—forsooth!—your fellow —magistrate. I've consulted my solicitor as to whether an action will lie for false imprisonment. I'm informed that it won't. I take this opportunity of saying that justice in this town is a travesty. I have no

wish to be associated further with you or your fellows; but you are vastly mistaken if you imagine that I shall resign my position on the Bench or the Town Council.—Yours,
"*John builder*."

*Ralph*. I say—keep your sense of humour, old boy.

*Builder*. [Grimly] Humour? I've spent a night in a cell. See this! [He holds out the document] It disinherits my family.

*Ralph*. John!

*Builder*. I've done with those two ladies. As to my wife—if she doesn't come back—! When I suffer, I make others suffer.

*Ralph*. Julia's very upset, my dear fellow; we all are. The girls came here to try and—

*Builder*. [Rising] They may go to hell! If that lousy Mayor thinks I'm done with—he's mistaken! [He rings the bell] I don't want any soft sawder. I'm a fighter.

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*Ralph*. [In a low voice] The enemy stands within the gate, old chap.

*Builder*. What's that?

*Ralph*. Let's boss our own natures before we boss those of other people. Have a sleep on it, John, before you do anything.

*Builder*. Sleep? I hadn't a wink last night. If you'd passed the night I had—

*Ralph*. I hadn't many myself.

*Topping* enters.

*Builder*. Take this note to the Mayor with my compliments, and don't bring back an answer. *Topping*. Very good, sir. There's a gentleman from the "Comet" in the hall, sir. Would you see him for a minute, he says.

*Builder*. Tell him to go to—

A voice says, "Mr Builder!" *Builder* turns to see the figure of the *journalist* in the hall doorway. *Topping* goes out.

*Journalist*. [Advancing with his card] Mr Builder, it's very good of you to see me. I had the pleasure this morning—I mean—I tried to reach you when you left the Mayor's. I thought you would probably have your own side of this unfortunate matter. We shall be glad to give it every prominence.

*Topping* has withdrawn, and *Ralph builder*, at the window, stands listening.

*Builder*. [Drily, regarding the *journalist*, who has spoken in a pleasant and polite voice] Very good of you!

*Journalist*. Not at all, sir. We felt that you would almost certainly have good reasons of your own which would put the matter in quite a different light.

*Builder*. Good reasons? I should think so! I tell you—a very little more of this liberty—-licence I call it—and there isn't a man who'll be able to call himself head of a family.

*Journalist*. [Encouragingly] Quite!

*Builder*. If the law thinks it can back up revolt, it's damned well mistaken. I struck my daughter—I was in a passion, as you would have been.

*Journalist*. [Encouraging] I'm sure—

*Builder*. [Glaring at him] Well, I don't know that you would; you look a soft sort; but any man with any blood in him.

*Journalist*. Can one ask what she was doing, sir? We couldn't get that point quite clear.

*Builder*. Doing? I just had my arm round my wife, trying to induce her to come home with me after a little family tiff, and this girl came at me. I lost my temper, and tapped her with my cane. And—that policeman brought by my own daughter—a policeman! If the law is going to enter private houses and abrogate domestic authority, where the hell shall we be?

*Journalist*. [Encouraging] No, I'm sure—I'm sure!

*Builder*. The maudlin sentimentality in these days is absolutely rotting this country. A man can't be master in his own house, can't require his wife to fulfil her duties, can't attempt to control the conduct of his daughters, without coming up against it and incurring odium. A man can't control his employees; he can't put his foot down on rebellion anywhere, without a lot of humanitarians and licence-lovers howling at him.

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*Journalist*. Excellent, Sir; excellent!

*Builder*. Excellent? It's damnable. Here am I—a man who's always tried to do his duty in private life and public—brought up before the Bench— my God! because I was doing that duty; with a little too much zeal, perhaps—I'm not an angel!

*Journalist*. No! No! of course.

*Builder*. A proper Englishman never is. But there are no proper Englishmen nowadays.

He crosses the room in his fervour.

*Ralph*. [Suddenly] As I look at faces—

*Builder*. [Absorbed] What! I told this young man I wasn't an angel.

*Journalist*. [Drawing him on] Yes, Sir; I quite understand.

*Builder*. If the law thinks it can force me to be one of your weak-kneed sentimentalists who let everybody do what they like—

*Ralph*. There are a good many who stand on their rights left, John.

*Builder*. [Absorbed] What! How can men stand on their rights left?

*Journalist*. I'm afraid you had a painful experience, sir.

*Builder*. Every kind of humiliation. I spent the night in a stinking cell. I haven't eaten since breakfast yesterday. Did they think I was going to eat the muck they shoved in? And all because in a moment of anger—which I regret, I regret!—I happened to strike my daughter, who was interfering between me and my wife. The thing would be funny if it weren't so disgusting. A man's house used to be sanctuary. What is it now? With all the world poking their noses in?

He stands before the fire with his head bent, excluding as it were his interviewer and all the world.

*Journalist*. [Preparing to go] Thank you very much, Mr Builder. I'm sure I can do you justice. Would you like to see a proof?

*Builder*. [Half conscious of him] What?

*Journalist*. Or will you trust me?

*Builder*. I wouldn't trust you a yard.

*Journalist*. [At the door] Very well, sir; you shall have a proof, I promise. Good afternoon, and thank you.

*Builder*. Here!

But he is gone, and *builder* is left staring at his brother, on whose face is still that look of whimsical commiseration.

*Ralph*. Take a pull, old man! Have a hot bath and go to bed.

*Builder*. They've chosen to drive me to extremes, now let them take the consequences. I don't care a kick what anybody thinks.

*Ralph*. [Sadly] Well, I won't worry you anymore, now.

*Builder*. [With a nasty laugh] No; come again to-morrow!

*Ralph*. When you've had a sleep. For the sake of the family name, John, don't be hasty.

*Builder*. Shut the stable door? No, my boy, the horse has gone.

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*Ralph*. Well, Well!

With a lingering look at his brother, who has sat down sullenly at the writing table, he goes out into the hall.

*Builder* remains staring in front of him. The dining-room door opens, and CAMILLE's head is thrust in. Seeing him, she draws back, but he catches sight of her.

*Builder*. Here!

*Camille* comes doubtfully up to the writing table. Her forehead is puckered as if she were thinking hard.

*Builder*. [Looking at her, unsmiling] So you want to be my mistress, do you?

*Camille* makes a nervous gesture.

Well, you shall. Come here.

*Camille*. [Not moving] You f—frighten me.

*Builder*. I've paid a pretty price for you. But you'll make up for it; you and others.

*Camille*. [Starting back] No; I don't like you to-day! No!

*Builder*. Come along! [She is just within reach and he seizes her arm] All my married life I've put a curb on myself for the sake of respectability. I've been a man of principle, my girl, as you saw yesterday. Well, they don't want that! [He draws her close] You can sit on my knee now.

*Camille*. [Shrinking] No; I don't want to, to-day.

*Builder*. But you shall. They've asked for it!

*Camille*. [With a supple movement slipping away from him] They? What is all that? I don't want any trouble. No, no; I am not taking any.

She moves back towards the door. *Builder* utters a sardonic laugh.

Oh! you are a dangerous man! No, no! Not for me! Good-bye, sare!

She turns swiftly and goes out. *Builder* again utters his glum laugh. And then, as he sits alone staring before him, perfect silence reigns in the room. Over the window-sill behind him a *boy's* face is seen to rise; it hangs there a moment with a grin spreading on it.

*Boy's voice*. [Sotto] Johnny Builder!

As *builder* turns sharply, it vanishes.

'Oo beat 'is wife?

*Builder* rushes to the window.

*Boy's voice*. [More distant and a little tentative] Johnny Builder!

*Builder*. You little devil! If I catch you, I'll wring your blasted little neck!

*Boy's voice*. [A little distant] 'Oo blacked the copper's eye?

*Builder*, in an ungovernable passion, seizes a small flower-pot from the sill and dings it with all his force. The sound of a crash.

*Boy's voice*. [Very distant] Ya-a-ah! Missed!

*Builder* stands leaning out, face injected with blood, shaking his fist.

The *curtain* falls for a few seconds.

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## SCENE III

Evening the same day.

BUILDER's study is dim and neglected-looking; the window is still open, though it has become night. A street lamp outside shines in, and the end of its rays fall on *builder* asleep. He is sitting in a high chair at the fireside end of the writing-table, with his elbows on it, and his cheek resting on his hand. He is still unshaven, and his clothes unchanged. A Boy's head appears above the level of the window-sill, as if beheaded and fastened there.

*Boy's voice*. [In a forceful whisper] Johnny Builder!

*Builder* stirs uneasily. The Boy's head vanishes. *Builder*, raising his other hand, makes a sweep before his face, as if to brush away a mosquito. He wakes. Takes in remembrance, and sits a moment staring gloomily before him. The door from the hall is opened and *topping* comes in with a long envelope in his hand.

*Topping*. [Approaching] From the "Comet," sir. Proof of your interview, sir; will you please revise, the messenger says; he wants to take it back at once.

*Builder*. [Taking it] All right. I'll ring.

*Topping*. Shall I close in, sir?

*Builder*. Not now.

*Topping* withdraws. *Builder* turns up a standard lamp on the table, opens the envelope, and begins reading the galley slip. The signs of uneasiness and discomfort grow on him.

*Builder*. Did I say that? Muck! Muck! [He drops the proof, sits a moment moving his head and rubbing one hand uneasily on the surface of the table, then reaches out for the telephone receiver] Town, 245. [Pause] The "Comet"? John Builder. Give me the Editor. [Pause] That you, Mr Editor? John Builder speaking. That interview. I've got the proof. It won't do. Scrap the whole thing, please. I don't want to say anything. [Pause] Yes. I know I said it all; I can't help that. [Pause] No; I've changed my mind. Scrap it, please. [Pause] No, I will not say anything. [Pause] You can say what you dam' well please. [Pause] I mean it; if you put a word into my mouth, I'll sue you for defamation of character. It's undignified muck. I'm tearing it up. Good-night. [He replaces the receiver, and touches a bell; then, taking up the galley slip, he tears it viciously across into many pieces, and rams them into the envelope.]

*Topping* enters.

Here, give this to the messenger-sharp, and tell him to run with it.

*Topping*. [Whose hand can feel the condition of the contents, with a certain surprise] Yes, sir.

He goes, with a look back from the door.

The Mayor is here, sir.  I don't know whether you would wish

*Builder*, rising, takes a turn up and down the room.

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*Builder*. Nor do I. Yes! I'll see him.

*Topping* goes out, and *builder* stands over by the fender, with his head a little down.

*Topping*. [Re-entering] The Mayor, sir.

He retires up Left. The *Mayor* is overcoated, and carries, of all things, a top hat. He reaches the centre of the room before he speaks.

*Mayor*. [Embarrassed] Well, Builder?

*Builder*. Well?

*Mayor*. Come! That caution of mine was quite parliamentary. I 'ad to save face, you know.

*Builder*. And what about my face?

*Mayor*. Well, you—you made it difficult for me. 'Ang it all! Put yourself into my place!

*Builder*. [Grimly] I'd rather put you into mine, as it was last night.

*Mayor*. Yes, yes! I know; but the Bench has got a name to keep up—must stand well in the people's eyes. As it is, I sailed very near the wind. Suppose we had an ordinary person up before us for striking a woman?

*Builder*. I didn't strike a woman—I struck my daughter.

*Mayor*. Well, but she's not a child, you know. And you did resist the police, if no worse. Come! You'd have been the first to maintain British justice. Shake 'ands!

*Builder*. Is that what you came for?

*Mayor*. [Taken aback] Why—yes; nobody can be more sorry than I—

*Builder*. Eye-wash! You came to beg me to resign.

*Mayor*. Well, it's precious awkward, Builder. We all feel—

*Builder*. Save your powder, Mayor. I've slept on it since I wrote you that note. Take my resignations.

*Mayor*. [In relieved embarrassment] That's right. We must face your position.

*Builder*. [With a touch of grim humour] I never yet met a man who couldn't face another man's position.

*Mayor*. After all, what is it?

*Builder*. Splendid isolation. No wife, no daughters, no Councillorship, no Magistracy, no future—[With a laugh] not even a French maid. And why? Because I tried to exercise a little wholesome family authority. That's the position you're facing, Mayor.

*Mayor*. Dear, dear! You're devilish bitter, Builder. It's unfortunate, this publicity. But it'll all blow over; and you'll be back where you were. You've a good sound practical sense underneath your temper. [A pause] Come, now! [A pause] Well, I'll say good-night, then.

*Builder*. You shall have them in writing tomorrow.

*Mayor*. [With sincerity] Come! Shake 'ands.

*Builder*, after a long look, holds out his hand. The two men exchange a grip.

The *Mayor*, turning abruptly, goes out.

*Builder* remains motionless for a minute, then resumes his seat at the side of the writing table, leaning his head on his hands.

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The Boy's head is again seen rising above the level of the window-sill, and another and another follows, till the three, as if decapitated, heads are seen in a row.

*Boys' voices*. [One after another in a whispered crescendo] Johnny Builder! Johnny Builder! Johnny Builder!

*Builder* rises, turns and stares at them. The *three heads* disappear, and a Boy's voice cries shrilly: "Johnny Builder!" *Builder* moves towards the window; voices are now crying in various pitches and keys: "Johnny Builder!" "Beatey Builder!" "Beat 'is wife-er!" "Beatey Builder!"*Builder* stands quite motionless, staring, with the street lamp lighting up a queer, rather pitiful defiance on his face. The voices swell. There comes a sudden swish and splash of water, and broken yells of dismay.

*Topping's voice*. Scat! you young devils!

The sound of scuffling feet and a long-drawnout and distant "Miaou!"

*Builder* stirs, shuts the window, draws the curtains, goes to the armchair before the fireplace and sits down in it.

*Topping* enters with a little tray on which is a steaming jug of fluid, some biscuits and a glass. He comes stealthily up level with the chair. *Builder* stirs and looks up at him.

*Topping*. Excuse me, sir, you must 'ave digested yesterday morning's breakfast by now—must live to eat, sir.

*Builder*. All right. Put it down.

*Topping*. [Putting the tray down on the table and taking up *Builder's* pipe] I fair copped those young devils.

*Builder*. You're a good fellow.

*Topping*. [Filling the pipe] You'll excuse me, sir; the Missis—has come back, sir—

*Builder* stares at him and *topping* stops. He hands *builder* the filled pipe and a box of matches.

*Builder*. [With a shiver] Light the fire, Topping. I'm chilly.

While *topping* lights the fire *builder* puts the pipe in his mouth and applies a match to it. *Topping*, having lighted the fire, turns to go, gets as far as half way, then comes back level with the table and regards the silent brooding figure in the chair.

*Builder*. [Suddenly] Give me that paper on the table.  No; the other one—the Will.

*Topping* takes up the Will and gives it to him.

*Topping*. [With much hesitation] Excuse me, sir.  It's pluck that get's 'em 'ome, sir—-begging your pardon.

*Builder* has resumed his attitude and does not answer.

[In a voice just touched with feeling] Good-night, sir.

*Builder*. [Without turning his head] Good-night.

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*Topping* has gone. *Builder* sits drawing at his pipe between the firelight and the light from the standard lamp. He takes the pipe out of his mouth and a quiver passes over his face. With a half angry gesture he rubs the back of his hand across his eyes.

*Builder*. [To himself] Pluck! Pluck! [His lips quiver again. He presses them hard together, puts his pipe back into his mouth, and, taking the Will, thrusts it into the newly-lighted fire and holds it there with a poker.]

While he is doing this the door from the hall is opened quietly, and *Mrs builder* enters without his hearing her. She has a work bag in her hand. She moves slowly to the table, and stands looking at him. Then going up to the curtains she mechanically adjusts them, and still keeping her eyes on *builder*, comes down to the table and pours out his usual glass of whisky toddy. *Builder*, who has become conscious of her presence, turns in his chair as she hands it to him. He sits a moment motionless, then takes it from her, and squeezes her hand. *Mrs builder* goes silently to her usual chair below the fire, and taking out some knitting begins to knit. *Builder* makes an effort to speak, does not succeed, and sits drawing at his pipe.

The *curtain* falls.

## LOYALTIES

From the 5th Series Plays

By John Galsworthy

## PERSONS OF THE PLAY

In the Order of Appearance

*Charles Winsor*..... Owner of Meldon Court, near Newmarket
*lady Adela*..... His Wife
*Ferdinand de Levis*..... Young, rich, and new
*Treisure*..... Winsor's Butler
*general Canynge*..... A Racing Oracle
*Margaret Orme*..... A Society Girl
*captain Ronald Dandy*, D.S.O..... Retired
*Mabel*..... His Wife
*inspector Dede*..... Of the County Constabulary
*Robert*..... Winsor's Footman
A *constable*..... Attendant on Dede
*Augustus bobbing*..... A Clubman

*lord st Erth*..... A Peer of the Realm
A *footman*..... Of the Club
*major Colford*..... A Brother Officer of Dancy's
*Edward Graviter*..... A Solicitor
A *young clerk*..... Of Twisden & Graviter's
*Gilman*..... A Large Grocer
*Jacob Twisden*..... Senior Partner of Twisden & Graviter
*Ricardos*..... An Italian, in Wine

*Act* I.

*Scene* I. *Charles* WINSOR's dressing-room at Meldon Court, near Newmarket, of a night in early October.

*Scene* II. *De Levis's* Bedroom at Meldon Court, a few minutes later.

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*Act* II.
*Scene* I. The Card Room of a London Club between four and five in the afternoon, three weeks later.
*Scene* II. The Sitting-room of the *Dancys*' Flat, the following morning.

*Act* III.
*Scene* I. *Old Mr Jacob Twisden's* Room at *Twisden* & *Graviter's* in Lincoln's Inn Fields, at four in the afternoon, three months later.
*Scene* II. The same, next morning at half-past ten.
*Scene* III. The Sitting-room of the *Dancys*' Flat, an hour later.

## ACT I

### SCENE I

The dressing-room of *Charles Winsor*, owner of Meldon Court, near Newmarket; about eleven-thirty at night. The room has pale grey walls, unadorned; the curtains are drawn over a window Back Left Centre. A bed lies along the wall, Left. An open door, Right Back, leads into *lady* ADELA's bedroom; a door, Right Forward, into a long corridor, on to which abut rooms in a row, the whole length of the house's left wing. WINSOR's dressing-table, with a light over it, is Stage Right of the curtained window. Pyjamas are laid out on the bed, which is turned back. Slippers are handy, and all the usual gear of a well-appointed bed-dressing-room. *Charles Winsor*, a tall, fair, good-looking man about thirty-eight, is taking off a smoking jacket.

*Winsor*. Hallo! Adela!

V. *Of lady* A. [From her bedroom] Hallo!

*Winsor*. In bed?

V. *Of lady* A. No.

She appears in the doorway in under-garment and a wrapper. She, too, is fair, about thirty-five, rather delicious, and suggestive of porcelain.

*Winsor*. Win at Bridge?

*Lady* A. No fear.

*Winsor*. Who did?

*Lady* A. Lord St Erth and Ferdy De Levis.

*Winsor*. That young man has too much luck—the young bounder won two races to-day; and he's as rich as Croesus.

*Lady* A. Oh! Charlie, he did look so exactly as if he'd sold me a carpet when I was paying him.

*Winsor*. [Changing into slippers] His father did sell carpets, wholesale, in the City.

*Lady* A. Really? And you say I haven't intuition! [With a finger on her lips] Morison's in there.

*Winsor*. [Motioning towards the door, which she shuts] Ronny Dancy took a tenner off him, anyway, before dinner.

*Lady* A. No! How?

*Winsor*. Standing jump on to a bookcase four feet high. De Levis had to pay up, and sneered at him for making money by parlour tricks. That young Jew gets himself disliked.

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*Lady* A. Aren't you rather prejudiced?

*Winsor*. Not a bit. I like Jews. That's not against him—rather the contrary these days. But he pushes himself. The General tells me he's deathly keen to get into the Jockey Club. [Taking off his tie] It's amusing to see him trying to get round old St Erth.

*Lady* A. If Lord St Erth and General Canynge backed him he'd get in if he did sell carpets!

*Winsor*. He's got some pretty good horses. [Taking off his waistcoat] Ronny Dancy's on his bones again, I'm afraid. He had a bad day. When a chap takes to doing parlour stunts for a bet—it's a sure sign. What made him chuck the Army?

*Lady* A. He says it's too dull, now there's no fighting.

*Winsor*. Well, he can't exist on backing losers.

*Lady* A. Isn't it just like him to get married now? He really is the most reckless person.

*Winsor*. Yes. He's a queer chap. I've always liked him, but I've never quite made him out. What do you think of his wife?

*Lady* A. Nice child; awfully gone on him.

*Winsor*. Is he?

*Lady* A. Quite indecently—both of them. [Nodding towards the wall, Left] They're next door.

*Winsor*. Who's beyond them?

*Lady* A. De Levis; and Margaret Orme at the end. Charlie, do you realise that the bathroom out there has to wash those four?

*Winsor*. I know.

*Lady* A. Your grandfather was crazy when he built this wing; six rooms in a row with balconies like an hotel, and only one bath—if we hadn't put ours in.

*Winsor*. [Looking at his watch] Half-past eleven. [Yawns] Newmarket always makes me sleepy. You're keeping Morison up.

> *Lady Adela* goes to the door, blowing a kiss. *Charles* goes up to his dressing-table and begins to brush his hair, sprinkling on essence. There is a knock on the corridor door.

Come in.

*De Levis* enters, clad in pyjamas and flowered dressing-gown. He is a dark, good-looking, rather Eastern young man. His face is long and disturbed.

Hallo! De Levis! Anything I can do for you?

*De Levis*. [In a voice whose faint exoticism is broken by a vexed excitement] I say, I'm awfully sorry, Winsor, but I thought I'd better tell you at once. I've just had—er—rather a lot of money stolen.

*Winsor*. What! [There is something of outrage in his tone and glance, as who should say: "In my house?"] How do you mean stolen?

*De Levis*. I put it under my pillow and went to have a bath; when I came back it was gone.

*Winsor*. Good Lord! How much?

*De Levis*. Nearly a thousand-nine hundred and seventy, I think.

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*Winsor*. Phew! [Again the faint tone of outrage, that a man should have so much money about him].

*De Levis*. I sold my Rosemary filly to-day on the course to Bentman the bookie, and he paid me in notes.

*Winsor*. What? That weed Dancy gave you in the Spring?

*De Levis*. Yes. But I tried her pretty high the other day; and she's in the Cambridgeshire. I was only out of my room a quarter of an hour, and I locked my door.

*Winsor*. [Again outraged] You locked—

*De Levis*. [Not seeing the fine shade] Yes, and had the key here. [He taps his pocket] Look here! [He holds out a pocket-book] It's been stuffed with my shaving papers.

*Winsor*. [Between feeling that such things don't happen, and a sense that he will have to clear it up] This is damned awkward, De Levis.

*De Levis*. [With steel in his voice] Yes. I should like it back.

*Winsor*. Have you got the numbers of the notes?

*De Levis*. No.

*Winsor*. What were they?

*De Levis*. One hundred, three fifties, and the rest tens and fives.

*Winsor*. What d'you want me to do?

*De Levis*. Unless there's anybody you think—

*Winsor*. [Eyeing him] Is it likely?

*De* Levis. Then I think the police ought to see my room. It's a lot of money.

*Winsor*. Good Lord! We're not in Town; there'll be nobody nearer than Newmarket at this time of night—four miles.

The door from the bedroom is suddenly opened and *lady Adela* appears. She has on a lace cap over her finished hair, and the wrapper.

*Lady* A. [Closing the door] What is it? Are you ill, Mr De Levis?

*Winsor*. Worse; he's had a lot of money stolen. Nearly a thousand pounds.

*Lady* A. Gracious!  Where?

*De Levis*.  From under my pillow, Lady Adela—my door was locked—I was in the bathroom.

*Lady* A. But how fearfully thrilling!

*Winsor*.  Thrilling!  What's to be done?  He wants it back.

*Lady* A. Of course! [With sudden realisation] Oh!  But Oh! it's quite too unpleasant!

*Winsor*.  Yes!  What am I to do?  Fetch the servants out of their rooms?
Search the grounds?  It'll make the devil of a scandal.

*De Levis*.  Who's next to me?

*Lady* A. [Coldly] Oh!  Mr De Levis!

*Winsor*.  Next to you?  The Dancys on this side, and Miss Orme on the other.  What's that to do with it?

*De Levis*.  They may have heard something.

*Winsor*.  Let's get them.  But Dancy was down stairs when I came up.  Get Morison, Adela!  No.  Look here!  When was this exactly?  Let's have as many alibis as we can.

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*De Levis*. Within the last twenty minutes, certainly.

*Winsor*. How long has Morison been up with you?

*Lady* A. I came up at eleven, and rang for her at once.

*Winsor*. [Looking at his watch] Half an hour. Then she's all right.
Send her for Margaret and the Dancys—there's nobody else in this wing.
No; send her to bed. We don't want gossip. D'you mind going yourself,
Adela?

*Lady* A. Consult General Canynge, Charlie.

*Winsor*. Right. Could you get him too? D'you really want the police,
De Levis?

*De Levis*. [Stung by the faint contempt in his tone of voice] Yes, I do.

*Winsor*. Then, look here, dear! Slip into my study and telephone to the police at Newmarket. There'll be somebody there; they're sure to have drunks. I'll have Treisure up, and speak to him. [He rings the bell].

*Lady Adela* goes out into her room and closes the door.

*Winsor*. Look here, De Levis! This isn't an hotel. It's the sort of thing that doesn't happen in a decent house. Are you sure you're not mistaken, and didn't have them stolen on the course?

*De Levis*. Absolutely. I counted them just before putting them under my pillow; then I locked the door and had the key here. There's only one door, you know.

*Winsor*. How was your window?

*De Levis*. Open.

*Winsor*. [Drawing back the curtains of his own window] You've got a balcony like this. Any sign of a ladder or anything?

*De Levis*. No.

*Winsor*. It must have been done from the window, unless someone had a skeleton key. Who knew you'd got that money? Where did Kentman pay you?

*De Levis*. Just round the corner in the further paddock.

*Winsor*. Anybody about?

*De Levis*. Oh, yes!

*Winsor*. Suspicious?

*De Levis*. I didn't notice anything.

*Winsor*. You must have been marked down and followed here.

*De Levis*. How would they know my room?

*Winsor*. Might have got it somehow. [A knock from the corridor] Come in.

*Treisure*, the Butler, appears, a silent, grave man of almost supernatural conformity. *De Levis* gives him a quick, hard look, noted and resented by *Winsor*.

*Treisure*. [To *Winsor*] Yes, sir?

*Winsor*. Who valets Mr De Levis?

*Treisure*. Robert, Sir.

*Winsor*. When was he up last?

*Treisure*. In the ordinary course of things, about ten o'clock, sir.

*Winsor*. When did he go to bed?

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*Treisure*. I dismissed at eleven.

*Winsor*. But did he go?

*Treisure*. To the best of my knowledge. Is there anything I can do, sir?

*Winsor*. [Disregarding a sign from *de Levis*] Look here, Treisure, Mr De Levis has had a large sum of money taken from his bedroom within the last half hour.

*Treisure*. Indeed, Sir!

*Winsor*. Robert's quite all right, isn't he?

*Treisure*. He is, sir.

*De Levis*. How do you know?

TREISURE's eyes rest on *de Levis*.

*Treisure*. I am a pretty good judge of character, sir, if you'll excuse me.

*Winsor*. Look here, De Levis, eighty or ninety notes must have been pretty bulky. You didn't have them on you at dinner?

*De Levis*. No.

*Winsor*. Where did you put them?

*De Levis*. In a boot, and the boot in my suitcase, and locked it.

*Treisure* smiles faintly.

*Winsor*. [Again slightly outraged by such precautions in his house] And you found it locked—and took them from there to put under your pillow?

*De Levis*. Yes.

*Winsor*. Run your mind over things, Treisure—has any stranger been about?

*Treisure*. No, Sir.

*Winsor*. This seems to have happened between 11.15 and 11.30. Is that right? [*De Levis* nods] Any noise-anything outside-anything suspicious anywhere?

*Treisure*. [Running his mind—very still] No, sir.

*Winsor*. What time did you shut up?

*Treisure*. I should say about eleven-fifteen, sir. As soon as Major Colford and Captain Dancy had finished billiards. What was Mr De Levis doing out of his room, if I may ask, sir?

*Winsor*. Having a bath; with his room locked and the key in his pocket.

*Treisure*. Thank you, sir.

*De Levis*. [Conscious of indefinable suspicion] Damn it! What do you mean? I *was*!

*Treisure*. I beg your pardon, sir.

*Winsor*. [Concealing a smile] Look here, Treisure, it's infernally awkward for everybody.

*Treisure*. It is, sir.

*Winsor*. What do you suggest?

*Treisure*. The proper thing, sir, I suppose, would be a cordon and a complete search—-in our interests.

*Winsor*. I entirely refuse to suspect anybody.

*Treisure*. But if Mr De Levis feels otherwise, sir?

*De Levis*. [Stammering] I? All I know is—the money was there, and it's gone.

*Winsor*. [Compunctious] Quite! It's pretty sickening for you. But so it is for anybody else. However, we must do our best to get it back for you.

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A knock on the door.

*Winsor*. Hallo!

*Treisure* opens the door, and *general*. *Canynge* enters.

Oh! It's you, General. Come in. Adela's told you?

*General Canynge* nods. He is a slim man of about sixty, very well preserved, intensely neat and self-contained, and still in evening dress. His eyelids droop slightly, but his eyes are keen and his expression astute.

*Winsor*. Well, General, what's the first move?

*Canynge*. [Lifting his eyebrows] Mr De Levis presses the matter?

*De* Levis. [Flicked again] Unless you think it's too plebeian of me,
General Canynge—a thousand pounds.

*Canynge*. [Drily] Just so! Then we must wait for the police, *Winsor*. Lady Adela has got through to them. What height are these rooms from the ground, Treisure?

*Treisure*. Twenty-three feet from the terrace, sir.

*Canynge*. Any ladders near?

*Treisure*. One in the stables, Sir, very heavy. No others within three hundred yards.

*Canynge*. Just slip down, and see whether that's been moved.

*Treisure*. Very good, General. [He goes out.]

*De Levis*. [Uneasily] Of course, he—I suppose you—

*Winsor*. We do.

*Canynge*. You had better leave this in our hands, De Levis.

*De Levis*. Certainly; only, the way he—

*Winsor*. [Curtly] Treisure has been here since he was a boy. I should as soon suspect myself.

*De Levis*. [Looking from one to the other—with sudden anger] You seem to think—! What was I to do? Take it lying down and let whoever it is get clear off? I suppose it's natural to want my money back?

*Canynge* looks at his nails; *Winsor* out of the window.

*Winsor*. [Turning] Of course, De Levis!

*De Levis*. [Sullenly] Well, I'll go to my room. When the police come, perhaps you'll let me know. He goes out.

*Winsor*. Phew! Did you ever see such a dressing-gown?

The door is opened. *Lady Adela* and *Margaret Orme* come in. The latter is a vivid young lady of about twenty-five in a vivid wrapper; she is smoking a cigarette.

*Lady* A. I've told the Dancys—she was in bed. And I got through to Newmarket, Charles, and Inspector Dede is coming like the wind on a motor cycle.

*Margaret*. Did he say "like the wind," Adela? He must have imagination. Isn't this gorgeous? Poor little Ferdy!

*Winsor*. [Vexed] You might take it seriously, Margaret; it's pretty beastly for us all. What time did you come up?

*Margaret*. I came up with Adela. Am I suspected, Charles? How thrilling!

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*Winsor*. Did you hear anything?

*Margaret*. Only little Ferdy splashing.

*Winsor*. And saw nothing?

*Margaret*. Not even that, alas!

*Lady* A. [With a finger held up] Leste! Un peu leste! Oh! Here are the Dancys. Come in, you two!

*Mabel* and *Ronald Dancy* enter. She is a pretty young woman with bobbed hair, fortunately, for she has just got out of bed, and is in her nightgown and a wrapper. *Dancy* is in his smoking jacket. He has a pale, determined face with high cheekbones, small, deep-set dark eyes, reddish crisp hair, and looks like a horseman.

*Winsor*. Awfully sorry to disturb you, Mrs Dancy; but I suppose you and Ronny haven't heard anything. De Levis's room is just beyond Ronny's dressing-room, you know.

*Mabel*. I've been asleep nearly half an hour, and Ronny's only just come up.

*Canynge*. Did you happen to look out of your window, Mrs Dancy?

*Mabel*. Yes. I stood there quite five minutes.

*Canynge*. When?

*Mabel*. Just about eleven, I should think. It was raining hard then.

*Canynge*. Yes, it's just stopped. You saw nothing?

*Mabel*. No.

*Dancy*. What time does he say the money was taken?

*Winsor*. Between the quarter and half past. He'd locked his door and had the key with him.

*Margaret*. How quaint! Just like an hotel. Does he put his boots out?

*Lady* A. Don't be so naughty, Meg.

*Canynge*. When exactly did you come up, Dance?

*Dancy*. About ten minutes ago. I'd only just got into my dressing-room before Lady Adela came. I've been writing letters in the hall since Colford and I finished billiards.

*Canynge*. You weren't up for anything in between?

*Dancy*. No.

*Margaret*. The mystery of the grey room.

*Dancy*. Oughtn't the grounds to be searched for footmarks?

*Canynge*. That's for the police.

*Dancy*. The deuce! Are they coming?

*Canynge*. Directly. [A knock] Yes?

*Treisure* enters.

Well?

*Treisure*. The ladder has not been moved, General. There isn't a sign.

*Winsor*. All right. Get Robert up, but don't say anything to him. By the way, we're expecting the police.

*Treisure*. I trust they will not find a mare's nest, sir, if I may say so.

He goes.

*Winsor*. De Levis has got wrong with Treisure. [Suddenly] But, I say, what would any of us have done if we'd been in his shoes?

*Margaret*. A thousand pounds? I can't even conceive having it.

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*Dancy*. We probably shouldn't have found it out.

*Lady* A. No—but if we had.

*Dancy*. Come to you—as he did.

*Winsor*. Yes; but there's a way of doing things.

*Canynge*. We shouldn't have wanted the police.

*Margaret*. No. That's it. The hotel touch.

*Lady* A. Poor young man; I think we're rather hard on him.

*Winsor*. He sold that weed you gave him, Dancy, to Kentman, the bookie, and these were the proceeds.

*Dancy*. Oh!

*Winsor*. He'd tried her high, he said.

*Dancy*. [Grimly] He would.

*Mabel*. Oh! Ronny, what bad luck!

*Winsor*. He must have been followed here. [At the window] After rain like that, there ought to be footmarks.

The splutter of a motor cycle is heard.

*Margaret*. Here's the wind!

*Winsor*. What's the move now, General?

*Canynge*. You and I had better see the Inspector in De Levis's room, *Winsor*. [To the others] If you'll all be handy, in case he wants to put questions for himself.

*Margaret*. I hope he'll want me; it's just too thrilling.

*Dancy*. I hope he won't want me; I'm dog-tired. Come on, Mabel. [He puts his arm in his wife's].

*Canynge*. Just a minute, Charles.

He draws dose to *Winsor* as the others are departing to their rooms.

*Winsor*. Yes, General?

*Canynge*. We must be careful with this Inspector fellow. If he pitches hastily on somebody in the house it'll be very disagreeable.

*Winsor*. By Jove! It will.

*Canynge*. We don't want to rouse any ridiculous suspicion.

*Winsor*. Quite. [A knock] Come in!

*Treisure* enters.

*Treisure*. Inspector Dede, Sir.

*Winsor*. Show him in.

*Treisure*. Robert is in readiness, sir; but I could swear he knows nothing about it.

*Winsor*. All right.

> *Treisure* re-opens the door, and says "Come in, please." The *inspector* enters, blue, formal, moustachioed, with a peaked cap in his hand.

*Winsor*. Good evening, Inspector. Sorry to have brought you out at this time of night.

*Inspector*. Good evenin', sir. Mr *Winsor*? You're the owner here, I think?

*Winsor*. Yes. General Canynge.

*Inspector*. Good evenin', General. I understand, a large sum of money?

*Winsor*. Yes. Shall we go straight to the room it was taken from? One of my guests, Mr De Levis. It's the third room on the left.

*Canynge*. We've not been in there yet, Inspector; in fact, we've done nothing, except to find out that the stable ladder has not been moved. We haven't even searched the grounds.

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*Inspector*. Right, sir; I've brought a man with me.

They go out.

*Curtain*. And interval of a Minute.

## SCENE II

[The same set is used for this Scene, with the different arrangement of furniture, as specified.]

The bedroom of *de Levis* is the same in shape as *Winsor's* dressing-room, except that there is only one door—to the corridor. The furniture, however, is differently arranged; a small four-poster bedstead stands against the wall, Right Back, jutting into the room. A chair, on which *de* LEVIS's clothes are thrown, stands at its foot. There is a dressing-table against the wall to the left of the open windows, where the curtains are drawn back and a stone balcony is seen. Against the wall to the right of the window is a chest of drawers, and a washstand is against the wall, Left. On a small table to the right of the bed an electric reading lamp is turned up, and there is a light over the dressing-table. The *inspector* is standing plumb centre looking at the bed, and *de Levis* by the back of the chair at the foot of the bed. *Winsor* and *Canynge* are close to the door, Right Forward.

Inspector. [Finishing a note] Now, sir, if this is the room as you left it for your bath, just show us exactly what you did after takin' the pocket-book from the suit case. Where was that, by the way?

*De Levis*. [Pointing] Where it is now—under the dressing-table.

He comes forward to the front of the chair, opens the pocket-book, goes through the pretence of counting his shaving papers, closes the pocket-book, takes it to the head of the bed and slips it under the pillow. Makes the motion of taking up his pyjamas, crosses below the *inspector* to the washstand, takes up a bath sponge, crosses to the door, takes out the key, opens the door.

*Inspector*. [Writing]. We now have the room as it was when the theft was committed. Reconstruct accordin' to 'uman nature, gentlemen—assumin' the thief to be in the room, what would he try first?—the clothes, the dressin'-table, the suit case, the chest of drawers, and last the bed.

He moves accordingly, examining the glass on the dressing-table, the surface of the suit cases, and the handles of the drawers, with a spy-glass, for finger-marks.

*Canynge*. [Sotto voce to *Winsor*] The order would have been just the other way.

The *inspector* goes on hands and knees and examines the carpet between the window and the bed.

*De Levis*. Can I come in again?

*Inspector*. [Standing up] Did you open the window, sir, or was it open when you first came in?

*De Levis*. I opened it.

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*Inspector*. Drawin' the curtains back first?

*De Levis*. Yes.

*Inspector*. [Sharply] Are you sure there was nobody in the room already?

*De Levis*. [Taken aback] I don't know. I never thought. I didn't look under the bed, if you mean that.

*Inspector*. [Jotting] Did not look under bed. Did you look under it after the theft?

*De Levis*. No. I didn't.

*Inspector*. Ah! Now, what did you do after you came back from your bath? Just give us that precisely.

*De Levis*. Locked the door and left the key in. Put back my sponge, and took off my dressing-gown and put it there. [He points to the footrails of the bed] Then I drew the curtains, again.

*Inspector*. Shutting the window?

*De Levis*. No. I got into bed, felt for my watch to see the time. My hand struck the pocket-book, and somehow it felt thinner. I took it out, looked into it, and found the notes gone, and these shaving papers instead.

*Inspector*. Let me have a look at those, sir. [He applies the spy-glasses] And then?

*De Levis*. I think I just sat on the bed.

*Inspector*. Thinkin' and cursin' a bit, I suppose. Ye-es?

*De Levis*. Then I put on my dressing-gown and went straight to Mr *Winsor*.

*Inspector*. Not lockin' the door?

*De Levis*. No.

*Inspector*. Exactly. [With a certain finality] Now, sir, what time did you come up?

*De Levis*. About eleven.

*Inspector*. Precise, if you can give it me.

*De Levis*. Well, I know it was eleven-fifteen when I put my watch under my pillow, before I went to the bath, and I suppose I'd been about a quarter of an hour undressing. I should say after eleven, if anything.

*Inspector*. Just undressin'? Didn't look over your bettin' book?

*De Levis*. No.

*Inspector*. No prayers or anything?

*De Levis*. No.

*Inspector*. Pretty slippy with your undressin' as a rule?

*De Levis*. Yes. Say five past eleven.

*Inspector*. Mr *Winsor*, what time did the gentleman come to you?

*Winsor*. Half-past eleven.

*Inspector*. How do you fix that, sir?

*Winsor*. I'd just looked at the time, and told my wife to send her maid off.

*Inspector*. Then we've got it fixed between 11.15 and 11.30. [Jots] Now, sir, before we go further I'd like to see your butler and the footman that valets this gentleman.

*Winsor*. [With distaste] Very well, Inspector; only—my butler has been with us from a boy.

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*Inspector*. Quite so. This is just clearing the ground, sir.

*Winsor*. General, d'you mind touching that bell?

*Canynge* rings a bell by the bed.

*Inspector*. Well, gentlemen, there are four possibilities. Either the thief was here all the time, waiting under the bed, and slipped out after this gentleman had gone to Mr *Winsor*. Or he came in with a key that fits the lock; and I'll want to see all the keys in the house. Or he came in with a skeleton key and out by the window, probably droppin' from the balcony. Or he came in by the window with a rope or ladder and out the same way. [Pointing] There's a footmark here from a big boot which has been out of doors since it rained.

*Canynge*. Inspector—you er—walked up to the window when you first came into the room.

*Inspector*. [Stiffly] I had not overlooked that, General.

*Canynge*. Of course.

A knock on the door relieves a certain tension,

*Winsor*. Come in.

The footman *Robert*, a fresh-faced young man, enters, followed by *Treisure*.

*Inspector*. You valet Mr—Mr De Levis, I think?

*Robert*. Yes, sir.

*Inspector*. At what time did you take his clothes and boots?

*Robert*. Ten o'clock, sir.

*Inspector*. [With a pounce] Did you happen to look under his bed?

*Robert*. No, sir.

*Inspector*. Did you come up again, to bring the clothes back?

*Robert*. No, sir; they're still downstairs.

*Inspector*. Did you come up again for anything?

*Robert*. No, Sir.

*Inspector*. What time did you go to bed?

*Robert*. Just after eleven, Sir.

*Inspector*. [Scrutinising him] Now, be careful. Did you go to bed at all?

*Robert*. No, Sir.

*Inspector*. Then why did you say you did? There's been a theft here, and anything you say may be used against you.

*Robert*. Yes, Sir. I meant, I went to my room.

*Inspector*. Where is your room?

*Robert*. On the ground floor, at the other end of the right wing, sir.

*Winsor*. It's the extreme end of the house from this, Inspector. He's with the other two footmen.

*Inspector*. Were you there alone?

*Robert*. No, Sir. Thomas and Frederick was there too.

*Treisure*. That's right; I've seen them.

*Inspector*. [Holding up his hand for silence] Were you out of the room again after you went in?

*Robert*. No, Sir.

*Inspector*. What were you doing, if you didn't go to bed?

*Robert*. [To *Winsor*] Beggin' your pardon, Sir, we were playin' Bridge.

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*Inspector*. Very good. You can go. I'll see them later on.

*Robert*. Yes, Sir. They'll say the same as me. He goes out, leaving a smile on the face of all except the *inspector* and *de Levis*.

*Inspector*. [Sharply] Call him back.

*Treisure* calls "Robert," and the *footman* re-enters.

*Robert*. Yes, Sir?

*Inspector*. Did you notice anything particular about Mr De Levis's clothes?

*Robert*. Only that they were very good, Sir.

*Inspector*. I mean—anything peculiar?

*Robert*. [After reflection] Yes, Sir.

*Inspector*. Well?

*Robert*. A pair of his boots this evenin' was reduced to one, sir.

*Inspector*. What did you make of that?

*Robert*. I thought he might have thrown the other at a cat or something.

*Inspector*. Did you look for it?

*Robert*. No, Sir; I meant to draw his attention to it in the morning.

*Inspector*. Very good.

*Robert*. Yes, Sir. [He goes again.]

*Inspector*. [Looking at *de Levis*] Well, sir, there's your story corroborated.

*De Levis*. [Stifly] I don't know why it should need corroboration, Inspector.

*Inspector*. In my experience, you can never have too much of that. [To *Winsor*] I understand there's a lady in the room on this side [pointing Left] and a gentleman on this [pointing Right] Were they in their rooms?

*Winsor*. Miss Orme was; Captain Dancy not.

*Inspector*. Do they know of the affair?

*Winsor*. Yes.

*Inspector*. Well, I'd just like the keys of their doors for a minute. My man will get them.

He goes to the door, opens it, and speaks to a constable in the corridor.

[To *Treisure*] You can go with him.

*Treisure* goes Out.

In the meantime I'll just examine the balcony.

He goes out on the balcony, followed by *de Levis*.

*Winsor*. [To *Canynge*] Damn De Levis and his money! It's deuced invidious, all this, General.

*Canynge*. The Inspector's no earthly.

There is a simultaneous re-entry of the *inspector* from the balcony and of *Treisure* and the *constable* from the corridor.

*Constable*. [Handing key] Room on the left, Sir. [Handing key] Room on the right, sir.

The *inspector* tries the keys in the door, watched with tension by the others. The keys fail.

*Inspector*. Put them back.

Hands keys to *constable*, who goes out, followed by *Treisure*.

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I'll have to try every key in the house, sir.

*Winsor*. Inspector, do you really think it necessary to disturb the whole house and knock up all my guests? It's most disagreeable, all this, you know. The loss of the money is not such a great matter. Mr De Levis has a very large income.

*Canynge*. You could get the numbers of the notes from Kentman the bookmaker, Inspector; he'll probably have the big ones, anyway.

*Inspector*. [Shaking his head] A bookie. I don't suppose he will, sir. It's come and go with them, all the time.

*Winsor*. We don't want a Meldon Court scandal, Inspector.

*Inspector*. Well, Mr *Winsor*, I've formed my theory.

As he speaks, *de Levis* comes in from the balcony.

And I don't say to try the keys is necessary to it; but strictly, I ought to exhaust the possibilities.

*Winsor*. What do you say, De Levis? D'you want everybody in the house knocked up so that their keys can be tried?

*De Levis*. [Whose face, since his return, expresses a curious excitement] No, I don't.

*Inspector*. Very well, gentlemen. In my opinion the thief walked in before the door was locked, probably during dinner; and was under the bed. He escaped by dropping from the balcony—the creeper at that corner [he points stage Left] has been violently wrenched. I'll go down now, and examine the grounds, and I'll see you again Sir. [He makes another entry in his note-book] Goodnight, then, gentlemen!

*Canynge*. Good-night!

*Winsor*. [With relief] I'll come with you, Inspector.

He escorts him to the door, and they go out.

*De Levis*. [Suddenly] General, I know who took them.

*Canynge*. The deuce you do! Are you following the Inspector's theory?

*De Levis*. [Contemptuously] That ass! [Pulling the shaving papers out of the case] No! The man who put those there was clever and cool enough to wrench that creeper off the balcony, as a blind. Come and look here, General. [He goes to the window; the *general*

follows. *De Levis* points stage Right] See the rail of my balcony, and the rail of the next? [He holds up the cord of his dressing-gown, stretching his arms out] I've measured it with this. Just over seven feet, that's all! If a man can take a standing jump on to a narrow bookcase four feet high and balance there, he'd make nothing of that. And, look here! [He goes out on the balcony and returns with a bit of broken creeper in his hand, and holds it out into the light] Someone's stood on that—the stalk's crushed—-the inner corner too, where he'd naturally stand when he took his jump back.

*Canynge*. [After examining it—stiffly] That other balcony is young Dancy's, Mr De Levis; a soldier and a gentleman. This is an extraordinary insinuation.

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*De Levis*. Accusation.

*Canynge*. What!

*De Levis*. I have intuitions, General; it's in my blood. I see the whole thing. Dancy came up, watched me into the bathroom, tried my door, slipped back into his dressing-room, saw my window was open, took that jump, sneaked the notes, filled the case up with these, wrenched the creeper there [He points stage Left] for a blind, jumped back, and slipped downstairs again. It didn't take him four minutes altogether.

*Canynge*. [Very gravely] This is outrageous, De Levis. Dancy says he was downstairs all the time. You must either withdraw unreservedly, or I must confront you with him.

*De Levis*. If he'll return the notes and apologise, I'll do nothing— except cut him in future. He gave me that filly, you know, as a hopeless weed, and he's been pretty sick ever since, that he was such a flat as not to see how good she was. Besides, he's hard up, I know.

*Canynge*. [After a vexed turn up and down the room] It's mad, sir, to jump to conclusions like this.

*De Levis*. Not so mad as the conclusion Dancy jumped to when he lighted on my balcony.

*Canynge*. Nobody could have taken this money who did not know you had it.

*De Levis*. How do you know that he didn't?

*Canynge*. Do you know that he did?

*De Levis*. I haven't the least doubt of it.

*Canynge*. Without any proof. This is very ugly, De Levis. I must tell *Winsor*.

*De Levis*. [Angrily] Tell the whole blooming lot. You think I've no feelers, but I've felt the atmosphere here, I can tell you, General. If I were in Dancy's shoes and he in mine, your tone to me would be very different.

*Canynge*. [Suavely frigid] I'm not aware of using any tone, as you call it. But this is a private house, Mr De Levis, and something is due to our host and to the esprit de corps that exists among gentlemen.

*De Levis*. Since when is a thief a gentleman? Thick as thieves—a good motto, isn't it?

*Canynge*. That's enough! [He goes to the door, but stops before opening it] Now, look here! I have some knowledge of the world. Once an accusation like this passes beyond these walls no one can foresee the consequences. Captain Dancy is a gallant fellow, with a fine record as a soldier; and only just married. If he's as innocent as—-Christ—mud will stick to him, unless the real thief is found. In the old days of swords, either you or he would not have gone out of this room alive. It you persist in this absurd accusation, you will both of you go out of this room dead in the eyes of Society: you for bringing it, he for being the object of it.

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*De Levis*. Society! Do you think I don't know that I'm only tolerated for my money? Society can't add injury to insult and have my money as well, that's all. If the notes are restored I'll keep my mouth shut; if they're not, I shan't. I'm certain I'm right. I ask nothing better than to be confronted with Dancy; but, if you prefer it, deal with him in your own way—for the sake of your esprit de corps.

*Canynge*. 'Pon my soul, Mr De Levis, you go too far.

*De Levis*. Not so far as I shall go, General Canynge, if those notes aren't given back.

*Winsor* comes in.

*Winsor*. Well, De Levis, I'm afraid that's all we can do for the present.
So very sorry this should have happened in my house.

*Canynge*. [Alter a silence] There's a development, *Winsor*. Mr De Levis accuses one of your guests.

*Winsor*. What?

*Canynge*. Of jumping from his balcony to this, taking the notes, and jumping back. I've done my best to dissuade him from indulging the fancy—without success. Dancy must be told.

*De Levis*. You can deal with Dancy in your own way. All I want is the money back.

*Canynge*. [Drily] Mr De Levis feels that he is only valued for his money, so that it is essential for him to have it back.

*Winsor*. Damn it! This is monstrous, De Levis. I've known Ronald Dancy since he was a boy.

*Canynge*. You talk about adding injury to insult, De Levis. What do you call such treatment of a man who gave you the mare out of which you made this thousand pounds?

*De Levis*. I didn't want the mare; I took her as a favour.

*Canynge*. With an eye to possibilities, I venture to think—the principle guides a good many transactions.

*De Levis*. [As if flicked on a raw spot] In my race, do you mean?

*Canynge*. [Coldly] I said nothing of the sort.

*De Levis*. No; you don't say these things, any of you.

*Canynge*. Nor did I think it.

*De Levis*. Dancy does.

*Winsor*. Really, De Levis, if this is the way you repay hospitality—

*De Levis*. Hospitality that skins my feelings and costs me a thousand pounds!

*Canynge*. Go and get Dancy, *Winsor*; but don't say anything to him.

*Winsor* goes out.

*Canynge*. Perhaps you will kindly control yourself, and leave this to me.

*De Levis* turns to the window and lights a cigarette. *Winsor* comes back, followed by *Dancy*.

*Canynge*. For WINSOR's sake, Dancy, we don't want any scandal or fuss about this affair. We've tried to make the police understand that. To my mind the whole thing turns on our finding who knew that De Levis had this money. It's about that we want to consult you.

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*Winsor*. Kentman paid De Levis round the corner in the further paddock, he says.

*De Levis* turns round from the window, so that he and *Dancy* are staring at each other.

*Canynge*. Did you hear anything that throws light, Dancy? As it was your filly originally, we thought perhaps you might.

*Dancy*. I? No.

*Canynge*. Didn't hear of the sale on the course at all?

*Dancy*. No.

*Canynge*. Then you can't suggest any one who could have known? Nothing else was taken, you see.

*Dancy*. De Levis is known to be rolling, as I am known to be stony.

*Canynge*. There are a good many people still rolling, besides Mr De Levis, but not many people with so large a sum in their pocket-books.

*Dancy*. He won two races.

*De Levis*. Do you suggest that I bet in ready money?

*Dancy*. I don't know how you bet, and I don't care.

*Canynge*. You can't help us, then?

*Dancy*. No. I can't. Anything else? [He looks fixedly at *de Levis*].

*Canynge*. [Putting his hand on DANCY's arm] Nothing else, thank you, Dancy.

*Dancy* goes. *Canynge* puts his hand up to his face. A moment's silence.

*Winsor*. You see, De Levis? He didn't even know you'd got the money.

*De Levis*. Very conclusive.

*Winsor*. Well! You are—!

There is a knock on the door, and the *inspector* enters.

*Inspector*. I'm just going, gentlemen. The grounds, I'm sorry to say, have yielded nothing. It's a bit of a puzzle.

*Canynge*. You've searched thoroughly?

*Inspector*. We have, General. I can pick up nothing near the terrace.

*Winsor*. [After a look at *de Levis*, whose face expresses too much] H'm! You'll take it up from the other end, then, Inspector?

*Inspector*. Well, we'll see what we can do with the bookmakers about the numbers, sir. Before I go, gentlemen—you've had time to think it over— there's no one you suspect in the house, I suppose?

*De* LEVIS's face is alive and uncertain. *Canynge* is staring at him very fixedly.

*Winsor*. [Emphatically] No.

*De Levis* turns and goes out on to the balcony.

*Inspector*. If you're coming in to the racing to-morrow, sir, you might give us a call. I'll have seen Kentman by then.

*Winsor*. Right you are, Inspector. Good night, and many thanks.

*Inspector*. You're welcome, sir. [He goes out.]

*Winsor*. Gosh! I thought that chap [With a nod towards the balcony] was going to—! Look here, General, we must stop his tongue. Imagine it going the rounds. They may never find the real thief, you know. It's the very devil for Dancy.

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*Canynge*. *Winsor*! Dancy's sleeve was damp.

*Winsor*. How d'you mean?

*Canynge*. Quite damp. It's been raining.

The two look at each other.

*Winsor*. I—I don't follow— [His voice is hesitative and lower, showing that he does].

*Canynge*. It was coming down hard; a minute out in it would have been enough—[He motions with his chin towards the balcony].

*Winsor*. [Hastily] He must have been out on his balcony since.

*Canynge*. It stopped before I came up, half an hour ago.

*Winsor*. He's been leaning on the wet stone, then.

*Canynge*. With the outside of the upper part of the arm?

*Winsor*. Against the wall, perhaps. There may be a dozen explanations. [Very low and with great concentration] I entirely and absolutely refuse to believe anything of the sort against Ronald Dancy in my house. Dash it, General, we must do as we'd be done by. It hits us all—it hits us all. The thing's intolerable.

*Canynge*. I agree. Intolerable. [Raising his voice] Mr De Levis!

*De Levis* returns into view, in the centre of the open window.

*Canynge*. [With cold decision] Young Dancy was an officer and is a gentleman; this insinuation is pure supposition, and you must not make it. Do you understand me?

*De Levis*. My tongue is still mine, General, if my money isn't!

*Canynge*. [Unmoved] Must not. You're a member of three Clubs, you want to be member of a fourth. No one who makes such an insinuation against a fellow-guest in a country house, except on absolute proof, can do so without complete ostracism. Have we your word to say nothing?

*De Levis*. Social blackmail? H'm!

*Canynge*. Not at all—simple warning. If you consider it necessary in your interests to start this scandal-no matter how, we shall consider it necessary in ours to dissociate ourselves completely from one who so recklessly disregards the unwritten code.

*De Levis*. Do you think your code applies to me? Do you, General?

*Canynge*. To anyone who aspires to be a gentleman, Sir.

*De Levis*. Ah! But you haven't known me since I was a boy.

*Canynge*. Make up your mind.

A pause.

*De Levis*. I'm not a fool, General. I know perfectly well that you can get me outed.

*Canynge*. [Icily] Well?

*De Levis*. [Sullenly] I'll say nothing about it, unless I get more proof.

*Canynge*. Good! We have implicit faith in Dancy.

There is a moment's encounter of eyes; the *general's* steady, shrewd, impassive; *Winsor's* angry and defiant; *de* LEVIS's mocking, a little triumphant, malicious. Then *Canynge* and *Winsor* go to the door, and pass out.

*De Levis*. [To himself] Rats!

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*Curtain*

## ACT II

### SCENE I

Afternoon, three weeks later, in the card room of a London Club. A fire is burning, Left. A door, Right, leads to the billiard-room. Rather Left of Centre, at a card table, *lord st Erth*, an old John Bull, sits facing the audience; to his right is *general Canynge*, to his left *Augustus Borring*, an essential Clubman, about thirty-five years old, with a very slight and rather becoming stammer or click in his speech. The fourth Bridge player, *Charles Winsor*, stands with his back to the fire.

*Borring*. And the r-rub.

*Winsor*. By George! You do hold cards, Borring.

*St Erth*. [Who has lost] Not a patch on the old whist—this game. Don't know why I play it—never did.

*Canynge*. St Erth, shall we raise the flag for whist again?

*Winsor*. No go, General. You can't go back on pace. No getting a man to walk when he knows he can fly. The young men won't look at it.

*Borring*. Better develop it so that t-two can sit out, General.

*St Erth*. We ought to have stuck to the old game. Wish I'd gone to Newmarket, Canynge, in spite of the weather.

*Canynge*. [Looking at his watch] Let's hear what's won the Cambridgeshire. Ring, won't you, *Winsor*? [*Winsor* rings.]

*St Erth*. By the way, Canynge, young De Levis was blackballed.

*Canynge*. What!

*St Erth*. I looked in on my way down.

*Canynge* sits very still, and *Winsor* utters a disturbed sound.

*Borring*. But of c-course he was, General. What did you expect?

A *footman* enters.

*Footman*. Yes, my lord?

*St Erth*. What won the Cambridgeshire?

*Footman*. Rosemary, my lord. Sherbet second; Barbizon third. Nine to one the winner.

*Winsor*. Thank you. That's all.

*Footman* goes.

*Borring*. Rosemary! And De Levis sold her! But he got a good p-price, I suppose.

The other three look at him.

*St Erth*. Many a slip between price and pocket, young man.

*Canynge*. Cut! [They cut].

*Borring*. I say, is that the yarn that's going round about his having had a lot of m-money stolen in a country house? By Jove! He'll be pretty s-sick.

*Winsor*. You and I, Borring.

He sits down in *Canynge's* chair, and the *general* takes his place by the fire.

*Borring*. Phew! Won't Dancy be mad! He gave that filly away to save her keep. He was rather pleased to find somebody who'd take her. Bentman must have won a p-pot. She was at thirty-threes a fortnight ago.

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*St Erth*. All the money goes to fellows who don't know a horse from a haystack.

*Canynge*. [Profoundly] And care less. Yes! We want men racing to whom a horse means something.

*Borring*. I thought the horse m-meant the same to everyone, General— chance to get the b-better of one's neighbour.

*Canynge*. [With feeling] The horse is a noble animal, sir, as you'd know if you'd owed your life to them as often as I have.

*Borring*. They always try to take mine, General. I shall never belong to the noble f-fellowship of the horse.

*St Erth*. [Drily] Evidently. Deal!

As *Borring* begins to deal the door is opened and *major Colford* appears—a lean and moustached cavalryman.

*Borring*. Hallo, C-Colford.

*Colford*. General!

Something in the tone of his voice brings them all to a standstill.

*Colford*. I want your advice. Young De Levis in there [He points to the billiard-room from which he has just come] has started a blasphemous story—

*Canynge*. One moment. Mr Borring, d'you mind—

*Colford*. It makes no odds, General. Four of us in there heard him. He's saying it was Ronald Dancy robbed him down at WINSOR's. The fellow's mad over losing the price of that filly now she's won the Cambridgeshire.

*Borring*. [All ears] Dancy! Great S-Scott!

*Colford*. Dancy's in the Club. If he hadn't been I'd have taken it on myself to wring the bounder's neck.

*Winsor* and *Borring* have risen. *St Erth* alone remains seated.

*Canynge*. [After consulting *st Erth* with a look] Ask De Levis to be good enough to come in here. Borring, you might see that Dancy doesn't leave the Club. We shall want him. Don't say anything to him, and use your tact to keep people off.

*Borring* goes out, followed by *Colford*. *Winsor*. Result of hearing he was black-balled—pretty slippy.

*Canynge*. St Erth, I told you there was good reason when I asked you to back young De Levis. *Winsor* and I knew of this insinuation; I wanted to keep his tongue quiet. It's just wild assertion; to have it bandied about was unfair to Dancy. The duel used to keep people's tongues in order.

*St Erth*. H'm! It never settled anything, except who could shoot straightest.

*Colford*. [Re-appearing] De Levis says he's nothing to add to what he said to you before, on the subject.

*Canynge*. Kindly tell him that if he wishes to remain a member of this Club he must account to the Committee for such a charge against a fellow-member. Four of us are here, and form a quorum.

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*Colford* goes out again.

*St Erth*. Did Kentman ever give the police the numbers of those notes, *Winsor*?

*Winsor*. He only had the numbers of two—the hundred, and one of the fifties.

*St Erth*. And they haven't traced 'em?

*Winsor*. Not yet.

As he speaks, *de Levis* comes in. He is in a highly-coloured, not to say excited state. *Colford* follows him.

*De Levis*. Well, General Canynge! It's a little too strong all this— a little too strong. [Under emotion his voice is slightly more exotic].

*Canynge*. [Calmly] It is obvious, Mr De Levis, that you and Captain Dancy can't both remain members of this Club. We ask you for an explanation before requesting one resignation or the other.

*De Levis*. You've let me down.

*Canynge*. What!

*De Levis*. Well, I shall tell people that you and Lord St Erth backed me up for one Club, and asked me to resign from another.

*Canynge*. It's a matter of indifference to me, sir, what you tell people.

*St Erth*. [Drily] You seem a venomous young man.

*De Levis*. I'll tell you what seems to me venomous, my lord—chasing a man like a pack of hounds because he isn't your breed.

*Canynge*. You appear to have your breed on the brain, sir. Nobody else does, so far as I know.

*De Levis*. Suppose I had robbed Dancy, would you chase him out for complaining of it?

*Colford*. My God! If you repeat that—

*Canynge*. Steady, Colford!

*Winsor*. You make this accusation that Dancy stole your money in my house on no proof—no proof; and you expect Dancy's friends to treat you as if you were a gentleman! That's too strong, if you like!

*De Levis*. No proof? Bentman told me at Newmarket yesterday that Dancy did know of the sale. He told Goole, and Goole says that he himself spoke of it to Dancy.

*Winsor*. Well—if he did?

*De Levis*. Dancy told you he didn't know of it in General Canynge's presence, and mine. [To *Canynge*] You can't deny that, if you want to.

*Canynge*. Choose your expressions more nicely, please!

*De Levis*. Proof! Did they find any footmarks in the grounds below that torn creeper? Not a sign! You saw how he can jump; he won ten pounds from me that same evening betting on what he knew was a certainty. That's your Dancy—a common sharper!

*Canynge*. [Nodding towards the billiard-room] Are those fellows still in there, Colford?

*Colford*. Yes.

*Canynge*. Then bring Dancy up, will you? But don't say anything to him.

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*Colford*. [To *de Levis*] You may think yourself damned lucky if he doesn't break your neck.

He goes out. The three who are left with *de Levis* avert their eyes from him.

*De Levis*. [Smouldering] I have a memory, and a sting too. Yes, my lord—since you are good enough to call me venomous. [To *Canynge*] I quite understand—I'm marked for Coventry now, whatever happens. Well, I'll take Dancy with me.

*St Erth*. [To himself] This Club has always had a decent, quiet name.

*Winsor*. Are you going to retract, and apologise in front of Dancy and the members who heard you?

*De Levis*. No fear!

*St Erth*. You must be a very rich man, sir. A jury is likely to take the view that money can hardly compensate for an accusation of that sort.

*De Levis* stands silent. *Canynge*. Courts of law require proof.

*St Erth*. He can make it a criminal action.

*Winsor*. Unless you stop this at once, you may find yourself in prison.
If you can stop it, that is.

*St Erth*. If I were young Dancy, nothing should induce me.

*De Levis*. But you didn't steal my money, Lord St Erth.

*St Erth*. You're deuced positive, sir. So far as I could understand it, there were a dozen ways you could have been robbed. It seems to me you value other men's reputations very lightly.

*De Levis*. Confront me with Dancy and give me fair play.

*Winsor*. [Aside to *Canynge*] Is it fair to Dancy not to let him know?

*Canynge*. Our duty is to the Club now, *Winsor*. We must have this cleared up.

*Colford* comes in, followed by *Borring* and *Dancy*.

*St Erth*. Captain Dancy, a serious accusation has been made against you by this gentleman in the presence of several members of the Club.

*Dancy*. What is it?

*St Erth*. That you robbed him of that money at WINSOR's.

*Dancy*. [Hard and tense] Indeed! On what grounds is he good enough to say that?

*De Levis*. [Tense too] You gave me that filly to save yourself her keep, and you've been mad about it ever since; you knew from Goole that I had sold her to Kentman and been paid in cash, yet I heard you myself deny that you knew it. You had the next room to me, and you can jump like a cat, as we saw that evening; I found some creepers crushed by a weight on my balcony on that side. When I went to the bath your door was open, and when I came back it was shut.

*Canynge*. That's the first we have heard about the door.

*De Levis*. I remembered it afterwards.

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*St Erth*. Well, Dancy?

*Dancy*. [With intense deliberation] I'll settle this matter with any weapons, when and where he likes.

*St Erth*. [Drily] It can't be settled that way—you know very well.
You must take it to the Courts, unless he retracts.

*Dancy*. Will you retract?

*De Levis*. Why did you tell General Canynge you didn't know Kentman had paid me in cash?

*Dancy*. Because I didn't.

*De Levis*. Then Kentman and Goole lied—for no reason?

*Dancy*. That's nothing to do with me.

*De Levis*. If you were downstairs all the time, as you say, why was your door first open and then shut?

*Dancy*. Being downstairs, how should I know? The wind, probably.

*De Levis*. I should like to hear what your wife says about it.

*Dancy*. Leave my wife alone, you damned Jew!

*St Erth*. Captain Dancy!

*De Levis*. [White with rage] Thief!

*Dancy*. Will you fight?

*De Levis*. You're very smart-dead men tell no tales. No! Bring your action, and we shall see.

*Dancy* takes a step towards him, but *Canynge* and *Winsor* interpose.

*St Erth*. That'll do, Mr De Levis; we won't keep you. [He looks round] Kindly consider your membership suspended till this matter has been threshed out.

*De Levis*. [Tremulous with anger] Don't trouble yourselves about my membership. I resign it. [To *Dancy*] You called me a damned Jew. My race was old when you were all savages. I am proud to be a Jew. Au revoir, in the Courts.

He goes out, and silence follows his departure.

*St Erth*. Well, Captain Dancy?

*Dancy*. If the brute won't fight, what am I to do, sir?

*St Erth*. We've told you—take action, to clear your name.

*Dancy*. Colford, you saw me in the hall writing letters after our game.

*Colford*. Certainly I did; you were there when I went to the smoking-room.

*Canynge*. How long after you left the billiard-room?

*Colford*. About five minutes.

*Dancy*. It's impossible for me to prove that I was there all the time.

*Canynge*. It's for De Levis to prove what he asserts. You heard what he said about Goole?

*Dancy*. If he told me, I didn't take it in.

*St Erth*. This concerns the honour of the Club. Are you going to take action?

*Dancy*. [Slowly] That is a very expensive business, Lord St Erth, and I'm hard up. I must think it over. [He looks round from face to face] Am I to take it that there is a doubt in your minds, gentlemen?

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*Colford*. [Emphatically] No.

*Canynge*. That's not the question, Dancy. This accusation was overheard by various members, and we represent the Club. If you don't take action, judgment will naturally go by default.

*Dancy*. I might prefer to look on the whole thing as beneath contempt.

He turns and goes out. When he is gone there is an even longer silence than after *de* LEVIS's departure.

*St Erth*. [Abruptly] I don't like it.

*Winsor*. I've known him all his life.

*Colford*. You may have my head if he did it, Lord St Erth. He and I have been in too many holes together. By Gad! My toe itches for that fellow's butt end.

*Borring*. I'm sorry; but has he t-taken it in quite the right way? I should have thought—-hearing it s-suddenly—

*Colford*. Bosh!

*Winsor*. It's perfectly damnable for him.

*St Erth*. More damnable if he did it, *Winsor*.

*Borring*. The Courts are b-beastly distrustful, don't you know.

*Colford*. His word's good enough for me.

*Canynge*. We're as anxious to believe Dancy as you, Colford, for the honour of the Army and the Club.

*Winsor*. Of course, he'll bring a case, when he's thought it over.

*St Erth*. What are we to do in the meantime?

*Colford*. If Dancy's asked to resign, you may take my resignation too.

*Borring*. I thought his wanting to f-fight him a bit screeny.

*Colford*. Wouldn't you have wanted a shot at the brute? A law court? Pah!

*Winsor*. Yes. What'll be his position even if he wins?

*Borring*. Damages, and a stain on his c-character.

*Winsor*. Quite so, unless they find the real thief. People always believe the worst.

*Colford*. [Glaring at *Borring*] They do.

*Canynge*. There is no decent way out of a thing of this sort.

*St Erth*. No. [Rising] It leaves a bad taste. I'm sorry for young Mrs Dancy—poor woman!

*Borring*. Are you going to play any more?

*St Erth*. [Abruptly] No, sir. Good night to you. Canynge, can I give you a lift?

He goes out, followed by *Canynge*. *Borring*.

[After a slight pause] Well, I shall go and take the t-temperature of the Club.

He goes out.

*Colford*. Damn that effeminate stammering chap! What can we do for Dancy, *Winsor*?

*Winsor*. Colford! [A slight pause] The General felt his coat sleeve that night, and it was wet.

*Colford*. Well! What proof's that? No, by George! An old school-fellow, a brother officer, and a pal.

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*Winsor*. If he did do it—

*Colford*. He didn't. But if he did, I'd stick to him, and see him through it, if I could.

*Winsor* walks over to the fire, stares into it, turns round and stares at *Colford*, who is standing motionless.

*Colford*. Yes, by God!

*Curtain*.

*Scene* II

[*note*.—This should be a small set capable of being set quickly within that of the previous scene.]

Morning of the following day. The *Dancys*' flat. In the sitting-room of this small abode *Mabel Dancy* and *Margaret Orme* are sitting full face to the audience, on a couch in the centre of the room, in front of the imaginary window. There is a fireplace, Left, with fire burning; a door below it, Left; and a door on the Right, facing the audience, leads to a corridor and the outer door of the flat, which is visible. Their voices are heard in rapid exchange; then as the curtain rises, so does *Mabel*.

*Mabel*. But it's monstrous!

*Margaret*. Of course! [She lights a cigarette and hands the case to *Mabel*, who, however, sees nothing but her own thoughts] De Levis might just as well have pitched on me, except that I can't jump more than six inches in these skirts.

*Mabel*. It's wicked! Yesterday afternoon at the Club, did you say? Ronny hasn't said a word to me. Why?

*Margaret*. [With a long puff of smoke] Doesn't want you bothered.

*Mabel*. But——Good heavens!——Me!

*Margaret*. Haven't you found out, Mabel, that he isn't exactly communicative? No desperate character is.

*Mabel*. Ronny?

*Margaret*. Gracious! Wives are at a disadvantage, especially early on. You've never hunted with him, my dear. I have. He takes more sudden decisions than any man I ever knew. He's taking one now, I'll bet.

*Mabel*. That beast, De Levis! I was in our room next door all the time.

*Margaret*. Was the door into Ronny's dressing-room open?

*Mabel*. I don't know; I—I think it was.

*Margaret*. Well, you can say so in Court any way. Not that it matters. Wives are liars by law.

*Mabel*. [Staring down at her] What do you mean—Court?

*Margaret*. My dear, he'll have to bring an action for defamation of character, or whatever they call it.

*Mabel*. Were they talking of this last night at the WINSOR's?

*Margaret*. Well, you know a dinner-table, Mabel—Scandal is heaven-sent at this time of year.

*Mabel*. It's terrible, such a thing—terrible!

*Margaret*. [Gloomily] If only Ronny weren't known to be so broke.

*Mabel*. [With her hands to her forehead] I can't realise—I simply can't. If there's a case would it be all right afterwards?

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*Margaret*. Do you remember St Offert—cards? No, you wouldn't—you were in high frocks. Well, St Offert got damages, but he also got the hoof, underneath. He lives in Ireland. There isn't the slightest connection, so far as I can see, Mabel, between innocence and reputation. Look at me!

*Mabel*. We'll fight it tooth and nail!

*Margaret*. Mabel, you're pure wool, right through; everybody's sorry for you.

*Mabel*. It's for him they ought—

*Margaret*. [Again handing the cigarette case] Do smoke, old thing.

*Mabel* takes a cigarette this time, but does not light it.

It isn't altogether simple. General Canynge was there last night. You don't mind my being beastly frank, do you?

*Mabel*. No. I want it.

*Margaret*. Well, he's all for esprit de corps and that. But he was awfully silent.

*Mabel*. I hate half-hearted friends. Loyalty comes before everything.

*Margaret*. Ye-es; but loyalties cut up against each other sometimes, you know.

*Mabel*. I must see Ronny. D'you mind if I go and try to get him on the telephone?

*Margaret*. Rather not.

*Mabel* goes out by the door Left.

Poor kid!

She curls herself into a corner of the sofa, as if trying to get away from life. The bell rings. *Margaret* stirs, gets up, and goes out into the corridor, where she opens the door to *lady Adela Winsor*, whom she precedes into the sitting-room.

Enter the second murderer! D'you know that child knew nothing?

*Lady* A. Where is she?

*Margaret*. Telephoning. Adela, if there's going to be an action, we shall be witnesses. I shall wear black georgette with an ecru hat. Have you ever given evidence?

*Lady* A. Never.

*Margaret*. It must be too frightfully thrilling.

*Lady* A. Oh! Why did I ever ask that wretch De Levis? I used to think him pathetic. Meg did you know——Ronald Dancy's coat was wet? The General happened to feel it.

*Margaret*. So that's why he was so silent.

*Lady* A. Yes; and after the scene in the Club yesterday he went to see those bookmakers, and Goole—what a name!—is sure he told Dancy about the sale.

*Margaret*. [Suddenly] I don't care. He's my third cousin. Don't you feel you couldn't, Adela?

*Lady* A. Couldn't—what?

*Margaret*. Stand for De Levis against one of ourselves?

*Lady* A. That's very narrow, Meg.

*Margaret*. Oh! I know lots of splendid Jews, and I rather liked little Ferdy; but when it comes to the point—! They all stick together; why shouldn't we? It's in the blood. Open your jugular, and see if you haven't got it.

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*Lady* A. My dear, my great grandmother was a Jewess.  I'm very proud of her.

*Margaret*.  Inoculated. [Stretching herself] Prejudices, Adela—or are they loyalties—I don't know—cris-cross—we all cut each other's throats from the best of motives.

*Lady* A. Oh!  I shall remember that.  Delightful! [Holding up a finger] You got it from Bergson, Meg.  Isn't he wonderful?

*Margaret*.  Yes; have you ever read him?

*Lady* A. Well—No. [Looking at the bedroom door] That poor child!  I quite agree.  I shall tell every body it's ridiculous.  You don't really think Ronald Dancy—?

*Margaret*.  I don't know, Adela.  There are people who simply can't live without danger. I'm rather like that myself.  They're all right when they're getting the D.S.O. or shooting man-eaters; but if there's no excitement going, they'll make it—out of sheer craving. I've seen Ronny Dancy do the maddest things for no mortal reason except the risk. He's had a past, you know.

*Lady* A. Oh!  Do tell!

*Margaret*.  He did splendidly in the war, of course, because it suited him; but—just before—don't you remember—a very queer bit of riding?

*Lady* A. No.

*Margaret*.  Most dare-devil thing—but not quite.  You must remember— it was awfully talked about.  And then, of course, right up to his marriage—[She lights a cigarette.]

*Lady* A. Meg, you're very tantalising!

*Margaret*.  A foreign-looking girl—most plummy.  Oh!  Ronny's got charm —this Mabel child doesn't know in the least what she's got hold of!

*Lady* A. But they're so fond of each other!

*Margaret*.  That's the mistake.  The General isn't mentioning the coat, is he?

*Lady* A. Oh, no!  It was only to Charles.

*Mabel* returns.

*Margaret*.  Did you get him?

*Mabel*.  No; he's not at Tattersall's, nor at the Club.

*Lady Adela* rises and greets her with an air which suggests bereavement.

*Lady* A. Nobody's going to believe this, my dear.

*Mabel*. [Looking straight at her] Nobody who does need come here, or trouble to speak to us again.

*Lady* A. That's what I was afraid of; you're going to be defiant. Now don't! Just be perfectly natural.

*Mabel*. So easy, isn't it? I could kill anybody who believes such a thing.

*Margaret*. You'll want a solicitor, Mabel, Go to old Mr Jacob Twisden.

*Lady* A. Yes; he's so comforting.

*Margaret*. He got my pearls back once—without loss of life. A frightfully good fireside manner. Do get him here, Mabel, and have a heart-to-heart talk, all three of you!

*Mabel*. [Suddenly] Listen! There's Ronny!

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*Dancy* comes in.

*Dancy*. [With a smile] Very good of you to have come.

*Margaret*. Yes. We're just going. Oh! Ronny, this is quite too— [But his face dries her up; and sidling past, she goes].

*Lady* A. Charles sent his-love—[Her voice dwindles on the word, and she, too, goes].

*Dancy*. [Crossing to his wife] What have they been saying?

*Mabel*. Ronny! Why didn't you tell me?

*Dancy*. I wanted to see De Levis again first.

*Mabel*. That wretch! How dare he? Darling! [She suddenly clasps and kisses him. He does not return the kiss, but remains rigid in her arms, so that she draws away and looks at him] It's hurt you awfully, I know.

*Dancy*. Look here, Mabel! Apart from that muck—this is a ghastly tame-cat sort of life. Let's cut it and get out to Nairobi. I can scare up the money for that.

*Mabel*. [Aghast] But how can we? Everybody would say—

*Ronny*. Let them! We shan't be here.

*Mabel*. I couldn't bear people to think—

*Dancy*. I don't care a damn what people think monkeys and cats. I never could stand their rotten menagerie. Besides, what does it matter how I act; if I bring an action and get damages—if I pound him to a jelly— it's all no good! I can't prove it. There'll be plenty of people unconvinced.

*Mabel*. But they'll find the real thief.

*Dancy*. [With a queer little smile] Will staying here help them to do that?

*Mabel*. [In a sort of agony] Oh! I couldn't—it looks like running away. We must stay and fight it!

*Dancy*. Suppose I didn't get a verdict—you never can tell.

*Mabel*. But you must—I was there all the time, with the door open.

*Dancy*. Was it?

*Mabel*. I'm almost sure.

*Dancy*. Yes. But you're my wife.

*Mabel*. [Bewildered] Ronny, I don't understand—suppose I'd been accused of stealing pearls!

*Dancy*. [Wincing] I can't.

*Mabel*. But I might—just as easily. What would you think of me if I ran away from it?

*Dancy*. I see. [A pause] All right! You shall have a run for your money. I'll go and see old Twisden.

*Mabel*. Let me come! [*Dancy* shakes his head] Why not? I can't be happy a moment unless I'm fighting this.

*Dancy* puts out his hand suddenly and grips hers.

*Dancy*. You are a little brick!

*Mabel*. [Pressing his hand to her breast and looking into his face]
Do you know what Margaret called you?

*Ronny*. No.

*Mabel*. A desperate character.

*Dancy*. Ha! I'm not a tame cat, any more than she.

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The bell rings. *Mabel* goes out to the door and her voice is heard saying coldly.

*Mabel*. Will you wait a minute, please? Returning. It's De Levis—to see you. [In a low voice] Let me see him alone first. Just for a minute! Do!

*Dancy*. [After a moment's silence] Go ahead! He goes out into the bedroom.

*Mabel*. [Going to the door, Right] Come in.

*De Levis* comes in, and stands embarrassed.

Yes?

*De Levis*. [With a slight bow] Your husband, Mrs Dancy?

*Mabel*. He is in. Why do you want to see him?

*De Levis*. He came round to my rooms just now, when I was out. He threatened me yesterday. I don't choose him to suppose I'm afraid of him.

*Mabel*. [With a great and manifest effort at self-control] Mr De Levis, you are robbing my husband of his good name.

*De Levis*. [Sincerely] I admire your trustfulness, Mrs Dancy.

*Mabel*. [Staring at him] How can you do it? What do you want? What's your motive? You can't possibly believe that my husband is a thief!

*De Levis*. Unfortunately.

*Mabel*. How dare you? How dare you? Don't you know that I was in our bedroom all the time with the door open? Do you accuse me too?

*De Levis*. No, Mrs Dancy.

*Mabel*. But you do. I must have seen, I must have heard.

*De Levis*. A wife's memory is not very good when her husband is in danger.

*Mabel*. In other words, I'm lying.

*De Levis*. No. Your wish is mother to your thought, that's all.

*Mabel*. [After staring again with a sort of horror, turns to get control of herself. Then turning back to him] Mr De Levis, I appeal to you as a gentleman to behave to us as you

would we should behave to you. Withdraw this wicked charge, and write an apology that Ronald can show.

*De Levis*. Mrs Dancy, I am not a gentleman, I am only a—damned Jew. Yesterday I might possibly have withdrawn to spare you. But when my race is insulted I have nothing to say to your husband, but as he wishes to see me, I've come. Please let him know.

*Mabel*. [Regarding him again with that look of horror—slowly] I think what you are doing is too horrible for words.

*De Levis* gives her a slight bow, and as he does so *Dancy* comes quickly in, Left. The two men stand with the length of the sofa between them. *Mabel*, behind the sofa, turns her eyes on her husband, who has a paper in his right hand.

*De Levis*. You came to see me.

*Dancy*. Yes. I want you to sign this.

*De Levis*. I will sign nothing.

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*Dancy*. Let me read it: "I apologise to Captain Dancy for the reckless and monstrous charge I made against him, and I retract every word of it."

*De Levis*. Not much!

*Dancy*. You will sign.

*De Levis*. I tell you this is useless. I will sign nothing. The charge is true; you wouldn't be playing this game if it weren't. I'm going. You'll hardly try violence in the presence of your wife; and if you try it anywhere else—look out for yourself.

*Dancy*. Mabel, I want to speak to him alone.

*Mabel*. No, no!

*De Levis*. Quite right, Mrs Dancy. Black and tan swashbuckling will only make things worse for him.

*Dancy*. So you shelter behind a woman, do you, you skulking cur!

*De Levis* takes a step, with fists clenched and eyes blazing. *Dancy*, too, stands ready to spring—the moment is cut short by *Mabel* going quickly to her husband.

*Mabel*. Don't, Ronny. It's undignified! He isn't worth it.

*Dancy* suddenly tears the paper in two, and flings it into the fire.

*Dancy*. Get out of here, you swine!

*De Levis* stands a moment irresolute, then, turning to the door, he opens it, stands again for a moment with a smile on his face, then goes. *Mabel* crosses swiftly to the door, and shuts it as the outer door closes. Then she stands quite still, looking at her husband —her face expressing a sort of startled suspense.

*Dancy*. [Turning and looking at her] Well! Do you agree with him?

*Mabel*. What do you mean?

*Dancy*. That I wouldn't be playing this game unless—

*Mabel*. Don't! You hurt me!

*Dancy*. Yes. You don't know much of me, Mabel.

*Mabel*. Ronny!

*Dancy*. What did you say to that swine?

*Mabel*. [Her face averted] That he was robbing us. [Turning to him suddenly] Ronny—-you—didn't? I'd rather know.

*Dancy*. Ha! I thought that was coming.

*Mabel*. [Covering her face] Oh! How horrible of me—how horrible!

*Dancy*. Not at all. The thing looks bad.

*Mabel*. [Dropping her hands] If I can't believe in you, who can? [Going to him, throwing her arms round him, and looking up into his face] Ronny! If all the world—I'd believe in you. You know I would.

*Dancy*. That's all right, Mabs! That's all right! [His face, above her head, is contorted for a moment, then hardens into a mask] Well, what shall we do? Let's go to that lawyer—let's go—

*Mabel*. Oh! at once!

*Dancy*. All right. Get your hat on.

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*Mabel* passes him, and goes into the bedroom, Left. *Dancy*, left alone, stands quite still, staring before him. With a sudden shrug of his shoulders he moves quickly to his hat and takes it up just as *Mabel* returns, ready to go out. He opens the door; and crossing him, she stops in the doorway, looking up with a clear and trustful gaze as

The *curtain* falls.

## ACT III

### SCENE I

Three months later. Old *Mr Jacob* TWISDEN's Room, at the offices of Twisden & Graviter, in Lincoln's Inn Fields, is spacious, with two large windows at back, a fine old fireplace, Right, a door below it, and two doors, Left. Between the windows is a large table sideways to the window wall, with a chair in the middle on the right-hand side, a chair against the wall, and a client's chair on the left-hand side.*Graviter*, *Twisden's* much younger partner, is standing in front of the right-hand window looking out on to the Fields, where the lamps are being lighted, and a taxi's engine is running down below. He turns his sanguine, shrewd face from the window towards a grandfather dock, between the doors, Left, which is striking "four." The door, Left Forward, is opened.

*Young clerk*. [Entering] A Mr Gilman, sir, to see Mr Twisden.

*Graviter*. By appointment?

*Young clerk*. No, sir. But important, he says.

*Graviter*. I'll see him.

The *clerk* goes. *Graviter* sits right of table. The *clerk* returns, ushering in an oldish *man*, who looks what he is, the proprietor of a large modern grocery store. He wears a dark overcoat and carries a pot hat. His gingery-grey moustache and mutton-chop whiskers give him the expression of a cat.

*Graviter*. [Sizing up his social standing] Mr Gilman? Yes.

*Gilman*. [Doubtfully] Mr Jacob Twisden?

*Graviter*. [Smiling] His partner. Graviter my name is.

*Gilman*. Mr Twisden's not in, then?

*Graviter*. No. He's at the Courts. They're just up; he should be in directly. But he'll be busy.

*Gilman*. Old Mr Jacob Twisden—I've heard of him.

*Graviter*. Most people have.

*Gilman*. It's this Dancy-De Levis case that's keepin' him at the Courts, I suppose?

*Graviter* nods.

Won't be finished for a day or two?

*Graviter* shakes his head. No.

Astonishin' the interest taken in it.

*Graviter*. As you say.

*Gilman*. The Smart Set, eh? This Captain Dancy got the D.S.O., didn't he?

*Graviter* nods.

Sad to have a thing like that said about you. I thought he gave his evidence well; and his wife too. Looks as if this De Levis had got some private spite. Searchy la femme, I said to Mrs Gilman only this morning, before I—

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*Graviter*. By the way, sir, what is your business?

*Gilman*. Well, my business here—No, if you'll excuse me, I'd rather wait and see old Mr Jacob Twisden. It's delicate, and I'd like his experience.

*Graviter*. [With a shrug] Very well; then, perhaps, you'll go in there. [He moves towards the door, Left Back].

*Gilman*. Thank you. [Following] You see, I've never been mixed up with the law—

*Graviter*. [Opening the door] No?

*Gilman*. And I don't want to begin. When you do, you don't know where you'll stop, do you? You see, I've only come from a sense of duty; and —other reasons.

*Graviter*. Not uncommon.

*Gilman*. [Producing card] This is my card. Gilman's—several branches, but this is the 'ead.

*Graviter*. [Scrutinising card] Exactly.

*Gilman*. Grocery—I daresay you know me; or your wife does. They say old Mr Jacob Twisden refused a knighthood. If it's not a rude question, why was that?

*Graviter*. Ask him, sir; ask him.

*Gilman*. I said to my wife at the time, "He's holdin' out for a baronetcy."

*Graviter* Closes the door with an exasperated smile.

*Young clerk*. [Opening the door, Left Forward] Mr *Winsor*, sir, and Miss Orme.

They enter, and the *clerk* withdraws.

*Graviter*. How d'you do, Miss Orme? How do you do, *Winsor*?

*Winsor*. Twisden not back, Graviter?

*Graviter*. Not yet.

*Winsor*. Well, they've got through De Levis's witnesses. Sir Frederick was at the very top of his form. It's looking quite well. But I hear they've just subpoenaed Canynge after all. His evidence is to be taken to-morrow.

*Graviter*. Oho!

*Winsor*. I said Dancy ought to have called him.

*Graviter*. We considered it. Sir Frederic decided that he could use him better in cross-examination.

*Winsor*. Well! I don't know that. Can I go and see him before he gives evidence to-morrow?

*Graviter*. I should like to hear Mr Jacob on that, *Winsor*. He'll be in directly.

*Winsor*. They had Kentman, and Goole, the Inspector, the other bobby, my footman, Dancy's banker, and his tailor.

*Graviter*. Did we shake Kentman or Goole?

*Winsor*. Very little. Oh! by the way, the numbers of those two notes were given, and I see they're published in the evening papers. I suppose the police wanted that. I tell you what I find, Graviter—a general feeling that there's something behind it all that doesn't come out.

*Graviter*. The public wants it's money's worth—always does in these Society cases; they brew so long beforehand, you see.

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*Winsor*. They're looking for something lurid.

*Margaret*. When I was in the bog, I thought they were looking for me. [Taking out her cigarette case] I suppose I mustn't smoke, Mr Graviter?

*Graviter*. Do!

*Margaret*. Won't Mr Jacob have a fit?

*Graviter*. Yes, but not till you've gone.

*Margaret*. Just a whiff. [She lights a cigarette].

*Winsor*. [Suddenly] It's becoming a sort of Dreyfus case—people taking sides quite outside the evidence.

*Margaret*. There are more of the chosen in Court every day. Mr Graviter, have you noticed the two on the jury?

*Graviter*. [With a smile] No; I can't say—

*Margaret*. Oh! but quite distinctly. Don't you think they ought to have been challenged?

*Graviter*. De Levis might have challenged the other ten, Miss Orme.

*Margaret*. Dear me, now! I never thought of that.

As she speaks, the door Left Forward is opened and old *Mr Jacob Twisden* comes in. He is tallish and narrow, sixty-eight years old, grey, with narrow little whiskers curling round his narrow ears, and a narrow bow-ribbon curling round his collar. He wears a long, narrow-tailed coat, and strapped trousers on his narrow legs. His nose and face are narrow, shrewd, and kindly. He has a way of narrowing his shrewd and kindly eyes. His nose is seen to twitch and snig.

*Twisden*. Ah! How are you, Charles? How do you do, my dear?

*Margaret*. Dear Mr Jacob, I'm smoking. Isn't it disgusting? But they don't allow it in Court, you know. Such a pity! The Judge might have a hookah. Oh! wouldn't he look sweet—the darling!

*Twisden*. [With a little, old-fashioned bow] It does not become everybody as it becomes you, Margaret.

*Margaret*. Mr Jacob, how charming! [With a slight grimace she puts out her cigarette].

*Graviter*. Man called Gilman waiting in there to see you specially.

*Twisden*. Directly. Turn up the light, would you, Graviter?

*Graviter*. [Turning up the light] Excuse me.

He goes.

*Winsor*. Look here, Mr Twisden—

*Twisden*. Sit down; sit down, my dear.

And he himself sits behind the table, as a cup of tea is brought in to him by the *young clerk*, with two Marie biscuits in the saucer.

Will you have some, Margaret?

*Margaret*. No, dear Mr Jacob.

*Twisden*. Charles?

*Winsor*. No, thanks. The door is closed.

*Twisden*. [Dipping a biscuit in the tea] Now, then?

*Winsor*. The General knows something which on the face of it looks rather queer. Now that he's going to be called, oughtn't Dancy to be told of it, so that he may be ready with his explanation, in case it comes out?

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*Twisden*. [Pouring some tea into the saucer] Without knowing, I can't tell you.

*Winsor* and *Margaret* exchange looks, and *Twisden* drinks from the saucer. *Margaret*. Tell him, Charles.

*Winsor*. Well! It rained that evening at Meldon. The General happened to put his hand on Dancy's shoulder, and it was damp.

*Twisden* puts the saucer down and replaces the cup in it. They both look intently at him.

*Twisden*. I take it that General Canynge won't say anything he's not compelled to say.

*Margaret*. No, of course; but, Mr Jacob, they might ask; they know it rained. And he is such a George Washington.

*Twisden*. [Toying with a pair of tortoise-shell glasses] They didn't ask either of you. Still-no harm in your telling Dancy.

*Winsor*. I'd rather you did it, Margaret.

*Margaret*. I daresay. [She mechanically takes out her cigarette-case, catches the lift of *Twisden's* eyebrows, and puts it back].

*Winsor*. Well, we'll go together. I don't want Mrs Dancy to hear.

*Margaret*. Do tell me, Mr Jacob; is he going to win?

*Twisden*. I think so, Margaret; I think so.

*Margaret*. It'll be too—frightful if he doesn't get a verdict, after all this. But I don't know what we shall do when it's over. I've been sitting in that Court all these three days, watching, and it's made me feel there's nothing we like better than seeing people skinned. Well, bye-bye, bless you!

*Twisden* rises and pats her hand.

*Winsor*. Half a second, Margaret. Wait for me. She nods and goes out. Mr Twisden, what do you really think?

*Twisden*. I am Dancy's lawyer, my dear Charles, as well as yours.

*Winsor*. Well, can I go and see Canynge?

*Twisden*. Better not.

*Winsor*. If they get that out of him, and recall me, am I to say he told me of it at the time?

*Twisden*. You didn't feel the coat yourself? And Dancy wasn't present?
Then what Canynge told you is not evidence—he'll stop your being asked.

*Winsor*. Thank goodness. Good-bye!

*Winsor* goes out.

*Twisden*, behind his table, motionless, taps his teeth with the eyeglasses in his narrow, well-kept hand. After a long shake of his head and a shrug of his rather high shoulders he snips, goes to the window and opens it. Then crossing to the door, Left Back, he throws it open and says

*Twisden*. At your service, sir.

*Gilman* comes forth, nursing his pot hat.

Be seated.

*Twisden* closes the window behind him, and takes his seat.

*Gilman*. [Taking the client's chair, to the left of the table] Mr Twisden, I believe? My name's Gilman, head of Gilman's Department Stores. You have my card.

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*Twisden*. [Looking at the card] Yes. What can we do for you?

*Gilman*. Well, I've come to you from a sense of duty, sir, and also a feelin' of embarrassment. [He takes from his breast pocket an evening paper] You see, I've been followin' this Dancy case—it's a good deal talked of in Putney—and I read this at half-past two this afternoon. To be precise, at 2.25. [He rises and hands the paper to *Twisden*, and with a thick gloved forefinger indicates a passage] When I read these numbers, I 'appened to remember givin' change for a fifty-pound note—don't often 'ave one in, you know—so I went to the cash-box out of curiosity, to see that I 'adn't got it. Well, I 'ad; and here it is. [He draws out from his breast pocket and lays before *Twisden* a fifty-pound banknote] It was brought in to change by a customer of mine three days ago, and he got value for it. Now, that's a stolen note, it seems, and you'd like to know what I did. Mind you, that customer of mine I've known 'im—well— eight or nine years; an Italian he is—wine salesman, and so far's I know, a respectable man-foreign-lookin', but nothin' more. Now, this was at 'alf-past two, and I was at my head branch at Putney, where I live. I want you to mark the time, so as you'll see I 'aven't wasted a minute. I took a cab and I drove straight to my customer's private residence in Putney, where he lives with his daughter—Ricardos his name is, Paolio Ricardos. They tell me there that he's at his business shop in the City. So off I go in the cab again, and there I find him. Well, sir, I showed this paper to him and I produced the note. "Here," I said, "you brought this to me and you got value for it." Well, that man was taken aback. If I'm a judge, Mr Twisden, he was taken aback, not to speak in a guilty way, but he was, as you might say, flummoxed. "Now," I said to him, "where did you get it—that's the point?" He took his time to answer, and then he said: "Well, Mr Gilman," he said, "you know me; I am an honourable man. I can't tell you offhand, but I am above the board." He's foreign, you know, in his expressions. "Yes," I said, "that's all very well," I said, "but here I've got a stolen note and you've got the value for it. Now I tell you," I said, "what I'm going to do; I'm going straight with this note to Mr Jacob Twisden, who's got this Dancy-De Levis case in 'and. He's a well-known Society lawyer," I said, "of great experience." "Oh!" he said, "that is what you do?"—funny the way he speaks! "Then I come with you!"—And I've got him in the cab below. I want to tell you everything before he comes up. On the way I tried to get something out of him, but I couldn't—I could not. "This is very awkward," I said at last. "It is, Mr Gilman," was his reply; and he began to talk about his Sicilian claret—a very good wine, mind you; but under the circumstances it seemed to me uncalled for. Have I made it clear to you?

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*Twisden*. [Who has listened with extreme attention] Perfectly, Mr Gilman. I'll send down for him. [He touches a hand-bell].

The *young clerk* appears at the door, Left Forward.

A gentleman in a taxi-waiting. Ask him to be so good as to step up. Oh! and send Mr Graviter here again.

The *young clerk* goes out.

*Gilman*. As I told you, sir, I've been followin' this case. It's what you might call piquant. And I should be very glad if it came about that this helped Captain Dancy. I take an interest, because, to tell you the truth, [Confidentially] I don't like—well, not to put too fine a point upon it 'Ebrews. They work harder; they're more sober; they're honest; and they're everywhere. I've nothing against them, but the fact is—they get on so.

*Twisden*. [Cocking an eye] A thorn in the flesh, Mr Gilman.

*Gilman*. Well, I prefer my own countrymen, and that's the truth of it.

As he speaks, *Graviter* comes in by the door Left Forward.

*Twisden*. [Pointing to the newspaper and the note] Mr Gilman has brought this, of which he is holder for value. His customer, who changed it three days ago, is coming up.

*Graviter*. The fifty-pounder. I see. [His face is long and reflective].

*Young clerk*. [Entering] Mr Ricardos, sir.

He goes out. *Ricardos* is a personable, Italian-looking man in a frock coat, with a dark moustachioed face and dark hair a little grizzled. He looks anxious, and bows.

*Twisden*. Mr Ricardos? My name is Jacob Twisden. My partner. [Holding up a finger, as *Ricardos* would speak] Mr Gilman has told us about this note. You took it to him, he says, three days ago; that is, on Monday, and received cash for it?

*Ricardos*. Yes, sare.

*Twisden*. You were not aware that it was stolen?

*Ricardos*. [With his hand to his breast] Oh! no, sare.

*Twisden*. You received it from—?

*Ricardos*. A minute, sare; I would weesh to explain—[With an expressive shrug] in private.

*Twisden*. [Nodding] Mr Gilman, your conduct has been most prompt. You may safely leave the matter in our hands, now. Kindly let us retain this note; and ask for my cashier as you go out and give him [He writes] this. He will reimburse you. We will take any necessary steps ourselves.

*Gilman*. [In slight surprise, with modest pride] Well, sir, I'm in your 'ands. I must be guided by you, with your experience. I'm glad you think I acted rightly.

*Twisden*. Very rightly, Mr Gilman—very rightly. [Rising] Good afternoon!

*Gilman*. Good afternoon, sir. Good afternoon, gentlemen! [To *Twisden*] I'm sure I'm very 'appy to have made your acquaintance, sir. It's a well-known name.

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*Twisden*. Thank you.

*Gilman* retreats, glances at *Ricardos*, and turns again.

*Gilman*. I suppose there's nothing else I ought to do, in the interests of the law? I'm a careful man.

*Twisden*. If there is, Mr Gilman, we will let you know. We have your address. You may make your mind easy; but don't speak of this. It might interfere with Justice.

*Gilman*. Oh! I shouldn't dream of it. I've no wish to be mixed up in anything conspicuous. That's not my principle at all. Good-day, gentlemen.

He goes.

*Twisden*. [Seating himself] Now, sir, will you sit down.

But *Ricardos* does not sit; he stands looking uneasily across the table at *Graviter*.

You may speak out.

*Ricardos*. Well, Mr Tweesden and sare, this matter is very serious for me, and very delicate—it concairns my honour. I am in a great difficulty.

*Twisden*. When in difficulty—complete frankness, sir.

*Ricardos*. It is a family matter, sare, I—

*Twisden*. Let me be frank with you. [Telling his points off on his fingers] We have your admission that you changed this stopped note for value. It will be our duty to inform the Bank of England that it has been traced to you. You will have to account to them for your possession of it. I suggest to you that it will be far better to account frankly to us.

*Ricardos*. [Taking out a handkerchief and quite openly wiping his hands and forehead] I received this note, sare, with others, from a gentleman, sare, in settlement of a debt of honour, and I know nothing of where he got them.

*Twisden*. H'm! that is very vague. If that is all you can tell us, I'm afraid—

*Ricardos*. Gentlemen, this is very painful for me. It is my daughter's good name—[He again wipes his brow].

*Twisden*. Come, sir, speak out!

*Ricardos*. [Desperately] The notes were a settlement to her from this gentleman, of whom she was a great friend.

*Twisden*. [Suddenly] I am afraid we must press you for the name of the gentleman.

*Ricardos*. Sare, if I give it to you, and it does ’im ’arm, what will my daughter say? This is a bad matter for me. He behaved well to her; and she is attached to him still; sometimes she is crying yet because she lost him. And now we betray him, perhaps, who knows? This is very unpleasant for me. [Taking up the paper] Here it gives the number of another note—a ’undred-pound note. I ’ave that too. [He takes a note from his breast pocket].

*Graviter*. How much did he give you in all?

*Ricardos*. For my daughter’s settlement one thousand pounds. I understand he did not wish to give a cheque because of his marriage. So I did not think anything about it being in notes, you see.

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*Twisden*. When did he give you this money?

*Ricardos*. The middle of Octobare last.

*Twisden*. [Suddenly looking up] Mr Ricardos, was it Captain Dancy?

*Ricardos*. [Again wiping his forehead] Gentlemen, I am so fond of my daughter. I have only the one, and no wife.

*Twisden*. [With an effort] Yes, yes; but I must know.

*Ricardos*. Sare, if I tell you, will you give me your good word that my daughter shall not hear of it?

*Twisden*. So far as we are able to prevent it—certainly.

*Ricardos*. Sare, I trust you.—It was Captain Dancy.

A long pause.

*Graviter* [Suddenly] Were you blackmailing him?

*Twisden*. [Holding up his hand] My partner means, did you press him for this settlement?

*Ricardos*. I did think it my duty to my daughter to ask that he make compensation to her.

*Twisden*. With threats that you would tell his wife?

*Ricardos*. [With a shrug] Captain Dancy was a man of honour. He said: "Of course I will do this." I trusted him. And a month later I did remind him, and he gave me this money for her. I do not know where he got it—I do not know. Gentlemen, I have invested it all on her—every penny-except this note, for which I had the purpose to buy her a necklace. That is the sweared truth.

*Twisden*. I must keep this note. [He touches the hundred-pound note] You will not speak of this to anyone. I may recognise that you were a holder for value received—-others might take a different view. Good-day, sir. Graviter, see Mr Ricardos out, and take his address.

*Ricardos*. [Pressing his hands over the breast of his frock coat—with a sigh] Gentlemen, I beg you—remember what I said. [With a roll of his eyes] My daughter—I am not happee. Good-day.

He turns and goes out slowly, Left Forward, followed by *Graviter*.

*Twisden*. [To himself] Young Dancy! [He pins the two notes together and places them in an envelope, then stands motionless except for his eyes and hands, which restlessly express the disturbance within him.]

*Graviter* returns, carefully shuts the door, and going up to him, hands him *Ricardos*' card.

[Looking at the card] Villa Benvenuto. This will have to be verified, but I'm afraid it's true. That man was not acting.

*Graviter*. What's to be done about Dancy?

*Twisden*. Can you understand a gentleman—?

*Graviter*. I don't know, sir. The war loosened "form" all over the place. I saw plenty of that myself. And some men have no moral sense. From the first I've had doubts.

*Twisden*. We can't go on with the case.

*Graviter*. Phew! . . . [A moment's silence] Gosh! It's an awful thing for his wife.

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*Twisden*. Yes.

*Graviter* [Touching the envelope] Chance brought this here, sir. That man won't talk—-he's too scared.

*Twisden*. Gilman.

*Graviter*. Too respectable. If De Levis got those notes back, and the rest of the money, anonymously?

*Twisden*. But the case, Graviter; the case.

*Graviter*. I don't believe this alters what I've been thinking.

*Twisden*. Thought is one thing—knowledge another. There's duty to our profession. Ours is a fine calling. On the good faith of solicitors a very great deal hangs. [He crosses to the hearth as if warmth would help him].

*Graviter*. It'll let him in for a prosecution. He came to us in confidence.

*Twisden*. Not as against the law.

*Graviter*. No. I suppose not. [A pause] By Jove, I don't like losing this case. I don't like the admission we backed such a wrong 'un.

*Twisden*. Impossible to go on. Apart from ourselves, there's Sir Frederic. We must disclose to him—can't let him go on in the dark. Complete confidence between solicitor and counsel is the essence of professional honour.

*Graviter*. What are you going to do then, sir?

*Twisden*. See Dancy at once. Get him on the phone.

*Graviter*. [Taking up the telephone] Get me Captain Dancy's flat. . . . What? . . .[To *Twisden*] Mrs Dancy is here. That's a propos with a vengeance. Are you going to see her, sir?

*Twisden*. [After a moment's painful hesitation] I must.

*Graviter*. [Telephoning] Bring Mrs Dancy up. [He turns to the window].

*Mabel Dandy* is shown in, looking very pale. *Twisden* advances from the fire, and takes her hand.

*Mabel*. Major Colford's taken Ronny off in his car for the night. I thought it would do him good. I said I'd come round in case there was anything you wanted to say before to-morrow.

*Twisden*. [Taken aback] Where have they gone?

*Mabel*. I don't know, but he'll be home before ten o'clock to-morrow. Is there anything?

*Twisden*. Well, I'd like to see him before the Court sits. Send him on here as soon as he comes.

*Mabel*. [With her hand to her forehead] Oh! Mr Twisden, when will it be over? My head's getting awful sitting in that Court.

*Twisden*. My dear Mrs Dancy, there's no need at all for you to come down to-morrow; take a rest and nurse your head.

*Mabel*. Really and truly?

*Twisden*. Yes; it's the very best thing you can do.

*Graviter* turns his head, and looks at them unobserved.

*Mabel*. How do you think it's going?

*Twisden*. It went very well to-day; very well indeed.

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*Mabel*. You must be awfully fed up with us.

*Twisden*. My dear young lady, that's our business. [He takes her hand].

MABEL's face suddenly quivers. She draws her hand away, and covers her lips with it.

There, there! You want a day off badly.

*Mabel*. I'm so tired of—! Thank you so much for all you're doing. Good night! Good night, Mr Graviter!

*Graviter*. Good night, Mrs Dancy.

*Mabel* goes.

*Graviter*. D'you know, I believe she knows.

*Twisden*. No, no! She believes in him implicitly. A staunch little woman. Poor thing!

*Graviter*. Hasn't that shaken you, sir? It has me.

*Twisden*. No, no! I—I can't go on with the case. It's breaking faith. Get Sir Frederic's chambers.

*Graviter*. [Telephoning, and getting a reply, looks round at *Twisden*] Yes?

*Twisden*. Ask if I can come round and see him.

*Graviter*. [Telephoning] Can Sir Frederic spare Mr Twisden a few minutes now if he comes round? [Receiving reply] He's gone down to Brighton for the night.

*Twisden*. H'm! What hotel?

*Graviter*. [Telephoning] What's his address? What . . . ? [To *Twisden*] The Bedford.

*Twisden*. I'll go down.

*Graviter*. [Telephoning] Thank you. All right. [He rings off].

*Twisden*. Just look out the trains down and up early to-morrow.

*Graviter* takes up an A B C, and *Twisden* takes up the Ricardos card.

*Twisden*. Send to this address in Putney, verify the fact that Ricardos has a daughter, and give me a trunk call to Brighton. Better go yourself, Graviter. If you see her, don't say anything, of course— invent some excuse. [*Graviter* nods] I'll be up in time to see Dancy.

*Graviter*. By George! I feel bad about this.

*Twisden*. Yes. But professional honour comes first. What time is that train? [He bends over the ABC].

*Curtain*.

## SCENE II

The same room on the following morning at ten-twenty-five, by the Grandfather clock.

The *young clerk* is ushering in *Dancy*, whose face is perceptibly harder than it was three months ago, like that of a man who has lived under great restraint.

Dancy. He wanted to see me before the Court sat.

*Young clerk*. Yes, sir. Mr Twisden will see you in one minute. He had to go out of town last night. [He prepares to open the waiting-room door].

*Dancy*. Were you in the war?

*Young clerk*. Yes.

*Dancy*. How can you stick this?

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*Young clerk*. [With a smile] My trouble was to stick that, sir.

*Dancy*. But you get no excitement from year's end to year's end. It'd drive me mad.

*Young clerk*. [Shyly] A case like this is pretty exciting. I'd give a lot to see us win it.

*Dancy*. [Staring at him] Why? What is it to you?

*Young clerk*. I don't know, sir. It's—it's like football—you want your side to win. [He opens the waiting-room door. Expanding] You see some rum starts, too, in a lawyer's office in a quiet way.

*Dancy* enters the waiting-room, and the *young clerk*, shutting the door, meets *Twisden* as he comes in, Left Forward, and takes from him overcoat, top hat, and a small bag.

*Young clerk*. Captain Dancy's waiting, sir. [He indicates the waiting-room].

*Twisden*. [Narrowing his lips] Very well. Mr Graviter gone to the Courts?

*Young clerk*. Yes, sir.

*Twisden*. Did he leave anything for me?

*Young clerk*. On the table, sir.

*Twisden*. [Taking up an envelope] Thank you.

The *clerk* goes.

*Twisden*. [Opening the envelope and reading] "All corroborates." H'm! [He puts it in his pocket and takes out of an envelope the two notes, lays them on the table, and covers them with a sheet of blotting-paper; stands a moment preparing himself, then goes to the door of the waiting-room, opens it, and says:] Now, Captain Dancy. Sorry to have kept you waiting.

*Dancy*. [Entering] *Winsor* came to me yesterday about General Canynge's evidence. Is that what you wanted to speak to me about?

*Twisden*. No. It isn't that.

*Dancy*. [Looking at his wrist watch] By me it's just on the half-hour, sir.

*Twisden*. Yes. I don't want you to go to the Court.

*Dancy*. Not?

*Twisden*. I have very serious news for you.

*Dancy*. [Wincing and collecting himself] Oh!

*Twisden*. These two notes. [He uncovers the notes] After the Court rose yesterday we had a man called Ricardos here. [A pause] Is there any need for me to say more?

*Dancy*. [Unflinching] No. What now?

*Twisden*. Our duty was plain; we could not go on with the case. I have consulted Sir Frederic. He felt—he felt that he must throw up his brief, and he will do that the moment the Court sits. Now I want to talk to you about what you're going to do.

*Dancy*. That's very good of you, considering.

*Twisden*. I don't pretend to understand, but I imagine you may have done this in a moment of reckless bravado, feeling, perhaps, that as you gave the mare to De Levis, the money was by rights as much yours as his.

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Stopping *Dancy*, who is about to speak, with a gesture.

To satisfy a debt of honour to this—lady; and, no doubt, to save your wife from hearing of it from the man Ricardos. Is that so?

*Dancy*. To the life.

*Twisden*. It was mad, Captain Dancy, mad! But the question now is: What do you owe to your wife? She doesn't dream—I suppose?

*Dancy*. [With a twitching face] No.

*Twisden*. We can't tell what the result of this collapse will be. The police have the theft in hand. They may issue a warrant. The money could be refunded, and the costs paid—somehow that can all be managed. But it may not help. In any case, what end is served by your staying in the country? You can't save your honour—that's gone. You can't save your wife's peace of mind. If she sticks to you—do you think she will?

*Dancy*. Not if she's wise.

*Twisden*. Better go! There's a war in Morocco.

*Dancy*. [With a bitter smile] Good old Morocco!

*Twisden*. Will you go, then, at once, and leave me to break it to your wife?

*Dancy*. I don't know yet.

*Twisden*. You must decide quickly, to catch a boat train. Many a man has made good. You're a fine soldier.

*Dancy*. There are alternatives.

*Twisden*. Now, go straight from this office. You've a passport, I suppose; you won't need a visa for France, and from there you can find means to slip over. Have you got money on you? [Dancy nods]. We will see what we can do to stop or delay proceedings.

*Dancy*. It's all damned kind of you. [With difficulty] But I must think of my wife. Give me a few minutes.

*Twisden*. Yes, yes; go in there and think it out.

He goes to the door, Right, and opens it. *Dancy* passes him and goes out. *Twisden* rings a bell and stands waiting.

*Clerk*. [Entering] Yes, sir?

*Twisden*. Tell them to call a taxi.

*Clerk*. [Who has a startled look] Yes, sir. Mr Graviter has come in, air, with General Canynge. Are you disengaged?

*Twisden*. Yes.

The *clerk* goes out, and almost immediately *Graviter* and *Canynge* enter. Good-morning, General. [To *Graviter*]

Well?

*Graviter*. Sir Frederic got up at once and said that since the publication of the numbers of those notes, information had reached him which forced him to withdraw from the case. Great sensation, of course. I left Bromley in charge. There'll be a formal verdict for the defendant, with costs. Have you told Dancy?

*Twisden*. Yes. He's in there deciding what he'll do.

*Canynge*. [Grave and vexed] This is a dreadful thing, Twisden. I've been afraid of it all along. A soldier! A gallant fellow, too. What on earth got into him?

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*Twisden*. There's no end to human nature, General.

*Graviter*. You can see queerer things in the papers, any day.

*Canynge*. That poor young wife of his! *Winsor* gave me a message for you, Twisden. If money's wanted quickly to save proceedings, draw on him. Is there anything I can do?

*Twisden*. I've advised him to go straight off to Morocco.

*Canynge*. I don't know that an asylum isn't the place for him. He must be off his head at moments. That jump-crazy! He'd have got a verdict on that alone—if they'd seen those balconies. I was looking at them when I was down there last Sunday. Daring thing, Twisden. Very few men, on a dark night—He risked his life twice. That's a shrewd fellow—young De Levis. He spotted Dancy's nature.

The *young clerk* enters.

*Clerk*. The taxi's here, sir. Will you see Major Colford and Miss Orme?

*Twisden*. Graviter—No; show them in.

The *young clerk* goes.

*Canynge*. Colford's badly cut up.

*Margaret Orme* and *Colford* enter.

*Colford*. [Striding forward] There must be some mistake about this, Mr Twisden.

*Twisden*. Hssh! Dancy's in there. He's admitted it.

Voices are subdued at once.

*Colford*. What? [With emotion] If it were my own brother, I couldn't feel it more. But—-damn it! What right had that fellow to chuck up the case—without letting him know, too. I came down with Dancy this morning, and he knew nothing about it.

*Twisden*. [Coldly] That was unfortunately unavoidable.

*Colford*. Guilty or not, you ought to have stuck to him—it's not playing the game, Mr Twisden.

*Twisden*. You must allow me to judge where my duty lay, in a very hard case.

*Colford*. I thought a man was safe with his solicitor.

*Canynge*. Colford, you don't understand professional etiquette.

*Colford*. No, thank God!

*Twisden*. When you have been as long in your profession as I have been in mine, Major Colford, you will know that duty to your calling outweighs duty to friend or client.

*Colford*. But I serve the Country.

*Twisden*. And I serve the Law, sir.

*Canynge*. Graviter, give me a sheet of paper. I'll write a letter for him.

*Margaret*. [Going up to *Twisden*] Dear Mr Jacob—pay De Levis. You know my pearls—-put them up the spout again. Don't let Ronny be—

*Twisden*. Money isn't the point, Margaret.

*Margaret*. It's ghastly! It really is.

*Colford*. I'm going in to shake hands with him. [He starts to cross the room].

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*Twisden*. Wait! We want him to go straight off to Morocco. Don't upset him. [To *Colford* and *Margaret*] I think you had better go. If, a little later, Margaret, you could go round to Mrs Dancy—

*Colford*. Poor little Mabel Dancy! It's perfect hell for her.

They have not seen that *Dancy* has opened the door behind them.

*Dancy*. It is!

They all turn round in consternation.

*Colford*. [With a convulsive movement] Old boy!

*Dancy*. No good, Colford. [Gazing round at them] Oh! clear out—I can't stand commiseration; and let me have some air.

*Twisden* motions to *Colford* and *Margaret* to go; and as he turns to *Dancy*, they go out. *Graviter* also moves towards the door. The *general* sits motionless. *Graviter* goes Out.

*Twisden*. Well?

*Dancy*. I'm going home, to clear up things with my wife. General Canynge, I don't quite know why I did the damned thing. But I did, and there's an end of it.

*Canynge*. Dancy, for the honour of the Army, avoid further scandal if you can. I've written a letter to a friend of mine in the Spanish War Office. It will get you a job in their war. [*Canynge* closes the envelope].

*Dancy*. Very good of you. I don't know if I can make use of it.

*Canynge* stretches out the letter, which *Twisden* hands to *Dancy*, who takes it. *Graviter* re-opens the door.

*Twisden*. What is it?

*Graviter*. De Levis is here.

*Twisden*. De Levis? Can't see him.

*Dancy*. Let him in!

After a moment's hesitation *Twisden* nods, and *Graviter* goes out. The three wait in silence with their eyes fixed on the door, the *general* sitting at the table, *Twisden* by his

chair, *Dancy* between him and the door Right. *De Levis* comes in and shuts the door. He is advancing towards *Twisden* when his eyes fall on *Dancy*, and he stops.

*Twisden*. You wanted to see me?

*De Levis*. [Moistening his lips] Yes. I came to say that—that I overheard—I am afraid a warrant is to be issued. I wanted you to realise—it's not my doing. I'll give it no support. I'm content. I don't want my money. I don't even want costs. Dancy, do you understand?

*Dancy* does not answer, but looks at him with nothing alive in his face but his eyes.

*Twisden*. We are obliged to you, Sir. It was good of you to come.

*De Levis*. [With a sort of darting pride] Don't mistake me. I didn't come because I feel Christian; I am a Jew. I will take no money—not even that which was stolen. Give it to a charity. I'm proved right. And now I'm done with the damned thing. Good-morning!

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He makes a little bow to *Canynge* and *Twisden*, and turns to face *Dancy*, who has never moved. The two stand motionless, looking at each other, then *de Levis* shrugs his shoulders and walks out. When he is gone there is a silence.

*Canynge*. [Suddenly] You heard what he said, Dancy. You have no time to lose.

But *Dancy* does not stir.

*Twisden*. Captain Dancy?

Slowly, without turning his head, rather like a man in a dream,
*Dancy* walks across the room, and goes out.

*Curtain*.

## SCENE III

The *Dancys*' sitting-room, a few minutes later. *Mabel Dancy* is sitting alone on the sofa with a newspaper on her lap; she is only just up, and has a bottle of smelling-salts in her hand. Two or three other newspapers are dumped on the arm of the sofa. She topples the one off her lap and takes up another as if she couldn't keep away from them; drops it in turn, and sits staring before her, sniffing at the salts. The door, Right, is opened and *Dancy* comes in.

Mabel. [Utterly surprised] Ronny! Do they want me in Court?

*Dancy*. No.

*Mabel*. What is it, then? Why are you back?

*Dancy*. Spun.

*Mabel*. [Blank] Spun? What do you mean? What's spun?

*Dancy*. The case. They've found out through those notes.

*Mabel*. Oh! [Staring at his face] Who?

*Dancy*. Me!

*Mabel*. [After a moment of horrified stillness] Don't, Ronny! Oh! No!
Don't! [She buries her face in the pillows of the sofa].

*Dancy* stands looking down at her.

*Dancy*. Pity you wouldn't come to Africa three months ago.

*Mabel*. Why didn't you tell me then? I would have gone.

*Dancy*. You wanted this case. Well, it's fallen down.

*Mabel*. Oh! Why didn't I face it? But I couldn't—I had to believe.

*Dancy*. And now you can't. It's the end, Mabel.

*Mabel*. [Looking up at him] No.

*Dancy* goes suddenly on his knees and seizes her hand.

*Dancy*. Forgive me!

*Mabel*. [Putting her hand on his head] Yes; oh, yes! I think I've known a long time, really. Only—why? What made you?

*Dancy*. [Getting up and speaking in jerks] It was a crazy thing to do; but, damn it, I was only looting a looter. The money was as much mine as his. A decent chap would have offered me half. You didn't see the brute look at me that night at dinner as much as to say: "You blasted fool!" It made me mad. That wasn't a bad jump-twice over. Nothing in the war took quite such nerve. [Grimly] I rather enjoyed that evening.

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*Mabel*. But—money! To keep it!

*Dancy*. [Sullenly] Yes, but I had a debt to pay.

*Mabel*. To a woman?

*Dancy*. A debt of honour—it wouldn't wait.

*Mabel*. It was—it was to a woman. Ronny, don't lie any more.

*Dancy*. [Grimly] Well! I wanted to save your knowing. I'd promised a thousand. I had a letter from her father that morning, threatening to tell you. All the same, if that tyke hadn't jeered at me for parlour tricks!—But what's the good of all this now? [Sullenly] Well—it may cure you of loving me. Get over that, Mab; I never was worth it—and I'm done for!

*Mabel*. The woman—have you—since—?

*Dancy*. [Energetically] No! You supplanted her. But if you'd known I was leaving a woman for you, you'd never have married me. [He walks over to the hearth].

> *Mabel* too gets up. She presses her hands to her forehead, then walks blindly round to behind the sofa and stands looking straight in front of her.

*Mabel*. [Coldly] What has happened, exactly?

*Dancy*. Sir Frederic chucked up the case. I've seen Twisden; they want me to run for it to Morocco.

*Mabel*. To the war there?

*Dancy*. Yes. There's to be a warrant out.

*Mabel*. A prosecution? Prison? Oh, go! Don't wait a minute! Go!

*Dancy*. Blast them!

*Mabel*. Oh, Ronny! Please! Please! Think what you'll want. I'll pack. Quick! No! Don't wait to take things. Have you got money?

*Dancy*. [Nodding] This'll be good-bye, then!

*Mabel*. [After a moment's struggle] Oh! No! No, no! I'll follow—I'll come out to you there.

*Dancy*. D'you mean you'll stick to me?

*Mabel*. Of course I'll stick to you.

*Dancy* seizes her hand and puts it to his lips. The bell rings.

*Mabel*. [In terror] Who's that?

The bell rings again. *Dancy* moves towards the door.

No! Let me!

She passes him and steals out to the outer door of the flat, where she stands listening. The bell rings again. She looks through the slit of the letter-box. While she is gone *Dancy* stands quite still, till she comes back.

*Mabel*. Through the letter-bog—I can see——It's—it's police. Oh! God! . . . Ronny! I can't bear it.

*Dancy*. Heads up, Mab! Don't show the brutes!

*Mabel*. Whatever happens, I'll go on loving you. If it's prison—I'll wait. Do you understand? I don't care what you did—I don't care! I'm just the same. I will be just the same when you come back to me.

*Dancy*. [Slowly] That's not in human nature.

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*Mabel*. It is. It's in Me.

*Dancy*. I've crocked up your life.

*Mabel*. No, no! Kiss me!

A long kiss, till the bell again startles them apart, and there is a loud knock.

*Dancy*. They'll break the door in. It's no good—we must open. Hold them in check a little. I want a minute or two.

*Mabel*. [Clasping him] Ronny! Oh, Ronny! It won't be for long—I'll be waiting! I'll be waiting—I swear it.

*Dancy*. Steady, Mab! [Putting her back from him] Now!

He opens the bedroom door, Left, and stands waiting for her to go. Summoning up her courage, she goes to open the outer door. A sudden change comes over *Dancy's* face; from being stony it grows almost maniacal.

*Dancy*. [Under his breath] No! No! By God! No! He goes out into the bedroom, closing the door behind him.

*Mabel* has now opened the outer door, and disclosed *inspector Dede* and the *young constable* who were summoned to Meldon Court on the night of the theft, and have been witnesses in the case. Their voices are heard.

*Mabel*. Yes?

*Inspector*. Captain Dancy in, madam?

*Mabel*. I am not quite sure—I don't think so.

*Inspector*. I wish to speak to him a minute. Stay here, Grover. Now, madam!

*Mabel*. Will you come in while I see?

She comes in, followed by the *inspector*.

*Inspector*. I should think you must be sure, madam. This is not a big place.

*Mabel*. He was changing his clothes to go out. I think he has gone.

*Inspector*. What's that door?

*Mabel*. To our bedroom.

*Inspector*. [Moving towards it] He'll be in there, then.

*Mabel*. What do you want, Inspector?

*Inspector*. [Melting] Well, madam, it's no use disguising it. I'm exceedingly sorry, but I've a warrant for his arrest.

*Mabel*. Inspector!

*Inspector*. I'm sure I've every sympathy for you, madam; but I must carry out my instructions.

*Mabel*. And break my heart?

*Inspector*. Well, madam, we're—we're not allowed to take that into consideration. The Law's the Law.

*Mabel*. Are you married?

*Inspector*. I am.

*Mabel*. If you—your wife—

The *inspector* raises his hand, deprecating.

[Speaking low] Just half an hour! Couldn't you? It's two lives—two whole lives! We've only been married four months. Come back in half an hour. It's such a little thing—-nobody will know. Nobody. Won't you?

*Inspector*. Now, madam—you must know my duty.

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*Mabel*. Inspector, I beseech you—just half an hour.

*Inspector*. No, no—don't you try to undermine me—I'm sorry for you; but don't you try it! [He tries the handle, then knocks at the door].

*Dancy's voice*. One minute!

*Inspector*. It's locked. [Sharply] Is there another door to that room?
Come, now—

The bell rings.

[Moving towards the door, Left; to the *constable*] Who's that out there?

*Constable*. A lady and gentleman, sir.

*Inspector*. What lady and— Stand by, Grover!

*Dancy's voice*. All right! You can come in now.

There is the noise of a lock being turned. And almost immediately the sound of a pistol shot in the bedroom. *Mabel* rushes to the door, tears it open, and disappears within, followed by the *inspector*, just as *Margaret Orme* and *Colford* come in from the passage, pursued by the *constable*. They, too, all hurry to the bedroom door and disappear for a moment; then *Colford* and *Margaret* reappear, supporting *Mabel*, who faints as they lay her on the sofa. *Colford* takes from her hand an envelope, and tears it open.

*Colford*. It's addressed to me. [He reads it aloud to *Margaret* in a low voice].

"*Dear Colford*,—This is the only decent thing I can do. It's too damned unfair to her. It's only another jump. A pistol keeps faith. Look after her, Colford—my love to her, and you."

*Margaret* gives a sort of choking sob, then, seeing the smelling bottle, she snatches it up, and turns to revive *Mabel*.

*Colford*. Leave her! The longer she's unconscious, the better.

*Inspector*. [Re-entering] This is a very serious business, sir.

*Colford*. [Sternly] Yes, Inspector; you've done for my best friend.

*Inspector*. I, sir? He shot himself.

*Colford*. Hara-kiri.

*Inspector*. Beg pardon?

*Colford*. [He points with the letter to *Mabel*] For her sake, and his own.

*Inspector*. [Putting out his hand] I'll want that, sir.

*Colford*. [Grimly] You shall have it read at the inquest. Till then— it's addressed to me, and I stick to it.

*Inspector*. Very well, sir. Do you want to have a look at him?

*Colford* passes quickly into the bedroom, followed by the *inspector*. *Margaret* remains kneeling beside *Mabel*.

*Colford* comes quickly back. *Margaret* looks up at him. He stands very still.

*Colford*. Neatly—through the heart.

*Margaret* [wildly] Keeps faith! We've all done that. It's not enough.

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*Colford*. [Looking down at *Mabel*] All right, old boy!

The *curtain* falls.

## WINDOWS

From the 5th Series of Plays

By John Galsworthy

## PERSONS OF THE PLAY

*Geoffrey march*..... Freelance in Literature
Joan march..... His Wife
Mary march..... Their Daughter
Johnny march..... Their Son
cook..... Their Cook
Mr Bly..... Their Window Cleaner
faith Bly..... His Daughter
blunter..... A Strange Young Man
Mr BARNADAS..... In Plain Clothes

The action passes in Geofrey March's House, Highgate-Spring-time.

*Act* I. Thursday morning. The dining-room-after breakfast.

*Act* II. Thursday, a fortnight later. The dining-room after lunch.

*Act* III. The same day. The dining-room-after dinner.

## ACT I

The *March's* dining-room opens through French windows on one of those gardens which seem infinite, till they are seen to be coterminous with the side walls of the house, and finite at the far end, because only the thick screen of acacias and sumachs prevents another house from being seen. The French and other windows form practically all the outer wall of that dining-room, and between them and the screen of trees lies the difference between the characters of Mr and Mrs March, with dots and dashes of Mary and Johnny thrown in. For instance, it has been formalised by *Mrs march* but the grass has not been cut by *Mr march*, and daffodils have sprung up there, which *Mrs* march desires for the dining-room, but of which *Mr march* says: "For God's

sake, Joan, let them grow." About half therefore are now in a bowl on the breakfast table, and the other half still in the grass, in the compromise essential to lasting domesticity. A hammock under the acacias shows that *Mary* lies there sometimes with her eyes on the gleam of sunlight that comes through: and a trail in the longish grass, bordered with cigarette ends, proves that *Johnny* tramps there with his eyes on the ground or the stars, according. But all this is by the way, because except for a yard or two of gravel terrace outside the windows, it is all painted on the backcloth. The marches have been at breakfast, and the round table, covered with blue linen, is thick with remains, seven baskets full. The room is gifted with old oak furniture: there is a door, stage Left, Forward; a hearth, where a fire is burning, and a high fender on which one can sit, stage Right, Middle; and in the wall below the fireplace, a service hatch covered with a sliding shutter, for the passage of dishes into the adjoining pantry. Against the wall, stage Left, is an old oak dresser,

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and a small writing table across the Left Back corner. *Mrs march* still sits behind the coffee pot, making up her daily list on tablets with a little gold pencil fastened to her wrist. She is personable, forty-eight, trim, well-dressed, and more matter-of-fact than seems plausible. *Mr march* is sitting in an armchair, sideways to the windows, smoking his pipe and reading his newspaper, with little explosions to which no one pays any attention, because it is his daily habit. He is a fine-looking man of fifty odd, with red-grey moustaches and hair, both of which stiver partly by nature and partly because his hands often push them up. *Mary* and *Johnny* are close to the fireplace, stage Right. Johnny sits on the fender, smoking a cigarette and warming his back. He is a commonplace looking young man, with a decided jaw, tall, neat, soulful, who has been in the war and writes poetry. *Mary* is less ordinary; you cannot tell exactly what is the matter with her. She too is tall, a little absent, fair, and well-looking. She has a small china dog in her hand, taken from the mantelpiece, and faces the audience. As the curtain rises she is saying in her soft and pleasant voice: "Well, what is the matter with us all, Johnny?"

Johnny. Stuck, as we were in the trenches—like china dogs. [He points to the ornament in her hand.]

*Mr march*. [Into his newspaper] Damn these people!

*Mary*. If there isn't an ideal left, Johnny, it's no good pretending one.

*Johnny*. That's what I'm saying: Bankrupt!

*Mary*. What do you want?

*Mrs march*. [To herself] Mutton cutlets. Johnny, will you be in to lunch? [*Johnny* shakes his head] Mary? [*Mary* nods] Geof?

*Mr march*. [Into his paper] Swine!

*Mrs march*. That'll be three. [To herself] Spinach.

*Johnny*. If you'd just missed being killed for three blooming years for no spiritual result whatever, you'd want something to bite on, Mary.

*Mrs march*. [Jotting] Soap.

*Johnny*. What price the little and weak, now? Freedom and self-determination, and all that?

*Mary*. Forty to one—no takers.

*Johnny*. It doesn't seem to worry you.

*Mary*. Well, what's the good?

*Johnny*. Oh, you're a looker on, Mary.

*Mr march*. [To his newspaper] Of all Godforsaken time-servers!

*Mary* is moved so lar as to turn and look over his shoulder a minute.

*Johnny*. Who?

*Mary*. Only the Old-Un.

*Mr march*. This is absolutely Prussian!

*Mrs march*. Soup, lobster, chicken salad. Go to Mrs Hunt's.

*Mr march*. And this fellow hasn't the nous to see that if ever there were a moment when it would pay us to take risks, and be generous—My hat! He ought to be—knighted! [Resumes his paper.]

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*Johnny*. [Muttering] You see, even Dad can't suggest chivalry without talking of payment for it. That shows how we've sunk.

*Mary*. [Contemptuously] Chivalry! Pouf! Chivalry was "off" even before the war, Johnny. Who wants chivalry?

*Johnny*. Of all shallow-pated humbug—that sneering at chivalry's the worst. Civilisation—such as we've got—is built on it.

*Mary*. [Airily] Then it's built on sand. [She sits beside him on the fender.]

*Johnny*. Sneering and smartness! Pah!

*Mary*. [Roused] I'll tell you what, Johnny, it's mucking about with chivalry that makes your poetry rotten. [*Johnny* seizes her arm and twists it] Shut up—that hurts. [*Johnny* twists it more] You brute! [*Johnny* lets her arm go.]

*Johnny*. Ha! So you don't mind taking advantage of the fact that you can cheek me with impunity, because you're weaker. You've given the whole show away, Mary. Abolish chivalry and I'll make you sit up.

*Mrs march*. What are you two quarrelling about? Will you bring home cigarettes, Johnny—not Bogdogunov's Mamelukes—something more Anglo-American.

*Johnny*. All right! D'you want any more illustrations, Mary?

*Mary*. Pig! [She has risen and stands rubbing her arm and recovering her placidity, which is considerable.]

*Mrs march*. Geof, can you eat preserved peaches?

*Mr march*. Hell! What a policy! Um?

*Mrs march*. Can you eat preserved peaches?

*Mr march*. Yes. [To his paper] Making the country stink in the eyes of the world!

*Mary*. Nostrils, Dad, nostrils.

*Mr march* wriggles, half hearing.

*Johnny*. [Muttering] Shallow idiots! Thinking we can do without chivalry!

*Mrs march*. I'm doing my best to get a parlourmaid, to-day, Mary, but these breakfast things won't clear themselves.

*Mary*. I'll clear them, Mother.

*Mrs march*. Good! [She gets up. At the door] Knitting silk.

She goes out.

*Johnny*. Mother hasn't an ounce of idealism. You might make her see stars, but never in the singular.

*Mr march*. [To his paper] If God doesn't open the earth soon—

*Mary*. Is there anything special, Dad?

*Mr march*. This sulphurous government. [He drops the paper] Give me a match, Mary.

As soon as the paper is out of his hands he becomes a different—an affable man.

*Mary*. [Giving him a match] D'you mind writing in here this morning, Dad? Your study hasn't been done. There's nobody but Cook.

*Mr march*. [Lighting his pipe] Anywhere.

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He slews the armchair towards the fire.

*Mary*. I'll get your things, then.

She goes out.

*Johnny*. [Still on the fender] What do you say, Dad? Is civilisation built on chivalry or on self-interest?

*Mr march*. The question is considerable, Johnny. I should say it was built on contract, and jerry-built at that.

*Johnny*. Yes; but why do we keep contracts when we can break them with advantage and impunity?

*Mr march*. But do we keep them?

*Johnny*. Well—say we do; otherwise you'll admit there isn't such a thing as civilisation at all. But why do we keep them? For instance, why don't we make Mary and Mother work for us like Kafir women? We could lick them into it. Why did we give women the vote? Why free slaves; why anything decent for the little and weak?

*Mr march*. Well, you might say it was convenient for people living in communities.

*Johnny*. I don't think it's convenient at all. I should like to make Mary sweat. Why not jungle law, if there's nothing in chivalry.

*Mr march*. Chivalry is altruism, Johnny. Of course it's quite a question whether altruism isn't enlightened self-interest!

*Johnny*. Oh! Damn!

The lank and shirt-sleeved figure of *Mr Bly*, with a pail of water and cloths, has entered, and stands near the window, Left.

*Bly*. Beg pardon, Mr March; d'you mind me cleanin' the winders here?

*Mr march*. Not a bit.

*Johnny*. Bankrupt of ideals. That's it!

*Mr Bly* stares at him, and puts his pail down by the window.

*Mary* has entered with her father's writing materials which she puts on a stool beside him.

*Mary*. Here you are, Dad! I've filled up the ink pot. Do be careful! Come on, Johnny!

She looks curiously at *Mr Bly*, who has begun operations at the bottom of the left-hand window, and goes, followed by *Johnny*.

*Mr march*. [Relighting his pipe and preparing his materials] What do you think of things, Mr Bly?

*Bly*. Not much, sir.

*Mr march*. Ah! [He looks up at *Mr Bly*, struck by his large philosophical eyes and moth-eaten moustache] Nor I.

*Bly*. I rather thought that, sir, from your writin's.

*Mr march*. Oh! Do you read?

*Bly*. I was at sea, once—formed the 'abit.

*Mr march*. Read any of my novels?

*Bly*. Not to say all through—I've read some of your articles in the Sunday papers, though. Make you think!

*Mr march*. I'm at sea now—don't see dry land anywhere, Mr Bly.

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*Bly*. [With a smile] That's right.

*Mr march*. D'you find that the general impression?

*Bly*. No. People don't think. You 'ave to 'ave some cause for thought.

*Mr march*. Cause enough in the papers.

*Bly*. It's nearer 'ome with me. I've often thought I'd like a talk with you, sir. But I'm keepin' you. [He prepares to swab the pane.]

*Mr march*. Not at all. I enjoy it. Anything to put off work.

*Bly*. [Looking at *Mr march*, then giving a wipe at the window] What's drink to one is drought to another. I've seen two men take a drink out of the same can—one die of it and the other get off with a pain in his stomach.

*Mr march*. You've seen a lot, I expect.

*Bly*. Ah! I've been on the beach in my day. [He sponges at the window] It's given me a way o' lookin' at things that I don't find in other people. Look at the 'Ome Office. They got no philosophy.

*Mr march*. [Pricking his ears] What? Have you had dealings with them?

*Bly*. Over the reprieve that was got up for my daughter. But I'm keepin' you.

He swabs at the window, but always at the same pane, so that he does not advance at all.

*Mr march*. Reprieve?

*Bly*. Ah! She was famous at eighteen. The Sunday Mercury was full of her, when she was in prison.

*Mr march*. [Delicately] Dear me! I'd no idea.

*Bly*. She's out now; been out a fortnight. I always say that fame's ephemereal. But she'll never settle to that weavin'. Her head got turned a bit.

*Mr march*. I'm afraid I'm in the dark, Mr Bly.

*Bly*. [Pausing—dipping his sponge in the pail and then standing with it in his hand] Why! Don't you remember the Bly case? They sentenced 'er to be 'anged by the neck until she was dead, for smotherin' her baby. She was only eighteen at the time of speakin'.

*Mr march*. Oh! yes! An inhuman business!

*Bly*. All! The jury recommended ’er to mercy. So they reduced it to Life.

*Mr march*. Life! Sweet Heaven!

*Bly*. That’s what I said; so they give her two years. I don’t hold with the Sunday Mercury, but it put that over. It’s a misfortune to a girl to be good-lookin’.

*Mr march*. [Rumpling his hair] No, no! Dash it all! Beauty’s the only thing left worth living for.

*Bly*. Well, I like to see green grass and a blue sky; but it’s a mistake in a ‘uman bein’. Look at any young chap that’s good-lookin’—’e’s doomed to the screen, or hair-dressin’. Same with the girls. My girl went into an ’airdresser’s at seventeen and in six months she was in trouble. When I saw ’er with a rope round her neck, as you might say, I said to meself: “Bly,” I said, “you’re responsible for this. If she ’adn’t been good-lookin’—it’d never ’eve ’appened.”

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During this speech *Mary* has come in with a tray, to clear the breakfast, and stands unnoticed at the dining-table, arrested by the curious words of *Mr Bly*.

*Mr march*. Your wife might not have thought that you were wholly the cause, Mr Bly.

*Bly*. Ah! My wife. She's passed on. But Faith—that's my girl's name—she never was like 'er mother; there's no 'eredity in 'er on that side.

*Mr march*. What sort of girl is she?

*Bly*. One for colour—likes a bit o' music—likes a dance, and a flower.

*Mary*. [Interrupting softly] Dad, I was going to clear, but I'll come back later.

*Mr march*. Come here and listen to this! Here's a story to get your blood up! How old was the baby, Mr Bly?

*Bly*. Two days—'ardly worth mentionin'. They say she 'ad the 'ighstrikes after—an' when she comes to she says: "I've saved my baby's life." An' that's true enough when you come to think what that sort o' baby goes through as a rule; dragged up by somebody else's hand, or took away by the Law. What can a workin' girl do with a baby born under the rose, as they call it? Wonderful the difference money makes when it comes to bein' outside the Law.

*Mr march*. Right you are, Mr Bly. God's on the side of the big battalions.

*Bly*. Ah! Religion! [His eyes roll philosophically] Did you ever read 'Aigel?

*Mr march*. Hegel, or Haekel?

*Bly*. Yes; with an aitch. There's a balance abart 'im that I like. There's no doubt the Christian religion went too far. Turn the other cheek! What oh! An' this Anti-Christ, Neesha, what came in with the war—he went too far in the other direction. Neither of 'em practical men. You've got to strike a balance, and foller it.

*Mr march*. Balance! Not much balance about us. We just run about and jump Jim Crow.

*Bly*. [With a perfunctory wipe] That's right; we 'aven't got a faith these days. But what's the use of tellin' the Englishman to act like an angel. He ain't either an angel or a blond beast. He's between the two, an 'ermumphradite. Take my daughter——If I was a blond beast, I'd turn 'er out to starve; if I was an angel, I'd starve meself to learn her the piano. I don't do either. Why? Becos my instincts tells me not.

*Mr march*. Yes, but my doubt is whether our instincts at this moment of the world's history are leading us up or down.

*Bly*. What is up and what is down? Can you answer me that? Is it up or down to get so soft that you can't take care of yourself?

*Mr march*. Down.

*Bly*. Well, is it up or down to get so 'ard that you can't take care of others?

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*Mr march*. Down.

*Bly*. Well, there you are!

*March*. Then our instincts are taking us down?

*Bly*. Nao. They're strikin' a balance, unbeknownst, all the time.

*Mr march*. You're a philosopher, Mr Bly.

*Bly*. [Modestly] Well, I do a bit in that line, too. In my opinion Nature made the individual believe he's goin' to live after'e's dead just to keep 'im livin' while 'es alive—otherwise he'd 'a died out.

*Mr march*. Quite a thought—quite a thought!

*Bly*. But I go one better than Nature. Follow your instincts is my motto.

*Mr march*. Excuse me, Mr Bly, I think Nature got hold of that before you.

*Bly*. [Slightly chilled] Well, I'm keepin' you.

*Mr march*. Not at all. You're a believer in conscience, or the little voice within. When my son was very small, his mother asked him once if he didn't hear a little voice within, telling him what was right. [*Mr march* touches his diaphragm] And he said "I often hear little voices in here, but they never say anything." [*Mr Bly* cannot laugh, but he smiles] Mary, Johnny must have been awfully like the Government.

*Bly*. As a matter of fact, I've got my daughter here—in obeyance.

*Mr march*. Where? I didn't catch.

*Bly*. In the kitchen. Your Cook told me you couldn't get hold of an 'ouse parlour-maid. So I thought it was just a chance—you bein' broadminded.

*Mr march*. Oh! I see. What would your mother say, Mary?

*Mary*. Mother would say: "Has she had experience?"

*Bly*. I've told you about her experience.

*Mr march*. Yes, but—as a parlour-maid.

*Bly*. Well! She can do hair. [Observing the smile exchanged between *Mr march* and *Mary*] And she's quite handy with a plate.

*Mr march*. [Tentatively] I'm a little afraid my wife would feel—

*Bly*. You see, in this weavin' shop—all the girls 'ave 'ad to be in trouble, otherwise they wouldn't take 'em. [Apologetically towards *Mary*] It's a kind of a disorderly 'ouse without the disorders. Excusin' the young lady's presence.

*Mary*. Oh! You needn't mind me, Mr Bly.

*Mr march*. And so you want her to come here? H'm!

*Bly*. Well I remember when she was a little bit of a thing—no higher than my knee—[He holds out his hand.]

*Mr march*. [Suddenly moved] My God! yes. They've all been that. [To *Mary*] Where's your mother?

*Mary*. Gone to Mrs Hunt's. Suppose she's engaged one, Dad?

*Mr march*. Well, it's only a month's wages.

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*Mary*. [Softly] She won't like it.

*Mr march*. Well, let's see her, Mr Bly; let's see her, if you don't mind.

*Bly*. Oh, I don't mind, sir, and she won't neither; she's used to bein' inspected by now. Why! she 'ad her bumps gone over just before she came out!

*Mr march*. [Touched on the raw again] H'm! Too bad! Mary, go and fetch her.

*Mary*, with a doubting smile, goes out. [Rising] You might give me the details of that trial, Mr Bly. I'll see if I can't write something that'll make people sit up. That's the way to send Youth to hell! How can a child who's had a rope round her neck—!

*Bly*. [Who has been fumbling in his pocket, produces some yellow paper-cuttings clipped together] Here's her references—the whole literature of the case. And here's a letter from the chaplain in one of the prisons sayin' she took a lot of interest in him; a nice young man, I believe. [He suddenly brushes a tear out of his eye with the back of his hand] I never thought I could 'a felt like I did over her bein' in prison. Seemed a crool senseless thing—that pretty girl o' mine. All over a baby that hadn't got used to bein' alive. Tain't as if she'd been follerin' her instincts; why, she missed that baby something crool.

*Mr march*. Of course, human life—even an infant's——

*Bly*. I know you've got to 'ave a close time for it. But when you come to think how they take 'uman life in Injia and Ireland, and all those other places, it seems 'ard to come down like a cartload o' bricks on a bit of a girl that's been carried away by a moment's abiration.

*Mr march*. [Who is reading the cuttings] H'm! What hypocrites we are!

*Bly*. Ah! And 'oo can tell 'oo's the father? She never give us his name. I think the better of 'er for that.

*Mr march*. Shake hands, Mr Bly. So do I. [*Bly* wipes his hand, and *Mr march* shakes it] Loyalty's loyalty—especially when we men benefit by it.

*Bly*. That's right, sir.

*Mary* has returned with *faith Bly*, who stands demure and pretty on the far side of the table, her face an embodiment of the pathetic watchful prison faculty of adapting itself to whatever may be best for its owner at the moment. At this moment it is obviously best for her to look at the ground, and yet to take in the faces of *Mr march* and *Mary* without their taking her face in. A moment, for all, of considerable embarrassment.

*Mr march*. [Suddenly] We'll, here we are!

The remark attracts *faith*; she raises her eyes to his softly with a little smile, and drops them again.

So you want to be our parlour-maid?

*Faith*. Yes, please.

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*Mr march*. Well, Faith can remove mountains; but—er—I don't know if she can clear tables.

*Bly*. I've been tellin' Mr March and the young lady what you're capable of. Show 'em what you can do with a plate.

*Faith* takes the tray from the sideboard and begins to clear the table, mainly by the light of nature. After a glance, *Mr march* looks out of the window and drums his fingers on the uncleaned pane. *Mr Bly* goes on with his cleaning. *Mary*, after watching from the hearth, goes up and touches her father's arm.

*Mary*. [Between him and *Mr Bly* who is bending over his bucket, softly] You're not watching, Dad.

*Mr march*. It's too pointed.

*Mary*. We've got to satisfy mother.

*Mr march*. I can satisfy her better if I don't look.

*Mary*. You're right.

> *Faith* has paused a moment and is watching them. As *Mary* turns, she resumes her operations. *Mary* joins, and helps her finish clearing, while the two men converse.

*Bly*. Fine weather, sir, for the time of year.

*Mr march*. It is. The trees are growing.

*Bly*. All! I wouldn't be surprised to see a change of Government before long. I've seen 'uge trees in Brazil without any roots—seen 'em come down with a crash.

*Mr march*. Good image, Mr Bly. Hope you're right!

*Bly*. Well, Governments! They're all the same—Butter when they're out of power, and blood when they're in. And Lord! 'ow they do abuse other Governments for doin' the things they do themselves. Excuse me, I'll want her dosseer back, sir, when you've done with it.

*Mr march*. Yes, yes. [He turns, rubbing his hands at the cleared table]
Well, that seems all right! And you can do hair?

*Faith*. Oh! Yes, I can do hair. [Again that little soft look, and smile so carefully adjusted.]

*Mr march*. That's important, don't you think, Mary? [*Mary*, accustomed to candour, smiles dubiously.] [Brightly] Ah! And cleaning plate? What about that?

*Faith*. Of course, if I had the opportunity—

*Mary*. You haven't—so far?

*Faith*. Only tin things.

*Mr march*. [Feeling a certain awkwardness] Well, I daresay we can find some for you. Can you—er—be firm on the telephone?

*Faith*. Tell them you're engaged when you're not? Oh! yes.

*Mr march*. Excellent! Let's see, Mary, what else is there?

*Mary*. Waiting, and house work.

*Mr march*. Exactly.

*Faith*. I'm very quick. I—I'd like to come. [She looks down] I don't care for what I'm doing now. It makes you feel your position.

# Page 661

*Mary*. Aren't they nice to you?

*Faith*. Oh! yes—kind; but— [She looks up] it's against my instincts.

*Mr march*. Oh! [Quizzically] You've got a disciple, Mr Bly.

*Bly*. [Rolling his eyes at his daughter] Ah! but you mustn't 'ave instincts here, you know. You've got a chance, and you must come to stay, and do yourself credit.

*Faith*. [Adapting her face] Yes, I know, I'm very lucky.

*Mr march*. [Deprecating thanks and moral precept] That's all right!
Only, Mr Bly, I can't absolutely answer for Mrs March. She may think—

*Mary*. There is Mother; I heard the door.

*Bly*. [Taking up his pail] I quite understand, sir; I've been a married man myself. It's very queer the way women look at things. I'll take her away now, and come back presently and do these other winders. You can talk it over by yourselves. But if you do see your way, sir, I shan't forget it in an 'urry. To 'ave the responsibility of her—really, it's dreadful.

FAITH's face has grown sullen during this speech, but it clears up in another little soft look at *Mr march*, as she and *Mr Bly* go out.

*Mr march*. Well, Mary, have I done it?

*Mary*. You have, Dad.

*Mr march*. [Running his hands through his hair] Pathetic little figure!
Such infernal inhumanity!

*Mary*. How are you going to put it to mother?

*Mr march*. Tell her the story, and pitch it strong.

*Mary*. Mother's not impulsive.

*Mr march*. We must tell her, or she'll think me mad.

*Mary*. She'll do that, anyway, dear.

*Mr march*. Here she is! Stand by!

He runs his arm through MARY's, and they sit on the fender, at bay. *Mrs march* enters, Left.

*Mr march*.  Well, what luck?

*Mrs march*.  None.

*Mr march*. [Unguardedly] Good!

*Mrs march*.  What?

*Mrs march*. [Cheerfully] Well, the fact is, Mary and I have caught one for ’you; Mr Bly’s daughter—

*Mrs march*.  Are you out of your senses?  Don’t you know that she’s the girl who—

*Mr march*.  That’s it.  She wants a lift.

*Mrs march*.  Geof!

*Mr march*.  Well, don’t we want a maid?

*Mrs march*. [Ineffably] Ridiculous!

*Mr march*.  We tested her, didn’t we, Mary?

*Mrs march*. [Crossing to the bell, and ringing] You’ll just send for Mr Bly and get rid of her again.

*Mr march*.  Joan, if we comfortable people can’t put ourselves a little out of the way to give a helping hand—

# Page 662

*Mrs march*. To girls who smother their babies?

*Mr march*. Joan, I revolt. I won't be a hypocrite and a Pharisee.

*Mrs march*. Well, for goodness sake let me be one.

*Mary*. [As the door opens]. Here's Cook!

*Cook* stands—sixty, stout, and comfortable with a crumpled smile.

*Cook*. Did you ring, ma'am?

*Mr march*. We're in a moral difficulty, Cook, so naturally we come to you.

*Cook* beams.

*Mrs march*. [Impatiently] Nothing of the sort, Cook; it's a question of common sense.

*Cook*. Yes, ma'am.

*Mrs march*. That girl, Faith Bly, wants to come here as parlour-maid.
Absurd!

*March*. You know her story, Cook? I want to give the poor girl a chance.
Mrs March thinks it's taking chances. What do you say?

*Cock*. Of course, it is a risk, sir; but there! you've got to take 'em to get maids nowadays. If it isn't in the past, it's in the future. I daresay I could learn 'er.

*Mrs march*. It's not her work, Cook, it's her instincts. A girl who smothered a baby that she oughtn't to have had—

*Mr march*. [Remonstrant] If she hadn't had it how could she have smothered it?

*Cook*. [Soothingly] Perhaps she's repented, ma'am.

*Mrs march*. Of course she's repented. But did you ever know repentance change anybody, Cook?

*Cook*. [Smiling] Well, generally it's a way of gettin' ready for the next.

*Mrs march*. Exactly.

*Mr march*. If we never get another chance because we repent—

*Cook*. I always think of Master Johnny, ma'am, and my jam; he used to repent so beautiful, dear little feller—such a conscience! I never could bear to lock it away.

*Mrs march*. Cook, you're wandering. I'm surprised at your encouraging the idea; I really am.

Cook plaits her hands.

*Mr march*. Cook's been in the family longer than I have—haven't you, Cook? [*Cook* beams] She knows much more about a girl like that than we do.

*Cook*. We had a girl like her, I remember, in your dear mother's time, Mr Geoffrey.

*Mr march*. How did she turn out?

*Cook*. Oh! She didn't.

*Mrs march*. There!

*Mr march*. Well, I can't bear behaving like everybody else. Don't you think we might give her a chance, Cook?

*Cook*. My 'eart says yes, ma'am.

*Mr march*. Ha!

*Cook*. And my 'ead says no, sir.

*Mrs march*. Yes!

*Mr march*. Strike your balance, Cook.

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*Cook* involuntarily draws her joined hands sharply in upon her amplitude.

Well? . . .  I didn't catch the little voice within.

*Cook*.  Ask Master Johnny, sir; he's been in the war.

*Mr march*. [To *Mary*] Get Johnny.

*Mary* goes out.

*Mrs march*.  What on earth has the war to do with it?

*Cook*.  The things he tells me, ma'am, is too wonderful for words.  He's 'ad to do with prisoners and generals, every sort of 'orror.

*Mr march*.  Cook's quite right.  The war destroyed all our ideals and probably created the baby.

*Mrs march*.  It didn't smother it; or condemn the girl.

*Mr march*. [Running his hands through his hair] The more I think of that—! [He turns away.]

*Mrs march*. [Indicating her husband] You see, Cook, that's the mood in which I have to engage a parlour-maid.  What am I to do with your master?

*Cook*.  It's an 'ealthy rage, ma'am.

*Mrs march*.  I'm tired of being the only sober person in this house.

*Cook*. [Reproachfully] Oh! ma'am, I never touch a drop.

*Mrs march*.  I didn't mean anything of that sort.  But they do break out so.

*Cook*.  Not Master Johnny.

*Mrs march*.  Johnny!  He's the worst of all.  His poetry is nothing but one long explosion.

*Mr march*. [Coming from the window] I say We ought to have faith and jump.

*Mrs march*.  If we do have Faith, we shall jump.

*Cook*. [Blankly] Of course, in the Bible they 'ad faith, and just look what it did to them!

*Mr march*.  I mean faith in human instincts, human nature, Cook.

*Cook*. [Scandalised] Oh! no, sir, not human nature; I never let that get the upper hand.

*Mr march*. You talk to Mr Bly. He's a remarkable man.

*Cook*. I do, sir, every fortnight when he does the kitchen windows.

*Mr march*. Well, doesn't he impress you?

*Cook*. Ah! When he's got a drop o' stout in 'im—Oh! dear! [She smiles placidly.]

*Johnny* has come in.

*Mr march*. Well, Johnny, has Mary told you?

*Mrs march*. [Looking at his face] Now, my dear boy, don't be hasty and foolish!

*Johnny*. Of course you ought to take her, Mother.

*Mrs march*. [Fixing him] Have you seen her, Johnny?

*Johnny*. She's in the hall, poor little devil, waiting for her sentence.

*Mrs march*. There are plenty of other chances, Johnny. Why on earth should we—?

*Johnny*. Mother, it's just an instance. When something comes along that takes a bit of doing—Give it to the other chap!

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*Mr march*. Bravo, Johnny!

*Mrs march*. [Drily] Let me see, which of us will have to put up with her shortcomings—-Johnny or I?

*Mary*. She looks quick, Mother.

*Mrs march*. Girls pick up all sorts of things in prison. We can hardly expect her to be honest. You don't mind that, I suppose?

*Johnny*. It's a chance to make something decent out of her.

*Mrs march*. I can't understand this passion for vicarious heroism, Johnny.

*Johnny*. Vicarious!

*Mrs march*. Well, where do you come in? You'll make poems about the injustice of the Law. Your father will use her in a novel. She'll wear Mary's blouses, and everybody will be happy—except Cook and me.

*Mr march*. Hang it all, Joan, you might be the Great Public itself!

*Mrs march*. I am—get all the kicks and none of the ha'pence.

*Johnny*. We'll all help you.

*Mrs march*. For Heaven's sake—no, Johnny!

*Mr march*. Well, make up your mind!

*Mrs march*. It was made up long ago.

*Johnny*. [Gloomily] The more I see of things the more disgusting they seem. I don't see what we're living for. All right. Chuck the girl out, and let's go rooting along with our noses in the dirt.

*Mr march*. Steady, Johnny!

*Johnny*. Well, Dad, there was one thing anyway we learned out there—
When a chap was in a hole—to pull him out, even at a risk.

*Mrs march*. There are people who—the moment you pull them out—jump in again.

*Mary*. We can't tell till we've tried, Mother.

*Cook*. It's wonderful the difference good food'll make, ma'am.

*Mrs march*. Well, you're all against me. Have it your own way, and when you regret it —remember me!

*Mr march*. We will—we will! That's settled, then. Bring her in and tell her. We'll go on to the terrace.

He goes out through the window, followed by *Johnny*.

*Mary*. [Opening the door] Come in, please.

*Faith* enters and stands beside *cook*, close to the door. *Mary* goes out.

*Mrs march*. [Matter of fact in defeat as in victory] You want to come to us, I hear.

*Faith*. Yes.

*Mrs march*. And you don't know much?

*Faith*. No.

*Cook*. [Softly] Say ma'am, dearie.

*Mrs march*. Cook is going to do her best for you. Are you going to do yours for us?

*Faith*. [With a quick look up] Yes—ma'am.

*Mrs march*. Can you begin at once?

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*Faith*. Yes.

*Mrs march*. Well, then, Cook will show you where things are kept, and how to lay the table and that. Your wages will be thirty until we see where we are. Every other Sunday, and Thursday afternoon. What about dresses?

*Faith*. [Looking at her dress] I've only got this—I had it before, of course, it hasn't been worn.

*Mrs march*. Very neat. But I meant for the house. You've no money, I suppose?

*Faith*. Only one pound thirteen, ma'am.

*Mrs march*. We shall have to find you some dresses, then. Cook will take you to-morrow to Needham's. You needn't wear a cap unless you like. Well, I hope you'll get on. I'll leave you with Cook now.

After one look at the girl, who is standing motionless, she goes out.

*Faith*. [With a jerk, as if coming out of plaster of Paris] She's never been in prison!

*Cook*. [Comfortably] Well, my dear, we can't all of us go everywhere, 'owever 'ard we try!

She is standing back to the dresser, and turns to it, opening the right-hand drawer.

*Cook*. Now, 'ere's the wine. The master likes 'is glass. And 'ere's the spirits in the tantaliser 'tisn't ever kept locked, in case Master Johnny should bring a friend in. Have you noticed Master Johnny? [*Faith* nods] Ah! He's a dear boy; and wonderful high-principled since he's been in the war. He'll come to me sometimes and say: "Cook, we're all going to the devil!" They think 'ighly of 'im as a poet. He spoke up for you beautiful.

*Faith*. Oh! He spoke up for me?

*Cook*. Well, of course they had to talk you over.

*Faith*. I wonder if they think I've got feelings.

*Cook*. [Regarding her moody, pretty face] Why! We all have feelin's!

*Faith*. Not below three hundred a year.

*Cook*. [Scandalised] Dear, dear! Where were you educated?

*Faith*. I wasn't.

*Cook*. Tt! Well—it's wonderful what a change there is in girls since my young days [Pulling out a drawer] Here's the napkins. You change the master's every day at least because of his moustache and the others every two days, but always clean ones Sundays. Did you keep Sundays in there?

*Faith*. [Smiling] Yes. Longer chapel.

*Cook*. It'll be a nice change for you, here. They don't go to Church; they're agnosticals. [Patting her shoulder] How old are you?

*Faith*. Twenty.

*Cook*. Think of that—and such a life! Now, dearie, I'm your friend. Let the present bury the past—as the sayin' is. Forget all about yourself, and you'll be a different girl in no time.

*Faith*. Do you want to be a different woman?

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*Cook* is taken flat aback by so sudden a revelation of the pharisaism of which she has not been conscious.

*Cook*. Well! You are sharp! [Opening another dresser drawer] Here's the vinegar! And here's the sweets, and [rather anxiously] you mustn't eat them.

*Faith*. I wasn't in for theft.

*Cook*. [Shocked at such rudimentary exposure of her natural misgivings] No, no! But girls have appetites.

*Faith*. They didn't get much chance where I've been.

*Cook*. Ah! You must tell me all about it. Did you have adventures?

*Faith*. There isn't such a thing in a prison.

*Cook*. You don't say! Why, in the books they're escapin' all the time. But books is books; I've always said so. How were the men?

*Faith*. Never saw a man—only a chaplain.

*Cook*. Dear, dear! They must be quite fresh to you, then! How long was it?

*Faith*. Two years.

*Cook*. And never a day out? What did you do all the time? Did they learn you anything?

*Faith*. Weaving. That's why I hate it.

*Cook*. Tell me about your poor little baby. I'm sure you meant it for the best.

*Faith*. [Sardonically] Yes; I was afraid they'd make it a ward in Chancery.

*Cook*. Oh! dear—what things do come into your head! Why! No one can take a baby from its mother.

*Faith*. Except the Law.

*Cook*. Tt! Tt! Well! Here's the pickled onions. Miss Mary loves 'em! Now then, let me see you lay the cloth.

She takes a tablecloth out, hands it to *faith*, and while the girl begins to unfold the cloth she crosses to the service shutter.

And here's where we pass the dishes through into the pantry.

The door is opened, and *Mrs March's* voice says: "Cook—a minute!"

[Preparing to go] Salt cellars one at each corner—four, and the peppers. [From the door] Now the decanters. Oh! you'll soon get on. [*Mrs march* "Cook!"] Yes, ma'am.

She goes. *Faith*, left alone, stands motionless, biting her pretty lip, her eyes mutinous. Hearing footsteps, she looks up. *Mr Bly*, with his pail and cloths, appears outside.

*Bly*. [Preparing to work, while *faith* prepares to set the salt cellars] So you've got it! You never know your luck. Up to-day and down to-morrow. I'll 'ave a glass over this to-night. What d'you get?

*Faith*. Thirty.

*Bly*. It's not the market price, still, you're not the market article. Now, put a good heart into it and get to know your job; you'll find Cook full o' philosophy if you treat her right—-she can make a dumplin' with anybody. But look 'ere; you confine yourself to the ladies!

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*Faith*. I don't want your advice, father.

*Bly*. I know parents are out of date; still, I've put up with a lot on your account, so gimme a bit of me own back.

*Faith*. I don't know whether I shall like this. I've been shut up so long. I want to see some life.

*Bly*. Well, that's natural. But I want you to do well. I suppose you'll be comin' 'ome to fetch your things to-night?

*Faith*. Yes.

*Bly*. I'll have a flower for you. What'd you like—daffydils?

*Faith*. No; one with a scent to it.

*Bly*. I'll ask at Mrs Bean's round the corner.

She'll pick 'em out from what's over. Never 'ad much nose for a flower meself. I often thought you'd like a flower when you was in prison.

*Faith*. [A little touched] Did you? Did you really?

*Bly*. Ah! I suppose I've drunk more glasses over your bein' in there than over anything that ever 'appened to me. Why! I couldn't relish the war for it! And I suppose you 'ad none to relish. Well, it's over. So, put an 'eart into it.

*Faith*. I'll try.

*Bly*. "There's compensation for everything," 'Aigel says. At least, if it wasn't 'Aigel it was one o' the others. I'll move on to the study now. Ah! He's got some winders there lookin' right over the country. And a wonderful lot o' books, if you feel inclined for a read one of these days.

*Cook's* Voice. Faith!

*Faith* sets down the salt cellar in her hand, puts her tongue out a very little, and goes out into the hall. *Mr Bly* is gathering up his pail and cloths when *Mr march* enters at the window.

*Mr march*. So it's fixed up, Mr Bly.

*Bly*. [Raising himself] I'd like to shake your 'and, sir. [They shake hands] It's a great weight off my mind.

*Mr march*. It's rather a weight on my wife's, I'm afraid. But we must hope for the best. The country wants rain, but—I doubt if we shall get it with this Government.

*Bly*. Ah! We want the good old times-when you could depend on the seasons. The further you look back the more dependable the times get; 'ave you noticed that, sir?

*Mr march*. [Suddenly] Suppose they'd hanged your daughter, Mr Bly. What would you have done?

*Bly*. Well, to be quite frank, I should 'ave got drunk on it.

*Mr march*. Public opinion's always in advance of the Law. I think your daughter's a most pathetic little figure.

*Bly*. Her looks are against her. I never found a man that didn't.

*Mr march*. [A little disconcerted] Well, we'll try and give her a good show here.

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*Bly*. [Taking up his pail] I'm greatly obliged; she'll appreciate anything you can do for her. [He moves to the door and pauses there to say] Fact is—her winders wants cleanin', she 'ad a dusty time in there.

*Mr march*. I'm sure she had.

*Mr Bly* passes out, and *Mr march* busies himself in gathering up his writing things preparatory to seeking his study. While he is so engaged *faith* comes in. Glancing at him, she resumes her placing of the decanters, as *Johnny* enters by the window, and comes down to his father by the hearth.

*Johnny*. [Privately] If you haven't begun your morning, Dad, you might just tell me what you think of these verses.

> He puts a sheet of notepaper before his father, who takes it and begins to con over the verses thereon, while *Johnny* looks carefully at his nails.

*Mr march*. Er—I—I like the last line awfully, Johnny.

*Johnny*. [Gloomily] What about the other eleven?

*Mr march*. [Tentatively] Well—old man, I—er—think perhaps it'd be stronger if they were out.

*Johnny*. Good God!

He takes back the sheet of paper, clutches his brow, and crosses to the door. As he passes *faith*, she looks up at him with eyes full of expression. *Johnny* catches the look, jibs ever so little, and goes out.

*Cook's voice*. [Through the door, which is still ajar] Faith!

*Faith* puts the decanters on the table, and goes quickly out.

*Mr march*. [Who has seen this little by-play—to himself—in a voice of dismay] Oh! oh! I wonder!

*Curtain*.

# ACT II

A fortnight later in the *March's* dining-room; a day of violent April showers. Lunch is over and the table littered with, remains—twelve baskets full.

Mr march and *Mary* have lingered. *Mr march* is standing by the hearth where a fire is burning, filling a fountain pen. *Mary* sits at the table opposite, pecking at a walnut.

Mr march. [Examining his fingers] What it is to have an inky present! Suffer with me, Mary!

*Mary*. "Weep ye no more, sad Fountains!
Why need ye flow so fast?"

*Mr march*. [Pocketing his pen] Coming with me to the British Museum? I want to have a look at the Assyrian reliefs.

*Mary*. Dad, have you noticed Johnny?

*Mr march*. I have.

*Mary*. Then only Mother hasn't.

*Mr march*. I've always found your mother extremely good at seeming not to notice things, Mary.

*Mary*. Faith! She's got on very fast this fortnight.

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*Mr march*. The glad eye, Mary. I got it that first morning.

*Mary*. You, Dad?

*Mr march*. No, no! Johnny got it, and I got him getting it.

*Mary*. What are you going to do about it?

*Mr march*. What does one do with a glad eye that belongs to some one else?

*Mary*. [Laughing] No. But, seriously, Dad, Johnny's not like you and me. Why not speak to Mr Bly?

*Mr march*. Mr Bly's eyes are not glad.

*Mary*. Dad! Do be serious! Johnny's capable of anything except a sense of humour.

*Mr march*. The girl's past makes it impossible to say anything to her.

*Mary*. Well, I warn you. Johnny's very queer just now; he's in the "lose the world to save your soul" mood. It really is too bad of that girl. After all, we did what most people wouldn't.

*Mr march*. Come! Get your hat on, Mary, or we shan't make the Tube before the next shower.

*Mary*. [Going to the door] Something must be done.

*Mr march*. As you say, something—Ah! Mr Bly!

*Mr Bly*, in precisely the same case as a fortnight ago, with his pail and cloths, is coming in.

*Bly*. Afternoon, sir! Shall I be disturbing you if I do the winders here?

*Mr march*. Not at all.

*Mr Bly* crosses to the windows.

*Mary*. [Pointing to *Mr* BLY's back] Try!

*Bly*. Showery, sir.

*Mr march*. Ah!

*Bly*. Very tryin' for winders. [Resting] My daughter givin' satisfaction, I hope?

*Mr march*. [With difficulty] Er—in her work, I believe, coming on well. But the question is, Mr Bly, do—er—any of us ever really give satisfaction except to ourselves?

*Bly*. [Taking it as an invitation to his philosophical vein] Ah! that's one as goes to the roots of 'uman nature. There's a lot of disposition in all of us. And what I always say is: One man's disposition is another man's indisposition.

*Mr march*. By George! Just hits the mark.

*Bly*. [Filling his sponge] Question is: How far are you to give rein to your disposition? When I was in Durban, Natal, I knew a man who had the biggest disposition I ever come across. 'E struck 'is wife, 'e smoked opium, 'e was a liar, 'e gave all the rein 'e could, and yet withal one of the pleasantest men I ever met.

*Mr march*. Perhaps in giving rein he didn't strike you.

*Bly*. [With a big wipe, following his thought] He said to me once: "Joe," he said, "if I was to hold meself in, I should be a devil." There's where you get it. Policemen, priests, prisoners. Cab'net Ministers, any one who leads an unnatural life, see how it twists 'em. You can't suppress a thing without it swellin' you up in another place.

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*Mr march*. And the moral of that is—?

*Bly*. Follow your instincts. You see—if I'm not keepin' you—now that we ain't got no faith, as we were sayin' the other day, no Ten Commandments in black an' white—we've just got to be 'uman bein's— raisin' Cain, and havin' feelin' hearts. What's the use of all these lofty ideas that you can't live up to? Liberty, Fraternity, Equality, Democracy—see what comes o' fightin' for 'em! 'Ere we are-wipin' out the lot. We thought they was fixed stars; they was only comets—hot air. No; trust 'uman nature, I say, and follow your instincts.

*Mr march*. We were talking of your daughter—I—I—

*Bly*. There's a case in point. Her instincts was starved goin' on for three years, because, mind you, they kept her hangin' about in prison months before they tried her. I read your article, and I thought to meself after I'd finished: Which would I feel smallest—if I was—the Judge, the Jury, or the 'Ome Secretary? It was a treat, that article! They ought to abolish that in'uman "To be hanged by the neck until she is dead." It's my belief they only keep it because it's poetry; that and the wigs—they're hard up for a bit of beauty in the Courts of Law. Excuse my 'and, sir; I do thank you for that article.

He extends his wiped hand, which *Mr march* shakes with the feeling that he is always shaking Mr. BLY's hand.

*Mr march*. But, apropos of your daughter, Mr Bly. I suppose none of us ever change our natures.

*Bly*. [Again responding to the appeal that he senses to his philosophical vein] Ah! but 'oo can see what our natures are? Why, I've known people that could see nothin' but theirselves and their own families, unless they was drunk. At my daughter's trial, I see right into the lawyers, judge and all. There she was, hub of the whole thing, and all they could see of her was 'ow far she affected 'em personally—one tryin' to get 'er guilty, the other tryin' to get 'er off, and the judge summin' 'er up cold-blooded.

*Mr march*. But that's what they're paid for, Mr Bly.

*Bly*. Ah! But which of 'em was thinkin' "'Ere's a little bit o' warm life on its own. 'Ere's a little dancin' creature. What's she feelin', wot's 'er complaint?"—impersonal-like. I like to see a man do a bit of speculatin', with his mind off of 'imself, for once.

*Mr march*. "The man that hath not speculation in his soul."

*Bly*. That's right, sir. When I see a mangy cat or a dog that's lost, or a fellow-creature down on his luck, I always try to put meself in his place. It's a weakness I've got.

*Mr march*. [Warmly] A deuced good one. Shake—

He checks himself, but *Mr Bly* has wiped his hand and extended it.

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While the shake is in progress *Mary* returns, and, having seen it to a safe conclusion, speaks.

*Mary*. Coming, Dad?

*Mr march*. Excuse me, Mr Bly, I must away.

He goes towards the door, and *Bly* dips his sponge.

*Mary*. [In a low voice] Well?

*Mr march*. Mr Bly is like all the greater men I know—he can't listen.

*Mary*. But you were shaking—

*Mr march*. Yes; it's a weakness we have—every three minutes.

*Mary*. [Bubbling] Dad—Silly!

*Mr march*. Very!

As they go out *Mr Bly* pauses in his labours to catch, as it were, a philosophical reflection. He resumes the wiping of a pane, while quietly, behind him, *faith* comes in with a tray. She is dressed now in lilac-coloured linen, without a cap, and looks prettier than ever. She puts the tray down on the sideboard with a clap that attracts her father's attention, and stands contemplating the debris on the table.

*Bly*. Winders! There they are! Clean, dirty! All sorts—All round yer! Winders!

*Faith*. [With disgust] Food!

*Bly*. Ah! Food and winders! That's life!

*Faith*. Eight times a day four times for them and four times for us. I hate food!

She puts a chocolate into her mouth.

*Bly*. 'Ave some philosophy. I might just as well hate me winders.

*Faith*. Well!

She begins to clear.

*Bly*. [Regarding her] Look ’ere, my girl! Don’t you forget that there ain’t many winders in London out o’ which they look as philosophical as these here. Beggars can’t be choosers.

*Faith*. [Sullenly] Oh! Don’t go on at me!

*Bly*. They spoiled your disposition in that place, I’m afraid.

*Faith*. Try it, and see what they do with yours.

*Bly*. Well, I may come to it yet.

*Faith*. You’ll get no windows to look out of there; a little bit of a thing with bars to it, and lucky if it’s not thick glass. [Standing still and gazing past *Mr Bly*] No sun, no trees, no faces—people don’t pass in the sky, not even angels.

*Bly*. Ah! But you shouldn’t brood over it. I knew a man in Valpiraso that ’ad spent ’arf ’is life in prison-a jolly feller; I forget what ‘e’d done, somethin’ bloody. I want to see you like him. Aren’t you happy here?

*Faith*. It’s right enough, so long as I get out.

*Bly*. This Mr March—he’s like all these novel-writers—thinks ’e knows ’uman nature, but of course ’e don’t. Still, I can talk to ’im—got an open mind, and hates the Gover’ment. That’s the two great things. Mrs March, so far as I see, ’as got her head screwed on much tighter.

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*Faith*. She has.

*Bly*. What's the young man like? He's a long feller.

*Faith*. Johnny? [With a shrug and a little smile] Johnny.

*Bly*. Well, that gives a very good idea of him. They say 'es a poet; does 'e leave 'em about?

*Faith*. I've seen one or two.

*Bly*. What's their tone?

*Faith*. All about the condition of the world; and the moon.

*Bly*. Ah! Depressin'. And the young lady?

*Faith* shrugs her shoulders.

Um—'ts what I thought. She 'asn't moved much with the times. She thinks she 'as, but she 'asn't. Well, they seem a pleasant family. Leave you to yourself. 'Ow's Cook?

*Faith*. Not much company.

*Bly*. More body than mind? Still, you get out, don't you?

*Faith*. [With a slow smile] Yes. [She gives a sudden little twirl, and puts her hands up to her hair before the mirror] My afternoon to-day. It's fine in the streets, after-being in there.

*Bly*. Well! Don't follow your instincts too much, that's all! I must get on to the drawin' room now. There's a shower comin'. [Philosophically] It's 'ardly worth while to do these winders. You clean 'em, and they're dirty again in no time. It's like life. And people talk o' progress. What a sooperstition! Of course there ain't progress; it's a world-without-end affair. You've got to make up your mind to it, and not be discouraged. All this depression comes from 'avin' 'igh 'opes. 'Ave low 'opes, and you'll be all right.

He takes up his pail and cloths and moves out through the windows.

*Faith* puts another chocolate into her mouth, and taking up a flower, twirls round with it held to her nose, and looks at herself in the glass over the hearth. She is still looking at herself when she sees in the mirror a reflection of *Johnny*, who has come in. Her face grows just a little scared, as if she had caught the eye of a warder peering through the peep-hole of her cell door, then brazens, and slowly sweetens as she turns round to him.

*Johnny*. Sorry! [He has a pipe in his hand and wears a Norfolk jacket] Fond of flowers?

*Faith*. Yes. [She puts back the flower] Ever so!

*Johnny*. Stick to it. Put it in your hair; it'll look jolly. How do you like it here?

*Faith*. It's quiet.

*Johnny*. Ha! I wonder if you've got the feeling I have. We've both had hell, you know; I had three years of it, out there, and you've had three years of it here. The feeling that you can't catch up; can't live fast enough to get even.

*Faith* nods.

Nothing's big enough; nothing's worth while enough—is it?

*Faith*. I don't know. I know I'd like to bite. She draws her lips back.

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*Johnny*. Ah! Tell me all about your beastly time; it'll do you good. You and I are different from anybody else in this house. We've lived they've just vegetated. Come on; tell me!

*Faith*, who up to now has looked on him as a young male, stares at him for the first time without sex in her eyes.

*Faith*. I can't. We didn't talk in there, you know.

*Johnny*. Were you fond of the chap who—?

*Faith*. No. Yes. I suppose I was—once.

*Johnny*. He must have been rather a swine.

*Faith*. He's dead.

*Johnny*. Sorry! Oh, sorry!

*Faith*. I've forgotten all that.

*Johnny*. Beastly things, babies; and absolutely unnecessary in the present state of the world.

*Faith*. [With a faint smile] My baby wasn't beastly; but I—I got upset.

*Johnny*. Well, I should think so!

*Faith*. My friend in the manicure came and told me about hers when I was lying in the hospital. She couldn't have it with her, so it got neglected and died.

*Johnny*. Um! I believe that's quite common.

*Faith*. And she told me about another girl—the Law took her baby from her. And after she was gone, I—got all worked up— [She hesitates, then goes swiftly on] And I looked at mine; it was asleep just here, quite close. I just put out my arm like that, over its face —quite soft— I didn't hurt it. I didn't really. [She suddenly swallows, and her lips quiver] I didn't feel anything under my arm. And—and a beast of a nurse came on me, and said "You've smothered your baby, you wretched girl!"

I didn't want to kill it—I only wanted to save it from living. And when I looked at it, I went off screaming.

*Johnny*. I nearly screamed when I saved my first German from living. I never felt the same again. They say the human race has got to go on, but I say they've first got to prove that the human race wants to. Would you rather be alive or dead?

*Faith*. Alive.

*Johnny*. But would you have in prison?

*Faith*. I don't know. You can't tell anything in there. [With sudden vehemence] I wish I had my baby back, though. It was mine; and I—I don't like thinking about it.

*Johnny*. I know. I hate to think about anything I've killed, really.
At least, I should—but it's better not to think.

*Faith*. I could have killed that judge.

*Johnny*. Did he come the heavy father? That's what I can't stand. When they jaw a chap and hang him afterwards. Or was he one of the joking ones?

*Faith*. I've sat in my cell and cried all night—night after night,
I have. [With a little laugh] I cried all the softness out of me.

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*Johnny*. You never believed they were going to hang you, did you?

*Faith*. I didn't care if they did—not then.

*Johnny*. [With a reflective grunt] You had a much worse time than I. You were lonely—

*Faith*. Have you been in a prison, ever?

*Johnny*. No, thank God!

*Faith*. It's awfully clean.

*Johnny*. You bet.

*Faith*. And it's stone cold. It turns your heart.

*Johnny*. Ah! Did you ever see a stalactite?

*Faith*. What's that?

*Johnny*. In caves. The water drops like tears, and each drop has some sort of salt, and leaves it behind till there's just a long salt petrified drip hanging from the roof.

*Faith*. Ah! [Staring at him] I used to stand behind my door. I'd stand there sometimes I don't know how long. I'd listen and listen—the noises are all hollow in a prison. You'd think you'd get used to being shut up, but I never did.

*Johnny* utters a deep grunt.

It's awful the feeling you get here-so tight and chokey. People who are free don't know what it's like to be shut up. If I'd had a proper window even—When you can see things living, it makes you feel alive.

*Johnny*. [Catching her arm] We'll make you feel alive again.

*Faith* stares at him; sex comes back to her eyes. She looks down.

I bet you used to enjoy life, before.

*Faith*. [Clasping her hands] Oh! yes, I did. And I love getting out now. I've got a fr—[She checks herself] The streets are beautiful, aren't they? Do you know Orleens Street?

*Johnny*. [Doubtful] No-o. . . . Where?

*Faith*. At the corner out of the Regent. That's where we had our shop. I liked the hair-dressing. We had fun. Perhaps I've seen you before. Did you ever come in there?

*Johnny*. No.

*Faith*. I'd go back there; only they wouldn't take me—I'm too conspicuous now.

*Johnny*. I expect you're well out of that.

*Faith*. [With a sigh] But I did like it. I felt free. We had an hour off in the middle of the day; you could go where you liked; and then, after hours—I love the streets at night—all lighted. Olga—that's one of the other girls—and I used to walk about for hours. That's life! Fancy! I never saw a street for more than two years. Didn't you miss them in the war?

*Johnny*. I missed grass and trees more—the trees! All burnt, and splintered. Gah!

*Faith*. Yes, I like trees too; anything beautiful, you know. I think the parks are lovely—-but they might let you pick the flowers. But the lights are best, really—they make you feel happy. And music—I love an organ. There was one used to come and play outside the prison—before I was tried. It sounded so far away and lovely. If I could 'ave met the man that played that organ, I'd have kissed him. D'you think he did it on purpose?

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*Johnny*. He would have, if he'd been me.

He says it unconsciously, but *faith* is instantly conscious of the implication.

*Faith*. He'd rather have had pennies, though. It's all earning; working and earning. I wish I were like the flowers. [She twirls the dower in her hand] Flowers don't work, and they don't get put in prison.

*Johnny*. [Putting his arm round her] Never mind! Cheer up! You're only a kid. You'll have a good time yet.

*Faith* leans against him, as it were indifferently, clearly expecting him to kiss her, but he doesn't.

*Faith*. When I was a little girl I had a cake covered with sugar. I ate the sugar all off and then I didn't want the cake—not much.

*Johnny*. [Suddenly, removing his arm] Gosh! If I could write a poem that would show everybody what was in the heart of everybody else—!

*Faith*. It'd be too long for the papers, wouldn't it?

*Johnny*. It'd be too strong.

*Faith*. Besides, you don't know.

Her eyelids go up.

*Johnny*. [Staring at her] I could tell what's in you now.

*Faith*. What?

*Johnny*. You feel like a flower that's been picked.

FAITH's smile is enigmatic.

*Faith*. [Suddenly] Why do you go on about me so?

*Johnny*. Because you're weak—little and weak. [Breaking out again] Damn it! We went into the war to save the little and weak; at least we said so; and look at us now! The bottom's out of all that. [Bitterly] There isn't a faith or an illusion left. Look here! I want to help you.

*Faith*. [Surprisingly] My baby was little and weak.

*Johnny*. You never meant—You didn't do it for your own advantage.

*Faith*. It didn't know it was alive. [Suddenly] D'you think I'm pretty?

*Johnny*. As pie.

*Faith*. Then you'd better keep away, hadn't you?

*Johnny*. Why?

*Faith*. You might want a bite.

*Johnny*. Oh! I can trust myself.

*Faith*. [Turning to the window, through which can be seen the darkening of a shower] It's raining. Father says windows never stay clean.

They stand dose together, unaware that *cook* has thrown up the service shutter, to see why the clearing takes so long. Her astounded head and shoulders pass into view just as *faith* suddenly puts up her face. *Johnny's* lips hesitate, then move towards her forehead. But her face shifts, and they find themselves upon her lips. Once there, the emphasis cannot help but be considerable. *Cook's* mouth falls open.

*Cook*. Oh!

She closes the shutter, vanishing.

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*Faith*. What was that?

*Johnny*. Nothing. [Breaking away] Look here! I didn't mean—I oughtn't to have—-Please forget it!

*Faith*. [With a little smile] Didn't you like it?

*Johnny*. Yes—that's just it. I didn't mean to It won't do.

*Faith*. Why not?

*Johnny*. No, no! It's just the opposite of what—No, no!

He goes to the door, wrenches it open and goes out.

*Faith*, still with that little half-mocking, half-contented smile, resumes the clearing of the table. She is interrupted by the entrance through the French windows of *Mr march* and *Mary*, struggling with one small wet umbrella.

*Mary*. [Feeling his sleeve] Go and change, Dad.

*Mr march*. Women's shoes! We could have made the Tube but for your shoes.

*Mary*. It was your cold feet, not mine, dear. [Looking at *faith* and nudging him] Now!

She goes towards the door, turns to look at *faith* still clearing the table, and goes out.

*Mr march*. [In front of the hearth] Nasty spring weather, Faith.

*Faith*. [Still in the mood of the kiss] Yes, Sir.

*Mr march*. [Sotto voce] "In the spring a young man's fancy." I—I wanted to say something to you in a friendly way.

*Faith* regards him as he struggles on. Because I feel very friendly towards you.

*Faith*. Yes.

*Mr march*. So you won't take what I say in bad part?

*Faith*. No.

*Mr march*. After what you've been through, any man with a sense of chivalry—

*Faith* gives a little shrug.

Yes, I know—but we don't all support the Government.

*Faith*. I don't know anything about the Government.

*Mr march*. [Side-tracked on to his hobby] Ah I forgot. You saw no newspapers. But you ought to pick up the threads now. What paper does Cook take?

*Faith*. "*Cosy*."

*Mr march*. "Cosy"? I don't seem— What are its politics?

*Faith*. It hasn't any—only funny bits, and fashions. It's full of corsets.

*Mr march*. What does Cook want with corsets?

*Faith*. She likes to think she looks like that.

*Mr march*. By George! Cook an idealist! Let's see!—er—I was speaking of chivalry. My son, you know—er—my son has got it.

*Faith*. Badly?

*Mr march*. [Suddenly alive to the fact that she is playing with him] I started by being sorry for you.

*Faith*. Aren't you, any more?

*Mr march*. Look here, my child!

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*Faith* looks up at him. [Protectingly] We want to do our best for you.
Now, don't spoil it by— Well, you know!

*Faith*. [Suddenly] Suppose you'd been stuffed away in a hole for years!

*Mr march*. [Side-tracked again] Just what your father said. The more I see of Mr Bly, the more wise I think him.

*Faith*. About other people.

*Mr march*. What sort of bringing up did he give you?

*Faith* smiles wryly and shrugs her shoulders.

*Mr march*. H'm! Here comes the sun again!

*Faith*. [Taking up the flower which is lying on the table] May I have this flower?

*Mr march*. Of Course. You can always take what flowers you like—that is—if—er—

*Faith*. If Mrs March isn't about?

*Mr march*. I meant, if it doesn't spoil the look of the table. We must all be artists in our professions, mustn't we?

*Faith*. My profession was cutting hair. I would like to cut yours.

*Mr March's* hands instinctively go up to it.

*Mr march*. You mightn't think it, but I'm talking to you seriously.

*Faith*. I was, too.

*Mr march*. [Out of his depth] Well! I got wet; I must go and change.

*Faith* follows him with her eyes as he goes out, and resumes the clearing of the table. She has paused and is again smelling at the flower when she hears the door, and quickly resumes her work. It is *Mrs march*, who comes in and goes to the writing table, Left Back, without looking at *faith*. She sits there writing a cheque, while *faith* goes on clearing.

*Mrs march*. [Suddenly, in an unruffled voice] I have made your cheque out for four pounds. It's rather more than the fortnight, and a month's notice. There'll be a cab for you in an hour's time. Can you be ready by then?

*Faith*. [Astonished] What for—ma'am?

*Mrs march*. You don't suit.

*Faith*. Why?

*Mrs march*. Do you wish for the reason?

*Faith*. [Breathless] Yes.

*Mrs march*. Cook saw you just now.

*Faith*. [Blankly] Oh! I didn't mean her to.

*Mrs march*. Obviously.

*Faith*. I—I—

*Mrs march*. Now go and pack up your things.

*Faith*. He asked me to be a friend to him. He said he was lonely here.

*Mrs march*. Don't be ridiculous. Cook saw you kissing him with p—p—

*Faith*. [Quickly] Not with pep.

*Mrs march*. I was going to say "passion." Now, go quietly.

*Faith*. Where am I to go?

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*Mrs march*. You will have four pounds, and you can get another place.

*Faith*. How?

*Mrs march*. That's hardly my affair.

*Faith*. [Tossing her head] All right!

*Mrs march*. I'll speak to your father, if he isn't gone.

*Faith*. Why do you send me away—just for a kiss! What's a kiss?

*Mrs march*. That will do.

*Faith*. [Desperately] He wanted to—to save me.

*Mrs march*. You know perfectly well people can only save themselves.

*Faith*. I don't care for your son; I've got a young—[She checks herself] I—I'll leave your son alone, if he leaves me.

*Mrs march* rings the bell on the table.

[Desolately] Well? [She moves towards the door. Suddenly holding out the flower] Mr March gave me that flower; would you like it back?

*Mrs march*. Don't be absurd! If you want more money till you get a place, let me know.

*Faith*. I won't trouble you.

She goes out.

*Mrs march* goes to the window and drums her fingers on the pane.

*Cook* enters.

*Mrs march*. Cook, if Mr Bly's still here, I want to see him. Oh! And it's three now. Have a cab at four o'clock.

*Cook*. [Almost tearful] Oh, ma'am—anybody but Master Johnny, and I'd 'ave been a deaf an' dummy. Poor girl! She's not responsive, I daresay. Suppose I was to speak to Master Johnny?

*Mrs march*. No, no, Cook! Where's Mr Bly?

*Cook*. He's done his windows; he's just waiting for his money.

*Mrs march*. Then get him; and take that tray.

*Cook*. I remember the master kissin' me, when he was a boy. But then he never meant anything; so different from Master Johnny. Master Johnny takes things to 'eart.

*Mrs march*. Just so, Cook.

*Cook*. There's not an ounce of vice in 'im. It's all his goodness, dear little feller.

*Mrs march*. That's the danger, with a girl like that.

*Cook*. It's eatin' hearty all of a sudden that's made her poptious. But there, ma'am, try her again. Master Johnny'll be so cut up!

*Mrs march*. No playing with fire, Cook. We were foolish to let her come.

*Cook*. Oh! dear, he will be angry with me. If you hadn't been in the kitchen and heard me, ma'am, I'd ha' let it pass.

*Mrs march*. That would have been very wrong of you.

*Cook*. Ah! But I'd do a lot of wrong things for Master Johnny. There's always some one you'll go wrong for!

*Mrs march*. Well, get Mr Bly; and take that tray, there's a good soul.

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*Cook* goes out with the tray; and while waiting, *Mrs march* finishes clearing the table. She has not quite finished when *Mr Bly* enters.

*Bly*. Your service, ma'am!

*Mrs march*. [With embarrassment] I'm very sorry, Mr Bly, but circumstances over which I have no control—

*Bly*. [With deprecation] Ah! we all has them. The winders ought to be done once a week now the Spring's on 'em.

*Mrs march*. No, no; it's your daughter—

*Bly*. [Deeply] Not been given' way to'er instincts, I do trust.

*Mrs march*. Yes. I've just had to say good-bye to her.

*Bly*. [Very blank] Nothing to do with property, I hope?

*Mrs march*. No, no! Giddiness with my son. It's impossible; she really must learn.

*Bly*. Oh! but 'oo's to learn 'er? Couldn't you learn your son instead?

*Mrs march*. No. My son is very high-minded.

*Bly*. [Dubiously] I see. How am I goin' to get over this? Shall I tell you what I think, ma'am?

*Mrs march*. I'm afraid it'll be no good.

*Bly*. That's it. Character's born, not made. You can clean yer winders and clean 'em, but that don't change the colour of the glass. My father would have given her a good hidin', but I shan't. Why not? Because my glass ain't as thick as his. I see through it; I see my girl's temptations, I see what she is—likes a bit o' life, likes a flower, an' a dance. She's a natural morganatic.

*Mrs march*. A what?

*Bly*. Nothin'll ever make her regular. Mr March'll understand how I feel. Poor girl! In the mud again. Well, we must keep smilin'. [His face is as long as his arm] The poor 'ave their troubles, there's no doubt. [He turns to go] There's nothin' can save her but money, so as she can do as she likes. Then she wouldn't want to do it.

*Mrs march*. I'm very sorry, but there it is.

*Bly*. And I thought she was goin' to be a success here. Fact is, you can't see anything till it 'appens. There's winders all round, but you can't see. Follow your instincts—it's the only way.

*Mrs march*. It hasn't helped your daughter.

*Bly*. I was speakin' philosophic! Well, I'll go 'ome now, and prepare meself for the worst.

*Mrs march*. Has Cook given you your money?

*Bly*. She 'as.

He goes out gloomily and is nearly overthrown in the doorway by the violent entry of *Johnny*.

*Johnny*. What's this, Mother? I won't have it—it's pre-war.

*Mrs march*. [Indicating *Mr Bly*] Johnny!

*Johnny* waves *Bly* out of the room and doses the door.

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*Johnny*. I won't have her go. She's a pathetic little creature.

*Mrs march*. [Unruffled] She's a minx.

*Johnny*. Mother!

*Mrs march*. Now, Johnny, be sensible. She's a very pretty girl, and this is my house.

*Johnny*. Of course you think the worst. Trust anyone who wasn't in the war for that!

*Mrs march*. I don't think either the better or the worse. Kisses are kisses!

*Johnny*. Mother, you're like the papers—you put in all the vice and leave out all the virtue, and call that human nature. The kiss was an accident that I bitterly regret.

*Mrs march*. Johnny, how can you?

*Johnny*. Dash it! You know what I mean. I regret it with my—my conscience. It shan't occur again.

*Mrs march*. Till next time.

*Johnny*. Mother, you make me despair. You're so matter-of-fact, you never give one credit for a pure ideal.

*Mrs march*. I know where ideals lead.

*Johnny*. Where?

*Mrs march*. Into the soup. And the purer they are, the hotter the soup.

*Johnny*. And you married father!

*Mrs march*. I did.

*Johnny*. Well, that girl is not to be chucked out; won't have her on my chest.

*Mrs march*. That's why she's going, Johnny.

*Johnny*. She is not. Look at me!

> *Mrs march* looks at him from across the dining-table, for he has marched up to it, till they are staring at each other across the now cleared rosewood.

*Mrs march*. How are you going to stop her?

*Johnny*. Oh, I'll stop her right enough. If I stuck it out in Hell, I can stick it out in Highgate.

*Mrs march*. Johnny, listen. I've watched this girl; and I don't watch what I want to see —like your father—I watch what is. She's not a hard case—yet; but she will be.

*Johnny*. And why? Because all you matter-of-fact people make up your minds to it. What earthly chance has she had?

*Mrs march*. She's a baggage. There are such things, you know, Johnny.

*Johnny*. She's a little creature who went down in the scrum and has been kicked about ever since.

*Mrs march*. I'll give her money, if you'll keep her at arm's length.

*Johnny*. I call that revolting. What she wants is the human touch.

*Mrs march*. I've not a doubt of it.

*Johnny* rises in disgust.

Johnny, what is the use of wrapping the thing up in catchwords? Human touch! A young man like you never saved a girl like her. It's as fantastic as—as Tolstoi's "Resurrection."

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*Johnny*. Tolstoi was the most truthful writer that ever lived.

*Mrs march*. Tolstoi was a Russian—always proving that what isn't, is.

*Johnny*. Russians are charitable, anyway, and see into other people's souls.

*Mrs march*. That's why they're hopeless.

*Johnny*. Well—for cynicism—

*Mrs march*. It's at least as important, Johnny, to see into ourselves as into other people. I've been trying to make your father understand that ever since we married. He'd be such a good writer if he did—he wouldn't write at all.

*Johnny*. Father has imagination.

*Mrs march*. And no business to meddle with practical affairs. You and he always ride in front of the hounds. Do you remember when the war broke out, how angry you were with me because I said we were fighting from a sense of self-preservation? Well, weren't we?

*Johnny*. That's what I'm doing now, anyway.

*Mrs march*. Saving this girl, to save yourself?

*Johnny*. I must have something decent to do sometimes. There isn't an ideal left.

*Mrs march*. If you knew how tired I am of the word, Johnny!

*Johnny*. There are thousands who feel like me—that the bottom's out of everything. It sickens me that anything in the least generous should get sat on by all you people who haven't risked your lives.

*Mrs march*. [With a smile] I risked mine when you were born, Johnny.
You were always very difficult.

*Johnny*. That girl's been telling me—I can see the whole thing.

*Mrs march*. The fact that she suffered doesn't alter her nature; or the danger to you and us.

*Johnny*. There is no danger—I told her I didn't mean it.

*Mrs march*. And she smiled? Didn't she?

*Johnny*. I—I don't know.

*Mrs march*. If you were ordinary, Johnny, it would be the girl's look-out. But you're not, and I'm not going to have you in the trap she'll set for you.

*Johnny*. You think she's a designing minx. I tell you she's got no more design in her than a rabbit. She's just at the mercy of anything.

*Mrs march*. That's the trap. She'll play on your feelings, and you'll be caught.

*Johnny*. I'm not a baby.

*Mrs march*. You are—and she'll smother you.

*Johnny*. How beastly women are to each other!

*Mrs march*. We know ourselves, you see. The girl's father realises perfectly what she is.

*Johnny*. Mr Bly is a dodderer. And she's got no mother. I'll bet you've never realised the life girls who get outed lead. I've seen them—I saw them in France. It gives one the horrors.

# Page 682

*Mrs march*. I can imagine it. But no girl gets “outed,” as you call it, unless she’s predisposed that way.

*Johnny*. That’s all you know of the pressure of life.

*Mrs march*. Excuse me, Johnny. I worked three years among factory girls, and I know how they manage to resist things when they’ve got stuff in them.

*Johnny*. Yes, I know what you mean by stuff—good hard self-preservative instinct. Why should the wretched girl who hasn’t got that be turned down? She wants protection all the more.

*Mrs march*. I’ve offered to help with money till she gets a place.

*Johnny*. And you know she won’t take it. She’s got that much stuff in her. This place is her only chance. I appeal to you, Mother—please tell her not to go.

*Mrs march*. I shall not, Johnny.

*Johnny*. [Turning abruptly] Then we know where we are.

*Mrs march*. I know where you’ll be before a week’s over.

*Johnny*. Where?

*Mrs march*. In her arms.

*Johnny*. [From the door, grimly] If I am, I’ll have the right to be!

*Mrs march*. Johnny! [But he is gone.]

*Mrs march* follows to call him back, but is met by *Mary*.

*Mary*. So you’ve tumbled, Mother?

*Mrs march*. I should think I have! Johnny is making an idiot of himself about that girl.

*Mary*. He’s got the best intentions.

*Mrs march*. It’s all your father. What can one expect when your father carries on like a lunatic over his paper every morning?

*Mary*. Father must have opinions of his own.

*Mrs march*. He has only one: Whatever is, is wrong.

*Mary*. He can't help being intellectual, Mother.

*Mrs march*. If he would only learn that the value of a sentiment is the amount of sacrifice you are prepared to make for it!

*Mary*. Yes: I read that in "The Times" yesterday. Father's much safer than Johnny. Johnny isn't safe at all; he might make a sacrifice any day. What were they doing?

*Mrs march*. Cook caught them kissing.

*Mary*. How truly horrible!

As she speaks *Mr march* comes in.

*Mr march*. I met Johnny using the most poetic language. What's happened?

*Mrs march*. He and that girl. Johnny's talking nonsense about wanting to save her. I've told her to pack up.

*Mr march*. Isn't that rather coercive, Joan?

*Mrs march*. Do you approve of Johnny getting entangled with this girl?

*Mr march*. No. I was only saying to Mary—

# Page 683

*Mrs march*. Oh! You were!

*Mr march*. But I can quite see why Johnny—

*Mrs march*. The Government, I suppose!

*Mr march*. Certainly.

*Mrs march*. Well, perhaps you'll get us out of the mess you've got us into.

*Mr march*. Where's the girl?

*Mrs march*. In her room-packing.

*Mr march*. We must devise means—

*Mrs march* smiles.

The first thing is to see into them—and find out exactly—

*Mrs march*. Heavens! Are you going to have them X-rayed? They haven't got chest trouble, Geof.

*Mr march*. They may have heart trouble. It's no good being hasty, Joan.

*Mrs march*. Oh! For a man that can't see an inch into human nature, give me a—-psychological novelist!

*Mr march*. [With dignity] Mary, go and see where Johnny is.

*Mary*. Do you want him here?

*Mr march*. Yes.

*Mary*. [Dubiously] Well—if I can.

She goes out. A silence, during which the *marches* look at each other by those turns which characterise exasperated domesticity.

*Mrs march*. If she doesn't go, Johnny must. Are you going to turn him out?

*Mr march*. Of course not. We must reason with him.

*Mrs march*. Reason with young people whose lips were glued together half an hour ago! Why ever did you force me to take this girl?

*Mr march*. [Ruefully] One can't always resist a kindly impulse, Joan. What does Mr Bly say to it?

*Mrs march*. Mr Bly? "Follow your instincts "and then complains of his daughter for following them.

*Mr march*. The man's a philosopher.

*Mrs march*. Before we know where we are, we shall be having Johnny married to that girl.

*Mr march*. Nonsense!

*Mrs march*. Oh, Geof! Whenever you're faced with reality, you say "Nonsense!" You know Johnny's got chivalry on the brain.

*Mary* comes in.

*Mary*. He's at the top of the servants' staircase; outside her room. He's sitting in an armchair, with its back to her door.

*Mr march*. Good Lord! Direct action!

*Mary*. He's got his pipe, a pound of chocolate, three volumes of "Monte Cristo," and his old concertina. He says it's better than the trenches.

*Mr march*. My hat! Johnny's made a joke. This is serious.

*Mary*. Nobody can get up, and she can't get down. He says he'll stay there till all's blue, and it's no use either of you coming unless mother caves in.

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*Mr march*. I wonder if Cook could do anything with him?

*Mary*. She's tried. He told her to go to hell.

*Mr march*. I Say! And what did Cook—?

*Mary*. She's gone.

*Mr march*. Tt! tt! This is very awkward.

*Cook* enters through the door which *Mary* has left open.

*Mr march*. Ah, Cook! You're back, then? What's to be done?

*Mrs march*. [With a laugh] We must devise means!

*Cook*. Oh, ma'am, it does remind me so of the tantrums he used to get into, dear little feller! Smiles with recollection.

*Mrs march*. [Sharply] You're not to take him up anything to eat, Cook!

*Cook*. Oh! But Master Johnny does get so hungry. It'll drive him wild, ma'am. Just a Snack now and then!

*Mrs march*. No, Cook. Mind—that's flat!

*Cook*. Aren't I to feed Faith, ma'am?

*Mr march*. Gad! It wants it!

*Mrs march*. Johnny must come down to earth.

*Cook*. Ah! I remember how he used to fall down when he was little—he would go about with his head in the air. But he always picked himself up like a little man.

*Mary*. Listen!

They all listen. The distant sounds of a concertina being played with fury drift in through the open door.

*Cook*. Don't it sound 'eavenly!

The concertina utters a long wail.

*Curtain*.

# ACT III

The *March's* dining-room on the same evening at the end of a perfunctory dinner. *Mrs march* sits at the dining-table with her back to the windows, *Mary* opposite the hearth, and *Mr march* with his back to it. *Johnny* is not present. Silence and gloom.

*Mr march*. We always seem to be eating.

*Mrs march*. You've eaten nothing.

*Mr march*. [Pouring himself out a liqueur glass of brandy but not drinking it] It's humiliating to think we can't exist without. [Relapses into gloom.]

*Mrs march*. Mary, pass him the walnuts.

*Mary*. I was thinking of taking them up to Johnny.

*Mr march*. [Looking at his watch] He's been there six hours; even he can't live on faith.

*Mrs march*. If Johnny wants to make a martyr of himself, I can't help it.

*Mary*. How many days are you going to let him sit up there, Mother?

*Mr march*. [Glancing at *Mrs march*] I never in my life knew anything so ridiculous.

*Mrs march*. Give me a little glass of brandy, Geof.

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*Mr march*. Good! That's the first step towards seeing reason.

He pours brandy into a liqueur glass from the decanter which stands between them. *Mrs march* puts the brandy to her lips and makes a little face, then swallows it down manfully. *Mary* gets up with the walnuts and goes. Silence. Gloom.

*Mrs march*. Horrid stuff!

*Mr march*. Haven't you begun to see that your policy's hopeless, Joan? Come! Tell the girl she can stay. If we make Johnny feel victorious—we can deal with him. It's just personal pride—the curse of this world. Both you and Johnny are as stubborn as mules.

*Mrs march*. Human nature is stubborn, Geof. That's what you easy—going people never see.

*Mr march* gets up, vexed, and goes to the fireplace.

*Mr march*. [Turning] Well! This goes further than you think. It involves Johnny's affection and respect for you.

*Mrs march* nervously refills the little brandy glass, and again empties it, with a grimacing shudder.

*Mr march*. [Noticing] That's better! You'll begin to see things presently.

*Mary* re-enters.

*Mary*. He's been digging himself in. He's put a screen across the head of the stairs, and got Cook's blankets. He's going to sleep there.

*Mrs march*. Did he take the walnuts?

*Mary*. No; he passed them in to her. He says he's on hunger strike. But he's eaten all the chocolate and smoked himself sick. He's having the time of his life, mother.

*Mr march*. There you are!

*Mrs march*. Wait till this time to-morrow.

*Mary*. Cook's been up again. He wouldn't let her pass. She'll have to sleep in the spare room.

*Mr march*. I say!

*Mary*. And he's got the books out of her room.

*Mrs march*. D'you know what they are? "The Scarlet Pimpernel," "The Wide Wide World," and the Bible.

*Mary*. Johnny likes romance.

She crosses to the fire.

*Mr march*. [In a low voice] Are you going to leave him up there with the girl and that inflammatory literature, all night? Where's your common sense, Joan?

*Mrs march* starts up, presses her hand over her brow, and sits down again. She is stumped.

[With consideration for her defeat] Have another tot! [He pours it out] Let Mary go up with a flag of truce, and ask them both to come down for a thorough discussion of the whole thing, on condition that they can go up again if we don't come to terms.

*Mrs march*. Very well! I'm quite willing to meet him. I hate quarrelling with Johnny.

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*Mr march*. Good! I'll go myself. [He goes out.]

*Mary*. Mother, this isn't a coal strike; don't discuss it for three hours and then at the end ask Johnny and the girl to do precisely what you're asking them to do now.

*Mrs march*. Why should I?

*Mary*. Because it's so usual. Do fix on half-way at once.

*Mrs march*. There is no half-way.

*Mary*. Well, for goodness sake think of a plan which will make you both look victorious. That's always done in the end. Why not let her stay, and make Johnny promise only to see her in the presence of a third party?

*Mrs march*. Because she'd see him every day while he was looking for the third party. She'd help him look for it.

*Mary*. [With a gurgle] Mother, I'd no idea you were so—French.

*Mrs march*. It seems to me you none of you have any idea what I am.

*Mary*. Well, do remember that there'll be no publicity to make either of you look small. You can have Peace with Honour, whatever you decide. [Listening] There they are! Now, Mother, don't be logical! It's so feminine.

As the door opens, *Mrs march* nervously fortifies herself with the third little glass of brandy. She remains seated. *Mary* is on her right.

*Mr march* leads into the room and stands next his daughter, then *faith* in hat and coat to the left of the table, and *Johnny*, pale but determined, last. Assembled thus, in a half fan, of which *Mrs march* is the apex, so to speak, they are all extremely embarrassed, and no wonder.

Suddenly *Mary* gives a little gurgle.

*Johnny*. You'd think it funnier if you'd just come out of prison and were going to be chucked out of your job, on to the world again.

*Faith*. I didn't want to come down here. If I'm to go I want to go at once. And if I'm not, it's my evening out, please.

She moves towards the door. *Johnny* takes her by the shoulders.

*Johnny*. Stand still, and leave it to me. [*Faith* looks up at him, hypnotized by his determination] Now, mother, I've come down at your request to discuss this; are you ready to keep her? Otherwise up we go again.

*Mr march*. That's not the way to go to work, Johnny. You mustn't ask people to eat their words raw—like that.

*Johnny*. Well, I've had no dinner, but I'm not going to eat my words, I tell you plainly.

*Mrs march*. Very well then; go up again.

*Mary*. [Muttering] Mother—logic.

*Mr march*. Great Scott! You two haven't the faintest idea of how to conduct a parley. We have—to—er—explore every path to—find a way to peace.

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*Mrs march*. [To *faith*] Have you thought of anything to do, if you leave here?

*Faith*. Yes.

*Johnny*. What?

*Faith*. I shan't say.

*Johnny*. Of course, she'll just chuck herself away.

*Faith*. No, I won't. I'll go to a place I know of, where they don't want references.

*Johnny*. Exactly!

*Mrs march*. [To *faith*] I want to ask you a question. Since you came out, is this the first young man who's kissed you?

*Faith* has hardly had time to start and manifest what may or may not be indignation when *Mr march* dashes his hands through his hair.

*Mr march*. Joan, really!

*Johnny*. [Grimly] Don't condescend to answer!

*Mrs march*. I thought we'd met to get at the truth.

*Mary*. But do they ever?

*Faith*. I will go out!

*Johnny*. No! [And, as his back is against the door, she can't] I'll see that you're not insulted any more.

*Mr march*. Johnny, I know you have the best intentions, but really the proper people to help the young are the old—like—

*Faith* suddenly turns her eyes on him, and he goes on rather hurriedly

—your mother. I'm sure that she and I will be ready to stand by Faith.

*Faith*. I don't want charity.

*Mr march*. No, no! But I hope—

*Mrs march*. To devise means.

*Mr march*. [Roused] Of course, if nobody will modify their attitude —Johnny, you ought to be ashamed of yourself, and [To *Mrs march*] so ought you, Joan.

*Johnny*. [Suddenly] I'll modify mine. [To *faith*] Come here—close! [In a low voice to *faith*] Will you give me your word to stay here, if I make them keep you?

*Faith*. Why?

*Johnny*. To stay here quietly for the next two years?

*Faith*. I don't know.

*Johnny*. I can make them, if you'll promise.

*Faith*. You're just in a temper.

*Johnny*. Promise!

During this colloquy the *marches* have been so profoundly uneasy that *Mrs march* has poured out another glass of brandy.

*Mr march*. Johnny, the terms of the Armistice didn't include this sort of thing. It was to be all open and above-board.

*Johnny*. Well, if you don't keep her, I shall clear out.

At this bombshell *Mrs march* rises.

*Mary*. Don't joke, Johnny! You'll do yourself an injury.

*Johnny*. And if I go, I go for good.

*Mr march*. Nonsense, Johnny! Don't carry a good thing too far!

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*Johnny*. I mean it.

*Mrs march*. What will you live on?

*Johnny*. Not poetry.

*Mrs march*. What, then?

*Johnny*. Emigrate or go into the Police.

*Mr march*. Good Lord! [Going up to his wife—in a low voice] Let her stay till Johnny's in his right mind.

*Faith*. I don't want to stay.

*Johnny*. You shall!

*Mary*. Johnny, don't be a lunatic!

*Cook* enters, flustered.

*Cook*. Mr Bly, ma'am, come after his daughter.

*Mr march*. He can have her—he can have her!

*Cook*. Yes, sir. But, you see, he's—Well, there! He's cheerful.

*Mr march*. Let him come and take his daughter away.

But *Mr Bly* has entered behind him. He has a fixed expression, and speaks with a too perfect accuracy.

*Bly*. Did your two Cooks tell you I'm here?

*Mr march*. If you want your daughter, you can take her.

*Johnny*. Mr Bly, get out!

*Bly*. [Ignoring him] I don't want any fuss with your two cooks. [Catching sight of *Mrs march*] I've prepared myself for this.

*Mrs march*. So we see.

*Bly*. I 'ad a bit o' trouble, but I kep' on till I see 'Aigel walkin' at me in the loo-lookin' glass. Then I knew I'd got me balance.

They all regard *Mr Bly* in a fascinated manner.

*Faith*. Father! You've been drinking.

*Bly*. [Smiling] What do you think.

*Mr march*. We have a certain sympathy with you, Mr Bly.

*Bly*. [Gazing at his daughter] I don't want that one. I'll take the other.

*Mary*. Don't repeat yourself, Mr Bly.

*Bly*. [With a flash of muddled insight] Well! There's two of everybody; two of my daughter; an' two of the 'Ome Secretary; and two-two of Cook —an' I don't want either. [He waves *cook* aside, and grasps at a void alongside *faith*] Come along!

*Mr march*. [Going up to him] Very well, Mr Bly! See her home, carefully. Good-night!

*Bly*. Shake hands!

He extends his other hand; *Mr march* grasps it and turns him round towards the door.

*Mr march*. Now, take her away! Cook, go and open the front door for Mr Bly and his daughter.

*Bly*. Too many Cooks!

*Mr march*. Now then, Mr Bly, take her along!

*Bly*. [Making no attempt to acquire the real *faith*—to an apparition which he leads with his right hand] You're the one that died when my girl was 'ung. Will you go—first or shall—I?

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The apparition does not answer.

*Mary*. Don't! It's horrible!

*Faith*. I did die.

*Bly*. Prepare yourself. Then you'll see what you never saw before.

He goes out with his apparition, shepherded by *Mr march*.

*Mrs march* drinks off her fourth glass of brandy. A peculiar whistle is heard through the open door, and *faith* starts forward.

*Johnny*. Stand still!

*Faith*. I—I must go.

*Mary*. Johnny—let her!

*Faith*. There's a friend waiting for me.

*Johnny*. Let her wait! You're not fit to go out to-night.

*Mary*. Johnny! Really! You're not the girl's Friendly Society!

*Johnny*. You none of you care a pin's head what becomes of her. Can't you see she's on the edge? The whistle is heard again, but fainter.

*Faith*. I'm not in prison now.

*Johnny*. [Taking her by the arm] All right! I'll come with you.

*Faith*. [Recoiling] No.

Voices are heard in the hall.

*Mary*. Who's that with father? Johnny, for goodness' sake don't make us all ridiculous.

*Mr March's* voice is heard saying: "Your friend in here." He enters, followed by a reluctant young man in a dark suit, with dark hair and a pale square face, enlivened by strange, very living, dark, bull's eyes.

*Mr march*. [To *faith*, who stands shrinking a little] I came on this—er —friend of yours outside; he's been waiting for you some time, he says.

*Mrs march*. [To *faith*] You can go now.

*Johnny*. [Suddenly, to the *young man*] Who are you?

*Young* M. Ask another! [To *faith*] Are you ready?

*Johnny*. [Seeing red] No, she's not; and you'll just clear out.

*Mr march*. Johnny!

*Young* M. What have you got to do with her?

*Johnny*. Quit.

*Young* M. I'll quit with her, and not before. She's my girl.

*Johnny*. Are you his girl?

*Faith*. Yes.

*Mrs march* sits down again, and reaching out her left hand, mechanically draws to her the glass of brandy which her husband had poured out for himself and left undrunk.

*Johnny*. Then why did you—[He is going to say: "Kiss me," but checks himself]—let me think you hadn't any friends? Who is this fellow?

*Young* M. A little more civility, please.

*Johnny*. You look a blackguard, and I believe you are.

*Mr march*. [With perfunctory authority] I really can't have this sort of thing in my house. Johnny, go upstairs; and you two, please go away.

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*Young* M. [To *Johnny*] We know the sort of chap you are—takin' advantage of workin' girls.

*Johnny*. That's a foul lie. Come into the garden and I'll prove it on your carcase.

*Young* M. All right!

*Faith*. No; he'll hurt you. He's been in the war.

*Johnny*. [To the *young man*] You haven't, I'll bet.

*Young* M. I didn't come here to be slanged.

*Johnny*. This poor girl is going to have a fair deal, and you're not going to give it her. I can see that with half an eye.

*Young* M. You'll see it with no eyes when I've done with you.

*Johnny*. Come on, then.

He goes up to the windows.

*Mr march*. For God's sake, Johnny, stop this vulgar brawl!

*Faith*. [Suddenly] I'm not a "poor girl" and I won't be called one. I don't want any soft words. Why can't you let me be? [Pointing to *Johnny*] He talks wild. [*Johnny* clutches the edge of the writing-table] Thinks he can "rescue" me. I don't want to be rescued. I —[All the feeling of years rises to the surface now that the barrier has broken] —I want to be let alone. I've paid for everything I've done—a pound for every shilling's worth.

And all because of one minute when I was half crazy. [Flashing round at *Mary*] Wait till you've had a baby you oughtn't to have had, and not a penny in your pocket! It's money —money—all money!

*Young* M. Sst! That'll do!

*Faith*. I'll have what I like now, not what you think's good for me.

*Mr march*. God knows we don't want to—

*Faith*. You mean very well, Mr March, but you're no good.

*Mr march*. I knew it.

*Faith*. You were very kind to me. But you don't see; nobody sees.

*Young* M. There!  That's enough!  You're gettin' excited.  You come away with me.

FAITH's look at him is like the look of a dog at her master.

*Johnny*. [From the background] I know you're a blackguard—I've seen your sort.

*Faith*. [Firing up] Don't call him names!  I won't have it.  I'll go with whom I choose! [Her eyes suddenly fix themselves on the *young man's* face] And I'm going with him!

*Cook* enters.

*Mr march*.  What now, Cook?

*Cook*.  A Mr Barnabas in the hall, sir.  From the police.

Everybody starts.  *Mrs march* drinks off her fifth little glass of brandy, then sits again.

*Mr march*.  From the police?

He goes out, followed by *cook*.  A moment's suspense.

*Young* M. Well, I can't wait any longer.  I suppose we can go out the back way?

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He draws *faith* towards the windows. But *Johnny* stands there, barring the way. *Johnny*. No, you don't.

*Faith*. [Scared] Oh! Let me go—let him go!

*Johnny*. You may go. [He takes her arm to pull her to the window] He can't.

*Faith*. [Freeing herself] No—no! Not if he doesn't.

*Johnny* has an evident moment of hesitation, and before it is over *Mr march* comes in again, followed by a man in a neat suit of plain clothes.

*Mr march*. I should like you to say that in front of her.

P. C. *Man*. Your service, ma'am. Afraid I'm intruding here. Fact is, I've been waiting for a chance to speak to this young woman quietly. It's rather public here, sir; but if you wish, of course, I'll mention it. [He waits for some word from some one; no one speaks, so he goes on almost apologetically] Well, now, you're in a good place here, and you ought to keep it. You don't want fresh trouble, I'm sure.

*Faith*. [Scared] What do you want with me?

P. C. *Man*. I don't want to frighten you; but we've had word passed that you're associating with the young man there. I observed him to-night again, waiting outside here and whistling.

*Young* M. What's the matter with whistling?

P. C. *Man*. [Eyeing him] I should keep quiet if I was you. As you know, sir [To *Mr march*] there's a law nowadays against soo-tenors.

*Mr march*. Soo—?

*Johnny*. I knew it.

P. C. *Man*. [Deprecating] I don't want to use any plain English—with ladies present—

*Young* M. I don't know you. What are you after? Do you dare—?

P. C. *Man*. We cut the darin', 'tisn't necessary. We know all about you.

*Faith*. It's a lie!

P. C. *Man*. There, miss, don't let your feelings—

*Faith*. [To the *young man*] It's a lie, isn't it?

*Young* M. A blankety lie.

*Mr march*. [To BARNABAs] Have you actual proof?

*Young* M. Proof? It's his job to get chaps into a mess.

P. C. *Man*. [Sharply] None of your lip, now!

At the new tone in his voice *faith* turns and visibly quails, like a dog that has been shown a whip.

*Mr march*. Inexpressibly painful!

*Young* M. Ah! How would you like to be insulted in front of your girl? If you're a gentleman you'll tell him to leave the house. If he's got a warrant, let him produce it; if he hasn't, let him get out.

P. C. *Man*. [To *Mr march*] You'll understand, sir, that my object in speakin' to you to-night was for the good of the girl. Strictly, I've gone a bit out of my way. If my job was to get men into trouble, as he says, I'd only to wait till he's got hold of her. These fellows, you know, are as cunning as lynxes and as impudent as the devil.

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*Young* M. Now, look here, if I get any more of this from you—I—I'll consult a lawyer.

*Johnny*. Fellows like you—

*Mr march*. Johnny!

P. C. *Man*. Your son, sir?

*Young* M. Yes; and wants to be where I am. But my girl knows better; don't you?

He gives *faith* a look which has a certain magnetism.

P. C. *Man*. If we could have the Court cleared of ladies, sir, we might speak a little plainer.

*Mr march*. Joan!

But *Mrs march* does not vary her smiling immobility; *faith* draws a little nearer to the *young man*. *Mary* turns to the fire.

P. C. *Man*. [With half a smile] I keep on forgettin' that women are men nowadays. Well!

*Young* M. When you've quite done joking, we'll go for our walk.

*Mr march*. [To *Barnabas*] I think you'd better tell her anything you know.

P. C. *Man*. [Eyeing *faith* and the *young man*] I'd rather not be more precise, sir, at this stage.

*Young* M. I should think not! Police spite! [To *faith*] You know what the Law is, once they get a down on you.

P. C. *Man*. [To *Mr march*] It's our business to keep an eye on all this sort of thing, sir, with girls who've just come out.

*Johnny*. [Deeply] You've only to look at his face!

*Young* M. My face is as good as yours.

*Faith* lifts her eyes to his.

P. C. *Man*. [Taking in that look] Well, there it is! Sorry I wasted my time and yours, Sir!

*Mr march*. [Distracted] My goodness! Now, Faith, consider! This is the turning-point. I've told you we'll stand by you.

*Faith*. [Flashing round] Leave me alone! I stick to my friends. Leave me alone, and leave him alone! What is it to you?

P. C. *Man*. [With sudden resolution] Now, look here! This man George Blunter was had up three years ago—for livin' on the earnings of a woman called Johnson. He was dismissed with a caution. We got him again last year over a woman called Lee—that time he did—

*Young* M. Stop it! That's enough of your lip. I won't put up with this —not for any woman in the world. Not I!

*Faith*. [With a sway towards him] It's not—!

*Young* M. I'm off! Bong Swore la Companee! He tarns on his heel and walks out unhindered.

P. C. *Man*. [Deeply] A bad hat, that; if ever there was one. We'll be having him again before long.

He looks at *faith*. They all look at *faith*. But her face is so strange, so tremulous, that they all turn their eyes away.

*Faith*. He—he said—he—!

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On the verge of an emotional outbreak, she saves herself by an effort. A painful silence.

P. C. *Man*. Well, sir—that's all. Good evening! He turns to the door, touching his forehead to *Mr march*, and goes.

As the door closes, *faith* sinks into a chair, and burying her face in her hands, sobs silently. *Mrs march* sits motionless with a faint smile. *Johnny* stands at the window biting his nails. *Mary* crosses to *faith*.

*Mary*. [Softly] Don't. You weren't really fond of him?

*Faith* bends her head.

*Mary*. But how could you? He—

*Faith*. I—I couldn't see inside him.

*Mary*. Yes; but he looked—couldn't you see he looked—?

*Faith*. [Suddenly flinging up her head] If you'd been two years without a word, you'd believe anyone that said he liked you.

*Mary*. Perhaps I should.

*Faith*. But I don't want him—he's a liar. I don't like liars.

*Mary*. I'm awfully sorry.

*Faith*. [Looking at her] Yes—you keep off feeling—then you'll be happy! [Rising] Good-bye!

*Mary*. Where are you going?

*Faith*. To my father.

*Mary*. With him in that state?

*Faith*. He won't hurt me.

*Mary*. You'd better stay. Mother, she can stay, can't she?

*Mrs march* nods.

*Faith*. No!

*Mary*. Why not? We're all sorry. Do! You'd better.

*Faith*. Father'll come over for my things tomorrow.

*Mary*. What are you going to do?

*Faith*. [Proudly] I'll get on.

*Johnny*. [From the window] Stop!

All turn and look at him. He comes down. Will you come to me?

*Faith* stares at him. *Mrs march* continues to smile faintly.

*Mary*. [With a horrified gesture] Johnny!

*Johnny*. Will you? I'll play cricket if you do.

*Mr march*. [Under his breath] Good God!

He stares in suspense at *faith*, whose face is a curious blend of fascination and live feeling.

*Johnny*. Well?

*Faith*. [Softly] Don't be silly! I've got no call on you. You don't care for me, and I don't for you. No! You go and put your head in ice. [She turns to the door] Good-bye, Mr March! I'm sorry I've been so much trouble.

*Mr march*. Not at all, not at all!

*Faith*. Oh! Yes, I have. There's nothing to be done with a girl like me. She goes out.

*Johnny*. [Taking up the decanter to pour himself out a glass of brandy] Empty!

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*Cook*. [Who has entered with a tray] Yes, my dearie, I'm sure you are.

*Johnny*. [Staring at his father] A vision, Dad! Windows of Clubs—men sitting there; and that girl going by with rouge on her cheeks—

*Cook*. Oh! Master Johnny!

*Johnny*. A blue night—the moon over the Park. And she stops and looks at it.—What has she wanted—the beautiful—something better than she's got—something that she'll never get!

*Cook*. Oh! Master Johnny!

She goes up to *Johnny* and touches his forehead. He comes to himself and hurries to the door, but suddenly *Mrs march* utters a little feathery laugh. She stands up, swaying slightly. There is something unusual and charming in her appearance, as if formality had dropped from her.

*Mrs march*. [With a sort of delicate slow lack of perfect sobriety] I see—it—all. You—-can't—help—unless—you—love!

*Johnny* stops and looks round at her.

*Mr march*. [Moving a little towards her] Joan!

*Mrs march*. She—wants—to—be—loved. It's the way of the world.

*Mary*. [Turning] Mother!

*Mrs march*. You thought she wanted—to be saved. Silly! She—just— wants—to—be—loved. Quite natural!

*Mr march*. Joan, what's happened to you?

*Mrs march*. [Smiling and nodding] See—people—as—they—are! Then you won't be—-disappointed. Don't—have—ideals! Have—vision—just simple —vision!

*Mr march*. Your mother's not well.

*Mrs march*. [Passing her hand over her forehead] It's hot in here!

*Mr march*. Mary!

*Mary* throws open the French windows.

*Mrs march*. [Delightfully] The room's full of *gas*. Open the windows! Open! And let's walk—out—into the air!

She turns and walks delicately out through the opened windows; *Johnny* and *Mary* follow her. The moonlight and the air flood in.

*Cook*. [Coming to the table and taking up the empty decanter] My Holy Ma!

*Mr march*. Is this the Millennium, Cook?

*Cook*. Oh! Master Geoffrey—there isn't a millehennium. There's too much human nature. We must look things in the face.

*Mr march*. Ah! Neither up—nor down—but straight in the face! Quite a thought, Cook! Quite a thought!

*Curtain*.