THE COMPLETE PLAYS OF JOHN GALSWORTHY

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FIRST SERIES:

THE SILVER BOX

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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.

[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!

[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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.]

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?

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?

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?

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.

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?

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.

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?

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 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 arsk 'em

again. What makes you stand like that--you long-sufferin',

Gawd-forsaken image--that's why I can't keep my hands off you. So

now you know. Work! You can work, but you 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?

[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.

[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?

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?

[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.

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?

[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.

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!

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.

[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.

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.

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.

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.

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!

[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?

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.

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?

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?

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.

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.

[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.

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?

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.

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.

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.

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.

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----

[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.

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----

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.]

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.

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!

[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!

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----

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----

[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.

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----

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!

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.

[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!

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.

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.

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!

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.

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.

[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.]

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.

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!

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!

[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----

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!

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.

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----

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.

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?

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.

[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?

[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."

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.

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----

[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----

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.]

[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.

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.]

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.

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.

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.]

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!

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

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?

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?

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.]

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.]

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?

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----

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?"

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.

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.]

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.

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?

[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.

[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?

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.]

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?

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.

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.

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.]

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?

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!

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.

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!

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.

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.

[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.

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?

[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?

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, 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.]

[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.

[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.]

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.

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----

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?

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.

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.

[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!

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.

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.

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--

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.

[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.]

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?

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----

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!

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?

[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

The Little Dream

Justice

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

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.

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!

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!

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.

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.

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!

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?

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.

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.

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.

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 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.

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.

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.]

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.

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----

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.

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?

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.

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.

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!

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?

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.

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.

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!

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!

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.

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.

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?

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.

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!

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!

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!

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?

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!

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

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.

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.

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!

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!

THE FLOWERS 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:

"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.

THE FLOWERS, 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!

THE FLOWERS 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!"

"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!

THE FLOWERS 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.

THE FLOWERS laugh happily.

THE WINE HORN. With me you shall lie on a bed of dove's feathers.

THE FLOWERS 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!

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:

"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.

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]

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?

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.

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.

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.

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.

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

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.

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.

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.

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?

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.

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?

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.

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.

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.

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?

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.

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.

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'.

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?

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!

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.

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.

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.

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 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.

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?

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 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 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 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.

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]

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 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?

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]

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.

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.

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.

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.

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]

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.

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?

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?

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, 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

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.

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.

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.

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.

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?

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!

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.

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.

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.

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.

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!

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

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?

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!

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?

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."

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!

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.

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----

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.

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.

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.

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!

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.

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, 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!

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!

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.

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.

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.

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!

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.

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.

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]

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?

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----

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!

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.

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.

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?

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?

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.

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.

[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!

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?

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!

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.

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!

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!

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.

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

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.

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----

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.

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?

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'!

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 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.

[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.

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!

[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!

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?

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!

[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.

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!

[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.]

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.

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]

'Espece 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]

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.]

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!

[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.

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.

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----

[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!

[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.

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?

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----

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.

[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?

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.

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.]

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.]

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!

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.]

[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.]

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.]

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!

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?

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.

[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.]

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.

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.

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.]

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!

[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.]

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.]

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.

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?

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.

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?

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.]

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!

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!

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?

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!

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?

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----"

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.

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?

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?

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?

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.

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.

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?

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!

[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.

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!

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!

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!

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.

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!

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?

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!

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.

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.

THE CURTAIN 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----

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!

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.]

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!

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.

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.

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!

[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!

[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!

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.

THE CURTAIN 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

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SCENE: A VILLAGE OF THE WEST

The Action passes on Ascension Day.

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SCENE I. The Village Inn.

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ACT III. Evening

SCENE I. STRANGWAY'S rooms.

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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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

[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.

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.

[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?

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!

[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.

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.

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.]

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.]

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.

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.]

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?

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!

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?

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.

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.

[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.]

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.

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.

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.

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.

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!

[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.

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.

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.]

[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!

[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.

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----

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.]

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:]

"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.

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. 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!

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.

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?

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?

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.

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.

[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.

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.

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?

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.

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?

[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.]

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?

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?

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."

[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.

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.

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.

[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.

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.]

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.

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.

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.

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.]

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.]

[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.

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."

[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.]

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.

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.

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?

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?

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!

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.

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.

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.

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.

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?

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.

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!

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?

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.

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.

[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!

[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!

[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?

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.

[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.

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?

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!

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.

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.

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?

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

[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.

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?

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!

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!

[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?

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.

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

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.

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.

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!

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.

[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.

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.

[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.

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!

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.]

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.

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.

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.

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

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.]

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?

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.

[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.

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!

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.

[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----

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----

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.

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.]

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.

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.

[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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

[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.

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?

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.]

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.

[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.

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

The Little Man

Hall-marked

Defeat

The Sun

Punch and Go

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.

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.]

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.

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?

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!

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!

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 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?

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.

[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.

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?

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.

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.

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.

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!

[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:]

"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?

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?

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.

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.

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.]

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.

[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.

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.

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?

[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?

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.

[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!

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'!

[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 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

DEFEAT

THE SUN

PUNCH AND GO

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!

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!

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.]

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.]

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?

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!

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.

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.]

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.

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?

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.

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 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.]

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!

[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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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 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.]

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.

[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."

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.

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.]

[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!

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].

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.]

[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!

[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

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A Family Man

Loyalties

Windows

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

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.

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!

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.

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.

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!

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?

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

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!

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!

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?

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.

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.

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--

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!

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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?

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.

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.

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.

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!

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!

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.

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.

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.

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!

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!

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.]

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?

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.

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?

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--

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!

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.

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!

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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 bath-room.

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.

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?

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.

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!

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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!

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.

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.

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.

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.

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?

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.

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?

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.

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!

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.

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.

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.

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--

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.

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?

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.

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?

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.

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.

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.

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.

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?

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.

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?

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].

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!

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.

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.

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.

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.

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, 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.]

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.

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.

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."

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?

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.

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.

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.

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--

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.

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!

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?

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?

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!

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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?

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.

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!

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?

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.

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.

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."

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.

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--

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.

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.

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.

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.

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!

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?

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.

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?

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.

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--!

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!

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.