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OSCAR WILDE

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THE PLAYS OF OSCAR WILDE

☆

☆ ALBERT & CHARLES BONI ☆

DECORATIONS AND TYPES
SPECIALLY DESIGNED
BY
FREDERIC W. GOUDY

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The Duchess of Padua

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CONTENTS

	PAGE
LADY WINDERMEEE'S FAN.	1
Act I	7
II.	29
Ill.	52
IV.	70
A WOMAN OF NO IMPORTANCE	89
Act I.	93
II.	116
III.	145
IV.	167
tHE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST . .	191
Act I.	197
II.	229
III.	268
AN IDEAL HUSBAND.	289
Act I	295
I I	335
Ill	372
IV.	402

PAGE

VERA; OR, THE NIHILISTS 429
Prologue 433
Act I 443
II 462
III 484
IV 501

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA 513
Act I 519
II 536
III 560
IV 578
V 601

SALOME" 619

LADY WINDERMERE'S FAN

The acting rights to "Lady Windermere's Fan" are held by Mr. Charles Frohman, Empire Theatre Building, New York City, to whom application must be made for the right to perform either by amateurs or professionals.

To

Gladys

COUNTESS DE GREY

LADY WINDERMERE'S FAN

London: St. James's Theatre: Lessee and Manager, Mr. George Alexander, February 22nd, 1892.

CHARACTERS

LORD WINDERMERE	Mr. George Alexander
LORD DARLINGTON	Mr. Nutcombe Gould
LORD AUGUSTUS LORTON	Mr. H. H. Vincent
MR. CECIL GRAHAM	Mr. Ben Webster
MR. DUMBY	Mr. Vane-Tempest
MR. HOPPER	Mr. Alfred Hollis
PARKER (Butler)	Mr. V. Sansbury
LADY WINDERMERE	Miss Lily Hanbuiy
THE DUCHESS OF BERWICK	Miss Fanny Coleman
LADY AGATHA CARLISLE	Miss Laura Graves
LADY PLYMDALE	Miss Granville
LADY JEDBURGH	Miss B. Page
LADY STUTFIELD	Miss Madge Girdlestone
MRS. COWPER-COWPER	Miss A. De Winton
MRS. ERLYNNE	Miss Marion Terry
ROSALIE (Maid)	Miss Winifred Dolan

THE SCENES OF THE PLAY

ACT I	Morning-room in Lord Windermere's House.
ACT II	Drawing-room in Lord Windermere's House.
ACT III	Lord Darlington's rooms.
ACT IV	Same as Act I.

Time—The Present.
Place—London.

The Action of the Play takes place within twenty-four hours, beginning on a Tuesday afternoon at five o'clock, and ending the next day at 1 30 p. m.

LADY WINDERMERE'S FAN

ACT I

SCENE — *Morning-room of* LORD WINDERMERE'S *house in Carlton House Terrace. Doors* c. *and* R. *Bureau with books and papers* R. *Sofa with small tea-table* L. *Window opening on to terrace* L. *Table* R.

[LADY WINDERJVIERE *is at table* R. *Arranging roses in a blue bowl.]*

[Enter PARKER.]

PARKER. Is your ladyship at home this afternoon?

LADY w. Yes—who has called?

PARKER. Lord Darlington, my lady.

LADY w. *[Hesitates for a moment].* Show him up —and I'm at home to any one who calls.

PARKER. Yes, my lady. *[Exit* c.]

LADY w. It's best for me to see him before tonight. I'm glad he's come.

[Enter PARKER c.]

PARKER. Lord Darlington.

[Enter LORD D. c. *Exit* PARKER.]

LORD D. How do you do, Lady Windermere?

LADY w. How do you do, Lord Darlington? No, I can't shake hands with you. My hands are all wet with these roses. Aren't they lovely? They came up from Selby this morning.

LORD D. They are quite perfect. *[Sees a fan lying on the table.]* And what a wonderful fan! May I look at it?

LADY w. Do. Pretty, isn't it! It's got my name on it, and everything. I have only just seen it myself. It's my husband's birthday present to me. You know to-day is my birthday?

LORD D. No? Is it really?

LADY w. Yes; I'm of age to-day. Quite an important day in my life, isn't it? That is why I am giving this party to-night. Do sit down. *[Still arranging flowers]*

LORD D. *[Sitting down], I* wish I had known it was your birthday, Lady Windermere. I would have covered the whole street in front of your house with flowers for you to walk on. They are made for you. *[A short pause.]*

LADY w. Lord Darlington, you annoyed me last night at the Foreign Office. I am afraid you are going to annoy me again.

LORD D. I, Lady Windermere?

[Enter PARKER *and* FOOTMAN C. *with tray and tea-things.]*

LADY w. Put it there, Parker. That will do. *[Wipes her hands with her pocket-handkerchief, goes to tea-table* L. *and sits down.]* Won't you come over, Lord Darlington?

[Exeunt PARKER *and* FOOTMAN C.]

LORD D. *[Takes chair and goes across* L. C.] I am quite miserable, Lady Windermere. You must tell me what I did. *[Sits down at table* L.]

LADY w. Well, you kept paying me elaborate compliments the whole evening.

LORD D. *[Smiling].* Ah, now-a-days we are all of us so hard up, that the only pleasant things to pay are compliments. They're the only things we *can* pay.

LADY w. *[Shaking her head].* No, I am talking very seriously. You mustn't laugh, I am quite serious. I don't like compliments, and I don't see, why a man should think he is pleasing a woman enormously when he says to her a whole heap of things that he doesn't mean.

LORD D. Ah, but I did mean them. *[Takes tea which she offers him.]*

LADY w. *[Gravely].* I hope not. I should be sorry to have to quarrel with you, Lord Darlington. I like you very much, you know that. But I shouldn't like you at all if I thought you were what most other men are. Believe me, you are better than most other men, and I sometimes think you pretend to be worse.

LORD D. We all have our little vanities, Lady Windcrmere.

LADY w. Why do you make that your special one? *[Still seated at table* L.]

LORD D. *[Still seated* L. c.]. Oh, now-a-days so many conceited people go about Society pretending to be good, that I think it shows rather a sweet and modest disposition to pretend to be bad. Besides, there is this to be said. If you pretend to be good, the world takes you very seriously. If you pretend to be bad, it doesn't. Such is the astounding stupidity of optimism.

LADY w. Don't you *want* the world to take you beriously then, Lord Darlington?

LORD D. No, not the world. Who are the people the world takes seriously? All the dull people one can think of, from the Bishops down to the bores. I should like *you* to take me veiy seriously, Lady Windermere, *you* more than anyone else in life.

LADY w. Why—why me?

LORD D. *[After a slight hesitation].* Because I think we might be great friends. Let us be great friends. You may want a friend some day.

LADY w. Why do you say that?

LORD D. Oh!—we all want friends at times.

LADY w. I think we're very good friends already, Lord Darlington. We can always remain so *QS* long as you don't——

LORD D. Don't what?

LADY w. Don't spoil it by saying extravagant, silly things to me. You think I am a Puritan, I suppose? Well, I have something of the Puritan in me. I was brought up like that. I am glad of it. My mother died when I was a mere child. I lived always with Lady Julia, my father's eldest sister, you know. She was stem to me,,but she taught me, what the world is forgetting, the differs ence that there is between" what js right and what is wrong *She* allowed of no compromise. I allow of none.

LORD D. My dear Lady Windermere!

LADY w. *[Leaning back on the sofa].* You look on me as being behind the age.—Well, I am! I should be sorry to be on the same level as an age like this.

LORD D. You think the age very bad?

LADY w. Yes. Now-a-days people seem to look on life as a speculation. It is not a speculation. It is a sacrament. Its ideal is Love. Its purification is sacrifice.

LORD D. *[Smiling].* Oh, anything is better than being sacrificed!

LADY w. *[Leaning forward].* Don't say that.

LORD D. I do say it. I feel it—I know it.

[Enter PARKER C.]

PARKER. The men want to know if they are to put the carpets on the terrace for to-night, my lady?

LADY w. You don't think it will rain, Lord Darlington, do you?

LORD D. I won't hear of its raining on your birthday!

LADY. w. Tell them to do it at once, Parker.

[Exit PARKER C.]

LORD D. *[Still seated].* Do you think then—of course I am only putting an imaginary instance—do you think, that in the case of a young married couple, say about two years married, if the husband suddenly becomes the intimate friend of a woman of—well, more than doubtful character, is always calling upon her, lunching with her, and probably paying her bills—do you think that the wife should not console herself?

LADY w. *[Frowning],* Console herself?

LORD D. Yes, I think she should—I think she? has the right.

LADY w. Because the husband is vile—should the wife be vile also?

LORD D. Vileness is a terrible word, Lady Windermere.

LADY w. It is a terrible thing, Lord Darlington,

LORD D. Do you know I am afraid that good people do a great deal of harm in this world. (Certainly the greatest harm they do is that they make badness of such extraordinary importance. It is absurd to divide people into good and bad. People are either charming or tedious. I take the side of the charming, and you, Lady Windermere, can't help belonging to them.

LADY w. Now, Lord Darlington. *[Rising and crossing* R., *frant of him.]* Don't stir, I am merely going to finish my flowers. *[Goes to table* R. c.]

LORD D. *[Rising and moving chair].* And I must say I think you are very hard on modern life, Lady Windermere. Of course there is much against it, I admit. Most women, for instance, now-a-days, are rather mercenary.

LADY w. Don't talk about such people.

LORD D. Well, then, setting mercenary people aside, who, of course, are dreadful, do you think seriously that women who have committed what the world calls a fault should never be forgiven?

LADY w. *[Standing at table].* I think they should never be forgiven.

LORD D. And me? Do you think that there should be the same laws for men as there are for women?

LADY w. Certainly!

LORD D. I think life too complex a thing to be settled by these hard and fast rules.

LADY w. If we had "these hard and fast rules," we should find life much more simple.

LOKD D. You allow of no exceptions?

LADY w. None!

LORD D. Ah, what a fascinating Puritan you are, Lady Windermere!

LADY w. The adjective was unnecessary, Lord Darlington.

LORD D. I couldn't help it. I can resist everything except temptation.

LADY w. You have the modern affectation of weakness.

LORD D. *[looking at her}.* It's only an affectation, Lady Windermere.

[Enter PARKER c.]

PARKER. The Duchess of Berwick and Lady Agatha Carlisle.

[Enter the DUCHESS OF B. *and* LADY A. c. c.]

[Exit **PARKER C.]**

DUCHESS OF B. *[Corning down* c. *and shaking hands].* Dear Margaret, I am so pleased to see you. You remember Agatha, don't you? *[Crossing* L. c. How do you do, Lord Darlington? I won't let you know my daughter, you are far too wicked.

LORD D. Don't say that, Duchess. As a wicked man I am a complete failure. Why, there are lots of people who say I have never really done anything wrong in the whole course of my life. Of course they only say it behind my back.

DUCHESS OF B. Isn't he dreadful? Agatha, this

is Lord Darlington. Mind you don't believe a word he says. [LORD DARLINGTON *crosses* R. c.] No, no tea, thank you, dear. *[Crosses and sits on sofa.]* We have just had tea at Lady Markby's. Such bad tea, too. It was quite undrinkable. I wasn't at all surprised. Her own son-in-law supplies it. Agatha is looking forward so much to your ball to-night, dear Margaret.

LADY w. *[Sealed* L. c.]. Oh, you mustn't think it is going to be a ball, Duchess. It is only a dance in honor of my birthday. A small and early.

LORD D. *[Standing* L. c.]. Very small, very early, and very select, Duchess.

DUCHESS OF B. *[On sofa* L.]. Of course it's going to be select. But we know *that,* dear Margaret, about *your* house. It is really one of the few houses in London where 1 can take Agatha, and where I feel perfectly secure about poor Berwick. I don't know what Society is coming to. The most dreadful people seem to go everywhere. They certainly come to my parties—the men get quite furious if one doesn't ask them. Really, some one should make a stand against it.

LADY w. / will, Duchess. I will have no one ii) my house about whom there is any scandal.

LORD D. [R. c.]. Oh, don't say that, Lady Windermere. I should never be admitted! *[Sitting.]*

DUCHESS OF B. Oh, men don't matter. With women it is different. We're good. Some of us are, atleast. But we are positively getting elbowed into the corner. Our husbands would really forget our existence if we didn't nag at them from time to

time, just to remind them that we have a perfect legal right to do so.

LORD D. It's a curious thing, Duchess, about the game of marriage—a game, by the way, that is going out of fashion—the wives hold all the honours, and invariably lose the odd trick.

DUCHESS OF B. The odd trick? Is that the husband, Lord Darlington?

LORD D. It would be rather a good name for the modern husband.

DUCHESS OF B. Dear Lord Darlington, how thoroughly depraved you are!

LADY w. Lord Darlington is trivial.

LORD D. Ah, don't say that, Lady Windermere.

LADY w. Why do you *talk so* trivially about life, then?

LORD D. Because I think that life is far too important a thing ever to talk seriously about it. *[Moves up* c.]

DUCHESS OF B. What does he mean? Do, as a concession to my poor wits, Lord Darlington, just explain to me what you really mean?

LORD D. *[Coming dawn back of table].* I think I had better not, Duchess. Now-a-days to be intelligible is to be found out. Good-bye! *[Shakes hands with* DUCHESS.] And now *[Goes up stage],* Lady Windermere, good-bye. I may come tonight, mayn't I? Do let me come.

LADY w. *[Standing up stage with* LORD D.]. Yes, certainly. But you are not to say foolish insincere things to people.

LORD D. *[Smiling].* Ah! you are beginning to

reform me. It is a dangerous thing to reform any one, Lady Windermere. *[Bows, and exit* c.]

DUCHESS OF B. [*Who has risen, goes* c.]. What a charming, wicked creature! I like him so much. I'm quite delighted he's gone! How sweet you're looking! Where *do* you get your gowns? And now I must tell you how sorry I am for you, dear Margaret. *[Crosses to sofa and sits with* LADY w.] Agatha, darling!

LADY A. Yes, mamma. *[Rises.]*

DUCHESS OF B. Will you go and look over the photograph album that I see there?

LADY A. Yes, mamma. *[Goes to table* L.]

DUCHESS OF B. Dear girl! She is so fond of photographs of Switzerland. Such a pure taste, I think. But I really am so sorry for you, Margaret.

LADY w. *[Smiling].* Why, Duchess?

DUCHESS OF B. Oh, on account of that horrid woman. She dresses so well, too, which makes it much worse, sets such a dreadful example. Augustus—you know my disreputable brother—such a trial to us all — well, Augustus is completely infatuated about her. It is quite scandalous, for she is absolutely inadmissible into society. Many a woman has a past, but I am told that she has at least a dozen, and that they all fit.

LADY w. Whom are you talking about, Duchess.

DUCHESS OF B. About Mrs. Erlynne.

LADY w. Mrs. Erlynne? I never heard of her, Duchess. And what *has* she to do with me?

DUCHESS OF B. My poor child! Agatha, darling!

LADY A. Yes, mamma.

DUCHESS OF B. Will you go out on the terrace and look at the sunset?

LADY A. Yes, mamma.

[Exit through window L.]

DUCHESS OF B. Sweet girl! So devoted to sunsets! Shows such refinement of feeling, does it not? After all, there is nothing like nature, is there?

LADY w. But what is it, Duchess? Why do you talk to me about this person?

DUCHESS OF B. Don't you really know? I assure you we're all so distressed about it. Only last night at dear Lady Fansen's every one was saying how extraordinary it was that, of all men in London, Windermere should behave in such a way.

LADY w. My husband—what has *he* got to do with any woman of that kind?

DUCHESS OF B. Ah, what indeed, dear? That is the point. He goes to see her continually, and stops for hours at a time, and while he is there she is not at home to any one. Not that many ladies call on her, dear, but she has a great many disreputable men friends—my own brother in particular, as I told you—and that is what makes it so dreadful about Windermere. We looked upon *him* as being such a model husband, but I am afraid there is no doubt about it. My dear nieces—you know the Saville girls, don't you?—such nice domestic creatures—plain, dreadfully plain, but so good—well, they're always at the window doing fancy work, and making ugly things for the poor, which I think so useful of them in these dreadful

socialistic days, and this terrible woman has taken a house in Curzon Street, right opposite them—such a respectable street, too. I don't know what we're coming to! And they tell me that Windermere goes there four and five times a week—they *see* him. They can't help it—and although they never talk Scandal, they—well, of course—they remark on it to every one. And the worst of it all is, that I have been told that this woman has got a great deal of money out of somebody, for it seems that she came to London six months ago without anything at all to speak of, and now she has this charming house in Mayfair, drives her pony in the Park every afternoon, and all—well all—since she has known poor dear Windermere.

LADY w. Oh, I can't believe it!

DUCHESS OF B. But it's quite true, my dear. The whole of London knows it. That is why I felt it was better to come and talk to you, and advise you to take Windermere away at once to Hornburg or to Aix, where he'll have something to amuse him, and where you can watch him all day long. I assure you, my dear, that on several occasions after I was first married I had to pretend to be very ill, and was obliged to drink the most unpleasant mineral waters, merely to get Berwick out of town. He was so extremely Susceptible. Though I am bound to say he never gave away any large sums of money to anybody. He is far too high-principled for that.

LADY w. *[Interrupting].* Duchess, Duchess, it's impossible! *[Rising and crossing stage* c.] We are

only married two years. Our child is but six months old. *[Sits in chair* R. *of* L. *table.]*

DUCHESS OF B. Ah, the dear pretty baby! How is the little darling? Is it a boy or a girl? I hope a girl—Ah, no, I remember it's a boy! I'm so sorry. Boys are so wicked. My boy is excessively immoral. You wouldn't believe at what hours he comes home. And he's only left Oxford a few months—I really don't know what they teach them there.

LADY w. Are *all* men bad?

DUCHESS OF B. Oh, all of them, my dear, all of them, without any exception. And they never grow any better. Men become old, but they never become good.

LADY w. Windermcre and I married for love.

DUCHESS OF B. Yes, we begin like that. It was only Berwick's brutal and incessant threats of suicide that made me accept him at all, and before the year was out he was running after all kinds of petticoats, every color, every shape, every material In fact, before the honeymoon was over, I caught him winking at my maid, a most pretty, respectable girl. I dismissed her at once without a character.—No, I remember I passed her on to my sister; poor dear Sir George is so short-sighted, I thought it wouldn't matter. But it did, though it was most unfortunate. *[Rises.]* And now, my dear child, I must go, as we are dining out. And mind you don't take this little aberration of Windermere's too much to heart. Just take him abroad, and he'll come back to you all right.

LADY w. Come back to me? [c.]

DUCHESS OF B. [L. c.]. Yes, dear, these wicked women get our husbands away from us, but they always come back, slightly damaged, of course. And don't make scenes, men hate them!

LADY w. It is very kind of you, Duchess, to come and tell me all this. But I can't believe that my husband is untrue to me.

DUCHESS OF B. Pretty child! I was like that once. Now I know that all men are monsters. [LADY w. *rings bell].* The only thing to do is to feed the wretches well. A good cook does wonders, and that I know you have. My dear Margaret, you are not going to cry?

LADY w. You needn't be afraid, Duchess, I never cry.

DUCHESS OF B. That's quite right, dear. Crying is the refuge of plain women, but the ruin of pretty ones. Agatha, darling!

LADY A. *[Entering* L.]. Yes, mamma. *[Stands back of table* L. c.]

DUCHESS OF B. Come and bid good-bye to Lady Windermere, and thank her for your charming visit. *[Coming down again.]* And by the way, I must thank you for sending a card to Mr. Hopper—he's that rich young Australian people are taking such notice of just at present. His father made a great fortune by selling some kind of food in circular tins—most palatable, I believe—I fancy it is the thing the servants always refuse to eat. But the son is quite interesting. I think he's attracted by dear Agatha's clever talk. Of course,

we should be very sorry to lose her, but I think that a mother who doesn't part with a daughter every season has no real affection. We're coming to-night, dear. [PARKER *opens* c. *doors.]* And remember my advice, take the poor fellow out of town at once, it is the only thing to do. Good-bye, once more; come, Agatha. *[Exeunt* DUCHESS *and* LADY A. c.]

LADYW. How horrible! I understand now what Lord Darlington meant by the imaginary instance of the couple not two years married. Oh! it can't be true—she spoke of enormous sums of money paid to this woman. I know where Arthur keeps his bank book—in one of the drawers of that desk. I might find out by that. I *will* find out. *[Opens drawer.]* No, it is some hideous mistake. *[Rises and goes* c.]. Some silly scandal! He loves *me!* He loves *me!* But why should I not look? I am his wife, I have a right to look! *[Returns to bureau, takes out book and examines it, page by page, smiles and gives a sigh of relief.}* I knew it, there is not a word of truth in this stupid story. *[Puts book back in drawer. As she does so, starts and takes out another book].* A second book—private—locked! *[Tries to open it, but fails. Sees paper knife on bureau, and with it cuts cover from book. Begins to start at the first page.]* Mrs. Erlynne—£600—Mrs. Erlynne—£700—Mrs. Erlynne—£400. Oh! it is true! it is true! How horrible! *[Throws book on floor.]*

[Enter LORD w. c.]

LORD w. Well, dear, haa the fan been sent home

yet? *[Going* R. c. *sees book.]* Margaret, you have cut open my bank book. You have no right to do such a thing!

LADY w. You think it wrong that you are found out, don't you?

LORD w. I think it wrong that a wife should spy on her husband.

LADY w. I did not spy on you. I never knew of this woman's existence till half an hour ago. Some one who pitied me was kind enough to tell me what every one in London knows already—your daily visits to Curzon Street, your mad infatuation, the monstrous sums of money you squander on this infamous woman! *[Crossing L.]*

LORD w. Margaret, don't talk like that of Mrs. Erlynne, you don't know how unjust it is!

LADY w. *[Turning to him].* You are very jealous of Mrs. Erlynne's honour. I wish you had been as jealous of mine.

LORD w. Your honour is untouched, Margaret. You don't think for a moment that——*[puts book back into desk.]*

LADY w. I think that you spend your money strangely. That is all. Oh, don't imagine I mind about the money. As far as I am concerned, you may squander everything we have. But what I *do* mind is that you who have loved me, you who have taught me to love you, should pass from the love that is given to the love that is bought. Oh, it's horrible! *[Sits on sofa.]* And it is I who feel degraded. *You* don't feel anything. I feel stained, utterly stained. You can't realise how hideous the

last six months seem to me now—every kiss you have given me is tainted in my memory.

LORD w. *[Crossing to her].* Don't say that, Margaret, I never loved any one in the whole world but you.

LADY w. *[Rises].* Who is this woman, then? Why do you take a house for her?

LORD w. I did not take a house for her.

LADY w. You gave her the money to do it, which is the same thing.

LORD w. Margaret, as far as I have known Mrs. Erlynne——

LADY w. Is there a Mr. Erlynne—or is he a myth?

- LOHD w. Her husband died many years ago. She is alone in the world.

LADY"W. No relations? *[A pause.]*

LORD w. None.

LADY w. Rather curious, isn't it? [L.]

LORD w. [L. c.] Margaret, I was saying to you —and I beg you to listen to me—that as far as I have known Mrs. Erlynne, she has conducted herself well. If years ago——

LADY w. Oh! *[Crossing* R. c.]. I don't want details about her life.

LORD w. I am not going to give you any details about her life. I tell you simply this—Mrs. Erlynne was once honoured, loved, respected. She was well born, she had a position—she lost everything—threw it away, if you like. That makes it all the more bitter. Misfortunes one can endure—they come from outside, they are acci-

dents. But to suffer for one's own faults—ah! there is the sting of life. It was twenty years ago, too. She was little more than a girl then. She had been a wife for even less time than you have.

LADY w. I am not interested in her—and—you should not mention this woman and me in the same breath. It is an error of taste. *[Sitting* R. *at desk.]*

LORD w. Margaret, you could save this woman. She wants to get back into society, and she wants you to help her. *[Crossing to her.]*

LADY w. Me!

LORD w. Yes, you.

LADY w. How impertinent of her! *[A pause}*

LORD w. Margaret, I came to ask you a great favour, and I still ask it of you, though you have discovered what I had intended you shoul never have known, that I have given Mrs. Eiiynne a large sum of money. I want you to send her an invitation for our party to-night. *[Standing* L. *of her.}*

LADY w. You are mad. *[Rises.]*

LORD w. I entreat you. People may chatter about her, do chatter about her, of course, but they don't know anything definite against her. She has been to several houses—not to houses where you would go, I admit, but still to houses where women who are in what is called Society now-a-days do go. That does not content her. She wants you to receive her once.

LADY w. As a triumph for her, I suppose?

LORD w. No; but because she knows that you

are a good woman—and that if she comes here once she will have a chance of a happier, a surer life, than she has had. She will make no further effort to know you. Won't you help a woman who is trying to get back?

LADY w. No! If a woman really repents, she never wishes to return to the society that has made or seen her ruin.

LORD w. I beg of you.

LADY w. *[Crossing to door* R.]. 1 am going to dress for dinner, and don't mention the subject again this evening. Arthur *[going to him* c.], you fancy because I have no father or mother that I am alone in the world and that you can treat me as you choose. You are wrong, I have friends, many friends.

LORD w. [L. c.]. Margaret, you are talking foolishly, recklessly. I won't argue with you, but I insist upon your asking Mrs. Erlynne to-night.

LADY w. [R. c.]. I shall do nothing of the kind. *[Crossing* L. c.]

LORD w. You refuse? [c.]

LADY w. Absolutely!

LORD w. Ah, Margaret, do this for my sake; it is her last chance.

LADY w. What has that to do with me?

LORD w. How hard good women are!

LADY w. How weak bad men are!

LORD w. Margaret, none of us men may be good enough for the women we marry—that is quite true—but you don't imagine I would ever—oh, the suggestion is monstrous!

LADY w. Why should *you* be different from other men? I am told that there is hardly a husband in London who does not waste his life over *some* shameful passion.

LORD w. I am not one of them

LADY w. I am not sure of that!

LORD w. You are sure in your heart. But don't make chasm after chasm between us. God knows the last few minutes have thrust us wide enough apart. Sit down and write the card.

LADY w. Nothing in the whole world would induce me.

LORD w. *[Crossing to the bureau}.* Then I will. *[Rings electric bell, sits and writes card.]*

LADY w. You are going to invite this woman? *[Crossing to him.]*

LORD w. Yes. *[Pause.]*

[Enter PARKER.]

LORD w. Parker I

PARKER. Yes, my lord. *[Comes down* L. c.]

LORD w. Have this note sent to Mrs. Erlynne at No. 84a Curzon Street. *[Crossing to L.* c. *and giving note to* PARKER.] There is no answer.

[Exit PARKER C.]

LADY w. Arthur, if that woman comes here, I shall insult her.

LORD w. Margaret, don't say that.

LADY w. I mean it.

LORD w. Child, if you did such a thing, there's not a woman in London who wouldn't pity you.

LADY w. There is not a *good* woman in London who would not applaud me. We have been too

lax. We must make an example. I propose to begin to-night. *[Picking up fan.]* Yes, you gave me this fan to-day; it was your birthday present. If that woman crosses my threshold, I shall strike her across the face with it.

LORD w, Margaret, you couldn't do such a thing.

LADYW. You don't know me! *[Moves* R.]

[Enter PARKER.]

Parker!

PARKER. Yes, my lady.

LADY w. I shall dine in my own room. I don't want dinner, in fact. See that everything is ready by half-past ten. And, Parker, be sure you pronounce the names of the guests very distinctly to-night. Sometimes you speak so fast that I miss them. I am particularly anxious to hear the names quite clearly, so as to make no mistake. You understand, Parker?

PARKER. Yes, my lady.

LADY w. That will do! *[Exit* PARKER c.] *[Speaking to* LORD w.] Arthur, if that woman comes here—I warn you——

LORD w. Margaret, you'll ruin us!

LADY w. Us! From this moment my life is separate from yours. But if you wish to avoid a public scandal, write at once to this woman, and tell her that I forbid her to come here!

LORD w. I will not—I cannot—she must come!

LADY w. Then I shall do exactly as I have said. *[Goes* R.] You leave me no choice. *[Exit* R.]

LORD w. *[Calling after her].* Margaret! Mar-

garet! *[A pause.]* My God! What shall I do! I dare not tell her who this woman really is. The shame would kill her. *[Sinks down into a chair and buries his face in his hands.]*

ACT-DROP

ACT II

SCENE—*Drawing-room in* LORD w's *house. Door* R. u. *opening into ball-room, where band is playing. Door* L. *through which guests are entering. Door* L. u. *opens on an illuminated terrace. Palms, flowers, and brilliant lights. Room crowded with guests.* LADY w. *is receiving them.*

DUCHESS OF B. *[Up* c.]. So strange Lord Windermere isn't here. Mr. Hopper is very late, too. You have kept those five dances for him, Agatha! *[Comes down.]*

LADY A. Yes, mamma.

DUCHESS OF B. *[Sitting on sofa].* Just let me see your card. I'm so glad Lady Windermere has revived cards.—They're a mother's only safeguard. You dear simple little thing! *[Scratches out two names.]* No nice girl should ever waltz with such particularly younger sons! It looks so fast! The last two dances you must pass on the terrace with Mr. Hopper.

[Enter MR. DUMBY *and* LADY PLYMDALE *from the ball-room.]*

LADY A. Yes, mamma.

DUCHESS OF B. *[Fanning herself].* The air is so pleasant there.

PARKER. Mrs. Cowper-Cowper. Lady Stutfield. Sir James Royston. Mr. Guy Berkeley.

[These people enter as announced.]

DUMBY. Good evening, Lady Stutfield. I suppose this will be the last ball of the season?

LADY s. I suppose so, Mr. Duraby. It's been a delightful season, hasn't it?

DUMBY. Quite delightful! Good evening, Duchess. I suppose this will be the last ball of the season?

DUCHESS OF B. I suppose so, Mr. Duinby. It has been a very dull season, hasn't it?

DUMBY. Dreadfully dull! Dreadfully dull!

MRS. c.-c. Good evening, Mr. Duinby. I suppose this will be the last ball of the season?

DUMBY. Oh, I think not. There'll probably be two more. *[Wanders back to* LADY p.]

PARKER. Mr. Rufford. Lady Jedburgh and Miss Graham. Mr. Hopper.

[These people enter as announced.]

HOPPER. How do you do, Lady Windermere? How do you do, Duchess? *[Bows to* LADY A.]

DUCHESS OF B. Dear Mr. Hopper, how nice of you to come so early. We all know how you are run after in London.

HOPPER. Capital place, London! They are not nearly so exclusive in London as they are in Sydney.

DUCHESS OF B. Ah! we know your value, Mr. Hopper. We wish there were more like you. It would make life so much easier. Do you know, Mr. Hopper, dear Agatha and I are so much interested in Australia. It must be so pretty with all the dear little kangaroos flying about. Agatha

has found it on the map. What a curious shape it is! Just like a large packing case. However, it is a very young country, isn't it?

HOPPER. Wasn't it made at the same time as the others, Duchess?

DUCHESS OF B. How clever you are, Mr. Hopper. You have a cleverness quite of your own. Now I mustn't keep you.

HOPPER. But I should like to dance with Lady Agatha, Duchess.

DUCHESS OF B. Well, I *hope* she has a dance left. Have you got a dance left, Agatha?

LADY A. Yes, mamma.

DUCHESS OF B. The next one?

LADY A. Yes, mamma.

HOPPER. May I have the pleasure? [LADY AGATHA *bows.]*

DUCHESS OF B. Mind you take great care of my little chatterbox, Mr. Hopper. [LADY A. *and* MR. H. *pass into ball-room.]*

[Enter LORD w. L.]

LORD w. Margaret, I want to speak to you.

LADY w. In a moment. *[The music stops.]*

PARKER. Lord Augustus Lorton.

[Enter LORD A.]

LORD A. Good evening, Lady Windermere.

DUCHESS OF B. Sir James, will you take me into the ball-room? Augustus has been dining with us to-night. I really have had quite enough of dear Augustus for the moment.

[SIR JAMES R. *gives the* DUCHESS *his arm and escorts her into the ball-room.]*

PARKER. Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Bowden. Lord and Lady Paisley. Lord Darlington.

[These people enter as announced.]

LORD A. *[Coming up to* LORD w.] Want to speak to you, particularly, dear boy. I'm worn to a shadow. Know I don't look it. None of us men do look what we really are. Demmed good thing, too. What I want to know is this. Who is she? Where does she come from? Why hasn't she got any demmed relations? Demmed nuisance, relations! But they make one so demmed respectable.

LORD w. You are talking of Mrs. Erlynne, I suppose? I only met her six months ago. Till then I never knew of her existence.

LORD A. You have seen a good deal of her since then.

LORD w. *[Coldly].* Yes, I have seen a good deal of her since then. I have just seen her.

LORD A. Egad! the women are very down on her. I have been dining with Arabella this evening! By Jove! you should have heard what she said about Mrs. Erlynne. She didn't leave a rag on her. . . . . *[Aside.]* Berwick and I told her that didn't matter much, as the lady in question must have an extremely fine figure. You should have seen Arabella's expression! .... But, look here, dear boy. I don't know what to do about Mrs. Erlynne. Egad! I might be married to her; she treats me with such demmed indifference. She's deuced clever, too! She explains everything. Egad! She explains you. She has got

any amount of explanations for you—and all of them different.

LORD w. No explanations are necessary about my friendship with Mrs. Erlynne.

LORD A. Hem! Well, look here, dear old fellow. Do you think she will ever get into this demmcd thing called Society? Would you introduce her to your wife? No use beating about the confounded bush. Would you do that?

LORD w. Mrs. Erlynne is coming here to-night,

LORD A. Your wife has sent her a card?

LORD w. Mrs. Erlynne has received a card.

LORD A. Then she's all right, dear boy. But why didn't you tell me that before. It would have saved me a heap of worry and demmed misunderstandings!

[LADY A. *and* MR. H. *cross and exit on terrace* x u. E.]

PARKER. Mr. Cecil Graham.

[Enter MR. CECIL G.]

CECIL G. *[Bows to* LADY w., *passes over and shakes hands with* LORD w.]. Good evening, Arthur. Why don't you ask me how I am? I like people to ask me how I am. It shows a widespread interest in my health. Now to-night I am not at all well. Been dining with my people. Wonder why it is one's people are always so tedious? My father would talk morality after dinner. I told him he was old enough to know better. But my experience is that as soon as people are old enough to know better, they don't know anything at all. Hullo, Tuppy! Hear you're

going to be married again; thought you were tired of that game.

LORD A. You're excessively trivial, my dear boy, excessively trivial!

CECIL G. By the way, Tuppy, which is it? Have you been twice married and once divorced, or twice divorced and once married? I say, you've been twice divorced and once married. It seems so much more probable.

LORD A. I have a very bad memory. I really don't remember which. *[Moves away* R.]

LADY P. Lord Windermere, I've something most particular to ask you.

LORD w. I am afraid—if you will excuse me—I must join my wife.

LADY P. Oh, you mustn't dream of such a thing. It's most dangerous now-a-days for a husband to pay any attention to his wife in public. It always makes people think that he beats her when they're alone. The world has grown so suspicious of anything that looks like a happy married life. But I'll tell you what it is at supper. *[Moms towards door of ball-room.]*

LORD w. [c.] Margaret, I *must* speak to you.

LADY w. Will you hold my fan for me, Lord Darlington? Thanks. *[Comes down to him.]*

LORD w. *[Crossing to her].* Margaret, what you said before dinner was, of course, impossible?

LADY w. That woman is not coming here tonight!

LORD w. [R. c.]. Mrs. Erlynne is coming here, and if you in any way annoy or wound her, you

will bring shame and sorrow on us both. Remember that! Ah, Margaret! only trust me! A wife should trust her husband!

LADY W. [c.]. London is full of women who trust their husbands. One can always recognise them. They look so thoroughly unhappy. I am not going to be one of them. *[Moves up.]* Lord Darlington, will you give me back my fan, please? Thanks. .". . A useful thing, a fan, isn't it? ... I want a friend to-night, Lord Darlington. I didn't know I would want one so soon.

LORD D. Lady Windermere! I knew the time would come some day; but why to-night?

LORD W. I *mil* tell her. I must. It would be terrible if there were any scene. Margaret . . .

PARKER. Mrs. Erlynne.

[LORD W. *starts.* MRS. E. *enters, very beautifully dressed and very dignified.* LADY W, *clutches at her fan, then lets it drop on the floor. She baws coldly to* MRS. E., *who bows to her sweetly in turn, and sails into the room.]*

LORD D. You have dropped your fan, Lady Windermere. *[Picks it up and hands it to her.]*

MRS. E. [c.] How do you do, again, Lord Windermere? How charming your sweet wife looks! Quite a picture!

LORD W. *[In a low voice].* It was terribly rash of you to come!

MRS. E. *[Smiling].* The wisest thing I ever did in my life. And, by the way, you must pay me a good deal of attention this evening. I am afraid of the women. You must introduce me to some of

them. The men I can always manage. How do you do, Lord Augustus? You have quite neglected me lately. I have not seen you since yesterday. I am afraid you're faithless. Every one told me so.

LORD A. [B.] Now really, Mrs. Erlynne, allow me to explain.

MRS. E. [R. c.] No, dear Lord Augustus, you can't explain anything. It is your chief charm,

LORD A. Ah! if you find charms in me, Mrs. Erlynne—*[They converse together.* LORD w. *moves uneasily about the room watching* MRS. E.]

LORD D. *[To* LADY w.]. How pale you are!

LADY w. Cowards are always pale,

LORD D. You look faint. Come out on the terrace.

LADY w. Yes. [To PARKER]. Parker, send my cloak out.

MRS. E. *[Crossing to her].* Lady Windermere, how beautifully your terrace is illuminated. Reminds me of Prince Doria's at Rome. [LADY w. *bows coldly, and goes off with* LORD D.] Oh, how do you do, Mr. Graham? Isn't that your aunt, Lady Jedburgh? I should so much like to know her.

CECIL G. *[After a moment's hesitation and embarrassment].* Oh, certainly, if you wish it. Aunt Caroline, allow me to introduce Mrs. Erlynne.

MRS. E. So pleased to meet you, Lady Jedburgh. *[Sits beside her on the sofa.]* Your nephew and I are great friends. I am so much interested in his political career. I think he's sure to be a wonderful

success. He thinks like a Tory, and talks like a Radical, and that's so important now-a-days. He's such a brilliant talker, too. But we all know from whom he inherits that. Lord Allandale was saying to me only yesterday in the Park, that Mr. Graham talks almost as well as his aunt.

LADY j. [R.] Most kind of you to say these charming things to me! [MBS. E. *smiles and continues conversation.]*

DUMBY. *[To* CECIL G.]. Did you introduce Mrs. Erlynne to Lady Jedburgh?

CECIL G. Had to, my dear fellow. Couldn't help it. That woman can make one do anything she wants. How, I don't know.

DUMBY. Hope to goodness she won't speak to me! *[Saunters towards* LADY p.]

MRS. E. [c. *To* LADY j.]. On Thursday? With great pleasure. *[Rises and speaks to* LORD w. *laughing.]* What a bore it is to have to be civil to these old dowagers. But they always insist on it.

LADY p. *[To* MR. D.]. Who is that well-dressed woman talking to Windermere?

DUMBY. Haven't got the slightest idea. Looks like an *edition de luxe* of a wicked French novel, meant specially for the English market.

MRS. E. So that is poor Dumby with Lady Plymdale? I hear she is frightfully jealous of him. He doesn't seem anxious to speak to me to-night. I suppose he's afraid of her. Those straw-coloured women have dreadful tempers. Do you know, I think I'll dance with you first, Windermere. [LORD w. *bites his lip and frowns.]* It will make

Lord Augustus so jealous! Lord Augustus! [LORD A. *comes down.]* Lord Windermere insists on my dancing with him first, and, as it's his own house, I can't well refuse. You know I would much sooner dance with you.

LORD A. *[With a low bow].* I wish I could think so, Mrs. Erlynne.

MRS. E. You know it far too well. I can fancy a person dancing through life with you and finding it charming.

LORD A. *[Placing his hand on his white waistcoat].* Oh, thank you, thank you. You are the most adorable of all ladies!

MRS. E. What a nice speech! So simple and so sincere! Just the sort of speech I like. Well, you shall hold my bouquet. *[Goes towards ballroom on* LORD w.'s *arm.]* Ah, Mr, Dumby, how are you? I am so sorry I have been out the last three times you have called. Come and lunch on Friday.

DUMBY *[With perfect nonchalance}.* Delighted.

[LADY p. *glares with indignation at* MR. D. LORD A. *follows* MRS. E. *and* LORD w. *into the ball-room holding bouquet]*

LADY P. *[To* MR. D.]. What an absolute brute you are! I never can believe a word you say! Why did you tell me you didn't know her? What do you mean by calling on her three times running? You are not to go to lunch there; of course you understand that?

DUMBY. My dear Laura, I wouldn't dream **of** going!

LADY P. You haven't told me her name yet! Who is she?

DUMBY. *[Coughs slightly and smoothes his hair].* She's a Mrs. Erlynne.

LADY P. *That* woman!

DUMBY. Yes, that is what every one calls her.

LADY P. How very interesting! How intensely interesting! I really must have a good stare at her. *[Goes to door of ball-room and looks in.] I* have heard the most shocking things about her. They say she is ruining poor Windermere. And Lady Windermere, who goes in for being so proper, invites her! How extremely amusing! It takes a thoroughly good woman to do a thoroughly stupid thing. You are to lunch there on Friday!

DUMBY. Why?

LADY p. Because I want you to take my husband with you. He has been so attentive lately, that he has become a perfect nuisance. Now, this woman is just the thing for him. He'll dance attendance upon her as long as she lets him, and won't bother me. I assure you, women of that kind are most juseful. They form the basis of other people's marriages.

DUMBY. What a mystery you are!

LADY p. *[Looking at him].* I wish you were!

DUMBY. I am—to myself. I am the only person in the world I should like to know thoroughly; but I don't see any chance of it just at present.

[They pass into the ball-roomy and LADY w. *and* LOKD D. *enter from the terrace.]*

LADY w. Yes. Her coming here is monstrous, unbearable. I know now what you meant to-day at tea time. Why didn't you tell me right out? You should have!

LORD D. I couldn't! A man can't tell these things about another man! But if I had known he was going to make you ask her here to-night, I think I would have told you. That insult, at any rate, you would have been spared.

LADY w. I did not ask her. He insisted on her coming—against my entreaties—against my commands. Oh! the house is tainted for me! I feel that every woman here sneers at me as she dances by with my husband. What have I done to deserve this? I gave him all my life. He took it—used it—spoiled it! I am degraded in my own eyes; and I lack courage—I am a coward! *[Sits down on sofa.]*

LORD D. If I know you at all, I know that you can't live with a man who treats you like this! What sort of life would you have with him? You would feel that he was lying to you every moment of the day. You would feel that the look in his eyes was false, his voice false, his touch false, his passion false. He would come to you when he was weary of others; you would have to comfort him. He would come to you when he was devoted to others; you would have to charm him. You would have to be to him the mask of his real life, the cloak to hide his secret.

LADY w. You are right—you are terribly right. But where am I to turn? You said you would be

my friend, Lord Darlington.—Tell me, what am I to do? Be my friend now.

LORD D. Between men and women there is no friendship possible. There is passion, enmity, worship, love, but no friendship. I love you——

LADY w. No, no! *[Rises.]*

LORD D. Yes, I love you! You are more to me than anything in the whole world. What does your husband give you? Nothing. Whatever is in him he gives to this wretched woman, whom he has thrust into your society, into your home, to shame you before every one. I offer you my life——

LADY w. Lord Darlington!

LORD D. My life—my whole life. Take it, and do with it what you will.... I love you—love you as I have never loved any living thing. From the moment I met you I loved you, loved you blindly, adoringly, madly! You did not know it then—you know it now! Leave this house to-night. I won't tell you that the world matters nothing, or the world's voice, or the voice of society. They matter a good deal. They matter far too much. But there are moments when one has to choose between living one's own life, fully, entirely, completely—or dragging out some false, shallow, degrading existence that the world in its hypocrisy demands. You have that moment now. Choose! Oh, my love, choose!

LADY w. *[Moving slowly away from him, and looking at him with startled eyes].* I have not the courage.

LORD D. *[Followmg her].* Yes; you have the

courage. There may be six months of pain, of disgrace even, but when you no longer bear his name, when you bear mine, all will be well. Margaret, my love, my wife that shall be some day—yes, my wife! You know it! What are you now? This woman has the place that belongs by right to you. Oh! go—go out of this house, with head erect, with a smile upon your lips, with courage in your eyes. All London will know why you did it; and who will blame you? No one. If they do, what matter. Wrong? What is wrong? It's wrong for a man to abandon his wife for a shameless woman. It is wrong for a wife to remain with a man who so dishonours her. You said once you would make no compromise with things. Make none now. Be brave! Be yourself!

LADY w. I am afraid of being myself. Let me think! Let me wait! My husband may return to me. *[Sits down on sofa.]*

LORD D. And you would take him back! You are not what I thought you were. You are just the same as every other woman. You would stand anything rather than face the censure of a world, whose praise you would despise. In a week you will be driving with this woman in the Park. She will be your constant guest—your dearest friend. You would endure anything rather than break with one blow this monstrous tie. You are right. You have no courage; none!

LADY w. Ah, give me time to think. I cannot answer you now, *[Passes her hand nervously over her brow.]*

LORD D. It must be now or not at all.

LADY w. *[Rising from the sofa].* Then not at all! *[A pause.]*

LORD D. You break my heart!

LADY w. Mine is already broken. *[A pause.]*

LORD D. To-morrow I leave England. This is the last time I shall ever look on you. You will never see me again. For one moment our lives met—our souls touched. They must never meet or touch again. Good-bye, Margaret. *[Exit.]*

LADYW. How alone I am in life! How terribly alone!

[The music stops. Enter the DUCHESS OF B. *and* LORD p. *laughing and talking. Other guests come on from ball-room.]*

DUCHESS OF B. Dear Margaret, I've just been having such a delightful chat with Mrs. Erlynne. I am so sorry for what I said to you this afternoon about her. Of course, she must be all right if *you* invite her. A most attractive woman, and has such sensible views on life. Told me she entirely disapproved of people marrying more than once, so I feel quite safe about poor Augustus. Can't imagine why people speak against her. It's those horrid nieces of mine—the Saville girls—they're always talking scandal. Still, I should go to Homburg, dear, I really should. She is just a little too attractive. But where is Agatha? Oh, there she is. [LADY A. *and* MR. H. *enter from the terrace* L. u. E.] Mr. Hopper, I am very angry with you. You have taken Agatha out on the terrrace, and she is so delicate.

HOPPER. [L. c.]. Awfully sorry, Duchess. We went out for a moment and then got chatting together.

DUCHESS OF B. [c.] Ah, about dear Australia, I suppose?

HOPPER. Yes.

DUCHESS OF B. Agatha, darling! *[Beckons her over.]*

LADY A. Yes, mamma.

DUCHESS OF B. *[Aside]. Did Mr. Hopper definitely*——

LADY A. Yes, mamma.

DUCHESS OF B. And what answer did you give him, dear child?

LADY A. Yes, mamma.

DUCHESS OF B. *[Affectionately].* My dear one! You always say the right thing. Mr. Hopper! James! Agatha has told me everything. How cleverly you have both kept your secret.

HOPPER. You don't mind my taking Agatha off to Australia, then, Duchess?

DUCHESS OF B. *[Indignantly].* To Australia? Oh, don't mention that dreadful vulgar place.

HOPPER. But she said she'd like to come with me.

DUCHESS OF B. *[Severely].* Did you say that, Agatha?

LADY A. Yes, mamma.

DUCHESS OF B. Agatha, you say the most silly things possible. I think on the whole that Grosvenor Square would be a more healthy place to reside in. There are lots of vulgar people live in

Grosvenor Square, but at any rate there are no horrid kangaroos crawling about. But we'll talk about that to-morrow. James, you can take Agatha down. You'll come to lunch, of course, James. At half-past one instead of two. The Duke will wish to say a few words to you, I am sure.

HOPPER. I should like to have a chat with the Duke, Duchess. He has not said a single word to me yet.

DUCHESS OF B. I think you'll find he will have a great deal to say to you to-morrow. *[Exit* LADY A. *with* MR. H.] And now good-night, Margaret. I'm afraid it's the old, old stoiy, dear. Love—well, not love at first sight, but love at the end of the season, which is so much more satisfactory.

LADY w. Good-night, Duchess.

[Exit the DUCHESS OF B. on LORD p.'s *arm.]*

LADY P. My dear Margaret, what a handsome woman your husband has been dancing with! I should be quite jealous if I were you! Is she a great friend of yours?

LADY w. No!

LADY p. Really? Good-night, dear. *[Looks at* MR. D. *and exit.]*

DUMBY. Awful manners young Hopper has!

CECIL G. Ah! Hopper is one of Nature's gentlemen, the worst type of gentlemen I know.

DUMBY. Sensible woman, Lady Windermere. Lots of wives would have objected to Mrs. Erlynne coming. But Lady Windermere has that uncommon thing called common sense.

CECIL G. And Windermere knows that nothing looks so like innocence as an indiscretion.

DUMBY. Yes; dear Windermere is becoming almost modern. Never thought he would. *[Bows to* LADY W. *and exit.]*

LADY J. Good-night, Lady Windermere. What a fascinating woman Mrs. Erlynne is! She is coming to lunch on Thursday, won't you come too? I expect the Bishop and dear Lady Merton.

LADY W. I am afraid I am engaged, Lady Jedburgh.

LADY J. So sorry. Come, dear.

[Exeunt LADY J. *and* MISS G.]

[Enter MRS. E. *and* LORD W.]

MRS. E. Charming ball it has been! Quite reminds me of old days. *[Sits on the sofa.]* And I see that there are just as many fools in society as there used to be. So pleased to find that nothing has altered! Except Margaret. She's grown quite pretty. The last time I saw her—twenty years ago—she was a fright in flannel. Positive fright, I assure you. The dear Duchess! and that sweet Lady Agatha! Just the type of girl I like! Well, really, Windermere, if I am to be the Duchess's sister-in-law——

LORD W. *[Sitting* L. *of her].* But are you——? *[Exit* MR. CECIL G. *with rest of guests.* LADY W. *watches with a look of scorn and pain,* MRS. E. *and her husband. They are unconscious of her presence.]*

MRS. E. Oh yes! He's to call to-morrow at twelve o'clock! He wanted to propose to-night.

In fact he did. He kept on proposing. Poor Augustus, you know how he repeats himself. Such a bad habit! But I told him I wouldn't give him an answer till to-morrow. Of course I am going to take him. And I dare say I'll make him an admirable wife, as wives go. And there is a great deal of good in Lord Augustus. Fortunately it is all on the surface. Just where good qualities should be. Of course you must help me in this matter.

LORD W. I am not called on to encourage Lord Augustus, I suppose?

MRS. E. Oh, no! I do the encouraging. But you will make me a handsome settlement, Windermere, won't you?

LORD W. *[Frowning],* Is that what you want to talk to me about to-night?

MRS. E. Yes.

LORD W. *[With a gesture of impatience].* I will not talk of it here.

MRS. E. *[Laughing].* Then we will talk of it on the terrace. Even business should have a picturesque background. Should it not, Windermere? With a proper background women can do anything.

LORD W. Won't to-morrow do as well?

MRS. E. No; you see, to-morrow I am going to accept him. And I think it would be a good thing if I was able to tell him that—well, what shall I say?—£2,000 a year left to me by a third cousin—or a second husband—or some distant relative of that kind. It would be an additional attraction,

wouldn't it? You have a delightful opportunity now of paying me a compliment, Windermere. But you are not very clever at paying compliments. I am afraid Margaret doesn't encourage you in that excellent habit. It's a great mistake on her part. When men give up saying what is charming they give up thinking what is charming. But seriously, what do you say to £2,000? £2,500, I think. In modern life margin is everything. Windermere, don't you think the world an intensely amusing place? I do!

[Exit on terrace with LORD W. *Music strikes up in ball-room.]*

LADY W. To stay in this house any longer is impossible. To-night a man who loves me offered me his whole life. I refused it. It was foolish of me. I will offer him mine now. I will give him mine. I will go to him! *[Puts on cloak and goes to door, then turns back. Sits down at table and writes a letter, puts it into an envelope, and leaves it on table.]* Arthur has never understood me. When he reads this, he will. He may do as he chooses now with his life. I have done with mine as I think best, as I think right. It is he who has broken the bond of marriage—not I. I only break its bondage. *[Exit.]*

[PARKER *enters* L. *and crosses towards the ball-room* R. *Enter* MRS. E.]

MRS. E. Is Lady Windermere in the ball-room?

PARKER. Her ladyship has just gone out.

MRS, E. Gone out? She's not on the terrace?

PARKER. No, madam. Her ladyship has just gone out of the house.

MRS. E. *[Starts and looks at the servant with puzzled expression on her face].* Out of the house?

PARKER. Yes, madam—her ladyship told me she had left a letter for his lordship on the table.

MRS. E. A letter for Lord Windermere?

PARKER. Yes, madam.

MRS. E. Thank you. *[Exit* PARKER. *The music in the ball-room stops.]* Gone out of her house! A letter addressed to her husband! *[Goes over to bureau and looks at letter. Takes it up and lays it down again with a shudder of fear.}* No, no! It would be impossible! Life doesn't repeat its tragedies like that! Oh, why does this horrible fancy come across me? Why do I remember now the one moment of my life I most wish to forget? DoesJile repeat its tragedies? *[Tears letter open and reads it, then sinks down into a chair with a gesture of anguish.]* Oh, how terrible! The same words that twenty years ago I wrote to her father! and how bitterly I have been punished for it! No; my punishment, my real punishment is to-night, is now! *[Still seated* R.]

[Enter LORD w. L. u. E.]

LORD w. Have you said good-night to my wife? *[Comes* c.]

MRS. E. *[Crushing letter in her hand].* Yes.

LORD w. Where is she?

MRS. E. She is very tired. She has gone to bed. She said she had a headache.

LORD W. I must go to her. You'll excuse me?

MRS. E. *[Rising hurriedly].* Oh, no! It's nothing serious. She's only very tired, that is all. Besides, there are people still in the supper-room. She wants you to make her apologies to them. She said she didn't wish to be disturbed. *[Drops letter.]* She asked me to tell you.

LORD W. *[Picks up letter].* You have dropped something.

MRS. E. Oh, yes, thank you, that is mine. *[Puts out her hand to take it.]*

LORD W. *[Still looking at letter].* But it's my wife's handwriting, isn't it?

MRS. E. *[Takes the letter quickly].* Yes, it's—an address. Will you ask them to call my carriage, please?

LORD W. Certainly. *[Goes* L. *and exit.]*

MRS. E. Thanks. What can I do? What can I do? I feel a passion awakening within me that I never felt before. What can it mean? The daughter must not be like the mother—that would be terrible. How can I save her? How can I save my child? A moment may ruin a life. Who knows that better than I? Windermere must be got out of the house; that is absolutely necessary. *[Goes* L.] But how shall I do it? It must be done somehow. Ah!

[Enter LORD A. R. u. E. *carrying bouquet.]*

LORD A. Dear lady, I am in such suspense! May I not have an answer to my request?

MRS. E. Lord Augustus, listen to me. You are to take Lord Windermere down to your club at

once, and keep him there as long as possible. You understand?

LORD A. But you said you wished me to keep early hours!

MBS. E. *[Nervously].* Do what I tell you. Do what I tell you.

LORD A. And my reward?

MRS. E. Your reward? Your reward? Oh! ask me that to-morrow. But don't let Windermere out of your sight to-night. If you do I will never forgive you. I will never speak to you again. I'll have nothing to do with you. Remember you are to keep Windermere at your club, and don't let him come back to-night. *[Exit.]*

LORD A. Well, really, I might be her husband already. Positively I might. *[Follows her in a bewildered manner.}*

ACT-DROP

ACT III

SCENE—LORD DARLINGTON'S *rooms. A large sofa is in front of fireplace* R. *At the back of the stage a curtain is drawn across the urindow. Doors* L. *and* R. *Table* R. *with writing materials. Table* c. *with syphons, glasses, and Tantalus frame. Table* L. *with cigar and cigarette box. Lamps lit.*

LADY w. *[Standing by the fireplace}.* Why doesn't he come? This waiting is horrible. He should be here. Why is he not here, to wake by passionate words some fire within me? I am cold —cold as a loveless thing. Arthur must have read my letter by this time. If he cared for me, he would have come after me, would have taken me back by force. But he doesn't care. He's entrammelled by this woman—fascinated by her—dominated by her. If a woman wants to hold a man, she has merely to appeal to what is worst in him. We make gods of men, and they leave us. Others make brutes of them and they fawn and are faithful. How hideous life is!. . .Oh lit was mad of me to come here, horribly mad. And yet which is the worst, I wonder, to be at the mercy of a man who loves one, or the wife of a man who in one's own house dishonours one? What woman knows? What woman in the whole world? But will he

love me always, this man to whom I am giving my life? What do I bring him? Lips that have lost the note of joy, eyes that are blighted by tears, chill hands and icy heart. I bring him nothing. I must go back—no; I can't go back, my letter has put me in their power—Arthur would not take me back! That fatal letter! No! Lord Darlington leaves England to-morrow. I will go with him—I have no choice. *[Sits down for a few moments. Then starts up and puts on her cloak.}* No, no! I will go back, let Arthur do with me what he pleases. I can't wait here. It has been madness my coming. I must go at once. As for Lord Darlington—Oh! here he is! What shall I do? What can I say to him? Will he let me go away at all? I have heard that men are brutal, horrible. . . . Oh! *[Hides her face in her hands.]*

[Enter MRS. E. L.I

MRS. E. Lady Windermere! [LADY w. *starts and looks up. Then recoils in contempt.]* Thank Heaven I am in time. You must go back to your husband's house immediately.

LADY w. Must?

MRS. E. *[Authoritatively].* Yes, you must! There is not a second to be lost. Lord Darlington may return at any moment.

LADY w. Don't come near me!

MRS. E. Oh! you are on the brink of ruin: you are on the brink of a hideous precipice. You must leave this place at once, my carriage is waiting at the corner of the street. You must come with me and drive straight home. [LADY w. *throws off her*

cloak and flings it on the sofa.] What are you doing?

LADY w. Mrs. Erlynne — if you had not come here, I would have gone back. But now that I see you, I feel that nothing in the whole world would induce me to live under the same roof as Lord Windermere. You fill me with horror. There is something about you that stirs the wildest rage within me. And I know why you are here. My husband sent you to lure me back that I might serve as a blind to whatever relations exist between you and him.

MRS. E. Oh! you don't think that — you can't.

LADY w. Go back to my husband, Mrs. Erlynne. He belongs to you and not to me. I suppose he is afraid of a scandal. Men are such cowards. They outrage every law of the world, and are afraid of the world's tongue. But he had better prepare himself. He shall have a scandal. He shall have the worst scandal there has been in London for years. He shall see his name in every vile paper, mine on every hideous placard.

MRS. E. No — no –

LADY w. Yes! he shall. Had he come himself, I admit I would have gone back to the life of degradation you and he had prepared for me — I was going back — but to stay himself at home, and to send you as his messenger — oh ! it was infamous —infamous.

MRS. E. [c.] Lady Windermere, you wrong me horribly — you wrong your husband horribly. He doesn't know you are here — he thinks you are

safe in your own house. He thinks you are asleep in your own room. He never read the mad letter you wrote to him!

LADYW. [R.] Never read it!

MRS. E. No—he knows nothing about it.

LADY w. How simple you think me! *[Going to her.]* You are lying to me!

MRS. E. *[Restraining herself],* I am not. I am telling you the truth.

LADY w. If my husband didn't read my letter, how is that you are here? Who told you I had left the house you were shameless enough to enter? Who told you where I had gone to? My husband told you, and sent you to decoy me back. *[Crosses* L.]

MRS. E. [R. c.] Your husband has never seen the letter. I—saw it, I opened it. I—read it.

LADY w. *[Turning to her].* You opened a letter of mine to my husband? You wouldn't dare!

MRS. E. Dare! Oh! to save you from the abyss into which you are falling, there is nothing in the world I would not dare, nothing in the whole world. Here is the letter. Your husband has never read it. He never shall read it. *[Going to fireplace.]* It should never have been written. *[Tears it and throws it into the fire.]*

LADY w. *[With infinite contempt in her voice and look].* How do I know that that was my letter after all? You seem to think the commonest device can take me in!

MRS. E. Oh! why do you disbelieve everything I tell you! What object do you think I have *id*

coming here, except to save you from utter ruin, to save you from the consequence of a hideous mistake? That letter that is burning now *was* your letter. I swear it to you!

LADY w. *[Slowly].* You took good care to burn it before I had examined it. I cannot trust you. You, whose whole life is a lie, how could you speak the truth about anything? *[Sits down.]*

MRS. E. *[Hurriedly}.* Think as you like about me—say what you choose against me, but go back, go back to the husband you love.

LADY w. *[Sullenly].* I do *not* love him!

MBS. E. You do, and you know that he loves you.

LADY w. He does not understand what love is, He understands it as little as you do—but I see what you want. It would be a great advantage for you to get me back. Dear Heaven! what a life I would have then! Living at the mercy of a woman who has neither mercy nor pity in her, a woman whom it is an infamy to meet, a degradation to know, a vile woman, a woman who comes between husband and wife!

MRS. E. *[With a gesture of despair].* Lady Windermere, Lady Windermere, don't say such terrible things. You don't know how terrible they are, how terrible and how unjust. Listen, you must listen! Only go back to your husband, and I promise you never to communicate with him again on any pretext—never to see him—never to have anything to do with his life or yours. The money that he gave me, he gave me, not through love,

but through hatred, not in worship, but in contempt. The hold I have over him——

LADY w. *[Rising].* Ah! you admit you have a hold.

MRS. E. Yes, and I will tell you what it is. It is his love for you, Lady Windermere.

LADY w. You expect me to believe that?

MRS. E. You must believe it! It is true. It is his love for you that has made him submit to—oh! call it what you like, tyranny, threats, anything you choose. But it is his love for you. His desire to spare you—shame, yes, shame and disgrace.

LADY w. What do you mean? You are insolent! What have I to do with you?

MRS. E. *[Humbly].* Nothing. I know it—but I tell you that your husband loves you—that you may never meet with such love again in your whole life—that such love you will never meet—and that if you throw it away, the day may come when you will starve for love and it will not be given to you, beg for love and it will be denied you—Oh! Arthur loves you!

LADY w. Arthur? And you tell me there is nothing between you?

MRS. E. Lady Windermere, before Heaven your husband is guiltless of all offence towards you! And I—I tell you that had it ever occurred to me that such a monstrous suspicion would have entered your mind, I would have died rather than have crossed your life or his—oh! died, gladly died! *[Moves away to sofa* R.]

LADY w. You talk as if you had a heart. Wo-

men like you have no hearts. Heart is not in you. You are bought and sold. *{Sits* L. c.]

MKS. E. *[Starts with a gesture of pain. Then restrains herself, and comes over to where* LADY w. *is sitting. As she speaks, she stretches out her hands towards her, but does not dare to touch her].* Believe what you choose about me. I am not worth a moment's sorrow. But don't spoil your beautiful young life on my account! You don't know what may be in store for you, unless you leave this house at once. You don't know what it is to fall into the pit, to be despised, mocked, abandoned, sneered at—to be an outcast! to find the door shut against one, to have to creep in by hideous byways, afraid every moment lest the mask should be stripped from one's face, and all the while to hear the laughter, the horrible laughter of the world, a thing more tragic than all the tears the world has ever shed. You don't know what it is. One pays for one's sin, and then one pays again, and all one's life one pays. You must never know that.—As for me, if suffering be an expiation, then at this moment I have expiated all my faults, whatever they have been; for to-night you have made a heart in one who had it not, made it and broken it.—But let that pass. I may have wrecked my own life, but I will not let you wreck yours. You—why, you are a mere girl, you would be lost. You haven't got the kind of brains that enables a woman to get back. You have neither the wit nor the courage. You couldn't stand dishonour. No! Go back, Lady

Windermere, to the husband who loves you, whom you love. You have a child, Lady Windermere. Go back to that child who even now, in pain or in joy, may be calling to you. [LADY w. *rises.]* God gave you that child. He will require from you that you make his life fine, that you watch over him. What answer will you make to God if his life is ruined through you? Back to your house, Lady Windermere—your husband loves you. He has never swerved for a moment from the love he bears you. But_gyen if he had a thousandjove^ you must stay with your child. If he was harsh to you, you must stay with your child. If he ill-treated you, you must stay with your child. If he abandoned you, your place is with your child. [LADTW.b*ursts into tears and buries her face in her hands.] [Rushing to her.]* Lady Windermere!

LADY w. *[Holding out her hands to her, helplessly, as a child might do].* Take me home. Take me home.

MRS. E. *[Is about to embrace her. Then restrains herself. There is a look of wonderful joy in Jherface.]* Come! Where is your cloak? *[Getting it from sofa.]* Here. Put it on. Come at once! *[They go to the door.]*

LADY W. Stop! Don't you hear voices?

MRS. E. No, no! There is no one!

LADY w. Yes, there is! Listen! Oh! that is my husband's voice I He is coming in! Save me! Oh, it's some plot! You have sent for him!

[Voices outside.]

MRS. E. Silence! I am here to save you if I

can. But I fear it is too late! There! *[Points to the curtain across the window.]* The first chance you have, slip out, if you ever get a chance!

LADY w. But you!

MRS. E. Oh! never mind me. Ill face them.

[LADY w. *hides herself behind the curtain.]*

LORD A. *[Outside].* Nonsense, dear Windermere, you must not leave me!

MRS. E. Lord Augustus! Then it is I who am lost! *[Hesitates for a moment, then looks round and sees door* R., *and exit through it.]*

[Enter LORD D., MR. D., LORD w., LORD A. L., *and* MR. CECIL G.]

DUMBY. What a nuisance their turning us out of the club at this hour! It's only two o'clock. *[Sinks into a chair.]* The lively part of the evening is only just beginning. *[Yawns and closes his eyes.]*

LORD w. It is very good of you, Lord Darlington, allowing Augustus to force our company on you, but I'm afraid I can't stay long.

LORD D. Really! I am so sorry! You'll take a cigar, won't you?

LORD w. Thanks! *[Sits down.]*

LORD A. *[To* LORD w.]. My dear boy, you must not dream of going. I have a great deal to talk to you about, of demmed importance, too. *[Sits down with him at* L. *table.]*

CECIL G. Oh! we all know what that is! Tuppy can't talk about anything but Mrs. Erlynne!

LORD w. Well, that is no business of yours, is it, Cecil?

CECIL G. None! That is why it interests me. My own business always bores me to death. I prefer other people's.

LORD D. Have something to drink, you fellows. Cecil, you'll have a whiskey and soda?

CECIL G. Thanks. *[Goes to the table tvith* LORD D.] Mrs. Erlynne looked very handsome to-night, didn't she?

LORD D. I am not one of her admirers.

CECIL G. I usen't to be, but I am now. Why! she actually made me introduce her to poor dear Aunt Caroline. I believe she is going to lunch there.

LORD D. *[In surprise].* No?

CECIL G. She is, really.

LORD D. Excuse me, you fellows. I'm going away to-morrow. And I have to write a few letters. *[Goes to witing table and sits doivn.]*

DUMBY. Clever woman, Mrs. Erlynne.

CECIL G. Hallo, Dumby! I thought you were asleep.

DUMBY. I am, I usually am!

LORD A. A very clever woman. Knows perfectly well what a demmed fool I am—knows it as well as I do myself. [CECIL G. *comes towards him laughing.]* Ah! you may laugh, my boy, but it is a great thing to come across a woman who thoroughly understands one.

DUMBY. It is an awfully dangerous thing. They always end by marrying one.

CECIL G. But I thought, Tuppy, you were never going to see her again. Yes! you told me

so yesterday evening at the club. You said you'd heard—*[Whispering to him],*

LORD A. Oh, she's explained that.

CECIL G, And the Wiesbaden affair?

LORD A. She's explained that, too.

DUMBY. And her income, Tuppy? Has she explained that?

LORD A. *[In a very serious voice].* She's going to explain that to-morrow.

[CECIL G. *goes back to* c. *table.]*

DUMBY. Awfully commercial, women now-a-days. Our grandmothers threw their caps over the mills, of course, but, by Jove, their granddaughters only throw their caps over mills that can raise the wind for them.

LORD A. You want to make her out a wicked woman. She is not!

CECIL G. Oh! Wicked women bother one. Good women bore one. That is the only difference between them.

LORD D. *[Puffing a cigar].* Mrs. Erlynne has a future before her.

DUMBY. Mrs. Erlynne has a past before her.

LORD A. I prefer women with a past. They're always so demmed amusing to talk to.

CECIL G. Well, you'll have lots of topics of conversation with *her,* Tuppy. *[Rising and going to him.]*

LORD A. You're getting annoying, dear boy; you're getting demmed annoying.

CECIL G. *[Puts his hands on his shoulders].* Now,

Tuppy, you've lost your figure and you've lost your character. Don't lose your temper; you have only got one.

LORD A. My clear boy, if I wasn't the most good-natured man in London——

CECIL G. We'd treat you with more respect wouldn't we, Tuppy? *[Strolls away.]*

DUMBY. The youth of the present day are quite monstrous. They have absolutely no respect for dyed hair.

[LORD A. *looks round angrily.]*

CECIL G. Mrs. Erlynne has a very great respect for dear Tuppy.

DUMBY. Then Mrs. Erlynne sets an admirable example to the rest of her sex. It is perfectly brutal the way most women now-a-days behave to men who are not their husbands.

LORD w. Dumby, you are ridiculous, and Cecil, you let your tongue run away with you. You must leave Mrs. Erlynne alone. You don't really know anything about her, and you're always talking scandal against her.

CECIL G. *[Coming towards him* L. c.]. My dear Arthur, I never talk scandal. I only talk gossip.

LORD w. What is the difference between scandal and gossip?

CECIL G. Oh! gossip is charming! Histoiy is merely gossip. But scandal is gossip made tedious by morality. Now I never moralise. A man who moralises is usually a hypocrite, and a woman who moralises is invariably plain. There is nothing in the whole world so unbecoming to a woman as a

Nonconformist conscience. And most women know it, I'm glad to say.

LORD A. Just my sentiments, dear boy, just my sentiments.

CECIL G. Sorry to hear it, Tuppy; whenever people agree with me, I always feel I must be *wrong.*

LORD A. My dear boy, when I was your age——

CECIL G. But you never were, Tuppy, and you never will be. *[Goes up* c.] I say, Darlington, let us have some cards. You'll play, Arthur, won't you?

LORD w. No, thanks, Cecil.

DITMBY. *[With a sigh].* Good heavens! how marriage ruins a man! It's as demoralising as cigarettes, and far more expensive.

CECIL G. You'll play, of course, Tuppy?

LORD A. *[Pouring himself out a brandy and soda at table].* Can't, dear boy. Promised Mrs. Erlynne never to play or drink again.

CECIL G. Now, my dear Tuppy, don't be led astray into the paths of virtue. Reformed, you would be perfectly tedious. That is the worst of women. They always want one to be good. And if we are good, when they meet us, they don't love us at all. They like to find us quite irretrievably bad, and to leave us quite unattractively good.

LORD D. *[Rising from* R. *table, where he has been writing letters].* They always do find us bad!

DUMBY. I don't think we are bad. I think we are all good except Tuppy.

LORD D. No, we are all in the gutter, but some

of us are looking at the stars. *[Sits down at* c. table]"

DUMBY. We are all in the gutter, but some of us are looking at the stars? Upon my word, you are very romantic to-night, Darlington.

CECIL G. Too romantic! You must be in love. Who is the girl?

LOKD D. The woman I love is not free, or thinks she isn't. *[Glances instinctively at* LORD w. *while he speaks.]*

CECIL G. A married woman, then! Well, there's nothing in the world like the devotion of a married woman. It's a thing no married man knows anything about.

LORD D. Oh! she doesn't love me. She is a good woman. She is the only good woman I have ever met in my life.

CECIL G. The only good woman you have ever met in your life?

LORD D. Yes!

CECIL G. *[Lighting a cigarette].* Well, you are a lucky fellow! Why, I have met hundreds of good women. I never seem to meet any but good women. The world is perfectly packed with good women. To know them is a middle-class education.

LOrD D. This woman has purity arid innocence. She has everything we men have lost.

CECIL G. My dear fellow, what on earth should we men do going about with purity and innocence? A carefully thought-out buttonhole is much more effective.

DUMBY. She doesn't really love you then?

66THEPLAYSOFOSCARWILDE[ACTLORDD.No,shedoesnot!

DUMBY. I congratulate you, my dear fellow. In this world there are only two tragedies. One is not getting what one wants, and the other is getting it. The last is much the worst, the last is a real tragedy! But I am interested to hear she does not love you. How long could you love a woman who didn't love you, Cecil?

CECIL G. A woman who didn't love me? Oh, all my life!

DUMBY. So could I. But it's so difficult to meet one.

LORD D. How can you be so conceited, Dumby?

DUMBY. I didn't say it as a matter of conceit. I said it as a matter of regret. I have been wildly, madly adored. I am sorry I have. It has been an immense nuisance. I should like to be allowed a little time to myself, now and then.

LORD A. *[Looking round].* Time to educate yourself, I suppose.

DUMBY. No, time to forget all I have learned. That is much more important, dear Tuppy.

[LORD A. *moves uneasily in his chair.]*

LORD D. What cynics you fellows are!

CECIL G. What is a cynic? *[Sitting on the back of the sofa.]*

LORD D. A man who knows the price of everything, and the value of nothing.

CECIL G. And a sentimentalist, my dear Darlington, is a man who sees an absurd value in everything, and doesn't know the market price of any single thing.

LORD D. You always amuse me, Cecil. You talk as if you were a man of experience.

CECIL G. I am. *[Moves up to front of fireplace.]*

LORD D. You are far too young!

CECIL G. That is a great error. Experience is a question of instinct about life. I have got it. Tuppy hasn't. Experience is the name Tuppy gives to his mistakes. That is all.

[LORD A. *looks around indignantly.]*

DUMBY. Experience is the name everyone gives to their mistakes

CECIL G. *[Standing with his back to fireplace].* One shouldn't commit any. *[Sees* LADY *w.'sfan on sofa.]*

DUMBY. Life would be very dull without them.

CECIL G. Of course you are quite faithful to this woman you are in love with, Darlington, to this good woman?

LORD D. Cecil, if one really loveS a woman, all other women iij the world become absolutely meaningless to one. Love changes one—I am changed.

CECIL G. Dear me! How very interesting! Tuppy, I want to talk to you.

[LORD A. *takes no notice.]*

DUMBY. It's no use talking to Tuppy. You might just as well talk to a brick wall.

CECIL G. But I like talking to a brick wall—it's the only thing in the world that never contradicts me! Tuppy

LORD A. Well, what is it? What is it? *[Rising and going over to* CECIL G.]

CECIL G. Come over here. I want you particularly. *[Aside.]* Darlington has been moralising and talking about the purity of love, and that sort of thing, and he has got some woman in his rooms all the time.

LORD A. No, really! really!

CECIL G. *[In a low voice].* Yes, here is her fan. *[Points to the fan.]*

LORD A. *[Chuckling].* By Jove! By Jove!

LORD w. [*Up by door].* I am really off now, Lord Darlington. I am sorry you are leaving England so soon. Pray call on us when you come back! My wife and I will be charmed to see you!

LORD D. *[Up stage with* LORD w.]. I am afraid I shall be away for many years. Good-night!

CECIL G. Arthur!

LORD w. What?

CECIL G. I want to speak to you for a moment. No, do come!

LORD w. *[Putting on his coat].* I can't—I'm off!

CECIL G. It is something very particular. It will interest you enormously.

LORD w. *[Smiling}.* It is some of your nonsense, Cecil.

CECIL G. It isn't! It isn't really!

LORD A. *[Going to him].* My dear fellow, you mustn't go yet. I have a lot to talk to you about And Cecil has something to show you.

LORD w. *[Walking over].* Well, what is it?

CECIL G. Darlington has got a woman here in Ms rooms. Here is her fan. Amusing, isn't it? *[A pause.]*

LORD w. Good God! *Seizes the fan*—DUMBY *rises.]*

CECIL G. What is the matter?

LORD w. Lord Darlington!

LORD D. *[Turning round}.* Yes!

LORD w. What is my wife's fan doing here **in** your rooms? Hands off, Cecil. Don't touch me.

LORD D. Your wife's fan?

LORD w. Yes, here it is!

LORD D. *[Walking towards him].* I don't know!

LORD w. You must know. I demand an explanation. Don't hold me, you fool. *[To* CECIL G.]

LORD D. *[Aside].* She is here after all!

LORD w. Speak, sir! Why is my wife's fan here? Answer me, By God! I'll search your rooms, and if my wife's here, I'll——*[moves.]*

LORD D. You shall not search my rooms. You have no right to do so. I forbid you!

LORD w. You scoundrel! I'll not leave your room till I have searched every corner of it! What moves behind that curtain? *[Rushes towards the curtain* c.]

MRS. E. *[Enters behind* R.] Lord Windermere!

LORD w. Mrs. Erlynne!

[Every one starts and turns round. LADY w. *slips out from behind the curtain and glides from the roam* L.]

MRS. E. I am afraid I took your wife's fan in mistake for my own, when I was leaving your house to-night. I am so sorry. *[Takes fan from him.* LORD w. *looks at her in contempt.* LORD D. *in mingled astonishment and anger.* LORD A. *turns away. The other men smile at each other.]*

ACT-DROP

ACT IV

SCENE—*Same as in Act I*

LADY w. *[Lying on sofa].* How can I tell him? I can't tell him. It would kill me. I wonder what happened after I escaped from that horrible room. Perhaps she told him the true reason of her being there, and the real meaning of that—fatal fan of mine. Oh, if he knows—how can I look him in the face again? He would never forgive me. *[Touches bell.]* How securely one thinks one lives—out of reach of temptation, sin, folly. And then suddenly—Oh! Life is terrible. It rules us, we do not rule it.

[Enter ROSALIE R.]

ROSALIE. Did your ladyship ring for me?

LADY w. Yes. Have you found out at what time Lord Windermere came in last night?

ROSALIE. His lordship did not come in till five o'clock.

LADY w. Five o'clock! He knocked at my door this morning, didn't he?

ROSALIE. Yes, my lady—at half-past nine. I told him your ladyship was not awake yet.

LADY w. Did he say anything?

ROSALIE. Something about your ladyship's fan. I didn't quite catch what his lordship said. Has the fan been lost, my lady? I can't find it,

and Parker says it was not left in any of the rooms. He has looked in all of them and on the terrace as well.

LADY w. It doesn't matter. Tell Parker not to trouble. That will do.

[Exit ROSALIE.]

LADY w. *[Rising].* She is sure to tell him. I can fancy a person doing a wonderful act of self-sacrifice, doing it spontaneously, recklessly, nobly —and afterwards finding out that it costs too much. Why should she hesitate between her ruin and mine? . . . How strange! I would have publicly disgraced her in my own house. She accepts public disgrace in the house of another to save me. . . . There is a bitter irony in things, a bitter irony in the way we talk of good and bad women. . . . Oh, what a lesson! and what a pity that in life we only get our lessons when they are of no use to us! For even if she doesn't tell, I must. Oh! the shame of it, the shame of it. To tell it is to live through it all again. Actions are the first tragedy in life, words are the second. Words are perhaps the worst. Words arc merciless … Oh! *[Starts as* LORD w. *enters.]*

LORD w. *[Kisses her].* Margaret—how pale you look!

LADY w. I slept very badly.

LORD w. *[Sitting on sofa with her].* I am so sorry. I came in dreadfully late, and didn't like to wake you. You are crying, dear.

LADY w. Yes, I am crying, for I have something to tell you, Arthur.

LORD w. My dear child, you are not well. You've been doing too much. Let us go away to the country. You'll be all right at Selby. The season is almost over. There is no use staying on. Poor darling! We'll go away to-day, if you like. *[Rises.]* We can easily catch the 4.30. I'll send a wire to Fannen. *[Crosses and sits down at table to write a telegram.]*

LADY w. Yes; let us go away to-day. No; I can't go to-day, Arthur. There is some one I must see before I leave town—some one who has been kind to me.

LORD w. *[Rising and leaning over sofa].* Kind to you?

LADY w. Far more than that. *[Rises and goes to him.]* I will tell you, Arthur, but only love me, love me as you used to love me.

LORD w. Used to? You are not thinking of that wretched woman who came here last night? *[Coming round and sitting* R. *of her.]* You don't still imagine—no, you couldn't.

LADY w. I don't. I know now I was wrong and foolish.

LORD w. It was very good of you to receive her last night—but you are never to see her again.

LADY w. Why do you say that? *[A pause.]*

LORD w. *[Holding her hand].* Margaret, I thought Mrs. Erlynne was a woman more sinned against than sinning, as the phrase goes. I thought she wanted to be good, to get back into a place that she had lost by a moment's folly, to lead again a decent life. I believed what she told

me—I was mistaken in her. She is bad—as bad as a woman can be.

LADY w. Arthur, Arthur, don't talk so bitterly about any woman. I don't think now that people can be divided into the good and the bad, as though they were two separate races or creations. What arc called good women may have terrible things in them, mad moods of recklessness, assertion, jealousy, sin. Bad women, as they are termed, may have in them sorrow, repentance, pity, sacrifice. And I don't think Mrs. Erlynne a bad woman—I know she's not.

LORD w. My dear child, the woman's impossible. No matter what harm she trios to do us, you must never see her again. She is inadmissible anywhere.

LADY w. But I want to see her. I want her to come here.

LORD w. Never!

LADY w. She came here once as *your* guest. She must coine now as *mine.* That is but fair.

LORD w. She should never have come here.

LADY w. *[Rising].* It is too late, Arthur, to say that now. *[Moves away.]*

LORD w. *[Rising].* Margaret, if you knew where Mrs. Erlynne went last night, after she left this house, you would not sit in the same room with her. It was absolutely shameless, the whole thing.

LADY w. Arthur, I can't bear it any longer. I must tell you. Last night——

[Enter PARKER *with a tray on which lie* LADY W.'B *fan and a card.]*

PARKER. Mrs. Erlynne has called to return your ladyship's fan which she took away by mistake last night. Mrs. Erlynne has written a message on the card.

LADY w. Oh, ask Mrs. Erlynne to be kind enough to come up. *[Reads card.]* Say I shall be very glad to see her. *[Exit* PARKER.] She wants to see me, Arthur.

LORD w. *[Takes card and looks at it].* Margaret, I *beg* you not to. Let me see her first, at any rate. She's a very dangerous woman. She is the most dangerous woman I know. You don't realise what you're doing.

LADY w. It is right that I should see her.

LORD w. My child, you may be on the brink of a great sorrow. Don't go to meet it. It is absolutely necessary that I should see her before you do.

LADY w. Why should it be necessary?

[Enter PARKER.]

PARKER. Mrs. Erlynne.

[Enter MRS. E. *Exit* PARKER.]

MRS. E. How do you do, Lady Windermere? *[To* LORD w.] How do you do? Do you know, Lady Windermere, I am so sorry about your fan. I can't imagine how I made such a silly mistake. Most stupid of me. And as I was driving in your direction, I thought I would take the opportunity of returning your property in person, with many apologies for my carelessness, and of bidding you good-bye.

LADY w. Good-bye? *[Moves towards sofa with*

MrS. E. *and sits down beside her.]* Are you going away, then, Mrs. Erlynne?

MRS. E. Yes; I am going to live abroad again. The English climate doesn't suit me. My—heart is affected here, and that I don't like. I prefer living in the south. London is too full of fogs and —and serious people, Lord Windermere. Whether the fogs produce the serious people or whether the serious people produce the fogs, I don't know, but the whole thing rather gets on my nerves, and so I'm leaving this afternoon by the Club Train.

LADY w. This afternoon? But I wanted so much to come and see you.

MRS. E. How kind of you! But I am afraid I have to go.

LADY w. Shall I never see you again, Mrs. Erlynne?

MRS. E. I am afraid not. Our lives lie too far apart. But there is a little thing I would like you to do for me. I want a photograph of you, Lady Windermere—would you give me one? You don't know how gratified I should be.

LADY w. Oh, with pleasure. There is one on that table. I'll show it to you. *[Goes across to the table.]*

LORD w. *[Coming up to* MRS. E. *and speaking in a low voice].* It is monstrous your intruding yourself here after your conduct last night.

MRS. E. *[With an amused smile].* My dear Windermere, manners before morals!

LADY w. *[Returning]. I'm* afraid it is very

flattering—I am not so pretty as that. *[Showing photograph.]*

MRS. E. You are much prettier. But haven't you got one of yourself with your little boy?

LADY w. I have. Would you prefer one of those?

MRS. E. Yes.

LADY w. I'll go and get it for you, if you'll excuse me for a moment. I have one upstairs.

MRS. E. So sorry, Lady Winder-mere, to give you so much trouble.

LADY w. *[Moves to door* R.]. No trouble at all, Mrs. Erlynne.

MRS. E. Thanks so much. *[Exit* LADY w. R.] You seem rather out of temper this morning, Windermere. Why should you be? Margaret and I get on charmingly together.

LORD w. I can't bear to see you with her. Besides, you have not told me the truth Mrs. Erlynne.

MRS. E. I have not told *her* the truth, you mean.

LORD w. *[Standing* c.]. I sometimes wish you had. I should have been spared then the misery, the anxiety, the annoyance of the last six months. But rather than my wife should know—that the mother whom she was taught to consider as dead, the mother whom she has mourned as dead, is living—a divorced woman going about under an assumed name, a bad woman preying upon life, as I know you now to be—rather than that, I was ready to supply you with money to pay bill

after bill, extravagance after extravagance, to risk what occurred yesterday, the first quarrel I have ever had with my wife. You don't understand what that means to me. How could you? But I tell you that the only bitter words that ever came from those sweet lips of hers were on your account, and I hate to see you next her. You sully the innocence that is in her. *[Moves* L. c.] And then I used to think that with all your faults you were frank and honest. You are not.

MRS. E. Why do you say that?

LORD w. You made me get you an invitation to my wife's ball.

MRS. E. For my daughter's ball—yes.

LORD w. You came, and within an hour of your leaving the house, you are found in a man's rooms—you are disgraced before every one. *[Goes up stage* c.]

MRS. E. Yes.

LORD w. *[Turning round on her].* Therefore I have a right to look upon you as what you are—a worthless, vicious woman. I have the right to tell you never to enter this house, never to attempt to come near my wife——

MRS. E. *[Coldly].* My daughter, you mean.

LORD w. You have no right to claim her as your daughter. You left her, abandoned her, when she was but a child in the cradle, abandoned her for your lover, who abandoned you in turn.

MRS. E. *[Rising].* Do you count that to his credit, Lord Windermere—or to mine?

LORD w. To his, now that I know you.

MRS. E. Take care—you had better be careful.

LORD w. Oh, I am not going to mince words for you. I know you thoroughly.

MRS. E. *[Looking steadily at him].* I question that.

LORD w. I *do* know you. For twenty years of your life you lived without your child, without a thought of your child. One day you read in the papers that she had married a rich man. You saw your hideous chance. You knew that to spare her the ignominy of learning that a woman like you was her mother, *I* would endure anything. You began your blackmailing.

MRS. E. *[Shrugging her shoulders].* Don't use ugly words, Windermere. They are vulgar. I saw my chance, it is true, and took it.

LORD w. Yes, you took it—and spoiled it all last night by being found out.

MRS. E. *[With a strange smile].* You are quite right, I spoiled it all last night.

LORD w. And as for your blunder in taking my wife's fan from here, and then leaving it about in Darlington's rooms, it is unpardonable. I can't bear the sight of it now. I shall never let my wife use it again. The thing is soiled for me. You should have kept it, and not brought it back.

MRS. E. I think I *shall* keep it. *[Goes up.]* It's extremely pretty. *[Takes up fan.]* I shall ask Margaret to give it to me.

LORD w. I hope my wife will give it you.

MRS. E. Oh, I'm sure she will have no objection.

LORD w. I wish that at the same time she would

give you a miniature she kisses every night before she prays—It's the miniature of a young, innocent-looking girl with beautiful dark hair.

MRS. E. Ah, yes, I remember. How long ago that seems! *[Goes to sofa and sits down.]* It was done before I was married. Dark hair and an innocent expression were the fashion then, Windermere! *[A pause.]*

LORD W. What do you mean by coming here this morning? What is your object? *[Crossing* L. C. *and sitting.]*

MRS. E. [*With a note of irony in her voice].* To bid good-bye to my dear daughter, of course. [LORD W. *bites his underlip in anger.* MRS. E. *looks at him, and her voice and manner become serious. In her accents as she talks there is a note of deep tragedy. For a moment she reveals herself.]* Oh, don't imagine I am going to have a pathetic scene with her, weep on her neck and tell her who I am, and all that kind of thing. I have no ambition to play the part of a mother. Only once in my life have I known a mother's feelings. That was last night. They were terrible—they made me suffer—they made me suffer too much. For twenty years, as you say, I have lived childless—I want to live childless still. *[Hiding her feelings with a trivial laugh.]* Besides, my dear Windermere, how on earth could I pose as a mother with a grown-up daughter? Margaret is twenty-one, and I have never admitted that I am more than twenty-nine, or thirty at the most. Twenty-nine when there are pink shades, thirty when there are not. So

you see what difficulties it would involve. No, as far as I am concerned, let your wife cherish the memory of this dead, stainless mother. Why should I interfere with her illusions? I find it hard enough to keep my own. I lost one illusion last night. I thought I had no heart. I find I have, and a heart doesn't suit me, Windermere. Somehow it doesn't go with modern dress. It makes one look old. *[Takes up hand-mirror from table and looks into it.]* And it spoils one's career at critical moments.

LORD W. You fill me with horror—with absolute horror.

MRS. E. *[Rising].* I suppose, Windermere, you would like me to retire into a convent or become a hospital nurse or something of that kind, as people do in silly modern novels. That is stupid of you, Arthur; in real life we don't do such things—not as long as we have any good looks left, at any rate. No—what consoles one now-a-days is not repentance, but pleasure. Repentance is quite out of date. And besides, if a woman really repents, she has to go to a bad dressmaker, otherwise no one believes in her. And nothing in the world would induce me to do that. No; I am going to pass entirely out of your two lives. My coming into them has been a mistake—I discovered that last night.

LORD W. A fatal mistake.

MRS. E. *[Smiling].* Almost fatal.

LORD W. I am sorry now I did not tell my wife the whole thing at once.

MRS. E. I regret my bad actions. You regret your good ones—that is the difference between us.

LORD w. I don't trust you. I *mil* tell my wife. It's better for her to know, and from me. It will cause her infinite pain—it will humiliate her terribly, but it's right that she should know.

MRS. E. You propose to tell her?

LORD w. I am going to tell her.

MRS. E. *[Going up to him].* If you do, I will make my name so infamous that it will mar every moment of her life. It will ruin her and make her wretched. If you dare to tell her, there is no depth of degradation I will not sink to, no pit of shame I will not enter. You shall not tell her—I forbid you.

LORD w. Why?

MRS. E. *[After a pause].* If I said to you that I cared for her, perhaps loved her even—you would sneer at me, wouldn't you?

LORD w. I should feel it was not true. A mother's love means devotion, unselfishness, sacrifice. What could you know of such things?

MRS. E. You are right. What could I know of such things? Don't let us talk any more about *it,* as for telling my daughter who I am, that I do not allow. It is my secret, it is not yours. If I make up my mind to tell her, and I think I will, I shall tell her before I leave this house—if not, I shall never tell her.

LORD w. *[Angrily].* Then let me beg of you to leave our house at once. I will make your excuses to Margaret.

[Enter LADY w. R. *She goes over to* MRS. E. *with the photograph in her hand.* LORD w. *moves to back of sofa, and anxiously watches* MRS. E. as *the scene progresses.]*

LADY w. I am so sorry, Mrs. Erlynne, to have kept you waiting. I couldn't find the photograph anywhere. At last I discovered it in my husband's dressing-room—he had stolen it.

MRS. E. *[Takes the photograph from her and looks at it]. I* am not surprised—it is charming. *[Goes over to sofa with* LADY w. *and sits down beside her. Looks again at the photograph.]* And so that is your little boy! What is he called?

LADY w. Gerard, after my dear father.

MRS. E. *[Laying the photograph down}.* Really?

LADY w. Yes. If it had been a girl, I would have called it after my mother. My mother had the same name as myself, Margaret.

MRS. E. My name is Margaret, too.

LADY w. Indeed!

MRS. E. Yes. *[Pause.]* You are devoted to your mother's memory, Lady Windermere, your husband tells me.

LADY w. We all have ideals in life. At least we all should have. Mine is my mother.

MRS. E. Ideals are dangerous things. Realities are better. They wound, but they are better.

LADY w. *[Shaking her head].* If I lost my ideals, I should lose everything.

MRS. E. Everything?

LADY w. Yes. *[Pause.]*

MBS. E. Did your father often speak to you of your mother?

LADY w. No, it gave him too much pain. He told me how my mother had died a few months after I was born. His eyes filled with tears as he spoke. Then he begged me never to mention her name to him again. It made him suffer even to hear it. My father—my father really died of a broken heart. His was the most ruined life I know.

MRS. E. *[Rising].* I am afraid I must go now, Lady Windermere.

LADY w. *[Rising].* Oh no, don't.

MRS. E. I think I had better. My carriage must have come back by this time. I sent it to Lady Jedburgh's with a note.

LADY w. Arthur, would you mind seeing if Mrs. Erlynne's carriage has come back?

MRS. E. Pray don't trouble Lord Windermere, Lady Windermere.

LADY w. Yes, Arthur, do go, please. [LORD w. *hesitates for a moment and looks at* MRS. E. *She remains quite impassive. Pie leaves the room.] [To* MRS. E.] Oh! What am I to say to you? You saved me last night! *[Goes toward her.]*

MRS. E. Hush—don't speak of it.

LADY w. I must speak of it. I can't let you think that I am going to accept this sacrifice. I am not. It is too great. 1 am going to tell my husband everything. It is my duty.

MRS. E. It is not your duty—at least you have duties to others besides him. You say you owe me something?

LADY w. I owe you everything.

MRS. E. Then pay your debt by silence. That is the only way in which it can be paid. Don't spoil the one good thing I have done in my life by telling it to anyone. Promise me that what passed last night will remain a secret between us. You must not bring misery into your husband's life. Why spoil his love? You must not spoil it. Love is easily killed. Oh, how easily love is killed! Pledge me your word, Lady Windermere, that you will *never* tell him. I insist upon it.

LADY w. *[With bowed head].* It is your will, not mine.

MRS. E. Yes, it is my will. And never forget your child—I like to think of you as a mother. I like you to think of yourself as one.

LADY w. *[Looking up].* I always will now. Only once in my life I have forgotten my own mother—that was last night. Oh, if 1 had remembered her, I should not have been so foolish, so wicked.

MRS. E. *[With a slight shudder].* Hush, last night is quite over.

[Enter LORD w.]

LORD w. Your carriage has not come back yet, Mrs. Erlynne.

MRS. E. It makes no matter. I'll take a hansom. There is nothing in the world so respectable as a good Shrewsbury and Talbot. And now, dear Lady Windermere, I am afraid it is really good-bye. *[Moves up* c.] Oh, I remember. You'll think me absurd, but do you know, I've

taken a great fancy to this fan that I was silly enough to run away with last night from your ball. Now, I wonder would you give it to me? Lord Windermere says you may. I know it is his present.

LADY W. Oh, certainly, if it will give you any pleasure. But it has my name on it. It has 'Margaret' on it.

MRS. E. But we have the same Christian name.

LADY W. Oh, I forgot. Of course, do have it. What a wonderful chance our names being the same!

MRS. E. Quite wonderful. Thanks—it will always remind me of you. *[Shakes hands with her.]*

[Enter PARKER.]

PARKER. Lord Augustus Lorton. Mrs. Erlynne's carriage has come.

[Enter LORD A.]

LORD A. Good morning, dear boy. Good morning, Lady Windermere. *[Sees* MRS. E.] Mrs. Erlynne!

MRS. E. How do you do, Lord Augustus? Are you quite well this morning?

LORD A. *[Coldly].* Quite well, thank you, Mrs. Erlynne.

MRS. E. You don't look at all well, Lord Augustus. You stop up too late—it is so bad for you. You really should take more care of yourself. Good-bye, Lord Windermere. *[Goes towards door with a bow to* LORD A. *Suddenly smiles, and looks back at him]* Lord Augustus! Won't you see me to my carriage? You might carry the fan.

LORDW. Allow me!

MRS. E. No, I want Lord Augustus. I have a special message for the dear Duchess. Won't you carry the fan, Lord Augustus?

LOKD A. If you really desire it, Mrs. Erlynne.

MRS. E. *[Laughing].* Of course I do. You'll carry it so gracefully. You would carry off anything gracefully, dear Lord Augustus. *[When she reaches the door she looks back for a moment at* LADY w. *Their eyes meet. Then she turns, and exit* c., *followed by* LORD A.]

LADY w. You will never speak against Mrs. Erlynne again, Arthur, will you?

LORD w. *[Gravely],* She is better than one thought her.

LADY w. She is better than I am.

LORD w. *[Smiling as he strokes her hair].* Child, you and she belong to different worlds. Into your world evil has never entered.

LADY w. Don't say that, Arthur. There is the same world for all of us, and good and evil, sin and innocence, go through it hand in hand. To shut one's eyes to half of life that one may live securely is as though one blinded oneself that one might walk with more safety in a land of pit and precipice.

LORD w. *[Moves down with her].* Darling, why do you say that?

LADY w. *[Sits on sofa].* Because I, who had shut my eyes to life, came to the brink. And one who had separated us——

LORD w. We were never parted.

LADY w. We never must be again. Oh, Arthur, don't love me less, and I will trust you more. I

will trust you absolutely. Let us go to Selby. In the Rose Garden at Selby, the roses are white and red.

[Enter LORD A. c.]

LORD A. Arthur, she has explained everything! [LADY w. *looks horribly frightened.* LORD w. *starts.* LORD A. *takes* LORD w. *by the arm, and brings him to front of stage].* My dear fellow, she has explained every demmed thing. We all wronged her immensely. It was entirely for my sake she went to Darlington's rooms—called first at the club. Fact is, wanted to put me out of suspense, and being told I had gone on, followed—naturally—frightened when she heard a lot of men coming in—retired to another room—I assure you, most gratifying to me, the whole thing. We all behaved brutally to her. She is just the woman for me. Suits me down to the ground. All the condition she makes is that we live out of England—a very good thing, too!—Demmed clubs, demmed climate, demmed cooks, demmed everything! Sick of it all.

LaDY w. *[Frightened].* Has Mrs. Erlynne——?

LORD A. *[Advancing towards her with a bow].* Yes, Lady Windermere, Mrs. Erlynne has done me the honour of accepting my hand.

LORD w. Well, you are certainly marrying a very clever woman.

LADY w. *[Taking her husband's hand}.* Ah! you're marrying a very good woman.

CURTAIN

A WOMAN OF NO IMPORTANCE

The acting rights to "A Woman of No Importance" arc held by Mr. Charles Frohman, Empire Theatre Building, New York City, to whom application must be made for the Tight to perform, either by amateurs or professionals.

A WOMAN OF NO IMPORTANCE

London: Haymarket Theatre: Lessee and Manager, Mr. H. Beerbohm Tree, April 19, 1893

CHArACTERS

LORD ILLINGWORTH	Mr. Tree
SIR JOHN PONTEFRACT	Mr. E. Holman Clark
LORD ALFRED RUFFORD	Mr. Ernest Lawford
MR. KELVIL, M.P.	Mr. Charles Allan
THE YEN. ARCHDEACON DAUBENY, D.D.	Mr. Kemble
GERALD ARBUTHNOT	Mr. Terry
FARQUHAR (Butler)	Mr. Hay
FRANCIS (Footman)	Mr. Montague
LADY HUNSTANTON	Miss Rose Leclerq
LADY CAROLINE PONTEFRAcr	Miss Le Thiere
LADY STUTFIELD	Miss Blanche Horlock
MRS. ALLONBY	Mrs. Tree
MISS HESTER WORSLEY	Miss Julia Neilson
ALICE (Maid)	Miss Kelly
MRS. ARBUTHNOT	Mrs. Bernard-Beere

THE SCENES OF THE PLAY

ACT I The Terrace at Hunstanton Chase.
ACT II The Drawing-Room at Hunstanton Chase.
ACT III The Hall at Hunstanton Chase.
ACT IV Sitting-room in Mrs. Arbuthnot's House at Wrockley.

Time—The Present.
Place—The Shires.

The action of the play takes place within twenty-four hours.

A WOMAN OF NO IMPORTANCE

ACT I

SCENE—Lawn *in front of the terrace at Hunstanton.* [SIR JOHN *and* LADY CAROLINE PONTEFRACT, MISS WORSLEY, *on chairs under large yew tree.]*

LADY CAROLINE. I believe this is the first English country house you have stayed at, Miss Worsley?

HESTER. Yes, Lady Caroline.

LADY CAROLINE. You have no country houses, I am told, in America?

HESTER. We have not many.

LADY CAROLINE. Have you any country? What we should call country?

HESTER *[Smiling].* We have the largest country in the world, Lady Caroline. They used to tell us at school that some of our states are as big as France and England put together.

LADY CAROLINE. Ah! you must find it very draughty, I should fancy. *[To* SIR JOHN.] John, you should have your muffler. What is the use of my always knitting mufflers for you if you won't wear them?

SIR JOHN. I am quite warm, Caroline, I assure you.

LADY CAROLINE. I think not, John. Well, you couldn't come to a more charming place than this,

Miss Worsley, though the house is excessively damp, quite unpardonably damp, and dear Lady Hunstanton is sometimes a little lax about the people she asks down here. *[To* SIR JOHN.] Jane mixes too much. Lord Illingworth, of course, is a man of high distinction. It is a privilege to meet him. And that member of Parliament, Mr. Kettle——

SIR JOHN. Kelvil, my love, Kelvil.

LADY CAROLINE. He must be quite respectable. One has never heard his name before in the whole course of one's life, which speaks volumes for a man, now-a-days. But Mrs. Allonby is hardly a very suitable person.

HESTER. I dislike Mrs. Allonby. I dislike her more than I can say.

LADY CAROLINE. I am not sure, Miss Worsley, that foreigners like yourself should cultivate likes or dislikes about the people they are invited to meet. Mrs. Allonby is very well bora. She is a niece of Lord Brancaster's. It is said, of course, that she ran away twice before she was married. But you know how unfair people often are. I myself don't believe she ran away more than once.

HESTER. Mr. Arbuthnot is very charming.

LADY CAROLINE. Ah, yes! the young man who has a post in a bank. Lady Hunstanton is most kind in asking him here, and Lord Illingworth seems to have taken quite a fancy to him. I am not sure, however, that Jane is right in taking him out of his position. In my young days, Miss Worsley, one nevpa* met any one in society who

worked for their living. It was not considered the thing.

HESTER. In America those are the people we respect most.

LADY CAROLINE. I have no doubt of it.

HESTER. Mr. Arbuthnot has a beautiful nature! He is so simple, so sincere. He has one of the most beautiful natures I have ever come across. It is a privilege to meet *him.*

LADY CAROLINE. It is not customary, in England, Miss Worsley, for a young lady to speak with such enthusiasm of any person of the opposite sex. English women conceal their feelings till after they are married. They show them then.

HESTER. Do you, in England, allow no friendship to exist between a young man and a young girl?

[Enter LADY HUNSTANTON *followed by* FOOTMAN *with shawls and a cushion.]*

LADY CAROLINE. We think it very inadvisable. Jane, I was just saying what a pleasant party you have asked us to meet. You have a wonderful power of selection. It is quite a gift.

LADY HUNSTANTON. Dear Caroline, how kind* of you! I think we all do fit in very nicely together. And I hope our charming American visitor will carry back pleasant recollections of our English country life. *[To* FOOTMAN.] The cushion there, Francis. And my shawl. The Shetland. Get the Shetland.

[Exit FOOTMAN *for shawl]*

[Enter GERALD ARBUTHNOT.]

GERALD. Lady Hunstanton, I have such good news to tell you. Lord Illingworth has just offered to make me his secretary.

LADY HUNSTANTON. His secretary? That is good news indeed, Gerald. It means a very brilliant future in store for you. Your dear mother will be delighted. I really must try and induce her to come up here to-night. Do you think she would, Gerald? I know how difficult it is to get her to go anywhere.

GERALD. Oh! I am sure she would, Lady Hunstanton, if she knew Lord Illingworth had made me such an offer.

[Enter FOOTMAN *with shaivl.]*

LADY HUNSTANTON. I will write and tell her about it, and ask her to come up and meet him. *[To* FOOTMAN.] Just wait, Francis. *[Writes letter.]*

LADY CAROLINE. That is a very wonderful opening for so young a man as you are, Mr. Arbuthnot.

GERALD. It is indeed, Lady Caroline. I trust I shall be able to show myself worthy of it.

LADY CAROLINE. I trust SO.

GERALD *[To* HESTER]. *You* have not congratulated me yet, Miss Worsley.

HESTER. Are you very pleased about it?

GERALD. Of course I am. It means everything to me—things that were out of the reach of hope before may be within hope's reach now.

HESTER. Nothing should be out of the reach of hope. Life is a hope.

LADY HUNSTANTON. I fancy, Caroline, that

Diplomacy is what Lord Illingworth is aiming at. I heard that he was offered Vienna. But that may not be true.

LADY CAROLINE. I don't think that England should be represented abroad by an unmarried man, Jane. It might lead to complications.

LADY HUNSTANTON. You are too nervous, Caroline. Believe me, you are too nervous. Besides, Lord Illingworth may marry any day. I was in hopes he would have married Lady Kelso. But I believe he said her family was too large. Or was it her feet? I forget which. I regret it very much. She was made to be an ambassador's wife.

LADY CAROLINE. She certainly has a wonderful faculty of remembering people's names, and forgetting their faces.

LADY HUNSTANTON. Well, that is very natural, Caroline, is it not? *[To* FOOTMAN.] Tell Henry to wait for an answer. I have written a line to your dear mother, Gerald, to tell her your good news, and to say she really must come to dinner.

[Exit FOOTMAN.]

GERALD. That is awfully kind of you, Lady Hunstanton. [To HESTER.] Will you come for a stroll, Miss Worsley?

HESTER. With pleasure. *[Exit with* GERALD.]

LADY HUNSTANTON. I am very much gratified at Gerald Arbuthnot's good fortune. He is quite a *prologe* of mine. And I am particularly pleased that Lord Illingworth should have made the offer of his own accord without my suggesting anything. Nobody likes to be asked favours. I remember

poor Cliarlotte Pagden making herself quite unpopular one season because she had a French governess she wanted to recommend to every one.

LADY CAROLINE. I saw the governess, Jane. Lady Pagden sent her to me. It was before Eleanor came out. She was far too good-looking to be in any respectable household. I don't wonder Lady Pagden was so anxious to get rid of her.

LADY HUNSTANTON. Ah, that explains it.

LADY CAROLINE. John, the grass is too damp for you. You had better go and put on your overshoes at once.

SIR JOHN. I am quite comfortable, Caroline, I assure you.

LADY CAROLINE. You must allow me to be the best judge of that, John. Pray do as I tell you.

[SIR JOHN *gets up and goes off.]*

LADY HUNSTANTON. You spoil him, Caroline, you do indeed!

[Enter MRS. ALLONBY *and* LADY STUTFIELD.]

[To MRS. ALLONBY.] Well, dear, I hope you like the park. It is said to be well timbered.

MRS. ALLONBY. The trees are wonderful, Lady Hunstanton.

LADY STUTFIELD. Quite, quite wonderful.

MRS. ALLONBY. But somehow, I feel sure that if I lived in the country for six months, I should become so unsophisticated that no one would take the slightest notice of me.

LADY HUNSTANTON. I assure you, dear, that the country has not that effect at all. Why, it was

from Melthrope, which is only two miles from here, that Lady Belton eloped with Lord Fethersdale. I remember the occurrence perfectly. Poor Lord Belton died three days afterwards of joy, or gout. I forget which. We had a large party staying here at the time, so we were all very much interested in the whole affair.

MRS. ALLONBY. I think to elope is cowardly. It's running away from danger. And danger has become so rare in modern life.

LADY CAROLINE. As far as I can make out, the young women of the present day seem to make it the sole object of their lives to be always playing with fire.

MRS. ALLONBY. The one advantage of playing with fire, Lady Caroline, is that one never gets even singed. It is the people who don't know how to play with it who get burned up.

LADY STUTFIELD. Yes; I see that. It is very, very helpful.

LADY HUNSTANTON. I don't know how the world would get on with such a theory as that, dear Mrs. Allonby.

LADY STUTFIELD. Ah! The world was made for men and not for women.

MRS. ALLONBY. Oh, don't say that, Lady Stutfield. We have a much better time than they have. There are far more things forbidden to us than are forbidden to them.

LADY STUTFIELD. Yes; that is quite, quite true. I had not thought of that.

[Enter SIR JOHN *and* MR. KELVIL.]

LADY HUNSTANTON. Well, Mr. Kelvil, have you got through your work?

KELVIL. I have finished my writing for the day, Lady Hunstanton. It has been an arduous task. The demands on the time of a public man are very heavy now-a-days, very heavy indeed. And I don't think they meet with adequate recognition.

LADY CAROLINE. John, have you got your overshoes on?

SIR JOHN. Yes, my love.

LADY CAROLINE. I think you had better come over here, John. It is more sheltered.

SIR JOHN. I am quite comfortable, Caroline.

LADY CAROLINE. I think not, John. You had better sit beside me. [SIR JOHN *rises and goes across.]*

LADY STUTFIELD. And what have you been writing about this morning, Mr. Kelvil?

KELVIL. On the usual subject, Lady Stutfield. On Purity.

LADY STUTFIELD. That must be such a very, very interesting thing to write about.

KELVIL. It is the one subject of really national importance, now-a-days, Lady Stutfield. I purpose addressing my constituents on the question before Parliament meets. I find that the poorer classes of this country display a marked desire for a higher ethical standard.

LADY STUTFIELD. How quite, quite nice of them.

LADY CAROLINE. Are you in favour of women taking part in politics, Mr. Kettle?

SIR JOHN. Kelvil, my love, Kelvil.

KELVIL. The growing influence of women is the one reassuring thing in our political life, Lady Caroline. Women are always on the side of morality, public and private.

LADY STUTFIELD. It is so very, very gratifying to hear you say that.

LADY HUNSTANTON. Ah, yes! the moral qualities in women—that is the important thing. I am afraid, Caroline, that dear Lord Illingworth doesn't value the moral qualities in women as much as he should.

[Enter LORD ILLINGWORTH.]

LADY STUTFIELD. The world says that Lord Illingworth is very, very wicked.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. But what world says that, Lady Stutfield? It must be the next world. This world and I are on excellent terms. *[Sits down beside* MRS. ALLONBY.]

LADY STUTFIELD. Every one / know says you are very, very wicked.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. It is perfectly monstrous the way people go about, now-a-days, saying things against one behind one's back that are absolutely and entirely true.

LADY HTJNSTANTON. Dear Lord Illingworth is quite hopeless, Lady Stutfield. I have given up trying to reform him. It would take a Public Company with a Board of Directors and a paid Secretary to do that. But you have the secretary already, Lord Illingworth, haven't you? Gerald Arbuthnot has told us of his good fortune; it is really most kind of you.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Oh, don't say that, Lady Hunstanton. Kind is a dreadful word. I took a great fancy to young Arbuthnot the moment I met him, and he'll be of considerable use to me in something I am foolish enough to think of doing.

LADY HUNSTANTON. He is an admirable young man. And his mother is one of my dearest friends. He has just gone for a walk with our pretty American. She is very pretty, is she not?

LADY CAROLINE. Far too pretty. These American girls carry off all the good matches. Why can't they stay in their own country? They are always telling us it is the Paradise of women.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. It is, Lady Caroline. That is why, like Eve, they are so extremely anxious to get out of it.

LADY CAROLINE. Who are Miss Worsley's parents?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. American women are wonderfully clever in concealing their parents.

LADY HUNSTANTON. My dear Lord Illingworth, what do you mean? Miss Worsley, Caroline, is an orphan. Her father was a very wealthy millionaire, or philanthropist, or both, I believe, who entertained my son quite hospitably, when he visited Boston. I don't know how he made his money, originally.

KELVIL. I fancy in American dry goods.

LADY HUNSTANTON. What are American dry goods?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. American novels.

LADY HUNSTANTON. How very singular! . . .

Well, from whatever source her large fortune came, I have a great esteem for Miss Worsley. She dresses exceedingly well. All Americans do dress well. They get their clothes in Paris.

MRS. ALLONBY. They say, Lady Hunstanton, that when good Americans die they go to Paris.

LADY HUNSTANTON. Indeed? And when bad Americans die, where do they go to?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Oh, they go to America.

KELVIL. I am afraid you don't appreciate America, Lord Illingworth. It is a very remarkable country, especially considering its youth.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. The youth of America is their oldest tradition. It has been going on now for three hundred years. To hear them talk one would imagine they were in their first childhood. As far as civilisation goes they are in their second.

KELVIL. There is undoubtedly a great deal of corruption in American politics. I suppose you allude to that?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. I WOllder.

LADY HUNSTANTON. Politics are in a very sad way everywhere, I am told. They certainly are in England. Dear Mr. Cardew is ruining the country. I wonder Mrs. Cardew allows him. I am sure, Lord Illingworth, you don't think that uneducated people should be allowed to have votes?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. I think they are the only people who should.

KELVIL. Do you take no side then in modern politics, Lord Illingworth?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. One should never take sides in anything, Mr. KclviL Taking sides is the beginning of sincerity, and earnestness follows shortly afterwards, and the human being becomes a bore. However, the House of Commons really 'does very little harm. You can't make people good by Act of Parliament—that is something.

KELVIL. You cannot deny that the House of Commons has always shown great sympathy with the sufferings of the poor.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. That is its special vice. That is the special vice of the age. One should sympathise with the joy, the beauty, the colour of life. The less said about life's sores the better, Mr. Kelvil.

KELVIL. Still our East End is a very important problem.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Quite so. It is the problem of slavery. And we are trying to solve it by amusing the slaves.

LADY HUNSTANTON. Certainly, a great deal may be done by means of cheap entertainments, as you say, Lord Illingworth. Dear Dr. Daubeny, our rector here, provides, with the assistance of his curates, really admirable recreations for the poor during the winter. And much good may be done by means of a magic lantern, or a missionary, or some popular amusement of that kind.

LADY CAROLINE. I am not at all in favour of amusements for the poor, Jane. Blankets and coals are sufficient. There is too much love of pleasure amongst the upper classes as it is. Health

is what we want in modern life. The tone is not healthy, not healthy at all.

KELVIL. You are quite right, Lady Caroline.

LADY CAROLINE. I believe I am usually right.

MRS. ALLONBY. Horrid word 'health/

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Silliest word in our language, and one knows so well the popular idea of health. The English country gentleman galloping after a fox—the unspeakable in full pursuit of the uneatable.

KELVIL. May I ask, Lord Illingworth, if you regard the House of Lords as a better institution than the House of Commons?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. A much better institution, of course. We in the House of Lords are never in touch with public opinion. That makes us a civilised body.

KELVIL. Are you serious in putting forward such a view?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Quite serious, Mr. Kelvil. *[To* MRS. ALLONBY.] Vulgar habit that is people have now-a-days of asking one, after one has given them an idea, whether one is serious or not. Nothing is serious except passion. The intellect is not a serious thing, and never has been. It is an instrument on which one plays, that is all. The only serious form of intellect I know is the British intellect. And on the British intellect the illiterates play the drum.

LADY HUNSTANTON. What are you saying, Lord Illingworth, about the drum?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. I was merely talking to

Mrs. Allonby about the leading articles in the London newspapers.

LADY HUNSTANTON. But do you believe all that is written in the newspapers?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. I do. Now-a-days it is only the unreadable that occurs. *[Rises with* MRS. **ALLONBY.]**

LADY HUNSTANTON. Are you going, Mrs. Allonby?

MRS. ALLONBY. Just as far as the conservatory. Lord Illingworth told me this morning that there was an orchid there as beautiful as the seven deadly sins.

LADY HUNSTANTON. My dear, I hope there is nothing of the kind. I will certainly speak to the gardener. *[Exit* MRS. ALLONBY *and* LORD ILLINGWORTH.]

LADY CAROLINE. Remarkable type, Mrs. Allonby.

LADY HUNSTANTON. She lets her clever tongue run away with her sometimes.

LADY CAROLINE. Is that the only thing, Jane, Mrs. Allonby allows to run away with her?

LADY HUNSTANTON. I hope so, Caroline, I am sure.

[Enter LORD ALFRED.]

Dear Lord Alfred, do join us. [LORD ALFRED *sits down beside* LADY STUTFIELD.]

LADY CAROLINE. You believe good of every one, Jane. It is a great fault.

LADY STUTFIELD. Do you really, really think, Lady Caroline, that one should believe evil of every one?

LADY CAROLINE. I think it is much safer to do so, Lady Stutfield. Until, of course, people are found out to be good. But that requires a great deal of investigation, now-a-days.

LADY STUTFIELD. But there is so much unkind scandal in modern life.

LADY CAROLINE. Lord Illingworth remarked to me last night at dinner that the basis of every scandal is an absolutely immoral certainty.

KELVIL. Lord Illingworth is, of course, a very brilliant man, but he seems to me to be lacking in that fine faith in the nobility and purity of life which is so important in this century.

LADY STUTFIELD. Yes, quite, quite important, is it not?

KELVIL. He gives me the impression of a man who does not appreciate the beauty of our English home-life. I should say that he was tainted with foreign ideas on the subject.

LADY STUTFIELD. There is nothing, nothing like the beauty of home-life, is there?

KELVIL. It is the mainstay of our moral system in England, Lady Stutfield. Without it we would become like our neighbours.

LADY STUTFIELD. That would be so, so sad, would it not?

KELVIL. I am afraid, too, that Lord Illingworth regards woman simply as a toy. Now, I have never regarded woman as a toy. Woman is the intellectual helpmate of man in public as in private life. Without her we should forget the true ideals, *[Sits down beside* LADY STUTFIELD.]

LADY STUTFIELD. I am so very, very glad to hear you say that.

LADY CAROLINE. You a married man, Mr. Kettle?

SIR JOHN. Kelvil, dear. Kelvil.

KELVIL. I am married, Lady Caroline.

LADY CAROLINE. Family?

KELVIL. Yes.

LADY CAROLINE. How many?

KELVIL. Eight.

[LADY STUTFIELD *turns her attention to* LORD ALFRED.]

LADY CAROLINE. Mrs. Kettle and the children are, I suppose, at the seaside? [SIR JOHN *shrugs his shoulders.]*

KELVIL. My wife is at the seaside with the children, Lady Caroline.

LADY CAROLINE. You will join them later on, no doubt?

KELVIL. If my public engagements permit me.

LADY CAROLINE. Your public life must be a great source of gratification to Mrs. Kettle?

SIR JOHN. Kelvil, my love, Kelvil.

LADY STUTFIELD *[To* LORD ALFRED]. HOW **Very,** very charming those gold-tipped cigarettes of yours are, Lord Alfred.

LORD ALFRED. They are awfully expensive. *I* can only afford them when I'm in debt.

LADY STUTFIELD. It must be terribly, terribly distressing to be in debt.

LORD ALFRED. One must have some occupation now-ardays. If I hadn't my debts I shouldn't

have anything to think about. All the chaps I know are in debt.

LADY STUTFIELD. But don't the people to whom you owe the money give you a great, great deal of annoyance?

[Enter FOOTMAN.]

LORD ALFRED. Oh no, they write; I don't.

LADY STUTFIELD. How very, very strange.

LADY HUNSTANTON. Ah, here is a letter, Caroline, from dear Mrs. Arbuthnot. She won't dine. I am so sorry. But she will come in the evening. I am very pleased indeed. She is one of the sweetest of wpmen. Writes a beautiful hand, too, so large, so firm. *[Hands letter to* LADY CAROLINE.]

LADY CAROLINE. *[Looking at it].* A little lacking in femininity, Jane. Femininity is the quality I admire most in women.

LADY HUNSTANTON *[Taking back letter and leaving it on table].* Oh! she is very feminine, Caroline, and so good, too. You should hear what the Archdeacon says of her. He regards her as his right hand in the parish. [FOOTMAN *speaks to her.]* In the Yellow Drawing-room. Shall we all go in? Lady Stutfield, shall we go in to tea?

LADY STUTFIELD. With pleasure, Lady Hunstanton. *[They rise and proceed to go off.* SIR JOHN *offers to carry* LADY STUTFIELD'S *cloak.]*

LADY CAROLINE. John! If you would allow your nephew to look after Lady Stutfield's cloak, you might help me with my workbasket.

[Enter LORD ILLINGWORTH *and* MRS. ALLONBY.]

SIR JOHN. Certainly, my love. *[Exeunt.]*

MRS. ALLONBY. Curious thing, plain women are always jealous of their husbands, beautiful women never are!

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Beautiful women never have time. They are always so occupied in being jealous of other people's husbands.

MRS. ALLONBY. I should have thought Lady Caroline would have grown tired of conjugal anxiety by this time! Sir John is her fourth!

LORD ILLINGWORTH. So much marriage is certainly not becoming. Twenty years of romance make a woman look like a ruin; but twenty years of marriage make her something like a public building.

MRS. ALLONBY. Twenty years of romance! Is there such a thing?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Not in our day. Women have become too brilliant. Nothing spoils a romance so much as a sense of humour in the woman.

MRS. ALLONBY. Or the want of it in the man.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. You are quite right. In a Temple every one should be serious, except the thing that is worshipped.

MRS. ALLONBY. And that should be man?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Women kneel so gracefully; men don't.

MRS. ALLONBY. You are thinking of Lady Stutfield!

LORD ILLINGWORTH. I assure you I have not thought of Lady Stutfield for the last quarter of an hour.

MRS. ALLONBY. Is she such a mystery?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. She is more than a mystery—she is a mood.

MRS. ALLONBY. Moods don't last.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. It is their chief charm.

[Enter HESTER *and* GERALD.]

GERALD. Lord Illingworth, every one has been congratulating me, Lady Hunstanton and Lady Caroline, and . . . every one. I hope I shall make a good secretary.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. You will be the pattern secretary, Gerald. *[Talks to him.]*

MRS. ALLONBY. You enjoy country life, Miss Worsley?

HESTER. Very much indeed.

MRS. ALLONBY. Don't find yourself longing for a London dinner party?

HESTER. I dislike London dinner parties.

MRS. ALLONBY. I adore them. The clever people never listen, and the stupid people never talk.

HESTER. I think the stupid people talk a great deal.

MRS. ALLONBY. Ah, I never listen!

LORD ILLINGWORTH. My dear boy, if I didn't like you I wouldn't have made you the offer. It is because I like you so much that I want to have you with me.

[Exit HESTER *With* GERALD.]

Charming fellow, Gerald Arbuthnot!

MRS. ALLONBY. He is very nice; very nice indeed. But I can't stand the American young lady.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Why?

URS. ALLONBY. She told me yesterday, and in

quite a loud voice too, that she was only eighteen. It was most annoying.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. One should never trust a woman who tells one her real age. A woman who would tell one that would tell one anything.

MRS. ALLONBY. She is a Puritan besides——

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Ah, that is inexcusable. I don't mind plain women being Puritans. It is the only excuse they have for being plain. But she is decidedly pretty. I admire her immensely. *[Looks steadfastly at* MRS. ALLONBY.]

MRS. ALLONBY. What a thoroughly bad man you must be!

LORD ILLINGWORTH. What do you call a bad man?

MRS. ALLONBY. The sort of man who admires innocence.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. And a bad woman?

MRS, ALLONBY. Oh! the sort of woman a man never gets tired of.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. You are severe—on yourself.

MRS. ALLONBY. Define us as a sex.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Sphinxes without secrets.

MRS. ALLONBY. Does that include the Puritan women?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Do you know, I don't believe in the existence of Puritan women! I don't think there is a woman in the world who would not be a little flattered if one made love to her. It is that which makes women so irresistibly adorabjo.

MBS. ALLONBY. You think there is no woman in the world who would object to being kissed?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Very few.

MRS. ALLONBY. Miss Worsley would not let you kiss her.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Are you sure?

MRS. ALLONBY. Quite.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. What do you think she'd do if I kissed her?

MRS. ALLONBY. Either marry you, or strike you across the face with her glove. What would you do if she struck you across the face with her glove?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Fall in love with her, probably.

MRS. ALLONBY. Then it is lucky you are not going to kiss her!

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Is that a challenge?

MRS. ALLONBY. It is an arrow shot into the air.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Don't you know that I always succeed in whatever I try?

MRS. ALLONBY. I am sorry to hear it. *We* women adore Jaijures. They lean on us.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. YOU Worship SUCCCSSES. You cling to them.

MRS. ALLONBY. We are the laurels to hide their baldness.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. And they need you aiways, except at the moment of triumph.

MRS. ALLONBY. They are uninteresting then.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. How tantalising you are! *[A pause.]*

MBS. ALLONBY. Lord Illingworth, there is one thing I shall always like you for.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Only one thing? And I have so many bad qualities.

MRS. ALLONBY. Ah, don't be too conceited about them. You may lose them as you grow old.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. I never intend to grow old. The soul is born old but grows young. That is the comedy of life.

MRS. ALLONBY. And the body is born young and grows old. That is life's tragedy.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Its comedy also, sometimes. But what is the mysterious reason why you will always like me?

MRS. ALLONBY. It is that you have never made love to me.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. I have never done anything else.

MRS. ALLONBY. Really? I have not noticed it.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. How fortunate! It might have been a tragedy for both of us.

MRS. ALLONBY. We should each have survived.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. One can survive everything now-a-days, except death, and live down anything except a good reputation.

MRS. ALLONBY. Have you tried a good reputation?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. It is one of the many annoyances to which I have never been subjected.

MRS. ALLONBY. It may come.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Why do you threaten me?

MRS. ALLONBY. I will tell you when you have kissed the Puritan.

[Enter FOOTMAN.]

FRANCIS. Tea is served in the Yellow Drawing-room, my lord.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Tell her ladyship we are coming in.

FRANCIS. Yes, my lord. *[Exit.]*

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Shall we go in to tea?

MRS. ALLONBY. Do you like such simple pleasures?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. I adore simple pleasures. They are the last refuge of the complex. But, if you wish, let us stay here. Yes, let us stay here. The Book of Life begins with a man and a woman in a garden.

MRS. ALLONBY. It ends with Revelations.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. You fence divinely. But the button has come off your foil.

MRS. ALLONBY. I have still the mask.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. It makes your eyes lovelier.

MRS. ALLONBY. Thank you. Come.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. *[Sees* MRS. ARBUTHNOT'S *letter on table, and takes it up and looks at envelope.]* What a curious handwriting! It reminds me of the handwriting of a woman I used to know years ago.

MRS. ALLONBY. Who?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Oh! no one. No one in particular. A woman of no importance. *[Throws letter doim, and passes up the steps of the terrace with* MRS. ALLONBY. *They smile at each other.]*

ACT-DROP

ACT II

SCENE—*Drawing-room at Hunstanton, after dinner, lamps lit. Door* L.C. *Door* B.C.

[Ladies seated on sofas.]

MRS. ALLONBY. What a comfort it is to have got rid of the men for a little!

LADY STUTFIELD. Yes; men persecute us dreadfully, don't they?

MRS. ALLONBY. Persecute us? I wish they did.

LADY HUNSTANTON. My dear!

MRS. ALLONBY. The annoying thing is that the wretches can be perfectly happy without us. That is why I think it is every woman's duty neve:: to leave them alone for a single moment, except during this short breathing space after dinner; without which I believe we poor women would be absolutely worn to shadows.

[Enter SERVANTS *with coffee.}*

LADY HUNSTANTON. Worn to shadows, dear?

MRS. ALLONBY. Yes, Lady Hunstanton. It is such a strain keeping men up to the mark. They are always trying to escape from us.

LADY STUTFIELD. It seems to me that it is we who are always trying to escape from them. Men are so very, very heartless. They know their power and use it.

LADY CAROLINE *[Takes coffee from* SERVANT]. What stuff and nonsense all this about men is!

The thing to do is to keep men in their proper place.

MRS. ALLONBY. But what is their proper place, Lady Caroline?

LADY CAROLINE. Looking after their wives, Mrs. Allonby.

MRS. ALLONBY *[Takes coffee from* SERVANT]. Really? And if they're not married?

LADY CAROLINE. If they are not married, they should be looking after a wife. It's perfectly scandalous the amount of bachelors who are going about society. There should be a law passed to compel them all to marry within twelve months.

LADY STUTFIELD *[Refuses coffee].* But if they're in love with some one who, perhaps, is tied to another?

LADY CAROLINE. In that case, Lady Stutfield, they should be married off in a week to some plain respectable girl, in order to teach them not to meddle with other people's property.

MRS. ALLONBY. I don't think that we should ever be spoken of as other people's property. All men are married women's property. That is the only true definition of what married women's property really is. But we don't belong to any one.

LADY STUTFIELD. Oh, I am so very, very glad to hear you say so.

LADY HUNSTANTON. But do you really think, dear Caroline, that legislation would improve matters in any way? I am told that, now-a-days,

all the married men live like bachelors, and all the bachelors like married men.

MRS. ALLONBY. I certainly never know one from the other.

LADY STUTFIELD. Oh, I think one can always know at once whether a man has home claims upon his life or not. I have noticed a very, very sad expression in the eyes of so many married men.

MRS. ALLONBY. Ah, all that I Ijave noticed is that they are horribly tedious when they are good husbands, and abominably conceited when they are not.

LADY HUNSTANTON. Well, I suppose the type of husband has completely changed since my young days, but I'm bound to state that poor dear Hunstanton was the most delightful of creatures, and as good as gold.

MRS. ALLONBY. Ah, my husband is a sort of promissory note; I am tired of meeting him.

LADY CAROLINE. But you renew him from time to time, don't you?

MRS. ALLONBY. Oh no, Lady Caroline. I have only had one husband as yet. I suppose you look upon me as quite an amateur.

LADY CAROLINE. With your views on life I wonder you married at all

MRS. ALLONBY. So do I.

LADY HUNSTANTON. My dear child, I believe you are really very happy in your married life, but that you like to hide your happiness from others.

MRS. ALLONBY. I assure you I was horribly deceived in Ernest.

LADY HUNSTANTON. Oh, I hope not, dear. I knew his mother quite well. She was a Stratton, Caroline, one of Lord Crowland's daughters.

LADY CAROLINE. Victoria Stratton? 1 remember her perfectly. A silly fair-haired woman with no chin.

MRS. ALLONBY. Ah, Ernest has a chin. He has a very strong chin, a square chin. Ernest's chin is far too square.

LADY STUTFIELD. But do you really think a man's chin can be too square? I think a man should look very, very strong, and that his chin should be quite, quite square.

MRS. ALLONBY. Then you should certainly know Ernest, Lady Stutfield. It is only fair to tell you beforehand he has got no conversation at all.

LADY STUTFIELD. I adore silent meo.

MRS. ALLONBY. Oh, Ernest isn't silent. He talks the whole time. But he has got no conversation. What he talks about I don't know. I haven't listened to him for years.

LADY STUTFIELD. Have you never forgiven him then? How sad that seems! But all life is very, very sad, is it not?

MRS. ALLONBY. Life, Lady Stutfield, is simply a *rnamais quart d'heure* made up of exquisite moments.

LADY STUTFIELD. Yes, there are moments, certainly. But was it something very, very wrong that Mr. Allonby did? Did he become angry

with you, and say anything that was unkind or true?

MRS. ALLONBY. Oh dear, no. Ernest is invariably calm. That is one of the reasons he always gets on my nerves. Nothing is so aggravating as calmness. There is something positively brutal about the good temper of most modern men. I wonder we women stand it as well as we do.

LADY STUTFIELD. Yes; men's good temper shows they are not so sensitive as we are, not so finely strung. It makes a great barrier often between husband and wife, does it not? But I would so much like to know what was the wrong thing Mr. Allonby did.

MBS. ALLONBY. Well, I will tell you, if you solemnly promise to tell everybody else.

LADY STUTFIELD. Thank you, thank you. I will make a point of repeating it.

MRS. ALLONBY. When Ernest and I were engaged he swore to me positively on his knees that he never had loved any one before in the whole course of his life. I was very young at the time, so I didn't believe him, I needn't tell you. Unfortunately, however, I made no enquiries of any kind till after I had been actually married four or five months. I found out then that what he had told me was perfectly true. And that sort of thing makes a man so absolutely uninteresting.

LADY HUNSTANTON. My dear!

MRS. ALLONBY. Men always want to be a woman's first love. That is their clumsy vanity. We women have a more subtle instinct about

things. What we like is to be a man's last romance.

LADY STUTFIELD. I see what you mean. It's very, very beautiful..

LADY HUNSTANTON. My dear child, you don't mean to tell me that you won't forgive your husband because he never loved any one else? Did you ever hear such a thing, Caroline? I am quite surprised.

LADY CAROLINE. Oh, women have become so highly educated, Jane, that nothing should surprise us now-a-days, except happy marriages. They apparently are getting remarkably rare.

MRS. ALLONBY. Oh, they're quite out of date.

LADY STUTFIELD. Except amongst the middle classes, I have been told.

MRS. ALLONBY. How like the middle classes!

LADY STUTFIELD. Yes—is it not?—very, very like them.

LADY CAROLINE. If what you tell us about the middle classes is true, Lady Stutfield, it redounds greatly to their credit. It is much to be regretted that in our rank of life the wife should be so persistently frivolous, under the impression apparently that it is the proper thing to be. It is to that I attribute the unhappiness of so many marriages we all know of in society.

MRS. ALLONBY. Do you know, Lady Caroline, I don't think the frivolity of the wife has ever anything to do with it. More marriages are ruined now-a-days by the common sense of the husband than by anything else. How can a woman be ex-

pected to be happy with a man who insists on treating her as if she were a perfectly rational being?

LADY HUNSTANTON. My dear!

MRS. ALLONBY. Man, poor, awkward, reliable, necessary man belongs to a sex that has been rational for millions and millions of years. He can't help himself. It is in his race. The History of Woman is very different. We have always been picturesque protests against the mere existence of common sense. We saw its dangers from the first.

LADY STUTFIELD. Yes, the common sense of husbands is certainly most, most trying. Do tell me your conception of the Ideal Husband. I think it would be so very, very helpful.

MRS. ALLONBY. The Ideal Husband? There couldn't be such a thing. The institution is wrong.

LADY STUTFIELD. The Ideal Man, then, in his relations to *us*.

LADY CAROLINE. He would probably be extremely realistic.

MRS. ALLONBY. The Ideal Man! Oh, the Ideal Man should talk to us as if we were goddesses, and treat us as if we were children. He should refuse all our serious requests, and gratify every one of our whims. He should encourage us to have caprices, and forbid us to have missions. He should always say much more than.he means, and always mean much more than he says.

LADY HUNSTANTON. But how could he do both, dear?

MRS. ALLONBY. He should never run down other pretty women. That would show he had no taste, or make one suspect that he had too much. No; he should be nice about them all, but say that somehow they don't attract him.

LADY STITTFIELD. Yes, that is always very, very pleasant to hear about other women.

MRS. ALLONBY. If we ask him a question about anything, he should give us an answer all about ourselves. He should invariably praise us for whatever qualities he knows we haven't got. But he should be pitiless, quite pitiless, in reproaching us for the virtues that we have never dreamed of possessing. He should never believe that we know the use of useful things. That would be unforgivable. But he should shower on us everything we don't want.

LADY CAROLINE. As far as I can see, he is to do nothing but pay bills and compliments.

MRS. ALLONBY. He should persistently compromise us in public, and treat us with absolute respect when we are alone. And yet he should be always ready to have a perfectly terrible scene, whenever we want one, and to become miserable, absolutely miserable, at a moment's notice, and to overwhelm us with just reproaches in less than twenty minutes, and to be positively violent at the end of half an hour, and to leave us for ever at a quarter to eight, when we have to go and dress for dinner. And, when, after that, one has seen him for really the last time, and he has refused to take back the little things he has given one,

and promised never to communicate with one again, or to write one any foolish letters, he should be perfectly broken-hearted, and telegraph to one all day long, and send one little notes every half hour by a private hansom, and dine quite alone at the club, so that every one should know how unhappy he was. And after a whole dreadful week, during which one has gone about everywhere with one's husband, just to show how absolutely lonely one was, he may be given a third last parting, in the evening, and then, if his conduct has been quite irreproachable, and one has behaved really badly to him, he should be allowed to admit that he has been entirely in the wrong, and when he has admitted that, it becomes a woman's duty to forgive, and one can do it all over again from the beginning, with variations.

LADY HUNSTANTON. How clever you are, my dear! You never mean a single word you say.

LADY STUTFIELD. Thank you, thank you. It has been quite, quite entrancing. I must try and remember it all. There are such a number of details that are so very, very important.

LADY CAROLINE. But you have not told us yet what the reward of the Ideal Man is to be.

MRS. ALLONBY. His reward? Oh, infinite expectation. That is quite enough for him.

LADY STUTFIELD. But men are so terribly, terribly exacting, are they not?

MRS. ALLONBY. That makes no matter. One should never surrender.

LADY STUTFIELD. Not even to the Ideal Man?

MRS. ALLONBY. Certainly not to him. Unless, of course, one wants to grow tired of him.

LADY STUTFIELD. O h ! . . . yes. I see that. It is very, very helpful. Do you think, Mrs. Allonby, I shall ever meet the Ideal Man? Or are there more than one?

MRS. ALLONBY. There are just four in London, Lady Stutfield.

LADY HUNSTANTON. Oh, my dear!

MRS. ALLONBY *[Going over to her].* What has happened? Do tell me.

LADY HUNSTANTON *[In a low voice].* I had completely forgotten that the American young lady has been'in the room all the time. I am afraid some of this clever talk may have shocked her a little.

MRS. ALLONBY. Ah, that will do her so much good!

LADY HUNSTANTON. Let us hope she didn't understand much. I think I had better go over and talk to her. *[Rises and goes across to* HESTER WORSLEY.] Well, dear Miss Worsley. *[Sitting down beside her.]* How quiet you have been in your nice little corner all this time! I suppose you have been reading a book? There are so many books here in the library.

HESTER. No, I have been listening to the conversation.

LADY HUNSTANTON. You mustn't believe everything that was said, you know, dear.

HESTER. I didn't believe any of it.

LADY HUNSTANTON. That is quite right dear.

HESTER *[Continuing]. I* couldn't believe that any women could really hold such views of life as I have heard to-night from some of your guests. *[An awkward patise.]*

LADY HUNSTANTON. I hear you have such pleasant society in America. Quite like our own in places, my son wrote to me.

HESTER. There are cliques in America as elsewhere, Lady Hunstanton. But true American society consists simply of all the good women and good men we have in our country.

LADY HUNSTANTON. What a sensible system, and I dare say quite pleasant too. I am afraid in England we have too many artificial social barriers. We don't see as much as we should of the middle and lower classes.

HESTER. In America we have no lower classes.

LADY HUNSTANTON. Really? What a very strange arrangement!

MRS. ALLONBY. What is that dreadful girl talking about?

LADY STUTFIELD. She is painfully natural, is she not?

LADY CAROLINE. There are a great many things you haven't got in America, I am told, Miss Worsley. They say you have no ruins, and no curiosities.

MRS. ALLONBY *[To* LADY STUTFIELD]. **What** nonsense! They have their mothers and their manners.

HESTER. The English aristocracy supply us with our curiosities, Lady Caroline. They are

sent over to us every summer, regularly, in the steamers, and propose to us the day after they land. As for ruins, we are trying to build up something that will last longer than brick or stone. *[Gets up to take her fan from table.]*

LADY HUNSTANTON. What is that, dear? Ah, yes, an iron Exhibition, is it not, at that place that has the curious name?

HESTER *[Standing by table].* We are trying to build up life, Lady Hunstanton, on a better, truer, purer basis than life rests on here. This sounds strange to you all, no doubt. How could it sound other than strange? You rich people in England; you don't know how you are living. How could you know? You shut out from your society the gentle and the good. You laugh at the simple and the pure. Living, as you all do, on others and by them, you sneer at self-sacrifice, and if you throw bread to the poor, it is merely to keep them quiet for a season. With all your pomp and wealth and art you don't know how to live—you don't even know that. You love the beauty that you can see and touch and handle, the beauty that you can destroy, and do destroy, but of the unseen beauty of life, of the unseen beauty of a higher life, you know nothing. You have lost life's secret. Oh, your English society seems to me shallow, selfish, foolish. It has blinded its eyes, and stopped its ears. It lies like a leper in purple. It sits like a dead thing smeared with gold. It is all wrong, all wrong.

LADY STUTFIELD. I don't think one should

know of these things. It is not very, very nice, is it?

LADY HUNSTANTON. My dear Miss Worsley, I thought you liked English society so much. You were such a success in it. And you were so much admired by the best people, I quite forget what Lord Henry Weston said of you—but it was most complimentary, and you know what an authority he is on beauty.

HESTER. Lord Henry Weston! I remember him, Lady Hunstanton. A man with a hideous smile and a hideous past. He is asked everywhere. No dinner-party is complete without him. What of those whose ruin is due to hini? They are outcasts. They are nameless. If you met them in the street you would turn your head away. I don't complain of their punishment. Let all women who have sinned be punished.

[MRS. ARBUTHNOT *enters from terrace behind in a cloak with a lace veil over her head. She hears the last words and starts.]*

LADY HUNSTANTON. My dear young lady!

HESTER. It is right that they should be punished, but don't let them be the only ones to suffer. If a man and woman have sinned, let them both go forth into the desert to love or loathe each other there. Let them both be branded. Set a mark, if you wish, on each, but don't punish the one and let the other go free. Don't have one law for men and another for women. You are unjust to women in England. And till you count what is a shame in a woman to be an infamy in a man, you

will always be unjust,' and Right, that pillar of fire, and Wrong, that pillar of cloud, will be made dim to your eyes, or be not seen at all, or if seen, not regarded.

LADY CAROLINE. Might I, dear Miss Worsley, as you are standing up, ask you for my cotton that is just behind you? Thank you.

LADY HITNSTANTON. My dear Mrs. Arbuthnot! I am so pleased you have come up. But I didn't hear you announced.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. Oh, I came straight in from the terrace, Lady Hunstanton, just as I was. You didn't tell me you had a party.

LADY HUNSTANTON. Not a party. Only a few guests who are staying in the house, and whom you must know. Allow me. *[Tries to help her. Rings bell.]* Caroline, this is Mrs. Arbuthnot, one of my sweetest friends. Lady Caroline Pontefract, Lady Stutfield, Mrs. Allonby, and my young American friend, Miss Worsley, who has just been telling us all how wicked we are.

HESTER. I am afraid you think I spoke too strongly, Lady Hunstanton. But there are some things in England——

LADY HUNSTANTON. My dear young lady, there was a great deal of truth, I dare say, in what you said, and you looked very pretty while you said it, which is much more important, Lord Illingworth would tell us. The only point where I thought you were a little hard was about Lady Caroline's brother, about poor Lord Henry. He is really such good company.

[Enter FOOTMAN.]

Take Mrs. Arbuthnot's things.

[Exit FOOTMAN *with wraps.]*

HESTER. Lady Caroline, 1 had no idea it was your brother. I am sorry for the pain I must have caused you—I——

LADY CAROLINE. My dear Miss Worsley, the only part of your little speech, if I may so term it, with which I thoroughly agreed, was the part about my brother. Nothing that you could possibly say could be too bad for him. I regard Henry as infamous, absolutely infamous. But I am bound to state, as you were remarking, Jane, that he is excellent company, and he[1] has one of the best cooks in London, and after a good dinner one can forgive anybody, even one's own relations.

LADY HUNSTANTON *[To* MISS WORSLEY]. Now, do come, dear, and make friends with Mrs. Arbuthnot. She is one of the good, sweet, simple people you told us we never admitted into society. I am sorry to say Mrs. Arbuthnot comes very rarely to me. But that is not my fault.

MRS. ALLONBY. What a bore it is the men staying so long after dinner! I expect they are saying the most dreadful things about us.

LADY STUTFIELD. Do you really think so?

MRS. ALLONBY. I am SUTC of it.

LADY STUTFIELD. How very, very horrid of them! Shall we go on to the terrace?

MRS. ALLONBY. Oh, anything to get away from the dowagers and the dowdies. *[Rises and goes*

with LADY STUTFIELD *to door* L. c.] We are only going to look at the stars, Lady Hunstanton.

LADY HUNSTANTON. You will find a great many, dear, a great many. But don't catch cold. *[To* MRS. ARBUTHNOT.] We shall all miss Gerald so much, dear Mrs. Arbuthnot.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. But has Lord Illingworth really offered to make Gerald his secretary?

LADY HUNSTANTON. Oh, yes! He has been most charming about it. He has the highest possible opinion of your boy. You don't know Lord Illingworth, I believe, dear.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. 1 have never met him.

LADY HUNSTANTON. You know him by name, no doubt?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. I am afraid I don't. I live so much out of the world, and see so few people. I remember hearing years ago of an old Lord Illingworth who lived in Yorkshire, I think.

LADY HUNSTANTON. Ah, yes. That would be the last Earl but one. He was a very curious man. He wanted to marry beneath him. Or wouldn't, I believe. There was some scandal about it. The present Lord Illingworth is quite different. He is very distinguished. He does—well, he does nothing, which I am afraid our pretty American visitor here thinks very wrong of anybody, and I don't know that he cares much for the subjects in which you are so interested, dear Mrs. Arbuthnot. Do you think, Caroline, that Lord Illingworth is interested in the Housing of the Poor?

LADY CAROLINE. I should fancy not at all, Jane.

LADY HUNSTANTON. We all have our different tastes, have we not? But Lord Illingworth has a very high position, and there is nothing he couldn't get if he chose to ask for it. Of course, he is comparatively a young man still, and he has only come to his title within—how long exactly is it, Caroline, since Lord Illingworth succeeded?

LADY CAROLINE. About four years, I think, Jane. I know it was the same year in which my brother had his last exposure in the evening newspapers.

LADY HUNSTANTON. Ah, I remember. That would be about four years ago. Of course, there were a great many people between the present Lord Illingworth and the title, Mrs. Arbuthnot. There was—who was there, Caroline?

LADY CAROLINE. There was poor Margaret's baby. You remember how anxious she was to have a boy, and it was a boy, but it died, and her husband died shortly afterwards, and she married almost immediately one of Lord Ascot's sons, who, I am told, beats her.

LADY HUNSTANTON. Ah, that is in the family, dear, that is in the family. And there was also, I remember, a clergyman who wanted to be a lunatic, or a lunatic who wanted to be a clergyman, I forget which, but I know the Court of Chancery investigated the matter, and decided that he was quite sane. And I saw him afterwards at poor Lord Plumstead's with straws in his hair, or some^ thing very odd about him. I can't recall what. I

often regret, Lady Caroline, that dear Lady Cecilia never lived to see her son get the title.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. Lady Cecilia?

LADY HUNSTANTON. Lord Illingworth's mother, dear Mrs. Arbuthnot, was one of the Duchess of Jerningham's pretty daughters, and she married Sir Thomas Harford, who wasn't considered a very good match for her at the time, though he was said to be the handsomest man in London. I knew them all quite intimately, and both the sons, Arthur and George.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. It was the eldest son who succeeded, of course, Lady Hunstanton?

LADY HUNSTANTON. No, dear, he was killed in the hunting field. Or was it fishing, Caroline? I forget. But George came in for everything. I always tell him that no younger son has ever had such good luck as he has had.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. Lady Hunstanton, I want to speak to Gerald at once. Might I see him? Can he be sent for?

LADY HUNSTANTON. Certainly, dear. I will send one of the servants into the dining-room to fetch him. I don't know what keeps the gentlemen so long. *[Rings bell.]* When I knew Lord Illingworth first as plain George Harford, he was simply a very brilliant young man about town, with not a penny of money except what poor dear Lady Cecilia gave him. She was quite devoted to him. Chiefly, I fancy, because he was on bad terms with his father. Oh, here is the dear Archdeacon. *[To* SERVANT.] It doesn't matter.

[Enter SIR JOHN *and* DOCTOR DAUBENY. SIR JOHN *goes over to* LADY STUTFIELD, DOCTOR DAUBENY *to* **LADY HUNSTANTON.]**

THE ARCHDEACON. Lord Illingworth has been most entertaining. I have never enjoyed myself more. *[Sees* MRS. ARBUTHNOT.] Ah, Mrs. Arbuthnot

LADY HUNSTANTON ***[To* DOCTOR DAUBENY].*** **You** see I have got Mrs. Arbuthnot to come to me at last.

THE ARCHDEACON. That is a great honour, Lady Hunstanton. Mrs. Daubeny will be quite jealous of you.

LADY HUNSTANTON. Ah, I am so sorry Mrs. Daubeny could not come with you to-night. Headache as usual, I suppose.

THE ARCHDEACON. Yes, Lady Hunstanton; a perfect martyr. But she is happiest alone. She is happiest alone.

LADY CAROLINE *[To her husband].* John! [SIR JOHN *goes over to his wife.* DOCTOR DAUBENY *talks to* LADY HUNSTANTON *and* MRS. ARBUTHNOT.]

[MRS. ARBUTHNOT *watches* LORD ILLINGWORTH *the whole time. He has passed across the room without noticing her, and approaches* MRS. ALLONBY, *who wlih* LADY STUTFIELD *is standing by the door looking on to the terrace.]*

LORD ILLINGWORTH. How is the most charming woman in the world?

MRS. ALLONBY *(Taking* LADY STUTFIELD *by the hand].* We are both quite well, thank you, Lord Illingworth. But what a short time you have been

in the dining-room! It seems as if we had only just left.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. I was bored to death. Never opened my lips the whole time. Absolutely longing to come in to you.

MRS. ALLONBY. You should have. The American girl has been giving us a lecture.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Really? All Americans lecture, I believe. I suppose it is something in their climate. What did she lecture about?

MRS. ALLONBY. Oh, Puritanism, of course.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. I am going to convert her, am I not? How long do you give me?

MRS. ALLONBY. A week.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. A week is more than enough.

[Enter GERALD *and* LORD ALFRED.]

GERALD *[Going to* MRS. ARBUTHNOT]. Dear mother!

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. Gerald, I don't feel at all well. See me home, Gerald. I shouldn't have come.

GERALD. I am so sorry, mother. Certainly. But you must know Lord lllingworth first. *[Goes across room.]*

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. Not to-night, Gerald.

GERALD. Lord lllingworth, I want you so much to know my mother.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. With the greatest pleasure. [To MRS. ALLONBY.] I'll be back in a moment. People's mothers always bore me to death. All women become like their mothers. That is their tragedy.

MRS. ALLONBY. No man does. That is his.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. What a delightful mood you are in to-night! *[Turns round and goes across With* GERALD *to* MRS. ARBUTHNOT. *When he sees her, he starts back in wonder. Then slowly his eyes turn towards* GERALD.]

GERALD. Mother, this is Lord Illingworth, who has offered to take me as his private secretary. [MRS. ARBUTHNOT *bows coldly.]* It is a wonderful opening for me, isn't it? I hope he won't be disappointed in me, that is all. You'll thank Lord Illingworth, mother, won't you?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. Lord Illingworth is very good, I am sure, to interest himself in you for the moment.

LORD ILLINGWORTH *[Putting his hand on* GERALD'S *shoulder].* Oh, Gerald and I are great friends already, Mrs. . . . Arbuthnot.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. There can be nothing in common between you and my son, Lord Illingworth.

GERALD. Dear mother, how can you say so? Of course, Lord Illingworth is awfully clever and that sort of thing. There is nothing Lord Illingworth doesn't know.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. My dear boy!

GERALD. He knows more about life than any one I have ever met. I feel an awful duffer when I am with you, Lord Illingworth. Of course, I have had so few advantages. I have not been to Eton or Oxford like other chaps. But Lord Illingworth doesn't seem to mind that. He has been awfully good to me, mother.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. Lord Illingworth may change his mind. He may not really want you as his secretary.

GERALD. Mother!

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. You must remember, as you said yourself, you have had so few advantages.

MRS. ALLONBY. Lord Illingworth, I want to speak to you for a moment. Do come over.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Will you excuse me, Mrs. Arbutlmot? Now, don't let your charming mother make any more difficulties, Gerald. The thing is quite settled, isn't it?

GERALD. I hope SO. [LORD ILLINGWORTH *goes across to* MRS. ALLONBY.]

MRS. ALLONBY. I thought you were never going to leave the lady in black velvet.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. She is excessively handsome. *[Looks at* MRS. ARBUTHNOT.]

LADY HUNSTANTON. Caroline, shall we all make a move to the music-room? Miss Worsley is going to play. You'll come too, dear Mrs. Arbuthnot, won't you? You don't know what a treat is in store for you. *[To* DOCTOR DAUBENY.] I must really take Miss Worsley down some afternoon to the rectory. I should so much like dear Mrs. Daubeny to hear her on the violin. Ah, I forgot. Dear Mrs. Daubeny's hearing is a little defective, is it not?

THE ARCHDEACON. Her deafness is a great privation to her. She can't even hear my sermons now. She reads them at home. But she has many resources in herself, many resources.

LADY HUNSTANTON. She reads a good deal, I suppose?

THE ARCHDEACON. Just the very largest print. The eyesight is rapidly going. But she's never morbid, never morbid.

GERALD [To LORD ILLINGWORTH]. Do Speak **to** my mother, Lord Illingworth, before you go into the music-room. She seems to think, somehow, you don't mean what you said to me.

MRS. ALLONBY. Aren't you coming?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. In a few moments. Lady Hunstanton, if Mrs. Arbuthnot would allow me, I would like to say a few words to her, and we will join you later on.

LADY HUNSTANTON. Ah, of COUrSC. **You will** have a great deal to say to her, and she will have a great deal to thank you for. It is not every son who,gets such an offer, Mrs. Arbuthnot. But I know you appreciate that, dear.

LADY CAROLINE. John!

LADY HUNSTANTON. Now, don't keep **Mrs.** Arbuthnot too long, Lord Illingworth. We can't spare her.

[Exit following the other guests. Sound of violin heard from music-room.]

LORD ILLINGWORTH. So that is our son! Well, I am very proud of him. lie is a Harford, every inch of him. By the way, why Arbuthnot, Rachel?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. One name is as good as another, when one has no right to any name.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. I suppose so—but why Gerald?

MES. ARBTJTHNOT. After a man whose heart I broke—after my father.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Well, Rachel, what is over is over. All I have got to say now is that I am very, very much pleased with our boy. The world will know him merely as my private secretary, but to me he will be something very near, and very dear. It is a curious thing, Rachel; my life seemed to be quite complete. It was not so. It lacked something, it lacked a son. 1 have found my son now, I am glad I have found him.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. You have no right to claim him, or the smallest part of him. The boy is entirely mine, and shall remain mine.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. My dear Rachel, you have had him to yourself for over twenty years. Why not let me have him for a little now? He is quite as much mine as yours.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. Are you talking of the child you abandoned? Of the child who, as far as you arc concerned, might have died of hunger and of want?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. You forget, Rachel, it was you who left me. It was not I who left you.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. I left you because you refused to give the child a name. Before my son was born, I implored you to marry me.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. I had no expectations then. And besides, Rachel, I wasn't much older than you were. I was only twenty-two. I was twenty-one, I believe, when the whole thing began in your father's garden.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. When a man is old enough to do wrong he should be old enough to do right also.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. My dear Rachel, intellectual generalities are always interesting, but generalities in morals mean absolutely nothing. As for saying I left our child to starve, that, of course, is untrue and silly. My mother offered you six hundred a year. But you wouldn't take anything. You simply disappeared, and carried the child away with you.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. I wouldn't have accepted a penny from her. Your father was different. He told you, in my presence, when we were, in Paris, that it was your duty to marry me.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Oh, duty is what one expects from others, it is not what one does one's self. Of course, I was influenced by my mother. Every man is when he is young.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. I am glad to hear you say so. Gerald shall certainly not go away with you.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. What nonsense, Rachel!

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. Do you think I would allow my son——

LORD ILLINGWORTH. *Our* SOn.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. My son [LORD ILLINGWORTH *shrugs his shoulders]*—to go away with the man who spoiled my youth, who ruined my life, who has tainted every moment of my days? You don't realise what my past has been in suffering and in shame.

LORD ILLINGWOKTH. My dear Rachel, I must

candidly say that I think Gerald's future considerably more important than your past.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. Gerald cannot separate his future from my past.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. That is exactly what he should do. That is exactly what you should help him to do. What a typical woman you are! You talk sentimentally, and you are thoroughly selfish the whole time. But don't let us have a scene. Rachel, I want you to look at this matter from the common-sense point of view, from the point of view of what is best for our son, leaving you and me out of the question. What is our son at present? An underpaid clerk in a small Provincial Bank in a third-rate English town. If you imagine he is quite happy in such a position, you are mistaken. He is thoroughly discontented.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. He was not discontented till he met you. You have made him so.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Of course, I made him so. Discontent is the first step in the progress of a man or a nation. But I did not leave him with a mere longing for tilings he could not get. No, I made him a charming offer, lie jumped at it, I need hardly say. Any young man would. And now, simply because it turns out that I am the boy's own father and he my own son, you propose practically to ruin his career. That is to say, if I were a perfect stranger, you would allow Gerald to go away with me, but as he is my own flesh and blood you won't. How utterly illogical you are!

MBS. ARBUTHNOT. I will not allow him to go.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. How can you prevent it? What excuse can you give to him for making him decline such an offer as mine? I won't tell him in what relations I stand to him, I need hardly say. But you daren't tell him. You know that. Look how you have brought him up.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. I have brought him up to be a good man.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Quite so. And what is the result? You have educated him to be your judge if he ever finds you out. And a bitter, an unjust judge he will be to you. Don't be deceived, Rachel. Children begin by loving their parents. After a time they judge them. Rarely, if ever, do they forgive them.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. George, don't take my son away from me. I have had twenty years of sorrow, and I have only had one thing to love me, only one thing to love. You have had a life of joy, and pleasure, and success. You have been quite happy, you have never thought of us. There was no reason, according to your views of life, why you should have remembered us at all. Your meeting us was a mere accident, a horrible accident. Forget it. Don't come now, and rob me of. . .of all I have, of all I have in the whole world. You are so rich in other things. Leave me the little vineyard of my life; leave me the walled-in garden and the well of water; the ewe-lamb God sent me, in pity or in wrath, oh! leave me that, George, don't take Gerald from me.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Rachel, at the present moment you are not necessary to Gerald's career; I am. There is nothing more to be said on the subject.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. I will not let him go.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Here is Gerald. He has a right to decide for himself.

[Enter GERALD.]

GERALD. Well, dear mother, I hope you have settled it all with Lord Illingworth?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. I have not, Gerald.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Your mother seems not to like your coming with me, for some reason.

GERALD. Why, mother?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. I thought you were quite happy here with me, Gerald. I didn't know you were so anxious to leave me.

GERALD. Mother, how can you talk like that? Of course I have been quite happy with you. But a man can't stay always with his mother. No chap does. I want to make myself a position, to do something. I thought you would have been proud to see me Lord Illingworth's secretary.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. I do not think you would be suitable as a private secretary to Lord Illingworth. You have no qualifications.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. I don't wish to seem to interfere for a moment, Mrs. Arbuthnot, but as far as your last objection is concerned, I surely am the best judge. And I can only tell you that your son has all the qualifications I had hoped for. He has more, in fact, than I had even thought of.

Farmore,[MRS.ARBUTHNOT*remainssilent]*Have you any other reason, Mrs. Arbuthnot, why you don't wish your son to accept this post?

GERALD. Have you, mother? Do answer.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. If you have, Mrs. Arbuthnot, pray, pray say it. We are quite by ourselves here. Whatever it is, I need not say I will not repeat it.

GERALD. Mother?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. If you would like to be alone with your son, I will leave you. You may have some other reason you don't wish me to hear.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. I have no other reason.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Then, my dear boy, we may look on the thing as settled. Come, you and I will smoke a cigarette on the terrace together. And, Mrs. Arbuthnot, pray let me tell you, that I think you have acted very, very wisely.

[Exit With **GERALD. MRS. ARBUTHNOT** *IS left alone. She stands immobile, with a look of unititerable sorrow on her face.]*

ACT-DROP

ACT III

SCENE—*The Picture Gallery at Hunstanton. Door al back leading on to terrace.*

[LORD ILLINGWORTH *and* GERALD, R. c. LORD ILLINGWORTH *lolling on a sofa.* GERALD *in a chair.]*

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Thoroughly sensible woman, your mother, Gerald. I knew she would come round in the end.

GERALD. My mother is awfully conscientious, Lord Illingworth, and I know she doesn't think I am educated enough to be your secretary. She is perfectly right, too. I was fearfully idle when I was at school, and I couldn't pass an examination now to save my life.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. My dear Gerald, examinations are of no value whatsoever. If a man is a gentleman, he knows quite enough, and if he is not a gentleman, whatever he knows is bad for him.

GERALD. But I am so ignorant of the world, Lord Illingworth.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Don't be afraid, Gerald. Remember that you've got on your side the most wonderful thing in the world—youth! There is nothing like youth. The middle-aged are mortgaged to Life. The old are in Life's lumber-room. But youth is the Lord of Life. Youth has a king-

dom waiting for it. Every one is born a king, and most people die in exile, like most kings. To win back my youth, Gerald, there is nothing I wouldn't do—except take exercise, get up early, or be a useful member of the community.

GERALD. But you don't call yourself old, Lord Illingworth?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. I am old enough to be your father, Gerald.

GERALD. I don't remember my father; he died years ago.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. So Lady Ilunstanton told me.

GERALD. It is very curious, my mother never talks to me about my father. I sometimes think she must have married beneath her.

LORD ILLINGWORTH *[Winces slightly].* Really? *[Goes over and puts his hand on* GERALD'S *shoulder.]* You have missed not having a father, I suppose, Gerald?

GERALD. Oh, no; my mother has been so good to me. No one ever had such a mother as I have had.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. I am quite sure of that. Still I should imagine that most mothers don't quite understand their sons. Don't realise, I mean, that a son has ambitions, a desire to see life, to make himself a name. After all, Gerald, you couldn't be expected to pass all your life in such a hole as Wrockley, could you?

GERALD. Oh, no! It would be dreadful!

LOED ILLINGWORTH. A mother's love is very

touching, of course, but it is often curiously selfish. I mean, there is a good deal of selfishness in it.

GERALD *[Slowly].* I suppose there is.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Your mother is a thoroughly good woman. But good women have such limited views of life, their horizon is so small, their interests are so petty, aren't they?

GERALD. They are awfully interested, certainly, in things we don't care much about.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. I suppose your mother is very religious, and that sort of thing.

GERALD. Oh, yes, she's always going to church.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Ah! she is not modern, and to be modern is the only thing worth being now-a-days. You want to be modern, don't you, Gerald? You want to know life as it really is. Not to be put off with any old-fashioned theories about life. Well, what you have to do at present is simply to fit yourself for the best society. A man who can dominate a London dinner-table can dominate the world. The future belongs to the dandy. It is the exquisites who are going to rule.

GERALD. I should like to wear nice things awfully, but 1 have always been told that a man should riot think too much about his clothes.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. People now-a-days are so absolutely superficial that they don't understand the philosophy of the superficial. By the way, Gerald, you should learn how to tie your tie better. Sentiment is all very well for the button-hole. But the essential thing for a necktie is style. A well-tied tie is the first serious step in life.

GERALD *[Laughing].* I might be able to learn how to tie a tie, Lord Illingworth, but I should never be able to talk as you do. I don't know how to talk.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Oh! talk to every woman as if you loved her, and to every man as if he bored you, and at the end of your first season you will have the reputation of possessing the most perfect social tact.

GERALD. But it is very difficult to get into society, isn't it?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. To get into the best society, now-a-days, one has either to feed people, amuse people, or shock people—that is gll.

GERALD. I suppose society is wonderfully delightful!

LORD ILLINGWORTH. To be in it is merely a bore. But to be out of it simply a tragedy. Society is a necessary thing. No man has any real success in this world unless he has got women to back him, and women rule society. If you have not got women on your side you are quite over. You might just as well be a barrister, or a stockbroker, or a journalist at once.

GERALD. It is very difficult to understand women, is it not?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. You should never try to understand them. Women are pictures. Men are problems. If you want to know what a woman really means—which, by the way, is always a dangerous thing to do—look at her, don't listen to her.

GERALD. But women are awfully clever, aren't they?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. One should always tell them so. But, to the philosopher, my dear Gerald, women represent the triumph of matter over mind—just as men represent the triumph of mind over mortals.

GERALD. How then can women have so much power as you say they have?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. The history of women is the history of the worst form of tyranny the world has ever known. The tyranny of the weak over the strong. It is the only tyranny that lasts.

GERALD. But haven't women got a refining influence?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Nothing refines but the intellect.

GERALD. Still, there are many different kinds of women, aren't there?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Only two kinds in society: the plain and the coloured.

GERALD. But there are good women in society, aren't there?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Far too many.

GERALD. But do you think women shouldn't be good?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. One should never tell them so, they'd all become good at once. Women are a fascinatingly wilful sex. Every woman is a rebel, and usually in wild revolt against herself.

GERALD. You have never been married, Lord Illingworth, have you?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Men marry because they are tired; women because they are curious. Both are disappointed.

GERALD. But don't you think one can be happy when one is married?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Perfectly happy. But the happiness of a married man, my dear Gerald, depends on the people he has not married.

GERALD. But if one is in love?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. One should always be in love. That is the reason one should never marry.

GERALD. Love is a very wonderful thing, isn't it?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. When one is in love one begins by deceiving one's self. And one ends by deceiving others. That is what the world calls a romance. But a really *grande passion* is comparatively rare now-a-days. It is the privilege of people who have nothing to do. That is the one use of the idle classes in a country, and the only possible explanation of us Harfords.

GERALD. Harfords, Lord Illingworth?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. That is my family name. You should study the Peerage, Gerald. It is the one book a young man about town should know thoroughly, and it is the best thing in fiction the English have ever done. And now, Gerald, you are going now into a perfectly new life with me, and I want you to know how to live. [MRS. ARBUTHNOT *appears on terrace behind.]* For the world has been made by fools that wise men should live in it!

[Enter L. a LADY HUNSTANTON *and* DR. DAUBENY.]

LADY HUNSTANTON. Ah! here you are, dear Lord Illingworth. Well, I suppose you have been telling our young friend, Gerald, what his new duties are to be, and giving him a great deal of good advice over a pleasant cigarette.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. I have been giving him the best of advice, Lady Hunstanton, and the best of cigarettes.

LADY HUNSTANTON. I am so sorry I was not here to listen to you, but I suppose I am too old now to learn. Except from you, dear Archdeacon, when you are in your nice pulpit. But then I always know what you are going to say, so I don't feel alarmed. *[Sees* MRS. ARBUTHNOT.] Ah! dear Mrs. Arbuthnot, do come and join us. Come, dear. *[Enter* MRS. ARBUTHNOT.] Gerald has been having such a long talk with Lord Illingworth; I am sure you must feel very much flattered at the pleasant way in which everything has turned out for him. Let us sit down. *[They sit down.]* And how is your beautiful embroidery going on?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. I am always at work, Lady Hunstanton.

LADY HUNSTANTON. Mrs. Daubeny embroiders a little, too, doesn't she?

THE ARCHDEACON. She was very deft with her needle once, quite a Dorcas. But the gout has crippled her fingers a good deal. She has not touched the tambour frame for nine or ten years. But she has many other amusements. She is very much interested in her own health.

LADY HUNSTANTON. Ah! that is always a nice

distraction, is it not? Now, what are you talking about, Lord Illingworth? Do tell us.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. I was on the point of explaining to Gerald that the world has always laughed at its own tragedies, that being the only way in which it has been able to bear them. And that, consequently, whatever the world has treated seriously belongs to the comedy side of tilings.

LADY HUNSTANTON. Now I am quite out of my depth. I usually am when Lord Illingworth says anything. And the Humane Society is most careless. They never rescue me. I am left to sink. I have a dim idea, dear Lord Illingworth, that you are always on the side of the sinners, and I know I always try to be on the side of the saints, but that is as far as I get. And after all, it may be merely the fancy of a drowning person.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. The only difference between the saint and the sinner is that every saint has a past, and every sinner has a future.

LADY HUNSTANTON. Ah! that quite does for me. I haven't a word to say. You and I, dear Mrs. Arbuthnot, are behind the age. We can't follow Lord Illingworth. Too much care was taken with our education, I am afraid. To have been well brought up is a great drawback now-a-days. It shuts one out from so much.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. I should be sorry to follow Lord Illingworth in any of his opinions.

LADY HUNSTANTON. You are quite right, dear.

[GERALD *shrugs his shoulders and looks irritably over at his mother. Enter* LADY CAROLINE.]

LADY CAROLINE. Jane, have you seen John anywhere?

LADY HUNSTANTON. You needn't be anxious about him, dear. He is with Lady Stutfield; I saw them some time ago, in the Yellow Drawing-room. They seem quite happy together. You are not going, Caroline? Pray sit down.

LADY CAROLINE. I think I had better look after John. *[Exit* LADY CAROLINE.]

LADY HUNSTANTON. It doesn't do to pay men so much attention. And Caroline has really nothing to be anxious about. Lady Stutfield is very sympathetic. She is just as sympathetic about one thing as she is about another. A beautiful nature.

[Enter SIR JOHN *and* MRS. ALLONBY.]

Ah! here is Sir John! And with Mrs. Allonby too! I suppose it was Mrs. Allonby I saw him with. Sir John, Caroline has been looking everywhere for you.

MRS. ALLONBY. We have been waiting for her in the Music-room, dear Lady Hunstanton.

LADY HUNSTANTON. Ah! the Music-room, of course. I thought it was the Yellow Drawing-room, my memory is getting so defective. [To *the* ARCHDEACON.] Mrs. Daubeny has a wonderful memory, hasn't she?

THE ARCHDEACON. She used to be quite remarkable for her memory, but since her last attack she recalls chiefly the events of her early childhood. But she finds great pleasure in such retrospections, great pleasure.

[Enter LADY STUTFIELD *and* MR. KELVIL.]

LADY HUNSTANTON. All! dear Lady Stutfield; and what has Mr. Kelvil been talking to you about?

LADY STUTFIELD. About Bimetallism, as well as I remember.

LADY HUNSTANTON. Bimetallism! Is that quite a nice subject? However, 1 know people discuss everything very freely now-a-days. What did Sir John talk to you about, dear Mrs. Allonby?

MRS. ALLONBY. About Patagonia.

LADY HUNSTANTON. Really? What a remote topic! But very improving, I have no doubt.

MRS. ALLONBY. He has been most interesting on the subject of Patagonia. Savages seem to have quite the same views as cultured people on almost all subjects. They are excessively advanced.

LADY HUNSTANTON. What do they do?

MRS. ALLONBY. Apparently everything.

LADY HUNSTANTON. Well, it is very gratifying, dear Archdeacon, is it not, to find that Human Nature is permanently one.—On the whole, the world is the same world, is it not?

LORD ILLINGWOBTH. The world is simply divided into two classes—those who believe the incredible, like the public—and those who do the improbable——

MRS. ALLONBY. Like yourself?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Yes; I am always astonishing myself. It is the only thing that makes life worth living.

LADY STUTFIELD. And what have you been doing lately that astonishes you?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. I have been discovering all kinds of beautiful qualities in my own nature.

MRS. ALLONBY. Ah! don't become quite perfect all at once. Do it gradually!

LORD ILLINGWORTH. I don't intend to grow perfect at all. At least, I hope 1 shan't. It would be most inconvenient. Women love us for our defects. If we have enough of them, they will forgive us everything, even our gigantic intellects.

MRS. ALLONBY. It is premature to ask us to forgive analysis. We forgive adoration; that is quite as much as should be expected from us.

[Enter LORD ALFRED. *He joins* LADY STUTFIELD.]

LADY HUNSTANTON. Ah! we women should forgive everything, shouldn't we, dear Mrs. Arbuthnot? I am sure you agree with me in that.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. I do not, Lady Hunstanton. I think there are many things women should never forgive.

LADY HUNSTANTON. What sort of things?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. The ruin of another woman's life. *[Moves slowly away to back of stage.]*

LADY HUNSTANTON. Ah! those things are very sad, no doubt, but 1 believe there are admirable homes where people of that kind are looked after and reformed, and I think on the whole that the secret of life is to take things very, very easily.

MRS. ALLONBY. The secret of life is never to have an emotion that is unbecoming.

LADY STUTFIELD. The secret of life is to appreciate the pleasure of being terribly, terribly deceived.

KELVIL. The secret of life is to resist temptation, Lady Stutfield.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. There is no secret of life. Life's aim, if it has one, is simply to be always looking for temptations. There are not nearly enough. I sometimes pass a whole day without coming across a single one. It is quite dreadful. It makes one so nervous about the future.

LADY HUNSTANTON *[Shakes her fan at him]. I* don't know how it is, dear Lord Illingworth, but everything you have said to-day seems to be excessively immoral. It has been most interesting, listening to you.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. All thought is immoral. It's the very essence of destruction. If you think of anything, you kill it. Nothing survives being thought of.

LADY HUNSTANTON. I don't understand a word, Lord Illingworth. But I have no doubt it is all quite true. Personally, I have very little to reproach myself with, on the score of thinking. I don't believe in women thinking too much. Women should think in moderation, as they should do all things in moderation.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Moderation is a fatal thing, Lady Hunstanton. Nothing succeeds like excess.

LADY HUNSTANTON. I hope I shall remember that. It sounds an admirable maxim. But I'm

beginning to forget everything. It's a great misfortune.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. It is one of your most fascinating qualities, Lady Hunstanton. No woman should have a memory. Memory in a woman is the beginning of dowdiness. One can always tell from a woman's bonnet whether she has got a memory or not.

LADY HUNSTANTON. How charming you are, dear Lord lllingworth. You always find out that one's most glaring fault is one's most important virtue. You have the most comforting views of life.

[Enter FAKQUHAR.]

FARQUHAR. Doctor Daubeny's carriage!

LADY HUNSTANTON. My dear Archdeacon! It is only half-past ten.

THE ARCHDEACON *[Rising].* I am afraid I must go, Lady Hunstanton. Tuesday is always one of Mrs. Daubeny's bad nights.

LADY HUNSTANTON *[Rising],* Well, I won't keep you from her. *[Goes with him towards door.}* I have told Farquhar to put a brace of partridge into the carriage. Mrs. Daubeny may fancy them.

THE ARCHDEACON. It is very kind of you, but Mrs. Daubeny never touches solids now. Lives entirely on jellies. But she is wonderfully cheerful, wonderfully cheerful. She has nothing to complain of.

***[Exit With* LADY HUNSTANTON.]**

MRS. ALLONBY *[Goes over to* LORD ILLINGWORTH]. There is a beautiful moon to-night.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Let us go and look at it. To look at anything that is inconstant is charming now-a-days.

MRS. ALLONBY. You have your looking-glass.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. It is unkind. It merely shows me my wrinkles.

MRS. ALLONBY. Mine is better behaved. It never tells me the truth.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Then it is in love with you.

[Exeunt SIR JOHN, LADY STUTFIELD, MR. KELVIL, *and* **LORD ALFRED.]**

GERALD *[To* **LORD ILLINGWORTH]. May I Come** too?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Do, my dear boy. *[Moves towards the door wiih* MRS. ALLONBY *and* GERALD.]

[LADY CAROLINE *enters, looks rapidly round and goes out in opposite direction to that taken by* SIR **JOHN** *and* **LADY STUTFIELD.]**

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. Gerald!

GERALD. What, mother

***[Exit* LORD ILLINGWORTH** *With* **MRS. ALLONBY.]**

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. It is getting late. Let us go home.

GERALD. My dear mother. Do let us wait a little longer. Lord Illingworth is so delight!al, and, by the way, mother, I have a great surprise for you. We are starting for India at the end of this month.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. Let us go home.

GERALD. If you really want to, of course, mother, but I must bid good-bye to Lord Illingworth first. Fll be back in five minutes. *[Exit.]*

MRS. ARBTJTHNOT. Let him leave me if he chooses, but not with him—not with him! I couldn't bear it. *[Walks up and down.]*

[Enter HESTER.]

HESTER. What a lovely night it is, **Mrs.** Arbuthnot.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. **Is it?**

HESTER. Mrs. Arbuthnot, I wish you would let us be friends. You are so different from the other women here. When you came into the drawing-room this evening, somehow you brought with you a sense of what is good and pure in life. I had been foolish. There are things that are right to say, but that may be said at the wrong time and to the wrong people.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. I heard what you said. I agree with it, Miss Worsley.

HESTER. I didn't know you had heard it. But I knew you would agree with me. A woman who has sinned should be punished, shouldn't she?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. Yes.

HESTER. She shouldn't be allowed to come into the society of good men and women?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. She should not.

HESTER. And the man should be punished in the same way?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. In the same way. And the children, if there are children, in the same way also?

HESTER. Yes, it is right that the sins of the parents should be visited on the children. It is a just law. It is God's law.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. **It** is one of God's terrible **laws.** *[Mores away to fireplace.]*

HESTER. You are distressed about your son leaving you, Mrs. Arbutlmot?

MRS. ARBITTHNOT. Yes.

HESTER. Do you like him going away with Lord Illingworth? Of course there is position, no doubt, and money, but position and money are not everything, are they?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. They are nothing; they bring misery.

HESTER. Then why do you let your son go with him?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. He wishes it himself.

HESTER. But if you asked him he would stay, would he not?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. He has set his heart on going.

HESTER. He couldn't refuse you anything. He loves you too much. Ask him to stay. Let me send him in to you. He is on the terrace at this moment with Lord Illingworth. I heard them laughing together as I passed through the music-room.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. Don't trouble, Miss Worsley, I can wait. It is of no consequence.

HESTER. No, I'll tell him you want him. Do—do ask him to stay. *[Exit* HESTER.]

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. He won't come—14mow he won't come.

[Enter LADY CAROLINE. *She looks round anxiously. Enter* GERALD.]

LADY CAROLINE. Mr. Arbuthnot, may I ask you is Sir John anywhere on the terrace?

GERALD. No, Lady Caroline, he is not on the terrace.

LADY CAROLINE. It is very curious. It is time for him to retire.

[Exit **LADY CAROLINE.]**

GERALD. Dear mother, I am afraid I kept you waiting. I forgot all about it. I am so happy to-night, mother; I have never been so happy.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. At the prospect of going away?

GERALD. Don't put it like that, mother. Of course I am sorry to leave you. Why, you are the best mother in the whole world. But after all, as Lord Illingworth says, it is impossible to live in such a place as Wrockley. You don't mind it. But I'm ambitious; I want something more than that. I want to have a career. I want to do something that will make you proud of me, and Lord Illingworth is going to help me. He is going to do everything for me.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. Gerald, don't go away with Lord Illingworth. I implore you not to. Gerald, I beg you!

GERALD. Mother, how changeable you are! You don't seem to know your own mind for a single moment. An hour and a half ago in the drawing-room you agreed to the whole thing; now you turn round and make objections, and try to force me to give up my one chance in life. Yes, my one chance. You don't suppose that men like

Lord Illingworth arc to be found every day, do you, mother? It is very strange that when I have had such a wonderful piece of good luck, the one person to put difficulties in my way should be my own mother. Besides, you know, mother, 1 love Hester Worsley. Who could help loving her? I love her more than I have ever told you, far more. And if I had a position, if I had prospects, I could—I could ask her to— Don't you understand now, mother, what it means to me to be Lord Illingworth's secretary? To start like that is to find a career ready for one—before one—waiting for one. If I were Lord lllingworth's secretary I could ask Hester to be my wife. As a wretched bank clerk with a hundred a year it would be an impertinence.

MRS. AKBUTHNOT. I fear you need have no hopes of Miss Worsley. I know her views on life. She has just told them to me. [A *pause.]*

GERALD. Then I have my ambition left, at any rate. That is something—I am glad I have that! You have always tried to crush my ambition, mother—haven't you? You have told me that the world is a wicked place, that success is not worth having, that society is shallow, and all that sort of thing—well, I don't believe it, mother. 1 think the world must be delightful. 1 think society must be exquisite. I think success is a thing worth having. You have been wrong in all that you taught me, mother, quite wrong. Lord Illingworth is a successful man. He is a fashionable man. He is a man who lives in the world and for

it. Well, I would give anything to be just like Lord Illingworth.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. I would sooner see you dead.

GERALD. Mother, what is your objection to Lord Illingworth? Tell me—tell me right out. What is it?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. He is a bad man.

GERALD. In what way bad? I don't understand what you mean.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. I will tell you.

GERALD. I suppose you think him bad, because he doesn't believe the same things as you do. Well, men are different from women, mother. It is natural that they should have different views.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. It is not what Lord Illingworth believes, or what he does not believe, that makes him bad. It is what he is.

GERALD. Mother, is it something you know of him? Something you actually know?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. It is something I know.

GERALD. Something you are quite sure of?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. Quite sure of.

GERALD. How long have you known it?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. For twenty years.

GERALD. Is it fair to go back twenty years in my man's career? And what have you or I to do with Lord Illingworth's early life? What business is it of ours?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. What this man has been, he s now, and will be always.

GERALD. Mother, tell me what Lord Illing*worth* did? If he did anything shameful, I will

not go away with him. Surely you know me well enough for that?

MRS. ARBuTHNOT. Gerald, come near to me. Quite close to me, as you used to do when you were a little boy, when you were mother's own boy. [GERALD *sits down beside his mother. She runs her fingers through his hair, and strokes his hands.]* Gerald, there was a girl once, she was very young, she was little over eighteen at the time. George Harford—that was Lord Illingworth's name then—George Harford met her. She knew nothing about life. He—knew everything. He made this girl love him. He made her love him so much that she left ner father's house with him one morning. She loved him so much, and he had promised to marry her! He had solemnly promised to marry her, and she had believed him. She was very young, and—and ignorant of what life really is. But he put the marriage off from week to week, and month to month.—She trusted in him all the while. She loved him.—Before her child was born—for she had a child—she implored him for the child's sake to marry her, that the child might have a name, that her sin might not be visited on the child, who was innocent. He refused. After the child was born she left him, taking the child away, and her life was ruined, and her soul ruined, and all that was sweet, and good, and pure in her ruined also. She suffered terribly—she suffers now. She will always suffer. For her there is no joy, no peace, no atonement. She is a woman who drags a chain like a guilty thing. She

is a woman who wears a mask, like a thing that is a leper. The fire cannot purify her. The waters cannot quench her anguish. Nothing can heal her! no anodyne can give her sleep! no poppies forgetfulness! She is lost! She is a lost soul!—That is why I call Lord Illingworth a bad man. That is why I don't want my boy to be with him.

GERALD. My dear mother, it all sounds very tragic, of course. But I dare say the girl was just is much to blame as Lord Illingworth was.—After ill, would a really nice girl, a girl with any nice 'eelings at all, go away from her home with a man x> whom she was not married, and live with him as lis wife? No nice girl would.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT *[After a pause].* Gerald, I withdraw all my objections. You are at liberty to go away with Lord Illingworth, when and where you choose.

GERALD. Dear mother, I knew you wouldn't jtand in my way. You are the best woman God evermade. And, as for Lord Illingworth. I don't relieve he is capable of anything infamous or rase. I can't believe it of him—I can't.

HESTER *[Outside].* Let me go! Let me go!

[Enter HESTER *in terror, and rushes over to* GERILD *and flings herself in his arms.]*

HESTER. Oh! save me—save me from him!

GERALD. From whom?

HESTER. He has insulted me! Horribly inlulted me! Save me!

GERALD. Who? Who has dared——?

[LORD ILLINGWORTH *enters at back of stage.* HESTER *breaks from* GERALD'S *arms and points to him.]*

GERALD *[He is quite beside himself with rage and indignation.]*

Lord Illingworth, you have insulted the purest thing on God's earth, a thing as pure as my own mother. You have insulted the woman I love most in the world with my own mother. As there is a God in heaven, I will kill you!

MRS. ARBUTHNOT *[Rushing across and catching hold of him.].* No! no!

GERALD *[Thrusting her back].* Don't hold me, mother. Don't hold me—I'll kill him!

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. Gerald!

GERALD. Let me go, I say!

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. Stop, Gerald, stop! He is your own father.

[GERALD *clutches his mother's hands and looks into her face. She sinks slowly on the ground in shame.* HESTER *steals towards the door,* LORD ILLINGWORTH *frowns and bites his lip. After a time* GERALD *raises his mother up, puts his arm around her, and leads her from the room.]*

ACT-DROP

ACT IV

SCENE—*Sitting-room at* MRS. ARBUTHNOT'S. *Large open French window at back, looking on to garden. Doors* R. c. *and* L. c.

[GERALD ARBUTHNOT *writing at table]*

[Enter ALICE R. c. *followed by* LADY HUNSTANTON ***and* MRS. ALLONBY.]**

ALICE. Lady Hunstanton and Mrs. Allonby.

[Exit L. c.]

LADY HUNSTANTON. Good morning, Gerald.

GERALD *[Rising].* Good morning, Lady Hunstanton. Good morning, Mrs. Allonby.

LADY HUNSTANTON *[Sitting down].* We came to inquire for your dear mother, Gerald. I hope she is better?

GERALD. My mother has not come down yet, Lady Hunstanton.

LADY HUNSTANTON. Ah, I am afraid the heat *was* too much for her last night. I think there must have been thunder in the air. Or perhaps it wasthe music. Music makes one feel so romantic —at least it always gets on one's nerves.

MRS. ALLONBY. It's the same thing, now-a-days.

LADY HUNSTANTON. I am so glad I don't know pdiat you mean, dear. I am afraid you mean something wrong. Ah, I see you're examining Mrs. Arbuthnot's pretty room. Isn't it nice and oId-fashioned?

MRS. ALLONBY *[Surveying the room through her lorgnette]*. It looks quite the happy English home.

LADY HUNSTANTON. That's just the word, dear; that just describes it. One feels your mother's good influence in everything she has about her, Gerald.

MRS. ALLONBY. Lord Illhigworth says that all influence is bad, but that a good influence is the worst in the world.

LADY HUNSTANTON. When Lord Illingworth knows Mrs. Arbuthnotf better, he will change his mind. I must certainly bring him here.

MRS. ALLONBY. I should like to see Lord Illingworth in a happy English home.

LADY HUNSTANTON. It would do him a great deal of good, dear. Most women in London, now-a-days, seem to furnish their rooms with nothing but orchids, foreigners, and French novels. But here we have the room of a sweet saint. Fresh natural flowers, books that don't shock one, pictures that one can look at without blushing.

MRS. ALLONBY. But I like blushing.

LADY HUNSTANTON. Well, there *is* a good deal to be said for blushing, if one can do it at the proper moment. Poor dear Hunstanton used to tell me I didn't blush nearly often enough. But then he was so very particular. He wouldn't let me know any of his men friends, except those who were over seventy, like poor Lord Ashton: who afterwards, by the way, was brought into the Divorce Court. A most unfortunate case.

MRS. ALLONBY. I delight in men over seventy.

They always offer one the devotion of a lifetime. I think seventy an ideal age for a man.

LADY HUNSTANTON. She is quite incorrigible, Gerald, isn't she? By-the-by, Gerald, I hope your dear mother will come and see me more often now. You and Lord Illingworth start almost immediately, don't you?

GERALD. I have given up my intention of being Lord Illingworth's secretary.

LADY HUNSTANTON. Surely not, Gerald! It would be most unwise of you. What reason can you have?

GERALD. I don't think I should be suitable for the post.

MRS. ALLONBY. I wish Lord Illingworth would ask me to be his secretary. But he says I am not serious enough.

LADY HUNSTANTON. My dear, you really mustn't talk like that in this house. Mrs. Arbuthnot doesn't know anything about the wicked society in which we all live. She won't go into it. She is far too good. I consider it was a great honour her coming to me last night. It gave quite an atmosphere, of respectability to the party.

MRS. ALLONBY. Ah, that must have been what you thought was thunder in the air.

LADY HUNSTANTON. My dear, how can you say that? There is no resemblance between the two things at all. But really, Gerald, what do you mean by not being suitable?

GERALD. Lord Illingworth's views of life and mine are too different.

LADY HUNSTANTON. But, my dear Gerald, at your age you shouldn't have any views of life. They are quite out of place. You must be guided by others in this matter. Lord Illingworth has made you the most flattering offer, and travelling with him you would see the world—as much of it, at least, as one should look at—under the best auspices possible, and stay with all the right people, which is so important at this solemn moment in your career.

GERALD. I don't want to see the world: I've seen enough of it.

MRS. ALLONBY. I hope you don't think you have exhausted life, Mr. Arbuthnot. When a man says that one knows that life has exhausted him.

GERALD. I don't wish to leave my mother.

LADY HUNSTANTON. Now, Gerald, that is pure laziness on your part. Not leave your mother! If I were your mother I would insist on your going.

[Enter ALICE L. c.]

ALICE. Mrs. Arbuthnot's compliments, my lady, but she has a bad headache, and cannot see any one this morning. *[Exit* R. c.]

LADY HUNSTANTON *[Rising].* A bad headache! I am so sorry! Perhaps you'll bring her up to Hunstanton this afternoon, if she is better, Gerald.

GERALD. I am afraid not this afternoon, Lady Hunstanton.

LADY HUNSTANTON. Well, to-morrow, then. Ah, if you had a father, Gerald, he wouldn't let you waste your life here. He would send you off

with Lord Illingworth at once. But mothers are so weak. They give up to their sons in everything. We are all heart, all heart. Come, dear, 1 must call at the rectory and inquire for Mrs. Daubeny, who, I am afraid, is far from well. It is wonderful how the Archdeacon bears up, quite wonderful. He is the most sympathetic of husbands. Quite a model. Good-bye, Gerald, give my fondest love to your mother.

MRS. ALLONBY. Good-bye, Mr. Arbuthnot.

GERALD. Good-bye.

[Exit **LADY HUNSTANTON** *and* **MRS. ALLONBY.** GERALD *sits down and teads over his letter.]*

GERALD. What name can I sign? I, who have no right to any name. *[Signs name, puts letter into envelope, addresses it, and is about to seal it, when Door* L. c. *opens, and* MRS. ARBUTHNOT *enters.* GERALD *lays down sealing-wax. Mother and son look at each other.]*

LADY HUNSTANTON *[Through French window at the back].* Good-bye, again, Gerald. We are taking the short cut across your pretty garden. Now, remember my advice to you—start at once with Lord Illingworth.

MRS. ALLONBY. *Au revoir,* Mr. Arbuthnot. Mind you bring me back something nice from your travels—not an Indian shawl—on no account an Indian shawl. *[Exeunt.]*

GERALD. Mother, I have just written to him.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. To whom?

GERALD. To my father. I have written to tell him to come here at four o'clock this afternoon.

MBS. ARBUTHNOT. He shall not come here. He shall not cross the threshold of my house.

GERALD. He must come.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. Gerald, if you are going away with Lord Illingworth, go at once. Go before it kills me: but don't ask me to meet him.

GERALD. Mother, you don't understand. Nothing in the world would induce me to go away with Lord Illingworth, or to leave you. Surely you know me well enough for that. No: I have written to him to say——

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. What can you have to say to him?

GERALD. Can't you guess, mother, what I have written in this letter?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. No.

GERALD. Mother, surely you can. Think, think what must be done, now, at once, within the next few days.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. There is nothing to be done.

GERALD. I have written to Lord Illingwortb to tell him that he must marry you.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. Marry me?

GERALD. Mother, I will force him to do it. The wrong that has been done you must be repaired. Atonement must be made. Justice may be slow, mother, but it comes in the end. In a few days you shall be Lord Illingworth's lawful wife.

tfras. ARBUTHNOT. But, Gerald——

GERALD. I will insist upon his doing it. I will make him do it: he will not dare to refuse.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. But, Gerald, it is I who refuse. I will not marry Lord Illingworth.

GERALD. Not marry him? Mother!

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. I will not marry him.

GERALD. But you don't understand: it is for your sake I am talking, not for mine. This marriage, this necessary marriage, this marriage that, for obvious reasons, must inevitably take place, will not help me, will not give me a name that will be really, rightly mine to bear. But surely it will be something for you, that you, my mother, should, however late, become the wife of the man who is my father. Will not that be something?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. I will not marry him.

GERALD. Mother, you must.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. I will not. You talk of atonement for a wrong done. What atonement can be made to me? There is no atonement possible. I am disgraced: he is not. That is all. It is the usual history of a man and a woman as it usually happens, as it always happens. And the ending is the ordinary ending. The woman suffers. The man goes free.

GERALD. I don't know if that is the ordinary ending, mother: I hope it is not. But your life, at any rate, shall not end like that. The man shall make whatever reparation is possible. It is not enough. It does not wipe out the past, I know that. But at least it makes the future better, better for you, mother.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. I refuse to marry Lord Illingworth.

GERALD. If he came to you himself and asked you to be his wife you would give him a different answer. Remember, he is my father.

MBS. ARBUTHNOT. If he came himself, which he will not do, my answer would be the same. Remember, I am your mother.

GERALD. Mother, you make it terribly difficult for me by talking like that, and I can't understand why you won't look at this matter from the right, from the only proper standpoint. It is to take away the bitterness out of your life, to take away the shadow that lies on your name, that this marriage must take place. There is no alternative: and after the marriage you and I can go away together. But the marriage must take place first. It is a duty that you owe, not merely to yourself, but to all other women—yes: to all the other women in the world, lest he betray more.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. I owe nothing to other women. There is not one of them to help me. There is not one woman in the world to whom I could go for pity, if I would take it, or for sympathy, if I could win it. Women are hard on each other. That girl, last night, good though she is, fled from the room as though I were a tainted thing. She was right. I am a tainted thing. But my wrongs are my own, and I will bear them alone. I must bear them alone. What have women who have not sinned to do with me, or 1 with them? We do not understand each other.

[Enter HESTER *behind,]*

GERALD. I implore you to do what I ask you.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. What son has ever asked of his mother to make so hideous a sacrifice? None.

GERALD. What mother has ever refused to marry the father of her own child? None.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. Let me be the first, then. I will not do it.

GERALD. Mother, you believe in religion, and you brought me up to believe in it also. Well, surely your religion, the religion that you taught me when I was a boy, mother, must tell you that I am right. You know it, you feel it.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. I do not know it. I do not feel it, nor will I ever stand before God's altar and ask Cod's blessing on so hideous a mockery as a marriage between me and George Harford. I will not say the words the Church bids us to say. I will not say them. I dare not. How could I swear to love the man I loathe, to honour him who wrought you dishonour, to obey him who, in his mastery, made me to sin? No: marriage is a sacrament for those who love each other. It is not for such *as* him, or such *as* me. Gerald, to save you from the world's sneers and taunts I have lied to the world. For twenty years I have lied to the world. 1 could not tell the world the truth. Who can, ever? But not for my own sake will I lie to God, and in God's presence. No, Gerald, no ceremony, Church-hallowed or State-made, shall ever bind me to George Harford. It may be that I am too bound to him already, who, robbing me, yet left me richer, so that in the mire of my

life, I found the pearl of price, or what I thought would be so.

GERALD. I don't understand you now.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. Men don't understand what mothers are. I am no different from other women except in the wrong done me and the wrong I did, and my very heavy punishments and great disgrace. And yet, to bear you I had to look on death. To nurture you I had to wrestle with it. Death fought with me for you. All women have to fight with death to keep their children. Death, being childless, wants our children from us. Gerald, when you were naked I clothed you, when you were hungry I gave you food. Night and day all that long winter I tended you. No office is too mean, no care too lowly for the thing we women love—and oh! how / loved *you.* Not Hannah Samuel more. And you needed love, for you were weakly, and only love could have kept you alive. Only love can keep anyone alive. And boys are careless often and without thinking give pain, and we always fancy that when they come to man's estate and know us better, they will repay us. But it is not so. The world draws them from our side, and they make friends with whom they are happier than they are with us, and have amusements from which we are barred, and interests that are not ours: and they are unjust to us often, for when they find life bitter they blame us for it, and when they find it sweet we do not taste its sweetness with them. … You made many friends and went into their

houses and were glad with them, and I, knowing my secret, did not dare to follow, but stayed at home and closed the door, shut out the sun and sat in darkness. What should I have done in honest households? My past was ever with me. . . . And you thought I didn't care for the pleasant things of life. I tell you I longed for them, but did not dare to touch them, feeling I had no right. You thought I was happier working amongst the poor. That was my mission, you imagined. It was not, but where else was I to go? The sick do not ask if the hand that smoothes their pillow is pure, nor the dying care if the lips that touch their brow have known the kiss of sin. It was you I thought of all the time; I gave to them the iove you did not need: lavished on them a love that was not theirs. . . . And you thought I spent too much of my time in going to Church, and in Church duties. But where else could I turn? God's house is the only house where sinners are made welcome, and you were always in my heart, Gerald, too much in my heart. For, though day after day, at morn or even-song, I have knelt in God's house, I have never repented of my sin. How could I repent of my sin when you, my love, were its fruit! Even now that you are bitter to me I cannot repent. I do not. You are more to me than innocence. I would rather be your mother—oh! much rather!—than have been always pure. . . . Oh, don't you see? don't you understand? It is my dishonour that has made you so dear to me. It is my disgrace that has

bound you so closely to me. It is the price I paid for you—the price of soul and body—that makes me love you as I do. Oh, don't ask me to do this horrible thing. Child of my shame, be still the child of my shame!

GERALD. Mother, I didn't know you loved me so much as that. And I will be a better son to you than I have been. And you and I must never leave each other . . . but, mother ... I can't help it ... you must become my father's wife. You must marry him. It is your duty.

HESTER *[Running forward arid embracing* MRS. ARBUTHNOT]. No, no: you shall not. That would be real dishonour, the first you have ever known. That would be real disgrace: the first to touch you. Leave him and come with me. There are other countries than England. . . . Oh! other countries over sea, better, wiser, and less unjust lands. The world is very wide and very big.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. No, not for me. For me the world is shrivelled to a palm's breadth, and where I walk there are thorns.

HESTER, It shall not be so. We shall somewhere find green valleys and fresh waters, and if we weep, well, we shall weep together. Have we not both loved him?

GERALD. Hester!

HESTER *[Waving him back].* Don't, don't! You cannot love me at all, unless you love her also. You cannot honour me, unless she's holier to you. In her all womanhood is martyred. Not she alone, but all of us are stricken in her house.

GERALD. Hester, Hester, what shall I do?

HESTER. Do you respect the man who is your father?

GERALD. Respect him? I despise him! He is infamous!

HESTER. I thank you for saving me from him last night.

GERALD. Ah, that is nothing. I would die to save you. But you don't tell me what to do now!

HESTER. Have I not thanked you for saving *me?*

GERALD. But what should I do?

HESTER. Ask your own heart, not mine. I never had a mother to save, or shame.

MRS. ARBTTTHNOT. He is hard—he is hard. Let *me,* go away.

GERALD *[Rushes aver and kneels down beside his mother].* Mother, forgive me: I have been to blame.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. Don't kiss my hands: they are cold. My heart is cold: something has broken it.

HESTER. Ah, don't say that. Hearts live by being wounded. Pleasure may turn a heart to stone, riches may make it callous, but sorrow—oh, sorrow cannot break it. Besides, what sorrows have you now? Why, at this moment you are more clear to him than ever, *dear* though you have *been,* and oh! how dear you *have* been always. Ah! be kind to him.

GERALD. You are my mother and my father all in one. I need no second parent. It was for you I spoke, for you alone. Oh, say something,

mother. Have I but found one love to lose another? Don't tell me that. 0 mother, you are cruel. *[Gels up and flings himself sobbing on a sofa.]*

MRS. ARBtJTHNOT *[To* HESTER]. But has he found indeed another love?

HESTER. You know I have loved him always.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. But we are very poor.

HESTER. Who, being loved, is poor? Oh, no one. I hate my riches. They are a burden. Let him share it with me.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. But we are disgraced. We rank among the outcasts. Gerald is nameless. The sins of the parents should be visited on the children. It is God's law.

HESTER. I was wrong. God's law is only Love.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT *[Rises, and taking* HESTER *by the hand, goes slowly over to where* GERALD *is lying on the sofa with his head buried in his hands. She touches him and he looks up].* Gerald, I cannot give you a father, but I have brought you a wife.

GERALD. Mother, I am not worthy either of her or you.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. So she comes first, you are worthy. And when you are away, Gerald. . . . with . . . her—oh, think of me sometimes. Don't forget me. And when you pray, pray for me. We should pray when we are happiest, and you will be happy, Gerald.

HESTER. Oh, you don't think of leaving us?

GERALD. Mother, you won't leave us?

MRS. ARBUTIJNOT. I might bring shame upon you!

GERALD. Mother!

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. For a little then: and if you let me, near you always.

HESTER [To MRS. ARBUTHNOT]. Come Out with us to the garden.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. Later on, later on.

[Exeunt HESTER *and* GERALD.]

[MRS. ARBUTHNOT *goes towards door* L. c. *Stops at looking-glass over mantel-piece and looks into it.]*

[Enter ALICE R. c.]

ALICE. A gentleman to see you, ma'am.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. Say I am not at home. Show me the card. *[Takes card from salver and looks at it.]* Say I will not see him.

[LORD ILLINGWORTH *enters.* MRS. ARBUTHNOT *sees him in the glass and starts, but does not turn round. Exit* ALICE.]

What can you have to say to me to-day, George Harford? You can have nothing to say to me. You must leave this house.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Rachel, Gerald knows everything about you and me now, so some arrangement must be come to that will suit us all three. I assure you, he will find in me the most charming and generous of fathers.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. My son may come in at any moment. T saved you last night. I may not be able to save yoa again. My son feels my dishonour strongly, terribly strongly. I beg you to go.

LORD ILLINGWORTH *[Sitting down].* Last night was excessively unfortunate. That silly Puritan girl making a scene merely because I wanted to kiss her. What harm is there in a kiss?

MRS. ARBTJTHNOT *[Turning round].* A kiss may ruin a human life, George Harford. / know that, / know that too well.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. We won't discuss that at present. What is of importance to-day, as yesterday, is still our son. I am extremely fond of him, as you know, and odd though it may seem to you, I admired his conduct last night immensely. He took up the cudgels for that pretty prude with wonderful promptitude. He is just what I should have liked a son of mine to be. Except that no son of mine should ever take the side of the Puritans: that is always an error. Now, what I propose is this.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. Lord Illingworth, no proposition of yours interests me.

LORD ILLINGW[T]ORTH. According to our ridiculous English laws, I can't legitimise Gerald. But I can leave him my property. Illingworth is entailed, of course, but it is a tedious barrack of a place. He can have Ashby, which is much prettier, Harborough which has the best shooting in the north of England, and the house in St. James Square. What more can a gentleman desire in this world?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. Nothing more, I am quite sure.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. As for a title, a title is

really rather a nuisance in these democratic days. As George Harford I had everything 1 wanted. Now I have merely everything that other people want, which isn't nearly so pleasant. Well, my proposal is this.

MRS. ARBXJTHNOT. I told you I was not interested, and I beg you to go.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. The boy is to be with you for six months in the year, and with me for the other six. That is perfectly fair, is it not? You can have whatever allowance you like, and live where you choose. As for your past, no one knows anything about it except myself and Gerald. There is the Puritan, of course, the Puritan in white muslin, but she doesn't count. She couldn't tell the story without explaining that she objected to being kissed, could she? And all the women would think her a fool and the men think her a bore. And you need not be afraid that Gerald won't be my heir. I needn't tell you I have not the slightest intention of marrying.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. You come too late. My son has no need of you. You are not necessary.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. What do you mean, Rachel?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. That you are not necessary to Gerald's career. He does not require you.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. I do not understand you.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. Look into the garden. [LORD ILLINGWORTH *rises and goes towards window.]* You had better not let them see you: you bring

unpleasant memories. [LORD ILLINGWORTH *looks out and starts.]* She loves him. They love each other. We are safe from you, and we are going away.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Where?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. We will not tell you, and if you find us we will not know you. You seem surprised. What welcome would you get from the girl whose lips you tried to soil, from the boy whose life you have shamed, from the mother whose dishonour comes from you?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. You have grown hard, Rachel

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. I was too weak once. It is well for me that I have changed.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. I was very young at that time. We men know[r] life too early.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. And we women know life too late. That is the difference between men and women. *[A pause.}*

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Rachel, I want my son. My money may be of no use to him now. I may be of no use to him, but I want my son. Bring us together, Rachel. You can do it if you choose. *[Sees letter on table.]*

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. There is no room in my boy's life for *you.* He is not interested in *you.*

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Then why does he write to me?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. What do you mean?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. What letter is this? *[Takes up letter.]*

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. That—is nothing. Give it to me.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. It is addressed to *me.*

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. You are not to open it. I forbid you to open it.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. And in Gerald's handwriting.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. It was not to have been sent. It is a letter he wrote to you this morning before he saw me. But he is sorry now he wrote it, very sorry. You are not to open it. Give it to me.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. It belongs to me. *[Opens it, sits down and reads it slowly.* MRS. ARBUTHNOT *watches him all the time.]* You have read this letter, I suppose, Rachel?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. No.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. You know what is in it.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. Yes!

LORD ILLINGWORTH. I don't admit for a moment that the boy is right in what he says. I don't admit that it is any duty of mine to marry you. I deny it entirely. But to get my son back I am ready—yes, I am ready to marry you, Rachel—and to treat you always with the deference and respect due to my wife. I will marry you as soon as you choose. I give you my word of honour.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. You made that promise to me once before and broke it.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. I will keep it now. And that will show you that I love my son, at least as much as you love him. For when I marry you,

Rachel, there are some ambitions I shall have to surrender. High ambitions too, if any ambition is high.

MRS. ARBUTHnOT. I decline to marry you, Lord Illingworth.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Are you serious?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. **Yes.**

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Do tell me your reasons. They would interest me enormously.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. I have already explained them to my son.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. I suppose they were intensely sentimental, weren't they? You women live by your emotions and for them. You have no philosophy of life.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. You are right. We women live by our emotions and for them. By our passions, and for them, if you will. I have two passions, Lord Illingworth: my love of him, my hate of you. You cannot kill those. They feed each other

LORD ILLINGWORTH. What sort of love is that which needs to have hate as its brother?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. It Ls the sort of love I have for Gerald. Do you think that terrible? Well, it is terrible. All love is terrible. All love is a tragedy. I loved you once, Lord Illingworth. Oh, what a tragedy for a woman to have loved you!

LORD ILLINGWORTH. So you really refuse to marry me?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. Yes.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Because you hate me?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. Yes.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. And does my son hate me as yon do?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. No.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. I am glad of that, Rachel.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. He merely despises you.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. What a pity! What a pity for him, I mean.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. Don't be deceived, George. Children begin by loving their parents. After a time they judge them. Rarely if ever do they forgive them.

LORD ILLINGWORTH *[Reads letter over again, very slowly]*. May I ask by what arguments you made the boy who wrote this letter, this beautiful, passionate letter, believe that you should not marry his father, the father of your own child?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. It is not I who made him see it. It was another.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. What *fin-de-sticle* person?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. The Puritan, Lord Illing-Worth. *[A pause.]*

LORD ILLINGWORTH *[Winces, then rises slowly and goes over to table where his hat and gloves are.* MRS. ARBUTHNOT *is standing close to the table. He picks up one of the gloves and begins putting it on]*. There is not much then for me to do here, Rachel?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. Nothing.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. It is good-bye, is it?

MrS. ARBUTHNOT. For ever, I hope, this time, Lord Illingworth.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. How curious! Ah! this moment you look exactly as you looked the night you left me twenty years ago. You have just the same expression in your mouth. Upon my word, Rachel, no woman ever loved me as you did. Why, you gave yourself to me like a flower, to do anything I liked with. You were the prettiest of playthings, the most fascinating of small romances. . . . *[Pulls out watch.]* Quarter to two! Must be strolling back to Hunstanton. Don't suppose I shall see you there again. I'm sorry, I am, really. It's been an amusing experience to have met amongst people of one's own rank, and treated quite seriously too, one's mistress, and one's——

[MRS. ARBUTHNOT *snatches up glove and strikes* LORD ILLINGWORTH *across the face mth it.* LORD ILLINGWORTH *starts. He is dazed by the insult of his punishment. Then he controls himself, and goes to window and looks out at his son. Sighs, and leaves the room.]*

MRS. ARBUTHNOT *[Falls sobbing on the sofa].* He would have said it. He would have said it.

[Enter GERALD *and* HESTER *from the garden.]*

GERALD. Well, dear mother. You never came out after all. So we have come in to fetch you. Mother, you have not been crying? *[Kneels down beside her.]*

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. My boy! My boy! My boy! *[Running her fingers through his hair.]*

HESTER *[Coming over].* But you have two children now. You'll let me be your daughter?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT *[Looking up].* Would you choose me for a mother?

HESTER. You of all women I have ever known.

[They move towards the door leading into garden with their arms around each other's waist. GERALD *goes to table* L. c. *for his hat. On turning round he sees* LORD ILLINGWORTH'S *glove lying on the floor, and picks it up.]*

GERALD. Hallo, mother, whose glove is this? You have had a visitor. Who was it?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT *[Turning round].* Oh! no one. No one in particular. A man of no importance.

CURTAIN

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST

Tke acting rights to "The Importance of Being Earnest" are held by Mr. Charles Frohman, Smjtire Theatre Building, New York City, to whom application must be made for the right to perform, either by amateurs or professionals.

To

Robert Baldwin Ross

IN APPRECIATION
IN AFFECTION

CECILY. Certainly not.

GWENDOLEN. Mr. Worthing, I have something very particular to ask you. Much depends on your reply.

CECILY. Gwendolen, your common sense is invaluable. Mr. Moncrieff, kindly answer me the following question: Why did you pretend to be my guardian's brother?

ALGERNON. In order that I might have an opportunity of meeting you.

CECILY [To GWENDOLEN]. That certainly seems a satisfactory explanation, does it not?

GWENDOLEN. Yes, dear, if you can believe him.

CECILY. I don't. But that does not affect the wonderful beauty of his answer.

GWENDOLEN. True. In matters of grave importance, style, not sincerity is the vital thing. Mr. Worthing, what explanation can you offer to me for pretending to have a brother? Was it in order that you might have an opportunity of coming up to town to see me as often as possible?

JACK. Can you doubt it, Miss Fairfax?

GWENDOLEN. I have the gravest doubts upon the subject. But I intend to crush them. This is not the moment for German scepticism. *[Moving to* CECILY.] Their explanations appear to be quite satisfactory, especially Mr. Worthing's. That seems to me to have the stamp of truth upon it.

CECILY. I am more than content with what Mr. Moncrieff said. His voice alone inspires one with absolute credulity.

GWENDOLEN. Then you think we should forgive them?

CECILY. Yes. I mean no.

GWENDOLEN. True! I had forgotten. There are principles at stake that one cannot surrender. Which of us should tell them? The task is not a pleasant one.

CECILY. Could we not both speak at the same time?

GWENDOLEN. An excellent idea! I nearly always speak at the same time as other people. Will you take the time from me?

CECILY. Certainly. [GWENDOLEN *beats time with uplifted finger.]*

GWENDOLEN and CECILY *[Speaking together}.* Your Christian names are still an insuperable barrier! That is all!

JACK and ALGERNON *[Speaking together].* Our Christian names! Is that all? But we are going to be christened this afternoon.

GWENDOLEN *[To* JACK]. For my sake you are prepared to do this terrible thing?

JACK. I am.

CECILY *[To* ALGERNON]. To please me you are ready to face this fearful ordeal?

ALGERNON. I am!

GWENDOLEN. How absurd to talk of the equality of the sexes! Where questions of self-sacrifice are concerned, men are infinitely beyond us.

JACK. We are. *[Clasps hands with* ALGERNON.]

CECILY. They have moments of physical courage of which we women know absolutely nothing.

GWENDOLEN *[To* JACK]. Darling!

ALGERNON *[To* CECILY]. Darling! *[They fall into each other's arms.]*

[Enter MERRIMAN. *When he enters he coughs loudly, seeing the situation.}*

MERRIMAN. Ahem! Ahem! Lady Bracknell!

JACK. Good heavens!

[Enter LADY BRACKNELL. *The couples separate in alarm. Exit* MERRIMAN.]

LADY BRACKNELL. Gwendolen! What does this mean?

GWENDOLEN. Merely that I am engaged to be married to Mr. Worthing, mamma.

LADY BRACKNELL. Come here. Sit down. Sit down immediately. Hesitation of any kind is a sign of mental decay in the young, of physical weakness in the old. *[Turns to* JACK.] Apprised, sir, of my daughter's sudden flight by her trusty mr'i, whose confidence I purchased by means of i unall coin, I followed her at once by a luggage crain. Her unhappy father is, I am glad to say, under the impression that she is attending a more than usually lengthy lecture by the University Extension Scheme on the Influence of a Permanent Income on Thought. I do not propose to undeceive him. Indeed I have never undeceived him on any question. I would consider it wrong. But of course, you will clearly understand that all communication between yourself and my daughter must cease immediately from this moment. On this point, as indeed on all points, I am firm.

JACK. I am engaged to be married to Gwendolen, Lady Bracknell!

LADY BRACKNELL. You are nothing of the kind, sir. And now, as regards Algernon! . . . Algernon!

ALGERNON. Yes, Aunt Augusta.

LADY BRACKNELL. May I ask if it is in this house that your invalid friend Mr. Bunbury resides?

ALGERNON *[Stammering]*. Oh! No! Bunbury doesn't live here. Bunbury is somewhere else at present. In fact, Bunbury is dead.

LADY BRACKNELL. Dead! When did Mr. Bunbury die? His death must have been extremely sudden.

ALGERNON *[Airily]*. Oh! I killed Bunbury this afternoon. I mean poor Bunbury died this afternoon.

LADY BRACKNELL. What did he die of?

ALGERNON. Bunbury? Oh, he was quite exploded.

LADY BRACKNELL. Exploded! Was he the victim of a revolutionary outrage? I was not aware that Mr. Bunbury was interested in social legislation. If so, he is well punished for his morbidity.

ALGERNON. My dear Aunt Augusta, I mean he was found out! The doctors found out that Bunbury could not live, that is what I mean—so Bunbury died.

LADY BRACKNELL. He seems to have had great confidence in the opinion of his physicians. I am glad, however, that he made up his mind at the

last to some definite course of action, and acted under proper medical advice. And now that we have finally got rid of this Mr. Bunbury, may I ask, Mr. Worthing, who is that young person whose hand my nephew Algernon is now holding in what seems to me a peculiarly unnecessary manner?

JACK. That lady is Miss Cecily Cardew, my ward. [LADY BRACKNELL *bows coldly to* CECILY.]

ALGERNON. I am engaged to be married to Cecily, Aunt Augusta.

LADY BRACKNELL. I beg your pardon?

CECILY. Mr. Moncrieff and I are engaged to be married, Lady Bracknell.

LADY BRACKNELL *[With a shiver, crossing to the sofa and sitting doum]. 1* do not know whether there is anything peculiarly exciting in the air of this particular part of Hertfordshire, but the number of engagements that go on seems to me considerably above the proper average that statistics have laid down for our guidance. I think some preliminary enquiry on my part would not be out of place. Mr. Worthing, is Miss Cardew at all connected with any of the larger railway stations in London? I merely desire information. Until yesterday I had no idea that there were any families or persons whose origin was a Terminus. [JACK *looks perfectly furious, but restrains himself.]*

JACK *[In a clear, cold voice].* Miss Cardew is the granddaughter of the late Mr. Thomas Cardew of 149, Belgrave Square, S.W.; Gervase Park, Dorking, Surrey; and the Sporran, Fifeshire, N.B.

LADY BRACKNELL. That sounds not unsatis-

factory. Three addresses always inspire confidence, even in tradesmen. But what proof have I of their authenticity?

JACK. I have carefully preserved the Court Guides of the period. They are open to your inspection, Lady Bracknell.

LADY BRACKNELL *[Grimly].* I have known strange errors in that publication.

JACK. Miss Cardew's family solicitors are Messrs. Markby, Markby, and Markby.

LADY BRACKNELL. Markby, Markby, and Markby? A firm of the very highest position in their profession. Indeed I am told that one of the Mr. Markbys is occasionally to be seen at dinner parties. So far I am satisfied.

JACK *[Very irritably].* How extremely kind of you, Lady Bracknell! I have also in my possession, you will be pleased to hear, certificates of Miss Cardew's birth, baptism, whooping cough, registration, vaccination, confirmation, and the measles; both the German and the English variety.

LADY BRACKNELL. Ah! A life crowded with incident, I see; though perhaps somewhat too exciting for a young girl. I am not myself in favour of premature experiences. *[Rises, looks at her watch.}* Gwendolen! the time approaches for our departure. We have not a moment to lose. As a matter of form, Mr. Worthing, I had better ask you if Miss Cardew has any little fortune?

JACK. Oh! about a hundred and thirty thousand pounds in the Funds. That is all. Good-bye, Lady Bracknell. So pleased to have seen you.

LADY BRACKNELL *[Sitting down again].* A moment, Mr. Worthing. A hundred and thirty thousand pounds! And in the Funds! Miss Cardew seems to me a most attractive young lady, now that 1 look at her. Few girls of the present day have any really solid qualities, any of the qualities that last, and improve with time. We live, I regret to say, in an age of surfaces. [To CECILY.] Come over here, dear. [CECILY *goes across.]* Pretty ehild! your dress is sadly simple, and your hair seems almost as Nature might have left it. But we can soon alter all that. A thoroughly experienced French maid produces a really marvellous result in a very brief space of time. I remember recommending one to young Lady Lancing, and after three months her own husband did not know her.

JACK *[Aside].* And after six months nobody tmew her.

LADY BRACKNELL *[Glares at* JACK *for a few moments. Then bends, with a practised smile, to* CECILY.] Kindly turn round, sweet child. [CECILY *turns completely round.}* No, the side view is what I want. [CECILY *presents her profile.]* Yes, quite as I expected. There are distinct social possibilities in your profile. The two weak points in our age are its want of principle and its want of profile. The chin a little higher, dear. Style largely depends on the way the chin is worn. They are worn very high, just at present. Algernon!

ALGERNON. Yes, Aunt Augusta!

LADY BRACKNELL. There are distinct social possibilities in Miss Cardew's profile.

ALGEKNON. Cecily is the sweetest, dearest, prettiest girl in the whole world. And I don't care twopence about social possibilities.

LADY BRACKNELL. Never speak disrespectfully of Society, Algernon. Only people who can't get into it do that. [To CECILY.] Dear child, of course you know that Algernon has nothing but his debts to depend upon. But I do not approve of mercenary marriages. When I married Lord Bracknell I had no fortune of any kind. But I never dreamed for a moment of allowing that to stand in my way. Well, I suppose I must give my consent.

ALGERNON. Thank you, Aunt Augusta.

LADY BRACKNELL. Cecily, you may kiss me!

CECILY *[Kisses her]*. Thank you, Lady Bracknell.

LADY BRACKNELL. You may also address me as Aunt Augusta for the future.

CECILY. Thank you, Aunt Augusta.

LADY BRACKNELL. The marriage, I think, had better take place quite soon.

ALGERNON. Thank you, Aunt Augusta.

CECILY. Thank you, Aunt Augusta.

LADY BRACKNELL. To speak frankly, I am not in favour of long engagements. They give people the opportunity of finding out each other's character before marriage, which I think is never advisable.

JACK. I beg your pardon for interrupting you,

Lady Bracknell, but this engagement is quite out of the question. I am Miss Cardew's guardian, and she cannot marry without my consent until she comes of age. That consent I absolutely decline to give.

LADY BRACKNELL. Upon what grounds, may I ask? Algernon is an extremely, I may almost say an ostentatiously, eligible young man. He has nothing, but he looks everything. What more can one desire?

JACK. It pains me very much to have to speak frankly to you, Lady Bracknell, about your nephew, but the fact is that I do not approve at all of his moral character. I suspect him of being untruthful. [ALGERNON *and* CECILY *look at him in indignant amazement.]*

LADY BRACKNELL. Untruthful! My nephew Algernon? Impossible! He is an Oxonian.

JACK. I fear there can be no possible doubt about the matter. This afternoon, during my temporary absence in London on an important question of romance, he obtained admission to my house by means of the false pretence of being my brother. Under an assumed name he drank, I've just been informed by my butler, an entire pint bottle of my Perrier-Jouet, Brut, '89; a wine I was specially reserving for myself. Continuing his disgraceful deception, he succeeded in the course of the afternoon in alienating the affections of my only ward. He subsequently stayed to tea, and devoured every single muffin. And what makes his conduct all the more heartless is, that he was

perfectly well aware from the first that I have no brother, that I never had a brother, and that 1 don't intend to have a brother, not even of any kind. I distinctly told him so myself yesterday afternoon.

LADY BRACKNELL. Ahem! Mr. Worthing, after careful consideration I have decided entirely to overlook my nephew's conduct to you.

JACK. That is very generous of you, Lady Bracknell. My own decision, however, is unalterable. I decline to give my consent.

LADY BRACKNELL *[To* CECILY]. Come here, sweet child. [CECILY *goes over].* How old are you, dear?

CECILY. Well, I am really only eighteen, but I always admit to twenty when 1 go to evening parties.

LADY BRACKNELL. You are perfectly right in making some slight alteration. Indeed, no woman should ever be quite accurate about her age. It looks so calculating. . . . *[In a meditative manner.]* Eighteen, but admitting to twenty at evening parties. Well, it will not be very long before you are of age and free from the restraints of tutelage. So I don't think your guardian's consent is, after all, a matter of any importance.

JACK. Pray excuse me, Lady Bracknell, for interrupting you again, but it is only fair to tell you that according to the terms of her grandfather's will Miss Cardew does not come legally of age till she is thirty-five.

LADY BRACKNELL. That does not seem to me

to be a grave objection. Thirty-five is a very attractive age. London society is full of women of the very highest birth who have, of their own free choice, remained thirty-five for years. Lady Dumblcton is an instance in point. To my own knowledge she has been thirty-five ever since she arrived at the age of forty, which was many years ago now. I sec no reason why our dear Cecily should not be even still more attractive at the age you mention than she is at present. There will be a large accumulation of property.

CECILY. Algy, could you wait for me till I was thirty-five?

ALGERNON. Of course I could, Cecily. You know I could.

CECILY. Yes, I felt it instinctively, but I couldn't wait all that time. I hate waiting even five minutes for anybody. It always makes me rather cross. I am not punctual myself, I know, but I do like punctuality in others, and waiting, even to be married, is quite out of the question.

ALGERNON. Then what is to be done, Cecily?

CECILY. I don't know, Mr. Moncrieff.

LADY BRACKNELL. My dear Mr. Worthing, as Miss Cardew states positively that she cannot wait till she is thirty-five—a remark which I am bound to say seems to me to show a somewhat impatient nature—I would beg of you to reconsider your decision.

JACK. But my dear Lady Bracknell, the matter **is** entirely in your own hands. The moment you consent to my marriage with Gwendolen, I will

most gladly allow your nephew to form an alliance with my ward.

LADY BRACKNELL *[Rising and drawing herself up}.* You must be quite aware that what you propose is out of the question.

JACK. Then a passionate celibacy is all that any of us can look forward to.

LADY BRACKNELL. That is not the destiny I propose for Gwendolen. Algernon, of course, can choose for himself. *[Pulls out her watch.]* Come dear; [GWENDOLEN *rises]* we have already missed five, if not six, trains. To miss any more might expose us to comment on the platform.

[Enter DR. CHASUBLE.]

CHASUBLE. Everything is quite ready for the christenings.

LADY BRACKNELL. The christenings, sir! Is not that somewhat premature?

CHASUBLE *[Looking rather puzzled, and pointing to* JACK *and* ALGERNON]. Both these gentlemen have expressed a desire for immediate baptism.

LADY BRACKNELL. At their age? The idea is grotesque and irreligious! Algernon, I forbid you to be baptised. I will not hear of such excesses. Lord Bracknell would be highly displeased if he learned that that was the way in which you wasted your time and money.

CHASUBLE. Am I to understand then that there are to be no christenings at all this afternoon?

JACK. I don't think that, as things are now, it would be of much practical value to either of us, **Dr.** Chasuble.

CHASUBLE. I am grieved to hear such sentiments from you, Mr. Worthing. They savour of the heretical views of the Anabaptists, views that I have completely refuted in four of my unpublished sermons. However, as your present mood seems to be one peculiarly secular, I will return to the church at once. Indeed, I have just been informed by the pew-opener that for the last hour and a half Miss Prism has been waiting for me in the vestry.

LADY BRACKNELL *[Starting]*. Miss Prism! Did I hear you mention a Miss Prism?

CHASUBLE. Yes, Lady Bracknell. I am on my way to join her.

LADY BRACKNELL. Pray allow me to detain you for a moment. This matter may prove to be one of vital importance to Lord Bracknell and myself. Is this Miss Prism a female of repellant aspect, remotely connected with education?

CHASUBLE *[Somewhat indignantly]*. She is the most cultivated of ladies, and the very picture of respectability.

LADY BRACKNELL. It is obviously the same person. May I ask what position she holds in your household?

CHASUBLE *[Severely]*. I am a celibate, madam.

JACK *[Interposing]*. Miss Prism, Lady Bracknell, has been for the last three years Miss Cardew's esteemed governess and valued companion.

LADY BRACKNELL. In spite of what I hear of her, I must see her at once. Let her be sent for.

CHASUBLE *[Looking off].* She approaches; she is nigh.

[Enter MISS PRISM *hurriedly.]*

MISS PRISM. I was told you expected me in the vestry, dear Canon. I have been waiting for you there for an hour and three-quarters. *[Catches sight of* LADY BRACKNELL, *who has fixed her with a stony glare.* MISS PRISM *grows pale and quails. She looks anxiously round as if desirous to escape.]*

LADY BRACKNELL *[In a severe, judicial voice].* Prism! [MISS PRISM *bows her head in shame.]* Come here, Prism! [MISS PRISM *approaches in a humble manner.]* Prism! Where is that baby? *[General consternation. The Canon starts back in horror.* ALGERNON *and* JACK *pretend to be anxious to shield* CECILY *and* GWENDOLEN *from hearing the details of a terrible public scandal.]* Twenty-eight years ago, Prism, you left Lord Bracknell's house, Number 104, Upper Crosvenor Street, in charge of a perambulator that contained a baby, of the male sex. You never returned. A few weeks later, through the elaborate investigations of the Metropolitan police, the perambulator was discovered at midnight, standing by itself in a remote corner of Bayswater. It contained the manuscript of a three-volume novel of more than usually revolting sentimentality. [MISS PRISM *starts in involuntary indignation.]* But the baby was not there! *[Everyone looks at* MISS PRISM.] Prism; Where is that baby? *[A pause.]*

MISS PRISM. Lady Bracknell, I admit with shame that I do not know. I only wish I did.

The plain facts of the case are these. On the morning of the day you mention, a day that is for ever branded on my memory, I prepared as usual to take the baby out in its perambulator. I had also with me a somewhat old, but capacious hand-bag in which I had intended to place the manuscript of a work of fiction that I had written during my few unoccupied hours. In a moment of mental abstraction, for which I never can forgive myself, I deposited the manuscript in the bassinette, and placed the baby in the hand-bag.

JACK *[Who has been listening attentively].* But where did you deposit the hand-bag?

MISS PRISM. Do not ask me, Mr. Worthing.

JACK. Miss Prism, this is a matter of no small importance to me. I insist on knowing where you deposited the hand-bag that contained that infant.

MISS PRISM. I left it in the cloak-room of one of the larger railway stations in London.

JACK. What railway station?

MISS PRISM *[Quite crushed].* Victoria. The Brighton line. *[Sinks into a chair.]*

JACK. I must retire to my room for a moment. Gwendolen, wait here for me.

GWENDOLEN. If you are not too long, I will wait here for you all my life.

[Exit JACK *in great excitement.]*

CHASUBLE. What do you think this means, Lady Bracknell?

LADY BRACKNELL. I dare not even suspect, Dr Chasuble. I need hardly tell you that in fam-

ilies of high position strange coincidences are not supposed to occur. They are hardly considered the thing.

[Noises heard overhead as if someone was throwing trunks about. Everyone looks up.}

CECILY. Uncle Jack seems strangely agitated.

CHASUBLE. Your guardian has a very emotional nature.

LADY BRACKNELL. This noise is extremely unpleasant. It sounds as if he was having an argument. I dislike arguments of any kind. They are always vulgar, and often convincing.

CHASUBLE *[Looking up}.* It has stopped now. *[The noise is redoubled.}*

LADY BRACKNELL. I wish he would arrive at some conclusion.

GWENDOLEN. This suspense is terrible. I hope it will last.

[Enter JACK *with a hand-bag of black leather in his hand.]*

JACK *[Rushing over to* MISS PRISM]. Is this the hand-bag, Miss Prism? Examine it carefully before you speak. The happiness of more than one life depends on your answer.

MISS PRISM *[Calmly].* It seems to be mine. Yes, here is the injury it received through the upsetting of a Gower Street omnibus in younger and happier days. Here is the stain on the lining caused by the explosion of a temperance beverage, an incident that occurred at Leamington. And here, on the lock, are my initials. I had forgotten that in an extravagant mood I had had them placed

there. The bag is undoubtedly mine. I am delighted to have it so unexpectedly restored to me. It has been a great inconvenience being without it all these years.

JACK *[In a pathetic voice].* Miss Prism, more is restored to you than this hand-bag. I was the baby you placed in it.

MISS PRISM *[Amazed].* You?

JACK *[Embracing her].* Yes . . . mother!

MISS PRISM *[Recoiling in indignant astonishment].* Mr. Worthing! I am unmarried!

JACK. Unmarried! I do not deny that is a serious blow. But after all, who has the right to cast a stone against one who has suffered? Cannot repentance wipe out an act of folly? Why should there be one law for men, and another for women *t* Mother, I forgive you. *[Tries to embrace her again.]*

Miss PRISM *[Still more indignant].* Mr. Worthing, there is some error. *[Pointing to* LADY BRACKNELL.} There is the lady who can tell you who you really are.

JACK *[After a pause].* Lady Bracknell, I hate to seem inquisitive, but would you kindly inform me who I am?

LADY BRACKNELL. I am afraid that the news I have to give you will not altogether please you. You are the son of my poor sister, Mrs. Moncrieff, and consequently Algernon's elder brother.

JACK. Algy's elder brother! Then I have a brother after all. I knew I had a brother! I always said I had a brother! Cecily,—how could you have ever doubted that I had a brother.

[Seizes hold of ALGERNON.] Dr. Chasuble, my unfortunate brother. Miss Prism, my unfortunate brother. Gwendolen, my unfortunate brother. Algy, you young scoundrel, you will have to treat me with more respect in the future. You have never behaved to me like a brother in all your life.

ALGERNON. Well, not till to-day, old boy, I admit. I did my best, however, though I was out of practice. *[Shakes hands.]*

GWENDOLEN *[To* JACK]. My own! But what own are you? What is your Christian name, now that you have become someone else?

JACK. Good heavens!... I had quite forgotten that point. Your decision on the subject of my name is irrevocable, I suppose?

GWENDOLEN. I never change, except in my affections.

CECILY. WJiat a noble nature you have, Gwendolen!

JACK. Then the question had better be cleared up at once. Aunt Augusta, a moment. At the time when Miss Prism left me in the hand-bag, had I been christened already?

LADY BRACKNELL. Every luxury that money could buy, including christening, had been lavished on you by your fond and doting parents.

JACK. Then I was christened! That is settled. Now, what name was I given? Let me know the worst.

LADY BRACKNELL. Being the eldest son you were naturally christened after your father.

JACK *[Irritably].* Yes, but what was my father's Christian name?

LADY BRACKNELL *[Meditatively].* I cannot at the present moment recall what the General's Christian name was. But 1 have no doubt he had one. He was eccentric, I admit. But only in later years. And that was the result of the Indian climate, and marriage, and indigestion, and other things of that kind.

JACK. Algy! Can't you recollect what our father's Christian name was?

ALGERNON. My dear boy, we "Were never even on speaking terms. He died before I was a year old.

JACK. His name would appear in the Army Lists of the period, 1 suppose, Aunt Augusta?

LADY BRACKNELL. The General was essentially a man of peace, except in his domestic life. But I have no doubt his name would appear in any military directory.

JACK. The Army Lists of the last forty years arc here. These delightful records should have been my constant study. *[Rushes to bookcase and tears the books out.]* M. Generals . . . . Mallam, Maxbohm, Magley, what ghastly names they have —Markby, Migsby, Mobbs, Moncrieff! Lieutenant 1840, Captain, Lieutenant-Colonel, Colonel, General 1869, Christian names, Ernest John. *[Puts book very quietly down and speaks quite calmly.]* I always told you, Gwendolen, my name was Ernest, didn't I? Well, it is Ernest after all. I mean it naturally is Ernest.

LADY BRACKNELL. Yes, I remember that the General was called Ernest. I knew I had some particular reason for disliking the name.

GWENDOLEN. Ernest! My own Ernest! I felt from the first that you could have no other name!

JACK. Gwendolen, it is a terrible thing for a man to find out suddenly that all his life he has been speaking nothing but the truth. Can you forgive me?

GWENDOLEN. I can. For I feel that you are sure to change.

JACK. My own one!

CHASUBLE *[To* MISS PRISM]. Laetitia! *[Embraces her.]*

MISS PRISM *[Enthusiastically].* Frederick! At last!

ALGERNON. Cecily! *[Embraces her.]* At last!

JACK. Gwendolen! *[Embraces her.]* At last!

LADY BRACKNELL. My nephew, you seem to be displaying signs of triviality.

JACK. On the contrary, Aunt Augusta, I've now realised for the first time in my life the vital Importance of Being Earnest.

TABLEAU

CURTAIN

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

The acting rights to 'An Ideal Husband' are held by Mr. Charles Frohman, Empire Theatre Building, Neie York City, to whom application must be made for the right to *perform, either by amateurs or professionals.*

To

frank Harris:

A SLIGHT TRIBUTE TO
HIS POWER AND DISTINCTION
AS AN ARTIST
HIS CHIVALRY AND NOBILITI?
AS A FRIEND

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

London: Theatre Royal, Haymarket: Sole Lessee Mr. Herbert Beerbohm Tree: Managers, Mr. Lewis Waller and Mr. H. H. Morcll, January 3, 1895.

CHARACTERS

THE EARL OF CAVERSHAM	Mr. Alfred Bishop
VISCOUNT GORING	Mr. Chas. H. Hawtrey
SIR ROBERT CHILTERN	Mr. Lewis Waller
VICOMTE DE NANJAC	Mr. Cosmo Stuart
MR. MONTFORD	Mr. Harry Stanford
PHIPPS	Mr. C. H. Brookfield
MASON	Mr. H. Deane
JAMES (Footman)	Mr. Charles Meyrick
HAROLD (Footman)	Mr. Goodhart
LADY CHILTERN	Miss Julia Neilson
LADY MARKBY	Miss Fanny Brough
COUNTESS OF BASILDON	Miss Vane Featherston
MRS. MARCHMONT	Miss Helen Forsyth
MISS MABEL CHILTERN	Miss Maude Millett
MRS. CHEVELEY	Miss Florence West

THE SCENES OF THE PLAY

ACT I The Octagon Room in Sir Robert Chill tern's House in Grosvenor Square.

ACT II Morning-Roorn in Sir Robert Chiltern's House.

ACT III The Library of Lord Goring's House in Curzon Street.

ACT IV , Same as Act II.

Time—The Present.

Place—London.

The Action of the Play is completed within twenty-four hours.

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT I

SCENE—*The octagon room at* SIR ROBERT CHILTERN'S *house in Grosvenor Square.*

[The room is brilliantly lighted and full of guests. At the top of the staircase stands LADY CHILTERN, *a woman of grave Greek beauty, about twenty-seven years of age. She receives the guests as they come up. Over the well of the staircase hangs a great chandelier with wax lights, which illumine a large eighteenth-century French tapestry—representing the Triumph of Love, from a design by Boucher—that is stretched on the staircase wall. On the right is the entrance to the music-room. The sound of a string quartette is faintly heard. The entrance on the left leads to other reception-rooms.* MRS. MARCHMONT *and* LADY BASILDON, *two very pretty women, are seated together on a Louis Seize sofa. They are types of exquisite fragility. Their affectation of manner has a delicate charm. Watteau would have loved to paint them}*

MRS. MARCHMONT. Going on to the Hartlocks' to-night, Olivia?

LADY BASILDON. I suppose so. Are you?

MRS. MARCHMONT. Yes. Horribly tedious parties they give, don't they?

LADY BASILDON. Horribly tedious! Never know why I go. Never know why I go anywhere.

MKS. MARCHMONT. I come here to be educated.

LADY BASILDON. Ah! I hate being educated!

MRS. MARCHMONT. So do I. It puts one almost on a level with the commercial classes, doesn't it? But dear Gertrude Chiltern is always telling me that I should have some serious purpose in life. So I come here to try to find one.

LADY BASILDON *[Looking round through her lorgnette].* I don't see anybody here to-night whom one could possibly call a serious purpose. The man who took me in to dinner talked to me about his wife the whole time.

MRS. MARCHMONT. How very trivial of him!

LADY BASILDON. Terribly trivial! What did your man talk about?

MRS. MARCHMONT. About myself.

LADY BASILDON *[Languidly].* And were you interested?

MRS. MARCHMONT *[Shaking her head].* Not in the smallest degree.

LADY BASILDON. What martyrs we are, dear Margaret!

MRS. MARCHMONT *[Rising].* And how well it becomes us, Olivia!

[They rise and go towards the music-room. The VICOMTE DE NANJAC, *a young attache known for his neckties and his Anglomania, approaches with a low bow, and enters into conversation.]*

MASON [Announcing guests from the top of the stair-' case]. Mr. and Lady Jane Barf ord. Lord Caversham.

[Enter LORD CAVERSHAM, *an old gentleman of seventy, wearing the riband and star of the Garter. A fine Whig type. Rather like a portrait by Lawrence.]*

LORD CAVERSHAM. Good evening, Lady Chiltern! Has my good-for-nothing young son been here?

LADY CHILTERN *[Smiling].* I don't think Lord Goring has arrived yet.

MABEL CHILTERN *[Coming Up to* LORD CAVERSHAM]. Why do you call Lord Goring good-for-nothing?

[MABEL CHILTERN *is a perfect example of the English type of prettiness, the apple-blossom type. She has all the fragrance and freedom of a flower. There is ripple after ripple of sunlight in her hair, and the little mouth, with its parted lips, is expectant, like the mouth of a child. She has the fascinating tyranny of youth, and the astonishing courage of innocence. To sane people she is not reminiscent of any work of art. But she is really like a Tanagra statuette, and would be rather annoyed if she were told so.]*

LORD CAVERSHAM. Because he leads such an idle life.

MABEL CHILTERN. How can you say such a thing? Why, he rides in the Row at ten o'clock in the morning, goes to the Opera three times a week, changes his clothes at least five times a day, and dines out every night of the season. You don't call that leading an idle life, do you?

LORD CAVERSHAM *[Looking at her with a kindly twinkle in his eyes].* You are a very charming young lady!

MABEL CHILTERN. How sweet of you to say that, Lord Caversham! Do come to us more often. You know we are always at home on Wednesdays, and you look so well with your star!

LORD CAVERSHAM. Never go anywhere now. Sick of London Society. Shouldn't mind being introduced to my own tailor; he always votes on the right side. But object strongly to being sent down to dinner with my wife's milliner. Never could stand Lady Caversham's bonnets.

MABEL CHILTERN. Oh, I love London Society! 1 think it has immensely improved. It is entirely composed now of beautiful idiots and brilliant lunatics. Just what Society should be.

LORD CAVERSHAM. Hum! Which is Goring? Beautiful idiot, or the other thing?

MABEL CHILTERN *[Gravely].* *I* have been obliged for the present to put Lord Goring into a class quite by himself. But he is developing charmingly!

LORD CAVERSHAM. Into what?

MABEL CHILTERN *[With a little curtsey].* I hope to let you know veiy soon, Lord Caversham!

MASON *[Announcing guests].* Lady Markby. Mrs. Cheveley.

[Enter LADY MARKBY *and* MRS. CHEVELEY. LADY MARKBY *is a pleasant, kindly, popular woman, ivith gray hair a la marquise and good lace.* MRS. CHEVELEY, *who accompanies her, is tall and rather slight. Lips very thin and highly-coloured, a line of scarlet on a paUidface. Venetian red hair, aquiline nose, and long throat. Rouge accentuates the natural*

paleness of her complexion. Gray-green eyes that move restlessly. She is in heliotrope, with diamonds. She looks rather like an orchid, and makes great demands on one's curiosity. In all her movements she is extremely graceful. A work of art, on the whole, but showing the influence of too many schools.]

LADY MARKBY. Good evening, dear Gertrude! So kind of you to let me bring my friend, Mrs. Cheveley. Two such charming women should know each other!

LADY CHILTERN *[Advances towards* MRS. CHEVELEY *with a sweet smile. Then suddenly stops, and bows rather distantly].* I think Mrs. Cheveley and I have met before. I did not know she had married a second time.

LADY MARKBY *[Genially.]* Ah, nowadays people marry as often as they can, don't they? It is most fashionable. *[To* DUCHESS OF MARYBOROUGH.] Dear Duchess, and how is the Duke? Brain still weak, I suppose? Well, that is only to be expected, is it not? His good father was just the same. There is nothing like race, is there?

MRS. CHEVELEY *[Playing with her fan].* But have we really met before, Lady Chiltern? I can't remember where. I have been out of England for so long.

LADY CHILTERN. We were at school together, Mrs. Cheveley.

MRS. CHEVELEY *[Superdliously].* Indeed? I have forgotten all about my school days. I have a vague impression that they were detestable.

LADY CHILTERN *[Coldly].* I am not surprised!

MRS. CHEVELEY *[In her sweetest manner].* **Do** you know, I am quite looking forward to meeting your clever husband, Lady Chiltern. Since he has been at the Foreign Office, he has been so much talked of in Vienna. They actually succeed in spelling his name right in the newspapers. That in itself is fame, on the continent.

LADY CHILTERN. I hardly think there will be much in common between you and my husband, Mrs. Cheveley! *[Moms away]*

VICOMTE DE NANJAC. Ah! chere Madame, quelle surprise! I have not seen you since Berlin!

MRS. CHEVELEY. Not since Berlin, Vicomte. Five years ago!

VICOMTE DE NANJAC. And you are younger and more beautiful than ever. How do you manage it?

MRS. CHEVELEY. By making it a rule only to talk to perfectly charming people like yourself.

VICOMTE DE NANJAC. Ah! you flatter me. You butter me, as they say here.

MRS. CHEVELEY. Do they say that here? How dreadful of them!

VICOMTE DE NANJAC. Yes, they have a wonderful language. It should be more widely known.

[SIR ROBERT CHILTERN *enters. A man of forty, but looking somewhat younger. Clean-shaven, with finely-cut features, dark-haired and dark-eyed. A personality of mark. Not popular—few personalities are. But intensely admired by the few, and deeply respected by the many. The note of his manner is that of perfect distinction, with a slight touch of pride. One feels that he is conscious of the success he*

has made in life. A nervous temperament, with a tired look. The firmly chiselled mouth and chin contrast strikingly with the romantic expression in the deep-set eyes. The variance is suggestive of an almost complete separation of passion and intellect, as though thought and emotion were each isolated in its own sphere through some violence of will-power. There is nervousness in the nostrils, and in the pale, thin, pointed hands. It would be inaccurate to call him picturesque. Picturesqueness cannot survive the House of Commons. But Vandyck would have liked to hare painted his head.]

SIR ROBERT CHiLTERN. Good evening, Lady Markby! I hope you have brought Sir John with you?

LADY MARKET. Oh! I have brought a much more charming person than Sir John. Sir John's temper since he has taken seriously to politics has become quite unbearable. Really, now that the House of Commons is trying to become useful, it does a great deal of harm.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. I hope not, Lady Markby. At any rate we do our best to waste the public time, don't we? But who is this charming person you have been kind enough to bring to us?

LADY MARKBY. Her name is Mrs. Cheveley! One of the Dorsetshire Cheveleys, I suppose. But I really don't know. Families are so mixed nowadays. Indeed, as a rule, everybody turns out to be somebody else.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. Mrs. Cheveley? I seem to know the name.

LADY MARKET. She has just arrived from Vienna.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. Ah! yes. I think I know whom you mean.

LADY MARKBY. Oh! she goes everywhere there, and has such pleasant scandals about all her friends. I really must go to Vienna next winter. I hope there is a good chef at the Embassy.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. If there is not, the Ambassador will certainly have to be recalled. Pray point out Mrs. Cheveley to me. I should like to see her.

LADY MARKBY. Let me introduce you, *[To* MRS. CHEVELEY.] My dear, Sir Robert Chiltern is dying to know you!

SIR ROBERT CHILTLRN *[Bowmg].* Everybody is dying to know the brilliant Mrs. Cheveley. Our attaches at Vienna write to us about nothing else.

MRS. CHEVELEY. Thank you, Sir Robert. An acquaintance that begins with a compliment is sure to develop into a real friendship. It starts in the right manner. And I find that I know Lady Chiltern already.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. Really?

MRS. CHEVELEY. Yes. She has just reminded me that we were at school together. I remember it perfectly now. She always got the good conduct prize. I have a distinct recollection of Lady Chiltern always getting the good conduct prize!

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN *[Smiling].* And what prizes did you get, Mrs. Cheveley?

MRS. CHEVELEY. My prizes came a little later

on in life. I don't think any of them were for good conduct. I forget!

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. I am sure they were for something charming!

MRS. CHEVELEY. I don't know that women are always rewarded for being charming. I think they are usually punished for it! Certainly, more women grow old nowadays through the faithfulness of their admirers than through anything else! At least that is the only way I can account for the terribly haggard look of most of your pretty women in London!

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. What in appalling philosophy that sounds! To attempt to classify you, Mrs. Chevcley, would be an impertinence. But may I ask, at heart, are you an optimist or a pessimist? Those seem to be the only two fashionable religions left to us nowadays.

MRS. CHEVELEY. Oh, I'm neither. Optimism begins in a broad grin, and Pessimism ends with blue spectacles. Besides, they are both of them merely poses.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. You prefertobe natural?

MRS. CHEVELEY. Sometimes. But it is such a very difficult pose to keep up.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. What WOUld those modern psychological novelists, of whom we hear so much, say to such a theory as that?

MRS. CHEVELEY. Ah! the strength of women comes from the fact that psychology cannot explain us. Men can be analysed, women . . . merely adored.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. You think science cannot grapple with the problem of women?

MRS. CHEVELEY. Science can never grapple with the irrational. That is why it has no future before it, in this world.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. And women represent the irrational.

MRS. CHEVELEY. Well-dressed women do.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN [*With a polite bvw*\. I fear I could hardly agree with you there. But do sit down. And now tell me, what makes you leave your brilliant Vienna for our gloomy London—or perhaps the question is indiscreet?

MRS. CHEVELEY. Questions arc never indiscreet. Answers sometimes are.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. Well, at any rate, may I know if it is politics or pleasure?

MRS. CHEVELEY. Politics are my only pleasure. You see nowadays it is not fashionable to flirt till one is forty, or to be romantic till one is forty-five, so we poor women who are under thirty, or say we are, have nothing open to us but politics or philanthropy. And philanthropy seems to me to have become simply the refuge of people who wish to annoy their fellow-creatures. I prefer politics. I think they are more . . . becoming!

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. A political life is a noble career!

MRS. CHEVELEY. Sometimes. And sometimes it is a clever game, Sir Robert. And sometimes it is a great nuisance.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. Which do you find it?

MRS. CHEVELEY. I? A combination of all three. *[Drops her fan.]*

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN *[Picks up fan].* Allow me!

MRS. CHEVELEY. Thanks.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. But you have not told me yet what makes you honour London so suddenly. Our season is almost over.

MRS. CHEVELEY. Oh! I don't care about the London season! It is too matrimonial. People are either hunting for husbands, or hiding from them. I wanted to meet you. It is quite true. You know what a woman's curiosity is. Almost as great as a man's! I wanted immensely to meet you, and . . . to ask you to do something for me.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. I hope it is not a little thing, Mrs. Cheveley. I find that little things are so very difficult to do.

MRS. CHEVELEY *[After a moment's reflection].* No, I don't think it is quite a little thing.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. I am so glad. Do tell me what it is.

MRS. CHEVELEY. Later on. *[Rises.]* And now may I walk through your beautiful house? I hear your pictures are charming. Poor Baron Araheim—you remember the Baron?—used to tell me you had some wonderful Corots.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN *[With an almost imperceptible start].* Did you know Baron Arnheim well?

MRS. CHEVELEY *[Smiling].* Intimately. Did you?

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. At one time.

MRS. CHEVELEY. Wonderful man, wasn't he?

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN *[After a pause].* He was very remarkable, in many ways.

MRS. CHEVELEY. I often think it such a pity he never wrote his memoirs. They would have been most interesting.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. Yes; he knew men and cities well, like the old Greek.

MRS. CHEVELEY. Without the dreadful disadvantage of having a Penelope waiting at home for him.

MASON. Lord Goring.

[Enter LORD GORING. *Thirty-four, but always says he is younger. A well-bred, expressionless face. He is dever, but would not like to be thought so. A flawless dandy, he would be annoyed if he were considered romantic. He plays with life, and is on perfectly good terms with the world. He is fond of being misunderstood. It gives him a post of vantage.]*

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. Good evening, my dear Arthur! Mrs. Cheveley, allow me to introduce to you Lord Goring, the idlest man in London.

MRS. CHEVELEY. I have met Lord Goring before.

LORD GORING *[Bowing].* I did not think you would remember me, Mrs. Cheveley.

MRS. CHEVELEY. My memory is under admirable control. And are you still a bachelor?

LORD GORING. I ... believe so.

MRS. CHEVELEY. How very romantic!

LORD GORING. Oh! I am not at all romantic. I am not old enough. I leave romance to my seniors.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. Lord Goring is the result of Boodle's Club, Mrs. Cheveley.

MRS. CHEVELEY. He reflects every credit on the institution.

LORD GORING. May I ask are you staying in London long?

MRS. CHEVELEY. That depends partly on the weather, partly on the cooking, and partly on Sir Robert.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. You are not going to plunge us into a European war, I hope?

MRS. CHEVELEY. There is no danger, at present!

[She nods to LORD GORING, *with a look of amusement in her eyes, and goes out with* SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. LORD GORING *saunters over to* MABEL CHILTERN.]

MABEL CHILTERN. You arc very late!

LORD GORING. Have you missed me?

MABEL CHILTERN. Awfully!

LORD GORING. Then I am sorry I did not stay away longer. I like being missed.

MABEL CHILTERN. How very selfish of you!

LORD GORING. I am very selfish.

MABEL CHILTERN. You are always telling me of your bad qualities, Lord Goring.

LORD GORING. I have only told you half of them as yet, Miss Mabel!

MABEL CHILTERN. Are the others very bad?

LORD GORING. Quite dreadful! When I think of them at night I go to sleep at once.

MABEL CHILTERN. Well, I delight in your bad

qualities. I wouldn't have you part with one of them.

LORD GORING. How very nice of you! But then you are always nice. By the way, I want to ask you a question, Miss Mabel. Who brought Mrs. Cheveley here? That woman in heliotrope, who has just gone out of the room with your brother?

MABEL CHILTERN. Oh, I think Lady Markby brought her. Why do you ask?

LORD GORING. 1 hadn't seen her for years, that is all.

MABEL CHILTERN. What an absurd reason I

LORD GORING. All reasons are absurd.

MABEL CHILTERN. What sort of woman is she?

LORD GORING. Oh! a genius in the daytime and a beauty at night!

MABEL CHILTERN. I dislike her already.

LORD GORING. That shows your admirable good taste.

VICOMTE DE NANJAC *[Approaching].* Ah, the English young lady is the dragon of good taste, is she not? Quite the dragon of good taste.

LORD GORING. So the newspapers arc always telling us.

VICOMTE DE NANJAC. I read all your English newspapers. I find them so amusing.

LORD GORING. Then, my dear Nanjac, you must certainly read between the lines.

VICOMTE DE NANJAC. I should like to, but my professor objects. [To MABEL CHILTERN.] May I have the pleasure of escorting you to the music-room, Mademoiselle?

MABEL CHILTERN *[Looking very disappointed],* Delighted, Vicomte, quite delighted! *[Turning to* LORD GORING.] Aren't you coming to the music-room?

LORD GORING. Not if there is any music going on, Miss Mabel.

MABEL CHILTERN *{Severely}.* The music is in German. You would not understand it.

[Goes out with the VICOMTE DE NANJAC. LORD CAVERSHAM *comes up to his son.]*

LORD CAVERSHAM. Well, sir! what are you doing hene,? Wasting your life as usual! You should be in bed, sir. You keep too late hours! I heard of you the other night at Lady Rufford's dancing till four o'clock in the morning!

LORD GORING. Only a quarter to four, father.

LORD CAVERSHAM. Can't make out how you stand London Society. The thing has gone to the dogs, a lot of damned nobodies talking about nothing.

LORD GORING. I love talking about nothing, father. It is the only thing I know anything about.

LORD CAVERSHAM. You seem to me to be living entirely for pleasure.

LORD GORING. What else is there to live for, father. Nothing ages like happiness.

LORD CAVERSHAM. You are heartless, sir, very heartless!

LORD GORING. I hope not, father. Good evening, Lady Basildon!

LADY BASILDON *[Arching two pretty eyebrows].*

Are you here? I had no idea you ever eame to political parties!

LORD GOKING. I adore political parties. They are the only place left to us where people don't talk politics.

LADY BASILDON. I delight in talking politics. I talk them all day long. But I can't bear listening to them. I don't know how the unfortunate men in the House stand these long debates.

LORD GORING. By never listening.

LADY BASILDON. Really?

LORD GORING [In *his most serious manner].* Of course. You see, it is a very dangerous thing to listen. If one listens one may be convinced; and a man who allows himself to be convinced by an argument is a thoroughly unreasonable person.

LADY BASILDON. Ah! that accounts for so much in men that I have never understood, and so much in women that their husbands never appreciate in them!

MRS. MARCHMONT *[With a sigh].* Our husbands never appreciate anything in us. We have to go to others for that!

LADY BASILDON *[Emphatically].* Yes, always to others, have we not?

LORD GORING *[Smiling].* And those are the views of the two ladies who are known to have the most admirable husbands in London.

MRS. MARCHMONT. That is exactly what we can't stand. My Reginald is quite hopelessly faultless. He is really unendurably so, at times!

There is not the smallest element of excitement in knowing him.

LORD GORING. How terrible! Really, the thing should be more widely known!

LADY BASILDON. Basildon is quite as bad; he is as domestic as if he was a bachelor.

MRS. MARCHMONT *[Pressing* LADY BASILDON'S *hand]*. My poor Olivia! We have married perfect husbands, and we are well punished for it.

LORD GORING. I should have thought it was the husbands who were punished.

MRS. MARCHMONT *[Drawing herself up]*. Oh, dear no! They are as happy as possible! And as for trusting us, it is tragic how much they trust us.

LADY BASILDON. Perfectly tragic!

LORD GORING. Or comic, Lady Basildon?

LADY BASILDON. Certainly not comic, Lord Goring. How unkind of you to suggest such a thing!

MRS. MARCHMONT. I am afraid Lord Goring is in the camp of the enemy, as usual. I saw him talking to that Mrs. Cheveley when he came in.

LORD GORING. Handsome woman, Mrs. Cheveley!

LADY BASILDON *[Stiffly]*. Please don't praise other women in our presence. You might wait for us to do that!

LORD GORING. I did wait.

MBS. MARCHMONT. Well, we are not going to praise her. I hear she went to the Opera on Monday night, and told Tommy Rufford at supper that, as far as she could see, London Society was entirely made up of dowdies and dandies.

LORD GORING. She is quite right, too. The men are all dowdigs and the women are all dandies, aren't they?

MKS.MARCHMONT *[After a pause].* Oh! do you really think that is what Mrs. Chevey meant?

LORD GORING. Of course. And a very sensible remark for Mrs. Cheveley to make, too.

[Enter MABEL CHILTERN. *She joins the group.}*

MABEL CHILTERN. Why are you talking about Mrs. Cheveley? Everybody is talking about Mrs. Cheveley! Lord Goring says—what did you say, Lord Goring, about Mrs. Cheveley? Oh! I remember, that she was a genius in the daytime and a beauty at night.

LADY BASILDON. What a horrid combination! So very unnatural!

MRS. MARCHMONT *[In her most dreamy manner].* I like looking at geniuses, and listening to beautiful people.

LORD GORING. Ah! that is morbid of you, Mrs. Marchmont!

MRS. MARCHMONT *[Brightening to a look of real pleasure}.* I am so glad to hear you say that. Marchmont and I have been married for seven years, and he has never once told me that I was morbid. Men are so painfully unobservant!

LADY BASILDON *[Turning to her}.* I have always said, dear Margaret, that you were the most morbid person in London.

MRS. MARCHMONT. Ah! but you are always sympathetic, Olivia!

MABEL CHILTERN. Is it morbid to have a desire

for food? I have a great desire for food. Lord Goring, will you give me some supper?

LORD GORING. With pleasure, Miss Mabel. *[Moves away with her.]*

MABEL CHILTERN. How horrid you have been! You have never talked to me the whole evening!

LORD GORING. How could I? You went away with the child-diplomatist.

MABEL CHILTERN. You might have followed us. Pursuit would have been only polite. I don't, think I like you at all this evening!

LORD GORING. I like you immensely.

MABEL CHILTERN. Well, I wish you'd show it in a more marked way! *[They go downstairs.]*

MRS. MARCHMONT. Olivia, I have a curious feeling of absolute faintness. I think I should like some supper very much. I know I should like some supper.

LADY BASILDON. I am positively dying for supper, Margaret!

MRS. MARCHMONT. Men are so horribly selfish, they never think of these things.

LADY BASILDON. Men are grossly material, grossly material!

[The VICOMTE DE NANJAC *enters from the music-room with some other guests. After having carefully examined all the people present, he approaches* LADY BASILDON.]

VICOMTE DE NANJAC. May I have the honour of taking you clown to supper, Comtesse?

LADY BASILDON *[Coldly].* I never take supper, thank you, Vicomte. *[The* VICOMTE *is about to*

retire. LADY BASILDON, *seeing this, rises at once and takes his arm.]* But I will come down with you with pleasure.

VICOMTE DE NANJAC. I am so fond of eating! I am very English in all my tastes.

LADY BASILDON. You look quite English, Vicomte, quite English.

[They pass out. MR. MONTFORD, *a perfectly groomed young dandy, approaches* MRS. MARCHMONT.]

MR. MONTFORD. Like some supper, Mrs. Marchmont?

MRS. MARCHMONT *[Languidly].* Thank you, Mr. Montford, I never touch supper. *[Rises hastily and takes his arm.]* But I will sit beside you, and watch you.

MR. MONTFORD. I don't know that I like being watched when I am eating!

MRS. MARCHMONT. Then I will watch some one else.

MR. MONTFORD. I don't know that 1 should like that either.

MRS. MARCHMONT *[Severely].* Pray, Mr. Montford, do not make these painful scenes of jealousy in public!

[They go downstairs with the other guests, passing **SIR ROBERT CHILTERN** *and* **MRS. CHEVELEY,** *who now enter.]*

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. And are you going to any of our country houses before you leave England, Mrs. Cheveley?

MRS. CHEVELEY. Oh, no! I can't stand your

English house-parties. In England people actually try to be brilliant at breakfast. That is so dreadful of them! Only dull people are brilliant at breakfast. And then the family skeleton is always reading family prayers. My stay in England really depends on you, Sir Robert. *[Sits down on the sofa.]*

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN *[Taking a seat beside her].* Seriously?

MRS. CHEVELEY. Quite seriously. I want to talk to you about a great political and financial scheme, about this Argentine Onal Company, in fact.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. What a tedious, practical subject for you to talk about, Mrs. Cheveley!

MRS. CHEVELEY. Oh, I like tedious, practical subjects. What I don't like are tedious, practical people. There is a wide difference. Besides, you are interested, I know, in International Canal schemes. You were Lord Radley's secretary, weren't you, when the Government bought the Suez Canal shares?

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. Yes. But the Suez Canal was a very great and splendid undertaking. It gave us our direct route to India. It had Imperial value. It was necessary that we should have control. This Argentine scheme is a commonplace Stock Exchange swindle.

MRS. CHEVELEY. A speculation, Sir Robert! A brilliant, daring speculation.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. Believe me, Mrs. Chcveley, it is a swindle. Let us call things by their

proper names. It makes matters simpler. We have all the information about it at the Foreign Office. In fact, I sent out a special Commission to inquire into the matter privately, and they report that the works are hardly begun, and as for the money already subscribed, no one seems to know what has become of it. The whole thing is a second Panama, and with not a quarter of the chance of success that miserable, affair ever had. I hope you have not invested in it. I am sure you are far too clever to have done that.

MRS. CHEVELEY. I have invested very largely in it.

SIR ROBERT CHiLTERN. Who could have advised you to do such a foolish thing?

MRS. CHEVELEY. Your old friend—and mine.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. Who?

MRS. CHEVELEY. Baron Arnheim.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN *[Frowning],* Ah! yes. I remember hearing, at the time of his death, that he had been mixed up in the whole affair.

MRS. CHEVELEY. It was his last romance. His last but one, to do him justice.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN *[Rising].* But you have not seen my Corots yet. They are in the musio room. Corots seem to go with music, don't they? May I show them to you?

MRS. CHEVELEY *[Shaking her head].* I am not in a mood to-night for silver twilights, or rose-pink dawns. I want to talk business. *[Motions to him with her fan to sit down again beside her.]*

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. I fear I have no advice

to give you, Mrs. Cheveley, except to interest yourself in something less dangerous. The success of the Canal depends, of course, on the attitude of England, and I am going to lay the report of the Commissioners before the House to-morrow night.

MRS. CHEVELEY. That you must not do. In your own interests, Sir Robert, to say nothing of mine, you must not do that.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN *[Looking at her in wonder].* In my own interests? My dear Mrs. Cheveley, what do you mean? *[Sits down beside her}.*

MRS. CHEVELEY. Sir Robert, 1 will be quite frank with you. I want you to withdraw the report that you had intended to lay before the House, on the ground that you have reasons to believe that the Commissioners have been prejudiced or misinformed, or something. Then I want you to say a few words to the effect that the Government is going to reconsider the question, and that you have reason to believe that the Canal, if completed, will be of great international value. You know the sort of things ministers say in cases of this kind. A few ordinary platitudes will do. In modern life nothing produces such an effect as a good platitude. It makes the whole world kin. Will you do this for me?

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. Mrs. Ohevelcy, you cannot be serious in making me such a proposition!

MRS. CHEVELEY. 1 am quite serious.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN *[Coldly].* Pray allow me to believe that you are not!

MRS. CHEVELEY *[Speaking with great deliberation and emphasis].* Ah! but I am. And, if you do what I ask you, I ... will pay you very handsomely!

SIR ROBERT ciiiLTERN. Pay me!

MRS. CHEVELEY. **Yes.**

SIR ROBERT CHiLTERN. I am afraid I don't quite understand what you mean.

MRS. CHEVELEY *[Leaning back on the sofa and looking at him}.* How very disappointing! And I have come all the way from Vienna in order that you should thoroughly understand me.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. I fear I don't.

MRS. CHEVELEY *[In her most nonchalant manner].* My dear Sir Robert, you are a man of the world, and you have your price, I suppose. Everybody has nowadays. The drawback is that most people are so dreadfully expensive. I know 1 am. I hope you will be more reasonable in your terms.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN *[Rises indignantly].* **If** you will allow me, I will call your carriage for you. You have lived so long abroad, Mrs. Clicvcley, that you seem to be unable to realise that you are talking to an English gentleman.

MRS. CHEVELEY *[Detains him by touching his arm with her fan, and keeping 'it there while she is talking}.* I realise that I am talking to a man who laid the foundation of his fortune by selling to a Stock Exchange speculator a Cabinet secret.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN *[Biting his lip}.* What do you mean?

MRS. CHEVELEY *[Rising and facing him].* I mean

that I know the real origin of your wealth and your career, and I have got your letter, too.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN". What letter?

MRS. CHEVELEY *[Contemptuously].* The letter you wrote to Baron Arnheim, when you were Lord Radley's secretary, telling the Baron to buy Suez Canal shares—a letter written three days before the Government announced its own purchase.

SIR ROBERT ciiiLTERN *[Hoarsely].* It is not true.

MRS. CHEVELEY. You thought that letter had been destroyed. How foolish of you! It is in my possession.

SIR ROBERT CIIILTERN. The affair to which you allude was no more than a speculation. The House of Commons had not yet passed the bill; it might have been rejected.

MRS. CIIEVELEY. It was a swindle, Sir Robert. Let us call things by their proper names. It makes everything simpler. And now I am going to sell you that letter, and the price I ask for it is your public support of the Argentine scheme. You made your own fortune out of one canal. You must help me and my friends to make our fortunes out of another!

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. It is infamous, what 'you propose—infamous!

MRS. CHEVELEY. Oh, no! This is the game of life as we all have to play it, Sir Robert, sooner or later!

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. I cannot do what you ask me.

MRS. CHEVELEY. You mean you cannot help doing it. You know you are standing on the edge of a precipice. And it is not for you to make terms. It is for you to accept them. Supposing you refuse——

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. What then?

MRS. CHEVELEY. My dear Sir Robert, what then? you are ruined, that is all! Remember to what a point your Puritanism in England has brought you. In old days nobody pretended to be a bit better than his neighbours. In fact, to be a bit better than one's neighbour was considered excessively vulgar and middle-class. Nowadays, with our modern mania for morality, everyone has to pose as a paragon of purity, incorruptibility, and all the other seven deadly virtues—and what is the result? You all go over like ninepins—one after the other. Not a year passes in England without somebody disappearing. Scandals used to lend charm, or at least interest, to a man—now they crush him. And yours is a very nasty scandal. You couldn't survive it. If it were known that as a young man, secretary to a great and important minister, you sold a Cabinet secret for a large sum of money, and that that was the origin of your wealth and career, you would be hounded out of public life, you would disappear completely. And after all, Sir Robert, why should you sacrifice your entire future rather than deal diplomatically with your enemy? For the moment I am your enemy. I admit it! And I am much stronger than you are. The big battalions are on my side.

You have a splendid position, but it is your splendid position that makes you so vulnerable. You can't defend it! And I am in attack. Of course I have not talked morality to you. You must admit in fairness that I have spared you that. Years ago you did a clever, unscrupulous thing; it turned out a great success. You owe to it your fortune and position. And now you have got to pay for it. Sooner or later we all have to pay for what we do. You have to pay now. Before I leave you to-night, you have got to promise me to suppress your report, and to speak in the House in favour of this scheme.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. What you ask is impossible.

MRS. CHEVELEY. You must make it possible. You are going to make it possible. Sir Robert, you know what your English newspapers are like. Suppose that when I leave this house I drive down to some newspaper office, and give them this scandal and the proofs of it! Think of their loathsome joy, of the delight they would have in dragging you down, of the mud and mire they would plunge you in. Think of the hypocrite with his greasy smile penning his leading article, and arranging the foulness of the public placard.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. Stop! You want me to withdraw the report and to make a short speech stating that I believe there arc possibilities in the scheme?

mRS. CHEVELEY *[Sitting down on the sofa].* Those are my terms.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN *[In a low Voice].* **I will** give you any sum of money you want.

MRS. CHEVELEY. Even you are not rich enough, Sir Robert, to buy back your past. No man is.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. I will not do what you ask. I will not.

MRS. CHEVELEY. You have to. If you don't. . . *[Rises from the sofa.]*

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN *[Bewildered and unnerved].* Wait a moment! What did you propose? You said that you would give me back my letter, didn't you?

MRS. CHEVELEY. Yes. That is agreed. I will be in the Ladies' Gallery to-morrow night at half-past eleven. If by that time—and you will have had heaps of opportunity—you have made an announcement to the House in the tenns I wish, I shall hand you back your letter with the prettiest thanks, and the best, or at any rate the most suitable, compliment I can think of. I intend to play quite fairly with you. One should always play fairly . . . when one has the winning cards. The Baron taught me that . . . amongst other things.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. You must let me have time to consider your proposal.

MRS. CHEVELEY. No; you must settle now!

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. Give me a week—three days!

MRS. CHEVELEY. Impossible! I have got to telegraph to Vienna to-night.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. My God! what brought you into my life?

MRS. CHEVELEY. Circumstances.

[Moves towards the door.]

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. Doil't go. I *consent.* The report shall be withdrawn. I will arrange for a question to be put to me on the subject.

MRS. CHEVELEY. Thank you. I knew we should come to an amicable agreement. I understood your nature from the first. I analysed you, though you did not adore me. And now you can get my carriage for me, Sir Robert. I see the people coining up from supper, and Englishmen always get romantic after a meal, and that bores me dreadfully. *[Exit* SIR ROBERT CHILTERN.]

[Enter Guests, LADY CHILTERN, LADY MARKBY, LORD CAVERSHAM, LADY BASILDON, MRS. MARCHMONT. VICOMTE DE NANJAC, MR. MONTFORD.]

LADY MARKBY. Well, dear Mrs. Chevelcy, I hope you have enjoyed yourself. Sir Robert is very entertaining, is he not?

MRS. CHEVELEY. Most entertaining! I have enjoyed my talk with him immensely.

LADY MARKBY. He has had a very interesting and brilliant career. And he has married a most admirable wife. Lady Chiltern is a woman of the very highest principles, I am glad to say. I am a little too old now, myself, to trouble about setting a good example, but I always admire people who do. And Lady Chiltern has a very ennobling effect on life, though her dinner-parties are rather dull sometimes. But one can't have everything, can one? And now I must go, dear. Shall I call for you to-morrow?

MRS. CHEVELEY. Thanks.

LADY MARKBY. We might drive in the Park at five. Everything looks so fresh in the Park now!

MRS. CHEVELEY. Except the people!

LADY MARKBY. Perhaps the people are a little jaded. I have often observed that the Season as it goes on produces a kind of softening of the brain. However, I think anything is better than high intellectual pressure. That is the most unbecoming thing there is. It makes the noses of the young girls so particularly large. And there is nothing so difficult to marry as a large nose, men don't like them. Good-night, dear! *[To* LADY CHILTERN.] Good-night, Gertrude! *[Goes out on* LORD CAVERSHAM'S *arm.]*

MRS. CHEVELEY. What a charming house you have, Lady Chiltern! I have spent a delightful evening. It has been so interesting getting to know your husband.

LADY CHILTERN. Why did you wish to meet my husband, Mrs. Cheveley?

MRS. CHEVELEY. Oh, I will tell you. I wanted to interest him in this Argentine Canal scheme, of which I dare say you have heard. And 1 found him most susceptible,—susceptible to reason, I mean. A rare thing in a man. I converted him in ten minutes. He is going to make a speech in the House to-morrow night in favour of the idea. We must go to the Ladies' Gallery and hear him! It will be a great occasion!

LADY CHILTERN. There must be some mistake.

That scheme could never have my husband's support.

MRS. CHEVELEY. Oh, I assure you it's all settled. I don't regret my tedious journey from Vienna now. It has been a great success. But, of course, for the next twenty-four hours the whole thing is a dead secret.

LADY CHILTERN *[Gently].* A secret? Between whom?

MRS. CHEVELEY [*With a flash of amusement in her eyes].* Between your husband and myself.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN *[Entering].* Your carriage is here, Mrs. Chcveley!

MRS. CHEVELEY. Thanks! Good evening, Lady Chillern! Good night, Lord Goring! I am at Claridge's. Don't you think you might leave a card?

LORD GORING. If you wish it, Mrs. Cheveley!

MRS. CHEVELEY. Oh, don't be so solemn about it, or I shall be obliged to leave a card on you. In England I suppose that would be hardly considered *en regie.* Abroad, we are more civilised. Will you see me down, Sir Robert? Now that we have both the same interests at heart we shall be great friends, I hope.

[Sails out on SIR ROBERT CHILTERN'S *arm.* LADY CHILTERN *goes to the top of the staircase and looks down at them as they descend. Her expression is troubled. After a little time she is joined by some of the guests, and passes with them into another reception-room.]*

MABEL CHILTERN. What a horrid woman!

LORD GORING. You should go to bed, Miss Mabel.

MABEL CHILTERN. Lord Goring!

LORD GORING. My father told me to go to bed an hour ago. I don't see why I shouldn't give you the same advice. I always pass on good advice. It is the only thing to do with it. It is never of any use to oneself.

MABEL CHILTERN. Lord Goring, you are always ordering me out of the room. I think it most courageous of you. Especially as I am not going to bed for hours. [Goes *over to sofa.]* You can come and sit down if you like, and talk about anything in the world, except the Royal Academy, Mrs. Chevcley, or novels in Scotch dialect. They are not improving subjects. *[Catches sight of something that is lying on the sofa half-hidden by the cushion.]* What is this? Some one has dropped a diamond brooch! Quite beautiful isn't it? *[Shows it to him.]* I wish it was mine, but Gertrude won't Jet me wear anything but pearls, and I am thoroughly sick of pearls. They make one look so plain, so good and so intellectual. I wonder whom the brooch belongs to?

LORD GORING. I wonder who dropped it.

MABEL CHILTERN. It is a beautiful brooch.

LORD GORING. It is a handsome bracelet.

MABEL CHILTERN. It isn't a bracelet. It's a brooch.

LORD GORING. It can be used as a bracelet. *[Takes it from her, and, pulling out a green letter-case, puts the ornament carefully in it, and replaces*

the whole thing in his breast-pocket zvith the most perfect sang-froid.}

MABEL CHILTERN. What are you doing?

LORD GORING. Miss Mabel, I am going to make a rather strange request of you.

MABEL CHILTERN *[Eagerly].* Oh, pray do! I have been waiting for it all the evening.

LORD GORING *[Is a little taken aback, but recovers himself}.* Don't mention to anybody that I have taken charge of this brooch. Should anyone write and claim it, let me know at once.

MABEL CHILTERN. That is a strange request.

LORD GORING. Well, you see I gave this brooch to somebody once, years ago.

MABEL CHILTERN. YOU did?

LORD GORING. **Yes.**

[LADY CHILTERN *enters alone. The other guests have gone.}*

MABEL CHILTERN. Then I shall certainly bid you good-night. Good-night, Gertrude! *[Exit.]*

LADY CHILTERN. Good-night, dear! [To LORD GORING.] You saw whom Lady Markby brought here to-night.

LORD GORING. Yes. It was an unpleasant surprise. What did she come here for?

LADY CHILTERN. Apparently to try and lure Robert to uphold some fraudulent scheme in which she is interested. The Argentine Canal, in fact.

LORD GORING. She has mistaken her man, hasn't she?

LADY CHILTERN. She is incapable of understanding an upright nature like my husband's!

LORD GORING. Yes. I should fancy she came to grief if she tried to get Robert into her toils. It is extraordinary what astounding mistakes clever women make.

LADY CHILTERN. I don't call women of that kind clever. I call them stupid!

LORD GORING. Same thing often. Good-night, Lady Chiltern!

LADY CHILTERN. Good-night!

[Enter SIR ROBERT CHILTKRN.]

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. My dear Arthur, you are not going? Do stop a little!

LORD GORING. Afraid I can't, thanks. I have promised to look in at the Hartlocks*. I believe they have got a mauve Hungarian band that plays mauve Hungarian music. See you soon. Good-bye. *[Exit.]*

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. How beautiful you look to-night, Gertrude!

LADY CHILTERN. Robert, it is not true, is it? You are not going to lend your support to this Argentine speculation? You couldn't!

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN *[Starling],* Who told you I intended to do so?

LADY CHILTERN. That woman who has just gone out, Mrs. Cheveley, as she calls herself now. She seemed to taunt me with it. Robert, I know this woman. You don't. We were at school together. She was untruthful, dishonest, an evil influence on everyone whose trust or friendship she could win. I hated, I despised her. She stole things, she was a thief. She was sent away for

being a thief. Why do you let her influence you?

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. Gertrude, what you tell me may be true, but it happened many years ago. It is best forgotten! Mrs. Cheveley may have changed since then. No one should be entirely judged by their past.

LADY CHILTERN *[Sadly].* One's past is what one is. It is the only way by which people should be judged.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. That is a hard saying, Gertrude!

LADY CHILTERN. It is a true saying, Robert. And what did she mean by boasting that she had got you to lend your support, your name to a thing I have heard you describe as the most dishonest and fraudulent scheme there has ever been in political life?

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN *[Biting his lip].* I was mistaken in the view I took. We all may make mistakes.

LADY CHILTERN. But you told me yesterday that you had received the report from the Commission, and that it entirely condemned the whole thing.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN *[Walking up and down].* I have reasons now to believe that the Commission was prejudiced, or, at any rate, misinformed. Besides, Gertrude, public and private life are different things. They have different laws, and move on different lines.

LADY CHILTERN. They should both represent

man at his highest. I see no difference between them.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN *[Stopping]*. In the present case, on a matter of practical politics, I have changed my mind. That is all.

LADY CHILTERN. All!

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN *[Sternly]*. Yes!

LADY CHILTERN. Robert! Oh! it is horrible that I should have to ask you such a question—Robert, are you telling me the whole truth?

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. Why do you ask me such a question?

LADY CHILTERN *[After a pause]*. Why do you not answer it?

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN *[Sitting down]*. Gertrude, truth is a very complex thing, and politics is a very complex business. There are wheels within wheels. One may be under certain obligations to people that one must pay. Sooner or later in political life one has to compromise. Everyone does.

LADY CHILTERN. Compromise? Robert, why do you talk so differently to-night from the way I have always heard you talk? Why are you changed?

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. I am not changed. But circumstances alter things.

LADY CHILTERN. Circumstances should never alter principles!

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. But if I told you——

LADY CHILTERN. What?

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. That it was necessary, vitally necessary.

LADY CHILTERN. It can never be necessary to do what is not honourable. Or if it be necessary, then what is it that I have loved! But it is not, Robert; tell me it is not. Why should it be? What gain would you get? Money? We have no need of that! And money that comes from a tainted source is a degradation. Power? But power is nothing in itself. It is power to do good that is fine—that, and that only. What is it, then? Robert, tell me why you are going to do this dishonourable thing?

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. Gertrude, you have no right to use that word. I told you it was a question of rational compromise. It is no more than that.

LADY CHILTERN. Robert, that is all very well for other men, for men who treat life simply as a sordid speculation; but not for you, Robert, not for you. You are different. All your life you have stood apart from others. You have never let the world soil you. To the world, as to myself, you have been an ideal always. Oh! be that ideal still. That great inheritance throw not away—that tower of ivory do not destroy. Robert, men can love what is beneath them—things unworthy, stained, dishonoured. We women worship when we love; and when we lose our worship, we lose everything. Oh! don't kill my love for you, don't kill that!

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. Gertrude!

LADY CHILTERN. I know that there are men with horrible secrets in their lives—men who have

done some shameful thing, and who in some critical moment have to pay for it, by doing some other act of shame—oh! don't tell me you are such as they are! Robert, is there in your life any secret dishonour or disgrace? Tell me, tell me at once, that——

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. That what?

LADY CHILTERN *[Speaking very slowly].* That our lives may drift apart.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. Drift apart?

LADY CHILTERN. That they may be entirely separate. It would be better for us both.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. Gertrude, there is nothing in my past life that you might not know.

LADY CHILTERN. I Was sure of it, **Robert, I Was** sure of it. But why did you say those dreadful things, things so unlike your real self? Don't let us ever talk about the subject again. You will write, won't you, to Mrs. Cheveley, and tell her that you cannot support this scandalous scheme of hers? If you have given her any promise you must take it bark, that is all!

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. Must I write and tell her that?

LADY CHILTERN. Surely, Robert! What else is there to do?

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. I might see her personally. It would be better.

LADY CHILTERN. You must never see her again, Robert. She is not a woman you should ever speak to. She is not worthy to talk to a man like you. No; you must write to her at once, now,

this moment, and let your letter show her that your decision is quite irrevocable!

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. Write this moment!

LADY CHILTEBN. Yes.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. But it is so late. It is close on twelve.

LADY CHILTERN. That makes no matter. She must know at once that she has been mistaken in you—and that you are not a man to do anything base or underhand or dishonourable. Write here, Robert. Write that you decline to support this scheme of hers, as you hold it to be a dishonest scheme. Yes—write the word dishonest. She knows what that word means. [SIR ROBERT CHILTERN *sits down and writes a letter. His wife takes it up and reads it.]* Yes; that will do. *[Kings bell.]* And now the envelope. *[He writes the envelope slowly. Enter* MASON.] Have this letter sent at once to Claridge's Hotel. There is no answer. *[Exit* MASON. LADY CHILTERN *kneels down beside her husband and puts her arms around him.]* Robert, love gives one a sort of instinct to things. I feel to-night that I have saved jou from something that might have been a danger to you, from something that might have made men honour you less than they do. I don't think you realise sufficiently, Robert, that you have brought into the political life of our time a nobler atmosphere, a finer attitude towards life, a freer air of purer aims and higher ideals—I know it, and for that I love you, Robert.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. Oh, love me always, Gertrude, love me always!

LADY CHILTERN. I will love you always, because you will always be worthy of love. We needs must love the highest when we see it! *[Kisses him and rises and goes out.]*

[SIR ROBERT CHILTERN *walks up and down for a moment; then sits down and buries his face in his hands. The* SERVANT *enters and begins putting out the lights.* SIR ROBERT CHILTERN *looks up.}*

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. Put OUt the lights, Mason, put out the lights!

[The SERVANT *puts out the lights. The room becomes almost dark. The only light there is comes from the great chandelier that hangs over the staircase and illumines the tapestry of the Triumph of Love.]*

ACT-DROP

ACT II

SCENE—*Morning-room at* SIR ROBERT CHILTERN's *house.*

[LORD GORING, *dressed in the height of fashion, is lounging in an armchair.* SIR ROBERT CHILTERN is *standing in front of the fireplace. He is evidently in a state of great mental excitement and distress. As the scene progresses he paces nervously up and down the room.]*

LORD GORING. My dear Robert, it's a very awkward business, very awkward indeed. You should have told your wife the whole thing. Secrets from other people's wives are a necessary luxury in modern life. So, at least, I am always told at the club by people who are bald enough to know[7] belter. But no man should have a secret from his own wife. She invariably finds it out. Women have a wonderful instinct about things. They can discover everything except the obvious.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. Arthur, I couldn't tell my wife. When could I have told her? Not last night. It would have made a life-long separation between us, and I would have lost the love of the one woman in the world I worship, of the only woman who has ever stirred love within me. Last night it would have been quite impossible. She would have turned from ine in horror ... in horror and in contempt.

LORD GORING. Is Lady Chiltern as perfect as all that?

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. Yes; my wife is as perfect as all that.

LORD GORING *[Taking off his left-hand glove}.* What a pih I beg your pardon, my dear fellow, I didn't quite mean that. Hut if what you tell me is true, I should like to have a serious talk about life with Lady Chiltern.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. It would be quite useless.

LORD GORING. May I try"

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. Yes; but nothing could make her alter her views.

LORD GORING. Well, at the worst it would sim*ply* be a psychological experiment.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. All such experiments are terribly dangerous.

LORD GORING. Everything is dangerous, my dear fellow. If it wasn't so, life wouldn't be worth living. . . . Well, I am bound to say that I think you should have told her years ago.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. When? When we were engaged? Do you think she would have married me if she had known that the origin of my fortune is such as it is, the basis of my career such as it is, and that 1 had done a thing that 1 suppose most men would call shameful and dishonourable?

LORD GORING *[Slowly].* Yes; most men would call it ugly names. There is no doubt of that.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN *[Bitterly].* Men who every day do something of the same kind them-

selves. Men who, each one of them, have worse seerets in their own lives.

LORD GORING. That is the reason they are so pleased to find out other people's secrets. It distracts public attention from their own.

SIR ROBERT CHiLTERX. And, after all, whom did I wrong by what 1 did? No one.

LORD GORING *[Looking at him steadily}.* Except yourself, Robert.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN *[After a pause].* Of course I had private information about a certain transaction contemplated by the Government of the day, and I acted on it. private information is practically the source of every large modern fortune.

LORD GORING *[Tapping his boot with his tone}.* And public scandal nuariably the result.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN *[Pacing up and down the room].* Arthur, do you think that what I did nearly eighteen years ago should be brought up against me now? Do you think it fair that a man's whole career should be mined for a fault done in one's boyhood almost. 1 was twenty-two at the time, and I had the double misfortune of being well-born and poor, two unforgivable things nowadays. Is it fair that the folly, the sin of one's youth, if men choose to call it a sin, should wreck a life like mine, should place me in the pillory, should shatter all that I have worked for, all that I have built up? Is it fair, Arthur?

LORD GORING. Life is never fair, Robert. And perhaps it is a good thing for most of us that it is not.

SIR ROBERT CHIltERN. Every man of ambition has to fight his century with its own weapons. What this century worships is wealth. The Cod of this century is wealth. To succeed one must have wealth. At all costs one must have wealth.

LORD GORING. You underrate yourself, Robert. Believe me, without wealth you could have succeeded just as well.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. When I was old, perhaps. When I had lost my passion for power, or could not use it. When I was tired, worn out, disappointed. I wanted my success when I was young. Youth is the time for success. I couldn't wait.

LORD GORING. Well, you certainly have had your success while you are still young. No one in our day has had such a brilliant success. Under-secretary for Foreign Affairs at the age of forty—that's good enough for anyone, I should think.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. And if it is all taken away from me now? If I lose everything over a horrible scandal? If I am hounded from public life?

LORD GORING. Robert, how could you have sold yourself for money?

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN *[Excitedly],* I did not sell myself for money. I bought success at a great price. That is all.

LORD GORING *{Grarely}..* Yes; you certainly paid a great price for it. But what first made you think of doing such a thing?

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. Baron Arnheim.

LORD GORING. Damned scoundrel!

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. No; he was a man of a most subtle and refined intellect. A man of culture, charm, and distinction. One of the most intellectual men I ever met.

LORD GORING. All! I prefer a gentlemanly fool any day. There is more to he said for stupidity than people imagine. Personally 1 have a great admiration for stupidity. It is a sort of fellow-feeling, I suppose. But how did he do it? Tell me the whole thing.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN *[Throws hhnsclf into an armchair by the writing table}.* One night after dinner at Iord Radley's the Baron began talking about success in modem life as something that one could reduce to an absolutely definite science. With that wonderfully fascinating quiet voice of his he expounded to us the most terrible of all philosophies, the philosophy of powder, preached to us the most marvellous of all gospels, the gospel of gold. I think he saw the effect he had produced on me, for some days afterwards he wrote and asked me to come and see him. He was living then in Park Lane, in the house Lord Woolcomb has now. I remember so well how, with a strange smile on his pale curved lips, he led me through his wonderful picture gallery, showed me his tapestries, his enamels, his jewels, his carved ivories, made me wonder at the strange loveliness of the luxury in which he lived; and then told me that luxury was nothing but a background, a painted scene in a play, and that power, power over other men,

power over the world was the one thing worth having, the one supreme pleasure worth knowing, the one joy one never tired of, and that in our century only the rich possessed it.

LORD GORING *[With great deliberation].* A thoroughly shallow creed.

SIR ROBERT chiLTERN *[Rising].* I didn't think so then. I don't think so now. Wealth has given me enormous power. It gave me at the very outset of my life freedom, and freedom is everything. You have never been poor, and never known What ambition is. You cannot understand what a wonderful chance the Baron gave me. Such a chance as few men get.

LORD GORING. Fortunately for them, if one is to judge by results. But tell me definitely, how did the Baron finally persuade you to—well, to do what you did?

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. When I was going away he said to me that if I ever could give him any private information of real value ho would make me a very rich man. I was dazed at the prospect he held out to me, and my ambition and my desire for power were at that time boundless. Six weeks later certain private documents passed through my hands.

LORD COKING *[Keeping his eyes steadily fixed on the carpet}.* State documents?

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. Yes. [LORD GORING *sighs, then passes his hand across his forehead and looks up.]*

LORD GORING. I had no idea that you, of **all**

men in the world, could have been so weak, Robert, as to yield to such a temptation as Baron Arnheini held out to you.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. Weak? Oh, I am sick of hearing that phrase. Sick of using it about others. Weak? Do you really think, Arthur, that it is weakness that yields to temptation? I tell you that there are terrible temptations that it requires strength, strength arid courage, to yield to. To stake all one's life on a single moment, to risk everything on one throw, whether the stake be power or pleasure, I care not—there is no weakness in that. There is a horrible, a terrible courage. I had that courage. I sat down the same afternoon and wrote Baron Arnheim the letter this woman now holds. He made three-quarters of a million over the transaction.

LORD GORING. And you?

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. I received from the Baron £110,000.

LORD GORING. You were worth more, Robert.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. No; that money gave me exactly what I wanted, power over others. I went into the House immediately. The Baron advised me in finance from time to time. Before five years I had almost trebled my fortune. Since then everything that I have touched has turned out a success. In all things connected with money I have had a luck so extraordinary that sometimes it has made me almost afraid. I remember having read somewhere, in some strange book, that when the gods wish to punish us they answer our prayers.

LORD GORING. But tell me, Robert, did you never suffer any regret for what you had done?

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. No. I felt that I had fought the century with its own weapons, and won.

LORD GORING *[Sadly].* You thought you had won?

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. I thought so. *[After a long pause.]* Arthur, do you despise me for what I have told you?

LORD GORING *[With deep feeling in his voice].* I am very sorry for you, Robert, very sorry indeed.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. I don't say that I suffered any remorse. I didn't. Not remorse in the ordinary, rather silly sense of the word. But I have paid conscience money many times. I had a wild hope that I might disarm destiny. The sum Baron Arnheim gave me I have distributed twice over in public charities since then.

LORD GORING *[Looking up].* In public charities? Dear me! what a lot of harm you must have done, Robert!

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. Oh, don't say that, Arthur; don't talk like that.

LORD GORING. Never mind what I say, Robert. I am always saying what I shouldn't say. In fact, I usually say what I really think. A great mistake nowadays. It makes one so liable to be misunderstood. As regards this dreadful business, I will help you in whatever way I can. Of course you know that.

SIB ROBERT CHILTEBN. Thank you, Arthur,

thank you. But what is to be done? What can be done?

LORD GORING *[Leaning back with his hands in his pockets].* Well, the English can't stand a man who is always saying he is in the right, but they are very fond of a man who admits that he has been in the wrong. It is one of the best things in them. However, in your case, Robert, a confession would not do. The money, if you will allow me to say so, is . . . awkward. Besides, if you did make a clean breast of the whole affair, you would never be able to talk morality again. And in England a man who can't talk morality twice a week to a large, popular, immoral audience is quite over as a serious politician. There would be nothing left for him as a profession except Botany or the Church. A confession would be of no use. It would ruin you.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. It would ruin me. Arthur, the only thing for me to do now is to fight the thing out.

LORD GORING *[Rising from his chair].* I was waiting for you to say that, Robert. It is the only thing to do now. And you must begin by telling your wife the whole story.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. That I will not do.

LORD GORING. Robert, believe me, you are wrong.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. I Couldn't do it. It would kill her love for me. And now about this woman, this Mrs. Cheveley. How can I defend myself against her. You knew her before, Arthur, apparently.

LORD GORING. Yes.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. Did you know her well?

LORD GORING *[Arranging his necktie].* So little at I got engaged to be married to her once, hen I was staying at the Tenbys'. The affair sted for three days . . . nearly

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. Why was it broken off?

LORD GORING *[Airily].* Oh, I forget. At least, it akes no matter. By the way, have you tried her th money? She used to be confoundedly fond money.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. I offered her any sum e wanted. She refused.

LORD GORING. Then the marvellous gospel of Id breaks down sometimes. The rich can't do erything, after all.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. Not everything. I supse you are right. Arthur, I feel that public disice is in store for me. I feel certain of it. I ver knew what terror was before. I know it w. It is as if a hand of ice were laid upon one's art. It is as if one's heart were beating itself to ath in some empty hollow.

LORD GORING *[Striking the table],* Robert, you ist fight her. You must fight her.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. But how?

LORD GORING. I can't tell you how, at present, lave not the smallest idea. But everyone has ne weak point. There is some flaw in each one us. *[Strolls over to the fireplace and looks at himf in the glass.]* My father tells me that even I ve faults. Perhaps I have. I don't know.

SIB ROBERT CHiLTERN. In defending myself against Mrs. Cheveley, I have a right to use any weapon I can find, have I not?

LORD GORING *[Still looking in the glass].* In your place I don't think I should have the smallest scruple in doing so. She is thoroughly well able to take care of herself.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN *[Sits down at the table and takes a pen in his hand}.* Well, I shall send a cipher telegram to the Embassy at Vienna, to inquire if there is anything known against her. There may be some secret scandal she might be afraid of.

LORD GORING *[Settling his buttonhole}.* Oh, I should fancy Mrs. Cheveley is one of those very modern women of our time who find a new scandal as becoming as a new bonnet, and air them both in the Park every afternoon at five-thirty. I am sure she adores scandals, and that the sorrow of her life at present is that she can't manage to have enough of them.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN *[Writing}.* Why do you say that?

LORD GORING *[Turning round}.* Well, she wore far too much rouge last night, and not quite enough clothes. That is always a sign of despair in a woman.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN *[Striking a bell].* But it is worth while my wiring to Vienna, is it not?

LORD GORING. It is always worth while asking a question, though it is not always worth while answering one.

lEnter MASON.!

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. Is Mr. Trafford in his room?

MASON. Yes, Sir Robert.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN *[Puts what he has written into an envelope, which he then carefully closes].* Tell him to have this sent off in cipher at once. There must not be a moment's delay.

MASON. Yes, Sir Robert.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. Oh! just give that back to me again.

[Writes something on the envelope. MASON *then goes out with the letter.]*

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. She must have had some curious hold over Baron Arnheim. I wonder what it was.

LORD GORING *[Smiling].* I wonder.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. I will fight her to the death, as long as my wife knows nothing.

LORD GORING *[Strongly].* Oh, fight in any case—• in any case.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN *[With a gesture of despair].* If my wife found out, there would be little left to fight for. Well, as soon as I hear from Vienna, I shall let you know the result. It is a chance, just a chance, but I believe in it. And as I fought the age with its own weapons, I will fight her with her weapons. It is only fair, and she looks like a woman with a past, doesn't she?

LORD GORING. Most pretty women do. But there is a fashion in pasts just as there is a fashion in frocks. Perhaps Mrs. Cheveley's past is merely a slightly *dfoollett* one, and they are excessively

popular nowadays. Besides, my dear Robert, I should not build too high hopes on frightening Mrs. Cheveley. I should not fancy Mrs. Cheveley is a woman who would be easily frightened. She has survived all her creditors, and she shows wonderful presence of mind.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. Oh! I live on hopes now. I clutch at every chance. I feel like a man on a ship that is sinking. The water is round my feet, and the very air is bitter with storm. Hush! I hear my wife's voice.

[Enter LADY CHILTERN *in walking dress.]*

LADY CHILTERN. Good afternoon, Lord Goring!

LORD GORING. Good afternoon, Lady Chiltern! Have you been in the Park?

LADY CHILTERN. No: I have just come from the Woman's Liberal Association, where, by the way, Robert, your name was received with loud applause, and now I have come in to have my tea. [To LORD GORING.] You will wait and have some tea, won't you?

LORD GORING. I'll wait for a short time, thanks.

LADY CHILTERN. I will be back in a moment. I am only going to take my hat off.

LORD GORING *[In his most earnest manner].* Oh! please don't. It is so pretty. One of the prettiest hats I ever saw. I hope the Woman's Liberal Association received it with loud applause.

LADY CHILTERN *[With a smile].* We have much more important work to do than to look at each other's bonnets, Lord Goring.

LORD GORING. Really? What sort of work?

LADY CHILTEKN. Oh! dull, useful, delightful things, Factory Acts, Female Inspectors, the Eight Hours Bill, the Parliamentary Franchise. . . . Everything, in fact, that you would find thoroughly uninteresting.

LORD GOEING. And never bonnets?

LADY CHILTERN [*With mock indignation].* Never bonnets, never!

[LADY CHILTEKN *goes out through the door leading to her boudoir.]*

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN *[Takes* LORD GORING'S *hand].* You have been a good friend to me, Arthur, a thoroughly good friend.

LORD GORING. I don't know that I have been able to do much for you, Robert, as yet. In fact, I have not been able to do anything for you, as far as I can see. I am thoroughly disappointed with myself.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. You have enabled me to tell you the truth. That is something. The truth has always stifled me.

LORD GORING. Ah! the truth is a thing I get rid of as soon as possible! Bad habit, by the way. Makes one very unpopular at the club . . . with the older members. They call it being conceited. Perhaps it is.

SIB ROBERT CHILTERN. I Would to God that I had been able to tell the truth ... to live the truth. Ah! that is the great thing in life, to live the truth. *[Sighs, and goes towards the door.]* I'll see you soon again, Arthur, shan't I?

LORD GORING. Certainly. Whenever you like.

I'm going to look in at the Bachelors' Ball to-night, unless I find something better to do. But I'll come round to-morrow morning. If you should want me to-night by any chance, send round a note to Curzon Street.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. Thank you.

[As he reaches the door, LADY CHILTERN *enters from her boudoir.]*

LADY CHILTERN. You are not going, Robert?

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. I have some letters to write, dear.

LADY CHILTERN *[Going to him].* You work too hard, Robert. You seem never to think of yourself, and you are looking so tired.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. It is nothing dear, nothing. *[Pie kisses her and goes out.]*

LADY CHILTERN *[To* LORD GORING]. Do sit down. I am so glad you have called. I want to talk to you about . . . well, not about bonnets, or the Woman's Liberal Association. You take far too much interest in the first subject, and not nearly enough in the second.

LORD GORING. You want to talk to me about Mrs. Cheveley?

LADY CHILTERN. Yes. You have guessed it After you left last night I found out that what she had said was really true. Of course I made Robert write her a letter at once, withdrawing his promise.

LORD GORING. So he gave me to understand.

LADY CHILTERN. To have kept it would have been the first stain on a career that has been stain-

less always. Robert must be above reproach. He is not like other men. He cannot afford to do what other men do. *[She looks at* LORD GORING, *who remains silent.]* Don't you agree with me? You are Robert's greatest friend. You are our greatest friend, Lord Goring. No one, except myself, knows Robert better than you do. He has no secrets from me, and I don't think he has any from you.

LORD GORING. He certainly has no secrets from me. At least I don't think so.

LADY CHILTERN. Then am I not right in my estimate of him? I know I am right. But speak to me frankly.

LORD GORING *[Looking straight at her].* Quite frankly?

LADY CHILTERN. Surely. You have nothing to conceal, have you?

LORD GORING. Nothing. But, my dear Lady Chiltern, I think, if you will allow me to say so, that in practical life——

LADY CHILTERN *[Smiling].* Of which you know so little, Lord Goring——

LORD GORING. Of which I know nothing by experience, though I know something by observation. I think that in practical life there is something about success, actual success, that is a little unscrupulous, something about ambition that is unscrupulous always. Once a man has set his heart and soul on getting to a certain point, if he has to climb the crag, he climbs the crag; if he has to walk in the mire——

LADY CHILTERN. Well?

LORD GORING. He walks in the mire. Of course I am only talking generally about life.

LADY CHILTERN *[Gravely].* I hope so. Why do you look at me so strangely, Lord Goring?

LORD GORING. Lady Chiltern, I have sometimes thought that. . . perhaps you are a little hard in some of your views on life. I think that . . . often you don't make sufficient allowances. In every nature there are elements of weakness, or worse than weakness. Supposing, for instance, that—that any public man, my father, or Lord Merton, or Robert, say had, years ago, written some foolish letter to some one . . .

LADY CHILTERN. What do you mean by a foolish letter?

LORD GORING. A letter gravely compromising one's position. I am only putting an imagery case.

LADY CHILTERN. Robert is as incapable of doing a foolish thing as he is of doing a wrong thing.

LORD GORING *[After a long pause].* Nobody is incapable of doing a foolish thing. Nobody is Incapable of doing a wrong thing.

LADY CHILTERN. Are you a Pessimist? What will the other dandies say. They will all have to go into mourning.

LORD GORING *[Rising].* No, Lady Chiltern, I am not a Pessimist. Indeed I am not sure that I quite know what Pessimism really means. All I do know is that life Cannot be understood without much charity, cannot be lived without much char-

ity. It is love, and not German philosophy, that is the true explanation of this world, whatever may be the explanation of the next. And if you are ever in trouble, Lady Chiltern, trust me absolutely, and I will help you in every way I can. If you ever want me, come to me for my assistance, and you shall have it. Come at once to me.

LADY CHILTERN *[Looking at him in surprise].* Lord Goring, you are talking quite seriously. I don't think I ever heard you talk seriously before.

LORD GORING *[Laughing].* You must excuse me, Lady Chiltern. It won't occur again, if I can help it.

LADY CHILTERN. But I like you to be serious.

[Enter MABEL CHILTERN, *in the most ravishing frock.]*

MABEL CHILTERN. Dear Gertrude, don't say such a dreadful thing to Lord Goring. Seriousness would be very unbecoming to him. Good afternoon, Lord Goring! Pray be as trivial as you can.

LORD GORING. I should like to, Miss Mabel, but I am afraid I am . . .a little out of practice this morning; and besides, I have to be going now.

MABEL CHILTERN. Just when I have come in! What dreadful manners you have! I am sure you were very badly brought up.

LORD GORING. I Was.

MABEL CHILTERN. I wish I had brought you up!

LORD GORING. I am so sorry you didn't.

MABEL CHILTERN. It is too late now, I suppose?

LORD GORING *[Smiling].* *I* am not sure.

MABEL CHILTERN. Will yOU ride tO-morrow morning?

LORD GORING. Yes, at ten.

MABEL CHILTERN. Don't forget.

LORD GORING. Of course I shan't. By the way, Lady Chiltern, there is no list of your guests in 'The Morning Post' of to-day. It has apparently been crowded out by the County Council, or the Lambeth Conference, or something equally boring. Could you let me have a list? I have a particular reason for asking you.

LADY CHILTERN. I am sure Mr. Trafford will be able to give you one.

LORD GORING. Thanks, so much.

MABEL CHILTERN. Tommy is the most useful person in London.

LORD GORING *[Turning to her].* And who is the most ornamental?

MABEL CHILTERN *[Triumphantly].* I am.

LORD GORING. How clever of you to guess it! *[Takes up his hat and cane.]* Good-bye, Lady Chiltern! You will remember what I said to you, won't you?

LADY CHILTERN. Yes; but I don't know why you said it to me.

LORD GORING. I hardly know myself. Good-bye, Miss Mabel!

MABEL CHILTERN *[With a little move of disappointment}.* I wish you were not going. I have had four wonderful adventures this morning; four and a half, in fact. You might stop and listen to some of them.

LORD GORING. How very selfish of you to have four and a half! There won't be any left for me.

MABEL CHILTERN. I don't want you to have any. They would not be good for you.

LORD GORING. That is the first unkind thing you have ever said to me. How charmingly you said it! Ten to-morrow.

MABEL CHILTERN. Sharp.

LORD GORING. Quite sharp. But don't bring Mr. Trafford.

MABEL CHILTERN *[With a little toss of the head\.* Of course I shan't bring Tommy Trafford. Tommy Trafford is in great disgrace.

LORD GORING. I am delighted to hear it. *[Bows and goes out.]*

MABEL CHILTERN. Gertrude, I wish you would speak to Tommy Trafford.

LADY CHILTERN. What has poor Mr. Trafford done this time? Robert says he is the best secretary he has ever had.

MABEL CHILTERN. Well, Tommy has proposed to me again. Tommy really- does nothing but propose to me. He proposed to me last night in the music-room, when I was quite unprotected, as there was an elaborate trio going on. I didn't dare to make the smallest repartee, I need hardly tell you. If I had, it would have stopped the music at once. Musical people are so absurdly unreasonable. They always want one to be perfectly dumb at the very moment when one is longing to be absolutely deaf. Then he proposed to me in broad daylight this morning, in front of that dread-

ful statue of Achilles. Really, the things that go on in front of that work of art are quite appalling. The police should interfere. At luncheon I saw by the glare in his eye that he was going to propose again, and I just managed to check him in time by assuring him that I was a bimetallist. Fortunately I don't know what bimetallism means. And I don't believe anybody else does either. But the observation crushed Tommy for ten minutes. He looked quite shocked. And then Tommy is so annoying in the way he proposes. If he proposed at the top of his voice, I should not mind so much. That might produce some effect on the public. But he does it in a horrid confidential way. When Tommy wants to be romantic he talks to one just like a doctor. I am very fond of Tommy, but his methods of proposing are quite out of date. I wish, Gertrude, you would speak to him, and tell him that once a week is quite often enough to propose to anyone, and that it should always be done in a manner that attracts some attention.

LADY CHILTERN. Dear Mabel, don't talk like that. Besides, Robert thinks very highly of Mr. Trafford. He believes he has a brilliant future before him.

MABEL CHILTERN. Oh! I wouldn't marry a man with a future before him for anything under the sun.

LADY CHILTERN. Mabel!

MABEL CHILTERN. I know, dear. You married a man with a future, didn't you? But then

Robert was a genius, and you have a noble, self-sacrificing character. You can stand geniuses. I have no character at all, and Robert is the only genius I could ever bear. As a rule, I think they are quite impossible. Geniuses talk so much, don't they? Such a bad habit! And they are always thinking about themselves, when I want them to be thinking about me. I must go round now and rehearse at Lady Basildon's. You remember, we are having tableaux, don't you? The Triumph of something, I don't know what! I hope it will be triumph of me. Only triumph I am really interested in at present. *[Kisses* LADY CHILTERN *and goes out; then comes running back.]* Oh, Gertrude, do you know who is coming to see you? That dreadful Mrs. Cheveley, in a most lovely gown. Did you ask her?

LADY CHILTERN *[Rising].* Mrs. Cheveley! Coming to see me? Impossible!

MABEL CHILTERN. I assure you she is coming upstairs, as large as life and not nearly so natural.

LADY CHILTERN. You need not wait, Mabel. Remember, Lady Basildon is expecting you.

MABEL CHILTERN. Oh! I must shake hands with Lady Markby. She is delightful. I love being scolded by her.

[Enter MASON.]

MASON. Lady Markby. Mrs. Cheveley.

[Enter LADY MARKBY *and* MRS. CHEVELEY.]

LADY CHILTERN *[Advancing to meet them].* Dear Lady Markby, how nice of you to come and see me! *[Shakes hands with her, and bows somewhat*

distantly to MRS. CHEVELEY.] Won't you sit down, Mrs. Cheveley?

MRS. CHEVELEY. Thanks. Isn't that Miss Chiltern? I should like so much to know her.

LADY CHILTERN. Mabel, Mrs. Cheveley wishes to know you. [MABEL CHILTERN *gives a little nod.]*

MRS. CHEVELEY *[Sitting down]. I* thought your frock so charming last night, Miss Chiltern. So simple and . . . suitable.

MABEL CHILTERN. Really? I must tell my dressmaker. It will be such a surprise to her. Good-bye, Lady Markby!

LADY MARKBY. Going already?

MABEL CHILTERN. I am so sorry but I am obliged to. I am just off to rehearsal. I have got to stand on my head in some tableaux.

LADY MARKBY. On your head, child? Oh! I hope not. I believe it is most unhealthy. *[Takes a seat on the sofa next* LADY CHILTERN.]

MABEL CHILTERN. But it is for an excellent charity: in aid of the Undeserving, the only people I am really interested in. I am the secretary, and Tommy Trafford is treasurer.

MRS. CHEVELEY. And what is Lord Goring?

MABEL CHILTERN. Oh! Lord Goring is president.

MRS. CHEVELEY. The post should suit him admirably, unless he has deteriorated since I knew him first.

LADY MARKBY *[Reflecting].* You are remarkably modern, Mabel. A little too modem, perhaps. Nothing is so dangerous as being too modern.

One is apt to grow old-fashioned quite suddenly. I have known many instances of it.

MABEL CHILTERN. What a dreadful prospect!

LADY MARKET. Ah! my dear, you need not be nervous. You will always be as pretty as possible. That is the best fashion there is, and the only fashion that England succeeds in setting.

MABEL CHILTERN *[With a curtsey].* Thank you so much, Lady Markby, for England . . . and myself. *[Goes out.}*

LADY MARKBY *[Turning to* LADY CHILTERN]. Dear Gertrude, we just called to know if Mrs. Oheveley's diamond brooch has been found.

LADY CHILTERN. Here?

MRS. CHEVELEY. Yes. I missed it when I got back to Claridge's, and I thought I might possibly have dropped it here.

LADY CHILTERN. I have heard nothing about it. But I will send for the butler and ask. *[Touches the bell]*

MRS. CHEVELEY. Oh, pray, don't trouble, Lady Chiltern. I dare say I lost it at the Opera, before we came on here.

LADY MARKBY. Ah, yes, I suppose it must have been at the Opera. The fact is, we all scramble and jostle so much nowadays that I wonder we have anything at all left on us at the end of an evening. I know myself that, when I am coming back from the Drawing Room, I always feel as if I hadn't a shred on me, except a small shred of decent reputation, just enough to prevent the lower classes making painful observations through the windows

of the carriage. The fact is that our Society is terribly overpopulated. Really, some one should arrange a proper scheme of assisted emigration. It would do a great deal of good.

MRS. CHEVELEY. I quite agree with you, Lady Markby. It is nearly six years since I have been in London for the season, and I must say Society has become dreadfully mixed. One sees the oddest people everywhere.

LADY MARKBY. That is quite true, dear. But one needn't know them. I'm sure I don't know half the people who come to my house. Indeed, from all I hear, I shouldn't like to.

[Enter MASON.]

LADY CHILTERN. What sort of a brooch was it that you lost, Mrs. Cheveley?

MRS. CHEVELEY. A diamond snake-brooch with a ruby, a rather large ruby.

LADY MARKBY. I thought you said there was a sapphire on the head, dear?

MRS. CHEVELEY *[Smiling].* No, Lady Markby—a ruby.

LADY MARKBY *[Nodding her head].* And very becoming, I am quite sure.

LADY CHILTERN. Has a ruby and diamond brooch been found in any of the rooms this morning, Mason?

MASON. No, my lady.

MRS. CHEVELEY. It really is of no consequence, Lady Chiltern. I am so sorry to have put you to any inconvenience.

LADY CHILTERN *[Coldly].* Oh, it has been no in-

convenience. That will do, Mason. You can bring tea.

LADY MARKET. Well, I must say it is most annoying to lose anything. I remember once at Bath, years ago, losing in the Pump Room an exceedingly handsome cameo bracelet that Sir John had given me. I don't think he has ever given me anything since, I am sorry to say. He has sadly degenerated. Really, this horrid House of Commons quite ruins our husbands for us. I think the Lower House by far the greatest blow to a happy married life that there has been since that terrible thing called the Higher Education of Women was invented.

LADY CHILTERN. Ah! it is heresy to say that in this house, Lady Markby. Robert is a great champion of the Higher Education of Women, and so, I am afraid, am I.

MRS. CHEVELEY. The higher education of men is what I should like to see. Men need it so sadly.

LADY MARKBY. They do, dear. But I am afraid such a scheme would be quite unpractical. I don't think man has much capacity for development. He has got as far as he can, and that is not far, is it? With regard to women, well, dear Gertrude, you belong to the younger generation, and I am sure it is all right if you approve of it. In my time, of course, we were taught not to understand anything. That was the old system, and wonderfully interesting it was. I assure you that the amount of things I and my poor dear sister were taught not to understand was quite extraordinary.

But modern women understand everything, I am told.

MRS. CHEVELEY. Except their husbands. That is the one thing the modern woman never understands.

LADY MARKBY. And a very good thing too, dear, I dare say. It might break up many a happy home if they did. Not yours, I need hardly say, Gertrude. You have married a pattern husband. I wish I could say as much for myself. But since Sir John has taken to attending the debates regularly, which he never used to do in the good old days, his language has become quite impossible. He always seems to think that he is addressing the House, and consequently whenever he discusses the state of the agricultural labourer, or the Welsh Church, or something quite improper of that kind, I am obliged to send all the servants out of the room. It is not pleasant to see one's own butler, who has been with one for twenty-three years, actually blushing at the sideboard, and the footmen making contortions in corners like persons in circuses. I assure you my life will be quite ruined unless they send John at once to the Upper House. He won't take any interest in politics then, will he? The House of Lords is so sensible. An assembly of gentlemen. But in his present state, Sir John is really a great trial. Why, this morning before breakfast was half over, he stood up on the hearthrug, put his hands in his pockets and appealed to the country at the top of his voice. I left the table as soon as I had my second cup of

tea, I need hardly say. But his violent language could be heard all over the house! I trust, Gertrude, that Sir Robert is not like that?

LADY CHILTERN. But I am very much interested in politics, Lady Markby. I love to hear Robert talk about them.

LADY MARKBY. Well, I hope he is not as devoted to Blue Books as Sir John is. I don't think they can be quite improving reading for anyone.

MRS. CHEVELEY *[Languidly].* I have never read a Blue Book. I prefer books... in yellow covers.

LADY MARKBY *[Genially unconscious].* Yellow is a gayer colour, is it not? I used to wear yellow a good deal in my early days, and would do so now if Sir John was not so painfully personal in his observations, and a man on the question of dress is always ridiculous, is he not?

MRS. CHEVELEY. Oh, no! I think men are the only authorities on dress.

LADY MARKBY. Really? One wouldn't say so from the sort of hats they wear, would one?

[The butter enters, followed by the footman. Ten is set on a small table close to LADY CHILTERN.]

LADY CHILTERN. May I give you some tea, Mrs. Cheveley?

MRS. CHEVELEY. Thanks. *[The butler hands* MRS. CHEVELEY *a cup of tea on a salver.]*

LADY CHILTERN. Some tea, Lady Markby?

LADY MARKBY. No, thanks, dear. *[The servants go out.]* The fact is, I have promised to go round for ten minutes to see poor Lady Brancaster, who is in very great trouble. Her daughter, quite a

well-brought up girl, too, has actually become engaged to be married to a curate in Shropshire. It is very sad, very sad, indeed. I can't understand this modern mania for curates. In my time we girls saw them, of course, running about the place like rabbits. But we never took any notice of them, I need hardly say. But I am told that nowadays country society is quite honeycombed with them. I think it most irreligious. And then the eldest son has quarrelled with his father, and it is said that when they meet at the club Lord Brancaster always hides himself behind the money article in 'The Times.' However, I believe that is quite a common occurrence nowadays and that they have to take in extra copies of 'The Times' at all the clubs in St. James's Street; there are so many sons who won't have anything to do with their fathers, and so many fathers who won't speak to their sons. I think myself, it is very much to be regretted.

MRS. CHEVELEY. So do I. Fathers have so much to learn from their sons nowadays.

LADY MARKBY. Really, dear? What?

MRS. CHEVELEY. The art of living. The only really Fine Art we have produced in modern times.

LADY MARKBY *[Shaking her head].* Ah! I am afraid Lord Brancaster knew a good deal about that. More than his poor wife ever did. *[Turning to* LADY CHILTERN.] You know Lady Brancaster, don't you, dear?

LADY CHILTERN. Just slightly. She was staying at Langton last autumn, when we were there.

LADY MARKBY. Well, like all stout women, she looks the very picture of happiness, as no doubt you noticed. But there are many tragedies in her family, besides this affair of the curate. Her own sister, Mrs. Jekyll, had a most unhappy life; through no fault of her own, I am sorry to say. She ultimately was so broken-hearted that she went into a convent, or on to the operatic stage, I forget which. No; I think it was decorative art-needlework she took up. I know she had lost all sense of pleasure in life. *[Rising.]* And Gertrude, if you will allow me, I shall leave Mrs. Cheveley in your charge and call back for her in a quarter of an hour. Or perhaps, dear Mrs. Cheveley, you wouldn't mind waiting in the carriage while I am with Lady Brancaster. As I intend it to be a visit of condolence, I shan't stay long.

MRS. CHEVELEY *[Rising],* I don't mind waiting in the carriage at all, provided there is somebody to look at one.

LADY MARKBY. Well, I hear the curate is always prowling about the house.

MRS. CHEVELEY. I am afraid I am not fond of girl friends.

LADY CHILTERN *[Rising].* Oh, I hope Mrs. Cheveley will stay here a little. I should like to have a few minutes' conversation with her.

MRS. CHEVELEY. How very kind of you, Lady Chiltern! Believe me, nothing would give me greater pleasure.

LADY MARKBY. Ah! no doubt you both have many pleasant reminiscences of your schooldays

to talk over together. Good-bye, dear Gertrude! Shall I see you at Lady Bonar's to-night? She has discovered a wonderful new genius. He does . . . nothing at all, I believe. That is a great comfort, is it not?

LADY CHILTERN. Robert and I are dining at home by ourselves to-night, and I don't think I shall go anywhere afterwards. Robert, of course, will have to be in the House. But there is nothing interesting on.

LADY MARKBY. Dining at home by yourselves? Is that quite prudent? Ah, I forgot, your husband is an exception. Mine is the general rule, and nothing ages a woman so rapidly as having married the general rule. *[Exit* LADY MARKBY.]

MRS. CHEVELEY. Wonderful woman, Lady Markby, isn't she? Talks more and says less than anybody I ever met. She is made to be a public speaker. Much more so than her husband, though he is a typical Englishman, always dull and usually violent.

LADY CHILTERN *[Makes no answer, but remains standing. There is a pause. Then the eyes of the two women meet.* LADY CHILTERN *looks stern and pale.* MRS. CHEVELEY *seems rather amused.]* Mrs. Cheveley, I think it is right to tell you quite frankly that, had I known who you really were, I should not have invited you to my house last night.

MRS. CHEVELEY *[With an impertinent smile].* Really?

LADY CHILTERN. I could not have done so.

MBS. CHEVELEY. I see that after all these years you have not changed a bit, Gertrude.

LADY CHILTERN. I never change.

MBS. CHEVELEY *[Elevating her eyebroivs].* Then life has taught you nothing?

LADY CHILTERN. It has taught me that a person who has once been guilty of a dishonest and dishonourable action may be guilty of it a second time, and should be shunned.

MBS. CHEVELEY. Would you apply that rule to everyone?

LADY CHILTERN. Yes, to everyone, without exception.

MBS. CHEVELEY. Then I am sorry for you, Gertrude, very sorry for you.

LADY CHILTERN. You see now, I am sure, that for many reasons any further acquaintance between us during your stay in London is quite impossible?

MBS. CHEVELEY *[Leaning back in her chair.]* Do you know, Gertrude, I don't mind your talking morality a bit. Morality is simply the attitude we adopt towards people whom we personally dislike. You dislike me. I am quite aware of that. And I have always detested you. And yet I have come here to do you a service.

LADY CHILTERN *[Contemptuously].* Like the service you wished to render my husband last night, I suppose. Thank heaven, I saved him from that.

MBS. CHEVELEY *[Starting to her feet}.* It was you who made him write that insolent letter to me? It was you who made him break his promise?

LADY CHILTERN. Yes.

MRS. CHEVELEY. Then you must make him keep it. I give you till to-morrow morning—no more. If by that time your husband does not solemnly bind himself to help me in this great scheme in which I am interested——

LADY CHILTERN. This fraudulent speculation—

MRS. CHEVELEY. Call it what you choose. I hold your husband in the hollow of my hand, and if you are wise you will make him do what I tell him.

LADY CHILTERN *[Rising and going towards her].* You are impertinent. What has my husband to do with you? With a woman like you?

MRS. CHEVELEY *[With a bitter laugh}.* In this world like meets with like. It is because your husband is himself fraudulent and dishonest that we pair so well together. Between you and him there are chasms. He and I are closer than friends. We are enemies linked together. The same sin binds us.

LADY CHILTERN. How dare you class my husband with yourself? How dare you threaten him or me? Leave my house. You are unfit to enter it.

[SIR ROBERT CHILTERN *enters from behind. He hears his wife's last words, and sees to whom they are addressed. He grows deadly pale.}*

MRS. CHEVELEY. Your house! A house bought with the price of dishonour. A house, everything in which has been paid for by fraud. *[Turns round and sees* SIR ROBERT CHILTERN.] Ask him what the origin of his fortune is! Get him to tell you

how he sold to a stockbroker a Cabinet secret. Learn from him to what you owe your position.

LADY CHILTERN. It is not true! Robert! It is not true!

MRS. CHEVELEY *[Pointing at him with outstretched finger}.* Look at him! Can he deny it? Does he dare to?

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. Go! Go at once. You have done your worst now.

MRS. CHEVELEY. My worst? I have not yet finished with you, with either of you. I give you both till to-morrow at noon. If by then you don't do what I bid you to do, the whole world shall know the origin of Robert Chiltern.

[SIR ROBERT CHILTERN *strikes the bell. Enter* MASON.]

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. Show Mrs. Cheveley out.

[MRS. CHEVELEY *starts; then bows with somewhat exaggerated politeness to* LADY CHILTERN, *who makes no sign of response. As she passes by* SIR ROBERT CHILTERN, *who is standing close to the door, she pauses far a moment and looks him straight in the face. She then goes out, followed by the servant, who closes the door after him. The husband and wife are left alone.* LADY CHILTERN *stands like some one in a dreadful dream. Then she turns round and looks at her husband. She looks at him with strange eyes, as though she was seeing him for the first time.]*

LADY CHILTERN. You sold a Cabinet secret for money! You began your life with fraud! You

built up your career on dishonour! Oh, tell me it is not true! Lie to me! Lie to me! Tell me it is not true!

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. What this woman said is quite true. But, Gertrude, listen to me. You don't realise how I was tempted. Let me tell you the whole thing. *[Goes towards her.]*

LADY CHILTERN. Don't come near me. Don't touch me. I feel as if you had soiled me forever. Oh! what a mask you have been wearing all these years! A horrible painted mask! You sold yourself for money. Oh! a common thief were better. You put yourself up to sale to the highest bidder! You were bought in the market. You lied to the whole world. And yet you will not lie to me.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN *[Rushing towards her].* Gertrude! Gertrude!

LADY CHILTERN *[Thrusting him back with outstretched hands].* No, don't speak! Say nothing! Your voice wakes terrible memories—memories of things that made me love you—memories of words that made me love you—memories that now are horrible to me. And how I worshipped you! You were to me something apart from common life, a thing pure, noble, honest, without stain. The world seemed to me finer because you were in it, and goodness more real because you lived. And now—oh, when I think that I made of a man like you my ideal! the ideal of my life!

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. There was your mistake. There was your error. The error all women commit. Why can't you women love us, faults and all?

Why do you place us on monstrous pedestals? We have all feet of clay, women as well as men; but when we men love women, we love them knowing their weaknesses, their follies, their imperfections, love them all the more, it may be, for that reason. It is not the perfect, but the imperfect, who have need of love. It is when we are wounded by our own hands, or by the hands of others, that love should come to cure us—else what use is love at all? All sins, except a sin against itself, Love should forgive. All lives, save loveless lives, true Love should pardon. A man's love is like that. It is wider, larger, more human than a woman's. Women think that they are making ideals of men. What they are making of us are false idols merely. You made your false idol of me, and I had not the courage to come down, show you my wounds, tell you my weaknesses. I was afraid that I might lose your love, as I have lost it now. And so, last night you ruined my life for me—yes, ruined it! What this woman asked of me was nothing compared to what she offered to me. She offered security, peace, stability. The sin of my youth, that I had thought was buried, rose up in front of me, hideous, horrible, with its hands at my throat. I could have killed it forever, sent it back into its tomb, destroyed its record, burned the one witness against me. You prevented me. No one but you, you know it. And now what is there before me but public disgrace, ruin, terrible shame, the mockery of the world, a lonely, dishonoured life, a lonely, dishonoured death, it may be, some

day! Let women make no more ideals of men! let them not put them on altars and bow before them, or they may ruin other lives as completely as you—you whom I have so wildly loved—have ruined mine!

[He passes from the room. LADY CHILTERN *rushes towards him, but the door is closed when she reaches it. Pale with anguish, bewildered, helpless, she sways like a plant in the water. Her hands, outstretched, seem to tremble in the air like blossoms in the wind. Then she flings herself down beside a sofa and buries her face. Her sobs are like the sobs of a child.}*

ACT-DROP

ACT III

SCENE—*The Library in* LORD COKING'S *house. An Adams room. On the right is the door leading into the hall. On the left, the door of the smoking-room. A pair offolding doors at the back open into the drawing-room. The fire is lit.* PHIPPS, *the butler, is arranging some newspapers on the writing-table. The distinction of* PHIPPS *is his impassivity. He has been termed by enthusiasts the Ideal Butler. The Sphinx is not so incommunicable. He is a mask ivith a manner. Of his intellectual or emotional life history knows nothing. He represents the dominance of form.*

[Enter LORD GORING *in evening dress with a buttonhole. He is wearing a silk hat and Inverness cape. White-gloved, he carries a Louis Seize cane. His are all the delicate fopperies of Fashion. One sees that he stands in immediate relation to modern life, makes it indeed, and so masters it. He is the first well-dressed philosopher in the history of thought.]*

LORD GORING. Got my second buttonhole for me, Phipps?

PHIPPS. Yes, my lord. *[Takes his hat, cane and cape, and presents new buttonhole on salver.]*

LORD GORING. Rather distinguished thing, Phipps. I am the only person of the smallest importance in London at present who wears a buttonhole.

PHIPPS. Yes, my lord. I have observed that.

LORD GORING *[Taking out old buttonhole].* You see, Phipps, Fashion is what one wears oneself. What is unfashionable is what other people wear.

PHIPPS. Yes, my lord.

LORD GORING. Just as vulgarity is simply the conduct of other people.

PHIPPS. Yes, my lord.

LORD GORING *[Pulling in new buttonhole].* And falsehoods the truths of other people.

PHIPPS. Yes, my lord.

LORD GORING. Other people are quite dreadful. The only possible society is oneself.

PHIPPS. Yes, my lord.

LORD GORING. To love oneself is the beginning of a life-long romance, Phipps.

PHIPPS. Yes, my lord.

LORD GORING *[Looking at himself in the glass].* Don't think I quite like this buttonhole, Phipps. Makes me look a little too old. Makes me almost in the prime of life, eh, Phipps?

PHIPPS. I don't observe any alteration in your lordship's appearance.

LORD GORING. You don't, Phipps?

PHIPPS. No, my lord.

LORD GORING. I am not quite sure. For the future a more trivial buttonhole, Phipps, on Thursday evenings.

PHIPPS. I will speak to the florist, my lord. She has had a loss in her family lately, which perhaps accounts for the lack of triviality your lordship complains of in the buttonhole.

LORD GORING. Extraordinary thing about the lower classes in England—they are always losing their relations.

PHIPPS. Yes, my lord! They are extremely fortunate in that respect.

LORD GORING *[Turns round and looks at him.* PHIPPS *remains impassive}.* Hum! Any letters, Phipps?

PHIPPS. Three, my lord. *(Hands letters on a salver.]*

LORD GORING *[Takes letters].* Want my cab round in twenty minutes.

PHIPPS. Yes, my lord. *[Goes towards door.]*

LORD GORING *[Holds up letter in pink envelope].* Ahem! Phipps, when did this letter arrive?

PHIPPS. It was brought by hand just after your lordship went to the Club.

LORD GORING. That will do. *[Exit* PHIPPS.] Lady Chiltern's handwriting on Lady Chiltern's pink notepaper. That is rather curious. I thought Robert was to write. Wonder what Lady Chiltern has got to say to me? *[Sits at bureau and opens letter, and reads it.]* 'I want you. I trust you. I am coming to you. Gertrude/ *[Puts down the letter with a puzzled look. Then takes it up, and reads it again slowly.}* 'I want you. I trust you. I am coming to you/ So she has found out everything! Poor woman! Poor woman! *[Pulls out watch and looks at it.]* But what an hour to call! Ten o'clock! I shall have to give up going to the Berkshires'. However, it is always nice to be expected, and not to

arrive. I am not expected at the Bachelors', so I shall certainly go there. Well, I will make her stand by her husband. That is the only thing for her to do. That is the only thing for any woman to do. It is the growth of the moral sense in women that makes marriage such a hopeless, one-sided institution. Ten o'clock. She should be here soon. I must tell Phipps I am not in to anyone else. *[Goes towards bell]*

[Enter PHIPPS.]

PHIPPS. Lord Caversham.

LORD GORING. Oh, why will parents always appear at the wrong time? Some extraordinary mistake in nature, I suppose. *[Enter* LORD CAVERSHAM.] Delighted to see you, my dear father. *[Goes to meet him.]*

LORD CAVERSHAM. Take my cloak off.

LORD GORING. Is it worth while, father?

LORD CAVERSHAM. Of course it is worth while, sir. Which is the most comfortable chair?

LORD GORING. This one, father. It is the chair I use myself, when I have visitors.

LORD CAVERSHAM. Thank ye. No draught, I hope, in this room?

LORD GOBING. No, father.

LORD CAVERSHAM *[Sitting down].* Glad to hear it. Can't stand draughts. No draughts at home.

LORD GORING. Good many breezes, father.

LORD CAVERSHAM. Eh? Eh? Don't understand what you mean. Want to have a serious conversation with you, sir.

LORD GORING. My dear father! At this hour?

LORD CAVEBSHAM. Well, sir, it is only ten o'clock. What is your objection to the hour? I think the hour is an admirable hour!

LORD GORING. Well, the fact is, father, this is not my day for talking seriously. I am very sorry, but it is not my day.

LORD CAVERSHAM. What do you mean, sir?

LORD GORING. During the season, father, I only talk seriously on the first Tuesday in every month, from four to seven.

LORD CAVERSHAM. Well, make it Tuesday, sir, make it Tuesday.

LORD GORING. But it is after seven, father, and my doctor says I must not have any serious conversation after seven. It makes me talk in my sleep.

LORD CAVERSHAM. Talk in your sleep, sir? What does that matter? You are not married.

LORD GORING. No, father, I am not married.

LORD CAVERSHAM. Hum! That is what I have come to talk to you about, sir. You have got to get married, and at once. Why, when I was your age, sir, I had been an inconsolable widower for three months, and was already paying my addresses to your admirable mother. Damme, sir, it is your duty to get married. You can't be always living for pleasure. Every man of position is married nowadays. Bachelors are not fashionable any more. They are a damaged lot. Too much is known about them. You must get a wife, sir. Look where your friend Robert Chiltern has got to by probity, hard work, and a

sensible marriage with a good woman. Why don't you imitate him, sir? Why don't you take him for your model?

LORD GORING. I think I shall, father.

LORD CAVERSHAM. I wish you would, sir. Then I should be happy. At present I make your mother's life miserable on your account. You are heartless, sir, quite heartless.

LORD GORING. I hope not, father.

LORD CAVERSHAM. And it is high time for you to get married. You are thirty-four years of age, sir.

LORD GORING. Yes father, but I only admit to thirty-two—thirty-one and a half when I have a really good buttonhole. This buttonhole is not . . trivial enough.

LORD CAVERSHAM. I tell you you are thirty-four, sir. And there is a draught in your room, besides, which makes your conduct worse. Why did you tell me there was no draught, sir? I feel a draught, sir, I feel it distinctly.

LORD GORING. So do I, father. It is a dreadful draught. I will come and see you to-morrow, father. We can talk over anything you like. Let me help you on with your cloak, father.

LORD CAVERSHAM. No, sir; I have called this evening for a definite purpose, and I am going to see it through at all costs to my health or yours. Put down my cloak, sir.

LORD GORING. Certainly, father. But let us go into another room. *[Rings bell.]* There is a dreadful draught here. *[Enter* PHIPPS.] Phipps, is there a good fire in the smoking-room?

PHIPPS. Yes, my lord.

LORD GORING. Come in there, father. Your sneezes are quite heart-rending.

LORD CAVERSHAM. Well, sir, I suppose I have a right to sneeze when I choose?

LORD GORING *[Apologetically].* Quite so, father. I was merely expressing sympathy.

LORD CAVERSHAM. Oh, damn sympathy. There is a great deal too much of that sort of thing going on nowadays.

LORD GORING. I quite agree with you, father. If there was less sympathy in the world there would be less trouble in the world.

LORD CAVERSHAM. *[Going towards the smoking-room].* That is a paradox, sir. I hate paradoxes.

LORD GORING. So do I, father. Everybody one meets is a paradox nowadays. It is a great bore. It makes society so obvious.

LORD CAVERSHAM *[Turning round, and looking at his son beneath his bushy eyebrows].* Do you always really understand what you say, sir?

LORD GORING *[After some hesitation].* Yes, father, if I listen attentively.

LORD CAVERSHAM *[Indignantly].* If you listen attentively! . . . Conceited young puppy!

[Goes off grumbling into the smoking-room. PHIPPS *enters.]*

LORD GORING. Phipps, there is a lady coming to see me this evening on particular business. Show her into the drawing-room when she arrives. You understand?

PHIPPS. Yes, my lord.

LORD GORING. It is a matter of the gravest importance, Phipps.

PHIPPS. I understand, my lord.

LORD GORING. No one else is to be admitted, under any circumstances.

PHIPPS. I understand, my lord. *[Bell rings.]*

LORD GORING. Ah! that is probably the lady. I shall see her myself.

[Just as he is going towards the door LORD CAVERSHAM *enters from the smoking-room}.*

LORD CAVERSHAM. Well, sir? am I to wait attendance on you?

LORD GORING *[Considerably perplexed].* In a moment, father. Do excuse me. [LORD CAVERSHAM *goes back.]* Well, remember my instructions, Phipps—into that room.

PHIPPS. Yes, my lord.

[LORD GORING *goes into the smoking-room.* HAROLD, *the footman, shows* MRS. CHEVELEY *in. Lamia-like, she is in green and silver. She has a cloak of black satin, lined urith dead rose-leaf silk.]*

HAROLD. What name, madam?

MRS. CHEVELEY *[To* PHIPPS, *who advances towards her].* Is Lord Goring not here? I was told he was at home?

PHIPPS. His lordship is engaged at present with Lord Caversham, madam.

[Turns a cold, glassy eye on HAROLD, *who at once retires.]*

MRS. CHEVELEY *[To herself].* How very filial!

PHIPPS. His lordship told me to ask you, madam, to be kind enough to wait in the drawing-

room for him. His lordship will come to you there.

MRS, CHEVELEY *[With a look of surprise].* Lord Goring expects me?

PHIPPS. Yes, madam.

MR,;. CHEVELEY. Are you quite sure?

PHIPPS. His lordship told me that if a lady called I was to ask her to wait in the drawing-room. *[Goes to the door of the drawing-room and opens it.]* His lordship's directions on the subject were very precise.

MRS. CHEVELEY *[To herself].* How thoughtful of him! To expect the unexpected shows a thoroughly modern intellect. *[Goes towards the drawing-room and looks in.]* Ugh! How dreary a bachelor's drawing-roorn always looks. I shall have to alter all this [PHIPPS *brings the lamp from the writing-table.}* No, I don't care for that lamp. It is far too glaring. Light some candles.

PHIPPS *[Replaces lamp].* Certainly, madam.

MRS. CHEVELEY. I hope the candles have very becoming shades.

PHIPPS. We have had no complaints about them, madam, as yet.

[Passes into the drawing-room and begins to light ihe candles.]

MRS. CHEVELEY *[To herself].* I wonder what woman he is waiting for to-night. It will be delightful to catch him. Men always look so silly when they are caught. And they are always being caught. *[Looks about room and approaches the writing-table}* What a very interesting room!

What a very interesting picture! Wonder what his correspondence is like. *[Takes up letters.]* Oh, what a very uninteresting correspondence! Bills and cards, debts and dowagers! Who on earth writes to him on pink paper? How silly to write on pink paper! It looks like the beginning of a middle-class romance. Romance should never begin with sentiment. It should begin with science and end with a settlement. *[Puts letter down, then takes it up again.}* I know that hand-writing. That is Gertrude Chiltern's. I remember it perfectly. The ten commandments in every stroke of the pen, and the moral law all over the page. Wonder what Gertrude is writing to him about? Something horrid about me, I suppose. How I detest that woman! *[Reads it.]* ' I trust you. I want you. I am coming to you, Gertrude 'I trust you. I want you. I am coming to you.'

[A *look of triumph comes over her face. She is just about to steal the letter, when* PHIPPS *comes in]*

PHIPPS. The candles in the drawing-room are lit, madam, as you directed.

MRS. CHEVELEY. Thank you. *[Rises hastily, and slips the letter under a large silver-cased blotting-book that is lying on the table.]*

PHIPPS. I trust the shades will be to your liking, madam. They are the most becoming we have. They are the same as his lordship uses himself when he is dressing for dinner.

MRS. CHEVELEY *[With a smile].* Then I am sure they will be perfectly right.

PHIPPS *[Gravely].* Thank you, madam.

[MRS. CHEVELEY *goes into the drawing-room.* PHIPPS *closes the door and retires. The door is then slowly opened, and* MRS. CHEVELEY *comes out and creeps stealthily towards the writing-table. Suddenly voices are heard from the smoking-room.* MRS. CHEVELEY *groivs pale, and stops. The valces grow louder, and she goes back into the drawing-room, biting her lip.]*

[Enter LORD GORING *and* LORD CAVERSHAM.]

LORD GORING *[Expostulating].* My dear father, if I am to get married, surely you will allow me to choose the time, place and person? Particularly the person.

LORD CAVERSHAM *[Testily].* That is a matter for me, sir. You would probably make a very poor choice. It is I who should be consulted, not you. There is property at stake. It is not a matter for affection. Affection comes later on in married life.

LORD GORING. Yes. In married life affection comes when people thoroughly dislike each other, father doesn't it? *[Puts on* LORD CAVERSHAM'S *cloak for him.]*

LORD CAVERSHAM. Certainly, sir. I mean certainly not, sir. You are talking very foolishly tonight. What I say is that marriage is a matter for common sense.

LORD GORING. But women who have common sense are so curiously plain, father, aren't they? Of course I only speak from hearsay.

LORD CAVERSHAM. No woman, plain or pretty,

has any common sense at all, sir. Common sense is the privilege of our sex.

LORD GORING. Quite so. And we men are so self-sacrificing that we never use it, do we, father?

LORD CAVERSHAM. I use it, sir. I use nothing else.

LORD GORING. So my mother tells me.

LORD CAVERSHAM. It is the secret of your mother's happiness. You arc very heartless, sir, very heartless.

LORD GORING. I hope not, father.

[Goes out for a moment. Then returns, looking rather put out, with SIR ROBERT CHILTERN.]

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. My dear Arthur, what a piece of good luck meeting *you* on the doorstep! Your servant had just told me you were not at home. How extraordinary!

LORD GORING. The fact is, I am horribly busy to-night, Robert, and I gave orders I was not at home to anyone. Even my father had a comparatively cold reception. He complained of a draught the whole time.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. All! you must be at home to me, Arthur. You are my best friend. Perhaps by to-morrow you will be my only friend. My wife has discovered everything.

LORD GORING. Ah! I guessed as much!

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN *[Looking at him]*. Really! How?

LORD GORING *[After some hesitation]*. Oh, merely by something in the expression of your face as you came in. Who told her?

SIR ROBERT CHiLTERN. Mrs. Cheveley herself. And the woman I love knows that I began my career with an act of low dishonesty, that I built up my life upon the sands of shame—that I sold, like a common huckster, the secret that had been intrusted to me cos a man of honour. I thank heaven poor Lord Radley died without knowing that I betrayed him. I would to God I had died before I had been so horribly tempted, or had fallen so low. *[Burying his face in his hands.]*

LORD GORING *[After a pause].* You have heard nothing from Vienna yet, in answer to your wire?

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN *[Looking up].* Yes; I got a telegram from the first secretary at eight o'clock to-night.

LORD GORING. **Well?**

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. Nothing is absolutely known against her. On the contrary, she occupies a rather high position in society. It is a sort of open secret that Baron Arnheim left her the greater portion of his immense fortune. Beyond that I can learn nothing.

LORD GORING. She doesn't turn out to be a spy, then?

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. Oh! spies are of no use nowadays. Their profession is over. The newspapers do their work instead.

LORD GORING. And thunderingly well they do it.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. Arthur, I ain parched with thirst. May I ring for something? Some hock and seltzer?

LORD GORING. Certainly. Let me. *[Rings the bell]*

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. Thanks! I don't know what to do, Arthur, I don't know what to do, and you are ray only friend. But what a friend you are—the one friend I can trust. I can trust you absolutely, can't I?

[Enter PHIPPS.]

LORD GORING. My dear Robert, of course. Oh! *[To* PHIPPS.] Bring some hock and seltzer.

PHIPPS. Yes, my lord.

LORD GORING. And Phipps!

PHIPPS. Yes, my lord.

LORD GORING. Will you excuse me for a mo ment, Robert? I want to give some directions to my servant.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. Certainly.

LORD GORING. When that lady calls, tell her that I am not expected home this evening. Tell her that I have been suddenly called out of town. You understand?

PHIPPS. The lady is in that room, my lord. You told me to show her into that room, my lord.

LORD GORING. You did perfectly right. *[Exit* PHIPPS.] What a mess I am in. No; I think I shall get through it. I'll give her a lecture through the door. Awkward thing to manage, though.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. Arthur, tell me what I should do. My life seems to have crumbled about me. I am a ship without a rudder in a night without a star.

LORD GORING. Robert, you love your wife, don't you?

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. I love her more than anything in the world. I used to think ambition the great thing. It is not. Love is the great thing in the world. There is nothing but love, and I love her. But I am defamed in her eyes. I am ignoble in her eyes. There is a wide gulf between us now. She has found me out, Arthur, she has found me out.

LORD GORING. Has she never in her life done some folly—some indiscretion—that she should not forgive your sin?

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. My wife! Never! She does not know what weakness or temptation is. I am of clay like other men. She stands apart as good women do—pitiless in her perfection—cold and stern and without mercy. But I love her, Arthur. We are childless, and I have no one else to love, no one else to love me. Perhaps if God had sent us children she might have been kinder to me. But God has given us a lonely house. And she has cut my heart in two. Don't let us talk of it. I was brutal to her this evening. But I suppose when sinners talk to saints they are brutal always. I said to her things that were hideously true, on my side, from my standpoint, from the standpoint of men. But don't let us talk of that.

LORD GORING. Your wife will forgive you. Perhaps at this moment she is forgiving you. She loves you, Robert. Why should she not forgive?

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. God grant it! God

grant it! *[Buries his face in his hands.]* But there is something more I have to tell you, Arthur.

[Enter PHIPPS *with drinks.]*

PHIPPS *[Hands hock and seltzer to* SIR ROBERT CHILTERN]. Hock and seltzer, sir.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. Thank you.

LORD GORING. Is your carriage here, Robert?

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. No; I walked from the club.

LORD GORING. Sir Robert will take my cab, Phipps.

PHIPPS. Yes, my lord.

LORD GORING. Robert, you don't mind my sending you away?

SIR HOBERT CHILTERN. Arthur, you must let me stay for five minutes. I have made up my mind what I am going to do to-night in the House. The debate on the Argentine Canal is to begin at eleven. [A *chair falls in the draiving-room.]* What is that?

LORD GORING. Nothing.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. I heard a chair fall in the next room. Some one has been listening.

LORD GORING. No, no; there is no one there.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. There is some one. There are lights in the room, and the door is ajar. Some one has been listening to every secret of my life. Arthur, what does this mean?

LORD GORING. Robert, you are excited, unnerved. I tell you there is no one in that room. Sit down, Robert.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. Do you give me your word that there is no one there?

LORD GORING. Yes.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. Your Word of honOUT? *[Sits down.]*

LORD GORING. Yes.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN *[Rues].* Arthur, let me see for myself.

LORD GORING. No, no.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. If there is no one there why should I not look in that room? Arthur, you must let me go into that room and satisfy myself. Let me know that no eavesdropper has heard my life's secret. Arthur, you don't realise what I am going through.

LORD GORING. Robert, this must stop. I have told you that there is no one in that room—that is enough.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN ***[Rushes to the door of tilt room].*** It is not enough. I insist on going into this room. You have told me there is no one there, so what reason can you have for refusing me?

LORD GORING. For God's sake, don't! There is some one there. Some one whom you must not see.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. Ah, I thought SO!

LORD GORING. I forbid you to enter that room.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. Stand back. My life is at stake. And I don't care who is there. I will know who it is to whom I have told my secret and my shame. *[Enters room}*

LORD GORING. Great Heaven! his own wife!

[SIR ROBERT CHILTERN *comes back, with a look of scorn and anger on his face}*

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. What explanation have you to give me for the presence of that woman here?

LORD GORING. Robert, I swear to you on my honour that that lady is stainless and guiltless of all offence towards you.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. She is a vile, an infamous thing!

LORD GORING. Don't say that, Robert! It was for your sake she came here. It was to try and save you she came here. She loves you and no one else.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. You are mad. What have I to do with her intrigues with you? Let her remain your mistress! You are well suited to each other. She, corrupt and shameful—you, false as a friend, treacherous as an enemy even——

LORD GORING. It is not true, Robert. Before heaven, it is not true. In her presence and in yours I will explain all.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. Let me pass, sir. You have lied enough upon your word of honour.

[SIR ROBERT CHILTERN *GOES Out.* LORD GORING *rushes to the door of the drawing-room, when* MRS. CHEVELEY *comes out, looking radiant and much amused.]*

MRS. CHEVELEY *[With a mock curtsey].* Good evening, Lord Goring!

LORD GORING. Mrs. Cheveley! Great Heavens! . . . May I ask what you were doing in my drawing-room?

MRS. CHEVELEY. Merely listening. I have a

perfect passion for listening through keyholes. One always hears such wonderful things through them.

LORD GORING. Doesn't that sound rather like tempting Providence?

MRS. CHEVELEY. Oh! surely Providence can resist temptation by this time. *[Makes a sign to him to take her cloak off, which he does.]*

LORD GORING. I am glad you have called. I am going to give you some good advice.

MRS. CHEVELEY. Oh! pray don't. One should never give a woman anything that she can't wear in the evening.

LORD GORING. I see you are quite as willful as you used to be.

MRS. CHEVELEY. Far more! I have greatly improved. I have had more experience.

LORD GORING. Too much experience is a dangerous thing. Pray have a cigarette. Half the pretty women in London smoke cigarettes. Personally I prefer the other half.

MRS. CHEVELEY. Thanks. I never smoke. My dressmaker wouldn't like it, and a woman's first duty in life is to her dressmaker, isn't it? What the second duty is, no one has as yet discovered.

LORD GORING. You have come here to sell me Robert Chiltern's letter, haven't you?

MRS. CHEVELEY. To offer it to you on conditions. How did you guess that?

LORD GORING. Because you haven't mentioned the subject. Have you got it with you?

MRS. CHEVELEY *[Sitting down].* Oh, no! A well-made dress has no pockets.

LOED GORING. What is your price for it?

MRS. CHE VELE Y. How absurdly English you are I The English think that a cheque-book can solve every problem in life. Why, my dear Arthur, I have very much more money than you have, and quite as much as Robert Chiltcrn has got hold of. Money is not what I want.

LORD GORING. What do you want then, Mrs. Cheveley?

MRS. CHEVELBY. Why don't you call me Laura?

LORD GORING. I don't like the name.

MRS. CHEVELEY. You used to adore it.

LORD GORING. Yes; that's why. [MRS. CHEVELEY *motions to him to sit down beside her. He smiles, and docs so.]*

MRS. CHEVELEY. Arthur, you loved me once,

LORD GORING. Yes.

MRS. CHEVELEY. And you asked me to be your wife.

LORD GORING. That was the natural result of my loving you.

MRS. CHEVELEY. And you threw me over because you saw, or said you saw, poor old Lord Mortlake trying to have a violent flirtation with me in the conservatory at Tcnby.

LORD GORING. I am under the impression that my lawyer settled that matter with you on certain terms . . . dictated by yourself.

MRS. CHEVELEY. At that time I was poor; you were rich.

LORD GORING. Quite so. That is why you pretended to love me.

MRS. CHEVELEY *[Shrugging her shoulders].* Poor old Lord Mortlake, who had only two topics of conversation, his gout and his wife. I never could quite make out which of the two he was talking about. He used the most horrible language about them both. Well, you were silly, Arthur. Why, Lord Mortlake was never anything more to me than an amusement. One of those utterly tedious amusements one only finds at an English country house on an English country Sunday. I don't think anyone at all morally responsible for what he or she docs at an English country house.

LORD GORING. Yes. I know lots of people think that.

MRS. CHEVELEY. I loved you, Arthur.

LORD GORING. My dear Mrs. Cheveley, you have always been far too clever to know anything about love.

MRS. CHEVELEY. I did love you. And you loved me. You know you loved me; and love is a very wonderful thing. I suppose that when a man has once loved a woman, he will do anything for her, except continue to love her? *[Puts her hand on his.]*

LORD GORING *[Taking his hand away quietly].* Yes: except that.

MRS. CHEVELEY *[After a pause].* I am tired of living abroad. I want to come back to London. I want to have a charming house here. I want to have a salon. If one could only teach the English how to talk, and the Irish how to listen, society

here would be quite civilised. Besides, I have arrived at the romantic stage. When I saw you last night at the Chilterns' I knew you were the only person I had ever cared for, if I ever have cared for anybody, Arthur. And so, on the morn- of the day you marry me, I will give you Robert Chiltern's letter. That is my offer. I will give it to you now, if you promise to marry me.

LORD GORING. Now?

MRS. CHEVELEY *[Smiling].* To-morrow.

LORD GORING. Are you really serious?

MRS. CHEVELEY. Yes, quite serious.

LORD GORING. I should make you a very bad husband.

MRS. CHEVELEY. I don't mind bad husbands. I have had two. They amused me immensely.

LORD GORING. You mean that you amused yourself immensely, don't you?

MRS. CHEVELEY. What do you know about my married life?

LORD GORING. Nothing: but I can read it like a book.

MRS. CHEVELEY. What book?

LORD GORING *[Rising].* The Book of Num- bers.

MRS. CHEVELEY. Do you think it quite charm- ing of you to be so rude to a woman in your own house?

LORD GORING. In the case of very fascinating women, sex is a challenge, not a defence.

MRS. CHEVELEY. I suppose that is meant for a compliment. My dear Arthur, women are never

disarmed by compliments. Men always are. That is the difference between the two sexes.

LORD GORING. Women are never disarmed by anything, as far as I know them.

MRS. CHEVELEY *[After a pause].* Then you are going to allow your greatest friend, Robert Chiltern, to be ruined, rather than marry some one who really has considerable attractions left? I thought you would have risen to some great height of self-sacrifice, Arthur. I think you should. And the rest of your life you could spend in contemplating your own perfections.

LORD GORING. Oh! I do that as it is. And self-sacrifice is a thing that should be put down by law. It is so demoralising to the people for whom one sacrifices oneself. They always go to the bad.

MRS. CHEVELEY. As if anything could demoralise Robert Chiltern! You seem to forget that I know his real character.

LORD GORING. What you know about him is not his real character. It was an act of folly done in his youth, dishonourable, I admit, shameful, I admit, unworthy of him, I admit, and therefore . . . not his true character.

MRS. CHEVELEY. How you men stand up for each other!

LORD GORING. How you women war against each other!

MRS. CHEVELEY *[Bitterly].* *I* only war against one woman, against Gertrude Chiltern. I hate her. I hate her now more than ever.

LORD GORING. Because you have brought a real tragedy into her life, I suppose.

MRS. CHEVELEY *[With a sneer].* Oh, there is only one real tragedy in a woman's life. The fact that her past is always her lover, and her future invariably her husband.

LORD GORING. Lady Chiltern knows nothing of the kind of life to which you are alluding.

MRS. CHEVELEY. A woman whose size in gloves is seven and three-quarters never knows much about anything. You know Gertrude has always worn seven and three-quarters? That is one of the reasons why there was never any moral sympathy between us . . . Well, Arthur, I suppose this romantic interview may be regarded as at an end. You admit it was romantic, don't you? For the privilege of being your wife I was ready to surrender a great prize, the climax of my diplomatic career. You decline. Very well. If Sir Robert doesn't uphold my Argentine scheme, I expose him. *Voila tout.*

LORD GORING. You mustn't do that. It would be vile, horrible, infamous.

MRS. CHEVELEY *[Shrugging her shoulders].* Oh! don't use big words. They mean so little. It is a commercial transaction. That is all. There is no good mixing up sentimentality in it. I offered to sell Robert Chiltern a certain thing. If he won't pay me my price, he will have to pay the world a greater price. There is no more to be said. I must go. Good-bye. Won't you shake hands?

LOBD GORING. With you? No. Your transaction with Robert Chiltern may pass as a loathsome commercial transaction of a loathsome commercial age; but you seem to have forgotten that you who came here to-night to talk of love, you whose lips desecrated the word love, you to whom the thing is a book closely sealed, went this afternoon to the house of one of the most noble and gentle women in the world to degrade her husband in her eyes, to try and kill her love for him, to put poison in her heart, and bitterness in her life, to break her idol and, it may be, spoil her soul. That I cannot forgive you. That was horrible. For that there can be no forgiveness.

MRS. CHEVELEY. Arthur, you are unjust to me. Believe me, you are quite unjust to me. I didn't go to taunt Gertrude at all. I had no idea of doing anything of the kind when I entered. I called with Lady Markby simply to ask whether an ornament, a jewel, that I lost somewhere last night, had been found at the Chilterns'. If you don't believe me, you can ask Lady Markby. She will tell you it is true. The scene that occurred happened after Lady Markby had left, and was really forced on me by Gertrude's rudeness and sneers. I called, oh!—a little out of malice if you like—but really to ask if a diamond brooch of mine had been found. That was the origin of the whole thing.

LORD GORING. A diamond snake-brooch with a ruby?

MRS. CHEVELEY. Yes. How do you know?

LORD GORING. Because it is found. In point of fact, I found it myself, and stupidly forgot to tell the butler anything about it as I was leaving. *[Goes over to the writing-table and pulls out the drawers.]* It is in this drawer. No, that one. This is the brooch, isn't it? *[Holds up the brooch.]*

MRS. CHEVELEY. Yes. I am so glad to get it back. It was . . . a present.

LORD GORING. Won't you wear it?

MRS. CHEVELEY. Certainly, if you pin it in. [LORD GORING *suddenly clasps it on her arm.]* Why do you put it on as a bracelet? I never knew it could be worn as a bracelet.

LORD GORING. Really?

MRS. CHEVELEY *[Holding out her handsome arm].* No; but it looks very well on me as a bracelet, doesn't it?

LORD GORING. Yes; much better than when I saw it last.

MRS. CHEVELEY. When did you see it last?

LORD GORING *[Calmly].* Oh, ten years ago, on Lady Berkshire, from whom you stole it.

MRS. CHEVELEY *[Starting].* What do you mean?

LORD GORING. I mean that you stole that ornament from my cousin, Mary Berkshire, to whom I gave it when she was married. Suspicion fell on a wretched servant, who was sent away in disgrace. I recognised it last night. I determined to say nothing about it till I had found the thief. I have found the thief now, and I have heard her own confession.

MRS. CHEVELEY *[Tossing her head].* It is not true.

LORD GORING. You know it is true. Why, thief is written across your face at this moment.

MRS. CHEVELEY. I will deny the whole affair from beginning to end. I will say that I have never seen this wretched thing, that it was never in my possession.

[MRS. CHEVELEY *tries to get the bracelet off her arm, but fails.* LORD GORING *looks on amused. Her thin fingers tear at the jewel to no purpose. A curse breaks from her.]*

LORD GORING. The drawback of stealing a thing, Mrs. Cheveley, is that one never knows how wonderful the thing that one steals is. You can't get that bracelet off, unless you know where the spring is. And I see you don't know where the spring is. It is rather difficult to find.

MRS. CHEVELEY. You brute! You coward! *[She tries again to unclasp the bracelet, but fails.]*

LORD GORING. Oh! don't use big words. They mean so little.

MRS. CHEVELEY *[Again tears at the bracelet in a paroxysm of rage, with inarticulate sounds. Then stops, and looks at* LORD GORING]. What are you going to do?

LORD GORING. I am going to ring for my servant. He is an admirable servant. Always comes in the moment one rings for him. When he comes I will tell him to fetch the police.

MRS. CHEVELEY *[Trembling].* The police? What for?

LORD GORING. To-morrow the Berkshires will prosecute you. That is what the police are for.

MRS. CHEVELEY *[Is now in an agony of physical terror. Her face is distorted. Her mouth awry. A mask has fallen from her. She is, for the moment, dreadful to look at].* Don't do that. I will do anything you want. Anything in the world you want.

LORD GORING. Give me Robert Chiltern's letter.

MRS. CHEVELEY. Stop! Stop! Let me have time to think.

LORD GORING. Give me Robert Chiltern's letter.

MRS. CHEVELEY. I have not got it with me. I will give it to you to-morrow.

LORD GORING. You know you are lying. Give it to me at once. [MRS. CHEVELEY *pulls the letter out, and hands it to him. She is horribly pale.]* This is it?

MRS. CHEVELEY *[In a hoarse voice].* Yes.

LORD GORING *[Takes the letter, examines il, sighs, and burns it over the lamp].* For so well-dressed a woman, Mrs. Cheveley, you have moments of admirable common sense. I congratulate you.

MRS. CHEVELEY *[Catches sight of* LADY CHILTERN'S *letter, the cover of which is just showing from under the blotting-book].* Please get me a glass of water.

LORD GORING. Certainly. *[Goes to the corner of the room and pours out a glass of water. While his back is turned* MRS. CHEVELEY *steals* LADY CHILTERN'S *letter. When* LORD GORING *returns with the glass she refuses it with a gesture.}*

MRS. CHEVELEY. Thank you. Will you help me on with my cloak?

LORD GORING. With pleasure. *[Puts her cloak on.]*

MRS. CHEVELEY. Thanks, I am never going to try to harm Robert Chiltern again.

LORD GORING. Fortunately you have not the chance, Mrs. Chcveley.

MRS. CHEVELEY. Well, if even I had the chance, I wouldn't. On the contrary, I am going to render him a great service.

LORD GORING. I am charmed to hear it. It is a reformation.

MRS. CHEVELEY. Yes. I can't bear so upright a gentleman, so honourable an English gentleman, being so shamefully deceived, and so——

LORD GORING. Well?

MRS. CHEVELEY. I find that somehow Gertrude Chiltern's dying speech and confession has strayed into my pocket.

LORD GORING. What do you mean?

MRS. CHEVELEY *[With a bitter note of triumph in her voice].* I mean that I am going to send Robert Chiltern the love letter his wife wrote to you tonight.

LORD GORING. Love letter?

MRS. CHEVELEY *[Laughing].* 'I want you. I trust you. I am coming to you. Gertrude.'

[LORD GORING *rushes to the bureau and takes up the envelope, finds it empty, and turns round.]*

LORD GORING. You wretched woman, must you always be thieving? Give me back that letter.

I'll take it from you by force. You shall not leave my room till I have got it.

[He rushes towards her, but MRS. CHEVELEY *at once puts her hand on the electric bell that is on the table. The bell sounds wiih shrill reverberations, and* PHIPPS *enters.]*

MRS. CHEVELEY *[After a pause].* Lord Goring merely rang that you should show me out. Good-night, Lord Goring!

[Goes out, followed by PHIPPS. *Her face is illumined wiih evil triumph. There is joy in her eyes. Youth seems to have come back to her. Her last glance is like a swift arrow.* LORD GORING *bites his lip, and lights a cigarette.]*

ACT-DROP

ACT IV

SCENE—*Same as Act II.*

[LORD GORING *is standing by the fireplace with his hands in his pockets. He is looking rather bored.]*

LORD GORING *[Pulls out his watch, inspects it, and rings the bell}.* It is a great nuisance. I can't find anyone in this house to talk to. And I am full of interesting information. I feel like the latest edition of something or other.

[Enter Servant.]

JAMES. Sir Robert is still at the Foreign Office, my lord.

LORD GORING. Lady Chiltern not down yet?

JAMES. Her ladyship has not yet left her room. Miss Chiltern has just come in from riding.

LORD GORING *[To himself].* Ah! that is something.

JAMES. Lord Caversham has been waiting some time in the library for Sir Robert. I told him your lordship was here.

LORD GORING. Thank you. Would you kindly tell him I've gone?

JAMES *[Bowing].* I shall do so, my lord.

[Exit Servant.}

LORD GORING. Really, I don't want to meet my father three days running. It is a great deal too much excitement for any son. I hope to goodness he won't come up. Fathers should be neither

seen nor heard. That is the only proper basis for family life. Mothers are different. Mothers are darlings. *[Throws himself down into a chair, picks up a paper and begins to read it.]*

[Enter LORD CAVERSHAM.]

LORD CAVERSHAM. Well, sir, what are you doing here? Wasting your time as usual, I suppose?

LORD GORING *[Throws dovm paper and rises].* My dear father, when one pays a visit it is for the purpose of wasting other people's time, not one's own.

LORD CAVERSHAM. Have you been thinking over what I spoke to you about last night?

LORD GORING. I have been thinking about nothing else.

LORD CAVERSHAM. Engaged to be married yet?

LORD GORING *[Genially].* Not yet; but I hope to be before lunch-time.

LORD CAVERSHAM *[Causticallij].* You can have till dinner-time if it would be of any convenience to you.

LORD GORING. Thanks awfully, but I think I'd sooner be engaged before lunch.

LORD CAVERSHAM. Humph! Never know when you are serious or not.

LORD GORING. Neither do I, father.

[A *pause.]*

LORD CAVERSHAM. I suppose you have read 'The Times' this morning?

LORD GORING *[Airily].* 'The Times'? Certainly not. I only read 'The Morning Post.' All that one should know about modern life is

where the Duchesses are; anything else is quite demoralising.

LORD CAVERSHAM. Do you mean to say you have not read 'The Times" leading article on Robert Chiltern's career?

LORD GORING. Great heavens! No. What does it say?

LORD CAVERSHAM. What should it say, sir? Everything complimentary, of course. Chiltern's speech last night on this Argentine Canal Scheme was one of the finest pieces of oratory ever delivered in the House since Canning.

LORD GORING. Ah! Never heard of Canning. Never wanted to. And did . . . did Chiltern uphold the scheme?

LORD CAVERSHAM. Uphold it, sir? How little you know him! Why, he denounced it roundly, and the whole system of modern political finance. This speech is the turning-point in his career, as 'The Times' points out. You should read this article, sir. *[Opens 'The Times.']* 'Sir Robert Chiltern . . . most rising of all our young statesmen . . . Brilliant orator . . . Unblemished career . . . Well-known integrity of character . . . Represents what is best in English public life . . . Noble contrast to the lax morality so common among foreign politicians/ They will never say that of you, sir.

LORD GORING. I sincerely hope not, father. However, I am delighted at what you tell me about Robert, thoroughly delighted. It shows he has got pluck.

LORD CAVERSHAM. He has got more than pluck, sir, he has got genius.

LORD GORING. Ah! I prefer pluck. It is not so common, nowadays, as genius is.

LORD CAVERSHAM. I wish you would go into Parliament.

LORD GORING. My dear father, only people who look dull ever get into the House of Commons, and only people who are dull ever succeed there.

LORD CAVERSHAM. Why don't you try to do something useful in life?

LORD GORING. I am far too young.

LORD CAVERSHAM *[Testily].* I hate this affectation of youth, sir. It is a great deal too prevalent nowadays.

LORD GORING. Youth isn't an affectation. Youth is an art.

LORD CAVERSHAM. Why don't you propose to that pretty Miss Chiltern?

LORD GORING. I am of a very nervous disposition, especially in the morning.

LORD CAVERSHAM. I don't suppose there is the smallest chance of her accepting you.

LORD GORING. I don't know how the betting stands to-day.

LORD CAVERSHAM. If she did accept you she would be the prettiest fool in England.

LORD GORING. That is just what I should like to marry. A thoroughly sensible wife would reduce me to a condition of absolute idiocy in less than six months.

LORD CAVERSHAM. You don't deserve her, sir.

LORD GORING. My dear father, if we men married the women we deserved, we should have a very bad time of it.

[Enter MABEL CHILTERN.]

MABEL CHILTERN. Oh! How do you do, Lord Caversham? I hope Lady Caversham is quite well?

LORD CAVERSHAM. Lady Caversham is as usual, as usual.

LORD GORING. Good morning, Miss Mabel!

MABEL CHILTERN *[Taking no notice at all of* LORD GORING, *and addressing herself exclusively to* LORD CAVERSHAM]. And Lady Caversham's bonnets . . . are they at all better?

LORD CAVERSHAM. They have had a serious relapse, I am sorry to say.

LORD GORING. Good morning, Miss Mabel!

MABEL CHILTERN ***[To*** **LORD CAVERSHAM].** **I** hope an operation will not be necessary.

LORD CAVERSHAM *[Smiling at her pertness].* If it is we shall have to give Lady Caversham a narcotic. Otherwise she would never consent to have a feather touched.

LORD GORING *[With increased emphasis].* Good morning, Miss Mabel!

MABEL CHILTERN *[Turning round tvith feigned surprise}.* Oh, are you here? Of course you understand that after your breaking your appointment I am never going to speak to you again.

LORD GORING. Oh, please don't say such a

thing. You are the one person in London I really like to have to listen to me.

MABEL CHILTERN. Lord Goring, I never believe a single word that either yon or I say to each other.

LORD CAVERSHAM. You are quite right, my dear, quite right . . . as far as he is concerned, I mean.

MABEL CHILTERN. Do you think you could possibly make your son behave a little better occasionally? Just as a change.

LORD CAVERSHAM. I regret to say, Miss Chiltern, that I have no influence at all over my son. I wish I had. If I had I know what I would make him do.

MABEL CHILTERN. I am afraid that he has one of those terribly weak natures that are not susceptible to influence.

LORD CAVERSHAM. He is very heartless, very heartless.

LORD GORING. It seems to me that I am a little in the way here.

MABEL CHILTERN. It is very good for you to be in the way, and to know what people say of you behind your back.

LORD GORING. 1 don't at all like knowing what people say of me behind my back. It makes me far too conceited.

LORD CAVERSHAM. After that, my dear, I really must bid you good morning.

MABEL CHILTERN. Oh! I hope you are not going to leave me all alone with Lord Goring? Especially at such an early hour in the day.

LORD CAVEESHAM. I am afraid I can't take him with me to Downing Street. It is not the Prime Minister's day for seeing the unemployed.

[Shakes hands with MABEL CHILTERN, *takes up his hat and stick, and goes out, with a parting glare of indignation at* LORD GORING.]

MABEL CHILTERN *[Takes up roses and begins to arrange them in a bowl on the table].* People who don't keep their appointments in the Park are horrid.

LORD GORING. Detestable.

MABEL CHILTERN. I am glad you admit it. But I wish you wouldn't look so pleased about it.

LORD GORING. I can't help it. I always look pleased when I am with you.

MABEL CHILTERN *[Sadly].* Then I suppose it is my duty to remain with you?

LORD GORING. Of course it is.

MABEL CHILTERN. Well, my duty is a thing I never do, on principle. It always depresses me. So I am afraid I must leave you.

LORD GORING. Please don't, Miss Mabel. I have something very particular to say to you.

MABEL CHILTERN *[Rapturously].* Oh! is it a proposal?

LORD GORING *[Somewhat taken aback].* Well, yes, it is—I am bound to say it is.

MABEL CHILTERN *[With a sigh of pleasure]. I* am so glad. That makes the second to-day.

LORD GORING *[Indignantly].* The second to-day? What conceited ass has been impertinent

enough to dare to propose to you before I had proposed to you?

MABEL CHILTEEN. Tommy Trafford, of course. It is one of Tommy's days for proposing. He always proposes on Tuesdays and Thursdays, during the season.

LORD GORING. You didn't accept him, I hope?

MABEL CHILTERN. I make it a rule never to accept Tommy. That is why he goes on proposing. Of course, as you didn't turn up this morning, I very nearly said yes. It would have been an excellent lesson both for him and for you if I had. It would have taught you both better manners.

LORD GORING. Oh! bother Tommy Trafford. Tommy is a silly little ass. I love you.

MABEL CHILTERN. I know. And I think you might have mentioned it before. I am sure I have given you heaps of opportunities.

LORD GORING. Mabel, do be serious. Please be serious.

MABEL CHILTERN. Ah! that is the sort of thing a man always says to a girl before he has been married to her. He never says it afterwards.

LORD GORING *[Taking hold of her hand].* Mabel, I have told you that I love you. Can't you love me a little in return?

MABEL CHILTERN. You silly Arthur! If you knew anything about . . . anything, which you don't, you would know that I adore you. Everyone in London knows it except you. It is a public scandal the way I adore you. I have been going

about for the last six months telling the whole of society that I adore you. I wonder you consent to have anything to say to me. I have no character left at all. At least, I feel so happy that I am quite sure I have no character left at all.

LORD GORING *[Catches her in his arms and kisses her. Then there is a pause of bliss].* Dear! Do you know I was awfully afraid of being refused!

MABEL CHILTERN *[Looking up at him].* But you never have been refused yet by anybody, have you, Arthur? I can't imagine anyone refusing you.

LORD GORING *[After kissing her again].* Of course I'm not nearly good enough for you, Mabel.

MABEL CHILTERN *[Nestling close to him]. I* am so glad, darling. I was afraid you were.

LORD GORING *[After some hesitation].* And I'm . . . I'm a little over thirty.

MABEL CHILTERN. Dear, you look weeks younger than that.

LORD GORING *[Enthusiastically].* How sweet of you to say so! . . . And it is only fair to tell you frankly that I am fearfully extravagant.

MABEL CHILTERN. But so am I, Arthur. So we're sure to agree. And now I must go and see Gertrude.

LORD GORING. Must you really? *[Kisses her.]*

MABEL CHILTERN. Yes.

LORD GORING. Then do tell her I want to talk to her particularly. I have been waiting here all the morning to see either her or Robert.

MABEL CHILTERN. Do you mean to say you didn't come here expressly to propose to me?

LORD GORING *[Triumphantly].* No; that was a flash of genius.

MABEL CHILTERN. Your first.

LORD GORING *[With determination].* My last.

MABEL CHILTERN. I am delighted to hear it. Now don't stir. I'll be back in five minutes. And don't fall into any temptations while I am away.

LORD GORING. Dear Mabel, while you are away, there are none. It makes me horribly dependent on you.

[Enter LADY CHILTERN.]

LADY CHILTERN. Good morning, dear. How pretty you arc looking!

MABEL CHILTERN. How pale you are looking, Gertrude! It is most becoming!

LADY CHILTERN. Good morning, Lord Goring!

LORD GORING *[Boiving].* Good morning, Lady Chiltern!

MABEL CHILTERN *[Aside to* **LORD GORING].** I shall be in the conservatory, under the second palm tree on the left.

LORD GORING. Second on the left?

MABEL CHILTERN *[With a look of mock surprise].* Yes; the usual palm tree.

[Blows a kiss to him, unobserved by LADY CHILTERN, *and goes out.]*

LORD GORING. Lady Chiltern, I have a certain amount of very good news to tell you. Mrs. Cheveley gave me up Robert's letter last night, and I burned it. Robert is safe.

LADY CHILTEBN *[Sinking on the sofa].* Safe! Oh! C am so glad of that. What a good friend you are to him—to us!

LORD GORING. There is only one person now that could be said to be in any danger.

LADY CHILTERN. Who is that?

LORD GORING *[Sitting down beside her].* Yourself.

LADY CHILTERN. I! In danger? What do you mean?

LORD GORING. Danger is too great a word. It is a word I should not have used. But I admit I have something to tell you that may distress you, that terribly distresses me. Yesterday evening you wrote me a very beautiful, womanly letter, asking me for my help. You wrote to me as one of your oldest friends, one of your husband's oldest friends. Mrs. Cheveley stole that letter from my rooms.

LADY CHILTERN. Well, what use is it to her? Why should she not have it?

LORD GORING *[Rising].* Lady Chiltern, I will be quite frank with you. Mrs. Cheveley puts a certain construction on that letter and proposes to send it to your husband.

LADY CHILTERN. But what construction could she put on it? . . . Oh! not that! not that! If I in—in trouble, and wanting your help, trusting you, propose to come to you . . . that you may advise me . . . assist me . . . Oh! are there women so horrible as that . . . ? And she proposes to send it to my husband? Tell me what happened. Tell me all that happened.

LORD GORING. Mrs. Clieveley was concealed in a room adjoining my library, without my knowledge. I thought that the person who was waiting in that room to see me was yourself. Robert came in unexpectedly. A chair or something fell in the room. He forced his way in, and he discovered her. We had a terrible scene. I still thought it was you. He left me in anger. At the end of everything Mrs. Cheveley got possession of your letter—she stole it, when or how, I don't know.

LADY CHILTERN. At what hour did this happen?

LORD GORING. At half-past ten. And now I propose that we tell Robert the whole thing at once.

LADY CHILTERN *[Looking at him with amazement that is almost terror]*. You want me to tell Robert that the woman you expected was not Mrs. Cheveley, but myself? That it was I whom you thought was concealed in a room in your house, at half-past ten o'clock at night? You want me to tell him that?

LORD GORING. I think it is better that he should know the exact truth.

LADY CHILTERN *[Rising]*. Oh, I couldn't, I couldn't!

LORD GORING. May I do it?

LADY CHILTERN. No.

LORD GORING *[Gravely]*. You are wrong, Lady Chiltern.

LADY CHILTERN. No. The letter must be intercepted. That is all. But how can I do it?

Letters arrive for him every moment of the day. His secretaries open them and hand them to him. I dare not ask the servants to bring me his letters. It would be impossible. Oh! why don't you tell me what to do?

LORD GORING. Pray be calm, Lady Chiltern, and answer the questions I am going to put to you. You said his secretaries open his letters.

LADY CHILTERN. Yes.

LORD GORING. Who is with him to-day? Mr. Trafford, isn't it?

LADY CHILTERN. No. Mr. Montford, I think.

LORD GORING. You can trust him?

LADY CHILTERN [*With a gesture of despair].* Oh! how do I know?

LORD GORING. He would do what you asked him, wouldn't he?

LADY CHILTERN. I think SO.

LORD GORING. Your letter was on pink paper. He could recognise it without reading it, couldn't he? By the colour?

LADY CHILTERN. I suppose so.

LORD GORING. Is he in the house now?

LADY CHILTERN. Yes.

LORD GORING. Then I will go and see him myself, and tell him that a certain letter, written on pink paper, is to be forwarded to Robert to-day, and that at all costs it must not reach him. *[Goes to the door, and opens it.]* Oh! Robert is coming upstairs with the letter in his hand. It *has* reached him already.

LADY CHILTERN [*With a cry of pain].* Oh! you

have saved his life; what have you done with mine!

[Enter SIR EOBEBT CHILTERN. *He has the letter in his hand, and is reading it. He comes towards his wife, not noticing* LORD GORING'S *presence.]*

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. 'I want you. I trust you. I am coming to you. Gertrude/ Oh, my love? Is this true? Do you indeed trust me, and want me? If so, it was for me to come to you, not for you to write of coming to me. This letter of yours, Gertrude, makes me feel that nothing that the world may do can hurt me now. You want me, Gertrude?

[LORD GORING, *unseen by* SIR ROBERT CHILTERN, *makes an imploring sign to* LADY CHILTERN *to accept the situation and* SIR ROBERT'S *error.]*

LADY CHILTERN. **Yes.**

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. You trust me, Gertrude?

LADY CHILTERN. **Yes.**

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. Ah! why did you not add you loved me?

LADY CHILTERN *[Taking his hand].* Because I loved you.

[LORD GORING *passes into the conservatory.]*

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN *[Kisses her].* Gertrude, you don't know what I feel. When Montford passed me your letter across the table—he had opened it by mistake, I suppose, without looking at the handwriting on the envelope—and I read it—oh! I did not care what disgrace or punishment 'was in store for me, I only thought you loved me still.

LADY CHILTERN. There is no disgrace in store for you, nor any public shame. Mrs. Cheveley has handed over to Lord Goring the document that was in her possession, and he has destroyed it.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. Are you sure of this, Gertrude?

LADY CHILTERN. Yes; Lord Goring has just told me.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. Then I am safe! Oh! what a wonderful thing to be safe! For two days I have been in terror. I am safe now. How did Arthur destroy my letter? Tell me.

LADY CHILTERN. He burned it.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. I wish I had seen that one sin of my youth burning to ashes. How many men there are in modern life who would like to see their past burning to white ashes before them! Is Arthur still here?

LADY CHILTERN. Yes; he is in the conservatory.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. I am so glad now I made that speech last night in the House, so glad. I made it thinking that public disgrace might be the result. But it has not been so.

LADY CHILTERN. Public honour has been the result.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. I think so. I fear so, almost. For although I am safe from detection, although every proof against me is destroyed, I suppose, Gertrude . . . I suppose I should retire from public life? *[He looks anxiously at his wife.]*

LADY CHILTERN *[Eagerly].* Oh yes, Robert, you should do that. It is your duty to do that.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. It is much to surrender.

LADY CHILTERN. No; it will be much to gain.

[SIR ROBERT CHILTERN *walks up and down the room with a troubled expression. Then comes over to his wife, and puts his hand on her shoulder.]*

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. And you would be happy living somewhere alone with me, abroad perhaps, or in the country away from London, away from public life? You would have no regrets?

LADY CHILTERN. Oh! none, Robert.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN *[Sadly].* And your ambition for me? You used to be ambitious for me.

LADY CHILTERN. Oh, my ambition! I have none now, but that we two may love each other. It was your ambition that led you astray. Let us not talk about ambition.

[LORD GORING *returns from the conservatory, looking very pleased with himself, and with an entirely new buttonhole that same one has made for him.]*

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN *[Going towards him}.* Arthur, I have to thank you for what you have done for me. I don't know how I can repay you. *[Shakes hands with him.}*

LORD GORING. My dear fellow, I'll tell you at once. At the present moment, under the usual palm tree . . . I mean in the conservatory . . .

[Enter MASON.]

MASON. Lord Caversham.

LORD GORING. That admirable father of mine really makes a habit of turning up at the wrong moment. It is very heartless of him, very heartless indeed.

[Enter LORD CAVERSHAM. MASON *goes out.]*

LORD CAVERSHAM. Good morning, Lady Chiltern! Warmest congratulations to you, Chiltern, on your brilliant speech last night. I have just left the Prime Minister, and you are to have the vacant seat in the Cabinet.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN *[With a look of joy and triumph].* A seat in the Cabinet?

LORD CAVERSHAM. Yes; here is the Prime Minister's letter. *[Hands letter.}*

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN *[Takes letter and reads it].* A seat in the Cabinet!

LORD CAVERSHAM. Certainly, and you well deserve it too. You have got what we want so much in political life nowadays—high character, high moral tone, high principles. *[To* LORD GORING.] Everything that you have not got, sir, and never will have.

LORD GORING. I don't like principles, father. I prefer prejudices.

[SIR ROBERT CHILTERN *is on the brink of accepting the Prime Minister's offer, when he sees his wife looking at him with her clear, candid eyes. He then realises that it is impossible.}*

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. I cannot accept this offer, Lord Caversham. I have made up my mind to decline it.

LORD CAVERSHAM. Decline it, sir!

SIB ROBERT CHILTERN. My intention is to retire at once from public life.

LORD CAVERSHAM *[Angrily].* Decline a seat in the Cabinet, and retire from public life? Never heard such damned nonsense in the whole course of my existence. I beg your pardon, Lady Chiltern. Chiltern, I beg your pardon. *[To* LORD GORING.] Don't grin like that, sir.

LORD GORING. No, father.

LORD CAVERSHAM. Lady Chiltern, you are a sensible woman, the most sensible woman in London, the most sensible woman I know. Will you kindly prevent your husband from making such a . . . from talking such . . . Will you kindly do that, Lady Chiltern?

LADY CHILTERN. I think my husband is right in his determination, Lord Caversham. I approve of it.

LORD CAVERSHAM. You approve of it? Good Heavens!

LADY CHILTERN *[Taking her husband's hand]. I* admire him for it. I admire him immensely for it. I have never admired him so much before. He is finer than even I thought him. *[To* SIR ROBERT CHILTERN.I You will go and write your letter to the Prime Minister now, won't you? Don't hesitate about it, Robert.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN *[With a touch of bitterness]. I* suppose I had better write it at once. Such offers are not repeated. I will ask you to excuse me for a moment, Lord Caversham.

LADY CHILTERN. I may come with you, Robert, may I not?

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. Yes, Gertrude.

[LADY CHILTERN *goes out with him.]*

LORD CAVERSHAM. What is the matter with this family? Something wrong here, eh? *[Tapping his forehead.]* Idiocy? Hereditary, I suppose. Both of them, too. Wife as well as husband. Very sad. Very sad indeed! And they are not an old family. Can't understand it.

LORD GORING. It is not idiocy, father, I assure you.

LORD CAVERSHAM. What is it then, sir?

LORD GORING *[After some hesitation].* Well, it is what is called nowadays a high moral tone, father. That is all.

LORD CAVERSHAM. Hate these new-fangled names. Same thing as we used to call idiocy fifty years ago. Shan't stay in this house any longer.

LORD GORING *[Taking his arm].* Oh! just go in here for a moment, father. Second palm tree to the left, the usual palm tree.

LORD CAVERSHAM. What, sir?

LORD GORING. I beg your pardon, father, I forgot. The conservatory, father, the conservatory—there is some one there I want you to talk to.

LORD CAVERSHAM. What about, sir?

LORD GORING. About me, father.

LORD CAVERSHAM *[Grimly].* Not a subject on which much eloquence is possible.

LORD GORING. No, father; but the lady is like me. She doesn't care much for eloquence in others. She thinks it a little loud.

[LOBD CAVERSHAM *goes into the conservatory.* LADY CHILTERN *enters.]*

LORD GORING. Lady Chiltera, why are you playing Mrs. Cheveley's cards?

LADY CHILTERN *[Startled].* I don't understand you.

LORD GORING. Mrs. Chevelcy made an attempt to ruin your husband. Either to drive him from public life, or to make him adopt a dishonourable position. From the latter tragedy you saved him. The former you are now thrusting on him. Why should you do him the wrong Mrs. Cheveley tried to do and failed?

LADY CHILTERN. Lord Goring!

LORD GORING *[Pulling himself together for a great effort, and showing the philosophy that underlies the dandy].* Lady Chiltern, allow me. You wrote me a letter last night in which you said you trusted me and wanted my help. Now is the moment when you really want my help, now is the time when you have got to trust me, to trust in my counsel and judgment. You love Robert. Do you want to kill his love for you? What sort of existence will he have if you rob him of the fruits of his ambition, if you take him from the splendour of a great political career, if you close the doors of public life against him, if you condemn him to sterile failure, he who was made for triumph and success? Women are not meant to judge us, but to forgive us when we need forgiveness. Pardon, not punishment, is their mission. Why should you scourge him with rods for a sin done in his youth,

before he knew you, before he knew himself? A man's life is of more value than a woman's. It has larger issues, wider scope, greater ambitions A woman's life revolves in curves of emotions. It is upon lines of intellect that a man's life progresses. Don't make any terrible mistake, Lady Chiltern. A woman who can keep a man's love, and love him in return, has done all the world wants of women, or should want of them.

LADY CHILTERN *[Troubled and hesitating}.* But it is my husband himself who wishes to retire from public life. He feels it is his duty. It was he who first said so.

LORD GORING. Rather than lose your love, Robert would do anything, wreck his whole career, as he is on the brink of doing now. He is making for you a terrible sacrifice. Take my advice, Lady Chiltern, and do not accept a sacrifice so great. If you do, you will live to repent it bitterly. We men and women are not made to accept such sacrifices from each other. We are not worthy of them. Besides, Robert has been punished enough.

LADY CHILTERN. We have both been punished. I set him up too high.

LORD GORING *[With deep feeling in his voice].* Do not for that reason set him down now too low. If he has fallen from his altar, do not thrust him into the mire. Failure to Robert would be the very mire of shame. Power is his passion. He would lose everything, even his power to feel love. Your husband's life is at this moment in

your hands, *your* husband's love is in your hands. Don't mar both for him.

[Enter SIR EGBERT CHILTERN.]

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. Gertrude, here is the draft of my letter. Shall I read it to you?

LADY CHILTERN. Let me see it.

[SIR ROBERT *hands her the letter. She reads it, and then, With a gesture of passion, tears it up.]*

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. What are you doing?

LADY CHILTERN. A man's life is of more value than a woman's. It has larger issues, wider scope, greater ambitions. Our lives revolve in curves of emotions. It is upon lines of intellect that a man's life progresses. I have just learnt this, and much else with it, from Lord Goring. And I will not spoil your life for you, nor see you spoil it as a sacrifice to me, a useless sacrifice!

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. Gertrude! Gertrude!

LADY CHILTERN. You can forget. Men easily forget. And I forgive. That is how women help the world. I see that now.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN *[Deeply overcome by emotion, embraces her].* My wife! my wife! [To LORD GORING.] Arthur, it seems that I am always to be in your debt.

LORD GORING. Oh dear no, Robert. Your debt is to Lady Chiltern, not to me!

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. I owe you much. And now tell me what you were going to ask me just now as Lord Caversham came in.

LORD GORING. Robert, you are your sister's

guardian, and I want your consent to my marriage with her. That is all.

LADY CHILTERN. Oh, I am so glad! I am so glad! *[Shakes hands with* LORD GORING.]

LORD GORING. Thank you, Lady Chiltern.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN *[With a troubled look].* My sister to be your wife?

LORD GORING. Yes.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN *[Speaking with great firmness].* Arthur, I am very sorry, but the thing is quite out of the question. I have to think of Mabel's future happiness. And I don't think her happiness would be safe in your hands. And I cannot have her sacrificed!

LORD GORING. Sacrificed!

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. Yes, utterly sacrificed. Loveless marriages are horrible. But there is one thing worse than an absolutely loveless marriage. A marriage in which there is love, but on one side only; faith, but on one side only; devotion, but on one side only, and in which of the two hearts one is sure to be broken.

LORD GORING. But I love Mabel. No other woman has any place in my life.

LADY CHILTERN. Robert, if they love each other, why should they not be married?

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. Arthur cannot bring Mabel the love that she deserves.

LORD GORING. What reason have you for saying that?

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN *[After a pause].* Do you really require me to tell you?

LORD GORING. Certainly I do.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. As you choose. When I called on you yesterday evening I found Mrs. Cheveley concealed in your rooms. It was between ten and eleven o'clock at night. I do not wish to say anything more. Your relations with Mrs. Cheveley have, as I said to you last night, nothing whatsoever to do with me. I know you were engaged to be married to her once. The fascination she exercised over you then seems to have returned. You spoke to me last night of her as a woman pure and stainless, a woman whom you respected and honoured. That may be so. But I cannot give my sister's life into your hands. It would be wrong of me. It would be unjust, infamously unjust to her.

LORD GORING. I have nothing more to say.

LADY CHILTERN. Robert, it was not Mrs. Cheveley whom Lord Goring expected last night.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. Not Mrs. Cheveley! Who was it then?

LORD GORING. Lady Chiltern!

LADY CHILTERN. It was your own wife. Robert, yesterday afternoon Lord Goring told me that if ever I was in trouble I could come to him for help, as he was our oldest and best friend. Later on, after that terrible scene in this room, I wrote to him telling him that I trusted him, that I had need of him, that I was coining to him for help and advice. [SIR ROBERT CHILTERN *takes the letter out of his pocket.]* Yes, that letter. I didn't go to Lord Goring's, after all. I felt that it is from

ourselves alone that help can come. Pride made me think that. Mrs. Cheveley went. She stole my letter and sent it anonymously to you this morning, that you should think . . . Oh! Robert, 1 cannot tell you what she wished you to think. . . .

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. What! Had I fallen so low in your eyes that you thought that even for a moment I could have doubted your goodness? Gertrude, Gertrude, you are to me the white image of all good things, and sin can never touch you. Arthur, you can go to Mabel, and you have my best wishes! Oh! stop a moment. There is no name at the beginning of this letter. The brilliant Mrs. Cheveley docs not seem to have noticed that. There should be a name.

LADY CHILTERN. Let me write yours. It is you I trust and need. You and none else.

LORD GORING. Well, really, Lady Chiltern, I think I should have back my own letter.

LADY CHILTERN *[Smiling].* No; you shall have Mabel. *[Takes the letter and writes her husband's name on it.]*

LORD GORING. Well, I hope she hasn't changed her mind. It's nearly twenty minutes since I saw her last.

[Enter MABEL CHILTERN *and* LORD CAVERSHAM.] .

MABEL CHILTERN. Lord Goring, I think your father's conversation much more improving than yours. I am only going to talk to Lord Caversham in the future, and always under the usual palm tree.

LORD GORING. Darling! *[Kisses her.]*

LORD CAVERSHAM *[Considerably aback].* What does this mean, sir? You don't mean to say that this charming, clever young lady has been so foolish as to accept you?

LORD GORING. Certainly, father! And Chiltern's been wise enough to accept a seat in the Cabinet.

LORD CAVERSHAM. I am very glad to hear that, Chiltern . . . I congratulate you, sir. If the country doesn't go to the dogs or the Radicals, we shall have you Prime Minister, some day.

[Enter MASON.!

MASON. Luncheon is on the table, my Lady!

[MASON *goes out.]*

LADY CHILTERN. You'll stop to luncheon, Lord Cavcrsham, won't you?

LORD CAVERSHAM. With pleasure, and I'll drive you down to Downing Street afterwards, Chiltern. You have a great future before you, a great future. Wish I could say the same for you, sir. *[To* LORD GORING.] But your career will have to be entirely domestic.

LORD GORING. Yes, father, I prefer it domestic.

LORD CAVERSHAM. And if you don't make this young lady an ideal husband, I'll cut you off with a shilling.

MABEL CHILTERN. An ideal husband! Oh, I don't think I should like that. It sounds like something in the next world.

LORD CAVERSHAM. What do you want him to be then, dear?

MABEL CHILTEEN. He can be what he chooses. All I want is to be . . . to be . . . oh! a real wife to him.

LORD CAVERSHAM. Upon my word, there is a good deal of common sense in that, Lady Chiltern.

[They all go out except SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. *He sinks into a chair, wrapt in thought. After a little time* LADY CHILTERN *returns to look for him.]*

LADY CHILTERN *[Leaning over the back of the chair].* Aren't you coming in, Robert?

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN *[Taking her hand].* Gertrude, is it love you feel for me, or is it pity merely?

LADY CHILTERN *[Kisses him].* It is love, Robert. Love, and only love. For both of us a new life **is** beginning.

CURTAIN

VERA; OR, THE NIHILISTS

VERA; OR, THE NIHILISTS

PERSONS IN THE PROLOGUE

PETER SABOUROFF (an Innkeeper)
VERA SABOUROFF *(his* Daughter)
MICHAEL (a Peasant)
COLONEL KOTEMKIN

Scene, Russia. Time—1795

PERSONS IN THE PLAY

IVAN THE CZAR.
PRINCE PAUL MARALOFFSKI (Prime Minister of Russia).
PRINCE PETROVITCH.
COUNT ROUVALOFF.
MARQUIS DE POIVRARD.
BARON RAFF.
GENERAL KOTEMKIN.
A PAGE.

Nihilists

PETER TCHERNAVITCH, President of the Nihilists.
MICHAEL.
ALEXIS IVANACIEVITCH, known as a Student of Medicine.
PROFESSOR MARFA.
VERA SABOUROFF.

Soldiers, Conspirators, etc.

Scene, Moscow. Time—1800

PROLOGUE

SCENE—*A Russian Inn. Large door opening on snowy landscape at back of stage.*

PETER SABOUROFF *and* MICHAEL.

PETER *[Warming his hands at a stove].* Has Vera not come back yet, Michael?

MICH. No, Father Peter, not yet; 'tis a good three miles to the post-office, and she has to milk the cows besides, and that dun one is a rare plaguey creature for a wench to handle.

PETER. Why didn't you go with her, you young fool? she'll never love you unless you are always at her heels; women like to be bothered,

MICH. She says I bother her too much already, Father Peter, and I fear she'll never love me after all.

PETER. Tut, tut, boy, why shouldn't she? You're young and wouldn't be ill-favoured either, had God or thy mother given thee another face. Aren't you one of Prince Maraloffski's game-keepers; and haven"t you got a good grass farm, and the best cow in the village? What more does a girl want?

MICH. But Vera, Father Peter——

PETER. Vera, my lad, has got too many ideas; I don't think much of ideas myself; I've got on well enough in life without 'em; why shouldn't

my children? There's Dmitri! could have stayed here and kept the inn; many a young lad would have jumped at the offer in these hard times; but he, scatter-brained featherhead of a boy, must needs go off to Moscow to study the law! What does he want knowing about the law! let a man do his duty, say I, and no one will trouble him.

MICH. Ay! but, Father Peter, they say a good lawyer can break the law as often as he likes, and no one can say him nay.

PETER. That is about all they are good for; and there he stays, and has not written a line to us for four months now—a good son that, eh?

MICH. Come, come, Father Peter, Dmitri's letters must have gone astray—perhaps the new postman can't read; he looks stupid enough, and Dmitri, why, he was the best fellow in the village. Do you remember how he shot the bear at the barn in the great winter?

PETER. Ay, it was a good shot; I never did a better myself.

MICH. And as for dancing, he tired out three fiddlers Christmas come two years.

PETER. Ay, ay, he was a merry lad. It is the girl that has the seriousness—she goes about as solemn as a priest for days at a time.

MICH. Vera is always thinking of others.

PETER. There is her mistake, boy. Let God and our little Father look to the world. It is none of my work to mend my neighbour's thatch. Why, last winter old Michael was frozen to death in his sleigh in the snowstorm, and his wife and

children starved afterwards when the hard times came; but what business was it of mine? I didn't make the world. Let God and the Czar look to it. And then the blight came, and the black plague with it, and the priests couldn't bury the people fast enough, and they lay dead on the roads—men and women both. But what business was it of mine? 1 didn't make the world. Let God and the Czar look to it. Or two autumns ago, when the river overflowed on a sudden, and the children's school was carried away and drowned every girl and boy in it. I didn't make the world—let God and the Czar look to it.

MICH. But, Father Peter—

PETER. No, no, boy; no man could live if he took his neighbour's pack on his shoulders. *[Enter* VERA *in peasant's dress.]* Well, my girl, you've been long enough away—where is the letter?

VERA. There is none, to-day, Father.

PETER. I knew it.

VERA. But there will be one to-morrow, Father.

PETER. Curse him, for an ungrateful son.

VERA. Oh, Father, don't say that; he must be sick.

PETER. Ay! sick of profligacy, perhaps.

VERA. How dare you say that of him, Father? You know that is not true.

PETER. Where does the money go, then? Michael, listen. I gave Dmitri half his mother's fortune to bring with him to pay the lawyer folk of Moscow. He has only written three times, and every time for more money. He got it, not

at my wish, but at hers *[Pointing to* VERA], and now for five months, close on six almost, we have heard nothing from him.

VERA. Father, he will come back.

PETEE. Ay! the prodigals always return; but let him never darken my doors again.

VERA *[Sitting down pensive].* Some evil has come on him; he must be dead! Oh! Michael, I am so wretched about Dmitri.

MICH. Will you never love any one but him, Vera?

VERA *[Smiling].* *I* don't know; there is so much else to do in the world but love.

MICH. Nothing else worth doing, Vera.

PETER. What noise is that, Vera? *[A metallic clink is heard.]*

VERA *[Rising and going io the door].* I don't know, Father; it is not like the cattle bells, or I would think Nicholas had come from the fair. Oh! Father! it is soldiers!—coming down the hill—there is one of them on horseback. How pretty they look! But there are some men with them with chains on! They must be robbers. Oh! don't let them in, Father; I couldn't look at them.

PETER. Men in chains! Why, we are in luck, my child! I heard this was to be the new road to Siberia, to bring the prisoners to the mines; but I didn't believe it. My fortune is made! Bustle, Vera, bustle! I'll die a rich man after all. There will be no lack of good customers now. An honest man should have the chance of making his living out of rascals now and then.

VERA. Are these men rascals, Father? What have they done?

PETER. I reckon they're some of those Nihilists the priest warns us against. Don't stand there idle, my girl.

VERA. I suppose, then, they are all wicked men.

[Sound of soldiers outside; cry of "Halt!" enter Russian officer with a body of soldiers and eight men in chains, raggedly dressed; one of them on entering hurriedly puts his coat above his ears and hides his face; some soldiers guard the door, others sit down; the prisoners stand.]

COLONEL. Innkeeper!

PETER. Yes, Colonel.

COLONEL *[Pointing to Nihilists].* Give these men some bread and water.

PETER *[To himself].* I shan't make much out of that order.

COLONEL. As for myself, what have you got fit to eat?

PETER. Some good dried venison, your Excellency—and some rye whisky.

COLONEL. Nothing else?

PETER. Why, more whisky, your Excellency.

COLONEL. What clods these peasants are! You have a better room than this?

PETER. Yes, sir.

COLONEL. Bring me there. Sergeant, post your picket outside, and see that these scoundrels do not communicate with any one. No letter writing, you dogs, or you'll be flogged for it. Now for the venison. *[To* PETER *bowing before him.]* Get out

of the way, you fool! Who is that girl? *[Sees* **VERA.]**

PETER. My daughter, your Highness.

COLONEL. Can she read and write?

PETER. Ay, that she can, sir.

COLONEL. Then she is a dangerous woman. No peasant should be allowed to do anything of the kind. Till your fields, store your harvests, pay your taxes, and obey your masters—that is your duty.

VERA. Who are our masters?

COLONEL. Young woman, these men are going to the mines for life for asking the same foolish question.

VERA. Then they have been unjustly condemned.

PETER. Vera, keep your tongue quiet. She is a foolish girl, sir, who talks too much.

COLONEL. Every woman does talk too much. Come, where is this venison? Count, I am waiting for you. How can you see anything in a girl with coarse hands? *[He passes with* PETER *and his aide-de-camp into an inner room.]*

VERA *[To one of the Nihilists].* Won't you sit down? you must be tired.

SERGEANT. Come now, young woman, no talking to my prisoners.

VERA. I shall speak to them. How much do you want?

SERGEANT. How much have you?

VERA. Will you let these men sit down if I give you this? *[Takes off her peasant's necklace.]* It is all I have; it was my mother's.

SERGEANT. Well, it looks pretty enough, and is heavy too. What do you want with these men?

VERA. They are hungry and tired. Let me go to them?

ONE OF THE SOLDIERS. Let the wench be, if she pays us.

SERGEANT. Well, have your way. If the Colonel sees you, you may have to come with us, my pretty one.

VERA *[Advances to the Nihiltits].* Sit down; you must be tired. *[Serves them food.]* What are you?

A PRISONER. Nihilists.

VERA. Who put you in chains?

PRISONER. Our Father the Czar.

VERA. Why?

PRISONER. For loving liberty too well.

VERA *[To prisoner who hides his face].* What did you want to do?

DMITRI. To give liberty to thirty millions of people enslaved to one man.

VERA *[Startled at the voice].* What is your name?

DMITRI. I have no name.

VERA. Where are your friends?

DMITRI. I have no friends.

VERA. Let me see your face!

DMITRI. You will see nothing but suffering in it. They have tortured me.

VERA *[Tears the cloak from his face].* Oh, God! Dmitri! my brother.

DMITRI. Hush! Vera; be calm. You must not let my father know; it would kill him. I thought J could free Russia. I heard men talk of Liberty

one night in a caf6. I had never heard the word before. It seemed to be a new god they spoke of. I joined them. It was there all the money went. Five months ago they seized us. They found me printing the paper. I am going to the mines for life. I could not write. I thought it would be better to let you think I was dead; for they are bringing me to a living tomb.

VERA *[Looking round].* You must escape, Dmitri. I will take your place.

DMITRI. Impossible! You can only revenge us.

VERA. I shaL revenge you.

DMITRI. Listen! there is a house in Moscow——

SERGEANT. Prisoners, attention!—the Colonel is coming—young woman, your time is up.

[Enter COLONEL, AIDE-DE-CAMP *and* PETER.]

PETER. I hope your Highness is pleased with the venison. I shot it myself.

COLONEL. It had been better had you talked less about it. Sergeant, get ready. *[Gives purse to* PETER.] Here, you cheating rascal!

PETER. My fortune is made! long live your Highness. I hope your Highness will come often this way.

COLONEL. By Saint Nicholas, I hope not. It is too cold here for me. *[To* VERA.] Young girl, don't ask questions again about what does not concern you. I will not forget your face.

VERA. Nor I yours, or what you are doing.

COLONEL. You peasants are getting too saucy since you ceased to be serfs, and the knout is the

best school for you to learn politics in. Sergeant, proceed.

[The COLONEL *turns and goes to top of stage. The prisoners pass out double file; as* DMITRI *passes* VERA *he lets a piece of paper fall on the ground; she puts her foot on it and remains immobile.]*

PETER *[Who has been counting the money the* COLONEL *gave him].* Long life to your Highness. I will hope to see another batch soon. *[Suddenly catches sight of* DMITRI *as he is going out of the door, and screams and rushes up.]* Dmitri! Dmitri! my God! what brings you here? he is innocent, I tell you. I'll pay for him. Take your money *[Flings money on the ground],* take all I have, give me my son. Villains! Villains! where are you bringing him?

COLONEL. To Siberia, old man.

PETER. No, no; take me instead.

COLONEL. He is a Nihilist.

PETER. You lie! you lie! He is innocent. *[The soldiers force him back with their guns and shut the door against him. He beats with his fists against it.]* Dmitri! Dmitri! a Nihilist! *[Falls down on floor.]*

VERA *[Who has remained motionless, picks up paper now from under her feet and reads].* '99 Rue Tchernavaya, Moscow. To strangle whatever nature is in me; neither to love nor to be loved; neither to pity nor to be pitied; neither to marry nor to be given in marriage, till the end is come.' My brother, I shall keep the oath. *[Kisses the paper.]* You shall be revenged!

[VERA *stands immobile, holding paper in her lifted hand,* PETER *is lying on the floor.* MICHAEL, *who has just come in, is bending over him.]*

END OF PROLOGUE

VERA; OR, THE NIHILISTS

ACT I

SCENE—99 *Rue Tchernavaya, Moscow. A large garret lit by oil lamps hung from ceiling. Some masked men standing silent and apart from one another. A man in a scarlet mask is writing at a table. Door at back. Man in yellow with drawn sword at it. Knocks heard. Figures in cloaks and masks enter.*

Password. Per crucem ad lucem.

Answer. Per sanguinem ad libertatem.

[Clock strikes. CONSPIRATORS *form a semicircle in the middle of the stage.]*

PRESIDENT. What is the word?

FIRST CONSP. Nabat.

PRES. The answer?

SECOND CONSP. Kalit.

PRES. What hour is it?

THIRD CONSP. The hour to suffer.

PRES. What day?

FOURTH CONSP. The day of oppression.

PRES. What year?

FIFTH CONSP. Since the Revolution of France, Clie ninth year.

PRES. How many are we in number?

SIXTH CONSP, Ten, nine, and three.

PRES. The Galilaean had less to conquer the world; but what is our mission?

SEVENTH CONSP. To give freedom.

PRES. Our creed?

EIGHTH CONSP. To annihilate.

PRES. Our duty?

NINTH CONSP. To obey.

PRES. Brothers, the questions have been answered well. There are none but Nihilists present. Let us see each other's faces. *[The* CONSPIRATORS *unmask.]* Michael, recite the oath.

MICHAEL. To strangle whatever nature is in us; neither to love nor to be loved, neither to pity nor to be pitied, neither to marry nor to be given in marriage, till the end is come; to stab secretly by night; to drop poison in the glass; to set father against son, and husband against wife; without fear, without hope, without future, to suffer, to annihilate, to revenge.

PRES. Arc we all agreed?

CONSPIRATORS. we are all agreed. *[They disperse in various directions about the stage.]*

PRES. 'Tis after the hour, Michael, and she is not yet here.

MICH. Would that she were! We can do little without her.

ALEXIS. She cannot have been seized, President? but the police are on her track, I know.

MICH. You always seem to know a good deal about the movements of the police in Moscow—too much for an honest conspirator.

PRES. If those dogs have caught her, the red

flag of the people will float on a barricade in every street till we find her! It was foolish of her to go to the Grand Duke's ball. I told her so, but she said she wanted to see the Czar and all his cursed brood face to face once.

ALEXIS. Gone to the State ball?

MICH. I have no fear. She is as hard to capture as a she-wolf is, and twice as dangerous; besides, she is well disguised. But is there any news from the Palace to-night, President? What is that bloody despot doing now besides torturing his only son? Have any of you seen him? One hears strange stories about him. They say he loves the people; but a king's son never does thai. You cannot breed them like that.

PRES. Since he came back from abroad a year ago his father has kept him in close prison in his palace.

MICH. An excellent training to make him a tyrant in his turn; but is there any news, I say?

PRES. A council is to be held to-morrow, at four o'clock, on some secret business the spies cannot find out.

MICH. A council in a king's palace is sure to be about some bloody work or other. But in what room is this council to be held?

PRES. *[Reading from letter}.* In the yellow tapestry room called after the Empress Catherine.

MICH. I care not for such long-sounding names. I would know where it is.

PRES. I cannot tell, Michael. I know more about the insides of prisons than of palaces.

MICH. *[Speaking suddenly to* ALEXIS]. Where is this room, Alexis?

ALEXIS. It is on the first floor, looking out on to the inner courtyard. But why do you ask, Michael?

MICH. Nothing, nothing, boy! I merely take a great interest in the Czar's life and movements and I knew you could tell me all about the palace. Every poor student of medicine in Moscow knows all about king's houses. It is their duty, is it not?

ALEXIS *[Aside].* Can Michael suspect me? There is something strange in his manner to-night. Why doesn't she come? The whole fire of revolution seems fallen into dull ashes when she is not here.

MICH. Have you cured many patients lately, at your hospital, boy?

ALEX. There is one who lies sick to death I would fain cure, but cannot.

MICH. Ay, and who is that?

ALEX. Russia, our mother.

MICH. The curing of Russia is surgeon's business, and must be done by the knife. I like not your method of medicine.

PRES. Professor, we have read the proofs of your last article; it is very good, indeed.

MICH. What is it about, Professor?

PROFESSOR. The subject, my good brother, is assassination considered as a method of political reform.

MICH. I think little of pen and ink in revolutions. One dagger will do more than a hundred

epigrams. Still, let us read this scholar's last production. Give it to me. I will read it myself.

PROF. Brother, you never mind your stops; let Alexis read it.

MICH. Ay! he is as tripping of speech as if he were some young aristocrat; but for my own part I care not for the stops so that the sense be plain.

ALEX. *[Reading].* 'The past has belonged to the tyrant, and he has defiled it; ours is the future, and we shall make it holy.' Ay! let us make the future holy; let there be one revolution at least which is not bred in crime, nurtured in murder!

MICH. They have spoken to us by the sword, and by the sword we shall answer! You are too delicate for us, Alexis. There should be none here but men whose hands are rough with labour or red with blood.

PRES. Peace, Michael, peace! He is the bravest heart among us.

MICH. *[Aside].* He will need to be brave tonight.

[The sound of the sleigh bells is heard outside.]

VOICE *[Outside].* Per crucem ad lucem.

Answer of man on guard. Per sanguinem ad libertatem.

MICH. Who is that?

VERA. God save the people!

PRES. Welcome, Vera, welcome! We have been sick at heart till we saw you; but now methinks the star of freedom has come to wake us from the night.

VERA. It is night, indeed, brother! Night

without moon or star! Russia is smitten to the heart! The man Ivan whom men call the Czar strikes now at our mother with a dagger deadlier than ever forged by tyranny against a people's life!

MICH. What has the tyrant done now?

VERA. To-morrow martial law is to be proclaimed in Russia.

OMNES. Martial law! We are lost! We are lost!

ALEX. Martial law! Impossible!

MICH. Fool, nothing is impossible in Russia but reform.

VERA. Ay, martial law. The last right to which the people clung has been taken from them. Without trial, without appeal, without accuser even, our brothers will be taken from their houses, shot in the streets like dogs, sent away to die in the snow, to starve in the dungeon, to rot in the mine. Do you know what martial law means? It means the strangling of a whole nation. The streets will be filled with soldiers night and day; there will be sentinels at every door. No man dare walk abroad now but the spy or the traitor. Cooped up in the dens we hide in, meeting by stealth, speaking with bated breath; what good can we do now for Russia?

PRES. We can suffer at least.

VERA. We have done that too much already. The hour is now come to annihilate and to revenge.

PRES. Up to this the people have borne everything.

VERA. Because they have understood nothing. But now we, the Nihilists, have given them the tree of knowledge to eat of, and the day of silent suffering is over for Russia.

MICH. Martial law, Vera! This is fearful tidings you bring.

PRES. It is the death warrant of liberty in Russia.

VERA. Or the tocsin of revolution.

MICH. Are you sure it is true?

VERA. Here is the proclamation. I stole it myself at the ball to-night from a young fool, one of Prince Paul's secretaries, who had been given it to copy. It was that which made me so late.

[VERA *hands proclamation to* MICHAEL, *who reads it.]*

MICH. 'To ensure the public safely—martial law. By order of the Czar, father of his people/ The father of his people!

VERA. Ay! a father whose name shall not be hallowed, whose kingdom shall change to a republic, whose trespasses shall not be forgiven him, because he has robbed us of our daily bread; with whom is neither might, nor right, nor glory, now or forever.

PRES. It must be about this that the council meet to-morrow. It has not yet been signed.

ALEX. It shall not be while I have a tongue to plead with.

MICH. Or while I have hands to smite with.

VERA. Martial law! 0 God, how easy it is for a king to kill his people by thousands, but we cannot rid ourselves of one crowned man in

Europe! What Is there of awful majesty in these men which makes the hand unsteady, the dagger treacherous, the pistol-shot harmless? Are they not men of like passions with ourselves, vulnerable to the same diseases, of flesh and blood not different from our own? What made Olgiati tremble at the supreme crisis of that Roman life, and Guido's nerve fail him when he should have been of iron and of steel? A plague, I say, on these fools of Naples, Berlin, and Spain! Methinks that if I stood face to face with one of the crowned men my eye would see more clearly, my aim be more sure, my whole body gain a strength and power that was not my own! Oh, to think what stands between us and freedom in Europe! a few old men, wrinkled, feeble, tottering dotards whom a boy could strangle for a ducat, or a woman stab in a night-time. And these are the things that keep us from democracy, that keep us from liberty. But now methinks the brood of men is dead and the dull earth grown sick of child-bearing, else would no crowned dog pollute God's air by living.

OMNES. Try us! Try us! Try us!

MICH. We shall try thee, too, some day, Vera.

VERA. I pray God thou mayest! Have I not strangled whatever nature is in me, and shall I not keep my oath?

MICH. *[To* PRESIDENT]. Martial law, President! Come, there is no time to be lost. We have twelve hours yet before us till the council meet. Twelve

hours! One can overthrow a dynasty in less time than that.

PRES. Ay! or lose one's own head.

[MICHAEL and *the* PRESIDENT *retire to one corner of the stage and sit whispering.* VERA *takes up the proclamation, and reads it to herself.* ALEXIS *watches and, suddenly Brushes up to her.}*

ALEX. Vera!

VERA. Alexis, you here! Foolish boy, have I not prayed you to stay away? All of us here are doomed to die before our time, fated to expiate by suffering whatever good we do; but you, with your bright, boyish face you are too young to die yet.

ALEX. One is never too young to die for one's country!

VERA. Why do you come here night after night?

ALEX. Because I love the people.

VERA. But your fellow-students must miss you. Are there no traitors among them? You know what spies there are in the University here. 0 Alexis, you must go! You see how desperate suffering has made us. There is no room here for a nature like yours. You must not come again.

ALEX. Why do you think so poorly of me? Why should 1 live while my brothers suffer?

VERA. You spake to me of your mother once. *You* said you loved her. Oh, think of her!

ALEX. I have no mother now but Russia, my life is hers to take or give away; but to-night I am here to see you. They tell me you are leaving for Novgorod to-morrow.

VERA. I must* They are getting faint-hearted

there, and I would fan the flame of this revolution into such a blaze that the eyes of all kings in Europe shall be blinded. If martial law is passed they will need me all the more there. There is no limit, it seems, to the tyranny of one man; but there shall be a limit to the suffering of a whole people.

ALEX. God knows it, I am with you. But you must not go. The police are watching every train for you. When you are seized they have orders to place you without trial in the lowest dungeon of the palace. I know it—*no* matter how. Oh, think how without you the sun goes from our life, how the people will lose their leader and liberty her priestess. Vera, you must not go!

VERA. If you wish it, I will stay. I would live a little longer for freedom, a little longer for Russia.

ALEX. When you die then Russia is smitten indeed; when you die then I shall lose all hope—all. . . . Vera, this is fearful news you bring—martial law—it is too terrible. I knew it not, by my soul, I knew it not!

VERA. How could you have known it? It is too well laid a plot for that. This great White Czar, whose hands are red with the blood of the people he has murdered, whose soul is black with his iniquity, is the cleverest conspirator of us all. Oh, how could Russia bear two hearts like yours and his!

ALEX. Vera, the Emperor was not always like this. There was a time when he loved the people. It is that devil, whom God curse, Prince Paul

Maraloffski who has brought him to this. To-morrow, I swear it, I shall plead for the people to the Emperor.

VERA. Plead to the Czar! Foolish boy, it is only those who are sentenced to death that ever see our Czar. Besides, what should he care for a voice that pleads for mercy? The cry of a strong nation in its agony has not moved that heart of stone.

ALEX. *[Aside].* Yet shall I plead to him. They can but kill me.

PROF. Here are the proclamations, Vera. Do you think they will do?

VERA. I shall read them. How fair he looks! Methinks he never seemed so noble as to-night. Liberty is blessed in having such a lover.

ALEX. Well, President, what are you deep in?

MICH. We are thinking of the best way of killing bears. *[Whispers to* PRESIDENT *and leads him aside.]*

PROF. *[To* VERA]. And the letters from our brothers at Paris and Berlin. What answer shall we send to them?

VERA *[Takes them mechanically].* Had I not strangled nature, sworn neither to love nor to be loved, methinks I might have loved him. Oh, I am a fool, a traitor myself, a traitor myself! But why did he come amongst us with his bright young face, his heart aflame for liberty, his pure white soul? Why does he make me feel at times as if I would have him as my king, Republican though I be? Oh, fool, fool, fool! False to your oath! weak

as water! Have done! Remember what you are —a Nihilist, a Nihilist!

PRES. *[To* MICHAEL]. But you will be seized, Michael.

MICH. I think not. I will wear the uniform of the Imperial Guard, and the Colonel on duty is one of us. It is on the first floor, you remember; so I can take a long shot.

PRES. Shall I tell the brethren?

MICH. Not a word, not a word! There is a traitor amongst us.

VERA. Come, are these the proclamations? Yes, they will do; yes, they will do. Send five hundred to Kiev and Odessa and Novgorod, five hundred to Warsaw, and have twice the number distributed among the Southern Provinces, though these dull Russian peasants care little for our proclamations, and less for our martyrdoms. When the blow is struck it must be from the town, not from the country.

MICH. Ay, and by the sword not by the goose-quill.

VERA. Where are the letters from Poland?

PROF. Here.

VERA. Unhappy Poland! The eagles of Russia have fed on her heart. We must not forget our brothers there.

PRES. Is this true, Michael?

MICH. Ay, I stake my life on it.

PRES. Let the doors be locked, then. Alexis Ivanacievitch entered on our roll of the brothers as a Student of the School of Medicine at Moscow.

Why did you not tell us of this bloody scheme of martial law?

ALEX. I, President?

MICH. Ay, you! You knew it, none better. Such weapons as these are not forged in a day. Why did you not tell us of it? A week ago there had been time to lay the mine, to raise the barricade, to strike one blow at least for liberty. But now the hour is past! It is too late, it is too late! Why did you keep it a secret from us, I say?

ALEX. Now by the hand of freedom, Michael, my brother, you wrong me. I knew nothing of this hideous law. By my soul, my brothers, I knew not of it! How should I know?

MICH. Because you are a traitor! Where did you go when you left us the night of our last meeting here?

ALEX. To mine own house, Michael.

MICH. Liar! I was on your track. You left here an hour after midnight. Wrapped in a large cloak, you crossed the river in a boat a mile below the second bridge, and gave the ferryman a gold piece, you, the poor student of medicine! You doubled back twice, and hid in an archway so long that I had almost made up my mind to stab you at once, only that I am fond of hunting. So! you thought that you had baffled all pursuit, did you? Fool! I am a bloodhound that never loses the scent. I followed you from street to street. At last I saw you pass swiftly across the Place St. Isaac, whisper to the guards the secret password, enter the palace by a private door with your own key.

CONSPIRATORS. The palace!

VERA. Alexis!

MICH. I waited. All through the dreary watches of our long Russian night I waited, that I might kill you with your Judas hire still hot in your hand. But you never came out; you never left that palace at all. I saw the blood-red sun rise through the yellow fog over the murky town; I saw a new day of oppression dawn on Russia; but you never came out. So you pass nights in the palace, do you? You know the password for the guards! you have a key to a secret door. Oh, you are a spy—you are a spy! I never trusted you, with your soft white hands, your curled hair, your pretty graces. You have no mark of suffering about you; you cannot be of the people. You are a spy—a spy—traitor.

OMNES. Kill him! Kill him! *[Draw their knives.]*

VERA *[Rushing in front of* ALEXIS]. Stand back, I say, Michael! Stand back all! Do not dare lay a hand upon him! He is the noblest heart amongst us.

OMNES. Kill him! Kill him! He is a spy!

VERA. Dare to lay a finger on him and I leave you all to yourselves.

PRES. Vera, did you not hear what Michael said of him? He stayed all night in Czar's palace. He has a password and a private key. What else should he be but a spy?

VERA. Bah! I do not believe Michael. It is a lie! It is a lie! Alexis, say it is a lie!

ALEX. It is true. Michael has told what he

saw. I did pass that night in the Czar's palace. Michael has spoken the truth.

VERA. Stand back, I say; stand back! Alexis, I do not care. I trust you; you would not betray us; you would not sell the people for money. You are honest, true! Oh, say you are no spy!

ALEX. Spy? You know I am not. I am with you, my brothers, to the death.

MICH. Ay, to your own death.

ALEX. Vera, you know I am true.

VERA. I know it well.

PRES. Why are you here, traitor?

ALEX. Because I love the people.

MICH. Then you can be a martyr for them?

VERA. You must kill me first, Michael, before you lay a finger cm him.

PRES. Michael, we dare not lose Vera. It is her whim to let this boy live. We can keep him here to-night. Up to this he has not betrayed us.

[Tramp of soldiers outside, knocking at door.]

VOICE. Open in the name of the Emperor!

MICH. He *has* betrayed us. This is your doing, spy!

PRES. Come, Michael, come. We have no time to cut one another's throats while we have our own heads to save.

VOICE. Open in the name of the Emperor!

PRES. Brothers, be masked all of you. Michael, open the door. It is our only chance.

[Enter GENERAL KOTEMKIN *and soldiers.]*

GEN. All honest citizens should be in their own houses at an hour before midnight, and not more

than five people have a right to meet privately. Have you not noticed the proclamation, fellow?

MICH. Ay, you have spoiled every honest wall in Moscow with it.

VERA. Peace, Michael, peace. Nay, Sir, we knew it not. We are a company of strolling players travelling from Samara to Moscow to amuse His Imperial Majesty the Czar.

GEN. But I heard loud voices before I entered. What was that?

VERA. We were rehearsing a new tragedy.

GEN. Your answers are too *honest* to be true. Come, let me see who you are. Take off those players' masks. By St. Nicholas, my beauty, if your face matches your figure, you must be a choice morsel! Come, I say, pretty one; I would sooner see your face than those of all the others.

PRES. o God! if he sees it is Vera, we are all lost!

GEN. No coquetting, my girl. Come, unmask, I say, or I shall tell my guards to do it for you.

ALEX. Stand back, I say, General Kotemkm!

GEN. Who are you, fellow, that talks with such a ripping tongue to your betters? [ALEXIS *takes his mask off.]* His Imperial Highness the Czarevitch!

OMNES. The Czarevitch! It is all over!

PRES. He will give us up to the soldiers.

MICH. [To VERA]. Why did you not let me kill him? Come, we must fight to the death for it.

VERA. Peace! he will not betray us.

ALEX. A whim of mine, General! You know

how my father keeps me from the world and imprisons me in the palace. I should really be bored to death if I could not get out at night in disguise sometimes, and have some romantic adventure in town. I fell in with these honest folks a few hours ago.

GEN. But, your Highness——

ALEX. Oh, they are excellent actors, I assure you. If you had come in ten minutes ago, you would have witnessed a most interesting scene.

GEN. Actors, are they, Prince?

ALEX. Ay, and very ambitious actors, too. They only care to play before kings.

GEN. F faith, your Highness, I was in hopes I had made a good haul of Nihilists.

ALEX. Nihilists in Moscow, General! with you as head of the police? Impossible!

GEN. So I always tell your Imperial father. But I heard at the council to-day that that woman Vera Sabouroff, the head of them, had been seen in this very city. The Emperor's face turned as white as the snow outside. I think I never saw such terror in any man before.

ALEX. She is a dangerous woman, then, this Vera Sabouroff?

GEN. The most dangerous in all Europe.

ALEX. Did you ever see her, General?

GEN. Why, five years ago, when I was a plain Colonel, I remember her, your Highness, a common waiting girl in an inn. If I had known then what she was going to turn out, I would have flogged her to death on the roadside. She is not

a woman at all; she is a sort of devil! For the last eighteen months I have been hunting her, and caught sight of her once last September outside Odessa.

ALEX. How did you let her go, General?

GEN. I was by myself, and she shot one of my horses just as I was gaming on her. If I see her again I shan't miss my chance. The Emperor has put twenty thousand roubles on her head.

ALEX. I hope you will get it, General; but meanwhile you are frightening these honest people our of their wits, and disturbing the tragedy. Good night, General.

GEN. Yes; but I should like to see their faces, your Highness.

ALEX. No, General; you must not ask that; you know how these gipsies hate to be stared at.

GEN. Yes. But, your Highness——

ALEX. *[Haughtily].* General, they are my friends, that is enough. And, General, not a word of this little adventure here, you understand. I shall rely on you.

GEN. I shall not forget, Prince. But shall we not see you back to the palace? The State ball is almost over and you are expected.

ALEX. I shall be there; but I shall return alone. Remember, not a word about my strolling players.

GEN. Or your pretty gipsy, eh, Prince? your pretty gipsy! I faith, I should like to see her before I go; she lias such fine eyes through her mask. Well, good night, your Highness; good night.

ALEX. Good night, General.

[Exit GENERAL *and the soldiers.]*

VERA *[Throwing off her mask}.* Saved! and by you!

ALEX. *[Clasping her hand].* Brothers, you trust me now?

TABLEAU

END OF ACT I

ACT II

SCENE—*Council Chamber in the Emperor's Palace, hung with yellow tapestry. Table, with chair of State, set for the Czar; window behind, opening on to a balcony. As the scene progresses the light outside gets darker.*

Present—PRINCE PAUL MARALOFFSKI, PRINCE **PETROVITCH, COUNT ROUVALOFF, BARON RAFF, COUNT PETOUCHOF.**

PRINCE PETRO. So our young scatter-brained Czarevitch has been forgiven at last, and is to take his seat here again.

PRINCE PAUL. Yes; if that is not meant as an extra punishment. For my own part, at least, I find these Cabinet Councils extremely exhausting.

PRINCE PETRO. Naturally; you are always speaking.

PRINCE PAUL. No; I think it must be that I have to listen sometimes.

COUNT R. Still, anything is better than being kept in a sort of prison, like he was—never allowed to go out into the world.

PRINCE PAUL. My dear Count, for romantic young people like he is, the world always looks best at a distance; and a prison where one's allowed to order one's own dinner is not at ail a bad place. *[Enter the* CZAREVITCH. *The courtiers*

rise.] Ah! good afternoon, Prince. Your Highness is looking a little pale to-day.

CZARE. *[Slowly, after a pause].* *I* want change of air.

PRINCE PAUL *[Smiling].* *A* most revolutionary sentiment! Your Imperial father would highly disapprove of any reforms with the thermometer in Russia.

CZARE. *[Bitterly].* My Imperial father had kept me for six months in this dungeon of a palace. This morning he has me suddenly woke up to see some wretched Nihilists hung; it sickened me, the bloody butchery, though it was a noble thing to see how well these men can die.

PRINCE PAUL. When you are as old as I am, Prince, you will understand that there are few things easier than to live badly and to die well.

CZARE. Easy to die well! A lesson experience cannot have taught you, whatever you may know of a bad life.

PRINCE PAUL *[Shrugging his shoulders].* Experience, the name men give to their mistakes. I never commit any.

CZARE. *[Bitterly].* No; crimes are more in your line.

PRINCE PETRO. *[To the* CZAREVITCH]. The Emperor was a good deal agitated about your late appearance at the ball last night, Prince.

COUNT R. *[Laughing].* *I* believe he thought the Nihilists had broken into the palace and carried you off.

BARON RAFF. If they had you would have missed a charming dance.

PRINCE PAUL. And an excellent supper. Gringoire really excelled himself in his salad. Ah! you may laugh, Baron; but to make a good salad is a much more difficult thing than cooking accounts. To make a good salad is to be a brilliant diplomatist—the problem is so entirely the same in both cases. To know exactly how much oil one must put with one's vinegar.

BARON RAFF. A cook and a diplomatist! an excellent parallel. If I had a son who was a fool I'd make him one or the other.

PRINCE PAUL. I see your father did not hold the same opinion, Baron. But, believe me, you are wrong to run down cookery. For myself, the only immortality I desire is to invent a new sauce. I have never had time enough to think seriously about it, but I feel it is in me, I feel it is in me.

CZARE. You have certainly missed your *metier,* Prince Paul; the *cordon bleu* would have suited you much better than the Grand Cross of Honour. But you know you could never have worn your white apron well; you would have soiled it too soon, your hands are not clean enough.

PRINCE PAUL *[Bowing],* Que voulez vous? I manage your father's business.

CZARE. *[Bitterly].* You mismanage my father's business, you mean! Evil genius of his life that you are! before you came there was some love left in him. It is you who have embittered his nature, poured into his ear the poison of treacher-

ous counsel, made him hated by the whole people, made him what he is—a tyrant!

[The courtiers look significantly at each other.]

PRINCE PAUL *[Calmly]. I* see your Highness does want change of air. But I have been an eldest son myself. *[Lights a cigarette.]* I know what it is when a father won't die to please one.

[The CZAREVITCH *goes to the top of the stage, and leans against the window, looking out.]*

PRINCE PETRO. ***[To*** **BARON RAFF].** **Foolish boy!** He will be sent into exile, or worse, if he is not careful.

BARON RAFF. Yes. What a mistake it is to be sincere!

PRINCE PETRO. The only folly you have never committed, Baron.

BARON RAFF. One has only one head, you know, Prince.

PRINCE PAUL. My dear Baron, your head is the last thing any one would wish to take from you. *[Pulls out snuffbox and offers it to* PRINCE **PETROVITCH.]**

PRINCE PETRO. Thanks, Prince! Thanks!

PRINCE PAUL. Very delicate, isn't it? I get it direct from Paris. But under this vulgar Republic everything has degenerated over there. 'Cotelettes a I'imperiale' vanished, of course, with the Bourbon, and omelettes went out with the Orleanists. La belle France is entirely ruined, Prince, through bad morals and worse cookery. *[Enter the* MARQUIS DE POIVRARD.] Ah! Marquis. I trust Madame la Marquise is well?

MARQUIS DE P. You ought to know better than I do, Prince Paul; you see more *of* her.

PRINCE PAUL *[Bowing].* Perhaps I see more *in* her, Marquis. Your wife is really a charming woman, so full of *esprit*, and so satirical too; she talks continually of you when we are together.

PRINCE PETRO. *[Looking at the clock].* His Majesty is a little late to-day, is he not?

PRINCE PAUL. What has happened to you, my dear Petrovitch? you seem quite out of sorts. You haven't quarrelled with your cook, I hope? What a tragedy that would be for you; you would lose all your friends.

PRINCE PETRO. I fear I wouldn't be so fortunate as that. You forget I would still have my purse. But you are wrong for once; my chef and I are on excellent terms.

PRINCE PAUL. Then your creditors or Mademoiselle Vera Sabouroff have been writing to you? I find both of them such excellent correspondents. But really you needn't be alarmed. I find the most violent proclamations from the Executive Committee, as they call it, left all over my house. I never read them; they are so badly spelt as a rule.

PRINCE PETRO. Wrong again, Prince; the Nihilists leave me alone for some reason or other.

PRINCE PAUL *[Aside].* Ah! true. I forgot. Indifference is the revenge the world takes on mediocrities.

PRINCE PETRO. I am bored with life, Prince. Since the opera season ended I have been a perpetual martyr to ennui.

PRINCE PAUL. The maladie du siecle! You want a new excitement, Prince. Let me see—you have been married twice already; suppose you try —falling in love, for once.

BARON R. Prince, I have been thinking a good deal lately——

PRINCE PAUL *[Interrupting].* You surprise me very much, Baron.

BARON R. I cannot understand your nature.

PRINCE PAUL *[Smiling].* If my nature had been made to suit your comprehension rather than my own requirements, I am afraid I would have made a very poor figure in the world.

COUNT R. There seems to be nothing in life about which you would not jest.

PRINCE PAUL. Ah! my dear Count, life is much too important a thing ever to talk seriously about it.

CZARE. *[Coming back from the window].* I don't think Prince Paul's nature is such a mystery. He would stab his best friend for the sake of writing an epigram on his tombstone, or experiencing a new sensation.

PRINCE PAUL. Parbleu! I would sooner lose my best friend than my worst enemy. To have friends, you know, one need only be good-natured; but when a man has no enemy left there must be something mean about him.

CZARE. *[Bitterly].* If to have enemies is a measure of greatness, then you must be a Colossus, indeed, Prince.

PRINCE PAUL. Yes, I know I'm the most hated

man in Russia, except your father, except your father, of course, Prince. He doesn't seem to like it much, by the way, but I do, I assure you. *[Bitterly.]* I love to drive through the streets and sec how the canaille scowl at me from every corner. It makes me feel I am a power in Russia; one man against a hundred millions! Besides, I have no ambition to be a popular hero, to be crowned with laurels one year and pelted with stones the next; I prefer dying peaceably in my own bed.

CZARE. And after death?

PRINCE PAUL *[Shrugging his shoulders].* Heaven is a despotism. I shall be at home there.

CZARE. Do you never think of the people and their rights?

PRINCE PAUL. The people and their rights bore me. I am sick of both. In these modern days, to be vulgar, illiterate, common and vicious, seems to give a man a marvellous infinity of rights that his honest fathers never dreamed of. Believe me, Prince, in good democracy every man should be an aristocrat; but these people in Russia who seek to thrust us out are no better than the animals in one's preserves, and made to be shot at, most of them.

CZARE. *[Excitedly].* If they are common, illiterate, vulgar, no better than the beasts of the field, who made them so?

[Enter AIDE-DE-CAMP.]

AIDE-DE-CAMP. His Imperial Majesty, the Emperor! [PRINCE PAUL *looks at the* CZAREVITCH, *and smiles.]*

[Enter the CZAR, *surrounded by his guard.]*

CZARE. *[Rushing forward to meet him].* Sire!

CZAR *[Nervous and frightened].* Don't come too near me, boy! Don't come too near me, I say! There is always something about an heir to a crown unwholesome to his father. Who is that man over there? I don't know him. What is he doing? Is he a conspirator? Have you searched him? Give him till to-morrow to confess, then hang him!—hang him!

PRINCE PAUL. Sire, you are anticipating history. This is Count Petouchof, your new ambassador to Berlin. He is come to kiss hands on his appointment.

CZAR. To kiss my hand? There is some plot in it. He wants to poison me. There, kiss my son's hand! it will do quite as well.

[PRINCE PAUL *signs to* PRINCE PETOUCHOF *to leave the room. Exit* PETOUCHOF *and the guards.* CZAR *sinks down into his chair. The courtiers remain silent.]*

PRINCE PAUL *[Approaching].* Sire! will your Majesty——

CZAR. What do you startle me like that for? No, I won't. *[Watches the courtiers nervously.]* Why are you clattering your sword, sir? *[To* COUNT ROUVALOFF.] Take it off, I shall have no man wear a sword in my presence *[Looking at* CZAREVITCH], least of all my son. [To PRINCE PAUL.] You are not angry with me, Prince? You won't desert me, will you? Say you won't desert me. What do you want? You can have anything —anything.

PRINCE PAUL *[Bowing very low].* Sire! 'tis enough for me to have your confidence. *[Aside.]* I was afraid he was going to revenge himself, and give me another decoration.

CZAR *[Returning to his chair].* Well, gentlemen.

MARQ. DE POIV. Sire, I have the honour to present to you a loyal address from your subjects in the Province of Archangel, expressing their horror at the last attempt on your Majesty's life.

PRINCE PAUL. The last attempt but two, you ought to have said, Marquis. Don't you see it is dated three weeks back?

CZAR. They are good people in the Province of Archangel—honest, loyal people. They love me very much—simple, loyal people; give them a new saint, it costs nothing. Well, Alexis *[Turning to the* CZAREVITCH]—how many traitors were hung this morning?

CZARE. There were three men strangled, Sire.

CZAR. There should have been three thousand. I would to God that this people had but one neck that I might strangle them with one noose! Did they tell anything? whom did they implicate? what did they confess?

CZARE. Nothing, Sire.

CZAR. They should have been tortured then; why weren't they tortured? Must I always be fighting in the dark? Am I never to know from what root these traitors spring?

CZARE. What root should there be of discontent among the people but tyranny and injustice amongst their rulers?

CZAR. What did you say, boy? tyranny! tyranny! Am I a tyrant? I'm not. I love the people. I'm their father. I'm called so in every official proclamation. Have a care, boy; have a care. You don't seem to be cured yet of your foolish tongue. *[Goes over to* PRINCE PAUL *and puts his hand on his shoulder.]* Prince Paul, tell me were there many people there this morning to see the Nihilists hung?

PRINCE PAUL. Hanging is of course a good deal less of a novelty in Russia now, Sire, than it was three or four years ago; and you know how easily the people get tired even of their best amusements. But the square and the tops of the houses were really quite crowded, were they not, Prince? *[To the* CZAREVITCH *who takes no notice.]*

CZAR. That's right; all loyal citizens should be there. It shows them what to look forward to. Did you arrest any one in the crowd?

PRINCE PAUL. Yes, Sire, a woman for cursing your name. *[The* CZAREVITCH *starts anxiously.]* She was the mother of the two criminals.

CZAR *[Looking at* CZAREVITCH]. She should have blessed me for having rid her of her children. Send her to prison.

CZARE. The prisons of Russia are too full already, Sire. There is no room in them for any more victims.

CZAR. They don't die fast enough, then. You should put more of them into one cell at once. You don't keep them long enough in the mines. If you do they're sure to die; but you're all too

merciful. I'm too merciful myself. Send her to Siberia. She is sure to die on the way. *[Enter an* AIDE-DE-CAMP.] Who'sthat? Who's that?

AIDE-DE-CAMP. A letter for his Imperial Majesty.

CZAR *[To* PRINCE PAUL]. I won't open it. There may be something in it.

PRINCE PAUL. It would be a very disappointing letter, Sire, if there wasn't. *[Takes letter himself, and reads it.]*

PRINCE PETRO. ***[To*** **COUNT ROUVALOFF].** **It must** be some sad news. I know that smile too well.

PRINCE PAUL. From the Chief of the Police at Archangel, Sire. 'The Governor of the province was shot this morning by a woman as he was entering the courtyard of his own house. The assassin has been seized

CZAR. I never trusted the people of Archangel. It's a nest of Nihilists and conspirators. Take away their saints; they don't deserve them.

PRINCE PAUL. Your Highness would punish them more severely by giving them an extra one. Three governors shot in two months. *[Smiles to himself.]* Sire, permit me to recommend your loyal subject, the Marquis de Poivrard, as the new governor of your Province of Archangel.

MARQ. DE POIV. *[Hurriedly].* Sire, I am unfit for this post.

PRINCE PAUL. Marquis, you are too modest. Believe me, there is no man in Russia I would sooner see Governor of Archangel than yourself. *[Whispers to* CZAR.]

CZAR. Quite right, Prince Paul; you are always right. See that the Marquis's letters are made out at once.

PRINCE PAUL. He can start to-night, Sire. I shall really miss you very much, Marquis. I always liked your taste in wines and wives extremely.

MARQ. DE POIV. *[To the* CZAR]. Start to-night, Sire? [PRINCE PAUL *whispers to the* CZAR.]

CZAR. Yes, Marquis, to-night; it is better to go at once.

PRINCE PAUL. I shall see that Madame la Marquise is not too lonely while you are away; so you need not be alarmed for her.

COUNT R. *[To* PRINCE PETROVITCH]. **I should** be more alarmed for myself.

CZAR. The Governor of Archangel shot in his own courtyard by a woman! I'm not safe here. I'm not safe anywhere, with that she devil of the revolution, Vera Sabouroff, here in Moscow. Prince Paul, is that woman still here?

PRINCE PAUL. They tell me she was at the Grand Duke's ball last night. I can hardly believe that; but she certainly had intended to leave for Novgorod to-day, Sire. The police were watching every train for her; but, for some reason or other, she did not go. Some traitor must have warned her. But I shall catch her yet. A chase after a beautiful woman is always exciting.

CZAR. You must hunt her down with bloodhounds, and when she is taken I shall hew her

limb from limb. I shall stretch her on the rack till her pale white body is twisted and curled like paper in the fire.

PRINCE PAUL. Oh, we shall have another hunt immediately for her, Sire! Prince Alexis will assist us, I am sure.

CZARE. You never require any assistance to ruin a woman, Prince Paul.

CZAR. Vera, the Nihilist, in Moscow! 0 God, were it not better to die at once the dog's death they plot for me than to live as I live now! Never to sleep, or, if I do, to dream such horrid dreams that Hell itself were peace when matched with them. To trust none but those I have bought, to buy none worth trusting! To see a traitor in every smile, poison in every dish, a dagger in every hand! To lie awake at night, listening from hour to hour for the stealthy creeping of the murderer, for the laying of the damned mine! You are all spies! you are all spies! You worst of all—you, my own son! Which of you is it who hides these bloody proclamations under my own pillow, or at the table where I sit? Which of ye all is the Judas who betrays us? 0 God! 0 God! methinks there was a time once, in our war with England, when nothing could make me afraid. *[This with more calm and pathos.]* I have ridden into the crimson heart of war, and borne back an eagle which those wild islanders had taken from us. Men said I was brave then. My father gave me the Iron Cross of valour. Oh, could he see me now with this coward's livery

ever in my cheek! *[Sinks into his chair.]* *I* never knew any love when I was a boy. I was ruled by terror myself, how else should I rule now? *[Starts up.]* But I will have revenge; I will have revenge. For every hour I have lain awake at night, waiting for the noose or the dagger, they shall pass years in Siberia, centuries in the mines! Ay! I shall have revenge.

CZAKE. Father! have mercy on the people. Give them what they ask.

PRINCE PAUL. And begin, Sire, with your own head; they have a particular liking for that.

CZAR. The people! the people! A tiger which I have let loose upon myself; but I will fight with it to the death. I am done with half measures. I shall crush these Nihilists at a blow. There shall not be a man of them, ay, or a woman, either, left alive in Russia. Am I Emperor for nothing, that a woman should hold me at bay? Vera Sabouroff shall be in my power, I swear it, before a week is ended, though I burn my whole city to find her. She shall be flogged by the knout, stifled in the fortress, strangled in the square!

CZARE. o God!

CZAR. For two years her hands have been clutching at my throat; for two years she has made my life a hell; but I shall have revenge. Martial law, Prince, martial law over the whole Empire; that will give me revenge. A good measure, Prince, eh? a good measure.

PRINCE PAUL. And an economical one too, Sire. It would cany off your surplus population in six

months; and save you many expenses in courts of justice; they will not be needed now.

CZAR. Quite right. There are too many people in Russia, too much money spent on them, too much money in courts of justice. I'll shut them up.

CZARE. Sire, reflect before——

CZAR. When can you have the proclamations ready, Prince Paul?

PRINCE PAUL. They have been printed for the last six months, Sire. I knew you would need them.

CZAR. That's good! That's very good! Let us begin at once. All, Prince, if every king in Europe had a minister like you——

CZARE. There would be less kings in Europe than there are.

CZAR *[In frightened whisper, to* PRINCE PAUL]. What does he mean? Do you trust him? His prison hasn't cured him yet. Shall I banish him? Shall I *[Whispers]* . . .? The Emperor Paul did it. The Empress Catherine there *[Points to picture on the watt]* did it. Why shouldn't I?

PRINCE PAUL. Your Majesty, there is no need for alarm. The Prince is a very ingenuous young man. He pretends to be devoted to the people, and lives in a palace; preaches socialism, and draws a salary that would support a province. He'll find out one day that the best cure for Republicanism is the Imperial crown, and will cut up the 'bonnet rouge' of Democracy to make decorations for his Prime Minister.

CZAR. You are right. If he really loved the people, he could not be my son.

PRINCE PAUL. If he lived with the people for a fortnight, their bad dinners would soon cure him of his democracy. Shall we begin, Sire?

CZAR. At once. Read the proclamation. Gentlemen, be seated. Alexis, Alexis, I say, come and hear it! It will be good practice for you; you will be doing it yourself some day.

CZARE. I have heard too much of it already. *[Takes his seat at the table.]* [COUNT ROUVALOFF *whispers to him.]*

CZAR. What are you whispering about there, Count Rouvaloff?

COUNT R. I was giving his Royal Highness some good advice, your Majesty.

PRINCE PAUL. Count Rouvaloff is the typical spendthrift, Sire; he is always giving away what he needs most. *[Lays paper before the* CZAR.] I think, Sire, you will approve of this:—'Love of the people 'Father of his people 'Martial law and the usual allusions to Providence in the last line. All it requires now is your Imperial Majesty's signature.

CZARE. Sire!

PRINCE PAUL *[Hurriedly].* I promise your Majesty to crush every Nihilist in Russia in six months if you sign this proclamation; every Nihilist in Russia.

CZAR. Say that again! To crush every Nihilist in Russia; to crush this woman, their leader, who makes war upon me in my own city. Prince Paul

Maraloffski, I create you Marechale of the whole Russian Empire to help you to carry out martial law.

CZAR. Give me the proclamation. I will sign it at once.

PRINCE PAUL *[Points on paper].* Here, Sire.

CZARE. *[Starts up and puts his hands on the paper].* Stay! I tell you, stay! The priests have taken heaven from the people, and you would take the earth away too,

PRINCE PAUL. We have no time, Prince, now. This boy will ruin everything. The pen, Sire.

CZARE. What! is it so small a thing to strangle a nation, to murder a kingdom, to wreck an empire? Who are we who dare lay this ban of terror on a people? Have we less vices than they have, that we bring them to the bar of judgment before us?

PRINCE PAUL. What a Communist the Prince is! He would have an equal distribution of sin as well as of property.

CZARE. Wanned by the same sun, nurtured by the same air, fashioned of flesh and blood like to our own, wherein are they different to us, save that they starve while we surfeit, that they toil while we idle, that they sicken while we poison, that they die while we strangle?

CZAR. How dare——?

CZARE. I dare all for the people; but you would rob them of common rights of common men.

CZAR. The people have no rights.

CZARE. Then they have great wrongs. Father, they have won your battles for you; from the

pine forests of the Baltic to the palms of India they have ridden on victory's mighty wings in search of your glory! Boy as I am in years, I have seen wave after wave of living men sweep up the heights of battle to their death; aye, and snatch perilous conquest from the scales of war when the bloody crescent seemed to shake above our eagles.

CZAR *[Somewhat moved].* Those men are dead. What have I to do with them?

CZARE. Nothing! The dead are safe; you cannot harm them now. They sleep their last long sleep. Some in Turkish waters, others by the wind-swept heights of Norway and the Dane! But these, the living, our brothers, what have we done for them? They asked you for bread, you gave them a stone. They sought for freedom, you scourged them with scorpions. You have sown the seeds of this revolution yourself!——

PRINCE PAUL. And are we not cutting down the harvest?

CZARE. Oh, my brothers! better far that ye had died in the iron hail and screaming shell of battle than to come back to such a doom as this! The beasts of the forests have their lairs, and the wild beasts their caverns, but the people of Russia, conquerors of the world, have not where to lay their heads.

PRINCE PAUL. They have the headsman's block.

CZARE. The headsman's block: Aye, you have killed their souls at your pleasure, you would kill their bodies now.

CZAR. Insolent boy! Have you forgotten who is Emperor of Russia?

CZARE. No! The people reign now, by the grace of God. You should have been their shepherd; you have fled away like the hireling, and let the wolves in upon them.

CZAR. Take him away! Take him away, Prince Paul!

CZARE. God hath given this people tongues to speak with; you would cut them out that they may be dumb in their agony, silent in their torture! But God hath given them hands to smite with, and they shall smite! Ay! from the sick and labouring womb of this unhappy land some revolution, like a bloody child, shall rise up and slay you.

CZAR *[Leaping up]*. Devil! Assassin! Why do you beard me thus to my face?

CZARE. Because I am a Nihilist! *[The* MINISTERS *start to their feet; there is a dead silence for a few minutes.]*

CZAR. A Nihilist! a Nihilist! Scorpion whom I have nurtured, traitor whom I have fondled, is this your bloody secret? Prince Paul Maraloffski, Marechale of the Russian Empire, arrest the Czarevitch!

MINISTERS. Arrest the Czarevitch!

CZAR. A Nihilist! If you have sown with them, you shall reap with them! If you have talked with them, you shall rot with them! If you have lived with them, with them you shall die!

PRINCE PETRO. Die!

CZAR. A plague on all sons, I say! There should be no more marriages in Russia when one can breed such vipers as you are! Arrest the Czarevitch, I say!

PRINCE PAUL. Czarevitch! by order of the Emperor, I demand your sword. [CZAREVITCH *gives up sword;* PRINCE PAUL *places il on the table].* Foolish boy! you are not made for a conspirator; you have not learned to hold your tongue. Heroics are out of place in a palace.

CZAR *[Sinks into his chair with his eyes fixed on the* CZAREVITCH!. o God!

CZARE. If I am to die for the people, I am ready; one Nihilist more or less in Russia, what does that matter?

PRINCE PAUL *[Aside].* A good deal I should say to the one Nihilist.

CZARE. The mighty brotherhood to which I belong has a thousand such as I am, ten thousand better still! *[The* CZAR *starts in his seaL]* The star of freedom has risen already, and far off I hear the mighty wave democracy break on these cursed shores.

PRINCE PAUL [To PRINCE PETROVITCHJ. In that case you and I had better learn how to swim.

CZARE. Father, Emperor, Imperial Master, I plead not for my own life, but for the lives of my brothers, the people.

PRINCE PAUL *[Bitterly].* Your brothers, the people, Prince, are not content with their own lives, they always want to take their neighbour's too.

CZAR *[Standing up].* I am sick of being afraid. I have done with terror now. From this day I proclaim war against the people—war to their annihilation. As they have dealt with me, so shall I deal with them. I shall grind them to powder, and strew their dust upon the air. There shall be a spy in every man's house, a traitor on every hearth, a hangman in every village, a gibbet in every square. Plague, leprosy, or fever shall be less deadly than my wrath; I will make every frontier a graveyard, every province a lazar-house, and cure the sick by the sword. I shall have peace in Russia, though it be the peace of the dead. Who said I was a coward? Who said I was afraid? See, thus shall I crush this people beneath my feet! *[Takes up sword of* CZAREVITCH *off table and tramples on it.]*

CZARE. Father, beware, the sword you tread on may turn and wound you. The people suffer long, but vengeance comes at last, vengeance with red hands and bloody purpose.

PRINCE PAUL. Bah! the people are bad shots; they always miss one.

CZARE. There are times when the people are instruments of God.

CZAR. Ay! and when kings are God's scourges for the people. Oh, my own son, in my own house! My own flesh and blood against me! Take him away! Take him away! Bring in my guards. *[Enter the Imperial Guard.* CZAR *points to* CZAREVITCH, *who stands alone at the side of the stage.]* To the blackest prison in Moscow! Let me never see

his face again. [CZAREVITCH *is being led out.]* No, no, leave him! I don't trust guards. They are all Nihilists! They would let him escape and he would kill me, kill me! No, I'll bring him to prison myself, you and I *[To* PRINCE PAUL]. I trust you, you have no mercy. I shall have no mercy. Oh, my own son against me! How hot it is! The air stifles me! I feel as if I were going to faint, as if something were at my throat. Open the windows, I say! Out of my sight! Out of my sight! I can' t bear his eyes. Wait, wait for me. *[Throws window open and goes out on balcony.}*

PRINCE PAUL *[Looking at his watch].* The dinner is sure to be spoiled. How annoying politics are and eldest sons!

VOICE *[Outside, in the street}.* God save the people! [CZAR *is shot, and staggers back into the room.]*

CZARE. *[Breaking from the guards, and rushing over}.* Father!

CZAR. Murderer! Murderer! You did it! Murderer! *[Dies.]*

TABLEAU

END OF ACT II

ACT III

Same scene and business as Act I. Man in yellow dress, with drawn sword, at the door.

Password outside. Vae tyrannis.

Answer. Vae victis *[Repeated three times].*

[Enter CONSPIRATORS, *who form a semicircle, masked and cloaked.]*

PRESIDENT. What hour is it?

FIRST CONSP. The hour to strike.

PRES. What day?

SECOND CONSP. The day of Marat.

PRES. In what month?

THIRD CONSP. The month of liberty.

PRES. What is our duty?

FOURTH CONSP. To obey.

PRES. Our creed?

FIFTH CONSP. Parbleu, Mons. le President, I never knew you had one.

CONSP. A spy! A spy! Unmask! Unmask! A spy!

PRES. Let the doors be shut. There are others but Nihilists present.

CONSP. Unmask! Unmask! Kill him! kill him! *[Masked* CONSPIRATOR *unmasks.]* Prince Paul!

VERA. Devil! Who lured you into the lion's den!

CONSPS. Kill him! kill him!

PRINCE PAUL. En verite, Messieurs, you are not over-hospitable in your welcome!

VERA. Welcome! What welcome should we give you but the dagger or the noose?

PRINCE PAUL. I had no idea, really, that the Nihilists were so exclusive. Let me assure you that if I had not always had an *entree* to the very best society, and the very worst conspiracies, I could never have been Prime Minister in Russia.

VERA. The tiger cannot change its nature, nor the snake lose its venom; but are you turned a lover of the people?

PRINCE PAUL. Mon Dieu, non, Mademoiselle! I would much sooner talk scandal in a drawing-room than treason in a cellar. Besides, I hate the common mob, who smell of garlic, smoke bad tobacco, get up early, and dine off one dish.

PRES. What have you to gain, then, by a revolution?

PRINCE PAUL. Mon ami, I have nothing left to lose. That scatter-brained boy, the new Czar, has banished me.

VERA. To Siberia?

PRINCE PAUL. No, to Paris. He has confiscated my estates, robbed me of my office and my cook. I have nothing left but my decorations. 1 am here for revenge.

PRES. Then you have a right to be one of us. We also meet daily for revenge.

PRINCE PAUL. You want money, of course. No one ever joins a conspiracy who has any. Here. *[Throws money on table.]* You have so many spies

that I should think you want information. Well, you will find me the best informed man in Russia on the abuses of our Government. I made them nearly all myself.

VERA. President, I don't trust this man. He has done us too much harm in Russia to let him go in safety.

PRINCE PAUL. Believe me, Mademoiselle, you are wrong; I will be a most valuable addition to your circle; as for you, gentlemen, if I had not thought that you would be useful to me I shouldn't have risked my neck among you, or dined an hour earlier than usual so as to be in time.

PRES. Ay, if he had wanted to spy on us, Vera, he wouldn't have come himself.

PRINCE PAUL *[Aside].* No; I should have sent my best friend.

PRES. Besides, Vera, he is just the man to give us the information we want about some business we have in hand to-night.

VERA. Be it so if you wish it.

PRES. Brothers, is it your will that Prince Paul Maraloffski be admitted, and take the oath of the Nihilist?

CONSP. It is! it is!

PRES. *[Holding out the dagger and a paper].* Prince Paul, the dagger or the oath?

PRINCE PAUL. *[Smiles sardonically]. I* would sooner annihilate than be annihilated. *[Takes paper.]*

PRES. Remember: Betray us, and as long as the earth holds poison or steel, as long as men can

strike or woman betray, you shall not escape vengeance. The Nihilists never forget their friends, or forgive their enemies.

LRINCE PAUL. Really? I did not think you were so civilised.

VERA *[Pacing up and dawn].* Why is he not here? He will not keep the crown. I know him well.

PRES. Sign. [PRINCE PAUL *signs.]* You said you thought we had no creed. You were wrong. Read it.

VERA. This is a dangerous thing, President. What can we do with this man?

PRES. We can use him.

VERA. And afterwards?

PRES. *[Shrugging his shoulders].* Strangle him.

PRINCE PAUL *[Reading].* 'The rights of humanity!' In the old times men carried out their rights for themselves as they lived, but nowadays every baby seems bora with a social manifesto in its mouth much bigger than itself. 'Nature is not a temple, but a workshop: we demand the right to labour.' Ah, I shall surrender my own rights in that respect.

VERA *[Pacing up and down behind].* Oh, will he never come? will he never come?

PRINCE PAUL. 'The family as subversive of true socialistic and communal unity is to be annihilated/ Yes, President, I agree completely with Article 5. A family is a terrible incumbrance, especially when one is not married. *[Three knocks at the door.]*

VERA. Alexis at last!

Password. Vae tyrannis!

Answer. Vsevictis! Vse victis! Vse victis!

[Enter MICHAEL STROGANOFF.]

PRES. Michael, the regicide! Brothers, let us do honour to a man who has killed a king.

VERA *[Aside].* Oh, he will come yet.

PRES. Michael, you have saved Russia.

MICH. Ay, Russia was free for a moment when the tyrant fell, but the sun of liberty has set again like that false dawn which cheats our eyes in autumn.

PRES. The dread night of tyranny is not yet past for Russia.

MICH. *[Clutching his knife].* One more blow, and the end is come indeed.

VERA *[Aside].* One more blow! What does he mean? Oh, impossible! but why is he not with us? Alexis! Alexis! why are you not here?

PRES. But how did you escape, Michael? They said you had been seized.

MICH. I was dressed in the uniform of the Imperial Guard. The Colonel on duty was a brother, and gave me the password. I drove through the troops in safety with it, and, thanks to my good horse, reached the walls before the gates were closed.

PRES. What a chance his coming out on the balcony was!

MICH. A chance? There is no such thing as chance. It was God's finger led him there.

PRES. And where have you been these three days?

MICH. Hiding in the house of the priest Nicholas at the cross-roads.

PRES. Nicholas is an honest man.

MICH. Ay, honest enough for a priest. I am here now for vengeance on a traitor!

VERA *[Aside]*. 0 God, will he never come? Alexis! why arc you not here? You cannot have turned traitor!

MICH. *[Seeing* PRINCE PAUL.] Prince Paul Maraloffski here! By St. George, a lucky capture! This must have been Vera's doing. She is the only one who could have lured that serpent into the trap.

PRES. Prince Paul has just taken the oath.

VERA. Alexis, the Czar, has banished him from Russia.

MICH. Bah! A blind to cheat us. We will keep Prince Paul here, and find some office for him in our reign of terror. He is well accustomed by this time to bloody work.

PRINCE PAUL *[Approaching* MICHAEL]. That was a long shot of yours, mon camarade.

MICH, I have had a good deal of practice shooting, since I have been a boy, off your Highness's wild boars.

PRINCE PAUL. Arc my gamekeepers like moles, then, always asleep?

MICH. No, Prince. I am one of them; but, like you, I am fond of robbing what I am put to watch.

PRES. This must be a new atmosphere for you, Prince Paul. We speak the truth to one another here.

PEINCE PAUL. How misleading you must find it. You have an odd medley here, President—a little rococo, I am afraid.

PRES. You recognise a good many friends, I dare say?

PRINCE PAUL. Yes, there is always more brass than brains in an aristocracy.

PRES. But you are here yourself?

PRINCE PAUL. I? As I cannot be Prime Minister, I must be a Nihilist. There is no alternative.

VERA. 0 God, will he never come? The hand is on the stroke of the hour. Will he never come?

MICH. *[Aside].* President, you know what we have to do? Tis but a sorry hunter who leaves the wolf cub alive to avenge his father. How are we to get at this boy? It must be to-night. To-morrow he will be throwing some sop of reform to the people, and it will be too late for a Republic.

PRINCE PAUL. You are quite right. Good kings are the enemies of Democracy, and when he has begun by banishing me you may be sure he intends to be a patriot.

MICH. I am sick of patriot kings; what Russia needs is a Republic.

PRINCE PAUL. Messieurs, I have brought you two documents which I think will interest you—the proclamation this young Czar intends publishing to-morrow, and a plan of the Winter Palace where he sleeps to-night. *[Hands papers.]*

VERA. I dare not ask them what they are plotting about. Oh, why is Alexis not here?

PRES. Prince, this is most valuable information. Michael, you were right. If it is not to-night it will be too late. Read that.

MICH. Ah! A loaf of bread flung to a starving nation. A lie to cheat the people. *[Tears it up.]* It must be to-night. I do not believe in him. Would he have kept his crown had he loved the people? But how are we to get at him?

PRINCE PAUL. The key of the private door in the street. *[Hands key.]*

PRES. Prince, we are in your debt.

PRINCE PAUL *[Smiling].* The normal condition of the Nihilists.

MICH. Ay, but we are paying our debts off with interest now. Two Emperors in one week. That will make the balance straight. We would have thrown in a Prime Minister if you had not come.

PRINCE PAUL. Ah, I am sorry you told me. It robs my visit of all its picturesqueness and adventure. I thought 1 was perilling my head by coming here, and you tell me I have saved it. One is sure to be disappointed if one tries to get romance out of modern life.

MICH. It is not so romantic a thing to lose one's head, Prince Paul.

PRINCE PAUL. No, but it must often be very dull to keep it. Don't you find that sometimes? *[Clock strikes six.]*

VERA *[Sinking into a seat].* Oh, it is past the hour! It is past the hour!

MICH. *[To* PRESIDENT]. Remember to-morrow will be too late.

PRES. Brothers, it is full time. Which of us is absent?

CONSPS. Alexis! Alexis!

PRES. Michael, read Rule 7.

MICH, ' When any brother shall have disobeyed a summons to be present, the President shall inquire if there is anything alleged against him/

PRES. Is there anything against our brother Alexis?

CONSP. He wears a crown! He wears a crown!

PRES. Michael, read Article 7 of the Code of Revolution.

MICH. 'Between the Nihilists and all men who wear crowns above their fellows, there is war to the death/

PRES. Brothers, what say you? Is Alexis, the Czar, guilty or not?

OMNES. He is guilty!

PRES. What shall the penalty be?

OMNES. Death!

PRES. Let the lots be prepared; it shall be tonight.

PRINCE PAUL. Ah, this is really interesting! I was getting afraid conspiracies were as dull as courts are.

PROF. MARFA. My forte is more in writing pamphlets than in taking shots. Still a regicide has always a place in history.

MICH. If your pistol is as harmless as your pen, this young tyrant will have a long life.

PRINCE PAUL. You ought to remember, too, Professor, that if you were seized, as you probably

would be, and hung, as you certainly would be, there would be nobody left to read your own articles.

PEES. Brothers, are you ready?

VERA *[Starting up].* Not yet! Not yet! I have a word to say.

MICH. *[Aside].* Plague take her! I knew it would come to this.

VERA. This boy has been our brother. Night after night he has perilled his own life to come here. Night after night, when every street was filled with spies, every house with traitors. Delicately nurtured like a king's son, he has dwelt among us.

PRES. Ay! under a false name. He lied to us at the beginning. He lies to us now at the end.

VERA. I swear he is true. There is not a man here who does not owe him his life a thousand times. When the bloodhounds were on us that night, who saved us from arrest, torture, flogging, death, but he ye seek to kill?——

MICH. To kill all tyrants is our mission!

VERA. He is no tyrant. I know him well! He loves the people.

PRES. We know him too; he is a traitor.

VERA. A traitor! Three days ago he could have betrayed every man of you here, and the gibbet would have been your doom. He gave you all your lives once. Give him a little time—a week, a month, a few days; but not now—0 God, not now!

CONSPS. *[Brandishing daggers].* To-night! to-night! to-night!

VERA. Peace, you gorged adders; peace!

MICH. What, are we not here to annihilate? shall we not keep our oath?

VERA. Your oath! your oath! Greedy that you are of gain, every man's hand lusting for his neighbour's pelf, every heart set on pillage and rapine; who, of ye all, if the crown were set on his head, would give an empire up for the mob to scramble for? The people are not yet fit for a Republic in Russia.

PKES. Every nation is fit for a Republic.

MICH. The man is a tyrant.

VERA. A tyrant! Hath he not dismissed his evil counsellors. That ill-omened raven of his father's life hath had his wings clipped and his claws pared, and comes to us croaking for revenge. Oh, have mercy on him! Give him a week to live!

PRES. Vera pleading for a king!

VERA *[Proudly].* I plead not for a king, but for a brother.

MICH. For a traitor to his oath, for a coward who should have flung the purple back to the fools that gave it to him. No, Vera, no. The brood of men is not dead yet, nor the dull earth grown sick of child-bearing. No crowned man in Russia shall pollute God's air by living.

PRES. You bade us try you once; we have tried you, and you are found wanting.

MICH. Vera, I am not blind; I know your secret.

You love this boy, this young prince with his pretty face, his curled hair, his soft white hands. Fool that you are, dupe of a lying tongue, do you know what he would have done to you, this boy you think loved you? He would have made you his mistress, used your body at his pleasure, thrown you away when he was wearied of you; you, the priestess of liberty, the flame of Revolution, the torch of democracy.

VERA. What he would have done to me matters little. To the people, at least, he will be true. He loves the people—at least, he loves liberty.

PRES. So he would play the citizen-king, would he, while we starve? Would flatter us with sweet speeches, would cheat us with promises like his father, would lie to us as his whole race have lied?

MICH. And you whose very name made every despot tremble for his life, you, Vera Sabouroff, you would betray liberty for a lover and the people for a paramour!

CONSPS. Traitress! Draw the lots; draw the lots!

VERA. In thy throat thou liest, Michael! I love him not. He loves me not.

MICH. You love him not? Shall he not die then?

VERA *[With an effort, clenching her hands].* Ay, it is right that he should die. He hath broken his oath. There should be no crowned man in Europe. Have I not sworn it? To be strong our new Republic should be drunk with the blood of kings. He hath broken his oath. As the father

died so let the son die too. Yet not to-night, not to-night. Russia, that hath borne her centuries of wrong, can wait a week for liberty. Give him a week.

PRES. We will have none of you! Begone from us to this boy you love.

MICH. Though I find him in your arms I shall kill him.

CONSPS. To-night! To-night! To-night!

MICH. *[Holding up his hand].* A moment! I have something to say. *[Approaches* VERA ; *speaks very slowly.]* Vera Sabouroff, have you forgotten your brother? *[Pauses to see effect;* VERA *starts.]* Have you forgotten that young face, pale with famine; those young limbs twisted with torture; the iron chains they made him walk in? What week of liberty did they give him? What pity did they show him for a day? [VERA *falls in a chair.]* Oh! you could talk glibly enough then of vengeance, glibly enough of liberty. When you said you would come to Moscow, your old father caught you by the knees and begged you not to leave him childless and alone. I seem to hear his cries still ringing in my ears, but you were as deaf to him as the rocks on the roadside; as chill and cold as the snow on the hill. You left your father that night, and three weeks after he died of a broken heart. You wrote to me to follow you here. I did so; first because I loved you; but you soon cured me of that; whatever gentle feeling, whatever pity, whatever humanity, was in my heart you withered up and destroyed, as the

canker worm eats the corn, and the plague kills the child. You bade me cast out love from my breast as a vile thing, you turned my hand to iron and my heart to stone, you told me to live for freedom and for revenge. I have done so; but you, what have you done?

VERA. Let the lots be drawn! [CONSPIRATORS *applaud.]*

PRINCE PAUL *[Aside].* Ah, the Grand Duke will come to the throne sooner than he expected. He is sure to make a good king under my guidance. He is so cruel to animals, and never keeps his word.

MICH. Now you are yourself at last, Vera.

VERA *[Standing motionless in the middle].* The lots, I say, the lots! I am no woman now. My blood seems turned to gall; my heart is as cold as steel is; my hand shall be more deadly. From the desert and the tomb the voice of my prisoned brother cries aloud, and bids me strike one blow for liberty. The lots, I say, the lots!

PRES. Are you ready? Michael, you have the right to draw first; you are a Regicide.

VERA. 0 God, into my hands! Into my hands! *[They draw the lots from a bowl surmounted by a skull]*

PRES. Open your lots.

VERA *[Opening her lot].* The lot is mine! see the bloody sign upon it! Dmitri, my brother, you shall have your revenge now.

PRES. Vera Sabouroff, you are chosen to be a regicide. God has been good to you. The dagger or the poison? *[Offers her dagger and vial.]*

VERA. I can trust my hand better with the dagger; it never fails. *[Takes dagger.]* I shall stab him to the heart, as he has stabbed me. Traitor, to leave us for a ribbon, a gaud, a bauble, to lie to me every day he came here, to forget us in an hour. Michael was right, he loved me not, nor the people either. Methinks that if I was a mother and bore a man-child I would poison my breast to him, lest he might grow to a traitor or to a king. [PRINCE PAUL *whispers to the* PRESIDENT.]

PRES. Ay, Prince Paul, that is the best way. Vera, the Czar sleeps to-night in his own room in the north wing of the palace. Here is the key of the private door in the street. The passwords of the guards will be given to you. His own servants will be drugged. You will find him alone.

VERA. It is well. I shall not fail.

PRES. We will wait outside in the Place St. Isaac, under the window. As the clock strikes twelve from the tower of St. Nicholas you will give us the sign that the dog is dead.

VERA. And what shall the sign be?

PRES. You are to throw us out the bloody dagger.

MICH. Dripping with the traitor's life.

PRES. Else we shall know that you have been seized, and we will burst our way in, drag you from his guards.

MICH. And kill him in the midst of them.

PRES. Michael, you will head us?

MICH. Ay, I shall head you. See that your hand fails not, Vera Sabouroff.

VERA. Fool, is it so hard a thing to kill one's enemy?

PRINCE PAUL *[Aside].* This is the ninth conspiracy I have been in in Russia. They always end in a 'voyage en Siberie' for my friends and a new decoration for myself.

MICH. It is your last conspiracy, Prince.

PRES. At twelve o'clock, the bloody dagger.

VERA. Ay, red with the blood of that false heart. I shall not forget it. *[Standing in the middle of the stage.}* To strangle whatever nature is in me, neither to love nor to be loved, neither to pity nor to be pitied. Ay! it is an oath, an oath. Methinks the spirit of Charlotte Corday has entered my soul now. I shall carve my name on the world, and be ranked among the great heroines. Ay! the spirit of Charlotte Corday beats in each petty vein, and nerves my woman's hand to strike, as I have nerved my woman's heart to hate. Though he laugh in his dreams, 1 shall not falter. Though he sleep peacefully, I shall not miss my blow. Be glad, my brother, in your stifled cell; be glad and laugh to-night. To-night this new-fledged Czar shall post with bloody feet to Hell, and greet his father there! This Czar! 0 traitor, liar, false to his oath, false to me! To play the patriot amongst us, and now to wear a crown; to sell us, like Judas, for thirty silver pieces, to betray us with a kiss! *[With mare passion}* 0 Liberty, 0 mighty mother of

eternal time, thy robe is purple with the blood of those who have died for thee! Thy throne is the Calvary of the people, thy crown the crown of thorns. 0 crucified mother, the despot has driven a nail through thy right hand, and the tyrant through thy left! Thy feet are pierced with their iron. When thou wert athirst thou callcdst on the priests for water, and they gave thee bitter drink. They thrust a sword into thy side. They mocked thee in thine agony of age on age. Here, on thy altar, 0 Liberty, do I dedicate myself to thy service; do with me as thou wilt! *[Brandishing dagger.]* The end has come now, and by thy sacred wounds, 0 crucified mother, 0 Liberty, I swear that Russia shall *be* saved!

CURTAIN

END OF ACT III

ACT IV

SCENE—*Antechamber of the* CZAR'S *private room. Large window at the back, with drawn curtains over it.*

Present—PRINCE PETROVITCH, BARON RAFF, **MARQUIS DE POIVRARD, COUNT ROUVALOFF.**

PRINCE PETRO. He is beginning well, this young Czar.

BARON RAFF. *[Shrugs his shoulders].* All young Czars do begin well.

COUNT R. And end badly.

MARQ. DE POIV. Well, I have no right to complain. He has done me one good service, at any rate.

PRINCE PETRO. Cancelled your appointment to Archangel, I suppose?

MARQ. DE POIV. Yes; my head wouldn't have been safe there for an hour.

[Enter GENERAL KOTEMKIN.]

BARON RAFF. Ah! General, any more news of our romantic Emperor?

GEN. KOTEMK. You are quite right to call him romantic, Baron; a week ago I found him amusing himself in a garret with a company of strolling players; to-day his whim is all the convicts in Siberia are to be recalled, and political prisoners, as he calls them, amnestied.

PRINCE PETRO. Political prisoners! Why, half of them are no better than common murderers!

COUNT R. And the other half much worse?

BARON RAFF. Oh, you wrong them, surely, Count. Wholesale trade has always been more respectable than retail.

COUNT R. But he is really too romantic. He objected yesterday to my having the monopoly of the salt tax. He said the people had a right to have cheap salt.

MARQ. DE POIV. Oh, that's nothing; but he actually disapproved of a State banquet every night because there is a famine in the Southern provinces. *[The young* CZAR *enters unobserved, and overhears the rest.]*

PRINCE PETRO. Quelle b^tisc! The more starvation there is among the people, the better. It teaches them self-denial, an excellent virtue, Baron, an excellent virtue.

BARON RAFF. I have often heard so; I have often heard so.

GEN. KOTEMK. He talked of a Parliament, too, in Russia, and said the people should have deputies to represent them.

BARON RAFF. As if there was not enough brawling in the streets already, but we must give the people a room to do it in. But, Messieurs, the worst is yet to come. He threatens a complete reform in the public service on the ground that the people are too heavily taxed.

MARQ. DE POIV. He can't be serious there. What is the use of the people except to get money

out of? But talking of taxes, my dear Baron, you must really let me have forty thousand roubles to-morrow; my wife says she must have a new diamond bracelet.

COUNT R. *[Aside to* BARON RAFF]. Ah, to match the one Prince Paul gave her last week, I suppose.

PRINCE PETRO. I must have sixty thousand roubles at once, Baron. My son is overwhelmed with debts of honour which he can't pay.

BARON RAFF. What an excellent son to imitate his father so carefully!

GEN. KOTEMK. You are always getting money. I never get a single kopeck I have not got a right to. It's unbearable; it's ridiculous! My nephew is going to be married. I must get his dowry for him.

PRINCE PETRO. My dear General, your nephew must be a perfect Turk. He seems to get married three times a week, regularly.

GEN. KOTEMK. Well, he wants the dowry to console him.

COUNT R. I am sick of town. I want a house in the country.

MARQ. DE POIV. I am sick of the country. I want a house in town.

BARON RAFF. Mes amis, I am extremely sorry for you. It is out of the question.

PRINCE PETRO. But my son, Baron?

GEN. KOTEMK. But my nephew?

MARQ. DE POIV. But my house in town?

COUNT R. But my house in the country?

MARQ. DE POIV. But my wife's diamond bracelet?

BABON RAFF. Gentlemen, impossible! The old *regime* in Russia is dead; the funeral begins to-day.

COUNT R. Then I shall wait for the resurrection.

PRINCE PETRO. Yes, but, *en attendant*, what are we to dot

BARON RAFF. What have we always done in Russia when a Czar suggests reform?—nothing. You forget we are diplomatists. Men of thought should have nothing to do with action. Reforms in Russia are very tragic, but they always end in a farce.

COUNT R. I wish Prince Paul were here. By the bye, I think this boy is rather ungrateful to him. If that clever old Prince had not proclaimed him Emperor at once without giving him time to think about it, he would have given up his crown, I believe, to the first cobbler he met in the street.

PRINCE PETRO. But do you think, Baron, that Prince Paul is really going?

BARON RAFF. He is exiled.

PRINCE PETRO. Yes; but is he going?

BARON RAFF. I am sure of it; at least he told me he had sent two telegrams already to Paris about his dinner.

COUNT R. Ah! that settles the matter.

CZAR *[Coming forward].* Prince Paul had better send a third telegram and order *[Counting them] six extra places.*

BARON RAFF. The devil!

CZAR. No, Baron, the Czar. Traitors! There

would be no bad kings in the world if there were no bad ministers like you. It is men such as you who wreck mighty empires on the rock of their own greatness. Our mother, Russia, hath no need of such unnatural sons. You can make no atonement now; it is too late for that. The grave cannot give back your dead, nor the gibbet your martyrs, but I shall be more merciful to you. I give you your lives! That is the curse I would lay on you. But if there is a man of you found in Moscow by to-morrow night your heads will be off your shoulders.

BARON RAFF. You remind us wonderfully, Sire, of your Imperial father.

CZAR. I banish you all from Russia. Your estates are confiscated to the people. You may carry your titles with you. Reforms in Russia, Baron, always end in a farce. You will have a good opportunity, Prince Petrovitch, of practising self-denial, that excellent virtue! that excellent virtue! So, Baron, you think a Parliament in Russia would be merely a place for brawling. Well, I will see that the reports of each session are sent to you regularly.

BARON RAFF. Sire, you are adding another horror to exile.

CZAR. But you will have such time for literature now. You forget you are diplomatists. Men of thought should have nothing to do with action.

PRINCE PETRO. Sire, we did but jest.

CZAR. Then I banish you for your bad jokes.

Bon voyage, Messieurs. If you value your lives you will catch the first train for Paris. *[Exeunt* MINISTERS.] Russia is well rid of such men as these. They are the jackals that follow in the lion's track. They have no courage themselves, except to pillage and rob. But for these men and for Prince Paul my father would have been a good king, would not have died so horribly as he did die. How strange it is, the most real parts of one's life always seem to be a dream! The council, the fearful law which was to kill the people, the arrest, the cry in the courtyard, the pistol-shot, my father's bloody hands, and then the crown! One can live for years sometimes, without living at all, and then all life comes crowding into a single hour. I had no time to think. Before my father's hideous shriek of death had died in my ears I found this crown on my head, the purple robe around me, and heard myself called a king. I would have given it all up then; it seemed nothing to me then; but now, can I give it up now? Well, Colonel, well? *[Enter* COLONEL OF THE GUARD.]

COLONEL. What password does your Imperial Majesty desire should be given to-night?

CZAR. Password?

COLONEL. For the cordon of guards, Sire, on night duty around the palace.

CZAR. You can dismiss them. I have no need of them. *[Exit* COLONEL.] *[Goes to the crown lying on the table}* What subtle potency lies hidden in this gaudy bauble, the crown, that makes one

feel like a god when one wears it? To hold in one's hand this little fiery coloured world, to reach out one's arm to earth's uttermost limit, to girdle the seas with one's hosts; this is to wear a crown! to wear a crown! The meanest serf in Russia who is loved is better crowned than I. How love outweighs the balance! How poor appears the widest empire of this golden world when matched with love! Pent up in this palace, with spies dogging every step, I have heard nothing of her; I have not seen her once since that fearful hour three days ago, when I found myself suddenly the Czar of this wide waste, Russia. Oh, could I see her for a moment; tell her now the secret of my life I have never dared utter before; tell her why I wear this crown, when I have sworn eternal war against all crowned men! There was a meeting to-night. I received my summons by an unknown hand; but how could I go? I who have broken my oath! who have broken my oath!

[Enter PAGE.]

PAGE. It is after eleven, Sire. Shall I take the first watch in your room to-night?

CZAR. Why should you watch me, boy? The stars are my best sentinels.

PAGE. It was your Imperial father's wish, Sire, never to be left alone while he slept.

CZAR. My father was troubled with bad dreams. Go, get to your bed, boy; it is nigh on midnight, and these late hours will spoil those red cheeks. [PAGE *tries to kiss his hand.]* Nay, nay; we have played together too often as children for that.

Oh, to breathe the same air as her, and not to see her! the light seems to have gone from my life, the sun vanished from my day.

PAGE. Sire,—Alexis,—let me stay with you to-night! There is some danger over you; I feel there is.

CZAR. What should I fear? I have banished all my enemies from Russia. Set the brazier here, by me; it is very cold, and I would sit by it for a time. Go, boy, go; I have much to think about to-night. *[Goes to back of stage, draws aside curtain. View of Moscow by moonlight.]* The snow has fallen heavily since sunset. How white and cold my city looks under this pale moon! And yet what hot and fiery hearts beat in this icy Russia, for all its frost and snow! Oh, to see her for a moment; to tell her all; to tell her why I am a king! But she docs not doubt me; she said she would trust in me. Though I have broken my oath, she will have trust. It is very cold. Where is my cloak? I shall sleep for an hour. Then I have ordered my sledge, and, though I die for it, I shall see Vera to-night. Did I not bid thee go, boy? What! must I play the tyrant so soon? Go, go! I cannot live without seeing her. My horses will be here in an hour; one hour between me and love! How heavy this charcoal fire smells. *[Exit the* PAGE. *Lies down on a couch beside brazier.]*

[Enter VERA *in a black cloak.]*

VERA. Asleep! God, thou art good! Who shall deliver him from my hands now? This is

he! The democrat who would make himself a king, the republican who hath worn a crown, the traitor who hath lied to us. Michael was right. He loved not the people. He loved me not. *[Bends over him.]* Oh, why should such deadly poison lie in such sweet lips? Was there not gold enough in his hair before, that he should tarnish it with this crown? But my day has come now: the day of the people, of liberty, has come! Your day, my brother, has come! Though I have strangled whatever nature is in me, I did not think it had been so easy to kill. One blow and it is over, and I can wash my hands in water afterwards, I can wash my hands afterwards. Come, I shall save Russia. I have sworn it. *[Raises dagger to strike.]*

CZAR *[Starting up, seizes her by both hands}.* Vera, you here! My dream was no dream at all. Why have you left me three days alone, when I most needed you? 0 God, you think I am a traitor, a liar, a king? I am, for love of you. Vera, it was for you I broke my oath and wear my father's crown. I would lay at your feet this mighty Russia, which you and I have loved so well; would give you this earth as a footstool! set this crown on your head. The people will love us. We will rule them by love, as a father rules his children. There shall be liberty in Russia for every man to think as his heart bids him; liberty for men to speak as they think. I have banished the wolves that preyed on us; I have brought back your brother from Siberia; I have

opened the blackened jaws of the mine. The courier is already on his way; within a week Dmitri and all those with him will be back in their own land. The people shall be free—are free now—and you and I, Emperor and Empress of this mighty realm, will walk among them openly, in love. When they gave me this crown first, I would have flung it back to them, had it not been for you, Vera. 0 God! It is men's custom in Russia to bring gifts to those they love. I said, I will bring to the woman I love a people, an empire, a world! Vera, it is for you, for you alone, I kept this crown; for you alone I am a king. Oh, I have loved you better than my oath! Why will you not speak to me? You love me not! You love me not! You have come to warn me of some plot against my life. What is life worth to me without you? [CONSPIRATORS *murmur outside.]*

VERA. Oh, lost! lost! lost!

CZAR. Nay, you are safe here. It wants five hours still of dawn. To-morrow, I will lead you forth to the whole people——

VERA. To-morrow———!

CZAR. Will crown you with my own hands as Empress in that great cathedral which my fathers built.

VERA *[Loosens her hands violently from him, and starts up].* I am a Nihilist! I cannot wear a crown!

CZAR *[Falls at her feet].* I am no king now. I am only a boy who has loved you better than hi?

honour, better than his oath. For love of the people I would have been a patriot. For love of you I have been a traitor. Let us go forth together, we will live amongst the common people. I am no king. I will toil for you like the peasant or the serf. Oh, love me a little too! [CONSPIRATOKS *murmur outside.]*

VERA *[Clutching dagger].* To strangle whatever nature is in me, neither to love nor to be loved, neither to pity nor——Oh, I am a woman! God help me, I am a woman! 0 Alexis! I too have broken my oath; I am a traitor. I love. Oh, do not speak, do not speak—*[Kisses his lips]*—the first, the last time. *[He clasps her in his arms; they sit on the couch together.]*

CZAR. I could die now.

VERA. What does death do in thy lips? Thy life, thy love are enemies of death. Speak not of death. Not yet, not yet.

CZAR. I know not why death came into my heart. Perchance the cup of life is filled too full of pleasure to endure. This is our wedding night.

VERA. Our wedding night!

CZAR. And if death came himself, methinks that I could kiss his pallid mouth, and suck sweet poison from it.

VERA. Our wedding night! Nay, nay. Death should not sit at the feast. There is no such thing as death.

CZAR. There shall not be for us. [CONSPIRATORS *murmur outside.]*

VEERA. What is that? Did you not hear something?

CZAR. Only your voice, that fowler's note which lures my heart away like a poor bird upon the limed twig.

VERA. Methought that some one laughed.

CZAR. It was but the wind and rain; the night is full of storm. [CONSPIRATORS *murmur outside.]*

VERA. It should be so indeed. Oh, where are your guards? where are your guards?

CZAR. Where should they be but at home? I shall not live pent round by sword and steel. The love of a people is a king's best body-guard.

VERA. The love of a people!

CZAR. Sweet, you are safe here. Nothing can harm you here. 0 love, I knew you trusted me! You said you would have trust.

VERA. I have had trust. 0 love, the past seems but some dull grey dream from which our souls have wakened. This is life at last.

CZAR. Ay, life at last.

VERA. Our wedding night! Oh, let me drink my fill of love to-night! Nay, sweet, not yet, not yet. How still it is, and yet methinks the air is full of music. It is some nightingale, who, wearying of the south, has come to sing in this bleak north to lovers such as we. It is the nightingale. Dost thou not hear it?

CZAR. Oh, sweet, mine ears are clogged to all sweet sounds save thine own voice, and mine eyes blinded to all sights but thee, else had I heard that nightingale, and seen the golden-vestured

morning sun itself steal from its sombre east before its time for jealousy that thou art twice as fair.

VERA. Yet would that thou hadst heard the nightingale. Methinks that bird will never sing again.

CZAR. It is no nightingale. Tis love himself singing for very ecstasy of joy that thou art changed into his votaress. *[Clock begins striking twelve.]* Oh, listen, sweet, it is the lover's hour. Come, let us stand without, and hear the midnight answered from tower to tower over the wide white town. Our wedding night! What is that? What is that?

[Loud murmurs of CONSPIRATORS *in the street.]*

VERA *[Breaks from him and rushes across the stage].* The wedding guests are here already! Ay, you shall have your sign! *[Stabs herself.]* You shall have your sign! *[Rushes to the window.]*

CZAR *[Intercepts her by rushing between her and mndow, and snatches dagger out of her hand].* Vera!

VERA *[Clinging to him].* Give me back the dagger! Give me back the dagger! There are men in the street who seek your life! Your guards have betrayed you! This bloody dagger is the signal that you are dead. [CONSPIRATORS *begin to shout beloiv in the street.]* Oh, there is not a moment to be lost! Throw it out! Throw it out! Nothing can save me now; this dagger is poisoned! I feel death already in my heart.

CZAR *[Holding dagger out of her reach].* Death is in my heart too; we shall die together.

YERA. Oh, lovel love! love! be merciful to me! The wolves are hot upon you! you must live for liberty, for Russia, for me! Oh, you do not love me! You offered me an empire once! Give me this dagger now! Oh, you are cruel! My life for yours! What does it matter? *[Loud shouts in the street,* 'VERA! VERA! *To the rescue! To the rescue!']*

CZAR. The bitterness of death is past for me.

VERA. Oh, they are breaking in below! See! The bloody man behind you! [CZAR *turns round for an instant.]* Ah! [VERA *snatches dagger and flings it out of window.]*

CONSPS. *[Below].* Long live the people!

CZAR. What have you done?

VERA. I have saved Russia. *[Dies.]*

TABLEAU

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

DRAMATIS PERSONS

SIMONE GESSO (Duke of Padua).
BEATRICE (his Wife).
ANDREA POLLAIUOLO (Cardinal of Padua).
MAFFIO PETRUCCI
JEPPO VITELOZZO (of the Ducal Household).
TADDEO BARDI
GUIDO FERRANTI.
ASCANIO CRISTOFANO (his Friend).
COUNT MORANZONE.
BERNARDO CAVALCANTI (Chief Justiciar of Padua).
HUGO (the Public Executioner).
LUCIA (a Tirewoman).

Serving-Men, Burghers, Soldiers, Falconers, Monks, etc.

Scene—Padua

Time—Latter half of the sixteenth century.

ACT I Market place at Padua.
ACT II Room in the Ducal Palace.
ACT III Corridor in the Ducal Palace.
ACT IV Hall of Justice.
ACT V Prison.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT I

MARKET-PLACE AT PADUA, NOON

In the background the Cathedral, a building of black and white marble in the Romanesque style. Marble steps lead up to the great door; at foot of these two massive stone lions. Houses on eithef side, with bright-coloured awnings at the windows, and stone arcades along the front. To right a fountain,—a Triton in antique bronze, blowing his conch at the entrance of his cave. Round the basin runs a stone bench. The Cathedral bells are ringing, and the citizens, men and women and children, are flocking into Church.

GUIDO FERRANTI *and* ASCANIO CRISTOFANO

ASCANIO. Sure as I'm a man with the breath o' life in me, I'll not budge a step further; else shall I have no breath left,—to curse withal. 'Od's malison on this jack o' lantern dance, say I! *[Sits down on the stone bench.]*

GUIDO. Nay, lad! it must be here. *[Accosts a passer-by, doffing his cap.]* Pardon me, Sir, is this the Market-Place, and yonder the Church of Santa Croce? *[Citizen nods.]* Thanks, good Sir.

ASCANIO. Well?

GUIDO. Yea! this is the spot.

ASCANIO. F faith, I would 'twere any other; there's never a tavern in sight.

GUIDO *[Takes a letter from his pocket and reads].* "Time—noon; town—Padua; place—the Market square; day—St. Philip's."

ASCANIO. And the man? How says it we are to know *him?*

GUIDO *[Reads].* "I shall wear a violet cloak, with a silver falcon embroidered on the shoulder," —gay apparel, Ascanio!

ASCANIO. I'd liefer have my leathern jerkin. And dost think he will give thee tidings of thy father?

GUIDO. Surely. Dost not remember? 'tis scarce a week agone, I was in the vineyard, at the corner by the high-road, just where the goats aye break in, when a man came riding by who asked me if my name was Guido. Then he gave me this letter signed "Thy father's Friend," bidding me come hither to-day, if I would learn the secret of my birth. I have alway deemed old Pietro my uncle, but the letter said 'twas not so,—that I had but been entrusted to his charge by one whom he had never seen again.

ASCANIO. Dost not know then who thy father was?

GUIDO. No.

ASCANIO. Hast no recollection at all of him?

GUIDO. None, Ascanio, none.

ASCANIO *[Laughing].* Ah! then he can never have fetched thee so many a shrewd clout o' the head as mine did me!

GUIDO *[Smiling].* Didst never deserve 'em, of course, dear lad!

ASCANIO. Never! that was just the sin and shame o't. Not once did conscience round me I was guilty, never once!—What hour did he appoint?

GUIDO. Noon. *[Cathedral dock strikes.]*

ASCANIO. Tis that now, and our man is not here. I don't believe in him, Guido: I misdoubt 'tis some wench hath cast soft eyes on thee. I have companied thee from Perugia to Padua,—now, o' my life, thou shalt company me to the nearest tavern. *[Rises.]* By the great gods of appetite, Guido, I'm as sharp-set for meat as a widow for a husband, as weary of walking as a maid of moralising, and as dry as a sermon. Come, Guido! why stand there a-gape at nothing, like the village idiot, would peep into his own pate! Thy man is not coming.

GUIDO. I fear thou'rt i' the right. Ha! *[Just as he is preparing to go off ivith* ASCANIO, COUNT MORANZONE *appears in a violet cloak having a silver falcon embroidered on the shoulder. He goes up stage to the Cathedral; as he is on the point of entering the church,* GUIDO *springs up the steps and intercepts him.]*

MORANZONE. Guido Ferranti, thou art well true to time.

GUIDO. Then my father lives?

MORANZONE. Yea, he lives—in thee. Dost favour him in features, bearing, gait and all outward semblance; I pray thou be his match in mind and mettle.

GUIDO. Tell me of my father! For this moment only have I lived.

MORANZONE. We should be alone.

GUIDO. This is my trustiest friend, who for the love he bears me hath come with me to Padua; there is no secret we share not as brothers.

MOEANZONE. *One* secret thou must not confide to him.

GUIDO *[To* ASCANIO]. Return in an hour's time. He knows not there is naught in this world can dim the flawless mirror of our love. For one hour farewell!

ASCANIO. Talk not with him, he hath the evil eye.

GUIDO *[Laughing]*. No, no, I have no doubt he will tell me I am a great lord in Italy, and long and merry days await us. Leave us for an hour, dear lad! *[Exit* ASCANIO.] Now tell me of my father. *[Sits down on the stom bench.]* Was he tall? This at any rate I know for sure, he sat his horse right gallantly. His hair was dark?—mayhap a red gold, like the glint of fire? Was his voice soft and low? Doughty warriors sometimes have a gentle ring of voice. Or was it like the battle clarion that shatters the foemen's array? Rode he alone to war, or with a brave company of squires and valorous riders? Nay! I feel oft as if the blood of Kings pulsed through my veins. Was he a King?

MOBANZONE. He was the kingliest of men.

GUIDO *[Proudly]*. So, when last you saw him, my noble father towered high above the rest.

MORANZONE. High above others' heads—*[Going up to* GUIDO *and laying a hand on his shoulder]* there on the scaffold, where the headsman's axe lay ready for his neck.

GUIDO *[Starting back].* Who art thou, dreadful man, who like a raven, with its ghostly cry, comest from the grave to bring this hapless news?

MORANZONE. Men call me here the Count Moranzone, Lord of a poor mountain hold, a few starveling acres and a scanty crew of henchmen. Yet was I once a Noble of Parma's noblest,—nay! more than that, I was thy father's friend.

GUIDO *[Seizing the* COUNT'S *hand].* Tell me of him.

MORANZONE. Thou art Lorenzo's son, the great Duke, whose banner waved o'er many a hard-fought field, in battle with the Saracen infidels. He was Prince of Parma and Duke of all the fair realm of Lombardy up to the walls of Florence; yea! Florence itself was tributary to him.

GUIDO. Come to his death.

MORANZONE. Thou'lt hear that soon enough! He was at war,—oh! noble warrior-lion that in all Italy would never suffer wrong to be,—he led the fine flower of chivalry against the Lord of Rimini, that foul adulterer Giovanni Malatesta—whom God requite—and was lured by him into a traitorous ambush, bound in caitiff fetters and like a low-lived rascal, like a baseborn knave, butchered by the common headsman before all men's eyes.

GUIDO *[Grasping his dagger].* And Malatesta lives?

MORANZONE. No, he is dead.

GUIDO. Dead, you say? Oh! over-hasty Death, hadst but tarried a short while for me, I would have done thine office for thee.

MORANZONE *[Clasping the young man's wrist].* Tis not too late! The man who sold him is yet alive.

GUIDO. Sold him? my father was sold?

MORANZONE. Yea! sold like a head of bestial; bartered and betrayed for pelf, higgled and chaffered for in secret bargain, by one he thought the paragon of freres,—his bosom friend in whom he trusted, whose love he had knitted to himself by countless benefits. Who on this earth sows kindness reaps only base ingratitude.

GUIDO. So thou'rt alive, false Judas? Well, I will make the wide world thy Potter's field,—go, buy it forthwith, for verily thou must hang there.

MORANZONE. *Judas,* thou saidst? Yea! Judas in his unfaith, but he was craftier than Judas was; thirty pieces of silver *he* deemed too scant a price.

GUIDO. And what gat he for my father's head?

MORANZONE. What gat he? Why, cities, fiefs and principalities,—vineyards and broad lands.

GUIDO. Whereof he shall keep but six poor feet of soil, to rot in. Where is he, the accursed villain, tell me where? Show me the fellow, and though he come steel clad from head to foot, armoured and mailed in panoply, yea! guarded by a thousand horsemen,—yet will I pierce the bulwark of their spears and see his black heart's blood distil its latest drop from off my blade. I will kill him.

MORANZONE *[Speaking deliberately].* Fool, dost call that revenge? Death is the final lot of all us mortals, and if he come suddenly, why, then 'tis so much gained! *[Goes close up to* GUIDO.] Thy father was sold, sold,—be that thy cue; sell thou the seller in thy turn! Thou must to Court, sit at the same board with him, eat of the same bread.

GUIDO. Ah, bitter bread!

MORANZONE. Thy palate is too nice; vengeance will sweeten the taste. o' nights thou must be his boon-companion at the revel, his closest friend, that he may cling confidingly to thee and tell thee all his wiles. Laugh, if he asks thy merriment; runs his humour to melancholy, don mourning weeds! When the time is ripe—[GUIDO *grasps his sword].* No, no, I cannot trust thee; thy hot-blooded youth and unbridled temper will not wait for this slow satisfaction, but will shipwreck our schemes of vengeance.

GUIDO, You know me not. Tell me his name, and I will follow your counsel in all ways.

MORANZONE. When the time is fully come, the victim lulled asleep, the hour favourable, I will send thee secretly a sign by a speedy messenger.

GUIDO. Speak, how is the man to die?

MORANZONE. That night thou must clamber to his sleeping room,—note it well!

GUIDO. Nay, have no fear.

MORANZONE. I know not if crime-laden folk do sleep; but if he sleeps, then wake him first, and grip him by the throat—so, dost understand? Tell him of what blood thou art, of whose begetting,

and the motive of thy vengeance; then let him cringe to thee, cringe on his bended knees. Let him proffer thee his hoarded treasures for his life, and when he sacrifices all his fortune, say this: ' I want not gold, mercy I know not/—and straightway to thy task. Now swear, thou wilt not slay him ere I give the word; else I return home again and leave thee yet in ignorance and thy father unavenged.

GUIDO. I swear by my father's battle-flag——

MORANZONE. The headsman tore it to tatters in the open Market-square.

GUIDO. By my father's grave then——

MORANZONE. Grave! What grave? Thy gallant father hath no grave. His dust was scattered to the winds, his ashes borne by the breeze about the streets like chaff that pricks the eyes of beggarmen. His head was spiked before the gaol, tricked out in mockery with a paper crown, that the scurrilous rabble of the town might whet their ribald tongues at his expense.

GUIDO. Was all this so? Then by my father's spotless name, by his shameful, hideous death, by his friend's abject villainy,—these things at least remain,—by these I swear I will not assail his life until you bid me,—*then* God help his soul; he shall die, die worse than a dog's death! And now, the sign?

MORANZONE. This dagger, thy father's dagger, boy.

GUIDO. Oh! let me see it close. Ah! now I remember me how my so-called uncle, good old man,

spake of a cloak,—as a babe I was wrapped in it,—whereon were woven in gold two leopards such as these; in steel as here they like me better,—they're fitter for my purpose. Speak, Sir, have you no word to give me from my father?

MORANZONE. Thou never saw'st thy father—After his false friend had bewrayed him, I only escaped of all his liegemen to carry the fatal news to Parma to the Duchess.

GUIDO. Tell me of my mother.

MORANZONE. Thy mother—she was a very Saint of purity—fell into a swoon at the tidings, was seized with pangs of childbirth 'fore the time—she had been wed but seven short months—and brought thee prematurely into the world. Then fled her soul heavenward, to welcome thy father at the gate of Paradise.

GUIDO. The mother dead, the father bought and sold! Meseems as though I stood upon a beleaguered rampart, and messenger after messenger came to bring me Job's tidings. Prithee, let me get my breath; my ears are dinned with ill news.

MORANZONE. When thy mother died, in fear of foes I spread the report that thou too wast dead; then I spirited thee away, and carried thee to a trusty vassal, who dwells at Perugia; thou know'st the rest.

GUIDO. Saw you ever my father again?

MORANZONE. Yea, once; clad in the mean garb of a vinedresser, I crept to Rimini.

GUIDO. Oh noble heart!

MORANZONE. At Rimini everything is to be had

for gold—I bribed his gaolers. When thy father learned that a son was born to him, his eye flashed clear beneath his brows, like distant lightning on the main. He gripped my hand, and made me swear to rear thee worthily of him,—and I took the oath. Do thou revenge his death on the false friend!

GUIDO. For my dead father's sake, I thank thee. . . . Now his name?

MORANZONE. How thou remind'st me of him! in every lineament thou'rt his fellow.

GUIDO. The villain's name!

MORANZONE. Thou'lt learn it soon; the Duke is e'en now on his way hither, with his Court.

GUIDO. What of that? Tell me his name!

MORANZONE. Think'st not they make a gallant band of worshipful and stalwart gentlemen?

GUIDO. The name, Count!

[The DUKE OF PADUA *enters, attended by* COUNT BARDI, MAFFIO PETRUcci, *and other noblemen of his Court.]*

MORANZONE *[Quickly].* The man to whom I kneel is thy father's murderer. Mark him!

GUIDO *[Reachingfor the dagger].* The Duke!

MORANZONE. Keep thy fingers from the steel. What, dost forget so soon?—*[Kneels to the* DUKE.] My noble Lord!

DUKE. Greeting to ye, Moranzone; 'tis long since we have seen you at Padua. We were hunting yesterday around your Castle—you call it a Castle, yon chilly house wherein you sit mumbling o'er your beads, a-making your confession like a

good old man. I am never like to be a good old man; God would be outwearied with the confession of my sins! *[Sees* GUIDO, *and draws back.]* Who is that yonder?

MORANZONE. My sister's son, your Grace! just come of age for bearing arms; he would fain tarry a while at Court.

DUKE *[Still gazing at* GUIDO]. How is he called?

MORANZONE. Guido Ferranti, my Lord!

DUKE. Of what city?

MORANZONE. He springs from Mantua.

DUKE *[Approaching* GUIDO]. Thou hast the eyes of one I knew,—but he died childless. Thou would'st serve with me? well, we lack soldiers.—Art honest, sirrah? Then make no truck with thine honesty, keep it for thyself. At Padua honesty is deemed ostentation; so 'tis clean out o' fashion there. Look, see these lords, they smell of amber and perfumes. . . .

BARDI *[Aside].* For sure the poisoned shaft is aimed at us.

DUKE. Every man thou see'st hath his price; albeit—to pose as incorruptible—some set it high.

BARDI. I thought as much.

DUKE. So give up honesty. Singularity is no profitable quality, albeit in these stale, flat, insipid days, the very most singular thing a man can do *is* to have wits, for then the rabble jeers him. The rabble I scorn thou it as I do. Its praise is froth, and I count its windy favour accordingly. Popularity is the one insult I have never had to abide.

MAFFIO *[Aside].* He hath had no lack of hate, an that be what he craves.

DUKE. Be crafty; in thy dealings with the world, curb thine impetuousness! Think twice! The first impulse is oftcnest good-natured.

GUIDO *[Aside].* On his lips sits a toad that distils its venom thence.

DUKE. Give heed to foes, else will the world think light of thee; 'tis in its eyes a proof of power. Yet show a smiling mask of friendship to every man, till what time thou hast him safe in hand. Then crush him!

GUIDO *[Aside].* Oh, wise Philosopher! Art digging a deep grave for thine own self.

MORANZONE *[To* GUIDO]. Dost mark his words?

GUIDO. Yea, only too well!

DUKE. And never be over scrupulous; the hand that is clean is empty, and offers a pitiful show. Would'st have the lion's share in life's good things, why, don the fox's skin; it will bestead thee well. 'Tis a coat that fits every man, fat and lean, great and small; who makes thee such a coat, is a tailor who will never lack for customers.

GUIDO. Your Grace, I will remember.

DUKE. Good, my lad, good! I care not to have about me shallow fools, that mete out the gold of life with niggling scruples, and shifting, shuffling, come to shipwreck; failure is the one fault I never know. Let me have men about me. Conscience is but a name that dastard cowardice scrawls on the shield. Dost understand me, sirrah?

GUIDO. Yea, your Grace, in all ways will I obey your golden rule.

MAFFIO. Never have I seen your Grace so much inclined for preaching; the Cardinal must have an eye to his laurels.

DUKE. *My* gospel is practised by the world, his only talked about. I think little of the Cardinal; he must needs be a pious churchman that will deny his tediousness. Well, young sir, we number thee to-day amongst our Household. *[Reaches* GUIDO *his hand to kus.]* GUIDO *starts back in horror, but at a warning gesture from* COUNT MORANZONE, *kneels and kisses the* DUKE'S *hand.]* Henceforward thou must be accoutred as beseems our Court and thine own honour.

GUIDO. From my heart I thank your Grace.

DUKE. Tell me again; what was your name?

GUIDO. Guido Ferranti, my Lord.

DUKE. From Mantua? Have a care for your wives, when so trim a gallant comes to Padua. Yea, you do well to laugh, Count Bardi, I know right well how merry-hearted is the man at whose hearth sits an uncomely wife.

MAFFIO. By leave, your Grace, the dames of Padua are above suspicion.

DUKE. What, are all foul-featured? Come, the Cardinal hath long been waiting our pious consort; why, folk should clip him both his sermon and his beard. Will you with us, Count, and help us hear a homily of good St. Jerome.

MORANZONE *[Botving].* Alas, my Lord. . . .

DUKE *[Interrupting],* Spare your excuses;

you would as lief miss the Mass. Now follow all.

[Disappears with his train into the Cathedral.]

GUIDO *[After a pause].* My father was the Duke's victim, and I kissed his hand!

MORANZONE. Oft do it in the future!

GUIDO. Must I?

MORANZONE. Yea! thou hast sworn an oath.

GUIDO. My oath doth make me hard as granite.

MORANZONE. Farewell, my son; thou see'st me no more till the time is ripe.

GUIDO. I implore you, come soon.

MORANZONE. I will be to hand, when the time is ripe; be ready!

GUIDO. Have no fear.

MORANZONE. Yonder comes thy friend. Banish him from Padua, and from thy heart.

GUIDO. Yea, from Padua; from my heart, no.

MORANZONE. Nay, it must needs be. I will not leave thce, till thou hast done it.

GUIDO. Do you grudge me every friend?

MORANZONE. Revenge be thy friend, thou need'st no other.

GUIDO. Well, well, so be it!

ASCANIO [ASCANIO CRISTOFANO *enters].* Guido, lad, I have outdone thee every way. I have drunk a flask of wine, eaten a pasty and kissed the serving-wench. Thou look'st as down i' the mouth as a schoolboy that cannot buy him apples, or a potwalloper that cannot sell his vote. What is the news, Guido?

GUIDO. Ascanio, we two must part.

ASCANIO. That may be something new, but 'tis not true.

GUIDO. Too true, Ascanio; thou must now begone, and should'st never see my face again.

ASCANIO. No, no; thou dost not know me really, Guido mine. I am but a lowly farmer's son, ill practised in the use of courtly manners; so I can still, an thou art of noble lineage, be thy henchman. I will guard thee truer than an hireling doth.

GUIDO *[Seizing his hand].* Ascanio! *[Sees* MORANZONE'S *menacing look and drops* ASCANIO'S *hand.]* It cannot be.

ASCANIO. Hath it come to this with thee? Why, methought the friendship of the antique world was not yet dead, that the Roman exemplar might in our flat, stale and unheroic days yet find its worthy counterpart. By the love that sleeps peaceful as the summer seas, what fortune hath betid thee? May I share it?

GUIDO. Share it?

ASCANIO. Yea, share it.

GUIDO. Never, never.

ASCANIO. Hath an heritage come to thee,—a Castle with strong towers, and gold to boot?

GUIDO *[Bitterly].* Yea, I have entered on mine heritage. Oh, bloody legacy, horrid heirship! Verily must I guard it anxiously like any miser, and keep all for myself! Wherefore, I prithee, leave me now.

ASCANIO. What, must we never more sit hand in hand, as once we used, buried so deep in an old

tome of chivalry that curly head touched curly head? must we never more play truant, and away to follow the huntsman through the Autumn woods, and watch the falcons shake off their jesses, as puss breaks from the covert?

GUIDO. Never more.

ASCANIO. Must I leave thee then without one fond word?

GUIDO. Leave me, and my love go with thee.

ASCANIO. Unknightly, churlish thy behaviour!

GUIDO. Unknightly, churlish—yea, an thou wilt. . . . Why waste more useless words? Fare thee well!

ASCANIO. Hast thou no word of kindly parting, Guido?

GUIDO. No. The past all lies behind me like a dream. To-day a new life begins. Farewell!

ASCANIO. Farewell! *[Exit slowly and reluctantly.]*

GUIDO. Well, are you content? Saw you not how I drave from me my friend and staunchest comrade, as he were a kitchen scullion? Oh, to think I could treat him so!—Are you now content?

MORANZONE. I am content. But now my way is back to my desert fortalice in the hills. Forget not the token,—thy father's dagger. When as I send it thee, fulfil thy task! -

GUIDO. Be sure I will. *[Exit* COUNT MOBANZONE.] Oh, Everliving God, should my soul yet retain some trace of human nature,—kindly ruth or soft sympathy,—wither, consume, destroy it! An Thou dost not, I must myself cut compassion with cold steel from out my heart, I must smother

pity in my sleep o' nights, that it speak not within me. Revenge for me! Revenge, be thou my bedfellow, my bosom friend, sit thou by me, ride with me to the chase; if I am a-weary, sing me sweet songs, if I am light-hearted, make merry with me, and if I dream, whisper in mine ear the hideous story of my father's murder—Said I murder? *[Draws his dagger.]* Then hear me, God of Vengeance! Oh, God, Thou God which punishest all perjury, may Thine angels record this my solemn oath in flames of fire, that till the day I expiate my father's death with blood, I will forego the noble ties of honourable friendship, the noble joys of comradeship, the union of loving souls and heartfelt gratitude,—yea, more, from this hour forth I do foreswear the love of women and that hollow bauble men call female loveliness —*[The organ peals out in the Cathedral. Beneath a canopy of cloth of silver borne by four pages in scarlet, the* DUCHESS OF PADUA *descends the Church steps; as she passes* GUIDO, *their eyes meet for an instant, and as she leaves the stage, she turns to look back at the young man, whose dagger drops from his hand.]* Say, who is yonder lady?

BURGHER. The Duchess of Padua!

END OF ACT I

ACT II

A STATE APAKTMENT IN THE DUKE'S CASTLE

The walls are hung with tapestry representing the festal procession of Venus and the Graces. A wide central door leads onto a loggia with pillars of red marble, affording a view over Padua. To right, a great canopy, with three thrones, one being higher than the others. The ceiling is decorated with long gilt rays to imitate sunbeams. Furniture of the period,—seats covered in gilt and embossed leather, buffets set out with gold and silver plate, and chests painted with mythological scenes. A throng of Courtiers stands outside on the loggia, looking into the street below, from which ascends the roaring of a disorderly rabble, and shouts of "Down with the DUKE." *After a short pause, enter the* DUKE, *very calm. He leans on* FERRANTI'S *arm, and is accompanied by the* CARDINAL. *The outcries continue unabated.*

DUKE. No, Cardinal, I have had full enough of her; she is worse than wicked,—good.

MATTIO *[Excitedly].* Two thousand folk, Highness, are come together, clamouring more insolently every moment.

DUKE. Pshaw! they but offend their lungs! Who brawls so loud, my lords, will do us no hurt; the only foes I fear are the silent ones. *[Howls from the crowd.]* Look you, Cardinal, how my

people loves me; they offer me a serenade, I had liefer hear it than any soft complaining of the lute. Is't not ecstasy to hearken to it? *{Renewed outcry.]* Alas! they be a trifle out of tune; therefore must my men shoot at them. A cats' concert I cannot brook. Petrucci, go tell the Captain of our Guard below to clear the Square. Art hard o' hearing? Do what I wish. *[Exit* PETRUCCI.]

CARDINAL. I do beseech your Grace, give ear to their distress.

DUKE *[Seating himself on the throne].* Why, yes, the pears all this year have never been so fine as of yore. I pray you pardon, Cardinal, I thought you spake of pears. [A *shout of joy from the populace.]* What means that?

GUIDO *[Rushes to the window].* The Duchess is below in the Square,—pacing betwixt the soldiers and the folk, to stay the firing.

DUKE. The Foul Fiend have her!

GUIDO *[Still at the window].* Now hath she entered the Palace,—a dozen burghers after her.

DUKE *[Springing up].* The Duchess, by Heaven! she doth presume too far.

BARDI. She is here.

DUKE. Shut yonder door; the morning air strikes cold. *[The door onto the loggia henceforth remains closed.—The* DUCHESS *enters, followed by a band of shabbily clad burghers.]*

BEATRICE *[Falling on her knees].* I do beseech your Grace; hear our petition.

DUKE. Am I a tailor, lady wife, that you appear before me with so ragged a crew?

BEATRICE. Their rags make manifest, methought, their distress more clearer than I can myself.

DUKE. Wherein standeth their distress?

BEATRICE. All, my good lord, day by day they do endure such dole as neither you nor I nor ever a one of all these noble lords have ever used to have the faintest thought of. Why, the very bread they eat is baked of half rotten husks.

FIRST BURGHER. Yea, nothing but husks.

DUKE. A fine nourishing food; I give it my own nags.

BEATRICE *[Persisting].* And the water that flows into the town cisterns is corrupted by the breach of the aqueduct to foul swamps and miry pools.

DUKE. Drink wine; water is most unwholesome.

SECOND BURGHER. Ah, but, your Grace, the tolls are grown so high that be levied at the city gate that wine is not for us.

DUKE. Then commend the tolls, seeing they keep you sober.

BEATRICE. Think how we flaunt in pomp and splendour here, and lack naught that luxury and wealth can crave, with hosts of servants to obey our every nod. Whiles through *their* sunless lanes slinks haggard misery, and with sharp knife stealthily and noiselessly slits the little children's throats.

THIRD BURGHER. Yea verily, so 'tis; my pretty lad died yesterday of hunger. He was six years old; I am so poor I cannot bury him.

DUKE. Art poor? then dost not feel happy to say as much? Why, poverty is a Christian virtue; *[To the* CARDINAL] is't not so? You, Cardinal, I know have fat livings, tythes and lands,—that make you ready enow to preach voluntary poverty.

BEATRICE. My noble Duke, my husband, be pitiful! Whiles we sit here in proud palaces with pillared porticoes to guard us from the sun, with walls and roofs to keep out the winter's cold, there's many a burgher here in Padua lives in so vile a hole that rain and snow and blustering wind are fellow lodgers with him. Others sleep of autumn nights under the arches of the city bridges, till the damp mists stiffen their limbs, and fever comes, and then——

DUKE. —they are safe hid in Abraham's bosom. Them that be so wretched here below, I send 'em up to Heaven. And do they ever thank me for't? *[To the* CARDINAL.] Stands it not somewhere set down in Holy Writ, that every man should be content with that state of life God sends him? Why must I meddle therewith, and botch the handiwork of all-wise Providence? It hath decreed that some men starve, whiles others feast. The world is none of my making.

FIRST BURGHER. The Duke hath a hard heart.

SECOND BURGHER. Hist, neighbour, I hope the Cardinal is going to speak for us.

CARDINAL. Verily 'tis a Christian duty to bear poverty, for God doth appoint a rich reward thereto; yet is it no less Christian to be charitable, to still hunger and heal pain. Meseems here in

our city are many wrongs Your Highness' wisdom should reform.

FIRST BURGHER. What is this "reform"! What means it, eh?

SECOND BURGHER. 'Faith I it means this, to let all be as 'tis. I would have somewhat else.

DUKE. Reform! you, Cardinal, spake of reform? In Germany lives a man called Luther, who would fain reform your Roman Church. Well, have ye not proclaimed him heretic, and hang not the Church's ban and interdict over his head?

CARDINAL *[Starting up].* He hath lured the flock from out the fold,—all we ask is that *you* feed the sheep.

DUKE. I have shorn their fleece, so I may well feed them. But the rebels—*[The* DUCHESS *raises appealing hands}.*

FIRST BURGHER. Hist! a word of pity, he will grant us some boon.

SECOND BURGHER. Dost think so?

DUKE. For this ragged rabble that comes here before me,—their mouths are swollen with treason——

THIRD BURGHER. Softly, my noble Duke; then stop 'em with bread. We will be quiet enow then.

DUKE. Nay, but ye shall keep quiet, hungry or full. My lords, so mutinous have grown the times, the yokel scarce lifts his hat and fears no blows, while the day labourer hustles the noble in the open street. Now God hath appointed me for scourge to this rout, to chastise them for their sins.

BEATRICE. By what right? Art *Ihou* so sinless?

DUKE. If virtue punish sin, 'tis naught; but let sin chasten sin; then is God well pleased.

BEATRICE. Have you no awe of Heaven?

DUKE. Have I aught to fear? Man's enemy, am I not God's friend? *[To the* BURGHERS.] Now, my good, trusty men of Padua, anent the petition of the Duchess,—to deny a boon to so fair an advocate, were to lack love and courtesy,—I promise this, to do something for your distress——

FIRST BURGHER. Now is he going to abolish the tolls!

SECOND BURGHER. Or have them give us each a loaf of bread!

DUKE. Next Sunday shall the Cardinal choose for his sermon after the blessed Mass the text: "how beautiful a thing it is to be obedient!" *[Murmurs from the* BURGHERS.]

FIRST BURGHER. That will not fill our bellies.

SECOND BURGHER. A sermon is but a poor sauce, an a man have nothing more.

BEATRICE. Poor folk, ye see I have no weight with the Duke; but get you to the Castle yard, and my treasurer shall share amongst you an hundred ducats from my chest, albeit gold is not alway over plentiful therein.

ALMONER. An hundred ducats is the whole sum it holds.

BEATRICE. Give them what I have.

FIRST BURGHER. God keep the Duchess!

SECOND BURGHER. God keep her Grace!

BEATRICE. And every Monday morn bread

shall be given to them in need. *[The* BURGHERS *bow themselves out.]*

FIRST BURGHER *[As he goes].* God keep the Duchess, say I again.

DUKE *[Calling him back].* Come hither, fellow! What is thy name?

FIRST BURGHER. Dominic, my Lord.

DUKE. A fine name! Prithee, why Dominic, and no other?

FIRST BURGHER *[Scratching his head].* Because that I was born on St. George's day.

DUKE. An excellent good reason! Here's a ducat for thee; now shout likewise,—God keep the Duke!

FIRST BURGHER *[Feebly].* God keep the Duke!

DUKE. Louder, fellow, louder!

FIRST BURGHER *[A trifle louder].* God keep the Duke!

DUKE. More gleefully, fellow; put more heart in't! See, here's another ducat for thee.

FIRST BURGHER *[Overjoyed].* God keep the Duke.

DUKE *[Mockingly].* My lords, the love of this simple fellow stirs me deeply. *[Addressing the* BURGHER *roughly.} Begone,*sirrah! *[Exit*BURGHER, *bowing low.]* This is the trick o't to buy popularity nowadays. Yea, we are naught, if we be not democratical. *[To the* DUCHESS.] So, gracious lady, you stir up mutiny amongst our citizens, and by your daily alms-giving have filched the love o' the common herd. I cannot suffer this.

BEATRICE *[Casting a glance at* GUIDO]. You are in error, my Lord; they love me not.

DUKE. I will not have you give bread to the folk, only because they be hungry.

BEATRICE. The poor have unimpeachable rights,—the right to pity and the right to mercy.

DUKE. Thou pratest to me of rights? And this is the woman for whose sake I forewent my claim to three of the fairest towns in Italy, Pisa, Genoa and Orvieto.

BEATRICE. Promised, my lord, but not fulfilled! you broke your word, as alway.

DUKE. You do me wrong. Reasons of State it was. . . .

BEATRICE. What cause of State *can* justify the breach of plighted word?

DUKE. There is a forest nigh Pisa, yea, close by the city, where wild-boars lurk; when I promised Pisa to thy father,—the sanguine fool,—I had forgot the fine sport there.

BEATRICE. The man that is foresworn in honour, my lord, doth forget all.

DUKE. In Genoa, that is the place—yea, I am sure on't—they say red surmullet do swim in the bay more plentiful than anywhere in Italy. *[Turning to one of his train.]* You, my lord, you seem a hearty trencherman, you can tell our Duchess if 'tis true.

BEATRICE. And Orvieto?

DUKE *[Yaiming].* It hath slipped my remembrance, why I gave him not Orvieto,—in terms of our covenant. Mayhap I felt not so disposed. *[Going up to the* DUCHESS.] Now, look about you. Here you are alone. Back to France is many a

long dusty mile; and even there, your father keeps at his Court a bare hundred paltry knights. Hope'st yet for championship? Who of all these lords, the noble cavaliers of Padua, stands true to thee?

BEATRICE. Not one. [GUIDO *starts forward, but restrains himself.]*

DUKE. And never will, so long as I am Duke in Padua. Understand me,—I have had enow of thy charitable ways; thou art my property, so do what I bid. An 'tis my will to hold thee in the house, my Palace here must be thy prison; and if I will thou goest forth abroad, thou must from morn till eve be free as air.

BEATRICE. What right have you . . .?

DUKE. The second Duchess once asked me that same question; canst see her tomb in the Church of good St. Bartholomew, carvcn of red marble,—wondrous fine! Give me thine arm, Guido! My lords, let us throw off our falcons at the midday hour. Bethink you, you are alone here, noble lady.

[Exit DUKE, *leaning on* GUIDO'S *arm, and followed by his retinue.]*

BEATRICE *[Looking after them].* Strange that anyone, blameless to all seeming, doth love the Duke, hangs on his lips, that foully poison every word, and shrinks not from him, as though bound to his service! Well, what of it? it doth concern me not. I stand alone, to love inaccessible. The Duke saith well, I am alone, forlorn and disgraced and belittled—did ever woman stand so all alone as I? The wooer calls us pretty children, saith we

be not fit to make a life for ourselves, and therefore doth ruin the life we had. What said I, "Wooers"? We are their goods and chattels, their slaves; we are not so fondly fondled as the dog that licks their hand, as the falcon on their wrist. I said, "Wooers"? Nay, we be bought and sold, our very body is so much pelf to them. I wis it is poor woman's usual lot,—her life, mated with a man she loves not, makes shipwreck on his selfishness; but being usual, 'tis no less hard to bear. Meseems I never yet heard a woman laugh, laugh out of pure light-heartedness,—except one that stood at night i' the public street—poor soul! She had painted lips, a mask of joy to hide her sorrow, and she laughed,—pray God I may never laugh so. To die were better! [GUIDO *enters unobserved from behind; the* DUCHESS *throws herself dawn before a figure of the Madonna.}* Oh Holy Maiy, with the sweet, wan look, ringed with little angel heads that hover round thee, know'st thou no succour for me? Oh Mother of God, know'st thou no succour?

GUIDO. No, I can bear it no more. I must speak to her, speak to my love. Am I, fair lady, embraced in your prayer?

BEATRICE *[Rising].* Only unhappy souls need piy intercession.

GUIDO. Then needs must I be one, for sure!

BEATRICE. Why so? Doth not the Duke do fchee honour enow? dost lack advancement at our Court? 'Tis not within my power to give it thee; mine own self, I have as good as no weight here.

GUIDO. Of favour, your Grace, I have no lack from the Duke,—whom my soul loathes worse than hell,—I come on my knees to offer you true-proven service unto death.

BEATRICE. Alackaday! I am fallen so low in place, I can reward thee only with niggard thanks.

GUIDO *[Seizing her hand].* And not with love? *[The* DUCHESS *starts back,* GUIDO *falls at her feel.]* Oh, dear Saint! Forgive me, I have been over bold. Thy beauty sets my young blood glowing. An my mouth but touch thy hand in lowly greeting, leaps every nerve so fierce with passion, that I fear no extremity of daring for to win thy love. *[Springs to his feet.]* Bid me fare forth, and pluck renown from out the lion's jaws,—I will wrestle with the Nemean monster in the desert wastes! Toss into the throat of battle a riband, a flower, a bit of tinsel, anything, that hath once touched thee, I will bring it back to thee unscathed, in combat with all the knights of Christendom! Yea, more than that, bid me to scale the white cliffs of mighty England, and from her presumptuous scutcheon will I blot out thy France's lilies, which England, yon lion of the seas, hath filched from her.

Oh loved Beatrice! drive me not from thy side, for the minutes creep past leaden-footed without thee; though, an I look upon thy loveliness, the hours flit by like winged Mercuries, and the world gleams all golden.

BEATRICE. I never dreamed I could be really

loved. Dost truly love me so immeasurably as thou dost declare?

GUIDO. Go, ask the sea-gull an she loves the waves, ask the roses an they love the rain, ask the lark, that will not sipg before the break of dawn, an she loves the day,—and then these be but empty pictures, mere shadows of my love. Tis a fierce fire that all the waters of the ocean cannot extinguish.—Give me a word!

BEATRICE. Scarce know I what I should say.

GUIDO. Say, thou lov'st me.

BEATRICE. Is that thy behest? And must it be fulfilled forthwith? Yea, it might well be so, an if I really loved thee; but if not, what am I then to say?

GUIDO. An if thou lov'st me not, yet say thou dost; the lie would be shamed to truth upon thy tongue.

BEATRICE. Or should I remain for ever dumb? Lovers, they say, are happiest, when they be in doubt.

GUIDO. No! doubt doth kill me; and, must I die, let me die of joy, and not of doubt. Oh, tell me,—may I stay, or must I go?

BEATRICE. I would thou mightest neither stay nor go. If thou dost stay, thou steal'st my love from me; and if thou goest, thou takest it away with thee. An all the morning stars could sing, they might not manifest the greatness of my love. Guido, "I love thee.

GUIDO *[With outstretched arms].* Oh, never stop,—only by night, I thought once, sang the night-

ingale,—but if thou must be silent, let my lips find thine, that make so sweet a sound.

BEATRICE. My lips do not yet give thee my heart.

GUIDO. Dost thou steel that against me then?

BEATRICE. Ah, my love's lord, 'tis mine no longer; the first day I saw thee, I let my heart be filched away by thee,—thief against my will, who rashly brakest into my guarded treasure house and stole away my jewel! Strange robbery, which doth enrich thee, without thy knowing it, and hath left me poorer, yet all so happy.

GUIDO *[Embracing her].* Oh, my love, my love! Hide not thy head so! Let me open the little scarlet gates, that closed in music, dive after corals, and I will win a richer booty than all the gold the griffin guards in Armenia's wilderness.

BEATRICE. Thou, Guido, art my lord, what I possess is thine; what not, thy fancy lends me lavishly, which doth squander your treasures as they were a bauble. *[Kisses him.]*

GUIDO. How bold methinks I am to look at you like this. The gentle violet lurks beneath the leaf and fears to gaze at the great sun in dread of so much brightness; yet have mine eyes, presumptuous eyes! now grown so fro ward that like twin fixed stars they gaze at thee unwinking, rioting in thy loveliness.

BEATRICE. Dearest, would thou mightest watch me for aye! Thine eyes are polished mirrors; by looking in them, I can see myself therein, and so I know my likeness lives in thee.

GUIDO *[Taking her in his arms].* Stay still, thou heavenly orb, and make this hour eternal! *[A pause.]*

BEATRICE. Sit a little lower, yea just so, that my fingers may slip through thy hair, that thy face may be lifted like a cup to meet my kiss.

Hast ever marked, if one unlock a long neglected room,—heavy with dust and fouled with stains of mould, that foot of man hath not trod for years,—take down the rusty bars from the windows and throw wide the broken shutters, for to let the sun stream in,—hast marked how the sun doth transform each sooty flake of dust into a brilliant atom of dancing gold? Mine heart is like to that long empty hall, love glints gaily into it, and hath lent all life its gold. Dost not think love is the whole contents of life?

GUIDO. Yea, without love is life but an unhewn block, lying in the quarry, till the carver's hand awake the god within. Without love life is dumb as a common reed, that grows in marshes and by river banks, and holds no music.

BEATRICE. Yet therefrom the minstrel Love will cut a pipe, and draw forth music from it; so Love charms melody from out each life. Say I not true?

GUIDO. Tis women make it true. With pencil and with chisel do men work,—the dyer's son, Paul Veronese, their great rival at Venice, who painted God's Magdalen, slim as a lily and as white, mounting the Temple steps, and Raphael,

who painted divine Madonnas, divine in their pure motherhood,—and yet are women thfe greatest artists of this earth; they model men's daily life, which the greed of gold of our days doth degrade, and make it fair by love.

BEATRICE. Ah, Guido, I would that thou and I were poor,—the poor, that love each other, are so rich.

GUIDO. Say once more that thou lov'st me, Beatrice.

BEATRICE *[Letting her fingers glide round his collar].* How close the collar of thy doublet fits about thy neck! [COUNT MORANZONE *looks in through the door of the external corridor.]*

GUIDO. Nay, tell me that thou lov'st me.

BEATRICE. I do remember, when as a child I dwelt in my loved France at the Court at Fontainebleau, the King wore such a collar.

GUIDO. But tell me that thou lov'st me!

BEATRICE *[Jestingly].* The King of France was an illustrious hero, yet was he not so kingly as thou art. Why needs must I confess my love to thee? *[She takes his head between her hands and lifts his face to hers.]* Thou know'st I do belong to thee for ever, with soul and body both! *[She kisses him, then suddenly notices* MORANZONE *and springs up.]* Ha, what is that? [MORANZONE *disappears.]*

GUIDO. What, dearest?

BEATRICE. Methought I saw two eyes of flame prying upon us through the doorway.

GUIDO. Nay, it was nothing. Only the sen-

tinel's shadow moved across the floor. *[The* DUCHESS *still stands staring at the window.]* Twas nothing, love.

BEATRICE. What now need trouble us, who are in Love's guard and keeping? Twere all indifferent to me, an if the world and its menial backbiters should trample down and tread out my life. They say the common flowers of the field do shed a sweeter perfume, if they be trod on, than if they bloom undisturbed, and many plants, else scentless, diffuse only in death, when they are broken and torn, the odours of Araby. So is it with young lives, which daily stress is like to crush; it doth express all their sweets and oft heightens yet more their charm. Love is the crown of life; think'st not 'tis so?

GUIDO. Come, let us sport and sing! I feel I fain would sing now.

BEATRICE. Nay, hush! At times it seems as though all existence were narrowed to one single transport of delight, and joy's very intensity laid a seal upon the lips.

GUIDO. Let my lips break this seal! Thou lov'st me, Beatrice?

BEATRICE. Is't not strange, that loving thee, I should love mine enemy?

GUIDO. Thine enemy,—what enemy?

BEATRICE. Thyself, who with Love's shaft hast pierced my heart,—poor heart, that lived but for itself alone, till thine arrow struck it.

GUIDO. Ah, Beatrice, myself have been wounded so sore by this same bow, that all untended I

lie here to die, unless, beloved physician, thou dost heal me.

BEATRICE. Nay, I cannot make thee whole, for I am sick of the same sickness.

GUIDO. Oh, how I love thee! I must e'en rob the cuckoo of his voice, and sing one note for aye.

BEATRICE. Nay, sing no other! An this be the cuckoo's lay, then is the nightingale hoarse-throated, and the shrill lark hath lost her melody,

GUIDO. Kiss me, Beatrice! *[She takes his head between her hands, bends over and kisses him; a loud knocking is heard at the door,—*GUIDO *springs up. A serving-man enters.]*

SERVING-MAN. A packet for your Worship!

GUIDO *[Carelessly].* Ah, hand it here!

[The serving-man hands him the packet in a wrapper of vermilion silk, and goes off; as GUIDO *is in the act of opening it, the* DUCHESS *slips behind him and snatches it away in jest.]*

BEATRICE *[Laughing].* What is to wager, it comes from a girl?—she would fain see thee wearing her colours; I do begrudge her the smallest part in thee. Nay, like a miser I must have thee all, e'en though I may spoil thee by my greed.

GUIDO. Tis nothing.

BEATRICE. A maid doth send it thee.

GUIDO. Thou knowest well, 'tis nothing.

BEATRICE *[Turns away and opens the packet].* Traitor, tell me now, what means this: a dagger—two leopards on it of steel.

GUIDO *[Takes the dagger out of her hands}. o* God !

BEATRICE. Well, then, I will look out o' window; mayhap I may recognise by his arms the messenger who gave it to the porter at the Gate. I will never rest till I do know thy secret. *[Runs out onto the loggia laughing.]*

GUIDO. Tis horrible! So soon have I forgot my father's death, so readily admitted love into mine heart, that now must I ruthlessly banish it away and let in murder, that knocks fiercely at the door. I must! Have I not sworn an oath? Yet not to-night. Nay, it must be to-day. Farewell then, all joy and light of life; farewell, all memory of gentleness; farewell, Beloved! Can I with blood-stained hands stroke and caress her hands of innocence? with lips still wet with gore meet hers? Can a murderer's eyes look into her flowerlike orbs, that would strike me blind, to languish henceforward in eternal night? Nay, murder hath set up a barrier betwixt us—too high for exchange of kisses.

BEATRICE. Guido!

GUIDO. Beatrice, forget, forget that name, strike it out for ever from thy life!

BEATRICE *[Drawing near him].* Best beloved!

GUIDO *[Shrinking back],* A barrier is risen up betwixt us twain, that we may not pass.

BEATRICE. Naught is there I dare not do, an thou be near me.

GUIDO. Ah, there it is, I cannot be near thee, cannot more breathe the same air with thee, nor greet thy beauty with glance from eye to eye; it doth unnerve my wavering heart and makes my

flaccid hand to miss its aim. I prithee, let me go; forget that thou hast ever seen me!

BEATRICE. How, with thy kisses still hot upon my lips, forget the love plights that thou swarest?

GUIDO. I take them back.

BEATRICE. Thou canst not, Guido, they are a part of elemental nature; the air throbs with their harmony, and these fond oaths do give a sweeter melody to the song of birds.

GUIDO. Now is a barrier risen 'twixt us twain, before forgotten or not known.

BEATRICE. No, there is no barrier, Guido; in pauper's weeds I will follow thee to the end of the world.

GUIDO *[Wildly].* The world is not wide enough to hold us both. Fare thee well for ever.

BEATRICE *[Calmly, with restrained passion].* Why didst intrude into my life at all? Why sow in my tender heart the white flower of love?

GUIDO. Beatrice!

BEATRICE. Now thou art fain to tear it up root and branch, but every fibre holds my heart so fast, that, an thou breakest one, mine heart breaks too. Why didst come into my life? Why didst uncover the secret springs of my love, that long had been choked up? Ah, why?

GUIDO. Oh God!

BEATRICE *[Wringing her hands].* Why didst break open the sluices of passion, till, like the waters of a flooded river that sweep away with them meadows and woods, Love with the triumphant might of an avalanche did whirl away

my life with it? Must I drop by drop gather up again those waters? Ah me! a tear is formed of every drop, embittering my life with its salt savour.

GUIDO. Say no more, I do conjure thee, for I must needs leave thy life, to seek a way that is denied thee.

BEATRICE. I have heard tell that mariners, dying of thirst on a raft, wretched castaways on the wide seas, do dream of green meadows and rippling brooks, and then, their throats parched, awake to suffer yet more piteous torments, because sleep hath so deceived them; and so they die, cursing the sleep which did cradle them in dreams. I curse thee not, though I too have made shipwreck on the ocean men call despair.

GUIDO. Oh God, oh God!

BEATRICE. Ah, stay, stay, Guido; listen, I love thee. [A *short pause.]* Is there no echo, when I say I love thee, to sound back to me? Is it dead?

GUIDO. All, all is dead,—save only one thing, and that dies to-night.

BEATRICE. Then must I school my lips to parting; and yet, methinks they'll never learn the lesson, for when I shape them to cry farewell, naught will they say but this: I love thee! Must I chide the rebels? But can one lip chide the other? Ah, both are guilty, and refuse to utter the fatal word.

GUIDO. Then must I say it for them. Farewell; never can we see each other more. *[Rushes towards her.]*

BEATRICE. Art going? Nay, touch me not,—go, I say, go! *[Exit* GUIDO.] Never again,—was

that it,—never see each other again? Well, I know my duty. I will exchange the lamp of love for a funeral torch, lay my bridal wreath upon my bier, alter my wedding-march into a dirge, and so singing die, like the swan.

Oh grief, an thou art so enamoured of my life, why couldst not choose another form?—the mask of pain, not the smile of love, the raven's voice, not the nightingale's, the mole's blind eyes, not those sapphire orbs, that like the summer sky are so deep blue God would seem visible in them,—then, grief, then should I have known thee for what thou art.

Why in heaven's name spake he of a barrier? No, there is no barrier raised betwixt us; he lied, and should I therefore shun henceforth what I have loved, and hate what I adored? We women live not after such a guise. For should I cut his image from my heart, my heart, in pilgrim wise, would follow bleeding after that image through the world and summon it back with the soft call of love.

[Enter the DUKE *equipped for the chase with Falconers and dogs.]*

DUKE. You kept us waiting, and our dogs to boot.

BEATRICE. I do not hunt to-day.

DUKE. Why so?

BEATRICE. I cannot go, my Lord.

DUKE. What, baby face, thou dar'st to cross my will? I could bind thee on a jade and chase thee through the streets, that the rabble,—the

folk thou feedest!—might wave their caps and scoff at thee.

BEATRICE. Hast never then a kindly word for me?

DUKE. With kindly words a man doth catch his enemies. Thee I hold within the hollow of my hand; why need I waste flattering speeches?

BEATRICE. I am not coming.

DUKE *[Beating his boot with his riding whip]. I* have changed my mind. Thou art to remain at home, and like a devoted wife, mayst watch from the lattice for our return. Twcre too terrible if any accident befell thy dear consort! Ho, Lords, come on, the dogs are hot-foot,—and I too, with so dutiful a wife beside me. Where is Childe Guido?

MAFFIO. My lord, I have not seen him for a full hour past.

DUKE. No matter, soon enow I shall get a sight of him. You, gracious lady, tarry soft at home and spin. I wager you my word, home-keeping virtues are oft very commendable,—in other folks.

[Exit DUKE *with his train.]*

BEATRICE. The stars do fight against me, that is the sum of all. Wherefore will I this night, when my lord is asleep, make good use of my dagger and so end my days. My heart is like a stone that nothing scores save the dagger's edge. There let it find the name that lies hid within. To-night must death sever me from the Duke,—but yet he too, the old Duke, may die to-day. Why not? Yesterday his hand was stricken palsied; men have oft been slain by such a stroke,—and why

not he? Are there not fever too and ague and fit, as mostly such accompany old age? Nay, nay, he dies not, he is too sinful. The honour-worthy die before their time. The good die,—beside whom, in the hideous pollution of his life, he is a leper. Women and children die; the Duke dies not, he is too sinful.

Can it be, that sin hath a sort of immortality, unknown to virtue? Can it be that the bad man thrives on what to other mortals is death, like poisonous herbs that live from corruption? Nay, nay, God would never suffer that. Yet my lord dies not, he is too sinful. Wherefore 'tis I alone will die to-night. Grim death must so my bride-groom be, the grave my secret pleasure house of joy. A churchyard is the world, and like a coffin each one doth carry a skeleton within.

[COUNT MOKANZONE *enters, all in black; he crosses the stage in the background, gazing about him anxiously.]*

MORANZONE. Guido? Where is he? nowhere can I find him.

BEATRICE *[Perceiving him].* Oh God! 'Twas thou didst take away my love from me.

MORANZONE *[With flashing eyes].* How, hath he forsaken thee?

BEATRICE. What! dost not know? Give him back to me, oh, give him back to me; else will I have thy body torn limb from limb, and thy head nailed to the pillory, till the carrion vultures have flayed it bare. Better hadst thou crossed the lioness's path than come betwixt my love and me.

[With gathering passion.] Oh, give him back, thou know'st not how I love him. But now he knelt on that seat, here stood, there gazed at me and kissed my wide open portals, dropt a song of love, so wild with hand and spoiled these lips with his, and in these ears, yearning that all around the birds fell silent. Give him back to me!

MORANZONE. *He loves you not.*

BEATRICE. The plague dry up thy tongue, that saith so! Give him back to me!

MORANZONE. You will never, noble lady, see him more, neither this night nor any other night.

BEATRICE. What is thy name?

MORANZONE. What is my name?—Revenge!

[Exit.]

BEATRICE. Revenge! I have never harmed a little child; what seeks revenge then at my door? No matter, death stands ready there on watch, to light me with his gloomy torch. Tis true, men hate thee, Death, yet to me thou wilt be dearer than my best beloved. Send forth thy messengers then straightway, urge on the weary steeds of lagging day and hurry forward night, thy sister. Enwrap the world in black, and let thy parson, the owl, screech from his ruined tower, the toad croak, and the bat, slave of the dark Persephone, whir on fluttering pinions through the gloom. Tear up the shrieking mandrakes, that they make us music for the dance, and bid the mole dig deep thy cold, narrow bed. For this night will I lie within thine arms.

END OF ACT II

ACT III

A BROAD CORRIDOR IN THE DUKE'S PALACE

To left, a window affording a view over Padua by moonlight. To right, a flight of steps leading to a door, before which hangs a curtain of crimson satin embroidered with the Ducal arms in gold. On the bottom step is seated a black-robed figure. The scene is lighted by an iron brazier in which tow is burning. Thunder and lightning. Night-time.

[GUIDO *climbs in by the mndow.]*

GUIDO. The storm grows fiercer; how my ladder swayed! At every shock methought the ropes had parted! *[Looks back at the city.]* Great God, what a night! In the skies the crash of thunder, and wild lightnings that blaze through the town from pinnacle to pinnacle, till the pale houses tremble and seem to shudder each time another flash darts along the streets. [Crosses *stage to the foot of the steps.]* Ha, who art thou, that lurk'st on the stairs watching like Death for a guilty soul? *[A pause.]* Art dumb? Hath the storm paralysed thy tongue and benumbed thy speech? Out of the way; in yonder chamber have I work to accomplish, that no man else can do. *[The figure rises and removes its mask.]*

MORANZONE. Guido Feiranti! Thy dead father shouts with glad triumph this night!

GUIDO *[Confused].* What, are you here?

MORANZONE. I was waiting your coming.

GUIDO *[Looking away from him].* *I* did not expect you; yet am I glad I can now tell you mine intent.

MORANZONE. First would I inform thee of my plans! Know then, the horses stand ready at the Parma gate; once thou hast performed thine office, we ride thence away. To-morrow night, an our steeds prove trusty, we shall be at Parma. There are already warned the old-time friends of thy noble father, who have long been stirring up a revolt of the burghers. By dint of gold and empty promises I have won to our side many folk that now hold to the Duke, the usurper. Once the Duke is dead, the soldiery is soon induced to mutiny, and then thou mountest thy father's throne as lawful lord of Padua.

GUIDO. It cannot, cannot be.

MORANZONE. It shall be!

GUIDO. Now hear me, Count Moranzone, I am resolved not to kill the Duke.

MORANZONE. Say that again! Mine ears have cheated me, eld hath numbed my powers. I am grown a greybeard afore my time. What didst say? Thou wouldst with the dagger in thy girdle revenge thy father's bloody murder. Didst thou say that?

GUIDO. No, I said, Sir Count, I was resolved not to kill the Duke.

MORANZONE. Impossible, my senses do deceive me; or the midnight storm-laden air changes thy meaning in the saying.

GUIDO. You hear aright; I will not kill the man.

MORANZONE. And what, traitor, of thine oath?

GUIDO. I am determined to break it!

MORANZONE. And what of thy father's murder?

GUIDO. Think you, my father would have joy, to see this old man's blood reeking on my hands?

MORANZONE. Yea, he would laugh for pleasure.

GUIDO. Not so—the other world hath better knowledge; vengeance is God's, leave it to God.

MORANZONE. Thou art God's instrument of vengeance.

GUIDO. Nay! God needs no instrument but his own hand. I will not kill the man.

MORANZONE. Wilt not! then why art thou here?

GUIDO. Count Moranzone, I will push into the Duke's chamber, to lay the dagger here on the sleeper's bosom, and this paper. When he awakes, he will learn in whose power he was, who spared his life; that is the fairest revenge for me.

MORANZONE. Thou will not slay him?

GUIDO. No!

MORANZONE. Ignoble scion of the noblest of fathers, who dost not begrudge another hour of life to the man who sold him.

GUIDO. You stayed my hand therefrom. Else had I killed him in the open market-place, the day first I saw him.

MORANZONE. Twas not the time then; now the hour is come, and like a girl, thou pratest of mercy.

GUIDO. No, but of right revenge, such as beseems my father's son.

MORANZONE. Unhappy father, once more be-

trayed, and by your own son! Thou art a dastard; eke draw thy steel, dash into the Duke's room, and bring me back his black heart upon thy sword. Once he is dead, then thou may'st talk to me of noble vengeance.

GUIDO. Hear me! Upon your honour, upon your love toward my father's name, think you, my father, that puissant lord, that doughty hero, that knightly warrior, would e'er have crept in like a thief by night, and stabbed a greybeard in his bed? Speak!

MORANZONE *[After some hesitation].* Thou didst take an oath, and thou must keep it! Dost deem I know not thy secret, thy commerce with the Duchess?

GUIDO. Stop, thou liar! The moon herself is not so chaste, the stars not so pure.

MORANZONE. And yet thou lov'st her, weak fool, who usest love but only as a plaything!

GUIDO. Yea, thou dost well to talk; in thy veins, greybeard, youth stirs not stormily. Thy bleared eye hath barred its veiled gateway to beauty, thy ear is stopped, robbed of its erstwhile keenness, and shut to this world's music. Thou talk'st of love, and knowest not what love is.

MORANZONE. I too, young sir, have wandered moonstruck, have sworn, sick with yearning, to die, and died not; I too have nimbly rhymed of *loves* and *doves* in halting verses sung to a cracked guitar, as lovers used to do; I know the trick o't, mad lust of food and bed. … At bottom we all are beasts—love is mere sensuality under a holy name.

GUIDO. Now am I assured you know naught at all of Love. Love is life's sacrament; it hath magic to charm virtue out of naught, and purifies from all the nauseous refuse of this world. It is the fire that refines the gold from dross, the van that sifts chaff and wheat, the Spring that from the hard-frozen soil lets innocency put forth her rose-buds. God walks no more amongst mankind—his image, Love, goes in His stead. The man who loves a woman knoweth the secret as well of the Creator as of the world created. There is no house so lowly, so poor and pitiful, that, if the indwellers be pure of heart, Love shuns the same; but an if bloody murder knock at the Palace gate and find an entrance, then creeps Love wounded forth and dies. That is the penalty ordained of God for sin. The bad man cannot love. *[Groans are heard from the* DUKE'S *sleeping-room.]* What is that? Do you not hear it?

MORANZONE. Nay, 'twas nothing.

GUIDO. I take this to be woman's mission,—through the power of Love to save man's soul; love for my Beatrice hath taught me to see a more sublime, more holy vengeance, an if I spare the Duke, than in any bloody deed of murderous midnight violence,—young hands choking out an old man's life. Was't not for Love's sake that Christ, who was himself Love incarnate, exhorted men to forgive their enemies?

MORANZONE *[Scoffingly].* That was in Palestine, not at Padua—a saying coined for Saints. I have to deal with men.

GUIDO. Tis for all times.

MORANZONE. Wherein is shown the Duchess's gratitude? Will she bend her cheek to thine, and fondle thee, because her consort can no more torture her?

GUIDO. Woe is me! never must I see her face more. Scarce twelve hours agone I took leave of her so abruptly, with such unruly passion, that she hath shut fast her heart against me. No, I shall never see her more.

MORANZONE. What art minded to do?

GUIDO. Once I have laid the dagger in its place, I leave Padua this very night.

MORANZONE. And then?

GUIDO. I go to enroll my name with the Doge of Venice, that he send me speedily to the wars to fight against the Heathen in the Holy Land; there will I, for my life is but a burden to me, throw myself recklessly upon some foeman's spear. *[Renewed groaning from the* DUKE'S *chamber.]* Hear you not someone crying?

MORANZONE. I hear continually from the dark purlieus of the grave one crying for vengeance. We waste time; the morn is near; art thou determined not to kill the Duke?

GUIDO. I am so resolved.

MORANZONE. Guido Ferranti, there in yonder room lies the man who erst sold your father and delivered him to the headsman's hands. There he sleeps; thou hast thy father's dagger; wilt thou not slay him?

GUIDO. I will not.

MORANZONE. Unhappy father, thou art left unavenged.

GUIDO. Unhappier yet were thy son a murderer.

MORANZONE. Pshaw, what is life?

GUIDO. I know not, Sir Count; I did not give it, and I dare not take it.

MORANZONE. Not oft have I thanked God so heartily as now, that he hath bestowed never a son on me! Why, what bastard blood then flows in thy veins, that, having thine enemy in thy power, thou let'st him escape! I would thou hadst tarried where thou wert.

GUIDO. Mayhap it had been better so. Mayhap the best of all, an I had never seen this world of sorrow!

MORANZONE. Farewell!

GUIDO. Farewell to you, Count Moranzone! One day the purport of my vengeance will be clear to you.

MORANZONE. Never.

[Exit by the window, and down the rope-ladder.]

GUIDO. Thou, father, knowest of mine intent and art content with this nobler vengeance. Whenas I grant the man his life, I ween I am doing as thou would'st have done thyself. I cannot tell, father, whether human voice can break through the iron prison of the dead, whether the departed have any tidings of what we do and leave undone for their sakes. And yet, methinks, I feel a presence near me, like a shadow by my side, and meseems as though spirit kisses touched my lips, and left them sanctified. *[Kneels.]* Oh father, canst

thou not break the laws of Death and show thyself in bodily shape, that I may grasp thy hand? Nay, nay, 'tis naught. *[Rises.]* It is the midnight phantoms do befool us, the night deceives us like a puppet-showman, persuading us that what is not, is. Tis waxing late; I must now to my work. *[Draws a letter from his bosom and reads.]* When he wakes and sees this letter and the dagger beside it, disgust will take hold on him for his life. Will he mayhap repent and reform his ways? Or will he mock, because a young wight hath spared him, his bitter enemy? Tis all one to me. Thy errand, father, it is that I fullfil,—thy orders and my love's, which hath taught me to know thee as thou art. *[Glides up the steps; just as he is stretching out his hand to draw back the curtain, the* DUCHESS *comes forward to meet him, all in white.* GUIDO *starts back.]* Beatrice?

BEATRICE. Guido, is it thou here,—so late at night?

GUIDO. Thou stainless angel of my life, thou comest surely from God with a heavenly message,—that 'tis nobler to practise mercy than revenge.

BEATRICE. For mercy I do beseech thee from my heart of hearts.

GUIDO. Oh father, now do I know thy will; for with Mercy hand in hand appeared Love like a God upon my path.

BEATRICE. I felt sure thou would'st come back again, when thou didst leave me so cruelly. Oh why didst do it? I make no quarrel, for now can I keep thee, feel thy heart's pulse throb soft and

fearful against mine. We are a pair of cage birds that kiss each other through the bars.—The time slips by, dawn will be here in an hour; get horses for the ride to Venice, there I am in no suspicion from them.

GUIDO. I follow thec, dearest, to the world's end.

BEATRICE. Nay, but dost love me verily?

GUIDO. Loves the lark the grey of dawn, that wakes its note?

BEATRICE. Can naught change thee?

GUIDO. Naught in this world. So sure as swings the mariner's needle, so turn I to the loadstone of thy love.

BEATRICE. No obstacle rises now betwixt us?

GUIDO. None now, nor in the future.

BEATRICE. That is *my* work.

GUIDO. Now wait till I do mine.

BEATRICE. Wilt thou go from me? leave me again as erst?

GUIDO. In one moment will I fare back. First I must haste into the Duke's chamber and leave this letter there, and this dagger with it,—that when he wakes . . .

BEATRICE. Who wakes?

GUIDO. The Duke.

BEATRICE. He will never wake more.

GUIDO. Is he dead?

BEATRICE. Yea, he is dead.

GUIDO. Oh God, how wonderful are thy ways! Could I e'er have thought that, this very night when I entrusted to thy hands the vengeance that

is Thine, Thou wouldst touch the man with Thy finger and summon him before Thy judgment seat?

BEATRICE. I have just stabbed him. . . .

GUIDO *[in horror].* Oh!

BEATRICE. —in his sleep. Come nearer, beloved, let me tell you all. Ere I begin, kiss me on the mouth. What! thou wilt not kiss me? Well, thou wilt, when thou hast learned how I slew him. Meseemed, after thou hadst left me in anger, that life was stale, unprofitable, without thy love. I had resolved to kill myself this night. About an hour agone, I woke, drew forth my dagger from beneath the pillow, where I had hid it with this intent, bared the blade and tried its sharpness, and thought of thee, how fondly I loved thee. The weapon was already aimed upon myself, when I turned mine eyes to the greybeard, ripe in years and wickedness, as he lay there, still muttering curses in his sleep. At sight of that hateful face a lightning flash shot through me suddenly: this is the barrier Guido spake of—whom else could he mean when he said *barrier* but him?——

What happened next, I scarce know. One thing only, that betwixt him and me a reeking mist of blood arose.

GUIDO. Horrible!

BEATRICE. Yea, well mightest thou call the sight I saw horrible; there was a rain of gore, then he groaned grievously, and then the groaning died away. Then I only heard the blood drip, drip down on the floor.

GUIDO. Enough, enough.

BEATRICE. Wilt thou not kiss me now? Dost not remember what thou saidst,—that woman's love makes angels of us men; well, man's love makes martyrs of poor women, who bear everything for his sake.

GUIDO. God!

BEATRICE. Thou hast naught to say?

GUIDO. Speech dies betwixt my lips.

BEATRICE. The Duke was slain with this steel. I never thought he would have bled so sore. Well, water may wash clean my hands, is't not so? But my soul? Enough, enough! let us begone hence! Is not the barrier betwixt us fallen? What wouldst thou more? Come now, the mom draws nigh. *[Lays her hand on* GUIDO'S.]

GUIDO *[Shrinking away from her].* Lost Saint! Angel from hell! What bloody demon was it set thee on? That thou didst kill thy consort is naught,—Hell was already gaping for his soul,—but thou hast murdered Love along with him, and where Love was, is now but a bloody stain, that breathes forth reek of plague and pestilence, and chokes Love.

BEATRICE *[in a sort of amazement]. I* did it for thee. Hadst thou so willed, I had never suffered it. *Thou* art to remain forsooth without spot or blemish, untouched, blameless, unsmirched! Men know not what women do for love's sake. Have I not destroyed my soul for all eternity? Oh, be kind to me; I did it for thee.

GUIDO. Touch me not; there flows a slender stream of blood betwixt us, that yet can ne'er

be bridged. When thou didst stab thy husband, thou didst smite Love to the heart with the same blow. We must see each other no more.

BEATRICE *[Wringing her hands].* For thee! For thee! I did it for thee; canst forget that? Thou spakest of a barrier betwixt us twain; now the barrier lies in yon upper chamber, laid low, destroyed, shattered and overthrown,—it can divide us no more.

GUIDO. Thou didst misunderstand me, sin was the barrier, and thou hast set it up thyself; crime was the barrier, murder was the barrier, and thine own hand hath built it up so high it shuts out Heaven and God.

BEATRICE. I did it for thee, thou canst not, must not, forsake me. Guido, hear! See to getting horses, let us set forth to-night. What was is like an evil dream—forgotten, the future beckons us; are we not faring forth to find sweet days of love in the flowery meads? We will laugh; nay, then we will weep, if only we weep together, thou and I; I will serve thee like a poor drudge, like any handmaid. I will be so humble, so full of lowliness; thou dost not know me!

GUIDO. Nay, nay, I know thee now. Begone, begone, I say, from my sight!

BEATRICE *[Pacing backwards and forwards].* Ah God! how fondly I have loved this man!

GUIDO. Never! Else would Love have stayed thine arm, when thou didst sully his sanctuary, which only innocency may rightly enter.

BEATRICE. These are mere words, words, words.

GUIDO. Begone! How could we ever share the holy meal of love? Thou hast poured poison in the consecrated wine, murder dips his finger in the cup. I had liefer have borne a thousand deaths.

BEATRICE. Since I did the deed, I *have* borne a thousand deaths.

GUIDO. Tis life, not death, thou hast to dread.

BEATRICE *[Throwing herself upon her knees].* Then strike me dead! I have poured forth blood, pour forth more yet, and heaven, or else hell, will greet us twain united. Draw thy sword, and quick make reckoning with Death, who yet licks his lips after this feast. Quick, quick, let thy sword pierce to my heart, 'twill find there but the image of its lord. But an thou wilt not kill me with thy sword, then bid me fall upon this reeking knife, and I will do it.

GUIDO *[Wresting the knife from her hand].* Give it me, give it me, I say. Oh God! thy very hand is wet with blood. Hell is here, I can tarry no longer.

BEATRICE. Wilt thou not raise me up, or must I like a beggar grovel on my knees?

GUIDO. Let me never behold thy face again!

BEATRICE. Ah, well for me, had I never seen thee! But bethink thee, 'twas for thee I did it. [GUIDO *shrinks away; kneeling, she seizes his hands.]* Nay, Guido, grant me hearing for a brief space! Till thou earnest to Padua, I lived indeed a lamentable life there, but free from thoughts of murder,—subject to the cruelty of my husband, obedient to his unrighteous wishes, as pure as any maid of noble lineage, that now would draw

back shuddering from my touch. Then thou earnest, Guido, and I heard from thy lips the first words of kindness I had ever listened to since I left France. What then! Thou earnest hither, in thine ardent eyes I read the meaning of love, every word from thee rang like music in my numbed soul. Thou didst shine splendid, like the good Saint Michael in Santa Croce, the Church I used to pray in. Shall I ever go there to pray again? In thy bright, young face glowed the clear light of morning—and I loved thee, yet hid my love from thce. Thou didst pay court to me, didst kneel before me, as now I kneel at thy feet. With sweet-sounding oaths thou didst vow love to me, and I trusted thee. I thought how that many women in the world, if they were wedded to this monster, fettered to him, like galley-slaves to a leper,—that many women would have assailed thee as temptresses. I did not so. I know, an I had done it, albeit I had not lain in the very dust before thee, thou wouldst have loved me unchangingly. *[Approaches him timidly after a pause.]* Whether thou dost understand me even now, I cannot tell, Guido; for thee I have committed the outrage, that hath chilled my young blood to ice, for thee, and thee alone. *[Stretching out her arms.]*

Wilt thou not speak to me? Love me a little; ah, my youth hath so lacked love, so yearned for friendship.

GUIDO. I dare not look upon thee; what thou cravest is too, too publicly infamous. Get thee gone to thy chamberwomen!

BEATRICE. Ha, ha! there speaks a man!—Hadst *ihou* come to me with guilt-laden soul, a foul murder thou hadst committed not for love, but lucre, I would have sat me upon thy bed and watched by thee the livelong night, that remorse might not distil its poison in thine ear and drive sleep away. For the guilty man best merits love in his torment.

GUIDO. Where guilt is, love hath naught to seek.

BEATRICE. Where guilt is, ought not love to be? Oh God! how differently we women love from men. Many and many a woman lives here in Padua, that toils and moils and wears her fingers to the bone in hard work—the husband wastes the scanty week's wage in dissolute carouse, in the boisterous tavern, then staggers home late o' the Saturday night, to find his wife seated at the fireless hearth, lulling asleep her whimpering child. At that he starts beating his poor wife, because the child cries with hunger and the fire is black. Yet the wife loves him, rises up next morning, her face all swollen with grief and marks of blows, and tidies the house, sets her work in trim, forces a smile and is but too glad if he beat her not before their child another time!—That is a woman's love. *[Pause.]* Thou dost not speak. Oh be kind to me, while yet the summer of my life shines bright. Thou canst not drive me from thy side; whither am I to go, an if thou reject me? For thee hath this hand murdered life, for thee my soul hath undone itself beyond redemption.

GUIDO. Begone from my sight! The dead man

is a spirit, and our love hovers like a spectre round its desert grave and wanders through this charnel-house, and weeps, because it was murdered when thy consort was slain. Dost not see that?

BEATRICE. I see this, that when men love, they give women scant, scant measure, but women give all they have, when *they* love. That is what I see now, Guido.

GUIDO. Away! Away! Awake thy dead to life, ere thou dar'st return.

BEATRICE. All, would to God I could awake the dead, give back the glassy eye its power of vision, the tongue its erstwhile flow of words, the heart its life-pulse—but it cannot be. What's done is done; once dead, dead for aye; no more the fire warms, or the winter chills with all its snows. Something is flown; call him, no answer comes,—make jest, he laughs no more,—stab him, he never bleeds. Would that I *could* awake him! Oh God, turn back thy sun a brief while, erase this night in the book of time and blot it out. Reverse the sun and let me be what an hour agone I was. Nay, nay, time stands not still for anything, the sun stays not his course, though remorse cry e'er so hoarsely. But thou, beloved, has thou no word of pity more for me? Oh Guido, Guido, kiss me once again! Force me not to some desperate resolve! A woman waxes mad, when so entreated. Wilt thou not kiss me yet once more?

GUIDO *[Holding up the knife].* Nay, not till the blood is dried upon this steel, nor even then.

BEATRICE. How scant pity, Saviour, is for us

women in this rough world! Men do entice us to the abyss, and then desert us when we fall into it.

GUIDO *[Wildly].* Go, go to join thy dead!

BEATRICE *[Going up the steps].* Well then, I will go! May you one day find more pity than thou hast given me.

GUIDO. Let me find pity, when I do commit foul midnight murder.

BEATRICE *[Descending three or four steps again}.* Murder thou saidst? Murder is an hungered and doth crave for more. Death, his twin brother, is not satisfied; but stalks shrieking through the house and will not be appeased till he have company. Tarry a while, Death, I will give thee a faithful servant to fare with thee. Stay shrieking, murder, thou shalt enjoy a full feast, till thou be satiate.

A storm will threaten this house before morn, so fearful that the white moon is already changed to grey for very horror; a light wind sweeps moaning round the house, the stars above haste madly along their heavenly path, as if the night were melting in tears of fire for what the day brings with it. Oh weep, lamenting heaven! Weep thine eyes out! Though grief like a deluge drowned all the universe, till it became one ocean of bitter tears, yet were't not enough! [A *peal of thunder.]* Dost not understand? the heavens have mounted their artillery. Revenge is waked, and her sleuth hounds are let loose on the world. Who of us twain calls down the lightning on his head, let him beware the hurt that lurks within the forked levin's

flame. *[A flash of lightning, followed by a peal of thunder.}*

GUIDO. Away! Away!

[Exit the DUCHESS. As *she raises the crimson door-curtain, she throws one last look back at* GUIDO, *without the latter showing any sign of relenting. Thunder again.}*

In ashes at my feet lies my life, love itself is slain. In its stead hath murder crept in on stealthy bloodstained feet. And she, she who hath wrought the deed,—yet she loved me and did the outrage for my sake! Beatrice, Beatrice, come back!

[Just as he is mounting the steps, the tread of soldiers is heard approaching.} Ha, what is that? The gleam of torches and swift hurrying feet. God grant they do not seize her. *[The approaching sounds grow louder.}* Beatrice! there is still time for flight. Come down, come down! *[The* DUCHESS'S *voice is heard from without.]*

BEATRICE. This way fled my husband's murderer.

[Down the steps hurries a troop of soldiers. At first they do not see GUIDO, *until the* DUCHESS *appears, surrounded by her attendants carrying torches, at the top of the stairs and points out where* GUIDO *stands. He is at once arrested. One of the men-at-arms snatches the knife from his hands and shows it to the Captain of the Watch.]*

END OF ACT III

ACT IV

HALL OF JUSTICE

The lower part of the walls is hung with stamped grey velvet, the upper part painted red. Gilded symbolic figures support the roof, which is decorated with red stripes; frieze and skirting-boards are grey. A canopy of white satin with gold flower pattern is erected for the DUCHESS. *Below this, a long bench, draped with a red cloth, for the Judges. Below this again a table for the Clerks of the Court. Two soldiers stand either side of the Canopy, and two more guard the door. The citizens have some of them already entered, while others are still arriving and exchanging greetings. Two Ushers in violet uniforms keep order with long white wands.*

FIRST BURGHER. Good morrow, neighbour Anthony.

SECOND BURGHER. Good morrow, neighbour Dominic.

FIRST BURGHER. Tis a memorable day for Padua, eh?—the Duke dead.

SECOND BURGHER. Let me tell thee this, neighbour Dominic, I have never lived a right day's life since the last Duke died—as true as I'm an honest man.

FIRST BURGHER. They'll examine him first, and then judge him, won't they, neighbour Anthony?

SECOND BURGHER. Nay, nay! else might dis-

putes occur. First hell be judged, that he may get his deserts, and then the examination will be held, so that no injustice is possible.

FIRST BURGHER. Well, well, 'twill go hard with his neck, there's no doubt o' that.

SECOND BURGHER. Yea, 'tis most impious wicked to spill the blood of a Duke.

FIRST BURGHER. A Duke must have blue blood i' his veins, eh?

SECOND BURGHER. As I look on't, our Duke's blood was black, like his black soul.

FIRST BURGHER. Have a care, neighbour Anthony, the Usher with the blue eyes hath marked thee.

SECOND BURGHER. For what I care, let him cast his blue eyes on me an he will; he can't knock me down with 'cm.

THIRD BURGHER. What think ye specially of the young fellow who stuck his knife into the Duke?

SECOND BURGHER. Tis a well bred, well dispositioned, well looking lad,—and natheless a villain, for he hath killed the Duke.

THIRD BURGHER. He hath done't for the first time. Mayhap the law will give him extenuating circumstances, seeing 'tis a case of 'first offence.'

SECOND BURGHER. Yea truly, I never thought *o'* that. But then the Law is hard on every man.

USHER. Hold thy tongue, rascal!

SECOND BURGHER. What, am I thy mirror, that thou miscall'st me rascal?

FIRST BURGHER. Here comes one o' the House-

hold. How now, Dame Lucia, what news from Court? How is't with thy poor mistress, the Duchess with the gentle face?

LUCIA. A fine day truly! a fine day o' calamity! Alackaday, what a day and what a calamity! This very year come Michaelmas, 'tis just nineteen year since I wedded my good man. Now we be at August, and the Duke is murdered; there's a notable coincidence for ye!

SECOND BURGHER. Ah, if 'tis a notable coincidence, mayhap the lad will not be done for. 'Gainst coincidences is no law; at least I know *o'* none 'gainst incidents.

FIRST BURGHER, But how goes it with the Duchess?

LUCIA. I was sure some disaster was coming on the house; for six weeks past the cakes have all been burnt o' the one side, and only last Martinmas eve a big moth, with wings, flew into the candle, so that of sheer fright I well nigh——

SECOND BURGHER. But tell us of the Duchess, good gossip; how doth she fare?

LUCIA. I' fegs, and 'tis high time ye asked news of her; the poor lady is near out of her wits. The whole night long she hath never closed an eye, but hath paced back and forth her chamber. I begged her to take somewhat, a whey-posset or a sup of aquavitae, and get to bed, and not grudge a spell of sleep to her shattered nerves; but 'nay, nay,' she answered, 'I am afraid of dreaming!' What think ye of her word,—strange, is't not?

SECOND BURGHER. Great folks be something

short of sense; Providence doth make it up to 'em in fine clothes.

LUCIA. Well, well, this is all I can say: God keep us from murder, so long as we live.

[MORANZONE *enters hastily.]*

MORANZONE. Is the Duke dead?

SECOND BURGHER. His heart hath a knife stuck in't, and that can scarce be healthful for any man.

MORANZONE. Who is accused of the murder?

SECOND BURGHER. The prisoner, Sir.

MORANZONE. Who is the prisoner?

SECOND BURGHER. Why, the man they do accuse of having murdered the Duke.

MORANZONE. I mean, what is his name?

SECOND BURGHER. Why, just whatever his godfathers baptised him by? what could it be else?

USHER. Guido Ferranti is his name, noble sir.

MORANZONE. Yea, I knew it almost before you told me. *[Aside.]* Tis strange he should have killed the Duke, seeing he left me in so different a mind. Methinks, when he looked on the man, the fiendish bewrayer of his father, then passionate anger drew from out his heart all his boyish love-lore and planted revenge there instead. But I wonder he escaped not. *[Mingling again tvith the crowd.]* Say, how was he seized?

THIRD BURGHER. Why surely, by the forelock, Sir.

MORANZONE. I mean, who seized him?

THIRD BURGHER. Why verily, they who arrested him.

MORANZONE. Who raised the alarm?

THIRD BURGHER. That I cannot tell you, Sir.

LUCIA. The Duchess herself denounced him.

MORANZONE *[Aside].* The Duchess! That hath an ugly sound.

LUCIA. Of course! The dagger was still in his hand—the Duchess's dagger.

MORANZONE. What say you?

LUCIA. With the Duchess's dagger was my Lord Duke slain.

MORANZONE *[Aside],* Some mystery lurks behind all this, that I cannot fathom.

SECOND BURGHER. They tarry long ere they come into Court.

FIRST BURGHER. They will come soon enow, I trow, for the prisoner.

USHER. Silence! silence there!

FIRST BURGHER. Dost break the silence thine own self, Sir Usher, ordering us to keep it.

[The President of the Court and the Judges enter.]

SECOND BURGHER. Who is yonder fellow in scarlet? Is't the headsman?

THIRD BURGHER. Nay, that is the Chief Justiciar.

[GUIDO *is brought in under guard.]*

SECOND BURGHER. There comes the prisoner for sure.

THIRD BURGHER. He looks a likely lad enow.

FIRST BURGHER. Ay, but that is all his wiliness; scoundrels nowadays do look so respectable, that respectable folk, an they would be different from 'em, must needs look like scoundrels.

[The headsman enters, and takes his place behind **GUIDO.]**

SECOND BURGHER. Here comes the headsman! By'r Lord—think ye the axe is sharp?

FIRST BURGHER. Yea, a deal sharper than thy wits; but the edge is not turned toward him, mark ye that, neighbours?

SECOND BURGHER *[Scratching his neck].* Ton my word, I had liefer 'twere not quite so nigh.

FIRST BURGHER. Pshaw, needst have no fear, man; us common folk they never behead, but just set us a-swing at end of a rope. *[Fanfare of trumpets without.]*

THIRD BURGHER. What mean the trumpets? Is the sitting over already?

FIRST BURGHER. Nay, that doth mean the Duchess.

[Enter the DUCHESS *in black velvet; her train of flowered black velvet is borne by pages clad in violet. With her enter the* CARDINAL *in scarlet robes and the Gentlemen of the Court in black. She takes her place on the throne above the Judges' bench; the latter rise and remove their caps at her entrance. The* CARDINAL *sits beside the* DUCHESS, *but on a slightly lower level. The Courtiers group themselves about the throne.]*

SECOND BURGHER. The poor Duchess, how white she looks! Is she going to sit on the throne?

FIRST BURGHER. Yea, now she doth take the Duke's place.

SECOND BURGHER. Tis a right good thing for Padua; the Duchess is a kind-hearted, merciful Lady—once she cured my child of a fever.

THIRD BURGHER. Yea, and more than that; she

hath given us bread. That should not be forgot to her credit.

A SOLDIER. Stand back there, good folk!

SECOND BURGHER. Why need we to stand back, if we be good folk?

USHER. Silence in the Court!

CHIEF JUSTICIAR. With your Grace's leave, an it please you, we will deal with the Duke's murder. *[The* DUCHESS *bows assent.]* Let the prisoner step forward! What is thy name?

GUIDO. What matters that, my Lord?

CHIEF JUSTICIAR. Guido Ferranti they call thee in Padua.

GUIDO. A man can die under that name as well as another.

CHIEF JUSTICIAR. Tis well known to thee what awful crime they charge thee with,—most traitorous murder done on our Duke, Simone Gesso, Lord of Padua. What defence hast thou to offer?

GUIDO. None.

CHIEF JUSTICIAR. Then dost thou make confession of guilt?

GUIDO. Nay, I do confess naught, and I deny naught. I pray you, worshipful sir, proceed as fast as e'er the use of justice and the law permit. I will render no explanations.

CHIEF JUSTICIAR. Then canst thou not be guiltless of the murder; rather hath thy hardened, contumacious heart shut fast its gates against the right. Never think thy silence will avail thee; on the contrary it doth but magnify thy guilt, whereof

we have been all along fully convinced. Now once more, I bid thee speak.

GUIDO. I will not speak.

CHIEF JUSTICIAR. Then naught is left for me to do but speedily to pronounce on thee the doom of death.

GUIDO. I beseech you, say out your judgment quick. You can confer on me no more longed for boon.

CHIEF JUSTICIAR *[Rising]*. Guido Ferranti——

MORANZONE *[Advancing from among the crowd]*. Stay, stay, Sir Justiciar!

CHIEF JUSTICIAR. Who art thou that bidst justice stay?

MORANZONE. An it be justice, let it take its course; but an it be not——

CHIEF JUSTICIAR. Who is this?

BARDI. A Noble, and well known to our whilom Duke.

CHIEF JUSTICIAR. Well, Sir, you have come opportunely to be satisfied anent our Duke's murder. There stands the man who did the hideous deed.

MORANZONE. Hath mere suspicion fastened blindly on him, or have you proofs he was the man?

CHIEF JUSTICIAR. Thrice over hath the Court summoned him to say his say; but guilt lies heavy on his tongue, for not a word doth he advance in vindication, nor seeks to clear himself of blame, which surely innocence would have done.

MORANZONE. A second time I ask the question,—have you proofs?

CHIEF JUSTICIAK *[Showing the dagger].* This dagger, which the soldiers last night tore all bloody from his blood-stained hands. Need we better proof?

MORANZONE *[Takes the dagger and approaches the* DUCHESS]. Have I not seen a dagger much like this hanging at your Grace's girdle? *[The* DUCHESS *shudders, but without answering.]* Let me converse with this youth, who is in such peril of his life, for a few moments.

CHIEF JUSTICIAR. With much pleasure, Sir! And may you bring him to a frame of mind when he will unburden his heart of its load of guilt. [MOEANZONE *goes over to* GUIDO, *and takes his hand.]*

MORANZONE *[Whispers].* She did it! I could see it in her eyes! Canst think that I should suffer thy father's son to be dragged to the scaffold by this woman? Even as her Consort sold thy father, will she now do with thee.

GUIDO. Count Moranzone, I did it, and I alone. You may rest content, my father is avenged.

MORANZONE. Enough, enough, I know thou didst not do it; else had thy father's dagger, not this woman's plaything, fulfilled the work. Look, how she gazes at us! By God, the marble mask shall down; before all the world will I arraign her for this murder.

GUIDO. You must never do so.

MORANZONE. Be sure of this, I will.

GUIDO. Better say no word of it, my Lord.

MORANZONE. Why not? An she be guiltless she can prove it; if guilty, she must die.

GUIDO. And what am I to do?

MORANZONE. Thou or I—one of us twain is to toll the truth here and now.

GUIDO. The truth is,—I did the deed.

MORANZONE. We will see what our good Duchess answers.

GUIDO. Nay, I will tell all right out.

MORANZONE. Tis well said, Guido. On her own head fall the consequences of her outrage, not on thine! Did she not deliver thee to the guard?

GUIDO. Yea, she did.

MORANZONE. Well then, avenge thy father's death on her! She was wife of the false Judas!

GUIDO. Yea, she was!

MORANZONE. Now, methinks, no further urging is needed, albeit yesterday thou wast childishly discouraged and faint-hearted.

GUIDO. Faint-hearted though I was yesterday, I will no more be so to-day, be sure of that.

CHIEF JUSTICIAR. Doth he confess?

GUIDO. My Lord, I will confess,—that a cruel murder hath been committed.

FIRST BURGHER. Now, look at that; he hath a gentle heart and will know naught o' murder; so they will let him go free anon.

CHIEF JUSTICIAR. And that is all?

GUIDO. Nay, I say more than that,—I say, the man doth mortal sin who sheds man's blood.

SECOND BURGHER. He should go say that to the headsman; 'tis a good word.

GUIDO. Last boon of all, I do beseech the Court

to grant me leave frankly to expound the riddle of the murder, lighten this darkness, and name the guilty one who yesternight slew the Duke with this dagger.

CHIEF JUSTICIAR. The boon is granted.

BEATRICE *[Rising].* Nay, nay, he must not speak; need we any further proofs? Was he not seized at night within the Palace in the bloody garb of guilt?

CHIEF JUSTICIAR *[Showing her the Code}.* Your Grace may look yourself how the Law doth stand.

BEATRICE *[Pushing the book away}.* Bethink you, Sir Justiciar, is it not most likely a man of his sort might here in presence of all the people defame and vilify my late Consort, the City, the City's honour, mayhap even mine own self?

CHIEF JUSTICIAR. But the Law, your Grace!

BEATRICE. He must not speak; but with a gag in his mouth climb the ladder to the headsman's block.

CHIEF JUSTICIAR. But the Law!

BEATRICE. No Law binds us, 'tis we bind others by the Law.

MORANZONE. Sir Justiciar, you will never suffer such injustice here.

CHIEF JUSTICIAR. Nay, spare your reproaches, Count Moranzone. 'Twere sure a bad ensample, noble Lady, to turn away the Law from the right path; by such arbitrary power anarchy might well creep in to disturb our golden-balanced mean, and wrong win unrighteous victory.

BARDI. Your Grace cannot hinder the course of Justice.

BEATRICE. You preach of Justice and brag of the Law! Methinks, ye proud lords of Padua, the man who hurts your goods or pockets, who would but minish your monstrous incomings by the worth of one poor ferry toll, you would be far enow from giving *him* the benefit of the tardy Law's delay, with the same gentle patience ye do recommend to me.

BARDI. Your Grace doth wrong the Nobles.

BEATRICE. Nay, methinks I do not. Which of you all, an he found a thief at night in his house, stowing away some worthless trash amid his rags, would enter on discussions, and not call in a constable out of hand, to hale him straight to gaol?

So would ye, finding the villain with my husband's blood upon his hands, have haled him before his judge, that his head might be struck off.

GUIDO. God!

BEATRICE. Sir Justiciar, speak!

CHIEF JUSTICIAR. It may not be, your Grace. The laws of Padua are strict upon the point: even a common murderer hath the right thereafter to plead his case with his own mouth.

MORANZONE. Oh righteous Judge! Oh righteous law!

BEATRICE. Now are ye making triumph all too soon with your Law and Right! This is no ordinary, baseborn murderer, Justiciar, but a bold outlaw, a traitor to the State, caught in open rebellion. The man who murders the Ruler of the

State, murders the State *as* well, doth make all women widows, and all children orphans; so is he the public enemy of the State, as much as though he came with menacing artillery, in league with the hostile levies of Venice, and rattled at the gates of our Stronghold. Nay, more perilous is he to the State than serried spears and thundering cannon; for walls, gates, battlements, bastions, and all such things as are wrought of mere brute wood and stone, can be built up anew. But who can raise up again the body of my dead Consort, and bid him live and laugh?

MAFFIO. By Saint Paul, they will surely, I ween, forbid him the right to speak.

JEPPO. Yea, she hath gotten him fast hand and foot. But listen what more she hath to say.

BEATRICE. Wherefore bestrew ye now Padua's head with ashes, hang mourning banners out in all her streets, let every citizen go clad in sober black,—but ere we make us ready for the funeral feast, we must bethink us of the accursed murderer's hand, that hath wrought ruin on our State. Away with him straight to yon narrow house, whence no sound returns, where with a pinch of dust Death stops the lying mouths of men.

GUIDO. Let go there, constables. Hear me, Justiciar! Thou canst as little check the fetterless Ocean, the winter whirlwind, the Alpine hurricane, as silence me. Yea, should your soldiers drive their swords into my throat, yet shall each wound's gaping mouth with furious tongue cry out to Heaven.

CHIEF JUSTICIAR. Violence of this sort doth naught avail; so long as the tribunal grants thee not legitimate authority of free speech, thy words be but spoken to the winds. *[The* DUCHESS *smiles,* GUIDO *falls back with a despairing look.]*

Now, your Grace, I and these wise Justicers do propose with your good leave to withdraw us into another chamber, and there consider this hard case of law, and examine statutes and precedents.

BEATRICE. Go, worthy Justiciar, search the statute well, and be not at the beck and call of the slandering knave.

MORANZONE. Go, worthy Justiciar, search your own conscience, and send no man to death unheard.

[Exeunt CHIEF JUSTICIAR *and colleagues.]*

BEATRICE. Hold thy peace, thou evil genius of my life; for the second time thou com'st betwixt us. This time, I ween, Sir, 'tis my turn.

GUIDO. I will not die till I have spoken out.

BEATRICE. Die, and take thy secret along with thee to the grave!

GUIDO. Art still that same Duchess of Padua?

BEATRICE. I am what thou hast made me; look and see, I am thy creature.

MAFFIO. Look'ye, is she not like the white tigress at Venice an Indian Sultan once sent the Doge?

JEPPO. Hist, she can hear thy babble.

EXECUTIONER. My lad, I know not what thy speaking can effect, now mine axe is come so nigh thy neck; no words can blunt its edge. But seeing

it doth concern thee so nearly, I will hie me yonder to the Churchman; the commoner folks aye call him hither. I know of a surety, he hath a kind heart.

GUIDO. He whose trade is death is courtlier than all the rest.

EXECUTIONER. God have mercy on thee, I do thee the last service on earth.

GUIDO. Sir Cardinal, in a Christian land, where the pitying face of the Redeemer looks down from the high seat of justice, shall a human being die without confession? If not, then let me reveal the nightmare of my sins, so far as sin doth burden my soul.

BEATRICE. A needless waste of time.

CARDINAL. Ah, my son, I have no influence over the Justiciar. *Mine* office only begins when doom hath been pronounced, to stir the wavering sinner to repentance, that he may whisper in the ear of Holy Church the secrets of a sin-laden heart.

BEATRICE. As much as e'er thou wilt, may'st speak at the confessional, till thy lips be outwearied, but here thou shalt not so.

GUIDO. Reverend Father, you do bring me but weak consolation.

CARDINAL. Nay, my son, the strong power of the Church doth not end with this poor soap-bubble world, whereof we, saith St. Jerome, are but dust—for, an if the sinner die repentant, prayer and our holy masses may do much to rescue his soul from Purgatory.

BEATRICE. An thou dost meet my husband in Purgatory with a blood-red star over his heart, tell him I send you to bear him company

GUIDO. Oh God!

MORANZONE. This is the woman thou didst love, is't not?

CARDINAL. How cruel is Your Grace toward this man!

BEATRICE. Not half so cruel as he was to *your* Grace.

CARDINAL. Yea truly, he did to death your Consort.

BEATRICE. He did indeed!

CARDINAL. But mercy is the noblest prerogative of Princes.

BEATRICE. I found no mercy, and I give none. . . . He hath turned my heart into a stone, sowed nettle spawn in the flowering mead, poisoned the wellspring of compassion in my heart, and torn up loving-kindness by the roots; my life is like a land of famine, wherefrom all good things are utterly digged up. I am what thou hast made me. *[The* DUCHESS *weeps}*

JEPPO. Strange she should so have loved the wicked Duke.

MAFFIO. Strange 'tis women love their mates, and strange it is they love them not.

JEPPO. What a philosopher art thou, Petrucci!

MAFFIO. Why yes, I can bear with equanimity the ill-luck of other folks,—and that is philosophy.

BEATRICE. They tarry long, the greybeards, in debate, bid them come, bid them come quick, else

my heart will burst, so fiercely doth it beat; not that I am so exceeding anxious to live, for God wot, my life is not so joyful,—but at any rate I fain would not die without companions, nor fare alone to hell.

Sir Cardinal, canst not here on my brow read a word writ in scarlet letters,—the word 'Revenge.' . . . Bring water that I wash it out; it was branded there yesternight—say, must I wear it there by day, Cardinal? Oh, how it burns, and doth consume my brain! Give me a knife,—no, not that one, another,—that I may cut it out.

CARDINAL. It is but natural to rage against the murderous hand of the malefactor who struck dead your husband in his sleep.

BEATRICE. Ah, Cardinal, would I could burn that hand off,—it will burn in the world to come.

CARDINAL. Our Holy Church bids us forgive our enemies.

BEATRICE. Forgive? what is that? there was no forgiveness ever for me. Ha, they come at last! Well, Sir Justiciar, well?

[The CHIEF JUSTICIAR *enters.]*

CHIEF JUSTICIAR. Revered and most exalted our Liege Lady, long have we examined the knotty point, and well pondered Your Grace's words of wisdom,—never wisdom spake from fairer lips.

BEATRICE. Get on, my Lord, and let be compliments!

CHIEF JUSTICIAR. We find, as duly demonstrated to Your Grace, that whosoever, whether by force or fraud, doth conspire against the person

of the Prince, is *ipso facto* outlawed and void of all rights which appertain to other men, is a traitor and an enemy of the people, whom any sword may slay at will, without its wielder being called into account; but an if he be brought before the judgment seat, he must with dumb lips and all humility submit him to his well-deserved fate, seeing he hath forfeited the right of free speech.

BEATRICE. I thank thee from my heart, your law doth please me well. And so, I beg, finish with the assassin, as is meet for him; for I am weary of waiting, and the headsman is weary too. What, is there aught more?

CHIEF JUSTICIAR. Yea, Your Grace, one thing more. The man is a foreigner, no Paduan, and owes no fealty to our Duke, more than Nature claims of everyone. He may be accused of manifold treasons, whereof the penalty is certain death, yet hath he right of free speech in open session 'fore the people; nay, the Court will urgently call on him, in accord with proper precedent, to defend his life, to the end his City may not, justly incensed, charge unjust judgment 'gainst our State, whereby a War might well be brought upon us. So ruthful are Padua's laws toward the stranger that sojourneth within her walls!

BEATRICE. Is he, *as* member of our Household, a stranger in the city?

CHIEF JUSTICIAR. Only when he hath served seven years here, can he become a citizen of Padua.

GUIDO. I thank thee from my heart, your law doth please me well.

SECOND BURGHER. Law, I like not Law; an there were no Law, would be no transgressors o' the Law, and folk would live virtuous.

FIRST BURGHER. Yea, verily, that is a wise word, it carries a man far.

USHER. Yea, to the gallows, rascal!

BEATRICE. Is this the law?

CHIEF JUSTICIAR. Verily 'tis the Law of the Land, noble Lady.

BEATRICE. Show me the book; yea, there it stands in blood-red characters.

JEPPO. Look at our Duchess!

BEATRICE. Accursed law, ah, could I but tear thee from the code of state, as now I tear thee from this book. *[Tears the leaf out.]* Count Bardi, prithee, a word! Are you loyal? Then get me a horse, have it in waiting at my door, for I must ride in hot haste to Venice.

BARDI. You are for Venice, Duchess?

BEATRICE. Say naught of it! Go, go speedily.

***[Exit* BARDI.]**

A word more, Sir Justiciar. If, as thou say'st, this is law in Padua,—and of the Tightness of thy judgment I raise no doubt, albeit right in such a case is bitter wrong,—yet can I not, by virtue of mine office, adjourn this trial to a later time?

CHIEF JUSTICIAR. A blood process can never be postponed.

BEATRICE. I will not stay to hearken to the fellow insulting me with his rough answers. Besides, all important duties do await at the Palace. Attend me, gentlemen!

CHIEF JUSTICIAR. Noble Lady, you may not depart hence, until the accused is condemned or acquitted.

BEATRICE. *May* not, Sir Justiciar! Pray, by what right dost put obstacles in my way? Am I not Mistress here in Padua, Liege Lady of the State?

CHIEF JUSTICIAR. On this ground,—seeing you are source and fount of life and eke of death, wherefrom Right doth flow like a mighty river, Right is dried up, an you be not present, and hath no proper existence; therefore must you remain.

BEATRICE. Thou wouldst keep me here against my will.

CHIEF JUSTICIAR. Let not your will go against the Law.

BEATRICE. And if I force my way from out the Court?

CHIEF JUSTICIAR. You cannot force the Justicers to clear the way.

BEATRICE. I will not stay. *[Rises from her seat.]*

CHIEF JUSTICIAR. Is the Doorkeeper there? Let him step forward. *[Doorkeeper comes forward.]* Thou knowest what doth belong to thine office! *[The Doorkeeper shuts the doors of the Hall of Justice, which are to left of stage, and kneels down, as the* DUCHESS *and her train approach.]*

DOORKEEPER. In all humility 1 do beseech Your Grace, let not the doing of my duty become discourtesy, my unwelcome office be made a grievous burden. By virtue of the right that maketh you a Princess I stand here; were I to break

the law, Your Grace, I should be breaking your commandment and not my own.

BEATRICE. Is none amongst you, most honourable Sirs, will toss this prating windbag from my path?

MAFFIO *[Drawing his sword].* I will!

CHIEF JUSTICIAR. Count Maffio, be heedful what you do, *[to* JEPPO] and you too, my Lord; the first man that draws his sword, were't only against a constable, dies before night.

BEATRICE. Put up your swords, gentlemen; I am resolved to hear the man. *[Goes back to the throne.]*

MAFFIO. Well, thou hast got thine enemy in thy clutches now.

CHIEF JUSTICIAR *[Taking up the hour-glass].* Guido Ferranti, whiles here the sand runs in this hour-glass, 'tis allowed thee to speak freely, but no longer.

GUIDO. It is long enow.

CHIEF JUSTICIAR. Thou standest at the very extremest verge of death; by thy salvation, speak only the plain, undiluted truth. Naught else will stead thee.

GUIDO. An I speak untruth, deliver thou my body to the headsman.

CHIEF JUSTICIAR *[Turning the hour-glass].* Silence all, whiles the prisoner speaks.

USHER. Ho there, silence in the Court!

GUIDO. My Lord Justiciar, revered Judge of this high Court, scarce know I how to begin what I have to say, so strange and horrible seems the

tale to me. First, let me declare mine origin and birth. I am the bold Lorenzo's son, the Duke, who with hideous treachery was bewrayed by a villain,—whilom Duke in this same town of Padua.

CHIEF JUSTICIAR. Beware, 'twill help thee naught to defame the Prince who now lies in his coffin.

MAFFIO. By Saint James, why he is hereditary Lord then of Parma.

JEPPO. I aye took him to be noble born.

GUIDO. I do confess that, with a view to righteous revenge, most righteous revenge upon a murderer, I took service at the Duke's Court, sat with him at meat, drank of his wine and was his boon-companion; so much I do confess,—only this further, that I held my hand till he gave into my keeping the dearest secrets of his life, till he clung to me and in all ways trusted me, as once my noble father trusted him. I held my hand until— [*To the headsman.*] Thou man of blood, turn not thine axe toward me before the time; who knows whether my death-hour be really come. Is mine the only neck among folk present here?

CHIEF JUSTICIAR. Swift runs the sand in the hour-glass, be quick and tell us of the Duke's murder.

GUIDO. To be brief: yesternight 'twas midnight when I scaled the Palace walls with a stout rope, bent on avenging my father's murder; such was my purpose, I do own it, Sir. Thus much will I confess, and this to boot: when cautiously I had

climbed the steps that lead to the Duke's sleeping-room, and was stretching forth my hand to the scarlet curtain, that shook and shuddered in the storm, just then the white moon shone out in the sky and flooded the dark chamber with a silver sheen, the night lit up its tapers for my service. Asleep lay the hated Duke, still cursing in his dreams, and at the thought of my father's slaying, —my father whom he bartered to the block, sold to the scaffold, I pierced the traitor's heart with this dagger here, which by mere chance 1 found there in the room.

BEATRICE *[Springing up].* Oh!

GUIDO *[Speaking fast and excitedly].* I stabbed the Duke. Now, Justiciar, an I may yet crave one boon, let me see the sun never more, when he shines upon the misery of this sorrowful world.

CHIEF JUSTICIAR. Thy wish be granted thee. Die to-night! Lead him forth! Come ye with me, Sirs!

[GUIDO *is led off; as he goes, the* DUCHESS *throws wide her arms and rushes across the stage towards him.]*

BEATRICE. Guido! Guido! *[Falls in a swoon.]*

END OF ACT IV

ACT V

A DUNGEON IN THE STATE PRISON AT PADUA

GUIDO *lies (left) on a camp bed; beside him a table and on it a beaker. Five soldiers are drinking and dicing at a stone table in the corner; one of them has a lantern hanging from his halberd. A torch is stuck in the wall, above* GUIDO'S *head. In background two barred windows, and between them (middle) the door, all opening onto a passage without. Stage dimly lighted.*

FIRST SOLDIER *[Throwing the dice].* Six, six again, Pietro lad J

SECOND SOLDIER. Deuce and all, Lieutenant, I'll play no more with thee; else shall I lose all I have.

THIRD SOLDIER. All but thy wits; need'st have no fear about them.

SECOND SOLDIER. He can't rob me o' my wits.

THIRD SOLDIER. Nay, because thou hast none to lose.

SOLDIERS *[Laughing loudly].* Ha! ha! ha!

FIRST SOLDIER. Hist, ye will wake the prisoner, he's asleep.

SECOND SOLDIER. What matter? He'll sleep long and sound enow, once he's buried. My word on't, he'd be glad if only we *could* wake him, when he's laid i' the grave.

THIrD SOLDIER. Not he, for when he wakes up there, 'tis the last day come.

SECOND SOLDIER. Yea, he hath brought him* self to a pretty pass truly; why, let me tell ye,—to kill one of us, who be mere flesh and blood, is against orders, but to slay a Duke, that is against the laws.

FIRST SOLDIER. But he was a cursed bad Duke.

SECOND SOLDIER. Then should he have had no truck with him; the man who goes with bad folk, runs risk of being fouled with their badness.

THIRD SOLDIER. Why, o' course he doth. How old is the prisoner?

SECOND SOLDIER. Old enow to commit follies, and not old enow to be wise and sensible.

FIRST SOLDIER. He can be any age at that rate.

SECOND SOLDIER. They say the Duchess would fain reprieve him.

FIRST SOLDIER. Truly?

SECOND SOLDIER. Yea, it seems she appealed to the Chief Justiciar, but he refused.

FIRST SOLDIER. But I always thought, Pietro, the Duchess could do anything.

SECOND SOLDIER. For sure,—why, look'ye how she's made; I don't know a finer woman.

SOLDIERS. Ha! ha! ha!

FIRST SOLDIER. I meant that our Duchess could order anything and have it done.

SECOND SOLDIER. Not so; for now he's deliv-

up to his Judges, and they will take good care to see him executed, they and Big Hugo, the headsman. But once his head's off, then the Duchess

can pardon him, an it suits her fancy; there's no law to hinder that.

FIRST SOLDIER. I don't suppose after all that Big Hugo, as ye call him, when the last comes to the last, will get the chance to do his duty on him; this Guido comes of a noble house, so the laws allow him to take poison, an such be his pleasure.

THIRD SOLDIER. Ton honour, drinking poison is a sorry sort o' pleasure.

SECOND SOLDIER. What kind o' a thing is this poison, eh?

FIRST SOLDIER. Why, poison, man, that kills ye dead.

SECOND SOLDIER. What sort o' thing is't exactly, poison?

FIRST SOLDIER. A drink, like water, only not quite so wholesome. Would'st like to taste and try, there's some i' the beaker yonder.

SECOND SOLDIER. 'Zounds, an it be not wholesome, I'll not touch it.

THIRD SOLDIER. Now, an he won't drink it?

FIRST SOLDIER. Then they'll put him to death.

THIRD SOLDIER. But an he do drink it?

FIRST SOLDIER. Then will he die.

SECOND SOLDIER. A damned poor choice for him; well, 'tis to be hoped he'll make a wise one.

[Knocking heard at the door.]

FIRST SOLDIER. Go See, who 'tis.

[Third soldier goes and looks through the judos.]

THIRD SOLDIER. A woman.

FIRST SOLDIER. Is she a trim wench?

THIKD SOLDIER. I can't see, Lieutenant, she wears a mask.

FIBST SOLDIER. Only right fair or downright ugly women hide their faces. Let her come in! *[The soldier opens the door and the* DUCHESS *enters, masked and cloaked.}*

BEATRICE [To *the third soldier}.* Are you the Officer on guard?

FIRST SOLDIER *[Stepping forward].* I am, noble Lady.

BEATRICE. I must speak alone with the prisoner.

FIRST SOLDIER. Alas! that is impossible. *[Tlie* DUCHESS *hands him a ring, he looks at it and returns it with a bow; then orders the men.}* Withdraw! *[Exeunt the other soldiers.}*

BEATRICE. Your men are a trifle rough, Sir Officer.

FIRST SOLDIER. They mean no harm.

BEATRICE. In a few minutes I shall be coming again; as I go down the corridor then, see they do not lift my mask.

FIRST SOLDIER. You need have no fear, noble Lady.

BEATRICE. I have especial reasons for wishing no one to see my face.

FIRST SOLDIER. With this ring, noble Lady, you may go in and out at your good pleasure; 'tis the Duchess's ring.

BEATRICE. Now leave us alone. *[Just as the Officer is on the point of going}* One moment more. For what hour is the execution fixed?

FIRST SOLDIER. At twelve o'clock, noble Lady,

we are to lead him forth according to orders, but he will scarce surely wait for us; in all likelihood he will take a sip of the poison before then. Men are sore afraid of the headsman.

BEATRICE. Is that poison there?

FIRST SOLDIER. Yea, noble Lady, very powerful poison.

BEATRICE. Now, prithee go.

FIRST SOLDIER. 'Zounds, what a lovely hand! Who may she be, I wonder? Mayhap a woman who hath loved him. *[Exit.]*

BEATRICE *[Removing her mask].* At last! Now can he easily escape, cloaked and masked; we are almost of a size, no one will recognise him. Mine own fate I care little for. So long as he doth not curse me, albeit he forsake me, all is well; but will he curse me? he hath every right to. Tis eleven now, they come not ere twelve; what will they say, when they see the nest empty? *[Walks to the table.]* So that is poison. How wonderful that here in this liquor lies the key of all life's wisdom. *[Takes up the beaker.]* It smells of poppies; how well do I remember, when I was a child in Sicily, I plucked a wealth of scarlet poppies in the corn, and wove a garland of them; even mine uncle, the grim John of Naples, laughed. I knew not that poppy juice can choke the source of life, can stop its pulse and freeze the blo6tl, till men come and hale off the poor corpse and cast it in the grave,—yea, the dead body, but the soul fares either to heaven or hell. Whither will mine go?

[Takes the torch from the wall, and goes up to the pallet bed.}

How soft he sleeps, like a boy outwearied with play. Ah, would that I could sleep so peacefully, but I dream dreams. *[Bending over him.]* Poor lad, shall I kiss him? No, my lips would scorch him, sick and sorry as he is of love. But his white neck shall surely 'scape the headsman; that I have provided for. This night he shall fly from Padua, —and therefore I am glad. You are right cunning, Sir Justiciar, but you are not half so cunning as I,—and therefore I am glad. Oh God, how I loved him, and what a bloody flower hath blossomed therefrom. *[Returns to the table.]* Now, shall I drink this liquor, and so make an end? Were it not better to wait till Death come to find me in my bed with his horrid following,—remorse, disease, eld and affliction? I know not an there be much pain to suffer. … I am so young, so young, to go to my death now, yet it must needs be so. But why? why die? To-night he doth escape, so that his blood falls not upon my head. Nay, nay, I must die, I am laden with guilt, and therefore must I die; he loves me not, and therefore must I die; I had died happier, an he had kissed me, but that he will not do. Little I knew him; I deemed he would have denounced me to the Judge; we women never know our dearest, till they forsake us.

[Bell begins to toll] Hateful bell, why dost thou cry like a brazen-mouthed bloodhound hungering after his life; hush, thou dost cry in vain. He

stirs,—quick! *[Seizes the beaker.]* Oh love, love, love, I never thought to pledge thee so.

[Drinks the poison and puts dawn the beaker behind her on the table. The noise aivakens GUIDO; *he starts up, but does not see what she has done. Silence reigns for a minute, while they gaze at each other.]*

I am not come to crave for pardon now, I know I stand outside of all forgiveness, a guilty, an accursed woman! Enough! I have confessed already to the Justicers the exceeding burden of my sins. They would not listen to me. Some said, I had invented the tale to save thee, since thou wast in league with me; others, that women played with pity as they did with men; others again, that grief for my husband had robbed me of my senses. They would not hear me, and when I swore on the Book, I was sent to the physician. Ten against one; ten they are, thy life is in their power. Folk call me Duchess of Padua, though whether I be so still, I cannot tell. I have pardoned thee, and they have reversed my act, declaring 'tis treason what I have decreed,—mayhap it is. In an hour they will be here to hale thee from thy cell and bind thy hands behind thy back and drag thee to the block,—I have forerun them. Here is the signet-ring of Padua, it will bring thee safe past the watch; now take mask and cloak, they have orders to ask no questions. Once through the prison doors, turn to the left, and at the second bridge horses await thee—at morn thou shalt be at Venice. *[A pause,]* Thou wilt not speak, wilt

not once curse me, ere thou goest? Thou hast good right to.

Dost not comprehend that 'twixt thee and the scaffold scarce so much sand in the hour-glass is left to run as a child's fist holds. Here is the ring, the hand is clean; no blood cleaves to it. Have no fear! Wilt thou not take the ring?

GUIDO *[Takes it and kisses it]*. Willingly, noble Lady.

BEATRICE. And leave Padua?

GUIDO. How, leave Padua?

BEATRICE. This very night.

GUIDO. This very night?

BEATRICE. Thank thy God therefor.

GUIDO. Then I may live. Ne'er did life seem so alluring to me as now.

BEATRICE. Why dost delay, my Guido? Here is the cloak, at the bridge a horse,—at the toll-house yonder by the second bridge. Why wilt thou linger here? Can thine ear not catch the dreadful bell, which at each stroke shortens thy young life yet another minute? Fly, fly quickly!

GUIDO. He comes not speedily enough.

BEATRICE. Who?

GUIDO *[Calmly]*. Why, the headsman

BEATRICE. Nay, nay, say not that.

GUIDO. He alone can bring me out of Padua.

BEATRICE. What, thou dar'st, dar'st burden my over-burdened soul with two dead men; one, one is enough! For when I stand before my God eye to eye, thou must not, thou shalt not, with a red thread about thy white neck, step forward and

accuse me, so that the very devils that howl in hell should pity me. Wilt thou be harder-hearted than the devils God banishes from heaven!

GUIDO. I stay here, noble Lady.

BEATRICE. Nay, nay, thou canst not. Dost not understand I have less power now in Padua than any girl. They will kill me. I have just seen the scaffold in the open Square; already the rabble was pressing round it with cruel jests and lust of horrors, as though it were the stage of some masquerade and not the melancholy throne of death. Oh Guido, thou must fly.

GUIDO. Yea, by the hand of death, but not by thine.

BEATRICE. Oh, thou art pitiless, as pitiless now as alway. Nay, Guido, thou must away.

GUIDO. I shall remain, noble Lady.

BEATRICE. Thou must not, Guido, it would be so dreadful else, that e'en the stars, amazed and horrified, would fall from heaven, that the moon would be stopped and darkened in her path, and the sun cease to shine upon the earth that saw thy death.

GUIDO. I will not give way.

BEATRICE *[Wringing her hands].* Thou dost not know this, that once the Justicers are come, I am powerless to shield thee from the axe. As if I had not done outrage enow already! Will one sin not suffice? Must it engender yet another sin worse than the first crime? Oh God, shut up the womb that mothers sin, dry it up, and never more shall blood stain my hand, as it did but now.

GUIDO *[Taking her hand].* How, am I fallen so low, I should begrudge to die for thee?

BEATRICE *[Drawing away her hand].* For mer My life is a worthless thing, that hath been tossed out into the street mud of the world. Thou must not die for me, thou shalt not, Guido; I am a sinful woman.

GUIDO. Let them who know not what temptation is, let them who have not walked like us in the furnace-fire of passion, and whose life is tedious and colourless, in a word all them, if such there be, who have never loved, let them cast stones at us.

BEATRICE. Woe is me, ah, woe is me!

GUIDO *[Throwing himself at her feet].* Thou art my life, my highest, truest joy! Oh golden hair, oh purple mouth, oh cheeks framed to allure man's love! Incarnate image of loveliness! To thee doing homage, I forget all that hath been; to thee doing homage, my soul touches thine; to thee doing homage, I feel myself a God. Albeit my body come to the headsman's block, yet doth my love live for aye.

[The DUCHESS *holds her hands before her face,* GUIDO *draws them away.]* Lift the drooping curtains of thine eyes, that I may look in them and say,—I love thee, and never more than when Death presses his cold lips betwixt us. I love thee, Beatrice,—thine answer? Woe is me! I can well endure the headsman, but not this silence; say thou lovest me. This one word, and Death hath no sting left; but an thou say it not, fifty thousand

deaths are then a mercy. Thou art cruel, thou dost not love me.

BEATRICE. I have no right to. Love's hands of innocence are stained with blood vilely shed,—here on the ground is blood, sprinkled there by me.

GUIDO. Nay, love, not by thee; only a devil tempted thee.

BEATRICE *[Springing up].* No, no, each one is his own devil, and himself turns the world into a hell.

GUIDO. Then sink Paradise to Tartarus! For now I hold this world a heaven a brief while. I love thee, Beatrice.

BEATRICE. Tainted with the plague of sin, I am not worthy of thee.

GUIDO. By the Redeemer, the sin was mine, if sin there were. I nurtured murder in my heart, sweetened my meat therewith, flavoured my wine, in thought I struck down the accursed Duke an hundred times a day. Had the man died only half so often as I wished, Death would have been stalking for ever through the house, Murder would have never rested. But thou, Beloved, thou who looked with ruth upon the whipped hound, thou at whose gaze children's faces brightened, because where thou didst pass, sunshine went with thee, thou gentle angel of white, holy purity, what was it men call thy sin?

BEATRICE. What was it? Oft it seems to me a dream, an evil dream sent by an evil demon; but then, I see the corpse within its coffin, and know it is no dream, know that my hand is red with blood;

and my poor soul, on the voyage to a love's haven 'gainst the wild tempest of this mad world, hath wrecked her bark on the rock of sin. What was it, thou dost ask,—only a murder, naught else but murder, horrid murder.

GXJIDO. Nay, never, never; 'twas but the painful blossom of thy love, that in a moment burst into bloom, and in a moment's passion bare a bloody fruit, such as in thought myself had plucked a thousand times. My mind was full of murder, but my arm was weak; thy arm committed murder, but thy mind was innocent. I love thee for it, Beatrice; who refuses pity for thy distress, may he find no compassion in Heaven. Kiss me, sweet! *[Tries to kiss her.]*

BEATRICE. Nay, nay, thy mouth is pure, mine sullied; my paramour was murder, and sin slept in my bed. Guido, an thou lov'st me, fly, fly; for every moment gnaws at thy life like a deadly worm. Beloved, fly, and if in later days thou dost remember me, think of me as of one who loved thee better than all else in the world; as of a woman, Guido mine, who was fain to offer up her life for her love, and thereby slew her love.—What is't now? the bell hath fallen dumb, and up the stairs I hear the tread of armed men coming.

GUIDO *[Aside].* The signal for the watch to hale me forth.

BEATRICE. Why hath it stopped ringing?

GUIDO. Must thou know? For this side the grave, my life ends here,—beyond the tomb we shall see each other again.

BEATRICE. It is not yet too late; fly hence, the horse stands ready by the bridge, there yet is time. Away, away, thou must not tarry longer.

[Noise of soldiers in the corridor.]

A VOICE FROM WITHOUT. Make way for the Chief Justiciar of Padua!

[Through the barred window the Chief Justiciar is seen passing along the passage, torch-bearers preceding him.]

BEATRICE. It is too late.

A VOICE FROM WITHOUT. Make way for the Headsman!

BEATRICE *[Throwing herself down].* Oh!

[The Executioner, axe on shoulder, appears in the corridor, Monks carrying tapers behind him.]

GUIDO. Farewell, my love, I drink the poison here. I fear not the headsman; only this, I will not die upon the block.

BEATRICE. Oh!

GUIDO. Nay, rather here, here in thy arms, betwixt two kisses,—fareweil! *[Goes to the table, and seizes the cup.]* What, art empty? *[Tosses it on the floor.]* Oh niggardly gaoler, thou dost begrudge even thy poison.

BEATRICE *[In a weak voice].* No blame belongs to him.

GUIDO. Oh God, hast thou drunk it, Beatrice! tell me, thou hast not done that!

BEATRICE. An I were to lie, there burns a fire at my heart that will soon proclaim the truth.

GUIDO. Traitorous love, why didst leave me never a drop over?

BEATRICE. Nay, nay, there was death only for me in the cup.

GUIDO. Let me taste the dainty poison from thy lips; mayhap some still lingers there.

BEATRICE. Thou art not to die, thou has shed no blood, thou art not to die; 'tis I have shed blood, and I must die. Stands not the word writ: Blood for blood? Who said so? I cannot remember.

GUIDO. Wait for me, our souls will depart together.

BEATRICE. Nay, live! There be many women left in the world ready for love, not murder, for thy sake.

GUIDO. Thee only do I love.

BEATRICE. That is no good ground for dying.

GUIDO. An if we die together, why cannot we rest together in one tomb?

BEATRICE. The grave is but a narrow marriage bed.

GUIDO. It will suffice for us.

BEATRICE. They shall bedeck it with stiff cerecloth and bitter herbs; for roses, methinks, spring not in the grave, and if any there be, they are all withered, since the Duke died.

GUIDO. Ah Beatrice, thy mouth wears roses that do defy Death.

BEATRICE. Will not my mouth, whenas we lie in the grave, fall all to dust, thy bright eyes shrink to blind holes, and worms, our marriage-guests, gnaw at thy heart?

GUIDO. What matter? Death doth react on

love,—and through love's eternal majesty I die with thee.

BEATRICE. But the grave is dark, the tomb is dark; wherefore must I go first to light the tapers ere thou come. Nay, nay, I will not die, will not die. Beloved, thou art strong, and young and brave! Defend me when the Angel of Death draws near, and wrestle with him for me! *[Pushing* GUIDO *forward.]* I will kiss thee, when thou hast vanquished him. Hast thou no way to stay the poison that doth rage within me? Are there no rivers left in all Italy? Bring me a beaker of water and put out this burning firei

GUIDO. Oh God!

BEATRICE. Why didst thou never tell me that in Italy all is desert dryness,—no water anywhere, only fire?

GUIDO. Beloved!

BEATRICE. Send for the physician, but not for him who staunched my husband's blood. Fetch a physician instantly! There is for every poison an antidote, he will sell it us for a great price. Tell him, for one short hour of life Padua shall be his guerdon. I will not die. I am sick to death. Touch me not, poison gnaws at my vitals. I never knew it was such pain to die. Life, methought, had taken all the heart's agony for itself. It seems 'tis not so.

GUIDO. Accursed stars, quench ye your torches in tears, and bid your mistress, the moon, to pale her beams to-night.

BEATRICE. What do we here, Beloved? This

room is poorly furnished forth for a bridal chamber. Come, let us begone at once. Where are the horses? By now we should be half way to Venice. How cold the night is! Let us ride faster! Are not these our wedding bells, Guido?

[Outside the Monks begin their chants.]

Music! It might be merrier; but melancholy is now the fashion,—why I cannot tell. Why dost weep? Do we not love each other? Naught else is needed. Death, what seek'st thou here? Thou wert never asked to this feast; away, thou dost intrude. I tell thee, I drank thy health in wine, and not in poison. They lied who said I had drunk up thy poison; it was spilt on the ground, like my husband's blood,—thou hast come too late.

GUIDO. There's nothing here, sweetheart; these be but unsubstantial phantoms.

BEATRICE. Death, why dost thou tarry here? Go to the upper chamber, there stands prepared for thee the cold meats of my Consort's funeral feast; here 'tis a marriage banquet. Thou hast gone astray. Beside, 'tis summer now, we need not so fierce a fire; thou art scorching us. Guido, bid the sextons have done with digging of this empty grave. I will not be entombed therein. I burn, consume, melt in the inward glow; canst do naught to help me? Water, give me water, but no more poison.—Ha, now the pain is past; how strange, I feel no pain. Death is gone, how glad I am thereof; methought he would fain part us. Tell me this, Guido, art sorry thou didst ever see me?

GUIDO. What had my life been without thee? In this dull, flat world many a man hath died, waiting and wishing for such a moment as this, and never found it.

BEATRICE. Thou art not sorry then? How strange it seems!

GUIDO. Have I not fed mine eyes on beauty? That is joy enow for a man's life. I could jest for very merriment; at many a feast I have sat sadder; who can be sad at such a feast as this, where Death and Love are our cupbearers? We are made one in love and death.

BEATRICE. I have been guilty above all women, and therefore punished above all women. What dost truly think,—'tis not possible,—can love wipe away the blood from off my hands, pour balsam in my wounds, heal my scars, and wash my scarlet sins as white as snow? I have sinned much.

GUIDO. Who sins for love, sins not.

BEATRICE. I have sinned, and yet mayhap shall I be forgiven. I have loved much.

[They kiss each other for the first time in this Act. Suddenly the DUCHESS *springs up in a fearful death spasm, tears at her clothing in her agony, and finally falls back on her seat, her face wrung and distorted with pain.* GUIDO *takes the dagger from her girdle, kills himself with it, then as he falls across her knees, drags down the cloak hanging over the back of the chair, and covers her completely with it. A short pause. Then the trampling of soldiers in the corridor, the door opens, the Chief Justidar, the Executioner and the Watch enter, and see the black, muffled*

shape and GUIDO *lying athwart it. The Chief Justitiar rushes forward and draws away the cloak from the* DUCHESS, *whose countenance is now the marble image of Peace,—showing that God has forgiven her.]*

END OF ACT V

SALOMÉ

A TRAGEDY IN ONE ACT

TRANSLATED **FROM** THE FRENCH LANGUAGE INTO THE ENGLISH

SALOMÉ

THE PERSONS OF THE PLAY

HEROD ANTIPAS (Tetrarch of Judaea)
JOKANAAN (the Prophet)
THE YOUNG SYRIAN (Captain of the Guard)
TIGELLINUS (a Young Roman)
A CAPPADOCIAN
A NUBIAN
FIRST SOLDIER
SECOND SOLDIER
THE PAGE OF HERODIAS
JEWS, NAZARENES, ETC.
A SLAVE
NAAMAN (the Executioner)
HERODIAS (Wife of the Tetrarch)
SALOMÉ (Daughter of Herodias)
THE SLAVES OF SALOMÉ

SALOME

SCENE—*A great terrace in the Palace of* HEROD, *set above the banqueting-hall. Some soldiers are leaning over the balcony. To the right there is a gigantic staircase, to the left, at the back, an old cistern surrounded by a wall of green bronze. The moon is shining very brightly.*

THE YOUNG SYRIAN. How beautiful is the Princess Salome to-night!

THE PAGE OF HERODIAS. Look at the moon. How strange the moon seems! She is like a woman rising from a tomb. She is like a dead woman. One might fancy she was looking for dead things.

THE YOUNG SYRIAN. She has a strange look. She is like a little princess who wears a yellow veil, and whose feet are of silver. She is like a princess who has little white doves for feet. One might fancy she was dancing.

THE PAGE OF HERODIAS. She is like a woman who is dead. She moves very slowly.

[Noise in the banqueting-hall.]

FIRST SOLDIER. What an uproar! Who are those wild beasts howling?

SECOND SOLDIER. The Jews. They are always like that. They are disputing about their religion.

FIRST SOLDIER. Why do they dispute about their religion?

SECOND SOLDIER. I cannot tell. They are al-

ways doing it. The Pharisees, for instance, say that there are angels, and the Sadducees declare that angels do not exist.

FIRST SOLDIER. I think it is ridiculous to dispute about such things.

THE YOUNG SYRIAN. How beautiful is the Princess Salomè to-night!

THE PAGE OF HERODIAS. You are always looking at her. You look at her too much. It is dangerous to look at people in such fashion. Something terrible may happen.

THE YOUNG SYRIAN. She is very beautiful to-night.

FIRST SOLDIER. The Tetrarch has a sombre aspect.

SECOND SOLDIER. Yes; he has a sombre aspect.

FIRST SOLDIER. He is looking at something.

SECOND SOLDIER. He is looking at some one.

FIRST SOLDIER. At whom is he looking?

SECOND SOLDIER. I cannot tell.

THE YOUNG SYRIAN. How pale the Princess is! Never have I seen her so pale. She is like the shadow of a white rose in a mirror of silver.

THE PAGE OF HERODIAS. You must not look at her. You look too much at her.

FIRST SOLDIER. Herodias has filled the cup of the Tetrarch.

THE CAPPADOCIAN. Is that the Queen Herodias, she who wears a black mitre sewed with pearls, and whore hair is powdered with blue dust?

FIRST SOLDIER. Yes; that is Herodias, the Tetrarch's wife.

SECOND SOLDIER. The Tetrarch is very fond of wine. He has wine of three sorts. One which is brought from the Island of Samothrace, and is purple like the cloak of Caesar.

THE CAPPADOCIAN. I have never seen Caesar.

SECOND SOLDIER. Another that comes from a town called Cyprus, and is as yellow as gold.

THE CAPPADOCIAN. I love gold.

SECOND SOLDIER. And the third is a wine of Sicily. That wine is as red as blood.

THE NUBIAN. The gods of my country are very fond. Twice in the year we sacrifice to them young men and maidens; fifty young men and a hundred maidens. But I am afraid that we never give them quite enough, for they are very harsh to us.

THE CAPPADOCIAN. In my country there are no gods left. The Romans have driven them out. There are some who say that they have hidden themselves in the mountains, but I do not believe it. Three nights I have been on the mountains seeking them everywhere. I did not find them. And at last I called them by their names, and they did not come. I think they are dead.

FIRST SOLDIER. The Jews worship a God that one cannot see.

THE CAPPADOCIAN. I cannot understand that.

FIRST SOLDIER. In fact, they only believe in things that one cannot see.

THE CAPPADOCIAN. That seems to me altogether ridiculous.

THE VOICE OF JOKANAAN. After me shall come another mightier than I. I am not worthy so

much as to unloose the latchet of his shoes. When he cometh, the solitary places shall be glad. They shall blossom like the rose. The eyes of the blind shall see the day, and the ears of the deaf shall be opened. The suckling child shall put his hand upon the dragon's lair, he shall lead the lions by their manes.

SECOND SOLDIER. Make him be silent. He is always saying ridiculous things.

FIRST SOLDIER. No, no. He is a holy man. He is very gentle, too. Every day, when I give him to eat he thanks me.

THE CAPPADOCIAN. Who is he?

FIRST SOLDIER, A prophet.

THE CAPPADOCIAN. What is his name?

FIRST SOLDIER. Jokanaan.

THE CAPPADOCIAN. Whence comes he?

FIRST SOLDIER. From the desert where he fed on locusts and wild honey. He was clothed in camel's hair, and round his loins he had a leathern belt. He was very terrible to look upon. A great multitude used to follow him. He even had disciples.

THE CAPPADOCIAN. What is he talking of?

FIRST SOLDIER. We can never tell. Sometimes he says things that affright one, but it is impossible to understand what he says.

THE CAPPADOCIAN. May one see him?

FIRST SOLDIER. No. The Tetrarch has forbidden it.

THE YOUNG SYRIAN. The Princess has hidden her face behind her fan! Her little white hands

are fluttering like doves that fly to their dovecotes. They are like white butterflies. They are just like white butterflies.

THE PAGE OF HERODIAS. What is that to you? Why do you look at her? You must not look at her. . . . Something terrible may happen.

THE CAPPADOCIAN *[Pointing to the cistern]*. What a strange prison!

SECOND SOLDIER. It is an old cistern.

THE CAPPADOCIAN. An old cistern! That must be a poisonous place in which to dwell!

SECOND SOLDIER. Oh no! For instance, the Tetrarch's brother, his elder brother, the first husband of Herodias the Queen, was imprisoned there for twelve years. It did not kill him. At the end of the twelve years he had to be strangled.

THE CAPPADOCIAN. Strangled? Who dared to do that?

SECOND SOLDIER *[Pointing to the Executioner, a huge Negro]*. That man yonder, Naaman.

THE CAPPADOCIAN. He was not afraid?

SECOND SOLDIER. Oh no! The Tetrarch sent him the ring.

THE CAPPADOCIAN. What ring?

SECOND SOLDIER. The death-ring. So he was not afraid.

THE CAPPADOCIAN. Yet it is a terrible thing to strangle a king.

FIRST SOLDIER. Why? Kings have but one neck, like other folk.

THE CAPPADOCIAN. I think it terrible.

THE YOUNG SYRIAN. The Princess is getting up! She is leaving the table! She looks very troubled. Ah, she is coming this way. Yes, she is coming towards us. How pale she is! Never have I seen her so pale.

THE PAGE OF HERODIAS. I pray you not to look at her.

THE YOUNG SYRIAN. She is like a dove that has strayed. . . . She is like a narcissus trembling in the wind. . . . She is like a silver flower.

[Enter SALOMÉ.]

SALOMÉ. I will not stay. I cannot stay. Why does the Tetrarch look at me all the while with his mole's eyes under his shaking eyelids? It is strange that the husband of my mother looks at me like that. I know not what it means. Of a truth I know it too well.

THE YOUNG SYRIAN. You have left the feast, Princess?

SALOMÉ. How sweet is the air here! I can breathe here. Within there are Jews from Jerusalem who are tearing each other in pieces over their foolish ceremonies, and barbarians who drink and drink, and spill their wine on the pavement, and Greeks from Smyrna with painted eyes and painted cheeks, and frizzed hair curled in columns, and Egyptians silent and subtle, with long nails of jade and russet cloaks, and Romans brutal and coarse, with their uncouth jargon. Ah! how I loathe the Romans! They are rough and common, and they give themselves the airs of noble lords.

THE YOUNG SYRIAN. Will you be seated, Princess?

THE PAGE OF HERODIAS. Why do you speak to her? Oh! something terrible will happen. Why do you look at her?

SALOME. How good to see the moon! She is like a little piece of money, a little silver flower. She is cold and chaste. I am sure she is a virgin. Yes, she is a virgin. She has never defiled herself. She has never abandoned herself to men, like the other goddesses.

THE VOICE OF JOKANAAN. Behold! the Lord hath come. The son of man is at hand. The centaurs have hidden themselves in the rivers, and the nymphs have left the rivers, and are lying beneath the leaves of the forest.

SALOME. Who was that who cried out?

SECOND SOLDIER. The prophet, Princess.

SALOME. Ah, the prophet! He of whom the Tetrarch is afraid?

SECOND SOLDIER. We know nothing of that, Princess. It was the prophet Jokanaan who cried out.

THE YOUNG SYRIAN. Is it your pleasure that I bid them bring your litter, Princess? The night is fair in the garden.

SALOME. He says terrible things about my mother, does he not?

SECOND SOLDIER. We never understand what he says, Princess.

SALOME Yes; he says terrible things about her.

[Enter a Slave.]

THE SLAVE. Princess, the Tetrarch prays you to return to the feast.

THE YOUNG SYRIAN. Pardon me, Princess, but if you return not some misfortune may happen.

SALOMfi. Is he an old man, this prophet?

THE YOUNG SYRIAN. Princess, it were better to return. Suffer me to lead you in.

SALOME. This prophet ... is he an old man?

FIRST SOLDIER. No, Princess, he is quite young.

SECOND SOLDIER. One cannot be sure. There are those who say he is Elias.

SALOME. Who is Elias?

SECOND SOLDIER. A prophet of this country in bygone days, Princess.

THE SLAVE. What answer may I give the Tetrarch from the Princess?

THE VOICE OF JOKANAAN. Rejoice not, 0 land of Palestine, because the rod of him who smote thee is broken. For from the seed of the serpent shall come a basilisk, and that which is born of it shall devour the birds.

SALOME. What a strange voice I I would speak with him.

FIRST SOLDIER. I fear it may not be, Princess. The Tetrarch does not suffer any one to speak with him. He has even forbidden the high priest to speak with him.

SALOME. I desire to speak with him.

FIRST SOLDIER. It is impossible, Princess.

SALOME. I will speak with him.

THE YOUNG SYRIAN. Would it not be better to return to the banquet?

SALOMÉ. Bring forth this prophet.

[Exit the Slave.]

FIRST SOLDIER. We dare not, Princess.

SALOME *[Approaching the cistern and looking down into it].* How black it is, down there! It must be terrible to be in so black a hole! It is like a tomb. . . . *[To the soldiers.}* Did you not hear me? Bring out the prophet. I would look on him.

SECOND SOLDIER. Princess, I beg you do not require this of us.

SALOME. You are making me wait upon your pleasure.

FIRST SOLDIER. Princess, our lives belong to you, but we cannot do what you have asked of us. And indeed, it is not of us that you should ask this thing.

SALOME *[Looking at the young Syrian].* Ah!

THE PAGE OF HERODIAS. Oh! what is going to happen? I am sure that something terrible will happen.

SALOME *[Going up to the young Syrian].* Thou wilt do this thing for me, wilt thou not, Narraboth? Thou wilt do this thing for me. I have ever been kind towards thee. Thou wilt do it for me. I would but look at him, this strange prophet. Men have talked so much of him. Often I have heard the Tetrarch talk of him. I think he is afraid of him, the Tetrarch. Art thou, even thou, also afraid of him, Narraboth?

THE YOUNG SYRIAN. I fear him not, Princess; there is no man I fear. But the Tetrarch has for

mally forbidden that any man should raise the cover of this well.

SALOME. Thou wilt do this thing for me, Narraboth, and to-morrow when I pass in my litter beneath the gateway of the idol-sellers I will let fall for thee a little flower, a little green flower.

THE YOUNG SYRIAN. Princess, I cannot, I cannot.

SALOME *[Smiling].* Thou wilt do this thing for me, Narraboth. Thou knowest that thou wilt do this thing for me. And on the morrow when I shall pass in my litter by the bridge of the idol-buyers, I will look at thee through the muslin veils, I will look at thee, Narraboth, it may be I will smile at thee. Look at me, Narraboth, look at me. Ah! thou knowest that thou wilt do what I ask of thee. Thou knowest it. . . . I know that thou wilt do this thing.

THE YOUNG SYRIAN *[Signing to the third soldier].* Let the prophet come forth. . . . The Princess Salome desires to see him.

SALOME. Ah!

THE PAGE OF HEBODiAS. Oh! how strange the moon looks. Like the hand of a dead woman who is seeking to cover herself with a shroud.

THE YOUNG SYRIAN. She has a strange aspect! She is like a little princess, whose eyes are eyes of amber. Through the clouds of muslin she is smiling like a little princess.

[The prophet comes out of the cistern. SALOME *looks at him and steps slowly back.]*

JOKANAAN. Where is he whose cup of abominations is now full? Where is he, who in a robe of

silver shall one day die in the face of all the people? Bid him come forth, that he may hear the voice of him who hath cried in the waste places and in the houses of kings.

SALOME. Of whom is he speaking?

THE YOUNG SYRIAN. No one can tell, Princess.

JOKANAAN. Where is she who saw the images of men painted on the walls, even the images of the Chaldeans painted with colours, and gave herself up unto the lust of her eyes, and sent ambassadors into the land of Chaldaea.

SALOME. It is of my mother that he is speaking.

THE YOUNG SYRIAN. Oh, no Princess.

SALOME. Yes; it is of my mother that he is speaking.

JOKANAAN. Where is she who gave herself unto the Captains of Assyria, who have baldricks on their loins, and crowns of many colours on their heads? Where is she who hath given herself to the young men of the Egyptians, who are clothed in fine linen and hyacinth, whose shields are of gold, whose helmets are of silver, whose bodies are mighty? Go, bid her rise up from the bed of her abominations, from the bed of her incestuousness, that she may hear the words of him who prepareth the way of the Lord, that she may repent her of her iniquities. Though she will not repent, but will stick fast in her abominations; go, bid her come, for the fan of the Lord is in His hand.

SALOME. Ah, but he is terrible, he is terrible!

THE YOUNG SYRIAN. Do not stay here, Princess, I beseech you.

SALOME. It is his eyes above all that are terrible. They are like black holes burned by torches in a tapestry of Tyre. They are like the black caverns of Egypt in which the dragons make their lairs. They are like black lakes troubled by fantastic moons. . . . Do you think he will speak again?

THE YOUNG SYRIAN. Do not stay here, Princess. I pray you do not stay here.

SALOME. How wasted he is! He is like a thin ivory statue. He is like an image of silver. I am sure he is chaste as the moon is. He is like a moonbeam, like a shaft of silver. I would look closer at him. I must look at him closer.

THE YOUNG SYRIAN. Princess! Princess!

JOKANAAN. Who is this woman who is looking at me? I will not have her look at me. Wherefore doth she look at me with her golden eyes, under her gilded eyelids. I know not who she is. I do not desire to know who she is. Bid her begone. It is not to her that I would speak.

SALOME. I am Salome, daughter of Herodias, Princess of Judaea.

JOKANAAN. Back! daughter of Babylon! Come not near the chosen of the Lord. Thy mother hath filled the earth with the wine of her iniquities, and the cry of her sinning hath come up even to the ears of God.

SALOME. Speak again, Jokanaan. Thy voice is as music to mine ear.

THE YOUNG SYRIAN. Princess! Princess! Princess!

SALOME. Speak again! Speak again, Jokanaan, and tell me what I must do.

JOKANAAN. Daughter of Sodom, come not near me! But cover thy face with a veil, and scatter ashes upon thine head, and get thee to the desert and seek out the Son of Man.

SALOMfi. Who is he, the Son of Man? Is he as beautiful as thou art, Jokanaan?

JOKANAAN. Get thee behind me! I hear in the palace the beating of the wings of the angel of death.

THE YOUNG SYRIAN. Princess, I beseech thee to go within.

JOKANAAN. Angel of the Lord God, what dost thou here with thy sword? Whom seekest thou in this palace? The day of him who shall die in a robe of silver has not yet come.

SALOME. Jokanaan!

JOKANAAN. Who speaketh?

SALOMES. I am amorous of thy body, Jokanaan! Thy body is white like the lilies of a field that the mower hath never mowed. Thy body is white like the snows that lie on the mountains of Judaea, and come down into the valleys. The roses in the garden of the Queen of Arabia are not so white as thy body. Neither the roses of the garden of the Queen of Arabia, the garden of spices of the Queen of Arabia, nor the feet of the dawn when they light on the leaves, nor the breast of the moon when she lies on the breast of the sea. .. . There is nothing in the world so white as thy body. Suffer me to touch thy body.

JOKANAAN. Back! daughter of Babylon! By woman came evil into the world. Speak not to

me. I will not listen to thee. I listen but to the voice of the Lord God.

SALOME. Thy body is hideous. It is like the body of a leper. It is like a plastered wall where vipers have crawled; like a plastered wall where the scorpions have made their nest. It is like a whitened sepulchre full of loathsome things. It is horrible, thy body is horrible. It is thy hair that I am enamoured of, Jokanaan. Thy hair is like clusters of grapes, like the clusters of black grapes that hang from the vine-trees of Edom in the land of the Edomites. Thy hair is like the cedars of Lebanon, like the great cedars of Lebanon that give their shade to the lions and to the robbers who would hide them by day. The long black nights, when the moon hides her face, when the stars are afraid, are not so black as thy hair. The silence that dwells in the forest is not so black. There is nothing in the world that is so black as thy hair.... Suffer me to touch thy hair.

JOKANAAN. Back, daughter of Sodom! Touch me not. Profane not the temple of the Lord God.

SALOME. Thy hair is horrible. It is covered with mire and dust. It is like a knot of serpents coiled round thy neck. I love not thy hair. . . . It is thy mouth that I desire, Jokanaan. Thy mouth is like a band of scarlet on a tower of ivory. It is like a pomegranate cut in twain with a knife of ivory. The pomegranate-flowers that blossom in the gardens of Tyre, and are redder than roses, are not so red. The red blasts of trumpets that herald the approach of kings, and make afraid the

enemy, are not so red. Thy mouth is redder than the feet of the doves who inhabit the temples and are fed by the priests. It is redder than the feet of him who cometh from a forest where he hath slain a lion, and seen gilded tigers. Thy mouth is like a branch of coral that fishers have found in the twilight of the sea, the coral that they keep for the kings! ... It is like the vermilion that the Moabites find in the mines of Moab, the vermilion that the kings take from them. It is like the bow of the King of the Persians, that is painted with vermilion, and is tipped with coral. There is nothing in the world so red as thy mouth. . . . Suffer me to kiss thy mouth.

JOKANAAN. Never! daughter of Babylon! Daughter of Sodom! Never!

SALOME. I will kiss thy mouth, Jokanaan. I will kiss thy mouth.

THE YOUNG SYRIAN. Princess, Princess, thou who art like a garden of myrrh, thou who art the dove of all doves, look not at this man, look not at him! Do not speak such words to him. I cannot endure it. ... Princess, do not speak these things.

SALOME. I will kiss thy mouth, Jokanaan.

THE YOUNG SYRIAN. Ah! *[He kills himself and falls between* SALOME *and* JOKANAAN.]

THE PAGE OF HERODIAS. The young Syrian has slain himself! The young captain has slain himself! He has slain himself who was my friend! I gave him a little box of perfumes and ear-rings wrought in silver, and now he has killed himself!

Ah, did he not say that some misfortune would happen? I too said it, and it has come to pass. Well I knew that the moon was seeking a dead thing, but I knew not that it was he whom she sought. Ah I why did I not hide him from the moon? If I had hidden him in a cavern sne would not have seen him.

FIRST SOLDIER. Princess, the young captain has just slain himself.

SALOME. Suffer me to kiss thy mouth, Jokanaan.

JOKANAAN. Art thou not afraid, daughter of Herodias? Did I not tell thee that I had heard in the palace the beating of the wings of the angel of death, and hath he not come, the angel of death?

SALOME. Suffer me to kiss thy mouth.

JOKANAAN. Daughter of adultery, there is but one who can save thee, it is He of whom I spake. Go seek Him. He is in a boat on the sea of Galilee, and He talketh with His disciples. Kneel down on the shore of the sea, and call unto Him by His name. When He cometh to thee (and to all who call on Him He cometh), bow thyself at His feet and ask of Him the remission of thy sins.

SALOME. Suffer me to kiss thy mouth.

JOKANAAN. Cursed be thou! daughter of an incestuous mother, be thou accursed!

SALOME. I will kiss thy mouth, Jokanaan.

JOKANAAN. I will not look at thee, thou art accursed, Salome, thou art accursed. *[He goes down into the cistern.}*

SALOME. I will kiss thy mouth, Jokanaan; I will kiss thy mouth.

FIRST SOLDIER. We must bear away the body to another place. The Tetrarch does not care to see dead bodies, save the bodies of those whom he himself has slain.

THE PAGE OF HERODUS. He was my brother, and nearer to me than a brother. I gave him a little box full of perfumes, and a ring of agate that he wore always on his hand. In the evening we were wont to walk by the river, and among the almond trees, and he used to tell me of the things of his country. He spake ever very low. The sound of his voice was like the sound of the flute, of one who playeth upon the flute. Also he had much joy to gaze at himself in the river. I used to reproach him for that.

SECOND SOLDIER. You are right; we must hide the body. The Tetrarch must not see it.

FIRST SOLDIER. The Tetrarch will not come to this place. He never comes on the terrace. He is too much afraid of the prophet.

[Enter HEROD, HERODIAS, *and all the Court.]*

HEROD. Where is SaloMe? Where is the Princess? Why did she not return to the banquet as I commanded her? Ah! there she is!

HERODIAS. You must not look at her! You are always looking at her!

HEROD. The moon has a strange look to-night. Has she not a strange look? She is like a mad woman who is seeking everywhere for lovers. She is naked, too. She is quite naked. The clouds are seeking to clothe her nakedness, but she will not let them. She shows herself naked in the

sky. She reels through the clouds like a drunken woman. … I am sure she is looking for lovers. Does she not reel like a drunken woman? She is like a mad woman, is she not?

HERODIAS. No; the moon is like the moon, that is all. Let us go within. . . . We have nothing to do here.

HEROD. I will stay here! Manasseh, lay carpets there. Light torches, bring forth the ivory table, and the tables of jasper. The air here is sweet. I will drink more wine with my guests. We must show all honours to the ambassadors of Caesar.

HERODIAS. It is not because of them that you remain.

HEROD. Yes; the air is very sweet. Come, Herodias, our guests await us. Ah! I have slipped! 1 have slipped in blood! It is an ill omen. Wherefore is there blood here? . . . and this body, what does this body here? Think you I am like the King of Egypt, who gives no feast to his guests but that he shows them a corpse? Whose is it? I will not look on it.

FIRST SOLDIER. It is our captain, sire. He is the young Syrian whom you made captain of the guard but three days gone.

HEROD. I issued no order that he should be slain.

SECOND SOLDIER. He slew himself, sire.

HEROD. For what reason? I had made him captain of my guard.

SECOND SOLDIER. We do not know, sire. But with his own hand he slew himself.

HEROD. That seems strange to me. I had thought it was but the Roman philosophers who slew themselves. Is it not true, Tigellinus, that the philosophers at Rome slay themselves?

TIGELLINUS. There be some who slay themselves, sire. They are the Stoics. The Stoics are people of no cultivation. They are ridiculous people. I myself regard them as being perfectly ridiculous.

HEEOD. I also. It is ridiculous to kill oneself.

TIGELLINUS. Everybody at Rome laughs at them. The Emperor has written a satire against them. It is recited everywhere.

HEROD. Ah! he has written a satire against them? Caesar is wonderful. He can do everything. . . . It is strange that the young Syrian has slain himself. I am sorry he has slain himself. I am very sorry; for he was fair to look upon. He was even very fair. He had very languorous eyes. I remember that I saw that he looked languorously at Salome. Truly, I thought he looked too much at her.

HERODIAS. There are others who look too much at her.

HEROD. His father was a king. I drove him from his kingdom. And of his mother, who was a queen, you made a slave—Herodias. So he was here as my guest, as it were, and for that reason I made him my captain. I am sorry he is dead. Ho! why have you left the body here? I will not look at it—away with it! *[They take away the*

body.] It is cold here. There is a wind blowing* Is there not a wind blowing?

HEBODIAS. No; there is no wind.

HEROD. I tell you there is a wind that blows. . . . And I hear in the air something that is like the beating of wings, like the beating of vast wings. Do you not hear it?

HERODIAS. I hear nothing.

HEROD. I hear it no longer. But I heard it. It was the blowing of the wind. It has passed away. But no, I hear it again. Do you not hear it? It is just like the beating of wings.

HERODIAS. I tell you there is nothing. You are ill. Let us go within.

HEROD. I am not ill. It is your daughter who is sick to death. Never have I seen her so pale.

HERODIAS. I have told you not to look at her.

HEROD. Pour me forth wine. *[Wine is brought.]* Salome, come drink a little wine with me. I have here a wine that is exquisite. Caesar himself sent it me. Dip into it thy little red lips, that I may drain the cup.

SALOME. I am not thirsty, Tetrarch.

HEROD. You hear how she answers me, this daughter of yours?

HERODIAS. She does right. Why are you always gazing at her?

HEROD. Bring me ripe fruits. *[Fruits are brought.]* Salome, come and eat fruits with me. I love to see in a fruit the mark of thy little teeth. Bite but a little of this fruit that I may eat what is left.

SALOME. I am not hungry, Tetrarch.

HEROD [To HERODIAS]. You see how you have brought up this daughter of yours.

HERODIAS. My daughter and I come of a royal race. As for thee, thy father was a camel driver! He was a thief and a robber to boot!

HEROD. Thou liest!

HERODIAS. Thou knowest well that it is true.

HEROD. Salome, come and sit next to me. I will give thee the throne of thy mother.

SALOME. I am not tired, Tetrarch.

HERODIAS. You see in what regard she holds you.

HEROD. Bring me—what is it that I desire? I forget. Ah! ah! I remember.

THE VOICE OF JOKANAAN. Behold the time is come! That which I foretold has come to pass. The day that I spoke of is at hand.

HERODIAS. Bid him be silent. I will not listen to his voice. This man is for ever hurling insults against me.

HEROD. He has said nothing against you. Besides, he is a very great prophet.

HERODIAS. I do not believe in prophets. Can a man tell what will come to pass? No man knows it. Also he is for ever insulting me. But I think you are afraid of him. … I know well that you are afraid of him.

HEROD. I am not afraid of him. I am afraid of no man.

HERODIAS. I tell you, you are afraid of him. If you are not afraid of him why do you not de-

liver him to the Jews who for these six months past have been clamouring for him?

A JEW. Truly, my lord, it were better to deliver him into our hands.

HEROD. Enough on this subject. I have already given you my answer. I will not deliver him into your hands. He is a holy man. .He is a man who has seen God.

A JEW. That cannot be. There is no man who hath seen God since the prophet Elias. He is the last man who saw God face to face. In these days God doth not show Himself. God hideth Himself. Therefore great evils have come upon the land.

ANOTHER JEW. Verily, no man knoweth if Elias the prophet did indeed see God. Peradventure it was but the shadow of God that he saw.

A THIRD JEW. God is at no time hidden. He showeth Himself at all times and in all places. God is in what is evil even as He is in what is good.

A FOURTH JEW. Thou shouldst not say that. It is a very dangerous doctrine. It is a doctrine that cometh from Alexandria, where men teach the philosophy of the Greeks. And the Greeks are Gentiles: They are not even circumcised.

A FIFTH JEW. No one can tell how God worketh. His ways are very dark. It may be that the things which we call evil are good, and that the things which we call good are evil. There is no knowledge of any thing. We can but bow our heads to His will, for God is very strong. He

breaketh in pieces the strong together with the weak, for He regardeth not any man.

FIRST JEW. Thou speakest truly. Verily God is terrible; He breaketh in pieces the strong and the weak as a man breaks corn in a mortar. But as for man, he hath never seen God. No man hath seen God since the prophet Elias.

HERODIAS. Make them be silent. They weary me.

HEROD. But I have heard it said that Jokanaan is in very truth your prophet Elias.

THE JEW. That cannot be. It is more than three hundred years since the days of the prophet Elias.

HEROD. There be some who say that this man is Elias the prophet.

A NAZARENE. I am sure that he is Elias the prophet.

THE JEW. Nay, but he is not Elias the prophet.

THE VOICE OF JOKANAAN. Behold the day is at hand, the day of the Lord, and I hear upon the mountains the feet of Him who shall be the Saviour of the world.

HEROD. What does that mean? The Saviour of the world?

TIGELLINUS. It is a title that Caesar adopts.

HEROD. But Caesar is not coming into Judaea. Only yesterday I received letters from Rome. They contained nothing concerning this matter. And you, Tigellinus, who were at Rome during the winter, you heard nothing concerning this matter, did you?

TIGELLINUS. Sire, I heard nothing concerning the matter. I was explaining the title. It is one of Caesar's titles.

HEROD. But Cassar cannot come. He is too gouty. They say that his feet are like the feet of an elephant. Also there are reasons of State. He who leaves Rome loses Rome. He will not come. Howbeit, Caesar is lord, he will come if such be his pleasure. Nevertheless, I think he will not come.

FIRST NAZARENE. It was not concerning Caesar that the prophet spake these words, sire.

HEROD. How?—it was not concerning Caesar?

FIRST NAZARENE. No, my lord.

HEROD. —Concerning whom then did he speak?

FIRST NAZARENE. Concerning Messias who has come.

A JEW. Messiah hath not come.

FIRST NAZARENE. He hath come, and everywhere He worketh miracles.

HERODIAS. Ho! ho! miracles! I do not believe in miracles. I have seen too many. *[To the Page.]* My fan.

FIRST NAZARENE. This man worketh true miracles. Thus, at a marriage which took place in a little town of Galilee, a town of some importance, He changed water into wine. Certain persons who were present related it to me. Also He healed two lepers that were seated before the Gate of Capernaum simply by touching them.

SECOND NAZARENE. Nay, it was blind mep that he healed at Capernaum.

FIRST NAZARENE. Nay; they were lepers. But He hath healed blind people also, and He was seen on a mountain talking with angels.

A SADDUCEE. Angels do not exist.

A PHARISEE. Angels exist, but I do not believe that this Man hath talked with them.

FIRST NAZARENE. He was seen by a great multitude of people talking with angels.

HERODIAS. How these men weaiy me! They are ridiculous! *[To the Page.]* Well! my fan! *[The Page gives her the fan.]* You have a dreamer's look; you must not dream. It is only sick people who dream. *[She strikes the Page with her fan.]*

SECOND NAZARENE. There is also the miracle of the daughter of Jairus.

FIRST NAZARENE. Yea, that is sure. No man can gainsay it.

HERODIAS. These men are mad. They have looked too long on the moon. Command them to be silent.

HEROD. What is this miracle of the daughter of Jairus?

FIRST NAZARENE. The daughter of Jairus was dead. This Man raised her from the dead.

HEROD. How! He raises people from the dead?

FIRST NAZARENE. Yea, sire, He raiseth the dead.

HEROD. I do not wish Him to do that, I forbid Him to do that. I suffer no man to raise the dead. This Man must be found and told that I forbid Him to raise the dead. Where is this Man at present?

SECOND NAZARENE. He is in every place, my lord, but it is hard to find Him.

FIRST NAZARENE. It is said that He is now in Samaria.

A JEW. It is easy to see that this is not Messias, if He is in Samaria. It is not to the Samaritans that Messias shall come. The Samaritans are accursed. They bring no offerings to the Temple.

SECOND NAZARENE. He left Samaria a few days since. I think that at the present moment He is in the neighbourhood of Jerusalem.

FIRST NAZARENE. No; he is not there. I have just come from Jerusalem. For two months they have had no tidings of Him.

HEROD. No matter! But let them find Him, and tell Him, thus saith Herod the King, 'I will not suffer Thee to raise the dead!' To change water into wine, to heal the lepers and the blind. ... He may do these things if He will. I say nothing against these things. In truth I hold it a kindly deed to heal a leper. But no man shall raise the dead. It would be terrible if the dead came back.

THE VOICE OF JOKANAAN. Ah! the wanton one! The harlot! Ah! the daughter of Babylon with her golden eyes and her gilded eyelids! Thus saith the Lord God, Let there come up against her a multitude of men. Let the people take stones and stone her. . . .

HERODIAS. Command him to be silent.

THE VOICE OF JOKANAAN. Let the captainsof the hosts pierce her with their swords, let them crush her beneath their shields.

HERODIAS. Nay, but it is infamous.

THE VOICE OF JOKANAAN. It is thus that I will wipe out all wickedness from the earth, and that all women shall learn not to imitate her abominations.

HERODIAS. You hear what he says against me? You suffer him to revile her who is your wife?

HEROD. He did not speak your name.

HERODIAS. What does that matter? You know well that it is I whom he seeks to revile. And I am your wife, am I not?

HEROD. Of a truth, dear and noble Herodias, you are my wife, and before that you were the wife of my brother.

HERODIAS. It was thou didst snatch me from his arms.

HEROD. Of a truth I was stronger than he was. . . . But let us not talk of that matter. I do not desire to talk of it. It is the cause of the terrible words that the prophet has spoken. Peradventure on account of it a misfortune will come. Let us not speak of this matter. Noble Herodias, we are not mindful of our guests. Fill thou my cup, my well-beloved. Ho! fill with wine the great goblets of silver, and the great goblets of glass. I will drink to Caesar. There are Romans here, we must drink to Caesar.

ALL. Caesar! Caesar!

HEROD. Do you not see your daughter, how pale she is?

HERODIAS. What is that to you if she be pale or not?

HEROD. Never have I seen her so pale.

HERODIAS. You must not look at her.

THE VOICE OF JOKANAAN. In that day the sun shall become black like sackcloth of hair, and the moon shall become like blood, and the stars of the heaven shall fall upon the earth like unripe figs that fall from the fig-tree, and the kings of the earth shall be afraid.

HERODIAS. Ah! Ah! I should like to see that day of which he speaks, when the moon shall become like blood, and when the stars shall fall upon the earth like unripe figs. This prophet talks like a drunken man . . . but I cannot suffer the sound of his voice. I hate his voice. Command him to be silent.

HEROD. I will not. I cannot understand what it is that he saith, but it may be an omen.

HERODIAS. I do not believe in omens. He speaks like a drunken man.

HEROD. It may be he is drunk with the wine of God.

HERODIAS. What wine is that, the wine of God? From what vineyards is it gathered? In what wine-press may one find it?

HEROD *[From this point he looks all the while at* SALOMe]. Tigellinus, when you were at Rome of late, did the Emperor speak with you on the subject of . . .?

TIGELLINUS. On what subject, my Lord?

HEROD. On what subject? Ah! I asked you a question, did I not? I have forgotten what I would have asked you.

HERODIAS. You are looking again at my daughter. You must not look at her. I have already said so.

HEROD. You say nothing else.

HERODIAS. I say it again.

HEROD. And that restoration of the Temple about which they have talked so much, will anything be done? They say the veil of the Sanctuary has disappeared, do they not?

HERODIAS. It was thyself didst steal it. Thou speakest at random and without wit. I will not stay here. Let us go within.

HEROD. Dance for me, Salomd

HERODIAS. I will not have her dance.

SALOME. I have no desire to dance, Tetrarch.

HEROD. Salom6, daughter of Herodias, dance for me.

HERODIAS. Peace! let her alone.

HEROD. I command thee to dance, Salom6.

SALOME. I will not dance, Tetrarch.

HERODIAS *[Laughing]*. You see how she obeys you.

HEROD. What is it to me whether she dance or not? It is naught to me. To-night I am happy, I am exceeding happy. Never have I been so happy.

FIRST SOLDIER. The Tetrarch has a sombre look. Has he not a sombre look?

SECOND SOLDIER. Yes, he has a sombre look.

HEROD. Wherefore should I not be happy? Caesar, who is lord of the world, Csesar, who is lord of all things, loves me well. He has just sent me most precious gifts. Also he has promised me

to summon to Rome the King of Cappadocia, who is rny enemy. It may be that at Rome he will crucify him, for he is able to do all things that he has a mind to. Verily, Caesar is lord. Therefore I do well to be happy. There is nothing in the world that can mar my happiness.

THE VOICE OF JOKANAAN. He shall be seated on his throne. He shall be clothed in scarlet and purple. In his hand he shall bear a golden cup full of his blasphemies. And the angel of the Lord shall smite him. He shall be eaten of worms.

HEEODIAS. You hear what he says about you. He says that you will be eaten of worms.

HEROD. It is not of me that he speaks. He speaks never against me. It is of the King of Cappadocia that he speaks; the King of Cappadocia who is mine enemy. It is he who shall be eaten of worms. It is not I. Never has he spoken word against me, this prophet, save that I sinned in taking to wife the wife of my brother. It may be he is right. For, of a truth, you are sterile.

HERODIAS. I am sterile, I? You say that, you that are ever looking at my daughter, you that would have her dance for your pleasure? You speak as a fool. I have borne a child. You have gotten no child, no, not on one of your slaves. It is you who are sterile, not I.

HEROD. Peace, woman! I say that you are sterile. You have borne me no child, and the prophet says that our marriage is not a true marriage. He says that it is a marriage of incest, a marriage that will bring evils. ... I fear he is

right; I am sure that he is right. I would be happy at this. Of a truth, I am happy. There is nothing I lack.

HERODIAS. I am glad you are of so fair a humour to-night. It is not your custom. But it is late. Let us go within. Do not forget that we hunt at sunrise. All honours must be shown to Caesar's ambassadors, must they not?

SECOND SOLDIER. The Tetrarch has a sombre look.

FIRST SOLDIER. Yes, he has a sombre look.

HEROD. Salome, Salome, dance for me. I pray thee dance for me. I am sad to-night. Yes; I am passing sad to-night. When I came hither I slipped in blood, which is an evil omen; also I heard in the air a beating of wings, a beating of giant wings. I cannot tell what they mean. . . . I am sad to-night. Therefore dance for me. Dance for me, Salome, I beseech thee. If thou dancest for me thou mayest ask of me what thou wilt, and I will give it thee, even unto the half of my kingdom.

SALOME *[Rising]*. Will you indeed give me whatsoever I shall ask of thee, Tetrarch?

HERODIAS. Do not dance, my daughter.

HEROD. Whatsoever thou shalt ask of me, even unto the half of my kingdom.

SALOME. You swear it, Tetrarch?

HEROD. I swear it, Salome.

HERODIAS. Do not dance, my daughter.

SALOME. By what will you swear this thing, Tetrarch?

HEROD. By my life, by my crown, by my gods. Whatsoever thou shalt desire I will give it thee even to the half of my kingdom, if thou wilt but dance for me. 0 Salome, Salome, dance for me!

SALOMe. You have sworn an oath, Tetrarch.

HEROD. I have sworn an oath.

HERODIAS. My daughter, do not dance.

HEROD. Even to the half of my kingdom. Thou wilt be passing fair as a queen, Salom6, if it please thee to ask for the half of my kingdom. Will she not be fair as a queen? Ah lit is cold here! There is an icy wind, and I hear . . . wherefore do I hear in the air this beating of wings? Ah! one might fancy a huge black bird that hovers over the terrace. Why can I not see it, this bird? The beat of its wings is terrible. The breath of the wind of its wings is terrible. It is a chill wind. Nay, but it is not cold, it is hot. I am choking. Pour water on my hands. Give me snow to eat. Loosen my mantle. Quick! quick! loosen my mantle. Nay, but leave it. It is my garland that hurts me, my garland of roses. The flowers are like fire. They have burned my forehead. *[He tears the wreath from his head and throws it on the table.]* Ah! I can breathe now. How red those petals are! They are like stains of blood on the cloth. That does not matter. It is not wise to find symbols in everything that one sees. It makes life too full of terrors. It were better to say that stains of blood are as lovely as rose petals. It were better far to say that.. . . But we will not speak of this. Now I am happy. I am passing

happy. Have I not the right to be happy? Your daughter is going to dance for me. Wilt thou not dance for me, Salome? Thou hast promised to dance for me.

HERODIAS. I will not have her dance.

SALOME. I will dance for you, Tetrarch.

HEROD. You hear what your daughter says. She is going to dance for me. Thou doest well to dance for me, Salome And when thou hast danced for me, forget not to ask of me whatsoever thou hast a mind to ask. Whatsoever thou shalt desire I will give it thee, even to the half of my kingdom. I have sworn it, have I not?

SALOME. Thou hast sworn it, Tetrarch.

HEROD. And I have never broken my word. I am not of those who break their oaths. I know not how to lie. I am the slave of my word, and my word is the word of a king. The King of Cappadocia had ever a lying tongue, but he is no true king. He is a coward. Also he owes me money that he will not repay. He has even insulted my ambassadors. He has spoken words that were wounding. But Caesar will crucify him when he comes to Rome. I know that Caesar will crucify him. And if he crucify him not, yet will he die, being eaten of worms. The prophet has prophesied it. Well! wherefore dost thou tarry, Salome?

SALOMe. I am waiting until my slaves bring perfumes to me and the seven veils, and take from off my feet my sandals. *[Slaves bring perfumes and the seven veils, and take off the sandals of* SALOMe.]

HEROD. Ah thou art to dance with naked feet.

Tis well! Tis well. Thy little feet will be like white doves. They will be like little white flowers that dance upon the trees. . . . No, no, she is going to dance on blood. There is blood spilt on the ground. She must not dance on blood. It were an evil omen.

HERODIAS. What is it to thee if she dance on blood? Thou hast waded deep enough in it. …

HEROD. What is it to me? Ah! look at the moon! She has become red. She has become red as blood. All! the prophet prophesied truly. He prophesied that the moon would become as blood. Did he not prophesy it? All of ye heard him prophesying it. And now the moon has become as blood. Do ye not see it?

HERODIAS. Oh, yes, I see it well, and the stars are falling like unripe figs, are they not? and the sun is becoming black like sackcloth of hair, and the kings of the earth are-afraid. That at least one can see. The prophet is justified of his words in that at least, for truly the kings of the earth are afraid. . . . Let us go within. You are sick. They will say at Rome that you are mad. Let us go within, I tell you.

THE VOICE OF JOKANAAN. Who is this who COm-eth from Edom, who is this who cometh from Bozra, whose raiment is dyed with purple, who shineth in the beauty of his garments, who walketh mighty in his greatness? Wherefore is thy raiment stained with scarlet?

HERODIAS. Let us go within. The voice of that man maddens me. I will not have my daughter

dance while he is continually crying out. I will not have her dance while you look at her in this fashion. In a word, I will not have her dance.

HEROD. Do not rise, my wife, my queen, it will avail thee nothing. I will not go within till she hath danced. Dance, Salome, dance for me.

HERODIAS. Do not dance, my daughter.

SALOME. I am ready, Tetrarch.

[SALOMES *dances the dance of the seven veils.]*

HEROD. Ah! wonderful! wonderful! You see that she has danced for me, your daughter. Come near, Salome, come near, that I may give thee thy fee. Ah! I pay a royal price to those who dance for my pleasure. I will pay thee royally. I will give thee whatsoever thy soul desireth. What wouldst thou have? Speak.

SALOMe *[Kneeling].* I would that they presently bring me in a silver charger . . .

HEROD *[Laughing].* In a silver charger? Surely yes, in a silver charger. She is charming, is she not? What is it thou wouldst have in a silver charger, 0 sweet and fair Salome, thou art fairer than all the daughters of Judsca? What wouldst thou have them bring thee in a silver charger? Tell me. Whatsoever it may be, thou shalt receive it. My treasures belong to thee. What is it that thou wouldst have, Salome?

SALOME *[Rising].* The head of Jokanaan.

HERODIAS. Ah! that is well said, my daughter.

HEROD. No, no!

HERODIAS. That is well said, my daughter.

HEROD. No, no, Salome. It is not that thou

desirest. Do not listen to thy mother's voice. She is ever giving thee evil counsel. Do not heed her.

SALOMe. It is not my mother's voice that I heed. It is for mine own pleasure that I ask the head of Jokanaan in a silver charger. You have sworn an oath, Herod. Forget not that you have sworn an oath.

HEROD. I know it. I have sworn an oath by my gods. I know it well. But I pray thee, Salome, ask of me something else. Ask of me the half of my kingdom, and I will give it thee. But ask not of me what thy lips have asked.

SALOME I ask of you the head of Jokanaan.

HEROD. No, no, I will not give it thee.

SALOME. You have sworn an oath, Herod.

HERODIAS. Yes, you have sworn an oath. Everybody heard you. You swore it before everybody.

HEROD. Peace, woman! It is not to you I speak.

HERODIAS. My daughter has done well to ask the head of Jokanaan. He has covered me with insults. He has said unspeakable things against me. One can see that she loves her mother well. Do not yield, my daughter. He has sworn an oath, he has sworn an oath.

HEROD. Peace! Speak not to me! . . . Salome, I pray thee be not stubborn. I have ever been kind toward thee. I have ever loved thee. . . . It may be that I have loved thee too much. Therefore ask not this thing of me. This is a terrible thing, an awful thing to ask of me. Surely, I think thou art jesting. The head of a man that

is cut from his body is ill to look upon, is it not? It is not meet that the eyes of a virgin should look upon such a thing. What pleasure couldst thou have in it? There is no pleasure that thou couldst have in it. No, no, it is not that thou desirest. Hearken to me. I have an emerald, a great emerald, thou canst see that which passeth afar off. Caesar himself carries such an emerald when he goes to the circus. But my emerald is the larger. I know well that it is the larger. It is the largest emerald in the whole world. Thou wilt take that, wilt thou not? Ask it of me and I will give it thee.

SALOME. I demand the head of Jokanaan.

HEROD. Thou art not listening. Thou art not listening. Suffer me to speak, Salome

SALOME. The head of Jokanaan.

HEROD. No, no, thou wouldst not have that. Thou sayest that but to trouble me, because I have looked at thee and ceased not this night. It is true, I have looked at thee and ceased not this night. Thy beauty has troubled me. Thy beauty has grievously troubled me, and I have looked at thee over-much. Nay, but I will look at thee no more. One should not look at anything. Neither at things, nor at people should one look. Only in mirrors is it well to look, for mirrors do but show us masks. Oh! oh! bring wine! I thirst.... Salome, Salome, let us be as friends. Bethink thee. . . . Ah! what would I say? What was't? Ah! I remember it! ... Salome—nay but come nearer to me; I fear thou wilt not hear my words—

Salome, thou knowest my white peacocks, my beautiful white peacocks, that walk in the garden between the myrtles and the tall cypress trees. Their beaks are gilded with gold and the grains that they eat are smeared with gold, and their feet are stained with purple. When they cry out the rain comes, and the moon shows herself in the heavens when they spread their tails. Two by two they walk between the cypress trees and the black myrtles, and each has a slave to tend it. Sometimes they fly across the trees, and anon they crouch in the grass, and round the pools of the water. There are not in all the world birds so wonderful. I know that Caesar himself has no birds so fair as my birds. I will give thee fifty of my peacocks. They will follow thee whithersoever thou goest, and in the midst of them thou wilt be like unto the moon in the midst of a great white cloud.... I will give them to thee all. I have but a hundred, and in the whole world there is no king who has peacocks like unto my peacocks. But I will give them all to thee. Only thou must loose me from my oath, and must not ask of me that which thy lips have asked of me. *[He empties the cup of wine.]*

SALOME. Give me the head of Jokanaan.

HERODIAS. Well said, my daughter! As for you, you are ridiculous with your peacocks.

HEKOD. Ah! thou art not listening to me. Be calm. As for me, am I not calm? I am altogether calm. Listen. I have jewels hidden in this place —jewels that thy mother even has never seen;

jewels that are marvellous to look at. I have a collar of pearls, set in four rows. They are like unto moons chained with rays of silver. They are even as half a hundred moons caught in a golden net. On the ivory breast of a queen they have rested. Thou shalt be as fair as a queen when thou wearest them. I have amethysts of two kinds, one that is black like wine, and one that is red like wine that one has coloured with water. I have topazes, yellow as are the eyes of tigers, and topazes that are pink as the eyes of a wood-pigeon, and green topazes that are as the eyes of cats. I have opals that burn always, with a flame that is cold as ice, opals that make sad men's minds, and are afraid of the shadows. I have onyxes like the eyeballs of a dead woman. I have moonstones that change when the moon changes, and are wan when they see the sun. I have sapphires big like eggs, and as blue as blue flowers. The sea wanders within them and the moon comes never to trouble the blue of their waves. I have chrysolites and beryls and chrysoprases and rubies. I have sardonyx and hyacinth stones, and stones of chalcedony, and I will give them all unto thee, all, and other things will I add to them. The King of the Indies has but even now sent me four fans fashioned from the feathers of parrots and the King of Numidia a garment of ostrich feathers. I have a crystal, into which it is not lawful for a woman to look, nor may young men behold it until they have been beaten with rods. In a coffer of nacre I have three wondrous tur-

quoises. He who wears them on his forehead can imagine things which are not, and he who carries them in his hand can turn the fruitful woman into a woman that is barren. These are great treasures above all price. But this is not all. In an ebony coffer I have two cups, amber, that are like apples of pure gold. If an enemy pour poison into these cups they become like apples of silver. In a coffer incrusted with amber I have sandals incrusted with glass. I have mantles that have been brought from the land of the Seres, and bracelets decked about with carbuncles and with jade that come from the city of Euphrates. . . . What desirest thou more than this, Salome! Tell me the thing that thou dcsirest, and I will give it thee. All that thou askest I will give thee, save one thing only. I will give thee all that is mine, save only the head of one man. I will give thee the mantle of the high priest. I will give thee the veil of the sanctuary.

THE JEWS. Oh! oh!

SALOME. Give me the head of Jokanaan.

HEROD *[Sinking back in his seat].* Let her be given what she asks! Of a truth she is her mother's child! *[The first Soldier approaches.* HERODIAS *draws from the hand of the Tetrarch the ring of death, and gives it to the Soldier, who straightway bears it to the Executioner. The Executioner looks scared.]* Who has taken my ring? There was a ring on my right hand. Who has drunk my wine? There was wine in my cup. It was full of wine. Someone has drunk it! Oh! surely some evil will

befall some one. *[The Executioner goes dawn into the cistern.]* Ah! Wherefore did I give my oath? Hereafter let no king swear an oath. If he keep it not, it is terrible, and if he keep it, it is terrible also.

HERODIAS. My daughter has done well.

HEROD. I am sure that some misfortune will happen.

SALOME *[She leans over the cistern and listens].* There is no sound. I hear nothing. Why does he not cry out, this man? Ah! if any man sought to kill me, I would cry out, I would struggle, I would not suffer. . . . Strike, strike, Naaman, strike, I tell you. . . . No, I hear nothing. There is a silence, a terrible silence. Ah! something has fallen upon the ground. I heard something fall. He is afraid, this slave. He is a coward, this slave! Let soldiers be sent. *[She sees the Page of* HERODIAS *and addresses him.]* Come thither, thou wert the friend of him who is dead, wert thou not? Well, I tell thee, there are not dead men enough. Go to the soldiers and bid them go down and bring me the thing I ask, the thing the Tetrarch has promised me, the thing that is mine. *[The Page recoils. She turns to the soldiers.]* Hither, ye soldiers. Get ye down into this cistern and bring me the head of this man. Tetrarch, Tetrarch, command your soldiers that they bring me the head of Jokanaan.

[A huge black arm, the arm of the Executioner, comes forth from the cistern, bearing on a silver shield the head of JOKANAAN, SALOME *seizes it.*

HEROD *hides his face with his cloak.* HERODIAS *smiles and fans herself. The Nazarenes fall on their knees and begin to pray.]*

Ah! thou wouldst not suffer me to kiss thy mouth, Jokanaan. Well, I will kiss it now. I will bite it with my teeth as one bites a ripe fruit. Yes, I will kiss thy mouth, Jokanaan. I said it; did I not say it? I said it. Ah! I will kiss it now. . . . But, wherefore dost thou not look at me, Jokanaan? Thine eyes that were so terrible, so full of rage and scorn, are shut now. Wherefore are they shut? Open thine eyes! Lift up thine eyelids, Jokanaan! Wherefore dost thou not look at me? Art thou afraid of me, Jokanaan, that thou wilt not look at me? . . . And thy tongue, that was like a red snake darting poison, it moves no more, it speaks no words, Jokanaan, that scarlet viper that spat its venom upon me. It is strange, is it not? How is it that the red viper stirs no longer? . . . Thou wouldst have none of me, Jokanaan. Thou rejectedst me. Thou didst speak evil words against me. Thou didst bear thyself toward me as to a harlot, as to a woman that is a wanton, to me, Salomd, daughter of Herodias, Princess of Judsea! Well, I still live, but thou art dead, and thy head belongs to me. I can do with it what I will. I can throw it to the dogs and to the birds of the air. That which the dogs leave, the birds of the air shall devour. . . . Ah, Jokanaan, thou wert the man that I loved alone among men. All other men were hateful to me. But thou wert beautiful!

Thy body was a column of ivory set upon feet of silver. It was a garden full of doves and lilies of silver. It was a tower of silver decked with shields of ivory. There was nothing in the world so white as thy body. There was nothing in the world so black as thy hair. In the whole world there was nothing so red as thy mouth. Thy voice was a censer that scattered strange perfumes, and when I looked on thee I heard a strange music. Ah! wherefore didst thou not look at me, Jokanaan? With the cloak of thine hands and with the cloak of thy blasphemies thou didst hide thy face. Thou didst put upon thine eyes the covering of him who would see his God. Well, thou hast seen thy God, Jokanaan, but me, me, thou didst never see. If thou hadst seen me thou hadst loved me. I saw thee, and I loved thee. Oh, how I loved thee! I love thee yet, Jokanaan, I love only thee. . . . I am athirst for thy beauty; I am hungry for thy body; and neither wine nor apples can appease my desire. What shall I do now, Jokanaan? Neither the floods nor the great waters can quench my passion. I was a princess, and thou didst scorn njp. I was a virgin, and thou didst take my virginity from me. I was chaste, and thou didst fill my veins with fire. . . . Ah! ah! wherefore didst thou not look at me? If thou hadst looked at me thou hadst loved me. Well I know that thou wouldst have loved me, and the mystery of love is greater than the mystery of death.

HEROD. She is monstrous, thy daughter, I tell thee she is iponstrous. In truth, what she has done

is a great crime. I am sure that it is. A crime against some unknown God.

HERODIAS. I am well pleased with my daughter. She has done well. And I would stay here now.

HEROD. *[Rising].* Ah! There speaks my brother's wife! Come! I will not stay in this place. Come, I tell thee. Surely some terrible thing will befall. Manasseh, Issadar, Zias, put out the torches. I will not look at things, I will not suffer things to look at me. Put out the torches! Hide the moon! Hide the stars! Let us hide ourselves in our palace, Herodias. I begin to be afraid.

[The slaves put out the torches. The stars disappear. A great cloud crosses the moon and conceals it completely. The stage becomes quite dark. The Tetrarch begins to climb the staircase.]

THE VOICE OF SALOME Ah! I have kissed thy mouth, Jokanaan, I have kissed thy mouth. There was a bitter taste on my lips. Was it the taste of blood? , . . Nay; but perchance it was the taste of love. . . . They say that love hath a bitter taste. . . . But what matter? what matter? I have kissed thy mouth.

HEROD *[Turning round and seeing* SALOME]. Kill that woman!

[The soldiers rush forward and crush beneath their shields SALOME, *daughter of* HERODIAS, *Princess of Judaea.]*

CURTAIN