CRISIS IN HEAVEN

CAST

Crisis in Heaven was first produced at the King's Theatre, Edinburgh, on February 28th, 1944, with the following cast :

1 S T EVZONE	Anthony Dawson
2 N D EVZONE	Fred Groves
ARISTOPHANES . .	Lloyd Pearson
VOLTAIRE	Ernest Thesiger
FROUST . . .	Nicholas Phipps
AN ENGLISH SOLDIER . . .	Esmond Knight
ABRAHAM LINCOLN . . .	Herbert Lomas
FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE .	Josephine Middleton
VOLUMNIA	Dorothy Green
FREDERICK THE GREAT . .	Frederick Schrecker
HELEN OF TROY . . .	Dorothy Dickson
RHODOPE	Frances Clare
PUSHKIN	Barry Morse
THE VICAR OF BRAY . . .	Felix Irwin
A NURSING SISTER . . .	Betty Sparks
GALEN	Deeung Wells
IRENE	Adele Dixon

Diiected by John Gielgud.
Settings and costumes designed by Cecil Beaton.

CRISIS IN HEAVEN

An Elysian Comedy

by

ERIC LINKLATER

LONDON
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SCENES

ACT I

SCENE I.—In front of the Assembly Rooms in a certain district of Elysium.

SCENE II.—A room in Helen of Troy's country house.

SCENE III.—The library in Voltaire's house.

ACT II

SCENE I.—Miss Nightingale's Elysian Nursing Home.

SCENE II.—A pavilion in the fields.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

Two EVZONES
ARISTOPHANES
VOLTAIRE
FROUST, *a poet*
AN ENGLISH SOLDIER
ABRAHAM LINCOLN
FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE
VOLUMNIA, *mother of Conolanus*
FREDERICK THE GREAT
HELEN OF TROY
RHODOPE, *her maid*
ALEXANDER SERGEYEVITCH PUSHKIN
THE VICAR OF BRAY
A NURSING SISTER
GALEN
IRENE

ACT I

SCENE I

The scene is played in front of the Assembly Rooms in a certain district of Elysium.

Two attendants guard the door : Greek soldiers wearing the uniform of EVZONES, *the white-kilted Highlanders of their country. They have a confident and soldierly demeanour' but their carnage is not stiff like that of sentries of the Brigade of Guards.*

Whenever the door of the building opens, the harsh and confused noise of many people talking is heard. A large audience has gathered and is seated within, but the speakers have not yet arrived', and though an organ is being played to entertain the waiting assembly, it can scarcely be heard for the gabble of impatient voices. The purpose of the meeting is stated on two large posters, one on either side of the building, which read as follows :

THE POET
and
HIS RESPONSIBILITY

A discussion by
ROBERT BURNS
and
ALEXANDER SERGEYEVITCH PUSHKIN

Chairman :
ARISTOPHANES

Over each bill a red-lettered slip has been pasted: 'House Full'.

All the characters of the play wear the costumes of their own country and period, and they appear to be in that time of life at which their fame was highest, or resemble the popular conception of them.

ARISTOPHANES, *who is the first to appear, is severe of aspect, as befits a comic dramatist; bearded in the fashion of ancient Greece, he wears a bordered himation, loosely draped, that leaves the upper part of his body bare.*

VOLTAIRE, *who follows him, is a meagre, shrivelled Jigure with an elderly gait, bewigged and wearing black, but black that is cut to the elegance of the eighteenth century ; lace adorns it, rings gleam on his white fingers.*

FIRST EVZONE. Every man has a right to his own opinion, you can't deny that.

SECOND EVZONE. I don't deny it. What I'm saying is that an opinion is one thing and a fact is another, and a fact will remain a fact in spite of forty opinions to the contrary.

FIRST EVZONE. I suppose you were taught to believe that——

SECOND EVZONE. It isn't what I was taught, it's what I've learnt. I had sixty years to learn things, and it's reasonable to suppose that I learnt more in sixty years than you could in twenty-four.

FIRST EVZONE. I'd been married for six years, in prison for eighteen months, and fought in the war. You can't do any of those things without learning a good deal.

SECOND EVZONE. I'd been married three times, I fought in four campaigns, and I had the wit to keep out of prison. Therefore I know more than you, and that's not an opinion, that's a fact.

FIRST EVZONE. I'm not prepared to accept it——

SECOND EVZONE. Quiet ! (FREDERICK THE GREAT *comes in : a pompous man in a brilliant uniform. He walks towards the door of the Assembly Rooms, but is halted by the* EVZONES.) Very sorry, sir, but you can't come in here.

FREDERICK. I cannot go in ? / cannot go in ? Do you not know who I am ?

FIRST EVZONE. Weren't you King of Prussia once upon a time, sir ?

FREDERICK. Was I King of Prussia ! Ha ! it is laughable. I, Frederick the Great, was I once King of Prussia ! You know nothing, you ignorant peasants. Get out of my way.

SECOND EVZONE. It doesn't matter who you are, sir, you can't come in here.

FREDERICK. Why not, you fool ?

SECOND EVZONE. Because the house is full.

FREDERICK. Who says so ?

SECOND EVZONE. It says so on that poster.

FREDERICK *looks at the nearer poster, stares frowning for a moment, then seizes it and tears it in two, and throws the pieces on the ground.*

FREDERICK. It is dangerous to interfere with me or to oppose my wishes ! Wherever I go, I insist upon justice, and always I get my own way.

The EVZONES, *puzzled and a little shocked by his behaviour, make no further attempt to oppose him, and* FREDERICK *goes into the rooms.*

FIRST EVZONE. He's got an interesting character, hasn't he ?

SECOND EVZONE. It won't do him any good in the long run. I remember one of our officers who used to behave in that way.

FIRST EVZONE. What happened to him ?

SECOND EVZONE. He never knew what hit him ; but everyone else did.

There is a brief pause in their conversation and the younger EVZONE *tries to repair the torn poster.*

FIRST EVZONE. I wonder if they're going to come ? It's nearly half an hour past the time.

SECOND EVZONE. If there's one thing I hate, it's unpunctuality. You can waste money if you like — that doesn't matter much — but you shouldn't waste a man's work, and you shouldn't waste his time.

FIRST EVZONE. It depends on what you mean by time. Five minutes on the guard-room clock is one thing, and five minutes in the life of a poet is something else. It may be that he won't notice it at all, and it's quite possible that he'll think it's eternity.

SECOND EVZONE. And what happens to the four hundred people they keep waiting? They've been kept waiting for a good thirty minutes, not five, and even to a poet that's six times nothing, or half a dozen eternities; and you can have too much of either, in my opinion. I know that Mr. Burns and Mr. Pushkin are great poets, but they're men like anybody else, and if they make an appointment they ought to watch the clock and keep it.

FIRST EVZONE. Now you've put yourself in the wrong completely. First of all you admit they're great poets, and then you say they're just like the rest of us. But we're not poets, neither great nor little, and therefore

you're talking nonsense. They're not like the rest of us, and you know it. But you wish they were, you want everyone to think and behave the same way, so as to make all Elysium neat and tidy, and easily managed, with no one being obstreperous and everybody as punctual as if the whole place was a parade-ground. But I say that would be dull.

SECOND EVZONE. It wouldn't be as dull as sitting for half an hour, with nothing to do, waiting for Mr. Burns and Mr. Pushkin to make up their minds whether it's eternity or four o'clock.

The door opens with a gust of noise from inside, and **ARISTOPHANES** *Comes Out.*

ARISTOPHANES. Is there any sign of those ink-swilling poets yet ?

SECOND EVZONE. No, sir.

ARISTOPHANES. Your sergeant sent three men to look for them : have they come back ?

FIRST EVZONE. Not yet, sir.

ARISTOPHANES. And it's four o'clock. Four o'clock. . . . Have either of you any experience in quelling a riot?

FIRST EVZONE. You generally fire the first volley over their heads, sir.

SECOND EVZONE. I think it's better, on the whole, to fix bayonets and advance at a steady pace, doing nothing to inflame the anger of the crowd, but showing quite unmistakably that you mean business.

ARISTOPHANES. That's all very well in ordinary circumstances, but what happens when your rioters are four hundred of the leading citizens of Elysium ? Four hundred indestructible celebrities, every one of them

a headline, heroes of the history-books, roaring their immortality. The whole top-drawer, the pride and cream of the world for two thousand years is in there.

FIRST EVZONE. People like that would certainly be offended by a bayonet charge.

ARISTOPHANES, But something will have to be done, and done quickly. This topic of the poets has filled them all with pig-headed conviction or the four-footed contrariness of a mule. Most of them were in a mood to fight for a decision before they came here, and now, after waiting for half an hour, their opinions have come to the boil, and how to cool them again, unless by drowning, I can't think.

SECOND EVZONE. It wouldn't be easy to drown them, sir.

ARISTOPHANES. Listen to that. They're shouting now.

SECOND EVZONE. It's getting worse and worse.

ARISTOPHANES. On the one side of the hall they're declaring that a poet is a person of special gifts, and therefore of special privilege, and must be allowed to behave exactly as he likes ; the other side retorts that a poet is a man like the rest of us, with the obligations and duties common to all in any civilised community. And while half of them argue with the frenzy of fanatical belief, the others reply with the passion of absolute conviction, and the total effect is sound and fury.

FIRST EVZONE. Now, in my opinion, for what it's worth, a poet is primarily a poet, and must be recognised as such.

SECOND EVZONE. If your poet eats like a man, and lives in a house like other men, and takes a wife in the natural way, he must be regarded first and fore-

most as a citizen, with all the responsibilities of a citizen : that's what I say.

ARISTOPHANES. So you're infected by it too ? There'll be civil war if it spreads like this.

FIRST EVZONE. There's someone coming now, sir. Two of them.

ARISTOPHANES. Pushkin and Burns ? They'll be torn limb from limb ; but if our savage intellectuals get their victims now, the rest of us may live in peace.

SECOND EVZONE. No, sir, it isn't Mr. Burns and it isn't Mr. Pushkin. It's M. de Voltaire and a gentleman with him that I've never seen before.

ARISTOPHANES. I wonder if Voltaire would satisfy them. . . .

> VOLTAIRE *comes in, followed by a tall young man dressed in pyjamas with a blanket round his shoulders. This is* FROUST. *His hair is untidy and abundant, his manner assured, his voice high-pitched. He is an English poet, lately deceased.*

VOLTAIRE. I hope I am not late ? I was busy with my correspondence. The wretched habit I acquired upon earth of writing letters, and answering them, still clings to me. I am well aware there's no more vicious perversion of one's time than answering letters, and yet I write fifty a week, to strangers who use a pen for no other purpose than to scratch themselves wherever they may itch, and are quite incapable of understanding what I, with my laborious devotion to reason, compose in reply. But a habit is like a mistress : once acquired, the initiative is transferred to the other party. — I'm not too late for the discussion ?

ARISTOPHANES. You are late, but not the last.

Neither Burns nor Pushkin has arrived.

VOLTAIRE. Your speakers should have been writers of blank verse. It is more conducive to punctuality than rhyme. There is nothing more inimical to a sense of time than the quest for a conclusively ringing couplet. (*To* FROUST) Do you, sir, use rhyme ?

FROUST. In all my important work — I should say in my longer poems, for everything I write is important — I use a prosody of my own invention, based upon what I call syllabic polytones with accentual dissonance.

ARISTOPHANES. Are you a poet ?

VOLTAIRE. He is. He told me so in his first sentence. He has newly arrived here, I met him by mere accident.

FROUST. I am — or I was — the leader of the New English Nominalists. Even in academic circles my significance was undisputed, and the intellectual critics were unanimous in asserting that I was the most remarkable force in English literature since Wordsworth ; but more dynamic than he. My death was an unmitigated tragedy.

ARISTOPHANES. A poet, an English poet ? Newly dead from those embattled islands ? You're the very man I need !

FROUST. I was not actually in England——

ARISTOPHANES. What does that matter ? A poet dead in a war for freedom and the spirit of man can hold any audience in Elysium. My dear young sir, you have observed these placards ?

FROUST. With a great deal of interest. It is barely six weeks ago that I spoke on this very subject, and I made it clear that Poetic Nominalism could easily be extended to politics and economics——

ARISTOPHANES. Keep your doctrine for a larger audience. The very top and cream of our society

is here, as hungry as cannibals for new argument. Will you come and speak to them ?

FROUST. Of course I will. I am always ready to speak to a really large and influential audience. I feel it is my duty.

ARISTOPHANES. Then come and discharge it. I am presiding, and you, Voltaire, will introduce him.

VOLTAIRE. When you have pronounced the grace, I throw him to the lions ? I like formality.

ARISTOPHANES *(to* EVZONEs). Open the door.

FROUST. What ravishing little skirts your policemen wear ! Have you a ballet here ?

As the doors are opened a tumultuous noise is heard and a glimpse is caught of the turbulence within. ARISTOPHANES *leads the way,* FROUST *and* voLTAiRE/o//0H;, *and the* EVZONES *close the double doors behind them.*

SECOND EVZONE. And he's a poet !

FIRST EVZONE. I liked the way he stood up for himself. Confidence in a young man is a very good sign.

SECOND EVZONE. I can't think how he got here. I'll lay a month's pay he wasn't killed in the war. Why is he wearing pyjamas ?

FIRST EVZONE. I suppose he died of wounds in hospital somewhere. Or he may have been in a ship that was torpedoed.

SECOND EVZONE. I don't believe it. If you ask me, he's come in under false pretences.

FIRST EVZONE. And suppose he hasn't been in the war ; what then ?

SECOND EVZONE. Then he's got no business here.

FIRST EVZONE. Now, listen to me, and tell me this

first : how many poets have we got in Elysium ?

SECOND EVZONE. Hundreds of them. They're like a swarm of bees or a shoal of mackerel. That's why there's so much excitement about this debate.

FIRST EVZONE. But if someone had invented total war three thousand years ago, and everybody had always been liable to national service from the beginning of history, all the great poets of the world wouldn't have been poets at all. They'd have become gunners, and munition-makers, and clerks in the Pay Corps, and Civil Servants, and stokers, and Air Raid Wardens. And what would the world be like to-day if there wasn't any poetry in it ?

SECOND EVZONE. Just exactly what it is ! Poetry's never made a penn'orth of difference to the ordinary man.

FIRST EVZONE. The ordinary man would still be an ordinary monkey if it wasn't for poetry !

SECOND EVZOI^E. Now, there's no point in losing your temper and making wild statements that don't mean anything at all——

FIRST EVZONE. I've got a very good reason for losing my temper, because I believe a great poet is first cousin to Almighty God, and you say he's nothing better than a clerk in a warehouse, and ought to stop writing poetry and become a healthy citizen !

SECOND EVZONE. And so he ought ! Healthy citizens are what we need.

FIRST EVZONE. If it wasn't for the poets we wouldn't be aware of health, we wouldn't be aware of citizenship, we wouldn't be aware of the need for them, we wouldn't be aware of anything at all.

SECOND EVZONE. Do you think I depend on poets to know what's right and wrong, to know if it's a

fine day or beginning to rain ? Haven't I got a mind of my own ?

FIRST EVZONE. I see very little sign of it.

SECOND EVZONE. Because you're more than half blind ; and I've always known it from the sort of women you choose. And if you take after your father, your mother must have been wholly blind, even supposing he could afford to pay for his entertainment, which I don't think likely.

FIRST EVZONE. If I were really short-sighted, I wouldn't be so upset by your appearance ; but as it is, I'm always reminded of a dead mule in a good summer for bluebottles. I admit, however, that my nose may play some part in suggesting the comparison.

SECOND EVZONE. I wonder if my hands suggest anything to you ? I wonder if your sense of feeling, when they're round your throat, will be as acute as your sense of smell ?

FIRST EVZONE. It would be interesting to find out, but I don't suppose you'll retain consciousness long enough to make the experiment. . . ,

An ENGLISH SOLDIER *has come in. He is wearing a ragged battle-suit, a steel helmet jauntily aslant; he carries a slung rifle and the equipment of battle-order. He is a lightly moving man, alert and wiry, good-humoured and tough.*

SOLDIER. Well, what's going on here ? Eliminating contest for the Middleweight Championship of Elysium, or just a barrack-room conversazione?

SECOND EVZONE. Who are you ?

SOLDIER. Don't you worry about me, I shan't interfere. Go on with the argument.

SECOND EVZONE. Let me see your papers.

SOLDIER. Now, don't be unfriendly.

SECOND EVZONE. I don't want any back-chat. Let me see them.

SOLDIER. Well, it so happens that you're a couple of hours too late in asking. I got my pocket picked this morning, down at the harbour. There was a big crowd there to-day: new arrivals. Most of them going to the Reception Camp for identification and disposal. I got into the wrong queue, and when I came out again I'd lost my pay-book.

SECOND EVZONE. Do you expect me to believe that ?

SOLDIER. Why not ?

FIRST EVZONE. How did you come here ?

SOLDIER. The usual way.

FIRST EVZONE. Killed in battle ?

SOLDIER. You're Greeks, aren't you ? Well, you ought to know the place. It's between the sea and the mountains, on a gulf on the east side. A narrow pass, though not so narrow as it used to be. It's called Thermopylae.

SECOND EVZONE. You were killed in Greece, fighting for Greece ?

SOLDIER. Yes — this time.

FIRST EVZONE. My comrade, my brother !

SECOND EVZONE. That makes a difference. That makes a lot of difference. Look here : you come along to our canteen when we go off duty, and we'll make a night of it. And then to-morrow I'll get you some papers. I'll get you a General's papers if you want them.

SOLDIER. Not an Italian General.

SECOND EVZONE. No, a good General. You trust me.

FIRST EVZONE. We were killed in this war too. He's my oldest friend ; we were fighting side by side. Our regiment was one of the three that defeated the Alpini in the Pindus Mountains. The Italians were very proud of that division. They said it was their crack division. And we, the Evzones, heard it crack. We cracked it !

SECOND EVZONE. What's going on now ? It looks like trouble, doesn't it? *(The doors of the Assembly Rooms open a few inches, and tremble ajar. There is a hurricane of noise within, and a breeze of the hullabaloo escapes. Then, from inside, the doors are closed again with a bang.}* Open them, and see what's happening.

The EVZONES, *with some difficulty, open the doors and discover* ABRAHAM LINCOLN *with a protective arm round a lady's shoulders. His back is to the stage, and he is speaking, with considerable anger, to the assembly within.* LINCOLN, *when he can be clearly seen, is the familiar figure : tall and lean, deep furrows and benignity in his face. Pie is dressed in shabby black, a greenish tinge upon it, and the pockets of his coat are stuffed with papers. He wears a top-hat.*

The lady whom he is protecting is FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE. MISS NIGHTINGALE *is to be imagined at the age of fifty or so she is dressed in a fashion of the 1870*s. An angular lady of imperious temper, she has a spacious brow, an aquiline commanding nose, and a rather bitter mouth.*

LINCOLN. Whatever the urgency of discussion, whatever the merits of your case may be, they do not warrant your interference——

*By the pressure of the crowd within^* LINCOLN *and* MISS NIGHTINGALE *arc forced away from the door, and two or three of the angry audience follow them on to the stage. An Elizabethan poet and a Churchman who resembles El Greco's portrait of the Inqmntor Nino de Guevara are in the forefront, but most prominent of all is the redoubtable figure of a Roman matron. This is* **VOLUMNIA.**

I say, no matter what the merits of your case may be, they do not warrant your interference with the liberty of individuals, and they certainly don't excuse your offering rudeness to a lady. You, Volumnia——

VOLUMNIA. Yes, I, Volumnia ! I bore a man-child once——

MISS N. Is that relevant to the argument ?

VOLUMNIA. The argument, untimely smothered in the extreme heat and breath of bitter words, has been extinguished quite.

LINCOLN. Precisely. And if Miss Nightingale is indisposed to take sides with either party, she has the undisputed right to remain neutral, and you have no title in law nor moral justification for endeavouring, by any form of coercion, to obtain her support against her own will.

VOLUMNIA. How limp and peevish is the mind that cannot find a party ! Rather than stand aside, when once debate is joined, I'd fasten all my nails within the bubbling eyes of him who stood the neaiest, and cry to Heaven, ' Here's my enemy ! '

MISS N. Stuff and nonsense.

LINCOLN. If Miss Nightingale wishes to leave the meeting, she is at liberty to do so, and I insist that her liberty be respected. Stand back, Volumnia.

VOLUMNIA. With purpose unconcluded ! — Come, inside ! But time will tell what direful times betide.

VOLUMNIA *and her supporters retire into the hall, and the* EVZONES *close the doors behind them.*

MISS N. Thank you, Mr. Lincoln. I am obliged for your very timely assistance. When temper is roused to the pitch that we have seen, reasonable discussion becomes impossible, and the reasonable person is consequently at some disadvantage. I had no more intention of taking a side in this disgraceful fracas than I would think of intervening, on the bank of an African river, in a struggle between a crocodile and a male gorilla.

LINCOLN. To tell you the truth, I was mighty glad of the chance to get myself out, under the pretext of helping you. It was a very unpleasant experience, and I hope your nerves haven't been shaken by it.

MISS N. My nerves are not easily affected, Mr. Lincoln. But I fear my bonnet has suffered, and I am sorry for that. It will not be easy to replace it, for I find little to please me in the more recent styles of millinery. I must go home and do what I can to repair the damage to it.

LINCOLN. I should count it an honour to escort you, if I may.

MISS N. Thank you, Mr. Lincoln, but I shall not trouble you further. *(To the* SOLDIER) Are you being properly looked after here ?

SOLDIER. No complaints, ma'am.

MISS N. You are sadly in need of a new uniform. Tell your Quartermaster to give you one immediately, and if he offers any objection, say that you are speak-

ing on my instruction. I am Miss Nightingale.

SOLDIER. Very good, ma'am.

MISS N. *(to* EVZONES). The night before last I observed that some of the windows in your guard-room were shut. In weather like this you must keep all your windows open at all times. Do you understand that ?

FIRST EVZONE. Yes, ma'am.

MISS N. Then kindly remember it. Good afternoon, Mr. Lincoln.

Calm and dignified, she leaves the scene.

SECOND EVZONE. I like sleeping with the windows shut. It's what I'm used to.

LINCOLN. When I was a young man they weren't made to open, and we thought they were pretty good windows at that. But if you take my advice, you'll do what she says. A little fresh air isn't nearly as bad as Miss Nightingale on the war-path.

SOLDIER. Here's another refugee breaking out.

One of the doors opens slightly, a hand and arm come out — black sleeve and lace ruffles — and clasp the outer side of it.

LINCOLN. I recognise that hand. Voltaire ! I thought so.

An EVZONE *has pulled that side of the door open.* VOLTAIRE, *backing out, is followed by* FREDERICK THE GREAT, *in a vile temper; but he cannot come very far, as now both doors are held against him. He is caught between them.*

FREDERICK. Come back, you viper !

VOLTAIRE. His Majesty of Prussia has no jurisdiction here !

FREDERICK. Can you deny the sacred claim of friendship ? I gave you my hospitality. . . .

VOLTAIRE. I nearly died of it.

FREDERICK. Come back !

The SOLDIER, *advancing lightly up the steps to the building, places the palm of his left hand against* FREDERICK'S *face, and exclaiming,* ' Move along, there, move along ! ' *pushes him back. The doors are closed, and the two* EVZONES *brace their backs against them.*

VOLTAIRE. Both sides have now become so completely unreasonable that poor Frederick, who, being a German, is desperately anxious to take the wrong one, cannot make up his mind which way to face, and is quite out of humour in consequence.

LINCOLN. Our only hope is to keep the doors closed and shut in the whole crazy herd of them till they've spent their fury on each other. What became of that young man in pyjamas ?

VOLTAIRE. He appeared to be in considerable danger of losing them. I am sorry my good-nature betrayed me into bringing him, for it was he who stirred the pot till it boiled over.

LINCOLN. He may be a good poet, but I didn't take very kindly to his voice.

ARISTOPHANES *and* FROUST *come in, right.* ARISTOPHANES *has a cut on his forehead,* FROUST *a black eye. He has lost his blanket, his pyjama-jacket is torn*

across, and he is wearing a Highland bonnet with a jewel and a plume in it.

ARISTOPHANES. Gentlemen, the crisis is approaching. Keep that door shut, if you can.

LINCOLN. How did you get out ?

ARISTOPHANES. By twisting the neck of a Portuguese admiral, climbing over the dead body of a persistent martyr, and kicking a German philosopher in his Absolute Reality. I then found myself in a small room at the back of the hall, climbed through a window, and Froust followed me.

LINCOLN. If two men get through a window, so can a hundred, given time. *(To the* SOLDIER) You come with me. Let's see if we can do anything about it.

LINCOLN *and the* SOLDIER *go out, right.*

VOLTAIRE *(to* FROUST). That cap isn't yours. Have you been looting the dead ?

FROUST. I took it from someone who said he was a Jacobite, and wanted to wrestle with me.

VOLTAIRE. It was you, you unfortunate young man, who stirred up this ferment.

FROUST. It was at your invitation that I spoke — or yours, perhaps. At any rate, I only did what I had been asked to do.

ARISTOPHANES. You let me suppose you had been killed in the war, whereas you had taken no part in it whatsoever.

FROUST. I regarded the war as an interruption to my career. I had done nothing to provoke it, and therefore I did what I could to avoid it.

ARISTOPHANES. As soon as it broke out, you left your own country and took refuge in Mexico.

FROUST. In many ways I found Mexico more enlightened than England.

VOLTAIRE. I told the audience that you had died of your wounds, for so I inferred from our first conversation.

FROUST. I am not responsible for your inferences.

ARISTOPHANES. You are responsible for contradicting them. You chose to make a true confession at the very moment when anybody with a scrap of common sense would have gone to ground in the biggest lie he could find.

FROUST. I am not in the least ashamed of what happened. I died, most regrettably for the world, of a perforating gastric ulcer, the result of Mexican cooking. I was living in Mexico, and therefore I had to eat Mexican food. It was an unpleasant experience, but I cannot see that it was in any way dishonourable.

> LINCOLN, *some agitation apparent in his manner, comes in right. He is soon followed by the* SOLDIER, *whose back is to the stage, for he is facing and restraining as well as he can, with his rifle for a barrier, that part of the crowd which has broken out through the window. Its leaders are the Elizabethan poet, the Churchman who looks like El Greco's Inquisitor, and the Roman matron,* VOLUMNIA.

LINCOLN. We were too late, gentlemen. Too late and too few. We did what we could, but we were heavily outnumbered. The time has come for a tactical withdrawal.

VOLUMNIA. Come on, you laggard cowards ! Must

these old withered arms teach you to fight, when glory beckons ? Seize them, the fustian rogues, and shake their mouldy bones out of their dusty coats !

By this time ARISTOPHANES, LINCOLN, *and* FROUST *are on the extreme left of the stage ; and immediately following* VOLUMNIA'J *speech, the doors of the Assembly Rooms are forced open, the* EVZONES *thrown back, and* FREDERICK THE GREAT *appears, with others behind him.*

FREDERICK. My patience is exhausted ! Now we shall have war !

CURTAIN

ACT I

SCENE II

The following night : a full moon.

The scene is a room in HELEN OF TROY'J *country house ; and Oriental taste is evident both in the architecture and the furniture. The back of the room is open, through a central arch, to the moonlit sky. Arches of less diameter complete the background. A trellis of wrought iron, like a Moorish grille, stands in front of the central arch, breaking the moonlight, and before it on a cushioned divan draped with a striped cloth* HELEN *is reclining.*

HELEN'sJ *beauty has triumphantly survived her youth, and custom, it becomes clear, has not staled her ardour. That she dramatises her emotions can hardly be denied, but in a woman who has been lovely for so long, and so long an artist of the emotions, this mannerism must be regarded with a kindly understanding.*

RHODOPE, HELENA *maid, who is young and charming, is sitting on her heels near the foot of the couch. Both she and* HELEN *wear classical Greek costume.*

HELEN.

Midnight and the Moon are gone,
Far from Orion the Doves have flown,
The long hours labour with the Dawn,
And I lie on my bed alone.

Alone . . .

RHODOPE. But the moon is high, madame, and there is still an hour to midnight.

HELEN. My mind looks forward to the dark and solitude. I shall not sleep. I did not sleep last night, did I, Rhodope ?

RHODOPE. Not very well, madame.

HELEN. Not at all, Rhodope. I did not sleep at all. I lay and tortured myself, wondering what had happened to him. Why has he not come ?

RHODOPE. It's very curious when you consider the way he's been behaving for the last week or more. I would have said, and everybody would have agreed with me, that wild horses couldn't keep him away.

HELEN. There are no wild horses in Elysium.

RHODOPE. I used the expression merely to illustrate his devotion, madame.

HELEN. But it is true, Rhodope ! There *are* no wild horses in Elysium. Neither wolf nor leopard, nor mountain bear nor lion live here. There is nothing wild except my heart. My untamed heart ! And when the night comes, when no birds sing and the panting lizard is lost in the darkened rock and the brightness of running water is deep and still, we who are wild need refuge from our freedom. We need love !

RHODOPE. And it did appear that we could rely on Mr. Burns for that. Didn't it, Madame ?

HELEN. Why has he not come ?

RHODOPE. It all seemed to be going so well. To begin with we had Mr. Burns and Mr. Pushkin coming together, and then Mr. Pushkin came less and less, and Mr. Burns came more and more. And I always think that makes such a good start : when there's competition, I mean, and then one of them sees that he is winning. A man who has defeated another man is so proud of himself that he wants to give you all

the pleasure that both might have given ; just to show you how good he is.

HELEN. I was much attracted by Pushkin, but he was less responsible than Burns. His temper was too volatile ; his manner, on occasion, *farouche.* But Burns is sincere. He told me of a saying in his country : ' Dark and true and tender is the North '. I like sincerity in a man. Why has he not come ?

My heart's a wounded antelope !
And wanton flesh to widow'd bone
Bemoans the withering of hope,
And I lie on my bed, alone !

The shape of a man, silhouetted by the moon, rises behind the iron grille, and can be seen pressed against it. His voice is heard.

PUSHKIN'S VOICE.

A bed that's broad enough for two
Will have the devil's job to atone
For incivility, if you
Persist in lying all alone !

HELEN. Who's there ? What voice is that ? It is not Burns. . . .

Through one of the smaller arches PUSHKIN *comes in. Sallow of complexion, with prominent lips and flashing eyes, he is elegantly whiskered and dressed in the extreme of early nineteenth-century fashion : the well-known engraving of Count d'Orsay might suggest his tailor.*

HELEN. Pushkin ! Why are you here ?

PUSHKIN. The moon is full. The moon, the Queen of Heaven, has no power to budge a dull and sleepy pool in the fields, but the deep and tumultuous sea obeys on the instant her command. Let us suppose your expected visitor was shallow like a pool, but in my soul there is the turbulence of the ocean : then you will understand why he is absent, and I am here.

HELEN. If the Queen of Heaven is your mistress, you should kneel to her and feel for her white hand.

PUSHKIN. I did. But suddenly remembering you, I thought she looked a trifle dowdy in comparison, and so I left her. Your hand's much whiter.

RHODOPE. Shall I go now, madamc ?

HELEN. No, no ! Pushkin is not here by invitation.

PUSHKIN. My name — surely you have not forgotten ? — is Alexander Sergeyevitch, and the diminutive, Sasha, is a pleasant usage of my more intimate friends. It would suit your lips to say it.

HELEN. And you would understand it, I have no doubt, as the invitation to further intimacy.

PUSHKIN. In Russia, the dear country of my life, my liberal views got me into trouble again and again. And I still believe, if not in progress, in progression.

HELEN. You seek your own pleasure. Why make a boast of it, Pushkin ?

PUSHKIN. Sasha.

HELEN. To be selfish in love is the destruction of love. It is the base-born cousin of love that like a pirate comes to take its happiness ; true love comes to give. Your friend Burns knew that. He was sincere. Where is Burns ?

PUSHKIN. You need not worry about him. I promise you he won't interfere with us.

HELEN. Why do you speak with so much certainty ? What has happened to him ?

PUSHKIN. For as long as I could I endured the sight of him lapping cream, like a cat, at your feet ; purring under your hand ; offering you, to drown in, the adoration of his eyes — and when the spectacle became intolerable, I took steps to end it. I have had him kidnapped.

HELEN. My gentle Burns, the victim of your brutal jealousy ! You are a savage, Pushkin. Where is he ?

PUSHKIN. If there is little moderation in my methods, it is because there are no limits to my love. Do not blame me too severely ; for you are liable to the charge of incitement.

HELEN. Where is he ? How did you kidnap him ?

PUSHKIN. It was more difficult, I confess, than I had looked for. I knew two countrymen of his, Highlanders who had been killed in some mad romantic foray, and were still hungry for adventure, and told them I was dying for your love. They sympathised. * Will you kidnap my rival ? ' I asked. ' Who is he ? ' they demanded. ' Robert Burns,' say I. ' A canting Presbyterian ! ' cries one. ' A bellowing Lowland stot ! ' exclaims the other. — There is no hatred, Helen, like a neighbour's hatred. Foreigners may skirmish, but fellow-natives fight to the death. — 'That is the man; I say ; ' will you take care of him ? ' ' Leave him to us,' they answer, and I thought all was well. But when it came to the push, Burns fought like the devil, broke the nose of one of rny Highlanders, and the other sent for help. That was yesterday. We renewed the battle this morning, finally overcame your former lover——

HELEN. My lover still.

PUSHKIN. Your former lover, Helen. We overcame him, and removed him to a place of safety ; I left my Highlanders on guard and hurried here.

HELEN. I feel his misadventure like a bruise upon my breast. Poor Burns ! I knew he was sincere.

PUSHKIN. Have I not proved, in action, a sincerity as deep ? And more imaginative ?

HELEN. But you are a savage, Pushkin.

PUSHKIN. Sasha.

HELEN. You are cruel . . . Sasha.

RHODOPE. Shall I go now, madame ?

PUSHKIN. *Yes, go !*

HELEN. No, Rhodope, no !

PUSHKIN. The poor girl is limp with sleep. Look at her eyes, drooping like a tired child dragging herself to bed. Drooping towards bed. Have you no sympathy ?

HELEN. Poor Rhodope ! I was being selfish. Go, then, do. Go, child.

RHODOPE *bows, and goes out.*

PUSHKIN. It is the cause, it is the cause, my soul !

HELEN. Do you seek comfort in philosophy now ?

PUSHKIN. I seek a destiny of most damnable impotence. For beauty, close it as you may, is never captured. Your golden voice may rhapsodise, philosophise, or tell the simple truth : no matter, I can silence it ! But your beauty is impregnable. I can storm it, as I shall, and still it is yours. It is you who maintain the attack, not I. Your beauty crowds my heart, and I who would possess you am myself possessed — by you.

HELEN. So many years ago that I have lost all

count of them, a bird like a little falcon, wearied by a storm, came to my garden in the town of Troy. Though wounded, it was fierce. I tended it, I gave it food, and healed its tattered wing. That savage bird grew tame and would take a morsel from my lips. He flew away, returned, and stayed with us again. I fed him from my lips and he touched me with his wings. An old sea captain told us that bird had come to us, besieged in Troy, from Mount Caucasus. Your country, Sasha.

PUSHKIN. Beauty had conquered him, we yield to nothing else ! Let all the tribes that ever leapt out of the old scarred loins of war come in their steel, and we shall meet them, throw them back — we Russians, Tartars if you like ! — but beauty is our master, and our mistress ! Beauty commands, takes tribute as she will. Give me your lips, and my wings will touch you, not as the beating of a conqueror, but in further supplication.

HELEN. It is the cause, it is the cause, my soul.

PUSHKIN. Philosophy ?

HELEN. No, surrender ! Give me what is yours, and all that's mine I give to you. You talk of beauty : what does that mean ? A certain disposition of the bone, a tincture of the skin, a congruence, perhaps, of brightness in the eyes, a melting closure of the lips, a measured strength and softness in the body — what more ? That's all ! But if the will to give combines these minor virtues in a corporate action, and all unite to make of beauty, not a thing itself, but the craftsman of love — oh, Sasha, what is love ?

PUSHKIN. You and I made perfect.

HELEN. If I were bold as you, I'd answer yes !

PUSHKIN. Were you devout as I, you'd answer yes.

RHODOPE *comes in.*

RHODOPE. Aristophanes is here, madame. He is most insistent, and declares that he will not leave without seeing you. He knows that Mr. Pushkin is here.

HELEN. He should have come long since, or at some future time. Tell him there is a day to-morrow.

PUSHKIN. Tell him to pack and go. Tell him to look for business of his own, and mind it.

RHODOPE. I did all I could to hinder and dissuade him, madame. But nothing I could say had any effect.

ARISTOPHANES *(outside].* Helen !

HELEN. Let him come in.

As RHODOPE *turns to summon him,* ARISTOPHANES *enters.*

ARISTOPHANES. Good evening to you, Helen. Have you heard what is happening ?

HELEN. It is very late for news.

ARISTOPHANES. It's very late indeed. And it's no choice of mine to be out of bed at such an hour. I've had a long, difficult, and rather dangerous day and I'm extremely tired.

HELEN. Bring wine, Rhodope.

RHODOPE *goes out.*

ARISTOPHANES. Thank you. *(To* PUSHKIN) Do you ever keep an appointment ?

PUSHKIN. At the moment I am rather anxiously wondering how long I must harbour disappointment.

ARISTOPHANES. For a long time, if you get your deserts.

PUSHKIN. If the conversation is to be angry, I think we have the right to play first.

ARISTOPHANES. The game began yesterday.

PUSHKIN. What day's to-day ?

ARISTOPHANES. A day too late.

PUSHKIN. But yesterday . . .

ARISTOPHANES. You begin to remember ?

PUSHKIN. I do remember — but it's impossible ! What is to-day ? No, no, it wasn't yesterday ! O Lord, how lamentable !

HELEN. Why do you stutter ? What's been forgotten ?

RHODOPE *returns with wine, and goes again.*

ARISTOPHANES. Yesterday afternoon about four hundred people came to hear Robert Burns and Alexander Sergeyevitch open a discussion on * The Poet and his Responsibility '.

HELEN. Yes, Burns had spoken about that. Was there a good debate ?

ARISTOPHANES. Many came to the meeting with a rumble of ready-made opinion, looking for someone who disagreed with them, on whom they could discharge it. Neither Burns nor Pushkin was there. The audience waited, impatient from the start, and the load of their conviction became intolerable in the mounting heat. They began to void it. The air grew dense with noise, the floor was shaken. Then a stranger came, led by Voltaire, and said he was a poet, an English poet newly dead ; but talkative. There was no sign of Burns, and Alexander Sergeyevitch had

forgotten to come. So I sent in the Englishman, who spoke enough for both. His voice was insolent, but also plaintive, a voice bred in shelter, disdainful of the world but yet in need of sympathy. His voice created, quickly, two hundred frowning enemies, and what he said confirmed their hatred and blew it to a blaze. The remaining double-hundred, their nerves on edge with that proud bleating voice, and stirred already to the pitch of war, saw their immediate chance and took it. They took the poet's side, this English poet, and with a cause to fight for — no better cause than that, but still a cause — began the tussle. Some of us escaped ; but all the others, men and women, piled their fury in a common fire that spread, before we left, to the adjacent town, and now has reached a dozen counties, more perhaps, and rages in Elysium. We are at war !

HELEN. But war's the sum and total of calamity. We are not irremediably at war ?

ARISTOPHANES. A bitter, neighbour-smite-neighbour, internecine war.

HELEN. Is all God's mercy spent ?

PUSHKIN. Whose side are you recruiting ? I caused this trouble, or some part of it, and I'll do what I can to mend it. Whichever party you have joined, I'll join it too.

ARISTOPHANES. You will join neither side.

PUSHKIN. I never yet heard of a quarrel and stood by neutral.

ARISTOPHANES. I do not ask you to be neutral.

PUSHKIN. Then what do you want ?

HELEN. You mean that Pushkin must take care of me ? You have come to warn us, and counsel us where to go for refuge? But, Aristophanes, could we

in conscience leave our people ?

ARISTOPHANES. I did not come to warn you, but to beg from you. I am a good housekeeper, Helen. I have come to borrow a recipe.

PUSHKIN. A strange time, surely, to be giving a dinner-party ?

ARISTOPHANES. I want a recipe for peace.

HELEN. But why come here for it ?

ARISTOPHANES. I had expected to find Burns here. He and Alexander Sergeyevitch are both poets, and the poet is a creator. The meaning of the word is one who makes. And I wanted the poets to work at their trade, and make peace.

PUSHKIN. If you want a proper peace, the first ingredient in your recipe must be Reason. But where can you find it in sufficient quantity ? Poets are too honest for your purpose ; you should go to a politician for your meal. Find a politician clever enough, and he'll cook a dish, and call it Peace, out of the scraps and leavings that you can find in any larder.

ARISTOPHANES. That's not the sort I want. We have seen too many meals cooked in a hurry for people, hungry after years of war, who clamour for peace no matter what it's made of, or what it tastes like: meals cooked by politicians and by soldiers, by conference and committee, by demagogues, dictators, economic prophets — and what's the result ? In some quarters a bellyful of wind, in others a griping of the gut. One nation suffers from an over-stulfed and fulminating liver, another from hot darting in the kidneys. Some grow hugely fat and all the blood in their body becomes the servant of mere digestion : the brain is starved, they yawn their heads off, their hands become soft like a woman's hands, and their legs go limp and drooping

at the knee. Their neighbours, meanwhile, crazy with starvation, scratching their flinty ribs, are poisoned by their hunger and ready from one week's end to the other to go stark mad. A yellow tongue, a sour and furry blanket of a tongue, betrays them all — all the whole sickroom of the wretched world — a nauseous floating of the head's endemic. Total rebellion of the stomach follows, then catastrophe, the general vomit, and up it comes : peace, undigested, on the floor!

PUSHKIN. A pretty picture of human history and mortal statesmanship. Pass me the wine. I feel a certain queasiness.

ARISTOPHANES. The peace we need, here in Elysium, must be a natural thing, a grouping of substance and principle in conformity with Nature's own creation. And you were right when you said there must be Reason in the recipe. Reason must be the first ingredient.

HELEN. There's no such recipe.

ARISTOPHANES. And so no peace ? No real and lasting peace ? We must make peace.

HELEN. The oak tree with its rough branches that spread a canopy of whispering leaves ; the foal with soft lips and silky hair, balancing stiffly on its thick young legs ; the dolphin leaping through a silver-crested wave, and the quick swallow nesting under the eaves — these are not made by measuring quantities and mixing them, nor is anything that lives. And peace must be a living thing ! It must move in strength and beauty, declare its will, and breed in turn as it was bred.

PUSHKIN. You've changed the metaphor.

HELEN. To improve the sense. A living thing is

not confected, but born alive. And the mother of Peace is Love.

ARISTOPHANES. Fool that I am ! Of course, of course ! I come to you, awkward and tetchy like an old woman caught in the rain, begging for recipes, when what I need — fool that I am ! — is a pedigree. Peace can't be made, she must be bred, and her pedigree's by Reason out of Love ! And now that we have learnt the way of it, now there's work to be done. You, honey-tongue, dearest of women that the world has known, you must go to work, now, on the instant !

HELEN. What work ?

ARISTOPHANES. To breed !

HELEN. That indeed is a true man's idea. To breed, indeed ! No, by heaven, no !

ARISTOPHANES. In all the ages of the world since you made Troy the siege of love, your name has been the warmth in every lamp that lit a way to love.

PUSHKIN. That's true, and simple truth. From the dark forest and our northern snow to the hot cliffs and peacock-blue Aegean sea, wherever men with their imagination build the intricate and soaring domiciles of love, your name in secret's carved upon the lintel. Their mouths may speak a hundred names, but in their hearts a tongue calls ' Helen, Helen ! ' Very quietly, so the bride won't hear, their beating hearts all whisper ' Helen ! ' You are the pulse that plumps the very thought of love. Your name's the ritual, more holy name of love.

ARISTOPHANES. And so, beyond all questioning, it's you who must breed and be the mother of our Peace.

HELEN. I will not do it. I do not want to do it !

ARISTOPHANES. The mother of our straight and stalwart Peace.

HELEN. I am not worthy.

ARISTOPHANES. What woman is there, here in this treasure-house of the world, that you would call more worthy ? Tell me her name.

HELEN. I cannot think.

PUSHKIN. There is none.

HELEN. But so many years have gone since then ! I mean, since I, being young, let love beguile me into mothering. No, no, I could not.

PUSHKIN. To save Elysium from a ten years' war ? You know what sorrow, famine, cruelty, and desolation come with war. Picture them again, and think that you, and you alone, can heal their wounds.

HELEN. Why do you take sides with him ? Why do you say that I — I and no other — must play this part ?

PUSHKIN. Why is there one moon in heaven and no other moon ? Your duty's clear, there's no time to be wasted, Helen, and you must consent. . . . And if I too can help to bring the Peace we all desire, then, Aristophanes . . .

ARISTOPHANES. Your sense of duty might persuade you to offer yourself as the other parent ? You fancy yourself as Father Reason ?

PUSHKIN. I first thought of it : surely that gives me a claim. And you cannot say that I, a poet, am devoid of reason.

HELEN. The venture is not ours alone. We have lost our moment, Sasha.

PUSHKIN. But why ? Whose claim is greater ? Do you think I'll stand aside, smiling fatly in the porch, while Helen goes in marriage to another man ? No

matter what his title, I'll dispute it. Either I'll be the bridegroom or the bridegroom's challenger : there's my position clearly stated.

ARISTOPHANES. As a poet, Alexander Sergeyevitch, I admire you. As a man, I like you. But as the prospective father of Peace, I doubt your influence. The qualities that made you a poet and distinguished your manhood were ingenuity and a passionate imagination. You had gaiety and wit, a daring wit, and your sympathy, whenever roused, was often as violent as the rage of ordinary men.

PUSHKIN. You've seen a wheat-field, waving and blazing in the sun, the air gasping for breath above its heat, so that you'd think the earth a baker's oven clothed in gold ? — A Russian soul in the summer of its desire is ripe as that, and fertile as the steppes in harvest-time.

ARISTOPHANES. And still — and still — you're not the sire I have in mind. You're not the calm and perfect picture of pure Reason that I want for stud. I have another man in view.

PUSHKIN. His name ?

ARISTOPHANES. Yesterday, when everybody lost his reason — or rather, threw it from him like a book that he detested — I heard him speak of reason, of his own possession of it, so quietly that it might have been the colour of his hair. Like a man, indifferent to appearance, who says, ' I'm going grey,' he spoke of his own servitude to reason. Not boasting, but as though, like hair gone grey, reason had become his colour. And I remembered that, remembered him, the very moment when you said Reason must make our Peace.

HELEN. Who is he ?

ARISTOPHANES. Voltaire.

PUSHKIN. That rattling bag of ancient crooked bones !

HELEN. Oh, no ! You would not marry me to him !

PUSHKIN. That little mouldy shrivelled cask of vinegar !

ARISTOPHANES. You are a woman, Helen ; you have loved and seen a ten years' war. No one more truly knows what war will mean in terms of misery. No one, more richly than you, can see what peace will mean in terms of gladness.

PUSHKIN. No peace is worth the profanation of her beauty. Deny him, Helen — tell him no !

HELEN. Whatever I have had of beauty I have had so long it's lost some value, like a child's old toy. — But are you sure ? Oh, Aristophanes, I would do anything to save Elysium from war's ruin and the scars of hate ; to bring back peace, the richness and the gladness and the growth of peace. But that old man : so splinter-sharp and sour ! Can you be sure ?

ARISTOPHANES. He stands to all the world for Reason, as you for Love. His name's the very synonym of Reason. And you——

PUSHKIN. She shall not do it. I forbid her !

HELEN. You, Sasha ? You forbid me ?

PUSHKIN. It is my love that speaks.

HELEN. Your love forbids me to make peace ?

PUSHKIN. I say you shall not marry that old man.

HELEN. In all my life no one has ever spoken so before. As no man has ever denied me, none has ever commanded me. My only master is my heart.

PUSHKIN. Helen !

HELEN. Be quiet. For I must think and count the cost of this.

ARISTOPHANES. Love count the cost ! Love's not a

shopkeeper. Love gives, and gives with both her hands.

HELEN. Yes, like that.

ARISTOPHANES. To please herself, to please a wheedling boy, Love gives herself entire.

HELEN. Again and yet again. Ah, spendthrift Love !

ARISTOPHANES. And now, when all Elysium's at stake, and a whole people, down on their knees, will bless you——

HELEN. Will they in truth ? Will they be grateful ?

ARISTOPHANES. Gratitude is a pauper's word. For such a gift as peace they'll worship you.

HELEN. They would, they would ! But the reward counts nothing, I do not think of that. *(She takes a bell from a table and rings it.}*

PUSHKIN. What are you going to do ? Helen, you'll break my heart.

HELEN. No, Sasha, no. Your heart's more durable than you suppose. But tell me this : Voltaire himself is ready for the marriage ?

ARISTOPHANES. Would any man say no ?

HELEN. Oh, Aristophanes ! At every point you beat me !

ARISTOPHANES. Then you agree ? You'll marry him and breed our Peace ?

PUSHKIN. Take time. Take time and think.

HELEN. To give ! It is our woman's blessing and love's high principle, to give. And there's no truth in giving, nobility or worth in giving, without giving all. . . . *(She rings the bell again, with impatient vigour, and* RHODOPE, *sleepy-eyed, comes in.)* Rhodope !

RHODOPE. Yes, madame.

HELEN. I have a chiton, not worn yet, of Persian silk, an oyster-coloured silk. Lay it upon my bed.

RHODOPE. **Yes,** madame.

HELEN. And I have jewels. Someone whose name has gone — it does not matter, pay no heed to that — someone once gave me rubies. There was a necklace and a ring.

RHODOPE. And bracelets, madame. A pair of bracelets.

HELEN. Yes, I remember now. His name — it's of no consequence — if you can find them, Rhodope, set them on my table.

RHODOPE. Yes, madame. Will that be all ?

HELEN. The perfume, Rhodope, that's in the alabaster jar. A ribbon for my hair, the sandals with the silver lace and knots of pearl. Arid Rhodope ! prepare the bath.

CURTAIN

ACT I

SCENE III

Time : Early the following morning.

Scene : A small library in VOLTAIRE'S *house. There are many books, some eighteenth-century furniture', a writing-table in the foreground. In the centre of the back wall there is a fairly elaborate doorway — a noticeable door — and windows on either side of it open to a garden in perennial bloom. There is another door on the right.*

VOLTAIRE, *in a dressing-gown, is reading, more or less at random, an accumulation of letters ; but his temper is agitated and he cannot settle himself to work ; he rises, looks at a clock, compares it with a watch, and returns impatiently to the table. Then* FROUST *comes in, right. He is wearing a foxhunteds red coat over his pyjamas.*

VOLTAIRE. You have been a long time, Mr. Froust. Does it really take you an hour to go from my house to Aristophanes' and return ?

FROUST. I found Aristophanes in a rather difficult mood. He has been completely upset, it seems, by your refusal to get married ; though for my part I must say that I think you're absolutely right——

VOLTAIRE. He abused me, did he ?

FROUST. I shouldn't like to create any bad blood, or make mischief between you, but he did say that you were behaving with the vile and catastrophic irresponsibility of a gilded catamite.

VOLTAIRE. I have always found that for really grievous insult you must listen to your oldest friends.

A mere acquaintance will not put his imagination to sufficient pains. — Where did you find that coat ?

FROUST. Just round the corner. Some people were fighting in the street, and suddenly a man dressed as a foxhunter came running up, shouting the rather ridiculous words they use — I think he was Irish — and threw off his coat and joined in. And as he immediately disappeared in the very midst of the fight, I took the opportunity of trying it on. It fits very well, don't you think ?

VOLTAIRE. You must attend more of our battles, until you find the opportunity of supplying yourself with a pair of trousers. — Tell me, did Aristophanes compare me with a catamite before he read my letter, or after ?

FROUST. Oh, before. As soon as I went in he told me how deeply your rejection of his proposal had shocked him——

VOLTAIRE. He woke me from my morning sleep.

FROUST. He, apparently, had been up all night, and like everybody who has endured the smallest discomfort in the cause of virtue, was utterly merciless. And then he did read the letter confirming your refusal——

VOLTAIRE. And made some further observations ?

FROUST. It's very unpleasant and rather embarrassing to have to repeat such things, but as I'm now in your service — and I'm very grateful indeed to you for giving me some temporary employment — I suppose I must tell you everything. Well, his actual comment was that your exhibition of moral bankruptcy would put to shame the delinquent daughter of a cardsharper and a Japanese acrobat. And then he made me wait while he wrote this last appeal.

VOLTAIRE *(taking the letter from* FROUST, *reads).* 'I

give you a final chance to save Elysium from the ineffable disaster of civil war. Marry Helen, give us Peace, and receive our general gratitude ; or refuse, and live in the infamy of eternal shame amid the execrations of our ruined world : there is your choice.' — With what delightful brevity he writes ! I shall have copies made of this and send them as a model to my regular correspondents. Will you take this answer, Mr. Froust ? Are you ready ? — ' My dear Aristophanes : Eternal infamy would, I believe, be the very protection that I have long sought against the wearisome attention of my innumerable friends. I welcome the prospect, therefore, and look forward with the happiest expectancy to the peace that I shall henceforth enjoy. Morally bankrupt I may be, but mentally insolvent — No ! You will accept, I hope, my very kind regards. Yours sincerely, Voltaire.'

FROUST. ' Yours sincerely, Voltaire.'

VOLTAIRE. That must be delivered at once. Will you need another hour to do it ?

FROUST. Aristophanes sent a man with me. He's waiting in the hall.

VOLTAIRE. Then give him the letter, and we can at last get to work. Half the morning has been wasted already. (FROUST *goes out, tight.* VOLTAIRE *takes several letters from the pile on the table.* FROUST, *returning, sits at the table, and* VOLTAIRE, *with an appearance now of relaxation, in a nearby chair)}* The morning's post, I find, has brought fourteen letters in almost identical terms ; and we may as well begin with them. Fourteen of our fellow-citizens are bewildered by the present crisis, and ask me to tell them which side they should take. The same reply will serve them all, but be careful to superscribe on each the proper name, and where

necessary the correct title. Are you ready ? — ' Your inability, my dear sir, to decide which party you should join in our present civil war reminds me of a very good sort of man whom I once encountered on the bank of a certain river. He had resolved on suicide, for his life was unhappy, but he could not decide whether to throw himself into the river or to walk some little way to a promontory where he might cast himself into the sea. We discussed for an hour the several advantages of being drowned in salt water or fresh, and with a great deal of ingenuity he showed me how much there was to be said for either. Our debate, however, was interrupted by a heavy shower of rain, that soaked us to the very skin, whereupon my friend left me in a great hurry to go home and change his clothes lest he catch cold and perhaps die of it. . . .' (VOLTAIRE *is interrupted by a heavy knocking on the outer door. There is a pause, then the noise is repeated.)* See who it is, but remember that I am receiving no one, and I must not be disturbed.

> FROUST *goes out, right.* VOLTAIRE *waits impatiently. In a few seconds voices are heard, disputing, and* LINCOLN *appears with* FROUST *behind him.*

LINCOLN *(at first unseen).* Whether he likes it or not, I insist on seeing him. . . . Voltaire !

VOLTAIRE. I have much to do this morning, Mr. Lincoln, and I would prefer to be undisturbed.

LINCOLN. At this critical moment in the history of Elysium you cannot stand aside and say that you alone have no concern for the future, no responsibility in the present, and no part to play in the restoration of peace to our unhappy realm !

VOLTAIRE. If everybody were to mind his business, as I do mine, the present crisis would disappear and peace restore itself. By refusing to take part in the dispute I am setting not merely a useful but a necessary example.

LINCOLN. Passive example has no power of persuasion when battle has been joined. Overt action is required. We are engaged in a civil war testing whether our beatitude here, conceived for the furtherance of God's purpose and dedicated to the proposition that all men are perfectible, can now endure. You with your genius and gift of reason are essential to the task before us. As it is in your power to give us peace, so it is your duty. I do not appeal to your compassion, though compassion of itself has prompted many good men to undertake the most perilous and sternest duty ; I appeal to your reason, for which you stand pre-eminent here and in the memory of the world.

VOLTAIRE. In simple words, you are suggesting, are you not, that I should marry Helen of Troy ?

LINCOLN. That is so.

VOLTAIRE. How would you reply to such an invitation ?

LINCOLN. There would be no point in my contracting such a marriage. None whatever.

VOLTAIRE. You underrate yourself, Mr. Lincoln. You, in your great career, revealed so much heroic reason, so mighty a concept of the best and disdain alike of evil and disadvantage, that you, on a fair estimate, would be the ideal choice for Helen's husband. Why not marry her yourself?

LINCOLN. I've learnt to appreciate your Continental sense of humour, Voltaire, but I can't agree that this

is the proper occasion for its display.

VOLTAIRE. I am wholly in earnest. You come to me and say that I must marry Helen, and I, with equal argument, reply : Wed her yourself.

LINCOLN. No, sir !

VOLTAIRE. Why not ?

LINCOLN. Well, I don't feel at home with these foreign women.

VOLTAIRE. She is a famous beauty.

LINCOLN. That's no argument for matrimony. Would any man, over the age of twenty-three and in his right mind, want to marry a famous beauty ? Would you like to start the day, and every day, by sitting at the breakfast-table with a woman who's conscious of having been a famous and fatal beauty for three thousand years ?

VOLTAIRE. But surely your own feelings are of very little consequence in comparison with the welfare of Elysium. If you marry Helen, and bring peace into our realm——

LINCOLN. Putting me and Helen into double harness won't bring peace : I can tell you that.

VOLTAIRE. Then who will marry her, for I certainly shall not ? But to save ourselves we must find someone. Who is there among us who truly embodies Reason ? Who has a mind so brightly illumined by the pure light of reason that all his actions make it manifest ? Who was there in the world of whom it could be said : This man, in study as in action, was truly reasonable ?

LINCOLN. We've got the pick of humankind to choose from. It shouldn't be difficult to think of someone.

VOLTAIRE. A little thought is all that's necessary.

LINCOLN. Give me a moment while I jog my memory.

VOLTAIRE. H'm.

LINCOLN. You thought of someone ?

VOLTAIRE. No.

LINCOLN. Neither have I.

VOLTAIRE. I have him . . . no. No, no. He was liable to enthusiasm.

LINCOLN. I was wondering if ... well, maybe not. He had peculiar notions about women.

VOLTAIRE. There is, of course . . . h'm. I had forgotten his religion, he would not do.

LINCOLN. I'd like to suggest . . .

VOLTAIRE. Who ?

LINCOLN. No, on second thoughts, I guess not.

VOLTAIRE. A possible choice would be ... but he was too fond of hanging.

LINCOLN. Would you consider ... no, no, he's no good either. Can't carry his liquor.

VOLTAIRE. I had in mind . . .

LINCOLN. Yes ?

VOLTAIRE. He will not do.

LINCOLN. Don't say you're beaten.

VOLTAIRE. It is nearly incredible, Mr. Lincoln, but I can think of no one ! — of no one whom I consider wholly reasonable.

LINCOLN. It's a humiliating confession, but I've got to share it. I'm up a gum tree.

FROUST. Have you thought of Diogenes ? He renounced wealth and power and popularity because they are enemies to Reason.

LINCOLN. I'd like to congratulate you on your unsullied innocence. Can you picture Helen of Troy sharing the bridal suite that Diogenes can offer ?

Diogenes, young man, is still living in a tub.

VOLTAIRE. Must we, then, admit defeat ?

LINCOLN. We must agree, I think, that we're right back where we started : you're the bridegroom, Voltaire. There's no one else.

VOLTAIRE *(striking the table in anger).* No, no, no !

A louder knocking at the outer door. FROUST *goes to admit the new visitor, and does not return except to show him in. It is* PUSHKIN.

PUSHKIN. You will forgive me, gentlemen, if I go straight to the point. — I have been told, M. de Voltaire, that you refuse to marry Helen.

VOLTAIRE. That is so.

PUSHKIN. If your refusal, sir, is designed to insult her, it recoils upon yourself: in the manner, which it is, of blasphemy.

VOLTAIRE. My refusal is designed for the protection of my own peace of mind, and my own physical comfort : for no other purpose.

PUSHKIN. I was in love with Helen, and a suitor for her love on the very threshold of acceptance. But she changed her mind and sent me packing — for your sake !

VOLTAIRE. You will write the better poetry for it. Disappointment is invaluable to a literary person. For every poem inspired by a woman's *Tes,* there are twenty born of *No.*

PUSHKIN. You avoid the issue, M. de Voltaire.

VOLTAIRE. I am practising avoidance as much as I can. It is the most beneficial exercise I know. To avoid one's creditors or the north-east wind ; one's recollection of a needy and pathetic relative or duty

to one's conscience ; one's reverence for the great, and hatred of falsehood and the little meanness of the world — to avoid such things would be indeed the mark of a successful life, and the assurance of a pleasant one.

PUSHKIN. Would you avoid a challenge ?

VOLTAIRE. A challenge to fight ?

PUSHKIN. I pleaded with Helen for her love, and you have refused her love. That's blasphemy on the one hand ; on the other, an insult to my perception and my taste. I have no option but to challenge you.

VOLTAIRE *(opening his dressing-gown).* Your sword would be hard put to it to find an entrance. There's little here but bone.

PUSHKIN. But why, why do you reject her ? It drives me mad to see refusal of that exquisite, delectable, and richest piece in all Elysium !

VOLTAIRE. In a beautiful woman there are two disabilities. One is her beauty, the other her womanhood. The first requires an ever-wakeful admiration, and the second demands attention that is almost as continuous. The reward for the one, moreover, is merely permission to exert yourself again in the other. And for a man whose mind is mature, but his physical strength a little past its prime, the profit is negligible.

PUSHKIN. You can make a joke of it, and perhaps you are fortunate. Perhaps. But I don't think so. Is it really good fortune to see nothing but occasion for a twisted laugh where others would watch the honey-growth of love like a cherry orchard coming to its flower in the April sun beneath Caucasian snows — and where I see nothing but the black renunciation of my love ? There are times, and this is one, when a

man who makes a joke betrays his moral destitution.

LINCOLN. That's a very deplorable condition for any man to be in, but we ought to be grateful, I think, that he chooses to make a joke rather than snivel about it.

PUSHKIN. You are not in love with Helen.

LINCOLN. I most certainly am not.

PUSHKIN. But I am ! I see no cause for gratitude. I only see, through Helen's eyes, refusal like a blow. And I have felt the blow ; for I have been refused.

LINCOLN. Can't you ignore her refusal ? I've heard it said that a woman's refusal is no more than mustard on a plate of cold beef. It's not so much a prohibition as a relish.

PUSHKIN. I am dedicated to Helen's will, and her will, her wilful will, is to marry Voltaire. Therefore Voltaire shall marry her.

VOLTAIRE. I will not ! *(A knocking on the outer door : three heavy blows, distinct and sinister. There is silence, an anxious and foreboding silence, till* FROUST *ushers in* ARISTOPHANES.) I will not marry her ! There is no argument in the world——

ARISTOPHANES. Do you remember a king of Prussia called Frederick, whom history has distinguished as Frederick the Great ?

VOLTAIRE. He used to open my letters !

ARISTOPHANES. You were friendly with him, weren't you ?

VOLTAIRE. I was his guest in Germany. He pleaded with me to come. For years he implored me to visit him. He badgered me with his ravenous friendship, and when at last I consented and joined him in his penurious court at Berlin, he opened my letters !

ARISTOPHANES. He now commands one party in the war. Within the last hour or so they've simplified the quarrel by choosing leaders. Already they've forgotten why the war began, and merely follow their generals, who detest each other and now infect their troops with their own hatred. On the one side is that ancient ranting virago, that swollen enormity of old woman's iniquity, the Roman matron Volumnia ; and commanding the other side is the former king of Prussia, Frederick the Great. Your friend, Voltaire.

VOLTAIRE. My inveterate friend ! He thought I had a price, and he could buy me. He pestered me to sell myself, and all the time was sweating in mortal agony to think what I might cost him. He ruled his royal household as though he were a little shopkeeper, counting every penny that was spent and going round at night to save candle-ends. And then he would bring me his French verses to correct. He used a spade for a pen, and every morning he carefully filled his inkpot with new mud. What verses he wrote ! For years I did his dirty washing, and when at last I made my escape from his malignant hospitality, he had me arrested at Frankfurt !

LINCOLN. Frederick of Prussia's a very able and pertinacious man. We mustn't underrate him.

VOLTAIRE. He is pertinacious indeed. Only a month ago he showed me his latest poem. It contained all the solecisms that he was guilty of two hundred years ago, but his lack of sensibility had reached a new profundity. As I read the poem it occurred to me that of all the enemies I have had, there was none whom I so dearly detested as my royal friend Frederick.

ARISTOPHANES. Would you like to see him defeated ?

VOLTAIRE. The spectacle of his humiliation would be delicious.

ARISTOPHANES. You can effect it. You can defeat him, if you will. He is a soldier who believes in war. Make peace, and show him the poverty of war.

VOLTAIRE. By marrying Helen ?

ARISTOPHANES. While there is war, Frederick is in his element. But bring back peace, and you'll see him gasp and flounder like a new-caught fish, not knowing what to do.

VOLTAIRE. And I'll be Helen's husband.

ARISTOPHANES. Make peace, Voltaire ! Take Frederick on a hook, and haul him ashore. And when he's no better than a fish out of water, you can sit and watch him ; impotent, yet faintly struggling.

VOLTAIRE. There is some danger that I myself might have lost vitality by then.

ARISTOPHANES. Think of the warlike king, your ruthless friend, dragged from his element and panting for life in the air of peace ; like a red mullet sobbing and twisting on the bottom-boards of an old boat.

VOLTAIRE. Ha ! Frederick !

ARISTOPHANES. And you would tell him that *you* had caught him.

VOLTAIRE. I always beat him in the end.

ARISTOPHANES. Beat him again, to show your power remains.

VOLTAIRE. An old red mullet with a hook in his mouth.

ARISTOPHANES. You will do it, then ? You'll marry Helen ?

VOLTAIRE. To rob Frederick of his victory ! He's bound to win if I don't take a hand.

ARISTOPHANES. And if he wins he will make him-

self Emperor of Elysium, I suppose. It would not be pleasant to live under such a rule.

VOLTAIRE. Intolerable ! Impossible ! He shall not be the Emperor ! — Have you made all preparations ?

ARISTOPHANES. Helen is here. She's waiting in the garden.

VOLTAIRE. Already ? But I'm in my dressing-gown, I can't be married in my dressing-gown. And where's the priest ?

LINCOLN. I've seen to that. I brought him with me.

VOLTAIRE. *Who is he ?*

LINCOLN. An Englishman, who fortunately escaped after being taken prisoner by each side in turn. I gather that he swore allegiance to both, and, having lulled their suspicion, got away. I don't remember his name, but he's pretty well known. He used to be the Vicar of Bray.

ARISTOPHANES. Will you ask him to come in ? And if you are ready, Voltaire, I shall inform Helen.

VOLTAIRE. My fate cries out, imperative. I must put on a coat.

VOLTAIRE *hurries out, right., and is followed by* **LINCOLN.**

PUSHKIN. Let me come with you. I must say good-bye to her.

ARISTOPHANES. You are honest ? You'll not make mischief ?

PUSHKIN. This is my Calvary. I go to crucify my love.

ARISTOPHANES. But you must not delay the other ceremony . . .

Followed by ARISTOPHANES, PUSHKIN *goes out through the centre door into the garden beyond. As they leave the stage* FROUST *comes in, right, and hurriedly begins to tidy* VOLTAIRE'S *table. A moment later* LINCOLN *appears with the* VICAR OF BRAY : *a stout, red-faced, genial little man in clerical costume of the early eighteenth century.*

VICAR. Charming, charming, perfectly charming. There hasn't been a summer like it since 1894. A marvellous year for the partridges. The young birds are on the wing already. And the fruit, of course, is beyond all belief. Have you seen my pears ?

LINCOLN. I don't believe I have, Sir.

VICAR. If there is one thing I have always loved, it is a pear tree. Human affection is mutable, mutable indeed, and yet in the midst of mutability I have been constant to my vegetable love. A pear tree is one of God's greatest marvels upon earth. Do you not think so, Mr. Lincoln ?

LINCOLN. It's certainly a very pleasant fruit.

VICAR. How curious to think that I, whose life was governed by this fidelity, have been remembered as a kind of weathercock ! They made a song about me, you know, ' In good King Charles's golden days, When loyalty no harm meant. . . .' And it's quite true, of course, that I did offer my allegiance to any king who cared to sit upon the throne — but why ? That's the important thing to consider.

LINCOLN. I daresay your reasons were very interesting——

VICAR. I wasn't going to leave my vicarage for any king or bishop that ever lived, because in the vicarage garden I grew the finest espalier pear trees in all

Berkshire ! Blossom and branch and fruit, I loved 'em all my life, and devoted my life to them. And they call me a weathercock !

LINCOLN. A lamentable misunderstanding, I'm sure. But have you met the bridegroom ?

> VOLTAIRE *comes in, right, now wearing a notably handsome wig and a richly patterned waistcoat; but he is in his shirt-sleeves.*

VICAR. M. dc Voltaire ! This is one of the red-letter days in my normally humdrum and placid existence——

VOLTAIRE. Be quiet. — Lincoln, I have changed my mind.

LINCOLN. No, *sir !*

VOLTAIRE. I am not going to marry. I cannot do it.

LINCOLN. It's too late to be fanciful now. You've got to go through with it.

VOLTAIRE. Even to revenge myself on Frederick, even to humiliate my deadliest friend, I cannot marry Helen.

LINCOLN. You can't renegue ! Be a man, Voltaire, and do your duty !

> LINCOLN *has pulled an old-fashioned pistol from his hip-pocket, and threatens* VOLTAIRE. *As they stand face to face,* PUSHKIN *comes in through the centre door and holds it open. Music is heard from the garden. An Elysian orchestra is playing Mendelssohn's Wedding March.* HELEN, *radiantly beautiful, appears on* ARISTOPHANES' *arm ;* RHODOPE *behind her. Slowly, very slowly, she comes forward. The music grows louder.*

LINCOLN *(a fierce whisper to* VOLTAIRE). Turn round !

VOLTAIRE *turns to meet his bride, and reluctantly advances with* LINCOLN'S *pistol pushing the small of his back. Now the music is triumphant; and slowly the curtain falls.*

ACT II

SCENE I

Time . Some months later.

Scene : A waiting-room in MISS NIGHTINGALE'S *Elysian Nursing Home. A corridor crosses the rear of the stage, showing at the back of it two wards, Numbers 10 and II. On Number 10 is a large-lettered notice, PRIVATE. The waiting-room opens off the corridor — it is a mere broadening of the corridor — and is furnished and decorated in a surprisingly modern style. Chwmmm steel and bright enamel make a thoroughly antiseptic decor.*

As the curtain rises a nurse, in the uniform of an Army SISTER, *1914, is talking through a half-open door to the patient in Number 10.*

SISTER. I'll be back in plenty of time, there's no need to fret yourself. — Your husband ? No, he isn't here yet, but I'll let you know as soon as he comes. — Yes, the doctor's on his way now. You do what I told you and help us all you can. Would you like a nice cup of tea ? — Oh, all right !

She shuts the door and turns to meet MISS NIGHTINGALE, *who comes in left — along the corridor, that is.* MISS NIGHTINGALE, *in an older style of nursing uniform, is an impressive figure in full armour of starched linen.*

MISS N. Is our distinguished patient giving you a lot of trouble, Sister ?

SISTER. No, not really, Matron. She's a bit excited,

but from all I've heard she might be a lot worse. I'm not used to cases of this kind, of course, but I think she's doing her best.

MISS N. We are so very short-handed, Sister, that I had no alternative but to ask you to take this case ; though I know how busy you are. I am going in to see her in a moment, but I want first to have a word with the soldier who is waiting to be discharged. He's in Number II, isn't he ?

SISTER. Yes, Matron. Will you see him now ?

MISS N. Yes, Sister. (*The* SISTER *goes in to Number //, and* MISS NIGHTINGALE *sits down at a small table and immediately begins to make notes on one of the several medical history sheets that she is carrying. In a moment or two the door of Number n opens again, and the* SOLDIER *who appeared in the first scene comes out. He is now more decently clad: he wears a forage cap, bush shirt and shorts, and puttees. There is a medal-ribbon on his shirt. It is now seen, perhaps more clearly than before, that he is not a young man. He is alett and wiry and tough, but he has passed his youth, and the new scar on his face will soon be no more than yet another deep line on his face. He closes the ward door carefully, and with a Guardsman's smartness approaches* MISS NIGHTINGALE'S *table, where, halting, he salutes her with a Guardsman?s style.)* You have made a very quick recovery.

SOLDIER. Yes, ma'am.

MISS N. Are you sure you feel quite well, and really able to return to duty ?

SOLDIER. Yes, ma'am.

MISS N. You need not stand at Attention.

SOLDIER. Very good, ma'am. *(He stands At Ease, but with a Guardsman's rigid conception of the position.}*

MISS N. The Army's notion of what it means to be

at ease is not mine. I want to talk to you, but I can't talk while you remain in that angular position. Do make yourself more comfortable.

SOLDIER. Certainly, ma'am.

He takes off his cap, and sits on the edge of MISS NIGHTINGALE'j *table ; she draws her chair a little farther away, and resumes :*

MISS N. Your medical history sheet has been very imperfectly filled in. I want to know why.

SOLDIER. Well, you see, I had my pocket picked, down at the harbour, just before the war began, and lost my pay-book. And not having any documentary evidence of service, I thought it better to say nothing about it.

MISS N. You came here in 1941, shortly after you had been killed in Greece ?

SOLDIER. That's right.

MISS N. But the doctor's report makes it clear that you had been wounded several times before that, though your record of service, as it is stated here, has no mention of any previous campaigns.

SOLDIER. I've been in too many, you see. On the spur of the moment, when you come into hospital with your face split open, like I did, you can't remember all the dates and places, like a boy at school reciting ' Cold on the hills or Minden's plain '. — Minden was a good battle.

MISS N. How do you know that ?

SOLDIER. Well, it's difficult to explain, ma'am, unless you know a great deal about the British Army.

MISS N. I know more than most people.

SOLDIER. And what do you think of it ?

MISS N. When I think of England's traditional attitude towards the Army — total neglect by the vast majority, and the small minority's firm belief that military service is a suitable pastime for young gentlemen — when I think of that, and also remember the really very considerable number of battles that we have won, I am inclined to think of the British Army as a recurrent miracle.

SOLDIER. And you're not so far wrong. It's a curious institution, is the Army. It's generally there when it's needed — well, after a bit, because there's always some delay to begin with — and then as soon as peace returns, it disappears. Not quite, but very nearly. Have you ever seen a French vineyard in the winter ?

MISS N. Of course I have.

SOLDIER. It's like the Army in peace-time, isn't it ? They cut the vines down to nothing at all — and yet a little while later there's a new vintage, that may be better or worse than the average, but it's the same wine. The same wine. ... I remember in 1916, when we were fighting on the Somme : I remember finding myself, in one of those chalky grey trenches, stinking a bit because it was July, beside a man I'd never seen before, and yet he was familiar. And I said to him, shouting loudly because there was a lot of shell-fire, I said, ' Have we ever met before ? ' And he said to me, shouting too, ' You were picking roses the last time.' And then I remembered. It was at that place I mentioned in the poem I quoted : Minden. The battle of Minden, where we stopped in a garden to pick roses, and stuck them in our caps, and then went forward to the charge, the whole regiment like a bloody nosegay. And there we were together again,

in July of 1916, on the river Somme. And that shows you, ma'am, what I was saying before : you may cut down the vines as often as you like, but they still grow the same wine. I'm an old soldier, ma'am, and I know what I'm talking about.

MISS N. When I was nursing in Scutari, in the Crimean War, there were men in hospital, in those dark and dreadful beds, who looked like the tomb-stone images of our Crusaders. And others, nimble and square-shouldered, blue-eyed with broad cheek-bones and rough smiling mouths, who might have been King Harry's archers who fought at Agincourt,

SOLDIER. Cut 'em down as often as you like, they grow again.

MISS N. *(after a moment of silence].* Oh, nonsense. You're talking nonsense and so am I.

SOLDIER. We've learnt a lot since we came here, Miss Nightingale, but not everything. It doesn't do to be too sure.

An electric bell rings, harsh and insistent.

MISS N. I have been wasting time. You have made me waste a lot of time, and I have work to do. But come and talk to me again, if you have the opportunity.

SOLDIER. I should like to, ma'am.

MISS N. Are you sure that you are able for duty ?

SOLDIER. Yes, ma'am.

MISS N. Be careful with your diet, so far as you can make any choice in it. Plenty of green vegetables, and don't drink too much. Keep your window open in barracks — fresh air is *most* essential — and take several pairs of clean socks into battle with you.

SOLDIER. It's all right, ma'am, I can look after myself.

MISS N. Then good-bye for the present, and good luck.

SOLDIER. Thank you, ma'am.

He salutes, turns smartly about, and goes out, right. On his way out he passes, and salutes, VOLTAIRE *and* ARISTOPHANES, *who are coming in.*

VOLTAIRE. How is she, Matron ? How is she now ?

MISS N. Very well indeed. I was just going in to see her.

The bell rings again.

VOLTAIRE. Is that her bell ?

MISS N. I believe so.

VOLTAIRE. You have not left her alone ?

MISS. N. My hospital is full of wounded soldiers, M. de Voltaire. I am grievously understaffed, and all my sisters and nurses are working to the utmost limit of their strength. Your wife, though momentarily unattended, is, I assure you, perfectly comfortable.

VOLTAIRE. Is not the doctor here?

MISS N. Dr. Galen is on his way here now.

VOLTAIRE. Galen ? But Galen is very old-fashioned. Galen died in A.D. 200. That's more than seventeen hundred years ago. Galen was a contemporary of that insufferable bore, Marcus Aurelius !

MISS N. Last night, in view of certain unusual features in the case, I called, on my own responsibility, two of our most distinguished modern gynaecologists. They both agreed that Dr. Galen, because of his connexion with a more ancient tradition of medicine, was the most suitable *accoucheur.* And so, again on

my own responsibility, I summoned him. He examined the patient and came to a very definite conclusion about her. He will be here at any moment now. (*The bell rings again, and the* SISTER, *with a cup of tea in her hand, comes out of Number* //.) Will you go in and look at Number 10, Sister?

SISTER. Yes, Matron.

VOLTAIRE. Number 10 ! Do you refer to Helen of Troy as Number 10 ?

MISS N. As all my patients receive the same meticulous attention, it is only necessary to distinguish them by their location. In my hospital there is neither neglect nor favouritism. *(A telephone rings. The instrument is on the right-hand wall.* MISS NIGHTINGALE *crosses and picks up the receiver.}* Matron speaking. — Dr. Galen ? Tell him to come up to Number 10. Thank you.

VOLTAIRE. You know him, Aristophanes. Could I speak to him first, before he sees my wife ? I am not wholly myself. I did not sleep last night; my pulse is light and feverish.

ARISTOPHANES. Sit down and calm yourself. Galen is busy enough, in these days, without you for a patient.

VOLTAIRE. Busy ? Busy ? He is a doctor, and if I am ill I am his business as much as anyone ! I should not have come here, it is too much for me.

ARISTOPHANES. You had better stay now, it will look better.

> GALEN *comes in, right. He is an elderly man, much occupied and rather worried. He wears Roman dress of the second century, A D., but carries a small black bag of the sort that more recent doctors have made familiar.*

GALEN. Good morning, Matron. Your patient had a good night, I hope ?

MISS N. She slept for several hours after you left, and since then everything has gone as you predicted.

GALEN. Good, good. I was pretty sure, as soon as I saw her——

MISS N. Have you met M. de Voltaire? *(Whispers]* The husband, Doctor.

GALEN. I don't think I have had the pleasure. How do you do ? — And Aristophanes ; how are you ? Gentlemen, I should like a few words with you before I see my patient, but first, if you will allow me, Matron, I must ring up the Citadel.

MISS N. Of course.

While GALEN *telephones, she goes into Number 10.*

GALEN. I want the Citadel. As quickly as you can. . . . Gentlemen, there are certain unusual features in this case, and I must ask you — you especially, M. de Voltaire — to be prepared for, well, I should not like to call it a shock, but certainly a surprise. The normal expectation, you must realise, is only normal when circumstances are normal. . . . Hullo? Is that the Citadel? This is Dr. Galen. Put me through to the Senior Medical Officer . . . as I was saying, the anticipated event is likely to give you some surprise unless you have an extensive knowledge of the very early history of obstetrics, and the experience of some of the earliest obstetricians. It is a subject of absorbing interest, and the type of birth that has become common form during the last twenty or thirty centuries should not blind us to the fact that Nature is still capable of the most astonishing depart-

ures from current practice when it suits her needs. . . . Yes ? Is that Harvey ? Galen here. Look, Harvey : I've seen your patient, the English king, Charles II, and it's quite obvious that he's suffering from a very definite anxiety neurosis. For some time now he's been in command of one of those Women's Legions that were formed a few months ago. Yes, yes. He's worried, that's all. Well, I've recommended leave of absence and a complete change of scene. I'm sure he'll be all right again in a few weeks' time. Not at all. Good-bye, Harvey. . . . Now what was I saying ? Ah, yes. We must be prepared to admit that Nature, without ceasing to be natural in the most generous interpretation of that word, may still spring an occasional surprise upon us-

MISS NIGHTINGALE *appears at the door of Number 10.*

MISS N. Will you come now, Doctor ?

GALEN. Immediately ?

MISS N. I think it better.

GALEN *goes into Number 10, the door closes behind him, but opens again a moment later and the* SISTER, *coming out with pursed lips and a hurried stride, fetches the small black bag that he has left behind him. A few seconds pass before* VOLTAIRE *speaks.*

VOLTAIRE. What did that warning mean ?

ARISTOPHANES. A professional mannerism. A desire to impress the layman with his professional difficulties and professional knowledge. It may have been no more than that.

VOLTAIRE. He was serious. He said it might be a

shock for me. I am frightened, Aristophanes.

ARISTOPHANES. I know. I know you are. But that's not the proper mood. — A moment ago I tried to minimise the occasion : I should not have done that. It was human weakness that prompted me : nothing else. But fear is not the proper mood. No, no ! We are, I think, on the very lip and nearest edge of one of those events in history which, when they are accomplished, divide a new epoch from the past by a prodigious chasm ; as though an earthquake had split and broken asunder the very cliffs of time.

VOLTAIRE. Is that a comforting remark ? Do you suppose an expectant father, anxious alike for the safety of his wife and the welfare of his unborn child, is likely to be reassured by a suggestion that he's about to become the parent of an earthquake ?

ARISTOPHANES. That's a foolish alarm. I was speaking of the world's spiritual development. I don't regard you as the likely author of a cosmic disturbance.

VOLTAIRE. How do you know ? According to Oriental mythology there were, in the earliest dawn of Pacific history, two persons known as Isanagi and Isanami ; and she gave birth to the islands of Japan !

ARISTOPHANES. You do not seriously suppose that Galen had such a thing in mind ?

VOLTAIRE. I am incapable of seriously supposing anything ; and unable to dismiss the wildest conjecture.

LINCOLN *and* PUSHKIN *make their appearance, right, with an air of delicate intrusion.*

LINCOLN. We were told that you were here. Is all going well ?

ARISTOPHANES. We hope SO.

PUSHKIN. How is Helen ? Have you seen her ?

ARISTOPHANES. The Doctor is with her now.

VOLTAIRE. Give me a glass of water.

LINCOLN. It's never easy to be calm and composed when you're waiting for one of Nature's verdicts. We know that this seeming miracle has been enacted, happily and safely, time and time again, times without number in all the ages of mankind ; and yet we never take for granted the infinite resource of Nature, and her general mercy——

VOLTAIRE. It is the infinite resource of Nature that is bedevilling my mind at the present moment !

LINCOLN. Is there anything unusual in the case ?

ARISTOPHANES. According to Galen, it is likely to be most unusual.

PUSHKIN. You do not mean that Helen is in danger ?

ARISTOPHANES. There was no suggestion of that. No suggestion at all. But Galen, by innuendo and vague allusion, by hinting at possibilities and by reference that he did not stay to explain — in a word, he made a mystery of it, and all we can assume is that we're on the edge of some momentous occasion. On the outermost brink of some high tableland in history.

VOLTAIRE. You have said that before ! It served no purpose then and it serves no purpose now. You will oblige me by refraining from further discussion of my wife's condition.

LINCOLN. Yes, yes. We are men, and we can abide the event. — Have you heard the news to-day ?

ARISTOPHANES. Frederick has won another battle.

LINCOLN. And a proclamation from the other side says they are unalterably determined and fully prepared to continue the war until final victory has been

achieved. That fool who is their common spokesman is now calling it a war of attrition ; and whenever I hear that word, which means no more than mutual destruction, cried about as though it were some laudable kind of strategy, I come near despairing of the human mind.

PUSHKIN. The trouble with Volumnia's side is that there's no one on it with a scrap of imagination. If any one of them could see beyond the end of his nose, he'd realise that this is the very time for a really bold and massive counter-attack. Now, when Frederick's lines of communication are ridiculously extended, and half his northern flank is bare. If Volumnia could strike in force, on this side of the lake——

LINCOLN. Hush !

The door of Number 10 opens. GALEN *appears, and closes it behind him. He stands for a moment, thoughtfully rubbing his chin.*

VOLTAIRE. My wife ! How is she ?

GALEN. She's very well. She's remarkably well. Quite unbelievably well.

VOLTAIRE. You mean, it has happened ?

GALEN. You are the father of a girl. Yes, a girl.

VOLTAIRE. Give me a glass of water. Aristophanes said it was going to be an earthquake.

LINCOLN. Voltaire, my dear friend, let me congratulate you. This wonderful news gives me almost as much pleasure as it must give you.

PUSHKIN. I loved her, Voltaire. For her sake, I rejoice.

ARISTOPHANES. The event has been more gentle than we thought. We were needlessly perturbed, and

I am glad. — To begin with, Galen, you filled us with alarm, but now you bring us peace of mind.

GALEN. Peace in a more material form than that. Do not forget the purpose of this marriage. Your daughter's name, Voltaire, is Irene.

VOLTAIRE. Who gave her that name ?

GALEN. Who gave the elder gods their names ? — Before I was called to undertake my task, gentlemen, I had begun to remind Voltaire that Nature, though commonly active according to certain rules, is by no means a servant to those rules. She herself created them, and may ignore them at her will. We who are scientists, true scientists and not empirical quacks, admit that we still know very little about the inherent nature of Nature. There is much in the world that is wholly fantastical, incredible beyond the last frontiers of invention ; and yet, because it is common, we accept it without surprise as being natural. But who can set a line between natural and unnatural ? The birth of a child is an everyday event, and no one is amazed ; but could you, you the sages, wits, and poets of the world, have by the exercise of your own fancy imagined that ineffable process and improbable parturition ? If a normal birth were to occur now, for the first time in history, how astonished we should be ! Consider that, if you are tempted to regard as unbelievable the stories of extraordinary birth that survive from ancient times. The story of Athene, Goddess of Wisdom, who was born in full growth out of her father's ear ; the story of Helen herself — your wife, Voltaire — who was hatched from an egg, a swan's egg, we must believe, and so were her brothers Castor and Pollux. The Oriental demiurge, Isanagi——

VOLTAIRE. Isanagi ? We have spoken of him. He got his wife with Japan.

GALEN. That is so. And then, by the mere act of blowing his nose, produced a Japanese admiral. And when we recall the primitive aristocracy of Egypt, we are almost obliged to regard the whole business of incarnation as a grotesque lottery. In the ancient nurseries of Egypt one never knew what to expect.

VOLTAIRE. What is the purpose of this tedious discourse ? I want to see my daughter !

GALEN. You shall. But think of the times we live in, and remember the omnipotence of Nature. Your daughter has been born for the execution of a certain task, and like Athene herself——

The door of Number 10 is thrown violently open, and out of it, exuberant, comes a great stalwart young woman dressed in the uniform of a London police-woman. It is IRENE.

IRENE. Father. Where is my father ?

VOLTAIRE. Give me a glass of water.

GALEN *points, and* IRENE, *rushing to* VOLTAIRE, *enfolds him in her towering embrace.*

IRENE. Father, dear Father ! How worried you must have been. But everything is all right now, and Mother is perfectly wonderful. Say you're glad to see me, Father !

VOLTAIRE. You were right, Aristophanes. It is a cosmic disturbance that I have begotten.

IRENE. Don't you like me ?

VOLTAIRE. Your name is Irene ?

IRENE. Yes. It is the Greek word for Peace, Father.

VOLTAIRE. I am not entirely illiterate.

PUSHKIN. What monstrous pretence is this ? You are not Helen's daughter !

IRENE. Who are you ?

PUSHKIN. I loved your mother.

IRENE. Don't talk like that in my father's presence ! Have you no respect for his feelings ?

LINCOLN *(pointing to the baton in her belt}.* Does Peace come into the world with a weapon at her side.

IRENE. Who are you ?

LINCOLN. My name is Abraham Lincoln.

IRENE. Mr. Lincoln ! You're going to be my godfather ! Oh, I am glad to meet you. You can help me, you can explain to them what I have to do, and why I've got to do it. You know why I've brought my baton with me. You made peace in America ; but how ?

LINCOLN. I had no love for war ; I was compelled to wage it. In peace or war, it is the intention that matters.

IRENE. And my intention's positive. My father there thought Peace would be a little dainty thing, blue ribbons and a smile, a gurgling voice, something to kiss and lay aside. But we know better ! You and I, godfather, know better than that.

LINCOLN. I am on your side, my dear, and wish you well. But I have to confess that, like your father, I haven't yet got wholly accustomed to your appearance. I, in my simplicity, had expected the usual dimensions and the conventional cradle.

IRENE. How could a little child persuade the world, so ill-advised and naughty a world as this world of yours, to mend itself and live in peace ?

ARISTOPHANES. All doubt is over now. You are the answer I had prayed for !

IRENE. Your name ?

ARISTOPHANES. Is Aristophanes.

IRENE. My other godfather ! You are pleased with me ?

ARISTOPHANES. It was I — and gentlemen, I boast of this ! — it was I who made the marriage between your parents.

IRENE. Then listen ! I am Peace, and I shall prevail. Nature has given me strength and stature because I need them to ensure my rule. A little tiny blue-eyed weakling Peace would be no more than mockery for your world that's broken into fragments by a war, and must be mended, and guarded still. There are soldiers in your streets who must have broken heads before they'll lay down their arms, but soldiers are not the only enemies to Peace ! There are soldiers who will be my better friends than many who wear the clothes and ordinary garb of peace. There are malefactors of the heart, there are men whose minds are more evil than guns and bloody steel, and little traitors who twine and twist about your council halls, and they're more damnable than all your bayonets and field-guns belching death ! Before my rule prevails, their heads must be broken too.

PUSHKIN. O brave Irene ! I'm of your party, I declare allegiance here and now !

IRENE. All who love life, and love their fellow men, and have some reason in their love, are on my side.

VOLTAIRE. Reason, you said ?

IRENE. I did.

VOLTAIRE. It may be true . . . perhaps she is my daughter !

IRENE. Moreover, when my rule has been established, I must maintain it. And till the world has learnt the benefits of peace, I must, where necessary, maintain it by some force. If you would live in peace, you must give Peace the rule. Peace must be throned, and girded with a dedicated sword. Do you agree to that ? *(A stone, thrown from outside, breaks a window on the right and crashes on the floor. The roar of angry voices is heard.)* Is that my challenge ?

The SOLDIER, *his brow bloody, comes in, right.*

SOLDIER. Where's Miss Nightingale ?

GALEN. She's busy with a patient.

SOLDIER. There's a nasty crowd outside. I had a bit of a scuffle with them, but they were too much for me alone. We'll have to organise some kind of defence.

PUSHKIN. A sortie ! Take them by surprise and scatter them. Who'll come with me ?

IRENE. One moment ! I am now in command. You, Soldier, and you who were my mother's lover, I shall take with me. The remainder will stay here on guard. Gentlemen, the war has entered a new phase. Peace takes the field !

Drawing her baton, IRENE *marches out, right, followed by* PUSHKIN *and the* SOLDIER ; *while the noise of the crowd outside the hospital rises in a crescendo of rage, and the curtain falls.*

ACT II

SCENE II

A pavilion in the fields.

The time is about a week later.

At the entrance to the pavilion there is a table at which ABRAHAM LINCOLN *is sitting, with* ARISTOPHANES *standing beside him. They are busy with ledgers and a pile of documents.*

The TWO EVZONES *of the First Act are again on duty ; but rather in easy attendance than stiffly like formal sentries.*

FIRST EVZONE. It's all over bar shouting ; that's my opinion.

SECOND EVZONE. Do you remember what you said in the very first week of the war ? You offered to bet even money that it wouldn't last three months.

FIRST EVZONE. And you wouldn't take me.

SECOND EVZONE. That doesn't affect the point at issue. What I'm saying is that you're an irresponsible optimist, and your opinion isn't worth the trouble of listening to. You can't make things happen in a certain way merely by wishing they'll happen.

FIRST EVZONE. As a matter of fact, that's the only way that human achievement ever does come about. By wishing for it. Think of the blessed martyrs ; from infancy they wanted to become saints, and eventually their claims were recognised.

SECOND EVZONE. Anybody can become a martyr.

FIRST EVZONE. No, they can't. You've got to attract a lot of attention to begin with. Now take

your own case. Do you think you could attract sufficient attention to make people go to the trouble of burning you at the stake ?

LINCOLN. Do you think you two could argue more quietly ? We've got work to do here, and we're trying to do it. What was that last figure ?

ARISTOPHANES. 236.

LINCOLN. 236 and 139 and 481, that's 856. And 2041 in the last lot. How many were brought in yesterday ?

ARISTOPHANES. **Just** Over 7OO.

LINCOLN. We'll have to find more accommodation for them, that's all. Have you got that list of requisitioned buildings ?

ARISTOPHANES. Froust took it out to have it copied.

LINCOLN. He's been away for an hour at least. *(Shouts)* Froust ! *(To an* EVZONE) Go and look for Mr. Froust, will you ?

ARISTOPHANES. What a change in a few days ! It's a different picture from the grim prospect of a week ago.

LINCOLN. Irene certainly hasn't wasted time. With prisoners coming in at this rate, it can't go on much longer.

ARISTOPHANES. She's gone through their ranks like a scythe among corn. No, it won't last much longer. Both sides have suffered equally, and either or both may collapse at any moment now.

LINCOLN. I'm a cautious, doubtful man by nature, but when I woke this morning I smelt peace in the air.

FROUST *comes in, left. He is now dressed in a Florentine costume of the Cinquecento.*

LINCOLN. Where in creation did you get those clothes ?

FROUST. I happened to find them. And as I've had to fend for myself almost entirely, since coming here, I thought I might as well use them.

LINCOLN. You haven't gone and murdered someone for his pants, have you ?

FROUST. Of course not ! There was no need for violence, he was sound asleep.

ARISTOPHANES. One of our prisoners ?

FROUST. Yes, but I haven't ill-treated him. I left my own clothes in exchange.

LINCOLN. Well, maybe he deserved it. I'll have a word with him later. — I want that list of requisitioned buildings, Froust.

FROUST. Yes, here it is. I got three copies made.

He gives a paper to LINCOLN, *and goes out again. A trumpet sounds.*

FIRST EVZONE. It's Mr. Pushkin, sir.

PUSHKIN *comes in. He now wears a magnificent Hussar uniform.*

PUSHKIN. Gentlemen, she was like a vernal gale ! The wilful turbulence of an April wind, smelling of waking sweetness, tearing asunder the icy grasp of winter, loosening the tawny rush of the torrents of Spring that sweep December's frozen barriers away — so Irene, tempestuous with natural strength and lighted with the sun's most honeyed glance, made havoc of their ranks !

LINCOLN. What has happened ?

PUSHKIN. Have I not told you ? There they stood, all Frederick's army, a panoplied magnificence. Dull glint of armour, combings of scarlet like a windy sunset or cornfields overflowing with runnels of blood-red poppies ; here a deep wedge of rifle-green, white surcoats blazing there, then tossing plumes ; indigo barred with gold, a thundercloud of dark-blue horsemen streaked with gold, more steel upon the left, and in the very centre a turbulence of kilted clansmen ! By God, sirs, had anyone less calm than I been there, less orderly and tutored to the occasion, he would have looked at Frederick's army and fallen straight in love with war !

ARISTOPHANES. But what was the upshot ? Tell us the event. Tell us who won !

PUSHKIN. That's what I've come to tell, and warn you to prepare. Listen again. In front of our ramparts stood Volumnia's army, that's been besieging us. Her splendour was no less than Frederick's. She had indeed more banners, crimson and faded blue. On the one flank was a host of Cuirassiers that glittered like a mountain waterfall on a bright morning ; on the other a lawn-white regiment of Crusaders crossed with scarlet. There then were the two armies, and what Irene did was this : having all week been harrying both with our few thousand loyalists, she drew at last the Prussian force to eyesight distance of the other, and so compelled a major battle. No sooner was it joined than she came in upon the flank, and like a sudden storm dispelled them both. As if a great gale were scattering all the winter snow from a deep forest, you saw the white uplifting of ten thousand faces, pale and stricken, as they turned to meet her charge, then on the instant scatter, blown to every quarter, power-

less before her. We charged, I say, and as the lovely turbulence of April breaks the winter, so we broke War ! All's over now, Irene has conquered, and her kingdom's Peace !

ARISTOPHANES. Where is Irene ?

PUSHKIN. I left her some half a mile away. She should be here.

ARISTOPHANES. We have the preparations made. Her kingdom's waiting.

LINCOLN. Peace, thank God !

Trumpets again.

SECOND EVZONE. It's Volumnia ! Volumnia's a prisoner !

VOLUMNIA, *in a towering rage, is brought in by the* SOLDIER, *whose arm is tucked in hers in a firm but friendly manner.*

SOLDIER. Now, come along, Ma, step out. There's no use making a fuss about it now. You're for the Glass House, and you might as well make up your mind to it.

VOLUMNIA. Had I a hundred sons, these withered dugs would give them gall to suck, so they might feed on venomed hatred for their mother's conqueror !

SOLDIER. That's no way for an old lady to speak. You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Ma !

VOLUMNIA. As well suppose a drifting leaf should bruise the Etruscan wall at high Fiesole, as think this trumpery and small mishap can touch my Roman soul, that sheer disaster and stark ruin still would leave unscathed ! Before the cantle of the present moon has waxed and waned——

ARISTOPHANES. Keep her quiet.

The SOLDIER *claps his large hand over* VOLUMNIA'S *mouth.*

SOLDIER. No ill-feeling, Ma. I'm only helping you to save your breath.

LINCOLN *(shouting).* Froust !

FROUST *enters immediately.*

FROUST. Yes, Mr. President ? (*To* SOLDIER) What a dreadful woman ! Do be careful.

LINCOLN. Take Volumnia to the room prepared for her.

FROUST. Not by myself!

LINCOLN *(to* SOLDIER). Froust will show you where to go.

As they go out, left — VOLUMNIA *vainly struggling — the trumpets sound again, and* IRENE *appears leading* FREDERICK, *his wrists bound by a cord. The others rise to greet her.*

IRENE. Has Volumnia been brought in ?

LINCOLN. She has been taken to her room.

IRENE. Good. And here's the other ruling male-factor. The war is over, gentlemen.

LINCOLN. Let us dispose of him before we start to thank you.

ARISTOPHANES. He is quieter than the other. Was the battle hard ?

IRENE. Hard enough to prove our strength.

FREDERICK *(to* IRENE). It was not fair ! You gave me no warning ! I was not fighting against you.

You had no quarrel with me ! I was fighting against Volumnia.

IRENE. My purpose was to stop your fighting.

FREDERICK. But I would have won if you had not stopped me ! And you were rough. You were too rough !

VOLTAIRE *comes in, right.*

VOLTAIRE. Your Majesty ! What a pleasure it is to see you. I am now at last in a position to repay Your Majesty's hospitality as Your Majesty so richly deserves. But you are looking tired. Do you not enjoy a battle as much as you were used ?

FREDERICK. Voltaire ! You are my old friend, you must be sympathetic. I have been treated unfairly ; I have been defeated.

VOLTAIRE. By my daughter, Your Majesty. What a small world it is, to be sure. Irene, my dear, let me congratulate you. You have done very well indeed ; I'm proud of you. Your mother will be down in a few minutes.

FREDERICK. But you were my honoured guest, Voltaire. For many months you lived with me in Berlin, and revelled in my royal hospitality.

VOLTAIRE. And now I can return it. What satisfaction that will give me ! Your Majesty's apartment is ready for you. It is quiet, and you will have it all to yourself. It is ten feet square, with a good stone floor and a pretty little window. The window is just under the ceiling, and very small, so there will be no danger of your falling out. *(He takes the rope from* IRENE.) Come, Your Majesty, I shall escort you. It will be my privilege to lock you in.

FREDERICK. But Voltaire ! I thought you loved me. This is not fair !

VOLTAIRE *leads him out, left.*

ARISTOPHANES. We cannot praise you, Irene, nor thank you. There is no praise sufficient, and all the words of gratitude, compared with what we owe, would be like the penny you throw into a beggar's cap.

LINCOLN. We shall do more than praise or thank you. Henceforth, Irene, we shall serve. You've brought us peace, and you must rule it as our Queen.

ARISTOPHANES. The ordinance is ready. The proclamation can be made within an hour.

IRENE. You'll make no proclamation till I have seen it ; and I warn you that I'm not going to do anything without advice and proper thought.

ARISTOPHANES. We have, I assure you, already taken a great deal of thought. In addition to the ordinance proclaiming your accession, we have devised a coronation service suitable, we hope, to this great occasion. And when the diadem is placed upon your head, and the sceptre of Justice in your hand, then we shall see what all good men have ever longed to see : Peace on her throne, Peace regnant over all.

IRENE. Will there be anyone to share my throne ?

ARISTOPHANES. No one. The power and the glory and the throne are yours. No one may share them.

LINCOLN. Would you like to look at this outline of the service ?

IRENE. Wait a minute. It seems to me that you're going too fast and much too fast. I've had a great deal of trouble settling this war of yours, and now you

offer me, apparently as a reward, the endless prospect of a lonely servitude as your virgin queen. And suppose that doesn't suit me ?

LINCOLN. But you were born to rule. Call it destiny, or call it duty, your path is clear, and if you turn aside from it now, you will write tragedy for us, and betrayal for your own part in it. You cannot refuse, ma'am.

IRENE. Was I born to rule alone ?

LINCOLN. It was our hope that Peace would be absolute. We want to see no delegation or diminution of your power.

IRENE. So you would like to see me fruitless ? You want to see me live barren and grow old like a nun telling her beads from day to day, all days the same and none of them alive ?

ARISTOPHANES. If you rule alone, the honour of the throne is wholly yours. There will be no one to divide it.

IRENE. Don't talk to me of honour ! We've heard too often of Peace coming home with Honour, and within a year Peace has been thrown into the street because Honour wouldn't pay the rent. Honour, indeed ! What I want is a husband. Yes, a husband ! If I'm to be your Queen, you must find me a King. That's my condition, and nothing will budge me from it. Listen to me, old men. I'm not a barren stock, and I don't intend to live as one. I am Peace, and Peace is fruitful. Peace multiplies from year to year; from month to month ! You say that I am destined to rule, but I say that I am also destined to be a mother.

LINCOLN. My dear lady, it was only last week that you were born, and though I sympathise with your

natural feelings, I cannot believe there is, as yet, any great urgency in the matter.

IRENE. Peace ripens quickly, because all men are waiting for her. In the hot sun of their expectancy she will mature within the hour.

LINCOLN. That, of course, is metaphorical.

IRENE. Do you know me better than I know myself?

LINCOLN. I know the circumstances, my dear, and I can assure you that you have no cause for alarm.

IRENE. Do not mock me. Do not treat me lightly, for I shall be the mother of your prosperity, mother of the arts, mother of all good that men have ever fought for. So do not laugh at me when I tell you that I need a husband ; and do not think that I shall be satisfied with a promise and a husband this time next year. I want him now ! Now, do you hear ? This very day, for already I am beginning to quicken, and my children will need a father to give them a name and make them decent. Get me a husband !

ARISTOPHANES. We can find a hundred able-bodied men within the hour, ma'am, but you must choose and discriminate. You can't wed the first person to come knocking at the door. You are our destined Queen ; and your consort must be comparable in dignity. If you have already formed a preference, tell us whom you favour, and we shall consider his quality.

LINCOLN. Even a shot-gun wedding requires that the bride should know her own mind with some particularity.

IRENE. But you must help me. You are old, you have experience ; use it to find a good husband for me. And then, when I can go to it with a companion

by my side, we shall discuss the coronation.

HELEN OF TROY *and* **MISS NIGHTINGALE** *have Come in, right.*

HELEN. Whose coronation are you talking of?

IRENE. Mother !

HELEN. My poor child, how hot and uncomfortable you look ! But who is to be crowned, and with what power ?

LINCOLN. We mean to make known our victory, not only by proclaiming peace, but by proclaiming the enthronement of Peace. Your daughter, Helen, is about to become our Queen.

HELEN. In a costume like this ? What utter nonsense ! Irene, my child, how are you ?

IRENE. Mother, we have won !

HELEN. You have done splendidly, I'm sure, but you must change your clothes immediately. I cannot bear to see you in that brutal uniform. I would as soon live on bread and water as wear a uniform.

MISS N. Within my observation a uniform is often more decently becoming to a young woman than her own choice of clothes. For though a Government Department makes no pretence to good taste, it has at least a disinclination to unnecessary exposure.

HELEN. Put your hand on that sleeve. Even a sailor, newly home from a voyage to the North Pole, might flinch from contact with such material.

MISS N. I do not suppose it was intended to attract sailors.

IRENE. And I have work to do ! I have only begun my task——

HELEN. Aristophanes, will you ask someone to tell

Rhodope to come here ? — She's waiting over there. — I have had some new frocks made for you, child, because the clothes I originally prepared were, as things turned out, no use at all. Nor was your cradle, of course. It was such a pretty cradle — but there! Who knows ? Some day it may be useful to you. Some day, dear.

IRENE. I have no doubt it will, and the sooner the better. But, in the meantime, Mother, I'm not interested in clothes. Really I'm not ! I have work to do, and that's what I want to think about.

RHODOPE *comes in, carrying a long cardboard box.*

HELEN. A woman has always work to do, but if she is not well dressed she will not enjoy doing it. Wait till you see the frock that Rhodope has brought. Open the box, Rhodope, quickly now, and let us try it on.

IRENE. Not here ! I can't try on a frock here.

MISS N. Indeed, I hope not. There is a time and a place for everything, and this is neither the one nor the other for a visit to the dressmaker.

HELEN. I have never been a slave to time, nor ever daunted by my environment. *(She displays the dress.)* There ! Isn't that charming ? Take off your coat, child.

MISS N. You may or may not be indifferent to your surroundings, but so long as I am here you shall not wholly neglect propriety. — Mr Lincoln !

LINCOLN. I was just going to suggest that we might go inside and continue our work. And perhaps you will let us know when our return is opportune.

MISS N. I am most grateful to you, Mr. Lincoln.

LINCOLN *(to* ARISTOPHANES). We shan't be wasting time if we take another look at the ordinance. . , .

They go into the pavilion.

HELEN. Take off her shoes, Rhodope, and those very unpleasant stockings.

MISS N. Mr. Pushkin ! (PUSHKIN, *who for some time has been in the background — a spectator attentive to the action in the self-conscious manner of a romantic poet — now rises, bows, and with a little reluctance goes into the pavilion. But as he is going* MISS NIGHTINGALE *calls to him again.}* Mr. Pushkin ! Will you take the two soldiers with you ? And see to it, please, that they remain inside until I call you.

PUSHKIN *and the* EVZONES *go into the pavilion, which closes upon them.*

IRENE. I feel guilty, Mother. I should keep on my uniform until peace has been really and firmly established. It's wrong to suppose that my work is finished because I have brought the war to an end. My work is only beginning.

MISS N. I agree with you entirely.

IRENE. Till peace has become the only way of life, and everybody breathes it like the air, there must be laws to enforce it.

MISS N. Elysium requires not only a police force, but a sanitary inspector. Many of the social and political opinions that I hear indicate very clearly the existence among us of a kind of intellectual cesspool. And until that has been purified there can be no health in our polity, however vigorous its laws.

HELEN. You haven't been very long in the world, my dear, but long enough to perceive the great multitude of men who also inhabit it. And if you play your part properly, they will observe your wishes, and make the laws of peace, and enforce them too. It would be fatal to be your own policeman, and ludicrous to pretend that you are a sanitary inspector. You must be loved. You must be gracious and beautiful — that other stocking, Rhodope — and the more beautiful you are, the more eagerly will men agree with all your views. There is a peculiar quality in men that should be encouraged ; they like to do things for others, and because service improves their character, we should, I think, give them every opportunity to serve. If you are beautiful, you will not lack policemen ; if you are wise and charming, you may even recruit a sufficiency of sanitary inspectors.

MISS N. I cannot believe that you will forward the interests, either of your daughter or Elysium, by instructing her to behave like a courtesan.

HELEN. My dear Miss Nightingale, a courtesan has two clear advantages over a politician. She knows her own mind, which he rarely does, and also the mentality of her public, which he never does.

MISS N. Humbug ! And pernicious humbug !

HELEN. The frock, Rhodope.

FROUST *comes in, right, and having paused for a moment to speak, goes into the pavilion.*

FROUST. Is this the only place you can find to do that sort of thing ? It's very inconsiderate of you.

IRENE. How rude, how very rude !

MISS N. When I lived in England we had no motor-

cars on the road, but we had manners in the home. I am by no means sure that the exchange has been for the better.

HELEN. It suits you, child. Oh, it suits you very well.

IRENE. Do you think so, Miss Nightingale ?

MISS N. I advise you to wear a woollen body-belt in the evening. You can afford to expose the arms and shoulders if you keep your abdomen warm.

The SOLDIER *comes in, right., and whistles admiringly, looking at* IRENE.

SOLDIER. Well, you're the prettiest piece I've seen in Elysium ; I hardly recognised you for a moment.

IRENE. Did I look so plain before ?

SOLDIER. You weren't doing justice to yourself in those other clothes. It often seemed to me that your face was trying to say something, but no one could hear it properly because your uniform was shouting it down. But it's all right now. I can hear it now.

HELEN. You see how right I was ? Doesn't he agree with me ?

SOLDIER *(to* MISS N.). Good evening, ma'am. I was looking for Mr. Froust. He gave me the slip just now. You haven't seen him, I suppose ?

MISS N. He is in the pavilion.

SOLDIER. Thank you, ma'am.

MISS N. I shall come with you. I wish to speak to Mr Lincoln.

MISS NIGHTINGALE *and the* SOLDIER *go into the pavilion.* IRENE *is now dressed in the gown of* HELENA *choice and* HELEN *has set on her head a wreath of olive*

leaves. RHODOPE *hands her — as if it were a bridal bouquet — a cornucopia, and holds up a mirror.*

IRENE. I did look plain before.

HELEN. And he could not hear what you were saying. But beauty, opening first the eyes, then opens a door into the heart — the wreath should come a little more to the front — and when you have opened their hearts you can tell them anything you like.

IRENE. I shall tell them to be sensible.

HELEN. That is not what they will expect to hear, of course. It is seldom the most endearing thing to say. You may, indeed, throw away the advantage you have gained, if you talk too much about being sensible.

IRENE. But they must be sensible ! Because if they are sensible they will live at peace, and if they are not——

HELEN. Yes, yes, but there are ways and means, and you must use certain natural advantages which, as you grow up, you will learn that you possess.

IRENE. I wish you would realise, Mother, that I am already fully grown. I am well aware of my own nature, and I know my potentialities.

HELEN. But do you know how to use them ? You are a woman, my dear, as I am ; and I have always been grateful for the accident that made me so. — Rhodope, remove that uniform and the other garments. Irene will not need them again.

RHODOPE. Yes, madame.

HELEN. The rose, Irene, that opens its petals to the sun . . .

FROUST *comes out from the pavilion, hesitates, and remains in view.* HELEN, *with a little gesture of*

annoyance, begins to lead IRENE *into some further privacy. As they go out one way,* RHODOPE *goes the other.*

HELEN. Let us take a little walk. The rose, dear child, that opens to the sun is fulfilling a purpose. You may say, indeed, that the rose is its own purpose. . . .

The SOLDIER *comes out, and engages the reluctant* FROUST *in conversation.*

SOLDIER. You slipped out pretty quietly.

FROUST. I have a great deal of work to do.

SOLDIER. Well, I won't keep you long, but what I wanted to say was this. You've got a staff job now, and you might be able to fix things for me. You see, I haven't got any proper identification papers. Nicolopoulos in there gave me some kind of a passport that once belonged to a Polish General who hadn't any more use for it, but I don't feel quite happy about that. The photograph isn't like me, for one thing. So if you could get me something a bit more regimental and generally convincing, I'd be very grateful.

FROUST. What happened to your own papers ?

SOLDIER. My A.B.64, you mean ? Well, I lost it.

FROUST. That's the only document you carry, is it ?

SOLDIER. It's all we need in the Army. A Soldier's Paybook, in a little brown cover, usually dirty.

FROUST. I found one of those some time ago. I don't want it — not now — and you can have it if it's any good to you. *(He feels in a pocket and brings out letters and so forth.)* No, these belong to the man who was wearing my clothes. I haven't had time to read

them yet. Ah, here it is. Is this what you want ?

SOLDIER. That's it ; A.B.64. Thank you very much, Mr. Froust. . . . Well, stone me if it isn't my own!

FROUST. What do you say ?

SOLDIER. It's my own. The one I lost.

FROUST. Oh.

SOLDIER. Where did you get this ?

FROUST. I told you, I found it somewhere.

SOLDIER. No, you didn't. I'm too old a soldier to go leaving my paybook lying about. I lost this down on the quay, the day the war began, when I had my pocket picked.

FROUST. Well, obviously that has nothing to do with me.

SOLDIER. I'm not so sure about that. The first time I ever saw you——

FROUST. Was outside the Assembly Rooms, after that absurd discussion.

SOLDIER. No, it wasn't. It was down at the harbour, that morning. You were in that new draft coming in.

FROUST. I certainly didn't see you there.

SOLDIER. But you could take this out of my hip-pocket without exactly seeing who I was, couldn't you ? I think we'd better talk it over and talk it over pretty thoroughly. — *(Shouting.)* Nicolopoulos ! Andreas ! — They're my friends, they'll be interested in this.

ANDREAS *and* NIGOLOPOULOS, *the two* EVZONES, *come from the pavilion.*

FROUST. I have no desire to talk to you and your friends. I have a lot to do this evening——

SOLDIER. Keep a hold of him. You remember, Nick, what I told you about losing my paybook ? You remember, Andreas ?

FIRST EVZONE. And we gave you new papers.

SECOND EVZONE. I gave him new papers.

SOLDIER. Well, I've found my own again.

FROUST. I *wish* you would let me go. This has got nothing to do with me.

SOLDIER. He had it. He picked my pocket——

FROUST *(shouting).* Mr. Lincoln ! Help, help !

LINCOLN *(coming from pavilion).* Will you men keep quiet ? Aristophanes and I are busy, and we don't want to be interrupted.

FROUST. Mr. President, these men are ill-treating me.

LINCOLN. Out of pure malice, with levity, or for some particular reason ?

SOLDIER. I had my paybook stolen some time ago, and I've just found it in his possession.

LINCOLN. Is that true ?

FROUST. When I discovered that he wanted a pay-book, I gave him one ; and now he repays my kindness by accusing me of theft.

LINCOLN. Had you stolen it ?

FROUST. I think I was entitled to it.

LINCOLN. It was, however, initially in his possession, and you by some convenient method transferred it to yours ?

FROUST. It wasn't a simple case of theft by any means. . . . The fact is that I had to protect myself.

LINCOLN. From what ?

FROUST. Against prejudice, ignorance, and a vicious departmental obtuseness. When I came ashore here I was given a landing-card which, if I had obeyed

the instructions on it, would have taken me to Limbo. Limbo, the Paradise of Fools !

LINCOLN. It's surprising how many public characters do go there.

FIRST EVZONE. It would be very hard on a conscientious poet to send him to Limbo, sir.

FROUST. I am not going ! I have never paid the smallest attention to academic criticism of my poems, and I don't intend to now.

SECOND EVZONE. It's you that's being criticised, not your poetry.

FROUST. I and my poetry are one. We are indivisible.

LINCOLN. What was the principal complaint against you ?

FROUST. Just what you might expect from a parcel of illiterate bureaucrats. They said that most of my poetry was incomprehensible, and my behaviour inconsistent. I told them, as civilly as I could, that if they couldn't understand my poetry, they were incapable of judging it. ...

FIRST EVZONE. That's logic. That's very good.

SECOND EVZONE. If they couldn't understand it, then nobody could. And if nobody could, then it wasn't poetry ; and that's as good logic as his.

LINCOLN. But what was the inconsistency in your behaviour ?

FROUST. I suppose you have read my long poem, ' Let Us Now Make Common Cause with the Masses ' ?

LINCOLN. I'm afraid I haven't.

FROUST. Well, they asked me why, if that poem really expressed my opinion, I went to Mexico when the masses were preparing to march to Berlin. A very crude way of putting it, I thought.

LINCOLN. It does appear, however, to indicate a certain inconsistency on your part.

FROUST. Only to the most superficial observer. I went to Mexico in order to retain my individuality, because if I forfeited my individuality there would be no significance in identifying myself with the masses.

FIRST EVZONE. That's another good answer. I'd like to have thought of that for myself.

SECOND EVZONE. It's a slimy, slippery, good-for-nothing answer worth no more than a drink to a dead man.

FIRST EVZONE. And who are you to set yourself up as a judge ?

SECOND EVZONE. As good a judge as you !

LINCOLN. Quiet, men, be quiet.

FROUST. I don't want to make trouble here, and possibly start another war——

LINCOLN. You had better not !

FROUST. But if I choose to make an issue of my treatment, I shan't lack support.

LINCOLN. I may be able to get your case reconsidered, but in the meantime you'll have to submit to close arrest.

FROUST. Without prejudice ?

LINCOLN. Without conditions. *(To* SOLDIER) Take him to the guard-room and hand him over to the Sergeant.

FROUST. I hope you understand that whatever happens I am *not* going to Limbo !

LINCOLN. I can promise nothing except that I shall do my best to have your case brought up for review.

FROUST. I must be given some choice in the matter, I insist on that. If I don't stay here — I am not sure

that I should like to now — but if I am not wanted in Heaven, then I shall go to Hollywood.

Escorted by the SOLDIER, FROUST *goes out, right.*

FIRST EVZONE. He's got a proper spirit, that young man. I like him.

SECOND EVZONE. The first thing he needs to be taught is respect for authority.

FIRST EVZONE. Now you're talking like a Fascist, and if the facts were known——

SECOND EVZONE. If the facts were known about you, you'd be in clink along with Froust.

FIRST EVZONE. That's the sort of thing a Fascist always says——

LINCOLN. For heaven's sake, stop arguing ! If there's to be any prospect of peace in Elysium, you've got to think more and talk less. It's only fools like you who enable a fool like Froust to bring calamity upon us. Be quiet ! Go in now and give my compliments to Aristophanes ; tell him I want to see him.

One of the EVZONES *goes into the pavilion ; a moment later* ARISTOPHANES *comes out. Then the curtain of the front wall of the pavilion is drawn back and* MISS NIGHTINGALE *and* PUSHKIN *are seen ; he is holding a skein of wool which she is winding. One of the* EVZONES *stands in the inner part of the pavilion, the other remains outside.*

LINCOLN. Aristophanes, we've got to hurry. There's danger in the air, it's full of anger still, and we must get Peace enthroned or another storm will break upon us.

ARISTOPHANES. What new trouble is there ?

LINCOLN. Nothing new. It's Froust again. But never mind that now. It's the ordinance we must think of.

ARISTOPHANES. I have read it through again. It is a good ordinance.

LINCOLN. But will our god-daughter approve of it ? If we've forgotten anything, we're going to hear about it in a voice like the flat of a mother's hand. Irene knows her own mind and won't be shy about declaring it.

ARISTOPHANES. She has the boldness and simplicity of perfect innocence. We must remember — though it is hard to realise — that she is still in the very babyhood of innocence.

LINCOLN. And even within its normal limitations, infancy can provoke a mighty lot of embarrassment. I'm frankly nervous.

ARISTOPHANES. Unduly so, I think. The ordinance will satisfy, and the coronation service will impress her.

LINCOLN. I'm no expert on the ritual and procedure of a coronation. I think we've included everything of importance, but maybe we ought to have more trumpets.

> HELEN *and* IRENE *come in, left.* PUSHKIN, *as soon as he sees them, beckons to the nearer* EVZONE, *transfers to his hands the skein of wool, and comes forward to speak to* IRENE.

HELEN. Trumpets ? Why do you want trumpets ?

LINCOLN. To enrich and dignify your daughter's coronation.

HELEN. That has been arranged, has it ?

LINCOLN. In all the particulars but one. The ordinance proclaiming her accession to the throne is ready. A coronation service, suitable we hope to this great occasion, has been devised. But if Irene was serious when she said that she would not rule alone——

IRENE. I was serious.

LINCOLN. Then we have still to learn your consort's name.

IRENE. You have not found a husband for me ?

LINCOLN. No, madame.

IRENE. But I ordered you to do so. Why have you neglected my order ?

LINCOLN. You were in earnest ?

IRENE. I am always in earnest. Oh, this promises a poor beginning to my reign. Am I to have no help at all ?

PUSHKIN. Command all these to go, Irene. Make use of your royal prerogative and give them permission to leave. Then I shall tell you your husband's name.

HELEN. What are you saying, Sasha ?

PUSHKIN. Here is Voltaire, my dear.

VOLTAIRE *comes in, right, and, after speaking to* IRENE, ***joins*** **HELEN.**

VOLTAIRE. Frederick, your prisoner, is safe, my dear. I locked him in myself and then, with the bars between us, we had some agreeable conversation. But how smart you're looking, child. I believe you're going to do me credit.

IRENE. I may need your help, Father.

VOLTAIRE. Learn to think for yourself, child. That's the best help I can give you. Helen, my dear, you

must encourage the child to be self-reliant. Children should not be pampered.

PUSHKIN *(to* IRENE). Shall I whisper his name ?

IRENE. Whoever becomes my husband cannot expect to have his name kept secret.

PUSHKIN. It's modesty, my confounded modesty, that makes me think a little privacy would be better. But beggars can't be choosers, and I'm the most exigent and clamorous beggar that ever stood with outstretched hands. I fell in love with you, ten fathoms deep, when I rode with you to war ; and now, made sweet for peace, your loosened beauty takes me beyond redemption in its net. But there's no time for elegance in our courtship, so put the case another way. Were I a tipster, I would say, You are beautiful, I am a Russian ; you are a queen and I a poet. There is your winning double ! I am your proper husband, and the odds declare it.

IRENE. No, Pushkin, no. But what do I mean ? Do I mean yes or no ? I am quite confused. The suddenness of your proposal has thrown me into a flutter. Mother ! What shall I say ?

HELEN. The rose that opens to a summer morning does not waste time in argument. Logic is fallible, but one guide never fails the heart. Passion !

IRENE. That will not do. Not now, in such a turn as this. This calls for judgment. We must disregard my mother, Pushkin, and you must base your offer on some good argument. What, as a husband, would you bring to me ?

PUSHKIN. A realm of my own to join with yours. I am a poet, and king in my own right of a great realm of imagination. Were Peace and Imagination brought together, no march between them and a

common tongue spoken throughout, what an empire we might rule ! For Peace by itself—you must confess it — may be a trifle dull. A land of comfort indeed, but somewhat heavy and without sufficient liveliness. It needs Imagination to create all manner of delight, the endless search for newer riches and the wittiest beatitudes ; and still remember this : that I would love you, not for your queenly state, but for your woman's self.

IRENE. Your argument is very interesting. I like your argument. Let me hear more of it.

LINCOLN. I do not think your rule, with such a consort, would be sufficiently stable, ma'am.

IRENE. You do not disapprove of Pushkin ? Oh, surely not !

LINCOLN. Neither as a man nor as a poet. But poetry is one thing and statesmanship another. Were he to become my king, my loyalty would be undermined by a profound uneasiness.

PUSHKIN. Mr. President, you insult me !

LINCOLN. Mr. Pushkin, a man in my position is incapable of pleasing everyone.

PUSHKIN. This is a matter that concerns Irene and myself. Irene, give me your answer.

LINCOLN. It is a matter that concerns every living soul in Elysium. Tell him your answer is No !

IRENE. Mother, I am in a perfect turmoil ! What shall I say ?

HELEN. Ask your heart, my dear, and if your heart is moved its answer will ring clear as a lyre that is plucked with proficient fingers. Clear and passionate !

ARISTOPHANES. If you are to rule a kingdom of peace, and keep peace with justice, avoid passion like the plague. I chose Helen for your mother, but she

must not become the Queen-Mother. I do not go so far as to say, Banish her——

VOLTAIRE. My dear sir, do you refer to my wife ?

ARISTOPHANES. I do.

VOLTAIRE. There are times when the most reasonable of men must open the door to ramping chivalry. Though I married her against my will, Helen's love has become mine and her honour is now in my keeping. I must demand that you immediately retract your vile suggestion.

ARISTOPHANES. I shall nothing of the kind. I am concerned with one thing only : the establishment of peace. Whoever threatens that, by foolish act or mischievous advice, is an enemy to the state whom I shall not hesitate to arraign. . . .

PUSHKIN *(to* LINCOLN). I asked you for an apology, and you repeated the insult. I ask you again : will you apologise ? (LINCOLN *puts him off with an upraised hand.)* I wait your answer, sir.

LINCOLN. Then you will have to wait. I am too old for duelling, but let me tell you, Mr. Pushkin, that if you had spoken to me in such a tone of voice when I was a younger man——

PUSHKIN. What then ?

LINCOLN. I might have lost my temper and laid you across my knee.

PUSHKIN *(a hand on his sword-hilt).* Oh, intolerable !

VOLTAIRE *(snapping his fingers under* ARISTOPHANES' *nose).* That, sir ! That in your face !

IRENE. God help me, how can I rule in such a land as this ! How can Peace live where even the wisest and the best are so stubborn in their opinion that they offer to fight at the mere sound of a falling word ? Oh, give me courage ! Give me courage !

The main door at the back has opened, and the SOLDIER *comes in.*

SOLDIER. Yes, miss, what's the trouble ?

ARISTOPHANES. Why do you come here ?

SOLDIER. I heard her calling me.

PUSHKIN. You ?

SOLDIER. She was shouting my name. Weren't you, miss ?

IRENE. No, I don't think so.

SOLDIER. Yes, you were. I know your voice. I'd recognise it anywhere, though you spoke no louder than a whisper. And I'd come at once.

IRENE. But I didn't call for anyone. I prayed — and I prayed aloud, I think — for courage.

SOLDIER. Of course you did. And now what can I do for you ?

IRENE. I don't understand you.

SOLDIER. You called me, and here I am. My name's Courage.

IRENE. Do you mean——

SOLDIER. Private Courage, and here's my paybook to prove it.

ARISTOPHANES. You were in a different uniform when I first saw you.

SOLDIER. I got a new suit from the Quartermaster's store. Miss Nightingale saw to that.

ARISTOPHANES. No, no, I was thinking of a long time since. You have been here before. In Elysium, I mean.

SOLDIER. I wouldn't say that's impossible.

LINCOLN. How many times before ?

SOLDIER. As often as the exigencies of the Service required.

LINCOLN. It is a very exacting service.

SOLDIER. It's got its hardships but it's got its compensations too. We don't get much money, but nobody can say we don't earn what we get.

LINCOLN. Nothing has ever been made until the soldier has made safe the field where the building shall be built, and the soldier is the scaffolding until it has been built, and the soldier gets no reward but honour. In how many campaigns have you served ?

SOLDIER. In as many as England needed me.

PUSHKIN. You need not make a boast of it. There is no singularity in your devotion. There are Russian soldiers who have never refused their country's call.

VOLTAIRE. France, too, has soldiers.

ARISTOPHANES. And Greece.

LINCOLN. My country also. They have fought for freedom, which is the prime condition of peace ; and for the establishment of a single rule that would ensure our peace.

IRENE. It is true. *(She gives the* SOLDIER'j *paybook to* LINCOLN.) What he has said is true.

SOLDIER. What exactly is it that you want, ma'am ?

IRENE. A husband.

SOLDIER. Well, that's funny.

IRENE. Funny ?

SOLDIER. Yes, in a way. You see, the very moment I heard who you were — that was in Miss Nightingale's Nursing Home — I said to myself, ' Why, that's the bit of stuff I've always been after ! ' Well, it's difficult to explain, because we've done a lot of fighting in our time, we Englishmen, and when we're put to it we often make quite a tidy showing. I've seen us do pretty well, now and then. Pretty well by any standards. But what we really want to do is to live on

comfortable terms with our neighbours, and go along to the local at night and have a pint or two with our friends, and do a decent job of work by day, and see that our kids have a fair start in life, and take our pleasure when we can, and make the most of things. That's always been our idea. But it won't work unless you've got peace, and very often, as things have turned out, we've had to go and fight for peace, and then, as I said before, we do fight, and no holding back. But all the time we know what we're fighting for, and that's you, Irene. I've been fighting for you for hundreds of years.

IRENE. Because you loved me ?

SOLDIER. I loved the very thought of you, like a schoolboy thinks of holidays. And my mates, who've died in every country of the earth, they wanted you like a homing pigeon wants its own loft. I don't boast about myself, but when I think of the mates I've had, I'm prouder than the sun in splendour. You look at the battle honours of any good British regiment and it's like a pagan psalm of victory sung across half the world ; but that's not what I mean. What I'm thinking of is the endurance and the faith, the patience and the fortitude, the cheerfulness and general decency that went to make those victories, and took the shame out of the defeats that we don't talk about. Gallantry I've known, and virtue also, and gentleness under many a red or khaki coat. I've lived in good company, Irene, and I won't disgrace you.

IRENE. But do you love me ? Tell me you love me !

SOLDIER. I've told you that I have been fighting for you all my life. And I'm a free man ; I don't go to war unless my heart takes me there.

IRENE. Mother ! Godfather ! What shall I say ?

HELEN. What does your heart say ?

IRENE. Yes ! But I mistrust it.

LINCOLN. Courage that seeks no profit for itself, and wins no profit upon earth, has in this realm always had the entry among the highest to a place of high esteem. And Peace has great need of courage. Peace without courage cannot maintain itself or grow.

PUSHKIN. And peace without imagination is dead from the beginning !

SOLDIER. I daresay I've had as much experience as you, and she looks healthy enough to me.

ARISTOPHANES. In war it is the soldier, in peace the statesman who guards his country. There is no need to remind the soldier that courage must be his companion, but the statesman is more forgetful. I say that peace has greater need of courage, a visible and palpable courage, than many a battlefield where courage is redundant. There is your proper husband, God-daughter.

IRENE. Mother !

HELEN. Ask your heart, there is no other course. And then obey. It is so simple, dear.

IRENE. I ask my love to ask me.

SOLDIER. I've carried the thought of you, like a photograph in my pocket, over half the world and half a thousand years. As I've been faithful to the idea, so I shall be faithful to reality. If half my love is age-long hunger, the other half is clear delight and gratitude. Irene, will you marry me ?

IRENE *(embracing him).* My husband and my king !

PUSHKIN. Courage without imagination is like a ship without a pilot. You cannot live unless I help you.

IRENE, *still embracing the* SOLDIER, *holds out her hand to* PUSHKIN. *He kneels and kisses it. In the background, in the pavilion,* MISS NIGHTINGALE, *like one of the Fates, is calmly knitting.*

IRENE. Because I have a husband, shall I not have a friend ?

THE END

Punted in Great Britan by R. & R. CIArK, LIMIted, *Edinburgh*

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