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THREE PLAYS

THE RAT TRAP

THE VORTEX

FALLEN ANGELS

BY NOEL COWARD

*WITH THE AUTHOR'S REPLY TO HIS
CRITICS*



LONDON: ERNEST BENN LIMITED

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INTRODUCTION

THERE are contained in this volume two produced plays, "The Vortex" and "Fallen Angels," and one unproduced, "The Rat Trap." For years I have mourned the fact that "The Rat Trap" never saw the light of day—if a sudden exposure to the slightly resentful glare of a First Night Audience can so be named—but now the time for it is past, the sterling merits I saw in it when it was first written in 1920 have rather faded. There is an infinite sadness in looking back on early work, frightful errors of construction and painful immaturities of dialogue jump to the eye in a most depressing manner. The same thing will occur five years hence—perhaps less—when I look back upon my present work, at least I hope so, for the only consolation of going on with anything is that one feels one is progressing—even in the face of the kindly critics, both professional and amateur, who state with gentle insistence that one is not.

⁴⁴ "The Rat Trap" was my first serious play, and I took a lot of trouble with it. I considered it brilliant beyond words, and filled with the most fearless and shattering truths. I can still perceive some good moments in it, particularly the very end of the play, and the scene between Keld and Sheila in the second act. The great fault of the play is a desperate desire to be witty at all costs, but when the would-be pyrotechnical frills are torn away and a few pieces of untidy but real psychology emerge it isn't so bad. I sadly fear, however, that by lying on the shelf for so long it has missed its mark, so far as being a stepping-stone in my career is concerned.

I am only just beginning to discover imperfections in "The Vortex," as it is comparatively new (1923) and, strange as it may seem, they are not those which some of the critics pointed out. As a matter of fact, practically all my notices for this play were generously adulatory, though most of them seemed concerned that I should choose such an "unpleasant" subject and such "decadent" types. I have come to the conclusion that an "unpleasant" subject is something that everybody knows about, but shrinks from the belief that other people know about it too.

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"Decadent" has, of course, been so enthusiastically incorporated into journalese that as a descriptive adjective it has almost ceased to mean anything at all. The minor characters in "The Vortex" drink cocktails, employ superlatives, and sometimes turn on the gramophone. Apart from these mild amusements their degeneracy is not marked. Nicky and Florence are certainly frail for the purposes of the play, but not to any hair-raising extent. Florence takes lovers occasionally and Nicky takes drugs very occasionally, despite the many exuberant phrases applied to him, such as "Crazed with dope," "Drug fiend," etc. I consider neither of these vices any more unpleasant than murder or seduction, both of which have been a standing tradition in the English theatre for many years.

"Fallen Angels," which aimed no higher than to be an amusing evening's entertainment, has brought a positive hail of abuse about my ears, which is Really very lucky, as, being extremely light, I fear it might not have succeeded on its own merits had it not been given the *reclame* of being "Disgusting," "Shocking," "Nauseating," "Daring," and "Outrageous." The two things in it which seem to have reduced the daily Press to such a pulp of shocked exasperation are, first, that the two wives confess to having had one love affair before marriage, and second, that they become faintly intoxicated when dining quietly together, mainly because they have spent a nervy and trying day, and feel that a little champagne will cheer them up. They have been accused variously of being "Decadent social types," "Suburban sluts" (a phrase which makes up in vituperative force for what it lacks in subtlety), and finally, with a wealth of scorn, "Modern women." This is all very peculiar and surprising, and I really am at a loss to understand it; the only possible solution of the mystery is, I think, that although the critics may be unaware of it, it is not the play they dislike at all, but my own particular attitude of mind. If this is the case, it is very unfortunate indeed, as that is the one thing that cannot be remedied either by laudatory or adverse criticism.

It would, of course, be very easy to justify the theme of "Fallen Angels" by comparing it with any of the farces and musical

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comedies which have for so many years sent tears of hearty laughter cascading down honest British cheeks, so easy, in fact, that I will refrain from doing so ; but I do feel that the moment had come to administer a slight but austere reprimand to the critics for giving themselves away so much. Their confusion of the different strata of Society must be painfully embarrassing to the lay reader, besides being definitely bad for the " morale " of the nation at large.

I certainly deny very firmly the imputation (made by several) that I wrote " Fallen Angels " in order to be " daring " and " shocking." Neither of these exceedingly second-rate ambitions has ever occurred to me.

The English theatre is undoubtedly passing through rather a turbulent phase at the moment, owing to the ardent crusade being conducted against " Sex Plays." Here is another thing that puzzles me dreadfully: What exactly is a sex play? It is apparently a new and cancerous growth in our midst which no one seems really able to locate. Of course, all the big successes there have ever been—with one or two exceptions—have had a larger percentage of sex in them than anything else, but these can't be the cause of the trouble, otherwise surely they would have been commented upon before.

I admit there is a tendency among the modern writers to *discuss* some of the various phases of sex a little more openly than was usual a few years ago, but I fail to see where this can be harmful to the public morals. On the contrary, in many instances I should imagine it to be definitely beneficial. Rocks are infinitely more dangerous when they are submerged, and the sluggish waves of false sentiment and hypocrisy have been washing over reality far too long already in the art of this country.

Sex being the most important factor of human nature is naturally, and always will be, the fundamental root of good drama, and the well-meaning but slightly muddled zealots who are trying to banish sex from the stage will find on calmer reflection that they are bumpuously attempting a *volte face* which could only successfully be achieved by the Almighty.

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One of the most disheartening difficulties for sincere dramatists to overcome is the desire of the British public to be amused and not enlightened. The problem arises: is the theatre to be a medium of expression, setting forth various aspects of reality, or merely a place of relaxation where weary business men and women can witness a pleasing spectacle bearing no relation whatsoever to the hard facts of existence and demanding no effort of concentration ?

One hears on every side the petulant assertion that there is enough unpleasantness in real life without paying to be harrowed in the theatre. This attitude would be more consistent did it empty the Old Bailey during the more lurid cases, and diminish the sales of sensational Sunday newspapers. However, as a palliative to the wounded and irritated self-esteem of those teeming millions who leave the theatre untouched by our wilder intellectual flights, it is to be highly commended.

As a matter of strict fact it has been proved, over and over again, that the more violent a play is—whether the portrayed emotions be false or true—the better the public like it. Even such a commonplace occurrence as a kiss on the stage frequently has a peculiar effect on the cheaper parts of the house, unless it is handled with great tact. The least hint of reality will cause over-excited ladies and gentlemen in the gallery to make rude noises with their mouths upon the backs of their hands. I never know whether this is an expression of resentment at the possible lack of such happy salutations in their own home lives, or the sudden venting of a certain sex self-consciousness which has taken them unawares.

The great problem for the young dramatist is whether to set out from the very first writing what managers require of him, or to concentrate on creating what he requires of himself. The latter is by far the more difficult course to pursue, but in the end, providing he is backed by genuine ability, infinitely more satisfactory. Financially the first holds greater possibilities, because he can accept, without offending his artistic conscience, hack jobs, such as adaptations and re-writing the seedy farces which managers are always so eager to produce. This will provide him with a certain amount of publicity. Play agents will meet at lunch and discuss

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him jovially, telling each other that this young man " will write a good play one day! " They are quite wrong, because he won't unless he changes his tactics. He may, of course, write a successful farce, but by that time he will have crushed down any literary or psychological impulses he may have had at the beginning, and become lost in a maze of " situation," " technique," and " construction " from which escape is impossible.

There are, of course, hundreds of people who regard the stage purely as a commercial proposition, and shape their work accordingly along old familiar lines. These people have enormous success, and deserve it, because after all they are achieving the object for which they set out.

There will always be a public for the Cinderella story, the same as there will always be a public for Miss Ethel M. Dell and the *Girl's Companion*. In the world of amusement it is essential for someone to cater for the illiterate, mainly because at least three-quarters of the English nation must be illiterate, otherwise the yearly plethora of second-rate music, second-rate painting, second-rate plays, and second-rate literature would not be tolerated. But the fact that most people one meets would rather have a Kirchner hanging in their bedroom than a Gauguin does not depreciate the value of the Gauguin in any way, even commercially; on the contrary, it rather adds to it.

When the self-advertising denouncers of the Stage describe the English theatre as being in a " disgraceful state " they speak a bitter truth without being aware of it. It *is* in a disgraceful state, but for none of the reasons so far put forward. The actual cause of the very definite decline of our drama is that at least ninety per cent of the people at present concerned in it are mentally incapable of regarding it as art at all. I think, perhaps, that the public are still suffering from the complacent after-effects of winning the War, and have not yet regained the little discrimination they had a few years ago, otherwise they would not accept so cheerfully the somewhat tawdry efforts of our commercial managers to amuse them. One cannot, of course, blame the managers; they have their living to make and their wives and mistresses to support,

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but it certainly is regrettable that these noble and natural aspirations should be achieved so easily and at the cost of so little intellectual endeavour.

To assert that this age is degenerate and decadent is supremely ridiculous; it is no more degenerate and decadent than any other civilised age, the only difference is that the usual conglomeration of human vices have come to the surface a little more lately, and there is mercifully a little less hypocrisy about. Speaking for myself, I should like to say that I intend to write as honestly and sincerely as possible on any subject I choose, and if the public do not like it they need not pay to come and see it. Theatre-going, when all is said and done, is optional.

There is another very insidious blight with which the British drama has to contend, and that is that with the present democratic destruction of all social barriers "Society," like a reservoir suddenly released from its dam, has effusively swirled into the theatre and practically swamped many of our potential actors and actresses, filling them with false ambitions, and confusing the development of their talents by encouraging that most nauseating but inevitable trait latent in all of us—"snobbery." In the days when the imposing doors of the stately homes of England were austere closed to the theatrical profession, the hard-working actor had more time to devote to his career, and achieved a good deal more in consequence. Now, of course, in the era of night clubs and cabarets, where the cream of the aristocracy enthusiastically hobnobs with the clotted cream of the profession, very little is achieved in either direction, the only tangible reward of both parties being a frequently scurrilous mass of cheap publicity which on the face of it is but a poor consolation for the loss of their respective glamour and dignity, to say nothing of the amount of time wasted in the general confusion.

The number of "Society" girls who are taking up acting at the present moment is positively frightening. They have nearly all met the leading theatrical lights at parties, and find it quite easy to insinuate themselves into various productions as understudies or the playing of small parts for which,

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though they may be suitable in type, they are obviously unfitted by experience. This is, of course, grossly unfair when the stage is already filled to overflowing with quite adequately experienced people, who have endured all the usual drudgeries and hardships in order to earn their living and make careers for themselves.

I can honestly say that in all the productions with which I have been concerned so far I have never caused to be engaged anyone who was not an actor or actress by profession, and so far as it lies in my power I never shall.

It is very disheartening to reflect that England is the only country in the world where the public and Press make it possible for this inanely muddled state of affairs to exist, and it is not to be wondered at that so many of our sincere and ambitious actors and actresses have emigrated to America, where the obstacles in the path of genuine achievement are less overpowering and futile.

Probably the figure most to be pitied in connection with the English theatre to-day is the Lord Chamberlain. He has a poor time, to say the least of it, harassed and hated by servile managers and authors, bullied by county councils and corporations waving banners of middle-class puritanism, trying sincerely to save the public morals from being corrupted, shutting his eyes fiercely to the unworthy truth that the public morals of any advanced civilisation are inevitably at a deplorably low ebb, and striving against the realisation that he is fighting a losing battle in attempting to repress eager young writers with their unpleasantly truthful problems, who, after all, are only expressing the spirit of their times and in most cases bringing coals to Newcastle.

The censorship as an institution is merely a figure-head for all those worthy British qualities most detrimental to the progress of true art, hypocrisy, sex-repression, lack of education, religious mania, respectability, and above all moral cowardice. It may be that, having as a nation achieved so much by physical courage, we have grown up in the belief that that is all that matters, which anyhow supplies a reason for our rather paltry progress in art as compared with other countries. The truth of the matter is that morally we allow ourselves to be governed too much by "fear";

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fear of giving ourselves away, fear of what other people may think, fear of exposing real emotions of any sort, and a very definite fear of seeing ourselves as we really are. This being so, it is possible to realise how very necessary a Censor is to the general peace of mind—one more protecting arm of false security, one more fortification built up in order to shut out unpleasant truths, but it must be painfully uncomfortable for the wretched Buffer.

I do not wish to convey the impression that the Censor faces all his difficulties entirely alone, for he has an able staff of readers to assist him. None of them, I gather, are particularly young men, that would be too dangerous. Youth in authority is so terribly unstable and cannot be relied upon not to evolve suddenly a new conviction or be unexpectedly carried away by enthusiasm; also it lacks the matured solidity of character so revered by the middle-class mind; but it would undoubtedly be an interesting experiment to place upon the Board of Censors a few clear-thinking young men and women (morally impeccable, of course, if such a thing is possible) and watch the ultimate effect upon the national drama.

Years hence I shall probably be horrified at this reckless exposition of my youthful credo. One can, after all, be sure of nothing except that one's opinions change with the passing of time, but I have tried in this Introduction to express sincerely my views on the theatre of to-day as I see it, and although a good deal of success has come to me early in life, I definitely consider my present work to be no more than a very tentative first step towards what I hope and intend to achieve in the future.

NOEL COWARD.

THE RAT TRAP

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

SHEILA BRANDRETH
OLIVE LLOYD-KENNEDY
RUBY RAYMOND
NAOMI FRITH-BASSINGTON
BURRAGE
EDMUND CROWE
KELD MAXWELL

- ACT I: *Olive Lloyd-Kennedy's Flat in Kensington.*
(Six months elapse.)
- ACT II: *Study of the Maxwell's House in Belgravia.*
(One year elapses.)
- ACT III: *Same as Act II.*
(Four months elapse.)
- ACT IV: *Living Room of "Iverna Cottage" The Lizard*
Cornwall.

ACT I

ACT I

SCENE: DRAWING-ROOM OF MRS. LLOYD-KENNEDY'S FLAT IN WEST KENSINGTON.

It is comfortably furnished. At the back, on the right, there is an alcove in which is set a dinner-table.

When the curtain rises OLIVE LLOYD-KENNEDY, SHEILA BRANDRETH, and KELD MAXWELL are discovered just finishing dinner. OLIVE is a chic woman of about thirty-five. SHEILA is twenty-four, and attractive. KELD is about twenty-seven or -eight, and to all appearances is the well-groomed young man about town.

OLIVE: Now I'll give you a toast

SHEILA: Do stop cracking nuts, Keld, and let Olive speak.

OLIVE: I only just want to wish you both absolute, unclouded happiness—I feel a little sad when I think of Sheila leaving me, we've been awfully happy together. But, Keld dear, I trust you to look after her—always—she's worth it.

SHEILA (*pressing her hand across the table*): Thank you, Olive darling; Keld, you really ought to respond.

OLIVE: No, don't respond. Speech-making is really a most odious habit. I ought never to have started.

KELD: I'll only just thank you—like Sheila.

SHEILA: I'm glad my last night of blessed singleness has been like this, just with the two people I love best in the world—all to-day has been so deliciously free from fuss; I always imagined a wedding eve to be full of boxes with their lids off, and new frocks lying over the backs of chairs and bright girlish bridesmaids asking foolish questions,

OLIVE: It would be like that if you were having the ordinary orthodox performance in church with everyone grinning and smiling and—thinking; weddings really are the most horribly delicate affairs; why on earth can't peonte marry privately and give a reception to their well-wishers when they return from their honeymoon.

THE RAT TRAP

KELD: I know what you mean; it's unpleasant to feel that when the couple have arrived at their destination the relatives and friends all sit at home and say, " They're there by now, I expect," or, " I wonder if they'll go out to-night." A honeymoon is a thing for two, and no one else should know anything at all about it.

OLIVE: You'd have to let the hotel managers into the secret, they're so careful nowadays, I believe you have to pin your marriage lines on the registration form even in Cornwall.

SHEILA (*raptly*): Oh, Keld, just think of it—our Cornwall. I'm so thankful we both love it; it would have been awful if you had wanted Devon.

OLIVE: But South Devon is very sweet, darling. It has nice red cliffs and blue postcardy sea with little boats, and it's all very sunny and pretty—and in the nicer places like Paignton and Torquay they have concert parties on piers.

SHEILA: I wonder if Cornwall will ever get civilised and horrible.

KELD: I suppose so,"some day, now that the labour classes are so firmly getting the upper hand; all the beauty of England is bound to be spoilt eventually.

OLIVE (*rising*): Well, let's leave these depressing remains now; isn't it comforting to feel that we have done the right thing, oozed sentiment over one another and drunk toasts—it gives one such a lovely glow of satisfaction to feel thoroughly in the picture, even over a trifle.

SHEILA: Do you consider bur marriage a trifle?

OLIVE: Marriage nowadays is nothing but a temporary refuge for those who are uncomfortable at home.

SHEILA: Well, it isn't with me, because I haven't got a home to be uncomfortable in.

OLIVE: Don't pull my little remark to pieces, Sheila, I was only trying to round off the dinner with a few brilliant shafts of biting satire. You literary people never allow anyone to be epigrammatic but yourselves—I think it's most selfish. If you want

OLIVE LLOYD-KENNEDY'S FLAT

to drink port, Keld, and tell immoral stories to yourself, draw the curtains and try to forget that we're listening at the other side.

KELD: I don't want, to-night, thanks.

OLIVE: Very well, come in here so that the servants can clear away.

SHEILA: I thought it was her evening out.

OLIVE: No, dear, every second Tuesday, you ought to know by this time; there are cigarettes in that silver box, Keld; stinkers on one side and opulent Turkish on the other.

KELD: Splendid. Will you have one?

OLIVE (*taking one*): Thanks. By the way, Naomi Frith-Bassington wants to come up for a little while this evening.

KELD: Who is she?

OLIVE: A placid creature who writes fiercely sensuous novels; she's bringing her man with her.

SHEILA: What kind of man—husband, father, brother, or only lover?

OLIVE: Only lover. They live in mild unassuming sin on the first floor. They'd much rather be married really, but someone once told them that free love was Bohemian. His name is Crowe—Edmund Crowe. He writes inferior poems for very inferior art periodicals and haunts the Poetry Bookshop.

KELD: That brands him as a minor literary at once.

SHEILA: Haven't I met *her* before somewhere?

OLIVE: Yes, at the Next Week Club; she gave a lecture the other night on books one should read, and Rebecca North replied with a few pointed remarks on "Books one should not write." Poor Naomi was completely routed.

KELD: Would she be good copy?

OLIVE: Excellent, she's a "soul"; she does her own washing up with a volume of Verlaine wedged in the soap box. She says she couldn't live without the classics, and seems to imagine that the classics couldn't live without her.

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KELD: Oh, do fetch her, Olive, I'll put her in a play.

OLIVE: I'm afraid she's rather an obvious type, but still——
(*She rises.*)

KELD: Never mind.

OLIVE: I shan't be long.

SHEILA: Do, dear.

[*Exit OLIVE.*]

KELD: Well it's your last night of freedom; do you feel frightened?

SHEILA: Of course not, I'm thrilled.

KELD: So am I, but I'm frightened as well—terrified! What if anything should happen to prevent it? I lie awake at night and imagine horrible things—one of us having an accident. I suppose it's silly nerves, but to be on the brink of a great happiness is a scarifying feeling.

SHEILA: Stupid old darling, you'll be a wreck to-morrow if you go on worrying over nothing.

KELD: Oh, no I shan't, there's not much longer to wait now, thank Heaven—we've been very patient. I say, doesn't "we've" sound simply wonderful; a few months ago there wasn't any "we've," only "I've"!

SHEILA: Yes, it stands for our love and our happiness and the joy of working together and helping one another to make our way in the world. Oh, Keld darling, wouldn't it be awful if we failed?

KELD: You're getting nervous now.

SHEILA: I'm not nervous over the immediate future; I'm looking further ahead ;we might become over-ambitious and wreck our happiness or under-ambitious and wreck our careers.

KELD: We must make up our minds firmly to stick to the middle way and have both happiness and careers.

SHEILA: It sounds easy but will probably be a struggle.

KELD: Well, as long as we struggle together it won't matter,

OLIVE LLOYD-KENNEDY'S FLAT

SHEILA (*with fervour*) *But* whatever happens we *must* struggle together, don't let's part in thought for one minute, or even have difference of opinion, they *are* so undermining.

KELD (*laughing*): Darling, you must be reasonable; I'm afraid we shan't be able to get to the end of our married life without occasional arguments.

SHEILA: Yes, but let's keep to little ones, they're less—dangerous.

KELD: You darling.

SHEILA (*passionately*): Oh, I do love you, Keld—but somehow I don't believe there is enough of the maternal in my affection; I feel that to be a good wife I should want to smooth your hair and warm your slippers and—be tactful at breakfast, but I don't. I want to kiss you—go on kissing you—and to ruffle your hair hard, not smooth it. (*She does so.*)

KELD (*kissing her passionately*): You're adorable, you're wonderful! I—I—Oh, God! (*His words are lost in an exceedingly passionate kiss.*)

SHEILA (*half laughing and breaking away*): Do stop, Keld, we shall be so dishevelled when Olive comes back with those people.

KELD: I like that! You ruffled my hair first.

SHEILA: I couldn't help it, it was asking to be ruffled, all sleek and flat—(*she rubs her hands together*)—and greasy.

KELD: It's the best hair wash in London—smell. (*He proffers his head.*)

SHEILA (*sniffing*): Yes, it is rather nice.

KELD: If you were a proper girlish bride you'd like me to reek of tobacco and tweed, and you could call me your "big brown husband"; don't you think that would be awfully attractive?

SHEILA: No, I should hate it. (*There is the noise of outer door opening.*) Look out, here they come—do let them catch us embracing, they rather expect it of us—I hate disappointing people. (*They embrace.*)

THE RAT TRAP

[Enter OLIVE, NAOMI and EDMUND. NAOMI is dark and a trifle willowy, but not too exaggerated, EDMUND is tall and slightly lugubrious.

[KELD and SHEILA break away from one another in assumed embarrassment.

KELD: By Jove, I——

SHEILA: We never heard you, I——

OLIVE: Now don't pretend. You know you wouldn't mind the whole world watching you kiss, you frequently do it in 'buses when your feelings become too much for you.

SHEILA: You are a liar, Olive, we only did it once, and that was outside with one old man looking on.

OLIVE: Well, we won't argue about it now—you all know one another, don't you? At least by name, Naomi Frith-Bassington, Sheila Brandreth, Edmund Crowe, Keld Maxwell. How I loathe introducing people. Do sit down everybody and talk. Keld, hand round the cigarettes, I can't be a bit entertaining to-night; it saps my vitality dreadfully having to keep a restraining hand upon Sheila's bubbling spirits. I've been terrified during the last few days that she'd scream suddenly with excitement in the street.

NAOMI: Miss Brandreth, how courageous it is of you to marry! I should never dare.

KELD: Why not?

NAOMI: Well, Edmund and I realise the value of love, perhaps better than anyone; it seems sacrilege to fetter it down with chains of matrimony.

SHEILA: Keld and I don't intend to be fettered in any way; personally I think that the strain of living together openly would be much harder to bear; I should hate self-righteous people to look down their noses at me.

EDMUND: That sort of thing though is so trivial.

SHEILA: Trivial perhaps when you haven't got to make a success in the world, but you see we have, and we don't mean to be

OLIVE LLOYD-KENNEDY'S FLAT

handicapped at the start by adverse public opinion. Also, we shall feel happier—married.

NAOMI: Of course, speaking commercially, marriage is certainly a sop to the public, but that is just the horror of it—one married for fear under those circumstances—not for love.

OLIVE (*laughing*): In view of to-morrow's event, I think this is quite the most delicious argument I have ever heard.

NAOMI: Oh, please forgive me for talking so much, you see Edmund and I are so happy, somehow I feel it my duty to try to help others to be happy too.

KELD: Have a stinker? (*He offers her box of cigarettes.*)

NAOMI (*taking one*): Thanks.

SHEILA: Oh, please go on, we don't mind a bit; your theory is that love should be free?

NAOMI (*enthusiastically*): Absolutely—free always.

KELD (*lighting her cigarette*): Like the National Gallery.

SHEILA: Don't be absurd, Keld.

OLIVE: Personally, I agree with Sheila.—A light please, Keld.

KELD: Righto. (*He lights her cigarette.*)

SHEILA: Then there's another point—how do you face the child problem? To me it seems terribly cruel to bring a child into the world under any circumstances, but to make it illegitimate as well is surely adding unnecessary insult to injury.

NAOMI: Nowadays that sort of thing never matters; do you imagine that I should mind if I were illegitimate?

SHEILA: Perhaps not, but your son or daughter, when it grows up, might have different views. At present, of course, the world feels that it has convention firmly under its thumb; so it has, for the nonce, but there's no guarantee that convention won't rise one day and begin to assert herself.

NAOMI: Anyhow, Edmund and I are not going to have any children.

THE RAT TRAP

KELD: Supreme faith in a benevolent Providence must be a great comfort.

EDMUND (*with an air of one taking up a prearranged cue*): By the way, apropos of Pi evidence, have you read Naomi's new book "Fate's Plaything"? It came out last week,'

SHEILA: No, I'm afraid I haven't yet.

NAOMI: I'll send you a copy if you would care for it. I should value your criticism very highly.

SHEILA: Thank you so much——

NAOMI: Of course I'm afraid that in some ways it is a little outspoken, but one can't write of Bohemia without defying convention a tiny bit.

KELD: I didn't know there was any Bohemia left now; I dropped into the Cafe Royale the other night hoping to see long-haired decadents, soused in absinthe, exchanging amorous embraces with scarlet-lipped women! And all I found were a few moth-eaten publicans drinking Guinness.

OLIVE: Did you say publicans or publishers?

KELD: Publicans. Publishers never touch alcohol in any form; it might go to their heads and make them accept things.

EDMUND: It is heartrending to send one's work to unappreciative boor who fail to understand one's message.

OLIVE: Personally I've given up writing with a message to humanity in it. "Only a Shop Girl," for instance, my masterpiece—eight thousand words—firmly refused by every editor in London. Even "Fireside Fun" turned it down.

SHEILA: Fancy sending it to such an awful——

OLIVE (*holding up her hand*): Don't, dear, don't. I won't hear a word against "Fireside Fun." It may not like my story; its sense may not be attuned to the pathos and yearning appeal of "Only a Shop Girl," but in spite of that it is a splendid little paper; it says so on the cover and it ought to know.

NAOMI: I know the editor of "Home Happiness"; perhaps if——

OLIVE LLOYD-KENNEDY'S FLAT

OLIVE: No, I've sent it there; they were nicer. They said it wasn't the type that they published, but that they liked my style, and would I do a fairy-tale for their Children's Corner.

KELD: Well, I think that is a very unkind reflection on " Only a Shop Girl"!

OLIVE: Not at all; they want to encourage me. Perhaps they will offer me a job as Aunt Olive—you know the idea. " Darling Chickabidies—such fun—a grand new competition for you this week. All you have to do is to buy eighteen copies of this number and get your dadsie or mumsie to buy eighteen more copies; then you cut out coupon on page twenty-three of each and draw upon it your favourite flower or birdie; then, darlings, you send it in to Lady Goodheart, ' Home Happiness,' 15 Paradise Street, Clerkenwell. Who knows what you will win! Lots of love, chicks,—another story about little Albert next week, your loving Aunt Olive! " Isn't it a beautiful thought?

EDMUND: It is cruel the way those bleary Editors gull the unfortunate children.

SHEILA: I think the children like it—I know I used to.

KELD: Would you all think it frightfully rude of me if I went home to bed now?

SHEILA: Oh, Keld!

KELD: Now don't press me to stay; we're going to be together to the end of our lives and I want a good night's rest in order to face the situation with the requisite courage.

SHEILA (*laughing*): You are a beast.

KELD: Well, anyhow, good night, darling. (*He kisses her fondly.*)

SHEILA: Good night, dear.

[*He shakes hands with NAOMI and EDMUND.*]

KELD: Olive. (*He kisses her.*)

OLIVE: Good night, Keld. Try to sleep.

[*KELD laughs and goes off, followed by SHEILA.*]

THE RAT TRAP

NAOMI: I suppose we really ought to be going too.

OLIVE: Oh, no, it's quite early yet.

NAOMI (*rising*): But as it's your last night with Miss Brandreth I'm sure you'll want to be alone and talk! It must be a great wrench parting.

OLIVE: I shall miss her dreadfully.

EDMUND (*shaking hands with OLIVE*): Good night, Mrs. Kennedy; thank you so much for letting us come up.

OLIVE: Not at all. I hope you'll come again, and cheer my loneliness.

NAOMI: We should love to.

[They go to door and meet SHEILA re-entering.]

Oh, Miss Brandreth, I wish you all the happiness in the world; nothing can ever matter in life if people really love each other.

SHEILA: Thank you ever so much. You will come and see us soon, won't you?

EDMUND: Good night, all my best wishes too.

SHEILA: Thank you, you're both very kind.

[Exit NAOMI and EDMUND. OLIVE sees them out, then returns.]

(Sinking Into chair.) How nice it is of people to be so kind, and how perfectly awful it is to have to keep saying " Good night—thank you "; " Good night—thank you so much "; " Thank you—good night"!

OLIVE: It is difficult to keep from being monotonous; I suppose we really "ought to manage it by inflection. "Good night, thank you "; "good *night*, thank you "!

SHEILA: If I hear those words once more I shall go raving mad.

OLIVE: I feel that the moment has now arrived for us to say a few sentimental words to each other and retire firmly to bed.

SHEILA: Oh, Olive, isn't it awful, the last evening in this flat together! I'm so miserable.

OLIVE LLOYD-KENNEDY'S FLAT

OLIVE (*laughing*): Miserable! If you could only see yourself at the moment, so bubbling over with happiness that you can hardly speak—besides, it isn't a bit awful for you. You're going to have a nice strong husband to honour and obey you, and endless love and Romance, and—the thought of it makes me quite maudlin—I shall be left alone, Sheila, all alone, when you are giving gorgeous dinner parties and receptions and standing at the top of the staircase superbly dressed receiving your guests. I——

SHEILA: As we don't intend to entertain our guests in the bathroom, dear, it would be simpler to receive them in the hall—the staircase is very narrow.

OLIVE: I was referring to the time when as the result of the vast fortunes earned by you both you have a mansion in Park Lane.

SHEILA: There are few things I should dislike more. I've no wish to live among the lost ten tribes.

OLIVE: But seriously, darling, I do *hate* your going.

SHEILA: I can't think why you are adopting this depressingly hopeless attitude just as if a little thing like marriage could ever make any difference to us.

OLIVE: I wasn't thinking of that. ✓

SHEILA: What were you thinking of?

OLIVE: (*suddenly*) Sheila, I'm going to do a dreadful thing just as a sort of salve to my conscience,—I'm going to deliver a warning to you, and—flippancy only makes it harder for me, so please try to be serious.

SHEILA: All right, dear.

OLIVE: Well, to begin with, I have a pet theory. I'm sensible enough to keep it in a cage, but still there it is; it lives on fat pieces of experience, and when there's the least likelihood of trouble it sings. It's singing now.

SHEILA: You're not exactly cheering to-night, are you?

OLIVE: Worse is to come, dear. In the course of conversation

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I'm going to tell you that " It's all for your own good " and that " It's my duty as a friend to speak out, etc." If suitably encouraged I might almost be induced to say that " As you are alone in the world, I feel I must be a mother to you "!

SHEILA: You're flippant now.

OLIVE: Well, anyhow, this is my theory: when two brilliant egoists marry, unless one of them is prepared to sacrifice certain things, there is bound to be trouble.

SHEILA: What kind of things?

OLIVE: To bring the matter down to a more personal note, either you or Keld will have to sacrifice a certain amount of personality; no two people of your intellectual abilities could live together for long without getting on one another's nerves—it's a psychological impossibility.

SHEILA: Do you class our intellects as equal?

OLIVE: Far from it, dear; you are much the cleverer of the two, and because of that I prophesy that you will be the one to give in.

SHEILA: I see your argument, Olive, but I don't agree with it. I love Keld and he loves me really—deep down, therefore, being the clever man he is, he won't want to give up one particle of either my work or my personality.

OLIVE: In reply to that, I can only remark with gentle emphasis that I have been married before; you haven't.

SHEILA: Yes, and you're correspondingly cynical—you don't understand. Keld and I are different, we've both knocked about a good lot and we realise the value of real love and comradeship; instead of jarring on each other as you say we will, we shall encourage one another's intellects and work. We've talked it all over, we're not marrying blindly, on the impulse of sudden infatuation. We're marrying as lovers, I grant you, but our love is mental as well as physical. I love Keld's dear intelligence as much as my own, and he is the same.

OLIVE LLOYD-KENNEDY'S FLAT

OLIVE: That is the one weak spot, dear; you can never be sure that he is the same; he may appear to be at first, men often do, but it will in all probability wear off quite soon. I only want to warn you for your own good.

SHEILA: You've said it, you perfect lamb, you've said it. I know it's for my own good, but don't let's be serious any more, it's my last night of singleness, and any woman who has psychological discussions on her wedding eve deserves to be unhappy. Keld was so wonderful all through lunch to-day, the sheepish groom to the life; he kept on pressing my hand under the table and saying, " Little wife so soon to be." Wasn't it adorable of him?

OLIVE: Yes, it was rather.

SHEILA: I gazed coyly at him and tried to look as though I'd never written anything but laundry and library lists.

OLIVE: Wouldn't it be awful if you had ultimately to give up your writing altogether?

~~SHEILA: What do you mean?~~

OLIVE: You may have to.

SHEILA: But I couldn't give it up, you don't understand—it's my greatest happiness. As I write now I'm providing myself with a key, and when I'm old and have no future at all, I shall use it to unlock the door of the Past.

OLIVE: I wonder if you could.

SHEILA: Of course I could, that's the joy of it.

OLIVE: Yes, dear, but——

SHEILA: I mean to make Keld work as well. Olive, he's going to be great, you can see that by the stuff he's done already, and he's quite young yet. I want to be at the first night of his first play. Just think of the thrill of it, all London sailing in determined to be critical and destructive, and they won't get the chance because it will be a success, a tremendous artistic success, and I shall be sitting there saying to myself every word of it, and awaiting the laughs and applause.

OLIVE: Do you think his work really is clever?

THE RAT TRAP

SHEILA: Yes, I do; he has a wonderful sense of the dramatic, which of course is most important, and his dialogue is exceedingly witty. He may fail a little in construction, but that won't matter a bit if he shows real sincerity.

OLIVE (*dubiously*): No, I suppose not.

SHEILA: Do you know I believe you dislike Keld.

OLIVE: Don't be absurd, Sheila, I'm very fond of him, as fond as I could ever be of a man who is taking you away. We've been happy here together for a good time now, and naturally it's a break. I hate breaks.

SHEILA: But such a very slight one, darling.

OLIVE: I shall be extraordinarily lonely without you.

SHEILA: My lamb! (*She kisses her.*) I'll take jolly good care you're not without me—much.

OLIVE: You won't be able to help it for the first few—years.

SHEILA: You were going to say weeks, I saw it coming. No, dear, I think we shall last longer than that. (*She looks at photograph of KELD in bigframe on table.*) He's such a darling.

OLIVE: He's sweet. (*Acidly.*)

SHEILA: I'm sure you're against him for something, Olive; I wish I could find out what it is.

OLIVE: I've nothing against him at all—really—but somehow,—well, to begin with he has talent, we know, but nothing compared to you; coupled with that he has, if anything, more temperament than you. As you know, I place a very high value on your brain. You're going to be great if you work; Keld can never be great.

SHEILA: But, Olive——

OLIVE: No, let me go on. He may be successful, wildly successful, but not great, and my one all-absorbing fear is that you will in time become so enthralled and interested in his work that you'll allow yours to go to the wall. He'll have your brain as well as his own to write with,

OLIVE LLOYD-KENNEDY'S FLAT

SHEILA: He doesn't need it—you don't understand, Olive; as for letting my work go, it's absurd—we shall pull together all the time over everything. A few minutes ago you said you were afraid that I should give up writing voluntarily; now you say that I shall merge my brain into Keld's. I tell you firmly I shall do neither. I love him too much to give in to him.

OLIVE: You'll probably end in giving in to him too much to love him.

SHEILA: If you make one more epigram, Olive, I shall break something valuable.

OLIVE: You can't, dear; it's a furnished flat.

SHEILA: You think I shall stop loving him after a time, but you're wrong, I won't. For the last few years I've satirised love; I've written cynical criticisms of other people's love stories—I've burlesqued Romance and laughed at passion until at last, goaded to desperation, love, romance and passion have risen up and jumped on me—hard—just to show what a fool I've been, and one thing is quite certain, they won't let me go now they've got me. Keld may die or run away with another woman forgetting me altogether, but I shall go on loving him, whatever happens; it's just retribution for my sneers in the past. I shall probably go through hell later on, but I shall love him, love him, love him, to the last day of my life, and it will damned well serve me right.

OLIVE: Perhaps so, dear—anyhow, it will be sure to do you a lot of good. It's an ill wind that blows somebody something. I wish I could get that right, I've never been able to yet.

SHEILA: I hope you never will; it's a most irritating remark.

OLIVE: Yes, but sometimes it's such a relief to fall back on commonplaces. " Marriage is a lottery "—there's another. I feel much revived! Shall we go to bed now?

SHEILA: I suppose we'd better, but I know I shan't sleep.

OLIVE: Of course you'll sleep; if not, you can read. I've put Wells' " Marriage " on the table by your bed—just to cheer you up. Come along.

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SHEILA: Very well.

[They both go towards the door. Suddenly SHEILA turns, and running back to the table, she takes up photograph of KELD.]

OLIVE (*laughing*): Little wife so soon to be!

CURTAIN.

ACT II

ACT II

(Six months have elapsed since Act I)

SCENE: STUDY IN KELD MAXWELL'S HOUSE, BELGRAVIA

It is a very comfortably furnished room with large leather arm-chairs and a big desk. There are shelves let into the walls filled with books. There is a big padded fire-guard round the fender.

When curtain rises KELD is typing busily ; there comes a knock at the door.

KELD *(absently)*: Come in,

[Another knock.

(Impatiently.) Come in!

[Enter BURRAGE. She is a grey-haired woman, a cross between housekeeper, cook and parlourmaid.

BURRAGE: Excuse me, sir, but will you be in for dinner to-night?

KELD: I have just finished a hearty breakfast; is it quite the moment for that question?

BURRAGE: I want to know what to order in, sir.

KELD: I see your point, Burrage—but surely in well-managed houses dinner is always on the table at the correct time, irrespective of whether the master happens to be in or not?

BURRAGE: That wouldn't come out very economical, sir, you see.

KELD: Perhaps not, Burrage, but the various intricacies of household economy are not as interesting to me as they are to you. I have other, if not greater, at least equally important work to attend to; would you be kind enough to discuss the dinner problem with your mistress ?

BURRAGE: The mistress said she was going to be busy all the morning, sir

KELD: Oh, did she? Well, I'm busy too; if necessary we'll go without dinner.

BURRAGE *(firmly)*: There's no occasion for that, sir—there's always the cold mutton from yesterday.

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KELD: That is a source of immeasurable comfort to me.

BURRAGE: I wondered if it mightn't look a bit more tempting if I warmed it up.

KELD: I'm sure it would look absolutely alluring warmed up; do so by all means.

BURRAGE: I might get in some vegetables and make a casserole of it.

KELD: Doubtless there are no limits to what you might do with the mutton, Burrage, and you're perfectly at liberty to go to the utmost extremes of abandon with it, but please don't mention the subject again in my hearing—I'm exceedingly busy.

BURRAGE (*injured*): I only thought it best, sir, to consult you.

KELD: You were perfectly right, and I assure you I feel most flattered by the attention, but unfortunately you chose the wrong moment; if you'd attacked me in my bath this morning, or murmured "mutton" seductively to me when you brought my tea, all would have been well. I should have taken an intelligent interest and we should both have been saved a lot of heartburn and unhappiness; as it is I'm mentally incapable of grappling with the subject. Will you leave me now, please, Burrage?

BURRAGE: I'm sure I'm very sorry, sir——

KELD: Don't apologise—after all it's your profession, and only natural that you should wish to talk about it. If I discussed dramatic construction with you, you'd be bored stiff. I'm certain you would. Well, I feel the same about mutton. *Do go away now, Burrage.*

BURRAGE: I couldn't very well walk away, sir, when you was talking. It wouldn't have been respectful.

KELD: You're so right, but if you stand there being so deliciously attentive I shall go on talking for hours and we shall neither of us do a stroke of work; do break away from the snare of my conversation and damn respect!

BURRAGE (*slightly huffy*): Very good, sir. *[Exit firmly.]*

[KELD goes on with his typing for a few moments. A loud ring of the front door bell is heard. KELD jumps and listens.]

STUDY OF THE MAXWELLS' HOUSE

Then comes a loud rat-a-tat-tat at the knocker, the noise of voices outside, then another knock at the study door.

KELD (*testily*): Come in, for God's sake.

[*Re-enter BURRAGE.*

BURRAGE: Miss Raymond to see you, sir.

KELD: Miss who?

BURRAGE: Miss Raymond; Ruby Raymond I think she said, sir.

KELD: Oh, show her in.

BURRAGE: Yes, sir.

[She goes out with dignity and re-enters in a moment announcing RUBY RAYMOND, then she goes out. RUBY is a pretty, well-dressed girl—a very common type but unfailingly attractive.

RUBY (*with beautiful enunciation*): Oh, please forgive me, Mr. Maxwell, for coming *so* early, but I wanted to catch you before you went out.

KELD: I'm delighted, Miss Raymond, do sit down, won't you?

RUBY: Thanks. (*Sits down and loosens her sables.*) I'm not generally up at this time, you know, still it's a nice change to be out before eleven for once.

KELD: Have a cigarette?

RUBY: No thanks. I never dare smoke before lunch because of my voice.

KELD: I didn't know time made any difference.

RUBY: Neither it does really, but if once I started smoking in the morning I should never stop: you know how bad habits grow on one! (*Laughs.*) But there, I mustn't take up, too much *of your* morning. I'm sure you must be fearfully busy. I only came round to ask you when they're really going to start rehearsals. I wouldn't ask Charlie Baker, he'd want to know what I wanted to know for. Managers are awful—so inquisitive. As a matter of fact, between you and me, I'm going down to Frinton for a few days.

KELD: I think they seriously intend to begin next Monday.

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RUBY ; Oh, well, that gives me nearly a week. You won't let on where I am, will you? You know what Charlie is.

KELD: Is he anything beyond being a business manager?

RUBY : Well, he's got a bit of a crush on me—ever since he met me at Doddie's party. D'you know Doddie? He gives jolly good parties.

KELD: I'm afraid I don't.

RUBY: He's a nice boy. Anyhow, Charlie won't leave me alone now. I did think I was going to get away from all that sort of thing when I left musical comedy.

KELD: Do you know, Miss Raymond, I'm sadly afraid you'll never get away from " that sort of thing," and even if you did, I'm sure you'd hate it.

RUBY (*laughing*): Oh God! I keep forgetting I'm talking to an author. You get me all the time—it's quite uncanny. Between you and me, Charlie's passing out over me.

KELD: Yes, I noticed something of the sort when I saw you both at the reading last week. Was it through him you got the engagement?

RUBY: Yes, more or less. I've been wanting to go into straight stuff for ages, and he fixed it all up with Sampson for me.

KELD: I'm glad you're making your first plunge into legitimate drama in my first play—it gives us a sort of bond in common, doesn't it?

RUBY: Rather. By the way, what's Irene Harrison like?

KELD : On or off?

RUBY: Off. I'd like to know what I'm in for before we start.

KELD: I believe she's very charming. I've only met her twice. Of course she'll be marvellous in the part, tho' I'm afraid she's a little inclined to be unsympathetic.

RUBY: Now, that's exactly, what I say, and she doesn't dress smartly enough—too bitty. Miss Harrison's dress in Act II by Maison Lyons—you know the stunt?

STUDY OF THE MAXWELLS' HOUSE

KELD: I shall be very interested to see how you and she get on together.

RUBY: Oh, I shall be perfectly natural with her; if she gets jealous though, I can't help it, can I?

KELD: Do you think she will?

RUBY: Oh, you never know. Look what a swine Cissy Neville was after the first night of " Kiss Granny "; we'd been such pals too, and just because I'd made a success she stuck my photograph up in the scullery next to Horatio Bottomley.

KELD: That, of course, was real malice.

RUBY: Yes, wasn't it? And the fuss she made about dressing-rooms; not that I minded being put up on the second floor, but it was hard luck on the Guards having to tramp up all those stairs after they'd been fighting for us and everything.

KELD: I see that you possess the true patriotic spirit.

RUBY: Now you're being sarcastic, I know you are; but still I never thought you'd be so nice. Between you and me, I was a bit frightened of coming to see you. I don't quite know why I did it either—half to spite Charlie and half to be on good terms with the author.

KELD (*roaring with laughter*): You really are an amazing person. Anyhow, you've succeeded in one half—I can't answer for Charlie's feelings in the matter.

RUBY: I don't care what he thinks, really.

KELD: Why do you encourage him?

RUBY: I don't, beyond letting him take me out to lunch every day. He keeps on telling me of nice little places he knows in Soho, but I'm quite happy at Claridge's; there's something so county about Claridge's.

KELD: Yes, there is. One feels that even the waiters are the sons of retired colonels.

RUBY (*rising*): Well, I really must be going now. I've trespassed on your time too much as it is.

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KELD (*hurriedly*): Please don't dream of going yet; you're not trespassing a bit. I love you to be here.'

RUBY (*sitting down again*): Oh, well. I'm sure I don't know what Charlie'd say; he'd think I was getting round you to write in new bits for me.

KELD: Well, aren't you?

RUBY (*laughing*): Exit designing actress, crushed by blunt question. Yes, perhaps that's what I *do* want; after all it would be nice to make a big success, and my part's not very large.

KELD: As a matter of fact, I am writing you an entirely new scene. They didn't like the end of the second act as it was, so now I'm going to make you come in and tell Sylvia everything.

RUBY: Lovely! Is it dramatic?

KELD: Yes, but of course humour too. I believe it will play very well.

RUBY: Irene Harrison plays Sylvia, doesn't she?

KELD: Yes.

RUBY: Oh God!

KELD: Why, " Oh God!"?

RUBY: I don't know, but she looks the kind of woman who'd cut in on one's laughs.

KELD: *I don't* think she will; you mustn't be too prejudiced against her before you start, it will only end in trouble.

RUBY: I don't care if it does as long as I win. Do go on telling me about the new scene. Have you finished it ?

KELD: Oh, no, I've only done the rough outline, but you decide to give Jack up and come and ask Sylvia's forgiveness; of course it's a bit sloppy, but still——

RUBY: I think it sounds perfectly wonderful. I can't imagine how people can write, it's terribly clever. I'd give anything to be able to, like you do.

KELD: But you can sing and dance and act instead.

STUDY OF THE MAXWELLS' HOUSE

RUBY: You haven't seen me act properly yet—I haven't had a chance.

KELD: I'd love to write a part for you exactly as you are.

RUBY: The Censor'd go off the deep end if you did.

KELD: Oh, no, I should write it very carefully.

RUBY: What I want is something really dramatic—you know, having a child and not finding the father till the last act. I'm sick of singing bright songs. I want a bit of sordid realism.

KELD: You ought to do some Repertory work.

RUBY: I can't speak Lancashire well enough, but still, anything to get into real straight stuff—I'm fed to the teeth with musical comedy.

KELD: Are you satisfied with this part?

RUBY: Oh, rather, even though it isn't the lead—it will be such a relief not having the chorus dodging about behind me. (*Suddenly laughs loudly.*)

KELD: What is it now?

RUBY: Oh, I've just "got" myself, that's all—I should be haughty about the chorus—I was in it myself two years ago, so was Cissie Neville. She hasn't got any real sense of humour though, she can't get outside herself and laugh at herself—it's so silly to take things seriously, as if it mattered to me where she put the photographs—that sort of trick shows such a small mind, doesn't it? But still, we're quite friendly again now, but I wouldn't trust her an inch—once bitten, twice shy. There's a lot of truth in those old philosophers. (*Rises.*) I really must go now; I've to pack for Frinton. You're sure they won't begin till Monday?

KELD (*helping her on with her furs*) \ Yes, quite.

RUBY: Will you come and have tea with me one day?

KELD: I'd simply love to.

RUBY: Well, do, and I'll try to make you write in a bit more for me—but you won't make me out too hard, will you? I'm not a bit really, you know—do make me be nice to What's-his-

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name in the last act, even if I am chucking him. I always believe in keeping on being sweet to people whatever happens, it does them in so damned well. I shall finish with Charlie soon, but I shan't cut him or anything like that—too much of a give away; I shall just behave as though nothing had happened.

KELD: I hope nothing has. (*Rings bell.*)

RUBY: Oh, well, you know what I mean.

KELD: When do you intend to deal the final blow to his happiness?

RUBY: Oh, not till after the first night; he arranges all my Press interviews for me, and it would be silly to throw away good advertisement deliberately.

KELD: Can it be, Miss Raymond, that you have a mercenary mind?

RUBY (*laughing*): You'd have a mercenary mind if you were with Charlie for long.

KELD: Well, I sincerely hope I shall not be.

RUBY: You won't let on about Frinton, will you?

KELD: I won't mention it at all.

RUBY: Promise?

KELD: Promise.

[*Enter BURRAGE.*]

RUBY: He'd be livid with me, and you know what Jews are when they're roused.

KELD: They very seldom are though.

RUBY: They're almost as bad when they're in love. If it wasn't that Charlie had a wife already I should have been dragged to the Synagogue ages ago. I believe he's trying to divorce her or something—just as if I'd ever marry him. Between you and me, I like a man to be a bit more up and doing. Charlie grovels too much, but still he *is* the Business Manager! Good-bye—see you on Monday.

[*Exit RUBY followed by BURRAGE. KELD, left alone, laughs*]

STUDY OF THE MAXWELLS' HOUSE

for a moment or two and then sits down and commences to work again.

[Enter SHEILA. She looks charming, but a little untidy, as though she had been so Immersed in her work that she had had no time to bother about her appearance.

KELD *[impatiently]*: Oh, damn!

SHEILA: What's the matter, dear?

KELD: I've been trying all the blessed morning to get this scene done, and there have been nothing but interruptions and disturbances.

SHEILA: Well, you often disturb me at *my* work; anyhow, I wanted a pencil, you've taken practically every one in the house. *(Takes pencil from tray.)*

KELD: Not that one, it's the best.

SHEILA *(laughing)*: Don't you think I deserve the best, darling? After all, you have the comfortable study to work in, and the typewriter.

KELD: Why don't you go and buy one for yourself?

SHEILA: Because I shouldn't be able to use it if I did. *(Leans over and kisses him.)* Don't be grumpy, there's a lamb.

KELD: If I were allowed to write in peace, I shouldn't even want to be grumpy.

SHEILA: You're hardly ever disturbed, really, you know—just this morning perhaps once or twice—you mustn't be unreasonable. *(Sniffs.)* What a funny scent. Who's been here?

KELD: Miss Ruby Raymond.

SHEILA: Who's she?

KELD: You know perfectly well—I told you the other day; she's playing the cocotte in my play.

SHEILA: Oh, of course, yes, I'd forgotten. She'll make a success of it if she continues to use this scent. By the way, will you be in to dinner?

KELD: No, I shall dine on the Sahara desert to-night.

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SHEILA: Why this blundering attempt at sarcasm, dear, are you upset over anything?

KELD: No, not upset, only driven to frenzy by that question; constant repetition of a thing is apt to grate on anyone.

SHEILA: I haven't mentioned the subject before.

KELD: No, but Burrage has; she's been in here twice this morning, frisking round me with bright girlish remarks, worrying me to death.

SHEILA: I hope you weren't rude to her, Keld; she's an excellent servant.

KELD: She'd be a more excellent servant if she managed things on her own without bothering me.

SHEILA: I believe you *have* been rude to her; you've been terribly disagreeable this morning.

KELD: I tell you I haven't been rude; she's perfectly happy playing with the mutton and arranging things round it. But seriously, you can't expect me to work when I'm worried every few minutes by inane domestic questions; surely that is rather more your department than mine?

SHEILA: No, it's not, I have to work too. Why don't you lock the door?

KELD: Because if I did Burrage would bang until I opened it; she's a firm woman, you can see that by her chin.

SHEILA: I've no time this morning to discuss Burrage's chin.

KELD: Neither have I; I only mentioned it in passing to illustrate my conception of her character—firm chin, firm woman.

SHEILA: As a matter of fact she's very weak—no real moral courage at all—especially when dealing with the tradespeople.

KELD: Well, we won't argue about it; you say she's weak, I say she's not

SHEILA: I've had many more opportunities of studying her than you.

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KELD: I doubt it, considering that you shut yourself up in your room all day and lock the door.

SHEILA: Now, Keld darling, *don't* be tiresome! You know I'm working hard as well and have to lock myself in; anyone would think that my sole mission in life was to arrange your meals with Burrage.

KELD: If you mention Burrage's name again I'll—I'll—yell the place down.

SHEILA: Really, you are childish, making such a fuss over trifles; here you are, surrounded by everything you want, in a cosy room where you can write in absolute comfort, and all you do is to get nervy and irritated over nothing at all. You must pull yourself together, darling.

KELD: But it is so awful, just when I'm concentrating on an important scene—to have my thoughts wrenched away to mutton! Why, the very word "mutton" is enough to damn anyone's inspiration.

SHEILA: You couldn't have been concentrating very hard with Ruby What's-her-name here.

KELD: I was concentrating before she came, and her name is Raymond.

SHEILA: I shouldn't bank on it if I were you, it's probably Blaggins, or Winterbottom, or something terrible. Raymond doesn't sound genuine to me—anyhow, why not blame her for disturbing you instead of the unfortunate Burrage?

KELD: There you go again, back to Burrage! Hadn't we better give her notice before she lands us in the Divorce Courts?

SHEILA (*bursting out laughing*): Oh Keld, aren't we fools? We were actually getting quite heated.

KELD: I wasn't; it was only airy badinage.

SHEILA: Yes you were; come on, admit it like a darling. So was I. I could have hit you several times. (*Kisses him.*) It's been one of the most tiresome mornings I've ever known—everything's gone wrong—no pencils, bad egg at breakfast, you and Burrage,

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that irritating letter from Naomi asking for our subscriptions to her club. No wonder we're both fractious; let's unsay everything since we got up, and start all over again.

KELD: Angel, we will! (*Kisses her.*) I love you more than ever after we've just been bickering; it gives a sort of relish.

SHEILA: I hate it. I'm quite happy without relish. Don't let's bicker any more, it's terrible waste of time.

KELD: All right, we won't; I was only trying to make the best of our silliness. How's "The Shadow Show" going?

SHEILA: Not frightfully well; I've only done two chapters. I'm thrilled with the idea, but somehow it's difficult to get really started. Wouldn't it be wonderful to be able just to think out a novel and see it lying complete in front of you without the terrible strain of writing it?

KELD: Published, or just proofs?

SHEILA: Oh, proofs, so that you could make a fuss of correcting them, and say how hard worked you were.

KELD: Sometimes I wish we neither of us wrote at all.

SHEILA: Why, dear, we're awfully happy!

KELD: Yes, but somehow—oh, I don't know—it would be rather nice to go up to the city every day and do commonplace monotonous work, and lunch at the same place with the same people and catch the same train back in the evening, to be greeted by you, perfectly dull and sweet, full of thrilling little bits of news about the model vacuum cleaner and how you retorted to the cook when she gave notice; Think of the wonderful tranquillity of having no temperament or intellect.

SHEILA: Would you like me to be like that, now?

KELD: My darling, don't be so absurd. Do you think I could go on loving you for a moment without your dear intelligence and brain?

SHEILA: I sometimes wonder, that's all.

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KELD: Well, I wish you wouldn't; it never does any good to wonder about those sort of things.

SHEILA: All right, dear, I won't. Now I must go and do some more work; I'm sure you're dying to too. I'll read you my two chapters after lunch.

KELD: Oh, well, then before we both start again I want to read you this bit of the second act.

SHEILA (*without enthusiasm*): We've wasted an awful lot of time already.

KELD: Of course, if you don't want to hear it——

SHEILA: It isn't that I don't want to, but it's nearly half-past twelve now and we've hardly done anything this morning. Why not read it after lunch when I read mine?

KELD: I don't suppose I shall feel in the mood then.

SHEILA (*flopping impatiently into chair*): Oh, go on then.

KELD: Well, as a matter of fact I haven't actually written it yet. I just wanted to know if you approve of the idea, the end of the second act, you know. Instead of having Rose, the cocotte, truculent all through, I'm going to make her apologise to Sylvia rather pathetically for everything——

SHEILA: But she never would.

KELD: Why not?

SHEILA: Certainly not the type you've written. You'd have to alter the whole character to make her do that. No girl who had——

KELD: But, my dear Sheila, I don't see why cocottes shouldn't be apologetic as well as anyone else.

SHEILA: Yes, but not the character you've drawn; she's much too hard, also she's supposed to hate Sylvia. There's no earthly reason for her suddenly to turn repentant and nice—it's psychologically wrong.

KELD: It *isn't* psychologically wrong; why, Ruby Raymond was raving about it just now. She said that——

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SHEILA: Of course, if you go to ex-chorus girls for criticisms, why ask me?

KELD: Don't be silly, Sheila.

SHEILA: It's you who are being silly, quoting Ruby Raymond to me. We'll think out something different for the end of the act after lunch.

KELD: I don't want anything different. I'm quite satisfied with this.

SHEILA: Well, there's nothing more to be said, is there? If you're actually pretending to know more about women than I do——

KELD: I'm not pretending at all. You, being a woman yourself, are much too down on your sex; / regard you all impartially with the eye of an observer.

SHEILA: Yes, like standing outside Buckingham Palace and trying to make an inventory of the furniture.

KELD: Not at all. I've had lots of opportunities of studying women.

SHEILA: You may have had the opportunities, but there's nothing to prove that you've taken advantage of them; your writing certainly doesn't.

KELD: It's silly to be catty about my writing, just because we happen to disagree.

SHEILA: I wasn't in the least catty; I merely say that your wopien aren't good. No man, unless he's abnormal, can ever really get a grip on the feminine mind, and you're not a bit abnormal.

KELD: I'm afraid, darling, you're rather talking through your hat; heaps of perfectly normal men have written brilliantly about women.

SHEILA: Perhaps, but only up to a certain point; but of course you haven't even reached that point with Rose—she's an obvious type—she'd never, never, never become a charming sympathetic character after all her beastliness. You know perfectly well I'm right now, don't you?

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KELD: No, I don't.

SHEILA: Well, all I can say is it's sheer obstinacy.

KELD: It isn't obstinacy at all; I like Rose in spite of her beastliness; I feel that given the opportunity she *would* be repentant.

SHEILA: Well, if that's your conception of her character you certainly haven't written up to it, and anyhow, if you don't like my criticism you shouldn't have asked for it.

KELD: You're only being destructive because you weren't keen to hear what I'd done; you read your stuff to me on every possible occasion, and always get impatient when I try to read you mine.

SHEILA (*angrily*): It isn't fair of you to say things like that, Keld, and it's not true. I love your work, and I'm always ready to take an interest, that's why I criticise; then you get bad tempered and turn round on me. If you can't stand criticism you'll never get anywhere. You think you know all there is to know about women, and you really know nothing about them at all except superficialities. Look at the heroine in that one act play you did last month——

KELD: That's it, drag that up again. I admitted I was wrong then; I couldn't do more. I know one thing about women, and that is——

SHEILA: Don't lose your temper, it's so foolish.

KELD (*furiously*): I'm not losing my temper, but I shall if, whenever we have an argument, you can't keep from raking up all the things we said weeks ago.

SHEILA: I didn't rake up anything. I merely pointed out that——

KELD: That I happened really to be in the wrong for once, I know; you never let me forget it; that's typical of a woman.

SHEILA: And just because I give you an honest criticism of your work you get childish and rude,

KELD: If you had only stopped up in your own room this morning and not come down and disturbed me, we should both have been saved all this aimless bickering.

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SHEILA: You said you liked bickering just now because it was a relish. Anyhow, I had no pencil. You take jolly good care to have everything you want round you when you want to work. You grab all the writing necessities, leaving me none. Have you ever been without a pen or pencil for one moment since we've been married?

KELD: Oh, for Heaven's sake don't harp on the beastly pencils; buy hundreds and hundreds and hundreds and give me the bill. I'll pay it willingly—anything, anything for peace.

SHEILA (*sarcastically*): My dear Keld, can it be that you are beginning to see yourself in the picture as a henpecked husband?

KELD: I'm only playing up to your marvellous impersonation of a nagging wife—it's very stupid of you to do it. I have to finish off this play to make money for us both, and all you do is to——

SHEILA: Anyone would think that you were the only one who earned anything. On what have we been living for the last month? Cheques for my short stories and occasional royalties for my last book.

KELD: Oh, I know all that; I'm only a beginner, but what you say only proves the necessity of my earning a *lot* quite soon. Even your brilliant short stories won't go on for ever; therefore, Sheila *dear*, would you be kind enough to leave me to my work now?

SHEILA: No, I won't leave you to your work; you won't be able to write a word after all this squabbling—neither shall I. I should go upstairs and think of the beastly things I might have said to you and regret not having said them, and you would do the same down here. That's not a bit of good for our happiness; if we can't get on together without this eternal jarring we'd better face it. It's dangerous to leave little unfinished quarrels lying about the place like loose ends; they might join together and wreck our lives later on.

KELD: What do you intend to do? Have a pitched battle?

SHEILA: Don't be foolish, Keld. It's serious, and you know it

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For the last three months we've had absurd nagging arguments like this one on an average of about four times a week. Of course, we always make it up in the end, but that doesn't put things right; we break out again in a day or two over some trivial irritation, and work ourselves up into tempers, and say malicious things to each other—all for nothing, or comparatively nothing. That only proves that there is something radically wrong either with one or both of us, and the sooner we find out what it is, the better.

KELD: I quite agree, but how are we to do it? I quite realise the folly of sparring and hurling caustic epithets at each other, I've realised it for a long time. I've vowed frequently that never, never, never shall an unkind word pass my lips again, but it's all of no avail; an hour later I find myself embroiled in a fierce verbal skirmish from which it is impossible to escape without considerable losses on both sides, and how in God's name we're going to pitch on the exact cause of it is beyond me.

SHEILA: I suppose our temperaments are too much alike, and our talents are too much alike. If you were an engineer or a stock-broker it might be better.

KELD: On the contrary, I'm convinced that it would be infinitely worse; you'd take not the slightest interest in my work, and I'd have no toleration or understanding for yours.

SHEILA: Do you think, really and candidly, that we are interested in each other's work now?

KELD: Yes, of course we are.

SHEILA: I'm not so sure; I know we try very hard, and often help one another considerably, but I don't feel that there is any genuine interest there. Perhaps there's a certain element of jealousy that stands in the way.

KELD: If there is, it's certainly subconscious.

SHEILA: It is so difficult to be sure of that. I mean to discover what the trouble is; it's getting on my nerves terribly, so it is on yours. We're not being happy together, Keld, we're not being happy

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together. Don't you realise it—isn't it awful? (*She almost cries, but pulls herself together.*)

KELD (*at once rising and kissing her*): Darling, it isn't as bad as that, I *know* it isn't—these rows are only silly trivialities.

SHEILA: No, they're not, they're not, they go deeper down, and if we don't stop in time we——Oh, don't you see what I mean?—something horrible will happen, we shall separate or——

KELD: Now listen to me, you've been overworking, I can see that.

SHEILA: No, I haven't. I've worked hardy at all.

KELD: Well, you're suffering from some sort of strain, you've been so odd this morning.

SHEILA: Haven't you been understanding what I mean?

KELD: Yes, of course I have in a way, but I think you attach too much value to trifles; all married couples with any temperament at all have squabbles, it's only natural; and as for being jealous of one another—why, that's absurd. You're wonderful and helpful to me, and I try to be the same to you. I love every word you write. I——

SHEILA (*slowly*): You said all that last week when we'd just made up a quarrel, don't you remember?

KELD: Yes, perhaps I did more or less, but really I can't see——

SHEILA: You'll say it again next week, and we shall kiss and be frightfully in love until the next time after that.

KELD: Sheila darling, you are a silly old baby, youVe..worrying over nothing.

SHEILA (*vehemently*): I'm *not* worrying over nothing, I'm worrying over the most important thing in the world—our happiness; I'd sacrifice anything, anything for that. You don't see what I mean, I *know* you won't, and you haven't been understanding all along, but you've got to understand, you *must*. I love you now, Keld, even more than when we married, and you love me, but each petty argument and disagreement we have will undermine

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that love a little more, though we may not be conscious of it, and one day it will stop in one of us—not both—no two people ever stop loving at the same time, there's always one left to be miserable. That's what these little rows will lead us to, and they mustn't, they mustn't, they've got to stop dead!

KELD: Perhaps if we controlled our tempers a little more——

SHEILA: No, occasional outbursts of temper don't matter, it's the feeling behind the temper that counts. Control is all very well, but there oughtn't to be anything *to* control. Why should we fly into rages with one another over nothing at all? I tell you there's something wrong, and you won't understand; you still think it's a triviality. I'm frightened, terribly frightened, of the future, and it isn't altogether hysteria either. There's a something lacking; perhaps it's a domestic tie we need, some sort of bond in common other than our work.

KELD: We have Burrage.

SHEILA: I know you think I'm working myself up over nothing, Keld, so you're relieving the strain by occasional dashes of humour. I don't want any humour now, darling, so do be a lamb and curb it; I'm quite serious, and I *do* so want you to be serious too.

KELD (*brightly*)-. I'm as solemn as a judge.

SHEILA (*appealingly*): Keld, please?

KELD (*with irritating brightness*)". I don't know why you're looking at me like that; I can't be any more serious without bursting into tears. What is it you want to discuss? Our respective mental disturbances, a quick plunge into the treacherous pool of psycho-analysis?

SHEILA: It's very unkind of you to be so irritating.

KELD (*cheerfully*): Really, darling, I don't know what you mean.

SHIELA (*stamping her foot*): You know very well what I mean. You are treating everything I say facetiously, and it's neither clever nor amusing; it's horrid of you. You may be a young

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dramatist with an "elfin sense of humour" and "a gleam of cynical mischief in your smile"; you may imagine that you are handling your wife's hysteria with the masterful touch of a man who knows women through and through, but you're not, you're making me hate you. There are moments in life when flippancy is intolerable even if it happens to be brilliant, which yours certainly was not.

KELD: My dear girl, it's no use firing off streams of scathing remarks at me just because I don't feel in the mood to dissect my innermost feelings and put them together again like a jig-saw puzzle; if it's a usual failing among lady novelists to wallow in long intimate discussions about their inner lives, Heaven preserve me from them.

SHEILA: Their dislike of your conceit will preserve you from them much more effectively than Heaven.

KELD: Conceit! That's new so far. I've been accused this morning of childishness, rudeness, unintelligence and flippancy—soon there won't be anything left to call me.

SHEILA: You flatter yourself.

KELD: It becomes necessary when my own wife fails so lamentably to appreciate my virtues.

SHEILA: If what you have been giving me is a sample of your virtues, I shall take every opportunity of encouraging your vices.

KELD: What a pity it is that there isn't a stenographer here to take all this down in shorthand; it would make an excellent scene in a domestic comedy.

SHEILA (*losing control*): Keld, there are times when I could kill you——

[There is a knock at the door.]

KELD: Come in.

[Enter BURRAGE.]

BURRAGE: I'm sorry to bother you again, sir, but will you be in for lunch? You generally go out, but I wasn't quite sure.

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KELD: I have some interesting news for you, Burrage. I intend to give up my career as a dramatist and devote myself entirely to a life of domesticity. I shall certainly be in to lunch. We will have a ragout of yesterday's mutton with seakale and *souffle* potatoes; we will also have——

SHEILA (*controlling herself with an effort*). The master is only joking, Burrage.

KELD (*rudely*): I was speaking to Burrage, Sheila; please don't interrupt.

[SHEILA grips on to the back of a chair and makes no answer. As I was saying, after the mutton we will have apple charlotte.

BURRAGE: There aren't any apples, sir.

KELD: Well, go out and buy some.

BURRAGE: It's not my place to run errands, sir; if you'd have told me before I'd have ordered them when the greengrocer came this morning.

KELD: I don't wish to be argued with, Burrage; go out and get those apples at once.

BURRAGE: I take my orders from the mistress, sir.

KELD (*angrily*): On the contrary, you take your orders from me. Will you kindly go and get those apples?

SHEILA (*very quietly*): There is no need for you to get any apples, Burrage; the master doesn't understand the amount of work you have to do, or else he wouldn't ask any more of you. You may go now.

BURRAGE: Thank you, ma'am.

[*Exit BURRAGE hurriedly.*

KELD (*with ominous quietness*): What do you mean by making me look a fool in front of Burrage?

SHEILA (*coldly*): I think you must be taking leave of your senses.

KELD: Now understand me, Sheila——

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SHEILA (*going towards door*): I've no intention of even trying to understand you, until you learn how to behave yourself.

KELD (*standing in front of door*): I feel that it would be wiser to finish this little argument now, while we're in the mood.

SHEILA: Please come away from that door, Keld, and let me go out.

KELD: No.

SHEILA: Are you mad?

KELD: No, at the moment I feel particularly sane.

[SHEILA goes to open door. He seizes her arm, twisting it slightly, and, pushing her down stage, he forces her into chair.

SHEILA: You hurt my arm.

KELD: That was your own fault.

SHEILA (*dully*): I wonder if I shall ever be able to love you again after this?

KELD: That is beside the point. I have only one desire at the moment, and that is to impress upon you the extreme folly of making me look ridiculous before the servants. I won't have it. I put up with a lot—slovenly meals, eternal disturbances when I'm trying to work, utter lack of enthusiasm for anything I do—merely because my wife happens to write herself, and has such a superlatively high opinion of the feminine intellect that she——

SHEILA: If you possessed a little more feminine intellect yourself you'd realise that you are wrecking the future happiness of both of us by this insufferable behaviour.

KELD: I think that our mutual happiness has been drifting towards disaster for so long that any slight assistance from me would only hasten the inevitable.

SHEILA (*suddenly*): Keld—please, please let's stop—let me out of the room now—we—we don't really mean all the horrible things we've said; it's only foolish temper—it's—it's been an irritating morning and it's a hot, muggy day; the room's terribly stuffy. Please, please let me go!

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KELD: No, we must have this out; one of us must surrender.

SHEILA (*apprehensively*): What do you mean—surrender what?

KELD: Just give in. You're trying to beat me mentally all the time, and I can't stand it any longer; it's impossible to go on living and writing in a constant atmosphere of antagonism.

SHEILA (*pitifully*): It isn't true; there isn't any antagonism.

KELD: You're lying, Sheila, you said so yourself a little while ago, only in different words. You got angry because I wouldn't take you seriously; well, I didn't want to because I realised what the consequences would be if I did; now damn the consequences! I'm willing to face facts, the principal one being that you're jealous of my writing; you hated me having a play accepted—I *know* you did, you like always to be in the picture as the brilliant novelist encouraging her moderately talented husband, and all your friends would smile and say, "Isn't Sheila Brandreth sweet to devote so much time to him; you can see her hand in all the stuff he writes; I'm so glad they're happy together, but then of course with her intelligence she knows how to manage him." Well, I'm sorry our married life hasn't quite come up to your expectations. I'm afraid I'm getting on too quickly for you. I know——

SHEILA (*furiously*): You utter, utter beast to say such things; every word you speak is untrue and you know it; you are filled up with vile conceit of yourself. Do you imagine you'll ever be able to write a single thing really well until you cast off some of your bombast and complacency? / jealous of your work! / who from the very first have done nothing but encourage and help you—why, if I wasn't so utterly, wretchedly disappointed in you I'd laugh—yes, laugh—(*laughs hysterically and ends up by sobbing*)—but I can't—I can't!

KELD: Look here, Sheila, I'm sorry, I didn't quite mean what I said——

SHEILA (*pushing him away*): Don't touch me, don't come near me—not now. For once you've gone too far—I'm finished; it was

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all wrong, we should never have married, however much in love we thought we were; I realise it now. Olive warned me and it's come true; we're like two rats in a trap, fighting, fighting, fighting. You need a commonplace, dull, domesticated wife with no brain and boundless open-mouthed appreciation for every mortal thing you do—someone who would hang on your words and convince you all the time of your own incredible brilliance; the sort of woman who could be tactful when you were fractious and upset, and affectionate when you felt in the mood for it, which would be in the evening after a well-cooked and well-ordered dinner, and you'd stroke her hair and dole out a few well-chosen words of praise—not too many for fear of making her conceited—and there would never be a single moment in the day or night when you wouldn't be absolutely, unconditionally satisfied with yourself. With a larger mind you'd be a brute—but you're too contemptible even for that.

KELD (*lividly*): Shut up, shut up, shut up!

[He tries to put his hand over her mouth. She slaps his face furiously with her right hand. He staggers back.]

SHEILA: Go away—for God's sake go away!

[He looks at her for a moment as though he were going to kill her—then he turns and goes quickly out of the room. SHEILA gasps and falls across the table sobbing hopelessly. There is a slight pause and the sound of the front door slamming. Enter BURRAGE.]

BURRAGE: Lunch is served, ma'am.

QUICK CURTAIN.

ACT III

ACT III

SCENE: THE SCENE is THE SAME AS IN ACT II

When curtain rises SHEILA is entertaining NAOMI and EDMUND. They have just finished tea. It is a late November afternoon and the firelight is flickering on the walls. A whole year has passed since the previous act. When the lights are turned up presently it will be noticed that the room is much tidier than ever it was before. SHEILA herself is tidier ; she lacks a little of her sparkle and general youthfulness, and there is certainly a change in her manner that was never noticeable before.

NAOMI: But you'll come to the meeting, won't you? It will be awfully interesting.

SHEILA: I won't promise, but Keld will go.

EDMUND: Do you really think so! That would be wonderful; he's such a great celebrity now, two big dramatic successes in a year, he'd be a splendid acquisition to the club; you must try and persuade him to join permanently.

SHEILA: I'll do my best, but you can ask him yourself, he'll be in presently.

NAOMI: Last night must have been too thrilling; weren't you proud and excited? The papers said the enthusiasm was absolutely boundless.

SHEILA: Oh, first nights are all very much alike.

NAOMI: Yes, but it's different when you happen to *belong* to the author. I shall never forget my feelings when Edmund's first book of poems was published—I was bathed in ecstasy for days: too absurd of me.

EDMUND: I loved you for it, darling.

NAOMI: Was Keld very nervous?

SHEILA: Yes, I believe he was; he dined out. I didn't see him until it was nearly over; he came round to my box for a moment during the last act. Are you sure you don't want any more tea, either of you?

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NAOMI: Quite, dear, thanks.

SHEILA: Just ring the bell, will you, Edmund; it's behind you. Keld always gets annoyed if the table's full of things when he wants to work; I don't suppose he will though to-night. It's been a very tiring week for him, dress rehearsals and things.

EDMUND: Does he do all his work in here?

SHEILA: Yes, and he's so sweet about my having tea-parties here; it's far cosier than the drawing-room.

NAOMI: Where do you write?

SHEILA: Oh, anywhere; in my own room generally, it's nice and quiet.

NAOMI: Yes, quiet is essential, isn't it? Sometimes perhaps the swish of the sea will inspire me, or the wind in the trees; but as a rule I like perfect silence. When is your next book coming out?

SHEILA: I've only done two chapters of it.

NAOMI: And you're letting it simmer; I understand. You'll return to it later with an open mind—it's the only way when one gets stuck. I shall never forget in "The Lips of Love" I came to an absolute *impasse*. I couldn't write another *line*, so I just flung it away from me for three months, and when I took it up again the words flowed like—like——

EDMUND (*mechanically*): Molten silver.

[BURRAGE *enters and clears away tea-things, Exits.*

NAOMI: Molten silver from my pen.

SHEILA: How extraordinary. I'm afraid mine has been left so long that it will be dead when I go back to it, *if* I go back to it.

NAOMI: It's rather wicked of you not to write more, Sheila; people are waiting and watching for your next book. Clara Dewlap was saying only the other day——

SHEILA: What a pity it is that Sheila Brandreth has so faded into the background—she was quite a genius in her way; so many promising people write themselves out in their first year of success—it's too odd. I know exactly what Clara Dewlap *would* say,

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what all my erstwhile literary acquaintances are probably saying, but I can't help it; I don't want to write now, somehow—I've got out of the habit of it; after all, there's really no need, Keld is making hundreds.

NAOMI (*shocked at such a commercial view*): But, Sheila, think of the joy of writing. I sometimes look upon it as a golden key of the cobwebbed gate of the past, a key that one can use at will—to go back and live again those joys and sorrows.

SHEILA: I know, I know, I said all that once, but now I realise that there is nothing I should loathe so much in the world as to live again one moment of the past. I hate the past and everything to do with it.

EDMUND (*dreamily*):

The, Past is but an empty dream_
A mist-wrought land of make-believe,
In which our mournful memories stray
In search of youthful yesterday!

Who was it said that?

NAOMI: You did, dear.

EDMUND: Oh, yes, of course, now I remember.

SHEILA: I'm sure that the only way to be comfortable is to live in the present alone, and not worry over the past or future.

NAOMI: If the present is happy, why not? But still——

SHEILA: But the present *is* happy for me, anyhow. I shall go to the play again to-night, there have probably been some alterations that I haven't seen yet; besides, Keld would like me to go. It's splendid being an author's wife, the management are so awfully nice to me. You know, of course, that Keld's historical play is to be produced at the Spinet Theatre next month; that will mean another thrilling first night—you and Edmund really must come with me. I shall have a box, of course, also a new frock—Keld promised me one.

EDMUND: They described your last night's dress in the " Mirror " this morning.

THE RAT TRAP

SHEILA: **Did** they really? I never saw it. Was my name mentioned?

NAOMI: They said, " We noticed the author's wife, Mrs. Maxwell, looking very happy and proud of her young husband's success; her dress of blue charmeuse edged with silver showed her great charm to full advantage."

SHEILA: Oh, what a pity that I happened to be wearing jet last night; they're probably mining me up with Hermione Viking, she was in the next box.

EDMUND: Is Keld just the same as ever, in spite of his success?

SHEILA: Absolutely unspoiled.

EDMUND: How splendid of him !

NAOMI: So few men are clever enough not to be conceited.

[Enter BURRAGE.

BURRAGE: Miss Raymond has called to see the master, ma'am.

SHEILA: Miss Raymond. Oh, well, he'll be in very soon; show her up here, Burrage.

BURRAGE: Yes, ma'am.

[Exit.

NAOMI: We really must be going now.

SHEILA: Oh, please don't. I'd love you to stay a little longer; you must meet Miss Raymond, she's playing in Keld's first play, " The Choice of Evils."

NAOMI: I know, dear.

EDMUND: Miss Raymond. Is it Ruby Raymond?

SHEILA: Yes.

EDMUND: She used to be at the Gaiety. I remember her quite well.

NAOMI: Did you, Edmund? You never mentioned her to me

[Re-enter BURRAGE.

BURRAGE: Miss Raymond.

[Enter RUBY RAYMOND, elaborately dressed as usual.

[Exit BURRAGE.

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RUBY: Please forgive me dropping in like this, but I'm longing to hear about the show last night—was it a success?

SHEILA: How nice of you to come. Yes, it was wonderful. Let me introduce Miss Frith-Bassington and Mr. Crowe.

RUBY: Pleased to meet you.

SHEILA: Will you have some tea?

RUBY: No, thanks, I've just had some at the Rosebud. They've started "The Dansants" there. I went with Irene, she loves dancing; you'd never think it to look at her, would you?

SHEILA: You mean Irene Harrison?

RUBY: Yes. (*To NAOMI.*) She's playing in "The Choice of Evils" with me, you know, one of my greatest friends.

NAOMI: Do you know I'm afraid I don't admire her very much on the stage.

RUBY: Isn't it funny now, most people say that. I think I know what they mean; of course, she isn't pretty, and she generally dresses so badly. I'm always telling her she doesn't make the most of herself.

NAOMI: It isn't only that, but somehow she doesn't suggest the part to me.

RUBY (*quickly*): Well, of course, you must remember she isn't really a clever woman. I've known her a long time now, and she's awfully sweet, but no one clever would ever be as jealous as she is over small things. Last week, for instance, they put my photo in the "Tatler," quite an original pose up against a screen, and would you believe it, she's got a full page in this week! Miss Harrison in her garden. Well, that sort of thing is so small, isn't it? Not that I mind, I mean to say it amuses me, specially as she's never had a garden in her life. Some people have no sense of humour, you know; fancy being taken in a bathing-dress with her legs.

EDMUND: Why, was she wearing a bathing-dress in the garden?

THE RAT TRAP

RUBY: Oh, that was another photo, she's always having them put in; her man does them for her, he's an awful little Dago too. Everyone laughs when they dance together—but still, I like her.

NAOMI: She sounds charming.

RUBY: Yes, but *do* go on telling me about last night, Mrs. Maxwell. Did Keld have to make a speech like he did at our show?

SHEILA: Yes, poor dear, he was horribly nervous.

RUBY: I bet! Was Nellie Grahame there? she said she was going, though how her husband can let her go out looking like she does at the present moment—some women are so brazen; but still, I'm frightfully glad it was a success. Aren't you feeling damned proud of Keld? I know I should be if I was his wife.

SHEILA: Of course I am—very proud. Won't you take off your furs?

RUBY: No, thanks, I shall be going in a minute, I only just dropped in, you know, on my way to the Berkeley; I'm dining there with Lord Churchington. I think he's a dear old thing, though everyone runs him down. Of course, he gets a bit tight sometimes; but we all have our weaknesses, don't we?

SHEILA: I always imagined that Lord Churchington had more than his fair share.

RUBY: There, that's what everybody says—poor old devil—he always behaves like a perfect gentleman to me, but then I know how to manage him; if his stories get too hot I just tell him off.

NAOMI: I'm sure that's the only way.

RUBY: When are you coming to the play again, Mrs. Maxwell? I haven't seen you in front lately.

SHEILA: I've seen it so many times, I think I almost know it by heart.

RUBY: Yes, of course you must; it's still going wonderfully, but now I suppose you'll be going to the new show all the time; forsaking the old love for the new, 7 call it. (*She giggles.*)

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SHEILA: I don't know that I quite look upon "The Choice of Evils" as an old love. I never thought it a really good play, neither does Keld in his heart of hearts.

RUBY: But it *must* be a good play, it's run nearly a year.

NAOMI: That doesn't always follow; the public are so strange they will sometimes scorn one's most beautiful ideals and simply rave over one's more blatant efforts.

RUBY (*quickly*): I don't think Keld ever makes blatant efforts, do you, Mrs. Maxwell?

SHEILA: I'm afraid we are all inclined to at times,

RUBY: Oh well, I'll get blatant effort if I keep Churchie waiting for his dinner—he hates rushing over his food, he's quite a sinecure, you know, takes hours ordering everything. I have to be in the theatre at seven-thirty now they've started ringing up a half an hour earlier. Good-bye, Miss Bassington, pleased to have met you. (*She shakes hands.*) Good-bye. (*She shakes hands with EDMUND.*)

SHEILA: Won't you stay and see Keld?

RUBY: No, I really haven't time, but give him my love. Won't you try and persuade him to let me play lead in his historical play. I'd love to be able to say "Odd's bodikins" and "Beshrew me"; it sounds so rude, doesn't it? Good-bye, dear. [*Exit brightly.*]

NAOMI: Does she often come to see you?

SHEILA: Yes, fairly; Keld is keen on her work—he says she will do great things some day

NAOMI: I'm sure her Cockney humour is inimitable. (*Cattily.*)

EDMUND: Being Cockney doesn't matter a bit; they have feelings and emotions as well as we do. Don't be snobbish, Naomi, this is a democratic age.

NAOMI: I'm not in the least snobbish.

SHEILA: I'm afraid I haven't as much faith in Ruby Raymond as Keld has; she's very amusing as you say, Naomi, in her own special line, but I don't think she will go much further.

THE RAT TRAP

EDMUND: She was very good at the Gaiety.

NAOMI: You seem to have followed her career with great interest, Edmund, also with great secrecy; you've never mentioned her to me before.

EDMUND: Now, darling, don't be a silly bird. *(To SHEILA.)* We're so jealous of one another you know, it's too absurd.

NAOMI: I'm certainly not jealous.

EDMUND: My little sweet. *(He kisses her.)* Please excuse me, Sheila ; you do understand, don't you ?

SHEILA *(laughing)*: Yes, of course.

NAOMI: These men, these men, I know he'll break my heart one day. We really must go now, Sheila dear. Will you ask Keld about the Club for us ?

SHEILA: Yes, but are you sure you won't wait for him ?

NAOMI: Quite, dear, we shall be terribly late as it is, we have to dine with Psyche Bellamy. Philip Boblett is going to read one of his plays afterwards; he is an uncouth creature, but I believe very talented.

EDMUND: We've so enjoyed this afternoon.

[Enter KELD.]

SHEILA: Here is Keld after all.

KELD: Hallo—how are you? *(He shakes hands with both.)*

EDMUND: Splendid, thanks.

NAOMI: I'm so glad we just caught you before we went. I want you to become a permanent member of the Next Week Club, instead of just coming occasionally.

KELD *(laughing)*: This is very sudden.

NAOMI: But will you? I'll send you a list of the various advantages you will be able to obtain by belonging.

KELD: Are you a member, Sheila?

SHEILA: Of course, you know I have been for years.

KELD: Very well then, if you'll send me full particulars.

STUDY OF THE MAXWELLS' HOUSE

NAOMI: Oh, I am glad; isn't that splendid, Edmund? Our little mission has been successful. You'll be a tremendous draw, Keld.

KELD: You talk as though it were a kind of music-hall.

NAOMI: It really is great fun on Thursday evenings.

KELD: You forget I've spoken there once or twice.

NAOMI: Yes, but only as a guest. To be one with everybody is so nice. Clara Dewlap was saying only the other day that the Club room had an atmosphere of mingled intellects that was quite stunning!

KELD: How unlike Miss Dewlap to use such a schoolboy expression !

NAOMI: Oh, but she meant it literally—anyhow you must come and see for yourself. By the way, Edmund and I must both congratulate you on your thrilling success last night. Sheila has told us all about it—wonderful! We're coming next week.

KELD: I'm so glad; you must tell me what you think of it.

EDMUND: We will.

NAOMI: We really must go now—it's nearly seven. Come along, Edmund. Good-bye again, Sheila dear, it *has* been so nice, and *do* get on with your book, we're all longing for it. Good-bye, Keld.

KELD: Good-bye. *(They all shake hands.)*

[Exit NAOMI and EDMUND.]

KELD *(flopping into chair)*: Have they been here long?

SHEILA: Since about four. You must get them seats for the show.

KELD: Right you are, I'll leave a note at the box office. How are you, darling? *(He rises and kisses her and then goes back to his chair.)*

SHEILA: Much the same as usual; nothing out of the way has happened. To-day has been rather an anti-climax after last night. I'm tired.

THE RAT TRAP

KELD: So am I.

SHEILA: Will you be in for dinner, dear?

KELD: No, I'm dining with the Gailbys at the Carlton. I shall have to go and dress soon. Damn it.

SHEILA: Mary Gailby was wearing such a pretty frock at lunch the other day; she doesn't look a day over twenty-five.

KELD: She's very attractive. Are there any messages for me?

SHEILA: None. Ruby Raymond came round to hear how the play went. I told her all about it.

KELD: Now, wasn't that sweet of her?

SHEILA: Very. I think she wants a part in "The Crusader." Oh, and your new silk hat has come from Barnards, it's up in your room.

KELD: Splendid. By the way, what did Naomi say about a book? Have you started a new one?

SHEILA: Good Heavens, no! She meant "The Shadow Show." I haven't looked at it for nearly a year.

KELD: Why, don't you ever write now, Sheila?

SHEILA: Oh, I don't know.

KELD: Of course, we had those silly rows before, but I don't think we should be foolish enough to start them again. Were they the reason you stopped?

SHEILA: In a way, but not altogether; there isn't any need for me to write now somehow, you do it all.

KELD (*pleased*): Yes, I suppose I do turn out a good bit. Are you happy now, Sheila?

SHEILA: What an extraordinary question. Of course I'm happy; why shouldn't I be?

KELD: I only wondered; you'll tell me if anything goes wrong, any little worries?

SHEILA: Silly old thing, everything is going quite well—it's sweet of you to think of me.

STUDY OF THE MAXWELLS' HOUSE

KELD: Not at all—only somehow I should like you to start work again, something to occupy your spare time; it seems such a pity to waste talent like yours.

SHEILA: For me to write now would necessitate absolute concentration. I don't feel capable of it—there are lots of other things to do.

KELD: Oh, Sheila, I wish you were the famous one instead of me; I'd like to be nothing, absolutely nothing. I'm tired to-night; I want to sit at home and rest, and you could read to me and——

SHEILA: Not if I were the famous one. I should be dining at the Carlton with the Gailbys.

KELD: Damn the Gailbys.

SHEILA: You're suffering from reaction, it's only natural after tremendous nerve strain and excitement; why don't you go and lie down?

KELD: Fat lot of time I have to lie down these days.

SHEILA: You can't have everything, you know, dear; even success has its trials.

[Enter BURRAGE with piles of evening papers.]

BURRAGE: They've just sent all these, sir.

KELD: Thank you, Burrage. *(He takes them and commences to look anxiously through them.)*

SHEILA: These will cheer you up; more marvellous notices.

BURRAGE: Can you spare me a moment, ma'am?

SHEILA: Yes, what is it?

BURRAGE: Well, the washing's just come home in a shocking state; they seem to get worse and worse at that laundry.

SHEILA: I've written to them twice about it.

BURRAGE: It does seem a shame—that lovdy tea-cloth of yours with iron-mould right across it.

SHEILA: Do you think we ought to change again?

BURRAGE: Well, ma'am, if I was you I'd——

THE RAT TRAP

KELD: I say, listen to this. (*Reads.*) "Mr. Maxwell has certainly excelled himself in 'Stress,' produced with enormous success at the Modern Theatre last night. At moments it rises to heights of greatness. Miss Sunderland in particular"—wait a minute, there's some more about me lower down. Ah! here it is—" If only all young playwrights would follow Mr. Maxwell's brilliant example and introduce really natural dialogue on to the stage, they would be doing the theatrical profession and the public a signal service! " There, what d'you think of that?

SHEILA: It's wonderful, isn't it?

KELD: In the " Courier," too; they're generally pretty scathing.

SHEILA: Yes, they are.

[There is a silence for a moment. KELD picks up another paper.]

SHEILA (*quietly to BURRAGE*): But don't you think we'd better give them one more trial? I'll write another note to the manageress.

BURRAGE: And the girl that brings it is so impudent, ma'am. I don't mind a joke now and again in its proper place, but when it comes to poking fun at your elders and betters.

SHEILA: If I were you I shouldn't take any notice of that, Burrage; if they send the things back badly done again we'll go to the Elmtree Laundry⁵ they have motor vans with uniformed drivers, I believe, so you won't have any more rude young girls to put up with. Incidentally they're about three times as expensive, but still——

KELD: Listen, this is rather a nice way of putting it, isn't it? " 'Stress' was not only greeted with enthusiasm but genuine enthusiasm; there was none of that forced appreciation one generally sees at first nights nowadays; the debonair author made a witty speech in response to the ecstatic calls for him. He should indeed be proud of a really great achievement The acting was——" Well, never mind about that.

SHEILA: Splendid. You haven't had one bad review, have you?

KELD: No. *[He goes on looking through papers.]*

STUDY OF THE MAXWELLS' HOUSE

BURRAGE: Will that be all, ma'am?

SHEILA: Yes, Burrage.

BURRAGE: Hadn't I better take down the spare room curtains on Monday morning and get Mrs. Babin to come in and do them? It seems a pity to trust good lace like that to——

KELD (*irritable*): Oh God!

SHEILA: We'll discuss all that in the morning, Burrage.

BURRAGE: Very good, ma'am. *[Exit BURRAGE.]*

KELD: Let's talk about the laundry for hours; let's sit round and look at it from all possible points of view; let's compare it with all the other laundries we can think of; let's . . .

SHEILA (*laughing*): Keld, you are absurd.

KELD: Not at all, I'm serious. I feel that hitherto we have shamefully neglected the laundry; it has not entered into our thoughts enough. Let us conjure up a picture of that lonely laundry, putting iron-moulds on your tea-cloths out of sheer pique—all its feelings outraged by our lack of regard. Why waste our time on idle play-writing or press notices—let's talk of nothing but the laundry. I say damn the laundry, damn it, damn it, damn it!

[Exit KELD angrily.]

[SHEILA sighs, looks at the clock, and is just going to follow KELD out of the room when the front door bell rings. She stops and listens. There is a noise outside, and then the door bursts open and OLIVE enters.]

OLIVE: Sheila!

SHEILA (*delighted*): Olive, I'd no idea you were in London, or even England, for that matter—why——(*They embrace.*)

OLIVE: I'm up for one night on my way to Scotland; I came straight to you.

SHEILA: Of course you'll stay here?

OLIVE: No thanks, darling, I've booked a room at the St. Pancras Hotel—my train goes quite earlyish; besides, I didn't know for certain you were in town.

THE RAT TRAP

SHEILA : I always am.

OLIVE : Do you realise that I haven't seen you for about eight months?

SHEILA: I should just think I do realise it; I hate your beastly paper for taking you away so much—but still, as it's lucrative, I suppose one mustn't grufrible.

OLIVE: It's lucrative of the most wonderful experience as well as money; of course my peculiarly unpleasant nature makes me successful at writing biting revelations about celebrities staying abroad. I feel rather a brute sometimes though.

SHEILA: I've never read anything of yours that could be called really malicious.

OLIVE: You can't have read many then, dear. I'm getting worse too. I scavenge round the foreign hotels in search of juicy scandal like a dago dog in a dust heap.

SHEILA: It was a bright idea of your editor's, but I should imagine pretty expensive.

OLIVE: He gets his money back; the very libellousness of my special page would be enough to sell thousands of copies.

SHEILA: Have there been many law suits?

OLIVE: Oh, hundreds, I believe, but I'm always kept in the background, well out of harm's way. You see, if people once knew the identity of the scurrilous scribbler the game would be up.

SHEILA : You're a lucky creature, Olive—it sounds a perfectly wonderful job.

OLIVE: Lucky! Why, I'd give it all up for a quarter of your talent.

SHEILA (*holding up her hand*): Mutual admiration society! Do let's be careful.

OLIVE: But it's quite true, I would. This, of course, is interesting and amusing—full of odd adventures—but in reality it's only hack work—there's no art in it, all one needs is a certain amount of observance, absolutely no scruples and a spiteful sort of sense of humour—all of which I possess.

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SHEILA: It seems a little demoralising to self-respect.

OLIVE: I never had any self-respect, dear; I tell you that in this I'm admirably suited, it fell from the skies into my lap.

SHEILA: Well, there's ample reason then for me to say "Lucky creature." I'm thoroughly envious of you, your life, the wonderful independence of travelling about the world, the heaven-sent delight of seeing new places and people, and above all the freedom of it.

OLIVE (*laughing*): Has matrimony brought on the caged^dbird feeling already.

SHEILA (*listlessly*): I don't know.

OLIVE: You're looking a little bit tired; are you upset over anything?

SHEILA: No, dear, nothing.

OLIVE: How's Keld?

SHEILA: Very well, and doing splendidly—everything he touches now turns to money.

OLIVE: He had a new play produced last night, didn't he? I read something about it in the paper.

SHEILA: Yes, but don't let's talk about it; I've had Naomi and Edmund here all the afternoon, agape for information. Then Ruby Raymond came——

OLIVE (*starting*): Ruby Raymond!

SHEILA: Yes, do you know her?

OLIVE: I know of her.

SHEILA: They've all been cross-examining me about the play and what Keld said in his speech, and who was there, and what was I wearing! I'm sick to death of the whole thing.

OLIVE: Keld hasn't altered at all—since his success?

SHEILA: Of course not, he's just the same as ever he was.

OLIVE: You're not though.

SHEILA: What d'you mean?

OLIVE: You're entirely different from when I last saw you.

THE RAT TRAP

SHEILA: In what way—different?

OLIVE: In lots of ways; you've lost your sparkle, your vitality, you're not nearly as thrilled with things as you were. Don't tell me the worst has happened and we're to expect little clinging fingers and the patter of tiny feet!

SHEILA (*half laughing*): No, it's not as bad as that.

OLIVE: It *is* bad then?

SHEILA: No, it's *not* bad. I'm merely rather dull, that's all.

OLIVE: What are you working on now?

SHEILA: Nothing.

OLIVE (*incredulously*): So you've actually kept to it.

SHEILA: You mean my vow last year?

[OLIVE *nods*.

Yes, I have.

OLIVE (*relentlessly*): And you feel really happier for it?

SHEILA (*trying to be convincing*): Of course I am. Infinitely happier. We never have those rows now; they were so awful, absolutely awful—squabblings and scratchings and making it up afterwards. Thank Heaven the big row came and cleared the air.

OLIVE: You're going to do no more writing at all?

SHEILA: None. I'm a little dull sometimes, perhaps, but balanced against that is the fact that I have no strain and worry of work—no heated arguments—no moments of black depression when I feel I'm not writing my best—no——

OLIVE: Apparently your life is carefree as a butterfly's, everything is radiant and beautiful, your husband is successful, you are prosperous, you have found the true happiness—there is nothing left in the world for you to wish for. But all this peaceful ecstasy has given you tired eyes, Sheila, and a weary droop to your mouth——

SHEILA: You don't understand; there has been a lot of strain during the last week, you see——

OLIVE: I see that there has been a lot of strain in the past year.

STUDY OF THE MAXWELLS' HOUSE

SHEILA: No, Olive, you're wrong, I——

OLIVE: Don't be silly, dear, and try to deceive me⁵ you're not happy, that's obvious to a blind cat. How could you be happy under the circumstances; do you think I don't *know!* My dear, I've not become a professional scandalmonger for nothing; of course it's typical of you to sit tight and say nothing, when other women would be weeping over their husband's faithlessness and screaming for separation or divorce.

SHEILA (*slowly*): What do you mean?

OLIVE (*a little hurt*): Don't you think we have been pals enough in the past to admit of a little more confidence in the present? Anyhow, that sort of thing always leaks out—I heard it at Nice. Evangeline Featherstone was there with Billy Grainger; they discussed Keld's mad infatuation quite openly. Of course she said the Raymond woman wasn't worth it and that——

SHEILA (*passing her hand across her forehead*): Oh—I——

OLIVE: How long have you known?

SHEILA (*quietly*): Not—not—very long.

OLIVE: It's horrible for you, Sheila darling, and I'm frightfully, frightfully sorry, but heaps of men behave like that; it's considered quite the thing. To shoot a fox or cheat at cards is not cricket, absolutely unforgiveable, but to cheat at life as Keld is doing, doesn't matter a bit—they'll take anything and everything you give without a word; in my opinion you've given too much—you've given too much—you've given your brain and your personality, therefore you're bound to lose a certain amount of attraction. Oh, Sheila dear, never make another vow like that one.

SHEILA: I did it—I did it for the best.

OLIVE: What attitude do you propose to take up over it? You can't sit still for ever.

SHEILA: I haven't thought.

OLIVE: Poor darling—has it . . . utterly rotten?

SHEILA (*speaking with an effort*): Olive, will you dine with me to-night—out somewhere?

THE RAT TRAP

OLIVE : Of course I will.

SHEILA: You see, I feel terribly tired now; I shall take some aspirin and lie down, then I shall be better able to discuss everything.

OLIVE (*rising*): I understand perfectly, dear. What time shall I call for you ?

SHEILA : About—about—half-past seven. Will you ring up and get a table? The Ivy, or Petit Savoyard—somewhere quiet.

OLIVE (*Aissing her*): Cheer up, dear.

SHEILA (*trying to smile*): I'll try. *[Exit OLIVE.*

[SHEILA stands quite still for a moment, then she sits down in chair facing the audience ; she seems dazed. After a moment BURRAGE enters with a note on a salver.

BURRAGE : A note for the master, ma'am.

SHEILA: Well, take it up to him; he's dressing.

BURRAGE: He said he wasn't to be disturbed on any account. I think he's having a short rest.

SHEILA: Leave it here then, Burrage.

BURRAGE: The boy that brought it from the Berkeley said it was most important, ma'am.

SHEILA (*starting*): The Berkeley! That will do, Burrage.

BURRAGE : Very good, ma'am. *[Exit BURRAGE.*

[SHEILA hesitates for a moment, then she takes the note and turns it over in her hands, then quite calmly she opens it and reads it ; when she has done so she crumples it in her hand and closes her eyes for a moment as though the effort of realising everything was too much for her. Then she clenches her hands, and with a sort of concentrated quiet fury she picks up the poker and going to KELD'S desk (right), she breaks it open—sparing no noise in the process. This done, she searches through all the drawers and pigeon-holes,, Battering papers broadcast. At last she discovers a packet of letters ; she compares the writing with the crumpled letter in her hand.

[Enter KELD in dressing-gown.

STUDY OF THE MAXWELLS' HOUSE

KELD: What are you doing?

SHEILA (*quietly*): Don't bluster—it's no use—I've found out everything.

KELD: Look here. Sheila, you don't understand.

SHEILA: I do understand, Keld.

KELD: Give me those letters.

SHEILA: Certainly. (*She throws them at his feet. He picks them up and makes a movement to go.*) Please don't go, I want to speak to you.

KELD (*turning*): You've made the biggest mistake in your life; how dared you break opⁿ my desk? Do you think that sort of trick ever does any good?

SHEILA: I've given up trying to do any good, all my efforts have ended in such miserable failure. Now, I don't care.

KELD: You're being unnecessarily dramatic.

SHEILA: I haven't been dramatic at all yet, that will all come later, the sobbing and crying and hysterical reproaches, I can't hope to escape it—but now that I'm calm I realise I have to face facts, beastly, incredible facts—this situation we've so often refused to write about because it was too hackneyed. Now we're living it and we can't get away.

KELD: If only you'd let me explain; it's natural for a man of my temperament to want——

SHEILA: I thought at least that you were above making excuses.

KELD: Sheila, won't you listen, and try to understand? You think that because I chose to flirt about with Ruby that——

SHEILA: I think the fact of your choosing to flirt about with Ruby is enough for me. I wonder if you'll ever realise what you've done. What I'm going to say is affected but it's true, you've killed my heart stone dead. I'm numb—you've taken everything from me; I allowed you to because I hoped it might ultimately lead to happiness, but it hasn't; it has only led to deception and lying and making love to a flaming cocotte behind my back just to repay me for my gifts. I don't love you any more now. I hate you—I

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hate you. I've put up with your intolerance, your selfishness, all the horrible traits in your character which you encourage rather than control, because I felt all the time that you loved me in spite of everything, and that it would all come right in the end and we'd live happy ever after. I haven't written a word because we couldn't both write—that was proved a year ago. I gave up my working brain for you. I've devoted all my time to household affairs; I've let myself be worried over washing bills—and new servants and the miserable drudgery of mind that goes with that sort of thing. That is how I've given up my intellect for you, and through it all I've loved you, unflinching, and that is how I've given up my intelligence for you.

KELD: Sheila—forgive me—let me explain.

SHEILA: Do you think it's necessary?

KELD: Yes, I do. I'm going to make excuses for myself as well—why shouldn't I? You've been different during the last year, and you know it. You left me. Mentally you didn't take the slightest interest in my plays though you pretended to. I've been working terribly hard lately and naturally I need diversion, entire change. I looked to you, but you weren't ready to help, you didn't realise it—so I went to Ruby Raymond. I don't love her, I swear I don't love her, I never could, but she's there when I want her, amusing, frivolous, absolute contrast to any woman I've ever met. Won't you understand and forgive me, Sheila? I've been a cad—I know now—forgive me for my beastly tempers, forgive me for my selfishness in every way, and, above all, forgive me for being untrue to you. You say you've loved me all this time—give me one more chance—I'd do anything to win you back to me. All this year I honestly didn't know you hated it so—you seemed content, happy—

SHEILA (*losing control*): Content! Happy! I loathed every minute of it; I was sick with the nauseating drudgery, and you say I seemed content. Couldn't you see, couldn't you see even that? You make your stupid weak excuses, your need for diversion and change—and I wasn't ready to help you—not realising it. The

STUDY OF THE MAXWELLS' HOUSE

last's true; I didn't, I could never realise your despicable behaviour until it was banged into my brain by proof, hard, bitter proof. I'm finished with you, utterly, entirely finished. I don't want a penny of your money. I don't want to hear of you or see you again, ever in my life—I mean it—from the bottom of my heart. I'm done with you—done with you—done with you!

[She goes out of the room, slamming the door after her.]

[KELD stands quite still as though stunned, then he slowly tears RUBY'S letters into pieces and throws them into the fire. He goes to the mantelpiece, leans his head on his arms and watches them burn.]

KELD (*brokenly*)! Sheila—Sheila. Oh God!

CURTAIN.

ACT IV

ACT IV

(Four months have elapsed since Act III)

SCENE: LIVING ROOM OF A COTTAGE IN CORNWALL

There are two windows, back, with front door between them, another door down left opening on stairs and kitchen. The table is /aidfor tea. It is late afternoon and the light is growing dim.

When curtain rises OLIVE is standing behind table in front of looking-glass on wall—she has just taken off her hat and coat and is tidying her hair. KELD is standing up, left, looking anxiously out of window.

OLIVE: Doesn't one look perfectly awful after a railway journey, a kind of greeny colour. Of course I really ought to wash at once, but I simply couldn't summon up the energy unless I had some tea first,

KELD: You don't look a bit dirty. *(He goes on looking out of window.)*

OLIVE: Thank you, Keld, you are a great comfort.

KELD: What can have happened to her?

OLIVE: I don't see any reason for anything to have happened to her, she didn't expect us until to-morrow and naturally didn't wait in.

KELD: She didn't expect " us " at all, she only expected you.

OLIVE: If Sheila is anything like the psychologist she pretends to be she'd guess that I, with my soft appealing nature, would at least make some sort of an effort to reunite your two yearning souls.

KELD: I wish you wouldn't be so flippant.

OLIVE: My dear Keld, I took you seriously all the way from Exeter to Plymouth—when we were passing such nice scenery, too—you can't expect me to keep on with it.

KELD: You're behaving like this because you're really just as miserably nervous as I am.

THE RAT TRAP

OLIVE: Discerning man—you're perfectly right, but it's not the slightest good giving way to it. I wish Burrage would hurry up with the tea, that'll buck us both up.

KELD: She won't understand, I know she won't—why should she take me back? Four months is a long time, even if she missed me a bit at first, that's all over now——

OLIVE: Don't talk about being "taken back" in that abased manner, as a matter of fact she was nearly as much to blame as you in the first place—making stupid vows and being, idiotic enough to stick to them. Only one thing really matters, and that is whether she is still in love with you; if she is, all will be well——

KELD: Oh, Olive, I do wish I were you—sitting back smiling and looking on, giving a useful bit of advice here and a damnable little bit of common sense there. Of course you're glad when things go right and sorry when they go wrong—in moderation—but at heart you're unmoved by all this, while I'm feeling so desperate and hopeless, you're just wanting your tea and hoping for the best——

OLIVE: Considering that I've dragged you down here, like a benevolent Fairy Godmother in order to try and put everything right—and gone to endless trouble for you both—it's hardly nice of you to stand there and lash me with your tongue. .

KELD: I wasn't—I really wasn't—you've been perfectly wonderful—whatever happens you've been more helpful than any Fairy Godmother, however benevolent. I was only just envying you——

[Enter BURRAGE with tea and toast.

BURRAGE: I've toasted the splits for you, ma'am, they're nicer hot.

OLIVE: Thank you so much, Burrage. I suppose you haven't any idea how far Mrs. Maxwell was going this afternoon?

BURRAGE: She said something about Kynance Cove. It's a long way, across the moors, but she generally gets back about this time.

LIVING ROOM OF " IVERNA COTTAGE"

KELD: It wouldn't be any use going out to meet her?

OLIVE (*quickly*): No, I shouldn't think it would—we'll possess our souls in patience. Thank you, Burrage.

[*Exit BURRAGE.*]

Come and sit down, Keld dear—worrying won't do any good. You were right when you said I was as nervous as you are, and quite wrong when you accused me of being unmoved and smiling. I'm not smiling, I'm hating it—but there's one comfort and that is that you're doing the right thing—keep that in your mind. Now have some tea. (*She pours it out.*)

KELD: What shall I do if she refuses to listen to me?

OLIVE: She won't refuse to listen.

KELD (*taking tea*): If she does listen—and comes back to me—do you think things will go on running smoothly? I mean after the first flush of happiness has died away. Is it hopeless for us to try and live together?

OLIVE: Not at all—now—you've both had quite a lot of unhappiness and consequently learnt a bit.

KELD: I don't want her not to write any more—she must go on with it, whatever happens. Will you tell her that?

OLIVE: You'll be able to tell her yourself.

KELD (*suddenly jumping up*): No, no, *you* tell her—you see her first—oh, please, please do. I'll wait outside on the cliff—you can signal to me if it's all right.

OLIVE: Coward!

KELD (*excitedly*): No, it isn't cowardice at all when you come to think it out—it's sense—if she suddenly sees me here it will be a great shock. She'll probably be furious at being taken unawares. I know Sheila, she would be—if you talked to her first—found out how she really felt towards me——

OLIVE: I was rather relying on that shock!

KELD: Please, Olive—do what I ask. I don't think I can bear to take the risk of surprising her—you could calm her down so

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much better than I could. I'm so worried and anxious I should probably be foolish and tactless from sheer nerves—it means everything in the world to me. I never realised quite how much I wanted her until I came in to this room—it's full of her things—books and photographs—all the absurd sentiment we always laugh at—we may quarrel and bicker till doomsday but she must come back—she must, she must, she must!

OLIVE: What can I say to her? She'll in all probability be terribly angry with me?

KELD: Oh, Olive, please—please don't fail me now, you've been so sympathetic and so splendid all along—help me at the last lap make an effort—

OLIVE: You can't go and wait out on the cliff—it's raining quite hard.

KELD: I don't care—I must. I'll tell you something, Olive. I've existed without her for four months, thinking that if I stood out long enough time would dull the misery of it—then you came and put me in the wrong—firmly, where I should have put myself from the first. Since then the longing for her has been ten thousand times worse. I daren't allow myself to think of us being together again, in case it all falls through, in case I fail to convince her that I love her, and now—it all depends on what transpires during the next hour. Olive, I feel as if I were going mad.

OLIVE (*rising and resting her hand on his arm*): It's all right, Keld, I understand. I'll do what I can—you'd better go out now, at once.

KELD: You'll call me—if—when——!

OLIVE: Yes—now then go quickly—here's your hat.

KELD (*at door*): I'll be over there—just behind that shed, I'll be able to see her come in.

OLIVE: Very well.

KELD (*catching hold of her hand*): Olive, go on doing your best, won't you?

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OLIVE: You know I will.

[KELD goes out. OLIVE shuts door after him and draws curtains—she then walks thoughtfully over to arm-chair by the fire and sits down. She takes her unfinished cup of tea from the table.

[Enter BURRAGE.

BURRAGE: Oh, I heard the door go—I thought it was the mistress.

OLIVE: No, Burrage, it was only Mr. Maxwell going out I think he's walking a little way in the hopes of meeting her.

BURRAGE: He'll get wet.

OLIVE: He won't mind that.

BURRAGE: He might have taken that mackintosh.

OLIVE: He never thought of it. Tell me, Burrage, has your mistress been well during these last few weeks?

BURRAGE: Yes, ma'am, working hard and taking a lot of exercise.

OLIVE: Working—what at?

BURRAGE: Oh, her writing—she's taken it up again with a vengeance, at it all day she is.

OLIVE: I'm glad of that.

BURRAGE: So am I, ma'am.

OLIVE: And she's quite happy and comfortable?

BURRAGE: No one could be comfortable in a place with no electric light or gas, no hot water laid on, miles from anywhere, and a kitchen range that covers you in soot if you look at it—but she's certainly happier than I've see her for years.

OLIVE (*alarmed*): Is she—*really* ?

BURRAGE: I don't wonder—she's free again, that's what it is, it only bears out what I've always said—marriage is a snare.

OLIVE: What?

BURRAGE: Snare, Ma'am.

THE RAT TRAP

OLIVE: You've never been married, have you, Burrage?

BURRAGE: No, ma'am, not *married*.

OLIVE: Then how can you tell if it's a snare or not?

BURRAGE: By the way other people behave. You see, the trouble is no woman can ever really know what a man's like until she's lived with him for a time—then it's too late to do anything about it. I watched the master and mistress carefully—you couldn't help noticing things, being with them all the time as I was. She used to feel she ought to give in to him over trifles, and he used to take it all for granted—any man would—it's human nature. They used to have awful arguments over things, and she used to win and then pretend he had for the sake of peace. I always knew trouble was bound to come. The one thing love never teaches you is how to manage each other.

OLIVE: I never realised, Burrage, that you were a woman of such experience.'

BURRAGE: I've seen a lot one way and another; I've never been strictly beautiful, but I've 'ad my moments.

OLIVE: And you think it has all turned out for the best?

BURRAGE: Certainly I do, ma'am—she's independent again now, and working, with nothing to worry about.

OLIVE (*thoughtfully*): Nothing to worry about.

BURRAGE: No, ma'am, and I don't think she'll make the same mistake again in a hurry.

OLIVE: How do you mean?

BURRAGE: I think I'm rather sorry for the master now, though he brought it on himself. [Exit BURRAGE.]

[OLIVE walks over to the fireplace looking rather worried. She hears footsteps outside and quickly hides KELD'S teacup behind chair.]

[Enter SHEILA in oilskin coat and sou'wester. She sees OLIVE and starts.]

LIVING ROOM OF " IVERNA COTTAGE"

SHEILA: Olive—my dear—this is wonderful—why didn't you let me know you were coming a day earlier?

OLIVE: I thought I'd surprise you.

SHEILA (*smiling*): You have—beautifully. (*She takes off her coat and cap and puts them on the window-seat.*) Have you had tea?

OLIVE: Yes, it saved my life after the beastly train.

SHEILA: If only you'd wired or something I could have met you at Helston.

OLIVE: I'm sure human woman couldn't have borne that bus ride both ways, it nearly jerked my inside out.

SHEILA: Locomotion is still quite primitive here. Pour me out some tea, there's a lamb—I'm rather damp.

OLIVE (*pouring out tea*): Sit down and tell me all about everything; I haven't seen you for so long. (*She hands her cup.*)

SHEILA: You probably have much more news than I have.

OLIVE: No, I want to hear about you. Burrage says you're writing again.

SHEILA: Yes, I am. I've finished " The Shadow Show."

OLIVE : " The Shadow Show " ?

SHEILA. Yes, the novel I started when I was first married and then left to simmer for nearly a year.

OLIVE: Oh yes, I remember. Are you really pleased with it now?

SHEILA: It's quite the best thing I've done, but what is more to the point, Claverton and Lake are pleased too—they have written ecstatic letters simply raving, and they're bringing it out extra early.

OLIVE: Sheila darling, how perfectly splendid!

SHEILA (*without the slightest enthusiasm*): Yes, isn't it?

OLIVE: You don't appear to be particularly thrilled about it.

SHEILA: I'm not.

OLIVE: Are you happy?

THE RAT TRAP

SHEILA: What a silly question—it's so difficult to be happy.

OLIVE (*suddenly*): Sheila—I have something to confess—I was going to try to draw you out and sound your real feelings and then spring my surprise on you, but now I somehow feel that those tactics are rather stupid and unworthy. I'm going to tell you right out. I brought Keld down with me to-day—he's out there on the cliff now—waiting.

SHEILA: I know.

OLIVE: You know?

SHEILA: Yes, I saw him as I came by—he didn't see me though. Why did you do it?"

OLIVE: Because he's so utterly wretched without you and has been all along. He's aching for you to go back to him. You *must* go back to him.

SHEILA: I'm going back to him all right—you'd better call him in, he'll catch cold out there in the rain.

OLIVE: Sheila, I'm so glad.

SHEILA: Don't, Olive—there's nothing to be glad about.

OLIVE: What do you mean?

SHEILA: Call him in.

OLIVE: But, Sheila——

SHEILA (*quietly*): I've been down here for four months now, Olive, alone except for Burrage. I've sat in this room on grey leaden days and watched the rain trickling down the windows—feeling as though the weight of everything were driving me mad—fighting to control my nerves. Then I've tramped across the moors in the shrieking winds and wandered like a lost soul through the sudden and exceedingly inappropriate Scotch mists—all the time getting things straightened out in my mind, and now at last I've succeeded—I can see ahead clearly and dispassionately. Will you call Keld in?—I want to talk things over.

OLIVE (*after a slight pause*): Very well. (*She goes to door and calls, Keld—Keld. She doses door and comes over to SHEILA.*) I've

LIVING ROOM OF "IVERNA COTTAGE"

been away from you so long that I've lost the trick of reading your thoughts like I used to. Are you glad ?

SHEILA (*patting her hands*): Olive dear, it won't be a rapturous, sentimental reconciliation with tears of joy coursing down everybody's cheeks—it will probably be rather dull from a dramatic point of view. You see, I don't love him any more!

[*Enter KELD.*]

KELD: Sheila!

SHEILA: Come in and get warm.

KELD (*looking at OLIVE*): Is it all right?

OLIVE: I don't know.

KELD: Sheila—have you forgiven me?

SHEILA: Yes.

KELD: Will you come back to me?

SHEILA: Yes.

KELD: May I kiss you again?

SHEILA: Yes.

[*He takes her in his arms. OLIVE starts to go upstairs.*]

SHEILA *gently disentangles herself.*

Don't go, Olive—please.

OLIVE: I think I'd rather.

SHEILA: I want you to be here.'

OLIVE: Do you—really?

SHEILA: Yes—come and sit down. Keld, sit down too—there are lots of things to say.

KELD: Sheila—(*he sits down*)—give me your hand—I'm wretchedly humble.

SHEILA: Don't be humble, that's all over. I want your help now—frightfully badly.

KELD: I want your help too. I want you to come back and make a fresh start with me. I——

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SHEILA: Don't let's deceive ourself. How can we make a fresh start with all our illusions and dreams broken up behind us? We've just got to go on and make the best of the situation.

KELD: Do you love me at all—any more?

SHEILA: No.

KELD: Oh, I see—you were so cold—I wondered, that's all. (*He rests his arms on the table and buries his head in them.*)

OLIVE: Sheila, don't be too cruel.

SHEILA: I'm not cruel—I can't help not loving him.

OLIVE: Why, are you going back to him then—what's the use?

SHEILA: Oh, Olive, Olive—don't you see?

OLIVE (*looking at her*): See—Sheila—my dear—I never thought.

KELD (*looking up*): What do you mean.

SHEILA: I'm going to have a child.

KELD: Sheila!

SHEILA: Don't look at me like that.

KELD: When did you know?

SHEILA: The first week I came down here.

KELD: Oh, Sheila darling——

SHEILA: Are you so glad?

KELD: Yes, I am—terribly glad—it's wonderful.

SHEILA: It frightens me rather.

OLIVE: The first week, and you never let me know.

SHEILA: You were in Sweden working hard, you couldn't have left without losing a lot—besides, it was better that I should face things by myself—much, much better.

KELD: Sheila, I do love you so—this is another chance—don't you see—we're getting another chance—I'll do anything in the world to make you happy—love me again—please, please, love me again.

LIVING ROOM OF " IVERNA COTTAGE"

SHEILA: Don't, Keld. I can't help it. I'll try to make up for it in every way I can—I promise I will.

KELD: I'd do anything—anything——

SHEILA: I might just regain it suddenly—you never know/ (*There is a pause.*) Oh God! Why aren't we ordinary normal people without these beastly analytical minds? I'd willingly give up every particle of brain, intellect and talent if only I could recapture the old longing for you—I hate being able to pry about and criticise—I want not to know anything—just to love you, but I can't—I can't, and now—now I feel so alone—and so dreadfully frightened——

[*OLIVE gets up and puts her arms around her. KELD just sits staring at her.*]

CURTAIN.

THE VORTEX

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DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

PRESTON

HELEN SAVILLE

PAUNCEFORT QUENTIN

CLARA HIBBERT

FLORENCE LANCASTER

TOM VERYAN

NICKY LANCASTER

DAVID LANCASTER

BUNTY MAINWARING

BRUCE FAIRLIGHT

ACT I

ACT I

The scene is the drawing-room of MRS. LANCASTER'S flat in London, The colours and decoration are on the verge of being original. The furniture is simple but distinctly expensive.

Persons shown are HELEN SAVILLE and PAUNCEFORT QUENTIN. HELEN SAVILLE and PAUNCEFORT QUENTIN are shown in by PRESTON. HELEN is a smartly dressed woman of about thirty. "PAWNIE" is an elderly maiden gentleman. •

PRESTON: I'm expecting Mrs. Lancaster in at any moment now, Ma'am.

HELEN: Thank you, Preston, we'll wait a little.

PRESTON: Shall I get you some tea?

HELEN: No thanks, we've already had some—give me a cigarette, Pawnie, they're in that box on the table.

[PAWNIE hands her cigarette box. PRESTON goes out.]

PAWNIE: It may be tiresome of me, but I think all this colouring is oppressive.

HELEN: You make such a "Fetish" of house decoration, Pawnie.

PAWNIE (*wandering round the room*): Not at all, but I do like things to be good and right.

HELEN: Well, I don't consider the new frieze in your bathroom either good or right.

PAWNIE: How can you, Helen! It's too marvellous for words. Parelli designed it specially for me.

THE VORTEX

HELEN: Personally, it would make me self-conscious to sit in a bath surrounded by frisky gods and goddesses all with such better figures than mine.

PAWNIE: I find it encouraging. This whole room is so typical of Florence.

HELEN: In what way? '

PAWNIE: Every way. Look at the furniture.

HELEN: A little artificial perhaps, but quite harmless.

PAWNIE: Dear Helen, you're such a loyal friend.

HELEN: I'm very fond of Florence.

PAWNIE: We all are. Oh, my God, look at that lampshade!

HELEN: I gave it to her last Christmas.

PAWNIE: Wasn't that a little naughty of you?

HELEN: I don't see why, it's extremely pretty.

PAWNIE: Too unrestrained. Such a bad example for the servants. (*He takes up frame from desk.*) Who's this boy?

HELEN: Tom Veryan. You must have seen him.

PAWNIE: Florence's past, present or future?

HELEN: Present.

PAWNIE: He has that inj*6cent look that never fails to attract elderly women.

HELEN: Don't be a cat.

PAWNIE: I wasn't meaning Florence, she's too divine to be in any marked category.

HELEN: I wonder.

THE VORTEX

PAWNIE: Oh, yes, Helen, deathless sort of magnetism, you know,

HELEN: I often wonder what will happen to Florence eventually.

PAWNIE: My dear, I'm far too occupied in wondering what's going to happen to me to worry about other people.

HELEN: I've always thought your course was quite clear, Pawnie.

PAWNIE: However offensive that remark was intended to be, Helen, I shall take it in the most complimentary spirit.)

HELEN: I'm sure you will.

PAWNIE: I expect Florence will just go on and on, then suddenly become quite beautifully old, and go on and on still more.

HELEN: It's too late now for her to become beautifully old, I'm afraid. She'll have to be young indefinitely.

PAWNIE: I don't suppose she'll mind that, but it's trying for David.

HELEN: And fiendish for Nicky,

PAWNIE: Oh, no, my dear, you're quite wrong there. I'm sure Nicky doesn't care a damn.

HELEN: It's difficult to tell with Nicky.

PAWNIE: He's divinely selfish; all amusing people are.

HELEN: Did you hear him play in Paris?

PAWNIE: Yes.

HELEN: Well?

THE VORTEX

PAWNIE: Erratic—one or two things perfect, but he's slovenly.

HELEN: He only takes things seriously in spurts, but still he's very young.

PAWJUE: Do you really think that's a good excuse.

HELEN: No, I'm afraid not, especially when so much depends on it.

PAWNIE: What does depend on it?

HELEN: Everything—his life's happiness.

PAWNIE: Don't be so terribly intense, dean

HELEN: It's true.

PAWNIE: Fm quite sure Nicky will be perfectly happy as long as he goes on attracting people; he loves being attractive.

HELEN: Naturally, he's Florence's son.

PAWNIE: Such an exciting thing to be.

HELEN: *You* don't believe Nicky's got anything in him at all, do you?

PAWNIE (*lightly*): I don't think it matters, anyway.

HELEN: I do.

PAWNIE: But you've got a loving nature, Helen. I always know it.

HELEN: Nicky hasn't had a chance.

PAWNIE: Nonsense—he's had everything he wanted ever since the day he was born, and he'll go on wasting his opportunities until he dies,

HELEN: Quite possibly.

THE VORTEX

PAWNIE: Well, there you are then.

HELEN: He may have had everything he wanted, but he's had none of the things he really needs.

PAWNIE: Are you talking socially or spiritually.

HELEN: You're quite right, Pawnie, you wouldn't be so beautifully preserved if you'd wasted any of your valuable time or sincerity.

PAWNIE: I forgive you for that, Helen, freely.

HELEN: Thank you so much.

PAWNIE: You must realize one thing, everyone is sacrificed to Florence—it's as it should be—of course, she's a couple of hundred years too late—she ought to have been a flaunting, intriguing King's mistress, with black page boys and jade baths and things too divine—•

[Enter PRESTON.

PRESTON (*announcing*): Miss Hibbert.

[Enter CLARA HIBBERT—she is affected, but quite well dressed, PRESTON goes out.

CLARA: My dears. Isn't Florence back yet ?'

HELEN: No, we're waiting for her.

PAWNIE: You look harassed, Clara.

CLARA: I am harassed.

HELEN: Why?

CLARA: I'm singing to-night for Laura Tennant—she's giving a dreadful reception at her dreadful house for some dreadful Ambassador—

PAWNIE: How dreadful!

THE VORTEX

CLARA: No one will listen to me, of course—they'll all be far too busy avoiding the Cup and searching for the Champagne.

HELEN: What are you singing?

CLARA: One Gabriel Faure, two Reynaldo Hahn's and an Aria.

PAWNIE: Which Aria?

CLARA: I can't think, but my accompanist will know—I've got a frightful headache.

HELEN: Why don't you take off your hat?

CLARA: My dear, I daren't—I've just had my hair done—I suppose you haven't got a "Cachet Faivre," either of you?

HELEN: No, but Florence has, I expect—Preston will know where they are—ring the bell, Pawnie.

PAWNIE (*ringing bell*): My poor Clara—I do hope your singing to-night will justify the fuss you're making this afternoon.

CLARA: Don't be so *brutal*, Pawnie.

HELEN: Is Gregory going with you?

CLARA: Of *course*—I *never* sing unless he's *there*—in gives me such marvellous moral support.

PAWNIE: "Moral" is hardly the word / should have chosen, dear.

[Enter PRESTON.

HELEN: Do you know if Mrs. Lancaster has any "Cachet Faivre" anywhere?

PRESTON: Yes, Ma'am—I think so.

THE VORTEX

CLARA : *Do* get me one, Preston, I'm suffering *tortures*.

PRESTON : Very well, Miss.

[She goes out.]

PAWNIE : Preston has such wonderful poise, hasn't she ?

HELEN : She needs it in this house.

CLARA : I do wish Florence would hurry up. I want to borrow her green fan. I've got a new Patou frock that positively *demand*s it.

HELEN : She can't be long now.

CLARA : I suppose I daren't ask Preston for the fan and creep away with it ?

HELEN : I shouldn't, if I were you—Florence is very touchy over that sort of thing.

CLARA ; She promised it to me ages ago.

PAWNIE : Surely there isn't such a desperate hurry ? You won't be singing until about half-past eleven.

CLARA (*petulantly*) : My *dear*, I've got to *rehearse*—I don't know a *word*——

[Re-enter PRESTON with a " Cachet Faivre " and a glass of water.]

CLARA : You're a *Saint*, Preston—thank you a *thousand* times——

PAWNIE : Soak it a little first, dear, or you'll choke, and I should *detest* that.

*[CLARA soaks " Cachet " and then swallows it
PRESTON goes out.]*

CLARA : Now I must lie *down flat*—get out of the way, Helen.

THE VORTEX

PAWNIE : Perhaps you'd like us *both* to go *right* out of the room and sit in the *hall* ?

CLARA: No, Pawnie, I should never expect the least consideration from you.

[She lies down flat on the divan, HELEN arranges cushions for her.]

CLARA: Thank you, Helen darling—I shall always come to you whenever I'm ill.

HELEN : That *will* be nice.

[Enter FLORENCE LANCASTER followed by TOM VERYAN. FLORENCE is brilliantly dressed almost to the point of being "outré." Her face still retains the remnants of great beauty. TOM is athletic and good looking. One feels he is good at games and extremely bad at everything else.]

FLORENCE: Helen—Pawnie, have you been here long?

PAWNIE: No, only a few hours.

FLORENCE: My dear. I'm so frightfully sorry—we've been held up for ages in the traffic. Davis is a congenital idiot. Always manages to get to a turning just as the policeman puts out his hand. No initiative whatever. What's happened to Clara? Has she been run over?

CLARA : No, dear, I've got a frightful head.

FLORENCE : Pawnie, you know Tom, don't you ?—Tom Veryan, Mr. Quentin, I'm sure you'll adore one another.

TOM (*shaking hands*): How are you ?

PAWNIE : Very well, thank you—how sweet of you to ask me?

FLORENCE: Is there anything I can do, Clara?

THE VORTEX

CLARA : Yes, dear, lend me your green fan for to-night.

FLORENCE: All right—but you *won't* get too carried away with it, will you, dear? I stould hate the feathers to come out. Does anyone want any tea?

HELEN: No thanks, dear,

FLORENCE: Cocktails, then?

PAWNIE: It's too early.

FLORENCE (*ringing bell*): It's never too early for a cocktail.

CLARA : I should like to go quite quietly into a Convent, and never see anybody again ever——

PAWNIE: Gregory would be bored stiff in a Convent.

FLORENCE: We've just been to a most frightful Charity *matinee*. Nothing but inaudible speeches from dreary olcTliCtors, and leading ladies nudging one another all over the stage. (PRESTON *enters*.) Cocktails, Preston, and ask Barker to wrap up my green fan for Miss Hibbert to take away with her.

PRESTON : Very good, Ma'am. *[She goes out.*

CLARA: You're an angel, Florence—I think I'll sit up now.

FLORENCE: Do, dear, then Tom will be able to sit down.

CLARA (*sitting up*): I really do feel most peculiar.

PAWNIE : You look far from normal, dear.

CLARA: If Pawnie's rude to me any more I shall burst into tears.

FLORENCE : Tom, give me a cigarette.

THE VORTEX

PAWNIE: Here are some.

FLORENCE: No, Tom has a special rather hearty kind that I adore.

CLARA: Lend me your lip stick, Helen, mine has sunk down into itself.

HELEN: Here you are.

CLARA: What a lovely colour! I look far prettier than I feel.

FLORENCE (*to TOM*): Thank you, angel.

CLARA: I shan't be able to get down to the house until Saturday evening, Florence—I'm seeing Gregory off to Newcastle.

PAWNIE: Why Newcastle?

CLARA: His home's just near there— isn't it too awful for him?

FLORENCE: Well, wire me the time of your train, won't you?

CLARA: Of course, dear.

HELEN: You're smelling divinely, Florence. What is it?

FLORENCE (*flicking her handkerchief*): It is good, isn't it?

PAWNIE: "Narcisse Noir" of Caron, I use it.

FLORENCE: Yes, you would, Pawnie.

[*Re-enter PRESTON with parcel.*]

PRESTON: Here is the fan, Miss.

CLARA (*taking it*): Thank you *so* much—you are sweet, Florence. A fan gives me such a feeling of *security* when I'm singing modern stuff. (PRESTON *goes out.*) I must rush now——

THE VORTEX

FLORENCE: Don't you want a cocktail before you go?

CLARA: No, darling—I should only hiccup all the evening. Good-bye, you've been *such* a comfort—good-bye, Helen—Pawnie, you will be nicer to me over the week-end, won't you? I shall be *so* depressed, what with Gregory going away and everything—Good-bye, Tom—I shall dine in bed and give way at every pore——

[She goes out.]

PAWNIE: Poor Clara—she eternally labours under the delusion that she really matters,

HELEN: We all do that a little.

FLORENCE (*laughing*): You're awfully cruel to her, Pawnie.

PAWNIE: She upsets my vibrations.

FLORENCE (*before glass*): I've taken a sudden hatred to this hat. (*She takes it off.*) That's better—are you going to the "New Elaine" to-night, either of you?

HELEN: I'm not—but Pawnie is, of course.

PAWNIE: It's going to be *amazing*—what a cast, my dear! Marvellous Selwyn Steele, Nora Dean, and that perfect woman, Lily Burfield——

HELEN: I can't stand her, she always over-acts.

PAWNIE (*incensed*): How *can* you, Helen! Did you see her in "Simple Faith?"

HELEN: Yes, unfortunately.

PAWNIE: Oh, you really are too tiresome for words!

HELEN: Her technique creaks like machinery.

PAWNIE: It's sacrilege—she's too, too marvellous.

THE VORTEX

[Enter PRESTON with a tray of cocktails. Everyone helps themselves.]

FLORENCE: What do you think about it, Tom?

TOM: I've never seen her.

FLORENCE: Yes, you have. About three months ago, at the "Comedy."

TOM: Oh. . . . I don't remember

PAWNIE: Don't remember! An artist like that! Good God, it's agony!

HELEN: You'll look awfully tired at dinner-time, Pawnie, if you don't calm down a little.

FLORENCE: This is special—my own invention

HELEN: Absolutely delicious.

TOM: A bit too sweet.

FLORENCE: Tom, *darling*, don't be so taciturn—he's always taciturn after a *matinee*.

PAWNIE: When's Nicky coming back?

FLORENCE: To-morrow, isn't it too divine? He's been away for a whole year, but I saw him for a moment on my way through Paris last month.

PAWNIE: Has he been working hard?

FLORENCE: I suppose so, but you know what Nicky is—bless his heart!

PAWNIE: I heard him play at Yvonne Mirabeau's.

FLORENCE: She's a loathsome woman, isn't she?

HELEN: Not as bad as that.

PAWNIE: She's a half-wit. I can't bear half-wits.

THE VORTEX

FLORENCE: She goes on so dreadfully about things—devastating.

PAWNIE: Funny Nicky liking her so much. .

FLORENCE: Only because she keeps on saying how wonderful he is—that always appeals to Nicky,

PAWNIE: How old is he now?

FLORENCE: Twenty-four. Isn't it absurd to think I have such a grown-up son—old General Fenwick said last Thursday that——(*The telephone rings, she goes to it.*) Hallo—hallo—yes, my dear, how are you?—Yes, so am I, simply worn out. No, when? How perfectly marvellous. . . . No, dear, it's a prescription; but I can let you have a little in a jar. . . . Quite easy, all you do is just rub it on at night. . . . Don't be so silly . . . not in the least, if you send the car round that will be all right. . . . Very well. . . . Good-bye, darling. (*She hangs up receiver*). I give Clara Hibbert ten for stupidity, don't you, Helen?

HELEN: A hundred and ten.

PAWNIE: Ten's the limit.

TOM: I say, Florence—I think I'd better be getting along if I've got to be dressed and back here by half-past seven——

FLORENCE: You've got half an hour.

TOM: That's not very much.

FLORENCE: The car's outside . . . take it and send it straight back.

PAWNIE: Can it drop me, Florence dear? I always feel so much richer in your car than anyone else's.

THE VORTEX

FLORENCE : Of course, Pawnie.

[The telephone rings again.]

FLORENCE (*at telephone*): Hallo . . . yes . . . speaking.
. . . How do you do——?

PAWNIE: Good-bye, Helen, it's been divine——

HELEN: Ring me up at tea-time to-morrow.

FLORENCE: . . . How perfectly sweet of you . . . now, now really . . . well, naturally, if you persist in saying such charming things . . . (*laughing gaily*) . . . what nonsense. . . .

PAWNIE: Good-bye, Florence——

FLORENCE (*she puts her hand over mouthpiece*)'. It's that awful General Fenwick. . . . Good-bye, Pawnie dear, you're coming down to the house on Friday?

PAWNIE: Yes, too lovely——

FLORENCE: Helen's coming by the five o'clock—you'd better travel together.

PAWNIE: Perfect. (*To TOM.*) Are you ready?

TOM: Quite.

PAWNIE (*as they go out*): You *can* drop me first, can't you? I'm not as young as I was——

FLORENCE (*at telephone*): Please forgive me—people rushing in and out, this house grows more like a railway station every day . . . now, General, that was a deliberate compliment (*She laughs.*) Ridiculous man . . . very well. . . . good-bye. (*She hangs up receiver.*) My God, ten for dreariness!

HELEN : He's not a bad old thing.

THE VOICES

FLORENCE: No, but he tries to be, and that's what's so frightful. (*Arranging her hair before glass.*) I look like Death. . . . Isn't Tom a darling?

HELEN: Yes, dear, without being aggressively brilliant

FLORENCE: I'm afraid, Helen, you're getting rather bitter.

HELEN: Nonsense.

FLORENCE: It's silly to be sarcastic about Tom.

HELEN: It's better than being maudlin about him.

FLORENCE: I don't know what you mean, dear. I'm not in the least maudlin, and never have been about anybody. I sometimes wish I could be—I'm too hard.

HELEN (*taking a cigarette*): Tom will let you down.

FLORENCE: Let me down? Why . . . how ... I don't understand——

HELEN: You're more in love with him than he is with you.

FLORENCE: Don't be so *absurd*, Helen.

HELEN: It's true.

FLORENCE (*complacently*): He adores me—worships me—he's never seen anyone like me before in his life. I'm something strange . . . exotic——

HELEN: You're more in love with him than he is with you.

FLORENCE: You're getting on my nerves to-day, Helen.

HELEN: You do see that I'm right, don't you?

FLORENCE: If you knew some of the things he's said to me.

THE VORTEX

HELEN: I can guess them.

FLORENCE: That boy was utterly unawakened until he met me.

HELEN : He's very young.

FLORENCE: I've taught him—everything.

HELEN : Or nothing.

FLORENCE: Helen, I believe you're jealous.

HELEN : Don't be a fool.

FLORENCE: I wish I hadn't this fatal knack of seeing through people,

HELEN: How's David?

FLORENCE: I don't know—he ought to be home soon.

HELEN: Doesn't he ever suspect anything?

FLORENCE: Of course not—he adores me.

HELEN : It seems so strange not to see——

FLORENCE: I'm devoted to David—I'd do anything for him, anything in the world—but he's grown old and I've kept young—it does muddle things up so. I can't help having a temperament, can I?

HELEN: Temperament. . . . No.

FLORENCE: David's always loved me and never understood me -you see, I'm such an extraordinary *mixture*. I have so many *sides* to my character. I adore being at home and running the house and looking after David and Nicky——

HELEN : You don't exactly overdo it.

FLORENCE: Well, Nicky's been away for such ages,

THE VORTEX

Also, one must be in London for the season. You can't expect me to bury myself in the country indefinitely—I shall be there practically all through the spring and summer.

HELEN: Lovely tennis parties and cricket weeks and things——

FLORENCE: Certainly.

HELEN (*kissing her*): You're a divine creature, Florence.

FLORENCE (*basking*): Am I? (*The telephone rings.*) Hallo—yes—speaking. (*To HELEN in a whisper.*) It's Inez Zulieta, I never went to her recital. . . . Inez, *darling*, I never recognized your voice . . . didn't you get my note? . . . it was absolutely true, I was in agony. . . . Inez, don't be angry, if you only knew how I longed for the sound of your wonderful, wonderful voice . . . *darling*. . . . Inez, don't be so cruel . . . to-morrow, then. (*She hangs up receiver.*) I do wish Inez wasn't so persistent.

HELEN: You never stop encouraging her.

FLORENCE: Oh, Helen, I'm so tired of everyone.

HELEN: Except Tom?

FLORENCE: Yes, except Tom; he's such a darling.

HELEN: How do you think he and Nicky will get on?

FLORENCE: Marvellously—Tom loves music,

HELEN: He says he does.

FLORENCE: My dear, I took him to that Russian thing the other day and he sat entranced from beginning to end,

HELEN: Poor Nicky!

THE VORTEX

FLORENCE: Why do you say that?

HELEN: Because I sometimes feel it.

FLORENCE (*suddenly furious*): Oh, I wonder why we're such friend—we're so opposite—you don't understand me a bit. I used to think you did, but you've been different lately—unsympathetic.

HELEN: No, I haven't.

FLORENCE: Yes, you have—over Tom—I believe you're in love with him yourself.

HELEN (*smiling*): No—it isn't that.

FLORENCE: Anyhow, you can't bear him being in love with me.

HELEN: I don't think he is—really. I quite realize that he *was* very violently infatuated, but that is wearing off a bit now. I'm beginning to see him as he is. ...

FLORENCE: No, no, it's not true—you don't understand——

HELEN: We *are* friends, Florence, though we're so "opposite." Do you really know the-truth—inside you? Or is all this shrill vanity real?

FLORENCE: What's the matter with you?

HELEN: You're ten years older than I am, but when I'm your age I shall be twenty years older than you.

FLORENCE: *Darling*, how deliciously involved—what *can* you mean by that?

HELEN: I mean, I think it's silly not to grow old when the time comes.

[She rises and goes towards door.]

THE VORTEX

FLORENCE (*outraged*): Helen! (*There is suddenly heard a violent knocking at the front door.*) What on earth is that?

[There is a noise outside, then the door bursts open and NICKY enters. He is extremely well dressed in travelling clothes. He is tall and pale, with thin, nervous hands.]

FLORENCE: Nicky.

NICKY: Mother.

[He embraces her.]

FLORENCE: But I'd no idea—I thought you were coming to-morrow.

NICKY: No, to-day—I wrote to you.

FLORENCE: I'm terribly, terribly excited.

NICKY: Helen, dear, how are you?

[He kisses her.]

HELEN: Splendid, Nicky.

FLORENCE: I can't get over your arriving like this. . . . I never realized——

NICKY: Silly . . . you're looking awfully well

FLORENCE: Am I?

NICKY: Wonderful, as usual.

FLORENCE: I was talking to George Morrison only last Thursday——

NICKY: The man who wrote that fearful book?

FLORENCE: It isn't a fearful book, it's brilliant—anyhow, he absolutely refused to believe that I had a grown-up son.

THE VORTEX

HELEN: My dears, I must fly.

NICKY: Don't go yet.

HELEN: I must—I'm hours late as it is.

NICKY: Be a little later, then.

FLORENCE: Remember, five o'clock train on Friday.

NICKY: Oh, is she coming down to the house—
divine?

HELEN: Yes, if Florence is still speaking to me—
good-bye.

[She goes out.]

NICKY: Have you been having a scene?

FLORENCE: No, dear.

NICKY: She's a darling—Helen——

FLORENCE: Extremely stupid and tactless sometimes.

NICKY: It doesn't feel as though I'd been away at all.

FLORENCE: I've missed you appallingly—we had
such a short time together in Paris—did you enjoy all my
letters?

NICKY: I adored them—so did John Bagot. I used to
read most of them aloud to him. He's mad on you, saw
your pictures in the "Taler," or something, and fell in
love with it.

FLORENCE: Is he nice?

NICKY: He's grand.

FLORENCE: We must all dine at the Embassy. When is
he coming to England?

NICKY: Not until after Christmas.

THE VORTEX

FLORENCE: You must see my new photographs, they're wonderful.

[She takes large packet from desk.]

NICKY: It's heavenly—being back.

FLORENCE: Look.

NICKY: I don't like that one.

FLORENCE: How can you, Nicky!—Tom likes that one best of all.

NICKY: Who's Tom?

FLORENCE: Tom Veryan—he's a dear, you'll like him frightfully—you know—the very nicest type of Englishman.

NICKY: I hate the very nicest type of Englishman.

FLORENCE: Don't be tiresome, Nicky, he's only twenty-four, and they all think *so* well of him——

NICKY: All who?

FLORENCE: All his officers and people, he's in the Brigade.

NICKY (*holding photograph away from him and scrutinizing it through half-closed eyes*): Now that one really is *enchanting*—they've got your hair *beautifully*—Oh, yes, my dear, it's perfect——

FLORENCE (*complacently*): It *is* good—she's sweet—Madame Henderson, she simply won't hear of my paying for these—she says it's quite sufficient to be allowed to exhibit them in the window.

NICKY: Is anyone dining this evening?

THE VORTEX

FLORENCE: No—Oh, dear, I'd forgotten—I'm dining out with Tom.

NICKY: Oh—I see.

FLORENCE: Your first night home, too—how perfectly fiendish. What a fool I am to have muddled it up.

NICKY: It doesn't matter, darling.

FLORENCE: Oh, but it *does*. I wonder if we could get another seat——

NICKY: Seat, what for?

FLORENCE: We're going to the first night of "The New Elaine," it's going to be marvellous.

NICKY: Who's in it?

FLORENCE: Nora Dean and Selwyn Steele——

NICKY: Oh, God!

FLORENCE: It's silly of you *always* to jeer at Selwyn Steele. He's a brilliant actor, if only he could get away from his wife. . . .

NICKY: I couldn't bear him to-night anyway, I'm tired. Is father home yet?

FLORENCE: No, I don't think so. Oh, I do feel such a beast——

NICKY: Don't be silly—honestly, I don't mind a bit.

FLORENCE: I know—you have a nice quiet dinner here and join us at the Embassy afterwards.

NICKY: Is it a late night?

FLORENCE: Yes, they play the most heavenly tune

THE VORTEX

there now—Tom always makes them do it over and over again—I'll put it on——

[She goes to the gramophone.]

NICKY: How's Iris?

FLORENCE: My dear, don't speak of her.

NICKY: Why—what's she done?

FLORENCE: She's been absolutely foul.

NICKY: In what way?

FLORENCE: Every way—I never trusted her, luckily—Thank God I've got instincts about people—listen, isn't this marvellous—She said the most filthy things to Gloria Craig about me—I always knew she was insanely jealous, but there are limits. I loathe being at people's beck and call. . . . Come and dance.

NICKY (*as they dance*): I'm sorry you've rowed—I rather liked her——

FLORENCE: Only because she kept on saying how wonderful you were. . . . She doesn't know a thing about music really.

NICKY: Oh, yes, she does.

FLORENCE: It's merely bluff—all that appreciation—*Darling*, how oddly you're dancing.

NICKY: It's probably because we haven't danced together for so long. . . .

FLORENCE: Anyhow, now she's gone off to Monte Carlo with Violet Fenchurch—silly fool——

[Enter DAVID LANCASTER. He is an elderly grey-haired pleasant man.]

THE VORTEX

DAVID (*delighted*): Nicky—my boy——

NICKY (*kissing him*): Hallo, father——

DAVID: I thought—Florence said—to-morrow——

NICKY: Mother muddled it up.

DAVID: You look rather tired.

NICKY: Pm splendid—how's everything?

DAVID: The same as usual. Pve made lots of improvements down at the house.

FLORENCE: David thinks and talks of nothing but the farm——

DAVID: It's beginning to pay a bit—Peterson's an awfully good man.

NICKY: We'll make a grand tour of it on Sunday.

DAVID: Have you enjoyed yourself in Paris?

NICKY: Oh, yes, rather—it's a splendid place to work.

DAVID: It never struck me that way quite, but still——

FLORENCE: Sophie de Molignac said Nicky's playing had improved wonderfully.

DAVID: Pm so glad, Nicky.

NICKY: I've been doing some Spanish stuff lately.

DAVID: I wish I knew more about it.

NICKY: Never mind, father.

DAVID: Come to my room and talk, I can't bear that thing——

FLORENCE: Father's such a beast, he never will dance with me.

THE VORTEX

DAVID: Is the " Evening News " anywhere about?

NICKY: Yes, here.

[He gives it to htm.

DAVID: I'm so glad you're home again, Nicky—don't forget—come and talk. . . .

[He goes out,

FLORENCE: David's so much happier in the country.

NICKY: Why on earth doesn't he retire and live at the house for good?

FLORENCE: Work has become such a habit with him—he's always hated giving up habits.

NICKY: Mother—I've got something rather important to tell you.

FLORENCE: Darling, how thrilling! What is it?

NICKY: I am engaged to be married.

FLORENCE: What!

NICKY: Practically—as much as one can be these days.

FLORENCE: Nicky!

NICKY: Don't look so stricken.

FLORENCE: But, Nicky—I never sort of visualized you being engaged, or married, or anything.

NICKY: Why not?

FLORENCE: You're not old enough.

NICKY: I'm twenty-four.

FLORENCE: You don't look it. ... Thank God!

NICKY: What do you really feel about it, mother?

THE VORTEX

FLORENCE: *Darling*—I hardly know what to say—you've sprung it on me so suddenly—who is she?

NICKY: A girl called Bunty Mainwaring.

FLORENCE: What a silly name!

NICKY: It isn't at all—it's very attractive.

FLORENCE: Is she an actress, or a student, or what?

NICKY: Neither—she is what is technically termed a " lady."

FLORENCE: Do you think she'll like me?

NICKY: She went mad over your photograph.

FLORENCE: Which one?

NICKY: The " looking out of the window " one.

FLORENCE: That really is one of the best I've ever had done.

NICKY: She said you had the face of an heroic little boy.

FLORENCE: What a *divine* thing to say!

[She glances at herself in the glass.]

NICKY: She does say *divine* things—she's supremely intelligent.

FLORENCE: Is she in Paris?

NICKY: No, she came over with me to-day.

FLORENCE: Where does she live?

NICKY: Just round the corner in Carbury Square.

FLORENCE: Near the Churchingtons.

NICKY: It's her mother's house, but her mother's

THE VORTEX

away just now, so I asked her to change quickly and come on here.

FLORENCE: Nicky!

NICKY: Why not? I wanted you to see her as soon as possible

FLORENCE (*realizing parental responsibility*): It's an awful shock, you know.

NICKY: Nonsense, mother—you're quite excited about it, really.

FLORENCE (*with determination*): I shall be charming to her.

NICKY: Then she'll adore you at once—probably too much, and I shall be jealous.

FLORENCE: You'd better both dine here together and come on to the Embassy—how old is she?

NICKY: Twenty-three.

FLORENCE: What does she do?

NICKY: Nothing much—she writes things occasionally.

FLORENCE: Where did you meet her?

NICKY: First of all at a party at Olive Lloyd-Kennedy's.

FLORENCE: I can't bear Olive Lloyd-Kennedy—she's a cat.

NICKY: Then I met her again at Marion Fawcett's—a frightful sort of reception affair—she was staying with her.

FLORENCE: She seems to move exclusively among my worst enemies—is she pretty?

THE VORTEX

NICKY: I don't know—I haven't really noticed.

FLORENCE (*with a touch of realfeeling*) I Nicky, darling, I do feel so extraordinary about it.

NICKY: Why extraordinary?

FLORENCE: It's a milestone, isn't it—you being engaged? A definite milestone? (*She catches sight of herself.*) Look at my nose. (*She powders it.*) I do hope she'll like me—I must go and dress now, Tom is fetching me half-past seven—bring her to my room when she comes.

NICKY: Don't go for a minute.

FLORENCE: I must, really—Tom will be furious.

NICKY: Oh, damn Tom!

FLORENCE: Oh, Nicky, *don't* go and take one of your tiresome prejudices against him.

NICKY (*smiling*): All right, I'll try not to.

FLORENCE: He's frightfully good-looking.

NICKY: Oh!

FLORENCE: And he adores music.

NICKY: Now, then, mother——

FLORENCE: He does, honestly.,

NICKY: Good.

FLORENCE: And he dances beautifully.

NICKY: I shall never stop dancing with him.

FLORENCE: And he's so good at games.

NICKY: He sounds adorable.

FLORENCE: Of course, he needs knowing.

THE VORTEX

NICKY : So do I.

FLORENCE: You will make an effort though, darling, won't you? For my sake!

NICKY : Yes, mother.

FLORENCE: And we'll all have a divine time together, Tom and me and you and what's her name——

NICKY: Bunty.

FLORENCE: Oh, yes, of course, Bunty

[Front door bell rings.]

NICKY : This is her, I expect.

FLORENCE: Do you feel wonderful about her?

NICKY: Yes.

FLORENCE: It is thrilling, isn't it—being in love?

NICKY (*frowning a little*): Yes.

FLORENCE : Your father was right—you look awfully tired, Nicky.

NICKY: What nonsense! I feel grand.

{Enter PRESTON.

PRESTON (*announcing*): Miss Mainwaring.

[BUNTY comes in, very self-assured and well-dressed. She is more attractive than pretty in a boyish sort of way.]

[PRESTON goes out.]

NICKY : Bunty. You have been quick.

BUNTY : I've simply flown.

NICKY : Bunty . . . here is mother. . . .

THE VORTEX

BUNTY: Oh!

FLORENCE (*taking both her hands*): This is frightfully exciting, isn't it?

[She kisses her.

NICKY: I've told her.

BUNTY: Are you furious?

FLORENCE: Of course not—why should I be? Specially now.

BUNTY: It's absolutely incredible, you being Nicky's mother.

FLORENCE: Am I anything like you thought I'd be?

BUNTY: Yes, exactly—but I couldn't believe it until I saw you.

FLORENCE: Take off that perfectly divine cloak and have a cigarette—I've got to rush and dress now, because I'm *terribly* late, but you're dining here with Nicky and joining Tom Veryan and me at the Embassy afterwards.

BUNTY: Tom Veryan . . . ?

FLORENCE: Yes, do you know him?

BUNTY: I did when I was a child—if it's the same one.

[She takes off her cloak.

FLORENCE (*effusively*): Nicky—I don't feel extraordinary about it any more—I'm *delighted*.

NICKY: Angel,

FLORENCE: Perhaps Bunty would like to come down to the house on Friday for the week-end?

NICKY: Oh, yes, marvellous.

THE VORTEX

BUNTY: It's awfully sweet of you, Mrs. Lancaster.

FLORENCE: You must call me Florence—I can't bear Mrs. Lancaster. I must fly, Tom will be here at any moment—that's him on the desk.

BUNTY (*going over to photograph*): Yes—it is the same one.

FLORENCE: How too divine! . . .

[Telephone rings.

'Hallo—yes, speaking—Elsa, darling, how are you . . . What? . . . to-night . . . how perfectly heavenly, of course, I'd adore it . . . listen, Nicky's just back from Paris, can he come too with Bunty Mainwaring—yes, he's here.—See you to-night, dear. . . . Here, Nicky, talk to Elsa. . . .

[She snatches up her hand-bag and fur coat and kisses BUNTY effusively.

I'm so glad about you and Nicky—it's too wonderful.

[She rushes out.

NICKY (*at telephone*): Hallo, Elsa . . . I'd no idea you were in London. I'm terribly thrilled—my dear, you haven't . . . all those lovely tunes you played to me in Paris? . . . *how amazing*^ I am glad . . . have you done anything with that Tango? . . . You must play it to-night, I want Bunty to hear it. . . . It is perfect, isn't it? . . . Good-bye, dear. (*He hangs up the receiver*)
Bunty.

BUNTY: What?

NICKY: I'm terribly happy,,.

THE VORTEX

BUNTY: So am I.

NICKY: Do you remember how we planned all this—coming home together—and breaking it to mother—and everything?

BUNTY: Rather.

NICKY: Do you really like her?

BUNTY: I adore her—she's a perfect angel.

NICKY: I told her your "heroic little boy" line—she loved it.

BUNTY: It's true, you know—rather defiant too—laughing at Fate.

NICKY: Doesn't Paris seem ages away now?

BUNTY: A different life altogether.

NICKY: That nasty little bit of channel is such an enormous gulf, really. Did you put that dress on on purpose.

BUNTY (*smiling*): Perhaps.

NICKY: You are a devil.

BUNTY: It's such fun being reminded of things.

NICKY: And such agony, too.

BUNTY: Nicky, darling—why agony?

NICKY: It's always agony being in love, and I started loving you in that dress.

BUNTY: Did you?

NICKY: Don't pretend you didn't know.

BUNTY: I suppose one always knows—really.

NICKY: From the very first moment.

THE VORTEX

BUNTY: Yes.

NICKY: A sort of spark.

BUNTY: Your playing helped a lot.

NICKY: I meant it to,

BUNTY: Calculating pig.

NICKY: Have a cigarette?

BUNTY: All right.

[He hands her box, and she takes one.]

NICKY (*lighting her cigarette*): I wish we weren't so free.

BUNTY: Why? What do you mean?

NICKY: I feel I should like to elope, or something violently romantic like that.

BUNTY (*laughing*): There wouldn't be much point in it now, would there?

NICKY: Perhaps not. How much do you love me?

BUNTY: I don't know.

NICKY: It's fun analysing one's emotions.

BUNTY: Marvellous fun.

NICKY: And a comfort, too, when things go wrong—but it kills sentiment stone dead.

BUNTY: A good job too.

NICKY: You're frightfully hard, Bunty.

BUNTY: Am I?

NICKY: Much harder than me—really.

BUNTY: You've got so much hysteria.

THE VORTEX

NICKY : I can't help it,

BUNTY: Of course not, it's your temperament. You burst out suddenly.

NICKY : Not so badly as I used to.

BUNTY : You're growing older.

NICKY: God, yes; isn't it foul?

BUNTY : Hell, my dean

NICKY: It's funny how mother's generation always longed to be old when they were young, and we strain every nerve to keep young.

BUNTY : That's because we see what's coming so much more clearly.

NICKY: Wouldn't it be terrible to know *exactly*—I feel frightened sometimes.

BUNTY: Why?

NICKY : We're all so hectic and nervy. . . .

BUNTY : It doesn't matter—it probably only means we shan't live so long. . . .

NICKY (*suddenly*): Shut up—shut up. . . .

[*Enter* PRESTON.

PRESTON (*announcing*): Mr. Veryan.

[*Enter* TOM. NICKY greets him and shakes hands.

Exit PRESTON.

NICKY: How are you?—I'm Nicky—I came over to-day instead of to-morrow. . . .

TOM: Oh!

NICKY: Do you know Bunty Mainwaring?

THE VORTEX

TOM: Bunty—I say—I am glad.

[They shake hands warmly.]

NICKY: We'd better have some cocktails.

[He goes to the door and shouts.]

Preston . . . bring us some cocktails. . . .

TOM: This *is* jolly—I didn't know what had become of you.

BUNTY: I've been living in Paris a good deal.

TOM: How many years ago is it since we . . .

BUNTY: During the War—the last time I saw you, you were at Sandhurst.

NICKY: Such a pretty place.

TOM: You've hardly altered a bit—more grown up, of course.

NICKY: All this is most affecting.

TOM: Bunty and I used to know one another awfully well.

NICKY: What fun!

BUNTY (*warningly*): Nicky . . .

NICKY: But it is—it's thrilling—there's nothing so charming as a reunion.

BUNTY: Nicky and I have been travelling all day. . . . Boats and trains get on his nerves. . . .

NICKY: When the cocktails come, tell Preston to bring mine to me in father's room.

BUNTY: Nicky, don't be so silly.

THE VORTEX

NICKY: Surely it's not silly to want to talk to my aged father after a year's debauch in Paris? I fail to see why you should have the monopoly of reunions.

BUNTY: Well, don't be long.

TOM: Cheerio!

NICKY (*crossfy*): Oh, God!

[He goes out,

TOM: What's up?

BUNTY: These temperamental musicians.

TOM: Silly ass.

BUNTY: He isn't really—he's only jealous.

TOM: Why . . . is he . . . ?

BUNTY: We're by way of being engaged.

TOM: What?

BUNTY: Why not?

TOM: Are you . . . are you in love with him?

BUNTY (*lightly*): Yes—isn't it damnable?

TOM: Good Lord!

[He laughs,

BUNTY: What are you laughing at?

TOM: It seems so funny you being in love with that sort of chap.

BUNTY: What do you mean by "that sort of chap"?

TOM: Oh—I don't know, that type seems so unlike you.

THE VORTEX

BUNTY: Type?

TOM: Yes, you know—up in the air—effeminate,

BUNTY: You're more bucolic than you used to be, Tom.

TOM: Here, I say . . .

[Enter PRESTON with cocktails.]

BUNTY: Will you please take Mr. Nicky's in to him in his father's room?

PRESTON: Yes, miss.

TOM: Is Mrs. Lancaster nearly ready?

PRESTON: I think so, sir.

TOM: Ask her to hurry—we shall be late,

PRESTON: Yes, sir.

[He goes out.]

BUNTY: I can laugh now.

[She does so.]

TOM: Why?

BUNTY: I've just realized something.

TOM: What?

BUNTY: We shall meet again—over the week-end.

TOM: Are you coming down to the house?

BUNTY: Yes.

TOM: That's splendid—come for a tramp Sunday morning and we'll talk.

THE VORTEX

BUNTY : What about?

TOM : Oh, lots of things—old times

BUNTY (*lifting her cocktail*): Old times, Tom.

TOM (*doing the same*): Cheerio!

CURTAIN

ACT II

ACT II

The scene is the hall of MRS. LANCASTER'S house, about forty miles from London.

When the curtain rises it is just after dinner on the Sunday of the week-end party—the gramophone is going, and there is a continual buzz of conversation. CLARA HIBBERT, an emaciated soprano, is dancing with TOM VERYAN, HELEN with PAWNIE, and NICKY with BUNTY. FLORENCE is seated on the club fender talking intellectually with BRUCE FAIRLIGHT, an earnest dramatist, the squalor of whose plays is much appreciated by those who live in comparative luxury.

There must be a feeling of hectic amusement and noise, and the air black with cigarette smoke and superlatives. During the first part of the scene everyone must appear to be talking at once, but the actual lines spoken while dancing must be timed to reach the audience as the speakers pass near the footlights. This scene will probably be exceedingly difficult to produce, but is absolutely indispensable.

HELEN : It's much too fast, Nicky.

TOM : Do slow down a bit.

NICKY : It's the pace that's marked on the record,

PAWNIE : Fve never danced well since the War, I don't know why.

FLORENCE : But your last act was so strong, when she came in half mad with fright and described everything minutely.

BRUCE : I try to write as *honestly* as possible.

THE VORTEX

CLARA: I gave her three for manners, but seven for charm, because I had to be a *little* nice!

TOM: I thought she was rather a decent sort.

BUNTY: No, but really, Nicky, his technique completely annihilated his inspiration.

NICKY: Not with Debussy and Ravel, with the older Masters, yes; but he's probably tired of them.

BUNTY: That's so stupid, I think.

HELEN: My dear, it was the most "Chic" thing you've ever seen, but unfortunately the wrong colour.

PAWNIE: Marion Ferris had that Poiret model copied in the most frightful blue!

CLARA: I believe my shoe's coming off.

TOM: Shall we stop?

CLARA: No, it's all right

FLORENCE: I wonder if you could gouge this cigarette-end out of the holder for me?

BRUCE: I'll try. (*He does so.*) I always smoke a pipe when I'm working.

FLORENCE: How soothing!

BUNTY: I suppose one can never really judge properly from a recital.

NICKY: Not with him, because he's not dramatic enough.

BUNTY: Dramatic pianists make me uncomfortable.

HELEN: Pawnie, your tongue grows more venomous every day.

THE VORTEX

PAWNIE (*giggling*)-. Well, I had to say something—anyhow, it was true.

HELEN: Especially about her ankles.

PAWNIE: My dear, yes!

[They both faugh.

[The record comes to an end, and NICKY begins to change it. Everyone talks and laughs.

CLARA: You must come next Sunday week.

TOM: Thanks awfully, I'd love to.

CLARA: I'm only singing ballads, but you know what Sunday concerts are.

TOM: Oh, yes, rather.

CLARA (*to NICKY*): What's on the other side?

NICKY: "You've got the cutest ears and eyes and nose."

PAWNIE: Do put on "Spony Moon in Upper Carolina."

HELEN: No, don't put it on, Nicky, play it yourself! you always make the gramophone go too quickly.

BUNTY: Yes, go on, Nicky.

FLORENCE (*refusing BRUCE'S offer of a cigarette*): No, thanks, not another—I'm dancing with Tom.

BUNTY (*gaily*): Missing one, Tom.

TOM: Righto!

[NICKY commences to play a foxtrot.

BUNTY (*dragging BRUCE to his feet*): Come on, Mr. Fairlight, don't overdo the serious dramatist stunt!

THE VORTEX

BRUCE: I warn you I'm no good.

[He dances with her, and confirms the truth of his warning. CLARA HIBBERT squashes down on the piano-seat next to NICKY and endeavours with one finger in the treble to follow the tune he is playing. HELEN and PAWNIE stand right down close to the footlights, smoking and talking, their backs are half-turned to the audience, but their remarks must be perfectly audible.]

HELEN: Tom Veryan doesn't dance as well as he thinks he does.

PAWNIE: With that figure he ought to be marvellous.

HELEN: He's too athletic.

PAWNIE: Anyhow, I'm sure he's a success at the Bath Club.

HELEN: Doesn't Florence look astounding?

PAWNIE: Absolutely. She knows exactly what suits her.

HELEN: Where's David?

PAWNIE: He went off to his study to smoke.

HELEN: I do wish Florence wouldn't be irritable with him in front of everybody. I felt acutely uncomfortable at dinner.

PAWNIE: It makes Nicky furious as a rule, but to-night he was too occupied with that stupid little fool Bunty Mainwaring to take any notice.

HELEN: She's an excellent type.

PAWNIE: Very average; I only hope nothing will come of Nicky's mania for her.

THE VORTEX

HELEN: I don't think we need worry.

PAWNIE: Why?

HELEN: Wait and see, my dear.

CLARA (*leaving NICKY at the piano and advancing on PAWNIE*): Come and dance, Pawnie, and tell me how divinely I sang on Tuesday.

PAWNIE (*agreeably*): You didn't.

CLARA: Ten for cruelty.

[They start to dance. HELEN moves over to the mantelpiece for a cigarette.]

HELEN: Have you a match, Nicky?

NICKY: Isn't this a marvellous tune?

HELEN: Fascinating! (*She goes over and sits next to him. Gently slipping her hand into his coat pocket.*) Darling, I do want a match. (*She brings out a little box.*) What a divine little box!

[NICKY stops playing and jumps up.]

NICKY (*violently*): Helen, give that to me——!

[Everyone stops dancing.]

CLARA: Nicky, dear, *don't* be tiresome.

NICKY (*recovering himself*): I'm sick of playing, let's have the gramophone again. (*To HELEN.*) Here's a light, dearie.

[He takes match-box out of another pocket and lights HELEN'S cigarette. She looks at him queerly for a moment, then he restarts the gramophone and everyone begins to dance again except HELEN and BRUCE FAIRLIGHT. HELEN goes over to the fireplace and takes a coffee-cup from the mantelpiece.]

THE VORTEX

HELEN: Whose coffee is this? Someone drank mine, and I'd hardly touched it,

BRUCE: If it has no sugar in it, it's mine.

HELEN (*draining it*): It had no sugar in it.

FLORENCE: You're dancing abominably, Tom.

TOM: Oh, am I?

FLORENCE: What's the matter with you?

TOM: I don't know, I suppose I'm tired.

FLORENCE: You're not usually tired when you're dancing with me.

TOM: Oh, Florence, don't nag!

FLORENCE: How dare you speak to me like that? '

[She stops dancing and goes over to the fireplace.]

TOM (*following her*): I say, Florence—I'm sorry——

PAWNIE: Let's stop the music for a moment and think of something really marvellous to do.

BUNTY: No, let's go on dancing.

CLARA: I'm exhausted.

PAWNIE (*stopping the gramophone*): What was that divine game we played coming back from Paris, Helen?

HELEN: Just ordinary "Clumps," wasn't it?

BUNTY: I loathe "Clumps."

NICKY: What about the History game?

BRUCE: What's that?

BUNTY: Oh, no, Nicky, it's too intellectual.

THE VORTEX

FLORENCE: There's a Mah-jong set in the drawing-room.

PAWNIE: How divine!—let's make up a table immediately.

CLARA: I won't be happy until someone gives me a set made entirely of jade.

NICKY: Come on, Bunty.

BUNTY (*looking at TOM*): I can't play it.

NICKY: You can; you used to play in Paris with Yvonne.

BUNTY: I've forgotten it.

NICKY: You'll soon remember again.

[He drags her off.]

PAWNIE: Come along, Clara.

CLARA: I insist on Mr. Fairlight learning.

BRUCE: I'm afraid I'm no good at that sort of thing.

CLARA: You'll be able to put it in one of your plays.

PAWNIE: Come and watch, it's too thrilling for words,

[CLARA, BRUCE and PAWNIE go off.]

HELEN: Have you only one set, Florence?

FLORENCE: Yes, isn't it maddening? Clara promised to bring hers down but forgot.

HELEN: Does Bruce Fairlight play Bridge?

FLORENCE: No, I don't think so.

HELEN: Dramatists are such a comfort in a house-party, aren't they?

[She goes off.]

THE VORTEX

TOM: Are you coming, Florence?

FLORENCE: No.

TOM (*nonplussed*): Oh !

FLORENCE: **But** please don't let me *stop you* going, I'm sure you're *dying* to be with the others.

TOM : I say, Florence, I wish you wouldn't go on like that.

FLORENCE: I don't know what's the matter with you, you've never behaved like this before. -

TOM: I haven't behaved like anything.

FLORENCE: You've been exceedingly rude to me, both at dinner and afterwards.

TOM : I wasn't at dinner.

FLORENCE: Yes, you were; you snapped me up when I said I didn't like Elsie Saunders.

TOM : You know perfectly well she's a friend of mine.

FLORENCE: Well, she oughtn't to be, after the things she's said about me.

TOM: You will go on imagining.

FLORENCE: Nothing of the sort—I *know I* If you weren't so dense you'd see, too—the jealousy I have to put up with. I get so tired of it all, so desperately tired.

[She becomes a little pathetic.

TOM: Talk about being different, you're different
too——

FLORENCE: I'm unhappy.

TOM: Why?

THE VERTEX

FLORENCE: Because I hate to see you being put against me.

TOM: Florence!

FLORENCE: You'll understand one day. They're all very subtle, but I can see.

TOM: Nobody's said a word to me about you, they'd better not try.

FLORENCE: Why, what Would you do?

TOM: I'd—I'd be furious.

FLORENCE: Oh I

TOM: And I'd let them see it, too.

FLORENCE (*holding out her hands*): Tom——

TOM: Yes?

FLORENCE: I forgive you.

TOM: I can't bear you being angry with me,

FLORENCE: Can't you, really?

TOM: It makes me feel beastly.

FLORENCE: Comeandsithere.

TOM (*sitting next to her on the club fender*): That's a lovely dress.

FLORENCE: It is sweet, isn't it?

TOM: You always wear wonderful clothes.

FLORENCE: Do I, Tom?

TOM: You know you do.

FLORENCE: Do you remember the very first time we met?

THE VORTEX

TOM: Rather.

FLORENCE: Oxford's so full of romance, isn't it?

TOM: It was when you came down.

FLORENCE: Thank you, Tom, dear.

TOM: We did have fun.

FLORENCE: You used to come up to *matinees*, and I'd motor you back afterwards.

TOM: Ripping!

FLORENCE: That reminds me, I've got seats for " Rolling Stones " on Tuesday—don't forget.

TOM: You never said you were going to get them.

FLORENCE: It doesn't matter, I thought I did. We'd better dine at Claridges.

TOM: But, Florence, I—I can't come!

FLORENCE: Why not?

TOM: I promised to go out.

FLORENCE: Who with?

TOM: Mother.

FLORENCE: Can't you put her off, it will be such a good first night?

TOM: Well—you see, as a matter of fact—it's rather awkward—I put her off the other day——

[There is a slight pause.]

FLORENCE (*a trifle coldly*): Oh, well, never mind, we'll go some other night.

[Enter DAVID.]

THE VORTEX

DAVID: Hallo, Florence, I thought you were in the drawing-room.

FLORENCE: They're playing Mah-jong, and there's only one set. I shall break in presently.

TOM: I'll just go and see how they're getting on.

[This obvious excuse for getting out of the room is not lost upon FLORENCE.]

FLORENCE: Yes, do.

TOM: Come and play soon.

[He goes out quietly.]

FLORENCE: Don't you think this is a divine frock?

DAVID: Very pretty.

FLORENCE: You and Helen seemed to be very thick at dinner. What were you talking about?

DAVID: Nothing much—I like Helen.

FLORENCE: Only because she flatters you and listens to everything you say.

DAVID: She doesn't flatter me.

FLORENCE: I suppose she was talking about the farm, and giving her opinions.

DAVID: We did discuss the farm a little.

FLORENCE: She doesn't know a thing about it, really.

DAVID: Perhaps not, but it passed the time.

[He goes out.]

[FLORENCE sits still for a moment, then she wearily buries her face in her hands. Enter NICKY,

NICKY (going to her): What's the matter, darling?

THE VORTEX

FLORENCE: Nothing, I've got a slight headache.

NICKY: Why don't you go Byes?

FLORENCE: I can't, it's much too early.

NICKY: I'm sick of Mah-jong.

FLORENCE: Who's playing now?

NICKY: Pawnie and Helen and Clara are trying to teach Bruce Fairlight, he's an awful fool at it.

[He sits down at the piano and plays absently.]

FLORENCE: You must get Bunty out of that habit of contradicting everything people say.

NICKY: I don't see why.

FLORENCE: It's bad breeding.

NICKY *(striking a note viciously)*: Who cares nowadays? We've all got a right to our opinions.

FLORENCE: She seems to forget that I'm much older than she is.

TOM: That's no argument, mother; it's silly only to remember your age when someone says something you don't like.

FLORENCE: She's having a bad effect on you.

NICKY: Nonsense!

FLORENCE: You've changed since Paris.

NICKY: Naturally.

FLORENCE: You never used to be rude to me.

NICKY: Oh, damn, I'm not rude.

FLORENCE: Yes, you are.

THE VORTEX

NICKY : Well, don't start running down Bunty.

FLORENCE: Stop playing—stop playing!

NICKY (*getting up angrily*): Oh, God!

[He goes towards door and collides with HELEN.

HELEN: What's happening?

FLORENCE: Nothing, Bunty's just putting Nicky against me. I knew she'd try to.

\She goes out.

HELEN: You must be having a delightful evening! You leave the drawing-room having rowed with Bunty, and come here and row with Florence.

NICKY: Mother's impossible.

HELEN: She's no different from what she's always been.

NICKY : Well, I haven't realized it before.

HELEN (*taking a cigarette and lighting it*): You haven't been engaged before.

NICKY: I'm hating this house-party.

HELEN (*lightly*)\ Don't say that, dear, it's not kind.

NICKY: You know I don't mean you.

HELEN: Are you very much in love?

NICKY: Yes.—No.—I don't know.

HELEN: I wonder.

NICKY: It's utterly devastating, anyhow.

HELEN: When did you meet her?

NICKY : About five months ago.

HELEN: What was she doing in Paris?

THE VORTEX

NICKY : Oh, I don't know—fooling about.

HELEN: Splendid.

NICKY : She's been studying French literature.

HELEN: Why?

NICKY : She's going to write—herself—some day.

HELEN: Oh, I see!

NICKY: Helen, do you like her?

HELEN: I can't tell yet—yesterday was the first time I'd ever set eyes on her.

NICKY: She's wonderfully intelligent.

HELEN : Yes—I'm sure she is.

NICKY: You *don't* like her?

HELEN : I tell you—I'm not sure yet.

NICKY: It's generally the way—one's friends always hate one another.

HELEN (*smiling*): It *is* difficult for you, isn't it?

NICKY : I should so like you to like her.

HELEN : Very well—I'll try.

NICKY : She's utterly opposite to me in every way.

HELEN : Yes, I see that.

NICKY: But that's as it ought to be, isn't it?

HELEN: It depends.

NICKY: I need a sort of restraining influence terribly.

HELEN : Yes, Nicky.

NICKY : She's awfully good for me.

THE VORTEX

HELEN: Is she?

NICKY: Yes—she curbs me when I get temperamental and silly.

HELEN: I always felt you needed encouraging more than curbing.

NICKY (*laughing*): Oh, Helen—aren't you a darling!

HELEN: I mean it.

NICKY: You're wrong, though—I'm all over the place.

HELEN: Anyhow, I do hope you'll be very happy with her.

NICKY: I don't suppose I shall ever be that—I haven't got the knack.

HELEN: Do you work hard?

NICKY: Yes.

HELEN: Really hard?

NICKY: Frightfully.

HELEN: Liar!

NICKY: If you'd seen me in Paris—studying, studying—all night long until the grey dawn put the guttering candle to shame—and my nerveless hands dropped from the keys——

HELEN: Candles gutter awfully quickly when they're burnt at both ends,

NICKY: Meaning that I look a debauched wreck of my former self?

HELEN: Exactly.

NICKY: If you go on encouraging me at this rate I shall commit suicide.

THE VORTEX

HELEN: You do resent anyone taking a real interest in you, don't you?

NICKY: I distrust it

HELEN: Why?

NICKY: I don't know—I'm not worth it.

HELEN: You seem to be suffering from a slight inferiority complex.

NICKY: Not a bit of it—I'm gay and witty and handsome.

HELEN: Oh, Nicky, you're so maddening.

NICKY: Don't be cross, Helen.

HELEN: I'm one of the few people who know what you're really like, and you won't give me the credit for it.

NICKY: Do you think you do, honestly?

HELEN: Yes—and I'm exceedingly worried about you.

NICKY: You needn't be.

HELEN: You're sensitive and reserved and utterly foolish.

NICKY: Thank you—I'm beginning to feel beautifully picturesque.

HELEN: And you're scared.

NICKY: Why! What have I to be scared about?

HELEN: Would you like me to tell you?

NICKY: No.

HELEN: Why not?

NICKY: Because you're a sentimentalist, and you see things that aren't there at all.

THE VORTEX

HELEN: You're far more sentimental than I.

NICKY: Darling Helen—you've got such a lovely mind—like a Christmas card—with frosted robins and sheep wandering about in the snow—bleating.

HELEN: All the same, I should give up drugs if I were you.

NICKY: Helen!

HELEN: Well?

NICKY: I don't know what you mean.

HELEN: Do you think I can't see?

NICKY (*forcing a laugh*): You're being terribly funny, aren't you?

HELEN: You fool! You unutterable little fool!

NICKY: Don't be dramatic, dear.

HELEN: I thought you had common sense; I credited you with more intelligence than that.

NICKY: If you persist in being absurd.

HELEN (*suddenly with intense feeling*): Nicky, don't resist me, don't fight me, I'm your friend, I wouldn't have said a word if I weren't. You've got to stop it; you haven't gone very far yet, there's still time—for God's sake listen to reason.

NICKY: Shut up, shut up, don't speak so loudly.

HELEN: Nicky, throw it away.

NICKY: When did you find out?

HELEN: To-night, you know, when you were playing, but I've guessed for ages.

THE VORTEX

NICKY: You needn't be frightened, Helen, I only take just the tiniest little bit, once in a blue moon!

HELEN: If anything goes wrong, you'll take a lot—throw it away.

NICKY: What could go wrong?

HELEN: Never mind, throw it away!

NICKY: I can't—look out, somebody's coming.

[Enter DAVID.]

DAVID: Hallo!

NICKY: Hallo, father!

DAVID: What's the matter?

NICKY: The matter—why?

DAVID: You look very worried.

NICKY: Helen and I have just had a grand heart-to-heart talk; we've undone our back hair, loosened our stays and wallowed in it.

DAVID: Oh, I see!

HELEN: We haven't seen one another for so long—it was inevitable.

DAVID: You never came and looked at the Farm this morning—I waited for you.

NICKY: I'm awfully sorry, father—I just went on sleeping.

HELEN: I'll see you later, Nicky.

NICKY: All right.

[HELEN goes out.]

THE VORTEX

DAVID: How do you think your mother's looking?

NICKY: Splendid—the same as ever.

DAVID: Would you like a cigar?

NICKY: No thanks, father—I'm not very good at them.

DAVID: I was just on my way to bed—there are far too many people in the house.

NICKY (*smiling*): You must be used to that by now.

DAVID: You ought to stay down here, you know—during the week and get some fresh air.

NICKY: I've got such millions of things to do in London.

DAVID: Worth doing?

NICKY: Yes, of course.

DAVID: You look as though you needed a rest.

NICKY: You needn't worry about me—I feel splendid.

DAVID: She seems a nice girl.

NICKY: Who—Bunty?

DAVID: Yes. Quiet and untiresome.

NICKY: She's a darling!

DAVID: When do you propose to get married?

NICKY: I don't know—the engagement's only a sort of try out, you know.

DAVID: Oh, I see—I didn't realize that—I'm so unversed in modern technicalities.

NICKY: It's her idea really—just to tread water for a bit.

DAVID: It sounds an excellent plan.

NICKY: I'm awfully glad you like her.

THE VORTEX

DAVID: Is she musical?

NICKY : Oh, yes—frightfully!

DAVID: Good!

NICKY : Father, I think I will come dowji here for a few days—and work quietly.

DAVID: If you do that I'll only go up to London every other day—I see so little of you when you're at the flat.

NICKY: That's settled then. I wonder what mother will say!

DAVID : I'll talk to her.

NICKY : All right—she won't bother about us much.

DAVID: No—I don't suppose she will—I think I'll be getting along to bed now. Good night, my boy!

NICKY: Good night, father!

[They shake hands, and DAVID pats NICKY'S shoulder rather tentatively. He goes upstairs and NICKY wanders to the piano. He plays absently, and BUNTY enters.]

BUNTY : I want to talk to you.

NICKY (*still playing*): All right.

BUNTY : Perhaps you'd stop playing for a minute.

NICKY: Won't you let me woo you with a little Scriabine?

BUNTY: Please stop.

NICKY (*rising*): I'm unappreciated—that's what it is.

[There is a slight pause—he goes over to her.]

I say, Bunty——

THE VORTEX

BUNTY: What?

NICKY: Before you say anything awful to me, I *am* sorry for being rude just now.

BUNTY: So you ought to be.

NICKY: Will you forgive me?

BUNTY: Yes, I forgive you.

NICKY: I've been irritable all the evening.

BUNTY: Give me a cigarette, Nicky.

NICKY: Here.

[They both smoke.]

BUNTY: Thanks.

NICKY: What did you want to talk to me about?

BUNTY: Lots of things—Us!

NICKY (*hardening*): Oh, I see!

BUNTY: Don't you think it's rather silly—being engaged?

NICKY: No, not at all.

BUNTY: I do.

NICKY: Just because we bickered a bit to-night?

BUNTY: No, not only because of that.

NICKY: Why then?

BUNTY: Can't you see?

NICKY: No.

BUNTY: Well, we're not very suited to one another, are we?

NICKY: Why do you suddenly say that?

THE VORTEX

BUNTY: Because I've only just realized it

NICKY: I'm sorry,

BUNTY: It's not your fault particularly.

NICKY: I'm glad.

BUNTY: It's circumstances and surroundings.

NICKY: Oh, that can be altered quite easily. We'll change the shape of the house—we'll take all that wall away and turn that into a studio—you love studios, don't you?—then we'll transform the drawing-room into an enormous aviary.

BUNTY: It's practically that now!

NICKY: And then we'll——

BUNTY: Shut up, Nicky!

NICKY: I'm only trying to be amenable.

BUNTY: Are you, really?

NICKY: Yes, I'm putting up a sort of defence, Bunty. I have a feeling that you're going to be unpleasant, and I want to establish myself comfortably before you start.

BUNTY: I don't want to be unpleasant—only honest.

NICKY: You won't let the two run together, will you?

BUNTY (*with vehemence*): You're hopeless, hopeless, hopeless!

NICKY: Yes—I think I am rather.

BUNTY: In a way I'm glad—it makes it easier.

NICKY: Does it?

BUNTY: You're not in love with me, really—you couldn't be!

THE VORTEX

NICKY : Please, don't say that.

BUNTY: Why don't you face things properly?

NICKY : One generally has to in the end—I like to put it off for as long as possible.

BUNTY : That's cowardly.

NICKY: Don't be pompous, darling.

BUNTY : You're a great help, I must say.

NICKY : Why should I help to destroy my own happiness?

BUNTY: That's self-pity and self-deception.

NICKY: Why are you going on like this?

BUNTY : Because I tell you—I've realized the truth.

NICKY : I suppose you've taken a hatred to mother!

BUNTY: No, not a hatred.

NICKY: You don't like her.

BUNTY: Not very much.

NICKY: Why not? She likes you.

BUNTY: She detests me.

NICKY: Nonsense, why should she?

BUNTY: Because I'm young.

NICKY : What a filthy thing to say!

BUNTY: It's true.

NICKY : It's nothing of the sort.

BUNTY : You're so stupid sometimes.

NICKY : Thank you.

BUNTY : Don't let's start bickering again,

THE VORTEX

NICKY: We won't discuss mother any more then.

BUNTY: You started it.

NICKY: I wish I could make you understand her like I do—I mean she's awfully irritating, I know—but deep down she's marvellous in spite of everything.

BUNTY (*coldly*): Everything?

NICKY (*vehemently*): Yes, *everything!* Don't be a beast, Bunty, just try to see her point a little, even if you do dislike her. She is terribly silly about being "young" I know, but she's been used to so much admiration and flattery and everything always, she feels she sort of can't give it up—you do see that, don't you? And she hasn't really anything in the least comforting to fall back upon, she's not clever—real kind of brain cleverness—and father's no good, and I'm no good, and all the time she's wanting life to be as it was instead of as it is. There's no harm in her anywhere—she's just young inside. Can't you imagine the utter foulness of growing old? Specially if you've been lovely and attractive like she was. The beautiful Flo Lancaster! She used to be known as that—I can remember her when I was quite small, coming up to say good night to me, looking too perfectly radiant for words—and she used to come to the school, too, sometimes, and everyone used to go mad over her, and I used to get frightfully proud and excited——

BUNTY: I've never heard you talk like this before.

NICKY: I don't think I ever have.

BUNTY: I like you better clear cut, not blurred by sentiment.

[NICKY looks at her for a moment in amazement.

THE VORTEX

NICKY: To describe you as hard would be inadequate—you're metallic!

BUNTY: I can see straight

NICKY (*politely*): Can you?

BUNTY: Yes. We could never be happy together.

NICKY: Perhaps not.

BUNTY: Shall we just—finish—then?

NICKY: Certainly, I'm sorry we were too modern to have an engagement ring, you'd have been able to give it back to me so beautifully.

BUNTY: Don't be ridiculous!

NICKY: Better than being blurred by sentiment.

[BUNTY *lights another cigarette and, kicking off her shoes, perches on the club-fender and proceeds to warm her feet at the fire.*

{Enter CLARA HIBBERT.

CLARA: My dear, I'm *shattered*—and I'm going straight to bed—probably for several weeks.

BUNTY: Why?

CLARA: Shshsh! He's coming.

BUNTY: Who's coming?

CLARA: Bruce Fairlight—I've been teaching him Mah-jong—these master brains—agony, dear——

[Enter BRUCE FAIRLIGHT.

BRUCE: Very interesting, that game.

CLARA (*weakly*): I thought you'd like it

THE VORTEX

BRUCE: It's interesting *psychologically*! The concentration and suspense——

[Enter FLORENCE, HELEN, PAWNIE and TOM.
TOM is grasping a whiskey and soda—PAWNIE is eating a biscuit.

PAWNIE: I'm quite exhausted—it must be the country air——

FLORENCE: —it was too lovely, because I started with two red dragons in my hand——

HELEN: I wondered who had them——

PAWNIE: One more tune, Nicky, before we go to bed——

FLORENCE: Yes, just one——

NICKY (*looking at BUNTY*): I'll play " I love you "—such a romantic tune.

[*He puts on the gramophone.*

BUNTY: Do.

HELEN: What time's everyone going up in the morning?

FLORENCE: The ten o'clock's the best—we'll have breakfast at nine downstairs.

PAWNIE (*confidentially*): Do you know that in London I can never do more than nibble a piece of thin toast, and whenever I'm away I eat *enormously*!

NICKY: How very peculiar!

PAWNIE: Your tone revolts me, Nicky—you must never be irascible with your old friends.

NICKY: I haven't got any.

THE VORTEX

HELEN: Nicky!

NICKY: Sorry, Helen.

FLORENCE: I don't know what's the matter with Nicky—he's been in a vile temper all the evening—his first week-end home, too.

NICKY: Such a pity, when so much trouble has been taken to make me happy and cosy.

TOM: Come and dance, Bunty.

BUNTY: No, not now,

NICKY: Dance with him, Bunty—chaps must have exercise.

FLORENCE: You dance with Bunty, Pawnie—I'll dance with Tom—come on.

[She and TOM dance.]

HELEN: The great thing in this world is not to be obvious, Nicky—over *anything*!

[FLORENCE and TOM dance, also HELEN and PAWNIE. Everyone talks at once, as in the beginning of the act.]

PAWNIE: You are infuriating, Helen—it's a wonderful book.

HELEN: Thoroughly second-rate.

PAWNIE: What do you think about "Mischievous Passion," Fairlight?

BRUCE: I never read novels on principle.

PAWNIE: Well, you must read this—it's colossal.

HELEN: Don't be led away by Pawnie, Mr. Fairlight, he has no discrimination.

THE VORTEX

PAWNIE: But I tell you it's brilliant! Absolutely *brilliant!*

HELEN: Nonsense.

PAWNIE: There are times, Helen, when I could willingly see you dead at my feet.

FLORENCE: A little slower, for Heaven's sake!

NICKY: How's that?

[He makes it far too slow.]

FLORENCE: I think you'd better go to bed, Nicky.

HELEN: We're all going, anyhow.

NICKY: Not yet, please, Mummy dear—I'm having such a lovely time!

[He slams off in a rage.]

PAWNIE: I always knew the Continent was fatal for the young.

BUNTY: Nicky's upset—it's my fault—we're not engaged any more.

FLORENCE: Why—what's happened?

BUNTY: Nothing happened—it was never very serious, really.

HELEN: I had a feeling that it was.

BUNTY: You were wrong.

FLORENCE: Well, I must say it's all been rather abrupt.

BUNTY: It's better to finish things off at once—cleanly—if you're not quite sure, don't you think?

FLORENCE: Well, I'm sorry, Bunty—if you feel like that about it there's nothing more to be said.N/^

THE VORTEX

BUNTY: I wouldn't have mentioned it at all—only you all seemed to be blaming him for being irritable——

HELEN: Poor Nicky!

CLARA: I really must go up to bed now. I'm so tired. Good night, Florence dear.

FLORENCE: Good night, Clara. Breakfast at nine. Have you got books and everything you want?

CLARA: Yes, thanks. Good night, everyone.

[Everyone murmurs good night politely.]

FLORENCE: Tom, be an angel and fetch me a glass of milk—it's in the drawing-room.

TOM: Allright

[He goes off.]

HELEN: Come on up, Florence, I'm dead.

FLORENCE: So am I. Will you turn out the lights when you come?

PAWNIE: With beautiful precision, dear.

FLORENCE *(as she and HELEN go upstairs)*: Tell Tom to bring my milk up to me, somebody.

PAWNIE: All right.

FLORENCE: Good night, Mr. Fairlight

BRUCE: Good night.

PAWNIE: Good night, Florence.

[FLORENCE and HELEN go off.]

BRUCE: I suppose we'd all better go up.

BUNTY: I don't feel I could sleep yet.

[Re-enter TOM with glass of milk.]

THE VORTEX

TOM: Hallo! where's Florence?

BUNTY: Gone up to bed—will you take her milk to her?

PAWNIE: What's become of Nicky?

TOM: In the smoking-room, I think.

BRUCE: Good night, Miss Mainwaring.

BUNTY: Goodnight.

[They shake hands.]

PAWNIE: I shall come, too—good night.

TOM: Good night.

PAWNIE *(to BRUCE as they go upstairs)*: When you're writing, do your characters grow as you go along?

BRUCE: No, I think each one out minutely beforehand.

PAWNIE: How too intriguing!

[They go off.]

TOM: So you've broken it off already?

BUNTY: Yes.

TOM: I didn't know you were going to do it so soon.

BUNTY: It's better to get things over.

TOM: What did he say?

BUNTY: Nothing much.

TOM: Was he furious?

BUNTY: Oh! what does it matter? Don't let's go on about it.

TOM: It's all damned awkward.

BUNTY: What?

THE VORTEX

TOM: The whole thing.

BUNTY: You're rather scared, aren't you?

TOM: No, not exactly—now that I've got you to back me up.

BUNTY: I shall be glad when we're out of this house.

TOM: So shall I.

BUNTY: I hate the atmosphere.

TOM: I don't know how I've stood it for so long.

BUNTY: You didn't notice it until I came, any more than I noticed Nicky's atmosphere until you came.

TOM: It's queer, isn't it?

BUNTY: We're reverting to type, don't you see?

TOM: How d'you mean?

BUNTY: Never mind, it's true.

TOM: Do you think I'm being a cad to Florence?

BUNTY: Yes, I do rather.

TOM: But, Bunty! You said this morning——

BUNTY: That I didn't see how you could help yourself, neither I do—it's frightfully difficult, but it's not altogether your fault, any more than it would have been mine if I'd married Nicky. One gets carried away by glamour, and personality, and magnetism—they're beastly treacherous things.

TOM: You are wonderful.

BUNTY: Don't be silly.

TOM: You're so cool and clear, and you see everything.

BUNTY: I'm sorry—for Nicky.

THE VORTEX

TOM : Oh, damn Nicky!

BUNTY (*laughing*): Oh, Tom!

TOM: Why, what's up?

BUNTY : You're so dead set.

TOM : You're worth ten of him any day. What's the use of a chap like that? He *doesn't do* anything except play the piano—he can't play any games, he's always trying to be funny——

BUNTY: Shut up, Tom, you're being rather cheap; I haven't reverted to type so quickly that I can't see some of the things I'm missing.

TOM : I wish I knew what you were talking about.

BUNTY : Oh, God! I feel so miserable!

[She burst into tears.

TOM (*flummoxed*): I say—Bunty—for Heaven's sake——

[He puts his arms round her.

BUNTY (*shaking him off*): Don't, don't—give me my shoes——

[He picks up her shoes; she puts them on. She is half sobbing all the time.

TOM: I say, old girl, hadn't you better go to bed? You're all wrought up!

BUNTY : He said beastly things.

TOM : I'll wring his neck.

BUNTY (*with a fresh burst of tears*): Shut up, Tom, shut up——

THE VORTEX

TOM: Bunty, stop crying—there's a dear—please, please stop crying——

[He takes her in his arms and kisses her, she is groping for her handkerchief. FLORENCE comes quietly downstairs.]

BUNTY: I can't find my hanky!

TOM: Here's mine.

FLORENCE *(like a pistol shot)*: Tom!

[ToM and BUNTY break away.]

TOM: Yes, Florence?

FLORENCE *(ominously)*: What does this mean?

TOM: I'm sorry, Florence—I——

FLORENCE: You utter cad!

BUNTY: Look here—I should like to say——

FLORENCE: Be quiet—mind your own business.

[NiCKY enters.]

NiCKY *(seeing tears on BUNTY'S face)*: What's the matter—is anybody hurt?

FLORENCE *(ominously)*: No, not hurt!

BUNTY: I banged my hand, that's all.

FLORENCE: Liar!

NiCKY: Mother—don't be so stupid——

TOM: Florence—I——

FLORENCE: Don't *spea*k to me——

NiCKY *(quietly)*: Mother—not now—not now—it's

THE VORTEX

all wrong—control yourself! Bunty—Bunty—do go to bed—please.

[He goes to the piano and begins to play jazz.]

BUNTY: All right—Tom——

[FLORENCE goes to the fireplace^ trembling with rage. NICKY goes on playing. TOM and BUNTY go towards the stairs.]

FLORENCE: Stop—I want an explanation, please!

BUNTY: How dare you speak to me like that?

FLORENCE: Get out of my house! Get out of my house!

BUNTY: This is disgusting!

TOM: I say, Florence——

FLORENCE: Get out of my house!

BUNTY: I shall leave the first thing in the morning, it's much too late to-night.

[She goes off.]

[NICKY never stops playing for a moment.]

FLORENCE: Tom. *(He goes towards her absolutely silent.)* You kissed her—you kissed her—I saw you——!

TOM: Yes.

FLORENCE: In this house!

TOM: Yes, Florence, I apologise.

FLORENCE: Apologise! You're beneath contempt—never speak to me again, never touch me again—I hate you!

THE VORTEX

TOM: Look here, Florence—I'm desperately sorry—you see, I'm afraid I love her.

FLORENCE (*hysterically*): You dare to stand there and say that to me? It's incredible—after all I've done for you—after all we've been to one another. Love! You don't know what it means. You've lied to me—all these months. It's contemptible—humiliating. Get out of my sight!

TOM (*turning and going upstairs*): Very well.

FLORENCE (*suddenly realizing that he is gone*): Tom—Tom—come back—come back——!

[She runs upstairs after him. NICKY at last stops playing and lets his hands drop from the keys.]

CURTAIN

ACT III

ACT III

The scene is FLORENCE'S bedroom the same night—about two hours have elapsed. When the curtain rises FLORENCE is lying face downwards on the bed, she is dressed in a very beautiful but slightly exotic negligé.

HELEN is standing by the window fully dressed, she is holding the curtain aside, and a bar of moonlight comes in to mingle with the amber of the dressing-table lights. FLORENCE is obviously extremely hysterical.

HELEN: Florence, what *is* the use of going on like that?'

FLORENCE: I wish I were dead!

HELEN: It's so cowardly to give way utterly—as you're doing.

FLORENCE: I don't care—I don't care!

HELEN: If you don't face things in this world, they only hit you much harder in the end.

FLORENCE: He loved me—he adored me!

HELEN: Never! He hadn't got it in him.

FLORENCE: After all I've done for him, to go to—to Bunty!

HELEN (*leaving the window*): If it hadn't been Bunty it would have been someone else—don't you see how inevitable it was?

FLORENCE: How dared they!—Here!—In this house!

HELEN: That's a little thing, it doesn't matter at all.

FLORENCE: It does—it does——

HELEN: Florence, sit up and pull yourself together.

THE VORTEX

FLORENCE (*sitting up slowly*): I think I'm going mad.

HELEN: Not a bit of it, you're just thoroughly hysterical.

FLORENCE: Give me some water.

[HELEN *goes to the bathroom and returns with a glass of water.*

FLORENCE (*taking it*): What time is it?

HELEN (*looking at her watch*): Ten past one.

FLORENCE: Don't go to London by the early train, Helen; stay and come up with me in the car.

HELEN: Very well.

FLORENCE: Thank God, you were here!

HELEN: I wish I'd known what was happening, I might have done something.

FLORENCE: What can I do to get him back?

HELEN: Don't be silly.

FLORENCE: What can I do—what can I do——?

HELEN: Do you mean to say you'd *take* him back after to-night?

FLORENCE: No, never. Not if he crawled to me—never——

HELEN: Well, then, make up your mind definitely never to see him again whatever happens.

FLORENCE: Yes—I will.

HELEN: Why don't you go to bed now?

FLORENCE: I couldn't sleep.

HELEN: Put it all out of your mind—make an effort.

THE VORTEX

FLORENCE: I can't—I'm too unhappy.

HELEN : Think of Nicky.

FLORENCE: Nicky's young.

HELEN : That doesn't make it any better for him

FLORENCE : He'll get over it in the long run.

HELEN : The long run never counts at the moment

FLORENCE: He wasn't in love—really?

HELEN : As much as either you or he are capable of it.

FLORENCE: He's well rid of her—she'd never have appreciated him properly—she hasn't the intelligence.

HELEN: I don't agree with you there—she's got intelligence right enough.

FLORENCE: Treacherous little beast!

HELEN : Yes, but far-seeing.

FLORENCE: Are you standing up for her? Do you think it was *right* of her to get Tom away from me?

HELEN : Yes, quite right.

FLORENCE: Helen!

HELEN: To do her justice, she didn't deliberately set herself out to get him away from you at all. She discovered that in spite of the somewhat decadent years Tom was still her type, and likely to remain so. So with common sense she decided to shelve Nicky forthwith and go for him.

FLORENCE: Her type indeed!

HELEN : Yes, she'd have been quite a nice girl really if she'd been left alone and not allowed to go to Paris and get into the wrong set.

THE VORTEX

FLORENCE: You are extraordinary, Helen. Do you realize that you're making excuses for the girl who's betrayed your best friend?

HELEN: Don't be so utterly absurd—I'm not making excuses, and anyhow she hasn't betrayed you. She hardly knows you in the first place, and she's just followed her instincts regardless of anyone else's feelings—as you've done thousands of times.

FLORENCE: Helen—you're being horrible to me!

HELEN: I'm not, I'm trying to make you see! You're battering your head against silly cast-iron delusions, and I want to dislodge them.

FLORENCE: Helen, I'm so unhappy—so desperately unhappy.

HELEN: Yes, but not because you've lost Tom, it's something far deeper than that.

FLORENCE: What then?

HELEN: You're on the wrong tack, and have been for years.

FLORENCE: I don't understand.

HELEN: You *won't* understand!

[FLORENCE gets off the bed and goes over to the dressing-table. She sits and stares at herself in the glass for a moment without speaking.]

FLORENCE: My eyes are sore. (*She powders her face and sprays a little scent on her hair.*) It's so lovely this—and so refreshing.

HELEN: I think I'll go to bed now.

THE VORTEX

FLORENCE: No, wait a little longer with me—please Helen—just a few minutes.

HELEN: It's so hot in here.

FLORENCE: Open the window then.

HELEN: All right.

[She goes to the window and opens it. FLORENCE takes a cigarette out of a box and then shakes a scent-bottle and rubs the cigarette lightly with the stopper.]

FLORENCE: Do you ever do this? It's divine.

HELEN: What a wonderfully clear night—you can see the hills right across the valley—the moon's quite strong.

[FLORENCE goes to the window and stands next to HELEN looking out—she is puffing her cigarette.]

FLORENCE: I chose this room in the first place because the view was so lovely.

HELEN: Do you ever look at it?

FLORENCE *(listlessly)*: Of course I do, often!

HELEN: It's been raining—I wish you'd throw away that cigarette—it spoils the freshness.

FLORENCE *(turning away)*: It's soothing me—calming my nerves.

HELEN: I do wish I could help you—really!

FLORENCE: You are helping me, darling—you're being an angel,

HELEN *(suddenly angry)*: Don't talk so emptily, Florence, I'm worth more than that.

FLORENCE: I don't know what you mean.

THE VORTEX

HELEN: It sickens me to see you getting back so soon,

FLORENCE: Getting back?

HELEN: Yes, to your usual worthless attitude of mind.

FLORENCE: Helen!

HELEN: A little while ago you were really suffering for once, and in a way I was glad because it showed you were capable of a genuine emotion. Now you're glossing it over—smarming it down with your returning vanity, soon you won't be unhappy any more—just vindictive.

FLORENCE: Don't go on at me like that—I'm too wretched.

HELEN (*going to her*): Florence dear, forgive me, but it's true—and I don't want it to be.

[The door opens and NICKY enters. He is in dressing-gown and pyjamas. His face looks strained and white.]

FLORENCE: Nicky!

NICKY: Helen, I want to talk to mother, please.

HELEN: All right, Nicky.

FLORENCE: What is it?

NICKY: I couldn't sleep.

HELEN: Florence dear—good night.

FLORENCE: No—no, Helen—don't go yet—

HELEN: I must.

FLORENCE: Helen—stay with me.

NICKY: Please go.

THE VORTEX

HELEN : I can't stay, Florence—it's quite impossible.

[She goes out,

FLORENCE : I don't know what you mean—by coming here and ordering Helen out of my room.

NICKY : I'm sorry, mother. I felt I had to talk to you alone.

FLORENCE : At this hour of the night—you're mad!

NICKY : No I'm not, I think I'm probably more unhappy than I've ever been in my *life.*"

FLORENCE: You're young—you'll get over it.

NICKY : I hope so.

FLORENCE: I knew the first moment I saw her—what sort of a girl she was.

NICKY: Oh, mother!

FLORENCE: It's true. I had an *instinct* about her.

NICKY: It's all been rather a shock, you know——

FLORENCE (*becoming motherly*): Yes, dear—I know—I know—but you mustn't be miserable about her—she isn't worth it. (*She goes to kiss him.*)

NICKY (*gently pushing her away*): Don't, mother!

FLORENCE: Listen, Nicky—go back to bed now—there's a dear—my head's splitting.

NICKY : I can't yet.

FLORENCE: Take some asperin—that'll calm your nerves.

NICKY: I'm afraid I'm a little beyond asperin.

FLORENCE: I don't want you to think I don't sym-

THE VORTEX

pathize with you, darling—my heart *aches* for you—I know so well what you're going through.

NICKY: Do you?

FLORENCE: It's agony—absolute agony—but, you see—it will wear off—it always does in time. (NICKY *doesn't answer*.) Nicky, please go now!

NICKY: I want to talk to you.

FLORENCE: To-morrow—we'll talk to-morrow.

NICKY: No, now—*now*!

FLORENCE: You're inconsiderate and cruel—I've told you my head's bursting.

NICKY: I want to sympathize with you, too—and try to understand everything—as well as I can——

FLORENCE: Understand everything?

NICKY: Yes, please.

FLORENCE: I don't know what you mean——

NICKY: Will you tell me things—as though I were somebody quite different?

FLORENCE: What kind of things?

NICKY: Things about you—your life.

FLORENCE: Really, Nicky—you're ridiculous—asking me to tell you stories at this hour!

NICKY (*with dead vehemence*): Mother—sit down quietly. I'm not going out of this room until I've got everything straight in my mind.

FLORENCE (*sinking down—almost hypnotized*): Nicky—please—I——

THE VORTEX

NICKY: Tom Veryan has been your lover, hasn't he?

FLORENCE (*almost shrieking*): Nicky—how dare you!

NICKY: Keep calm—it's our only chance—keep calm.

FLORENCE (*bursting into tears*): How dare you speak to me like that—suggest such a thing—I——

NICKY: It's true, isn't it?

FLORENCE: Go away—go away!

NICKY: It's true, isn't it?

FLORENCE: No—no!

NICKY: It's true, isn't it?

FLORENCE: No—I tell you—no-no—no!

NICKY: You're lying to me, mother. What's the use of that?

FLORENCE: You're mad—mad——

NICKY: Does father know?

FLORENCE: Go away!

NICKY: Does father know?

FLORENCE: Your father knows nothing—he doesn't understand me any more than you do.

NICKY: Then it's between us alone.

FLORENCE: I tell you I don't know what you're talking about.

NICKY: Mother—don't go on like that, it's useless—we've arrived at a crisis, wherever we go—whatever we do we can't escape from it. I know we're neither of us very strong-minded or capable, and we haven't much hope of coming through successfully—but let's try—it's

THE VORTEX

no good pretending any more—our lives are built up of pretences all the time. For years—ever since I began to think at all, I've been bolstering up my illusions about you. People have made remarks not realizing that I was your son, and I've pretended that they were inspired by cattiness and jealousy. I've noticed things—trivial in-criminating little incidents, and I've brushed them aside and not thought any more about them because you were my mother—clever and beautiful and successful—and naturally people *would* slander you *because* you were so beautiful—and now I *know*—they were right!

FLORENCE: Nicky—I implore you—go away now—leave me alone.

NICKY: No, I can't.

FLORENCE: You're cruel—cruel to torment me——

NICKY: I don't want to be cruel——

FLORENCE: Go to bed then, and we'll talk everything over quietly another time.

NICKY: It is true about Tom Veryan, isn't it?

FLORENCE: No. No——

NICKY: We're on awfully dangerous ground—I'm straining every nerve to keep myself under control. If you lie to me and try to evade me any more—I won't be answerable for what might happen.

FLORENCE (*dropping her voice—terrified*): What do you mean?

NICKY: I don't know—I'm frightened.

FLORENCE: Nicky—**darling** Nicky—I——

[She approaches him.]

THE VORTEX

NICKY : Don't touch me, please.

FLORENCE: Have a little pity for me.

NICKY: Was Tom Veryan your lover?

FLORENCE (*in a whisper*): Yes.

NICKY : I want to understand why——

FLORENCE: He loved me.

NICKY: But you—did you love him?

FLORENCE: Yes.

NICKY: It was something you couldn't help, wasn't it—something that's always been the same in you since you were quite, quite young——?

FLORENCE: Yes, Nicky—yes——

NICKY: And there have been others, too, haven't there?

FLORENCE (*with her face in her hands*): I won't be cross-questioned any more—I won't—I won't——

NICKY: I wish you'd understand I'm not blaming you—I'm trying to help you—to help us both——

FLORENCE: What good can all this possibly do?

NICKY : Clear things up, of course. I can't go on any more half knowing——

FLORENCE: Why should that side of my life be any concern of yours?

NICKY: But, mother!

FLORENCE: I'm different from other women—completely different—and you expect me to be the same—why can't you realize that with a temperament like mine

THE VORTEX

it's impossible to live an ordinary humdrum life—you're not a boy any longer—you're a man—and——

NICKY: I'm nothing—I've grown up all wrong.

FLORENCE: It's not my fault.

NICKY: Of course it's your fault, mother—who else's fault *could it be?*

FLORENCE: Your friends—the people you mix with——

NICKY: It wouldn't matter *who* I mixed with if only I had a background.

FLORENCE: You've got as much money as you want—you've got your home——

NICKY (*bitterly*): Home! That's almost funny—there's no peace anywhere—nothing but the ceaseless din of trying to be amused——

FLORENCE: David never complains.

NICKY: I don't suppose you've looked at father during the last few years—or you wouldn't say that.

FLORENCE: He's perfectly happy because he's sensible—he lives his own life and doesn't try to interfere with mine.

NICKY: It must be your vanity that makes you so dreadfully blind—and foolish.

FLORENCE: Understand once and for all, I *won't* be spoken to like this——

NICKY: You've had other lovers besides Tom Veryan—haven't you?

FLORENCE: Yes, I have—I have. Now then!

THE VORTEX

NICKY : Well, anyhow—that's the truth—at last——

[He rises, turns his back on her and stands looking out of the window.]

FLORENCE *(after a pause—going to him)*: Nicky—don't be angry—please don't be angry with me.

NICKY: I'm not angry a bit—I realize that I'm living in a world where things like this happen—and they've got to be faced and given the right value. If only I'd had the courage to realize everything before—it wouldn't be so bad now—it's the sudden shock that's thrown the whole thing out of focus for me—but I mean to get it right—please help me!

FLORENCE *(dully)*: I don't know what to do.

NICKY: It's your life, and you've lived it as you've wanted to live it—that's fair——

FLORENCE: Yes—yes.

NICKY : You've wanted love always—passionate love, because you were made like that—it's not your fault—it's the fault of circumstances and civilization—civilization makes rottenness so much easier—we're utterly rotten—both of us——

FLORENCE: Nicky—don't—don't——

NICKY : How can we help ourselves?—We swirl about in a vortex of beastliness—this is a chance—don't you see—to realize the truth—our only chance.

FLORENCE: Oh, Nicky, do stop—go away!

NICKY: Don't keep on telling me to stop when our only hope is to hammer it out.

THE VORTEX

FLORENCE: You're overwrought—it isn't as bad as you think.

NICKY: Isn't it?

FLORENCE: No, no. Of course it isn't. To-morrow morning you'll see things quite differently.

NICKY: You haven't understood.

FLORENCE: Yes, I have—I have.

NICKY: You haven't understood. Oh, my God, you haven't understood! You're building up silly defences in your mind. I'm overwrought. To-morrow morning I shall see things quite differently. That's true—that's the tragedy of it, and you won't see—To-morrow morning I *shall* see things differently. All this will seem unreal—a nightmare—the machinery of our lives will go on again and gloss over the truth as it always does—and our chance will be gone for ever.

FLORENCE: Chance—chance? What are you talking about—what chance?

NICKY: I must make you see somehow.

FLORENCE: You're driving me mad.

NICKY: Have patience with me—please—please——

FLORENCE (*wildly*): How can I have patience with you?—You exaggerate everything.

NICKY: No I don't—I wish I did.

FLORENCE: Listen—let me explain something to you.

NICKY: Very well—go on.

FLORENCE: You're setting yourself up in judgment on me—your own mother.

THE VORTEX

NICKY: No I'm not.

FLORENCE: You are—you are—let me speak—you don't understand my temperament in the least—nobody does—I——

NICKY: You're deceiving yourself—your temperament's no different from thousands of other women, but you've been weak and selfish and given way all along the line——

FLORENCE: Let me speak, I tell you——!

NICKY: What's the use—you're still pretending—you're building up barriers between us instead of helping me to break them down.

FLORENCE: What are you accusing me of having done?

NICKY: Can't you see yet?

FLORENCE: No, I can't. If you're preaching morality you've no right to—that's my affair—I've never done any harm to anyone.

NICKY: Look at me.

FLORENCE: Why—what do you mean?

NICKY: You've given me *nothing* all my life—nothing that counts.

FLORENCE: Now you're pitying yourself.

NICKY: Yes, with every reason.

FLORENCE: You're neurotic and ridiculous—just because Bunty broke off your engagement you come and say wicked, cruel things to me——

NICKY: You forget what I've seen to-night, mother.

FLORENCE: I don't care what you've seen.

THE VORTEX

NICKY: I've seen you make a vulgar, disgusting scene in your own house, and on top of that humiliate yourself before a boy half your age. The misery of losing Bunty faded away when that happened—everything is comparative after all.

FLORENCE: I didn't humiliate myself——

NICKY: You ran after him up the stairs because your vanity wouldn't let you lose him—it isn't that you love him—that would be easier— you never love anyone, you only love them loving you—all your so-called passion and temperament is false—your whole existence had degenerated into an endless empty craving for admiration and flattery—and then you say you've done no harm to anybody. Father used to be a clever man, with a strong will and a capacity for enjoying everything—I can remember him like that, and now he's nothing—a complete nonentity because his spirit's crushed. How could it be otherwise? You've let him down consistently for years—and God knows I'm nothing for him to look forward to—but I might have been if it hadn't been for you——

FLORENCE: Don't talk like that. Don't—don't—it can't be such a crime being loved—it can't be such a crime being happy——

NICKY: You're not happy—you're never happy—you're fighting—fighting all the time to keep your youth and your looks—because you can't bear the thought of living without them—as though they mattered in the end.

FLORENCE(*hysterically*): What does anything matter—ever?

THE VORTEX

NICKY: That's what I'm trying to find but.

FLORENCE: I'm still young inside—I'm still beautiful—why shouldn't I live my life as I choose?

NICKY: You're not young or beautiful; I'm seeing for the first time how old you are—it's horrible—your silly fair hair—and your face all plastered and painted——

FLORENCE : Nicky—Nicky—stop—stop—stop!

[She flings herself face downwards on the bed.

NICKY goes over to her.

NICKY: Mother!

FLORENCE: Go away—go away—I hate you—go away——

NICKY: Mother—sit up——

FLORENCE (*pulling herself together*): Go out of my room——

NICKY: Mother——

FLORENCE: I don't ever want to see you again—you're insane—you've said wicked, wicked things to me—you've talked to me as though I were a woman off the streets. I can't bear any more—I can't bear any more!

NICKY : I have a slight confession to make——

FLORENCE: Confession?

NICKY: Yes.

FLORENCE: Go away—go away——

NICKY (*taking a small gold box from his pocket*): Look——

FLORENCE: What do you mean—what is it——?

THE VORTEX

NICKY: Don't you know?

[FLORENCE *takes the box with trembling fingers and opens it. She stares at it for a moment. When she speaks again her voice is quite dead.*

FLORENCE: Nicky, it isn't—you haven't——?

NICKY: Why do you look so shocked?

FLORENCE (*dully*): Oh, my God!

NICKY: What does it matter?

[FLORENCE *suddenly rises and hurls the box out of the window.*

That doesn't make it any better.

FLORENCE (*flinging herself on her knees beside him*): Nicky, promise me, oh, promise you'll never do it again—never in your life—it's frightful—horrible——

NICKY: It's only just the beginning.

FLORENCE: What can I say to you—what can I say to you?

NICKY: Nothing—under the circumstances.

FLORENCE: What do you mean?

NICKY: It can't possibly matter—now.

FLORENCE: Matter—but it's the finish of everything—you're young, you're just starting on your life—you must stop—you must swear never to touch it again—swear to me on your oath, Nicky—I'll help you—I'll help you——

NICKY: You!

[*He turns away.*

THE VORTEX

FLORENCE (*burying her face in her hands and moaning*):
Oh—oh—oh!

NICKY: How could you possibly help me?

FLORENCE (*clutching him*): Nicky!

NICKY (*almost losing control*): Shut up—shut up—
don't touch me——

FLORENCE (*trying to take him in her arms*): Nicky—
Nicky——

NICKY: I'm trying to control myself, but you won't
let me—you're an awfully rotten woman, really.

FLORENCE: Nicky—stop—stop—stop——

[She beats him with her fists.

NICKY: Leave go of me!

*[He breaks away from her, and going up to the
dressing-table he sweeps everything off on to the floor
with his arm.*

FLORENCE (*screaming*): Oh—oh—Nicky———!

NICKY: Now then! Now then! You're not to have
any more lovers; you're not going to be beautiful and
successful ever again—you're going to be my mother for
once—it's about time I had one to help me, before I go
over the edge altogether——

FLORENCE: Nicky—Nicky——

NICKY: Promise me to be different—you've got to
promise me!

FLORENCE (*sinking on to the end of couch, facing audience*):
Yes—yes—I promise—(*the tears are running down her
face*).

THE VORTEX

NICKY : I love you, really—that's why it's so awful.

[He falls on his knees by her side and buries his face in her lap.]

FLORENCE : No. No, not awful—don't say that—I love you, too.

NICKY (*sobbing hopelessly*): Oh, mother——!

FLORENCE (*staring in front of her*): I wish I were dead!

NICKY : It doesn't matter about death, but it matters terribly about life.

FLORENCE: I know——

NICKY (*desperately*): Promise me you'll be different—promise me you'll be different——

FLORENCE : Yes, yes—I'll try——

NICKY : We'll both try.

FLORENCE: Yes, dear.—Oh, my dear——!

[She sits quite still, staring in front of her—the tears are rolling down her cheeks, and she is stroking NICKY'S hair mechanically in an effort to calm him.]

CURTAIN

FALLEN ANGELS

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DRAMATIS PERSONS

JULIA STERROLL

FREDERICK STERROLL

JANE BANBURY

WILLIAM BANBURY

MAURICE DUCLOS

SAUNDERS

The action of the play takes place in the STERROLLS' flat.

ACT I

ACT I

The scene is the dining-room of the STERROLLS' flat—the wall separating it from the drawing-room has been abolished, therefore the two rooms are used as one. There is a grand piano, R. The rest of the furniture can be left to the producer's discrimination.

When the curtain rises FRED is having his breakfast and JULIA is sitting in an arm-chair, L., reading the newspaper and dangling her legs over the arm. She is dressed plainly and appropriately for an ordinary London day in which nothing particular may be expected to happen. (There must not be the faintest suggestion of the usual elegant silks and satins so beloved by the theatrical dressmaker. FRED is in golfing clothes.)

JULIA: You'll only get hiccups if you gobble like that

FRED: I'm not gobbling,

JULIA: What time's Willy coming?

FRED: He ought to be here now.

[There is a slight pause.]

JULIA (*rustling newspaper*): I say—Muriel Fenchurch is divorcing her husband.

FRED: That's uncommonly generous of him.

JULIA: Do you want any more coffee?

FRED: No thanks, dear.

[There is another pause. JULIA goes on reading.]

JULIA: There was an old lady found dead on Claphain Common last night.

FRED: Another!

FALLEN ANGELS

JULIA : Don't be silly, Fred, the last one was Wandsworth Common.

FRED: Oh!

JULIA : I think you'd better have some more coffee,

FRED: Why?

JULIA : Because I want you to see our new treasure.

FRED: Oh! all right, I didn't know we had one.

JULIA: She seems a nice girl, but rather grand. (*She rings.*)

FRED: Thank God what's-her-name's gone; I couldn't bear her.

[*Enter SAUNDERS.*]

FRED: Good morning.

SAUNDERS : Good morning, sir.

FRED: What's your name?

SAUNDERS : Jasmin, sir.

FRED: Oh!

JULIA: We have arranged that she shall be called Saunders.

FRED: Oh! good. I shan't want any more coffee, Saunders.

SAUNDERS : Yes, sir. (*She exits.*)

JULIA: She seems all right, doesn't she?

FRED: Quite. (*He rises from the table.*) I wish Willy'd learn to be punctual.

FALLEN ANGELS

JULIA: Never mind, you've got the whole day; sit down quietly and smoke, and he'll be here in a minute,

[FRED sits in arm-chair, JULIA sits on the edge and lights his cigarette.]

FRED: What are you going to do?

JULIA: Nothing in particular. I'm lunching with Jane, and we shall probably go to a matinee.

FRED: There now, didn't I tell you your day would pan out perfectly normally?

JULIA: Yes, but I *did* have a presentiment when I first woke up.

FRED: But it was nothing definite, you said so.

JULIA: Of course it wasn't; you can't define a presentiment exactly, that's what's so horrid, the feeling of being unsettled.

FRED: I expect it's indigestion.

JULIA: No, I really felt quite odd, as though something damnable were going to happen,

FRED: If you go on thinking in that vein, something damnable *will* happen.

JULIA: You're being rather taciturn and important this morning.

FRED: I don't like to see you worrying yourself over nothing.

JULIA (*laughing*): I'm not really—I'm very happy.

FRED: Are you—honestly?

JULIA: Of course.

FRED: Sure?

FALLEN ANGELS

JULIA: Positive.

FRED: Good! I think it's awfully silly of people to lead unhappy lives, don't you?

JULIA: Yes, I suppose so. We shall both know the first minute we go off one another.

FRED: We've been married five years.

JULIA: A divine five years.

FRED: Yes—wonderful.

JULIA: We're not in love a bit now, you know.

FRED: I don't know anything of the sort.

JULIA: It's true.

FRED: The first violent passion is naturally over——

JULIA: Thank God!

FRED: Why?

JULIA: It's so uncomfortable—passion.

FRED: Yes, but it's a thoroughly fundamental thing, one couldn't do without it.

JULIA: You mean we couldn't

FRED: No, I don't, we can and are doing without it.

JULIA: One can't be really in love without passion, that's why I said we weren't any more.

FRED: Don't be annoying, Julia, you know perfectly well we've reached a remarkable sublime plane of affection and good comradeship, far above——

JULIA: Just ordinary "being in love." I quite agree,

FRED: We *are* in love.

JULIA: Hypocrite, we're not.

FRED: We are—in a different way.

FALLEN ANGELS

JULIA: There is no different way. It's exactly the same with everybody, I've discussed it with Jane.

FRED: Damn Jane.

JULIA: By all means, but she knows—just as I do.

FRED: You're psycho-analytical neurotics both of you.

JULIA: That sounds lovely, Fred.

FRED: Do you always discuss everything with Jane?

JULIA: Yes, everything.

FRED: Even the most intimate relationships—us?

JULIA: Yes, you know I do, I always have.

FRED: I think that's dreadful—it shocks me.

JULIA: Nonsense, you discuss everything with Willy.

FRED: Yes, but differently.

JULIA: Less accurately, I expect, that's the only difference.

FRED: I'm sure married life was much easier in the Victorian days.

JULIA: If you think women didn't discuss everything minutely in the Victorian days just as much as they do now you're very much mistaken.

FRED: But it was all so much simpler.

JULIA: For the men.

FRED: For the women too; they didn't know so much.

JULIA: They didn't give themselves away so much, poor dears, they were too frightened.

FRED: Anyhow, on the whole I'd rather be as we are.

JULIA: That's right, dear.

FALLEN ANGELS

FRED: But you're wrong when you say I don't love you any more.

JULIA: I didn't say that at all. I know you love me very much, and I love you, too—you're a darling. But we're not "in love." Can't you see the difference?

FRED: I suppose so, but I don't want to.

JULIA: Well, we won't go on about it any more—you shall go and play your golf and quarrel with Willy, and I'll stay at home and quarrel with Jane, and we'll all be awfully happy. Are you coming home to-morrow?

FRED: Perhaps to-night if the weather's bad.

JULIA: Well, you might telephone and let me know

FRED: All right.

[There is the sound of the front door bell.]

JULIA: There is Willy.

FRED: I'll let him in and save Jasmin the trouble.

JULIA: Saunders.

FRED: Saunders, then. *(He goes out into the hall, and after a moment ushers in WILLY, also in plus fours and looking very nice in them.)*

WILLY: Good morning, Julia—how are you?

JULIA: I'm feeling grand. Fred and I have just had a little psychological romp—it was very stimulating.

FRED: It's depressed me for the day,

WILLY: Jane's been a trifle difficult this morning.

JULIA: In what way?

WILLY: She woke up with a presentiment.

FRED: Good Lord!

FALLEN ANGELS

WILLY: She went on about it all through breakfast. -

JULIA: How tactless of her—I at least waited until after breakfast.

WILLY: Have you had one, too?

JULIA: Yes, a beast! But don't ask me to explain it, it's quite intangible at present.

FRED: We'd better go, Willy, and leave them to their dreary forebodings, we'll be very hearty and jolly all day and drink a lot of beer at lunch.

WILLY: The car's downstairs.

FRED: Come on then.

WILLY: Have you got your clubs?

FRED: They're in the hall.

WILLY: Good-bye, Julia—don't encourage Jane too much for Heaven's sake!

JULIA: Whatever encouragement there is will be mutual—I feel in a particularly heart-to-heart mood to-day.

FRED: Good-bye, darling. (*He kisses her.*)

JULIA: Good-bye, love—don't forget to telephone.

[FRED and WILLY go out amicably. JULIA rings the bell and goes over to the piano—she sits down and begins to play absently. Re-enter SAUNDERS with tray to clear away the breakfast things.

JULIA: Does it feel awful to be in a new place, Saunders?

SAUNDERS: No, ma'am—not particularly.

JULIA: I'm so glad—I'm sure I should be terrified and break everything.

FALLEN ANGELS

SAUNDERS: It's just getting used to things, ma'am.

JULIA: I hope you're not secretly hurt at our refusing to call you Jasmin?

SAUNDERS: Oh, no, ma'am—I don't mind.

JULIA: It's a sticky name, isn't it—for the house?

SAUNDERS: I've never thought about it much, ma'am.

JULIA: That's right, then you won't miss it, will you?

SAUNDERS: No, ma'am.

JULIA: If rather a strange-looking man calls during the morning will you take him straight to the bathroom?

SAUNDERS: Yes, ma'am.

JULIA: He'll probably be the plumber.

SAUNDERS: Very good, ma'am.

[SAUNDERS goes out with the tray. JULIA begins to sing lightly.]

JULIA (*singing*):

Meme les Anges succombent a l'amour,
C'est pourquoi done je vous en prie—
Dieu qui arrange les jours et les séjours
Laisse moi encore une heure de paradis.
Tous mes amours me semblent comme des fleurs,
Leurs parfums restent douces quand meme
Donne moi tes levres, ton ame, et ton coeur,
Parce que follement je t'aime—je t'aime—je t'aime.

[There is a ring at the front door bell. After a moment JANE enters in travelling clothes and carrying a suit-case. She looks extremely startled.]

FALLEN ANGELS

JULIA (*still singing without noticing her*):

Je t'aime—je t'aime—je t'aime——

JANE (*in a stifled voice*): Julia, stop singing that song.

JULIA: My dear, what a fright you gave me.

JANE (*tragically*): You don't know—that's all—you just don't know!

JULIA: Why, what on earth's the matter?

JANE: I should like a glass of water.

JULIA: What nonsense, you've only just finished breakfast.

JANE (*plumping her suit-case down*): We must both go away at once.

JULIA (*amiably*): All right, where shall we go?

JANE: Don't be maddening, Julia, I'm serious.

JULIA: If you'd stop trying to get dramatic effects and just explain what it's all about——

JANE (*handing her a postcard*): Read that.

JULIA: It's the Blue Grotto at Capri,

JANE (*impatiently*): I know it is, read it.

JULIA (*turning it over*): Good God! (*She reads it carefully.*)

JANE: There now!

JULIA: This is frightful! (*She rings bell.*)

JANE: What are you ringing for?

JULIA: I want a glass of water.

JANE: What are we to do?

FALLEN ANGELS

JULIA: Think—we must think!

[Enter SAUNDERS.

Two glasses of water please, SAUNDERS.

SAUNDERS : Yes, ma'am. *(She goes out.)*

JULIA: When's he coming?

JANE: Now, I suppose—to-day—any moment!

JULIA: Oh, Jane, I wonder if he's changed.

JANE: I don't expect so—that type never does.

JULIA: Don't say "that type" like that—it's most irreverent.

[Re-enter SAUNDERS with two glasses of water on a salver.

JANE *(taking one)*: Thank you.

JULIA *(also taking one)*: Thank you, Saunders,

[Exit SAUNDERS.

JANE: I packed just a few things very hurriedly—I thought perhaps Brighton for a day or two until our passports were properly *visid*.

JULIA: Passports?

JANE: Yes, for America.

JULIA: Don't be ridiculous.

JANE: You must forgive me, darling, but I'm worked up—it was a most frightful shock, and the funny part of it was that I had a presentiment when I woke this morning.

JULIA : So did I

JANE : There, you see!

FALLEN ANGELS

JULIA: We must keep calm, and talk it over quietly, it's the only way. Have a cigarette. (*She hands JANE box.*)

JANE (*taking one*): Thanks, dear.

JULIA (*also taking one and lighting both*): We've got the whole day before us.

JANE (*fervently*): I only hope we have.

JULIA: You don't think he'll arrive before lunch?

JANE: He might, he never had. the slightest restraint. Oh, after seven years, I do think it's cruel! (*She takes off her hat in front of the glass over the mantelpiece and fluff s out her hair. JULIA is sitting on the sofa.*)

JULIA: It might have happened before; that would have been much worse.

JANE: I wonder—perhaps we should have had more strength to—to—resist.

JULIA: Oh, no, we've never been exactly bursting with that kind of strength.

JANE (*intensely*): You know what we are, don't you? We're the slaves of coincidence—we always have been, it does make life so dreadfully difficult.

JULIA: Yes, but easier at moments; we can at least face it together.

JANE: It's going to be perfectly awful—facing *him* together!

JULIA: We must be firm; after all, we're not in love with him any more.

JANE: Not at the moment, but suppose when he arrives he's just as attractive and glamorous as ever? We shall go down like ninepins.

FALLEN ANGELS

JULIA: I shan't, I've changed in seven years—I'm too fond of Fred.

JANE: I've been bolstering myself up like that all the morning, arguing that I'm too fond of Willy, and that everything is quite different now, but I don't know—I'm afraid, terribly afraid. You see, we might just as well face facts—we're not really *in love* with our husbands. I had a scene with Willy about it only last night. We're awfully happy, and there's a lovely firm basis of comradeship and affection and all that, but the real "being in love" part is dead. You couldn't expect it to be anything else after all this time.

JULIA: Yes, I told Fred all that this morning.

JANE: Oh, Julia, I do wish we hadn't—when we did!

JULIA: It's a fat lot of good wishing that now.

JANE: Give me back the Blue Grotto.

JULIA (*handing it to her*): It's typical of him to send that, anyhow.

JANE (*looking at it*): Maurice! It gives me a fearful sort of illegitimate thrill even to look at his name.

JULIA (*warningly*): Now then, Jane,

JANE: I wonder if he realises that he's been the one Grand Passion in both our lives.

JULIA: Of course he does, it's almost his profession!

JANE: Our love for our husbands has been on an entirely different plane all along—much nicer and worthier and everything, but not half so soul-shattering.

JULIA: I wonder if he can speak English now.

FALLEN ANGELS

JANE: I hope not, he was so lovely in French.

JULIA: What would Willy and Fred say if they knew?

JANE (*shuddering*): Don't!

JULIA: Fred would be sensible, I think, after the first shock had worn off.

JANE: Willy wouldn't

JULIA: It isn't as if we'd been unfaithful *since* marriage, it all happened before.

JANE: Yes, but men never forgive that sort of thing, whenever it happened.

JULIA: It seems so unfair that men should have the monopoly of Wild Oats.

JANE: They haven't really, but it's our job to make them think they have.

JULIA: When I think of Italy, and the Cypresses and Moonlight and the wonderful romance of it all——

JANE: Don't dear, you'll only upset yourself.

JULIA: Do you remember me writing to you in Scotland and telling you all about it?

JANE: Yes.

JULIA (*far away*): How I adored him! And nobody knew—nobody knew a thing. I left Aunt Mary a week earlier than I said, and got out of the train at Pisa—he was waiting for me—we used to go and look at the Leaning Tower night after night—Carrara marble, dear—too marvellous!

JANE: I was so worried because I guessed——

FALLEN ANGELS

JULIA: And that lovely song he used to sing all the time—sometimes on the terribly cracked piano at the hotel, and sometimes just walking along the street. (*She goes to piano and begins to sing :*)

" Merne les Anges succombent a, l'amour
C'est pourquoi done je vous en prie——"

JANE: Don't, don't—he sang that to me afterwards—

JULIA (*still singing*):

" Donne moi tes levres, ton ame, et ton coeur——"

[JANE joins in and they sing the last line together.

BOTH: "Parce que follement je t'aime—je t'aime—je t'aime——"

[SAUNDERS enters with a postcard on a salver—she takes it to JULIA.

JULIA (*jumps slightly—in stifled tones*): That will do, Saunders.

[Exit SAUNDERS.

JANE (*with her eyes tight shut*): Don't tell me, dear, I know it's the Leaning Tower of Pisa.

JULIA: Of course it is.

JANE: What a devil!

JULIA (*reading*): J'arriverai a Londres cette semaine—J'espere avec tout mon coeur que me n'oubliez pas.—Maurice.

JANE: Cette semaine! And to-day's Saturday. Oh, God!

JULIA: Listen, Jane, we're in for a bitter time—we must summon up all our courage and face it properly.

FALLEN ANGELS

JANE: Yes, give me another cigarette.

JULIA (*handing her box*): We must get the whole situation laid out quite clearly, like Patience, then we shall know where we are.

JANE (*lighting both cigarettes*): Yes—oh, yes!

JULIA (*sitting back on sofa*): Now then.

JANE: Now then what?

JULIA (*in business-like tones*): Two wretchedly happy married women——

JANE: Yes.

JULIA: Both during the first two years of their married lives having treated their exceedingly nice husbands to the requisite amount of passion and adoration——

JANE: Yes.

JULIA: As is usual in such cases—after a certain time the first ecstasies of passionate adoration subside, leaving in some instances an arid waste of discontent——

JANE: Lovely, darling!

JULIA: In some instances rank boredom and rampant adultery on both sides——

JANE: Don't be gross, dear.

JULIA: And in other rarer instances such as ours—complete happiness and tranquillity devoid of violent emotions of any kind with the possible exception of golf.

JANE: Quite.

JULIA: And there lies the trouble—the lack of violent emotion, fireworks, etc.

JANE: I don't want fireworks.

FALLEN ANGELS

JULIA: Neither do I—not the nice part of me, but there's an unworthy, beastly thing in both of us waiting to spring—it sprang once before our marriage, and it will spring again—it hasn't been fed for a long, long time——

JANE (*shocked*): Julia!

JULIA: To put it mildly, dear, we're both ripe for a lapse.

JANE (*going into peals of laughter*): A Elapse, Julia.— Oh, dear!

JULIA (*also collapsing*): It's perfectly appalling, and we're laughing on the very edge of an abyss!

JANE: I can't help it, it's hysteria.

JULIA: By a semi-humorous malignity of fate we both happened to throw our respective bonnets over the same windmill——

JANE (*giggling weakly*): Oh, do stop——!

JULIA (*relentlessly*): And now, at a critical moment in our matrimonial careers, that windmill is coming to wreck us.

JANE (*wailing*): I don't want to be wrecked! I don't want to be wrecked!

JULIA: Shhh, dear! Saunders will hear you.

JANE (*panic-stricken*): Don't you see? What I suggested[^] in the first place, it's the only way—we must go—at once—anywhere out of London.

JULIA: I shall do nothing of the sort, it would be so cowardly.

JANE: A blind goat could see through that, dear!

JULIA: All the same, I shall stay and face it.

FALLEN ANGELS

JANE: If you do, I shall.

JULIA: There is not the least necessity for us both to suffer.

JANE: If you imagine I should enjoy being by myself in Brighton while you were gallivanting about London with Maurice——

JULIA: I should be too much upset to gallivant.

JANE: No, dear, it won't do.

JULIA: What do you mean, " It won't do " ?

JANE: We stand or fall together.

JULIA: I don't mind standing together, but I won't fall together, it would be most embarrassing.

JANE: Whatever happens, I am not going to be left out.

JULIA: Very well, then I'll go away and you stay.

JANE (*eagerly*): All right.

JULIA: What about standing or falling together?

JANE (*nobly*): I'm willing to sacrifice myself for you,

JULIA: Liar!

JANE: Julia, how can you——?

JULIA: I thought so.

JANE (*airily*): I don't know what you mean.

JULIA: Oh, yes, you do.

JANE: If you're going to be bad-tempered I shall go.

JULIA: I'm not in the *least* bad-tempered, I'm only seeing through you, that's all.

JANE: Seeing through me, indeed? What about you not going away because it would be cowardly? Huh!

FALLEN ANGELS

JULIA (*sweetly*): Are you insinuating, dear, that I *want* to stay?

JANE: Not insinuating—I'm dead certain of it.

JULIA (*laughingforcedly*): Ha ha! Really, Jane——

JANE: You're simply longing for him.

JULIA: Jane!

JANE: You are, you know you are!

JULIA: So are you.

JANE: Certainly I am.

JULIA: Oh, Jane, we must be very careful.

JANE: I'm always careful.

JULIA: I don't mean about him, I mean about us.

JANE: Oh!

JULIA: Don't you see what's going to happen?

JANE: Yes—yes, I do.

JULIA: It's always the way, when sex comes up it wrecks everything. It's a beastly rotten thing——

JANE: It didn't wreck us before.

JULIA: We weren't together before—if we had been we should have been the blackest enemies in five minutes.

JANE: Yes, as it was you were a bit upset when I met him afterwards.

JULIA: I was awfully sweet about it.

JANE: It was too late for you to be anything else—I took jolly good care not to let you know until it was all over.

JULIA: Yes, that's true.

FALLEN ANGELS

JANE: We've been friends, real friends, ever since we were eight and nine respectively——

JULIA: And in all probability this will break all that up.

JANE: Certainly—unless we circumvent it.

JULIA (*firmly*): I won't go away.

JANE: Neither will I—we're both firmly agreed on that point.

JULIA: It's only natural, after all, that we should want to see him again.

JANE: And it's also only natural that when we do see him again we shall fight like tigers.

JULIA: I wonder if we shall—really?

JANE: It's unavoidable—we almost started just now out of sheer anticipation.

JULIA: Oh, Jane darling, how miserable I am.

JANE: Nonsense, you're thoroughly thrilled and excited.

JULIA: Not altogether, I'm torn between my better self and my worse self. I never realised there were two of me until this moment so clearly defined. I want terribly badly to be a true, faithful wife and look after Fred and live in peace, and I want terribly to have violent and illicit love made to me and be frenziedly happy and supremely miserable.

JANE: We're both in exactly the same boat. But the most horrible contingency is that one of us may give in utterly and leave the other shrouded for ever in unrewarded virtue.

JULIA: Meaning the one he fancies most?

JANE: Exactly.

FALLEN ANGELS

JULIA: Well, there won't be any virtue at all—just biting jealousy.

JANE: We must make a vow that however badly one or both of us behaves during the black and scarlet period before us—when it's all over and died down we can reinstate ourselves on the same concrete plane of friendship and intimacy without the slightest sacrificing of pride on either side.

JULIA: Oh, yes, yes, Jane—I vow it now.

JANE (*tissing her*): Darling! So do I—whatever we do, and whatever we may say when temporarily unhinged by sex——

JULIA: Whatever we do and whatever we say——

JANE: Afterwards—perfect friendship again.

JULIA: Perfect friendship again—and *no* apologies!

JANE: Not one!

JULIA (*suddenly*): Jane—I can't go through with it after all

JANE: Now, Julia——

JULIA: It's no use—I can't—it will be frightful.

JANE: Agony.

JULIA: Let's do your plan, and fly.

JANE: Together?

JULIA (*impatiently*): Yes, oh, yes, together.

JANE: He'll think it so rude.

JULIA: Jane, don't be weak.

JANE: Frenchmen are so particular about that sort of thing.

FALLEN ANGELS

JULIA: It can't be helped, one can carry good manners - too far.

JANE: We ought to be hospitable.

JULIA: Well, as we can neither of us be hospitable without giving him the run of the house, we'd better leave him to freeze on the door-step!

JANE: / know! We can leave him a letter.

JULIA: Saying we've been called away.

JANE: Yes—that would ease my conscience.

JULIA: Quick then, you write it while I pack——
Saunders——Saunders——

JANE: Your French is much better than mine.

JULIA: Never mind—I'll help——

[Enter SAUNDERS.

Saunders, I want you to pack a small suit-case—I've been called away——

SAUNDERS: Yes, ma'am.

[They both go off into bedroom, L., leaving door open.

JANE *(at desk)*: Shall I start, Mon cher Maurice?

JULIA *(off)*: No, " Notre cher," it's less compromising.

JANE *(after writing for a moment)*: Listen—" Notre cher Maurice—nous sommes désolée, mais il n'est pas possible pour nous vous voir cette fois——"

JULIA *(off)*: Not " cette fois," it sounds so sly.

JANE: What shall I put, then?

JULIA: While you are in London——No, Saunders, I shan't need those sort of things at all——

JANE: What's "while"?

JULIA: Pendant.

FALLEN ANGELS

JANE (*writing*): " Pendant vous etes a Londres." Do let me put " cette fois " now, it sort of rounds it off.

JULIA: All right. (*To SAUNDERS.*) Yes, it's on the dressing-table—no, the pink one——

JANE: Listen—" Nous sommes marine maintenant tres heureusement——"

JULIA (*off*): Isn't that a little crude, dear?

JANE: I think he ought to know.

JULIA: Well, put " Isn't it fun " after it.

JANE: I don't know how to.

JULIA (*off*): C'est amusant, n'est pas?

JANE: That sounds so facetious—and, anyhow, it isn't particularly.

JULIA: It probably will be to him, he'll rock with laughter.

JANE: Oh, very well. (*She writes.*)

JULIA: Put " Have you got a beard yet? "

JANE (*laughing*): All right. (*She writes.*) Wouldn't it be awful if he had?

JULIA: Much safer. That's right, Saunders, in the top drawer among my stockings——

JANE: Is beard masculine or feminine?

JULIA: I'm not sure, make it feminine, he'll appreciate it more.

JANE (*writing hard*): That's all that's necessary now, don't you think?

JULIA: Tidy up, Saunders. (*She enters in travelling things and carrying a small suit-case.*) Yes, dear, finish it off gracefully.

FALLEN ANGELS

JANE: " Nous esperons pour vous voie quelquefois bientot." We must put that—it's mere politeness.

JULIA: Yes, now we'll both sign our names.

[They do so.]

I'll address the envelope while you put on your hat.

JANE (*putting on her hat hurriedly before glass*): We ought to explain to Willy and Fred.

JULIA: We haven't time to leave any more notes, we'll telephone——

JANE: Where from?

JULIA: Aberdeen—come on! Saunders, there's a note here for a foreign gentleman when he calls.

SAUNDERS (*off*): Very good, ma'am.

JULIA: Hurry up, Jane.

JANE: All right—I'm ready.

JULIA (*exultantly*): I'm glad! I'm tremendously glad—we're doing the right thing—don't you feel marvellous?

JANE: No—awful.

JULIA: Never mind—our better selves have won in spite of everything.

JANE: Yes, I suppose they have.

[They go towards the door with their bags. They almost reach it, when there comes a loud ring and knock at the front door. They both stand still> as though they had been struck—looking at one another. Then with one accord they plank their bags down.]

JULIA (*with determination*): Anyhow, it will be good for our French!

CURTAIN.

ACT II

ACT II

The scene Is the same as Act I, and it is the evening of the same day.

When curtain rises, JULIA is looking out of the window. JANE is seated on the sofa. They are both elaborately dressed. The dinner-table is laid for two, and there are some lovely flowers in the room.

JANE: I'm extremely hungry, Julia.

JULIA: So am I—ravenous.

JANE: It's getting on for nine.

JULIA: I know.

JANE: There's not the least likelihood of him arriving at this time.

JULIA: He might, especially if the Paris train were late.

JANE: We don't know whether he was coming from Paris.

JULIA: Where else would he be coming from?

JANE: Don't snap at me, Julia—he might be coming from the Channel Islands, or Brussels, or anywhere—he's frightfully cosmopolitan.

JULIA: I'm quite sure he's coming from Paris.

JANE: Well, anyhow, the idea was for him to arrive unexpectedly and discover us quietly dining together in charming domestic surroundings—not sitting twiddling our thumbs with eager strained expressions, and the room decorated like a Bridal Suite.

JULIA: That, dear, was not in the best of taste. Would you like a salted almond? *(She goes to table.)*

FALLEN ANGELS

JANE: Yes, please—it may assuage the pangs a little.

JULIA (*throwing her one*): Here you are.

JANE (*missing it, and picking it up from the sofa*): Thanks.

JULIA: The table looks pretty, doesn't it?

JANE (*weakly*): Lovely, dear.

JULIA (*sitting down beside her*): It's been the most shattering day.

JANE: I shall never forget your face when, after all that suspense, the plumber arrived.

JULIA: I'm thankful he did all the same.

JANE: Why?

JULIA: Domestic reasons.

JANE: Why do you suppose Violet Coswick chose to-day of all days to come to tea?

JULIA: And talk exclusively of Paris and Frenchmen—

JANE: She has an awfully unpleasant mind, poor Violet, I suppose it must be the result of so much repression.

JULIA: Repression of what, dear?

JANE: Oh, everything.

JULIA: She lacks opportunities—it's her clothes, I think.

JANE: They don't lack opportunities, they grab them whole-heartedly.

JULIA: I've never seen so many things on any woman.

JANE: What was the meaning of that hat, anyhow?

JULIA: It appeared to be kept on by suction. Shall we have a cocktail?

FALLEN ANGELS

JANE: It isn't very wise, is it? On empty stomachs.

JULIA (*ringing bell*): I shall get black depression if I don't.

JANE (*resigned*): We shall just lapse into complete silliness, and when Maurice does come we shall giggle helplessly at him and our heads will wobble.

[*Enter SAUNDERS.*

JULIA: Cocktails, please, Saunders.

SAUNDERS: Yes, ma'am.

JULIA: Strong ones.

JANE: Julia!

SAUNDERS: Very good, ma'am.

[*Exit SAUNDERS.*

JULIA: I don't believe he ever will come.

JANE: Neither do I.

JULIA: It's probably all a sort of elfin joke—he was always being elfin.

JANE: And so terribly unreliable.

JULIA: I wouldn't trust him an inch,

JANE: I never did.

JULIA: But still, he was a darling.

JANE: Adorable, damn him!

JULIA: And he doesn't know many people in England.

JANE: I think he *will* come.

JULIA: So do I.

JANE: He'll kiss our hands and look up at us while he does it—you remember?

FALLEN ANGELS

JULIA : Oh, yes, I remember all right

JANE : And he'll laugh and show all his teeth.

JULIA : Many more than are usual

JANE: You know what we're doing, don't you?

JULIA: What?

JANE: We're working ourselves up.

JULIA : We have been all day.

JANE: I should like to scream now—scream and scream
andscreamandrollaboutonthefloor—————

JULIA : So should I, but we must restrain ourselves.

JANE: It's want of food, you know.

JULIA : Yes, that's what it is.

{SAUNDERS *comes In with cocktails.*

JANE: Oh, Julia—don't let's wait any longer.

JULIA: All right. (*She takes cocktail and hands it to*
JANE.) Here you are, dear.—Dinner, please, Saunders.

JANE: Quickly.

SAUNDERS: Yes, ma'am. Shall I open the champagne?

JANE (*beseechingly*): Julia!

JULIA (*firmly*): Yes, Saunders.

{SAUNDERS *goes out.*

JANE: Listen! There's a taxi stopping outside.

JULIA: Quick!

[*They both rush to the window and peer out.*

JANE: I can't see—it's so dark.

JULIA : He's got a black hat.

FALLEN ANGELS

JANE: It must be—it must be!

JULIA: It's the beastly woman from upstairs—how dare she drive about in taxis.

JANE: Look, there's another coming round the corner.

[They both crane round to see.

[Re-enter SAUNDERS with oysters.

SAUNDERS: Dinner is served, ma'am.

JULIA: It's no use—come and eat.

JANE: It was lovely of you to think of oysters, darling.

JULIA: They do give one a "grand" feeling. It's awfully necessary for us to feel "grand" to-night.

[They both sit down.

JANE: Wouldn't it be dreadful if Fred and Willy came home?

JULIA (*with a warning look towards SAUNDERS*): Shhhh!

JANE: Drunk.

JULIA: What do you mean?

JANE: I say wouldn't it be dreadful if Fred and Willy came home drunk?

JULIA: Why should they?

JANE (*grimacing towards SAUNDERS*): Don't be silly, Julia.

JULIA: Oh, I see—yes, dreadful I'd forgotten it was Saturday.

JANE: Saturday?

JULIA: Yes, naturally depressing in November because of the fog.

FALLEN ANGELS

JANE: But only if you pay your subscription in advance.

[SAUNDERS, *having served champagne and oyster s,*
goes out.

JULIA: Poor Saunders.

JANE: She looked extremely startled.

JULIA: You must be careful.

JANE: I'm sorry, darling, I quite forgot she was there.

JULIA: Wouldn't it be wonderful if he arrived suddenly now!

JANE: I should choke.

JULIA: You're sure you left a thoroughly clear message at your flat in case he went there?

JANE: Of course.

JULIA: We shall probably have a fearful shock when we do see him.

JANE: I don't see why, really.

JULIA: He's sure to have got fat, or bald, or something.

JANE: No, he'll be the same as ever, he wouldn't come at all if he weren't—he's much too conceited.

JULIA: Not conceited, a little vain perhaps, naturally.

JANE: With those eyes one can't blame him.

JULIA: And those hands——

JANE: And teeth——

JULIA: And legs! Oh, Jane!

JANE: Oh, Julia!

[*Re-enter SAUNDERS with " CEufs au plat Bercy "*
on separate dishes.

FALLEN ANGELS

JULIA: The cushions of the carriages are always so dusty.

JANE: She ought never to have been burnt at the stake because she was such a nice girl.

JULIA: I can hardly wait until strawberries come in again.

SAUNDERS (*putting dish before JANE*): Be careful, ma'am—it's very hot.

JANE: Thank you, I will.

JULIA: More champagne?

JANE: Yes, darling. (*She holds out her glass and JULIA fills it.*)

JULIA (*filling her own*): I'm feeling better now, aren't you?

JANE: Yes, I adore this little sausage with my egg;

JULIA: It is sweet, isn't it?

[SAUNDERS *goes out.*

JANE (*leaning back*): It's all such a wonderful adventure.

JULIA: It hasn't started yet.

JANE: Oh, yes it has—I've enjoyed my day enormously.

JULIA: How can you? It's been damnable!

JANE: But frightfully exciting. I love something to break the monotony.

JULIA: Don't be "young," Jane.

JANE: You're being awfully superior, but you're as thrilled as I am.

FALLEN ANGELS

JULIA: I see such blackness ahead if we⁵re not careful.

JANE: We mustn't lose our heads.

JULIA: Perhaps he won't want us to this time.

JANE: I have sudden beastly pangs about Fred and Willy.

JULIA: So do I.

JANE: We're being so disloyal.

JULIA: Only in thought so far.

[The telephone rings.]

BOTH: My God!

JANE (*rising*): I'll go.

JULIA (*also rising*): It's my house.

JANE: Quick—toss for it—rough or smooth, see!
(*She picks up a fork.*)

JULIA: Rough.

JANE (*tossing it*): Rough it is.

JULIA (*at telephone*): Hallo!—Yes, Park 8720—yes—
(*To JANE in a hoarse whisper.*) It's a call office.—Hallo!
—yes, speaking——(*She jumps.*) It is—it is——! Is
that you, Maurice?

JANE (*rushing up and trying to hear*): It can't be—it
can't be——

JULIA (*crossly*): Oh! Uncle Hugo, is that you—I
thought it was someone else.

JANE: Damn!

JULIA (*impatiently*): No, he won't be home until to-
morrow, he's playing golf with Willy.

JANE: Damn—damn—damn!

FALLEN ANGELS

JULIA : Shut up, Jane.—Yes, all right, I'll tell him—
Good-bye.

JANE : Stupid old fool.

JULIA : I hate all Fred's relations, anyhow.

[They go back to the table.]

JANE : He's probably gone straight to an hotel and had a lovely hot bath and changed his clothes and will come on here afterwards.

JULIA : I wonder.

JANE : Of course, he always has a hot bath after a journey.

JULIA : I hadn't forgotten, dear.

JANE : He'll probably wear a soft silk shirt with his dinner-jacket—so beautifully careless.

JULIA : Stop, Jane, I'm beginning to feel dreadful.

JANE (*dreamily*): I can see him now threading his way between the tables outside Florian's in the Piazza San Marco—we used to have coffee there always, then we used to stroll languidly along to the Piazzetta—I had a lovely green shawl—and then drift over the lagoon—and we'd hitch our gondola to a serenata and lie back and look up at the stars while darling little men in white shirts poured out their sentimental souls in the most shattering tenor voices. Sometimes we wouldn't stop at all, but just glide on through the Piccolo Canales until we suddenly came out into that big lagoon behind Venice—away from everywhere—just one or two buildings rising up like ghosts out of the mist, then Maurice used to——

[SAUNDERS *enters with Tournedos and sauce Bearnaise and Pommes Dauphine.*

FALLEN ANGELS

JULIA : The worst of a circus is, I'm always so *terrified* that they ill-treat the animals.

JANE : Poor George and he *was* so charming before he married.

JULIA: I hope you haven't forgotten the sauce Bearn-aise, Saunders?

SAUNDERS : No, ma'am—it's here.

JANE : How delicious.

JULIA: Have some more champagne?

JANE: All right.

JULIA (*refilling both glasses*): We ought to have some of those little wooden things in coloured paper to take the gassiness out.

JANE: They're such fun !

[*There is suddenly a loud ring at the front door bell. JULIA gives a cry, and JANE, who is drinking, chokes.*]

JULIA : Jane, pull yourself together.

JANE (*choking badly*): I can't—it's agony——

JULIA: Leave the potatoes, Saunders, and answer the door.

SAUNDERS : Very good, ma'am.

JULIA (*to JANE*): Eat some bread quickly.

JANE (*recovering a little*): Oh, don't let him in—not yet——

JULIA: Eat some bread—here——(*She rushes round the table and administers bread and water to JANE.*)

FALLEN ANGELS

JANE (*weakly*): It's all right now. I'm better. (*She rises and grabs her bag, then proceeds to powder her nose frantically.*)

[*Re-enter SAUNDERS.*

SAUNDERS : It's a foreign gentleman, ma'am.

JANE : There, now!

JULIA : Why didn't you show him in?

SAUNDERS : He says he won't come in. He only wants to know if there's a Madame Gambelitti living here.

JANE : What's he like?

SAUNDERS : Quite respectable, ma'am, but with a long moustache.

JULIA : Come on, Jane, we'll peep.

[*They go to the door and peep round it into the hall —then return to the table crestfallen.*

JULIA : Why didn't you tell him there was no Madame What's-her-name here, and get rid of him?

SAUNDERS : You said you were expecting a foreign gentleman, ma'am, and I thought I'd better keep him in case.

JULIA : Well, get rid of him now.

SAUNDERS : Very good, ma'am.

[*Exit SAUNDERS.*

JANE (*a/most in tears*): It's downright cruel, that's what it is.

JULIA : It's the first time that anybody not aggressively English has rung that bell since we've been here.

FALLEN ANGELS

JANE: And he would come after his beastly Madame Gambelitti to-night of all nights. It's indecent!

JULIA: More champagne?

JANE (*loudly*): Yes.

JULIA: Well, don't shout.

JANE: I shall if I want to, Julia; you mustn't be dictatorial.

[*JuLiA Jills both glasses again.*]

JULIA: Let's have a toast!

JANE (*rising and holding up her glass*): Maurice Duclos.

JULIA (*also rising*): Maurice Duclos! No heel taps.

[*They both drain their glasses.*]

JANE (*sitting down quickly*): That was silly of us, Julia.

JULIA (*also sitting*): Eat some steak quickly.

[*There is silence for a moment while they devote themselves to their food.*]

JANE: Wouldn't it be awful if a tree blew down and killed Fred and Willy on the golf links?

JULIA (*shocked*): Jane, how can you!

JANE: It would serve us right.

JULIA: It would be too awful—I should never forgive myself.

JANE: Neither should I.

JULIA: There's a dreadful gale blowing.

JANE: Things like that do happen!

JULIA: No, they don't—not if you don't think about them. Mind over matter.

FALLEN ANGELS

JANE: I do admire you, Julia, you're so strong—and sensible.

JULIA: Nonsense, dear, I'm just not afraid of life.

JANE: You're brave.

JULIA: No braver than you.

JANE (*verging on tears*): We must both be brave always, Julia.

JULIA (*slightly maudlin*): Whatever happens.

JANE: Even if Fred and Willy *were* killed we should have to bear it.

JULIA: Yes, Jane—we wouldn't break down—we'd face the world with a smile.

JANE: Not quite a smile, dear, it might be misunderstood.

JULIA: Poor darling Fred, I can see him now being carried in on a stretcher——

JANE: With Willy on another stretcher. Oh, dear——
(*She breaks down.*)

JULIA: Jane dear—don't——

[Re-enter SAUNDERS with sweet—"profiteroles au chocolat"

JANE: I've eaten much too much already.

JULIA: So have I, but we must go on, it will keep up our strength.

JANE: They look lovely.—Tinker, tailor, soldier, sailor——

JULIA (*giggling*): No, you do that with cherry stones.

JANE (*also giggling*): I like doing it with these.

FALLEN ANGELS

JULIA: Have some more champagne?

JANE: No, thank you.

JULIA: Here you are. (*She pours it out.*)

JANE: Thanks, darling.

JULIA: What's so silly is that I'm beginning to feel sleepy.

JANE: I'm not—exactly—just cosy.

JULIA: Bring the coffee straightaway, Saunders.

SAUNDERS: Yes, ma'am.

[*Exit SAUNDERS.*]

JANE: What a pretty girl Saunders is!

JULIA: Yes, isn't she?

JANE: She ought to be a great success in life, she's so calm.

JULIA (*suddenly bursting out laughing*): Oh, dear——!

JANE: What are you laughing at?

JULIA: You look frightfully funny!

JANE: What's the matter with me? (*She gets up just a little unsteadily and looks at herself in the glass.*)

JULIA (*giggling hopelessly*): I don't know—you just do!

JANE: So do you.

JULIA (*also getting up and looking in glass*): It's our heads, I think—they're far too big.

JANE: We've had too much champagne.

JULIA (*agreeably*): Much too much.

JANE: Let's sit down again.

FALLEN ANGELS

JULIA: All right.

[They return to the table.]

JANE: Wouldn't it be awful if the King and Queen suddenly came in?

JULIA: They won't, because they're at Sandhurst.

JANE: Not Sandhurst, dear, Sandown.

JULIA: It isn't that either. I know it's Sand- something.

JANE: I feel awfully warm and comfortable.

JULIA: A child could play with me.

[The telephone rings.]

JANE: There now!

JULIA: It must be him this time.

JANE: It's my turn; come and stand close to me.

JULIA: All right—I'll sit on the edge of the sofa.

JANE *(at telephone—loudly)*: Hallo!

JULIA: He isn't deaf,

JANE: Hallo! Yes, this is Park 8724.

JULIA: It isn't.

JANE: Keep quiet, I can't hear——

JULIA: Look on the thing; it's not 8724.

JANE *(gives a quick look at telephone number)*: No, it isn't—it isn't—it's 8720—hallo! Exchange——They've gone. Julia, it's a trunk call; what *am* I to do?—Exchange, hallo——!

JULIA: Hang the receiver up.

FALLEN ANGELS

JANE: It will only go on ringing and ringing and ringing if I do.—Exchange, hallo! (*She bangs receiver up and down.*) Oh, this is agony!

JULIA: Here, give it to me. (*She snatches the telephone out of JANE'S hand.*) Hallo! No, you've got the wrong number.—No, I'm not; I'm somebody quite different. (*She slams receiver down.*) It's a shame! What on earth did you say we were Park 8724 for? You ought to know the number by now.

JANE: I couldn't help it; he jumped at me.

JULIA: You were in such a flutter because you thought it was Maurice——

JANE (*with dignity*): I was as calm as a cucumber.

JULIA: You were shaking all over.

JANE: So were you—simply bobbing up and down on the sofa.

JULIA: Why you said it was Park 8724 I can't imagine.

JANE: I told you I couldn't help it.

JULIA: Don't argue, Jane, when you've been stupid over anything it's much better not to argue.

JANE (*irately*): Stupid indeed!—I like that. Why, if you——

[The telephone rings.]

JULIA: Leave it alone.

JANE: It may be him.

JULIA: No, it's only that trunk call again. It'll probably go on all night because you told him it was Park 8720.

JANE: I didn't—I said Park 8724.

FALLEN ANGELS

JULIA: Jane, how can you! You said 8720!

JANE: It *is* 8720.

JULIA: It isn't.

JANE: Look there. (*She shows her.*)

JULIA: I shall go mad, that's all, and it will serve you right.

[The telephone continues to ring.

JANE: Oh, stop it, for God's sake!

JULIA: There. (*She takes off receiver and puts it on table.*)

[Enter SAUNDERS with coffee. JULIA and JANE both sit down at the table again.

JANE: I don't mind what happens now—I'm just past everything.

JULIA: Have some coffee?

JANE (*taking it from SAUNDERS*): Thank you.

JULIA: A liqueur?

JANE (*giggling*): Don't be ridiculous.

JULIA: Cordial Medoc, Saunders.

JANE: Shall we have it in tumblers?

JULIA: I ordered it specially—it rounds off a dinner so nicely.

JANE: It certainly will.

[SAUNDERS goes to sideboard, pours out two liqueurs and puts them down on the table.

JULIA: Thank you, Saunders—that will do now.

FALLEN ANGELS

SAUNDERS: Very good, ma'am.

[SAUNDERS goes out with the remains of the sweet on a tray.

JANE (*sipping her liqueur*): It's terribly strong!

JULIA (*airily*): It's supposed to make one feel rather—rather——(*She waves her hand vaguely.*)

JANE: How thoughtful of you, dear.

JULIA: Have some fruit?

JANE: I couldn't.

JULIA: Do, it rounds off the dinner so nicely,

JANE: For Heaven's sake stop rounding *off* the dinner, it's getting on my nerves.

JULIA: Don't be temperamental.

JANE: Do you think it would matter if I took off my shoes?

JULIA: Not at all—they always do in Japan, I believe.

JANE (*kicking off her shoes*): If Maurice had any instincts at all he'd arrive at this moment—looking marvellous.

JULIA: And make the most lovely sort of baffled scene!

JANE: What would baffle him?

JULIA: Us, of course, because we'd be so gloriously aloof and stately.

JANE: I shouldn't—I should give in without a murmur.

JULIA: Then he'd want me more,

JANE: If you feel that's the only way to make him, you'd better encourage me.

JULIA: You don't need any encouraging.

FALLEN ANGELS

JANE: What do you mean by that?

JULIA: What I say.

JANE: Oh!

JULIA: Anyhow, I should never let you cheapen yourself.

JANE (*affronted*): How dare you, Julia.

JULIA: How dare I what?

JANE: Insult me.

JULIA: I didn't.

JANE: You did—you went too far—it was past a joke.

JULIA: It wasn't intended to be a joke—I hate jokes, bitterly.

JANE: Then you meant it?

JULIA: Meant what?

JANE: How can anyone carry on a conversation when you keep on saying what, what, what, what, what, what, what all the time! If you can't quite grasp what I say, you'd better go to bed.

JULIA: That was exceedingly rude, Jane.

JANE: I'm sorry, Julia, but you're annoying me.

JULIA: Unfortunately, this happens to be my flat.

JANE (*looking round*): Never mind, dear, you'll get used to it in time.

JULIA: Stop bickering, Jane.

JANE: How can you expect me not to bicker when you sit there abusing me.

JULIA: I never abused you.

FALLEN ANGELS

JANE: Yes, you did—you insinuated that I was brazen.

JULIA: Well, so you are—sometimes—we all are, it's human nature.

JANE: Nothing of the sort.

JULIA: Don't contradict everything I say—it infuriates me.

JANE: Brazen! It was you who refused to run away this morning, anyhow.

JULIA: Why should I run away?

JANE (*laughing*): That's funny.

JULIA (*coldly*): glad you think so.

JANE: Why should you run away—ha-ha!

JULIA: I think you must be going to have a cold, Jane

JANE: Why?

JULIA: Your voice is so strident.

JANE: I shall whisper for the rest of the evening.

JULIA: Do, it's more soothing.

JANE (*in a hoarse whisper*): Anyhow, there's this to be said—if you hadn't met Maurice first and gone on with him like that in Pisa——

JULIA: You're being insufferable.

JANE: Not at all—I'm merely pointing out that it's no use riding a high horse now because the whole affair's been entirely your fault from beginning to end.

JULIA (*rising*): I'm awfully disappointed in you, Jane—I thought you had a nicer mind than that.

FALLEN ANGELS

JANE: Mind! What about yours? I suppose you imagine it's a lovely gilt basket filled with mixed fruit and a bow on the top!

JULIA: Better than being an old sardine tin with a few fins left in it!

JANE (*rising*): You'll regret that remark in your soberer moments.

JULIA: Have a cigarette.

JANE (*taking one*): Thank you.

JULIA (*striking a match*): Here!

JANE (*with dignity*): Thank you.

JULIA (*grandly*): Perhaps you'd like a little music? Shall I put the gramophone on?

JANE: Do if you feel it would put you in a better temper.

JULIA (*ignoring her—conversationally*): I had such an amusing letter from Aunt Harriet this morning.

JANE (*rudely*): Did you really? I thought she was dead.

JULIA (*with a superior frown*): I'm afraid you must be muddling her up with someone else.

JANE: Go on, dear—tell me some more news. I love you when you're offended.

JULIA (*sadly*): I'm not offended, Jane. A little hurt, perhaps, and surprised——

JANE (*suddenly furious*): How dare you draw yourself up and become the outraged hostess with *me*!

FALLEN ANGELS

JULIA : I'm sorry—I must have lost my sense of humour—perhaps because I'm tired—we've been together so much lately, we've probably grated on one another's nerves.

JANE: Yes, you're right there. Where are my shoes?

JULIA (*disdainfully*). I really don't know—they can't have gone far.

JANE: I should like to shake you, Julia, shake you and shake you and shake you until your eyes dropped out!

JULIA: Indeed?

JANE: Yes, when you're superior and grand like that you rouse the very worst in me——

JULIA: Obviously.

JANE: You make me feel like a French Revolution virago. I'd like to rush up and down Bond Street with your head on a pole!

JULIA: You'd better pull yourself together and I'll ask Saunders to help you to your flat.

JANE: If she comes near me I'll throttle her.

JULIA: I've never seen you violent before—it's very interesting psychologically.

JANE (*with sudden determination*): I could bring you down to earth in one moment if I liked.

JULIA: Vulgarity always leaves me unmoved.

JANE: This is not vulgarity—it's something I was more ashamed of than vulgarity, but I'm not ashamed of it any more—I'm glad! I've kept something from you, Julia.

JULIA: I wish you'd go home, Jane.

FALLEN ANGELS

JANE: I must have realised subconsciously all the time that you were going to turn out false and beastly——

JULIA: What are you talking about?

JANE: Where are my shoes?

JULIA: Never mind about your shoes—what do you mean?

JANE: Give me my shoes.

JULIA (*moving over to the mantelpiece*): They're probably under the table—you'd better get them and go.

JANE (*finding them and putting them on savagely*): And now I'm thankful to God I *did* keep it to myself.

JULIA: That's right.

JANE: You're still too gramt to be curious, I suppose.

JULIA: Don't be cheap,jane.

JANE: It concerns Maurice.

JULIA (*turning*): Oh! it concerns Maurice, does it?

JANE: Yes, I thought that would rouse you!

JULIA: I think you'd better tell me—if you don't want to wreck our friendship for ever.

JANE: It will wreck our friendship all right when I *do* tell you—and I don't care. It's this—/ *know where he is!*

JULIA: It's a lie!

JANE: No, it isn't. He rang me up while I was dressing to-night.

JULIA: Jane!

FALLEN ANGELS

JANE: Yes, I didn't want to tell you because I thought it would have hurt your feelings. But now I know that you haven't got any feelings to hurt—only a shallow sort of social vanity——

JULIA: Where is he, then? Tell me!

JANE: I shall do nothing of the sort. I don't want you to rush round there and make a fool of yourself.

JULIA (*losing all control*): How dare you! How dare you! I'll never speak to you again as long as I live. You're utterly completely contemptible! If it's true, you're nothing but a snivelling hypocrite! And if it's false, you're a bare^faced liar! There's not much to choose between you. Please go at once!

JANE: Go—I'm only too delighted. You must curb your social sense, Julia, if it leads you to drunken orgies and abuse!

JULIA (*in tears*): Go—go—go away——!

JANE: Certainly I shall—and it may interest you to know that I'm going *straight* to Maurice!

JULIA (*wailing*): Liar—Liar!

JANE: I'm not lying—it's true. And I shall go away with him at once, and you and Fred and Willy can go to hell, the whole lot of you!

[JANE *flounces out*. JULIA *hurls herself on to the sofa in screaming hysterics*.]

CURTAIN.

ACT III

ACT III

The same scene. It is the next morning. JULIA is finishing her breakfast gloomily. She rings the bell at her side. Enter SAUNDERS.

JULIA: When I say a "Soft-boiled egg," Saunders, I don't mean an un-boiled egg.

SAUNDERS: I'm sorry, ma'am.

JULIA: There was also a long dark hair in the marmalade.

SAUNDERS (*anxiously*): Was there, ma'am?

JULIA: I haven't the remotest idea how it got there as we are both distinct blondes; perhaps it was Mr. Robertson's.

SAUNDERS: Yes, ma'am.

JULIA: Anyhow, please search the marmalade in future,

SAUNDERS: Very good, ma'am.

[JULIA goes over to the telephone.

JULIA (*at telephone*): Park 5703—yes, please—03——Damn! (*She slams the telephone down and goes over to the window and drums her fingers on the pane—it is pouring with rain. She picks up the paper, looks at it in disgust for a moment, then throws it away. She goes once more to the telephone.*)

JULIA: Hallo!—Park 5703—yes, please.—Oh! (*She holds the receiver away from her ear as the engaged signal is deafening, lifter a pause* :) " It can't possibly still be engaged!—Very well—hallo—My good girl, you suffer from being both incompetent *and* stupid! " (*She slams down receiver. There is a ring at the front door bell. She jumps, After a moment WILLY enters.*)

FALLEN ANGELS

WILLY : Good morning, Julia.

JULIA: Willy! What on earth are you doing here?
Where's Fred?

WILLY (*gloomily*): I left him at the Grand Hotel,
Littlestone. Where's Jane?

JULIA (*coldly*): I don't know.

WILLY: You don't know?

JULIA : I haven't the faintest idea—she might be any-
where by now.

WILLY : What d'you mean " By now " ?

JULIA : Just " By now."

WILLY: What's the matter?

JULIA: Nothing.

WILLY: What's happened?

JULIA : Everything probably—by now!

WILLY: What are you talking about?

JULIA: Oh, don't be tiresome!

WILLY: I irtade sure Jane would be with you. Where's
she gone?

JULIA: Do stop cross-questioning me—anyone would
think I'd murdered her and put her in a box.

WILLY: Well, from the furtive way you're behaving
I shouldn't be in the least surprised.

JULIA: Anyhow, what do you mean by leaving Fred
all alone in the Grand Hotel, Littlestone?

WILLY : We had a row last night.

JULIA : Oh, did you!

FALLEN ANGELS

WILLY : Yes, Fred infuriated me.

JULIA (*with sarcasm*): I'm sure I'm very sorry—I'll speak to him severely.

WILLY: And I felt I couldn't bear to meet him at breakfast and go all over it again—so I crept out and left by the early train.

JULIA: What did you row about?

WILLY: Nothing.

JULIA: That's the worst kind.

WILLY: Have you quarrelled with Jane?

JULIA: Yes, bitterly.

WILLY: What about?

JULIA : Nothing!

WILLY: Oh!

JULIA : We got drunk.

WILLY: What!

JULIA : Extremely drunk.

WILLY: Julia!

JULIA: Jane was much worse than I was, and—well, we quarrelled.

WILLY (*incensed*): If I can't go away for a quiet game of golf without you making Jane drunk——

JULIA : I didn't make her drunk—it was voluntary.

WILLY: Disgusting, I call it.

JULIA : And she banged out of the flat

WILLY: Where is she now?

FALLEN ANGELS

JULIA : I don't know, and I don't care.

WILLY : Don't be callous, Julia.

JULIA : She's probably at home in bed sleeping it off.

WILLY : She isn't—I've just been there.

JULIA : I thought you came straight here.

WILLY : No, I had a large bag and golf clubs.

JULIA : Are you sure she isn't at home?

WILLY : Perfectly, but I didn't worry because I thought she'd be with you.

JULIA (*turning away*): Then it *was* true, then——

WILLY : What was true?

JULIA (*biting her lip angrily*): Oh!—Oh!

WILLY : What in God's name's the matter?

JULIA : I was going to ring her up and make friends again. I didn't believe for a moment—I didn't think that——Oh!

WILLY : Didn't believe *what* !

JULIA : She must have been deceiving me steadily all through dinner. How dare she! Oh, oh, oh!

[JuLiA *begins striding up and down the room.*

WILLY : Julia, will you stop still and explain what's happened?

JULIA (*stopping*): Explain! Oh, yes, I'll explain all right—the sly, underhand little——!

WILLY (*with dignity*): Will you please remember that you are referring to my wife.

FALLEN ANGELS

JULIA: Your wife!—Huh! Optimist!

WILLY: Julia!

JULIA (*irately*): Yes, my poor Willy—my poor, poor Willy.

WILLY: You're maddening me, Julia.

JULIA (*beginning to stride again*): To have behaved like that—after all these years. Oh, it's contemptible!

WILLY (*catching her by the shoulders*): What's happened to Jane? Where's she gone?

JULIA: I should like to break it to you gently, Willy—she's gone off with a man!

WILLY: What!

JULIA (*defiantly*): A Frenchman.

WILLY: Nonsense, she can't have.

JULIA: I tell you she has.

WILLY: I don't believe it—you're unhinged, that's what it is.

JULIA: I'm perfectly hinged. It's true.

WILLY: I'm sorry, Julia, but I don't believe it. I know Jane too well 5 she'd never rush off like that at a moment's notice.

JULIA (*bitterly*): She knew where he was all the time, and she went to him.

WILLY: She was pulling your leg.

JULIA: Don't be so pig-headed, Willy, this is one of the few big moments in your life, and you're behaving like a ninny!

FALLEN ANGELS

WILLY: If you think stamping up and down the room and blackguarding Jane is a big moment in my life you're very much mistaken.

JULIA (*exasperated*): It's true! She's known him for years. She was in love with him before she married you—before she ever met you.

WILLY: Don't be ridiculous!

JULIA: Your smug complacency is beyond belief. I suppose you feel quite sure that no woman could bear to leave you?

WILLY: Jane couldn't—she'd hate it.

JULIA: There's going to be a shattering awakening for you.

WILLY: I say, Julia, don't go on ramping any more—just calm down and explain things quietly. I'll pour myself out some coffee, if I may.

[*He does so. JULIA watches him in silence.*]

JULIA: Willy—I——Oh! (*She bursts into tears.*)

WILLY: What's up now?

JULIA: I'm a beast—a traitress——(*She sobs.*)

WILLY: No, you're not—you're just thoroughly hysterical—you'll be better in a moment. (*He drinks some coffee.*)

JULIA (*controlling herself*): Listen, Willy!—I'm sorry—but I'm afraid what I said just now was the truth.

WILLY (*amiably*): I'm trying hard to understand I can't help feeling that there's something awfully silly behind all this—it doesn't seem to ring true.

FALLEN ANGELS

JULIA (*with sarcasm*): Perhaps you think I'm playing an amusing practical joke on you?

WILLY: No, it isn't that, but you've either deceived yourself into believing it or else you're making a mistake,

JULIA: But, Willy——

WILLY: If Jane really had left me, I know I should have some sort of feeling about it—but I haven't.

JULIA: That'll come later all right.

WILLY: Who is this man she's supposed to be with?

JULIA: He's a Frenchman—Maurice Duclos. Jane and I both knew him before we married.

WILLY: Did you know him well?

JULIA: Extremely well.

WILLY: And Jane? Was Jane in love with him then?

JULIA: Yes, violently! We both were.

WILLY: Did you—er—did you——?

JULIA: Yes, Willy.

WILLY: Where?

JULIA: Pisa.

WILLY: And did Jane ever——?

JULIA: Yes, Willy.

WILLY: Good God, where?

JULIA: Venice.

WILLY: This is horrible—incredible——

JULIA: Willy, I'm sorry I——

WILLY (*abruptly*): You'd better save your apologies for Fred. I'm going to find Jane.

FALLEN ANGELS

JULIA: I'll come too.

WILLY: Has she seen this man since we've been married?

JULIA: No—at least—I don't know—she's such a liar.

WILLY: When *did you* last see him?

JULIA: Seven years ago on the railway station at Pisa. We were both going to Paris, and at the last moment he said he wanted a Salami sandwich, and as I hated garlic, we had a row. He was far too temperamental, anyhow, so I pushed him out on to the platform just as the train was starting. I repented it bitterly at the time—but now I'm glad.

WILLY: I think you ought to be ashamed of yourself.

JULIA: I didn't push him very hard.

WILLY: I don't mean about that—I mean the whole affair.

JULIA: Are you daring to disapprove of me, Willy?

WILLY: Yes. You're devoid of the slightest moral sense.

JULIA: What about Jane?

WILLY: Jane's different—she's just weak. You probably set her a bad example.

JULIA: Willy!

WILLY (*hotly*): I wouldn't mind betting you met the beastly man first and then told Jane all about it and generally egged her on.

JULIA: She didn't need any egging—she met him and never said a word to me for ages afterwards.

FALLEN ANGELS

WILLY: She was probably too ashamed and repentant.

JULIA: Repentant my foot.

WILLY: Anyhow, it's more than you are—you're positively glorying in your—your—shame!

JULIA: If I'd known what a smug little man you were I'd never have let Jane marry you at all.

WILLY: And if I'd known how utterly lacking you were in all the finer feelings I'd never have let Fred come near you.

JULIA: I should think it would be as well to stop hurling abuse at me and go in search of your weak but strictly virtuous wife, who, if she hasn't succeeded in finding Maurice Duclos, is probably roaming about the streets in deep evening dress and hiccuping.

WILLY: You must come with me.

JULIA: I shall do nothing of the sort.

WILLY: You said you would.

JULIA: That was before your insults.

WILLY: Julia, do come?

JULIA: Where could we go first—Vine Street?

WILLY: She can't have gone far.

JULIA: Judging by her condition when she left this flat she's probably gone farther than our wildest dreams.

WILLY: Please come, Julia.

JULIA: I'll come back to your flat—she may have left a note or something.

WILLY: I never thought of that.

FALLEN ANGELS

JULIA: Wait a moment. (*She goes into the bedroom and issues forth in a small hat and a coat over her arm.*)

WILLY: Look here, Julia, I'm sorry for what I said just now.

JULIA: So you ought to be.

WILLY: But I still don't believe it all—quite.

JULIA: I want you to understand one thing clearly. I'm not coming with you just to help you. I'm coming because I wish to find Jane and tell her exactly what I think of her.

WILLY: I say, Julia, don't be beastly to her. She's probably feeling pretty awful.

JULIA: I don't care if she's feeling heavenly, she won't be when I've finished with her!

[They go out. SAUNDERS just catches sight of them as they vanish. SAUNDERS, humming to herself, begins to pile the breakfast things on a tray. The telephone rings.]

SAUNDERS (*at telephone*): "Hallo!—yes—yes, sir.—No, sir, she isn't in at present.—I don't know, sir, she didn't say.—Yes, sir, what name, sir?—One moment, sir, I'll write it down—" (*She writes on block.*) Maurice Duclos—Park 9264.—Yes, sir, I'll tell her." (*She hangs up the receiver and continues to clear away. She is on her way to the door when FRED comes in.*)

FRED: Good morning, Saunders.

SAUNDERS: Good morning, sir.

FRED: Where's the mistress?

SAUNDERS: She's gone out, sir.

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FRED: Gone out? But it's pouring.

SAUNDERS : Yes, sir

FRED: Where's she gone?

SAUNDERS : I don't know, sir.

FRED: She's with Mrs. Banbury, I expect. Run up, will you, and tell her I've come back?

SAUNDERS: What number is it, sir?

FRED: Number five—two floors up.

SAUNDERS : Very good, sir. *(She goes out.)*

[FRED lights a cigarette and wanders about the room aimlessly. He goes over to the piano and plays absently the tune of "Meme les Anges" with one finger. He also hums it a little.

[JANE enters rather draggled, in evening dress and a cloak.

JANE: Fred! What are you doing?

FRED *(turning)*: Playing the piano. Good heavens!

JANE: What?

FRED: Have you been out all night?

JANE: Yes.

FRED : Lucky for you I left Willy at Littlestone.

JANE: Oh, you did, did you?

FRED : Yes, sleeping like a hog. I left early in the car.

JANE: Why?

FRED : We had rather a row last night. If you'll forgive my saying so, your husband is a fool sometimes.

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JANE: I've always found him extremely intelligent.

FRED: Where have you been?

JANE: Mind your own business, Fred!

FRED: Don't jump down my throat—it was quite a harmless question.

JANE: I object to your dictatorial tone.

FRED: Well, to come in like that at eleven o'clock in the morning is a little——

JANE: If I choose to come in naked on a tricycle it's no affair of yours. Where's Julia?

FRED: I don't know, she went out before I arrived.

JANE: Out—where?

FRED: I haven't the faintest idea/ I thought she'd probably be with you.

[Re-enter SAUNDERS.]

SAUNDERS: The mistress isn't at Mrs. Banbury's, sir. *(She sees JANE.)* Oh !

JANE: Don't look so surprised, Saunders. You left the door open so I walked in.

SAUNDERS: Yes, ma'am.

FRED: What time did the mistress go out, Saunders?

SAUNDERS : Just before you came in, sir.

FRED: Was she alone?

SAUNDERS : No, sir, there was a gentleman with her.

JANE *(tensely)*: A what?

SAUNDERS: A gentleman, ma'am.

FALLEN ANGELS

FRED: Who was it?

SAUNDERS: I don't know, sir, he didn't give any name when I opened the door; he just walked straight in.

JANE: What was he like?

SAUNDERS: About medium height, ma'am, and dark.

JANE (*ominously*): Dark was he!

FRED: Why, what's the matter?

JANE: I'm sorry for you, Fred, extremely sorry for you.

FRED (*startled*): That will do, Saunders.

SAUNDERS: Very good, sir. (*She goes out.*)

FRED: What do you mean, Jane?

JANE: Don't speak to me for a moment, just don't speak to me—I'm trying to control myself, and I should like a cigarette.

FRED (*giving her one—very puzzled*): What's all this mystery about?

JANE (*austerely*): There is no mystery, I'm afraid, any more—it's all far too clear.

FRED: Jane—tell me at once—what's happened?

JANE: You'll know all too soon, Fred dear. Julia was my friend—I have no intention of being disloyal.

FRED: Jane—tell me what's happened!

JANE (*sadly*): I'm sorry, Fred, but I can tell you nothing. Julia may be double-faced, treacherous, and thoroughly immoral. But I repeat, she was my friend.

FRED (*relieved*): Oh, I see—you had a row last night, too.

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JANE: Yes, we did.

FRED: What about?

JANE: I don't know—Julia spoke rather indistinctly.

FRED: Do you know where she's gone now?

JANE: I have a shrewd suspicion, but my lips are sealed.

FRED: Tell me at once!

JANE: I can't possibly. I———(*She catches sight of MAURICE'S name on the telephone block. She gives a gasp of fury.*) Oh!—Oh!

FRED: What's the matter now?

JANE: So she knew—all the time—Oh!

FRED (*frantically*): Knew what?

JANE: How dare she—how dare she—it's contemptible—it's—Oh!———(*She takes up the telephone block and hurls it to the ground.*) The sneaking hypocrite! Oh! the despicable squalor of it all—to be deceived like that by one's best friend, and for such a sordid purpose.—Oh!—Oh!—Oh! (*She positively stamps with rage.*)

[FRED picks up the block and reads the name on it.

FRED: Who's this?

JANE: Don't speak to me—don't speak to me!

FRED: What does it mean?

JANE: It means that Julia has deserted you, Fred.

FRED: Deserted me?

JANE: Yes, she's gone off with that man Maurice Duclos—she's known him for years—long before you were married—in Italy.

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FRED: Are you mad, Jane?

JANE: No—I'm terribly sane.

FRED: You don't seriously expect me to believe that Julia would leave me suddenly without rhyme or reason?

JANE: She'd do anything! She hasn't a single scruple or a pang of conscience anywhere—she'd lie, slander, forge, thief, murder, anything! She's a thorough out-and-out bad lot—she's a—a——

QANE *bursts into violent tears.*

FRED: Pull yourself together, Jane, you're overwrought just because you've had a little row with Julia——

JANE: Go away—go away—leave me alone.

FRED: You know perfectly well you like her better than anyone else in the world, and always will.

JANE: Don't, Fred—stop!

FRED: I expect she's feeling just the same as you at this very moment.

JANE: Not she, she's far too busy.

FRED: Jane, do control yourself.

JANE (*making an effort*): I came here first—even before going home—because I wanted to make up the row. I've had a wretched night all by myself in an hotel in Bayswater.

FRED: Why on earth Bayswater?

JANE: Because the taxi man took me there. I'll tell you everything—it's awful. Julia and I were both drunk, and before we were married we both had an affair with the same man, and he's come to England, and we were terrified we'd fall in love with him again, and we worked

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ourselves up and waited for him, and Julia got grand after dinner, and ordered me out of the house, and I pretended I knew where he was and was going straight to him, and I went to the Granville Hotel, Bayswater.

FRED: Was he there?

JANE: Don't be such a fool; of course he wasn't.

FRED: Where is he then?

JANE: With Julia.

FRED: Impossible.

JANE: Nothing of the sort—here's his name in capitals on the telephone block, and Saunders saw them go out together.

FRED: You say you both knew him in Italy before you married?

JANE: Yes, Fred.

FRED: And you both——

JANE: Yes, Fred.

FRED: How dare you stand there and say "Yes, Fred"!

JANE: Well, it's true.

FRED: You appal me absolutely! Your dreadful matter-of-fact callousness.—" Yes, Fred." Oh, my God!

JANE: Don't be melodramatic.

FRED: Melodramatic! It's horrible—awful——

JANE: You were playing the love song he used to sing to us both when I came in—" Meme les Anges succombent a l'amour——"

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FRED: I suppose you feel proud of yourself, having led Julia into that blackguard's clutches!

JANE: Led her! Ha-ha—that's funny.

FRED: Yes, led her—deliberately. You've got a depraved mind.

JANE: You're insufferable and pompous, you like wallowing in a quagmire yourself and you think everybody else likes wallowing in a quagmire.

FRED: Don't be ridiculous. You ought to be humble and ashamed instead of truculent.

JANE: Humble and ashamed. Why? Do you expect me to believe you led a model life before marriage?

FRED: That's beside the point.

JANE: No it isn't. If you had, Julia would never have married you at all; you'd have been too dull!

FRED (*shocked*): Jane!

JANE: Yes, it's no use going on like that—it's just silly—the great thing is what are you going to do now?

FRED: Do! I'm going to find Julia.

JANE: That'll be nice.

FRED: And you're coming with me.

JANE: Oh, no, I'm not. I've seen quite enough of Julia to last me for a long time.

FRED (*/irrmly*): You're coming with me. (*He takes her arm.*)

JANE: Let go.

FRED: Come on.

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JANE: I can't go like this.

FRED: You'll have to.

JANE (*losing all control and bursting into hysterical tears*):
Let me go—how dare you pull me about. Fred, Fred, let
go at once——!

FRED: I'm quite determined.

JANE: Oh! help! help! help!——

[They struggle for a moment or two.

[Re-enter JULIA and WILLY.

JULIA: Fred!

WILLY: Jane! Where have you been?

JANE (*slowly—aghast*): It was *you* who went out with
Julia and not—not——

JULIA (*coldly*): Good morning, Jane.

JANE: Julia—Julia—I've done the most awful thing!

JULIA (*turning away*): I'm not at all surprised,

FRED (*to WILLY*): How did you get up here?

WILLY: I left by the early train.

JANE: Julia, you must listen—I haven't been where
you think—I've been all by myself at an hotel in Bayswater.

JULIA: What?

JANE: I came back here to make it up with you and
found Fred—and Saunders said you'd just gone out with
a dark man, and then I saw that! (*She shows her telephone
block.*)

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JULIA (*under her breath*): What are we to do now? (*Loudly.*) Jane, I think it only fair for you to know that I have told Willy everything.

JANE: Julia!

JULIA: Yes, everything.

JANE: I've told Fred a good deal, too.

JULIA: Jane!

FRED: I want to get this cleared up, please. Willy, what has Julia told you?

WILLY: About Jane and a snivelling Frenchmen in Venice.

JANE (*to JULIA*): Hypocrite!

WILLY: What's Jane told you?

FRED: About Julia and a Frenchman in Pisa.

JULIA (*to JANE*): I'll never look at you again as long as I live.

JANE (*hysterically*): It's not true, any of it—it's all a joke—we made it up between us—just to—just to——

FRED: She's lying. Julia, tell me the truth.

JULIA (*firmly*): Certainly I will—it's all a ridiculous fuss about nothing. Jane and I have been perfectly faithful to you both—always.

WILLY: Before marriage?

JANE: We couldn't be faithful to you before we met you, could we?

FRED (*loudly*): Is this Frenchman story true?

JULIA: Jane—Jane—I'm sorry, d'you hear? I'm sorry for everything. We've got to stand together now; they're going to be perfectly beastly.

FALLEN ANGELS

JANE: All right. Willy, listen to me, I——

JULIA: Fred, you must listen——

[SAUNDERS *enters*.

SAUNDERS (*announcing*): Mr. Maurice Duclos.

[*There is a dead silence. Enter MAURICE, beautifully dressed, most attractive, and exceedingly amiable.*

[SAUNDERS *goes out*.

MAURICE (*kissing JULIA'S hand*): Julia! Aprcs sept ans—c'est emotionant!

JULIA (*snatching her hand away*): Oh !

MAURICE (*kissing JANE'S hand*): Jane! Je suis enchante—ravi—Ma chere, Jane!

JANE (*helplessly*): Julia!

JULIA (*beginning to laugh*): This is agony! Sheer agony——!

JANE (*with an effort*): Willy, let me present Monsieur Duclos—my husband.

WILLY (*coldly*): Good morning.

MAURICE (*puzzled*): How do you do.

JULIA (*hysterically*): My husband—Maurice, this is *my* husband.

MAURICE (*shaking FRED'S hand warmly*): How do you do. I had no idea—I haven't seen Julia for so long——

WILLY (*sharply*): When did you last see Jane?

MAURICE: I beg your pardon?

JANE: Shut up, Willy!

FALLEN ANGELS

JULIA: You speak English very well now.

MAURICE: Yes.—Seven years.—It seems like yesterday.

[There is an awful silence.]

JANE (*conversationally*): Do you think we've changed?

MAURICE: Not at all. (*To WILLY.*) I met your wife abroad, years ago. It is so strange renewing old friendships.

WILLY: Damned strange.

JANE: Willy!

[MAURICE raises his eyebrows slightly and looks at JULIA, who makes a meaning grimace at him.]

MAURICE (*to FRED*): My first day in London—and look at it—it's too bad.

FRED: I should like to have a little chat with you sometime, Monsieur Duclos—there are several things I want explained.

MAURICE: I shall be charmed.

[There is another awful silence.]

WILLY: I can't stand this any longer! (*To MAURICE.*) Look here, you've arrived at a very opportune moment. We've just discovered——

MAURICE: What have you discovered? (*He gives a quick glance at JULIA and JANE, who look appealingly at him. JANE grimaces wildly.*)

JULIA: I'll explain. Maurice, our husbands have found out that you and Jane and I were very intimate friends in Italy seven years ago. They've just found out this moment. I must apologise for their surly behaviour, but they're naturally upset.

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MAURICE (*laughing*): *Mon Dieu !* It's succeeded beyond your wildest dreams, hasn't it?

WILLY: What do you mean?

QANE and JULIA look at him blankly.

MAURICE (*to JULIA, still laughing*): It was cruel of you to ask me here this morning—without warning me—cruel of you. It would serve you right if I gave you away.

FRED: You needn't trouble, they've done that for themselves.

MAURICE (*to JANE*): Please, please, let me tell them the truth now—it places me in such an embarrassing position.

JULIA (*eagerly*): Yes, yes—you'd better—tell them the truth——

JANE (*mystified*): I'm going mad!

JULIA: Be quiet, Jane.

WILLY: I'm afraid we know the truth; there's nothing much more to be said.

MAURICE: Do you love your wife, monsieur?

WILLY: Mind your own business.

FRED: What do you mean? What are you getting at?

MAURICE (*to JULIA*): I have your permission to speak?

JULIA: Yes—yes——

MAURICE: Well, I am afraid it has all been rather what you would call a " Put-up job "!

WILLY: Put-up job?

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MAURICE: Yes, you see I haven't known Jane and Julia for a very long while—we are great friends—they confide in me.

FRED: The hell they do!

MAURICE: You would make it much easier, monsieur, if you were not so angry. I give you my word there is nothing to be angry about.

WILLY: I'm glad you think so—we have rather a different sense of values in England.

MAURICE: An obvious remark, monsieur, and not very much to the point.

FRED: What is the point?

MAURICE: Has not the suspicion ever crossed your minds that here in England husbands take their wives a little too much for granted sometimes?

WILLY: So they ought to.

MAURICE: It is a little dull for the wives. In France, of course, it is all arranged so differently—there are so many diversions.

FRED: What are you trying to say?

MAURICE: Perhaps Jane and Julia require a bit more attention than you are prepared to give?

WILLY: Rubbish!

JANE: It isn't rubbish, is it, Julia?

JULIA: Certainly not.

MAURICE: You've been married now for how long?

[JULIA *holds up five fingers behind FRED'S back—unperceived.*

Five years, is it not?

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FRED: What I want to know is, whether this revolting story's true. Is it or isn't it?

MAURICE: Of course it isn't. We made a plan, Julia, Jane and I——

WILLY: Damned impertinence.

MAURICE (*ignoring him*): Five years brings one to rather a critical matrimonial period as a rule. The first Romance is over—everything seems slightly "gauche." Our plan was to rouse you up to a sense of your responsibilities—don't you see?

FRED: That was extremely kind of you.

JULIA: Fred darling, don't be cross any more—it's all such absurd nonsense.

WILLY: I don't understand at all.

JULIA: We've muddled it so dreadfully—or at least you did by coming home unexpectedly—it's taken all the wind out of our sails. Jane was going to break it to Fred that *I'd* run off with Maurice, and I was going to break it to Willy that *she'd* run off with Maurice—as it was you appeared much too early, before we were properly rehearsed. It's all so supremely ridiculous—please forgive us.

FRED (*to MAURICE*): How long have you been in London?

MAURICE: Three weeks.

FRED: Was this what you were hinting at when you said yesterday morning that you had a presentiment, and that I didn't love you any more?

JANE (*laughing loudly*): Yes, don't you see? She was paving the way; that's what she was doing!

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JULIA: Shhhh, Jane!

JANE (*hysterically*): I won't shhh—it's so stupid, but we were right, it's cleared the air—they were much too sure of us—much, much, much, much, much too—
Oh dear——

JULIA: Would you like something to drink, Maurice?
Fred is still too flurried to be hospitable,

FRED: I'm sorry—it never struck me! Whiskey and soda?

MAURICE: No, thank you—I really only came down for a minute. I have the flat exactly above this one for a year.

JANE: Oh dear! Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha———(*She sinks hysterically into a chair,*)

MAURICE: And Julia and Jane promised to help me choose an attractive cretonne for my curtains.

JULIA: Yes, we did, didn't we? Pull yourself together, Jane.

MAURICE (*to WILLY*): Perhaps you'd all come up—it's rather untidy at present—but you won't mind?

WILLY: No, thanks, I've got to change.

MAURICE: They're sending for the patterns back at twelve o'clock.

JULIA: We'll come up now.

FRED: Look here, Julia, I——

JULIA: Would you rather I didn't, Fred?

FRED: No, no—it's all right. (*To MAURICE.*) I must apologise to you for being so boorish. It was all very puzzling.

FALLEN ANGELS

JULIA : Come on, Jane.

JANE (*still giggling weakly*): Oh dear! oh dear!——

MAURICE: Will you all lunch with me to-day? It is so dull being alone.

WILLY: Thanks, but I think I——

FRED: Yes—it's very nice of you—we'd be delighted.

WILLY: Look here, I——

FRED: Shut up, Willy.

JULIA (*kissing FRED*): You are a darling. Come along, Maurice—we shan't be more than ten minutes, Fred.

JANE: Don't be cross, Willy.

WILLY: I don't quite see why——

JANE: Don't try to see any more——

WILLY: But——

JANE: No more buts——

WILLY: But *why* are you in evening dress?

JANE (*wildly*): That was part of the plan, dear—you were to discover me dead drunk in the downstairs hall—we were going to rehearse this morning——

[*Exit with MAURICE and JULIA.*]

FRED- (*beginning to laugh*): It's damned funny—it really is——

WILLY: What?

FRED: The way we arrived and wrecked their little game.

WILLY: But look here, Fred——

FALLEN ANGELS

FRED: Have a drink?

WILLY: All right.

FRED (*giving him drink*): You never know what Jane and Julia will do next when they start discussing things analytically.

WILLY: It isn't what they'll do next—it's what they did last! Thanks.

FRED: I don't think he's a bad chap, that Frenchman——

WILLY: I wouldn't trust him an inch.

FRED (*laughing*): The lies they told!

WILLY: You seem to have completely wiped it from your mind seriously—the whole thing——

FRED: I never believed Jane from the first when she told me that lurid story about Italy.

WILLY: It seems very queer to me still.

FRED: Oh, dry up!

WILLY: But it does—even if they'd got away with their scheme—what good would it have done them?

FRED: Made us jealous.

WILLY: Don't be an abject fool, Fred. He was bluffing us—the whole damned thing's true from beginning to end—I'm sure of it.

FRED: Why?

WILLY: I've never seen Jane hysterical like that before—she must have been upset over something——

FRED: Are you serious?

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WILLY : Yes, I am. Do you realise that we've let them both go up to his flat—alone?

FRED (*startled*): Willy—I——

[His speech is cut short by the sound of music above. They both listen. MAURICE'S voice can be plainly heard singing the last phrase of " Méme les Anges" He is singing it with great feeling—" ye t'aime—je t'aime—je t'aime" FRED and WILLY gaze at one another with stricken faces.

CURTAIN.

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