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**In** this play, Mr. Ervine, treats a contemporary social and political theme which affects the life of everybody. Essentially, the theme is the relation of the community to the individual, but it is expressed in terms of the "closed shop" in industry. Peter Logan has religious scruples against joining a trade union. His employers, whom he has served faithfully throughout his working life, refuse to dismiss him. A strike is followed by the virtual confiscation of their property. The theme behind the play is: has a majority the right to disregard a minority merely because it is a minority? Are a hundred thousand people a hundred thousand times more in the right than one person? And can a nation thrive if the individual is forbidden to make adventures and to follow his own light?

*by the same author*

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ST. JOHN ERVINE

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PRIVATE  
ENTERPRISE

*a play*

*in three acts*

LONDON

GEORGE ALLEN & UNWIN LTD

FIRST PUBLISHED IN 1948

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LEICESTER

**TO**  
**JAMES ALEXANDER BROWN**

*Member of the Northern Ireland Bar  
who served in the 1st Battalion of the  
Royal Ulster Rifles from 1939 to 1945*

PRIVATE ENTERPRISE was performed for the first time at St. James's Theatre, London, on Tuesday, November 25th, 1947. It was produced by Basil Dean with the following cast:

EDMUND DELAWARE, Nicholas Hannen  
ALICE EDDINGTON, Elizabeth Gray  
MELANIE, Elizabeth Allan  
ELSIE, a maid, Ella Atkinson  
REV. GEORGE FENNELL, M.A., Charles Lloyd Pack  
PHILIP DELAWARE, Andre Morell  
ANDREW DELAWARE, **Hector** ROSS  
DENZIL ("SNOOKY") DELAWARE, William Fox  
AMABEL ALDERNEY-EVANS, Eileen Peel  
ARTHUR SELBY, Julien Mitchell  
BERT SNODDY, Russell Waters  
PETER LOGAN, Meadows White  
GORDON TALBOT, Nigel Neilson

## CHARACTERS

*in order of their appearance*

EDMUND DELAWARE, a manufacturer

ALICE EDDINGTON, his widowed daughter

MELANIE, Philip's wife

ELSIE, a maid

REV. GEORGE FENNELL, M.A., Vicar of Altonbury

PHILIP DELAWARE, Edmund's eldest son

ANDREW DELAWARE, Edmund's second son

AMABEL ALDERNEY-EVANS

DENZIL ("Snooky") DELAWARE, Edmund's youngest son

**ARTHUR SELBY** }

ARTHUR SELBY Trade Unionists

BERT SNODDY

PETER LOGAN, a workman

GORDON TALBOT, a factory director

The time is the present and the immediate future.

The place is the manufacturing town of Altonbury.

The action throughout the play is laid  
in Edmund Delaware's drawing-room

### ACT I

SCENE 1: An evening

SCENE 2: Several days later

### ACT II

SCENE 1: Six months later

SCENE 2: Several weeks later

### ACT III

SCENE 1: A few days later

SCENE 2 : Three weeks later

# PRIVATE ENTERPRISE

## ACT I

### SCENE I

EDMUND DELAWARE, whose age is seventy-two, is reading *The Times* in his drawing-room in a provincial town where he owns a factory which has been in his family's possession for three generations. The hour is soon after nine o'clock in the evening. The room is comfortably furnished in a style which may be called good, but unnotable ; in conventionally good taste, DELAWARE has a fine appearance. His looks are not in the least like those of the business men imagined by cartoonists in *Left Wing* newspapers or the editors of *Big Business* magazines. He is a handsome, well-bred man., with a flexible face which has laughter lurking in every crease. His humour is slightly cynical, but is not unkindly. There are no snarls in it. It does not irresponsibly wound. A person, unaware of his history,, might suppose him to be a solicitor in an old family practice, or an intelligent doctor, or a liberal-minded clergyman, but would not think of him as the owner of a factory where component parts for motor-cars are made. This is an educated business man, a graduate of Oxford University, who had once had ideas of a far different career : diplomacy ; but had, soon after coming down from Corpus Christi, found himself fascinated by the factory his grandfather had founded, and had joined his father in managing it. The fineness of his features does not denote any weakness in his character. He has strength and decision, and is swift and shrewd in his judgments, far swifter and shrewder than his father was, and as sure and determined as his grandfather. More generous and less rough than that old gentleman, who lifted himself out of a labourer's cottage into this very house

*where EDMUND DELAWARE now sits, he is not less strong. He no longer devotes himself as closely to his factory as he formerly did : but this slackening of effort is not due to failing powers ; he wishes his eldest son, PHILIP, to take greater responsibility for the business while his father is still active and fit to give him any guidance he may need.*

*A clock strikes the first quarter, and immediately after its sound has ceased, the door opens, and DELAWARE'S only daughter, ALICE, enters. Her age is thirty-three. She is a widow, her husband having been killed early in the war, leaving her childless. ALICE EDDINGTON has inherited her father's judgment, but not his good looks. Her husband's death made her bleed internally. She keeps her grief to herself, however. It is not inflicted even on her father, although he is well aware of it. Hers was a short marriage, a few weeks in duration, and it did not take her from her home, which she keeps for her father and brother. This woman has a delusive air of calm. She is sensitive and emotional, but she has schooled herself to seem calm to other people. When she is caught suddenly by demanding events, she shows her emotions, but shows them only for a moment or two.*

ALICE. Did you listen to the News, Father ?

DELAWARE (*abstractedly*). What did you say, my dear ?

ALICE. Did you listen to the News ?

DELAWARE. Oh, no, I forgot. How stupid of me. I'm getting very forgetful. The fact is I was absorbed in an article on toads.

ALICE. Toads ?

DELAWARE. Yes. A toad's life is an odd one. It has four months of activity, two months of love, and six months of lethargy. The proportions seem all wrong to me. Too much lethargy and not enough love. The News is over, I suppose ?

ALICE (*switching on the wireless*). We may hear the end of it. Sometimes they repeat the headlines.

DELAWARE. I'm sick of news. All this history we're making is very fatiguing. The papers are almost unreadable.

ALICE. And dull.

DELAWARE. Yes, very dull. What I want is the news that's unfit to print—something very scandalous about archbishops in the Athenaeum! . . .

*The wireless comes on*

ANNOUNCER. That is the end of the News.

ALICE (*switching the wireless off*). Too late. Because we haven't listened, there's sure to be something exciting. You're a very tiresome old man. (*She kisses the top of his head*).

DELAWARE. Yes, I know, my dear. I ought to be laid up in flannel. Still, we'll see it all in the morning, and much more of it, worse luck. Where's everybody? I haven't seen a soul since supper. Is Philip in?

ALICE. Not yet.

DELAWARE. He's later than usual tonight.

ALICE. Yes. He's meeting Andrew.

DELAWARE. Of course. Has Melanie gone with him?

ALICE. No, she's upstairs. She spends a lot of time in her room.

DELAWARE. Well, if you're as ornamental as she is, you have to.

ALICE. Father, you must speak to Philip. He's working far too hard. If he doesn't ease off, he'll collapse.

DELAWARE. Old Logan's our chiefheadache at the moment.

ALICE. What! Peter?

DELAWARE. Yes. He has some religious quirk about unions. I don't pretend to understand it, but he's convinced himself that unions are unscriptural and he would be breaking God's law if he were to join one. That's one of the reasons why Philip looks harassed and haggard. Isn't Melanie the person to talk to him?

ALICE. She doesn't notice such things. She has to tittivate.

DELAWARE. Now, now, no pussy talk, Alice.

ALICE. Very well, father. Though I do think she's an odd girl for Philip to marry.

DELAWARE. I like her myself. She's gaudy. The only

gaudy thing we know in these dull times. But then, I'm an old rip really ! . . .

ALICE (*laughing*). Oh, daddy !

DELAWARE. Oh, yes, I am. I once went for fun to consult a psycho-analyst and I've never been able to look myself in the face since. The things I've been thinking since I was two months old!

ALICE. But Philip's such a sobersides !

DELAWARE. Exotics have a disturbing effect on sober people. Melanie's a stylish woman. She has nearly all the style there is in the town. My eyes glisten when I see her—something lovely left over from the world we've lost . . .

ALICE. She doesn't do anything, father.

DELAWARE. She exists. That's enough. My dear, we're all starving for light and colour. Our eyes are sore with seeing dull sights, dull food, dull shops, dull streets and dreadfully dull women in dull clothes.

ALICE. Well, you must speak to Philip, father.

DELAWARE. Very well, my dear, though it's hard on an old man to have to tell a fully adult son the facts of life.

ALICE. The reason you find it hard is that you were worse than Philip. Like father, like son.

DELAWARE (*a little bitterly*). Not always, Alice.

ALICE. No, not always. I often wonder what's become of Snooky.

DELAWARE. So do I. Poor Snooky.

ALICE. Yes, poor Snooky. Such a bad hat!

DELAWARE. But why? Why, in the name of God? We're decent people, Alice. But Snooky! . . . (*He cannot finish his sentence*).

ALICE (*putting her hand on his shoulder*). I know. Bad, bad hat. But very likeable.

DELAWARE. Yes, very likeable. Once, when he was a little boy and had done something rather nasty, I took him upstairs to beat him, and when I lifted the cane he looked at me with that queer, crumpled smile he had . . . and I couldn't touch him. I just stopped myself from giving him five bob.

ALICE. Yes, he had that effect on me, too. But he had his good points, daddy, and even when he was most maddening, I still loved him. I wish we knew where he is. I'd give anything to have him home again.

DELAWARE. What a rum family we are! Philip, so sure and steady; Snooky, so uncertain and . . . vicious, really!

ALICE. No, not vicious, father. Very annoying, but not vicious.

DELAWARE. Well, not far from it. And then Andrew—full of quirks and principles. Compared with him, Stafford Cripps is positively loose!

ALICE. What about me?

DELAWARE. You—just a darling! I'm very glad you're my daughter. If you'd been any other man's, I should have had to steal you. What a remarkable person I must be, to have fathered four such dissimilar children. Or was it your mother who was remarkable?

ALICE. I expect it was mother. Men always claim the credit for their children, and give all the blame to their wives. My children, when you're proud of them. *Your* children, when you're not.

DELAWARE. Well, that's a fair division of labour!

*The door opens, and MELANIE DELAWARE enters: a woman in full possession of herself. She is thirty-three and, without being beautiful, she contrives to look it. As Delaware says, she has style. There is nothing obtrusive about MELANIE. She behaves as if her right to a prominent place in the sun were not only unquestionable, but unquestioned. It does not occur to MELANIE that anybody could dream of denying her anything. Despite rationing and shortage, she not only looks, but is well dressed.*

DELAWARE. Ah, Melanie, my dear.

MELANIE. Hasn't Philip come home yet?

DELAWARE (*rising from his seat*). No. Sit here, my dear. (*She takes his seat*). Would you like to see *The Times*?

MELANIE. No, thank you.

DELAWARE. Well, perhaps you're right. (*Looking round*

*jar a seat*). Philip's gone to meet Andrew. (ALICE *pushes a chair towards him*). Thank you, Alice. (*Seats himself*). They'll be here at any moment. What have you been doing since supper ?

MELANIE. Oh, things. I must get some new stockings. Have you any coupons to spare, Alice ?

ALICE. Nobody has any coupons to spare.

*The telephone bell rings.*

DELAWARE. If that's someone for me, tell him I passed away very peacefully this afternoon. (*To MELANIE*) I don't know whether I have any coupons that would be useful to you, Melanie! . . .

ALICE (*at the telephone*). Hello! Yes, this is Mr. Delaware's house. No, I'm Mrs. Eddington, his daughter. Can I take a message? Very well, just a moment, please. (*She covers the mouthpiece with her hand*). It's the *Daily Express*, father. It wants to speak to you.

DELAWARE. But I don't want to speak to it.

ALICE (*holding the receiver to him*). They say it's important.

DELAWARE. Yes, I know. Ought girls to wear trousers on Good Friday ?

*The door opens, and ELSIE, a girl about sixteen, enters.*

ELSIE. A man from a paper wants to see you, sir, and the Vicar's come.

DELAWARE (*bewildered and exasperated*). What is all this ?

ALICE. You answer the telephone. I'll see them.

*She goes out, followed by ELSIE. DELAWARE speaks to the Daily Express.*

DELAWARE. Hello ! Yes, I'm Mr. Delaware. What news ? (*He stiffens as he listens*). Yes, I have a son of that name. (*Then his voice quickens*). What did you say ? (*His expression changes from one of apprehension to one of mingled joy and incredulity*). Are you sure ? No, I didn't listen to the News tonight. I forgot about it. Oh, thank you, thank you ! No, no, I haven't anything to say. I can scarcely speak. Yes. Yes, yes, yes. No, no, please not tonight. I'm too overcome. Yes. Yes. You can say I'm pleased and . . . proud. Thank

you. You're very kind. (*He puts down the receiver*). My God! Oh, my God!

*He picks up The Times which has fallen on the floor, and then, dropping it again, almost reels towards the door.*

MELANIE. What is it? What's wrong?

DELAWARE (*disregarding her*). Alice! . . . Alice! . . .

*The door opens and Alice, intensely excited, enters.*

DELAWARE. Alice, Snooky! . . .

*He is about to fall when she catches him.*

ALICE. I know, father, I've just heard.

*She holds him in her arms, sustaining him. The Rev. George Fennell, a man about Delaware's age, enters. He, too, is excited.*

FENNELL (*both hands extended*'). My dear old friend, what glorious news!

DELAWARE (*recovering himself*). I feel shattered, George. I only heard about it a moment ago. A newspaperman rang me up! . . .

FENNELL. But didn't you listen to the nine-o'clock news?

DELAWARE. No, I was reading *The Times* and I forgot about news.

FENNELL. Oh, how wonderful, how wonderful. (*Catching sight of Melanie*). Oh, good-evening!

MELANIE. What has happened?

DELAWARE. Melanie doesn't know yet.

ALICE. Snooky's won the V.C.

MELANIE. The V.C.!

FENNELL. Isn't it splendid? I always knew he'd make good. (*To DELAWARE*). Did they tell you what he did?

DELAWARE. I was too dazed to grasp it! . . .

FENNELL. I would not have believed that any human being could be so brave.

ALICE. Snooky never felt any fear.

FENNELL. But, my dear Alice, this is unimaginable valour. It's a miracle he's alive. As I listened to what he'd done, I felt overwhelmed with wonder and pride, You've never met Denzil, Melanie?

MELANIE. No. Is he coming here ?

ALICE. We don't know where he is.

FENNELL. That newspaperman who came in with me was as moved as I was. And no wonder. *And no wonder !*

MELANIE. I hope he will come home. I should like to meet Denzil.

DELAWARE. What did he do, George ?

FENNELL. What did he not do ? He went out by himself, with plenty of time to feel frightened, and cleared a lot of Boche out of a place that seemed impregnable. Walked right up to death and took no notice of it. What a noble thing it is to treat death with disdain.

DELAWARE. Snooky was always a fearless lad. Too fearless. I used to wish he could feel frightened.

FENNELL. His courage saved a lot of lives. Not one man was wounded where many might have been killed. This is the sort of act that redeems us all. I don't mind telling you, Edmund, there have been times when I've despaired of people and felt inclined to pray, Oh, God, wipe us all out. We're not fit to live. But one deed like Denzil's redeems a lot.

ALICE. Did they say on the wireless where he is ?

FENNELL. No. You'll have the whole town here tomorrow. We must give him a public reception when he comes home. How proud his mother would have been. I wish she'd lived to hear this news.

DELAWARE. So do I. The last news she had of him wasn't . . . nice.

FENNELL. Forget that, Edmund. Forget all that. Think only of this. Did you know he was in the Army ?

DELAWARE. No.

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ALICE. We haven't heard of him since that time . . . just before mother died.

DELAWARE. Eight years.

FENNELL. And now this ! It is still true that God moves in a mysterious way, His wonders to perform.

DELAWARE. I sometimes wish that He were less mysterious, that He would remember His first commandment.

ALICE. What's that, father ?

DELAWARE. Let there be Light!

MELANIE. Why don't you try to find out where he is ?  
Can't you ring up someone ?

FENNELL. We might try the War Office.

DELAWARE. At this hour ?

FENNELL. There's always somebody about. Those War Office people do a lot of work, even in wartime.

*Alice is busy with the London Telephone Directory.*

ALICE. War Office! War Office! War Department. Oh, it's got pages of numbers.

FENNELL. Try the first one.

*Philip Delaware enters while they are talking. He is about thirty-eight and full of purpose, like his father, but without his father's slightly cynical humour. He has enough humour, however, to save him from priggery, but not enough to save him from suffering and strain. He looks very tired. He kisses Melanie.*

ALICE (*glancing up from the Telephone Directory*). Oh, Philip, Snooky's won the V.C.!

*The news shakes the fatigue out of Philip.*

PHILIP. What ? What did you say ?

ALICE. It was on the wireless tonight.

FENNELL. A superb act of courage, Philip.

PHILIP. Is he alive ?

DELAWARE. Yes, he's alive.

PHILIP. When did he win it ?

FENNELL. Some time ago, but there was delay in awarding it because some of the witnesses went to Burma.

PHILIP. Where is he ? Is he here ?

ALICE. We don't know. I'm just going to ring up the War Office.

PHILIP. Give me that book. (*He takes the Directory from her*). My God, what a wonderful thing to have happened! Our Snooky! . . . I came home tonight feeling all in. Andrew's train was late, and it was wet and cold in that station.

But now, I could kick the stars out of heaven. (*He turns the pages of the Directory as he speaks*).

ALICE. Where is Andrew ?

PHILIP. War Dept., War Dept.!... Upstairs. Unpacking. General Switchboard. That ought to do.

ALICE. I'll go up and tell him about Snooky. (*Exit*).

PHILIP (*at the telephone*). Trunks, please.

MELANIE. I wonder how Andrew will take this ?

DELAWARE. Like the rest of us.

FENNELL. With pride.

DELAWARE. Of course he will.

MELANIE. Snooky is very handsome, isn't he ?

FENNELL. Yes, remarkably.

MELANIE. And audacious ?

DELAWARE. Very audacious!

PHILIP. This is Altonbury 185. Yes. I want London, Whitehall 9400—the War Office. Yes, please, and as soon as you can. (*He puts down the receiver*). They'll ring up when they get through. What were you saying about Andrew ?

DELAWARE. Melanie was wondering how Andrew would take it, and I said like the rest of us. We're a funny family, George, but we're affectionate.

FENNELL. Don't I know it.

DELAWARE. I've never known a family so divided, and yet so closely united, as this one. Hit one of us, and you hit us all. I suppose Snooky has hurt us more than anyone would believe. There have been times, Melanie, when I've come near to hating him! . . .

PHILIP. Not hating, father.

DELAWARE. Yes, Philip, *hating*. But affection survived.

MELANIE. Everything I have heard of him makes me think he must be very fascinating.

FENNELL. He is, very.

PHILIP. Everybody likes Snooky, in spite of his faults.

DELAWARE. Sometimes, George, I'm not sure that people can help their faults. We behave as if we can. But can we ?

**FENNELL.** We should be slaves if we couldn't.

DELAWARE. Perhaps we ate. That's why I try not to blame anybody for anything, but I'm less tolerant than I should like to be. No one falls down on his faith as often as I do.

FENNELL. We can choose, Edmund, therefore we are free.

DELAWARE. What choice has anybody? I wasn't asked if I'd like to live. I had life thrust upon me. That's a liberty to take with a man—give him life without his leave. If Denzil had been allowed decision in his own life, do you think he would have chosen to be Denzil? Would anybody choose to be what he is?

PHILIP. The biologists have an explanation of it, father. They say that each of us is the result of a slight disarrangement of chromosomes! One arrangement produces Christ. Another produces Crippen. I don't care about that explanation. It makes life an accident. If we were as chance-born as that, we should be mindless, but we're not. We can wish to be better. Mindless slaves couldn't desire improvement.

FENNELL. Or bring it about, Philip. I hate your belief, Edmund. I hate the thought that I'm irresponsible, the result of a whim, tossed into this world without any kindness for me! . . .

DELAWARE. I hate it myself. But hating a thing doesn't abolish it.

*ANDREW enters. His age is thirty-four. He is a nervous, almost solemn, man, whose face kindles amazingly when he smiles. This is a fanatic, but a gentle fanatic, although he is none the less determined for that.*

FENNELL. Ah, Andrew.

DELAWARE. Hullo, Andrew, you've heard about Denzil?

ANDREW. Yes, Alice told me. It's the sort of thing I'd expect him to do. Good evening, Melanie.

MELANIE. Evening, Andrew. Your brother must be a very brave man. I like brave men.

PHILIP. So do I. But there are all sorts of bravery.

ANDREW. Melanie doesn't like conscientious objectors.

MELANIE. I like men who fight.

*ALICE enters and sits down.*

DELAWARE. What did your people in London want ?

ANDREW. They want me to go back to China.

FENNELL. But you've just been there.

ANDREW. That's why they want me to go back. I know the country. It's in an appalling plight, father. If we can put China right, the rest of the world will be easy.

FENNELL. Andrew's a refutation of your doubt, Edmund. He's made a choice—not one I care about myself—but a hard choice for anybody to make. Your father thinks we've no free will, Andrew : we're all slaves.

ANDREW. But slaves sometimes escape.

ALICE. What would happen to people if your fear were true, father ?

PHILIP. We should vanish.

DELAWARE. Would that matter ?

ALICE. Oh yes, father, yes. Think of what Snooky was, and what he has done now.

FENNELL. Of course it would matter. Imagine this world without hope or aspiration.

ALICE. Dreadful! *Dreadful I* A piece of waste tissue in a pointless universe.

ANDREW. There isn't any living thing that doesn't hope and aspire.

PHILIP. And we all want to live. How can we want life if it is empty and pointless ? What do you think, Melanie ?

MELANIE. Me ? I don't think. I enjoy what there is to enjoy. If it isn't much, I enjoy all there is.

DELAWARE. Sensible girl.

ANDREW. I sympathise with those who aspire to something better than themselves. I like to think of Caliban lifting up his eyes to Miranda—that muddied vesture aspiring to purity and loveliness. And I'm full of pride that he had the wish to climb out of his swamp and desire beauty.

DELAWARE, How dare a beast lay hands on beauty !

ANDREW. Because he needs beauty, father.

*The telephone bell rings.*

PHILIP. This'U be the War Office. (*Taking the call*).

Hello! What? Who? Oh, Snooky! (*The others spring up when they hear this*). Where are you, Snooky? Oh, come home, come home. Yes, we're all here, waiting for you. Here's father! . . .

*He thrusts the receiver into his father's hands. Delaware, suddenly trembling, takes it and lifts it to his ear.*

DELAWARE. Is that you, Snooky? Oh, my dear boy, my dear boy! . . .

*The receiver falls out of his hand, and he turns away in tears. Alice takes it up.*

ALICE. It's Alice speaking, Snooky. Daddy's upset. I'm crying too, darling. Oh, come home, Snooky, come home. We *all* want you home! . . .

*The scene closes.*

## ACT I

### SCENE II

*It is the afternoon, several days later. ELSIE opens the door of the drawing-room and ushers in AMABEL ALDERNEY-EVANS, a sentimental-looking woman of thirty-three who has a surprising streak of hardness in her when she fears that a demand for service that will cause her discomfort is about to be made. Amabel likes her comforts, creature and intellectual, and is convinced that any person who disturbs her is wicked. She dissolves into tears very easily, but the tears are as easily dried.*

ELSIE. I'll tell Mrs. Eddington you're here, miss.

AMABEL. Thank you, Elsie. Is Mr. Denzil about ?

ELSIE. I don't hardly know, miss. I haven't hardly known anything since he came home. I seem to go about in a kind of a daze.

AMABEL. It must be thrilling to have a hero in the house.

ELSIE. Oh, it is, miss. Too thrilling. I broke three plates this morning thinking about it. You see, miss, I've never been in a house with a hero before. There's only dad at home. It's just like being in the pictures, miss, except that it's true. He's ever so nice, too. Friendly.

AMABEL. All heroes are friendly.

ELSIE. So are lots of people that aren't heroes. Meets you once, and behaves like they knew you all their life. And if you tell them to stop it, they say you've gone all county. I took his breakfast up to him this morning. You wouldn't think he'd won the V.C., if you saw him in his pyjamas.

AMABEL. Well, the war's over, thank heaven, and all our dear boys are home again.

ELSIE. Yes, and didn't some of them get a surprise when they came. My gran'dad was awfully upset when he heard it

was over. You see, miss, he had a grudge against the Germans over the last one. Getting on very nice he was, what with munitions and everything, and then they went and stopped it. And now they've stopped it again. That's twice the Germans have done it on Gran'dad, and it's made him lose his faith in everything.

DENZIL DELAWARE *enters. He is wearing battledress, with a captain's badges. His age is thirty, and he is handsomer even than his father, but pleasing in manner more than in looks. He can disarm an opponent by smiling at him—that sort of chap.*

DENZIL. Oh, sorry! I didn't know anyone was here ! . . . Why, it's Amabel!

*He goes over to greet her, and ELSIE, with a look of adoration on her face, goes out.*

AMABEL. Fancy you remembering me.

DENZIL. I couldn't forget you. Nobody could.

AMABEL. Flatterer. After all you've gone through, and all the glory you've won. You might easily forget a poor insignificant little person like me. I can scarcely believe it is all true. But I know him, I said when I heard the news, we were sweethearts when we were children ! . . .

DENZIL. So we were.

AMABEL. It seems incredible that anyone I knew could win the V.C.

DENZIL. Well, someone you know has won it.

AMABEL. Doesn't that show how wonderful life is ? *I do think everything is wonderful. Only last week, I said to myself—I was resting at the time—I'm not very strong, as you may remember—isn't it wonderful, I said ! . . .*

DENZIL. What ?

AMABEL. Oh, nothing in particular. Just everything. Isn't it wonderful, I said. It made me feel a better woman.

DENZIL. But did you need to ?

AMABEL. Now you're teasing me, Denzil, just as you used to when we were sweethearts. But I know I have faults. Who hasn't ? That's just what I always say. Who hasn't I

say. And why should I expect to be faultless when everybody has faults ? All the same, there's good in the worst and bad in the best, and when I heard the news about you winning the V.C., I said, Well, I said, doesn't that just prove it.

DENZIL. M'yes!

AMABEL. I was always on your side, Snooky. You don't mind my calling you Snooky, do you ?

DENZIL. Of course not.

AMABEL. No matter what anyone said against you, I stood up for you. He'll win out in the end, I said. And you have. Oh, I'm so proud of you, Snooky. You've justified my faith.

DENZIL. How nice of me.

AMABEL. I told Elsie I'd come in to speak to Alice, but I really ran in to catch a glimpse of you when you weren't surrounded by admirers . . . just us two, perhaps.

DENZIL. Well, how have you been all this long time ?

AMABEL. I've felt the strain of the war very deeply. I don't always show my feelings, but you must remember how sensitive I am. The least thing upsets me. I did what I could, of course. One has to do one's bit. "Who dies if England lives ?" That's always been my motto. I have a weak heart, though, and that's a great handicap.

DENZIL. Yes, I expect it is.

AMABEL. Doctor Barclay disapproved of my doing anything strenuous, and he gave me a certificate. He's such a nice man, Dr. Barclay. He'll give you a certificate for almost anything. But I did all I could. The moment war broke out, I said to myself, What can I do for England ? Dr. Barclay said the best thing I could do was nothing. Keep calm and cool. But that wasn't enough for me. Setting an example is all very well, but I wanted to do more than that, and I started the Canteen. How grateful the dear boys were when I served them with coffee. One of them told me that a cup of coffee from a woman's hand reconciled him to anything. He spent a lot of his time in the Canteen, eating doughnuts and reminding himself of the gentle things of life. I sometimes wonder where he is now.

DENZIL. In clink, I fancy.

AMABEL. Clink ?

DENZIL. Yes, one of those places we liberated. He must miss the doughnuts.

AMABEL. Ah, me, what a lot has happened since we were children.

DENZIL. A lot has happened since anybody's childhood.

AMABEL. But we were very happy then. I was so fond of you, Denzil, though you *were* naughty.

DENZIL. Was I? I don't remember. Anyhow, I hope you're still fond of me.

AMABEL. Well, of course, we're older now, aren't we? I mean to say, we aren't children any longer. Isn't that a pity?

DENZIL. No, I don't think so. I hated my childhood.

AMABEL. Oh, but Denzil, it's so beautiful. Heaven lies about us in our childhood. Who was it said that?

DENZIL. A damned fool. I didn't enjoy mine. It's an over-rated period of life, much admired by old men and older women.

AMABEL. You're just the same as ever—different.

DENZIL. This girl, Melanie! . . .

AMABEL (*with a drop in temperature*). Oh, yes.

DENZIL. How did old Philip pick her up?

AMABEL. Oh, I don't think he picked her up. It's only Americans who pick people up.

DENZIL. Americans don't pick. They're picked. Where did Philip meet her?

AMABEL. Oh, in the war. You know the way people did meet. War's frightfully promiscuous, I think.

DENZIL. Was she in the Forces?

AMABEL. Oh, no. Melanie would never go into Forces.

DENZIL. I suppose she got a certificate too?

AMABEL. No, she went into a Government office with a V.I.P. or something. That's how Philip met her, I think. He was doing some work for the Government.

DENZIL. She's a smart girl.

AMABEL. M'yes.

DENZIL. You don't like her ?

AMABEL. Oh, I do, I do. I admire her very much. Only—well, ought one to look so smart when England's in such trouble ?

DENZIL. That's the time to look your smartest. Most Englishwomen manage to look damned dowdy even when England isn't in trouble, I'm all for style. It does a soldier good to come out of the Line and see smart women !

AMABEL. I do hope I shall see a lot of you, Snooky !

DENZIL. Oh, you will!

AMABEL. But I mean—well, not in a crowd, but as we used to meet when we were children—and sweethearts.

ALICE *enters.*

ALICE. I'm so sorry, Amabel!

AMABEL. Don't apologise. I've enjoyed my little talk with Snooky. We had so much to say ! . . .

ALICE. Oh, Snooky, the Clerk of the Council has telephoned. The Mayor and he are coming to consult you.

DENZIL. Consult me. What about ?

ALICE. A public reception ! . . .

DENZIL. Oh, God, must I have one ?

ALICE. You don't have to have anything. But it'll be disappointing to people if you don't.

AMABEL. Of course it will. They're pining to see you.

DENZIL. It was the last of me they pined to see when I was here before.

ALICE. Need you harp on that? It isn't anything to remember.

AMABEL. Forgive and forget. We were all wrong—even you, Snooky.

DENZIL (*with his attractive twisted smile*). Sorry, Alice, I'm not really a harper. What do I have to do ? Stand about and look noble ? Tell 'em I only did what anybody would have done?

ALICE. Yes, that's about all! When's the Investiture ?

DENZIL. A week today.

ALICE. We'd like the public reception here immediately after that.

AMABEL. You'll wear it, won't you ? The V.C. I mean.

DENZIL. This is going to be a frightful fuss.

AMABEL. All heroes are modest!

DENZIL. I'm not modest. I know I did a damned brave thing. That's what surprises me. I can't think how I came to do it! . . .

AMABEL. I said you were modest.

DENZIL. No, I'm not modest. I'm puzzled. I suppose I'm as brave as most people, and as frightened, but how did I come to be as brave as all that ? It was the daftest, damned thing to do. I must have been off my nut.

AMABEL. Oh, Denzil, everybody knows how calm and cool you were. The Vicar never stops talking about it. He tells everybody how deliberate you were.

DENZIL. Yes, he's mentioned that to me more than once. But he's wrong. I tell you if I had thought about it, I shouldn't have done it.

AMABEL. Nonsense, nonsense!

ALICE. You're serious, Snooky ?

DENZIL. Absolutely dead serious. I simply don't know how I came to do that incredibly courageous act. My God, I go cold and shivery when I think of it. How did I survive ? I wasn't even hit.

AMABEL. You were guided and protected.

DENZIL. Why weren't other men guided and protected? And if I was, why was I ? Why should a bad hat like me be guided and protected ? No, that's blind alley stuff, Amabel. Just sentimental gush. I *must* have been mad. And what a chap does when he's daft isn't courageous.

ALICE. It's what we call courage.

DENZIL. Yes, but is it ?

AMABEL. Indeed it is. When I think of it, my heart leaps with elation.

DENZIL. When I think of it my knees knock with fear.

AMABEL. I want to cry when I hear you talking like that.

It makes me feel that after all the world is worth while and that people are good. So much nobility and so much modesty. Forgive me for crying ! . . .

MELANIE *enters.*

DENZIL. Ah, Melanie!

MELANIE. Am I intruding ?

DENZIL. No, no, of course you aren't.

MELANIE. How are you, Amabel ?

AMABEL. I feel uplifted, Melanie. That's the only word I can use. Uplifted. You see, I've been crying. Of course, I feel things very deeply. I'm so sensitive. You're much tougher than I am. So are you, Alice. And then, of course, Melanie, I've known Denzil since we were children. He and I were sweethearts. Weren't we, Denzil ?

DENZIL. What ? Oh, yes, yes, of course we were. I mean, Melanie, I used to knock her about a bit.

AMABEL. You never hit me, Denzil, never. You were always sweet! . . . I must go home, Alice. I really came to see Denzil and I've been rewarded. I feel so moved that I want to go to my room ... and pray.

DENZIL. Why ?

AMABEL. Oh, Denzil! . . .

*She almost runs out of the room.*

ALICE. I must go and see her off. (*Exit.*)

DENZIL. She's a comic.

MELANIE. She's very sentimental.

DENZIL. Yes, dripping with slop. She was always a mushy piece. Cries very easily. But knows how to take care of herself. These weepers always do. I shouldn't say you cried much, Melanie.

MELANIE. No, I'm not a weeper. But I also know how to take care of myself.

DENZIL. Do you ?

MELANIE. Yes. All women should know how to take care of themselves. But no man should. Security for women; danger for men.

DENZIL. The women get the best of it, don't they ?

MELANIE. It's a man's privilege to give women the best of it.

ALICE *re-enters*.

DENZIL. Got rid of her ?

ALICE. Yes, she almost fell down the steps in her excitement.

DENZIL. Did she do much work in the war ?

MELANIE. You'd think she'd won it from the way she talks!

ALICE. She served coffee to the troops and played bridge for the Red Cross. That's what she called keeping up the public morale. She's bridge mad. On the resurrection morning, she'll play the last trump.

MELANIE. She's very rich, isn't she ?

ALICE. Very. She's so rich that she can afford to be rich.

DENZIL. Why hasn't she married ?

ALICE. Oh, she's not as rich as all that. Men are very choosy now. They like their women to be intelligent.

DENZIL. But all rich women are intelligent. And beautiful! I wonder if I could live with her.

MELANIE. Would you marry her ?

DENZIL. Well, not gladly, but patiently. I suppose I ought to settle down, and if she can keep me in the style to which I should like to feel accustomed, she'd do all right. I'm not fussy about women, so long as they're rich.

ALICE. People who marry for money have to work very hard for their wages.

MELANIE. Not nearly as hard as people who marry for love. And they do get some wages. Lovers don't.

DENZIL. I've had all the hardship I want, and I'm taking things easily from now on. If Amabel has enough money, I'll let her maintain me, but I want a lot.

MELANIE. You won't have any difficulty in persuading her. She's ripe for the plucking.

ELSIE *enters*.

ELSIE. The Mayor and the Town Clerk are here, madam. I've shown them into the morning room.

ALICE. Very well, Elsie. (*Exit Elsie*). You'd better go and speak to them, Denzil. If you want me, I'll still be here.

DENZIL. Right. Only this sort of thing isn't my line.

*He goes out.*

MELANIE. Isn't he odd ?

ALICE. He was always odd.

MELANIE. But very likeable.

ALICE. You like him ?

MELANIE. Very much. But I shouldn't care to be his wife.

ALICE. A good lover, you think, but not a good husband ?

MELANIE. M'yes! You know where you are with a husband.

ALICE. But not with a lover ?

MELANIE. No.

ALICE. How full of guile you sound, Melanie.

MELANIE. I have my wisdom, Alice. It is not everybody's wisdom, but it serves me very well. I think the most important thing in the world is wisdom.

ALICE. More than love ?

MELANIE. Much more.

ALICE. Did you say *wisdom* or *worldly wisdom* ?

MELANIE. I don't know the difference.

ALICE. I was afraid you didn't. There is one, you know. I've taken a long time to find it out. Listen, Melanie. When Gerald was killed, I felt very bitter about Andrew. But I'm ashamed of that bitterness now. Gerald wouldn't have liked it.

MELANIE. I never talk about these things, Alice. What's the use ? Your loss isn't any less because people are sorry for you. But I feel for you more than you imagine.

ALICE. We'd only been married a month.

MELANIE. No wonder you felt bitter.

ALICE. I wasn't fair to Andrew. I thought he went about looking smugly noble because he wasn't fighting, drawing himself up as if he were thinking, "How much finer I am than these people who go about dying for their country and their faith !" Every time I thought of Gerald crashing in flames!...

MELANIE. Don't.

ALICE. It's all right. I can manage. He had a quick

death. Better than a long illness. That's what I tell myself, but I don't feel very convinced about it. I think I hated Andrew then. He was standing aside, and that seemed a poor thing to do. But I don't hate him any more. He has his courage too. He's been under more fire than many soldiers. His ambulance was in nearly every blitz in London. He isn't a coward.

MELANIE. But he won't fight. A man should be willing to fight.

ALICE. How are we to stop war if everybody wants to fight ?

MELANIE. Why do you want to stop it ?

ALICE. We shall finish ourselves if we don't.

MELANIE. You think I'm shallow, don't you ?

ALICE (*hesitatingly*). Well—yes, I did.

MELANIE. Don't you still ?

ALICE. I'm not sure.

MELANIE. I knew you did. Lots of people do. They fancy because I'm not always shedding tears and running round like an agitated rabbit, that I don't think and feel. I think and feel a great deal, Alice. But even if I were as shallow as you thought me, are you sure I should be wrong ?

ALICE. Go on. You've more than that to say.

MELANIE. Shallow people are very happy, but people who feel things deeply are miserable. They suffer unnecessary pain. And what's the good? They can't prevent our troubles.

ALICE. We shan't prevent them if we don't try.

MELANIE. I'd rather be me, Alice, and forget my troubles quickly, than you, and never forget them. I'm much happier than you are.

ALICE. Is that all you care about—happiness ?

MELANIE. Do you know anything better ? Why is it wise to remember your grief, and shallow to forget it ? I sometimes think you're a fool.

ALICE. Me ?

MELANIE. Yes, far more of a fool than I am, with your deep feelings and your sense of duty. Philip's as bad as you are,

and what thanks does he get ? His workmen think he's done very well out of the war, don't they ?

ALICE. Yes.

MELANIE. Well!

ALICE. You seem to think that all these things are merely a matter of opinion. Aren't you forgetting our nature ?

MELANIE. No. But that works both ways, for the shallow, like me, and the deep, like you. I don't let nature take liberties with me. I take liberties with nature. Anyhow, if it's my nature to be shallow, that's not my fault, is it ?

ALICE. So father says, but you can change your nature.

MELANIE. Can you ?

*The door opens and DELAWARE, followed by ANDREW, enters. ANDREW has a letter in his hand.*

DELAWARE. Take no notice of it.

ANDREW. I shan't.

ALICE. What is it, Andrew ?

ANDREW. Another anonymous letter, comparing me unfavourably with Snooky. *(He tears the letter in pieces and puts it in the wastepaper basket).*

MELANIE. Do you get many letters like that ?

ANDREW. Quite a lot. I oughtn't to feel upset by them, but I do. I don't like being abused, even by people I despise.

MELANIE. How odd ! When I despise people, they don't exist.

DELAWARE. People who write letters like that, Andrew, are either fools or vicious, and generally both. If your mind is troubled by their reproach, then you deserve reproach. It's a sign that you're unsure of yourself.

ANDREW. I am.

ALICE *(in surprise)*. Are you ?

ANDREW. Sometimes. I'm not so sure of my own tightness that I never have a doubt.

DELAWARE. If we were to wait for certainty, we should die of despair. What you've never realised, Andrew, is that there's another view round the corner ! . . . I met Amabel in the street. She told me she'd been here,

ALICE. Snooky's thinking of marrying her.

ANDREW. Snooky! Oh, nonsense. He's larking.

DELAWARE. Well, he'll have to live with her. That'll be harder than winning the V.C.

ANDREW. She's a kindly creature of course.

ALICE. A man always says that about a woman when he thinks she's a drivelling idiot.

DELAWARE. If Amabel hadn't any kindness of heart, what could you say she has.

MELANIE. Money.

DELAWARE. Ha, ha.

MELANIE. Her kindness doesn't interest Snooky. Her income does.

DELAWARE. Well, of course, she ought to provide for somebody besides herself. But I shouldn't like him to hurt Amabel.

MELANIE. People hurt themselves. It is their own fault if they are hurt.

ANDREW. You've got very definite views, Melanie.

MELANIE. As definite as I can make them. I'm sure of nothing but my own desire.

ANDREW. And what's that?

MELANIE. To have a good time.

ANDREW. I wish I could satisfy myself as easily as that. I keep on wondering how to give other people a good time.

DELAWARE. That's what you think you think. You really form an opinion of a good time, and then try to impose it on other people. There's a Hitler in the heart of every idealist.

ALICE. Father, why do you talk so cynically. You know that's not how you feel.

DELAWARE. It's how I ought to feel.

ANDREW. Sometimes I feel so despondent that I want to throw in my hand. Is anything any of us do worth doing? We spend our lives trying to improve ourselves, and look at us. What a bloody lot we are!

DELAWARE. Yes, look at us. Not a pretty sight, are we, Melanie?

MELANIE (*rising and almost exhibiting her grace*). I do my best to look well.

DELAWARE. And you succeed, my dear.

MELANIE. You shall have a kiss for that. (*She kisses him, and then reseats herself*).

ALICE. It's very easy to be pessimistic. Most people are. A man needs courage to be an optimist.

ANDREW. Yes. One day, about two years ago, when I was in Devon, taking a rest after a bout of blitzes, I climbed up a hill above a little town on the sea, so small that it hasn't any industry at all, not even a laundry ! It was a lovely evening, one of those fine days when England warms your heart, and you want to gather it up in your arms and hug it. While I was sitting there, almost at peace, two aeroplanes flew in from the sea. They came over the hill where I was sitting and turned towards the town, and I saw a bomb come out of one of them and fall on some workmen's houses. It was just about tea-time. There was an explosion and the whole place was hidden in a cloud of red dust. Presently, flames flickered through. I couldn't hear a sound, not a single sound. Even the flames were silent. Then the cloud of dust began to settle, and houses emerged from the mist. I ran down the hill as fast as I could, and found rescuers trying to recover the dead and wounded from the wrecked houses. In one house lived some people I knew : a young workman and his wife and two children. They had just begun their tea when the bomb hit their home and destroyed them ! . . . Do you know, the whole raid was over in about a minute and a half. Two young men flew in from the sea and killed a workman and his wife and children in less than ninety seconds, and went away again. I don't know why this raid upset me more than any I'd seen in London, but it did. I suppose it was the flippancy of it, the obscene whimsicality that shattered me. If that airman had fumbled with his trigger for a moment, his bomb would have fallen in the sea, and all those four people would still be alive. Isn't it frightful that our lives should depend on such mischance? But that isn't all. Am I to feel admiration for the young men

who did that? What's noble about it? We've lived for myriads of years and made progress and more progress, and we think very highly of ourselves, but at the end of it all, two light-hearted lads come casually out of the sky and kill a workman and his wife and children who were sitting down to tea ! . . . Noble, isn't it ? Something to sing about!

MELANIE. Well, what can we do about it ?

ANDREW. I want people to say they won't do that—that they would rather die than do that! .. .

DELAWARE. They never will.

ANDREW. Then the sooner the human race packs up and departs, the better.

ALICE. Do you think Gerald was flippant when he raided the Germans ?

ANDREW. Oh, Alice, you know what I mean. I hate the thought of asking him to do such things.

ALICE. It isn't any-worse than any other kind of war. It's more merciful to be killed by a bomb than to have a bayonet stuck in your bowels.

ANDREW. The whole thing is horrible . . . .

ALICE. Gerald died for you ! . . .

DELAWARE (*taking hold of her*). Alice, my dear !

*He leads her to a chair, where she sits down and sobs.*

ANDREW. Alice!

DELAWARE *waves him into silence. In a few moments, she recovers herself.*

ALICE. I'm sorry, father.

DELAWARE. All right, my dear.

ALICE (*rising*). You'll all be in to supper, won't you ? I'll just go to the kitchen and see what there is.

*She goes out, and as she does so, Denzil enters.*

DENZIL. Hello ! Alice looks upset.

DELAWARE. Yes, she is, but don't take any notice.

DENZIL. Well, I've got rid of them. I told them I'd do what they wanted, and they went away as pleased as Punch.

DELAWARE. What are you talking about ?

DENZIL. Oh, of course, you weren't here when they came

in. The Mayor and the Clerk came to see me about the public reception. What's wrong? You all look very glum!

DELAWARE. Andrew has a poor opinion of mankind. Idealists nearly always have. Their admiration for man in the abstract is so great that when they meet man in the concrete they lose their temper. But I, being a pessimist, and having no very great hopes of improvement, am continually surprised to find how much better people are than I expected them to be.

ANDREW. What's the war taught you, Snooky?

DENZIL. How to kill.

ANDREW. Nothing else?

DENZIL. Yes, a few things, but that mostly. You forget, don't you, that killing's a soldier's job. The more enemies he wipes out, the more likely he is to win the war. Kill or be killed—that's about all it amounts to. I'll tell you something else I've learned from the war. The more principles a man has, the more ready he is to kill people who don't agree with him. High-minded men can be very bloody-minded and damned cruel. I'd feel a lot safer with a common blackguard who fights for fun than I would with a moral man who fights for faith. I might get more mercy from the blackguard: I shouldn't get any from the moralist.

MELANIE. Do you think Andrew would be less merciful than—than . . . ?

DENZIL. Than me? Yes, much less. I wouldn't trust myself with Andrew when he was suffering from moral indignation.

ANDREW. Snooky likes his joke.

DENZIL. That's not a joke. My dear Andrew, all the tyrants and ruthless oppressors have been men with a moral mission . . . certain they were sent into the world to redeem it. The most bloodthirsty man I met in the war was a pious Highlander who nearly passed out at the thought of playing football on Sunday.

DELAWARE. I'm afraid of high-minded men myself, but I'm also afraid of scoundrels. I could do very well without either.

DENZIL. What, and have the world full of smug little Civil Servants.

DELAWARE. I don't think they need be smug, Denzil.

DENZIL. Must be, if they're Civil Servants. Can't help themselves. They pass examinations in smugness. Listen, father, I've got a problem for you. What's to become of me ?

DELAWARE. I'm damned if I know !

DENZIL. Well, you brought me into the world. It's your business to see me safely through it. (*Alice returns and sits down beside her father*). Something's got to be done about me. I'm not high-minded like Andrew or devoted to duty like Philip. I'm just a plain bad hat. Until this war, I wasn't anybody's blue-eyed boy. I was a complete flop, a moral and social washout. But now look at me! People who'd have crossed the street to avoid meeting me, now come rushing up to shake my hand. Mayors and Town Clerks solicit interviews with me, and ask me when it'll be convenient for me to be publicly received by my proud fellow-citizens. And why? Because I killed a lot of people I didn't know ! It seems that I have a talent for killing. But I can't walk into an office and say to the Managing Director, "I'm very nifty at slaughter, and I'd like a good job at fifteen hundred a year !" Well, what are you going to do about me ?

DELAWARE. We can't get up a war every now and then for your benefit, Denzil! . . .

DENZIL. But if I'd lived two or three centuries ago, that's exactly what would have been done for me. I'd have been a chap who earned his living wherever there was a war, and it would have been somebody's business to see that I had a job. I've strayed out of my period. I'm lost. Hitler really did me a good turn when he started the war. I'd probably be in gaol now if he hadn't.

ALICE. Why should you expect us to make your life for you ? You should make it yourself! . . .

DENZIL. I did, and a nice mess it was.

ALICE. Men make their own lives. It's only slaves who expect to have them made.

DENZIL. In that case, I'm a willing slave. I want to be kept. Amabel's the most likely keeper I've seen so far. If nobody better turns up, she can have me. (PHILIP *enters*). Oh, hullo, Philip! Still got your nose to the grindstone?

PHILIP. Yes, and I'm not sure which will give out first, the grindstone or the nose. (*To MELANIE as he kisses her*). Hullo, darling. Father, I've had a talk with old Logan. He's immovable. He won't join any union.

DELAWARE. Well, why should he if he doesn't want to?

PHILIP. The men say he must join or go.

DELAWARE. I'm damned if he will. He's worked for us all his life!

PHILIP. I know. That's how I feel. But we'll have trouble if he doesn't join. That chap Snoddy's particularly unpleasant about him, and he's got a lot of influence over the men. I'm prepared to fight, father.

MELANIE. Fight? What do you mean—fight?

PHILIP. If Logan doesn't join their union, the men will strike. I'm willing to fight, father, if you are.

DENZIL. That'll make you damned unpopular.

PHILIP. Yes, but Logan's a good man. He's been faithful to us, and we must be faithful to him.

DELAWARE. Besides, it's our factory, Denzil.

DENZIL. The men don't seem to think so.

PHILIP. That's what we must teach them. Oh, Melanie, I've got a meeting tonight.

MELANIE. Another meeting. You've been to one almost every night for a month.

PHILIP. Not every night, darling. Pretty often, I admit. I can't help it. The work has to be done, and most of the people who should be doing it, aren't here. Can I have something to eat fairly soon, Alice?

ALICE. Yes, Philip. It's a cold supper, so you can have it now. Come along.

*Exit ALICE.*

PHILIP. Good! Father, you'll fight, won't you?

DELAWARE. Well, yes. I don't like this sort of thing. I'm an old man, and I want peace.

PHILIP (*going towards the door*). But not at any price, father.

DELAWARE (*following him to door*). No, not at any price. But I'd pay a good deal for it.

PHILIP. We'll fight, father.

DELAWARE. All right, Philip. This is your job more than mine !

*They go out together.*

ANDREW (*calling after them*). But why ? Why ? No fight is worth what it costs !

PHILIP (*off*). I don't agree.

ANDREW. But, Philip . . . (*He goes off to continue his plea*).

DENZIL. Looks as if we were going to have trouble.

MELANIE. Yes, I don't like it much.

DENZIL. Well, why don't you stop Philip ?

MELANIE. Have you ever tried to stop him ?

DENZIL. Yes, several times.

MELANIE. Who won ?

DENZIL. He did.

MELANIE. Philip's tough. Very tough. Well, I'd better go and see that he's getting a proper meal.

DENZIL. Come here. (*She comes up to him. They look at each other for a moment or two. Then he puts his arms round her and kisses her ardently*).

MELANIE (*releasing herself*). You're a little rough, aren't you ?

DENZIL. You wanted me to kiss you ?

MELANIE. Yes.

*He kisses her again, and this time her arms go round him and his kiss is returned as ardently as it is given. Then MELANIE withdraws from his arms and sits down and sighs. With satisfaction? Or regret? With both? They are silent for a few moments.*

DENZIL. Well, where do we go from here ?

MELANIE. Nowhere.

DENZIL. Oh ! Is this the end ?

MELANIE. Listen Snooky. I'm not getting into trouble for you or anybody else. If you think I'm going to land myself in tie divorce court because you're amusing to kiss, you must think again, and think better. I don't attach any importance to this sort of thing. It's amusing . . . that's all... agreeable entertainment, but not more important than going to the movies.

DENZIL. But you enjoyed being kissed ! . . .

MELANIE. I enjoy tennis. But I'm not breaking up my life with Philip for kisses or tennis. You're much too casual a gentleman for a girl to leave home for.

DENZIL (*almost offended*). I see.

MELANIE. I don't mind being kissed by you. I like skilful kissing, and you're good at it. But that's all, Snooky. (*She rises as she speaks*). Understand ?

DENZIL. Huh ... uh ... huh.

*She walks to the door, where she pauses.*

MELANIE. Oh, and another thing. I'd rather sit and watch Philip eating cold spam for supper than be kissed by you . . . or anybody.

*She goes out, as it were, flicking her skirt. He stands gaping at the door through which she has vanished, then he shakes his fist.*

DENZIL. Well, damn your eyes, then! Damn and blast your eyes !

## ACT II

### SCENE I

*The time is close on seven o'clock on a winter night about six months later. DENZIL, no longer in uniform, is sitting reading the evening paper. The sound of a car is heard outside. "This must be them" he says, and going to one of the windows, pulls a curtain aside and looks out.*

DENZIL (*still at the window*). Good Lord, it's Amabel! Damn! I forgot all about her. (*He returns to the centre of the room*). Phooo-oo-oo, she will be in a wax!

*He goes to the door and opens it and listens. The sound of women's voices—AMABEL'S and ELSIE'S—can be heard. Then ELSIE says—"No, Miss, he's by himself in the drawing room."*

DENZIL (*calling into the hall*). I'm here, Amabel.

*A moment later, Amabel appears in the doorway.*

AMABEL. Oh, Snooky!

DENZIL (*drawing her into the room and kissing her*). I'm terribly sorry, darling! . . .

AMABEL (*pouting*). I waited and waited!

DENZIL. Well, I'm sorry! . . .

AMABEL. I couldn't believe you wouldn't be there to meet me. Why weren't you there?

DENZIL (*shutting the door*). Well, the truth is, I forgot.

AMABEL. Forgot!

DENZIL. Yes, I know that sounds awful, darling! . . .

AMABEL. You said you'd meet me. You promised! And a promise is a promise. But you forgot.

DENZIL. Wait till you hear my news!

AMABEL. What news? I haven't heard any.

DENZIL. I'll tell you if you'll listen! . . .

AMABEL. Well, I *am* listening. I've been listening all the

time. I was so cold standing there, waiting and waiting. You know how delicate I am. The least thing upsets me. I waited *ever* so long, *hours and hours* / . . .

DENZIL. Ten minutes!

AMABEL. Well, it seemed like hours, and when it seems hours, it li hours. And then you tell me you forgot. I mean to say! . . .

DENZIL. Sit down, darling. You must be very tired! . . .

AMABEL. I am. Pm sure I've got a temperature or something. I always get a temperature. The *slightest* thing gives me a temperature. I stood on a man's foot all the way from Euston! . . .

DENZIL. He must have enjoyed that.

AMABEL. He was very nasty about it, and kept on making remarks. As if I wanted to stand on his foot. It's bad enough to have to stand on your own. Why didn't you meet me? You know you promised! . . .

DENZIL. Well, darling, Crump died suddenly.

AMABEL. Crump! Crump! Who's Crump?

DENZIL. Our Member of Parliament.

AMABEL. Oh, him! He's no loss, is he? He's only Labour. And we could do with less of them. I'd gladly go to a memorial service for the whole lot.

DENZIL. There's going to be a bye-election, Amabel.

AMABEL. Oh, is there? Why?

DENZIL. Because Crump's dead.

AMABEL. He's as much nuisance dead as he was alive.

DENZIL. I'm almost certain to be asked to stand for the seat.

AMABEL. What! Go into Parliament?

DENZIL. Yes. I'm expecting a deputation at any moment. In fact, I thought you were the deputation.

AMABEL. Oh, well, of course, if you're going to be in Parliament, that's different. I expect you'll get on very nicely there. We'll meet everybody and go to everything.

DENZIL. When Selby and Snoddy arrive! . . .

AMABEL. Snoddy! But he's a Socialist!

DENZIL. Yes, darling. I shall be a Labour candidate.

AMABEL. But you're not Labour!. ..

DENZIL. Yes, I am. For the time being anyhow.

AMABEL. Oh, Denzil, it's ridiculous. How can you be Labour? You're a gentleman.

DENZIL. I don't see much difference between one politician and another. It's mostly a matter of accent.

AMABEL. Father used to say that when a Conservative couldn't get a job from his own party, he joined Labour.

DENZIL. Well, you wouldn't blame a poor bloke for going abroad when he couldn't get a job at home.

AMABEL. Anyhow, I think you might have met me. *(He stops her complaint with a kiss).*

ELSIE enters.

ELSIE. There's some men to see you, sir.

DENZIL. Oh, yes, Elsie. Show them in here, will you? How many are there?

ELSIE. Two, sir. *(Exit).*

AMABEL. I suppose I'd better go now.

DENZIL. No, wait a while. I want to introduce you to them.

AMABEL. That will please Snoddy. He glares at me as if I'd pinched his purse.

*DENZIL hears the sound of feet advancing along the hall, and he goes to the door, which has been left open by ELSIE, to greet his visitors.*

DENZIL. Ah, gentlemen, come in!

ARTHUR SELBY, a man about sixty, enters, followed by BERT SNODDY, whose age is about thirty. SELBY is a Trade Unionist rather than a Socialist, the sort of Labour man who is nearly extinct. His sense is sound and solid, easy going and good natured, and his opinions and his word are respected even by his opponents. He is better describable as a Radical than as a Socialist. At the back of his mind, he feels distrust of officials, and resents their interference in his affairs. He realises that they cannot be done without, but he wishes there were fewer of them and that they had less to do. Nevertheless, he works with the Socialists, and even with the Commu-

nists, because he thinks they are more likely than other politicians to give workmen what he wishes them to have .... BERT SNODDY is a very different sort of man : aggressive and embittered and distrustful of anybody who differs from his opinions. His agile mind is full of hatred. He loathes his opponents because they are his opponents, and would cheerfully disembowel any person who does not bow his head reverently every time Karl Marx's name is mentioned. He is a fanatic, chief victim of his own slogans and political catchwords. In the fourth century, he would have been a Desert Father, abhorring humanity and especially his relations : and in the fifteenth he would have been a thin-lipped Dominican monk, seeking whom he might torment and torture. His austerity would have worried Cromwell. In the first third of the nineteenth century, he would have been a High Anglican at Oxford with Newman, and eager to mortify his own and other people's flesh. Now he is a Communist, but substantially, he is a sour-minded puritan, to whom suffering and discomfort are congenial. He will be very unhappy in Heaven, but in his element in Hell. SNODDY is cleverer than SELBY, if cleverness is anything, but not nearly so sound or sensible. Both are religious men, but SELBY mingles his faith with hope and charity : SNODDY doesn't. SELBY likes people and trusts them; SNODDY dislikes them and distrusts them. SELBY is an optimist and a Christian and full of hope : SNODDY is a Communist and a pessimist and full of despair. SELBY is an Englishman ; SNODDY is an internationalist: and that's a description which, in SELBY'S opinion, is tantamount to saying that he is an atheist and probably immoral.

DENZIL. I've brought you in here because this is the only room with a fire. How are you, Selby ?

SELBY. Fine. Good evening miss.

AMABEL. Good evening, Mr. Selby.

DENZIL. How are you, Snoddy ?

SNODDY. Austerity must be a novelty here.

DENZIL. Not as novel as you think, Snoddy. My great-grandfather was a workman, and had opinions almost as strict

as yours. We keep up some of his traditions, though I can't say I care about them.

SELBY. I saw him once when I was a young lad. Fine old fellow 'e was.

SNODDY. Well, the upper classes are learning a little about deprivation. Do 'em good.

DENZIL. Let me introduce you to Miss Alderney-Evans. We're going to be married ! . . .

SELBY (*holding out his hand to AMABEL*). Oh, indeed! I congratulate you both.

AMABEL. Thank you, Mr. Selby. I'm very lucky, aren't I? It isn't every woman who marries a V.C., is it?

SELBY. No, it isn't.

SNODDY. We've met before—on Committees !

AMABEL. Yes, haven't we? I'm afraid we differed, didn't we?

SNODDY. We did.

DENZIL. You two are the first outside the family to hear of our engagement.

SELBY. Well, there's no class war in love.

SNODDY. It's worse in love than in economics. If you want to know the biological evils of class distinctions, read Bernard Shaw.

SELBY. It's only Conservatives that read Shaw. 'E's a reactionary. Believes in equality. Labour 'as no use for that nonsense. I wish you all the best, Miss Alderney-Evans.

AMABEL. Thank you. Good-night!

SELBY.

Goodnight. (*Exit AMABEL and DENZIL*).

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SNODDY. I don't like this engagement much.

SELBY. What's it got to do with you?

SNODDY. She's a rich woman, isn't she? Her father was one of the worst reactionaries in this town.

SELBY. You think anybody's a reactionary that doesn't agree with you, Bert.

SNODDY. Well, that stands to reason, doesn't it. I'm a progressive, aren't I?

SELBY. That depends on where you're progressin'.

SNODDY. I don't like the idea of Labour men marrying rich women.

SELBY. Why, 'alf the Cabinet's married to 'em.

SNODDY. That's all right if the women are Socialists, but this one's a Conservative. Absolutely rank.

SELBY. 'E'll look after 'er. Any man that is a man sees that 'is wife votes the way 'e does. Any'ow, 'e's the best candidate we're likely to get now. I always said old Crump was a rotten choice. 'E got the lowest majority in the Labour party, an' 'e's no sooner elected than 'e goes an' dies. This chap'll win the seat as easy as wink. An' 'e's got 'er on toast. Anybody can see she's daft about 'im.

SNODDY. Well, so long as your eyes are open.

SELBY. They're open all right.

*Re-enter DENZIL.*

DENZIL. Well, gentlemen! Won't you sit down! (*They do so*). I expect you could do with a little drink! . . .

SNODDY. Not for me, thanks.

DENZIL. You will, Selby? I've asked Elsie to bring it in.

SELBY. Well, if it's goin'. Bert doesn't drink on principle, but I say drink's to be drunk, not argued about.

*ELSIE enters with a tray on which are whisky and soda. She sets it down.*

DENZIL. Thank you, Elsie.

*Exit ELSIE. DENZIL pours out whisky for himself and SELBY.*

DENZIL. Sure you won't have one, Snoddy?

SNODDY. Quite sure.

DENZIL. It's harmless stuff—practically lemonade.

SNODDY. I disapprove of drink.

DENZIL. You don't mind us having it, I hope.

SNODDY. I do, but what's the use.

SELBY. It does me good to see a bottle like that. Must be months since I saw one.

SNODDY. You'd be better off if you never saw another.

SELBY. I don't want to be better off. (*Takes his glass from DENZIL*). Well, 'ere's the skin off your nose.

DENZIL (*taking a drink, too*). And the skin off yours.

SELBY. I often wonder what teetotallers do when they want to celebrate anything.

DENZIL. They don't.

SELBY. Don't what ?

DENZIL. Want to celebrate anything. Here's the skin off your nose again.

SELBY. An' off yours. Well, now, you know why Bert an' me are 'ere. Joe Crump's death's took us by surprise an' put us in a proper fix. That's the sort of chap 'e was. Always in aste. A lingerin' death 'ud a-bin more convenient to us, but o' course, Joe 'ad to go and die sudden. As I was sayin' to Bert a minute ago, our majority at the General Election wasn't too good, an' we can't afford to run any risks with it. We want a candidate that'll go down well with the wobblers.

SNODDY. And with the women.

SELBY. Same thing. All women wobble. They 'aven't any stability. I don't 'old with women's suffrage myself. Never 'ave 'eld with it, an' never will. But since we've got it, we 'ave to cope with it. What we need badly, Captain, if you'll excuse the expression, is a picturesque candidate. I'm an ardent Labour man myself, but I must admit we aren't what you'd call picturesque. Our chaps seem to keep their minds in dungarees.

SNODDY. Their business is with facts, not fairy tales.

SELBY. But the electors like fairy tales. Think of the things we told them at the General Election. An' they like a picturesque personality.

SNODDY. They got one in Ramsay MacDonald, and look what he did to us.

SELBY. Well, Ramsay Mac 'ad 'is points. If 'e'd been a Conservative, 'e'd 'ave been advanced in 'is views. But any'ow, we need a picturesque personality in this constituency, an' (*turning to DENZIL as he speaks*) you've got one. The crowd's a comic thing. It doesn't know what it wants till it gets it, an'

then it doesn't want it. It doesn't matter what sort of crowd it is, 'igh-brow or low-brow or no-brow, it's comic, an' it 'as to be treated comic. If Oratio Bottomley an' Socrates 'ad stood for Oxford University, Socrates would 'ave lost 'is deposit. Well, now, captain, you see 'ow it is. I've thought it best to be open an' aboveboard with you. You're the best candidate we can put up, though I ought to tell you there was opposition to you!

SNODDY. I was part of it. I'm against upper class Labour candidates as a rule. I think Labour representatives should be part of the proletariat.

SELBY. That word *proletariat* goes to Bert's 'ead. It's 'is form of intoxication.

DENZIL (to SNODDY). But I thought you were against class distinctions.

SNODDY. I'm against them in the rich, but the proletariat must stick together.

SELBY. It's a nice, long, juicy word, that word *proletariat*. Sort of satisfies you when you've nothin' to think about.

DENZIL. Why don't you stand, Snoddy?

SNODDY. They wouldn't elect me.

SELBY. That's a fact. They wouldn't. Wouldn't touch Bert with a barge pole.

DENZIL. Why?

SELBY. 'E's extreme. 'E's went to Ruskin College an' lost 'is zest for life.

SNODDY. I'm logical.

SELBY. I 'ate logic. It's only fit for foreigners.

SNODDY. I'm what's called a bitter ender. I don't believe in half measures or compromise. All or nothing, that's me.

SELBY. An' that's why we can't 'ave 'im as our candidate. 'E doesn't know the elementary facts of life, Bert doesn't. If you ask for all or nothin', you damn well get nothin'. Everybody 'ere knows that Bert's a Communist, an' if 'e was to stand for the seat, we'd lose it.

SNODDY. That's the position, Captain. Half the people that voted for Joe Crump wouldn't vote for me, and as it's more

important to keep the seat for Labour than to choose me as a candidate, I'm content to stand down.

DENZIL. But isn't that compromise ?

SNODDY. I suppose it is, but even I have to face facts. And the fact in this constituency is, I'd be licked.

SELBY. He's right, Captain. We're not Communists; we're Labour men. Communism is a foreign 'abit, an' we prefer English 'abits. I don't 'old with foreigners as a rule. They're a bit 'ysterical, always wavin' their arms about, an' la di da'in'. Communism's all right for backward people, but we're not Russians, so let's stick to English ways, if you see what I mean.

DENZIL. Yes, I see.

SELBY. All you've got to do is go on platforms an' let them see that bit o' ribbon you've got, an' the seat'll be yours 'andsome. Give the proletariat what it wants, an' it'll eat out of your 'and.

DENZIL. And what does the proletariat want ?

SNODDY. Everything.

SELBY. They won't get it, but you 'ave to make 'em think they will.

DENZIL. Well, what do I have to do ?

SELBY. Toe the Party line. That's all. But what, roughly, are your ideas about things ?

DENZIL. Well, roughly, I shall do whatever the Party tells me, provided, of course, you approve of it.

SELBY. That's the only idea you need. Pers'nally, I'm against members of parliament 'avin' too many ideas. One at a time is enough. It's a pity you aren't gettin' married this week. A weddin' 'as a very stimulat'in' effect on an election.

SNODDY. There's one question you'll have to answer. It's about the closed shop.

DENZIL. Yes ?

SNODDY. We're going to have a bit of trouble with your firm.

DENZIL. Ours ?

SNODDY. Yes. You've got a chap called Logan, a religious chap, working for you.

DENZIL. Yes, I've heard about him.

SNODDY. He doesn't belong to our Union. We're negotiating with your firm, but we're not getting anywhere, and we'll have to have a decision pretty soon. Supposing there's a strike, where'll you stand ?

DENZIL. I'll take an impartial view ! . . .

SNODDY. But that's just what we don't want you to do. We want you to take ours.

DENZIL. Oh, I don't suppose there'll be any serious trouble. Anyway, we can cope with it when it comes.

SELBY. That's right. 'Alf the trouble in the world is caused by people lookin' for it. Give it a miss, I say, an' it isn't there. Well, captain, I think that's about all we can do tonight. We wanted to find out if you'd be willing to stand. Of course, you'll 'ave to meet the executive. This, you understand, is only a sort of a feeler.

DENZIL. Yes, I understand that.

SNODDY. But if you'll stand, we'll see that you're chosen.

DENZIL. When does the executive meet ?

SNODDY. Tomorrow night.

DENZIL. All right. I'll be there !

SNODDY. Then you'll stand ?

DENZIL. Yes.

SELBY. Good ! Good, good !

DENZIL. But my selection must be unanimous.

SELBY. In six weeks' time you'll be our member.

*They rise as he speaks. In the middle of good-bye babble > the door opens and PHILIP enters.*

PHILIP (*halting in the doorway*). Oh, I beg your pardon. I didn't know ! . . .

DENZIL. That's all right, Philip. We've just finished.

PHILIP (*greeting the others*). Hullo, Selby, what are you doing here ? And you, Snoddy ? Hobnobbing with bloated capitalists ! There'll be great dismay in Moscow when Stalin hears of this.

SELBY. I wouldn't be surprised. But (*pointing to DENZIL*) 'e isn't an enemy. 'E's one of us. An' it won't be long before you 'ave a member of parliament in your family.

PHILIP. What! Denzil ?

SELBY. That's right. 'E's just consented to be Labour candidate at the bye-election.

PHILIP. *Labour* candidate ?

SELBY. That's right. An' 'e'll be the most popular candidate we've ever 'ad.

PHILIP (*to DENZIL*). Your conversion's been very sudden, hasn't it ?

DENZIL. All conversions are sudden, but it isn't as sudden as you think. I've been attending Labour meetings ever since I came home. Haven't I, Selby ?

SELBY. Ay, you've been very regular.

DENZIL. I haven't listened to the men in the Army for six years without learning something. They don't intend to suffer the slumps and the disappointments their fathers suffered after the last war.

SELBY. That's a fact! If we can 'ave full employment in wartime, we'll take damn good care there's full employment in peace.

SNODDY. There'll never be peace till we win the class war.

SELBY. It's a bit late for a chin-wag on Karl Marx, Bert, but even if it wasn't, I can't stand the chap. 'E'd too much 'air on 'is face. (*To DENZIL*) I'll let you know in the mornin' about the meeting tomorrow night. (*To PHILIP*) Good-night, Mr. Delaware.

PHILIP (*shaking his hand*). Good-night. (*Turning to SNODDY and holding out his hand*). You won't be compromised in the Kremlin, will you, if we shake hands ?

SNODDY (*taking his hand*). Good-night!

*Exeunt DENZIL, SELBY and SNODDY, chattering. PHILIP is alone for a moment or two. MELANIE enters.*

MELANIE. Has the revolution begun ?

PHILIP. Denzil's been receiving a deputation from the

Labour Party. He's to be their candidate at this bye-election we're to have.

MELANIE. Did you say Labour ?

PHILIP. Yes. You knew he'd been going to Labour meetings?

MELANIE. Oh, yes, but I thought that was just juvenile intellectuality—spots on the brain !

PHILIP. Snooky isn't a juvenile, Melanie.

MELANIE. Not in years, but he is in mind. He isn't half the man you are.

PHILIP (*pleased*). Don't you think so ? He's admired by women.

MELANIE. M'yes, the sort that Amabel is—all gooseflesh and gurgle. But he isn't your equal. You're a very fine man, Philip, though I says it as shouldn't.

PHILIP. Who else has a better right to say it ? I'd rather hear it from you than from any other living soul.

MELANIE. Goose!

PHILIP. I thought you were a bit gone on Snooky yourself.

MELANIE. What! Me ? I'm gone on you.

PHILIP. But weren't you interested in him ?

MELANIE. I'm interested in James Mason, but only as a photograph.

PHILIP (*drawing her close to him*). I seem to love you more and more every day.

MELANIE (*kissing him*). Dear Philip. I'm not a very intelligent woman, but I have the good sense to love you. I'm the sort that wants to live with a man and have his children. That's all. I'm your woman, and I want you to be my children's father. It'll be good for them to have you for their father ! ...

PHILIP. And you for their mother.

MELANIE. You see, Philip, I'm quite primitive. I just want primitive things : a man, and a home, and a family; and I don't care one damn about anything else. I think that making a home and creating children that are worth having is

a good job of work, and I'm content to do it. The moment I saw you, I marked you down !...

PHILIP. You make me seem to have been trapped, my dear.

MELANIE. Well, you were trapped. I wanted you, and I was determined to get you. And I did get you. Do you think that a woman who took as much trouble to trap a man as I took to trap you is going to waste her thoughts on a flibberty-gibberty fellow like Snooky !. . .

PHILIP. He has charm, you know!

MELANIE. Charm! Pooh! Crooks have that! There's more character in your little finger, Philip, than there is in Snooky's whole composition. Or mine ! (*She kisses him and moves away*). Why is he standing for Labour ?

PHILIP. Labour's in power. But I oughtn't to say that. It sounds as if I thought him insincere.

MELANIE. Well, isn't he ?

PHILIP. Oh, no. Snooky has his own integrity.

MELANIE. So had Hitler.

PHILIP. Don't tie me up in words, Melanie.

MELANIE. I'm not trying to. DenziPs the sort that's out for himself. That's all. Amabel won't like this Labour association.

PHILIP. She'll like whatever he likes. He's her signature tune. Before long, she'll be swathed in red ties and singing *The Red Flag*. What have you been doing since lunch ?

MELANIE. The usual stuff. Snooky and I went for a walk after tea.

PHILIP. But he had to meet Amabel, hadn't he ?

MELANIE. Had he ? He didn't tell me that. (*To DENZIL, who enters as she speaks*). Denzil, did you meet Amabel tonight ?

DENZIL. I forgot all about it.

MELANIE. Forgot!

DENZIL. Yes. And she was damned angry, too.

MELANIE. I should think so.

DENZIL. Has Philip told you my news, Melanie ?

MELANIE. He told me some cockeyed story about you being a Labour candidate ! . . .

DENZIL. There's nothing cockeyed about it. It's a fact.

MELANIE. Well, look at the horny-handed son of toil! Do we have to call you Comrade ?

DENZIL. There are six Old Etonians in the Ministry. I've just been looking them up in *Who's Who*.

EDMUND DELAWARE, followed by ALICE EDDINGTON,  
*enters.*

MELANIE. Oh, father, Snooky's going into parliament.

DELAWARE. What for ?

MELANIE (*sneeringly*). To serve his country.

DELAWARE. Have you chosen your Party yet, Snooky ?

DENZIL. Yes, father. Labour. Or rather, it's chosen me.

PHILIP. You've just missed the deputation.

ALICE. But Snooky, you don't know a thing about politics.

DELAWARE. Is that necessary in a member of parliament, my dear ?

ALICE. I should have thought so, father.

DELAWARE. Innocent child. I've known about twenty members in my life, and most of them were the damnedest asses I've ever met. Snooky'll feel at home at Westminster, won't you, Snooky ?

DENZIL. All right, dad, I can take it.

DELAWARE. Parliament is made up of fluent fools and pompous prigs, with an occasional genius thrown in to save our self-respect. Thank God, this country's better than the people its puts in parliament. We'd be ruined if it weren't.

ALICE. You're a bitter old man, father.

DELAWARE. I don't know whom to pity the most these days, the young or the old, those who've lost hope or those who've never had any.

DENZIL. What help am I going to get from you ?

PHILIP. Help!

ALICE. Us!

DENZIL. Yes, I take it you'll help me.

ALICE. But why ?

MELANIE. Yes, Snooky, why ?

DENZIL. Well, I'm one of the family, aren't I ? You want me to succeed ?

DELAWARE. My dear Denzil, are you quite daft ?

PHILIP. Succeed in what ? Your Party wants to put us out of business, and you ask us to help them do it.

ALICE. Will you kindly sharpen this razor so that I can cut your throat. We're Conservatives, Snooky, not Socialists.

DENZIL. Will you work for me, Melanie ?

MELANIE. No, Snooky.

ALICE. We're all against you, Snooky.

DENZIL. Well, I shall have to fight without you.

DELAWARE. You'll have to do more than that, my boy. You'll have to fight against us. (ANDREW enters). Perhaps Andrew will help you.

ANDREW. What's that, father ?

DELAWARE. Perhaps you'll help Snooky.

DENZIL. I'm standing for Parliament, Andrew.

ANDREW. So am I.

OMNES. You!

ANDREW. Yes. I'm standing as a Pacifist.

MELANIE. Well, we can't work for both of you.

DENZIL. But I'm to be the Labour candidate, Andrew.

ANDREW. Yes, I know. That's why I'm standing. I want to prove that principles are above family feeling or any personal relations. Besides, Snooky, the Labour Party is the worst enemy of peace ! . . .

DENZIL. Don't be so damned silly.

PHILIP. Oh ! What about the class war ?

DENZIL. That's a rhetorical expression.

ANDREW. It's the main point in your creed. Labour men believe in conflict and contention. All the terms you use in your industrial struggles are terms of war. There'd be no need for Trade Union leaders if employers and workmen were satisfied, so they spread a belief that employers and workmen are natural enemies, and there can be no peace ~~until the~~ workers have overcome the employers.

DENZIL. That's very clever, no doubt! . . .

ANDREW. I'm not trying to be clever, Snooky. The world is sick of cleverness. It wants peace. But how can there be any peace anywhere when there's no peace here—in our heads and our hearts. (*He strikes his head and his breast as he speaks*). I'm against your Party, Denzil. It's the warmonger's party.

DENZIL. There are more pacifists in the Labour Party than any other.

ANDREW. I can well believe that. It wasn't peace they wanted : it was safety,

DENZIL. Don't you want safety ?

ANDREW. No, I want peace.

DENZIL. There's no sense in your standing. You haven't a hope of election. You'll forfeit your deposit.

ANDREW. I shall have made a profession of faith.

PHILIP. And he may keep you out, Snooky.

DENZIL. Oh, that's it, is it ? Divide the progressive vote !

DELAWARE. Why do Labour people always assume that they alone are progressive ?

ALICE. All you care about is higher wages and less work.

MELANIE. I'm rather like that myself—only I don't pretend to be noble about it.

DENZIL. Well, that's part of progress, isn't it ? Providing more and more people with more and more amenities of civilised life.

ALICE. Such as dog races and football pools.

DENZIL. Are they any worse than horse races and bridge parties ?

DELAWARE. Are they any better ? That chap Selby, the chairman of your Labour Party here ! . . .

DENZIL. A very decent, upright man.

DELAWARE. Yes, a very decent upright man. I have the greatest respect for Selby's character, but I haven't the slightest respect for his opinions. I've talked to him about this progress he thinks he's making, and it's the rankest reaction. Industry is to be controlled by the working class who are "the people of England," Aren't we "the people of England" too ? Selby

thinks a thing must be right because it's big. The biggest crowd is the best crowd, and a million men are more important than one man. But they're not, Snooky. A million men can destroy the world. One man can save it.

DENZIL. One man damned nearly destroyed it.

MELANIE. It only needs you to stand, Philip, and the family party'll be complete.

PHILIP. Somebody in this house must work. Father and I will try to keep the factory going while Snooky and Andrew fiddle about.

DELAWARE. Your pacifism puzzles me, Andrew. You seem to think that mankind will perish if we don't make universal peace. But will it? There have been at least fifty wars in the last hundred years. And many of them have been great wars. We were fighting in the Crimea when my father was a boy, and since then we've had—let me see, the Indian Mutiny, the American Civil War, the Franco-German War, two South African wars, and . . . (*he cracks his fingers as if he were trying to recall names*).

PHILIP. The Spanish-American and the Russo-Japanese wars, father.

DELAWARE. Yes, yes, of course. Wars in Abyssinia and China.

ALICE. And the two World Wars.

DELAWARE. Yes, the two World Wars. Yet, in spite of all these wars, in which millions of vigorous men and women were killed, we have more abundant life than there was in your great grandfather's day, and we've made immense material progress.

ANDREW. Is that a plea for war, father?

DELAWARE. No, my son, it's a plea for common sense. The world is better off now, in spite of the mess we're in, than it ever was before.

ANDREW. Except one thing father.

DELAWARE. What's that?

ANDREW. It has lost its soul.

DELAWARE. Lost—or only mislaid?

ANDREW. Does it matter which ? We'd be better off if we were to lose our possessions and recover our spirit.

DENZIL. If you say things like that in your election address, you won't get a single vote. And you'll be mobbed.

ANDREW. Nevertheless, I shall say them.

PHILIP. We haven't lost or mislaid our spirit. His soul is the one thing a man can't lose. It's still there, even when he has forgotten it. It's bigger and better than he is. Do you think this frail and easily broken thing, this body you call me, is all I am, or that it matters more than the everlasting, striving thing that brought us all out of ancient slime and sent us half-way up the pinnacle of life ? I keep my hope and I keep my fighting faith. I don't believe in your party of slavers, Snooky, nor do I believe in your perpetual peace, Andrew. You fellows make me feel sick. You go to your little tin tabernacles and swear you will not cease from mental strife, for shall your sword sleep in your hand, and while the words are ringing on your lips, you turn Conchy at the first hint of war.

MELANIE. Philip, darling, how eloquent you are !

PHILIP. No, Melanie, not eloquent, only hopeful.

DELAWARE. Hopeful, Philip ! Still ?

PHILIP. Yes, father, and shall be as long as I live.

ELSIE (*entering*). Supper is ready, ma'am.

DELAWARE. Come along, all of you. I'm simply starving.

## ACT II

### SCENE II

*We are still in DELAWARE'S drawing-room a few weeks after the events of the first scene. The REV. GEORGE FENNELL and DELAWARE are playing chess, and the Vicar is getting much the worst of the game. He is seated at the table, anxiously considering his dismal plight, while DELAWARE, secure in the thought of victory, stands in front of the fireplace, gloating over him.*

DELAWARE. Beaten, George ?

FENNELL. Doesn't look very good, does it? Wait a minute ! Ah ! *(He makes a move).*

DELAWARE *(crossing to the table and looking at the move).* Yes, that's pretty good.

FENNELL. But not good enough. Only prolonging the agony.

DELAWARE *(making a move).* Yes. How's that ?

FENNELL. It's a fair cop, constable. Don't hit me and I'll go quiet!

DELAWARE. Have another ?

FENNELL. No, I think not. I've been swiped hard enough for one day.

*They place the chessmen into the box during the following speeches, and DELAWARE puts the box and the board aside.*

FENNELL. I see Andrew's back. I met him in the town this morning. He seems to have got over that crack on the head he got in the election.

DELAWARE. Oh, yes. Andrew's pretty tough. He soon recovers from things. But it was a great shock to him to find that the only argument the high-minded proletariat could think of using against him was hah<sup>o</sup> a brick.

FENNELL. He was lucky not to have his eye knocked out, His poll didn't amount to much.

DELAWARE. No, indeed ! To forfeit your deposit and get laid out by a brick is a poor reward for trying to serve the people! . . .

FENNELL. How does Denzil like being a member of parliament ?

DELAWARE. Loves it. So does Amabel. They're here. Came this afternoon. They're coming in when they've finished hobnobbing with their committee.

*The door opens, and AMABEL enters.*

AMABEL. Hullo, everybody.

FENNELL (*rising to greet her*). Amabel, my dear !

AMABEL. Have I disturbed you ?

FENNELL. No, no ! This old confidence trickster has just given me the licking of my life at chess, and I'm sore all over. I'm going home to lick my wounds. Anyhow, nothing can disturb chess players.

DELAWARE. Don't you believe him, Amabel.

AMABEL. I don't. They look calm because they're dazed. Father was terrible if you breathed while he was making a move.

FENNELL. Chess is the most intellectual of games. A good chess player !. ..

DELAWARE. I know what you're going to say. He can win wars as easy as winking because he's such a brilliant strategist. Well, one of the worst soldiers I ever kifew was a brilliant chess player!

AMABEL. Besides, who wants intellect in a game? Just ruins the game. I'm against intellect. It spoils everything. Why can't people just be themselves instead of running around trying to be mental ?

FENNELL. How are you liking politics ?

AMABEL. I love them—meeting everybody and being in everything. I mean to say, all the important people and all that. I met Aneurin Bevan on Thursday. It was such fun !

DELAWARE. Well, I'm glad somebody finds politics amusing.

They depress me terribly. But then I belong to the criminal classes. I'm an employer of labour.

FENNELL (*to AMABEL*). I suppose Snooky and you have come here to stir us all up ?

DELAWARE. It's all this bothersome business about Peter Logan. You know him, George ?

FENNELL. Yes, and a very decent chap he is, though he isn't a churchman.

DELAWARE. Peter has his own opinions about the universe. He belongs to one of those obscure, but delightful sects which relieve the tedium of establishment by proving that nobody else is going to heaven. Hell will be full of bishops, George, and vicars !, ..

FENNELL. In that case, hell won't be so bad as it's made out to be.

AMABEL. Oh, I can't believe they'd put a bishop in hell. A curate, perhaps, but not a bishop.

DELAWARE. Anyway, Logan won't join a union, and the chaps say they'll strike if he doesn't.

AMABEL. Denzil says he wasn't free when he was a soldier, so why should anybody be free just because he's a civilian.

DELAWARE. At this moment, Amabel, your father is revolving rapidly in his grave.

AMABEL. Well, why doesn't Logan join a union ? He'd save a lot of trouble if he did.

DELAWARE. Yes, if saving trouble is all that matters.

FENNELL. Didn't Hitler say something like that in 1940 ? He was right. We should have saved a lot of trouble if we'd put up our hands. Only we preferred the trouble.

AMABEL. It's all so silly. Why can't he do what everybody does?

DELAWARE. There, George. That's the new gospel. Do what everybody does. Don't dare to be different.

AMABEL. Of course, you can all argue the head off me. I don't understand these things. But I do think it's a pity for one man to stand out against the rest.

DELAWARE (*to FENNELL*). Didn't Caiaphas, the High Priest, say something like that ?

FENNELL. Yes. It is expedient for us that one man should die for the people.

DELAWARE. What sort of a people is it that saves its skin by letting a man die for it ? Thank God, I am an old man and have a chance of dying in liberty. But I'm afraid, Amabel, that your children will be slaves.

AMABEL. Well, if they want to be ! ...

DELAWARE. That's the worst kind of slave—the man who wants to be one. He's servile in his soul.

AMABEL. Being free hasn't been a lot of fun for some people, and they'd rather feel secure. That's what Denzil says.

DENZIL, *followed by PHILIP, enters.*

DENZIL. What did I say ?

DELAWARE. Amabel has been making an eloquent plea for slavery, Denzil, fresh, I gather, from your lips.

DENZIL. Oh, that! The word slavery doesn't frighten us. Our watchword is security.

FENNELL. I know men who are perfectly secure. They have no worries or responsibilities. They are certain of their food and clothing and housing. They have regular employment, and a doctor to look after their health, and a parson to see that their souls are carefully inspected. They are guarded and protected and absolutely secure. But they all want to get out.

AMABEL. Oh, where are they ?

FENNELL. In Wormwood Scrubs, my dear. I think I'd better go now. If I don't I shall forget that I am a clergyman and say something dreadful. (*As PHILIP prepares to go to the door with him*). No, don't come to the door, Philip, I know my way.

ANDREW *enters, almost colliding with him.*

ANDREW. Sorry, Vicar. Just going ?

FENNELL. Yes, if I can get out before I'm arrested.

ANDREW. Arrested ! What for ?

FENNELL. Oh, just anything, just anything ! Good-bye !  
(*Exit*).

ANDREW. Is there a to-do on ?

PHILIP. Yes, and you're just in time to take part in it. It's this business about Peter Logan. We're all mixed up in the firm and you're affected by it as much as any of us. I've asked Peter to come here for an informal talk with Selby and Snoddy and us. They'll arrive in a few minutes. Where's Alice ?

AMABEL. I'll call her. She's in the kitchen.

PHILIP. And we'd better have Melanie in, too. This is a family affair. (*Exit AMABEL*).

DENZIL. You understand, don't you, that this is very awkward for me. I hope to get an office in the Government!...

DELAWARE. Really ! As what ?

DENZIL. I don't know. The first vacancy ! . . .

DELAWARE. What a pleasant way of working. The Army, the Navy or the Air Force—take your pick !

DENZIL. You may dish me if you take up a reactionary attitude about Logan.

PHILIP. I don't care a tuppenny damn what becomes of your political career. I care a great deal about how we treat Peter Logan, and I care a great deal, too, about the way we run our factory. If you think that we are going to let injustice be done to Logan so that you may become Minister of Fisheries, you're greatly mistaken.

DENZIL. Well, so long as we quite understand where we are!

PHILIP. We understand perfectly.

ALICE, *followed by MELANIE and AMABEL, enters.*

ALICE. What is this, father ?

DELAWARE. You tell them, Philip.

PHILIP. Things are coming to a head, and as you have some financial interest in the business, father and I think you'd better know exactly what the situation is.

MELANIE. I still don't see why you should upset your business for one person. Peter Logan may be all you say, but he isn't all that important.

ALICE. Be careful how you treat an obscure man, Melanie. He may turn out to be your saviour.

MELANIE. Well, let him save then. In any case, aren't there too many saviours about ?

PHILIP. The factory happens to be ours, Melanie. We made it. Without father and grandfather it wouldn't be there. I've no use for this twaddle about working men being the foundation of everything. They aren't—not by a long chalk. This body of mine would be nothing without this. (*He strikes his head with his hand*). Take the mind away and what's left ? I don't intend to let our factory become a cockpit for politicians and officials. It's our factory and we'll employ in it whom we please.

MELANIE. How can you if the men go on strike ?

PHILIP. We can shut down until they return.

DENZIL. The Government won't let you do that. They'll take it over.

PHILIP. What's the factory without us ? A body without a brain. This isn't a fight for Logan alone, Melanie, as you seem to think. It's a fight for all working men—the men who want to do their job and earn their pay and spend their wage the way they want to spend it. That's what we're fighting for, and I'll fight for it, if I have to barricade myself in the factory to do it. I'm against directed men, Denzil. We fight, father.

MELANIE. Have you told them our news ?

PHILIP. Not yet.

MELANIE. I'm going to have a baby.

ALICE. Melanie!

MELANIE. It will make me very happy to hear that the factory has been ruined for the benefit of Mr. Peter Logan.

ELSIE *enters*.

ELSIE. Mr. Selby's come, sir, and Mr. Snoddy.

PHILIP. Thank you, Elsie. (*Exit with ELSIE*).

ALICE. I'm so glad, Melanie.

AMABEL. So am I.

DELAWARE. This will be my first grandchild.

AMABEL. I do hope it's a boy. But of course you never

know how things will turn out. I know a woman who went to the best gynaecologist in London, and he told her her heart beats showed she was going to have a daughter, but she had twin sons ! Isn't that funny !

MELANIE (*going to DELAWARE*). You see, don't you, why I feel like that about the factory.

DELAWARE. Yes, I see.

MELANIE. Please be sensible, all of you. This isn't the time for heroic stunts. I don't understand your politics, and your principles. All I know is that I'm going to have a baby, and I want it to have all we've got and a bit more.

PHILIP *returns*.

PHILIP. Come in, won't you ?

SELBY *and* SNODDY *enter*.

PHILIP. Peter hasn't turned up yet. I expect he'll be here any minute now. I think you know everybody. You've met my wife, haven't you ?

SELBY. Well, not exactly met. 'Ow are you, ma'am ?

MELANIE. Hoping, Mr. Selby—hoping there'll be common sense tonight. How do you do, Mr. Snoddy ? (*She shakes hands with both of them*).

SNODDY. Uncommon sense is what's needed these days, Mrs. Delaware.

MELANIE. Well, whatever sort's needed, I hope there'll be a lot of it. (*Turning to ALICE and AMABEL*). I suppose we'd better leave them to it.

SELBY. It's a shame for us to drive you out! . . .

ALICE. That's all right, Mr. Selby. We'll go to the kitchen. We're used to it. One of these days, men'll have the strike of their lives.

SNODDY. And what'll that be ?

ALICE. A general strike of women. You men have given us a dirty deal. What we're going to do with you on our hands when you're working only five days a week, God knows ? . . .  
*She goes out, and AMABEL and MELANIE follow her to the door.*

MELANIE. Them's my sentiments, too, Mr. Snoddy.

AMABEL. When I say things like that, Denzil says men can always wheedle women into anything. But he's wrong !

*They both go out, AMABEL shutting the door behind her.*

DELAWARE. Well, gentlemen, sit down. (*To PHILIP*). Peter ought to be here.

SELBY. We're a little in front of our time, I think. (*To DENZIL*). When did you get down ?

DENZIL. This afternoon. It wasn't easy to get away but I thought I ought to be here. Naturally, this business interests me more than the usual trouble.

SELBY. Naturally. Mr. Delaware, I may as well tell you the Union is absolutely determined about this business. Snoddy and I 'ave come 'ere because we feel respect for you ... an' you, too ! (*He turns to PHILIP*). But our minds are made up, an' nothin' that's said tonight is likely to change them. Peter Logan's a decent man, but 'is decency 'as nothin' to do with the matter in 'and. If 'e was the Archangel Gabriel 'imself an' 'e worked in your factory, 'e'd 'ave to join the Union.

SNODDY. Or go.

DELAWARE. Where ?

SNODDY. Wherever he came from!

DELAWARE. That's heaven, isn't it ?

*ELSIE knocks on the door. PHILIP opens it.*

ELSIE (*outside*). Mr. Logan, sir.

PHILIP. Ah, Peter, come in.

*PETER LOGAN is an elderly workman, about fifty-five, as fine in his fashion as SELBY, as upright and determined: and he has the same fanaticism as SNODDY. His sincerity is transparent.*

SELBY. Evenin', Peter.

LOGAN. Evenin', Arthur. Evenin', Snoddy.

SNODDY. Evening, Logan.

LOGAN (*to DELAWARE*). How are you, sir ?

DELAWARE (*taking his hand*). All the better for seeing you, Peter. How's your wife.

LOGAN. Fine, sir, fine. She's a cheerful woman, thank

God. (*To DENZIL and ANDREW*) Good evening. (*They murmur friendly greetings*).

DELAWARE. Come and sit down here. Peter, beside me. (*Logan does so*). You and I are old friends, and old friends must stand together. Well, gentlemen, there's no need for us to waste time on preliminaries, so we'll go straight to the point.

SELBY. An' the point is plain. Peter, you've got to join the Union.

LOGAN. What Union ?

SELBY. Our Union.

SNODDY. There are too many Unions. One would be enough. All these little Unions weaken the working class, and some of them are scab.

LOGAN. I've no choice then ?

SELBY. No.

DENZIL. Why should you ? A soldier has no choice. He has to serve where he's sent.

LOGAN. I'm not a soldier. I'm a civilian.

SELBY. That's where you are wrong, Peter. You *are* a soldier. In the Workers' Army.

SNODDY. Ay, and some of us think you're a deserter.

SELBY. Now, now, Bert, no 'ard words, if you please. We know Peter, an' we know 'e's a sincere and honest man !

SNODDY. What's the use of sincerity without sense. Goodness is a crime when it's silly. This is a war, and there are only two sides to it: your side and the enemy's.

LOGAN. I'm not joining any Union, big or small.

SNODDY. Then you'll have to leave your job !

LOGAN. Listen to me, Snoddy. I've never had the slightest respect for you. You're a sour-bellied, bitter-minded, barren man, with a heart full of hatred. Men like you are evil, and I've spent my life fighting evil! . . .

SNODDY. Have I got to listen to this ?

SELBY. 'E listened to you, Bert. You might listen to 'im.

SNODDY. Abuse is no argument.

LOGAN. I'm not abusing you. I'm telling you what I think of you. I don't doubt your sincerity, but you yourself said a

second ago, sincerity without sense is crime. In my opinion, you're a criminal.

SELBY. Ah, steady, Peter.

SNODDY. Let him talk.

LOGAN. My family has lived in this town and district for as long as we have any memory, and we've always been a fighting family, fighting for freedom. My great-grandfather was transported for trying to form a Union ! . . .

SNODDY. And you're trying to wreck what he tried to start.

LOGAN. No, I'm not. I'm carrying on his fight—for freedom. He wasn't the only one of us that fought. My grandfather was a Chartist and was sent to prison. I can remember him, an old man, telling me the hard times he had, and how cruelly he was treated in prison. I don't forget that. I'll never forget it.

SNODDY. Then why aren't you on our side now ?

LOGAN. I'm on the same side as my grandfather and my great-grandfather. I'm defending my freedom. They fought the Government and the employers, but mine's a harder fight than theirs. I have to fight my own class.

SNODDY. Pah ! There's no sense in talk like that. Those that aren't for us are against us.

LOGAN. You see, Snoddy, I don't share your belief. I don't think that all the right is in one class and all the wrong in the other. There are some bad workmen and some good employers, (*Turning to DELAWARE*). You're a good employer, sir.

DELAWARE. And you're a good workman, Peter.

SNODDY. Good employers are the workers' worst enemies. They reconcile them to capitalism.

LOGAN. That's street-corner trash ! My mind's made up. I won't be forced into anything.

SELBY. You'll be forced out of your job, Peter.

LOGAN. Very well, I'll be forced out of it.

PHILIP. But haven't we some say in this, Selby ?

SELBY. Oh, yes, everybody 'as a say.

DELAWARE. Even if he hasn't anything else.

PHILIP. Do you mean that if Peter doesn't join your Union and we refuse to sack him, you'll declare a strike ?

SELBY. Yes.

PHILIP. Then what happens ?

SELBY. Who can tell ? The strike may spread ! . . .

DENZIL. Why should there be a strike at all ? Peter's not a young man. He can retire. We could pension him.

LOGAN. I don't want to retire. I'm an able-bodied man, and I like my work. I'm not retiring, and I'm not being bribed by a pension.

SNODDY. Listen, Peter Logan. We're fighting for the emancipation of the working-class, and we look on men like you as traitors ! . . .

SELBY. You'll never convert a good man by bad words, Bert.

LOGAN. It's all right, Arthur. I don't mind what he says. I can give as good as I get.

SNODDY. I'm trying to make you realise what we feel. We've had to fight for every right we possess. Nothing's ever been granted to us by grace or because it was right we should have it. We've had to force it from the bosses, fight for it, suffer for it, starve and die for it. Your grandfather and your great-grandfather, you say, fought for freedom. For whom ? For us. Just as we're fighting for it now. You won't join the fight but you'll accept the benefits that are won in it. Is that fair or decent ? (*Pointing to ANDREW*). He was a Conchy in the war. He wouldn't fight, but he takes the freedom other people won. You're the same. If we win better conditions of life for the working people, you'll benefit by them, though you never raised a finger to win them, though you did worse than that, you hampered them that won them.

LOGAN. My religion forbids me to take part in political movements ! . . .

SNODDY. How can you live if you don't ?

LOGAN. Perfectly. The business of this world is not mine. You have no hope hereafter, so you must agitate yourself about your condition here. I have all the hope there is, and I'm not

much concerned about earthly things. You think that this little bit of life, this sixty or seventy years, is important because you don't believe there's anything else. But I do believe there's more than this, so much more, Snoddy, that this existence that hardly lasts as long as the flame of a match you light your pipe with, doesn't matter that! (*He snaps his fingers*).

SNODDY. Pah! That kind of talk gets nobody anywhere. If your grandfather and your great-grandfather had acted as you're doing, we'd still be where they were.

SELBY. That's the point, Peter.

LOGAN. They're where I shall be, in the everlasting grace of the Almighty God.

SNODDY. That's what you say, but we're making sure of something here in case there's nothing after; and we mean to change the whole structure of society from top to bottom. There wouldn't be a community without the working class. (*He turns to DELAWARE.*) Without us, you couldn't live.

DELAWARE. Could you live without us?

SNODDY. Easily. We can create our own leaders.

PHILIP. Who will become the same as us in time, with the same outlook and habits and the same sense of superiority. You don't think, do you, that Stalin lets every Tom, Dick and Harry in Moscow slap his back and tell him what to do.

SNODDY. He has a working-class mind.

PHILIP. He has a master's mind.

DELAWARE. No man in authority has a working-class mind.

PHILIP. Supposing we were to strike—I mean the managerial class?

SNODDY. You'd be licked in a week.

PHILIP. Wouldn't the withdrawal of mind be paralysing?

SELBY. Not so paralysing as the withdrawal of labour.

SNODDY. If the whole working class were to strike for a week, where should we all be?

SELBY. Sunk!

DELAWARE. I'm glad you use the word *all*, Snoddy. It includes the working class.

PHILIP. Why suppose what can't happen?

SNODDY. Can't it? When we've got the working class thoroughly organised, anything can happen.

LOGAN. I'd rather be bossed by feudal lords than shop stewards.

DENZIL. What about Parliament?

SNODDY. We don't take much notice of that. A general strike can do more in a fortnight than a parliament can do in ten years. The working man is the first fact for us, Mr. Delaware, and we put facts first. The rest of the population can have what's left when the working class is satisfied. You've had your turn. It's our turn now. Well, Logan, what's it to be?

LOGAN. I won't submit to force!

SELBY. Then, Mr. Delaware, you must sack him or we come out.

DELAWARE. That's a very grave threat, Selby.

SELBY. Ay, very grave.

PHILIP. We shall not sack Peter.

SELBY (*rising*). Very well, Mr. Philip.

*They all rise.*

SNODDY. It'll be a bitter war.

DENZIL. I still think my suggestion is the right one. Peter, why don't you retire?

LOGAN. You mean run away, don't you?

ANDREW (*rhetorically*). This is an evil thing you are about to do. You will put bitterness in many hearts. There will be wreck and ruin, and no one knows what the end will be.

SELBY (*suddenly and fervently*). Peter, why don't you come in. We don't want to fight over a decent chap like you.

LOGAN. You have your way of looking at things, Arthur. I have mine. Time will tell which of us is right. (*To DELAWARE*). Good-night, sir.

DELAWARE (*taking his hand*). Good-night, Peter.

LOGAN. I'd just like to tell you, sir, and you, too, Mr. Philip, that if you decide to sack me, there'll be no ill-feeling on my part. We'll still be good friends.

*He goes out. There is a general bustle among the others.*

SELBY. Of course, you'll understand that this is an informal meeting. Nothing official has been settled here tonight.

PHILIP. Yes, Selby, we understand.

SELBY. We shall have to report to the Ministry of Labour, an' they'll send someone down, I suppose, an' if he can't arrange a settlement, the matter'll have to go before the Tribunal! . . .

SNODDY. The men may take the matter into their own hands!

DENZIL. But unofficial strikes and lock-outs are illegal!

*There is general laughter at this statement.*

PHILIP. So are black markets and burglars.

SNODDY. If the men come out of their own accord, who'll stop them? You can't gaol the lot. It's time we had a decision. I shall go straight to the factory and report what's happened there. (*To DENZIL*). Whose side will you take?

DENZIL. The right side.

DELAWARE. You'll lose your seat if you do.

SNODDY. There's only one side now : ours.

*There is a movement towards the door. SELBY and*

*SNODDY go out, accompanied by PHILIP and DENZIL.*

DELAWARE. This will be the first strike we've had in our factory. I wish I had died with the record unbroken.

ANDREW. Oh, father, dying's so easy. Anybody can do that. It's living that's so\*hard.

*MELANIE enters.*

MELANIE. Well ?

DELAWARE. It's not well, my dear.

MELANIE. Haven't you settled it ?

DELAWARE. No. We're going to fight.

*PHILIP returns.*

MELANIE. Fight! Philip, you aren't going to fight ?

PHILIP. Yes.

MELANIE. But you can't fight!

PHILIP. We can and we will.

MELANIE. Philip, you mustn't fight.

PHILIP. Why ?

MELANIE. We may lose all we possess.

PHILIP. Well ?

MELANIE. I want my son to have his inheritance. You've no right to waste it. It's not yours (*turning to DELAWARE*) nor yours. It's his. You've had it on trust for him. Logan isn't worth it. Don't fight.

PHILIP. We must fight, Melanie. Every man must fight for his faith.

MELANIE. What's your fate to my son ? How will you face him if you risk all you have for your faith ?

PHILIP. How shall I face him if I don't ?

MELANIE. Father, the factory's yours, not Philip's . . .

DELAWARE. I'm on Philip's side, my dear.

ANDREW. It's wrong, it's all wrong. You're playing pitch and toss on the brink of hell.

MELANIE, *with a gesture of despair*, sits down. ALICE enters.

ALICE. Amabel and Denzil are moving out.

DELAWARE. Moving out ?

ALICE. Yes. They think it's better they shouldn't stay here while there's all this trouble. They're upstairs packing. Has the strike begun ?

ANDREW. Practically.

ALICE. I seem to have spent all my life in war. Ever since I was a child there has been fighting of some sort. Won't anybody keep the peace ?

PHILIP. Dead men don't fight. Living men do.

*The telephone bell rings. Philip picks up the receiver.*

PHILIP. Yes? Oh, yes, John. (*He listens for a few moments*). All right, John. No, don't do anything. I'll come at once. Goodbye. (*He replaces the receiver*). They're out. (*The others do not speak*). I'm going round to the works. Are you coming, father ? (*DELAWARE makes a desponding motion with his handsy but does not answer*).

MELANIE. I'll come with you ! . . .

PHILIP. No. Stay here. I'll go alone.

*He goes out. MELANIE stands gazing about her. The front door is heard to slam as PHILIP goes out. Then she sits down.*

ALICE. Well, I suppose we shall still want something to eat!

*She looks around as if expecting an answer., but., getting none., she goes out. The sound of a car starting is heard. It rises and then dies away. ANDREW, MELANIE and DELAWARE sit in silence. The scene ends.*

## ACT III

### SCENE I

*It is a few days later., and we are still in the drawing room.*

MELANIE *is seated by a window, scribbling on a writing pad, which she balances on her knees.* ALICE *enters.*

MELANIE. Switch the light on, Alice, please.

ALICE. I thought I heard Philip coming in.

MELANIE. No, not yet. But father's just come home.

ALICE (*seating herself*). I hope they've settled something at this conference.

MELANIE. The whole thing could have been settled easily and simply.

ALICE. By sacking Logan.

MELANIE. Yes.

DELAWARE, *in a state of dejection, enters.*

ALICE. Hullo, father.

DELAWARE. Hullo, my dear.

MELANIE. Have you settled the strike ?

DELAWARE. We're farther away than ever. When we think we've reached an agreement, the men spring a new demand on us.

ALICE. What happens now ?

DELAWARE *shrugs his shoulders and sits down despondently.*

MELANIE. Logan's out of work, too, I suppose ?

DELAWARE. Yes. We're all out of work.

MELANIE. Well, then, the strike can be settled at once. Logan needn't be taken back. It's perfectly simple.

DELAWARE. My experience, Melanie, is that perfectly simple things are generally impossible.

MELANIE. Where's Philip ?

DELAWARE. He'll be here presently. I felt so sick of this miserable business that I came away. There's a queer temper these times.

MELANIE. Hasn't there always been a queer temper after a war?

DELAWARE. But it's worse now. The men want rights without responsibilities. Gimme, gimme, gimme—that's the spirit of this age. You've got something. I want it. Gimme, gimme, gimme!

MELANIE. Do you really think it matters much whether we own the factory, so long as we control it?

DELAWARE. How can we control it if we don't own it?

MELANIE. Ownership doesn't seem important to me. Control does.

DELAWARE. I'm too old to appreciate these distinctions, Melanie. A man takes care of his own property: he doesn't take care of other people's.

MELANIE. Doesn't that apply to workmen, too?

DELAWARE. Yes, I... I suppose so.

MELANIE. Very well, then. I don't care two pins who owns what, so long as I'm in the group that governs. I can have as good a time under Communists as I have under the Conservatives.

ALICE. You don't care what happens so long as you have a good time?

MELANIE. No. If I can't get my comfort the Conservative way, I'll get it the Communist way. The wives of Russian Commissars have a very good time, and the wives of Labour M.P.s don't do too badly. I met a woman M.P. the other day—she's the Under Secretary of something—and she was the smartest-looking woman *in the room!* . . .

DELAWARE. Except you, my dear.

ALICE. Well, why not?

MELANIE. She was much better dressed than I was. I thought to myself, if that's what being a Labour woman M.P. can do for you, I'm all for it. She made the only duchess in the room look a frump.

PHILIP *enters.*

MELANIE. Well, Philip?

PHILIP. After you'd gone, father, Snoddy muttered some-

thing about a sympathetic strike, and Selby said he was afraid that Meldrum Factory'd have to shut down.

MELANIE. All for one man ! Is it worth it ?

DELAWARE. If this strike goes on, our business may be ruined. My time's almost over, and it doesn't matter much to me how I finish financially. But it matters to you Alice, and to Philip and Andrew. Snooky's all right. Amabel can look after him. I suggest that I buy back your shares in the factory. You'll be safe then.

PHILIP. I think that's right as far as Alice and Andrew are concerned father, but I'm in this fight! . . .

MELANIE. You're forgetting me, aren't you ?

PHILIP. I can earn our living—here or elsewhere.

DELAWARE. Melanie's point's a good one, Philip. I'll buy your shares too. It only means that my estate is distributed now instead of when I'm dead. If the strike ruins the estate there'll be nothing left to distribute. I can't leave Alice in the lurch.

*Enter* ELSIE.

ELSIE. There's a gentleman to see you, sir.

PHILIP. Me ?

ELSIE. He just said Mr. Delaware, sir. His name's Talbot.

PHILIP. Oh, yes. Is he in the morning room ?

ELSIE. Yes, sir.

PHILIP. I'll see him, father.

*Exit* PHILIP. ELSIE *draws curtains.*

ALICE. Isn't he from Meldrum factory ?

DELAWARE. Yes. The managing director.

ALICE. Then I suppose his men *have* come out.

DELAWARE. I shouldn't be surprised.

MELANIE. It's a pretty mess, isn't it ? All for the love of Logan!

ANDREW *enters.*

ANDREW. The Meldrum men are out.

DELAWARE. So I gather. Talbot's talking to Philip in the morning room.

ANDREW. Yes. I met him on the doorstep. He's in the devil of a rage.

*Exit* ELSIE.

MELANIE. I don't wonder. It's a bit hard to have his factory upset because our men have had a row with us. Supposing the entire town comes out? Supposing the strike spreads to the rest of the country?

DELAWARE. I should still say fight. There comes a moment when appeasement is worse than war. I'd rather die on my feet than live on my hands and knees.

ALICE. Father's right. There's a time when you must put up your fists. You can only make peace by fighting.

ANDREW. That's what they've always said—but there's no peace. One row makes another. I must avenge my defeat. You must avenge yours. And the end is bitterness and sorrow.

DELAWARE. What would you do, Andrew?

ANDREW. Give in!

ALICE. Give in?

ANDREW. Yes, no victory is worth what it costs.

DELAWARE. How odd that you and Melanie should think alike!

MELANIE. Allies are always odd. I want this strike settled, Andrew. I don't care how it's settled so long as it is. That's what you want, isn't it?

ANDREW. I want peace.

ALICE. At any price.

ANDREW. Yes. What do all these things matter if we can only get them and keep them by cutting each other's throats. Shedding blood for furniture and houses and possessions. I'd strip myself bare if that would bring peace.

*The door opens and PHILIP enters, followed by GORDON TALBOT, a keen-faced man off forty-five.*

PHILIP. Talbot wants a word with you, father.

DELAWARE (*rising*). Come in, Talbot.

*The others rise as if to depart, but TALBOT checks them.*

TALBOT. No, please. Don't go. I'll only stay a few moments and I hope I'll persuade Mrs. Philip, and you, too,

Mrs. Eddington, to support me. (*They resume their seats*). I suppose you know our men are out? (*Murmurs of assent*). They won't be the only ones.

DELAWARE. No, I don't suppose so.

TALBOT. Do you want a general strike?

MELANIE. I don't want any strike.

DELAWARE. Nobody wants strikes except people with a vested interest in trouble.

TALBOT. Then why let one happen in your factory?

PHILIP. Because we won't let Snoddy and Selby do what they like with us.

TALBOT. That's just talk. Our job's to get our trade balances right. Nothing else matters now. When we've straightened them, we can tackle these Trade Union chaps on level terms and knock hell out of them. This isn't the time for strikes.

ANDREW. No time is.

ALICE. But if the men make unreasonable demands.

TALBOT. Let 'em! Give 'em anything they want now. We can deal with them later on. Look here, Delaware, you've got to stop this strike.

DELAWARE. By sacking a faithful workman.

TALBOT. I'd sack the Almighty to stop a strike. I tell you this strike is spreading like wildfire.

PHILIP. Listen, Talbot. We're up against something far bigger than you think. Our shop stewards are all Communists.

TALBOT. So are ours.

PHILIP. Well, these chaps don't want peace. They want war. They want to wipe us out. The men themselves are out of hand. We mustn't reprove a man now. There'll be a strike if we do! We mustn't promote anybody without the workmen's approval. If we make one concession, we must make another. We have a five-day week. Presently, it'll be a four-day week. A workman may lose his temper with me, but I mustn't lose my temper with him. He's proving his independence. I'm only showing what a tyrant and bully I am. It was the working class that won the war. We did nothing.

They're all tired and in need of a rest. Well, my God, Talbot, aren't we tired too? How much of this sort of thing are we going to stand?

TALBOT. All of it until the slump comes. Then we'll put these chaps in their places.

PHILIP. I don't like your way of talking, Talbot. If I'm to fight, I'll fight as fairly as I'm able. I'm not looking forward to slumps so that I can starve men into submission. That's a dirty way of fighting.

ANDREW. All ways of fighting are dirty.

ALICE. No, they're not. There's fair fighting and foul.

ANDREW. Does it matter to a dead man if he's killed fairly or foully? He didn't want to die.

TALBOT. Don't drag religion into it. The minute you bring religion into daily life, there's hell to pay. Do you think workmen are full of nobility when they fight? Don't they beat up any man who won't join their strike? What do they care who they hurt as long as they get what they want? They'd starve the rest of us for a bob a day on their pay.

PHILIP. Nevertheless, Talbot, we'll do what we believe to be right.

TALBOT. And your idea of what is right is only an opinion.

PHILIP. What else have we to work with but our opinions?

DELAWARE. You see, Talbot, we believe that individuals are more important than crowds. And we know that every fight that is worth fighting has to be fought by lonely, determined people. The freedom you and I enjoy wasn't won by crowds. It was won in spite of them. We fought the King: we fought the peers: we fought the manufacturers: we're fighting the state: and soon we'll fight our worst enemy—the working man. We'll get knocked about, and may seem to be beaten. But if there is any heart and soul in this world, we'll win at last.

TALBOT. A very nice piece of oratory, Delaware, very nice, indeed, and if this was a Pleasant Sunday afternoon, I'd applaud it as loudly as anybody. But it isn't. Face facts, man.

DELAWARE. I am. You're running away from them. We've been through far worse than this before, and we'll come out of it as we came out of all our troubles, if we'll remember our breed and fight wrong wherever we see it.

TALBOT. Well, your blood be on your own head. The Ministry'll send someone down to tackle this trouble. Meanwhile, the Employers' Federation'll do all it can to stop it. We regard you, Delaware, as the Trade Unions regard Logan. You've got to conform. Or perish. Good-day!

DELAWARE. Good-day!

TALBOT *goes out almost violently.*

DELAWARE. I dislike him even more than I dislike Snoddy.

ANDREW. He almost made me feel bellicose. All the time he was talking, I felt the most frightful longing to hit him on the jaw.

MELANIE. But he was talking sense.

DELAWARE. I remember reading a story about that profane politician, Lord Melbourne, who remarked that he had been at many meetings where all the wise men were on one side and all the damned fools on the other. "And by God," he said, "the damned fools were right!"

MELANIE. A good story, father, doesn't settle strikes.

ELSIE *enters.*

ELSIE. Mr. Logan wants to speak to you, sir.

PHILIP (*going to the door*). Come in, Peter.

PETER LOGAN *enters.* ELSIE *retires, shutting the door behind her.*

MELANIE. Well, Logan, more trouble.

LOGAN (*ignoring her, and going to DELAWARE*). I've decided to join the Union, sir.

MELANIE. Oh, splendid.

LOGAN. I thought that was only fair to you, sir. My principles are the same as they were, but I can't bear to see your business wrecked.

PHILIP. This doesn't settle anything, Peter. There's a more important question, and that's our right to run our own lives. I tell you all, these chaps mean to dispossess us. They

claim power and dominion. You must join their Union. We must all do what they tell us. They're to have all the rights: we're to have none. That question has still to be settled. Fight, man, fight.

LOGAN. At my age, sir ?

PHILIP. At any age. Go to your grave with your head up and your fists free.

LOGAN. I'm joining the Union.

DELAWARE. What's come on us all, Peter.

LOGAN. Sin, sir. Pride and selfishness and sin. Good-night.

DELAWARE (*rising*). I'll come to the door with you. Give me your arm. I've known you since we were both young lads, and I've always liked you, Peter.

LOGAN. And I've always liked you, sir.

DELAWARE. I think we might have been allowed to work out our time together in the way we're used to, but I suppose we're both out of date.

LOGAN. Ay, mebbe. Mebbe we've both been here long enough, and it's time we went.

*They go, arm in arm, towards the door.*

PHILIP. But we're fighting, father. You hear, Peter! We're fighting it out.

*The two old men turn for a moment to look at him. Then they go out in silence, LOGAN unlinking his arm and letting DELAWARE go first.*

MELANIE. They look as if they were already dead.

*The scene ends.*

## ACT III

### SCENE II

*The time is three weeks later. AMABEL is seated in a corner of the room, reading a magazine. The door opens and DENZIL enters.*

DENZIL. You alone ?

AMABEL. Can't you see I am ? I've been here by myself ever since lunch. Alice and Melanie went out and didn't even ask me if I'd like to go with them. And I haven't seen you for hours and hours and hours.

DENZIL. I've been busy.

AMABEL. I'm being neglected. I know I'm not clever, but I'm not a fool, and I do know when I'm being neglected. I mean to say, if everybody goes out and nobody asks you to go with them, you *are* neglected. It's no good arguing about it!

DENZIL. Fm not.

AMABEL. That's what I say. It's no good arguing about it. If nobody takes any notice of you, and everybody goes out and doesn't ask you if you'd like to go, you're neglected. And that's that. Do you still love me, Denzil ?

DENZIL. Yes. Have you seen *The Times* ?

AMABEL. It's about here somewhere. Well, if you love me, why do you neglect me ?

DENZIL. I haven't neglected you. I've been busy I tell you.

AMABEL. I can't see that being busy's an excuse for neglecting your wife. I've been sitting here by myself for hours and hours and hours. You haven't even kissed me.

DENZIL. Oh, all right. (*He pecks her*). But a man can't keep on remembering to kiss a woman when he has things on his mind.

AMABEL. I don't see why not. After all, what's life without

love. I mean to say it isn't much fun for a girl if there's no love, is it? And if you had to sit here alone for hours and hours and hours! . . .

DENZIL. Listen, Amabel, I want to have another go at father and Philip before I spring our proposal on them. I've been hammering it all out since I saw you this morning. That's why you seem to have been neglected. But you haven't, darling. I had you at the back of my mind all the time.

AMABEL. I want to be at the front of your mind, Denzil. After all, I *am* your wife. You can't get away from that.

DENZIL. I don't want to get away from it.

AMABEL. I'm like the island in *Mary Rose*, Denzil; I like to be remembered.

DENZIL (*almost to himself*). God grant me patience.

AMABEL. What did you say, dear?

DENZIL. I was only asking God to make me worthy of you.

AMABEL. Oh, how sweet of you. I shall kiss you for that. (*As she does so, the door opens and PHILIP, followed by DELAWARE, enters*).

DENZIL. Ah, father, I'm glad you've come back. I've had a long talk with Verner.

DELAWARE. Who's he?

DENZIL. A man from the Ministry of Labour.

DELAWARE. Oh, a Civil Servant!

DENZIL. Yes, and a very intelligent one.

DELAWARE. All Civil Servants are intelligent apart. It's only when they get together that they're such damned fools.

DENZIL. Verner didn't say anything definite but he hinted quite a lot.

PHILIP. Hinted what?

DENZIL. The Government takes a very serious view of this strike!

DELAWARE. I'm glad it's taking a serious view of something.

DENZIL. Verner advises you to settle.

PHILIP. We've always been willing to settle. The factory's there. The men have only to return!

DENZIL. On your terms.

PHILIP. Certainly. It's our factory. They want to return on their terms, don't they? And it isn't their factory.

DENZIL. They take a different view from ours. They regard themselves as partners! . . .

DELAWARE. No, Denzil, they don't. They regard themselves as the owners. We're merely their managers.

DENZIL. Well, there's something in their argument, isn't there?

PHILIP. Not a damned thing.

DELAWARE. As Philip says, Denzil, not a damned thing. A man can live without hands and feet, but he can't live without a head.

DENZIL. I don't suppose it makes any difference to you, but if you were to behave reasonably and settle it, it would be a good thing for me personally.

DELAWARE. I'm surprised, Denzil, to hear you hinting at a job. I thought that all Labour men were above vulgar ambition.

PHILIP. My dear father, you've only to watch a Labour man's face when a job's lurking round the corner, to get rid of that idea.

AMABEL (*who has been absorbed in her magazine*). I think it must be terrible to be buried alive.

*The others gaze at her in astonishment.*

DELAWARE. What!

DENZIL. What on earth are you talking about?

AMABEL. I've just read an article in this magazine on premature burial, and it sounds awful. I think people should make certain you're really dead before they bury you.

*She goes out, as if she were about to order her lawyers to add a codicil to her will to ensure that she isn't buried alive.*

DELAWARE. Amabel has a very detached sort of mind. I sometimes find it hard to follow. Your lives must be very enthralling, Snooky. I don't suppose you ever know what she's going to say next.

DENZIL. Listen, father, Verner asked me to arrange another unofficial meeting between you and the Union. I've

seen Selby and Snoddy, and they'll be here shortly. Snoddy's not very agreeable.

PHILIP. He never is.

DENZIL. Well, he's as fierce for a fight as you are, Philip. He's coming, though he didn't want to.

DELAWARE. Supposing we can't agree ?

DENZIL. That will be very serious, father.

PHILIP. For whom ?

DENZIL. For you.

DELAWARE. You mean the Government will take over our factory ?

DENZIL. How do I know what the Government will do ?

PHILIP. But that's what you think it'll do ?

DENZIL. It doesn't want to. It has enough trouble on its hands already.

DELAWARE. But if we don't settle on the men's terms, it will confiscate our property ?

DENZIL. Confiscate is an ugly word, father !

DELAWARE. And confiscation is an ugly thing. Theft doesn't cease to be theft when the Government commits it.

DENZIL. But, father, the state's morality is different from the individual's.

DELAWARE. That's what's wrong with it. I don't see why the State should be allowed to commit acts for which you and I would be put in prison or hanged.

DENZIL. You can't argue with Governments, unless they've lost their majority. And this one hasn't.

*ELSIE enters.*

ELSIE. Those men are here, sir.

DELAWARE. What men ?

ELSIE. The strike men, sir.

DENZIL. Do you mean Mr. Selby and Mr. Snoddy ?

ELSIE. Yes, sir. The men that were here before, sir.

DENZIL. Oh, all right.

*He goes out, and ELSIE drifts after him.*

PHILIP. Selby's a decent man. It's Snoddy I don't like.

DELAWARE. Oh, he's just the common fanatic. There have

always been men of his sort. He's only a Desert Father standing on his head. The Christian church has thousands of Snoddys.

DENZIL *returns, followed by SELBY and SNODDY.*

DELAWARE (*rising to greet them*). Well, gentlemen ?

SELBY. I'm responsible for this visit, Mr. Delaware. Snoddy 'ere is opposed to it.

SNODDY. Tooth and nail.

SELBY. We've 'ad a talk with this chap, Verner, from the Ministry of Labour, an' we thought that mebbe if you an' me 'ad a talk we might settle this business.

SNODDY. There's only one way to settle it.

PHILIP. For us to put up our hands ?

SNODDY. Yes. Unconditional surrender.

DELAWARE. You see, Selby ?

SELBY. Bert an' me don't look at things from the same point of view. 'E thinks there's only one way of settlin' trouble, but I think there's 'alf a dozen ways, an' if one won't work, I try another. You've made it 'ard for me by refusin' to negotiate until the men return to work. I didn't think you'd do that, Mr. Delaware.

DELAWARE. I didn't think my men would strike without warning.

SELBY. Well, you 'ave to make allowances for the spirit of the time. We're all restless an' upset. I still can't see what all this fuss is about.

PHILIP. Human rights, Selby. There's nothing on earth so irrational and unreasonable as liberty. But it's this irrational thing that men want and will die for. There isn't a man on this earth who'll go to the stake for slavery, but millions of them will die for freedom.

SNODDY. Rhetoric! That's all that is!

PHILIP. This strike may end in our ruin ! . . .

DENZIL. But why should there be ruin for anybody? Hasn't Logan offered to join the Union ?

PHILIP. That makes no difference to us. This trouble is sure to develop again. We must settle it now.

SNODDY. In any case, the Union will refuse Logan's application.

DENZIL. Refuse!

SNODDY. Yes.

DELAWARE. I don't understand, Snoddy. I thought this strike was because he wasn't a member of the Union.

SNODDY. He caused this strike and must suffer for it. We won't have him in the Union.

DELAWARE. You can't mean ! . . .

PHILIP. Yes, father, that's exactly what they do mean. They don't intend to let Logan earn his living here again.

SNODDY. Not in our trade. The man betrayed his class. He must pay the penalty.

DELAWARE. Arthur Selby, do you consent to that ?

SELBY. Yes, Mr. Delaware. I don't like it. Nobody could. But Peter was the cause of this trouble, an' 'e must be punished. We won't 'ave 'im in the Union, an' we won't 'ave 'im in the works.

DELAWARE. But this is tyranny and oppression.

SELBY. Those are words, Mr. Delaware. They don't frighten us.

DELAWARE. That's a pity. They frighten me, and they ought to frighten you.

SNODDY. Our terms, Mr. Delaware, are simple. No man will be allowed to work in the factories of this town unless he belongs to our Union. Any employer employing a man who doesn't belong to our Union will not be able to carry on his business. But that isn't all. We want some share in the management. In future, no man is to be employed or promoted without our consent. Those are our terms, and it's a waste of your time and ours to discuss anything else.

PHILIP. And those are terms we shall not accept.

DELAWARE. Well, Denzil, what's your opinion of this ?

DENZIL. It's pretty drastic, father.

PHILIP. Do you approve of it ?

DENZIL. I'm like Selby. I hate this sort of thing . . .

DELAWARE. Are you taking our side ? Well, Denzil ? . . .

*There is a pause.*

DENZIL. I shall support the men, father.

PHILIP. At the cost of your conscience ?

DENZIL. My conscience is clear.

DELAWARE. Isn't the word *adaptable*, Denzil ?

SELBY. Mr. Delaware, Peter Logan's an old man ! . . .

DELAWARE. Not so very old, Arthur !

SELBY. You know what I mean. Industrially 'e's old. In a year or two VII be out of industry altogether. 'E'll 'ave 'is old-age pension an' 'is savings an' one thing an<sup>s</sup> another. Is a war over 'im common sense ?

DELAWARE. In a year or two, Arthur, all of us will be dead. Is it common sense to fight about anything? No man is defeated until he's dead, and even then I'm not sure that he's licked.

PHILIP. And, anyhow, we'll go to our graves kicking.

DELAWARE. Yes, kicking. The English are a peculiar people, Arthur, as you ought to know. They always come back. They may be kicked out, but they return. Defeat is only an incident in a war they know they'll win. Do you remember that song the soldiers used to sing in the first World War ?

SELBY. We sang a lot of songs.

DELAWARE. Yes, we sang a lot of songs. We're a singing people. But there was one song which was more than a song! It was a revelation of character and faith. Here we are, here we are, here we are *again!* We shall come back. You see, Arthur, the English always come back.

SNODDY. I'm English aren't I ?

DELAWARE. Yes, but your mind is full of ideas that aren't. You think security is all that matters. We don't.

SELBY. Well, my little mission's failed.

*He rises as he speaks.*

DENZIL. Don't do anything in a hurry. Sleep on it. Another day won't make much difference.

PHILIP. It won't make any. We shall still be where we are.

SELBY (*holding out his hand to Delaware*). Good-night. ,

DELAWARE (*shaking his hand warmly*). Good-night, Arthur! You know, you and I have a good deal in common. I don't feel alien to you as I do to him (*nodding his head towards SNODDY*). You're a bitter man, Snoddy, and the English aren't a bitter people. That's why you'll never lead them. Good-night !

SNODDY. Bitterness is an element in life, Mr. Delaware. We need it. I don't care whether I lead or follow, so long as my crowd goes in the right direction. Good-night.

*There is a babble of sound as they go out, leaving DELAWARE alone. ALICE enters.*

ALICE. Well, father.

DELAWARE. We're where we were, my dear. Denzil's on their side.

ALICE. Bad boy makes bad.

DELAWARE. Human beings have lived on this earth for millions of years, Alice. Wouldn't you think by this time they'd have learnt how to live ?

ALICE. Will they ever learn, father ?

DELAWARE. I wonder.

*ANDREW enters.*

ANDREW. Well, it's settled.

ALICE. What! The strike ?

ANDREW. My appointment.

ALICE. Oh, that!

ANDREW. I'm to go out to China at once. Things are in a very bad way in China.

DELAWARE. Indeed. The poor unfortunate heathen ! How much they need the blessings of European civilisation !

ANDREW. I shall have plenty to do. Hunger and disease and dissension everywhere.

DELAWARE. So different from dear old England.

*Enter MELANIE and PHILIP.*

DELAWARE. Andrew's going to China. Tfce Chinese are in great need of progress, and he's going out to teach it to them.

MELANIE. You must send some of them here, Andrew, to see how well we're doing.

ELSIE enters.

ELSIE. Mr. Logan wants to see you, sir. He wants to say good-bye.

DELAWARE. Say good-bye! Show him in, Elsie.

ELSIE. Yes, sir.

*She goes out, leaving the door open.*

DELAWARE. Good-bye! Where's he going?

MELANIE. It's a pity he didn't go sooner. He's like you, Andrew, ruined by principles and ideals.

ELSIE returns.

ELSIE. Mr. Logan, sir.

LOGAN enters. ELSIE retires, shutting the door behind her.

DELAWARE (rising). Come in, Peter. Sit down. What's this I hear about good-bye?

LOGAN (to the others). Good-evening.

*They murmur their responses.*

ALICE. Do you want to speak to father alone, Peter?

LOGAN. No, Mrs. Eddington. I've just come to say good-bye to you all.

DELAWARE. Where are you going?

LOGAN. South Africa, sir.

DELAWARE. South Africa!

LOGAN. Yes, sir. I have a daughter out there. She's sent for me and her mother.

DELAWARE. I remember her. Wasn't her name Jenny?

LOGAN. Yes, sir.

DELAWARE. A nice girl. But you mustn't go away.

LOGAN. I've no place here any more, sir, England's not my home now.

PHILIP. Is it anybody's?

ALICE. We used to say that an Englishman's home was his castle. Now it's his concentration camp.

DELAWARE. Perhaps you're right to go, Peter. You'll be happy with Jenny.

LOGAN. Uh-huh! But we belong here, sir. I'm afraid my wife'll fret.

PHILIP. I'm damned sorry, Peter.

LOGAN. Oh, well, sir, we get these ups and downs. If it hadn't been this, it would have been something else.

MELANIE. None of this need have happened. You were all wilful and must have your own way.

LOGAN. That's what you always said, Mrs. Philip.

MELANIE. Wasn't I right? What good has this nobility and high-mindedness done anybody?

LOGAN. Given us some satisfaction, ma'am, inside us. I don't regret anything I did.

DELAWARE. Nor do I, Peter.

LOGAN. But that doesn't prevent me from feeling sorry to go, the way I'm going. Hardly anybody speaks to me now. They stare right through me or turn away. When I was a child, sir, and heard the Minister reading about the scapegoat, in the Bible, that was driven into the Wilderness, I used to feel pity for the scapegoat.

DELAWARE. Uh-huh!

LOGAN. I never dreamt that I'd be one. I wouldn't mind if it weren't for Hannah.

ALICE. Your wife.

LOGAN. Ay. She feels it bad. This sort of thing's hard on women, sir.

DELAWARE. It's hard on us all, Peter.

LOGAN. Ay, but harder on women. It doesn't matter much to us where we are, but it matters to them. One place in the world is no more to me than another.

MELANIE. I almost envy you, Mr. Logan.

LOGAN. Envy me, ma'am?

MELANIE. Yes, your confidence about now and hereafter.

LOGAN. I have nothing ma'am, that you or anybody else can't have.

MELANIE. You see, I believe only in what I have.

LOGAN. If that was all I had, ma'am, I should have nothing at all. Well, I just came in to say good-bye, so I'll be going now. I'm afraid this strike's been hard on you, sir.

DELAWARE. Yes, Peter, it has, but no harder than some other things. When do you sail?

LOGAN. As soon as I can get away, sir.

DELAWARE. Let me know the date, will you? I'd like to come to the station and see you off.

LOGAN. That's too much trouble for you to take.

DELAWARE. No, no! Perhaps I'll go to South Africa with you.

LOGAN. I wish you would. Good-bye, sir.

DELAWARE. For the present, Peter. I want to come to the station. Don't forget.

LOGAN. No, sir, I won't. (*Then, almost to himself as he gazes about him*). It's my wife I'm sorry for. She'll take on!...

*He suddenly crumples and sits down with his head in his hands.*

ALICE. Poor Peter!

LOGAN (*recovering himself a little*). I'm sorry, sir. (*Going towards the door*). Silly of me! ...

*He opens the door and goes out. DELAWARE follows him. The others move uneasily about the room, but do not speak. The sound of a street door being closed is heard.*

PHILIP (*to ANDREW*). When are you going to China?

ANDREW. Like Peter, as soon as I can get away.

*DELAWARE returns, shutting the drawing room door behind him. He goes to his seat and sits down. After a moment or two, he speaks.*

DELAWARE. Poor old Logan! He's taking this harder than we imagine.

MELANIE. What I can't understand is why the strike goes on, now that Logan's out of it. He'll be in South Africa before long, and we'll still be on strike. That's grotesque.

PHILIP. Is there anything on earth you'd fight for, Melanie?

MELANIE. Yes, you. And my child.

PHILIP. Well, fight for us then. What sort of people should we be if we put up our hands every time somebody shouted at us. If you were a soldier and you knew that the end of your fight would be death, would you stop fighting? (*MELANIE does not answer*).

ANDREW. Dying for your country's not enough. You should live for it.

ALICE. Do you really mean that the Government will take the factory from us ?

DELAWARE. Yes, my dear.

ALICE. But they can't do that!

DELAWARE. Can't they ? If they can confiscate our lives, they can confiscate our property. What was that song we used to sing—an old-fashioned song? Oh, I remember, Britons never, never, *never* shall be slaves. Makes you laugh, doesn't it?

PHILIP. They'll have to put us out, and we'll go out kicking.

MELANIE. Why ?

PHILIP. If nobody will fight, Hitler's won the war.

DELAWARE. He, being dead, yet dictates.

PHILIP. Well, I'm fighting him, dead or alive, Nazi or Bolshie. There must be some men left. We can't all be robots.

MELANIE. I'd rather be a robot than a corpse.

ALICE. Would you ? Why ?

MELANIE. Because life's all I've got.

ALICE. I'm on your side, Philip. If we go down, we'll go down with ribbons in our hats.

PHILIP. Thank you, Alice. But Melanie isn't the coward she makes herself out to be.

*AMABEL enters., followed by DENZIL.*

AMABEL. We've got good news for you !

PHILIP. Us ?

DELAWARE. I think it must have been about the year 1908 when I last heard good news. Well, what is it, Amabel ?

AMABEL. You tell them, Snooky !.. .

DENZIL. After I left Selby and Snoddy, I went to see Verner ! . . .

DELAWARE. The Civil Servant! .. .

DENZIL. Yes. I'd already mentioned an idea I had when I last saw the Prime Minister.

AMABEL. We call him Clem—among ourselves, of course. His name's Clement. After the saint, I think.

DENZIL. Do you mind, Amabel ?

AMABEL. Mind what ?

DENZIL. If I go on talking about the strike. I'm sorry to interrupt you.

AMABEL. Oh, dear, I'm a frightful fribble, aren't I ? Just like the brook.

DELAWARE. What brook ?

AMABEL. Tennyson's. You know, the one that went on for ever.

DENZIL. I shouldn't have said that you went on for ever, Amabel, but you do go on. Listen, father, the situation in the whole industry is serious and this strike has made it worse. You haven't been as tactful as you might have been, Philip, and the men are angry. The Government's got the wind up. It's worried about exports, and it's afraid that the men's temper will deteriorate. If it does, the result may be very grave. None of us want anything extreme. We want a settlement. The P.M.'s a moderate man.

DELAWARE. So was Pontius Pilate.

AMABEL. Oh, no, not at all like that. He's a public school boy, and went to Oxford.

DENZIL. But the P.M. may be forced to do things he'd rather not.

DELAWARE. No, no, don't tell me that man of blood and iron can be forced to do anything he doesn't want to do.

AMABEL. Oh, but he can. You've no idea how difficult it is to govern a country. Now I'm in the Government myself, I'm just beginning to get a glimpse of it. But I'm interrupting you Snooky, darling.

DENZIL. Yes, you are.

AMABEL. I do so get carried away by things. Go on, Snooky.

DENZIL. I made a suggestion to the P.M. which he liked. He left me to settle it with Verner. But it's the final suggestion, father.

DELAWARE. Final ?

DENZIL. Yes. The Government can't run the risk of further deterioration. That's what the Communists want.

PHILIP. And what was your suggestion ?

DENZIL, That Amabel should buy the factory from you, father.

PHILIP. Amabel ?

DELAWARE. Buy my factory ?

DENZIL. Yes.

PHILIP. Good God, Denzil !

DENZIL. The strike would then end. The men would return to work.

PHILIP. On their terms.

DENZIL. Yes. And the factory would still be in the family.

AMABEL. I should love to own a factory. It must be lovely to look at it and say to yourself "That's mine" !

DELAWARE. Do I hear the voice of a Socialist ?

AMABEL. Oh, we're not as Socialist as all that. I mean to say everybody says things on platforms they wouldn't dream of saying in private. Wasn't it clever of Snooky to think of this idea?

DELAWARE (*drily*). Very clever !

PHILIP. But you can't run the factory, Snooky.

AMABEL. We thought you would. As manager, I mean.

PHILIP. Indeed! But will the men consent to my managing it ?

DELAWARE. Philip is the master of the factory, Denzil. Your suggestion is that he should step down to manager.

DENZIL. A very special kind of manager, father.

ANDREW. Won't you have to ask Selby and Snoddy for permission to make Philip manager ? What will happen if they refuse ?

DENZIL. Well, of course, we haven't got down to details yet. Amabel and I thought we ought to mention the-matter to you all first.

ANDREW. The consent of Selby and Snoddy isn't quite a detail, is it ? Surely, it's essential ?

PHILIP. Andrew's right. You see, Snooky, they wouldn't let old Logan stay in his job, nor would they let him join their Union. He has to emigrate. Are they likely to be more tender with me than they were with him ?

DENZIL. That remains to be seen. What I want to know now is whether you'll take the job.

PHILIP. No, Snooky, I won't.

AMABEL. But why, Philip ? It would be so nice to have you managing my factory.

PHILIP. I won't be manager where I was master.

DENZIL. What's your opinion, Melanie ?

MELANIE. I shouldn't like Philip to be turned down by Snoddy.

DENZIL. Father ?

DELAWARE. Philip must make his own decisions. The factory, you know, is owned entirely by me. I'm still capable of running it.

DENZIL. What do you mean exactly ? Will you sell it to Amabel or keep it yourself ?

ALICE. Will he be allowed to keep it ?

DENZIL. Let's be clear about this, father. The Union will only settle on the men's terms.

ANDREW. What a relief it will be to get back to China !

AMABEL. China ! What's China got to do with it ?

ALICE. Andrew's going there almost at once.

AMABEL. Whatever for ?

DENZIL (*impatiently*). All right, darling, all right!

AMABEL. Of course, I once knew a man who went to South America, but he didn't stay long. He lives at Saffron Walden now! . . .

DENZIL. *All right, darling ! Well, father ?*

DELAWARE. Is there anything about the rights of the owner ?

PHILIP. You won't be the owner, father. You'll be the hired man. You don't own a business when your subordinates dictate to you. Yours not to reason why, yours but to do what the Trade Union tells you.

DELAWARE. Well, Denzil, what rights have I ?

DENZIL. Oh, general rights, father.

DELAWARE. I'm more interested in particular rights—*my* rights. The men's terms seem to deny me any.

ALICE. Don't agree to them, father.

AMABEL. You'll be ruined if you don't.

ALICE. All right, then, we'll be ruined. But we can start again somewhere. Don't agree, father.

DELAWARE. Will you please tell your Union friends, Snooky, that the factory belongs to me, not to them, and that I shall employ in it anyone I please. I shall not ask Mr. Selby or Mr. Snoddy for permission to employ my son or any other man.

AMABEL. Please sell it to me.

DELAWARE. I will not sell it to anyone. If it is taken from me, you may buy it from the thieves, but you'll be a receiver of stolen goods if you do. In former times you would have been put in prison for that, but now you will receive a reward. Snooky will enter the Ministry.

DENZIL. Listen, father, I said this was the end of negotiation. The Government has made up its mind about that. Verner told me this afternoon that if he fails to settle the strike, the factory will be ... taken over.

DELAWARE (*after a pause*). You mean—confiscated ?

DENZIL. No, father—taken over. At a price to be fixed by an arbitrator. You'll get better terms from Amabel.

AMABEL. Oh, yes, I'll pay you well for it. After all, you are Snooky's father. I mean that does make a difference, doesn't it ?

ALICE. But what right have the Government to take it ?

DENZIL. They have the power.

ALICE. I'm talking about right.

DENZIL. And I'm talking about power.

ANDREW. You mean that might is right ?

DENZIL. First, last and all the time.

ANDREW. Force—physical force ?

DENZIL. Yes.

ANDREW. What about moral force ?

DENZIL. Moral Force ? What's that ? An abstract term used by priests and philosophers, signifying nothing. Morality is a matter of convenience, Andrew. Anything that is inconvenient to the majority is immoral.

DELAWARE. You have performed a remarkable feat, Denzil.

DENZIL. What's that, father ?

DELAWARE. You have cancelled the Christian creed.

ANDREW. That's what Caiaphas thought.

ALICE. And Judas Iscariot.

ANDREW. But they were mistaken.

DENZIL. I promised to telephone Verner to tell him what you'd decided to do. If you won't sell to Amabel, he'll return to London tonight and report to the Minister.

MELANIE. You must give father time to think.

DELAWARE. I've had time, my dear, all my life, my dear, and I have thought.

DENZIL. Well, father ?

DELAWARE. Tell the Government, Denzil, it can go to hell.

PHILIP. Good, father, good.

DENZIL. Then you agree to that, Philip ?

PHILIP. Absolutely.

DENZIL. You're quite sure, father ?

DELAWARE. Quite sure, Denzil. I was never so sure of anything in my life as I am of this. Telephone to your friend.

DENZIL *hesitates. He moves towards the telephone and then turns back.*

DENZIL. Father, do for God's sake think what you're doing.

DELAWARE. Ring up your friend, the Civil Servant.

DENZIL. I can't father. He must find out for himself.

PHILIP *rises and goes to the telephone.*

PHILIP. Where can I find him ?

DENZIL. At the Town Hall. He's in the Clerk's office.

PHILIP *(to operator)*. Altonbury One.

DENZIL. Well, I've done my best. Nobody can do any more.

DENZIL *goes out.* AMABEL *follows him half-way and then stands gazing at them irresolutely.*

AMABEL. Oh, I do wish everybody would be nice and agreeable. It's so much nicer when everybody's nice.

DENZIL *(off).* Amabel!

AMABEL. I was only saying to the Prime Minister the other day, why can't everybody be nice. And he said, Yes, why can't they ?

DENZIL *(off).* Amabel!

AMABEL. Yes, Snooky ! *(She goes out almost at a run).*

PHILIP *(The call comes through).* Is that the Town Hall ? Put me through to the Clerk's office. I want to speak to Mr. Verner. Yes. Mr. Delaware. *(A pause).* Hullo! Is that Mr. Verner ? No, I'm his son. My brother has told me of your talk this afternoon and I wish to tell you what I have just told him. Our factory is not for sale. It is our factory, and we won't allow anyone to interfere with it. *(A* Yes, I realise that. Tell the Government from us that they can go and be damned. Yes. They may take it from us, but we are not giving it up. We are not surrendering it to anybody. They must force us out of it. And by God's grace we shall light a candle in England this day that shall never be put out.









