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THE STAR SPANGLED MANNER

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DOWN THE GARDEN PATH

FOR ADULTS ONLY

Failures

Three Plays by
Beverley Nichols



With a Preface by the Author

Jonathan Cape
Thirty Bedford Square London

FIRST PUBLISHED 1933

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Author's Preface

ONE of the salutary cruelties of the theatre is that a failure cannot be disguised. A dramatist cannot say 'my play was a success' if it wasn't, for the simple reason that the play comes *off*. And the theatre which was so recently the cradle of his hopes is already blazoning the wreckage of those hopes over some busy thoroughfare, while the bright lights, which yesterday spelt his name, have already been twisted to sparkle out the fame of someone else, high above the unheeding crowds.

How different is this from any other profession! A general whose gay incompetence is responsible for the death of three thousand men has only to 'flick the mud from his tunic, enter a Rolls-Royce, retire to the Base, and find a new medal awaiting him. You may see that medal glistening on his chest when he rises, at banquets, to explain to a new generation the vital necessity of preparing for war in order to attain peace. A politician can use a great historical family name to cover gross incompetence, can make bloomer after bloomer, and always tumble to better things. A novelist, with the aid of a dishonest publisher and a few venal reviewers, can make a far better showing than is warranted by the facts. A blundering surgeon can hold his head high at the very funeral of the patient for whose

death he is responsible. And in these days, the rashest of stockbrokers can retain his reputation for financial sagacity even in the bankruptcy court, by putting all his errors of judgment on to that universal scapegoat, 'the depression'.

The dramatist cannot fake like this. If the public does not like his play, the play stops, and that is the end of it. The actors go off sadly, in search of another job. The costumes are packed away into shabby trunks, the satins and the silks, the greens and the reds. And the tinsel gives a last flicker as the lid closes on it, as though a spark of limelight still lingered in its folds. Out and away go the flats and the backcloths, the baronial hall is crated, the dawn put away in brown paper parcels, and the sunset rolled up on a wooden pole. Not for us to inquire into these painful obsequies, nor follow these fallen properties to their ultimate destination. Only once did I learn what happened to the scenery in a play which had flopped. I was attending the first night of an uproariously successful farce, and when the curtain went up I saw that the set was the same, literally the same, as we had used in my own play *The Stag*. It was a healthily humiliating experience. There was my staircase, which had been planned to usher in so much tragedy, and now, a fat woman was sliding down it! There were my windows, which had looked out on to mountains misty with tears, and now a comic curate was making faces through them! There is a short story in that

situation, now I come to think of it, and you are welcome to write it. But meanwhile I want to explain why I am publishing these plays at all.

i i

They have all been failures. By which I mean that though they have all been produced, none of them has made any money for the managers who were so misguided as to back them.

The Stag was produced at the Globe Theatre in April 1929. It got good notices, it appeared to please the few people who paid to see it, and it had to be taken off at the end of six weeks.

Avalanche was first produced by the Masque Theatre in Edinburgh in July 1931, and afterwards made its debut at the Arts Theatre in London, that admirable experimental theatre which has been the nursery of so many West End successes. However, as far as *Avalanche* was concerned, the Arts Theatre was not only the nursery but the grave, for nobody showed the least desire to transfer it to a 'regular' theatre. And so, it has petered out, although it occasionally flits across the boards of tiny, remote theatres in America and the Continent. I have been told that there is even a version of it in Russian. In fact, with one thing and another, my gross royalties from *Avalanche* cannot be far short of fifty pounds.

When the Crash Comes was first produced by

the Birmingham Repertory Company in March 1933. As I am writing before that date, I am perhaps being unduly pessimistic in suggesting that this play is already foredoomed. However, I am so certain that it will fail to attract, that I am willing to take the risk. If, by some miracle, it should turn out to be a success, it will make no difference to my opinion of it, although I shall be delighted for the sake of that sportsman Sir Barry Jackson, who is putting it on.

Why, then, am I publishing these plays? If the public would not pay to see them, why should they pay to read them?

Firstly because they have some very obvious technical errors, which should be of assistance to all aspiring dramatists. To know what not to do, in the theatre, is almost as important as to know what to do. In fact, it might almost be said to be more important. Noel Coward once observed to me, 'The theatre is an enormous magnifying glass'. He never said a truer word. The footlights *do* magnify . .". casting monstrous shadows behind your slightest movements, thundering out your dialogue till it roars you to shame. Every young dramatist overwrites, which is why early plays often make such entertaining reading, while later plays, which may be far more effective theatrically, often read as dull as ditch-water.

That is one reason why I have published these plays. They nearly succeeded, but they didn't

quite. Why? The aspiring dramatist might spend a worse evening than in asking himself this question about these three plays. He might not spend a very much worse evening, but it is possible to imagine drearier occupations.

However, that is not the real reason why I am publishing these plays. The real reason is because in each of them I had something to say that moved me very deeply, and it is possible that this something, though it did not get over the footlights, may come through the printed page.

III

Which instantly arouses a problem. These are really preaching plays. And should one ever preach in the theatre?

The obvious, instinctive answer is 'No'. One should write a play about people, about their loves and hates, about the clash of circumstance. One should not preach. The dramatist, say the purists, should be like a guide through the corridors of life — he opens a door, and shows you a man and woman making love, he opens another door, and you are in a chamber of horrors, he draws up a blind, and you see a fair landscape, with figures moving. The guides who show you round the Palace of Potsdam do not dilate on the psychological peculiarities of Frederick the Great — (I often wish they did) — nor do the little shabby men who persecute you

at Versailles whine out a declamation against the sins of Louis Seize, as they shuffle down those tarnished galleries, like tortured spirits. No. They merely open doors — conjure up a ghost — and shut the door again at the psychological moment, which is the equivalent to drawing down the curtain.

We are told that the dramatist should be like that. He should record — he should not take sides. But is this really the case? The argument has only to be stated to be challenged. Why should the dramatist be immune from temptations which assail all other artists, temptations which not only assail but conquer them, and in conquering them confer upon them a tremendous power of creation? Dickens took sides, in his novels, with such violence that some of his most moving passages are like extracts from the speech of the counsel for the defence, or for the prosecution. Every artist takes sides. El Greco was on the side of the angels. So was C sar Franck. And Francis Thompson. As for Shaw — he has never been passionate except when he is partisan, and his brain never thinks clearly until he has set a black cap on it.

The answer to all this, I suppose, is the dull answer that the true creative artist, especially the dramatist, sees all round a problem. He sees all points of view, A woman has been wronged? She is speaking — here and now? His pen flies to paper to give voice to her thoughts. But she has to be answered, hasn't she? And the man who wronged

her, *he* has his point of view. Whereupon the dramatist has to take a mental leap into the man's brain, and make him say what he really *would* say — because, you see, the man thinks he's right too. Dialogue isn't always as difficult to write as that, but I have a feeling that it should be. In the second act of *Avalanche*, for example (if you will forgive me for referring to this play), I had a very definite feeling of leaping from brain to brain. I *lived* the part of Nigel — I approved of everything he said and did — but I also forced myself to see the other man's point of view. Forced is the only word to use. Once I had seen it, the answer was easy to write.

What do 'born' dramatists do about it, I wonder? Do they take these mental leaps, from character to character? Or does the talk drift down to them on bright wings, fluttering over their magic pages — do words tumble in plentiful showers on to their trembling sheets of manuscript — is the air alive with chatter which they seize eagerly? Has the dramatist only to open a door of his brain to see a scene which makes him catch his breath, a woman walking silently past white windows, a man stretched grotesquely on the floor, a dancing group of girls, swaying to a tune, with parted lips? These pale spaces of the brain, which are filled with hurrying forms, are they apportioned differently in the dramatist? Is his grey matter . . . but we have had enough of these rhetorical questions. Let us get back to the point, which was first mentioned when I

said that these plays were all about something which had moved me very deeply.

i v

The Stag is about cruelty. So are the other plays, if you choose to analyse them, but let us stick to *The Stag* for a moment.

The main theme is one of attempted abortion. (This word is not mentioned in the play, which, in order to comply with the demands of censorship, contains nothing which could possibly offend a child of eight.) There is also a subsidiary theme which is atmospheric rather than actual ... by which I mean that it is in the air, and is not stated in so many words. This subsidiary theme is the conflict of a group of people, who represent cruelty and folly, against an individual, who represents kindness and common sense. The play was a failure, artistically as well as commercially, and it is probable that these two themes became blurred. And since I think they are worthy of restatement, we will consider them for a moment.

Abortion is an ugly word, because we have made it so, and for no other reason. There is nothing ugly in a sudden passion. There is nothing ugly in the terror which the natural results of such a passion inspire in the breast of an unhappy woman. The ugliness is in the attitude of society, and that attitude is the result of so many ancient hatreds of the old

for the young, so many religious taboos, so many generations of ingrained sexual repression that it is quite impossible to analyse it. If you are free from these hatreds and repressions, the word abortion, though it is not pretty, is no more shocking than the word osteopathy.

And, on the whole, the *motive* for abortion is strong enough to excuse the act.

This motive, in nine cases out of ten, is really mother-love, at its highest form. The fact that this motive has been perverted by society until it is forced to assume the form of murder should not blind us to its essential nobility. If you read the newspaper reports of these cases, you will nearly always find at the end of the paragraph, a grim and heartrending little quotation from the defendant's own lips, when she says, in effect, 'I did it because I could not bear to bring into the world a child that would suffer for my sins.' I happen to be writing on a Sunday morning and there are three such cases in the newspaper on my desk. One woman, half demented with anxiety, had even gone so far as to christen her unborn child. She had called it Ruth, because she was sure it was going to be a daughter. In imagination she had already held it in her arms, suckled it, sung it to sleep. But the fear of 'society' was too strong for her. 'Society' would sneer at 'Ruth', cut her, make her life a hell. And so, one day she walked down a long grey street, and knocked at a squalid door. The police

were watching, and the 'criminals' were brought to justice.

Now 'society' is you and me. And if we knew the facts of that case, we wouldn't condemn that woman. Yet, indirectly we *do* condemn her, because as voters we elect the men who make our laws, and the law still maintains that abortion, under all circumstances, is illegal. And so, really, we are perpetually playing the part of spectators at a tragedy which we applaud.

Well, I am not going to applaud it. I am not getting any younger, and every day I live I feel the urgency of trying to do *something* to fight the intolerable cruelties which 'society, is adding to the already intolerable cruelties of God.

All of which seems to be taking us away from *The Stag*. But in reality I am only putting down, in the form of an argument, the emotions I felt when, in that darkening hall, Marion confessed to Keith that she was going to have a baby, and Keith gave her the address of a doctor who would destroy it. And to me the tragedy was heightened by my sense that the whole thing was so ludicrously unnecessary. In any sensibly organized society, free of shams and repressions, Marion ought to have been able to have gone up to her fiancé and said 'I'm terribly sorry, but I made an utter idiot of myself in Venice with Keith, and I'm afraid I'll have to spend next week-end in a nursing home.' Which would have resulted in a *mauvais quart d'heure* for Alan,

and a possible black-eye for Keith, but nothing worse.

After all, neither man nor woman is a monogamous animal. This is an unpleasant truth to be forced to swallow . . . especially if you happen to be desperately in love! Nevertheless, the earlier it is swallowed the fewer will be the chances of any really serious emotional disaster. I do not know how you are going to get a general acceptance of this truth, in a world which has erected such tremendous sentimental barricades against it. However the fact remains that to subject any one person to perpetual physical fidelity to any other person is unfortunately as unreasonable as to subject him to a perpetual diet of fish, and to tell him that for the rest of his life he must drink no other wine than Sauterne, smoke no other cigarette than Gold Flake, and hear no music that was not written by Brahms. To expect and to demand physical fidelity is worse than unreasonable. It is extremely unkind.

So much for that theme of *The Stag*. The other theme, which is never definitely stated, is implicit in the conflict between Victor and the 'sportsmen'. Victor is, of course, overdrawn, and so are the sportsmen. The young dramatist might spend a profitable hour in mentally toning down these people to reasonable proportions. I hope, however, that he will not try to make Victor a gentleman. That would be, I am glad to say, an impossible task.

I think that the 'sportsmen*' were overdrawn

because I could not control my detestation of everything which they stood for. It is inadvisable to feel too deeply when you are trying to create character. Prose should never be served at the boil. It should be allowed to simmer. And I am afraid I was very near boiling point when I wrote about the 'sportsmen' in *The Stag*.

It is their hypocrisy which is so revolting. If these country gentlemen openly said 'Yes, we are cruel, we enjoy cruelty for the sake of cruelty, we get a thrill out of it and we are damned well going to continue to get that thrill, as long as we can afford it . . .' then, one might respect them, even though one hoped that they all broke their stiff necks at the nearest ditch.

But they do not make such admissions. When confronted by opposition they take refuge in a cloud of airy generalizations which would not convince a schoolboy. The stag-hunters say, for example that they are serving a useful purpose, because by keeping down the number of stags they are helping the farmers. It would be interesting to know how this argument applied to those numerous occasions when stags are brought up to the moor in carts, and prodded out with a stick. Many fox-hunters, incredible as it sounds, still proclaim that the fox likes being hunted! I should love to know how this statement would be defended by the members of a certain hunt in the eastern counties, who recently pursued a fox to an empty house. They found that

it had climbed up the chimney, and proceeded to light a fire in the grate, so that the wretched animal fell down, stupefied. It was then dragged from the flames by the hounds and torn to pieces before the delighted eyes of the sportsmen.

People who applaud such sports are, in my opinion, cowardly and contemptible. However, my opinion is, presumably, of little importance, because every society weekly is filled with pictures of these barbarians, charmingly clad, and magnificently mounted, in preparation for their weekly orgy. So let us leave *The Stag* and go on to *Avalanche*.

v

If I was at the boil when I wrote *The Stag* I was even hotter when I wrote *Avalanche*, which is a point of interest, not because I flatter myself that the public is particularly interested in a very minor dramatist's emotions about his work, but because, as I said before, it may impress upon a few other very minor dramatists the aforementioned importance of allowing oneself to simmer down before setting pen to paper. Because my very deep and passionate sincerity about the unspeakable folly and horror of war did not, apparently, 'get over'. One critic actually accused me of joking about the war! Only one, I admit, but that there should have been one was enough to make me realize that I ought to have delayed writing this play until I could

talk reasonably to people who were not passionately pacific.

I do not think that *Avalanche* is a bad play. I think Act i is dramatically good. Act n is sometimes stimulating, and Act m, at times, beautiful. (If you disagree, do so, and leave it at that.) The reason why the play, as a whole, is a failure, is because it was written at boiling point, and its ingredients had no time to get into a formal dramatic mould.

Wordsworth really summed up this argument when he said that poetry is 'emotion remembered in tranquillity'. This definition most certainly applies to drama too. But I cannot be tranquil when civilization is threatened with complete annihilation, and when so comparatively few people of any real intellectual standing have the courage to wave the white flag of peace against the black clouds which are sweeping down upon us.

Bernard Shaw has fluttered his handkerchief, somewhat ineffectually, in his last play *Too True to be Good*. But it was a feeble emblem to have drawn from so vast a pocket. Somerset Maugham has made a gesture of contempt with his *For Services Rendered*—but his face was turned to the past rather than to the future. R. C. Sherriff, in *Journey's End*[^] sounded a trumpet call which awoke such echoes in the hearts of England's youth that the task of the recruiting officer will be greatly lightened in the next War to end War. How then

can I hope that anyone will listen to the feeble pipings of my own Nigel? I do not hope. Still, books get into strange hands. And even the most random sparks may sometimes light a fire.

v i

When the Crash Comes is another 'if play. It is a failure, from the aesthetic point of view, because the first essential of any work of art is unity, and that is a quality which this play lacks. A play or a novel or a poem or a sonata should . . . in memory, at least . . . 'make a single gesture', as Mr. James Agate has observed. There may be infinite gradations in that gesture . . . e.g. in the popular Tschaikovsky symphony so aptly termed *Tath^tique* there are moments as riotous as a country jig. But the sum total of the emotion should be singular, if you will forgive me for lapsing into Irish.

The emotional sum total of *When the Crash Comes* is not singular, because the comedy and the tragedy are too crudely intermingled. I am no Sean O'Casey, to drag across his tragic stage a jester in cap and bells, and make that jester's cap as sombre as night, and ring those bells with so apt a jingle that they exquisitely blend with the dirge which he is playing. Some alchemy is needed here . . . some strange fire which will fuse into a solitary flame the primitive elements of tears and laughter.

In the meantime, however, though I cannot kindle this fire I can switch on the bright lights of controversy, and this seems to me an admirable opportunity for doing so. Because in the event of an English revolution — which would have occurred annually in the last fifteen years, if we had a decent climate — people would behave very much as they behave in my play.

Both classes would learn a great deal from each other. Naturally the upper, uneducated classes would learn the most, but the others would also gain some valuable instruction. They would learn, for example, the futility of most of the things which are so highly valued by the rich. However, the main result of an English revolution would probably be as I have suggested, i.e. nothing at all. The English character is so strong, so solid, so ingrained with a curious fatalistic humour that any scenes of hysteria and violent excess are literally unthinkable. And when the majority of the people cannot think of a thing, it cannot happen. Jim Maxwell, the Socialist agitator in *When the Crash Comes* could think of them, but he was no more a typical Englishman than that fine and lovable character Mr. James Maxton.

The only people who could really cause a revolution in England, and who are unconsciously working their hardest to do so, are the big newspaper proprietors. These misguided men, by their gross under-estimation of the intelligence of the British public, and even more by their perpetual denial

of the elementary principles of fair play, are driving all honest and independent men into the Bolshevik fold at full tilt. Day after day they print, in flaring headlines, accounts of the appalling conditions under the Bolshevik regime . . . stories of torture and immorality and starvation . . . when precisely these same conditions exist within a hundred yards of their own front doors. There are tenements unfit for human habitation within a few minutes walk of the Houses of Parliament. And within a hundred yards of one of our biggest and most fashionable squares there is a street where ten people are living in one room.

Ten-people-in-one-room!

In case this indecent picture does not instantly present itself to you, in all its horrible outlines, let me tell you a story. It concerns a charity fSte which was given for some poor children. They were very poor indeed and they seized eagerly any little presents which were offered to them. Among these presents were some small framed pictures of dogs and cats and rabbits and other agreeable animals which were being handed round by a kind old lady. She approached a very pale and frightened little girl, who was clutching a couple of biscuits in her hand. 'Would you like these pretty pictures?' asked the old lady. 'To hang on your walls?'

A pair of large puzzled eyes stared at her. And the answer came, in a small husky voice 'We have no walls.'

The old lady was a little deaf. 'What did you say, my child?'

'We have no walls.'

'But what do you mean?'

'We live in the middle of the room.'

You followed that story? It is true. It happened a few days ago. You can have names, dates and addresses if you require them. And having read that story, will you tell me if you think it either fair or reasonable that newspaper proprietors should foam at the mouth with rage when Russia, which is denied access to the entire British press, endeavours to give the public some idea of the new world it is trying to build, by broadcasting, once a week, a lecture on Soviet conditions? '*Poison Propaganda!*' screams the Daily Blank, the morning after one of these broadcasts (which are singularly intelligent). '*What is the Foreign Office doing to allow this filth to drift through the ether to corrupt our happy English homes?*' To which outbursts one might reply that the best way of shutting out Russian propaganda would be by building walls for the English people.

I like fair play. Not in any silly public school sense, because the public schools are the very last places where fair play is either taught or demanded (except at the annual speech day). But I like fair play because it is the active counterpart of intellectual integrity. And Russia has never had a square deal in England or in anywhere else outside the U.S.S.R.

Yet, it is gradually being realized by the peoples that a tremendous miracle has been wrought in Russia ... a miracle so tremendous that if I were offered the alternative of a trip to Mars or to Moscow I should unhesitatingly choose Moscow. I may really claim to speak without prejudice in this matter, because, for some reason which has never been explained to me, the authorities at Moscow will not allow me to set foot in their country. I have applied for a visa and it has been curtly refused. Which proves that there are silly bureaucrats, even in that strange new world. Yet, in spite of this refusal, I shall not lose my conviction that sooner or later the whole world will be forced to adopt the general principles of Communism, and that therefore, in our own interests, it is high time that we stopped talking about the Bolsheviki as if they were merely a collection of bogies and blasphemous savages, and began seriously to study their ideals, their methods, and their achievements.

Which does not in any way deter me from admitting that I should probably be bored stiff in Russia, and vastly irritated, and should fly back, at the earliest opportunity, and at considerable expense, to the flesh-pots of Berlin.

I will not say any more about *When the Crash Comes*, for the moment, because until I have seen it on the stage I am unable to form any clear idea of its faults or virtues.

Now for a few of the technical faults which may give this little volume a certain value as a textbook on How Not To Do It.

First and foremost, if I were criticizing these plays as an outsider, I would condemn them for 'Starting too many hares'. I did not realize the full force of this criticism until very recently, when I was talking to that master of the theatre, William Somerset Maugham. We were discussing a very interesting play called *Strange Orchestra* by young Mr. Rodney Acland. Maugham had many kind things to say about *Strange Orchestra* but he hit the nail on the head with perfect precision when he said 'the fault with this play is that it starts too many hares. There are enough ideas in it for half a dozen plays. And that's the fault which is made by nearly every inexperienced dramatist at the beginning of his career.'

If Maugham were to read *When the Crash Comes* I fear that he would accuse me of letting loose a rabbit warren. For there are at least six different themes in it, and I am too near to the writing of it to know whether they are woven together in any sort of unity. Had I enjoyed the privilege, when I wrote it, of collaborating with Mr. Edward Knoblock, I should have simplified it exceedingly. However *When the Crash Comes* was written before I ever met Knoblock in a professional capacity.

This collaboration taught me, in two weeks, more about writing for the theatre than I should have learnt, on my own, in two years. For example, it gave me *courage* ... a tremendous asset in a dramatist. The young dramatist is often timid . . . he daren't leave a stage empty for a second . . . though he would like to ... he daren't write dialogue softly . . . for fear he should bore the audience . . . for fear their attention should wander. He forgets that vital remark of Noel Coward, which I quoted before 'The stage is an enormous magnifying glass' . . . , and so he always overwrites, because he really underrates the intelligence, or rather, the *attentiveness* of the audience.

Again, my collaboration taught me the value of honesty. Knoblock, like the old hand he is, showed me that unless you are scrupulously honest about your characters, to *yourself*, your puppets will remain puppets. Often I wrote something which I thought was theatrically convincing, and Knoblock said ' *Would she say that?*' And the answer, often enough, was 'no', whereupon the line came out. In fact, now I come to think of it, the main thing Knoblock taught me about writing for the theatre is the necessity of forgetting the theatre, and remembering nothing but life.

For example. Every young dramatist worthy of his salt gets a thrill out of writing stage directions. I have never seen an amateur's play which was not cluttered with unnecessary technicalities . . . the

toys of the dramatic nursery. They are such tremendous fun. When I first learnt what L.U.E. meant I scattered it all over the place, so that there would have been considerable congestion at this entrance had my play ever been produced. There is an excitement even in writing 'exit'. You are a god when you write that word. Yes — a god. You have created a man. Now you dismiss him, with a single arrogant word.

But you must not think like that. You must not think that when you have written 'exit' after a character, you have disposed of him for good and all. Good heavens, no! You brought this man into the world, you made him strut across the stage, you breathed your spirit into him. You cannot just push him through a door, and write the word 'exit', as though it were a motto on a tombstone. (It would be a good enough motto for most of us.) If you think of your characters in that spirit, your dialogue *will* sound as though it were written on tombstones.

And so, when I wrote 'exit', Knoblock always said 'Where?'

'Well, through the stage door, I suppose.'

'No . . . but does he go home? Or does he wait outside the door? Or does he walk up and down the streets? Or what?'

These questions, which at first seemed superfluous, since the character was not going to appear again, proved themselves to be of real value. Because

they constantly switched one's attention away from the stage, and forced one to concentrate on life. Life, life, life . . . the first, second, and third things which a dramatist has to know.

And yet . . . how many 'and yet's' are there to be written in any essay on the theatre! And yet, you have to compromise with life, time and again. In the very first line of the first play in this book, *The Stag*) you will find an example of a refusal to compromise, and any experienced dramatist could have told me in advance that this refusal would endanger the success of the play. But when I wrote it, I said to myself 'I want this to open with a bang . . . I want to set a terrific pace at the very outset . . . I don't want any damned butlers drifting about the stage with tea-things.' So I began with the words 'I tell you I *know*' Which plunged straight into the tragedy. Yet, when we produced the play, we had to drag in the damned butler, willy, nilly, because the producer knew something which I didn't, i.e. that the theatre is a commercial institution, that people never have been and never will be in their seats by eight-thirty, and that the dramatist who has spilled all his beans by eight-thirty-one is a fool.

Of course, you can instantly hurl at my head the galvanic couplet which opens in *Anthony and Cleopatra*:

Nay, but this dotage of our generals
O'erflows the measure:

If ever there was a case of leaping head first into the running tide of drama, and using the rising curtain as a diving board, here it is. But it is not fair to quote Shakespeare, whose sun dispels all these misty theories. Besides, the audiences at the Globe Theatre had only footpads to delay them. They were not subjected to the domination of a policeman's hand in a traffic block. And so I would suggest that any young dramatist who wants his play to be a commercial success should learn the importance of filling in the first ten minutes with airy persiflage. I have never written the word persiflage before, and having written it I doubt if it exists. But it is a charming word, of a singular airiness, and any really competent stage butler can be counted upon to supply persiflage, until such time as the gap of five stalls in Row H has been filled by the party who decided not to go without liqueurs.

There were many other things which Knoblock taught me. For example, the really vital necessity of a scenario. A dramatist who attempts to write a play without a complete frame-work prepared in advance, containing every exit and entrance, is either a half-wit or a genius, and in either case his plays will fail. You can write a novel without any idea of its end, because a novel is a bastard form of art, though a delightful one. It is like a cruise in the country where you can turn the wheel of your car up any lane you fancy.' A play, on the other hand, has to run on rails. You must know where you are

bound for. If you don't, you will not deliver the goods.

Other little tags of wisdom drift through my mind as I recall that charming fortnight when Knoblock and I sat by the sea, writing our heads off.

'Never have a long scene between two women. They never pull it off/ You can quote numerous exceptions to this rule, but generally speaking, it holds good. 'Never write "what do you mean?" in your dialogue. It's a sign of loose thinking/ Again, this is arbitrary, but it is also salutary. The inexperienced dramatist writes, on an average, ten "what do you means?" in every act, and he writes them for the simple reason that he does not know what he means himself. Again . . .

But really, we must stop. It is not for me to write a long preface, like this, to a volume of 'Failures'. There is something a little top-heavy about it. Long prefaces should be reserved for 'Successes'. And I am afraid that I shall not be able to publish that volume for a good many years to come,

The Stag

The Stag was first produced in London at the Globe Theatre on April 2nd, 1929, with the following cast:

Marion Temple

Keith Staines

Alan Cameron

The Hon. Audrey Findon

Colonel George Temple

Lady Emily Temple

Victor Conway

ELISSA LANDI

ERIC MATURIN

IAN HUNTER

ADRIANNE ALLEN

ATHOLE STEWART

MABEL TERRY LEWIS

REGINALD OWEN

CHARACTERS

In the order of their appearance

MARION TEMPLE

KEITH STAINES

ALAN CAMERON

THE HON. AUDREY FINDON

COLONEL GEORGE TEMPLE, *Marion's father*

LADY EMILY TEMPLE, *Marion's mother*

GARRETT, *Butler*

VICTOR CONWAY

MCPHERSON, *Gillie*

RICHARD, *Valet*

SCENES

Act I. An evening in September.

Act II. An afternoon three days later. (The
Curtain is lowered during this Act to denote
the passage of several hours.)

Act III. Morning of the next day.

*The entire action of the play takes place in the hall
of Drochness, Colonel Temple's shooting-box near
Inverness.*

TIME—The Present.

ACT I

SCENE:

The Hall of Drochness. It is the spacious, comfortable and extremely ugly hall of a typical Scottish shooting box. In the centre, at the back, are wide French windows, through which can be seen a stretch of lawn, and beyond, the sweep of purple mountains. A staircase runs up L.; about fifteen feet of it are seen by the audience. Above this staircase, and indeed on every available place on the wall, are stags' heads. There must be about twenty of them. Four claymores over doorway on stairs. Elsewhere, a stuffed bird; a pike in a glass case, and one depressing Landseer picture. On the other side R. is the fireplace, in which a log fire is burning. In the centre of stage is a large settee. There are exits on both sides of stage, on staircase side leading to library, on the other side leading to dining-room.

TIME:

// is about 6.30. Dusk is falling outside, but the lamps have not yet been lit.

(As the curtain rises, there are discovered MARION, a slim, beautiful girl of about twenty-two, and KEITH STAINES, dark, rather sallow, good-looking in a disagreeable way. Both are in tweeds. The butler is drawing the curtains?)

MARION You needn't bother to draw them yet, Garrett, I'll see to that.

GARRETT Very good, miss. By the way, Miss Marion . . .

MARION Well?

GARRETT The gentleman from London — Mr. Conway — he arrived by the four o'clock.

MARION Oh, thank you. Where is he?

GARRETT Upstairs, miss. In bed.

MARION (*dully*) In bed?

GARRETT Yes, miss. I told him you mightn't be home just yet.

MARION Oh, very well.

GARRETT Is there any particular time you wish me to call him, miss?

MARION Oh no, it doesn't matter. In time for dinner. That's all, Garrett.

GARRETT Thank you, miss. (*Exit*)

MARION (*almost savagely*) I tell you — I *know*.

KEITH. I don't believe it.

MARION. But you've got to believe it.

KEITH It's impossible.

MARION Why? It seems to me only too horribly natural. Only we didn't think of that—three months ago.

KEITH You'll be better in a day or so. You're probably making some ghastly mistake.

MARION How can I make a mistake about a thing like that?

KEITH Oh, God!

MARION Yes — Oh, God!

KEITH When did you first suspect?

MARION About the beginning of last week. At first I thought I was just tired — run down. I tried resting in the evening — giving up cocktails.

KEITH You should have told me before.

MARION I wanted to make quite certain.

KEITH But don't you realize that in this sort of business every day's vital if . . .

MARION If what?

KEITH If you're going to do anything about it.

MARION What can I do?

KEITH Well, that's what we've got to think about.

MARION Think! (*She begins to sob*) I can't think any longer. I want to die.

KEITH Look here. You've got to pull yourself together.

MARION It's easy for you to say that.

KEITH Oh, I know. I'm sorry. I've been an utter cad.

MARION That wouldn't have mattered if I hadn't been an utter fool.

KEITH! It's no use saying that now. We've got to *do* something. Do they suspect anything?

MARION Who?

KEITH Your mother — and the Colonel.

MARION Suspect? No. There's no reason why they should.

KEITH Suppose you told them, what would happen?

MARION I don't know what mother would do. I think she'd just freeze. But it would kill daddy.

KEITH I believe it would.

MARION But I'm not thinking of them.

KEITH You mean — Alan?

MARION Yes.

KEITH Supposing you told him?

MARION Are you mad?

KEITH Well — he loves you, doesn't he? You're going to marry him — aren't you? If he were a sportsman . . .

MARION A sportsman! You're incredible.

KEITH And you're impossible where that man's concerned. After all — it might have been him.

MARION How dare you say a thing like that about Alan?

KEITH Oh, very well. You needn't look at me as though I were a criminal.

MARION I was only looking at you to try to explain to myself how I could possibly — even for three days — have thought that I was in love with you.

KEITH Thank you. I wish you'd realize that it doesn't do either of us any *good* to talk about what happened in those three days in Venice. We've got to concentrate on what's going to happen now.

MARION Well — what is going to happen?

KEITH That depends on you. I take it for granted that nobody's going to be told?

MARION Absolutely.

KEITH That leaves two alternatives. You couldn't — go away somewhere for six months or so?

MARION Where could I go?

KEITH There must be some place.

MARION I don't know of any.

KEITH You're being fearfully helpful — aren't you?

MARION Well — where? I can't suddenly disappear. It isn't as if I hadn't a family — as if nobody knew who I was. Besides — oh, don't you understand . . . if it did come to that . . . I couldn't desert . . .

KEITH I see. Then there's only the other alternative.

MARION What?

KEITH (*looking round*) Are you prepared to take a risk?

MARION (*she slowly understands what he means*) Oh — don't.

KEITH But . . . you've got to realize.

MARION It's too horrible.

KEITH It's not as bad as all that.

MARION Let me think! What would it mean?

KEITH Oh, quite easy. Listen. There's a chap in London I know of who . . . He's a very brilliant doctor but he's rather — well, he's got a reputation, you see. Still, he's absolutely straight. And a genius. I think you ought at any rate to see him.

MARION Oh — I feel so utterly degraded.

KEITH Why? It's only a consultation. Besides, it's that, or nothing. It isn't as if you were the first woman ever to get into . . .

MARION Oh . . . stop, please. I don't want excuses made for me. I'm only wondering if I could possibly — go through with it.

KEITH Why not? I could arrange everything. It's perfectly simple. A matter of twenty-four hours.

MARION Is this man in London now?

KEITH Yes. I saw him dining at the club the night I came up.

MARION Where does he live?

KEITH (*eagerly*) Does that mean you'll do it?

MARION I don't know. Perhaps. At any rate I could see him. Will you write down his address?

KEITH You're coming to your senses at last. (*Going to writing desk. Writes quickly and goes to MARION with envelope*) His name is Simon Kerr. It's just off Wimpole Street. That's the telephone number. You'd better ring him up before you go. (*A door slams*)

(*ALAN enters. He is a nice, clean-looking young man. He is in shooting kit. He glances at the two. MARION folds the envelope quickly in one hand — an action which is not lost on*

ALAN.)

KEITH Well, that's that.

MARION Hullo, darling.

ALAN (*sulkily*) Hullo!

KEITH Good sport?

ALAN (*goes to fire, warms hands*) No; couldn't get a thing. What about you? Been stalking?

KEITH Yes. Bagged a ten-pointer after lunch. By gad — he was a fine brute. Twenty-one stone.

ALAN Some people have all the luck.

KEITH Oh, I don't know. It's just a question of knowing the way the wind's blowing.

ALAN Yes, I should think you were pretty good at that.

KEITH That sounds double-edged.

ALAN You'd feel double-edged if you'd been crawling about on your stomach all day without finding anything you could possibly shoot at except a char-a-banc.

KEITH Well — why the deuce didn't you shoot at that?

ALAN I did. And missed.

KEITH You're a queer fish, Alan.

ALAN Thank you.

KEITH One bad day's sport . . . and life isn't worth living.

ALAN I wasn't thinking about . . . sport.

KEITH Well, whatever your thoughts were, I shall leave you to offer them to Marion. My whole soul's crying for a bath.

ALAN (*as KEITH goes upstairs*) When you've finished washing your . . . soul . . . you might let me know.

KEITH (*on stairs*) Why?

ALAN It'll probably be a long job. (*Exit KEITH.*)

(*ALAN goes up and switches on lights?*)

So sorry to have interrupted.

MARION Interrupted? You didn't.

ALAN So sorry *not* to have interrupted, then.

MARION Oh — please don't be tiresome.

ALAN No. I suppose more than one scene in an evening is apt to be exhausting.

MARION What do you mean?

ALAN I was only judging by appearances.

MARION Mine?

ALAN Yes. Extraordinarily attractive. What a pity more women don't realize how becoming a guilty conscience can be.

MARION Guilty conscience?

ALAN Yes. The flushed cheeks. The heaving breast. The sudden breakaway. Very pretty. Quite like the real thing.

MARION Alan! You'd better realize that I'm not going to be spoken to like that!

ALAN (*suddenly showing his anger*) And you'd better realize that this has got to stop.

MARION This?

ALAN Oh, don't pretend to be dense.

MARION I suppose you're referring to Keith?

ALAN Yes, I am. You're always with him. Whispering together in corners. Looking as if . . .

MARION As if what?

ALAN Oh — I don't know.

MARION You certainly don't. You're perfectly ridiculous.

ALAN (*turns*) Am I? Then why does he write you letters, even when you're staying in the same house?

MARION Letters? Keith's never written me a letter in his life.

ALAN Hasn't he? Hasn't he? Tell me — What's that you've got in your hand now?

MARION What? Oh — that? That's just an address. (*She waves it before him*)

ALAN Let me see.

MARION Alan — I'm not going to be bullied.

ALAN And I'm not going to be made a fool of. Let me see it.

MARION Alan, you'll go too far! Leave me alone. (ALAN *snatches envelope, glances at it*. MARION *watches him nervously*) Well?

ALAN I'm sorry.

MARION (*with a sigh of relief*) You should be.

ALAN When you love anybody terribly, you don't stop to think.

MARION That may be, but I'm getting tired of these scenes.

ALAN (*turns quickly and comes down to her*) You're not getting tired of *me*? (As MARION *turns away her head*) MARION, please?

MARION I'll never do that, I'm afraid.

ALAN You're afraid? There's nothing to be afraid of!

MARION Isn't there? Isn't there? Oh, Alan!
(*She holds out her arms to him — she suddenly sobs*)

ALAN Darling, what is it?

MARION I do love you.

ALAN You blessed little fool.

MARION I've never said 'I love you' to anyone else before. *Not those words.* Will you always remember that. . . whatever happens?

ALAN But nothing's going to happen.

MARION (*smiling sadly*) Darling!

(*There is a clatter outside. Enter AUDREY FINDON. She is a masculine^ Eton-cropped girl, who walks with an aggressive swagger.*")

AUDREY Hullo, you two. Lord, what a day!

ALAN Didn't you catch anything?

AUDREY Various diseases, but nothing eatable.

ALAN What part of the river did you fish?

AUDREY Every part. And most of the trees on the bank.

MARION Why don't you try a net, darling?

AUDREY I suggested that to the gillie — it upset him so much that he began to tell me the most intimate things about salmon — Scotland's so full of sex.

ALAN You've got an awful mind.

(*Enter COLONEL TEMPLE. // is enough to describe him as the sort of man who spends £20,000 a year on a shoot in Scotland because he likes it.*)

MARION Hullo, daddy. Any luck?

COLONEL Not bad. Couple of stags. Keith bagged a ten-pointer.

AUDREY He's a *genius*.

COLONEL He's a good shot, if that's what you mean. How's my infant daughter?

MARION Rather tired.

COLONEL You're overdoing it.

AUDREY You live on your *nerves*, darling.

MARION That's better than living on other people's, precious.

AUDREY Don't call me precious. I was called precious by Lady Hardcastle in the butts yesterday. It made me feel quite sick.

ALAN You ought to be flattered. She's supposed to be the first Lady in Inverness-shire.

AUDREY The first? Well, everything must have a beginning.

COLONEL (to MARION) By the way, has your Mr.—, what's his name? . . . Conway arrived?

MARION Oh yes, rather. I forgot. He came by the four o'clock. I haven't seen him yet, he went straight up to rest.

COLONEL What's he want to rest for?

ALAN Isn't that what actors are always doing?

AUDREY Actors? It isn't *Victor Conway*?

MARION Yes, darling, it is.

AUDREY How too thrilling!

COLONEL Why in heaven's name do you ask people like that up here? — it's a damned nuisance, if you ask me. He's probably a most infernal bore,

MARION Father!

COLONEL I'll wager he doesn't shoot or fish.

AUDREY He fences quite marvellously.

COLONEL I suppose that means he'll be rushing all over the forest asking stags to point. (To MARION) I can't imagine why you asked the fellow —

(Enter LADY EMILY, *tall, hard, grey-haired,*)

LADY E. Which fellow?

COLONEL This fellow Conway.

LADY E. Oh — has he arrived?

AUDREY Ssh! He's resting.

LADY E. Resting? How very eccentric. Well, Marion darling. You've got to look after him.

MARION Well, of course. I'm going up to dress now. So long, everybody.

AUDREY (*going over*) Wait a minute. I want you to show me something.

MARION What?

AUDREY The resting place!

LADY E. You're not going to wake him up?

AUDREY Certainly.

LADY E. HOW?

AUDREY Well, really. How do you imagine a girl wakes a man up?

(*Exeunt MARION and AUDREY.*)

COLONEL Ha!

LADY E. (*to COLONEL*) I suppose that rather throaty noise implied that you'd been able to extract a double meaning from something?

COLONEL Double! I'd call it single enough. Ha!

LADY E. I thought so. Thank heaven, most of your indiscretions fade away in the region of your tonsils.

(To ALAN) I'm so sorry that this has happened, Alan.

ALAN What?

LADY E. This man Conway.

ALAN Why? Oh — I'm not worrying about *him*.

LADY E. But it isn't quite fair to you.

ALAN Honestly, I'm rather glad he's come.

LADY E. Strangers are most unsettling. We were such a happy family party before.

ALAN Were we?

LADY E. Well, weren't we?

ALAN Oh — of course.

LADY E. Nobody knows him except Marion. I haven't even seen him act.

ALAN (*incredulously*) Haven't seen him act?

COLONEL Why *should* we have seen him act? The man probably plays nothing but Shakespeare.

LADY E. I don't know what Keith will think of him. Keith's so terribly particular about the people he meets.

ALAN Some people have to be.

COLONEL Seems to me, young man, that you have got your knife into Keith. He has been poaching on your preserves, hasn't he?

ALAN (*quickly*) What do you mean?

COLONEL Well, he bagged the only ten-pointer in the forest this morning.

ALAN Oh, I see.

COLONEL Wonderful fellow, Keith. Always gets what he wants. It doesn't matter what he takes up, whether it's in the city or in the open field, or if it comes to that, in the night club. Wonderful fellow.

ALAN (*rising*) I am sorry but I shall have to hear the rest of Keith's virtues a little later on. I'm going to snatch a bath. (*Exit*)

COLONEL (*following him*) After me, my boy.

LADY E. George —

COLONEL What is it?

LADY E. Just a minute — I want to speak to you.

COLONEL Can't it wait until after dinner?

LADY E. No, it's about Marion,

COLONEL What about her?

LADY E. Do sit down, dear, you know how nervous you make me.

COLONEL But there's nothing to sit down about.

LADY E. There's always something to sit down about when one has a daughter.

COLONEL Oh, very well. Only why a chap shouldn't be allowed to have a really hot bath in his own house passes my imagination.

LADY E. I shan't keep you a minute. I wanted to ask you about this curious man, Victor Conway.

COLONEL Well?

LADY E. There really isn't anything in it, is there?

COLONEL In what way?

LADY E. Marion's so absurdly susceptible. And to have a sort of tame Hamlet all over the house, upsetting the servants . . .

COLONEL Is he going to upset the servants?

LADY E. I shall be exceedingly surprised if he doesn't. Garrett told me only this morning he found one of the housemaids cutting out a picture of him from one of the papers.

COLONEL Which one?

LADY E. Which picture?

COLONEL No — which housemaid?

LADY E. I haven't the remotest idea.

COLONEL Is Marion cutting out photographs of Conway?

LADY E. She has a photograph of him on her dressing-table already. It's far too large, and it's signed in the strangest way.

COLONEL How is it signed?

LADY E. I hardly like to say. It's — er — scarcely decent.

COLONEL What! Do you mean my daughter . . .

LADY E. (*restraining him*) George, dear, please control yourself. After all, Marion didn't write it. As a matter of fact, it's a quotation.

COLONEL What from?

LADY E. Macbeth.

COLONEL Then what's the matter?

LADY E. Macbeth may be very well on the stage, but it's hardly the sort of thing one expects to find in a young girl's bedroom, especially this particular line.

COLONEL Well, what is the line?

LADY E. (*looking round*) 'What bloody man is this — ?'

COLONEL (*vaguely*) What bloody man is who?

LADY E. That was the quotation.

COLONEL But who was he?

LADY E. Macbeth. Oh, don't be absurd — it's a quotation from Macbeth.

COLONEL What?

LADY E. (*with infinite patience*) Macbeth. Shakespeare. Quotation. Written on the photograph Victor Conway gave to Marion.

COLONEL Why?

LADY E. What does it matter why? Can't you see how demoralizing that sort of thing is?

COLONEL Seems to me just a damn piece of nonsense. She must have known perfectly well who it was.

LADY E. But that isn't the point. The point was the word.

COLONEL But Shakespeare wrote that.

LADY E. Yes, but there's no point in reminding people of such unpleasant things.

COLONEL (*pompously*) Oh, that's *art*!

LADY E. That, from you, is extremely entertaining.

COLONEL (*rising*) If that is all you have to tell me, I might just as well go and get a bath.

LADY E. Yes — and if that's all the help you are, I think you might.

COLONEL (*looking at watch*) It's half-past seven already.

LADY E. George, could you hurry a little — could you, George? And come and see that everything's all right?

COLONEL Right you are. I suppose that blighter has used up all the hot water — by now — *(they both go up slowly)*

(The stage is empty for a moment. Then at the top of the stairs appears VICTOR CONWAY. He is middle-aged, with an attractive face which, in spite of its humour, gives the impression that he has suffered. He is in evening dress. He descends slowly, gazing at the stags' heads in a sort of awe. He takes out his handkerchief and gently flicks the nose of one. A few steps further down he takes the head of a small ibis in his hand and, unhooking it, says:)

VICTOR *(softly)* 'Alas, poor Yorick! *(looking at stag L.)* I knew him, Horatio. A fellow of infinite jest, of most excellent fancy. And now, how abhorred in my imagination it is! *(Puffing back the head with a sudden distaste)* My gorge rises at it.' *(Crosses stage and pauses in front of a stuffed owl)* Ah!

'Hail to thee, blithe spirit,

Bird thou never wert. . . .'

(His eye lights upon an old Scottish sword. He stretches out his hand towards it.)

'Is this a dagger which I see before me?

Come, let me clutch thee!'

(Takes it down and brandishes it in the air. Crosses to fireplace.)

'One of us two, Herminius,
Shall never more go home.
I will lay on for Tusculum,
And lay thou on for Rome!'

(Makes passes with sword, using it as though he were fencing. He points at head over mantelpiece.)

(KEITH comes down the stairs. He is dressed.)

KEITH Ahem!

VICTOR *(turning round)* Damn!

KEITH Please don't let me stop you.

VICTOR I never allow the public in to rehearsals.

KEITH Oh — are you Conway?

VICTOR I am — now.

KEITH My name's Staines.

VICTOR How do you do? *(They shake hands)*
You're a sportsman, I expect.

KEITH It's very good of you to say so.

VICTOR Not at all. The word has many interpretations. What I meant was—you shoot, and fish, and leap about on stallions, and all that sort of thing?

KEITH If you put it like that.

VICTOR I'm so glad, as perhaps you can tell me one or two things I want to know. Firstly, who is it who has such a grudge against stags in this house?

KEITH Well — the whole family's pretty sporting.

VICTOR I see. Do they shoot them one at a time, or are they lined up in platoons and subjected to concentrated fire?

KEITH Oh — you're pulling my leg.

VICTOR In which direction?

KEITH (*at fireplace*) I mean — you've stalked, haven't you?

VICTOR Stalked?

KEITH Yes. You know, gone out with a gillie.

VICTOR 'Gone out with a gilley. Gone out with a gilley.' Oh, my dear fellow, that is marvellous.

KEITH Marvellous? Why?

VICTOR Don't you see? Cue for song!

'Where's my little Willie?

Gone out with a Gillie.'

KEITH Oh, Lord.

VICTOR It's superb.

'Who she is I do not know,

But I'm sure she's silly — '

KEITH A gillie usually happens to be a man.

VICTOR (*wagging his fingers*) Ah! We'll alter that. We'll have female gillies. Dozens of 'em. Coming out in kilts, shooting little pop-guns — you know, just like you do.

KEITH Thanks.

VICTOR (*seriously*) Forgive me. This must sound like sacrilege to you.

KEITH (*coldly*) Not at all.

VICTOR Quite. Not at all. Not in the very least. Have a cigarette.

KEITH Thanks. No. I never smoke when I'm shooting.

VICTOR Ah! I expect you're afraid of the stags smelling you.

KEITH No. I merely like to keep my eye in.

VICTOR I see. You don't mind? (*Lighting cigarette*)

KEITH (*shrugging shoulders*) Not in the least. (*A pause*)

VICTOR (*humming*)

'Where's my little Willie?

Gone out with a gillie — '

Talking of that, by the way — where's my little Marion?

KEITH *Tour* little Marion?

VICTOR Yes, I haven't seen her yet.

KEITH You must be feeling quite impatient.

VICTOR Of course. Isn't she enough to make anybody feel impatient?

KEITH She's a great friend of yours, I suppose?

VICTOR I have that honour.

KEITH Then it's strange that you don't know that she's rather heavily engaged.

VICTOR But of course I know.

KEITH Well then . . .

VICTOR You mean, what am I doing here?

KEITH Quite.

VICTOR (*stepping softly towards him*) Listen: have you never seen a rose without wanting to pull it to pieces?

KEITH Is this Shakespeare?

VICTOR No. It's common sense. If that's too subtle, put it like this. Have you never seen a bird flying in the sky without wanting to shoot it down?

KEITH Oh — I see. You mean, have I never seen a pretty girl without wanting to make love to her?

VICTOR Exactly.

KEITH Well then, the answer is in the negative.

VICTOR I thought so.

(MARION comes downstairs — she is wearing a tea-gown?)

MARION Victor!

VICTOR (*turning round*) At last. If you hadn't come soon I'd have begun to sprout horns.

MARION Has he been boring you?

VICTOR Boring? No. But alarming, yes. You see — so few stags have come into my life before. And now, the whole world seems full of them. I see their antlers waving in the wind. I see them beckoning to me, crooking their fingers, as though they were saying 'Come along, come along, you pretty little sportsman.' Ugh! (*Passes his hand across his eyes*) But now the nightmare's gone. And the dawn has come.

MARION Am I the dawn?

VICTOR I have never seen a dawn.

(KEITH begins to exit.)

But I think you would make a beautiful substitute. I presume that *he* is *not* the lucky man?

(KEITH exit.)

MARION My fiancé? (*She gives a forced laugh*) Good heavens, no.

VICTOR (*smiling*) In fact, he is nothing in your life at all?

MARION (*smilingly*) Nothing. Why do you ask?

VICTOR I don't know.

MARION Why are you looking at me in such a funny way?

VICTOR It's a perfectly natural way. One's always rather funny when one's natural — haven't you found that out?

MARION No. I'm not an actress.

VICTOR Aren't you? I wonder. I say, you're looking ill.

MARION I'm abominably healthy. Perhaps a little tired. I've walked fifteen miles to-day.

VICTOR (*horrified*) You shouldn't overdo it!

MARION I don't see that my health is a very absorbing subject.

VICTOR Oh, yes, it is. Besides, I'm claiming the privilege all middle-aged men are entitled to — the privilege of being paternal. (*Holding MARION'S hands*)

MARION Do you feel so paternal?

VICTOR Not in the least. Of course I know all the things I should say: I ought to tell you to take a couple of aspirins, and go to bed, and sleep with the window open, and drink quantities of orange juice.

MARION It doesn't sound a bit like you.

VICTOR It isn't. Do you know what I'd like to tell you?

MARION Perhaps I can guess.

VICTOR Only vaguely. And I'm sure you couldn't phrase it nearly so beautifully.

MARION Are you sure I couldn't?

VICTOR Quite. You see — you're not in love — at least with me.

MARION Victor dear, don't go into all that again.

VICTOR I haven't the least intention of doing so. I don't believe in revivals — I only reminded you of the fact in case you might be dazzled by the brilliance of my phraseology. You see ...

'The lunatic, the lover and the poet
Are of imagination all compact.'

MARION Your imagination isn't at all compact.

VICTOR It is when it's concentrated on you. It narrows down to a single pair of lips. Which I shall never approach — oh, don't be afraid 'of that.

MARION It sounds rather dull.

VICTOR Dull? If you could see inside my heart!

MARION What should I see?

VICTOR Have you ever been to Naples?

MARION Oh — Vesuvius.

VICTOR Exactly. A volcano. Sending its fire right through my veins, and its fumes up into my head. Tell me, am I talking shop?

MARION The most dreadful shop, my dear.

VICTOR I knew it. It's these stags. Does *he* shoot stags?

MARION Who?

VICTOR You know.

MARION Alan?

VICTOR Is that his name?

MARION My fiance's name, yes.

VICTOR Ridiculous name.

MARION (*indignantly*) It's a divine name.

VICTOR A reflected divinity, then.

MARION Thank you. That was pretty.

VICTOR Does he?

MARION What?

VICTOR Shoot stags?

MARION Oh yes. He shoots everything.

VICTOR Bloodthirsty brute!

MARION Victor. Don't be horrible.

VICTOR (*going towards her*) Oh, how can I help it? You adorable, wretched, abominable creature. (MARION *rises, drawing up and away towards fire*) No, don't run away. Let me hold your hand.

MARION But really . . .

VICTOR Oh yes. Really. Listen. Supposing Alan were to come in now?

MARION I don't care in the least if he does.

VICTOR Should I shoot him?

MARION Don't be idiotic.

VICTOR Should I stab him to the heart, cleanly, beautifully . . . and then wipe the dagger so that the servants wouldn't be bothered in the morning?

MARION Don't forget the servants.

VICTOR And then . . . away with you over the moors? Up hill and down dale, frightening the stags out of their sleep, scaring the grouse into the starry skies. Forging the swiftest, darkest rivers. . . .

MARION I'm afraid, my dear, you'd be rather out of breath.

VICTOR (*sadly letting go her hands*) Yes, that's true.

MARION Victor, you're not hurt? I didn't mean to be unkind.

VICTOR You weren't. You said it just in time.

MARION You see ... Alan might come down and . . .

VICTOR I know. Do you love him terribly?

MARION (*without expression*) Yes.

VICTOR As terribly as all that? Tell me. How terribly do you love him?

MARION Oh — I don't know.

VICTOR But I want to know. Is he fairer to you than the young moon? And his locks . . . are they scented with nard?

MARION I haven't any idea.

VICTOR (*with a lightning change of tone*) Darling, what is nard?

MARION (*laughing*) Idiot.

VICTOR But seriously? I've always wanted to know.

MARION You break off in such a funny way.

VICTOR Ah! That's my salvation — if I didn't. . .

MARION Well?

VICTOR I might say things.

MARION Say them, Victor.

VICTOR What's the use?

MARION I like to hear you.

VICTOR Ah, yes! You like to hear me talk. Talk, talk, talk, talk. My whole life's spent talking. Ha! Ha! Victor Conway talking — talking.

MARION That's hardly kind, Victor.

VICTOR (*in a tired voice*) I'm sorry. What shall I talk about?

MARION Perhaps you'd better keep silent for a minute.

VICTOR (*passionately*) Silent! Never, never, never let me be silent. Not with you. Don't you see? Words . . . they're a sort of safety valve for me. They bubble, and bubble and bubble, and I — bubble with them. But in the silence . . . anything may happen. Didn't you know that? It's only in the silence that a man can learn to love. And it's only in the silence that a man can hear his own heart . . . breaking.

(There is a moment's silence. ALAN'S voice is heard off the stage shouting 'Marion!' He runs quickly down the stairs, not noticing CONWAY at first.)

ALAN Marion! Hullo! Any cocktails on the horizon, yet?

MARION (*at fireplace*) Not yet. Alan, this is Mr. Conway.

ALAN I beg your pardon. How do you do?

VICTOR (*to MARION*) And this is Alan?

MARION It is.

ALAN 'Alan' already? I say, that's friendly. (*They shake hands*)

VICTOR (*gloomily*) Not at all. I have to kill you.

MARION Victor!

ALAN But what have I done?

VICTOR You have become engaged to the lady of my heart.

ALAN Oh, I see. (*Crossing to MARION, taking her arm*) Well, I don't blame you. I always said, when I got engaged to Marion, that the whole of Scotland would mobilize against me. Didn't I, Marion?

MARION (*detaching herself*) You said a lot of silly things, Alan. But not as silly as Victor.

VICTOR That reminds me. (*Going over to ALAN*) May I — look at something? (*Bends ALAN'S head over and sniffs*) Not nard. Brilliantine!

ALAN (*to MARION*) What the devil?

MARION (*laughing*) Oh, he's mad, that's all.

(There is a noise of voices chattering. Enter LADY EMILY, in a stately black dress; AUDREY, in a very short, smart little frock; COLONEL TEMPLE in a velvet smokingjacket. MARION greets them)

Mother, this is Mr. Conway.

LADY E. How d'you do? I'm so sorry I wasn't here when you arrived.

VICTOR On the contrary.

LADY E. Of course, I've often seen you act, haven't I?

VICTOR Don't let that prejudice you.

(Enter COLONEL and AUDREY stairs.)

COLONEL I told the fellow he'd never seen a salmon jump.

AUDREY If it had seen him, it would have jumped all right.

LADY E. George, this is Mr. Conway.

VICTOR and COLONEL How d'you do?

LADY E. And Miss Findon — Mr. Conway.

VICTOR Miss Findon — how d'you do?

AUDREY How d'you do? I *liked* your Hamlet.

VICTOR That's good of you.

AUDREY Yes. You made him such a *sportsman*.

VICTOR That was, of course, my intention.

(*Pause.*)

COLONEL Do you know Scotland well, Mr. Conway?

VICTOR So far I have endeavoured to avoid the provinces. But after this — (*Smiles and shrugs his shoulders*)

COLONEL You'll see it at its best up here.

VICTOR I'm sure.

(*Enter KEITH, unobserved.*)

COLONEL I oughtn't to say it — but we've one of the best shoots in the country, Mr. Conway.

KEITH *The best.*

COLONEL Thirty thousand acres, you know. Plenty of grouse ground, first rate salmon river. Damned fine stalking, too.

VICTOR I gathered that somebody had — as it were — stalked.

LADY E. I expect Marion has told you all about it.

VICTOR No. I think we talked of — other things.

LADY E. Really? Marion has never been a great talker.

VICTOR Ah, but she can listen marvellously.

COLONEL (*laughingly*) There speaks the actor who likes to hear his own voice. What? (*He guffaws*) Forget you're an actor up here. Take some good hard exercise.

LADY E. I suppose you find it difficult to get much exercise in London, Mr. Conway?

VICTOR Oh, no. I have a masseur who is very cruel to me on Tuesdays and Thursdays. So cruel, in fact, that I'm thinking of cutting out the Tuesdays altogether.

COLONEL Pshaw! You won't need a masseur after a little of Scotland. You've brought a rifle, I suppose?

VICTOR I believe I left all my properties behind.

COLONEL Oh, I daresay we can fix you up. You might go out with Marion to-morrow. She knows the ropes.

MARION (*rising*) Sorry, dad, but I've got to go to London.

COLONEL

LADY E.

ALAN

AUDREY

} -What!

MARION Whatever's the matter?

LADY E. Marion — what on earth for?

MARION I've only just heard that I've got to fix up that wretched charity performance at Chelsea. I'm head of the committee, you know.

COLONEL But you never said anything about this affair before.

MARION I'm sure I did. You've forgotten.

ALAN How long are you going for?

MARION Only a night.

ALAN Will you be able to come back all right the next day?

MARION Come back all right? Of course. What an absurd question.

ALAN You wouldn't like me to come, too?

MARION Don't be ridiculous. Of course not.

ALAN No, perhaps you're right.

MARION Really. I think you're all making an absurd fuss about nothing.

LADY E. But Marion . . .

MARION Mother . . .

LADY E. Still, 'if you're determined.

MARION I am. Absolutely.

LADY E. I think you should apologize to Mr. Conway. After all, he's your guest. And you fly away the moment he arrives.

MARION I do apologize, Victor. I'm terribly sorry. But it's only for forty-eight hours. And I'm sure you'll understand.

VICTOR Of course, I entirely understand.

(BUTLER *enters with cocktails?*)

MARION Why don't you go out with Audrey? She's a marvellous shot.

AUDREY Sorry. But I promised Keith.

MARION Oh, I see.

ALAN Look here. I'd be honoured.

VICTOR But really. You're too kind.

ALAN That's settled then. You know what you're in for?

VICTOR Fortunately I don't.

COLONEL (*jointing to picture*) This — er — might give you some idea. (*Switches on light under picture*)

VICTOR (*looking at if*) Which am I? The one with the red beard? Or the one with the blue?

MARION Obviously the blue beard.

VICTOR (*to MARION*) That means I shall have to shoot eight stags and keep them in a private room?

COLONEL (*impatiently*) This — picture . . .

VICTOR Oh — I beg your pardon.

COLONEL This is a Landseer. Marvellous man Landseer. Look at the expression on that animal's face.

VICTOR Very poignant.

COLONEL Nobody ever painted stags like Landseer, Nobody ever will.

VICTOR I can well believe that.

COLONEL I've no use for these modern artists. I like a stag to look like a stag, and not like a sort of half-baked giraffe.

VICTOR How could the poor dears look like anything but themselves, with all those things on their heads?

LADY E. George, Mr. Conway might be more interested in the pike.

COLONEL What? Hasn't he seen the pike?

MARION *Haven't* you seen the pike?

AUDREY Oh, you *must* see the pike.

VICTOR (*quietly, looking at each in turn*) Pike? Pike? Pike? (*Confidentially to COLONEL.*) Isn't it peculiar how words — repeated *ad nauseam* — I beg your pardon — repeated — become almost meaningless? I remember once when I was playing at

the Lyceum about ten years ago I had exactly one line to say, and it was this: 'Listen to the cuckoo in the thicket/ Just that. Just one cuckoo and one thicket. And after a fortnight or so, the cuckoo ceased to be a cuckoo at all. It just became a — well — partly a 'cook' and partly an 'oo.' (To ALAN) Cuckoo! Cuckoo! *{Walking to COLONEL}* Cuckoo! Cuckoo! *{Suddenly realizing he is not being very polite}* You'll forgive my — er — facetiousness?

COLONEL Oh — er — certainly. Only how the devil you'd ever mistake *that {pointing to the pike}* for anything but a pike — *{looking at VICTOR}* — even if you 'piked' away till you were black in the face, I don't know.

VICTOR No. I'm sure you're right.

LADY E. My husband spent three months catching it, Mr. Conway — three months! You must forgive us if we seem to regard it as something of a friend of the family.

VICTOR You would be inhuman, Lady Emily, if you were to do otherwise.

LADY E. Thank you.

· (KEITH and AUDREY, who have been whispering together, burst into laughter?)

KEITH Did you hear that, Colonel?

COLONEL What?

KEITH Audrey says young Wodehouse nearly killed old Lady Cressy this morning.

LADY E. I don't think that's anything amusing.

AUDREY Oh yes, it is. He shot her just in the — well — where she sits down.

COLONEL (*guffaws*) What a target!

KEITH Four acres.

LADY E. George! You can't help being vulgar, but you needn't be callous.

AUDREY She wasn't hurt. There were yards to spare.

VICTOR Will this lady be in evidence to-morrow?

AUDREY Why?

VICTOR I was just wondering.

LADY E. The moors are hardly safe nowadays.

VICTOR If one remembers Othello, Moors never were. Perhaps I'd better stay at home.

KEITH (*contemptuously*) Oh, you'll be all right.

COLONEL Alan will look after you.

ALAN Of course.

MARION Cocktail, daddy?

COLONEL You know it's no use offering me those things. Give me a glass of sherry.

MARION Victor? Keith?

KEITH Rather!

AUDREY What shall we drink to?

KEITH Good sport.

AUDREY Don't be obvious. Drink to something new and strange.

MARION Such as . . .?

(BUTLER *enters and speaks to* LADY E.)

ALAN (*quietly, looking at* MARION) Such as a successful committee meeting at Chelsea.

AUDREY I don't call that very wonderful.

VICTOR That means that you have never seen charity when it's naked and unadorned.

AUDREY Oh, haven't I? I was Lady Godiva for three nights running in aid of St. George's Hospital . . . (*She poses*)

LADY E. Audrey!

VICTOR Supposing I gave you a toast.

MARION Oh, do, Victor.

AUDREY Yes — give us something thrilling out of your favourite role.

VICTOR Very well. This is going to be a strangely beautiful toast.

ALAN What's it out of?

VICTOR Macbeth.

LADY E. (*rising nervously*) Oh — er — Mr. Conway . . .

VICTOR Yes?

LADY E. I'm so sorry — I'm afraid I shall have to disturb you, you see — dinner.

AUDREY Oh, let him give us the toast.

LADY E. I am sure Mr. Conway is far too hungry to think of anything at all suitable at the moment.

COLONEL So am I.

LADY E. Come along, Audrey, drink up your cocktail.

AUDREY I'm longing to know what the toast is.

LADY E. You can have plenty of toast at dinner.

AUDREY Oh, darling, you made an epigram. Oh, very well. Cheerio, everybody.

KEITH Well, that's that.

COLONEL Come along, you youngsters. Mr. Conway, we go in as we please.

VICTOR How wise of you.

(*Exeunt* AUDREY, KEITH, MARION, LADY E., COLONEL.)

ALAN (*touching VICTOR'S arm*) I say . . .

VICTOR (*turning round*) Hullo. D'you want me?

ALAN Only a second.

VICTOR But . . . , dinner?

ALAN This is rather important. Look here, I like you.

VICTOR I'm delighted to know that.

ALAN And I trust you.

VICTOR (*suspiciously*) Are you feeling quite well?

ALAN Perfectly, thanks. I only want to ask you a question.

VICTOR What is it?

ALAN Do you happen to know of a man in London by the name of Simon Kerr?

VICTOR Simon Kerr? (*Thinking*) Simon Kerr? Isn't there some sort of a doctor of that name?

ALAN Yes, he is a doctor.

VICTOR Pretty shady doctor, as far as I recollect.

ALAN I wondered.

VICTOR Why — of course. Don't you remember? He was mixed up in rather a curious case about two years ago. A girl tried to throw herself in the river.

ALAN Is that the man?

VICTOR I'm sure of it. The papers were full of it. (*Looks at him curiously*) You weren't thinking of ...

ALAN (*with a forced laugh*) Just something I'd heard. That's all.

VICTOR I see.

(BUTLER *enters?*)

BUTLER Her ladyship is waiting, sir.

(ALAN *goes out quickly* — VICTOR *follows more slowly* — *watching him?*)

C U R T A I N

ACT I I

SCENE:

There is a mist outside the window, which gradually clears as the Act -proceeds.

TIME:

After lunch. Three days later.

(At Rise: VICTOR and ALAN are discovered. They are both looking out of the window. VICTOR turns away from window, lights a cigarette and begins pacing nervously up and down the room.)

VICTOR Oh, this mist! This mist! Is it never going to lift again?

ALAN *(at window)* It's lifting now.

VICTOR Three days under a white blanket. Creeping down the mountains. Creeping over the house. Creeping over my heart. *(Shudders)* I'm going back to bed. *(Climbs stairs)*

ALAN You're getting nervy.

VICTOR *(on stairs)* If I wasn't getting nervy, I'd long ago have lost my self-respect. I'm almost ashamed of myself for being sane at all. It's worrying me. I shouldn't be sane. I should be rushing round the house with antlers sprouting out of my head, and

roaring like a bull. I ought to be leaping like a salmon. (*Points to pike*) Instead of which I'm only grouching . . .

ALAN Like a grouse. You're certainly doing that.

VICTOR (*coming down stairs*) Well. Put yourself in my place. Reverse the roles. Supposing that I had locked *you* up for three days in a house entirely filled with actors and actresses. Supposing that the hall was plastered with play-bills, the butler a stage butler, that you dined off a stage dinner in limelight, to the sound of a perpetual orchestra. Supposing that you slept in a stage bed, and had to cover your face with grease-paint before you appeared in the morning. Supposing . . .

ALAN Oh — stop supposing.

VICTOR Well, isn't that what I've had to put up with? I've had stags, stags, stags, morning, noon and night. There are stags' heads in the library, in the dining-room, in the corridors. There's even a stag's head over my bed. I bribed the housemaid to take it down this morning. I told her that its antlers twisted themselves round my neck in the night. It's on top of the wardrobe now, sticking two ridiculous horns over the edge, a sort of inverted hat-rack. (*Laughs*) And when it isn't stags, it's grouse. I know so much about grouse that I shall never *eat* the beastly bird again. I know all about their habits, which are singularly monotonous. I even know where they go in the winter time. And when it isn't grouse, it's salmon. God! What conceivable interest

is there in a salmon? The proper place for a salmon is the Savoy. How it ever gets to the Savoy, if it likes being at the Savoy, if it has been long at the Savoy — that doesn't matter. There are some things which are better left to the imagination. There's something almost indecent about a salmon when it's removed from its proper environment of cucumber.

ALAN The mist's lifting fast.

VICTOR What good is that? When it has lifted, there's nothing to see. Except a quantity of hills, very badly arranged.

ALAN Cheer up, you'll soon be dead.

VICTOR I shall be. And how sorry everybody in this house will be! How they hate me!

ALAN It isn't as bad as that.

VICTOR Oh! How they hate — hate me — hate me. Lady Emily leaps away from me as if I were a snake. The Colonel becomes almost inarticulate at the very sight of me. *(Laughs)* As for Audrey and that man Keith. . . . *(He makes a gesture of despair)*

ALAN You know, you made a mistake right at the beginning — putting that false beard on the Colonel's best stag.

VICTOR Well, one must do something.

ALAN And you were a bit stand-offish about charades.

VICTOR Charades! Good God! You don't think it amuses me to play charades? To stand in a draughty corridor for half an hour! While a lot of

giggling idiots decide they're going to imitate a banana. Not that *that* calls for any great histrionic ability from any of them. Besides, my dear fellow, it isn't *done*.

ALAN What isn't done?

VICTOR Asking me to act. If the Colonel came to stay with me, I shouldn't lead him out into the garden and tell him to shoot stray cats. If Audrey came to me I shouldn't give her a fishing rod and tell her to go and catch her own breakfast. Why, then, should I be made to act? Heavens, I'm always acting. I believe I'm acting now. (*Walks quickly to a mirror*) I *am*, you know. Marvellous expression! Insane. . . . Pity. . . . (*Sighs*) 'That he is mad 'tis true. 'Tis true, 'tis pity, 'tis pity 'tis, 'tis true' . . .

ALAN Tell me — why did you come here?

VICTOR (*in an altered tone*). You know why.

ALAN Marion?

VICTOR I'm afraid it was . . .

ALAN Oh, you needn't be afraid. I'm not jealous.

VICTOR You've no need to be.

ALAN Oh, I wasn't thinking of you.

VICTOR You're excessively flattering.

ALAN Sorry. But after all — well — you're rather older, aren't you?

VICTOR Centuries.

ALAN Besides — you're a sportsman.

VICTOR (*sighing*) Have I come to that?

ALAN No. You're all right.

VICTOR Then, who's all wrong?

ALAN Oh — I don't know.

VICTOR Tell me — who *is* this Keith person?

ALAN The Colonel's known him for a long time. He's a fine shot. Apart from that, all I know is that he's something or other in the City. And seems to do damned well out of it, too.

VICTOR I suppose he's what they call a 'stag'?

ALAN What is that?

VICTOR It's a technical name on the Stock Exchange. It means somebody who comes in and takes a quick profit without making any actual payment.

ALAN (*quickly*) Were you thinking of anything in particular when you said that?

VICTOR No. I merely thought it fitted in with his mentality.

ALAN By God — you're right!

VICTOR As a matter of fact — we're all stags, in some way or other. We all want to have our little profits, and our little pleasures, quickly — without the unpleasant formality of paying for them. (*Abruptly*) How long has Marion known him?

ALAN About four months.

VICTOR Where did he meet her?

ALAN In Venice. Last May. They were in the same party.

VICTOR Well . . .

ALAN Oh, I wish I knew what to think. There *was* something, I'm sure of that. And Venice . . .

VICTOR Yes . . . Venice!

ALAN You see — Marion's so terribly sensitive to anything beautiful. When I first met her, I sometimes thought she was almost mad, till I understood. I've seen her run out on a summer evening, when the mist was rising from the valley, and dance away into it, laughing and twining her hands over her head, as though the mist were a sort of veil which she was weaving round her face. Even in London, I've had to take her away from parties because there was a full moon, and she wanted to go down to the Embankment, all glittering with coloured lights. Very pale and queer under the moon. She was utterly carried away by it all. But — Venice! Life becomes a sort of lovely, terrifying masquerade. And Marion there with that brute, and the lapping of the water, and the music, and the full moon. . . . Oh, my God!

VICTOR Look here — don't let your imagination run away with you.

ALAN Imagination! Is that all you think it is? Well — is Dr. Simon Kerr — imagination?

VICTOR Simon Kerr? What the devil's he got to do with it?

ALAN That's what I want to know.

VICTOR I don't follow you.

ALAN I'm sorry. I oughtn't to be talking about this at all, really. But I've got to talk to somebody. You remember my asking you about this doctor chap?

VICTOR Yes.

ALAN Well — Marion's gone up to see him.

VICTOR To see Kerr! You're raving.

ALAN I'm only too terribly sane. The other day — the day you arrived — I came in here and found Keith and Marion together. He was giving her something — an envelope. I thought at first it was a love letter, and I lost my temper. I told her to give it to me. She said it was only an address. I wouldn't believe her and I forced it out of her hand. It was only an address — Simon Kerr's address, in Keith's handwriting. I didn't understand then, and I apologized. It was only later on that I began to connect Simon Kerr's name with . . . with that sort of thing.

VICTOR Then she went to London to see Kerr!

ALAN To see Kerr. The committee was all a blind. I took the trouble to find that out. It hasn't even been formed yet. The first meeting's in November.

VICTOR Oh! — My God . . .

ALAN Quite.

VICTOR Marion's — Where is this man?

ALAN Keith? He's about somewhere.

VICTOR I'm going to get him.

ALAN What for?

VICTOR What for? To find out the truth.

ALAN You won't get the truth from — him.

VICTOR Oh yes, I will — or I'll hang for it.

ALAN (*quietly*) If there's anything of that sort to be done, it's my job.

VICTOR What makes you think that?

ALAN Marion and I happen to be ...

VICTOR Yes — yes — (*suddenly disheartened*) Of course, I see. I'm sorry. (*Laughing hysterically*) Oh — this is the funniest role I've ever played. A lover without a love, an avenger — without a sword! A pitiable hopeless fool!

(AUDREY *hurries down the stairs. She is carrying a fishing rod in her hand?*)

AUDREY (*indignantly*) I say, does anybody know anything about this?

ALAN What?

AUDREY Well — somebody's been messing about with my rod. It's absolutely spoilt. The reel's all tangled up and the top joint's broken; it'll have to go back to the makers.

VICTOR (*sadly*) I'm sorry!

AUDREY You — oh, so it was you, was it? I thought as much.

ALAN But you haven't been using it, have you?

VICTOR Not in a very orthodox manner.

AUDREY May I ask why you want to meddle with my rod at all?

VICTOR I had no desire to meddle with it. It would be more accurate to say that it meddled with me.

AUDREY For heaven's sake be natural!

VICTOR Well — this fishing rod was *thrust* upon me. The housemaid put it in my room.

AUDREY Why didn't you give it back to me, then?

VICTOR I didn't know it belonged to you. I thought it was one of the customs of the country. And so — I fished.

AUDREY *Tou* fished! What for?

VICTOR Roses.

AUDREY **RoseS?**

VICTOR Yes. My bedroom overlooks the rose garden, you know. I caught three divine 'Gloires de Dijon' before breakfast. I thought of sending them to you.

AUDREY The thing's absolutely ruined.

VICTOR I'll buy you another. A prettier one.

AUDREY You're not in the least amusing; and Keith'll be furious.

VICTOR (*quickly*) Keith — ?

AUDREY We'd arranged to fish the upper part of the river to-day. And now — that's all off. I suppose we'll have to go for a walk with Lady Emily now.

VICTOR I'm very sorry.

AUDREY **YOU look it.**

LADY E. (*entering down stairs. Going to window*) It's almost clear now.

VICTOR There's a lot more mist coming.

LADY E. (*acidly*) I'm afraid our Scottish weather doesn't appeal to you, Mr. Conway.

VICTOR I must say that I prefer a London fog. It seems more human . . .

LADY E. It's certainly dirtier, if that's what you mean. (*To ALAN*) Marion's terribly late.

ALAN Yes. That's natural with this fog.

LADY E. She ought to be here by now. I thought I saw the car coming over the hill from my window. I came down. But really — in this mist. Listen — surely I heard something?

VICTOR It was only the wind, moaning in the roof.

LADY E. Really, Mr. Conway. You'll make us all nervous . . .

VICTOR I beg your pardon.

LADY E. I'm sure it was the car. Yes — it is . . .

(Enter GARRETT with suit-case and hat-box.)

Miss Temple has arrived, Garrett?

GARRETT Yes, m'lady. *(Exit)*

(Enter MARION slowly. She looks pale and tired.)

MARION Hullo, everybody. Hullo, mother.

AUDREY Hullo, Marion.

LADY E. Darling! It is good to see you back.

MARION Hullo, Alan. *(Shivering)* I'm frozen.

ALAN Shall I get you something hot to drink?

MARION In a minute. Not just now. I had a ghastly journey. The heating went wrong in my compartment.

(Exit AUDREY stairs.)

LADY E. You look terribly tired, child . . .

MARION Yes, I'm tired. It took ages coming from the station, too, in this mist.

LADY E. You ought never to have gone. It's perfectly ridiculous these committees. They never leave you alone. Was everything all right?

(KEITH, who has been standing looking out of the window, turns round.)

MARION How do you mean — was everything all right?

LADY E. Well — did you get the wretched business finished?

MARION (*laughing a little hysterically*) Finished! Oh — I don't expect it'll ever be finished.

(KEITH *again turns to window?*)

LADY E. If I were you, I should wash my hands of the whole thing.

MARION I wish I could.

LADY E. Once you let yourself in for this sort of thing — it's hopeless.

MARION Yes. It is — hopeless.

LADY E. In fact I shouldn't be surprised for all the good you've done you might just as well have stayed at home.

MARION Yes — for all the good I've done, I might just as well have stayed at home.

LADY E. Well, darling, you've learnt your lesson.

MARION I have.

LADY E. I'm going for a walk with Audrey and you had better go upstairs until dinner-time.

(*Exit stairs.*)

MARION I should like to, mother. (*Walks towards staircase. She pauses*) Hello, Keith.

KEITH Hullo . . .

MARION (*with an effort*). Have you been having — good sport?

KEITH Sport! In this mist?

MARION I hope it will soon lift . . .

KEITH It's about time.

MARION I think it is. *(She walks slowly up the stairs)*
(VICTOR, with a glance at the two men, takes a newspaper, hesitates a moment, then goes out to the library, KEITH goes to sideboard and pours out drink.)

ALAN *(at fireplace, coldly)* I thought you weren't drinking nowadays?

KEITH I'm not really. Just felt a bit — Oh, I don't know — shaky. Can't make it out.

ALAN Can't you?

KEITH Why no. I'm perfectly fit. Sleeping like a top.

ALAN No worries, eh?

KEITH None whatever, thanks.

ALAN Nothing on your mind?

KEITH No.

ALAN You're lucky. *(Pause)* Funny you should feel shaky like that all of a sudden.

KEITH Yes.

ALAN Just came on a few minutes ago, didn't it?

KEITH Oh, I don't know. I don't keep a chart of my emotions.

ALAN I didn't know you were so temperamental.

KEITH Didn't you? And I didn't know you took such a brotherly interest in my well-being. It's the first time I've noticed it.

ALAN It's not quite the first time.

KEITH Anyway, I hope it won't be the last.
(Gets another drink)

ALAN Going to have another?

KEITH Ah. Brotherly love continues! Any objection?

ALAN No. After all, your body's your own.

KEITH Thank the Lord, yes. It's about the only thing that is. Funny thing, the body.

ALAN Funny?

KEITH Yes. When I say funny I mean funny. Lots of arms and legs, and odd bits here and there — and then . . .

ALAN Well . . . ?

KEITH Well, one collection of arms and legs and toes and fingers meets another collection — with slight variations — and then — the band begins to play. (*Hums Wedding March*)

ALAN That's not always the tune it plays.

KEITH I say, we're getting rather witty, aren't we?

ALAN Are we?

KEITH Yes, repartee, and all that sort of thing. 'Le mot juste' — the right word in the right place.

ALAN Are you sure we've had the right words so far?

KEITH I'm sure of nothing. I'm going to get a rifle.

ALAN Hadn't you better wait for Marion?

KEITH For Marion? Why?

ALAN I should have thought you had certain things to discuss with her.

KEITH (*laughing*) Me? No such luck. I leave that job to you.

ALAN You're rather fond of leaving — other people to finish — jobs, aren't you?

KEITH I don't know what the devil you're driving at, but you sound singularly offensive. (*Turns to go*)

ALAN Just a minute.

KEITH Oh, what the devil is it? If you have anything to say, say it! (*Goes over to him*)

ALAN I intend to.

KEITH What do you mean?

ALAN You know very well what I mean.

KEITH I see. The brotherly love was only a bit of camouflage, was it?

ALAN I'm not dealing in camouflage any longer.

KEITH Aren't you? Well, why the devil don't you come out with it? I'm sick of these suggestions; you keep dancing about like a cat on hot bricks. If you want to say something, say it and I'll give you an answer. If you want to hit something, hit it and I'll give you an answer to that, too.

ALAN By God, I will! (*Walks over to KEITH, his fists clenched*)

(*Enter COLONEL TEMPLE.*)

COLONEL Ready, Keith?

KEITH (*with a bow to ALAN*) Have I your permission?

COLONEL (*with feeling*) I'll be glad to get out of this house.

KEITH Why? Touch of liver?

COLONEL No. Touch of Conway. Of all the damned, impertinent mountebanks . . .

KEITH What's he been up to now?

COLONEL Well, I was coming along from the gun-room just now, and he stopped me. And what d'you think he did?

KEITH Kissed you, I expect.

COLONEL Pshaw. He had the impertinence to ask me for a subscription to the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. Yes, it's all very well for you to laugh. The man's not your guest.

KEITH Was he serious?

COLONEL How do I know? I can't understand half the blighter says.

KEITH What was his reason for picking on you?

COLONEL Well — he waved his hands about . . .
(waves]

KEITH Yes — he's rather good at that.

COLONEL And he pointed to that stag's head in the alcove — you know, the one we put up when we got rid of that Gainsborough — and he said he was sure that anybody who was so keen on preserving animals after their death would be even keener on preserving them when they were alive.

KEITH I hope you had your answer ready.

COLONEL I had! Ha! I should say so. What d'you think I said?

KEITH Don't ask me.

COLONEL I looked him straight in the eye and I said 'Mr. Conway, we've all got to die at some time or another.'

KEITH Well?

COLONEL What d'you think of that?

KEITH Oh — er — splendid. Good for you.

COLONEL Yes ... I thought it wasn't so bad myself. 'We've all got to die at some time or another/ I didn't say another word.

KEITH That must have given him something to think about.

COLONEL Don't you believe it. All the effect it had on him was to make him say that 'in that case I'd better make it guineas'. The man's not a gentleman.

KEITH P'raps you're right.

COLONEL Has anybody seen my cape?

KEITH Is that it over there?

COLONEL Here! What the devil . . .

KEITH Can I help you?

COLONEL Who's been monkeying about with my cape?

ALAN Oh, sorry. I forgot to tell you. Victor was wearing that this morning.

COLONEL Wearing my cape?

ALAN Yes. He got into rather a mess with the string round the neck.

COLONEL Rather a mess? The thing's hopelessly tangled. What the deuce was he wearing it for?

ALAN Oh — acting, I suppose.

KEITH Acting? Looks more like knitting to me. Turn the damn thing round — I can't . . .

COLONEL Look here, we can't wait for this. Have you got a knife?

KEITH Yes. Shall I cut it?

COLONEL If you please. (*While KEITH is cutting he walks up and down*) The next thing that happens, the man'll be taking my trousers. Or using my toothbrush.

KEITH (*over his shoulder*) Or using your rifle.

COLONEL No fear of that. I'm taking that myself. Finished, Keith?

KEITH Yes. That's the best I can do. (*Handing belt*) Do you want that?

COLONEL No thanks, keep that, it will remind you of Conway. Well, let's be getting on. You're not coming, Alan?

ALAN I may join you later. Which way are you going?

COLONEL I think over the Black Spur. We shan't have much time for more to-day.

ALAN Which road are you taking?

COLONEL I suppose we shall go up over the stone bridge and bear to the right.

ALAN Past the quarry?

COLONEL Oh yes — it's really immaterial. (*Impatiently. Exit.*)

KEITH You're very inquisitive to-day, aren't you?

ALAN Perhaps I am.

COLONEL (*Of*) Look here, Keith . . . if you're not coming now, I shall go on alone.

KEITH Right you are. (*Goes to door*) So long, Alan.

(*ALAN does not reply. Exit KEITH. ALAN goes over to fireplace*) sits in deep armchair. Enter MARION by stairs.)

MARION Keith! (*low*) Keith! (*ALAN gets up*) Oh, my dear, I'm so sorry— I thought you were Keith. Where is he, do you know?

ALAN Anything urgent?

MARION (*nervously*) Well, rather.

ALAN He's gone out with the Colonel.

MARION Gone out already? But . . .

ALAN Well?

. MARION Oh — it'll do later.

ALAN Come and sit down. Are you glad to see me again?

MARION (*facetiously*) Not a bit, my angel.

ALAN I knew it. I suppose you've been terribly wicked in London?

MARION Terribly. September's such a dizzy month, isn't it?

ALAN Tell me all about it.

MARION I shouldn't dream of it.

ALAN I shall guess, then.

MARION All right. (*Pause*)

ALAN When the train arrived at London you got out.

MARION Brilliant.

ALAN Drawing your furs round you, you stepped into the rich Rolls.

MARION Wrong. I had the dingiest of taxis.

ALAN Any car that you drive in is a Rolls to me.

MARION Not bad for a beginner, darling.

ALAN And you drove to ...

MARION Well?

ALAN Home?

MARION Go on.

ALAN Is that right?

MARION Til tell you in a minute.

ALAN You open the door with a latch-key, you are greeted by a faithful handmaiden.

MARION Well?

ALAN She attends to you. She gives you steaming coffee and a lovely omelette. Having digested same, you leap into a beautiful bath and stay in it far too long.

MARION Quite.

ALAN You emerge from the bath. You are extremely wet.

MARION Alan, you're a genius!

ALAN You dry yourself. With the assistance of the handmaiden you put on a dress.

MARION What colour is the dress?

ALAN Grey.

MARION No, beige. But you wouldn't know the difference. Go on.

ALAN You powder your nose. You do a little hard work with the lipstick. And then . . .

MARION And then?

ALAN You begin to pace up and down the room.

MARION You're psychic, angel.

ALAN Up and down, up and down.

MARION And then up again.

ALAN You are worried.

MARION Naturally.

ALAN The thought of your approaching ordeal. . .

MARION Alan, this is a silly game. . .

ALAN I love it. The thought of your approaching ordeal . . .

MARION Committee meetings aren't exactly ordeals.

ALAN Oh — I forgot the committee meeting. Well, you pace up and down.

MARION You've said that before.

ALAN And then you put your hat on. You look in the glass and you see a pale face with rings under the eyes.

MARION This is charming!

ALAN You think: 'That youth should come to this! That life should be so cruel! That one should have to face such ordeals as . . .'

MARION Alan — please let's stop this.

ALAN As committee meetings. (MARION *is silent*) You walk down the stairs and you step outside. It is a grey, miserable day, with a wind that seems to tell of an early winter. You shiver slightly. You get into another taxi. I wonder why you didn't have the Rolls?

MARION (*sharply*) Why should I?

ALAN I said, I wondered. And you start out for Chelsea.

MARION Oh, don't take me all over that again, please!

ALAN Why, was it tiresome?

MARION Well. . . . Have you ever been to a committee meeting?

ALAN No., Have you?

MARION (*very quickly*) What do you mean? (*As ALAN smiles*) Oh — I see. You're being facetious again.

ALAN Ami? Well — let me think. The vision fades.

MARION Thank goodness for that.

ALAN Oh, but it's clearing again. The journey begins. But — somehow I don't understand.

MARION What don't you understand?

ALAN (*in a changed and almost hostile 'voice'*) You don't seem to be going to Chelsea at all.

MARION (*frightened*) Really? How very odd.

ALAN Yes. Very odd. Perhaps the taxi-man doesn't know the way. He's taking you up through Grosvenor Square . . . up Duke Street . . . across Oxford Street. . .

MARION Alan! Please. I'm terribly tired . . .

ALAN Just a minute. Into another street ... a long grey street . . . with big cars standing outside . . . and brass plates on the doors . . .

MARION Alan! Let go my arm, please! (*Rising*)

ALAN I can just make out the name of the street. . . It begins with a W.

MARION (*terror*) Alan! — leave me alone.

ALAN **W-I-M-P-O-L-**

(*Enter VICTOR with gun, which he drops with crash on floor. The audience observes that he purposely drops the gun. ALAN and MARION hear crash. ALAN leaves go of her wrists. MARION rushes from the room. ALAN follows her, and then pauses.*)

VICTOR Lovers' quarrels?

ALAN Lovers! (*Laughs bitterly*)

VICTOR I shouldn't follow if I were you.

ALAN You don't happen to be me though.

VICTOR That's my misfortune.

ALAN Misfortune? If you knew!

VICTOR Perhaps I do.

ALAN You? What do you know?

VICTOR Well . . . one thing which I certainly do *not* know is how this curious and highly undecorative instrument is meant to function. (*Pointing to gun*) You see — it has a great many — what shall I say? — angles of approach. This little knob here — who knows that if I push that . . .

ALAN You'd better put that down.

VICTOR (*resisting him*) Put it down? Not on your life! Why — why this, with this little rod — I might open the doors of romance. I might kill you and find myself facing a judge in scarlet at the Old Bailey. I might kill myself, and find myself facing another sort of judge in scarlet at the Old . . . Well, wherever they might happen to bill me in the after-life. Why — I might even shoot a stag! A stag, my boy! A stag! (*Points gun at him*) But you're not interested. You've got a lovers' quarrel. Well, quarrel away. (*As ALAN turns up stage?*) Go to her, and upbraid her for being human. Go to her and blame her because she's a woman.

ALAN A stag! (*Exit*)

VICTOR And forgive her because you are a man.
(*He sighs and plays with his gun*)

(*Enter LADY EMILY and AUDREY. They are dressed for out-of-doors. VICTOR turns round with a start, and levels the gun at them.*)

Halt! Who goes there?

LADY E. Mr. Conway! Please put that gun down at once.

VICTOR Not till you've given me the pass-word.

AUDREY Oh— he's mad!

VICTOR Mad? Talking of madness, have you ever considered how extremely delicate is the border line between a thorough-going lunatic like myself, and a delicate half-wit like . . .

LADY E. I do not wish to consider anything while you have that rifle in your hand.

(*VICTOR throws gun on sofa. LADY EMILY gives a jump*)

VICTOR There goes my last hope.

LADY E. Mr. Conway! I'm sorry if I appear to be unduly cautious — please leave things to people who understand them. We don't want to have a tragedy in the house.

VICTOR No. A tragedian is probably — sufficient.

AUDREY I'm beginning to think it is.

VICTOR Ah — you're still thinking of fishing rods. But you can always repair a fishing rod. There are other things you can't repair.

LADY E. I hope you haven't broken anything else?

VICTOR I? No. Not I.

AUDREY Then who has broken what?

VICTOR I wonder. Somebody might have broken somebody's heart,

LADY E. (*acidly*) How you manage to keep up such eloquence in these extremely healthy surroundings I don't know.

VICTOR It's amazing, isn't it?

AUDREY I rather like him when he's talking — he does that rather well.

VICTOR Thank you.

AUDREY Whose heart is broken, Hamlet?

VICTOR Again, Ophelia, I wonder. It might be yours.

AUDREY No Such luck.

VICTOR It might be ... (*Pointing to LADY E., whose back is turned?*)

AUDREY Don't be vulgar.

VICTOR Very well. I'll be truthful. It might be. . .

(*Enter ALAN, walking quickly. He is very pale.*)

ALAN Anybody seen my rifle?

LADY E. You will probably find that Mr. Conway has it.

ALAN (*going over to sofa*) No. That's the old one.

VICTOR But it looks a very nice one.

AUDREY (*to ALAN, who is striding up the stairs*) Are you going out now?

ALAN Yes. (*Exit up-stage*)

LADY E. I think it's time that we went along, too.

AUDREY. I'm ready.

LADY E. Mr. Conway, I imagine, will stay indoors.
VICTOR Is that a command?

LADY E. Not at all. I thought you preferred it.
(To AUDREY) Is there anywhere you particularly want to go?

AUDREY I suppose we couldn't join up with Keith?

LADY E. Now, Audrey!

AUDREY What do you mean?

LADY E. I think you've seen quite enough of that young man in the last three days.

AUDREY I never heard of such a thing.

LADY E. Perhaps not — anyway we shall all feel better after some exercise. (, VICTOR) If you should wish to read, you will find some books in the library.

VICTOR Thank you. I have already examined them.

(Exit LADY EMILY.)

AUDREY And if you change your mind and come out, you'd better ring a bell if you see anything human on the horizon. *(Exit)*

(VICTOR stands looking after them for a moment. Examines gun, aims, goes up, looks out of window, then goes quickly to cupboard or chest and takes out a coat which he puts on. All the time he is looking up the staircase. Picks up cartridges and places in pocket?)

(ALAN runs down the stairs. He has on an old cap; his gun is slung round his shoulder.)

ALAN Hullo! You still here?

VICTOR Yes. I was waiting for you.

ALAN Sorry. I can't stop.

VICTOR I'm coming out with you.

ALAN You? Don't be ridiculous.

VICTOR Is it so ridiculous to wish for your company?

ALAN But I'm going out to shoot, man! To shoot!

VICTOR *(in a sudden outburst)* And don't you think I want to shoot too? Do you imagine that you've got a monopoly of sportsmanship? Do you think I'm a poor weakling to be kept only to amuse people after dinner, and for the rest of the day to be shut up in a library containing nothing but Scottish sermons? I beg your pardon. But I'm coming out with you.

ALAN You don't realize what you're in for.

VICTOR Perhaps I do.

ALAN We're going a long way.

VICTOR Further perhaps than you imagine.

ALAN We'll have to hurry. *(Sharply)* Come along then!

VICTOR I'm ready!

ALAN Very well.

VICTOR *(quietly)* How far is it to the ... to the Black Spur?

ALAN *(slowly, turning towards him)* Why do you ask that?

(Curtain falls quickly, and remains doivn for one minute to indicate the passage of about four hours?)

(When curtain rises again it is seven o'clock. Enter LADY EMILY and AUDREY. LADY EMILY is leading a dog.)

LADY E. Close the window, Audrey, when you come in.

AUDREY It won't close.

LADY E. Push the catch to the right.

AUDREY I can't shut it. (*Coming over to LADY EMILY, who is examining letters*) Is that the post?

LADY E. Yes. I seem to be attracting the usual neglect. There is one for you.

AUDREY Thank you. (*Sitting*) Oh — how very exciting!

LADY E. What is it?

AUDREY (*in a mincing voice*) The Embassy Club are having a gala every Sunday in the season. Oh, and listen: 'On every evening a beautiful Parisian baby doll will be given to each lady present/

LADY E. With what object?

AUDREY Darling. It makes the party go.

LADY E. I fail to see why a lot of foolish women should be presented with Parisian baby dolls at a night club.

AUDREY Oh yes, it's the nearest approach that most of them ever make to maternity.

LADY E. In that case, perhaps you'd ring the bell for Garrett. (*As AUDREY fumbles*) Push it to the right, darling. You're not very good at bells, are you? And *must* you use all that lipstick?

AUDREY Why? (*Turning round*) Am I making my mouth the wrong shape?

LADY E. It's a long time since I've seen a girl's mouth. I'm hardly qualified to say.

AUDREY Oh—I love you when you're like this. It's amazingly effective.

LADY E. It's perfectly sincere. As a matter of fact, I've never used a lipstick. I'm rather glad. I read in the paper the other day that a modern woman actually swallowed enough lipstick in her life-time to stretch from her feet to her neck.

AUDREY Did you believe that?

LADY E. No. It seemed to me to be something of an understatement.

GARRETT (*entering*) You rang, m'lady?

LADY E. Yes, Garrett. Will you take Jem, please?

GARRETT Yes, m'lady.

LADY E. You'd better give her to Andrews, and tell him to dry her. Has anybody else returned, Garrett?

GARRETT Not yet, m'lady.

LADY E. Is Miss Marion still resting?

GARRETT I believe so, m'lady.

LADY E. And Mr. Conway?

GARRETT He went out with Mr. Cameron, m'lady.

AUDREY Went out? With Mr. Cameron?

LADY E. (*to AUDREY*) How very extraordinary.

AUDREY (*rising*) *taking off coat and flaring it on stool*) Poor Alan! He'll be terribly disagreeable at dinner.

LADY E. That reminds me, you had better arrange to have dinner at nine.

GARRETT **Very** good, m'lady.

AUDREY **Does** that mean two whole hours before a cocktail?

LADY E. You can have one now, if you wish.

AUDREY Angel.

LADY E. Is the tray there, Garrett?

GARRETT Outside, m'lady.

LADY E. Bring it in then.

GARRETT Very good, m'lady. (*Exit GARRETT*)

LADY E. What Alan is doing with Victor Conway passes my imagination.

AUDREY That man passed my imagination long ago. If I lived in the same house with him for long I should take to drink.

LADY E. Now's your time to begin.

(*Enter GARRETT.*)

AUDREY (*to GARRETT*) I'll mix them, Garrett.
(*Crosses to table above settee*)

(*Exit GARRETT.*)

(*Mixing cocktails*) Are you joining me?

LADY E. No, thanks.

AUDREY Then I shall have two and light up the entire room. I feel abominably healthy. Shall I make some for the others?

LADY E. If you like. I don't know anything about cocktails. I had an idea that they went bad unless they were drunk at once.

AUDREY All right, I'll leave them. I wonder what time they'll be back?

LADY E. Meaning Keith?

AUDREY Yes — well — Keith — and the others.

LADY E. Aren't you being a little foolish about Keith?

AUDREY Foolish? Why?

LADY E. In the apocryphal times in which I was a girl we should have said that you were setting your cap at him.

AUDREY What a divine expression.

LADY E. Well — aren't you?

AUDREY He's terribly attractive, don't you think?

LADY E. Perhaps . . .

AUDREY And a marvellous sportsman.

LADY E. He shoots *extremely* well.

AUDREY And a perfect sense of humour.

LADY E. Having been frequently informed that I have no humour myself, I can't offer any opinion on that question.

AUDREY Well then — what's wrong?

LADY E. Nothing. I merely think that it is undignified for any girl to pursue any man.

AUDREY Pursue! I like that. If you call asking a man to mend a fishing rod 'pursuing him'. . .

LADY E. (*with a smile*) It was a very tangled fishing rod . . .

AUDREY Darling — you're hopeless.

LADY E. That's what I'm usually told when I venture to express an opinion.

AUDREY Well — let's forget it. Nothing's happened yet.

LADY E. No, and I don't suppose anything will.

AUDREY For which faintly catty remark I shall embrace you. (*Kisses her*)

(*Enter MCPHERSON, a gillie-, in a kilt. He is pale and agitated. AUDREY sees him first,*)

Hullo.

(*MCPHERSON speaks with a Scottish accent, which I will not attempt to indicate phonetically,*)

MCPHERSON I beg your pardon, m'lady . . .

LADY E. Well, what is it?

MCPHERSON I'd like to see your ladyship alone at once.

LADY E. (*rising*) Has anything happened?

MCPHERSON Yes, m'lady. There's been an accident.

AUDREY An accident?

MCPHERSON Yes, miss.

LADY E. Not the Colonel?

MCPHERSON No, m'lady. Mr. Keith . . .

AUDREY Keith? He's not . . .? Not. . .?

MCPHERSON Yes, miss.

AUDREY Not dead? Oh —God!

(*MCPHERSON bows his head.*)

LADY E. (*speaking very quickly and sharply*) What happened?

MCPHERSON The gentleman from London . . .

LADY E. (*slowly*) And we let him go out with a gun. I shall never forgive myself . . . never. . .

MCPHERSON It wasn't his fault, m'lady.

LADY E. How and where did it happen?

MCPHERSON It was out on the Black Spur, my lady. We'd been stalking for some time — but the mist was too thick to see much. He shot at something he saw moving across the ridge. It was an accident, m'lady.

LADY E. Where is ... the . . . the . . .

MCPHERSON They're bringing him along in the second car, m'lady.

AUDREY (*getting up*) It isn't true. It can't be.

LADY E. You can go, McPherson.

(*Exit MCPHERSON.*)

Audrey, dear . . .

AUDREY Oh — I don't believe it ... I don't, I tell you.

LADY E. He said it was an accident.

AUDREY It's impossible.

LADY E. Audrey, please pull yourself together.

AUDREY Keith dead — death — (*sits*)

LADY E. Have you never seen death before? (*Grimly*) Don't you live among it every day — rejoice in it — (*turning round*) Oh, why isn't somebody here. . .

(*Enter COLONEL by turret; he is very pale.*)

George!

COLONEL You know?

LADY E. Yes. McPherson has just told us.

COLONEL Shot through the heart. Instantaneous.

AUDREY (*sitting down*) Dead.

LADY E. Where is ... Mr. Conway?

COLONEL Outside somewhere. (*Passionately*) Why the devil was he asked here?

LADY E. What do you propose to do with him?
He can't stay here now.

(Enter ALAN.)

Alan!

ALAN Is there a drink about?

LADY E. Yes, dear. It's too ghastly. How did it happen?

ALAN What does that matter?

LADY E. Please tell me.

ALAN How do these things happen? It was all so quick — so damnably sudden . . . We were on the Black Spur — we'd been stalking a stag for half an hour. It was rather misty — you could see all right for about a hundred yards — after that — things looked different, as though . . .

AUDREY Do you mean to tell me a man can be mistaken for a stag?

ALAN I don't know. I just know that Conway fired and hit something, and it was only when we heard the gillies shouting in the distance that we knew something was wrong.

AUDREY He hated Keith.

ALAN Don't talk damned rot, Audrey.

AUDREY He hated Keith.

ALAN (*shouting*) Will you be quiet?

LADY E. Alan!

ALAN Sorry. But I'm rather shattered. Besides, let's be fair.

COLONEL Good God, you sound as if you were sorry for Conway.

ALAN Well, aren't you?

COLONEL Sorry? For that contemptible fool who just killed one of my friends?

ALAN That's a rotten attitude.

COLONEL It's the attitude of any decent . . .

(VICTOR at door. The COLONEL sees him. There is a silence. He does not look at them. He goes straight over to the stairs, his back to audience. There is an uncomfortable paused]

LADY E. (at fireplace] Please say something. I can't bear this standing about. Why are we all looking at each other like this? Can nobody do anything?

COLONEL (grimly] Mr. Conway has put it out of our power to do anything.

(The grouping is now: COLONEL at table, ALAN by window, up. AUDREY by fire. VICTOR bottom of staircase. LADY EMILY by fire.)

(MARION appears at top of staircase.)

MARION Hullo! What's the matter with everybody? You look as though you had been quarrelling. (Coming partly down)

COLONEL Marion . . .

MARION Yes? (Coming farther down} What on earth's happened? You all look positively funereal.

ALAN Marion — you see ...

MARION For heaven's sake — what is it?

AUDREY Keith! It's Keith! He's killed Keith,

MARION (stunned} Keith! Who . . .

no

LADY E. Darling. There has been a horrible accident. Mr. Conway went out with Alan. He fired at something, he thought, he thought ... it was ... it was a stag . . .

MARION Keith! Oh, God! (*She begins to sway*)

(VICTOR is close to her. *She faints in his arms.*

ALAN *runs forward.*")

VICTOR (*lifting her up and going up the first steps of staircase*) Let me.

C U R T A I N

ACT III

TIME:

Morning of the next day.

(At Rise: MCPHERSON discovered talking to INSPECTOR HAWKINS from Inverness police station. HAWKINS is in plain clothes. He speaks with a Scottish accent and is taking notes?)

HAWKINS Just getting dark, was it?

MCPHERSON. Aye.

HAWKINS And misty?

(Enter COLONEL.)

COLONEL **Oh**, just one more thing, Inspector; d'ycm want to see Mr. Conway next, or will there be anybody else?

HAWKINS *(rising)* No, sir. Only Mr. Conway.

COLONEL Shall I send him in now?

HAWKINS In two or three minutes, sir. I'm just getting the end of McPherson's story.

COLONEL Very good. And after that, there'!! be no one else? You don't want to see me any more?

HAWKINS No one, sir.

COLONEL Right you are. *(Exit)*

HAWKINS *(writing)* Just getting dark, was it . . .?

MCPHERSON Aye.

HAWKINS And misty, you say?

MCPHERSON Aye.

HAWKINS Where were the parties located at the time?

MCPHERSON Beg pardon?

HAWKINS Whereabouts did it happen?

MCPHERSON On the Black Spur.

HAWKINS What part of the Black Spur?

MCPHERSON This side of the ridge. Half a mile to the left of old Macdonald's cottage.

HAWKINS You were stalking, you say?

MCPHERSON Old Macdonald sent down word that he'd seen two or three stags coming that way.

HAWKINS Had you been out with these gentlemen before?

MCPHERSON With Mr. Alan — scores of times.

HAWKINS And Mr. Conway?

MCPHERSON Never. I'm sure he had never seen a stag before.

HAWKINS What makes you say that?

MCPHERSON The way of his behaviour and the way the man was dressed, and he was talking all the time.

HAWKINS Who was he talking to?

MCPHERSON Himself! Fine chance we had of sport with that going on.

HAWKINS What was Mr. Cameron doing?

MCPHERSON Walking.

HAWKINS Talking, too?

MCPHERSON No, didn't get the chance.

HAWKINS There was no argument then . . .

MCPHERSON I'm telling ye the man was talking to himself.

HAWKINS Now we come to the tragedy. How were the three of you placed?

MCPHERSON We were more or less in a line — lying on our stomachs. Mr. Alan and the gentleman from London were lying close together on the left. I was a long way forward, on the right. I was watching the top of the ridge.

HAWKINS How much could you see?

MCPHERSON Not over much — what with the mist and the trees and the dark coming on.

HAWKINS Tell me just exactly what happened.

MCPHERSON I had crawled just over the side of the ridge when I heard a shot fired. There was a cry from out yonder! I went back quick. There was Mr. Alan sort of dazed, and Mr. Conway, all excited, shouting 'God! I've shot something!'

HAWKINS Well — what then?

MCPHERSON Well — it was all sort of confused. I saw the Colonel coming out of the mist — very pale and fierce-looking, and there was a lot of hard words. When they brought him down he was dead.

HAWKINS Ah! Ah! It's a sad business.

MCPHERSON Aye! It turned out a bad day for Mr. Keith.

(Enter VICTOR down staircase.)

VICTOR I'm sorry if I have kept you waiting, Inspector. Have you been terribly bored? Good morning to you, McPherson.

MCPHERSON (*gruffly*) Morning — sir.

HAWKINS You can go now, McPherson. I shall want you presently to walk over the ground where the accident took place.

MCPHERSON You should have told me, sir, that you wanted to have a shot at a stag, so I could have guided you; stalking is no for the inexperienced.
(*Exit*)

HAWKINS (*back to fireplace*) I am sorry, Mr. Conway, to trouble you, but I shall have to ask you a few questions.

VICTOR Yes, I know. Name. Residence. Age, etc.

HAWKINS Oh, the name's familiar enough.

VICTOR Oh, is it? What have you put down?

HAWKINS Why! — Victor Conway.

VICTOR Then I'm afraid you'll have to cross that out. That's my stage name.

HAWKINS Stage name!

VICTOR Yes, the actor's first and most pitiable conceit! I must ask you to write in a firm, round hand.

HAWKINS Well, sir?

VICTOR George William Dobbs.

HAWKINS Is that your name, sir?

VICTOR Yes, it sounds vulgar, but it's true.

HAWKINS Quite so, sir. (*Pyrites*) George William Dobbs.

VICTOR Two b's.

HAWKINS Yes, sir, I got that the first time. Age?

VICTOR Thirty-nine. I suppose I am the last to be interviewed?

HAWKINS Yes, sir.

VICTOR Mr. Cameron has given you the facts?

HAWKINS Yes, sir, but I am afraid I must ask you for yours.

VICTOR (*with a laugh*) We must be careful that all these stories don't clash.

HAWKINS That's the idea. Now, sir, let me have your account of this affair.

VICTOR Let me think. (*Talks in a monotonous sing-song voice*) I went out with Mr. Cameron, about four. McPherson with us. We clambered up the side of a mountain which I understand is called the Black Spur. I was using Mr. Cameron's second gun.

HAWKINS You were using his rifle?

VICTOR Yes, didn't he tell you?

HAWKINS (*picking up rifle from stool*) Is this the rifle?

VICTOR Yes, that's the gun.

HAWKINS Had you shot at anything on the way up?

VICTOR No, there was nothing to shoot at. Shortly after five the gillie told us that we might be nearing some stags, we were ordered to fall on our hands and knees — I was naturally excited.

HAWKINS Have you ever shot at a stag before?

VICTOR No, and please God I never will.

HAWKINS Go on.

VICTOR We crawled about in this way for some time. It was beginning to get dark and the mist was coming on thicker. I was feeling disappointed.

I felt that I had been dragged out under false pretences. I had come out to shoot and there seemed nothing to shoot at. I determined that if by any stroke of luck we did come across a stag I should be the first to get it.

HAWKINS Go on.

VICTOR There's very little more to tell. It was now almost dark. I was all keyed up. My gun was raised as we reached the edge of the ridge. Suddenly, out of the trees and the mist, I saw something move. My whole mind was concentrated on stags. Never for a single second did I imagine that there might be other things, human things, on that mountain. Without a moment's hesitation, I took aim, and fired. There was a cry, and then I knew.

HAWKINS (*pause*) It's bad luck that it should have happened to you, sir. (*Pause*) It's a terrible thing to have killed a man, even by accident.

VICTOR Thank you for your sympathy. Is that all?

HAWKINS That's all I want to know. You will have to attend the Sheriff's inquiry at Aberdeen, to-morrow.

VICTOR I suppose it is largely a matter of form?

HAWKINS Yes, sir. It's a straightforward case. A verdict will be returned of Accidental Death.

VICTOR (*with a sigh of relief*) Thank God for that.

HAWKINS You haven't anything to worry over, sir.

VICTOR I can't help feeling a little anxious.

HAWKINS You'll be feeling better by to-morrow afternoon, sir.

(Enter COLONEL. He glares at VICTOR, who turns away up.)

COLONEL The Sheriff has just been on the 'phone, Inspector. The inquiry is fixed for eleven o'clock to-morrow morning. They want you in Aberdeen as soon as possible.

HAWKINS I have finished here, Colonel. I've only got to go over the scene of the accident with McPherson, then I'm through — sir . . .

COLONEL You must get us out of this mess with as little publicity as possible. Reporters have been on the 'phone all day.

HAWKINS I'll do all I can, Colonel — but it'll be difficult with a prominent actor like Mr. Victor Conway in the case.

(Exit COLONEL.)

VICTOR *(writing on one of his cards)* If you find yourself in London at any time, Inspector, when I'm playing, present this at the Box Office.

HAWKINS Thank you, sir. Mrs. Hawkins and I have seen you act, sir. She *will* be pleased when she hears you're in this case. Don't worry, sir. *(Crosses up)* Looking forward to seeing you at the inquiry, to-morrow. *(Exit)*

(Enter GARRETT, carrying two suit-cases.)

VICTOR Who do those belong to? Who is leaving?

GARRETT Mr. Cameron, sir.

VICTOR Mr. Cameron? Going away?

GARRETT Yes, *sir*. So I understand, sir.

VICTOR I see. Well, tell Mr. Cameron that I'd like to see him.

GARRETT Here is Mr. Cameron, sir. (*Exit GARRETT*)

(*ALAN comes downstairs slowly. He avoids looking VICTOR in the face.*)

VICTOR So you are going away?

ALAN Yes.

VICTOR Without seeing me — or any one?

ALAN Yes.

VICTOR Isn't that like the proverbial thief in the night?

ALAN Is it?

VICTOR Where are you going?

ALAN I don't know.

VICTOR Is that what you call sporting? I'm sorry to use the word, but it seems to go with the house.

ALAN I didn't think I could face you.

VICTOR Why?

ALAN Oh, damn it, you know. I owe you too much.

VICTOR Nonsense!

ALAN I've written you a letter.

VICTOR Where is it?

ALAN Here! (*Indicates his pocket*) I was going to leave it in your room.

VICTOR May I see it?

(*ALAN takes letter from his pocket. VICTOR opens it, reads it. There is a pause.*)

(*Softly*) Fool! A dear fool, but a damn fool! — Don't you realize that this — (*Snapping the letter*) — is an open confession. Don't you know — that every word damns you to death?

ALAN I've been up all night thinking things over. I don't suppose there's any sort of hell I haven't been through. But that doesn't matter. At the end of it all — just as it was getting light — I knew the one thing I'd got to do. Or perhaps I ought to say — I knew the one thing I hadn't got to do.

VICTOR And what was that?

ALAN To let you — go on — with your sacrifice.

VICTOR Sacrifice!

ALAN Yes. You're a strange chap, aren't you? You act like a saint and you try to talk like a fool.

VICTOR I'm sorry if that's the only effect my eloquence has on you. But actually, this isn't the time for phrases — there's no need for them. The situation's perfectly simple. There'll be an inquest, that's all. But, my God! writing letters like this — (*He tears it in half, places it on the fire*) — What a temptation to put in my way. I wish I could rid myself of memories as easily.

(VICTOR looks at the fire. ALAN sits down beside him.)

ALAN I ought to give myself up.

VICTOR Be quiet! I'd have done it myself if I'd known how.

ALAN But I can't allow you.

VICTOR Too late now.

ALAN I went mad — when I saw him come out of the mist.

VICTOR I don't know how you saw at all. I saw nothing.

ALAN I'd have known who it was if it had been pitch dark. I was holding myself back, keeping myself in check, perhaps if I hadn't seen him —just then, but when I caught sight of that shadow, something snapped. The next thing I remember was you grabbing my rifle, and saying you had fired.

VICTOR I had to act quickly. No one would believe that you could mistake a man for a stag. They would believe anything of me. If I were to run amok and roll in the heather and charge down the valley waving a sword, they'd have thought it only right and proper for me, the mountebank, the pantaloon, the clown. Nothing matters but you, they would never suspect you of any incompetence. Besides, there's that little question of motive. It's the motive that draws a noose round a man's neck. (ALAN *shudders*)

Where's Marion?

ALAN I don't know.

VICTOR What! Haven't you seen her?

ALAN No.

VICTOR Well — aren't you going to see her?

ALAN No.

VICTOR Why not?

ALAN Can't you see? The whole position from every angle is impossible.

VICTOR You still love her?

ALAN More than ever,

VICTOR Then it won't make any difference — the fact that . . .

ALAN Oh, you needn't be afraid of saying it. The fact that I should have a child of whom I wasn't the father. No, it wouldn't make any difference. Now I'm going away.

VICTOR And you call yourself a sportsman?

ALAN Yes, I do. Do you think there's any woman in the world from whom I am entitled to demand love, honour and obedience?

VICTOR There are cases where any husband is better than none.

ALAN Thank you. I deserved that.

VICTOR I wasn't trying to be bitter, but only to make you realize. In a way you did it for her. In a way she is partly responsible. But that's beside the point — the point is that she loves you — needs you more than ever . . .

ALAN How do you know?

VICTOR How do I know? (*Desperately*) How do I know that the sky is dark — that the air is full of mist? How do I know that a stag feels pain — when you hunt it to death? How do I know anything at all in this pestilential world? Leave me at least the emotion of understanding. I would suggest that you stop acting like a fool, and begin to realize that you have responsibilities. Go to her. (*He turns towards window — sees the COLONEL and LADY EMILY*)

Oh Lord! here comes the Colonel. Where's my pipe? (*Takes pipe from pocket and js crossing stage*)

(*Enter COLONEL and LAPY, MILY.*)

COLONEL One moment, Mr! Conway.

VICTOR At your service, Colonel.

COLONEL Alan — be good enough to ask Marion and Audrey to come here.

(*Exit ALAN.*)

What I have to say will not take long. You can readily understand that after what has happened, your presence in this house, to say the least, is embarrassing.

VICTOR Perfectly.

COLONEL Quite! A train leaves for Aberdeen at 11.45. That will give your man ample time to pack.

VICTOR You think that a wise move?

COLONEL Wise or not wise, it is what my wife and I have decided upon.

VICTOR Can you tell me — has the hotel in Aberdeen a bathroom?

COLONEL What the devil, man, has that to do with it?

VICTOR Everything. Comfort, as you know, is the only consideration that ever enters my head.

COLONEL Damn it, sir — have you no decent feelings?

VICTOR As to that — isn't it a little unfeeling asking me to change quarters after making me so truly comfortable?

COLONEL God bless my soul!—don't you know when you are not wanted?

VICTOR We mustn't be hasty about this ... Sit down. Colonel.

COLONEL By God, sir, if I were a few years younger . . .

VICTOR I'm glad you're not, Colonel.

COLONEL Well?

VICTOR Did I hear you say you wanted to avoid publicity as much as possible?

COLONEL You did.

VICTOR Then sit down.

COLONEL I won't! By God I won't . . .! (6VV/)

VICTOR You distract my train of thought jogging up and down. Thank you! If I leave your hospitable roof suddenly, it is sure to be commented upon. I shall profit by it, as you can readily understand. Publicity is one of the very few temptations I find myself unable to resist. Reporters will swarm the hotel, and if I don't give them a story they will make one up. Famous actor — ordered to leave the house. Why? Beautiful daughter — rivals quarrel — and a thousand and one things. By the time they're through you won't recognize any of us. They might even, in a moment of wild enthusiasm, put in a picture of you.

COLONEL Good God!

LADY E. I think Mr. Conway is right about not doing anything hastily.

COLONEL He can't stay here, that's that . . .

VICTOR (to COLONEL) We must time everything right. If there is one thing I know all about -r it's timing — the pause — for the sigh — the pause — for the laugh.

LADY E. At any rate, your cynicism is ill-timed.

COLONEL I might just as well tell you now that in future as far as we are concerned, you will cease to exist.

VICTOR Life's made up of tragedies.

COLONEL And you will be good enough to drop all communication with my daughter.

(Enter MARION.)

VICTOR Marion?

MARION Yes.

VICTOR Did you hear that?

MARION Yes.

VICTOR What havejy0# got to say about it?

MARION I think I'll wait until I can tell you alone.

COLONEL Tell him? What have you got to tell him?

MARION Never mind, daddy.

COLONEL But I do mind, damn it! I've never minded anything so much in my life.

VICTOR As me?

COLONEL If you insist, yes. '

VICTOR I worry you, don't I?

COLONEL Worry!

VICTOR Enrage you, make your blood boil, make your breath come in quick, short pants?

COLONEL (to LADY EMILY) What's he saying?

LADY E. It appears to be some sort of recitation.
In any case, it's confusing the issue.

COLONEL By Jove, it is!

VICTOR What is the — issue?

COLONEL It's extremely simple. That, in future, you will cease to have any communication with my daughter. I don't intend to see her contaminated.

VICTOR Contaminated? Do you mean to say that because of yesterday's accident — however ghastly and tragic — that in future I would contaminate anyone I associated with? I think this is going a little too far, Colonel.

(Enter AUDREY and ALAN. For the moment they stay on the landing?)

It would be interesting to know if Audrey is of the same opinion. *(Goes to fireplace)*

COLONEL Sit down, Audrey. I sent for you both in order that you should know exactly how matters stand. I find myself placed in a most unpleasant position by this gentleman. This horrible affair has caused endless gossip. I have just got rid of two reporters, and the 'phone has been ringing all the morning. Now I want to have your assurance that at the inquiry to-morrow no names are mentioned that are not strictly relevant. '

ALAN What names, for instance?

COLONEL Marion's for one.

LADY E. How can Marion possibly come into it, George?

COLONEL Astonishing the damn things these people can make up.

VICTOR There can be only one person concerned — myself. Has anyone suggested — otherwise?

COLONEL Yes, sir. One reporter had the most offensive story I ever heard. I told hkn I will sue his paper for libel if I see it in print. I beg you that whoever is called to the inquiry to-morrow says as little as possible. Let us adhere to the good old adage . . .

(AUDREY *comes downstairs, followed by ALAN.*)
— the maxim — least said the soonest mended.
(VICTOR *smiles at the COLONEL.*)

AUDREY It's all very amusing, isn't it, Mr. Conway?

LADY E. Audrey!

AUDREY (to COLONEL) Tell us the reporter's story.

COLONEL No purpose would b§ served by repeating it.

AUDREY No — ? It would be highly interesting to know what other people think about the *accident*.

ALAN What do you mean by that, Audrey?

AUDREY Some of us have *our own* opinions of that *accident*,

COLONEL Audrey! — What the devil . . . ?

AUDREY Mysterious accident — wasn't it?

ALAN Who says there is anything mysterious about it?

AUDREY Too misty to see. A man mistaken for a stag . . . (*She laughs*)

ALAN What are you driving at?

AUDREY The truth.

ALAN What do you mean?

VICTOR It would be interesting to know what she has at the back of her mind.

AUDREY I dare say!

VICTOR Mayn't we be enlightened?

AUDREY You hated Keith . . .

COLONEL I think you had better go to your room, Audrey.

AUDREY I daresay *he* would like me to go.

COLONEL Audrey! Be silent! This is no affair of yours.

AUDREY Then I make it my affair.

COLONEL It is bad enough as it is without *you* making it worse. It's damned unpleasant . . .

AUDREY Unpleasant! What a discreet little word! *{Turning on the COLONEL in a fury}* If you'd been shot down in cold blood — you might think that 'unpleasant' was hardly an adequate word to describe your feelings.

LADY E. Audrey — Audrey!

ALAN It was an accident. I should know. There's McPherson.

VICTOR Let us stop behaving like hysterical women. It'll only twist us into a tragedy we'll never get out of.

COLONEL He's right, damn it! We're discussing the best way to hush it up — not stir it up.

AUDREY So we are to hush it up — are we?

VICTOR *(to AUDREY)* What is it you really want?

AUDREY I want a little justice. As far as I can see, I'm playing a slightly unpopular role. I apologize. I suppose I ought to be standing about like the rest of you, trying to avoid making it unpleasant for each other. (To VICTOR) And you — only thinking how much advertisement you can get out of it! — And I am asked to help!

ALAN Your attitude towards Victor is unpardonable.

VICTOR Alan!

ALAN I won't stand for it.

AUDREY I'm not so blind that I can't see through things. You, with the instinct of a rabbit, were anxious enough to be a sportsman yesterday afternoon. Why?

ALAN Oh, shut up, Audrey!

AUDREY Oh — of course — hush up and shut up. Is that all the help you will give a friend who's been shot down?

ALAN He was a cad.

LADY E. Alan!

VICTOR Steady, old man.

COLONEL You are forgetting yourself.

ALAN I can't stand this any longer.

VICTOR (to AUDREY) I gather from your remarks that you are making an accusation.

AUDREY Yes. I saw you watching him. Everything he did. You ought to be hanged!

ALAN Don't take any notice. She's hysterical. She doesn't know what she's saying.

VICTOR By what right do you make these accusations?

AUDREY Right! (*Hysterically*) Keith was my lover. The only man I ever loved. Loved, I tell you! (*She goes close to VICTOR, speaks passionately*) How can you know what that means — you — damned actor!

COLONEL Audrey — control yourself!

AUDREY Do you know what you've done to me — what you've made me?

LADY E. Audrey! You're degrading yourself by behaving like this.

AUDREY Do you think I don't know that? Do you think I'm not glad of that? What do I care now? I would have gone to hell for Keith. And perhaps for all you fools know — I did!

(*Exit AUDREY.*)

LADY E. (*in a trembling voice*) George, take me to my room, please. I can't stay here any longer!

(*Exeunt COLONEL and LADY EMILY.*)

ALAN By God! Marion!

VICTOR Steady!

ALAN I know quite well what I'm doing. Marion!

MARION No, no, I don't want to hear. I don't want to hear anything.

ALAN Everything that Victor has told you as a lie. I shot Keith. fS

MARION I know. (*To herself*) Why did I come back?

ALAN I'd guessed for some time.

MARION Alan! I want to be alone with Victor for a little.

VICTOR Wait in the garden.

(Exit ALAN.)

MARION You took the blame — for him.

VICTOR No — for you.

MARION Oh — why are you so impossibly good to me? *(She cries softly)*

VICTOR Is there any need to ask that?

MARION I can't do anything to repay you.

VICTOR *(sitting)* You can. You can stop crying. And yet in a way I'm glad you are crying. May I tell you a secret? I've cried, too, once or twice in these last few days. I've stood at the window at dusk and smelt the scent of the roses drifting up, so sweet and strong like wine; and I cried just because the world was so beautiful, and because always the beauty seemed to escape me — to pass me by. Everything I've wanted has always been on the other side of the hill — just around the corner. I can hear it calling, but I can never catch it up. I have to content myself with the echo. That's why I cried, perhaps they were actor's tears.

MARION Give me your hand.

VICTOR Shall we indulge in a positive orgy of sentiment? Shall we swear eternal vows of friendship? What about Alan?

MARION Yes. What about Alan?

VICTOR You love him, don't you?

MARION Yes. Every little absurd thing, good or bad, about him.

VICTOR I hope so — before I leave you I want to be sure that what I have done has not been thrown away. If you and Alan , . .

MARION That can't ever happen . . . now.

VICTOR Because of yesterday?

MARION No. I don't feel that he's done wrong. It is because of what I have done — myself.

VICTOR Funny little Marion! I know all about it.

MARION (*pathetically*) Then . . . don't you understand?

VICTOR No, I don't.

MARION Now can I allow him to sacrifice himself?

VICTOR There's no question of sacrifice.

MARION Two wrongs don't make a right.

VICTOR Are you sure they don't cancel out? He needs you desperately and you need his protection. But most of all he needs you.

MARION Oh, if it could only be — poor Alan!

VICTOR It could be if . . .

MARION If what?

VICTOR (*takes her hand, kisses it, and lays it in her own lap*) If you'll give your hand where it really belongs.

MARION Where is he?

VICTOR He is in the garden — be kind.

MARION Til go to him. (*Rises*)

VICTOR That's my Marion. I knew I could trust you to do the right thing.

and exit through French windows?)

(*On settee*) The exit of my Marion — pale but determined. The tragedy has worked itself out. The last act is drawing to a close. The medicine for disaster is equanimity — there is a moment's pause.

(A clock is heard striking the hour?)

Ah — the clock strikes the hour.

(A door is heard slamming?)

Was that the slamming of the door? (*He rises*)

(Enter RICHARD, Victor's valet, carrying a kit-bag, cap, overcoat, scarf.)

Only Richard. Why the bag?

RICHARD Didn't you send orders, sir, we were leaving by the 11.45. The car is at the door, sir.

VICTOR Perfect timing. (*Taking cap, pulling it on his head*) Is this the thing I wore three days ago?

RICHARD Yes, sir.

VICTOR And that coat's really mine?

RICHARD Why, yes, sir.

VICTOR Is it really! (*He puts on gloves*) Well, Richard, we're going back to sunshine and laughter — pavements, Richard.

RICHARD Thank you, sir.

VICTOR No roaring river to keep us awake, Richard—just the soft hum of a friendly city—where no one has ever seen a stag . . .

RICHARD Yes, sir.

VICTOR My voice — Richard.

(RICHARD puts scarf round his neck.)

Come— we've dallied too long. . . . What was it Othello said, Richard?

RICHARD (*scratches his head*) Something about good-bye, wasn't it, sir? (*Exit*)

VICTOR 'Farewell, the neighing steed and the shrill trump,

The spirit, stirring drum, the ear-piercing fife.

The Royal banner; and all quality,

Pride, pomp and circumstance of glorious war!

(*He pauses suddenly. Outside the window ALAN and MARION appear. RICHARD has gone on with the bag. VICTOR goes to door quickly, looks towards window.*)

(*In husky voice*) Farewell! Othello's occupation gone!"

(*Exit VICTOR.*)

C U R T A I N

Avalanche

Avalanche was first produced in London at the Arts Theatre Club on January 27th, 1932, with the followingcast:

Lady Rockstone	ELLIS JEFREYS
Violet Pinxton	EVELYN NEILSON
The Hon. Helen Ashton	HELEN SPENCER
Lord Rockstone	FREDERICK LLOYD
Jack Willington	DENIS WEBB
Paul Tanner	JACK LIVESEY
Nigel Chelmsford	MAURICE EVANS
Forsythe	ERIC H. MESSITER

CHARACTERS

NIGEL CHELMSFORD, *a young dramatist*
JACK WILLINGTON, *a young man-about-town*
LORD ROCKSTONE, *an English financier*
PAUL TANNER, *an American poet*
HON. HELEN ASHTON, *Lord Rockstone's daughter*
LADY ROCKSTONE, *Helen's step-mother*
VIOLETPINXTON, *Paul Tanners fiancée*
FORSYTHE, *Butler*

SCENES

Act I. After dinner on Monday.
Act II. Before dinner on Tuesday.
Act III. Dawn on Wednesday.

*The entire action takes place in the lounge hall of
Chalet Cadenza, Nigers summer house in Switzerland.*

TIME—Winter, a year hence.

ACT I

SCENE:

The Lounge Hall of Chalet Cadenza. An impression of length and luxury. Two sets of French windows and two long sofas. Extremely modern furniture. There is a piano somewhere. There are lots of doors.

There enter three women in evening dress. They are LADY ROCKSTONE, 45, cleverly massaged, discontented; HELEN, a large girl with a serious face and passionate eyes, and VIOLET, a pleasant little wisp of a thing, with a baby's mind.

The atmosphere is tense with irritation.

LADY R. Of course, it was ridiculous to come here in the winter at all.

VIOLET (*hesitantly*) But I always thought that the winter was the right time for Switzerland.

LADY R. Do you still think so?

VIOLET Why no ... I don't know . . .

LADY R. (*snappily*) Well, there are ten feet of snow outside the window. I should have thought that would be enough to give even you an opinion.

VIOLET (*tearfully*) I didn't put it there.

LADY R. What?

VIOLET I said I dñn't put the snow there.

LADY R. (*to HELEN, tapping forehead*) She says she didn't put the snow there. It's gone to her head.

HELEN Oh, don't tease her so.

LADY R. Tease her? Some women are born teased.

VIOLET I wish I'd never been born at all.

HELEN It isn't as bad as all that.

LADY R. I fail to see how it could be worse. Here we are, snowed up, ten miles from the nearest railway station, telephone broken down, absolutely no means of communication with the rest of the world . . . and nothing left to drink but creme de menthe, which is poison to *me*.

HELEN That won't hurt us — for three days.

LADY R. Yes, but how long's it going on?

VIOLET (*forlornly*) I feel as though I'd never lived anywhere else.

LADY R. From your conversation—you haven't.

HELEN (*to LADY ROCKSTONE*) It's no use losing your temper about it.

LADY R. What *is* any use?

HELEN Don't ask me.

VIOLET (*suddenly*) Helen! What about the wireless?

HELEN The batteries have run down — ages ago.

VIOLET Couldn't we make them go again?

LADY R' (*sarcastically*) Oh yes. Just go and breathe heavily on them for a minute or two.

VIOLET You're awfully helpful.

LADY R. In any case, what conceivable use would the wireless be?

VIOLET We might get news.

LADY R. Yes. A lecture on German boy scouts. With rude noises in the atmosphere. Now, if we all had skis . . .

VIOLET I can't ski.

LADY R. *That* doesn't surprise me.

VIOLET Nor can you, anyway.

HELEN Oh, do stop this wrangling.

LADY R. Wrangling!

HELEN Yes. You seem to forget that I'm rather anxious.

VIOLET Oh Helen — you needn't be.

LADY R. When did Nigel go?

HELEN About five.

VIOLET Well, it's only half-past nine now.

HELEN I know. But normally it only takes half an hour to get to the station. And about an hour back.

LADY R. Of course, I think it was madness for him to go at all.

HELEN (*tensely*) You don't think anything's happened?

LADY R. Nigel's so absurdly temperamental.

VIOLET He's exceedingly brave.

LADY R. There's no point in being brave for no reason.

VIOLET If people weren't sometimes brave without having a reason, there wouldn't be any brave men in the world.

LADY R. (*to HELEN*) Am I wrong? Or is that an exceptionally meaningless statement?

HELEN Oh mother . . . please.

LADY R. Well, my dear, I can't help being irritated. I've got an accurate mind. And Violet has been hurling wild generalizations round the house all the evening.

VIOLET (*at window*) The evenings are drawing out, aren't they?

LADY R. (*rising*) There! What did I tell you? That's the fortieth time you've drawn out the evenings since we've been in this house.

VIOLET Well — it's true, isn't it?

LADY R. It's indecently true. What do you expect the evenings to do in March? Draw in? Do you know, I believe if you met the devil face to face, you'd tell him the evenings are drawing out.

VIOLET You never *would* meet the devil face to face. You'd take jolly good care not to.

LADY R. Thank you. That's the first sensible remark you've made since dinner.

HELEN Oh — why must we go on like this? Nigel's outside somewhere — struggling through the snow for us — and all we do is sit here and scratch each other. It's perfectly disgusting.

LADY R. It is. When I think that at this moment I might have been sitting in the blazing sunshine at Cannes. . . .

HELEN When / think that at this moment Nigel might be sitting *here* . . .

LADY R. Don't get morbid, Helen. He insisted on going. Why — heaven knows.

HELEN We all egged him on.

LADY R. / didn't.

HELEN You did. You were nagging at him all day. And Daddy was worse.

VIOLET He really started it.

LADY R. In what way?

HELEN All that nonsense about a war with America.

LADY R. Well, if Nigel hasn't learnt by now not to take your father seriously on that subject, it's his own fault.

VIOLET (to HELEN) It did look rather bad two days ago. Paul said so, too.

LADY R. Your Mr. Tanner was born a poet.

VIOLET He was also born an American.

LADY R. Can one be born an American? I always thought one did it with a certificate.

VIOLET. It's women like you who make war possible.

LADY R. And it's women like you who make peace impossible.

HELEN Anyway, it's all sheer nonsense.

VIOLET That ultimatum wasn't.

HELEN Which ultimatum?

VIOLET I don't quite know. Paul explained it to me. About the fleet. It was all in the paper.

LADY R. Then I should let it stay there.

VIOLET It's all very well saying that . . .

LADY R. Anyway, here are the men. If you're so determined to be depressed, I'm sure they'll help you.

(There is a sound of laughter outside. The door opens and the men come in. LORD ROCKSTONE, a tall, red-faced Englishman, with a loud voice and a leathery mind; JACK WILLINGTON, good-looking, with a careless, open-air charm; PAUL TANNER, a simple, charming American, who slightly limps.)

LORD R. No sign of our host yet?

HELEN No. Absolutely none. Do you think it's all right?

LORD R. Oh perfectly. Nigel knows this country inside out.

VIOLET Yes, but with all this snow the country is rather inside out just now.

LORD R. Ha! Very amusing, that. Ha!

HELEN It was your fault, Daddy. You oughtn't to have made him go.

LORD R. I? What had I to do with it?

HELEN All those scares about the international situation.

LORD R. You can hardly describe an ultimatum as a scare.

LADY R. Politicians are always sending ultimatums to each other. It's their form of leaving cards.

LORD R. It meant a good deal to the Stock Exchange, at any rate.

LADY R. What, for example?

LORD R. Industrials marked down all along the line, a fall of two pounds in war loan, and every speculative issue gone to pot.

HELEN (*bitterly*) So *thafs* why you were so anxious to get news.

LORD R. What?

HELEN Your old shares. Making Nigel risk his life for that.

LORD R. I had nothing whatever to do with it. He went entirely voluntarily.

HELEN You talked him out of the house.

LORD R. In any case, it was criminally thoughtless on Nigel's part to get us into this situation at all.

LADY R. With that I entirely agree.

LORD R. To build a chalet in this position, with only a narrow road that's almost impassable even in summer, and then to invite a house party in the worst part of the season, with the telephone broken down, and one pair of skis . . .

HELEN It's no use talking about that now. It's Nigel we've got to think of.

JACK He'll be all right, Helen. Don't you worry.

HELEN Do you really think so?

JACK Why, of course. And I'll tell you why. You see . . .

(They sit on sofa and talk in low voices, unheard by the audience?)

VIOLET (*breaking away from PAUL and coming to LORD ROCKSTONE*) Lord Rockstone . . . supposing there was a war . . .

LORD R. Well?

VIOLET What would happen to me? I mean — if I was married to Paul?

LADY R. (*with relief*) You'd be interned.

LORD R. Oh, of course, that would depend . . .

VIOLET On what?

LORD R. On a great many things — the state of international feeling — and, of course, your own attitude . . .

LADY R. She has only one attitude.

PAUL (*coming up*) Still talking about the war?

VIOLET Oh Paul — I'm so worried.

PAUL Nothing to be worried about.

LORD R. I'm not so sure about that.

PAUL The thing's inconceivable.

VIOLET I think anything's conceivable — up here — with all this snow.

PAUL Yes. It's funny, isn't it?

LORD R. What's funny?

PAUL (*moodily*) The things that silence does to people.

LORD R. (*facetiously*) I haven't noticed much silence in this house.

PAUL I didn't mean that. I meant the bigger silence. Here we are, in a tiny little shell, shut off from the world. And the earth's turning round and round with all its noises and its clamour and its music, and we can't hear anything . . .

LORD R. There speaks the poet.

PAUL Not really. There speaks the American. Just a hunger for news.

VIOLET You ought to write a poem about it, Paul.

LADY R. Oh really! That is the world's most half-witted remark!

PAUL Not to me. Lady Rockstone. You see, I happen to have done so.

LADY R. Oh — I'm so sorry. Won't you recite it to us?

PAUL I don't think you'd like it.

LADY R. But I adore poetry.

PAUL This is a satirical poem.

LADY R. I adore satire. What is it about?

PAUL It's about a woman standing by a window at night, looking out on to the snow. She's a middle-aged woman, with fair hair, and a thin mouth, and discontented eyes.

LADY R. It sounds exactly like Olga Wetherspoone.

PAUL And the snow mocks her and mocks until she almost goes mad. The snow is white and virgin . . . whereas she . . .

LADY R. It is Olga Wetherspoone. (*Getting up*) I shall send it to her. Too amusing. The most hateful woman.

PAUL (*dryly*) Quite.

LADY R. Anyway, it's high time we stopped thinking about these horrible things. What about a game of bridge?

LORD R. I'm ready.

LADY R. Helen! If Jack has finished telling you the story of his life, you might possibly come and play bridge.

HELEN No, thanks. I don't feel like it.

LADY R. But we *must* make a four.

HELEN I can't, really.

LADY R. It's no use brooding over things.

HELEN I can't help it. I shouldn't be the least use.

LADY R. Oh, very well. Come along, Jack.

JACK Sorry. I don't think I'll play.

LADY R. Why not?

JACK I don't feel in the mood.

LADY R. You never *have* moods.

JACK Oh, don't I?

LADY R. Well, anyway, you oughtn't to. You do physical exercises every morning.

LORD R. (*turning round*) What's that?

LADY R. Jack's complaining of moods.

LORD R. Oh, I see. The prevailing complaint.
(*Turns round again*)

JACK I'm sorry.

LADY R. (*human for once in a way*) Oh it doesn't matter. But you're about the only person here who doesn't get on my nerves.

JACK (*bowing*) I'm honoured. (*Goes back to HELEN*)

PAUL (*coming up*) Any chance of a game?

LADY R. Yes. If you don't suffer from moods.

PAUL Who else is playing?

LADY R. I'm not quite sure.

PAUL Supposing you and Lord Rockstone take on Violet and me.

LADY R. (*idly*) Violet? That will be delightful.

VIOLET Oh Paul, I'm not sure whether Tin good enough.

PAUL Of course you are. I'll help you.

LADY R. (*cuttingly*) Just the sort of game I like. Everybody helping everybody else.

(*To VIOLET*) You wouldn't rather play snap?

VIOLET (*standing up for herself*) No. I'm quite sure you'd win at that.

PAUL (*chuckling*) Come along. (*Gets table*) Lord Rockstone.

LORD R. Yes?

PAUL Bridge!

LORD R. Good. How are we playing?

PAUL (*holding VIOLET'S arm*) We're taking you on.

LORD R. Splendid.

VIOLET How shall we sit?

LADY R. As still as possible.

PAUL It doesn't matter; anywhere.

LADY R. Yes. You might just group yourself round the room.

LORD R. What stakes?

VIOLET Oh — something small—*please*.

LADY R. Perhaps you'd like to play for love?

PAUL (*looking at VIOLET*) I shall be doing that in any case.

LORD R. Now then! This is business. What about half a crown a hundred?

PAUL That does me.

VIOLET It seems an awful lot.

LORD R. You play contract?

VIOLET Yes. It's the only sort I do play.

LORD R. (to LADY ROCKSTONfi) Amy?

LADY R. **YeS?**

LORD R. You ready?

LADY R. **Quite.**

LORD R. Right. Well, then deal.

(They begin to play. They are half in a sort of alcove. This is a difficult scene to produce, but it is essential to the play. The theme is the whispered conversation of JACK and HELEN against the murmured background of the bridge-players' conversation.)

JACK You're looking pale, to-night.

HELEN That's not very strange, is it?

JACK Still worrying about Nigel?

HELEN Yes.

JACK Lucky chap! Sorry.

HELEN Why?

JACK I'm nearing forbidden ground again.

HELEN I didn't notice it.

JACK That's because I'm so subtle, you know. I'm a regular serpent of subtlety, really. (HELEN *smiles absently*) I wish I could do something.

HELEN So do I.

JACK Just for you.

HELEN Bless you.

JACK Would it be any use if I went and buried myself somewhere?

HELEN Not much, I'm afraid.

JACK Would you care, a bit?

HELEN Very much indeed.

JACK How much? (*measuring an inch on his little finger*) That much?

HELEN Oh — more than that.

JACK (*measuring more*) That much?

HELEN Still more.

JACK (*holding on to his elbow*) That much?

HELEN Yes — that's about it.

JACK I say. I'm getting on. I only got as far as my wrist last time.

HELEN (*starting up*) Was that a noise?

JACK I didn't hear anything.

HELEN I thought — outside the window. Oh dear.

JACK You mustn't get nervy, you know.

HELEN I can't help it.

LADY R. (*from bridge table*) If you're not feeling very well, there's some creme de menthe on the sideboard.

HELEN We're all right.

LADY R. I thought I heard some sort of rumbling noise.

JACK That was me — making polite conversation.

LADY R. (*to VIOLET*) Why on earth did you do that?

VIOLET What?

LADY R. Double my heart?

PAUL She wanted to put you off the scent.

LADY R. I wasn't speaking to you.

VIOLET Anyway we got the game.

LADY R. Only by the most ridiculous fluke.

PAUL Life is rather a ridiculous fluke in any case,
Lady Rockstone.

LADY R. (*with a glance at VIOLET*) Sometimes I
think it is.

VIOLET What's trumps?

LADY R. (*to VIOLET*) Dummy is not supposed to
speak.

VIOLET I'm so sorry.

LADY R. Such a quaint convention, isn't it?

VIOLET Very. (*She deals. They flay*)

(*HELEN gets up and walks to window?*)

JACK Where are you going?

HELEN I'm restless. I'd like to go outside.

JACK You can't. It's snowing.

HELEN I don't care.

JACK Can't you stop thinking of Nigel?

HELEN I don't know.

JACK Now, look here, Helen, for the Lord's sake
be sensible. You *cant* go out.

HELEN Well, I'm going to the window anyway.

LADY R. Helen, do keep still.

LORD R. Really. Do you mind paying attention
to the game?

LADY R. How can I pay attention to the game
with this babel all round me?

LORD R. It isn't babel. I didn't even hear
them.

HELEN I'm sorry. Listen!

ALL What?

HELEN I did hear something this time.

VIOLET (*springing to her feet*) Oh Helen 1

LADY R. (*throwing down cards*) Oh, this is impossible.

HELEN It's Nigel.

LADY R. That's an end of *bridge*.

LORD R. Where?

HELEN Outside. (To JACK) Jack, open the window.

(They run to the window. There is a babel of conversation. Slowly through the window comes NIGEL, a thin, keen-faced young man of thirty. The curtains blow out, there is a drift of snow, the windows shut, he stands, pale, breathing heavily, looking at them.)

LADY R. He looks absolutely done.

HELEN Nigel, are you all right?

LORD R. What has happened?

VIOLET Oh, Nigel.

NIGEL I'm rather tired.

HELEN Darling. Come and sit down.

NIGEL (*going to the sofa*) Is there any brandy?

LADY R. There's gallons of *creme de menthe*.

LORD R. I've got a drop in my flask. (*Pours it out and gives it to Nigel*)

HELEN You're frozen.

NIGEL (*taking brandy*) Thanks. I'll be all right in a minute. (*He leans back and doses his eyes*)

VIOLET Oh — if we could only get a doctor.

LADY R. (*hissing*) Don't be a fool. You might as well ask for an elephant.

NIGEL I don't want a doctor. I'm fine. (*Rousing himself*) I'm terribly sorry to make such an obvious entrance. But — I had a job getting back.

HELEN We were afraid you weren't going to make any entrance, at all.

NIGEL I hate obvious entrances. I never wrote one in any of my plays, did I, darling?

LORD R. (*tapping head*) Delirious!

NIGEL No. Not really. Merely a sense of style.

PAUL You've got that all right, old man.

NIGEL So the critics tell me.

HELEN What critics?

NIGEL In the *Times*.

LORD R. You got to the village, then? You heard the news?

NIGEL Yes.

LORD R. Tell us — what is it?

NIGEL **Awful.**

LORD R. Good God. Then the ultimatum . . .

NIGEL Oh — I wasn't referring to the ultimatum. I meant my first night.

LORD R. Your first night . . . what does that matter?

NIGEL (*sitting up*) What does my first night matter?

HELEN (*to LORD ROCKSTON*) Don't worry him for a minute.

LORD R. But — this is preposterous . . .

NIGEL It is. Do you know what that damned critic said?

LORD R. I can't stand this any longer. Is there or is there not a declaration of war?

NIGEL Just a minute. *(Rises)* I want to see if I can stand up.

HELEN Are you all right?

NIGEL Yes. Now I want to see if I can walk straight.

(Slowly he walks to the farthest window. They stand in a semi-circle, watching him. He counts left, right, left, right. Then he turns, his back to the wall, facing them.)

(There is an acute air of tension)

LORD R. Why are you doing this?

NIGEL Because I may have to do a lot of walking very soon.

HELEN What do you mean?

NIGEL *(a note of hysteria in his voice)* Walking in time — with other men — marching, marching on and on ...

LORD R. *(awed)* Then — it's happened?

NIGEL *(suddenly sober)* Yes. It's happened.

LORD R. Good God!

HELEN Nigel!

VIOLET There isn't a war?

NIGEL There's a war.

(VIOLET suddenly falls back in a half-faint.)

PAUL *(running to VIOLET)* Baby!

VIOLET *(weakly)* I'm all right.

PAUL *(to LORD ROCKSTONE)* Give me that flask.

(LORD ROCKSTONE gives it to him)

HELEN Let me. (*She takes it*) You'll feel better in a minute, darling.

VIOLET I'm all right now. I only felt giddy.

PAUL Don't try to stand up yet, baby.

NIGEL You stay quiet, Violet.

VIOLET Please don't worry about me. I want to *scar* everything.

NIGEL Funny I should be standing with my hand on Paul's shoulder, isn't it? Paul, old chap, we're enemies now.

PAUL It's not true, Nigel, it can't be.

NIGEL I'm afraid it is. You and I —we've got to kill each other, sooner or later.

VIOLET Paul . . . don't go away . . . don't leave me . . . it won't make any difference to me.

PAUL Nothing'll ever make any difference now.

LORD R. What *has* happened? Please let us know that.

NIGEL Right. Helen. You might get my coat. You'll find some papers in it.

(HELEN *gets his coat?*)

LADY R. Will it be — like the last war?

NIGEL How do you mean?

LADY R. Will — everybody have to go?

NIGEL I expect so. Everybody . . . (*With a grim smile*) who's worth while.

HELEN (*with papers*) Here you are.

NIGEL Suppose you all sit down? Then I can explain.

LORD R. Please don't keep us waiting.

NIGEL Very well (*Taking first paper*) You remember that the last news we had was three days ago?

LORD R. Yes, yes. We know all that.

NIGEL The situation then was that England had sent an ultimatum to America to the effect that if their new naval bill was passed in Congress, England would consider it a hostile act.

LADY R. And was it passed?

NIGEL It was not only passed, but . . . however . . . listen to this. This is an emergency bulletin from Lucerne. A lot of them were dropped by aeroplane a few hours ago. I had to pay a thousand francs for it. The headline is: 'America Declares War on England/ I've got later news by telephone, but this is all we want.

PAUL (*dropping his head on his hands*) It's the end of the world.

NIGEL (*reading*) 'At one o'clock this morning, a state of war was declared to exist between England and the United States. Until nearly midnight frenzied efforts were made by the British Foreign Office to find some means of averting this world catastrophe. As the evening drew on, vast crowds assembled in the streets, scanning the bulletins. At midnight (British time); seven o'clock (American time), the President of the United States began his speech. From the opening sentences it was evident that the last hope of conciliation had vanished. The President contemptuously dismissed every argument advanced by the Prime Minister. At exactly two

minutes to one, the following words, flashing across the cables, announced the opening of Armageddon: "And thus America, with grief beyond expression, but with a courage that is dauntless in the right, unsheathes her sword in the interests of liberty, of democracy and of life itself. I call upon this house to declare a state of war to exist between the people of the United States and the people, of whatsoever race or creed, who are still under the misguided domination of the British Empire."¹

LORD R. *Good God!*

VIOLET (*crying*) Paul!

JACK (*heartily*) Good old England!

LADY R. **YOU fool!**

JACK Sorry!

LORD R. Be quiet. This is the end of everything. What else is there?

NIGEL That's all in that paper. But I've got the *Gazette* from Lucerne. It's rather incoherent.

LORD R. What does it say?

NIGEL Let's see. Oh—one thing—the cables have been cut between England and America. It's all wireless news.

LORD R. Have they started fighting?

NIGEL (*reading*) Yes. There's been a raid of British planes over the Canadian border.

JACK Oh Lord — I want to be in it.

LADY R. Sit down.

NIGEL The Singapore fleet is on its way to San Francisco.

LORD R. What about finance?
NIGEL A panic on the Stock Exchange.
PAUL What other countries are in?
NIGEL Japan.
PAUL Where?
NIGEL For us ... against you.
JACK Hooray!
LORD R. Stop behaving like an idiot, sir.
JACK Oh — all right.
LORD R. Let me look.
NIGEL Here you are
 (Hands him newspaper.)
LORD R. Good God!
LADY R. What does it all mean?
LORD R. It means good-bye to Grosvenor Square.
LADY R. Impossible!
LORD R. We'll be lucky if we've got a roof over
our heads at all in a week.
JACK Have they started scrapping yet?
VIOLET Oh, why do you ask that?
JACK Because I shall be doing it myself soon.
HELEN That's the spirit, Jack!
NIGEL *(with a curious intonation)* So you're getting
the war spirit, too.
HELEN Yes. Thank God. Oh Nigel — it was a
shock at first. But now I'm glad — glad.
NIGEL Are you?
HELEN Glad to think that I've got somebody like
you, somebody to fight for me. Oh — *(turning round)*
why are we cooped up here?

JACK D'you think we'll be able to get away to-morrow?

HELEN Jack, you're splendid.

NIGEL I don't know about to-morrow. But they're bound to send the plough up within forty-eight hours. I bribed them shamelessly.

HELEN I'll come with you, Nigel.

NIGEL Where?

HELEN To London. You'll have to go there first, won't you?

NIGEL I don't think so.

HELEN But you can't join up in Switzerland.

NIGEL No, I can't.

HELEN Well then . . .

NIGEL Well what? I'm going to stay here.

HELEN What do you mean?

(The others gradually stop talking and gather round.)

NIGEL Mean? Exactly what I say. I'm going to stay here.

HELEN How can you?

NIGEL I've got a play to write.

HELEN But — I don't understand.

NIGEL Oh — the war ? That doesn't interest me.

(HELEN stares at him for a moment and then laughs.)

HELEN Nigel, don't be tiresome. I know it's all perfectly awful, but we've got to make plans.

NIGEL I've made mine.

HELEN Then when can we go?

NIGEL When you like.

HELEN If we can get away the day after to-morrow, we could be in London on Tuesday.

NIGEL I'm not going to London.

HELEN Nigel!

NIGEL Well!

HELEN *This is a joke, isn't it?*

NIGEL Is it? I don't know that it strikes me as very funny.

LORD R. He's pulling your leg, Helen.

HELEN I'm not so sure.

LORD R, Of course. Why — the idea of Nigel not doing his duty.

NIGEL Duty? Of course I'm going to do my duty.

HELEN Thank heavens.

NIGEL Yes. My duty is to finish my play.

JACK (*to HELEN*) He means it.

HELEN He doesn't. He can't.

VIOLET Nigel. Don't be a beast. You're hurting Helen.

HELEN Be quiet, Nigel. I don't want to be a bore, but I can't quite stand this . . . this . . . attitude.

NIGEL It isn't an attitude. Really! What's the matter with everybody?

LADY R. That's a nice question, with a war on!

PAUL Perhaps he realizes it more than you.

VIOLET Paul! How can you? He's not playing fair.

NIGEL Is that your feeling, Violet?

VIOLET Yes, it is.

NIGEL (to JACK) And what's yours?

JACK (turning away) I'd rather not say.

NIGEL Most absorbing. (To LORD ROCKSTONE)
And yours?

LORD R. I think it high time you stopped this nonsense. You're only hurting Helen.

NIGEL I'm sorry. (To LADY ROCKSTONE) And yours?

LADY R. If you can read expressions in faces, you'll probably realize what *I'm* feeling.

NIGEL (to HELEN) And yours?

HELEN I want to think.

LORD R. Really — this is — this is ...

NIGEL Supposing I leave you all alone to talk about it for a little while? I appear to be rather a disturbing influence. Well?

(*Silence.*)

All right. There doesn't seem to be any overwhelming demand for my presence.

(*At door.*)

If you want me, I'll be in my room. (*Exit.*)

(*As soon as the door shuts there is an absolute babel of conversation, out of which the following sentences are heard almost simultaneously.*)

LORD R. If anybody had ever told me that I should have been in a situation like this . . .

VIOLET My head feels as though it were going to burst . . .

LADY R. Personally, I always said it was madness to come here at all.

JACK Helen, I wish you wouldn't look like that. It'll be all right.

PAUL I wish I had my book of etiquette on me.

(And HELEN breaks in on it all by shouting, 'Stop! Stop!')

LADY R. *Helen!*

HELEN Please, mother, there's no need to talk about it now.

LORD R. I think there's every need to talk about it. You can't possibly intend to continue your association with such a creature?

(Almost collides with Paul.)

I beg your pardon, sir.

PAUL Not at all. You've got every right to get in my way, and I've got every right to get in yours. In fact, it's become almost our duty to do so.

LADY R. Mr. Tanner, I should advise you not to try our patience too far.

PAUL Why? You can't intern me here. There isn't a spare bedroom.

VIOLET (whimpering) Paul! It's all so horrible.

PAUL Now, baby. *Tou* needn't worry. You've put your money on the *right* horse.

(He taps his chest.)

LADY R. (sitting down heavily) I really feel on the verge of hysterics. What is happening?

LORD R. What is happening is what every sane man in the British E <rre knew would happen, sooner or later.

LADY R. Don't talk about sane men in the British Empire. There aren't any.

LORD R. Don't you realize what the international outlook is?

LADY R. I'm a woman and I haven't got an international outlook. I've got too much common sense.

LORD R. I should suggest that you used it in *this* situation.

LADY R. The situation's got beyond it. We need a miracle to get us out of *this*.

LORD R. We need a man!

LADY R. Well, I for one don't know where we shall find one.

VIOLET I don't want the snow-plough to come now, after all.

PAUL Well, it probably won't.

LORD R. If it does, sir, you'll be going on foot.

LADY R. Really, George. How can you bother about such details now? It's Helen we've got to think about. Personally, I should write to the *Morning Post* and contradict the engagement tomorrow.

(PAUL *laughs*.)

LADY R. (*acidly looking at him*) If I were quite certain that no alien influence would tamper with the mails.

VIOLET I won't have Paul called an alien influence.

PAUL Oh — it's all the same to me.

LORD R. For all you know, the *Morning Post* may already have ceased publication.

LADY R. (*aghast*) Good heavens! (*Almost to herself*) Then what *will* happen to the world?

LORD R. I'm glad that *something* seems to be bringing the real horror of war home to you.

JACK (*coming forward suddenly*) I say. Aren't we all being a little cheap?

LORD R. and LADY R. Cheap?

JACK No, sir. Not in this.

LORD R. You seem to be taking a good deal upon yourself, young man.

JACK (*shuffling his feet*) Yes, sir.

LADY R. What right have you got?

(*JACK makes no reply.*)

(*HELEN breaks in suddenly?*)

HELEN Please, I can't bear this any longer.

LORD R. What?

HELEN This ridiculous discussion of my private affairs. If you want to discuss the war, well and good. But I'm not going to be argued about as if I were a child.

LADY R. We were only trying to think of the best way out of this entanglement with Nigel.

HELEN And how do you know I want to find a way out?

LORD R. and LADY R. What?

HELEN I want to talk to Nigel alone. Jack!

LORD R. But Helen. . ' .

JACK Yes?

HELEN Do see if you can find him.

JACK All right.

(Exit JACK.)

LADY R. Really, Helen, you surely don't mean to say . . .

HELEN I don't mean to say anything to anybody — except Nigel.

(She turns her back.)

PAUL In those circumstances. . . .

VIOLET *(tremulously)* Oh — I've been wanting to go for hours.

(Exeunt?)

LORD R. It would appear that we were superfluous.

LADY R. Any fool could see that.

(Exeunt?)

(Enter JACK.)

JACK He'll be down in a minute. I wouldn't be too hard on him, Helen.

HELEN You? *(With a look of amazement)* Somehow I never expected you to be taking his side.

JACK I'm not exactly. But I'm damned sorry for him.

HELEN He didn't seem to be particularly sorry for himself.

JACK Oh yes, he was.

HELEN *(with a touch of bitterness)* I suppose you understand him better than I do.

JACK (*bravely*) I wonder. (*A pause*) Of course, in one way, I *don't* understand. I suppose it's because I'm what Nigel would call 'excessively English'. I can't see how it's possible for a man not to want to fight for his country, if he loves it — and England, of all countries.

HELEN Do you think Nigel does love England?

JACK Think? He's soppy about it. Only he doesn't show it. Why — I suppose you didn't know that Nigel wrote poetry.

HELEN Does he?

JACK (*pleased*) I thought I could tell you something!

HELEN You certainly can.

JACK Well — he not only writes poetry, but publishes it. There!

HELEN When did he publish it.

JACK Well — I admit it was some time ago — about five years, to be precise. A little book called 'Down an English Lane'.

HELEN It sounds extremely sentimental.

JACK It was. I loved it. It was published anonymously. '

HELEN How do you know Nigel wrote it?

JACK He told me one day, when he was rather tight. I'd taken it about with me for quite a long time. It's about the only book of poetry I ever read through. He saw it lying on my dressing-table. He said: 'What's this?' And I told him. I even recited the first verse of the first poem.

HELEN What did he say then?

JACK He said: 'I always knew that was tripe. But I didn't know what bloody tripe it was until I heard you recite it.'

HELEN Oh — Nigel.

JACK Yes. He told me, then. I oughtn't to have told you, I suppose.

HELEN I'm glad you did.

JACK I'm sorry.

HELEN Why?

JACK Because I'm a cad. I don't want you to go on loving him, really.

HELEN Please!

JACK You know why.

HELEN Please!

JACK I can't help it. It was ... it was the poetry that did it.

HELEN Did what?

JACK Made me. . . . *(He -pauses)* Helen!

HELEN Well?

JACK Supposing I get killed. . . .

HELEN It's rather early to talk about that.

JACK I don't know. We'll be out of this in a day or two, and then — well, I never had much luck in that sort of way — anyhow, I just wanted you to remember that I did love you most awfully.

HELEN Thank you, Jack.

JACK. I'm a swine to talk like this, and I wouldn't do it if I wasn't certain that nothing in the world would ever make you go back on Nigel.

HELEN (*almost to herself*) I wish I were as certain of that myself.

JACK (*sharply*) What d'you say?

HELEN Never mind.

JACK You said you wished you were certain yourself. What does that mean?

HELEN I don't know.

JACK Does it mean I'd have a chance if—if your feelings changed towards Nigel?

HELEN Do you think they'll change?

JACK I didn't till you made me think they might.

HELEN You mean — supposing I found out — after all that — he was funkling.

(NIGEL appears in door a moment, listens, then quietly goes out again.)

JACK (*getting up*) Oh — I feel contemptible. It wasn't right of me to put that idea in your head.

HELEN You didn't. It was there already. Jack, don't let's talk about this any more at the moment. I don't know where I stand. I shan't till I've seen Nigel.

JACK If, when you've seen him — you feel differently — can I . . . ?

(Enter NIGEL.)

NIGEL Hullo, Jack. Are you in on this?

JACK No. (*Awkwardly*) I'll be going upstairs. Good night, Helen.

HELEN Good night.

JACK Good night, Nigel. And (*gallantly*) good luck.
(Exit JACK.)

MGEL Good night. Well, darling. I suppose this is a grand opportunity for tossing the engagement ring into my face. Only don't toss it on the floor because one of the stones is rather loose.

HELEN (*looking at the ring, thoughtfully*) Yes. One of the stones is rather loose.

NIGEL Are you speaking metaphorically?

HELEN If I am you ought to gain a certain amount of comfort from the fact that the ring's still on my finger.

NIGEL (*touched*) That's sweet of you. (*Quietly*) And is it going to remain?

HELEN I don't know.

NIGEL When will you know?

HELEN I suppose I ought to know *now*. You see I trust you absolutely.

NIGEL Thank you, darling.

HELEN I've no doubt whatever about your motives.

NIGEL You needn't have. They're as pure as the driven snow.

HELEN (*harshly*) Do you mind not playing to the gallery for a minute? I'm trying to tell you that I don't believe you're a funk. And you're making it rather difficult.

NIGEL I see. I was conceited enough to imagine that there was' no necessity for you to tell me that. But since you have told me, I'm delighted to hear it. And now — after this charming declaration — may I ask what's troubling you?

HELEN Nigel. For heaven's sake, let's be human.

NIGEL Whenever I'm asked to be human I always know that the person asking me is longing to have a grand scene. And I don't want to have a scene.

HELEN Neither do I. But I do want to talk things over.

NIGEL Oh — very well.

HELEN D'you mind sitting down for a moment?

NIGEL If it's going to help you to recover your self-possession,

HELEN Thank you. (*They J/V*) I'm glad you mentioned my self-possession. It's rather — to the point. You see, up here it's comparatively easy to be level-headed. It's when we get back to England — that's what I'm frightened of.

NIGEL Why?

HELEN Do you remember the last war?

NIGEL Not personally. I was at school all the time.

HELEN And I was only ten when it stopped. But I remember the absolute madness of everybody round us. I had an old aunt, the sweetest thing that ever lived, normally. She used to put her arm round my shoulders and tell me that if the Germans ever came to England they'd stick a bayonet through me and eat me alive.

NIGEL Disgusting old woman!

HELEN She wasn't! She was a peaceful, harmless, good-natured, fairly intelligent Englishwoman.

NIGEL Yes. They're always the worst sort.

HELEN (*quietly*) She was merely *temporarily* insane. And so was everybody else in England at the time.

NIGEL (*impatiently*) What's all this got to do with you and me?

HELEN Simply this. That when the time comes, I shall probably be insane, too.

NIGEL Do you mean to tell me that you're going to believe that Henry Ford is going to breakfast off British babies? Or, if it comes to that—that Paul Tanner is going to charge down Bond Street with a carving knife slicing large portions off the behinds of respectable British matrons?

HELEN There is no need to reduce my argument to an absurdity.

NIGEL It didn't need much reduction.

HELEN (*louder*) No. That's the whole point. It didn't. What you said wasn't so far from the sort of thing I *shall* be believing.

NIGEL You!

HELEN Yes, me. Why will you deliberately blind yourself to the facts?

NIGEL I was under the impression that I was being singularly clear-sighted.

HELEN You are. And to be clear-sighted in war time is to see things out of focus.

NIGEL As an aphorism that's not bad. But it's only an aphorism after all.

HELEN It's a hard cold truth. Have you ever *read* anything about the last war?

NIGEL Almost everything I could lay my hands on.

HELEN Did you ever read Lloyd George's speeches?

NIGEL I didn't know they were about the war. I thought they were all about the Welsh mountains.

HELEN Exactly. He never got much nearer to the facts of the war than the Welsh mountains — the horrible, sordid facts, I mean — the personal agony and squalor and boredom. None of the statesmen did. They were living on a stage all the time, playing tremendous roles, and so, of course, the chorus, the soldiers themselves, had to be kept in the background. They were just useful in order to bring the great men into relief.

NIGEL You're coming round to my way of thinking, at last.

HELEN I'm *not*. Nigel, it's impossible to believe that anybody of your intelligence can be so dense. The reason why I mentioned Lloyd George was simply to remind you that he *was* a tremendous hero during the war. A hero, not only to the masses, and the jingoes, and the people who join patriotic societies and wave flags, but to supposedly intelligent people like you and me.

NIGEL I strongly doubt it.

HELEN You don't. You know it's true.

NIGEL Well, even supposing it were true, then, it would never be true again.

HELEN I wonder.

NIGEL You sound as if you were frightened of something.

HELEN I am. I'm frightened of myself.

NIGEL That's not like you.

HELEN I've never been up against anything like this before.

NIGEL If you really trusted me . . .

HELEN I do, but it doesn't make much difference,

NIGEL That's rather odd, isn't it?

HELEN It would be if we had only ourselves to consider. But we haven't. We've all the world. Do you realize what your position in London will be if you do this?

NIGEL D'you think anybody'll have a position in London after a few weeks?

HELEN What do you mean?

NIGEL Well — to put it crudely — do you think there'll be any London left to have a position in? Isn't it highly probable that it will be blown to pieces?

HELEN (*with a flash of humour*) Even if it were, English people wouldn't consider it good form to admit it. (*A little impatiently*) But I'm afraid I can't let you escape on those grounds. If the world goes to pieces, then we might as well dismiss this argument as futile. However, the very fact that we're arguing implies that we assume, at any rate, that there will be some sort of world to go back to. And what's that world going to be like for you?

NIGEL I don't care.

HELEN I do. I know what people will say. They'll accept you still — some of them — you'll still be the brilliant young dramatist. But you'll be despised,

NIGEL I've a shrewd suspicion that I shall be in very good company then, if half of what the younger generation said about the next war is true.

HELEN The younger generation will do what all younger generations have always done. They'll fight. And they'll die.

(A pause.)

NIGEL So you're afraid of what people will say? Afraid that I may be hissed on my first nights?

HELEN Yes. I am. Oh, but there's something deeper than that — something purely instinctive. I suppose if you analyse it, it's savage and deplorable and barbarous, but I can only say that I feel just now exactly as I should feel if we'd been walking down a street together and had come across a man beating a child, and you had crossed over to the other side because you didn't want to be mixed up in it.

NIGEL Are you serious?

HELEN Bitterly.

NIGEL You mean to say that you seriously think that international struggles are as simple as all that — as simple as a man beating a child?

HELEN No. But the reactions they arouse in me are. I can't help it. I love England.

NIGEL I love the world.

HELEN You can't love the world in that way. You can't love a multitude of people in the same way that you love one people. You can't love all the highways of the world in the same way that you love one little English lane.

NIGEL (*harshly*) That's maudlin sentiment.

HELEN I don't care if it is.

NIGEL You're trusting to your instincts, are you?

HELEN I've nothing left to trust to.

NIGEL I see. (*He gets up and turns to window; when he turns round his 'voice is very harsh*) Then it's very strange that your instincts don't tell you the truth about me.

HELEN What do you mean?

NIGEL (*stretching out his hand, which is shaking violently*) Look at that!

HELEN Nigel!

NIGEL (*still holding out hand*) Yes. You know what that is, don't you? That's funk!

HELEN I don't believe it!

NIGEL Don't you?

HELEN (*turning away*) Oh, please.

NIGEL You brought this on yourself.

HELEN I never guessed. , . .

NIGEL Oh yes, you did. You fell in love with me, didn't you? You knew me —didn't you? —the inside of me — good and bad — though I don't admit that this is bad.

HELEN What is it then?

NIGEL It's *me!* Listen, Helen. Try to realize why you fell in love with me. It was because I was different, wasn't it?

HELEN Not in that way.

NIGEL How can you separate that — from me — if you understand me in the least? Part of the reason that you loved me was because I saw things that other men didn't see. I saw that you were smiling when your lips were still, and that you were, crying when your eyes were dry. I knew when your heart was beating more quickly, even though you seemed half asleep. How did I know these things? It wasn't only because I loved you, though that had something to do with it. It was because I feel everything — *everything* — infinitely more acutely than even you can guess. It's agony for me to see flowers die. I run away from it. When they're mowing the grass outside here, in the summer, I go down into the valley because I can't bear to see the poppies in the young grass cut down. It's as though their blood were on my hands. I'm almost physically sick when I see pain. I tell you, the world's too much for me, often. (*Softly*) I don't want to change, really/ I don't want to become dull and monotonous. I know that whenever spring comes round I shall be filled with a joy that's such agony that it's as though my whole body were torn in two. I know that as long as I live I shall be playing a dozen parts whenever I'm in a room full of people, suffering with them, laughing with them,

far more acutely than they laugh or suffer themselves. That isn't conceit, it's truth. And to ask me to go out there — to go out to that hell. . . .

HELEN Other poets have died.

NIGEL (*almost screaming*) How dare you say that? How dare you ask me to go where bodies — human bodies — are being blown to pieces — where men are running round with their entrails hanging on the ground — where they are staggering through the mud with their eyes blown out — where their lungs are swelling and bursting with gas. It's blood, blood . . .

HELEN' (*outraged*) Pull yourself together. I don't want to hear any more. I think you'd better go to your room.

NIGEL (*with a tremendous effort*) And you . . . were once . . . in love . . . with me!

(*Slowly he walks out. HELEN buries her face in her hands?*)

C U R T A I N

ACT II

SCENE:

Same as Act I But the lamps are not yet lit.

TIME:

// is evening of the following day.

(At Rise: LORD ROCKSTONE is pacing the room. For the fourth time he rings the bell. Enter FORSYTHE the butler.)

ROCKSTONE There you are. I've been ringing for ten minutes.

FORSYTHE I'm sorry m'lord, but the bell is very faint. The batteries have run down.

ROCKSTONE Does everything in this damned house run down?

FORSYTHE. Everything, m'lord. Except the water.

ROCKSTONE What's happened to that?

FORSYTHE The pipes are burst.

ROCKSTONE Oh well — one more discomfort won't make any difference. What I really wanted to know is if it isn't possible to fix this wireless.

FORSYTHE I'm afraid not, m'lord. You see — it's hardly a wireless at all.

ROCKSTONE Why not?

FORSYTHE Mr. Chelmsford threw away all the works last week (*Opens if*) It's only a box now.

ROCKSTONE Then — that's useless too?

FORSYTHE Yes, H'l'ord.

ROCKSTONE Is there absolutely no means of getting news?

FORSYTHE None that I can think of, m'lord.

ROCKSTONE There must be *something*. It's monstrous to be shut up like this.

FORSYTHE It's worse to be outside, m'lord.

ROCKSTONE Did the chauffeur try to get to the station?

FORSYTHE Yes, m'lord. He got about a mile and then he had to come back. Three hours, he was, over that, too. There's a raging blizzard outside, and the drifts are treacherous.

ROCKSTONE. Then the only hope's the snow-plough?

FORSYTHE That's all, m'lord.

ROCKSTONE This is the most impossible situation I've ever been in.

FORSYTHE Yes, m'lord, it's hard. With a war on — and all that. (*A pause*) Do you think it's likely to go on ... for long, m'lord?

ROCKSTONE Don't ask me. For all I know half the world may be ruins already.

FORSYTHE You heard the aeroplanes, this morning, m'lord?

ROCKSTONE Was that what that noise was?

FORSYTHE Yes, m'lord. A whole fleet of them. Flying very high on account of the mountains.

ROCKSTONE. What nationality were they?

FORSYTHE German, I should say, m'lord. They had the black cross on their wings.

ROCKSTONE Then . . .

FORSYTHE. It looks as if Germany were in it too.

ROCKSTONE. Good God! And we don't even know what side they're on.

FORSYTHE. It's hard, not knowing, m'lord.

ROCKSTONE We don't know anything! I don't even know what's happening in this house. Forsythe . . . perhaps I oughtn't to, er, to discuss these matters with you , . . but can you explain things to me?

FORSYTHE In what way, m'lord?

ROCKSTONE (*exasperated*) Well, where *is* everybody? Damn it all—it's a quarter to six, and I've seen nobody all day but my wife. Where's Mr. Chelmsford, for instance? He didn't come down to lunch.

FORSYTHE Mr. Chelmsford had an omelette in his room, m'lord.

ROCKSTONE Why?

FORSYTHE He's very fond of omelettes, m'lord.

ROCKSTONE Damn it. I don't want to know his taste in food. I want to know why he didn't come down. Has he decided to mope by himself?

FORSYTHE (*with dignity*) I can assure you that Mr. Chelmsford is not moping, m'lord. I have already taken two bottles of champagne to his room.

ROCKSTONE Champagne? I was told there wasn't anything in the house but creme de menthe. Really I ... (*Fuming*) However that's no affair of yours. I should be glad if you would tell Mr. Chelmsford that I have a very urgent matter to discuss with him, and should like to see him at once.

FORSYTHE Mr. Chelmsford will see you at ten minutes past six, m'lord.

ROCKSTONE What's that?

FORSYTHE Ten minutes past six.

ROCKSTONE What d'you mean?

FORSYTHE He is seeing Lady Rockstone at six o'clock, Mr. Tanner at five minutes past, your lordship at ten minutes past, Miss Pinxton at a quarter past, Mr. Willington at twenty minutes past, and Miss Helen at twenty-five minutes past. At the half hour he desired me to prepare his bath.

ROCKSTONE I don't understand it at all.

FORSYTHE Those are Mr. Chelmsford's orders, m'lord. If you will excuse me, I will inform the others. (*He stands waiting*)

(*Enter PAUL. He looks pale and restless.*)

PAUL (*shyly*) Good morning.

ROCKSTONE Good evening.

PAUL Is it as late as that?

ROCKSTONE It will soon be time for dinner.

PAUL I didn't realize. Oh Forsythe . . .

FORSYTHE Yes sir.

PAUL Still no news?

FORSYTHE No sir.

PAUL Then we've just got to wait?

ROCKSTONE. Failing the intervention of a few angels, yes.

FORSYTHE Is there anything else, m'lord?

ROCKSTONE Not for me.

PAUL No thanks, Forsythe.

FORSYTHE (*to Paul*) Excuse me, sir, but Mr. Chelmsford wished me to tell you that he would see you at five minutes past six.

PAUL Five minutes past six.

(*To ROCKSTONE.*)

That sounds very business-like for Nigel, doesn't it?

(*Receives no answer.*)

(*To FORSYTHE.*)

Very well. Where?

FORSYTHE In this room, sir.

PAUL Very good, Forsythe.

(*Exit FORSYTHE.*)

ROCKSTONE So you decided to come down?

PAUL Yes.

ROCKSTONE Do you think that was quite advisable?

PAUL Why not?

ROCKSTONE (*hotly*) Damn it sir, don't you realize that you're an American?

PAUL (*with a twinkle*) All right. I won't hurt you.

ROCKSTONE You'll gain nothing by being facetious.

PAUL I was trying to be human.

ROCKSTONE It's extremely bad taste.

PAUL What — being human?

ROCKSTONE Imposing your company here at all. You can't imagine that it's welcome.

PAUL (*thoughtfully*) Gee!—you *have* changed.

ROCKSTONE I should hardly be a decent Englishman if I hadn't.

PAUL Last night" we were playing bridge together and you were my friend. To-night . . .

ROCKSTONE. To-night sir, I'm your enemy and I shall be glad if you'd remember it.

PAUL It'll be awfully difficult. You've got such a kind expression.

ROCKSTONE Haven't you any patriotic sentiments yourself?

PAUL Not of that sort. . . .

ROCKSTONE I see. (*With a sneer*) Too much of a poet, I suppose.

PAUL You honour me,

ROCKSTONE. It was not my intention to do so. (*Drawing himself up*) In England at least, our poets have always been men.

PAUL Is that so?

ROCKSTONE It was Shelley himself who wrote 'poets are the trumpets who sing to battle'.

PAUL Yes. Shelley was a poet all right. But as far as politics were concerned, he was just a big stiff. (*Getting up*) Lord Rockstone, why can't you be yourself?

ROCKSTONE In what way?

PAUL Why can't you get all this nonsense out of your head?

ROCKSTONE Nonsense?

PAUL About singing to battle and all that.

ROCKSTONE It's not my fault that your country has set out to destroy the entire world.

PAUL My country? What about yours?

(Enter VIOLET suddenly.)

VIOLET What's happening, Paul?

PAUL *(still looking at ROCKSTONE)* Just a minute baby. You'd better not come near me. I'm an American.

VIOLET *(to ROCKSTONE)* What have you been saying to Paul?

ROCKSTONE I've been giving him a few home truths.

PAUL Yes. 'HOME' truths is the right word. Take those truths away from 'home' and they'd look precious like lies.

ROCKSTONE Are you calling me a liar?

PAUL *(hotly)* I'm calling any man a liar who says that America wanted war.

ROCKSTONE *(to VIOLET, with icy contempt)* And this is the man you had intended to marry.

VIOLET *(with spirit)* Had intended? I still intend to.

ROCKSTONE Are you out of your senses?

VIOLET No. And you won't make me change my mind.

ROCKSTONE Do you realize what your life will be if you're married to an American?

VIOLET (*stubbornly*) I don't care.

ROCKSTONE You'll be an outcast in your own country. You'll be hated and despised. You'll live in hell.

VIOLET (*with spirit*) Well, anyway, half the Anglo-American peeresses will be in hell with me.

PAUL Good for you, baby!

VIOLET And the whole world'll be in hell. So it doesn't matter what particular section of it I'm in provided I'm with the people I like.

ROCKSTONE You've learnt your lesson very well.

VIOLET It isn't a lesson. It's me. (*Stamping*) It's me! I know you think me a fool, because I'm not clever, like Helen, and because I can't do anything but dance . . . and just listen . . . but I have got opinions . . . and . . . my opinions are much better than yours. , . .

ROCKSTONE Indeed!

VIOLET. Yes they are. You won't help anybody, talking about enemies . . . when you know they aren't enemies at all . . . but just nice people like anybody else . . . and what's more I don't believe you do think they're enemies . . . you're only thinking about your old stocks, and how much money you can make.

ROCKSTONE (*outraged*) If you were *my* daughter . . .

VIOLET (*trembling but determined*) If I were your daughter, I should probably be waving the Union

Jack over my head and saying 'To hell with America'. Well, I'm not. And I wish that there were a million English girls like me who were engaged to a million American boys like Paul, and then there'd never be a war at all. And — (*with an effort that almost breaks her little body*) — if I've got to shout to hell with anybody, I shall shout, to hell with you!

(LADY ROCKSTONE has entered and crosses the stage quickly. VIOLET stands panting, holding on to Paul's arm, glaring at LORD ROCKSTONE like an outraged kitten.)

LADY R. What is the girl saying?

VIOLET (*with a start*) Oh God!

LADY R. (*to VIOLET*) Have you been drinking cr&me de menthe?

ROCKSTONE No. She's been drinking the pure spring of American patriotism.

PAUL I should prefer to call it common sense.

ROCKSTONE She accuses me of being a blood-thirsty profiteer.

LADY R. What?

VIOLET He called Paul an enemy.

LADY R. Well isn't he?

VIOLET (*almost crying*) He's not my enemy.

LADY R. Don't be a little idiot. Have you forgotten that you're an Englishwoman?

VIOLET I don't want to be an Englishwoman. I want to marry Paul.

LADY R. I see. (*To PAUL*) So you've been influencing her against her own country?

VIOLET He hasn't.

LADY R. Trying to turn her into a good little American . . .

VIOLET Leave him alone.

LADY R. Teaching her to spy, I suppose . . .

PAUL Lady Rockstone, just a minute.

LADY R. I don't wish to hear from you.

PAUL. I'll ask you to call a truce.

ROCKSTONE (*with a sneer*) The white flag already.

PAUL Quite.

LADY R. I'm afraid I can't consider your suggestion.

PAUL It's going to make conversation exceedingly difficult if we divide ourselves into armed camps.

LADY R. That has no effect upon me.

PAUL It'll also put an end to bridge.

LADY R. (*pompously*) I am prepared for any sacrifices.

PAUL In that case there's nothing more to be said?

LADY R. Nothing.

PAUL Thank you. (*To VIOLET*) Baby?

VIOLET Yes.

PAUL We'll go and do some spying.

(*Exeunt PAUL and VIOLET.*)

ROCKSTONE (*gloomily*) How's Helen?

LADY R. Oh, I've given Helen up. I don't know what she wants or what she thinks.

ROCKSTONE Nigel ought to be shot.

LADY R. He probably will be.

ROCKSTONE He's the last person I should have accused of cowardice.

LADY R. I don't believe it is cowardice. I think it's just perversity.

ROCKSTONE It's the same thing.

LADY R. Not in Nigel's case. I shouldn't be in the least surprised to hear that he'd gone up in a balloon and was dropping bad plays on to Broadway just to lower the American morale.

ROCKSTONE Anyway, it was probably for the best.

LADY R. I don't agree. He always got us free seats for first nights. Oh, by the way, what is this extraordinary idea of his wanting to see me at six sharp?

ROCKSTONE Well, you wanted to see him, didn't you?

LADY R. Yes. But why six *sharp*?"

ROCKSTONE I don't know. He's seeing me at ten past.

LADY R. It's very odd. Treating us as though we were buses.

ROCKSTONE It's nearly six now. I suppose I'd better leave you alone.

LADY R. I think you had.

ROCKSTONE (*pompously, pausing as he goes out*)
If you should need any assistance. . . .

LADY R. If I do, I shall ring the bell.

ROCKSTONE It doesn't work.

LADY R. (*snappily*) In that case, I shall trust in God. Good-bye.

(*Exit ROCKSTONE.*)

(*Enter FORSYTHE, who proceeds to draw the blinds. The clock strikes four quarters, then six strokes. On the sixth stroke FORSYTHE goes out R., and NIGEL enters L.*)

NIGEL Good evening.

LADY R. Oh, there you are. What does all this mean?

NIGEL I understood you wanted to see me.

LADY R. Yes. But why at six *sharp*?

NIGEL Why not?

LADY R. I hate anything sharp. It agitates me. And in any case, I can't possibly say all I have to say in five minutes.

NIGEL In that case, suppose we begin at once? May I smoke? (*Puts out his hand for cigarette box.*)

LADY R. Yes. But you'll only find gaspers in there.

NIGEL Ah! That's where you're wrong.

LADY R. But Forsythe distinctly told me that as supplies were running so short he had to fill all the boxes with gaspers.

NIGEL Quite. But he didn't tell you that all the boxes had false bottoms did he? (*Shows her*) See?

(*LADY R. helps herself to cigarettes which she puts in her ca'e.*)

NIGEL Here — steady on!

LADY R. That's the price of my silence! Otherwise, I go about telling everybody that this house is full of false bottoms. Now, as we're such good friends again, I can speak out.

NIGEL I know exactly what you're going to say. You're going to ask me to join the army.

LADY R. No, I'm not. All I wanted to know was whether it wasn't possible to come to some sort of compromise.

NIGEL What with?

LADY R. Well — I've been thinking it all out. Now, the first thing I want you to realize is that I don't blame you in the least. For instance I don't think you're a coward.

NIGEL (*ironically*) That's very sweet of you.

LADY R. (*amiably*) Yes. I thought you'd think so. After all, there are *degrees* of courage. You've got one sort. Anybody who can go, like you do, to every single one of his own first nights . . . well, that takes courage. But the other sort you haven't got. Not the . . . the messy sort, I mean. You're too nervous . . . highly-strung . . . you imagine things too much . . . that's why you write such good plays.

NIGEL Go on. This is divine.

LADY R. You're not being sarcastic?

NIGEL On the contrary. I'm revelling in the first kind words that have been said to me since this morning, when Forsythe told me my bath was ready.

LADY R. (*sharply*) Did you have a bath?

NIGEL Certainly. Didn't you?

LADY R. Forsythe told me that there was no hot water because all the pipes had burst.

NIGEL Forsythe is an admirable servant — to his master.

LADY R. He's the most insolent man I ever met.

NIGEL But we weren't talking about Forsythe.

LADY R. (*crossly*) No. Where was I?

NIGEL In the middle of an exquisitely touching analysis of my soul. I was nervous, highly-strung, and I imagined things too much. What happens after that?

LADY R. I don't *blame* you for not wanting to go, but I do blame you for not wanting to keep up appearances.

NIGEL I don't follow.

LADY R. Well — what I mean is — whether one likes it or not, war has its *social* side. Of course nobody ever knows who anybody else is, and in a way it doesn't seem to matter much — though personally I can't feel entirely at home with a bounder even if he's the commander-in-chief — but all the same, the one thing which is definitely difficult to explain is being *nothing*.

NIGEL I have no intention of being nothing. I intend to create a superb romance — up here in the mountain air.

LADY R. Yes, my dear, I'm sure that would be delightful — and very popular too — but you must admit that it would also be very difficult to explain.

NIGEL What, my romance?

LADY R. Certainly, in war time. When we go back to London, if we ever do, I should hardly like to repeat what you said, even if I could remember it.

NIGEL Well, why couldn't you just say that I was giving birth to a masterpiece in Switzerland?

LADY R. That is the very last thing I should say. People have got such hateful minds.

NIGEL Well, what would you really like to say?

LADY R. What I should really like to say of course would be that you were fighting the enemy.

NIGEL When you don't even know whether the enemy, apart from the Americans, is German or French, or Russian, or Chinese?

LADY R. (*with a flash of genuine emotion*) Exactly. That sounds ridiculous to you, of course, because you're logical and masculine and cosmopolitan, and I'm illogical and feminine and English. And thank God I am! (*She collects herself*) All I wanted to know was, if it wasn't possible for you to compromise.

NIGEL What with — the French or the Germans or the Russians or the Chinese?

LADY R. No. With . . . with the army, I mean. Couldn't you . . . join the . . . well, it sounds very silly I know . . . but . . . well, there's the Labour Corps.

NIGEL What about it?

LADY R. Well — lots of quite *nice* people joined it last time . . . people who weren't really at all *interested* in the war.

NIGEL Then why did they join it?

LADY R. Well — some of them had weak hearts, and some of them had influential uncles.

NIGEL I haven't got a weak heart.

LADY R. I wish to heavens you had.

NIGEL And my uncle isn't even a gentleman.

LADY R. That's no reason why he shouldn't be influential.

NIGEL I'm sorry. But I don't want that sort of influence.

LADY R. I wish I knew what you did want.

NIGEL I've told you. I want to finish my play.

LADY R. (*exasperated*) Well then, why can't you at least go and finish it in the War Office? You'd have much more peace and leisure there than you would have here.

NIGEL Thank you. I may be a cad. But I'm not that sort of a cad.

LADY R. (*looking down, and fumbling for a handkerchief*) If I hadn't almost entirely run out of face powder I should have a good cry.

NIGEL I'm not being much help, am I?

LADY R. No, you're not. I came down here with such high hopes — and now — you've made me feel ridiculous.

NIGEL (*affectionately*) I didn't mean to do that. I'm awfully fond of you.

LADY R. That's an enormous — consolation.

NIGEL But I am. We just see things differently.

LADY R. Yes. I suppose I'm rather like Jack, in some ways. He just sees the bright side of war.

NIGEL (*in a sudden outburst*) The bright side of the war! The bright side!

LADY R. Really! You needn't shout at me.

NIGEL I beg your pardon. I was forgetting that you only wished me to join the army socially.

LADY R. And if you're going to be heavily ironic it seems useless to continue the argument any further.

NIGEL I'm afraid it is.

LADY R. (*looking at her watch*) I appear to have exceeded my time limit by nearly two minutes. I beg your pardon.

NIGEL That's all right. Would you ask Paul to come in now?

LADY R. Very well. (*Exit*)

(*A moment's pause, enter PAUL.*)

PAUL Here I am.

NIGEL (*looking down at the carpet, speaking almost to himself*) Yes. There you are. But *where* are you, I wonder? Where are we all? (*Looking up*) Oh, it's you.

PAUL Weren't you expecting me?

NIGEL Yes. Only my mind's got into rather an extraordinary condition. I've been transported to spiritual heights that I never even dreamed existed.

PAUL By Lady Rockstone?

NIGEL Yes. She asked me to join the war for social reasons. Rather as though she were suggesting that I ought to join a decent club. (*Laughing bitterly*) Good God! It's illuminating though, isn't it? Won't you sit down?

PAUL Thanks.

NIGEL I imagine that you aren't going to ask me to join the war for social reasons.

PAUL No. I am not sufficiently interested in society.

NIGEL What *are* you interested in?

PAUL You — at the moment.

NIGEL Then right at the outset may I ask why you — who are at least an artist — can't understand me when I say that the one thing I ought to do — the one thing it's my duty to do — is to put my work first?

PAUL But of course I understand. You've got to put your work first.

NIGEL (*delighted; with sudden facetiousness*) Do my ears deceive me?

PAUL Not at all. I think you'd be wrong to let anything or any person interfere with your development as a dramatist.

NIGEL Then you agree that I ought *not* to go to the war?

PAUL Oh no. I certainly think you *ought* to go to the war.

NIGEL (*astounded*) What? Why?

PAUL (*a little apologetically*) Because I'm' afraid I think you're a damned bad dramatist.

NIGEL (*for once in a way taken back*) How very entertaining. You — you quite surprise me, Paul. I didn't know that you had such an exquisite sense of levity. (*A little harshly*) I happen to disagree with you in your estimate of my talents, but at the same time I fully appreciate the value of your remark, in its context. It was time we had a little facetiousness.

PAUL I wasn't being facetious. Perhaps I exaggerated when I said I thought you were a damned bad dramatist. What I really wanted to say was that you never wrote a thing that *meant* a damn.

NIGEL (*bland but very angry*) Oh — I see. Quite different.

PAUL Why yes, it is. You've written plays that were technically brilliant. You've invented situations that were marvellously ingenious. You've written dialogue that was as delicate as ... (*Picking up a cigarette box*) — as the filigree work on this cigarette box. And — (*opening it*) It's rather symbolical that the box is empty.

NIGEL I am so glad that you said that. The box happens to have a false bottom.

PAUL (*pulling it out*) So it has!

NIGEL Yes. Like me. Very symbolical isn't it? Won't you have a cigarette?

PAUL No, thanks.

is trembling) So I'm to join the British army in order to learn how to be a dramatist, am I?

PAUL There are worse ways of learning.

NIGEL And you think that by the time I've formed a sufficient number of fours, and later on, when I've breathed an adequate quantity of chlorine gas, I may possibly rival the style of the author of 'Journey's End'.

PAUL I wasn't paying you so high a compliment as that.

NIGEL (*biting his nails and controlling himself with an effort*) Why am I a bad dramatist?

PAUL I've told you. Because you never wrote a thing that meant a damn. And the reason for that is because you never dealt with any subject of the least importance.

NIGEL What *are* subjects of importance?

PAUL You know as well as I do.

NIGEL No, I don't. (*Suddenly smiling*) Oh, I see! You mean that I never wrote a scene in which a Red Cross nurse renounces sex and goes back to mother? Or that I never wrote a scene in which little Willie pins on his grandfather's medals and enlists as the mascot of the London Scottish? Is that your idea of a subject of importance?

PAUL I think it's as good a subject as the sort of play you write, in which little Willie pins on his grandfather's medals and has an affair with the housemaid.

NIGEL You're being extraordinarily elevating, aren't you?

PAUL Whose fault is that?

NIGEL Yours. You're treating me as if I were a child.

PAUL You are, until . . .

NIGEL (*sharply*) Wait a minute! I know what you're going to say. Until I've had my 'baptism of fire' — isn't that it?

PAUL Baptism of fire. Yes. That's rather a wonderful phrase, isn't it?

NIGEL You make me tired. I've never been a very vigorous upholder of baptism of any sort, but that sort seems to me even more futile than usual.

PAUL Futile! (*Looks at him in astonishment*) Gee — I was right. The sooner you joined up the better. Futile! You call yourself an artist in words and yet you use the most cynical callous adjective to describe one of the most vital parts of the general experience of mankind — the struggle for existence.

NIGEL (*very loudly*) Well — merely because war happens to be part of the general experience of mankind, is that any reason for assuming that it's valuable experience? A few centuries ago, the black plague was part of the general experience of mankind. Do you want to bring that back again — for the benefit of the artists? A hundred diseases and abuses and abominations used to be part of the general experience of mankind. Are you sorry that they've gone? Do you think that — (*Sneering*) —

the literary style of the world has deteriorated because — for instance — Pasteur discovered the cure for hydrophobia?

PAUL War isn't hydrophobia.

NIGEL It seems to me to be hardly distinguishable from it.

PAUL That's not a clever remark Nigel. Unless — of course — you can prove to me that Shakespeare had been bitten by a mad dog when he wrote 'Come the four corners of the world in arms . . .'

NIGEL (*interrupting*)

'And we shall shock them, NAUGHT shall make
us rue

If England to herself do prove but true/
Very pretty. But Shakespeare didn't happen to live in an age when wars were declared because one group of old gentlemen were angry because another group of old gentlemen were sitting on top of an oil well.

PAUL Didn't he? I'm not so sure. I should imagine that most wars had an economic origin. The Carthaginian wars certainly had. And after all they were somewhat previous to the Shakespearian era. But it isn't so much the origin of the war that matters. It's what happens in you — in your own heart — when your own country's in danger.

NIGEL I can tell you what happens in my heart — disgust at the futility of it all — utter sickening disgust.

PAUL That's not quite all.

NIGEL It is — it is, I tell you.

PAUL You're not fair to yourself, Nigel. You're deliberately setting yourself aside from the rest of the world.

NIGEL Well supposing I am?

PAUL (*pleading*) You can't do it — not if you're the man I take you for. It's — it's — oh God — it's difficult to say it without seeming horribly high-falutin and sentimental and all that — But don't you *see* — there *are* certain tremendous emotional experiences — falling in love, and seeing a sunset and listening to the first cry of your own child and seeing the sleeping face of someone you loved, dead — and conflict — just conflict — men pitted against men — when the whole world's red and falling in ruins about you. . . .

NIGEL (*icily cold*) I think you'd better reserve that sort of stuff for your publishers.

PAUL Thank you. (*A-pause. He looks at his watch*) I see my time's up. (*He turns to go*)

NIGEL (*suddenly remorseful*) Paul! I'm — just a minute . . .

PAUL (*not looking at him*) I'll tell Rockstone you're ready for him.

(PAUL *goes out.*)

(NIGEL *stands there twisting his hands nervously together. He walks over to the fireplace and pokes a log, savagely.*)

(ROCKSTONE *comes in*)

ROCKSTONE Good evening.

NIGEL (*fiercely*) Oh — go away.

ROCKSTONE (*outraged*) I beg your pardon?

NIGEL I can't see you now.

ROCKSTONE Can't *see* me? But you made a particular *point* of seeing me — at ten minutes past six.

NIGEL Well it's twenty past. And I've changed my mind.

ROCKSTONE I haven't.

NIGEL That doesn't surprise me in the least.

ROCKSTONE (*furious*) Damn it sir, there are limits. If I weren't a guest in your house . . .

NIGEL Dear me! I was quite forgetting.

ROCKSTONE. That's putting it mildly.

NIGEL Yes. My sense of old-world hospitality has undergone rather a strain lately. Won't you sit down?

ROCKSTONE No, thank you, I prefer to stand.

NIGEL Very well.

ROCKSTONE (*at fireplace, hands behind back*) I suppose my wife has been — er — talking a lot of damned rot.

NIGEL I wouldn't put it like that. She merely asked me to join the war because I should meet such nice people in it.

ROCKSTONE That's just where she's wrong. You wouldn't. You'd meet a lot of bounders. Not that I suppose *that* would greatly upset you.

NIGEL Not at all.

ROCKSTONE Well ... I don't suppose you'll object to talking a little hard sense for a change, what?

NIGEL Not at all.

ROCKSTONE Quite. Well. Til put all my cards on the table. Now, as you may be aware, I'm engaged in various commercial enterprises of considerable importance. I'm the managing director of one of our largest coal-mines. I have considerable shipping interests. I am the head of the butter combine. I am considerably interested in the production of artificial silk, which is rapidly attaining the position of one of our chief exports. I have various other, er — activities which I needn't particularize. The point I wish to make is, as you might say — a psychological one. (*Pleased with himself*) Yes — a psychological one.

NIGEL I see.

ROCKSTONE Now — as far as I am aware — you are still engaged to my daughter.

NIGEL Am I?

ROCKSTONE (*quickly*) Well, aren't you?

NIGEL I don't know. I haven't seen her to-day.

ROCKSTONE Well, if she were going to break it off you'd have known by now. Breaking off an engagement is a thrill that no woman could possibly postpone for more than five minutes.

NIGEL Helen isn't like other women.

ROCKSTONE Every woman's like other women. You'll learn that in time. Now let's get down to

brass tacks. If you are engaged to my daughter, you are to a certain extent a cog in the great wheel of British industry.

NIGEL I'm a *wharf*

ROCKSTONE Let me explain. Business to-day has, if I may say so, a human factor. That is part of its beauty. We public men, through the press and other mediums, are, to a large degree, identified with the products which we purvey to the people. We don't seek it. We would of course prefer to remain in obscurity. But there it is. Our lives, our families, even our — our features — are inevitably associated with our goods.

NIGEL You don't mean to say that they've started to print your face on silk stockings?

ROCKSTONE Although your remark is, as usual, offensive, it has a grain of truth in it. In a sense my face *is* printed on those silk stockings.

NIGEL Good God!

ROCKSTONE It is printed on them to the extent that the buyer of them knows that I make them, and also knows that I am an honest man, a clean man, and a ...

NIGEL But what on earth has that got to do with it? Please — I'm really not being facetious or rude or any of the things you usually accuse me of — but I do feel a little — well — out of my depth.

ROCKSTONE (*pompous/y*) That is, perhaps, to be expected. We will consider a very obvious example. Take Henry Ford. Supposing Mr. Henry Ford —

who is known to be a teetotaller, a non-smoker, and a strictly religious man — supposing he had acquired the reputation of a reckless libertine, what would have happened?

NIGEL I suppose he'd probably have made a faster car.

ROCKSTONE (*shrugging his shoulders*) I give you up.

NIGEL But really you don't mean to tell me that the American business man, whenever he gets into a Ford car, presses the accelerator, smiles a pious smile, and praises God that he's in a teetotal, religious, non-smoking vehicle? Hasn't anybody ever been drunk when they're driving a Ford?

ROCKSTONE (*still sublimely offended*) If they were, and if they escaped, it would be a very good advertisement for Mr. Ford.

NIGEL In which case I *give you up*!

ROCKSTONE Damn it all sir, can't you *see*?

NIGEL Oh yes, I see what you're driving at. But it all seems to me grossly exaggerated. Personally if I liked a car, or a pair of silk socks, or whatever else it might be, I shouldn't care if the owner of the factory was wallowing in vice.

ROCKSTONE Which doesn't surprise me in the least. But I may remind you that *you* — thank Heavens — are not a typical member of the British public.

NIGEL I see. (*A slight pause*) Well, couldn't you hush me up?

ROCKSTONE No sir. I could not. As soon as we

return to England — if we ever do — it will be known all over the country that you — my future son-in-law — *my* future son-in-law — are a conscientious objector. That's going to be a pretty piece of publicity, isn't it?

NIGEL I really don't know.

ROCKSTONE You don't know? Well, I'll ask you this. What's the British housewife going to say when she reads in the paper that Lord Rockstone, the head of the butter combine, is likely to be connected by marriage with a conscientious objector?

NIGEL I suppose the worst she could do would be to rush out and buy quantities of margarine.

ROCKSTONE Which is exactly what she *would* do. God! It makes me sick.

NIGEL What — margarine?

ROCKSTONE No — the thought that you — out of pure malice . . .

NIGEL (*impatiently*) I'm not making anybody eat margarine out of pure malice. In fact I entirely fail to see why a lot of women in Wimbledon should change their diet because their views on the international situation do not happen to coincide with mine.

ROCKSTONE Women have often changed their diet for much more obscure reasons than that. You simply don't understand.

NIGEL Don't understand! Oh — you're funny. I understood you before you even came into the room.

ROCKSTONE Indeed.

NIGEL Yes. I knew what you were going to ask me to do. Though I didn't realize you'd phrase it with quite such exquisite stupidity.

ROCKSTONE Nigel!

NIGEL Just a minute. What *ARE* you asking me to do? You're asking me to be shot through the heart in order that *you* may sell a few more pounds of butter,

ROCKSTONE (*in real indignation*) Look here . . .

NIGEL (*ferociously*) Stop! You're asking me to bury my face in mud and dirt, to fill *my* lungs with acid, in order that *you* may sell a few more pairs of silk stockings. You're asking all the young men of our damned, misguided Empire to hurl themselves like wild animals against an enemy who isn't an enemy, to drown themselves in blood, blind themselves, stifle themselves — for you — *you* — and your precious cheap, tawdry, good-for-nothing goods. That's what you're asking me to do!

ROCKSTONE (*with a certain dignity*) At least there is one thing that I have not asked you to do, because I knew from the start that it would be useless.

NIGEL And what is that?

ROCKSTONE I have never asked you to behave like a gentleman.

NIGEL (*wincing, but controlling himself*) Gentleman! The one word which an Englishman always falls back upon when he has no other way of excusing his stupidity. (*Pause*) You will find Violet outside. I should be glad if you would show her in.

(ROCKSTONE *looks at him, pauses, goes out?*)

(Again NIGEL is left alone. With an obvious effort he twists his face into a smile. VIOLET enters.)

VIOLET Good evening.

NIGEL *(not looking at her)* Good evening, darling.

VIOLET *(a little piqued)* Please don't bother to get up, will you?

NIGEL *(blandly, still not looking at her)* No darling, I won't.

VIOLET And of course there's not the least necessity to give me a cigarette and ask me to make myself comfortable.

NIGEL *(still looking away)* Of course not, darling. You're a grown up girl and you always do those things, *without* being asked.

VIOLET *(sitting down with a bump)* Thanks awfully. *(A pause)* What are you thinking of?

NIGEL *(still looking away)* I'm trying to guess in advance the probable reason that *you* will suggest for my joining the army.

VIOLET *(innocently surprised)* Has anybody been suggesting that you should join the Army?

NIGEL Oh no!

VIOLET *(beaming)* I'm so glad. Because *that* was going to be *my* surprise! *(With a query in her voice)* But how did you think that / was going to ask you?

NIGEL *(looks at her)* Well, I knew that you, at least, had an original mind.

VIOLET *(delighted)* Oh Nigel! Whatever makes you think that?

NIGEL (*kidding her*) Ah!

VIOLET (*bubbling*) Of course, I'm not clever, or brilliant or anything funny like that — but I *have* got my own views about things. Lots of things.

NIGEL And lots of views, too.

VIOLET Yes,

NIGEL That's an awfully pretty frock you've got on.

VIOLET I didn't come here to talk about frocks.

NIGEL No, of course not. But doesn't it seem to bunch out a bit at the back?

VIOLET (*with pursed lips*) I don't care if it does. This isn't a time for women to think about clothes. (*Gets up*)

NIGEL Oh — you mean the war.

VIOLET (*passing casually in front of the mirror and stealing a glance at herself*) Well — of course. I've been thinking about the war until I've got a headache. I don't see how anybody — (*With her eyes glued to her reflection*) — *could* think about anything but the war, even for a moment. It doesn't bunch out at the back at all.

NIGEL Of course it doesn't, darling. When you stand up like that. But I imagine that even if there is a war, you won't be standing up during the entire period of hostilities. Of course, they'll be playing the National Anthem a lot, and you'll be perfect in moments like that. But no really nice girl ever tries to make an impression while the National Anthem's being played.

VIOLET (*still looking in the glass*) It's that damned H  loise. She charges the most outrageous prices and then the thing's never right. I believe she's a beastly German.

NIGEL In that case she's probably one of our new allies, so you mustn't speak disrespectfully of her.

VIOLET Oh dear, you don't think we're fighting *with* the Germans this time?

NIGEL I should think it only too probable. You see, war's a sort of *holiday* for politicians. And they arrange it like other holidays. For instance, just as you say, 'we went to Cannes last year, let's go to Venice this,' so the politicians say, 'we fought Germany last time, let's fight France this.'

VIOLET It's going to make things awfully difficult.

NIGEL Oh no, it won't. They'll rake out the old Hymn of Hate and translate it into French. That'll be the first step. Then they'll drag out a few old statues of the Kaiser, and soften down his moustaches. And then James Douglas will write a series of articles on the awful things that he saw in Paris. By which time our patriotic fervour will be complete.

VIOLET But — Nigel . . .

NIGEL But! There aren't any buts. It'll happen. (*Laughing harshly*) Oh — it's divine — the number of things that are going to happen. The recantations! The somersaults! The twists and the turns!

VIOLET (*quietly, but in a trembling voice*) You're — you're very funny, Nigel.

NIGEL Not half as funny as the politicians! They'll get a lot of Royal Academicians to paint views of Berlin by moonlight — such a pretty town — and there'll be lots of cheap reprints of the life of Beethoven.

VIOLET (*absently*) It doesn't sound a bit like what I thought it was going to be.

NIGEL What did you think it was going to be?

VIOLET I don't know. (*As though recollecting herself*) You know I think you're probably quite wrong about it all.

NIGEL Really?

VIOLET Yes. I think war's probably just what we make it.

NIGEL As I was endeavouring to point out.

VIOLET (*bravely*) And I don't think that I, personally, shall make it quite so cheap and silly as you've made it.

NIGEL Oh — so you're going to make yourself believe the fairy tales, are you?

VIOLET I expect so. It probably sounds very foolish to you Nigel, but I expect that's what women always do, you know. You don't know much about women, do you, Nigel?

NIGEL (*harshly*) Don't talk to me like a penny novelette. The issue's perfectly simple.

VIOLET It would be, if you only wouldn't talk about it so much.

NIGEL /talk about it? I like that!

VIOLET So I've observed,

an

NIGEL (*controlling himself*) Why is the issue perfectly simple? As far as you and Paul are concerned, for instance? It didn't seem so simple last night when you were talking to Rockstone.

VIOLET Oh, Rockstone! He'd make me say anything. You're very much like Rockstone, you know.

NIGEL I — like Rockstone!

VIOLET Yes. You've both got obsessions. He's thinking of his dairies, and you're thinking of your dialogue.

NIGEL And what are you thinking of?

VIOLET Paul, and myself. We both realize the world's gone mad. We both love each other. And we're both going to do the right thing.

NIGEL The right thing! You're being sentimental and mushy and tiresome.

VIOLET Yes. I think I've got some excuse, too. (*She suddenly breaks down and weeps*)

NIGEL (*without sympathy*) At least you're being human now.

VIOLET (*sniffing indignantly and looking up*) Human! If you had a spark of humanity in you, you wouldn't be trying to make me cry.

NIGEL (*genuinely astonished*) I — make you cry!

VIOLET Yes — with your beastly logic and your sneering attitude. You know perfectly well that Paul and I love each other, and that we've got to separate, and you go and make it all the worse by laughing at us. I know that the war's a stupid idiotic thing, I know it won't do anybody any good,

I know it's a crime, but the crime's been committed and we've got to face the fact. And if Paul didn't join up in his beastly country to fight our beastly Empire . . . I'd hate him. I may be mad, but I'm made that way. And so's every decent woman.

NIGEL My God, do you realize *how* you'll be looking each other in the face—from opposite sides, with No Man's Land in between—and each of your faces distorted by hatred and seen through a mist of lies?

VIOLET (*quieting herself*) It won't be like that, Nigel. (*Shaking her head*) Not a bit like that. I'll see him, and he'll see me, as we are, in a silly world, with nothing to hold on to but ourselves. (*Rising and pulling herself together with an effort*) Well, I expect I've given you a good laugh. And I don't seem to have been a good recruiting officer. I'd better be going.

NIGEL Violet, can't we be ourselves, in spite of all this?

VIOLET We are being, my dear, more than we've ever been before.

NIGEL Couldn't you possibly say something to Helen. . .

VIOLET About you? No, I couldn't do that. We happen to think alike about these things.

NIGEL (*bitterly*) I see. That means there's not much chance.

VIOLET Not very much. At least, I hope so.

NIGEL You hope so!

VIOLET Yes. For both your sakes. (*In a bright, assumed voice*) And now, who is the next on the list?

NIGEL (*sullenly*) I don't know,

VIOLET I saw Jack outside, looking very self-conscious.

NIGEL (*brightening*) Jack! Oh then — for the Lord's sake ask him to come in. At least *he* won't want me to change my mind. And it's about time I had a little light relief.

VIOLET I left my handkerchief somewhere.

NIGEL Here it is.

VIOLET Thank you. I'm sorry Nigel, if I've bored you.

NIGEL Oh — that's all right.

(*Exit VIOLET.*)

(*Enter JACK.*)

NIGEL (*looking up*) Oh, I *am* glad to see you.

JACK (*smiling shyly*) Why — what have I done?

NIGEL It's not what you've done so much as what you're *not* going to do. Have a drink?

JACK Is there such a thing?

NIGEL Yes — inside that rather wistful-looking Venus.

JACK (*going to it and removing head*) I say, whisky! That a good idea.

NIGEL Yes, isn't it? You'll find the soda water in the cupboard.

JACK This is a regular speak-easy.

NIGEL It is. There's been a great deal of easy speaking going on in the last hour. But now — thank God, it's over.

JACK What did you mean when you said that the

reason you were pleased to see me was because of what I was *not* going to do?

NIGEL Oh — that? I merely meant that you weren't going to ask me to join the army.

JACK But I *am*.

NIGEL (*suddenly collapsing*) Oh God!

JACK I say — what's up?

NIGEL Nothing — oh nothing at all. I've been asked to join the army by Lady Rockstone because I'm a gentleman or because I'm not, I forget which; by Paul because he wants me to write a war play; by Rockstone because he wants the right sort of publicity; by Violet because — well, honestly, I don't know why she wants it — and then, when *you* came in the room, I thought at least that I'd hear the other side of the case for a change . . .

JACK Why?

NIGEL Well — we happen both to be in love with the same girl.

JACK I'm glad you said it for me. That's just the reason why I want you to join the army.

NIGEL Am I being exceptionally obtuse or are you? We're both in love with the same girl. You've got a tremendous advantage over me, since last night, owing to the fact that you are a potential hero and I'm a potential conscientious objector. And you're asking me to take that advantage away from you.

JACK Quite. I don't want it.

NIGEL Why not?

JACK Because it's an unfair advantage.

NIGEL Really, my brain's reeling. I'm not used to breathing such a rarefied atmosphere of self-sacrifice.

JACK It isn't that, Nigel. It's pure selfishness really.

NIGEL Is it?

JACK Well — obviously. You see — it's like this. If Helen accepted me now, I wouldn't be able to kid myself into believing that she was taking *me* — I'd feel all the time that she was just giving herself to a sort of symbol — just because I was a soldier and you weren't.

NIGEL Aren't you rating Helen's taste a little low? She isn't the nursemaid type you know, that falls in love with a uniform . . .

JACK (*darkly*) No. I was perhaps rating your taste a little high. I didn't think that you'd bring the conversation down to that level.

NIGEL Well — it hasn't reached any great heights, so far.

JACK (*fiercely*) Whose fault is that?

NIGEL Oh — please let's keep calm. I'm muddled enough as it is. Do you mind — reiterating — as clearly as possible — the situation as you see it?

JACK All right. It's damned difficult, because I don't see it so very clearly myself. All I see is three figures, Helen, whom I love — (*Looking down*) I don't think it's necessary to say how much I love her—I couldn't — there aren't words for that sort of thing — Helen — and you and I.

NIGEL Well?

JACK Well — I've butted in, so to speak. I haven't really, because it's been like this for ages, only I've never showed how I felt, because I thought she was happy. But yesterday . . .

NIGEL Go on,

JACK Oh damn it, Nigel, I hate saying it. But yesterday, you — you — showed yourself in a different sort of light. And I — oh well — I suppose I let her see what I felt about it all.

NIGEL (*boldly*) You made love to her?

JACK Did I? I don't know. I've always made love to her, in secret. That isn't the point. The point is that there are two of us now, and we've both got to start fair.

NIGEL All's fair in love and war.

JACK Oh no, it isn't. Not in my opinion. It isn't fair to fight a chap who's got one hand tied behind his back.

NIGEL Meaning me?

JACK Naturally.

NIGEL (*suddenly*) What school were you at?

JACK Rugby. Why?

NIGEL I only wondered. I feel I'm seeing the mentality of the public school system for the first time. I always thought it was a myth.

JACK Yes. You've always thought lots of things were myths, haven't you?

NIGEL Such as?

JACK I wish you hadn't this damned sense of caricature. You make everything I say seem so cheap.

NIGEL Make!

JACK Yes, make. Nigel, it's all very simple, really.

NIGEL That's what everybody tells me.

JACK I haven't come here to *ask* you to join the army. I only came to say that I *hoped* you would. Then I'd feel, at any rate, at liberty to go ahead.

NIGEL (*sneering*) With your courtship?

JACK (*softly*) Yes.

NIGEL Well, as far as I'm concerned, you're at liberty to go ahead now.

JACK You don't mean to say — you're going to let Helen down?

NIGEL Let her down? If by that you mean that I'm going to jilt her, certainly not. If there's any jilting to be done, she can do it herself. All I meant was that you needn't consider my feelings in the matter. Well, aren't you satisfied?

JACK No. It's very sporting of you, of course.

NIGEL Please don't call me 'sporting'. I've had enough insults to-day without that,

JACK All the same, I'm afraid I can't accept your offer.

(HELEN *appears in the door.*)

NIGEL Why not?

JACK Don't you see? It'd still leave things the same. I love Helen much too much to take advantage of a situation like this. It'd be like asking her to marry me for money or for a title — it's the same thing — and just now, when she's hurt and unhappy . . .

HELEN (*breaking in*) Not so terribly unhappy, Jack, my dear.

NIGEL Helen.

JACK (*shy and unhappy*) I'd better go.

HELEN (*gently*) Just a minute, Jack. (JACK *turns away*) Aren't you going to look at me?

JACK (*fuming round*) Well?

HELEN Smile!

JACK (*smiles*) What's the use?

HELEN There's always some use for a smile. I'm afraid that's a dreary sort of remark, but it's true.

NIGEL Am I in the way?

HELEN Only for a minute. There's something I want to say to Jack.

NIGEL I'll wait outside. (*Exits*)

HELEN Jack. What I've got to say is rather damnable.

JACK Oh it's all right. / knew — as soon as I saw you look at him.

HELEN You make me frightened — you know so much about me.

JACK It's funny, isn't it?

HELEN I wish we could think it was. You see — I'm terribly fond of you.

JACK (*a little bitterly*) Terribly fond! That's a lovely expression. It's the sort of thing you'd say about a cocktail. (*Quickly repentant*) I'm sorry. I didn't mean to say that. But — flippancy's in the atmosphere. Somehow . . . (*getting up*) I think it must be this room.

HELEN We shan't be in it much longer.

JACK No — thank God. Not much longer.
(*Stretching his arms*) We'll be — over the hills and far away. (*Dropping them*) Helen, I love you so.

HELEN It's no use.

JACK I know. I'll go. (*Pausing*) It's funny, isn't it? Sorry to say that again, but it is,

HELEN What?

JACK We've told each other nothing at all. And we've told each other everything. At least you've told me everything. I've been a fool.

HELEN I wish there were more fools like you in the world.

JACK Do you?

(*Suddenly going over to her and kissing her. She does not resist. He breaks away and says, in a broken voiced*)

The first — and the last.

(*Exit JACK.*)

(*Enter NIGEL. He looks at her curiously for a moment, and then goes to the piano and plays; singing softly.*)

(*The chords die away.*)

HELEN I wonder if there's another man on earth who would have realized that that was exactly the right thing to do.

NIGEL You may take it from me that there isn't.
(*He kisses her hand.*)

HELEN Oh Nigel!

NIGEL Oh Helen!

HELEN Isn't it marvellous . . . to be sure?

NIGEL It is. (*He is being flippant to hide his emotion*)
Especially about one thing.

HELEN What's that?

NIGEL The fact that you're not going to ask me to join the army.

HELEN How did you know?

NIGEL Second sight, I expect.

HELEN You told me you fell in love with me at second sight.

NIGEL I know. It's the only time I ever believed in it. Oh what a relief this is! Let's both blow our noses loudly and then drench everything in the room with tears.

HELEN I've been crying an awful lot already.

NIGEL Darling! I'm a brute. I wish you'd tell me all about it.

HELEN I'm going to. (*Laughing*) You needn't worry about that. From the beginning.

NIGEL Well — what happened when you went to bed? I came up with every intention of battering on your door and delivering a speech on the international situation, but I thought better of it. I'm glad I did. All the same — I would like to know what happened — in your head.

HELEN Well — at first I cursed you.

NIGEL I can well believe that.

HELEN Literally cursed you. I thought you were degraded and horrible. I was as near madness as any woman can be.

NIGEL Darling.

HELEN I don't want ever to have to go through it again. I don't think there'll ever be any need to. Because I — I believe I know you now — everything about you — and I don't want you to be any different.

NIGEL Supposing there *was* something you didn't know . . . ?

HELEN There isn't!

NIGEL Are you sure?

HELEN I believe I am. I see you, Nigel, as I see . . .

NIGEL What?

HELEN You're a terrible person to tell things to. Because there's always the horrible possibility that you're going to laugh. I *was* going to say 'I saw you as a child crying in the dark . . . '

NIGEL (*gravely*) That isn't funny, darling — to me.

HELEN (*pressing his hand*) Bless you. I think I'll turn my back on you while I say the rest. (*She turns her back while he holds her hand*) I see you as a child crying in the dark. You're afraid of everything around you. They're only shadows on the ceiling, really, but to you they are real people — waving their arms above you — threatening you. Your heart's beating at a terrible pace because you daren't cry out for fear that the shadows will hear you and come down on you and kill you. You're terrified of death, not because of the pain of it, or even because of the squalor of it —

but because it means going into the dark — mingling with the shadows as a shadow. When the night's over, you're so happy that you're never still — everybody's so bright and vivid , . . . (*She breaks down*) Oh I can't go on.

NIGEL (*tenderly*) Come here.

(*He takes her in his arms.*)

HELEN I'm sorry. But I'm tired.

NIGEL I know.

HELEN You see — it's *because* you're not strong in that way — that I'm going to stay with you.

NIGEL (*looking away*) That sounds rather like pity to me.

HELEN It isn't pity — it's just love.

(*FORSYTHE suddenly enters.*)

FORSYTHE Excuse me, sir.

(*NIGEL and HELEN separate*)

NIGEL What is it, Forsythe?

FORSYTHE The snow-plough's got through, sir.

HELEN What?

FORSYTHE Not right up to the house, miss, but about half a mile away.

HELEN Does that mean we can go?

FORSYTHE Very soon, miss.

NIGEL (*a little bitterly*) Do you want to go so much?

(*This dialogue very quick!*)

HELEN Nigel darling, don't be silly. I merely mean I'm glad we're in touch with the world again.

NIGEL The world!

HELEN (*to FORSYTHE*) What are those?

FORSYTHE The papers miss.

HELEN Oh let me see them.

NIGEL (*seizing them*) Just a minute. (*With a certain gravity*) This is an 'occasion'. We can't be selfish about it. You must call the others.

HELEN All of them?

NIGEL Yes. They've all been rejoicing in the downfall of civilization. They might as well rejoice together.

HELEN (*eagerly*) All right.

(*She runs to the door and opens it, disclosing*

LORD and LADY ROCKSTONE.)

LADY R. What is this I hear about the downfall of civilization?

NIGEL Ah! Listening at the door!

ROCKSTONE There was no particular reason to listen. Everybody's been shouting at the top of their voices.

LADY R. What is it, Helen?

HELEN The snow-plough's through.

LADY R. At last!

(*To NIGEL.*)

Now I can tell you my real opinion of you.

ROCKSTONE Don't be ridiculous Ethel. This isn't a time for frivolity.

LADY R. I had no intention of giving a frivolous opinion.

HELEN Mother darling. Nigel's got the papers.

ROCKSTONE What's that? Here, let me see. I want to see what War Loans dropped to.

NIGEL Just a minute. As this is a grand dramatic episode I think we ought to have a suitable audience.

(PAUL and VIOLET appear.)

Oh, here they are.

VIOLET What is it?

ROCKSTONE (to PAUL) Nothing that concerns you, sir.

PAUL Oh stop gargling!

LADY R. Really!

NIGEL In order to relieve the tension I will explain for the last time that we are now once more in touch with the world, and that we are about to learn its fate. What's the date of this paper, Forsythe?

FORSYTHE Yesterday, sir. Dropped by aeroplane from Zurich.

NIGEL Good. Lord Rockstone, you have a clear resonant voice, will you oblige us?

(ROCKSTONE snatches the paper. They all crowd round. NIGEL retires and stands watching them with folded arms.)

ROCKSTONE (reading) Rumoured engagement of Miss Greta Garbo.

ALL What?

PAUL No. Look at the stop press.

ROCKSTONE Miss Greta Garbo issues a stern denial.

LADY R. It's the wrong date!

ROCKSTONE March 2nd. It's yesterday.

(A moments silence. They all turn to NIGEL.)

ROCKSTONE What does this mean?

NIGEL (*slowly, rather seriously*) I'm afraid it means that you've all been rather badly fooled.

ROCKSTONE You mean to say . . .

LADY R. *Tou* did it?

HELEN There isn't any war?

NIGEL No. Not even a little one.

VIOLET Oh Paul.

(*She throws herself on to PAUL and cries happily.*)

ROCKSTONE I am completely at a loss.

LADY R. It's *not* true?

PAUL Of all the damned low-down tricks.

NIGEL Thank you. As a matter of fact, now I come to think of it, the whole affair was in somewhat questionable taste.

HELEN (*tensely*) Why did you do it?

NIGEL I'll tell you in a minute.

LADY R. *How* did you do it?

NIGEL Ah.

ROCKSTONE I insist upon an explanation. What about the previous papers?

VIOLET You aren't . . . joking . . . Nigel?

NIGEL Not now, darling.

ROCKSTONE The man's a born liar.

NIGEL Yes. (*Brightly*) Why don't we all sit down?

ROCKSTONE I demand an explanation.

NIGEL Well — you can listen just as well sitting down, can't you? Or does the blood go to your . . . away from your heads?

LADY R. Sit down. We've got to humour him.

(They all sit down. NIGEL stands in the middle of them.)

NIGEL Now then.

HELEN Why did you do it?

NIGEL First I want to explain *how* I did it. It was extraordinarily simple. The idea came to me the night before last.

(To ROCKSTONE.)

It was entirely your fault, of course.

ROCKSTONE Mine?

NIGEL Entirely. Your conversation at dinner.

ROCKSTONE I don't remember any conversation.

NIGEL I'll remind you. We'd been snowed for forty-eight hours. The last news we had was three days old. Among the items of that news was a report of a rather delicate situation between England and America. Any sane man would have realized that the problem could be solved in five minutes. But the world is not exclusively composed of sane men.

ROCKSTONE *(ironically)* I'm well aware of that.

NIGEL I sat back there . . . *(He speaks rather dreamily)* and I half closed my eyes . . . and I thought of the little paragraph which had crept into the newspapers, sixteen years ago. Assassination of an archduke in Serbia. A funny little archduke whose name nobody could pronounce, even if they wanted to. And I thought of how that paragraph grew, and grew, how it swelled out into a

column, how it was given great black headlines, how it burst through the whole press of the world, and started a blaze that nobody will ever put out.

ROCKSTONE We're not talking about the last war.

NIGEL No. But what was the difference? The mentality's still there. *Tour* mentality was exactly the same. You were perfectly prepared to see, in a little thing like that the cause for a World War. You'd been without news for three days. It had made you jumpy. You'd dreamt of war, because you've got war minds. And gradually, just because of the poison which was in you, we became filled with poison too. We were surrounded by silence and snow. Instead of sleeping in that silence and leaving that snow white, we deliberately filled the silence with uproar, we deliberately trampled on the snow until it was black and splashed with blood.

ROCKSTONE We!

NIGEL Yes, all of us. (*Looking at VIOLET*) Or nearly all of us. That's why I tried this experiment. It was almost too easy. We were snowed up. That at least was true. We hadn't a telephone. The wireless was run down. The whole thing was ready for me. I've got a little printing press at the back of the house.

LADY R. So that's how it was done.

NIGEL Precisely. It took me rather under three hours. I was amazed that you all took it so easily. Why, if you'd even noticed the dates on the back you'd have seen that the thing was a fake. But you

didn't study them. You were far too anxious for it to happen. Most of you.

ROCKSTONE Well I'm damned.

NIGEL I say everybody! I'm rather thrilled.

HELEN *(bitterly)* Thrilled?

NIGEL Yes. I'll tell you why.

(They gather round.)

You see, I'm writing a play around this very situation. This looks to me just like the end of Act Two. And I'm terribly anxious to see what Act Three is going to be.

(To HELEN.)

Aren't you?

(They all stare at him.)

C U R T A I N

ACT III

During this Act the curtain is lowered for a few moments to indicate the lapse of five hours.

SCENE:

The same. It is four o'clock on the morning of the following day. The curtain rises on darkness, broken by a solitary light on Nigel's desk, where he sits writing. He is pale, with tousled hair, and one guesses by the half empty whisky bottle by his side, that he is a little drunk. The floor around him is littered with scraps of paper.

He reads:

[All the following, until page 235 represents NIGEL'S soliloquy, or rather, his reading of his own play. The stage is occupied by NIGEL alone, playing all the parts.~]

\When any dialogue or stage direction occurs which is not from NIGEL'S imaginary play it is underlined,

NIGEL (*reading*) Act III. Morning of the following day. A fresh storm has blown up in the night, and through the windows one sees only a sheet of grey, driving snow.

(Gets up and looks through curtains?)

Well, it looks as if that'll be accurate, anyway.

(At desk) again, reading.}

When the curtain rises, the stage is empty. The table is laid for breakfast. Enter FORSYTHE, who puts coffee and hot milk on the hot-plate, left. Enter VIOLET, who looks extremely bright. (*Aside*) I bet she does, too.

VIOLET (brightly) Good morning, Forsythe. What an awful day!

FORSYTHE Yes, miss. Worse than ever, this morning.

VIOLET (still more brightly) Do you think we shall be able to get away this morning?

FORSYTHE Doesn't look much like it, miss.

VIOLET (with supreme brightness) Never mind. I'm ravenous. (VIOLET goes to hot-plate, helps herself liberally to eggs and bacon, and sits down. Exit FORSYTHE. A moment later one hears him energetically beating the gong outside.)

(NIGEL *beats inkstand to imitate gong?*)

(NIGEL *continues to read.*)

NIGEL (Enter Lady Rockstone.)

LADY R. (snappily) Why anybody should consider it necessary to make that abominable noise this morning, I fail to understand.

VIOLET I thought it was rather a nice, jolly noise.

LADY R. I believe you'd say anything was a nice jolly noise — even if you'd been sitting on the walls of Jericho.

VIOLET Why, was there a lot of noise in Jericho?

(*Aside.*)

I wonder if that'll get a laugh?

LADY R. I know nothing about Jericho.

VIOLET (complacently) Then why d'you talk about it at this time in the morning?

LADY R. Oh — I'm so angry about last night.

NIGEL *(Aside, turning over leaves rapidly.)*

Yes. That's all right. Useful padding at any rate.

Let's get on to my scene with Helen.

(Looking straight ahead of him.)

Helen and Nigel 1 Act III.

(He laughs. Then he bends his head and reads the stage directions in a monotonous sing-song voice, returning to his normal voice when the dialogue begins.)

(HELEN is sitting on the sofa, looking straight in front of her. An unlit cigarette is in her hands.

Enter NIGEL, briskly.)

Here, I'd better act this.

(NIGEL gets up and goes to door, holding papers in his hand, and reading from them as he walks about.)

NIGEL Good morning, darling. (HELEN does not reply.)

NIGEL I said 'good morning'. Oh, I see, we're not going to speak, aren't we? (HELEN does not reply.) (NIGEL tiptoes up to her, strikes a match

(NIGEL does so) which she blows out.)

NIGEL Shall I go away? (HELEN gives no reply.)
Very well.

(NIGEL sits down on sofa, folds his arms and smiles. Suddenly the smile fades from his face and he looks round at the imaginary HELEN in consternation)

NIGEL Darling, you're not crying? What is it?

HELEN (NIGEL reads dryly and quickly from MS.)

You're such a cad, playing that trick on us.

NIGEL I know. But can't we forget all about that?

HELEN You'd no right to torture us.

NIGEL Torture you? Don't you think I was torturing myself, too?

(Aside.)

Here, I seem to be getting the better of this argument.

(Puts down papers)

Now — what would her attitude be? What is her attitude?

(Looks up to ceiling)

Helen (Louder)

Helen \ (A pause)

No — she's asleep.

(Smiles)

Millions and millions of miles away.

(He blows her a kiss)

That's for you, Helen. Wherever you may be. Where was I? Oh, yes. Don't you think I was torturing myself, too?

HELEN (crying) You made us all look such fools.

NIGEL You didn't look a fool, darling.

HELEN Didn't I?

NIGEL You gave me the strongest proof any man could wish for.

(Turns over pages.)

Yes. That's all right. Now, let's get to the part I really like — the big speech.

(He reads, but he only occasionally glances at his MS. It is as though he knew the speech by heart. He says, slowly.)

I wonder if this is only a play, or if it'll be life as well?

(Then he glances at the MS. and half speaks, half reads:)

Listen', darling. You told me, last night, that I was like a child crying in the dark. I wonder if you knew how true that was? I wonder if you knew how much I cried, and how deep the darkness was?

(He puts down the papers and the audience does not know whether he is reciting a speech from his play or whether he is speaking impromptu.)

I've always been in darkness, ever since I can remember. I'm frightened of life. I suppose that's what drives me on to challenge it — the same sort of spirit that makes you shout out 'Who's there?' when you wake up in the night.

(NIGEL shouts out again, "Who's there?" turning his head quickly. Then he pulls himself together quickly and forces a smile. He repeats: 'when you wake up in the night.' There is a slight pause. He continues?)

That's what made me play that trick on you all.

I don't know whether I'm a coward or a hero. One can't tell, till the moment comes. I can see myself going out, some fine, radiant morning, to the sound of trumpets, and getting a bullet through the breast and rejoicing to see the red blood flow and drip down and mingle with the earth — the earth that's so soon to cover me — and I can see myself skulking away, on some grey twilight, behind the lines, like a ghost, through gaunt deserted buildings, till I was only a poor damned, dancing silhouette on the horizon, without honour and without soul . . . which is the real me? I don't know. In my heart there is sunrise and sunset — nights that are starry and nights that are dull — there is music and storm and silence — but even in the silence there is a whisper which has in it every cadence of every melody that's ever drifted over this restless world — the agonizing music of the words when I say them — I love you.

(There is a sudden knocking on the door.)

(NIGEL'S imaginary play ceases here, and the real play is resumed.)

(The rapping becomes louder. NIGEL starts violently.)

NIGEL Hullo — who's there?

FORSYTHE *(from outside)* It's me, sir.

NIGEL *(staring wildly at the door)* Who is it?
Come in!

(He throws down his papers on the desk, and stands waiting.)

(FORSYTHE *appears*, a grotesque figure in a dressing-gown with rumpled hair. He stands blinking at the light.)

NIGEL (*astonished*) Forsythe! What on earth do you want?

FORSYTHE Beg pardon, sir. Thought I heard voices, sir.

NIGEL (*somewhat embarrassed*) Well — you did. I've been reading a play.

FORSYTHE (*dubiously*) Oh, I see, sir.

(*He peers into the darkness*)

NIGEL (*irritably*) What are you looking for? There isn't anybody else here. Damn it all, you ought to know my habits well enough. I was reading to myself. And now you've entirely interrupted my chain of thought. It's most annoying.

(*He switches on the light.*)

FORSYTHE I'm very sorry, sir. But the — the reading sounded so, er, 'eated, sir, that I got up, and then when I saw that Mr. Jack wasn't in his room . . .

NIGEL Well, what's that got to do with me ?

FORSYTHE And 'is bed's not been slept in either, sir.

NIGEL Oh really. This is all very irritating. What d'you want to bother me at this time of night for?

FORSYTHE. Well. It was really Mr. Jack, sir ...

NIGEL Well — I don't know where he is.

FORSYTHE No, sir.

NIGEL You didn't expect to find him down here, did you?

FORSYTHE In a manner of speaking, I did, sir.

NIGEL Why?

FORSYTHE I'm afraid you'll think I'm presuming,
sir ...

NIGEL (*impatiently*) Oh, come on. There's no need to keep me waiting up all night.

FORSYTHE Well, sir — I did think there might 'ave been something upsetting like, in the letter 'e wrote you to-night.

NIGEL What letter?

FORSYTHE Why, sir, the one I gave you before I locked up — after the others 'ad gone to bed.

NIGEL Good Lord! Yes. I'd forgotten all about it. Where did I put it, do you know?

FORSYTHE In your pocket, sir.

(NIGEL *feels in his side pocket.*)

No, inside.

NIGEL Yes, here it is. (*He holds it in his hand and looks at Forsythe*) When did he give you this?

FORSYTHE Before dinner, sir.

NIGEL Yes, but what time?

FORSYTHE Must 'ave been about half-past six.

NIGEL (*a note of fear in his voice, and turning away*)
Half-past six.

(*He turns and opens letter?*)

FORSYTHE (*now feeling a little more at ease, and speaking facing the audience, as NIGEL's back is turned*)
With special orders not to deliver it till everybody'd gone to bed. Particular attention he laid on that sir. And said 'e was going up to 'is room to rest, sir,

and that 'e wouldn't be wanting any dinner. So naturally I thought there might be something disagreeable, and then when I 'eard the voices, and saw his door open, and 'is bed not slept in ...

NIGEL (*turning round quickly*) Forsythe! He's gone.

FORSYTHE Gone, sir? Where?

NIGEL (*pointing wildly to window*) Out there! Away!

FORSYTHE But sir ... that's . . . that's suicide.

NIGEL (*walking unsteadily to desk*) Oh my God — it's worse than that. It's murder. And I've murdered him.

FORSYTHE (*becoming suddenly efficient*) Look here, sir, you'd better have a drink. (*Pours one out*)

NIGEL Thank you. (*Drinks*)

FORSYTHE Whatever possessed 'im to do a thing like that, sir?

NIGEL I don't know. Yes, I do know. But — well anyway he wasn't here for the explanation.

FORSYTHE Lord, sir, I never noticed that.

NIGEL Neither did I. He took our little joke seriously. He decided he couldn't wait any longer. He's on his way to the great war. (*Laughs hysterically*) God! What a fool I've been.

FORSYTHE Well, sir, you were never to know that anything like that would happen.

NIGEL A lot of good that does. Did he say anything to you when he gave you this?

FORSYTHE No, sir. Not beyond the time he wanted it delivered.

NIGEL He didn't give you any other letter?

FORSYTHE No, sir.

NIGEL Not to Miss Ashton?

FORSYTHE Why no, sir.

NIGEL (*to himself*) Then nobody else knows.
(*Quickly*) Where are my skis?

FORSYTHE (*awed*) You're not thinking of going after him, sir?

NIGEL (*ironically*) Thinking! (*He stamps over to door*)

FORSYTHE But, sir, you can't. It's madness. It's as black as pitch. . . .

NIGEL (*tensely*) I know that.

FORSYTHE There's a forty-mile-an-hour gale. Lord knows how deep the drifts'll be by now . . .

NIGEL (*almost shouting*) And I'd be glad if they were deeper — as deep as hell — to bury me in. (*He controls himself*) Forsythe, there's no time to waste. Are the skis outside?

FORSYTHE Yes, sir. In the porch.

NIGEL Get the lantern, please. And my overcoat.

FORSYTHE You'd better take some brandy with you, sir.

NIGEL All right. I'll get that. Hurry up, please.

(*Exit FORSYTHE.*)

(*NIGEL goes to a drawer, takes out a flask, puts it in his pocket. Then he switches out the main light, leaving the desk light shining, muttering as he does so:*)

We don't want the whole house down here.

(He goes to the window and opens it. The curtains blow violently into the room and there is a low moaning of wind. He stands there in an attitude of challenge, while the wind falls and rises.)

(Enter TORSYTHE with coat and 'lantern. He helps NIGEL into the coat. As he does so, NIGEL says:)

Listen, Forsythe. Nobody's to know about this. D'you understand?

FORSYTHE How do you mean, sir?

NIGEL Well — if by any chance I shouldn't come back . . .

FORSYTHE *(with real agony in his voice)* Please, sir.

NIGEL Now then. None of that. If by any chance I shouldn't, I don't want any 'hero' business, see?

FORSYTHE No, sir.

NIGEL Then listen. I never received that letter, see?

FORSYTHE Yes, Sir.

NIGEL And I didn't go out to get Mr. Jack, see?

FORSYTHE Yes, sir.

NIGEL The reason I went out was because . . .

(He pauses, searching for a reason. Then his face lights up.)

Because I was drunk! See? I'd been writing, and drinking too much, and at four o'clock in the morning I rang for you and you came down and I told you I was bored and wanted some fresh air, and was going out ski-ing, and you tried to prevent me, but I was too drunk, and just went. And then in the morning . . .

FORSYTHE To-morrow morning, sir?

NIGEL Yes. Then if anything goes wrong — then you can put the letter to me on Mr. Jack's dressing-table. You'll have to get a new envelope for it, but that's easy enough . . .

FORSYTHE Oh — Mr. Nigel . . .

NIGEL So long, Forsythe. (*At door*) And turn out that light. It's shining out on to the snow. (*Through door*) And Forsythe!

FORSYTHE Yes, sir.

NIGEL You can tear up all that manuscript on my desk. It won't be wanted, now.

(The curtains blow out again.)

(FORSYTHE goes to desk and switches out light. There is a sound of tearing paper.)

(The wind rises. Through the windows one sees a lantern swinging. It blinks — once, twice, three times. Even that light at last is swallowed up in the enveloping darkness.)

CURTAIN

(When the curtain rises again it is morning about ten. It is grey and miserable outside. At the table sits PAUL, swallowing his last cup of coffee. VIOLET sits by him.)

PAUL (*amiably*) I wish you wouldn't watch me like that. It makes me choke. And let's have some more coffee.

VIOLET (*removing pot*) You've had far too much coffee already.

PAUL But I *like* too much coffee.

VIOLET Well, you're not going to get it. It ties your inside up into knots.

PAUL Well, what's an inside for? (*He takes her hand and kisses it*)

VIOLET (*firmly*) You're not going to have any more coffee.

(*FORSYTHE enters and VIOLET draws away her hand?*)

And behave yourself.

FORSYTHE Oh — beg pardon, miss. I thought everybody had finished.

VIOLET D'you want to clear away?

FORSYTHE Well, miss . . .

VIOLET Then you can.

PAUL Look here . . .

VIOLET We've *quite* finished, Forsythe.

PAUL (*to VIOLET*) What about Nigel and Jack? They haven't been down yet?

VIOLET Oh, yes — what about them, Forsythe?

FORSYTHE (*awkwardly*) Mr. Chelmsford and Mr. Willington are — er, having breakfast in their rooms, miss.

PAUL Oh — all right.

(*FORSYTHE rapidly removes breakfast things.*)

(*To VIOLET.*)

Since I've been denied my coffee, I shall fall asleep on you in the afternoon.

VIOLET (*indignantly*) Paul!

PAUL I don't mean literally.

VIOLET Well, you needn't have said that either.

PAUL (*grinning*) Gee, you're hard to please.

VIOLET (*relenting*) No, I'm not. You can have some more coffee. After all, it is your inside.

PAUL No, it isn't any longer. I've given it to you.
(*He kisses her properly*) Bless you.

(*Exit FORSYTHE.*)

VIOLET I say. Doesn't Forsythe look like the morning after?

PAUL Yes — I guess he's feeling pretty ashamed of himself.

VIOLET I don't see why. After all, it was all Nigel's fault.

PAUL Do you feel sore at Nigel?

VIOLET No. Not a bit. I ought to, I suppose, but . . . (*Going up to him*) . . . you know why I don't. Oh, Paul — I'm so glad you don't have to go to the war.

PAUL (*kissing her*) Darling! I say, do you think the others are sore?

VIOLET I haven't seen any of them yet.

PAUL I know *one* thing that Lady Rockstone'll say.

VIOLET What?

PAUL That she suspected it all the time.

VIOLET Oh! She *couldn't* tell such a whopper.

PAUL Couldn't she? You wait. Here she is.

(*Enter LADY ROCKSTONE.*)

LADY R. (*brightly*) Good morning.

PAUL and VIOLET Good morning.

LADY R. *What* a day! It's worse than ever.

VIOLET Did you hear the snow-plough, Lady Rockstone?

LADY R. *Hear* it? It kept me awake all night.

VIOLET I rather liked it. I thought it sounded like a cat purring.

LADY R. I thought it sounded like a rhinoceros having hysterics. Still, we all have our views about things. (*To PAUL*) And how are you feeling after Nigel's little joke, Mr. Tanner?

PAUL Fine, thanks. And you?

LADY R. Oh, very well indeed. Of course, / suspected it all along.

PAUL (*to VIOLET*) There! What did I tell you?

LADY R. I beg your pardon?

VIOLET (*hastily*) Paul had only just been telling me that he was sure that there was *one* person who hadn't been entirely taken in, and that was you.

LADY R. (*beaming*) Really? How nice of him! Of course the whole thing was absolutely ridiculous. The idea of *war* nowadays — when so many people remember the last war — (*quickly*) of course, I was only quite a girl at the time — still one does remember things . . .

PAUL What sort of things, Lady Rockstone?

LADY R. Well, we were all bored to death! There was nothing to *do*, there was nobody to *see*, there was no decent *food* — in fact the whole thing was a complete frost, as far as Society was concerned. Oh, no — that'll never happen again.

VIOLET (*slyly*) It was wonderful, the way you played up, and didn't give the whole thing away.

LADY R (*pleased*) Oh — I had to enter into the spirit of it, of course. You see, I understand Nigel so well. Dear Nigel ! Full of tricks, and ideas. It's quite difficult to keep pace with him sometimes. Ah, here's my husband.

(*Enter LORD ROCKSTONE.*)

LORD R. Good morning, my love. (*Kisses her*)

LADY R. Good morning.

LORD R. Morning, Violet. Morning, Tanner. (*Heartily*) Well, *you* were all pretty well fooled yesterday, what?

VIOLET and PAUL We? What about you?

LADY R. (*sharply*) You're not going to tell us that you suspected?

LORD R. Suspected? Ha! I *knew*!

LADY R. (*in sibilant tones*) Really George, I wonder that God doesn't strike you dead.

LORD R. What's the matter? Just because you happen to have had your legs slightly pulled.

LADY R. Slightly? What about yours? Your legs were pulled off and thrown out of the window.

LORD R. Really, I ...

LADY R. Why didn't you tell us, then? Why did you allow us all to be tortured?

VIOLET *But you weren't tortured, Lady Rockstone.*

LADY R. No, I know, but . . .

LORD R. You're not trying to make out that *you* suspected?

LADY R. (*icily*) I was quite certain from' the beginning.

LORD R. Then why *did you* allow us to be tortured then?

LADY R. (*to VIOLET*) There, you see! Tu quoque! That proves it.

LORD R. Proves what?

LADY R. Whenever you begin to hurl 'tu quoques' in my face I know you're in the wrong.

LORD R. Well, that wasn't a 'tu quoque'.

LADY R. Yes, it was. And, anyway, whether it was or not, I'm a woman and I've got my own opinions of 'tu quoques'.

LORD R. You kept them to yourself yesterday, anyway.

LADY R. So did you!

PAUL (*he has been nudging VIOLET, and gets up and says to LADY ROCKSTONE*) I'll ask you to excuse us, Lady Rockstone.

LADY R. Excuse you for what?

VIOLET Paul's going to read me a new poem.

LADY R. In that case we certainly will excuse you.

(HELEN *appears in the doorway. She looks pale and nervous.*)

(*As PAUL and VIOLET go out, they say:*)

Hullo, Helen.

HELEN **Hullo.**

PAUL Slept well?

HELEN (*dully*) Yes, thanks.

(*Exeunt PAUL and VIOL!T.*)

LORD R. Hullo, darling.

HELEN **Hullo.**

LADY R. (*turning round*) Oh — there you are.

(HELEN *gives them each a brief kiss and sits down listlessly.*)

LORD R. Had breakfast?

HELEN Yes. Where's Jack, d'you know?

LADY R. I don't know where anybody is. This house is like a rabbit-warren — everybody popping in and out.

LORD R. You look tired, you know.

HELEN I am rather.

LADY R. (*coldly*) I suppose that's due to the strain of being the only person in the house who didn't know that the whole thing yesterday was a joke.

HELEN I'd rather not talk about yesterday, if you don't mind.

LORD R. (*to LADY ROCKSTON*) There, you see. You'll only upset people if you keep harping on that subject.

LADY R. I?

HELEN (*restlessly*) I wonder where Jack *can* be?

LORD R. Have you looked in his room?

HELEN Yes. He wasn't there. He wasn't in the library, either.

LADY R. Why this sudden violent desire to see Jack?

HELEN (*tonelessly*) I only wanted to tell him that I'm going to marry him.

LORD R. and LADY '. What?

HELEN (*calmly*) Marry him. M A double R Y.

LADY R. Really, darling. I wish you wouldn't say these silly things. You gave me quite a shock.

LORD R. (*chortling*) Oh, don't you *see*? She's caught the prevailing complaint. Practical jokes.

LADY R. Well, I think it's a very silly one. I'm sure Nigel would think so, too.

HELEN (*bitterly*) Nigel!

LADY R. What are you saying 'Nigel' like that for? **that's he** done?

HELEN What's he *done*? Oh — you're both of you incredible.

LORD R. (*seriously*) Now Helen, my dear, you mustn't speak like that.

LADY R. (*to* LORD ROCKSTON*fi*) I believe she's serious.

LORD R. Oh, don't be ridiculous. (*To* HELEN) Now Helen.

HELEN (*sharply*) Do you mind allowing me to speak for a moment?

LADY R. (*to* LORD ROCKSTONE, *SOttO* *VOCe*) **I told** you so.

HELEN I'm going to marry Jack. I hate Nigel as I've never hated anybody in my life. It may sound extraordinary to you, considering the fact that yesterday I was going to marry him in spite of everything, but I can't help it. I hate him. Don't you see? That *mind!* *His* mind! There's something evil about it. There's something definitely evil about anybody who could invent that sort of thing, and sit back, and laugh ...

LADY R. Evil? I know the affair was all in rather questionable taste, but still . . .

LORD R. After all, Nigel's an artist.

HELEN Well, I don't want to be that sort of artist's wife.

LADY R. Why not?

HELEN Can't you see? I'm not going to be just a — a subject for analysis. Something to be watched because I'm good copy. I'm not going to have my emotions X-rayed — to be put in all sorts of horrible situations to see how I'd react.

LORD R. Do you imagine that Nigel is going to do this sort of thing again?

HELEN He's done it once. That's enough.

LADY R. Now, my dear, do please try to think calmly about this. Of course I know it's difficult up here, with this abominable climate and the snow and everybody thoroughly upset and disorganized, but I do beg of you not to do anything rash. You must remember that marriage is not — *{Looking at ROCKSTONE}* ahem! — entirely an affair of romance . . .

HELEN I'm not asking for romance. I've had more than enough of it. I want to get back to truth.

LORD R. Quite. Well, what is the truth of the matter? If you marry Jack you'll just be plain Mrs. Willington. Well, what's that? 'Who's Willington, people will say?' 'Lord Rockstone's secretary . . .'

LADY R. Whereas it would be something to be Mrs. Nigel Chelmsford. Of course, you might have done very much better for yourself, very much better, still, at least it would be *something*.

HELEN Yes. It would. It would be hell.

LORD R. Helen, my dear . . .

HELEN Hell ! Hell! (*Suddenly relaxed?*) I'm sorry. I'm terribly tired. I didn't sleep very well.

LADY R. Why do you want to marry Jack?

HELEN I'm going to marry him because . . .

LADY R. Why?

HELEN (*sullenly*) I've already explained.

LADY R. You have not. And if you can't explain, you obviously don't love him. (*Apause*) Well?

HELEN I'm going to marry him.

LADY R. (*to ROCKSTONE*) You see? She hasn't once said that she loved him.

HELEN (*defiantly*) I love everything that he stands for.

LADY R. What nonsense! It sounds like falling in love with a member of parliament because of his platform.

HELEN (*suddenly breaking down*) Oh — I'm so unhappy.

LORD R. (*with awkward tenderness*) Look here, my dear, why don't you go and lie down and think it all over?

HELEN I can't think any more.

LORD R. No, I know. It's all been too much for you.

LADY R. It's all been too much for all of us. I don't know whether I'm standing on my head or my heels.

HELEN I don't want to lie down. I want to find Jack . . . , *(She runs out)*

LORD R. This is a pretty state of affairs.

LADY R. I told you from the beginning it was madness to come here in this season.

LORD R. What's the season got to do with it?

LADY R. Everything. It's all a question of liver.

LORD R. I wish I could think the same.

LADY R. Well, what are we going to do?

LORD R. I don't see there's anything we *can* do.

LADY R. We can't leave her to run about the house in her present condition. Breaking off engagements, and then proposing to another man in the same breath. Can't you find Jack and speak to him before she does?

LORD R. What can I say to him?

LADY R. Tell him what's happened. Tell him that Helen's not quite herself and say you're sure you can trust him to behave with proper discretion, and not take advantage of this situation.

LORD R. It's going to be damnably awkward.

LADY R. Well, can you think of anything better?

LORD R. No, I can't. All right, I'll do it. And meanwhile you'd better drop a hint to Nigel.

LADY R. Very well. Which way are you going?

LORD R. *(at door)* Round to the green room. If he isn't still upstairs, that's about the only place he could be.

LADY R. And I shall go straight up to Nigel and batter on his door until he lets me in.

(Exeunt.)

(Enter FORSYTHE. He looks pale and distracted. He sets a cushion straight, winds the clock, and then goes to look out of the window, his fingers tapping nervously on the pane.)

(The windows blow open. NIGEL staggers in.

FORSYTHE *runs Up to* NIGEL.)

FORSYTHE Mr. Nigel!

NIGEL Get me a drink.

FORSYTHE *(getting it)* Oh sir. I've been through hell, I 'ave.

NIGEL Yes. So have I. Come on, man. . . .

FORSYTHE There you are, sir.

(He stands back, radiantly happy, while NIGEL starts to press soda syphon.)

I've not slept a wink, sir, wondering what had become of you.

NIGEL Quite. Do you mind pressing that for me? My arm's broken.

FORSYTHE Your arm's broken?

NIGEL Yes. The right one.

(FORSYTHE puts out his hand.)

No, don't bother. Give me a drink.

(FORSYTHE, frightened, does so. NIGEL tosses it down.)

NIGEL *(in a queer, dry voice)* Forsythe!

FORSYTHE Yes, sir?

NIGEL Mr. Jack . . .

FORSYTHE Yes, sir.

(NIGEL suddenly breaks down and cries.)

FORSYTHE (awed) You don't mean to say . . .

NIGEL I don't know what to do. I was in the valley, down there. I practically — tripped over him. And then I found he'd . . . (he shudders) the neck was broken. His head hung over like . . .

(NIGEL throws his head back in a ghastly gesture.)

I got hold of the — body — and managed to drag him up about a hundred yards — you know — on to that rock that sticks out over the valley — and then I couldn't get any farther. It was so damned dark, and the wind nearly knocked me over. Well, then I fell down and I suppose that's when I bust my arm.

FORSYTHE Is 'e there still, sir?

NIGEL No. I managed to get away to old Dubois' cottage, and I broke the window there and got 'em up. He and his son are bringing — Mr. Jack — home. They'll be here at any minute now.

FORSYTHE Dead!

(NIGEL sobs hysterically. There is no other sound in the room. Suddenly he pulls himself together.)

NIGEL Where's Helen — Miss Ashton?

FORSYTHE I passed her on the way down, sir.

NIGEL Go and get her, please.

FORSYTHE But, sir — your arm . . .

NIGEL (*monotonously*) That can wait. Go and get her, please.

(*FORSYTHE goes out?*)

(*NIGEL pulls himself together, straightens his hair, and stands by the mantel-piece*)

(*Enter HELEN. She is pale, remote, hostile.*)

HELEN So there you are.

NIGEL Yes. (*He steps forward*) Helen . . .

HELEN (*quickly*) Just a minute. I'm sure you've got a lot of charming things to tell me, but for the moment I want to speak myself.

NIGEL But Helen, I've got something I *must* say.

HELEN I'll listen to you when you've listened to me.

NIGEL But it's about Jack.

HELEN Really? (*Coldly*) How amusing. I was going to talk about Jack, too.

NIGEL YOU?

HELEN Yes. (*Brightly*) I'm going to marry him.

(*NIGEL staggers back*)

(*HELEN does not notice this, but she glances at him when he does not reply*)

Well? Haven't you got anything to say about it?

NIGEL Let me think a minute.

HELEN Really. I didn't know that you were capable of such genuine emotion.

NIGEL (*turning to her with real agony in his voice*)

Oh-Helen . . .

HELEN (*sullenly, turning from him*) It's no use now.

NIGEL No. It's no use.

HELEN Oh. So you agree with me, do you?

(NIGEL stares suddenly round him, walks swiftly to the curtains and draws them.)

What on earth are you doing?

NIGEL *(desperately)* There's — there's too much light — too much snow, I mean. I want to shut it out.

HELEN You're behaving very strangely. *(A little more kindly)* I'm sorry if I broke it with too much of a shock.

NIGEL Yes. *(To himself)* You shouldn't break things with too much of a shock, should you?

HELEN Do you mind standing still for a minute?
(NIGEL turns away from her) Nigel!

NIGEL Yes?

HELEN *(quietly)* You've got to hear this sooner or later. You might as well hear it now.

NIGEL *(in a numbed voice)* Yes. I expect you're right.

(NIGEL sits down in an armchair. His back is turned to Helen.)

(HELEN'S speech is delivered at him, rather than to him)

HELEN I'd like to ask a question first. You were telling the truth — when you said that you invented that story, because of a play you were writing, weren't you?

NIGEL Yes.

HELEN That's all I wanted to know. It's enough. Oh — it's more than enough.

NIGEL **Well?**

HELEN Don't you *see*? Nigel, my dear, you don't really imagine that you love me, do you?

NIGEL (*quietly*) Why not?

HELEN God! Why not? There must be *some* sort of understanding in love.

NIGEL Haven't I understood you?

HELEN The fact that you ask that question at all shows me that it's rather silly to try to explain. Still . . .

NIGEL Go on.

HELEN You don't know—you'll never realize—what yesterday meant to me. I went through the greatest mental agony it's possible for a woman to go through. Everything I trusted seemed to be turned upside down. There was the war—that was bad enough—but then on top of it, there was you, your attitude. It wasn't even as if I could talk it over with you, quietly and reasonably, I knew that if I went to you you'd only be bitter and sarcastic. I had to fight it out alone. I'm not a particularly intellectual person, Nigel. I've got very ordinary ideas and very normal instincts. I had to scrap all those. I had to tell myself, over and over again, that I mustn't trust to those instincts—that the only thing I must trust in was my love of you. It was like fighting against a strong sea—often I nearly drowned in it all—often I just flung myself on my knees and cried, and said: 'I can't . . . I can't, . . .' Everything that I had ever heard or read or felt

made me feel that I despised you. But I got over that somehow. I killed all that part of me. I killed the whole world, except you and me. I somehow or other managed to get to the pitch where I said: 'There's Nigel and there's me and — perhaps — there's God. That's all I know and that's all I want to know. And it was in that mood I came down to you. And — *(passionately)* it was in that mood that you laughed in my face.

NIGEL *(putting out his hand as though to shield himself)* I know — I know . . .

HELEN *(in an outburst)* You know nothing! You feel nothing! You can't — you can't. Your brain's a stage and your emotions are stagey and . . . and . . . my God! I'd rather you'd have taken me by the throat and strangled me than have turned me into one of your contemptible little puppets . . .

NIGEL Helen. *(Tragically)* There are limits — even to my endurance . . .

HELEN *(collecting herself. She is almost crying)* Yes. *(With a curious, unbalanced laugh)* Well? Now, you know. I feel better now. It was not very nice having to say it. But it had to be said. I just wanted to show that I was rather more — of a *-person* — than you seemed to imagine — not just — a subject for analysis. Still, I've said all that. I — I'd better say the rest to Jack.

NIGEL Oh, I can't bear it!

(He gets up and walks to the fireplace.)

HELEN I wish you wouldn't pretend that you minded so much. You don't.

NIGEL. Helen. You can't marry Jack.

HELEN Can't? That's very funny.

(NIGEL goes to the curtains again and looks through?)

Why will you keep meddling with those curtains?

NIGEL (*turning round*) Why do you want to marry him?

HELEN What does that matter to you?

NIGEL It matters terribly.

HELEN He loves me.

NIGEL Do you love him?

HELEN I won't be cross-examined. You — you've no right. Jack's one of the most wonderful people I've ever known.

NIGEL Do you love him? Helen darling, it's not an idle question. It's going to affect the whole course of our lives — how you answer it. Tell me *now—now . . .*

HELEN Why are you in such a hurry?

NIGEL Because . . . because . . . Helen, please. (HELEN *turns away*) Thank God. You don't.

HELEN (*passionately*) I'm going to marry him. You needn't flatter yourself.

NIGEL I'm not thinking of myself.

HELEN That's very strange.

NIGEL Yes, Helen. I've got something to tell you.

HELEN **Well?**

NIGEL It's about Jack.

HELEN I won't insult you by suggesting that you're going to try to influence me against him,

NIGEL Thank you. Listen, Jack wasn't here for the explanation last night.

HELEN What do you mean?

NIGEL I mean —he doesn't — didn't — know about the joke.

HELEN Well? You can tell him, can't you? Or do you want me to?

NIGEL He went out . . .

HELEN Out — where?

NIGEL He went out last night to try and —join up.

HELEN Out? Into that? *(Suddenly frightened)* Nigel, what are you trying to tell me? Hasn't he come back?

NIGEL No.

HELEN Well — he'll be all right, won't he? Nigel — what is it?

NIGEL He had an accident.

HELEN How do you know?

NIGEL I followed him.

HELEN Nigel — it's nothing . . .?

NIGEL I'm afraid . . .

HELEN He's not . . .

(She suddenly bursts into hysterical laughter.)

NIGEL Helen! Helen! Listen!

HELEN Go away! Leave me alone!

NIGEL I must tell you. He's dead now . . . and beyond it all . . .

HELEN Leave me alone.

NIGEL There's nothing I can do or say. I've killed him, I know. But Helen, — please — for his sake.

HELEN (*with blank tragedy*) I want — so much — to die.

NIGEL Not more than I do, darling.

HELEN What happened?

NIGEL It was in the southern valley. Over the big rock. He left a letter. I didn't open it till four o'clock this morning. I went out. I found him. He'd ... it was a quick death.

HELEN Where is he? Why didn't you stay with him?

NIGEL I broke my arm.

HELEN Nigel!

NIGEL It's all right. I got to a cottage. They're bringing him up.

HELEN Then . . . that's why. . . .

(They both turn round to look at the curtains. She clings to his arm.)

Oh — Nigel, I can't bear it, I can't bear it!

NIGEL Darling, please . . .

HELEN It wasn't your fault . . . no, it wasn't ... I shall tell everybody . . . But, Jack.

(She stares at the curtains always.)

They may be coming now. . . .

NIGEL Yes.

HELEN Outside.

NIGEL Yes.

HELEN We must be ready.

NIGEL I've told them to ... *(He pauses)*
I thought, in his own room, would be best.

HELEN I don't mean that. I mean ourselves.

NIGEL I'll do anything.

HELEN Draw back those curtains.

NIGEL I'd rather not.

HELEN Please draw them back.

NIGEL You'll only hurt yourself.

HELEN I can't hurt myself any more.

(NIGEL goes to curtains and draws them. The sun shines in, brilliantly.)

(HELEN speaks with a note of strange hysteria.)

The sun's come out, you see. It's going to be a beautiful day. I expect the snow will be melting, down in the valley. He'd have been able to go, if he'd wanted, so easily. In sunshine, too. He was so young, Nigel. Much younger than you or I. But you were right. I never loved him, Nigel, please give me your hand.

NIGEL *(desperately)* Don't — don't look.

HELEN It's all right. It's quite all right. I wanted to be close to you, that's all. You've — you've had to bear a good deal. They're coming now.

NIGEL I can see nothing.

HELEN They're coming up the slope at the bottom of the drive — round the corner where the snow lies so deep — they're stumbling — he's heavy — that's better — they're coming straight ahead . . .

NIGEL (*suddenly breaking down*) I can't! I can't!
I'm not strong enough!

*(He breaks away and flings himself in a chair,
facing audience, burying his face in his arm.)*

HELEN It's all right, Nigel. Everything's going
to be all right — some day.

*(She stands facing the window. The silence is
broken by NIGEL'S sobs.)*

*(Two men, with their heads bowed, pass
slowly by the window, carrying a stretcher,
over which a coarse tarpaulin is stretched.
The sun shines on them, and then, they are
gone.)*

*(HELEN stands very still, like a soldier at
attention.)*

C U R T A I N

When the Crash Comes

**A PLAY IN THREE ACTS AND
A PROLOGUE** .

CHARACTERS

In the order in which they speak

IVY MAXWELL
LADY POOLE
HON. ROBERT POOLE
MRS. MAXWELL
JAMES MAXWELL
HON. CELIA POOLE
FORSTER
MAJOR VERNON ASH

[Prologue. Listening to The Results. The Pooles and the Maxwells in their homeJ]

The Time is after the next General Election

- Act I. Scene i. Drawing-room of Lady Poole's house in Smith Square, Westminster. A week after the election. A morning in May.
- Scene 2. The same. Evening of same day.
- Act II. Scene i. The same. Three weeks later.
- Scene 2. Evening of same day.
- Act III. Scene i. The same. Three days later. Morning.
- Scene 2. Celia's sitting-room in Canning Town. Six months later. Evening.

PROLOGUE

Note. Soft music should accompany this scene.

The curtain rises to a great deal of noise coming from a loud speaker which occupies the centre of the stage.

Against a front-curtain of black velvet we see two families in sharp contrast, the POOLES and the MAXWELLS.

The station of the POOLES is indicated by a luxurious sofa on which LADY POOLE sits, with her daughter CELIA. No other furniture is needed. ROBERT POOLE half sits on the edge of the sofa. He is facing the loud speaker.

The station of the MAXWELLS is similarly indicated. A kitchen table with a pot of tea and three cups. Only two chairs are needed for Mrs. Maxwell and her daughter IVY. JIM MAXWELL half sits on the edge of the table facing the loud speaker.

The POOLES look shocked and incredulous. The MAXWELLS are frankly exultant.

It should be evident to the audience that this treatment is symbolical and that we are supposed to be seeing a glimpse of two widely different homes.

THE voice (as applause dies down) Hullo everybody! Here are a few more results. Birmingham East. John Foster, Communist Party of Great Britain, 21,542; Col. Arthur Thomas, Conservative, 3,406; Miss Phoebe Brown, Liberal, 201. Communist Gain. (Cheers from loud speaker. Families react)

THE VOICE Bournemouth. Fred Slocombe, Communist Party of Great Britain, 19,349; Sir Arthur Payne, Conservative, 2,318. Communist Gain. *(Similar reactions.)*

THE VOICE It is now nearly midnight, and results are still pouring in. At the present moment the state of parties is, Communist Party of Great Britain, 171; Conservatives, 11; Liberals, nil; Independents, 2. Wait a minute. Here's another one. Canning Town . . .

IVY Jim! *It's you!*

LADY POOLE Turn it off for heaven's sake.

BOBBY Just a minute.

VOICE James Maxwell, Communist Party of Great Britain.

MRS. MAXWELL Oh Jiiti, I knew ... I knew you'd do it. ...

JIM Ssh!

VOICE 33,311; Sir Victor Carstairs, Conservative 3>²¹7-

JIM *(proudly)* 30,000 majority!

VOICE Major Seely Fox, Liberal 512.

IVY Listen to them cheering. Isn't it wonderful?

CELIA Listen to them cheering. The fools! Bobby, do turn it off.

VOICE We will now reiterate the state of parties.

MRS. MAXWELL *(happily)* Oh Jim, turn it off now. We know all we want to know.

(JIM and BOBBY advance to loud speaker)

VOICE The state of parties now is, Communist Party of Great Britain 172. . . . *(The voice is shut off)*

JIM *(going to his mother and embracing her)* Well ma, what do you think of your son, now?

MRS. MAXWELL *(tearfully)* I don't know what to say. But I do wish your father were alive to see this day.

CELIA Well? What d'you think's going to happen?

LADY POOLE I don't know. But I'm thankful your father's not alive to see this day.

BOBBY I say. What about a drink?

CELIA There's some brandy over there ... if that's going to do you any good.

LADY POOLE Yes. We'd better drink it while we can. It's probably the last we shall ever get.

(The lights fade out on the Poo/es.)

JIM I say, ma, what about celebrating?

IVY There's still a bit of that stout left, if it's not gone bad.

JIM Come on. *(Pours out for Mrs. Maxwell)*

MRS. MAXWELL Oh I couldn't. *(But she does)*

JIM You Ivy?

IVY I should say so.

JIM And we'll drink to the new England — that I'm going to help to build!

(They all rise> holding their glasses. The lights fade on them too. The music rises to a crescendo and the curtain falls.)

ACT I

SCENE i

Drawing room of LADY POOLE'S house in Smith Square, Westminster. Pretty, luxurious, sunny.

A long balcony runs, without interruption, outside the two tall windows.

The house is on the north side of the square, and you can see Big Ben through the windows.

It is noon.

BOBBY is at the telephone. He is a healthy good-humoured young man of about twenty-two, very nicely dressed.

BOBBY (*in an exasperated tone of voice*) Hullo? Lloyds Bank? Yes. We were cut off. But Mr. Marshall, I've got to have some money. How much is standing to my credit now? Five hundred? Well, it's *my* money, why can't I get it? Oh I know we've got a Communist government, but they can't take away a chap's *money*? Not in England? I simply don't understand. You say I'm not allowed to draw out a single . . . Hullo? *Hullo?* (*He jigs the receiver up and down*) Oh hell! (*He puts the telephone aside*)

(CELIA enters. She is two years older than BOBBY. She is pretty and evidently intelligent. She moves with a quiet dignity. She carries a *paper*.)

CELIA What's the matter?

BOBBY My bank manager won't let me have any money.

CELIA That's nothing new for you, darling, is it?

BOBBY But I've *got* the money. *In* the bank. Five hundred.

CELIA Well, why don't you draw it out?

BOBBY The government won't let me.

CELIA Why not? Have you done anything you shouldn't?

BOBBY Yes, darling. I've saved five hundred pounds. Which is a grave offence in the eyes of a Communist.

CELIA But—you don't mean to say that this applies to everyone?

BOBBY So the bank manager says.

CELIA But—it's preposterous. If you've got the money. (*She takes up telephone*) Here, I'll speak to him.

BOBBY I wouldn't, darling. He's not feeling very gay this morning. He's got a lady in a bright red petticoat sitting on his desk demanding an overdraft in the name of Karl Marx.

CELIA Honestly . . . it's.

BOBBY Yes. Honestly it is.

CELIA What are you going to do?

BOBBY I think I shall sell myself to cook. She's a Bolshevik—judging from her coffee.

CELIA She may have been, but she isn't now. She's just given me this. (*Hands paper*)

BOBBY What is it?

CELIA Read it and see.

BOBBY Where did she get it?

CELIA It was delivered at the back door, by a man in a red tie. He kissed her and called her Comrade.

BOBBY Kissed cook?

CELIA Very heartily, she says.

BOBBY I should say there *was* a revolution on.
(Reads) 'Redistribution of the People Act. By order of the Supreme Council of Direct Action. Be it known that all householders, occupying premises containing accommodation greater than their requirements, as stipulated in the decree issued by the Supreme Council on April the eighteenth ult .. .'

CELIA (*interrupting*) Oh, don't bother to read all that.

BOBBY But what's it all about?

CELIA I'll tell you. It means that people with big houses, like this, will be forced to accommodate people from districts which are overcrowded.

BOBBY Accommodate? But d'you mean to say they could come and live with us?

CELIA Certainly.

BOBBY Here?

CELIA Yes — here.

BOBBY But what sort of people?

CELIA Anybody.

BOBBY Even if we don't know anything about them?

CELIA Quite.

BOBBY (*stunned*) Come and live with *us*? Strangers?
(*Laughs*) Oh — the thing must be a joke.

CELIA It isn't. It's there in black and white.

BOBBY But — this is England. It isn't Russia.

CELIA (*bitterly*) Is there so much difference, now?

BOBBY Look here. Let's get this thing straight.
Supposing we refuse to have them?

CELIA How can we refuse? It's the law.

BOBBY But supposing they're large smelly people,
with moustaches?

CELIA They probably will be. In which case we
shall have to call them Comrade.

BOBBY I refuse to call anybody Comrade. It's
indecent.

CELIA It is, isn't it?

BOBBY I say, Celia. Supposing they do park
some family down on us, couldn't we make it so
awful for them that they'd have to go?

CELIA How?

BOBBY Well, you could get out your violin again.

CELIA Thank you.

BOBBY And I could stay in the bath for hours.

CELIA You always do.

BOBBY Anyway that probably wouldn't worry
them.

CELIA I know. Those sort of people only use a
bath for washing socks. It makes me hate the lower
classes, (*Appealing to him*) I never used to be like
that, did I, darling?

BOBBY I should say not. Why, you were always messing about in the East End.

CELIA And I didn't do it for the fun of the thing. I did try. And I got to be quite fond of some of them. But now they've got the upper hand like this . . .

BOBBY They've certainly got that.

CELIA Well — don't let's worry too much. Perhaps it won't happen at all. Hullo Mother.

(Enter LADY POOLE. She is a worldly, disillusioned woman but one likes and trusts her. She is about forty-five.)

LADY POOLE *(who is evidently in no good humour)* Oh, here you are, darlings, I've got something to show you.

BOBBY *(gloomily)* So have we.

LADY POOLE Well, I'm sure it's not as interesting as this. *(She waves some papers)*

CELIA What is it?

LADY POOLE *(taking some of the papers between her thumb and forefinger, holding them up as though they were poisonous, and allowing them to flutter to the floor. She speaks in slow, glacial tones)* Meat coupons!

CELIA What for?

LADY POOLE In order, darling, that we may obtain meat. *(Repeating gesture)* Fish coupons!

BOBBY Where did you get them?

LADY POOLE They were given to cook. By a man who kissed her and called her Comrade.

CELIA Again?

LADY POOLE Why — have there been others?

BOBBY Dozens, I should think.

LADY POOLE Good heavens. Well, I suppose we ought to be glad that somebody wants to kiss cook. At least it may mean a bloater for breakfast. (*Repeating gesture with papers*) Groceries!

CELIA Is everything rationed?

LADY POOLE Everything.

BOBBY Except, apparently, cook.

LADY POOLE Darling, I wish you'd realize the seriousness of the situation. We mayn't have enough to eat.

CELIA That's not what's worrying *me*. There's something worse.

LADY POOLE **What?**

CELIA Mother darling, prepare for a shock. Somebody may be coming to stay.

LADY POOLE **Who?**

BOBBY We don't know.

LADY POOLE What *are* you talking about?

CELIA We may have some people billeted on us.

LADY POOLE Billeted? I thought that was something unpleasant people did in the war?

CELIA There's been a law passed.

LADY POOLE Another?

BOBBY Yes. All the owners of ancestral mansions, such as this, will be required to accommodate as many hoi polloi as choose to honour us with their presence.

LADY POOLE Are you serious?

BOBBY Perfectly.

LADY POOLE But . . . but I won't have it.

CELIA We can't help ourselves,

LADY POOLE Strange people in this house? P'raps workmen? Really, this is the sort of thing you read about in the memoirs of grand duchesses.

BOBBY You'd better give me those coupons.

LADY POOLE **Why?**

BOBBY I'll go out and get some meat before it's all commandeered.

CELIA Yes. That's a good idea.

LADY POOLE But darling — what are you going to get?

BOBBY Oh — anything nourishing. I think the occasion calls for a nice juicy cut off the rump.

(Exit BOBBY.)

LADY POOLE You see? It's having an effect on his language already. I expect that after a few weeks of this we shall all be swearing like bargees.

CELIA I wish I knew what was going to happen.

LADY POOLE So do I. I went out in the streets this morning to try to find out, but I had to come back.

CELIA Why?

LADY POOLE Oh — it was horrible. It wasn't so much what was happening as what *wasn't* happening. No buses, no taxis, no newspapers. People walking]about with white faces. Now and then a procession of communists, waving red flags. And then silence.

CELIA The sort of silence that comes before an earthquake.

(Enter FORSTER.)

FORSTER I beg pardon m'lady.

LADY POOLE What is it Forster?

FORSTER Some persons downstairs, who wish to see you.

LADY POOLE **Who?**

FORSTER The name is Maxwell, m'lady.

LADY POOLE Maxwell? I don't know any Maxwells. What do they want?

FORSTER They seemed to think, m'lady, that they were going to stay.

LADY POOLE To stay?

CELIA Mother!

LADY POOLE **What?**

CELIA **It's** happened.

LADY POOLE You don't mean to say that these people have got anything to do with that ridiculous paper you showed me?

CELIA It sounds very like it. (To FORSTER) Have they brought any luggage?

FORSTER There were some, ahem, packages, miss.

CELIA And have they got any papers — any authority?

FORSTER They showed me a paper which mentioned this address.

CELIA How many of them are there?

FORSTER Three. One male and two female.

LADY POOLE Are they ... I mean . . . what type of people. . . .

FORSTER They are not any type of person, m'lady.

LADY POOLE Then can't you get rid of them?

FORSTER They refuse to go, m'lady.

CELIA But they *must* go. There are limits.

LADY POOLE Is it any use sending for the police?

CELIA No. I'm afraid it isn't.

LADY POOLE (to FORSTER) Why couldn't you just say I was not at home?

FORSTER I'm afraid that would not have much effect, m'lady.

CELIA Mother, we *must* do something, (*yokes of the MAXWELLS off*) Listen! They're surely not coming up already?

LADY POOLE I believe they are. Forster . . . lock the door.

(But it is too late, for JAMES MAXWELL has already pushed his way through. He is a fine upstanding young man of about twenty-five, with a shock of black hair. He wears a red tie. He carries a bundle in each hand. He collides with the door as FORSTER is trying to shut it. He stands in the entrance staring at FORSTER, an ironical smile on his lips.)

JIM Hullo . . . hullo . . . what's all this? (*Perceives LADY POOLE. Puts down bags. Advances to her with a smile.*) Good morning, Comrade.

LADY POOLE (*coldly, ignoring his outstretched hand*) Who are you? What do you want?

JIM Oho! Is that the way to welcome your new companions?

CELIA How are you our companions?

JIM We're billeted here.

CELIA (*to LADY POOLE*) I **told** yOU SO.

LADY POOLE By whose authority?

JIM The authority of the state. Haven't you heard of the Redistribution of the People Act?

LADY POOLE Vaguely.

JIM Well, there's nothing vague about this.
(*Hands her a paper*)

LADY POOLE I don't wish to see it.

CELIA Let me see. (*She takes paper*)

JIM You'll find everything in order. These are our quarters and here we'll stay. And I must say, I like the look of them. (*Pats sofa cushion*) A bit bourgeois, but still . . .

CELIA (*looking up from paper*) He's right, mother. It's true.

LADY POOLE I refuse to accept this fantastic situation. Forster!

FORSTER Yes, m'lady.

LADY POOLE Show this man downstairs.

JIM (*laughing*) Oh—that's funny!

LADY POOLE If he refuses to go, send for the police.

JIM (*laughing more loudly*) That's funnier still. Didn't you know the police were all on our side?

LADY POOLE (*to CELIA*) Is **that** true?

CELIA I believe it is.

LADY POOLE What about Vernon. Could he do anything?

JIM And who may Vernon be?

CELIA He happens to be my fiancé. He also happens to command a battalion of Life Guards.

JIM Does he, now. Are you sure? You haven't heard then, that the troops have mutinied?

LADY POOLE That's a lie.

JIM Is it? Walk down Whitehall, then. You won't see any more of those pretty little soldiers, standing in their toy boxes.

CELIA (*urgently*, to LADY POOLE) Oh! Do you think Vernon's all right?

LADY POOLE I don't know what to think.

JIM (*smiling*) Now then . . . Why not make the best of things? I know it's a bit of a shock — seeing that you haven't had much education — but you'll get over it. Besides you haven't seen the others yet,

LADY POOLE Who are . . . the others?

JIM My mother. And my sister. I'll fetch them. They're downstairs.

CELIA Just a minute.

JIM Well?

CELIA Do you mind telling us *who you* are?

JIM (*in slow impressive tones*) I'm the Secretary of the Supreme Committee of Transport.

LADY POOLE Good God!

JIM (*dropping his banter and sneering*) You don't like it, eh? Well, one day pretty soon you may be thankful that I'm staying in your house — our

house. It may save people like you from a certain amount of trouble. *(Exit)*

LADY POOLE *(sits down and stares in front of her. She speaks in a tortured voice.)* This is the end! Forster!

FORSTER Yes, m'lady.

LADY POOLE You needn't wait.

FORSTER Very good, m'lady. *(Exit)*

CELIA Oh — I wish Vernon were here!

LADY POOLE I don't believe what that brute said about the army. Try to get him on the telephone.

CELIA Yes, I will — *(Picks up telephone)* Whitehall 6000. Yes. First Life Guards.

LADY POOLE First Life Guards! How very comforting that sounds. Discipline, and law, and order!

CELIA *(at telephone)* If there still is discipline.

LADY POOLE You know, I think I shall keep on repeating a lot of old fashioned phrases, just to remind myself that I'm sane. Two and two makes four. A stitch in time saves nine. Look after the pennies...

CELIA Well, will you try them again please?

LADY POOLE *(monotonously)* Parallel lines never meet. A mammal suckles its young. Two pints one quart. Two quarts one gallon. *(To CELIA)* What happens after gallons?

CELIA Oh mother — there's no reply.

LADY POOLE Well, probably it only means that an orderly's gone to sleep.

CELIA I'm so terribly anxious.

LADY POOLE Celia, at the risk of seeming pompous, I must ask you to keep a stiff upper lip.

CELIA I'll try.

LADY POOLE This house may be invaded, but this house has traditions.

CELIA I know.

LADY POOLE In your grandfather's time, Disraeli used to come here, and stand at that window, just as you're standing now. Let's try to remember things like that.

JIM (*off*) Come on ma . . . come on Ivy. . . .

(*Enter JIM.*)

Look here — give that to me.

(*Enter MRS. MAXWELL.*)

(*As she enters, timidly, she hands another bundle to JIM. She is a kind, motherly looking woman, like a very respectable charwoman. She is dressed in black. She is followed by her daughter IVY. IVY is ravishingly pretty, dressed in simple, shabby clothes. She is terrified but puts on an air of hostile grandeur. Tet one likes her.*)

MRS. MAXWELL (*awed*) Oh Jim! (*Looking round*) Are you sure we're in the right place?

JIM (*nervous in spite of himself*) 'Course I'm sure. Come on and meet your new Comrade. (*Drags her over to LADY POOLE*) This is — Mrs. Poole.

LADY POOLE (*icily*) How do you do? (*She turns and walks to the window*)

JIM (*angrily*) Look here. We don't want any of those manners here.

MRS. MAXWELL Please Jim . . .

IVY (*advancing*) If that's the way *ladies* are brought up to behave . . .

JIM (*shortly*) Hold your tongue. (*To LADY POOLE*) Mrs. Poole! (*LADY POOLE does not reply*)

CELIA (*advancing to MRS. MAXWELL*) I'm afraid my mother's not feeling very well.

MRS. MAXWELL Oh, I'm so sorry.

CELIA Won't you sit down?

MRS. MAXWELL Oh, thank you. (*Sits*)

JIM There's nothing to thank her for. It's your house as much as hers.

IVY In that case, I'd like a cup of tea.

MRS. MAXWELL Oh, SO WOULD I.

JIM I could do with one too.

CELIA Certainly. I'll ring.

JIM Ring? What for?

CELIA To order the tea.

JIM Oh — I see. And a servant's got to come all the way upstairs and go down again, and another servant's got to make it, and they've both got to sweat and toil, because you want a cup of tea?

CELIA (*coolly*) Not at all. Because *you* want a cup of tea.

JIM That's beside the point.

CELIA And anyway, there's not so much sweat and toil about making a cup of tea.

JIM You're very clever, aren't you? I'll go] and get it myself.

LADY POOLE (*suddenly turning round*) I wouldn't advise you to do that.

JIM **Oh!** So we're talking at last, are we? **And** why wouldn't you advise it?

LADY POOLE I don't think that cook likes visitors in her kitchen.

JIM *Her* kitchen? Kitchens belong to the people nowadays. Not to the cooks.

LADY POOLE Really? (*Significantly*) How many cooks have you known?

JIM That's neither here nor there. I'll go and get that tea. (*Exit*)

(There is an awkward silence. The POOLÉS look at each other. So do the MAXWELLS.)

MRS. MAXWELL (*timidly*) Very pleasant weather we've been 'aving lately.

LADY POOLE Charming.

MRS. MAXWELL Yes.

(Another pause. Suddenly IVY springs to her feet.)

IVY Oh, I can't stand this.

MRS. MAXWELL Ivy 1

IVY They're laughing at us. I told you they would.

MRS. MAXWELL Now then Ivy, don't carry on.

IVY We'd have been happier where we were — in one room.

CELIA (*gently*) Was that all you had — one room.

IVY (*in a hostile voice*) Between the three of us.

MRS. MAXWELL (*excusing herself*) Jim always slept be'ind a screen.

CELIA I see.

IVY (*bitterly*) Funny, isn't it?

CELIA No. I don't think it is.

IVY Oh — you don't understand.

CELIA I think I do. What part of London did you come from?

IVY Canning Town.

MRS. MAXWELL (*hastily*) Of course — it was never my idea of what we should 'ave 'ad. But then, ever since my 'usband's death in the war . . .

LADY POOLE Was your husband killed in the war?

MRS. MAXWELL Yes. At Ypres.

LADY POOLE So was mine. What regiment was he in?

MRS. MAXWELL First Grenadiers.

LADY POOLE (*in a strange voice*) The first Grenadiers! (*She looks at CELIA*)

CELIA (*impulsively*) But Mrs. Maxwell . . . (*Sees her mother checking her*) Oh — I'm so sorry.

IVY What's all this got to do with it? A fat lot of good it did us, his being killed for his country.

LADY POOLE (*proudly*) With that I entirely agree.

IVY You?

MRS. MAXWELL But I always thought people like you . . .

LADY POOLE It's rather late now for any of us to bother to think much, isn't it?

(*Enter JIM. He looks disgruntled.*)

CELIA Well — did you get your tea?

JIM It's coming up.

LADY POOLE I thought you were going to bring it up yourself?

JIM (*hotly*) That cook of yours is an insolent woman. I shall deal with her later. Now. Supposing we make arrangements about accommodation. I've a committee meeting in half an hour and I want the family settled. Now. . . . (*Takes paper out of his pocket*) Check me if I'm wrong. There are three of you. And then there's one butler. One cook. Three maids. One chauffeur. And his wife.

LADY POOLE And one spare room.

JIM I'm afraid there isn't a spare room. The top floor of this house has been commandeered.

LADY POOLE and CELIA What?

JIM Commandeered. For offices.

LADY POOLE Since when?

CELIA By whom?

JIM By the government. Of which I am a member.

LADY POOLE Did *you* do this?

JIM Not entirely. But it'll be convenient for me to have my offices in the building where I sleep.

LADY POOLE But . . . but . . . this is impossible. Where is everybody to go?

JIM (*grimly*) We'll settle that, all right. And by the way the ground floor's been commandeered too.

MRS. MAXWELL I do think you might have broken it a bit more gently, Jim.

JIM This isn't a time for breaking things gently. When a family's evicted from one room in Canning Town the landlords don't break it gently.

IVY That's true enough.

JIM Anybody would think I was inflicting a hardship. There are six bedrooms on this floor. There are three of you. Three of us. And six of the staff. That makes six bedrooms between twelve people. What more does anybody want?

LADY POOLE It depends on the people.

JIM Well, the chauffeur and the butler can sleep in one room.

CELIA (*cheerfully*) In which case there'll be bloodshed.

JIM The cook and one of the maids can sleep in another room.

LADY POOLE (*also cheerfully*) In which case there'll be slaughter.

JIM Two other maids in another room. That gets rid of the staff. Now there are three rooms for us. Mother, you'll go in with Ivy.

MRS. MAXWELL Oh thank 'eavens.

JIM What d'you mean?

MRS. MAXWELL Well, with all these changes, I didn't know 'oo . . . (*Glancing at LADY POOLE*) I might be put with.

LADY POOLE Thank you.

MRS. MAXWELL (*a little indignant*) Same to you, I'm sure.

JIM (*nodding at LADY POOLE and CELIA*) You two can go together. And I'll go in with your son.

LADY POOLE That *will* be a pleasant surprise for him.

JIM Where is he, by the way?

LADY POOLE He's out buying meat. The sort of meat that I'm sure you would appreciate.

JIM Oh. Well — that's settled.

CELIA Is it? I'm sorry — but are we to be expected to remain in our bedrooms all day?

JIM Not unless you want to.

CELIA Then where are we to live, if all the rest of the house has been commandeered?

JIM We've got this room, haven't we?

LADY POOLE Between all of us?

IVY (*bitterly*) There are lots of families of more than six who haven't a room as big as *this*, where we come from — to sleep in, too.

CELIA Very well. But I seem to remember that the families I saw, living like that, always divided the room.

MRS. MAXWELL Well — that's an idea. Then we shouldn't all be treading on each other's toes.

IVY It looks as if we shall be doing that in any case.

CELIA What do you say, mother?

LADY POOLE Oh — anything you like.

JIM It isn't for her to say. It's for all of us.

CELIA Well, I suggest we divide.

MRS. MAXWELL So do I.

CELIA You take that side and we'll take this.

IVY It might save trouble.

CELIA There are two doors. The fireplace is in the middle. It's perfectly practical.

(LADY POOLE suddenly breaks into hysterical laughter.)

CELIA Mother, what is it?

LADY POOLE Nothing, nothing. I know I'm dreaming, that's all. But I do want to wake up, I want to wake up!

CELIA. Mother, it's all right. Please.

LADY POOLE (*controlling herself*) I'm sorry. (*She stifles a sob*) I'm not setting a very good example, am I? Go on with your division.

JIM (*not unkindly*) One day you'll be laughing at the fact that you thought this was a tragedy.

LADY POOLE Indeed? And when will that be?

JIM (*exultantly*) When you've realized the glory of sharing, and sharing equally.

LADY POOLE (*looking at him*) I see. (*A pause. Then she says in utterly casual tones*) In that case would you mind pushing the sofa just a little *our* way?

(JIM does so)

LADY POOLE You said we must share equally, I think?

IVY (*carrying a small chair*) You'll be wanting one of these.

LADY POOLE Oh no, *please!* Please, my dear, take it back. It's a fake. (IVY puts it down) But you can have this. (*Hands a nude statuette to MRS. MAXWELL, who regards it with intense disapproval*)

MRS. MAXWELL Oh, thank you.

LADY POOLE It's quite all right. It's supposed to represent the triumph of Labour.

CELIA (*advancing with cushions*) Which would you prefer — the green or the yellow?

IVY It's immaterial to me.

CELIA Oh, but you must decide.

(*IVY snatches the green one.*)

CELIA I'm so glad you chose that. It's got a hole in it.

LADY POOLE There's the Encyclopaedia Britannica here. Which half do you want? A to K, or K to Z?

JIM (*mutters to IVY*) Don't take any notice of 'em.

CELIA K to Z has the life of Lenin in it.

LADY POOLE Yes, but it's also got the life of Queen Victoria.

JIM (*stepping across*) There's no need to make this thing ridiculous.

LADY POOLE I think there's every need. And be careful — or you'll step over the frontier.

(*JIM retreats and stands with his back to audience.*)

MRS. MAXWELL (*at switchboard near door*) What are all these knobs?

CELIA Those are for the electric light.

MRS. MAXWELL Oh, dear . . . (*to IVY*) d'you think we'll ever learn which is which?

IVY Of course we will. You leave it to me. They're just trying to make fools of us, that's all.

LADY POOLE (*at window*) The view, I suppose, we share in common?

(*No reply.*)

LADY POOLE Well, do we or don't we? I should hate to feel that I was getting more than my share of Big Ben.

JIM (*impetuously*) Look here. You think this is all very amusing, don't you? Well, let me tell you this. I'll stand for a lot of things, but I won't stand for sarcasm. I'll agree to this division, as a matter of temporary convenience. But what you've got to realize is that you own nothing — *nothing!* (*He stretches out his arms with a fanatical gesture*) It's everybody's!

(*Enter BOBBY.*)

BOBBY Hullo! (*Notices MAXWELLS*) Oh, I say — am I butting in on anything?

LADY POOLE Not at all. You'd better come and be introduced to your new comrades. This is Mrs. Maxwell, Miss Maxwell. My son Robert.

BOBBY (*puzzled*) How d'you do?

(*His eyes are fixed on IVY in admiration. She tosses her head.*)

MRS. MAXWELL Pleased to meet you.

(*IVY bows.*)

BOBBY (*looking at his mother-, still puzzled*) Well?

LADY POOLE (*casually*) Oh, I forgot. They've, er, come to stay.

BOBBY What, here? (*Smiles broadly, and steps forward*) I say — (*Looking round at them all, and then smiling at IVY*) how marvellous!

JIM Look here — none of that.

BOBBY None of what?

JIM We don't want any monkey business, see?

BOBBY But I do think it's marvellous. D'you know, I thought you were going to be a large smelly man with a moustache?

JIM I wasn't referring to myself. (*Looking at IVY*)

BOBBY You mean your sister. That's even more marvellous. I thought she'd probably squint and talk Russian.

JIM (*stepping forward*) Look here . . .

MRS. MAXWELL Be careful, Jim. (*Pointing to carpet*) You're going over the line.

(BOBBIE looks at CELIA with a puzzled expression. She gives him a whispered explanation.)

JIM (*checking himself*) All right. And as long as we keep to our side of the line, let's see that you keep to yours. Or else there'll be trouble.

(Enter FORSTER.)

FORSTER Excuse me, m'lady . . .

LADY POOLE Yes, Forster.

FORSTER Have you any, er, suggestions about luncheon?

LADY POOLE (*distractedly*) Luncheon? Luncheon?

JIM (*curtly. To his mother*) She means dinner.

CELIA Have you got anything, Forster?

FORSTER Not very much, miss. Certainly not enough for any (*sniffs*) guests.

JIM (*gruffly*) It's all right. We've had ours. We'll be taking the evening meal with you, though, whatever you call it.

CELIA That'll be charming,

BOBBY But what'll we eat at the, er, evening meal?

IVY (*snappily*) We've got our coupons, same as you.

LADY POOLE Coupons! (*She laughs*) Coupons! (*She laughs again, hysterically*)

CELIA (*running to her*) Mother, darling.

LADY POOLE (*between her sobs*) I've just remembered that this was the room in which Disraeli read my mother the first chapters of Coningsby. The future of England. The future of England! If he'd only known!

QUICK CURTAIN

ACT I

SCENE 2

Same as before. It is about eight o'clock, and though it is twilight outside, the lamps are not lit, nor the curtains drawn.

IVY is discovered at a table, typing.

(Enter MRS. MAXWELL.)

(She glances nervously at IVY, walks to fireplace, glances again, says i)

MRS. MAXWELL Oh, Ivy!

IVY *(typing)* What?

MRS. MAXWELL CouldrTt you do that in *our* room?

IVY No. They're moving in an extra bed.

MRS. MAXWELL I SCC.

IVY It doesn't worry you, does it?

MRS. MAXWELL Not me. But I was wondering 'ow the others would like it. It may be a sound they're not used to.

IVY They'll be hearing a lot of sounds they're not used to before very long.

MRS. MAXWELL Oh, well — I suppose you know best. Is it very important?

IVY Yes. It's notes for Jim's meetings to-night.

MRS. MAXWELL *Another* meeting?

IVY Three.

MRS. MAXWELL Oh, dear! When'll 'e be back from the last one?

IVY Any minute now. You might turn on the light, will you?

MRS. MAXWELL Oh, yes . . . (*She rises and looks uncertainly at the many lights*) which one would you prefer?

IVY The one on this desk. It lights from over there.
(*MRS. MAXWELL goes to switch, looks at it with fear and trembling, turns on a light which illuminates a picture. She hastily turns it off again. Turns on another which illuminates another picture?*)

IVY (*still typing*) Come on, mother. I can hardly see.

MRS. MAXWELL All right, love. I was just experimenting.

(*Turns on another light which illuminates brackets over fireplace. Turns it off quickly. Turns on another which illuminates candelabra?*)

Well, I never!

IVY (*looking round, irritably*) I don't want all *that*.

MRS. MAXWELL Well, I didn't mean to give it you. These lights worry me as much as the,escalating railway.

IVY I'll come and do it.

MRS. MAXWELL No. Just a minute. I 'ate to be beaten by a capitalist contraption.

(*As she says 'capitalist contraption' she scornfully turns off the candelabra light.*)

I'll take pot luck.

(*She makes a wild grab at the board. The desk light is illuminated.*)

MRS. MAXWELL (*glancing at light*) Well, I never.
IVY Now, do leave it alone.

MRS. MAXWELL I *will*. And I'll tie a bit of tape round that one.

IVY Tape. Yes. (*Rising*) That reminds me. I must go and get a new ribbon for this machine. Are our things upstairs?

MRS. MAXWELL Yes, love. I've unpacked. (*With a sigh*) What there was to unpack, (*IVY goes towards door*) Oh, Ivy!

IVY What?

MRS. MAXWELL I know it's no business of mine, but 'ave you noticed that that young gentleman . . .

IVY Gentleman? What's that?

MRS. MAXWELL (*flustered*) Oh, I'm always forgetting that a gentleman's been made illegal. 'Ave you noticed that that Bobby what's-'is-name 'as been looking at you in rather a funny way?

IVY I ought to have done. He's been pestering me all day.

MRS. MAXWELL 'E 'asn't been insulting?

IVY He has. Do you know what he called me?

MRS. MAXWELL **What?**

IVY Comrade!

MRS. MAXWELL I thought that was what we were all supposed to be?

IVY There are ways of saying the word. *He* makes it sound like — well I should hate to say what he makes it sound like.

MRS. MAXWELL Oh, dear. It's all very difficult.

IVY Don't you worry. I can manage *him* all right. Besides (*and here she smiles to herself*) apart from that side of him, I don't think he's such a bad chap. At least he's got a smile on his face sometimes . . .

(*Enter FORSTER. IVY glares at him.*)

which is more than you can say about some people in this house. I'll go and get that ribbon.

(*Exit IVY.*)

(*FORSTER walks pompously to the windows and draws the curtains.*)

MRS. MAXWELL Ahem!

(*FORSTER stares at her, continues drawing curtains.*)

MRS. MAXWELL Oh, Mr. Forster.

FORSTER Well?

MRS. MAXWELL There's something I want to ask you.

FORSTER (*coming forward*) And there are a great many things I'd like to ask you, Mrs. Maxwell. Who do you think you are? What d'you mean by coming into a respectable house, like a lot of pirates, and turning everything upside down? This is England, Mrs. Maxwell. And in England there are some people who know their place. And it's those people (*evidently meaning himself*) who have made England what it is.

MRS. MAXWELL (*on verge of tears*) Yes, I'm sure. Still, it wasn't entirely my doing.

FORSTER No. It was that good-for-nothing son of yours.

MRS. MAXWELL (*hotly*) I won't 'ave you say that, Mr. Forster. Jim's a man in a million. You mayn't agree with all 'e says, but if you knew . . . (*tremulously*) if you knew . . .

FORSTER (*pacifying*) Oh, very well . . . 'ave it your own way. Only if I'd been the father of that boy, I'd have given 'im 'comrade' on a place where 'e evidently hasn't been used to it. Now what was it you wanted to know?

MRS. MAXWELL. It's about supper.

FORSTER Dinner, please. We may be 'aving a revolution but we'll continue to dine. Even if we 'ave to dine *off* sardines. Well, what about dinner?

MRS. MAXWELL Will we 'ave to eat with them?

FORSTER Yes, you will.

MRS. MAXWELL (*miserably*) Oh, Lord!

FORSTER And what's more you'll 'ave to eat in 'ere. There's a lot of rampaging lunatics in the dining-room. One of them comes up to me and says, 'the millennium's come.' <Oh, 'as it,' I says. 'Then you can deliver it at the back door/ I says. Well, what about dinner?

MRS. MAXWELL I was just wondering. If you see me doing anything wrong . . .

FORSTER What exactly do you expect to do wrong?

MRS. MAXWELL Well, don't they 'ave a lot of funny things to eat?

FORSTER To-night we're 'aving cold 'am, owing to the coupon system. I should have thought you might be able to negotiate that.

MRS. MAXWELL (*pathetically*) It's a long time since I 'ad 'am.

FORSTER Look 'ere, Mrs. Maxwell, I 'ates your principles, but I've no objection to you. And I'll do you a favour. If I should see you doing anything absolutely outrageous . . .

MRS. MAXWELL Outrageous?

FORSTER Well, I 'aven't seen you eat yet. But if you should, I'll cough.

MRS. MAXWELL Oh, thank you, Mr. Forster. And what shall I do then?

FORSTER Stop it. Whatever you're doing.

MRS. MAXWELL But supposing I'm eating?

FORSTER Swallow it and stay still.

(*Enter IVY. Exit FORSTER.*)

IVY I couldn't find that ribbon anywhere. I'll have to make do with this. What's he been saying?

MRS. MAXWELL Oh, nothing. I was just asking a few questions, about the 'ouse.

IVY You may well ask. I don't know what everybody's doing. That girl's been out all the afternoon. Gone *off* to see her fiancé, I suppose. Expects him to come along and rescue them with a battalion of His Majesty's Life Guards! Even little Bobby's made himself scarce. Gone to Trafalgar Square to see the riots.

MRS. MAXWELL Are they still rioting?

IVY So he says. Oh, well, he'll get a knock on the head. And then perhaps he'll be satisfied. What time do we eat?

MRS. MAXWELL Eight, so I'm told.

IVY Getting on for that now. I'm looking forward to it, aren't you?

MRS. MAXWELL Yes. I'm looking forward to it.

(Enter LADY POOLE.)

(She pauses in doorway at sight of IVY typing. Then she walks to a chair, takes a magazine and sits down. She keeps glancing over her shoulder at IVY. Penally she can bear it no longer. She gets up and says:)

LADY POOLE Is it absolutely necessary that you should make that noise in here?

IVY If you'd ever typed, you'd have made a certain amount of noise yourself.

LADY POOLE I hope I shouldn't have made it with so much relish. But why should you do it in here?

IVY They're moving in an extra bed in our room.

LADY POOLE It's already moved.

IVY Oh, is it? I'm glad. *(Goes on typing)*

LADY POOLE Do you refuse to take your typing up to your own room?

IVY I've got a perfect liberty to type here if I want. Besides, it's very important.

LADY POOLE I SCC.

(She gives a final glare at IVY, goes over to gramophone and turns on a particularly noisy jazz record. Then she retires to her chair.)

IVY *(shouting)* I can't possibly concentrate with all that noise.

LADY POOLE *(shouting)* Can't you? Neither can I.

IVY You're doing this simply to annoy me.

LADY POOLE Naturally. It's a horrible tune, isn't it?

IVY (*advancing*) I'm not going to have it.

LADY POOLE Take care! (*Pointing to carpet*) The frontier!

IVY (*pausing*) Are you going on playing that record?

LADY POOLE Yes, and there are plenty more.

IVY Very well—we'll see who gives in first.

(She goes to fireplace, takes a scuttle and beats it violently with a poker. After a few seconds of this incredible din> BOBBY enters?)

BOBBY I say—what the deuce? (*Goes up to IVY*) Have you gone mad?

IVY Ask your mother.

BOBBY Well—please stop that awful noise.

(He takes the fire-irons from her. There is a slight struggle. They stand glaring at each other?)

BOBBY Now what's all this about?

IVY Your mother turned on the gramophone to drown the noise of my typing.

BOBBY Well, I don't blame her. Still, now it is on ...

(He seizes her round the waist and begins to dance. She breaks away and slaps his face.

LADY POOLE turns off the gramophone.)

BOBBY I say—don't you ever relax?

(IVY tosses her head and walks away. She goes to typewriter but does not type for the moment.)

LADY POOLE (*severely*) I think you're making a fool of yourself, Bobby.

BOBBY **Oh**, don't say that. I was nearly killed in Trafalgar Square just now.

LADY POOLE. Why — was there rioting?

BOBBY Yes. A lot of jolly old bottles whizzing about. Where's Celia?

LADY POOLE (*at window*) She's coming across the square now. (*Waves*) I wonder why Vernon isn't with her? (*Coming away*) She's been to see your Aunt Emily. Vernon said he was going to meet her there.

BOBBY Why did she go to Aunt Emily's?

LADY POOLE She's entertaining — er — guests, too. A widowed butcher and six children.

BOBBY Good Lord. I don't envy the butcher.

LADY POOLE No. Emily told me on the telephone that he was already looking rather pale.

(*IVY types viciously.*)

LADY POOLE (*indignantly*), Really!

(*She glares at IVY and then goes to the gramophone as though to turn it on.*)

IVY (*stops*) Oh, very well. (*With menace*) We'll wait till Jim comes home.

(*Enter CELIA. She looks a little pale, as though she had been running.*)

LADY POOLE Darling, what an age you've been.

CELIA I know. I couldn't get away before. Oh — how lovely to get back to a quiet room!

LADY POOLE (*looking at IVY*) Quiet!

BOBBY Why, were there a lot of butcher noises at Aunt Emily's?

CELIA I didn't go to Aunt Emily's.

LADY POOLE Why not? I told Vernon you were going to be there. He's gone to meet you.

CELIA Has he? I'm so sorry. I went out. I wanted to see what was happening.

BOBBY Really, darling, you are a fool. You might have got knocked on the head.

CELIA Well, anything's better than this — tension. I honestly think that this square's the only place in London where people aren't screaming like a lot of lunatics.

LADY POOLE (*again looking at IVY*) I wouldn't be too sure of that, either. Where did you go?

CELIA I went to Mr. Maxwell's Transport meeting in Victoria.

MRS. MAXWELL (*springing to her feet*) You went to 'ear Jim? 'Ow did it go? 'Ow was 'e?

CELIA D'you really want to know?

MRS. MAXWELL Why — wasn't 'e a success?

CELIA I'm afraid — he wasn't.

IVY A lot of good it is asking you whether he was a success or not — with your prejudices!

CELIA My prejudices have got nothing to do with the rotten eggs they threw at him.

MRS. MAXWELL Did they throw *them*?

CELIA Quite a number.

IVY Yes — and who threw them? You and your class!

CELIA In that case you must congratulate my class on the accuracy of its aim.

(Enter FORSTER.)

LADY POOLE Yes, Forster?

FORSTER What time will you be dining, m'lady?

LADY POOLE (*looking at* MRS. MAXWELL) We were waiting for Mr. Maxwell.

CELIA He ought to be here very soon.

LADY POOLE Then — Til ring, Forster.

FORSTER Very good, m'lady. (*Exit* FORSTER)

BOBBY And mother, darling, *as* Mr. Maxwell may wish to wipe off a few egg stains, and *as* the supply of hot water is extremely limited, I *think* I shall have a bath.

LADY POOLE But what about dinner?

BOBBY Well, it's only cold ham. And that tastes the same at any hour of the day. (*Exit* BOBBY)

MRS. MAXWELL (*timidly*) 'E wasn't — hurt — was 'e?

CELIA (*kindly*) No. And though I hated what he said, I think he was very brave.

LADY POOLE I hope that at least he's changed his shirt.

CELIA He had to change entirely.

IVY How do you know?

CELIA He announced the fact from the platform. He was rather funny about it. I expect that's why he's late.

IVY (*rising*) There was the front door. It must be Jim!

(*She glances at LADY POOLE. Sits down and types viciously.*)

LADY POOLE (*to IVY, going to gramophone*) I've warned you before!

IVY Well, you can address your future complaints to Jim.

(*LADY POOLE turns on gramophone.*)

(*The door opens and MAJOR VERNON ASH walks in. He is a man of about 35. He is good looking, with keen intelligent eyes, and a humorous mouth. His men adore him. He pauses for a moment¹, astonished by the people and the noise. LADY POOLE turns off the gramophone. CELIA runs to him.*)

CELIA Darling!

VERNON Celia! (*Kissing her*) What's the matter?

CELIA Oh, we've been through such hell, wondering what had happened to you.

VERNON But what *should* have happened?

LADY POOLE We were told the army had mutinied.

VERNON First I've heard of it.

CELIA Then hasn't *anything* happened?

VERNON Not that I know of. One of the drummer boys developed measles yesterday afternoon. But they seemed to be a perfectly respectable variety. German!

LADY POOLE (*glaring at IVY*) There! What do you say to that?

VERNON (*turning round*) I don't think I know these ladies?

IVY Come on, ma. I can see a few more insults in the air.

(*She drags MRS. MAXWELL to the door. In the doorway she addresses LADY POOLE.*)

When Jim gets back, and when *suppah*,s ready, perhaps you would kindly inform us?

(*Exeunt IVY and MRS. MAXWELL.*)

VERNON Sweet girl. Who is she?

CELIA She's one of the family that's staying here.

VERNON **I thought SO.**

CELIA (*running to him*) Darling, what *are* we to do?

VERNON (*gently*) Don't you worry. It's much worse for them than it is for you.

LADY POOLE (*indignantly*) Really!

VERNON But of course it is. Both those women were suffering from an acute inferiority complex.

CELIA You wouldn't say that about the son, if you saw him.

VERNON Why, has he been objectionable?

LADY POOLE That's a mild way of describing it.

VERNON (*to CELIA, quickly*) But not *to you*?

CELIA Not particularly to me. To all of us.

VERNON I see. (*He suddenly smiles at her*) My dear, don't look so solemn. I know this is all rather a bore, but it's really so very unimportant.

CELIA (*really shocked*) You call a revolution unimportant?

LADY¹ POOLE In *England*?

VERNON Exactly. Because it *is* in England.

CELIA I don't understand you.

VERNON But darling, you can't make a revolution by an act of parliament. Revolutions aren't a matter of manifestoes or meat coupons. They're a matter of character. A mere glance at Forster's face is enough to make any Bolshevik reconsider his opinion.

LADY POOLE You can hardly take Forster as typical.

VERNON I'm not so sure. Forster's a snob, of course. But he's not nearly such a snob as the three red ladies who are staying with me.

CELIA *With you?* Who?

VERNON Oh, yes, I forgot to tell you. Three female communists have descended on me at the Albany.

CELIA *What?*

VERNON They arrived this morning.

LADY POOLE But you've only two bedrooms. Where are they all going to sleep?

VERNON I shall be extremely interested to find that out myself.

CELIA Oh, my dear, how awful for you.

VERNON It's all right. I shall stay in barracks.

CELIA Have you seen them yet?

VERNON Only for about half an hour.

CELIA What were they like? Were they pretty?

VERNON Quite. But extremely boring.

LADY POOLE In what way?

VERNON Well, they talked of nothing but the British aristocracy. It was a mixture of curses and passionate curiosity. They wanted to abolish Lady Diana, of course. But not before they'd discovered if she really *did* use Pond's cold cream.

CELIA (*laughs*) Oh, Vernon, you make it almost bearable.

LADY POOLE You could hardly make Mr. Maxwell bearable.

CELIA No. I'm afraid he *is* a revolutionary.

LADY POOLE His very toenails are revolutionary.

VERNON I know. He's rather a fine fellow, in some ways.

LADY POOLE. Fine?

VERNON Certainly. He's one of the best speakers I ever heard.

CELIA I agree with you there.

VERNON Why, when did you hear him?

CELIA I went to his meeting to-night.

VERNON Oho! (*Seriously*) That was naughty of you.

CELIA But you just told us there was nothing to worry about.

VERNON I know. But all the same those meetings aren't for . . . girls. Don't go again, darling, will you?

CELIA I'd rather not promise.

VERNON You'll only hear a lot of lies.

LADY POOLE I can well believe that.

VERNON By the way, where d'you get this idea about a revolt in the army?

(*Enter JIM. He looks pale and dishevelled.*)

CELIA (*pointing to him*) There's the source of our information.

JIM Who are you?

VERNON (*pleasantly*) My name is Smythe. It's a capitalist version of Smith.

JIM (*looking at CELIA*) Oh, yes! I suppose you want to take her out of this, eh?

VERNON Not at all. I think Celia's extremely lucky to be observing you at such close quarters.

JIM (*hostile, baffled*) Oh, do you?

VERNON She'll be able to make quite a lot of money out of writing articles on you . . . when the revolution's over.

JIM And when d'you think that'll be?

VERNON In about three weeks.

(*JIM laughs harshly.*)

VERNON That is to say if you go on as you're going on now. (*Smiling*) Telling lies to the British people.

JIM Lies?

VERNON You gave these ladies to understand that the army had revolted. That is not true.

JIM (*hotly*) It'll be bloody well true to-morrow.

VERNON Celia. You'd better note down that sentence. 'It'll be bloody well true to-morrow.' It's an extremely illuminating remark.

JIM (*on an up scale*) In what way?

VERNON It throws a very clear light on your mentality. Firstly it shows that your sources of information are faulty. Secondly, it shows that you're a raving optimist. Thirdly . . .

JIM I don't want to hear any thirdly. (To LADY POOLE) Is supper ready?

VERNON But the third's the most important of all. Because it concerns your language.

JIM (*sneering*) It's too coarse for you, is it?

VERNON (*politely*) Oh, my dear fellow! Have you ever heard a British sergeant major when a recruit drops his rifle? Why — every flag in the neighbourhood turns bright red. No . . . I was referring to the ladies. Surely you've read Maxton's life of Lenin?

JIM I can't afford expensive books.

VERNON (*quite sincerely*) I'm so sorry. I'll lend you my copy. Lenin was a most courteous man, you know. Extremely polished. Charming manners. And, of course, he never allowed himself to get in the state of nerves that you're in now . . .

JIM (*putting his feet on the cushion, pretending to be nonchalant*) Who says I'm in a state of nerves?

VERNON (*quietly*) Well, look at your feet. You're only putting your feet on that cushion because you're so terribly afraid that you might be mistaken for a gentleman.

JIM (*springing to his feet*) Look here, I've had enough of this. You can go!

(VERNON seizes JIM'S wrist and grimly twists it. There is a tense moment. VERNON relaxes his grip. He continues to smile. JIM'S face has twisted to agony for a moment. The women do not see this little by-play.)

VERNON (*softly*) I go when I choose. I choose to go now because I'm sorry for you.

(JIM *walks away.*)

VERNON (*to CELIA*) He's got three meetings to night, you know. And naturally, he's a little nervous about them, because he's not quite sure of his figures. Celia, darling . . . if you want me, I'll be round in ten minutes, even if I have to desert.

CELIA (*with a sort of tearful radiance*) Oh, I'm so glad you came. You don't know what a difference it's made.

LADY POOLE (*grimly*) Yes. Whenever I hear anything offensive in future I shall take out a note-book.

VERNON Good night, my sweet.

CELIA (*kissing him*) Good night. Take care of yourself.

VERNON Good night, Lady Poole.

LADY POOLE Good night, Vernon.

(*Exit VERNON.*)

JIM (*turning round*) In future, I think you'd better advise that young man to keep away from this house.

CELIA (*coolly*) Are you frightened of him?

JIM I'm frightened of what might happen to him if he went too far.

LADY POOLE That's a brave little Bolshevik for you!

CELIA (*coldly*) I think that he, at least, is a man who's able to look after himself.

JIM You think so?

(MRS. MAXWELL *comes in quickly*, followed by IVY.)

MRS. MAXWELL Oh, Jim! Are you all right?

JIM I should say so. We had a triumph! Swept 'em off their feet.

MRS. MAXWELL But what about them eggs?

JIM Eggs? Who said anything about eggs?

IVY This young lady.

JIM (to CELIA) Did you go to my meeting?

CELIA Yes, I did.

JIM Howd'yougetin? It was for communists only.

CELIA (to IVY) That rather knocks the bottom out of your argument, doesn't it?

JIM What argument?

CELIA (coolly) I mentioned that certain, er, objects were thrown at you. Do you deny that?

JIM (gruffly) There's always some rowdyism, at an affair of that sort.

CELIA Your sister suggested that they were thrown only by anti-communists. And yet you say the meeting was for communists only.

IVY (to CELIA) *Tou* got in. Other traitors may have got in, too.

CELIA (softly to JIM) Or the traitors may be in your own ranks? Well?

JIM (*in a desperate voice*) There are traitors everywhere.

MRS. MAXWELL Oh, Jim!

JIM (*passing his hand over his eyes*) I'm sorry. Don't let's talk about it. I'm a bit tired.

IVY Of course you are. I wish you hadn't those other meetings to-night.

JIM D'you finish those notes?

IVY Not quite.

JIM Oh, Ivy!

IVY It's all right. I'll get them done.

(Enter FORSTER and a footman, with a table which is already set.)

LADY POOLE But dinner's coming in now.

IVY I'll finish those notes first.

JIM Don't bother.

IVY It isn't any bother.

LADY POOLE You can put the table here, Forster.

(She indicates a position in front of sofa.)

JIM *(seeing table)* Hullo! What's this?

LADY POOLE Is there anything wrong?

JIM There are only six places here.

LADY POOLE *(ironically)* There are only six of us.

Or are we to expect any other guests.

JIM What about the staff—as you call them?

LADY POOLE What about them?

JIM Don't they have to eat, too?

LADY POOLE Certainly.

JIM Well, why not here? Are we any better than they are?

LADY POOLE Really!

JIM Forster!

MRS. MAXWELL Oh, Jim — I wouldn't bother now.

JIM You be quiet. I'm not going to sit down and see honest men humiliated. Forster!

FORSTER Yes, sir?

JIM You come and take a place at this table.

FORSTER I think not, sir.

JIM **Oh** yes, you will, man. And what's more you'll go and get the others, too.

FORSTER (*ignoring him*) Dinner is served, m'lady.

JIM But, listen man. To-day — we're all equal in this house.

FORSTER I think not, sir.

JIM But what's the matter? D'you think it's any *honour* to sit down with us?

FORSTER Anything but, sir. Dinner is served m'lady.

JIM Oh, I see! You're one of those born servants, are you? Prepared to lap out of anybody's hand, provided you get paid for it?

MRS. MAXWELL Jim. You'd better come and sit down. The soup'll get cold.

JIM All right. Come on Ivy. You can finish those later.

IVY No. I d rather finish them now.

MRS. MAXWELL But what about the soup?

IVY I don't want any soup.

MRS. MAXWELL Jim — tell her to come and sit down.

JIM I'm not going to tell her to act against her convictions. (*To LADY POOLE*) Where's your son?

LADY POOLE He'll be down in a moment.

JIM I've got a word or two to say to him when he does come down.

CELIA Really? What about?

TIM Oh — you'll see, soon enough.

(The seating at the table is as indicated below:}

Sofa

LADY POOLE

MRS. MAXWELL

DINING

CELIA

JIM

TABLE

Empty places for BOBBY and IVY

[N.B. BOBBY is of. IVY is typing behind."]

(As soon as they sit down, MRS. MAXWELL puts her napkin under chin.)

FORSTER Ahem!

(MRS. MAXWELL stares wildly round her, cannot see where the others have put their napkins and sits on hers.)

LADY POOLE Oh, Forster — have we still got some wine?

FORSTER Oh, yes, m'lady.

LADY POOLE Nobody's living in the cellar, by any chance?

FORSTER Not yet, m'lady.

CELIA Then we'd better drink while we can. Mrs. Maxwell, what would you like?

MRS. MAXWELL Well, if it's possible, I would like . . .

FORSTER Ahem!

MRS. MAXWELL A glass of water,

CELIA It should be possible, unless we have to have coupons for it. Do we, Mr. Maxwell? (*No answer*) Water for Mrs, Maxwell, Forster. (*To JIM*) And what do you drink?

JIM Water.

CELIA Two waters. (*Coldly*) I feel, mother, that the occasion calls for champagne.

LADY POOLE (*virulently*) I can't *tell you* how much I agree with you. Will you get some, Forster?

FORSTER I have it here, m'lady.

LADY POOLE Splendid. It's poison to me. But I'd as soon be poisoned by my own hand as by the government. (*To MRS. MAXWELL*) I'm so sorry, but I think that tray of salted almonds is just a little too much to your side. Could we have it in the middle, do you think?

MRS. MAXWELL Oh, please.

CELIA On the other hand, these flowers are too much this way. (*Pushes bowl over*) Some roses for you, Mr. Maxwell.

JIM You can keep your roses.

CELIA Don't you like them?

JIM (*looking at her*) I've no time — for beauty.

CELIA Really? (*She lowers her eyes*) That must make life very dull for you.

JIM You should be able to judge whether it's dull or not — after my meeting to-night.

(*The soup is now being removed, and plates of sliced ham are being served.*)

LADY POOLE I hope you like ham, Mrs. Maxwell.
MRS. MAXWELL Very much, indeed, thank you.

LADY POOLE We shall probably be having it for
at least a week.

MRS. MAXWELL (*quite genuinely*) That w/7/be nice!
(CELIA *smiles.*)

JIM (*to CELIA*) Have you got some private joke?

CELIA And what if I have?

JIM I don't like private jokes.

LADY POOLE Don't be a fool. Get on with your
ham.

FORSTER Salad, sir?

JIM No. I'm not hungry.

MRS. MAXWELL Oh, Jim!

JIM I'm not hungry, I tell you.

MRS. MAXWELL (*to LADY POOLE*) 'E **never** WOULD
eat enough.

LADY POOLE (*maliciously*) We must fatten him up
then.

(MRS. MAXWELL *puts a piece of bread into her
mouth.* FORSTER *coughs.* Business. Another
cough.)

LADY POOLE Forster, have you got a cold?

FORSTER No, m'lady.

LADY POOLE (*significantly, to CELIA*) Oh! I hope
he hasn't *caught* anything (*Looking at JIM*) from
anybody.

(*Enter BOBBY, briskly.*)

BOBBY I'm so sorry to be late.

LADY POOLE You haven't missed very much.

BOBBY Good evening, Mr. Maxwell.

JIM Good evening.

BOBBY Are you enjoying your ham?

CELIA It's delicious, darling.

MRS. MAXWELL Very nice, thank you.

BOBBY I tried to get r-r-rump steak. (*Looking at JIM*) But since your government came in, there seems to have been rather a run on it. Hulloo — what's little Ivy doing?

JIM (*laying down his knife and fork*) I'd like a word with you about that.

BOBBY About little Ivy? Why, has she been naughty?

JIM I don't like your attitude to her.

BOBBY My attitude is one of humble admiration.

JIM I beg to differ about the humility.

IVY (*getting up*) Jim — please don't go on.

JIM She's a damned sight too good for you. She's not like the sort of girls you've been accustomed to.

BOBBY I'm quite aware of that. It's part of her charm.

JIM It's not for you to talk about her charm. She's my sister.

IVY Jim. *Please!*

BOBBY Really, Maxwell, aren't you being a little illogical? I thought, in your philosophy, that everybody belonged to everybody else.

JIM You thought that, did you? Well — yom try it on her . . . (*He is almost shouting now*):\$ • • and I'll wring your bloody neck.

BOBBY (*furious*) I'd like to see you try, you . . .

LADY POOLE (*like a pistol shot*) Bobby!

(*There is silence.*)

LADY POOLE (*in trembling disgust*) I think I've had enough of this. (*She turns to go*)

BOBBY Mother! (*She does not heed him. She is at the door*) Mother!

(*LADY POOLE goes out. BOBBY follows her.*)

(*Again a moment's silence. Suddenly MRS. MAXWELL breaks into hysterical weeping.*)

IVY (*running forward*) Oh, mother! Please don't carry on like that. (*Looking at JIM*) You ought to be ashamed of yourself. He hadn't done anything. He's not a bad sort.

JIM (*gruffly*) Take her upstairs. She'll be all right.

MRS. MAXWELL (*through her sobs*) You didn't ought to have said those things. (*She sobs*) Ideals is all right. I'm all for ideals. But we can 'ave manners, too. Even if we were brought up common. And I tried not to bring you up common.

IVY (*very tenderly*) Mummy dear. Let's go and lie down.

MRS. MAXWELL All right (*She looks wistfully at her plate*) I wish I'd 'ad a chance of finishing that 'am.

(*Exeunt IVY and MRS. MAXWELL.*)

(*CELIA stares at JIM.*)

CELIA Well — I hope you're satisfied.

JIM (*sullenly*) You'd better sit down and get on with your supper.

CELIA Is that all you have to say?

JIM I'm not arguing with you.

CELIA Because you're afraid to.

JIM No. Because I've got better things to think about.

CELIA Your mother?

JIM She'll get over a little scene like that.

CELIA (*bitterly*) You're incomprehensible.

JIM Am I?

CELIA (*tensely*) I don't know why I'm wasting my time talking to you. In a few days, when this country's come to its senses, you'll be kicked out, and I hope you and your kind will go to gaol.

JIM Thankyou.

CELIA But in the meantime, out of intellectual curiosity, I'd like to know what's at the back of your mind.

JIM (*coolly*) I'll give you one of my pamphlets to read.

CELIA I'm not interested in pamphlets. I'm interested in you, here and now. Why did you make that scene?

JIM I didn't make it.

CELIA Don't quibble, please. You took a perfectly harmless, joking remark of my brother's and turned it into an insult.

JIM I don't understand that sort of joke.

CELIA Why don't you? Because you're a fanatic? Or because you're just a common bully?

JIM This is very good ham. I'll take up some more for mother.

CELIA What's food got to do with this?

JIM It's got everything to do with it. You think I'm bitter, don't you? Well, I am bitter. Against you. Against your brother. Against your whole class. Why? Because of *this!* (*Pointing to the food before him*)

CELIA That old argument!

JIM Yes. It's the sort of argument that breeds fanatics. (*Cutting ham*) Perhaps you'd have been a fanatic if you'd ever known what it was to tighten your belt, and see your family tightening theirs. To have to watch your mother drink glass after glass of water, water, water — because water's cheap, and fills up the cracks when there's nothing else to put inside.

CELIA You could have worked.

JIM I *have* worked, day in and day out, till my body was aching and my brain was on fire, to put an end to it all.

CELIA An unpaid agitator!

JIM Unpaid! You're right. D'you think that made it any easier? D'you think it was easy for me, when I might have made my two or three pounds a week, to work for nothing but an ideal?

CELIA The ideal of your own conceit.

JIM You think so?

CELIA You had a duty to your own people.

JIM I fulfilled it.

CELIA And made them miserable.

JIM No. I made them happy. I made them see the glory of it! Even my mother, when she was hungry. Even my sister, when she was lonely and tired. She could have had all she wanted. She's a pretty girl, like you. But there's only one thing she'd have sacrificed herself for, and that was me. She'd have given her body in the cause I was working for, as eagerly as you must have given your body in the cause of your own pleasure!

CELIA (*rigid with anger*) You cad! (*She steps forward and hits him on the face*) You guttersnipe! (*For a second she stands facing him, trembling violently. He stares at her, white and still. She turns and walks swiftly out of the room. She slams the door.*)

QUICK CURTAIN

ACT I I

SCENE i

Same scene as in Act I Three weeks later. About ten o'clock in the morning.

(There is the sound of thunder. FORSTER enters, goes to window, sniffs, shuts it. Goes to breakfast table which has remains of breakfast on it. Is about to clear away when BOBBY enters. BOBBY, as usual, looks extremely bright,

BOBBY Morning, Forster.

FORSTER Oh — I was just going to clear away, sir.

BOBBY I know. I'm rather late. Is the coffee hot?

FORSTER Fairly, sir.

BOBBY *(feels pot)* It'll do. *(Sits)* You know, it was this shirt that delayed me.

FORSTER Is that the one I washed, sir?

BOBBY Yes. It bites.

FORSTER I'm sorry, sir.

BOBBY Oh well *(putting his hand under his collar)* I suppose it's better to be sore than to be dirty. I wonder if the laundries will ever get going again?

FORSTER I wonder if *anything* *II* get going again, sir. We'll be living like savages soon.

BOBBY Oh, I wouldn't put it as bad as that. Still, I must say I'd like a hot bath, now and again. The water was stony this morning.

FORSTER There's no coal, sir. There's no nothing. And what I say to these communists is, what's the *use* of letting everybody 'ave everything, if what it means is that nobody 'asn't got nothing.

BOBBY (*taps egg*) Forster.

FORSTER Yes, sir.

BOBBY (*in sinister tones*) The hen that laid this — had everything.

FORSTER Is it bad, sir?

BOBBY That isn't an egg. It's a bomb.

FORSTER I'm very sorry, sir.

BOBBY Never mind, I'll have some bread and butter. (*Digs knife into butter disk*) What ever's this?

FORSTER I'm afraid, sir, that it's margarine.

BOBBY (*examining it with great interest*) What an amazing *thing*! Little did I think that I should live to see the day when I should meet margarine face to face. It's made out of something's bladder, isn't it?

FORSTER I don't know what it's made out of, sir.

BOBBY Are we having this by request of the Maxwells?

FORSTER No, sir. We can't get anything else. And cook had to allow certain liberties to the grocer to get even this.

BOBBY You don't mean to tell me she sold her virtue for a mess of margarine?

FORSTER Not exactly that, sir. But she did refrain from telling him what she thought of him.

BOBBY Which on cook's part must be an even greater sacrifice. (*Tastes if*) But it's delicious.

FORSTER You think so, sir?

BOBBY *Simply* delicious. Like nuts.

FORSTER We won't eat it in the kitchen, sir.

BOBBY But you should. I shall never eat butter again.

FORSTER I'm afraid you mayn't, sir.

(*Exit FORSTER with tray, almost colliding with JIM as he comes in.*)

JIM Good morning.

BOBBY Good morning. Had breakfast?

JIM Yes. I've been up since five o'clock.

BOBBY Good Lord. You *are* revolting aren't you?

JIM Yes. (*He pauses indeterminate for a moment*) Look here. I want you to help me.

BOBBY Me? Help you? This is very sudden, isn't it?

JIM (*intensely earnestly*) For God's sake man, listen to what I've got to say. There's no time to lose.

BOBBY (*serious at last*) All right. Fire away.

JIM I want you to get your sister out of this house.

BOBBY Celia?

JIM And my sister. And all the women in this house.

BOBBY But how? Why?

JIM I'll explain how. There's no need to tell you why.

BOBBY There's every need. What's the idea?

JIM I suppose I'll have to tell you. (*As though the words choked him*) Well — they're after my blood.

BOBBY Who?

JIM (*his voice rising*) The people I've worked for — slaved for — the transport workers — the men who bring you your daily bread — the whole damn lot of them.

BOBBY But what have all these people got against you? I'm sorry to ask obvious questions. But you must remember we've had no newspapers for three weeks.

JIM No, of course. Well, it's like this. When they made me Secretary of the Supreme Committee of Transport, they didn't realize what an important job that was. They didn't realize that actually it was the pivot of the whole communist idea.

BOBBY Go on.

JIM There was another thing they didn't realize. And that was, that in a country like this, you can't bring about a revolution in three weeks.

BOBBY I should say you can't.

JIM Nor can you avoid extreme suffering.

BOBBY I'm with you there, too.

JIM And they're beginning to show the white feather.

BOBBY **Who?**

JIM The people who matter. *My people.*

BOBBY And what do they want to do?

JIM They want to go back to their old masters.

BOBBY To go back?

JIM Yes. They're frightened of the disorganization. They're frightened that they may be hungry — that their wives may be hungry.

BOBBY And if they did go back?

JIM It'd mean the end of the communist idea.

BOBBY My God!

JIM But — they're not going back.

BOBBY Who's going to stop them?

JIM I am!

BOBBY I see.

(He must rise here as though thinking and walk a face or two.)

You know, Maxwell, I dislike your ideas intensely, but I'm bound to admit that you've got guts. I suppose, in the interests of my country, I ought to try to knock you down and lock you up. But I don't suppose that would do much good. Do you mind explaining where I come in on this?

JIM Yes. It's quite simple. To-night, at Transport House, there's a mass meeting of all our delegates.

BOBBY Transport House? That's just round the corner, isn't it?

JIM A stone's throw. That meeting's been called for one reason, and one only.

BOBBY What's that?

JIM To lower the red flag, and to raise the white.

BOBBY Look here, old chap, don't speak in parables.

JIM Very well — to go back to the old system, the old slavery — the muddle, the muck, the mess.

BOBBY (*with heat*) You talk about muddle and muck and mess . . .

JIM (*almost shouting*) I tell you, man, I'm trying to build a new world!

BOBBY I see. Well, we've no time to go into *that*. Why d'you want the women out of the way?

JIM Because there may be trouble to-night. I've got to face a thousand men who are angry, and hungry. They know where I live. They know this house. And when a crowd gets its blood up . . .

BOBBY Phew! I see. You mean, they might follow you here.

JIM There's no knowing what mightn't happen.

BOBBY (*scratching his head*) Well . . . what can I do?

JIM Get the women away. Anywhere. You've got a cottage in Surrey or somewhere, haven't you?

BOBBY Yes, but . . .

JIM Well, take 'em there.

BOBBY How? We can't get railway tickets. We're not allowed to buy petrol.

JIM I'll see to that. I'll get a permit for you. It's best if you go by car. I don't know what trains are running. (*Looks at him*) Well? What are you thinking about?

BOBBY (*hesitantly*) I was thinking that if things are going to be as exciting as you say, I'm not too keen on leaving the field of action at this moment.

JIM But good God, man, what about the women?

BOBBY But why should I take 'em? What about Vernon?

JIM (*looking away*) I had thought of him.

BOBBY Well, isn't he the ideal person?

JIM (*still looking away*) Is he?

BOBBY Yes. And he's a swell driver. And a middle-weight champion, in case they meet any of your friends on the roads.

JIM (*ironically*) He sounds ideal.

BOBBY Is that settled, then?

JIM Yes. Will you get in touch with him at once?

BOBBY (*looking at wrist watch*) He won't be off duty just yet. I'll go along in a few minutes.

JIM Good. That's taken something off my mind. You needn't say anything to the women till it's all fixed up.

BOBBY All right. And about — that permit . . .

JIM I'll arrange that at once.

(*Enter IVY.*)

IVY Oh, Jim! (*Sees BOBBY*) Am I interrupting anything?

JIM No. What is it?

IVY There's a whole batch of telegrams here.

(*Hands them to him.*)

JIM (*taking telegrams*) Well — somebody's got something to say to me. (*Turns*)

IVY Do you want me to come up and take down dictation?

JIM Not just yet. Til read these through, first. If you want me, I'll be in my room.

(Exit JIM.)

(IVY comes over to BOBBY. She looks rather coquettish. She is really a little in love with BOBBY, whereas BOBBY is only amused and tickled by her?)

IVY What were you talking about?

BOBBY Oh — we just had the usual row. *(Points to rug)* Look out, the frontier!

IVY *(reproachfully)* You didn't care so much about the frontier last night.

BOBBY *(cheerfully)* I know — I was tight.

IVY What — have you forgotten all about it?

BOBBY Completely. Did I cross the frontier last night?

IVY In more senses than one.

BOBBY Good Lord! What did I do?

IVY You told me that I was pretty.

BOBBY Is *that* all?

IVY Well, it's enough, isn't it?

BOBBY No. It's not nearly enough. You're *extremely* pretty.

IVY *(pointing to rug)* Frontier!

BOBBY Damn the frontier.

(He stands on the edge.)

IVY *(coming up, coquettishly)* It is rather in the way, isn't it?

(He kisses her lightly on the cheek.)

IVY Really, Mr. Poole!

BOBBY Really, Miss Maxwell! That'll teach you to keep on your own side of the garden wall!

(She sits on sofa, her side. He sits on sofa, his side, and takes her hand. She makes a gesture of assumed protest.)

BOBBY It's all right. *(Slaps his thigh)* The larger part of me's strictly in bounds.

IVY *(with a sigh)* Isn't it all silly . . . this frontier business?

BOBBY Well, it's pretty necessary.

IVY I suppose it is.

BOBBY You know, I think I'm the only member of my family who can bear the sight of a Maxwell.

IVY *(disconsolately)* I'm afraid you are. And that's about all you do with me.

BOBBY But I *love* the sight of you.

IVY The sight p'raps. But you don't really like *me*.

BOBBY *(chaffing her)* Ah — you mean the inner woman! The soul that throbs inside!

IVY *(quietly)* Don't rag me, please. I've . . . I've not had your education.

BOBBY *(puzzled)* Ivy! What's the matter?

IVY *(trying to smile)* Nothing. Only — you know — common people are very sensitive.

BOBBY But I've never regarded you as common.

IVY *(looking at him, not unkindly)* Haven't you?
(BOBBY looks away) Of course you have. I *am* common.

BOBBY (*awkwardly*) Honestly — I'm terribly sorry if I've ever given — that sort of impression. I always thought it was wonderful — the way you managed — considering . . .

IVY Considering we used to live in one room . . . and wonder how we were going to pay for it. Is that what you mean?

BOBBY Why, yes . . . (*Awkwardly*) You speak so well . . .

IVY I've got Jim to thank for that.

BOBBY But how did *he* learn?

IVY He learnt at night schools. And in free libraries. He doesn't believe in . . . in God . . . but he used to go to church because it was the only place where he could hear English spoken — decently — like gentlemen speak it.

BOBBY But I thought he didn't believe in gentlemen either?

IVY He doesn't. But he realized that if he was going to fight them he might as well fight them on equal terms.

BOBBY And what about you? For instance, the way you move, and hold yourself? How d'you learn that?

IVY (*smiling*) Not in church.

BOBBY I should hope not. But where?

IVY You'll laugh when I tell you.

BOBBY No I won't.

IVY Cinemas.

BOBBY D'you mean to say — you learnt anything from them?

IVY A great deal. Oh, not in the cinemas *you* go to. No. In little stuffy places in Canning Town, where the seats are twopence, fourpence and sixpence, and the films are three years old. I used to go there with a pencil and paper. I used to see how the actresses dressed and walked and what a grand house looked like. I'd never seen a grand house before I came here. And the reason this didn't overpower me was because I kept on telling myself — this isn't real, this is a film. (*With a pathetic little smile*')} See?

BOBBY (*genuinely moved*) Oh — Ivy!

IVY You've never called me that before. (*Her face sets suddenly. She takes away her hand*) I don't think you'd better call me it again. I might make a fool of myself.

BOBBY But, please.

IVY No! You're real, and I'm a sham. (*Her voice becomes slightly common again*) You're the genuine article and I'm a cheap imitation. That's one way of looking at it. But there's another way. *Pm* real, and you're a sham. If I stick to my ideals. The ideals that Jim taught me.

BOBBY (*gently*) Must you stick to them?

IVY What else have I got? (*Desperately*) What else? (*She gets #/>, and forgetting the 'frontier', walks across it.*)

(*Enter LADY POOLE.*)

LADY POOLE I beg your pardon, but I thought this was *our* part of the room.

(*IVY turns back and goes to window.*)

BOBBY Oh, mother, why bother about that now?

LADY POOLE Well, it wasn't *my* idea. But / get screamed at if I so much as *look* over there. Not that I very often want to, I've just been talking to your Aunt Emily.

BOBBY What's she got to say for herself?

LADY POOLE You remember that butcher she had staying with her?

BOBBY Yes?

LADY POOLE He's dead. (*With a glance at IVY*) Some people have all the luck.

BOBBY She'll only get somebody worse.

LADY POOLE I don't know. She asked me to spread a rumour that she poisoned him. Personally, I think she did.

(*Enter MRS. MAXWELL.*)

MRS. MAXWELL Oh, Ivy 1

IVY Yes, mother.

MRS. MAXWELL Jim wants you. Something about taking down some telegrams . . .

IVY I'll go.

(*Exit IVY.*)

MRS. MAXWELL (*to BOBBY*) And he asked me to give you this. (*Hands him an envelope*)

BOBBY Oh, thank you.

LADY POOLE What is it?

BOBBY (*glancing inside*) Nothing of any importance. Mother, I'm going out for a bit.

LADY POOLE Where?

BOBBY Oh, just for a stroll. Will you be here when I get back?

LADY POOLE I hope so. Unless we've been blown up.

BOBBY *(at door)* I may have some good news for you in a little while.

LADY POOLE What news?

BOBBY Never mind. See you later.

(Exit BOBBY.)

(LADY POOLE immediately becomes a conspirator. Her face is wreathed in smiles. She beams at MRS. MAXWELL. She puts her finger to her lips and whispers.)

LADY POOLE Mrs. Maxwell!

MRS. MAXWELL *(also smiling and whispering)* Have you got it?

LADY POOLE Yes. It's in this parcel.

MRS. MAXWELL Oh — your ladyship!

LADY POOLE Ssh! You mustn't call me your ladyship. You might say it one day in front of the others.

MRS. MAXWELL It's very 'ard 'aving to go on pretending to be enemies.

LADY POOLE Yes. But don't forget — I'm the only member of my family who can even bear the sight of a Maxwell. *(Takes out dress)* There!

MRS. MAXWELL Oh, it's beautiful!

LADY POOLE It's not a bad little dress.

MRS. MAXWELL The material! I've never seen anything so fine. But you've hardly worn it!

LADY POOLE Only a few times.

MRS. MAXWELL But you can't spare it.

LADY POOLE Oh, yes I can. I've got plenty more. Now stand up a minute. (*Holds dress against MRS. MAXWELL*) Yes ... I think that'll do very nicely. You'll have to shorten it a little — that's all.

MRS. MAXWELL I'll never be able to thank you enough.

LADY POOLE Don't try then. Put the dress back in the parcel in case somebody comes in.

MRS. MAXWELL I don't know why you're doing this for me.

LADY POOLE I hardly know why I'm doing it myself. You know—I detested you, Mrs. Maxwell, when you first arrived.

MRS. MAXWELL I wasn't too partial *to you*, neither.

LADY POOLE And then—I don't know how it was—gradually I came to like you. You've been very kind, you know.

MRS. MAXWELL Oh, no, I 'aven't.

LADY POOLE //aven't.

MRS. MAXWELL //aven't.

LADY POOLE Yes, you have been kind. You've made things easier. Don't you remember that time when I had a headache? And then, when my maid was ill? To say nothing of the fact that if it hadn't been for you, cook would have left long ago.

MRS. MAXWELL I only 'elped 'er a little.

LADY POOLE //elped. (*Reprovingly*) The h's are very bad this morning.

MRS. MAXWELL I know. I think it must be the 'eat.

LADY POOLE //eat. What's the matter?

MRS. MAXWELL (*almost crying*) I feel so — common.

LADY POOLE (*surprised and touched*) Oh, my dear — really—you mustn't say such things.

MRS. MAXWELL But I am. (*With increasing agitation*) You must think me such a fool. You've been so kind and 'elpful — helpful. . . .

LADY POOLE Never mind about the h's now. What is it?

MRS. MAXWELL (*trying to smile*) I think it's — indigestion.

LADY POOLE **What?**

MRS. MAXWELL An empty stomach makes some people light-'eaded. I've been used to an empty stomach for so long that all this — this luxury's made me a bit light-'eaded too.

LADY POOLE (*gently*) Did you really used to be — hungry?

MRS. MAXWELL (*with a quiet smile*) Yes.

LADY POOLE You've never talked about those days to me.

MRS. MAXWELL Well — there's not much to talk about. Nor to complain about really. I've 'ad Ivy and Jim.

LADY POOLE (*severely*) Jim ought to have been spanked.

MRS. MAXWELL Yes. I expect you're right. But then, 'e was such a bright boy. And 'is whole 'eart

and soul was in this thing. And then, when 'e got on, and became a speaker, and when I used to go to 'is meetings and 'ear 'im — well — I used to get carried away too, / used to think you could build heaven on earth—just by shifting people round a bit. It's funny, isn't it? P'raps if he'd had a father to talk to 'im, things'd 'ave been difflrent.

LADY POOLE (*really moved*) Mrs. Maxwell, I told you just now that I didn't know what first made me feel that we'd got something in common. I wasn't telling the truth.

MRS. MAXWELL What d'you mean?

LADY POOLE (*looking straight in front of her*) Your husband was my husband's servant in the war.

MRS. MAXWELL (*incredulous*) My 'usband?

LADY POOLE Yes. He was in the 1st Grenadiers, wasn't he?

MRS. MAXWELL Why, yes.

LADY POOLE There wasn't any other Maxwell of that name.

MRS. MAXWELL No. But . . . 'e was killed in the front line.

LADY POOLE They were both killed in the front line. Your husband was given his job — the day he was killed.

MRS. MAXWELL (*dully*) It's — a coincidence.

LADY POOLE Yes. The last letter I ever had mentions your husband's name, perhaps you might like to see it. It's only a few words.

MRS. MAXWELL (*eagerly*) Please.

(LADY POOLE *hands it to her and walks to window.*)^v

MRS. MAXWELL (*reads*) Have just got a new batman — Private Maxwell — as smart a fellow as you'd wish to find — to-morrow — (*She turns the page, stares blankly at it. Then she cries*) Jim! Jim!

LADY POOLE There — there — don't upset yourself (*Tragically*) It's so long ago — for both of us.

MRS. MAXWELL (*hopelessly*) As smart a fellow — as you'd wish to find — It was true.

LADY POOLE Yes, yes — I'm sure it was true. I thought you'd like to know.

MRS. MAXWELL Jim!

(*She buries her head in her hands.*)

LADY POOLE (*trying to pull herself together*) I shouldn't have shown it to you if I'd thought you were going to cry. You mustn't, please.

MRS. MAXWELL I'm sorry (*She too pulls herself together*) As you say — it's all so long ago.

LADY POOLE I just wanted you to understand.

MRS. MAXWELL Thank you.

(*The two women look at each other with infinite grief for a moment. Then they both smile.*)

(BOBBY'S voice is heard off)

BOBBY (*off*) Mother!

LADY POOLE It's Bobby. Quick. You'd better go, or he'll see you've been crying.

MRS. MAXWELL Yes. I'll take the parcel with me, may I?

LADY POOLE Ofcourse. (*Affectionately*) And have a nice lie down before lunch.

MRS. MAXWELL I think I will.

(*She pauses a minute. Then, impulsively, she goes to LADY POOLE, and kisses her hand.*)

(*She goes to door. She is not quite out when BOBBY and VERNON enter.*)

LADY POOLE Ah, Bobby! And Vernon too!
(*Shakes hand*)

VERNON Good morning. Where's Celia?

LADY POOLE In her room, I think. Do you want to see her?

VERNON Yes, we do.

BOBBY It's rather urgent.

LADY POOLE Oh! (*Turns to MRS. MAXWELL*) Mrs. Maxwell, if you're going upstairs you might ask my daughter to come down, will you?

MRS. MAXWELL Certainly.

(*Exit MRS. MAXWELL.*)

LADY POOLE Nothing wrong is there?

VERNON On the contrary.

BOBBY (*cheerfully*) No. It's good news.

LADY POOLE (*to VERNON*) You're very mysterious. Have you managed to get an extra supply of meat coupons?

VERNON No. It's not meat coupons.

LADY POOLE (*eagerly*) Fish, then?

(*VERNON shakes his head*)

LADY POOLE Oh, dear. I did hope it might be fish. I can't tell you what a little cold salmon would mean to me at the moment. What is it?

VERNON We'll tell you when Celia comes down.

(Enter CELIA.)

LADY POOLE Well, here is Celia, so you can tell us now.

CELIA Good morning, darling.

(Goes to VERNON to be kissed?)

\ saw you arriving. How ever did you manage to get your car out?

VERNON Ah, that's a secret.

CELIA I thought only Bolsheviks were allowed to drive about in cars. You haven't gone Bolshy have you?

VERNON Not just yet.

LADY POOLE I insist upon an explanation. Celia, they're keeping something from us.

VERNON All right. (*Mysteriously*) You're going to be taken away.

LADY POOLE (*alarmed*) Heavens! Not to prison?

VERNON No. To Surrey.

CELIA Who's going to take us?

VERNON I am. I've got a permit to use as much petrol as I like . . .

CELIA Where did you get the permit from?

VERNON As a matter of fact, Maxwell gave it to Bobby . . .

CELIA I see. Go on.

VERNON And we're going to take you . . . and the rest of the ladies . . . out of London.

LADY POOLE Where d'you propose to go?

VERNON Down to the cottage, obviously. The roses must be looking lovely just now.

BOBBY There's enough poultry there to keep the lot of you for months.

VERNON And old Anna's down there, isn't she? And her husband?

LADY POOLE Yes. They're both down there.

VERNON Well? Aren't you pleased?

LADY POOLE (*grimly*) I'm thinking there's a catch in it somewhere.

CELIA (*quietly*) Why is Mr. Maxwell so anxious for us to leave this house?

BOBBY It isn't only you. It's Ivy and Mrs. Maxwell too.

CELIA Quite. All the *women*. Why?

VERNON Oh, there's no need to go into that now, Celia. Look here, I've got special leave till six. If we're going we ought to start now.

LADY POOLE You haven't answered Celia's question.

CELIA Permits aren't easy things to get, even for the Secretary of Transport. Why should he give that to *us* . . . in such a hurry too?

(VERNON and BOBBY do not reply.)

CELIA It is because he expects trouble?

VERNON (*quietly*) In a way . . . yes.

CELIA I thought so. Well, I'm not going.

VERNON Celia!

CELIA (*strenuously.*) Nothing would induce me to go. I think *mother* ought to go. But I'm staying.

LADY POOLE And if by 'trouble' you mean that a lot *more* lunatics are going to come charging about this house, *I'm* staying too.

VERNON But you don't realize . . .

LADY POOLE I realize that at least I can sit tight in *one* armchair and keep *that* clean!

VERNON Lady Poole — Celia — it's a bit more serious than you think. We didn't want to have to tell you, but apparently we must. Things have come to a crisis as far as Maxwell's concerned.

CELIA I know.

BOBBY *How* do you know? We never get any papers.

CELIA (*to* VERNON, *ignoring* BOBBY'S *question*) Well?

VERNON I gather that his own transport people are trying to get him to climb down.

LADY POOLE (*irritably*) Who *are* the transport people?

CELIA (*with a strange thrill in her voice, to* LADY POOLE) They're tremendously important. It means the dockers, who unload the ships, the lorry drivers, who carry the goods from the docks, the railway men who put them on the trains, the engine drivers, who take them to every part of the country. *Thais* who the transport workers are! And he ... (*she is almost exalted*) — he's the head of them all!

VERNON (*quietly*) Yes. But unfortunately, the tail is not entirely in sympathy with the head. In fact, it's inclined to wag the head right off.

LADY POOLE Do you mean they're going to disown him?

VERNON I think so.

CELIA And I don't.

VERNON Since when have you been so interested in the transport movement, darling?

CELIA Oh, Vernon, I wish you wouldn't laugh at everything that's serious.

VERNON Aren't you being rather inconsistent? / think it's serious enough for you to come away.

CELIA And I think it's too serious for me to go.

VERNON For *you*? Or for the Communist Party?
(CELIA *does not reply.*)

LADY POOLE What exactly are you afraid of?

VERNON It's very simple really. As you may or may not be aware the whole revolution is about to end in the most ignominious failure.

CELIA You think so?

VERNON I *know*, darling. If you want statistics I can give them to you.

LADY POOLE Oh, never mind about statistics. They can't bite.

VERNON No. But a thousand angry men can. It's like this. There's a meeting to-night at Transport House . . .

LADY POOLE Just round the corner?

VERNON Yes. There'll be a thousand men there. They'll be pretty desperate. Some of them are hungry. They want to go back to their old masters. And the one person who's standing in their way is Maxwell.

LADY POOLE How can one man have so much power?

VERNON He hasn't any longer. But he's hypnotized them, in the past. He and a few others.

LADY POOLE And now — the spell's broken?

VERNON Apparently.

LADY POOLE Thank God for that.

VERNON (*urgently*) But don't you *see* the danger of it? Transport House is just over there. (*Pointing to window*) He's going there to-night to make an inflammatory speech. D'you think they're going to listen politely and let him go? Why, he may be lynched. You may have the whole lot of them round here. Windows broken — the place sacked.

LADY POOLE Well, we can pour boiling water at them over the balcony.

VERNON And I'm told that I'm frivolous! (*To CELIA*) Celia!

CELIJA All that you've said makes me still more determined to stay. The others can go if they like. Mrs. Maxwell and Ivy. If you'll drive them.

VERNON I'll drive them, all right. But why not *you*? (*Tenderly*) Oh, my dear, I wish you'd be frank with me.

CELIA You . . . you don't understand.

VERNON I understand so terribly well. (*With extraordinary comprehension*) There's something rather wonderful about Maxwell. Isn't there?

(CELIA *does not reply.*)

• LADY POOLE Well . . . I'm sure it's all very exciting and I'm going round to tell Aunt Emily.

BOBBY Why d'you bother about her now?

LADY POOLE She's got a dead butcher and six children to look after. I should think *she* needed some protection.

BOBBY Why don't you telephone to her?

LADY POOLE Telephone! The telephone system in the last three weeks makes me think we didn't know when we were well off.

BOBBY I'll come with you. I don't like you going out alone.

LADY POOLE Just as you wish. (*Turning*) I'm sorry, Vernon.

VERNON So am I.

LADY POOLE Why don't you come round to-night and see the fun—and help, with the boiling water?

VERNON I think I will.

(*Exit LADY POOLE and BOBBY.*)

(*The thunder is heard.*)

VERNON (*as if to himself*) And so ... you've been bewitched, after all.

CELIA Vernon dear. I'm rather tired. I think you'd better go.

VERNON Til go in a minute. (*Grimly*) I don't want to go, though. I don't like to see you . . . under a spell.

CELIA I don't know what you're talking about.

VERNON Don't you? (*Slowly*) I suppose I ought to have been prepared for this. But it's very difficult, you know, to cut a fine figure in a revolution if you've got a respect for figures. (*Laughs and crosses to her*) Now, my dear. You *are* tired. I'll go. But give me your hand a minute. And listen.

CELIA Well?

VERNON (*very gently*) I love you. I believe you love me. But I know that there are times in life when one doesn't see quite clearly. I think you're going through such a time now.

CELIA Vernon . . . please!

VERNON Just a minute. All I want to say is that I'll wait . . . while you have your dream. For it is only a dream.

CELIA (*desperately*) You're assuming much too much.

VERNON Am I?

(*CELIA does not reply.*)

VERNON (*kissing her hand*) Good-bye, my darling.
(*Exit VERNON.*)

(*CELIA goes to window and looks out. The thunder mutters intermittently.*)

(*Enter JIM. He looks pale and anxious. He carries some papers in his hand. He shuts the door.*)

CELIA (*starting*) Oh!

JIM I'm so sorry. Did I startle you?

CELIA Oh, no. I was a little nervy with this thunder. (JIM *turns to go*) Where are you going?

JIM You won't want to be disturbed.

CELIA On the contrary. I want to talk to you.

JIM (*his eyes downcast*) Yes.

CELIA Why didn't you tell me about this idea of our going away?

JIM I didn't think it necessary.

CELIA But you've told me so many other things. You've trusted me before.

JIM I didn't realize till last night how serious things were.

CELIA Well — I'm not going.

JIM What's that?

CELIA I'm not going.

JIM Celia — for God's sake.

CELIA My mind's made up.

JIM But didn't your fiancé tell you?

CELIA Oh, yes. He was quite lurid about it. {*Lightly*} I understand that this house may be sacked.

JIM This isn't a joking matter.

CELIA Quite. That's why I'm staying.

JIM And what about Ivy and mother?

CELIA I don't know. They're being told about it now. If they want to go, they can. Vernon' promised to drive them.

JIM (*slowly*) Why do you want to stay?

CELIA (*looking away*) I think you know.

JIM (*his voice ringing*) Celia! (*He steps to her*)

CELIA (*holding up her hand*) Now Jim! This is a difficult enough situation as it is, without losing control.

JIM I should say it was.

CELIA You know, I believe I'm the only member of my family that can even bear the sight of a Maxwell.

JIM (*bitterly*) I don't blame them for that. I've caused enough trouble.

CELIA But you want to cause trouble, don't you? Isn't that your creed?

JIM Not in that way.

CELIA (*seriously*) You're not weakening, are you?

JIM (*suddenly bursting into harsh laughter*) Weakening! That's damned funny.

CELIA I don't understand you.

JIM (*quickly, passionately*) You understand me too well. I'm frightened of the way you understand. You gave me your friendship, after I'd insulted you. You listened to me, when the others merely sneered. And I sneered too, at first, at you, and your hands and your hair . . .

CELIA (*tensely*) Jim — let's avoid that subject.

JIM (*controlling himself*) Yes. You're right. Well . . . I am weakening. Look at these. (*He waves telegrams in her face*) There are over a hundred telegrams here. All from leading delegates. Telling me to compromise. In other words to give in. I don't know what to do.

CELIA {quietly} Now let's face this. Together. Shall we?

JIM Oh — if you only knew what a relief it was, to talk to you.

CELIA I'm glad. Now I want the facts. Is this speech of yours to-night going to make any difference? I mean, is there any chance of their listening to you, and carrying on for a bit longer?

JIM Not a hope. (*His own voice rising passionately*) Not a hope! Oh — it's cruelty to be betrayed like this! (*His voice breaking*) What do they expect? Paradise in a couple of weeks? In an industrial country like this? I never promised them that. Even when I was making speeches down in the docks, years ago, long before anyone had ever heard of me, I always told them the truth. I always said there'll be suffering, and chaos, and agony, and disillusionment, but if you'll only believe . . .

(*He throws out his hands . . . then lets them fall and buries his head in them.*)

It's hard.

CELIA (*gently*) Yes, it's hard.

JIM (*looking straight in front of him*) I've been a fool, I suppose. Intoxicated with an ideal. When I first took charge of those meetings, I used to look out on the faces of the people, and I thought I saw the light which I felt shining on me, reflected on them. I don't see anything now. (*Tragically*) I can't see anything but darkness.

CELIA (*urgently*) You mustn't give way like this.

JIM (*faying no heed, a twisted smile coming on his face*) Oh, yes — I *can* see other things. I can see fat bourgeois English faces, puckered with discontent, because the usual number of buses aren't running. I can see young men who've been drawing the dole for the last ten years, cursing me and the government, because we've been conscripting them for work. Calling me a bloody Bolshevik! What do they expect me to be? What did they elect me for? Worst of all, I see my own comrades — comrades — that's a funny word now, it used to be a beautiful word for me — my own comrades in the government shifting and shuffling, and saying, 'Yes, Mr. Maxwell, that would be very nice, but we've got to go slow, you know, slow —' or 'No, Mr. Maxwell, we couldn't do that — this is England you know, not Russia!' Why did they ever give me their trust, if it was only to crucify me in the end?

CELIA (*gently*) What are you going to do?

JIM What can I do? I was going to fight. But the fight's gone out of me. I suppose I shall go down to-night and say 'Yes. Go back to your old masters. The comedy's finished. And we've failed.'

CELIA (*with intense conviction*) If you do that I hope that you'll never try to look *me* in the face again.

JIM (*dazed*) What's that?

CELIA You, of all people! To go down there with your tail between your legs! Whining! I'm beginning to think I must have been mistaken in you.

JIM But Celia . . .

CELIA. Wait a minute. Do you know why I gave you my friendship? It wasn't because I was impressed by your arguments. I don't believe in them, however much I'd like to. I don't believe you can make people as — good, or as — happy — as you think. But I believe *in you*. Jim! There was something fine and shining — and rather wonderful about you. You were complete. There were no flaws in your faith. You mustn't let there be any now. Tell me. There aren't any? Are there?

(JIM stares at CELIA. He is trying not to cry. He turns away. His body shakes with silent sobs. He leans against the wall, his back turned to her?)

CELIA You're tired.

(JIM nods?)

CELIA But you're not beaten?

JIM *(shakes his head. He turns slowly. He says:}*
No. There are no flaws in my faith . . . in you.

•
QUICK CURTAIN

ACT I I

SCENE 2

[Important Production Note.]

The moment the curtain falls on the last scene, JIM'S VOICE is heard through the loud speaker, interrupted by yells, cat calls, etcetera. For JIM'S words, and for precise moment of raising the curtain, see below.

The main point to observe is that after JIM'S final words 'There are no flaws in my faith in you' the theatre must be drowned in noise. To make clear to the audience that it is the wireless to which they are listening, a few screeches, whistles and other aerial disturbances should be introduced. But the noise should be deafening.

The time is about a quarter to nine on the same evening, and we are hearing the final sentences of JIM'S speech through the wireless.

The curtain is not yet up.

We begin with tremendous booing. JIM'S VOICE at last gets a hearing.

JIM'S VOICE For the last time, will you listen?
(More booes.)

JIM'S VOICE You won't frighten me with abuse.
I'm used to it.
(More booes,)

JIM'S VOICE And what's more, I'll take on any couple of you down there, and make you swallow those words you've been shouting at *me*.

A VOICE Give him a chance.

JIM'S VOICE Thank you.

A VOICE After all, 'e's paid for it. Which is more than we are!

(A sound of tremendous laughter. Then silence.

JIM'S VOICE is heard speaking clearly.)

JIM'S VOICE You all heard what that cur said down there. Well, it's a lie. I'm not paid for this. I'm not a wage slave, like most of you seem anxious to be ... *(Tremendous booing)*

THE CURTAIN RISES

// Shows LADY POOLE, MRS. MAXWELL, IVY and BOBBY, sitting down, listening to the wireless. They look tense and apprehensive. The lights are dim. The curtains are not drawn.

LADY POOLE *(through the booes)* This is absolutely unnerving.

MRS. MAXWELL *(to IVY)* D'you think 'e'll be safe?

IVY He'll be all right, mum. He'll carry 'em.

BOBBY Listen!

(The booes die down. JIM'S VOICE is heard again.)

JIM'S VOICE I'll give you one more chance to listen to reason. If you accept the proposals which have been put before you to-night by your late masters, you will

not only destroy the ideals for which the people of this country declared themselves a few weeks ago, you will not only strangle the revolution at its birth, but you will set back the clock of progress for a hundred years — perhaps for ever.

Do you *wish* to do that? Are you doing it with your eyes open? I'm not trying to fool you. I've never promised Paradise . . . (*Ironic laughter and booes*) I've told you, not once but a hundred times, that the path of progress is a narrow path, that can be trodden only by men with staunch hearts and hard bodies. If you follow me, you'll suffer and you'll be in want. We may never even reach the goal we're seeking. But at least we shall have played a man's part in the great drama of human life. Are your hearts so weak and your bodies so soft that you can't even . . .

(There is a sound like a shot from the receiver. JIM'S voice stops. There are screams and a hideous uproar.)

MRS. MAXWELL (*urgently*) What was that?

LADY POOLE It sounded like a shot.

BOBBY (*goes quickly to the wireless and turns it of.*) Here, we've had enough of this.

IVY But it *did* sound like a shot.

BOBBY (*uneasily*) Nonsense. It was just a—just a noise.

MRS. MAXWELL Why did you turn it off? Can't we go on listening?

BOBBY What's the use of listening? It only

upsets you. (*Pointing his finger*) You know, both of you ought to have gone away, this morning, while you had the chance.

MRS. MAXWELL What — and leave Jim?

LADY POOLE What *good* can you do him?

IVY (*to LADY POOLE*) Why didn't *you* go, then?

LADY POOLE (*with dignity*) This is still my house. I'm still fond of it. And if there's going to be any trouble, I prefer to be *here*. .

MRS. MAXWELL (*to BOBBY*) Couldn't we have the wireless again? (*BOBBY shakes his head*)

LADY POOLE If there was any real uproar, we could almost hear from this window. (*Goes to balcony*)

MRS. MAXWELL (*running after her*) Oh—I wish he were safe back 'ome.

IVY (*to BOBBY*) Was that a shot, just then?

BOBBY Of course not. Anyway, there are a thousand people in that hall. Why should you assume that it's got anything to do with him?

(*A flash of lightning and a deafening peal of thunder.*)

MRS. MAXWELL (*coming from balcony with a little scream*) Oh! I do 'ate the thunder.

IVY (*going to her*) Mother—you must pull yourself together. It's no use going on about it.

LADY POOLE (*in a trembling 'voice*) It's this storm. Distracting us all. It's been threatening all day.

(*It begins to rain.*)

BOBBY Well, it's begun to rain now. That'll clear things up a bit. What about a drink?

MRS. MAXWELL I wish I knew what 'e was doing.

LADY POOLE Is there anything to drink?

BOBBY There's still a little communal brandy.

LADY POOLE Well, give some to Mrs. Maxwell.

MRS. MAXWELL I don't want anything, thanks.

BOBBY It'd do you good.

MRS. MAXWELL I couldn't, really.

BOBBY Miss Maxwell?

IVY No, thanks. .

BOBBY Mother?

LADY POOLE Yes. And a large one. Anything to help one forget. (*Enter FORSTER*) What is it, Forster?

FORSTER I came up to shut the windows, m'lady, because of the rain.

LADY POOLE You needn't bother about them here. It's so stuffy. Are they shut downstairs?

FORSTER Yes, m'lady. I bolted and barred them, after Miss Celia went out.

LADY POOLE What? Miss Celia's not gone *out*?

FORSTER But yes, m'lady. About half an hour ago.

LADY POOLE Why didn't you tell me?

FORSTER I thought you knew, m'lady.

LADY POOLE But it's madness. (*To BOBBY*) Bobby, what are we to do?

BOBBY Where the devil's she gone? (*To FORSTER*) Did she say anything?

FORSTER No, sir.

MRS. MAXWELL I CxpcCt **she's gone to Jim's** meeting.

IVY She wouldn't be able to get in.

MRS. MAXWELL She's got into the others all right.

LADY POOLE Really — it's too bad of her — at a time like this.

BOBBY I'll go out and have a look if you like.

LADY POOLE But where? We don't *know* if she's gone there. And even if she has, what could you *do*? Besides, I'd rather you *didn't* go. We've got to have somebody *here* in case . . . what was that?

IVY I think it was the front door.

LADY POOLE Well, it can't be *her* then.

FORSTER It might be, m'lady.

LADY POOLE But hasn't she got her latch-key?

BOBBY It wouldn't be any use. The doors are bolted.

LADY POOLE (to FORSTER) Well, go down at once, then.

(*Exit* FORSTER.)

BOBBY I'll go too.

(*Exit* BOBBY.)

LADY POOLE (at window) Really — this rain! She'll be soaked.

MRS. MAXWELL I wish I knew whether that was a shot we 'card.

LADY POOLE (to MRS. MAXWELL) Please don't keep on reminding us of that. It was nothing. Look here (*walking to wireless*) — we'll turn it on again. (*Turns it on. A dance tune comes out softly*) There! They're dancing now.

IVY It's a different wave length.

LADY POOLE Well — it's a very much more cheerful one.

MRS. MAXWELL Doesn't the music make it all seem — queer?

LADY POOLE It makes it all seem — futile.

IVY (*tensely*) If they were always playing music like that, there wouldn't be any — shots!

LADY POOLE Oh, there you are again on that subject. What is Bobby doing? (*Enter BOBBY*) Who was it?

BOBBY Only Vernon.

LADY POOLE And Celia wasn't with him?

BOBBY No.

LADY POOLE Well, isn't Vernon coming up?

BOBBY He's taking off his coat. He got wet. Mother, *don't worry*. Damn good thing you've got *that* going. (*Points to wireless*) Takes your mind off things.

(*Enter VERNON.*)

VERNON Where's Celia? Bobby says she's gone out.

LADY POOLE I know. *Where* is she?

VERNON Did you *let* her go?

LADY POOLE I can't lock the girl up.

VERNON I'd better go and have a look for her.

LADY POOLE Oh, don't be *absurd*. It's no use our scattering all over London. We'd better concentrate our forces here.

VERNON I suppose you're right.

LADY POOLE I thought you were coming before?

VERNON I tried to. But there's a wild crowd at every street corner. The whole city's gone crazy . . . waving flags and singing . . . I wish to God I knew where Celia was. Look here — I really think I'd better go.

LADY POOLE Please! If anybody's anxious, I am. But if you'll think one moment, you'll realize that your place is here. She'll be back in a minute.

VERNON Very well (*Looking at wireless*) I suppose we *must* have that tune on?

BOBBY Yes, we must. (*Looking at women*) It does 'em good.

IVY (*quietly*) You said the crowds were waving flags and singing. What flags were they waving?

VERNON I'm glad you asked me that. (*Quietly*) I'm afraid it wasn't the red flag. And it wasn't the International that they were singing.

LADY POOLE You mean . . .

VERNON I mean that we've got back to the Union Jack and God Save the King.

BOBBY And about time too.

MRS. MAXWELL (*in a tragic voice*) Jim!

LADY POOLE (*tenderly*) Oh, Mrs. Maxwell . . . I can't pretend to be sorry about the news . . . but I do realize what you must be feeling,

MRS. MAXWELL (*speaking with a great effort*) I'm not sorry about the news . . . if the truth were known . . .

IVY Mother! How can you speak like that?

MRS. MAXWELL Nor are you Ivy ... if the truth were known.

IVY You don't know what you're saying.

MRS. MAXWELL Oh yes, I do ... *(Suddenly frightened)* You won't tell Jim what I said.

IVY I should hope not.

MRS. MAXWELL *(looking round)* Nor any of you?

BOBBY *(awkwardly)* Of course not.

MRS. MAXWELL We musn't let him think we're letting him down. *(A slight-pause. The music flays)*

VERNON *(nervously)* Oh, must we have that tuner

LADY POOLE Turn it off, Bobby.

(Enter CELIA.)

VERNON Celia! *(The music stops)*

LADY POOLE Darling! Where have you been?

BOBBY I say, you're a nice one . . .

MRS. MAXWELL Is Jim all right?

CELIA *(being helped off with her hat and coat, which are dripping wet, by VERNON)* Yes. He's coming along.

MRS. MAXWELL Thank God.

CELIA He was magnificent.

(She speaks in an exalted voice. Her eyes are very bright?)

LADY POOLE You went to the meeting then?

(This dialogue at lightning speed?)

CELIA Yes.

IVY How did you get in?

CELIA Oh, I managed.

MRS. MAXWELL We 'card something like a shot. . .

CELIA It was a shot.

MRS. MAXWELL At Jim?

CELIA Yes. But it missed. The man got away.

VERNON Who was it?

CELIA (*looking at him, and sneaking with intense bitterness*) Oh — a patriot, I suppose.

VERNON I see.

LADY POOLE What do you mean ... a patriot?

CELIA I mean somebody who was against Jim.

VERNON (*smiling*) Well — why do you say it like that?

CELIA D'you want me to speak affectionately of murderers — even if they are on our side?

MRS. MAXWELL Why didn't they catch him?

CELIA They couldn't. He was standing in a window.

BOBBY Did you see him?

CELIA Yes. He had a black cap on. Quite a little man.

LADY POOLE What happened after the shooting?

CELIA Well — we don't know yet. It almost turned the scale.

IVY Did they listen to him after that?

CELIA Yes — they listened. And, my God, they cheered! But I'm afraid it was just an hysterical reaction.

VERNON You're afraid?

CELIA (*sharply*) Oh, Vernon, don't keep on repeating what I say,

VERNON I'm sorry. I only wanted to be quite clear as to your attitude.

CELIA Well? Aren't you?

(A 'very tense pause. VERNON shrugs his shoulders.")

LADY POOLE I — I think we're all a little overwrought. (*As if changing the subject*) Celia — how did you get in — to this house I mean?

CELIA Over the wall and through the kitchen window. I gave Forster rather a shock.

IVY Is Jim coming that way too?

CELIA Yes. I told him to.

VERNON *Tou* told him?

CELIA (*hysterically*) I will *not* be asked to repeat everything I say. (*Pulling herself together*) I'm sorry. But it's been rather exciting. And, after all, he's not back yet.

MRS. MAXWELL You don't think there's any chance of ... I mean . . . any more danger?

CELIA I don't think so now.

IVY Was it over when you left?

CELIA Yes. He was coming off the platform.

MRS. MAXWELL He ought to be here.

BOBBY What d'you think actually'11 happen? About the men going back to work?

CELIA I don't know. It was all too disorganized to take a vote.

IVY D'you think there's a chance? That he really might have carried them with him?

CELIA (*exalted*) If any man could, he could. After that attempt on his life, he was the soul of revolution. He seemed to be inspired — like a spirit — speaking

in utter silence. People were crying — great big men, crying — (*she runs to MRS. MAXWELL*) Oh, you ought to be proud — proud! (*A sound of cheering in the street*) What's that?

VERNON They're coming here! (*Runs to window*)

LADY POOLE (*agitated*) Oh — d'you think they're going to try to get in?

CELIA If they do — it'll only be to cheer him.

BOBBY Celia, for God's sake don't talk rot. You're behaving as if you'd gone crazy,

CELIA Perhaps I have.

VERNON I say — the whole street's filling up — (*LADY POOLE goes to window*) — no, don't come out.

LADY POOLE What sort of people?

VERNON Can't say. (*Turning round, to BOBBY*) Is everything locked up downstairs?

BOBBY As far as it can be.

LADY POOLE But they could break in the windows. Locks aren't much use against a crowd like that. Listen! (*A sound of great cheering*)

CELIA Isn't it wonderful?

IVY They are cheering! (*Runs to window*)

VERNON No — please don't come out on the balcony — anybody. You don't know who's in that crowd.

(*From now on the dialogue is punctuated by the sound of a vast multitude outside.*)

MRS. MAXWELL (*crying*) But where's Jim?

(*Enter JIM.*)

JIM (quietly) Here I am.

(He stands for a moment in the doorway. He looks pale but happy. He is still wearing his dripping oil-skins. For a moment his eyes meet CELIA'S. Then he goes swiftly to his mother.)

MRS. MAXWELL Jim!

IVY Jim!

JIM *(holding his mother)* Mother! *(Gently)* What's the matter? Everything's all right, isn't it?

MRS. MAXWELL We didn't know what was happening—with them trying to shoot you . . . *(Feeling his clothes)* . . . it didn't touch you, did it?

JIM Course not. That was just a crazy fool. *(To LADY POOLE)* I'm awfully sorry about this crowd outside.

LADY POOLE *(nervous/y)* Well, they do seem a little excited.

(Sound of cheers.)

IVY They're cheering you, Jim!

JIM Yes. I know. I'll have to go and speak to 'em.

VERNON *(sternly)* You don't propose to go out and use this balcony as a platform for your political ideas?

JIM I'm afraid I do.

VERNON And I'm afraid you won't.

CELIA Vernon!

VERNON All right—I'm running this.

JIM (*a note of frenzy in his voice*) Oh, no, you're not! The revolution's running it! There's a tide in the affairs of men which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune! That tide's come to me now! The flood's breaking! I'm on the top of the wave!

(*His voice rises shrilly. He tries to force his way to the window. VERNON gets in his way. There is a brief struggle. The cheering outside increases.*)

CELIA (*like a pistol shot*) Vernon! Unless you get out of the way, you need never come near me again.

VERNON (*relaxing*) Celia! You don't know what you're saying.

CELIA I know very clearly what I'm saying. I shan't say it twice.

VERNON But Celia. . . .

CELIA You can choose!

(*VERNON hesitates a minute. Then he lets go of JIM'S arm, and walks away, his head bowed. JIM goes to balcony.*)

[Production Note]

All the characters are now turned with their backs to the audience. There is nobody between JIM and the audience. The door (L) is open. As JIM steps out there is a renewed burst of cheering.

JIM Comrades! (*A burst of cheering*) When I called you Comrades before, some of you doubted me. Do you doubt me now? (*Cheering*) We've

just seen, over there, an example of the terrorism which *other* parties see fit to employ in order to stifle the cause of liberty. (*Cries of shame*) We need not comment on the mentality of the men who employ such agents. They are beneath your contempt and mine.

But I do not want you to be swayed towards me merely because of an act of crime and folly. I want none of that sort of sympathy . . .

(The door on the left opens gently. Through it creeps, 'very slowly, a little man with a black cap. He is deadly white, and has the eyes of a madman. He is not seen by any of the occupants of the room. He carries a revolver. Slowly he raises his arm.)

I want your faith!

(JIM stretches out his arms. Against the light outside he is a black silhouette — he is like a figure on the cross. In tones of trembling exaltation he cries . . .)

If you will only believe in me.

(The man fires.)

(These things now happen, almost simultaneously.

1. *All the women scream. There is uproar outside.*

2. *JIM staggers back. MRS. MAXWELL 'crying' on one side — VERNON on the other. They help him to the sofa. These are the lines which accompany this action.)*

JIM Oh God — oh God — they've done me in this time.

MRS. MAXWELL Jim — Jim — Oh, get a doctor quick — Jim, it's all right. (*Praying*) Oh God . . . please help me . . . please.

IVY What can we do . . . what can we do?

VERNON Lean on me, old chap.

CELIA Let me ... let *me!* Follow him. (*Pointing to door*) He must have gone through there.

BOBBY (*at door*) The door's locked . . . Vernon . . . give me a hand.

3. VERNON *runs to help* BOBBY. *They force the door.*

(*Exeunt* VERNON and BOBBY.)

4. Meanwhile JIM *has got to sofa.*

5. LADY POOLE *closes windows quickly. This shuts out all the noise.*

JIM (*gasping*) Mother — I'm afraid they've done me in.

(MRS. MAXWELL *gives a little trembling sigh and collapses?*)

LADY POOLE She's fainted . . . Ivy . . . help me to get her to this chair . . .

(CELIA *is left kneeling by JIM. She is calm as death. Her face is like a mask?*)

CELIA Ivy. Get me the brandy.

(IVY *hurries to get it?*)

(JIM'S head *is falling back?*)

CELIA Jim! Jim!

(IVY comes with brandy. CELIA says 'Quick' to IVY, tries to give it to JIM but his lips are almost closed.)

IVY (*in a trembling, crying, whisper*) He can't drink it.

(*She is standing at the back of the sofa.*)

CELIA Ivy, don't! You'll upset him.

IVY (*burying her face in her hands*) Jim!

(*And now it is as though CELIA and JIM were alone.*)

CELIA Jim! It was my fault. I made you go. Will you ever forgive me?

JIM (*very weakly*) Forgive! Give me your hand. (*She puts her hands over his breast. There is a moment's utter silence.*)

JIM (*in a dying whisper*) I've kept — my faith! (*His face is lit by a slow and radiant smile. Suddenly his head falls back.*)

CELIA Jim! Jim! (*Screaming*) Jim! (*She falls on her knees, and the room echoes with her desperate sobbing.*)

C U R T A I N

ACT III

SCENE I

// it midday, three days later, and the scene is the same, except that the blinds are drawn.

The curtain rises on an empty stage.

(Enter LADY POOLE, followed by BOBBY. Both are in deep mourning?)

LADY POOLE *(wearily)* Bobby, you might draw up the blinds, will you?

BOBBY I thought they were going to be kept down all day?

LADY POOLE No. Only till the funeral was over. Are the others coming along?

BOBBY I put Ivy and Mrs. Maxwell into a taxi. They ought to be here at any minute.

LADY POOLE And what about Celia?

BOBBY She was still waiting.

LADY POOLE Where?

BOBBY By the grave. *(Tensely)* I wish she wouldn't go on like this. She's showing it more than any of us. Even more than Mrs. Maxwell.

LADY POOLE *(quietly)* I know. I don't understand it at all. She seems to think in some way that she's responsible.

BOBBY Celia? How could she be?

LADY POOLE Of course, it's ridiculous. But then I think the last few weeks have been enough to give any of us delusions.

BOBBY Thank God it's all over now.

LADY POOLE I know. (*More brightly*) Wasn't it wonderful to see the buses running again?

BOBBY Rather. And to see the old *Evening News* placards out.

LADY POOLE And everybody in the streets looking so happy.

BOBBY And flags flying everywhere.

LADY POOLE Yes. (*Sadly*) And he's out of it all.

BOBBY Jim?

LADY POOLE Yes. Poor misguided boy.

BOBBY Perhaps it's just as well. It would have broken his heart to see England to-day . . . back to the normal.

LADY POOLE I suppose it would. Poor Jim.

BOBBY When are they going?

LADY POOLE To-day.

BOBBY Oh mother, couldn't you have let them wait a bit longer?

LADY POOLE I asked them to. But Mrs. Maxwell doesn't want to stay here any longer. I think I understand.

BOBBY You know, it sounds absurd, but I believe we shall quite miss the Maxwells.

LADY POOLE I'm sure we shall,

BOBBY Ivy might have been a really fine girl, if she'd ever had a chance.

LADY POOLE Mrs. Maxwell is a very fine woman. And she's *never* had a chance. I'm going to try to give her one — now.

BOBBY What do you mean?

(Enter MRS. MAXWELL. She looks white and numbed, and somehow smaller in her shabby black.)

LADY POOLE Oh, Mrs. Maxwell!

MRS. MAXWELL I'm sorry. I didn't know you'd got back. I just came for my things.

LADY POOLE But won't you even wait for lunch?

MRS. MAXWELL No, thank you. I'd rather not. *(Starts to go)* I think my things are upstairs.

LADY POOLE Let Bobby see to them for you. Are they all packed up?

MRS. MAXWELL Yes.

LADY POOLE Then, Bobby, just go and tell Forster to take them down into the hall. And we'll ring when we want a taxi.

BOBBY All right. There's nothing else you'd like, Mrs. Maxwell?

MRS. MAXWELL Nothing, thank you.

(Exit BOBBY.)

LADY POOLE Now do sit down for a minute. You must be worn out. *(Leads MRS. MAXWELL to sofa)* There!

MRS. MAXWELL You're very kind.

LADY POOLE Isn't there anything I can get you? A nice cup of tea?

MRS. MAXWELL Not just now, thank you. (*She begins to cry softly*)

LADY POOLE Oh — my dear!

MRS. MAXWELL (*pulling herself together*) It's all right. I've done with crying really. I suppose I ought to be proud, at having such a fine funeral for him.

LADY POOLE Yes. Try to think *that*. They gave him the same honour as they'd have given to some great soldier.

MRS. MAXWELL (*like an automaton*) There were some beautiful flowers.

(*Her whole body shakes. Then she speaks in a harsh voice!*)

But what's the use of honour and flowers? They won't bring him back. (*Pulls herself together*) I'm sorry. You've had enough trouble from all of us without my adding to it. (*Rises*) I wonder what Ivy's doing. We ought to be going.

LADY POOLE Are you going back to your old room?

MRS. MAXWELL Yes. (*Simply*) I was happy there.
(*A brief pause!*)

LADY POOLE Mrs. Maxwell. This has been terrible for all of us. But it's been far more terrible for you than for any one else. I wish you'd let me help you.

MRS. MAXWELL **How?**

LADY POOLE I ... oh ... it's so difficult to say . . . but I would like to make life a little easier for you. I don't like to think of two of you going back to one room.

MRS. MAXWELL There used to be three of us in it.

LADY-POOLE Yes, but . . .

MRS. MAXWELL I shall manage.

LADY POOLE But there's no need for you to 'manage.' I *could* help, really. I'd like to, so much. It would make me feel better about things.

MRS. MAXWELL (*gently*) You're very kind. I like you. But you've done all you need. I've got that dress of yours, you know.

LADY POOLE (*deprecatingly*) Oh — that dress . . .

MRS. MAXWELL I shall have it dyed. (*Enter IVY*) Oh, here's Ivy.

LADY POOLE (*ignoring IVY*) But *won't* you let me help?

MRS. MAXWELL (*proudly*) I don't think Jim would have liked me to take charity.

(*IVY comes forward. She is dead pale and in a state of suppressed hysteria.*)

IVY What's this about charity?

LADY POOLE I was only trying to persuade your mother to allow me to help her for a little while.

IVY (*defiantly*) Well, we don't want any help, thanks very much. We can manage for ourselves.

MRS. MAXWELL Ivy! That's no way to speak. 'Er ladyship was only trying to be kind.

IVY (*tartly*) So we've got back to 'her ladyship' already, have we?

LADY POOLE You can call *me* what you like. But I do ask you to be considerate to your mother. You're not being very kind, you know.

IVY All right. You'll be rid of me soon. And then you can say all the things you want to say. (*To MRS. MAXWELL, who is going out*) Where are you going?

MRS. MAXWELL I'm just going to see if the things are ready. Are you coming.

IVY I'll be along soon.

(*Exit MRS. MAXWELL.*)

LADY POOLE Don't you think you ought to go with your mother? She looks quite worn out.

IVY She'll be all right for a little while. I'm waiting for somebody.

LADY POOLE Not . . . my son?

iw (*with a scornful laugh*) Bobby? No! I've said good-bye to him. He's about the only member of your family that's treated me like a human being. No. I'm waiting for Celia. I beg your pardon . . . Miss Celia.

LADY POOLE (*quietly*) Why are you so bitter with me?

IVY Yes. Why? I suppose you've some excuse for asking that. I sometimes wonder why myself. (*Wildly*) Perhaps it's because some of Jim's spirit may have entered into me! As I stood there, by the grave (*She closes her eyes in a sort of ecstasy*) I felt as though something were rising out of it, like a breath of life from the grave, into me . . . (*Suddenly shouts*) Don't you laugh at me!

LADY POOLE I'm not laughing at you. But I think you're tired and over-wrought. And you mustn't give way to fancies like that.

IVY They're not fancies! They're not, I tell you.

(Enter CELIA. She is pale and walks as though in a dream.)

LADY POOLE Oh, Celia. We were waiting for you.

CELIA I'm sorry. I stayed behind. Mother, I want to talk to Ivy.

LADY POOLE Would you like me to go?

CELIA If you don't mind.

LADY POOLE Very well. Only don't keep her too long.

(She whispers in CELIA'S ear. CELIA nods, absently)

(Exit LADY POOLE.)

IVY *(fiercely)* Well. Are you going to tell me now? Or have I got to drag it out of you?

CELIA *(weakly)* I'll tell you.

IVY I'm waiting.

CELIA Oh, please — give me a little time to think.

IVY You've had three days to think. Three days since he died in your arms, and you told him that it was your fault, and asked him to forgive you. Why was it your fault? And what had he to forgive you for?

CELIA *(desperately)* I'll tell you in a minute.

IVY You'll tell me now. I was the only person who heard you say that. I've been asking you what it meant for three days. *(CELIA does not reply)* Well? Have I got to answer it for you? Have I got to say that you were his lover?

. CELIA How dare you say that? How can you pretend to have loved Jim and say things like that?

IVY I'm only trying to get at the truth.

CELIA (*in a cold distant voice*) Very well. I'll tell you the truth. (*She walks away, and speaks with her back to IVY*) You remember the morning of Jim's death?

IVY Yes.

CELIA You remember bringing him a great number of telegrams?

IVY Yes.

CELIA They were all urging him to give in.

IVY I know.

CELIA Do you know why he didn't give in?

IVY (*on a note of real inquiry*) No? I always supposed it was because he'd lost his head? Because it was all too much for him?

CELIA *Thai's* what you think?

IVY Well — what else *can* I think? Jim was the soul of revolution. But he wasn't a fool. He knew when to compromise.

CELIA Yes. But I didn't.

IVY You?

CELIA (*in a dead voice*) I persuaded him to go down and make the speech which ended in his death.

IVY (*tensely*) What are you saying? What are you talking about?

CELIA (*passionately*) Oh, Ivy. Please listen. When I said I wasn't Jim's lover, I was telling the truth.

He never even kissed my hand. It wasn't that. It was something utterly different—I don't understand. It was almost as though he were a prophet, and I were his disciple. I didn't believe in his doctrine, not then, but I believed in *him*> the beauty of him, the completeness and the radiance. He was like a light, burning in a dark world. Everybody was trying to blow that light out, because they thought it was leading them to destruction. But I didn't care where it led. I only wanted the light to go on shining, because I felt I would be so infinitely dark without it. (*Her voice dropping*) That was why I did what I did. (*In a broken voice*) That was why the light was shining—to the end.

IVY (*almost in a hiss*) Is this true?

CELIA Yes.

IVY He was going to compromise, and you stopped him?

CELIA Yes.

IVY Then I suppose you know what it means? Stripped of all your pretty words about light and darkness it means that you killed my brother.

CELIA (*in agony*) Ivy!

IVY You killed my brother!

CELIA Ivy—for God's sake.

IVY (*almost snarling*) You say you didn't love him. That's as it may be. But you made him love *you*. Oh, yes. You can shake your head, but it's true. You made him love you! Not as a disciple, as you call it, but as a woman.

CELIA It's not true !

IVY You know it's true. I've seen him looking at you as he never looked at any other woman. Jim didn't know much about women — especially women like you. And when he met you . . . why, any fool could see what was happening. I saw. The way he used to wait for you, after a meeting. The change that came into his voice when he spoke to you. The way he . . . he trembled when you were near.

CELIA (*with intense sincerity*) If this is true, I swear before God that it was none of my doing.

IVY (*in a broken voice*) My heart's dead. I can only feel . . . (*she strikes her breast*) . . . something burning inside me. (*A brief pause*) But I believe you.

CELIA (*going to her*) Ivy!

IVY (*drawing away*) Don't touch me, please.

CELIA But you said you believed?

IVY Yes. But do you think I can ever forgive? Or that mother could ever forgive, if she knew?

CELIA Ivy! I'll do anything — anything in the world.

IVY What *can* you do?

CELIA I'll give up everything — make any sacrifice.

IVY Do you mean that?

CELIA I never meant anything so much.

IVY You mean . . . you'd work for us, with me, anywhere, in poverty perhaps, for the things that Jim left undone? That you'd give up this sort of life?

CELIA Yes, yes.

IVY (*slowly*) And that you'd give up *anybody* who stood in the way?

CELIA (*dully*) I don't understand.

IVY Don't you? What about this Vernon friend of yours?

CELIA What has he got to do with it?

IVY What's he got to do with it? (*Scornfully*) Oh — I might have known you weren't serious.

CELIA For God's sake don't say that. I'm bitterly serious. I only want to see your point of view.

IVY Well — my point of view is this — that to go to that man now, after what's happened, would be like spitting in Jim's face.

CELIA Ivy!

IVY I'm sorry. I belong to the lower classes. We're coarse and crude. But sometimes we say what we mean.

CELIA (*falling on sofa, sobbing*) Let me think!

(*There is a pause, broken only by the sound of CELIA's sobs. IVY's expression softens, but the tension of her body does not relax. She goes quickly to sofa and kneels by CELIA.*)

IVY Listen. Do you love this man?

CELIA (*brokenly*) Yes.

IVY How much do you love him?

CELIA I don't know. I just — can't imagine — being without him. I don't know what — life would be like.

IVY Can you imagine what life will be like, for us, without Jim?

CELIA Please . . .

IVY (*very simply and with a terrible conviction*) He died in your arms. He died loving you. He died because you had sent him to his death because you had made him keep faith. You said you didn't believe in the things he died for. But he believed in you. The last words he ever said were 'I have kept my faith/ What is your answer going to be to that?

CELIA (*between her sobs*) Oh — please, please go away. I don't know what to do.

VERNON'S VOICE (*off*) Celia!

IVY (*hearing voice*) Well — now is the time for you to choose.

(*Enter VERNON.*)

VERNON Celia? (*Noticing IVY*) Oh, good morning. (*Sees CELIA crying*) But, darling, what's the matter?

IVY (*stiffly*) I think she's got something to tell you.

(*Exit IVY.*)

VERNON But, my sweet . . . what is it?

CELIA (*removing her hands from his*) Vernon . . . (*In a frightened voice, noticing IVY has gone*) Oh, she's gone.

VERNON Has that girl been upsetting you?

CELIA No. It's not that. (*She begins to cry again*)

VERNON Oh, darling — you'll break my heart, if you cry like that. What is it?

CELIA My heart's broken already.

(*He tries to hold her. She breaks away and walks slowly to the window?*)

VERNON Celia!

CELIA (*with her back to him*) Vernon. I can't go on with our engagement.

VERNON What's that?

CELIA You heard what I said.

VERNON But . . . but . . . (*He shrugs his shoulders*) If this is any sort of joke . . .

CELIA (*turning round, tragically*) Do I look as though I were joking?

VERNON But — have I done anything?

CELIA No.

VERNON Is there anybody else?

CELIA No.

VERNON Then. . . you just don't care any more?

CELIA (*desperately*) Vernon ... I can't talk about it.

VERNON (*shrugging his shoulders again*) This is a bit of a shock. I've got the car outside. I thought we might have driven out to the country ... to celebrate the end of the revolution. (*A brief -pause*) But I forgot. You've been to the funeral, haven't you?

CELIA Yes.

VERNON (*a long pause, at the end of which VERNON speaks very tenderly*) Celia, darling, you don't imagine you loved that man, do you?

CELIA (*tensely*) Who do you mean?

VERNON You know who I mean.

CELIA (*as though caught in a trap*) I tell you I can't talk about him.

VERNON **But** let me, just for a minute. I'm not blind, darling. I've watched you, during the last few weeks . . . falling under that spell. For it was a spell *you* know. He was a fine man, but he wasn't a real man. He was rather like his philosophy — made of moonlight and shadows. I thought, when the sun came out again, that you'd see that. . . that you'd see *me*, and not him.

CELIA Oh, Vernon . . . you're making it infinitely harder . . .

VERNON (*gently*) Well . . . it's not exactly easy for me. Because you see, I love you. And I believe you love me. Don't you?

CELIA (*trying not to look at him, as though the words were forced from her*) No! (*She backs away from him*) Leave me alone!

VERNON (*quietly*) You're a bad liar, Celia. All the same, it hurts to hear that from you, even when it is a lie. It is, isn't it?

CELIA (*turning round, on the point of breaking down*) I'm so desperately unhappy.

VERNON My dear, if you'd only tell me . . .

(*Enter IVY. She is carrying a bundle in one hand, a suit-case in the other. She walks straight to CELIA.*)

IVY (*looking in CELIA'S eyes, and holding out the bundle*) Would you mind helping me with this? It's got all Jim's things in. The things he was wearing when he died.

CELIA (*softly*) When he died . . .

IVY You see, it's got all his books and his speeches in it even his last speech.

CELIA His last . . .

IVY It's rather a heavy . . . burden.

VER'NON Let me.

CELIA (*loudly*) No! No! (*She clutches the bundle to her*) Yes. It's rather heavy. But I'll carry it!

(*She makes for the door. She cries hysterically,*)
I'll carry it!

(*IVY follows her. The door slams. VERNON stares after ~~them~~.*)

CURTAIN

ACT III

SCENE 2

CELIA'S sitting-room in Canning Town. It is the room over the MAXWELLS'. // is gaunt and comfortless. There is only one small window, giving on to the neighbouring roofs and chimneys, which are dimly seen in the moonlight. The rest of the furniture consists of a bed, a table, two chairs, an armchair, and a cupboard. There is a photograph of Jim on the mantelpiece.

There are a few placards on the walls, announcing Communist meetings. The table is littered with papers. A gas fire is on the right.

Six months have elapsed since the last scene. It is about six o'clock on an evening in early December.

(The curtain rises on an empty stage. The voice of MRS. MAXWELL is heard off.)

MRS. MAXWELL *(off)* This way, sir. Mind the extra step, Mr. Bobby. *That's right.*

(Enter MRS. MAXWELL, followed by BOBBY, who wears an overcoat?)

MRS. MAXWELL Ooh — it's cold in here. I'll just put a light to the fire.

(Goes to the gas fire and lights it.)

BOBBY I'm afraid I'm a bit early.

MRS. MAXWELL Well, she won't be long now, be-

cause she knew you were coming. She told me. Otherwise, I'm afraid I wouldn't 'ave been able to let you in. 'Ow did you manage it?

BOBBY Manage what?

MRS. MAXWELL Well — getting 'er to see you? We've 'ad such times down 'ere, with 'er shutting 'erself off from 'er own people. I even 'ad to send 'er ladyship away, as I suppose you know.

BOBBY Yes. That hurt my mother very much. (*Seeing MRS. MAXWELL'S face drop, hastily*) Oh, no, she knew it wasn't *your* fault.

MRS. MAXWELL Then 'ow *did you* persuade her?

BOBBY I told her I had a message from Major Ash.

MRS. MAXWELL But he's the very *last* person she'd see.

BOBBY I know. But he's leaving England to-morrow for several years. And anyway, I told her that if she didn't listen to what I'd got to tell her I'd stand under the window and shout.

MRS. MAXWELL Oh, Mr. Bobby!

BOBBY I wish she'd see him herself.

MRS. MAXWELL Not a chance.

BOBBY He's just outside, you know.

MRS. MAXWELL (*jumping*) *What?*

BOBBY Oh — not outside the door. In the next street. He brought his car down, because he hoped she might go with him.

MRS. MAXWELL Oh, I wish she would.

BOBBY Why *won't* she?

MRS. MAXWELL (*going up to BOBBY and speaking with a lowered voice*) Mr. Bobby. There's something about your sister that I don't understand. Something queer. I don't believe 'er 'eart's really in this thing. I *know* she don't believe 'alf she says at those meetings of 'ers. But she goes on and on, as though something were *driving* 'er. Almost as though she were being . . . haunted.

BOBBY (*softly*) By Jim?

MRS. MAXWELL (*looking away*) In a way . . . yes.

BOBBY Why, is there anyone else?

MRS. MAXWELL (*passionately*) Yes. . . there's Ivy! (*Embarrassed*) Oh, I know I oughtn't to speak against my own daughter. And I don't really. But it's like this. When Jim died. Ivy seemed to . . . well it was as though she felt she 'ad to carry on his work. That was natural in a way, though there were times when I thought she'd gone queer in the 'ead, the way she talked of his spirit entering into 'er, the things she said about messages 'e'd sent 'er, in 'er dreams. But what wasn't natural was the sudden hold she seemed to get over your sister. It was almost as though she *knew* something, something she could bring up against 'er . . .

BOBBY Against Celia? But that's absurd.

MRS. MAXWELL That's what I say. But 'ow else are you to explain it—all the things I've seen? It was Ivy who made 'er come down 'ere. It was Ivy who taught 'er everything she knows about the movement. And when she's been tired or sick of it, or

wanted to go back to the West End, it's Ivy who stopped her. (*Tensely*) Ivy's only got to give 'er a look, just one look, and your sister's like somebody who's being . . . hypnotized. (*Slight pause*) At least, -it was like that till a few days ago. That's what makes it so awful . . . what Ivy's going to do now.

BOBBY What's she going to do?

MRS. MAXWELL She's going to get married.

BOBBY But there's nothing very awful about that.

MRS. MAXWELL You don't understand. It's Ivy that's kept your sister going. She thinks that Ivy's given up men and marriage and everything. And when she hears this, it'll break 'er 'eart. Especially when she hears who it is.

BOBBY Who is it?

MRS. MAXWELL (*ironically*) It's not a communist, nor anybody who wears a red tie. You'll laugh. It's the grocer at the end of the street. Two thousand pounds, e's got, in war loan. And 'is shop. And the business. And a couple of kids.

BOBBY How old is he?

MRS. MAXWELL Oh, 'e's not old. Thirty or so. But 'e's the last person I thought Ivy'd get struck on. 'E 'ates the sight of a communist. Still — there it is. I oughtn't to 'ave told you this, Mr. Bobby.

BOBBY (*significantly*) I'm glad you did.

MRS. MAXWELL (*alarmed*) Oh — but you won't tell Miss Celia?

BOBBY I can't say.

MRS. MAXWELL But I promised Ivy — faithful — I don't know 'ow it all came out. She'd never forgive me.

BOBBY Listen, Mrs. Maxwell. I love my sister. You've told me something that I think may — break this spell you talked of. You don't want to take that chance away from me, do you?

(MRS. MAXWELL *looks away and does not reply.*)

MRS. MAXWELL (*starting*) Oh — there's the front door. I expect that's 'er. (*Goes to door*) You'd like to be left alone?

BOBBY If you don't mind.

MRS. MAXWELL (*impulsively*) You do as you think best, Mr. Bobby. I only want to see 'er - 'appy.

(*Exit* MRS. MAXWELL.)

(*Enter* CELIA. *She is dressed in very simple black. She looks like a tired working girl. She runs to* BOBBY.)

CELIA Bobby!

BOBBY Celia, darling! (*Looking at her*) My dear, you look dead beat.

CELIA I'm all right.

BOBBY But you're *not* all right.

CELIA Oh, don't bother about me. It's so lovely to see you again.

BOBBY I like that, considering you've refused to see anybody for the last six months!

CELIA I know. (*Awkwardly*) I'll try to explain that in a minute. How's mother?

BOBBY Mother's extremely irritated, with *you*. And I don't blame her.

CELIA (*laughing*) Oh, Bobby! Is she well?

BOBBY She's as well as can be expected of a mother with a prodigal daughter. But then, of course, she gains a good deal of comfort by looking at me.

CELIA How's Forster?

BOBBY Forster's taken it much worse. Your name's mud with Forster. Any other inquiries?

CELIA What d'you mean?

BOBBY Well, I only thought you might want to know how Vernon was getting on?

CELIA Vernon? (*Trying to appear casual*) Oh —he always gets on all right, doesn't he? He's so terribly efficient.

BOBBY You tried to make that sound bitter, but you didn't succeed very well.

CELIA Didn't I?

BOBBY I'm glad to see you're still in love with him.

CELIA Bobby, I'd rather not talk about Vernon.

BOBBY Well then, I will for a minute. (*With a silencing gesture*) No, only for a minute. Listen. Vernon's been ordered away to-morrow. He'll probably be gone for at least three years.

CELIA Three years!

BOBBY It's a long time, isn't it?

CELIA Where's he going?

BOBBY I think he'd prefer to tell you the details himself. He's outside now.

CELIA (*sharply*) Vernon? Where? I ... I won't see him.

BOBBY (*pleading*) Celia . . . why in heaven's name. . .

CELIA (*quickly*) I can't tell you why. But I've got a very good reason. You wouldn't understand. *He* wouldn't understand. (*Hopelessly*) I won't see him.

BOBBY I think I know why.

CELIA Do you?

BOBBY You're afraid.

CELIA Am I?

BOBBY You know you couldn't fool him if you told him you didn't care.

CELIA (*desperately*) Bobby, I will *not* talk about Vernon. (*Apologetically*) I'm sorry. I'm behaving abominably. But I'm awfully tired. I've had rather a hard day.

BOBBY You seem to have a good many hard days.

CELIA Why? Who told you?

BOBBY Well—judging from your appearance. Are you happy?

CELIA (*hesitantly*) I don't know. I've never asked myself that.

BOBBY Haven't you?

CELIA I've not got the time.

BOBBY Life's just one long round of communal gaiety, is it?

CELIA (*looking at him, begins to laugh, and the laugh turns to a cry*) Oh, Bobby . . . it's so marvellous to see somebody with a civilized sense of humour again.

BOBBY (*gently*) Darling!

CELIA It's all been so difficult.

BOBBY I bet it has. Tell me about it.

CELIA There's nothing to tell, really. It's all just squalid and dull.

BOBBY Squalid? Why I thought it was all a grand adventure?

CELIA So did I, at first.

BOBBY What's happened then?

CELIA (*putting her hand over her eyes*) I don't know. (*Begins to soft*) I think it's just because I ... I'm not worthy of it all. (*Pulls herself up*) Oh — it's silly I suppose. But the reality's so terribly different from the ideal.

BOBBY Tell me.

CELIA Well — for instance. I go to meetings. Workers' wives, and all that sort of thing. I get excited and worked up, before I go. I think I'm going to make a great speech to them. I learn it off by heart. I put in little bits of poetry. I close my eyes, and think of myself on a great platform, talking to hundreds and thousands of working women, about England, about the future, about some life that's got some beauty in it . . .

BOBBY Yes?

CELIA (*in a flat bitter voice*) And then . . . what happens? I walk through a lot of filthy streets to a little local hall. I go inside. It's cold and badly lit and almost empty. A few women drift in. Some of them are drunk, some of them are sober. All of

them are stupid. I try to talk to them, as one woman to another. But they're not interested in me as a woman. They're interested in me as a — 'lady'.

BOBBY (*really moved*) You poor darling.

CELIA (*laughing bitterly*) It's really rather funny, I suppose. There I am, imagining myself to be a prophet, and all they're interested in is the way I dress. (*Almost in a whisper*) They come up to me and they *feel* my dresses. They ask me about the quality and the cut. I want to speak to them about a new world. But all they want to talk about is *crSpe de chine*.

BOBBY Oh, it must be hell.

CELIA (*quietly*) Yes. It's hell. (*Loudly*) They're such snobs! Just because things are a bit better, in the country, because the unemployment figures are going down, because a lot of them are getting three and four pounds a week, they've forgotten all they ever learnt from — Jim. They're not communists any longer. They're just — lower class. Yes, it's hell. To be thinking of the brotherhood of man, and then to be asked how many servants one kept, at home!

BOBBY Why d'you go on with it?

CELIA I couldn't, if it weren't for ... somebody.

BOBBY Ivy?

CELIA (*surprised*) Yes. How did you know?

BOBBY Something Mrs. Maxwell told me.

CELIA Oh — but she couldn't have told you a fraction of what Ivy's been — of what she is!

(*Hesitantly*) Bobby. There was something connected with Jim's death which concerned me rather closely.

BOBBY *Tou?*

CELIA I can't tell you what it is. But Ivy showed me where my duty lay. (*In an exalted voice*) Oh — she's been wonderful — she's been supremely wonderful.

BOBBY Has she?

CELIA You'll never realize it, because you haven't seen her as I have. But it really is as if she were possessed by Jim's spirit. (*Softly*) And it's through her that I've got something of that spirit, too!

BOBBY She seems to have a pretty strong hold over you.

CELIA She has! It sounds silly, you know, but we made vows to each other.

BOBBY What sort of vows?

CELIA Well, it was her idea really. We just swore to give everything up, till we'd played some part in making things better, as Jim would have wanted us to,

BOBBY Everything?

CELIA Yes . . . comfort . . . friends . . .

BOBBY And lovers?

CELIA Yes. (BOBBY *smiles*) You needn't smile! It's not been so easy. In fact, it's only when I'm with her that I'm sure of myself. That's what's made it so hard, just lately.

BOBBY Why — haven't you seen much of her?

CELIA No.

BOBBY How's that?

CELIA She's been working very hard — in a different district. Listen! I believe that's her now.

BOBBY She probably won't want to see me.

CELIA Of course she will. Please stay.

BOBBY All right.

CELIA And be nice to her, won't you?

BOBBY I'll try.

CELIA Bless you!

(Enter IVY.)

IVY Oh! So you've come down!

BOBBY *(walking to her with outstretched hand)* Good evening, Ivy! *(She does not meet his hand)* Well, aren't you going to shake hands? I don't mind if they're dirty!

IVY *(laughing in spite of herself)* I never could be angry with you for long. All the same *(grimly)* what are you doing here?

CELIA He's only come down to see me.

IVY Is that so? Well — we arranged that you weren't going to see any of the others, didn't we?

BOBBY *(chaffing)* You surely don't rank me with the others, do you? *(With an undertone of seriousness)* Besides. I was only a messenger.

IVY *(sharply)* From whom?

BOBBY Wouldn't you like to know?

CELIA He came with a message from Vernon.

IVY From him!

CELIA Yes. I'm not going to see him.

IVY Are you sure?

CELIA Quite sure.

IVY I wonder. (*Nervously, to BOBBY*) Why d'you want to "come down here, upsetting her like this?

BOBBY I didn't know I *was* upsetting her.

IVY -We're quite happy by ourselves.

BOBBY Are you?

IVY -What d'you mean, 'are you?'

BOBBY I only thought you looked a little tired.

CELIA Ivy's been working terribly hard.

BOBBY Oh, I see. Business, I suppose.

CELIA Ivy never thinks of anything else.

BOBBY Doesn't she?

IVY Why d'you keep on repeating people's questions?

BOBBY I don't know. Just a bad habit, I suppose. Never thinks of anything else but business. My Lord! There's an example for you.

IVY (*very nervously*) Celia, I'm tired. I can't stand here talking. I'll see you when your brother's gone. (*Goes to door*)

CELIA Bobby, please.

BOBBY I've got a question to ask her.

IVY About what?

BOBBY About your business.

(*A slight -pause. BOBBY walks up to IVY and looks at her significantly*)

How is the grocery business?

IVY (*like a pistol shot*) What's that?

BOBBY Groceries. You know — sultanas, and bacon, and . . . and fly-papers, and all that!

IVY (*in a strangled voice, to CELIA*) Your brother's very — amusing, isn't he?

CELIA (*amused but puzzled*) Bobby, what are you talking about?

BOBBY I was only asking Ivy a question' which concerned her very intimately.

CELIA Ivy? Groceries? What *do* you mean?

BOBBY Ask Ivy.

(CELIA *turns to IVY.*)

IVY (*desperately*) Who have you been talking to? Mother?

BOBBY Does it make any difference?

IVY (*turning to door*) I'll never forgive her for this.

BOBBY Aren't you making an absurd fuss about nothing?

CELIA What/Vail this? What *are* you talking about?

BOBBY Shall I tell her? Or will you?

(IVY *looks at him. She suddenly begins to cry.*

She sinks into a chair. CELIA runs to her.)

CELIA Ivy! Please don't cry. Bobby — I hate you for this. I don't know what it's all about, but . . .

BOBBY No, you don't.

IVY (*through her sobs*) You'd better tell her?

BOBBY Shall I? (IVY *nods*)

BOBBY Very well. Ivy's going to get married. (CELIA *starts*) Just a minute. You haven't heard half of it yet. Ivy is going to get married to a grocer. Bear up darling. There's worse coming. Because I'm afraid he's a very respectable grocer. With two thousand pounds in war loan, a freehold shop, a

quantity of goods in excellent preservation, and a wholesome hatred of communists.

CELIA (*almost in a whisper*) Is this true?

IVY (*springing to her feet*) No! It's a lie. I'm going to marry a man that I've fallen in love with. That's all. A man. That I love. Love! (*Hysterically*) I can't help it. I didn't seek for it. It's just happened. (*With a gesture to CELIA*) There you are. I've let you down. You can say what you like about me, now. But I couldn't help myself. (*Sobbing*) I couldn't.

(CELIA stands silent.)

BOBBY (*who is the only sane person in the room*) It's very stuffy in here.

(*Goes to window and opens it. As he does so he leans out of window and waves to street below*)

That's better. I think that gas fire may be leaking. I'll turn it off. (*Does so*) Now do you know what I advise you two girls? Ivy, I should suggest that you go round to the grocer's straight away and ask if you can pick any flies off the currants. If you get any qualms of conscience you can think that they're nasty capitalist flies preying on poor communist currants. And as for you, Celia, the only thing that I can suggest is that you powder your nose and look slippy about it. Your nose is a positive disgrace . . .

CELIA (*not looking at him*) Bobby! Please leave us for a minute.

BOBBY (*quietly, after looking at them both*) All right.
(Exit BOBBY.)

CELIA (*shuddering and walking away from IVY*) Oh — I feel such a fool! You've made me such a fool.

IVY (*in a dead voice*) We've both been fools.

CELIA You — to say that!

IVY There was a book Jim used to read. -It was called 'Tragic Comedians'. I never read it. But it sounds like us.

CELIA (*hotly*) There's nothing so tragic about *you*. Your life seems to have settled itself very nicely, with your little grocer!

IVY That's the comedy of it then, I suppose. If there's anything so comic about groceries.

CELIA (*half laughing, half crying*) Oh, Ivy.

IVY (*holding out her arms*) Celia.

CELIA (*running to her*) All the plans, all the dreams we had!

IVY They were too much for us.

CELIA We tried — we did try so hard.

IVY It's no use women trying. Women can't change the world. It's a man's world, Celia. We've got to realize that.

CELIA (*brokenly*) And I've let my man go!

(*VERNON enters quietly. IVY sees him. CELIA'S face is buried in IVY'S shoulder. A silent signal passes between IVY and VERNON.*)

IVY Do you love Vernon so much?

CELIA He's the only real thing that's ever happened in my life.

IVY Oh, my dear! Listen, Celia. Will you do something for me?

CELIA Yes!

IVY Promise?

CELIA- Yes!

IVY Well—just close your eyes a minute. And then put your head on this cushion. There!

CELIA Oh — I'm so tired.

IVY Now — don't open your eyes yet, will you?

CELIA All right.

(IVY beckons to VERNON who comes closer. She takes VERNON'S hand?)

IVY Now I'm going to put my hand on your forehead and keep it while you count ten. And then, when you've counted ten, I shall tell you something that'll make everything seem much better. Now are you ready?

CELIA Yes.

IVY (*puts VERNON'S hands on CELIA's forehead*) Now count!

(Exit IVY on tiptoe.)

CELIA One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten. Well?

VERNON (*softly*) Well?

CELIA (*springing up*) Vernon!

VERNON Celia, darling. (*He takes her in his arms. She does not resist him*)

CELIA But how — where have you come from?

VERNON It doesn't so much matter where I've come from as where we're going to.

CELIA Where we are going to?

VERNON We're going a long journey, Celia. All

the way, through darkness and shadow, until **we** get to ... well, I thought the Ritz was as good as anywhere for this evening.

CELIA (*laughing*) Darling! -

VERNON Sweet! Are you cured? Or are you still a little communist?

CELIA (*seriously*) I'm afraid I'm still a little communist. No. Don't look depressed. (*She leads him to sofa. He sits down. She stands behind him.*) One of the principles of communism is the equality of labour. And now, I'm going to begin to make up for lost time.

(Very gently she kisses the top of his head. Slowly, caressingly, she kisses him, as the curtain falls.)

cu RTAIN

