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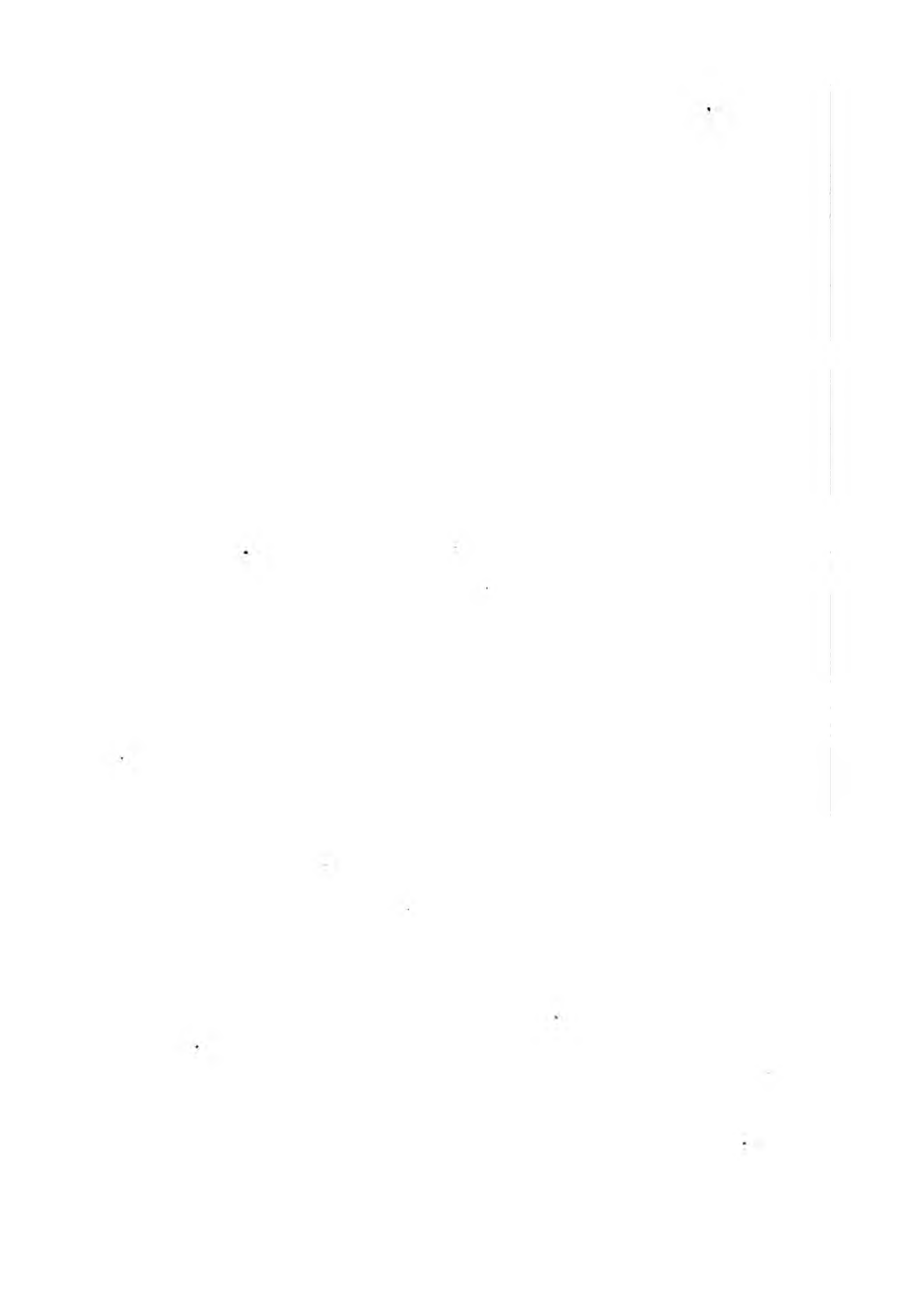
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THE SILVER BOX

JOY

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THE SILVER BOX
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JOY
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IN THREE ACTS

by
JOHN GALSWORTHY

DUCKWORTH
3 HENRIETTA STREET
LONDON, W.C.2

First issued in one volume
(New Readers Library 1930)



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THE SILVER BOX

PERSONS OF THE PLAY

JOHN BARTHWICK, M.P., *a wealthy Liberal*

MRS. BARTHWICK, *his wife*

JACK BARTHWICK, *their son*

ROPER, *their solicitor*

MRS. JONES, *their charwoman*

MARLOW, *their manservant*

WHEELER, *their maidservant*

JONES, *the stranger within their gates*

MRS. SEDDON, *a landlady*

SNOW, *a detective*

A POLICE MAGISTRATE

AN UNKNOWN LADY, *from beyond*

TWO LITTLE GIRLS, *homeless*

LIVENS, *their father*

A RELIEVING OFFICER

A MAGISTRATE'S CLERK

AN USHER

POLICEMEN, CLERKS, AND OTHERS

TIME: The present. The action of the first two Acts takes place on Easter Tuesday; the action of the third on Easter Wednesday week.

ACT I., SCENE I. Rockingham Gate. John Barthwick's dining-room.

SCENE II. The same.

SCENE III. The same.

ACT II., SCENE I. The Jones' lodgings, Merthyr Street.

SCENE II. John Barthwick's dining-room.

ACT III. A London police court.

**CAST OF THE ORIGINAL PRODUCTION AT
THE ROYAL COURT THEATRE, LONDON,
ON SEPTEMBER 25, 1906**

JOHN BARTHWICK, M.P.	<i>Mr. James Hearn</i>
MRS. BARTHWICK	<i>Miss Frances Ivor</i>
JACK BARTHWICK	<i>Mr. A. E. Matthews</i>
ROPER	<i>Mr. A. Goodsall</i>
MRS. JONES	<i>Miss Irene Rooke</i>
MARLOW	<i>Mr. Frederick Lloyd</i>
WHEELER	<i>Miss Gertrude Henriques</i>
JONES	<i>Mr. Norman McKinnell</i>
MRS. SEDDON	<i>Mrs. Charles Maltby</i>
SNOW	<i>Mr. Trevor Lowe</i>
A POLICE MAGISTRATE	<i>Mr. Athol Forde</i>
AN UNKNOWN LADY	<i>Miss Sydney Fairbrother</i>
LIVENS	<i>Mr. Edmund Gurney</i>
RELIEVING OFFICER	<i>Mr. Edmund Gwenn</i>
MAGISTRATE'S CLERK	<i>Mr. Lewis Casson</i>
USHER	<i>Mr. Norman Page</i>

ACT I

SCENE I

The curtain rises on the BARTHWICKS' dining-room, large, modern, and well furnished; the window curtains drawn. Electric light is burning. On the large round dining-table is set out a tray with whisky, a syphon, and a silver cigarette-box. It is past midnight.

A fumbling is heard outside the door. It is opened suddenly; JACK BARTHWICK seems to fall into the room. He stands holding by the door knob, staring before him, with a beatific smile. He is in evening dress and opera hat, and carries in his hand a sky-blue velvet lady's reticule. His boyish face is freshly coloured and clean-shaven. An overcoat is hanging on his arm.

JACK. Hello! I've got home all ri—— [*Defiantly.*]
Who says I sh'd never've opened th' door without
'sistance. [*He staggers in, fumbling with the reticule.*
A lady's handkerchief and purse of crimson silk fall out.]
Serve her joll' well right—everything droppin' out.
Th' cat. I've scored her off—I've got her bag. [*He*
swings the reticule.] Serves her joll' well right. [*He*

takes a cigarette out of the silver box and puts it in his mouth.] Never gave tha' fellow anything! [*He hunts through all his pockets and pulls a shilling out; it drops and rolls away. He looks for it.*] Beastly shilling! [*He looks again.*] Base ingratitude! Absolutely nothing. [*He laughs.*] Mus' tell him I've got absolutely nothing.

[*He lurches through the door and down a corridor, and presently returns, followed by JONES, who is advanced in liquor. JONES, about thirty years of age, has hollow cheeks, black circles round his eyes, and rusty clothes. He looks as though he might be unemployed, and enters in a hang-dog manner.*]

JACK. Sh! sh! sh! Don't you make a noise, whatever you do. Shu' the door, an' have a drink. [*Very solemnly.*] You helped me to open the door—I've got nothin' for you. This is my house. My father's name's Barthwick; he's Member of Parliament—Liberal Member of Parliament: I've told you that before. Have a drink! [*He pours out whisky and drinks it up.*] I'm not drunk—— [*Subsiding on a sofa.*] Tha's all right. Wha's your name? My name's Barthwick, so's my father's; I'm a Liberal too—wha're you?

JONES. [*In a thick, sardonic voice.*] I'm a bloomin' Conservative. My name's Jones! My wife works 'ere; she's the char; she works 'ere.

JACK. Jones? [*He laughs.*] There's 'nother Jones at college with me. I'm not a Socialist myself; I'm

a Liberal—there's ve-lill difference, because of the principles of the Lib—Liberal Party. We're all equal before the law—tha's rot, tha's silly. [*Laughs.*] Wha' was I about to say? Give me some whisky.

[*JONES gives him the whisky he desires, together with a squirt of syphon.*]

Wha' I was goin' tell you was—I've had a row with her. [*He waves the reticule.*] Have a drink, Jones—sh'd never have got in without you—tha's why I'm giving you a drink. Don' care who knows I've scored her off. Th' cat! [*He throws his feet up on the sofa.*] Don' you make a noise, whatever you do. You pour out a drink—you make yourself good long, long drink—you take cigarette—you take anything you like. Sh'd never have got in without you. [*Closing his eyes.*] You're a Tory—you're a Tory Socialist. I'm Liberal myself—have a drink—I'm an excel'nt chap.

[*His head drops back. He, smiling, falls asleep, and JONES stands looking at him; then, snatching up JACK's glass, he drinks it off. He picks the reticule from off JACK's shirt-front, holds it to the light, and smells at it.*]

JONES. Been on the tiles and brought 'ome some of yer cat's fur. [*He stuffs it into JACK's breast pocket.*]

JACK. [*Murmuring.*] I've scored you off! You cat!

[*JONES looks around him furtively; he pours out whisky and drinks it. From the silver box he takes a cigarette, puffs at it, and drinks more whisky. There is no sobriety left in him.*]

JONES. Fat lot o' things they've got 'ere ! [*He sees the crimson purse lying on the floor.*] More cats' fur. Puss, puss ! [*He fingers it, drops it on the tray, and looks at JACK.*] Calf ! Fat calf ! [*He sees his own presentment in a mirror. Lifting his hands, with fingers spread, he stares at it ; then looks again at JACK, clenching his fist as if to batter in his sleeping, smiling face. Suddenly he tilts the rest of the whisky into the glass and drinks it. With cunning glee he takes the silver box and purse and pockets them.*] I'll score you off too, that's wot I'll do !

[*He gives a little snarling laugh and lurches to the door. His shoulder rubs against the switch ; the light goes out. There is a sound as of a closing outer door.*

The curtain falls.

The curtain rises again at once.

SCENE II

In the BARTHWICKS' dining-room. JACK is still asleep ; the morning light is coming through the curtains. The time is half-past eight. WHEELER, brisk person, enters with a dust-pan, and MRS. JONES more slowly with a scuttle.

WHEELER. [*Drawing the curtains.*] That precious husband of yours was round for you after you'd gone yesterday, Mrs. Jones. Wanted your money for drink, I suppose. He hangs about the corner here half

the time. I saw him outside the "Goat and Bells" when I went to the post last night. If I were you I wouldn't live with him. I wouldn't live with a man that raised his hand to me. I wouldn't put up with it. Why don't you take the children and leave him? If you put up with 'im it'll only make him worse. I never can see why, because a man's married you, he should knock you about.

MRS. JONES. [*Slim, dark-eyed, and dark-haired; oval-faced, and with a smooth, soft, even voice; her manner patient, her way of talking quite impersonal; she wears a blue linen dress, and boots with holes.*] It was nearly two last night before he come home, and he wasn't himself. He made me get up, and he knocked me about; he didn't seem to know *what* he was saying or doing. Of course I *would* leave him, but I'm really afraid of what he'd do to me. He's such a violent man when he's not himself.

WHEELER. Why don't you get him locked up? You'll never have any peace until you get him locked up. If I were you I'd go to the police court to-morrow. That's what I would do.

MRS. JONES. Of course I ought to go, because he does treat me so badly when he's not himself. But you see, Bettina, he has a very hard time—he's been out of work two months, and it preys upon his mind. When he's in work he behaves himself much better. It's when he's out of work that he's so violent.

WHEELER. Well, if you won't take any steps you'll never get rid of him.

MRS. JONES. Of course it's very wearing to me; I don't get my sleep at nights. And it's not as if I were getting help from him, because I have to do for the children and all of us. And he throws such dreadful things up at me, talks of my having men to follow me about. Such a thing never happens; no man ever speaks to me. And of course it's just the other way. It's what he does that's wrong and makes me so unhappy. And then he's always threatenin' to cut my throat if I leave him. It's all the drink, and things preying on his mind; he's not a bad man really. Sometimes he'll speak quite kind to me, but I've stood so much from him, I don't feel it in me to speak kind back, but just keep myself to myself. And he's all right with the children too, except when he's not himself.

WHEELER. You mean when he's drunk, the beauty.

MRS. JONES. Yes. [*Without change of voice.*] There's the young gentleman asleep on the sofa.

[*They both look silently at Jack.*]

MRS. JONES. [*At last, in her soft voice.*] He doesn't look quite himself.

WHEELER. He's a young limp. that's what he is. It's my belief he was tipsy last night, like your husband. It's another kind of bein' out of work that sets *him* to drink. I'll go and tell Marlow. This is his job. [*She goes.*]

[*Mrs. Jones, upon her knees, begins a gentle sweeping.*]

JACK. [*Waking.*] Who's there? What is it?

MRS. JONES. It's me, sir, Mrs. Jones.

JACK. [*Sitting up and looking round.*] Where is it—what—what time is it?

MRS. JONES. It's getting on for nine o'clock, sir.

JACK. For nine! Why—what! [*Rising. and loosening his tongue; putting hand to his head, and staring hard at Mrs. Jones.*] Look here, you, Mrs.—Mrs. Jones—don't you say you caught me asleep here.

MRS. JONES. No, sir, of course I won't, sir.

JACK. It's quite an accident; I don't know how it happened. I must have forgotten to go to bed. It's a queer thing. I've got a most beastly headache. Mind you don't say anything, Mrs. Jones.

[*Goes out and passes MARLOW in the doorway.*

MARLOW is young and quiet; he is clean-shaven, and his hair is brushed high from his forehead in a coxcomb. Incidentally a butler, he is first a man. He looks at MRS. JONES, and smiles a private smile.

MARLOW. Not the first time, and won't be the last. Looked a bit dicky, eh, Mrs. Jones?

MRS. JONES. He didn't look quite himself. Of course I didn't take notice.

MARLOW. You're used to them. How's your old man?

MRS. JONES. [*Softly as throughout.*] Well, he was very bad last night; he didn't seem to know what he was about. He was very late, and he was most abusive. But now, of course, he's asleep.

MARLOW. That's his way of finding a job, eh?

MRS. JONES. As a rule, Mr. Marlow, he goes out

early every morning looking for work, and sometimes he comes in fit to drop—and of course I can't say he doesn't try to get it, because he does. Trade's very bad. [*She stands quite still, her pan and brush before her, at the beginning and the end of long vistas of experience, traversing them with her impersonal eye.*] But he's not a good husband to me—last night he hit me, and he was so dreadfully abusive.

MARLOW. Bank 'oliday, eh! He's too fond of the "Goat and Bells," that's what's the matter with him. I see him at the corner late every night. He hangs about.

MRS. JONES. He gets to feeling very low walking about all day after work, and being refused so often, and then when he gets a drop in him it goes to his head. But he shouldn't treat his wife as he treats me. Sometimes I've had to go and walk about at night, when he wouldn't let me stay in the room; but he's sorry for it afterwards. And he hangs about after me, he waits for me in the street; and I don't think he ought to, because I've always been a good wife to him. And I tell him Mrs. Barthwick wouldn't like him coming about the place. But that only makes him angry, and he says dreadful things about the gentry. Of course it was through me that he first lost his place, through his not treating me right; and that's made him bitter against the gentry. He had a very good place as groom in the country; but it made such a stir, because of course he didn't treat me right.

MARLOW. Got the sack?

MRS. JONES. Yes; his employer said he couldn't keep him, because there was a great deal of talk; and he said it was such a bad example. But it's very important for me to keep my work here; I have the three children, and I don't want him to come about after me in the streets, and make a disturbance as he sometimes does.

MARLOW. [*Holding up the empty decanter.*] Not a drain! Next time he hits you get a witness and go down to the court——

MRS. JONES. Yes, I think I've made up my mind. I think I ought to.

MARLOW. That's right. Where's the ciga——?

[*He searches for the silver box; he looks at MRS. JONES, who is sweeping on her hands and knees; he checks himself and stands reflecting. From the tray he picks two half-smoked cigarettes, and reads the name of them.*]

Nestor—where the deuce——?

[*With a meditative air he looks again at MRS. JONES, and, taking up JACK'S overcoat, he searches in the pockets. WHEELER, with a tray of breakfast things, comes in.*]

MARLOW. [*Aside to WHEELER.*] Have you seen the cigarette-box?

WHEELER. No.

MARLOW. Well, it's gone. I put it on the tray last night. And he's been smoking. [*Showing her the ends*

of cigarette.] It's not in these pockets. He can't have taken it upstairs this morning! Have a good look in his room when he comes down. Who's been in here?

WHEELER. Only me and Mrs. Jones.

MRS. JONES. I've finished here; shall I do the drawing-room now?

WHEELER. [*Looking at her doubtfully.*] Have you seen—— Better do the boudwower first.

[*MRS. JONES goes out with pan and brush. MARLOW and WHEELER look each other in the face.*]

MARLOW. It'll turn up.

WHEELER. [*Hesitating.*] You don't think *she*—— [*Nodding at the door.*]

MARLOW. [*Stoutly.*] I don't—I never believes anything of anybody.

WHEELER. But the master'll have to be told.

MARLOW. You wait a bit, and see if it don't turn up. Suspicion's no business of ours. I set my mind against it.

The curtain falls.

The curtain rises again at once

SCENE III

BARTHWICK *and* MRS. BARTHWICK *are seated at the breakfast table. He is a man between fifty and sixty; quietly important, with a bald forehead, and pince-nez, and the "Times" in his hand. She is a lady of nearly fifty, well dressed, with greyish hair, good features, and a decided manner. They face each other.*

BARTHWICK. [*From behind his paper.*] The Labour man has got in at the by-election for Barnside, my dear.

MRS. BARTHWICK. Another Labour? I can't think what on earth the country is about.

BARTHWICK. I predicted it. It's not a matter of vast importance.

MRS. BARTHWICK. Not? How can you take it so calmly, John? To me it's simply outrageous. And there you sit, you Liberals, and pretend to encourage these people!

BARTHWICK. [*Frowning.*] The representation of all parties is necessary for any proper reform, for any proper social policy.

MRS. BARTHWICK. I've no patience with your talk of reform—all that nonsense about social policy. We know perfectly well what it is they want; they want things for themselves. Those Socialists and Labour men are an absolutely selfish set of people. They have no sense of patriotism, like the upper classes, *they simply want what we've got.*

BARTHWICK. Want what we've got! [*He stares into space.*] My dear, what are you talking about? [*With a contortion.*] I'm no alarmist.

MRS. BARTHWICK. Cream? Quite uneducated men! Wait until they begin to tax our investments. I'm convinced that when they once get a chance they will tax everything—they've no feeling for the country. You Liberals and Conservatives, you're all alike; you don't see an inch before your noses. You've no imagination, not a scrap of imagination between you. You ought to join hands and nip it in the bud.

BARTHWICK. You're talking nonsense! How is it possible for Liberals and Conservatives to join hands, as you call it? That shows how absurd it is for women—— Why, the very essence of a Liberal is to trust in the people!

MRS. BARTHWICK. Now, John, eat your breakfast. As if there were any real difference between you and the Conservatives. All the upper classes have the same interests to protect, and the same principles. [*Calmly.*] Oh! you're sitting upon a volcano, John.

BARTHWICK. What!

MRS. BARTHWICK. I read a letter in the paper yesterday. I forget the man's name, but it made the whole thing perfectly clear. You don't look things in the face.

BARTHWICK. Indeed! [*Heavily.*] I am a Liberal! Drop the subject, please!

MRS. BARTHWICK. Toast? I quite agree with what this man says: Education is simply ruining the lower

classes. It unsettles them, and that's the worst thing for us all. I see an enormous difference in the manner of servants.

BARTHWICK. [*With suspicious emphasis.*] I welcome any change that will lead to something better. [*He opens a letter.*] H'm! This is that affair of Master Jack's again. "High Street, Oxford. Sir, We have received Mr. John Barthwick, Senior's, draft for forty pounds." Oh! the letter's to him! "We now enclose the cheque you cashed with us, which, as we stated in our previous letter, was not met on presentation at your bank. We are, Sir, yours obediently, Moss and Sons, Tailors." H'm! [*Staring at the cheque.*] A pretty business altogether! The boy might have been prosecuted.

MRS. BARTHWICK. Come, John, you know Jack didn't mean anything; he only thought he was over-drawing. I still think his bank ought to have cashed that cheque. They must know your position.

BARTHWICK. [*Replacing in the envelope the letter and the cheque.*] Much good that would have done him in a court of law. [*He stops as JACK comes in, fastening his waistcoat and staunching a razor cut upon his chin.*]

JACK. [*Sitting down between them, and speaking with an artificial joviality.*] Sorry I'm late. [*He looks lugubriously at the dishes.*] Tea, please, mother. Any letters for me? [*BARTHWICK hands the letter to him.*] But look here, I say, this has been opened! I do wish you wouldn't——

BARTHWICK. [*Touching the envelope.*] I suppose I'm entitled to this name.

JACK. [*Sulkily.*] Well, I can't help having your name, father! [*He reads the letter, and mutters.*]
Brutes

BARTHWICK. [*Eyeing him.*] You don't deserve to be so well out of that.

JACK. Haven't you ragged me enough, dad?

MRS. BARTHWICK. Yes, John, let Jack have his breakfast.

BARTHWICK. If you hadn't had me to come to, where would you have been? It's the merest accident—suppose you had been the son of a poor man or a clerk. Obtaining money with a cheque you knew your bank could not meet. It might have ruined you for life. I can't see what's to become of you if these are your principles. I never did anything of the sort myself.

JACK. I expect you always had lots of money. If you've got plenty of money, of course——

BARTHWICK. On the contrary, I had not your advantages. My father kept me very short of money.

JACK. How much had you, dad?

BARTHWICK. It's not material. The question is, do you feel the gravity of what you did?

JACK. I don't know about the gravity. Of course, I'm very sorry if you think it was wrong. Haven't I said so! I should never have done it at all if I hadn't been so jolly hard up.

BARTHWICK. How much of that forty pounds have you got left, Jack?

JACK. [*Hesitating.*] I don't know—not much.

BARTHWICK. How much?

JACK. [*Desperately.*] I haven't got any.

BARTHWICK. What?

JACK. I know I've got the most beastly headache.

[*He leans his head on his hand.*]

MRS. BARTHWICK. Headache? My dear boy! Can't you eat any breakfast?

JACK. [*Drawing in his breath.*] Too jolly bad!

MRS. BARTHWICK. I'm so sorry. Come with me, dear; I'll give you something that will take it away at once.

[*They leave the room; and BARTHWICK, tearing up the letter, goes to the fireplace and puts the pieces in the fire. While he is doing this MARLOW comes in, and, looking round him, is about quietly to withdraw.*]

BARTHWICK. What's that? What d'you want?

MARLOW. I was looking for Mr. John, sir.

BARTHWICK. What d'you want Mr. John for?

MARLOW. [*With hesitation.*] I thought I should find him here, sir.

BARTHWICK. [*Suspiciously.*] Yes, but what do you want him for?

MARLOW. [*Offhandedly.*] There's a lady called—asked to speak to him for a minute, sir.

BARTHWICK. A lady, at this time in the morning. What sort of a lady?

MARLOW. [*Without expression in his voice.*] I can't tell, sir; no particular sort. She might be after

charity. She might be a Sister of Mercy, I should think, sir.

BARTHWICK. Is she dressed like one ?

MARLOW. No, sir, she's in plain clothes, sir.

BARTHWICK. Didn't she say what she wanted ?

MARLOW. No, sir.

BARTHWICK. Where did you leave her ?

MARLOW. In the hall, sir.

BARTHWICK. In the hall ? How do you know she's not a thief—not got designs on the house ?

MARLOW. No, sir, I don't fancy so, sir.

BARTHWICK. Well, show her in here ; I'll see her myself.

[MARLOW goes out with a private gesture of dismay. He soon returns, ushering in a young pale lady with dark eyes and pretty figure, in a modish, black, but rather shabby dress, a black and white trimmed hat with a bunch of Parma violets wrongly placed, and fuzzy-spotted veil. At the sight of MR. BARTHWICK she exhibits every sign of nervousness. MARLOW goes out.]

UNKNOWN LADY. Oh ! but—I beg pardon—there's some mistake—I—— [She turns to fly.]

BARTHWICK. Whom did you want to see, madam ?

UNKNOWN. [Stopping and looking back.] It was Mr. John Barthwick I wanted to see.

BARTHWICK. I am John Barthwick, madam. What can I have the pleasure of doing for you ?

UNKNOWN. Oh ! I—I don't—— [She drops her

eyes. BARTHWICK *scrutinises her, and purses his lips.*]

BARTHWICK. It was my son, perhaps, you wished to see?

UNKNOWN. [*Quickly.*] Yes, of course, it's your son.

BARTHWICK. May I ask whom I have the pleasure of speaking to?

UNKNOWN. [*Appeal and hardness upon her face.*] My name is—oh! it doesn't matter—I don't want to make any fuss. I just want to see your son for a minute. [*Boldly.*] In fact, I *must* see him.

BARTHWICK. [*Controlling his uneasiness.*] My son is not very well. If necessary, no doubt I could attend to the matter; be so kind as to let me know—

UNKNOWN. Oh! but I *must* see him—I've come on purpose—[*She bursts out nervously.*] I don't want to make any fuss, but the fact is, last—last night your son took away—he took away my— [She stops.]

BARTHWICK. [*Severely.*] Yes, madam, what?

UNKNOWN. He took away my—my reticule.

BARTHWICK. Your reti—?

UNKNOWN. I don't care about the reticule; it's not *that* I want—I'm sure I don't want to make any fuss—[*her face is quivering*]—but—but—all my money was in it!

BARTHWICK. In what—in what?

UNKNOWN. In my purse, in the reticule. It was a crimson silk purse. Really, I wouldn't have come—I don't want to make any fuss. But I must get my money back—mustn't I?

BARTHWICK. Do you tell me that my son——?

UNKNOWN. Oh! well you see, he wasn't quite—I mean he was—— *[She smiles mesmerically.]*

BARTHWICK. I beg your pardon.

UNKNOWN. *[Stamping her foot.]* Oh! don't you see—tipsy! We had a quarrel.

BARTHWICK. *[Scandalised.]* How? Where?

UNKNOWN. *[Defiantly.]* At my place. We'd had supper at the——and your son——

BARTHWICK. *[Pressing the bell.]* May I ask how you knew this house? Did he give you his name and address?

UNKNOWN. *[Glancing sidelong.]* I got it out of his overcoat.

BARTHWICK. *[Sardonically.]* Oh! you got it out of his overcoat. And may I ask if my son will know you by daylight?

UNKNOWN. Know me? I should jolly—I mean, of course he will! *[MARLOW comes in.]*

BARTHWICK. Ask Mr. John to come down.

[MARLOW goes out, and BARTHWICK walks uneasily about.]

And how long have you enjoyed his acquaintance-ship?

UNKNOWN. Only since—only since Good Friday.

BARTHWICK. I am at a loss—I repeat I am at a loss——

[He glances at this unknown lady, who stands with eyes cast down, twisting her hands. And suddenly Jack appears. He stops on seeing]

who is here, and the unknown lady hysterically giggles. There is a silence.

BARTHWICK. [*Portentously.*] This young—er—lady says that last night—I think you said last night, madam—you took away——

UNKNOWN. [*Impulsively.*] My reticule, and all my money was in a crimson silk purse.

JACK. Reticule. [*Looking round for any chance to get away.*] I don't know anything about it.

BARTHWICK. [*Sharply.*] Come, do you deny seeing this young lady last night?

JACK. Deny? No, of course. [*Whispering.*] Why did you give me away like this? What on earth did you come here for?

UNKNOWN. [*Tearfully.*] I'm sure I didn't want to—it's not likely, is it? You snatched it out of my hand—you know you did—and the purse had all my money in it. I didn't follow you last night because I didn't want to make a fuss and it was so late, and you were so——

BARTHWICK. Come, sir, don't turn your back on me—explain!

JACK. [*Desperately.*] I don't remember anything about it. [*In a low voice to his friend.*] Why on earth couldn't you have written?

UNKNOWN. [*Sullenly.*] I want it now; I must have it—I've got to pay my rent to-day. [*She looks at BARTHWICK.*] They're only too glad to jump on people who are not—not *well off*.

JACK. I don't remember anything about it, really. I don't remember anything about last night at all.

[*He puts his hand up to his head.*] It's all—cloudy, and I've got such a beastly headache.

UNKNOWN. But you *took* it; you know you did. You said you'd score me off.

JACK. Well, then, it must be here. I remember now—I remember something. Why did I take the beastly thing?

BARTHWICK. Yes, why did you take the beastly—
[*He turns abruptly to the window.*]

UNKNOWN. [*With her mesmeric smile.*] You weren't quite—were you?

JACK. [*Smiling pallidly.*] I'm awfully sorry. If there's anything I can do—

BARTHWICK. Do? You can restore this property, I suppose.

JACK. I'll go and have a look, but I really don't think I've got it.

[*He goes out hurriedly. And BARTHWICK, placing a chair, motions to the visitor to sit; then, with pursed lips, he stands and eyes her fixedly. She sits, and steals a look at him; then turns away, and, drawing up her veil, stealthily wipes her eyes. And JACK comes back.*]

JACK. [*Ruefully holding out the empty reticule.*] Is that the thing? I've looked all over—I can't find the purse anywhere. Are you sure it was there?

UNKNOWN. [*Tearfully.*] Sure? Of course I'm sure. A crimson silk purse. It was all the money I had.

JACK. I really am awfully sorry—my head's so jolly bad. I've asked the butler, but he hasn't seen it.

UNKNOWN. I *must* have my money—

JACK. Oh! Of course—that'll be all right; I'll see that that's all right. How much?

UNKNOWN. [*Sullenly.*] Seven pounds—twelve—it's all I've got in the world.

JACK. That'll be all right; I'll—send you a—cheque.

UNKNOWN. [*Eagerly.*] No; now, please. Give me what was in my purse; I've got to pay my rent this morning. They won't give me another day; I'm a fortnight behind already.

JACK. [*Blankly.*] I'm awfully sorry; I really haven't a penny in my pocket.

[*He glances stealthily at BARTHWICK.*

UNKNOWN. [*Excitedly.*] Come, I say you must—it's my money, and you took it. I'm not going away without it. They'll turn me out of my place.

JACK. [*Clasping his head.*] But I can't give you what I haven't got. Don't I tell you I haven't a beastly penny?

UNKNOWN. [*Tearing at her handkerchief.*] Oh! do give it me! [*She puts her hands together in appeal; then, with sudden fierceness.*] If you don't I'll summons you. It's stealing, that's what it is!

BARTHWICK. [*Uneasily.*] One moment, please. As a matter of—er—principle, I shall settle this claim. [*He produces money.*] Here is eight pounds; the extra will cover the value of the purse and your cab

fares. I need make no comment—no thanks are necessary.

[Touching the bell, he holds the door ajar in silence. The Unknown lady stores the money in her reticule, she looks from JACK to BARTHWICK, and her face is quivering faintly with a smile. She hides it with her hand, and steals away. Behind her BARTHWICK shuts the door.]

BARTHWICK. *[With solemnity.]* H'm! This is a nice thing to happen!

JACK. *[Impersonally.]* What awful luck!

BARTHWICK. So this is the way that forty pounds has gone! One thing after another! Once more I should like to know where you'd have been if it hadn't been for me! You don't seem to have any principles. You—you're one of those who are a nuisance to society; you—you're dangerous! What your mother would say I don't know. Your conduct, as far as I can see, is absolutely unjustifiable. It's—it's criminal. Why, a poor man who behaved as you've done . . .d'you think he'd have any mercy shown him? What you want is a good lesson. You and your sort are—*[he speaks with feeling]*—a nuisance to the community. Don't ask me to help you next time. You're not fit to be helped.

JACK. *[Turning upon his sire, with unexpected fierceness.]* All right, I won't then, and see how you like it. You wouldn't have helped me this time, I know, if you hadn't been scared the thing would get into the papers. Where are the cigarettes?

BARTHWICK. [*Regarding him uneasily.*] Well—I'll say no more about it. [*He rings the bell.*] I'll pass it over for this once, but—— [*MARLOW comes in.*]
You can clear away.

[*He hides his face behind the "Times."*]

JACK. [*Brightening.*] I say, Marlow, where are the cigarettes?

MARLOW. I put the box out with the whisky last night, sir, but this morning I can't find it anywhere

JACK. Did you look in my room?

MARLOW. Yes, sir; I've looked all over the house. I found two Nestor ends in the tray this morning, so you must have been smokin' last night, sir. [*Hesitating.*] I'm really afraid some one's purloined the box.

JACK. [*Uneasily.*] Stolen it!

BARTHWICK. What's that? The cigarette-box! Is anything else missing?

MARLOW. No, sir; I've been through the plate.

BARTHWICK. Was the house all right this morning? None of the windows open?

MARLOW. No, sir. [*Quietly to JACK.*] You left your latchkey in the door last night, sir.

[*He hands it back, unseen by BARTHWICK.*]

JACK. Tst!

BARTHWICK. Who's been in the room this morning?

MARLOW. Me and Wheeler, and Mrs. Jones is all, sir, as far as I know.

BARTHWICK. Have you asked Mrs. Barthwick? [*To JACK.*] Go and ask your mother if she's had it;

ask her to look and see if she's missed anything else. [JACK goes upon this mission.]

Nothing is more disquieting than losing things like this.

MARLOW. No, sir.

BARTHWICK. Have you any suspicions?

MARLOW. No, sir.

BARTHWICK. This Mrs. Jones—how long has she been working here?

MARLOW. Only this last month, sir.

BARTHWICK. What sort of person?

MARLOW. I don't know much about her, sir; seems a very quiet, respectable woman.

BARTHWICK. Who did the room this morning?

MARLOW. Wheeler and Mrs. Jones, sir.

BARTHWICK. [*With his forefinger upraised.*] Now, was this Mrs. Jones in the room alone at any time?

MARLOW. [*Expressionless.*] Yes, sir.

BARTHWICK. How do you know that?

MARLOW. [*Reluctantly.*] I found her here, sir.

BARTHWICK. And has Wheeler been in the room alone?

MARLOW. No, sir, she's not, sir. I should say, sir, that Mrs. Jones seems a very honest——

BARTHWICK. [*Holding up his hand.*] I want to know this: Has this Mrs. Jones been here the whole morning?

MARLOW. Yes, sir—no, sir—she stepped over to the greengrocer's for cook.

BARTHWICK. H'm! Is she in the house now?

MARLOW. Yes, sir.

BARTHWICK. Very good. I shall make a point of clearing this up. On principle I shall make a point of fixing the responsibility; it goes to the foundations of security. In all your interests——

MARLOW. Yes, sir.

BARTHWICK. What sort of circumstances is this Mrs. Jones in? Is her husband in work?

MARLOW. I believe not, sir.

BARTHWICK. Very well. Say nothing about it to any one. Tell Wheeler not to speak of it, and ask Mrs. Jones to step up here.

MARLOW. Very good, sir.

[MARLOW goes out, his face concerned; and BARTHWICK stays, his face judicial and a little pleased, as befits a man conducting an inquiry. MRS. BARTHWICK and her son come in.]

BARTHWICK. Well, my dear, you've not seen it, I suppose?

MRS. BARTHWICK. No. But what an extraordinary thing, John! Marlow, of course, is out of the question. I'm certain none of the maids——As for cook!

BARTHWICK. Oh, cook!

MRS. BARTHWICK. Of course! It's perfectly detestable to me to suspect anybody.

BARTHWICK. It is not a question of one's feelings. It's a question of justice. On principle——

MRS. BARTHWICK. I shouldn't be a bit surprised if the charwoman knew something about it. It was Laura who recommended her.

BARTHWICK. [*Judicially.*] I am going to have Mrs. Jones up. Leave it to me; and—er—remember that nobody is guilty until they're proved so. I shall be careful. I have no intention of frightening her; I shall give her every chance. I hear she's in poor circumstances. If we are not able to do much for them we are bound to have the greatest sympathy with the poor.

[*Mrs. Jones comes in.*

[*Pleasantly.*] Oh! good morning, Mrs. Jones.

MRS. JONES. [*Soft, and even, unemphatic.*] Good morning, sir! Good morning, ma'am!

BARTHWICK. About your husband—he's not in work, I hear?

MRS. JONES. No, sir; of course he's not in work just now.

BARTHWICK. Then I suppose he's earning nothing.

MRS. JONES. No, sir, he's not earning anything just now, sir.

BARTHWICK. And how many children have you?

MRS. JONES. Three children; but of course they don't eat very much, sir.

[*A little silence.*

BARTHWICK. And how old is the eldest?

MRS. JONES. Nine years old, sir.

BARTHWICK. Do they go to school?

MRS. JONES. Yes, sir, they all three go to school every day.

BARTHWICK. [*Severely.*] And what about their food when you're out at work.

MRS. JONES. Well, sir, I have to give them their dinner to take with them. Of course I'm not always

able to give them anything; sometimes I have to send them without; but my husband is very good about the children when he's in work. But when he's not in work of course he's a very difficult man.

BARTHWICK. He drinks, I suppose?

MRS. JONES. Yes, sir. Of course I can't say he doesn't drink, because he does.

BARTHWICK. And I suppose he takes all your money?

MRS. JONES. No, sir, he's very good about my money, except when he's not himself, and then, of course, he treats me very badly.

BARTHWICK. Now what is he—your husband?

MRS. JONES. By profession, sir, of course he's a groom.

BARTHWICK. A groom! How came he to lose his place?

MRS. JONES. He lost his place a long time ago, sir, and he's never had a very long job since; and now, of course, the motor-cars are against him.

BARTHWICK. When were you married to him, Mrs. Jones?

MRS. JONES. Eight years ago, sir—that was in——

MRS. BARTHWICK. [*Sharply.*] Eight? You said the eldest child was nine.

MRS. JONES. Yes, ma'am; of course that was why he lost his place. He didn't treat me rightly, and of course his employer said he couldn't keep him because of the example.

BARTHWICK. You mean he—ahem——

MRS. JONES. Yes, sir; and of course after he lost his place he married me.

MRS. BARTHWICK. You actually mean to say you—you were——

BARTHWICK. My dear——

MRS. BARTHWICK. [*Indignantly*] How disgraceful!

BARTHWICK. [*Hurriedly.*] And where are you living now, Mrs. Jones?

MRS. JONES. We've not got a home, sir. Of course we've been obliged to put away most of our things.

BARTHWICK. Put your things away! You mean to --to--er--to pawn them?

MRS. JONES. Yes, sir, to put them away. We're living in Merthyr Street—that is close by here, sir—at No. 34. We just have the one room.

BARTHWICK. And what do you pay a week?

MRS. JONES. We pay six shillings a week, sir, for a furnished room.

BARTHWICK. And I suppose you're behind in the rent?

MRS. JONES. Yes, sir, we're a little behind in the rent.

BARTHWICK. But *you're* in good work, aren't you?

MRS. JONES. Well, sir, I have a day in Stamford Place Thursdays. And Mondays and Wednesdays and Fridays I come here. But to-day, of course, is a half-day, because of yesterday's Bank Holiday.

BARTHWICK. I see; four days a week, and you get half a crown a day, is that it?

MRS. JONES. Yes, sir, and my dinner; but sometimes it's only half a day, and that's eighteenpence.

BARTHWICK. And when your husband earns anything he spends it in drink, I suppose?

MRS. JONES. Sometimes he does, sir, and sometimes he gives it to me for the children. Of course he would work if he could get it, sir, but it seems there are a great many people out of work.

BARTHWICK. Ah! Yes. We—er—won't go into that. [*Sympathetically.*] And how about your work here? Do you find it hard?

MRS. JONES. Oh! no, sir, not very hard, sir; except of course, when I don't get my sleep at night.

BARTHWICK. Ah! And you help do all the rooms? And sometimes, I suppose, you go out for cook?

MRS. JONES. Yes, sir.

BARTHWICK. And you've been out this morning?

MRS. JONES. Yes, sir, of course I had to go to the greengrocer's.

BARTHWICK. Exactly. So your husband earns nothing? And he's a bad character.

MRS. JONES. No, sir, I don't say that, sir. I think there's a great deal of good in him; though he does treat me very bad sometimes. And of course I don't like to leave him, but I think I ought to, because really I hardly know how to stay with him. He often raises his hand to me. Not long ago he gave me a blow here [*touches her breast*] and I can

feel it now. So I think I ought to leave him, don't you, sir?

BARTHWICK. Ah! I can't help you there. It's a very serious thing to leave your husband. Very serious thing.

MRS. JONES. Yes, sir, of course I'm afraid of what he might do to me if I were to leave him; he can be so very violent.

BARTHWICK. H'm! Well, that I can't pretend to say anything about. It's the bad principle I'm speaking of—

MRS. JONES. Yes, sir; I know nobody can help me. I know I must decide for myself, and of course I know that he has a very hard life. And he's fond of the children, and it's very hard for him to see them going without food.

BARTHWICK. [*Hastily.*] Well—er—thank you, I just wanted to hear about you. I don't think I need detain you any longer, Mrs.—Jones.

MRS. JONES. No, sir, thank you, sir.

BARTHWICK. Good morning, then.

MRS. JONES. Good morning, sir; good morning, ma'am.

BARTHWICK. [*Exchanging glances with his wife.*] By the way, Mrs. Jones—I think it is only fair to tell you, a silver cigarette box—er—is missing.

MRS. JONES. [*Looking from one face to the other.*] I am very sorry, sir.

BARTHWICK. Yes; you have not seen it, I suppose?

MRS. JONES. [*Realising that suspicion is upon her;*

with an uneasy movement.] Where was it, sir; it you please, sir?

BARTHWICK. [*Evasively.*] Where did Marlow say? Er—in this room, yes, in *this* room.

MRS. JONES. No, sir, I haven't seen it—of course if I'd seen it I should have noticed it.

BARTHWICK. [*Giving her a rapid glance.*] You—you are sure of that?

MRS. JONES. [*Impassively.*] Yes, sir. [*With a slow nodding of her head.*] I have not seen it, and of course I *don't* know where it is.

[*She turns and goes quietly out.*]

BARTHWICK. H'm!

[*The three BARTHWICKS avoid each other's glances.*]

The curtain falls.

ACT II

SCENE I

The JONES' lodgings, Merthyr Street, at half-past two o'clock.

The bare room, with tattered oilcloth and damp, dis-tempered walls, has an air of tidy wretchedness. On the bed lies JONES, half-dressed; his coat is thrown across his feet, and muddy boots are lying on the floor close by. He is asleep. The door is opened and MRS. JONES comes in, dressed in a pinched black jacket and old black sailor hat; she carries a parcel wrapped up in "The Times." She puts her parcel down, unwraps an apron, half a loaf, two onions, three potatoes, and a tiny piece of bacon. Taking a teapot from the cupboard, she rinses it, shakes into it some powdered tea out of a screw of paper, puts it on the hearth, and sitting in a wooden chair quietly begins to cry.

JONES. [*Stirring and yawning.*] That you? What's the time?

MRS. JONES. [*Drying her eyes, and in her usual voice.*] Half-past two.

JONES. What you back so soon for?

MRS. JONES. I only had the half-day to-day, Jem.

JONES. [*On his back, and in a drowsy voice.*] Got anything for dinner?

MRS. JONES. Mrs. Barthwick's cook gave me a little bit of bacon. I'm going to make a stew. [*She prepares for cooking.*] There's fourteen shillings owing for rent, James, and of course I've only got two and fourpence. They'll be coming for it to-day.

JONES. [*Turning towards her on his elbow.*] Let 'em come and find my surprise packet. I've had enough o' this tryin' for work. Why should I go round and round after a job like a bloomin' squirrel in a cage. "Give us a job, sir"—"Take a man on"—"Got a wife and three children." Sick of it I am! I'd sooner lie here and rot. "Jones, you come and join the demonstration; come and 'old a flag, and listen to the ruddy orators, and go 'ome as empty as you came." There's some that seems to like *that*—the sheep! When I go seekin' for a job now, and see the brutes lookin' me up an' down, it's like a thousand serpents in me. I'm not arskin' for any treat. A man wants to sweat hisself silly and not allowed—that's a rum start, ain't it? A man wants to sweat his soul out to keep the breath in him and ain't allowed—that's justice—that's freedom and all the rest of it. [*He turns his face towards the wall.*] You're so milky mild; you don't know what goes on inside o' me. I'm done with the silly game. If they want me, let 'em come for me!

[MRS. JONES stops cooking and stands unmoving at the table.]

I've tried and done with it, I tell you. I've never been afraid of what's before *me*. You mark my words—if you think they've broke my spirit, you're mistook. I'll lie and rot sooner than arsk 'em again. What makes you stand like that—you long-sufferin', Gawd-forsaken image—that's why I can't keep my hands off you. So now you know. Work! You can work, but you haven't the spirit of a louse!

MRS. JONES. [*Quietly.*] You talk more wild sometimes when you're yourself, James, than when you're not. If you don't get work, how are we to go on? They won't let us stay here; they're looking to their money to-day, I know.

JONES. I see this Barthwick o' yours every day goin' down to Pawlyment snug and comfortable to talk his silly soul out; an' I see that young calf, his son, swellin' it about, and goin' on the razzle-dazzle. Wot 'ave they done that makes 'em any better than wot I am? They never did a day's work in their lives. I see 'em day after day——

MRS. JONES. And I wish you wouldn't come after me like that, and hang about the house. You don't seem able to keep away at all, and whatever you do it for I can't think, because of course they notice it.

JONES. I suppose I may go where I like. Where *may* I go? The other day I went to a place in the Edgware Road. "Gov'nor," I says to the boss,

“take me on,” I says. “I ’aven’t done a stroke o’ work not these two months; it takes the heart out of a man,” I says; “I’m one to work; I’m not afraid of anything you can give me ’” “My good man,” ’e says, “I’ve had thirty of you here this morning. I took the first two,” he says, “and that’s all I want.” “Thank you, then rot the world!” I says. “Blasphemins’,” he says, “is not the way to get a job. Out you go, my lad!” [*He laughs sardonically.*] Don’t you raise your voice because you’re starvin’; don’t yer even think of it; take it lyin’ down! Take it like a sensible man, carn’t you? And a little way down the street a lady says to me: [*Pinching his voice*] “D’you want to earn a few pence, my man?” and gives me her dog to ’old outside a shop—fat as a butler ’e was—tons o’ meat had gone to the makin’ of *him*. It did ’er good, it did, made ’er feel ’erself that *charitable*, but I see ’er lookin’ at the copper standin’ alongside o’ me, for fear I should make off with ’er bloomin’ fat dog. [*He sits on the edge of the bed and puts a boot on. Then looking up.*] What’s in that head o’ yours? [*Almost pathetically.*] Carn’t you speak for once?

[*There is a knock, and MRS. SEDDON, the landlady, appears, an anxious, harassed, shabby woman in working clothes.*

MRS. SEDDON. I thought I ’eard you come in, Mrs. Jones. I’ve spoke to my ’usband, but he says he really can’t afford to wait another day.

JONES. [*With scowling jocularly.*] Never you mind

what your 'usband says, you go your own way like a proper independent woman. Here, Jenny, chuck her that.

[*Producing a sovereign from his trousers pocket, he throws it to his wife, who catches it in her apron with a gasp. JONES resumes the lacing of his boots.*]

MRS. JONES. [*Rubbing the sovereign stealthily.*] I'm very sorry we're so late with it, and of course it's fourteen shillings, so if you've got six that will be right.

[*MRS. SEDDON takes the sovereign and fumbles for the change.*]

JONES. [*With his eyes fixed on his boots.*] Bit of a surprise for yer, ain't it?

MRS. SEDDON. Thank you, and I'm sure I'm very much obliged. [*She does indeed appear surprised.*] I'll bring you the change.

JONES. [*Mockingly.*] Don't mention it.

MRS. SEDDON. Thank you, and I'm sure I'm very much obliged. [*She slides away.*]

[*MRS. JONES gazes at JONES, who is still lacing up his boots.*]

JONES. I've had a bit of luck. [*Pulling out the crimson purse and some loose coins.*] Picked up a purse—seven pound and more.

MRS. JONES. Oh, James!

JONES. Oh, James! What about Oh, James! I picked it up I tell you. This is lost property, this is!

MRS. JONES. But isn't there a name in it, or something?

JONES. Name? No, there ain't no name. This don't belong to such as 'ave visitin' cards. This belongs to a perfec' lidy. Tike an' smell it. [*He pitches her the purse, which she puts gently to her nose.*] Now, you tell me what I ought to have done. You tell me that. You can always tell me what I ought to ha' done, can't yer?

MRS. JONES. [*Laying down the purse.*] I can't say what you ought to have done, James. Of course the money wasn't yours; you've taken somebody else's money.

JONES. Finding's keeping. I'll take it as wages for the time I've gone about the streets asking for what's my rights. I'll take it for what's *overdue*, d'ye hear? [*With strange triumph.*] I've got money in my pocket, my girl.

[*MRS. JONES goes on again with the preparation of the meal, JONES looking at her furtively.*]

Money in my pocket! And I'm not goin' to waste it. With this 'ere money I'm goin' to Canada. I'll let you have a pound. [*A silence.*] You've often talked of leavin' me. You've often told me I treat you badly—well I 'ope you'll be glad when I'm gone.

MRS. JONES. [*Impassively.*] You *have* treated me very badly, James, and of course I can't prevent your going; but I can't tell whether I shall be glad when you're gone.

JONES. It'll change my luck. I've 'ad nothing but

bad luck since I first took up with you. [*More softly.*] And you've 'ad no bloomin' picnic.

MRS. JONES. Of course it would have been better for us if we had never met. We weren't meant for each other. But you're set against me, that's what you are, and you *have* been for a long time. And you treat me so badly, James, going after that Rosie and all. You don't ever seem to think of the children that I've had to bring into the world, and of all the trouble I've had to keep them, and what'll become of them when you're gone.

JONES. [*Crossing the room gloomily.*] If you think I want to leave the little beggars you're bloomin' well mistaken.

MRS. JONES. Of course I know you're fond of them.

JONES. [*Fingering the purse, hal angrily.*] Well, then, you stow it, old girl. The kids'll get along better with you than when I'm here. If I'd ha' known as much as I do now, I'd never ha' had one o' them. What's the use o' bringin' 'em into a state o' things like this? It's a crime, that's what it is; but you find it out too late; that's what's the matter with this 'ere world.

[*He puts the purse back in his pocket.*]

MRS. JONES. Of course it would have been better for them, poor little things; but they're your own children, and I wonder at you talkin' like that. I should miss them dreadfully if I was to lose them.

JONES. [*Sullenly.*] An' you ain't the only one. If I make money out there—— [*Looking up, he sees her shaking out his coat—in a changed voice*] Leave that coat alone!

[The silver box drops from the pocket, scattering the cigarettes upon the bed. Taking up the box she stares at it; he rushes at her and snatches the box away.]

MRS. JONES. *[Covering back against the bed.]* Oh, Jem! oh, Jem!

JONES. *[Dropping the box on to the table.]* You mind what you're sayin'! When I go out I'll take and chuck it in the water along with that there purse. I 'ad it when I was in liquor, and for what you do when you're in liquor you're not responsible—and that's Gawd's truth as you ought to know. I don't want the thing—I won't have it. I took it out o' spite. I'm no thief, I tell you; and don't you call me one, or it'll be the worse for you.

MRS. JONES. *[Twisting her apron strings.]* It's Mr. Barthwick's! You've taken away my reputation. Oh, Jem, whatever made you?

JONES. What d'you mean?

MRS. JONES. It's been missed; they think it's me. Oh! whatever made you do it, Jem?

JONES. I tell you I was in liquor. I don't want it; what's the good of it to me? If I were to pawn it they'd only nab me. I'm no thief. I'm no worse than wot that yonng Barthwick is; he brought 'ome that purse that I picked up—a lady's purse—'ad it off 'er in a row, kept sayin' 'e'd scored 'er off. Well, I scored 'im off. Tight as an owl 'e was! And d'you think anything'll happen to him?

MRS. JONES. [*As though speaking to herself.*] Oh, Jem! it's the bread out of our mouths!

JONES. Is it then? I'll make it hot for 'em yet. What about that purse? What about young Barthwick?

[*MRS. JONES comes forward to the table and tries to take the box; JONES prevents her.*]

What do you want with that? You drop it, I say!

MRS. JONES. I'll take it back and tell them all about it. [*She attempts to wrest the box from him.*]

JONES. Ah, would yer?

[*He drops the box, and rushes on her with a snarl. She slips back past the bed. He follows; a chair is overturned. The door is opened; SNOW comes in, a detective in plain clothes and bowler hat, with clipped moustaches. JONES drops his arms, MRS. JONES stands by the window gasping; SNOW, advancing swiftly to the table, puts his hand on the silver box.*]

SNOW. Doin' a bit o' skylarkin'? Fancy this is what I'm after. J.B., the very same. [*He gets back to the door, scrutinising the crest and cypher on the box. To MRS. JONES.*] I'm a police officer. Are you Mrs. Jones?

MRS. JONES. Yes, sir.

SNOW. My instructions are to take you on a charge of stealing this box from J. Barthwick, Esquire, M.P., of 6, Rockingham Gate. Anything you say may be used against you. Well, missis?

MRS. JONES. [*In her quiet voice, still out of breath, her hand upon her breast.*] Of course I did *not* take it, sir. I never have taken anything that didn't belong to me; and of course I know nothing about it.

SNOW. You were at the house this morning; you did the room in which the box was left; you were alone in the room. I find the box 'ere. You say you didn't take it?

MRS. JONES. Yes, sir, of course I say I did not take it, because I did *not*.

SNOW. Then how does the box come to be here?

MRS. JONES. I would rather not say anything about it.

SNOW. Is this your husband?

MRS. JONES. Yes, sir, this is my husband, sir.

SNOW. Do you wish to say anything before I take her?

[JONES *remains silent, with his head bent down.*]

Well then, Missis. I'll just trouble you to come along with me quietly.

MRS. JONES. [*Twisting her hands.*] Of course I wouldn't say I hadn't taken it if I had—and I *didn't* take it, indeed I didn't. Of course I know appearances are against me, and I can't tell you what really happened. But my children are at school, and they'll be coming home—and I don't know what they'll do without me!

SNOW. Your 'usband'll see to them, don't you worry. [*He takes the woman gently by the arm.*]

JONES. You drop it—she's all right! [*Sullenly.*] I took the thing myself.

SNOW. [*Eyeing him.*] There, there, it does you credit. Come along, Missis.

JONES. [*Passionately.*] Drop it, I say, you blooming teck. She's my wife; she's a respectable woman. Take her if you dare!

SNOW. Now, now. What's the good of this? Keep a civil tongue, and it'll be the better for all of us.

[*He puts his whistle in his mouth and draws the woman to the door.*

JONES. [*With a rush.*] Drop her, and put up your 'ands, or I'll soon make yer. You leave her alone, will yer! Don't I tell yer, I took the thing myself!

SNOW. [*Blowing his whistle.*] Drop your hands, or I'll take you too. Ah, would you?

[*JONES, closing, deals him a blow. A Policeman in uniform appears; there is a short struggle and JONES is overpowered. MRS. JONES raises her hands and drops her face on them.*

The curtain falls.

SCENE II

[*The BARTHWICKS' dining-room the same evening. The BARTHWICKS are seated at dessert.*

MRS. BARTHWICK. John! [*A silence broken by the cracking of nuts.*] John!

BARTHWICK. I wish you'd speak about the nuts—they're uneatable. *[He puts one in his mouth.]*

MRS. BARTHWICK. It's not the season for them. I called on the Holyroods.

[BARTHWICK fills his glass with port.]

JACK. Crackers, please, dad.

[BARTHWICK passes the crackers. His demeanour is reflective.]

MRS. BARTHWICK. Lady Holyrood has got very stout. I've noticed it coming for a long time.

BARTHWICK. *[Gloomily.]* Stout? *[He takes up the crackers—with transparent airiness.]* The Holyroods had some trouble with their servants, hadn't they?

JACK. Crackers, please, dad.

BARTHWICK. *[Passing the crackers.]* It got into the papers. The cook, wasn't it?

MRS. BARTHWICK. No, the lady's maid. I was talking it over with Lady Holyrood. The girl used to have her young man to see her.

BARTHWICK. *[Uneasily.]* I'm not sure they were wise——

MRS. BARTHWICK. My dear John, what are you talking about? How could there be any alternative? Think of the effect on the other servants!

BARTHWICK. Of course in principle—I wasn't thinking of that.

JACK. *[Maliciously.]* Crackers, please, dad.

[BARTHWICK is compelled to pass the crackers.]

MRS. BARTHWICK. Lady Holyrood told me: "I had her up," she said; "I said to her, 'You'll leave

my house at once ; I think your conduct disgraceful. I can't tell, I don't know, and I don't wish to know, what you were doing. I send you away on principle ; you need not come to me for a character.' And the girl said : ' If you don't give me my notice, my lady, I want a month's wages. I'm perfectly respectable. I've done nothing.'—Done nothing !

BARTHWICK. H'm !

MRS. BARTHWICK. Servants have too much licence. They hang together so terribly you never can tell what they're really thinking ; it's as if they were all in a conspiracy to keep you in the dark. Even with Marlow, you feel that he never lets you know what's really in his mind. I hate that secretiveness ; it destroys all confidence. I feel sometimes I should like to shake him.

JACK. Marlow's a most decent chap. It's simply beastly every one knowing your affairs.

BARTHWICK. The less you say about that the better !

MRS. BARTHWICK. It goes all through the lower classes. You can *not* tell when they are speaking the truth. To-day when I was shopping after leaving the Holyroods, one of these unemployed came up and spoke to me. I suppose I only had twenty yards or so to walk to the carriage, but he seemed to spring up in the street.

BARTHWICK. Ah ! You must be very careful whom you speak to in these days.

MRS. BARTHWICK. I didn't answer him, of course. But I could see at once that he wasn't telling the truth.

BARTHWICK. [*Cracking a nut.*] There's one very good rule—look at their eyes.

JACK. Crackers, please, Dad.

BARTHWICK. [*Passing the crackers.*] If their eyes are straightforward I sometimes give them sixpence. It's against my principles, but it's most difficult to refuse. If you see that they're desperate, and dull, and shifty-looking, as so many of them are, it's certain to mean drink, or crime, or something unsatisfactory.

MRS. BARTHWICK. This man had dreadful eyes. He looked as if he could commit a murder. "I've 'ad nothing to eat to-day," he said. Just like that.

BARTHWICK. What was William about? He ought to have been waiting.

JACK. [*Raising his wineglass to his nose.*] Is this the '63, Dad?

[BARTHWICK, *holding his wine-glass to his eye, lowers it and passes it before his nose.*]

MRS. BARTHWICK. I hate people that can't speak the truth. [*Father and son exchange a look behind their port.*] It's just as easy to speak the truth as not. I've always found it easy enough. It makes it impossible to tell what is genuine; one feels as if one were continually being taken in.

BARTHWICK. [*Sententiously.*] The lower classes are their own enemies. If they would only trust us, they would get on so much better.

MRS. BARTHWICK. But even then it's so often their own fault. Look at that Mrs. Jones this morning.

BARTHWICK. I only want to do what's right in that

matter. I had occasion to see Roper this afternoon. I mentioned it to him. He's coming in this evening. It all depends on what the detective says. I've had my doubts. I've been thinking it over.

MRS. BARTHWICK. The woman impressed me most unfavourably. She seemed to have no shame. That affair she was talking about—she and the man when they were young, so immoral! And before you and Jack! I could have put her out of the room!

BARTHWICK. Oh! I don't want to excuse them, but in looking at these matters one must consider——

MRS. BARTHWICK. Perhaps you'll say the man's employer was wrong in dismissing him?

BARTHWICK. Of course not. It's not there that I feel doubt. What I ask myself is——

JACK. Port, please, Dad.

BARTHWICK. [*Circulating the decanter in religious imitation of the rising and setting of the sun.*] I ask myself whether we are sufficiently careful in making inquiries about people before we engage them, especially as regards moral conduct.

JACK. Pass the port, please, Mother!

MRS. BARTHWICK. [*Passing it.*] My dear boy, aren't you drinking too much?

[*JACK fills his glass.*]

MARLOW. [*Entering.*] Detective Snow to see you, sir.

BARTHWICK. [*Uneasily.*] Ah! say I'll be with him in a minute.

MRS. BARTHWICK. [*Without turning.*] Let him come in here, Marlow.

[SNOW *enters in an overcoat, his bowler hat in hand.*

BARTHWICK. [*Half rising.*] Oh! Good evening!

SNOW. Good evening, sir; good evening, ma'am. I've called round to report what I've done, rather late, I'm afraid—another case took me away. [*He takes the silver box out of his pocket, causing a sensation in the BARTHWICK family.*] This is the identical article, I believe.

BARTHWICK. Certainly, certainly.

SNOW. Havin' your crest and cypher, as you described to me, sir, I'd no hesitation in the matter.

BARTHWICK. Excellent. Will you have a glass of— [*he glances at the waning port*]—er—sherry— [*pours out sherry*]. Jack, just give Mr. Snow this.

[JACK *rises and gives the glass to SNOW; then, lolling in his chair, regards him indolently.*

SNOW. [*Drinking off wine and putting down the glass.*] After seeing you I went round to this woman's lodgings, sir. It's a low neighbourhood, and I thought it as well to place a constable below—and not without 'e was wanted, as things turned out.

BARTHWICK. Indeed!

SNOW. Yes, sir, I 'ad some trouble. I asked her to account for the presence of the article. She could give me no answer, except to deny the theft; so I took her into custody; then her husband came for me, so I was obliged to take him, too, for assault. He was

very violent on the way to the station—very violent—threatened you and your son, and altogether he was a handful, I can tell you.

MRS. BARTHWICK. What a ruffian he must be!

SNOW. Yes, ma'am, a rough customer.

JACK. [*Sipping his wine, bemused.*] Punch the beggar's head.

SNOW. Given to drink, as I understand, Sir.

MRS. BARTHWICK. It's to be hoped he will get a severe punishment.

SNOW. The odd thing is, sir, that he persists in sayin' he took the box himself.

BARTHWICK. Took the box himself! [*He smiles.*] What does he think to gain by that?

SNOW. He says the young gentleman was intoxicated last night—[*JACK stops the cracking of a nut, and looks at Snow. BARTHWICK, losing his smile, has put his wineglass down; there is a silence—SNOW, looking from face to face, remarks*—took him into the house and gave him whisky; and under the influence of an empty stomach the man says he took the box.

MRS. BARTHWICK. The impudent wretch!

BARTHWICK. D'you mean that he—er—intends to put this forward to-morrow—

SNOW. That'll be his line, sir; but whether he's endeavouring to shield his wife, or whether [*he looks at JACK*] there's something in it, will be for the magistrate to say.

MRS. BARTHWICK. [*Haughtily.*] Something in what?

I don't understand you. As if my son would bring a man like that into the house!

BARTHWICK. [*From the fireplace, with an effort to be calm.*] My son can speak for himself, no doubt.—Well, Jack, what do you say?

MRS. BARTHWICK. [*Sharply.*] What does he say? Why, of course, he says the whole story's stuff!

JACK. [*Embarrassed.*] Well, of course, I—of course, I don't know anything about it.

MRS. BARTHWICK. I should think not, indeed! [*To SNOW.*] The man is an audacious Ruffian!

BARTHWICK. [*Suppressing jumps.*] But in view of my son's saying there's nothing in this—this fable—will it be necessary to proceed against the man under the circumstances?

SNOW. We shall have to charge him with the assault, sir. It would be as well for your son to come down to the Court. There'll be a remand, no doubt. The queer thing is there was quite a sum of money found on him, and a crimson silk purse. [*BARTHWICK starts; JACK rises and sits down again.*] I suppose the lady hasn't missed her purse?

BARTHWICK. [*Hastily.*] Oh, no! Oh! No!

JACK. No!

MRS. BARTHWICK. [*Dreamily.*] No! [*To SNOW.*] I've been inquiring of the servants. This man *does* hang about the house. I shall feel much safer if he gets a good long sentence; I do think we ought to be protected against such ruffians.

BARTHWICK. Yes, yes, of course, on principle—but

in this case we have a number of things to think of. [To SNOW.] I suppose, as you say, the man *must* be charged, eh?

SNOW. No question about that, sir.

BARTHWICK. [*Staring gloomily at JACK.*] This prosecution goes very much against the grain with me. I have great sympathy with the poor. In my position I'm bound to recognise the distress there is amongst them. The condition of the people leaves much to be desired. D'you follow me? I wish I could see my way to drop it.

MRS. BARTHWICK. [*Sharply.*] John! it's simply not fair to other people. It's putting property at the mercy of any one who likes to take it.

BARTHWICK. [*Trying to make signs to her aside.*] I'm not defending him, not at all. I'm trying to look at the matter broadly.

MRS. BARTHWICK. Nonsense, John, there's a time for everything.

SNOW. [*Rather sardonically.*] I might point out, sir, that to withdraw the charge of stealing would not make much difference, because the facts must come out [*he looks significantly at JACK*] in reference to the assault; and as I said that charge will have to go forward.

BARTHWICK. [*Hastily.*] Yes, oh! exactly! It's entirely on the woman's account—entirely a matter of my own private feelings.

SNOW. If I were you, sir, I should let things take their course. It's not likely there'll be

much difficulty. These things are very quick settled.

BARTHWICK. [*Doubtfully.*] You think so—you think so?

JACK. [*Rousing himself.*] I say, what shall I have to swear to?

SNOW. That's best known to yourself, sir. [*Retreating to the door.*] Better employ a solicitor, sir, in case anything should arise. We shall have the butler to prove the loss of the article. You'll excuse me going, I'm rather pressed to-night. The case may come on any time after eleven. Good evening, sir; good evening, ma'am. I shall have to produce the box in court to-morrow, so if you'll excuse me, sir, I may as well take it with me.

[*He takes the silver box and leaves them with a little bow.*]

[BARTHWICK *makes a move to follow him, then dashing his hands beneath his coat tails, speaks with desperation.*]

BARTHWICK. I do wish you'd leave me to manage things myself. You *will* put your nose into matters you know nothing of. A pretty mess you've made of this!

MRS. BARTHWICK. [*Coldly.*] I don't in the least know what you're talking about. If you can't stand up for your rights, I can. I've no patience with your principles, it's such nonsense.

BARTHWICK. Principles! Good Heavens! What have principles to do with it for goodness' sake?

Don't you know that Jack was drunk last night!

JACK. Dad!

MRS. BARTHWICK. [*In horror rising.*] Jack!

JACK. Look here, mother—I had supper. Everybody does I mean to say—you know what I mean—it's absurd to call it being drunk. At Oxford everybody gets a bit "on" sometimes——

MRS. BARTHWICK. Well I think it's most dreadful! If that is really what you do at Oxford——

JACK. [*Angrily.*] Well, why did you send me there? One must do as other fellows do. It's such nonsense, I mean, to call it being drunk. Of course I'm awfully sorry. I've had such a beastly headache all day.

BARTHWICK. Tcha! If you'd only had the common decency to remember what happened when you came in. Then we should know what truth there was in what this fellow says—as it is, it's all the most confounded darkness

JACK. [*Staring as though at half-formed visions.*] I just get a—and then—it's gone——

MRS. BARTHWICK. Oh, Jack! do you mean to say you were so tipsy you can't even remember——

JACK. Look here, mother! Of course I remember I came—I must have come——

BARTHWICK. [*Unguardedly, and walking up and down.*] Tcha!—and that infernal purse! Good Heavens! It'll get into the papers. Who on earth could have foreseen a thing like this? Better to have lost a dozen cigarette boxes, and said nothing

about it. [*To his wife*] It's all your doing. I told you so from the first. I wish to goodness Roper would come!

MRS. BARTHWICK. [*Sharply.*] I don't know what you're talking about, John.

BARTHWICK. [*Turning on her.*] No, you—you—you don't know anything! [*Sharply.*] Where the devil is Roper? If he can see a way out of this he's a better man than I take him for. I defy *anyone* to see a way out of it. *I can't.*

JACK. Look here, don't excite Dad—I can simply say I was too beastly tired, and don't remember anything except that I came in and [*in a dying voice*] went to bed the same as usual.

BARTHWICK. Went to bed? Who knows where you went—I've lost all confidence. For all I know you slept on the floor.

JACK. [*Indignantly.*] I didn't, I slept on the——

BARTHWICK. [*Sitting on the sofa.*] Who cares where you slept; what does it matter if he mentions the—the—a perfect disgrace?

MRS. BARTHWICK. *What?* [*A silence.*] I *insist* on knowing.

JACK. Oh! nothing——

MRS. BARTHWICK. Nothing? What do you mean by nothing, Jack? There's your father in such a state about it——

JACK. It's only my purse.

MRS. BARTHWICK. Your purse! You know perfectly well you haven't got one.

JACK. Well, it was somebody else's—It was all a joke—I didn't want the beastly thing——

MRS. BARTHWICK. Do you mean that you had another person's purse, and that this man took it too?

BARTHWICK. Tcha! Of course he took it too! A man like that Jones will make the most of it. It'll get into the papers.

MRS. BARTHWICK. I don't understand. What on earth is all the fuss about? [*Bending over JACK, and softly.*] Jack now, tell me dear! Don't be afraid. What is it? Come!

JACK. Oh, don't mother!

MRS. BARTHWICK. But don't what, dear?

JACK. It was pure sport. I don't know how I got the thing. Of course I'd had a bit of a row—I didn't know what I was doing—I was—I was—well, you know—I suppose I must have pulled the bag out of her hand.

MRS. BARTHWICK. Out of her hand? Whose hand? What bag—whose bag?

JACK. Oh! I don't know—*her* bag—it belonged to—[*in a desperate and rising voice*] a woman.

MRS. BARTHWICK. A woman? *Oh! Jack! No!*

JACK. [*Jumping up.*] You *would* have it. I didn't want to tell you. It's not my fault.

[*The door opens and MARLOW ushers in a man of middle age, inclined to corpulence, in evening dress. He has a ruddy, thin moustache, and dark, quick-moving little eyes. His eyebrows are Chinese.*

MARLOW. Mr. Roper, sir. [*He leaves the room.*]

ROPER. [*With a quick look round.*] How do you do?

[*But neither JACK nor MRS. BARTHWICK make a sign.*]

BARTHWICK. [*Hurrying.*] Thank goodness you've come, Roper. You remember what I told you this afternoon; we've just had the detective here.

ROPER. Got the box?

BARTHWICK. Yes, yes, but look here—it wasn't the charwoman at all; her drunken loafer of a husband took the things—he says that fellow there [*he waves his hand at JACK, who with his shoulder raised, seems trying to ward off a blow*] let him into the house last night. Can you imagine such a thing?

[*Roper laughs.*]

BARTHWICK. [*With excited emphasis.*] It's no laughing matter, Roper. I told you about that business of Jack's too—don't you see—the brute took both the things—took that infernal purse. It'll get into the papers.

ROPER. [*Raising his eyebrows.*] H'm! The purse! Depravity in high life! What does your son say?

BARTHWICK. He remembers nothing. D——n! Did you ever see such a mess? It'll get into the papers.

MRS. BARTHWICK. [*With her hand across her eyes.*] No! it's not that——

[*BARTHWICK and ROPER turn and look at her.*]

BARTHWICK. It's the idea of that woman—she's just heard——

[ROPER *nods*. And MRS. BARTHWICK, *setting her lips, gives a slow look at JACK, and sits down at the table.*]

What on earth's to be done, Roper? A ruffian like this Jones will make all the capital he can out of that purse.

MRS. BARTHWICK. I don't believe that Jack took that purse.

BARTHWICK. What—when the woman came here for it this morning?

MRS. BARTHWICK. Here? She had the impudence? Why wasn't I told?

[*She looks round from face to face—no one answers her, there is a pause.*]

BARTHWICK. [*Suddenly.*] What's to be done, Roper?

ROPER. [*Quietly to JACK.*] I suppose you didn't leave your latch-key in the door?

JACK. [*Sullenly.*] Yes, I did.

BARTHWICK. Good heavens! What next?

MRS. BARTHWICK. I'm certain you never let that man into the house, Jack, it's a wild invention. I'm sure there's not a word of truth in it, Mr. Roper.

ROPER. [*Very suddenly.*] Where did you sleep last night?

JACK. [*Promptly.*] On the sofa, there—[*hesitating*] that is—I——

BARTHWICK. On the sofa? D'you mean to say you didn't go to bed?

JACK. [*Sullenly*] No.

BARTHWICK. If you don't remember anything, how can you remember that?

JACK. Because I woke up there in the morning.

MRS. BARTHWICK. Oh, Jack!

BARTHWICK. Good Gracious!

JACK. And Mrs. Jones saw me. I wish you wouldn't bait me so.

ROPER. Do you remember giving any one a drink?

JACK. By Jove, I do seem to remember a fellow with—a fellow with—— [*He looks at Roper.*] I say, d'you want me——?

ROPER. [*Quick as lightning.*] With a dirty face?

JACK. [*With illumination.*] I do—I distinctly remember his——

[BARTHWICK moves abruptly; MRS. BARTHWICK looks at ROPER angrily, and touches her son's arm.]

MRS. BARTHWICK. You don't remember, it's ridiculous! I don't believe the man was ever here at all.

BARTHWICK. You must speak the truth, if it *is* the truth. But if you *do* remember such a dirty business, I shall wash my hands of you altogether.

JACK. [*Glaring at them.*] Well, what the devil——

MRS. BARTHWICK. Jack!

JACK. Well, mother, I—I don't know what you *do* want.

MRS. BARTHWICK. We want you to speak the truth and say you never let this low man into the house.

BARTHWICK. Of course if you think that you really

gave this man whisky in that disgraceful way, and let him see what you'd been doing, and were in such a disgusting condition that you don't remember a word of it——

ROPER. [*Quick.*] I've no memory myself—never had.

BARTHWICK. [*Desperately.*] I don't know what you're to say.

ROPER [*To JACK.*] Say nothing at all! Don't put yourself in a false position. The man stole the things or the woman stole the things, you had nothing to do with it. You were asleep on the sofa.

MRS. BARTHWICK. Your leaving the latchkey in the door was quite bad enough, there's no need to mention anything else. [*Touching his forehead softly.*] My dear, how hot your head is!

JACK. But I want to know what I'm to do. [*Passionately.*] I won't be badgered like this.

[*Mrs. BARTHWICK recoils from him.*]

ROPER. [*Very quickly.*] You forget all about it. You were asleep.

JACK. Must I go down to the Court to-morrow?

ROPER. [*Shaking his head.*] No.

BARTHWICK. [*In a relieved voice.*] Is that so?

ROPER. Yes.

BARTHWICK. But *you'll* go, Roper.

ROPER. Yes.

JACK. [*With wan cheerfulness.*] Thanks, awfully! So long as I don't have to go. [*Putting his hand up to his head.*] I think if you'll excuse me—I've had a most beastly day. [*He looks from his father to his mother.*]

MRS. BARTHWICK. [*Turning quickly.*] Good night, my boy.

JACK. Good-night, mother.

[*He goes out.* MRS. BARTHWICK *heaves a sigh.*
There is a silence.

BARTHWICK. He gets off too easily. But for my money that woman would have prosecuted him.

ROPER. You find money useful.

BARTHWICK. I've my doubts whether we ought to hide the truth—

ROPER. There'll be a remand.

BARTHWICK. What! D'you mean he'll have to *appear* on the remand?

ROPER. Yes.

BARTHWICK. H'm, I thought you'd be able to— Look here, Roper, you *must* keep that purse out of the papers. [*ROPER fixes his little eyes on him and nods.*]

MRS. BARTHWICK. Mr. Roper, don't you think the magistrate ought to be told what sort of people these Joneses are; I mean about their immorality before they were married. I don't know if John told you.

ROPER. Afraid it's not material.

MRS. BARTHWICK. Not material?

ROPER. Purely private life! May have happened to the magistrate.

BARTHWICK. [*With a movement as if to shift a burden.*] Then you'll take the thing into your hands?

ROPER. If the gods are kind. [*He holds his hand out.*]

BARTHWICK. [*Shaking it dubiously.*] Kind—*eh?* What? You going?

ROPER. Yes. I've another case, something like yours—most unexpected.

[He bows to MRS. BARTHWICK and goes out, followed by BARTHWICK, talking to the last.]

MRS. BARTHWICK *at the table bursts into smothered sobs.* BARTHWICK *returns.*

BARTHWICK. *[To himself.]* There'll be a scandal.

MRS. BARTHWICK. *[Disguising her grief at once.]* I simply can't imagine what Roper means by making a joke of a thing like that!

BARTHWICK. *[Staring strangely.]* You! You can't imagine anything! You've no more imagination than a fly!

MRS. BARTHWICK. *[Angrily.]* You dare to tell me that I have no imagination.

BARTHWICK. *[Flustered.]* I—I'm upset. From beginning to end, the whole thing has been utterly against my principles.

MRS. BARTHWICK. Rubbish! You haven't any! Your principles are nothing in the world but sheer—fright!

BARTHWICK. *[Walking to the window.]* I've never been frightened in my life. You heard what Roper said. It's enough to upset any one when a thing like this happens. Everything one says and does seems to turn in one's mouth—it's—it's uncanny. It's not the sort of thing I've been accustomed to. *[As though stifling, he throws the window open. The faint sobbing of a child comes in.]* What's that?

[They listen.]

MRS. BARTHWICK. [*Sharply.*] I can't stand that crying. I must send Marlow to stop it. My nerves are all on edge. [*She rings the bell.*]

BARTHWICK. I'll shut the window; you'll hear nothing. [*He shuts the window. There is silence.*]

MRS. BARTHWICK. [*Sharply.*] That's no good! It's on my nerves. Nothing upsets me like a child's crying. [*MARLOW comes in.*] What's that noise of crying, Marlow? It sounds like a child.

BARTHWICK. It is a child. I can see it against the railings.

MARLOW. [*Opening the window, and looking out—quietly.*] It's Mrs. Jones's little boy, ma'am; he came here after his mother.

MRS. BARTHWICK. [*Moving quickly to the window.*] Poor little chap! John, we oughtn't to go on with this!

BARTHWICK. [*Sitting heavily in a chair.*] Ah! but it's out of our hands!

[*MRS. BARTHWICK turns her back to the window. There is an expression of distress on her face. She stands motionless, compressing her lips. The crying begins again. BARTHWICK covers his ears with his hands, and MARLOW shuts the window. The crying ceases.*]

The curtain falls.

ACT III

Eight days have passed, and the scene is a London Police Court at one o'clock. A canopied seat of Justice is surmounted by the lion and unicorn. Before the fire a worn-looking MAGISTRATE is warming his coat-tails, and staring at two little girls in faded blue and orange rags, who are placed before the dock. Close to the witness-box is a RELIEVING OFFICER in an overcoat, and a short brown beard. Beside the little girls stands a bald POLICE CONSTABLE. On the front bench are sitting BARTHWICK and ROPER, and behind them JACK. In the railed enclosure are seedy-looking men and women. Some prosperous constables sit or stand about.

MAGISTRATE. [*In his paternal and ferocious voice, hissing his s's.*] Now let us dispose of these young ladies.

USHER. Theresa Livens, Maud Livens.

[*The bald CONSTABLE indicates the little girls who remain silent, disillusioned, inattentive.*

Relieving Officer !

[*The RELIEVING OFFICER steps into the witness-box*

USHER. The evidence you give to the Court shall be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God ! Kiss the book !

[*The book is kissed.*

RELIEVING OFFICER. [*In a monotone, pausing slightly at each sentence end, that his evidence may be inscribed.*] About ten o'clock this morning, your Worship, I found these two little girls in Blue Street, Pulham, crying outside a public-house. Asked where their home was, they said they had no home. Mother had gone away. Asked about their father. Their father had no work. Asked where they slept last night. At their aunt's. I've made inquiries, your Worship. The wife has broken up the home and gone on the streets. The husband is out of work and living in common lodging-houses. The husband's sister has eight children of her own, and says she can't afford to keep these little girls any longer.

MAGISTRATE. [*Returning to his seat beneath the canopy of Justice.*] Now, let me see. You say the mother is on the streets; what evidence have you of that?

RELIEVING OFFICER. I have the husband here, your Worship.

MAGISTRATE. Very well; then let us see him.

[*There are cries of "LIVENS." The MAGISTRATE leans forward, and stares with hard compassion at the little girls. LIVENS comes in. He is quiet, with grizzled hair, and a muffler for a collar. He stands beside the witness-box.*]

And you are their father? Now, why don't you keep your little girls at home. How is it you leave them to wander about the streets like this?

LIVENS. I've got no home, your Worship. I'm

living from 'and to mouth. I've got no work ; and nothin' to keep them on.

MAGISTRATE. How is that ?

LIVENS. [*Ashamedly.*] My wife, she broke my 'ome up, and pawned the things.

MAGISTRATE. But what made you let her ?

LEVINS. Your Worship, I'd no chance to stop 'er ; she did it when I was out lookin' for work.

MAGISTRATE. Did you ill-treat her ?

LIVENS. [*Emphatically.*] I never raised my 'and to her in my life, your Worship.

MAGISTRATE. Then what was it—did she drink ?

LIVENS. Yes, your Worship.

MAGISTRATE. Was she loose in her behaviour ?

LIVENS. [*In a low voice.*] Yes, your Worship.

MAGISTRATE. And where is she now ?

LIVENS. I don't know, your Worship. She went off with a man, and after that I——

MAGISTRATE. Yes, yes. Who knows anything of her ? [*To the bald CONSTABLE.*] Is she known here ?

RELIEVING OFFICER. Not in this district, your Worship ; but I have ascertained that she is well known——

MAGISTRATE. Yes—yes ; we'll stop at that. Now [*To the Father*] you say that she has broken up your home, and left these little girls. What provision can you make for them ? You look a strong man.

LIVENS. So I am, your Worship. I'm willin' enough to work, but for the life of me I can't get anything to do.

MAGISTRATE. But have you tried?

LIVENS. I've tried everything, your Worship—I've tried my 'ardest.

MAGISTRATE. Well, well—— [*There is a silence.*]

RELIEVING OFFICER. If your Worship thinks it's a case, my people are willing to take them.

MAGISTRATE. Yes, yes, I know; but I've no evidence that this man is not the proper guardian for his children. [*He rises and goes back to the fire.*]

RELIEVING OFFICER. The mother, your Worship, is able to get access to them.

MAGISTRATE. Yes, yes; the mother, of course, is an improper person to have anything to do with them. [*To the Father.*] Well, now what do you say?

LIVENS. Your Worship, I can only say that if I could get work I should be only too willing to provide for them. But what can I do, your Worship? Here I am obliged to live from 'and to mouth in these 'ere common lodging-houses. I'm a strong man—I'm willing to work—I'm half as alive again as some of 'em—but you see, your Worship, my 'air's turned a bit, owing to the fever—[*Touches his hair*]—and that's against me; and I don't seem to get a chance anyhow.

MAGISTRATE. Yes—yes. [*Slowly.*] Well, I think it's a case. [*Staring his hardest at the little girls.*] Now, are you willing that these little girls should be sent to a home?

LIVENS. Yes, your Worship, I should be very willing.

MAGISTRATE. Well, I'll remand them for a week. Bring them again to-day week; if I see no reason against it then, I'll make an order.

RELIEVING OFFICER. To-day week, your Worship.

[The bald CONSTABLE takes the little girls out by the shoulders. The Father follows them. The MAGISTRATE, returning to his seat, bends over and talks to his CLERK inaudibly.]

BARTHWICK. *[Speaking behind his hand.]* A painful case, Roper; very distressing state of things.

ROPER. Hundreds like this in the Police Courts.

BARTHWICK. Most distressing! The more I see of it, the more important this question of the condition of the people seems to become. I shall certainly make a point of taking up the cudgels in the House. I shall move——

[The MAGISTRATE ceases talking to his CLERK.]

CLERK. Remands.

BARTHWICK *stops abruptly.* *There is a stir and Mrs. JONES comes in by the public door; JONES, ushered by policemen, comes from the prisoner's door. They file into the dock.*

CLERK. James Jones, Jane Jones.

USHER. Jane Jones.

BARTHWICK. *[In a whisper.]* The purse—the purse *must* be kept out of it, Roper. Whatever happens you must keep that out of the papers.

[ROPER nods.]

BALD CONSTABLE. Hush !

[MRS. JONES, *dressed in her thin, black, wispy dress, and black straw hat, stands motionless with hands crossed on the front rail of the dock. JONES leans against the back rail of the dock, and keeps half turning, glancing defiantly about him. He is haggard and unshaven.*

CLERK. [*Consulting with his papers.*] This is the case remanded from last Wednesday, sir. Theft of a silver cigarette box and assault on the police ; the two charges were taken together. Jane Jones ! James Jones !

MAGISTRATE. [*Staring.*] Yes, yes ; I remember.

CLERK. Jane Jones.

MRS. JONES. Yes, sir.

CLERK. Do you admit stealing a silver cigarette box valued at five pounds, ten shillings, from the house of John Barthwick, M.P., between the hours of 11 P.M. on Easter Monday and 8.45 A.M. on Easter Tuesday last ? Yes or no ?

MRS. JONES. [*In a low voice.*] No, sir, I do not, sir.

CLERK. James Jones ? Do you admit stealing a silver cigarette box valued at five pounds, ten shillings, from the house of John Barthwick, M.P., between the hours of 11 P.M. on Easter Monday and 8.45 A.M. on Easter Tuesday last. And further making an assault on the police when in the execution of their duty at 3 P.M. on Easter Tuesday ? Yes or no ?

JONES. [*Sullenly.*] Yes, but I've a lot to say about it.

MAGISTRATE. [*To the CLERK.*] Yes—yes. But how comes it that these two people are charged with the same offence? Are they husband and wife?

CLERK. Yes, sir. You remember you ordered a remand for further evidence as to the story of the male prisoner.

MAGISTRATE. Have they been in custody since?

CLERK. You released the woman on her own recognizances, sir.

MAGISTRATE. Yes, yes, this is the case of the silver box; I remember now. Well?

CLERK. Thomas Marlow.

[*The cry of "THOMAS MARLOW" is repeated.*

MARLOW comes in, and steps into the witness-box, and is sworn. The silver box is handed up, and placed on the rail.

CLERK. [*Reading from his papers.*] Your name is Thomas Marlow? Are you butler to John Barthwick, M.P., of 6, Rockingham Gate?

MARLOW. Yes, sir.

CLERK. Did you between 10.45 and 11 o'clock on the night of Easter Monday last place a silver cigarette box on a tray on the dining-room table at 6, Rockingham Gate? Is that the box?

MARLOW. Yes, sir.

CLERK. And did you miss the same at 8.45 on the following morning, on going to remove the tray?

MARLOW. Yes, sir.

CLERK. Is the female prisoner known to you?

[MARLOW *nods.*]

Is she the charwoman employed at 6, Rockingham Gate?

[*Again* MARLOW *nods.*]

Did you at the time of your missing the box find her in the room alone?

MARLOW. Yes, sir.

CLERK. Did you afterwards communicate the loss to your employer, and did he send you to the police station?

MARLOW. Yes, sir.

CLERK. [*To* MRS. JONES.] Have you anything to ask him?

MRS. JONES. No, sir, nothing, thank you, sir.

CLERK. [*To* JONES.] James Jones, have you anything to ask this witness?

JONES. I don't know 'im.

MAGISTRATE. Are you sure you put the box in the place you say at the time you say?

MARLOW. Yes, your Worship.

MAGISTRATE. Very well; then now let us have the officer.

[MARLOW *leaves the box, and* SNOW *goes into it.*]

USHER. The evidence you give to the court shall be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God.

[*The book is kissed.*]

CLERK. [*Reading from his papers.*] Your name is Robert Snow? You are a detective in the X. B. division of the Metropolitan police force? According

to instructions received did you on Easter Tuesday last proceed to the prisoner's lodgings at 34, Merthyr Street, St. Soames' ? And did you on entering see the box produced, lying on the table ?

SNOW. Yes, sir.

CLERK. Is that the box ?

SNOW. [*Fingering the box.*] Yes, sir.

CLERK. And did you thereupon take possession of it, and charge the female prisoner with theft of the box from 6, Rockingham Gate ? And did she deny the same ?

SNOW. Yes, sir.

CLERK. Did you take her into custody ?

SNOW. Yes, sir.

MAGISTRATE. What was her behaviour ?

SNOW. Perfectly quiet, your Worship. She persisted in the denial. That's all.

MAGISTRATE. Do you know her ?

SNOW. No, your Worship.

MAGISTRATE. Is she known here ?

BALD CONSTABLE. No, your Worship, they're neither of them known, we've nothing against them at all.

CLERK. [*To MRS JONES.*] Have you anything to ask the officer ?

MRS. JONES. No, sir, thank you, I've nothing to ask him.

MAGISTRATE. Very well then—go on.

CLERK. [*Reading from his papers.*] And while you were taking the female prisoner did the male prisoner interpose, and endeavour to hinder you in the

execution of your duty, and did he strike you a blow?

SNOW. Yes, sir.

CLERK. And did he say, "You let her go, I took the box myself"?

SNOW. He did.

CLERK. And did you blow your whistle and obtain the assistance of another constable, and take him into custody?

SNOW. I did.

CLERK. Was he violent on the way to the station, and did he use bad language, and did he several times repeat that he had taken the box himself?

[SNOW *nods.*]

Did you thereupon ask him in what manner he had stolen the box? And did you understand him to say that he had entered the house at the invitation of young Mr. Barthwick

[BARTHWICK, *turning in his seat, frowns at*
ROPER.]

after midnight on Easter Monday, and partaken of whisky, and that under the influence of the whisky he had taken the box?

SNOW. I did, sir.

CLERK. And was his demeanour throughout very violent?

SNOW. It *was* very violent.

JONES. [*Breaking in.*] Violent—of course it was. You put your 'ands on my wife when I kept tellin' you I took the thing myself.

MAGISTRATE. [*Hissing, with protruded neck.*] Now—you will have your chance of saying what you want to say presently. Have you anything to ask the officer?

JONES. [*Sullenly.*] No

MAGISTRATE. Very well then. Now let us hear what the female prisoner has to say first.

MRS. JONES. Well, your Worship, of course I can only say what I've said all along, that I didn't take the box.

MAGISTRATE. Yes, but did you know that it was taken?

MRS. JONES. No, your Worship. And, of course, as to what my husband says, your Worship, I can't speak of my own knowledge. Of course, I know that he came home very late on the Monday night. It was past one o'clock when he came in, and he was not himself at all.

MAGISTRATE. Had he been drinking?

MRS. JONES. Yes, your Worship.

MAGISTRATE. And was he drunk?

MRS. JONES. Yes, your Worship, he was almost quite drunk.

MAGISTRATE. And did he say anything to you?

MRS. JONES. No, your Worship, only to call me names. And of course in the morning when I got up and went to work he was asleep. And I don't know anything more about it until I came home again. Except that Mr. Barthwick—that's my employer, your Worship—told me the box was missing.

MAGISTRATE. Yes, yes.

MRS. JONES. But of course when I was shaking out my husband's coat the cigarette-box fell out and all the cigarettes were scattered on the bed.

MAGISTRATE. You say all the cigarettes were scattered on the bed? [*To SNOW.*] Did you see the cigarettes scattered on the bed?

SNOW. No, your Worship, I did not.

MAGISTRATE. You see he says he didn't see them.

JONES. Well, they were there for all that.

SNOW. I can't say, your Worship, that I had the opportunity of going round the room; I had all my work cut out with the male prisoner.

MAGISTRATE. [*To MRS. JONES.*] Well, what more have you to say?

MRS. JONES. Of course when I saw the box, your Worship, I was dreadfully upset, and I couldn't think why he had done such a thing; when the officer came we were having words about it, because it is ruin to me, your Worship, in my profession, and I have three little children dependent on me.

MAGISTRATE. [*Protruding his neck.*] Yes—yes—but what did he say to you?

MRS. JONES. I asked him whatever came over him to do such a thing—and he said it was the drink. He said that he had had too much to drink, and something came over him. And of course, your Worship he had had very little to eat all day, and the drink does go to the head when you have not had enough to eat. Your Worship may not know, but it is the

truth. And I would like to say that all through his married life I have never known him to do such a thing before, though we have passed through great hardships and [*speaking with soft emphasis*] I am quite sure he would not have done it if he had been himself at the time.

MAGISTRATE. Yes, yes. But don't you know that that is no excuse?

MRS. JONES. Yes, your Worship. I know that it is no excuse.

[*The MAGISTRATE leans over and parleys with his CLERK.*

JACK. [*Leaning over from his seat behind.*] I say, Dad——

BARTHWICK. Tsst! [*Sheltering his mouth he speaks to ROPER.*] Roper, you had better get up now and say that considering the circumstances and the poverty of the prisoners, we have no wish to proceed any further, and if the magistrate would deal with the case as one of disorder only on the part of——

BALD CONSTABLE. Hssshh!

[*ROPER shakes his head.*

MAGISTRATE. Now, supposing what you say and what your husband says is true, what I have to consider is—how did he obtain access to this house, and were you in any way a party to his obtaining access? You are the charwoman employed at the house?

MRS. JONES. Yes, your Worship, and of course if I had let him into the house it would have been very

wrong of me ; and I have never done such a thing in any of the houses where I have been employed.

MAGISTRATE. Well—so you say. Now let us hear what story the male prisoner makes of it.

JONES. [*Who leans with his arms on the dock behind, speaks in a slow, sullen voice.*] Wot I say is wot my wife says. I've never been 'ad up in a police-court before, an' I can prove I took it when in liquor. I told her, an' she can tell you the same, that I was goin' to throw the thing into the water sooner then 'ave it on my mind.

MAGISTRATE. But how did you get into the *house* ?

JONES. I was passin.' I was goin' 'ome from the "Goat and Bells."

MAGISTRATE. The "Goat and Bells,"—what is that? A public-house?

JONES. Yes, at the corner. It was Bank 'oliday, an' I'd 'ad a drop to drink. I see this young Mr. Barthwick tryin' to find the keyhole on the wrong side of the door.

MAGISTRATE. Well?

JONES. [*Slowly and with many pauses.*] Well—I 'elped 'im to find it—drunk as a lord 'e was. He goes on, an' comes back again, and says, I've got nothin' for you, 'e says, but come in an' 'ave a drink. So I went in just as you might 'ave done yourself. We 'ad a drink o' whisky just as you might have 'ad, 'nd young Mr. Barthwick says to me, "Take a drink 'nd a smoke. Take anything you like, 'e says. And then he went to sleep on the sofa. I 'ad some more

whisky—an' I 'ad a smoke—and I 'ad some more whisky—an' I carn't tell yer what 'appened after that.

MAGISTRATE. Do you mean to say you were so drunk that you can remember nothing?

JACK. [*Softly to his father.*] I say, that's exactly what——

BARTHWICK. Tssh!

JONES. That's what I do mean.

MAGISTRATE. And yet you say you stole the box?

JONES. I never stole the box. I took it.

MAGISTRATE. [*Hissing, with protruded neck.*] You did not steal it—you took it. Did it belong to you—what is that but stealing?

JONES. I took it.

MAGISTRATE. You took it—you took it away from their house and you took it to your house——

JONES. [*Sullenly breaking in.*] I ain't got a house.

MAGISTRATE. Very well, let us hear what this young man Mr.—Mr. Barthwick—has to say to your story.

[SNOW leaves the witness-box. The BALD CONSTABLE beckons JACK, who, clutching his hat, goes into the witness-box. ROPER moves to the table set apart for his profession.

SWEARING CLERK. The evidence you give to the Court shall be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God. Kiss the book.

[*The Book is kissed.*

ROPER. [*Examining.*] What is your name?

JACK [*In a low voice.*] John Barthwick, Junior.

[*The CLERK writes it down.*

ROPER. Where do you live ?

JACK. At 6, Rockingham Gate.

[*All his answers are recorded by the Clerk.*

ROPER. You are the son of the owner ?

JACK. [*In a very low voice.*] Yes.

ROPER. Speak up, please. Do you know the prisoner ?

JACK. [*Looking at the JONESES, in a low voice.*] I've seen Mrs. Jones. I—[*in a loud voice*] don't know the man.

JONES. Well, I know you !

BALD CONSTABLE. Hssh !

ROPER. Now, did you come in late on the night of Easter Monday ?

JACK. Yes.

ROPER. And did you by mistake leave your latchkey in the door ?

JACK. Yes.

MAGISTRATE. Oh ! You left your latchkey in the door ?

ROPER. And is that all you can remember about your coming in ?

JACK. [*In a loud voice.*] Yes, it is.

MAGISTRATE. Now, you have heard the male prisoner's story, what do you say to that ?

JACK. [*Turning to the MAGISTRATE, speaks suddenly in a confident, straightforward voice.*] The fact of the matter is, sir, that I'd been out to the theatre that

night, and had supper afterwards, and I came in late.

MAGISTRATE. Do you remember this man being outside when you came in?

JACK. No, sir. [*He hesitates.*] I don't think I do.

MAGISTRATE. [*Somewhat puzzled.*] Well, did he help you to open the door, as he says? Did *any* one help you to open the door?

JACK. No, sir—I don't think so, sir—I don't know.

MAGISTRATE. You don't know? But you must know. It isn't a usual thing for you to have the door opened for you, is it?

JACK. [*With a shamefaced smile.*] No.

MAGISTRATE. Very well, then——

JACK. [*Desperately.*] The fact of the matter is, sir, I'm afraid I'd had too much champagne that night.

MAGISTRATE. [*Smiling.*] Oh! you'd had too much champagne?

JONES. May I ask the gentleman a question?

MAGISTRATE. Yes—yes—you may ask him what questions you like.

JONES. Don't you remember you said you was a Liberal, same as your father, and you asked me wot I was?

JACK. [*With his hand against his brow.*] I seem to remember——

JONES. And I said to you, "I'm a bloomin' Conservative," I said; an' you said to me, "You look more like one of these 'ere Socialists. Take wotever you like," you said.

JACK. [*With sudden resolution.*] No, I don't. I don't remember anything of the sort.

JONES. Well, I do, an' my word's as good as yours. I've never been had up in a police court before. Look 'ere, don't you remember you had a sky-blue bag in your 'and—— [BARTHWICK *jumps*.

ROPER. I submit to your worship that these questions are hardly to the point, the prisoner having admitted that he himself does not remember anything. [*There is a smile on the face of Justice.*] It is a case of the blind leading the blind.

JONES. [*Violently.*] I've done no more than wot he 'as. I'm a poor man I've got no money an' no friends—he's a toff—he can do wot I can't.

MAGISTRATE. Now, now! All this won't help you—you must be quiet. You say you took this box? Now, what made you take it? Were you pressed for money?

JONES. I'm always pressed for money.

MAGISTRATE. Was that the reason you took it?

JONES. No.

MAGISTRATE. [*To SNOW.*] Was anything found on him?

SNOW. Yes, your worship. There was six pounds twelve shillin's found on him, and this purse.

[*The red silk purse is handed to the MAGISTRATE. BARTHWICK rises in his seat, but hastily sits down again.*

MAGISTRATE. [*Staring at the purse.*] Yes, yes—let me see—— [*There is a silence.*] No, no, I've nothing

before me as to the purse. How did you come by all that money?

JONES. [*After a long pause, suddenly.*] I declines to say.

MAGISTRATE. But if you had all that money, what made you take this box?

JONES. I took it out of spite.

MAGISTRATE. [*Hissing, with protruded neck.*] You took it out of spite? Well now, that's something! But do you imagine you can go about the town taking things out of spite?

JONES. If you had my life, if you'd been out of work——

MAGISTRATE. Yes, yes; I know—because you're out of work you think it's an excuse for everything.

JONES. [*Pointing at JACK.*] You ask 'im wot made 'im take the——

ROPER. [*Quietly.*] Does your worship require this witness in the box any longer?

MAGISTRATE. [*Ironically.*] I think not; he is hardly profitable.

[*JACK leaves the witness-box, and, hanging his head, resumes his seat.*]

JONES. You ask 'im wot made 'im take the lady's——

[*But the BALD CONSTABLE catches him by the sleeve.*]

BALD CONSTABLE. Sssh!

MAGISTRATE. [*Emphatically.*] Now listen to me.

I've nothing to do with what he may or may not have taken. Why did you resist the police in the execution of their duty?

JONES. It warn't their duty to take my wife, a respectable woman, that 'adn't done nothing.

MAGISTRATE. But I say it was. What made you strike the officer a blow?

JONES. Any man would a struck 'im a blow. I'd strike 'im again, I would.

MAGISTRATE. You are not making your case any better by violence. How do you suppose we could get on if everybody behaved like you?

JONES. [*Leaning forward, earnestly.*] Well, wot about 'er; who's to make up to 'er for this? Who's to give 'er back 'er good name?

MRS. JONES. Your Worship, it's the children that's preying on his mind, because of course I've lost my work. And I've had to find another room owing to the scandal.

MAGISTRATE. Yes, yes, I know—but if he hadn't acted like this nobody would have suffered.

JONES. [*Glaring round at JACK.*] I've done no worse than wot 'e 'as. Wot I want to know is wot's goin' to be done to 'im.

[*The BALD CONSTABLE again says "Hssh!"*]

ROPER. Mr. Barthwick wishes it known, your Worship, that considering the poverty of the prisoners he does not press the charge as to the box. Perhaps your Worship would deal with the case as one of disorder

JONES. I don't want it smothered up, I want it all dealt with fair—I want my rights—

MAGISTRATE. [*Rapping his desk.*] Now you have said all you have to say, and you will be quiet.

[*There is a silence ; the MAGISTRATE bends over and parleys with his CLERK.*

Yes, I think I may discharge the woman. [*In a kindly voice he addresses MRS. JONES, who stands unmoving with her hands crossed on the rail.*] It is very unfortunate for you that this man has behaved as he has. It is not the consequences to him but the consequences to you. You have been brought here twice, you have lost your work—[*He glares at JONES*] and this is what always happens. Now you may go away, and I am very sorry it was necessary to bring you here at all.

MRS. JONES. [*Softly.*] Thank you very much, your Worship.

[*She leaves the dock, and looking back at JONES, twists her fingers and is still.*

MAGISTRATE. Yes, yes, but I can't pass it over. Go away, there's a good woman.

[*MRS. JONES stands back. The MAGISTRATE leans his head on his hand : then raising it he speaks to JONES.*]

Now, listen to me. Do you wish the case to be settled here, or do you wish it to go before a Jury?

JONES. [*Muttering.*] I don't want no Jury.

MAGISTRATE. Very well then, I will deal with it

here. [*After a pause.*] You have pleaded guilty to stealing this Box—

JONES. Not to stealin'—

BALD CONSTABLE. Hssshh

MAGISTRATE. And to assaulting the police—

JONES. Any man as was a man—

MAGISTRATE. Your conduct here has been most improper. You give the excuse that you were drunk when you stole the box. I tell you that is no excuse. If you choose to get drunk and break the law afterwards you must take the consequences. And let me tell you that men like you, who get drunk and give way to your spite or whatever it is that's in you, are—are—a *nuisance to the community.*

JACK. [*Leaning from his seat.*] Dad ' that's what you said to me?

BARTHWICK. Tsst.

[*There is a silence, while the MAGISTRATE consults his CLERK; JONES leans forward wailing.*]

MAGISTRATE. This is your first offence, and I am going to give you a light sentence. [*Speaking sharply, but without expression.*] One month with hard labour.

[*He bends, and parleys with his CLERK. The BALD CONSTABLE and another help JONES from the dock.*]

JONES. [*Stopping and twisting round.*] Call this justice? What about 'im? 'E got drunk! 'E took

the purse—'e took the purse but [*in a muffled shout*]
it's 'is money got 'im off—*Justice!*

[*The prisoner's door is shut on JONES, and from the seedy-looking men and women comes a hoarse and whispering groan.*

MAGISTRATE. We will now adjourn for lunch! [*He rises from his seat.*]

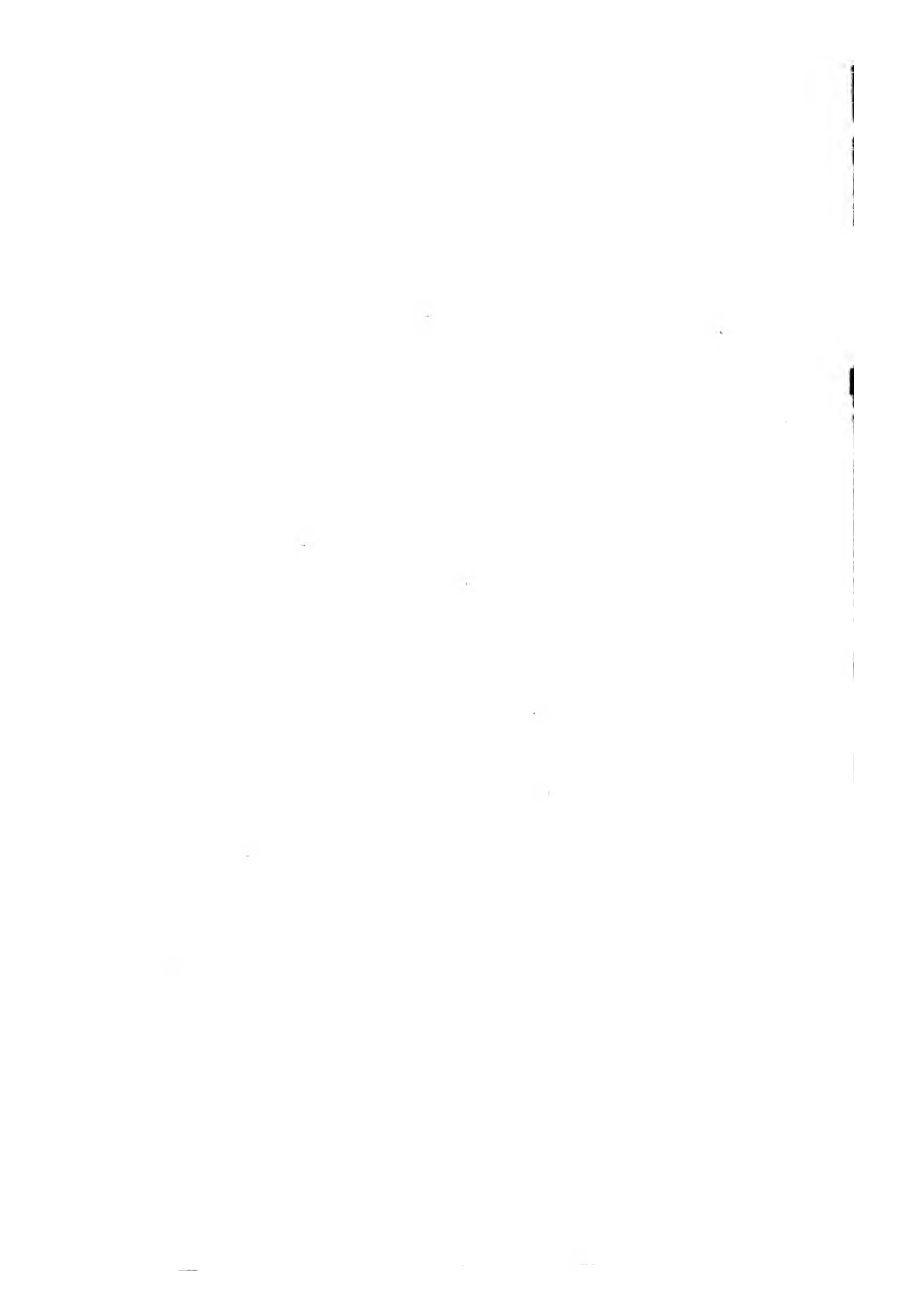
[*The Court is in a stir. ROPER gets up and speaks to the reporter. JACK, throwing up his head, walks with a swagger to the corridor; BARTHWICK follows.*

MRS. JONES. [*Turning to him with a humble gesture.*
Oh! Sir!—

[*BARTHWICK hesitates, then yielding to his nerves, he makes a shame-faced gesture of refusal, and hurries out of Court. MRS. JONES stands looking after him.*

The curtain falls.

JOY
A PLAY ON THE LETTER "I"
IN THREE ACTS



PERSONS OF THE PLAY

COLONEL HOPE, R.A., *retired*
MRS. HOPE, *his wife*
MISS BEECH, *their old governess*
LETTY, *their daughter*
ERNEST BLUNT, *her husband*
MRS. GWYN, *their niece*
JOY, *her daughter*
DICK MERTON, *their young friend*
HON. MAURICE LEVER, *their guest*
ROSE, *their parlourmaid*

TIME: The present. The action passes throughout mid-summer day on the lawn of Colonel Hope's house, near the Thames above Oxford.

CAST OF THE ORIGINAL PRODUCTION
AT THE SAVOY THEATRE, LONDON,
ON SEPTEMBER 24, 1907

COLONEL HOPE	<i>Mr. A. E. George</i>
MRS. HOPE	<i>Miss Henrietta Watson</i>
MISS BEECH	<i>Miss Florence Haydon</i>
LETTY	<i>Miss Mary Barton</i>
ERNEST BLUNT	<i>Mr. Frederick Lloyd</i>
MRS. GWYN	<i>Miss Wynne Matthison</i>
JOY	<i>Miss Dorothy Minto</i>
DICK MERTON	<i>Mr. Alan Wade</i>
HON. MAURICE LEVER	<i>Mr. Thalberg Corbet</i>
ROSE	<i>Miss Amy Lamborn</i>

ACT I

[The time is morning, and the scene a level lawn, beyond which the river is running amongst fields. A huge old beech tree overshadows everything, in the darkness of whose hollow many things are hidden. A rustic seat encircles it. A low wall clothed in creepers, with two openings, divides this lawn from the flowery approaches to the house. Close to the wall there is a swing. The sky is clear and sunny. COLONEL HOPE is seated in a garden-chair, reading a newspaper through pince-nez. He is fifty-five, and bald, with drooping grey moustaches and a weather-darkened face. He wears a flannel suit, and a hat from Panama; a tennis racquet leans against his chair. MRS. HOPE comes quickly through the opening of the wall, with roses in her hands. She is going grey; she wears tan gauntlets, and no hat. Her manner is decided, her voice emphatic, as though aware that there is no nonsense in its owner's composition. Screened by the hollow tree, MISS BEECH is seated; and JOY is perched on a lower branch, concealed by foliage.]

MRS. HOPE. I told Molly in my letter that she'd have to walk up, Tom.

COLONEL. Walk up in this heat? My dear, why didn't you order Benson's fly?

MRS. HOPE. Expense for nothing! Bob can bring up her things in the barrow. I've told Joy I won't have her going down to meet the train. She's so excited about her mother's coming there's no doing anything with her.

COLONEL. No wonder, after two months.

MRS. HOPE. Well, she's going home to-morrow; she must just keep herself fresh for the dancing to-night. I'm not going to get people in to dance, and have Joy worn out before they begin.

COLONEL. [*Dropping his paper.*] I don't like Molly's walking up.

MRS. HOPE. A great strong woman like Molly Gwyn! It isn't half a mile.

COLONEL. I don't like it, Nell; it's not hospitable.

MRS. HOPE. Rubbish! If you want to throw away money, you must just find some better investment than those wretched three per cents of yours. The green-fly are in my roses already! Did you ever see anything so *disgusting*? [*They bend over the roses they have grown, and lose all sense of everything.*] Where's the syringe? I saw you mooning about with it last night, Tom.

COLONEL. [*Uneasily.*] Mooning! [*He retires behind his paper. Mrs. HOPE enters the hollow of the tree.*] There's an account of that West Australian swindle. Set of ruffians! Listen to this, Nell! "It is under-

stood that amongst the shareholders are large numbers of women, clergymen, and Army officers." How people can be such fools!

[Becoming aware that his absorption is unobserved, he drops his glasses, and reverses his chair towards the tree.]

MRS. HOPE. *[Reappearing with a garden syringe.]* I simply won't have Dick keep his fishing things in the tree; there's a whole potful of disgusting worms. I can't touch them. You must go and take 'em out, Tom. *[In his turn the COLONEL enters the hollow of the tree.]*

MRS. HOPE. *[Personally.]* What on earth's the pleasure of it? I can't see! He never catches anything worth eating.

[The COLONEL reappears with a paint pot full of worms; he holds them out abstractedly.]

MRS. HOPE. *[Jumping.]* Don't put them near me!

MISS BEECH. *[From behind the tree.]* Don't hurt the poor creatures.

COLONEL. *[Turning.]* Hallo, Peachey? What are you doing round there?

[He puts the worms down on the seat.]

MRS. HOPE. Tom, take the worms off that seat at once!

COLONEL. *[Somewhat flurried.]* Good gad! I don't know what to do with the beastly worms!

MRS. HOPE. It's not *my* business to look after Dick's worms. Don't put them on the ground. I won't have them anywhere where they can crawl about. *[She flicks some green fly off her roses.]*

COLONEL. [*Looking into the pot as though the worms could tell him where to put them.*] Dash!

MISS BEECH. Give them to me.

MRS. HOPE. [*Relieved.*] Yes, give them to Peachey.

[*There comes from round the tree MISS BEECH, old-fashioned, barrel-shaped, balloony in the skirts. She takes the paint pot, and sits beside it on the rustic seat.*

MISS BEECH. Poor creatures!

MRS. HOPE. Well, it's beyond *me* how you can make pets of worms—wriggling, crawling, horrible things!

[*ROSE, who is young and comely, in a pale print frock, comes from the house and places letters before her on a silver salver.*

[*Taking the letters.*] What about Miss Joy's frock, Rose?

ROSE. Please, 'm, I can't get on with the back without Miss Joy.

MRS. HOPE. Well, then you must just find her. *I* don't know where she is.

ROSE. [*In a slow, sidelong manner.*] If you please, Mum, I think Miss Joy's up in the——

[*She stops, seeing MISS BEECH signing to her with both hands.*

MRS. HOPE. [*Sharply.*] What is it, Peachey?

MISS BEECH. [*Selecting a finger.*] Pricked meself!

MRS. HOPE. Let's look!

[*She bends to look, but MISS BEECH places the finger in her mouth.*

ROSE. [*Glancing askance at the COLONEL.*] If you please, Mum, it's—below the waist, I think I can manage with the dummy.

MRS. HOPE. Well, you can try. [*Opening her letter as ROSE retires.*] Here's Molly about her train.

MISS BEECH. Is there a letter for me?

MRS. HOPE. No, Peachey.

MISS BEECH. There never is.

COLONEL. What's that? You got four by the first post.

MISS BEECH. Exceptions!

COLONEL. [*Looking over his glasses.*] Why! You know, you get 'em every day!

MRS. HOPE. Molly says she'll be down by the eleven thirty. [*In an injured voice.*] She'll be here in half an hour! [*Reading with disapproval from the letter.*] "MAURICE LEVER is coming down by the same train to see Mr. Henty about the Tocopala Gold Mine. Could you give him a bed for the night?"

[*Silence, slight but ominous.*]

COLONEL. [*Calling in to his aid his sacred hospitality.*] Of course we must give him a bed!

MRS. HOPE. Just like a man! What room I should like to know!

COLONEL. Pink.

MRS. HOPE. As if *Molly* wouldn't have the Pink!

COLONEL. [*Ruefully.*] I thought she'd have the blue!

MRS. HOPE. You know perfectly well it's full of earwigs, Tom. I killed ten there yesterday morning.

MISS BEECH. Poor creatures !

MRS. HOPE. I don't know that I approve of this Mr. Lever's dancing attendance. Molly's only thirty-six.

COLONEL. [*In a high voice.*] You can't refuse him a bed ; I never heard of such a thing.

MRS. HOPE. [*Reading from the letter.*] "This gold mine seems to be a splendid chance. [*She glances at the COLONEL.*] I've put all *my* spare cash into it. They're issuing some Preference shares now ; if Uncle Tom wants an investment." [*She pauses, then in a changed, decided voice.*] Well, I suppose I shall have to screw him in somehow.

COLONEL. What's that about gold mines ? Gambling nonsense ! Molly ought to know my views.

MRS. HOPE. [*Folding the letter away out of her consciousness.*] Oh ! your views ! This may be a specially good chance.

MISS BEECH. Ahem ! Special case !

MRS. HOPE. [*Paying no attention.*] I'm sick of these 3 per cent dividends. When you've only got so little money, to put it all into that India Stock, when it might be earning 6 per cent. at least, quite safely ! There are ever so many things I want.

COLONEL. There you go !

MRS. HOPE. As to Molly, I think it's high time her husband came home to look after her, instead of sticking out there in that hot place. In fact

[*MISS BEECH looks up at the tree and exhibits cerebral excitement*]

I don't know what Geoff's about ; why doesn't he

find something in England, where they could live together.

COLONEL. Don't say anything against Molly, Nell!

MRS. HOPE. Well, I don't believe in husband and wife being separated. That's not my idea of married life.

[*The COLONEL whistles quizzically.*]

Ah, yes, she's *your* niece, not *mine*! Molly's very—

MISS BEECH. Ouch! [*She sucks her finger.*]

MRS. HOPE. Well, if I couldn't sew at your age, Peachey, without pricking my fingers! Tom, if I have Mr. Lever here, you'll just attend to what I say and look into that mine!

COLONEL. Look into your grandmother! I haven't made a study of geology for nothing. For every ounce you take out of a gold mine, you put an ounce and a half in. Any fool knows that, eh, Peachey?

MISS BEECH. I hate your horrid mines, with all the poor creatures underground.

MRS. HOPE. Nonsense, Peachey! As if they'd go there if they didn't want to!

COLONEL. Why don't you read your paper, then you'd see what a lot of wild-cat things there are about.

MRS. HOPE. [*Abstractedly.*] I can't put Ernest and Letty in the blue room, there's only the single bed. Suppose I put Mr. Lever there, and say nothing about the earwigs. I daresay he'll never notice.

COLONEL. Treat a guest like that!

MRS. HOPE. Then where am I to put him for goodness sake?

COLONEL. Put him in my dressing-room, I'll turn out

MRS. HOPE. Rubbish, Tom, I won't have you turned out, that's flat. He can have Joy's room, and she can sleep with the earwigs.

JOY. [*From her hiding-place upon a lower branch of the hollow tree.*] I won't.

[MRS. HOPE and the COLONEL jump.

COLONEL. God bless my soul!

MRS. HOPE. You wretched girl? I told you never to climb that tree again. Did you know, Peachey?

[MISS BEECH, smiles.

She's always up there, spoiling all her frocks. Come down now, Joy; there's a good child!

JOY. I don't want to sleep with earwigs, Aunt Nell.

MISS BEECH. I'll sleep with the poor creatures.

MRS. HOPE. [*After a pause.*] Well, it would be a mercy if you would for once, Peachey.

COLONEL. Nonsense, I won't have Peachey—

MRS. HOPE. Well, who is to sleep there then?

JOY. [*Coaxingly.*] Let me sleep with *Mother*, Aunt Nell, do!

MRS. HOPE. Litter her up with a great girl like you, as if we'd only one spare room! Tom, see that she comes down—I can't stay here, I must manage something. [*She goes away towards the house.*

COLONEL. [*Moving to the tree, and looking up.*] You heard what your Aunt said?

JOY. [*Softly.*] Oh, Uncle Tom!

COLONEL. I shall have to come up after you.

JOY. Oh, *do*, and Peachey too!

COLONEL. [*Trying to restrain a smile.*] Peachey, you talk to her. [*Without waiting for MISS BEECH however, he proceeds.*] What'll your Aunt say to me if I don't get you down?

MISS BEECH. Poor creature!

JOY. I don't want to be worried about my frock.

COLONEL. [*Scratching his bald head.*] Well, I shall catch it.

JOY. Oh, Uncle Tom, your head is so beautiful from here! [*Leaning over, she fans it with a leafy twig.*

MISS BEECH. Disrespectful little toad!

COLONEL. [*Quickly putting on his hat.*] You'll fall out, and a pretty mess that'll make on—[*he looks uneasily at the ground*—my lawn!

[*A voice is heard calling "Colonel! Colonel!"*

JOY. There's Dick calling you, Uncle Tom.

[*She disappears.*

DICK. [*Appearing in the opening of the wall.*] Ernie's waiting to play you that single, Colonel!

[*He disappears.*

JOY. Quick, Uncle Tom! Oh! *do* go, before he finds I am up here.

MISS BEECH. Secret little creature!

[*The COLONEL picks up his racquet, shakes his fist, and goes away.*

JOY. [*Calmly.*] I'm coming down now, Peachey.

[*Climbing down.*] Look out! I'm dropping on your head.

MISS BEECH. [*Unmoved.*] Don't hurt yourself!

[*Joy drops on the rustic seat and rubs her shin.*]

Told you so! [*She hunts in a little bag for plaster.*]
Let's see!

JOY. [*Seeing the worms.*] Ugh!

MISS BEECH. What's the matter with the poor creatures?

JOY. They're so wriggly!

[*She backs away and sits down in the swing. She is just seventeen, light and slim, brown-haired, fresh-coloured, and gray-eyed; her white frock reaches to her ankles, she wears a sun-bonnet.*]

Peachey, how long were you Mother's governess?

MISS BEECH. Five years.

JOY. Was she as bad to teach as me?

MISS BEECH. Worse! [*Joy claps her hands.*]

She was the worst girl I ever taught.

JOY. Then you weren't fond of her?

MISS BEECH. Oh! yes, I was.

JOY. Fonder than of me?

MISS BEECH. Don't you ask such a lot of questions!

JOY. Peachey, duckie, what was Mother's *worst* fault?

MISS BEECH. Doing what she knew she oughtn't.

JOY. Was she ever sorry?

MISS BEECH. Yes, but she always went on doin' it.

JOY. *I think being sorry's stupid!*

MISS BEECH. Oh, do you?

JOY. It isn't any good. Was Mother revengeful, like me?

MISS BEECH. Ah! Wasn't she?

JOY. And jealous?

MISS BEECH. The most jealous girl I ever saw.

JOY. [*Nodding.*] *I like to be like her.*

MISS BEECH. [*Regarding her intently.*] Yes! you've got all your troubles before you.

JOY. Mother was married at eighteen, wasn't she, Peachey? Was she—was she much in love with Father then?

MISS BEECH. [*With a sniff.*] About as much as usual. [*She takes the paint pot, and walking round begins to release the worms.*]

JOY. [*Indifferently.*] They don't get on now, you know.

MISS BEECH. What d'you mean by that, disrespectful little creature?

JOY. [*In a hard voice.*] They haven't ever since I've known them.

MISS BEECH. [*Looks at her, and turns away again.*] Don't talk about such things.

JOY. I suppose you don't know Mr. Lever? [*Bitterly.*] He's such a cool beast. He never loses his temper.

MISS BEECH. Is that why you don't like him?

JOY. [*Frowning.*] No—yes—I don't know.

MISS BEECH. Oh! perhaps you *do* like him?

JOY. I don't; I hate him.

MISS BEECH. [*Standing still.*] Fie! Naughty temper!

JOY. Well, so would you! He takes up all Mother's time.

MISS BEECH. [*In a peculiar voice.*] Oh! does he!

JOY. When he comes *I* might just as well go to bed. [*Passionately.*] And now he's chosen to-day to come down here, when I haven't seen her for two months! Why couldn't he come when Mother and I'd gone home. It's simply brutal!

MISS BEECH. But your mother likes him?

JOY. [*Sullenly.*] I don't *want* her to like him.

MISS BEECH. [*With a long look at Joy.*] I see!

JOY. What are you doing, Peachey?

MISS BEECH. [*Releasing a worm.*] Letting the poor creatures go.

JOY. If I tell Dick he'll never forgive you.

MISS BEECH. [*Sidling behind the swing and plucking off Joy's sunbonnet. With devilry.*] Ah-h-h! You've done your hair up; so that's why you wouldn't come down!

JOY. [*Springing up and pouting.*] I didn't want any one to see before Mother. You *are* a pig, Peachey!

MISS BEECH. I thought there was *something*!

JOY. [*Twisting round.*] How does it look?

MISS BEECH. I've seen better.

JOY. You tell any one before Mother comes, and see what I do!

MISS BEECH. Well, don't you tell about my worms, then !

JOY. Give me my hat ! [*Backing hastily towards the tree, and putting her finger to her lips.*] Look out ! Dick !

MISS BEECH. Oh ! dear !

[*She sits down on the swing concealing the paint pot with her feet and skirts.*]

JOY. [*On the rustic seat, and in a violent whisper.*] I hope the worms will crawl up your legs !

[*DICK, in flannels and a hard straw hat comes in. He is a quiet and cheerful boy of twenty. His eyes are always fixed on Joy.*]

DICK. [*Grimacing.*] The Colonel's getting licked. Hallo ! Peachey, in the swing ?

JOY. [*Chuckling.*] Swing her, Dick !

MISS BEECH. [*Quivering with emotion.*] Little creature !

JOY. Swing her ! [*DICK takes the ropes.*]

MISS BEECH. [*Quietly.*] It makes me sick, young man.

DICK. [*Patting her gently on the back.*] All right, Peachey.

MISS BEECH. [*Maliciously.*] Could you get me my sewing from the seat ? Just behind Joy.

JOY. [*Leaning her head against the tree.*] If you do, I won't dance with you to-night.

[*DICK stands paralysed. MISS BEECH gets off the swing, picks up the paint pot and stands concealing it behind her.*]

JOY. Look what she's got behind *her*, sly old thing!

MISS BEECH. Oh! dear!

JOY. Dance with her, Dick!

MISS BEECH. If he dare!

JOY. Dance with her, or I won't dance with you to-night. *[She whistles a waltz.]*

DICK. *[Desperately.]* Come on then, Peachey. We must.

JOY. Dance, dance!

[DICK seizes MISS BEECH by the waist. She drops the paint pot. They revolve.]

[Convulsed.] Oh, Peachey, oh!

[MISS BEECH is dropped upon the rustic seat.]

DICK seizes JOY's hands and drags her up.]

No, no! I won't!

MISS BEECH. *[Panting.]* Dance, dance with the poor young man! *[She moves her hands.]* La la—la la la—la la la! *[DICK and JOY dance.]*

DICK. By Jove, Joy! You've done your hair up. I say, how jolly! You do look——

JOY. *[Throwing her hands up to her hair.]* I didn't mean you to see!

DICK. *[In a hurt voice.]* Oh! didn't you? I'm awfully sorry!

JOY. *[Flashing round]* Oh, you old Peachey! *[She looks at the ground, and then again at DICK.]*

MISS BEECH. *[Sidling round the tree.]* Oh! dear!

JOY. *[Whispering.]* She's been letting out your worms. *[MISS BEECH disappears from view.]*

Look!

DICK. [*Quickly.*] Hang the worms! Joy, promise me the second and fourth and sixth and eighth and tenth and supper, to-night. Promise! Do!

[*Joy shakes her head.*]

It's not much to ask.

JOY. I won't promise anything.

DICK. Why not?

JOY. Because Mother's coming. I won't make any arrangements.

DICK. [*Tragically.*] It's our last night.

JOY. [*Scornfully.*] You don't understand! [*Dancing and clasping her hands.*] Mother's coming, mother's coming!

DICK. [*Violently.*] I wish—— Promise, Joy!

JOY. [*Looking over her shoulder.*] Sly old thing! If you'll pay Peachey out, I'll promise you supper!

MISS BEECH. [*From behind the tree.*] I hear you.

JOY. [*Whispering.*] Pay her out, pay her out! She's let out all your worms!

DICK. [*Looking moodily at the paint pot.*] I say, is it true that Maurice Lever's coming with your mother? I've met him playing cricket, he's rather a good sort.

JOY. [*Flashing out.*] I hate him.

DICK. [*Troubled.*] Do you? Why? I thought—I didn't know—if I'd known of course, I'd have——

[*He is going to say "hated him too!" But the voices of ERNEST BLUNT and the COLONEL are heard approaching, in dispute.*]

JOY. Oh! Dick, hide me, I don't want my hair seen till Mother comes.

[*She springs into the hollow tree. The COLONEL and ERNEST appear in the opening of the wall.*]

ERNEST. The ball *was* out, Colonel.

COLONEL. Nothing of the sort.

ERNEST. A good foot out.

COLONEL. It was not, sir. I saw the chalk fly.

[*ERNEST is twenty-eight, with a little moustache, and the positive cool voice of a young man who knows that he knows everything. He is perfectly calm.*]

ERNEST. I was nearer to it than you.

COLONEL. [*In a high, hot voice.*] I don't care where you were, I hate a fellow who can't keep cool.

MISS BEECH. [*From behind the hollow tree.*] Fie! Fie!

ERNEST. We're two to one, Letty says the ball was out.

COLONEL. Letty's *your wife*, she'd say anything.

ERNEST. Well, look here, Colonel, I'll show you the very place it pitched.

COLONEL. Gammon! You've lost your temper, you don't know what you're talking about.

ERNEST. [*Coolly.*] I suppose you'll admit the rule that one umpires one's own court.

COLONEL. [*Hotly.*] Certainly not *in this case!*

MISS BEECH. [*From behind the hollow tree.*] Special case!

ERNEST. [*Moving chin in collar—very coolly.*] Well, of course if you won't play the game!

COLONEL. [*In a towering passion.*] If you lose your temper like this, I'll never play with you again.

[*To LETTY a pretty soul in a linen suit, approaching through the wall.*

Do you mean to say that ball was out, Letty?

LETTY. Of course it was, father.

COLONEL. You say that because he's *your husband*. [*He sits on the rustic seat.*] If your mother'd been there she'd have backed *me* up!

LETTY. Mother wants Joy, Dick, about her frock.

DICK. I—I don't know where she is.

MISS BEECH. [*From behind the hollow tree.*] Ahem!

LETTY. What's the matter Peachey?

MISS BEECH. Swallowed a fly. Poor creature!

ERNEST. [*Returning to his point.*] Why I know the ball was out, Colonel, was because it pitched in a line with that arbutus tree——

COLONEL. [*Rising.*] Arbutus tree! [*To his daughter.*] Where's your mother?

LETTY. In the blue room, Father.

ERNEST. The ball was a good foot out; at the height it was coming when it passed me——

COLONEL. [*Staring at him.*] You're a—you're a—a theorist! From where you were you couldn't see the ball at all. [*To LETTY.*] Where's your mother?

LETTY. [*Emphatically.*] In the *blue* room, Father!

[*The COLONEL glares confusedly, and goes away towards the blue room.*

ERNEST. [*In the swing, and with a smile.*] Your old Dad'll never be a sportsman!

LETTY. [*Indignantly.*] I wish you wouldn't call Father old, Ernie! What time's Molly coming, Peachey?

[*Rose has come from the house, and stands waiting for a chance to speak.*

ERNEST. [*Breaking in.*] Your old Dad's only got one fault; he can't take an *impersonal* view of things.

MISS BEECH. Can you find me any one who can?

ERNEST. [*With a smile.*] Well, Peachey!

MISS BEECH. [*Ironically.*] Oh! of course, there's you!

ERNEST. I don't know about that! But——

ROSE. [*To LETTY.*] Please, Miss, the Missis says will you and Mr. Ernest please to move your things into Miss Peachey's room.

ERNEST. [*Vexed.*] Deuce of a nuisance havin' to turn out for this fellow Lever. What did Molly want to bring him for?

MISS BEECH. Course you've no personal feeling in the matter!

ROSE. [*Speaking to MISS BEECH.*] The Missis says you're to please move your things into the blue room, please Miss.

LETTY. Aha, Peachey! That settles you! Come on, Ernie!

[*She goes towards the house. ERNEST, rising from the swing, turns to MISS BEECH, who follows.*

ERNEST. [*Smiling, faintly superior.*] Personal, not a bit! I only think while Molly's out at grass, she oughtn't to——

MISS BEECH. [*Sharply.*] Oh! do you?

[*She hustles ERNEST out through the wall, but his voice is heard faintly from the distance:*
 "I think it's jolly thin."

ROSE. [*To DICK.*] The Missis says you're to take all your worms and things, Sir, and put them where they won't be seen.

DICK. [*Shortly.*] Haven't got any!

ROSE. The Missis says she'll be very angry if you don't put your worms away; and would you come and help kill earwigs in the blue ——?

DICK. Hang! [*He goes, and ROSE is left alone.*

ROSE. [*Looking straight before her.*] Please, Miss Joy, the Missis says will you go to her about your frock.

[*There is a little pause, then from the hollow tree JOY's voice is heard.*

JOY. No—o!

ROSE. If you didn't come, I was to tell you she was going to put you in the blue ——

[*JOY looks out of the tree.*

[*Immovable, but smiling.*] Oh, Miss Joy, you've done your hair up!

[*JOY retires into the tree.*

Please, Miss, what shall I tell the Missis?

JOY. [*JOY's voice is heard.*] Anything you like!

ROSE. [*Over her shoulder.*] I shall be drove to tell her a story, Miss.

JOY. All right ! Tell it.

[ROSE goes away, and JOY comes out. She sits on the rustic seat and waits. DICK, coming softly from the house, approaches her.]

DICK. [Looking at her intently.] Joy ! I wanted to say something——

[JOY does not look at him, but twists her fingers.]
I shan't see you again you know after to-morrow till I come up for the 'Varsity match.

JOY. [Smiling.] But that's next week.

DICK. Must you go home to-morrow ?

[JOY nods three times.
[Coming closer.] I shall miss you so awfully. You don't know how I——

Do look at me ! [JOY steals a look.] Oh ! Joy !

[Again JOY shakes her head.]

JOY. [Suddenly.] Don't !

DICK. [Seizing her hand.] Oh, Joy ! Can't you——

JOY. [Drawing the hand away.] Oh ! don't.

DICK. [Bending his head.] It's—it's—so——

JOY. [Quietly.] Don't, Dick !

DICK. But I can't help it ! It's too much for me, Joy, I must tell you——

[MRS. GWYN is seen approaching towards the house.]

JOY. [Spinning round.] It's Mother—oh, Mother !

[She rushes at her.]

[MRS. GWYN is a handsome creature of thirty-six, dressed in a muslin frock. She twists her daughter round, and kisses her.]

MRS. GWYN. How sweet you look with your hair up, Joy! Who's this? [*Glancing with a smile at DICK.*]

JOY. Dick Merton—in my letters you know.

[*She looks at DICK as though she wished him gone.*]

MRS. GWYN. How do you do?

DICK. [*Shaking hands.*] How d'you do? I think if you'll excuse me—I'll go in.

[*He goes uncertainly.*]

MRS. GWYN. What's the matter with him?

JOY. Oh, nothing! [*Hugging her.*] Mother! You do look such a duck. Why did you come by the towing-path, wasn't it cooking?

MRS. GWYN. [*Avoiding her eyes.*] Mr. Lever wanted to go into Mr. Henty's.

[*Her manner is rather artificially composed.*]

JOY. [*Dully.*] Oh! Is he—is he really coming here, Mother?

MRS. GWYN. [*Whose voice has hardened just a little.*] If Aunt Nell's got a room for him—of course—why not?

JOY. [*Digging her chin into her mother's shoulder.*] Why couldn't he choose some day when we'd gone? I wanted you all to myself.

MRS. GWYN. You are a quaint child—when I was your age—

JOY. [*Suddenly looking up.*] Oh! Mother, you must have been a chook!

MRS. GWYN. Well, I was about twice as old as you, I know that.

JOY. Had you any—any other offers before you were married, Mother?

MRS. GWYN. [*Smilingly.*] Heaps!

JOY. [*Reflectively.*] Oh!

MRS. GWYN. Why? Have you been having any?

JOY. [*Glancing at MRS. GWYN, and then down.*] N—o, of course not!

MRS. GWYN. Where are they all? Where's Peachey?

JOY. Fussing about somewhere; don't let's hurry! Oh! you duckie—duckie! Aren't there any letters from Dad?

MRS. GWYN. [*In a harder voice.*] Yes, one or two.

JOY. [*Hesitating.*] Can't I see?

MRS. GWYN. I didn't bring them. [*Changing the subject obviously.*] Help me to tidy—I'm so hot I don't know what to do.

[*She takes out a powder-puff bag, with a tiny looking-glass.*]

JOY. How lovely it'll be to-morrow—going home!

MRS. GWYN. [*With an uneasy look.*] London's dreadfully stuffy, Joy. You'll only get knocked up again.

JOY. [*With consternation.*] Oh! but Mother, I must come.

MRS. GWYN. [*Forcing a smile.*] Oh, well if you must, you must! [*Joy makes a dash at her.*]
Don't rumple me again. Here's Uncle Tom.

JOY. [*Quickly.*] Mother, we're going to dance to-night, promise to dance with me, there are three

more girls than men, at least, and don't dance too much with—with—you know—because I'm—*[dropping her voice and very still]*—jealous.

MRS. GWYN. *[Forcing a laugh.]* You are funny!

JOY. *[Very quickly.]* I haven't made any engagements because of you.

[The COLONEL approaches through the wall.]

MRS. GWYN. Well, Uncle Tom?

COLONEL. *[Genially.]* Why, Molly! *[He kisses her.]* What made you come by the towing-path?

JOY. Because it's so much cooler, of course.

COLONEL. Hallo! What's the matter with you? Phew! you've got your hair up? Go and tell your aunt your mother's on the lawn. Cut along!

[Joy goes, blowing a kiss.]

Cracked about you, Molly! Simply cracked! We shall miss her when you take her off to-morrow. *[He places a chair for her.]* Sit down, sit down, you must be tired in this heat. I've sent Bob for your things with the wheelbarrow; what have you got—only a bag, I suppose?

MRS. GWYN. *[Sitting, with a smile.]* That's all, Uncle Tom, except—my trunk and hat-box.

COLONEL. Phew! And what's-his-name brought a bag, I suppose?

MRS. GWYN. They're all together. I hope it's not too much, Uncle Tom.

COLONEL. *[Dubiously.]* Oh! Bob'll manage! I suppose you see a good deal of—of—Lever. That's his brother in the Guards, isn't it?

MRS GWYN. Yes.

COLONEL. Now what does this chap do.

MRS GWYN. What should he do, Uncle Tom? He's a Director.

COLONEL. Guinea-pig! [*Dubiously.*] Your bringing him down was a good idea.

[MRS. GWYN, *looking at him sidelong, bites her lips.*]

I should like to have a look at him. But, I say, you know, Molly—mines, mines! There are a lot of these chaps about, whose business is to cook their own dinners. Your aunt thinks——

MRS. GWYN. Oh! Uncle Tom, don't tell me what Aunt Nell thinks!

COLONEL. Well—well! Look here, old girl! It's *my* experience never to—what I mean is—never to trust too much to a man who has to do with mining. *I've* always refused to have anything to do with mines. If your husband were in England, of course, I'd say nothing.

MRS. GWYN. [*Very still.*] We'd better keep *him* out of the question, hadn't we?

COLONEL. Of course, if you wish it, my dear.

MRS. GWYN. Unfortunately, I do.

COLONEL. [*Nervously.*] Ah! yes, I know; but look here, Molly, your aunt thinks you're in a very delicate position—in fact, she thinks you see too much of young Lever——

MRS. GWYN. [*Stretching herself like an angry cat.*] Does she? And what do *you* think?

COLONEL. I? I make a point of not thinking. I only know that here he is, and I don't want you to go burning your fingers, eh?

[MRS. GWYN *sits with a vindictive smile.*]

A gold mine's a *gold* mine. I don't mean he deliberately—but they take in women and parsons, and—and all sorts of fools. [*Looking down.*] And then, you know, I can't tell your feelings, my dear, and I don't want to; but a man about town'll compromise a woman as soon as he'll look at her, and [*softly shaking his head*] I don't like that, Molly! It's not the thing!

[MRS. GWYN *sits unmoved, smiling the same smile, and the COLONEL gives her a nervous look.*]

If—if—you were any other woman—I shouldn't care—and if—if you were a plain woman, damme, you might do what you liked! I know you and Geoff don't get on; but here's this child of yours, devoted to you, and—and don't you see, old girl? Eh?

MRS. GWYN. [*With a little hard laugh.*] Thanks! Perfectly! I suppose as you don't think, Uncle Tom, it never occurred to you that *I* have rather a lonely time of it.

COLONEL. [*With compunction.*] Oh! my dear, yes, of course I know it must be beastly.

MRS. GWYN. [*Stonily.*] It is.

COLONEL. Yes, yes! [*Speaking in a surprised voice.*] I don't know what I am talking like this for! It's your Aunt! She goes on at me till she gets on my

nerves. What d'you think she wants me to do now? Put money into this gold mine! Did you ever hear such folly?

MRS. GWYN. [*Breaking into laughter.*] Oh! Uncle Tom!

COLONEL. All very well for you to laugh, Molly!

MRS. GWYN. [*Calmly.*] And how much *are* you going to put in?

COLONEL. Not a farthing! Why, I've got nothing but my pension and three thousand India Stock!

MRS. GWYN. Only ninety pounds a year, besides your pension! D'you mean to say that's all you've got, Uncle Tom? I never knew that before. What a shame!

COLONEL. [*Feelingly.*] It *is*—a d--d shame! I don't suppose there's another case in the army of a man being treated as *I've* been.

MRS. GWYN. But how on earth do you manage here on so little?

COLONEL. [*Brooding.*] Your Aunt's very funny. She's a born manager. She'd manage the hind leg off a donkey; but if *I* want five shillings for a charity or what not, I have to whistle for it. And then all of a sudden, Molly, she'll take it into her head to spend goodness knows what on some trumpery or other, and come to me for the money. If I haven't got it to give her, out she flies about 3 per cent., and worries me to invest in some wild-cat or other, like your friend's thing, the Jaco—what is it? I don't pay the slightest attention to her.

MRS. HOPE. [*From the direction of the house.*] Tom!

COLONEL. [*Rising.*] Yes, dear! [*Then dropping his voice.*] I say, Molly, don't you mind what I said about young Lever. I don't want you to imagine that I think harm of people—you know I don't—but so many women come to grief, and—[*hotly*—I can't stand men about town; not that he of course—

MRS. HOPE. [*Peremptorily.*] Tom!

COLONEL. [*In hasty confidence.*] I find it best to let your Aunt run on. If she says anything—

MRS. HOPE. To-om!

COLONEL. Yes, dear!

[*He goes hastily. Mrs. Gwyn sits drawing circles on the ground with her charming parasol. Suddenly she springs to her feet, and stands waiting like an animal at bay.*

THE COLONEL and MRS. HOPE approach her talking.

MRS. HOPE. Well, how was I to know?

COLONEL. Didn't Joy come and tell you?

MRS. HOPE. I don't know what's the matter with that child? Well, Molly, so here you are. You're before your time—that train's always late.

MRS. GWYN. [*With faint irony.*] I'm sorry, Aunt Nell!

[*THEY bob, seem to take fright, and kiss each other gingerly.*

MRS. HOPE. What have you done with Mr. Lever? I shall have to put him in Peachey's room. Tom's got no champagne.

COLONEL. They've a very decent brand down at the George, Molly, I'll send Bob over——

MRS. HOPE. Rubbish, Tom! He'll just have to put up with what he can get!

MRS. GWYN. Of course! He's not a snob! For goodness sake, Aunt Nell, don't put yourself out! I'm sorry I suggested his coming.

COLONEL. My dear, we *ought* to have champagne in the house—in case of accident.

MRS. GWYN. [*Shaking him gently by the coat.*] No, please, Uncle Tom!

MRS. HOPE. [*Suddenly.*] Now, I've told your Uncle, Molly, that he's not to go in for this gold mine without making certain it's a good thing. Mind, I think you've been very rash. I'm going to give you a good talking to; and that's not all—you oughtn't to go about like this with a young man; he's not at all bad looking. I remember him perfectly well at the Fleming's dance.

[*On MRS. GWYN's lips there comes a little mocking smile.*]

COLONEL. [*Pulling his wife's sleeve.*] Nell!

MRS. HOPE. No, Tom, I'm going to talk to Molly; she's old enough to know better.

MRS. GWYN. Yes?

MRS. HOPE. Yes, and you'll get yourself into a mess; I don't approve of it, and when I see a thing I don't approve of——

COLONEL. [*Walking about, and pulling his moustache.*] Nell, I won't have it, I simply won't have it.

MRS. HOPE. What rate of interest are these Preference Shares to pay?

MRS. GWYN. [*Still smiling.*] Ten per cent.

MRS. HOPE. What did I tell you, Tom? And are they safe?

MRS. GWYN. You'd better ask Maurice.

MRS. HOPE. There, you see, you call him Maurice! Now supposing your Uncle went in for some of them——

COLONEL. [*Taking off his hat—in a high, hot voice.*] I'm not going in for anything of the sort.

MRS. HOPE. Don't swing your hat by the brim! Go and look if you can see him coming!

[*The COLONEL goes.*]

[*In a lower voice.*] Your Uncle's getting very bald. I've only shoulder of lamb for lunch, and a salad. It's lucky it's too hot to eat.

[*MISS BEECH has appeared while she is speaking.*] Here she is, Peachey!

MISS BEECH. I see her. [*She kisses MRS. GWYN, and looks at her intently.*]

MRS. GWYN. [*Shrugging her shoulders.*] Well, Peachey! What d'you make of me?

COLONEL. [*Returning from his search.*] There's a white hat crossing the second stile. Is that your friend, Molly?

[*MRS. GWYN nods.*]

MRS. HOPE. Oh! before I forget, Peachey—Letty and Ernest can move their things back again. I'm going to put Mr. Lever in *your* room. [*Catching sight*

of the paint pot on the ground.] There's that disgusting paint-pot! Take it up at once, Tom, and put it in the tree.

[The COLONEL picks up the pot and bears it to the hollow tree followed by MRS. HOPE; he enters.]

MRS. HOPE. *[Speaking into the tree.]* Not there!

COLONEL. *[From within.]* Well, where then?

MRS. HOPE. Why—up—oh! gracious!

[MRS. GWYN, standing alone, is smiling. LEVER approaches from the towing-path. He is a man like a fencer's wrist, supple and steely. A man whose age is difficult to tell, with a quick, good-looking face, and a line between his brows; his darkish hair is flecked with grey. He gives the feeling that he has always had to spurt to keep pace with his own life.]

MRS. HOPE. *[Also entering the hollow tree.]* No—oh!

COLONEL. *[From the depths, in a high voice.]* Well, dash it then! What do you want?

MRS. GWYN. Peachey, may I introduce Mr. Lever to you? Miss Beech, my old governess.

[They shake each other by the hand.]

LEVER. How do you do?

[His voice is pleasant, his manner easy.]

MISS BEECH. Pleased to meet you.

*[Her manner is that of one who is not pleased.
She watches.]*

MRS. GWYN. *[Pointing to the tree—maliciously.]* This is my uncle and my aunt. They're taking exercise, I think.

[The COLONEL and MRS. HOPE emerge convulsively. They are very hot. LEVER and MRS. GWYN are very cool.]

MRS. HOPE. *[Shaking hands with him.]* So you've got here! Aren't you very hot?—Tom!

COLONEL. Brought a splendid day with you! Splendid!

[As he speaks, JOY comes running with a bunch of roses; seeing LEVER, she stops and stands quite rigid.]

MISS BEECH. *[Sitting in the swing.]* Thunder!

COLONEL. Thunder? Nonsense, Peachey, you're always imagining something. Look at the sky!

MISS BEECH. Thunder!

[Mrs. Gwyn's smile has faded.]

MRS. HOPE. *[Turning.]* Joy, don't you see Mr. Lever?

[Joy, turning to her mother, gives her the roses. With a forced smile, LEVER advances, holding out his hand.]

LEVER. How are you, Joy? Haven't seen you for an age!

JOY. [*Without expression.*] I am very well, thank you.

[*She raises her hand, and just touches his.* MRS. GYWN'S eyes are fixed on her daughter. MISS BEECH is watching them intently ; MRS. HOPE is buttoning the COLONEL'S coat.

The curtain falls.

ACT II

[It is afternoon, and at a garden-table placed beneath the hollow tree, the Colonel is poring over plans. Astride of a garden-chair, LEVER is smoking cigarettes. Dick is hanging Chinese lanterns to the hollow tree.]

LEVER. Of course, if this level [*pointing with his cigarette*] peters out to the West we shall be in a tightish place; you know what a mine is at this stage, Colonel Hope?

COLONEL. [*Absently.*] Yes, yes. [*Tracing a line.*] What is there to prevent its running out here to the East?

LEVER. Well, nothing, except that as a matter of fact it doesn't.

COLONEL. [*With some excitement.*] I'm very glad you showed me these papers, very glad! I say that it's a most astonishing thing if the ore suddenly stops there. [*A gleam of humour visits LEVER's face.*] I'm not an expert, but you ought to prove that ground to the East more thoroughly.

LEVER. [*Quizzically.*] Of course sir, if you advise that——

COLONEL. If it were *mine*, I'd no more sit down

under the belief that the ore stopped there, than I'd— There's a harmony in these things.

LEVER. I can only tell you what our experts say.

COLONEL. Ah! Experts! No faith in them— never had! Miners, lawyers, theologians, cowardly lot—pays them to be cowardly. When they haven't their own axes to grind, they've got their theories; a theory's a dangerous thing. [*He loses himself in contemplation of the papers.*] Now *my* theory is, you're in strata here of what we call the Triassic Age.

LEVER. [*Smiling faintly.*] Ah!

COLONEL. You've struck a fault, that's what's happened. The ore may be as much as thirty or forty yards out; but it's there, depend on it.

LEVER. Would you back that opinion, Sir?

COLONEL. [*With dignity.*] I never give an opinion that I'm not prepared to back. I want to get to the *bottom* of this. What's to prevent the gold going down *indefinitely*?

LEVER. Nothing, so far as I know.

COLONEL. [*With suspicion.*] Eh!

LEVER. All I can tell you is: This is as far as we've got, and we want more money before we can get any further.

COLONEL. [*Absently.*] Yes, yes; that's very usual.

LEVER. If you ask my personal opinion I think it's very doubtful that the gold does go down.

COLONEL. [*Smiling.*] Oh! a *personal* opinion—on a matter of this sort!

LEVER. [*As though about to take the papers.*] Per-

haps we'd better close the sitting, Sir; sorry to have bored you.

COLONEL. Now, now! Don't be so touchy! If I'm to put money in, I'm bound to look at it all round.

LEVER. [*With lifted brows.*] Please don't imagine that I *want* you to put money in.

COLONEL. Confound it, sir! D'you suppose I take you for a Company promoter?

LEVER. Thank you!

COLONEL. [*Looking at him doubtfully.*] You've got Irish blood in you—um? You're so hasty!

LEVER. If you're really thinking of taking shares—my advice to you is, don't!

COLONEL. [*Regretfully.*] If this were an ordinary gold mine, I wouldn't dream of looking at it, I want you to understand that. Nobody has a greater objection to gold mines than I.

LEVER. [*Looks down at his host with half-closed eyes.*] But it *is* a gold mine, Colonel Hope.

COLONEL. I know, I know; but I've been into it for *myself*; I've formed my *opinion personally*. Now, what's the reason you don't want me to invest?

LEVER. Well, if it doesn't turn out as you expect, you'll say it's my doing. I know what investors are.

COLONEL. [*Dubiously.*] If it were a Westralian or a Kaffir I wouldn't touch it with a pair of tongs! It's not as if I were going to put much in! [*He suddenly*

bends above the papers as though magnetically attracted.]
I like these Triassic formations!

[DICK, *who has hung the last lantern, moodily*
departs.

LEVER. [*Looking after him.*] That young man seems depressed.

COLONEL. [*As though remembering his principles.*] I don't like mines, never have! [*Suddenly absorbed again.*] I tell you what, Lever—this thing's got tremendous possibilities. You don't seem to believe in it enough. No mine's any good without faith; until I see for *myself*, however, I shan't commit myself beyond a thousand.

LEVER. Are you serious, sir?

COLONEL. Certainly! I've been thinking it over ever since you told me Henty had fought shy. I've a poor opinion of Henty. He's one of those fellows that says one thing and does another. An opportunist!

LEVER. [*Slowly.*] I'm afraid we're all that, more or less. [*He sits beneath the hollow tree.*

COLONEL. A man never knows what he is himself. There's my wife. She thinks she's— By the way, don't say anything to her about this, please. And, Lever [*nervously*], I don't think, you know, this is *quite* the sort of thing for my niece.

LEVER. [*Quietly.*] I agree. I mean to get her out of it.

COLONEL. [*A little taken aback.*] Ah! You know, she—she's in a very delicate position, living by her-

self in London. [LEVER *looks at him ironically.*] You [very nervously] see a good deal of her? If it hadn't been for Joy growing so fast, we shouldn't have had the child down here. Her Mother ought to have her with her. Eh! Don't you think so?

LEVER. [*Forcing a smile.*] Mrs. Gwyn always seems to me to get on all right.

COLONEL. [*As though making a discovery.*] You know, I've found that when a woman's living alone and unprotected, the very least thing will set a lot of hags and jackanapes talking. [*Hotly.*] The more unprotected and helpless a woman is, the more they revel in it. If there's anything I hate in this world, it's those wretched creatures who babble about their neighbours' affairs.

LEVER. I agree with you.

COLONEL. One ought to be very careful not to give them—that is [*checks himself confused ; then hurrying on*—I suppose you and Joy get on all right?

LEVER. [*Coolly.*] Pretty well, thanks. I'm not exactly in Joy's line; haven't seen very much of her, in fact.

[MISS BEECH and JOY have been approaching from the house. But seeing LEVER, JOY turns abruptly, hesitates a moment, and with an angry gesture goes away.]

COLONEL [*Unconscious.*] Wonderfully affectionate little thing! Well, she'll be going home to-morrow!

MISS BEECH. [*Who has been gazing after JOY.*] Talkin' business, poor creatures?

LEVER. Oh, no! If you'll excuse me, I'll wash my hands before tea.

[*He glances at the COLONEL poring over papers, and, shrugging his shoulders, strolls away.*]

MISS BEECH. [*Sitting in the swing.*] I see your horrid papers.

COLONEL. Be quiet, Peachey!

MISS BEECH. On a beautiful summer's day, too.

COLONEL. That'll do now.

MISS BEECH. [*Unmoved.*] For every ounce you take out of a gold mine you put two in.

COLONEL. Who told you that rubbish?

MISS BEECH. [*With devilry.*] *You did!*

COLONEL. This isn't an ordinary gold mine.

MISS BEECH. Oh! quite a *special* thing.

[*COLONEL stares at her, but subsiding at her impassivity he pores again over the papers.*]

[*ROSE has approached with a tea cloth.*]

ROSE. If you please, sir, the missis told me to lay the tea.

COLONEL. Go away! Ten fives fifty. Ten 5-16ths, Peachey?

MISS BEECH. I hate your nasty sums!

[*ROSE goes away. The COLONEL writes. MRS. HOPE's voice is heard, "Now then, bring those chairs, you two. Not that one, Ernest." ERNEST and LETTY appear through the openings of the wall, each with a chair.*]

COLONEL. [*With dull exasperation.*] What do you want!

LETTY. Tea, father.

[*She places her chair and goes away.*]

ERNEST. That Johnny-bird Lever is too cocksure for me, Colonel. Those South American things are no good at all. I know all about *them* from young Scotton. There's not one that's worth a red cent. If you want a flutter——

COLONEL. [*Explosively.*] Flutter! I'm not a gambler, sir!

ERNEST. Well, Colonel [*with a smile*], I only don't want you to chuck your money away on a stiff 'un. If you want anything good you should go to Mexico.

COLONEL. [*Jumping up and holding out the map.*] Go to—— [*He stops in time.*] What d'you call that, eh? M-E-X——

ERNEST. [*Not to be embarrassed.*] It all depends on what part.

COLONEL. You think you know everything—you think nothing's right unless it's your own idea! Be good enough to keep your advice to yourself.

ERNEST. [*Moving with his chair, and stopping with a smile.*] If you ask me, I should say it wasn't playing the game to put Molly into a thing like that.

COLONEL. What do you mean, sir?

ERNEST. Any Juggins can see that she's a bit gone on our friend.

COLONEL. [*Freezingly.*] Indeed!

ERNEST. He's not at all the sort of Johnny that appeals to me.

COLONEL. Really?

ERNEST. [*Unmoved.*] If I were you, Colonel, I should tip her the wink. He was hanging about her at Ascot all the time. It's a bit thick!

[*Mrs. HOPE followed by ROSE appears from the house.*

COLONEL. [*Stammering with passion.*] Jackanapes!

MRS. HOPE. Don't stand there, Tom; clear those papers, and let Rose lay the table. Now, Ernest, go and get another chair.

[*The COLONEL looks wildly round and sits beneath the hollow tree, with his head held in his hands. Rose lays the cloth.*

MISS BEECH. [*Sitting beside the COLONEL.*] Poor creature!

ERNEST. [*Carrying his chair about with him.*] Ask any Johnny in the City, he'll tell you Mexico's a very tricky country—the people are awful rotters—

MRS. HOPE. Put that chair down, Ernest.

[*ERNEST looks at the chair, puts it down, opens his mouth, and goes away. ROSE follows him.*]

What's he been talking about? You oughtn't to get so excited, Tom; is your head bad, old man? Here, take these papers! [*She hands the papers to the COLONEL.*] Peachey, go in and tell them tea'll be ready in a minute, there's a good soul! Oh! and on my dressing-table you'll find a bottle of Eau de Cologne——

MISS BEECH. Don't let him get in a temper again? That's three times to-day!

[*She goes towards the house.*]

COLONEL. Never met such a fellow in my life, the most opinionated, narrow-minded—thinks he knows everything. Whatever Letty could see in him I can't think. Pragmatical beggar!

MRS. HOPE. Now Tom! What have you been up to, to get into a state like this?

COLONEL. [*Avoiding her eyes.*] I shall lose my temper with him one of these days. He's got that confounded habit of thinking nobody can be right but himself.

MRS. HOPE. That's enough! I want to talk to you seriously! Dick's in love. I'm perfectly certain of it.

COLONEL. Love! Who's he in love with—Peachey?

MRS. HOPE. You can see it all over him. If I saw any signs of Joy's breaking out, I'd send them both away. I simply won't have it.

COLONEL. Why, she's a child!

MRS. HOPE. [*Pursuing her own thoughts.*] But she isn't—not yet. I've been watching her very carefully. She's more in love with her Mother than any one, follows her about like a dog! She's been quite rude to Mr. Lever.

COLONEL. [*Pursuing his own thoughts.*] I don't believe a word of it. [*He rises and walks about.*]

MRS. HOPE. Don't believe a word of what?

[*The COLONEL is silent.*]

[*Pursuing his thoughts with her own.*] If I thought there were anything between Molly and Mr. Lever, d'you suppose I'd have him in the house?

[*THE COLONEL stops, and gives a sort of grunt.*] He's a very nice fellow; and I want you to pump him well, Tom, and see what there is in this mine.

COLONEL. [*Uneasily.*] Pump!

MRS. HOPE. [*Looking at him curiously.*] Yes, you've been up to something! Now what is it?

COLONEL. Pump my own guest! I never heard of such a thing!

MRS. HOPE. There you are on your high horse! I do wish you had a little common sense, Tom!

COLONEL. I'd as soon you asked me to sneak about eavesdropping! Pump!

MRS. HOPE. Well, what were you looking at these papers for? It does drive me so wild the way you throw away all the chances you have of making a little money. I've got you this opportunity, and you do nothing but rave up and down, and talk nonsense!

COLONEL. [*In a high voice.*] Much you know about it! I've taken a thousand shares in this mine!

[*He stops dead. There is a silence.*]

MRS. HOPE. You've—WHAT? Without consulting me? Well, then, you'll just go and take them out again!

COLONEL. You want me to——?

MRS. HOPE. The idea! As if you could trust your judgment in a thing like that! You'll just

go at once and say there was a mistake ; then we'll talk it over calmly.

COLONEL. [*Drawing himself up.*] Go back on what I've said? Not if I lose every penny! First you worry me to take the shares, and then you worry me not—I won't have it, Nell, I won't have it!

MRS. HOPE. Well, if I'd thought you'd have forgotten what you said this morning and turned about like this, d'you suppose I'd have spoken to you at all. Now, *do* you?

COLONEL. Rubbish! If you can't see that this is a special opportunity!

[*He walks away followed by MRS. HOPE, who endeavours to make him see her point of view. ERNEST and LETTY are now returning from the house armed with a third chair.*]

LETTY. What's the matter with everybody? Is it the heat?

ERNEST. [*Preoccupied and sitting in the swing.*] That sportsman, Lever, you know, ought to be warned off.

[*Rose has followed with the tea tray.*]

LETTY. [*Signing to ERNEST.*] Where's Miss Joy, Rose?

ROSE. Don't know, Miss.

[*Putting down the tray, she goes.*]

LETTY. Ernie, be careful, you never know where Joy is.

ERNEST. [*Preoccupied with his reflections.*] Your old Dad's as mad as a hatter with me.

LETTY. Why?

ERNEST. Well, I merely said what I thought, that Molly ought to look out what she's doing, and he dropped on me like a cartload of bricks.

LETTY. The Dad's very fond of Molly.

ERNEST. But look here, d'you mean to tell me that she and Lever aren't—

LETTY. Don't! Suppose they are! If Joy were to hear it'd be simply awful. I *like* Molly. I'm not going to believe anything against her. I don't see the use of it. If it is, it is, and if it isn't, it isn't.

ERNEST. Well, all I know is that when I told her the mine was probably a frost she went for me like steam.

LETTY. Well, so should I. She was only sticking up for her friends.

ERNEST. Ask the old Peachey-bird. She knows a thing or two. Look here, I don't mind a man's being a bit of a sportsman, but I think Molly's bringin' him down here is too thick. Your old dad's got one of his notions that because this Josser's his guest, he must keep him in a glass case, and take shares in his mine, and all the rest of it.

LETTY. I do think people are horrible, always thinking things. It's not as if Molly were a stranger. She's *my own cousin*. I'm not going to believe anything about my own cousin. I simply *won't*.

ERNEST. [*Reluctantly realising the difference that this makes.*] I suppose it *does* make a difference, her bein' your cousin.

LETTY. Of course it does! I only hope to goodness no one will make Joy suspect——

[She stops and puts her finger to her lips, for JOY is coming towards them, as the tea-bell sounds. She is followed by DICK and MISS BEECH with the Eau de Cologne. THE COLONEL and MRS. HOPE are also coming back, discussing still each other's point of view.]

JOY. Where's Mother? Isn't she here?

MRS. HOPE. Now Joy, come and sit down; your mother's been told tea's ready; if she lets it get cold it's her look out.

DICK. *[Producing a rug, and spreading it beneath the tree.]* Plenty of room, Joy.

JOY. I don't believe Mother knows, Aunt Nell.

[MRS. GWYN and LEVER appear in the opening of the wall.]

LETTY. *[Touching ERNEST'S arm.]* Look, Ernie! Four couples and Peachey——

ERNEST. *[Preoccupied.]* What couples?

JOY. Oh! Mums, here you are!

[Seizing her, she turns her back on LEVER. They sit in various seats, and MRS. HOPE pours out the tea.]

MRS. HOPE. Hand the sandwiches to Mr. Lever, Peachey. It's our own jam, Mr. Lever.

LEVER. Thanks. *[He takes a bite.]* It's splendid!

MRS. GWYN. *[With forced gaiety.]* It's the first time I've ever seen you eat jam.

LEVER. [*Smiling a forced smile.*] Really! But I love it.

MRS. GWYN. [*With a little bow.*] You always refuse mine.

JOY. [*Who has been staring at her enemy, suddenly.*] I'm all burnt up! Aren't you simply boiled, Mother?

[*She touches her Mother's forehead.*

MRS. GWYN. Ugh! You're quite clammy, Joy.

JOY. It's enough to make any one clammy.

[*Her eyes go back to LEVER'S face as though to stab him.*

ERNEST. [*From the swing.*] I say, you know, the glass is going down.

LEVER. [*Suavely.*] The glass in the hall's steady enough.

ERNEST. Oh, I never go by that; that's a rotten old glass.

COLONEL. Oh! is it?

ERNEST. [*Paying no attention.*] I've got a little ripper—never puts you in the cart. Bet you what you like we have thunder before to-morrow night.

MISS BEECH. [*Removing her gaze from Joy to LEVER.*] You don't think we shall have it before to-night, do you?

LEVER. [*Suavely.*] I beg your pardon; did you speak to me?

MISS BEECH. I said, you don't think we shall have the thunder before to night, do you?

[*She resumes her watch on Joy.*

LEVER. [*Blandly.*] Really, I don't see any signs of it.

[*JOY, crossing to the rug, flings herself down. And DICK sits cross-legged, with his eyes fast fixed on her.*]

MISS BEECH. [*Eating.*] People don't often see what they don't want to, do they?

[*LEVER only lifts his brows.*]

MRS. GWYN. [*Quickly breaking in.*] What are you talking about? The weather's perfect.

MISS BEECH. Isn't it.

MRS. HOPE. You'd better make a good tea, Peachey; nobody'll get anything till eight, and then only cold shoulder. You must just put up with no hot dinner, Mr. Lever.

LEVER. [*Bowing.*] Whatever is good enough for Miss Beech is good enough for me.

MISS BEECH. [*Sardonically—taking another sandwich.*] So you think!

MRS. GWYN. [*With forced gaiety.*] Don't be so absurd, Peachey.

[*MISS BEECH grunts slightly.*]

COLONEL. [*Once more busy with his papers.*] I see the name of your engineer is Rodriguez—Italian, eh?

LEVER. Portuguese.

COLONEL. Don't like that!

LEVER. I believe he was born in England.

COLONEL. [*Reassured.*] Oh, was he? Ah!

ERNEST. Awful rotters, those Portuguese!

COLONEL. There you go!

LETTY. Well, Father, Ernie only said what you said.

MRS. HOPE. Now I want to ask you, Mr. Lever, is this gold mine safe? If it isn't—I simply won't allow Tom to take these shares; he can't afford it.

LEVER. It rather depends on what you call safe, Mrs. Hope.

MRS. HOPE. I don't want anything extravagant, of course; if they're going to pay their 10 per cent. regularly, and Tom can have his money out at any time—— [*There is a faint whistle from the swing.*] I only want to know that it's a thoroughly genuine thing.

MRS. GWYN. [*Indignantly.*] As if Maurice would be a director if it wasn't?

MRS. HOPE. Now Molly, I'm simply asking——

MRS. GWYN. Yes, you are!

COLONEL. [*Rising.*] I'll take two thousand of those shares, Lever. To have my wife talk like that—I'm quite ashamed.

LEVER. Oh, come, sir, Mrs. Hope only meant——

[*MRS. GWYN looks eagerly at LEVER.*

DICK. [*Quietly.*] Let's go on the river, Joy.

[*Joy rises, and goes to her Mother's chair.*

MRS. HOPE. Of course! What rubbish, Tom! As if any one ever invested money without making sure!

LEVER. [*Ironically.*] It seems a little difficult to make sure in this case. There isn't the smallest

necessity for Colonel Hope to take any shares, and it looks to me as if he'd better not.

[*He lights a cigarette.*]

MRS. HOPE. Now, Mr. Lever, don't be offended! I'm very anxious for Tom to take the shares if you say the thing's so good.

LEVER. I'm afraid I must ask to be left out, please.

JOY. [*Whispering.*] Mother, if you've finished, do come, I want to show you my room.

MRS. HOPE. I wouldn't say a word, only Tom's so easily taken in.

MRS. GWYN. [*Fiercely.*] Aunt Nell, how *can* you?

[*Joy gives a little savage laugh.*]

LETTY. [*Hastily.*] Ernie, will you play Dick and me? Come on, Dick! [*All three go out towards the lawn.*]

MRS. HOPE. You ought to know your Uncle by this time, Molly. He's just like a child. He'd be a pauper to-morrow if I didn't see to things.

COLONEL. Understand once for all that I shall take two thousand shares in this mine. I'm—I'm humiliated. [*He turns and goes towards the house.*]

MRS. HOPE. Well, what on earth have I said?

[*She hurries after him.*]

MRS. GWYN. [*In a low voice as she passes.*] You needn't insult my friends!

[*LEVER, shrugging his shoulders, has strolled aside. JOY, with a passionate movement seen only by MISS BEECH, goes off towards the house. MISS BEECH and MRS. GWYN are left alone beside the remnants of the feast.*]

MISS BEECH. Molly! [MRS. GWYN *looks up startled.*] Take care, Molly, take care! The child! Can't you see? [*Apostrophizing LEVER.*] Take care, Molly, take care!

LEVER. [*Coming back.*] Awfully hot, isn't it?

MISS BEECH. Ah! and it'll be hotter if we don't mind.

LEVER. [*Suavely.*] Do we control these things?

[MISS BEECH *looking from face to face, nods her head repeatedly; then gathering her skirts she walks towards the house. MRS. GWYN sits motionless, staring before her.*]

Extraordinary old lady! [*He pitches away his cigarette.*] What's the matter with her, Molly?

MRS. GWYN. [*With an effort.*] Oh! Peachey's a character!

LEVER. [*Frowning.*] So I see! [*There is a silence.*]

MRS. GWYN. Maurice!

LEVER. Yes.

MRS. GWYN. Aunt Nell's hopeless, you mustn't mind her.

LEVER [*In a dubious and ironic voice.*] My dear girl, I've too much to bother me to mind trifles like that.

MRS. GWYN. [*Going to him suddenly.*] Tell me, won't you?

[LEVER *shrugs his shoulders.*]
A month ago you'd have told me soon enough!

LEVER. Now, Molly!

MRS. GWYN. Ah! [*With a bitter smile.*] The Spring's soon over.

LEVER. It's always Spring between us.

MRS. GWYN. Is it?

LEVER. You didn't tell me what *you* were thinking about just now when you sat there like stone.

MRS. GWYN. It doesn't do for a *woman* to say too much.

LEVER. Have I been so bad to you that you need feel like that, Molly?

MRS. GWYN. [*With a little warm squeeze of his arm.*] Oh! my dear, it's only that I'm so—— [*She stops.*]

LEVER. [*Gently.*] So what?

MRS. GWYN. [*In a low voice.*] It's hateful here.

LEVER. I didn't want to come. I don't understand why you suggested it. [*Mrs. Gwyn is silent.*] It's been a mistake!

MRS. GWYN. [*Her eyes fixed on the ground.*] Joy comes home to-morrow. I thought if I brought you here—I should know——

LEVER. [*Vexedly.*] Um!

MRS. GWYN. [*Losing her control.*] Can't you see? It haunts me? How are we to go on? I must know—I must know!

LEVER. I don't see that my coming——

MRS. GWYN. I thought I should have more confidence; I thought I should be able to face it better in London, if you came down here openly—and now—I feel I mustn't speak or look at you.

LEVER. You don't think your Aunt——

MRS. GWYN. [*Scornfully.*] She! It's only Joy I care about.

LEVER. [*Frowning.*] We must be more careful, that's all. We mustn't give ourselves away again, as we were doing just now.

MRS. GWYN. When any one says anything horrid to you, I can't help it.

[*She puts her hand on the lappel of his coat.*

LEVER. My dear child, take care!

[*MRS. GWYN drops her hand. She throws her head back, and her throat is seen to work as though she were gulping down a bitter draught. She moves away.*]

[*Following hastily.*] Don't dear, don't! I only meant — Come, Molly, let's be sensible. I want to tell you something about the mine.

MRS. GWYN. [*With a quavering smile.*] Yes—let's talk sensibly, and walk properly in this sensible, proper place.

[*LEVER is seen trying to soothe her, and yet to walk properly. As they disappear, they are viewed by JOY, who like the shadow parted from its figure, has come to join it again. She stands now, foiled, a carnation in her hand; then flings herself on a chair, and leans her elbows on the table.*

JOY. I hate him! Pig!

ROSE. [*Who has come to clear the tea things.*] Did you call, Miss?

JOY. Not you!

ROSE. [*Motionless.*] No, Miss!

JOY. [*Leaning back and tearing the flower.*] Oh! do hurry up, Rose!

ROSE. [*Collects the tea things.*] Mr. Dick's coming down the path! Aren't I going to get you to do your frock, Miss Joy?

JOY. No.

ROSE. What will the Missis say?

JOY. Oh, *don't* be so stuck, Rose!

[*ROSE goes, but DICK has come.*]

DICK. Come on the river, Joy, just for half an hour. as far as the kingfishers—do! [*Joy shakes her head.*] Why not? It'll be so jolly and cool. I'm most awfully sorry if I worried you this morning. I didn't mean to. I won't again, I promise. [*Joy slides a look at him, and from that look he gains a little courage.*] Do come! It'll be the last time. I feel it awfully, Joy.

JOY. There's nothing to hurt *you*!

DICK. [*Gloomily.*] Isn't there—when you're like this?

JOY. [*In a hard voice.*] If you don't like me, why do you follow me about?

DICK. What *is* the matter?

JOY. [*Looking up, as if for want of air.*] Oh! Don't!

DICK. Oh, Joy, what *is* the matter? Is it the heat?

JOY. [*With a little laugh.*] Yes.

DICK. Have some Eau de Cologne. I'll make you a bandage. [*He takes the Eau de Cologne, and makes a bandage with his handkerchief.*] It's quite clean.

JOY. Oh, Dick, you are so funny!

DICK. [*Bandaging her forehead.*] I can't bear *you* to feel bad; it puts me off completely. I mean I don't generally make a fuss about people, but when it's *you*—

JOY. [*Suddenly.*] I'm all right.

DICK. Is that comfy?

JOY. [*With her chin up, and her eyes fast closed.*] Quite.

DICK. I'm not going to stay and worry you. You ought to rest. Only, Joy! Look here! If you want me to do *anything* for you, *any* time—

JOY. [*Half opening her eyes.*] Only to go away.

[*DICK bites his lips and walks away.*]

DICK—[*softly*]—Dick! [*DICK stops.*] I didn't mean that; will you get me some water-irises for this evening?

DICK. Won't I? [*He goes to the hollow tree and from its darkness takes a bucket and a boat-hook.*] I know where there are some rippers!

[*JOY stays unmoving with her eyes half closed.*]

Are you sure you're all right, Joy? You'll just rest here in the shade, won't you, till I come back; it'll do you no end of good. I shan't be twenty minutes.

[*He goes, but cannot help returning softly, to make sure.*]

You're *quite* sure you're all right?

[*JOY nods. He goes away towards the river. But there is no rest for JOY. The voices of MRS. GWYN and LEVER are heard returning.*]

JOY. [*With a gesture of anger.*] Hateful! Hateful!
[*She runs away.*]

[*MRS. GWYN and LEVER are seen approaching;
they pass the tree, in conversation.*]

MRS. GWYN. But I don't see why, Maurice.

LEVER. We mean to sell the mine; we must do some more work on it, and for that we must have money.

MRS. GWYN. If you only want a little, I should have thought you could have got it in a minute in the City.

LEVER. [*Shaking his head.*] No, no; we must get it privately.

MRS. GWYN. [*Doubtfully.*] Oh! [*She slowly adds.*] Then it isn't such a good thing!

[*And she does not look at him.*]

LEVER. Well, we mean to sell it.

MRS. GWYN. What about the people who buy?

LEVER. [*Dubiously regarding her.*] My dear girl, they've just as much chance as *we* had. It's not my business to think of them. There's *your* thousand pounds——

MRS. GWYN. [*Softly.*] Don't bother about *my* money, Maurice. I don't want you to do anything not quite——

LEVER. [*Evasively.*] Oh! There's my brother's and my sister's too. I'm not going to let any of you run any risk. When we all went in for it the thing looked splendid; it's only the last month that we've had doubts. What bothers me now is your Uncle.

I don't want him to take these shares. It looks as if I'd come here on purpose.

MRS. GWYN. Oh! he *mustn't* take them!

LEVER. That's all very well; but it's not so simple.

MRS. GWYN. [*Shyly.*] But, Maurice, have you told him about the selling?

LEVER. [*Gloomily, under the hollow tree.*] It's a Board secret. I'd no business to tell even you.

MRS. GWYN. But he thinks he's taking shares in a good—a permanent thing.

LEVER. You can't go into a mining venture without some risk.

MRS. GWYN. Oh, yes, I know—but—but Uncle Tom is such a dear!

LEVER. [*Stubbornly.*] I can't help his being the sort of man he is. I didn't want him to take these shares, I told him so in so many words. Put yourself in my place, Molly, how can I go to him and say—"This thing may turn out rotten," when he knows I got you to put your money into it?

[*But JOY, the lost shadow, has come back. She moves forward resolutely. They are divided from her by the hollow tree; she is unseen. She stops.*

MRS. GWYN. I think he *ought* to be told about the selling; it's not fair.

LEVER. What on earth made him rush at the thing like that? I don't understand that kind of man?

MRS. GWYN. [*Impulsively.*] I must tell him, Maurice; I can't let him take the shares without——

[*She puts her hand on his arm.*

[*JOY turns, as if to go back whence she came, but stops once more.*

LEVER. [*Slowly and very quietly.*] I didn't think you'd give me away, Molly.

MRS. GWYN. I don't think I quite understand.

LEVER. If you tell the Colonel about this sale the poor old chap will think me a man that you ought to have nothing to do with. Do you want that?

[*MRS. GWYN, giving her lover a long look, touches his sleeve. JOY, slipping behind the hollow tree, has gone.*]

You can't act in a case like this as if you'd only a principle to consider. It's the—the *special circumstances*——

MRS. GWYN. [*With a faint smile.*] But you'll be glad to get the money, won't you?

LEVER. By George, if you're going to take it like this, Molly!

MRS. GWYN. Don't!

LEVER. We may not sell after all, dear, we may find it turn out trumps.

MRS. GWYN. [*With a shiver.*] I don't want to hear any more. I know women don't understand. [*Impulsively.*] It's only that I can't bear any one should think that you——

LEVER. [*Distressed.*] For goodness' sake, don't look

like that, Molly! Of course, I'll speak to your Uncle. I'll stop him somehow, even if I have to make a fool of myself. I'll do anything you want——

MRS. GWYN. I feel as if I were being smothered here.

LEVER. It's only for one day.

MRS. GWYN. [*With sudden tenderness.*] It's not your fault, dear. I ought to have known how it would be. Well, let's go in!

[She sets her lips, and walks towards the house with LEVER following. But no sooner has she disappeared than JOY comes running after; she stops, as though throwing down a challenge. Her cheeks and ears are burning.]

JOY. Mother!

[After a moment MRS. GWYN reappears in the opening of the wall.]

MRS. GWYN. Oh! here you are!

JOY. [*Breathlessly.*] Yes.

MRS. GWYN. [*Uncertainly.*] Where—have you been? You look dreadfully hot; have you been running?

JOY. Yes—no.

MRS. GWYN. [*Looking at her fixedly.*] What's the matter—you're trembling! [*Softly.*] Aren't you well, dear?

JOY. Yes—I don't know.

MRS. GWYN. What is it, darling?

JOY. [*Suddenly clinging to her.*] Oh! Mother!

MRS. GWYN. I don't understand.

JOY. [*Breathlessly.*] Oh, Mother, let me go back home with you now at once——

MRS. GWYN. [*Her face hardening.*] Why? What on earth——

JOY. I can't stay here.

MRS. GWYN. But why?

JOY. I want to be with *you*—Oh! Mother, don't you love me?

MRS. GWYN. [*With a faint smile.*] Of course I love you, Joy.

JOY. Ah! but you love *him* more.

MRS. GWYN. Love him—whom?

JOY. Oh! Mother, I didn't——[*She tries to take her Mother's hand, but fails.*] Oh! *don't.*

MRS. GWYN. You'd better explain what you mean, I think.

JOY. I want to get you to—he—he's—he's—not——!

MRS. GWYN. [*Frigidly.*] Really, Joy!

JOY. [*Passionately.*] I'll fight against him, and I know there's something wrong about——

[*She stops.*

MRS. GWYN. About what?

JOY. Let's tell Uncle Tom, Mother, and go away.

MRS. GWYN. Tell Uncle Tom—what?

JOY. [*Looking down and almost whispering.*] About——about—the mine.

MRS. GWYN. What about the mine? What do you mean? [*Fiercely.*] Have you been spying on me?

JOY. [*Shrinking.*] No! oh, no!

MRS. GWYN. Where were you?

JOY. [*Just above her breath.*] I—I heard something.

MRS. GWYN. [*Bitterly.*] But you were not spying?

JOY. I wasn't—I wasn't! I didn't want—to hear. I only heard a little. I couldn't help listening, Mother.

MRS. GWYN. [*With a little laugh.*] Couldn't help listening?

JOY. [*Through her teeth.*] I hate him. I didn't mean to listen, but I hate him.

MRS. GWYN. I see. [*There is a silence.*]

Why do you hate him?

JOY. He—he—— [*She stops.*]

MRS. GWYN. Yes?

JOY. [*With a sort of despair.*] I don't know. Oh! I don't know! But I feel——

MRS. GWYN. I can't reason with you. As to what you heard, it's—ridiculous.

JOY. It's not that. It's—it's you!

MRS. GWYN. [*Stonily.*] I don't know what you mean.

JOY. [*Passionately.*] I wish Dad were here!

MRS. GWYN. Do you love your Father as much as me?

JOY. Oh! Mother, no—you *know* I don't.

MRS. GWYN. [*Resentfully.*] Then why do you want him?

JOY. [*Almost under her breath.*] Because of that man.

MRS. GWYN. Indeed!

JOY. I will never—never make friends with him.

MRS. GWYN. [*Cuttingly.*] I have not asked you to.

JOY. [*With a blind movement of her hand.*] Oh, Mother!

[*MRS. GWYN half turns away.*]

Mother—won't you? Let's tell Uncle Tom, and go away from him?

MRS. GWYN. If you were not a child, Joy, you wouldn't say such things.

JOY. [*Eagerly.*] I'm not a child, I'm—I'm a woman. I am.

MRS. GWYN. No! You—are—not a woman, Joy.

[*She sees JOY throw up her arms as though warding off a blow, and turning finds that LEVER is standing in the opening of the wall.*]

LEVER. [*Looking from face to face.*] What's the matter? [*There is no answer.*] What is it, Joy?

JOY. [*Passionately.*] I heard you, I don't care who knows. I'd listen again.

LEVER. [*Impassively.*] Ah! and what did I say that was so very dreadful?

JOY. You're a—a—you're a—coward!

MRS. GWYN. [*With a sort of groan.*] Joy!

LEVER. [*Stepping up to JOY, and standing with his hands behind him—in a low voice.*] Now, hit me in the face—hit me—hit me as hard as you can. Go on, Joy, it'll do you good.

[*JOY raises her clenched hand, but drops it, and hides her face.*]

Why don't you? I'm not pretending!

[Joy makes no sign.]

Come Joy; you'll make yourself ill, and that won't help, will it?

[But Joy still makes no sign.]

[With determination.] What's the matter; now come—tell me!

JOY. [In a stifled, sullen voice.] Will you leave my mother alone?

MRS. GWYN. Oh! my dear Joy, don't be silly!

JOY. [Wincing; then with sudden passion.] I defy you—I defy you!

[She rushes from their sight.]

MRS. GWYN. [With a movement of distress.] Oh!

LEVER. [Turning to MRS. GWYN with a protecting gesture.] Never mind, dear! It'll be—it'll be all right!

[But the expression of his face is not the expression of his words.]

The curtain falls.

ACT III

[It is evening; a full yellow moon is shining through the branches of the hollow tree. The Chinese lanterns are alight. There is dancing in the house; the music sounds now loud, now soft. MISS BEECH is sitting on the rustic seat in a black bunchy evening dress, whose inconspicuous opening is inlaid with white. She slowly fans herself.]

[DICK comes from the house in evening dress. He does not see MISS BEECH.]

DICK. Curse! *[A short silence.]* Curse!

MISS BEECH. Poor young man!

DICK. *[With a start.]* Well, Peachey, I can't help it.
[He fumbles off his gloves.]

MISS BEECH. Did you ever know any one that could?

DICK. *[Earnestly.]* It's such awfully hard lines on Joy. I can't get her out of my head, lying there with that beastly headache while everybody's jiggling round.

MISS BEECH. Oh! you don't mind about yourself—noble young man!

DICK. I should be a brute if I didn't mind more for her.

MISS BEECH. So you think it's a headache, do you?

DICK. Didn't you hear what Mrs. Gwyn said at dinner about the sun? [*With inspiration.*] I say, Peachey, couldn't you—couldn't you just go up and give her a message from me, and find out if there's anything she wants, and say how brutal it is that she's seedy; it would be most awfully decent of you. And tell her the dancing's no good without her. Do, Peachey, now do! Ah! and look here!

[*He dives into the hollow of the tree, and brings from out of it a pail of water, in which are placed two bottles of champagne, and some yellow irises—he takes the irises.*]

You might give her these. I got them specially for her, and I haven't had a chance.

MISS BEECH. [*Lifting a bottle.*] What's this?

DICK. Fizz. The Colonel brought it from the George. It's for supper; he put it in here because of— [*Smiling faintly*] Mrs. Hope, I think. Peachey, do take her those irises.

MISS BEECH. D'you think they'll do her any good?

DICK. [*Crestfallen.*] I thought she'd like—I don't want to worry her—you might try.

[*MISS BEECH shakes her head.*]

Why not?

MISS BEECH. The poor little creature won't let me in.

DICK. You've *been* up then!

MISS BEECH. [*Sharply.*] Of course I've been up. I've not got a stone for my heart, young man!

DICK. All right! I suppose I shall just have to get along somehow.

MISS BEECH. [*With devilry.*] That's what we've all got to do.

DICK. [*Gloomily.*] But this is too brutal for anything!

MISS BEECH. Worse than ever happened to any one!

DICK. I swear I'm not thinking of *myself*.

MISS BEECH. Did y'ever know anybody that swore they were?

DICK. Oh! shut up!

MISS BEECH. You'd better go in and get yourself a partner.

DICK. [*With pale desperation.*] Look here, Peachey, I simply loathe all those girls.

MISS BEECH. Ah—h! [*Ironically.*] Poor lot, aren't they?

DICK. All right; chaff away, it's good fun, isn't it? It makes me sick to dance when Joy's lying there. Her last night, too!

MISS BEECH. [*Sidling to him.*] You're a good young man, and you've got a good heart.

[*She takes his hand, and puts it to her cheek.*]

DICK. Peachey—I say Peachey—d'you think there's—I mean d'you think there'll ever be any chance for me?

MISS BEECH. I *thought* that was coming! I don't approve of your making love at your time of life; don't you think I'm going to encourage you.

DICK. But I shall be of age in a year ; my money's my own, it's not as if I had to ask any one's leave ; and I mean, I *do* know my own mind.

MISS BEECH. Of course you do. Nobody else would at your age, but *you* do.

DICK. I wouldn't ask her to promise, it wouldn't be fair when she's so young, but I do want her to know that I shall never change.

MISS BEECH. And suppose—only suppose—she's fond of you, and says *she'll* never change.

DICK. Oh ! Peachey ! D'you think there's a chance of that—*do* you ?

MISS BEECH. A—h—h !

DICK. I wouldn't let her bind herself, I swear I wouldn't. [*Solemnly.*] I'm not such a selfish brute as you seem to think.

MISS BEECH. [*Sidling close to him and in a violent whisper.*] Well—*have a go* !

DICK. Really ? You *are* a brick, Peachey !

[*He kisses her.*]

MISS BEECH. [*Yielding pleasurably; then remembering her principles.*] Don't you ever say I said so ! You're too young, both of you.

DICK. But it is exceptional, I mean in *my* case, isn't it ?

[*The Colonel and Mrs. Gwyn are coming down the lawn.*]

MISS BEECH. Oh ! *very* !

[*She sits beneath the tree and fans herself.*]

COLONEL. The girls are all sitting out, Dick! I've been obliged to dance myself. Phew!

[*He mops his brow.*]

[*DICK swinging round goes rushing off towards the house.*]

[*Looking after him.*] Hallo! What's the matter with him? Cooling your heels, Peachey? By George! it's hot. Fancy the poor devils in London on a night like this, what? [*He sees the moon.*] It's a full moon. You're lucky to be down here, Molly.

MRS. GWYN. [*In a low voice.*] Very!

MISS BEECH. Oh! so you think she's lucky, do you!

COLONEL. [*Expanding his nostrils.*] Delicious scent to-night! Hay and roses—delicious.

[*He seats himself between them.*]

A shame that poor child has knocked up like this. Don't think it was the sun myself—more likely neuralgic—she's subject to neuralgia, Molly.

MRS. GWYN. [*Motionless.*] I know.

COLONEL. Got too excited about your coming. I told Nell not to keep worrying her about her frock, and this is the result. But your Aunt—you know—she can't let a thing alone!

MISS BEECH. Ah! 't isn't neuralgia.

[*MRS. GWYN looks at her quickly and averts her eyes.*]

COLONEL. Excitable little thing. You don't understand her, Peachey.

MISS BEECH. Don't I?

COLONEL. She's all affection. Eh, Molly? I re-

member what I was like at her age, a poor affectionate little rat, and now look at me!

MISS BEECH. [*Fanning herself.*] I see you.

COLONEL. [*A little sadly.*] We forget what we were like when we were young. She's been looking forward to to-night ever since you wrote; and now to have to go to bed and miss the dancing. Too bad!

MRS. GWYN. Don't, Uncle Tom!

COLONEL. [*Patting her hand.*] There, there, old girl, don't think about it. She'll be all right to-morrow.

MISS BEECH. If I were her mother I'd soon have her up.

COLONEL. Have her up with that headache! What are you talking about, Peachey?

MISS BEECH. I know a remedy.

COLONEL. Well, out with it.

MISS BEECH. Oh! Molly knows it too!

MRS. GWYN. [*Staring at the ground.*] It's easy to advise.

COLONEL. [*Fidgeting.*] Well, if you're thinking of morphia for her, don't have anything to do with it. I've always set my face against morphia; the only time I took it was in Burmah. I'd raging neuralgia for two days. I went to our old doctor, and I made him give me some. "Look here, doctor," I said, "I hate the idea of morphia, I've never taken it, and I never want to."

MISS BEECH. [*Looking at Miss Gwyn.*] When a

tooth hurts, you should have it out. It's only putting off the evil day.

COLONEL. You say that because it wasn't your own.

MISS BEECH. Well, it was hollow, and you broke your principles!

COLONEL. Hollow yourself, Peachey; you're as bad as any one!

MISS BEECH [*With devilry.*] Well, I know that! [*She turns to MRS. GWYN.*] He should have had it out! Shouldn't he, Molly?

MRS. GWYN. I—don't—judge for other people.

[*She gets up suddenly, as though deprived of air.*]

COLONEL. [*Alarmed.*] Hallo, Molly! Aren't you feeling the thing, old girl?

MISS BEECH. Let her get some air, poor creature!

COLONEL. [*Who follows anxiously.*] Your Aunt's got some first-rate sal volatile.

MRS. GWYN. It's all right, Uncle Tom. I felt giddy, it's nothing, now.

COLONEL. That's the dancing. [*He taps his forehead.*] I know what it is when you're not used to it.

MRS. GWYN. [*With a sudden bitter outburst.*] I suppose you think I'm a very bad mother to be amusing myself while Joy's suffering.

COLONEL. My dear girl, whatever put such a thought into your head? We all know if there were anything you *could* do, you'd do it at once, wouldn't she, Peachey?

[*MISS BEECH turns a slow look on MRS. GWYN.*]

MRS. GWYN. Ah! you see, Peachey knows me better.

COLONEL. [*Following up his thoughts.*] I always think women are wonderful. There's your Aunt, she's very funny, but if there's anything the matter with me, she'll sit up all night; but when she's ill herself, and you try to do anything for her, out she raps at once.

MRS. GWYN [*In a low voice.*] There's always *one* that a woman will do anything for.

COLONEL. Exactly what I say. With your Aunt it's me, and by George! Molly, sometimes I wish it wasn't.

MISS BEECH. [*With meaning.*] But is it ever for another *woman*!

COLONEL. You old cynic! D'you mean to say Joy wouldn't do anything on earth for her Mother, or Molly for Joy? You don't know human nature. What a wonderful night! Haven't seen such a moon for years, she's like a great, great lamp!

[MRS. GWYN *hiding from MISS BEECH's eyes, rises and slips her arm through his; they stand together looking at the moon.*]

Don't like these Chinese lanterns, with that moon—tawdry! eh! By Jove, Molly, I sometimes think we humans are a rubbishy lot—each of us talking and thinking of nothing but our own potty little affairs; and when you see a great thing like that up there — [*Sighs.*] But there's your Aunt, if I were to say a thing like that to her she'd—she'd think me

a lunatic; and yet, you know, she's a *very good* woman.

MRS. GWYN. [*Half clinging to him.*] Do you think me very selfish, Uncle Tom?

COLONEL. My dear—what a fancy! Think you selfish—of *course* I don't; why should I?

MRS. GWYN. [*Dully.*] I don't know.

COLONEL. [*Changing the subject nervously.*] I like your friend, Lever, Molly. He came to me before dinner quite distressed about your Aunt, beggin' me not to take those shares. She'll be the first to worry me, but he made such a point of it, poor chap—in the end I was obliged to say I wouldn't. I thought it showed very nice feeling. [*Ruefully.*] It's a pretty tight fit to make two ends meet on my income—I've missed a good thing, all owing to your Aunt. [*Dropping his voice.*] I don't mind telling you, Molly, I think they've got a much finer mine there than they've any idea of.

[*MRS. GWYN gives way to laughter that is very near to sobs.*]

[*With dignity.*] I can't see what there is to laugh at.

MRS. GWYN. I don't know what's the matter with me this evening.

MISS BEECH. [*In a low voice.*] I do.

COLONEL. There, there! Give me a kiss, old girl! [*He kisses her on the brow.*] Why, you're forehead's as hot as fire. I know—I know—you're fretting about Joy. Never mind—come! [*He draws her hand beneath*

his arm.] Let's go and have a look at the moon on the river. We all get upset at times; eh! [*Lifting his hand as if he had been stung.*] Why, you're not crying, Molly! I say! Don't do that, old girl, it makes me wretched. Look here, Peachey. [*Holding out the hand on which the tear has dropped.*] This is dreadful!

MRS. GWYN. [*With a violent effort.*] It's all right, Uncle Tom!

[MISS BEECH *wipes her own eyes stealthily.*
From the house is heard the voice of MRS
HOPE, calling "Tom."

MISS BEECH. Some one calling you!

COLONEL. There, there, my dear, you just stay here, and cool yourself—I'll come back—shan't be a minute. [*He turns to go.*]

[MRS. HOPE'S voice sounds nearer.]
[*Turning back.*] And Molly, old girl, don't you mind anything I said. I don't remember what it was—it must have been *something*, I suppose.

[*He hastily retreats.*]

MRS. GWYN. [*In a fierce low voice.*] Why do you torture me?

MISS BEECH. [*Sadly.*] I don't want to torture you.

MRS. GWYN. But you do. D'you think I haven't seen this coming—all these weeks. I knew she must find out some time! But even a day counts——

MISS BEECH. I don't understand why you brought him down here.

MRS. GWYN. [*After staring at her, bitterly.*] When day after day and night after night you've thought

of nothing but how to keep them both, you might a little want to prove that it was possible, mightn't you? But *you don't* understand—how should you? You've never been a mother! [*And fiercely.*] You've never had a lov——

[*MISS BEECH raises her face—it is all puckered.*]
[*Impulsively.*] Oh, I didn't mean that, Peachey!

MISS BEECH. All right, my dear.

MRS. GWYN. I'm so dragged in two! [*She sinks into a chair.*] I knew it must come.

MISS BEECH. Does she know everything, Molly?

MRS. GWYN. She guesses.

MISS BEECH. [*Mournfully.*] It's either him or her then, my dear; one or the other you'll have to give up.

MRS. GWYN. [*Motionless.*] Life's very hard on women?

MISS BEECH. Life's only just beginning for that child, Molly.

MRS. GWYN. You don't care if it ends for *me*!

MISS BEECH. Is it as bad as that?

MRS. GWYN. Yes.

MISS BEECH. [*Rocking her body.*] Poor things!
Poor things!

MRS. GWYN. Are you still fond of me?

MISS BEECH. Yes, yes, my dear, of course I am.

MRS. GWYN. In spite of my—wickedness?

[*She laughs.*]

MISS BEECH. Who am I to tell what's wicked and what isn't? God knows you're both like daughters to me.

MRS. GWYN. [*Abruptly.*] I can't.

MISS BEECH. Molly.

MRS. GWYN. You don't know what you're asking.

MISS BEECH. If I could save you suffering, my dear, I would. I hate suffering, if it's only a fly, I hate it.

MRS. GWYN. [*Turning away from her.*] Life isn't fair. Peachey, go in and leave me alone.

[*She leans back motionless.*

[MISS BEECH gets off her seat, and stroking MRS. GWYN'S arm in passing goes silently away. In the opening of the wall she meets LEVER who is looking for his partner. They make way for each other.

LEVER. [*Going up to MRS. GWYN—gravely.*] The next is our dance, Molly.

MRS. GWYN. [*Unmoving.*] Let's sit it out here, then.

[LEVER sits down.

LEVER. I've made it all right with your Uncle.

MRS. GWYN. [*Dully.*] Oh?

LEVER. I spoke to him about the shares before dinner.

MRS. GWYN. Yes, he told me, thank you.

LEVER. There's nothing to worry over, dear.

MRS. GWYN. [*Passionately.*] What does it matter about the wretched shares *now*? I'm stifling.

[*She throws her scarf off.*

LEVER. I don't understand what you mean by "now."

MRS. GWYN. Don't you?

LEVER. We weren't—Joy can't *know*—why should she? I don't believe for a minute——

MRS. GWYN. Because you don't want to.

LEVER. Do you mean she does?

MRS. GWYN. Her heart knows.

[LEVER *makes a movement of discomfiture; suddenly Mrs. GWYN looks at him as though to read his soul.*]

I seem to bring you nothing but worry, Maurice. Are you tired of me?

LEVER. [*Meeting her eyes.*] No, I am not.

MRS. GWYN. Ah, but would you tell me if you were?

LEVER. [*Softly.*] Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.

[MRS. GWYN *struggles to look at him, then covers her face with her hands.*]

MRS. GWYN. If I were to give you up, you'd forget me in a month.

LEVER. Why do you say such things?

MRS. GWYN. If only I could believe I was necessary to you!

LEVER. [*Forcing the fervour of his voice.*] But you are!

MRS. GWYN. Am I? [*With the ghost of a smile.*] Midsummer day!

[*She gives a laugh that breaks into a sob.*]

[*The music of a waltz sounds from the house.*]

LEVER. For God's sake, don't, Molly—I don't believe in going to meet trouble.

MRS. GWYN. It's staring me in the face.

LEVER. Let the future take care of itself!

[MRS. GWYN *has turned away her face, covering it with her hands.*]

Don't, Molly! [*Trying to pull her hands away.*]

Don't!

MRS. GWYN. Oh! what *shall* I do?

[*There is a silence; the music of the waltz sounds louder from the house.*]

[*Starting up.*] Listen! One can't sit it out and dance it too. Which is it to be, Maurice, dancing—or sitting out? It must be one or the other, mustn't it?

LEVER. Molly! Molly!

MRS. GWYN. Ah, my dear! [*Standing away from him as though to show herself.*] How long shall I keep you? This is all that's left of me. It's time I joined the wallflowers. [*Smiling faintly.*] It's time I played the mother, isn't it? [*In a whisper.*] It'll be all sitting out then.

LEVER. Don't! Let's go and dance, it'll do you good.

[*He puts his hands on her arms, and in a gust of passion kisses her lips and throat.*]

MRS. GWYN. I can't give you up—I can't. Love me, oh! love me!

[*For a moment they stand so; then, with sudden remembrance of where they are, they move apart.*]

LEVER. Are you all right now, darling?

MRS. GWYN. [*Trying to smile.*] Yes, dear—quite.

LEVER. Then let's go, and dance. [*They go.*]

[*For a few seconds the hollow tree stands alone; then from the house ROSE comes and enters it. She takes out a bottle of champagne, wipes it, and carries it away; but seeing MRS. GWYN'S scarf lying across the chair, she fingers it, and stops, listening to the waltz. Suddenly draping it round her shoulders, she seizes the bottle of champagne, and waltzes with abandon to the music, as though avenging a long starvation of her instincts. Thus dancing, she is surprised by DICK, who has come to smoke a cigarette and think, at the spot where he was told to "have a go." ROSE, startled, stops and hugs the bottle.*]

DICK. It's not claret, Rose, I shouldn't warm it.

[*ROSE, taking off the scarf, replaces it on the chair; then with the half-warmed bottle, she retreats. DICK, in the swing, sits thinking of his fate. Suddenly from behind the hollow tree, he sees JOY darting forward in her day dress with her hair about her neck, and her skirt all torn. As he springs towards her she turns at bay.*]

DICK. Joy!

JOY. I want Uncle Tom.

DICK. [*In consternation.*] But ought you to have got up—I thought you were ill in bed; oughtn't you to be lying down?

JOY. I haven't *been* in bed. Where's Uncle Tom?

DICK. But where have you been—your dress is all torn? Look! [*He touches the torn skirt.*]

JOY. [*Tearing it away.*] In the fields. Where's uncle Tom?

DICK. Aren't you really ill then?

[*Joy shakes her head. Dick, showing her the irises.*]
Look at these. They were the best I could get!

JOY. Don't! I want Uncle Tom!

DICK. Won't you take them?

JOY. I've got something else to do.

DICK. [*With sudden resolution.*] What do you want the Colonel for?

JOY. I want him.

DICK. Alone?

JOY. Yes.

DICK. Joy, what *is* the matter?

JOY. I've got something to tell him.

DICK. What? [*With sudden inspiration.*] Is it about Lever?

JOY. [*In a low voice.*] The mine.

DICK. The mine?

JOY. It's not—not a proper one.

DICK. How do you mean, Joy?

JOY. I overheard. I don't care, I listened. I wouldn't if it had been anybody else, but I *hate* him.

DICK. [*Gravely.*] What did you hear?

JOY. He's keeping back something Uncle Tom ought to know.

DICK. Are you sure?

[Joy makes a rush to pass him.]

[Barring the way.] No, wait a minute—you must! Was it something that really matters, I don't want to know what.

JOY. Yes, it was.

DICK. What a beastly thing—are you quite certain, Joy?

JOY. [Between her teeth.] Yes.

DICK. Then you *must* tell him, of course, even if you did overhear. You can't stand by and see the Colonel swindled. Whom was he talking to?

JOY. I won't tell you.

DICK. [Taking her wrist.] Was it—was it your Mother? [Joy bends her head.]

But if it was your Mother, why doesn't she—

JOY. Let me go!

DICK. [Still holding her.] I mean I can't see what—

JOY. [Passionately.] Let me go!

DICK. [Releasing her.] I'm thinking of your Mother, Joy. She would never—

JOY. [Covering her face.] That man!

DICK. But Joy, just think! There must be some mistake. It's so queer—it's *quite impossible!*

JOY. He won't let her.

DICK. Won't let her—won't *let* her? But—
[Stopping dead, and in a very different voice.] Oh!

JOY. [Passionately.] Why d'you look at me like that? Why can't you speak?

[She waits for him to speak, but he does not.]

I'm going to show what he is, so that mother shan't speak to him again. I can—can't I—if I tell Uncle Tom?—can't I——?

DICK. But Joy—if your Mother knows a thing like—that——

JOY. She wanted to tell—she begged him—and he wouldn't.

DICK. But, Joy, dear, it means——

JOY. I hate him, I want to make her hate him, and I *will*.

DICK. But, Joy, dear, don't you see—if your Mother knows a thing like that, and doesn't speak of it, it means that she—it means that you can't *make* her hate him—it means—— If it were anybody else, but, well, you can't give *your own Mother* away!

JOY. How dare you! How *dare* you! [*Turning to the hollow tree.*] It isn't true—— Oh! it *isn't* true?

DICK. [*In deep distress.*] Joy, dear, I never meant, I didn't really! [*He tries to pull her hands down from her face.*]

JOY. [*Suddenly.*] Oh! go away, go away!

[*MRS. GWYN is seen coming back. JOY springs into the tree. DICK quickly steals away.*]

MRS. GWYN goes up to the chair and takes the scarf that she has come for, and is going again when JOY steals out to her.]

Mother! [*MRS. GWYN stands looking at her with her teeth set on her lower lip.*]

Oh! Mother, it isn't true?

MRS. GWYN. [Very still.] What isn't true?

JOY. That you and he are——

[*Searching her Mother's face, which is deadly still. In a whisper*]

Then it is true. Oh!

MRS. GWYN. That's enough, Joy! What *I* am is *my* affair—not *yours*—do you understand?

JOY. [*Low and fierce.*] Yes, I do.

MRS. GWYN. You don't. You're only a child.

JOY. [*Passionately.*] I understand that you've hurt—— [*She stops.*]

MRS. GWYN. Do you mean your father?

JOY. [*Bowing her head.*] Yes, and—and me. [*She covers her face.*] I'm—I'm ashamed.

MRS. GWYN. I brought you into the world, and you say that to me? Have I been a bad mother to you?

JOY. [*In a smothered voice.*] Oh! Mother!

MRS. GWYN. Ashamed? Am *I* to live all my life like a dead woman because you're ashamed? Am I to live like the dead because you're a child that knows nothing of life? Listen, Joy, you'd better understand this once for all. Your Father has no right over me and he knows it. We've been hateful to each other for years. *Can* you understand that? Don't cover your face like a child—look at me.

[*Joy drops her hands, and lifts her face. Mrs. Gwyn looks back at her, her lips are quivering; she goes on speaking with stammering rapidity.*]

D'you think—because I suffered when you were born and because I've suffered since with every ache you

M*

ever had, that that gives you the right to dictate to me now ? [*In a dead voice.*] I've been unhappy enough and I shall be unhappy enough in the time to come. [*Meeting the hard wonder in Joy's face.*] Oh ! you untouched things, you're as hard and cold as iron !

JOY. I would do anything for *you*, Mother.

MRS. GWYN. Except—let me live, Joy. That's the only thing you won't do for me, I quite understand.

JOY. Oh ! Mother, you *don't* understand—I *want* you so ; and I seem to be nothing to you now.

MRS. GWYN. Nothing to me ? [*She smiles.*]

JOY. Mother, darling, if you're so unhappy let's forget it all, let's go away and I'll be everything to you, I promise.

MRS. GWYN. [*With the ghost of a laugh.*] Ah, Joy !

JOY. I would try so hard.

MRS. GWYN. [*With the same quivering smile.*] My darling, I know you would, until you fell in love yourself.

JOY. Oh, Mother, I wouldn't, I never would, I swear it.

MRS. GWYN. There has never been a woman, Joy, that did not fall in love.

JOY. [*In a despairing whisper.*] But it's wrong of you—it's wicked !

MRS. GWYN. If it's wicked, *I* shall pay for it, not *you* !

JOY. But I want to save you, Mother !

MRS. GWYN. Save me ? [*Breaking into laughter.*]

JOY. I can't bear it that *you*—if you'll only—I'll never leave you. You think I don't know what I'm saying, but I *do*, because even now I—I half love somebody. Oh, Mother! [*Pressing her breast.*] I feel—I feel so *awful*—as if everybody knew.

MRS. GWYN. You think I'm a monster to hurt you. Ah! yes! You'll understand better some day.

JOY. [*In a sudden outburst of excited fear.*] I won't believe it—I—I—can't—you're *deserting me*, Mother.

MRS. GWYN. Oh, you untouched things! You—
[*JOY looks up suddenly, sees her face, and sinks down on her knees.*]

JOY. Mother—it's for *me*!

MRS. GWYN. Ask for my life, Joy—don't be afraid!

[*JOY turns her face away. MRS. GWYN bends suddenly and touches her daughter's hair; JOY shrinks from that touch.*]

[*Recoiling as though she had been stung.*] I forgot—I'm deserting you.

[*And swiftly without looking back she goes away, JOY left alone under the hollow tree, crouches lower, and her shoulders shake. Here DICK finds her, when he hears no longer any sound of voices. He falls on his knees beside her.*]

DICK. Oh! Joy, dear, don't cry. It's so dreadful

to see you! I'd do anything not to see you cry! Say something.

[*Joy is still for a moment, then the shaking of the shoulders begins again.*]

Joy, *darling!* It's so awful, you'll make yourself ill, and it isn't worth it, really. I'd do anything to save you pain—won't you stop just for a minute?

[*Joy is still again.*]

Nothing in the world's worth *your* crying, Joy. Give me just a little look

Joy. [*Looking; in a smothered voice*] Don't!

DICK. You do look so sweet! Oh, Joy! I'll comfort you, I'll take it all on myself. I know all about it.

[*Joy gives a sobbing laugh.*]

I do. I've had trouble too, I swear I have. It gets better, it does really.

Joy. You don't know—it's—it's——

DICK. Don't think about it! No, no, no! I know *actly* what it's like.

[*He strokes her arm.*]

Joy. [*Shrinking, in a whisper.*] You mustn't.

[*The music of a waltz is heard again.*]

DICK. Look here, Joy! It's no good, we must talk it over calmly.

Joy. You don't *see!* It's the—it's the disgrace——

DICK. Oh! as to disgrace—she's *your* Mother, whatever she does; I'd like to see anybody say anything about her—[*viciously*]*—I'd punch his head.*

Joy. [*Gulping her tears.*] That doesn't help.

DICK. But if she doesn't love your Father——

JOY. But she's *married* to him!

DICK. [*Hastily.*] Yes, of course, I know, marriage is awfully important; but a man understands these things.

[*Joy looks at him. Seeing the impression he has made, he tries again.*]

I mean, he understands better than a woman. I've often argued about moral questions with men up at Oxford.

JOY. [*Catching at a straw.*] But there's nothing to argue about.

DICK. [*Hastily.*] Of course, *I* believe in morals. [*They stare solemnly at each other.*] Some men don't. But *I* can't help seeing marriage is awfully important.

JOY. [*Solemnly.*] It's sacred.

DICK. Yes, I know, but there must be exceptions, Joy.

JOY. [*Losing herself a little in the stress of this discussion.*] How can there be exceptions if a thing's sacred?

DICK. [*Earnestly.*] All rules have exceptions; that's true, you know; it's a proverb.

JOY. It can't be true about marriage—how can it when——?

DICK. [*With intense earnestness.*] But look here, Joy. I know a really clever man—an author. He says that if marriage is a failure people ought to be perfectly free; it isn't everybody who believes that marriage is everything. Of course, *I* believe it's

sacred, but if it's a failure, I *do* think it seems awful—don't you?

JOY. I don't know—yes—if—— [*Suddenly*] But *it's my own Mother!*

DICK. [*Gravely.*] I know, of course. I can't expect *you* to see it in *your own case* like this. [*With desperation.*] But look here, Joy, this'll show you! If a person loves a person, they have to decide, haven't they? Well, then, you see, that's what your Mother's done.

JOY. But that doesn't show me anything!

DICK. But it does. The thing is to look at it as if it wasn't yourself. If it had been you and me in love, Joy, and it was wrong, like them, of course [*ruefully*] I know you'd have decided right. [*Fiercely.*] But I swear I should have decided wrong. [*Triumphantly.*] That's why I feel I understand your Mother.

JOY. [*Brushing her sleeve across her eyes.*] Oh, Dick, you are so sweet—and—and—funny!

DICK. [*Sliding his arm about her.*] I love you, Joy, that's why, and I'll love you till you don't feel it any more. I will. I'll love you all day and every day; you shan't miss anything, I swear it. It's such a beautiful night—it's on purpose. Look! [*Joy looks; he looks at her.*] But it's not so beautiful as you.

JOY. [*Bending her head.*] You mustn't. I don't know—what's coming.

DICK. [*Sidling closer.*] Aren't your knees tired, darling? I—I *can't* get near you properly.

JOY. [*With a sob.*] Oh! Dick, you are a funny—comfort!

DICK. We'll stick together, Joy, always; nothing'll matter then.

[*They struggle to their feet—the waltz sounds louder.*]

You're missing it all! I can't bear you to miss the dancing. It seems so queer! Couldn't we? Just a *little turn*?

JOY. No, no!

DICK. Oh! try!

[*He takes her gently by the waist, she shrinks back.*]

JOY. [*Brokenly.*] No—no! Oh! Dick—to-morrow'll be so awful.

DICK. To-morrow shan't hurt you, Joy; nothing shall ever hurt *you* again.

[*She looks at him, and her face changes; suddenly she buries it against his shoulder.*]

[*They stand so just a moment in the moonlight; then turning to the river move slowly out of sight. Again the hollow tree is left alone. The music of the waltz has stopped. The voices of MISS BEECH and the COLONEL are heard approaching from the house. They appear in the opening of the wall. The COLONEL carries a pair of field-glasses with which to look at the moon.*]

COLONEL. Charming to see Molly dance with Lever.

their steps go so well together! I can always tell when a woman's enjoying herself, Peachey.

MISS BEECH. [*Sharply.*] Can you? You're *very* clever.

COLONEL. Wonderful, that moon! I'm going to have a look at her! Splendid glasses these, Peachey [*he screws them out*], not a better pair in England. I remember in Burmah with these glasses I used to be able to tell a man from a woman at two miles and a quarter. And that's no joke, I can tell you. [*But on his way to the moon, he has taken a survey of the earth to the right along the river. In a low but excited voice*] I say, I say—is it one of the maids?—the baggage! Why! It's Dick! By George, she's got her hair down, Peachey! It's *Joy*!

[*MISS BEECH goes to look. He makes as though to hand the glasses to her, but puts them to his own eyes instead—excitedly.*]

It is! What about her headache? By George, they're kissing. I *say*, Peachey! I shall have to tell Nell!

MISS BEECH. Are you sure they're kissing? Well, that's some comfort.

COLONEL. They're at the stile now. Oughtn't I to stop them, eh? [*He stands on tiptoe.*] We mustn't spy on them, dash it all. [*He drops the glasses.*] They're out of sight now.

MISS BEECH. [*To herself.*] He said he wouldn't let her.

COLONEL. *What!* have you been encouraging them.

MISS BEECH. Don't be in such a hurry!

[*She moves towards the hollow tree.*]

COLONEL. [*Abstractedly.*] By George, Peachey, to think that Nell and I were once—Poor Nell! I remember just such a night as this——

[*He stops, and stares before him, sighing.*]

MISS BEECH. [*Impressively.*] It's a comfort she's got that good young man. She's found out that her mother and this Mr. Lever are—you know.

COLONEL. [*Losing all traces of his fussiness, and drawing himself up as though he were on parade.*] You tell me that my niece——?

MISS BEECH. Out of her own mouth!

COLONEL. [*Bowing his head.*] I never would have believed she'd have forgotten herself.

MISS BEECH. [*Very solemnly.*] Ah, my dear! We're all the same; we're all as hollow as that tree! When it's ourselves it's always a *special case!*

[*The COLONEL makes a movement of distress, and*

MISS BEECH goes to him.]

Don't you take it so to heart, my dear! [*A silence.*]

COLONEL. [*Shaking his head.*] I couldn't have believed Molly would forget that child.

MISS BEECH. [*Sadly.*] They must go their own ways, poor things! She can't put herself in the child's place, and the child can't put herself in Molly's. A woman and a girl—there's the tree of life between them!

COLONEL. [*Staring into the tree to see indeed if that were the tree alluded to.*] It's a grief to me, Peachey,

it's a grief! [*He sinks into a chair, stroking his long moustaches. Then to avenge his hurt.*] Shan't tell Nell—dashed if I do anything to make the trouble worse!

MISS BEECH. [*Nodding.*] There's suffering enough, without adding to it with our trumpery judgments! If only things would last between them!

COLONEL. [*Fiercely.*] Last! By George, they'd better—— [*He stops, and looking up with a queer sorry look.*] I say, Peachey—*Life's very funny!*

MISS BEECH. Men and women are! [*Touching his forehead tenderly.*] There, there—take care of your poor, dear head! Tsst! The blessed innocents!

[She pulls the COLONEL's sleeve. They slip away towards the house, as JOY and DICK come back. They are still linked together, and stop by the hollow of the tree.]

JOY. [*In a whisper.*] Dick, is love always like this!

DICK. [*Putting his arms round her, with conviction.*] *It's never been like this before. It's you and me!*

[He kisses her on the lips.]

The curtain falls.



