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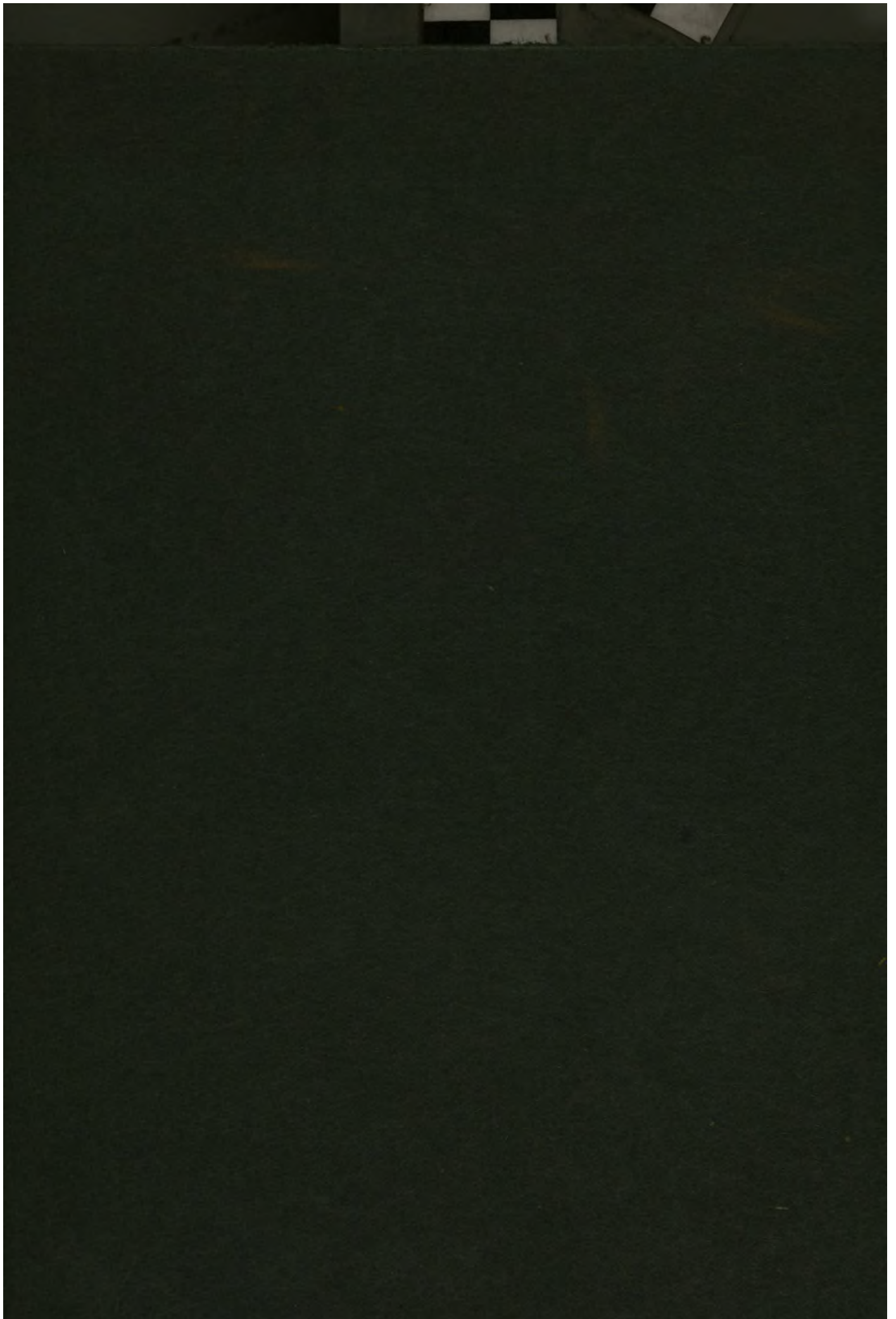
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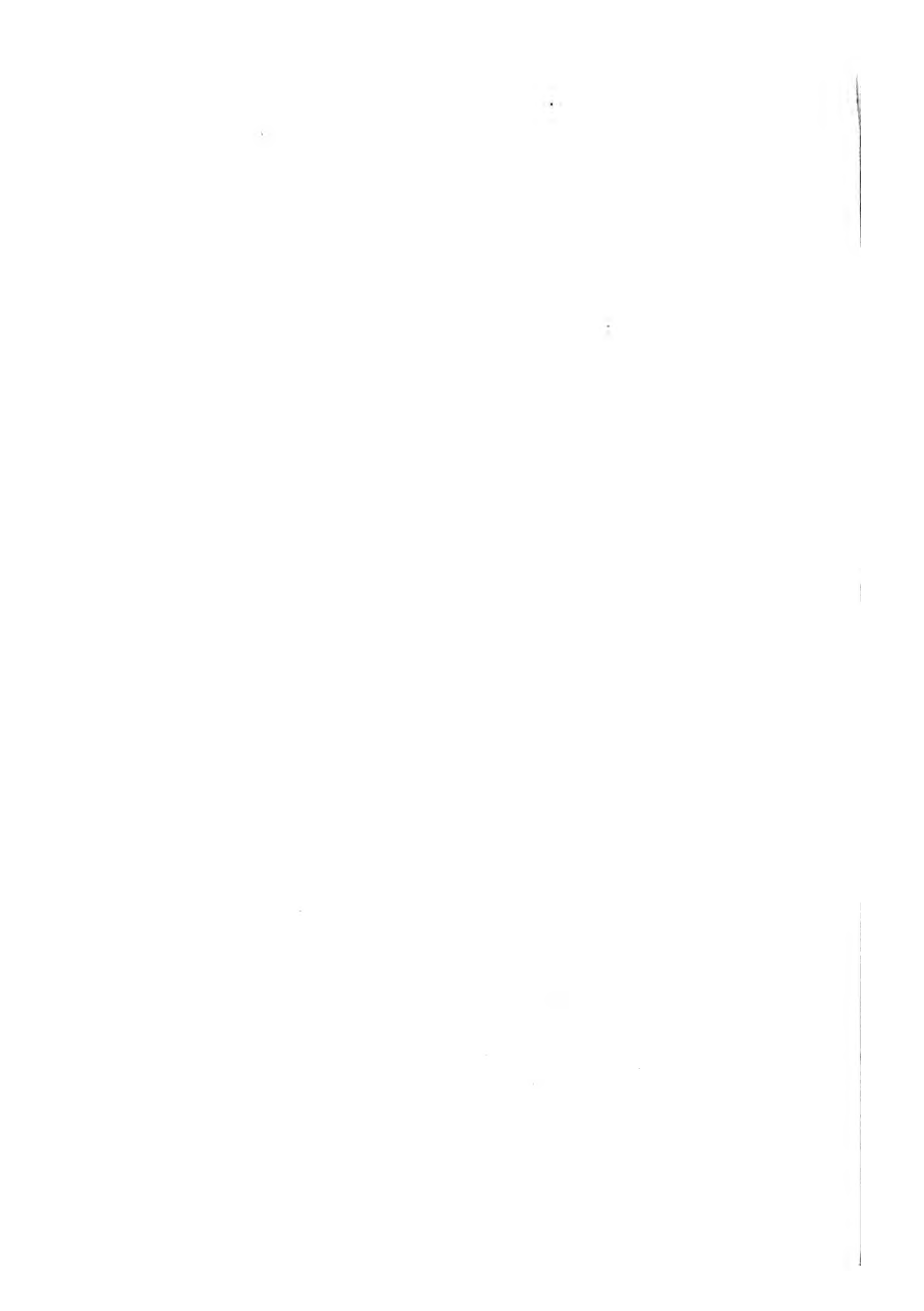
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WE MODERNS
BY ISRAEL ZANGWILL

WE MODERNS
A POST-WAR COMEDY IN THREE MOVEMENTS
(ALLEGRO, ANDANTE, ADAGIO)
BY ISRAEL ZANGWILL

WITH AN AFTERWORD AND APPENDIX BY
THE AUTHOR

“And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children,
and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come
and smite the earth with a curse.”—MALACHI.

LONDON: WILLIAM HEINEMANN
1926



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TO
LAWRENCE A. STEINHARDT
GRATITUDE FOR WHOSE INNUMERABLE SERVICES
AS A LAWYER HAS BEEN SUPPLEMENTED
BY AFFECTION FOR A FRIEND
AND TO
HIS WIFE
NO LESS CHARMING AND GAY THAN MY LITTLE HEROINE
IF MORE SENSIBLE
THE AUTHOR DEDICATES IN CORDIAL ADMIRATION
THIS COMEDY OF THE CONTEMPORARY



Note

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The words 'Right' and 'Left' are given from the spectator's point of view. For the actors they should be reversed.



CAST:

	Gaiety Theatre, New York, March 11, 1924.	New Theatre, London, July 7, 1925.	Fortune, London, September 12, 1925.
ROBERT SUNDALE, K.C.	<i>O. P. Heggie</i>	<i>Hubert Harben</i>	<i>H. St. Barbe-West</i>
RICHARD SUNDALE .	<i>Kenneth Mackenna</i>	<i>Walter Hudd</i>	<i>Lawrence Ireland</i>
JOHN ASHLAR, D.S.O. .	<i>Harris Gilmore</i>	<i>Vernon Sylvaine</i>	<i>Clifford Cobbe</i>
OSCAR PLEAT .	<i>James Dale</i>	<i>Robert Holmes</i>	<i>George Owen</i>
SIR WILLIAM WIMPLE, Bart.	<i>St. Clair Bayfield</i>	<i>Frederick Culley</i>	<i>William Lorrimer</i>
BEAMISH	<i>Galwey Herbert</i>	<i>Stockwell Hawkins</i>	<i>H. Halladay-Hope</i>
MARY SUNDALE .	<i>Helen Hayes</i>	<i>Olga Jocelyn</i>	<i>Nancy Atkin</i>
KATHERINE SUNDALE .	<i>Isabel Irving</i>	<i>Mary Ferrol</i>	<i>Constance Robertson</i>
DOROTHY WIMPLE .	<i>Gilda Leary</i>	<i>Jane Welsh</i>	<i>Jane Bacon</i>
JOANNA HERZBERG .	<i>Mary Shaw</i>	<i>Dora Gregory</i>	<i>Dora Gregory</i>
MADAME MOSKOWSKI . (FEODOSIA)	<i>Olin Field</i>	<i>May Agate</i>	<i>May Grew</i>

ACT I. *Mrs. Sundale's Drawing-Room in a quiet London Square. After dinner on a Tuesday in the season. Allegro: Youth talks.*

ACT II. *Richard Sundale's studio in Chelsea the next afternoon. Andante: Life talks.*

ACT III. *Mrs. Sundale's Drawing-Room about 10.30 the same Wednesday night. Adagio: The Heart talks.*

WE MODERNS

Act One

8 [MRS. ROBERT SUNDALE'S *drawing-room in a quiet square after dinner in the London season. It is a spacious, solid ground-floor Victorian room, with a good piano in the right corner to back, and pictures by outmoded R.A.'s—a dominant gold-framed canvas by Stanley Morden in his anecdotage hangs over the mantelpiece in back wall. There is a settee on the left standing forward, behind it a little writing-table with lamp, books and magazines; another table to the right with arm-chairs near. On the left wall, which also contains the window, is a pier-glass. The door is opposite. This door is thrown open from without, and* MRS. SUNDALE, a lady of about fifty, with traces of beauty, but obviously crushed by life, in a modest but elegant evening dress, enters, followed by her husband, ROBERT SUNDALE, K.C., who, although ten years older and greyish-haired, is a more vital figure, with his clear-cut, clean-shaven legal face. His manner to his wife blends affection with old-fashioned courtesy.]

SUNDALE [*Closing the door*]

Well, my dear, you've got a cook at last! And such a cook!

[*Wheels her arm-chair near her work-bag.*]

MRS. SUNDALE [*Sitting*]

Thank you, Bob! And to think people once talked of too *many* cooks——!

SUNDALE

Well, *that* broth wasn't spoiled.

[*Smacks his lips.*]

MRS. SUNDALE

It might have been—waiting for those wicked children. Even now I'm not so sure cook won't give notice.

SUNDALE [*Shuddering*]

Don't talk of such things. . . . What made it so red?

MRS. SUNDALE

Beetroot—it was a Russian soup. Cook's Russian, you know, from that Georgian Republic—a refugee from Bolshevism.

SUNDALE [*Moving up to the writing-table*]

Well, I never thought I should be grateful to the Bolsheviks. . . . Your magazine.

[*Tenders her a magazine with a flamboyant cover.*]

MRS. SUNDALE [*Waving it away regretfully for her work-bag*]

I'm simply dying to know who did the murder. But—

[*Pulling out a torn silk stocking and showing it to him*]

these modern girls with their silk stockings—look at the ladders!

SUNDALE [*Picking up the evening paper, and settling down with it in the opposite arm-chair*]

That cheese *soufflé*! What an artist!

MRS. SUNDALE

Yes, but artists are so touchy! Even with ordinary servants it's here to-day and gone to-morrow. I didn't dare ask her to keep the children's dinner warm.

SUNDALE

Serve Dick and Mary right.

[*Glances at paper*]

Dear me, another famine in China! . . . Two million dying.

MRS. SUNDALE

I simply couldn't face another cookless period.

SUNDALE

Do you think it would help if I expressed *my* satisfaction?

MRS. SUNDALE [*Smiling*]

You did that only too well—it was fortunate Dick and Mary did *not* turn up.

SUNDALE

Oh, Kitty! Was I greedy? But it was the first good din——

MRS. SUNDALE [*Agitated*]

Listen! Cook's coming up to give notice!

SUNDALE [*Listening tensely, then breaking into a smile of relief*]

Surely you recognize Beamish's fairy footfall.

[*Enter BEAMISH, an old family butler, the ponderous pillar of the household, bearing a silver tray with two cups of coffee.*]

MRS. SUNDALE [*As he offers it*]

No, thank you, Beamish. . . . Is the new cook—
settling down?

BEAMISH

Well, Ma'am, *we're* settling down to *her*, so to speak. I
always thought Russia a *cold* country, but Georgia——

[*Shakes his head and turns to SUNDALE*]

You see, sir, she's so . . . affectionate. It makes
one nervous.

SUNDALE [*Soothingly*]

Oh, that's just the Slavonic temperament.

BEAMISH

Yes, sir, and I must say that now we've found she
can cook roast-beef, opinion has veered round. . . .
Sugar, sir?

SUNDALE [*Taking his cup*]

No, thank you. Isn't it time you knew?

BEAMISH

Tastes change, sir.

[*Places tray on table and exit with dignity.*]

MRS. SUNDALE

O Robert, you shouldn't have ruffled him—suppose
he was to give notice!

SUNDALE

Ruffle Beamish! Is that possible? But why does he
always bring in a cup for *you*?

MRS. SUNDALE
Don't *you* always drink it?

SUNDALE
Do I? I suppose I do. May I smoke?

MRS. SUNDALE
Of course.
[*Smiling*]
Isn't it time you knew?

SUNDALE [*Rising to get cigar-box from back table*]
Tastes change, Madam.
[*Telephone heard in hall. MRS. SUNDALE puts her
hand to her heart*]
What makes you so jumpy, dear?

MRS. SUNDALE
Ever since Dick was sent down from Oxford for those Bolshevik cartoons I've been expecting a bomb-shell from Mary.

SUNDALE [*Choosing a cigar*]
But that's impossible! Didn't I cut short her schooling expressly to avoid a similar bother?

MRS. SUNDALE
The very reason she's now at a loose end—seventeen and no definite occupation. Goodness knows what she'll be up to.

SUNDALE
Then why do you allow her a latchkey?

MRS. SUNDALE

We couldn't always sit up for her.

SUNDALE [*Cutting off his cigar-end*]

You'll never persuade me, Kitty, that it's proper for a young man to take a girl to a dance—a girl to whom he's not even engaged—and after dancing every dance with her, see her home in a taxi.

MRS. SUNDALE

It's the *girl's* taxi, dear, and she's taken *him* to the dance. You see, the post-war young men are so poor, and hostesses need them. You can't fight the fashion.

SUNDALE

Tastes change indeed!

[*Strikes a match and lights his cigar*]

If *I* had gone home with a girl in a taxi after a champagne supper, I should have kissed her.

MRS. SUNDALE

These are revelations, Robert.

SUNDALE

I was speaking hypothetically. There were no taxis then.

[*Hastily, as he drops on the settee*]

From my den I've heard Mary come in as late as 2 A.M.

MRS. SUNDALE

I do wish, dear, you'd give up working so late. Haven't you made enough money?

SUNDALE [*Smiling*]
Wait till I'm a Judge.

MRS. SUNDALE [*Shaking her head*]
You've no friends at court—look how they've ignored your work on the Economy Commission. Do think of your health, dear.

SUNDALE
We must think of the children.

MRS. SUNDALE [*Sadly*]
They don't think much of us. Ah, how I used to look forward to having them! And now——!

SUNDALE
You would never let me thrash them. And now it's too late. They'd hit back.

MRS. SUNDALE
You needn't exaggerate——

SUNDALE
Well, Mary mightn't—because she knows she'd get the worse of it. But Dick——? I'd never strike *him*—except in self-defence.

[*Puffs out smoke leisurely*]

As I once said to his headmaster, you may be right in abolishing corporal punishment, but do teach our boys not to inflict it on *us*.

[*Re-enter BEAMISH.*]

MRS. SUNDALE

You didn't really say——?

[*Pauses as she perceives the butler.*]

BEAMISH

Miss Mary's rung up to say she's motoring home, but you're not to wait dinner.

SUNDALE [*Grimly*]

Oh, indeed! And did you tell her dinner was over?

BEAMISH

It is not my place to admonish the young generation.

[*Exit with dignity.*]

SUNDALE

Beamish is right—you must admonish Mary.

MRS. SUNDALE

And why don't *you* admonish Dick? Instead, you give him a studio to paint his preposterous pictures in.

SUNDALE

Well, you didn't want to see them hanging about here!

[*Knocking the ash off his cigar*]

It's best their failure should bring him to reason.

MRS. SUNDALE

But they're *not* failures! He showed me an essay by Oscar Pleat proclaiming him the greatest living painter.

SUNDALE

And who is Oscar Pleat?

MRS. SUNDALE

Dick says he's the greatest living critic.

SUNDALE

Ha! Ha! Ha!

[*Suddenly serious*]

Now I come to think of it, Oscar Pleat was the name to which Mary dedicated a poem I saw lying about—I meant to tell you. “Honeymoons in Hellas” was its chaste title—lucky we *didn't* leave her at school.

MRS. SUNDALE

That's just poetry, dear, and phrases she parrots from Dick and his set. She knows nothing about honeymoons, really.

SUNDALE

You are sure?

MRS. SUNDALE

Quite. She never even reads the love-novels *my* generation gloated over. Except for poetry, her pet books are all deadly dull—psycho-analysis and——

SUNDALE [*Horried*]

Psycho-analysis! But that's indecency reduced to a science!

MRS. SUNDALE [*Perturbed*]

Is it?

SUNDALE

Why, they're best-sellers!

MRS. SUNDALE [*Recovering her composure*]
But you see, dear, Mary has such a sweet stupidity. Why, when Dick had a schoolboy friend staying here, she entertained them both at a secret midnight banquet in her bedroom.

SUNDALE
Good gracious! How old was she?

MRS. SUNDALE
Thirteen. And so far as sex is concerned, she is thirteen still. You needn't worry.

SUNDALE
Surely the very reason for worrying. . . . Oughtn't you to explain things to her?

MRS. SUNDALE
It's so difficult at this stage, especially as she thinks she knows it all. You should hear her discourse on the biology of fishes.

SUNDALE
Then what's the bombshell you're afraid of?

MRS. SUNDALE
How can I foretell? She might come out as a Bolshevik like Dick; she might insist on exploring in Tibet or aeroplaning over Africa; she might jump up in church and tell the Vicar Christianity is played out; she might join the Salvation Army.

SUNDALE [*Who has risen wearily*]

I told you getting the vote wouldn't be the end of this female restlessness. The modern girl appears to have lost everything that charmed my generation.

[*Stoops gallantly and kisses her hand.*]

MRS. SUNDALE

Yet the ballrooms seem as thick with young men as ever.

SUNDALE

Because they're not ballrooms—they're haunts of cuddling kangaroos!

MRS. SUNDALE [*Rather shocked*]

A good dinner seems to enliven your expressions.

SUNDALE [*Picking up a book absently from the writing-table*]

They're below the reality. Fancy kissing those lipstick girls! They ought to put up "wet paint". . . . *Glad Cucumbers!* . . . "To Mary from Joanna". . . . What on earth are *Glad Cucumbers?* . . . "The buried bubble is bursting—give it right of asylum! O sunset, O saucepans!" . . . Am *I* mad or the writer?

MRS. SUNDALE

I'm so glad, dear. I was afraid *I* was.

[*Enter BEAMISH with letters on a salver.*]

BEAMISH

Mr. John Ashlar has called, and could you spare him two minutes?

SUNDALE [*Heartily*]
Show him up. Is that the last post?

BEAMISH

Yes, sir.

[*Exit. SUNDALE begins sifting the letters. MRS. SUNDALE in agitation puts by her mending.*]

MRS. SUNDALE

But John knows how busy you are!

SUNDALE

Never mind—it's always a pleasure to see him—most of the young generation make me reel. I cling to him like a drunken man to a lamp-post.

MRS. SUNDALE

Your expressions to-night!

SUNDALE

But it's a fact—he's my only sane specimen of post-war youth—I wish to God Mary would cling to him too, as she did when she was a baby—her "big John" she used to call him, you remember.

MRS. SUNDALE

Yes, but "big John" is only a penniless engineer.

SUNDALE

Pennies be damned—I beg your pardon. But you know how his career was put back by the war. And didn't *we* waste years of happiness by marrying so

late? Why can't I set the young people up? It would save me this Bolshevik super-tax. Curious,

[*Puffing out smoke as he stands by the writing-table*]
when I had no money there was practically no income-tax, now—hullo! What's this big official seal?

[*Begins to slit envelope*]
More Government worry?

BEAMISH [*Announcing*]

Mr. John Ashlar!

[*SUNDALE mechanically pockets letter. A breezy young Englishman of a fine manly type, some twenty-seven years old, bursts in. He is in morning clothes and addresses MRS. SUNDALE apologetically.*]

JOHN

Do excuse my intrusion and my clothes—but such glorious news!

[*Waves a letter.*]

MRS. SUNDALE [*Coldly shaking hands*]

How do you do? Won't you sit down?

JOHN

I haven't time.

SUNDALE

Nonsense—have that cup of coffee!

JOHN [*Waving it aside*]

I'm off to Iraq on Saturday.

SUNDALE [*Dropping on the settee*]

Oh, Mesopotamia. I thought you had lost that job.

JOHN

But the successful candidate has typhoid!

MRS. SUNDALE

And that's what you call glorious news!

JOHN [*Addressing her, then each alternately*]

You are right—poor chap—I was thinking only of my own happiness. But, somehow, from the days I read the Bible as a kid, Mesopotamia fascinated me. It was the site of Paradise, you remember. Imagine my disappointment, sir, when the war dropped me there to find it more like an Inferno—filth and flies and heat and mosquitoes and smells and mud and more flies. The thought came to me—if only God spared my life—how wonderful it would be to turn Gehenna back again to Eden. For you know one can still see the lines of the old irrigation canals, especially from one's aeroplane. Fancy filling that great malarial marsh with waving wheat and happy homesteads—it would be some little compensation for the blood shed there, for the poor devils one had to bomb.

[*Covers his eyes for a moment.*]

SUNDALE [*Paternaly*]

So you sail at once?

JOHN

Yes. You see, I've got to take over the other fellow's berth—even some of his kit. It will be two years before I get a holiday.

SUNDALE [*Concerned*]
Two years?

JOHN
That's why I've come to-night.

MRS. SUNDALE
To say good-bye, I see.
 [*Rising, she extends her hand, which he takes rather
 disconcertedly*]
Well, take plenty of quinine—you'll be careful of
yourself, won't you?
 [*Drops his hand.*]

JOHN
Thank you—but you see the other fellow got typhoid
here. Anyhow, they insure my life.

MRS. SUNDALE [*Vaguely as she drops into a chair*]
Do they really?

JOHN
Yes, it's an American company, very considerate.
The President's over here—he writes me himself.
Look!
 [*He produces the letter, but she doesn't look*]
That's why I wanted to know if you would mind—
if Mary would mind—if I—you see I've got nobody
in the world—so I could insure in Mary's favour.

MRS. SUNDALE
But wouldn't that rather—compromise Mary?

SUNDALE

And why shouldn't he compromise Mary?

JOHN [*Joyously seizing his hands*]

Thank you, sir. I didn't like to speak before, but now that I shall have ten thousand dollars a year to play with——

MRS. SUNDALE [*Surprised*]

That's two thousand pounds, isn't it?

SUNDALE [*Dropping back on the settee*]

More, with the exchange!

MRS. SUNDALE [*Wavering*]

But Mary is so young.

JOHN

I know—but before I get back she'll be nineteen.

SUNDALE

And you expect to pin a butterfly two years!

MRS. SUNDALE [*Resentfully*]

She's not a butterfly—Mary has great determination.

SUNDALE

That's why it's so foolish of John to come to *us*.

JOHN [*Dazed*]

Foolish?

SUNDALE

We're only her parents.

JOHN

But surely——

SUNDALE

My dear John, you're a mathematical hermit—you don't know your own generation. Mary is an up-to-date idiot.

MRS. SUNDALE [*Now alarmed for the match*]

Robert!

SUNDALE [*Not to be stopped*]

You've got to get *her* consent first. If Mary suspected we thought you were *good* for her, she'd refuse to take you—as she used to refuse to take castor-oil.

MRS. SUNDALE

Robert! Your expressions!

JOHN [*Eagerly*]

Then you do consent—can I see her now?

SUNDALE

If she blows in—she might blow in about 2 A.M.

MRS. SUNDALE [*Angrier at this new indiscretion*]

Nonsense—that's only when she's at a dance.

JOHN

But I could wait.

MRS. SUNDALE

Of course—give him a cigar, dear.

SUNDALE

But he hasn't time to sit down.

JOHN

I could write the answer to the letter here—I haven't accepted yet—may I use this desk?

SUNDALE [*Getting up*]

Use your own—you're only round the corner——

[*Looks at his watch*]

If she comes in before 10.30, I'll ring you up.

JOHN

Thank you—that *would* give me more time. *Au revoir*, then. You *have* bucked me up.

[*Exit.*]

SUNDALE [*Calling after him as door closes*]

Hold on—you're not through yet.

[*Rings to apprise BEAMISH.*]

MRS. SUNDALE

I don't see why you want to run down your own daughter.

SUNDALE [*Smiling*]

I'm so glad you agree with me. Here's a letter for you. What did I do with mine?

MRS. SUNDALE [*Still more resentful*]

Only a halfpenny one!

[*Opening it*]

I suppose there are no letters for Dick?

SUNDALE [*Placing Mary's pile on central table*]

No.

MRS. SUNDALE

You see the result of setting him up in a studio—he has them all addressed there. And goodness knows what they contain.

SUNDALE

I know what they don't contain—cheques for his pictures. Ah, here it is!

[*Draws the letter with the big seal from his pocket.*]

MRS. SUNDALE [*Pulling out a press-cutting from her envelope*]

With Oscar Pleat's Compliments? "Richard Sundale and Rubens"? . . . Oh, but it's for Miss, not Mrs.!

[*Re-encloses it fretfully and adds it to Mary's heap*]

Why does this Oscar Pleat want Mary to know he's buttering up her brother?

SUNDALE [*Engrossed in his letter, moving wifewards*]

By Jove, old lady!

MRS. SUNDALE [*Still fretful*]

What's the matter now?

SUNDALE

The matter? . . . The matter is, dearest, that His Gracious Majesty is celebrating his birthday——

MRS. SUNDALE

What *of* it?

SUNDALE

By making you Lady Sundale!

MRS. SUNDALE [*Dazed*]

Me? . . . Oh, you mean the King has knighted *you*! . . . Oh, Bob!

[*Breaks down as she goes to him.*]

SUNDALE

There's nothing to cry about.

MRS. SUNDALE [*Crying on his shoulder*]

Of course not. But when I think of the long years before we could marry—how sure my people were you would never get on at the Bar——!

SUNDALE [*Trying to carry it off lightly*]

It's not as a legal luminary I'm knighted, it's as President of the Economy Commission.

MRS. SUNDALE [*Struggling to master herself under his example*]

I know.

[*Only half-sobbing*]

Didn't I always say they'd recognize you've saved the country millions?

SUNDALE

They haven't adopted my recommendations yet. So far the enquiry has only *cost* the country *thousands*.

MRS. SUNDALE [*Breaking down again*]

If only Rumpelkin could have lived to see this day!

[*She smooths an imaginary rumpled head.*]

SUNDALE [*Smitten by the old grief*]

Don't, dearest! You know we agreed that by dying before the war, Robbie was spared the horror of it.

MRS. SUNDALE [*Letting him press her into a chair*]

Yes, yes—and sometimes it seems to me Robbie is the only one of our children that really survives, that I possess eternally. The other two—they seem almost changelings.

SUNDALE

There's always a breach between the generations, Kitty. You remember how angry your mother was when you joined that very mild Suffrage Society. Come, let me have my first kiss.

MRS. SUNDALE

Your first kiss?

SUNDALE

Have I ever kissed "my lady"?

MRS. SUNDALE [*Breaking down afresh*]

Bob! You have always been my perfect knight.

[*Their lips meet, the door flies open, they separate*]

guiltily. DICK *bursts in—a youth of twenty-one in a loose artistic dress, with an air of genius and conceit, and the wielder of an irritatingly superior laugh.*]

DICK [*Annoyed*]
Dinner over?

MRS. SUNDALE [*Wiping her eyes furtively*]
Oh, Dick! You said you'd be home for it—cook's first night too!

DICK [*Crossing to the settee*]
Gods and grasshoppers! I'd forgotten the première. But my picture *must* go in by Friday and the sun set so late.

SUNDALE [*Drily*]
Did it? It's usually so punctual.

DICK [*Perched on the settee-end*]
Don't be funny!

SUNDALE
Don't be rude! *I called my father "sir".*

DICK
Dr. Johnson called everybody "sir". But that didn't guarantee politeness. I was trying to finish Dolly Wimple.

MRS. SUNDALE
Not Sir William's daughter?

DICK
The identical nymph. Who would believe the old
jossler could generate such a fairy? Such subtle arm-pits!

MRS. SUNDALE
Arm-pits? You don't mean to say she sits to you in
that state?

DICK
In what state? She's combing her hair—Heine's
mermaid, you know—the tail is the only section she
won't sit for.

SUNDALE
With all due deference, Dick, to the greatest living
artist,
[DICK bows with equal irony]
and though I know that under your Cubist treatment
Miss Wimple will be safe from recognition, I still think
that for some "sections" professional models——

DICK [*Striding petulantly from his perch*]
Oh, that's all pre-war Pharisaism. You ought to be
glad we poor artists can make the economy. Why
should girls trust us less than their doctors? We
moderns have grown out of your standards, they're
too small. As for my pictures, I'm tired of explaining
that I use subjects or sitters merely to express *Me!* . . .
[*Glares at the gold-framed anecdote*]

Stanley Morden, R.A.—Rotten Artist. A thousand pounds he stung you for that! Hoo! Hoo!

[*Moving doorwards*]

I suppose I'll find something to eat.

MRS. SUNDALE

Be careful—cook may give notice.

DICK

The way you Victorians kowtow to your cooks! Like the Amazon ants that are helpless without slaves. Never mind—

[*Takes up the cup of coffee*]

this will do for the moment—I'm due soon at the Blue Bohemians.

SUNDALE [*Sarcastically from the settee*]

Where you presumably cook your own supper.

DICK [*Defiantly between both*]

The cheap Victorian repartee. As a matter of fact, I do cook my breakfasts at my studio.

MRS. SUNDALE

And who *pays* for your studio? Father's the slave *you* can't do without.

DICK [*Drinking*]

What tosh, mother! It's the working man who slaves for all of us—poor imbecile!

SUNDALE

That's tosh, if you like. No wonder Oxford sent you down.

DICK [*Bashing his cup on his saucer*]

Oxford! A dirty mediæval monastery. You can't even get a bath without running across a quad. If it wasn't for the town with its motors and movies, the place would be a living tomb.

SUNDALE

Would to God I were back in it! But I daren't even accept my old college's invitation to the gaudy last week.

MRS. SUNDALE

You disgraced him so.

DICK

Disgraced him? Didn't Oxford send Shelley down? And now they have a monument to him!

SUNDALE

To be kicked out of Oxford doesn't make a Shelley. Still less can you earn a monument by destroying a girl's modesty.

DICK [*Setting down his cup on the table*]

Who's destroying a girl's modesty?

[*He moves back to the settee.*]

SUNDALE [*Rising imperiously*]

I don't like Miss Wimple sitting to you, especially as

her father, besides being our doctor, was my friend at Oxford.

DICK

I destroy Dolly's modesty? I like that!

[Laughs ironically, with his peculiarly irritating]

Hoo! Hoo! Hoo!

SUNDALE *[His face darkening]*

What are you insinuating?

DICK *[Sullenly]*

That's *her* secret.

SUNDALE

Good God! You don't mean——?

[MRS. SUNDALE rises agitatedly.]

DICK

I mean only this—and let me tell you, dad, once for all—we mean to live by our own light, not by yours. Your generation has reduced Europe to a shambles—and what touches you more nearly—to a bankrupt estate. So before you come the accusing angel, kindly remember you're in the dock.

SUNDALE

You were too young to fight, anyhow.

DICK

Maybe. But even that sentimental twaddler, your own beloved Barrie, calls on youth to rise up and

throw you over. And—by the Lord—we will! Your morals, your politics, your religions—they are all on the dust-heap.

MRS. SUNDALE [*Half-weeping*]
It's Dolly you've thrown there.

SUNDALE
Poor little Dolly—such a sweet child I remember her. It's dreadful.

DICK
What's dreadful? It's beautiful. Only your generation never had any first-hand sense of beauty, any living sense of love. You were moved entirely by conventions, like marionettes by strings; you went about feeling, seeing, believing nothing.

SUNDALE [*Taking his wife's hand*]
Listen to the superman!

DICK
Oh yes, you loved—in your novels. But even your heroes and heroines never gave themselves generously. They had to have parsons, settlements, contracts before they delivered the goods.

SUNDALE
Very necessary, Dick. Free love isn't love—it isn't even free. You're tied just the same. Read Daudet.

MRS. SUNDALE
It's these theories that have ruined poor Dolly.

DICK

Ruined, indeed! Do drop these clichés, mother.
“ Poor ” Dolly is the most worshipped girl in London.

SUNDALE [*Drily*]

The greatest living goddess?

DICK

So she is. A glorious creature. Sparkling and free
as a wave.

SUNDALE

You sound in love with her yourself.

DICK

Of course I'm in love with her—and a hundred other
beautiful and noble things. We haven't your mania
for possession.

MRS. SUNDALE [*Outraged*]

Richard!

SUNDALE

Leave him to me! It's clear he knows nothing about
love.

DICK [*Jumping up, as outraged as his mother*]

I know nothing? Well, read Oscar Pleat!

SUNDALE

Oscar Pleat? The greatest living critic?

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DICK

Ah, you know! Yes, he's the leader of the modern man.

SUNDALE

And the misleader of the modern woman?

DICK [*Hotly*]

Misleader? When he has led her to life's topmost height?

SUNDALE

Her? Good heavens, how many *besides* Dolly?

DICK

I never said there were others.

SUNDALE [*Victoriously*]

You never said there was Dolly.

DICK [*Sitting down sullenly*]

I forgot I was up against a professional cross-examiner. No matter—everybody knows.

SUNDALE

Including her father? Has Sir William been told?

DICK

Of course not. He's not grown up.

MRS. SUNDALE [*Dazed*]

Not grown up?

DICK

A peculiarly early Victorian. Thumps your chest or your tummy, but knows nothing about your real inside.

SUNDALE [*Severely*]

I trust your sister has been treated as no older than Sir William.

DICK

Oh, Mary knows Dolly is the "Beatrice" Oscar dedicates his books to, but she thinks it's like Dante and Beatrice—she doesn't really understand. On the other hand, she calls the real article *Platonic* love!

SUNDALE
MRS. SUNDALE } Platonic?

DICK

The fact is, her head's so full of poetic piffle, nobody talks openly before her—not even at the Blue Bohemians.

MRS. SUNDALE [*Relieved*]

What did I tell you, Bob?

SUNDALE

In any case she ought never to have been given the key to those circles. Where is she now?

[*To DICK.*]

DICK [*Sullenly*]

Am I my sister's keeper?

SUNDALE

You all need keepers. You're stark, staring mad, every one of you, with your art, your music, your jazzing——

MRS. SUNDALE [*Rising agitatedly*]

Never mind that now—I must go at once to Sir William—since the poor girl has no mother. This Oscar Pleat must marry her.

DICK

But he doesn't believe in marriage.

MRS. SUNDALE

I don't care what he believes.

DICK [*Asprawl on the settee*]

But he's married already!

SUNDALE [*Approaching him angrily*]

Then he's the greatest living scoundrel!

MRS. SUNDALE [*Picking up the press-cutting*]

And to think he dares write to Mary!

SUNDALE

Kitty, dear, we had better leave Sir William in his blindness.

MRS. SUNDALE

Yes . . . Hush! I hear Mary.

[*Sits down with feigned calm.* MARY bursts the

door open and hurries in; a sweet-looking child, in her street dress and hat, with great innocent eyes. She conveys the sense of absolute simplicity, frankness and cocksureness without a jot of pose or self-consciousness.]

MARY [*Breathlessly*]
Dinner over already?

SUNDALE [*Showing watch*]
It's half-past nine, Mary.

MARY
Is it? That summer-time is so confusing.
[*Throws down her hat on the table*]
You see, I went to study the home conditions of an unmarried mother.

SUNDALE }
MRS. SUNDALE } What!

MARY [*Serenely pulling off her gloves*]
Yes, I barged into a batch of them with their babies at Lady Leonard's—some committee of investigation.

MRS. SUNDALE
It was disgraceful of Lady Leonard to let you see them. Why, you don't even know what an unmarried mother is.

MARY [*With seraphic superiority as she puts the gloves in her hat*]
How Victorian you are! Every modern girl knows it's simply a woman who has had a child without a father.

DICK

Hoo! Hoo! Hoo!

SUNDALE

Shut up! Surely, Mary, you know that the real missing factor is the ceremony.

MARY

But I particularly looked at the babies, and they were exactly the same as ceremonial babies. I nearly brought one home.

SUNDALE [*Sardonically*]

As a present for whom?

MARY

It looked so dirty and neglected.

[*DICK laughs again; she glares at him*]

And don't we waste lots of milk, and isn't our old rocking-horse eating its head off in the nursery?

[*MRS. SUNDALE quivers at this reference, but as she is silent, only her husband is conscious of her emotion*]

I should have loved to look after the little precious while its mother went fruit-picking in the country. But she wouldn't part with it.

SUNDALE

Thank heaven!

MARY [*Joyously perceiving her correspondence*]

Letters! I shall have company at dinner after all.

[*Takes them from the central table and moves doorwards.*]

MRS. SUNDALE

Be careful not to ask for soup—any moment cook may give notice.

MARY

Oh, mother, you've got a cook-complex.

[*Snatches up her hat*]

Well, I can always get a snack at my Club.

DICK

You can feed with me and Dolly at the B.B.'s.

MARY

Right-O! . . .

MRS. SUNDALE

Mary!

MARY

Yes, mummy.

MRS. SUNDALE

You are *not* to sup with Dolly at the Blue Bohemians.

MARY

Where then?

SUNDALE

Nowhere. You are never to meet her again.

MRS. SUNDALE

She may sink in this modern mud—you shan't.

MARY [*Dazed*]
Dolly sunk in the mud?

MRS. SUNDALE
Up to the arm-pits.

DICK [*With his irritating laugh*]
Hoo! Hoo! Hoo!

MARY [*Going over to him*]
Do explain the joke, Dick.

DICK [*Embarrassed*]
Well, you know I'm painting her as Heine's *Lorelei*—
they object to her showing her arm-pits.

MARY
But don't we all show them?

SUNDALE [*Savagely*]
You do indeed—plus your peeling chests and your
blistered backs. . . .

MRS. SUNDALE
Robert!

SUNDALE [*Not to be arrested*]
You all make me think of mustard-plasters.

MARY
Because we worship the sun with our bodies? O
daddy, you have such curious complexes.

SUNDALE [*Grimly*]
I have, have I?

MARY

But I don't know anybody whose suppressed wishes are more obvious . . . There—you see! You are wishing I were young enough to smack.

SUNDALE [*Roaring as he retreats from the temptation*]
Yes, I am.

MARY [*With a sweet smile*]
Don't I know? You're just like a toy.

MRS. SUNDALE [*Reproachfully*]
A toy, Mary?

MARY
A sweet little toy, wound up to put on its little legal wig with its little clockwork hands, and to trot into the Law Courts every morning on its little mechanical legs——

SUNDALE
Indeed!

MARY
And on Saturday afternoons, with its little automatic arms, to slash its little golf-ball into the bunker and go 'damn!'

MRS. SUNDALE
Mary! I will not have such expressions.

MARY
It's not me, mummy, it's the apparatus.

SUNDALE [*Grimly*]

The apparatus, Mary, will stretch out its little arms and take away your little latchkey.

MARY [*Suddenly serious*]

Let it try—that's all. You're both jealous *I'm* not an automaton too.

MRS. SUNDALE

We're only jealous for your dignity, Mary. Remember, you're getting old enough to be married.

MARY

I'm old enough to know better.

DICK

Hoo! Hoo! Hoo!

SUNDALE

Do scrap that hooter, Dick.

[*Enter* BEAMISH.]

BEAMISH

Miss Wimple is at the door in a car.

DICK [*Jumping up*]

Dolly! How ripping!

MRS. SUNDALE

We are not at home.

BEAMISH

I don't think they asked for you, Madam.

SUNDALE

They?

DICK

It'll be Oscar and Joanna with her.

SUNDALE

Oscar!

[In terrible tones]

Is it *the* Oscar?

MARY *[Enthusiastically]*

Yes, dad! The greatest living writer! The author of *Meditations of a Modern!*

MRS. SUNDALE

And Joanna is even worse.

MARY *[Dazed]*

Worse?

MRS. SUNDALE *[To her husband]*

It's she who wrote *Glad Cucumbers*. And she's got a figure *like* one.

MARY *[Outraged]*

What have her looks to do with it? Joanna's the kindest soul in London and the greatest living sub-consciousness.

SUNDALE

The greatest what?

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MARY

Her book, *Glad Cucumbers*, is the last word of psychoanalysis.

SUNDALE

I sincerely hope it is.

MRS. SUNDALE

Even your father couldn't make head or tail of it.

MARY

You have to learn her language.

MRS. SUNDALE

But the *words* seemed English.

DICK [*Who has resumed his sprawl on the settee*]

Mary isn't speaking of words. What have words to do with literature?

SUNDALE [*Throwing up his hands, murmurs*]

Good God!

DICK

Glad Cucumbers is an exercise in the subconscious.

MARY

Yes—what do you think of when I say “Glad”? “Rags”, is it not? And “Rags” suggest “Bones”, and “Bones” “Frames”, and “Frames” “Cucumbers”. Joanna's genius joins “Glad” and

“ Cucumbers ” in one jump. It’s a new *form* she is creating.

MRS. SUNDALE

A pity she can’t create a new form for herself.

MARY

Don’t be vulgar, mother.

SUNDALE [*Becoming angrily aware of the listening butler*]

Beamish! What are you waiting for? . . . Oh, ah, I’m sorry. Say, Mr. Richard is coming down. And wait—I was forgetting—ring up Mr. Ashlar and tell him Miss Mary is *home*.

BEAMISH

Yes, sir.

[*Exit.*]

MARY

What’s that I hear? Mr. Ashlar’s coming?

MRS. SUNDALE [*Sweetly*]

He wants to see you particularly, dear—“ big John ”!

MARY

So that’s it. I’m kept from the Club to meet Mr. Ashlar. No, thank you. Come along, Dick.

[*Takes his arm.*]

SUNDALE [*Putting out his arm like a constable*]

I tell you “ No! ”

DICK [*Pushing his arm away*]
Don't be ridiculous, dad.

SUNDALE
What did I tell you, Kitty?

MRS. SUNDALE [*Starting up, with unnecessary melodrama*]
Dick! Dick—remember he's your father!

DICK
Quite a moving picture. Hoo! Hoo! Well, I shan't go either, then! I can't expose an unprotected sister to that prig, Ashlar.

MARY [*With dignity*]
I can fight my own battles, thank you, Dick. Go along—I daresay it'll all end in a compromise. And then I can come on in a taxi.

DICK [*Parodying his father's voice and arrestive arm*]
I tell you "No!"
[*She pushes his arm away similarly. Re-enter BEAMISH*]
Beamish! Say, I'm very sorry, but I've been detained by a family squabble.

BEAMISH
Yes, sir, a family matter.

DICK
No, sir. A Row!! We moderns don't believe in storing skeletons in cupboards.

SUNDALE

Beamish! You'll say I've forbidden Mr. Richard to join them.

DICK

What!!! . . . Hoo! Hoo! Hoo! I see through you—you want me to go.

SUNDALE [*To BEAMISH*]

Why don't you take my message?

BEAMISH

Yes, sir. But cook would like to speak to Madam.

MRS. SUNDALE [*Tottering*]

Cook? . . . What does she want?

BEAMISH

You, Madam.

SUNDALE

Yes, yes, that's all right, Beamish. . . . You've rung up Mr. Ashlar already?

BEAMISH

Yes, sir—he must have been waiting at the 'phone.

[*Exit.*]

SUNDALE

Aren't you going, Kitty? . . .

MRS. SUNDALE [*Rising wearily while Mary flops down*]

Yes—yes—oh, it will be too terrible if I have to start cook-hunting again.

SUNDALE

Appalling! Poor Kitty. But remember—tact's the word.

DICK

It is indeed. The word for your whole Victorian era. Can't even face a cook straight.

SUNDALE

Silence, you Georgian jizzer! And Kitty——!

MRS. SUNDALE [*Turning at door*]

Yes, dear.

SUNDALE

Servants are such snobs—mightn't it be a good idea to let out you're now *Lady Sundale*?

MRS. SUNDALE

Oh, not till it's public, dear.

MARY [*Starting up, utterly amazed*]

Mother is *Lady Sundale*?

MRS. SUNDALE [*Beaming*]

Aren't you proud of your father?

[*Exit.*]

DICK

Gods and grasshoppers! Father knighted! Hoo!
Hoo! Hoo!

[Rolls helplessly on sofa]
Oh, let's make a night of it!

SUNDALE *[Sternly]*

Dick!

DICK *[Wiping the tears from his eyes]*

Sir Robert! You see I shall have to call you "Sir"
after all!

SUNDALE

What is there so funny about a title?

DICK

Well, look at Mary. She can hardly keep her face
from exploding.

MARY *[Crossing the room in hysteric laughter; finally
managing to speak]*

Well, it *is* a funny idea, dad, you must admit—
mother not being a "lady" till now.

SUNDALE

That's the first nice thing you've said about your
mother for ages.

MARY

I'm not so old as all that. But seriously, dad, how can
you be proud of joining the mushrooms? Especially

with so many toadstools in the basket. Think of our really great men. Think of Shakespeare, think of Shelley, think of Oscar Wilde, yes, and of Oscar Pleat.

SUNDALE

To hell with Oscar Pleat!

MARY [*Clapping her hands*]

I do love making your suppressed wishes go pop.

SUNDALE

But *Tennyson* became a Lord!

MARY AND DICK [*Together, in withering contempt*]

Tennyson!

DICK

Hoo! Hoo! Hoo!

MARY [*Marking the rhythm with hands and feet*]

“Lives of great men all remind us
We can make our lives sublime.”

SUNDALE [*Frenziedly*]

But that's Longfellow!

MARY [*Waving it aside*]

What's the difference? “And departing leave behind us” —

MARY AND DICK [*Together, fortissimo, she prancing, his legs kicking upwards on his settee*]
“Footprints on the sands of time”!

MARY [*Falling into a chair in hysteric merriment*]
Footprints! As if they'd stay on the sands. Oh, what a wash-out!

SUNDALE [*Savagely*]
Yes, I know, they're all wash-outs. There's only the everlasting Bernard Shaw.

MARY [*In horror*]
Bernard Shaw!

DICK
Hoo! Hoo! Hoo!

MARY
Why, he's Longfellow over again!

SUNDALE
What!!

DICK
A pre-war Puritan preacher!

MARY
Almost as silly as Carlyle!

SUNDALE [*Dazed*]
So even Bernard Shaw is antiquated.

MARY

A super-Methuselah!

SUNDALE

Then what in God's name do you believe in?

DICK

In expressing ourselves, of course.

MARY

Our highest self, Dick means.

DICK [*Growling, with his legs in the air*]

Oh, do I?

SUNDALE

Of course you do. When one stands on one's head, the lowermost *does* come topwards.

DICK

Hoo! Hoo! Hoo!

SUNDALE [*Mimicking him furiously*]

Hoo! Hoo! Hoo! The trouble with you young people is that you are young. Do you remember, Mary, how, when you were five, you told mother you were saving up to buy her a tombstone?

MARY

Did I? How funny!

SUNDALE

Yes, we smiled because we knew you didn't understand

the realities of death. As little, Mary, do you now understand the realities of life.

MARY
Oh, come.

SUNDALE
At seven you kept a white rabbit which *you* christened John after John Ashlar, who had given it you when he went to Cambridge. When somebody informed you it was a female, you said that was impossible, because no female was ever called John.

MARY
No? How killing!

DICK
Hoo! Hoo! Hoo!

SUNDALE
At fourteen you were off John—man or rabbit. You adored St. Teresa—you wanted to found an order.

MARY
I remember! *Wasn't* I funny?

SUNDALE
You're a damn sight funnier now. And one day you'll see it. All the conventions Dick hoo-hoos at are necessary. Yes, *necessity* is the mother of convention.

DICK [*Still on his back on the sofa*]
That's a chestnut!

SUNDALE

It's worth pulling out of the fire then. There's something even in the Fifth Commandment.

DICK [*Sitting up in mock horror*]

The Fifth Commandment—fancy mentioning that before Mary!

MARY [*Trotting up eagerly*]

Why, what's the Fifth Commandment?

SUNDALE

"Honour thy father and thy mother."

MARY [*Crestfallen*]

Oh!

SUNDALE [*Maliciously*]

Oh! Dick's *complexes* called up a later Commandment.

DICK

Pooh! The Ten Commandments are as dead as the Fourteen Points.

SUNDALE

They'll outlive all your "Modern Meditations".

MARY

The way you talk, dad, there'd never be any progress.

SUNDALE

Progress can't mean going backwards. You want to

scrap civilization and start afresh. But you wouldn't do that even with an aeroplane or a gramophone—you'd just alter or add here or there. And civilization isn't a machine—it's a living organism, infinitely complex.

DICK [*Springing up*]

But it was *your* generation that smashed up civilization—turning mankind into “man-hunting savages”; I quote your Kipling. You talk of the Commandments—how about “Thou shalt not murder”?

SUNDALE [*Putting his arms earnestly on DICK's shoulders*]

The war was meant to *end* mutual murder. But it's useless arguing.

MARY

Because you can't.

SUNDALE

Because—as I told your mother—there's a breach between the generations. We can't see eye to eye.

DICK

The breach between *our* generations was made by your guns.

SUNDALE [*Turning wearily to go*]

I must see why mother is downstairs so long. She's been greatly overstrained by the servant difficulties—if cook really gives notice she'll most likely collapse. I repeat, Mary, your connection with Dolly and her

gang, and especially Mr. Pleat, must be absolutely broken off.

MARY

Absurd! At *my* age!

SUNDALE [*Pinching her chin*]

Though a patriarch in wisdom, you are in law a child. When you are of age you may do as you please.

MARY

I did so hope you'd say as I damn please.

SUNDALE

The toy doesn't always work, you see. As for you, Comrade, I can't really presume to *prohibit*—I can only leave you to your sounder impulses. It is not against John that your sister needs protecting. Good-night. I have my briefs. I shan't come down again.

[*Opens door*]

One last word—

DICK [*Murmuring*]

"And I have done." O those clichés.

SUNDALE [*Glaring at him*]

You are not to mention my knighthood before it's publicly announced.

DICK [*Resuming his sprawl*]

Rely on us! We'll cover it up as long as possible . . .

MARY

Poor dad! Didn't they give you the option of a fine?

SUNDALE [*Puzzled*]
The option . . . ?

MARY
When they sentenced you to it.

SUNDALE [*With angry dignity*]
You are not to spoil mother's pleasure in my title.
[*Exit. The door bangs to behind him. MARY gets suddenly serious, and speaks with despairing earnestness as she drops into a chair.*]

MARY
What *are* we to do with our parents?

DICK [*Tickled at her grotesque gravity, yet half-agreeing*]
You wise kid! That *is* the conundrum.
[*Pulls out his pipe.*]

MARY
But what's the answer?

DICK [*Facetiously*]
That's the question. In a few simple but well-chosen words I declare the discussion open.

MARY
If you're not serious, I shan't discuss.

DICK
Damn! I've no 'baccy.

MARY
Cigarette?
[*Throws over her case.*]

DICK
But it's your last.

MARY
I'd rather *you* smoked it—it makes me feel squeamish—
I only smoke because mother objects.

DICK [*Laughingly*]
You poor martyr!
[*Lights it.*]

MARY [*Puckering her brow in profound meditation*]
Why can't people be born *without* parents—like fishes?

DICK
Hoo! Hoo!
[*Catching her indignant glance, he chokes down his amusement, and, coughing with the cigarette smoke, says with a serious air*]
But fishes do have parents.

MARY
In a way, I know. But the cod has three to six million eggs a season, and the ling may even have sixty millions. Not much parental authority there, you see—there's safety in numbers—you're practically an *orphan*.

DICK
Hoo! Hoo! Hoo!
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MARY [*Springing up*]
You artists never take science seriously! . . .

DICK
I'm sorry. Go ahead.

MARY [*Subsiding again*]
In some African tribes you can *make* yourself an orphan. Parents are only allowed to live to a certain age. But I suppose that's too advanced for Europe.

DICK [*Sitting up seriously*]
In Europe it's the old that kill off the young in their ridiculous wars.

MARY
Not only in their wars. I know girls whose lives are simply sucked up by decrepit parents. Vampires! Why can't we have a national crèche for all the babies? That would practically *abolish* parents.

DICK [*Quizzical again*]
Wouldn't it be simpler to abolish babies?

MARY
But they're dying out of themselves! Mother told me her grandmother had twenty-three children—you never see such fishy families nowadays. I suppose it's a change in the climate.

DICK
Hoo! Hoo! Hoo! What a baby you are yourself!

MARY [*Outraged*]
Me! Why, I'm older than mother!

DICK
Yes, but not—as dad pointed out—not legally. So perhaps you'd better listen to him and see less of Oscar and Dolly.

MARY [*Rising resentfully*]
But he can't lock me up as they did in the old novels!

DICK
I'm not so sure. Law is his strong point, remember—his *only* strong point.

MARY [*Kicking DICK as she flings away*]
I think you're horrid—siding with the autocracy. You know how I adore Oscar.

BEAMISH [*Opening door*]
Mr. John Ashlar has called to see Miss Mary.

DICK [*Jumping up hastily*]
Good-bye.

MARY
No! No! You said you'd protect me.

DICK
You said you'd fight your own battles. Ask him to come up, Beamish.

MARY [*Turning fiercely on DICK*]
How dare you interfere? Beamish, ask him to come up!

BEAMISH [*Bemuddled*]
Which am I to do?

DICK
Which you like!
[Hurries out, and the sound of his "Hoo! Hoo! Hoo!" comes back into the room. BEAMISH moves bewildered doorwards.]

MARY
Stop, Beamish. Do I remind *you* of a mustard-plaster?

BEAMISH [*Murmuring as he goes out*]
The young generation is getting beyond me.
[MARY goes to the pier-glass and examines her neck, pivoting round to see her back, and then turning again, so that when BEAMISH throws open the door and JOHN enters she has her back to him. He stands there shyly, not knowing what to do, an embarrassed figure, now in immaculate evening dress, with a bouquet of white roses in one hand and his opera-hat in the other. He puts the hat on a chair.]

MARY [*Seeing him in the glass, impatiently*]
Come along, John—this glass is so deceptive. Tell me honestly, *do* I remind you of a mustard-plaster?

JOHN

Of what?

[Advances vaguely.]

MARY

Dad says we're all red and raw—like underdone steak. Do inspect me.

[Thrusts her back under his eyes and revolves like a dressmaker's mannequin.]

JOHN *[Hoarsely]*

You remind me only of these roses.

MARY

You fibber! Why, they're white!

JOHN

That's your white soul.

MARY

Oh, dear! What Victorian clichés you do use! Why, my soul is all the colours of the spectrum.

JOHN

Yes, but don't they all make white?

MARY *[Impressed]*

That's true. You're not so unoriginal. Oddly enough, John, although you're a Cambridge "Blue," you, too, call up white in my mind.

JOHN *[Gratified]*

Do I really?

MARY

Yes. Don't you remember the white rabbit you gave me? I called it John. But you were really a female all along.

JOHN

A female?

MARY

I mean *he* was a female. . . . So you see when anybody says "John", I think "white". That's psycho-analysis.

JOHN [*Glumly*]

Is it? I suppose I ought to be glad you don't think "John—rabbit".

MARY

But I do. I mean my old gratitude to the giver gushes up.

JOHN [*Brightening*]

Ha!

[*Tenders bouquet*]

Then perhaps in future you'll think "John—roses".

MARY

O the darlings!

[*Buries her face in them*]

But you know I'm afraid "John-rabbit" will still win out. Isn't psycho-analysis exciting? . . . Why have you kept away all the month?

58

JOHN [*Eagerly*]
You missed me?

MARY [*Laying down the flowers*]
Not till this moment.

JOHN [*Blankly*]
Oh! . . . You mean you've only just realized I'd
stopped away.

MARY [*Sitting down*]
Yes—I've been in such a whirl. Why did you?

JOHN
I was desperate—I'd lost a job I wanted in Irak—in
Mespot—the future seemed blank.

MARY
And now you've got over your disappointment—I'm
so glad.

JOHN
Better still—I've got the appointment! That's not a
pun . . . I leave on Saturday—for two years.

MARY
Two years?

JOHN
If I could only believe you would realize *that* absence!
59

MARY

Of course I'll realize it. Two years should give one leisure to recall you. Don't look so glum—my subconsciousness always feels you safely in the background.

JOHN

I shall be recalling you all the time—it will feel terrible not seeing you for two years.

MARY

They might invent a wireless something—to see as well as talk.

JOHN

Even that would be tantalizing.

MARY

Why? It isn't as if you were my dancing partner.
[*She begins dancing some of the latest steps.*]

JOHN [*Bitterly*]

I wish now I *had* learnt those beastly dances.

MARY [*Whirling round*]

Why didn't you, you old swot?

JOHN

I had all those war-years to make up. You see, Mary, I always hoped that some day you'd be—my wife.

MARY [*Frozen suddenly in her whirl*]

Your wife? So that's what mother was hinting at!

That's why they—I knew something unpleasant was looming.

JOHN
Unpleasant, Mary?

MARY [*Bowing her head*]
This revelation! I felt I'd have to speak openly—we moderns don't believe in storing skeletons in cupboards.

JOHN [*Laughingly*]
Well, where *do* you store them?

MARY [*Offended*]
I shan't tell you now.

JOHN
I don't want to know. I'm sure your skeletons are only of rabbits.

MARY [*Insulted*]
Why, they're gigantic!

JOHN
Even your elephants would be white.
[*Seizes her hands*]
O you adorable child, I love you! I have always loved you.

MARY
Then why haven't you mentioned it before?
61

JOHN

You were too young and I was too poor. But this post in Mesopotamia—

MARY

I see. Now you've got the money to buy a mate.

JOHN

Don't put it like that!

MARY

It's what you said.

JOHN

One can't marry without money!

MARY

And that's what's called love. But *with* money or without, I can't marry you, John.

[*Withdraws her hands.*]

JOHN [*Pitifully*]

You can't? Why can't you?

MARY [*Very solemnly*]

Because I have a suppressed wish to marry Oscar Pleat.

JOHN [*Finally crushed by the concrete confession*]

Oscar Pleat? . . . I seem to know that name.

MARY

It's to be hoped you do! Even in Russia—wait!
He's in the hall.

JOHN [*Bristling*]
Eh?

MARY
With the Bradshaw.
[*Runs out and returns instantly with a great red volume.*]

JOHN
Oh! *Who's Who*, you mean!

MARY [*Handling it*]
Yes—you see it opens of itself at Oscar.

JOHN [*Reading*]
“Pleat, Oscar, Poet and Essayist. Born Blackburn, 1893. Fellow All Souls, Oxford. Newdigate Prize for Poetry. Works: *Meditations of a Modern*, 1913 . . .”
[*Reading on dumbly.*]

MARY [*Excitedly, jogging him on*]
“Translated Heine!”

JOHN [*Miserably*]
Seems a brilliant man. “Married 1918 the Hon. Eleanor——”?
[*With a cry of relief*]
But he's married!

MARY [*Sadly, almost in tears*]
Yes, I know. She makes his life a hell, he tells me—
as she's a Catholic he can't even get a divorce.
[*Brisking up*]

But read his "Recreations"—they all write it themselves of course—just at the end.

JOHN [*Reading*]

"Recreations: Skating on Thin Ice, Hunting Philistines, Shooting Folly as it Flies——"

MARY [*Ecstatically*]

Isn't he witty?

JOHN [*Equally pleased for his own reason*]

Yes, but he's married!

MARY [*Sad again*]

I told you my wish was suppressed. I can't even be his consolatrix.

JOHN

His what?

MARY

Like Dante and Beatrice, you know—even that position is filled.

JOHN

Thank God! Then where's the barrier between us?

MARY

But I told you. That suppressed wish to soothe his sorrows. And the more I suppress it, the more suppressed it gets. Just like in Mrs. Meynell's wonderful sonnet:

“ With the first dream that comes with the first sleep
I run, I run, I am gathered to thy heart.”

JOHN [*Not fully understanding*]
You run in your sleep?

MARY
Didn't I say psycho-analysis was exciting?

JOHN
But by day?—You don't run to him by day?

MARY
Of course not. By day I know he already has his
Beatrice. I don't even want to *see* him particularly—
isn't it queer?—only to *listen* to him. I'd be quite
content to have him on the 'phone. I don't think
though I'd enjoy him broadcasted.

JOHN [*Finally relieved*]
You ridiculous child!

MARY
I'm not a child and I'm not ridiculous. It would have
been too dreadful if even by day I had been tempted to
tamper with that beautiful relation between him and
Dolly—so spiritual, so Platonic. Do you know, once
I chanced on her kissing away his sorrows

[JOHN *starts in surprise and utters a comical murmur*]
and they both looked so ecstatic I understood for the
first time why the highest love is called after Plato. I
tiptoed away as from a shrine—and rushed to the
British Museum.

JOHN
Whatever for?

MARY
To read up the subject, of course. The old Librarian told me all the books about it were out, and I couldn't even find 'Kissing' in the catalogue, but I learnt from a *Treatise on Psycho-Biology* that there are so many little blood-vessels in the lips that if two pairs meet, their owners feel consecrated and united for life.

JOHN [*Moved by her shining innocent eyes*]
But I feel like that already . . . And you do care a little for "big John"?

MARY
I like him to be around.

JOHN
All around?
[Draws her to his embrace. She leans her cheek to his in a moment of hypnotism. Gradually their lips meet, but almost instantly she tears herself away.]

MARY
No! No! No! You mustn't. Let me go! John!

JOHN [*Releasing her*]
Forgive me—I thought you weren't minding.

MARY
I wasn't—I was happy—then suddenly you seemed

to be getting power over me, trying to absorb me into *you*. I won't have it, I tell you.

JOHN
But dearest——

MARY
The Treatise omitted to warn me of the menace to personality. But I *won't* be the puppet of physiology!

JOHN
But, Mary——

MARY
No, John! I *must* be myself. You'd better go to your Mesopot alone.

JOHN
Of course I shall go alone—but not, I hope, without your promise.

MARY [*Hurt*]
You were going *alone*? You weren't asking me to come *with* you?

JOHN
How could I ask you to share my privations?

MARY
But Mesopotamia is a heavenly place. Bagdad and the Arabian Nights and the Garden of Eden——

JOHN

There's not much Eden now. The part I am going to is all wilderness.

MARY

So much the better!

[*Quotes ecstatically*]

“A book of verses underneath the bough,
A jug of wine, a loaf of bread and thou
Beside me singing in the wilderness——”

[*Hypnotized by the romance of the words, she puts out her hands to him, and he takes them gladly; but his embarrassment at her proposed co-voyage, mingling with his dread of her objection to kissing, makes him keep her awkwardly at half-arm's length.*]

JOHN

But I can't sing, and in a wilderness there isn't any bough—only mud and millions of flies.

MARY [*Not to be disentranced*]

“The murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves.”
That's Keats.

JOHN

It's Keating's that's needed.

MARY [*Tearing herself away angrily*]

I knew you had no sense of romance.

68

JOHN

One must face reality, dear. And there's marauding Arabs, too. It's no place for a woman.

MARY

Haven't the Arabs got women?

JOHN

Yes, with ophthalmia—contagious!

MARY

Oh, I never catch anything.

JOHN

But there wouldn't even be a house to live in—only a tent.

MARY [*More enraptured than ever*]

A tent!

“ Under the wide and starry sky,
Glad did I live and gladly die.”

JOHN

You'd die all right. We should be arriving at the hottest season.

MARY

You know I'm a sun-worshipper.

JOHN

But we couldn't well be married by Saturday.

69

MARY

What does that matter?

JOHN

But surely, dear, you realize you couldn't sail *with* me unless your mother came too!

MARY

My mother! You want a mother-in-law in Mesopotamia! Why can't we be married when we get there? Not that I remember a ceremony over Eve and Adam, though the orange-blossom lay so handy.

JOHN

For one thing, darling, children can't live there.

MARY

But we're not children.

JOHN

I mean—those that might come to us.

MARY

But they don't nowadays—I was just talking to Dick about it.

JOHN

Darling, every word you babble makes me love you more. But the two years will soon pass——

MARY

Two years! Good heavens! Each with 365 days,

and each day with twenty-four hours—and longer now, what with summer time—no, John, you take me or leave me!

JOHN [*Pale and set*]
You don't mean that seriously, Mary?

MARY
I do—absolutely.
[JOHN *takes a stamped envelope out of his pocket, pulls out the letter, re-pockets the envelope, and begins tearing up the sheet of paper*]
What are you doing?

JOHN
Destroying my letter of acceptance. I won't go to Mesopotamia.
[*Throws the pieces into the waste-paper basket.*]

MARY
You won't go?

JOHN
How can I leave you?

MARY
O John!
[*Falls emotionally into his arms*]
Now we can go to Hellas!

JOHN
Go to Hellas?

MARY [*Rhapsodically*]

“The isles of Greece, the isles of Greece
Where burning Sappho loved and sung.”

[*Shrinking from a menaced kiss*]

No, don't! . . . And, beloved, you won't want
mother on our honeymoon now?

JOHN

Of course not, darling. There'll be time to turn
round, now—it will be some time before I can expect
a post in England.

MARY [*Drawing back from him*]

You're not bringing up money-barriers again?

JOHN

But obviously, dear, if I've thrown up my salary, I——

MARY [*Frigidly*]

Do I understand that even if you *don't* go to Meso-
potamia, you still put off our marrying?

JOHN

What else can we do? Your parents wouldn't even
consent.

MARY

My *parents*! Did they ask *my* consent?

JOHN

Be serious, Mary. I'm not even sure that at your
age the marriage could be performed without their
sanction.

MARY

And who wants an effete ceremony?

JOHN

I want it, Mary.

MARY

Then hadn't you better find another crusted antiquity of the female gender?

[*Getting hysterical and more and more rapid*]

I offer to go with you to Mesopotamia, and instead of saying, Mary, the Garden of Eden may be a wilderness, but your coming will make it blossom as the rose, you put me off with funerals and weddings and mothers-in-law and flies—as if we couldn't take fly-papers—and when I say, very well then, let's honeymoon in healthy Hellas, with or without the option of orange-blossom, you turn me down just as cold-bloodedly. "Safety first" seems——

JOHN

But Mary——

MARY [*Torrential*]

It's no use butting in. "Safety first" is *your* motto. Even when you tore up the letter, your subconsciousness saved the stamp.

JOHN

But Mary——

MARY [*Cyclonic*]

Yes, I know—you explained to me before that one

can't marry without money. I tell you that's a delusion engendered by our criminal capitalist system. If a man and woman can exist singly, they can exist in conjunction. One and one are only two.

JOHN
Not always—just consider a little——

MARY
I've considered it since I was seven——

JOHN
Oh, come!

MARY [*Tornadic*]
Yes, I have—ever since mother told me she had waited eleven years to marry father. I made up my mind there and then I wouldn't wait eleven months. Will you marry me in ten?

JOHN
Darling, how can I be sure?

MARY
Will you elope with me then?

JOHN
Certainly not.

MARY [*Whirling towards the window*]
Then go to Mesopotamia!

JOHN
I can't now, Mary.

MARY
But you've only to write the letter again!
 [Bends and dumps forward the waste-paper basket]
There it is!

JOHN *[Waves it away]*
I couldn't leave England now.

MARY
Why "now"?

JOHN *[Slowly]*
Because now I see you need me even more than I
need you.

MARY
You flatter yourself. Hush! I hear mother!
 [Springs up with cyclonic swiftness]
Good-bye—for ever!

JOHN *[Coolly]*
Au revoir.
 [Going doorwards.]

MARY
No, no—you'd meet her. She'd want to pump you.
This way!
 [Throws up window. He hesitates]

It's not three feet to the pavement, you old "Safety First."

[Hypnotized by her whirlwind impulsion, he scrambles out]

Wait! Your hat!

[Rushes for his opera hat, opens it with a plop, throws his roses into it, hands it out, and draws the window-curtains just as the door opens and MRS. SUNDALE enters, grim and strung-up.]

MARY

You look upset, mother. What's happened?

MRS. SUNDALE *[Vaguely conscious through all her agitation of something missing]*

Hasn't Mr. Ashlar come?

MARY

Bother Mr. Ashlar! What did cook want?

MRS. SUNDALE *[As she drops into a chair]*

She wanted the run of your father's library—that's the worst of your alien domestics—I told her it was mainly law books, and offered her my Jane Austens and George Eliots! But she sniffed at everything. Finally it transpired she was yearning for the English originals of an immoral author she had read in Russian.

MARY *[With dancing eyes]*

Not Oscar Pleat by any chance?

MRS. SUNDALE *[Springing up]*

Never let me hear that name from your lips!

MARY [*Springing up too with a shriek of humorous joy*]
Then it *is* Oscar! Oh, what fun! And did you tell
her I had them all?

MRS. SUNDALE
I did *not*. I gave her notice.

MARY
What!

MRS. SUNDALE [*Glorying in her new firmness*]
I gave her notice.

MARY [*As much amused as angry*]
You are too absurd! I shall go and lend them to her
at once.

MRS. SUNDALE
No, you won't! For one thing you haven't got them.
I've just been to your room and destroyed them.

MARY [*Blazing*]
You didn't!

MRS. SUNDALE
I did—he's a blackguard, and your father complained
I've been too weak with you.

[MARY, *drawing herself up haughtily and snatching
up her hat, starts doorwards with stately frigidity.*]

MRS. SUNDALE [*Following her*]
Where are you going?

MARY
To the Blue Bohemians.

MRS. SUNDALE [*With an unexpected and surprising agility outflanking her and facing her*]
To meet Oscar Pleat?

MARY
And eat something—I've had no dinner.

MRS. SUNDALE
But you know your father forbade——! Sit down—
I'll get you something myself.
[*With another astonishingly dexterous movement she is outside the door, and the key is heard turning in the lock. Furious at the insult, MARY rushes to the door and rattles the handle.*]

MARY
How dare you? It's illegal! You said I was old
enough to be married! Ha!
[*A taxicab is heard crawling outside. She rushes towards the window*]
I said I'd come along in a——
[*Pulls up window*]
Taxi!
[*Jumps out. Quick curtain.*]

Act Two

[The next afternoon. A studio in Chelsea, with a view of the Thames. There is a door on the left giving on a grassy court, and on the right is a little staircase leading to a bedroom. Under it hangs a peculiarly nebulous and flamboyant picture, half gondola, half donkey-cart; other fantastic pictures are stacked or hung everywhere, with the usual studio litter, including books and magazines and some grotesque pseudo-primitive statuary, a screen, but no sofa. On the model's throne sits DOLLY WIMPLE, a beautiful golden-haired girl of about twenty-three, with a great air of the smart set, who looks bewitching even when clad in DICK's dressing-gown, with which he has just enswathed her: below, light feminine garments exude and very dainty shoes. The picture DICK is working at is on the easel, and represents a nude golden-haired mermaid on a sea-washed rock, combing her hair with a golden comb, a beautiful but somewhat conventional picture, strikingly different from the ultra-modern pictures around. The window is placed high and meets the top light.]

DICK

There, Dolly! You'll be warm enough now. This beastly changeable climate! Lucky your hands are all I have to finish.

[Completes buttoning her up]

So!

DOLLY

Thank you, Dick. This is the greatest stroke of art I've seen you achieve in all my sittings.

DICK

How do you mean?

DOLLY

Isn't it your theory that the greatest art is to conceal Nature?

DICK

Hoo! Hoo! Hoo! You're too witty—really the same person has no right to be a gallery of the graces and a cabinet of all the talents. Pick up your comb!

DOLLY

Pick up your brush.

[He does so. She picks up a great gilded comb and resumes the pose of combing her hair. He starts painting at the hands]

Seriously, Dick, aren't you backsliding? You haven't concealed Nature very effectively this time. Why, it might be a Stanley Morden! Well, anyhow it's much more like me than like you. It may even sell!

DICK

Oh, no, it won't.

DOLLY [*Smiling*]

Don't look so fierce. I withdraw the insulting suggestion.

80

DICK

You misunderstand. I wish to God I could sell a picture and be independent of my Philistine pater, especially as I lent a pal my last quarter's rent, and my landlord's getting nasty. I only mean I'll never part with *this*.

DOLLY [*Sternly*]

Nonsense, Dick! I sat for art's sake, not yours. You're going back on our bargain as well as on your art. I was to be for inspiration, not imitation.

DICK

I've never before had a model so thunderingly worth imitating.

DOLLY

You artful dodger! Stick to the point.

DICK

But you see I had to stick to Heine too. To quote Oscar's version, which will be printed in the catalogue:
"The loveliest maiden sitteth——"

DOLLY

But Heine doesn't say the maiden was a mermaid.

DICK

Surely? Listen:

"The loveliest maiden sitteth
So wonderful up there!
The light through her golden gems flitteth,
She combeth her golden hair."

DOLLY

Yes, her *head*. But where's her *tail*?

DICK

At the end, of course—wait.

“ They say that the wild waves clinging
Pull boat and boatman down,
And this is what with her singing
The water-witch——”

DOLLY [*Triumphantly*]

You see! A mere witch!

[*Then her witching coquettish smile fades, her hands droop.*]

DICK

Don't let your hands drop, please.

DOLLY

I'm tired. But there!

[*Holds them up firmly*]

I daresay I can hold out for ten minutes more.

DICK [*Stops*]

Gods and grasshoppers! Only ten minutes?

DOLLY

Don't waste them. I *must* have tea with Oscar at our inn up the river.

DICK

I don't see the necessity.

DOLLY

We always meet there Wednesdays to avoid the Sunday

mob. Oscar can't punt, so when I am through with my "flannelled fools," I rush to him and tone up my brain after their silly slang.

DICK

But you're not up the river to-day.

DOLLY

Oscar doesn't know that. When we all parted last night at the Blue Bohemians there was no idea of this final 'last sitting.' It was just a chance that the weather was in your favour—and I felt a bit out of sorts too.

DICK

So you thought the quiet would do you good. You didn't come for my sake.

DOLLY

That, too. I knew the B. B. show opens next week.

DICK

Then won't you stay as long as the light lasts?

DOLLY

I can't disappoint Oscar. I'm late already—he must be kicking his heels in our inn parlour. It's our weekly ritual, don't you understand, our only religion. . . . Shall I go on singing?

DICK [*With sulky sentimentality*]

If you wish to drive my bark on the rocks.

83

DOLLY

Now, Dick, play the game . . .

[She begins to sing Heine's song:

Ich weiss nicht, was soll es bedeuten,

Dass ich so traurig bin;

Ein Märchen aus alten Zeiten——

[Suddenly DICK throws down his brush.]

DICK

But look here, Dolly! You needn't run away. Oscar may be coming *here* to tea!

DOLLY *[Dropping her comb in her agitation]*
Here?

DICK

Yes—I had a wire. Where did I put it?

[Searches with vague futility]

Ah, I remember—in my pocket!

[Rushes and extracts the telegram from the pocket of the dressing-gown she is wearing]

There!

DOLLY *[Taking it with trembling fingers]*

I seem still a bit dizzy—the letters dance. You read it.

DICK *[Taking it]*

“Coming to tea with a lady.”

DOLLY *[Dropping comb]*

With a lady?

84

DICK

Yes—"With a lady. Don't be away. Urgent.
Have asked Oscar too. Mary."

DOLLY [*Vastly relieved*]

Mary? It's only from Mary?

[*Laughs a bit hysterically*]

Ha! Ha! Ha!

DICK

So you see, you'd best go on sitting quietly here.

DOLLY

Don't be silly, Dick.

[*Picks up her comb and poses afresh*]

As if Oscar's at the beck and call of a child! . . . And
who is the lady she's bringing?

DICK

Haven't the remotest idea. Haven't seen the kid
since I left her last night with the prig I was telling
you about.

DOLLY

The swain who came with roses in his hand and sheep's
eyes in his head?

DICK

Hoo! Hoo! Hoo! But it's just like Mary inviting
strangers.

[*A knock at the door*]

Gods and grasshoppers! There they are!

[*Angrily throws down his brush*]

Come in!

[The door opens, and a big good-humoured woman's head is stuck in, with a briar pipe between its teeth. The costume of this massive JOANNA HERZBERG is similarly epicene.]

JOANNA [*Waving a bulky letter*]
Sorry, Dick—but have you got a stamp?

DICK
Come in, Joanna, come in.
[Wanders about vaguely, opening drawers, cigarette boxes; suddenly recognizes the model.]

JOANNA
That's never you, Dolly!

DOLLY
Yes, it is—the habit doesn't make the mermaid.

JOANNA
But you're up the river Wednesdays!

DICK
She took pity on a poor painter. You see my picture *must* go in by Friday.

JOANNA [*Waving letter*]
And my copy *must* go out by 5.30. Where's that stamp, old chap?

DICK

I'm looking, old man . . . Is it your London news-letter?

JOANNA

Yes, "from our London correspondent"—the rotten stuff I feed the provinces with. But what a mercy you *are* here, Dolly—I'm five lines short.

[*Puffs out smoke*]

You haven't got a bit of smart scandal?

DOLLY

But I brought you up to date last night, the Royal Garden Party included.

JOANNA

Yes, I know—

[*Tapping envelope*]

that's all in—but——

DICK

Hoo! Hoo! Hoo! So it's from Dolly you get your society stunts.

JOANNA [*Puffing out indignant smoke*]

You don't suppose *I* move in Court circles!

DICK

But what happens when you *don't* meet Dolly?

JOANNA [*Drily*]

Necessity is the mother of invention.

87

DOLLY

Oh Joanna, is that honest?

JOANNA

One must live, and what the public wants isn't information but titillation. What does it matter if the things happened or not? Besides, most London letters are written in the provincial office. Mine are at least manufactured in London . . . How about that stamp, old bean?

DOLLY [*Producing from the pocket of the dressing-gown a heap of crumpled dragged stamps*]

What's this? . . . Fancy keeping your stamps like that?

DICK [*Facetiously, as he takes them*]

What right have you to go over my pockets?

[*Dolly hands them over to JOANNA.*]

JOANNA

One's enough, thank you, old fellow.

[*Sticks the stamp on her letter*]

But I'll put the others where I can find them next time.

[*Ranges them neatly in a drawer and then holds up a wistful fountain-pen*]

You're sure you've got nothing to give me, Dolly, not even a Cabinet secret?

DOLLY [*Laughingly*]

I can't give away people I don't know.

JOANNA [*Resignedly*]

Well, there's always ink . . . I know—I'll do five lines about Dick's picture.

DICK

But your readers are fed up with my picture!

JOANNA

You don't sound very grateful. But I've never put them wise about your model.

DICK

If you do, old man, I'll punch your head.

JOANNA

That's more than either of my late husbands could do.

DOLLY [*In comical surprise*]

Joanna! You've never buried *two* husbands!

JOANNA

Yes I have—one dead and the other alive.

DICK } What!

DOLLY } Buried one alive!

JOANNA [*Subsiding on the step of the throne*]

Divorced him, I mean.

DOLLY [*Laughingly*]

Fancy Joanna having had two husbands!

JOANNA [*A little nettled*]

I know I'm not such a siren as you, but there's more in me than meets the eye—considerable as that is! . . . Well, since I've got to earn a dishonest living, I suppose I must draw on my fountain-pen.

[*Flourishes it.*]

DOLLY

Why not on your subconsciousness? The authoress of *Glad Cucumbers* should surely——

JOANNA

Glad you're behind me, Satan. Besides, nothing could possibly come out of my subconsciousness sensible enough for the provinces.

[*Draws at her pipe*]

It's only you high-brows that see such wonderful things in *Glad Cucumbers*. You know, I can't understand a word of it myself.

DOLLY

Did Shakespeare understand his own *Hamlet*?

JOANNA [*Wistfully*]

I'm never sure you and Oscar are not pulling my leg.

DOLLY

That's what makes us so sure you're not pulling ours—that the stuff comes genuinely out of the planchette.

DICK [*Taken aback*]

The planchette?

DOLLY

Didn't you know? Joanna's absolute surrender to her subliminal self is what calls her genius from the vasty deep.

JOANNA

Here, stow that! You're not going to drive me to the planchette again, I hope. Else I shall end like my mother—in a private asylum. Yes, that's something even *you* don't know, Dolly. The royalties from *Glad Cucumbers* come in beautifully to support my poor mother. But I'd rather not be buried alive myself, thank you.

DOLLY [*Rapt*]

Those two buried figures that come thrusting up through your text—how much they explain in *Glad Cucumbers*! “The buried bubble is bursting—give it right of asylum!”

JOANNA

I thought you understood it all already. Well
[*Rising, waves fountain-pen towards other pictures*]
I'll have to fill up from these old eyesores. . . . But I must be careful not to repeat myself—not that my readers ever notice, but editors have good memories.

DOLLY [*Laughingly*]

As liars should have.

DICK

Hoo! Hoo! Hoo!

JOANNA [*Moving round the pictures and fixing the dominant flamboyant fantasia*]
I'll just write up that gondola.

DICK [*Indignantly*]
Gondola! That's a donkey-cart!

JOANNA
Is it? I sometimes suspect, Dick, you practise with the planchette yourself. Between you and me, this mermaid of yours is the only thing I can look at without apologizing to my eye. . . . But I'd better make it a gondola for the provinces.

[*Turning towards Dolly, she writes, murmuring*]
"Mr. Sundale's world-famous Venetian sonata in B minor is one of the——"
[*Murmurs on.*]

DOLLY [*In a changed voice*]
Joanna!

JOANNA [*Writing*]
Yes, dear.

DOLLY
Have you a fire in your room?

JOANNA [*Writing on*]
Yes, I was just going to make my tea.

DOLLY
Would you mind making a cup for me?
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JOANNA [*Still writing, but with a strange side-look at DOLLY*]

Delighted . . . We'll all have it together . . . I'll just get this bunkum off.

[*Shuts and licks envelope. Steals another significant look at DOLLY*]

No, I can put the kettle on first.

[*Hurries out.*]

DOLLY

Isn't she a dear?

DICK

A disillusion! So *Glad Cucumbers* was written by the planchette!

DOLLY

That's the miracle. It's just like Joan of Arc. Here is a mere illiterate hack writing in journalese——

DICK

Absolutely ignorant of art——

DOLLY

Absolutely ignorant of art—yet when she——

DICK

Oh, hang Joanna! You *are* chucking tea with Oscar after all! How splendid of you!

DOLLY [*Rising*]

That's another disillusion for you, I fear—I'm going straight home.

DICK
Oh, Dolly!

DOLLY [*Sinking on the step of the throne*]
I *must* economize my strength—I have a dinner-party at eight-thirty.

DICK [*Fretfully*]
The way you career around!

DOLLY
But it's our own dinner-party—before going on to the Royal Society Soirée. Oh, Dick, the queerest collection of early Victorian successes—old surgeons, old scientists, old lawyers—I'm the only female!

DICK
Ha! You enjoy that?

DOLLY
Immensely . . . To look at those wrinkled faces, and to think of all that's packed inside those bald heads. There's one shrivelled mummy of a Professor of Astronomy, whose skull embraces the stars. When he holds my hand, I feel like flirting with the firmament.

DICK
Do they *all* hold your hand?

DOLLY [*Smiling*]
Not all at once . . . And to think that if I had gone

on the river to-day it would have been held by those flannelled juveniles. Isn't life wonderful, so palpitating, so rich in contrasts, so many-sided?

DICK [*Sulkily*]

Many-handed, do you mean?

[*Paints sullenly for a moment. A knock*]

Come in! Hullo, Oscar!

[OSCAR PLEAT *appears at the opened door, a smallish but exquisite being in the early thirties, elegantly tailored, with a beautifully-trimmed French beard, a mincing Oxford accent, and a play of sensitive long fingers that becomes almost hieratic when he is laying down the law and the gospel of his hedonism.*]

OSCAR

Is Mary here?

DOLLY [*Harshly*]

No, but *I* am. Don't keep the door open, I'm cold.

OSCAR [*Closing it and moving slowly towards her*]

I am sorry. But I was lost in wonder at the telepathy between us—at the brain-wave that assured me you would *not* be at our inn to-day.

DOLLY [*Drily*]

Your Marconigram failed to inform you where I'd be instead. . . . Give me a cigarette, one of you.

[OSCAR *produces his case, but DICK is first with his box from the easel tray. She takes one from DICK.*]

OSCAR *redeems himself by striking the match first, but she throws down the cigarette]*

No, it wouldn't do me any good. I'd better get dressed and go home.

[Descends the throne and goes towards the staircase.]

DICK

Wait, wait, Dolly! There's a fire laid in the bedroom—been waiting months to be useful. I'll put a match to it.

[Snatches up the box of matches. Hurries up the staircase into the bedroom.]

OSCAR

You look queer, Dolly.

DOLLY

Like a mermaid in a mackintosh, I know.

OSCAR

I mean a little pale.

DOLLY

The London season isn't exactly a course of hygiene.

OSCAR

Why will you race and whirl so?

DOLLY

Oh, stop sermonizing—I'm not the woman you've sworn to love and cherish. How is *she*?

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OSCAR
She?

DOLLY
The legitimate! She who must be disobeyed!

OSCAR
Eleanor? O Dolly, don't remind me of her—she's beginning to smell a rat.

DOLLY
What a charming phrase to use about our relation!

OSCAR
I'm sorry—I was thinking about the cat. Yes, a cat, that's what my wife is, for all her culture—a green-eyed monster of jealousy, a spitfire unsheathing her claws.

DOLLY
Loathsome! What's the *use* of her clinging on, even if you can't divorce——?

OSCAR [*Unable quite to suppress he is thinking of DOLLY too*]

There seem to be cats in the manger as well as dogs. We moderns, who have put off the cave-man, are still a small band of brothers and sisters, like the early Christians.

[*He waves his manicured hand*]

The obsolete Othello still represents the psychology of the crowd.

DOLLY [*Tartly*]

At any rate Desdemona was sure he loved her.

OSCAR

A pretty consolation while he was smothering her.

DOLLY

She might have preferred that moment of agony to the daily torture of doubt.

OSCAR [*Waving the subject away*]

Her primitive psychology does not interest me.

DOLLY

You are quite sure you yourself have evolved beyond jealousy?

OSCAR

What a question! Did I raise any objections to your sitting to Dick?

DOLLY

On the contrary—you urged me to accede to his request!

OSCAR

For art's sake. He needed your golden hair.

DOLLY

You are sure? You didn't seize the opportunity to throw me into his arms?

OSCAR [*With an outraged air*]
My dear Dolly! . . . *Are* you in his arms?

DOLLY
If I am not, it's as much *his* fidelity to you as mine.
You know that however true the needle is to the pole,
it can be deflected by any magnet that happens to be
nearer.

OSCAR [*Taking her hands*]
Bravo, Dolly! For us moderns concealment is the
only sin.

DOLLY [*Tearing them away*]
Then why haven't you mentioned the wire from Mary?

DICK [*Appearing at bedroom door*]
It blazed up and went out. I've used up all my
matches.

OSCAR [*Throwing up his box of matches*]
Here you are!
[DICK catches it and disappears within.]

DOLLY
Is that what's happened to *you*?

OSCAR
How do you mean?

DOLLY
Blazing up and going out?

OSCAR [*Ostentatiously offering telegram, which DOLLY waves back*]

Because of a schoolgirl's telegram? Surely if Mary's wire meant anything . . . adult, I, with the openness that is my only virtue——

DOLLY [*Hotly interrupting his bland slow phrasing*]
But you never told your *wife* your love had burnt out!

OSCAR
My wife is not a modern. Free love is a freemasonry. And you know, you and I agreed that when our flame did go out——!

DOLLY
Yes, but I didn't realize there were *two* flames, and they mightn't go out at the same moment.

OSCAR
I should have thought that was obvious from the doctrine of probabilities.

DOLLY
You're a cold-blooded sophist!

OSCAR
Don't be mediæval, Dolly. Each soul is its own world, and that two worlds should blaze up at the same moment—isn't that a coincidence marvellous and glorious enough? Sufficient for the day is the illumination thereof.

DOLLY [*Hysterically*]
I don't want your epigrams.

OSCAR
I thought you adored my books.

DOLLY
But this is life!

DICK [*Reappearing*]
It's blazing beautifully!
 [*Begins to descend*]
Go along, Dolly!
 [*She looks uncertainly at OSCAR.*]

OSCAR [*In low tones*]
Go along. I'll wait.

DOLLY
For that chit of a Mary?

OSCAR
Your psychology is disappointingly primitive.

DOLLY
You certainly don't suffer from any inferiority complex.
 [*Her eyes spit fire, her nails loom like claws; then with a disdainful gesture she turns away and passes DICK silently on the stairs, and the bedroom door slams behind her. OSCAR turns with feigned enthusiasm to DICK.*]

OSCAR
Isn't she a glorious creature?

DICK
Glorious.

OSCAR
Just the really modern girl you've always dreamed of.

DICK [*Dubiously*]
Ye-es. . . . It was awfully decent of you, Oscar, to suggest my asking her to sit. I should never have had the cheek of myself.

OSCAR [*Laying a paternal hand on DICK's shoulder*]
One is not a cave-man. It was my duty to help your picture.

DICK
And you have been awfully generous about it, now it's painted. My only fear is, you've *overboomed* it.

OSCAR
To a deaf world one has to shout. You see I am frank with you. But if it's not quite the masterpiece I've had to proclaim, it's sufficiently big to be worth my sacrifice.

DICK
Your sacrifice?

OSCAR

Bless the simple lad! You don't know you've sup-
planted me?

DICK [*Dazed*]

I? . . . With Dolly? Oh, how absurd! Why, she's
glacial—no wonder she needs a fire.

OSCAR [*With superior scepticism*]

Indeed. And you?

DICK [*Blushing and stammering*]

Well—I—I'm not such a superman as you. I—I
wonder you trusted me.

OSCAR [*Patting DICK's hands*]

My dear Dick! But this is even bigger than your
picture. We moderns must be open—it is the only
way of avoiding immoral complexes. I realize, alas!
that youth must be served, and that a man of my
years must fall back—like Boethius—on the con-
solations of philosophy. Will you say good-bye for
me to Dolly, and tell your little sister I was sorry I
couldn't wait?

[*Goes to door and opens it*]

though possibly I may be back.

[*In doorway*]

Hail, Caesar, the conquered salutes thee.

[*Disappears, closing door.*]

[*DICK walks up and down agitated, stares at his
picture, tries with trembling fingers to light a cigarette.
When, finally, he succeeds, he throws it away after*

*a puff or two. Moves his easel back, by window.
DOLLY begins descending the staircase, ravishingly
attired, the ideal of smart self-assured femininity.]*

DOLLY
Oscar gone?

DICK
Yes. . . . But he may return.

DOLLY [*Bitterly*]
I see.

DICK [*Facetiously*]
Wait and see!

DOLLY
Not even for Joanna's tea. . . . May I trouble you
with the usual——?
*[She turns sideward, showing that her bodice is not
fastened up.]*

DICK
It's not a *trouble*.
[Begins operations—she has almost her back to him.]

DOLLY
Why do women have such silly clothes? . . . But
then we *are* the silly sex.

DICK
I wish I was as clever as you.

DOLLY
How original!

DICK
Don't sneer—I mean it.

DOLLY
So do I. To praise a person behind her back—isn't that original?

DICK [*Feebly*]
Hoo! Hoo! Hoo!

DOLLY
Do get on—it's no laughing matter. Your fingers seem all thumbs to-day.

DICK
I'm sorry—but it makes me nervous to think this is the last time I shall do you up.

DOLLY
Prophecy, said George Eliot, is the most gratuitous form of error.

DICK [*Excited*]
You *will* sit to me again?

DOLLY
Prophecy, said George Eliot——

DICK
You mean the present moment is all we are sure of.

DOLLY

Doesn't every moment teach it? When I entered this room, I was sure I should be now at tea with Oscar——

DICK

But you will wait for Joanna's tea at least—I'll go and hurry her up.

DOLLY [*Imperatively*]

Hurry up with that hook!

[*Gropes with her hand towards it.*]

DICK [*Prisoning the groping hand and speaking slowly and tensely*]

Then we really have only this moment?

DOLLY [*Still more slowly*]

Only this moment.

[*Somehow she has fallen back in his arms, and he turns her face to his and their lips meet in a long kiss.*]

DICK [*In a sobbing murmur*]

At last, my dear, at last!

DOLLY

At last, indeed. I have felt this kiss hovering in the air for days. Why did it remain suspended so long?

DICK [*Stammering*]

I never realized—you were too wonderful—I thought you and Oscar——

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DOLLY

Yes, yes, let us not delve into antiquity. Sufficient for the day is the illumination thereof.

[*Puts her face to his again.*]

DICK [*Ecstatic*]

Yes—it illumines everything, doesn't it?—life and death, and this old blood-stained world. One feels that after all at the heart of things is love.

DOLLY [*Responding to his mood*]

Love—and a wild glory.

DICK

And we will marry at once, won't we, dear?

DOLLY [*Drawing away*]

Marry? Why should we marry?

DICK

O Dolly! I couldn't bear to think you held yourself free to pass on to another—I can hardly bear to think of what has already been—but our marriage will blot it out like a bad dream, won't it, dear? I should feel you mine, mine wholly, mine for ever.

DOLLY

For ever? O Dick! And we just agreed that only the moment is sure! Apart from your primitive idea of proprietorship, don't you realize that marriage is a promissory note, which no honest modern can sign? How can a woman promise to love, honour, and obey, till death——?

DICK

I agree. I would have the word "obey" struck out—or put in on *my* side, dearest.

DOLLY

Who worries about obedience if there is oneness? It is love that is the impossible word. I can promise to obey, for that is a question of will. But how can I promise to love—which is beyond the will?

[Falls back into his arms, as if in illustration of her words.]

DICK *[Equally tranced again, speaking hoarsely]*

Yes—it is a great tide—that comes sweeping——

DOLLY

And then ebbing?

DICK

Don't, Dolly! Don't spoil even the moment.

DOLLY

It was you that spoilt it—by bringing in the future.

DICK

But you do love me—for the moment at least?

DOLLY

How can I be sure?

DICK

What! Not even of the moment?

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DOLLY

You shouldn't ask questions. . . . Perhaps it is only your youth that draws me, perhaps it is only pique against Oscar, perhaps I only wanted to catch you on my hook——

DICK [*Relaxing his embrace*]

O my dear, my dear—the wild glory is all going.

DOLLY [*Feverishly changing her mood*]

But it shan't, it mustn't. Hold me closer, Dick. For this moment at least we are masters of fate.

[*She is about to kiss him when she staggers back.*]

DICK [*Catching her*]

What is it? Dolly! Dolly!

[*Alarmed, he carries her limp form to the throne.*]

DOLLY [*Reviving after an instant*]

Why am I here? What has happened?

DICK

You must have fainted.

DOLLY

How silly of me! Didn't I say we are the silly sex?

DICK

Hadn't I better send for a doctor?

DOLLY [*Vehemently*]

No! No! It was only a little dizziness. It came on this morning.

[*Struggles to her feet, then collapses.*]

DICK

I must certainly send for a doctor.

DOLLY

For God's sake let me be!

[Rises by sheer will-power]

See, I can stand quite well. But if you don't mind, I'll lie down a little in your room—I shall be better soon.

[Starts towards the staircase—he advances to help her, but she waves him off]

No, don't touch me!

[Walks rigidly, and begins to mount, clinging to the balustrade.]

DICK

Couldn't I get something——?

DOLLY

Get me Joanna—only Joanna.

DICK

Yes, dear, I'll go at once.

[But at the studio door he turns anxiously to watch her, till she disappears into the bedroom. As he then in relief opens the studio door, JOANNA is seen framed in the entry with a tea-tray]

Thank God! O Joanna!

[He clutches at her, almost overturning the tray.]

JOANNA

Clumsy! My best china. . . . But where's Dolly?

DICK

She just went to lie down—she fainted for a moment.

JOANNA

Fainted?

[Nearly drops the tray—this time it is he who steadies it]

You've been making her sit too long.

DICK

No, she was dizzy when she got up this morning—that's why she gave up the river—to sit quietly.

JOANNA

My poor Dolly!

[Collapses on the nearest chair, the tray rattling with her emotion.]

DICK

But, Joanna! It's not anything serious?

JOANNA

Can't you guess?

DICK

How should I?

JOANNA *[Sternly and solemnly]*

Yet you talk so glibly of life and death. If it was only one of the "complexes" you're always jawing about! But it's something a jolly sight simpler—as simple as a babe unborn.

III

DICK

Good God!

[Collapses into his nearest chair. Both sit, somewhat grotesquely, sideways, she with the tray.]

JOANNA [*Almost to herself*]

I was afraid she and Oscar would be foolish.

DICK

But, Joanna—are you really sure?

JOANNA

You moderns are always monkeying with words—but you can't monkey with facts.

DICK

Then oughtn't Oscar to put things straight? . . .
Couldn't his wife divorce him?

JOANNA

But she's a Catholic. And in any case he's more weary of Dolly than of his wife.

DICK [*Dazed*]

Weary of Dolly? But I understood——

JOANNA

You didn't. He positively dislikes her for clinging on.

DICK [*Slowly*]

Ah, but when he knows——

JOANNA
His dislike will change to disgust.

DICK [*Outraged*]
Surely, Joanna, any decent man——

JOANNA [*Drily*]
We are speaking of Oscar.
 [*Starts up*]
I must go to her.

DICK
Yes, yes—she was asking for you.

JOANNA
Poor dear Dolly!

[She carries up the tray, which is heard rattling in her trembling hands all the way upstairs. DICK still remains huddled up tragically in his chair. Soon after JOANNA disappears there is a knock at the studio door, but DICK does not even hear it, and two repetitions of it with increasing loudness do not penetrate his tragic mood. At last the door flies open, and MARY in a simple summer dress and hat, with a rose at her breast, bursts in like a ray of sunshine, sweeping away all the morbid misery.]

MARY
So you *are* here! Haven't they come yet?

DICK [*Harshly*]
Haven't *who* come? Why didn't you knock?

MARY

Why, I knocked, knocked, knocked—like the knocking
in *Macbeth*!

DICK

What do you want?

MARY

Didn't you get my wire?

DICK

I can't be bothered now—I'm busy.

MARY

You look it.

DICK

Go away—go home!

MARY

Home? When I've just escaped!
[*Prances across the room.*]

DICK [*jumps up*]

Where are you going?

MARY

Anywhere! They've put you out of bounds.

DICK

Why, what have I done?

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MARY

It's me, you stupid. The studio is forbidden and all its fauna. Don't you know that *verboden* feeling?

[Capers about joyously, jumps on the throne, seizes the comb and pretends to pose, then starts up and surveys his canvas]

Why, what have you done to the picture? It's coming like a Stanley Morden. You'll be in the Academy if you're not careful.

DICK

Never you mind my mermaid!

[Turns the canvas angrily with its back frontwards.]

MARY *[Sweetly]*

The back *is* more artistic!

[Runs up the stairs.]

DICK

Stop! Where are you going?

MARY

I want to enjoy every inch of mustn'tness!

DICK

Come down at once.

MARY

Why?

DOLLY *[Within, in horror at JOANNA'S revelation]*

No! No!

MARY
What's that? Aha, *cherchez la femme!*

DICK [*Hissing*]
You clear out!

DOLLY [*Within*]
But it can't be! It shan't!

MARY [*With a shriek of joy*]
It's Dolly! I'm killing two *verbotens* with one stone.

DICK [*Following her furiously, seizing her by the sleeve*]
Come down!

MARY [*Drolly*]
But I want to see her arm-pits!

DICK
Whatever for?

MARY
To see if she's washed away the mud, of course.
Ha! Ha! Ha! Don't you remember how you
laughed yesterday when mother said——

[*A sound of sobbing interrupts her—her voice
changes*]
Why, she's crying!

JOANNA [*Within*]
Hush, dear—it's calm you need now.
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MARY
And Joanna's *with* her?

DICK
Yes, Dolly's ill.

MARY
Oh—poor Dolly!

DOLLY [*Within, hysterically*]
I won't have it, I tell you, I won't have it!

MARY
She won't take her medicine—just like me when I was a kid.

DICK [*Tugging at her*]
Come down!

MARY
But she ought to take it now she's grown up. I'll go and talk to her like a mother.

DICK [*Dragging her down by main force*]
There isn't any medicine yet—it's only—only tea.

MARY [*Hastening down of herself*]
Then hadn't I better fetch her father?

DICK
For heaven's sake!

MARY

But why not? She won't even have to pay him.

DICK

Would you like *your* father if you were in a hole—a legal hole, I mean?

MARY

You are right. Last night when the policeman caught me——

DICK [*Dazed*]

The police caught you?

MARY

Like a cricket-ball, I mean. When I jumped from the window!

DICK

What window?

MARY [*Impatiently*]

The drawing-room—when you left me with John!

DICK

Good heavens! You had to jump from John! I thought he at least——

MARY

No, no—I jumped because mother had locked the door.

DICK

She'd locked you in together? Well, of all the shameless match-making——!

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MARY

You seem quite moidered to-day. Almost like the Dogberry who arrested John.

DICK

John was arrested?

MARY

We were both arrested. Wasn't it fun? John looked so comical trying to explain that he wasn't a burglar, and that the swag hidden in his opera-hat was only roses. And when I landed at his feet like an accomplice, it didn't ease the situation. Fortunately John had a letter in his pocket from an American millionaire, and with the aid of a treasury note and my assurance that we were only eloping, we managed to escape in the taxi just as we heard mother drop the tray and rush to the open window.

DICK

What tray?

MARY

Oh, it's too long to explain now, when I ought to be fetching a doctor.

[Runs doorward. Then ecstatically with hand on knob]

Oh, but you should have heard the smash—glass, china, crockery—it was beautiful!

DICK

Yes, yes. . . . Go along. . . . So you've got engaged to John?

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MARY [*Turning back*]
Sh! I never said so.

DICK
You practically told the police so.

MARY
That was only for police consumption. Anyhow, John was so pressing, and our common peril had brought us so close, that although you called him a prig and marriage an obsolete——

DICK [*Wincing*]
I thought you were going for a doctor.

MARY
Then why do you ask so many questions?

DICK [*Tetchily*]
Who's asking questions? Then you *are* engaged to John?

MARY
Sh, I tell you! If mother got wind of it, it would be all day long, you mustn't do this—you're mortgaged, you can't do that—there's a tab on you. You mustn't have a male friend or a dancing p——

DICK [*Relieved*]
Anyhow, you *are* engaged to him!

MARY
He's engaged to *me*. You see, in the favour I got at

the restaurant there was a little brass ring, so for fun I made him wear it.

DICK [*Sternly*]

You went with John to a restaurant at night! That wasn't for fun.

MARY

Of course not—for supper. I was so hungry. I ate up even the ice he was toying with—after I was through with mine. But after he'd got the ring on I happened to see our faces in the restaurant mirror—they were so unattuned, so dismally unlike Dante and Beatrice, that I turned quite cold.

DICK

It was the two ices.

MARY

Don't talk like father. If you don't watch out, heredity will get you, body and soul, and you'll be a marionette like *him*. Do you know, when I pulled his strings at midnight——

DICK

You didn't sit gorging till midnight?

MARY

Of course not. We wrote a letter together refusing to live in Mesopotamia, and sent it by special messenger to the American millionaire.

DICK

But why should a millionaire want you to live in Mesopotamia?

MARY

Your habit of asking questions is becoming a neurosis. At midnight, I say, after my taxi had dropped John on his doorstep, there they were—both our parents—drawn up like a couple of cannon with open mouths, and gracious! how they volleyed and thundered. “Why did you go through the window?” “Because I couldn’t get through the keyhole.” “Why did you go to the Blue Bohemians?” “Because it was *verboden*.”

DICK

But you didn’t come to the——?

MARY

Of course not. That was the cream of the joke. If they had known I had been gallivanting with their beloved John, then instead of mother having hysterics——

DICK [*Rather concerned*]

Did mother have——?

MARY

There you go with your questions when Dolly——!

[*Hurries doorward again*]

Then I’m to fetch her a doctor who *isn’t* her father?

DICK

If you can! I mean——!

[*Drops hopelessly into a chair.*]

MARY [*Opening door*]

Of course I can—they've all got red lamps, haven't they? And brass plates with M.D., F.R.G.S., or something! I'll get a plate with the most letters.

DICK

If you *are* going, you'd better get a woman doctor.

MARY

Right-O! I'm glad you're such a good feminist.

[*Is closing door. DICK heaves a sigh of relief*]

But have *ladies* got lamps?

DICK [*At the last pitch of exasperation*]

God knows!

MARY

Perhaps *they're* green. No, I'd better get a red lamp.

DICK [*Roaring*]

Get anything—so long as you get out!

MARY

Gods and grasshoppers, you *are* in a state over Dolly!

One would think she were *your* inamorata!

[*He half rises angrily*]

Oh, all right—I'll get a proper plated woman.

[*Exit. Is almost out but reappears immediately.*]

DICK [*Roaring*]
What now?

MARY
You'll ask her to wait for me when she comes, won't you?

DICK
Certainly not—I'll send her up to Dolly at once.

MARY
But she doesn't want Dolly! . . . Oh, you mean the doctor woman! I'm talking of Feodosia.

DICK
Feodosia?

MARY
Madame Moskowski—I wired you. She's late, but I remember she had to go to the Greek Church or the movies or something. Tell her and Oscar——!

DICK
To hell with Oscar!

MARY [*Shocked*]
O Dick! You've got the same suppressed wish as father! I hope it's only heredity!
[*Serious exit.*]

DICK
Only heredity?
[*Murmurs*]

God! Am I only feeling what my savage forbears felt?

[Jumps up with a great sweep of his arm]

To hell with heredity!

[The bedroom door opens and JOANNA begins to descend.]

JOANNA

She's quieted down—I'm going to get a taxi and take her home.

DICK

Shan't I get the taxi?

JOANNA *[Going doorward]*

You! You are all of a tremble—you'd get run over. What a silly sex men are in a crisis! Why, you've even got your picture wrong way round!

DICK

I'm not going to exhibit it now.

JOANNA *[Gravely]*

You are right. There'd be talk enough without that, if it got out. But of course we mustn't let it.

DICK

You're a dear good soul.

JOANNA

And a damn unlucky journalist! When I do get hold of a scandal at first hand——!

[Turns at door]

The next time I meet that cad Oscar I'll give him a piece of my mind, subconsciousness and all!

[DICK fumbles miserably for a cigarette. Hearing the bedroom door open, and perceiving DOLLY, he throws it down and hastens to help her—she waves him back. She is now a tragic figure, all the cocksure gaiety gone.]

DOLLY [*Descending*]

It's all right, Dick, I can come down of myself.

DICK

I'm so glad you feel better.

[*Wheels the softest chair towards her*]

You'd better wait in this—I suppose the taxi will get here before the doctor.

DOLLY [*Alarmed*]

The doctor?

DICK

Mary looked in, so I sent her for a woman doctor—of course she knows nothing.

DOLLY [*Wincing*]

And you?

[DICK nods silently. She totters, he catches her, and she clings to him hysterically]

O Dick, I'm so frightened!

DICK [*Putting her kindly away*]

But, dear, it's no more than every woman——

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DOLLY

You know it's not only that!

DICK

What else? If, as I suggested, we marry immediately——

DOLLY

Dick! You don't want to marry me still——!

DICK

Of course I do, darling—if you will have me.

DOLLY [*Sobbing*]

O Dick!

[*Her arms yearn towards him, but he avoids them.*]

DICK

Yes, we'll marry at once, and as soon as you're through your trouble—we'll have our honeymoon, won't we, dear? Think of it, Italy in the spring!

DOLLY [*Humbly*]

I understand.

DICK [*With false vivacity*]

You've no idea how quickly one can get tied up nowadays! The pal I told you of, who borrowed my studio rent, wanted it for a special licence—he's mediæval and High Church—but of course *we* can't have any truck with the Archbishop of Canterbury, not to mention the thirty quid. Another chap told

me you can do the trick almost as quickly for thirty bob—quicker and cheaper than you can get buried, he said, hoo! hoo! hoo!

DOLLY [*Miserably*]
It *will* be rather a funeral, won't it, Dick?

DICK
Then we'll let the dead past bury its dead.

DOLLY [*With a wan smile*]
Fancy you quoting Longfellow. That's "The Psalm of Life".

DICK
And jolly sound sense!
[JOANNA *sticks her head in.*]

JOANNA
I've got one already. . . . Ah, she's down! Good— saves threepence! Come along, dear.

DICK
Take my arm, won't you?
[DOLLY *obeys and he leads her towards the door*]
There she is, Joanna! And you'll be our witness at the Registry Office, won't you?

JOANNA
Your witness?

DICK

Dolly and I are going to marry.

JOANNA

You and Dolly?

DICK

Don't look so worried, old man!

JOANNA

It's the threepences ticking away in the taxi. Come along, dear.

DOLLY [*Broken*]

Au revoir, Dick. I'll write to you.

DICK

Thank you—that *will* be nice of you.

[*He kisses his hand to her and JOANNA takes her out. He strides distractedly about the studio, espies his mermaid picture, turns it round and surveys it savagely; but after menacing it for an instant with his palette knife, he starts brokenly to go upstairs. MARY bursts in, holding a book.*]

MARY

Oh, Dick! I found a brass-plated woman almost next door, only she's a Christian Science practitioner, and I didn't know if she would do for Dolly's complaint, and while she was selling me this book I saw Dolly drive away.

DICK

Yes, Joanna is kindly taking her home.

MARY

So I thought. I gave the practitioner her address and she is pursuing her in another taxi, full of "Science and Health".

DICK

You little silly! You know how bigoted Sir William is against Christian Science.

MARY

Because it spoils his business, I know. I say we ought to give everything a fair trial.

DICK

Some experiments are too risky. It's a damn lucky thing for you, Mary, that your John is so conservative. You'd better go home now and tell mother and father about your engagement.

MARY

After the way they've treated me! I haven't had time to tell you yet; they took away my latchkey like a thief in the night, and this morning I found myself locked in my bedroom with no way of escape but those fifty feet of gutter-pipe.

DICK

You didn't slide——?

[She puts her book over his mouth]

All right, tell it without questions.

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MARY

I didn't like to slide down in broad daylight. Those American boarders at No. 43—think of the false notions they'd have got of English womanhood! However, I was glad of the leisure to write up my diary, and by the time I had dashed off a few poems—free verse, of course, so much easier than rhyme, just like your pictures—there was mother with my lunch. Suddenly I remembered cook was a Russian.

DICK

Is cook a——?

MARY [*Again putting the book over his mouth*]

So she's an expert in escapes. Unfortunately I had now used up all my ink, but with a little of my blood——

DICK

Your blood? Oh!

[*Claps his hand over his mouth.*]

MARY

Mixed with the gravy—I managed to send her an S.O.S. hidden under the dish-cover. So when mother came back to take down my tray, she herself——

DICK

Cook must have thought you mad.

MARY

On the contrary. We were already sisters by our common devotion to Oscar Pleat.

[*DICK opens his mouth and then shuts it hopelessly*]

That's right. You *must* conquer your neurosis. Anyhow, thanks to Feodosia, here I am! Apropos, where's the tea for her?

DICK [*Springs up*]
For *her*? It's *cook* you invited?

MARY
It's her afternoon out.

DICK
It'll be mine too.
[*Rushes doorward. MARY clutches him by the coat and speaks swiftly*]

MARY
But you mustn't go—you can be so useful to her—she's awfully pretty and fascinating, so she could be your model; she told me she didn't mind sitting for the altogether, if there's only the artist there, and then of course she could cook your dinners and you wouldn't have to come home—

DICK
A *model* cook, in short! But I don't think I'll rob mother of her.

MARY
But mother has dismissed her for reading Oscar Pleat—isn't it the limit? And my idea was that if you didn't want her, Oscar could have her as a secretary, or if you both wanted her, you could toss up or take turns. She is so romantic. In fact, she's just my ideal of a cocotte.

DICK [*Horried*]
Of a cocotte?

MARY
I thought you knew French. I didn't say *coquette* because it isn't exactly our English coquette—simply a woman with *tempérament*—or, roughly speaking, temperament.

DICK [*Savagely*]
Or temperature. Look here, Mary, you've acted like an idiot and you talk like a baby. I have enough worries without your Russian adventuress. The fact is, I'm going to be married.

MARY
You? Ha! Ha! Ha!

DICK
Don't laugh!

MARY
But you always said marriage was a wash-out.

DICK
I didn't know love was a knock-out.

MARY
And who's knocked *you* out?

DICK
Can't you guess?

MARY

How could I? You said so many girls appealed to you—on different sides.

DICK [*Fretfully*]

Well, I've only got two sides, haven't I? It's—it's Miss Wimple.

MARY

Dolly? Now I'm sure you're pulling my leg!

DICK [*Furiously*]

Don't use that expression!

MARY

Joanna uses it.

DICK

Joanna isn't a lady.

MARY

But ladies have legs. A lady centipede has a hundred legs.

DICK

I'm fed up with your insects and fishes! Good-bye! If you won't go, I must.

MARY [*Slowly*]

Then you really are serious?

DICK

As serious as life and death.

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MARY

Oh!

[Breaks down, covers her eyes with her hands and sobs.]

DICK

I tell you I'm going to marry, and first you laugh and then you yowl. What on earth are you crying about?

MARY [*Sobbing*]

That beautiful vision shattered!

DICK

What beauti——? hell! I *have* to ask questions—you're so silly.

MARY [*Sobbing on*]

Dolly and Oscar. I thought it was Dante and Beatrice over again—a wonderful immortal passion. And now you've gone and seduced her away from him! It's horrible.

DICK

Be quiet, you little idiot. How do you know they hadn't parted of themselves?

MARY [*Stopping her sobs, appalled, with white drawn face*]

That would be still more horrible—if love can decay from within. And yet *you* want to marry one of them—though you know how changeable she is. O Dick, how can you take the risk?

DICK

Love takes all risks, Mary. And you, don't *you* love her? Don't you want her to be happy?

MARY [*Sobbingly*]

If she can bear to be.

[*A knock at the studio-door—she dabs hurriedly at her eyes with her handkerchief, whispering excitedly*]
There's Feodosia—Madame Moskowski! You *will* be nice to her, won't you?

DICK [*With an angry hiss*]

To cook?

[*Picks up hat and rushes doorwards.*]

MARY [*In an agonized whisper*]

Where are you rushing?

DICK

Into her arms—you are right!

[*Looks desperately at the top-light, realizes that there is no escape that way; picks up a book, then hurls it away; rushes upstairs and bangs his door. Its key is heard turning, the bolt is shot furiously. The knock at the studio-door is repeated more loudly.*]

MARY [*Tremulously*]

Come in!

[*Enter OSCAR PLEAT.*]

OSCAR

Mary! . . . And alone! . . . How dear of you to arrange it!

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MARY [*Retreating instinctively before his amorous advance and trying to hide her sopped handkerchief*]
But I didn't.

OSCAR [*In tender amaze*]
You are crying!

MARY [*Trying to master herself*]
I'm not crying. And if I *am*, it's because of you.

OSCAR [*Advancing triumphantly*]
Of me?

MARY [*Retreatingly instinctively*]
Of you and Dolly! I thought your relation with her was a sacred eternal splendour. And now she's marrying Dick!

OSCAR [*Surprised into an exultant note*]
Is she?

MARY [*Breaking down again*]
You sound quite glad! . . . Then it's true what Dick said! There isn't a tear between you! Oh! Oh! Oh!

OSCAR [*Puzzled, feeling his way slowly*]
Why shouldn't I be glad if Dolly finds happiness with your brother? Would you have me bitter and grudging? That is not the modern way. But I

mustn't take credit for magnanimity—the fact is, I never really cared for Dolly.

MARY
Never really cared? After that kiss I saw between you——!

OSCAR [*Taken aback*]
You saw us kissing? Where?

MARY
On the lips. It was absolutely Platonic.

OSCAR [*Puzzled again*]
What?

MARY [*Sobbingly*]
I thought that meant consecration for life.

OSCAR [*Glibly, grasping the situation and playing up to her idealism*]

With Dolly? But you see how lightly she has turned to Dick. Ah, but I realized almost from that first kiss that she was no true redeemer for my tortured spirit, that she lacked the Platonic constancy my soul craves. No, she is but a heady essence of witches' spells; not like you, dear one, of whom, as in divination, my Heine sings:

“ Ah, you are like a flower,
So fair and pure and fine.”

It is you who could be the true Beatrice—my *Vita Nuova*. O Mary! Had that kiss only been between us!

MARY [*Retreating, the spell, which was holding her, broken by alarm*]

No! No! It is too late now. I have had it.

OSCAR [*Puzzled and disconcerted*]

Had it?

MARY

On the lips! Yes, as you say, we moderns must be open. And the fact is, I have a suppressed wish to marry "big John"!

OSCAR [*Utterly taken aback*]

And who is "big John"?

MARY

Nobody in *your* world. Just a Cambridge "Blue"—a mere athlete and engineer—my fiancé.

OSCAR [*Bowled over*]

Your fiancé? He doesn't seem so very "suppressed".

MARY

He wasn't! But last night, just like in Mrs. Meynell's wonderful sonnet, with the first dream that came with the first sleep, I ran, I ran, I was gathered to his heart.

OSCAR [*Recovering his grip*]

But you're not married yet! And even if you were, wasn't Beatrice married?

MARY

That's true.

OSCAR

And Dante was even more married than I—he had four children, whereas I have only four books. Spiritual love, you see, o'erleaps these fleshly futilities.

[Seizes her hands, which she "spiritually" surrenders to him, the spell renewed]

Marry, if you will, dear Mary, but why should a creature of your compass, born to inspire and console, be constricted to mere wifehood?

[A loud and characteristic rat-tat-tat.]

MARY *[Leaving her hands calmly in his grasp. Joyously]*

That's "big John's" knock! How fortunate! We can explain your idea at once!

OSCAR *[Breaking away, panic-stricken]*
To "big John"?

MARY
Didn't you say we moderns must be open?

OSCAR
Not with antediluvian athletes. Didn't you say he wasn't of *my* world? He wouldn't understand, and we moderns hate scenes.

[Rushes up staircase.]

MARY *[With encouraging naïveté]*
Yes, Dick's there!

OSCAR [*Rushing down*]

Damn! Well, I'll wait here.

[*Rushes behind screen. His head reappears round the side, and he whispers hurriedly*]

Open the door yourself—then you can get rid of him from the doorstep.

[*He rapidly lights a cigarette and disappears. MARY, still spell-bound, obediently opens the door and bars the way. Enter JOHN ASHLAR.*]

JOHN [*Vastly relieved*]

I told them you'd be here! O Mary, your mother's in an awful state about your disappearance—especially as there were blood-stains on your tablecloth!

MARY [*Hysterically*]

Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha!

JOHN [*Gravely*]

You mustn't laugh, dear. She had no idea you weren't there till she went up to fetch you down to me—coming on top of your yesterday's disappearance, it quite prostrated her. I had to 'phone to your father, though he was in the middle of a consultation And she had so jumped at my invitation to the Royal Society to-night.

MARY

She won't miss much—fleas and gyroscopes and those dull dams of yours.

JOHN

Yes, yes, darling, but why did you frighten her so?

MARY [*Swiftly, emotionally shaken by the conjunction of her two lovers*]

Why does she lock me in? Surely I know better than she what is good for me! As for her prostration, it's what they called the vapours—all the old novels are full of it—and due merely to this mewing up of women. Why, I read yesterday that in 1903 the percentage of girls who suffered from chlorosis was 8.5. Imagine—out of every hundred girls 8½ were chlorotic—even the other 91½ were erotic and neurotic and——

JOHN [*With gentle gravity*]

We won't argue now, dear—Sir William Wimple has been sent for. I'll take you home.

MARY

You can't!

JOHN

What do you mean? . . . Why are you alone?

MARY

I'm not alone. I'm waiting for Madame Moskowski. I'll explain another time.

[*Tries to shut door.*]

JOHN [*Putting his foot in door*]

What are you hiding? . . . Why, look, the place is on fire!

MARY [*Turning and perceiving a thin coil of cigarette smoke rising above the screen*]
Nonsense! That's only a cigarette.

JOHN [*Stepping across her resistance*]
But there's a man attached to it! I hear him breathing!

OSCAR [*Emerging with the courage of despair, cigarette in hand*]
I was taking that liberty!
[*Manœuvring cautiously towards door.*]

MARY [*Unperturbed*]
John, let me introduce Mr. Oscar Pleat.

JOHN [*Still more agitated and menacing*]
Oscar Pleat! The suppressed—? The All Souls Poet?

OSCAR [*With feigned nonchalance*]
How do you do? Yes, they did try to suppress me.
But,
[*Passing him, so as to get near the door*]
as you heard, I still breathe.

JOHN [*Striving for the same gentlemanly calm*]
And may I ask what you were doing behind the screen?

MARY
He was smoking. Didn't you see?

JOHN [*Roughly*]
Don't play the fool! Why were you concealing him?

MARY

Don't shout—we are not afraid of your antediluvian athletics. Oscar merely shrank from your society—you and he have nothing in common.

JOHN

Indeed! And what have *you* and he in common?

MARY

The world of poetry and dreams.

JOHN [*Wincing violently*]

Dreams? . . . Have you informed him that we are engaged?

MARY

I have, though the information was then confidential and is now inaccurate.

OSCAR [*More alarmed than ever at the glare with which JOHN receives this*]

Oh, please don't quarrel on my account. . . .

[*Edges still nearer the door*]

Say good-bye to Dick for me, won't you?

JOHN [*Dazed*]

Is Dick here?

OSCAR [*Opening the door with one hand behind him, while facing JOHN*]

He has been here all the time—just gone upstairs.

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JOHN [*Slowly*]
I beg your pardon then.

MARY
How dare you beg pardon? What does it matter if
Dick is or is not kept on the premises?

OSCAR [*About to escape*]
A rivederla!

MARY [*Rushing impulsively in his wake*]
You mustn't go, Oscar!
[MR. SUNDALE *in a top hat, with an unfurled
umbrella in his hand, appears in the doorway.*]

SUNDALE [*In awful tones*]
Oscar? Is this Oscar Pleat?

MARY [*Defiantly*]
Yes, father. The *verboten* Oscar!

SUNDALE
So it was to meet him you escaped?

MARY
Not altogether. Oscar, let me introduce——

SUNDALE
Silence! Mr. Pleat, if I find you again in my
daughter's society, you will feel my stick across your
shoulders.

OSCAR

I seem to have stumbled among savages.

[Dexterously glides out.]

MARY *[Trying to follow him]*

He is right!

SUNDALE *[Banging the door to]*

Sit down!

JOHN *[Trying to hand her to a chair]*

Calm yourself, Mary!

MARY

Don't touch me—you are a stranger.

[Turns on her father]

And if you lay a finger on Oscar——!

SUNDALE

I ought to have laid it on *you*. I told your mother so only yesterday. . . . She will explain to you about this *Pleatonic* Oscar as soon as she is well enough.

[MARY fretfully goes to the back and stares at the picture and the window.]

I ought to have warned *you*, John.

JOHN *[Half aside]*

Never mind me, sir. What does Sir William say?

SUNDALE

He's given her a prescription—he didn't forbid her going with you to-night.

[Turning on MARY]

You wretched child! Get into the car at once!

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MARY

I won't. I'm never coming home again. I shall live with Dick.

SUNDALE

You will come home this moment, and you will live with John the first moment possible.

MARY

Indeed! . . . So, John, despite my proviso of secrecy——

SUNDALE

John didn't blab. It was your brass ring. A man doesn't sport a brass ring unless he's a fool or a fiancé.

[Shouting fiercely upwards]

Dick! Where is Dick? Hallo there!

DICK

Hallo. Is that you, dad?

[Sound of unlocking and unbolting his bedroom door.]

SUNDALE

Why are you bolted in?

DICK *[Appearing]*

Is she gone, Mary?

MARY

Yes, no—that is——

SUNDALE

What's all this mystery? Come home at once—I've got the car.

DICK [*Descending slowly*]
If you'll excuse me to-night, dad. I really don't want
any dinner.

SUNDALE
Why not?

DICK
I'm going to be married.

SUNDALE
What!! To whom?

DICK
To—to Dolly.

SUNDALE
Not Dolly Wimple? Are you crazy?

MARY
Yes, dad, he's crazy for Dolly. And while they're on
their honeymoon I can be caretaker here—it's provi-
dential.

SUNDALE
Stop your babble. You know, Dick, why I——

DICK
Yes, father, but she's a glorious girl and she's quite
changed——

SUNDALE
You can't change a changeable person. I absolutely
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forbid it. And I warn you that your allowance stops immediately.

MARY

And hasn't Sir William got enough money? Why, he's killed so many people he ought to pay death duties!

DICK

Shut up! As if I'd take Dolly's money—or she her father's.

[With a brave smile]

It's all right, dad—there's heaps of money in these pictures. We shall pull through.

MARY

Bravo, Dick! Me they want to marry and you they forbid. Didn't I say, what *shall* we do with our parents?

DICK

But they're quite right—about you, I mean—you've got to marry John!

[Retreating up the stairs.]

MARY *[Staggering]*

O Dick. . . . I said heredity would get you!

[A loud rat-tat at studio-door]

Ah, at last! Come in!

[Enter MADAME MOSKOWSKI, a dashing lady of uncertain age and status, with a foreign accent and a nodding plume.]

FEODOSIA

Excuse dat I am late.

MARY

But you come at the right moment. We need a feminine influence—an arbitratress. Father, you have met Madame Moskowski—

SUNDALE [*Hat in hand, bowing and shaking hands with old-fashioned courtesy, vaguely embarrassed*]

Have I? How do you do? Capricious weather, isn't it?

FEODOSIA [*Beaming*]

But I adore caprice. And I adore your daughter. You are proud of her, is it not? It is so good of her to help me with your beautiful son.

[*Smiling up at DICK, to the amusement of MARY, who makes a facetious gesture in his direction. Then FEODOSIA goes left to JOHN, worshipfully*]

And dees, I suppose, is Mr. Oscar Pleat.

JOHN [*Bounding*]

Me?

DICK [*With a last flicker of malice*]

But, dad, don't you recognize *cook*?

SUNDALE

Cook!!! . . . John, will you kindly get this lady a taxi!

JOHN [*Hurrying out*]

With pleasure, sir!

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FEODOSIA [*Advancing on SUNDALE, who claps on his top hat*]

You chase me?

[*Turns frenziedly on MARY*]

Infamous infant, did you bring me here to insult me?

[*With a scornful snort sweeps out majestically.*]

MARY [*Rushing after her with a great romantic cry*]

Feodosia!

SUNDALE

Stop!

MARY [*At door, turning*]

I *will* stop—I'll stop *here*—I'll live with Dick!

[*Running upstairs.*]

DICK

Don't be silly!

[*Retreats and bangs and bolts his door.*]

MARY

Oh!!!

JOANNA [*Appearing at open door, pipe in mouth*]

Can I have my tea-cups, old man? . . .

[*Catching sight of the ultra-respectable stranger*]

Good lord!

[*Retreating*]

I beg your pardon!

MARY [*Now frenzied*]

Joanna! They're *all* against me.

[*Flinging herself desperately on JOANNA'S breast*]

I'm coming to live with you!

JOANNA

My dear—I've only got one room—and I'm just marrying again! Sorry!

[*Exit.*]

MARY

Gods and grasshoppers!

[*Crosses the room, laughing hysterically.*]

SUNDALE

Silence! So you've been consorting with our own cook!

MARY [*Turning to face him*]

We *must* make the world safe for Democracy!

SUNDALE

We *must* make the world safe for *Posterity!* And if you young know-nothings presume to run the world at your private whim, flouting the gathered experience of mankind, it's high time *we ancients* resumed the old parental discipline. Into the car with you!

MARY

To be driven where *you* please? No, thank you, I'll find a place of my own.

SUNDALE

Into the car, I tell you! There's no place like home!

MARY

I——

[*But it is the last splutter of revolt for the moment. Before his imperious eye her head falls, and with*

a little impotent cry and a stamp of her foot she shuffles out, with hanging head. Left alone, her father throws the umbrella he is holding in his right hand triumphantly forwards, catches it by the middle, then with his left hand he adjusts his top hat a shade rakishly on his head and follows her to the car. The CURTAIN falls.]

Act Three

[MRS. SUNDALE'S *Drawing-Room* about 10.30 p.m. the same day. Moonlight filters through chinks in the drawn blinds. The room is deserted. From the Square comes the muffled singing of a passing group as the curtain is rising:

“ My country, 'tis of thee,
Sweet land of liberty,
Of thee I sing——”

As the song trails away BEAMISH enters, switching on the lights. He carries a tray with sandwiches, a tantalus containing spirits, a syphon of soda-water and glasses. His expression grows doleful over the singing.]

BEAMISH [*Muttering to himself*]

Since they opened that boarding-house at No. 43, this Square is not what it was.

[SUNDALE *in evening jacket enters, a shade distractedly, pen in hand.*]

SUNDALE

Mrs. Sundale not home yet?

BEAMISH [*With faint surprise*]

Hardly half-past ten, Sir Robert. But her ladyship likes to linger here before retiring, so I'm putting her sandwiches here—and the etceteras for Mr. Ashlar.

SUNDALE

They'll have had refreshments at the Royal Society.
But I'll try one myself.

[*Puts down his pen and takes a sandwich*]

I hadn't much appetite at dinner.

BEAMISH [*Sympathetically*]

Under the circumstances——

SUNDALE [*Munching*]

Is she still hunger-striking?

BEAMISH

Miss Mary? Threw her supper out of the window.
Fell on an American gentleman from that new board-
ing house at No. 43.

SUNDALE

Good gracious! An international complication!

BEAMISH

The police called about it. We didn't like to disturb
you, sir, knowing how your work has already been
broken up to-day.

SUNDALE [*Resentfully*]

I expect I'll *have* to unlock her door!

BEAMISH

Yes, Sir Robert.

SUNDALE

Don't call me Sir Robert! It's not public yet.

BEAMISH

No, Sir Robert, Sir Sundale, Sir—— I was only trying to get my tongue used to it. My brother Septimus who was with dear Queen Alexandra said that weeks after good King Edward came to the throne, Her Majesty would keep saying “The Prince”.

SUNDALE

But I haven't even accepted yet—the children don't like it!

[BEAMISH *throws up his hands in horror at the young generation, FEODOSIA's flirtatious laugh comes from the passage*]

Cook not gone yet?

BEAMISH

We're doing our best, Sir Rob—— Mr. Sundale. But it's her—her gratitude! You see, sir, everybody who helps her to pack—male *or* female—she embraces. She's in the hall, waiting for the car to come home.

SUNDALE

But at this hour Jenkins won't like—can't you get her a taxi?

BEAMISH

It's the farewell embrace she's after.

SUNDALE

Eh?

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BEAMISH

She's easier to start than the car. The chauffeur isn't too late or the milkman too early.

SUNDALE

What a dangerous woman! And to think, Beamish, that Miss Mary nearly made a friend of her!

[A clamour begins in the Square]

What's that?

BEAMISH

Must be those Americans again. Our drinks seem to stir up their patriotism.

MARY *[Outside window]*

How dare you touch me?

SUNDALE

Good heavens, it's Mary!

[He hurries to the window and pulls up the blind and sash. MARY is revealed, tousled and flushed, addressing an unseen constable.]

MARY

And can't a girl climb down her own gutter-pipe?

[The clamour is renewed.]

POLICEMAN'S VOICE *[Outside, surlily]*

Move on! Move on!

SUNDALE *[Sticking his head out]*

It's all right, constable.

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POLICEMAN'S VOICE [*Outside*]

Yes, Sir Robert.

[SUNDALE *looks reproachfully at* BEAMISH, *who shamefacedly goes out*]

Pass along, pass along, please!

SUNDALE

You dreadful child! Why did you climb down?

MARY [*Half through window*]

Because *you* wouldn't climb down.

SUNDALE

Don't pun. Just when my Knighthood has leaked out, too! And throwing your supper on Americans!

MARY

I know they'd prefer cocktails.

[*Scrambling in.*]

SUNDALE

Can't you come in by the door?

MARY

Why are you so stuck on doors? When gliders develop, we'll be dropping in by the skylight.

[*Sits on the window-ledge.*]

SUNDALE

Maybe! But meantime to climb down gutter-pipes is prohibited.

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MARY

Show me the Statute!

SUNDALE [*Finishing his sandwich*]

You are an impossible child.

MARY

Yes, impossible to imprison—ha!

[Perceives sandwiches, makes a dart at them and takes a gigantic bite.]

SUNDALE

I thought you were hunger-striking!

MARY [*Speaking with full mouth*]

Only till I was free! I call it filthy treatment.

SUNDALE

Not as filthy as your hands.

MARY [*Glancing at them, then spirting the soda-water syphon over them and drying them on a serviette, all as she speaks*]

Why, dad, you're simply mediæval!

SUNDALE

So glad I'm only in the Middle Ages.

MARY

Who's punning now? You'll be a Judge, Darling!

[Munchingly]

One would think this was Turkey. . . . No, don't say it's ham!

[*Eating voraciously*]

But even Turkey has a constitution nowadays.

SUNDALE

You'll spoil yours if you gobble like that!

MARY

Laughter in Court. But we're not in the Dark Ages.

SUNDALE [*Seriously*]

You are, Mary! In the young ages! When one *is* in the dark!

MARY

Well, sentencing me to solitary confinement won't enlighten me. No, nor force me to marry John!

SUNDALE

We didn't mean to force John on you—only to separate you from that bounder, Pleat. Give me your word you'll never meet him again, and I give you the key of your room!

[*Holds up a Yale key.*]

MARY

Why, dad, you talk like Foch at Versailles. But I've got you beaten to a frazzle, Yale lock and all. I shall meet Oscar Pleat when and where I please.

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SUNDALE

So you informed your mother before we locked you in. I wish I had let her tell you what he really is. But you know we had had to call in Sir William, and I was afraid of the excitement for her.

MARY

I know what he is—a poet

[*Munchingly*]

high above the world of matter. And you—like John—are a Philistine.

SUNDALE [*Losing his temper*]

So was Delilah!

MARY [*Nearly choking with indignation and ham*]

Father!

SUNDALE [*More gently*]

Any woman who plays about between two men is a bit of a Delilah!

MARY

But I don't play about. One is brain and one is brawn. The trouble is, we modern women have a duality too subtle for the old-fashioned male! They're all rhinoceroses—or should it be rhinoceri?

SUNDALE

Neither—since it's Greek.

MARY

Then, understanding Greek, how comes it you don't understand Plato? You surely don't suppose my desire for Oscar is Platonic!

SUNDALE [*Dazed*]

Not Platonic? . . . I don't understand.

MARY

What did I say?

SUNDALE

You're a little muddle-head. Go up to your room!

MARY

Right-O!

[*Makes for the window.*]

SUNDALE

You're not going back by the gutter-pipe!

MARY

I did take a return ticket.

SUNDALE [*Following her in alarm as she is scrambling out*]

But Mary! You'll slip down into the gutter!

MARY [*Half through the window*]

" 'Tis from the gutter not the boudoir that one sees the stars." Oscar Pleat—*Meditations of a Modern.*

SUNDALE [*Throwing up the sponge*]

Here's the key!

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MARY [*Taking it sweetly*]
Thank you, dad. And my latch-key? . . . *I'm* Foch
now, father.

SUNDALE [*Half-smiling, despite himself*]
It's not in this coat. . . . But you shall have it.

MARY
Honour bright?

SUNDALE
Do you want it in writing?

MARY
No, thank you—no scraps of paper!
[*He goes to the door, now almost smiling*]
And there will be no reversal on appeal?

SUNDALE [*At door, laughingly*]
Good night.

MARY
Won't you want your pen?
[*Picks it up and hands it.*]

SUNDALE
Thank you, dear. And aren't you going to bed?

MARY
Not while there's a sandwich unswallowed. Good
night, dad. I foresee we shall be quite friends some
day. . . .
[*Munchingly*]

when you understand the new age and the modern woman!

SUNDALE

Good Lord!

[Exit. Door closes. MARY eats on, squirts herself out some soda-water, then her hand hovers with curiosity over the decanters.]

MARY

I wonder how they taste!

[The door comes cautiously ajar—FEODOSIA MOSKOWSKI peers in—elegantly attired as before, but holding a little bag in her hand in addition to the parasol.]

FEODOSIA *[Advancing]*

Marusha! . . . So you have escaped.

MARY

I'm so glad you've come. I wanted so much to apologize to you.

FEODOSIA *[Pushing her towards the couch]*

It was not your fault—I see that now. . . . But this is good-bye, *Marusha!*

MARY

Good-bye, Feodosia?

FEODOSIA

Your *bourgeoise* mother chase me—she prefer to pay me out for the whole month.

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MARY
But why?

FEODOSIA
Do I know? She is . . .
[Taps her forehead.]

MARY
No, no, Feodosia. She's not of the *intelligentsia* of course—look at the literature she reads—
[Points to the magazine with the flamboyant cover]
detective drivel! But she's quite sensible—except about me!

FEODOSIA [Shaking her head]
I tell you when I peeped through the keyhole of the nursery, I saw her stroking the mane of the rocking-horse and calling it Rumpelkin!

MARY
Rumpelkin?

FEODOSIA
And it is this creature you obey!

MARY [Dazed]
The rocking-horse?

FEODOSIA
Your mother! It is she who forbids you the Master!

MARY

But, Feodosia! Oscar and I are to meet this very night
in this very room!

FEODOSIA [*With breathless romanticism*]

To-night? But when?

MARY

At eleven—Browning calls it “ Meeting at Midnight ”
and Oscar wanted it then, but I didn’t like it so late,
and the house is always asleep by eleven.

FEODOSIA

He is coming to you! And you are not in *grande
toilette!*

MARY

I didn’t think of that!

FEODOSIA

But how, though in-locked, did you contrive to——?

MARY [*Laughingly*]

Before they got their Yale lock I got Oscar on the
'phone *in dad's own den!*

FEODOSIA

Bravissima!

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MARY [*Rhapsodically*]

“ A tap at the pane, the quick sharp scratch
And blue spurt of a lighted match.”

That's Browning.

FEODOSIA

Browning? But with us Browning is a revolver.

MARY

In England it's a poet. That's why I had to go down
the gutter-pipe.

FEODOSIA [*Puzzled*]

That's why?

MARY

How else could Oscar come tapping at the pane?
Poets can't climb—like Cambridge 'Blues'.

FEODOSIA

Ah, life and poesie, they are so often sundered—like
you and me! *Lubimaia!*

[*About to embrace her. The door opens and BEAMISH
appears.*]

BEAMISH [*Blandly*]

Your taxi is at the door!

FEODOSIA [*Disconcerted*]

Oh! But my luggage.

BEAMISH

All on.

[Maliciously]

Next to the driver.

FEODOSIA

Au revoir, Marusha! Good-bye, Mr. Beamish.

[Makes as if to embrace him—he retreats in alarm]

Breetish ice-block!

[Exit.]

BEAMISH *[Hissing as he follows her]*

Georgian ghoul!

MARY *[Murmuring dazedly]*

What an affectionate soul!

[Catches sight of her rumpled hair and begins to straighten it. A church clock begins to chime]

A quarter to eleven!

[Rushes out through the door, obviously to make her toilette, collides with BEAMISH, entering with a clean glass]

Sorry!

[BEAMISH silently repairs the disorders of the table, discovers and wipes up the mess on the floor made by MARY's spirting soda. Re-enter SUNDALE again with his pen.]

SUNDALE *[Almost apologetic]*

I thought I heard the car—

BEAMISH

No, sir, that was only the foreign female's taxi—
driving away.

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SUNDALE

Oh! . . . I'm glad Miss Mary has gone to bed.

BEAMISH

Yes, Sir Rob——. Yes, sir.

SUNDALE

I do think Sir William was unwise to let her go.

BEAMISH [*Puzzled*]

To let her go to bed?

SUNDALE [*Vaguely taking up the flamboyant magazine*]

What are you maundering about? *Mrs.* Sundale, I mean.

BEAMISH

Yes, sir.

SUNDALE [*Reading from the magazine*]

“The great detective gazed pitilessly at the dauntless duchess, then with a sudden swoop he slipped the iron bracelets over her manicured hands.” . . .

And without a warrant apparently, Beamish. Ah, if only these detectives knew a little law!

BEAMISH

Yes, sir.

[*A motor is heard coming up.*]

SUNDALE

Ah, there she is!

BEAMISH

No, sir, it's quite too early—that's only another taxi.

SUNDALE [*Agitated*]

But it's stopping here. Go and see what's the matter.

BEAMISH

Yes, sir.

[*Exit*]

[SUNDALE *nervously pours himself out some brandy and tosses it off. Re-enter BEAMISH.*]

BEAMISH

It's a person to see you, sir. Says it's most urgent, looks like a witness——

SUNDALE

Oh, but I can't see witnesses direct. Send him away!

BEAMISH

Yes, sir—but it looks more like a woman—Herzberg is the name it gives.

SUNDALE

Herzberg?

BEAMISH

Says you've been talking a lot on the 'phone with her.

SUNDALE

Oh! Joanna! *Glad Cucumbers!* Show her in.

BEAMISH [*Bewildered*]

Yes, Sir Robert.

[*Goes out a bit dazed.*]

SUNDALE

Whatever is the woman up to?

[*JOANNA appears, carrying a canvas. BEAMISH hovers curiously in the rear*]

SUNDALE [*Frigidly*]

How do you do?

[*Comes forward, embarrassed by the canvas*]

That will do, Beamish.

[*Exit BEAMISH. SUNDALE turns ferociously on JOANNA*]

You haven't brought the picture *here*?

JOANNA

I couldn't help it, Mr. Sundale.

SUNDALE

With my wife expected any moment! And the whole thing to be a secret between you and me!

JOANNA

I know, sir, but believe me . . .!

[*Exhibiting it*]

It's the Venetian Sonata—the Donkey Cart, I mean.

SUNDALE

Good heavens! What made you choose that?

JOANNA

You said I was to buy the one least likely to sell.

SUNDALE

Yes, but I particularly stipulated *you* should keep it. . . . That's what comes of my listening to your telephonic pleadings!

JOANNA

My pleadings? If your own heart hadn't backed them——!

SUNDALE

Well, of course, I couldn't let the quixotic young idiot be turned out of his studio just when he wanted to shelter the daughter of my oldest friend. Have a drink?

JOANNA

No, thank you. Don't mind a cigar, if you've got 'em strong.

SUNDALE

Here's one I never dared smoke—given me by an East Indian.

JOANNA

You're very kind.

[*They light up.*]

SUNDALE

And you really think Dolly will settle down.

JOANNA [*Puffing*]

Oh, the Mermaid's not so bad as she's painted.

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SUNDALE

Ha! Why didn't you buy that?

JOANNA

Dick wouldn't—nothing would tempt him.

SUNDALE

Good for Dick!

JOANNA

All the same, two hundred pounds for this was too much. It'll only make him extravagant. Already he's applied for a special licence.

SUNDALE

Well, time *is* of the essence, what? You're sure he hasn't a suspicion?

JOANNA

Not a ghost!

SUNDALE

And the dealer you got it through is reliable?

JOANNA

Absolutely! Why, he's the man for all the fake antiques.

SUNDALE [*Smiling grimly*]

Ha! Then it's only you that's failed me!

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JOANNA

But I nailed it up over my bed—I did, honestly—and then, as I say in my articles, a strange thing happened!

SUNDALE

The jerry-built wall crumbled.

JOANNA

Worse! My whole life crumbled.

SUNDALE

What?

JOANNA

Well, you see, sir, my fiancé dropped in to supper.

SUNDALE

Ah, yes, your third fiancé.

JOANNA

Not my third, Mr. Sundale. I've had two *husbands*, but my fiancés I have ceased to count.

SUNDALE [*Involuntarily*]

Good Lord!—What's the attraction? I beg your pardon.

JOANNA

You needn't.—You see, most elderly men need mothers, and somebody who can make a good cup of tea. And if ever a man needed both, that man was Stanley Morden.

SUNDALE

Stanley Morden! Not the R.A.?

JOANNA

Yes—the R.A.

SUNDALE

I congratulate you.

[*Pointing to his pet picture*]

That's one of his. A thousand guineas——

JOANNA

I can't congratulate *you*. You wouldn't get a thousand roubles for it now.

SUNDALE

What do you mean?

JOANNA

You try. That's where the whole trouble comes in. Poor Stanley didn't even tell me his real name till to-night. You see, I picked him up on the pavement—literally on the pavement—chalking babies and battle scenes and Lloyd George—with a crowd around and a hat for coppers!

SUNDALE

Good heavens! But what ruined him? Drink?

JOANNA

Drink? *Us!!*

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SUNDALE

You?

JOANNA

Us modern critics! We captured all the art columns, ousted all the old critics, boosted all the freak painters and sculptors—as for the R.A.'s, we never mentioned 'em. Within ten years most of 'em were down and out! So you can see why, when poor Stanley caught sight of *this* over his future bed—well, it's what these highbrows call a complex—he screamed I must choose between him and it.

SUNDALE

I see. But you don't really mean you critics have all that power?

JOANNA

It's print that does it.

SUNDALE

But if your theory is correct, how do you account for *Dick's* not selling? “Richard Sundale and Rubens” I seem to remember.

JOANNA

Ah! But as you just said, time is of the essence. Oscar only set the ball rolling when he got stuck on Mary!

SUNDALE [*Springing up*]

Monstrous! So Richard has to be a Rubens because Oscar is a rake!

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JOANNA [*Shrugging her shoulders*]
It's life. But Richard *may* be a bit of a Rubens, you know—remember the Mermaid.—That's why I didn't like to chop this up.

SUNDALE

But where the devil can I put it? I particularly don't want Mrs. Sundale to see it—she's not in the best of health—even the coal-cellar she's just filled up at summer prices.

BEAMISH [*From hall*]

But your father's *not* upstairs, Mr. Richard.

DICK [*Outside*]

Don't lie to me! I'm not a visitor.

SUNDALE [*Panic-stricken*]

Here's Dick! Take it away—quick!

[*JOANNA grasps the picture and rushes awkwardly doorwards.*]

SUNDALE

Why are you so stuck on doors?

[*Drags it back with her to the window and raises sash. A dazzling bull's-eye light flashes in. Disconcerted, SUNDALE commands his voice*]

Is that you, Constable?

POLICEMAN [*Outside*]

Yes, Sir Robert. After the crowd melted away, I noticed a swell hovering around—fancied he might be a Raffles.

SUNDALE

So even the police read detective literature.

POLICEMAN [*Outside*]

Must have some distraction. Good night, Sir Robert.

SUNDALE

Good night, Constable

[*Frenziedly closes the window*]

Cover it up!

JOANNA [*Frenziedly looking around for something*]

Why isn't there a fire?

SUNDALE [*In solemn despair, quoting*]

"The buried bubble is bursting"—Ha!

[*Perceives the couch*]

"Give it right of asylum!"

[*He and JOANNA shove it underneath the couch, though it still sticks out a little.*]

JOANNA [*Mechanically continuing the quotation*]

"O sunset!"

SUNDALE

"O saucepans!"

[*Wipes his brow.*]

DICK [*Furiously from the hall*]

Why didn't you say Father was downstairs?

[*They hastily sit on the couch, hiding the protrusion of the canvas with their legs, smoking their big cigars.*

DICK *bursts in, evidently a shade the worse for drink.*]

SUNDALE [*With false geniality*]
Hullo, Dick!—Rather late for *dinner*.

DICK
I told you I didn't want——. *You* here, Joanna?
I say, you two seem rather thick!

SUNDALE
So does your speech. I'm afraid, Comrade, you've
been at the vodka.

DICK
Had to treat the boys when I sold my picture.

SUNDALE
You've sold a picture! No?

DICK
Hoo! Hoo! Hoo! I knew I'd pull it off some day.
Sent me down from Oxford? Pooh! I'll show 'em.
And I'll show you, too, Joanna—the very picture you
guyed!

JOANNA
Not the Gondola? The Donkey Cart, I mean.

DICK
Yes, the Donkey Cart. Two hundred quid.

JOANNA }
SUNDALE } Two hundred quid!

DICK

And seventeen others like it lying around.—That's three thousand, four hundred pounds, not allowing for the rise in my prices. Where's your Stanley Morden now? I'm a gold-mine, I tell you! An oil-well, a——

SUNDALE

Sh! Walls have ears. And the income-tax commissioner——

DICK

Of course I'll pay super-tax.

[*Takes the whisky decanter, to pour out*]

Superman—super-tax!

SUNDALE [*Taking the bottle away*]

Superfluity! If you're thirsty, drink this.

[*Pours out soda.*]

DICK

I *am* thirsty—dam thirsty.

[*Drinks*]

But if you think I don't see through your plottings—what's Joanna doing here?

SUNDALE

Giving me lessons in *Glad Cucumbers*—you said I had to learn the language.

DICK

It won't wash, dad. You're bribing her to persuade

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me to chuck Dolly—I've caught you red-handed. But I've got ahead of you, hoo! hoo! hoo!—I've already applied for a special licence.

SUNDALE

So you're both determined to——?

DICK

Rather! Dolly's just been round to the studio, settling our plans.

JOANNA

Don't fib, Dick. Why, Dolly's gone to the Royal Society with her father and——

DICK

That's all you know. The old josser was called away in the middle of his dinner-party—to kill a Cabinet Minister—hoo! hoo!—and on her way to the soirée, Dolly found an excuse to dash in. Oh, she's a glorious creature—sparkling and free as a wave.

SUNDALE

So you said yesterday.

DICK

There's lots of things I said yesterday—have you found the answers yet? War for righteousness—war to end war—judging by results, hadn't you better try a war for wickedness next time? A war for autocracy?

[jumps up and moves towards his father]

But, of course, you won't own up, any of you. You'll never kiss Truth's toe.

SUNDALE [*Rising*]

The trouble is, Dick, Truth hasn't got anything so definite as a toe.

DICK

Hasn't it, by Jove! That toe is going to kick you all. Wait till the next elections! Do you know, the Premier's son is going to fight his father in his own constituency.

JOANNA [*Eagerly producing her fountain-pen*]

No?

SUNDALE

I daresay that's all exaggerated——

JOANNA

But it's a great story to boom. Great!

[*Scribbles feverishly*]

Hang it! My pen's run dry.

[*Looks at writing-table*]

Can I use your ink?

SUNDALE

By all means! How far that little bottle throws its booms. . . . So shines a good stunt in a naughty world. . . .

[*But as JOANNA has thus likewise left her section of the sofa uncovered, DICK now perceives the picture.*]

DICK

Hullo! What's this?

[*Pounces on it and begins dragging it out*]

SUNDALE

Let it be—it's mine.

[Tugging it back.]

DICK

You've been buying another Stanley Morden, and you're ashamed—hoo! hoo!

[In the tug-of-war he tugs it suddenly away from his father. As he turns it round, his boisterous laughter ceases suddenly, his face changes. He is quite sobered. There is a dramatic silence. Then in a broken voice]

It's rather decent of you, dad. . . . Good night.

SUNDALE *[Taking the picture and putting it behind the sofa]*

Good night, Dick. . . . I'm so sorry for you.

DICK *[Flaring up]*

Sorry for me, dad? She's a glorious girl!

JOANNA *[Patting his shoulder]*

So she is, Dick. . . . It'll all come right.

DICK *[Almost breaking down]*

Oh, Joanna, I wish you'd been my mother!

[Falls on sofa and sinks his head on her bosom]

JOANNA *[Extricating herself]*

Don't! You've hurt your father.

DICK *[Putting out his left hand to his father who takes it]*

I didn't mean it that way, dad.

SUNDALE

I know you didn't—I'm quite glad to think Joanna will be near you, keeping a motherly eye on you.

DICK

It's awfully—decent of you, dad.

[*Suppressing a sob*]

But I've got to stick it.

SUNDALE

Yes, you've got to stick it—unless she chucks *you*.

[*Patting DICK's back as the boy stands with bowed head*]

You see, my boy, *we* moderns are merely us ancients.

DICK [*Brokenly*]

Oh, dad, what grammar!

SUNDALE

All these theories of yours were tried out and turned down before grammar was invented. And if you *will* leave the high road of matrimony for the wilds of free love, well, you must expect tumbles into the old, old pits!

JOANNA

High road of matrimony, Mr. Sundale? As if it wasn't always *up* somewhere! You tumble into pits, anyhow. God knows why *I'm* always trying a new hubby—the triumph of hope over experience, I suppose, as Ben Jonson puts it.

SUNDALE

Dr. Johnson, surely!

JOANNA

It's *Ben* in my articles.

BEAMISH [*Announcing grandiosely*]

Sir William Wimple!

[Enter SIR WILLIAM, a whiskered, pompous, genial Victorian physician, in full evening dress, with white waistcoat and glittering stars and orders, opera hat in hand.]

SUNDALE [*Anxiously*]

Billy? What brings you again?

SIR WILLIAM WIMPLE

Considering my car passes your house on my way to the R.S. soirée, and I'm by myself——

SUNDALE [*Vaguely*]

Ah, yes.

SIR WILLIAM WIMPLE

You see, Dolly went on earlier with the others—I had a call to the Home Secretary in mid-dinner—appendicitis, probably—Oh, Bob, it's a dog's life! And to-morrow at ten I'm off to Bradford to my fussiest Duke. . . . Ah, that's Dick, isn't it? Dear me—how time flies! I haven't seen him since I cut out his tonsils.

[Moves towards DICK and says with bedside manner]

And how are we getting on?

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DICK

I don't miss 'em, thank you. . . . Let me introduce Joanna—Mrs. Herzberg.

SIR WILLIAM WIMPLE [*Embarrassed before this weird female, but bowing with his professional courteousness*]

Delighted!

JOANNA [*Removing her cigar to produce her fountain-pen*]

Oh, Sir William! It's been the dream of my life to meet you—not in bed, of course—as a patient, I mean. But the family histories you must know——!

[*Her pen almost palpitates in her hand.*]

SIR WILLIAM WIMPLE [*Flattered*]

Ha! Ha! Ha! Yes, I expect I know more about the inner history of our best families than anybody in London. As dear King Edward once said to me——

JOANNA [*Tensely*]

Yes, yes.

SUNDALE [*Produces his watch*]

You'll never get to the soirée, Billy—and I want a word with you about Kitty

[*Makes Sir William sit on a chair to the right*]

Another time, Mrs. Herzberg, another time.

JOANNA [*Disappointed*]

Oh! . . . But you, too—you must know lots of scandals.

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SUNDALE

Only professionally. And, of course, honour would forbid——

JOANNA

What! Is there still that old-fashioned etiquette?
. . . Well, well, live and learn.

[*Pockets her pen*]

Come along, Dick.

[*Takes his arm affectionately*]

Au revoir, Sir William.

SUNDALE

SIR WILLIAM WIMPLE } [*Eagerly*] *Au revoir!*
[*SUNDALE rings the bell for BEAMISH.*]

DICK

Good-bye, dad; good-bye, Sir William. I'll let you know the date of the—er witnessing.

SUNDALE

I'll be there. God bless you both.

[*Exeunt DICK and JOANNA.*]

SIR WILLIAM [*Staring after them*]

Why, Bob, Dick's not going to marry that—gargoyle!

SUNDALE

Of course not, Billy. Hoo! Hoo! Hoo! as Dick would say. . . . Good Lord! They've forgotten the donkey-cart.

[*Starts for door with the picture.*]

SIR WILLIAM [*Staring at it*]
That's a donkey-cart?

SUNDALE [*Turning*]
Can't you see?—
[*The outer door bangs.*]

SIR WILLIAM
I can see the donkey in the *artist*. . . .

SUNDALE
Nonsense—that fellow can really paint—even if he paints himself rather than the *thing*. Besides, he's done a Mermaid—
[*Stops abruptly*]
The fact is, we don't give the youngsters enough encouragement, Billy—we ought to meet 'em half way.

SIR WILLIAM
Half way? Why, that picture exhibits every sign of degenerative psychosis—it's an epileptoid, paranoietic—

SUNDALE
Stow that, Billy! I happen to know the chap's got grit. However, since you dislike it so—
[*Shoves it behind the sofa*]
After all, the young *must* make experiments.

SIR WILLIAM
I'd experiment 'em. It's these theories of yours that

are ruining Mary. Why, they tell me she goes about with that Oscar Pleat.

SUNDALE

Mary's got grit, too. For all her romantic flapdoodle! You can't Yale-lock the young generation—we muddled things—with our Great War and our Little Peace—and they know it, Billy.

SIR WILLIAM [*Hardly listening to views that contradict his own*]

Yale-lock! I'd strait-waistcoat 'em! Firmness—that's all they need. Look how I've brought up Dolly, though her poor mother died so soon! Never had to Yale-lock Dolly!

SUNDALE [*Despairingly shelving the subject*]
A whisky and soda?

SIR WILLIAM [*Waving it away*]

No time! Anyhow, if I were you, Bob, I'd keep an eye on Mary.

SUNDALE [*Exasperated to ironic laughter*]
Hoo! Hoo! Hoo!

SIR WILLIAM

All very well. But she loosed a Christian Science lady on me this afternoon. Ugh! As if a woman could bring forth a religion!

SUNDALE

She brought us all forth. Why, there's Christian

Science in your bedside manner, Billy—even your medicines are half Christian Science.

SIR WILLIAM [*Guffawing*]
Yes, the Science half. By the way, you won't forget to give Kitty that medicine to-night?

SUNDALE
No, indeed—I'm only too anxious—I put it on her bed-table.

SIR WILLIAM
You see, when you need Science——

SUNDALE [*Sitting*]
Yes, but I don't cling to it in *every* crisis. Look how it has looped-the-loop since we were boys at Oxford. Then, it was all atoms—now it's all electricity—positive and negative—not so positive, though, as you scientists—nor so negative. I'd just like to cross-examine you, Billy.

SIR WILLIAM
Better cross-examine the Creator, Bob—about earthquakes, for example.

SUNDALE [*Rising and looking towards window*]
Well, I think there's something splendid about the way He won't go into the box—just goes on giving us sunrises and sunsets and this lovely moonlight.

SIR WILLIAM

You're incorrigible! But Dolly will be panting for me. Good-bye, old man.

SUNDALE

Good-bye—Do you think you'll find Dolly in that crush?

SIR WILLIAM

I've only got to look for a clump of men—Ha! ha!—just as I can always spot that Oscar Pleat by the clump of women—He! he! he! Oh, by the way, the nurse will be here at 7.30 in the morning.

SUNDALE

The nurse?

SIR WILLIAM

Didn't I tell you? You see the result of switching me off realities!

SUNDALE

Kitty needs a nurse? Then why—?

SIR WILLIAM

Now, now, don't get excited. It's all right. Of course, if Mary were like Dolly, she'd be nurse enough—after such a little op.

SUNDALE

A little op.? Do you mean operation?

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SIR WILLIAM

Yes—our slang *is* funny, when you come to think of it. It's just a prophylactic op.—Precautionary, that means.

SUNDALE

I haven't forgotten my Greek. But what, in God's name, is it *for*?

SIR WILLIAM

That's for Sir Simeon Cass to say. We're lucky to get him. He'll be here at eight to-morrow.

SUNDALE

Good God! It has to be so soon?

SIR WILLIAM

Only because Sir Simeon's tied up for the next few days—and I'd like to be here too.

SUNDALE

You are lying to me!

SIR WILLIAM

Bob!

SUNDALE

Why must it be so early?

SIR WILLIAM

I told you my Bradford train went at ten.

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SUNDALE

Then it's *not*—dangerous?

SIR WILLIAM

Not at all—at least, in all probability—just a benign tumour.

SUNDALE [*Bitterly*]

Benign!

SIR WILLIAM

I said our slang was queer.

SUNDALE

Not so queer as your quibbles. If it's so "benign", why all this hurry?

SIR WILLIAM

But I've explained to you.

SUNDALE

Just what you haven't done! Why can't it wait until you get back?

SIR WILLIAM

With a panicky pair like you! I've never forgotten how you both nearly fainted when Dick's tonsils were cut. Why, your condition would react on Kitty, and by the time the moment came for the op., she'd be so scared, she'd be half-dead already.

SUNDALE

Then the mind *can* act on the body?

SIR WILLIAM

Of course! Look how *your* body's shaking, you old unbeliever!

SUNDALE

And Kitty—does *she* know of this “benignity”?

SIR WILLIAM

Of course not. She has to be kept happy and unaware—up to the last moment—then we must, of course, get her permission.

SUNDALE

And with *that* waiting for her, you let her go out!

SIR WILLIAM

Just why!—She'd set her heart on seeing John's irrigation models. In fact, I begin to think she's in love with him. You'd better look out!

SUNDALE

Don't try your soothing-syrup on me—I'm not a baby.

SIR WILLIAM

You're behaving like one. I tell you, if you can't get up a better phiz to greet her with, I won't answer for the consequences.

SUNDALE [*Moving restlessly and facing window*]

O God!

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SIR WILLIAM

What she must find when she comes home to-night is just everydayness—or rather everynightness—what President Harding called “*normalcy*”. Talk of our queer words, ha! ha!

[*His laugh suddenly stops as he perceives the change on SUNDALE'S face*]

What's up?

SUNDALE [*Staring at the window*]

Some one at the window—didn't you see?

SIR WILLIAM

I told you your nerves—pull yourself together, man.

SUNDALE

Yes, yes.

[*Passes hand over brow*]

But swear to me, Billy——

SIR WILLIAM

By what? It's a great inconvenience, I see, being an Atheist. But I give you my word of honour——

[*Clasps his hand*]

I'll tell you what I'll do, old man. I'll find John and give him a hint to get Kitty home at once—I know you won't be happy till you get her. No, don't ring—my car's at the door, and where my chauffeur is, there Beamish is gathered together—they're great gossips.

SUNDALE

Then send him in to me, won't you?

SIR WILLIAM

Certainly. But remember, normalcy's the word. Good-bye—till to-morrow, a quarter to eight. Normalcy! Ha! Ha! Ha!

[Exit, feigning laughter. SUNDALE stands as in a dream. The car is heard going off and BEAMISH enters.]

SUNDALE

Oh, Beamish—I shan't be going to court to-morrow, I must 'phone up both my juniors.

BEAMISH

Yes, Sir Robert—sir——!

SUNDALE

A nurse will be arriving at 7.30 in the morning. Tell the housekeeper to get a bedroom ready—without informing Mrs. Sundale.

BEAMISH [*Faltering*]

Yes, sir . . . I hope her ladyship—

SUNDALE

She has to have an operation.

BEAMISH

Oh, Sir Robert!

SUNDALE

Oh, a mere trifle—don't worry. And don't wait up any longer—I'll be around—and besides, Mrs. Sundale has a latchkey. Good night.

[Exit.]

BEAMISH

Good night, Sir Robert. Her poor ladyship!

[Tidies things, puts out the light, and exit. The room is now lit only as at first through the chinks in the blind. The church bell strikes eleven. MARY creeps in, beautiful in evening dress, illumined by the light from the hall. As she closes the door, and moves towards the window, she stumbles over the picture behind the couch.]

MARY

Damn! I thought I knew every inch.

[She switches on the lights and begins to examine her bruised knee. There is a tap at the window]

Ha! The tap!

[SHE glides romantically to it and lifts the blind and the sash]

Oscar!

OSCAR *[In a romantic but cautious whisper]*

Beatrice!

[She helps him in. He is in an elegant cape cloak, white waistcoat, gardenia, etc., with a thick protective stick]

MARY *[Imitating his whisper]*

Where's the match?

OSCAR

The match? You don't want to smoke now!

MARY

Surely you remember Browning? “A tap at the pane
and the quick, sharp scratch—”

[*Laughingly*]

Yes, I did give myself a quick, sharp scratch just now.

OSCAR [*In poetic horror*]

A scratch, Beatrice? Where?

MARY

Just by the sofa.

OSCAR

But I mean, where on Beatrice's precious body?

MARY

Oh, just on the knee.

OSCAR

If Dante could kiss the place and make it well!

MARY

As if Beatrice would snivel over a scratch!—But it
isn't Dante this reminds me of—it's Shakespeare—
the end of *The Merchant of Venice*, you remember.
Look!

[*She pulls up the blind fully.*]

OSCAR

Yes—“In such a night——” But we mustn't spoil
the moonlight!

[*Switches off the light.*]

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MARY [*Simply*]

But what I was thinking of was——

[*Directing his attention ecstatically to the firmament*]

“ Look how the floor of heaven
Is thick inlaid with patines of bright gold,
There’s not the smallest orb that thou behold’st
But in its motion——”

[*Gradually OSCAR’S arm has been stealing around her and now he completes the quotation.*]

OSCAR

“ Like an angel sings.”

[*He is just about to lay his face on the unconscious MARY’S when a great dazzle from the bull’s-eye of a lantern floods the window*]

Damn that bobby!

[*He pulls down the blind, leaving the room thus as dark as at the beginning.*]

MARY

But it’s too dark!

OSCAR

It’s in the dark that the soul sees clearest.

[*Seizes her.*]

MARY [*Resisting*]

No, no—not Platonic!

OSCAR

Yes, yes, Beatrice—Platonic!

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MARY [*Frenziedly*]

Let me go!

[There is the sound of a kiss, a cry of "Oh!" from MARY, who breaks away, switches on the light and is seen wiping her lips and hurrying to the door.]

OSCAR

Where are you going?

MARY

Anywhere!—Daddy was right.

[Opens door]

Ha! He's coming down.

OSCAR

And you, a modern, will tell him your affairs!

MARY

Of course not!

[Drops on a chair]

Only go!

[OSCAR takes his hat and stick and raises the blind. Again the bull's-eye of light flares in. He lowers the blind quickly.]

OSCAR [*Looking around like a beast at bay*]

Why haven't you got a screen? Ha!

[Thinks to get under couch. The picture impedes him]

Oh, hell!

MARY

You'd best sit down quietly—we moderns must be open.

OSCAR [*Wiping his brow*]

Yes, yes.

[*Sits uneasily, then seizes his stick and sits warily on the couch, grasping it. The door opens. SUNDALÉ drifts in like a sleep-walker.*]

SUNDALÉ

Oh, it's you, Mary! I thought by the light your mother was back.

[*Walks to window, draws curtain, peers out, then stares unseeingly at OSCAR, and drifts out, leaving the door ajar.*]

OSCAR [*In a whisper*]

He didn't notice me—it's providential!

MARY [*Her eyes following only her father*]

It's terrible! Something's happened to him.

[*OSCAR rushes again to the window and looks out.*]

OSCAR [*In low tones*]

That idiot has moved on! Good night, Beatrice.

[*In her concern at her father's dazed condition she utterly ignores him—he scrambles out and closes down the window. At the same moment SUNDALÉ drifts in again.*]

SUNDALÉ

What do you make the time, dear?

MARY

Only just eleven—— Why aren't you working?

SUNDALE [*Vaguely*]

I suppose I'm waiting for mother.

MARY

Is she out?

SUNDALE

Gallivanting with John. Didn't you know?

MARY

How should I when you lock——

[*With sudden intuitive terror*]

It's something about mother!

SUNDALE

Go to bed, dear: she has her latchkey.

MARY

I must know!—I will know.

SUNDALE

She's—she's to have an operation early to-morrow morning.

[*Drops on a chair by the table*]

She doesn't know it yet.

[*Breaks down*]

Oh, Kitty, Kitty!

MARY [*Flying to him*]

Dad! Dad!

SUNDALE

I felt so sure I'd go first. But perhaps that was selfish. What would she have done without me—with you and Dick to wrestle with, too?

MARY [*Struggling between remorse and self-righteousness*]

We've only stood up for what was right.

SUNDALE

Yes, but we weren't so responsible for what was wrong——

[*Waves his hands vaguely*]

We're all caught in a coil. You never understood your mother.

[*MARY opens her mouth to speak*]

Yes, I know. . . . She mayn't have thought Carlyle silly, but at least she loved you; sat up nights when you were ill, and then there was Rumpelkin.

MARY

The rocking-horse?

SUNDALE

Rocking-horse? I'm talking of Robbie.

MARY

Oh! Dick's elder brother who died.

SUNDALE

You say it glibly because to you it's all a shadow. You never realized what Robbie's death meant to her.

MARY

How could I realize what happened before I was born?

SUNDALE

Yes, so many things happened before you were born. Even before *I* was born. Even before the human race was born. But you thought you knew it all.

[She hangs her head]

And then the anxiety in the war as Dick grew nearer and nearer the fighting age—the fear Death might take him too. She didn't know that Life would take him, as it has taken you.

MARY

But it *hasn't* taken me. I shall never leave you now. I shall learn to do the cooking—I shall——

SUNDALE

Nonsense, child—it's only right you should go sunwards, with faith and hope of your own. Only do have a little charity for us as we go down to the dust.

MARY

But the dust isn't the end, daddy—it can't be the end.

SUNDALE *[Grimly]*

Do you know, I never realized your mother was getting old.

[The sound of a car is heard.]

MARY *[Wildly excited]*

Ah, there she is! Mother! Mother!

[Running doorwards.]

SUNDALE [*Stopping her*]
Where are you going?

MARY
To open the door—to——

SUNDALE [*Pulling her back*]
But you might kill her!

MARY
Kill her?

SUNDALE
Diminish her chances, anyhow. Sir William particularly said that none of us must make any change in our behaviour—that would make her suspect her danger. And after the way you talked to her this afternoon—!

MARY
You mean to say I mustn't let her know how sorry I am; how much I love her?

SUNDALE
Not till she comes to—*if* she comes to.

MARY [*Frenziedly*]
If? Then I may never——?

SUNDALE
Perhaps, dear, that is your punishment.

JOHN [*From outside, in hall*]
Thank you, Mrs. Sundale—I *will* come in for a moment.

SUNDALE

Sh! Not a word! Best sit where she won't notice you. Pretend to read something.

[Waves her into the settee corner, frenziedly thrusts the detective magazine into her hands. She peers creepily out from behind it during the next scene.]

MRS. SUNDALE *[Bursting in]*

Oh, Bob, it was lovely!—Such lots of people I knew—But you oughtn't to have neglected your work, waiting down here for me. There was Lady Leonard—and Gertrude Nixon—younger than ever, and Lord Dorman with his new fiancée—and such wonderful Rothschild fleas—and Sir William turned up, too, just as we were going—strutting about with his stars and looking for Dolly—I heard lots of people talking about John's dams—

[She has slipped off her wrap and now turns to JOHN]
How your ears must have tingled! And Maisie sent her love—now don't pretend you don't remember her. It was she who gave Rumpelkin the rocking-horse. . . . I suppose that was what set me thinking of Robbie all the way home.

SUNDALE *[Holding her wrap]*

Yes, dear, but you must be tired. Come along.

JOHN

But you'll be down again, sir? I want to talk to you.

SUNDALE

Oh yes, I'll be down—Help yourself, won't you?

[JOHN abstractedly toys with the tantalus, stealing sidelong looks at the apparently engrossed MARY]

MRS. SUNDALE [*Pausing near the door*]
You know, Bob, I've come to the conclusion you and I must go out more . . . we mope too much—we grow old before our time.

SUNDALE [*Gallantly*]
You'll never grow old, Kitty.
[*Then realizing the ominous significance of his words*]
Oh!

MRS. SUNDALE
There! I knew that that neuralgia would get you again. I told you to let Sir William overhaul you. And it's me you send him to . . . *me*, the rosy milkmaid! Do take care of yourself, dear; you know I'm so looking forward to seeing you wearing the sword. Wouldn't Robbie have loved to see it—he adored swords! Have you ordered your Court costume yet?

SUNDALE
Not yet, old lady—my lady, I should say.

MRS. SUNDALE [*Laughingly*]
And you never got a wig till *I* took it in hand——

SUNDALE
Or a wiggling. Come along.

MRS. SUNDALE [*Looking round for her magazine*]
Oh, but I *must* have my murder!

SUNDALE
It'll only excite you.

MRS. SUNDALE
But it's two days now I've been kept waiting. I'm
sure it can't be that poor Duchess—I shall sleep all the
better if . . .

[*Suddenly perceives MARY*]
Why, Mary's got it!

SUNDALE [*With feigned merriment*]
The murder's out!
[*Snatches magazine from MARY*]
Up you come, my lady.

MRS. SUNDALE [*Obstinate*]
But why is she here? Has she promised you—?

SUNDALE
Not yet—Come along.

MRS. SUNDALE
Then why did you let her out?

SUNDALE
I didn't. She slid down the gutter-pipe.

MRS. SUNDALE
In *that* frock!
[*Hurries to examine it*]
Oh, Mary!

SUNDALE

Never mind the frock now.

[Waves the magazine]

It's a lovely murder—the Duchess—

MRS. SUNDALE

But she *must* promise.

SUNDALE

Yes, yes. To-morrow.

MRS. SUNDALE *[Pushing past him]*

No. To-night! Mary, will you promise never to see Oscar Pleat again?

MARY *[Rising to rush to her mother, then struggling to repress her real emotions and to exhibit "normalcy"]*

I—I shall do as I please.

MRS. SUNDALE

Oh!

[Turns doorwards. SUNDALE, relieved the scene is over, follows her anxiously]

MARY *[Stretching out her arms yearningly. In a hoarse whisper]*

Mother!

[MRS. SUNDALE turns back hopefully—SUNDALE warningly waves his fist at MARY. Over-anxious to cover up her slip, MARY gasps out in heart-broken accents]

As I damn please.

MRS. SUNDALE [*In pained surprise*]

Mary, never speak to me like that again!

[*Sails out. SUNDALE, with a comforting wave of the hand to MARY, follows her out. MARY collapses on a chair, covers her face with her hands, and sobs*]

MARY

Oh, what a beast I am, what a wicked little beast!

JOHN

I quite agree.

MARY [*Fiercely*]

No, you don't! At least not for the right reason. I *had* to speak to her like that—so that she mightn't suspect her danger.

JOHN

But surely the danger is not great enough to warrant—

MARY

Not great enough? Oh, Mother! Mother! Thank God! Thank God!

JOHN

Now don't jump to the other extreme! Sir William's awfully sorry that in his anxiety for his old pal he made a bad psychological blunder in preparing him.

MARY [*Alarmed again*]

Then there is still a risk?

JOHN

Every operation carries *some* risk—and I can't say your behaviour has been calculated to diminish it.

MARY

I told you I was a wicked little beast. . . . And I've been wicked to you, too—spoiling your dams and things.

JOHN

You didn't succeed. The company won't release me. I sail on Saturday, as arranged.

MARY [*Blankly*]

Oh!

JOHN

You didn't suppose I'd let your people force you to marry me?

MARY [*Jumping up, fiercely*]

Force me? What do you think I'm made of? Putty? Why, I'd have married you whatever they said.

JOHN

You would?

MARY

When you came back, I mean—and I was grown up. . . . Only it's impossible now.

JOHN
Impossible, dear?
 [Tries to take her hand.]

MARY *[Snatching it away]*
Don't touch me! I'm a Delilah.

JOHN
My darling!

MARY *[Sobbingly]*
I let him in—Oscar Pleat—Only just now—He made
love to me.

JOHN
Oscar Pleat made love to you?
 [Hoarsely]
Platonically?

MARY *[Sobbing as she bows her head affirmatively]*
On the lips.

JOHN
The infernal blackguard! And what did you do?

MARY
What I just told Mummie—as I damn pleased!—I
packed him off forever! Ugh! *[She moves from him
towards the table, then turns]* So you see, you must
give me back my brass ring.

JOHN
Yes, I see.
 [Deftly slips it off his finger on to hers.]

MARY [*Dazed*]
What are you doing?

JOHN
Binding you to me, as I have always been bound to you.

MARY
Oh, John!—Rabbit!

JOHN
Mary—Roses!—
[He stoops to kiss her. She evades him]

MARY
Not now, dear—not now.
[Droops her head on his breast]
I want my mother! Oh, I want my mother!
[His arms go comfortingly round her]

CURTAIN.

Afterword to "We Moderns"

AFTER this Comedy of mine had been played in the United States I discovered, to my regret, that its title had already been used for a little book of brief essays that had previously run through an organ of the young generation in England. There is of course no copyright in book-titles—any more than in the "Madonna and Child" of the nomenclature of painting—and the difference of genres between the drama and the essay fortunately prevents any confusion between the two works. But I should like to make amends by recommending the volume of Essays, which is as brilliant and sane as the introduction to the American edition by the iconoclast Menken—whose Christian name, if he has one, I forget for the moment—is glittering and unbalanced.

At the same time it is a satisfaction to me that the other book exists, for its title completely demolishes the argument of the dramatic critic of the *London Times* which, as England is still too uncivilised to give authors the *droit de réponse*, refuses to insert this crushing refutation of his contention that our contemporaries would never speak of themselves as "we moderns", "any more than a Greek of the period of Pericles would call himself a Greek of the best period". In any case, Mr. Walkley—for the critique bears a Dickensian cliché and all the other stigmata of that genial *persifleur*—was guilty of a false analogy in comparing the consciousness of being the latest thing in Man with the consciousness of superiority—though, as a matter of

fact, both concepts tend to fuse, especially in America with its mechanical marvels unknown to Aristotle.

But it so happens that Pericles *did* consider himself "a Greek of the best period". I have not Thucydides even in English at the moment of writing (indeed, few books at all in this little-used niche of mine in London), but surely that famous speech over the heroes who fell for Attica—a speech, moreover, understood rather to have been handed down by tradition than invented by the historian—is full of the feeling that the fallen patriots *were* "Greeks of the best period". Surely Mr. Walkley cannot have forgotten that noble oration, surcharged with the consciousness of an Athens self-chosen for a loftier destiny than common cities, an Athens whose mighty monuments of power would be the wonder of that and succeeding ages. As for the feeling of being "a modern", it is at least implicit in every historian from Herodotus downward. I remember it even in Theocritus. Still more clearly did this chronological self-consciousness come to the front in the celebrated "Battle of the Books" when a considerable section of civilisation was sure that its literature was superior to that of the ancients. Even without going back to the Latin and Greek classics, we know how Voltaire considered Shakespeare a barbarian who had the misfortune to be born before the elegant age of Addison.

Another argument of Mr. Walkley's is, I am afraid, inspired more by anti-Semitism than by observation. For he recorded in his organ—whose thunder is perhaps less awe-inspiring to-day than in the pre-Northcliffe period—that the enthusiastic reception of

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We Moderns at its London première was due to the Jews present. Now Jews are present at every première—indeed, what theatre in the Western world could exist without them? But the statement that they, in any way, helped in the first-night success is part of the Jew-complex which rarely obsesses minds so free from simplicity as Mr. Walkley's. Jews raised no finger in New York to save this play from the mendacity of the local critics who were out to avenge—and prove—the statement I had made in the Town Hall of their curious city, that America's sense of public honour was inferior to England's. Moreover, but for my own financial fight, the play would not have survived its first fortnight in London.

The only consolation in the whole wretched business is the blow it gives to the legend of "The Elders of Zion", among whom I have the honour to be—for the Roman Catholic papers of Europe—one of the most sinister figures. Here is a play of mine produced in New York, with the largest Jewish population any city has ever held, not excluding Jerusalem at the height of its glory—and the Jewish theatre-proprietor and the Jewish public between them allow it to die in three weeks. And on this death the verdict can only be "murder". As one New York critic reported gleefully: "our cantankerous critic has brought upon himself his own punishment". And, indeed, to be torn to pieces by wild asses is no enviable doom.

Genuine failures are allowed to slip out quietly. But as if to put their motives beyond dispute, some of my critics devoted articles with big head-lines to the obsequies, full of indecent jubilation. Of course,

a play is delightfully easy to assassinate, especially in New York, where takings that would delight a London manager scarcely suffice to pay the rent of the theatre. The patriotic gunman, who poses as dramatic critic, runs no risk of exposure, for the corpse is spirited away, post-mortem investigation precluded, and any protest like the present can be safely interpreted as the natural vapourings of mortified vanity. O that mine adversary had written a play, the author of Job should have phrased it.

I do not assert that all the New York critics were out to kill: on the contrary, I am profoundly grateful to the magnanimous minority that acclaimed my work, and whose praise was maliciously suppressed or distorted by organs professing to summarize opinion. Nor do I object to the criticism of thinkers like Mr. Ludwig Lewisohn or Mr. John Corbin, who write like gentlemen, and whose world-vision differs so curiously from mine that they can honestly believe a story and characters in which I closely copied life to be utterly unreal. But I do resent Mr. Lewisohn's intolerant assumption that I—nay, that every thinker—must share his sex-view, and that I am sinning against my own light when I am doubting the quality of his. The romantic circles Mr. Lewisohn admires, I find heavy with heartbreak and egotism, emptier of moral beauty than even the spheres of the bourgeois. Every society has room for exceptions, and modern civilisation can afford a wider charter to supermen like Goethe or Victor Hugo who enrich the general life through or despite their personal adventures. But few people have sufficient love, pity, or understanding

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of life to be trusted to hew out paths of their own: and where even a Shelley failed, it is unlikely that "we moderns" will succeed, who, retaining no sense of the geniality and poetry that temper the tragedy of our existence, stigmatize every touch of tenderness as "syrupy". One hardly dares mention innocence or honour, or to remind our dramatic critics that the true domestic triangle is not husband, wife, lover, but husband, wife, child.

In this situation, where the pieties of optimism and orthodoxy have been replaced by an equally shallow heterodoxy of unchecked impulse and experiment, it was the object of my comedy to offer an eirenicon to the warring generations, to hold the balance between the old and the new, and to resolve the discord in the common pity and tragedy of life. So far from grasping my purpose, Mr. Lewisohn accused me of immoral artistry in trying "to discredit a good doctrine by having it practised by a rotter". But, as we have seen, even a Shelley's practice of Freeloze did not leave that "good doctrine" utterly undiscredited. But its apostle in my play was not painted as a rotter: merely as a logical observer of his own gospel.

Mr. Lewisohn is peculiarly incensed at my defining psycho-analysis as "indecent reduced to a science", and reminds me of Nietzsche's saying: "What Master has not been betrayed by his disciples?" But Freud set his disciples the example by betraying himself. He ruined a good case by obscene over-statement, and it was high time that the hose of fun should be turned on all the humourless heresiarchs who ravage the modern world.

In a recent editorial the *New York Times* pleaded with the Theatre Guild to revive that "masterpiece of our national drama", my *Children of the Ghetto*. No wonder that Mr. Tyler, its well-punished pioneer, wrote to the journal to remind it that in 1899 when he produced this "masterpiece" with a wonderful cast, only one critic had a good word for it. Possibly twenty-five years hence—when I shall be beyond caring—*We Moderns*, too, will have grown into a masterpiece. Meantime America is avenged: an American company has been robbed of its work, an American manager of his due reward, and the American public of a salutary entertainment.

But it must have been galling for the newspapers after announcing with abnormal attention and large headlines the "Death of *We Moderns*" to find that the death was largely exaggerated and to have to record the very next year in similar headlines "Colleen Moore returns from filming *We Moderns* in London".

Of this star of the film firmament I confess I had never heard, but when I had the pleasure of receiving her in London she seemed quite intelligent and ready to follow the spirit of the play. Undoubtedly there are in every play—that most concentrated form of narrative Art—certain pictorial possibilities. But in what shape the Colleen Moore film will emerge from its final revision at Hollywood, Heaven only knows. Nor would I have let it be filmed with so scanty a control had it not been to show the critics how impotent they are to kill anything that has within itself the seed of life. And this play has always had a popular appeal, though considered "highbrow" by the brain-

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less wealthy. True, my parlourmaid's brother, witnessing the opening scene, plaintively classed the work as "classical", whereas he preferred musical plays—knowing, apparently, no mean between the two—but even *he* thawed, I was informed, as it went on, and being an accountant, not a critic, ultimately proceeded to enjoy it.

And though he was ignorant of Mary's really "classical" quotations and of how an imaginative girl in her 'teens lives through literature rather than through crude experience, he was saved from the stupid idea of some critics that because Mary reads or writes Futurist verse and sees, like Dolly, worlds of moonshiny meaning in the planchette-born drivel of *Glad Cucumbers*—my quotations from which are infinitely less funny than the work which I drew on, and which has its adoring disciples even among otherwise gifted persons—my little heroine would have no acquaintance whatever with, nor ever quote from, such poets as Browning or Mrs. Meynell. Nor have my critics grasped that Dolly, not Mary, is the "Modern" who puts theories into practice, besides being far more intellectual than Mary.

It is true that in our turbulent and jazz-ridden age—partly through an insanely prolonged war involving as it did for the first time in modern history practically all the civilian population—the spiritual dykes slowly built up through the ages were swept away, so that the high hedonism of a Walter Pater (which even he would not have evolved had he been a Pater Familias) has sunk into a low heathenism. It is true, one type of modern girl would ride lightly over such unregarded

contingencies as a coming baby and would not hesitate at abortion with all its dangers. It is true that others would flaunt the baby like the white flower of a lawless life. But I, in my artistic freedom, did not select these types nor seek to cram every aspect of modernity into a play that already errs on the long side. As for birth control, now so popular, an unsophisticated elder generation does not always understand that the newer methods cannot begin until the first risk has been taken.

The fact is that civilisation, as Mr. Sundale points out, is a very complex affair, and the idea that immature and inexperienced youths and maidens can airily override the experience of the race—however that experience may be capable of further evolution—is a fallacy that has been foisted on the young by sundry eminent authors who write as they run. “The method of trial and error” which these writers commend as Nature’s, but from which Nature defends even chickens by the maternal cluck, is a method which can be consciously adopted only under severe limitations. Our very conventions are no less Nature’s. For, as Shakespeare reminds us,

Nature is made better by no mean . . .
But Nature makes that mean. Over that Art,
Which you say adds to Nature, is an Art
That Nature makes.

But how extraordinary are the blunders of even the ablest of critics! The vigorous and vivifying mentality of James Agate, for example, could actually conceive—and not a few parasitic critics have parroted this perversion of the obvious—that I expose Mrs. Sundale to

the necessity and risk of an operation as a *punishment* for her daughter's flightiness. I thought of eking out Mary's broken exclamation: "Then I may never——?" with the full statement of what was in her mind, but her meaning seemed so plain and simple and the aposiopesis so natural to her emotional state that, with the best will in the world, I finally decided I could not write down to critics. I must be content to be understood by the man in the street—provided, of course, that he comes into the theatre.

I. Z.

THE TEMPLE, LONDON,
Sunday, Oct. 11, 1925.

Appendix

AUTHOR-MANAGER!

Extracted from the London "Daily Express"
of September 10, 1925

Punch pictured me years ago as Lord Zion, and lately many have believed that I aimed to be King of Jerusalem, with the Arabs expelled. But that I should ever become manager of a West-End London theatre has never entered into the wildest dreams, my own included. My younger children, enamoured of Red Indians, and looking forward seriously to spending their adult years among them in some vast American forest, said to me recently: "Daddy, if your insomnia really prevents you ever writing again, we can offer you a post in our Indian encampment". But now I have found a more civilised job. It only remains for me to learn to smoke a big cigar like dear Dora Gregory in *We Moderns*, and to dig out the old fur coat in which I was cartooned a generation ago in an extinct rival of *Punch*, yclept *Moonshine*. But without the generous sympathy and co-operation of my landlord, Victor Sheridan, as well as that of a band of fine artists, eager to join with me in this joyous adventure, not even my fur coat would have sufficed to start me in my new rôle.

During my season at the Fortune I hope to give most of my plays by making the popular pay for the "highbrow". "Box-office draws" will play no part

in the casting. The Anglo-Saxon public has, unfortunately, no appreciation of the fine art of acting. For it "the play's the thing". The acting of Du Maurier should alone have carried Mr. Sutro's latest play; the marvellous performance of Mary Clare, not to mention the rest of the cast, should have saved the still more recent play of Messrs. Agate and Openshaw, admirable, despite a weak third act.

It is true, under the influence of mass-suggestion, the public that did not even understand French idolised Sarah Bernhardt when her powers had failed and she had literally one foot in the grave. But Duse, when in her prime, was brought over to America by my own manager, George C. Tyler, and almost ruined him. Her recent triumph there—that led so tragically to her death—was secured only by a gigantic and protracted stunt, though the cosmopolitan character of America now affords the actor a chance of appreciation, which is why so many of the greatest American actors are English.

For *our* public Rossetti's line, "Beauty like hers is genius", sums up its notion of histrionic talent—for actresses at least. The young actresses I "present", Miss Nancy Atkin, Miss Jane Bacon, and Miss May Grew, are fortunately beautiful enough, but they have also genius. But no lady at the Fortune will be allowed to dress above the station or the means of the characters she enacts, merely to afford luscious paragraphs to lady journalists.

The size of the stage luckily deprives our stage-rooms of their ridiculous spaciousness. The author, though heard, will never be seen, with the sole excep-

tion of his promised appearance at the hundredth performance of *We Moderns*.

At a period when plays are tried and cast out even in three days, and the cruel game of General Post has replaced the comparative stability of the past, I shall aim at creating a stable company of players, and dragging one theatre, at least, from under the unclean thumb of the syndicate.

Being a Jew, I am not out for money, as my fellow-member of the Dramatists' Club, Mr. Henry Arthur Jones, the top-lofty patriot of the famous letter to "My dear Wells", so brazenly confessed that *he* was, forgetting the pioneer labours of his youth, when he even wrote a blank verse play. The music of the generally mediocre orchestra will be replaced by the solos of Victor Benham, of whom our own Ernest Newman says—and the leading critics of Europe echo him—"His playing is the embodiment of all that is beautiful." The courtesy of the audience will be requested for silence in the entr'actes. There will be neither cuts nor gags, and the text of the play as published will be identical with the words spoken.

I have left the critics to the last because they are so irrelevant to art. They will be courteously invited, as usual, though I know they can as little destroy a play the public will like if the management gives it breathing time, as they can force upon the public what the public does not want. Honest and competent opinion I am prepared to learn from, though I have rarely met it.

Of *The Melting Pot*, for example, the *New York Times* said: "This play contains nothing to interest man, woman, or child, Jew, heathen, or

Christian". The curse, like that of the Jackdaw of Rheims in the *Ingoldsby Legends*, was so beautifully comprehensive that I have always remembered it. Yet this play—besides being immediately endorsed by President Roosevelt, who was present at the first performance and shouted boyishly at the end, "That's a great play, Mr. Zangwill, that's a great play!"—has given a sobriquet to America which has influenced her policy and been cited by every successive President. It has been filmed throughout the world. In its theatrical form it has been played in such different languages as Polish and American-Spanish. The manager of the greatest opera-house in Buenos Aires informed me in quaint English that he was happy, inasmuch as all Buenos Aires was coming to his theatre to see it; also that he would call on me in England in the spring. When I replied, expressing my pleasure, but hinting that it was not unusual to pay royalties, he faded out of my life. Even in book form *The Melting Pot* has steadily sold its thousands annually, especially in America.

Mr. Walkley, in the *London Times*, though he sometimes calls desperately for soul and imagination in the theatre, failed almost as badly as his colleague in the *Times* of New York. At that period—before the Great War—he, like Santayana, could see nothing in modern life but its comedy. Of life's tragic depths and grotesque possibilities he had no conception. Hence he could find nothing in *The Melting Pot* but melodrama. I analysed—quite respectfully and admiringly—his limitations in an appendix to the second edition of the book. That appendix has not

diminished Mr. Walkley's tendency to damn all my plays with faint praise, though nothing can diminish my respect for his humour and elegance of style, within the aforesaid "urban" limitations. Our temperaments are fundamentally in discord. I find the "sob-stuff" implicit in the *Times*' annual advertisements of sons who fell in the war nearer to normal life than the complex psychology of Proust's sodomite Marquis, which Mr. Walkley presses on the innocent readers of that mighty organ.

But, at least, he is not a brother-dramatist like most of the critics; for, if it is unfair to say, as Disraeli did, that "the critics are those who have failed in literature and art", it is at least true that most of our dramatic critics are those who have not yet failed in drama. A dramatic critic must, therefore, be either a rival, dishonest (consciously or subconsciously), or, if honest, handicapped by his own theory of what a play should be. It takes a very rare soul to be both creator and critic. And mark how these critics rend one another when any of them achieve production—unless one scratches another's back. But dog should not eat dog or even scratch him. I was amused the other day to read a dramatic critique in the *Nation*, which in less than one column damned Strachey, Galsworthy, and myself. How young the poor man must be, and how full his drawer of rejected plays!

I shall be my own producer, for not even Mr. Harrison Grey Fiske, the American producer of *We Moderns*, nor Mr. Robert Atkins, its English producer (not to mention the critics of either country) understood the ironic interweaving of motifs in the

second movement. My old friend Mr. Grein writes in his organ that the teeming nature of the play made his brain nearly burst. Poor dear Grein! A simple East-End girl writes me that she enjoyed every word of it and wished it longer. This is the trouble of having to criticise. One never surrenders oneself to simple enjoyment. Even my young friend Thomas Moulton writes me that the first two movements were "not too long but too rich". That sounds a more subtle criticism. But why should my audience not work its brains? As the sole financier of my season, I have no rooted objection to anybody's coming twice or even three times. Why must the critics refrain from studying and learning from me merely because I was born within sound of Bow Bells?

But I must not be unjust to the critics. My old schoolmaster told me that he was at the first night of *The Lady of Lyons*, but that Bulwer Lytton's name was suppressed till he had trapped the journals which were his political enemies into praising the play. There is no need of that to-day in England at least. The notices of *We Moderns* in the *Morning Post* and the *Daily Mail*, organs with whose politics I have little in common, were immeasurably better than those in the Jewish papers.—Yours fortunately,

ISRAEL ZANGWILL.



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