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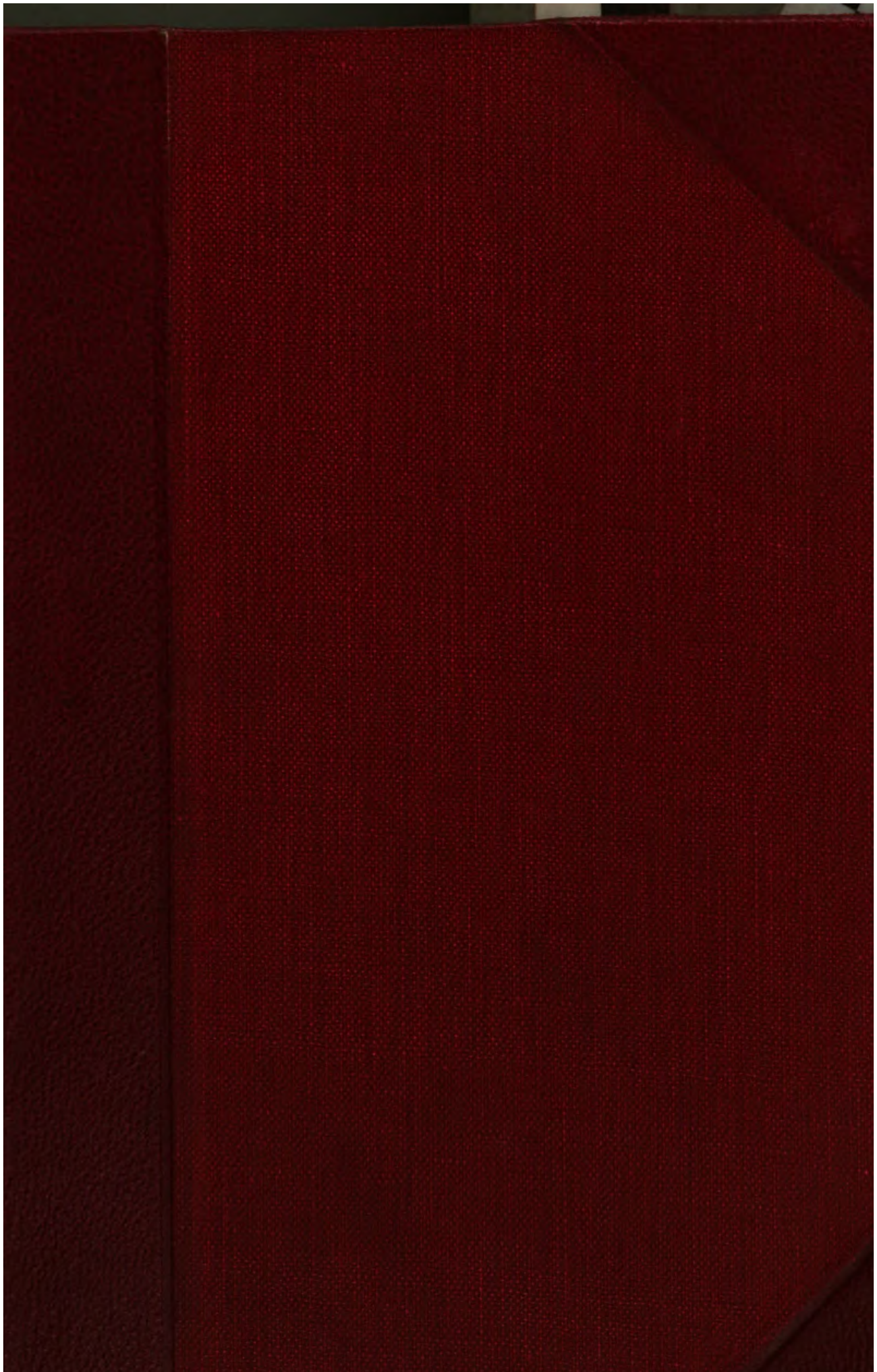
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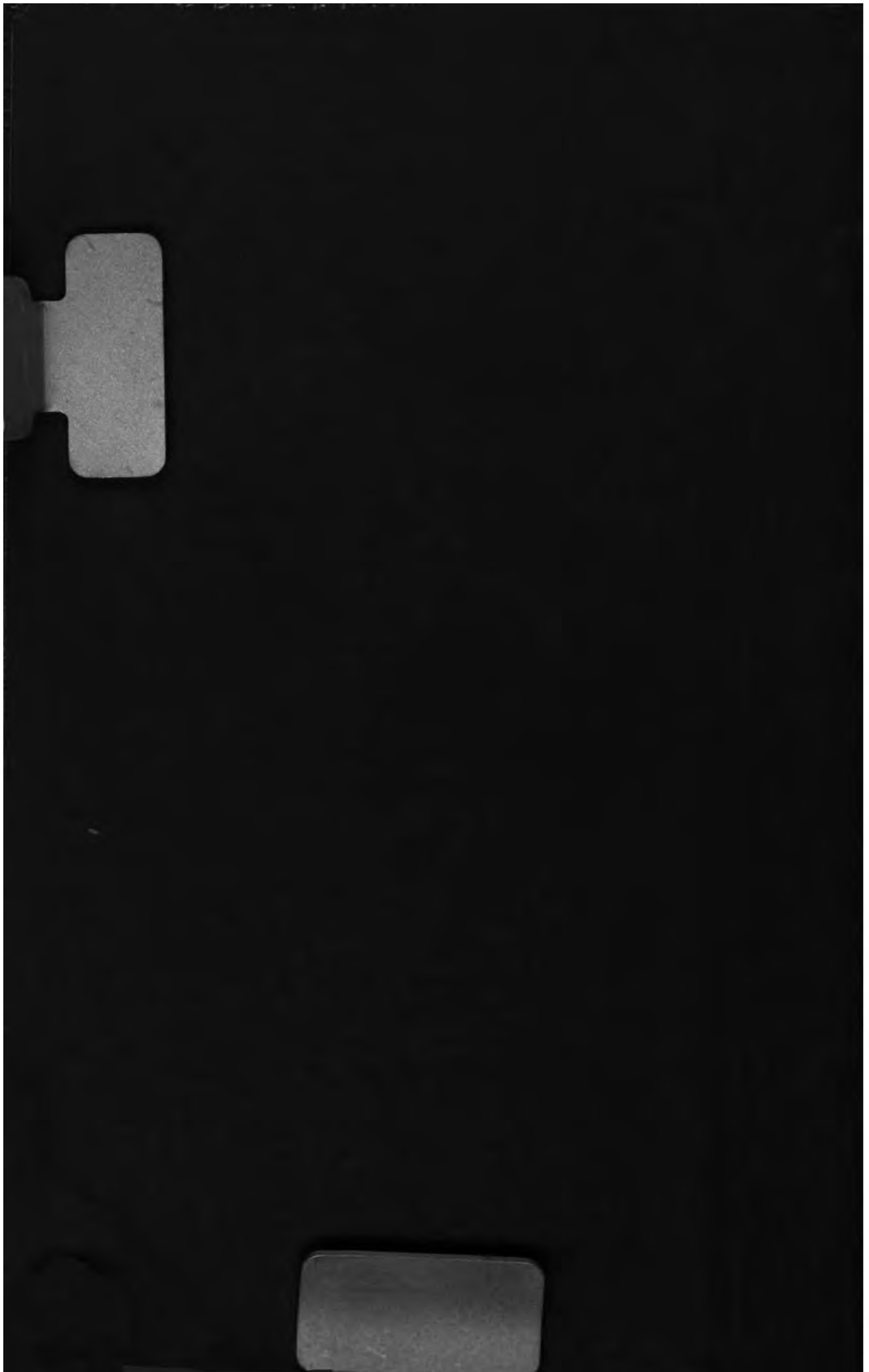
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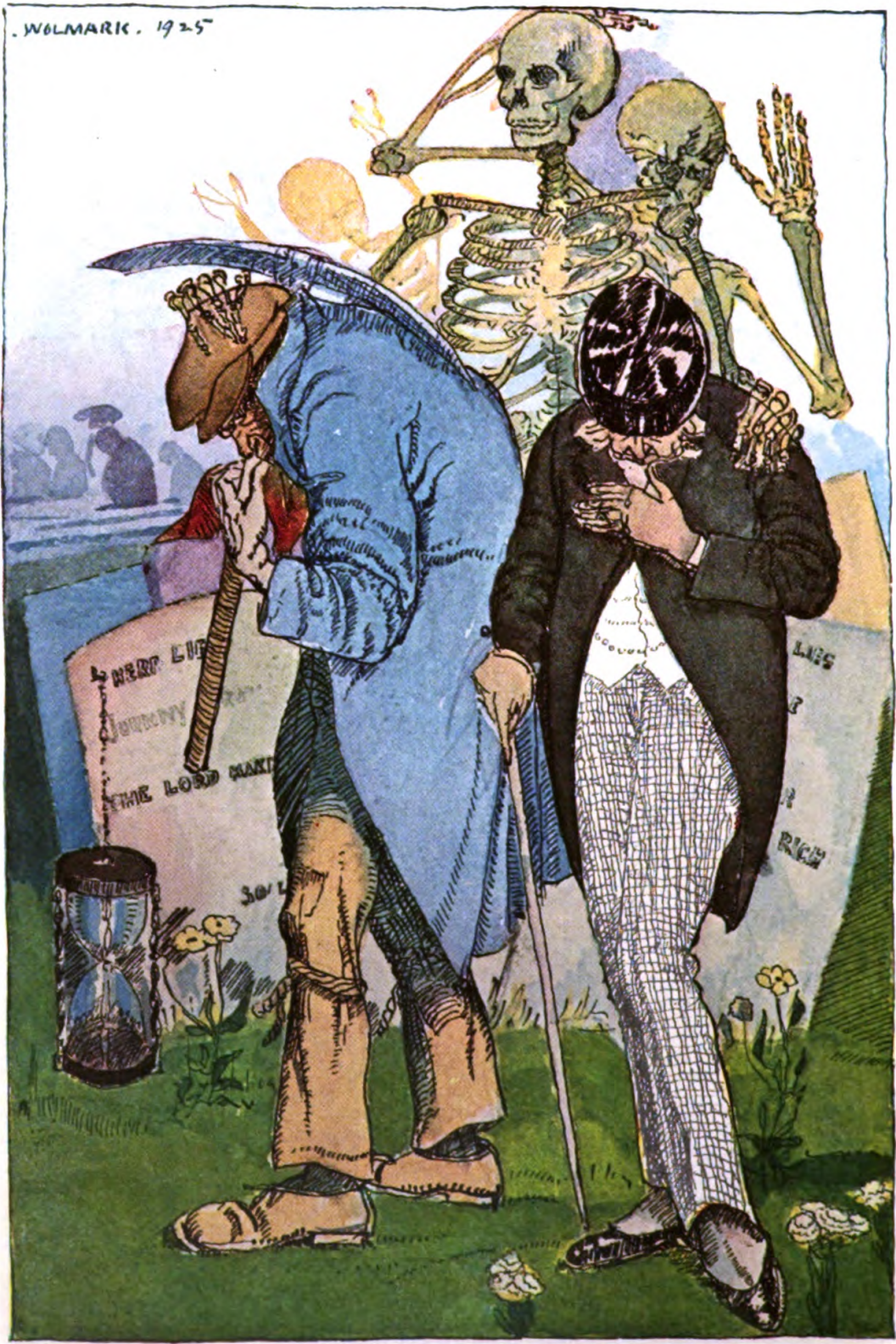
THE WORKS
OF
ISRAEL ZANGWILL

EDITION DE LUXE

VOL. XIV
THE FORCING HOUSE
WE MODERNS







Sir William Harcourt said "we are all Socialists now"

THE FORCING HOUSE

OR

THE COCKPIT CONTINUED

TRAGI-COMEDY IN FOUR ACTS

WE MODERNS

A COMEDY IN THREE MOVEMENTS

BY

ISRAEL ZANGWILL

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THE FORCING HOUSE

TO MAURICE MAETERLINCK

MY DEAR MAETERLINCK,—

The coincidence that this play was written in your neighbourhood, and that "The Cockpit" of which it is the sequel was dedicated to your first translator, our common friend, Sutro, suggests my inscribing it to the memory of the holiday month you and I spent together twenty years ago, tramping the delectable regions you have since chosen for your dwelling-place. In those sunlit winter walks, eternalised in your exquisite essay on "The Sources of Spring," a frequent theme of our discussions was the nature of Time. You in those days favoured a fixed Eternity in which the future already existed as much as the past, so that one could imagine going backwards or forwards in it: a conception since illustrated by the cinematograph. I on the other hand was all for the essential reality of Time, with an insistence that would now be called Bergsonian, and I would have none of the fatalism involved in your conception. A tramway-collision, immediately after one of these discussions, left me injured and you unhurt but the argument anent Fate unimpaired on either side. I could wish, however, that you had been in the right and that it were possible to go back in Time, to tread over again those rocky olive-green by-ways and track together the sources of our springtide.

The nature of the Drama was not, so far as I remember, ever debated with my fellow-Peripatetic. Possibly I acquiesced in the profound preface you had contributed to friend Sutro's first published play,

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“The Cave of Illusion,” in which you lamented that the decay of supernatural beliefs had robbed the dramatist of that background of depth, mystery and grandeur against which the figures of the classic tragedies had been set. Possibly I sympathised with the demand in your essay on *Le Tragique Quotidien* for a Drama of the Future, which should be almost a still-life drama: inasmuch as for us cultured moderns crude external violence had almost vanished from the planet, so that “we who lived far from blood and cries and swords,” whose “tears had become silent, invisible, almost spiritual,” felt on visiting a theatre, as if we were “passing some hours with our ancestors.” The Sage sitting by his lamp, a hand opening or closing a door, a ray of light through a casement, a shadow on a blind, these, you urged, were the only legitimate effects open to the modern dramatist, if his colour-scale was to be as subdued and subtle as life’s. Assuredly your own contributions to this quietist theatre — immortal creations like “L’Intruse” or “Intérieur”—had not disposed me to question its programme—would indeed you could “recapture that first fine careless rapture!” They may even have disposed me to accept the optimism of your subsequent essay on *Le Drame Moderne*, in which, anticipating a clarification of the human conscience and a broadening of human love, you looked forward to a theatre whence not only external violence but even ugly internal passions should be banished, “a theatre of peace, of beauty without tears.” Perhaps if I left that phase of serene faith unquestioned, it was because of your impatience with the scepticism of the race of Eccle-

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siastes. And yet it was the Pagan poet of an imperial people who saw that tears are not to be banished, that the texture of life, even at its peace-fullest, is irretrievably tragic: *sunt lachrymae rerum*.

Ten years after you had penned this dream of "a theatre without tears," your country was invaded. You had said that "violated virgins and imprisoned citizens" were but the outworn motifs of the obsolescent theatre of "blood, external tears and death." Alas, you now saw all Belgium as a violated virgin, your own tears fell over "ruins and sacrifices, nameless tortures and numberless dead," and in your philippic, "The Hour of Destiny," the whilom Pacifist philosopher urged revenge and destruction "root and branch," "even against our own sense of pity and generosity." I did not need your assurance to me that you had modified your view of the scope and function of the modern stage. Your play, "The Burgomaster of Stilemonde," was your own most eloquent comment on your early conception, if indeed "Monna Vanna" had not anticipated its awakening to the "external" world.

But what you had felt constructively as a poet, lesser souls had been feeling in their negative prosaic fashion. In an essay on "The War and the Drama," I pointed out that among our dramatic critics—drawn for the most part from the genteel circles of a sophisticated and pacific civilisation—a similar reaction against violence had taken place, if without the Maeterlinckian profundity. They had seen the drama become—in the Robertsonian theatre—a storm in a teacup. They had seen the disappearance of the

robustious actor and the growth of the natural, if not always audible, *jeune premier*. They believed—with that admirable light comedian, Sir Charles Hawtrey—that the day of the high tragedian was over, though he might linger on in those occasional galvanisations of Shakespeare which piety for the dead classics would continue to inspire. But, in truth, Shakespeare seemed as barbarous to them as he had seemed to Voltaire. In their ignorance of life, all the flamboyance of passion and colour, all the odd gleams of purity and beauty, all the pathos and grotesquerie that challenge the artist's eye from Clapham to Martaban, had ceased to exist for them when those things went out of fashion on the stage. All characters not common as city clerks were improbable; sentiments not expressed currently in drawing-rooms were fustian. They recognised comedy by soda-water syphons and cigarettes, and melodrama by pistols. That pistols might consist with comedy, or cigarettes with tragedy—even blank verse tragedy—they could not conceive.

But it was not a dramatic critic, it was a thinker—and no lesser thinker than George Santayana—who as late as 1913 complained, if not quite in the schoolboyish spirit of Stevenson and Henley yearning for bloodshed, that “the hue of daily adventure is dull . . . our bodies in this generation are generally safe and comfortable . . . the whole drift of things presents a huge good-natured comedy to the observer.”

Personally I was saved by my daily business of plucking Jews out of the pale of Christian massacre from regarding modern life as altogether “a huge

good-natured comedy." That generous spirit, Octave Mirbeau, who had hailed you as "The Belgian Shakespeare," gave in one of his books so heartrending an account of a pogrom in Russian Jewry, taken from the life—or should one say, the death?—that no Parisian critic had any excuse for thinking that the spectacle he beheld from his club window exhausted the contingencies of contemporary existence. There was in fact even before the war so much mass-tragedy in being—one need only mention the Congo or Armenian atrocities—that it should not have needed the explosion of Europe to confound Mr. Santayana's "observer." It should not have needed famine and pestilence, poison-gas and flame-propellers, cannibalism and the return of the wolf, the murder or exile of Emperors, the overthrow of dynasties and economic systems, to remind him over what a thin volcanic crust our "huge good-natured comedy" went a-tripping.

Yet even after all these experiences, so accustomed had our urban civilisation become to its drab surface and its shallow security, so set is the human mind, in which prepossession is nine points of the law, that despite the monstrous happenings in Ireland at this very moment, a drama holding up the mirror to natural phenomena of this order is still liable to be classed as "melodramatic." The word was recently applied by a critic to a revival of an old play of mine that had come straight out of the heart of my work for Jewish emigrants.

Not that my critic understood that "melodrama" taken literally is the art of Æschylus or Sophocles. He used the word in that debased sense which it had

acquired in our popular theatres, wherein strong situations are dissociated from psychology or probability, and life is distorted by sentimentality, and destiny moves—in a reversed Hellenic direction—to a happy matrimonial ending. These transpontine theatres had become the sole purveyors of the drama of violence, to them all strong situations had been surrendered, and their presentation of incidents cut off from character had led to the notion that what constituted melodrama was its situations. But if theatrical situations rooted in psychology be melodramatic, then those plays of Racine which the Comédie Française interprets with such impressive art, would have to come under the contemned label. There is an excellent word “dramatic” which seems to have gone quite out of fashion. It should surely be revived, for it covers ground otherwise undefined. The name of Sardou—that master of dramatic technique—is rarely mentioned nowadays without a sneer. I used to speak of him myself as a stage-carpenter. But closer acquaintance with his plays and especially with his prefaces has convinced me that, although he may have sometimes divorced incidents from their roots in psychology, he was as frequently dramatic in the best sense, and that his starting-point was not so much *une scène à faire* as a moral idea. His play with the unfortunately melodramatic title of *L’Affaire des Poisons*, contains one of the noblest characters and some of the finest scenes known to me in all drama. In conceiving the drama as primarily dramatic, Sardou was superbly right. The drama should be dramatic, just as the stage should be stagy. The

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obloquy attaching to staginess was originally aimed at its transference from the stage to real life. As dirt is matter in the wrong place, so staginess is manner in the wrong place. It is by a curious retroversion that censure is associated with staginess even in the right place. There was finality in the dictum of Goethe that we call Art Art because it is not Nature.

The fact that the drama is meant to be acted, places it in a specific category of Art, differentiates it from all other forms of literature, and removes it irrevocably from realism in any narrow sense. It must weave at once with a double thread a play as well as a story. Confined to a few feet of space, and a few hours of time, it must achieve a concentration and a tenseness undemanded of the novelist. Though the tension may be relaxed in comedy, in serious work a slackening is fatal. But to be serious about trifles is absurd, so that if strong passions and situations are withdrawn from the legitimate area of the dramatist's art, the drama proper must inevitably perish, and the comedian reign sole, "*vacuâ in aulâ.*"

So far, however, from such narrowing of the drama's scope being necessitated by the nature of our epoch, it is melodrama, almost in its popular signification, that the war has vindicated. Life, I sum up the lesson, is still heroic and vulgar in the grandiose old fashion. There are soldiers, not chocolate but iron, there are traitors and bullies. There are clamorous and riotous crowds that pillage and run amok, there are love-makings and clownings under the shadow of death, there are monstrous coincidences, impudently improbable. Even the spy does, it appears, really exist.

Nevertheless Heraclitus was right, and the same river never runs twice into the sea. The drama, if it is to go on holding "the mirror up to nature," must show the age its particular "form and pressure." It is clear that the author who assigned this function to the drama would not have been writing Shakespearean plays, had he lived to-day. The occasional exploitation of "the divine William" is less a sign of grace than of the dearth of a living poetic drama, and our stage, in which he alone represents high art, makes on me the effect which I have elsewhere compared to that of a savage dressed exclusively in a top hat. The safe and obvious resource of managements or actors aiming at classic rank or the reputation of culture, Shakespeare but serves to bar out still more effectually any attempt to replace or supplement his artistic convention, or to express, if I may misapply Whitman:

"Years of the modern, years of the unperformed."

As the Bible has become the enemy of religion, so is Shakespeare the enemy of the British drama.

How far the blame for the absence of a modern heroic drama is to be divided among dramatists, managers, critics and the public is a complex question. That the fault lies more with the managers than with the public may be seen from the steady success of high art at such a People's Theatre as the Old Vic. But the dramatists have also their share of responsibility. There is indeed, as Santayana complained in 1913, a decay of seriousness in all the arts which are—"like truant children who think their life will be glorious if

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they only run away and play for ever; no need is felt of a dominant ideal passion and theme, nor of any moral interest in the interpretation of nature." One can imagine that the war would not have lessened Santayana's sense of the need of an art not all play. It set M. Victor Giraud, the editor of the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, expressing this very demand for a "dominant ideal passion and theme," as well as a "moral interest." He echoed too your old cry for a modern framework. The war, he urged, with its great moral issues and its high fate-driven personages had provided the themes, it but remained for the modern dramatist to find the framework. With all respect, it seems to me that a modern picture is infinitely more important than a modern frame. Your new "internal" theatre may have needed a new framework and you found a beautiful one, but seeing that the old "external" theatre of violence must persist in the mirror of art, is it really necessary to look "behind the looking-glass"? Our Thomas Hardy invented for his epical drama of "The Dynasts" a new machinery of Spirits of Irony and Pity. But for all the conviction they carry, he might as well have reanimated the archangels of Milton. "Life itself," as I urged in the essay already cited, "offers every element of pathos and mystery, of horror and devilry, that poetic dignity demands. Out of the clash and conflict of the forces of life the modern dramatist may build a tragedy as noble and unadorned as a Doric temple rising 'twixt sea and sky on its rocky headland."

This present play makes, of course, no pretence to be that tragedy. It even labels itself a tragi-comedy.

Its order of architecture is Corinthian, not Doric, for it is difficult to handle in simple tragic outline a theme so complex, so bristling with contemporary questions and problems. The theme is at any rate immune from the danger of critical ignorance of its existence. "Bolshevism" indeed has become an obsession: it is one of those words which people put into their mouths to steal away their brains. That is why I have tabooed the word in my play. Socialism or Communism had been in the air all my lifetime and long before I was born. An infinity of treatises, novels, journals, plays and speeches in every language under the sun had dealt with it. I myself had weighed its pros and cons twelve years ago in my "Italian Fantasies." "We are all Socialists now," said that distinguished English statesman, Sir William Harcourt, who was already dead a decade before the war. Yet to-day Socialism sets the mouth of the world agape with horror as at some dread diabolical novelty fallen suddenly from the blue. Only less comic than this consternation of "the bourgeois" is the dismay of the Socialists, their haste to disavow their progeny.

For my own part, nothing that has happened has contradicted my published prevision of the course Socialism would run, and my handling of the theme dramatically would have been substantially the same had Russia been as imaginary a country as my Valdania, though I have, of course, profited by the Russian experience to add a concrete touch or two. There is, equally of course, no attempt to photograph facts and personages. The artist needs free elbow-room and must profit by his "poetic license." As

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Renan pointed out in the preface to his own play, *Le Prêtre de Nemi*, by the side of real history there is also ideal history which has not occurred literally, and yet is essentially a summary of historic realities. No less apposite is his remark in the same preface that it should be impossible to refute a thorough work of art, for "the other side of every thought ought to be indicated in it, so that the reader may seize at one glance the two opposite sides of which the truth is composed." The Jewish psychology of Trotsky offered a rich and tempting model, but it would have over-weighted the theme and I set him aside for a simpler type of leader. Moreover Russia is not the only country where the dread "new" disease has raged. The pioneer country seems to have been Mexico, and you may be interested to hear that the young man who took a snapshot of you, when you lunched with me at my hotel, was the son of the very President of Mexico in whose period of office "Bolshivism" broke out. Naturally he supplied me with vivid details of the movement that had ruined his family and made of him a precocious Conservative.

My Prologue is already too long, but looking over what I have written, I find a certain farcical futility in writing on the philosophic aspects of the theatre, when the main factor of that institution is economic. In a country where, despite Matthew Arnold, the theatre remains unorganised, where there is no care for art nor curiosity about life, can one erect a noble contemporary drama upon a paying basis? How far those cynics are right who reduce all history, however high-flown, to economics I will not pretend to determine. But the

economic basis of drama is unfortunately beyond question.

“The drama’s laws the drama’s patrons give,
And they who live to please must please to live.”

The Utilitarian Philosophy had a formula which might almost have been invented to express the secret of dramatic success. The play must produce “the greatest happiness of the greatest number.” It must express, therefore, the lowest common measure of culture, the most normal emotion and vision. Mr. Bernard Shaw, in his preface to one of his plays, calculates at seventy or a hundred thousand the number of patrons who must indirectly put their money together to enable a play to run. But in these days, when to score your century on the stage no longer demonstrates success but merely the avoidance of failure, a hundred thousand spectators will not carry you very long. And Mr. Shaw has omitted the most important item in the calculation. For “the first hundred thousand” must precipitate themselves in the first hundred days, nay, the signs of the rush must appear from the moment of production. “Delays are dangerous,” says Bacon. But in the theatre they are fatal. That leisurely respite during which the book may educate taste, win appreciation and gather momentum is impossible in a theatre, where at least a hundred pounds are oozing away every evening. Thus the herd mind must not only find itself mirrored in the play, it must discover this at once and be drawn theatrewards, “as the deer breaks, as the steer breaks.”

Hitherto London managements have been prepared to accept moderate houses all the week, provided they could rely on "bumper houses" at the two Saturday performances. But it now appears from an interview with a manager that, by reason of the rising prices, a play will have to be withdrawn, unless at every performance it can "play to capacity." The gravity of this situation is obvious. It lowers still further the quality by extending the quantity of spectators necessary to make ends meet. And if relief is sought in higher prices, the public may be still more driven to the cinema, with its smaller demand on the pocket as on the brain. Between this Scylla and Charybdis the finer forms of drama must surely suffer shipwreck.

Shakespeare said "all the world's a stage." It is a pity he spoiled the profundity of the remark by detailing the sense in which he meant it. It is in the social comedy that men and women are "merely players." (Shakespeare should have written "players" in Greek—"hypocrites" to wit.) And the players themselves, being merely men and women, are equally compelled to the hypocrisy of life. The theatre's form of the social comedy is to run a business under the guise of an art. In his green-room slang, the actor has always called his play-house a "shop." He should now call it a gambling-house. For it is no longer run even as an industry, but persists by a perpetual change of ruined speculators, lured on by the dazzle of the few lucky punters. Save in two or three theatres, in which the presence of an actor-manager or an ambitious tyro gives a certain constancy, there is no

stage in London whose fare is fixed, still less does any exist constituted to receive such pieces as "The Forcing House." In your timeless Eternity it may, for aught I know, be already in performance—even on the films—but it was assuredly not inspired by any hopes of gold or glory from the contemporary stage.

And yet it was not designed any the more for a "closet drama." But fortunately the dual nature of the drama, which can exist without actors, though the actors cannot exist without it, makes it possible for a drama written expressly for ultimate or posthumous performance, to enjoy a sufficient life in its literary embodiment—or disembodiment. Through this medium I have had almost as much pleasure from Mr. Drinkwater's "Oliver Cromwell"—a play that, I am sure, will pay when some manager with boldness and brains arises—as from an actual performance. In reading French plays—those of François de Curel for example—I have enjoyed myself more than at most French theatres, and without the drawbacks of the journey, the price of a stall, or the elderly French harpies. The concentration of life, which is drama, the rapidity with which one arrives at the essence of the situation, is infinitely exhilarating after the average novel, especially to one who can read a play as a musician reads a score—and for those who cannot, it should be eked out by stage directions and descriptions, first found, I believe, in the published plays of Oscar Wilde.

The practice of publishing new plays is growing in England and contributing by reflex action to the elevation of our literary standard of drama, already

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improved by the accession to the theatre of almost all our men of letters (though they give it only their second-best). "I always say to dramatists, publish your play," Henry James observed to me once. "Publish your play if you are not ashamed of it. Let us see what your success looks like in cold print." The practice was indeed dismally discouraged by the Press, for, while the author was hoping to bring his work before a higher and more leisured court than the bench of dramatic criticism, he found his book almost invariably dismissed with the words: "Text of the play produced at the so-and-so Theatre." You could not even "publish and be damned." If, on the other hand, the play had not been produced, it might not be noticed at all. "The published play seems to be the Cinderella of literature," a boycotted dramatist lamented. He must have forgotten Cinderella's ultimate fate.

But even for the non-production of a play on the stage there is ample compensation. I am not thinking of the freedom from stage censorship, for the thought of the Lord Chamberlain, though he still keeps a play of mine under embargo, has never hampered my pen in the faintest. Nor have I in mind the inevitable materialisation and refraction which made Charles Lamb prefer Shakespeare unstaged, and impaired for me the charm of your own "Blue Bird." No, the compensation is physiological. For while play-writing, despite all the pains of parturition, is life-enhancing, play-producing is life-destroying. Business managers were sufficiently katabolic, but no self-respecting man of letters can have truck with mere

gamblers. Even contact with one's actors, delightful as they can be, and much as they may vivify one's work, is not conducive to longevity. My youthful epigram that for the actor, despite Euclid, the part is greater than the whole, has had a flattering currency. But it has not changed the player's psychology. Even such a lord of the European stage as the author of "Pygmalion"—we gather from a managerial indiscretion—has not been spared desperate combats with his leading lady. Whether under the Socialism he favours he will be able to tame his tigress, or whether he himself will find his own claws pared, is an interesting speculation, with which I ring up the curtain on this tragi-comedy of Communism.

Commending it to your gracious mercies and hoping that my association of it with your name will not tend to diminish your friendship,

I am,

Cordially yours,

ISRAEL ZANGWILL.

Midsummer, 1922.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ:

RIFFONI VITTORIO	. . .	<i>A Socialist</i>
PROFESSOR SALARET	. . .	<i>A Socialist Writer</i>
COUNT CAZOTTI	. . .	<i>Prime Minister of Valdania</i>
BARON GRIPSTEIN	. . .	<i>A Financier</i>
DUKE D'AZOLLO	. . .	<i>Formerly Ex-Regent of Valdania</i>
MARSHAL ROXO	. . .	<i>Ex-War Minister</i>
COLONEL MOLP	. . .	<i>Head of the Royal Body-Guard</i>
CORPORAL VANNI	. . .	<i>Of the Palace Guards</i>
BRIO	. . .	<i>Gripstein's Majordomo</i>
OMAR	. . .	<i>Gripstein's Doorkeeper</i>
MARGHERITA	. . .	<i>Queen of Valdania</i>
LIVIA (BARONESS SIGISMONDO GRIPSTEIN)	. . .	<i>Gripstein's Daughter-in-Law</i>
SIGNORA DA GRASSO	. . .	<i>Wife of a Valdanian Landowner</i>
COUNTESS CAZOTTI	. . .	<i>Wife of the Prime Minister</i>

Guests, Lackeys and Guards

The action passes in our day at Scaletta, the capital of Valdania.

ACT I. in Baroness Gripstein's salon, ACTS II., III. and IV. in the former Throne Room of the old San Marco Palace.

(In the description of scenes, R. and L. stand for Right and Left of the actor, not the spectator, from whose point of view they can be read transposed.)

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THE FORCING HOUSE

Act One

[*The scene is a salon in BARON GRIPSTEIN'S house at Scaletta, the capital of Valdania, on a spring evening. The room has been made by dividing and partly modernising a vast ancient banqueting hall, the unseen portion of which, behind modern folding doors in the rear wall, constitutes the dining-room. The furniture is massive, and there are tapestries and old oil-portraits and religious pictures, but the mediæval gloom, which the electric candles in sconces cannot quite dissipate, is dispelled by the masses of hot-house roses in the great old vases. In the lower part of the left wall is a tall Gothic leaden-paned casement with a cushioned seat, opening on the courtyard. The original old doors, oaken and brass-studded, are in the centre of the right and the upper part of the left wall. OMAR, the Moslem doorkeeper, clad in fez and robes, is going out obsequiously L., when he is recalled by the magnificent majordomo, BRIO, who, attired in Western evening dress, is holding in his white-gloved hand a menu and a music-programme, both printed on satin.*]

BRIO

Wait, Omar. I forgot to explain to you that when Her Majesty arrives, she cannot be left like the other

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guests to come upstairs of herself. The Baron must be already below to welcome her. And the Baroness Sigismondo, too, of course, since she is acting as hostess for her father-in-law. See that you warn them in time.

OMAR

But how, Signor Brio, shall I know when Her Majesty is arriving? I am not a prophet of Allah.

BRIO

A gendarme from the courtyard must apprise you.

OMAR

It is a word of wisdom. But would wisdom had inspired Colonel Molp to plant more gendarmes! Already the courtyard is invaded and the carpet and the awning are besieged by a godless crowd.

BRIO

Not so godless, Omar. Open that window and you will hear them crying out against the Jew's presumption in entertaining the Queen of Valdania.

OMAR [*Firing up*]

It is their own presumption, if you will forgive mine, Signor Brio. Since it pleases Her Majesty to honour our master. . . .

BRIO [*With a wry face*]

Our *master!* Well, well, these are hard times, Omar. But what need was there for the Queen to stoop, too?

However, I see you Moslems are at heart more for the Jews than for us Christians.

OMAR

It is only Her Majesty that I have at heart, Signor Brio.

[The handle of the door R. of the men turns.]

BRIO

Hush! To your duties.

[As OMAR goes out by the door L. BARON GRIPSTEIN enters by the door R. This florid but white-haired and sympathetic personage of Semitic appearance is dressed for dinner and wears the sash of the Order of the Redeemer. HE has at this moment a nervous, even fussy, air.]

BARON GRIPSTEIN

The Baroness Sigismondo not down yet, Brio?

BRIO

It is much too early, Excellency.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

Not on an occasion like this. Ha! Is that the menu?

BRIO *[Giving him the satin sheets]*

This is the menu, and this the music-programme.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

Debussy, Strauss, Wagner—but there's not a single one of the Queen's compositions!

BRIO

Baroness Sigismondo's orders, Excellency. Her Majesty dislikes hearing her own compositions except accidentally.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

Ah, if my daughter-in-law arranged it——!

[*Returns programme*]

Who painted this menu?

BRIO

Klingermann, Excellency.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

But he's a German artist, not a Valdanian.

BRIO

There were not enough first-class native artists to go round. I consulted the Baroness. Your Excellency was so busy with the Bosnavinian Loan.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

But Klingermann is even a Jew! I shall be accused of patronising Jews! . . . Her Majesty's menu—that at least is Valdanian?

BRIO

By Delsio!

[*Apologetically*]

But I had to pay him two thousand lire.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

Bravo!

BRIO

It is a water-colour of the Valley of the Vaar.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

In Bosnavina? But the Queen dislikes any reminder that she is Duchess of Bosnavina! She hates our having seized our neighbour's territory, and she regarded Governor Marrobio's assassination by a Bosnavinian patriot as a righteous nemesis.

BRIO

It is a womanly weakness one does not take seriously, Excellency.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

One takes it so seriously, Brio, that the Bosnavinian Loan was designed by Cazotti as much to pacify Her Majesty as Bosnavina. And it is wonderful how the inflow of capital is already quenching the ardour of Bosnavinian patriotism. In vain Rolmenia will now throw oil on the flame. Ah, Cazotti is a wonderful statesman. Don't you think so, Brio?

BRIO

It is wonderful how he is always Prime Minister!

BARON GRIPSTEIN

Ah, I see you do not share my enthusiasm. But opinion is free in Valdania—thanks to Cazotti again. I suspect you heard him slandered in the circles from which I took you.

BRIO

They said he began on a tub and would end on the throne.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

That sounds like the Duke D'Azollo. But his only tub was his journal, and considering it was he who set the Queen on the throne——!

BRIO

There are stories, Excellency, that he could not help himself; that so far from his having saved her from her mother's fate by bringing her up in a Roman convent, the princess was really discovered by Roxo in America!

BARON GRIPSTEIN

Really, really, how the ducal circle can fabricate such myths or you swallow them——!

[With sudden agitation]

Why is there no ham on the menu? I particularly said——

BRIO

There is, Excellency. With the madeira. The eleventh course before the sorbet.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

Oh, ah! I beg your pardon. But it is so unobtrusive. Ha! So you did get enough early strawberries!

BRIO

But they made me pay through the nose, those Jew monopolists——

[Stops and coughs confusedly.]

BARON GRIPSTEIN

Business is business, Brio. We Valdanians are too hard on the Jews. The Queen loves strawberries and the Comptroller can't afford them yet for the royal table.

BRIO

And yet your Excellency admires Cazotti! Surely he ought to allow Her Majesty more money.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

Impossible with out post-war taxation. It would set all the Socialists shrieking. . . . I am glad to find *you're* not a Socialist, Brio.

BRIO

I? I would smoke them out like wasps.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

That's Marshal Roxo's recipe. But these drastic methods are incompatible with democracy.

[Handing back the menu]

See that this Klingermann menu is put in *my* place. And give the Valley of the Vaar sketch not to the Queen but to Marshal Roxo. . . .

[BRIO bows]

The *chef* is satisfied?

BRIO

He says that not since he created the pink luncheon for the Grand Duke of Baden the day the Kaiser——

BARON GRIPSTEIN

Ach, do not raise these melancholy memories. What shadows we are, Brio, even the greatest of us!

BRIO

I do not consider myself a shadow. And I shall yet live to see all the royal houses flourishing again.

[Exit by the folding doors, giving a glimpse of the dazzling dinner-table with more roses, and hovering lackeys.]

BARON GRIPSTEIN

These cheery Valdanians!

[After an instant of musing, he looks nervously at his watch. Then the door R. opens and the BARONESS SIGISMONDO, a young Valdanian lady with a distinguished face and bearing, comes in. Her gown is simple but exquisite, and her only jewellery is a pearl necklace]

Ah, Livia, at last!

LIVIA

At last? I am a full half hour too early! I hurried my toilette, knowing you would be ramping like a lion.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

Never mind—how could you make yourself *more* beautiful?

LIVIA

Make myself? One would think I were the Countess Cazotti.

[*Moves to adjust the roses in a vase.*]

BARON GRIPSTEIN

Don't laugh at your old father-in-law. He's not used to making gallant speeches. But you might have worn his diamond necklace.

LIVIA

I'm wearing his pearl one.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

Pearls are at such a discount, now they can be made artificially.

LIVIA

I am not casting them before swine. . . . Do put away that watch—one would think you had never seen the Queen.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

I've never seen her in my house. And how can I be too grateful for the lead she is giving Society? Everybody will come now.

LIVIA [*Drily*]

Except the Duchess D'Azollo.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

But, *cara*, she's coming to-night!

LIVIA [*Still arranging roses*]
The Duchess enjoys providential headaches. I know her from my maid of honour days. She has never forgiven me for marrying a Jew.

BARON GRIPSTEIN [*Agitated*]
A Jew? My Sigismondo is not a Jew! When was Sigismondo converted to Judaism?

LIVIA
Yes, I know it's only a religion. But somehow—anyhow the Duchess considers herself better-born than the Queen.

BARON GRIPSTEIN
But how is that possible?

LIVIA
Ask Sigismondo. He has all the genealogies at his fingers' ends.

BARON GRIPSTEIN [*Suddenly covering his eyes and sobbing*]
Oh! Oh! Oh!

LIVIA
O my dear father! What is it?

BARON GRIPSTEIN
It is only at his fingers' ends that Sigismondo can have anything. My poor blinded boy! And he won't even see the Queen in our home!

LIVIA

He is very happy in his library, typing his history of Alpastroom.

BARON GRIPSTEIN [*Hysterically*]

I wish Alpastroom had never existed—it was in trying to emulate our mediæval hero that Sigismondo——

LIVIA

Don't, father. It was during the war with Bosnavina that I learnt to love Sigismondo. And genius like his conquers even blindness. He knows exactly where I have to look for a date or an episode.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

Ah, Livia, you are eyes to me as well as to him. Bereaved of wife and eldest-born, but for you I should have gone down in blackness to the grave. . . .
Carissima!

[*Embraces her.*]

LIVIA [*Disengaging herself gently*]

Don't ruffle the hostess's chevelure.

[*OMAR enters through the door to their left and presents to the BARON a card on a silver salver.*]

BARON GRIPSTEIN [*Wonderingly*]

"Riffoni Vittorio; *La Sera*"? But I can't see a journalist now.

OMAR

So I told him, Effendi. But he says his business burns.

BARON GRIPSTEIN [*Fretfully*]
Yes, I know. But tell him I've already sent the
press the list of guests.

LIVIA [*Shocked*]
Eh? . . .
[*Grimly*]
And now, I suppose, he expects the menu.

BARON GRIPSTEIN
Ah, yes.
[*To OMAR*]
Give him a menu.

LIVIA
No, no!

BARON GRIPSTEIN [*To OMAR*]
Not a real menu, of course, with a water-colour. A
copy.

OMAR
I understand, Effendi.
[*Salaams and exit.*]

LIVIA
Oh, Baron, you are hopeless. Why did you send out
the list of guests?

BARON GRIPSTEIN
To seal our position, of course.
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LIVIA

Considering the Queen's visit has precisely that gracious object, you might have left the publication to the Court chronicler.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

He would have published only the dinner-guests, not the reception list.

[*Re-enter* OMAR.]

OMAR

I have given him the menu, Effendi, but he stands like a pillar.

LIVIA [*Angrily*]

He won't go?

OMAR

Not without a word to Baron Gripstein.

LIVIA

You see! Now that you have conceded the creature the menu, he renews his hope of an interview. . . .

[*To* OMAR]

Tell him the Baron has nothing to say for publication.

[OMAR *salaams and exit again.*]

BARON GRIPSTEIN

I suppose because the paper is now mine, the fellow *thinks*——

LIVIA [*Shocked*]

You've bought the *Sera*? The Socialist rag that is egging on the peasants to claim the land!

BARON GRIPSTEIN [*Smiling*]

That is why Cazotti gave me the hint to buy it up.

LIVIA

Oh, I see.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

Yes. Its effect on the peasants one does not take seriously, especially as they can't read. But it began running a translation of a boycotted American book by the notorious Nicholas Stone called *The Nemesis of Nationality*, which urged that in this latter-day world of heavy armaments, nationality is a luxury beyond our means. Even the middle-classes, groaning under the post-war taxation, began to ask, Does patriotism pay?

LIVIA

You were quite right to stop the paper.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

No, no, *cara*—we haven't stopped it. Under the new editorship *La Sera* can be made a respectable property—respectable in every sense. We haven't even stopped the Nicholas Stone serial. But I understand that by a little judicious mistranslation, it is coming to a *sounder conclusion*. Ha! ha! ha! Not a bad joke, Livia.

LIVIA

But surely, Baron, that's not fair to the American author!

[*Re-enter* OMAR.]

OMAR

The pillar still stands, Effendi.

LIVIA

What! Why have you not thrown him out?

OMAR

I took counsel of Signor Brio. But he feared, with the crowd round the house——

BARON GRIPSTEIN

Brio is quite right. We cannot have a scene to-night. Tell the man I'll see him in the morning. . . .

[*Apologetically to* LIVIA]

One *must* see journalists—they have such sharp quills.

LIVIA

Not when one owns their papers.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

The same man writes on other papers—even opposition papers.

LIVIA

How horrible!

BARON GRIPSTEIN

They are no worse than barristers.

[To OMAR]

What are you waiting for?

OMAR

For an instruction. The man will surely again refuse to go without a word from you. Shall we throw him into the crowd?

LIVIA

Of course.

BARON GRIPSTEIN [*Agitated*]

No, no, Livia. And we *must* get rid of him before Her Majesty arrives. Lucky I came down so early. Tell him, Omar, I will give him five minutes at once——

[OMAR *salaams and exit*]

And his dismissal from the paper to-morrow. And you will have five minutes to change to the diamond necklace.

LIVIA

I had better employ them in inspecting the dinner-table.

[*Goes to central folding doors. Pauses*]

Will you never remember——?

BARON GRIPSTEIN [*Rushing to open the doors*]

I beg your pardon.

[*There is again a glimpse of the rose-crowned table, BRIO, and the hovering lackeys.*]

LIVIA

And don't forget on the other hand that you must make no special fuss of the Queen, beyond our going down to receive her. . . . And not a word to this interviewer about Her Majesty or ourselves—especially in a paper of your own. I don't know why Society nowadays puts itself on the level of dancers or cinema clowns that live only by the breath of the mob.

[Exit as OMAR ushers in RIFFONI VITTORIO, taking his hat and stick. The newcomer is a magnetic figure in the prime of early manhood with a long, powerful, clean-shaven face and the eyes of a fanatic. His clothes, though he is not in evening dress, are sufficiently well-cut and brushed to account for OMAR'S indecision. In his hand he holds a copy of the menu.]

BARON GRIPSTEIN *[Very cordially]*

Ah, Signor——

[Looking at card still in his hand]

Riffoni. I was sorry to be unable to receive you immediately. And even now——

[Takes out his watch.]

RIFFONI

The five minutes, Baron, will be ample.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

Ah! Won't you take a seat?

RIFFONI

Thank you.

[Sits.]

BARON GRIPSTEIN

I fear we must not touch upon the honour Her Majesty is doing me.

RIFFONI

I never meant to touch upon it.

BARON GRIPSTEIN [*Disconcerted*]

No—precisely—er—do you smoke?

RIFFONI

I neither smoke nor drink.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

A paragon among us Christians! Then we can go on talking here.

[*Sits*]

For of course the room in which I receive Her Majesty——

RIFFONI

Naturally.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

Not that anybody ever smokes in this room even when Her Majesty is not here. The Baroness Sigismondo, my daughter-in-law, who was a maid of honour, learnt repugnance to tobacco from her royal mistress, and even I am not allowed to taint our ancestral tapestries. It makes a difficulty when her aunt, the Grand Duchess of Carelia, who is fond of cigarettes——

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RIFFONI [*Abruptly*]
I have come to talk about Salaret!

BARON GRIPSTEIN [*Startled*]
Eh?

RIFFONI
About Salaret.

BARON GRIPSTEIN
Salaret! What is Salaret?

RIFFONI
You don't know the greatest man in Valdania?

BARON GRIPSTEIN
Oh, it is a man.

RIFFONI
And the greatest in the world—except Nicholas Stone.

BARON GRIPSTEIN
Ah, a Pacifist! . . .
[*Rising*]
Excuse me, are you still on the staff of the *Sera*?

RIFFONI
Of course not. I was kicked out with Salaret when the paper changed hands. Did I give you my old card? I should have given you this.
[*Produces another card.*]

BARON GRIPSTEIN [*Taking it*]

“Honorary Secretary of the Scaletta Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.”

RIFFONI [*With a grim smile*]

Editors included. At first we thought the *Sera* had been acquired by its new editor, Orosobonetti. But we have just traced the proprietorship to you.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

I see. But you take a strange tone if you wish me to put you back.

RIFFONI

Me? What do *I* matter? I was born with plenty of money and never clogged my wings with a wife. But Professor Salaret was a child of poverty and has fifty-five years and eight children to carry. His wife's money enabled him to give up his professorship and devote himself to Socialistic literature; but it was merely an annuity, and when she died, he had only this editorship to rely on. Of course I've done what I could, but the paper had already swallowed up most of my funds, and now his children are practically starving.

BARON GRIPSTEIN [*Moved*]

Poor things!

RIFFONI

The eldest son, Guido, who is just of age, is most brilliant—a real genius for chemistry. But had it not

been for the generosity of Komak, a fellow-student, he would not have been able to remain at the Technical College.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

A genius for chemistry! But it is what our country needs.

RIFFONI

She needs his father more. Salaret must be restored to his editorship.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

But of course! I knew nothing of these changes in detail. But I can easily find another billet for Orosconetti, or whatever his name is.

RIFFONI

Ah, thank you. I expected to meet a monster and I find a man.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

Capitalists as well as editors should come under the protection of your Society.

[Holds out his hand]

And if you would like a subscription to it——

RIFFONI

How good of you!

BARON GRIPSTEIN

Of course *this* friend of yours will edit it in the new spirit.

RIFFONI [*Drops his hand as if stung*]
What! As a bourgeois Cazotti organ!

BARON GRIPSTEIN
As a popular Liberal evening paper.

RIFFONI
How dare you insult the Master? Salaret who has
given Valdania the new vision, whose whole life——!
[*Chokes with indignation.*]

BARON GRIPSTEIN
You surely don't expect me to pay a man to saw away
the legs of my chair?

RIFFONI
If it will prevent your own legs being sawn away.
As Pacifists, Salaret and I have never preached
violence. We have thought that the workers, being
the overwhelming majority, had only to return a
Labour Parliament to bring about the dictation of
the proletariat. But if you destroy our organ, if you
cut out our tongue—oh, don't you see that to take
away free speech is to deny the right of citizens to
reform their State from within, is to make us foreigners
whose only weapon is force?

BARON GRIPSTEIN
But who denies you free speech? Even my major-
domo stands opposed to my politics. Start another
organ.

RIFFONI

But where can we find a capitalist?

BARON GRIPSTEIN

Ha! ha! ha! Excuse my merriment. So even to destroy capital you need a capitalist! What about the capitalist I bought it from?

RIFFONI

There was no such capitalist. I thought I explained that Salaret had started the paper himself while his wife was alive, and that afterwards I helped him all I could.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

But what about the money I paid for it?

RIFFONI

Salaret had to use that to pay off the printers' arrears.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

But I took those over, if I remember. Anyhow, Salaret sold me his own paper, and you accuse me of sacking him!

RIFFONI

He had to sell—else the printers would have stopped it all the same. But he had no idea that the buyer was your agent, and he fully expected to be kept on as editor.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

When he had failed to make it pay? . . . How much did he owe the printers?

RIFFONI
How should I know?

BARON GRIPSTEIN
You sank your fortune in the paper, yet you never saw a balance-sheet?

RIFFONI
A balance-sheet? Salaret is a saint and a martyr!

BARON GRIPSTEIN [*Drily*]
And a true Socialist—willing to share your last lira.

RIFFONI
How dare you! It was a privilege for me.

BARON GRIPSTEIN
Anyhow, even with your money and the money he married, he could not make the paper pay.

RIFFONI
That was not his fault. The price had to be doubled—printing is so dear nowadays.

BARON GRIPSTEIN
But why is printing so dear? See how these Trade Unions cut one another's throats! So the proletariat won't pay for your ideas?

RIFFONI
They can't afford to.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

Not four soldi? But think what they spend on cinemas and cigarettes! No, no, Signor, it is clear your ideas are not wanted.

RIFFONI

Not wanted?

BARON GRIPSTEIN

Whatever is wanted is paid for.

RIFFONI

A pretty touchstone!

BARON GRIPSTEIN

The only scientific one. Face the facts, my friend.

RIFFONI

Then—do you suppose *you* are wanted to this extent?

[*Waves his arm round the room.*]

BARON GRIPSTEIN [*Complacently*]

To all appearance. Do not forget what Valdania was before I took her in hand. Hardly an industry, hardly a railway, a mass of peasantry exploited by the boyars. I have done more for the proletariat than all your Salarets.

RIFFONI

On the contrary. You are destroying their old feudal life. The boyar was a brother, if too much of a big brother. To-day in these industries of yours

every man is for himself and the devil for them all. Mother earth is paved over, masses slave or starve unnoted. And while a Salaret is thrown on the scrap-heap, some brainless prodigal son squanders in a night what would keep the Master and his family going for a year. What a system!

BARON GRIPSTEIN

With all its faults it is the only system that works. If the son is prodigal, it means the father has saved and slaved—and if he had not been able to pass on his savings to his son, would he have worked so hard?

RIFFONI

So that is humanity's last word—to produce not for consumption, but for profit! And to distribute so wickedly that your lazy luxurious childless ladies are living off mothers of the people—hardly recognisable as of the same species—with infants at their wizened breasts and a ragged brood at their skirts! O the cry of the people—cannot you hear it day and night like the moaning of a wintry sea?

BARON GRIPSTEIN

The last time I heard it was at the races, when it was jubilant over the victory of my filly, Margherita.

RIFFONI

They must have *some* outlet, these helots of our reeking alleys. Ah, Baron, why not help us to build a world of justice and common joyous labour? Believe me, you would be happier than in this monstrous and brutal opulence.

BARON GRIPSTEIN [*Outraged*]
Brutal? And my hospitals, soup-kitchens, orphan-
ages, free milk centres——?

RIFFONI
Blackmail to ward off revolution or to keep your
footing in society.

BARON GRIPSTEIN
Your five minutes are at an end.
[*Moves coldly away.*]

RIFFONI
You asked me to face the facts. Do you suppose
people come to you for your beautiful eyes? Even
Queens, they say, need money.

BARON GRIPSTEIN
It is a scandalous suggestion—go, go!

RIFFONI
Even if Her Majesty takes no money from you for
herself, she takes it for her charities.

BARON GRIPSTEIN
And has she not given to mine?

RIFFONI
You may be charitable in yourself, it remains true
that, in the words of Karl Marx, the thing you repre-
sent face to face with me has no heart in its breast.
And do you call it charity to give away what you

never feel the absence of? Have you sacrificed a single petal of your bed of roses? You may throw the poor the thousands, you wallow in the millions.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

And divided among the poor, what would my millions amount to? Not fifty lire per head. Kept together, they create industries, promote commerce, foster art. You, like Montesquieu's savage, would cut down the tree to gather the fruit.

RIFFONI

No! But I would divide it equally. Look at the fruit on this menu alone!

BARON GRIPSTEIN

And would that equalise happiness? My butler's boys came back from the war, but my eldest-born rots in the ravines of Bosnavina.

[Falls into a chair and covers his eyes.]

RIFFONI

I am sorry—but paupers too lost their sons. When I was a lad my little brother was drowned in the lake, but my father did not consider that this was a reason for eating more than his neighbour.

[Tears up his copy of the menu.]

BARON GRIPSTEIN *[Hardly listening]*

And my blinded Sigismondo! Will you cut out one of *your* eyes and give him optical equality? Ah, Signor, you make so much of poverty because you

have never known it. Otherwise you would have known that bodily hunger is not so horrible as this gnawing of the heart.

RIFFONI

Baron Gripstein is hardly an authority on hunger.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

Is he not?

[*Springs up*]

And do you suppose he inherited this?

[*Waving arm round*]

No, Signor, I was born in one of the reeking alleys you speak of—no, no, not here, in Germany—and my mother was one of those women of the people, torn between the babe at the breast and the brood at the skirt. There were ten of us, never knowing whether father would bring home bread or not, yet every Friday evening——

[*Pauses abruptly.*]

RIFFONI [*Interested*]

Every Friday evening——

BARON GRIPSTEIN

Yes—trumpet it to your papers if you like—it was the Jew-street I was born in. But the Sabbath hallowed it with peace. Ah, I have never been so happy since.

[*Drops back into his chair and covers his eyes again.*]

RIFFONI [*Half moved, half sneering*]

A pity you don't try to return to that happiness.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

On the road of life there is no returning. But do you think I could bear to go on treading it, if I didn't still believe in God?

RIFFONI

God! Ah, there we have it. God! The belief that keeps this devil's system safe! That takes away our responsibility, saps our effort——

[Re-enter LIVIA by the folding doors.]

LIVIA

Not finished yet? You seem to have agitated the Baron. Please go.

RIFFONI

Not till the Baron has agreed to my terms.

LIVIA

Your terms?

[SHE goes haughtily to the bell.]

BARON GRIPSTEIN *[Looking up wearily]*

Don't ring, Livia. The Signor will go quietly. He knows that the Queen is expected, that gendarmes lurk everywhere, and that at a movement of my finger he would be arrested.

RIFFONI

Gendarmes everywhere! Ha! ha! ha! So this is your beloved sovereign.

[Enter OMAR.]

BARON GRIPSTEIN [*Perturbed*]
Nobody rang.

OMAR
No, Effendi. But I thought that with the pillar still standing, you would wish to know that the Prime Minister's carriage has reached the courtyard.

LIVIA
Already?

BARON GRIPSTEIN
He told me he would come early to get a private chat on the Bosnavinian Loan. . . . Thank you, Omar, you acted rightly. And will you see the Signor out?

RIFFONI
But the Prime Minister is the very person I wish to meet!

LIVIA
This is outrageous. Omar, will you tell Colonel Molp——?

RIFFONI
Pause, Baroness, before you kick me out into a crowd composed not merely of idolaters of your goddess, but of worshippers of Salaret, to whom you and yours are but parasites upon Labour. And even to the idolaters, the thought of their girl-queen inveigled here by a Jew-financier——!

BARON GRIPSTEIN [*Hastily*]
Omar, why are you not escorting the Prime Minister?
[OMAR *salaams and exit. To LIVIA*]
Cazotti will deal with him.

RIFFONI
I hope so. For whatever Cazotti lacks, it is not
prudence.

OMAR [*Reappearing at door*]
His Excellency, the Prime Minister.
[COUNT CAZOTTI *advances and kisses the BARONESS'S
hand. His short frame is tending to corpulence,
but his conscious Napoleonic head is free from signs
of spiritual growth. He wears many decorations.*]

LIVIA
Delighted to see you so early.

BARON GRIPSTEIN [*Shaking hands*]
But where is the dear Countess?

CAZOTTI [*Smilingly*]
You know she prefers coming in Her Majesty's train.

BARON GRIPSTEIN
Ah, yes, of course, always so devoted to duty.

CAZOTTI [*Linking his arm in the BARON'S*]
And now, if the Baroness will excuse me, let us talk
of my investments. You see the bonds at Amster-
dam——

[*Pauses abruptly as he becomes aware of RIFFONI,
who bows ironically.*]

BARON GRIPSTEIN

I am so sorry, your Excellency, but this man insists on meeting you.

CAZOTTI

Eh?

LIVIA

We must humbly apologise. But you arrived before we could have him removed.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

He is taking advantage of the mob outside to blackmail me into reinstating the old editor of the *Sera*. There's his card.

CAZOTTI [*Perusing it*]

Oh, that gaol-bird!

RIFFONI

BARON GRIPSTEIN } Gaol-bird?
LIVIA }

CAZOTTI

Curiously enough the Minister of the Interior showed me his dossier only this morning.

RIFFONI

I challenge you to detail it.

CAZOTTI

You deny you have been in prison? Why, you only just escaped execution!

BARON GRIPSTEIN
My God!

RIFFONI
Don't be alarmed. It was only for scattering Pacifist poems from my aeroplane during the Bosnavinian war. My father's *Songs of Brotherhood*.

CAZOTTI
We all believe in brotherhood. But that was not the moment.

RIFFONI
It never is. And so our streets are filled with noseless torsos, like the wreckage of ancient sculpture come to grotesque life. But if you think we shall for ever go to the shambles at the bidding of old men with shrivelled hearts and fly-blown brains——!

LIVIA
How dare you speak like that to the Prime Minister?

CAZOTTI
Oh, I'm used to it, dear Signora. The Labour Party in the Chamber is not large but it is vivacious.

RIFFONI
Shall I tell you something else that happened to me in the air? I heard one day through the roar of my machine the hymns of both armies ascending to heaven in rival requests for victory. In the absence of God, I determined to answer their foolish prayer myself by giving them not victory but peace.

BARON GRIPSTEIN
A blasphemous lunatic!

RIFFONI [*Drily*]
Whose ambition is to leave the world a little saner than he found it. I tell you I will make a new heaven and a new earth—by making heaven *upon* earth. My father could only dream the dream—I, by realising it, shall best avenge his murder.

BARON GRIPSTEIN [*Shocked again*]
His murder?

CAZOTTI
Your father was not murdered. He died of heart failure while on sentry duty at the Palace.

RIFFONI
To conscript a man of that age, and expose him in that frost!

CAZOTTI
We must all die for our country when duty calls.

RIFFONI
No! Our country must die for us when duty calls. Nationalism is the enemy.

CAZOTTI
Aha! Nicholas Stone! . . . With these Pacifist sentiments of yours, how do you explain your behaviour on your release from the military prison?

You sought to revenge yourself on my person, and, not finding me in the carriage, you insulted my wife and assaulted my coachman.

LIVIA

Ah, I remember the case. The poor Countess was a witness.

RIFFONI

A false one.

CAZOTTI [*Raising his fist*]

You dare——!

RIFFONI

Ah, now *you* will do the assaulting.

[CAZOTTI'S *arm drops*]

Your coachman was lashing his horses brutally because they refused to pass a piece of paper—perhaps

[*Smilingly*]

it was a page of the *Sera*. You know, Baroness, how horses yearn dumbly to us through their great tragic eyes. When I remonstrated with the brute—the real brute—he turned his whip on me. I seized the thong and was pulling him out of his seat when your perjured police came up.

CAZOTTI

The judge saw the facts otherwise. . . . No sooner were you released than you began a series of violent articles in the *Sera*.

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BARON GRIPSTEIN

And he told me he never preached violence.

RIFFONI

A violent article is not one preaching violence. Not even prison and injustice could destroy my faith in the force of reason. Rotten houses fall of themselves. A gnat's bite will kill a man whose blood is purulent. And a society which makes it a crime to proclaim brotherhood, which would have shot me dead, had I not happened to have saved a brother-airman, though at the cost of sending his assailant crashing down in cinders—ugh!

[Covers his eyes]

Oh, how could I bear to live under an economic system which makes such things inevitable?

CAZOTTI

It is to save you from living under it—so far at least as Valdania is concerned—that the Minister of the Interior has just signed an order for your expulsion.

RIFFONI

What!

LIVIA

Bravo!

BARON GRIPSTEIN *[Rubbing hands]*

Aha!

[All speaking simultaneously.]

CAZOTTI

You will pursue your quest for brotherhood and economic equality in some other country.

RIFFONI

I am to be expelled from Valdania?

CAZOTTI

To-morrow morning. May I advise you to take advantage of this early information by hurrying home to wind up your affairs?

RIFFONI

And that is your Democratic Constitution!

CAZOTTI

Democracy means that every man in Valdania has a vote. You will not be in Valdania. It is very simple.

RIFFONI

As simple as the way you crawled by slimy spirals to the summit of power. And under what law does the State exile its citizens?

CAZOTTI

The first law of nature—the law of self-protection.

RIFFONI [*With set face and clenched fists*]

Ah, the party of force was right after all! . . . So, unable to meet our arguments, you capitalist bullies, not content to cut out our organ of speech, cut us out of the realm altogether.

CAZOTTI

Us?

RIFFONI

Salaret and me.

CAZOTTI

Oh, we are not deporting Salaret. He is not dangerous.

RIFFONI [*Dazed*]

Salaret is not dangerous?

OMAR [*At door L., announcing*]

His Highness, the Duke D'Azollo.

[*Exit.*]

[*The DUKE, magnificently bestarred and beribboned, comes tottering and peering in. Age has wrinkled his fine features and reduced his snowy mane, but his smile is still fascinating. HE kisses LIVIA'S hand with the romantic courtesy of an earlier generation.*]

LIVIA

Delighted to see you looking so well. . . .

[*Ironically*]

The Duchess, I fear, has a headache.

DUKE D'AZOLLO

As you divine, alas!

BARON GRIPSTEIN [*Shakes his hand*]

I am so sorry.

DUKE D'AZOLLO

If it abates, she hopes to come in for the reception.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

So good of Her Highness to honour our humble home.

DUKE D'AZOLLO [*Peering*]

Ah, is that our perpetual Premier?

[*Shakes hands with CAZOTTI, then stumbles on
RIFFONI*]

Well, well, Vittorio, who would expect to meet *you* here?

[*Wrings his hand warmly.*]

CAZOTTI [*Taken aback*]

You know him?

DUKE D'AZOLLO

Am I not President of his Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals? Or have I been superseded, Vittorio?

RIFFONI [*Coldly*]

The Duchess sent me your resignation when I was imprisoned for assaulting Count Cazotti's coachman.

DUKE D'AZOLLO

But that was very wrong of you, Vittorio. How could the coachman help his master's misgovernment? It is really very Christian of Cazotti to meet you like this. In future, my young friend, stick to your delightful articles.

CAZOTTI

You approve of his articles!

DUKE D'AZOLLO

What can be more digestive after a good dinner than a spirited denunciation of the sinfulness of eating it? A Riffoni article with one's coffee is better than cognac.

CAZOTTI [*Sarcastically*]

If our host had only known, he would have put one on the menu.

DUKE D'AZOLLO

Tut! Tut! Our young friend is merely developing your ideas more logically.

CAZOTTI

My ideas?

DUKE D'AZOLLO

Didn't your Government take possession of my finest farm for a munition factory? As for your income-tax, it is only expropriation under another name. Your Finance Minister simply ruins my other creditors. He! he! he! And this pretence of not being socialistic is the sillier because it takes in the masses, and thus you despoil us without appeasing them.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

There is something in that.

DUKE D'AZOLLO

And then isn't the State going to own my pictures?

CAZOTTI

Only by your generosity.

DUKE D'AZOLLO

Not at all—by my dear Baron's.

[Claps GRIPSTEIN'S shoulder laughingly. The
BARON makes deprecatory Oriental gestures]

When he redeemed them from my creditors, he allowed me only a life-interest.

CAZOTTI

At any rate the State does not confiscate them.

DUKE D'AZOLLO

It confiscated alcohol-values in America. Everywhere in Europe it comes between the house-proprietor and his natural rent. Ah, it is clear the heyday of private property is over.

RIFFONI

Bravo!

CAZOTTI

I am sorry to see the ex-Regent of Valdania coquetting with Communism.

DUKE D'AZOLLO

But why should not the State be run in peace-time with the same common devotion as in war-time?

RIFFONI
Bravissimo!

CAZOTTI
That intensity of co-operation is possible only under deadly danger. Like deathbed repentance, it does not survive recovery.

LIVIA
And even under danger, Duke, it is not to be relied on. When I worked in the hospital, I found men who had mutilated themselves to escape service.

CAZOTTI
Exactly. As I found profiteers who had mutilated the State. Even the patriotic workers sent in their bills afterwards— Ha! ha! ha! My dentist confessed to me that when he was first mobilised to look after the soldiers' teeth, he worked thirteen hours a day till his fellow-dentists laughed him out of it. Then he became a slacker like the others. No, no, Duke, State-interest cannot vie with self-interest.

DUKE D'AZOLLO
Yet self as the central principle of society is hardly compatible with our religion.

RIFFONI [*Drily*]
Nor did the early Christians possess private steam-yachts and picture galleries. St. Francis defined theft as keeping anything somebody else needed more.

DUKE D'AZOLLO [*Laughingly*]
This terrible Vittorio. He's not content I should coquet with Communism. He wants a marriage on the spot—a marriage of inconvenience! My galleries—you have already heard they are to go to the proletariat, though it prefers its pictures moving. But what would you do with my steam-yacht? Eh? Have fishermen spill their catches on its carpets and spit out their quids on its painted panels? Nothing is ready yet for your new system, my dear Vittorio. Give us time. Rome was not destroyed in a day. Life is compromise.

RIFFONI
Never! Life is sacrifice!

CAZOTTI [*To the DUKE*]
I beg you not to engage your friend in argument now. He has to go before the Queen arrives.

DUKE D'AZOLLO [*Turning to BARON*]
He is not staying to dinner?

BARON GRIPSTEIN [*Embarrassed*]
He—I——

LIVIA [*Feigning a smile*]
Can't you see, Duke, by his clothes?

DUKE D'AZOLLO [*Peering at RIFFONI*]
Eh? My sight is getting even worse than my memory!
[*Feeling in his pockets*]

I must have left my glasses in my overcoat.

[*Moves to door L.*]

BARON GRIPSTEIN

Let me send down for them.

DUKE D'AZOLLO

No, no, my pockets are still private property, eh, Vittorio? He! he! he!

[*At door pauses and turns*]

Talking of glasses, Vittorio, you Utopians remind me of a passage in an American author named—named——

[*Twiddles his thumbs.*]

RIFFONI

Nicholas Stone?

DUKE D'AZOLLO

No, no. *Santa Maria*, my memory! . . . Ah, Mark Twain! He went up Mont Blanc by telescope. That's how you Socialists go up your Mont Rouge—at a peep. Aha! but wait till you are actually among the crevasses and glaciers——

RIFFONI

We shall be roped together.

DUKE D'AZOLLO [*Moving back into room, prepared to argue*]

And together you will tumble.

CAZOTTI [*Almost pushing him out*]
You are forgetting your glasses.

DUKE D'AZOLLO
Santa Maria, I forget everything—except my manners.
[*Exit.*]

CAZOTTI
The old sinner. How he can mention that yacht of his without blushing——!

BARON GRIPSTEIN
Oh, but that's all over now. We go to early mass together.

CAZOTTI
It was high time—for *him*, I mean. . . . And now, Signor Riffoni, now that we have considerably concealed your painful position from your friend, the Duke, you will kindly take your leave before he discovers it.

RIFFONI
Take my leave? When it is my last evening in Valdanian society! No, no, let me see everybody—it is my last chance.

BARON GRIPSTEIN
You surely do not propose to be here when the Queen——!

RIFFONI

But I've only seen her caracoling in a colonel's uniform, goading us on to murder. A more intimate impression——

LIVIA

This is the climax!

RIFFONI

The crown, you should say. Will she wear it? I have often wondered how the same crown fits all our successive sovereigns. I suppose their heads swell uniformly.

CAZOTTI

Stop this fooling and go!

[Takes out his watch]

I give you sixty seconds to clear out.

[RIFFONI drops into a chair and folds his arms.]

BARON GRIPSTEIN

Oh, your Excellency, you should not have told him of his expulsion.

CAZOTTI

It was an indiscretion, I admit. But there are ways of expulsion even from a salon.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

But he has his gang outside. Her Majesty must not be agitated.

LIVIA

Don't be so timid, Baron. The man cannot be here when the Queen——

RIFFONI

And has not every Valdanian the right to appeal to his sovereign?

CAZOTTI

So that's your game, is it, to appeal against your banishment?

RIFFONI

As if I would submit my natural right to the caprice of a pampered young woman. No!

[*Springs up*]

Let us two come face to face—the despised and rejected of Valdania with its idol and glory, the lowly peace-lover with the swaggering Amazon who drew the sword of Alpastroom!

BARON GRIPSTEIN

But she is *not* such an antithesis—she is rather——

CAZOTTI

Fifty-eight, fifty-nine, sixty!

[*Snaps watch-case*]

You permit me to ring, Baroness?

LIVIA

Of course.

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BARON GRIPSTEIN

For God's sake!

[CAZOTTI rings. Enter OMAR.]

CAZOTTI

Ask Colonel Molp to step in!

[RIFFONI sits down defiantly again. There is a tense silence during which the BARON opens his mouth agitatedly several times to address CAZOTTI or RIFFONI, but fails to say anything, and ends by wiping his brow. COLONEL MOLP enters by door L., a rather rough-hewn figure in evening dress with medals. HE bows to the company]

Colonel Molp, we wish you to prevent this man leaving the house——

[RIFFONI gives a murmur of surprise]

till Her Majesty is safely at dinner. Keep him under arrest and subsequently under observation till he is deported.

MOLP

Yes, Excellency. I know his record.

RIFFONI

I know yours. Janissary, spy, denouncer, *agent provocateur*——

MOLP [*Imperturbably*]

This way, Signor.

[*Motions towards door. RIFFONI with a sudden dart the other way opens the window, letting in the confused sounds of a mob. MOLP veers round.*]

RIFFONI

Back, or I appeal to our followers!

BARON GRIPSTEIN [*Beside himself, to CAZOTTI*]
I warned your Excellency——

CAZOTTI [*To RIFFONI*]

Close the window and you shall remain.

[*RIFFONI closes the window with a triumphant smile*]

Bring in your men, Colonel, they will cover him up from the Queen.

MOLP

Or draw her eyes to him. Her Majesty hates seeing *me*, much more my men. She refused our escort.

CAZOTTI

But suppose he is armed! . . . If he moves a suspicious finger, use your dagger—not your pistol.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

God of Israel!

RIFFONI

You would murder me?

CAZOTTI

Would you have us accused of collusion in the murder of the Queen?

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RIFFONI

I have no weapon except a fountain-pen. Do you suppose I would sacrifice my destruction of your whole social order to vengeance on your paltry Margherita? The peasant must have the land, the workman the industries, the country peace—that's what I shall tell your royal Juggernaut.

CAZOTTI

With your fountain-pen. One word in Her Majesty's hearing and Salaret shares your exile.

RIFFONI

You brute!

[HE collapses on the cushioned window-seat. MOLP takes up his post vigilantly beside him. Re-enter the DUKE D'AZOLLO, still peering but through eyeglasses. HE brushes by the astonished MOLP.]

DUKE D'AZOLLO

Ah, Vittorio, glad you haven't run away yet. Because I *should* like to hear what you will do with my steam-yacht.

RIFFONI

I shall come back in her—with the Red Flag flying.

DUKE D'AZOLLO

Back? You are leaving Valdania?

RIFFONI

Needs must when the devil drives.

DUKE D'AZOLLO
But where does he drive you?

RIFFONI
Up Mont Rouge.

DUKE D'AZOLLO
He! he! he! You are not the first whom the
devil has taken up a high mountain. But can you
really read Karl Marx? I'd sooner be expropriated.
What does he mean
 [Sits down beside him for a long talk]
by all that algebraical stuff about surplus-value? . . .

OMAR *[Announcing at door]*
Their Excellencies, the Viscount and Viscountess
Palestra.
 [A pompous couple enters.]

LIVIA
So glad you could come.
 [The VISCOUNT kisses her hand.]

BARON GRIPSTEIN
Welcome to my humble home. . . .
 [Sotto voce to the VISCOUNT]
I managed to allot you those Bosnavinian bonds.
 [The couple passes on to greet CAZOTTI.]

OMAR
Signor and Signora da Grasso.
 [An elderly saturnine gentleman appears with a

bouncing middle-aged beauty, whose natural charms, though considerable, do not conceal art.]

LIVIA [*As her hand is kissed*]
So glad to see you back in Scaletta. Your peasants must have quieted down.

ESTER DA GRASSO
Yes, my husband soon stopped that nonsense of their wanting our land.

LIVIA
Why, what did he do?

BARON GRIPSTEIN
Don't tell us, please.
[*Quietly and with an uneasy look towards VITTORIO, who is, however, engrossed in his argument with the DUKE*]
The Socialists might hear of it.
[*Lowering his voice further*]
Even the Queen is capable of siding with the peasants.

ESTER DA GRASSO
I have no patience with what I hear of her.

BARON GRIPSTEIN [*Shocked and alarmed*]
Sh! Sh!

OMAR [*Announcing*]
His Excellency, Marshal Roxo.

BARON GRIPSTEIN [*Darting forward in relief*]

Ah!

[LIVIA checks him with a glance and HE returns sheepishly to her side. The MARSHAL, an ailing veteran, peppered with medals and orders, comes forward rheumatically to kiss her hand. The DA GRASSOS join the PALESTRAS and CAZOTTI.]

LIVIA

Delighted to see you about again, Marshal; by the way, have you your slip?

[HE produces a scrap of paper]

Ha! As I thought. But I'm afraid the Duchess D'Azollo is indisposed.

ROXO

All the better—no, I don't mean that. But I shan't have to give her the wrong arm.

CAZOTTI [*Advancing to shake hands*]

Ah, Marshal, how goes the enemy?

ROXO

As you see—not formidable enough to prevent my sortie.

CAZOTTI

You are a wonderful man—we shall yet see you heading a new campaign.

ROXO

Not while you remain Prime Minister!

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CAZOTTI

Ha! ha! ha! And the Queen thinks me so warlike. But the Bosnavinian business finished me. The old conquerors got loot, we moderns get income-tax! Not to mention loans to the conquered! I bless my stars that Rolmenia didn't call your bluff and fly to liberate Bosnavina.

ROXO

It wasn't me Rolmenia was frightened of, it was poor Marrobio. But now that she's got him safely assassinated——

OMAR [*Announcing*]

Their Highnesses, Prince and Princess Gondaroff.

ROXO [*To CAZOTTI, as the youngish PRINCE and PRINCESS advance to be greeted*]

Bosnavinians here?

CAZOTTI

You see the effect of the loan. But they are not the only Bosnavinians who prefer Scaletta and our culture, though the Queen fusses so over the compulsory Valdanian in their schools.

OMAR [*Announcing*]

His Excellency, the Rolmenian Minister!

[*A gorgeously uniformed and subtle-looking ancient advances.*]

CAZOTTI [*Sotto voce to ROXO as the Minister is being welcomed*]

Oh, do go and let him pump you on the army.

ROXO

Shall I let out it's strong or weak?

CAZOTTI

Strong, but undermined by Socialism.

ROXO

But that's the truth!

CAZOTTI

As if he will believe it!

[*ROXO goes up to greet the Rolmenian Minister as he leaves the BARONESS.*]

OMAR

Her Excellency, the Countess Villop.

LIVIA [*As the COUNTESS enters*]

How good of you to come!

BARON GRIPSTEIN

Ah, Countess, there is no one whose presence in my humble home——

[*Cheering from outside penetrates even through the closed window*]

Ah, Her Majesty! Excuse me! Come, Livia.

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LIVIA

There is plenty of time.

[Turns to PRINCESS GONDAROFF, who has not left her]

Yes, Princess, your *Bora* is not a nice wind. But in revenge your summers——

[Louder cheering.]

BARON GRIPSTEIN [Glancing anxiously at RIFFONI]

Livia! We shall be late.

[Enter OMAR R.]

OMAR

Her Majesty is arriving.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

I told you we should be late.

LIVIA [Taking his arm and whispering]

Compose yourself!

[THEY go out, not without an uneasy backward glance of the BARON'S at RIFFONI, who is still in discussion with the DUKE, both oblivious of the watching MOLP. OMAR closes the door and disappears.]

ESTER DA GRASSO [Sotto voce to COUNTESS VILLOP]

What manners! . . . And to think Livia sold herself to that Shylock's son! . . . Ah, there's poor old D'Azollo!

[Goes over to the window-seat and interrupts the discussion by a romantic call]

Rinaldo!

DUKE D'AZOLLO [*Rising and bowing vaguely*]
Signora! Neither of us is named Rinaldo.

ESTER DA GRASSO [*Piqued*]
You've forgotten Armida!

DUKE D'AZOLLO [*Puzzled*]
Armida?
[*With exaggerated and mendacious romanticism*]
How could I forget Armida?

ESTER DA GRASSO [*Drawing him away*]
They warned me you and Fiuma had no eyes now but
for the Queen.

DUKE D'AZOLLO
But I do remember you!
[*Sniffing her obviously strong scent*]
It's like a whiff of old times!

ESTER DA GRASSO
Ah, Rinaldo, those days on the yacht——

DUKE D'AZOLLO
You were on the yacht?
[*Sniffs again*]
Ah, of course, I remember! Little Ester—with the
opera-singers——!

ESTER DA GRASSO [*Perceiving her husband is
coming up*]
Hush! My husband!

DUKE D'AZOLLO

But he's deaf!

ESTER DA GRASSO

That was my previous husband.

DUKE D'AZOLLO

Santa Maria! My memory!

ESTER DA GRASSO

When I was whisked into exile among our obstreperous peasants, I thought I'd go out of my mind. But I see I've gone out of yours.

[The door opens. A sudden hush falls on the company. Those who are sitting, rise. OMAR appears.]

CAZOTTI [*Quietly to RIFFONI*]

Get up! And remember . . .!

RIFFONI [*Rising sullenly*]

For Salaret's sake.

OMAR

Her Exalted Majesty, the Queen.

[MARGHERITA enters, escorted by the BARON and BARONESS LIVIA, and accompanied by the MARQUIS FIUMA, whose manly beauty is enhanced by a chivalrous and devoted bearing, the COUNTESS CAZOTTI, a dyed and bediamonded beauty, desperately young, and a pretty Maid of Honour.

MARGHERITA, though in the prime of youth and

beauty, wears an air of noble sadness. HER costume is plain, with a pearl necklace, and she enters unassumingly, not breaking off her conversation. ALL bow or curtsy, except RIFFONI, who has folded his arms again. But the accidental grouping of the company, all clustering round the QUEEN and hanging on her lips, assists the wilful posture of MOLP to hide the rebel from the royal eyes.]

THE QUEEN [*Smilingly yet mechanically acknowledging the greetings*]
But you have a wonderful house, Baron. That quaint stone staircase from the courtyard!

BARON GRIPSTEIN

My Sigismondo says it dates from the Crusades, and that those Byzantine reliefs in the hall were inserted in the thirteenth century by the Duke of Dalmatia during his happily brief conquest of our country. I have had to cut his banqueting hall in twain—it was too large for our humble selves.

QUEEN

What a pity! And how is dear Sigismondo?

LIVIA

He felt his presence would damp our spirits—he begs Your Majesty to excuse him.

QUEEN

Oh, but that is morbid. Bring him down before I

go—don't forget. . . . Ah, there is my Rolmenian friend!

[SHE extends her hand enthusiastically to the Rolmenian Minister, who kisses it]

And how goes it with your beautiful country?

ROLMENIAN MINISTER

Alas, Madam, our army is undermined by Socialism.

[CAZOTTI and ROXO look at each other.]

CAZOTTI [*Murmuring*]

Liar!

QUEEN

But I was just reading Prince Igmor's speech, congratulating the army on its morale.

ROLMENIAN MINISTER

That was for his royal father's consumption, Madam. Since His Majesty's last stroke we dare not tell him the truth.

QUEEN

I'm afraid it does not require strokes for sovereigns to be kept in the dark, eh, Cazotti?

[Offers her hand smilingly.]

CAZOTTI [*Bowing to kiss it*]

Your Majesty's intuitions are only too illuminating.

COUNTESS CAZOTTI

But it's quite true, Alexis. You don't even tell *me*!

[*Laughter.*]

QUEEN [*Espying the PRINCESS*]

Ah, Princess, glad to see you in Valdania. How are things in Bosnavina?— But I forget, you come from Carlsbad. I hope you left your rheumatism there. That's where *you* ought to go, Marshal Roxo.

ROXO [*Kissing her hand*]

Ah, Madam, there is no cure for age and loneliness.

QUEEN

Poor Roxo! We are a pair.

ROXO

You, Madam, with your youth?

QUEEN

I am not so young as our friend, D'Azollo.

[*SHE turns to him and gives him her hand to kiss*]

The Duchess is not with you?

DUKE D'AZOLLO

If she were, would I look so young?

[*Laughter.*]

COUNTESS CAZOTTI

Oh, the monsters! This is what they say behind our backs.

[*Laughter.*]

DUKE D'AZOLLO

But it was a compliment to the Duchess! She asks me to convey her homage and regrets her headache is too bad.

QUEEN

Too bad indeed! Since she resigned her Court duties, she has never come to see me. And I particularly wanted to see her to-night.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

She did hold out the hope of coming to the reception. . . . Shall I telephone Your Majesty's wishes?

QUEEN

Wouldn't her husband's telephoning have more influence?

DUKE D'AZOLLO [*Laughingly*]

I shall 'phone her we are thirteen at table.

[*The BARON opens the door R. as if to conduct him*]

Don't trouble, Baron. I know where the telephone is.

LIVIA [*Smiling*]

And he complains of his memory!

[*The DUKE totters out and the BARON closes the door.*]

BARON GRIPSTEIN

I trust Your Majesty will not wait for the Duchess——

QUEEN [*Smiling*]

Your *chef* need not be alarmed. Seriously, my dear Baron, the absence of this guest is not so annoying as the presence of others.

BARON GRIPSTEIN [*Turning pale*]

But the list was submitted——

QUEEN

Those skeletons at the feast, I mean.

[Looks towards MOLP and RIFFONI, the latter of whom, gazing at her dumbly as if spell-bound, has finally attracted her attention]

You know how tired I am of seeing Molp, and now you have added a new protector, not even camouflaging him as a guest.

BARON GRIPSTEIN [*Miserably*]

I—I—believe me, Your Majesty, it was necessary.

QUEEN

In a private house? Though I was surprised to find my coming to you had leaked out, I encountered nothing but loyal demonstrations. True, in the Piazza da Pietra a woman sprang forward, and our brave Marquis turned pale. But he was only holding out a child to be touched against the evil eye.

CAZOTTI

There is always an evil eye on rulers, however popular.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

A man to whom a great treasure is entrusted cannot be too careful.

QUEEN

I appreciate your solicitude, but it spoils my appetite. Please send them away.

BARON GRIPSTEIN [*In agonised embarrassment*]
Certainly, Your Majesty. I had no idea of having
them in the dining-room.

QUEEN
But I don't want them in the house at all.

BARON GRIPSTEIN
They shall not be.

QUEEN
But let them go at once.

BARON GRIPSTEIN
Of course. Colonel Molp, you heard Her Majesty's
command.
[MOLP *hesitates, embarrassed.*]

QUEEN
Don't look so sullen, Molp. You know how much I
appreciate your devotion. How is my little god-
child?

MOLP [*Brightening*]
Nina has cut another tooth, Your Majesty.

QUEEN
Dear little thing. It must be very difficult for you
now your poor wife is dead.

MOLP
My mother has been with us: unfortunately, Your
Majesty, she has had to go home to my aged father—
a day distant.

QUEEN

Time *you* went home to say good-night to little Nina.

MOLP

Yes, Your Majesty.

[*To RIFFONI*]

After you, my friend.

[*RIFFONI does not move.*]

QUEEN

Why doesn't the man go? Is he deaf?

CAZOTTI [*Audaciously*]

I suppose he was selected so as not to overhear our conversation.

QUEEN

But he looks so intelligent—he ought to be doing higher work.

ROXO

What can be higher than protecting Your Majesty?

BRIO [*Opening doors*]

Her Majesty is served.

[*There is a fresh view of the rose-crowned table and the gorgeous lackeys.*]

BARON GRIPSTEIN

Ouf!

[*Wipes his brow*]

Your Majesty, may I have the distinguished honour . . . ?

[The QUEEN takes his arm, the other guests pair off consulting their slips, the PRINCESS GONDAROFF with the ROLMENIAN MINISTER, the VISCONTRESS PALESTRA with the PRINCE, the COUNTESS VILLOP with the MARQUIS FIUMA, the COUNTESS CAZOTTI with the VISCOUNT PALESTRA, SIGNORA DA GRASSO with CAZOTTI, and the MAID OF HONOUR with SIGNOR DA GRASSO.]

COUNTESS CAZOTTI *[Pushing past the COUNTESS VILLOP]*

Excuse me—I think we go first.

[The procession begins to move in, chattering and talking.]

LIVIA *[To MARSHAL ROXO]*

Those telephone clerks! I'm afraid you'll have to give me the wrong arm.

[SHE smilingly takes his left arm and brings up the rear. BRIO closes the folding doors behind her. Immediately through side-door R., as by secret instruction, MOLP's men pour in, while from door L., OMAR and footmen and gendarmes enter.]

MOLP

Now, Signor!

RIFFONI *[Turning on him and the newcomers with all the fury of long-suppressed speech]*

Minions, lackeys, lickspittles! Legions that could

dictate to those gorging despots and that insolent minx——!

MOLP

Are you going quietly?

RIFFONI

More quietly than I shall return. By heaven and hell and all your sluggard saints, this society you grovel before shall feel my broom to the last cobweb!

A FOOTMAN [*Grinning*]

He's already been in the cellar.

[*Laughter.*]

RIFFONI [*To MOLP*]

Not speak? The day shall come when she shall beg for a word with me.

[*HE shakes his fist towards the folding doors*]

A rivederla, Margherita!

[*COLONEL MOLP steps towards him.*]

CURTAIN.

Act Two

[A year later. The former throne-room in the old San Marco Palace at Scaletta, a vast oblong apartment, now turned into "The People's Hall." The throne, ornate and gilded, and blazoned with the arms of Valdania, a serpent encircling an eagle, still stands on the dais to the left, but the purple canopy has been removed, while a table, heaped with papers and placed in front of the throne, shows that the royal seat has been converted into a business chair, though a gong, a bell and a pistol on the table suggest that it is still no haven of security. Other seats, ranged beside the throne, suggest committees or tribunals. The captured flags which used to adorn the room are replaced by the Red Flag of Socialism and Labour banners, and instead of the busts of kings and the stone figures in the niches, there are busts of Karl Marx, Lassalle, Liebknecht, Rosa Luxemburg, etc. But there is no change in the mosaic floor, the rear wall barbaric with battle frescoes ("Alpastrum falling at Rome," etc.), the great fireless hearth in the centre of this wall, the narrow oak tables with their tall wax candles in great silver candlesticks. The two marble pillars still mark a sort of exit to the right, nor have the Oriental hangings veiling the entrance to the more private parts of the Palace been removed. In fact it is only in the right casement in the rear wall that there is a glaring change, for the beautiful old Madonna and child in stained glass has been replaced by a large plain glazed pane, which con-

trasts sadly with the rich colours of the heraldic blazons of the old Valdanian provinces that still glow in the left casement. The worn stone steps leading to these casements give no indication that they are no longer trodden by the feet of sovereigns on their way to bow from the stone balcony. There is even no visible alteration in the line of guards that stands with fixed bayonets near the plain casement. They are still dressed in kilts with quaint feathered caps, and from their voluminous and brilliantly coloured silken sashes scimitars and yataghans still hang. The one-armed CORPORAL VANNI is still in command, though at the moment he is on the balcony absorbedly looking down on the Piazza da Pietra, disregarding the distant view of the lake and the snow peaks, though it can be enjoyed as communistically as ever. His men profit by his semi-absence and are chattering as the curtain rises.]

VANNI

Silence, pigs! I can't hear Comrade Riffoni's farewell to the troops.

[Silence falls]

Too late! They're off for the front.

[Bugles sound, drums roll, marching and cantering is heard from the Piazza below. VANNI comes in, shutting the casement]

The President isn't leaving too many for home defence.

MOLP *[Now among the Guards, but somewhat disguised by a great scar on his cheek]*

Nor too much in the larder.

VANNI

Peace, you White swine. You get more grub than our Dukes and Marquises in their skulking-holes. You're a counter-revolutionary, that's what you are, a lousy capitalist conspirator—strikes me I've seen your face over a white shirt—Melano, did you say your name was?

MOLP

A white shirt doesn't make a White. All I want is to get to the front like those lucky beggars down there.

VANNI

All you want is to get two square meals a day.

[*Laughter of the GUARDS.*]

MOLP

More food would be welcome, I don't deny. But I was an officer before the Revolution and I—

VANNI

Officer or organ-grinder, we're all equal now and you're under me—don't you forget it!

MOLP

But I'm wasted here!

VANNI

Wasted? Guarding the People's Hall? You look out, Comrade, or my sister Fenella'll get her knife into you.

MOLP [*Wincing as at a memory, but recovering himself*]
Because I want to get *my* knife into the dirty Rolmenians?

VANNI
There's dirtier than the Rolmenians. How about your old Roxo?

MOLP
What about the Marshal?

VANNI
He's joined the Rolmenians, haven't you heard? Doesn't care a damn about us so long as he can restore the Queen to that chair there. I expect he'll guide Prince Igmor over our marshes. But they're no match for Riffoni, either of them, the saints be thanked.

MOLP
Not so certain. Riffoni after all is an amateur. Igmor has long led the Rolmenian forces and Roxo is a thundering tactician.

VANNI
Pooh! Pooh! The Marshal was never a patch on poor Marrobio. And now he's too shaky and rheumatic to cope with the President.

MOLP
But Igmor is young—and has already driven us out of Bosnavina.

VANNI

Hold your tongue, you pro-Rolmenian Royalist. You'll never see the Queen squatting here again—if she's alive at all!

[There is a stir to the right]

Attention!

[The rank stiffens in rigid awe. Enter between the pillars RIFFONI in a General's uniform. He looks considerably aged, with a set and anxious countenance. The GUARDS present arms. HE seats himself on the throne and examines papers for a moment amid the severe silence.]

RIFFONI *[Grasping a document]*

Comrade Vanni!

VANNI

Yes, my General.

RIFFONI

I see that Signor Orosobonetti, the editor of the *Sera*, was to be shot this morning. Has it been done?

VANNI

At dawn, my General.

RIFFONI

Good! The sun rose on one reactionary the less. How did he die?

VANNI

Crying "Long live Liberty!"

RIFFONI

Liberty—to destroy the Workers' Republic! Ah, these bourgeois with their egoistic ideals.

VANNI

And may we read the *Sera* now?

RIFFONI [*Smiting the table*]

Corpo di Bacco! Surely you know that its printing press still eludes us. If you are found with anything except the State organs, the *Red Worker* and the *International Republican*, you'll get very short shrift, my friend.

VANNI [*With chattering teeth*]

Yes, my General. I wasn't asking for myself—but I've got a White among my own men.

RIFFONI [*Spasmodically grasping the pistol*]

A Judas among my bodyguard!

VANNI

He even admires Roxo!

RIFFONI [*Springing up*]

Who is this whited sepulchre?

VANNI

He was only sent me this morning, but it didn't take me long to nose him out. Stand forward, Melano.

[*MOLP obeys and salutes.*]

MOLP

I'm neither White nor Red. I'm a soldier.

RIFFONI

Your name, Comrade.

MOLP

Melano.

RIFFONI

So I just heard. But I want your real name. . . .

[*A silence*]

Try to remember it!

MOLP

One can't forget one's name.

RIFFONI

I forgot mine when I sneaked back into Valdania. Come, come—your face haunts me. . . . You know we have instruments for making the dumb speak. What were you before the Social Revolution?

MOLP [*Hesitates*]

I told you—a soldier.

VANNI

An officer, he told me, and he wants to go to the front.

RIFFONI

An officer, were you? What grade?

MOLP

Colonel.

RIFFONI

Ah, Colonel *Molp*! Of course, of course. That new scar of yours put me off. Then this time last year—
ha! ha! ha!

[Relapses complacently on his throne]

Where did you get that scar?

MOLP

In the attack on this Palace.

RIFFONI

You mean in the defence—you defended the miserable Margherita.

MOLP

Could I desert her like Vanni?

VANNI

Could I desert the rest of the army—especially when my sister Fenella——?

RIFFONI

Silence!

MOLP

It was that virago that jabbed my cheek when I was trying to save the Marquis Fiuma——

RIFFONI

Who had already contrived the Queen's escape, the devil take him.

MOLP [*Bowing his head*]

I hope he is with the angels. A gallant gentleman, who loved the Queen.

RIFFONI

Yes, I daresay you do too. Ah, she has you all in her net. She tried her tricks even on me, do you remember, though she thought I was only one of your men.

MOLP

She only said you ought to be doing better work.

RIFFONI [*Smiling*]

She doesn't lack intelligence, the minx.

MOLP

And I didn't lack courtesy. I treated you like a gentleman, though you treated me like a dog. When I escorted you across the frontier, I offered to share my sandwiches with you. Don't you remember?

RIFFONI

Perfectly. And though I refused your communistic offer, I said it was an augury of the future—do you remember that? Ah, you laughed then—you thought me done with. Despite all your gangs of spies and denouncers and *agents provocateurs*, you never tracked the underground railway by which I was to creep back when our propaganda had prepared the Revolution.

MOLP

It wasn't your propaganda—it was Rolmenia coming to liberate Bosnavina from our yoke.

RIFFONI

Ah, but why did Rolmenia dare the adventure?

MOLP

Because Marrobio was no longer alive to frighten her.

RIFFONI

Marrobio's assassination was only a minor factor. Rolmenia's real motive was to keep down the Socialism in her army. She had to give it work and glory to divert it. As a result—mark the irony of fate—she exploded the Socialism in *our* army, which refused to go to the shambles to keep a sister-country in subjection.

MOLP

But it *is* going—you have just sent it off!

RIFFONI

In self-defence, not aggression. Rolmenia hasn't understood that our Republic was quite content to lose Bosnavina, that we should in any case have given back the freedom violated by our rapacious Queen. Drunk with success, the Rolmenians have dared to invade our own sacred soil.

MOLP

I know, curse them. That's why I want to go to the front.

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RIFFONI [*Sardonically*]

I daresay. Anything sooner than the gallows, eh? So, Colonel Molp, you thought to treat me as the Bosnavinian student treated Marrobio.

MOLP

By God, it is false!

RIFFONI

Obsolete oaths won't mend your case.

MOLP

But I was assigned here by the local Enrolment and Distribution Committee appointed by the Industrial Alliance under the Commissariat of Labour. In vain I reminded them of the German proverb not to use the piano for firewood. They pointed out it was a rise on my last job.

RIFFONI

What was that?

MOLP [*In a low shamed voice*]

Cleaning out slaughter-houses and latrines—it was when the typhus was raging.

RIFFONI

You explained to them you were *Colonel* Molp?

MOLP

Yes—er—that is, Colonel Melano.

RIFFONI

Why did you take a false name if not for false purposes? So many old officers applied for jobs under my Government and have found good ones too.

MOLP

Yes, but none had had my unpleasant relation with you. I was afraid of your vengeance—rightly so, as it has proved.

RIFFONI [*Bridling*]

How proved? You're not hanged yet, and if you are, it will be not by me but the Counter-Revolutionary Commission. . . . If you were so frightened of me, why didn't you flee the country?

MOLP

I had my little girl—I couldn't leave her.

RIFFONI

And yet you want to go to the front!

[*Laughter of the GUARDS.*]

VANNI

That little girl is a whopper.

[*Laughter of the GUARDS.*]

RIFFONI

Silence, Comrades! I know there *was* a little girl. Called Nina, wasn't she?

MOLP

You know her name?

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RIFFONI

Aha! . . . She is dead now, I suppose.

MOLP [*With a convulsive start*]

God forbid! She's with her grandmother in the country.

RIFFONI

So you *could* part with her.

MOLP

Because there is corn and milk in the village—it is so far from towns.

RIFFONI

That is no answer. Town children are fed equally, however we grown-ups may go short.

MOLP

But I assure you——

RIFFONI

It is Salaret's proudest achievement. Ah, Colonel, it was when I saw *his* children starving under the pitiless economic process that I vowed no child in our State should ever go hungry or acold.

MOLP

But Nina——

RIFFONI

Fed, warmed, educated, entertained, cherished as never before in human history, our children show such

rosy faces that one might say the Red Flag rides triumphant in their cheeks.

MOLP [*Grimly*]
My Nina was white with hunger.

RIFFONI [*Agitated*]
Puns are out of place, Colonel. . . . Vanni, did you ever hear of children starving?

VANNI
I did hear something once, but as the gallows took the grumbler, I thought it was just White propaganda.

RIFFONI
The gallows shall take the Children's Committee, if this prove true, Colonel Molp. Fortunately Salaret will be back from his provincial tour this very morning—he shall at once investigate your Nina's case. But to come back to my question, you say you couldn't bear to leave her, yet you want to go to the front—whence you may never come back to her.

MOLP [*Struggling with his emotion*]
God help me! But can I see our country overrun by Rolmenians?

RIFFONI
They won't get far, I assure you. Why not stay here and go on with your old job?

MOLP [*Dazed*]
Go on with my old job?

RIFFONI [*Smiling*]

With me substituted for Margherita of course. . . .
You said you were not a White but a soldier. Your
job with the Queen has lapsed. You don't feel bound
to her any longer, I assume.

MOLP [*Slowly*]

No, I suppose I don't.

RIFFONI

Then take over *my* protection. I work in this room
because thus I have under my eye the Piazza, which is
the natural focus of revolution, and I sit in this chair
because so I cannot well be stabbed in the back. But
assassination hangs over it as that old sword of
Alpastruum used to do. And why? Because I have
made it for the first time the throne of justice. . . .
Come, why do you hesitate?

MOLP

I don't see how Nina could have got here without a
God.

RIFFONI

What can you mean? What has that to do with it?

MOLP

The officers who took Government service told me
they had to profess atheism.

RIFFONI

Humph! . . . But we can consider this a private
post, not Government service.

MOLP

It is a heavy responsibility. I should have to take preventive measures——

RIFFONI

Who objects to that?

MOLP

You did, in the case of the Queen. You see they involve spies, even *agents provocateurs*——

RIFFONI

The Queen's life concerned only herself. Mine concerns the new social order. It is *that* they wish to assassinate—we cannot be squeamish with assassins. No, no, you do exactly as before. So that's settled. . . .

[*Begins writing*]

And whatever your salary was——

MOLP

Then you do permit differences of income?

RIFFONI

It is not strict Socialism, I know. But Salaret condones transitional measures.

[*Gives him the paper he has written*]

There, Comrade Molp! Present this at the State Workers' Bureau, Section 17B, and they will give you a Colonel's uniform. And come back at noon to lunch with me—share my sandwiches!

MOLP

Thank you, my General—Comrade!

RIFFONI

And bring back little Nina to share yours.

MOLP [*Going*]

God bless you!

RIFFONI

Tut! Tut! If I permit you your superstition, do not obtrude it.

[*A confused clamour penetrates from the Piazza*]

What is that? Stop, Molp! You may have to begin your new functions at once. See what's going on.

[*MOLP opens the casement near the pillars and steps out to survey the Piazza. The clamour clarifies itself into cheers. HE comes in, closing the window.*]

MOLP

It is Salaret coming back.

RIFFONI [*Relieved*]

Bravo!

MOLP

A man was throwing a bouquet into the car.

RIFFONI

Ah, we are still popular. *Viva* Salaret. Shout, Comrades!

GUARDS

Viva Salaret! *Evoè* Salaret!

[*MOLP goes out between the pillars with a military salute which only RIFFONI returns.*]

RIFFONI

Why didn't you salute him? He is your officer now.

VANNI

A thousand apologies, my General.

RIFFONI

And don't forget to salute Comrade Salaret, though he is not a soldier.

VANNI

Do you hear, pigs—Comrades?

RIFFONI

And remind me to speak to him about Comrade Molp's little girl.

VANNI

Yes, my General.

RIFFONI

I can't understand, Comrade, why you didn't report to me those rumours of hungry children. Are there any other grievances you know of? Tell me, Comrade.

VANNI

Well, Comrade, it doesn't seem right I shouldn't get more rations than my men.

RIFFONI [*Winningly*]

But that *is* Communism, Comrade. Under the old system some people got too much and some too little.

VANNI

Now we all get too little.

RIFFONI [*Rather irritated*]

That's only temporary. Wait till Rolmenia gives us breathing-space to organise production.

VANNI

But if it's the dictation of the proletariat, why can't we dictate ourselves more rations all round?

RIFFONI

That is silly.

VANNI

But my brother-in-law, the brooch-maker, says——

RIFFONI [*Sharply*]

The brooch-maker! Does he still make brooches?

VANNI [*Alarmed*]

With your head, my President.

RIFFONI

Let him look to his own! Brooches indeed, when we want every possible hand for earth-labour, clothing or poison gas. How came the Enrolment and Distribution Committee to allow it?

VANNI

He—he is Chairman of the Committee, my General.

RIFFONI

The Burial Committee will soon be busy with him.

[*Writes.*]

VANNI [*Panic-stricken*]

But my poor sister, Fenella——!

RIFFONI

Silence! The Republic has no use for slackers and shirkers. I expected you to ask for the privilege of arresting him.

VANNI [*Cringing*]

So I would if it wasn't for Fenella. He's a cocky little brute, is Stefano, and when he was made Chairman two chairs wouldn't hold him. But remember how Fenella that night—how she helped to make the Republic.

RIFFONI

Is that a reason her husband should help to destroy it?

[*Enter between the pillars PROFESSOR SALARET, carrying a bouquet. The GUARDS salute. SALARET is a prophetic-bearded, elderly figure, but looks tired and heavy-eyed beyond his years. RIFFONI springs up and hurries down the dais to salute him on both cheeks.*]

RIFFONI

Welcome home, Master. Even more welcome than your reassuring telegrams.

SALARET [*Returning his kisses*]
So glad to find you in Scaletta. I was afraid——

VANNI [*Imploringly*]
My General——!

RIFFONI
Not another word. Every man who abuses his position
must hang!

VANNI
But, Comrade, in the Bosnavinian war——!

RIFFONI [*Handing him paper*]
Give Captain Lambri the order for his arrest, and
withdraw. March!

[VANNI *motions miserably to his men to file out
with him*]

Ah, Salaret, I cannot tell you what a comfort it has
been amid all the chaos to learn that the peasantry
was sound, that as far up the river as your yacht
could penetrate, the new brotherhood was working
blissfully.

SALARET
It is impossible to imagine more enthusiastic activity
than I left behind me everywhere.

RIFFONI
Ah, Salaret, you are indeed fortunate. To how few
pioneers is it given to see their vision translated into
life! Surely you disprove the Roman proverb:
Call no man happy till he is dead.

SALARET [*Tugging at his beard*]

Humph! You realise, of course, that what enraptures them is the possession of the land. While some had seized it in advance, others did not even understand it was to be theirs for nothing—they offered me money to transmit to their refugee masters.

RIFFONI

Poor simple souls. But I hope you made it clear that it really belongs to the State and that it was to be worked in common.

SALARET

I would not press that point overmuch now, Vittorio. One big step at a time. Get your factory-workers as contented as your land-workers and then we can move further.

RIFFONI

But the nationalisation of the industries obviously involves work in common. You can't give each man a machine!

SALARET

But you added to their discontent by denationalising what was already nationalised.

RIFFONI [*Fretfully*]

You mean religion. But we couldn't compromise in *everything*. How can a modern State be built on these grotesque beliefs?

SALARET

But was there any need to turn half the churches into cinemas?

RIFFONI [*Smiling*]

I doubled their congregations. The Entertainment Committee needed them to instil Socialism—the one true religion. Besides, you, yourself, transferred their ikons and Church plate to your Exchequer.

SALARET

The Church treasure couldn't be left in the cinemas.

RIFFONI

Don't let us argue to-day, dear Salaret. You must be tired. Sit down.

[*Drawing him towards the throne.*]

SALARET

No, no. Not there!

RIFFONI

It is there you should have been from the first.

SALARET

I know my place better. I am—our conversation has proved it once again—a mere curb on your creative vehemence. As Finance Minister I dock your schemes, as Commissary of the Interior I mutilate them to correspond with the possible.

RIFFONI

But it was your books that inspired everything!

SALARET

Was it I that lit the spark that glorious night? No, no. To hold the masses, to breathe fire into the army, to repress revolution—that needs you. Ah, trust the people to know its true leader.

[*Presses him into the throne, places the bouquet on the table, and sits beside him*]

Why do you smile?

RIFFONI

Not at your exaggerations. I was remembering how I told the Duke D'Azollo I would come back on his steam-yacht, with the Red Flag flying. And if I didn't fulfil my prophecy literally, my sending you on the yacht to supervise land-distribution came very near. You really found it better than your limousine?

SALARET

Incomparably. You see one wasn't dependent on wretched country hotels or village inns—one had a floating home.

RIFFONI

I never thought of that. . . . Ah, if the Duke had only employed it like you, instead of making it a floating harem.

SALARET [*Hastily changing the conversation*]

I even ensured the draining of the marshes by distributing them too.

RIFFONI

Good! We sorely need more home-grown food.

SALARET

Oh, the marshes can merely make pasture-land.

RIFFONI

That's something. If only these cursed militarists had conquered their own country!

SALARET [*With a grim smile*]

Isn't that what Roxo is trying to do now? Your radio announcing the bad news quite spoilt my home-coming. Indeed, I fully expected to find you away at the front. You are not alarmed?

RIFFONI

On the contrary. Igmor's invasion has stopped the factory strikes and pulled the country together—it may be the saving of the Workers' Republic.

SALARET

How splendid! But all the same Prince Igmor——

RIFFONI

Trust General Hussein. He may not be as dashing as poor Marrobio, but he's wilier.

SALARET

You comfort me. But fancy Roxo going over to the enemy!

RIFFONI

I heard him once ask what could be higher than protecting the Queen. The old fanatic probably

imagines that once Margherita was restored, Prince Igmor would trot home like a lamb. But of course he would simply annex us.

SALARET

According to Armida——

[*Tugs at his beard in confusion*]

I mean, they say it is Margherita that Igmor really wants to annex—but perhaps that is all gossip.

RIFFONI [*Rising, agitated*]

It's all true—I found it in the archives. And she was ready to prostitute herself to that pig-eyed princeling, if only he would help her to conquer Bosnavina.

[*Grimly*]

But Igmor will neither annex Margherita nor Val-dania. He will be lucky even to get home.

SALARET

You seem very sure.

RIFFONI [*Laying his hand on Salaret's shoulder*]

Be proud of your son, Salaret. The experiments have succeeded at last.

SALARET

Guido's aerial torpedoes?

RIFFONI

Kites we now call them for short. Yes, charged with his new poison gas, they annihilate in their descent all life—for at least a square kilometre.

SALARET

How horrible!

RIFFONI

Not so horrible as the annihilation of the Workers' Republic—the spiritual hope of the world. It was to organise this last line of defence that I flew back here yesterday—unfortunately the Kites are ponderous and we lack transport to convey them to the front. Igmor must come here if he wants to be wiped out. . . . Would I could wipe out our deficit as easily!

SALARET

The Church treasure was a great disappointment. The jewels in the ikons had already been stolen by the priests.

RIFFONI

I know. I am not criticising your balance-sheet. But if only Gripstein had not been so obstinately Royalist—by the way, thanks to the patriotic wave caused by the Romenian advance, he was betrayed into our hands yesterday.

SALARET

Bravo! Then can't you convert him?

RIFFONI

To Socialism? More easily to Judaism!

SALARET [*Smoothing his beard*]

Ha! ha! ha!

RIFFONI

He won't even give away the hiding place of the Queen, or of the printing-press of the *Sera*, though I am sure he knows both. Apropos, Orosobonetti was shot this morning.

SALARET [*Starting up*]

My dear Vittorio! Not so many executions.

RIFFONI

He was more dangerous to the Republic than Prince Igmor.

SALARET

But I thought you had stopped his paper.

RIFFONI

It still appears—in the most unexpected places. Exploiting our every error and drawback. Wittily—I trace the Duke's pen. Ah, there is the latest copy.

[*Picks it up from litter on table.*]

SALARET [*Taking it*]

"Shorter Working Hours Demanded — An Eight Hour Day for the Hangman." There! Just what I was saying. The first moment I came in, you were talking of hanging somebody. Armida—er—a lady told me you've been nicknamed "Riffoni the Red."

RIFFONI

Of course I'm a Red. But do you know what they call you? "Salaret the Soft!" Alliteration always

pleases the people. But you won't get far with softness, believe me, dear Master. We tried that years enough, you and I. We wore out our quills and our throats. Ah, it is unimaginable how greedy, lazy and ungrateful men are, how cunning and evasive. Three times have I closed and sealed up the old markets, yet illicit buying and selling continues, and thieves and speculators plunge their dirty paws into the State stores. In vain I raid the houses in the middle of the night to search for army necessities, my very detectives spirit them away. I tell you, Salaret, terror is the only shaping-tool. The Earthly Paradise we plan must be cleared of weeds: pitilessly—for pity's own sake.

VANNI [*Reappearing timidly between the pillars*]
My General, you asked me——

RIFFONI
I asked you to give Captain Lambri the order for his arrest.

VANNI
But the little Nina——!

RIFFONI
Oh, that!
[*VANNI salutes and begins to retire*]
There's a case in point. Children unfed by some mismanagement or misappropriation. You must look into it. . . . Wait a moment, Corporal. Fetch me Comrade Gripstein.

VANNI
Yes, my General.

RIFFONI
And on second thoughts collect Comrade Livia, too.
. . . No, let one of your men get the lady—we don't
want the two prisoners consulting.

VANNI
I understand, Comrade.
[*Exit.*]

SALARET
What are you going to do?

RIFFONI
Try my shaping-tool.

SALARET
More terrorism?

RIFFONI
The Baron must be frightened into confessing where
he has concealed his gold reserve. And his daughter-
in-law, who was a maid of honour, surely knows
where the Queen is burrowing.

SALARET
Why not let lost monarchs lie?

RIFFONI
As long as she lives, she will be the storm-centre of
reaction. You yourself said her beauty was the real
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cause of Igmor's invading us. Even the currency you have failed to stamp out is infectious. Every coin with her image is a counter-revolutionary.

[*Produces one*]

Look at the hussy! She will always have a train of young monarchists all in love with her.

SALARET

Bah! *Cazotti* uncaught is more formidable.

RIFFONI

More sinister and spidery, but not more dangerous—unless you mean he has his wife's death to revenge.

SALARET

To revenge?

[*Laughs mirthlessly*]

From all I hear the shot that killed the Countess removed the one clog on his career. The woman simply dragged him down.

RIFFONI

All women drag one down.

SALARET

You haven't much experience.

RIFFONI

I had my youthful plunge—thanks to too much pocket-money. Ah, how good it was to come up to

the surface and breathe the clean sweet air of service!
It was your books dragged me up from the slime.

SALARET [*With uneasy facetiousness*]

And yet people call them dry. Odd that your father's books bored you then. But it's a wise child that knows his own father.

[*Moves towards the curtains*]

I suppose my old rooms——

RIFFONI

Yes, the Queen's suite is still at your disposal—I stick to my camp-bed in the basement. But you will surely wait to tackle Gripstein?

SALARET

No, thanks. I don't like experiments in terror.

RIFFONI

But as Finance Minister you are peculiarly interested.

SALARET [*Drawing aside curtains and revealing OMAR on duty with a pistol in his girdle*]

I would rather have a wash. . . . Well, Omar, how are you?

OMAR [*Salaams*]

Great is the mercy of Allah.

[*HE closes the curtains behind himself and SALARET. Enter through the pillars BARON GRIPSTEIN followed by CORPORAL VANNI. The BARON looks wistful, unkempt, unbrushed and woe-begone.*]

RIFFONI

Ah, Comrade Gripstein, good-morning.

[BARON *does not reply*]

So you are still tongue-tied?

BARON GRIPSTEIN

I have nothing to say.

RIFFONI

And if we try some of those quaint instruments we unearthed in the vault—the prickly hare, the mouth-widener——?

BARON GRIPSTEIN

You will not.

RIFFONI

And why not, pray?

BARON GRIPSTEIN

You founded a Society for the Prevention of Cruelty——

RIFFONI

Surgery is not cruelty. An operation for dumbness——

BARON GRIPSTEIN

Must be done under chloroform.

RIFFONI

Bah! Your fencing will not save you. . . . Nor your daughter-in-law, either.

[LIVIA, *as he speaks, is brought in through the*

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curtains, pale, but in better fettle. SHE smiles at the BARON and they look lovingly at each other]
Give Comrade Livia a chair.

LIVIA
I would rather stand.

RIFFONI
As you please. Don't imagine your disdain impresses me, any more than it did in your own salon. Why you should be so proud of never having earned your clothes and keep, your God alone knows. And you weren't too proud to blend your blood with the breed of Shylock! . . .

[LIVIA *winces*]
Come now, my patience is at an end. Where is the Queen?

LIVIA
Why not consult the *Sera*?

RIFFONI
You are adding insolence to your iniquities. Where is the Queen?

LIVIA
With the Duke and Duchess D'Azollo.

RIFFONI
Yes, and the Duke and Duchess with the Queen. Do not try me too far.

[*Turns again to GRIPSTEIN*]
Where is your bank bullion?

BARON GRIPSTEIN

A Socialist State does not need gold.

RIFFONI

It must pay for its imports.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

And thus foster Capitalism abroad?

RIFFONI

It is not our fault if Socialism is not everywhere simultaneous.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

And since it can never be simultaneous it can never *be*.

RIFFONI

The sunrise is not simultaneous but the world rolls always towards it. Where is your gold, I say? . . . Ah, the old British King would have taken out your teeth.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

You will find only a little gold there.

LIVIA

Ha! ha! ha!

RIFFONI

Silence, woman. And you, Jew, understand that by the law of Valdania all bank-assets must be nationalised.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

So must all raw stuffs: yet to keep your factories going you yourselves buy secretly of speculators and profiteers.

RIFFONI

We are above the law: you are under it. What have you done with your bullion?

BARON GRIPSTEIN [*Sullenly*]

Marshal Roxo has it.

RIFFONI

You traitor! Then he has carried it to Rolmenia!

BARON GRIPSTEIN [*Jubilant*]

Has he? Then Margherita will be restored!

RIFFONI [*Grimly*]

You shall not live to see it.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

I died when Sigismondo died. Ah, the poor blind boy could not see his murderers! But God saw them! I will repay, saith the Lord, I will repay.

RIFFONI

Ha! ha! ha! Let Him first repay what He owes the old *régime*. Corporal Vanni!

VANNI

Yes, my General.

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RIFFONI

String the Jew up at once.

BARON GRIPSTEIN [*Transformed from prophet to
poltroon*]

Not *hanged*! Creator of the Universe!

RIFFONI

What does it matter to one dead already?

LIVIA

You dare not hang a Knight of the Order of the Redeemer.

RIFFONI

And who will redeem him? He doesn't deserve a soldier's death. . . . Now, Corporal!

BARON GRIPSTEIN

But give me time—an hour—half an hour——!

RIFFONI

What do you need time for?

BARON GRIPSTEIN

For prayer—repentance—the confession of my sins.

RIFFONI

Surely a week wouldn't suffice for your sins against Labour. Give him ten minutes, Comrade, perhaps he will repent of his refusal to help the Republic.

BARON GRIPSTEIN
God bless you. But I need a Rabbi.

LIVIA [*Revolted*]
A Rabbi? You!

BARON GRIPSTEIN [*Frenzied*]
A Rabbi, for God's sake! I have trespassed——!
[*Begins to beat his breast and recite the Hebrew confession*]
Al chêt shechetanu lefanecha——

RIFFONI
Stop these mummeries. The State recognises no holy slackers. They have all accepted useful work under the Republic—the Patriarch, the Mufti, the Grand Rabbi. Only the Cardinal has so far managed to evade our Enrolment Committees—but we shall yet harness him.

LIVIA
The Church has survived worse persecutions.

RIFFONI
Persecutions? Who interferes with your performances? We won't pay for them, that's all. Apropos, since the Cardinal does no State work, let *him* be fetched to the Baron.

BARON GRIPSTEIN
No! No! Not a priest! A Rabbi!

RIFFONI
You queer pious people—one man's saviour is another

man's Satan! Take him away! . . . Wait! Unless within the ten minutes he reveals the Queen's hiding-place, let his daughter-in-law dangle beside him.

LIVIA

Do not speak, father!

BARON GRIPSTEIN [*Huskily*]

You to be hanged!

LIVIA

What is death but stepping across a frontier—into the arms of Christ!

BARON GRIPSTEIN

Ah, if I could believe in Him!

LIVIA

You do—you must. Pray to the Sacred Heart and His Precious Blood. He will guide you to God.

BARON GRIPSTEIN [*Clutching at her hand*]

You must guide me—ah, I see only a black road.

LIVIA

Sigismondo is waiting to lend you his eyes——

BARON GRIPSTEIN

Out of my first earnings, we moved into a tiny two-roomed house and there was gas. O the light and hope when it first blazed yellow from our match! . . . And that it should all have come to this!

[*Covers his eyes. MOLP, now in a colonel's uniform, re-enters between the pillars.*]

RIFFONI

Ah, Colonel, the very man I wanted. . . . How nicely that fits you! . . . Your first job will, I hope, be as amusing to you as it is to me. You are to conduct these two undesirables across the frontier.

MOLP [*Surveying them*]

I see the joke.

BARON GRIPSTEIN [*Dazed*]

The frontier?

RIFFONI

Not the one with Christ in the custom-house. . . . Nor, Colonel, the Bosnavinian frontier where they would only reinforce the other White refugees. Take my motor-car. And divide your sandwiches with them—ham, I hope.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

We are not to be hanged? O God of Israel!

LIVIA

O Blessèd Mary!

RIFFONI

Settle between yourselves which has saved you. But I will tell you, Baron, *what* has saved you—the anonymous pension you paid Salaret!

BARON GRIPSTEIN

You know?

RIFFONI [*Smiling*]

Haven't we got possession of all your papers of no value? Ah, the agony when friend Molp was escorting *me* out of Valdania—the thought that I was leaving Salaret and his little ones to starve. But those bank-notes the post brought him every first of the month——

[*HIS voice breaks down. HE extends his hand, which the BARON takes as in a dream*]

Addio. Don't counterplot too much.

BARON GRIPSTEIN [*Still dazed*]

How truly is it written that charity averts the evil decree!

RIFFONI

Look after him, Baroness, he's a good old soul, despite all his religions.

LIVIA

I should have been more grateful, Signor, had you played with us less cruelly.

RIFFONI

I am sorry that it was necessary in the State interest to try to extract the information. I have failed and there's an end of it. As a matter of fact, I haven't the power to send people to death without a trial. Find them Austrian passports, Molp, else the Baron will be refused admission as a Socialist. Ha! ha! ha!

MOLP

Then you won't expect me to lunch.

RIFFONI

Ha! I'm sorry. But come as soon as they are safe and report——

[*Re-enter SALARET through the curtains*]

Ah, Salaret, just in time to say good-bye to your benefactor.

SALARET

He has disgorged the bullion?

RIFFONI

No, no—I was referring to the banknotes he sent you every month.

SALARET

He? But *you* sent them!

RIFFONI

I? I could scarcely keep myself. Didn't I tell you I discovered they were his secret amends for having sacked you?

SALARET

That was very kind of you, Baron. But I had rather you had given me back my editorship.

BARON GRIPSTEIN [*With a twinkle*]

You can have it back now, if you like.

RIFFONI

Ha! ha! ha! The old chap has more humour than his God.

SALARET

But I accept your offer. Where is the printing-office?

RIFFONI

Ha! ha! ha! Well countered, Salaret! Write him an order on the Treasury for his advances—with interest.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

No, not interest. Don't rob me of my good deed.

SALARET [*Writing*]

Very well.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

But you must double the principal.

SALARET

Eh?

BARON GRIPSTEIN

The currency has halved its value since you became Finance Minister.

LIVIA

How can you chaffer so, Baron? When we have just escaped death.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

That is *why, carissima*. We have to *live*. What with

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Bosnavina repudiating her loan, even the fare to America would be a consideration.

[OMAR comes through the curtains towards RIFFONI, bearing a letter on a salver.]

LIVIA [*Shocked*]
You here, Omar!

OMAR [*Apologetically*]
I had to live, your Excellencies.

BARON GRIPSTEIN
Just what I was saying, Omar. And very glad to see you alive.

[RIFFONI takes the letter and begins opening it.]

SALARET [*Simultaneously handing GRIPSTEIN the order on the Treasury*]

There! You can't say the Workers' Republic is as repudiatory as Bosnavina.

RIFFONI [*Looking up*]
You'd better lend him *your* car to the frontier, Salaret—it's more comfortable than mine. Unless he'd like my aeroplane.

BARON GRIPSTEIN [*Shuddering*]
God forbid!

[RIFFONI, *amused*, begins to read the letter, and MOLP speaks to SALARET, evidently about the motor-car.]

OMAR [*To GRIPSTEIN*]
Is Signor Brio alive, Effendi?

BARON GRIPSTEIN

My majordomo? . . . How should I know?

OMAR [*Lowering his voice*]

And Her Majesty?

[GRIPSTEIN *makes a warning gesture that MOLP is approaching.*]

MOLP

Are you ready, Baron?

BARON GRIPSTEIN

Perfectly. Signor Riffoni, as you have been merciful, may you find mercy. *Addio.*

RIFFONI [*Absently, absorbed in the letter*]

A rivederla.

[MOLP *salutes equally unmarked and together with VANNI and the GUARD escorts the BARON and LIVIA out. RIFFONI gives a long low whistle.*]

SALARET

What is it, Vittorio?

RIFFONI [*Joyously*]

The beginning of the end!

[HE *hands him the letter. SALARET tugs at his beard nervously. RIFFONI'S face falls at a sudden suspicion*]

But do you know if that is his handwriting? It may be an assassin.

SALARET

It may be worse—it may be the man himself. . . .
What is the Signor like, Omar?

OMAR

Very shabby, Effendi. Like a deserter. I marvel
they let him cross to my side of the Palace. He must
know his way about it.

RIFFONI

He would.

OMAR

They say Captain Lambri let him in because he saw
him throw a bouquet into your car.

SALARET

The rogue! But is he fat, thin, long, short?

OMAR

Short and not so fat as last year.

RIFFONI

Ha! Then you know him.

OMAR

No, Effendi. But his garments hang loose.

SALARET

Quite a Sherlock Holmes.

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RIFFONI

Who sees everything except the central fact. You didn't recognise Cazotti?

OMAR

The Prime Minister! . . . The counter-revolutionist, I mean. But Count Cazotti's face was hairless and this man is bearded like a Medina pilgrim.

RIFFONI

Beards, unlike brains, can grow. Let him come. . . .

[*Exit* OMAR]

Ah, I nearly cried "Thank God!"—such is the force of early idioms. The Workers' Republic is safe! Embrace me, Salaret.

SALARET [*Waving him off*]

Beware of Cazotti's embrace. The Republic safe, forsooth! If you accept his offer to betray the Queen's hiding-place, you will have to amnesty him—he is even capable of demanding the reward for delivering himself up! Once he has got his foot in again, he will renew communication with Roxo, and the traitor within will deliver the citadel to the traitor without.

RIFFONI

You overlook, dear Master, that once we capture the Queen, there will be no dynasty for Roxo to restore.

[CAZOTTI comes through the curtains which are parted by OMAR; a broken refugee with a ragged iron-grey beard and whiskers]

So, Cazotti, the game's up!

CAZOTTI

Yes, King Capital is dead, long live the Workers' Republic!

RIFFONI [*Astonished*]

You're a Socialist now?

CAZOTTI

I always was.

SALARET

What!!

CAZOTTI

Every statesman is, seeing that the State is only a Social group. Individualism is anarchy.

SALARET

Oh really! Do you take us for innocents?

CAZOTTI

Innocence and politics are incompatible. Your days of innocence are over, Signor Salaret.

SALARET [*Sharply*]

I don't understand you.

CAZOTTI

May I sit down? I am tired.

[*HE finds a chair and sits looking round*]

The room seems to have lost colour! Ah, you have removed the window-Madonna!

RIFFONI

She let in the air through a hundred bullet-holes.

CAZOTTI

Yes, and a bullet on my poor wife, who had such a foolish faith in her protection.

[*Covers his eyes and is silent a space. Looks up fiercely*]

Ah, I daresay you think I am posing at bereavement. My wife was often absurd, I know, but I can't forget that with a dozen rich aspirants for her hand, she married the struggling journalist when he hadn't a soldo.

[*Covers his eyes again.*]

SALARET [*Breaking the silence sardonically*]

So you always were a Socialist?

CAZOTTI [*Animated again*]

What was the constitution I gave Valdania if not Socialist?

SALARET

It was Democratic, not Socialist.

CAZOTTI

Your paper said the contrary.

SALARET [*Outraged*]

My paper?

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CAZOTTI

Practically. You said that now every man had a vote, Labour being the overwhelming majority had only to return a Workers' Parliament to ensure the dictation of the proletariat.

RIFFONI

That was true in theory but in practice the propertied classes would have resisted expropriation with the knife.

CAZOTTI

I quite agree *they* would have become the revolutionary party. Anyhow, you don't suppose it was tenderness for *them* that instigated my reforms? Did not the Duke D'Azollo complain I had commandeered his farm? The aristocratic party I overthrew used to fling at me that I had begun on a tub. In reality I began lower—on a doorstep. I am not only a son of the people, but a nameless son. Ah, it was not capital that rocked my cradle. Never have I lost the burning sympathy with my own class that springs from the sense of a wronged childhood.

RIFFONI

But you said in my own hearing that self-interest is the only practicable pivot of society—you quoted your dentist.

CAZOTTI [*Smiling*]

I thought you would throw that in my teeth.

[RIFFONI *smiles*]

He has now charge of yours by the way, and your every smile shows the world he was wrong and that happily human nature is better than we thought. You have proved that love of the State is sufficient to make the wheels go round — I can hear them humming all around me.

RIFFONI [*With satisfaction*]

Ha!

SALARET

A quick conversion.

CAZOTTI

And if I had not been converted, what would you have said? That like the Bourbons I learn nothing and forget nothing. I overrated the power of resistance of the possessing classes. All wars in my experience have been economic at bottom. What then, I thought, would be the bloodiness of the war which is economic at top too! Your colleague has just admitted he thought the propertied classes would have fought even constitutional expropriation to the death. Had I foreseen how feeble would be their defence, or even with what comparative apathy the workers would submit to docketing and regimentation, I would have gone forward more boldly. You accused me of moving in spirals. It is true. As a workaday politician I did not believe the popular intelligence sufficiently advanced to follow a straight lead. I had not your genius and courage for a frontal attack on the old order. But if I moved spirally, the spirals were

always upward, and now that I have made the last turn—here I am at your side!

RIFFONI [*Rather dazed*]

You offer co-operation as well as information?

CAZOTTI

In any capacity, however humble.

SALARET

After you expelled him from Valdania?

RIFFONI

Ah, I was forgetting. . . . And you, Comrade Cazotti, forget you are not now in the Chamber of Deputies. Here we demand Truth.

CAZOTTI

I expelled you from Valdania because I thought your frontal attacks would only stiffen the bourgeois against my spiral methods.

SALARET

But when we achieved your secret aim, why did you not join us at once, why lie low so long?

CAZOTTI

Were you in the mood to have me, or rather were your ferocious followers, the Fenellas and Lambris? I had to wait for the first ferment to be over.

SALARET

Or for the revolution to succeed.

RIFFONI

Or for the revolution to succeed. Then you throw us bouquets.

CAZOTTI

And do you call this success? Western Europe drawing daily further from you, and the Romenian army nearer? No, Comrades, what I offer to share is your risk, not your success. It is the ruin of my career if you are conquered.

RIFFONI

We shall not be conquered. At the worst our Kites——

SALARET

Sh! You are indiscreet. . . . And what help, Count Cazotti, can *you* bring us?

CAZOTTI

What help can *I* bring? Leaving out that I bring you the Queen, cannot you see that with my European reputation my accession to your ranks will show the world that opposition is futile, that you are here to stay?

RIFFONI

Ha!

CAZOTTI

While my personal relations with the various Cabinets will ensure the recognition of the Republic. I can pour oil on the troubled waters.

SALARET

Thank you—we can offer our own petroleum concessions.

RIFFONI

Ha! ha! ha!

CAZOTTI

The capitalist countries may deal with you, but they will not recognise you politically.

RIFFONI

Just what we want. What you call our Fenellas and Lambris would resent our recognising *them*. You are sure that if we deal with them, we can rely on their not recognising us officially?

CAZOTTI [*Smiling*]

Even for that you need a practised diplomatist. And still more for the oil concessions will you need a practised Finance Minister.

SALARET [*Bounding*]

What!! . . . Vittorio, we must discuss this alone. . . . I insist.

[RIFFONI *strikes the gong on his table once.* VANNI *and his men file in.*]

RIFFONI

Remove Count Cazotti till I signal again.

[*They march him out.*]

CAZOTTI [*At exit*]

Like you, Comrade Riffoni, I shall return.

SALARET

O my guileless Vittorio, with all your genius! The scoundrel is playing on your nobility.

RIFFONI [*A little restive*]

Say gullibility and have done with it. Surely what he says is true—his accession will be the seal of our success. And he is devilishly able.

SALARET

Devilishly. A sinister spider, as you put it just before. Stamp upon him.

RIFFONI

And let the Queen escape?

SALARET

We shall find her without him.

RIFFONI

Not so sure.

SALARET

The new patriotic wave you tell me of will fling her at our feet, as it flung Gripstein.

RIFFONI

And in the meantime her damnable face is to hover in the air, obscuring our future.

SALARET

You exaggerate her importance.

RIFFONI

At any rate I cannot exaggerate Cazotti's. Surely the Interior is burden enough for you. Suppose you hand him over the Finances—he did do wonders with them.

SALARET

Under Gripstein's coaching. Even then look at the debt he left us.

RIFFONI

That was the Bosnavinian war. As you wittily said in the *Sera*, we died beyond our means.

SALARET

Yes, but who sent us to death? Cazotti.

RIFFONI

No, no, Margherita was the murderess. Margherita, with her craving to add Bosnavina to her dominions and Duchess to her title. Ah, Cazotti will more than atone for his past, if he really delivers her into our hands.

SALARET

Then let him deliver her—and let them die together!

RIFFONI [*Surprised and shocked*]

Salaret! How could we act so dishonourably? We promised amnesty to any informant——

SALARET [*Tugging at his beard*]

Did we? Then Cazotti's information must be refused.

RIFFONI

Why? Amnesty does not imply accepting him as a colleague, nor even perhaps keeping him in the country—I could deport him. That would complete the turning of the tables. Ha! ha! ha! But we *must* have the Queen!

SALARET

Vittorio, I beseech you.

RIFFONI [*Touched*]

A Salaret does not beseech. Let the dog go!

[*Strikes gong.*]

SALARET

Unhanged?

RIFFONI

You said not so many hangings.

SALARET

One hanging may save many.

RIFFONI

We can always catch him again—the brute is sadly winded.

[*Already CAZOTTI is returning with VANNI and the GUARDS, who range themselves against the wall.*

RIFFONI *seats himself on the throne*]

Count Cazotti, Comrade Salaret and I have considered both your offer of information and your offer of co-operation, and in both cases——

[*Enter OMAR through the curtains*]

I didn't ring.

OMAR

No, Effendi, but the Commissary of Police is telephoning——

RIFFONI

Komak? Can't you take the message?

OMAR

He says it is too great for any ear but the President's.

RIFFONI

I shall really have to instal the receiver here. And then farewell even to the dregs of peace. Salaret, will you convey our decision to Count Cazotti?

SALARET

With pleasure. And give Komak my greetings. He was my boy's college - chum and subsidiser, you remember! A splendid fellow!

[*RIFFONI follows OMAR out. SALARET seats himself on the dais, but not on the throne*]

Count Cazotti, we have come to the conclusion that since leopards do not change their spots——

CAZOTTI [*Coolly*]

Hadn't you and I likewise better discuss this alone?

SALARET

There is nothing to discuss. And if there was, do you suppose I would trust myself within reach of the leopard's paw?

CAZOTTI

Very well. Do not blame me if my revelations before the proletariat——

[Their eyes meet.]

SALARET

Corporal Vanni, search this man for weapons.

VANNI

Yes, Excel—— Comrade!

[Taps CAZOTTI everywhere with his one arm]

Aha!

[Bounding back]

A hand-grenade! . . . No, no, my friend, I'm not going to lose my other arm.

CAZOTTI *[Producing and re-pocketing it]*

It is an apple . . . I have had to eat as I could.

SALARET

Ah, like me when I lost my editorship. . . . Comrade Vanni, withdraw your men, but if I sound the gong——

VANNI

The President strikes twice when he wants us to *rush*. And there is his pistol on the table.

SALARET

Ah!

[*Seizes it as the GUARDS turn and go.*]

CAZOTTI

Put it down—you are such a bad shot, you might really hit me. A pity you had no pre-revolution experience, like your aviating chief. See! I retire to this pillar—whence Marrobio once addressed the Queen. Now you can listen calmly.

SALARET

I shall not listen long.

CAZOTTI

There is no need. One word of yours sufficed to show me how the land lay.

SALARET [*Puzzled*]

What?

CAZOTTI

Precisely. The little word “What.” When I mentioned the finances. You were not anxious I should take them over.

SALARET

Why should I be?

CAZOTTI [*Blandly*]

I know I'm not such a *chartered* accountant as you are.

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SALARET [*Fiercely*]
What are you hinting at?

CAZOTTI
Only the expense of carrying on your yacht's ducal tradition.

SALARET
Ducal tradition?

CAZOTTI
Come, come! You had your underground news-service before the revolution—we have it after.

SALARET
We?

[*Strikes gong twice*]
I told Riffoni you were dangerous.
[*VANNI and the GUARDS dash in.*]

CAZOTTI [*Coolly*]
And I once told him you were not.

SALARET [*Waving VANNI back*]
I was only testing your vigilance. Thank you.
[*The GUARDS retire*]
So you admit you are here for treachery to the Republic.

CAZOTTI
And what name do you give to seducing the Republic's lady prisoners?

SALARET
What do you say?

CAZOTTI
I can speak louder if you like.

SALARET
No, no, I hear quite well—at least come a little closer.

CAZOTTI [*Coming almost up to him, sardonically*]
You see, how you are losing your alarm.

SALARET
Your news-service is false. There are no women on the yacht. Riffoni will never believe you.

CAZOTTI
You may have smuggled them into safety—you could hardly do less after your marine revelries. But when I call for the prison-records of the counter-revolutionaries and ask where are such and such highborn ladies, awaiting trial or execution—well, if I rightly understand the evolution of your Riffoni, that dynamic visionary, that ascetic assassin——

SALARET
He wasn't always such a saint. What good would it have done to shoot all those beautiful women?

CAZOTTI
Oh, don't suppose I utterly condemn you. You had a hard plodding youth, and a big dull family that you

couldn't always feed, and suddenly you find yourself riding on the rainbow and commanding the eclipse. You couldn't stand it, my friend, any more than those highborn ladies could stand hunger and cold and the fear of death. I couldn't stand these things myself. That's why I'm coming into your Government.

SALARET

You seriously insist——?

CAZOTTI

Government has become a habit with me—call it a vice. Without power I feel like the opium-eater without his drug.

SALARET

No! No! You shall not come in to betray Riffoni. Rather will I tell him everything. After all there's only one woman now, and I'm ready, nay anxious, to marry her.

CAZOTTI

It takes three to make a marriage and Signor da Grasso is still alive. But who says I come in to betray Riffoni? I come in to escape eating apples and creeping about like a hunted cat. There used to be flags and red carpets when I arrived at a town, every street grew full of pointing fingers, the place, however important, became a mere background for my personality. Now a pointing finger would be an arrow at my heart. It is not pleasant.

SALARET

I could smuggle you out of the country on the yacht—
with a countess or two, if you like.

CAZOTTI

I don't. This is my year of mourning for my wife.

SALARET

You are a strange man.

CAZOTTI

I want my drug!

SALARET

Join Roxo—the Rolmenians will give you plenty of
power.

CAZOTTI

Ah, but I want this new and concentrated form of it—
decrees, ukases, rules, regulations, registrations, restric-
tions, prescriptions, perquisitions, inquisitions, raids,
confiscations, censorship, compulsory labour, dictation
at the bayonet's point, without public meetings,
without newspapers, without parliaments—ye gods,
what a flavour! How does it taste, Comrade, how
does it taste?

SALARET

You exaggerate our autocracy as you caricature its
object. If we take power, it is for social construction.
You would take it as a drug.

CAZOTTI [*Chuckling*]
But not as an aphrodisiac.

SALARET
Damn you for a devil!
[*Re-enter RIFFONI through the curtains.*]

RIFFONI
A devil indeed! When he offered to betray the Queen he knew she was already in our hands.

SALARET
We have the Queen?

RIFFONI
And the Duke D'Azollo! And the printers of the *Sera*! As I suspected, the gang clung together. And Komak nearly got this rascal too, who was on a visit to the house, only he cunningly passed himself off as President of the House Committee.

SALARET
The Queen has been in Scaletta all along?

RIFFONI
In the very heart. In an upper apartment belonging to Brio's mother. The printing-press was in the loft. Ah, Salaret, this is a great moment—second only to that when we first stood here—you and I—in a Palace purified of Queen and Court. Embrace me again, dear Master.

[*THEY kiss each other*]

Ah, how they melt away, all the obstacles to your noble purpose! It is the compensation of your long joyless years. . . .

[CAZOTTI *has turned pale, but with arms folded strives to meet SALARET'S averted eye. HE now lets a little snigger escape him. RIFFONI turns on him*]

As for this dog, he said he began on a doorstep, let him end high on the gallows. The Tribunal must sit at once. Where is Vanni?

[*Picks up his gong-stick.*]

SALARET [*Clutching the gong-stick*]

But, Vittorio, you said it was dishonourable to hang him.

RIFFONI [*Pulling his stick back*]

Only if we had accepted his information. . . . Ah, Salaret the Soft, when it comes to the point you can't bear even a spider stamped on. You will next be pleading for the Queen.

SALARET

The Queen is an encumbrance: Cazotti, you urged, may be an asset.

RIFFONI [*Dazed*]

But it was you who—why I just heard you call him a devil!

CAZOTTI

Because I mocked at your amateur Socialism. If I couldn't make a better State than that, well, I shouldn't wait for *you* to hang me.

RIFFONI

We know it is rough and ready.

CAZOTTI

Rough because *you* were not ready. Believe me, I studied the Professor's books and bought your paper regularly, but never did I see any imaginative grasp of the new order, or the new evils that would arise in place of the old, as the dint in an india-rubber ball varies its place as you try to squeeze it away. You foresaw nothing, prepared nothing.

RIFFONI

We cross our bridges when we come to them.

CAZOTTI

And they break down under you. And your boats you had already burnt.

RIFFONI

When Michael Angelo was asked how it was possible to paint frescoes on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, he replied the work itself would teach the method. We live from day to day.

CAZOTTI

And from hand to mouth apparently. Communism forsooth! You had to offer money even for my arrest —enriching some individual!

RIFFONI

It's not so easy to abolish money.

CAZOTTI

No—it remains the root of all evil. Well, I congratulate the anti-Socialists. Your State is a splendid advertisement for them.

RIFFONI [*Piqued*]
What would *you* do?

CAZOTTI

When the physician is called in, he will prescribe.

SALARET

Do call him in, Riffoni—his very mockery convinced me of his sincerity.

RIFFONI [*Dazed*]
You are convinced of his sincerity?

SALARET

Absolutely.

RIFFONI

Then convince me of yours—give him over the Finances.

SALARET

With enthusiasm.

RIFFONI [*Taken aback*]

Although you know he was with the Queen this very morning?

CAZOTTI [*Glibly*]

I went to inform her of my change of views—to counsel her to quit Valdania.

SALARET

That was only fair.

RIFFONI [*Slowly*]

Well, Comrade Cazotti, this is a strange turn in the situation. *Would* you undertake the Finances?

[SALARET *looks at CAZOTTI wistfully.*]

CAZOTTI

The problems of the Interior tempt me more.

SALARET [*In grateful admiration*]

Just as you please. . . .

[*Holds out his hand, which CAZOTTI grasps. Enter OMAR bearing a luncheon tray with three covers and a bottle of champagne, supplementing the water-bottle.*]

RIFFONI

How the morning flies!

[*To CAZOTTI*]

You will join our repast?

CAZOTTI

With the greatest hunger.

RIFFONI [*Smiling*]

Luckily you come in for Colonel Molp's rations. He had to go off.

CAZOTTI

Colonel Molp? He has seen the light too? Bravo!

RIFFONI [*With sudden rage to OMAR*]

Why have you brought champagne?

OMAR

Signor Salaret's orders, Effendi.

SALARET

To celebrate my return. Why let the royal wine spoil in the cellars?

RIFFONI

We agreed it was to be used in the hospitals.

SALARET

That only resulted, I found, in the hospital staff getting drunk.

CAZOTTI [*Laughingly*]

Didn't I say the problems of the Interior were tempting?

RIFFONI

This is no laughing matter. I see we must prohibit alcohol altogether.

CAZOTTI

But not on the day of the Queen's capture! I do hope it's the special vintage presented to her by the King of Rolmenia—just before he declared war.

SALARET

We ought to have sent *you* to the cellar.

CAZOTTI

I was expecting to be sent lower still. And the dungeon is deplorably out of repair. Ugh!

SALARET

Trust Omar to choose a good wine—wasn't he with Gripstein?

[OMAR *has meantime opened the bottle and poured out two glasses, but RIFFONI stops him at the third, which he fills himself from the water-bottle and raises in a toast.*]

RIFFONI

To our Triumvirate!

CAZOTTI [*Clinking a champagne glass with RIFFONI'S*]
And the Workers' Republic!

SALARET [*Clinking both glasses*]

To the Workers' Republic!

[*THEY drink. A confused sound of cavalry and shouting from the Piazza. RIFFONI drops his glass, which breaks.*]

RIFFONI [*Rushing towards the casement*]

Ah, at last!

CAZOTTI [*Amazed*]

You haven't had the Queen brought *here*?

RIFFONI
Where else?

CAZOTTI
The Fort Prison, of course.

RIFFONI
Right away on the lake? No, no. After the long strain of awaiting her capture, I must have her under my own eye.

CAZOTTI
But where will you put her?

RIFFONI
There is a dungeon.

CAZOTTI
Madness! I beg your pardon, but prisoners are my department. You don't want the anti-Socialists to go on congratulating themselves. Who has her old suite?

RIFFONI
Salaret.

CAZOTTI
Salaret? What is he doing in a woman's apartment?

[Hurries through the curtains.]

SALARET
Oh, Vittorio! Suppose he should connive at her escape.

RIFFONI [*Impatiently*]

You veer round like a child's toy.

[*HE throws open the casement, revealing the lake and the snow mountains*]

Listen!

[*From the Piazza mounts a loud booing, through which penetrate cries of "Down with Margherita," "Death to Margherita." A voluptuously vindictive smile slowly illumines his ascetic features as the curtain falls.*]

Act Three

[*The same, the next morning. COLONEL MOLP stands showing OMAR a photograph.*]

MOLP

Intelligent? She's wonderful! Why, her grandmother writes——

[*Pauses to press the picture to his lips. RIFFONI dashes in between the pillars clad in his airman's costume. MOLP slips the photograph away.*]

RIFFONI [*Throwing his cap and coat to OMAR, who goes out with them*]

Don't be so shy—I know it's only little Nina. . . . Ouf, I wish I hadn't left word I'd call on Comrade Margherita at ten. I had to fly back just when I espied the Rolmenian vanguard.

MOLP

What a pity! For Her Majesty—er—Comrade Margherita—begs to be excused. She cannot receive you this morning.

RIFFONI [*Angrily*]

Eh?

MOLP

She has a headache.

RIFFONI [*Furious*]

Those feminine headaches! She had one yesterday,

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and she'll have one to-morrow—and for as long as we leave her head on her shoulders. Did she look headachy?

MOLP

I saw only Signora da Grasso.

RIFFONI

Ha! In providing her with a Dame of Honour we have supplied her with a medium for her mendacity. I told Cazotti it was a mistake to continue this fairy-tale ritual. She should have had the dungeon for her boudoir, with the rats for courtiers.

MOLP

What have her courtiers proved but rats?

RIFFONI

Not all. More died for her than she deserved. I at least have no obligation to put up with her majestic megrims. Tell her I must insist on paying my respects.

MOLP

Respects? . . . Yes, my President.

[Going towards the curtains.]

RIFFONI

One moment, Molp. Now that the last of the Whites are accounted for, we shan't need the guards, even in the corridor.

MOLP [*Alarmed*]
Oh, but you mustn't withdraw Vanni entirely.

RIFFONI [*Smiling*]
I won't—nor my confidence in you.
 [*Lays hand amicably on his shoulder*]
I was only testing you.

MOLP [*Wounded*]
You had my word.

RIFFONI
But the Queen is terribly fascinating—remember Fiuma—and you seemed so moved, so solicitous.

MOLP
She is so young, so pitiable.

RIFFONI
Oh, you soldiers! You wouldn't be so sympathetic if she were ugly and coarse-handed, like a woman who has worked for her food.

MOLP
If you doubt me, my President, let me resign.

RIFFONI
Ah, you want to get out of dragooning her—she must be a witch. . . . Hark you, Comrade, if you try any tricks against the Republic——! . . . Forgive me, my nerves are on edge. I didn't sleep last night. . . . When are you bringing little Nina to see me?

MOLP

I haven't brought her yet from her grandmother's.

RIFFONI

Ah, you are afraid the Rolmenians will really get to Scaletta—don't deny it!

MOLP

Since our troops are retreating before them——!

RIFFONI

Faintheart. . . . Ah, here is the new Commissary. Look! There's cheerfulness for you.

[CAZOTTI enters between the pillars, spruced up, clean-shaven and frock-coated, a portfolio under his arm, and in his whole bearing the jocundity of a salvaged skipper, his foot again on his quarter-deck.]

MOLP

I will deliver your message to Comrade Margherita.

[Exit to the interior.]

RIFFONI [*Shaking hands*]

Good morning, Cazotti, you look yourself again.

CAZOTTI

And you look somebody else. What's the matter?

RIFFONI

Insomnia—and news from General Hussein that sent me scouting at dawn. But read for yourself.

[Tenders war-report.]

CAZOTTI [*Perusing it*]

Ah, Roxo and Igmor are a tough combination. . . .
And Roxo was always clever with cavalry. But
surely this swift advance of theirs plays into your
hands.

RIFFONI

How so?

CAZOTTI

Won't it soon bring them within range of your aerial
torpedoes? In fact Hussein ought to feign retreating
faster.

RIFFONI [*Startled*]

Feign retreating?

CAZOTTI

If you are sure the torpedoes are all-annihilating.

RIFFONI

Yes, but then our troops would be between them and
the enemy! And if some of the Kites fell short and
annihilated ourselves! . . . Besides, you can't put
the ranks in the secret. And imagine a demoralised
army falling back on Scaletta—they might sow panic
and revolution, paralyse even our Kite corps.

[*Smiling*]

No, Cazotti, stick to the problems of the Interior.

CAZOTTI [*Opening portfolio*]

I've done so. I, too, haven't slept. Here are the
edicts I promised to draft for you.

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RIFFONI

Already? You're a miracle. But leave them on my table, will you—it is high time I ran over to the War Office to wire Hussein my ideas.

CAZOTTI

I am astonished at his giving way so—it was I that originally promoted him, despite the anti-Moslem prejudice. But do sign these at once.

RIFFONI

I must study them—wait five minutes, please.

[Hurries out through the curtains. CAZOTTI, rather annoyed, steps on the dais to deposit the edicts. VANNI appears at the pillars.]

VANNI

Oh, Excellency, for the blessed Mary's sake——!

CAZOTTI [*Turning*]

Such words here?

VANNI

It was a slip of the tongue, Excellen—Comrade. But Stefano—they're hanging him to-morrow! And you promised——!

CAZOTTI

When I said I'd get your brother-in-law off, I didn't know that besides making brooches he sold them with the Queen's head.

VANNI

It was only the old stock, Excellency. He didn't like to waste them. And he lost an eye in the Bosnian war.

CAZOTTI

But if the Tribunal condemned him——!

VANNI

They didn't dare not to——

[Lowers his voice]

The President is so jealous of the Queen's pictures.

CAZOTTI

And I don't dare, either. What would the People say?

VANNI

But they're saying it's a bloody shame. Oh!

[Claps his hand to his mouth.]

CAZOTTI

Then why don't they say it aloud?

VANNI

Oh, your Excellency, if we only whisper, we feel the flies are listening. Our shadows seem like spies following us. His wife's the only one who won't keep her mouth padlocked—in fact Fenella's been trying to turn my own men against the Government—if it wasn't for pity of her hysterics, they'd have denounced my poor sister.

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CAZOTTI [*Lightly*]

Then there's no chance of her turning them?

VANNI

Not while we get more grub than the civilians.

[*Enter through the pillars SALARET bearing a portfolio, but minus his wonted spectacles.*]

CAZOTTI [*Loudly*]

Not another word, Corporal, it is impossible to raise your rations.

SALARET

Is he grumbling again?

CAZOTTI

Old soldiers always grumble.

[*VANNI sneaks back to his corridor*]

But what's happened to you?

SALARET

Happened? Oh, you mean my spectacles! They broke, and the only decent opticians are dead or fled. Fortunately I can see to read or write, though I can't see far.

CAZOTTI

No—or you would have foreseen the flight of skilled labour.

SALARET [*Angrily*]

Have done! I have had enough of your criticisms.

And, short-sighted as I am, I can see you are here to help the Queen.

CAZOTTI [*Enjoying himself*]
Lynx!

SALARET
Why else did you rush to receive her yesterday?

CAZOTTI
But I haven't even seen her yet—nor D'Azollo either. I merely made arrangements for them. As a matter of fact, it will be rather awkward to meet my fellow-refugees.

SALARET
But Signora da Grasso—last night when you suggested my smuggling her over from the yacht for the Queen's service, I was grateful to you for facilitating our romance. But on reflection I saw you were making things easier for the Queen, not for me.

CAZOTTI
I am making them easier for myself. I couldn't risk having one of my prisoners gallivanting on a yacht. Riffoni might have strung me up at your side—Comrade.

SALARET
Riffoni has no time to visit yachts.

CAZOTTI

But somebody might have put him on the scent—
and the lady has a strong one. . . .

[*Sniffing*]

Phew! You must have slept in the Palace!

SALARET [*Tugging at his beard*]

How you try to nose out everything!

CAZOTTI

Better I than Riffoni. The lady understands, I hope,
she is supposed to have come straight from prison.

SALARET

Armida is prudent.

CAZOTTI

Armida? Ha! ha! ha! And does she call you
Rinaldo?

SALARET [*Angrily*]

Youth is not the only quality that attracts a woman's
sense of romance.

CAZOTTI

No—especially when she that loses her heart shall
save her head. So you actually think she loves you
for your beautiful eyes!

SALARET

I know it.

CAZOTTI

Aha! It is for her you broke your spectacles!

SALARET

You chaff like a college-student.

CAZOTTI

Why not shave off *your* beard and be as young as **I**?

SALARET

I am younger—a great passion rejuvenates.

CAZOTTI

Yes, to second childhood. Fancy putting yourself in the power of your own subordinate, the **Commissary** of Police!

SALARET

But Komak is in *my* power too.

CAZOTTI

You knew he was bribed not to find the Queen?

SALARET [*Startled*]

You know?

CAZOTTI [*Laughingly*]

Considering it was I who paid him his **monthly** subsidy from Gripstein!

SALARET

Of course—I am stupid. . . .

[*With sudden alarm*]

But you won't give him away now? If he were arrested, he might round on *me*.

CAZOTTI

Highly probable. No, I won't give him away—it is much more useful to have him in my pocket. But you will scarcely expect me to believe in your devotion to the Republic!

SALARET

I never attached importance to the Queen's capture—indeed it only saddles us with a problem. But Riffoni was always so obsessed about her.

CAZOTTI

Aha! *Cherchez la femme* in a double sense, eh?

SALARET

More college humour—you rightly said he's an ascetic.

CAZOTTI

So were you—till you were tempted. I expect she injected the fire when he saw her at Gripstein's.

SALARET

Don't be absurd, I tell you. He hates women, the Queen most of all.

CAZOTTI [*Going towards curtains with his portfolio*]

Well, anyhow, keep Armida out of his way.

SALARET [*Scandalised*]
Signora da Grasso?

CAZOTTI
He's been noticeably restless since her aroma permeated these corridors.

SALARET
You are trying to make me jealous—to divide us and rule.

CAZOTTI
Owl! I meant he might get wind of your relations.

SALARET
Armida is prudent, I tell you. . . .
[*With renewed alarm*]
Oh, but D'Azollo—you didn't tell him about——?
[*Pauses shyly.*]

CAZOTTI
About his yacht? How shocked the old penitent would be to learn it is still the seat of Satan! But calm yourself—knowledge is power, and I had so little power just then I kept all I had to myself. . . .
But soft! I smell brimstone . . .!

[*HE moves aside to let SIGNORA DA GRASSO enter. SHE sweeps by him in all her exotic beauty, natural and artificial*]

Good morning, Signora da Grasso!

ESTER DA GRASSO [*Turning with feigned surprise*]
You *here*, Count Cazotti?

CAZOTTI
Didn't Salaret tell you?

ESTER DA GRASSO
Salaret?

CAZOTTI [*Impishly*]
My colleague—Let me introduce you.

ESTER DA GRASSO [*Taken in by his blandness and bowing slightly*]
How do you do, Signor Salaret?

SALARET [*Furious, but restraining himself*]
I hope you slept well.

ESTER DA GRASSO
Beautifully, thank you. Such a change from the prison. . . . So, Count Cazotti, you've turned Red.

CAZOTTI
I thought *you* would, when he asked how you slept.

ESTER DA GRASSO [*Blushing and disconcerted*]
He knows?

SALARET
I've already damned him for a devil.

CAZOTTI

Ha! ha! ha! . . . Armida is prudent.

[HE moves laughingly towards the curtains, but, as with a sudden thought, turns and goes out the other way.]

SALARET [*Approaching* ESTER]

Don't look so upset, *carissima*. I've sold him my soul for his silence.

[*Tries to take her hand.*]

ESTER DA GRASSO [*Snatching it away*]

Let me be! Why didn't you warn me? . . . Where is Riffoni the Red?

SALARET

Sh! What do you want of him?

ESTER DA GRASSO

The Queen sent me to say she prefers to come to *him*.

SALARET

Really? Why should she humiliate herself?

ESTER DA GRASSO

It's pride, not humility. She won't have her apartments profaned by the brute's presence.

SALARET

Hush, I tell you.

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ESTER DA GRASSO

Oh, you are always a jelly before him. Hardly Rinaldo's way, was it?

SALARET

You don't understand. I care for Vittorio and I care for our Republic.

ESTER DA GRASSO

Yes, for everything except me.

SALARET

You know that's not true.

ESTER DA GRASSO

It *is* true—you let that cad Cazotti insult me.

SALARET

He insulted me too: we can only comfort each other.

[Throws down his portfolio]

Give me a kiss.

ESTER DA GRASSO *[Recoiling]*

Aren't you sated yet?

SALARET

My love is infinite.

ESTER DA GRASSO

Yes, without beginning.

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SALARET

After I've put away my glasses to please you!

[*Seizes her hands*]

Just one!

ESTER DA GRASSO [*Wriggling her face from his lips*]

Not here!

SALARET [*Facetiously*]

Well, *there!*

[*Dabs a kiss on her neck, while her face shows disgust*]

Why, you seem all strange. . . . Ah, you've changed your scent.

ESTER DA GRASSO

I've tried to wash it all away—the Queen didn't like it.

SALARET

That profaned her chamber, too, confound her?

ESTER DA GRASSO

It aggravated her headache, poor thing. Are you going to murder her?

SALARET

Ask the President. It's job enough to keep *you* alive. Even before the Revolution you helped your husband to shoot down his peasants, and the fact that he has

escaped only makes the mob bitterer against you.
Sh! I hear Vittorio's footsteps.

[THEY move apart. RIFFONI re-enters by the curtains, sniffing involuntarily.]

RIFFONI

Good morning, Salaret. . . . Who is this lady?

SALARET

The Dame of Honour Cazotti selected from the prisoners. She says the Queen wants to come to you.

RIFFONI

Aha! Margherita begins to understand our relative positions.

[*Eagerly*]

When will she come?

ESTER DA GRASSO

At once, Signor.

RIFFONI [*Recoiling*]

No, no, I can't see her now.

[*Ascends the dais and takes up CAZOTTI's drafts*]

I have my work. I will send for her when I want her.
Tell her so.

ESTER DA GRASSO

I will—but not in that tone.

[*Sweeps out haughtily, her lips moving vituperatively. RIFFONI, plunging resolutely into CAZOTTI's drafts, pays no attention to her.*]

SALARET [*Uneasily covering her defiance*]
A beautiful creature, is she not?

RIFFONI [*Not looking up*]
So far as I remember.

SALARET
Remember? Why, you've just seen her.

RIFFONI
Oh, you mean that enchantress!

SALARET [*Crestfallen*]
You don't admire her?

RIFFONI
One can see you've broken your glasses. A woman whose sex reeks and shrieks at you, the quintessence of that sinister force that perverts thought and saps purpose; one of the worst incarnations of the old order. Hardly a fit companion for a presumably virgin Queen. . . . Where's Cazotti? I asked him to wait.

[*Rings violently.*]

SALARET
He went that way. . . .
[*Moves towards pillars*]

Ah, he is talking to Vanni.

[*Enter OMAR.*]

RIFFONI

Tell Comrade Cazotti I am back. He is in the corridor.

[OMAR *salaams and exit*]

If you had done your duty, Salaret, she would have been executed long ago.

SALARET [*Startled*]

I couldn't help the Queen's not being caught before.

RIFFONI

Who is speaking of the Queen? I mean that scented Signora—why have you kept her untried all these months?

SALARET [*Tugging at his beard*]

Hers was merely a case of preventive arrest—if I remember aright. . . . Or was she a hunger-striker too ill to be tried?

RIFFONI

A hunger-striker? Ha! ha! ha! Happily the Home Department is in sterner hands now.

[*Enter CAZOTTI with OMAR, who goes back. RIFFONI waves a draft*]

Ah, Cazotti, we were just talking of hunger-strikes. And your hunger lock-out will be such a logical counter.

CAZOTTI

You've hit off my programme precisely. Logic—that is what I want our State to exemplify.

SALARET [*Taking the draft uneasily*]

What is this hunger lock-out? . . . Our peasants work splendidly.

RIFFONI

And grow their own food. You can't cut off *their* rations. But in the towns, the slackers, strikers, and those who won't work on Saints'-days——

SALARET

Madness! There's too much logic already, Vittorio—you're only too blind to life.

RIFFONI

I like that! When I follow your books!

SALARET

My books are pure mathematics. But life, like practical engineering, is applied mathematics—it has to take count of the obstacles and materials.

CAZOTTI

Surely our workers must be taught that now our workshops are nationalised, they have no more right to strike than a soldier to mutiny. A Workers' Republic that won't work is beyond a joke.

SALARET

But you have to deal with myriads. Even Roxo couldn't shoot down a battalion.

CAZOTTI

No, but he would have shot down every tenth man.

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RIFFONI

That is an idea. Even though the enemy is on our soil, the turnout of the Kite-factories is in inverse proportion to the demand for rations and wages. It is high time the masses should realise that there is no inexhaustible source of wealth to be perpetually parcelled out, that the storehouse once emptied can be refilled only by their own labours——

CAZOTTI [*Blandly*]

Perhaps you didn't realise it yourself, while the cupboard was full. But now the logic of legislation must meet the logic of facts.

SALARET

Too much logic is simply dynamite.

RIFFONI

And doesn't the practical engineer use dynamite?

SALARET

You will blow up the State. But perhaps that's what Cazotti wants.

[*Throws down the draft angrily.*]

RIFFONI [*Pained and picking up the draft*]

Salaret, that is not fair criticism. . . . There's only one thing I must strike out of your draft, Cazotti, and that is the quotation from St. Paul—I'm afraid I can't cite that in my edict.

CAZOTTI [*Reading from the draft*]

“ If any man will not work, neither shall he eat ”?
But surely that will bowl over the Cardinal.

RIFFONI

It will prop up St. Paul.

SALARET

The President is right. Socialism will be suspected
of Christianity.

RIFFONI

Then with your permission, Comrade Cazotti, out it
goes.

CAZOTTI

Why, my permission? The edict is yours—I merely
offer suggestions.

RIFFONI [*Striking out the quotation*]

Good! . . . Then here is my signature.

[*Writes. CAZOTTI snatches at the draft*]

Wait, it'll smudge.

[*Blots it, CAZOTTI is snatching at it again*]

Stop a moment! Does it say women-slackers shall
be locked-out too?

CAZOTTI [*Chuckling as he takes it*]

Trust me to give them full sex-equality.

RIFFONI

A pity you make us cocker Margherita so—I'd like to
see those white arms deep in the wash-trough.

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SALARET

Don't be so truculent, Vittorio.

CAZOTTI [*Impatient to get his dynamite exploded*]
Would you mind signing the alcohol prohibition?

[RIFFONI *becomes absorbed in the other draft.*]

SALARET

Has she really got such white arms, Cazotti?

CAZOTTI

The Queen? Oh yes—she's beautiful enough if she wouldn't look so gloomy.

SALARET

I've only seen her from afar like a shrined idol. Then she isn't beautiful only by the royal standard?

CAZOTTI

The royal standard. Ha! ha! ha! Yes, it's pretty low. The pig-eyes of Prince Igmor are "blazing orbs of war" in the Rolmenian literature.

RIFFONI [*Without looking up from the draft*]

And that's the man she was ready to sell her beauty to!

CAZOTTI

Fortunately I was able to stop the transaction. . . .
Need you study it so minutely?

[RIFFONI, *apparently re-absorbed, does not reply.*]

SALARET

They say her mother's marriage was a still more scandalous transaction.

CAZOTTI

What would you? Royal marriages are made in the War Office. But do you remember the sensation when King Tito brought home his northern bride?

SALARET

I was studying in Germany—I remember only the sensation at her murder.

CAZOTTI

Ah, that is another reason why we must go gingerly with the daughter. Margherita's trial must be solemnly staged at the High Court, with all deliberateness and dignity.

RIFFONI [*Flinging away his pen*]

Fiddlesticks!

CAZOTTI

I didn't know you were listening. But it is the only possible course. Precipitation would seem assassination. Your crude new tribunals with their ranting amateur lawyers and their turbulent courts, from which the bourgeois are excluded—what you call the justice of the People——

RIFFONI [*Springing up*]

Then while your obsolete mummeries are preparing,

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the vixen who drew the sword of Alpastroom is to live in her Palace, the centre of a thousand secret sympathies!

CAZOTTI

Why did you bring her to the Palace? But as for sympathies, surely you heard the mob howling yesterday for her blood.

RIFFONI

Under the eye of Komak—I remembered afterwards——

CAZOTTI

Then if they really don't want her to die, why put her to death?

RIFFONI

All the more reason. Every day she breathes would be a breathing-space for the counter-revolution.

CAZOTTI

But also for the Republic. Once she is executed, you won't find even commercial dealings easy, especially with the king-ridden countries.

RIFFONI

Humph! What say you, Salaret?

SALARET

I understand Cazotti's point of view.

CAZOTTI [*Turning on him*]
What do you mean by insinuating——?

SALARET
Insinuating?

CAZOTTI
That I am trying to delay her execution!

SALARET
I never said so.

CAZOTTI
And that I am in secret communication with Roxo!

SALARET [*Sullenly*]
It is you who say it.

RIFFONI
Comrades, friends, what is the matter with you?

CAZOTTI
Salaret reeks with suspicions like Signora da Grasso with patchouli. I'd rather throw up my job—I can work only in an atmosphere of confidence.

RIFFONI [*Dominated and deprecatory*]
But all he said was he understood your point of view. And so do I—on reflection. A ceremonious State trial certainly—worthy of the dignity of the Workers' Republic. Only let it be staged without delay. Will you see to the arrangements?

CAZOTTI

I suppose it falls within my department. . . . The alcohol prohibition still waits your signature.

[RIFFONI *sits and signs the second draft without further study and CAZOTTI blots and seizes it*]

Thanks! I'll have them both printed and placarded at once. Apropos, among a batch of misdemeanants sentenced yesterday afternoon and to be hanged to-morrow, I find that one lost an eye in the Bosnian war. I propose to pardon him on that ground.

RIFFONI

By all means—and it will remind the People of the horrors of the old *régime*.

[*Takes a paper*]

I will sign the pardon at once.

CAZOTTI

Thank you. I don't need your signature.

SALARET [*Sharply*]

Why not?

CAZOTTI

Coming from the President, the pardon would savour of the bad old royal prerogative. Coming from me, it will seem to come from his comrades, the People!

RIFFONI

Cazotti is right.

CAZOTTI

Similarly should you be thinking of pardoning the Duke——

RIFFONI [*Springing up*]

D'Azollo? *Corpo di Bacco*, I had forgotten all about him!

CAZOTTI

Then I'm glad I reminded you, for his future too will need settling.

RIFFONI [*Perturbed*]

Need one trouble about such a meagre future?

CAZOTTI

Once the Queen is disposed of, reaction may take *him* for its focus. Remember he has been Regent.

RIFFONI [*Drops on the throne again*]

You are always right. Ah, what a comfort to have your solid intellect to rest on—especially on a day when I seem unable to fix my thoughts.

[*Strikes the bell. Enter OMAR*]

Find Colonel Molp and ask him to bring the Duke D'Azollo.

[*Exit OMAR, salaaming. CAZOTTI is following him*]

No, don't go, Cazotti. I want you both to sit beside me.

CAZOTTI

You are not going to try him now?

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RIFFONI

Of course not. I suppose he, too, would be a High Court case.

[SALARET *seats himself on RIFFONI's right*]

You take this chair, Cazotti, I want to impress him.

CAZOTTI

I have better things to do than impress an old dotard.

RIFFONI

Not such a dotard—it was his wit barbed the *Sera*. I recognised the D'Azollo sting.

CAZOTTI [*Moving away*]

But I *must* get these posted up.

RIFFONI

Very well—let me see a proof, though, first, especially of the drink decree. . . . But I warn you I have a weakness for the Duke.

CAZOTTI [*Going towards the pillared exit*]

That doesn't alarm me. I know that the greater your affection for a person, the more sternly would you guard the interests of the Republic. Am I not right, Salaret?

SALARET

Oh, damn the Duke!

CAZOTTI [*Laughingly*]

Precisely what I ask.

SALARET

The truth is, Vittorio, Cazotti is ashamed to meet him.

CAZOTTI

Ashamed? I never said that.

[Turns indignantly and remounts the dais.]

RIFFONI

I don't understand you to-day, Salaret.

[Strikes the gong once. VANNI and his men appear]

Stay here and salute Colonel Molp when he enters.

VANNI

Yes, my President.

CAZOTTI *[Taking his seat]*

Won't the Duke imagine the salute is for *him*?

RIFFONI

And if he does, poor old ruin? And don't you think if we get his promise to accept the Republic——?

CAZOTTI

A promise? Fetters made of breath.

RIFFONI

Of the breath of a gentleman, Cazotti.

CAZOTTI

But his memory is so bad!

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RIFFONI

Sh! His hearing is good.

[The curtains rustle, and RIFFONI on his throne between his two ministers takes a majestic pose, while the GUARDS stand rigidly. SALARET caresses his beard. CAZOTTI's aplomb seems for once to fail him and he rolls and unrolls his drafts. The DUKE totters in, followed by MOLP. Though perceptibly aged, D'AZOLLO is the speckless old dandy of yore. The GUARDS present arms. The DUKE and MOLP acknowledge the salute. RIFFONI surveys his prisoner complacently for a silent moment]

Well, Your Highness, I told you I should return.

DUKE D'AZOLLO *[Drily]*

Yes, I heard you were back.

RIFFONI

Ha! ha! ha! You haven't lost your wit—or your elegance. How do you manage it?

DUKE D'AZOLLO

These are the secrets of the bad old capitalist order—like courtesy to the aged and weary.

RIFFONI

I beg your pardon—give him a chair!

[MOLP hands the DUKE a chair.]

DUKE D'AZOLLO *[Sitting down]*

Thank you! . . . And what do you propose to do with me?

RIFFONI

Humph! Not so easy as disposing of your yacht—my colleague, Professor Salaret, has put that to better uses than you ever did.

DUKE D'AZOLLO

I sincerely hope so. How do you do, Professor? People known to the public are known to one another, as Euclid should have said. I have enjoyed your books—much more than Karl Marx's at any rate—and I am sorry our meeting in the flesh should be under such unhappy circumstances.

SALARET

They could not well be happier for *me*, Your Highness.

DUKE D'AZOLLO

I sit rebuked. But it is a consolation to see Cazotti in your ranks.

CAZOTTI

Eh?

DUKE D'AZOLLO

He will avenge us all!

SALARET

Ha! ha! ha! The Duke is in form.

CAZOTTI

The Duke is ungrateful. It is to my presence in the Government—if you will permit me to tell him so—

that he and the Queen stand indebted for their considerate treatment. Let me tell him too that it is to him I owe my conversion to your form of Socialism.

DUKE D'AZOLLO

To me?

CAZOTTI

The wisdom you scattered at Baron Gripstein's—those little forgotten seeds have a way of germinating.

RIFFONI [*Eagerly*]

Ah, I remember! And since Your Highness favoured Socialism platonically——?

DUKE D'AZOLLO

Quite the contrary. I distinctly remember leading the debate for the negative.

RIFFONI

Where?

DUKE D'AZOLLO

At my University.

RIFFONI

I am speaking of a year ago, not a century.

DUKE D'AZOLLO

Santa Maria, my memory!

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RIFFONI

You were ready to go up Mont Rouge—by telescope at least.

DUKE D'AZOLLO

Ah, something begins to glimmer, God forgive me.

RIFFONI

And now that the mountain is scaled by foot—and the Red Flag planted at the peak—

DUKE D'AZOLLO

But your State is an abomination. Without free speech or free art or free movement! A dead-house!

RIFFONI [*Taking up a number of the Sera*]

Last month you called it only a forcing house.

DUKE D'AZOLLO

Did I? I am so glad. Yes, it is Socialism while you won't wait. Not a Paradise of blossoming brotherhood, not a natural growth under God's heaven, but a Socialism ripened prematurely under the heat of compulsion and watered with blood: a Socialism under a sky of glass, unstable, sterile, without spontaneous sap, that can be perpetuated only by ever-renewed compulsion. And forced—good God!—from what seed? Constricting figs in greenhouse pots will precipitate them artificially, but there is high authority for doubting if they can be gathered from thistles. And human nature is unfortunately thistly. I speak feelingly, for I was a forced child, artificially pietised

by a monastery of pedagogues. The result was the sailing brothel that Professor Salaret has purged.

CAZOTTI

Ha! ha! ha! The Duke is in form.

SALARET

The Duke is in error. Our State is neither a dead-house nor a forcing house but a school-house.

DUKE D'AZOLLO

I certainly see the rod.

RIFFONI

You used it to keep down the masses: we to educate them. Did not Garibaldi, the champion of freedom, say they could reach liberty only through dictatorship? Slave Socialism will beget free Socialism.

CAZOTTI

And don't forget, Duke, that to safeguard the young Republic, we have to live under martial law.

RIFFONI

Especially with Rolmenia never relaxing her attack.

SALARET

The censorship you jib at is merely the means to an end, and the end does not resemble the means any more than a fruit resembles its seed.

RIFFONI

But we won't be nipped in the bud by your aristocratic artists and thinkers!

DUKE D'AZOLLO [*Blandly*]

Are there any others?

RIFFONI [*Passionately*]

Their art is worthless. Art and Thought must be of the People.

DUKE D'AZOLLO

Good God! My peasants turned my library into cigarette-papers and my grand piano into a manure-sleigh. Aren't you satisfied with handing politics over to the People—the lowest thought of the greatest number!

CAZOTTI [*Seeing the others a bit disconcerted*]

The voice of the People is the voice of God.

DUKE D'AZOLLO

Then the voice of God needs training.

RIFFONI [*Unsmiling*]

Precisely. I knew you were with us at heart. Come, Duke, I am sure we can find a formula to spare your life.

DUKE D'AZOLLO

My life! What do these dregs matter? Ah, Vittorio, if you must take vengeance on the old order, let *me* be its representative, not the Queen.

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RIFFONI

You offer your dregs for her brimming sparkle?

DUKE D'AZOLLO

Alas, it is all I can offer.

RIFFONI

You have nothing to offer. Your life is separately forfeit to the Republic. If you wish to redeem it, you must recognise that the old order is dead.

DUKE D'AZOLLO

Dead? Scarred perhaps, but titanicly strong and crafty, like one of those great old whales that go careering about the oceans, stuck full of harpoons. Believe me, Capital has a long swim before it, and will yet upset your boat with a flick of its mighty tail.

RIFFONI

I only ask *you* not to bore holes in the boat. Give me your word and you go free, with undisturbed possession for life of your town house at least.

CAZOTTI

A too generous offer. But I am ready to write you a free pardon.

DUKE D'AZOLLO

God forgive you! . . . You say, Vittorio, I repudiated Capitalism?

RIFFONI

Yes, at Gripstein's.

DUKE D'AZOLLO

Who wouldn't repudiate it *there?* . . . But did I ever repudiate my Queen?

[*Anxiously*]
Tell me that!

RIFFONI

I am afraid not.

DUKE D'AZOLLO

Thank God! Then, Vittorio, it all depends on whether you will give up that seat to her.

CAZOTTI [*Dropping his drafts*]

Put her back on the throne?

RIFFONI

You can't have a Queen in a Socialist State.

DUKE D'AZOLLO

Why not?

RIFFONI

It's a patent absurdity—unheard of!

DUKE D'AZOLLO

How conventional you are! But if there is no place in your State for the Queen, there is none for me. I go with her to the end.

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CAZOTTI

Amen!

[*Picks up his drafts and remains standing*]

And now I suppose I may get on with my work.

RIFFONI [*Ignoring him*]

Then you would abandon the Duchess to a lonely old age in an enemy country?

DUKE D'AZOLLO [*Eagerly*]

She has arrived in Bosnavina? You are sure?

RIFFONI

According to our Socialist spies, Gripstein's major-domo smuggled her across the frontier.

DUKE D'AZOLLO

Well done, Brio! Ah, he was our good angel. He even did the housework.

RIFFONI [*Smiling*]

In his white gloves? An excellent training for the Workers' Republic. And Margherita, I suppose, basked and purred by the fire.

DUKE D'AZOLLO [*Springing up*]

Speak more respectfully! Murder the Queen, but do not insult her.

RIFFONI

Speak more respectfully yourself. A State does not murder.

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DUKE D'AZOLLO

Spare me verbal quibbles. Words were given us to drape our actions. Her Majesty did all we would permit her to do.

RIFFONI

Did she make her own bed?

DUKE D'AZOLLO

Yes, and my ailing wife's too.

RIFFONI

First Lady of the Bedchamber. Ha! ha! ha!

DUKE D'AZOLLO

Brio could have got her across the frontier at the same time as my wife, only she would not desert her country so long as there was any hope of helping it.

RIFFONI [*Meaningly*]

Ha! And I suppose *you* preferred to remain with *her*!

DUKE D'AZOLLO [*Re-seating himself placidly*]

Cazotti was so sure the Republic would collapse.

CAZOTTI

I? It was Gripstein who kept insisting it was bankrupt.

RIFFONI

Bah! Bankruptcy is only another way of spelling national debt.

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DUKE D'AZOLLO [*Smiling*]

And in the end *we* were bankrupt—through Gripstein's arrest. That's why we were caught. . . . Oh, my memory! What have you done with the poor Baron?

RIFFONI

Don't worry—he won't stay poor long. How do you mean you were caught because you were bankrupt?

DUKE D'AZOLLO

Obviously we couldn't go on outbribing the reward on our heads.

RIFFONI [*Springing to his feet*]
Outbribing?

SALARET [*Tugging his beard*]

Our Commissary bribed? Impossible! Why, he——
[*Stops short with a sudden perception he has said too much.*]

RIFFONI [*Thundering*]
Who is this dog?

CAZOTTI

That is the question. There are so many Police Commissaries. But of course you can't trust His Highness's memory.

DUKE D'AZOLLO

Not if you ask me his name—for I never knew it. But you ought to know, Cazotti, since it was you who paid his monthly account.

RIFFONI [*Turning fiercely on CAZOTTI*]
You paid him?

CAZOTTI [*Smiling sturdily*]
The finances always seem my job.

RIFFONI
You knew one of our Police Commissaries was a traitor and you failed to inform me?

CAZOTTI
Cazotti does not betray those who serve him.

RIFFONI
Then it seems he betrays those he serves.

CAZOTTI
Pardon me! My very first thought was to get rid of the rogue quietly.

SALARET [*Astounded*]
You have dismissed him?

CAZOTTI [*Dramatically handing RIFFONI a letter*]
Here is the letter I was just despatching. . . . No, no, give it me back. I forgot it has his name.

RIFFONI [*Refusing with a gesture and reading*]
Komak! . . . The Commissary in Chief!! Impossible!

SALARET
That's what I said. Komak is a pioneer of the faith—my son's bosom friend.

RIFFONI
A serpent in the State's bosom!

DUKE D'AZOLLO
He! he! he! A very talking serpent. An agreeable young rattle—a droll mixture of impulses. The day he arrested us, he explained apologetically that he could not afford to lose the reward—I understood he was in collusion with a mock informant. He even kissed me, mauding I reminded him of his aged father, and he asked me for my blessing and forgiveness.

RIFFONI
Drunk into the bargain!

DUKE D'AZOLLO [*Shaking his head*]
Sober as a Moslem. I expect he had Bosnavinian blood. They have this odd emotionalism. He even wished to embrace the Queen.

RIFFONI
That's not so odd.

DUKE D'AZOLLO

Ah, but the tears were streaming down his cheeks. He was so sorry he couldn't afford to give up the reward for her sake.

SALARET

The poor fellow must have needed money desperately.

RIFFONI

For orgies? . . . Was it you who appointed him? The wretch who failed to feed the children was also your selection. You seem unfortunate——

SALARET

But for Komak's generosity Guido could never have invented the Kites.

RIFFONI

His generosity will not save him.

SALARET

It saved Gripstein.

RIFFONI [*Re-seating himself to fill up an order for arrest*]

There is no parallel between the cases. Gripstein was an avowed enemy.

SALARET

My boy will be heartbroken.

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RIFFONI [*Writing*]

I can well imagine it. To lose at once his friend and his faith in him. What can be more tragic? Colonel Molp, escort the Duke to his room and see that this arrest is made instantly. . . . I am sorry Your Highness should have formed a mean opinion of the Republic's integrity—you will now witness its justice.

DUKE D'AZOLLO [*Who has risen*]

The test of a State is not the justice meted out to the guilty but the justice meted out to the innocent. Touch a hair of the Queen's head, Signori, and history will write you down poltroons and assassins.

CAZOTTI

Ah, but it is we who will write the histories now.

[*The DUKE bows silently and totters out through the curtains, which MOLP parts for him. CAZOTTI holds out his hand to RIFFONI*]

Congratulations, Comrade!

RIFFONI [*Fiercely waving it aside*]

On what? On the rottenness of the Republic?

CAZOTTI

On your firmness with the Duke.

RIFFONI

The Duke? Did I decide about him? I am distracted. . . . Whom can I trust if a Komak fails me?

[*SALARET rises*]

Where are you going?

SALARET

I feel I ought to see Komak safely arrested.

RIFFONI

Why? It is not your Department now. Molp won't let him escape. Do sit down—there is so much to discuss.

SALARET

But I have urgent financial business—there's a crisis.

RIFFONI

When Cazotti's accession has already put the exchange up?

[ESTER DA GRASSO *parts the curtains.* RIFFONI
turns testily on her]

What is it now?

ESTER DA GRASSO [*Coming forward*]

Her Majesty begs you to receive her at once.

RIFFONI

I told you she must await my pleasure.

ESTER DA GRASSO

Waiting is so unnerving. She wants to get the interview over.

RIFFONI

I—I won't see her to-day at all.

ESTER DA GRASSO

That's a blessing.

[Turns to go.]

RIFFONI

Insolence! Tell her she must come at once.

[ESTER DA GRASSO shrugs her shoulders and continues her walk.]

ESTER DA GRASSO *[At exit]*

I hope you will remember that Her Majesty has a headache.

RIFFONI

Corporal Vanni, take those men away!

VANNI

Right turn, quick march!

[Exeunt.]

CAZOTTI

Why did you send them away?

RIFFONI

I thought they might salute her—or you suggest it.

CAZOTTI

They would have been as useful to impress her as to impress the Duke.

RIFFONI

I don't want to impress her.

CAZOTTI

Really? Then I suppose I can go.

RIFFONI

Ah, you *are* ashamed to meet your old friends.

CAZOTTI [*Wincing*]

I have my work.

[*Exit CAZOTTI by the pillars, carrying the ukases. RIFFONI sits brooding darkly. SALARET, who has resumed his seat sullenly, is tugging at his beard.*]

SALARET

Vittorio, you surely won't press for the death-penalty?

RIFFONI

Why should she escape the doom of a Marie Antoinette?

SALARET

She? We are at cross-purposes to-day. I was speaking of Komak.

RIFFONI

Komak! You bring that up again!

SALARET

Only for my boy's sake.

RIFFONI

Were it Guido himself, I should string him up!

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SALARET

Oh! . . . This is your friendship . . . And I, were I
in your place——

RIFFONI [*Starting up*]

What a good idea! *Take* my place.

SALARET

Your place?

RIFFONI

Sit here and do the talking to the lady—what with the
Duke and Komak on top of a sleepless night my nerves
are on edge.

SALARET

Why not spare yourself then? There is no point in
our seeing her before the trial.

RIFFONI

None whatever. I will countermand her.

[*Rings. Enter OMAR*]

Tell Signora da Grasso that I cannot—that—that she
is not to accompany her mistress.

[*Sits down again shamefacedly. OMAR salaams
and exit*]

I had to say something—you see, on second thoughts,
I felt the Queen would think me an irresolute idiot.

SALARET

You said you didn't want to impress her.

RIFFONI

But I don't want to feed her vanity—make her feel irreplaceable! That's why I asked *you* to receive her—I'm quite unstrung.

SALARET

But without my spectacles I won't even see her face properly.

RIFFONI

All the better. It won't trouble your dignity.

SALARET [*Grudgingly*]

If I receive her, you must go and try to get a little sleep.

RIFFONI [*Rising*]

That *would* be wisest. . . . No, I have a curiosity to see the creature. Come, sit there and I'll sit here.

[*Motions SALARET to the throne and takes a chair on the far side of the table*]

She'll think I'm a secretary.

[*HE seizes a pen and heaps up papers, partly hiding his face.*]

SALARET [*Seating himself gingerly on the throne*]

What on earth am I to say to her?

RIFFONI

What on earth does it matter? We shall enjoy her humiliation.

SALARET

I shan't—I shall feel uncomfortable, I know. Surely you can do the talking yourself.

RIFFONI

And if I do, who knows where my hate may carry me? I shan't stop at the mealy-mouthed courtesies Cazotti would approve. At my first meeting with her, remember, I had to be dumb—that suppressed speech has been boiling in my veins ever since.

[There is a stir in the corridor—SALARET leaves the throne hurriedly and sits to the right.]

SALARET

I can talk just as well from here. She might think I was you.

RIFFONI [*Rising*]

Nonsense—trust her to have seen our pictures.

[Moves to the chair on the near side]

I'd better sit here—then I'll have my back to her when she comes in!

OMAR [*Parting the curtains*]

Way for the Queen!

RIFFONI [*Angrily*]

Why, who the devil told Omar——? . . . Quick! Don't leave her throne empty!

[SALARET scuttles back into it and tugs his beard.

RIFFONI again snatches a pen and heaps papers.

The QUEEN enters slowly, sad, but with unbroken

dignity. SALARET rises instinctively, SHE bows silently. RIFFONI is ostentatiously writing, but with an obviously shaky hand.]

SALARET

Be seated, Madam, I am sorry I cannot offer you your usual seat.

QUEEN [*Taking the chair vacated by the DUKE*]

You are welcome to it, Signor Salaret.

SALARET

Your Majesty's recognition flatters me.

[*Re-seats himself*]

As you see I am deputising for the President; he is so—overworked.

QUEEN

Please convey to him my appreciation of his courtesy in the matter of my apartments. I had not expected it.

SALARET [*Stroking his beard*]

The Workers' Republic is much maligned.

[*There is an awkward pause. SHE looks round*]

You find the Palace changed?

QUEEN

It looks so military.

SALARET

Military, Madam? Why, it was a positive barrack!

QUEEN [*Looking at the plain casement*]
At least the Madonna stood guard too.

SALARET
The Republic can dispense with her protection. . . .
But you can still find her undamaged in the Palace
chapel. Access is not denied you, I believe.

QUEEN
There are no priests.

SALARET
You would not have us enthrone superstition in our
own headquarters?

QUEEN
Is the worship of the People a nobler superstition
than the worship of God?

SALARET
The People at least is a reality. And we can make it
worthy of worship.

RIFFONI [*Murmuring*]
Bravo!
[SALARET *frowns in his direction.*]

QUEEN
Ah, the Duke always says nothing can shake the
credulity of atheists. . . . What do you mean to do
with him?

SALARET

With D'Azollo? He will be tried like you.

QUEEN

Poor old man! What has *he* done?

SALARET

What has he left undone?

QUEEN

Cannot *my* death atone for his sins too?

SALARET

I did not say you would be condemned to death.

QUEEN

Do not rob me of my last hope.

RIFFONI [*Dropping his pen*]

Eh?

SALARET [*Equally amazed*]

You desire death?

QUEEN

"He giveth His belovèd sleep." O to be done with
the duty of living!

[*Covers her eyes.*]

SALARET

Why should you wish to die?

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QUEEN

Why should I wish to survive my friends? Ah, so many have been sent behind the black curtain—
Fiuma, Marrobio, Livia, Gripstein——

[Her voice breaks.]

RIFFONI [*Prompting SALARET*]

But Gripstein——

SALARET [*Annoyed*]

Yes, yes, I know. . . . Gripstein and the Baroness have been spared, Madam. As for Marrobio, murdered by a Bosnavinian patriot, he fell a victim to your imperialistic insanity.

RIFFONI [*Thumping the table*]

Bravo! Bravissimo!

[The QUEEN at last turns and looks in his direction.]

SALARET

Restrain yourself, Comrade. You have spilt the ink.

RIFFONI [*Hoarsely*]

What is her answer? You see she has no answer.

SALARET

What is your answer, Madam?

QUEEN

It was Bosnavina declared war. I had no more power under my Government than I have under yours.

RIFFONI [*Springing up and facing her*]
It is false——!

SALARET [*Interjecting*]
Vittorio!

RIFFONI [*Fiercely uninterrupted*]
You drew the sword of Alpastroom, and girding it on Marrobio, bade him win back your Bosnavinian Duchy. What is your answer?

QUEEN [*Rising*]
I thank you, Signor Salaret, for your courtesy.
[*Bows and moves towards the curtains.*]

RIFFONI
Stop, Madam!
[*SHE moves disdainfully on. HE strikes the gong twice. VANNI and his GUARDS rush in.*]
Arrest her!

QUEEN [*Turning to face their bayonets*]
Corporal Vanni!
[*THEY shrink back.*]

RIFFONI
Arrest that woman, I tell you.
[*THEY surround her.*]

QUEEN [*Veering round to confront RIFFONI*]
Who are you that dare insult your Queen?
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RIFFONI

That Queen's master.

QUEEN

Ha! I thought you posed always in general's uniform. . . . So *you* are Riffoni the Red?

RIFFONI

Yes. Last time I was Riffoni the Silent.

QUEEN

Last time? We have met before?

RIFFONI

At Baron Gripstein's.

QUEEN

So the Duke always insisted—but I thought it was his bad memory.

RIFFONI

It was your own, Madam. And yet I flattered myself I had made an impression. For you pronounced me intelligent—intelligent enough for higher work.

QUEEN [*With a flash of remembrance*]

Ah, you were Molp's man!

RIFFONI [*Grimly*]

No, I was not Molp's man, but Molp is my man. I hope I have justified your flattering augury. Yes, intelligent as I was, I was thrust out of your realm

that night, torn from my friends, my work, deported like a criminal.

QUEEN

It is what you have proved, Signor.

RIFFONI

Have a care how you insult the Republic!

QUEEN

An intelligent criminal is worse than a criminal fool. And murder, pillage——

RIFFONI

Be silent, woman! . . . Withdraw, Vanni!

[VANNI *silently marches his men out, while* RIFFONI *without a pause continues vehemently*]

You to condemn murder, under whose rule I was first forced to kill! Ah, the nausea that overcame me when I had to send a brother-airman shrivelling to the ground like a burnt moth!

QUEEN

And was it not enough our land was torn by wars of race and wars of religion and wars of revenge, must you add the war of classes?

RIFFONI

And why may not war be waged perpendicularly as well as horizontally? The war of classes is the only war worth waging, the war for a righteous order, the war to end war. It is the horizontal wars of grab and

glory that are immoral. Ah, what really excites the world's horror in our perpendicular campaign is that it is a blasphemy against the great god, Money; that it is the wealthy we combat, those who made of the masses a footstool for their feet and a cushion for their backs. But if we make them suffer in their turn, it is not for revenge but to shape the brotherhood of all.

QUEEN

Brotherhood cannot be shaped by steel like a dead log. It must grow slowly like a living tree, fed by the dews and rains, ripened by the sun——

SALARET

Ah, the forcing house again! She is a gramophone for the Duke's platitudes.

QUEEN

The Duke is wiser than you both. But it is not from the Duke I have learnt this wisdom—it is from Vittorio.

SALARET [*Astonished*]
Vittorio?

QUEEN [*Producing a dainty little volume*]
I carry his songs with me night and day.

RIFFONI [*Dazed*]

You read my father's poems?

[*HE descends almost unconsciously towards her.*]

QUEEN [*Equally amazed*]
Vittorio was your father?

RIFFONI
He wrote under his Christian name.

QUEEN
He wrote Christianly indeed.

RIFFONI
And was done to death in this Palace of yours. On
that balcony!
[*Points to the plain casement.*]

QUEEN
I am glad he did not live to see his son do others to
death.

RIFFONI
They die that his ideas may live.

QUEEN [*Surveying the book*]
What a caricature of his doctrine of love!

RIFFONI
I deny it. Is love less love because like the sun it
wears a face of flame? Has not destruction also its
angel? This old malarial world needed a storm to
purify it, to uproot its monstrous millennial growths.
Ah, wait till the lightnings have ceased to sear, and
the storm has blown by, and you behold the blue of
the new heaven and the green of the new earth.

QUEEN

And how long must I behold only the red of your new hell? This storm of yours, that hides heaven and earth, will my death hasten its passing? Then kill me speedily in God's name.

RIFFONI [*Moving nearer to her*]

Why should the Workers' Republic kill you? Perhaps it can find work for you.

QUEEN

What place can there be for me among your sans-culottes and furies? No, no, if you would have me live, let it be far from you.

RIFFONI

What! Swell the camp of our enemy exiles in Bosnavina!

QUEEN

I should leave the Cockpit altogether—let me go to America!

RIFFONI

Aha, so that's the game, that's why old Gripstein was so anxious about his fare. So that great sentimental country is to espouse the cause of beauty in distress, its myriads of rich Valdanians are to write cheques and manifestoes for our destruction. No, Comrade Margherita, if you sincerely share my father's vision, your place is here, helping us to give it substance.

SALARET [*Starting up*]
Vittorio! What are you saying?

RIFFONI
It is the only solution. It will please Cazotti and his Western friends. It will bring peace. D'Azollo will be saved. The Royalist exiles will troop back.

SALARET
Yes, to their estates and investments!

RIFFONI [*Furiously*]
I speak to the Queen!
[SALARET *subsides on the throne.*]

QUEEN
But I loathe your methods, I tell you—how can I work with you?

SALARET
Or under what Constitution?

RIFFONI
Constitutions were made for States, not States for Constitutions. Let her style herself Queen for aught I care.

SALARET
Queen of the Republic? Ha! ha! ha!

RIFFONI
Am I not practically its King? You are so conventional, so afraid of words—ah, you were always a

writer. All that matters is that we keep Comrade Margherita among us to inspire us with her noble outlook, to be the incarnation of our dreams, the Lady of our Republic. Come, what say you, Comrade Margherita?

QUEEN

I have answered you.

RIFFONI

Yes, you dislike our methods. But methods are provisional. The end we dream is the same.

QUEEN

I did not say that. Economic equality is not the light of the world nor even its sure happiness.

RIFFONI

It is the way of reason and brotherhood. Rations and rational are one at root. Shall mankind for ever scuffle for its food like a litter of swine? Ah, your love of my father's poems is as sterile as the Duke's Socialism. Too many idealists wish that idealism were practicable. Dare to face your own beliefs and to live them.

QUEEN

What is it you want? What is it you are proposing?

RIFFONI

I am proposing an alliance.



QUEEN

Between Monarchy and Republicanism? Is that feasible?

SALARET

The lady has more sense than you, Vittorio.

RIFFONI

Why do you interfere? All Europe shows alliances between Monarchies and Republics. And when an alliance between these systems is incarnated in persons——

QUEEN

In persons?

RIFFONI

In you and me.

QUEEN [*Slowly, as his meaning begins to dawn on her*]
In me—and you?

RIFFONI

Ah, you shrink. But you were ready enough for an alliance with Prince Igmor?

QUEEN

You know that? . . . Then you know to what a horrible political necessity I would have sacrificed myself. They told me it was Valdania's only salvation.

RIFFONI

And may not *our* alliance be its salvation?

SALARET

Your destruction!

RIFFONI

Be silent!

SALARET

Reds and Whites would be equally revolted.

RIFFONI

On the contrary—they will be reconciled through us.

QUEEN [*Shuddering*]

God did not deliver me from Prince Igmor to hand me over to Riffoni the Red.

RIFFONI [*Savagely*]

But He did, you see.

QUEEN

Let me die then. Your idea is monstrous. Even the Rolmenian proposition was not so cold-blooded. There was love on the Prince's side at least.

RIFFONI

And how do you know there is none on the President's?

QUEEN

On yours? Why, you hate me! You have scarcely seen me.

RIFFONI

My first glimpse was enough for hate at first sight—does love need a prolonged stare? Nay, was it hate you kindled in my veins, was it not perhaps love—love all the fiercer for my hate of all you stood for? Your beauty seemed as sinister to me as the blue lake that had sucked down my little brother. But who knows if it was not really your face that drew me back from exile? Perhaps my whole Revolution was only a bridge to span the gulf between us. Even then you lurked uncaptured, forcing my thoughts to dwell on you, and if I wrested them free from your image, it was only to meet it again in bust or picture, coin or stamp. And yet when you were at last under my roof—under *your* roof—under *our* roof—my yearning to see and face you was shot through with dread. I felt you were more terrible to my Republic than Roxo and all his Rolmenians. But now that I find you no goddess of war, but a friend of my father's dream, not treacherous like our lake, not fatal and sinister, but sweet and simple, I say to you, Margherita——

QUEEN [*Recoiling*]

Do not say it. The blood of my murdered friends cries out against my listening.

RIFFONI [*Exasperated*]

You must listen! If I have shattered your world to bits, it was only to remould it more justly.

QUEEN

The gasping for breath of a child I saw shattered here in your assault, refutes your loud-lunged logic.

RIFFONI [*Subdued*]

My logic may have led me astray. Perhaps I took the wrong turning to my father's Paradise. Your voice leads me back from that red road to his quiet footpaths—I hear the village church bells—Comrade Margherita, put your hand in mine——

[*Holds it out.*]

QUEEN

I cannot.

RIFFONI

Not even to lead me in *your* way? Come!

[*Grasps at her hand.*]

QUEEN [*Dropping her book*]

Touch that hand stained with my people's blood?

RIFFONI [*Stung to frenzy*]

It is not the people's blood on my hand, it is the plebeian blood in my veins. But by all your gods I am a better man than your pig-eyed princeling. Your hand, I say!

QUEEN
Never!

RIFFONI
Now!
[*Seizes it.*]

QUEEN
Release me, Signor!

RIFFONI
Not till you——
[*SALARET, who has sat spell-bound on the throne, starts up and strikes the gong twice. RIFFONI drops the QUEEN'S hand. VANNI and his men rush in. OMAR appears at the curtains.*]

SALARET
Escort Her Majesty to her apartment.
[*The GUARDS salute. OMAR rushes to pick up the QUEEN'S book and parts the curtains reverentially. Ceremoniously bowing to SALARET, SHE passes out with stately tread, followed by VANNI and his GUARDS. RIFFONI stands in silent impotent fury.*]

RIFFONI [*Turning on SALARET*]
How dare you interfere?

SALARET
I had to save you from yourself—and my Republic from your folly.

RIFFONI

You are an old pedant with red ink in your veins.
This woman and I are mates—mates in body and soul.

SALARET

But the woman loathes you.

RIFFONI

As I thought I loathed her. She is the counterpart
created for me—blood and spirit cry it together.

*[Flings out through the curtains. SALARET lets
himself fall into the royal chair, dazed. By the
pillars CAZOTTI re-enters, carrying large placards.]*

CAZOTTI

Ha! ha! ha! What did I say?

SALARET

You heard?

CAZOTTI

Enough to grasp the situation. So you begin to see
your idol's feet of clay.

SALARET

When the idol loses his head, one naturally notices the
feet. As I sat here at his request, for he felt the sight
of his darling would un-king him, I found myself
endowed literally with a new point of view. And
looking down on him, as he grovelled before her, I
asked myself why I, the senior, should live like a
schoolboy under the preceptor's rod.

CAZOTTI

Especially when Komak's effusiveness might set the rod swishing——

SALARET

Clairvoyant!

CAZOTTI

And Cazotti was at hand to snap it.

SALARET

Mind-reader!

CAZOTTI

Ha! ha! ha!

[*Extends hand, which SALARET grasps*]

So it's a bargain. . . .

[*Smiling*]

You don't remain in the chair, of course. . . . No, no hurry.

SALARET [*Rising*]

So long as I keep the yacht. . . . But I won't have Vittorio killed! You must deport him.

CAZOTTI [*Laughing*]

What again? Molp will get tired. . . . But we can't deport him yet. We need his military genius to destroy Roxo and the Rolmenians.

SALARET [*Dazed*]

Then you are not in league with them? You don't want to restore Margherita?

CAZOTTI

When I've just asked you for her chair?

SALARET

You? You wish to be *King*?

CAZOTTI

Don't you know the doze of the drug must always be increased?

SALARET

Then why do you postpone the Queen's execution?

CAZOTTI

How do you know *Roxo* won't win? Where should I be then? As it is, by restoring her to her rooms and keeping her untried, I have proved my loyalty.

SALARET

But what about me?

CAZOTTI

Haven't you just won her gratitude?

SALARET

But if *Roxo* is annihilated?

CAZOTTI

That is what I hope and believe, for then, with the Queen already in our hands, we have only to get rid of *Riffoni*.

SALARET

Those edicts of yours will do that, I know. But won't we both blow up *with* him?

CAZOTTI [*Chuckling*]

Not while he signs the edicts and I the pardons. Cazotti the Compassionate, eh? You are already safeguarded as Salaret the Soft. Be faithful to me and I will save you, even if Komak prove leaky. Nay, for your boy's sake, I will save Komak himself, as I have already saved Stefano.

SALARET

Are you sure you know your Riffoni? Have a care! He is capable of turning suddenly like a bull in the arena. With one bound he may unhorse us both.

CAZOTTI

Bah! Picador Cupid will weaken him hopelessly. Already you have seen him quivering under the darts. My only fear is lest he collapse before he has unhorsed Roxo and Igmor.

[*Sirens begin to sound*]

What is that?

SALARET

It must be the signal for my boy's Kite Corps.

[*Bugles sound from the Piazza. Excursions, alarums.*]

CAZOTTI [*Troubled*]

The Rolmenians must have broken our line!

SALARET

I'm afraid so.

[RIFFONI *rushes in through the curtains in his airman's cap and coat, transfigured equally in bearing, waving a telegram.*]

RIFFONI

At last my strategy has come off!

CAZOTTI

Your strategy?

RIFFONI

The tactics you all but guessed at—to lure the enemy within range of our Kites! But by letting them out-flank us, not drive us before them! Roxo has fallen into the trap and is advancing swiftly on Scaletta and annihilation.

SALARET [*Perturbed*]

But if the Kites fail! Surely you take a terrible risk.

RIFFONI

It is by taking terrible risks that I stand here.

CAZOTTI

Bravo—

[*Grasps his hand.*]

RIFFONI

Roxo is finely fooled. When he used to conduct the manœuvres against King Tito, he always had to work

desperately to get the King to outflank him. Yet he failed to see the same game was being played on himself.

[The faint strains of a band striking up the National Hymn ascend from the Piazza.]

CAZOTTI

We must make Hussein a Marshal.

RIFFONI

Naturally. Ah, the sacred joy of battle for our flag! She asperses our swords, but they are holier than her Madonnas, our Kites are more heavenly than her angels. And to think that a moment ago I was possessed of a demon!

CAZOTTI

How do you mean?

RIFFONI

Salaret has not told you?

CAZOTTI

Oh, that! The thought of caressing a Queen flattered your senses for a moment, I never took it seriously.

RIFFONI

Thank you—you knew me better than myself. In that moment of clouded vision our Republic was in the balance, my granite plans ran like wax, and but for Salaret——

[Grasps his hand emotionally]

Forgive me, dear saint—but—in that mad moment—to touch a shrinking hand seemed more wonderful than to build up a State for mankind.

[*The bugle is heard more loudly*]

Ah, I thank the god of chance who sent me this stern reminder. Ouf! it is good to cast out the demon that has preyed on one's vitals, to feel free again, free to shape with steel and flame, a man among men!

[*Grasps CAZOTTI's hand also for a moment, uniting the triumvirate*]

Imagine it, Cazotti, her pose as a peace-lover deceived even me—I was fooled worse than Hussein fooled Roxo. I forgot that my first sight of her was in a colonel's uniform—now the wily female wears my father's *Songs of Brotherhood* next to her heart.

CAZOTTI

Ha! ha! ha! Why, her military ambitions were the worry of my ministry.

SALARET

The devil fell sick, the devil a saint would be.

RIFFONI

She is wilier than the devil—was she not brought up in a Jesuit Convent? Though she had dodged capture all these months, she pretended that death was her dearest desire; and to set my palm itching worse for her, she feigned to shrink from its bloody touch. Ah, let her have the death she whined for—she is too dangerous to live. We three, Cazotti, must adjudge her doom forthwith—we can't await your ceremonial tomfoolery.

CAZOTTI [*Taken aback*]
But my friends in the West——

RIFFONI

To hell with them all and damn diplomacy! We have stood so far by our own brute strength. Force is all that the West respects—only by ruthlessness can we save our Republic from the foes without and the still more dangerous foes within. Apropos, Cazotti, I veto your pardoning the one-eyed malefactor. He must die at dawn and Komak with him. And that signora and the other ladies your softness has spared so long must join their mistress on the scaffold. It will be her escort of honour, ha! ha! ha! *A rivederci!*

[*Hastens towards the pillars.*]

CAZOTTI [*Waving his placards*]
But these proofs!

RIFFONI

Read them yourself!

[*The bugle sounds a peculiar flourish*]

Do you hear? Our air-scouts have sighted Igmor's cavalry. I must be in at the death!

[*Exit hurriedly. SALARET looks at CAZOTTI, as though to say "I told you so." CAZOTTI shrugs his shoulders.*]

CURTAIN.

Act Four

[*The same on a waning afternoon some weeks later. The table on the dais is heaped chaotically with correspondence, opened and unopened. OMAR and VANNI are conversing in low tones.*]

OMAR

Courage, friend, this is not like Allah's hell, in which one must remain for ever.

VANNI

I wish I had my two hands to strangle him with as he had Stefano strangled.

OMAR

You have twice as many hands as you have soldiers. But Captain Lambri is *their* job, remember.

VANNI

But can I rely on their hands, the swine? You see——

[*Enter SALARET hurriedly through the pillars. HE is spectacled once more.*]

SALARET [*Suspiciously*]

Why are you not at your posts?

[*They are sneaking out in opposite ways*]

Stop, Omar! I want you to go to the Queen's apartments and send Signora da Grasso here.

OMAR

Yes, Effendi. But without a pass Captain Lambri won't let even her shadow cross the doorstep.

SALARET

These men of the Left wing are very tiresome.

OMAR [*Murmuring*]

May they drink boiling water!

[SALARET *clears a space at the table, bends down and writes.*]

SALARET

Here you are!

[OMAR *takes the pass, salaams and exit.* SALARET *goes to the plain casement and throws it open, revealing the lovely blue lake backed by snow-mountains.* HE *peers out sideways*]

Ah, you can just see her funnels.

[*With a sudden thought* HE *slips off and hides his spectacles.* *A band in the Piazza below strikes up a march and troops are heard swinging forward to it*]

Already?

[HE *closes the window.* *The curtains part rustling.* HE *turns eagerly, but his face falls to see only OMAR re-entering.*]

OMAR

The Signora refuses to come.

SALARET

Refuses? You should have fetched her by force!

OMAR

Bismillah! It is not *my* harem.

SALARET

Insolent! . . . I *must* see her before the President returns.

[SIGNORA DA GRASSO *appears at the curtains*]

Ah, the Signora has changed her mind.

OMAR

I am your humble servant who kisses the hem of your garment.

[*Salaams and exit.*]

SALARET [*Advancing*]

At last, *carissima!*

ESTER DA GRASSO [*Retreating*]

Keep your distance. You know you have grown abhorrent to me, that even your letters are returned, unopened.

SALARET

Because you make me responsible for the Queen's condemnation. As if——!

ESTER DA GRASSO

A truce to words. I have come only to find out why these soldiers are marching. Our guards, who tell

me everything, seem tongueless when Captain Lambri is on the pounce. Does it mean Riffoni is returning?

SALARET

That's why I sent for you. They're off to the station to welcome him.

ESTER DA GRASSO

Mother in heaven! Then he has crushed the rural revolution?

SALARET

As completely as he asphyxiated Roxo and the Rolmenians. He has forced the villages to divide their crops and cattle with the towns, and will thus regain in the towns the prestige imperilled by his edicts and executions.

ESTER DA GRASSO

He has the devil's own luck.

SALARET

But the angels' luck can be ours, Armida. Listen!

[*Lowers his voice*]

The yacht is ready to sail. Ever since the news of his return came this morning, I have been secretly provisioning it with food and gold. . . . Get your hat and cloak—enough of your things are still there.

ESTER DA GRASSO

Sail with you?

SALARET

Without a moment's delay. We will steam down the river to the Mediterranean, and then hey for the magic islands!

ESTER DA GRASSO

You would abandon your precious Republic and your precious President?

SALARET

The situation has grown beyond me—sown with traps and menaces for me as well as for you. There are whisperings and rumblings and preparations of I don't know what—and I don't want to know. I am tired of the strain. Far better to leave this witches' cauldron to seethe as it will. I have already sent my younger children to Italy, where they are sure of food at least. Come!

ESTER DA GRASSO

And let the Queen die deserted?

SALARET

Threatened Queens live long. Already her execution has been postponed.

ESTER DA GRASSO

Only because Riffoni was called to quell the peasant rising. But now that he is coming home—— O my poor Margherita!

[Hurrying out hysterically.]

SALARET [*Desperately*]
Stop, Armida! His return endangers only you.

ESTER DA GRASSO [*Turning incredulous*]
How only me?

SALARET
Because I have been able to keep you alive so far on the plea you were necessary to the Queen's last hours. But now that she is not to be executed——

ESTER DA GRASSO
Not to be executed?

SALARET
No. I ought not to tell you these State secrets, but Riffoni found Western sentiment so outraged——

ESTER DA GRASSO [*Excitedly*]
We know from a New York paper Omar slipped in that an American petition was cabled to Riffoni.

SALARET
Quite so. And it impressed him particularly because it was got up by that same Nicholas Stone whose book we ran through the *Sera*. As, moreover, he desires commercial relations with the States, he decided to forgo her death.

ESTER DA GRASSO [*Bursting into tears*]
Thank God!

SALARET

So you see you have only to save yourself.

ESTER DA GRASSO

For what? I am not worth saving.

SALARET

Nonsense, pull yourself together, *cara*. The yacht lies moored near the Fort Prison—I can pretend I'm transferring you to your old cell—look!

[*Opens the casement*]

You can see her funnels!

[*From the Piazza comes up the rumble of waggons advancing, followed by raucous cries of a mob. "The Red Flag" begins to mingle with "The Marseillaise."*]

ESTER DA GRASSO

What's going on?

[*SHE rushes on the balcony and looks down. Then she utters a scream, rushes back, bangs the casement to, and leans panting against it, as if to shut out what she has seen.*]

SALARET

What is it, Armida? What is the matter?

ESTER DA GRASSO [*Shrieking at him*]

Murderer!

[*HE goes puzzled to the casement*]

Don't open it! They are bringing the guillotine!

SALARET [*Amazed*]
In broad daylight?

ESTER DA GRASSO
You lied to me—the execution is imminent.

SALARET [*Dully*]
Not before to-morrow morning.

ESTER DA GRASSO [*Wrings her jewelled hands*]
O blessèd Mother!

SALARET
I lied to you because it was the only way to save you.
Riffoffi telegraphed instructions for both your deaths.
Unless you come at once——

ESTER DA GRASSO
Let me be! If only I can really help her last
moments——!

SALARET
I don't understand you, Armida. You were con-
demned for complicity in shooting down your land-
hungry peasants. You were a frenzied proprietor,
not a fanatical Royalist.

ESTER DA GRASSO
I am fanatical for the woman, not the Queen. I had
never really known her. It was you who brought me
under her spell. Why did you make me love her, if
you only meant to butcher her?

SALARET

We are not butchering her—she had a fair trial.

ESTER DA GRASSO

And do you call that a trial in which, faced with the filthy insinuations of renegade courtiers, the poor angel refused to open her lips? And now your State cinemas display forged films of her amours with Fiuma and D'Azollo. I hear our guards sniggering over them—it is abominable.

SALARET

A little scandal goes a long way, I know. But Riffoni believes fervently in the Fiuma story at least.

ESTER DA GRASSO

Then it can only be to drug the dregs of his conscience.

SALARET

To drug his heart-ache, more likely. He feels her death necessary to the State, and if he did not think her unworthy of his love, the conflict between passion and duty would drive him mad.

ESTER DA GRASSO [*Amazed*]
He loves Margherita?

SALARET

She has not told you?

ESTER DA GRASSO

Not that. The heart that refused to open to the

Court has not been so closed to unworthy me. But that the brute dared to desire her—no, she could not bring her tongue to tell me that. As for liaisons of her own——!

[Indignation and sobs choke her utterance.]

SALARET

Anyhow she was not condemned for them, but for her political crimes. She might have replied to those charges at least.

ESTER DA GRASSO

Why should she stoop to justify herself, when life had become indifferent to her?

SALARET

How you women evade! But if it's true she doesn't want life, why do you want it for her?

ESTER DA GRASSO

Because the tragedy has deepened—she wants it desperately now.

SALARET

Aha!

ESTER DA GRASSO

Your masculine complacency is maddening. That cabled petition from America seems to have unfrozen her, and set her yearning to escape from the cockpit of Europe, and settle incognita in those kindly States; working at her music. I even gather there's a love

romance—some young attaché at our legation presumably, whom she would now be free to marry. Cazotti seems to have told her he was married, but even she has now begun to doubt Cazotti.

SALARET

Poor woman! I wish sincerely I could deposit her in the young man's arms.

ESTER DA GRASSO [*Hysterically*]

Can't you? Can't you take her on the yacht?

[*Embracing him frenziedly*]

I will love you so much, Rinaldo.

SALARET

Impossible, *cara*. Captain Lambri would cut off his own nose rather than lose the Queen's head. He is Redder even than Riffoni. He warned Cazotti, whom he mistrusts, that in the event of a counter-revolution, or even any attempted escape of the Queen, he would stab her with his own hand.

ESTER DA GRASSO [*Recoiling, moaningly*]

How horrible! How horrible!

SALARET

Do not make it more horrible, Armida, by dying with her.

ESTER DA GRASSO

That is the only thing that could make it endurable.

SALARET

You are talking wildly. Think of our nights under the stars.

[Tries to draw her to him again.]

ESTER DA GRASSO *[Breaking away]*

I hate you. You told me when you took me that you had power of life and death. But it seems now it is Captain Lambri. Well, perhaps he is a man too—perhaps——

[Exit frenziedly.]

SALARET *[Dazedly, as she is disappearing]*

What do you mean? You are mad! . . . Stop!

[HE rushes to the gong and strikes it repeatedly in his agitation. VANNI and the soldiers rush in]

Arrest her.

VANNI

Who?

SALARET *[Sobered by the sight of them]*

Nobody.

[HE pulls out his spectacles, cleans them nervously and puts them on]

What I mean is, arrest the setting up of the guillotine. Telephone to Komak that——

VANNI *[Opening his eyes]*

But he is hanged——!

SALARET [*Shuddering*]

Yes, yes, my tongue slipped. Telephone to the new Police Commissary that not even the platform must be put up now. It must be done decently in the dead of night.

VANNI

Into line, Comrades.

[HE salutes and goes out through the curtains. After a moment SALARET follows him, distractedly re-polishing his spectacles. In the first silent pause the confused songs and cries of the crowd are heard more loudly. A soldier, piqued by curiosity, opens the casement and steals out to look from the balcony. The sounds swell and other soldiers gradually follow him, opening the other casement too. One distinguishes the commands of gendarmes, the calls of labourers moving timber, the brutal laughter of hooligans. VANNI returns to an empty stage]

Hell and damnation!

[HE perceives the open casements]

Come out of that, you swine! Never seen a guillotine put up before?

[They slink in as he talks and close the casements behind them]

Not that they'll trouble to put one up for you—a lamppost does for the likes of us. Though, come to think of it, if we're all equals and comrades, why should the Queen die more handsomely than my brother-in-law?

GUARDS

Ha! ha! ha!

VANNI

That's not a joke, you sons of bitches. How dare you laugh at poor Fenella's bereavement! Cazotti the Compassionate did his best to save him, but you might as well talk to that mountain-top. And Stefano won't be the last to wear the poor man's necktie. It comes cheaper than Kites, eh? *They're* a nice spirited way of fighting, I must say, for a man who's ever sat a horse or spiked a Bosni. Poison-gas, indeed! If I had wanted to poison people, I'd have been a wine-seller, not a soldier. . . . Why the hell don't you laugh when you *do* hear a joke?

GUARDS [*Feebly*]

He! he! he!

VANNI

Cristo! It's neither grub nor glory for the soldier nowadays. Ah, they want to chop off *her* head now, but it wasn't like that, boys, when *She* sat there——

[*Points to the throne*]

We got our knives into the Bosnis and our forks into the bacon.

GUARDS [*With beautiful unanimity*]

Ha! ha! ha!

VANNI [*Beaming*]

And when a filthy naturalised Bosni blew off my arm, there was scarcely a day but the Queen came to the hospital with chrysanthemums and jellies. Fancy Riffoni carrying a chap flowers!

GUARDS
Down with Riffoni!

VANNI
And God save the Queen!

GUARDS
God save the Queen!

CAZOTTI [*Who has come between the pillars un-
perceived*]
Treason! Open treason in the People's Hall! What
does this mean, Corporal Vanni?

VANNI
I—your Excellency—Comrade——

CAZOTTI
Dismiss your men. You shall answer to me for this,
alone.

VANNI [*Confused*]
Right about turn, you swine. March!
[*Exeunt soldiers.*]

CAZOTTI
You indiscreet imbecile! For aught you knew I
might have been the President!

VANNI
But I should have heard the band returning, Ex-
cellency.

CAZOTTI

It happens he *is* coming with the procession. But he *might* have slipped home by car to evade assassins.

[*A church-clock strikes the half-hour. HE lowers his voice*]

Fortunately the danger from your folly will soon be over. He dies to-day.

VANNI [*Startled*]

To-day?

CAZOTTI

Before that clock strikes the hour. How else can we save the Queen, God bless her?

VANNI

God bless her! When do I shoot Captain Lambri?

CAZOTTI

I have told you. Not till you hear a shot from this balcony.

[*Points to the right casement*]

That will be the signal to Fenella's crowd that Riffoni is dead. Then you rush your men towards the Queen's apartments, while Fenella bursts into the Palace.

VANNI

But I've been thinking, Excellency—won't that shot serve to warn Captain Lambri?

CAZOTTI

He'll hardly hear it where he is. Do give up thinking,

Corporal, it doesn't suit a soldier, and you haven't Fenella's brains. Ah, I wish I could have saved her husband for her. But Riffoni was too rabid.

VANNI

A heart of stone, Excellency.

CAZOTTI

It will soon be cold as one.

VANNI

The saints be praised. And then we shall have enough grub again?

CAZOTTI [*Smiling*]

Tons. Though your men will no longer get the same rations as you.

VANNI [*Chuckling*]

I shan't tell 'em that.

CAZOTTI

For once you are sensible. Tell them as little as possible—just rush them about. But remember! no budging till you hear that shot from the balcony—instead of saving the Queen you might kill all of us, if you moved before the mob, or while Riffoni remained alive and kicking.

VANNI

I understand. But if he shouts for help or beats his gong?

CAZOTTI

If he beats it once, you march in as usual. But if he beats it twice, you're as deaf as *he* was to Stefano's cries for mercy. By the way, take no notice either of the shot that kills him—that will be point-blank and muffled by his damned brains.

[*Re-enter SALARET spectacted.*]

SALARET [*To VANNI*]

Did you tell the Commissary——? Ah, how do you do, Cazotti?

VANNI

The Commissary said, Excellency, that his guillotine carpenters won't work at night.

[*Salutes and exit.*]

SALARET

But surely, Cazotti, he could have waited till Riffoni had passed.

CAZOTTI

You saw Riffoni's wire forbidding further delay. And new brooms sweep clean.

SALARET

Clean? He has swept into the Piazza the rowdiest and basest elements.

CAZOTTI

So much the better for our *coup d'état*.

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SALARET

It is for to-day?

CAZOTTI

To-morrow the trainload of food that Riffoni has brought home will allay the *stomach* for revolution. To-morrow those whose one hope is to save the Queen will have been disheartened. Ah, his haste to execute her has but precipitated his doom. Truly those whom the gods wish to destroy they first make mad. The bull was already mad the last time he charged—do you remember how I shrugged my shoulders?—already I saw him dragged ignominiously from the arena. Bulls always charge with their eyes shut, and he failed to see that behind Stefano was Fenella, and behind Komak your Guido and the young generation. Had he consented to pardon them, I should have reaped only the profit of clemency, as it is, I reap the benefit of their deaths into the bargain.

SALARET

But the crowd seems as Red as Riffoni—didn't you hear its songs and screams?

CAZOTTI

My dear Salaret, crowds have no sentiments, sentiments have crowds. Fenella and her gang, aided by your son's pals among the Kite Corps, will, at the given signal, change the mood of the mob. The sight of the guillotine already evokes sympathy for the young Queen. Riffoni is hated even more than he is feared, and the mob is even hungrier than it is

Republican and Socialist. And the moment they know Riffoni is dead, they will clamour for Cazotti the Compassionate.

SALARET [*Shocked*]
He is to die?

CAZOTTI
He will not survive his return by ten minutes.

SALARET
My God!

CAZOTTI
You *have* no God! What do you mean? Don't play Salaret the Soft with me. Your friend chose to come between me and the power I had worked for all my life—he must be removed, he and his fantastic visions.

SALARET
But how will saving the Queen help *you* to the throne?

CAZOTTI
Who says the Queen will be saved? Captain Lambri will look after that. Not that her death is necessary—I would prefer to connive at her flight from the realm. But Captain Lambri is impossible.

SALARET [*Hoarse and trembling*]
And who will—look after—Vittorio?

CAZOTTI

The person who has easiest access to him, of course.

SALARET [*Bounding*]

I?

CAZOTTI

As if I would rely on a reed! No——

[*Lowering his voice with a chuckle*]

a man who would far rather shoot Lambri, if he guessed my combination.

[*Points to curtains.*]

SALARET

Omar? I thought he was whispering mischief. So he is a Royalist!

CAZOTTI

Yes.

[*Chuckling*]

That will cover us. Better still, he is an ex-servant of Gripstein. That will enable us to say, if necessary, that the Jews pulled the strings. Death is a strange glorifier and any reaction in Riffoni's favour will thus pass off harmlessly in a pogrom.

SALARET

I said you were the devil!

CAZOTTI [*Complacently*]

Of course there is also the danger of a reaction in the

Queen's favour. But that is provided for by this letter I am sending to Riffoni the moment he returns.

[Draws out from his breast-pocket an imposing sealed letter]

It contains my resignation unless he accedes to the American petition and allows me to pardon the Queen—that will also put me right with America and the West generally.

SALARET

I wonder you tell me all this so nakedly, Cazotti.

CAZOTTI

Since my poor wife died I have no one to admire my combinations—or to call me by my Christian name. Won't you call me Alexis?

SALARET

When you are murdering the only man I do call by his Christian name! Are you not afraid I shall warn him?

CAZOTTI *[Patting his shoulder]*

I always said you were not dangerous. You know that you will breathe more freely when death snaps your schoolmaster and his cane.

SALARET *[With a sudden hope or fear, he scarcely knows which]*

But there is one piece on the chess-board you have overlooked—the protecting knight.

CAZOTTI

Molp? That man is a mystery. As devoted at heart to the Queen as Omar, he remains ferociously faithful to Riffoni. However a telegram has already met him at the station summoning him to the deathbed of his little Nina at her grandmother's in the country. . . .

[Laughing merrily at the mixture of horror and admiration on the face of his silenced colleague, he points to the throne]

Would you mind taking the chair a moment?

SALARET

What for?

CAZOTTI

To witness the climax of the combination.

[Laughingly pushes the wondering SALARET into the royal chair and rings the bell. Enter OMAR. CAZOTTI hands him the letter]

Here is the letter, Omar, and here

[Pointing to SALARET]

is the President back—we will suppose. Now go out and let us see your conception of the part.

[OMAR grins, salaams and exit.]

SALARET

What are we doing?

CAZOTTI

He is coming back to present my ultimatum to Riffoni, you being Riffoni.

SALARET
I being Riffoni?

CAZOTTI
How slow you are! The star part! Be very busy with these accumulations. But don't open the letter when Omar brings it—else I should have to write a new envelope. Just pretend to read it. You will naturally be perturbed at my threatened resignation. That will be Omar's opportunity.

SALARET
It is a rehearsal of the—— O my God!

CAZOTTI
Your God again! Omar has really an Allah, yet you see he doesn't turn a hair. Atheists should be at least as godless as believers.

SALARET
I am not an atheist in your sense. There is no God, but a divine sap rises within us.

CAZOTTI [*With a coarse laugh*]
Tell that to Armida.

SALARET
I know I have sinned against my light. But to implicate me in a murder——!
[*Springs up.*]

CAZOTTI [*Pressing him back*]
Sit down.

SALARET

I told you I wouldn't have him murdered. . . . Your colleague! What will the world think of you?

CAZOTTI

How dull you are to-day! The letter found on your body—on *his* body, don't look so frightened—will not only seal the legend of Cazotti the Compassionate, but acquit me of any ambition to supplant either my Queen or my President.

SALARET

But posterity will surely discover——

CAZOTTI

Posterity may say what it likes so long as it waits till I am dead. Now do try to look the part—attend to these accumulations.

SALARET [*Rising again*]

Don't torture me! Let Omar rehearse on *you*, if rehearsal is necessary.

CAZOTTI

I have to be at the wing, giving Vanni his cue.

SALARET

Then why doesn't Omar come in and get it over?

CAZOTTI

My fault. The stage directions are he is not to enter till Riffoni is alone. It is a scene constructed for two

characters only; any additional personage might upset the tragedy.

[Pressing him back on the throne]

Now I will leave the stage clear.

[Goes out smilingly through the pillars. An instant after OMAR enters by the curtains, with the letter on a salver.]

OMAR

An immediate answer is requested, Effendi.

[SALARET pretends to open and read the letter, though his hands tremble violently. OMAR drops the salver, whips out a pistol and claps it to his forehead, with a mock cry]

Bang!

[Highly amused, he rushes with his pistol to the right casement, flings it open and leaps on to the balcony. Over the buzz of the crowd he utters a second mock cry]

Bang!

CAZOTTI *[Without]*

Riffoni is dead! *Viva* Margherita! Yes, the bang was your cue, Vanni.

[HE comes in, clapping his hands, as OMAR reappears from the balcony, closing the casement]

Bravo, Omar, Bravissimo.

[To SALARET]

But I can't applaud you. Why didn't you fall? . . .

Wait, Omar, you have forgotten the letter.

[OMAR, grinning more broadly than ever, picks up the salver and letter and retires salaaming. SALARET collapses half-fainting, huddled on his chair.]

CAZOTTI

Ah, if you had only done that at the right moment!

SALARET [*Springing up fiercely*]

Let me be! You might have spared me the dreadful foreknowledge.

CAZOTTI

I wanted you to know so as to keep out of the way. Go over to your yacht—it will be your safest position from every point of view.

SALARET

And where will you be?

CAZOTTI

In the Tower Room—another of my combinations—for it combines freedom from risk with a fine view of the counter-revolution. . . . Good-bye—I counsel you to be off at once. Omar's revolver has six chambers you heard, and fanatics don't like interference.

SALARET

Poor Omar! Working for you, though he thinks he is working for his Queen.

CAZOTTI

Don't we all work to ends unseen? Even I may never get to the throne—the greasy plank may give me a tumble at the last inch—ah, your eyes light up at the prospect. Do not deny it.

SALARET

I can't pretend that your restoring Monarchy and Capitalism enraptures me. So this is the end of the Revolution.

CAZOTTI

Isn't it the end of every Revolution—the top of the wheel come round again? But who knows? Bismarck toyed with the idea of a monarchist Socialism, and perhaps we statesmen who have pandered to democracy ought to be grateful to you for showing that the State may be an apiary. But, alas! I fear Socialism presupposes a quality which is not in human nature.

SALARET

But *Riffoni* was honest.

CAZOTTI

Ha! ha! ha! I wasn't thinking of honesty but of omniscience—we are not as high above men as beemasters above the hive, not even your *Riffoni*.

[HE goes towards the curtains.]

SALARET [*In a last desperate appeal*]

But Cazotti—Alexis!—is his death absolutely necessary?

CAZOTTI

Absolutely necessary. And absolutely deserved.

SALARET

Because he has killed others?

CAZOTTI

What an idea! Statesmen, like generals, cannot regard life. No, Riffoni must die like all men who adventure in waters too deep for them. He called up forces he cannot control, nourished illusions he cannot maintain, and raised expectations he cannot satisfy. He appealed to man's master-passion, Greed——

SALARET [*Fiercely*]

He appealed to man's master-passion, Justice!

CAZOTTI

Pooh! The sense of justice lives only because each man thinks *he* hasn't got his deserts.

[*Smiling*]

I don't suppose I shall be satisfied even as King.

SALARET [*Bitterly*]

No. Not if, as you say, the dose must always be increased. You will be wanting next to be Emperor of Europe.

CAZOTTI

Why not? It's the only way to turn the Cockpit into a Concert Hall.

[*Parts the curtains*]

Be off to your yacht!

[*Exit.*]

SALARET [*Miserably*]

My yacht!

[*HE opens the casement and gazes out. Above the*

buzz of the crowd comes the thump, thump of hammers.]

VOICE [*From Piazza*]

Bring the cross-piece, you idiots! . . . No! No!
The cross-piece!

[*SALARET shudders and closes the casement. MOLP in uniform and spurred comes in agitatedly through the pillars. SALARET turns, startled at the sight of him.*]

SALARET

You *here!*

MOLP [*Suspiciously*]

Where else should I be?

SALARET [*Recovering composure*]

In—in the procession.

MOLP

I galloped ahead to caution Vanni and Omar.

SALARET

What about?

MOLP

Guarding the President. My little Nina is terribly ill, dying perhaps.

SALARET

How sad! And such a journey for you!

MOLP [*Swiftly*]

How did you know it was a journey?

SALARET

You—you told me that having to accompany the President on his campaign, you had to leave her at her grandmother's.

MOLP

Did I? I thought it was Cazotti I told.

[*Rings the bell*]

Suppose the wire from her village is a ruse?

SALARET

A ruse?

MOLP

I know my Valdania. I have practised too many tricks myself. Suppose there was a plot against the President and they wanted to lure me away?

[*Enter OMAR, who is obviously startled to see him, but swiftly exchanges his surprise for an Oriental impassivity*]

Omar, I have an uneasy feeling a last attempt may be made to save the Queen. Let no stranger approach the President.

OMAR

No stranger shall approach.

MOLP

Swear it to me.

OMAR [*With convincing solemnity*]
By the beard of the Prophet, I swear it.

MOLP
And I swear by the tail of the devil that if anything happens to him, *you* shall pay the forfeit.

OMAR
It will be just.

MOLP
Good. *Addio*, Comrade Salaret.

SALARET [*Uneasily*]
Must you go?

MOLP
How can I stay away?

SALARET
But—but there seems such a savage crowd round the Palace. Listen!

[*HE throws open the blazoned casement. The command of a master-carpenter is heard above the noise and the hammering.*]

MASTER-CARPENTER [*Without*]
Fix in the knife, you fools, fix in the knife!

MOLP
Close it, close it, I know. I came through the mob—

it's only what executions always draw. God spares me from the sight of that death at least.

[Going towards the pillars.]

SALARET *[Making talk to detain him]*
You were in her service, were you not?

MOLP

She could not bear the sight of me, but to me the sight of her was like an almond tree in the spring.

SALARET

Ah, that must have been in her own springtide.

MOLP

And now, so early, winter is upon her. Poor Margherita! How dreadful that her death is necessary to the Republic!

SALARET

Is it necessary?

MOLP

Absolutely necessary and absolutely deserved—the President has convinced me.

SALARET

Absolutely necessary and absolutely deserved. . . .
Ha! ha! ha!

MOLP

What are you laughing at? Isn't he right?

SALARET

I suppose so. My friend Riffoni is a great man.

MOLP

The greatest I have ever known.

SALARET [*Rather surprised*]

Indeed? . . . Greater than Cazotti?

MOLP

Ah, they are the two creatures of our national arms, the serpent and the eagle.

SALARET [*Points to the blazoned throne*]

Yes, but look! It is the serpent that encircles the eagle.

MOLP

God save us!

[*Crosses himself*]

So it is.

[*Looks at watch*]

But I must catch my train.

[*Moves on.*]

SALARET

Wait a moment!

MOLP

I can't—God help me.

[*With a half-sob he goes out hurriedly.*]

SALARET [*Calling after him*]

Cheer up! I'm sure you'll find the child better.

[*HE drops exhausted and trembling on a chair. After an instant RIFFONI comes quietly through the curtains in general's uniform, with spurs. SALARET springs up, startled.*]

RIFFONI [*Laughing*]

You look as if I were a ghost! What's the matter?

[*Embraces him.*]

SALARET

I expected you to come with bands and banners.

RIFFONI

I came by the subway. I slipped out of the procession, when I found it would have to pass the guillotine.

SALARET

I am glad it spoiled your triumph. Why, to-morrow morning? Why such brutal haste?

RIFFONI [*Turns away to ascend dais*]

I was afraid if I saw her again I might waver.

SALARET

Yes, seeing people again makes a great difference. You *ought* to have seen her again.

RIFFONI

Do not scold me, dear Master, I am very tired. Ah, there is my old armchair.

[*Drops on the throne*]

What was it Catullus said about the wanderer dropping into his familiar seat?

SALARET

Catullus hardly had a throne in mind.

RIFFONI

Nor such a heap of correspondence.

[Takes up letters.]

SALARET *[Alarmed]*

Must you attend to it now? Let's go for one of our old walks and talks.

RIFFONI

When I am just in my armchair?

[Opens a letter]

By the way, Molp's child is dangerously ill.

SALARET

I know. He looked in for a moment to admonish Omar and Vanni to super-vigilance.

RIFFONI

Dear Molp! He has assassination on the brain. Ah, I mustn't forget my promise to him to keep my pistol handy.

[Lays it on the table]

I do hope he'll find his Nina better. How vast it can be—the death of one child. I remember the spacious emptiness at home when my little brother was drowned. Poor Carlo with his long curls and his passion for

paper-boats. Now the passing of myriads seems like the melting of bubbles.

[The military music of the returning soldiers is heard faintly.]

SALARET

Had you to sacrifice many peasants?

RIFFONI

I spared as many as I could. But I had to think of our foodless cities, and our imperilled social structure. Ah, the ancients symbolised profoundly when they laid human sacrifices in the basement of their buildings. But for how long, I ask myself, will our house stand unshaken, for how long will there be food in its larder? The unrest seems too deep-seated, one might as well try to extinguish a volcano with a fire-hose. Ah, as I mowed down the poor stupid peasants, who could not understand that the crops must be communised as well as the land, the Queen's words kept rising up against me—yes, even the Duke's—and I wondered—forgive me, dear Master—whether the Workers' Republic was indeed only a forcing house. Perhaps mankind runs to property as the male chin to hair. Can we breed a beardless sex by the razor?

SALARET

Or ensure a Republic by the guillotine?

RIFFONI

Do not raise that question—I am unhappy enough.

[The soldiers swing buoyantly past to their music]

Ha! Do you hear? She talks to me of love and pity and that was her own music—her own war-march against Bosnavina. Fate has made it her death-march.

[OMAR *parts the curtains, holding the CAZOTTI letter on a salver, but, obviously disconcerted by SALARET'S presence, he withdraws, unmarked save of SALARET*]

And yet that vivid flame blown out, that flesh so soft and warm to fatten worms—what madness is this?

SALARET

Ah, you love her! You love her still!

RIFFONI

No, no, who could love the creature the trial revealed?

SALARET

Even were it all true, would she be less desirable? Molp just said that in her springtide she was lovely as almond-blossom. Suffering has dulled that rosy radiance, but give her freedom and happiness and you will enjoy her re-flowering.

RIFFONI

I shall enjoy? But she shrinks from my touch.

SALARET

That was her guile, you said. Get her at close quarters—you will soon learn if you are less attractive than the others.

RIFFONI

At close quarters?

SALARET

Carry her off to the Mediterranean, to some enchanted island. You say you are very tired. Leave all this cumber before your nerves break down. Try a dose of joy.

RIFFONI

Your love for me unbalances you—you forget she dies to-morrow.

SALARET

Take her to-night then. Luckily my yacht is provisioned and coaled and can sail at a moment's notice.

RIFFONI

Eh? How comes that?

SALARET

I—I decided to take a holiday when you returned—the strain without you was too great. The moment your wire came, I made arrangements. Come *with* me.

RIFFONI

It is too sudden.

SALARET

Your bag is not yet unpacked. All we need is to manœuvre the Queen on board——

[*Gives him a pen*]

Write me an order for Captain Lambri to hand her over to my charge for secret removal to the Fort Prison, on the ground of a possible Royalist attempt at rescue this last night. I will persuade her lady-in-waiting that I am helping them to escape your clutches. They won't dream you are on board till the yacht has sailed. Come! You must slip away at once.

RIFFONI [*Momentarily carried away*]
Where is the yacht?

SALARET
Moored near the Fort. Look! You can just see her funnels.

[*Opens the blazoned casement. RIFFONI descends from his throne.*]

RIFFONI [*Looking*]
But why this lightning speed?
[*The sinister sound of hammers beats up from the Piazza.*]

SALARET [*Shuddering and closing casement*]
There is your answer.

RIFFONI
But I could reprieve her for a day or two.

SALARET
And suffer again all the agonies of indecision and desire, the more agonising because your nature is action? Come, obey the law of your being!

RIFFONI

And to-morrow morning—how do we explain her absence?

SALARET

Obviously on the ground that the Royalist rescue we apprehended was effected during the transference.

RIFFONI

Humph. Highly ingenious for an academic philosopher. But obey the law of *your* being, Salaret, and do not outrage your sense of right in your oversolicitude for my happiness. Why, when I merely grasped her hand in this very room, you rightly restrained me; why do you egg me on to violence now?

SALARET

Who spoke of violence? Opportunity, which makes the thief, favours also the lover. You could woo her at your leisure.

RIFFONI

Leisure! My work gives me none.

[Re-seats himself and takes up a letter.]

SALARET *[Desperate, burning his boats]*

Your work? Pouring water down volcanoes!

RIFFONI

I said that in a moment of weariness.

SALARET

In a moment of insight. Our Republic is an abortion.

RIFFONI

You believe that! *You!* All our painful parturition——?

SALARET

Worse than wasted. If only I could get you away, give you a little happiness.

RIFFONI

I never sought happiness.

SALARET

It seeks you.

RIFFONI

It must find me at my post.

SALARET

That post need not be Valdania.

RIFFONI

How do you mean?

SALARET

It is an impossible country; illiterate, priest-ridden, rooted immovably in the dead past. A new idea needs a new world. Let us sail to some more plastic country—Paraguay, perhaps, the scene of so many social experiments, whence we could get a leverage over all South America, the continent of the future.

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RIFFONI

It is a great conception—like all yours. Unfortunately, as Gripstein pointed out to me, when I went to him about the *Sera*, you can't overturn Capitalism without capital.

SALARET

But there is gold on the yacht—masses.

RIFFONI

On board? How?

SALARET

Isn't it a State yacht? I store the Treasury bullion there. In these turbulent times it is best to keep the whereabouts of our gold unknown.

RIFFONI [*Smiling*]

So Gripstein thought. But we can't carry off Valdania's finances.

SALARET

You talk like a bourgeois. Since we shall devote them to our ideal——!

[*Enter* ESTER DA GRASSO, *with* OMAR *protesting.*]

ESTER DA GRASSO [*Frantically pushing past*
OMAR]

Stand aside!

[OMAR *disappears*]

O Signor Riffoni, be merciful. I do not ask you to stop the execution. But stop that hammering, for

God's sake, or remove Her Majesty to a room which does not give on the Piazza. I have kept her from the window, I have already pulled down the blind and closed the shutters, I have tried to drown the sounds with her own music. But underneath, I know she has divined, that every stroke of the hammer beats on her heart. Ah, she is so young, so young——!

[*Sobs.*]

SALARET

Calm yourself, Signora. We will remove her from the Palace altogether—to the Fort Prison.

ESTER DA GRASSO

Ah, yes, yes, my old quarters—that will be quiet, and free from this ghoulisb mob.

SALARET [*Writing*]

The President will sign this order to Captain Lambri. Bring her to me, dressed for the transference, with her things for the night. You will accompany her, of course.

[*HE gives the paper to RIFFONI, who, hypnotised, signs it. SALARET hands it to ESTER DA GRASSO.*]

ESTER DA GRASSO

God bless you both for this mercy at least!

[*Exit as she came.*]

SALARET

Wasn't that providential—if I may use the word?

RIFFONI [*Rapt*]
And I shall see her again!

SALARET
Day after day—come, let us get your bag. My car
is at the gate.

RIFFONI
She will not smile, I fear. Only once did I see her
smile. It was like the spreading of sunshine over a
crystal pool.

SALARET
As soon as you reach the yacht, send the car back for
us. It is not three minutes by the short cuts.

RIFFONI
Ah no—they can't be true, those stories—with that
smile!

SALARET
I will bring her to the yacht with her Dame of Honour.
[Takes his arm to get him to move.]

RIFFONI
But she is coming here, you said—I shall see her at
once.

SALARET
No, no—you might be indiscreet—she might smell a
rat.

RIFFONI

I shall speak only of the Fort Prison—I shall not mention the yacht. You shall take them on board and send the car back for me.

SALARET

No—you must be on board first—surely you can wait ten minutes.

RIFFONI

And if your tyre burst in bringing her—no, no, I have starved long enough!

[*Enter* OMAR.]

OMAR

Signora da Grasso begs that Signor Salaret will come to her at once.

SALARET

Ha!

[OMAR *salaams and exit.*]

RIFFONI [*Feverishly*]

Is it a hitch? Does the Queen cling to her room after all?

SALARET

Who can say? Women are so unexpected. Or perhaps it's that ferocious Captain Lambri refusing to let them go.

[*Hurries out.*]

RIFFONI

The insolent dog! Put him in his place! . . . To watch her re-flowering——

[HE muses ecstatically. The curtains part and OMAR appears with the big heavily-sealed letter on the salver]

What is it?

OMAR

An immediate answer is requested, Effendi.

RIFFONI

Put it down—I can't attend to it now.

OMAR

But it is from Comrade Cazotti, Effendi. I dare not return, empty-handed.

RIFFONI

The devil take you both!

[HE opens the letter. OMAR'S hand slides to his bosom. MOLP enters through the pillars]

Ah, you're back! You've had reassuring news?

MOLP

No, but I could not bring myself to catch my train—I was haunted by a vision.

RIFFONI

Indeed? Of what?

MOLP

Of a serpent encircling an eagle.

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RIFFONI

The arms of Valdania? Why should that keep you from little Nina?

MOLP

I was reminded of my duty to protect Valdania's President.

RIFFONI [*Deeply touched*]

You put your duty to me before your love for your child?

MOLP

Not entirely. I wasn't sure the telegram wasn't a ruse.

RIFFONI [*Huskily*]

Don't whittle it down—you are a quixotic idiot. Get a car and be off at once.

MOLP

With all respect, now I must wait for the reply to my telegram of enquiry.

RIFFONI [*Facetiously covering his emotion*]

That's not so idiotic.

[*Looks at letter*]

Ha! ha! ha! How odd! Why didn't he say so before? Cazotti threatens resignation unless I allow him to pardon the Queen. . . . What would you have me reply?

[*Takes up pen and paper.*]

MOLP

The eagle does not take counsel of the sparrow.

RIFFONI

Don't talk like our friend here. What would *you* like me to do?

MOLP

You will always do what the welfare of the Republic demands.

RIFFONI [*Touched and troubled*]

Will I, indeed? Ah, if you knew how nearly the serpent had dragged down the eagle! Answer my question—what would *you* do if only *your* welfare was concerned?

MOLP

Sooner than hurt a hair of her head I would go to the block myself.

RIFFONI

Brave Molp! . . . I am sorry the welfare of the Republic demands my acceptance of the resignation.

[*Writes and gives the answer to OMAR, who salaams stoically and exit*]

Don't look so gloomy, Molp. Who is Cazotti to pardon an angel?

MOLP [*Ecstatic*]

You will pardon her yourself?

RIFFONI

Not even I am worthy. She will escape.

MOLP

Escape? By your connivance?

RIFFONI

And yours.

MOLP

Thank God! Ah, how great you are!

RIFFONI

Tut! Tut! *You* are the big man. We are pretending to transfer her to the Fort Prison with her lady-in-waiting, but in reality we shall put them on board Salaret's yacht. He is worn out, poor man, and sees the Republic not in red but in black. A sea voyage will pick him up, give him fresh faith.

MOLP

He will sail down the river then?

RIFFONI

Yes, into the Mediterranean. And land the Queen at any port she chooses.

[*Re-enter SALARET frenziedly.*]

SALARET [*In wild relief*]

Ah, you are alive! And Molp is back! Splendid!

RIFFONI

What are you maundering about? What did she want? You may speak before Molp.

SALARET

I didn't see them—they were dressing—Omar must have—er—misunderstood. Captain Lambri is bringing them.

RIFFONI

Good. I was just going to explain to Molp that I want *him* to act as escort—it will be less suspicious—and then he can return, wounded.

MOLP [*Startled*]
Eh?

RIFFONI [*Smiling*]

Bandaged, anyhow—you said you would go to the block for her. You will explain that a party of Royalists attacked you and carried off the Queen to the mountains.

SALARET

A false track—an admirable addition!

MOLP

It won't look very plausible entrusting her to a single escort.

RIFFONI

Why not? If our idea was to keep her removal

unobserved. Do motor down at once, Salaret, and instruct the captain to get up steam. Then return at top speed and wait at the gate till Molp brings down the ladies.

SALARET

But you?

RIFFONI

Quick! I hear them coming.

[Bundles the semi-dazed SALARET out between the pillars, while the QUEEN and ESTER DA GRASSO in travelling attire, the latter carrying a little bag, enter the opposite way, with CAPTAIN LAMBRI in their wake; a truculent officer with a fierce moustache, who salutes the President, clicking his heels]

I thank you Comrade Lambri for your vigilance. Colonel Molp will see to the transference of your prisoners. Molp, will you have the courtesy to relieve the Signora of that bag?

[LAMBRI glares ferociously as MOLP takes it]

Of course, Captain Lambri, we must not attract Royalist attention to the Queen's removal. But as soon as it is quite dark, please station your company outside the Fort Prison.

[CAPTAIN LAMBRI, pacified, salutes and goes.]

QUEEN

I am grateful to you, Signor Riffoni, for your consideration.

RIFFONI

I sincerely regret it is the last I can show you.

ESTER DA GRASSO [*Hysterically*]

But why can't you spare her? I know they cabled you from America to pardon her.

QUEEN

Hush, dear Ester! You haven't fastened your brooch—it will fall out.

[*Fastens it for her with fingers that do not falter*]

Signor Riffoni must follow his sense of his Republic's necessities.

RIFFONI

I thank you, Madam. You as a ruler have learnt that one cannot always please oneself. To pardon you would set Captain Lambri's faction raging—more bloodshed might ensue. But I have just instructed Colonel Molp—by the way, that bag is surely too small——

QUEEN

It is only for one night.

RIFFONI

Ah well, I expect you can pick up more *en route*.

QUEEN [*Almost breaking down for the first time*]

Ah, do not put it off any longer. That would be the cruellest kindness.

ESTER DA GRASSO

Yes, kill her—you shall not torture her any longer!

RIFFONI

But it is the end of her torture, I am trying to tell you.

[*To QUEEN*]

It is to freedom, Madam, that Comrade Molp will escort you.

ESTER DA GRASSO [*Ceasing to sob*]

To freedom?

QUEEN [*With her first sob*]

To freedom?

RIFFONI [*Smiling, to hide his own emotion*]

Only—don't let the cat out of that bag—you must tell your friends you were rescued by a Royalist raid.

QUEEN [*Dazed*]

I am free to go where I please?

RIFFONI

Where you please. Even to America.

QUEEN

Oh!

[*Breaks down and covers her eyes.*]

RIFFONI

I must risk your raising opinion against us.

QUEEN

But—Signor Riffoni—my only ambition is to sink quietly into the Melting Pot.

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ESTER DA GRASSO
And marry an American.

QUEEN [*Blushing*]
Ester——!

RIFFONI [*Huskily*]
So much the better. . . .
 [*Clearing his throat*]
Now, Molp, march!

QUEEN
Addio then. How can I thank you?
 [*SHE offers him her hand.*]

RIFFONI
You would touch my hand?

QUEEN
It is stained with blood, but not—I feel—with dis-
honour.

RIFFONI
Ah, Madam!
 [*HE bends and kisses her hand*]
The pioneer's hand can never be clean, and we who
create civilisation are like the swine-grease through
which perfumes are distilled for the delicate nostril.
But, in so far as is practicable, I will try to work in
your spirit.

QUEEN
In your father's spirit, Signor Vittorio.

RIFFONI

Put it as you please—I shall always feel you are the Lady of our Republic.

QUEEN

God grant you may remember. . . . We are ready, Colonel Molp. Ah, God forgive my selfishness! The Duke? What of him?

RIFFONI

D'Azollo?

[Laughs boisterously to relieve his emotion]

Ah, it is wonderful how he always goes out of my head. Talk of *his* memory!

[Starts writing]

Of course you shall have your Duke—the Royalist raid will capture quite a bag, eh, Molp? Larger than that! Ha! ha! ha!

QUEEN

God bless you.

RIFFONI *[Handing the order to MOLP]*

Bless Molp—it is all his doing.

[To the astonished MOLP]

No, I know you don't understand; you wouldn't be Molp if you did. Do you remember the Duke asking me that night what I would do with his yacht? Won't he be amused at my putting him on it!

ESTER DA GRASSO

The Duke's yacht?

RIFFONI

Salaret's now, more or less—it is *that* you are to escape on.

ESTER DA GRASSO

With Salaret on board?

RIFFONI (*Genially*)

Oh, yes, you shall have the Professor to see you through. Colonel Molp, unfortunately, cannot leave Valdania. His little girl is dangerously ill.

ESTER DA GRASSO

O my God! No, no, kill her rather. . . . O blessèd Virgin!

RIFFONI

Kill the child? What can you mean?

ESTER DA GRASSO

It is a trap!

[*Tugs at the QUEEN'S cloak*]

Come back, Your Majesty. Ah, I thought it was too good to be true.

QUEEN

What trap? What are you in a fever about? . . .

Poor little Nina! I am so sorry, Colonel——

ESTER DA GRASSO

Ah, I ought to have understood earlier—when the Fort Prison cropped up again.

[*Turns on RIFFONI*]

O you unspeakable——!

QUEEN

Èster! Compose yourself! I don't understand you.

ESTER DA GRASSO

No, Your Majesty, you never did. I should have confessed everything earlier, God forgive me. All my life I have had lovers—ah, I knew you would shrink from me. But better that you should shrink from me than rush into that! Is it so disgraceful to give oneself when the heart is free to open or close? I did not think so till your innocence came like a rebuke—there was always romance to redeem. But here—through dread of the thorns, I whose life had been all roses—through a cowardly fear of pain and death, I have sunk to my gaoler!

[Breaks down, hides her face.]

RIFFONI

To your gaoler? Which gaoler?

ESTER DA GRASSO

As if you did not know!

RIFFONI

But I know nothing.

ESTER DA GRASSO

So I was led to believe. But now I see that the devilish sense of power has wrought on you likewise. Only you flew at higher game and bided your time. Come back, Margherita, that hammering is less dreadful.

RIFFONI

Stay, Signora. You cannot go, leaving such imputations. Do I understand that you are afraid that if the Queen goes on board the yacht——?

ESTER DA GRASSO

She will find *you* there—as I shall find Salaret. O, I could endure these orgies myself if it would really save *her*. But that she too——!

RIFFONI

These orgies?

ESTER DA GRASSO

It was only towards the end of the cruise that Salaret discovered I was his special affinity.

RIFFONI

Salaret? . . . You are raving!

ESTER DA GRASSO

Alas, my sanity has stood the shock.

RIFFONI

Molp, do you know anything of this?

MOLP

It was before my time. But I did suspect something lately between Salaret and the Signora.

ESTER DA GRASSO

But I only let him in once—the first night—ah, you can never forgive me, Madam.

QUEEN

I forgive you now, Ester. You have saved me from worse than death.

[ESTER falls sobbing into her arms]

Hush! We must go back. Give me the bag, Colonel Molp!

[MOLP hesitates. In the tense silence the banging of the hammers penetrates again.]

RIFFONI

Do nothing of the sort, Molp! Ah, Madam, your friend would destroy, not save you. Go in tranquillity; we need the guillotine for a real criminal. I wish I could utterly deny the devilish design you attribute to me, but it had been exorcised—by this brave Comrade—even before your horror had brought home to me its full baseness. I had resolved to seek oblivion of you and purgation of myself in my work for the Republic. . . . Ah, how can I believe in the Republic now?

[Sinks broken into his throne]

Go, Comrade. Salaret should be waiting in his car by the time you get to the gate. Send him up to me and drive off at once with the ladies, and let the captain cast anchor immediately. Then they will be sure Salaret is not on board—nor I.

QUEEN

Come, Ester.

ESTER DA GRASSO

No, no! He is play-acting. What is to prevent him coming on board afterwards? I would not trust him on his oath.

RIFFONI

You must trust me without it, Signora, for God in heaven I have none.

MOLP

But *I* have, by God, and I swear I will never leave Her Majesty till she is safe among her friends!

RIFFONI

But your Nina——!

MOLP

She must live or die without me.

[ESTER DA GRASSO *looks at MOLP, then takes the QUEEN'S hand and moves towards the pillars.*]

MOLP

Excuse my preceding Your Majesty—I have to show the pass.

[*Exit; they follow.*]

RIFFONI [*Hurrying down from the dais*]

One moment, Madam! Accept a parting gift.

QUEEN [*Moving a few steps within*]

Your pistol?

RIFFONI

Loaded. Your final safeguard.

QUEEN [*Taking it*]

To think that I came to this Palace with love in my heart and go with death in my hand.

RIFFONI

I trust at least you go to happiness.

QUEEN

It is a happiness merely to go—to be released by God . . . to feel my forehead finally free of the crown. . . .

[With sudden gaiety SHE curtsies to the empty throne]

Good-bye, you!

[Exit.]

RIFFONI

Ah, she is younger already—she will flower again. . . .

[Calls after her]

But the Duke! Don't forget to collect the Duke!
Aha, I remembered him at last. Ha! ha! ha!
ha! ha!

[Mounts the dais in hysteric, half-sobbing laughter, and, dropping on his throne, rings the bell. Enter OMAR.]

RIFFONI

Give me your pistol, Omar.

OMAR *[Utterly disconcerted]*

Effendi!

RIFFONI

You carry a pistol for my protection, do you not?

[OMAR nods, speechless for once]

Give it me!

[Hypnotised, OMAR slowly hands it over.]

RIFFONI
Is it loaded ?

OMAR
In every chamber.

RIFFONI
Good. . . . I have parted with mine. You may go! . . . By the way, you gave my reply to Comrade Cazotti?

OMAR
Yes, Effendi.

RIFFONI
Did he say anything?

OMAR
Not to your humble servant.
[Salaams and exit. RIFFONI examines the pistol in a silence through which the hammering is heard again. Enter SALARET by the pillars.]

RIFFONI [*Sardonically, playing with the pistol*]
Ah, Salaret, all going well?

SALARET
To perfection. Steam is up and the car gone off. We have only to follow secretly. But I was surprised to see the Duke in the party—is that wise? Won't he put a spoke in our wheel?

RIFFONI [*With ferocious gaiety*]
In *his* wheel, Salaret. Isn't the yacht his?

SALARET
Ah, you are gay at last.

RIFFONI [*With savage blandness*]
Thanks to my wise Master. . . . So in five minutes
we shall be off to El Dorado!

SALARET
We carry El Dorado with us, ha! ha! ha!

RIFFONI
Ah, the gold, you mean. I had forgotten that. . . .
[*Smiling*]
Suppose the Duke should claim it?

SALARET
I said he would interfere.

RIFFONI
Interfere with your Department! Not while you're
alive, I promise you.

SALARET [*Grumblingly*]
Your weakness for the Duke will yet cost you dear.

RIFFONI
But not as dear as all that, Salaret. There are
millions, eh? Enough to turn Paraguay into a
Workers' Paradise!

SALARET

Trust me. Cazotti won't be so pleased to be Finance Minister now.

RIFFONI

Ah, that sticks in your gizzard, does it? But if Paraguay prove recalcitrant?

SALARET

The world is wide.

RIFFONI

Yes, all those far-stretching seas and continents—and yet it could all be dropped down a rift in the sun and lost like a little green bead. And the sun itself could be sucked up into Sirius like my little brother into the lake, with scarcely a ripple. What do you suppose this measureless mass of mud we call the universe is in such a whirl for, Salaret?

SALARET

For love and joy, Vittorio. Remember Goethe. Dry and dead is all theory, green and beautiful is living. Wait! Wait! You will soon cease to ask questions of the universe.

RIFFONI

You mean, if the Queen—but suppose she proves marble-cold? Do you think Signora da Grasso——?

SALARET

Oh, but I am sure the Queen won't resist you. And you don't like Signora da Grasso, you said.

RIFFONI

I said she reeked with sex. And so should I by that time—shouldn't I? The tiger, they say, once it has tasted blood rarely returns to a milk diet.

SALARET [*Perturbed*]

But Signora da Grasso is not the only lady still unexecuted.

RIFFONI

Ah! That is an idea! Are there others as handsome?

SALARET

Three at least—handsomer even.

RIFFONI

It would be a pity to leave them to Cazotti.

SALARET

Damn him!

RIFFONI

Is it too late to collect them? . . . What glorious revels we could hold in the moonlight!

SALARET

Glorious! . . . Ah, you mean to kill me! Armida has betrayed me.

RIFFONI [*The pistol in his hand*]

You have betrayed the Republic—and with it humanity's last hope. We were to show ourselves

supermen, you and I. A simple soldier, unscrupulous in his profession, puts us to shame as men even. Ah, I was ready to credit to nerves as tired as mine your despair of our work, to attribute your seduction of me to solicitude for my happiness. But I did not know you were a Tartuffe and a thief, that the Workers' Republic was to you merely a treasury and a brothel. Judas!

SALARET [*Stung by the exaggeration of this tirade to face his accuser, and finding himself desperately calm, now the long suspended sword has fallen*]

Ah, Vittorio, you make me wonder what is to be said for Judas? Men are not so simple. I sometimes think that monarchs who say "we" are the only true psychologists. How could I not care for the Republic—my whole life-work? How could I not care for you, my life-long supporter? Do you think I had no moments of heart-sickness when you turned the State my books projected into a shambles? I defended you before the Duke, but he was right. You would not wait to educate and evolve: your Socialism is only of the forcing house.

RIFFONI

But not of the bawdy-house.

SALARET

I know I fell. But if I tried to drag you down, too, my motive—believe me—was not wholly selfish, nor wholly without risk. Even more than Molp I was trembling for your safety.

RIFFONI

I was not playing for safety, but for achievement.

SALARET

You are sure it was not for power? You speak as if I alone had sucked voluptuous profit from the Republic. Your lust of blood wrought infinitely more misery than my lust of the flesh.

RIFFONI

My lust of blood?

SALARET

Even now you are yielding to its secret lure.

[RIFFONI *lowers his pistol*]

Shall I ever forget how you gloated over the asphyxiation of Prince Igmor? You must be in at the death, you said. Was it because Igmor dared to love your darling? And then your lust for applause. Never to move without salvos from reeking guns and stinking lungs.

RIFFONI [*Overwhelmed*]

If you knew how I have longed to be a shepherd in his wicker-work hut, open to wind and weather!

SALARET [*Sarcastically*]

And in practice you make a throne-room your bureau and a throne your office-chair—do not tell me you sleep on a camp-bed, it is the same megalomania, aping a Napoleon on his campaigns. And this passion of yours that I sincerely sought to gratify,

even if it gratified my own, why was it for Margherita and no lesser woman? Cazotti was right—the thought of fondling a Queen tickled you, as Napoleon was titillated by an Emperor's daughter.

RIFFONI

Have done! Travesty me if you will, but not my thought of Margherita. Is it not enough she has faded into the inaccessible—like all my visions of the Republic? . . . Ah, to what end do these mirages beguile our souls? Why are we not as the animals, which have ignorances but never illusions?

SALARET

And why hug the illusions, since not being animals we can grow in wisdom? Kill me if you will, Vittorio—I have had such hours as I did not even know life held, when I was merely a scribbling phantast, a biped with a quill. He who shoots at a star misses. Let us proportion our aim to our reach. Can you learn nothing from life?

RIFFONI

I am too tired—I can learn only from death.

[HE mounts the stone step before the plain casement and throws it open. The light has been fading and the snow mountains appear, rosy with sunset. A few stars are already twinkling]

Why is the mob grown silent?

SALARET

The guillotine was all but up when I came by—the thought of death must be awing them.

RIFFONI

What children! It is life that is awesome, not death. . . . Ah, there she goes, the yacht, like youth throbbing with purpose! And there rolls the purposeless universe, drifting like an old hulk in the ocean of space. . . . On this very balcony, Salaret, my father died, in his dream of love. And my forcing house is as visionary. Ah, they are both futile, force and love, while our breed remains so poor.

[*Steps out.*]

SALARET

Where are you going?

RIFFONI

To my father!

[*Disappears on the balcony. A shot rings out.*]

FENELLA'S VOICE [*Yelling from below*]

Riffoni is dead! *Viva* Cazotti!

CROWD [*In Piazza, echoing her*]

Cazotti! Cazotti! *Viva* Cazotti!

[*OMAR rushes in.*]

SALARET [*Gazing out*]

You are spared a crime. He is dead.

OMAR

You have killed him?

SALARET

Yes, God help me.

[HE falls on the stone step. The cheers for CAZOTTI swell into a great rolling thunder. OMAR rushes out through the pillars. SALARET grasps frenziedly at the Red Flag and tears it down]

The Republic is dead! Long live King Cazotti!

CURTAIN.

WE MODERNS



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-Waldie</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 Lorrie</i>
BEAMISH	<i>Galwey Herbert</i>	<i>Stockwell Hawkins</i>	<i>H. Halladay-Lindsay</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 Robson</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

[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——!

I

B

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 Bolshevist 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 [*Paternally*]

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?

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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?

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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?

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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

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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!

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?

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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!

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?

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
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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.

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.

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?
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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 Mespot!

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.

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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

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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.

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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?

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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 newsletter?

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.

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 draggled 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.

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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?

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! Hulloo, 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-
solutions 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——

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 spoiled 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 *verboten* 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 *verboten*.”

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——

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?
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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.

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?
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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.

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

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.

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 bouncer, 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.

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.

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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.

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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!!*

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

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?

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.

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. SUNDALE drifts in like a sleep-walker.*]

SUNDALE

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 SUNDALE drifts in again.*]

SUNDALE

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.

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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

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

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-

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.



