

**BENNETT
ARNOLD**

THE
HONEYMOON

Arnold Bennett
The Honeymoon

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The Honeymoon A comedy in three acts:

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The Honeymoon A comedy in three acts

NOTES ON CHARACTERS IN ACT I

Flora Lloyd. Beautiful. Elegant. Charming. All in the highest degree possible. The whole play turns on these qualities in her.

Cedric Haslam. Renowned aviator. The taciturn inventive Englishman. Very self-controlled, but capable of passionate moments. Obstinate, with enormous force of character. His movements, gestures, and speech have a certain air of slow indolence, but are at the same time marked by that masculine harshness and brusqueness which would specially appeal to a woman like Flora. No one could guess from his demeanour that he is famous.

Charles Haslam. Boyish. Impulsive. Very self-centred. But very agreeable.

Mrs. Reach Haslam. Majestic. Richly dressed. The foremost woman-novelist in England and America. Her name a household word. No sense of humour. But she is very, very far from being a

fool, and the part is not a low-comedy part. This play shows the least sympathetic side of her.

Mr. Reach Haslam. The husband of a celebrity. Strong sense of sardonic humour, which has very little outlet. Always exceedingly polite and even deferential to his wife, yet preserving his own dignity. A prim, dry, precise man.

Gaston. There are scores of Gastons in the hotels and restaurants of the West End. He does not differ from the type.

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ACT I

A sitting-room in the only hotel at a small seaside resort in Essex. Old-fashioned Victorian furniture, producing a picturesque general effect. Some modern touch, such as a framed coloured advertisement of pneumatic tyres.

Door, R., leading to hall, principal entrance, and kitchen. Door, L., leading through a porch to the garden. A large window, divided into three portions by stonework, at the back: the panes are small; one of these portions is open, the others are closed.

Through the window can be seen a view of the garden, and the sea in the distance. The fireplace is not seen.

Cedric and Flora are seated at either side of a tea-table.

Time: Afternoon in June. Sunshine.

Flora. Another cup? (Cedric, looking at her, makes no reply.) Cedric! Another cup? (with a touch of very good-humoured impatience).

(Cedric rises, goes round the table to her, takes hold of her, and kisses her.)

Cedric. (Standing over her, she looking up at him.) I've been wanting to do that for about thirty solid minutes.

Flora. Then why didn't you, my poor boy? (Cedric gives a

gesture to show that he doesn't know why) ... Instead of keeping us both waiting like that! (*Reflective.*) And yet it's barely three hours since you kissed me in the vestry!

Cedric. Vestry be dashed! And here's another thing I've been wanting to do (*he carefully kisses her ear*).

Flora. My ear!

Cedric. Precisely, your ear! Strange!.. And I can tell you something even stranger. Shall I? (*She nods.*) When I'm standing over you I feel as if I should like to kill you! Yes, really, Fluff! It takes me all of a sudden! You know – when you lean out of a high balcony and you feel you must jump – well, it's that sort of a feeling.

Flora. What particular *kind* of homicide?

Cedric. Oh! (*at a loss*) a kind of a fierce crushing. (*She smiles.*) You think it's justifiable?

Flora. I don't mind so long as I know my risks.

Cedric. (*After staring at her, with a convinced air.*) We shall get on together all right!

Flora. Yes, I think we're doing rather well so far, considering (*turning the ring on his finger*).

Cedric. Considering what?

Flora. Considering how nervous we both are, naturally (*drops his hand*).

Cedric. (*Moving away. Half to himself.*) Yes, and we shall keep getting more nervous!

Flora. (*Resuming exactly the same matter-of-fact tone as when*

she first put the question.) Another cup?

Cedric. (*Similar tone.*) How many have I had?

Flora. I don't know, dear.

Cedric. I've had enough, then.

Flora. Well, about our programme. Suppose we settle it a bit.

Cedric. Yes, let's. (*Sits down.*)

Flora. I do think it was a lovely idea to start off without any programme at all! Heaven itself couldn't say where we shan't be this time next week!

Cedric. Well, subject to your approval, I don't mind informing heaven that anyhow we shan't be here.

Flora. Tired of this place – already?

Cedric. On the contrary! But it's too small to hold a couple that have just walked out of a vestry. One hotel, one flagstaff, one boat, one sea. No pier, no tea-shop, no concert, and very probably no moon.

Flora. Extraordinary how even three hours of married life will change a man! You always used to be rather keen on quietness, solitude, old flannel suits, and so on.

Cedric. Now look here, Fluff! This honeymoon programme is important. Er – (*hesitates*).

Flora. (*Nods.*) Let's talk as man to man.

Cedric. The fact is I've always had a very distinct theory about honeymoons. Far from the madding crowd is a mistake on a honeymoon... Solitude! Wherever you are, if you're on a honeymoon, you'll get quite as much solitude as is good for you

every twenty-four hours. Constant change and distraction – that's what wants arranging for. Solitude will arrange itself.

Flora. I didn't expect this from you, dear.

Cedric. (*Hastily, apologetic.*) Simply a theory! I've had no practical experience, and I'm perfectly ready to sit at your feet in the matter. Honestly, I don't care a straw. I may be wrong, and if you —

Flora. (*Solemnly.*) You aren't wrong! You're quite fearfully right!

Cedric. (*After staring at her with a convinced air.*) We shall get on together – that's a bedrock certainty! Now this place ought to be excellent for a beginning, but I should imagine that about a couple of days of it would do us.

Flora. I never suspected – no, really, I never *did* suspect – that any man could have as much common-sense, *beforehand*, as you have, Cedric. Not to speak of courage!

Cedric. Cheek, you mean. But then, of course, I *am* supposed to have a bit of nerve. Well, that's settled. We are to travel, then.

Flora. The point is, where?

Cedric. Where would you like?

Flora. (*Radiantly.*) Anywhere.

Cedric. What about Paris?

Flora. Oh, not Paris.

Cedric. Why not?

Flora. We should be simply mobbed. My dearest boy, have you ever heard speak of the simplicity of genius?

Cedric. I seem to have read about it somewhere, perhaps in the ladies' papers.

Flora. Well, you won't understand it, because you've got it – acutely.

Cedric. And here all these years I've been taking myself for rather a crafty person!

Flora. Do you know how many times I've counted your portrait in the weeklies this year? One hundred and forty-six! And that's not reckoning the pictures where your aeroplane's so high up that you only look like a fly in a mouse-trap.

Cedric. In my simple mind I'd always thought that the surest way never to be recognised in the street was to have your portrait in the papers.

Flora. And then there's your likeness to your mother! A hundred and fifty-one thousand copies of your dear mother's last novel sold up to yesterday – so I saw in the "Telegraph." And then her new novel out to-day!

Cedric. I'm not suggesting that we should camp out in Piccadilly for our honeymoon, my dove and my love; I said Paris.

Flora. All London will be in Paris.

Cedric. What – next week?

Flora. Every week. Excuse me asking a pointed question, dearest, but have you ever been to Paris – I mean, since the flood?

Cedric. Yes. My knowledge of the unwieldy goods department of the big railway stations is probably matchless.

Flora. Well, if you'd stepped outside the stations you'd know

that Paris is now exclusively inhabited by nice respectable people from London and nice respectable people from Arizona; and when they aren't cricking their necks to look at aeroplanes, they're improving their minds with your dear mother's latest novel.

Cedric. (*Mock serious.*) Will you believe me – I'd no notion of this at all!

Flora. I tell you what – I wouldn't mind going to Paris under an assumed name.

Cedric. Oh, no!

Flora. Why not? It would be amusing.

Cedric. I don't see myself travelling under a false name. I suppose I am too English.

Flora. Well, I don't see myself in a Paris hotel as the bride of the most celebrated English aviator, and the daughter-in-law of the most celebrated English lady-novelist. I do not! (*With a characteristic gesture.*) Mobbed isn't the word for what we should be.

Cedric. (*Gazing at her.*) You must have noticed that I'm not what you'd call gushing. I've known myself go for a month without using a single superlative; but really, my most dear girl, my Fluffiest, when you strike an attitude like that, you're more marvellously and ineffably adorable than ever. Your beauty, your charm, your enormous slap-upness – (*changing his tone*) – Well, ecstasy is not my line... I only said Paris because the mater asked me if I thought we should be going there, and I told her it was

possible.

Flora. Will *she* be there?

Cedric. No, no! Only, if we *should* happen to go there, she wanted me to count the panes of glass in a lamp-post on the Alexander III. bridge. One of her realistic details, you know. I expect she's got her hero staring absently up at that lamp-post – after an indiscreet evening... She may be depending on me.

Flora. But surely that isn't a reason why we should go to Paris! Your dear mother might have wanted to know the number of ribs in the umbrella of the King of Siam – should we have had to book to Bangkok?

Cedric. I was only —

Flora. Husband, I must tell you something about your mother. I've kept it a secret from you. Do you know what made her give up her terrific scheme of our being married in the cathedral by the Bishop, surrounded by the press of Europe?

Cedric. I thought our angel-tongues persuaded her out of it.

Flora. Not at all. A threat did it. I dropped in on her one day for a little private chat while you were at Blackpool. She was just going to arrange with the Bishop. I told her confidentially – but of course *nicely*– that if she wouldn't agree to us being married by a curate at Chelmsford, with nobody but her and your father and Charlie present, and nothing whatever in the papers for at least a fortnight, then I should insist on being married at a registry office.

Cedric. The deuce you did! What did she say?

Flora. She merely said: "Of course your wish is our law, Mrs. Lloyd." But the next day she was calling me "Flora" again.

Cedric. The mater folded up like that?

Flora. There! (*Laughing.*) Listen to your own tone, dearest. Naturally she folded up. She only needs proper treatment.

Cedric. Well, I had a bit of a stir with her when I decided to give up my amateur status; but I must say as a rule I get on very well with the mater.

Flora. So do I. It's because I get on so well with her that we had a curate to-day instead of the Bishop. Rather a jolly curate, didn't you think?

Cedric. Struck me as a queer lot.

Flora. Of course they're all queer. I liked him because when he asked me to sign my name he didn't say (*imitating the snigger of a curate*) "for the last time." They always do, you know. It's almost part of the service, for them. And if he had said it, I do believe I should have screamed.

Cedric. I say, Fluff, why after hiding this secret for several weeks – it's practically a double life that you've been leading – why do you reveal it just at this particular moment?

Flora. Oh – sheer caprice, my dearest! It just popped into my head.

Cedric. (*Somewhat troubled and awkward.*) So your notion is that the mater's moral empire over her family and the British public might be checked without grave loss of life, eh?

Flora. Cedric! (*Cedric looks at her, arrested and questioning.*)

What's the rarest thing in the world? Quick?

Cedric. Common-sense, of course.

Flora. Oh! Good! I was afraid you might say a well-cooked potato.

Cedric. You ought to know me better than that.

Flora. But, Cedric, it's only now that we're beginning to make each other's acquaintance.

Cedric. That's true! But how did *you* know that common-sense is the rarest thing in the world?

Flora. Because I've got so very little of it myself. But even a very little will go a long way. Now, have I told you that our marriage isn't going to be like ordinary marriages – I mean, really?

Cedric. Well, you haven't exactly told me, but you've allowed me to suspect the fact.

Flora. Most marriages, and especially most honeymoons, are third-rate simply because the people concerned in them don't bring their bit of common-sense to bear on the problems that are (*mock platform manner*) – er – continually arising. (*Laughing.*) I intend to keep my bit of common-sense healthy by constant exercise. Common-sense, steadily applied, will solve any problem.

Cedric. (*Emphatically.*) Any! (*After a pause.*) Always provided —

Flora. (*Surprised.*) Always provided?

Cedric. My dear, in this outpouring of wisdom I, too, must

have my share. Common-sense will solve any problem – any! – always provided it is employed simultaneously with politeness. During a long and varied career as a bachelor, dear spouse (*mock platform manner*), I have noticed that marriage is usually the death of politeness between a man and a woman. I have noticed that the stronger the passion the weaker the manners. Now, my theory is that politeness, instead of decreasing with intimacy – should increase! And when I say "politeness" I mean common, superficial politeness. I don't mean the deep-down sort of thing that you can only detect with a divining-rod... Pardon, you were saying?

Flora. Cedric! (*Impulsively rushes to him and kisses him.*) How *right* you are! It's exactly what I've been thinking for years. Now, as to common-sense and the programme. It would be against common-sense for us to begin by annoying your mother. If you really do think your mother would be in the least upset by our not going to Paris, naturally I shall be delighted to go. We could stop just long enough to inspect the lamp-post – and then off again.

Cedric. Oh, no! Oh, no! Of course she won't be upset!

Flora. That's settled, then. Do you know I've had the tiniest idea of going to Ostend, and then taking the Orient express to Buda-Pesth? I'm dying to see Hungary, simply dying.

Cedric. My dearest, your life shall be saved regardless of cost.

Flora. I do want an expensive honeymoon. Not because I'm extravagant, but because a honeymoon is a solemn, important thing.

Cedric. A symbol.

Flora. A symbol. And it ought to be done – well, adequately.

Cedric. Nineteen thousand pounds odd of mine is now on deposit at my bank – all honestly taken by me out of the pockets of ratepayers of various important towns in less than a year. And when that's gone I can always get more at about the same rate, as you know.

Flora. Cedric! There is to be no flying during our honeymoon?

Cedric. Certainly not!

Flora. And it is to last a full month, naturally.

Cedric. A full calendar month – with no address for letters.

Flora. (*Sigh of ecstatic anticipation.*) Two or three days, you said, here?

Cedric. Yes, don't you think it's enough?

Flora. Oh! quite. We shall be gone before anybody's had time to guess – (*breaking off*). Dearest, don't you think we came into the hotel rather well?

Cedric. Fine. No one could suspect that we hadn't been *born* married. I was proud of both of us.

(*Enter Gaston, R.*)

Gaston. Shall I clear the table? (*Beginning to do so before receiving permission.*)

Flora. Yes. (*Flora and Cedric rise.*)

Gaston. (*With a cheerful air, quite unconscious of his impudent*

manner.) I suppose you stay here long time?

Flora. (*Determined to snub the waiter.*) Really!

Cedric. Why?

Gaston. Oh! honeymoon. Dull place. Fresh married English people demand generally dull place.

(*Flora collapses and exit hurriedly into the garden, L. Cedric, with more leisurely dignity, lights a cigarette and is about to follow her when he stops and turns.*)

Cedric. By the way, I don't think we *shall* stay long.

Gaston. (*After looking at Flora in the garden, impartially and cheerfully.*) It is strange how English people have shame of being married. One would say it was a crime in England. A young man and young lady in English hotel – they like better that one should think they not married. It is different in Switzerland. In Switzerland we are proud. We tell all the world. Why not?

Cedric. So you come from Switzerland?

Gaston. Oh, yes. I am not English (*eagerly.*) Geneva. My father is a *fabricant*, a —

Cedric. Manufacturer.

Gaston. Yes, manufacturer of door-mats. My father makes door-mats for all the hotels in Switzerland. Very big! Very important! He says – I must go into the hotel business. He will buy me a hotel. I learn everything. We do that in Switzerland. We are *scientifique*. I have been in the kitchens. Now I am waiter. No shame. Nobody could guess I am a gentleman.

Cedric. You mustn't be too hard on yourself, my friend. And

so you've come to England?

Gaston. My father says, Go to England. Study the English *caractère* in England. Very valuable. When I come to London I could not speak English – no!

Cedric. When was that? Last week?

Gaston. No. It is a year, nearly. But I had at once a situation, the first day, at the Grand Babylon Hotel.

Cedric. Rather awkward, wasn't it, not knowing English?

Gaston. Yes. That fatigues one – to hear a strange language all the day.

Cedric. I meant for the customers.

Gaston. (*Nonchalant gesture.*) They are now well habituated. Many of them learn French or German, it saves time. English people are so practical. They are not *logique*, but they are practical. Now to-day I speak German, Italian, as perfectly as English.

Cedric. Remarkable! But surely a man of your enormous ability is wasted in a sleepy place like this... Perhaps you find it amusing, though.

Gaston. (*Shakes his head. Passionately.*) Dull! It is for my health that I am here. Sleepy! Ah, my God! (*Disdainfully.*) But all England sleeps... But next month I go to Germany. I shall have done England.

Cedric. You like Germany.

Gaston. Ah! What a country! What organisation! What science! Never sleeps! Always conquers! (*Patronisingly.*) Do you

think in *your* business the Germans will not conquer, at the end?

Cedric. My business?

Gaston. Yes. Aeroplanes.

Cedric. So you know that?

Gaston. I know everything... Look at anileen!

Cedric. Anileen?

Gaston. Yes. Anileen – colours.

Cedric. Ah! You mean aniline dyes.

Gaston. Yes, I said so.

Cedric. What about them?

Gaston. What about them? England invented them. Germany has taken them from you – all. That is science. All German now. So with aeroplanes. England and France – proud, very proud. But at the end, you will see ... at the end.

Cedric. Oh!

Gaston. And soon.

Cedric. I say, if it isn't a rude question, how *did* you guess that we were – er – on our honeymoon? It might be useful for me to know.

Gaston. Ah, now – again! I read, I study. I alone in this sleepy place. By example, no afternoon newspapers – none – came into this place till I ordered one at the railway. I insisted. "The Piccadilly Gazette" – you know – Thackeray – "written by gentlemen for gentlemen." I read it every day. Ah! And is it not afraid of Germany!

Cedric. Do you mean there's something about my marriage in

the "Piccadilly Gazette"?

Gaston. Yes. Do you want to read it?

Cedric. Well, I should rather like to see it, if I'm not interfering with your studies.

Gaston. (*Taking paper out of his pocket.*) There! (*Stands waiting in a suggestive attitude.*)

Cedric. (*Accepting paper.*) Thanks! (*Looks at him and gives him a tip.*)

Gaston. (*Pocketing the coin.*) Thanks!.. And you will see about Klopstock too. (*Picking up tray.*)

Cedric. What about Klopstock?

Gaston. He comes to England soon as he has flyed at Breslau. Ah! You will see! (*Exit R. with tray.*)

(*Cedric sits down with paper, and begins to read.*)

Cedric. (*Quietly.*) Oh!

(*He drops the end of his cigarette into a flower-pot; then takes a cigar from his case, cuts it, puts it in his mouth, and produces a matchbox, but does not light it.*)

Cedric. Oh, indeed!

(*He goes to the window, and taps on one of the closed panes. After a moment Flora appears at the open part of the window. Cedric, with a motion of the hand, indicates that he wishes her to enter.*)

Flora. (*Off, in a conspiratorial whisper.*) Has the reader of hearts quite gone? (*Cedric nods.*) Come out. (*Cedric beckons her inwards with his finger.*)

(Enter Flora, L.)

Flora. Oh, Cedric! What a blow! We're the honeymoon couple now of Pixton-on-Sea. How did he guess?

Cedric. (*Scarcely listening to her.*) Fluff, read this (*hands her paper with his finger on a particular paragraph*). Top of second column.

Flora. (*Reads.*) "We are informed that Mr. Cedric Haslam, the celebrated aviator (*Cedric shows surprise*) was married privately this morning at Chelmsford to Mrs. Flora Lloyd, widow of the late Mr. Artemus Lloyd, stockbroker, who at one time was a well-known figure in the Kaffir Circus. Mr. and Mrs. Reach Haslam, the bridegroom's parents, and his brother, Mr. Charles Haslam, were present. The happy pair are spending the first part of the honeymoon at Pixton-on-Sea. By a curious coincidence, Mrs. Reach Haslam's new novel, 'The Wiving of the Chancellor,' appears on the very day of the marriage of her eldest son." (*Shaking her head.*) Only one thing is possible. Flight. Immediate flight! And plenty of it! Cedric, I suppose this is your dear mother's doing?

Cedric. I should doubt it. More probably some accidental leakage. She hates the very thought of self-advertisement.

Flora. Oh! I *know*. But I've always noticed she's somewhat unlucky in the matter of leakages. Your father ought to study plumbing.

Cedric. (*Slightly impatient.*) That's nothing. That's not what I wanted you to read. I hadn't even noticed that. Look! (*Pointing to a paragraph.*)

Flora. "Dissensions in the Cabinet. Extraordinary rumours."

Cedric. No, no. (*Takes the paper and reads.*) "The German Invasion. To-morrow, upon the conclusion of the Breslau meeting, Herr Klopstock will pack up his victorious new mono-plane and start for England. He announces his intention of trying within three weeks for the ten thousand pounds prize recently offered by the Aero Club to the first aviator who flies over Snowdon. Herr Klopstock, who has already, we understand, taken the whole of a hotel at Beddgelert for the accommodation of his staff, is convinced that his machine will rise easily to at least four thousand feet. The Kaiser has just christened the aeroplane the Black Eagle, by telegraph, and has assured the renowned aviator and ex-professor of the heartiest good wishes of himself and his house. His youngest grandchild, Prince – um – um – Fatherland – um – The news will certainly create a considerable sensation in England as it has done in Germany." I should say it would.

Flora. Why should it?

Cedric. What! The Kaiser's Black Eagle flying over the highest mountain in England, and getting ten thousand pounds for the job! It's unthinkable! How does it strike you?

Flora. It strikes me that it would have been much simpler and less expensive not to have offered the ten thousand pounds. It's

altogether too tempting. Besides, it seems to me anybody ought to be able to fly over a little thing like Snowdon, seeing how they sail over the Pyrenees and all that sort of thing.

Cedric. My adorable child, don't talk like a member of the public. Henceforth you are in the know. The fogs alone make Snowdon worse than the Pyrenees. And then the Aero Club has been clever enough to ordain that the aviator is to start and land within four miles of the summit. How is a man to get off on such ground, and where is he to land without breaking wood? And then the business of finding his way! He's bound to do a lot of corkscrewing to get up, and nothing less than six thousand feet would be safe.

Flora. (*With a gesture dismissing all that.*) Well, I don't think it's quite nice of Mr. Klopstock. It ought to have occurred to him. But then, it never does seem to occur to Germans... I've often noticed that in hotels. They don't seem to perceive. (*Different tone.*) Will he succeed?

Cedric. He *might*. I don't think he would; not with his present horse-power; but he just might.

Flora. Well, most probably he won't. And then you can try in July as you originally intended, and get the money after all. Then there will have been some *sense* in the prize, anyway.

Cedric. It isn't the money.

Flora. Surely it isn't the mountain?

Cedric. (*Following his own thought.*) We've got to come out on top in this business. I must get to business in the middle of

next week. It'll take a day to modify those wingtips, and another to tune her up. Oh! I shall be ready long before he is. But I'll give him a chance to get nicely installed in his hotel. I should like Herr Klopstock and his crew to admire the beautiful scenery.

Flora. (*Casually.*) You must be at the works next week?

Cedric. It's me or nobody! No use trying to disguise that fact, Fluff!

Flora. Perhaps in the heat of the moment you've forgotten that you happened to get married this morning, Cedric.

Cedric. I wish we hadn't happened to get married this morning. (*She looks at him.*) I mean, I wish we'd happened to get married a week ago. Frantic nuisance! However, there you are! It simply means we shall be fixed up a bit sooner in the flat —

Flora. But the flat won't be anything like ready by next week.

Cedric. Never mind, we'll sleep at the Grand Babylon, or in the backyard. (*A little pause.*) Of course as a nuisance it completely baffles description... To-day of all days... However, Fluff, as I said before with profound truth — there you are! It would never do in this world to give the German lot even a chance. The thing's too spectacular — altogether too spectacular. If it was a question of beating us quietly and for ever in technics or manufacture, the B.P. wouldn't think twice about it; but Snowdon is Snowdon, and a black eagle is a black eagle, and (*comically*) in short, madam, England will turn to your husband in its hour of peril. In other words, Fluff, it's up to me.

Flora. (*Lightly.*) I say, Cedric.

Cedric. Well?

Flora. I thought we were agreed about a full calendar month.

Cedric. (*After a pause; as lightly as possible.*) Do you mean you think I ought to let Snowdon slide? Do you really —

Flora. Yes, of course. Don't you?

Cedric. You aren't serious?

Flora. (*Persuasively.*) My dearest boy, is there any reason why I shouldn't differ from you and yet be serious?

Cedric. No, of course not. But in a case like this — if there was anybody else to take my place, I wouldn't mind. Of course Smith-James could do it if only he would use our machine — but he won't. Nothing would induce him to. So as I keep on saying — there you are!

Flora. But what does it matter? Is it because the other man's machine has been called the Black Eagle in a telegram that you —

Cedric. Yes, partly.

Flora. Oh! So that if this canvas-backed duck flies first over a lump of mud called Snowdon —

Cedric. But don't I tell you Snowdon is the highest mountain in England?

Flora. No, it isn't.

Cedric. Pardon me. Three thousand five hundred and seventy feet. The next highest is —

Flora. Well, you go and tell Lloyd George that Snowdon is the highest mountain in England, and see what you'll get.

Cedric. Wales, then. It's all the same.

Flora. (*With great charm.*) If you're thinking of the ten thousand pounds, I don't mind informing you, as a great secret, that I wouldn't sell a single day of my honeymoon with you for ten times ten thousand pounds. But I told you I wanted an expensive honeymoon, didn't I?

Cedric. (*Shaking his head and with calm certainty.*) The money doesn't influence me that much! (*Snaps his fingers.*) I don't wish to flatter myself, but I think I could light your cigarette with a bank note as gracefully as anybody. No —

Flora. You're pulling away at that cigar of yours, but I suppose you know it isn't lighted.

Cedric. Isn't it? (*As he lights the cigar.*) No! This Snowdon business. Well, it's a symbol (*half to himself*). I wonder how I can make you understand that.

Flora. (*Fascinatingly.*) Oh! Force is unnecessary, I understand that. But who was it said just now that the honeymoon was a symbol? It stands for all our married life. It's the most exciting and interesting time we shall ever have. And you can't put a honeymoon off, you know. It isn't like a box of cigars that you can keep in a cupboard and enjoy one of them every now and then when you've got a few minutes to spare. It must happen now or never. You can't postpone it. You can only kill it. (*Smiles lightly.*)

Cedric. (*Taking hold of her, in a caressing tone.*) She's tragic!

Flora. (*Disengaging herself.*) Oh, no!

Cedric. Now just listen to me, Fluff. I'm really thinking at

least as much of you as of myself. This affair is bound to have an influence on my career.

Flora. And what about its influence on mine?

Cedric. Same thing. I suppose our interests are identical.

Flora. My poor simple boy, do you really believe that?

Cedric. Well, dash it, aren't you my wife?

Flora. So far as I'm concerned, it would be more correct to say that you're my husband. In fact, you've got a career as my husband.

Cedric. (*Anxious to be fair.*) Certainly. And you as my wife. But —

Flora. One second, dearest. You're unique as an aviator, aren't you?

Cedric. (*Conventionally modest.*) Oh — well —

Flora. Now. Man to man. Give your modesty a rest. Really, don't you consider you've proved yourself unique in your line?

Cedric. (*Hesitatingly, chivalrously.*) I suppose I'm just about as unique in my line as you are in yours, my dear.

Flora. Now that's very nice of you.

Cedric. Not at all.

Flora. Yes, it is, because it's exactly what I wanted you to say. You've often said that I'm unique, and I just wanted you to say it again at this identical particular instant. Of course I could have reminded you of it, but that wouldn't have been quite so effective. That's why it's very nice of you.

Cedric. So you are unique — I'll say it as often as you like.

Flora. I warn you, you're giving yourself away.

Cedric. Delighted!

Flora. I wouldn't care to repeat all the lovely adjectives you've used about me. If you weren't such a determined enemy of gush and superlatives – people might suspect that sometimes you exaggerated the tiniest bit when you talked about me, *to* me. But of course *I*

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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