

GALSWORTHY

JOHN

THE MOB

John Galsworthy

The Mob

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John Galsworthy

The Mob: A Play in Four Acts

PERSONS OF THE PLAY

STEPHEN MORE, Member of Parliament
KATHERINE, his wife
OLIVE, their little daughter
THE DEAN OF STOUR, Katherine's uncle
GENERAL SIR JOHN JULIAN, her father
CAPTAIN HUBERT JULIAN, her brother
HELEN, his wife
EDWARD MENDIP, editor of "The Parthenon"
ALAN STEEL, More's secretary
JAMES HOME, architect |
CHARLES SHELDER, Solicitor |A deputation of More's
MARK WACE, bookseller |constituents
WILLIAM BANNING, manufacturer |
NURSE WREFORD
WREFORD (her son), Hubert's orderly
HIS SWEETHEART
THE FOOTMAN HENRY
A DOORKEEPER
SOME BLACK-COATED GENTLEMEN
A STUDENT
A GIRL
A MOB
ACT I. The dining-room of More's town house, evening.
ACT II. The same, morning.
ACT III. SCENE I. An alley at the back of a suburban theatre.
SCENE II. Katherine's bedroom.
ACT IV. The dining-room of More's house, late afternoon.
AFTERMATH. The corner of a square, at dawn.
Between ACTS I and II some days elapse.
Between ACTS II and III three months.
Between ACT III SCENE I and ACT III SCENE II no time.
Between ACTS III and IV a few hours.
Between ACTS IV and AFTERMATH an indefinite period.

ACT I

It is half-past nine of a July evening. In a dining-room lighted by sconces, and apparelled in wall-paper, carpet, and curtains of deep vivid blue, the large French windows between two columns are open on to a wide terrace, beyond which are seen trees in darkness, and distant shapes of lighted houses. On one side is a bay window, over which curtains are partly drawn. Opposite to this window is a door leading into the hall. At an oval rosewood table, set with silver, flowers, fruit, and wine, six people are seated after dinner. Back to the bay window is STEPHEN MORE, the host, a man of forty, with a fine-cut face, a rather charming smile, and the eyes of an idealist; to his right, SIR, JOHN JULIAN, an old soldier, with thin brown features, and grey moustaches; to SIR JOHN's right, his brother, the DEAN OF STOUR, a tall, dark, ascetic-looking Churchman: to his right KATHERINE is leaning forward, her elbows on the table, and her chin on her hands, staring across at her husband; to her right sits EDWARD MENDIP, a pale man of forty-five, very bald, with a fine forehead, and on his clear-cut lips a smile that shows his teeth; between him and MORE is HELEN JULIAN, a pretty dark-haired young woman, absorbed in thoughts of her own. The voices are tuned to the pitch of heated discussion, as the curtain rises.

THE DEAN. I disagree with you, Stephen; absolutely, entirely disagree.

MORE. I can't help it.

MENDIP. Remember a certain war, Stephen! Were your chivalrous notions any good, then? And, what was winked at in an obscure young Member is anathema for an Under Secretary of State. You can't afford —

MORE. To follow my conscience? That's new, Mendip.

MENDIP. Idealism can be out of place, my friend.

THE DEAN. The Government is dealing here with a wild lawless race, on whom I must say I think sentiment is rather wasted.

MORE. God made them, Dean.

MENDIP. I have my doubts.

THE DEAN. They have proved themselves faithless. We have the right to chastise.

MORE. If I hit a little man in the eye, and he hits me back, have I the right to chastise him?

SIR JOHN. We didn't begin this business.

MORE. What! With our missionaries and our trading?

THE DEAN. It is news indeed that the work of civilization may be justifiably met by murder. Have you forgotten Glaive and Morlinson?

SIR JOHN. Yes. And that poor fellow Groome and his wife?

MORE. They went into a wild country, against the feeling of the tribes, on their own business. What has the nation to do with the mishaps of gamblers?

SIR JOHN. We can't stand by and see our own flesh and blood ill-treated!

THE DEAN. Does our rule bring blessing – or does it not, Stephen?

MORE. Sometimes; but with all my soul I deny the fantastic superstition that our rule can benefit a people like this, a nation of one race, as different from ourselves as dark from light – in colour, religion, every mortal thing. We can only pervert their natural instincts.

THE DEAN. That to me is an unintelligible point of view.

MENDIP. Go into that philosophy of yours a little deeper, Stephen – it spells stagnation. There are no fixed stars on this earth. Nations can't let each other alone.

MORE. Big ones could let little ones alone.

MENDIP. If they could there'd be no big ones. My dear fellow, we know little nations are your hobby, but surely office should have toned you down.

SIR JOHN. I've served my country fifty years, and I say she is not in the wrong.

MORE. I hope to serve her fifty, Sir John, and I say she is.

MENDIP. There are moments when such things can't be said, More.

MORE. They'll be said by me to-night, Mendip.

MENDIP. In the House?

[MORE nods.]

KATHERINE. Stephen!

MENDIP. Mrs. More, you mustn't let him. It's madness.

MORE. [Rising] You can tell people that to-morrow, Mendip. Give it a leader in 'The Parthenon'.

MENDIP. Political lunacy! No man in your position has a right to fly out like this at the eleventh hour.

MORE. I've made no secret of my feelings all along. I'm against this war, and against the annexation we all know it will lead to.

MENDIP. My dear fellow! Don't be so Quixotic! We shall have war within the next twenty-four hours, and nothing you can do will stop it.

HELEN. Oh! No!

MENDIP. I'm afraid so, Mrs. Hubert.

SIR JOHN. Not a doubt of it, Helen.

MENDIP. [TO MORE] And you mean to charge the windmill?

[MORE nods.]

MENDIP. 'C'est magnifique'!

MORE. I'm not out for advertisement.

MENDIP. You will get it!

MORE. Must speak the truth sometimes, even at that risk.

SIR JOHN. It is not the truth.

MENDIP. The greater the truth the greater the libel, and the greater the resentment of the person libelled.

THE DEAN. [Trying to bring matters to a blander level] My dear Stephen, even if you were right – which I deny – about the initial merits, there surely comes a point where the individual conscience must resign it self to the country's feeling. This has become a question of national honour.

SIR JOHN. Well said, James!

MORE. Nations are bad judges of their honour, Dean.

THE DEAN. I shall not follow you there.

MORE. No. It's an awkward word.

KATHERINE. [Stopping THE DEAN] Uncle James! Please!

[MORE looks at her intently.]

SIR JOHN. So you're going to put yourself at the head of the cranks, ruin your career, and make me ashamed that you're my son-in-law?

MORE. Is a man only to hold beliefs when they're popular? You've stood up to be shot at often enough, Sir John.

SIR JOHN. Never by my country! Your speech will be in all the foreign press-trust 'em for seizing on anything against us. A show-up before other countries – !

MORE. You admit the show-up?

SIR JOHN. I do not, sir.

THE DEAN. The position has become impossible. The state of things out there must be put an end to once for all! Come, Katherine, back us up!

MORE. My country, right or wrong! Guilty – still my country!

MENDIP. That begs the question.

[KATHERINE rises. THE DEAN, too, stands up.]

THE DEAN. [In a low voice] 'Quem Deus volt perdere' – !

SIR JOHN. Unpatriotic!

MORE. I'll have no truck with tyranny.

KATHERINE. Father doesn't admit tyranny. Nor do any of us, Stephen.

HUBERT JULIAN, a tall Soldier-like man, has come in.

HELEN. Hubert!

[She gets up and goes to him, and they talk together near the door.]

SIR JOHN. What in God's name is your idea? We've forborne long enough, in all conscience.

MORE. Sir John, we great Powers have got to change our ways in dealing with weaker nations. The very dogs can give us lessons – watch a big dog with a little one.

MENDIP. No, no, these things are not so simple as all that.

MORE. There's no reason in the world, Mendip, why the rules of chivalry should not apply to nations at least as well as to – dogs.

MENDIP. My dear friend, are you to become that hapless kind of outcast, a champion of lost causes?

MORE. This cause is not lost.

MENDIP. Right or wrong, as lost as ever was cause in all this world. There was never a time when the word "patriotism" stirred mob sentiment as it does now. 'Ware "Mob," Stephen – 'ware "Mob"!

MORE. Because general sentiment's against me, I – a public man – am to deny my faith? The point is not whether I'm right or wrong, Mendip, but whether I'm to sneak out of my conviction because it's unpopular.

THE DEAN. I'm afraid I must go. [To KATHERINE] Good-night, my dear! Ah! Hubert! [He greets HUBERT] Mr. Mendip, I go your way. Can I drop you?

MENDIP. Thank you. Good-night, Mrs. More. Stop him! It's perdition.

[He and THE DEAN go out. KATHERINE puts her arm in HELEN'S, and takes her out of the room. HUBERT remains standing by the door]

SIR JOHN. I knew your views were extreme in many ways, Stephen, but I never thought the husband of my daughter would be a Peace-at-any-price man!

MORE. I am not! But I prefer to fight some one my own size.

SIR JOHN. Well! I can only hope to God you'll come to your senses before you commit the folly of this speech. I must get back to the War Office. Good-night, Hubert.

HUBERT. Good-night, Father.

[SIR JOHN goes out. HUBERT stands motionless, dejected.]

HUBERT. We've got our orders.

MORE. What? When d'you sail?

HUBERT. At once.

MORE. Poor Helen!

HUBERT. Not married a year; pretty bad luck! [MORE touches his arm in sympathy] Well! We've got to put feelings in our pockets. Look here, Stephen – don't make that speech! Think of

Katherine – with the Dad at the War Office, and me going out, and Ralph and old George out there already! You can't trust your tongue when you're hot about a thing.

MORE. I must speak, Hubert.

HUBERT. No, no! Bottle yourself up for to-night. The next few hours 'll see it begin. [MORE turns from him] If you don't care whether you mess up your own career – don't tear Katherine in two!

MORE. You're not shirking your duty because of your wife.

HUBERT. Well! You're riding for a fall, and a godless mucker it'll be. This'll be no picnic. We shall get some nasty knocks out there. Wait and see the feeling here when we've had a force or two cut up in those mountains. It's awful country. Those fellows have got modern arms, and are jolly good fighters. Do drop it, Stephen!

MORE. Must risk something, sometimes, Hubert – even in my profession!

[As he speaks, KATHERINE comes in.]

HUBERT. But it's hopeless, my dear chap – absolutely.

[MORE turns to the window, HUBERT to his sister – then with a gesture towards MORE, as though to leave the matter to her, he goes out.]

KATHERINE. Stephen! Are you really going to speak? [He nods] I ask you not.

MORE. You know my feeling.

KATHERINE. But it's our own country. We can't stand apart from it. You won't stop anything – only make people hate you. I can't bear that.

MORE. I tell you, Kit, some one must raise a voice. Two or three reverses – certain to come – and the whole country will go wild. And one more little nation will cease to live.

KATHERINE. If you believe in your country, you must believe that the more land and power she has, the better for the world.

MORE. Is that your faith?

KATHERINE. Yes.

MORE. I respect it; I even understand it; but – I can't hold it.

KATHERINE. But, Stephen, your speech will be a rallying cry to all the cranks, and every one who has a spite against the country. They'll make you their figurehead. [MORE smiles] They will. Your chance of the Cabinet will go – you may even have to resign your seat.

MORE. Dogs will bark. These things soon blow over.

KATHERINE. No, no! If you once begin a thing, you always go on; and what earthly good?

MORE. History won't say: "And this they did without a single protest from their public men!"

KATHERINE. There are plenty who —

MORE. Poets?

KATHERINE. Do you remember that day on our honeymoon, going up Ben Lawers? You were lying on your face in the heather; you said it was like kissing a loved woman. There was a lark singing – you said that was the voice of one's worship. The hills were very blue; that's why we had blue here, because it was the best dress of our country. You do love her.

MORE. Love her!

KATHERINE. You'd have done this for me – then.

MORE. Would you have asked me – then, Kit?

KATHERINE. Yes. The country's our country! Oh! Stephen, think what it'll be like for me – with Hubert and the other boys out there. And poor Helen, and Father! I beg you not to make this speech.

MORE. Kit! This isn't fair. Do you want me to feel myself a cur?

KATHERINE. [Breathless] I – I – almost feel you'll be a cur to do it [She looks at him, frightened by her own words. Then, as the footman HENRY has come in to clear the table – very low] I ask you not!

[He does not answer, and she goes out.]

MORE [To the servant] Later, please, Henry, later!

The servant retires. MORE still stands looking down at the dining-table; then putting his hand to his throat, as if to free it from the grip of his collar, he pours out a glass of water, and drinks it of. In the street, outside the bay window, two street musicians, a harp and a violin, have taken up their stand, and after some twangs and scrapes, break into music. MORE goes towards the sound, and draws aside one curtain. After a moment, he returns to the table, and takes up the notes of the speech. He is in an agony of indecision.

MORE. A cur!

He seems about to tear his notes across. Then, changing his mind, turns them over and over, muttering. His voice gradually grows louder, till he is declaiming to the empty room the peroration of his speech.

MORE... We have arrogated to our land the title Champion of Freedom, Foe of Oppression. Is that indeed a bygone glory? Is it not worth some sacrifice of our pettier dignity, to avoid laying another stone upon its grave; to avoid placing before the searchlight eyes of History the spectacle of yet one more piece of national cynicism? We are about to force our will and our dominion on a race that has always been free, that loves its country, and its independence, as much as ever we love ours. I cannot sit silent to-night and see this begin. As we are tender of our own land, so we should be of the lands of others. I love my country. It is because I love my country that I raise my voice. Warlike in spirit these people may be – but they have no chance against ourselves. And war on such, however agreeable to the blind moment, is odious to the future. The great heart of mankind ever beats in sense and sympathy with the weaker. It is against this great heart of mankind that we are going. In the name of Justice and Civilization we pursue this policy; but by Justice we shall hereafter be judged, and by Civilization – condemned.

While he is speaking, a little figure has flown along the terrace outside, in the direction of the music, but has stopped at the sound of his voice, and stands in the open window, listening – a dark-haired, dark-eyed child, in a blue dressing-gown caught up in her hand. The street musicians, having reached the end of a tune, are silent. In the intensity of MORE'S feeling, a wine-glass, gripped too strongly, breaks and falls in pieces onto a finger-bowl. The child starts forward into the room.

MORE. Olive!

OLIVE. Who were you speaking to, Daddy?

MORE. [Staring at her] The wind, sweetheart!

OLIVE. There isn't any!

MORE. What blew you down, then?

OLIVE. [Mysteriously] The music. Did the wind break the wine-glass, or did it come in two in your hand?

MORE. Now my sprite! Upstairs again, before Nurse catches you. Fly! Fly!

OLIVE. Oh! no, Daddy! [With confidential fervour] It feels like things to-night!

MORE. You're right there!

OLIVE. [Pulling him down to her, and whispering] I must get back again in secret. H'sh!

She suddenly runs and wraps herself into one of the curtains of the bay window. A young man enters, with a note in his hand.

MORE. Hello, Steel!

[The street musicians have again begun to play.]

STEEL. From Sir John – by special messenger from the War Office.

MORE. [Reading the note] "The ball is opened."

He stands brooding over the note, and STEEL looks at him anxiously. He is a dark, sallow, thin-faced young man, with the eyes of one who can attach himself to people, and suffer with them.

STEEL. I'm glad it's begun, sir. It would have been an awful pity to have made that speech.

MORE. You too, Steel!

STEEL. I mean, if it's actually started —

MORE. [Tearing tie note across] Yes. Keep that to yourself.

STEEL. Do you want me any more?

MORE takes from his breast pocket some papers, and pitches them down on the bureau.

MORE. Answer these.

STEEL. [Going to the bureau] Fetherby was simply sickening. [He begins to write. Struggle has begun again in MORE] Not the faintest recognition that there are two sides to it.

MORE gives him a quick look, goes quietly to the dining-table and picks up his sheaf of notes. Hiding them with his sleeve, he goes back to the window, where he again stands hesitating.

STEEL. Chief gem: [Imitating] "We must show Impudence at last that Dignity is not asleep!"

MORE. [Moving out on to the terrace] Nice quiet night!

STEEL. This to the Cottage Hospital – shall I say you will preside?

MORE. No.

STEEL writes; then looking up and seeing that MORE is no longer there, he goes to the window, looks to right and left, returns to the bureau, and is about to sit down again when a thought seems to strike him with consternation. He goes again to the window. Then snatching up his hat, he passes hurriedly out along the terrace. As he vanishes, KATHERINE comes in from the hall. After looking out on to the terrace she goes to the bay window; stands there listening; then comes restlessly back into the room. OLIVE, creeping quietly from behind the curtain, clasps her round the waist.

KATHERINE. O my darling! How you startled me! What are you doing down here, you wicked little sinner!

OLIVE. I explained all that to Daddy. We needn't go into it again, need we?

KATHERINE. Where is Daddy?

OLIVE. Gone.

KATHERINE. When?

OLIVE. Oh! only just, and Mr. Steel went after him like a rabbit. [The music stops] They haven't been paid, you know.

KATHERINE. Now, go up at once. I can't think how you got down here.

OLIVE. I can. [Wheedling] If you pay them, Mummy, they're sure to play another.

KATHERINE. Well, give them that! One more only.

She gives OLIVE a coin, who runs with it to the bay window, opens the aide casement, and calls to the musicians.

OLIVE. Catch, please! And would you play just one more?

She returns from the window, and seeing her mother lost in thought, rubs herself against her.

OLIVE. Have you got an ache?

KATHARINE. Right through me, darling!

OLIVE. Oh!

[The musicians strike up a dance.]

OLIVE. Oh! Mummy! I must just dance!

She kicks off her lisle blue shoes, and begins dancing. While she is capering HUBERT comes in from the hall. He stands watching his little niece for a minute, and KATHERINE looks at him.

HUBERT. Stephen gone!

KATHERINE. Yes – stop, Olive!

OLIVE. Are you good at my sort of dancing, Uncle?

HUBERT. Yes, chick – awfully!

KATHERINE. Now, Olive!

The musicians have suddenly broken off in the middle of a bar. From the street comes the noise of distant shouting.

OLIVE. Listen, Uncle! Isn't it a particular noise?

HUBERT and KATHERINE listen with all their might, and OLIVE stares at their faces. HUBERT goes to the window. The sound comes nearer. The shouted words are faintly heard: "Pyper – war – our force crosses frontier – sharp fightin' – pyper."

KATHERINE. [Breathless] Yes! It is.

The street cry is heard again in two distant voices coming from different directions: "War – pyper – sharp fightin' on the frontier – pyper."

KATHERINE. Shut out those ghouls!

As HUBERT closes the window, NURSE WREFORD comes in from the hall. She is an elderly woman endowed with a motherly grimness. She fixes OLIVE with her eye, then suddenly becomes conscious of the street cry.

NURSE. Oh! don't say it's begun.

[HUBERT comes from the window.]

NURSE. Is the regiment to go, Mr. Hubert?

HUBERT. Yes, Nanny.

NURSE. Oh, dear! My boy!

KATHERINE. [Signing to where OLIVE stands with wide eyes] Nurse!

HUBERT. I'll look after him, Nurse.

NURSE. And him keepin' company. And you not married a year. Ah! Mr. Hubert, now do 'ee take care; you and him's both so rash.

HUBERT. Not I, Nurse!

NURSE looks long into his face, then lifts her finger, and beckons OLIVE.

OLIVE. [Perceiving new sensations before her, goes quietly] Good-night, Uncle! Nanny, d'you know why I was obliged to come down? [In a fervent whisper] It's a secret!

[As she passes with NURSE out into the hall, her voice is heard saying, "Do tell me all about the war."]

HUBERT. [Smothering emotion under a blunt manner] We sail on Friday, Kit. Be good to Helen, old girl.

KATHERINE. Oh! I wish – ! Why – can't – women – fight?

HUBERT. Yes, it's bad for you, with Stephen taking it like this. But he'll come round now it's once begun.

KATHERINE shakes her head, then goes suddenly up to him, and throws her arms round his neck. It is as if all the feeling pent up in her were finding vent in this hug. The door from the hall is opened, and SIR JOHN'S voice is heard outside: "All right, I'll find her."

KATHERINE. Father!

[SIR JOHN comes in.]

SIR JOHN. Stephen get my note? I sent it over the moment I got to the War Office.

KATHERINE. I expect so. [Seeing the torn note on the table] Yes.

SIR JOHN. They're shouting the news now. Thank God, I stopped that crazy speech of his in time.

KATHERINE. Have you stopped it?

SIR JOHN. What! He wouldn't be such a sublime donkey?

KATHERINE. I think that is just what he might be. [Going to the window] We shall know soon.

[SIR JOHN, after staring at her, goes up to HUBERT.]

SIR JOHN. Keep a good heart, my boy. The country's first. [They exchange a hand-squeeze.]

KATHERINE backs away from the window. STEEL has appeared there from the terrace, breathless from running.

STEEL. Mr. More back?

KATHERINE. No. Has he spoken?

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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