

GALSWORTHY JOHN

JUSTICE

John Galsworthy

Justice

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Содержание

PERSONS OF THE PLAY	5
ACT I	6
ACT II	16
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	18

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Justice

PERSONS OF THE PLAY

JAMES HOW, solicitor
WALTER HOW, solicitor
ROBERT COKESON, their managing clerk
WILLIAM FALDER, their junior clerk
SWEEDLE, their office-boy
WISTER, a detective
COWLEY, a cashier
MR. JUSTICE FLOYD, a judge
HAROLD CLEAVER, an old advocate
HECTOR FROME, a young advocate
CAPTAIN DANSON, V.C., a prison governor
THE REV. HUGH MILLER, a prison chaplain
EDWARD CLEMENT, a prison doctor
WOODER, a chief warder
MOANEY, convict
CLIFTON, convict
O'CLEARY, convict
RUTH HONEYWILL, a woman
A NUMBER OF BARRISTERS, SOLICITERS, SPECTATORS, USHERS, REPORTERS,
JURYMEN, WARDERS, AND PRISONERS
TIME: The Present.
ACT I. The office of James and Walter How. Morning. July.
ACT II. Assizes. Afternoon. October.
ACT III. A prison. December.
SCENE I. The Governor's office.
SCENE II. A corridor.
SCENE III. A cell.
ACT IV. The office of James and Walter How. Morning.
March, two years later.

ACT I

The scene is the managing clerk's room, at the offices of James and Walter How, on a July morning. The room is old fashioned, furnished with well-worn mahogany and leather, and lined with tin boxes and estate plans. It has three doors. Two of them are close together in the centre of a wall. One of these two doors leads to the outer office, which is only divided from the managing clerk's room by a partition of wood and clear glass; and when the door into this outer office is opened there can be seen the wide outer door leading out on to the stone stairway of the building. The other of these two centre doors leads to the junior clerk's room. The third door is that leading to the partners' room. The managing clerk, COKESON, is sitting at his table adding up figures in a pass-book, and murmuring their numbers to himself. He is a man of sixty, wearing spectacles; rather short, with a bald head, and an honest, pugdog face. He is dressed in a well-worn black frock-coat and pepper-and-salt trousers.

COKESON. And five's twelve, and three – fifteen, nineteen, twenty-three, thirty-two, forty-one-and carry four. [He ticks the page, and goes on murmuring] Five, seven, twelve, seventeen, twenty-four and nine, thirty-three, thirteen and carry one.

He again makes a tick. The outer office door is opened, and SWEEDLE, the office-boy, appears, closing the door behind him. He is a pale youth of sixteen, with spiky hair.

COKESON. [With grumpy expectation] And carry one.

SWEEDLE. There's a party wants to see Falder, Mr. Cokeson.

COKESON. Five, nine, sixteen, twenty-one, twenty-nine – and carry two. Send him to Morris's. What name?

SWEEDLE. Honeywill.

COKESON. What's his business?

SWEEDLE. It's a woman.

COKESON. A lady?

SWEEDLE. No, a person.

COKESON. Ask her in. Take this pass-book to Mr. James. [He closes the pass-book.]

SWEEDLE. [Reopening the door] Will you come in, please?

RUTH HONEYWILL comes in. She is a tall woman, twenty-six years old, unpretentiously dressed, with black hair and eyes, and an ivory-white, clear-cut face. She stands very still, having a natural dignity of pose and gesture. SWEEDLE goes out into the partners' room with the pass-book.

COKESON. [Looking round at RUTH] The young man's out. [Suspiciously] State your business, please.

RUTH. [Who speaks in a matter-of-fact voice, and with a slight West-Country accent] It's a personal matter, sir.

COKESON. We don't allow private callers here. Will you leave a message?

RUTH. I'd rather see him, please.

She narrows her dark eyes and gives him a honeyed look.

COKESON. [Expanding] It's all against the rules. Suppose I had my friends here to see me! It'd never do!

RUTH. No, sir.

COKESON. [A little taken aback] Exactly! And here you are wanting to see a junior clerk!

RUTH. Yes, sir; I must see him.

COKESON. [Turning full round to her with a sort of outraged interest] But this is a lawyer's office. Go to his private address.

RUTH. He's not there.

COKESON. [Uneasy] Are you related to the party?

RUTH. No, sir.

COKESON. [In real embarrassment] I don't know what to say. It's no affair of the office.

RUTH. But what am I to do?

COKESON. Dear me! I can't tell you that.

SWEEDLE comes back. He crosses to the outer office and passes through into it, with a quizzical look at Cokeson, carefully leaving the door an inch or two open.

COKESON. [Fortified by this look] This won't do, you know, this won't do at all. Suppose one of the partners came in!

An incoherent knocking and chuckling is heard from the outer door of the outer office.

SWEEDLE. [Putting his head in] There's some children outside here.

RUTH. They're mine, please.

SWEEDLE. Shall I hold them in check?

RUTH. They're quite small, sir. [She takes a step towards COKESON]

COKESON. You mustn't take up his time in office hours; we're a clerk short as it is.

RUTH. It's a matter of life and death.

COKESON. [Again outraged] Life and death!

SWEEDLE. Here is Falder.

FALDER has entered through the outer office. He is a pale, good-looking young man, with quick, rather scared eyes. He moves towards the door of the clerks' office, and stands there irresolute.

COKESON. Well, I'll give you a minute. It's not regular.

Taking up a bundle of papers, he goes out into the partners' room.

RUTH. [In a low, hurried voice] He's on the drink again, Will. He tried to cut my throat last night. I came out with the children before he was awake. I went round to you.

FALDER. I've changed my digs.

RUTH. Is it all ready for to-night?

FALDER. I've got the tickets. Meet me 11.45 at the booking office. For God's sake don't forget we're man and wife! [Looking at her with tragic intensity] Ruth!

RUTH. You're not afraid of going, are you?

FALDER. Have you got your things, and the children's?

RUTH. Had to leave them, for fear of waking Honeywill, all but one bag. I can't go near home again.

FALDER. [Wincing] All that money gone for nothing. How much must you have?

RUTH. Six pounds – I could do with that, I think.

FALDER. Don't give away where we're going. [As if to himself] When I get out there I mean to forget it all.

RUTH. If you're sorry, say so. I'd sooner he killed me than take you against your will.

FALDER. [With a queer smile] We've got to go. I don't care; I'll have you.

RUTH. You've just to say; it's not too late.

FALDER. It is too late. Here's seven pounds. Booking office 11.45 to-night. If you weren't what you are to me, Ruth – !

RUTH. Kiss me!

They cling together passionately, then fly apart just as COKESON re-enters the room. RUTH turns and goes out through the outer office. COKESON advances deliberately to his chair and seats himself.

COKESON. This isn't right, Falder.

FALDER. It shan't occur again, sir.

COKESON. It's an improper use of these premises.

FALDER. Yes, sir.

COKESON. You quite understand-the party was in some distress; and, having children with her, I allowed my feelings – [He opens a drawer and produces from it a tract] Just take this! "Purity in the Home." It's a well-written thing.

FALDER. [Taking it, with a peculiar expression] Thank you, sir.

COKESON. And look here, Falder, before Mr. Walter comes, have you finished up that cataloguing Davis had in hand before he left?

FALDER. I shall have done with it to-morrow, sir – for good.

COKESON. It's over a week since Davis went. Now it won't do, Falder. You're neglecting your work for private life. I shan't mention about the party having called, but —

FALDER. [Passing into his room] Thank you, sir.

COKESON stares at the door through which FALDER has gone out; then shakes his head, and is just settling down to write, when WALTER How comes in through the outer Office. He is a rather refined-looking man of thirty-five, with a pleasant, almost apologetic voice.

WALTER. Good-morning, Cokeson.

COKESON. Morning, Mr. Walter.

WALTER. My father here?

COKESON. [Always with a certain patronage as to a young man who might be doing better] Mr. James has been here since eleven o'clock.

WALTER. I've been in to see the pictures, at the Guildhall.

COKESON. [Looking at him as though this were exactly what was to be expected] Have you now – ye – es. This lease of Boulter's – am I to send it to counsel?

WALTER. What does my father say?

COKESON. 'Aven't bothered him.

WALTER. Well, we can't be too careful.

COKESON. It's such a little thing – hardly worth the fees. I thought you'd do it yourself.

WALTER. Send it, please. I don't want the responsibility.

COKESON. [With an indescribable air of compassion] Just as you like. This "right-of-way" case – we've got 'em on the deeds.

WALTER. I know; but the intention was obviously to exclude that bit of common ground.

COKESON. We needn't worry about that. We're the right side of the law.

WALTER. I don't like it,

COKESON. [With an indulgent smile] We shan't want to set ourselves up against the law. Your father wouldn't waste his time doing that.

As he speaks JAMES How comes in from the partners' room. He is a shortish man, with white side-whiskers, plentiful grey hair, shrewd eyes, and gold pince-nez.

JAMES. Morning, Walter.

WALTER. How are you, father?

COKESON. [Looking down his nose at the papers in his hand as though deprecating their size] I'll just take Boulter's lease in to young Falder to draft the instructions. [He goes out into FALDER'S room.]

WALTER. About that right-of-way case?

JAMES. Oh, well, we must go forward there. I thought you told me yesterday the firm's balance was over four hundred.

WALTER. So it is.

JAMES. [Holding out the pass-book to his son] Three – five – one, no recent cheques. Just get me out the cheque-book.

WALTER goes to a cupboard, unlocks a drawer and produces a cheque-book.

JAMES. Tick the pounds in the counterfoils. Five, fifty-four, seven, five, twenty-eight, twenty, ninety, eleven, fifty-two, seventy-one. Tally?

WALTER. [Nodding] Can't understand. Made sure it was over four hundred.

JAMES. Give me the cheque-book. [He takes the check-book and cons the counterfoils] What's this ninety?

WALTER. Who drew it?

JAMES. You.

WALTER. [Taking the cheque-book] July 7th? That's the day I went down to look over the Trenton Estate – last Friday week; I came back on the Tuesday, you remember. But look here, father, it was nine I drew a cheque for. Five guineas to Smithers and my expenses. It just covered all but half a crown.

JAMES. [Gravely] Let's look at that ninety cheque. [He sorts the cheque out from the bundle in the pocket of the pass-book] Seems all right. There's no nine here. This is bad. Who cashed that nine-pound cheque?

WALTER. [Puzzled and pained] Let's see! I was finishing Mrs. Reddy's will – only just had time; yes – I gave it to Cokeson.

JAMES. Look at that 't' 'y': that yours?

WALTER. [After consideration] My y's curl back a little; this doesn't.

JAMES. [As COKESON re-enters from FALDER'S room] We must ask him. Just come here and carry your mind back a bit, Cokeson. D'you remember cashing a cheque for Mr. Walter last Friday week – the day he went to Trenton?

COKESON. Ye-es. Nine pounds.

JAMES. Look at this. [Handing him the cheque.]

COKESON. No! Nine pounds. My lunch was just coming in; and of course I like it hot; I gave the cheque to Davis to run round to the bank. He brought it back, all gold – you remember, Mr. Walter, you wanted some silver to pay your cab. [With a certain contemptuous compassion] Here, let me see. You've got the wrong cheque.

He takes cheque-book and pass-book from WALTER.

WALTER. Afraid not.

COKESON. [Having seen for himself] It's funny.

JAMES. You gave it to Davis, and Davis sailed for Australia on Monday. Looks black, Cokeson.

COKESON. [Puzzled and upset] why this'd be a felony! No, no! there's some mistake.

JAMES. I hope so.

COKESON. There's never been anything of that sort in the office the twenty-nine years I've been here.

JAMES. [Looking at cheque and counterfoil] This is a very clever bit of work; a warning to you not to leave space after your figures, Walter.

WALTER. [Vexed] Yes, I know – I was in such a tearing hurry that afternoon.

COKESON. [Suddenly] This has upset me.

JAMES. The counterfoil altered too – very deliberate piece of swindling. What was Davis's ship?

WALTER. 'City of Rangoon'.

JAMES. We ought to wire and have him arrested at Naples; he can't be there yet.

COKESON. His poor young wife. I liked the young man. Dear, oh dear! In this office!

WALTER. Shall I go to the bank and ask the cashier?

JAMES. [Grimly] Bring him round here. And ring up Scotland Yard.

WALTER. Really?

He goes out through the outer office. JAMES paces the room. He stops and looks at COKESON, who is disconsolately rubbing the knees of his trousers.

JAMES. Well, Cokeson! There's something in character, isn't there?

COKESON. [Looking at him over his spectacles] I don't quite take you, sir.

JAMES. Your story, would sound d – d thin to any one who didn't know you.

COKESON. Ye-es! [He laughs. Then with a sudden gravity] I'm sorry for that young man. I feel it as if it was my own son, Mr. James.

JAMES. A nasty business!

COKESON. It unsettles you. All goes on regular, and then a thing like this happens. Shan't relish my lunch to-day.

JAMES. As bad as that, Cokeson?

COKESON. It makes you think. [Confidentially] He must have had temptation.

JAMES. Not so fast. We haven't convicted him yet.

COKESON. I'd sooner have lost a month's salary than had this happen. [He broods.]

JAMES. I hope that fellow will hurry up.

COKESON. [Keeping things pleasant for the cashier] It isn't fifty yards, Mr. James. He won't be a minute.

JAMES. The idea of dishonesty about this office it hits me hard, Cokeson.

He goes towards the door of the partners' room.

SWEEDLE. [Entering quietly, to COKESON in a low voice] She's popped up again, sir – something she forgot to say to Falder.

COKESON. [Roused from his abstraction] Eh? Impossible. Send her away!

JAMES. What's that?

COKESON. Nothing, Mr. James. A private matter. Here, I'll come myself. [He goes into the outer office as JAMES passes into the partners' room] Now, you really mustn't – we can't have anybody just now.

RUTH. Not for a minute, sir?

COKESON. Reely! Reely! I can't have it. If you want him, wait about; he'll be going out for his lunch directly.

RUTH. Yes, sir.

WALTER, entering with the cashier, passes RUTH as she leaves the outer office.

COKESON. [To the cashier, who resembles a sedentary dragoon] Good-morning. [To WALTER] Your father's in there.

WALTER crosses and goes into the partners' room.

COKESON. It's a nahsty, unpleasant little matter, Mr. Cowley. I'm quite ashamed to have to trouble you.

COWLEY. I remember the cheque quite well. [As if it were a liver] Seemed in perfect order.

COKESON. Sit down, won't you? I'm not a sensitive man, but a thing like this about the place – it's not nice. I like people to be open and jolly together.

COWLEY. Quite so.

COKESON. [Buttonholing him, and glancing toward the partners' room] Of course he's a young man. I've told him about it before now – leaving space after his figures, but he will do it.

COWLEY. I should remember the person's face – quite a youth.

COKESON. I don't think we shall be able to show him to you, as a matter of fact.

JAMES and WALTER have come back from the partners' room.

JAMES. Good-morning, Mr. Cowley. You've seen my son and myself, you've seen Mr. Cokeson, and you've seen Sweedle, my office-boy. It was none of us, I take it.

The cashier shakes his head with a smile.

JAMES. Be so good as to sit there. Cokeson, engage Mr. Cowley in conversation, will you?

He goes toward FALDER'S room.

COKESON. Just a word, Mr. James.

JAMES. Well?

COKESON. You don't want to upset the young man in there, do you? He's a nervous young feller.

JAMES. This must be thoroughly cleared up, Cokeson, for the sake of Falder's name, to say nothing of yours.

COKESON. [With Some dignity] That'll look after itself, sir. He's been upset once this morning; I don't want him startled again.

JAMES. It's a matter of form; but I can't stand upon niceness over a thing like this – too serious. Just talk to Mr. Cowley.

He opens the door of FALDER'S room.

JAMES. Bring in the papers in Boulter's lease, will you, Falder?

COKESON. [Bursting into voice] Do you keep dogs?

The cashier, with his eyes fixed on the door, does not answer.

COKESON. You haven't such a thing as a bulldog pup you could spare me, I suppose?

At the look on the cashier's face his jaw drops, and he turns to see FALDER standing in the doorway, with his eyes fixed on COWLEY, like the eyes of a rabbit fastened on a snake.

FALDER. [Advancing with the papers] Here they are, sir!

JAMES. [Taking them] Thank you.

FALDER. Do you want me, sir?

JAMES. No, thanks!

FALDER turns and goes back into his own room. As he shuts the door JAMES gives the cashier an interrogative look, and the cashier nods.

JAMES. Sure? This isn't as we suspected.

COWLEY. Quite. He knew me. I suppose he can't slip out of that room?

COKESON. [Gloomily] There's only the window – a whole floor and a basement.

The door of FALDER'S room is quietly opened, and FALDER, with his hat in his hand, moves towards the door of the outer office.

JAMES. [Quietly] Where are you going, Falder?

FALDER. To have my lunch, sir.

JAMES. Wait a few minutes, would you? I want to speak to you about this lease.

FALDER. Yes, sir. [He goes back into his room.]

COWLEY. If I'm wanted, I can swear that's the young man who cashed the cheque. It was the last cheque I handled that morning before my lunch. These are the numbers of the notes he had. [He puts a slip of paper on the table; then, brushing his hat round] Good-morning!

JAMES. Good-morning, Mr. Cowley!

COWLEY. [To COKESON] Good-morning.

COKESON. [With Stupefaction] Good-morning.

The cashier goes out through the outer office. COKESON sits down in his chair, as though it were the only place left in the morass of his feelings.

WALTER. What are you going to do?

JAMES. Have him in. Give me the cheque and the counterfoil.

COKESON. I don't understand. I thought young Davis —

JAMES. We shall see.

WALTER. One moment, father: have you thought it out?

JAMES. Call him in!

COKESON. [Rising with difficulty and opening FALDER'S door; hoarsely] Step in here a minute.

FALDER. [Impassively] Yes, sir?

JAMES. [Turning to him suddenly with the cheque held out] You know this cheque, Falder?

FALDER. No, sir.

JAMES. Look at it. You cashed it last Friday week.

FALDER. Oh! yes, sir; that one – Davis gave it me.

JAMES. I know. And you gave Davis the cash?

FALDER. Yes, sir.

JAMES. When Davis gave you the cheque was it exactly like this?

FALDER. Yes, I think so, sir.

JAMES. You know that Mr. Walter drew that cheque for nine pounds?

FALDER. No, sir – ninety.

JAMES. Nine, Falder.

FALDER. [Faintly] I don't understand, sir.

JAMES. The suggestion, of course, is that the cheque was altered; whether by you or Davis is the question.

FALDER. I – I

COKESON. Take your time, take your time.

FALDER. [Regaining his impassivity] Not by me, sir.

JAMES. The cheque was handed to – Cokeson by Mr. Walter at one o'clock; we know that because Mr. Cokeson's lunch had just arrived.

COKESON. I couldn't leave it.

JAMES. Exactly; he therefore gave the cheque to Davis. It was cashed by you at 1.15. We know that because the cashier recollects it for the last cheque he handled before his lunch.

FALDER. Yes, sir, Davis gave it to me because some friends were giving him a farewell luncheon.

JAMES. [Puzzled] You accuse Davis, then?

FALDER. I don't know, sir – it's very funny.

WALTER, who has come close to his father, says something to him in a low voice.

JAMES. Davis was not here again after that Saturday, was he?

COKESON. [Anxious to be of assistance to the young man, and seeing faint signs of their all being jolly once more] No, he sailed on the Monday.

JAMES. Was he, Falder?

FALDER. [Very faintly] No, sir.

JAMES. Very well, then, how do you account for the fact that this nought was added to the nine in the counterfoil on or after Tuesday?

COKESON. [Surprised] How's that?

FALDER gives a sort of lurch; he tries to pull himself together, but he has gone all to pieces.

JAMES. [Very grimly] Out, I'm afraid, Cokeson. The cheque-book remained in Mr. Walter's pocket till he came back from Trenton on Tuesday morning. In the face of this, Falder, do you still deny that you altered both cheque and counterfoil?

FALDER. No, sir – no, Mr. How. I did it, sir; I did it.

COKESON. [Succumbing to his feelings] Dear, dear! what a thing to do!

FALDER. I wanted the money so badly, sir. I didn't know what I was doing.

COKESON. However such a thing could have come into your head!

FALDER. [Grasping at the words] I can't think, sir, really! It was just a minute of madness.

JAMES. A long minute, Falder. [Tapping the counterfoil] Four days at least.

FALDER. Sir, I swear I didn't know what I'd done till afterwards, and then I hadn't the pluck. Oh! Sir, look over it! I'll pay the money back – I will, I promise.

JAMES. Go into your room.

FALDER, with a swift imploring look, goes back into his room. There is silence.

JAMES. About as bad a case as there could be.

COKESON. To break the law like that-in here!

WALTER. What's to be done?

JAMES. Nothing for it. Prosecute.

WALTER. It's his first offence.

JAMES. [Shaking his head] I've grave doubts of that. Too neat a piece of swindling altogether.

COKESON. I shouldn't be surprised if he was tempted.

JAMES. Life's one long temptation, Cokeson.

COKESON. Ye-es, but I'm speaking of the flesh and the devil, Mr. James. There was a woman come to see him this morning.

WALTER. The woman we passed as we came in just now. Is it his wife?

COKESON. No, no relation. [Restraining what in jollier circumstances would have been a wink] A married person, though.

WALTER. How do you know?

COKESON. Brought her children. [Scandalised] There they were outside the office.

JAMES. A real bad egg.

WALTER. I should like to give him a chance.

JAMES. I can't forgive him for the sneaky way he went to work – counting on our suspecting young Davis if the matter came to light. It was the merest accident the cheque-book stayed in your pocket.

WALTER. It must have been the temptation of a moment. He hadn't time.

JAMES. A man doesn't succumb like that in a moment, if he's a clean mind and habits. He's rotten; got the eyes of a man who can't keep his hands off when there's money about.

WALTER. [Dryly] We hadn't noticed that before.

JAMES. [Brushing the remark aside] I've seen lots of those fellows in my time. No doing anything with them except to keep 'em out of harm's way. They've got a blind spat.

WALTER. It's penal servitude.

COKESON. They're nahsty places-prisons.

JAMES. [Hesitating] I don't see how it's possible to spare him. Out of the question to keep him in this office – honesty's the 'sine qua non'.

COKESON. [Hypnotised] Of course it is.

JAMES. Equally out of the question to send him out amongst people who've no knowledge of his character. One must think of society.

WALTER. But to brand him like this?

JAMES. If it had been a straightforward case I'd give him another chance. It's far from that. He has dissolute habits.

COKESON. I didn't say that – extenuating circumstances.

JAMES. Same thing. He's gone to work in the most cold-blooded way to defraud his employers, and cast the blame on an innocent man. If that's not a case for the law to take its course, I don't know what is.

WALTER. For the sake of his future, though.

JAMES. [Sarcastically] According to you, no one would ever prosecute.

WALTER. [Nettled] I hate the idea of it.

COKESON. That's rather 'ex parte', Mr. Walter! We must have protection.

JAMES. This is degenerating into talk.

He moves towards the partners' room.

WALTER. Put yourself in his place, father.

JAMES. You ask too much of me.

WALTER. We can't possibly tell the pressure there was on him.

JAMES. You may depend on it, my boy, if a man is going to do this sort of thing he'll do it, pressure or no pressure; if he isn't nothing'll make him.

WALTER. He'll never do it again.

COKESON. [Fatuously] S'pose I were to have a talk with him. We don't want to be hard on the young man.

JAMES. That'll do, Cokeson. I've made up my mind. [He passes into the partners' room.]

COKESON. [After a doubtful moment] We must excuse your father. I don't want to go against your father; if he thinks it right.

WALTER. Confound it, Cokeson! why don't you back me up? You know you feel —

COKESON. [On his dignity] I really can't say what I feel.

WALTER. We shall regret it.

COKESON. He must have known what he was doing.

WALTER. [Bitterly] "The quality of mercy is not strained."

COKESON. [Looking at him askance] Come, come, Mr. Walter. We must try and see it sensible.

SWEEDLE. [Entering with a tray] Your lunch, sir.

COKESON. Put it down!

While SWEEDLE is putting it down on COKESON's table, the detective, WISTER, enters the outer office, and, finding no one there, comes to the inner doorway. He is a square, medium-sized man, clean-shaved, in a serviceable blue serge suit and strong boots.

COKESON. [Hoarsely] Here! Here! What are we doing?

WISTER. [To WALTER] From Scotland Yard, sir. Detective-Sergeant Blister.

WALTER. [Askance] Very well! I'll speak to my father.

He goes into the partners' room. JAMES enters.

JAMES. Morning! [In answer to an appealing gesture from COKESON] I'm sorry; I'd stop short of this if I felt I could. Open that door. [SWEEDLE, wondering and scared, opens it] Come here, Mr. Falder.

As FALDER comes shrinkingly out, the detective in obedience to a sign from JAMES, slips his hand out and grasps his arm.

FALDER. [Recoiling] Oh! no, – oh! no!

WALTER. Come, come, there's a good lad.

JAMES. I charge him with felony.

FALTER. Oh, sir! There's some one – I did it for her. Let me be till to-morrow.

JAMES motions with his hand. At that sign of hardness, FALDER becomes rigid. Then, turning, he goes out quietly in the detective's grip. JAMES follows, stiff and erect. SWEEDLE, rushing to the door with open mouth, pursues them through the outer office into the corridor. When they have all disappeared COKESON spins completely round and makes a rush for the outer office.

COKESON: [Hoarsely] Here! What are we doing?

There is silence. He takes out his handkerchief and mops the sweat from his face. Going back blindly to his table, sits down, and stares blankly at his lunch.

The curtain falls

ACT II

A Court of Justice, on a foggy October afternoon crowded with barristers, solicitors, reporters, ushers, and jurymen. Sitting in the large, solid dock is FALDER, with a warder on either side of him, placed there for his safe custody, but seemingly indifferent to and unconscious of his presence. FALDER is sitting exactly opposite to the JUDGE, who, raised above the clamour of the court, also seems unconscious of and indifferent to everything. HAROLD CLEAVER, the counsel for the Crown, is a dried, yellowish man, of more than middle age, in a wig worn almost to the colour of his face. HECTOR FROME, the counsel for the defence, is a young, tall man, clean shaved, in a very white wig. Among the spectators, having already given their evidence, are JAMES and WALTER HOW, and COWLEY, the cashier. WISTER, the detective, is just leaving the witness-box.

CLEAVER. That is the case for the Crown, me lud!

Gathering his robes together, he sits down.

FROME. [Rising and bowing to the JUDGE] If it please your lordship and gentlemen of the jury. I am not going to dispute the fact that the prisoner altered this cheque, but I am going to put before you evidence as to the condition of his mind, and to submit that you would not be justified in finding that he was responsible for his actions at the time. I am going to show you, in fact, that he did this in a moment of aberration, amounting to temporary insanity, caused by the violent distress under which he was labouring. Gentlemen, the prisoner is only twenty-three years old. I shall call before you a woman from whom you will learn the events that led up to this act. You will hear from her own lips the tragic circumstances of her life, the still more tragic infatuation with which she has inspired the prisoner. This woman, gentlemen, has been leading a miserable existence with a husband who habitually ill-uses her, from whom she actually goes in terror of her life. I am not, of course, saying that it's either right or desirable for a young man to fall in love with a married woman, or that it's his business to rescue her from an ogre-like husband. I'm not saying anything of the sort. But we all know the power of the passion of love; and I would ask you to remember, gentlemen, in listening to her evidence, that, married to a drunken and violent husband, she has no power to get rid of him; for, as you know, another offence besides violence is necessary to enable a woman to obtain a divorce; and of this offence it does not appear that her husband is guilty.

JUDGE. Is this relevant, Mr. Frome?

FROME. My lord, I submit, extremely – I shall be able to show your lordship that directly.

JUDGE. Very well.

FROME. In these circumstances, what alternatives were left to her? She could either go on living with this drunkard, in terror of her life; or she could apply to the Court for a separation order. Well, gentlemen, my experience of such cases assures me that this would have given her very insufficient protection from the violence of such a man; and even if effectual would very likely have reduced her either to the workhouse or the streets – for it's not easy, as she is now finding, for an unskilled woman without means of livelihood to support herself and her children without resorting either to the Poor Law or – to speak quite plainly – to the sale of her body.

JUDGE. You are ranging rather far, Mr. Frome.

FROME. I shall fire point-blank in a minute, my lord.

JUDGE. Let us hope so.

FROME. Now, gentlemen, mark – and this is what I have been leading up to – this woman will tell you, and the prisoner will confirm her, that, confronted with such alternatives, she set her whole hopes on himself, knowing the feeling with which she had inspired him. She saw a way out of her misery by going with him to a new country, where they would both be unknown, and might pass as husband and wife. This was a desperate and, as my friend Mr. Cleaver will no doubt call it, an

immoral resolution; but, as a fact, the minds of both of them were constantly turned towards it. One wrong is no excuse for another, and those who are never likely to be faced by such a situation possibly have the right to hold up their hands – as to that I prefer to say nothing. But whatever view you take, gentlemen, of this part of the prisoner's story – whatever opinion you form of the right of these two young people under such circumstances to take the law into their own hands – the fact remains that this young woman in her distress, and this young man, little more than a boy, who was so devotedly attached to her, did conceive this – if you like – reprehensible design of going away together. Now, for that, of course, they required money, and – they had none. As to the actual events of the morning of July 7th, on which this cheque was altered, the events on which I rely to prove the defendant's irresponsibility – I shall allow those events to speak for themselves, through the lips of my witness. Robert Cokeson. [He turns, looks round, takes up a sheet of paper, and waits.]

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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