

ДЖЕК ЛОНДОН

THEFT: A
PLAY IN FOUR
ACTS

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Jack London

Theft: A Play In Four Acts

CHARACTERS

Margaret Chalmers

Howard Knox

Thomas Chalmers

Master Thomas Chalmers

Ellery Jackson Hubbard

Anthony Starkweather

Mrs Starkweather

Connie Starkweather

Felix Dobleman

Linda Davis

Julius Rutland

John Gieford

Matsu Sakari

Dolores Ortega

Senator Dowsett Mrs Dowsett

Housekeeper, Serves

Wife of Senator Chalmers

A Congressman from Oregon

A United States Senator and several times millionaire

Son of Margaret and Senator Chalmers

A Journalist

A great magnate, and father of Margaret Chalmers

His wife

Their younger daughter

Secretary to Anthony Starkweather

Maid to Margaret Chalmers

Episcopalian Minister

Labor Agitator

Secretary of Japanese Embassy

Wife of Peruvian Minister

Agents, etc

ACTORS' DESCRIPTION OF CHARACTERS

Margaret Chalmers. Twenty-seven years of age; a strong, mature woman, but quite feminine where her heart or sense of beauty are concerned. Her eyes are wide apart. Has a dazzling smile, which she knows how to use on occasion. Also, on occasion, she can be firm and hard, even cynical. An intellectual woman, and at the same time a very womanly woman, capable of sudden tendernesses, flashes of emotion, and abrupt actions. She is a finished product of high culture and refinement, and at the same time possesses robust vitality and instinctive right-promptings that augur well for the future of the race.

Howard Knox. He might have been a poet, but was turned politician. Inflamed with love for humanity. Thirty-five years of age. He has his vision, and must follow it. He has suffered ostracism because of it, and has followed his vision in spite of abuse and ridicule. Physically, a well-built, powerful man. Strong-featured rather than handsome. Very much in earnest, and, despite his university training, a trifle awkward in carriage and demeanor, lacking in social ease. He has been elected to Congress on a reform ticket, and is almost alone in fight he is making. He has no party to back him, though he has a following of a few independents and insurgents.

Thomas Chalmers. Forty-five to fifty years of age. Iron-gray mustache. Slightly stout. A good liver, much given to Scotch and soda, with a weak heart. Is liable to collapse any time. If anything, slightly lazy or lethargic in his emotional life. One of the "owned" senators representing a decadent New England state, himself master of the state political machine. Also, he is nobody's fool. He possesses the brain and strength of character to play his part. His most distinctive feature is his temperamental opportunism.

Master Thomas Chalmers. Six years of age. Sturdy and healthy despite his grandmother's belief to the contrary.

Ellery Jackson Hubbard. Thirty-eight to forty years of age. Smooth-shaven. A star journalist with a national reputation; a large, heavy-set man, with large head, large hands – everything about him is large. A man radiating prosperity, optimism and selfishness. Has no morality whatever. Is a conscious individualist, cold-blooded, pitiless, working only for himself, and believing in nothing but himself.

Anthony Starkweather. An elderly, well preserved gentleman, slenderly built, showing all the signs of a man who has lived clean and has been almost an ascetic. One to whom the joys of the flesh have had little meaning. A cold, controlled man whose one passion is for power. Distinctively a man of power. An eagle-like man, who, by keenness of brain and force of character, has carved out a fortune of hundreds of millions. In short, an industrial and financial magnate of the first water and of the

finest type to be found in the United States. Essentially a moral man, his rigid New England morality has suffered a sea change and developed into the morality of the master-man of affairs, equally rigid, equally uncompromising, but essentially Jesuitical in that he believes in doing wrong that right may come of it. He is absolutely certain that civilization and progress rest on his shoulders and upon the shoulders of the small group of men like him.

Mrs. Starkweather. Of the helpless, comfortably stout, elderly type. She has not followed her husband in his moral evolution. She is the creature of old customs, old prejudices, old New England ethics. She is rather confused by the modern rush of life.

Connie Starkweather. Margaret's younger sister, twenty years old. She is nothing that Margaret is, and everything that Margaret is not. No essential evil in her, but has no mind of her own – hopelessly a creature of convention. Gay, laughing, healthy, buxom – a natural product of her care-free environment.

Feux Dobleman. Private secretary to Anthony Starkweather. A young man of correct social deportment, thoroughly and in all things just the sort of private secretary a man like Anthony Starkweather would have. He is a weak-souled creature, timorous, almost effeminate.

Linda Davis. Maid to Margaret. A young woman of twenty-five or so, blond, Scandinavian, though American-born. A cold woman, almost featureless because of her long years of training, but with a hot heart deep down, and characterized by an intense

devotion to her mistress. Wild horses could drag nothing from her where her mistress is concerned.

Junus Rutland. Having no strong features about him, the type realizes itself.

John Gifford. A labor agitator. A man of the people, rough-hewn, narrow as a labor-leader may well be, earnest and sincere. He is a proper, better type of labor-leader.

Matsu Sakari. Secretary of Japanese Embassy. He is the perfection of politeness and talks classical book-English. He bows a great deal.

Dolores Ortega. Wife of Peruvian Minister; bright and vivacious, and uses her hands a great deal as she talks, in the Latin-American fashion.

Senator Dowsett. Fifty years of age; well preserved.

Mrs. Dowsett. Stout and middle-aged.

ACT I

A ROOM IN THE HOUSE OF SENATOR CHALMERS

Scene. In Senator Chalmers' home. It is four o'clock in the afternoon, in a modern living room with appropriate furnishings. In particular, in front, on left, a table prepared for the serving of tea, all excepting the tea urn itself. At rear, right of center, is main entrance to the room. Also, doorways at sides, on left and right. Curtain discloses Chalmers and Hubbard seated loungingly at the right front.

Hubbard

(After an apparent pause for cogitation.) I can't understand why an old wheel-horse like Elsworth should kick over the traces that way.

Chalmers

Disgruntled. Thinks he didn't get his fair share of plums out of the Tariff Committee. Besides, it's his last term. He's announced that he's going to retire.

Hubbard

(Snorting contemptuously, mimicking an old man's pompous enunciation.) "A Resolution to Investigate the High Cost of Living!" – old Senator Elsworth introducing a measure like that! The old buck! – How are you going to handle it?

Chalmers

It's already handled.

Hubbard

Yes?

Chalmers

(*Pulling his mustache.*) Turned it over to the Committee to Audit and Control the Contingent Expenses of the Senate.

Hubbard

(*Grinning his appreciation.*) And you're chairman. Poor old Elsworth. This way to the lethal chamber, and the bill's on its way.

Chalmers

Elsworth will be retired before it's ever reported. In the meantime, say after a decent interval, Senator Hodge will introduce another resolution to investigate the high cost of living. It will be like Elsworth's, only it won't.

Hubbard

(*Nodding his head and anticipating.*) And it will go to the Committee on Finance and come back for action inside of twenty-four hours.

Chalmers

By the way, I see *Cartwright's Magazine* has ceased muck-raking.

Hubbard

Cartwrights never did muck-rake – that is, not the big Interests – only the small independent businesses that didn't advertise.

Chalmers

Yes, it deftly concealed its reactionary tendencies.

Hubbard

And from now on the concealment will be still more deft. I've gone into it myself. I have a majority of the stock right now.

Chalmers

I thought I had noticed a subtle change in the last two numbers.

Hubbard

(Nodding.) We're still going on muck-raking. We have a splendid series on Aged Paupers, demanding better treatment and more sanitary conditions. Also we are going to run "Barbarous Venezuela" and show up thoroughly the rotten political management of that benighted country.

Chalmers

(Nods approvingly, and, after a pause.) And now concerning Knox. That's what I sent for you about. His speech comes off tomorrow per schedule. At last we've got him where we want him.

Hubbard

I have the ins and outs of it pretty well. Everything's arranged. The boys have their cue, though they don't know just what's going to be pulled off; and this time to-morrow afternoon their dispatches will be singing along the wires.

Chalmers

(Firmly and harshly.) This man Knox must be covered with ridicule, swamped with ridicule, annihilated with ridicule.

Hubbard

It is to laugh. Trust the great American people for that. We'll make those little Western editors sit up. They've been swearing by Knox, like a little tin god. Roars of laughter for them.

Chalmers

Do you do anything yourself?

Hubbard

Trust me. I have my own article for Cartwright's blocked out. They're holding the presses for it. I shall wire it along hot-footed to-morrow evening. Say – ?

Chalmers

(After a pause.) Well?

Hubbard

Wasn't it a risky thing to give him his chance with that speech?

Chalmers

It was the only feasible thing. He never has given us an opening. Our service men have camped on his trail night and day. Private life as unimpeachable as his public life. But now is our chance. The gods have given him into our hands. That speech will do more to break his influence —

Hubbard

(Interrupting.) Than a Fairbanks cocktail.

(Both laugh.) But don't forget that this Knox is a live wire. Somebody might get stung. Are you sure, when he gets up to make that speech, that he won't be able to back it up?

Chalmers

No danger at all.

Hubbard

But there are hooks and crooks by which facts are sometimes obtained.

Chalmers

(Positively.) Knox has nothing to go on but suspicions and hints, and unfounded assertions from the yellow press.

(Man-servant enters, goes to tea-table, looks it over, and makes slight rearrangements.) (Lowering his voice.) He will make himself a laughing stock. His charges will turn into boomerangs. His speech will be like a sheet from a Sunday supplement, with not a fact to back it up. *(Glances at Servant.)* We'd better be getting out of here. They're going to have tea.

(The Servant, however, makes exit.) Come to the library and have a high-ball. *(They pause as Hubbard speaks.)*

Hubbard

(With quiet glee.) And to-morrow Ali Baba gets his.

Chalmers

Ali Baba?

Hubbard

That's what your wife calls him – Knox.

Chalmers

Oh, yes, I believe I've heard it before. It's about time he hanged himself, and now we've given him the rope.

Hubbard

(Sinking voice and becoming deprecatingly confidential.)

Oh, by the way, just a little friendly warning, Senator Chalmers. Not so fast and loose up New York way. That certain lady, not to be mentioned – there's gossip about it in the New York newspaper offices. Of course, all such stories are killed. But be discreet, be discreet If Gherst gets hold of it, he'll play it up against the Administration in all his papers.

(Chalmers, who throughout this speech is showing a growing resentment, is about to speak, when voices are heard without and he checks himself.)

(Enter. Mrs. Starkweather, rather flustered and imminently in danger of a collapse, followed by Connie Starkweather, fresh, radiant, and joyous.)

Mrs. Starkweather

(With appeal and relief.)

Oh – Tom!

(Chalmers takes her hand sympathetically and protectingly.)

Connie

(Who is an exuberant young woman, bursts forth.) Oh, brother-in-law! Such excitement! That's what's the matter with mother. We ran into a go-cart. Our chauffeur was not to blame. It was the woman's fault. She tried to cross just as we were turning the corner. But we hardly grazed it. Fortunately the baby was not hurt – only spilled. It was ridiculous. *(Catching sight of Hubbard.)* Oh, there you are, Mr. Hubbard. How de do.

(Steps half way to meet him and shakes hands with him.) (Mrs. Starkweather looks around helplessly for a chair, and Chalmers

conducts her to one soothingly.)

Mrs. Starkweather

Oh, it was terrible! The little child might have been killed. And such persons love their babies, I know.

Connie

(To Chalmers.) Has father come? We were to pick him up here. Where's Madge?

Mrs. Starkweather

(Espying Hubbard, faintly.) Oh, there is Mr. Hubbard.

(Hubbard comes to her and shakes hands.) I simply can't get used to these rapid ways of modern life. The motor-car is the invention of the devil. Everything is *too* quick. When I was a girl, we lived sedately, decorously. There was time for meditation and repose. But in this age there is time for nothing. How Anthony keeps his head is more than I can understand. But, then, Anthony is a wonderful man.

Hubbard

I am sure Mr. Starkweather never lost his head in his life.

Chalmers

Unless when he was courting you, mother.

Mrs. Starkweather

(A trifle grimly.) I'm not so sure about that.

Connie

(Imitating a grave, business-like enunciation.) Father probably conferred first with his associates, then turned the affair over for consideration by his corporation lawyers, and, when they

reported no flaws, checked the first spare half hour in his notebook to ask mother if she would have him.

(They laugh.) And looked at his watch at least twice while he was proposing.

Mrs. Starkweather

Anthony was not so busy then as all that.

Hubbard

He hadn't yet taken up the job of running the United States.

Mrs. Starkweather

I'm sure I don't know what he is running, but he is a very busy man – business, politics, and madness; madness, politics, and business.

(She stops breathlessly and glances at tea-table.) Tea. I should like a cup of tea. Connie, I shall stay for a cup of tea, and then, if your father hasn't come, we'll go home. *(To Chalmers.)* Where is Tommy?

Chalmers

Out in the car with Madge.

(Glances at tea-table and consults watch.) She should be back now.

Connie

Mother, you mustn't stay long. I have to dress.

Chalmers

Oh, yes, that dinner.

(Yawns.) I wish I could loaf to-night.

Connie

(Explaining to Hubbard.) The Turkish Charge d'Affaires – I never can remember his name. But he's great fun – a positive joy. He's giving the dinner to the British Ambassador.

Mrs. Starkweather

(Starting forward in her chair and listening intently.) There's Tommy, now.

(Voices of Margaret Chalmers and of Tommy heard from without. Hers is laughingly protesting, while Tommy's is gleefully insistent.) (Margaret and Tommy appear and pause just outside door, holding each other's hands, facing each other, too immersed in each other to be aware of the presence of those inside the room. Margaret and Tommy are in street costume.)

Tommy

(Laughing.)

But mama.

Margaret

(Herself laughing, but shaking her head.) No. Tommy First —

Margaret

No; you must run along to Linda, now, mother's boy. And we'll talk about that some other time.

(Tommy notices for the first time that there are persons in the room. He peeps in around the door and espies Mrs. Starkweather. At the same moment, impulsively, he withdraws his hands and runs in to Mrs. Starkweather.)

Tommy

(Who is evidently fond of his grandmother.) Grandma!

(They embrace and make much of each other.)

(Margaret enters, appropriately greeting the others – a kiss (maybe) to Connie, and a slightly cold handshake to Hubbard.)

Margaret

(To Chalmers.) Now that you're here, Tom, you mustn't run away.

(Greets Mrs. Starkweather.)

Mrs. Starkweather

(Turning Tommy's face to the light and looking at it anxiously.)
A trifle thin, Margaret.

Margaret

On the contrary, mother —

Mrs. Starkweather

(To Chalmers.) Don't you think so, Tom?

Connie

(Aside to Hubbard.) Mother continually worries about his health.

Hubbard

A sturdy youngster, I should say.

Tommy

(To Chalmers.) I'm an Indian, aren't I, daddy?

Chalmers

(Nodding his head emphatically.) And the stoutest-hearted in the tribe.

(Linda appears in doorway, evidently looking for Tommy, and Chalmers notices her.) There's Linda looking for you, young stout

heart.

Margaret

Take Tommy, Linda. Run along, mother's boy.

Tommy

Come along, grandma. I want to show you something.

(He catches Mrs. Starkweather by the hand. Protesting, but highly pleased, she allows him to lead her to the door, where he extends his other hand to Linda. Thus, pausing in doorway, leading a woman by either hand, he looks back at Margaret.)
(Roguishly.) Remember, mama, we're going to scout in a little while.

Margaret

(Going to Tommy, and bending down with her arms around him.) No, Tommy. Mama has to go to that horrid dinner to-night. But to-morrow we'll play.

(Tommy is cast down and looks as if he might pout.) Where is my little Indian now?

Hubbard

Be an Indian, Tommy.

Tommy

(Brightening up.)

All right, mama. To-morrow. – if you can't find time to-day.

(Margaret kisses him.) (Exit Tommy, Mrs. Starkweather, and Linda, Tommy leading them by a hand in each of theirs.)

Chalmers

(Nodding to Hubbard, in low voice to Hubbard and starting to

make exit to right.) That high-ball.

(Hubbard disengages himself from proximity of Connie, and starts to follow.)

Connie

(Reproachfully.) If you run away, I won't stop for tea.

Margaret

Do stop, Tom. Father will be here in a few minutes.

Connie

A regular family party.

Chalmers

All right. We'll be back. We're just going to have a little talk.

(Chalmers and Hubbard make exit to right.) (Margaret puts her arm impulsively around Connie – a sheerly spontaneous act of affection – kisses her, and at same time evinces preparation to leave.)

Margaret

I've got to get my things off. Won't you wait here, dear, in case anybody comes? It's nearly time.

(Starts toward exit to rear, but is stopped by Connie.) Madge.

(Margaret immediately pauses and waits expectantly, smiling, while Connie is hesitant.)

I want to speak to you about something, Madge. You don't mind?

(Margaret, still smiling, shakes her head.) Just a warning. Not that anybody could believe for a moment, there is anything wrong, but —

Margaret

(Dispelling a shadow of irritation that has crossed her face.)

If it concerns Tom, don't tell me, please. You know he does do ridiculous things at times. But I don't let him worry me any more; so don't worry me about him.

(Connie remains silent, and Margaret grows curious.) Well?

Connie

It's not about Tom —

(Pauses.) It's about you.

Margaret

Oh.

Connie

I don't know how to begin.

Margaret

By coming right out with it, the worst of it, all at once, first.

Connie

It isn't serious at all, but — well, mother is worrying about it. You know how old-fashioned she is. And when you consider our position — father's and Tom's, I mean — it doesn't seem just right for you to be seeing so much of such an enemy of theirs. He has abused them dreadfully, you know. And there's that dreadful speech he is going to give to-morrow. You haven't seen the afternoon papers. He has made the most terrible charges against everybody — all of us, our friends, everybody.

Margaret

You mean Mr. Knox, of course. But he wouldn't harm

anybody, Connie, dear.

Connie

(*Bridling,*) Oh, he wouldn't? He as good as publicly called father a thief.

Margaret

When did that happen? I never heard of it.

Connie

Well, he said that the money magnates had grown so unprincipled, sunk so low, that they would steal a mouse from a blind kitten.

Margaret

I don't see what father has to do with that.

Connie

He meant him just the same.

Margaret

You silly goose. He couldn't have meant father. Father? Why, father wouldn't look at anything less than fifty or a hundred millions.

Connie

And you speak to him and make much of him when you meet him places. You talked with him for half an hour at that Dugdale reception. You have him here in your own house – Tom's house – when he's such a bitter enemy of Tom's. (*During the foregoing speech, Anthony Starkweather makes entrance from rear. His face is grave, and he is in a brown study, as if pondering weighty problems. At sight of the two women he pauses and surveys them.*

They are unaware of his presence.)

Margaret

You are wrong, Connie. He is nobody's enemy. He is the truest, cleanest, most right-seeking man I have ever seen.

Connie

(Interrupting.) He is a trouble-maker, a disturber of the public peace, a shallow-pated demagogue —

Margaret

(Reprovingly.)

Now you're quoting somebody — father, I suppose. To think of him being so abused — poor, dear Ali Baba —

Starkweather

(Clearing his throat in advertisement of his presence.) A-hem.

(Margaret and Connie turn around abruptly and discover him.)

Margaret

And Connie Father!

(Both come forward to greet him, Margaret leading.)

Starkweather

(Anticipating, showing the deliberate method of the busy man saving time by eliminating the superfluous.) Fine, thank you.

Quite well in every particular. This Ali Baba? Who is Ali Baba?

(Margaret looks amused reproach at Connie.)

Connie

Mr. Howard Knox.

Starkweather

And why is he called Ali Baba?

Margaret

That is my nickname for him. In the den of thieves, you know. You remember your Arabian Nights.

Starkweather

(Severely.) I have been wanting to speak to you for some time, Margaret, about that man. You know that I have never interfered with your way of life since your marriage, nor with your and Tom's housekeeping arrangements. But this man Knox. I understand that you have even had him here in your house —

Margaret

(Interrupting.) He is very liable to be here this afternoon, any time, now.

(Connie displays irritation at Margaret.)

Starkweather

(Continuing imperturbably.) Your house —you, my daughter, and the wife of Senator Chalmers. As I said, I have not interfered with you since your marriage. But this Knox affair transcends household arrangements. It is of political importance. The man is an enemy to our class, a firebrand. Why do you have him here?

Margaret

Because I like him. Because he is a man I am proud to call "friend." Because I wish there were more men like him, many more men like him, in the world. Because I have ever seen in him nothing but the best and highest. And, besides, it's such good fun to see how one virtuous man can so disconcert you captains of industry and arbiters of destiny. Confess that you are very much

disconcerted, father, right now. He will be here in a few minutes, and you will be more disconcerted. Why? Because it is an affair that transcends family arrangements. And it is your affair, not mine.

Starkweather

This man Knox is a dangerous character – one that I am not pleased to see any of my family take up with. He is not a gentleman.

Margaret

He is a self-made man, if that is what you mean, and he certainly hasn't any money.

Connie

(Interrupting.) He says that money is theft – at least when it is in the hands of a wealthy person.

Starkweather

He is uncouth – ignorant.

Margaret

I happen to know that he is a graduate of the University of Oregon.

Starkweather

(Sneeringly.) A cow college. But that is not what I mean. He is a demagogue, stirring up the wild-beast passions of the people.

Margaret

Surely you would not call his advocacy of that child labor bill and of the conservation of the forest and coal lands stirring up the wild-beast passions of the people?

Starkweather

(*Wearily.*) You don't understand. When I say he is dangerous it is because he threatens all the stabilities, because he threatens us who have made this country and upon whom this country and its prosperity rest.

(*Connie, scenting trouble, walks across stage away from them.*)

Margaret

The captains of industry – the banking magnates and the mergers?

Starkweather

Call it so. Call it what you will. Without us the country falls into the hands of scoundrels like that man Knox and smashes to ruin.

Margaret

(*Reprovingly.*) Not a scoundrel, father.

Starkweather

He is a sentimental dreamer, a hair-brained enthusiast. It is the foolish utterances of men like him that place the bomb and the knife in the hand of the assassin.

Margaret

He is at least a good man, even if he does disagree with you on political and industrial problems. And heaven knows that good men are rare enough these days.

Starkweather

I impugn neither his morality nor his motives – only his rationality. Really, Margaret, there is nothing inherently vicious

about him. I grant that. And it is precisely that which makes him such a power for evil.

Margaret

When I think of all the misery and pain which he is trying to remedy – I can see in him only a power for good. He is not working for himself but for the many. That is why he has no money. You have heaven alone knows how many millions – you don't; you have worked for yourself.

Starkweather

I, too, work for the many. I give work to the many. I make life possible for the many. I am only too keenly alive to the responsibilities of my stewardship of wealth.

Margaret

But what of the child laborers working at the machines? Is that necessary, O steward of wealth? How my heart has ached for them! How I have longed to do something for them – to change conditions so that it will no longer be necessary for the children to toil, to have the playtime of childhood stolen away from them. Theft – that is what it is, the playtime of the children coined into profits. That is why I like Howard Knox. He calls theft theft. He is trying to do something for those children. What are you trying to do for them?

Starkweather

Sentiment. Sentiment. The question is too vast and complicated, and you cannot understand. No woman can understand. That is why you run to sentiment. That is what is the

matter with this Knox – sentiment. You can't run a government of ninety millions of people on sentiment, nor on abstract ideas of justice and right.

Margaret

But if you eliminate justice and right, what remains?

Starkweather

This is a practical world, and it must be managed by practical men – by thinkers, not by near-thinkers whose heads are addled with the half-digested ideas of the French Encyclopedists and Revolutionists of a century and a half ago.

(Margaret shows signs of impatience – she is not particularly perturbed by this passage-at-arms with her father, and is anxious to get off her street things.)

Don't forget, my daughter, that your father knows the books as well as any cow college graduate from Oregon. I, too, in my student days, dabbled in theories of universal happiness and righteousness, saw my vision and dreamed my dream. I did not know then the weakness, and frailty, and grossness of the human clay. But I grew out of that and into a man. Some men never grow out of that stage. That is what is the trouble with Knox. He is still a dreamer, and a dangerous one.

(He pauses a moment, and then his thin lips shut grimly. But he has just about shot his bolt.)

Margaret

What do you mean?

Starkweather

He has let himself in to give a speech to-morrow, wherein he will be called upon to deliver the proofs of all the lurid charges he has made against the Administration – against us, the stewards of wealth if you please. He will be unable to deliver the proofs, and the nation will laugh. And that will be the political end of Mr. Ali Baba and his dream.

Margaret

It is a beautiful dream. Were there more like him the dream would come true. After all, it is the dreamers that build and that never die. Perhaps you will find that he is not so easily to be destroyed. But I can't stay and argue with you, father. I simply must go and get my things off.

(To Connie.) You'll have to receive, dear. I'll be right back.

(Julius Rutland enters. Margaret advances to meet him, shaking his hand.) You must forgive me for deserting for a moment.

Rutland

(Greeting the others.) A family council, I see.

Margaret

(On way to exit at rear.) No; a discussion on dreams and dreamers. I leave you to bear my part.

Rutland

(Bowing.) With pleasure. The dreamers are the true architects. But – a – what is the dream and who is the dreamer?

Margaret

(Pausing in the doorway.) The dream of social justice, of fair play and a square deal to everybody. The dreamer – Mr. Knox.

(Rutland is so patently irritated, that Margaret lingers in the doorway to enjoy.)

Rutland

That man! He has insulted and reviled the Church – my calling. He —

Connie

(Interrupting.) He said the churchmen stole from God. I remember he once said there had been only one true Christian and that He died on the Cross.

Margaret

He quoted that from Nietzsche.

Starkweather

(To Rutland, in quiet glee.) He had you there.

Rutland

(In composed fury.) Nietzsche is a blasphemer, sir. Any man who reads Nietzsche or quotes Nietzsche is a blasphemer. It augurs ill for the future of America when such pernicious literature has the vogue it has.

Margaret

(Interrupting, laughing.) I leave the quarrel in your hands, sir knight. Remember – the dreamer and the dream. *(Margaret makes exit.)*

Rutland

(Shaking his head.) I cannot understand what is coming over the present generation. Take your daughter, for instance. Ten years ago she was an earnest, sincere lieutenant of mine in all

our little charities.

Starkweather

Has she given charity up?

Connie

It's settlement work, now, and kindergartens.

Rutland

(Ominously.) It's writers like Nietzsche, and men who read him, like Knox, who are responsible.

(Senator Dowsett and Mrs. Dowsett enter from rear.)

(Connie advances to greet them. Rutland knows Mrs. Dowsett, and Connie introduces him to Senator Dowsett.)

(In the meantime, not bothering to greet anybody, evincing his own will and way, Starkweather goes across to right front, selects one of several chairs, seats himself, pulls a thin note-book from inside coat pocket, and proceeds to immerse himself in contents of same.) (Dowsett and Rutland pair and stroll to left rear and seat themselves, while Connie and Mrs. Dowsett seat themselves at tea-table to left front. Connie rings the bell for Servant.)

Mrs. Dowsett

(Glancing significantly at Starkweather, and speaking in a low voice.) That's your father, isn't it? I have so wanted to meet him.

Connie

(Softly.) You know he's peculiar. He is liable to ignore everybody here this afternoon, and get up and go away abruptly, without saying good-bye.

Mrs. Dowsett

(*Sympathetically.*) Yes, I know, a man of such large affairs. He must have so much on his mind. He is a wonderful man – my husband says the greatest in contemporary history – more powerful than a dozen presidents, the King of England, and the Kaiser, all rolled into one.

(*Servant enters with tea urn and accessories, and Connie proceeds to serve tea, all accompanied by appropriate patter – "Two lumps?" "One, please." "Lemon;" etc.)*

(*Rutland and Dowsett come forward to table for their tea, where they remain.*)

(*Connie, glancing apprehensively across at her father and debating a moment, prepares a cup for him and a small plate with crackers, and hands them to Dowsett, who likewise betrays apprehensiveness.*)

Connie

Take it to father, please, senator.

(*Note: – Throughout the rest of this act, Starkweather is like a being apart, a king sitting on his throne. He divides the tea function with Margaret. Men come up to him and speak with him. He sends for men. They come and go at his bidding. The whole attitude, perhaps unconsciously on his part, is that wherever he may be he is master. This attitude is accepted by all the others; forsooth, he is indeed a great man and master. The only one who is not really afraid of him is Margaret; yet she gives in to him in so far as she lets him do as he pleases at her afternoon tea.*) (*Dowsett carries the cup of tea and small plate across stage to Starkweather.*

Starkweather does not notice him at first.)

Connie

(Who has been watching.) Tea, father, won't you have a cup of tea?

(Through the following scene between Starkweather and Dowsett, the latter holds cup of tea and crackers, helplessly, at a disadvantage. At the same time Rutland is served with tea and remains at the table, talking with the two women.)

Starkweather

(Looking first at Connie, then peering into cup of tea. He grunts refusal, and for the first time looks up into the other man's face. He immediately closes note-book down on finger to keep the place.)
Oh, it's you. Dowsett.

(Painfully endeavoring to be at ease.) A pleasure, Mr. Starkweather, an entirely unexpected pleasure to meet you here. I was not aware you frequented frivolous gatherings of this nature.

Starkweather

(Abruptly and peremptorily.) Why didn't you come when you were sent for this morning?

Dowsett

I was sick – I was in bed.

Starkweather

That is no excuse, sir. When you are sent for you are to come. Understand? That bill was reported back. Why was it reported back? You told Dobleman you would attend to it.

Dowsett

It was a slip up. Such things will happen.

Starkweather

What was the matter with that committee? Have you no influence with the Senate crowd? If not, say so, and I'll get some one who has.

Dowsett

(Angrily.) I refuse to be treated in this manner, Mr. Starkweather. I have some self-respect —

(Starkweather grunts incredulously.) Some decency —

(Starkweather grunts.) A position of prominence in my state. You forget, sir, that in our state organization I occupy no mean place.

Starkweather

(Cutting him off so sharply that Dowsett drops cup and saucer.) Don't you show your teeth to me. I can make you or break you. That state organization of yours belongs to me.

(Dowsett starts — he is learning something new. To hide his feelings, he stoops to pick up cup and saucer.) Let it alone! I am talking to you.

(Dowsett straightens up to attention with alacrity.) (Connie, who has witnessed, rings for Servant.) I bought that state organization, and paid for it. You are one of the chattels that came along with the machine. You were made senator to obey my orders. Understand? Do you understand?

Dowsett

(Beaten.) I — I understand.

Starkweather

That bill is to be killed.

Dowsett

Yes, sir.

Starkweather

Quietly, no headlines about it.

(Dowsett nods.) Now you can go.

(Dowsett proceeds rather limply across to join group at tea-table.) (Chalmers and Hubbard enter from right, laughing about something. At sight of Starkweather they immediately become sober.) (No hands are shaken. Starkweather barely acknowledges Hubbard's greeting.)

Starkweather

Tom, I want to see you.

(Hubbard takes his cue, and proceeds across to tea-table.)

(Enter Servant. Connie directs him to remove broken cup and saucer. While this is being done, Starkweather remains silent. He consults note-book, and Chalmers stands, not quite at ease, waiting the other's will. At the same time, patter at tea-table. Hubbard, greeting others and accepting or declining cup of tea.) (Servant makes exit).

Starkweather

(Closing finger on book and looking sharply at Chalmers.)

Tom, this affair of yours in New York must come to an end. Understand?

Chalmers

(*Starting.*) Hubbard has been talking.

Starkweather

No, it is not Hubbard. I have the reports from other sources.

Chalmers

It is a harmless affair.

Starkweather

I happen to know better. I have the whole record. If you wish, I can give you every detail, every meeting. I know. There is no discussion whatever. I want no more of it.

Chalmers

I never dreamed for a moment that I was – er – indiscreet.

Starkweather

Never forget that every indiscretion of a man in your position is indiscreet. We have a duty, a great and solemn duty to perform. Upon our shoulders rest the destinies of ninety million people. If we fail in our duty, they go down to destruction. Ignorant demagogues are working on the beast-passions of the people. If they have their way, they are lost, the country is lost, civilization is lost. We want no more Dark Ages.

Chalmers

Really, I never thought it was as serious as all that.

Starkweather

(*Shrugging shoulders and lifting eyebrows.*) After all, why should you? You are only a cog in the machine. I, and the several men grouped with me, am the machine. You are a useful cog – too useful to lose —

Chalmers

Lose? – Me?

Starkweather

I have but to raise my hand, any time – do you understand? – any time, and you are lost. You control your state. Very well. But never forget that to-morrow, if I wished, I could buy your whole machine out from under you. I know you cannot change yourself, but, for the sake of the big issues at stake, you must be careful, exceedingly careful. We are compelled to work with weak tools. You are a good liver, a flesh-pot man. You drink too much. Your heart is weak. – Oh, I have the report of your doctor. Nevertheless, don't make a fool of yourself, nor of us. Besides, do not forget that your wife is my daughter. She is a strong woman, a credit to both of us. Be careful that you are not a discredit to her.

Chalmers

All right, I'll be careful. But while we are – er – on this subject, there's something I'd like to speak to you about.

(A pause, in which Starkweather waits non-committally.) It's this man Knox, and Madge. He comes to the house. They are as thick as thieves.

Starkweather

Yes?

Chalmers

(Hastily.) Oh, not a breath of suspicion or anything of that sort, I assure you. But it doesn't strike me as exactly appropriate that your daughter and my wife should be friendly with this

fire-eating anarchist who is always attacking us and all that we represent.

Starkweather

I started to speak with her on that subject, but was interrupted.
(*Puckers brow and thinks.*) You are her husband. Why don't you take her in hand yourself?

(*Enters Mrs. Starkweather from rear, looking about, bowing, then locating Starkweather and proceeding toward him.*)

Chalmers

What can I do? She has a will of her own – the same sort of a will that you have. Besides, I think she knows about my – about some of my – indiscretions.

Starkweather

(*Slyly.*)

Harmless indiscretions?

(*Chalmers is about to reply, but observes Mrs. Starkweather approaching.*)

Mrs. Starkweather

(*Speaks in a peevish, complaining voice, and during her harrangue Starkweather immerses himself in notebook.*) Oh, there you are, Anthony. Talking politics, I suppose. Well, as soon as I get a cup of tea we must go. Tommy is not looking as well as I could wish. Margaret loves him, but she does not take the right care of him. I don't know what the world is coming to when mothers do not know how to rear their offspring. There is Margaret, with her slum kindergartens, taking care of everybody

else's children but her own. If she only performed her church duties as eagerly! Mr. Rutland is displeased with her. I shall give her a talking to – only, you'd better do it, Anthony. Somehow, I have never counted much with Margaret. She is as set in doing what she pleases as you are. In my time children paid respect to their parents. This is what comes of speed. There is no time for anything. And now I must get my tea and run. Connie has to dress for that dinner.

(Mrs. Starkweather crosses to table, greets others characteristically and is served with tea by Connie.)

(Chalmers waits respectfully on Starkweather.)

Starkweather

(Looking up from note-book.) That will do, Tom.

(Chalmers is just starting across to join others, when voices are heard outside rear entrance, and Margaret enters with Dolores Ortega, wife of the Peruvian Minister, and Matsu Sakari, Secretary of Japanese Legation – both of whom she has met as they were entering the house.)

(Chalmers changes his course, and meets the above advancing group. He knows Dolores Ortega, whom he greets, and is introduced to Sakari.)

(Margaret passes on among guests, greeting them, etc. Then she displaces Connie at tea-table and proceeds to dispense tea to the newcomers.)

(Groups slowly form and seat themselves about stage as follows: Chalmers and Dolores Ortega; Rutland, Dowsett, Mrs.

Starkweather; Connie, Mr. Dowsett, and Hubbard.)

(Chalmers carries tea to Dolores Ortega.)

(Sakari has been lingering by table, waiting for tea and pattering with Margaret, Chalmers, etc.)

Margaret

(Handing cup to Sakari.) I am very timid in offering you this, for I am sure you must be appalled by our barbarous methods of making tea.

Sakari

(Bowing.) It is true, your American tea, and the tea of the English, are quite radically different from the tea in my country. But one learns, you know. I served my apprenticeship to American tea long years ago, when I was at Yale. It was perplexing, I assure you – at first, only at first I really believe that I am beginning to have a – how shall I call it? – a tolerance for tea in your fashion.

Margaret

You are very kind in overlooking our shortcomings.

Sakari

(Bowing.) On the contrary, I am unaware, always unaware, of any shortcomings of this marvelous country of yours.

Margaret

(Laughing.) You are incorrigibly gracious, Mr. Sakari. *(Knox appears at threshold of rear entrance and pauses irresolutely for a moment)*

Sakari

(Noticing Knox, and looking about him to select which group he will join.) If I may be allowed, I shall now retire and consume this – tea.

(Joins group composed of Connie, Mrs. Dowsett, and Hubbard.)

(Knox comes forward to Margaret, betraying a certain awkwardness due to lack of experience in such social functions. He greets Margaret and those in the group nearest her.)

Knox

(To Margaret.) I don't know why I come here. I do not belong. All the ways are strange.

Margaret

(Lightly, at the same time preparing his tea.) The same Ali Baba – once again in the den of the forty thieves. But your watch and pocket-book are safe here, really they are.

(Knox makes a gesture of dissent at her facetiousness.) Now don't be serious. You should relax sometimes. You live too tensely.

(Looking at Starkweather.) There's the arch-anarch over there, the dragon you are trying to slay.

(Knox looks at Starkweather and is plainly perplexed.) The man who handles all the life insurance funds, who controls more strings of banks and trust companies than all the Rothschilds a hundred times over – the merger of iron and steel and coal and shipping and all the other things – the man who blocks your child labor bill and all the rest of the remedial legislation you advocate.

In short, my father.

Knox

(*Looking intently at Starkweather.*) I should have recognized him from his photographs. But why do you say such things?

Margaret

Because they are true.

(*He remains silent.*) Now, aren't they? (*She laughs.*) Oh, you don't need to answer. You know the truth, the whole bitter truth. This *is* a den of thieves. There is Mr. Hubbard over there, for instance, the trusty journalist lieutenant of the corporations.

Knox

(*With an expression of disgust.*) I know him. It was he that wrote the Standard Oil side of the story, after having abused Standard Oil for years in the pseudo-muck-raking magazines. He made them come up to his price, that was all. He's the star writer on *Cartwright's*, now, since that magazine changed its policy and became subsidizedly reactionary. I know him – a thoroughly dishonest man. Truly am I Ali Baba, and truly I wonder why I am here.

Margaret

You are here, sir, because I like you to come.

Knox

We do have much in common, you and I.

Margaret

The future.

Knox

(Gravely, looking at her with shining eyes.) I sometimes fear for more immediate reasons than that.

(Margaret looks at him in alarm, and at the same time betrays pleasure in what he has said.) For you.

Margaret

(Hastily.) Don't look at me that way. Your eyes are flashing. Some one might see and misunderstand.

Knox

(In confusion, awkwardly.) I was unaware that I – that I was looking at you – in any way that —

Margaret

I'll tell you why you are here. Because I sent for you.

Knox

(With signs of ardor.) I would come whenever you sent for me, and go wherever you might send me.

Margaret

(Reprovingly.)

Please, please – It was about that speech. I have been hearing about it from everybody – rumblings and mutterings and dire prophecies. I know how busy you are, and I ought not to have asked you to come. But there was no other way, and I was so anxious.

Knox

(Pleased.) It seems so strange that you, being what you are, affiliated as you are, should be interested in the welfare of the common people.

Margaret

(*Judicially.*) I do seem like a traitor in my own camp. But as father said a while ago, I, too, have dreamed my dream. I did it as a girl – Plato's *Republic*, Moore's *Utopia*– I was steeped in all the dreams of the social dreamers.

(*During all that follows of her speech, Knox is keenly interested, his eyes glisten and he hangs on her words.*)

And I dreamed that I, too, might do something to bring on the era of universal justice and fair play. In my heart I dedicated myself to the cause of humanity. I made Lincoln my hero-he still is. But I was only a girl, and where was I to find this cause? – how to work for it? I was shut in by a thousand restrictions, hedged in by a thousand conventions. Everybody laughed at me when I expressed the thoughts that burned in me. What could I do? I was only a woman. I had neither vote nor right of utterance. I must remain silent. I must do nothing. Men, in their lordly wisdom, did all. They voted, orated, governed. The place for women was in the home, taking care of some lordly man who did all these lordly things.

Knox

You understand, then, why I am for equal suffrage.

Margaret

But I learned – or thought I learned. Power, I discovered early. My father had power. He was a magnate – I believe that is the correct phrase. Power was what I needed. But how? I was a woman. Again I dreamed my dream – a modified dream. Only

by marriage could I win to power. And there you have the clew to me and what I am and have become. I met the man who was to become my husband. He was clean and strong and an athlete, an outdoor man, a wealthy man and a rising politician. Father told me that if I married him he would make him the power of his state, make him governor, send him to the United States Senate. And there you have it all.

Knox

Yes? – Yes?

Margaret

I married. I found that there were greater forces at work than I had ever dreamed of. They took my husband away from me and molded him into the political lieutenant of my father. And I was without power. I could do nothing for the cause. I was beaten. Then it was that I got a new vision. The future belonged to the children. There I could play my woman's part. I was a mother. Very well. I could do no better than to bring into the world a healthy son and bring him up to manhood healthy and wholesome, clean, noble, and alive. Did I do my part well, through him the results would be achieved. Through him would the work of the world be done in making the world healthier and happier for all the human creatures in it. I played the mother's part. That is why I left the pitiful little charities of the church and devoted myself to settlement work and tenement house reform, established my kindergartens, and worked for the little men and women who come so blindly and to whom the future belongs to

make or mar.

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