

**GALSWORTHY**  
**JOHN**

THE PIGEON: A  
FANTASY IN  
THREE ACTS

John Galsworthy

**The Pigeon: A Fantasy in Three Acts**

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# **John Galsworthy**

## **The Pigeon: A Fantasy in Three Acts**

### **PERSONS OF THE PLAY**

CHRISTOPHER WELLWYN, an artist

ANN, his daughter

GUINEVERE MEGAN, a flower-seller

RORY MEGAN, her husband

FERRAND, an alien

TIMSON, once a cabman

EDWARD BERTLEY, a Canon

ALFRED CALWAY, a Professor

SIR THOMAS HOXTON, a Justice of the Peace

Also a police constable, three humble-men, and some curious persons

**The action passes in Wellwyn's Studio, and the street outside**

ACT I. Christmas Eve.

ACT II. New Year's Day.

ACT III. The First

## ACT I

It is the night of Christmas Eve, the SCENE is a Studio, flush with the street, having a skylight darkened by a fall of snow. There is no one in the room, the walls of which are whitewashed, above a floor of bare dark boards. A fire is cheerfully burning. On a model's platform stands an easel and canvas. There are busts and pictures; a screen, a little stool, two arm. chairs, and a long old-fashioned settle under the window. A door in one wall leads to the house, a door in the opposite wall to the model's dressing-room, and the street door is in the centre of the wall between. On a low table a Russian samovar is hissing, and beside it on a tray stands a teapot, with glasses, lemon, sugar, and a decanter of rum. Through a huge uncurtained window close to the street door the snowy lamplit street can be seen, and beyond it the river and a night of stars. The sound of a latchkey turned in the lock of the street door, and ANN WELLWYN enters, a girl of seventeen, with hair tied in a ribbon and covered by a scarf. Leaving the door open, she turns up the electric light and goes to the fire. She throws off her scarf and long red cloak. She is dressed in a high evening frock of some soft white material. Her movements are quick and substantial. Her face, full of no nonsense, is decided and sincere, with deep-set eyes, and a capable, well-shaped forehead. Shredding of her gloves she warms her hands. In the doorway appear the figures of two men. The first is rather short and slight, with a soft short beard, bright soft eyes, and a crumpled face. Under his squash hat his hair is rather plentiful and rather grey. He wears an old brown ulster and woollen gloves, and is puffing at a hand-made cigarette. He is ANN'S father, WELLWYN, the artist. His companion is a well-wrapped clergyman of medium height and stoutish build, with a pleasant, rosy face, rather shining eyes, and rather chubby clean-shaped lips; in appearance, indeed, a grown-up boy. He is the Vicar of the parish – CANON BERTLEY.

BERTLEY. My dear Wellwyn, the whole question of reform is full of difficulty. When you have two men like Professor Calway and Sir Thomas Hoxton taking diametrically opposite points of view, as we've seen to-night, I confess, I —

WELLWYN. Come in, Vicar, and have some grog.

BERTLEY. Not to-night, thanks! Christmas tomorrow! Great temptation, though, this room! Goodnight, Wellwyn; good-night, Ann!

ANN. [Coming from the fire towards the tea-table.] Good-night, Canon Bertley.

[He goes out, and WELLWYN, shutting the door after him, approaches the fire.]

ANN. [Sitting on the little stool, with her back to the fire, and making tea.] Daddy!

WELLWYN. My dear?

ANN. You say you liked Professor Calway's lecture. Is it going to do you any good, that's the question?

WELLWYN. I – I hope so, Ann.

ANN. I took you on purpose. Your charity's getting simply awful. Those two this morning cleared out all my housekeeping money.

WELLWYN. Um! Um! I quite understand your feeling.

ANN. They both had your card, so I couldn't refuse – didn't know what you'd said to them. Why don't you make it a rule never to give your card to anyone except really decent people, and – picture dealers, of course.

WELLWYN. My dear, I have – often.

ANN. Then why don't you keep it? It's a frightful habit. You are naughty, Daddy. One of these days you'll get yourself into most fearful complications.

WELLWYN. My dear, when they – when they look at you?

ANN. You know the house wants all sorts of things. Why do you speak to them at all?

WELLWYN. I don't – they speak to me.

[He takes off his ulster and hangs it over the back of an arm-chair.]

ANN. They see you coming. Anybody can see you coming, Daddy. That's why you ought to be so careful. I shall make you wear a hard hat. Those squashy hats of yours are hopelessly inefficient.

WELLWYN. [Gazing at his hat.] Calway wears one.

ANN. As if anyone would beg of Professor Calway.

WELLWYN. Well-perhaps not. You know, Ann, I admire that fellow. Wonderful power of-of-theory! How a man can be so absolutely tidy in his mind! It's most exciting.

ANN. Has any one begged of you to-day?

WELLWYN. [Doubtfully.] No – no.

ANN. [After a long, severe look.] Will you have rum in your tea?

WELLWYN. [Crestfallen.] Yes, my dear – a good deal.

ANN. [Pouring out the rum, and handing him the glass.] Well, who was it?

WELLWYN. He didn't beg of me. [Losing himself in recollection.] Interesting old creature, Ann – real type. Old cabman.

ANN. Where?

WELLWYN. Just on the Embankment.

ANN. Of course! Daddy, you know the Embankment ones are always rotters.

WELLWYN. Yes, my dear; but this wasn't.

ANN. Did you give him your card?

WELLWYN. I – I – don't

ANN. Did you, Daddy?

WELLWYN. I'm rather afraid I may have!

ANN. May have! It's simply immoral.

WELLWYN. Well, the old fellow was so awfully human, Ann. Besides, I didn't give him any money – hadn't got any.

ANN. Look here, Daddy! Did you ever ask anybody for anything? You know you never did, you'd starve first. So would anybody decent. Then, why won't you see that people who beg are rotters?

WELLWYN. But, my dear, we're not all the same. They wouldn't do it if it wasn't natural to them. One likes to be friendly. What's the use of being alive if one isn't?

ANN. Daddy, you're hopeless.

WELLWYN. But, look here, Ann, the whole thing's so jolly complicated. According to Calway, we're to give the State all we can spare, to make the undeserving deserving. He's a Professor; he ought to know. But old Hoxton's always dinning it into me that we ought to support private organisations for helping the deserving, and damn the undeserving. Well, that's just the opposite. And he's a J.P. Tremendous experience. And the Vicar seems to be for a little bit of both. Well, what the devil – ? My trouble is, whichever I'm with, he always converts me. [Ruefully.] And there's no fun in any of them.

ANN. [Rising.] Oh! Daddy, you are so – don't you know that you're the despair of all social reformers? [She envelops him.] There's a tear in the left knee of your trousers. You're not to wear them again.

WELLWYN. Am I likely to?

ANN. I shouldn't be a bit surprised if it isn't your only pair. D'you know what I live in terror of?

[WELLWYN gives her a queer and apprehensive look.]

ANN. That you'll take them off some day, and give them away in the street. Have you got any money? [She feels in his coat, and he his trousers – they find nothing.] Do you know that your pockets are one enormous hole?

WELLWYN. No!

ANN. Spiritually.

WELLWYN. Oh! Ah! H'm!

ANN. [Severely.] Now, look here, Daddy! [She takes him by his lapels.] Don't imagine that it isn't the most disgusting luxury on your part to go on giving away things as you do! You know what you really are, I suppose – a sickly sentimentalist!

WELLWYN. [Breaking away from her, disturbed.] It isn't sentiment. It's simply that they seem to me so – so – jolly. If I'm to give up feeling sort of – nice in here [he touches his chest] about people – it doesn't matter who they are – then I don't know what I'm to do. I shall have to sit with my head in a bag.

ANN. I think you ought to.

WELLWYN. I suppose they see I like them – then they tell me things. After that, of course you can't help doing what you can.

ANN. Well, if you will love them up!

WELLWYN. My dear, I don't want to. It isn't them especially – why, I feel it even with old Calway sometimes. It's only Providence that he doesn't want anything of me – except to make me like himself – confound him!

ANN. [Moving towards the door into the house – impressively.] What you don't see is that other people aren't a bit like you.

WELLWYN. Well, thank God!

ANN. It's so old-fashioned too! I'm going to bed – I just leave you to your conscience.

WELLWYN. Oh!

ANN. [Opening the door-severely.] Good-night – [with a certain weakening] you old – Daddy!

[She jumps at him, gives him a hug, and goes out.] [WELLWYN stands perfectly still. He first gazes up at the skylight, then down at the floor. Slowly he begins to shake his head, and mutter, as he moves towards the fire.]

WELLWYN. Bad lot... Low type – no backbone, no stability!

[There comes a fluttering knock on the outer door. As the sound slowly enters his consciousness, he begins to wince, as though he knew, but would not admit its significance. Then he sits down, covering his ears. The knocking does not cease. WELLWYN drops first one, then both hands, rises, and begins to sidle towards the door. The knocking becomes louder.]

WELLWYN. Ah dear! Tt! Tt! Tt!

[After a look in the direction of ANN's disappearance, he opens the street door a very little way. By the light of the lamp there can be seen a young girl in dark clothes, huddled in a shawl to which the snow is clinging. She has on her arm a basket covered with a bit of sacking.]

WELLWYN. I can't, you know; it's impossible.

[The girl says nothing, but looks at him with dark eyes.]

WELLWYN. [Wincing.] Let's see – I don't know you – do I?

[The girl, speaking in a soft, hoarse voice, with a faint accent of reproach: "Mrs. Megan – you give me this – " She holds out a dirty visiting card.]

WELLWYN. [Recoiling from the card.] Oh! Did I? Ah! When?

MRS. MEGAN. You 'ad some vi'lets off of me larst spring. You give me 'arf a crown.

[A smile tries to visit her face.]

WELLWYN. [Looking stealthily round.] Ah! Well, come in – just for a minute – it's very cold – and tell us what it is.

[She comes in stolidly, a Sphinx-like figure, with her pretty tragic little face.]

WELLWYN. I don't remember you. [Looking closer.] Yes, I do. Only – you weren't the same-were you?

MRS. MEGAN. [Dully.] I seen trouble since.

WELLWYN. Trouble! Have some tea?

[He looks anxiously at the door into the house, then goes quickly to the table, and pours out a glass of tea, putting rum into it.]

WELLWYN. [Handing her the tea.] Keeps the cold out! Drink it off!

[MRS. MEGAN drinks it of, chokes a little, and almost immediately seems to get a size larger. WELLWYN watches her with his head held on one side, and a smile broadening on his face.]

WELLWYN. Cure for all evils, um?

MRS. MEGAN. It warms you. [She smiles.]

WELLWYN. [Smiling back, and catching himself out.] Well! You know, I oughtn't.

MRS. MEGAN. [Conscious of the disruption of his personality, and withdrawing into her tragic abyss.] I wouldn't 'a come, but you told me if I wanted an 'and —

WELLWYN. [Gradually losing himself in his own nature.] Let me see – corner of Flight Street, wasn't it?

MRS. MEGAN. [With faint eagerness.] Yes, sir, an' I told you about me vi'lets – it was a luvly spring-day.

WELLWYN. Beautiful! Beautiful! Birds singing, and the trees, &c.! We had quite a talk. You had a baby with you.

MRS. MEGAN. Yes. I got married since then.

WELLWYN. Oh! Ah! Yes! [Cheerfully.] And how's the baby?

MRS. MEGAN. [Turning to stone.] I lost her.

WELLWYN. Oh! poor – Um!

MRS. MEGAN. [Impassive.] You said something abaht makin' a picture of me. [With faint eagerness.] So I thought I might come, in case you'd forgotten.

WELLWYN. [Looking at, her intently.] Things going badly?

MRS. MEGAN. [Stripping the sacking off her basket.] I keep 'em covered up, but the cold gets to 'em. Thruppence – that's all I've took.

WELLWYN. Ho! Tt! Tt! [He looks into the basket.] Christmas, too!

MRS. MEGAN. They're dead.

WELLWYN. [Drawing in his breath.] Got a good husband?

MRS. MEGAN. He plays cards.

WELLWYN. Oh, Lord! And what are you doing out – with a cold like that? [He taps his chest.]

MRS. MEGAN. We was sold up this morning – he's gone off with 'is mates. Haven't took enough yet for a night's lodgin'.

WELLWYN. [Correcting a spasmodic dive into his pockets.] But who buys flowers at this time of night?

[MRS. MEGAN looks at him, and faintly smiles.]

WELLWYN. [Rumpling his hair.] Saints above us! Here! Come to the fire!

[She follows him to the fire. He shuts the street door.]

WELLWYN. Are your feet wet? [She nods.] Well, sit down here, and take them off. That's right.

[She sits on the stool. And after a slow look up at him, which has in it a deeper knowledge than belongs of right to her years, begins taking off her shoes and stockings. WELLWYN goes to the door into the house, opens it, and listens with a sort of stealthy casualness. He returns whistling, but not out loud. The girl has finished taking off her stockings, and turned her bare toes to the flames. She shuffles them back under her skirt.]

WELLWYN. How old are you, my child?

MRS. MEGAN. Nineteen, come Candlemas.

WELLWYN. And what's your name?

MRS. MEGAN. Guinevere.

WELLWYN. What? Welsh?

MRS. MEGAN. Yes – from Battersea.

WELLWYN. And your husband?

MRS. MEGAN. No. Irish, 'e is. Notting Dale, 'e comes from.

WELLWYN. Roman Catholic?

MRS. MEGAN. Yes. My 'usband's an atheist as well.

WELLWYN. I see. [Abstractedly.] How jolly! And how old is he – this young man of yours?

MRS. MEGAN. 'E'll be twenty soon.

WELLWYN. Babes in the wood! Does he treat you badly?

MRS. MEGAN. No.

WELLWYN. Nor drink?

MRS. MEGAN. No. He's not a bad one. Only he gets playin' cards then 'e'll fly the kite.

WELLWYN. I see. And when he's not flying it, what does he do?

MRS. MEGAN. [Touching her basket.] Same as me. Other jobs tires 'im.

WELLWYN. That's very nice! [He checks himself.] Well, what am I to do with you?

MRS. MEGAN. Of course, I could get me night's lodging if I like to do – the same as some of them.

WELLWYN. No! no! Never, my child! Never!

MRS. MEGAN. It's easy that way.

WELLWYN. Heavens! But your husband! Um?

MRS. MEGAN. [With stoical vindictiveness.] He's after one I know of.

WELLWYN. Tt! What a pickle!

MRS. MEGAN. I'll 'ave to walk about the streets.

WELLWYN. [To himself.] Now how can I?

[MRS. MEGAN looks up and smiles at him, as if she had already discovered that he is peculiar.]

WELLWYN. You see, the fact is, I mustn't give you anything – because – well, for one thing I haven't got it. There are other reasons, but that's the – real one. But, now, there's a little room where my models dress. I wonder if you could sleep there. Come, and see.

[The Girl gets up lingeringly, loth to leave the warmth. She takes up her wet stockings.]

MRS. MEGAN. Shall I put them on again?

WELLWYN. No, no; there's a nice warm pair of slippers. [Seeing the steam rising from her.] Why, you're wet all over. Here, wait a little!

[He crosses to the door into the house, and after stealthy listening, steps through. The Girl, like a cat, steals back to the warmth of the fire. WELLWYN returns with a candle, a canary-coloured bath gown, and two blankets.]

WELLWYN. Now then! [He precedes her towards the door of the model's room.] Hsssh! [He opens the door and holds up the candle to show her the room.] Will it do? There's a couch. You'll find some washing things. Make yourself quite at home. See!

[The Girl, perfectly dumb, passes through with her basket – and her shoes and stockings. WELLWYN hands her the candle, blankets, and bath gown.]

WELLWYN. Have a good sleep, child! Forget that you're alive! [He closes the door, mournfully.] Done it again! [He goes to the table, cuts a large slice of cake, knocks on the door, and hands it in.] Chow-chow! [Then, as he walks away, he sights the opposite door.] Well – damn it, what could I have done? Not a farthing on me! [He goes to the street door to shut it, but first opens it wide to confirm himself in his hospitality.] Night like this!

[A sputter of snow is blown in his face. A voice says: "Monsieur, pardon!" WELLWYN recoils spasmodically. A figure moves from the lamp-post to the doorway. He is seen to be young and to have ragged clothes. He speaks again: "You do not remember me, Monsieur? My name is Ferrand – it was in Paris, in the Champs-Elysees – by the fountain... When you came to the door, Monsieur – I am not made of iron... Tenez, here is your card I have never lost it." He holds out to WELLWYN an old and dirty wing card. As inch by inch he has advanced into the doorway, the light from within falls on him, a tall gaunt young pagan with fair hair and reddish golden stubble of beard, a long ironical nose a little to one side, and large, grey, rather prominent eyes. There is a certain grace in his figure and movements; his clothes are nearly dropping off him.]

WELLWYN. [Yielding to a pleasant memory.] Ah! yes. By the fountain. I was sitting there, and you came and ate a roll, and drank the water.

FERRAND. [With faint eagerness.] My breakfast. I was in poverty – verree bad off. You gave me ten francs. I thought I had a little the right [WELLWYN makes a movement of disconcertion] seeing you said that if I came to England —

WELLWYN. Um! And so you've come?

FERRAND. It was time that I consolidated my fortunes, Monsieur.

WELLWYN. And you – have —

[He stops embarrassed.]

FERRAND. [Shrugging his ragged shoulders.] One is not yet Rothschild.

WELLWYN. [Sympathetically.] No. [Yielding to memory.] We talked philosophy.

FERRAND. I have not yet changed my opinion. We other vagabonds, we are exploited by the bourgeois. This is always my idea, Monsieur.

WELLWYN. Yes – not quite the general view, perhaps! Well – [Heartily.] Come in! Very glad to see you again.

FERRAND. [Brushing his arms over his eyes.] Pardon, Monsieur – your goodness – I am a little weak. [He opens his coat, and shows a belt drawn very tight over his ragged shirt.] I tighten him one hole for each meal, during two days now. That gives you courage.

WELLWYN. [With cooing sounds, pouring out tea, and adding rum.] Have some of this. It'll buck you up. [He watches the young man drink.]

FERRAND. [Becoming a size larger.] Sometimes I think that I will never succeed to dominate my life, Monsieur – though I have no vices, except that I guard always the aspiration to achieve success. But I will not roll myself under the machine of existence to gain a nothing every day. I must find with what to fly a little.

WELLWYN. [Delicately.] Yes; yes – I remember, you found it difficult to stay long in any particular – yes.

FERRAND. [Proudly.] In one little corner? No – Monsieur – never! That is not in my character. I must see life.

WELLWYN. Quite, quite! Have some cake?

[He cuts cake.]

FERRAND. In your country they say you cannot eat the cake and have it. But one must always try, Monsieur; one must never be content. [Refusing the cake.] 'Grand merci', but for the moment I have no stomach – I have lost my stomach now for two days. If I could smoke, Monsieur! [He makes the gesture of smoking.]

WELLWYN. Rather! [Handing his tobacco pouch.] Roll yourself one.

FERRAND. [Rapidly rolling a cigarette.] If I had not found you, Monsieur – I would have been a little hole in the river to-night – I was so discouraged. [He inhales and puffs a long luxurious whiff of smoke. Very bitterly.] Life! [He disperses the puff of smoke with his finger, and stares before him.] And to think that in a few minutes HE will be born! Monsieur! [He gazes intently at WELLWYN.] The world would reproach you for your goodness to me.

WELLWYN. [Looking uneasily at the door into the house.] You think so? Ah!

FERRAND. Monsieur, if HE himself were on earth now, there would be a little heap of gentlemen writing to the journals every day to call Him sloppee sentimentalist! And what is verree funny, these gentlemen they would all be most strong Christians. [He regards WELLWYN deeply.] But that will not trouble you, Monsieur; I saw well from the first that you are no Christian. You have so kind a face.

WELLWYN. Oh! Indeed!

FERRAND. You have not enough the Pharisee in your character. You do not judge, and you are judged.

[He stretches his limbs as if in pain.]

WELLWYN. Are you in pain?

FERRAND. I 'ave a little the rheumatism.

WELLWYN. Wet through, of course! [Glancing towards the house.] Wait a bit! I wonder if you'd like these trousers; they've – er – they're not quite —

[He passes through the door into the house. FERRAND stands at the fire, with his limbs spread as it were to embrace it, smoking with abandonment. WELLWYN returns stealthily, dressed in a Jaeger dressing-gown, and bearing a pair of drawers, his trousers, a pair of slippers, and a sweater.]

WELLWYN. [Speaking in a low voice, for the door is still open.] Can you make these do for the moment?

FERRAND. 'Je vous remercie', Monsieur. [Pointing to the screen.] May I retire?

WELLWYN. Yes, yes.

[FERRAND goes behind the screen. WELLWYN closes the door into the house, then goes to the window to draw the curtains. He suddenly recoils and stands petrified with doubt.]

WELLWYN. Good Lord!

[There is the sound of tapping on glass. Against the window-pane is pressed the face of a man. WELLWYN motions to him to go away. He does not go, but continues tapping. WELLWYN opens the door. There enters a square old man, with a red, pendulous jawed, shaking face under a snow besprinkled bowler hat. He is holding out a visiting card with tremulous hand.]

WELLWYN. Who's that? Who are you?

TIMSON. [In a thick, hoarse, shaking voice.] 'Appy to see you, sir; we 'ad a talk this morning. Timson – I give you me name. You invited of me, if ye remember.

WELLWYN. It's a little late, really.

TIMSON. Well, ye see, I never expected to 'ave to call on yer. I was 'itched up all right when I spoke to yer this mornin', but bein' Christmas, things 'ave took a turn with me to-day. [He speaks with increasing thickness.] I'm reg'lar disgusted – not got the price of a bed abaht me. Thought you wouldn't like me to be delicate – not at my age.

WELLWYN. [With a mechanical and distracted dive of his hands into his pockets.] The fact is, it so happens I haven't a copper on me.

TIMSON. [Evidently taking this for professional refusal.] Wouldn't arsk you if I could 'elp it. 'Ad to do with 'orses all me life. It's this 'ere cold I'm frightened of. I'm afraid I'll go to sleep.

WELLWYN. Well, really, I —

TIMSON. To be froze to death – I mean – it's awkward.

WELLWYN. [Puzzled and unhappy.] Well – come in a moment, and let's – think it out. Have some tea!

[He pours out the remains of the tea, and finding there is not very much, adds rum rather liberally. TIMSON, who walks a little wide at the knees, steadying his gait, has followed.]

TIMSON. [Receiving the drink.] Yer 'ealth. 'Ere's – soberiety! [He applies the drink to his lips with shaking hand. Agreeably surprised.] Blimey! Thish yer tea's foreign, ain't it?

FERRAND. [Reappearing from behind the screen in his new clothes of which the trousers stop too soon.] With a needle, Monsieur, I would soon have with what to make face against the world.

WELLWYN. Too short! Ah!

[He goes to the dais on which stands ANN's workbasket, and takes from it a needle and cotton.] [While he is so engaged FERRAND is sizing up old TIMSON, as one dog will another. The old man, glass in hand, seems to have lapsed into coma.]

FERRAND. [Indicating TIMSON] Monsieur!

[He makes the gesture of one drinking, and shakes his head.]

WELLWYN. [Handing him the needle and cotton.] Um! Afraid so!

[They approach TIMSON, who takes no notice.]

FERRAND. [Gently.] It is an old cabby, is it not, Monsieur? 'Ceux sont tous des buveurs'.

## **Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.**

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