

GALSWORTHY
JOHN

THE SILVER
BOX

John Galsworthy

The Silver Box

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John Galsworthy

The Silver Box: A Comedy in Three Acts

PERSONS OF THE PLAY

JOHN BARTHWICK, M.P., a wealthy Liberal

MRS. BARTHWICK, his wife

JACK BARTHWICK, their son

ROPER, their solicitor

MRS. JONES, their charwoman

MARLOW, their manservant

WHEELER, their maidservant

JONES, the stranger within their gates

MRS. SEDDON, a landlady

SNOW, a detective

A POLICE MAGISTRATE

AN UNKNOWN LADY, from beyond

TWO LITTLE GIRLS, homeless

LIVENS, their father

A RELIEVING OFFICER

A MAGISTRATE'S CLERK

AN USHER POLICEMEN, CLERKS, AND OTHERS

TIME: The present. The action of the first two Acts takes place on Easter Tuesday; the action of the third on Easter Wednesday week.

ACT I

SCENE I

The curtain rises on the BARTHWICK'S dining-room, large, modern, and well furnished; the window curtains drawn. Electric light is burning. On the large round dining-table is set out a tray with whisky, a syphon, and a silver cigarette-box. It is past midnight. A fumbling is heard outside the door. It is opened suddenly; JACK BARTHWICK seems to fall into the room. He stands holding by the door knob, staring before him, with a beatific smile. He is in evening dress and opera hat, and carries in his hand a sky-blue velvet lady's reticule. His boyish face is freshly coloured and clean-shaven. An overcoat is hanging on his arm.

JACK. Hello! I've got home all ri – [Defiantly.] Who says I sh'd never 've opened th' door without 'sistance. [He staggers in, fumbling with the reticule. A lady's handkerchief and purse of crimson silk fall out.] Serve her joll' well right – everything droppin' out. Th' cat. I 've scored her off – I 've got her bag. [He swings the reticule.] Serves her joly' well right. [He takes a cigarette out of the silver box and puts it in his mouth.] Never gave tha' fellow anything! [He hunts through all his pockets and pulls a shilling out; it drops and rolls away. He looks for it.] Beastly shilling! [He looks again.] Base ingratitude! Absolutely nothing. [He laughs.] Mus' tell him I've got absolutely nothing.

[He lurches through the door and down a corridor, and presently returns, followed by JONES, who is advanced in liquor. JONES, about thirty years of age, has hollow cheeks, black circles round his eyes, and rusty clothes: He looks as though he might be unemployed, and enters in a hang-dog manner.]

JACK. Sh! sh! sh! Don't you make a noise, whatever you do. Shu' the door, an' have a drink. [Very solemnly.] You helped me to open the door – I 've got nothin, for you. This is my house. My father's name's Barthwick; he's Member of Parliament – Liberal Member of Parliament: I've told you that before. Have a drink! [He pours out whisky and drinks it up.] I'm not drunk [Subsiding on a sofa.] Tha's all right. Wha's your name? My name's Barthwick, so's my father's; I'm a Liberal too – wha're you?

JONES. [In a thick, sardonic voice.] I'm a bloomin' Conservative. My name's Jones! My wife works 'ere; she's the char; she works 'ere.

JACK. Jones? [He laughs.] There's 'nother Jones at College with me. I'm not a Socialist myself; I'm a Liberal – there's ve – lill difference, because of the principles of the Lib – Liberal Party. We're all equal before the law – tha's rot, tha's silly. [Laughs.] Wha' was I about to say? Give me some whisky.

[JONES gives him the whisky he desires, together with a squirt of syphon.]

Wha' I was goin' tell you was – I 've had a row with her. [He waves the reticule.] Have a drink, Jonessh 'd never have got in without you – tha 's why I 'm giving you a drink. Don' care who knows I've scored her off. Th' cat! [He throws his feet up on the sofa.] Don' you make a noise, whatever you do. You pour out a drink – you make yourself good long, long drink – you take cigarette – you take anything you like. Sh'd never have got in without you. [Closing his eyes.] You're a Tory – you're a Tory Socialist. I'm Liberal myself – have a drink – I 'm an excel'nt chap.

[His head drops back. He, smiling, falls asleep, and JONES stands looking at him; then, snatching up JACK's glass, he drinks it off. He picks the reticule from off JACK'S shirt-front, holds it to the light, and smells at it.]

JONES. Been on the tiles and brought 'ome some of yer cat's fur. [He stuffs it into JACK's breast pocket.]

JACK. [Murmuring.] I 've scored you off! You cat!

[JONES looks around him furtively; he pours out whisky and drinks it. From the silver box he takes a cigarette, puffs at it, and drinks more whisky. There is no sobriety left in him.]

JONES. Fat lot o' things they've got 'ere! [He sees the crimson purse lying on the floor.] More cat's fur. Puss, puss! [He fingers it, drops it on the tray, and looks at JACK.] Calf! Fat calf! [He sees his own presentment in a mirror. Lifting his hands, with fingers spread, he stares at it; then looks again at JACK, clenching his fist as if to batter in his sleeping, smiling face. Suddenly he tilts the rest o f the whisky into the glass and drinks it. With cunning glee he takes the silver box and purse and pockets them.] I 'll score you off too, that 's wot I 'll do!

[He gives a little snarling laugh and lurches to the door. His shoulder rubs against the switch; the light goes out. There is a sound as of a closing outer door.]
The curtain falls.

The curtain rises again at once.

SCENE II

In the BARTHWICK'S dining-room. JACK is still asleep; the morning light is coming through the curtains. The time is half-past eight. WHEELER, brisk person enters with a dust-pan, and MRS. JONES more slowly with a scuttle.

WHEELER. [Drawing the curtains.] That precious husband of yours was round for you after you'd gone yesterday, Mrs. Jones. Wanted your money for drink, I suppose. He hangs about the corner here half the time. I saw him outside the "Goat and Bells" when I went to the post last night. If I were you I would n't live with him. I would n't live with a man that raised his hand to me. I wouldn't put up with it. Why don't you take your children and leave him? If you put up with 'im it'll only make him worse. I never can see why, because a man's married you, he should knock you about.

MRS. JONES. [Slim, dark-eyed, and dark-haired; oval-faced, and with a smooth, soft, even voice; her manner patient, her way of talking quite impersonal; she wears a blue linen dress, and boots with holes.] It was nearly two last night before he come home, and he wasn't himself. He made me get up, and he knocked me about; he didn't seem to know what he was saying or doing. Of course I would leave him, but I'm really afraid of what he'd do to me. He 's such a violent man when he's not himself.

WHEELER. Why don't you get him locked up? You'll never have any peace until you get him locked up. If I were you I'd go to the police court tomorrow. That's what I would do.

MRS. JONES. Of course I ought to go, because he does treat me so badly when he's not himself. But you see, Bettina, he has a very hard time – he 's been out of work two months, and it preys upon his mind. When he's in work he behaves himself much better. It's when he's out of work that he's so violent.

WHEELER. Well, if you won't take any steps you 'll never get rid of him.

MRS. JONES. Of course it's very wearing to me; I don't get my sleep at nights. And it 's not as if I were getting help from him, because I have to do for the children and all of us. And he throws such dreadful things up at me, talks of my having men to follow me about. Such a thing never happens;

no man ever speaks to me. And of course, it's just the other way. It's what he does that's wrong and makes me so unhappy. And then he 's always threatenin' to cut my throat if I leave him. It's all the drink, and things preying on his mind; he 's not a bad man really. Sometimes he'll speak quite kind to me, but I've stood so much from him, I don't feel it in me to speak kind back, but just keep myself to myself. And he's all right with the children too, except when he's not himself.

WHEELER. You mean when he's drunk, the beauty.

MRS. JONES. Yes. [Without change of voice] There's the young gentleman asleep on the sofa.

[They both look silently at Jack.]

MRS. JONES. [At last, in her soft voice.] He does n't look quite himself.

WHEELER. He's a young limb, that's what he is. It 's my belief he was tipsy last night, like your husband. It 's another kind of bein' out of work that sets him to drink. I 'll go and tell Marlow. This is his job.

[She goes.] [Mrs. Jones, upon her knees, begins a gentle sweeping.]

JACK. [Waking.] Who's there? What is it?

MRS. JONES. It's me, sir, Mrs. Jones.

JACK. [Sitting up and looking round.] Where is it – what – what time is it?

MRS. JONES. It's getting on for nine o'clock, sir.

JACK. For nine! Why – what! [Rising, and loosening his tongue; putting hands to his head, and staring hard at Mrs. Jones.] Look here, you, Mrs. – Mrs. Jones – don't you say you caught me asleep here.

MRS. JONES. No, sir, of course I won't sir.

JACK. It's quite an accident; I don't know how it happened. I must have forgotten to go to bed. It's a queer thing. I 've got a most beastly headache. Mind you don't say anything, Mrs. Jones.

[Goes out and passes MARLOW in the doorway. MARLOW is young and quiet; he is cleanshaven, and his hair is brushed high from his forehead in a coxcomb. Incidentally a butler, he is first a man. He looks at MRS. JONES, and smiles a private smile.]

MARLOW. Not the first time, and won't be the last. Looked a bit dicky, eh, Mrs. Jones?

MRS. JONES. He did n't look quite himself. Of course I did n't take notice.

MARLOW. You're used to them. How's your old man?

MRS. JONES. [Softly as throughout.] Well, he was very bad last night; he did n't seem to know what he was about. He was very late, and he was most abusive. But now, of course, he's asleep.

MARLOW. That's his way of finding a job, eh?

MRS. JONES. As a rule, Mr. Marlow, he goes out early every morning looking for work, and sometimes he comes in fit to drop – and of course I can't say he does n't try to get it, because he does. Trade's very bad. [She stands quite still, her fan and brush before her, at the beginning and the end of long vistas of experience, traversing them with her impersonal eye.] But he's not a good husband to me – last night he hit me, and he was so dreadfully abusive.

MARLOW. Bank 'oliday, eh! He 's too fond of the "Goat and Bells," that's what's the matter with him. I see him at the corner late every night. He hangs about.

MRS. JONES. He gets to feeling very low walking about all day after work, and being refused so often, and then when he gets a drop in him it goes to his head. But he shouldn't treat his wife as he treats me. Sometimes I 've had to go and walk about at night, when he wouldn't let me stay in the room; but he's sorry for it afterwards. And he hangs about after me, he waits for me in the street; and I don't think he ought to, because I 've always been a good wife to him. And I tell him Mrs. Barthwick wouldn't like him coming about the place. But that only makes him angry, and he says dreadful things about the gentry. Of course it was through me that he first lost his place, through

his not treating me right; and that's made him bitter against the gentry. He had a very good place as groom in the country; but it made such a stir, because of course he did n't treat me right.

MARLOW. Got the sack?

MRS. JONES. Yes; his employer said he couldn't keep him, because there was a great deal of talk; and he said it was such a bad example. But it's very important for me to keep my work here; I have the three children, and I don't want him to come about after me in the streets, and make a disturbance as he sometimes does.

MARLOW. [Holding up the empty decanter.] Not a drain! Next time he hits you get a witness and go down to the court —

MRS. JONES. Yes, I think I've made up my mind. I think I ought to.

MARLOW. That's right. Where's the ciga — ?

[He searches for the silver box; he looks at MRS. JONES, who is sweeping on her hands and knees; he checks himself and stands reflecting. From the tray he picks two half-smoked cigarettes, and reads the name on them.]

Nestor — where the deuce — ?

[With a meditative air he looks again at MRS. JONES, and, taking up JACK'S overcoat, he searches in the pockets. WHEELER, with a tray of breakfast things, comes in.]

MARLOW. [Aside to WHEELER.] Have you seen the cigarette-box?

WHEELER. No.

MARLOW. Well, it's gone. I put it on the tray last night. And he's been smoking. [Showing her the ends of cigarettes.] It's not in these pockets. He can't have taken it upstairs this morning! Have a good look in his room when he comes down. Who's been in here?

WHEELER. Only me and Mrs. Jones.

MRS. JONES. I've finished here; shall I do the drawing-room now?

WHEELER. [Looking at her doubtfully.] Have you seen — Better do the boudwower first.

[MRS. JONES goes out with pan and brush. MARLOW and WHEELER look each other in the face.]

MARLOW. It'll turn up.

WHEELER. [Hesitating.] You don't think she — [Nodding at the door.]

MARLOW. [Stoutly.] I don't — I never believes anything of anybody.

WHEELER. But the master'll have to be told.

MARLOW. You wait a bit, and see if it don't turn up. Suspicion's no business of ours. I set my mind against it.

The curtain falls.

The curtain rises again at once.

SCENE III

BARTHWICK and MRS. BARTHWICK are seated at the breakfast table. He is a man between fifty and sixty; quietly important, with a bald forehead, and pince-nez, and the "Times" in his hand. She is a lady of nearly fifty, well dressed, with greyish hair, good features, and a decided manner. They face each other.

BARTHWICK. [From behind his paper.] The Labour man has got in at the by-election for Barnside, my dear.

MRS. BARTHWICK. Another Labour? I can't think what on earth the country is about.

BARTHWICK. I predicted it. It's not a matter of vast importance.

MRS. BARTHWICK. Not? How can you take it so calmly, John? To me it's simply outrageous. And there you sit, you Liberals, and pretend to encourage these people!

BARTHWICK. [Frowning.] The representation of all parties is necessary for any proper reform, for any proper social policy.

MRS. BARTHWICK. I've no patience with your talk of reform – all that nonsense about social policy. We know perfectly well what it is they want; they want things for themselves. Those Socialists and Labour men are an absolutely selfish set of people. They have no sense of patriotism, like the upper classes; they simply want what we've got.

BARTHWICK. Want what we've got! [He stares into space.] My dear, what are you talking about? [With a contortion.] I 'm no alarmist.

MRS. BARTHWICK. Cream? Quite uneducated men! Wait until they begin to tax our investments. I 'm convinced that when they once get a chance they will tax everything – they 've no feeling for the country. You Liberals and Conservatives, you 're all alike; you don't see an inch before your noses. You've no imagination, not a scrap of imagination between you. You ought to join hands and nip it in the bud.

BARTHWICK. You 're talking nonsense! How is it possible for Liberals and Conservatives to join hands, as you call it? That shows how absurd it is for women – Why, the very essence of a Liberal is to trust in the people!

MRS. BARTHWICK. Now, John, eat your breakfast. As if there were any real difference between you and the Conservatives. All the upper classes have the same interests to protect, and the same principles. [Calmly.] Oh! you're sitting upon a volcano, John.

BARTHWICK. What!

MRS. BARTHWICK. I read a letter in the paper yesterday. I forget the man's name, but it made the whole thing perfectly clear. You don't look things in the face.

BARTHWICK. Indeed! [Heavily.] I am a Liberal! Drop the subject, please!

MRS. BARTHWICK. Toast? I quite agree with what this man says: Education is simply ruining the lower classes. It unsettles them, and that's the worst thing for us all. I see an enormous difference in the manner of servants.

BARTHWICK, [With suspicious emphasis.] I welcome any change that will lead to something better. [He opens a letter.] H'm! This is that affair of Master Jack's again. "High Street, Oxford. Sir, We have received Mr. John Barthwick, Senior's, draft for forty pounds!" Oh! the letter's to him! "We now enclose the cheque you cashed with us, which, as we stated in our previous letter, was not met on presentation at your bank. We are, Sir, yours obediently, Moss and Sons, Tailors." H 'm! [Staring at the cheque.] A pretty business altogether! The boy might have been prosecuted.

MRS. BARTHWICK. Come, John, you know Jack did n't mean anything; he only thought he was overdrawing. I still think his bank ought to have cashed that cheque. They must know your position.

BARTHWICK. [Replacing in the envelope the letter and the cheque.] Much good that would have done him in a court of law.

[He stops as JACK comes in, fastening his waistcoat and staunching a razor cut upon his chin.]

JACK. [Sitting down between them, and speaking with an artificial joviality.] Sorry I 'm late. [He looks lugubriously at the dishes.] Tea, please, mother. Any letters for me? [BARTHWICK hands the letter to him.] But look here, I say, this has been opened! I do wish you would n't —

BARTHWICK. [Touching the envelope.] I suppose I 'm entitled to this name.

JACK. [Sulkily.] Well, I can't help having your name, father! [He reads the letter, and mutters.] Brutes!

BARTHWICK. [Eyeing him.] You don't deserve to be so well out of that.

JACK. Haven't you ragged me enough, dad?

MRS. BARTHWICK. Yes, John, let Jack have his breakfast.

BARTHWICK. If you hadn't had me to come to, where would you have been? It's the merest accident – suppose you had been the son of a poor man or a clerk. Obtaining money with a cheque you knew your bank could not meet. It might have ruined you for life. I can't see what's to become of you if these are your principles. I never did anything of the sort myself.

JACK. I expect you always had lots of money. If you've got plenty of money, of course —

BARTHWICK. On the contrary, I had not your advantages. My father kept me very short of money.

JACK. How much had you, dad?

BARTHWICK. It's not material. The question is, do you feel the gravity of what you did?

JACK. I don't know about the gravity. Of course, I 'm very sorry if you think it was wrong. Have n't I said so! I should never have done it at all if I had n't been so jolly hard up.

BARTHWICK. How much of that forty pounds have you got left, Jack?

JACK. [Hesitating.] I don't know – not much.

BARTHWICK. How much?

JACK. [Desperately.] I have n't got any.

BARTHWICK. What?

JACK. I know I 've got the most beastly headache.

[He leans his head on his hand.]

MRS. BARTHWICK. Headache? My dear boy! Can't you eat any breakfast?

JACK. [Drawing in his breath.] Too jolly bad!

MRS. BARTHWICK. I'm so sorry. Come with me; dear; I'll give you something that will take it away at once.

[They leave the room; and BARTHWICK, tearing up the letter, goes to the fireplace and puts the pieces in the fire. While he is doing this MARLOW comes in, and looking round him, is about quietly to withdraw.]

BARTHWICK. What's that? What d 'you want?

MARLOW. I was looking for Mr. John, sir.

BARTHWICK. What d' you want Mr. John for?

MARLOW. [With hesitation.] I thought I should find him here, sir.

BARTHWICK. [Suspiciously.] Yes, but what do you want him for?

MARLOW. [Offhandedly.] There's a lady called – asked to speak to him for a minute, sir.

BARTHWICK. A lady, at this time in the morning. What sort of a lady?

MARLOW. [Without expression in his voice.] I can't tell, sir; no particular sort. She might be after charity. She might be a Sister of Mercy, I should think, sir.

BARTHWICK. Is she dressed like one?

MARLOW. No, sir, she's in plain clothes, sir.

BARTHWICK. Did n't she say what she wanted?

MARLOW. No sir.

BARTHWICK. Where did you leave her?

MARLOW. In the hall, sir.

BARTHWICK. In the hall? How do you know she's not a thief – not got designs on the house?

MARLOW. No, sir, I don't fancy so, sir.

BARTHWICK. Well, show her in here; I'll see her myself.

[MARLOW goes out with a private gesture of dismay. He soon returns, ushering in a young pale lady with dark eyes and pretty figure, in a modish, black, but rather shabby dress, a black and white trimmed hat with a bunch of Parma violets wrongly placed, and fuzzy-spotted veil. At the Sight of MR. BARTHWICK she exhibits every sign of nervousness. MARLOW goes out.]

UNKNOWN LADY. Oh! but – I beg pardon there's some mistake – I [She turns to fly.]

BARTHWICK. Whom did you want to see, madam?

UNKNOWN. [Stopping and looking back.] It was Mr. John Barthwick I wanted to see.

BARTHWICK. I am John Barthwick, madam. What can I have the pleasure of doing for you?

UNKNOWN. Oh! I – I don't [She drops her eyes. BARTHWICK scrutinises her, and purses his lips.]

BARTHWICK. It was my son, perhaps, you wished to see?

UNKNOWN. [Quickly.] Yes, of course, it's your son.

BARTHWICK. May I ask whom I have the pleasure of speaking to?

UNKNOWN. [Appeal and hardiness upon her face.] My name is – oh! it does n't matter – I don't want to make any fuss. I just want to see your son for a minute. [Boldly.] In fact, I must see him.

BARTHWICK. [Controlling his uneasiness.] My son is not very well. If necessary, no doubt I could attend to the matter; be so kind as to let me know —

UNKNOWN. Oh! but I must see him – I 've come on purpose – [She bursts out nervously.] I don't want to make any fuss, but the fact is, last – last night your son took away – he took away my [She stops.]

BARTHWICK. [Severely.] Yes, madam, what?

UNKNOWN. He took away my – my reticule.

BARTHWICK. Your reti – ?

UNKNOWN. I don't care about the reticule; it's not that I want – I 'm sure I don't want to make any fuss – [her face is quivering] – but – but – all my money was in it!

BARTHWICK. In what – in what?

UNKNOWN. In my purse, in the reticule. It was a crimson silk purse. Really, I wouldn't have come – I don't want to make any fuss. But I must get my money back – mustn't I?

BARTHWICK. Do you tell me that my son – ?

UNKNOWN. Oh! well, you see, he was n't quite I mean he was

[She smiles mesmerically.]

BARTHWICK. I beg your pardon.

UNKNOWN. [Stamping her foot.] Oh! don't you see – tipsy! We had a quarrel.

BARTHWICK. [Scandalised.] How? Where?

UNKNOWN. [Defiantly.] At my place. We'd had supper at the – and your son —

BARTHWICK. [Pressing the bell.] May I ask how you knew this house? Did he give you his name and address?

UNKNOWN. [Glancing sidelong.] I got it out of his overcoat.

BARTHWICK. [Sardonically.] Oh! you got it out of his overcoat. And may I ask if my son will know you by daylight?

UNKNOWN. Know me? I should jolly – I mean, of course he will!

[MARLOW comes in.]

BARTHWICK. Ask Mr. John to come down.

[MARLOW goes out, and BARTHWICK walks uneasily about.]

And how long have you enjoyed his acquaintanceship?

UNKNOWN. Only since – only since Good Friday.

BARTHWICK. I am at a loss – I repeat I am at a —

[He glances at this unknown lady, who stands with eyes cast down, twisting her hands And suddenly Jack appears. He stops on seeing who is here, and the unknown lady hysterically giggles. There is a silence.]

BARTHWICK. [Portentously.] This young – er – lady says that last night – I think you said last night madam – you took away —

UNKNOWN. [Impulsively.] My reticule, and all my money was in a crimson silk purse.

JACK. Reticule. [Looking round for any chance to get away.] I don't know anything about it.

BARTHWICK. [Sharply.] Come, do you deny seeing this young lady last night?

JACK. Deny? No, of course. [Whispering.] Why did you give me away like this? What on earth did you come here for?

UNKNOWN. [Tearfully.] I'm sure I didn't want to – it's not likely, is it? You snatched it out of my hand – you know you did – and the purse had all my money in it. I did n't follow you last night because I did n't want to make a fuss and it was so late, and you were so —

BARTHWICK. Come, sir, don't turn your back on me – explain!

JACK. [Desperately.] I don't remember anything about it. [In a low voice to his friend.] Why on earth could n't you have written?

UNKNOWN. [Sullenly.] I want it now; I must have, it – I 've got to pay my rent to-day. [She looks at BARTHWICK.] They're only too glad to jump on people who are not – not well off.

JACK. I don't remember anything about it, really. I don't remember anything about last night at all. [He puts his hand up to his head.] It's all – cloudy, and I 've got such a beastly headache.

UNKNOWN. But you took it; you know you did. You said you'd score me off.

JACK. Well, then, it must be here. I remember now – I remember something. Why did I take the beastly thing?

BARTHWICK. Yes, why did you take the beastly – [He turns abruptly to the window.]

UNKNOWN. [With her mesmeric smile.] You were n't quite were you?

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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