GALSWORTHY JOHN

PLAYS : THIRD SERIES

John Galsworthy

Plays : Third Series

Galsworthy J.

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Содержание

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THE FUGITIVE

A Play in Four Acts

PERSONS OF THE PLAY

GEORGE DEDMOND, a civilian
CLARE, his wife
GENERAL SIR CHARLES DEDMOND, K.C.B., his father.
LADY DEDMOND, his mother
REGINALD HUNTINGDON, Clare's brother
EDWARD FULLARTON, her friend
DOROTHY FULLARTON, her friend
PAYNTER, a manservant
BURNEY, a maid
TWISDEN, a solicitor
HAYWOOD, a tobacconist
MALISE, a writer
MRS. MILER, his caretaker
THE PORTER at his lodgings
A BOY messenger
ARNAUD, a waiter at "The Gascony"
MR. VARLEY, manager of "The Gascony"
TWO LADIES WITH LARGE HATS, A LADY AND GENTLEMAN, A LANGUID LORD, HIS COMPANION, A YOUNG MAN, A BLOND GENTLEMAN, A DARK GENTLEMAN.

ACT I. George Dedmond's Flat. Evening.
ACT II. The rooms of Malise. Morning.
ACT III. SCENE I. The rooms of Malice. Late afternoon.
SCENE II. The rooms of Malise. Early Afternoon.
ACT IV. A small supper room at "The Gascony."

Between Acts I and II three nights elapse.
Between Acts II and Act III, Scene I, three months.
Between Act III, Scene I, and Act III, Scene II, three months.
Between Act III, Scene II, and Act IV, six months.

"With a hey-ho chivy
Hark forrard, hark forrard, tantivy!"

ACT I

The SCENE is the pretty drawing-room of a flat. There are two doors, one open into the hall, the other shut and curtained. Through a large bay window, the curtains of which are not yet drawn, the towers of Westminster can be seen darkening in a summer sunset; a grand piano stands across one corner. The man-servant PAYNTER, clean-shaven and discreet, is arranging two tables for Bridge.

BURNEY, the maid, a girl with one of those flowery Botticellian faces only met with in England, comes in through the curtained door, which she leaves open, disclosing the glimpse of a white wall. PAYNTER looks up at her; she shakes her head, with an expression of concern.

PAYNTER. Where's she gone?

BURNEY. Just walks about, I fancy.

PAYNTER. She and the Governor don't hit it! One of these days she'll flit—you'll see. I like her—she's a lady; but these thoroughbred 'uns—it's their skin and their mouths. They'll go till they drop if they like the job, and if they don't, it's nothing but jib—jib—jib. How was it down there before she married him?

BURNEY. Oh! Quiet, of course.

PAYNTER. Country homes—I know 'em. What's her father, the old Rector, like?

BURNEY. Oh! very steady old man. The mother dead long before I took the place.

PAYNTER. Not a penny, I suppose?

BURNEY. [Shaking her head] No; and seven of them.

PAYNTER. [At sound of the hall door] The Governor!

BURNEY withdraws through the curtained door.

GEORGE DEDMOND enters from the hall. He is in evening dress, opera hat, and overcoat; his face is broad, comely, glossily shaved, but with neat moustaches. His eyes, clear, small, and blue-grey, have little speculation. His hair is well brushed.

GEORGE. [Handing PAYNTER his coat and hat] Look here, Paynter! When I send up from the Club for my dress things, always put in a black waistcoat as well.

PAYNTER. I asked the mistress, sir.

GEORGE. In future—see?

PAYNTER. Yes, sir. [Signing towards the window] Shall I leave the sunset, sir?

But GEORGE has crossed to the curtained door; he opens it and says: "Clare!" Receiving no answer, he goes in. PAYNTER switches up the electric light. His face, turned towards the curtained door, is apprehensive.

GEORGE. [Re-entering] Where's Mrs. Dedmond?

PAYNTER. I hardly know, sir.

GEORGE. Dined in?

PAYNTER. She had a mere nothing at seven, sir.

GEORGE. Has she gone out, since?

PAYNTER. Yes, sir—that is, yes. The—er—mistress was not dressed at all. A little matter of fresh air, I think; sir.

GEORGE. What time did my mother say they'd be here for Bridge?

PAYNTER. Sir Charles and Lady Dedmond were coming at half-past nine; and Captain Huntingdon, too—Mr. and Mrs. Fullarton might be a bit late, sir.

GEORGE. It's that now. Your mistress said nothing?

PAYNTER. Not to me, sir.
GEORGE. Send Burney.
PAYNTER. Very good, sir. [He withdraws.]

GEORGE stares gloomily at the card tables. BURNEY comes in front the hall.

GEORGE. Did your mistress say anything before she went out?
BURNEY. Yes, sir.
GEORGE. Well?
BURNEY. I don't think she meant it, sir.
GEORGE. I don't want to know what you don't think, I want the fact.
BURNEY. Yes, sir. The mistress said: "I hope it'll be a pleasant evening, Burney!"
GEORGE. Oh!—Thanks.
BURNEY. I've put out the mistress's things, sir.
GEORGE. Ah!
BURNEY. Thank you, sir. [She withdraws.]
GEORGE. Damn!

He again goes to the curtained door, and passes through. PAYNTER, coming in from the hall, announces: "General Sir Charles and Lady Dedmond." SIR CHARLES is an upright, well-groomed, grey-moustached, red-faced man of sixty-seven, with a keen eye for molehills, and none at all for mountains. LADY DEDMOND has a firm, thin face, full of capability and decision, not without kindliness; and faintly weathered, as if she had faced many situations in many parts of the world. She is fifty five.

PAYNTER withdraws.
SIR CHARLES. Hullo! Where are they? H'm!
As he speaks, GEORGE re-enters.
LADY DEDMOND. [Kissing her son] Well, George. Where's Clare?
GEORGE. Afraid she's late.
LADY DEDMOND. Are we early?
GEORGE. As a matter of fact, she's not in.
LADY DEDMOND. Oh?
SIR CHARLES. H'm! Not—not had a rumpus?
GEORGE. Not particularly. [With the first real sign of feeling] What I can't stand is being made a fool of before other people. Ordinary friction one can put up with. But that–
SIR CHARLES. Gone out on purpose? What!
LADY DEDMOND. What was the trouble?
GEORGE. I told her this morning you were coming in to Bridge. Appears she'd asked that fellow Malise, for music.
LADY DEDMOND. Without letting you know?
GEORGE. I believe she did tell me.
LADY DEDMOND. But surely–
GEORGE. I don't want to discuss it. There's never anything in particular. We're all anyhow, as you know.
LADY DEDMOND. I see. [She looks shrewdly at her son] My dear, I should be rather careful about him, I think.
SIR CHARLES. Who's that?
LADY DEDMOND. That Mr. Malise.
SIR CHARLES. Oh! That chap!
GEORGE. Clare isn't that sort.

LADY DEDMOND. I know. But she catches up notions very easily. I think it's a great pity you ever came across him.

SIR CHARLES. Where did you pick him up?

GEORGE. Italy—this Spring—some place or other where they couldn't speak English.

SIR CHARLES. Um! That's the worst of travellin'.

LADY DEDMOND. I think you ought to have dropped him. These literary people–[Quietly] From exchanging ideas to something else, isn't very far, George.

SIR CHARLES. We'll make him play Bridge. Do him good, if he's that sort of fellow.

LADY DEDMOND. Is anyone else coming?

GEORGE. Reggie Huntingdon, and the Fullartons.

LADY DEDMOND. [Softly] You know, my dear boy, I've been meaning to speak to you for a long time. It is such a pity you and Clare—What is it?

GEORGE. God knows! I try, and I believe she does.

SIR CHARLES. It's distressin'—for us, you know, my dear fellow— distressin'.

LADY DEDMOND. I know it's been going on for a long time.

GEORGE. Oh! leave it alone, mother.

LADY DEDMOND. But, George, I'm afraid this man has brought it to a point—put ideas into her head.

GEORGE. You can't dislike him more than I do. But there's nothing one can object to.

LADY DEDMOND. Could Reggie Huntingdon do anything, now he's home? Brothers sometimes–

GEORGE. I can't bear my affairs being messed about–

LADY DEDMOND. Well! it would be better for you and Clare to be supposed to be out together, than for her to be out alone. Go quietly into the dining-room and wait for her.

SIR CHARLES. Good! Leave your mother to make up something. She'll do it!

LADY DEDMOND. That may be he. Quick!

[A bell sounds.]

GEORGE goes out into the hall, leaving the door open in his haste. LADY DEDMOND, following, calls "Paynter!" PAYNTER enters.

LADY DEDMOND. Don't say anything about your master and mistress being out. I'll explain.

PAYNTER. The master, my lady?

LADY DEDMOND. Yes, I know. But you needn't say so. Do you understand?

PAYNTER. [In polite dudgeon] Just so, my lady.

[He goes out.]

SIR CHARLES. By Jove! That fellow smells a rat!

LADY DEDMOND. Be careful, Charles!

SIR CHARLES. I should think so.

LADY DEDMOND. I shall simply say they're dining out, and that we're not to wait Bridge for them.

SIR CHARLES. [Listening] He's having a palaver with that man of George's.

PAYNTER, reappearing, announces: "Captain Huntingdon." SIR CHARLES and LADY DEDMOND turn to him with relief.

LADY DEDMOND. Ah! It's you, Reginald!

HUNTINGDON. [A tall, fair soldier, of thirty] How d'you do? How are you, sir? What's the matter with their man?

SHE CHARLES. What!

HUNTINGDON. I was going into the dining-room to get rid of my cigar; and he said: "Not in there, sir. The master's there, but my instructions are to the effect that he's not."

SHE CHARLES. I knew that fellow–

LADY DEDMOND. The fact is, Reginald, Clare's out, and George is waiting for her. It's so important people shouldn't–

HUNTINGDON. Rather!

They draw together, as people do, discussing the misfortunes of members of their families.

LADY DEDMOND. It's getting serious, Reginald. I don't know what's to become of them. You don't think the Rector—you don't think your father would speak to Clare?

HUNTINGDON. Afraid the Governor's hardly well enough. He takes anything of that sort to heart so—especially Clare.

SIR CHARLES. Can't you put in a word yourself?

HUNTINGDON. Don't know where the mischief lies.

SIR CHARLES. I'm sure George doesn't gallop her on the road. Very steady-goin' fellow, old George.

HUNTINGDON. Oh, yes; George is all right, sir.

LADY DEDMOND. They ought to have had children.

HUNTINGDON. Expect they're pretty glad now they haven't. I really don't know what to say, ma'am.

SIR CHARLES. Saving your presence, you know, Reginald, I've often noticed parsons' daughters grow up queer. Get too much morality and rice puddin'.

LADY DEDMOND. [With a clear look] Charles!

SIR CHARLES. What was she like when you were kids?

HUNTINGDON. Oh, all right. Could be rather a little devil, of course, when her monkey was up.

SIR CHARLES. I'm fond of her. Nothing she wants that she hasn't got, is there?

HUNTINGDON. Never heard her say so.

SIR CHARLES. [Dimly] I don't know whether old George is a bit too matter of fact for her. H'm?

[A short silence.]

LADY DEDMOND. There's a Mr. Malise coming here to-night. I forget if you know him.

HUNTINGDON. Yes. Rather a thorough-bred mongrel.

LADY DEDMOND. He's literary. [With hesitation] You—you don't think he—puts—er—ideas into her head?

HUNTINGDON. I asked Greyman, the novelist, about him; seems he's a bit of an Ishmaelite, even among those fellows. Can't see Clare–

LADY DEDMOND. No. Only, the great thing is that she shouldn't be encouraged. Listen!—It is her-coming in. I can hear their voices. Gone to her room. What a blessing that man isn't here yet! [The door bell rings] Tt! There he is, I expect.

SIR CHARLES. What are we goin' to say?

HUNTINGDON. Say they're dining out, and we're not to wait Bridge for them.

SIR CHARLES. Good!

The door is opened, and PAYNTER announces "Mr. Kenneth Malise." MALISE enters. He is a tall man, about thirty-five, with a strongly marked, dark, irregular, ironic face, and eyes which seem to have needles in their pupils. His thick hair is rather untidy, and his dress clothes not too new.

LADY DEDMOND. How do you do? My son and daughter-in-law are so very sorry. They'll be here directly.

[MALISE bows with a queer, curly smile.]

SIR CHARLES. [Shaking hands] How d'you do, sir?
HUNTINGDON. We've met, I think.

He gives MALISE that peculiar smiling stare, which seems to warn the person bowed to of the sort of person he is. MALISE'S eyes sparkle.

LADY DEDMOND. Clare will be so grieved. One of those invitations
MALISE. On the spur of the moment.
SIR CHARLES. You play Bridge, sir?
MALISE. Afraid not!
SIR CHARLES. Don't mean that? Then we shall have to wait for 'em.
LADY DEDMOND. I forget, Mr. Malise—you write, don't you?
MALISE. Such is my weakness.
LADY DEDMOND. Delightful profession.
SIR CHARLES. Doesn't tie you! What!
MALISE. Only by the head.
SIR CHARLES. I'm always thinkin' of writin' my experiences.
MALISE. Indeed!
[There is the sound of a door banged.]
SIR CHARLES. [Hastily] You smoke, Mr. MALISE?
MALISE. Too much.
SIR CHARLES. Ah! Must smoke when you think a lot.
MALISE. Or think when you smoke a lot.
SIR CHARLES. [Genially] Don't know that I find that.
LADY DEDMOND. [With her clear look at him] Charles!

The door is opened. CLARE DEDMOND in a cream-coloured evening frock comes in from the hall, followed by GEORGE. She is rather pale, of middle height, with a beautiful figure, wavy brown hair, full, smiling lips, and large grey mesmeric eyes, one of those women all vibration, iced over with a trained stoicism of voice and manner.

LADY DEDMOND. Well, my dear!
SIR CHARLES. Ah! George. Good dinner?
GEORGE. [Giving his hand to MALISE] How are you? Clare! Mr. MALISE!
CLARE. [Smiling-in a clear voice with the faintest possible lisp] Yes, we met on the door-mat. [Pause.]
SIR CHARLES. Deuce you did! [An awkward pause.]
LADY DEDMOND. [Acidly] Mr. Malise doesn't play Bridge, it appears.
Afraid we shall be rather in the way of music.
SIR CHARLES. What! Aren't we goin' to get a game? [PAYNTER has entered with a tray.]
GEORGE. Paynter! Take that table into the dining room.
PAYNTER. [Putting down the tray on a table behind the door] Yes, sir.
MALISE. Let me give you a hand.

PAYNTER and MALISE carry one of the Bridge tables out, GEORGE making a half-hearted attempt to relieve MALISE.

SIR CHARLES. Very fine sunset!

Quite softly CLARE begins to laugh. All look at her first with surprise, then with offence, then almost with horror. GEORGE is about to go up to her, but HUNTINGDON heads him off.

HUNTINGDON. Bring the tray along, old man.

GEORGE takes up the tray, stops to look at CLARE, then allows HUNTINGDON to shepherd him out.

LADY DEDMOND. [Without looking at CLARE] Well, if we're going to play, Charles? [She jerks his sleeve.]

SIR CHARLES. What? [He marches out.]

LADY DEDMOND. [Meeting MALISE in the doorway] Now you will be able to have your music.

[She follows the GENERAL out]

[CLARE stands perfectly still, with her eyes closed.]

MALISE. Delicious!

CLARE. [In her level, clipped voice] Perfectly beastly of me! I'm so sorry. I simply can't help running amok to-night.

MALISE. Never apologize for being fey. It's much too rare.

CLARE. On the door-mat! And they'd whitewashed me so beautifully! Poor dears! I wonder if I ought–[She looks towards the door.]

MALISE. Don't spoil it!

CLARE. I'd been walking up and down the Embankment for about three hours. One does get desperate sometimes.

MALISE. Thank God for that!

CLARE. Only makes it worse afterwards. It seems so frightful to them, too.

MALISE. [Softly and suddenly, but with a difficulty in finding the right words] Blessed be the respectable! May they dream of—me! And blessed be all men of the world! May they perish of a surfeit of—good form!

CLARE. I like that. Oh, won't there be a row! [With a faint movement of her shoulders] And the usual reconciliation.

MALISE. Mrs. Dedmond, there's a whole world outside yours. Why don't you spread your wings?

CLARE. My dear father's a saint, and he's getting old and frail; and I've got a sister engaged; and three little sisters to whom I'm supposed to set a good example. Then, I've no money, and I can't do anything for a living, except serve in a shop. I shouldn't be free, either; so what's the good? Besides, I oughtn't to have married if I wasn't going to be happy. You see, I'm not a bit misunderstood or ill-treated. It's only–

MALISE. Prison. Break out!

CLARE. [Turning to the window] Did you see the sunset? That white cloud trying to fly up?

[She holds up her bare arms, with a motion of flight.]

MALISE. [Admiring her] Ah-h-h! [Then, as she drops her arms suddenly] Play me something.

CLARE. [Going to the piano] I'm awfully grateful to you. You don't make me feel just an attractive female. I wanted somebody like that. [Letting her hands rest on the notes] All the same, I'm glad not to be ugly.

MALISE. Thank God for beauty!

PAYNTER. [Opening the door] Mr. and Mrs. Fullarton.

MALISE. Who are they?

CLARE. [Rising] She's my chief pal. He was in the Navy.

She goes forward. MRS. FULLERTON is a rather tall woman, with dark hair and a quick eye. He, one of those clean-shaven naval men of good presence who have retired from the sea, but not from their susceptibility.

MRS. FULLARTON. [Kissing CLARE, and taking in both MALISE and her husband's look at CLARE] We've only come for a minute.

CLARE. They're playing Bridge in the dining-room. Mr. Malise doesn't play. Mr. Malise—Mrs. Fullarton, Mr. Fullarton.

[They greet.]

FULLARTON. Most awfully jolly dress, Mrs. Dedmond.

MRS. FULLARTON. Yes, lovely, Clare. [FULLARTON abases eyes which mechanically readjust themselves] We can't stay for Bridge, my dear; I just wanted to see you a minute, that's all. [Seeing HUNTINGDON coming in she speaks in a low voice to her husband] Edward, I want to speak to Clare. How d'you do, Captain Huntingdon?

MALISE. I'll say good-night.

He shakes hands with CLARE, bows to MRS. FULLARTON, and makes his way out. HUNTINGDON and FULLERTON foregather in the doorway.

MRS. FULLARTON. How are things, Clare? [CLARE just moves her shoulders] Have you done what I suggested? Your room?

CLARE. No.

MRS. FULLARTON. Why not?

CLARE. I don't want to torture him. If I strike—I'll go clean. I expect I shall strike.

MRS. FULLARTON. My dear! You'll have the whole world against you.

CLARE. Even you won't back me, Dolly?

MRS. FULLARTON. Of course I'll back you, all that's possible, but I can't invent things.

CLARE. You wouldn't let me come to you for a bit, till I could find my feet?

MRS. FULLARTON, taken aback, cannot refrain from her glance at FULLARTON automatically gazing at CLARE while he talks with HUNTINGDON.

MRS. FULLARTON. Of course—the only thing is that–

CLARE. [With a faint smile] It's all right, Dolly. I'm not coming.

MRS. FULLARTON. Oh! don't do anything desperate, Clare—you are so desperate sometimes. You ought to make terms—not tracks.

CLARE. Haggle? [She shakes her head] What have I got to make terms with? What he still wants is just what I hate giving.

MRS. FULLARTON. But, Clare–

CLARE. No, Dolly; even you don't understand. All day and every day —just as far apart as we can be—and still—Jolly, isn't it? If you've got a soul at all.

MRS. FULLARTON. It's awful, really.

CLARE. I suppose there are lots of women who feel as I do, and go on with it; only, you see, I happen to have something in me that—comes to an end. Can't endure beyond a certain time, ever.

She has taken a flower from her dress, and suddenly tears it to bits. It is the only sign of emotion she has given.

MRS. FULLARTON. [Watching] Look here, my child; this won't do. You must get a rest. Can't Reggie take you with him to India for a bit?

CLARE. [Shaking her head] Reggie lives on his pay.

MRS. FULLARTON. [With one of her quick looks] That was Mr. Malise, then?

FULLARTON. [Coming towards them] I say, Mrs. Dedmond, you wouldn't sing me that little song you sang the other night, [He hums] "If I might be the falling bee and kiss thee all the day"? Remember?

MRS. FULLARTON. "The falling dew," Edward. We simply must go,

Clare. Good-night. [She kisses her.]

FULLARTON. [Taking half-cover between his wife and CLARE] It suits you down to the ground-that dress.

CLARE. Good-night.

HUNTINGDON sees them out. Left alone CLARE clenches her hands, moves swiftly across to the window, and stands looking out.

HUNTINGDON. [Returning] Look here, Clare!

CLARE. Well, Reggie?

HUNTINGDON. This is working up for a mess, old girl. You can't do this kind of thing with impunity. No man'll put up with it. If you've got anything against George, better tell me. [CLARE shakes her head] You ought to know I should stick by you. What is it? Come?

CLARE. Get married, and find out after a year that she's the wrong person; so wrong that you can't exchange a single real thought; that your blood runs cold when she kisses you—then you'll know.

HUNTINGDON. My dear old girl, I don't want to be a brute; but it's a bit difficult to believe in that, except in novels.

CLARE. Yes, incredible, when you haven't tried.

HUNTINGDON. I mean, you—you chose him yourself. No one forced you to marry him.

CLARE. It does seem monstrous, doesn't it?

HUNTINGDON. My dear child, do give us a reason.

CLARE. Look! [She points out at the night and the darkening towers] If George saw that for the first time he'd just say, "Ah, Westminster! Clock Tower! Can you see the time by it?" As if one cared where or what it was—beautiful like that! Apply that to every —every—everything.

HUNTINGDON. [Staring] George may be a bit prosaic. But, my dear old girl, if that's all–

CLARE. It's not all—it's nothing. I can't explain, Reggie—it's not reason, at all; it's—it's like being underground in a damp cell; it's like knowing you'll never get out. Nothing coming—never anything coming again-never anything.

HUNTINGDON. [Moved and puzzled] My dear old thing; you mustn't get into fantods like this. If it's like that, don't think about it.

CLARE. When every day and every night!—Oh! I know it's my fault for having married him, but that doesn't help.

HUNTINGDON. Look here! It's not as if George wasn't quite a decent chap. And it's no use blinking things; you are absolutely dependent on him. At home they've got every bit as much as they can do to keep going.

CLARE. I know.

HUNTINGDON. And you've got to think of the girls. Any trouble would be very beastly for them. And the poor old Governor would feel it awfully.

CLARE. If I didn't know all that, Reggie, I should have gone home long ago.

HUNTINGDON. Well, what's to be done? If my pay would run to it—but it simply won't.

CLARE. Thanks, old boy, of course not.

HUNTINGDON. Can't you try to see George's side of it a bit?

CLARE. I do. Oh! don't let's talk about it.

HUNTINGDON. Well, my child, there's just one thing you won't go sailing near the wind, will you? I mean, there are fellows always on the lookout.

CLARE. "That chap, Malise, you'd better avoid him!" Why?

HUNTINGDON. Well! I don't know him. He may be all right, but he's not our sort. And you're too pretty to go on the tack of the New Woman and that kind of thing—haven't been brought up to it.

CLARE. British home-made summer goods, light and attractive—don't wear long. [At the sound of voices in the hall] They seem 'to be going, Reggie.

[HUNTINGDON looks at her, vexed, unhappy.]

HUNTINGDON. Don't head for trouble, old girl. Take a pull. Bless you! Good-night.

CLARE kisses him, and when he has gone turns away from the door, holding herself in, refusing to give rein to some outburst of emotion. Suddenly she sits down at the untouched Bridge table, leaning her bare elbows on it and her chin on her hands, quite calm. GEORGE is coming in. PAYNTER follows him.

CLARE. Nothing more wanted, thank you, Paynter. You can go home, and the maids can go to bed.

PAYNTER. We are much obliged, ma'am.

CLARE. I ran over a dog, and had to get it seen to.

PAYNTER. Naturally, ma'am!

CLARE. Good-night.

PAYNTER. I couldn't get you a little anything, ma'am?

CLARE. No, thank you.

PAYNTER. No, ma'am. Good-night, ma'am.

[He withdraws.]

GEORGE. You needn't have gone out of your way to tell a lie that wouldn't deceive a guinea-pig. [Going up to her] Pleased with yourself to-night? [CLARE shakes her head] Before that fellow MALISE; as if our own people weren't enough!

CLARE. Is it worth while to rag me? I know I've behaved badly, but

I couldn't help it, really!

GEORGE. Couldn't help behaving like a shop-girl? My God! You were brought up as well as I was.

CLARE. Alas!

GEORGE. To let everybody see that we don't get on—there's only one word for it—Disgusting!

CLARE. I know.

GEORGE. Then why do you do it? I've always kept my end up. Why in heaven's name do you behave in this crazy way?

CLARE. I'm sorry.

GEORGE. [With intense feeling] You like making a fool of me!

CLARE. No—Really! Only—I must break out sometimes.

GEORGE. There are things one does not do.

CLARE. I came in because I was sorry.

GEORGE. And at once began to do it again! It seems to me you delight in rows.

CLARE. You'd miss your—reconciliations.

GEORGE. For God's sake, Clare, drop cynicism!

CLARE. And truth?

GEORGE. You are my wife, I suppose.

CLARE. And they twain shall be one—spirit.

GEORGE. Don't talk wild nonsense!

[There is silence.]

CLARE. [Softly] I don't give satisfaction. Please give me notice!

GEORGE. Pish!

CLARE. Five years, and four of them like this! I'm sure we've served our time. Don't you really think we might get on better together—if I went away?

GEORGE. I've told you I won't stand a separation for no real reason, and have your name bandied about all over London. I have some primitive sense of honour.

CLARE. You mean your name, don't you?

GEORGE. Look here. Did that fellow Malise put all this into your head?

CLARE. No; my own evil nature.

GEORGE. I wish the deuce we'd never met him. Comes of picking up people you know nothing of. I distrust him—and his looks—and his infernal satiric way. He can't even 'dress decently. He's not—good form.

CLARE. [With a touch of rapture] Ah-h!

GEORGE. Why do you let him come? What d'you find interesting in him?

CLARE. A mind.

GEORGE. Deuced funny one! To have a mind—as you call it—it's not necessary to talk about Art and Literature.

CLARE. We don't.

GEORGE. Then what do you talk about—your minds? [CLARE looks at him] Will you answer a straight question? Is he falling in love with you?

CLARE. You had better ask him.

GEORGE. I tell you plainly, as a man of the world, I don't believe in the guide, philosopher and friend business.

CLARE. Thank you.

A silence. CLARE suddenly clasps her hands behind her head.

CLARE. Let me go! You'd be much happier with any other woman.

GEORGE. Clare!

CLARE. I believe—I'm sure I could earn my living. Quite serious.

GEORGE. Are you mad?

CLARE. It has been done.

GEORGE. It will never be done by you—understand that!

CLARE. It really is time we parted. I'd go clean out of your life. I don't want your support unless I'm giving you something for your money.

GEORGE. Once for all, I don't mean to allow you to make fools of us both.

CLARE. But if we are already! Look at us. We go on, and on. We're a spectacle!

GEORGE. That's not my opinion; nor the opinion of anyone, so long as you behave yourself.

CLARE. That is—behave as you think right.

GEORGE. Clare, you're pretty riling.

CLARE. I don't want to be horrid. But I am in earnest this time.

GEORGE. So am I.

[CLARE turns to the curtained door.]

GEORGE. Look here! I'm sorry. God knows I don't want to be a brute. I know you're not happy.

CLARE. And you—are you happy?

GEORGE. I don't say I am. But why can't we be?

CLARE. I see no reason, except that you are you, and I am I.

GEORGE. We can try.

CLARE. I HAVE—haven't you?

GEORGE. We used–

CLARE. I wonder!

GEORGE. You know we did.

CLARE. Too long ago—if ever.

GEORGE [Coming closer] I—still–

CLARE. [Making a barrier of her hand] You know that's only cupboard love.

GEORGE. We've got to face the facts.

CLARE. I thought I was.

GEORGE. The facts are that we're married—for better or worse, and certain things are expected of us. It's suicide for you, and folly for me, in my position, to ignore that. You have all you can reasonably want; and I don't—don't wish for any change. If you could bring anything against me—if I drank, or knocked about town, or expected too much of you. I'm not unreasonable in any way, that I can see.

CLARE. Well, I think we've talked enough.

[She again moves towards the curtained door.]

GEORGE. Look here, Clare; you don't mean you're expecting me to put up with the position of a man who's neither married nor unmarried? That's simple purgatory. You ought to know.

CLARE. Yes. I haven't yet, have I?

GEORGE. Don't go like that! Do you suppose we're the only couple who've found things aren't what they thought, and have to put up with each other and make the best of it.

CLARE. Not by thousands.

GEORGE. Well, why do you imagine they do it?

CLARE. I don't know.

GEORGE. From a common sense of decency.

CLARE. Very!

GEORGE. By Jove! You can be the most maddening thing in all the world! [Taking up a pack of cards, he lets them fall with a long slithering flutter] After behaving as you have this evening, you might try to make some amends, I should think.

CLARE moves her head from side to side, as if in sight of something she could not avoid. He puts his hand on her arm.

CLARE. No, no—no!

GEORGE. [Dropping his hand] Can't you make it up?

CLARE. I don't feel very Christian.

She opens the door, passes through, and closes it behind her. GEORGE steps quickly towards it, stops, and turns back into the room. He goes to the window and stands looking out; shuts it with a bang, and again contemplates the door. Moving forward, he rests his hand on the deserted card table, clutching its edge, and muttering. Then he crosses to the door into the hall and switches off the light. He opens the door to go out, then stands again irresolute in the darkness and heaves a heavy sigh. Suddenly he mutters: "No!" Crosses resolutely back to the curtained door, and opens it. In the gleam of light CLARE is standing, unhooking a necklet.

He goes in, shutting the door behind him with a thud.

CURTAIN

ACT II

The scene is a large, whitewashed, disordered room, whose outer door opens on to a corridor and stairway. Doors on either side lead to other rooms. On the walls are unframed reproductions of fine pictures, secured with tintacks. An old wine-coloured armchair of low and comfortable appearance, near the centre of the room, is surrounded by a litter of manuscripts, books, ink, pens and newspapers, as though some one had already been up to his neck in labour, though by a grandfather's clock it is only eleven. On a smallish table close by, are sheets of paper, cigarette ends, and two claret bottles. There are many books on shelves, and on the floor, an overflowing pile, whereon rests a soft hat, and a black knobby stick. MALISE sits in his armchair, garbed in trousers, dressing-gown, and slippers, unshaved and uncollared, writing. He pauses, smiles, lights a cigarette, and tries the rhythm of the last sentence, holding up a sheet of quarto MS.

MALISE. "Not a word, not a whisper of Liberty from all those excellent frock-coated gentlemen—not a sign, not a grimace. Only the monumental silence of their profound deference before triumphant Tyranny."

While he speaks, a substantial woman, a little over middle-age, in old dark clothes and a black straw hat, enters from the corridor. She goes to a cupboard, brings out from it an apron and a Bissell broom. Her movements are slow and imperturbable, as if she had much time before her. Her face is broad and dark, with Chinese eyebrows.

MALISE. Wait, Mrs. Miller!

MRS. MILER. I'm gettin' be'ind'and, sir.

She comes and stands before him. MALISE writes.

MRS. MILER. There's a man 'angin' about below.

MALISE looks up; seeing that she has roused his attention, she stops. But as soon as he is about to write again, goes on.

MRS. MILER. I see him first yesterday afternoon. I'd just been out to get meself a pennyworth o' soda, an' as I come in I passed 'im on the second floor, lookin' at me with an air of suspicion. I thought to meself at the time, I thought: You're a'andy sort of 'ang-dog man.

MALISE. Well?

MRS. MILER. Well-peekin' down through the balusters, I see 'im lookin' at a photograft. That's a funny place, I thinks, to look at pictures—it's so dark there, ye 'ave to use yer eyesight. So I giv' a scrape with me 'eel [She illustrates] an' he pops it in his pocket, and puts up 'is 'and to knock at number three. I goes down an' I says: "You know there's no one lives there, don't yer?" "Ah!" 'e says with an air of innercence, "I wants the name of Smithers." "Oh!" I says, "try round the corner, number ten." "Ah!" 'e says tactful, "much obliged." "Yes," I says, "you'll find 'im in at this time o' day. Good evenin'!" And I thinks to meself [She closes one eye] Rats! There's a good many corners hereabouts.

MALISE. [With detached appreciation] Very good, Mrs. Miler.

MRS. MILER. So this mornin', there e' was again on the first floor with 'is 'and raised, pretendin' to knock at number two. "Oh! you're still lookin' for 'im?" I says, lettin' him see I was 'is grandmother. "Ah!" 'e says, affable, "you misdirected me; it's here I've got my business." "That's lucky," I says, "cos nobody lives there neither. Good mornin'!" And I come straight up. If you want to see 'im at work you've only to go downstairs, 'e'll be on the ground floor by now, pretendin' to knock at number one. Wonderful resource!

MALISE. What's he like, this gentleman?

MRS. MILER. Just like the men you see on the front page o' the daily papers. Nasty, smooth-lookin' feller, with one o' them billycock hats you can't abide.

MALISE. Isn't he a dun?

MRS. MILER. They don't be'ave like that; you ought to know, sir. He's after no good. [Then, after a little pause] Ain't he to be put a stop to? If I took me time I could get 'im, innercent-like, with a jug o' water.

[MALISE, smiling, shakes his head.]

MALISE. You can get on now; I'm going to shave.

He looks at the clock, and passes out into the inner room. MRS. MILER, gazes round her, pins up her skirt, sits down in the armchair, takes off her hat and puts it on the table, and slowly rolls up her sleeves; then with her hands on her knees she rests. There is a soft knock on the door. She gets up leisurely and moves flat-footed towards it. The door being opened CLARE is revealed.

CLARE. Is Mr. Malise in?

MRS. MILER. Yes. But 'e's dressin'.

CLARE. Oh.

MRS. MILER. Won't take 'im long. What name?

CLARE. Would you say—a lady.

MRS. MILER. It's against the rules. But if you'll sit down a moment I'll see what I can do. [She brings forward a chair and rubs it with her apron. Then goes to the door of the inner room and speaks through it] A lady to see you. [Returning she removes some cigarette ends] This is my hour. I shan't make much dust. [Noting CLARE's eyebrows raised at the debris round the armchair] I'm particular about not disturbin' things.

CLARE. I'm sure you are.

MRS. MILER. He likes 'is 'abits regular.

Making a perfunctory pass with the Bissell broom, she runs it to the cupboard, comes back to the table, takes up a bottle and holds it to the light; finding it empty, she turns it upside down and drops it into the wastepaper basket; then, holding up the other bottle, and finding it not empty, she corks it and drops it into the fold of her skirt.

MRS. MILER. He takes his claret fresh-opened—not like these 'ere bawgwars.

CLARE. [Rising] I think I'll come back later.

MRS. MILER. Mr. Malise is not in my confidence. We keep each other to ourselves. Perhaps you'd like to read the paper; he has it fresh every mornin'—the Westminister.

She plucks that journal from out of the armchair and hands it to CLARE, who sits doom again unhappily to brood. MRS. MILER makes a pass or two with a very dirty duster, then stands still. No longer hearing sounds, CLARE looks up.

MRS. MILER. I wouldn't interrupt yer with my workin,' but 'e likes things clean. [At a sound from the inner room] That's 'im; 'e's cut 'isself! I'll just take 'im the tobaccer!

She lifts a green paper screw of tobacco from the debris round the armchair and taps on the door. It opens. CLARE moves restlessly across the room.

MRS. MILER. [Speaking into the room] The tobaccer. The lady's waitin'.

CLARE has stopped before a reproduction of Titian's picture "Sacred and Profane Love." MRS. MILER stands regarding her with a Chinese smile. MALISE enters, a thread of tobacco still hanging to his cheek.

MALISE. [Taking MRS. MILER's hat off the table and handing it to her] Do the other room.

[Enigmatically she goes.]

MALISE. Jolly of you to come. Can I do anything?

CLARE. I want advice-badly.

MALISE. What! Spreading your wings?

CLARE. Yes.

MALISE. Ah! Proud to have given you that advice. When?

CLARE. The morning after you gave it me . . .

MALISE. Well?

CLARE. I went down to my people. I knew it would hurt my Dad frightfully, but somehow I thought I could make him see. No good. He was awfully sweet, only—he couldn't.

MALISE. [Softly] We English love liberty in those who don't belong to us. Yes.

CLARE. It was horrible. There were the children—and my old nurse. I could never live at home now. They'd think I was–. Impossible —utterly! I'd made up my mind to go back to my owner —And then— he came down himself. I couldn't d it. To be hauled back and begin all over again; I simply couldn't. I watched for a chance; and ran to the station, and came up to an hotel.

MALISE. Bravo!

CLARE. I don't know—no pluck this morning! You see, I've got to earn my living—no money; only a few things I can sell. All yesterday I was walking about, looking at the women. How does anyone ever get a chance?

MALISE. Sooner than you should hurt his dignity by working, your husband would pension you off.

CLARE. If I don't go back to him I couldn't take it.

MALISE. Good!

CLARE. I've thought of nursing, but it's a long training, and I do so hate watching pain. The fact is, I'm pretty hopeless; can't even do art work. I came to ask you about the stage.

MALISE. Have you ever acted? [CLARE shakes her head] You mightn't think so, but I've heard there's a prejudice in favour of training. There's Chorus—I don't recommend it. How about your brother?

CLARE. My brother's got nothing to spare, and he wants to get married; and he's going back to India in September. The only friend I should care to bother is Mrs. Fullarton, and she's—got a husband.

MALISE. I remember the gentleman.

CLARE. Besides, I should be besieged day and night to go back. I must lie doggo somehow.

MALISE. It makes my blood boil to think of women like you. God help all ladies without money.

CLARE. I expect I shall have to go back.

MALISE. No, no! We shall find something. Keep your soul alive at all costs. What! let him hang on to you till you're nothing but— emptiness and ache, till you lose even the power to ache. Sit in his drawing-room, pay calls, play Bridge, go out with him to dinners, return to—duty; and feel less and less, and be less and less, and so grow old and—die!

[The bell rings.]

MALISE. [Looking at the door in doubt] By the wayhe'd no means of tracing you?

[She shakes her head.]

[The bell rings again.]

MALISE. Was there a man on the stairs as you came up?

CLARE. Yes. Why?

MALISE. He's begun to haunt them, I'm told.

CLARE. Oh! But that would mean they thought I—oh! no!

MALISE. Confidence in me is not excessive.

CLARE. Spying!

MALISE. Will you go in there for a minute? Or shall we let them ring—or—what? It may not be anything, of course.

CLARE. I'm not going to hide.

[The bell rings a third time.]

MALISE. [Opening the door of the inner room] Mrs. Miler, just see who it is; and then go, for the present.

MRS. MILER comes out with her hat on, passes enigmatically to the door, and opens it. A man's voice says: "Mr. Malise? Would you give him these cards?"

MRS. MILER. [Re-entering] The cards.

MALISE. Mr. Robert Twisden. Sir Charles and Lady Dedmond. [He looks at CLARE.]

CLARE. [Her face scornful and unmoved] Let them come.

MALISE. [TO MRS. MILER] Show them in!

TWISDEN enters-a clean-shaved, shrewd-looking man, with a fighting underlip, followed by SIR CHARLES and LADY DEDMOND. MRS. MILER goes. There are no greetings.

TWISDEN. Mr. Malise? How do you do, Mrs. Dedmond? Had the pleasure of meeting you at your wedding. [CLARE inclines her head] I am Mr. George Dedmond's solicitor, sir. I wonder if you would be so very kind as to let us have a few words with Mrs. Dedmond alone?

At a nod from CLARE, MALISE passes into the inner room, and shuts the door. A silence.

SIR CHARLES. [Suddenly] What!

LADY DEDMOND. Mr. Twisden, will you–?

TWISDEN. [Uneasy] Mrs. Dedmond I must apologize, but you—you hardly gave us an alternative, did you? [He pauses for an answer, and, not getting one, goes on] Your disappearance has given your husband great anxiety. Really, my dear madam, you must forgive us for this—attempt to get into communication.

CLARE. Why did you spy, HERE?

SIR CHARLES. No, no! Nobody's spied on you. What!

TWISDEN. I'm afraid the answer is that we appear to have been justified. [At the expression on CLARE'S face he goes on hastily] Now, Mrs. Dedmond, I'm a lawyer and I know that appearances are misleading. Don't think I'm unfriendly; I wish you well. [CLARE raises her eyes. Moved by that look, which is exactly as if she had said: "I have no friends," he hurries on] What we want to say to you is this: Don't let this split go on! Don't commit yourself to what you'll bitterly regret. Just tell us what's the matter. I'm sure it can be put straight.

CLARE. I have nothing against my husband—it was quite unreasonable to leave him.

TWISDEN. Come, that's good.

CLARE. Unfortunately, there's something stronger than reason.

TWISDEN. I don't know it, Mrs. Dedmond.

CLARE. No?

TWISDEN. [Disconcerted] Are you—you oughtn't to take a step without advice, in your position.

CLARE. Nor with it?

TWISDEN. [Approaching her] Come, now; isn't there anything you feel you'd like to say—that might help to put matters straight?

CLARE. I don't think so, thank you.

LADY DEDMOND. You must see, Clare, that–

TWISDEN. In your position, Mrs. Dedmond—a beautiful young woman without money. I'm quite blunt. This is a hard world. Should be awfully sorry if anything goes wrong.

CLARE. And if I go back?

TWISDEN. Of two evils, if it be so—choose the least!

CLARE. I am twenty-six; he is thirty-two. We can't reasonably expect to die for fifty years.

LADY DESMOND. That's morbid, Clare.

TWISDEN. What's open to you if you don't go back? Come, what's your position? Neither fish, flesh, nor fowl; fair game for everybody. Believe me, Mrs. Dedmond, for a pretty woman to strike, as it appears you're doing, simply because the spirit of her marriage has taken flight, is madness. You must know that no one pays attention to anything but facts. If now—excuse me—you—you had a lover, [His eyes travel round the room and again rest on her] you would, at all events, have some ground under your feet, some sort of protection, but [He pauses] as you have not—you've none.

CLARE. Except what I make myself.

SIR CHARLES. Good God!

TWISDEN. Yes! Mrs. Dedmond! There's the bedrock difficulty. As you haven't money, you should never have been pretty. You're up against the world, and you'll get no mercy from it. We lawyers see too much of that. I'm putting it brutally, as a man of the world.

CLARE. Thank you. Do you think you quite grasp the alternative?

TWISDEN. [Taken aback] But, my dear young lady, there are two sides to every contract. After all, your husband's fulfilled his.

CLARE. So have I up till now. I shan't ask anything from him— nothing—do you understand?

LADY DEDMOND. But, my dear, you must live.

TWISDEN. Have you ever done any sort of work?

CLARE. Not yet.

TWISDEN. Any conception of the competition nowadays?

CLARE. I can try.

[TWISDEN, looking at her, shrugs his shoulders]

CLARE. [Her composure a little broken by that look] It's real to me—this—you see!

SIR CHARLES. But, my dear girl, what the devil's to become of George?

CLARE. He can do what he likes—it's nothing to me.

TWISDEN. Mrs. Dedmond, I say without hesitation you've no notion of what you're faced with, brought up to a sheltered life as you've been. Do realize that you stand at the parting of the ways, and one leads into the wilderness.

CLARE. Which?

TWISDEN. [Glancing at the door through which MALISE has gone] Of course, if you want to play at wild asses there are plenty who will help you.

SIR CHARLES. By Gad! Yes!

CLARE. I only want to breathe.

TWISDEN. Mrs. Dedmond, go back! You can now. It will be too late soon. There are lots of wolves about. [Again he looks at the door]

CLARE. But not where you think. You say I need advice. I came here for it.

TWISDEN. [With a curiously expressive shrug] In that case I don't know that I can usefully stay.

[He goes to the outer door.]

CLARE. Please don't have me followed when I leave here. Please!

LADY DEDMOND. George is outside, Clare.

CLARE. I don't wish to see him. By what right have you come here? [She goes to the door through which MALISE has passed, opens it, and says] Please come in, Mr. Malise.

[MALISE enters.]

TWISDEN. I am sorry. [Glancing at MALISE, he inclines his head] I am sorry. Good morning. [He goes]

LADY DEDMOND. Mr. Malise, I'm sure, will see–

CLARE. Mr. Malise will stay here, please, in his own room.

[MALISE bows]

SIR CHARLES. My dear girl, 'pon my soul, you know, I can't grasp your line of thought at all!

CLARE. No?

LADY DEDMOND. George is most willing to take up things just as they were before you left.

CLARE. Ah!

LADY DEDMOND. Quite frankly—what is it you want?

CLARE. To be left alone. Quite frankly, he made a mistake to have me spied on.

LADY DEDMOND. But, my good girl, if you'd let us know where you were, like a reasonable being. You can't possibly be left to yourself without money or position of any kind. Heaven knows what you'd be driven to!

MALISE. [Softly] Delicious!

SIR CHARLES. You will be good enough to repeat that out loud, sir.

LADY DEDMOND. Charles! Clare, you must know this is all a fit of spleen; your duty and your interest—marriage is sacred, Clare.

CLARE. Marriage! My marriage has become the—the reconciliation—of two animals—one of them unwilling. That's all the sanctity there is about it.

SIR CHARLES. What!

[She looks at MALISE]

LADY DEDMOND. You ought to be horribly ashamed. CLARE. Of the fact-I am.

LADY DEDMOND. [Darting a glance at MALISE] If we are to talk this out, it must be in private.

MALISE. [To CLARE] Do you wish me to go?

CLARE. No.

LADY DEDMOND. [At MALISE] I should have thought ordinary decent feeling—Good heavens, girl! Can't you see that you're being played with?

CLARE. If you insinuate anything against Mr. Malise, you lie.

LADY DEDMOND. If you will do these things—come to a man's rooms–

CLARE. I came to Mr. Malise because he's the only person I know with imagination enough to see what my position is; I came to him a quarter of an hour ago, for the first time, for definite advice, and you instantly suspect him. That is disgusting.

LADY DEDMOND. [Frigidly] Is this the natural place for me to find my son's wife?

CLARE. His woman.

LADY DEDMOND. Will you listen to Reginald?

CLARE. I have.

LADY DEDMOND. Haven't you any religious sense at all, Clare?

CLARE. None, if it's religion to live as we do.

LADY DEDMOND. It's terrible—this state of mind! It's really terrible!

CLARE breaks into the soft laugh of the other evening. As if galvanized by the sound, SIR CHARLES comes to life out of the transfixed bewilderment with which he has been listening.

SIR CHARLES. For God's sake don't laugh like that!

[CLARE Stops]

LADY DEDMOND. [With real feeling] For the sake of the simple right, Clare!

CLARE. Right? Whatever else is right—our life is not. [She puts her hand on her heart] I swear before God that I've tried and tried. I swear before God, that if I believed we could ever again love each other only a little tiny bit, I'd go back. I swear before God that I don't want to hurt anybody.

LADY DEDMOND. But you are hurting everybody. Do—do be reasonable!

CLARE. [Losing control] Can't you see that I'm fighting for all my life to come—not to be buried alive—not to be slowly smothered. Look at me! I'm not wax—I'm flesh and blood. And you want to prison me for ever—body and soul.

[They stare at her]

SIR CHARLES. [Suddenly] By Jove! I don't know, I don't know! What!

LADY DEDMOND. [To MALISE] If you have any decency left, sir, you will allow my son, at all events, to speak to his wife alone. [Beckoning to her husband] We'll wait below.

SIR CHARLES. I—I want to speak. [To CLARE] My dear, if you feel like this, I can only say—as a—as a gentleman–

LADY DEDMOND. Charles!

SIR CHARLES. Let me alone! I can only say that—damme, I don't know that I can say anything!

He looks at her very grieved, then turns and marches out, followed by LADY DEDMOND, whose voice is heard without, answered by his: "What!" In the doorway, as they pass, GEORGE is standing; he comes in.

GEORGE. [Going up to CLARE, who has recovered all her self-control] Will you come outside and speak to me?

CLARE. No.

GEORGE glances at MALISE, who is leaning against the wall with folded arms.

GEORGE. [In a low voice] Clare!

CLARE. Well!

GEORGE. You try me pretty high, don't you, forcing me to come here, and speak before this fellow? Most men would think the worst, finding you like this.

CLARE. You need not have come—or thought at all.

GEORGE. Did you imagine I was going to let you vanish without an effort–

CLARE. To save me?

GEORGE. For God's sake be just! I've come here to say certain things. If you force me to say them before him—on your head be it! Will you appoint somewhere else?

CLARE. No.

GEORGE. Why not?

CLARE. I know all those "certain things." "You must come back. It is your duty. You have no money. Your friends won't help you. You can't earn your living. You are making a scandal." You might even say for the moment: "Your room shall be respected."

GEORGE. Well, it's true and you've no answer.

CLARE. Oh! [Suddenly] Our life's a lie. It's stupid; it's disgusting. I'm tired of it! Please leave me alone!

GEORGE. You rather miss the point, I'm afraid. I didn't come here to tell you what you know perfectly well when you're sane. I came here to say this: Anyone in her senses could see the game your friend here is playing. It wouldn't take a baby in. If you think that a gentleman like that [His stare travels round the dishevelled room till it rests on MALISE] champions a pretty woman for nothing, you make a fairly bad mistake.

CLARE. Take care.

But MALISE, after one convulsive movement of his hands, has again become rigid.

GEORGE. I don't pretend to be subtle or that kind of thing; but I have ordinary common sense. I don't attempt to be superior to plain facts–

CLARE. [Under her breath] Facts!

GEORGE. Oh! for goodness' sake drop that hifalutin' tone. It doesn't suit you. Look here! If you like to go abroad with one of your young sisters until the autumn, I'll let the flat and go to the Club.

CLARE. Put the fire out with a penny hose. [Slowly] I am not coming back to you, George. The farce is over.

GEORGE. [Taken aback for a moment by the finality of her tone, suddenly fronts MALISE] Then there is something between you and this fellow.

MALISE. [Dangerously, but without moving] I beg your pardon!

CLARE. There—is—nothing.

GEORGE. [Looking from one to the other] At all events, I won't—I won't see a woman who once—[CLARE makes a sudden effacing movement with her hands] I won't see her go to certain ruin without lifting a finger.

CLARE. That is noble.

GEORGE. [With intensity] I don't know that you deserve anything of me. But on my honour, as a gentleman, I came here this morning for your sake, to warn you of what you're doing. [He turns suddenly on MALISE] And I tell this precious friend of yours plainly what I think of him, and that I'm not going to play into his hands.

[MALISE, without stirring from the wall, looks at CLARE, and his lips move.]

CLARE. [Shakes her head at him—then to GEORGE] Will you go, please?

GEORGE. I will go when you do.

MALISE. A man of the world should know better than that.

GEORGE. Are you coming?

MALISE. That is inconceivable.

GEORGE. I'm not speaking to you, sir.

MALISE. You are right. Your words and mine will never kiss each other.

GEORGE. Will you come? [CLARE shakes her head]

GEORGE. [With fury] D'you mean to stay in this pigsty with that rhapsodical swine?

MALISE. [Transformed] By God, if you don't go, I'll kill you.

GEORGE. [As suddenly calm] That remains to be seen.

MALISE. [With most deadly quietness] Yes, I will kill you.

He goes stealthily along the wall, takes up from where it lies on the pile of books the great black knobby stick, and stealthily approaches GEORGE, his face quite fiendish.

CLARE. [With a swift movement, grasping the stick] Please.

MALISE resigns the stick, and the two men, perfectly still, glare at each other. CLARE, letting the stick fall, puts her foot on it. Then slowly she takes off her hat and lays it on the table.

CLARE. Now will you go! [There is silence]

GEORGE. [Staring at her hat] You mad little fool! Understand this; if you've not returned home by three o'clock I'll divorce you, and you may roll in the gutter with this high-souled friend of yours. And mind this, you sir—I won't spare you—by God! Your pocket shall suffer. That's the only thing that touches fellows like you.

Turning, he goes out, and slams the door. CLARE and MALISE remain face to face. Her lips have begun to quiver.

CLARE. Horrible!

She turns away, shuddering, and sits down on the edge of the armchair, covering her eyes with the backs of her hands. MALISE picks up the stick, and fingers it lovingly. Then putting it down, he moves so that he can see her face. She is sitting quite still, staring straight before her.

MALISE. Nothing could be better.
CLARE. I don't know what to do! I don't know what to do!
MALISE. Thank the stars for your good fortune.
CLARE. He means to have revenge on you! And it's all my fault.
MALISE. Let him. Let him go for his divorce. Get rid of him. Have done with him—somehow.

She gets up and stands with face averted. Then swiftly turning to him.

CLARE. If I must bring you harm—let me pay you back! I can't bear it otherwise! Make some use of me, if you don't mind!
MALISE. My God!
[She puts up her face to be kissed, shutting her eyes.]
MALISE. You poor–

He clasps and kisses her, then, drawing back, looks in her face. She has not moved, her eyes are still closed; but she is shivering; her lips are tightly pressed together; her hands twitching.

MALISE. [Very quietly] No, no! This is not the house of a "gentleman."
CLARE. [Letting her head fall, and almost in a whisper] I'm sorry.
MALISE. I understand.
CLARE. I don't feel. And without—I can't, can't.
MALISE. [Bitterly] Quite right. You've had enough of that.

There is a long silence. Without looking at him she takes up her hat, and puts it on.

MALISE. Not going?
[CLARE nods]
MALISE. You don't trust me?
CLARE. I do! But I can't take when I'm not giving.
MALISE. I beg—I beg you! What does it matter? Use me! Get free somehow.
CLARE. Mr. Malise, I know what I ought to be to you, if I let you in for all this. I know what you want—or will want. Of course—why not?
MALISE. I give you my solemn word–
CLARE. No! if I can't be that to you—it's not real. And I can't. It isn't to be manufactured, is it?
MALISE. It is not.
CLARE. To make use of you in such a way! No.
[She moves towards the door]
MALISE. Where are you going?

CLARE does not answer. She is breathing rapidly. There is a change in her, a sort of excitement beneath her calmness.

MALISE. Not back to him? [CLARE shakes her head] Thank God! But where? To your people again?

CLARE. No.

MALISE. Nothing—desperate?

CLARE. Oh! no.

MALISE. Then what—tell me—come!

CLARE. I don't know. Women manage somehow.

MALISE. But you—poor dainty thing!

CLARE. It's all right! Don't be unhappy! Please!

MALISE. [Seizing her arm] D'you imagine they'll let you off, out there—you with your face? Come, trust me trust me! You must!

CLARE. [Holding out her hand] Good-bye!

MALISE. [Not taking that hand] This great damned world, and—you! Listen! [The sound of the traffic far down below is audible in the stillness] Into that! alone—helpless—without money. The men who work with you; the men you make friends of—d'you think they'll let you be? The men in the streets, staring at you, stopping you—pudgy, bull-necked brutes; devils with hard eyes; senile swine; and the "chivalrous" men, like me, who don't mean you harm, but can't help seeing you're made for love! Or suppose you don't take covert but struggle on in the open. Society! The respectable! The pious! Even those who love you! Will they let you be? Hue and cry! The hunt was joined the moment you broke away! It will never let up! Covert to covert—till they've run you down, and you're back in the cart, and God pity you!

CLARE. Well, I'll die running!

MALISE. No, no! Let me shelter you! Let me!

CLARE. [Shaking her head and smiling] I'm going to seek my fortune. Wish me luck!

MALISE. I can't let you go.

CLARE. You must.

He looks into her face; then, realizing that she means it, suddenly bends down to her fingers, and puts his lips to them.

MALISE. Good luck, then! Good luck!

He releases her hand. Just touching his bent head with her other hand, CLARE turns and goes. MALISE remains with bowed head, listening to the sound of her receding footsteps. They die away. He raises himself, and strikes out into the air with his clenched fist.

CURTAIN

ACT III

MALISE'S sitting-room. An afternoon, three months later. On the table are an open bottle of claret, his hat, and some tea-things. Down in the hearth is a kettle on a lighted spirit-stand. Near the door stands HAYWOOD, a short, round-faced man, with a tobacco-coloured moustache; MALISE, by the table, is contemplating a piece of blue paper.

HAYWOOD. Sorry to press an old customer, sir, but a year and an 'alf without any return on your money–

MALISE. Your tobacco is too good, Mr. Haywood. I wish I could see my way to smoking another.

HAYWOOD. Well, sir—that's a funny remedy.

With a knock on the half-opened door, a Boy appears.

MALISE. Yes. What is it?

BOY. Your copy for "The Watchfire," please, sir.

MALISE. [Motioning him out] Yes. Wait!

The Boy withdraws. MALISE goes up to the pile of books, turns them over, and takes up some volumes.

MALISE. This is a very fine unexpurgated translation of Boccaccio's "Decameron," Mr. Haywood illustrated. I should say you would get more than the amount of your bill for them.

HAYWOOD. [Shaking his head] Them books worth three pound seven!

MALISE. It's scarce, and highly improper. Will you take them in discharge?

HAYWOOD. [Torn between emotions] Well, I 'ardly know what to say— No, Sir, I don't think I'd like to 'ave to do with that.

MALISE. You could read them first, you know?

HAYWOOD. [Dubiously] I've got my wife at 'ome.

MALISE. You could both read them.

HAYWOOD. [Brought to his bearings] No, Sir, I couldn't.

MALISE. Very well; I'll sell them myself, and you shall have the result.

HAYWOOD. Well, thank you, sir. I'm sure I didn't want to trouble you.

MALISE. Not at all, Mr. Haywood. It's for me to apologize.

HAYWOOD. So long as I give satisfaction.

MALISE. [Holding the door for him] Certainly. Good evening.

HAYWOOD. Good evenin', sir; no offence, I hope.

MALISE. On the contrary.

Doubtfully HAYWOOD goes. And MALISE stands scratching his head; then slipping the bill into one of the volumes to remind him, he replaces them at the top of the pile. The Boy again advances into the doorway.

MALISE. Yes, now for you.

He goes to the table and takes some sheets of MS. from an old portfolio. But the door is again timidly pushed open, and HAYWOOD reappears.

MALISE. Yes, Mr. Haywood?

HAYWOOD. About that little matter, sir. If—if it's any convenience to you—I've—thought of a place where I could–

MALISE. Read them? You'll enjoy them thoroughly.

HAYWOOD. No, sir, no! Where I can dispose of them.

MALISE. [Holding out the volumes] It might be as well. [HAYWOOD takes the books gingerly] I congratulate you, Mr. Haywood; it's a classic.

HAYWOOD. Oh, indeed—yes, sir. In the event of there being any–

MALISE. Anything over? Carry it to my credit. Your bill—[He hands over the blue paper] Send me the receipt. Good evening!

HAYWOOD, nonplussed, and trying to hide the books in an evening paper, fumbles out. "Good evenin', sir!" and departs. MALISE again takes up the sheets of MS. and cons a sentence over to himself, gazing blankly at the stolid BOY.

MALISE. "Man of the world—good form your god! Poor buttoned-up philosopher" [the Boy shifts his feet] "inbred to the point of cretinism, and founded to the bone on fear of ridicule [the Boy breathes heavily]—you are the slave of facts!"

[There is a knock on the door]

MALISE. Who is it?

The door is pushed open, and REGINALD HUNTINGDON stands there.

HUNTINGDON. I apologize, sir; can I come in a minute?

[MALISE bows with ironical hostility]

HUNTINGDON. I don't know if you remember me—Clare Dedmond's brother.

MALISE. I remember you.

[He motions to the stolid Boy to go outside again]

HUNTINGDON. I've come to you, sir, as a gentleman–

MALISE. Some mistake. There is one, I believe, on the first floor.

HUNTINGDON. It's about my sister.

MALISE. D—n you! Don't you know that I've been shadowed these last three months? Ask your detectives for any information you want.

HUNTINGDON. We know that you haven't seen her, or even known where she is.

MALISE. Indeed! You've found that out? Brilliant!

HUNTINGDON. We know it from my sister.

MALISE. Oh! So you've tracked her down?

HUNTINGDON. Mrs. Fullarton came across her yesterday in one of those big shops—selling gloves.

MALISE. Mrs. Fullarton the lady with the husband. Well! you've got her. Clap her back into prison.

HUNTINGDON. We have not got her. She left at once, and we don't know where she's gone.

MALISE. Bravo!

HUNTINGDON. [Taking hold of his bit] Look here, Mr. Malise, in a way I share your feeling, but I'm fond of my sister, and it's damnable to have to go back to India knowing she must be all adrift, without protection, going through God knows what! Mrs. Fullarton says she's looking awfully pale and down.

MALISE. [Struggling between resentment and sympathy] Why do you come to me?

HUNTINGDON. We thought–

MALISE. Who?

HUNTINGDON. My—my father and myself.

MALISE. Go on.

HUNTINGDON. We thought there was just a chance that, having lost that job, she might come to you again for advice. If she does, it would be really generous of you if you'd put my father in touch with her. He's getting old, and he feels this very much. [He hands MALISE a card] This is his address.

MALISE. [Twisting the card] Let there be no mistake, sir; I do nothing that will help give her back to her husband. She's out to save her soul alive, and I don't join the hue and cry that's after her. On the contrary—if I had the power. If your father wants to shelter her, that's another matter. But she'd her own ideas about that.

HUNTINGDON. Perhaps you don't realize how unfit my sister is for rough and tumble. She's not one of this new sort of woman. She's always been looked after, and had things done for her. Pluck she's got, but that's all, and she's bound to come to grief.

MALISE. Very likely—the first birds do. But if she drops half-way it's better than if she'd never flown. Your sister, sir, is trying the wings of her spirit, out of the old slave market. For women as for men, there's more than one kind of dishonour, Captain Huntingdon, and worse things than being dead, as you may know in your profession.

HUNTINGDON. Admitted—but–

MALISE. We each have our own views as to what they are. But they all come to—death of our spirits, for the sake of our carcases. Anything more?

HUNTINGDON. My leave's up. I sail to-morrow. If you do see my sister I trust you to give her my love and say I begged she would see my father.

MALISE. If I have the chance—yes.

He makes a gesture of salute, to which HUNTINGDON responds. Then the latter turns and goes out.

MALISE. Poor fugitive! Where are you running now?

He stands at the window, through which the evening sunlight is powdering the room with smoky gold. The stolid Boy has again come in. MALISE stares at him, then goes back to the table, takes up the MS., and booms it at him; he receives the charge, breathing hard.

MALISE. "Man of the world—product of a material age; incapable of perceiving reality in motions of the spirit; having 'no use,' as you would say, for 'sentimental nonsense'; accustomed to believe yourself the national spine—your position is unassailable. You will remain the idol of the country—arbiter of law, parson in mufti, darling of the playwright and the novelist—God bless you! —while waters lap these shores."

He places the sheets of MS. in an envelope, and hands them to the Boy.

MALISE. You're going straight back to "The Watchfire"?

BOY. [Stolidly] Yes, sir.

MALISE. [Staring at him] You're a masterpiece. D'you know that?

BOY. No, sir.

MALISE. Get out, then.

He lifts the portfolio from the table, and takes it into the inner room. The Boy, putting his thumb stolidly to his nose, turns to go. In the doorway he shies violently at the figure of CLARE, standing there in a dark-coloured dress, skids past her and goes. CLARE comes into the gleam of sunlight, her white face alive with emotion or excitement. She looks round her, smiles, sighs; goes swiftly to the door, closes it, and comes back to the table. There she stands, fingering the papers on the table, smoothing MALISE's hat wistfully, eagerly, waiting.

MALISE. [Returning] You!

CLARE. [With a faint smile] Not very glorious, is it?

He goes towards her, and checks himself, then slews the armchair round.

MALISE. Come! Sit down, sit down! [CLARE, heaving a long sigh, sinks down into the chair] Tea's nearly ready.

He places a cushion for her, and prepares tea; she looks up at him softly, but as he finishes and turns to her, she drops that glance.

CLARE. Do you think me an awful coward for coming? [She has taken a little plain cigarette case from her dress] Would you mind if I smoked?

MALISE shakes his head, then draws back from her again, as if afraid to be too close. And again, unseen, she looks at him.

MALISE. So you've lost your job?

CLARE. How did you–?

MALISE. Your brother. You only just missed him. [CLARE starts up] They had an idea you'd come. He's sailing to-morrow—he wants you to see your father.

CLARE. Is father ill?

MALI$E. Anxious about you.

CLARE. I've written to him every week. [Excited] They're still hunting me!

MALISE. [Touching her shoulder gently] It's all right—all right.

She sinks again into the chair, and again he withdraws. And once more she gives him that soft eager look, and once more averts it as he turns to her.

CLARE. My nerves have gone funny lately. It's being always on one's guard, and stuffy air, and feeling people look and talk about you, and dislike your being there.

MALISE. Yes; that wants pluck.

CLARE. [Shaking her head] I curl up all the time. The only thing I know for certain is, that I shall never go back to him. The more I've hated what I've been doing, the more sure I've been. I might come to anything—but not that.

MALISE. Had a very bad time?

CLARE. [Nodding] I'm spoilt. It's a curse to be a lady when you have to earn your living. It's not really been so hard, I suppose; I've been selling things, and living about twice as well as most shop girls.

MALISE. Were they decent to you?

CLARE. Lots of the girls are really nice. But somehow they don't want me, can't help thinking I've got airs or something; and in here [She touches her breast] I don't want them!

MALISE. I know.

CLARE. Mrs. Fullarton and I used to belong to a society for helping reduced gentlewomen to get work. I know now what they want: enough money not to work—that's all! [Suddenly looking up at him] Don't think me worse than I am-please! It's working under people; it's having to do it, being driven. I have tried, I've not been altogether a coward, really! But every morning getting there the same time; every day the same stale "dinner," as they call it; every evening the same "Good evening, Miss Clare," "Good evening, Miss Simpson," "Good evening, Miss Hart," "Good evening, Miss Clare." And the same walk home, or the same 'bus; and the same men that you mustn't look at, for fear they'll follow you. [She rises] Oh! and the feeling-always, always—that there's no sun, or life, or hope, or anything. It was just like being ill, the way I've wanted to ride and dance and get out into the country. [Her excitement dies away into the old clipped composure, and she sits down again] Don't think too badly of me—it really is pretty ghastly!

MALISE. [Gruffly] H'm! Why a shop?

CLARE. References. I didn't want to tell more lies than I could help; a married woman on strike can't tell the truth, you know. And I can't typewrite or do shorthand yet. And chorus—I thought —you wouldn't like.

MALISE. I? What have I–? [He checks himself] Have men been brutes?

CLARE. [Stealing a look at him] One followed me a lot. He caught hold of my arm one evening. I just took this out [She draws out her hatpin and holds it like a dagger, her lip drawn back as the lips of a dog going to bite] and said: "Will you leave me alone, please?" And he did. It was rather nice. And there was one quite decent little man in the shop—I was sorry for him—such a humble little man!

MALISE. Poor devil—it's hard not to wish for the moon.

At the tone of his voice CLARE looks up at him; his face is turned away.

CLARE. [Softly] How have you been? Working very hard?

MALISE. As hard as God will let me.

CLARE. [Stealing another look] Have you any typewriting I could do? I could learn, and I've still got a brooch I could sell. Which is the best kind?

MALISE. I had a catalogue of them somewhere.

He goes into the inner room. The moment he is gone, CLARE stands up, her hands pressed to her cheeks as if she felt them flaming. Then, with hands clasped, she stands waiting. He comes back with the old portfolio.

MALISE. Can you typewrite where you are?

CLARE. I have to find a new room anyway. I'm changing—to be safe. [She takes a luggage ticket from her glove] I took my things to Charing Cross—only a bag and one trunk. [Then, with that queer expression on her face which prefaces her desperations] You don't want me now, I suppose.

MALISE. What?

CLARE. [Hardly above a whisper] Because—if you still wanted me—I do—now.

[Etext editors note: In the 1924 revision, 11 years after this 1913 edition: "I do—now" is changed to "I could—now"– a significant change in meaning. D.W.]

MALISE. [Staring hard into her face that is quivering and smiling] You mean it? You do? You care–?

CLARE. I've thought of you—so much! But only—if you're sure.

He clasps her and kisses her closed eyes; and so they stand for a moment, till the sound of a latchkey in the door sends them apart.

MALISE. It's the housekeeper. Give me that ticket; I'll send for your things.

Obediently she gives him the ticket, smiles, and goes quietly into the inner room. MRS. MILER has entered; her face, more Chinese than ever, shows no sign of having seen.

MALISE. That lady will stay here, Mrs. Miler. Kindly go with this ticket to the cloak-room at Charing Cross station, and bring back her luggage in a cab. Have you money?

MRS. MILER. 'Arf a crown. [She takes the ticket—then impassively] In case you don't know —there's two o' them men about the stairs now.

The moment she is gone MALISE makes a gesture of maniacal fury. He steals on tiptoe to the outer door, and listens. Then, placing his hand on the knob, he turns it without noise, and wrenches back the door. Transfigured in the last sunlight streaming down the corridor are two men, close together, listening and consulting secretly. They start back.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.