

GALSWORTHY JOHN

PLAYS : FIFTH
SERIES

John Galsworthy
Plays : Fifth Series

«Public Domain»

Galsworthy J.

Plays : Fifth Series / J. Galsworthy — «Public Domain»,

Содержание

A FAMILY MAN	5
CHARACTERS	6
ACT I	7
SCENE I	7
SCENE II	13
ACT II	23
ACT III	34
SCENE I	34
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	37

John Galsworthy Plays : Fifth Series

A FAMILY MAN

From the 5th Series Plays

By John Galsworthy

CHARACTERS

JOHN BUILDER..... of the firm of Builder & Builder
JULIA..... His Wife
ATHENE..... His elder Daughter
MAUD..... His younger Daughter
RALPH BUILDER..... His Brother, and Partner
GUY HERRINGHAME..... A Flying Man
ANNIE..... A Young Person in Blue
CAMILLE..... Mrs Builder's French Maid
TOPPING..... Builder's Manservant
THE MAYOR..... Of Breconridge
HARRIS..... His Secretary
FRANCIS CHANTREY..... J.P.
MOON..... A Constable
MARTIN..... A Police Sergeant
A JOURNALIST..... From The Comet
THE FIGURE OF A POACHER
THE VOICES AND FACES OF SMALL BOYS

The action passes in the town of Breconridge, the Midlands.

ACT I. SCENE I. BUILDER'S Study. After breakfast. SCENE II. A Studio.

ACT II. BUILDER'S Study. Lunchtime.

ACT III. SCENE I. THE MAYOR'S Study. 10am the following day. SCENE II. BUILDER'S Study. The same. Noon. SCENE III. BUILDER'S Study. The same. Evening.

ACT I

SCENE I

The study of JOHN BUILDER in the provincial town of Breconridge. A panelled room wherein nothing is ever studied, except perhaps BUILDER'S face in the mirror over the fireplace. It is, however, comfortable, and has large leather chairs and a writing table in the centre, on which is a typewriter, and many papers. At the back is a large window with French outside shutters, overlooking the street, for the house is an old one, built in an age when the homes of doctors, lawyers and so forth were part of a provincial town, and not yet suburban. There are two or three fine old prints on the walls, Right and Left; and a fine, old fireplace, Left, with a fender on which one can sit. A door, Left back, leads into the dining-room, and a door, Right forward, into the hall.

JOHN BUILDER is sitting in his after-breakfast chair before the fire with The Times in his hands. He has breakfasted well, and is in that condition of first-pipe serenity in which the affairs of the nation seem almost bearable. He is a tallish, square, personable man of forty-seven, with a well-coloured, jowly, fullish face, marked under the eyes, which have very small pupils and a good deal of light in them. His bearing has force and importance, as of a man accustomed to rising and ownerships, sure in his opinions, and not lacking in geniality when things go his way. Essentially a Midlander. His wife, a woman of forty-one, of ivory tint, with a thin, trim figure and a face so strangely composed as to be almost like a mask (essentially from Jersey) is putting a nib into a pen-holder, and filling an inkpot at the writing-table.

As the curtain rises CAMILLE enters with a rather broken-down cardboard box containing flowers. She is a young woman with a good figure, a pale face, the warm brown eyes and complete poise of a Frenchwoman. She takes the box to MRS BUILDER.

MRS BUILDER. The blue vase, please, Camille.

CAMILLE fetches a vase. MRS BUILDER puts the flowers into the vase.

CAMILLE gathers up the debris; and with a glance at BUILDER goes out.

BUILDER. Glorious October! I ought to have a damned good day's shooting with Chantrey tomorrow.

MRS BUILDER. [Arranging the flowers] Aren't you going to the office this morning?

BUILDER. Well, no, I was going to take a couple of days off. If you feel at the top of your form, take a rest—then you go on feeling at the top. [He looks at her, as if calculating] What do you say to looking up Athene?

MRS BUILDER. [Palpably astonished] Athene? But you said you'd done with her?

BUILDER. [Smiling] Six weeks ago; but, dash it, one can't have done with one's own daughter. That's the weakness of an Englishman; he can't keep up his resentments. In a town like this it doesn't do to have her living by herself. One of these days it'll get out we've had a row. That wouldn't do me any good.

MRS BUILDER. I see.

BUILDER. Besides, I miss her. Maud's so self-absorbed. It makes a big hole in the family, Julia. You've got her address, haven't you?

MRS BUILDER. Yes. [Very still] But do you think it's dignified, John?

BUILDER. [Genially] Oh, hang dignity! I rather pride myself on knowing when to stand on my dignity and when to sit on it. If she's still crazy about Art, she can live at home, and go out to study.

MRS BUILDER. Her craze was for liberty.

BUILDER. A few weeks' discomfort soon cures that. She can't live on her pittance. She'll have found that out by now. Get your things on and come with me at twelve o'clock.

MRS BUILDER. I think you'll regret it. She'll refuse.

BUILDER. Not if I'm nice to her. A child could play with me to-day. Shall I tell you a secret, Julia?

MRS BUILDER. It would be pleasant for a change.

BUILDER. The Mayor's coming round at eleven, and I know perfectly well what he's coming for.

MRS BUILDER. Well?

BUILDER. I'm to be nominated for Mayor next month. Harris tipped me the wink at the last Council meeting. Not so bad at forty-seven—h'm? I can make a thundering good Mayor. I can do things for this town that nobody else can.

MRS BUILDER. Now I understand about Athene.

BUILDER. [Good-humouredly] Well, it's partly that. But [more seriously] it's more the feeling I get that I'm not doing my duty by her. Goodness knows whom she may be picking up with! Artists are a loose lot. And young people in these days are the limit. I quite believe in moving with the times, but one's either born a Conservative, or one isn't. So you be ready at twelve, see. By the way, that French maid of yours, Julia—

MRS BUILDER. What about her?

BUILDER. Is she—er—is she all right? We don't want any trouble with Topping.

MRS BUILDER. There will be none with—Topping.

[She opens the door Left.]

BUILDER. I don't know; she strikes me as—very French.

MRS BUILDER smiles and passes out.

BUILDER fills his second pipe. He is just taking up the paper again when the door from the hall is opened, and the manservant TOPPING, dried, dark, sub-humorous, in a black cut-away, announces:

TOPPING. The Mayor, Sir, and Mr Harris!

THE MAYOR of Breconridge enters. He is clean-shaven, red-faced, light-eyed, about sixty, shrewd, poll-parrot, naturally jovial, dressed with the indefinable wrongness of a burgher; he is followed by his Secretary HARRIS, a man all eyes and cleverness. TOPPING retires.

BUILDER. [Rising] Hallo, Mayor! What brings you so early? Glad to see you. Morning, Harris!

MAYOR. Morning, Builder, morning.

HARRIS. Good-morning, Sir.

BUILDER. Sit down-sit down! Have a cigar!

The MAYOR takes a cigar HARRIS a cigarette from his own case.

BUILDER. Well, Mayor, what's gone wrong with the works? He and HARRIS exchange a look.

MAYOR. [With his first puff] After you left the Council the other day, Builder, we came to a decision.

BUILDER. Deuce you did! Shall I agree with it?

MAYOR. We shall see. We want to nominate you for Mayor. You willin' to stand?

BUILDER. [Stolid] That requires consideration.

MAYOR. The only alternative is Chantrey; but he's a light weight, and rather too much County. What's your objection?

BUILDER. It's a bit unexpected, Mayor. [Looks at HARRIS] Am I the right man? Following you, you know. I'm shooting with Chantrey to-morrow. What does he feel about it?

MAYOR. What do you say, 'Arris?

HARRIS. Mr Chantrey's a public school and University man, Sir; he's not what I call ambitious.

BUILDER. Nor am I, Harris.

HARRIS. No, sir; of course you've a high sense of duty. Mr Chantrey's rather dilettante.

MAYOR. We want a solid man.

BUILDER. I'm very busy, you know, Mayor.

MAYOR. But you've got all the qualifications—big business, family man, live in the town, church-goer, experience on the Council and the Bench. Better say "yes," Builder.

BUILDER. It's a lot of extra work. I don't take things up lightly.

MAYOR. Dangerous times, these. Authority questioned all over the place. We want a man that feels his responsibilities, and we think we've got him in you.

BUILDER. Very good of you, Mayor. I don't know, I'm sure. I must think of the good of the town.

HARRIS. I shouldn't worry about that, sir.

MAYOR. The name John Builder carries weight. You're looked up to as a man who can manage his own affairs. Madam and the young ladies well?

BUILDER. First-rate.

MAYOR. [Rises] That's right. Well, if you'd like to talk it over with Chantrey to-morrow. With all this extremism, we want a man of principle and common sense.

HARRIS. We want a man that'll grasp the nettle, sir—and that's you.

BUILDER. Hm! I've got a temper, you know.

MAYOR. [Chuckling] We do—we do! You'll say "yes," I see. No false modesty! Come along, 'Arris, we must go.

BUILDER. Well, Mayor, I'll think it over, and let you have an answer. You know my faults, and you know my qualities, such as they are. I'm just a plain Englishman.

MAYOR. We don't want anything better than that. I always say the great point about an Englishman is that he's got bottom; you may knock him off his pins, but you find him on 'em again before you can say "Jack Robinson." He may have his moments of aberration, but he's a sticker. Morning, Builder, morning! Hope you'll say "yes."

He shakes hands and goes out, followed by HARRIS.

When the door is dosed BUILDER stands a moment quite still with a gratified smile on his face; then turns and scrutinises himself in the glass over the hearth. While he is doing so the door from the dining-room is opened quietly and CAMILLE comes in. BUILDER, suddenly seeing her reflected in the mirror, turns.

BUILDER. What is it, Camille?

CAMILLE. Madame send me for a letter she say you have, Monsieur, from the dyer and cleaner, with a bill.

BUILDER. [Feeling in his pockets] Yes—no. It's on the table.

CAMILLE goes to the writing-table and looks. That blue thing.

CAMILLE. [Taking it up] Non, Monsieur, this is from the gas.

BUILDER. Oh! Ah!

[He moves up to the table and turns over papers. CAMILLE stands motionless close by with her eyes fixed on him.]

Here it is!

[He looks up, sees her looking at him, drops his own gaze, and hands her the letter. Their hands touch. Putting his hands in his pockets]

What made you come to England?

CAMILLE. [Demure] It is better pay, Monsieur, and [With a smile] the English are so amiable.

BUILDER. Deuce they are! They haven't got that reputation.

CAMILLE. Oh! I admire Englishmen. They are so strong and kind.

BUILDER. [Bluffly flattered] H'm! We've no manners.

CAMILLE. The Frenchman is more polite, but not in the 'eart.

BUILDER. Yes. I suppose we're pretty sound at heart.

CAMILLE. And the Englishman have his life in the family—the Frenchman have his life outside.

BUILDER. [With discomfort] H'm!

CAMILLE. [With a look] Too mooch in the family—like a rabbit in a 'utch.

BUILDER. Oh! So that's your view of us! [His eyes rest on her, attracted but resentful].

CAMILLE. Pardon, Monsieur, my tongue run away with me.

BUILDER. [Half conscious of being led on] Are you from Paris?

CAMILLE. [Clasping her hands] Yes. What a town for pleasure—Paris!

BUILDER. I suppose so. Loose place, Paris.

CAMILLE. Loose? What is that, Monsieur?

BUILDER. The opposite of strict.

CAMILLE. Strict! Oh! certainly we like life, we other French. It is not like England. I take this to Madame, Monsieur. [She turns as if to go] Excuse me.

BUILDER. I thought you Frenchwomen all married young.

CAMILLE. I 'ave been married; my 'usband did die—en Afrique.

BUILDER. You wear no ring.

CAMILLE. [Smiling] I prefare to be mademoiselle, Monsieur.

BUILDER. [Dubiously] Well, it's all the same to us. [He takes a letter up from the table] You might take this to Mrs Builder too. [Again their fingers touch, and there is a suspicion of encounter between their eyes.]

CAMILLE goes out.

BUILDER. [Turning to his chair] Don't know about that woman—she's a tantalizer.

He compresses his lips, and is settling back into his chair, when the door from the hall is opened and his daughter MAUD comes in; a pretty girl, rather pale, with fine eyes. Though her face has a determined cast her manner at this moment is by no means decisive. She has a letter in her hand, and advances rather as if she were stalking her father, who, after a "Hallo, Maud!" has begun to read his paper.

MAUD. [Getting as far as the table] Father.

BUILDER. [Not lowering the paper] Well? I know that tone. What do you want—money?

MAUD. I always want money, of course; but—but—

BUILDER. [Pulling out a note—abstractedly] Here's five pounds for you.

MAUD, advancing, takes it, then seems to find what she has come for more on her chest than ever.

BUILDER. [Unconscious] Will you take a letter for me?

MAUD sits down Left of table and prepares to take down the letter.

[Dictating] "Dear Mr Mayor,—Referring to your call this morning, I have —er—given the matter very careful consideration, and though somewhat reluctant—"

MAUD. Are you really reluctant, father?

BUILDER. Go on—"To assume greater responsibilities, I feel it my duty to come forward in accordance with your wish. The—er—honour is one of which I hardly feel myself worthy, but you may rest assured—"

MAUD. Worthy. But you do, you know.

BUILDER. Look here! Are you trying to get a rise out of me?—because you won't succeed this morning.

MAUD. I thought you were trying to get one out of me.

BUILDER. Well, how would you express it?

MAUD. "I know I'm the best man for the place, and so do you—"

BUILDER. The disrespect of you young people is something extraordinary. And that reminds me where do you go every evening now after tea?

MAUD. I—I don't know.

BUILDER. Come now, that won't do—you're never in the house from six to seven.

MAUD. Well! It has to do with my education.

BUILDER. Why, you finished that two years ago!

MAUD. Well, call it a hobby, if you like, then, father.

She takes up the letter she brought in and seems on the point of broaching it.

BUILDER. Hobby? Well, what is it?

MAUD. I don't want to irritate you, father.

BUILDER. You can't irritate me more than by having secrets. See what that led to in your sister's case. And, by the way, I'm going to put an end to that this morning. You'll be glad to have her back, won't you?

MAUD. [Startled] What!

BUILDER. Your mother and I are going round to Athene at twelve o'clock. I shall make it up with her. She must come back here.

MAUD. [Aghast, but hiding it] Oh! It's—it's no good, father. She won't.

BUILDER. We shall see that. I've quite got over my tantrum, and I expect she has.

MAUD. [Earnestly] Father! I do really assure you she won't; it's only wasting your time, and making you eat humble pie.

BUILDER. Well, I can eat a good deal this morning. It's all nonsense! A family's a family.

MAUD. [More and more disturbed, but hiding it] Father, if I were you, I wouldn't-really! It's not-dignified.

BUILDER. You can leave me to judge of that. It's not dignified for the Mayor of this town to have an unmarried daughter as young as Athene living by herself away from home. This idea that she's on a visit won't wash any longer. Now finish that letter—"worthy, but you may rest assured that I shall do my best to sustain the—er—dignity of the office." [MAUD types desperately.] Got that? "And—er—preserve the tradition so worthily—" No— "so staunchly"—er—er—

MAUD. Upheld.

BUILDER. Ah! "—upheld by yourself.—Faithfully yours."

MAUD. [Finishing] Father, you thought Athene went off in a huff. It wasn't that a bit. She always meant to go. She just got you into a rage to make it easier. She hated living at home.

BUILDER. Nonsense! Why on earth should she?

MAUD. Well, she did! And so do— [Checking herself] And so you see it'll only make you ridiculous to go.

BUILDER. [Rises] Now what's behind this, Maud?

MAUD. Behind—Oh! nothing!

BUILDER. The fact is, you girls have been spoiled, and you enjoy twisting my tail; but you can't make me roar this morning. I'm too pleased with things. You'll see, it'll be all right with Athene.

MAUD. [Very suddenly] Father!

BUILDER. [Grimly humorous] Well! Get it off your chest. What's that letter about?

MAUD. [Failing again and crumpling the letter behind her back] Oh! nothing.

BUILDER. Everything's nothing this morning. Do you know what sort of people Athene associates with now—I suppose you see her?

MAUD. Sometimes.

BUILDER. Well?

MAUD. Nobody much. There isn't anybody here to associate with. It's all hopelessly behind the times.

BUILDER. Oh! you think so! That's the inflammatory fiction you pick up. I tell you what, young woman—the sooner you and your sister get rid of your silly notions about not living at home, and making your own way, the sooner you'll both get married and make it. Men don't like the new spirit in women—they may say they do, but they don't.

MAUD. You don't, father, I know.

BUILDER. Well, I'm very ordinary. If you keep your eyes open, you'll soon see that.

MAUD. Men don't like freedom for anybody but themselves.

BUILDER. That's not the way to put it. [Tapping out his pipe] Women in your class have never had to face realities.

MAUD. No, but we want to.

BUILDER. [Good-humouredly] Well, I'll bet you what you like, Athene's dose of reality will have cured her.

MAUD. And I'll bet you—No, I won't!

BUILDER. You'd better not. Athene will come home, and only too glad to do it. Ring for Topping and order the car at twelve.

As he opens the door to pass out, MAUD starts forward, but checks herself.

MAUD. [Looking at her watch] Half-past eleven! Good heavens!

She goes to the bell and rings. Then goes back to the table, and writes an address on a bit of paper.

TOPPING enters Right.

TOPPING. Did you ring, Miss?

MAUD. [With the paper] Yes. Look here, Topping! Can you manage—on your bicycle—now at once? I want to send a message to Miss Athene—awfully important. It's just this: "Look out! Father is coming." [Holding out the paper] Here's her address. You must get there and away again by twelve. Father and mother want the car then to go there. Order it before you go. It won't take you twenty minutes on your bicycle. It's down by the river near the ferry. But you mustn't be seen by them either going or coming.

TOPPING. If I should fall into their hands, Miss, shall I eat the despatch?

MAUD. Rather! You're a brick, Topping. Hurry up!

TOPPING. Nothing more precise, Miss?

MAUD. M—m—No.

TOPPING. Very good, Miss Maud. [Conning the address] "Briary Studio, River Road. Look out! Father is coming!" I'll go out the back way. Any answer?

MAUD. No.

TOPPING nods his head and goes out.

MAUD. [To herself] Well, it's all I can do.

She stands, considering, as the CURTAIN falls.

SCENE II

The Studio, to which are attached living rooms, might be rented at eighty pounds a year—some painting and gear indeed, but an air of life rather than of work. Things strewn about. Bare walls, a sloping skylight, no windows; no fireplace visible; a bedroom door, stage Right; a kitchen door, stage Left. A door, Centre back, into the street. The door knocker is going.

From the kitchen door, Left, comes the very young person, ANNIE, in blotting-paper blue linen, with a white Dutch cap. She is pretty, her cheeks rosy, and her forehead puckered. She opens the street door. Standing outside is TOPPING. He steps in a pace or two.

TOPPING. Miss Builder live here?

ANNIE. Oh! no, sir; Mrs Herringhame.

TOPPING. Mrs Herringhame? Oh! young lady with dark hair and large expressive eyes?

ANNIE. Oh! yes, sir.

TOPPING. With an "A. B." on her linen? [Moves to table].

ANNIE. Yes, sir.

TOPPING. And "Athene Builder" on her drawings?

ANNIE. [Looking at one] Yes, sir.

TOPPING. Let's see. [He examines the drawing] Mrs Herringhame, you said?

ANNIE. Oh! yes, Sir.

TOPPING. Wot oh!

ANNIE. Did you want anything, sir?

TOPPING. Drop the "sir," my dear; I'm the Builders' man. Mr Herringhame in?

ANNIE. Oh! no, Sir.

TOPPING. Take a message. I can't wait. From Miss Maud Builder. "Look out! Father is coming." Now, whichever of 'em comes in first—that's the message, and don't you forget it.

ANNIE. Oh! no, Sir.

TOPPING. So they're married?

ANNIE. Oh! I don't know, sir.

TOPPING. I see. Well, it ain't known to Builder, J.P., either. That's why there's a message. See?

ANNIE. Oh! yes, Sir.

TOPPING. Keep your head. I must hop it. From Miss Maud Builder. "Look out! Father is coming."

He nods, turns and goes, pulling the door to behind him. ANNIE stands "baff" for a moment.

ANNIE. Ah!

She goes across to the bedroom on the Right, and soon returns with a suit of pyjamas, a toothbrush, a pair of slippers and a case of razors, which she puts on the table, and disappears into the kitchen. She reappears with a bread pan, which she deposits in the centre of the room; then crosses again to the bedroom, and once more reappears with a clothes brush, two hair brushes, and a Norfolk jacket. As she stuffs all these into the bread pan and bears it back into the kitchen, there is the sound of a car driving up and stopping. ANNIE reappears at the kitchen door just as the knocker sounds.

ANNIE. Vexin' and provokin'! [Knocker again. She opens the door] Oh!

MR and MRS BUILDER enter.

BUILDER. Mr and Mrs Builder. My daughter in?

ANNIE. [Confounded] Oh! Sir, no, sir.

BUILDER. My good girl, not "Oh! Sir, no, sir." Simply: No, Sir. See?

ANNIE. Oh! Sir, yes, Sir.

BUILDER. Where is she?

ANNIE. Oh! Sir, I don't know, Sir.

BUILDER. [Fixing her as though he suspected her of banter] Will she be back soon?

ANNIE. No, Sir.

BUILDER. How do you know?

ANNIE. I d—don't, sir.

BUILDER. They why do you say so? [About to mutter "She's an idiot!" he looks at her blushing face and panting figure, pats her on the shoulder and says] Never mind; don't be nervous.

ANNIE. Oh! yes, sir. Is that all, please, sir?

MRS BUILDER. [With a side look at her husband and a faint smile] Yes; you can go.

ANNIE. Thank you, ma'am.

She turns and hurries out into the kitchen, Left. BUILDER gazes after her, and MRS BUILDER gazes at BUILDER with her faint smile.

BUILDER. [After the girl is gone] Quaint and Dutch—pretty little figure! [Staring round] H'm! Extraordinary girls are! Fancy Athene preferring this to home. What?

MRS BUILDER. I didn't say anything.

BUILDER. [Placing a chair for his wife, and sitting down himself] Well, we must wait, I suppose. Confound that Nixon legacy! If Athene hadn't had that potty little legacy left her, she couldn't have done this. Well, I daresay it's all spent by now. I made a mistake to lose my temper with her.

MRS BUILDER. Isn't it always a mistake to lose one's temper?

BUILDER. That's very nice and placid; sort of thing you women who live sheltered lives can say. I often wonder if you women realise the strain on a business man.

MRS BUILDER. [In her softly ironical voice] It seems a shame to add the strain of family life.

BUILDER. You've always been so passive. When I want a thing, I've got to have it.

MRS BUILDER. I've noticed that.

BUILDER. [With a short laugh] Odd if you hadn't, in twenty-three years. [Touching a canvas standing against the chair with his toe] Art! Just a pretext. We shall be having Maud wanting to cut loose next. She's very restive. Still, I oughtn't to have had that scene with Athene. I ought to have put quiet pressure.

MRS BUILDER Smiles.

BUILDER. What are you smiling at?

MRS BUILDER shrugs her shoulders.

Look at this—Cigarettes! [He examines the brand on the box] Strong, very—and not good! [He opens the door] Kitchen! [He shuts it, crosses, and opens the door, Right] Bedroom!

MRS BUILDER. [To his disappearing form] Do you think you ought, John?

He has disappeared, and she ends with an expressive movement of her hands, a long sigh, and a closing of her eyes. BUILDER'S peremptory voice is heard: "Julia!"

What now?

She follows into the bedroom. The maid ANNIE puts her head out of the kitchen door; she comes out a step as if to fly; then, at BUILDER'S voice, shrinks back into the kitchen.

BUILDER, reappearing with a razor strop in one hand and a shaving-brush in the other, is followed by MRS BUILDER.

BUILDER. Explain these! My God! Where's that girl?

MRS BUILDER. John! Don't! [Getting between him and the kitchen door] It's not dignified.

BUILDER. I don't care a damn.

MRS BUILDER. John, you mustn't. Athene has the tiny beginning of a moustache, you know.

BUILDER. What! I shall stay and clear this up if I have to wait a week. Men who let their daughters—! This age is the limit. [He makes a vicious movement with the strop, as though laying it across someone's back.]

MRS BUILDER. She would never stand that. Even wives object, nowadays.

BUILDER. [Grimly] The war's upset everything. Women are utterly out of hand. Why the deuce doesn't she come?

MRS BUILDER. Suppose you leave me here to see her.

BUILDER. [Ominously] This is my job.

MRS BUILDER. I think it's more mine.

BUILDER. Don't stand there opposing everything I say! I'll go and have another look—[He is going towards the bedroom when the sound of a latchkey in the outer door arrests him. He puts the strop and brush behind his back, and adds in a low voice] Here she is!

MRS BUILDER has approached him, and they have both turned towards the opening door. GUY HERRINGHAME comes in. They are a little out of his line of sight, and he has shut the door before he sees them. When he does, his mouth falls open, and his hand on to the knob of the door. He is a comely young man in Harris tweeds. Moreover, he is smoking. He would speak if he could, but his surprise is too excessive. BUILDER. Well, sir?

GUY. [Recovering a little] I was about to say the same to you, sir.

BUILDER. [Very red from repression] These rooms are not yours, are they?

GUY. Nor yours, sir?

BUILDER. May I ask if you know whose they are?

GUY. My sister's.

BUILDER. Your—you—!

MRS BUILDER. John!

BUILDER. Will you kindly tell me why your sister signs her drawings by the name of my daughter, Athene Builder—and has a photograph of my wife hanging there?

The YOUNG MAN looks at MRS BUILDER and winces, but recovers himself.

GUY. [Boldly] As a matter of fact this is my sister's studio; she's in France—and has a friend staying here.

BUILDER. Oh! And you have a key?

GUY. My sister's.

BUILDER. Does your sister shave?

GUY. I—I don't think so.

BUILDER. No. Then perhaps you'll tell me what these mean? [He takes out the strop and shaving stick].

GUY. Oh! Ah! Those things?

BUILDER. Yes. Now then?

GUY. [Addressing MRS BUILDER] Need we go into this in your presence, ma'am? It seems rather delicate.

BUILDER. What explanation have you got?

GUY. Well, you see—

BUILDER. No lies; out with it!

GUY. [With decision] I prefer to say nothing.

BUILDER. What's your name?

GUY. Guy Herringhame.

BUILDER. Do you live here?

Guy makes no sign.

MRS BUILDER. [To Guy] I think you had better go.

BUILDER. Julia, will you leave me to manage this?

MRS BUILDER. [To Guy] When do you expect my daughter in?

GUY. Now—directly.

MRS BUILDER. [Quietly] Are you married to her?

GUY. Yes. That is—no—o; not altogether, I mean.

BUILDER. What's that? Say that again!

GUY. [Folding his arms] I'm not going to say another word.

BUILDER. I am.

MRS BUILDER. John—please!

BUILDER. Don't put your oar in! I've had wonderful patience so far. [He puts his boot through a drawing] Art! This is what comes of it! Are you an artist?

GUY. No; a flying man. The truth is—

BUILDER. I don't want to hear you speak the truth. I'll wait for my daughter.

GUY. If you do, I hope you'll be so very good as to be gentle. If you get angry I might too, and that would be awfully ugly.

BUILDER. Well, I'm damned!

GUY. I quite understand that, sir. But, as a man of the world, I hope you'll take a pull before she comes, if you mean to stay.

BUILDER. If we mean to stay! That's good!

GUY. Will you have a cigarette?

BUILDER. I—I can't express—

GUY. [Soothingly] Don't try, sir. [He jerks up his chin, listening] I think that's her. [Goes to the door] Yes. Now, please! [He opens the door] Your father and mother, Athene.

ATHENE enters. She is flushed and graceful. Twenty-two, with a short upper lip, a straight nose, dark hair, and glowing eyes. She wears bright colours, and has a slow, musical voice, with a slight lisp.

ATHENE. Oh! How are you, mother dear? This is rather a surprise. Father always keeps his word, so I certainly didn't expect him. [She looks steadfastly at BUILDER, but does not approach].

BUILDER. [Controlling himself with an effort] Now, Athene, what's this?

ATHENE. What's what?

BUILDER. [The strop held out] Are you married to this—this—?

ATHENE. [Quietly] To all intents and purposes.

BUILDER. In law?

ATHENE. No.

BUILDER. My God! You—you—!

ATHENE. Father, don't call names, please.

BUILDER. Why aren't you married to him?

ATHENE. Do you want a lot of reasons, or the real one?

BUILDER. This is maddening! [Goes up stage].

ATHENE. Mother dear, will you go into the other room with Guy? [She points to the door Right].

BUILDER. Why?

ATHENE. Because I would rather she didn't hear the reason.

GUY. [To ATHENE, sotto voce] He's not safe.

ATHENE. Oh! yes; go on.

Guy follows MRS BUILDER, and after hesitation at the door they go out into the bedroom.

BUILDER. Now then!

ATHENE. Well, father, if you want to know the real reason, it's—you.

BUILDER. What on earth do you mean?

ATHENE. Guy wants to marry me. In fact, we—But I had such a stunner of marriage from watching you at home, that I—

BUILDER. Don't be impudent! My patience is at breaking-point, I warn you.

ATHENE. I'm perfectly serious, Father. I tell you, we meant to marry, but so far I haven't been able to bring myself to it. You never noticed how we children have watched you.

BUILDER. Me?

ATHENE. Yes. You and mother, and other things; all sorts of things—

BUILDER. [Taking out a handkerchief and wiping his brow] I really think you're mad.

ATHENE. I'm sure you must, dear.

BUILDER. Don't "dear" me! What have you noticed? D'you mean I'm not a good husband and father?

ATHENE. Look at mother. I suppose you can't, now; you're too used to her.

BUILDER. Of course I'm used to her. What else is marrying for?

ATHENE. That; and the production of such as me. And it isn't good enough, father. You shouldn't have set us such a perfect example.

BUILDER. You're talking the most arrant nonsense I ever heard. [He lifts his hands] I've a good mind to shake it out of you.

ATHENE. Shall I call Guy?

He drops his hands.

Confess that being a good husband and father has tried you terribly. It has us, you know.

BUILDER. [Taking refuge in sarcasm] When you've quite done being funny, perhaps you'll tell me why you've behaved like a common street flapper.

ATHENE. [Simply] I couldn't bear to think of Guy as a family man. That's all—absolutely. It's not his fault; he's been awfully anxious to be one.

BUILDER. You've disgraced us, then; that's what it comes to.

ATHENE. I don't want to be unkind, but you've brought it on yourself.

BUILDER. [Genuinely distracted] I can't even get a glimmer of what you mean. I've never been anything but firm. Impatient, perhaps. I'm not an angel; no ordinary healthy man is. I've never grudged you girls any comfort, or pleasure.

ATHENE. Except wills of our own.

BUILDER. What do you want with wills of your own till you're married?

ATHENE. You forget mother!

BUILDER. What about her?

ATHENE. She's very married. Has she a will of her own?

BUILDER. [Sullenly] She's learnt to know when I'm in the right.

ATHENE. I don't ever mean to learn to know when Guy's in the right. Mother's forty-one, and twenty-three years of that she's been your wife. It's a long time, father. Don't you ever look at her face?

BUILDER. [Troubled in a remote way] Rubbish!

ATHENE. I didn't want my face to get like that.

BUILDER. With such views about marriage, what business had you to go near a man? Come, now!

ATHENE. Because I fell in love.

BUILDER. Love leads to marriage—and to nothing else, but the streets. What an example to your sister!

ATHENE. You don't know Maud any more than you knew me. She's got a will of her own too, I can tell you.

BUILDER. Now, look here, Athene. It's always been my way to face accomplished facts. What's done can't be undone; but it can be remedied. You must marry this young—at once, before it gets out. He's behaved like a ruffian: but, by your own confession, you've behaved worse. You've been bitten by this modern disease, this—this, utter lack of common decency. There's an eternal order in certain things, and marriage is one of them; in fact, it's the chief. Come, now. Give me a promise, and I'll try my utmost to forget the whole thing.

ATHENE. When we quarrelled, father, you said you didn't care what became of me.

BUILDER. I was angry.

ATHENE. So you are now.

BUILDER. Come, Athene, don't be childish! Promise me!

ATHENE. [With a little shudder] No! We were on the edge of it. But now I've seen you again—Poor mother!

BUILDER. [Very angry] This is simply blasphemous. What do you mean by harping on your mother? If you think that—that—she doesn't—that she isn't—

ATHENE. Now, father!

BUILDER. I'm damned if I'll sit down under this injustice. Your mother is—is pretty irritating, I can tell you. She—she—Everything suppressed. And—and no—blood in her!

ATHENE. I knew it!

BUILDER. [Aware that he has confirmed some thought in her that he had no intention of confirming] What's that?

ATHENE. Don't you ever look at your own face, father? When you shave, for instance.

BUILDER. Of course I do.

ATHENE. It isn't satisfied, is it?

BUILDER. I don't know what on earth you mean.

ATHENE. You can't help it, but you'd be ever so much happier if you were a Mohammedan, and two or three, instead of one, had—had learned to know when you were in the right.

BUILDER. 'Pon my soul! This is outrageous!

ATHENE. Truth often is.

BUILDER. Will you be quiet?

ATHENE. I don't ever want to feel sorry for Guy in that way.

BUILDER. I think you're the most immodest—I'm ashamed that you're my daughter. If your another had ever carried on as you are now—

ATHENE. Would you have been firm with her?

BUILDER. [Really sick at heart at this unwonted mockery which meets him at every turn] Be quiet, you—!

ATHENE. Has mother never turned?

BUILDER. You're an unnatural girl! Go your own way to hell!

ATHENE. I am not coming back home, father.

BUILDER. [Wrenching open the door, Right] Julia! Come! We can't stay here.

MRS BUILDER comes forth, followed by GUY.

As for you, sir, if you start by allowing a woman to impose her crazy ideas about marriage on you, all I can say is—I despise you. [He crosses to the outer door, followed by his wife. To ATHENE] I've done with you!

He goes out.

MRS BUILDER, who has so far seemed to accompany him, shuts the door quickly and remains in the studio. She stands there with that faint smile on her face, looking at the two young people.

ATHENE. Awfully sorry, mother; but don't you see what a stunner father's given me?

MRS BUILDER. My dear, all men are not alike.

GUY. I've always told her that, ma'am.

ATHENE. [Softly] Oh! mother, I'm so sorry for you.

The handle of the door is rattled, a fist is beaten on it.

[She stamps, and covers her ears] Disgusting!

GUY. Shall I—?

MRS BUILDER. [Shaking her head] I'm going in a moment. [To ATHENE] You owe it to me, Athene.

ATHENE. Oh! if somebody would give him a lesson!

BUILDER's voice: "Julia!"

Have you ever tried, mother?

MRS BUILDER looks at the YOUNG MAN, who turns away out of hearing.

MRS BUILDER. Athene, you're mistaken. I've always stood up to him in my own way.

ATHENE. Oh! but, mother—listen!

The beating and rattling have recommenced, and the voice: "Are you coming?"

[Passionately] And that's family life! Father was all right before he married, I expect. And now it's like this. How you survive—!

MRS BUILDER. He's only in a passion, my dear.

ATHENE. It's wicked.

MRS BUILDER. It doesn't work otherwise, Athene.

A single loud bang on the door.

ATHENE. If he beats on that door again, I shall scream.

MRS BUILDER smiles, shakes her head, and turns to the door.

MRS BUILDER. Now, my dear, you're going to be sensible, to please me. It's really best. If I say so, it must be. It's all comedy, Athene.

ATHENE. Tragedy!

GUY. [Turning to them] Look here! Shall I shift him?

MRS BUILDER shakes her head and opens the door. BUILDER stands there, a furious figure.

BUILDER. Will you come, and leave that baggage and her cad?

MRS BUILDER steps quickly out and the door is closed. Guy makes an angry movement towards it.

ATHENE. Guy!

GUY. [Turning to her] That puts the top hat on. So persuasive! [He takes out of his pocket a wedding ring, and a marriage licence] Well! What's to be done with these pretty things, now?

ATHENE. Burn them!

GUY. [Slowly] Not quite. You can't imagine I should ever be like that, Athene?

ATHENE. Marriage does wonders.

GUY. Thanks.

ATHENE. Oh! Guy, don't be horrid. I feel awfully bad.

GUY. Well, what do you think I feel? "Cad!"

They turn to see ANNIE in hat and coat, with a suit-case in her hand, coming from the door Left.

ANNIE. Oh! ma'am, please, Miss, I want to go home.

GUY. [Exasperated!] She wants to go home—she wants to go home!

ATHENE. Guy! All right, Annie.

ANNIE. Oh! thank you, Miss. [She moves across in front of them].

ATHENE. [Suddenly] Annie!

ANNIE stops and turns to her.

What are you afraid of?

ANNIE. [With comparative boldness] I—I might catch it, Miss.

ATHENE. From your people?

ANNIE. Oh! no, Miss; from you. You see, I've got a young man that wants to marry me. And if I don't let him, I might get into trouble meself.

ATHENE. What sort of father and mother have you got, Annie?

ANNIE. I never thought, Miss. And of course I don't want to begin.

ATHENE. D'you mean you've never noticed how they treat each other?

ANNIE. I don't think they do, Miss.

ATHENE. Exactly.

ANNIE. They haven't time. Father's an engine driver.

GUY. And what's your young man, Annie?

ANNIE. [Embarrassed] Somethin' like you, sir. But very respectable.

ATHENE. And suppose you marry him, and he treats you like a piece of furniture?

ANNIE. I—I could treat him the same, Miss.

ATHENE. Don't you believe that, Annie!

ANNIE. He's very mild.

ATHENE. That's because he wants you. You wait till he doesn't.

ANNIE looks at GUY.

GUY. Don't you believe her, Annie; if he's decent—

ANNIE. Oh! yes, sir.

ATHENE. [Suppressing a smile] Of course—but the point is, Annie, that marriage makes all the difference.

ANNIE. Yes, Miss; that's what I thought.

ATHENE. You don't see. What I mean is that when once he's sure of you, he may change completely.

ANNIE. [Slowly, looking at her thumb] Oh! I don't—think—he'll hammer me, Miss. Of course, I know you can't tell till you've found out.

ATHENE. Well, I've no right to influence you.

ANNIE. Oh! no, Miss; that's what I've been thinking.

GUY. You're quite right, Annie—this is no place for you.

ANNIE. You see, we can't be married; sir, till he gets his rise. So it'll be a continual temptation to me.

ATHENE. Well, all right, Annie. I hope you'll never regret it.

ANNIE. Oh! no, Miss.

GUY. I say, Annie, don't go away thinking evil of us; we didn't realise you knew we weren't married.

ATHENE. We certainly did not.

ANNIE. Oh! I didn't think it right to take notice.

GUY. We beg your pardon.

ANNIE. Oh! no, sir. Only, seein' Mr and Mrs Builder so upset, brought it 'ome like. And father can be 'andy with a strap.

ATHENE. There you are! Force majeure!

ANNIE. Oh! yes, Miss.

ATHENE. Well, good-bye, Annie. What are you going to say to your people?

ANNIE. Oh! I shan't say I've been livin' in a family that wasn't a family, Miss. It wouldn't do no good.

ATHENE. Well, here are your wages.

ANNIE. Oh! I'm puttin' you out, Miss. [She takes the money].

ATHENE. Nonsense, Annie. And here's your fare home.

ANNIE. Oh! thank you, Miss. I'm very sorry. Of course if you was to change your mind—
[She stops, embarrassed].

ATHENE. I don't think—

GUY. [Abruptly] Good-bye, Annie. Here's five bob for the movies.

ANNIE. Oh! good-bye, sir, and thank you. I was goin' there now with my young man. He's just round the corner.

GUY. Be very careful of him.

ANNIE. Oh! yes, sir, I will. Good-bye, sir. Goodbye, Miss.

She goes.

GUY. So her father has a firm hand too. But it takes her back to the nest. How's that, Athene?

ATHENE. [Playing with a leathern button on his coat] If you'd watched it ever since you could watch anything, seen it kill out all—It's having power that does it. I know Father's got awfully good points.

GUY. Well, they don't stick out.

ATHENE. He works fearfully hard; he's upright, and plucky. He's not stingy. But he's smothered his animal nature—and that's done it. I don't want to see you smother anything, Guy.

GUY. [Gloomily] I suppose one never knows what one's got under the lid. If he hadn't come here to-day—[He spins the wedding ring] He certainly gives one pause. Used he to whack you?

ATHENE. Yes.

GUY. Brute!

ATHENE. With the best intentions. You see, he's a Town Councillor, and a magistrate. I suppose they have to be "firm." Maud and I sneaked in once to listen to him. There was a woman who came for protection from her husband. If he'd known we were there, he'd have had a fit.

GUY. Did he give her the protection?

ATHENE. Yes; he gave her back to the husband. Wasn't it—English?

GUY. [With a grunt] Hang it! We're not all like that.

ATHENE. [Twisting his button] I think it's really a sense of property so deep that they don't know they've got it. Father can talk about freedom like a—politician.

GUY. [Fitting the wedding ring on her finger] Well! Let's see how it looks, anyway.

ATHENE. Don't play with fire, Guy.

GUY. There's something in atavism, darling; there really is. I like it—I do.

A knock on the door.

ATHENE. That sounds like Annie again. Just see.

GUY. [Opening the door] It is. Come in, Annie. What's wrong now?

ANNIE. [Entering in confusion] Oh! sir, please, sir—I've told my young man.

ATHENE. Well, what does he say?

ANNIE. 'E was 'orrified, Miss.

GUY. The deuce he was! At our conduct?

ANNIE. Oh! no, sir—at mine.

ATHENE. But you did your best; you left us.

ANNIE. Oh! yes, Miss; that's why 'e's horrified.

GUY. Good for your young man.

ANNIE. [Flattered] Yes, sir. 'E said I 'ad no strength of mind.

ATHENE. So you want to come back?

ANNIE. Oh! yes, Miss.

ATHENE. All right.

GUY. But what about catching it?

ANNIE. Oh, sir, 'e said there was nothing like Epsom salts.

GUY. He's a wag, your young man.

ANNIE. He was in the Army, sir.

GUY. You said he was respectable.

ANNIE. Oh! yes, sir; but not so respectable as that.

ATHENE. Well, Annie, get your things off, and lay lunch.

ANNIE. Oh! yes, Miss.

She makes a little curtsey and passes through into the kitchen.

GUY. Strength of mind! Have a little, Athene won't you? [He holds out the marriage licence before her].

ATHENE. I don't know—I don't know! If—it turned out—

GUY. It won't. Come on. Must take chances in this life.

ATHENE. [Looking up into his face] Guy, promise me—solemnly that you'll never let me stand in your way, or stand in mine!

GUY. Right! That's a bargain. [They embrace.]

ATHENE quivers towards him. They embrace fervently as ANNIE enters with the bread pan. They spring apart.

ANNIE. Oh!

GUY. It's all right, Annie. There's only one more day's infection before you. We're to be married to-morrow morning.

ANNIE. Oh! yes, sir. Won't Mr Builder be pleased?

GUY. H'm! That's not exactly our reason.

ANNIE. [Right] Oh! no, sir. Of course you can't be a family without, can you?

GUY. What have you got in that thing?

ANNIE is moving across with the bread pan. She halts at the bedroom door.

ANNIE. Oh! please, ma'am, I was to give you a message—very important— from Miss Maud Builder "Lookout! Father is coming!"

She goes out.

The CURTAIN falls.

ACT II

BUILDER'S study. At the table, MAUD has just put a sheet of paper into a typewriter. She sits facing the audience, with her hands stretched over the keys.

MAUD. [To herself] I must get that expression.

Her face assumes a furtive, listening look. Then she gets up, whisks to the mirror over the fireplace, scrutinises the expression in it, and going back to the table, sits down again with hands outstretched above the keys, and an accentuation of the expression. The door up Left is opened, and TOPPING appears. He looks at MAUD, who just turns her eyes.

TOPPING. Lunch has been ready some time, Miss Maud.

MAUD. I don't want any lunch. Did you give it?

TOPPING. Miss Athene was out. I gave the message to a young party. She looked a bit green, Miss. I hope nothing'll go wrong with the works. Shall I keep lunch back?

MAUD. If something's gone wrong, they won't have any appetite, Topping.

TOPPING. If you think I might risk it, Miss, I'd like to slip round to my dentist. [He lays a finger on his cheek].

MAUD. [Smiling] Oh! What race is being run this afternoon, then, Topping?

TOPPING. [Twinkling, and shifting his finger to the side of his nose] Well, I don't suppose you've 'eard of it, Miss; but as a matter of fact it's the Cesarwitch.

MAUD. Got anything on?

TOPPING. Only my shirt, Miss.

MAUD. Is it a good thing, then?

TOPPING. I've seen worse roll up. [With a touch of enthusiasm] Dark horse, Miss Maud, at twenty to one.

MAUD. Put me ten bob on, Topping. I want all the money I can get, just now.

TOPPING. You're not the first, Miss.

MAUD. I say, Topping, do you know anything about the film?

TOPPING. [Nodding] Rather a specialty of mine, Miss.

MAUD. Well, just stand there, and give me your opinion of this.

TOPPING moves down Left. She crouches over the typewriter, lets her hands play on the keys; stops; assumes that listening, furtive look; listens again, and lets her head go slowly round, preceded by her eyes; breaks it off, and says:

What should you say I was?

TOPPING. Guilty, Miss.

MAUD. [With triumph] There! Then you think I've got it?

TOPPING. Well, of course, I couldn't say just what sort of a crime you'd committed, but I should think pretty 'ot stuff.

MAUD. Yes; I've got them here. [She pats her chest].

TOPPING. Really, Miss.

MAUD. Yes. There's just one point, Topping; it's psychological.

TOPPING. Indeed, Miss?

MAUD. Should I naturally put my hand on them; or would there be a reaction quick enough to stop me? You see, I'm alone—and the point is whether the fear of being seen would stop me although I knew I couldn't be seen. It's rather subtle.

TOPPING. I think there's be a rehaction, Miss.

MAUD. So do I. To touch them [She clasps her chest] is a bit obvious, isn't it?

TOPPING. If the haudience knows you've got 'em there.

MAUD. Oh! yes, it's seen me put them. Look here, I'll show you that too.

She opens an imaginary drawer, takes out some bits of sealing-wax, and with every circumstance of stealth in face and hands, conceals them in her bosom.

All right?

TOPPING. [Nodding] Fine, Miss. You have got a film face. What are they, if I may ask?

MAUD. [Reproducing the sealing-wax] The Fanshawe diamonds. There's just one thing here too, Topping.

In real life, which should I naturally do—put them in here [She touches her chest] or in my bag?

TOPPING. [Touching his waistcoat—earnestly] Well! To put 'em in here, Miss, I should say is more—more pishchological.

MAUD. [Subduing her lips] Yes; but—

TOPPING. You see, then you've got 'em on you.

MAUD. But that's just the point. Shouldn't I naturally think: Safer in my bag; then I can pretend somebody put them there. You see, nobody could put them on me.

TOPPING. Well, I should say that depends on your character. Of course I don't know what your character is.

MAUD. No; that's the beastly part of it—the author doesn't, either. It's all left to me.

TOPPING. In that case, I should please myself, Miss. To put 'em in 'ere's warmer.

MAUD. Yes, I think you're right. It's more human.

TOPPING. I didn't know you 'ad a taste this way, Miss Maud.

MAUD. More than a taste, Topping—a talent.

TOPPING. Well, in my belief, we all have a vice about us somewhere. But if I were you, Miss, I wouldn't touch bettin', not with this other on you. You might get to feel a bit crowded.

MAUD. Well, then, only put the ten bob on if you're sure he's going to win. You can post the money on after me. I'll send you an address, Topping, because I shan't be here.

TOPPING. [Disturbed] What! You're not going, too, Miss Maud?

MAUD. To seek my fortune.

TOPPING. Oh! Hang it all, Miss, think of what you'll leave behind. Miss Athene's leavin' home has made it pretty steep, but this'll touch bottom—this will.

MAUD. Yes; I expect you'll find it rather difficult for a bit when I'm gone. Miss Baldini, you know. I've been studying with her. She's got me this chance with the movie people. I'm going on trial as the guilty typist in "The Heartache of Miranda."

TOPPING. [Surprised out of politeness] Well, I never! That does sound like 'em! Are you goin' to tell the gov'nor, Miss?

MAUD nods. In that case, I think I'll be gettin' off to my dentist before the band plays.

MAUD. All right, Topping; hope you won't lose a tooth.

TOPPING. [With a grin] It's on the knees of the gods, Miss, as they say in the headlines. He goes. MAUD stretches herself and listens.

MAUD. I believe that's them. Shivery funky.

She runs off up Left.

BUILDER. [Entering from the hall and crossing to the fireplace] Monstrous! Really monstrous!

CAMILLE enters from the hall. She has a little collecting book in her hand.

BUILDER. Well, Camille?

CAMILLE. A sistare from the Sacred 'Eart, Monsieur—her little book for the orphan children.

BUILDER. I can't be bothered—What is it?

CAMILLE. Orphan, Monsieur.

BUILDER. H'm! Well! [Feeling in his breast pocket] Give her that.

He hands her a five-pound note.

CAMILLE. I am sure she will be verree grateful for the poor little beggars. Madame says she will not be coming to lunch, Monsieur.

BUILDER. I don't want any, either. Tell Topping I'll have some coffee.

CAMILLE. Topping has gone to the dentist, Monsieur; 'e 'as the toothache.

BUILDER. Toothache—poor devil! H'm! I'm expecting my brother, but I don't know that I can see him.

CAMILLE. No, Monsieur?

BUILDER. Ask your mistress to come here.

He looks up, and catching her eye, looks away.

CAMILLE. Yes, Monsieur.

As she turns he looks swiftly at her, sweeping her up and down. She turns her head and catches his glance, which is swiftly dropped. Will Monsieur not 'ave anything to eat?

BUILDER. [Shaking his head-abruptly] No. Bring the coffee!

CAMILLE. Is Monsieur not well?

BUILDER. Yes—quite well.

CAMILLE. [Sweetening her eyes] A cutlet soubise? No?

BUILDER. [With a faint response in his eyes, instantly subdued] Nothing! nothing!

CAMILLE. And Madame nothing too—Tt! Tt! With her hand on the door she looks back, again catches his eyes in an engagement instantly broken off, and goes out.

BUILDER. [Stock-still, and staring at the door] That girl's a continual irritation to me! She's dangerous! What a life! I believe that girl—

The door Left is opened and MRS BUILDER comes in.

BUILDER. There's some coffee coming; do your head good. Look here, Julia. I'm sorry I beat on that door. I apologize. I was in a towering passion. I wish I didn't get into these rages. But—dash it all—! I couldn't walk away and leave you there.

MRS BUILDER. Why not?

BUILDER. You keep everything to yourself, so; I never have any notion what you're thinking. What did you say to her?

MRS BUILDER. Told her it would never work.

BUILDER. Well, that's something. She's crazy. D'you suppose she was telling the truth about that young blackguard wanting to marry her?

MRS BUILDER. I'm sure of it.

BUILDER. When you think of how she's been brought up. You would have thought that religion alone—

MRS BUILDER. The girls haven't wanted to go to church for years. They've always said they didn't see why they should go to keep up your position. I don't know if you remember that you once caned them for running off on a Sunday morning.

BUILDER. Well?

MRS BUILDER. They've never had any religion since.

BUILDER. H'm! [He takes a short turn up the room] What's to be done about Athene?

MRS BUILDER. You said you had done with her.

BUILDER. You know I didn't mean that. I might just as well have said I'd done with you! Apply your wits, Julia! At any moment this thing may come out. In a little town like this you can keep nothing dark. How can I take this nomination for Mayor?

MRS BUILDER. Perhaps Ralph could help.

BUILDER. What? His daughters have never done anything disgraceful, and his wife's a pattern.

MRS BUILDER. Yes; Ralph isn't at all a family man.

BUILDER. [Staring at her] I do wish you wouldn't turn things upside down in that ironical way. It isn't—English.

MRS BUILDER. I can't help having been born in Jersey.

BUILDER. No; I suppose it's in your blood. The French— [He stops short].

MRS BUILDER. Yes?

BUILDER. Very irritating sometimes to a plain Englishman—that's all.

MRS BUILDER. Shall I get rid of Camille?

BUILDER. [Staring at her, then dropping his glance] Camille? What's she got to do with it?

MRS BUILDER. I thought perhaps you found her irritating.

BUILDER. Why should I?

CAMILLE comes in from the dining-room with the coffee.

Put it there. I want some brandy, please.

CAMILLE. I bring it, Monsieur.

She goes back demurely into the dining-room.

BUILDER. Topping's got toothache, poor chap! [Pouring out the coffee] Can't you suggest any way of making Athene see reason? Think of the example! Maud will be kicking over next. I shan't be able to hold my head up here.

MRS BUILDER. I'm afraid I can't do that for you.

BUILDER. [Exasperated] Look here, Julia! That wretched girl said something to me about our life together. What—what's the matter with that?

MRS BUILDER. It is irritating.

BUILDER. Be explicit.

MRS BUILDER. We have lived together twenty-three years, John. No talk will change such things.

BUILDER. Is it a question of money? You can always have more. You know that. [MRS BUILDER smiles] Oh! don't smile like that; it makes me feel quite sick!

CAMILLE enters with a decanter and little glasses, from the dining-room.

CAMILLE. The brandy, sir. Monsieur Ralph Builder has just come.

MRS BUILDER. Ask him in, Camille.

CAMILLE. Yes, Madame.

She goes through the doorway into the hall. MRS BUILDER, following towards the door, meets RALPH BUILDER, a man rather older than BUILDER and of opposite build and manner. He has a pleasant, whimsical face and grizzled hair.

MRS BUILDER. John wants to consult you, Ralph.

RALPH. That's very gratifying.

She passes him and goes out, leaving the two brothers eyeing one another.

About the Welsh contract?

BUILDER. No. Fact is, Ralph, something very horrible's happened.

RALPH. Athene gone and got married?

BUILDER. No. It's—it's that she's gone and—and not got married.

RALPH utters a sympathetic whistle.

Jolly, isn't it?

RALPH. To whom?

BUILDER. A young flying bouncer.

RALPH. And why?

BUILDER. Some crazy rubbish about family life, of all things.

RALPH. Athene's a most interesting girl. All these young people are so queer and delightful.

BUILDER. By George, Ralph, you may thank your stars you haven't got a delightful daughter.

Yours are good, decent girls.

RALPH. Athene's tremendously good and decent, John. I'd bet any money she's doing this on the highest principles.

BUILDER. Behaving like a—

RALPH. Don't say what you'll regret, old man! Athene always took things seriously—bless her!

BUILDER. Julia thinks you might help. You never seem to have any domestic troubles.

RALPH. No—o. I don't think we do.

BUILDER. How d'you account for it?

RALPH. I must ask at home.

BUILDER. Dash it! You must know!

RALPH. We're all fond of each other.

BUILDER. Well, I'm fond of my girls too; I suppose I'm not amiable enough. H'm?

RALPH. Well, old man, you do get blood to the head. But what's Athene's point, exactly?

BUILDER. Family life isn't idyllic, so she thinks she and the young man oughtn't to have one.

RALPH. I see. Home experience?

BUILDER. Hang it all, a family's a family! There must be a head.

RALPH. But no tail, old chap.

BUILDER. You don't let your women folk do just as they like?

RALPH. Always.

BUILDER. What happens if one of your girls wants to do an improper thing? [RALPH shrugs his shoulders]. You don't stop her?

RALPH. Do you?

BUILDER. I try to.

RALPH. Exactly. And she does it. I don't and she doesn't.

BUILDER. [With a short laugh] Good Lord! I suppose you'd have me eat humble pie and tell Athene she can go on living in sin and offending society, and have my blessing to round it off.

RALPH. I think if you did she'd probably marry him.

BUILDER. You've never tested your theory, I'll bet.

RALPH. Not yet.

BUILDER. There you are.

RALPH. The 'suaviter in modo' pays, John. The times are not what they were.

BUILDER. Look here! I want to get to the bottom of this. Do you tell me I'm any stricter than nine out of ten men?

RALPH. Only in practice.

BUILDER. [Puzzled] How do you mean?

RALPH. Well, you profess the principles of liberty, but you practise the principles of government.

BUILDER. H'm! [Taking up the decanter] Have some?

RALPH. No, thank you.

BUILDER fills and raises his glass.

CAMILLE. [Entering] Madame left her coffee.

She comes forward, holds out a cup for BUILDER to pour into, takes it and goes out. BUILDER'S glass remains suspended. He drinks the brandy off as she shuts the door.

BUILDER. Life isn't all roses, Ralph.

RALPH. Sorry, old man.

BUILDER. I sometimes think I try myself too high. Well, about that Welsh contract?

RALPH. Let's take it.

BUILDER. If you'll attend to it. Frankly, I'm too upset.

As they go towards the door into the hall, MAUD comes in from the dining-room, in hat and coat.

RALPH. [Catching sight of her] Hallo! All well in your cosmogony, Maud?

MAUD. What is a cosmogony, Uncle?

RALPH. My dear, I—I don't know.

He goes out, followed by BUILDER. MAUD goes quickly to the table, sits down and rests her elbows on it, her chin on her hands, looking at the door.

BUILDER. [Re-entering] Well, Maud! You'd have won your bet!

MAUD. Oh! father, I—I've got some news for you.

BUILDER. [Staring at her] News—what?

MAUD. I'm awfully sorry, but I-I've got a job.

BUILDER. Now, don't go saying you're going in for Art, too, because I won't have it.

MAUD. Art? Oh! no! It's the—[With a jerk]—the Movies.

BUILDER. who has taken up a pipe to fill, puts it down.

BUILDER. [Impressively] I'm not in a joking mood.

MAUD. I'm not joking, father.

BUILDER. Then what are you talking about?

MAUD. You see, I—I've got a film face, and—

BUILDER. You've what? [Going up to his daughter, he takes hold of her chin] Don't talk nonsense! Your sister has just tried me to the limit.

MAUD. [Removing his hand from her chin] Don't oppose it, father, please! I've always wanted to earn my own living.

BUILDER. Living! Living!

MAUD. [Gathering determination] You can't stop me, father, because I shan't need support. I've got quite good terms.

BUILDER. [Almost choking, but mastering himself] Do you mean to say you've gone as far as that?

MAUD. Yes. It's all settled.

BUILDER. Who put you up to this?

MAUD. No one. I've been meaning to, ever so long. I'm twenty-one, you know.

BUILDER. A film face! Good God! Now, look here! I will not have a daughter of mine mixed up with the stage. I've spent goodness knows what on your education—both of you.

MAUD. I don't want to be ungrateful; but I—I can't go on living at home.

BUILDER. You can't—! Why? You've every indulgence.

MAUD. [Clearly and coldly] I can remember occasions when your indulgence hurt, father. [She wriggles her shoulders and back] We never forgot or forgave that.

BUILDER. [Uneasily] That! You were just kids.

MAUD. Perhaps you'd like to begin again?

BUILDER. Don't twist my tail, Maud. I had the most painful scene with Athene this morning. Now come! Give up this silly notion! It's really too childish!

MAUD. [Looking at him curiously] I've heard you say ever so many times that no man was any good who couldn't make his own way, father. Well, women are the same as men, now. It's the law of the country. I only want to make my own way.

BUILDER. [Trying to subdue his anger] Now, Maud, don't be foolish. Consider my position here—a Town Councillor, a Magistrate, and Mayor next year. With one daughter living with a man she isn't married to—

MAUD. [With lively interest] Oh! So you did catch them out?

BUILDER. D'you mean to say you knew?

MAUD. Of course.

BUILDER. My God! I thought we were a Christian family.

MAUD. Oh! father.

BUILDER. Don't sneer at Christianity!

MAUD. There's only one thing wrong with Christians—they aren't!

BUILDER Seizes her by the shoulders and shakes her vigorously. When he drops her shoulders, she gets up, gives him a vicious look, and suddenly stamps her foot on his toe with all her might.

BUILDER. [With a yowl of pain] You little devil!

MAUD. [Who has put the table between them] I won't stand being shaken.

BUILDER. [Staring at her across the table] You've got my temper up and you'll take the consequences. I'll make you toe the line.

MAUD. If you knew what a Prussian expression you've got!

BUILDER passes his hand across his face uneasily, as if to wipe something off.

No! It's too deep!

BUILDER. Are you my daughter or are you not?

MAUD. I certainly never wanted to be. I've always disliked you, father, ever since I was so high. I've seen through you. Do you remember when you used to come into the nursery because Jenny was pretty? You think we didn't notice that, but we did. And in the schoolroom—Miss Tipton. And d'you remember knocking our heads together? No, you don't; but we do. And—

BUILDER. You disrespectful monkey! Will you be quiet?

MAUD. No; you've got to hear things. You don't really love anybody but yourself, father. What's good for you has to be good for everybody. I've often heard you talk about independence, but it's a limited company and you've got all the shares.

BUILDER. Rot; only people who can support themselves have a right to independence.

MAUD. That's why you don't want me to support myself.

BUILDER. You can't! Film, indeed! You'd be in the gutter in a year. Athene's got her pittance, but you—you've got nothing.

MAUD. Except my face.

BUILDER. It's the face that brings women to ruin, my girl.

MAUD. Well, when I'm there I won't come to you to rescue me.

BUILDER. Now, mind—if you leave my house, I've done with you.

MAUD. I'd rather scrub floors now, than stay.

BUILDER. [Almost pathetically] Well, I'm damned! Look here, Maud— all this has been temper. You got my monkey up. I'm sorry I shook you; you've had your revenge on my toes. Now, come! Don't make things worse for me than they are. You've all the liberty you can reasonably want till you marry.

MAUD. He can't see it—he absolutely can't!

BUILDER. See what?

MAUD. That I want to live a life of my own.

He edges nearer to her, and she edges to keep her distance.

BUILDER. I don't know what's bitten you.

MAUD. The microbe of freedom; it's in the air.

BUILDER. Yes, and there it'll stay—that's the first sensible word you've uttered. Now, come! Take your hat off, and let's be friends!

MAUD looks at him and slowly takes off her hat.

BUILDER. [Relaxing his attitude, with a sigh of relief] That's right! [Crosses to fireplace].

MAUD. [Springing to the door leading to the hall] Good-bye, father!

BUILDER. [Following her] Monkey!

At the sound of a bolt shot, BUILDER goes up to the window. There is a fumbling at the door, and CAMILLE appears.

BUILDER. What's the matter with that door? CAMILLE. It was bolted, Monsieur.

BUILDER. Who bolted it?

CAMILLE. [Shrugging her shoulders] I can't tell, Monsieur.

She collects the cups, and halts close to him. [Softly] Monsieur is not 'appy.

BUILDER. [Surprised] What? No! Who'd be happy in a household like mine?

CAMILLE. But so strong a man—I wish I was a strong man, not a weak woman.

BUILDER. [Regarding her with reluctant admiration] Why, what's the matter with you?

CAMILLE. Will Monsieur have another glass of brandy before I take it?

BUILDER. No! Yes—I will.

She pours it out, and he drinks it, hands her the glass and sits down suddenly in an armchair. CAMILLE puts the glass on a tray, and looks for a box of matches from the mantelshelf.

CAMILLE. A light, Monsieur?

BUILDER. Please.

CAMILLE. [She trips over his feet and sinks on to his knee] Oh! Monsieur!

BUILDER flames up and catches her in his arms

Oh! Monsieur—

BUILDER. You little devil!

She suddenly kisses him, and he returns the kiss. While they are engaged in this entrancing occupation, MRS BUILDER opens the door from the hall, watches unseen for a few seconds, and quietly goes out again.

BUILDER. [Pushing her back from him, whether at the sound of the door or of a still small voice] What am I doing?

CAMILLE. Kissing.

BUILDER. I—I forgot myself.

They rise.

CAMILLE. It was na-ice.

BUILDER. I didn't mean to. You go away—go away!

CAMILLE. Oh! Monsieur, that spoil it.

BUILDER. [Regarding her fixedly] It's my opinion you're a temptation of the devil. You know you sat down on purpose.

CAMILLE. Well, perhaps.

BUILDER. What business had you to? I'm a family man.

CAMILLE. Yes. What a pity! But does it matter?

BUILDER. [Much beset] Look here, you know! This won't do! It won't do! I—I've got my reputation to think of!

CAMILLE. So 'ave I! But there is lots of time to think of it in between.

BUILDER. I knew you were dangerous. I always knew it.

CAMILLE. What a thing to say of a little woman!

BUILDER. We're not in Paris.

CAMILLE. [Clasping her hands] Oh! 'Ow I wish we was!

BUILDER. Look here—I can't stand this; you've got to go. Out with you! I've always kept a firm hand on myself, and I'm not going to—

CAMILLE. But I admire you so!

BUILDER. Suppose my wife had come in?

CAMILLE. Oh! Don't suppose any such a disagreeable thing! If you were not so strict, you would feel much 'appier.

BUILDER. [Staring at her] You're a temptress!

CAMILLE. I lofe pleasure, and I don't get any. And you 'ave such a duty, you don't get any sport. Well, I am 'ere!

She stretches herself, and BUILDER utters a deep sound.

BUILDER. [On the edge of succumbing] It's all against my—I won't do it! It's—it's wrong!

CAMILLE. Oh! La, la!

BUILDER. [Suddenly revolting] No! If you thought it a sin—I—might. But you don't; you're nothing but a—a little heathen.

CAMILLE. Why should it be better if I thought it a sin?

BUILDER. Then—then I should know where I was. As it is—

CAMILLE. The English 'ave no idea of pleasure. They make it all so coarse and virtuous.

BUILDER. Now, out you go before I—! Go on!

He goes over to the door and opens it. His wife is outside in a hat and coat.

She comes in.

[Stammering] Oh! Here you are—I wanted you.

CAMILLE, taking up the tray, goes out Left, swinging her hips a very little.

BUILDER. Going out?

MRS BUILDER. Obviously.

BUILDER. Where?

MRS BUILDER. I don't know at present.

BUILDER. I wanted to talk to you about Maud.

MRS BUILDER. It must wait.

BUILDER. She's-she's actually gone and—

MRS BUILDER. I must tell you that I happened to look in a minute ago.

BUILDER. [In absolute dismay] You! You what?

MRS BUILDER. Yes. I will put no obstacle in the way of your pleasures.

BUILDER. [Aghast] Put no obstacle? What do you mean? Julia, how can you say a thing like that? Why, I've only just—

MRS BUILDER. Don't! I saw.

BUILDER. The girl fell on my knees. Julia, she did. She's—she's a little devil. I—I resisted her. I give you my word there's been nothing beyond a kiss, under great provocation. I—I apologise.

MRS BUILDER. [Bows her head] Thank you! I quite understand. But you must forgive my feeling it impossible to remain a wet blanket any longer.

BUILDER. What! Because of a little thing like that—all over in two minutes, and I doing my utmost.

MRS BUILDER. My dear John, the fact that you had to do your utmost is quite enough. I feel continually humiliated in your house, and I want to leave it—quite quietly, without fuss of any kind.

BUILDER. But—my God! Julia, this is awful—it's absurd! How can you? I'm your husband. Really—your saying you don't mind what I do—it's not right; it's immoral!

MRS BUILDER. I'm afraid you don't see what goes on in those who live with you. So, I'll just go. Don't bother!

BUILDER. Now, look here, Julia, you can't mean this seriously. You can't! Think of my position! You've never set yourself up against me before.

MRS BUILDER. But I do now.

BUILDER. [After staring at her] I've given you no real reason. I'll send the girl away. You ought to thank me for resisting a temptation that most men would have yielded to. After twenty-three years of married life, to kick up like this—you ought to be ashamed of yourself.

MRS BUILDER. I'm sure you must think so.

BUILDER. Oh! for heaven's sake don't be sarcastic! You're my wife, and there's an end of it; you've no legal excuse. Don't be absurd!

MRS BUILDER. Good-bye!

BUILDER. D'you realise that you're encouraging me to go wrong? That's a pretty thing for a wife to do. You ought to keep your husband straight.

MRS BUILDER. How beautifully put!

BUILDER. [Almost pathetically] Don't rile me Julia! I've had an awful day. First Athene—then Maud—then that girl—and now you! All at once like this! Like a swarm of bees about one's head. [Pleading] Come, now, Julia, don't be so—so impracticable! You'll make us the laughing-stock of the whole town. A man in my position, and can't keep his own family; it's preposterous!

MRS BUILDER. Your own family have lives and thoughts and feelings of their own.

BUILDER. Oh! This damned Woman's business! I knew how it would be when we gave you the vote. You and I are married, and our daughters are our daughters. Come, Julia. Where's your commonsense? After twenty-three years! You know I can't do without you!

MRS BUILDER. You could—quite easily. You can tell people what you like.

BUILDER. My God! I never heard anything so immoral in all my life from the mother of two grownup girls. No wonder they've turned out as they have! What is it you want, for goodness sake?

MRS BUILDER. We just want to be away from you, that's all. I assure you it's best. When you've shown some consideration for our feelings and some real sign that we exist apart from you—we could be friends again—perhaps—I don't know.

BUILDER. Friends! Good heavens! With one's own wife and daughters! [With great earnestness] Now, look here, Julia, you haven't lived with me all this time without knowing that I'm a man of strong passions; I've been a faithful husband to you—yes, I have. And that means resisting all sorts of temptations you know nothing of. If you withdraw from my society I won't answer for the consequences. In fact, I can't have you withdrawing. I'm not going to see myself going to the devil and losing the good opinion of everybody round me. A bargain's a bargain. And until I've broken my side of it, and I tell you I haven't—you've no business to break yours. That's flat. So now, put all that out of your head.

MRS BUILDER. No.

BUILDER. [Intently] D'you realise that I've supported you in luxury and comfort?

MRS BUILDER. I think I've earned it.

BUILDER. And how do you propose to live? I shan't give you a penny. Come, Julia, don't be such an idiot! Fancy letting a kiss which no man could have helped, upset you like this!

MRS BUILDER. The Camille, and the last straw!

BUILDER. [Sharply] I won't have it. So now you know.
But MRS BUILDER has very swiftly gone.
Julia, I tell you— [The outer door is heard being closed] Damnation!
I will not have it! They're all mad! Here—where's my hat?

He looks distractedly round him, wrenches open the door, and a moment later
the street door is heard to shut with a bang.

CURTAIN

ACT III

SCENE I

Ten o'clock the following morning, in the study of the Mayor of Breconridge, a panelled room with no window visible, a door Left back and a door Right forward. The entire back wall is furnished with books from floor to ceiling; the other walls are panelled and bare. Before the fireplace, Left, are two armchairs, and other chairs are against the walls. On the Right is a writing-bureau at right angles to the footlights, with a chair behind it. At its back corner stands HARRIS, telephoning.

HARRIS. What—[Pause] Well, it's infernally awkward, Sergeant. . . . The Mayor's in a regular stew. . . . [Listens] New constable? I should think so! Young fool! Look here, Martin, the only thing to do is to hear the charge here at once. I've sent for Mr Chantrey; he's on his way. Bring Mr Builder and the witnesses round sharp. See? And, I say, for God's sake keep it dark. Don't let the Press get on to it. Why you didn't let him go home—! Black eye? The constable? Well, serve him right. Blundering young ass! I mean, it's undermining all authority. . . . Well, you oughtn't—at least, I . . . Damn it all!—it's a nine days' wonder if it gets out—! All right! As soon as you can. [He hangs up the receiver, puts a second chair behind the bureau, and other chairs facing it.] [To himself] Here's a mess! Johnny Builder, of all men! What price Mayors!

The telephone rings.

Hallo? . . . Poaching charge? Well, bring him too; only, I say, keep him back till the other's over. By the way, Mr Chantrey's going shooting. He'll want to get off by eleven. What? . . . Righto !

As he hangs up the receiver the MAYOR enters. He looks worried, and is still dressed with the indefinable wrongness of a burgher.

MAYOR. Well, 'Arris?

HARRIS. They'll be over in five minutes, Mr Mayor.

MAYOR. Mr Chantrey?

HARRIS. On his way, sir.

MAYOR. I've had some awkward things to deal with in my time, 'Arris, but this is just about the [Sniffs] limit.

HARRIS. Most uncomfortable, Sir; most uncomfortable!

MAYOR. Put a book on the chair, 'Arris; I like to sit 'igh.

HARRIS puts a volume of Encyclopaedia on the Mayor's chair behind the bureau.

[Deeply] Our fellow-magistrate! A family man! In my shoes next year. I suppose he won't be, now. You can't keep these things dark.

HARRIS. I've warned Martin, sir, to use the utmost discretion. Here's Mr Chantrey.

By the door Left, a pleasant and comely gentleman has entered, dressed with indefinable rightness in shooting clothes.

MAYOR. Ah, Chantrey!

CHANTREY. How de do, Mr Mayor? [Nodding to HARRIS] This is extraordinarily unpleasant.

The MAYOR nods.

What on earth's he been doing?

HARRIS. Assaulting one of his own daughters with a stick; and resisting the police.

CHANTREY. [With a low whistle] Daughter! Charity begins at home.

HARRIS. There's a black eye.

MAYOR. Whose?

HARRIS. The constable's.

CHANTREY. How did the police come into it?

HARRIS. I don't know, sir. The worst of it is he's been at the police station since four o'clock yesterday. The Superintendent's away, and Martin never will take responsibility.

CHANTREY. By George! he will be mad. John Builder's a choleric fellow.

MAYOR. [Nodding] He is. 'Ot temper, and an 'igh sense of duty.

HARRIS. There's one other charge, Mr Mayor—poaching. I told them to keep that back till after.

CHANTREY. Oh, well, we'll make short work of that. I want to get off by eleven, Harris. I shall be late for the first drive anyway. John Builder! I say, Mayor—but for the grace of God, there go we!

MAYOR. Harris, go out and bring them in yourself; don't let the servants—

HARRIS goes out Left. The MAYOR takes the upper chair behind the bureau, sitting rather higher because of the book than CHANTREY, who takes the lower. Now that they are in the seats of justice, a sort of reticence falls on them, as if they were afraid of giving away their attitudes of mind to some unseen presence.

MAYOR. [Suddenly] H'm!

CHANTREY. Touch of frost. Birds ought to come well to the guns—no wind. I like these October days.

MAYOR. I think I 'ear them. H'm.

CHANTREY drops his eyeglass and puts on a pair of "grandfather" spectacles. The MAYOR clears his throat and takes up a pen. They neither of them look up as the door is opened and a little procession files in. First HARRIS; then RALPH BUILDER, ATHENE, HERRINGHAME, MAUD, MRS BUILDER, SERGEANT MARTIN, carrying a heavy Malacca cane with a silver knob; JOHN BUILDER and the CONSTABLE MOON, a young man with one black eye. No funeral was ever attended by mutes so solemn and dejected. They stand in a sort of row.

MAYOR. [Without looking up] Sit down, ladies; sit down.

HARRIS and HERRINGHAME succeed in placing the three women in chairs. RALPH BUILDER also sits. HERRINGHAME stands behind. JOHN BUILDER remains standing between the two POLICEMEN. His face is unshaved and menacing, but he stands erect staring straight at the MAYOR. HARRIS goes to the side of the bureau, Back, to take down the evidence.

MAYOR. Charges!

SERGEANT. John Builder, of The Cornerways, Breconridge, Contractor and Justice of the Peace, charged with assaulting his daughter Maud Builder by striking her with a stick in the presence of Constable Moon and two other persons; also with resisting Constable Moon in the execution of his duty, and injuring his eye. Constable Moon!

MOON. [Stepping forward—one, two—like an automaton, and saluting] In River Road yesterday afternoon, Your Worship, about three-thirty p.m., I was attracted by a young woman callin' "Constable" outside a courtyard. On hearing the words "Follow me, quick," I followed her to a painter's studio inside the courtyard, where I found three persons in the act of disagreement. No sooner 'ad I appeared than the defendant, who was engaged in draggin' a woman towards the

door, turns to the young woman who accompanied me, with violence. "You dare, father," she says; whereupon he hit her twice with the stick the same which is produced, in the presence of myself and the two other persons, which I'm given to understand is his wife and other daughter.

MAYOR. Yes; never mind what you're given to understand.

MOON. No, sir. The party struck turns to me and says, "Come in. I give this man in charge for assault." I moves accordingly with the words: "I saw you. Come along with me." The defendant turns to me sharp and says: "You stupid lout—I'm a magistrate." "Come off it," I says to the best of my recollection. "You struck this woman in my presence," I says, "and you come along!" We were then at close quarters. The defendant gave me a push with the words: "Get out, you idiot!" "Not at all," I replies, and took 'old of his arm. A struggle ensues, in the course of which I receives the black eye which I herewith produce. [He touches his eye with awful solemnity.]

The MAYOR clears his throat; CHANTREY'S eyes goggle; HARRIS bends over and writes rapidly.

During the struggle, Your Worship, a young man has appeared on the scene, and at the instigation of the young woman, the same who was assaulted, assists me in securing the prisoner, whose language and resistance was violent in the extreme. We placed him in a cab which we found outside, and I conveyed him to the station.

CHANTREY. What was his—er—conduct in the—er—cab?

MOON. He sat quiet.

CHANTREY. That seems—

MOON. Seein' I had his further arm twisted behind him.

MAYOR [Looking at BUILDER] Any questions to ask him?

BUILDER makes not the faintest sign, and the MAYOR drops his glance.

MAYOR. Sergeant?

MOON steps back two paces, and the SERGEANT steps two paces forward.

SERGEANT. At ten minutes to four, Your Worship, yesterday afternoon, Constable Moon brought the defendant to the station in a four-wheeled cab. On his recounting the circumstances of the assault, they were taken down and read over to the defendant with the usual warning. The defendant said nothing. In view of the double assault and the condition of the constable's eye, and in the absence of the Superintendent, I thought it my duty to retain the defendant for the night.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «Литрес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на Литрес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.