

## A Good Woman

BY ARNOLD BENNETT  
A FARCE

### CHARACTERS

JAMES BRETT [*a Clerk in the War Office, 33*]. GERALD O'MARA [*a Civil Engineer, 24*]. ROSAMUND FIFE [*a Spinster and a Lecturer on Cookery, 28*].

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[SCENE: *Rosamund's Flat; the drawing-room. The apartment is plainly furnished. There is a screen in the corner of the room furthest from the door. It is 9 A. M. Rosamund is seated alone at a table. She wears a neat travelling-dress, with a plain straw hat. Her gloves lie on a chair. A small portable desk full of papers is open before her. She gazes straight in front of her, smiling vaguely. With a start she recovers from her daydreams, and rushing to the looking-glass, inspects her features therein. Then she looks at her watch.*]

ROSAMUND. Three hours yet! I'm a fool [*with decision. She sits down again, and idly picks up a paper out of the desk. The door opens, unceremoniously but quietly, and James enters. The two stare at each other, James wearing a conciliatory smile*].

ROSAMUND. You appalling creature!

JAMES. I couldn't help it, I simply couldn't help it.

ROSAMUND. Do you know this is the very height and summit of indelicacy?

JAMES. I was obliged to come.

ROSAMUND. If I had any relations--

JAMES. Which you haven't.

ROSAMUND. I say *if* I had any relations--

JAMES. I say *which* you haven't.

ROSAMUND. Never mind, it is a safe rule for unattached women always to behave as if they had relations, especially female relations whether they have any or not. My remark is, that if I had any relations they would be absolutely scandalized by this atrocious conduct of yours.

JAMES. What have I done?

ROSAMUND. Can you ask? Here are you, and here am I. We are to be married to-day at twelve o'clock. The ceremony has not taken place, and yet you are found on my premises. You must surely be aware that on the day of the wedding the parties--yes, the "parties," that is the word--should on no account see each other till they see each other in church.

JAMES. But since we are to be married at a registry office, does the rule apply?

ROSAMUND. Undoubtedly.

JAMES. Then I must apologize. My excuse is that I am not up in these minute details of circumspection; you see I have been married so seldom.

ROSAMUND. Evidently. [*A pause, during which James at last ventures to approach the middle of the room.*] Now you must go back home, and we'll pretend we haven't seen each other.

JAMES. Never, Rosamund! That would be acting a lie. And I couldn't dream of getting married with a lie on my lips. It would be so unusual. No; we have sinned, or rather I have sinned, on this occasion. I will continue to sin--openly, brazenly. Come here, my dove. A bird in the hand is worth two under a bushel. [*He assumes an attitude of entreaty, and, leaving her chair, Rosamund goes towards him. They exchange an ardent kiss.*]

ROSAMUND [*quietly submissive*]. I'm awfully busy, you know, Jim.

JAMES. I will assist you in your little duties, dearest, and then I will accompany you to the sacred ed--to the registry office. Now, what were you doing? [*She sits down, and he puts a chair for himself close beside her.*]

ROSAMUND. You are singularly unlike yourself this morning, dearest.

JAMES. Nervous tension, my angel. I should have deemed it impossible that an *employé* of the War Office could experience the marvelous and exquisite sensations now agitating my heart. But tell me, what are you doing with these papers?

ROSAMUND. Well, I was just going to look through them and see if they contained anything of a remarkable or valuable nature. You see, I hadn't anything to occupy myself with.

JAMES. Was 'oo bored, waiting for the timey-pimey to come?

ROSAMUND [*hands caressing*]. 'Iss, little pet was bored, she was. Was Mr. Pet lonely this morning? Couldn't he keep away from his little cooky-lecturer? He should see his little cooky-lecturer.

JAMES. And that reminds me, hadn't we better lunch in the train instead of at Willis's? That will give us more time?

ROSAMUND. Horrid greedy piggywiggy! Perhaps he will be satisfied if Mrs. Pet agrees to lunch both at Willis's and in the train?

JAMES. Yes. Only piggywiggy doesn't want to trespass on Mrs. Pet's good nature. Let piggywiggy look at the papers. [*He takes up a paper from the desk.*]

ROSAMUND [*a little seriously*]. No, Jimmy. I don't think we'll go through them. Perhaps it wouldn't be wise. Just let's destroy them. [*Takes papers from his hand and drops them in desk.*]

JAMES [*sternly*]. When you have been the wife of a War Office clerk for a week you will know that papers ought never to be destroyed. Now I come to think, it is not only my right but my duty to examine this secret *dossier*. Who knows--[*Takes up at random another document, which proves to be a postcard. Reads.*] "Shall come tomorrow night. Thine, Gerald."

ROSAMUND [*after a startled shriek of consternation*]. There! There! You've done it, first time! [*She begins to think, with knitted brows.*]

JAMES. Does this highly suspicious postcard point to some--some episode in your past of which you have deemed it advisable to keep me in ignorance? If so, I seek not to inquire. I forgive you--I take you, Rosamund, as you are!

ROSAMUND [*reflective, not heeding his remark*]. I had absolutely forgotten the whole affair, absolutely. [*Smiles a little. Aside.*] Suppose he should come! [*To James.*] Jim, I think I had better tell you all about Gerald. It will interest you. Besides, there is no knowing what may happen.

JAMES. As I have said, I seek not to inquire. [*Stiffly.*] Nor do I imagine that this matter, probably some childish entanglement, would interest me.

ROSAMUND. Oh, wouldn't it! Jim, don't be absurd. You know perfectly well you are dying to hear.

JAMES. Very well, save my life, then, at the least expense of words. To begin with, who is this Gerald--"thine," thine own Gerald?

ROSAMUND. Don't you remember Gerald O'Mara? You met him at the Stokes's, I feel sure. You know--the young engineer.

JAMES. Oh! *That* ass!

ROSAMUND. He isn't an ass. He's a very clever boy.

JAMES. For the sake of argument and dispatch, agreed! Went out to Cyprus or somewhere, didn't he, to build a bridge, or make a dock, or dig a well, or something of that kind?

ROSAMUND [*nodding*]. Now, listen, I'll tell you all about it. [*Settles herself for a long narration.*] Four years ago poor, dear Gerald was madly in love with me. He was twenty and I was twenty-four. Keep calm--I felt like his aunt. Don't forget I was awfully pretty in those days. Well, he was so tremendously in love that in order to keep him from destroying himself--of course, I knew he was going out to Cyprus--I sort of pretended to be sympathetic. I simply *had* to; Irishmen are so passionate. And he was very nice. And I barely knew you then. Well, the time approached for him to leave for Cyprus, and two days before the ship sailed he sent me that very postcard that by pure chance you picked up.

JAMES. He should have written a letter.

ROSAMUND. Oh! I expect he couldn't wait. He was so impulsive. Well, on the night before he left England he came here and proposed to me. I remember I was awfully tired and queer. I had been giving a lecture in the afternoon on "How to Pickle Pork," and the practical demonstration had been rather smelly. However, the proposal braced me up. It was the first I had had--that year. Well, I was so sorry for him that I couldn't say "No" outright. It would have been too brutal. He might have killed himself on the spot, and spoilt this carpet, which, by the way, was new then. So I said, "Look here, Gerald--"

JAMES. You called him "Gerald"?

ROSAMUND. *Rather!* "Look here, Gerald," I said; "you are going to Cyprus for four years. If your feeling towards me is what you think it is, come back to me at the end of those four years, and I will then give

you an answer." Of course I felt absolutely sure that in the intervening period he would fall in and out of love half a dozen times at least.

JAMES. Of course, half a dozen times at least; probably seven. What did he say in reply?

ROSAMUND. He agreed with all the seriousness in the world. "On this day four years hence," he said, standing just there [*pointing*], "I will return for your answer. And in the meantime I will live only for you." That was what he said--his very words.

JAMES. And a most touching speech, too! And then?

ROSAMUND. We shook hands, and he tore himself away, stifling a sob. Don't forget, he was a boy.

JAMES. Have the four years expired?

ROSAMUND. What is the date of that postcard? Let me see it. [*Snatches it, and smiles at the handwriting pensively.*] July 4th--four years ago.

JAMES. Then it's over. He's not coming. To-day is July 5th.

ROSAMUND. But yesterday was Sunday. He wouldn't come on Sunday. He was always very particular and nice.

JAMES. Do you mean to imply that you think he will come to-day and demand from you an affirmative? A moment ago you gave me to understand that in your opinion he would have--er--other affairs to attend to.

ROSAMUND. Yes. I did think so at the time. But now--now I have a kind of idea that he may come, that after all he may have remained faithful. You know I was maddeningly pretty then, and he had my photograph.

JAMES. Tell me, have you corresponded?

ROSAMUND. No, I expressly forbade it.

JAMES. Ah!

ROSAMUND. But still, I have a premonition he may come.

JAMES [*assuming a pugnacious pose*]. If he does, I will attend to him.

ROSAMUND. Gerald was a terrible fighter. [*A resounding knock is heard at the door. Both start violently, and look at each other in silence. Rosamund goes to the door and opens it.*]

ROSAMUND [*with an unsteady laugh of relief*]. Only the postman with a letter. [*She returns to her seat.*] No, I don't expect he will come, really. [*Puts letter idly on table. Another knock still louder. Renewed start.*]

ROSAMUND. Now that *is* he, I'm positive. He always knocked like that. Just fancy. After four years! Jim, just take the chair behind that screen for a bit. I *must* hide you.

JAMES. No, thanks! The screen dodge is a trifle *too* frayed at the edges.

ROSAMUND. Only for a minute. It would be *such* fun.

JAMES. No, thanks. [*Another knock.*]

ROSAMUND [*with forced sweetness*]. Oh, very well, then....

JAMES. Oh, well, of course, if you take it in that way--[*He proceeds to a chair behind screen, which does not, however, hide him from the audience.*]

ROSAMUND [*smiles his reward*]. I'll explain it all right. [*Loudly.*] Come in! [*Enter Gerald O'Mara.*]

GERALD. So you are in! [*Hastens across room to shake hands.*]

ROSAMUND. Oh, yes, I am in. Gerald, how are you? I must say you look tolerably well. [*They sit down.*]

GERALD. Oh, I'm pretty fit, thanks. Had the most amazing time in spite of the climate. And you? Rosie, you haven't changed a little bit. How's the cookery trade getting along? Are you still showing people how to concoct French dinners out of old bones and a sardine tin?

ROSAMUND. Certainly. Only I can do it without the bones now. You see, the science has progressed while you've been stagnating in Cyprus.

GERALD. Stagnating is the word. You wouldn't believe that climate!

ROSAMUND. What! Not had nice weather? What a shame! I thought it was tremendously sunshiny in Cyprus.

GERALD. Yes, that's just what it is, 97° in the shade when it doesn't happen to be pouring with malarial rain. We started a little golf club at Nicosia, and laid out a nine-hole course. But the balls used to melt. So we had to alter the rules, keep the balls in an ice-box, and take a fresh one at every hole. Think of that!

ROSAMUND. My poor boy! But I suppose there were compensations? You referred to "an amazing time."

GERALD. Yes, there were compensations. And that reminds me, I want you to come out and lunch with me at the Savoy. I've got something awfully important to ask you. In fact, that's what I've come for.

ROSAMUND. Sorry I can't, Gerald. The fact is, I've got something awfully important myself just about lunch time.

GERALD. Oh, yours can wait. Look here, I've ordered the lunch. I made sure you'd come. [*Rosamund shakes her head.*] Why can't you? It's not cooking, is it?

ROSAMUND. Only a goose.

GERALD. What goose?

ROSAMUND. Well--my own, and somebody else's. Listen, Gerald. Had you not better ask me this awfully important question now? No time like the present.

GERALD. I can always talk easier, especially on delicate topics, with a pint of something handy. But if you positively won't come, I'll get it off my chest now. The fact is, Rosie, I'm in love.

ROSAMUND. With whom?

GERALD. Ah! That's just what I want you to tell me.

ROSAMUND [*suddenly starting*]. Gerald! what is that dreadful thing sticking out of your pocket, and pointing right at me?

GERALD. That? That's my revolver. Always carry them in Cyprus, you know. Plenty of sport there.

ROSAMUND [*breathing again*]. Kindly take it out of your pocket and put it on the table. Then if it does go off it will go off into something less valuable than a cookery-lecturer.

GERALD [*laughingly obeying her*]. There. If anything happens it will happen to the screen. Now, Rosie, I'm in love, and I desire that you should tell me whom I'm in love with. There's a magnificent girl in Cyprus, daughter of the Superintendent of Police--

ROSAMUND. Name?

GERALD. Evelyn. Age nineteen. I tell you I was absolutely gone on her.

ROSAMUND. Symptoms?

GERALD. Well--er--whenever her name was mentioned I blushed terrifically. Of course, that was only one symptom.... Then I met a girl on the home steamer--no father or mother. An orphan, you know, awfully interesting.

ROSAMUND. Name?

GERALD. Madge. Nice name, isn't it? [*Rosamund nods.*] I don't mind telling you, I was considerably struck by her--still am, in fact.

ROSAMUND. Symptoms?

GERALD. Oh!... Let me see, I never think of her without turning absolutely pale. I suppose it's what they call "pale with passion." Notice it?

ROSAMUND [*somewhat coldly*]. It seems to me the situation amounts to this. There are two girls. One is named Evelyn, and the thought of her makes you blush. The other is named Madge, and the thought of her makes you turn pale. You fancy yourself in love, and you wish me to decide for you whether it is Madge or Evelyn who agitates your breast the more deeply.

GERALD. That's not exactly the way to put it, Rosie. You take a fellow up too soon. Of course I must tell you lots more yet. You should hear Evelyn play the "Moonlight Sonata." It's the most marvelous thing.... And then Madge's eyes! The way that girl can look at a fellow.... I'm telling you all these things, you know, Rosie, because I've always looked up to you as an elder sister.

ROSAMUND [*after a pause, during which she gazes into his face*]. I suppose it was in my character of your elder sister, that you put a certain question to me four years ago last night?

GERALD [*staggered; pulls himself together for a great resolve; after a long pause*]. Rosie! I never thought afterwards you'd take it seriously. I forgot it all. I was only a boy then. [*Speaking quicker and quicker.*] But I see clearly now. I never *could* withstand you. It's all rot about Evelyn and Madge. It's you I'm in love with; and I never guessed it! Rosie!... [*Rushes to her and impetuously flings his arms around her neck.*]

JAMES [*who, during the foregoing scene, has been full of uneasy gestures; leaping with incredible swiftness from the shelter of the screen*]. Sir!

ROSAMUND [*pushing Gerald quickly away*]. Gerald!

JAMES. May I inquire, sir, what is the precise significance of this attitudinising? [*Gerald has scarcely yet abandoned his amorous pose, but now does so quickly*]. Are we in the middle of a scene from "Romeo and Juliet," or is this 9:30 A. M. in the nineteenth century? If Miss Fife had played the "Moonlight Sonata" to you, or looked at you as Madge does, there might perhaps have been some shadow of an excuse for your extraordinary and infamous conduct. But since she has performed neither of these feats of skill, I fail to grasp--I say I fail to grasp--er--

GERALD [*slowly recovering from an amazement which has rendered him mute*]. Rosie, a man concealed in your apartment! But perhaps it is the piano-tuner. I am willing to believe the best.

ROSAMUND. Let me introduce Mr. James Brett, my future husband. Jim, this is Gerald.

JAMES. I have gathered as much. [*The men bow stiffly.*]

ROSAMUND [*dreamily*]. Poor, poor Gerald! [*Her tone is full of feeling. James is evidently deeply affected by it. He walks calmly and steadily to the table and picks up the revolver.*]

GERALD. Sir, that tool is mine.

JAMES. Sir, the fact remains that it is an engine of destruction, and that I intend to use it. Rosamund, the tone in which you uttered those three words, "Poor, poor Gerald!" convinces me, a keen observer of symptoms, that I no longer possess your love. Without your love, life to me is meaningless. I object to anything meaningless--even a word. I shall therefore venture to deprive myself of life. Good-by! [*To Gerald.*] Sir, I may see you later. [*Raises the revolver to his temples.*]

ROSAMUND [*appealing to Gerald to interfere*]. Gerald.

GERALD. Mr. Brett, I repeat that that revolver is mine. It would be a serious breach of good manners if you used it without my consent, a social solecism of which I believe you, as a friend of Miss Fife's, to be absolutely incapable. Still, as the instrument happens to be in your hand, you may use it--but not on yourself. Have the goodness, sir, to aim at me. I could not permit myself to stand in the way of another's happiness, as I should do if I continued to exist. At the same time I have conscientious objections to suicide. You will therefore do me a service by aiming straight. Above all things, don't hit Miss Fife. I merely mention it because I perceive that you are unaccustomed to the use of firearms. [*Folds his arms.*]

JAMES. Rosamund, *do* you love me?

ROSAMUND. My Jim!

JAMES [*deeply moved*]. The possessive pronoun convinces me that you do. [*Smiling blandly.*] Sir, I will grant your most reasonable demand. [*Aims at Gerald.*]

ROSAMUND [*half shrieking*]. I don't love you if you shoot Gerald.

JAMES. But, my dear, this is irrational. He has asked me to shoot him, and I have as good as promised to do so.

ROSAMUND [*entreating*]. James, in two hours we are to be married.... Think of the complications.

GERALD. Married! To-day! Then I withdraw my request.

JAMES. Yes; perhaps it will be as well. [*Lowers revolver.*]

GERALD. I have never yet knowingly asked a friend, even an acquaintance, to shoot me on his wedding-day, and I will not begin now. Moreover, now I come to think of it, the revolver wasn't loaded. Mr. Brett, I inadvertently put you in a ridiculous position. I apologize.

JAMES. I accept the apology. [*The general tension slackens. Both the men begin to whistle gently, in the effort after unconcern.*]

ROSAMUND. Jim, will you oblige me by putting that revolver down somewhere. I know it isn't loaded; but so many people have been killed by guns that weren't loaded that I should feel safer.... [*He puts it down on the table.*] Thank you!

JAMES [*picking up letter*]. By the way, here's that letter that came just now. Aren't you going to open it? The writing seems to me to be something like Lottie Dickinson's.

ROSAMUND [*taking the letter*]. It isn't Lottie's; it's her sister's. [*Stares at envelope.*] I know what it is. I *know* what it is. Lottie is ill, or dead, or something, and can't come and be a witness at the wedding. I'm sure it's that. Now, if she's dead we can't *be* married to-day; it wouldn't be decent. And it's frightfully unlucky to have a wedding postponed. Oh, but there isn't a black border on the envelope, so she can't be *dead*. And yet perhaps it was so sudden they hadn't time to buy mourning stationery! This is the result of your coming here this morning. I felt sure something would happen. Didn't I tell you so?

JAMES. No, you didn't, my dear. But why don't you open the letter?

ROSAMUND. I am opening it as fast as I can. [*Reads it hurriedly.*] There! I said so! Lottie fell off her bicycle last night, and broke her ankle--won't be able to stir for a fortnight--in great pain--hopes it won't *inconvenience* us!

JAMES. Inconvenience! I must say I regard it as very thoughtless of Lottie to go bicycling the very night before our wedding. Where did she fall off?

ROSAMUND. Sloane Street.

JAMES. That makes it positively criminal. She always falls off in Sloane Street. She makes a regular practice of it. I have noticed it before.

ROSAMUND. Perhaps she did it on purpose.

JAMES. Not a doubt of it!

ROSAMUND. She doesn't want us to get married!

JAMES. I have sometimes suspected that she had a certain tenderness for me. [*Endeavoring to look meek.*]

ROSAMUND. The cat!

JAMES. By no means. Cats are never sympathetic. She is. Let us be just before we are jealous.

ROSAMUND. Jealous! My dear James! Have you noticed how her skirts hang?

JAMES. Hang her skirts!

ROSAMUND. You wish to defend her?

JAMES. On the contrary; it was I who first accused her. [*Gerald, to avoid the approaching storm, seeks the shelter of the screen, sits down, and taking some paper from his pocket begins thoughtfully to write.*]

ROSAMUND. My dear James, let me advise you to keep quite, quite calm. You are a little bit upset.

JAMES. I am a perfect cucumber. But I can hear you breathing.

ROSAMUND. If you are a cucumber, you are a very indelicate cucumber. I'm not breathing more than is necessary to sustain life.

JAMES. Yes, you are; and what's more you'll cry in a minute if you don't take care. You're getting worked up.

ROSAMUND. No, I shan't. [*Sits down and cries.*]

JAMES. What did I tell you? Now perhaps you will inform me what we are quarreling about, because I haven't the least idea.

ROSAMUND [*through her sobs*]. I do think it's horrid of Lottie. We can't be married with one witness. And I didn't want to be married at a registry office at all.

JAMES. My pet, we can easily get another witness. As for the registry office, it was yourself who proposed it, as a way out of a difficulty. I'm High and you're Low--

ROSAMUND. I'm not Low; I'm Broad, or else Evangelical.

JAMES [*beginning calmly again*]. I'm High and you're Broad, and there was a serious question about candles and a genuflexion, and so we decided on the registry office, which, after all, is much cheaper.

ROSAMUND [*drying her tears, and putting on a saintly expression*]. Well, anyhow, James, we will consider our engagement at an end.

JAMES. This extraordinary tiff has lasted long enough, Rosie. Come and be kissed.

ROSAMUND [*with increased saintliness*]. You mistake me, James. I am not quarreling. I am not angry.

JAMES. Then you have ceased to love me?

ROSAMUND. I adore you passionately. But we can never marry. Do you not perceive the warnings against such a course? First of all you come here--drawn by some mysterious, sinister impulse--in breach of all etiquette. That was a Sign.

JAMES. A sign of what?

ROSAMUND. Evil. Then you find that postcard, to remind me of a forgotten episode.

JAMES. Damn the postcard! I wish I'd never picked it up.

ROSAMUND. Hush! Then comes this letter about Lottie.

JAMES. Damn that, too!

ROSAMUND [*sighs*]. Then Gerald arrives.

JAMES. Damn him, too! By the way, where is he?

GERALD [*coming out from behind the screen*]. Sir, if you want to influence my future state by means of a blasphemous expletive, let me beg you to do it when ladies are not present. There are certain prayers which should only be uttered in the smoking-room. [*The two men stab each other with their eyes.*]

JAMES. I respectfully maintain, Mr. O'Mara, that you had no business to call on my future wife within three hours of her wedding, and throw her into such a condition of alarm and unrest that she doesn't know whether she is going to get married or not.

GERALD. Sir! How in the name of Heaven was I to guess--

ROSAMUND [*rising, with an imperative gesture*]. Stop! Sit down, both. James [*who hesitates*], this is the last request I shall ever make of you. [*He sits*]. Let me speak. Long ago, from a mistaken motive of kindness, I gave this poor boy [*pointing to Gerald*] to understand that I loved him; that any rate I should love him in time. Supported by that assurance, he existed for four years through the climatic terrors of a distant isle. I, pampered with all the superfluities of civilization, forgot this noble youth in his exile. I fell selfishly in love. I promised to marry ... while he, with nothing to assuage the rigors--

JAMES. Pardon me, there was Evelyn's "Moonlight Sonata," not to mention Madge's eyes.

ROSAMUND. You jest, James, but the jest is untimely. Has he not himself said that these doubtless excellent young women were in fact nothing to him, that it was *my* image which he kept steadfastly in his heart?

GERALD. Ye--es, of course, Rosie.

ROSAMUND [*chiefly to James*]. The sight of this poor youth fills me with sorrow and compunction and shame. For it reminds me that four years ago I lied to him.

GERALD. It was awfully good of you, you know.

ROSAMUND. That is beside the point. At an earlier period of this unhappy morning, James, you asseverated that you could not dream of getting married with a lie on your lips. Neither can I. James, I love you to madness. [*Takes his inert hand, shakes it, and drops it again.*] Good-by, James! Henceforth we shall be strangers. My duty is towards Gerald.

GERALD. But if you love *him*?

ROSAMUND. With a good woman, conscience comes first, love second. In time I shall learn to love *you*. I was always quick at lessons. Gerald, take me. It is the only way by which I can purge my lips of the lie uttered four years ago. [*Puts her hands on Gerald's shoulders.*]

JAMES. In about three-quarters of an hour you will regret this, Rosamund Fife.

ROSAMUND. One never regrets a good action.

GERALD. Oh! well! I say.... [*inarticulate with embarrassment*].

ROSAMUND [*after a pause*]. James, we are waiting.

JAMES. What for?

ROSAMUND. For you to go.

JAMES. Don't mind me. You forget that I am in the War Office, and accustomed to surprising situations.

GERALD. Look here, Rosie. It's awfully good of you, and you're doing me a frightfully kind turn; but I can't accept it, you know. It wouldn't do. Kindness spoils my character.

JAMES. Yes, and think of the shock to the noble youth.

GERALD. I couldn't permit such a sacrifice.

ROSAMUND. To a good woman life should be one long sacrifice.

GERALD. Yes, that's all very well, and I tell you, Rosie, I'm awfully obliged to you. Of course I'm desperately in love with you. That goes without saying. But I also must sacrifice myself. The fact is ... there's Madge....

ROSAMUND. Well?

GERALD. Well, you know what a place a steamer is, especially in calm, warm weather. I'm afraid I've rather led her to expect.... The fact is, while you and Mr. Brett were having your little discussion just now, I employed the time in scribbling out a bit of a letter to her, and I rather fancy that I've struck one or two deuced good ideas in the proposal line. How's this for a novelty: "My dear Miss Madge, you cannot fail to have noticed from my behavior in your presence that I admire you tremendously?" Rather a neat beginning, eh?

ROSAMUND. But you said you loved me.

GERALD. Oh, well, so I do. You see I only state that I "admire" her. All the same I feel I'm sort of bound to her, ... you see how I'm fixed. I should much prefer, of course....

JAMES. To a good man life should be one long sacrifice.

GERALD. Exactly, sir.

ROSAMUND [*steadying herself and approaching James*]. Jim, my sacrifice is over. It was a terrible ordeal, and nothing but a strict sense of duty could have supported me through such a trying crisis. I am yours. Lead me to the altar. I trust Gerald may be happy with this person named Madge.

JAMES. The flame of your love has not faltered?

ROSAMUND. Ah, no!

JAMES. Well, if my own particular flame hadn't been fairly robust, the recent draughts might have knocked it about a bit. You have no more sacrifices in immediate view?... [*She looks at him in a certain marvelous way, and he suddenly swoops down and kisses her.*] To the altar! March! Dash; we shall want another witness.

GERALD. Couldn't I serve?

ROSAMUND. You're sure it wouldn't be too much for your feelings?

GERALD. I should enjoy it.... I mean I shan't mind very much. Let us therefore start. If we're too soon you can watch the process at work on others, and learn how to comport yourselves. By the way, honeymoon?

JAMES. Paris. Charing Cross 1:30. Dine at Dover.

GERALD. Then you shall eat that lunch I have ordered at the Savoy.

ROSAMUND. Er--talking of lunch, as I'm hostess here, perhaps I should ask you men if you'd like a drink.

JAMES AND GERALD [*looking hopefully at each other*]. Well, yes.

ROSAMUND. I have some beautiful lemonade.

JAMES AND GERALD [*still looking at each other, but with a different expression*]. Oh, that will be delightful! [*Lemonade and glasses produced.*]

GERALD. I drink to the happy pair.

ROSAMUND [*a little sinister*]. And I--to Madge.

JAMES. And I--to a good woman--Mrs. Pet [*looking at her fixedly*]. All men like a good woman, but she shouldn't be too good--it's a strain on the system. [*General consumption of lemonade, the men*

*bravely swallowing it down, Rosamund rests her head on James's shoulder.]*

ROSAMUND. It occurs to me, Gerald, you only ordered lunch for two at the Savoy.

GERALD. Well, that's right. By that time you and James, if I may call him so, will be one, and me makes two.

*[Curtain.]*