

Make-Believe

BY A. A. MILNE

A CHILDREN'S PLAY IN A PROLOGUE AND THREE ACTS

Make-Believe was first produced at the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith, on December 24, 1918. The chief parts were played by Marjory Holman, Jean Cadell, Rosa Lynd, Betty Chester, Roy Lennol, John Barclay, Kinsey Peile, Stanley Drewitt, Ivan Berlyn, and Herbert Marshall--several parts each.

MAKE-BELIEVE

PROLOGUE

The playroom of the HUBBARD FAMILY--nine of them. Counting MR. and MRS. HUBBARD, we realize that there are eleven HUBBARDS in all, and you would think that one at least of the two people we see in the room would be a HUBBARD of sorts. But no. The tall manly figure is JAMES, the HUBBARDS' butler, for the HUBBARDS are able to afford a butler now. How different from the time when Old Mother Hubbard--called "old" because she was at least twenty-two, and "mother" because she had a passion for children--could not even find a bone for her faithful terrier; but, of course, that was before HENRY went into work. Well, the tall figure is JAMES, the butler, and the little one is ROSEMARY, a friend of the HUBBARD FAMILY. ROSEMARY is going in for literature this afternoon, as it's raining, and JAMES is making her quite comfortable first with pens and ink and blotting-paper--always so important when one wants to write. He has even thought of a stick of violet sealing-wax; after that there can be no excuse.

ROSEMARY. Thank you, James. (She sits down.) If any one calls I am not at home.

JAMES. Yes, Miss.

ROSEMARY. You may add that I am engaged in writing my auto--autobiography.

JAMES. Yes, Miss.

ROSEMARY. It's what every one writes, isn't it, James?

JAMES. I believe so, Miss.

ROSEMARY. Thank you. (He goes to the door.) Oh, James?

JAMES. Yes, Miss?

ROSEMARY. What *is* an autobiography?

JAMES. Well, I couldn't rightly say, Miss--not to explain it properly.

ROSEMARY (dismayed). Oh, James! . . . I thought you knew everything.

JAMES. In the ordinary way, yes, Miss, but every now and then----

ROSEMARY. It's very upsetting.

JAMES. Yes, Miss. . . . How would it be to write a play instead? Very easy work, they tell me.

ROSEMARY (nodding). Yes, that's much better. I'll write a play. Thank you, James.

JAMES. Not at all, Miss. [He goes out.

(ROSEMARY bites her pen, and thinks deeply. At last the inspiration comes.)

ROSEMARY (as she writes). Make-Believe. M-a-k-e hyphen B-e-l---
- (she stops and frowns) Now which way *is* it? (She tries it on the blotting-paper) *That* looks wrong. (She tries it again) So does that. Oh, dear! (She rings the bell . . . JAMES returns.)

JAMES. Yes, Miss?

ROSEMARY. James, I have decided to call my play Make-Believe.

JAMES. Yes, Miss.

ROSEMARY (carelessly). When you spell "believe," it is "i-e," isn't it?

JAMES. Yes, Miss.

ROSEMARY. I thought at first it was "e-i."

JAMES. Now you mention it, I think it is, Miss.

ROSEMARY (reproachfully). Oh, James! Aren't you certain?

JAMES. M-a-k-e, make, B-e-l---- (He stops and scratches his whiskers.)

ROSEMARY. Yes. *I* got as far as that.

JAMES. B-e-l----

ROSEMARY. You see, James, it spoils the play if you have an accident to the very first word of it.

JAMES. Yes, Miss. B-e-l----I've noticed sometimes that if one writes a word careless-like on the blotting-paper, and then looks at it with the head on one side, there's a sort of instinct comes over one, as makes one say (with a shake of the head) "Rotten." One can then write it the other way more hopeful.

ROSEMARY. I've tried that.

JAMES. Then might I suggest, Miss, that you give it another name altogether? As it might be, "Susan's Saturday Night," all easy words to spell, or "Red Revenge," or----

ROSEMARY. I *must* call it Make-Believe, because it's all of the play I've thought of so far.

JAMES. Quite so, Miss. Then how would it be to spell it wrong on purpose? It comes funnier that way sometimes.

ROSEMARY. Does it?

JAMES. Yes, Miss. Makes 'em laugh.

ROSEMARY. Oh! . . . Well, which *is* the wrong way?

JAMES. Ah, there you've got me again, Miss.

ROSEMARY (inspired). I know what I'll do. I'll spell it "i-e"; and if it's right, then I'm right, and if it's wrong, then I'm funny.

JAMES. Yes, Miss. That's the safest.

ROSEMARY. Thank you, James.

JAMES. Not at all, Miss. [He goes out.]

ROSEMARY (writing). Make-Believe. A Christmas Entertainment---
- (She stops and thinks, and then shakes her head.) No, play--a
Christmas Play in three acts. Er---- (She is stuck.)

Enter JAMES.

JAMES. Beg pardon, Miss, but the Misses and Masters Hubbard are without, and crave admittance.

ROSEMARY. All nine of them?

JAMES. Without having counted them, Miss, I should say that the majority of them were present.

ROSEMARY. Did you say that I was not at home?

JAMES. Yes, Miss. They said that, this being their house, and you being a visitor, if you *had* been at home, then you wouldn't have been here. Yumour on the part of Master Bertram, Miss.

ROSEMARY. It's very upsetting when you're writing a play.

JAMES. Yes, Miss. Perhaps they could help you with it. The more the merrier, as you might say.

ROSEMARY. What a good idea, James. Admit them.

JAMES. Yes, Miss. (He opens the door and says very rapidly) The Misses Ada, Caroline, Elsie, Gwendoline, and Isabel Hubbard, The Masters Bertram, Dennis, Frank, and Harold Hubbard. (They come in.)

ROSEMARY. How do you do?

ADA. Rosemary, darling, what *are* you doing?

BERTRAM. It's like your cheek, bagging our room.

CAROLINE (primly). Hush, Bertram. We ought always to be polite to our visitors when they stay with us. I am sure, if Rosemary wants our room----

DENNIS. Oh, chuck it!

ADA (at ROSEMARY'S shoulder). Oh, I say, she's writing a play!

(Uproar and turmoil, as they all rush at ROSEMARY.)

{ THE BOYS. Coo! I say, shove me into it. What's { it about? Bet it's awful rot. { { THE GIRLS. Oh, Rosemary! Am *I* in it? Do tell us { about it. Is it for Christmas?

ROSEMARY (in alarm). James, could you----?

JAMES (firmly). Quiet, there, quiet! Down, Master Dennis, down! Miss Gwendoline, if you wouldn't mind---- (He picks her up and places her on the floor.) Thank you. (Order is restored.)

ROSEMARY. Thank you, James. . . . Yes, it's a play for Christmas, and it is called "Make-Believe," and that's all I'm certain about yet, except that we're all going to be in it.

BERTRAM. Then I vote we have a desert island----

DENNIS. And pirates----

FRANK. And cannibals----

HAROLD (gloatingly). Cannibals eating people--Oo!

CAROLINE (shocked). Harold! How would *you* like to be eaten by a cannibal?

DENNIS. Oh, chuck it! How would *you* like to be a cannibal and have nobody to eat? (CAROLINE is silent, never having thought of this before.)

ADA. Let it be a fairy-story, Rosemary, darling. It's so much *prettier*.

ELSIE. With a lovely princess----

GWENDOLINE. And a humble woodcutter who marries her----

ISABEL (her only contribution). P'itty P'incess.

BERTRAM. Princesses are rot.

ELSIE (with spirit). So are pirates! (Deadlock.)

CAROLINE. *I* should like something about Father Christmas, and snow, and waits, and a lovely ball, and everybody getting nice presents and things.

DENNIS (selfishly, I'm afraid). Bags I all the presents.

(Of course, the others aren't going to have that. They all say so together.)

ROSEMARY (above the turmoil). James, I *must* have silence.

JAMES. Silence, all!

ROSEMARY. Thank you. . . . You will be interested to hear that I have decided to have a Fairy Story *and* a Desert Island *and* a Father Christmas.

ALL. Good! (Or words to that effect)

ROSEMARY (biting her pen). I shall begin with the Fairy Story. (There is an anxious silence. None of them has ever seen anybody writing a play before. How does one do it? Alas, ROSEMARY herself doesn't know. She appeals to JAMES.) James, how *do* you begin a play? I mean when you've *got* the title.

JAMES (a man of genius). Well, Miss Rosemary, seeing that it's to be called "Make-Believe," why not make-believe as it's written already?

ROSEMARY. What a good idea, James!

JAMES. All that is necessary is for the company to think very hard of what they want, and--there we are! Saves all the bother of writing and spelling and what not.

ROSEMARY (admiringly.) James, how clever you are!

JAMES. So-so, Miss Rosemary.

ROSEMARY. Now then, let's all think together. Are you all ready?

ALL. Yes! (They clench their hands.)

ROSEMARY. Then one, two, three--Go!

(They think. . . . The truth is that JAMES, who wasn't really meant to be in it, thinks too. If there is anything in the play which you don't like, it is JAMES thinking.)

ACT I.--THE PRINCESS AND THE WOODCUTTER

(The WOODCUTTER is discovered singing at his work, in a glade of the forest outside his hut. He is tall and strong, and brave and handsome; all that a woodcutter ought to be. Now it happened that the PRINCESS was passing, and as soon as his song is finished, sure enough, on she comes.)

PRINCESS. Good morning, Woodcutter.

WOODCUTTER. Good morning. (But he goes on with his work.)

PRINCESS (after a pause). Good morning, Woodcutter.

WOODCUTTER. Good morning.

PRINCESS. Don't you ever say anything except good morning?

WOODCUTTER. Sometimes I say good-bye.

PRINCESS. You *are* a cross woodcutter to-day.

WOODCUTTER. I have work to do.

PRINCESS. You are still cutting wood? Don't you ever do anything else?

WOODCUTTER. Well, you are still a Princess; don't *you* ever do anything else?

PRINCESS (reproachfully). Now, that's not fair, Woodcutter. You can't say I was a Princess yesterday, when I came and helped you stack your wood. Or the day before, when I tied up your hand where

you had cut it. Or the day before that, when we had our meal together on the grass. Was I a Princess then?

WOODCUTTER. Somehow I think you were. Somehow I think you were saying to yourself, "Isn't it sweet of a Princess to treat a mere woodcutter like this?"

PRINCESS. I think you're perfectly horrid. I've a good mind never to speak to you again. And--and I would, if only I could be sure that you would notice I wasn't speaking to you.

WOODCUTTER. After all, I'm just as bad as you. Only yesterday I was thinking to myself how unselfish I was to interrupt my work in order to talk to a mere Princess.

PRINCESS. Yes, but the trouble is that you *don't* interrupt your work.

WOODCUTTER (interrupting it and going up to her with a smile). Madam, I am at your service.

PRINCESS. I wish I thought you were.

WOODCUTTER. Surely you have enough people at your service already. Princes and Chancellors and Chamberlains and Waiting Maids.

PRINCESS. Yes, that's just it. That's why I want your help. Particularly in the matter of the Princes.

WOODCUTTER. Why, has a suitor come for the hand of her Royal Highness?

PRINCESS. Three suitors. And I hate them all.

WOODCUTTER. And which are you going to marry?

PRINCESS. I don't know. Father hasn't made up his mind yet.

WOODCUTTER. And this is a matter which father--which His Majesty decides for himself?

PRINCESS. Why, of course! You should read the History Books, Woodcutter. The suitors to the hand of a Princess are always set some trial of strength or test of quality by the King, and the winner marries his daughter.

WOODCUTTER. Well, I don't live in a Palace, and I think my own thoughts about these things. I'd better get back to my work. (He goes on with his chopping.)

PRINCESS (gently, after a pause). Woodcutter!

WOODCUTTER (looking up). Oh, are you there? I thought you were married by this time.

PRINCESS (meekly). I don't want to be married. (Hastily) I mean, not to any of those three.

WOODCUTTER. You can't help yourself.

PRINCESS. I know. That's why I wanted *you* to help me.

WOODCUTTER (going up to her). Can a simple woodcutter help a Princess?

PRINCESS. Well, perhaps a simple one couldn't, but a clever one might.

WOODCUTTER. What would his reward be?

PRINCESS. His reward would be that the Princess, not being married to any of her three suitors, would still be able to help him chop his wood in the mornings. . . . I *am* helping you, aren't I?

WOODCUTTER (smiling). Oh, decidedly.

PRINCESS (nodding). I thought I was.

WOODCUTTER. It is kind of a great lady like yourself to help so humble a fellow as I.

PRINCESS (meekly). I'm not *very* great. (And she isn't. She is the smallest, daintiest little Princess that ever you saw.)

WOODCUTTER. There's enough of you to make a hundred men unhappy.

PRINCESS. And one man happy?

WOODCUTTER. And one man very, very happy.

PRINCESS (innocently). I wonder who he'll be. . . . Woodcutter, if *you* were a Prince, would you be my suitor?

WOODCUTTER (scornfully). One of three?

PRINCESS (excitedly). Oo, would you kill the others? With that axe?

WOODCUTTER. I would not kill them, in order to help His Majesty make up his mind about his son-in-law. But if the Princess had made up her mind--and wanted me----

PRINCESS. Yes?

WOODCUTTER. Then I would marry her, however many suitors she had.

PRINCESS. Well, she's only got three at present.

WOODCUTTER. What is that to me?

PRINCESS. Oh, I just thought you might want to be doing something to your axe.

WOODCUTTER. My axe?

PRINCESS. Yes. You see, she *has* made up her mind.

WOODCUTTER (amazed). You mean--But--but I'm only a woodcutter.

PRINCESS. That's where you'll have the advantage of them, when it comes to axes.

WOODCUTTER. Princess! (He takes her in his arms) My Princess!

PRINCESS. Woodcutter! My woodcutter! My, oh so very slow and uncomprehending, but entirely adorable woodcutter!

(They sing together. They just happen to feel like that)

WOODCUTTER (the song finished). But what will His Majesty say?

PRINCESS. All sorts of things. . . . Do you really love me, woodcutter, or have I proposed to you under a misapprehension?

WOODCUTTER. I adore you!

PRINCESS (nodding). I thought you did. But I wanted to hear you say it. If I had been a simple peasant, I suppose you would have said it a long time ago?

WOODCUTTER. I expect so.

PRINCESS (nodding). Yes. . . . Well, now we must think of a plan for making Mother like you.

WOODCUTTER. Might I just kiss you again before we begin?

PRINCESS. Well, I don't quite see how I am to stop you.

(The WOODCUTTER picks her up in his arms and kisses her.)

WOODCUTTER. There!

PRINCESS (in his arms). Oh, Woodcutter, woodcutter, why didn't you do that the first day I saw you? Then I needn't have had the bother of proposing to you. (He puts her down suddenly) What is it?

WOODCUTTER (listening). Somebody coming. (He peers through the trees and then says in surprise) The King!

PRINCESS. Oh! I must fly!

WOODCUTTER. But you'll come back?

PRINCESS. Perhaps.

[She disappears quickly through the trees.

(The WOODCUTTER goes on with his work and is discovered at it a minute later by the KING and QUEEN.)

KING (puffing). Ah! and a seat all ready for us. How satisfying. (They sit down, a distinguished couple--reading from left to right, "KING, QUEEN"--on a bench outside the WOODCUTTER'S hut.)

QUEEN (crossly--she was like that). I don't know why you dragged me here.

KING. As I told you, my love, to be alone.

QUEEN. Well, you aren't alone. (She indicates the WOODCUTTER.)

KING. Pooh, he doesn't matter. . . . Well now, about these three Princes. They are getting on my mind rather. It is time we decided which one of them is to marry our beloved child. The trouble is to choose between them.

QUEEN. As regards appetite, there is nothing to choose between them. They are three of the heartiest eaters I have met for some time.

KING. You are right. The sooner we choose one of them, and send the other two about their business, the better. (Reflectively) There were six peaches on the breakfast-table this morning. Did I get one? No.

QUEEN. Did *I* get one? No.

KING. Did our darling child get one--not that it matters? No.

QUEEN. It is a pity that the seven-headed bull died last year.

KING. Yes, he had a way of sorting out competitors for the hand of our beloved one that was beyond all praise. One could have felt quite sure that, had the three competitors been introduced to him, only one of them would have taken any further interest in the matter.

QUEEN (always the housekeeper). And even he mightn't have taken any interest in his meals.

KING (with a sigh). However, those days are over. We must think of a new test. Somehow I think that, in a son-in-law, moral worth is even more to be desired than mere brute strength. Now my suggestion is this: that you should disguise yourself as a beggar woman and approach each of the three princes in turn, supplicating their charity. In this way we shall discover which of the three has the kindest heart. What do you say, my dear?

QUEEN. An excellent plan. If you remember, I suggested it myself yesterday.

KING (annoyed). Well, of course, it had been in my mind for some time. I don't claim that the idea is original; it has often been done in our family. (Getting up) Well then, if you will get ready, my dear, I will go and find our three friends and see that they come this way.

[They go out together.

(As soon as they are out of sight the PRINCESS comes back.)

PRINCESS. Well, Woodcutter, what did I tell you?

WOODCUTTER. What did you tell me?

PRINCESS. Didn't you listen to what they said?

WOODCUTTER. I didn't listen, but I couldn't help hearing.

PRINCESS. Well, *I* couldn't help listening. And unless you stop it somehow, I shall be married to one of them to-night.

WOODCUTTER. Which one?

PRINCESS. The one with the kindest heart--whichever that is.

WOODCUTTER. Supposing they all three have kind hearts?

PRINCESS (confidently). They won't. They never have. In our circles when three Princes come together, one of them has a kind heart and the other two haven't. (Surprised) Haven't you read any History at all?

WOODCUTTER. I have no time for reading. But I think it's time History was altered a little. We'll alter it this afternoon.

PRINCESS. What do you mean?

WOODCUTTER. Leave this to me. I've got an idea.

PRINCESS (clapping her hands). Oh, how clever of you! But what do you want me to do?

WOODCUTTER (pointing). You know the glade over there where the brook runs through it? Wait for me there.

PRINCESS. I obey my lord's commands.

[She blows him a kiss and runs off

(The WOODCUTTER resumes his work. By and by the RED PRINCE comes along. He is a--well, you will see for yourself what he is like.)

RED PRINCE. Ah, fellow. . . . Fellow! . . . I said fellow! (Yes, that sort of man.)

WOODCUTTER (looking up.) Were you speaking to me, my lord?

RED PRINCE. There is no other fellow here that I can see.

(The WOODCUTTER looks round to make sure, peers behind a tree or two, and comes back to the PRINCE.)

WOODCUTTER. Yes, you must have meant me.

RED PRINCE. Yes, of course I meant you, fellow. Have you seen the Princess come past this way? I was told she was waiting for me here.

WOODCUTTER. She is not here, my lord. (Looking round to see that they are alone) My lord, are you one of the Princes who is seeking the hand of the Princess.

RED PRINCE (complacently). I am, fellow.

WOODCUTTER. His Majesty the King was here a while ago. He is to make his decision between you this afternoon. (Meaningly) I think I can help you to be the lucky one, my lord.

RED PRINCE. You suggest that I take an unfair advantage over my fellow-competitors?

WOODCUTTER. I suggest nothing, my lord. I only say that I can help you.

RED PRINCE (magnanimously). Well, I will allow you to help me.

WOODCUTTER. Thank you. Then I will give you this advice. If a beggar woman asks you for a crust of bread this afternoon, remember-it is the test!

RED PRINCE (staggered). The test! But I haven't *got* a crust of bread!

WOODCUTTER. Wait here and I will get you one.

(He goes into the hut)

RED PRINCE (speaking after him as he goes). My good fellow, I am extremely obliged to you, and if ever I can do anything for you, such as returning a crust to you of similar size, or even lending you another

slightly smaller one, or---- (The WOODCUTTER comes back with the crust.) Ah, thank you, my man, thank you.

WOODCUTTER. I would suggest, my lord, that you should take a short walk in this direction (pointing to the opposite direction to that which the PRINCESS has taken), and stroll back casually in a few minutes' time when the Queen is here.

RED PRINCE. Thank you, my man, thank you.

(He puts the crust in his pocket and goes off.) (The WOODCUTTER goes on with his work. The BLUE PRINCE comes in and stands watching him in silence for some moments.) WOODCUTTER (looking up). Hullo!

BLUE PRINCE. Hullo!

WOODCUTTER. What do you want?

BLUE PRINCE. The Princess.

WOODCUTTER. She's not here.

BLUE PRINCE. Oh!

(The WOODCUTTER goes on with his work and the PRINCE goes on looking at him.)

WOODCUTTER (struck with an idea). Are you one of the Princes who is wooing the Princess?

BLUE PRINCE. Yes.

WOODCUTTER (coming towards him). I believe I could help your Royal Highness.

BLUE PRINCE. DO.

WOODCUTTER (doubtfully). It would perhaps be not Quite fair to the others.

BLUE PRINCE. Don't mind.

WOODCUTTER. Well then, listen. (He pauses a moment and looks round to see that they are alone.)

BLUE PRINCE. I'm listening.

WOODCUTTER. If you come back in five minutes, you will see a beggar woman sitting here. She will ask you for a crust of bread. You must give it to her, for it is the way His Majesty has chosen of testing your kindness of heart.

BLUE PRINCE (feeling in his pockets). No bread.

WOODCUTTER. I will give you some.

BLUE PRINCE. Do.

WOODCUTTER (taking a piece from his pocket). Here you are.

BLUE PRINCE. Thanks.

WOODCUTTER. Not at all, I'm very glad to have been able to help you.

(He goes on with his work. The BLUE PRINCE remains looking at him.)

BLUE PRINCE (with a great effort). Thanks.

(He goes slowly away. A moment later the YELLOW PRINCE makes a graceful and languid entry.)

YELLOW PRINCE. Ah, come hither, my man, come hither.

WOODCUTTER (stopping his work and looking up). You want me, sir?

YELLOW PRINCE. Come hither, my man. Tell me, has her Royal Highness the Princess passed this way lately?

WOODCUTTER. The Princess?

YELLOW PRINCE. Yes, the Princess, my bumpkin. But perhaps you have been too much concerned in your own earthy affairs to have noticed her. You--ah--cut wood, I see.

WOODCUTTER. Yes, sir, I am a woodcutter.

YELLOW PRINCE. A most absorbing life. Some day we must have a long talk about it. But just now I have other business waiting for me. With your permission, good friend, I will leave you to your faggots. (He starts to go.)

WOODCUTTER. Beg your pardon, sir, but are you one of those Princes that want to marry our Princess?

YELLOW PRINCE. I had hoped, good friend, to obtain your permission to do so. I beg you not to refuse it.

WOODCUTTER. You are making fun of me, sir.

YELLOW PRINCE. Discerning creature.

WOODCUTTER. All the same, I *can* help you.

YELLOW PRINCE. Then pray do so, log-chopper, and earn my everlasting gratitude.

WOODCUTTER. The King has decided that whichever of you three Princes has the kindest heart shall marry his daughter.

YELLOW PRINCE. Then you will be able to bear witness to him that I have already wasted several minutes of my valuable time in condescending to a mere faggot-splitter. Tell him this and the prize is mine. (Kissing the tips of his fingers) Princess, I embrace you.

WOODCUTTER. The King will not listen to me. But if you return here in five minutes, you will find an old woman begging for bread. It is the test which their Majesties have arranged for you. If you share your last crust with her--

YELLOW PRINCE. Yes, but do I look as if I carried a last crust about with me?

WOODCUTTER. But see, I will give you one.

YELLOW PRINCE (taking it between the tips of his fingers). Yes, but--

WOODCUTTER. Put it in your pocket, and when--

YELLOW PRINCE. But, my dear bark-scraper, have you no feeling for clothes at all? How can I put a thing like this in my pocket? (Handing it back to him) I beg you to wrap it up. Here take this. (Gives him a scarf) Neatly, I pray you. (Taking an orange ribbon out of his pocket) Perhaps a little of this round it would make it more tolerable. You think so? I leave it to you. I trust your taste entirely. . . . Leaving a loop for the little finger, I entreat you . . . so. (He hangs it on his little finger) In about five minutes, you said? We will be there. (With a bow) We thank you.

(He departs delicately. The WOODCUTTER smiles to himself, puts down his axe and goes off to the PRINCESS. And just in time. For behold! the KING and QUEEN return. At least we think it is the QUEEN, but she is so heavily disguised by a cloak which she wears over her court dress, that for a moment we are not quite sure.)

KING. Now then, my love, if you will sit down on that log there-- (placing her)--excellent--I think perhaps you should remove the crown. (Removes it) There! Now the disguise is perfect.

QUEEN. You're sure they are coming? It's a very uncomfortable seat.

KING. I told them that the Princess was waiting for them here. Their natural disappointment at finding I was mistaken will make the test of

their good nature an even more exacting one. My own impression is that the Yellow Prince will be the victor.

QUEEN. Oh, I hate that man.

KING (soothingly). Well, well, perhaps it will be the Blue one.

QUEEN. If anything, I dislike him *more* intensely.

KING. Or even the Red.

QUEEN. Ugh! I can't bear him.

KING. Fortunately, dear, you are not called upon to marry any of them. It is for our darling that we are making the great decision. Listen! I hear one coming. I will hide in the cottage and take note of what happens.

(He disappears into the cottage as the BLUE PRINCE comes in.)

QUEEN. Oh, sir, can you kindly spare a crust of bread for a poor old woman! Please, pretty gentleman!

BLUE PRINCE (standing stolidly in front of her and feeling in his pocket). Bread . . . Bread . . . Ah! Bread! (He offers it.)

QUEEN. Oh, thank you, sir. May you be rewarded for your gentle heart.

BLUE PRINCE. Thank you.

(He stands gazing at her. There is an awkward pause.)

QUEEN. A blessing on you, sir.

BLUE PRINCE. Thank you. (He indicates the crust) Bread.

QUEEN. Ah, you have saved the life of a poor old woman----

BLUE PRINCE. Eat it.

QUEEN (embarrassed). I--er--you--er---(She takes a bite and mumbles something.)

BLUE PRINCE. What?

QUEEN (swallowing with great difficulty). I'm almost too happy to eat, sir. Leave a poor old woman alone with her happiness, and---

BLUE PRINCE. Not too happy. Too weak. Help you eat. (He breaks off a piece and holds it to her mouth. With a great effort the QUEEN disposes of it.) Good! . . . Again! (She does it again.) Now! (She swallows another piece.) Last piece! (She takes it in. He pats her kindly on the back, and she nearly chokes.) Good. . . . Better now?

QUEEN (weakly). Much.

BLUE PRINCE. Good day.

QUEEN (with an effort). Good day, kind gentleman.

[He goes out.

(The KING is just coming from the cottage, when he returns suddenly. The KING slips back again.)

BLUE PRINCE. Small piece left over. (He gives it to her. She looks hopelessly at him.) Good-bye.

[He goes.

QUEEN (throwing the piece down violently). Ugh! What a man!

KING (coming out). Well, well, my dear, we have discovered the winner.

QUEEN (from the heart). Detestable person!

KING. The rest of the competition is of course more in the nature of a formality--

QUEEN. Thank goodness.

KING. However, I think that it will prevent unnecessary discussion afterwards if we--Take care, here is another one. (He hurries back.)

Enter the RED PRINCE.

QUEEN (with not nearly so much conviction). Could you spare a crust of bread, sir, for a poor hungry old woman?

RED PRINCE. A crust of bread, madam? Certainly. As luck will have it, I have a crust on me. My last one, but--your need is greater than mine. Eat, I pray.

QUEEN. Th-thank you, sir.

RED PRINCE. Not at all. Come, eat. Let me have the pleasure of seeing you eating.

QUEEN. M-might I take it home with me, pretty gentleman?

RED PRINCE (firmly). No, no. I must see you eating. Come! I will take no denial.

QUEEN. Th-thank you, sir. (Hopefully) Won't you share it with me?

RED PRINCE. No, I insist on your having it all. I am in the mood to be generous. Oblige me by eating it now for I am in a hurry; yet I will not go until you have eaten. (She does her best.) You eat but slowly. (Sternly) Did you deceive me when you said you were hungry?

QUEEN. N-no. I'm very hungry. (She eats)

RED PRINCE. That's better. Now understand--however poor I am, I can always find a crust of bread for an old woman. Always! Remember this when next you are hungry. . . . You spoke? (She shakes her head and goes on eating.) Finished?

QUEEN (with great difficulty). Yes, thank you, pretty gentleman.

RED PRINCE. There's a piece on the ground there that you dropped.
(She eats it in dumb agony) Finished?

QUEEN (huskily). Yes, thank you, pretty gentleman.

RED PRINCE. Then I will leave you, madam. Good morning.

[He goes out.

(The QUEEN rises in fury. The KING is about to come out of the cottage, when the YELLOW PRINCE enters. The QUEEN sits down again and mumbles something. It is certainly not an appeal for bread, but the YELLOW PRINCE is not to be denied.)

YELLOW PRINCE (gallantly). My poor woman, you are in distress. It pains me to see it, madam, it pains me terribly. Can it be that you are hungry? I thought so, I thought so. Give me the great pleasure, madam, of relieving your hunger. See (holding up his finger), my own poor meal. Take it! It is yours.

QUEEN (with difficulty). I am not hungry.

YELLOW PRINCE. Ah, madam, I see what it is. You do not wish to deprive me. You tell yourself, perchance, that it is not fitting that one in your station of life should partake of the meals of the highly born. You are not used, you say, to the food of Princes. Your rougher palate----

QUEEN (hopefully). Did you say food of princes?

YELLOW PRINCE. Where was I, madam? You interrupted me. No matter--eat. (She takes the scarf and unties the ribbon.) Ah, now I remember. I was saying that your rougher palate---

QUEEN (discovering the worst). No! No! Not bread!

YELLOW PRINCE. Bread, madam, the staff of life. Come, madam, will you not eat? (She tries desperately.) What can be more delightful than a crust of bread by the wayside?

(The QUEEN shrieks and falls back in a swoon. The KING rushes out to her.)

KING (to YELLOW PRINCE). Quick, quick, find the Princess.

YELLOW PRINCE. The Princess--find the Princess! (He goes vaguely off and we shall not see him again. But the WOODCUTTER and the PRINCESS do not need to be found. They are here.)

WOODCUTTER (to PRINCESS). Go to her, but don't show that you know me.

(He goes into the cottage, and the PRINCESS hastens to her father.)

PRINCESS. Father!

KING. Ah, my dear, you're just in time. Your mother---

PRINCESS. My mother?

KING. Yes, yes. A little plan of mine--of hers--your poor mother. Dear, dear!

PRINCESS. But what's the matter?

KING. She is suffering from a surfeit of bread, and---

(The WOODCUTTER comes up with a flagon of wine)

WOODCUTTER. Poor old woman! She has fainted from exhaustion. Let me give her some---

QUEEN (shrieking). No, no, not bread! I will *not* have any more bread.

WOODCUTTER. Drink this, my poor woman.

QUEEN (opening her eyes). Did you say drink? (She seizes the flagon and drinks)

PRINCESS. Oh, sir, you have saved my mother's life!

WOODCUTTER. Not at all.

KING. I thank you, my man, I thank you.

QUEEN. My deliverer! Tell me who you are!

PRINCESS. It is my mother, the Queen, who asks you.

WOODCUTTER (amazed, as well he may be). The Queen!

KING. Yes, yes. Certainly, the Queen.

WOODCUTTER (taking off his hat). Pardon, your Majesty. I am a woodcutter, who lives alone here, far away from courts.

QUEEN. Well, you've got more sense in your head than any of the Princes that *I've* seen lately. You'd better come to court.

PRINCESS (shyly). You will be very welcome, sir.

QUEEN. And you'd better marry the Princess.

KING. Isn't that perhaps going a *little* too far, dear?

QUEEN. Well, you wanted kindness of heart in your son-in-law, and you've got it. And he's got common sense too. (To WOODCUTTER) Tell me, what do you think of bread as--as a form of nourishment?

WOODCUTTER (cautiously). One can have too much of it.

QUEEN. Exactly my view. (To KING) There you are, you see.

KING. Well, if you insist. The great thing, of course, is that our darling child should be happy.

PRINCESS. I will do my best, father. (She takes the WOODCUTTER'S hand.)

KING. Then the marriage will take place this evening. (With a wave of his wand) Let the revels begin.

(They begin)

ACT II.--OLIVER'S ISLAND

SCENE I.--The Schoolroom (Ugh!)

(OLIVER is discovered lying flat on his--well, lying flat on the floor, deep in a book. The CURATE puts his head in at the door.)

CURATE. Ah, our young friend, Oliver! And how are we this morning, dear lad?

OLIVER (mumbling). All right, thanks.

CURATE. That's well, that's well. Deep in our studies, I see, deep in our studies. And what branch of Knowledge are we pursuing this morning?

OLIVER (without looking up). "Marooned in the Pacific," or "The Pirate's Bride."

CURATE. Dear, dear, what will Miss Pinniger say to this interruption of our studies?

OLIVER. Silly old beast.

CURATE. Tut-tut, dear lad, that is not the way to speak of our mentors and preceptors. So refined and intelligent a lady as Miss Pinniger. Indeed I came here to see her this morning on a little matter of embroidered vestments. Where is she, dear lad?

OLIVER. It isn't nine yet.

CURATE (looking at his watch). Past nine, past nine.

OLIVER (jumping up). Je-hoshaphat!

CURATE. Oliver! Oliver! My dear lad! Swearing at *your* age! Really, I almost feel it my duty to inform your aunt---

OLIVER. Fat lot of swearing in just mentioning one of the Kings of Israel.

CURATE. Of Judah, dear boy, of Judah. To be ignorant on such a vital matter makes it even more reprehensible. I cannot believe that our dear Miss Pinniger has so neglected your education that----

Enter our dear MISS PINNIGER, the Governess.

GOVERNESS. Ah, Mr. Smilax; how pleasant to see you!

CURATE. My dear Miss Pinniger! You will forgive me for interrupting you in your labours, but there is a small matter of--ah!---

GOVERNESS. Certainly, Mr. Smilax. I will walk down to the gate with you. Oliver, where is Geraldine?

OLIVER. Aunt Jane wanted her.

GOVERNESS. Well, you should be at your lessons. It's nine o'clock. The fact that I am momentarily absent from the room should make no difference to your zeal.

OLIVER (without conviction). No, Miss Pinniger. (He sits down at his desk, putting "Marooned in the Pacific" inside it.)

CURATE (playfully). For men must work, Oliver, men must work. How doth the little busy bee--Yes, Miss Pinniger, I am with you. [They go out.

OLIVER (opening his poetry book and saying it to himself). It was a summer evening--It was a summer evening--(He stops, refers to the book, and then goes on to himself) Old Kaspar's work was done. It was a summer evening, Old Kaspar's work was done---

Enter GERALDINE--or JILL.

JILL. Where's Pin?

OLIVER. Hallo, Jill. Gone off with Dearly Belovéd. Her momentary absence from the room should make no difference to your zeal, my dear Geraldine. And what are we studying this morning, dear child? (To himself) It was a summer evening, Old Kaspar's work was done.

JILL (giggling). Is that Pin?

OLIVER. Pin and Dearly Belovéd between them. She's a bit batey this morning.

JILL (at her desk). And all my sums have done themselves wrong. (Hard at it with paper and pencil) What's nine times seven, Oliver?

OLIVER. Fifty-six. Old Kaspar's work was done. Jolly well wish mine was. And he before his cottage door. Fat lot of good my learning this stuff if I'm going to be a sailor. I bet Beatty didn't mind what happened to rotten old Kaspar when he saw a German submarine.

JILL. Six and carry five. Aunt Jane has sent for the doctor to look at my chest.

OLIVER. What's the matter with your chest?

JILL. I blew my nose rather loud at prayers this morning.

OLIVER. I say, Jill, you *are* going it!

JILL. It wasn't my fault, Oliver. Aunt Jane turned over two pages at once and made me laugh, so I had to turn it into a blow.

OLIVER. Bet you what you like she knew.

JILL. Of course she did, and she'll tell the doctor, and he'll be as beastly as he can. What did she say to you for being late?

OLIVER. I said somebody had bagged my sponge, and she wouldn't like me to come down to prayers all unsponged, and she said, "Excuses, Oliver, *always* excuses! Leave me. I will see you later." Suppose that means I've got to go to bed this afternoon. Jill, if I do, be sporty and bring me up "Marooned in the Pacific."

JILL. They'll lock the door. They always do.

OLIVER. Then I shall jolly well go up for a handkerchief this morning, and shove it in the bed, just in case. Cavé--here's Pin.

MISS PINNIGER *returns to find them full of zeal.*

GOVERNESS (sitting down at her desk). Well, Oliver, have you learnt your piece of poetry?

OLIVER (nervously). I--I think so, Miss Pinniger.

GOVERNESS. Close the book, and stand up and say it. (Oliver takes a last despairing look, and stands up.) Well?

OLIVER. It was a summer evening---

GOVERNESS. The title and the author first, Oliver. Everything in its proper order.

OLIVER. Oh, I say, I didn't know I had to learn the title.

JILL (in a whisper). After Blenheim.

GOVERNESS. Geraldine, kindly attend to your own work.

OLIVER. After Blenheim. It was a summer evening.

GOVERNESS. After Blenheim, by Robert Southey. One of our greatest poets.

OLIVER. After Blenheim, by Robert Southey, one of our greatest poets. It was a summer evening, Old Kaspar's work was done--er--Old Kaspar's work was done--er--work was done, er . . .

GOVERNESS. And he before---

OLIVER. Oh yes, of course. And he before--er--and he before--er--It was a summer evening, Old Kaspar's work was done, and he before--er--and he before--- Er, it *was* a summer evening---

GOVERNESS. So you have already said, Oliver.

OLIVER. I just seem to have forgotten this bit, Miss Pinniger. And he before---

GOVERNESS. Well, what was he before?

OLIVER (hopefully). Blenheim? Oh no, it was *after* Blenheim.

GOVERNESS (wearily). His cottage door.

OLIVER. Oo, yes. And he before his cottage door was sitting in the sun. (He clears his throat) Was sitting in the sun. Er--(He coughs again)--er---

GOVERNESS. You have a cough, Oliver. Perhaps the doctor had better see you when he comes to see Geraldine.

OLIVER. It was just something tickling my throat, Miss Pinniger. Er--it was a summer evening.

GOVERNESS. You haven't learnt it, Oliver?

OLIVER. Yes, I have, Miss Pinniger, only I can't quite remember it. And he before his cottage door---

GOVERNESS. Is it any good, Geraldine, asking you if you have got any of your sums right?

JILL. I've got one, Miss Pinniger . . . nearly right . . . except for some of the figures.

GOVERNESS. Well, we shall have to spend more time at our lessons, that's all. This afternoon--ah--er---

(She stands up as AUNT JANE and the DOCTOR come in.)

AUNT JANE. I'm sorry to interrupt lessons, Miss Pinniger, but I have brought the Doctor to see Geraldine. (To DOCTOR) You will like her to go to her room?

DOCTOR. No, no, dear lady. There is no need. Her pulse--(He feels it)---dear, dear! Her tongue--(She puts it out)--tut-tut! A milk diet, plenty of rice-pudding, and perhaps she would do well to go to bed this afternoon.

AUNT JANE. I will see to it, doctor.

JILL (mutinously). I *feel* quite well.

DOCTOR (to AUNT JANE). A dangerous symptom. *Plenty* of rice-pudding.

GOVERNESS. Oliver was coughing just now.

OLIVER (to himself). Shut up!

DOCTOR (turning to OLIVER). Ah! His pulse--(Feels it)--tut-tut! His tongue--(OLIVER puts it out) Dear, dear! The same treatment, dear lady, as prescribed in the other case.

OLIVER (under his breath). Beast!

AUNT JANE. Castor-oil, liquorice-powder, ammoniated quinine--anything of that nature, doctor?

DOCTOR. *As necessary*, dear lady, *as necessary*. The system must be stimulated. Nature must be reinforced.

AUNT JANE (to GOVERNESS). Which do they dislike least?

OLIVER and JILL (hastily). Liquorice-powder!

DOCTOR. Then concentrate on the other two, dear lady.

AUNT JANE. Thank you, doctor. [They go out.

GOVERNESS. We will now go on with our lessons. Oliver, you will have opportunities in your bedroom this afternoon of learning your poetry. By the way, I had better have that book which you were reading when I came in just now.

OLIVER (trying to be surprised). Which book?

JILL (nobly doing her best to save the situation). Miss Pinniger, if you're multiplying rods, poles, or perches by nine, does it matter if---

GOVERNESS. I am talking to Oliver, Geraldine. Where is that book, Oliver?

OLIVER. Oh, *I* know the one you mean. I must have put it down somewhere. (He looks vaguely about the room.)

GOVERNESS. Perhaps you put it in your desk.

OLIVER. My desk?

JILL (going up to MISS PINNIGER with her work). You see, it's all gone wrong here, and I think I must have multiplied---- (Moving in front of her as she moves) I think I must have multiplied----

(Under cover of this, OLIVER makes a great effort to get the book into JILL'S desk, but it is no good.)

GOVERNESS (brushing aside JILL and advancing on OLIVER). Thank you, *I* will take it.

OLIVER (looking at the title). Oh yes, this is the one.

GOVERNESS. And I will speak to your aunt at *once* about the behaviour of both of you. [She goes out.

OLIVER (gallantly). *I don't care.*

JILL. I did try to help you, Oliver.

OLIVER. You wait. Won't I jolly well bag something of hers one day, just when she wants it.

JILL. I'm afraid you'll find the afternoon rather tiring without your book. What will you do?

OLIVER. I suppose I shall have to think.

JILL. What shall you think about?

OLIVER. I shall think I'm on my desert island.

JILL. Which desert island?

OLIVER. The one I always pretend I'm on when I'm thinking.

JILL. Isn't there any one else on it ever?

OLIVER. Oo, lots of pirates and Dyaks and cannibals and--other people.

JILL. What sort of other people?

OLIVER. I shan't tell you. This is a special think I thought last night. As soon as I thought of it, I decided to keep it for (impressively) a moment of great emergency.

JILL (silenced). Oh! . . . Oliver?

OLIVER Yes?

JILL. Let me be on your desert island this time. Because I did try to help you.

OLIVER. Well--well---- (Generously) Well, you can if you like.

JILL. Oh, thank you, Oliver. Won't you tell me what it's about, and then we can both think it together this afternoon.

OLIVER. I expect you'll think all sorts of silly things that *never* happen on a desert island.

JILL. I'll try not to, Oliver, if you tell me.

OLIVER. All right.

JILL (coming close to him). Go on.

OLIVER. Well, you see, I've been wrecked, you see, and the ship has foundered with all hands, you see, and I've been cast ashore on a desert island, you see.

JILL. Haven't I been cast ashore too?

OLIVER. Well, you will be this afternoon, of course. Well, you see, we land on the island, you see, and it's a perfectly ripping island, you see, and--and we land on it, you see, and. . . .

* * * * *

(But we are getting on too fast. When the good ship crashed upon the rock and split in twain, it seemed like that all aboard must perish. Fortunately OLIVER was made of stern mettle. Hastily constructing a raft and placing the now unconscious JILL upon it, he launched it into the seething maelstrom of waters and pushed off. Tossed like a cockle-shell upon the mountainous waves, the tiny craft with its precious freight was in imminent danger of foundering. But OLIVER was made of stern mettle. With dauntless courage he rigged a jury-mast, and placed a telescope to his eye. "Pull for the lagoon, JILL," cried the dauntless OLIVER, and in another moment. . . .)

(As the raft glides into the still waters beyond the reef, we can see it more clearly. Can it be JILL'S bed, with OLIVER in his pyjamas perched on the rail, and holding up his bath-towel? Does he shorten sail for a moment to thump his chest and say, "But OLIVER was made of stern mettle"? Or is it----)

(But the sun is sinking behind the swamp where the rattlesnakes bask. For a moment longer the sail gleams like copper in its rays, and then--fizz-z--we have lost it. See! Is that speck on the inky black waters the dauntless Oliver? It is. Let us follow to the island and see what adventures befall him.)

SCENE II.--It is the island which we have dreamed about all our lives. But at present we cannot see it properly, for it is dark. In one of those tropical darknesses which can be felt rather than seen OLIVER hands JILL out of the boat.

OLIVER. Tread carefully, Jill, there are lots of deadly rattlesnakes about.

JILL (stepping hastily back into the boat). Oli-ver!

OLIVER. You hear the noise of their rattles sometimes when the sun is sinking behind the swamp. (The deadly rattle of the rattlesnake is heard) There!

JILL. Oh, Oliver, are they very deadly? Because if they are, I don't think I shall like your island.

OLIVER. Those aren't. I always have their teeth taken out when ladies are coming. Besides, it's daylight now.

(With a rapidity common in the tropics--although it may just be OLIVER'S gallantry--the sun climbs out of the sea, and floods the island, JILL, no longer frightened, steps out of the boat, and they walk up to the clearing in the middle.)

JILL (looking about her). Oh, what a lovely island! I think it's lovely, Oliver.

OLIVER (modestly). It's pretty decent, isn't it? Won't you lie down? I generally lie down here and watch the turtles coming out of the sea to deposit their eggs on the sand.

JILL (lying down). How many do they de-deposit usually, Oliver?

OLIVER. Oh, three--or a hundred. Just depends how hungry I am. Have a bull's-eye, won't you?

JILL (excitedly). Oh, did you bring some?

OLIVER (annoyed). Bring some? (Brightening up) Oh, you mean from the wreck?

JILL (hastily). Yes, from the wreck. I mean besides the axe and the bag of nails and the gunpowder.

OLIVER. Couldn't. The ship sank with all hands before I could get them. But it doesn't matter, because (going up to one of the trees) I recognise this as the bull's-eye tree. (He picks a couple of bull's-eyes and gives one to her.)

JILL. Oh, Oliver, how lovely! Thank you. (She puts it in her mouth.)

OLIVER (sucking hard). There was nothing but breadfruit trees here the first time I was marooned on it. Rotten things to have on a decent island. So I planted a bull's-eye tree, and a barley-sugar-cane grove, and one or two other things, and made a jolly ripping place of it.

JILL (pointing). What's that tree over there?

OLIVER. That one? Rice-pudding tree.

JILL (getting up indignantly). Oliver! Take me back to the boat at once.

OLIVER. I say, shut up, Jill. You didn't think I meant it for *you*, did you?

JILL. But there's only you and me on the island.

OLIVER. What about the domestic animals? I suppose *they've* got to eat.

JILL. Oh, how lovely! Have we got a goat and a parrot, and a--a--

OLIVER. Much better than that. Look in that cage there.

JILL. Oh, is that a cage? I never noticed it. What do I do?

OLIVER (going to it). Here, I'll show you (He draws the blind, and the DOCTOR is exposed sitting on a stump of wood and blinking at the sudden light) What do you think of that?

JILL. Oliver!

OLIVER (proudly). I thought of that in bed one night. Spiffing idea, isn't it? I've got some other ones in the plantation over there. Awfully good specimens. I feed 'em on rice-pudding.

JILL. Can this one talk?

OLIVER. I'm teaching it. (Stirring it up with a stick) Come up there.

DOCTOR (mumbling). Ninety-nine, ninety-nine . . .

OLIVER. That's all it can say at present. I'm going to give it a swim in the lagoon to-morrow. I want to see if there are any sharks. If there aren't, then we can bathe there afterwards.

(The DOCTOR shudders.)

JILL. Have you given it a name yet? I think I should like to call it Fluffkins.

OLIVER. Righto! Good night, Fluffkins. Time little doctors were in bed. (He pulls down the blind.)

JILL (lying down again). Well, I think it's a lovely island.

OLIVER (lying beside her). If there's anything you want, you know, you've only got to say so. Pirates or anything like that. There's a ginger-beer well if you're thirsty.

JILL (closing her eyes). I'm quite happy, Oliver, thank you.

OLIVER (after a pause, a little awkwardly). Jill, you didn't ever want to marry a pirate, did you?

JILL (still on her back with her eyes shut). I hadn't thought about it much, Oliver dear.

OLIVER. Because I can get you an awfully decent pirate, if you like, and if I was his brother-in-law it would be ripping. I've often been marooned with him, of course, but never as his brother-in-law.

JILL. Why don't you marry his daughter and be his son-in-law?

OLIVER. He hasn't got a daughter.

JILL. Well, you could think him one.

OLIVER. I don't want to. If ever I'm such a silly ass as to marry, which I'm jolly well not going to be, I shall marry a--a dusky maiden. Jill, be sporty. All girls have to get married some time. It's different with men.

JILL. Very well, Oliver. I don't want to spoil your afternoon.

OLIVER. Good biz. (He stands up, shuts his eyes and waves his hands about.)

[Enter the PIRATE CHIEF.

PIRATE CHIEF (with a flourish). Gentles, your servant. Commodore Crookshank, at your service. Better known on the Spanish Main as One-eared Eric.

OLIVER. Glad to meet you, Commodore. I'm--er-- Two-toed Thomas, the Terror of the Dyaks. But you may call me Oliver, if you like. This is my sister Jill--the Pride of the Pampas.

PIRATE CHIEF (with another bow). Charmed!

JILL (politely). Don't mention it, Commodore.

OLIVER. My sister wants to marry you. Er--carry on. (He moves a little away from them and lies down.)

JILL (sitting down and indicating a place beside her). Won't you sit down, Commodore?

PIRATE CHIEF. Thank you, madam. The other side if I may. I shall hear better if you condescend to accept me. (He sits down on the other side of her.)

JILL. Oh, I'm so sorry! I was forgetting about your ear.

PIRATE CHIEF. Don't mention it. A little discussion in the La Plata river with a Spanish gentleman. At the end of it I was an ear short and he was a head short. It was considered in the family that I had won.

(There is an awkward pause.)

JILL (shyly). Well, Commodore?

PIRATE CHIEF. Won't you call me Eric?

JILL. I am waiting, Eric.

PIRATE CHIEF. Madam, I am not a marrying man, not to any extent, but if you would care to be Mrs. Crookshank, I'd undertake on my part to have the deck swabbed every morning, and to put a polish on the four-pounder that you could see your pretty face in.

JILL. Eric, how sweet of you. But I think you must speak to my brother in the library first. Oli-ver!

OLIVER (coming up). Hallo! Settled it?

JILL. It's all settled, Oliver, between Eric and myself, but you will want to ask him about his prospects, won't you?

OLIVER. Yes, yes, of course.

PIRATE. I shall be very glad to tell you anything I can, sir. I think I may say that I am doing fairly well in my profession.

OLIVER. What's your ship? A sloop or a frigate?

PIRATE. A brigantine.

JILL (excited). Oh, that's what Oliver puts on his hair when he goes to a party.

OLIVER (annoyed). Shut up, Jill! A brigantine? Ah yes, a rakish craft, eh, Commodore?

PIRATE (earnestly). Extremely rakish.

OLIVER. And how many pieces of eight have you?

PIRATE. Nine thousand.

OLIVER. Ah! (To JILL) What's nine times eight?

JILL (to herself). Nine times eight.

OLIVER (to himself). Nine times eight.

PIRATE (to himself). Nine times eight.

JILL. Seventy-two.

PIRATE. I made it seventy-one, but I expect you're right.

OLIVER. Then you've seventy-two thousand pieces altogether?

PIRATE. Yes, sir, about that.

OLIVER. Any doubloons?

PIRATE. Hundreds of 'em.

OLIVER. Ingots of gold?

PIRATE. Lashings of 'em.

JILL. And he's going to polish up the four-pounder until I can see my face in it.

OLIVER. I was just going to ask you about your guns. You've got 'em fore and aft of course?

PIRATE. Yes, sir. A four-pounder fore and a half-pounder haft.

OLIVER (a little embarrassed). And do you ever have brothers-in-law in your ship?

PIRATE. Well, I never have had yet, but I have always been looking about for one.

JILL. Oh, Oliver, isn't Eric a *nice* man?

OLIVER (casually). I suppose the captain's brother-in-law is generally the first man to board the Spaniard with his cutlass between his teeth?

PIRATE. You might almost say always. Many a ship on the Spanish Main I've had to leave unboarded through want of a brother-in-law. They're touchy about it somehow. Unless the captain's brother-in-law comes first they get complaining.

OLIVER (bashfully). And there's just one other thing. If the brigantine happened to put in at an island for water, and the captain's brother-in-law happened--just happened--to be a silly ass and go and marry a dusky maiden, whom he met on the beach---

PIRATE. Bless you, it's always happening to a captain's brother-in-law.

OLIVER (in a magnificent manner). Then, Captain Crookshank, you may take my sister!

JILL. Thank you, Oliver.

(It is not every day that one-eared ERIC, that famous chieftain, marries into the family of the TERROR OF THE DYAKS. Naturally the occasion is celebrated by the whole pirate crew with a rousing chorus, followed by a dance in which the dusky maidens of the Island join. At the end of it, JILL finds herself alone with TUA-HEETA, the Dusky Princess.)

JILL (fashionably). I'm so pleased to meet my brother's future wife. It's so nice of you to come to see me. You will have some tea, won't you? (She puts out her hand and presses an imaginary bell) I wanted to see you, because I can tell you so many little things about my brother, which I think you ought to know. You see, Eric--my husband-

-

TUA-HEETA. Erec?

JILL. Yes. I wish you could see him. He's so nice-looking. But I'm afraid he won't be home to tea. That's the worst of marrying a sailor. They are away so much. Well, I was telling you about Oliver. I think it would be better if you knew at once that--he doesn't like rice-pudding.

TUA-HEETA. Rice-poodeeng?

JILL. Yes, he hates it. It is very important that you should remember that. Then there's another thing--(An untidy looking servant comes in. Can it be--can it possibly be AUNT JANE? Horrors!) He dislikes-- Oh, there you are, Jane. You've been a very long time answering the bell.

AUNT JANE. I'm so sorry ma'am, I was just dressing.

JILL. Excuses, Jane, always excuses. Leave me. Take a week's notice. (To TUA-HEETA) YOU must excuse my maid. She's very stupid. Tea at once, Jane. (AUNT JANE sniffs and goes off) What was I saying? Oh yes, about Oliver. He doesn't care for cod-liver oil in the way that some men do. You would be wise not to force it on him just at first. . . . Have you any idea where you are going to live?

TUA-HEETA. Live? (These dusky maidens are no conversationalists.)

JILL. I expect Oliver will wish to reside at Hammersmith, so convenient for the City. You'll like Hammersmith. You'll go to St. Paul's Church, I expect. The Vicar will be sure to call. (Enter AUNT JANE with small tea-table.) Ah, here's tea. (To JANE) You're very slow, Jane.

AUNT JANE. I'm sorry, ma'am.

JILL. It's no good being sorry. Take another week's notice. (To TUA-HEETA) You must forgive my talking to my maid. She wants such a lot of looking after. (JANE puts down the table) That will do, Jane, (JANE bumps against the table) Dear, dear, how clumsy you are. What wages am I giving you now?

AUNT JANE. A shilling a month, ma'am.

JILL. Well, we'd better make it ninepence. (JANE goes out in tears.) Servants are a great nuisance, aren't they? Jane is a peculiarly stupid person. She used to be aunt to my brother, and I have only taken her on out of charity. (She pours out from an imaginary tea-pot) Milk? Sugar? (She puts them in and hands the imaginary cup to TUA-HEETA.)

TUA-HEETA. Thank you. (Drinks.)

JILL (pouring herself a cup). I hope you like China. (She drinks, and then rings an imaginary bell) Well, as I was saying---(Enter AUNT JANE.) You can clear away, Jane.

AUNT JANE. Yes, ma'am.

(She clears away the tea and TUA-HEETA and--very quickly--herself, as OLIVER comes back. OLIVER has been discussing boarding-tactics with his brother-in-law. CAPTAIN CROOKSHANK belongs to the now old-fashioned Marlinspike School; OLIVER is for well-primed pistols.)

JILL. Oh, Oliver, I love your island. I've been thinking things all by myself. You're married to Tua-heeta. You don't mind, do you?

OLIVER. Not at all, Jill. Make yourself at home. I've just been trying the doctor in the lagoon. There *were* sharks there, after all, so we'll have to find another place for bathing. Oh, and I shot an elephant. What would you like to do now?

JILL. Just let's lie here and see what happens. (What happens is that a cassowary comes along.) Oh, what a lovely bird! Is it an ostrich?

(The cassowary sniffs the air, puts its beak to the ground and goes off again.)

OLIVER. Silly! It's a cassowary, of course.

JILL. What's a cassowary?

OLIVER. Jill! Don't you remember the rhyme?

I wish I were a cassowary
Upon the plains of Timbuctoo
And then I'd eat a missionary--
And hat and gloves and hymn-book too!

JILL. Is that all they're for?

OLIVER. Well, what else would you want them for?

(A MISSIONARY, pith-helmet, gloves, hymn-book, umbrella, all complete--creeps cautiously up. He bears a strong likeness to the curate, the REVEREND SMILAX.)

MISSIONARY. I am sorry to intrude upon your privacy, dear friends, but have you observed a cassowary on this island, apparently looking for something?

OLIVER. Yes, we saw one just now.

MISSIONARY (shuddering). Dear, dear, dear. You didn't happen to ask him what was the object of his researches?

JILL. He went so quickly.

MISSIONARY (coming out of the undergrowth to them). I wonder if you have ever heard of a little rhyme which apparently attributes to the bird in question, when residing in the level pastures of Timbuctoo, an unholy lust for the body and appurtenances thereto of an unnamed clerical gentleman?

OLIVER and JILL (shouting together). Yes! Rather!

MISSIONARY. Dear, dear! Fortunately--I say fortunately--this is not Timbuctoo! (OLIVER slips away and comes back with a notice-board "Timbuctoo," which he places at the edge of the trees, unseen by the MISSIONARY, who goes on talking to JILL) I take it that a cassowary residing in other latitudes is of a more temperate habit. His appetite, I venture to suggest, dear lady, would be under better restraint. That being so, I may perhaps safely---- (He begins to move off, and comes suddenly up to the notice-board) Dear, dear, dear, dear, dear! This is terrible! You said, I think, that the--ah--bird in question was moving in *this* direction?

OLIVER. That's right.

MISSIONARY. Then I shall move, hastily yet with all due precaution, in *that* direction. (He walks off on tiptoe, looking over his shoulder in case the cassowary should reappear. Consequently, he does not observe the enormous CANNIBAL who has appeared from the trees on the right, until he bumps into him) I beg your---- (He looks up) Dear, dear, dear, dear, dear!

CANNIBAL. Boria, boria, boo!

MISSIONARY. Yes, my dear sir, it is as you say, a beautiful morning.

CANNIBAL. Boria, boria, boo!

MISSIONARY. But I was just going a little walk--in this direction--if you will permit me.

CANNIBAL (threateningly). Boria, boria, boo!

MISSIONARY. I have noticed it, my dear sir, I have often made that very observation to my parishioners.

CANNIBAL (very threateningly). Boria, boria, boo!

MISSIONARY. Oh, what's he saying?

OLIVER. He says it's his birthday to-morrow.

CANNIBAL. Wurra, wurra wug!

OLIVER. And will you come to the party?

MISSIONARY (to CANNIBAL). My dear sir, it is most kind of you to invite me, but a prior engagement in a different part of the country-- a totally unexpected call upon me in another locality--will unfortunately----

(While he is talking, the cassowary comes back, sidles up to him, and taps with his beak on the MISSIONARY'S pith-helmet.)

MISSIONARY (absently, without looking round). Come in! . . . As I was saying, my dear sir---- (The bird taps again. The MISSIONARY turns round annoyed) Can't you see I'm engaged----Oh dear, dear, dear, dear, dear!

(He clasps the CANNIBAL in his anguish, recoils from the CANNIBAL and clasps the cassowary. The three of them go off together, OLIVER and JILL following eagerly behind to see who gets most.)

(The PIRATES come back, each carrying a small wooden ammunition-box, and sit round in a semicircle, the PIRATE CHIEF in the middle.)

PIRATE. Steward! Steward!

STEWARD (hurrying in). Yes, sir, coming, sir.

CHIEF. Now then, tumble up, my lad. I would carouse. Circulate the dry ginger.

STEWARD (hurrying out). Yes, sir, going, sir.

CHIEF. Look lively, my lad, look lively.

STEWARD (hurrying in). Yes, sir, coming, sir. (He hands round mugs to them all.)

CHIEF (rising). Gentlemen! (They all stand up) The crew of the *Cocktail* will carouse---- (They all take one step to the right, one back, and one left--which brings them behind their boxes--and then place their right feet on the boxes together) One! (They raise their mugs) Two! (They drink) Three! (They bang down their mugs) Four! (They wipe their mouths with the backs of their hands) So! . . . Steward!

STEWARD. Yes, sir, here, sir.

CHIEF. The carouse is over.

STEWARD. Yes, sir. (He collects the mugs and goes out.) (The PIRATES sit down again.)

CHIEF (addressing the men). Having passed an hour thus in feasting and song----

(Hark! is it the voice of our dear MISS PINNIGER? It is.)

GOVERNESS (off). Oliver! Oliver! Jill! You may get up now and come down to tea.

CHIEF. Having, as I say, slept off our carouse---

GOVERNESS (off). Oliver! Jill! (She comes in) Oh, I beg your pardon, I--er---

(All the PIRATES rise and draw their weapons)

CHIEF. Pray do not mention it. (Polishing his pistol lovingly) You were asking---

GOVERNESS. I--I was l-looking for a small boy--Oliver--

CHIEF. Oliver? (To 1ST PIRATE) Have we any Olivers on board?

1ST PIRATE. NO, Captain. Only Bath Olivers.

CHIEF (to GOVERNESS). You cannot be referring to my brother-in-law, hight Two-Toed Thomas, the Terror of the Dyaks?

GOVERNESS. Oh no, no--Just a small boy and his sister--Jill.

CHIEF (to 2ND PIRATE). Have we any Jills on board?

2ND PIRATE. No, Captain. Only gills of rum.

CHIEF (to GOVERNESS). You cannot be referring to Mrs. Crookshank, styled the Pride of the Pampas?

GOVERNESS. Oh no, no, I am so sorry. Perhaps I--er--

CHIEF. Wait, woman. (to 6TH PIRATE) Ernest, offer your seat to the lady.

(The 6TH PIRATE stands up.)

GOVERNESS (nervously). Oh please don't trouble, I'm getting out at the next station--I mean I--

6TH PIRATE (thunderously). Sit down!

(She sits down tremblingly and he stands by her with his pistol.)

CHIEF. Thank you. (to 1ST PIRATE) Cecil, have you your pencil and notebook with you?

1ST PIRATE (producing them). Ay, ay, Captain.

CHIEF. Then we will cross-examine the prisoner. (to GOVERNESS)
Name?

GOVERNESS. Pinniger.

1ST PIRATE (writing). Pincher.

CHIEF. Christian names, if any?

GOVERNESS. Letitia.

1ST PIRATE (writing). Letisher--how would you spell it, Captain?

CHIEF. Spell it like a sneeze. Age?

GOVERNESS. Twenty-three.

CHIEF (to 1ST PIRATE). Habits--untruthful. Appearance--against
her. Got that?

1ST PIRATE. Yes, sir.

CHIEF (to GOVERNESS). And what are you for?

GOVERNESS. I teach. Oliver and Jill, you know.

CHIEF. And what do you teach them?

GOVERNESS. Oh, everything. Arithmetic, French, Geography,
History, Dancing----

CHIEF (holding up his hand). A moment! I would take counsel with
Percy. (to 2ND PIRATE) Percy, what shall we ask her in Arithmetic?
(The 2ND PIRATE whispers to him.) Excellent. (To her) If you really
are a teacher as you say, answer me this question. The brigantine
Cocktail is in longitude 40° 39' latitude 22° 50', sailing closehauled on
the port tack at 8 knots in a 15-knot nor'-nor' westerly breeze--how
soon before she sights the Azores?

GOVERNESS. I--I--I'm afraid I---You see--I----

CHIEF (to 1ST PIRATE). Arithmetic rotten.

1ST PIRATE (writing). Arithmetic rotten.

CHIEF (to 3RD PIRATE). Basil, ask her a question in French.

3RD PIRATE. What would the mate of a French frigate say if he wanted to say in French, "Avast there, ye lubbering swab" to a friend like?

GOVERNESS. Oh, but I hardly--I---

CHIEF (to 1ST PIRATE). French futile.

1ST PIRATE (writing). French futile.

CHIEF (to 4TH PIRATE). I don't suppose it's much use, Francis. But try her in Geography.

4TH PIRATE. Well now, lady. If you was wanting a nice creek to lay up cosy in, atween Dago Point and the Tortofitas, where would you run to?

GOVERNESS. It-run to? But that isn't--of course I---

CHIEF (to 1ST PIRATE). Geography ghastly.

1ST PIRATE (writing). Geography ghastly.

CHIEF (to 5TH PIRATE). Give her a last chance, Mervyn. See if she knows any history.

5TH PIRATE. I suppose you couldn't tell me what year it was when old John Cann took the *Saucy Codfish* over Black Tooth Reef and laid her alongside the Spaniard in the harbour there, and up comes the Don in his nightcap. "Shiver my timbers," he says in Spanish, "but there's only one man in the whole of the Spanish Main," he says, "and that's John Cann," he says, "who could---"

(The GOVERNESS looks dumbly at him.)

CHIEF. She couldn't. History hopeless.

1ST PIRATE. History hopeless.

CHIEF (to GOVERNESS). What else do you teach?

GOVERNESS. Music, dancing--er--but I don't think---

CHIEF. Steward!

STEWARD (coming in). Yes, sir, coming, sir.

CHIEF. Concertina.

STEWARD (going out). Yes, sir, going, sir.

CHIEF (to GOVERNESS). Can you dance a hornpipe?

GOVERNESS. No, I---

CHIEF. Dancing dubious.

1ST PIRATE (writing). Dancing dubious.

STEWARD (coming in). Concertina, sir.

CHIEF. Give it to the woman. (He takes it to her.)

GOVERNESS. I'm afraid I---(She produces one ghastly noise and drops the concertina in alarm.)

1ST PIRATE (writing). What shall I say, sir? Music mouldy or music measly?

CHIEF (standing up). Gentlemen, I think you will agree with me that the woman Pinniger has proved that she is utterly incapable of teaching anybody anything. Twenty-five years, man and boy, I have sailed the Spanish Main, and with the possible exception of a dumb

and half-witted negro whom I shipped as cook in '64, I have never met any one so profoundly lacking in intellect. I propose, therefore, that for the space of twenty-four hours the woman Pinniger should be incarcerated in the smuggler's cave, in the company of a black beetle of friendly temperament.

GOVERNESS. Mercy! Mercy!

1ST PIRATE. I should like to second that.

CHIEF. Those in favour--ay! (They all say "Ay.") Contrary--No! (The GOVERNESS says "No.") The motion is carried.

(One of the Pirates opens the door of the cave. The GOVERNESS rushes to the CHIEF and throws herself at his feet. OLIVER and JILL appear in the nick of time.)

OLIVER. A maiden in distress! I will rescue her. (She looks up and OLIVER recognises her) Oh! Carry on, Commodore.

(The GOVERNESS is lowered into the cave and the door is shut.)

CHIEF (to his men). Go, find that black beetle, and having found it, introduce it circumspectly by the back door.

PIRATES. Ay, ay, sir. [They go out.

OLIVER. All the same, you know, I jolly well should like to rescue somebody.

JILL (excitedly). Oo, rescue me, Oliver.

CHIEF (solemnly). Two-toed Thomas, Terror of the Dyaks, and Pest of the North Pacific, truly thou art a well-plucked one. Wilt fight me for the wench? (He puts an arm round JILL.)

OLIVER. I will.

CHIEF. Swords?

OLIVER. Pistols.

CHIEF. At twenty paces?

OLIVER. Across a handkerchief.

CHIEF. Done! (Feeling in his pockets) Have you got a handkerchief? I think I must have left mine on the dressing-table.

OLIVER (bringing out his and putting it hastily back again). Mine's rather--Jill, haven't you got one?

JILL (feeling). I know I had one, but I----

CHIEF. This is an ill business. Five-and-thirty duels have I fought--and never before been delayed for lack of a handkerchief.

JILL. Ah, here it is. (She produces a very small one and lays it on the ground. They stand one each side of it, pistols ready.)

OLIVER. Jill, you must give the word. JILL. Are you ready?

(The sound of a gong is heard.)

CHIEF. Listen! (The gong is heard again) The Spanish Fleet is engaged!

JILL. *I* thought it was our tea gong.

CHIEF. Ah, perhaps you're right.

OLIVER. I say, we oughtn't to miss tea. (Holding out his hand to her) Come on, Jill.

CHIEF. But you'll come back? We shall always be waiting here for you whenever you want us.

JILL. Yes, we'll come back, won't we, Oliver?

OLIVER. Oo, rather.

(The whole population of the Island, Animals, Pirates, and Dusky Maidens, come on. They sing as they wave good-bye to the children who are making their way to the boat.)

JILL (from the boat). Good-bye, good-bye.

OLIVER. Good-bye, you chaps.

JILL (politely). And thank you all for a very pleasant afternoon.

[They are all singing as the boat pushes off. Night comes on with tropical suddenness. The singing dies slowly down.]

ACT III.--FATHER CHRISTMAS AND THE HUBBARD FAMILY

SCENE I.--The drawing-room of the HUBBARDS before Fame and Prosperity came to them. It is simply furnished with a deal table and two cane chairs.

MR. and MRS. HUBBARD, in faultless evening dress, are at home, MR. HUBBARD reading a magazine, MRS. HUBBARD with her hands in her lap. She sighs.

MR. HUBBARD (impetuously throwing down his magazine).
Dearest, you sighed?

MRS. HUBBARD (quickly). No, no, Henry. In a luxurious and well-appointed home such as this, why should I sigh?

MR. HUBBARD. True, dear. Not only is it artistically furnished, as you say, but it is also blessed with that most precious of all things--(he lifts up the magazine)--a library.

MRS. HUBBARD. Yes, yes, Henry, we have much to be thankful for.

MR. HUBBARD. We have indeed. But I am selfish. Would you care to read? (He tears out a page of the magazine and hands it to her.)

MRS. HUBBARD. Thank you, thank you, Henry.

(They both sit in silence for a little. She sighs again.)

MR. HUBBARD. Darling, you did sigh. Tell me what grieves you.

MRS. HUBBARD. Little Isabel. Her cough troubles me.

MR. HUBBARD (thoughtfully). Isabel?

MRS. HUBBARD. Yes, dear, our youngest. Don't you remember, she comes after Harold?

MR. HUBBARD (counting on his fingers). A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I--dear me, have we got nine already?

MRS. HUBBARD (imploringly). Darling, say you don't think it's too many.

MR. HUBBARD. Oh no, no, not at all, my love . . . After all, it isn't as if they were real children.

MRS. HUBBARD (indignantly). Henry! How can you say they are not real?

MR. HUBBARD. Well, I mean they're only the children we thought we'd like to have if Father Christmas gave us any.

MRS. HUBBARD. They are just as real to me as if they were here in the house. Ada, Bertram, Caroline, the high-spirited Dennis, pretty Elsie with the golden ringlets, dear little fair-haired Frank--

MR. HUBBARD (firmly). Darling one, Frank has curly brown hair. It was an understood thing that you should choose the girls, and *I* should choose the boys. When we decided to take--A, B, C, D, E, F--a sixth child, it was my turn for a boy, and I selected Frank. He has curly brown hair and a fondness for animals.

MRS. HUBBARD. I daresay you're right, dear. Of course it is a little confusing when you never see your children.

MR. HUBBARD. Well, well, perhaps some day Father Christmas will give us some.

MRS. HUBBARD. Why does he neglect us so, Henry? We hang up our stockings every year, but he never seems to notice them. Even a diamond necklace or a few oranges or a five-shilling postal order would be something.

MR. HUBBARD. It is very strange. Possibly the fact that the chimney has not been swept for some years may have something to do with it. Or he may have forgotten our change of address. I cannot help feeling that if he knew how we had been left to starve in this way he would be very much annoyed.

MRS. HUBBARD. And clothes. I have literally nothing but what I am standing up in--I mean sitting down in.

MR. HUBBARD. Nor I, my love. But at least it will be written of us in the papers that the Hubbards perished in faultless evening dress. We are a proud race, and if Father Christmas deliberately cuts us off in this way, let us go down proudly. . . . Shall we go on reading or would you like to walk up and down the room? Fortunately these simple pleasures are left to us.

MRS. HUBBARD. I've finished this page.

MR. HUBBARD (tearing out one). Have another, my love. (They read for a little while, until interrupted by a knock at the door.)

MRS. HUBBARD. Some one at the door! Who could it be?

MR. HUBBARD (getting up). Just make the room look a little more homey, dear, in case it's any one important.

(He goes out, leaving her to alter the position of the chairs slightly.)

MRS. HUBBARD. Well?

MR. HUBBARD (coming in). A letter. (He opens it.)

MRS. HUBBARD. Quick!

MR. HUBBARD (whistling with surprise). Father Christmas! An invitation to Court! (Reading) "Father Christmas at Home, 25th December. Jollifications, 11.59 P.M." My love, he has found us at last! (They embrace each other.)

MRS. HUBBARD. Henry, how gratifying!

MR. HUBBARD. Yes. (Sadly, after a pause) But we can't go.

MRS. HUBBARD (sadly). No, I have no clothes.

MR. HUBBARD. Nor I.

MRS. HUBBARD. How can I possibly go without a diamond necklace? None of the Montmorency-Smythe women has ever been to Court without a diamond necklace.

MR. HUBBARD. The Hubbards are a proud race. No male Hubbard would dream of appearing at Court without a gentleman's gold Albert watch-chain. . . . Besides, there is another thing. There will be many footmen at Father Christmas's Court, who will doubtless require coppers pressed into their palms. My honour would be seriously affected, were I compelled to whisper to them that I had no coppers.

MRS. HUBBARD. It is very unfortunate. Father Christmas may have hundreds of presents waiting for us.

MR. HUBBARD. True. But how would it be to hang up our stockings again this evening--now that we know he knows we are here? I would suggest tied on to the door-knocker, to save him the trouble of coming down the chimney.

MRS. HUBBARD (excitedly). Henry, I wonder! But of course we will.

(They begin to take off--the one a sock, the other a stocking.)

MR. HUBBARD. I almost wish now that my last suit had been a knickerbocker one. However, we must do what we can with a sock.

MRS. HUBBARD (holding up her stocking and looking at it a little anxiously). I hope Father Christmas won't give me a bicycle. A stocking never sets so well after it has had a bicycle in it.

MR. HUBBARD (taking it from her). Now, dear, I will go down and put them in position. Let us hope that fortune will be kind to us.

MRS. HUBBARD. Let us hope so, darling. And quickly. For (picking up her page of the magazine) it is a trifle cold.

[He goes out and she is left reading.]

SCENE II.--Outside the house the snow lies deep. The stocking and sock are tied on to the door-knocker. There is a light in the window.

A party of carol-singers, with lanterns, come by and halt in the snow outside the house.

PETER ABLEWAYS. Friends, are we all assembled?

JONAS HUMPHREY. Ay, ay, Peter Ableways, assembled and met together in a congregation, for the purpose of lifting up our voices in joyous thanksgiving, videlicet the singing of a carol or other wintry melody.

JENNIFER LING. Keep your breath for your song, Master Humphrey. That last "Alleluia" of yours was a poor windy thing, lacking grievously in substance.

JONAS (sadly). It is so. I never made much of an Alleluia. It is not in my nature somehow. 'Tis a vain boastful thing an Alleluia.

MARTHA PORRITT. Are we to begin soon, Master Ableways? My feet are cold.

JONAS. What matter the feet, Martha Porritt, if the heart be warm with loving-kindness and seasonable emotions?

MARTHA. Well, nothing of me will be warm soon.

JENNIFER. Ay, let's begin, Peter Ableways, while we carry the tune in our heads. It is ill searching for the notes in the middle of the carol, as some singers do.

PETER. Well spoken, Mistress Jennifer. Now listen all, while I unfold the nature of the entertainment. *Item*--A carol or birth song to draw the attention of all folk to the company here assembled and the occasion celebrated. *Item*--Applause and the clapping of hands. *Item*--A carol or song of thanksgiving. *Item*--A collection.

JONAS. An entertainment well devised, Master Ableways, so be it the words of the second song remain with me after I am delivered of the first.

MARTHA. Are we to begin soon, Master Ableways? My feet are cold.

PETER. Are we all ready, friends? I will say one--two--three--and at "three" I pray you all to give it off in a hearty manner from the chest. One--two--

JONAS. Hold, hold, Master Ableways! Does it begin--No, that's the other one. (JENNIFER whispers the first line to him) Ay, ay--I have it now--and bursting to get out of me. Proceed, Peter Ableways.

PETER. One--two--three--(They carol.)

PETER. Well sung, all.

HUMPHREY. The applause followed, good Master Peter, as ordained. Moreover, I have the tune of the second song ready within

me. Likewise a la-la-la or two to replace such words as I have forgotten.

MARTHA. Don't forget the collection, Master Ableways.

PETER. Ay, the collection. (He takes off his hat and places it on the ground.)

HUMPHREY. Nay, not so fast, Master Peter. It would be ill if the good folk thought that our success this night were to be estimated by an empty hat. Place some of our money in it, Master Ableways. Where money is, money will come.

JENNIFER. Ay, it makes a pleasing clink.

PETER. True, Mistress Jennifer. Master Humphrey speaks true. (He pours some coppers from his pockets into his hat.)

MARTHA. Are we to go on, Master Ableways? My feet are cold.

PETER (shaking the hat). So, a warming noise.

HUMPHREY. To it again, gentles.

PETER. Are all ready? One--two--three! (They carol.)

PETER. Well sung, all.

HUMPHREY. Have you the hat, Master Peter?

PETER (picking it up). Ay, friend, all is ready.

(The door opens and MR. HUBBARD appears at the entrance.)

MR. HUBBARD. Good evening, friends.

PETER. Good evening, sir. (He holds out the hat.)

MR. HUBBARD (looking at it). What is this? (PETER shakes it) Aha! Money!

PETER. Remember the carol singers, sir.

MR. HUBBARD (helping himself). My dear friends, I will always remember you. This is most generous. I shall never forget your kindness. This is most unexpected. But not the less welcome, not the less--I think there's a ha'penny down there that I missed--thank you. As I was saying, unexpected but welcome. I thank you heartily. Good evening, friends.

[He goes in and shuts the door.]

PETER (who has been too surprised to do anything but keep his mouth open). Well! . . . Well! . . . Well, friends, let us to the next house. We have got all that we can get here.

[They trail off silently.]

MARTHA (as they go off). Master Ableways!

PETER. Ay, lass!

MARTHA. My feet aren't so cold now.

(But this is to be an exciting night. As soon as they are gone, a Burglar and a Burglaress steal into view)

BILL. Wotcher get, Liz? (She holds up a gold watch and chain. He nods and holds up a diamond necklace) 'Ow's that?

LIZ (starting suddenly). H'st!

BILL (in a whisper). What is it?

LIZ. Copper!

BILL (desperately). 'Ere, quick, get rid of these. 'Ide 'em in the snow, or---

LIZ. Bill! (He turns round) Look! (She points to the stocking and sock hanging up) We can come back for 'em as soon as 'e's gone.

(BILL looks at them, and back at her, and grins. He drops the necklace into one and the watch into the other. As the POLICEMAN approaches they strike up, "While shepherds watched their flock by night," with an air of great enthusiasm.)

POLICEMAN. Now then, move along there.

(They move along. The POLICEMAN flashes his light on the door to see that all is well. The stocking and sock are revealed. He beams sentimentally at them.)

SCENE III.--We are inside the house again. MRS. HUBBARD is still reading a page of the magazine. In dashes MR. HUBBARD with the sock and stocking.

MR. HUBBARD. My darling, what do you think? Father Christmas has sent you a little present. (He hands her the stocking.)

MRS. HUBBARD. Henry! Has he sent you one too?

MR. HUBBARD (holding up his sock). Observe!

MRS. HUBBARD. How sweet of him! I wonder what mine is. What is yours, darling?

MR. HUBBARD. I haven't looked yet, my love. Perhaps just a few nuts or something of that sort, with a card attached saying, "To wish you the old, old wish." We must try not to be disappointed, whatever it is, darling.

MRS. HUBBARD. Of course, Henry. After all, it is the kindly thought which really matters.

MR. HUBBARD. Certainly. All the same, I hope--Will you look in yours, dear, first, or shall I?

MRS. HUBBARD. I think I should like to, darling. (Feeling it) It feels so exciting. (She brings out a diamond necklace) Henry!

MR. HUBBARD. My love! (They embrace) Now you will be able to go to Court. You must say that your husband is unfortunately in bed with a bad cold. You can tell me all about it when you come home. I shall be able to amuse myself with--(He is feeling in his sock while talking, and now brings out the watch and chain.)

MRS. HUBBARD. Henry! My love!

MR. HUBBARD. A gentleman's gold hunter and Albert watch-chain. My darling!

(They put down their presents on the table and embrace each other again.)

MRS. HUBBARD. Let's put them on at once, Henry, and see how they suit us.

MR. HUBBARD. Allow me, my love. (He fastens her necklace.)

MRS. HUBBARD (happily). Now I feel really dressed again! Oh, I wish we had a looking-glass.

MR. HUBBARD (opening his gold watch). Try in here, my darling.

MRS. HUBBARD (surveying herself). How perfectly sweet! . . . Now let me put your watch-chain on for you, dear. (She arranges it for him--HENRY very proud.)

MR. HUBBARD. Does it suit me, darling?

MRS. HUBBARD. You look fascinating, Henry!

(They strut about the room with an air.)

MR. HUBBARD (taking out his watch and-looking at it ostentatiously). Well, well, we ought to be starting. My watch makes it 11.58. (He holds it to her ear) Hasn't it got a sweet tick?

MRS. HUBBARD. Sweet! But starting where, Henry? Do you mean we can really--But you haven't any money.

MR. HUBBARD. Money? (Taking out a handful) Heaps of it.

MRS. HUBBARD. Father Christmas?

MR. HUBBARD. Undoubtedly, my love. Brought round to the front door just now by some of his messengers. By the way, dear-- (indicating the sock and stocking)--hadn't we better put these on before we start?

MRS. HUBBARD. Of course. How silly of me!

(They sit down and put them on.)

MR. HUBBARD. Really this is a very handsome watch-chain.

MRS. HUBBARD. It becomes you admirably, Henry.

MR. HUBBARD. Thank you, dear. There's just one little point. Father Christmas is sometimes rather shy about acknowledging the presents he gives. He hates being thanked. If, therefore, he makes any comment on your magnificent necklace or my handsome watch-chain, we must say that they have been in the family for some years.

MRS. HUBBARD. Of course, dear. (They get up.)

MR. HUBBARD. Well, now we're ready.

MRS. HUBBARD. Darling one, don't you think we might bring the children?

MR. HUBBARD. Of course, dear! How forgetful of me! . . . Children--'shun! (Listen! Their heels click as they come to attention) Number! (Their voices--alternate boy and girl, one to nine--are heard) Right *turn!*

MRS. HUBBARD. Darling one, I almost seem to hear them!

MR. HUBBARD. Are you ready, my love?

MRS. HUBBARD. Yes, Henry.

MR. HUBBARD. Quick march!

(The children are heard tramping off. Very proudly MR. and MRS. HUBBARD bring up the rear.)

SCENE IV.--The Court of FATHER CHRISTMAS. Shall we describe it? No. But there is everything there which any reasonable person could want, from ices to catapults. And the decorations, done in candy so that you can break off a piece whenever you are hungry, are superb.

1ST USHER (from the back). Father Christmas!

SEVERAL USHERS (from the front). Father Christmas! (He comes in.)

FATHER CHRISTMAS (genially). Good evening, everybody.

(I ought to have said that there are already some hundreds of people there, though how some of them got invitations--but, after all, that is not our business. Wishing to put them quite at their ease, FATHER CHRISTMAS, who has a very creditable baritone, gives them a song. After the applause which follows it, he retires to the throne at the back, and awaits his more important guests. The USHERS take up their places, one at the entrance, one close to the throne.)

1ST USHER. Mr. and Mrs. Henry Hubbard! (They come in.)

MR. HUBBARD (pressing twopence into his palm). Thank you, my man, thank you.

2ND USHER. Mr. and Mrs. Henry Hubbard.

MR. HUBBARD (handing out another twopence). Not at all, my man, not at all.

(MRS. HUBBARD curtsies and MR. HUBBARD bows to FATHER CHRISTMAS.)

FATHER CHRISTMAS. I am delighted to welcome you to my Court. How are you both?

MR. HUBBARD. Very well, thank you, sir. My wife has a slight cold in one foot, owing to--

MRS. HUBBARD (hastily). A touch of gout, sir, inherited from my ancestors, the Montmorency-Smythes.

FATHER CHRISTMAS. Dear me, it won't prevent you dancing, I hope?

MRS. HUBBARD. Oh no, sir.

FATHER CHRISTMAS. That's right. We shall have a few more friends coming in soon. You have been giving each other presents already, I see. I congratulate you, madam, on your husband's taste.

MRS. HUBBARD (touching her necklace). Oh no, this is a very old heirloom of the Montmorency-Smythe family.

MR. HUBBARD. An ancestress of Mrs. Hubbard's--a lady-in-waiting at the Tottenham Court--at the Tudor Court--was fortunate enough to catch the eye of--er--

MRS. HUBBARD. Elizabeth.

MR. HUBBARD. Queen Elizabeth, and--er--

FATHER CHRISTMAS. I see. You are lucky, madam, to have such beautiful jewels. (Turning to MR. HUBBARD) And this delightful gold Albert watch-chain--

MR. HUBBARD. Presented to an ancestor of mine, Sir Humphrey de Hubbard, at the battle of--er--

MRS. HUBBARD. Agincourt.

MR. HUBBARD. As you say, dear, Agincourt. By King Richard the-- I should say William the--well, by the King.

FATHER CHRISTMAS. How very interesting.

MR. HUBBARD. Yes. My ancestor clove a scurvy knave from the chaps to the chine. I don't quite know how you do that, but I gather that he inflicted some sort of a scratch upon his adversary, and the King rewarded him with this handsome watch-chain.

USHERS (announcing). Mr. Robinson Crusoe! (He comes in.)

FATHER CHRISTMAS. How do you do?

CRUSOE (bowing). I'm a little late, I'm afraid, sir. My raft was delayed by adverse gales.

(FATHER CHRISTMAS introduces him to the HUBBARDS, who inform him that the weather is very seasonable.)

USHERS. Miss Riding Hood! (She comes in.)

FATHER CHRISTMAS. How do you do?

RIDING HOOD (curtseying). I hope I am in time, sir. I had to look in on my grandmother on the way here.

(FATHER CHRISTMAS makes the necessary introductions.)

MRS. HUBBARD (to CRUSOE). Do come and see me, Mr. Crusoe. Any Friday. I should like your advice about my parrot. He's moulting in all the wrong places.

MR. HUBBARD (to RED RIDING HOOD). I don't know if you're interested in wolves at all, Miss Hood. I heard a very good story about one the other day. (He begins to tell it, but she has hurried away before he can remember whether it was Thursday or Friday.)

USHERS. Baron Bluebeard! (He comes in.)

FATHER CHRISTMAS. How do you do?

BLUEBEARD (bowing). I trust you have not been waiting for me, sir. I had a slight argument with my wife before starting, which delayed me somewhat.

(FATHER CHRISTMAS forgives him.)

USHERS. Princess Goldilocks!

FATHER CHRISTMAS. How do you do?

GOLDBLOCKS (curtseying). I brought the youngest bear with me--do you mind? (She introduces the youngest bear to FATHER CHRISTMAS and the other guests) Say, how do you do, darling? (To an USHER) Will you give him a little porridge, please, and if you have got a nice bed where he could rest a little afterwards--he gets tired so quickly.

USHER. Certainly, your Royal Highness.

(Music begins.)

GOLDBLOCKS (to FATHER CHRISTMAS). Are we going to dance? How lovely!

FATHER CHRISTMAS (to the HUBBARDS). You will dance, won't you?

MRS. HUBBARD. I think not just at first, thank you.

GOLDBLOCKS (to CRUSOE). Come along!

CRUSOE. I am a little out of practice--er--but if you don't mind--er-- (He comes.)

BLUEBEARD (to RIDING HOOD). May I have the pleasure?

MRS. HUBBARD (to RIDING HOOD). Be careful, dear; he has a very bad reputation.

RIDING HOOD (to BLUEBEARD). You don't eat people, do you?

BLUEBEARD (pained by this injustice). Never!

RIDING HOOD. Oh then, I don't mind. But I do hate being eaten.

(Now we can't possibly describe the whole dance to you, for in every corner of the big ballroom couples were revolving and sliding, and making small talk with each other. So we will just take two specimen conversations.)

CRUSOE (nervous, poor man). Princess Goldilocks, may I speak to you on a matter of some importance to me?

GOLDILOCKS. I wish you would.

CRUSOE (looking across at BLUEBEARD and RED RIDING HOOD, who are revolving close by). Alone.

GOLDILOCKS (to BLUEBEARD). Do you mind? You can have your turn afterwards.

BLUEBEARD (to RIDING HOOD). Shall we adjourn to the Buffet?

RIDING HOOD. Oh, do let's. [They adjourn.

CRUSOE (bravely). Princess, I am a lonely man.

GOLDILOCKS (encouragingly). Yes, Robinson?

CRUSOE. I am not much of a one for society, and I don't quite know how to put these things, but--er--if you would like to share my island, I--I should so love to have you there.

GOLDILOCKS. Oh, Robbie!

CRUSOE (warming to it). I have a very comfortable house, and a man-servant, and an excellent view from the south windows, and several thousands of acres of good rough-shooting, and--oh, do say you'll come!

GOLDILOCKS. May I bring my bears with me?

CRUSOE. Of course! I ought to have said that. I have a great fondness for animals.

GOLDILOCKS. How sweet of you! But perhaps I ought to warn you that we all like porridge. Have you---

CRUSOE. I have a hundred acres of oats.

GOLDILOCKS. Then, Robinson, I am yours. (They embrace) There! Now tell me--did you make all your clothes yourself?

CRUSOE (proudly). All of them.

GOLDILOCKS (going off with him). How wonderful of you! Really you hardly seem to want a wife.

[They go out. Now it is the other couple's turn.

Enter, then, BLUEBEARD and RIDING HOOD

BLUEBEARD. Perhaps I ought to tell you at once, Miss Riding Hood, that I have been married before.

RIDING HOOD. Yes?

BLUEBEARD. My last wife unfortunately died just before I started out here this evening.

RIDING HOOD (calmly). Did you kill her?

BLUEBEARD (taken aback). I--I--I--

RIDING HOOD. Are you quite a nice man, Bluebeard?

BLUEBEARD. W-what do you mean? I am a very *rich* man. If you will marry me, you will live in a wonderful castle, full of everything that you want.

RIDING HOOD. That will be rather jolly.

BLUEBEARD (dramatically) But there is one room into which you must never go. (Holding up a key) Here is the key of it. (He offers it to her.)

RIDING HOOD (indifferently) But if I'm never to go into it, I shan't want the key.

BLUEBEARD (upset). You--you *must* have the key.

RIDING HOOD. Why?

BLUEBEARD. The--the others all had it.

RIDING HOOD (coldly). Bluebeard, you aren't going to talk about your *other* wives all the time, are you?

BLUEBEARD. N--no.

RIDING HOOD. Then don't be silly. And take this key, and go and tidy up that ridiculous room of yours, and when it's nice and clean, and when you've shaved off that absurd beard, perhaps I'll marry you.

BLUEBEARD (furiously drawing his sword). Madam!

RIDING HOOD. Don't do it here. You'll want some hot water.

BLUEBEARD (trying to put his sword back). This is too much, this is--

RIDING HOOD. You're putting it in the wrong way round.

BLUEBEARD (stiffly). Thank you. (He manages to get it in.)

RIDING HOOD. Well, do you want to marry me?

BLUEBEARD. Yes!

RIDING HOOD. Sure?

BLUEBEARD (admiringly). More than ever. You're the first woman I've met who hasn't been afraid of me.

RIDING HOOD (surprised). Are you very alarming? Wolves frighten me sometimes, but not just silly men. . . . (Giving him her hand) All right then. But you'll do what I said?

BLUEBEARD. Beloved one, I will do anything for you.

(CRUSOE and GOLDBLOCKS come back. Probably it will occur to the four of them to sing a song indicative of the happy family life awaiting them. On the other hand they may prefer to dance. . . .)

But enough of this. Let us get on to the great event of the evening. Ladies and gentlemen, are you all assembled? Then silence, please, for FATHER CHRISTMAS.

FATHER CHRISTMAS. Ladies and gentlemen, it gives me great pleasure to see you here at my Court this evening; and in particular my friends Mr. and Mrs. Hubbard, of whom I have been too long neglectful. However, I hope to make up for it to-night. (To an USHER) Disclose the Christmas Tree!

(The Christmas Tree is disclosed, and--what do you think? Children disguised as crackers are hanging from every branch! Well, I never!)

FATHER CHRISTMAS (quite calmly). Distribute the presents!

(An USHER takes down the children one by one and places them in a row, reading from the labels on them. "MRS. HUBBARD, MR. HUBBARD" alternately.)

USHER (handing list to MR. HUBBARD). Here is the nominal roll, sir.

MR. HUBBARD (looking at it in amazement). What's this? (MRS. HUBBARD looks over his shoulder) Ada, Bertram, Caroline--My darling one!

MRS. HUBBARD. Henry! Our children at last! Oh, are they all--*all* there?

MR. HUBBARD. We'll soon see, dear. Ada!

ADA (springing to attention). Father! (She stands at ease.)

MR. HUBBARD. Bertram! . . . (And so on up to ELSIE) . . . Frank!

FRANK. Father!

MR. HUBBARD. There you are, darling, I told you he had curly brown hair. . . . Gwendoline! (And so on.)

MRS. HUBBARD (to FATHER CHRISTMAS). Oh thank you so much. It is sweet of you.

MR. HUBBARD (to FATHER CHRISTMAS). We are slightly overcome. Do you mind if we just dance it off. (FATHER CHRISTMAS nods genially.) Come on, children!

(He holds out his hands, and he and his wife and the children dance round in a ring singing, "Here we go round the Christmas Tree, all on a Christmas evening. . . .")

(And then--But at this moment JAMES and ROSEMARY and the HUBBARD children stopped thinking, so of course the play came to an end. And if there were one or two bits in it which the children didn't quite understand, that was JAMES'S fault. He never ought to have been thinking at all, really.)

MR. PIM PASSES BY BY A. A. MILNE

A COMEDY IN THREE ACTS

CHARACTERS

GEORGE MARDEN, J.P. OLIVIA (his wife). DINAH (his niece).
LADY MARDEN (his aunt). BRIAN STRANGE. CARRAWAY
PIM. ANNE.

* * * * *

The first performance of this play in London took place at the New Theatre on January 5, 1920, with the following cast:

George Marden--BEN WEBSTER. Olivia--IRENE VANBRUGH.
Dinah--GEORGETTE COHAN. Lady Marden--ETHEL GRIFFIES.
Brian Strange--LESLIE HOWARD. Carraway Pim--DION
BOUCICAULT. Anne--ETHEL WELLESLEY.

MR. PIM PASSES BY

ACT I

(The morning-room at Marden House (Buckinghamshire) decided more than a hundred years ago that it was all right, and has not bothered about itself since. Visitors to the house have called the result such different adjectives as "mellow" "old-fashioned," "charming"--even "baronial" and "antique"; but nobody ever said it was "exciting." Sometimes OLIVIA wants it to be more exciting, and last week she let herself go over some new curtains. At present they are folded up and waiting for her; she still has the rings to put on. It is obvious that the curtains alone will overdo the excitement; they will have to be harmonised with a new carpet and cushions. OLIVIA has her eye on just the things, but one has to go carefully with GEORGE. What was good enough for his great-great-grandfather is good enough for him. However, we can trust OLIVIA to see him through it, although it may take time.)

(There are two ways of coming into the room; by the open windows leading from the terrace or by the door. On this pleasant July morning MR. PIM chooses the latter way--or rather ANNE chooses it for him; and old MR. PIM, wistful, kindly, gentle, little MR. PIM, living in some world of his own whither we cannot follow, ambles after her.)

ANNE. I'll tell Mr. Marden you're here, sir. Mr. Pim, isn't it?

PIM (coming back to this world). Yes--er--Mr. Carraway Pim. He doesn't know me, you understand, but if he could just see me for a moment--er--(He fumbles in his pockets) I gave you that letter?

ANNE. Yes, sir, I'll give it to him.

PIM (bringing out a letter which is not the one he was looking for, but which reminds him of something else he has forgotten). Dear me!

ANNE. Yes, sir?

PIM. I ought to have sent a telegram, but I can do it on my way back. You have a telegraph office in the village?

ANNE. Oh yes, sir. If you turn to the left when you get outside the gates, it isn't more than a hundred yards down the hill.

PIM. Thank you, thank you. Very stupid of me to have forgotten.

[ANNE goes out.

(MR. PIM wanders about the room humming to himself, and looking vaguely at the pictures. He has his back to the door as DINAH comes in. She is nineteen, very pretty, very happy, and full of boyish high spirits and conversation.)

DINAH. Hullo!

PIM (turning round). Ah, good morning, Mrs. Marden. You must forgive my--er--

DINAH. Oh I say, I'm not Mrs. Marden. I'm Dinah.

PIM (with a bow). Then I will say, Good morning, Miss Diana.

DINAH (reproachfully). Now, look here, if you and I are going to be friends you mustn't do that. Dinah, *not* Diana. Do remember it, there's a good man, because I get so tired of correcting people. Have you come to stay with us?

PIM. Well no, Miss--er--Dinah.

DINAH (nodding). That's right. I can see I shan't have to speak to *you* again. Now tell me *your* name, and I bet you I get it right first time. And do sit down.

PIM (sitting down). Thank you. My name is--er--Pim, Carraway Pim--
-

DINAH. Pim, that's easy.

PIM. And I have a letter of introduction to your father--

DINAH. Oh no; now you're going wrong again, Mr. Pim. George isn't my father; he's my uncle. *Uncle* George--he doesn't like me calling him George. Olivia doesn't mind--I mean she doesn't mind being called Olivia, but George is rather touchy. You see, he's been my guardian since I was about two, and then about five years ago he married a widow called Mrs. Telworthy--that's Olivia--so she became my Aunt Olivia, only she lets me drop the Aunt. Got that?

PIM (a little alarmed). I--I think so, Miss Marden.

DINAH (admiringly). I say, you *are* quick, Mr. Pim. Well, if you take my advice, when you've finished your business with George, you will hang about a bit and see if you can't see Olivia. She's simply devastating. I don't wonder George fell in love with her.

PIM. It's only the merest matter of business--just a few minutes with your uncle--I'm afraid I shall hardly--

DINAH. Well, you must please yourself, Mr. Pim. I'm just giving you a friendly word of advice. Naturally, I was awfully glad to get such a magnificent aunt, because, of course, marriage *is* rather a toss up, isn't it, and George might have gone off with anybody. It's different on the stage, where guardians always marry their wards, but George couldn't marry *me* because I'm his niece. Mind you, I don't say that I should have had him, because between ourselves he's a little bit old-fashioned.

PIM. So he married--er--Mrs. Marden instead.

DINAH. Mrs. Telworthy--don't say you've forgotten already, just when you were getting so good at names. Mrs. Telworthy. You see, Olivia married the Telworthy man and went to Australia with him, and he drank himself to death in the bush, or wherever you drink yourself to death out there, and Olivia came home to England, and met my uncle, and he fell in love with her and proposed to her, and he came into my room that night--I was about fourteen--and turned on the light and said, "Dinah, how would you like to have a beautiful aunt of your very own?" And I said: "Congratulations, George." That was the first time I called him George. Of course, I'd seen it coming for *weeks*. Telworthy, isn't it a funny name?

PIM. Very singular. From Australia, you say?

DINAH. Yes, I always say that he's probably still alive, and will turn up here one morning and annoy George, because that's what first husbands always do in books, but I'm afraid there's not much chance.

PIM (shocked). Miss Marden!

DINAH. Well, of course, I don't really *want* it to happen, but it *would* be rather exciting, wouldn't it? However, things like that never seem to occur down here, somehow. There was a hay-rick burnt last year about a mile away, but that isn't quite the same thing, is it?

PIM. No, I should say that that was certainly different.

DINAH. Of course, something very, very wonderful did happen last night, but I'm not sure if I know you well enough---- (She looks at him hesitatingly.)

PIM (uncomfortably). Really, Miss Marden, I am only a--a passer-by, here to-day and gone to-morrow. You really mustn't----

DINAH. And yet there's something about you, Mr. Pim, which inspires confidence. The fact is--(in a stage whisper)--I got engaged last night!

PIM. Dear me, let me congratulate you.

DINAH. I expect that's why George is keeping you such a long time. Brian, my young man, the well-known painter--only nobody has ever heard of him--he's smoking a pipe with George in the library and asking for his niece's hand. Isn't it exciting? You're really rather lucky, Mr. Pim--I mean being told so soon. Even Olivia doesn't know yet.

PIM (getting up). Yes, yes. I congratulate you, Miss Marden. Perhaps it would be better----

[ANNE comes in.

ANNE. Mr. Marden is out at the moment, sir---- Oh, I didn't see you, Miss Dinah.

DINAH. It's all right, Anne. *I'm* looking after Mr. Pim.

ANNE. Yes, Miss.

[She goes out.

DINAH (excitedly). That's me. They can't discuss me in the library without breaking down, so they're walking up and down outside, and slashing at the thistles in order to conceal their emotion. *You* know. I expect Brian----

PIM (looking at his watch). Yes, I think, Miss Marden, I had better go now and return a little later. I have a telegram which I want to send, and perhaps by the time I came back----

DINAH. Oh, but how disappointing of you, when we were getting on together so nicely. And it was just going to be your turn to tell me all about *yourself*.

PIM. I have really nothing to tell, Miss Marden. I have a letter of introduction to Mr. Marden, who in turn will give me, I hope, a letter to a certain distinguished man whom it is necessary for me to meet. That is all. (Holding out his hand) And now, Miss Marden----

DINAH. Oh, I'll start you on your way to the post office. I want to know if you're married, and all that sort of thing. You've got heaps to tell me, Mr. Pim. Have you got your hat? That's right. Then we'll-- hullo, here's Brian.

(BRIAN STRANGE comes in at the windows. He is what GEORGE calls a damned futuristic painter-chap, aged twenty-four. To look at, he is a very pleasant boy, rather untidily dressed.)

BRIAN (nodding). How do you do?

DINAH (seizing him). Brian, this is Mr. Pim. Mr. Carraway Pim. He's been telling me all about himself. It's so interesting. He's just going to send a telegram, and then he's coming back again. Mr. Pim, this is Brian--*you* know.

BRIAN (smiling and shaking hands). How do you do?

DINAH (pleadingly). You *won't* mind going to the post office by yourself, will you, because, you see, Brian and I--(she looks lovingly at BRIAN).

PIM (because they are so young). Miss Dinah and Mr.--er--Brian, I have only come into your lives for a moment, and it is probable that I shall now pass out of them for ever, but you will allow an old man----

DINAH. Oh, not old!

PIM (chuckling happily). Well, a middle-aged man--to wish you both every happiness in the years that you have before you. Good-bye, good-bye.

[He disappears gently through the windows.]

DINAH. Brian, he'll get lost if he goes that way.

BRIAN (going to the windows and calling after him). Round to the left, sir. . . . That's right. (He comes back into the room) Rum old bird. Who is he?

DINAH. Darling, you haven't kissed me yet.

BRIAN (taking her in his arms). I oughtn't to, but then one never ought to do the nice things.

DINAH. Why oughtn't you?

(They sit on the sofa together.)

BRIAN. Well, we said we'd be good until we'd told your uncle and aunt all about it. You see, being a guest in their house----

DINAH. But, darling child, what *have* you been doing all this morning *except* telling George?

BRIAN. *Trying* to tell George.

DINAH (nodding). Yes, of course, there's a difference.

BRIAN. I think he guessed there was something up, and he took me down to see the pigs--he said he had to see the pigs at once--I don't know why; an appointment perhaps. And we talked about pigs all the way, and I couldn't say, "Talking about pigs, I want to marry your niece----"

DINAH (with mock indignation). Of course you couldn't.

BRIAN. No. Well, you see how it was. And then when we'd finished talking about pigs, we started talking *to* the pigs----

DINAH (eagerly). Oh, *how* is Arnold?

BRIAN. The little black-and-white one? He's very jolly, I believe, but naturally I wasn't thinking about him much. I was wondering how to begin. And then Lumsden came up, and wanted to talk pig-food, and the atmosphere grew less and less romantic, and--and I gradually drifted away.

DINAH. Poor darling. Well, we shall have to approach him through Olivia.

BRIAN. But I always wanted to tell her first; she's so much easier. Only you wouldn't let me.

DINAH. That's *your* fault, Brian. You would tell Olivia that she ought to have orange-and-black curtains.

BRIAN. But she *wants* orange-and-black curtains.

DINAH. Yes, but George says he's not going to have any futuristic nonsense in an honest English country house, which has been good enough for his father and his grandfather and his great-grandfather, and--and all the rest of them. So there's a sort of strained feeling between Olivia and George just now, and if Olivia were to--sort of recommend you, well, it wouldn't do you much good.

BRIAN (looking at her). I see. Of course I know what *you* want, Dinah.

DINAH. What do I want?

BRIAN. You want a secret engagement, and notes left under door-mats, and meetings by the withered thorn, when all the household is asleep. *I* know you.

DINAH. Oh, but it is such fun! I love meeting people by withered thorns.

BRIAN. Well, I'm not going to have it.

DINAH (childishly). Oh, George! Look at us being husbandy!

BRIAN. You babe! I adore you. (He kisses her and holds her away from him and looks at her) You know, you're rather throwing yourself away on me. Do you mind?

DINAH. Not a bit.

BRIAN. We shall never be rich, but we shall have lots of fun, and meet interesting people, and feel that we're doing something worth doing, and not getting paid nearly enough for it, and we can curse the Academy together and the British Public, and--oh, it's an exciting life.

DINAH (seeing it). I shall love it.

BRIAN. I'll make you love it. You shan't be sorry, Dinah.

DINAH. You shan't be sorry either, Brian.

BRIAN (looking at her lovingly). Oh, I know I shan't. . . . What will Olivia think about it? Will she be surprised?

DINAH. She's never surprised. She always seems to have thought of things about a week before they happen. George just begins to get hold of them about a week *after* they've happened. (Considering him) After all, there's no reason why George *shouldn't* like you, darling.

BRIAN. I'm not his sort, you know.

DINAH. You're more Olivia's sort. Well, we'll tell Olivia this morning.

OLIVIA (coming in). And what are you going to tell Olivia this morning? (She looks at them with a smile) Oh, well, I think I can guess.

(Shall we describe OLIVIA? But you will know all about her before the day is over.)

DINAH (jumping up). Olivia, darling!

BRIAN (following). Say you understand, Mrs. Marden.

OLIVIA. Mrs. Marden, I am afraid, is a very dense person, Brian, but I think if you asked Olivia if she understood----

BRIAN. Bless you, Olivia. I knew you'd be on our side.

DINAH. Of course she would.

OLIVIA. I don't know if it's usual to kiss an aunt-in-law, Brian, but Dinah is such a very special sort of niece that--(she inclines her cheek and BRIAN kisses it).

DINAH. I say, you *are* in luck to-day, Brian.

OLIVIA (going over to her chair by the work-table and getting to business with the curtains) And how many people have been told the good news?

BRIAN. Nobody yet.

DINAH. Except Mr. Pim.

BRIAN. Oh, does *he*--

OLIVIA. Who's Mr. Pim?

DINAH. Oh, he just happened--I say, are those *the* curtains? Then you're going to have them after all?

OLIVIA (with an air of surprise). After all what? But I decided on them long ago. (to BRIAN) You haven't told George yet?

BRIAN. I began to, you know, but I never got any farther than "Er--there's just--er--"

DINAH. George *would* talk about pigs all the time.

OLIVIA. Well, I suppose you want me to help you.

DINAH. Do, darling.

BRIAN. It would be awfully decent of you. Of course, I'm not quite his sort really--

DINAH. You're *my* sort.

BRIAN. But I don't think he objects to me, and--

(GEORGE comes in, a typical, narrow-minded, honest country gentleman of forty odd.)

GEORGE (at the windows). What's all this about a Mr. Pim? (He kicks some of the mud off his boots) Who is he? Where is he? I had most important business with Lumsden, and the girl comes down and cackles about a Mr. Pim, or Ping, or something. Where did I put his card? (Bringing it out) Carraway Pim. Never heard of him in my life.

DINAH. He said he had a letter of introduction, Uncle George.

GEORGE. Oh, *you* saw him, did you? Yes, that reminds me, there *was* a letter--(he brings it out and reads it).

DINAH. He had to send a telegram. He's coming back.

OLIVIA. Pass me those scissors, Brian.

BRIAN. These? (He picks them up and comes close to her.)

OLIVIA. Thank you. (She indicates GEORGE'S back. "Now?" says BRIAN with his eyebrows. She nods.)

GEORGE (reading). Ah well, a friend of Brymer's. Glad to oblige him. Yes, I know the man he wants. Coming back, you say, Dinah?

Then I'll be going back. Send him down to the farm, Olivia, when he comes. (to BRIAN) Hallo, what happened to *you*?

OLIVIA. Don't go, George, there's something we want to talk about.

GEORGE. Hallo, what's this?

BRIAN (to OLIVIA). Shall I----?

OLIVIA. Yes.

BRIAN (stepping out). I've been wanting to tell you all this morning, sir, only I didn't seem to have an opportunity of getting it out.

GEORGE. Well, what is it?

BRIAN. I want to marry Dinah, sir.

GEORGE. You want to marry Dinah? God bless my soul!

DINAH (rushing to him and putting her cheek against his coat). Oh, do say you like the idea, Uncle George.

GEORGE. Like the idea! Have you heard of this nonsense, Olivia?

OLIVIA. They've just this moment told me, George. I think they would be happy together.

GEORGE (to BRIAN). And what do you propose to be happy together *on*?

BRIAN. Well, of course, it doesn't amount to much at present, but we shan't starve.

DINAH. Brian got fifty pounds for a picture last March!

GEORGE (a little upset by this). Oh! (Recovering gamely) And how many pictures have you sold since?

BRIAN. Well, none, but--

GEORGE. None! And I don't wonder. Who the devil is going to buy pictures with triangular clouds and square sheep? And they call that Art nowadays! Good God, man, (waving him to the windows) go outside and *look* at the clouds!

OLIVIA. If he draws round clouds in future, George, will you let him marry Dinah?

GEORGE. What--what? Yes, of course, you *would* be on his side--all this Futuristic nonsense. I'm just taking these clouds as an example. I suppose I can see as well as any man in the county, and I say that clouds *aren't* triangular.

BRIAN. After all, sir, at my age one is naturally experimenting, and trying to find one's (with a laugh)--well, it sounds priggish, but one's medium of expression. I shall find out what I want to do directly, but I think I shall always be able to earn enough to live on. Well, I have for the last three years.

GEORGE. I see, and now you want to experiment with a wife, and you propose to start experimenting with *my* niece?

BRIAN (with a shrug). Well, of course, if you--

OLIVIA. You could help the experiment, darling, by giving Dinah a good allowance until she's twenty-one.

GEORGE. Help the experiment! I don't *want* to help the experiment.

OLIVIA (apologetically). Oh, I thought you did.

GEORGE. You will talk as if I was made of money. What with taxes always going up and rents always going down, it's as much as we can do to rub along as we are, without making allowances to everybody who thinks she wants to get married. (to BRIAN) And that's thanks to you, my friend.

BRIAN (surprised) To me?

OLIVIA. You never told me, darling. What's Brian been doing?

DINAH (indignantly). He hasn't been doing anything.

GEORGE. He's one of your Socialists who go turning the country upside down.

OLIVIA. But even Socialists must get married sometimes.

GEORGE. I don't see any necessity.

OLIVIA. But you'd have nobody to damn after dinner, darling, if they all died out.

BRIAN. Really, sir, I don't see what my politics and my art have got to do with it. I'm perfectly ready not to talk about either when I'm in your house, and as Dinah doesn't seem to object to them--

DINAH. I should think she doesn't.

GEORGE. Oh, you can get round the women, I daresay.

BRIAN. Well, it's Dinah I want to marry and live with. So what it really comes to is that you don't think I can support a wife.

GEORGE. Well, if you're going to do it by selling pictures, I don't think you can.

BRIAN. All right, tell me how much you want me to earn in a year, and I'll earn it.

GEORGE (hedging). It isn't merely a question of money. I just mention that as one thing--one of the important things. In addition to that, I think you are both too young to marry. I don't think you know your own minds, and I am not at all persuaded that, with what I venture to call your outrageous tastes, you and my niece will live happily together. Just because she thinks she loves you, Dinah may persuade herself now that she agrees with all you say and do, but she has been properly brought up in an honest English country household, and--er--she--well, in short, I cannot at all approve of any engagement

between you. (Getting up) Olivia, if this Mr.--er--Pim comes, I shall be down at the farm. You might send him along to me.

(He walks towards the windows.)

BRIAN (indignantly). Is there any reason why I shouldn't marry a girl who has been properly brought up?

GEORGE. I think you know my views, Strange.

OLIVIA. George, wait a moment, dear. We can't quite leave it like this.

GEORGE. I have said all I want to say on the subject.

OLIVIA. Yes, darling, but I haven't begun to say all that *I* want to say on the subject.

GEORGE. Of course, if you have anything to say, Olivia, I will listen to it; but I don't know that this is quite the time, or that you have chosen--(looking darkly at the curtains)--quite the occupation likely to--er--endear your views to me.

DINAH (mutinously). I may as well tell you, Uncle George, that *I* have got a good deal to say, too.

OLIVIA. I can guess what you are going to say, Dinah, and I think you had better keep it for the moment.

DINAH (meekly). Yes, Aunt Olivia.

OLIVIA. Brian, you might take her outside for a walk. I expect you have plenty to talk about.

GEORGE. Now mind, Strange, no love-making. I put you on your honour about that.

BRIAN. I'll do my best to avoid it, sir.

DINAH (cheekily). May I take his arm if we go up a hill?

OLIVIA. I'm sure you'll know how to behave--both of you.

BRIAN. Come on, then, Dinah.

DINAH. Righto.

GEORGE (as they go). And if you do see any clouds, Strange, take a good look at them. (He chuckles to himself) Triangular clouds--I never heard of such nonsense. (He goes back to his chair at the writing-table) Futuristic rubbish. . . . Well, Olivia?

OLIVIA. Well, George?

GEORGE. What are you doing?

OLIVIA. Making curtains, George. Won't they be rather sweet? Oh, but I forgot--you don't like them.

GEORGE. I don't like them, and what is more, I don't mean to have them in my house. As I told you yesterday, this is the house of a simple country gentleman, and I don't want any of these new-fangled ideas in it.

OLIVIA. Is marrying for love a new-fangled idea?

GEORGE. We'll come to that directly. None of you women can keep to the point. What I am saying now is that the house of my fathers and forefathers is good enough for me.

OLIVIA. Do you know, George, I can hear one of your ancestors saying that to his wife in their smelly old cave, when the new-fangled idea of building houses was first suggested. "The Cave of my Fathers is--"

GEORGE. That's ridiculous. Naturally we must have progress. But that's just the point. (Indicating the curtains) I don't call this sort of thing progress. It's--ah--retrogression.

OLIVIA. Well, anyhow, it's pretty.

GEORGE. There I disagree with you. And I must say once more that I will not have them hanging in my house.

OLIVIA. Very well, George. (But she goes on working.)

GEORGE. That being so, I don't see the necessity of going on with them.

OLIVIA. Well, I must do something with them now I've got the material. I thought perhaps I could sell them when they're finished--as we're so poor.

GEORGE. What do you mean--so poor?

OLIVIA. Well, you said just now that you couldn't give Dinah an allowance because rents had gone down.

GEORGE (annoyed). Confound it, Olivia! Keep to the point! We'll talk about Dinah's affairs directly. We're discussing our own affairs at the moment.

OLIVIA. But what is there to discuss?

GEORGE. Those ridiculous things.

OLIVIA. But we've finished that. You've said you wouldn't have them hanging in your house, and I've said, "Very well, George." Now we can go on to Dinah and Brian.

GEORGE (shouting). But put these beastly things away.

OLIVIA (rising and gathering up the curtains). Very well, George. (She puts them away, slowly, gracefully. There is an uncomfortable silence. Evidently somebody ought to apologise.)

GEORGE (realising that he is the one). Er--look here, Olivia, old girl, you've been a jolly good wife to me, and we don't often have rows, and if I've been rude to you about this--lost my temper a bit perhaps, what?--I'll say I'm sorry. May I have a kiss?

OLIVIA (holding up her face). George, darling! (He kisses her.) Do you love me?

GEORGE. You know I do, old girl.

OLIVIA. As much as Brian loves Dinah?

GEORGE (stiffly). I've said all I want to say about that. (He goes away from her.)

OLIVIA. Oh, but there must be lots you want to say--and perhaps don't like to. Do tell me, darling.

GEORGE. What it comes to is this. I consider that Dinah is too young to choose a husband for herself, and that Strange isn't the husband I should choose for her.

OLIVIA. You were calling him Brian yesterday.

GEORGE. Yesterday I regarded him as a boy, now he wants me to look upon him as a man.

OLIVIA. He's twenty-four.

GEORGE. And Dinah's nineteen. Ridiculous!

OLIVIA. If he'd been a Conservative, and thought that clouds were round, I suppose he'd have seemed older, somehow.

GEORGE. That's a different point altogether. That has nothing to do with his age.

OLIVIA (innocently). Oh, I thought it had.

GEORGE. What I am objecting to is these ridiculously early marriages before either party knows its own mind, much less the mind of the other party. Such marriages invariably lead to unhappiness.

OLIVIA. Of course, *my* first marriage wasn't a happy one.

GEORGE. As you know, Olivia, I dislike speaking about your first marriage at all, and I had no intention of bringing it up now, but since you mention it--well, that is a case in point.

OLIVIA (looking back at it). When I was eighteen, I was in love. Or perhaps I only thought I was, and I don't know if I should have been happy or not if I had married him. But my father made me marry a man called Jacob Telworthy; and when things were too hot for him in England--"too hot for him"--I think that was the expression we used in those days--then we went to Australia, and I left him there, and the only happy moment I had in all my married life was on the morning when I saw in the papers that he was dead.

GEORGE (very uncomfortable). Yes, yes, my dear, I know. You must have had a terrible time. I can hardly bear to think about it. My only hope is that I have made up to you for it in some degree. But I don't see what bearing it has upon Dinah's case.

OLIVIA. Oh, none, except that *my father liked* Jacob's political opinions and his views on art. I expect that that was why he chose him for me.

GEORGE. You seem to think that I wish to choose a husband for Dinah. I don't at all. Let her choose whom she likes as long as he can support her and there's a chance of their being happy together. Now, with regard to this fellow--

OLIVIA. You mean Brian?

GEORGE. He's got no money, and he's been brought up in quite a different way from Dinah. Dinah may be prepared to believe that--er--all cows are blue, and that--er--waves are square, but she won't go on believing it for ever.

OLIVIA. Neither will Brian.

GEORGE. Well, that's what I keep telling him, only he won't see it. Just as I keep telling you about those ridiculous curtains. It seems to me that I am the only person in the house with any eyesight left.

OLIVIA. Perhaps you are, darling; but you must let us find out our own mistakes for ourselves. At any rate, Brian is a gentleman; he loves Dinah, Dinah loves him; he's earning enough to support himself, and you are earning enough to support Dinah. I think it's worth risking, George.

GEORGE (stiffly). I can only say the whole question demands much more anxious thought than you seem to have given it. You say that he is a gentleman. He knows how to behave, I admit; but if his morals are as topsy-turvy as his tastes and--er--politics, as I've no doubt they are, then--er--In short, I do *not* approve of Brian Strange as a husband for my niece and ward.

OLIVIA (looking at him thoughtfully). You *are* a curious mixture, George. You were so very unconventional when you married me, and you're so very conventional when Brian wants to marry Dinah. . . . George Marden to marry the widow of a convict!

GEORGE. Convict! What do you mean?

OLIVIA. Jacob Telworthy, convict--I forget his number--surely I told you all this, dear, when we got engaged?

GEORGE. Never!

OLIVIA. I told you how he carelessly put the wrong signature to a cheque for a thousand pounds in England; how he made a little mistake about two or three companies he'd promoted in Australia; and how--

GEORGE. Yes, yes, but you never told me he was *convicted*!

OLIVIA. What difference does it make?

GEORGE. My dear Olivia, if you can't see that--a convict!

OLIVIA. So, you see, we needn't be too particular about our niece, need we?

GEORGE. I think we had better leave your first husband out of the conversation altogether. I never wished to refer to him; I never wish to hear about him again. I certainly had not realised that he was actually--er--*convicted* for his--er--

OLIVIA. Mistakes.

GEORGE. Well, we needn't go into that. As for this other matter, I don't for a moment take it seriously. Dinah is an exceptionally pretty girl, and young Strange is a good-looking boy. If they are attracted to each other, it is a mere outward attraction which I am convinced will not lead to any lasting happiness. That must be regarded as my last word in the matter, Olivia. If this Mr.--er--what was his name, comes, I shall be down at the farm.

[He goes out by the door.

(Left alone, OLIVIA brings out her curtains again, and gets calmly to work upon them.)

(DINAH and BRIAN come in by the windows.)

DINAH. Finished?

OLIVIA. Oh no, I've got all these rings to put on.

DINAH. I meant talking to George.

BRIAN. We walked about outside--

DINAH. Until we heard him *not* talking to you any more--

BRIAN. And we didn't kiss each other once.

DINAH. Brian was very George-like. He wouldn't even let me tickle the back of his neck. (She goes up suddenly to OLIVIA and kneels by her and kisses her) Darling, being George-like is a very nice thing to be--I mean a nice thing for other people to be--I mean--oh, you know what I mean. But say that he's going to be decent about it.

OLIVIA. Of course he is, Dinah.

BRIAN. You mean he'll let me come here as--as--

DINAH. As my young man?

OLIVIA. Oh, I think so.

DINAH. Olivia, you're a wonder. Have you really talked him round?

OLIVIA. I haven't said anything yet. But I daresay I shall think of something.

DINAH (disappointedly). Oh!

BRIAN (making the best of it). After all, Dinah, I'm going back to London to-morrow--

OLIVIA. You can be good for one more day, Dinah, and then when Brian isn't here, we'll see what we can do.

DINAH. Yes, but I didn't want him to go back to-morrow.

BRIAN (sternly). Must. Hard work before me. Earn thousands a year. Paint the Mayor and Corporation of Pudsey, life-size, including chains of office; paint slice of haddock on plate. Copy Landseer for old gentleman in Bayswater. Design antimacassar for middle-aged sofa in Streatham. Earn a living for you, Dinah.

DINAH (giggling). Oh, Brian, you're heavenly. What fun we shall have when we're married.

BRIAN (stiffly). Sir Brian Strange, R.A., if you please, Miss Marden. Sir Brian Strange, R.A., writes: "Your Sanogene has proved a most excellent tonic. After completing the third acre of my Academy picture 'The Mayor and Corporation of Pudsey' I was completely exhausted, but one bottle of Sanogene revived me, and I finished the remaining seven acres at a single sitting."

OLIVIA (looking about her). Brian, find my scissors for me.

BRIAN. Scissors. (Looking for them) Sir Brian Strange, R.A., looks for scissors. (Finding them) Aha! Once more we must record an unqualified success for the eminent Academician. Your scissors.

OLIVIA. Thank you so much.

DINAH. Come on, Brian, let's go out. I feel open-airy.

OLIVIA. Don't be late for lunch, there's good people. Lady Marden is coming.

DINAH. Aunt Juli-ah! Help! (She faints in BRIAN'S arms) That means a clean pinafore. Brian, you'll jolly well have to brush your hair.

BRIAN (feeling it). I suppose there's no time now to go up to London and get it cut?

[Enter ANNE, followed by PIM.

ANNE. Mr. Pim!

DINAH (delighted). Hullo, Mr. Pim! Here we are again! You can't get rid of us so easily, you see.

PIM. I--er--dear Miss Marden--

OLIVIA. How do you do, Mr. Pim? I can't get up, but do come and sit down. My husband will be here in a minute. Anne, send somebody down to the farm--

ANNE. I think I heard the Master in the library, madam.

OLIVIA. Oh, will you tell him then?

ANNE. Yes, madam.

[ANNE goes out.

OLIVIA. You'll stay to lunch, of course, Mr. Pim?

DINAH. Oh, do!

PIM. It's very kind of you, Mrs. Marden, but--

DINAH. Oh, you simply must, Mr. Pim. You haven't told us half enough about yourself yet. I want to hear all about your early life.

OLIVIA. Dinah!

PIM. Oh, we are almost, I might say, old friends, Mrs. Marden.

DINAH. Of course we are. He knows Brian, too. There's more in Mr. Pim than you think. You *will* stay to lunch, won't you?

PIM. It's very kind of you to ask me, Mrs. Marden, but I am lunching with the Trevors.

OLIVIA. Oh, well, you must come to lunch another day.

DINAH. The reason why we like Mr. Pim so much is that he was the first person to congratulate us. We feel that he is going to have a great influence on our lives.

PIM (to OLIVIA). I, so to speak, stumbled on the engagement this morning and--er--

OLIVIA. I see. Children, you must go and tidy yourselves up. Run along.

BRIAN. Sir Brian and Lady Strange never run; they walk. (Offering his arm) Madam!

DINAH (taking it). Au revoir, Mr. Pim. (Dramatically) We--shall--meet--*again!*

PIM (chuckling). Good morning, Miss Dinah.

BRIAN. Good morning.

[He and DINAH go out.

OLIVIA. You must forgive them, Mr. Pim. They're such children. And naturally they're rather excited just now.

PIM. Oh, not at all, Mrs. Marden.

OLIVIA. Of course you won't say anything about their engagement. We only heard about it five minutes ago, and nothing has been settled yet.

PIM. Of course, of course!

[Enter GEORGE.

GEORGE. Ah, Mr. Pim, we meet at last. Sorry to have kept you waiting before.

PIM. The apology should come from me, Mr. Marden for having--er--

GEORGE. Not at all. Very glad to meet you now. Any friend of Brymer's. You want a letter to this man Fanshawe?

OLIVIA. Shall I be in your way at all?

PIM. Oh, no, no, please don't.

GEORGE. It's only just a question of a letter. (Going to his desk) Fanshawe will put you in the way of seeing all that you want to see. He's a very old friend of mine. (Taking a sheet of notepaper) You'll stay to lunch, of course?

PIM. I'm afraid I am lunching with the Trevors--

GEORGE. Oh, well, they'll look after you all right. Good chap, Trevor.

PIM (to OLIVIA). You see, Mrs. Marden, I have only recently arrived from Australia after travelling about the world for some years, and I'm rather out of touch with my--er--fellow-workers in London.

OLIVIA. Oh yes. You've been in Australia, Mr. Pim?

GEORGE (disliking Australia). I shan't be a moment, Mr. Pim. (He frowns at OLIVIA.)

PIM. Oh, that's all right, thank you. (to OLIVIA) Oh yes, I have been in Australia more than once in the last few years.

OLIVIA. Really? I used to live at Sydney many years ago. Do you know Sydney at all?

GEORGE (detesting Sydney). H'r'm! Perhaps I'd better mention that you are a friend of the Trevors?

PIM. Thank you, thank you. (to OLIVIA) Indeed yes, I spent several months in Sydney.

OLIVIA. How curious. I wonder if we have any friends in common there.

GEORGE (hastily). Extremely unlikely, I should think. Sydney is a very big place.

PIM. True, but the world is a very small place, Mr. Marden. I had a remarkable instance of that, coming over on the boat this last time.

GEORGE. Ah! (Feeling that the conversation is now safe, he resumes his letter.)

PIM. Yes. There was a man I used to employ in Sydney some years ago, a bad fellow, I'm afraid, Mrs. Marden, who had been in prison for some kind of fraudulent company-promoting and had taken to drink and--and so on.

OLIVIA. Yes, yes, I understand.

PIM. Drinking himself to death I should have said. I gave him at the most another year to live. Yet to my amazement the first person I saw as I stepped on board the boat that brought me to England last week was this fellow. There was no mistaking him. I spoke to him, in fact; we recognised each other.

OLIVIA. Really?

PIM. He was travelling steerage; we didn't meet again on board, and as it happened at Marseilles, this poor fellow--er--now what *was* his name? A very unusual one. Began with a--a T, I think.

OLIVIA (with suppressed feeling). Yes, Mr. Pim, yes? (She puts out a hand to GEORGE.)

GEORGE (in an undertone). Nonsense, dear!

PIM (triumphantly). I've got it! Telworthy!

OLIVIA. Telworthy!

GEORGE. Good God!

PIM (a little surprised at the success of his story). An unusual name, is it not? Not a name you could forget when once you had heard it.

OLIVIA (with feeling). No, it is not a name you could forget when once you had heard it.

GEORGE (hastily coming over to PIM). Quite so, Mr. Pim, a most remarkable name, a most odd story altogether. Well, well, here's your letter, and if you're sure you won't stay to lunch--

PIM. I'm afraid not, thank you. You see, I--

GEORGE. The Trevors, yes. I'll just see you on your way--(to OLIVIA) Er--my dear--

OLIVIA (holding out her hand, but not looking at him). Good-bye, Mr. Pim.

PIM. Good-bye, good-bye!

GEORGE (leading the way through the windows). This way, this way. Quicker for you.

PIM. Thank you, thank you.

[GEORGE hurries MR. PIM out.

(OLIVIA sits there and looks into the past. Now and then she shudders.)

[GEORGE comes back.

GEORGE. Good God! Telworthy! Is it possible? (Before OLIVIA can answer, LADY MARDEN is announced. They pull themselves together and greet her.)

ACT II

(Lunch is over and coffee has been served on the terrace. Conversation drags on, to the satisfaction of LADY MARDEN, but of nobody else. GEORGE and OLIVIA want to be alone; so do BRIAN and DINAH. At last BRIAN murmurs something about a cigarette-case; and, catching DINAH'S eye, comes into the house. He leans against the sofa and waits for DINAH.)

DINAH (loudly as she comes in). Have you found it?

BRIAN. Found what?

DINAH (in her ordinary voice). That was just for *their* benefit. I said I'd help you find it. It *is* your cigarette-case we're looking for, isn't it?

BRIAN (taking it out). Yes. Have one?

DINAH. No, thank you, darling. Aunt Juli-ah still thinks it's unladylike. . . . Have you ever seen her beagling?

BRIAN. No. Is that very ladylike?

DINAH. Very. . . . I say, what has happened, do you think?

BRIAN. Everything. I love you, and you love me.

DINAH. Silly! I meant between George and Olivia. Didn't you notice them at lunch?

BRIAN. I noticed that you seemed to be doing most of the talking. But then I've noticed that before sometimes. Do you think Olivia and your uncle have quarrelled because of *us*?

DINAH. Of course not. George may *think* he has quarrelled, but I'm quite sure Olivia hasn't. No, I believe Mr. Pim's at the bottom of it. He's brought some terribly sad news about George's investments. The old home will have to be sold up.

BRIAN. Good. Then your uncle won't mind your marrying me.

DINAH. Yes, darling, but you must be more dramatic about it than that. "George," you must say, with tears in your eyes, "I cannot pay off the whole of the mortgage for you. I have only two and ninepence; but at least let me take your niece off your hands." Then George will thump you on the back and say gruffly, "You're a good fellow, Brian, a damn good fellow," and he'll blow his nose very loudly, and say, "Confound this cigar, it won't draw properly." (She gives us a rough impression of GEORGE doing it.)

BRIAN. Dinah, you're a heavenly idiot. And you've simply got to marry me, uncles or no uncles.

DINAH. It will have to be "uncles," I'm afraid, because, you see, I'm his ward, and I can get sent to Chancery or Coventry or somewhere beastly, if I marry without his consent. Haven't *you* got anybody who objects to your marrying *me*?

BRIAN. Nobody, thank Heaven.

DINAH. Well, that's rather disappointing of you. I saw myself fascinating your aged father at the same time that you were fascinating George. I should have done it much better than you. As a George-fascinator you aren't very successful, sweetheart.

BRIAN. What am I like as a Dinah-fascinator?

DINAH. Plus six, darling.

BRIAN. Then I'll stick to that and leave George to Olivia.

DINAH. I expect she'll manage him all right. I have great faith in Olivia. But you'll marry me, anyhow, won't you, Brian?

BRIAN. I will.

DINAH. Even if we have to wait till I'm twenty-one?

BRIAN. Even if we have to wait till you're fifty-one.

DINAH (holding out her hands to him). Darling!

BRIAN (uneasily). I say, don't do that.

DINAH. Why not?

BRIAN. Well, I promised I wouldn't kiss you.

DINAH. Oh! . . . Well, you might just *send* me a kiss. You can look the other way as if you didn't know I was here.

BRIAN. Like this?

(He looks the other way, kisses the tips of his fingers, and flicks it carelessly in her direction.)

DINAH. That was a lovely one. Now here's one coming for you.

(He catches it gracefully and conveys it to his mouth.)

BRIAN (with a low bow). Madam, I thank you.

DINAH (curtseying). Your servant, Mr. Strange.

OLIVIA (from outside). Dinah!

DINAH (jumping up). Hullo!

(OLIVIA comes in through the windows, followed by GEORGE and LADY MARDEN, the latter a vigorous young woman of sixty odd, who always looks as if she were beagling.)

OLIVIA. Aunt Julia wants to see the pigs, dear. I wish you'd take her down. I'm rather tired, and your uncle has some business to attend to.

LADY MARDEN. I've always said that you don't take enough exercise, Olivia. Look at me--sixty-five and proud of it.

OLIVIA. Yes, Aunt Julia, you're wonderful.

DINAH. How old would Olivia be if she took exercise?

GEORGE. Don't stand about asking silly questions, Dinah. Your aunt hasn't much time.

BRIAN. May I come, too, Lady Marden?

LADY MARDEN. Well, a little exercise wouldn't do *you* any harm, Mr. Strange. You're an artist, ain't you?

BRIAN. Well, I try to paint.

DINAH. He sold a picture last March for--

GEORGE. Yes, yes, never mind that now.

LADY MARDEN. Unhealthy life. Well, come along.

[She strides out, followed by DINAH and BRIAN.

(GEORGE sits down at his desk with his head in his hand, and stabs the blotting-paper with a pen. OLIVIA takes the curtains with her to the sofa and begins to work on them.)

GEORGE (looking up and seeing them). Really, Olivia, we've got something more important, more vital to us than curtains, to discuss, now that we *are* alone at last.

OLIVIA. I wasn't going to discuss them, dear.

GEORGE. I'm always glad to see Aunt Julia in my house, but I wish she hadn't chosen this day of all days to come to lunch.

OLIVIA. It wasn't Aunt Julia's fault. It was really Mr. Pim who chose the wrong day.

GEORGE (fiercely). Good Heavens, is it true?

OLIVIA. About Jacob Telworthy?

GEORGE. You told me he was dead. You always said that he was dead. You--you--

OLIVIA. Well, I always thought that he was dead. He was as dead as anybody could be. All the papers said he was dead.

GEORGE (scornfully). The papers!

OLIVIA (as if this would settle it for GEORGE). The *Times* said he was dead. There was a paragraph about him. Apparently even his death was fraudulent.

GEORGE. Yes, yes, I'm not blaming you, Olivia, but what are we going to do, that's the question, what are we going to do? My God, it's horrible! You've never been married to me at all! You don't seem to understand.

OLIVIA. It is a little difficult to realise. You see, it doesn't seem to have made any difference to our happiness.

GEORGE. No, that's what's so terrible. I mean--well, of course, we were quite innocent in the matter. But, at the same time, nothing can get over the fact that we--we had no right to--to be happy.

OLIVIA. Would you rather we had been miserable?

GEORGE. You're Telworthy's wife, that's what you don't seem to understand. You're Telworthy's wife. You--er--forgive me, Olivia, but it's the horrible truth--you committed bigamy when you married me. (In horror) Bigamy!

OLIVIA. It is an ugly word, isn't it?

GEORGE. Yes, but don't you understand--(He jumps up and comes over to her) Look here, Olivia, old girl, the whole thing is nonsense, eh? It isn't your husband, it's some other Telworthy that this fellow met. That's right, isn't it? Some other shady swindler who turned up on the boat, eh? This sort of thing doesn't happen to people like *us*--committing bigamy and all that. Some other fellow.

OLIVIA (shaking her head). I knew all the shady swindlers in Sydney, George. . . . They came to dinner. . . . There were no others called Telworthy.

(GEORGE goes back despondently to his seat.)

GEORGE. Well, what are we going to do?

OLIVIA. You sent Mr. Pim away so quickly. He might have told us things. Telworthy's plans. Where he is now. You hurried him away so quickly.

GEORGE. I've sent a note round to ask him to come back. My one idea at the moment was to get him out of the house--to hush things up.

OLIVIA. You can't hush up two husbands.

GEORGE (in despair). You can't. Everybody will know. Everybody!

OLIVIA. The children, Aunt Julia, they may as well know now as later. Mr. Pim must, of course.

GEORGE. I do not propose to discuss my private affairs with Mr. Pim----

OLIVIA. But he's mixed himself up in them rather, hasn't he, and if you're going to ask him questions----

GEORGE. I only propose to ask him one question. I shall ask him if he is absolutely certain of the man's name. I can do that quite easily without letting him know the reason for my inquiry.

OLIVIA. You couldn't make a mistake about a name like Telworthy. But he might tell us something about Telworthy's plans. Perhaps he's going back to Australia at once. Perhaps he thinks I'm dead, too. Perhaps-- oh, there are so many things I want to know.

GEORGE. Yes, yes, dear. It would be interesting to--that is, one naturally wants to know these things, but of course it doesn't make any real difference.

OLIVIA (surprised). No difference?

GEORGE. Well, that is to say, you're as much his wife if he's in Australia as you are if he's in England.

OLIVIA. I am not his wife at all.

GEORGE. But, Olivia, surely you understand the position----

OLIVIA (shaking her head). Jacob Telworthy may be alive, but I am not his wife. I ceased to be his wife when I became yours.

GEORGE. You never *were* my wife. That is the terrible part of it. Our union--you make me say it, Olivia--has been unhallowed by the Church. Unhallowed even by the Law. Legally, we have been living in--living in--well, the point is, how does the Law stand? I imagine

that Telworthy could get a--a divorce. . . . Oh, it seems impossible that things like this can be happening to *us*.

OLIVIA (Joyfully). A divorce?

GEORGE. I--I imagine so.

OLIVIA. But then we could *really* get married, and we shouldn't be living in--living in--whatever we were living in before.

GEORGE. I can't understand you, Olivia. You talk about it so calmly, as if there was nothing blameworthy in being divorced, as if there was nothing unusual in my marrying a divorced woman, as if there was nothing wrong in our having lived together for years without having been married.

OLIVIA. What seems wrong to me is that I lived for five years with a bad man whom I hated. What seems right to me is that I lived for five years with a good man whom I love.

GEORGE. Yes, yes, my dear, I know. But right and wrong don't settle themselves as easily as that. We've been living together when you were Telworthy's wife. That's *wrong*.

OLIVIA. Do you mean wicked?

GEORGE. Well, no doubt the Court would consider that we acted in perfect innocence--

OLIVIA. What Court?

GEORGE. These things have to be done legally, of course. I believe the proper method is a nullity suit, declaring our marriage null and--er--void. It would, so to speak, wipe out these years of--er--

OLIVIA. Wickedness?

GEORGE. Of irregular union, and--er--then--

OLIVIA. Then I could go back to Jacob. . . . Do you really mean that, George?

GEORGE (uneasily). Well, dear, you see--that's how things are--one can't get away from--er----

OLIVIA. What you feel is that Telworthy has the greater claim? You are prepared to--make way for him?

GEORGE. Both the Church and the Law would say that I had no claim at all, I'm afraid. I--I suppose I haven't.

OLIVIA. I see. (She looks at him curiously) Thank you for making it so clear, George.

GEORGE. Of course, whether or not you go back to--er--Telworthy is another matter altogether. That would naturally be for you to decide.

OLIVIA (cheerfully). For me and Jacko to decide.

GEORGE. Er--Jacko?

OLIVIA. I used to call my first husband--I mean my only husband--Jacko. I didn't like the name of Jacob, and Jacko seemed to suit him somehow. . . . He had very long arms. Dear Jacko.

GEORGE (annoyed). You don't seem to realise that this is not a joke, Olivia.

OLIVIA (a trifle hysterically). It may not be a joke, but it *is* funny, isn't it?

GEORGE. I must say I don't see anything funny in a tragedy that has wrecked two lives.

OLIVIA. Two? Oh, but Jacko's life isn't wrecked. It has just been miraculously restored to him. And a wife, too. There's nothing tragic for Jacko in it.

GEORGE (stiffly). I was referring to *our* two lives--yours and mine.

OLIVIA. Yours, George? Your life isn't wrecked. The Court will absolve you of all blame; your friends will sympathise with you, and tell you that I was a designing woman who deliberately took you in; your Aunt Julia----

GEORGE (overwrought). Stop it! What do you mean? Have you no heart? Do you think I *want* to lose you, Olivia? Do you think I *want* my home broken up like this? Haven't you been happy with me these last five years?

OLIVIA. Very happy.

GEORGE. Well then, how can you talk like that?

OLIVIA (pathetically). But you want to send me away.

GEORGE. There you go again. I don't *want* to. I have hardly had time to realise just what it will mean to me when you go. The fact is I simply daren't realise it. I daren't think about it.

OLIVIA (earnestly). Try thinking about it, George.

GEORGE. And you talk as if I *wanted* to send you away!

OLIVIA. Try thinking about it, George.

GEORGE. You don't seem to understand that I'm not *sending* you away. You simply aren't mine to keep.

OLIVIA. Whose am I?

GEORGE. Your husband's. Telworthy's.

OLIVIA (gently). If I belong to anybody but myself, I think I belong to you.

GEORGE. Not in the eyes of the Law. Not in the eyes of the Church. Not even in the eyes of--er----

OLIVIA. The County?

GEORGE (annoyed). I was about to say "Heaven."

OLIVIA (unimpressed). Oh!

GEORGE. That this should happen to *us*! (He gets up and walks about the room, wondering when he will wake up from this impossible dream, OLIVIA works in silence. Then she stands up and shakes out her curtains.)

OLIVIA (looking at them). I do hope Jacko will like these.

GEORGE. What! You---- (Going up to her) Olivia, Olivia, have you no heart?

OLIVIA. Ought you to talk like that to another man's wife?

GEORGE. Confound it, is this just a joke to you?

OLIVIA. You must forgive me, George; I am a little over-excited--at the thought of returning to Jacob, I suppose.

GEORGE. Do you *want* to return to him?

OLIVIA. One wants to do what is right. In the eyes of--er--Heaven.

GEORGE. Seeing what sort of man he is, I have no doubt that you could get a separation, supposing that he didn't--er--divorce you. I don't know *what* is best. I must consult my solicitor. The whole position has been sprung on us, and--(miserably) I don't know, I don't know. I can't take it all in.

OLIVIA. Wouldn't you like to consult your Aunt Julia too? She could tell you what the County--I mean what Heaven really thought about it.

GEORGE. Yes, yes. Aunt Julia has plenty of common sense. You're quite right, Olivia. This isn't a thing we can keep from the family.

OLIVIA. Do I still call her *Aunt* Julia?

GEORGE (looking up from his paces). What? What? (ANNE comes in.) Well, what is it?

ANNE. Mr. Pim says he will come down at once, sir.

GEORGE. Oh, thank you, thank you.

[ANNE goes out.

OLIVIA. George, Mr. Pim has got to know.

GEORGE. I don't see the necessity.

OLIVIA. Not even for me? When a woman suddenly hears that her long-lost husband is restored to her, don't you think she wants to ask questions? Where is he living, and how is he looking, and----

GEORGE (coldly). Of course, if you are interested in these things--

OLIVIA. How can I help being? Don't be so silly, George. We *must* know what Jacko--

GEORGE (annoyed). I wish you wouldn't call him by that ridiculous name.

OLIVIA. My husband--

GEORGE (wincing). Yes, well--your husband?

OLIVIA. Well, we must know his plans--where we can communicate with him, and so on.

GEORGE. I have no wish to communicate with him.

OLIVIA. I'm afraid you'll have to, dear.

GEORGE. I don't see the necessity.

OLIVIA. Well, you'll want to--to apologise to him for living with his wife for so long. And as I belong to him, he ought to be told where he can--call for me.

GEORGE (after a struggle). You put it in a very peculiar way, but I see your-point. (With a shudder) Oh, the horrible publicity of it all!

OLIVIA (going up to him and comforting him). Poor George. Dear, don't think I don't sympathise with you. I understand so exactly what you are feeling. The publicity! It's terrible.

GEORGE (miserably). I want to do what's right, Olivia. You believe that?

OLIVIA. Of course I do. It's only that we don't quite agree as to what is right and what is wrong.

GEORGE. It isn't a question of agreeing. Right is right, and wrong is wrong, all the world over.

OLIVIA (with a sad little smile). But more particularly in Buckinghamshire, I think.

GEORGE. If I only considered myself, I should say: "Let us pack this man Telworthy back to Australia. He would make no claim. He would accept money to go away and say nothing about it." If I consulted simply my own happiness, Olivia, that is what I should say. But when I consult--er----

OLIVIA (surprised). Mine?

GEORGE. My conscience----

OLIVIA. Oh!

GEORGE. Then I can't do it. It's wrong. (He is at the window as he says this.)

OLIVIA (making her first and last appeal). George, aren't I worth a little----

GEORGE (turning round). H'sh! Dinah! (Loudly for DINAH'S benefit) Well, then I'll write to him and--Ah, Dinah, where's Aunt Julia?

DINAH (coming in). We've seen the pigs, and now she's discussing the Art of Landseer with Brian. I just came to ask----

OLIVIA. Dinah, dear, bring Aunt Julia here. And Brian too. We have things we want to talk about with you all.

GEORGE (outraged). Olivia!

DINAH. Righto. What fun!

[Exit DINAH.]

GEORGE. Olivia, you don't seriously suggest that we should discuss these things with a child like Dinah and a young man like Strange, a mere acquaintance.

OLIVIA. Dinah will have to know. I'm very fond of her, George. You can't send me away without telling Dinah. And Brian is my friend. You have your solicitor and your aunt and your conscience to consult--mayn't I even have Brian?

GEORGE (forgetting). I should have thought that your *husband*----

OLIVIA. Yes, but we don't know where Jacko is.

GEORGE. I was not referring to--er--Telworthy.

OLIVIA. Well then?

GEORGE. Well, naturally I--you mustn't--Oh, this is horrible!

(He comes back to his desk as the others come in.)

OLIVIA (getting up). George and I have had some rather bad news, Aunt Julia. We wanted your advice. Where will you sit?

LADY MARDEN. Thank you, Olivia. I can sit down by myself. (She does so, near GEORGE. DINAH sits on the sofa with OLIVIA, and BRIAN half leans against the back of it. There is a hush of expectation. . . .) What is it? Money, I suppose. Nobody's safe nowadays.

GEORGE (signalling for help). Olivia--

OLIVIA. We've just heard that my first husband is still alive.

DINAH. Telworthy!

BRIAN. Good Lord!

LADY MARDEN. George!

DINAH (excitedly). And only this morning I was saying that nothing ever happened in this house! (Remorsefully to OLIVIA) Darling, I don't mean that. Darling one!

LADY MARDEN. What does this mean, George? I leave you for ten minutes--barely ten minutes--to go and look at the pigs, and when I come back you tell me that Olivia is a bigamist.

BRIAN (indignantly). I say--

OLIVIA (restraining him). H'sh!

BRIAN (to OLIVIA). If this is a row, I'm on your side.

LADY MARDEN. Well, George?

GEORGE. I'm afraid it's true, Aunt Julia. We heard the news just before lunch--just before you came. We've only this moment had an opportunity of talking about it, of wondering what to do.

LADY MARDEN. What was his name--Tel--something--

OLIVIA. Jacob Telworthy.

LADY MARDEN. So he's alive still?

GEORGE. Apparently. There seems to be no doubt about it.

LADY MARDEN (to OLIVIA). Didn't you *see* him die? I should always want to *see* my husband die before I married again. Not that I approve of second marriages, anyhow. I told you so at the time, George.

OLIVIA. *And* me, Aunt Julia.

LADY MARDEN. Did I? Well, I generally say what I think.

GEORGE. I ought to tell you, Aunt Julia, that no blame attaches to Olivia over this. Of that I am perfectly satisfied. It's nobody's fault, except----

LADY MARDEN. Except Telworthy's. *He* seems to have been rather careless. Well, what are you going to do about it?

GEORGE. That's just it. It's a terrible situation. There's bound to be so much publicity. Not only all this, but--but Telworthy's past and--and everything.

LADY MARDEN. I should have said that it was Telworthy's present which was the trouble. Had he a past as well?

OLIVIA. He was a fraudulent company promoter. He went to prison a good deal.

LADY MARDEN. George, you never told me this!

GEORGE. I--er----

OLIVIA. I don't see *why* he should want to talk about it.

DINAH (indignantly). What's it got to do with Olivia, anyhow? It's not *her* fault.

LADY MARDEN (sarcastically). Oh no, I daresay it's mine.

OLIVIA (to GEORGE). YOU wanted to ask Aunt Julia what was the right thing to do.

BRIAN (bursting out). Good Heavens, what *is* there to do except the one and only thing? (They all look at him and he becomes embarrassed) I'm sorry. You don't want *me* to--

OLIVIA. *I* do, Brian.

LADY MARDEN. Well, go on, Mr. Strange. What would *you* do in George's position?

BRIAN. Do? Say to the woman I loved, "You're *mine*, and let this other damned fellow come and take you from me if he can!" And he couldn't--how could he?--not if the woman chose *me*.

(LADY MARDEN gazes at BRIAN in amazement, GEORGE in anger, OLIVIA presses his hand gratefully. He has said what she has been waiting--oh, so eagerly--for GEORGE to say.)

DINAH (adoringly). Oh, Brian! (In a whisper) It *is* me, isn't it, and not Olivia?

BRIAN. You baby, of course!

LADY MARDEN. I'm afraid, Mr. Strange, your morals are as peculiar as your views on Art. If you had led a more healthy life--

BRIAN. This is not a question of morals or of art, it's a question of love.

DINAH. Hear, hear!

LADY MARDEN (to GEORGE). Isn't it that girl's bedtime yet?

OLIVIA (to DINAH). We'll let her sit up a little longer if she's good.

DINAH. I will be good, Olivia, only I thought anybody, however important a debate was, was allowed to say "Hear, hear!"

GEORGE (coldly) I really think we could discuss this better if Mr. Strange took Dinah out for a walk. Strange, if you--er--

OLIVIA. Tell them what you have settled first, George.

LADY MARDEN. Settled? What is there to be settled? It settles itself.

GEORGE (sadly). That's just it.

LADY MARDEN. The marriage must be annulled--is that the word, George?

GEORGE. I presume so.

LADY MARDEN. One's solicitor will know all about that of course.

BRIAN. And when the marriage has been annulled, what then?

LADY MARDEN. Presumably Olivia will return to her husband.

BRIAN (bitterly). And *that's* morality! As expounded by Bishop Landseer!

GEORGE (angered). I don't know what you mean by Bishop Landseer. Morality is acting in accordance with the Laws of the Land and the Laws of the Church. I am quite prepared to believe that *your* creed embraces neither marriage nor monogamy, but my creed is different.

BRIAN (fiercely). My creed includes both marriage *and* monogamy, and monogamy means sticking to the woman you love, as long as she wants you.

LADY MARDEN (calmly). You suggest that George and Olivia should go on living together, although they have never been legally

married, and wait for this Telworthy man to divorce her, and then--
bless the man, what do you think the County would say?

BRIAN (scornfully). Does it matter?

DINAH. Well, if you really want to know, the men would say, "Gad, she's a fine woman; I don't wonder he sticks to her," and the women would say, "I can't *think* what he sees in her to stick to her like that," and they'd both say, "After all, he may be a damn fool, but you can't deny he's a sportsman." That's what the County would say.

GEORGE (indignantly) Was it for this sort of thing, Olivia, that you insisted on having Dinah and Mr. Strange in here? To insult me in my own house?

LADY MARDEN. I can't think what young people are coming to nowadays.

OLIVIA. I think, dear, you and Brian had better go.

DINAH (getting up). We will go. But I'm just going to say one thing, Uncle George. Brian and I *are* going to marry each other, and when we are married we'll stick to each other, *however* many of our dead husbands and wives turn up!

[She goes out indignantly, followed by BRIAN.]

GEORGE. Upon my word, this is a pleasant discussion.

OLIVIA. I think the discussion is over, George. It is only a question of where I shall go, while you are bringing your--what sort of suit did you call it?

LADY MARDEN (to GEORGE). Nullity suit. I suppose that *is* the best thing?

GEORGE. It's horrible. The awful publicity. That it should be happening to *us*, that's what I can't get over.

LADY MARDEN. I don't remember anything of the sort in the Marden Family before, ever.

GEORGE (absently). Lady Fanny.

LADY MARDEN (recollecting). Yes, of course; but that was two hundred years ago. The standards were different then. Besides, it wasn't quite the same, anyhow.

GEORGE (absently). No, it wasn't quite the same.

LADY MARDEN. No. We shall all feel it. Terribly.

GEORGE (his apology). If there were any other way! Olivia, what *can* I do? It *is* the only way, isn't it? All that that fellow said--of course, it sounds very well--but as things are. . . . *Is* there anything in marriage, or isn't there? You believe that there is, don't you? You aren't one of these Socialists. Well, then, *can* we go on living together when you're another man's wife? It isn't only what people will say, but it *is* wrong, isn't it? . . . And supposing he doesn't divorce you, are we to go on living together, unmarried, for *ever*? Olivia, you seem to think that I'm just thinking of the publicity--what people will say. I'm not. I'm not. That comes in any way. But I want to do what's right, what's best. I don't mean what's best for *us*, what makes us happiest, I mean what's really best, what's rightest. What anybody else would do in my place. *I* don't know. It's so unfair. You're not my wife at all, but I want to do what's right. . . . Oh, Olivia, Olivia, you do understand, don't you?

(They have both forgotten LADY MARDEN. OLIVIA has never taken her eyes off him as he makes his last attempt to convince himself.)

OLIVIA (almost tenderly). So very very well, George. Oh, I understand just what you are feeling. And oh, I do so wish that you could--(with a little sigh)--but then it wouldn't be George, not the George I married--(with a rueful little laugh)--or didn't quite marry.

LADY MARDEN. I must say, I think you are both talking a little wildly.

OLIVIA (repeating it, oh, so tenderly). Or didn't--quite--marry. (She looks at him with all her heart in her eyes. She is giving him his last chance to say "Damn Telworthy; you're mine!" He struggles desperately with himself. . . . Will he?--will he? . . . But we shall never know, for at that moment ANNE comes in.)

ANNE. Mr. Pim is here, sir.

GEORGE (emerging from the struggle with an effort). Pim? Pim? Oh, ah, yes, of course. Mr. Pim. (Looking up) Where have you put him?

OLIVIA. I want to see Mr. Pim, too, George.

LADY MARDEN. Who on earth is Mr. Pim?

OLIVIA. Show him in here, Anne.

ANNE. Yes, madam. [She goes out.

OLIVIA. It was Mr. Pim who told us about my husband. He came across with him in the boat, and recognised him as the Telworthy he knew in Australia.

LADY MARDEN. Oh! Shall I be in the way?

GEORGE. No, no. It doesn't matter, does it, Olivia?

OLIVIA. Please stay.

[ANNE enters followed by MR. PIM.

ANNE. Mr. Pim.

GEORGE (pulling himself together). Ah, Mr. Pim! Very good of you to have come. The fact is--er--(It is too much for him; he looks despairingly at OLIVIA.)

OLIVIA. We're so sorry to trouble you, Mr. Pim. By the way, do you know Lady Marden? (MR. PIM and LADY MARDEN bow to each

other.) Do come and sit down, won't you? (She makes room for him on the sofa next to her) The fact is, Mr. Pim, you gave us rather a surprise this morning, and before we had time to realise what it all meant, you had gone.

MR. PIM. A surprise, Mrs. Marden? Dear me, not an unpleasant one, I hope?

OLIVIA. Well, rather a--surprising one.

GEORGE. Olivia, allow me a moment. Mr. Pim, you mentioned a man called Telworthy this morning. My wife used to--that is to say, I used to--that is, there are reasons--

OLIVIA. I think we had better be perfectly frank, George.

LADY MARDEN. I am sixty-five years of age, Mr. Pim, and I can say that I've never had a moment's uneasiness by telling the truth.

MR. PIM (after a desperate effort to keep up with the conversation). Oh! . . . I--er--I'm afraid I am rather at sea. Have I--er--left anything unsaid in presenting my credentials to you this morning? This Telworthy whom you mention--I seem to remember the name--

OLIVIA. Mr. Pim, you told us this morning of a man whom you had met on the boat, a man who had come down in the world, whom you had known in Sydney. A man called Telworthy.

MR. PIM (relieved). Ah yes, yes, of course. I did say Telworthy, didn't I? Most curious coincidence, Lady Marden. Poor man, poor man! Let me see, it must have been ten years ago--

GEORGE. Just a moment, Mr. Pim. You're quite sure that his name was Telworthy?

MR. PIM. Telworthy--Telworthy--didn't I say Telworthy? Yes, that was it--Telworthy. Poor fellow!

OLIVIA. I'm going to be perfectly frank with you, Mr. Pim. I feel quite sure that I can trust you. This man Telworthy whom you met is my husband.

MR. PIM. Your husband? (He looks in mild surprise at GEORGE.)
But--er--

OLIVIA. My first husband. His death was announced six years ago. I had left him some years before that, but there seems no doubt from your story that he's still alive. His record--the country he comes from--above all, the very unusual name--Telworthy.

MR. PIM. Telworthy--yes--certainly a most peculiar name. I remember saying so. Your first husband? Dear me! Dear me!

GEORGE. You understand, Mr. Pim, that all this is in absolute confidence.

MR. PIM. Of course, of course.

OLIVIA. Well, since he is my husband, we naturally want to know something about him. Where is he now, for instance?

MR. PIM (surprised). Where is he now? But surely I told you? I told you what happened at Marseilles?

GEORGE. At Marseilles?

MR. PIM. Yes, yes, poor fellow, it was most unfortunate. (Quite happy again) You must understand, Lady Marden, that although I had met the poor fellow before in Australia, I was never in any way intimate--

GEORGE (thumping the desk). Where is he *now*, that's what we want to know?

(MR. PIM turns to him with a start.)

OLIVIA. Please, Mr. Pim!

PIM. Where is he now? But--but didn't I tell you of the curious fatality at Marseilles--poor fellow--the fish-bone?

ALL. Fish-bone?

MR. PIM. Yes, yes, a herring, I understand.

OLIVIA (understanding first). Do you mean he's dead?

MR. PIM. Dead--of course--didn't I--?

OLIVIA (laughing hysterically). Oh, Mr. Pim, you--oh, what a husband to have--oh, I--(But that is all she can say for the moment.)

LADY MARDEN. Pull yourself together, Olivia. This is so unhealthy for you. (to PIM) So he really *is* dead this time?

MR. PIM. Oh, undoubtedly, undoubtedly. A fishbone lodged in his throat.

GEORGE (trying to realise it). Dead!

OLIVIA (struggling with her laughter). I think you must excuse me, Mr. Pim--I can never thank you enough--a herring--there's something about a herring--morality depends on such little things--George, you--(Shaking her head at him in a weak state of laughter, she hurries out of the room.)

MR. PIM. Dear me! Dear me!

GEORGE. Now, let us have this quite clear, Mr. Pim. You say that the man, Telworthy, Jacob Telworthy, is dead?

MR. PIM. Telworthy, yes--didn't I say Telworthy? This man I was telling you about--

GEORGE. He's dead?

MR. PIM. Yes, yes, he died at Marseilles.

LADY MARDEN. A dispensation of Providence, George. One can look at it in no other light.

GEORGE. Dead! (Suddenly annoyed) Really, Mr. Pim, I think you might have told us before.

MR. PIM. But I--I *was* telling you--I--

GEORGE. If you had only told us the whole story at once, instead of in two--two instalments like this, you would have saved us all a good deal of anxiety.

MR. PIM. Really, I--

LADY MARDEN. I am sure Mr. Pim meant well, George, but it seems a pity he couldn't have said so before. If the man was dead, *why* try to hush it up?

MR. PIM (lost again). Really, Lady Marden, I--

GEORGE (getting up). Well, well, at any rate, I am much obliged to you, Mr. Pim, for having come down to us this afternoon. Dead! *De mortuis*, and so forth, but the situation would have been impossible had he lived. Good-bye! (Holding out his hand) Good-bye!

LADY MARDEN. Good-bye, Mr. Pim.

MR. PIM. Good-bye, good-bye! (GEORGE takes him to the door.) Of course, if I had--(to himself) Telworthy--I *think* that was the name. (He goes out, still wondering.)

GEORGE (with a sigh of thankfulness). Well! This is wonderful news, Aunt Julia.

LADY MARDEN. Most providential! . . . You understand, of course, that you are not married to Olivia?

GEORGE (who didn't). Not married?

LADY MARDEN. If her first husband only died at Marseilles a few days ago--

GEORGE. Good Heavens!

LADY MARDEN. Not that it matters. You can get married quietly again. Nobody need know.

GEORGE (considering it). Yes . . . yes. Then all these years we have been--er--Yes.

LADY MARDEN. Who's going to know?

GEORGE. Yes, yes, that's true. . . . And in perfect innocence, too.

LADY MARDEN. I should suggest a Registry Office in London.

GEORGE. A Registry Office, yes.

LADY MARDEN. Better go up to town this afternoon. Can't do it too quickly.

GEORGE. Yes, yes. We can stay at an hotel--

LADY MARDEN (surprised). George!

GEORGE. What?

LADY MARDEN. *You* will stay at your club.

GEORGE. Oh--ah--yes, of course, Aunt Julia.

LADY MARDEN. Better take your solicitor with you to be on the safe side. . . . To the Registry Office, I mean.

GEORGE. Yes.

LADY MARDEN (getting up). Well, I must be getting along, George. Say good-bye to Olivia for me. And those children. Of course, you

won't allow this absurd love-business between them to come to anything?

GEORGE. Most certainly not. Good-bye, Aunt Julia!

LADY MARDEN (indicating the windows). I'll go *this* way. (As she goes) And get Olivia out more, George. I don't like these hysterics. You want to be firm with her.

GEORGE (firmly) Yes, yes! Good-bye!

(He waves to her and then goes back to his seat.)

(OLIVIA comes in, and stands in the middle of the room looking at him. He comes to her eagerly.)

GEORGE (holding out his hands). Olivia! Olivia! (But it is not so easy as that.)

OLIVIA (drawing herself up proudly). Mrs. Telworthy!

ACT III

(OLIVIA is standing where we left her at the end of the last act.)

GEORGE (taken aback). Olivia, I--I don't understand.

OLIVIA (leaving melodrama with a little laugh and coming down to him). Poor George! Did I frighten you rather?

GEORGE. You're so strange to-day. I don't understand you. You're not like the Olivia I know.

(They sit down on the sofa together.)

OLIVIA. Perhaps you don't know me very well after all.

GEORGE (affectionately). Oh, that's nonsense, old girl. You're just my Olivia.

OLIVIA. And yet it seemed as though I wasn't going to be your Olivia half an hour ago.

GEORGE (with a shudder). Don't talk about it. It doesn't bear thinking about. Well, thank Heaven that's over. Now we can get married again quietly and nobody will be any the wiser.

OLIVIA. Married again?

GEORGE. Yes, dear. As you--er--(he laughs uneasily) said just now, you are Mrs. Telworthy. Just for the moment. But we can soon put that right. My idea was to go up this evening and--er--make arrangements, and if you come up to-morrow morning, if we can manage it by then, we could get quietly married at a Registry Office, and--er--nobody any the wiser.

OLIVIA. Yes, I see. You want me to marry you at a Registry Office to-morrow?

GEORGE. If we can arrange it by then. I don't know how long these things take, but I should imagine there would be no difficulty.

OLIVIA. Oh no, that part ought to be quite easy. But--(She hesitates.)

GEORGE. But what?

OLIVIA. Well, if you want to marry me to-morrow, George, oughtn't you to propose to me first?

GEORGE (amazed). Propose?

OLIVIA. Yes. It is usual, isn't it, to propose to a person before you marry her, and--and we want to do the usual thing, don't we?

GEORGE (upset). But you--but we . . .

OLIVIA. You see, dear, you're George Marden, and I'm Olivia Telworthy, and you--you're attracted by me, and think I would make you a good wife, and you want to marry me. Well, naturally you propose to me first, and--tell me how much you are attracted by me, and what a good wife you think I shall make, and how badly you want to marry me.

GEORGE (falling into the humour of it, as he thinks). The baby! Did she want to be proposed to all over again?

OLIVIA. Well, she did rather.

GEORGE (rather fancying himself as an actor). She shall then. (He adopts what he considers to be an appropriate attitude) Mrs. Telworthy, I have long admired you in silence, and the time has now come to put my admiration into words. Er--(But apparently he finds a difficulty.)

OLIVIA (hopefully). Into words.

GEORGE. Er--

OLIVIA (with the idea of helping). Oh, Mr. Marden!

GEORGE. Er--may I call you Olivia?

OLIVIA. Yes, George.

GEORGE (taking her hand). Olivia--I--(He hesitates.)

OLIVIA. I don't want to interrupt, but oughtn't you to be on your knees? It is--usual, I believe. If one of the servants came in, you could say you were looking for my scissors.

GEORGE. Really, Olivia, you must allow me to manage my own proposal in my own way.

OLIVIA (meekly). I'm sorry. Do go on.

GEORGE. Well, er--confound it, Olivia, I love you. Will you marry me?

OLIVIA. Thank you, George, I will think it over.

GEORGE (laughing). Silly girl! Well then, to-morrow morning. No wedding-cake, I'm afraid, Olivia. (He laughs again) But we'll go and have a good lunch somewhere.

OLIVIA. I will think it over, George.

GEORGE (good-humouredly). Well, give us a kiss while you're thinking.

OLIVIA. I'm afraid you mustn't kiss me until we are actually engaged.

GEORGE (laughing uneasily). Oh, we needn't take it as seriously as all that.

OLIVIA. But a woman must take a proposal seriously.

GEORGE (alarmed at last). What do you mean?

OLIVIA. I mean that the whole question, as I heard somebody say once, demands much more anxious thought than either of us has given it. These hasty marriages--

GEORGE. Hasty!

OLIVIA. Well, you've only just proposed to me, and you want to marry me to-morrow.

GEORGE. Now you're talking perfect nonsense, Olivia. You know quite well that our case is utterly different from--from any other.

OLIVIA. All the same, one has to ask oneself questions. With a young girl like--well, with a young girl, love may well seem to be all that matters. But with a woman of my age, it is different. I have to ask myself if you can afford to support a wife.

GEORGE (coldly). Fortunately that is a question that you can very easily answer for yourself.

OLIVIA. Well, but I have been hearing rather bad reports lately. What with taxes always going up, and rents always going down, some of our landowners are getting into rather straitened circumstances. At least, so I'm told.

GEORGE. I don't know what you're talking about.

OLIVIA (surprised). Oh, isn't it true? I heard of a case only this morning--a landowner who always seemed to be very comfortably off, but who couldn't afford an allowance for his only niece when she wanted to get married. It made me think that one oughtn't to judge by appearances.

GEORGE. You know perfectly well that I can afford to support a wife as my wife *should* be supported.

OLIVIA. I'm so glad, dear. Then your income--you aren't getting anxious at all?

GEORGE (stiffly). You know perfectly well what my income is. I see no reason for anxiety in the future.

OLIVIA. Ah, well, then we needn't think about that any more. Well, then, there is another thing to be considered.

GEORGE. I can't make out what you're up to. Don't you want to get married; to--er--legalise this extraordinary situation in which we are placed?

OLIVIA. I want to be sure that I am going to be happy, George. I can't just jump at the very first offer I have had since my husband died, without considering the whole question very carefully.

GEORGE. So I'm under consideration, eh?

OLIVIA. Every suitor is.

GEORGE (sarcastically, as he thinks). Well, go on.

OLIVIA. Well, then, there's your niece. You have a niece who lives with you. Of course Dinah is a delightful girl, but one doesn't like marrying into a household in which there is another grown-up woman. But perhaps she will be getting married herself soon?

GEORGE. I see no prospect of it.

OLIVIA. I think it would make it much easier if she did.

GEORGE. Is this a threat, Olivia? Are you telling me that if I do not allow young Strange to marry Dinah, you will not marry me?

OLIVIA. A threat? Oh no, George.

GEORGE. Then what does it mean?

OLIVIA. I'm just wondering if you love me as much as Brian loves Dinah. You *do* love me?

GEORGE (from his heart). You know I do, old girl. (He comes to her.)

OLIVIA. You're not just attracted by my pretty face? . . . *Is* it a pretty face?

GEORGE. It's an adorable one. (He tries to kiss it, but she turns away.)

OLIVIA. How can I be sure that it is not *only* my face which makes you think that you care for me? Love which rests upon a mere outward attraction cannot lead to any lasting happiness--as one of our thinkers has observed.

GEORGE. What's come over you, Olivia? I don't understand what you're driving at. Why should you doubt my love?

OLIVIA. Ah!--Why?

GEORGE. You can't pretend that we haven't been happy together. I've--I've been a good pal to you, eh? We--we suit each other, old girl.

OLIVIA. Do we?

GEORGE. Of course we do.

OLIVIA. I wonder. When two people of our age think of getting married, one wants to be very sure that there is real community of ideas between them. Whether it is a comparatively trivial matter, like the right colour for a curtain, or some very much more serious question of conduct which arises, one wants to feel that there is some chance of agreement between husband and wife.

GEORGE. We--we love each other, old girl.

OLIVIA. We do now, yes. But what shall we be like in five years' time? Supposing that after we have been married five years, we found ourselves estranged from each other upon such questions as Dinah's future, or the decorations of the drawing-room, or even the advice to give to a friend who had innocently contracted a bigamous marriage? How bitterly we should regret then our hasty plunge into a matrimony which was no true partnership, whether of tastes, or of ideas, or even of consciences! (With a sigh) Ah me!

GEORGE (nastily). Unfortunately for your argument, Olivia, I can answer you out of your own mouth. You seem to have forgotten what you said this morning in the case of--er--young Strange.

OLIVIA (reproachfully). Is it quite fair, George, to drag up what was said this morning?

GEORGE. You've brought it on yourself.

OLIVIA. I? . . . Well, and what did I say this morning?

GEORGE. You said that it was quite enough that Strange was a gentleman and in love with Dinah for me to let them marry each other.

OLIVIA. Oh! . . . *Is* that enough, George?

GEORGE (triumphantly). You said so.

OLIVIA (meekly). Well, if you think so, too, I--I don't mind risking it.

GEORGE (kindly). Aha, my dear! You see!

OLIVIA. Then you do think it's enough?

GEORGE. I--er--Yes, yes, I--I think so.

OLIVIA (going to him). My darling one! Then we can have a double wedding. How jolly!

GEORGE (astounded). A double one!

OLIVIA. Yes. You and me, Brian and Dinah.

GEORGE (firmly). Now look here, Olivia, understand once and for all, I am not to be blackmailed into giving my consent to Dinah's engagement. Neither blackmailed nor tricked. Our marriage has nothing whatever to do with Dinah's.

OLIVIA. No, dear. I quite understand. They may take place about the same time, but they have nothing to do with each other.

GEORGE. I see no prospect of Dinah's marriage taking place for many years.

OLIVIA. No, dear, that was what I said.

GEORGE (not understanding for the moment). You said. . . . ? I see. Now, Olivia, let us have this perfectly clear. You apparently insist on treating my--er--proposal as serious.

OLIVIA (surprised). Wasn't it serious? Were you trifling with me?

GEORGE. You know quite well what I mean. You treat it as an ordinary proposal from a man to a woman who have never been more than acquaintances before. Very well then. Will you tell me what you

propose to do, if you decide to--ah--refuse me? You do not suggest that we should go on living together--unmarried?

OLIVIA (shocked). Of course not, George! What would the County--I mean Heaven--I mean the Law--I mean, of *course* not! Besides, it's so unnecessary. If I decide to accept you, of *course* I shall marry you.

GEORGE. Quite so. And if you--ah--decide to refuse me? What will you do?

OLIVIA. Nothing.

GEORGE. Meaning by that?

OLIVIA. Just that, George. I shall stay here--just as before. I like this house. It wants a little re-decorating perhaps, but I do like it, George. . . . Yes, I shall be quite happy here.

GEORGE. I see. You will continue to live down here--in spite of what you said just now about the immorality of it.

OLIVIA (surprised). But there's nothing immoral in a widow living alone in a big country house, with perhaps the niece of a friend of hers staying with her, just to keep her company.

GEORGE (sarcastic). And what shall *I* be doing, when you've so very kindly taken possession of my house for me?

OLIVIA. I don't know, George. Travelling, I expect. You could come down sometimes with a chaperone. I suppose there would be nothing wrong in that.

GEORGE (indignant). Thank you! And what if I refuse to be turned out of my house?

OLIVIA. Then, seeing that we can't *both* be in it, it looks as though you'd have to turn *me* out. (Casually) I suppose there are legal ways of doing these things. You'd have to consult your solicitor again.

GEORGE (amazed). Legal ways?

OLIVIA. Well, you couldn't *throw* me out, could you? You'd have to get an injunction against me--or prosecute me for trespass--or something. It would make an awfully unusual case, wouldn't it? The papers would be full of it.

GEORGE. You must be mad!

OLIVIA (dreamily). Widow of well-known ex-convict takes possession of J.P.'s house. Popular country gentleman denied entrance to his own home. Doomed to travel.

GEORGE (angrily). I've had enough of this. Do you mean all this nonsense?

OLIVIA. I do mean, George, that I am in no hurry to go up to London and get married. I love the country just now, and (with a sigh) after this morning, I'm--rather tired of husbands.

GEORGE (in a rage). I've never heard so much--damned nonsense in my life. I will leave you to come to your senses. (He goes out indignantly.)

(OLIVIA, who has forgiven him already, throws a loving kiss after him, and then turns triumphantly to her dear curtains. She takes them, smiling, to the sofa, and has just got to work again, when MR. PIM appears at the open windows.)

PIM (in a whisper). Er, may I come in, Mrs. Marden?

OLIVIA (turning round in surprise). Mr. Pim!

PIM (anxiously). Mr. Marden is--er--not here?

OLIVIA (getting up). Do you want to see him? I will tell him.

PIM. No, no, no! Not for the world! (He comes in and looks anxiously at the door) There is no immediate danger of his returning, Mrs. Marden?

OLIVIA (surprised). No, I don't think so. What is it? You--

PIM. I took the liberty of returning by the window in the hope of--er--coming upon you alone, Mrs. Marden.

OLIVIA. Yes?

PIM (still rather nervous). I--er--Mr. Marden will be very angry with me. Quite rightly. I blame myself entirely. I do not know how I can have been so stupid.

OLIVIA. What is it, Mr. Pim? Has my husband come to life again?

PIM. Mrs. Marden, I throw myself on your mercy entirely. The fact is--his name was Polwittle.

OLIVIA (at a loss). Whose? My husband's?

PIM. Yes, yes. The name came back to me suddenly, just as I reached the gate. Polwittle, poor fellow.

OLIVIA. But, Mr. Pim, my husband's name was Telworthy.

PIM. No, no, Polwittle.

OLIVIA. But, really I ought to. . . .

PIM (firmly). Polwittle. It came back to me suddenly just as I reached the gate. For the moment, I had thoughts of conveying the news by letter. I was naturally disinclined to return in person, and--Polwittle. (Proudly) If you remember, I always said it was a curious name.

OLIVIA. But who *is* Polwittle?

PIM (in surprise at her stupidity). The man I have been telling you about, who met with the sad fatality at Marseilles. Henry Polwittle--or was it Ernest? No, Henry, I think. Poor fellow.

OLIVIA (indignantly). But you said his name was Telworthy! How *could* you?

PIM. Yes, yes, I blame myself entirely.

OLIVIA. But how could you *think* of a name like Telworthy, if it wasn't Telworthy?

PIM (eagerly). Ah, that is the really interesting thing about the whole matter.

OLIVIA. Mr. Pim, all your visits here to-day have been interesting.

PIM. Yes, but you see, on my first appearance here this morning, I was received by--er--Miss Diana.

OLIVIA. Dinah.

PIM. Miss Dinah, yes. She was in--er--rather a communicative mood, and she happened to mention, by way of passing the time, that before your marriage to Mr. Marden you had been a Mrs.--er--

OLIVIA. Telworthy.

PIM. Yes, yes, Telworthy, of course. She mentioned also Australia. By some process of the brain--which strikes me as decidedly curious--when I was trying to recollect the name of the poor fellow on the boat, whom you remember I had also met in Australia, the fact that this other name was also stored in my memory, a name equally peculiar--this fact I say . . .

OLIVIA (seeing that the sentence is rapidly going to pieces). Yes, I understand.

PIM. I blame myself, I blame myself entirely.

OLIVIA. Oh, you mustn't do that, Mr. Pim. It was really Dinah's fault for inflicting all our family history on you.

PIM. Oh, but a charming young woman. I assure you I was very much interested in all that she told me. (Getting up) Well, Mrs.--er--Marden,

I can only hope that you will forgive me for the needless distress I have caused you to-day.

OLIVIA. Oh, you mustn't worry about that--please.

PIM. And you will tell your husband--you will break the news to him?

OLIVIA (smiling to herself). I will--break the news to him.

PIM. You understand how it is that I thought it better to come to you in the first place?

OLIVIA. I am very glad you did.

PIM (holding out his hand). Then I will say good-bye, and--er--

OLIVIA. Just a moment, Mr. Pim. Let us have it quite clear this time. You never knew my husband, Jacob Telworthy, you never met him in Australia, you never saw him on the boat, and nothing whatever happened to him at Marseilles. Is that right?

PIM. Yes, yes, that is so.

OLIVIA. So that, since he was supposed to have died in Australia six years ago, he is presumably still dead?

PIM. Yes, yes, undoubtedly.

OLIVIA (holding out her hand with a charming smile). Then good-bye, Mr. Pim, and thank you so much for--for all your trouble.

PIM. Not at all, Mrs. Marden. I can only assure you I--

DINAH (from the window). Hullo, here's Mr. Pim! (She comes in, followed by BRIAN.)

PIM (anxiously looking at the door in case MR. MARDEN should come in). Yes, yes, I--er--

DINAH. Oh, Mr. Pim, you mustn't run away without even saying how do you do! Such old friends as we are. Why, it is ages since I saw you! Are you staying to tea?

PIM. I'm afraid I--

OLIVIA. Mr. Pim has to hurry away, Dinah. You mustn't keep him.

DINAH. Well, but you'll come back again?

PIM. I fear that I am only a passer-by, Miss--er--Dinah.

OLIVIA. You can walk with him to the gate, dear.

PIM (gratefully to OLIVIA). Thank you. (He edges towards the window) If you would be so kind, Miss Dinah--

BRIAN. I'll catch you up.

DINAH. Come along then, Mr. Pim. (As they go out) I want to hear all about your *first* wife. You haven't really told me anything yet.

(OLIVIA resumes her work, and BRIAN sits on the back of the sofa looking at her.)

BRIAN (awkwardly). I just wanted to say, if you don't think it cheek, that I'm--I'm on your side, if I may be, and if I can help you at all I should be very proud of being allowed to.

OLIVIA (looking up at him). Brian, you dear. That's sweet of you . . . But it's quite all right now, you know.

BRIAN. Oh, I'm so glad.

OLIVIA. Yes, that's what Mr. Pim came back to say. He'd made a mistake about the name. (Smiling) George is the only husband I have.

BRIAN (surprised). What? You mean that the whole thing--that Pim-- (With conviction) Silly ass!

OLIVIA (kindly). Oh, well, he didn't mean to be. (After a pause)
Brian, do you know anything about the Law?

BRIAN. I'm afraid not. I hate the Law. Why?

OLIVIA (casually). Oh, I just--I was wondering--thinking about all
the shocks we've been through to-day. Second marriages, and all that.

BRIAN. Oh! It's a rotten business.

OLIVIA. I suppose there's nothing wrong in getting married to the
same person twice?

BRIAN. A hundred times if you like, I should think.

OLIVIA. Oh?

BRIAN. After all, in France, they always go through it twice, don't
they? Once before the Mayor or somebody, and once in church.

OLIVIA. Of course they do! How silly of me . . . I think it's rather a
nice idea. They ought to do it in England more.

BRIAN. Well, once will be enough for Dinah and me, if you can work
it. (Anxiously) D'you think there's any chance, Olivia?

OLIVIA (smiling). Every chance, dear.

BRIAN (jumping up). I say, do you really? Have you squared him? I
mean, has he--

OLIVIA. Go and catch them up now. We'll talk about it later on.

BRIAN. Bless you. Righto.

(As he goes out by the windows, GEORGE comes in at the door.
GEORGE stands looking after him, and then turns to OLIVIA, who is
absorbed in her curtains. He walks up and down the room, fidgeting
with things, waiting for her to speak. As she says nothing, he begins to

talk himself, but in an obviously unconcerned way. There is a pause after each answer of hers, before he gets out his next remark.)

GEORGE (casually). Good-looking fellow, Strange.

OLIVIA (equally casually). Brian--yes, isn't he? And such a nice boy . . .

GEORGE. Got fifty pounds for a picture the other day, didn't he? Hey?

OLIVIA. Yes. Of course he has only just begun. . . .

GEORGE. Critics think well of him, what?

OLIVIA. They all say he has genius. Oh, I don't think there's any doubt about it . . .

GEORGE. Of course, I don't profess to know anything about painting.

OLIVIA. You've never had time to take it up, dear.

GEORGE. I know what I like, of course. Can't say I see much in this new-fangled stuff. If a man can paint, why can't he paint like--like Rubens or--or Reynolds?

OLIVIA. I suppose we all have our own styles. Brian will find his directly. Of course, he's only just beginning. . . .

GEORGE. But they think a lot of him, what?

OLIVIA. Oh yes!

GEORGE. H'm! . . . Good-looking fellow. (There is rather a longer silence this time, GEORGE continues to hope that he is appearing casual and unconcerned. He stands looking at OLIVIA'S work for a moment.)

GEORGE. Nearly finished 'em?

OLIVIA. Very nearly. Are my scissors there?

GEORGE (looking round). Scissors?

OLIVIA. Ah, here they are. . . .

GEORGE. Where are you going to put 'em?

OLIVIA (as if really wondering). I don't quite know. . . . I *had* thought of this room, but--I'm not quite sure.

GEORGE. Brighten the room up a bit.

OLIVIA. Yes. . . .

GEORGE (walking over to the present curtains). H'm. They *are* a bit faded.

OLIVIA (shaking out hers, and looking at them critically). Sometimes I think I love them, and sometimes I'm not quite sure.

GEORGE. Best way is to hang 'em up and see how you like 'em then. Always take 'em down again.

OLIVIA. That's rather a good idea, George!

GEORGE. Best way.

OLIVIA. Yes. . . . I think we might do that. . . . The only thing is--(she hesitates).

GEORGE. What?

OLIVIA. Well, the carpet and the chairs, and the cushions and things--
-

GEORGE. What about 'em?

OLIVIA. Well, if we had new curtains--

GEORGE. You'd want a new carpet, eh?

OLIVIA (doubtfully). Y--yes. Well, new chair-covers anyhow.

GEORGE. H'm. . . . Well, why not?

OLIVIA. Oh, but--

GEORGE (with an awkward laugh). We're not so hard up as all that, you know.

OLIVIA. No, I suppose not. (Thoughtfully) I suppose it would mean that I should have to go up to London for them. That's rather a nuisance.

GEORGE (extremely casual). Oh, I don't know. We might go up together one day.

OLIVIA. Well, of course if we *were* up--for anything else--we could just look about us, and see if we could find what we want.

GEORGE. That's what I meant.

(There is another silence. GEORGE is wondering whether to come to closer quarters with the great question.)

OLIVIA. Oh, by the way, George--

GEORGE. Yes?

OLIVIA (innocently). I told Brian, and I expect he'll tell Dinah, that Mr. Pim had made a mistake about the name.

GEORGE (astonished). You told Brian that Mr. Pim--

OLIVIA. Yes--I told him that the whole thing was a mistake. It seemed the simplest way.

GEORGE. Olivia! Then you mean that Brian and Dinah think that--that we have been married all the time?

OLIVIA. Yes . . . They both think so now.

GEORGE (coming close to her). Olivia, does that mean that you *are* thinking of marrying me?

OLIVIA. At your old Registry Office?

GEORGE (eagerly). Yes!

OLIVIA. To-morrow?

GEORGE. Yes!

OLIVIA. Do you want me to *very* much?

GEORGE. My darling, you know I do!

OLIVIA (a little apprehensive). We should have to do it very quietly.

GEORGE. Of course, darling. Nobody need know at all. We don't *want* anybody to know. And now that you've put Brian and Dinah off the scent, by telling them that Mr. Pim made a mistake--(He breaks off, and says admiringly) That was very clever of you, Olivia. I should never have thought of that.

OLIVIA (innocently). No, darling. . . . You don't think it was wrong, George?

GEORGE (his verdict). An innocent deception . . . perfectly harmless.

OLIVIA. Yes, dear, that was what I thought about--about what I was doing.

GEORGE. Then you will come to-morrow? (She nods.) And if we happen to see the carpet, or anything that you want--

OLIVIA. Oh, what fun!

GEORGE (beaming). And a wedding lunch at the Carlton, what? (She nods eagerly.) And--and a bit of a honeymoon in Paris?

OLIVIA. Oh, George!

GEORGE (hungrily). Give us a kiss, old girl.

OLIVIA (lovingly). George!

(She holds up her cheek to him. He kisses it, and then suddenly takes her in his arms.)

GEORGE. Don't ever leave me, old girl.

OLIVIA (affectionately). Don't ever send me away, old boy.

GEORGE (fervently). I won't. . . . (Awkwardly) I--I don't think I would have, you know. I--I--

(DINAH and BRIAN appear at the windows, having seen MR. PIM safely off.)

DINAH (surprised). Oo, I say!

(GEORGE hastily moves away.)

GEORGE. Hallo!

DINAH (going up impetuously to him). Give *me* one, too, George; Brian won't mind.

BRIAN. Really, Dinah, you are the limit.

GEORGE (formally, but enjoying it). Do you mind, Mr. Strange?

BRIAN (a little uncomfortably). Oh, I say, sir--

GEORGE. We'll risk it, Dinah. (He kisses her.)

DINAH (triumphantly to BRIAN). Did you notice that one? That wasn't just an ordinary affectionate kiss. It was a special bless--you--my--children one. (to GEORGE) Wasn't it?

OLIVIA. You do talk nonsense, darling.

DINAH. Well, I'm so happy, now that Mr. Pim has relented about your first husband--

(GEORGE catches OLIVIA'S eye and smiles; she smiles back; but they are different smiles.)

GEORGE (the actor). Yes, yes, stupid fellow Pim, what?

BRIAN. Absolute idiot.

DINAH.--And now that George has relented about *my* first husband.

GEORGE. You get on much too quickly, young woman. (to BRIAN) So you want to marry my Dinah, eh?

BRIAN (with a smile). Well, I do rather, sir.

DINAH (hastily). Not at once, of course, George. We want to be engaged for a long time first, and write letters to each other, and tell each other how much we love each other, and sit next to each other when we go out to dinner.

GEORGE (to OLIVIA). Well, *that* sounds fairly harmless, I think.

OLIVIA (smiling). I think so. . . .

GEORGE (to BRIAN). Then you'd better have a talk with me--er--Brian.

BRIAN. Thank you very much, sir.

GEORGE. Well, come along then. (Looking at his watch) I am going up to town after tea, so we'd better--

DINAH. I say! Are you going to London?

GEORGE (with the smile of the conspirator). A little business. Never you mind, young lady.

DINAH (calmly). All right. Only, bring me back something nice.

GEORGE (to BRIAN). Shall we walk down and look at the pigs?

BRIAN. Righto!

OLIVIA. Don't go far, dear. I may want you in a moment.

GEORGE. All right, darling, we'll be on the terrace.

[They go out together.

DINAH. Brian and George always try to discuss me in front of the pigs. So tactless of them. Are you going to London, too, darling?

OLIVIA. To-morrow morning.

DINAH. What are you going to do in London?

OLIVIA. Oh, shopping, and--one or two little things.

DINAH. With George?

OLIVIA. Yes. . . .

DINAH. I say, wasn't it lovely about Pim?

OLIVIA. Lovely?

DINAH. Yes; he told me all about it. Making such a hash of things, I mean.

OLIVIA (innocently). Did he make a hash of things?

DINAH. Well, I mean keeping on coming like that. And if you look at it all round--well, for all he had to say, he needn't really have come at all.

OLIVIA (smiling to herself). I shouldn't quite say that, Dinah. (She stands up and shakes out the curtains.)

DINAH. I say, aren't they jolly?

OLIVIA (demurely). I'm so glad everybody likes them. Tell George I'm ready, will you?

DINAH. I say, is *he* going to hang them up for you?

OLIVIA. Well, I thought he could reach best.

DINAH. Righto! What fun! (At the windows) George! George! (to OLIVIA) Brian is just telling George about the five shillings he's got in the Post Office. . . . George!

GEORGE (from the terrace). Coming!

(He hurries in, the model husband, BRIAN follows.)

OLIVIA. Oh, George, just hang these up for me, will you?

GEORGE. Of course, darling. I'll get the steps from the library.

[He hurries out.

(BRIAN takes out his sketching block. It is obvious that his five shillings has turned the scale. He bows to DINAH. He kisses OLIVIA'S hand with an air. He motions to DINAH to be seated.)

DINAH (impressed). What is it?

BRIAN (beginning to draw). Portrait of Lady Strange.

(GEORGE hurries in with the steps, and gets to work. There is a great deal of curtain, and for the moment he becomes slightly involved in it.

However, by draping it over his head and shoulders, he manages to get successfully up the steps. There we may leave him.)

(But we have not quite finished with MR. PIM. It is a matter of honour with him now that he should get his little story quite accurate before passing out of the MARDENS' life for ever. So he comes back for the last time; for the last time we see his head at the window. He whispers to OLIVIA.)

MR. PIM. Mrs. Marden! I've just remembered. His name was *Ernest* Polwittle--*not* Henry.

(He goes off happily. A curious family the MARDENS. Perhaps somebody else would have committed bigamy if he had not remembered in time that it was Ernest. . . . Ernest. . . . Yes. . . . Now he can go back with an easy conscience to the Trevors.)