

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.

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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.)