

The Boy Comes Home

BY A. A. MILNE
A COMEDY IN ONE ACT

CHARACTERS.

UNCLE JAMES. AUNT EMILY. PHILIP. MARY. MRS. HIGGINS.

This play was first produced by Mr. Owen Nares at the Victoria Palace Theatre on September 9, 1918, with the following cast:

Philip--OWEN NARES. Uncle James--TOM REYNOLDS. Aunt Emily--DOROTHY RADFORD. Mary--ADAH DICK. Mrs. Higgins--RACHEL DE SOLLA.

[SCENE.--A room in UNCLE JAMES'S house in the Cromwell Road.]

[TIME.--The day after the War.]

[Any room in UNCLE JAMES'S house is furnished in heavy mid-Victorian style; this particular morning-room is perhaps solider and more respectable even than the others, from the heavy table in the middle of it to the heavy engravings on the walls. There are two doors to it. The one at the back opens into the hall, the one at the side into the dining-room.]

[PHILIP comes from the hall and goes into the dining-room. Apparently he finds nothing there, for he returns to the morning-room, looks about him for a moment and then rings the bell. It is ten o'clock, and he wants his breakfast. He picks up the paper, and sits in a heavy armchair in front of the fire--a pleasant-looking well-built person of twenty-three, with an air of decisiveness about him. MARY, the parlour-maid, comes in.]

MARY. Did you ring, Master Philip?

PHILIP (absently). Yes; I want some breakfast, please, Mary.

MARY (coldly). Breakfast has been cleared away an hour ago.

PHILIP. Exactly. That's why I rang. You can boil me a couple of eggs or something. And coffee, not tea.

MARY. I'm sure I don't know what Mrs. Higgins will say?

PHILIP (getting up). Who is Mrs. Higgins?

MARY. The cook. And she's not used to being put about like this.

PHILIP. Do you think she'll say something?

MARY. I don't know *what* she'll say.

PHILIP. You needn't tell me, you know, if you don't want to. Anyway, I don't suppose it will shock me. One gets used to it in the Army. (He smiles pleasantly at her.)

MARY. Well, I'll do what I can, sir. But breakfast at eight sharp is the master's rule, just as it used to be before you went away to the war.

PHILIP. Before I went away to the war I did a lot of silly things. Don't drag them up now. (More curtly) Two eggs, and if there's a ham bring that along too. (He turns away.)

MARY (doubtfully, as she prepares to go). Well, I'm sure I don't know what Mrs. Higgins will say. [Exit MARY.]

(As she goes out she makes way for AUNT EMILY to come in, a kind-hearted mid-Victorian lady who has never had any desire for the vote.)

EMILY. There you are, Philip! Good-morning, dear. Did you sleep well?

PHILIP. Rather; splendidly, thanks, Aunt Emily. How are you? (He kisses her.)

EMILY. And did you have a good breakfast? Naughty boy to be late for it. I always thought they had to get up so early in the Army.

PHILIP. They do. That's why they're so late when they get out of the Army.

EMILY: Dear me! I should have thought a habit of four years would have stayed with you.

PHILIP. Every morning for four years, as I've shot out of bed, I've said to myself, "Wait! A time will come." (Smiling) That doesn't really give a habit a chance.

EMILY. Well, I daresay you wanted your sleep out. I was so afraid that a really cosy bed would keep you awake after all those years in the trenches.

PHILIP. Well, one isn't in the trenches all the time. And one gets leave--if one's an officer.

EMILY.(reproachfully). You didn't spend much of it with *us*, Philip.

PHILIP (taking her hands). I know; but you did understand, didn't you, dear?

EMILY. We're not very gay, and I know you must have wanted gaiety for the little time you had. But I think your Uncle James felt it. After all, dear, you've lived with us for some years, and he *is* your guardian.

PHILIP. I know. *You've* been a darling to me always, Aunt Emily. But (awkwardly) Uncle James and I--

EMILY. Of course, he is a *little* difficult to get on with. I'm more used to him. But I'm sure he really is very fond of you, Philip.

PHILIP. H'm! I always used to be frightened of him.... I suppose he's just the same. He seemed just the same last night--and he still has breakfast at eight o'clock. Been making pots of money, I suppose?

EMILY. He never tells me exactly, but he did speak once about the absurdity of the excess-profits tax. You see, jam is a thing the Army wants.

PHILIP. It certainly gets it.

EMILY. It was so nice for him, because it made him feel he was doing his bit, helping the poor men in the trenches.

[Enter MARY.]

MARY. Mrs. Higgins wishes to speak to you, ma'am. (She looks at PHILIP as much as to say, "There you are!")

EMILY (getting up). Yes, I'll come. (To PHILIP) I think I'd better just see what she wants, Philip.

PHILIP (firmly to MARY). Tell Mrs. Higgins to come here. (MARY hesitates and looks at her mistress.) At once, please. [Exit MARY.]

EMILY (upset). Philip, dear, I don't know what Mrs. Higgins will say--
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PHILIP. No; nobody seems to. I thought we might really find out for once.

EMILY (going towards the door). Perhaps I'd better go--

PHILIP (putting his arm round her waist). Oh no, you mustn't. You see, she really wants to see *me*.

EMILY. *You?*

PHILIP. Yes; I ordered breakfast five minutes ago.

EMILY. Philip! My poor boy! Why didn't you tell me? and I daresay I could have got it for you. Though I don't know what Mrs. Higgins--

(An extremely angry voice is heard outside, and MRS. HIGGINS, stout and aggressive, comes in.)

MRS. HIGGINS (truculently). You sent for me, ma'am?

EMILY (nervously). Yes--er--I think if you--perhaps--

PHILIP (calmly). *I* sent for you, Mrs. Higgins. I want some breakfast. Didn't Mary tell you?

MRS. HIGGINS. Breakfast is at eight o'clock. It always has been as long as I've been in this house, and always will be until I get further orders.

PHILIP. Well, you've just got further orders. Two eggs, and if there's a ham--

MRS. HIGGINS. Orders. We're talking about orders. From whom in this house do I take orders, may I ask?

PHILIP. In this case from me.

MRS. HIGGINS (playing her trump-card). In that case, ma'am, I wish to give a month's notice from to-day. *Inclusive*.

PHILIP (quickly, before his aunt can say anything). Certainly. In fact, you'd probably prefer it if my aunt gave *you* notice, and then you could go at once. We can easily arrange that. (TO AUNT EMILY as he takes out a fountain pen and cheque-book) What do you pay her?

EMILY (faintly). Forty-five pounds.

PHILIP (writing on his knee). Twelves into forty-five.... (Pleasantly to MRS. HIGGINS, but without looking up) I hope you don't mind a Cox's cheque. Some people do; but this is quite a good one. (Tearing it out) Here you are.

MRS. HIGGINS (taken aback). What's this?

PHILIP. Your wages instead of notice. Now you can go at once.

MRS. HIGGINS. Who said anything about going?

PHILIP (surprised). I'm sorry; I thought *you* did.

MRS. HIGGINS. If it's only a bit of breakfast, I don't say but what I mightn't get it, if I'm asked decent.

PHILIP (putting back the cheque). Then let me say again, "Two eggs, ham and coffee." And Mary can bring the ham up at once, and I'll get going on that. (Turning away) Thanks very much.

MRS. HIGGINS. Well, I--well--well! [Exit speechless.]

PHILIP (surprised). Is that all she ever says? It isn't much to worry about.

EMILY. Philip, how could you! I should have been terrified.

PHILIP. Well, you see, I've done your job for two years out there.

EMILY. What job?

PHILIP. Mess President.... I think I'll go and see about that ham.

(He smiles at her and goes out into the dining-room. AUNT EMILY wanders round the room, putting a few things tidy as is her habit, when she is interrupted by the entrance of UNCLE JAMES. JAMES is not a big man, nor an impressive one in his black morning-coat; and his thin straggly beard, now going grey, does not hide a chin of any great power; but he has a severity which passes for strength with the weak.)

JAMES. Philip down yet?

EMILY. He's just having his breakfast.

JAMES (looking at his watch). Ten o'clock. (Snapping it shut and putting it back) Ten o'clock. I say ten o'clock, Emily.

EMILY. Yes, dear, I heard you.

JAMES. You don't say anything?

EMILY (vaguely). I expect he's tired after that long war.

JAMES. That's no excuse for not being punctual. I suppose he learnt punctuality in the Army?

EMILY. I expect he learnt it, James, but I understood him to say that he'd forgotten it.

JAMES. Then the sooner he learns it again the better. I particularly stayed away from the office to-day in order to talk things over with him, and (looking at his watch) here's ten o'clock--past ten--and no sign of him. I'm practically throwing away a day.

EMILY. What are you going to talk to him about?

JAMES. His future, naturally. I have decided that the best thing he can do is to come into the business at once.

EMILY. Are you really going to talk it over with him, James, or are you just going to tell him that he *must* come?

JAMES (surprised). What do you mean? What's the difference? Naturally we shall talk it over first, and--er--naturally he'll fall in with my wishes.

EMILY. I suppose he can hardly help himself, poor boy.

JAMES. Not until he's twenty-five, anyhow. When he's twenty-five he can have his own money and do what he likes with it.

EMILY (timidly). But I think you ought to consult him at little, dear. After all, he *has* been fighting for us.

JAMES (with his back to the fire). Now that's the sort of silly sentiment that there's been much too much of. I object to it strongly. I don't want to boast, but I think I may claim to have done my share. I gave up my nephew to my country, and I--er--suffered from the shortage of potatoes to an extent that you probably didn't realize.

Indeed, if it hadn't been for your fortunate discovery about that time that you didn't really like potatoes, I don't know how we should have carried on. And, as I think I've told you before, the excess-profits tax seemed to me a singularly stupid piece of legislation--but I paid it. And I don't go boasting about how much I paid.

EMILY (unconvinced). Well, I think that Philip's four years out there have made him more of a man; he doesn't seem somehow like a boy who can be told what to do. I'm sure they've taught him something.

JAMES. I've no doubt that they've taught him something about--er--bombs and--er--which end a revolver goes off, and how to form fours. But I don't see that that sort of thing helps him to decide upon the most suitable career for a young man in after-war conditions.

EMILY. Well, I can only say you'll find him different.

JAMES. I didn't notice any particular difference last night.

EMILY. I think you'll find him rather more--I can't quite think of the word, but Mrs. Higgins could tell you what I mean.

JAMES. Of course, if he likes to earn his living any other way, he may; but I don't see how he proposes to do it so long as I hold the purse-strings. (Looking at his watch) Perhaps you'd better tell him that I cannot wait any longer.

(EMILY opens the door leading into the dining-room and talks through it to PHILIP.)

EMILY. Philip, your uncle is waiting to see you before he goes to the office. Will you be long, dear?

PHILIP (from the dining-room). Is he in a hurry?

JAMES (shortly). Yes.

EMILY. He says he is rather, dear.

PHILIP. Couldn't he come and talk in here? It wouldn't interfere with my breakfast.

JAMES. No.

EMILY. He says he'd rather you came to *him*, darling.

PHILIP (resigned). Oh, well.

EMILY (to JAMES). He'll be here directly, dear. Just sit down in front of the fire and make yourself comfortable with the paper. He won't keep you long. (She arranges him.)

JAMES (taking the paper). The morning is not the time to make oneself comfortable. It's a most dangerous habit. I nearly found myself dropping off in front of the fire just now. I don't like this hanging about, wasting the day. (He opens the paper.)

EMILY. You should have had a nice sleep, dear, while you could. We were up so late last night listening to Philip's stories.

JAMES. Yes, yes. (He begins a yawn and stifles it hurriedly.) You mustn't neglect your duties, Emily. I've no doubt you have plenty to do.

EMILY. All right, James, then I'll leave you. But don't be hard on the boy.

JAMES (sleepily). I shall be just, Emily; you can rely upon that.

EMILY (going to the door). I don't think that's quite what I meant. [She goes out.]

(JAMES, who is now quite comfortable, begins to nod. He wakes up with a start, turns over the paper, and nods again. Soon he is breathing deeply with closed eyes.)

PHILIP (coming in). Sorry to have kept you waiting, but I was a bit late for breakfast. (He takes out his pipe.) Are we going to talk business or what?

JAMES (taking out his match). A *bit* late! I make it just two hours.

PHILIP (pleasantly). All right, Uncle James. Call it two hours late. Or twenty-two hours early for tomorrow's breakfast, if you like. (He sits down in a chair on the opposite side of the table from his uncle, and lights his pipe.)

JAMES. You smoke now?

PHILIP (staggered). I what?

JAMES (nodding at his pipe). You smoke?

PHILIP. Good heavens! what did you think we did in France?

JAMES. Before you start smoking all over the house, I should have thought you would have asked your aunt's permission.

(PHILIP looks at him in amazement, and then goes to the door.)

PHILIP (calling). Aunt Emily!... Aunt Emily!... Do you mind my smoking in here?

AUNT EMILY (from upstairs). Of course not, darling.

PHILIP (to JAMES, as he returns to his chair). Of course not, darling. (He puts back his pipe in his mouth.)

JAMES. Now, understand once and for all, Philip, while you remain in my house I expect not only punctuality, but also civility and respect. I will *not* have impertinence.

PHILIP (unimpressed). Well, that's what I want to talk to you about, Uncle James. About staying in your house, I mean.

JAMES. I don't know what you do mean.

PHILIP. Well, we don't get on too well together, and I thought perhaps I'd better take rooms somewhere. You could give me an allowance until I came into my money. Or I suppose you could give me the money now if you really liked. I don't quite know how father left it to me.

JAMES (coldly). You come into your money when you are twenty-five. Your father very wisely felt that to trust a large sum to a mere boy of twenty-one was simply putting temptation in his way. Whether I have the power or not to alter his dispositions, I certainly don't propose to do so.

PHILIP. If it comes to that, I am twenty-five.

JAMES. Indeed? I had an impression that that event took place in about two years' time. When did you become twenty-five, may I ask?

PHILIP (quietly). It was on the Somme. We were attacking the next day and my company was in support. We were in a so-called trench on the edge of a wood--a damned rotten place to be, and we got hell. The company commander sent back to ask if we could move. The C.O. said, "Certainly not; hang on." We hung on; doing nothing, you know--just hanging on and waiting for the next day. Of course, the Boche knew all about that. He had it on us nicely.... (Sadly) Dear old Billy! he was one of the best--our company commander, you know. They got him, poor devil! That left *me* in command of the company. I sent a runner back to ask if I could move. Well, I'd had a bit of a scout on my own and found a sort of trench five hundred yards to the right. Not what you'd call a trench, of course, but compared to that wood--well, it was absolutely Hyde Park. I described the position and asked if I could go there. My man never came back. I waited an hour and sent another man. He went west too. Well, I wasn't going to send a third. It was murder. So I had to decide. We'd lost about half the company by this time, you see. Well, there were three things I could do--hang on, move to this other trench, against orders, or go back myself and explain the situation.... I moved.... And then I went back to the C.O. and told him I'd moved.... And then I went back to the company again.... (Quietly) That was when I became twenty-five.... or thirty-five.... or forty-five.

JAMES (recovering himself with an effort). Ah yes, yes. (He coughs awkwardly.) No doubt points like that frequently crop up in the trenches. I am glad that you did well out there, and I'm sure your Colonel would speak kindly of you; but when it comes to choosing a career for you now that you have left the Army, my advice is not altogether to be despised. Your father evidently thought so, or he would not have entrusted you to my care.

PHILIP. My father didn't foresee this war.

JAMES. Yes, yes, but you make too much of this war. All you young boys seem to think you've come back from France to teach us our business. You'll find that it is you who'll have to learn, not we.

PHILIP. I'm quite prepared to learn; in fact, I want to.

JAMES. Excellent. Then we can consider that settled.

PHILIP. Well, we haven't settled yet what business I'm going to learn.

JAMES. I don't think that's very difficult. I propose to take you into my business. You'll start at the bottom of course, but it will be a splendid opening for you.

PHILIP (thoughtfully). I see. So you've decided it for me? The jam business.

JAMES (sharply). Is there anything to be ashamed of in that?

PHILIP. Oh no, nothing at all. Only it doesn't happen to appeal to me.

JAMES. If you knew which side your bread was buttered, it would appeal to you very considerably.

PHILIP. I'm afraid I can't see the butter for the jam.

JAMES. I don't want any silly jokes of that sort. You were glad enough to get it out there, I've no doubt.

PHILIP. Oh yes. Perhaps that's why I'm so sick of it now.... No, it's no good, Uncle James; you must think of something else.

JAMES (with a sneer). Perhaps *you've* thought of something else?

PHILIP. Well, I had some idea of being an architect--

JAMES. You propose to start learning to be an architect at twenty-three?

PHILIP (smiling). Well, I couldn't start before, could I?

JAMES. Exactly. And now you'll find it's too late.

PHILIP. Is it? Aren't there going to be any more architects, or doctors, or solicitors, or barristers? Because we've all lost four years of our lives, are all the professions going to die out?

JAMES. And how old do you suppose you'll be before you're earning money as an architect?

PHILIP. The usual time, whatever that may be. If I'm four years behind, so is everybody else.

JAMES. Well, I think it's high time you began to earn a living at once.

PHILIP. Look here, Uncle James, do you really think that you can treat me like a boy who's just left school? Do you think four years at the front have made no difference at all?

JAMES. If there had been any difference, I should have expected it to take the form of an increased readiness in obey orders and recognize authority.

PHILIP (regretfully). You are evidently determined to have a row. Perhaps I had better tell you once and for all that I refuse to go into the turnip and vegetable marrow business.

JAMES (thumping the table angrily). And perhaps I'd better tell *you*, sir, once and for all, that I don't propose to allow rude rudeness from an impertinent young puppy.

PHILIP (reminiscently). I remember annoying our Brigadier once. He was covered with red, had a very red face, about twenty medals, and a cold blue eye. He told me how angry he was for about five minutes while I stood to attention. I'm afraid you aren't nearly impressive, Uncle James.

JAMES (rather upset). Oh! (Recovering himself) Fortunately I have other means of impressing you. The power of the purse goes a long way in this world. I propose to use it.

PHILIP. I see.... Yes... that's rather awkward, isn't it?

JAMES (pleasantly). I think you'll find it very awkward.

PHILIP (thoughtfully). Yes.

(With an amused laugh JAMES settles down to his paper as if the interview were over.)

PHILIP (to himself). I suppose I shall have to think of another argument. (He takes out a revolver from his pocket and fondles it affectionately.)

JAMES (looking up suddenly as he is doing this--amazed). What on earth are you doing?

PHILIP. Souvenir from France. Do you know, Uncle. James, that this revolver has killed about twenty Germans?

JAMES (shortly). Oh! Well, don't go playing about with it here, or you'll be killing Englishmen before you know where you are.

PHILIP. Well, you never know. (He raises it leisurely and points it at his uncle.) It's a nice little weapon.

JAMES (angrily). Put it down, sir. You ought to have grown out of monkey tricks like that in the Army. You ought to know better than to point an unloaded revolver at anybody. That's the way accidents always happen.

PHILIP. Not when you've been on a revolver course and know all about it. Besides, it *is* loaded.

JAMES (very angry because he is frightened suddenly). Put it down at once, sir. (PHILIP turns it away from him and examines it carelessly.) What's the matter with you? Have you gone mad suddenly?

PHILIP (mildly). I thought you'd be interested in it. It's shot such a lot of Germans.

JAMES. Well, it won't want to shoot any more, and the sooner you get rid of it the better.

PHILIP. I wonder. Does it ever occur to you, Uncle James, that there are about a hundred thousand people in England who own revolvers, who are quite accustomed to them and--who have nobody to practise on now?

JAMES. No, sir, it certainly doesn't.

PHILIP (thoughtfully). I wonder if it will make any difference. You know, one gets so used to potting at people. It's rather difficult to realize suddenly that one oughtn't to.

JAMES (getting up). I don't know what the object of this tomfoolery is, if it has one. But you understand that I expect you to come to the office with me to-morrow at nine o'clock. Kindly see that you're punctual. (He turns to go away.)

PHILIP (softly). Uncle James.

JAMES (over his shoulder). I have no more--

PHILIP (in his parade voice). Damn it, sir! stand to attention when you talk to an officer! (JAMES instinctively turns round and stiffens

himself.) That's better; you can sit down if you like. (He motions JAMES to his chair with the revolver.)

JAMES (going nervously to his chair). What does this bluff mean?

PHILIP. It isn't bluff, it's quite serious. (Pointing the revolver at his uncle) Do sit down.

JAMES (sitting down). Threats, eh?

PHILIP. Persuasion.

JAMES. At the point of the revolver? You settle your arguments by force? Good heavens, sir! this is just the very thing that we were fighting to put down.

PHILIP. *We* were fighting! *We!* *We!* Uncle, you're a humorist.

JAMES. Well, "you," if you prefer it. Although those of us who stayed at home--

PHILIP. Yes, never mind about the excess profits now. I can tell you quite well what we fought for. We used force to put down force. That's what I'm doing now. You were going to use force--the force of money--to make me do what you wanted. Now I'm using force to stop it. (He levels the revolver again.)

JAMES. You're--you're going to shoot your old uncle?

PHILIP. Why not? I've shot lots of old uncles--Landsturmiers.

JAMES. But those were Germans! It's different shooting Germans. You're in England now. You couldn't have a crime on your conscience like that.

PHILIP. Ah, but you mustn't think that after four years of war one has quite the same ideas about the sanctity of human life. How could one?

JAMES. You'll find that juries have kept pretty much the same ideas, I fancy.

PHILIP. Yes, but revolvers often go off accidentally. You said so yourself. This is going to be the purest accident. Can't you see it in the papers? "The deceased's nephew, who was obviously upset--"

JAMES. I suppose you think it's brave to come back from the front and threaten a defenceless man with a revolver? Is that the sort of fair play they teach you in the Army?

PHILIP. Good heavens! of course it is. You don't think that you wait until the other side has got just as many guns as you before you attack? You're really rather lucky. Strictly speaking, I ought to have thrown half a dozen bombs at you first. (Taking one out of his pocket) As it happens, I've only got one.

JAMES (thoroughly alarmed). Put that back at once.

PHILIP (putting down the revolver and taking it in his hands). You hold it in the right hand--so--taking care to keep the lever down. Then you take the pin in the finger--so, and--but perhaps this doesn't interest you?

JAMES (edging his chair away). Put it down at once, sir. Good heavens! anything might happen.

PHILIP (putting it down and taking up the revolver again). Does it ever occur to you, Uncle James, that there are about three million people in England who know all about bombs, and how to throw them, and--

JAMES. It certainly does not occur to me. I should never dream of letting these things occur to me.

PHILIP (looking at the bomb regretfully). It's rather against my principles as a soldier, but just to make things a bit more fair-- (generously) you shall have it. (He holds it out to him suddenly.)

JAMES (shrinking back again). Certainly not, sir. It might go off at any moment.

PHILIP (putting it back in his pocket). Oh no; it's quite useless; there's no detonator.... (Sternly) Now, then, let's talk business.

JAMES. What do you want me to do?

PHILIP. Strictly speaking, you should be holding your hands over your head and saying "Kamerad!" However, I'll let you off that. All I ask from you is that you should be reasonable.

JAMES. And if I refuse, you'll shoot me?

PHILIP. Well, I don't quite know, Uncle James. I expect we should go through this little scene again to-morrow. You haven't enjoyed it, have you? Well, there's lots more of it to come. We'll rehearse it every day. One day, if you go on being unreasonable, the thing will go off. Of course, you think that I shouldn't have the pluck to fire. But you can't be quite certain. It's a hundred to one that I shan't--only I might. Fear--it's a horrible thing. Elderly men die of it sometimes.

JAMES. Pooh! I'm not to be bluffed like that.

PHILIP (suddenly). You're quite right; you're not that sort. I made a mistake. (Aiming carefully) I shall have to do it straight off, after all. One--two--

JAMES (on his knees, with uplifted hands, in an agony of terror). Philip! Mercy! What are your terms?

PHILIP (picking him up by the scruff, and helping him into the chair). Good man, that's the way to talk. I'll get them for you. Make yourself comfortable in front of the fire till I come back. Here's the paper. (He gives his uncle the paper, and goes out into the hall.)

(JAMES opens his eyes with a start and looks round him in a bewildered way. He rubs his heart, takes out his match and looks at it, and then stares round the room again. The door from the dining-room opens, and PHILIP comes in with a piece of toast in his hand.)

PHILIP (his mouth full). You wanted to see me, Uncle James?

JAMES (still bewildered). That's all right, my boy, that's all right. What have you been doing?

PHILIP (surprised). Breakfast. (Putting the last piece in his mouth) Rather late, I'm afraid.

JAMES. That's all right. (He laughs awkwardly.)

PHILIP. Anything the matter? You don't look your usual bright self.

JAMES. I--er--seem to have dropped asleep in front of the fire. Most unusual thing for me to have done. Most unusual.

PHILIP. Let that be a lesson to you not to get up so early. Of course, if you're in the Army you can't help yourself. Thank Heaven I'm out of it, and my own master again.

JAMES. Ah, that's what I wanted to talk to you about. Sit down, Philip. (He indicates the chair by the fire.)

PHILIP (taking a chair by the table). You have that, uncle; I shall be all right here.

JAMES (hastily). No, no; you come here. (He gives PHILIP the armchair and sits by the table himself.) I should be dropping off again. (He laughs awkwardly.)

PHILIP. Righto. (He puts his hand to his pocket. UNCLE JAMES shivers and looks at him to horror. PHILIP brings out his pipe, and a sickly grin of relief comes into JAMES'S face.)

JAMES. I suppose you smoked a lot in France?

PHILIP. Rather! Nothing else to do. It's allowed in here?

JAMES (hastily). Yes, yes, of course. (PHILIP lights his pipe.) Well now, Philip, what are you going to do, now you've left the Army?

PHILIP (promptly). Burn my uniform and sell my revolver.

JAMES (starting at the word "revolver"). Sell your revolver, eh?

PHILIP (surprised). Well, I don't want it now, do I?

JAMES. No.... Oh no.... Oh, most certainly not, I should say. Oh, I can't see why you should want it at all. (With an uneasy laugh) You're in England now. No need for revolvers here--eh?

PHILIP (staring at him). Well, no, I hope not.

JAMES (hastily). Quite so. Well now, Philip, what next? We must find a profession for you.

PHILIP (yawning). I suppose so. I haven't really thought about it much.

JAMES. You never wanted to be an architect?

PHILIP (surprised). Architect? (JAMES rubs his head and wonders what made him think of architect.)

JAMES. Or anything like that.

PHILIP. It's a bit late, isn't it?

JAMES. Well, if you're four years behind, so is everybody else. (He feels vaguely that he has heard this argument before.)

PHILIP (smiling): To tell the truth, I don't feel I mind much anyway. Anything you like--except a commissionaire. I absolutely refuse to wear uniform again.

JAMES. How would you like to come into the business?

PHILIP. The jam business? Well, I don't know. You wouldn't want me to salute you in the mornings?

JAMES. My dear boy, no!

PHILIP. All right, I'll try it if you like. I don't know if I shall be any good--what do you do?

JAMES. It's your experience in managing and--er--handling men which I hope will be of value.

PHILIP. Oh, I can do that all right. (Stretching himself luxuriously) Uncle James, do you realize that I'm never going to salute again, or wear a uniform, or get wet--really wet, I mean--or examine men's feet, or stand to attention when I'm spoken to, or--oh, lots more things. And best of all, I'm never going to be frightened again. Have you ever known what it is to be afraid--really afraid?

JAMES (embarrassed). I--er--well--(He coughs.)

PHILIP. No, you couldn't--not really afraid of death, I mean. Well, that's over now. Good lord! I could spend the rest of my life in the British Museum and be happy....

JAMES (getting up). All right, we'll try you in the office. I expect you want a holiday first, though.

PHILIP (getting up). My dear uncle, this is holiday. Being in London is holiday. Buying an evening paper--wearing a waistcoat again--running after a bus--anything--it's all holiday.

JAMES. All right, then, come along with me now, and I'll introduce you to Mr. Bamford.

PHILIP. Right. Who's he?

JAMES. Our manager. A little stiff, but a very good fellow. He'll be delighted to hear that you are coming into the firm.

PHILIP (smiling). Perhaps I'd better bring my revolver, in case he isn't.

JAMES (laughing with forced heartiness as they go together to the door). Ha, ha! A good joke that! Ha, ha, ha! A good joke--but only a joke, of course. Ha, ha! He, he, he!

[PHILIP goes out. JAMES, following him, turns at the door, and looks round the room in a bewildered way. Was it a dream, or wasn't it? He will never be quite certain.]