

The Bracelet

BY ALFRED SUTRO
A PLAY IN ONE ACT

THE PERSONS OF THE PLAY

HARVEY WESTERN HIS HONOUR JUDGE BANKET MARTIN
WILLIAM MRS. WESTERN MRS. BANKET MISS FARREN
SMITHERS

TIME--*The present*

Produced at the Liverpool Repertory Theatre on Feb. 26, 1912

THE BRACELET

The dining-room in an upper middle-class house near the Park. It is furnished in the conventional modern style, soberly and without imagination. The room is on the ground floor, facing the street, the door is to the right, and leads into the hall. To the left of this door is a sideboard, glittering with silver. Three tall windows, at the back heavily curtained; between them hang two or three family portraits. The table, on which there is the usual debris of a meal that is over-- coffee-cups, liqueur-glasses, etc.--has been laid for four persons, and their four chairs are still around it. The fireplace, with its rather crude and ambitious mantelpiece, is in the centre of the left wall; and uncomfortable-looking heavy armchairs are on each side of it. On the mantelpiece are a marble clock and a few bits of china. In the angle formed at the left side is a small Queen Anne writing-table, open. To the right of the room is a large sofa. The floor is heavily carpeted, and there are many rugs scattered about.

When the curtain rises, the room is in darkness. WILLIAM, the footman, enters hurriedly and switches on the electric light. He rushes to the table, looks eagerly around, shifting cups and glasses, napkins,

etc., then goes on his hands and knees and searches on the carpet. After a moment, SMITHERS, the lady's-maid, follows him.

SMITHERS. [*Eagerly.*] Can't you find it?

WILLIAM. [*Sulkily.*] No. Not yet. Give me time.

SMITHERS. [*Feeling along the table-cloth.*] Under one of those rugs, perhaps.

WILLIAM. Well, I'm looking. [*Motor-horn sounds sharply, off.*] All right, all right!

SMITHERS. [*With a jerk of the head.*] Missis is telling him to do it.

WILLIAM. [*On all fours, crawling about.*] Very like her voice, too, when she's angry. Drat the thing! Where can it be?

[*He peers into the coal-scuttle.*

SMITHERS. No good looking in there, stupid.

WILLIAM. They always say it's the unlikeliest places--

[*MARTIN, the butler, comes in.*

MARTIN. Come, come, haven't you found it?

WILLIAM. No, Mr. Martin. It ain't here.

MARTIN. [*Bustling about.*] Must be, must be. She says--

WILLIAM. I can't help what she says. It ain't.

MARTIN. [*Looking under the sofa.*] Just you hustle, young man, and don't give me any back-answers.

[*Having completed his examination of the sofa, he moves to the sideboard, and fusses round that.*

SMITHERS. [*Methodically shaking out each napkin.*] I tell you she's cross.

MARTIN. [*Hard at work, searching.*] Doesn't mind disturbing *us*, in the midst of our supper!

WILLIAM. [*Who, all the time, has been on all fours searching.*] We're dirt, that's what we are--dirt.

MARTIN. [*Reprovingly.*] William, I've told you before--

WILLIAM. Very sorry, Mr. Martin, but this is the first time I've accepted an engagement at a stockbroker's. [*He has been crawling round the curtains at the back, shaking them; pulling hard at one of them he dislodges the lower part.*] Lor! Now I've done it!

SMITHERS. Clumsy!

MARTIN. [*Severely.*] That comes of too much talk Never mind the curtain--go on looking.

[*WILLIAM drops on to his hands and knees again; HARVEY WESTERN comes into the room, perturbed and restless. He is a well-preserved man of fifty.*

HARVEY. I say--not found it?

MARTIN. Not yet, sir.

HARVEY. Nuisance. *Must* be here, you know.

MARTIN. Is it a very valuable one, sir?

HARVEY. [*Who has gone to the table, and is turning things over.*] No, no, not particularly--but that's not the point. [*He looks under the table.*

MARTIN. [*Still seeking.*] When did madam find that she'd lost it, sir?

HARVEY. Oh, about five minutes after we'd started And we've turned over everything in the car. It's certainly not there. [*He fusses around the table.*]

MARTIN. Is madam quite sure she was wearing it, sir?

SMITHERS. [*Fretfully.*] Yes, yes, of course she was wearing it. I put it on her myself.

MARTIN. Where did madam put her cloak on, sir?

SMITHERS. In here. I brought it in.

MARTIN. You didn't notice whether--

SMITHERS. No. Don't you think if we moved *all* the rugs--

[*She moves across the room and joins WILLIAM, who is still grovelling on the floor, and goes on her knees by his side.*]

HARVEY. It must be here *somewhere*.

[*They are all searching furiously--WILLIAM by the windows, peering into the spaces between the wall and the carpets, MARTIN at the sideboard, SMITHERS gathering the rugs together, all on their hands and knees, while HARVEY, bent double, is looking under the table. MRS. WESTERN comes in stonily, followed by the JUDGE and MRS. BANKET. MRS. WESTERN is a handsome woman of forty-five, with a rather stern, cold face; the JUDGE, a somewhat corpulent, genial man of fifty-five; and his wife, an amiable nullity, seven or eight years younger. They are all in evening-dress, the ladies in opera-cloaks.*]

MRS. WESTERN. [*Pausing on the threshold.*] Well!

HARVEY. [*Rising and dusting himself.*] No trace of it.

MRS. WESTERN. [*Looking around.*] A nice mess you've made of the room!

MARTIN. You told us to look, Madam.

JUDGE. [*Going to the fire and standing with his back to it.*] I'm afraid we'll be shockingly late, Alice.

MRS. WESTERN. [*Firmly.*] I don't go without my bracelet.

[*She goes to the table, and proceeds to shift the cups and glasses.*

MRS. BANKET. [*Moving to the other side of the table, and doing the same.*] Quite right, dear--I wouldn't.

[*They all search, except the JUDGE, who shrugs his shoulders placidly, then takes a cigarette from his case, and lights it. The three servants still are grovelling on the floor.*

MRS. WESTERN. I *know* I had it while I was drinking my coffee--

JUDGE. My experience is, one should never look for things. They find themselves.

MRS. WESTERN. [*Shortly.*] Nonsense.

JUDGE. A fact. Or at least one should *pretend* to be looking for something else. My glasses now. When I lose them I declare loudly I can't find my cigar-case. That disheartens the glasses--they return at once.

MRS. BANKET. [*Reproachfully.*] Don't be so irritating, Tom!

JUDGE. That's all very well, but how about me? I was asked here to dine. I've dined--I'm not complaining about the dinner. But now the curtain's up--and here am I watching half-a-dozen people looking very hard for a thing that isn't there.

MRS. BANKET. Tom, Tom, it's those laughs you get in Court that make you so fond of talking. Don't you see how you're vexing your sister?

MRS. WESTERN. Oh, I'm used to Tom. Harvey, I think you might be looking.

HARVEY. My dear, I've been turning round and round in this corner like a bird in a cage.

MARTIN. [*Who all this time, like the other servants, has been crawling around the different articles of furniture in the room, suddenly rises to his feet and addresses his mistress firmly but respectfully.*] It's not here, madam.

[*The other servants also rise; and stand, each in their corner.*]

JUDGE. That, I imagine, is perfectly clear; and I congratulate the witness on the manner in which he has given his evidence. [*He throws his cigarette into the fire and steps forward.*] Now, my dear Alice--

MRS. WESTERN. [*Sitting doggedly in the chair in front of the table and proceeding to pull off her gloves.*] I don't go without my bracelet.

JUDGE. Heaven forbid that I should speak slightingly of a gift of Harvey's--but really it isn't of such priceless value.

MRS. WESTERN. That has nothing to do with it.

MRS. BANKET. Of course not. Oh, these men!

HARVEY. [*Stepping forward.*] Tom's right. Let's go. Look here, I'll get you another.

MRS. WESTERN. [*Drily.*] Thanks--I want *that* one.--Smithers, and you, William, just look again in the hall.

SMITHERS. Yes, m'm.

MRS. WESTERN. And then help the chauffeur--turn out *everything* in the car.

SMITHERS. Yes, m'm.

MRS. WESTERN. Bring the rugs into the house, and shake them.

SMITHERS. Yes, m'm. [*She and WILLIAM go.*]

JUDGE. [*Going back to the fire.*] Sumptuary laws--that's what we want. If women didn't wear bracelets, they couldn't lose them.

MRS. WESTERN. Martin, William is honest, isn't he?

HARVEY. [*Protesting.*] Oh, hang it, Alice!

MARTIN. Quite, madam--excellent character--a little flighty, but a most respectable young man.

MRS. WESTERN. I've seen him reading a sporting paper.

JUDGE. A weakness, my dear Alice, common to the best of us, I do it myself sometimes, but I'm willing to be searched.

MRS. BANKET. O Tom, *do* be quiet!

MRS. WESTERN. [*To the JUDGE.*] You're very unsympathetic. [*Turning to MARTIN again.*] None of the other servants came in after we left?

MARTIN. No, madam.

MRS. WESTERN. You're sure?

MARTIN. Quite sure, madam. They were all downstairs, having their supper.

MRS. WESTERN. Most mysterious! Incomprehensible!

JUDGE. [*Looking at his watch.*] Past nine! We shall plunge into the play--like body-snatchers, looking for the corpse of the plot--and we shall never know what it was that the heroine did.

MRS. WESTERN. [*Ignoring him, to MARTIN.*] Smithers I'll answer for.

MARTIN. Oh yes, madam. If I *might* make a suggestion--

MRS. WESTERN. Well?

MARTIN. It couldn't have fallen anywhere into your dress, madam?

MRS. WESTERN. Nonsense, how could it? [*She gets up and shakes herself.*] Absurd. [*She sits again.*]

MARTIN. Into your cloak?

MRS. WESTERN. Silk! No. That'll do, Martin. You might help the others outside. [MARTIN *goes.*]

JUDGE. [*With a step forward.*] Now, admirable sister--

MRS. WESTERN. Didn't it strike you that Martin's manner was rather strange?

HARVEY. [*Fretfully.*] Really you *must* not suspect the servants!

MRS. WESTERN. [*Turning to him.*] *Must* not--*must*! That's scarcely the way to speak to me, Harvey.

HARVEY. [*Deprecatingly.*] My dear--

MRS. WESTERN. And I wasn't suspecting--I was merely asking a question of my brother.

JUDGE. Come, Alice, let's go.

MRS. WESTERN. [*Shaking her head.*] You three go. You'll excuse me.

JUDGE. [*Cheerfully.*] If you insist--

MRS. BANKET. [*Coming forward.*] No, no. *Do* come, Alice!

MRS. WESTERN. I can't--I'm so puzzled. [*With a sudden idea.*] Oh!

HARVEY. [*Who is behind her to the left, between her and the* JUDGE.] What? Have you found it?

MRS. WESTERN. No, no--of course not. But ring, please, will you?

HARVEY. Why?

MRS. WESTERN, I want you to ring. [*He presses the bell by the fireplace.*] I just remember Miss Farren came in while we were having coffee.

HARVEY. [*Indignantly.*] Alice!

MRS. WESTERN. I asked her to write a card to Harrod's--she'll have written it in here.

HARVEY. [*Angrily.*] I say--really!

MRS. WESTERN. [*Coldly.*] No need to snub me again--before our guests! I need scarcely say I am not *suspecting* Miss Farren--but in justice to her--

MRS. BANKET. But, Alice, she'll have gone out--you told her she might--

MRS. WESTERN. Only to her sister's close by--and she may not have gone yet. Why don't they answer the bell? Ring again, Harvey.

JUDGE. The poor things are still searching.

HARVEY. [*Firmly.*] Alice, I protest, I do indeed--

MRS. WESTERN. Don't be so foolishly sentimental--it's ridiculous at your age. The young woman is in my employ, as governess to my children. [*MARTIN comes in.*] Has Miss Farren gone out yet?

MARTIN. No, madam. I believe she's in her room, dressing.

MRS. WESTERN. Ask her to come.

MARTIN. Yes, madam. [*He goes.*]

JUDGE. [*Shaking his head.*] No sense of proportion, that's the truth--they've no sense of proportion.

MRS. BANKET. Tom!

JUDGE. A fact, my dear--but you can't help it. You've every quality in the world but just that--you *will* always look through the wrong end of the telescope.

MRS. BANKET. Really, Tom, this isn't the moment for your nonsense--and if you only knew how stupid you are when you try to be funny!

HARVEY. [*Going nervously to MRS. WESTERN.*] I say, I really do think--

MRS. WESTERN. [*Roughly.*] I don't care *what* you think. Leave me alone!

[*There is silence. The JUDGE, sitting by the fire, whistles loudly "Waltz me around again, Willie!" HARVEY has gone moodily across the room and stands by the sideboard. MRS. BANKET is sitting behind the table. After a moment the door opens, and MISS FARREN comes in, with hat and cloak on, and goes straight to MRS. WESTERN. She is an extremely pretty girl of twenty.*]

MISS FARREN. You want me, Mrs. Western?

MRS. WESTERN. Oh, Miss Farren, I've lost my bracelet.

MISS FARREN. Really! I'm so sorry! Where?

MRS. WESTERN. I don't know. You didn't see it, of course, after we'd gone?

MISS FARREN. [*Shaking her head.*] No--and no one came in. I was writing the letter to Harrod's.

MRS. WESTERN. No one at all?

MISS FARREN. No--I'm sure of that. And I'd hardly got to my room when I heard the car come back.

MRS. WESTERN. Well, thank you, Miss Farren.

MISS FARREN. It's very annoying. You're sure it's not in the car?

JUDGE. My dear Miss Farren, it's not in the car, it's not anywhere, and I'm beginning to believe it never was at all. Come, Alice, let's go. We shan't see much of the play, but we can at least help the British drama by buying two programmes.

MISS FARREN. [*With a light laugh--then turning to MRS. WESTERN again.*] Do you want me any more, Mrs. Western?

MRS. WESTERN. No, thanks. [*MISS FARREN turns to go--MRS. WESTERN, who has suddenly cast an eager glance at her, as though attracted by something, calls her back.*] Oh, Miss Farren!

MISS FARREN. [*Turning.*] Yes?

MRS. WESTERN. I wonder whether you'd be so good as to shift this aigrette of mine--it's hurting me.

MISS FARREN. Certainly.

[*She comes back to MRS. WESTERN, and stands by her side; as she raises her arm MRS. WESTERN jumps up and seizes it by the wrist.*]

MRS. WESTERN. My bracelet!

[*Keeping a tight hold of MISS FARREN'S wrist, she holds it at arm's length. There is a general cry of amazement--the JUDGE and his wife start to their feet--HARVEY rushes eagerly towards her.*]

JUDGE. Alice!

MRS. BANKET. Oh!

HARVEY. No, no--

[These three exclamations are simultaneous.]

MRS. WESTERN. There it is! She took it!

JUDGE. Are you sure?

HARVEY. *[Breathless and urgent.]* Alice--

MISS FARREN. *[Recovering from her shock and bewilderment.]*
Mrs. Western, it isn't--

MRS. WESTERN. *[Sternly, still holding the girl by the wrist.]* You dare to pretend--

HARVEY. *[Who is now at the back of his wife's chair, looking closely at the bracelet.]* Let me look, let me look.... I say, Alice, you're wrong. It's not yours at all. The setting's different.

MRS. WESTERN. *[Angrily.]* What do you mean, different? You think I don't know my own bracelet? Are you mad? I say it's mine--and it is!

JUDGE. *[Stepping forward.]* Alice, be careful--

MRS. WESTERN. Careful! You're as bad as he! Of course the thing's mine--I've been wearing it for weeks--and you think I can make a mistake? She found it, and took it.

MISS FARREN. *[Very distressed.]* No, no, Mrs. Western, really! It isn't yours! I assure you!

HARVEY. Alice, I declare to you--

MRS. WESTERN. *[Roughly.]* Be quiet and go away. This is no business of yours.

HARVEY. [*Eagerly.*] But it is! It was I who bought the wretched thing--well, I am prepared to swear that this isn't the one!

MRS. WESTERN. [*A little shaken, looking at it again.*] You're prepared to.... [*She lifts her head.*] How can you talk such utter nonsense? There is not the least doubt--not the least!

JUDGE. [*Stopping HARVEY, who is about to protest violently.*] Alice, mind what you're saying. You'll get yourself into trouble. If Harvey says--

MRS. BANKET. [*Contemptuously.*] He's saying it to shield her, that's all.

HARVEY. [*Indignantly.*] I'm not. It's not true. But you mustn't bring such an accusation. It's monstrous. And I won't allow--

MRS. WESTERN. [*Drawing herself up.*] You--won't--allow! The girl takes my bracelet--and you won't allow!

Miss FARREN. [*Trying to free herself.*] Mrs. Western, I haven't, I haven't!

JUDGE. [*Impressively.*] Alice, will you listen to me?

MRS. WESTERN. No, I won't! This doesn't concern you, or any one, but me and this girl! Look at her--she knows!

MISS FARREN. Mrs. Western, you're hurting my arm....

MRS. WESTERN. Come now--confess! I won't be hard on you if you confess--

[*She wrenches off the bracelet, and releases the girl, who staggers back, nursing her wrist.*]

HARVEY. [*Almost beside himself, stamping his foot.*] Alice, Alice, will you hear--

MISS FARREN. Oh, you *have* hurt me! And you've no right--to say such things....

HARVEY. No, you haven't, you haven't!

MRS. WESTERN. Besides, a bracelet like that! [*She holds it up. To MISS FARREN.*] You won't confess? Very well, then. I'll send for a policeman.

HARVEY. [*Doggedly.*] The bracelet is hers.

MRS. WESTERN. [*Jeeringly.*] Turquoise and emeralds! Hers! A coincidence, perhaps. Very likely. I'll give her in charge at once.

HARVEY. The bracelet is hers, I tell you.

MRS. WESTERN. [*Turning furiously on him.*] You dare to say that?

HARVEY. [*Steadily.*] Yes. Because I myself--gave it to her.

[*There is a moment's almost stupefied silence; HARVEY and ALICE are face to face. MISS FARREN to the left of her, MRS. BANKET is still at the back, the JUDGE by the fire. MRS. WESTERN breaks the silence.*]

MRS. WESTERN. [*Sternly.*] You--gave--it--her?

HARVEY. [*Steadily.*] Yes.

MRS. WESTERN. You ask me to believe that you gave a bracelet to--this person--my children's governess?

HARVEY. I did.

MRS. WESTERN. An exact copy of the one you gave me?

HARVEY. I've told you--it's not an exact copy--there's a difference in the setting.

MRS. BANKET. Nonsense, nonsense, it can't be--he's just saying this--

JUDGE. Fanny, don't interfere.

HARVEY. I'm saying what's true.

MRS. WESTERN. I refuse to believe it. It's incredible. You've not sunk so low as that. It's a lie.

HARVEY. [*Indignantly.*] Alice!

MRS. WESTERN. Yes, a lie. A trumped-up story. The girl has taken it--

MISS FARREN. I have not!

MRS. WESTERN. You can tell that to the magistrate--[*She turns to HARVEY*] and you too, if you like. [*She moves to the bell.*]

JUDGE. [*Putting out a hand to stop her.*] Alice--

MRS. WESTERN. Leave me alone, Tom. I know what I'm doing. I'll send for a policeman.

HARVEY. [*Imploringly.*] Alice, Alice--

MRS. WESTERN. [*Pausing, with her hand on the bell.*] I'll let the girl off, if you'll tell me the truth.

HARVEY. I *have* told you the truth.

MRS. WESTERN. You persist in this silly falsehood?

HARVEY. It isn't--I tell you it isn't!

MRS. WESTERN. Very well, then.

[*She presses the bell. At that moment the door bursts open, and MARTIN comes in triumphantly, with the bracelet on a salver.*]

SMITHERS *and* WILLIAM *are behind him, but do not pass beyond the threshold.*

MARTIN. [*Eagerly.*] Ma'am, ma'am, we've found the--

[MRS. WESTERN *has turned towards him, still holding the other bracelet in her hand. MARTIN catches sight of it, and stops dead short, staring bewilderedly at it.*

MRS. WESTERN. [*Calmly.*] Where did you find it?

[*She takes the bracelet off the salver and lays it on the table.*

MARTIN. [*With a great effort.*] It had fallen into the pocket of the car--there was a hole in the pocket--it had worked its way right down into the body.

MRS. WESTERN. Very well. Thank you.

[MARTIN *goes; the other servants have already slunk off. There is a moment's silence. MRS. WESTERN suddenly flings the bracelet she has in her hand in MISS FARREN'S direction.*

MRS. WESTERN. [*Contemptuously.*] Here. I return you your property. And now pack up your things and leave the house.

HARVEY. [*Who has stepped forward and picked up the bracelet, standing between MRS. WESTERN and MISS FARREN.*] No.

MRS. WESTERN. [*Staring at him.*] What?

HARVEY. [*Violently.*] I say, No!

MRS. WESTERN. I have told the girl to leave my house.

HARVEY. *My house--mine! And she shall stay in it! Or, at least, when she goes, it shall be without the slightest stain or suspicion--*

MRS. WESTERN. [*Scornfully.*] I am not accusing her of theft.

HARVEY. But you are insinuating--I declare solemnly before you all--

JUDGE. [*Interposing.*] Harvey, one moment.... I am sure that Miss Farren would rather go to her room....

MISS FARREN. Yes.

HARVEY. By all means. Here, take your bracelet. [*He gives it to her.*] But you don't leave this house--you understand that? *I* am master here.

[MISS FARREN *goes quietly.*

JUDGE. Now just listen to me, both of you. Be calm--all this excitement won't help. Harvey, you too. You and Alice will have your explanation--

MRS. WESTERN. If the girl doesn't go to-night--

HARVEY. I tell you again she shall not! And there's no need. I was a fool to give her that bracelet--she didn't want to take it--

MRS. BANKET. Why *did* you?

HARVEY. I had given Alice one on her birthday.

MRS. WESTERN. Well?

HARVEY. And so I got *her* one.

MRS. WESTERN. Why?

HARVEY. Because--[*He stops, very embarrassed.*]

MRS. WESTERN. Well?

HARVEY. Because--oh, because--well, she admired it--and *she* liked pretty things too....

MRS. WESTERN. I don't think you need say anything more.

MRS. BANKET. No. He needn't. It's clear enough!

HARVEY. [*Eagerly.*] Look here, on my honour--I *am* fond of her, of course, in a way--but I'm old enough to be her father--and I swear to you all--I've seen her about, of course, a good deal--and I gave her that thing--but beyond that, nothing, nothing!

MRS. WESTERN. [*Sitting, and with a shrug of the shoulder.*] A ridiculous fairy tale!

JUDGE. My dear Alice, take my advice, and believe your husband.

MRS. WESTERN. You too!

MRS. BANKET. All alike, when there's a pretty face!

JUDGE. Let her find another situation, by all means.... But to turn a girl out, at a moment's notice! You couldn't.

MRS. WESTERN. [*Turning to the JUDGE.*] You are really suggesting that I should sleep under the same roof with--

JUDGE. [*Almost sternly.*] You are condemning, without the slightest evidence. And condemning, remember, an utterly defenceless creature. This girl has a claim on you: were your suspicions justified, she-would *still* have a claim.

MRS. WESTERN. Indeed!

MRS. BANKET. The nonsense he talks! It's really too silly!

JUDGE. You are extraordinary, you women! You exact such rigid morality from the governess and the housemaid! You're full of excuses when it's one of yourselves!

MRS. BANKET. [*Indignantly.*] Tom!

JUDGE. Well, that's true--we all know it! And here--I believe every word Harvey has said.

MRS. WESTERN. [*Scarcely believing her ears.*] You do!

JUDGE. Because he is a man of honour, and men of honour have their code. Their children's governess ... is safe. You will do well to believe it, too. Now, Fanny, we'll go. Be sensible, Alice--I tell you again, Harvey's right; the girl must not be--summarily dismissed: it would be an act of cruel injustice. Good-bye. [*He offers to kiss her--she turns away.*] As you like. Good-bye, Harvey, old man.

HARVEY. Good-bye, Tom. [*They shake hands.*] And thank you.

MRS. BANKET. [*Kissing MRS. WESTERN.*] My poor, dear Alice!

MRS. WESTERN. Good-bye, Fanny. I'm sorry that our party to-night--

MRS. BANKET. Oh, that doesn't matter! Poor thing! I promise you that Tom shall have a good talking to!

[*She is too angry with HARVEY to say good-bye to him: she and the JUDGE go. The moment the door closes, HARVEY begins, feverishly and passionately.*

HARVEY. Now just listen. I'm going to speak to you--I'm going to say things--things that have been in my heart, in my life, for years. I'm not going to spare you, I'm going to tell you the truth, and the truth, and the truth!

MRS. WESTERN. [*Calmly, looking ironically at him.*] If it's the same kind of truth you've been giving us to-night--

HARVEY. We've been married ten years. Oh, I know, we were neither of us very young. But anyhow the last five have been nothing but misery for me. Misery--do you hear that? You sitting there, calm and collected--not caring one damn for me--

MRS. WESTERN. [*Quietly.*] That's not true.

HARVEY. It is, and you know it. The mother of my children! Satisfied with that. Never a word of kindness, or sympathy. And as for--affection!

MRS. WESTERN. We're not sweethearts--we're middle-aged people.

HARVEY. Well, I need something more. And, look here, I'll tell you. This girl has made life worth living. That's all. I'd come home at night dog-tired, all day in the City--sick of it, Stock Exchange, office, and the mud and the grime and the worry--there were you, with a nod, ah, Harvey, good evening--and you'd scarcely look up from your Committee Report or your Blue-book, or damned pamphlet or other--

MRS. WESTERN. [*Contemptuously.*] You are one of the men who want their wife to be a mere sort of doll.

HARVEY. [*More and more vehemently.*] I want my wife to care for me! I want her to smile when I come in, and be glad--I want her to love me! You don't! By the Lord, I've sneaked upstairs, gone in and had a peep at the children--well, they'd be asleep. I tell you I've been hungry, hungry, for a word, for a look! And there, in the schoolroom, was this girl. I've played it low down, I know--she's fond of me. But I couldn't help it--I was lonely--that's what it was. I've gone up there night after night. *You* didn't know where I was--and you didn't care. In my study, you thought--the cold, chilly box that you call my study--glad to have me out of the way. Well, there I was, with this girl. It was something to look forward to, in the cab, coming home. It was something to catch hold of, when things went wrong, in that dreary grind of money-making. Her eyes lit up when they saw me. She'd ask me about things--if I coughed, she'd fuss me--she had pretty ways, and was pleased, oh, pleased beyond words, if I brought her home something--

MRS. WESTERN. So this isn't the first time!

HARVEY. [*With a snarl.*] No, of course not! She admired that bracelet of yours--by Jove, I said to myself, I'll get her one like it! Whatever I brought home to *you* you'd scarcely say thank you--and usually it went into the drawer--I'd such shocking bad taste! *She'd*

beam! Well, as ill-luck would have it, you took a fancy to this one. I told her she mustn't wear hers--

MRS. WESTERN. [*Calmly and cuttingly.*] Conspiring behind my back.

HARVEY. [*Raging.*] Oh, if you knew what has gone on behind your back! Not when I was with her--when I was alone! The things I've said about you--to myself! When I thought of this miserable life that had to be dragged on here, thought of your superior smile, your damnable cruelty--

MRS. WESTERN. [*Genuinely surprised.*] Cruelty! Why?

HARVEY. What else? I'd go up to you timidly--bah, why talk of it? To you I've been the machine that made money--money to pay for the house, and the car, and the dressmakers' bills--a machine that had to be fed--and when you'd done that, you'd done all. Well, there was this girl--

MRS. WESTERN. You had your children.

HARVEY. A boy of seven and a girl of five--in bed when I came home--and *your* children much more than mine--I'm a stranger to them! And anyhow, I wanted something more--something human, alive--that only a woman can give. And she gave it. Nothing between us, I swear--but just that. As Tom says, I've not been such a cur--and *you* ought to know me well enough, after all these years!... But there is the truth--she's fond of me: she is, it's a fact. And I *needed* that fondness--it has kept me going. And now--do you think I'll let her be thrust out into the street?

[*As he says these last words he drops into a chair, facing her, and looks fiercely and doggedly at her.*]

MRS. WESTERN. [*Calmly.*] Stop now, and listen to me. I've let you rattle on. Will you hear me for one moment?

HARVEY. Go on.

MRS. WESTERN. All those things you've said about me--[*With a shrug.*] Well, what's the use? I suppose we're like most married people when they come to our age. I've interests of my own, that don't appeal to you--

HARVEY. Blue-books and Committees!

MRS. WESTERN. I do useful work--oh yes, you may sneer--you always have sneered! If a woman tries to do something sensible with her life, instead of cuddling and kissing you all day, she's cold and cruel. We've drifted apart--well, your fault as much as mine. More, perhaps--but it's no good going into that--no good making reproaches. That's how things are--we must make the best of them. Wait, let me finish. About this girl. Granted that what you say is true--and I'm inclined to believe it--

HARVEY. [*Genuinely grateful.*] At least thank you for that!

MRS. WESTERN. Or at any rate it's better policy to believe it, for every one's sake--

HARVEY. [*Bitterly.*] That's right--that's more like you!

MRS. WESTERN. We gain nothing by abusing each other. And I didn't interrupt *you*. Let's look facts in the face. Here we are, we two--tied.

HARVEY. [*With a groan.*] Yes.

MRS. WESTERN. With our two children. If it weren't for them.... Well, we've *got* to remain together. Now there's this girl. It's quite evident, after what you've said, that she can't stop here--

HARVEY. [*Jumping to his feet.*] She shall!

MRS. WESTERN. [*Fretfully.*] Oh, do be a man, and drop this mawkish sentiment! You say she's fond of you--you've *made* her fond of you. Was this a very pretty thing--for a man of your age to do?

HARVEY. [*Sullenly, as he drops back into his chair.*] Never mind my age.

MRS. WESTERN. Very well then--for a married man?

HARVEY. An unhappy man.

MRS. WESTERN. Even granting that--though if you're unhappy it's your own fault--I've always been urging you to go on the County Council--What's to become of the girl, if she stops here?

HARVEY. [*Desperately.*] I don't know--but I can't let her go--I tell you I can't!

MRS. WESTERN. [*Scarcely able to conceal her disgust.*] Oh, if you knew how painful it is to hear you whining like this! It's pitiable, really! In the girl's own interest--how can she stop?

HARVEY. She must. I can't let her be turned out. It would break her heart.

MRS. WESTERN. [*Turning right round, and staring at him.*] What?

HARVEY. [*Doggedly.*] Yes--it would. She's very fond of me, that's the truth. I know that I've been to blame--but it's too late for that now. She's romantic, of course--what you'd call sentimental. I dare say I've played on her feelings--she saw I was lonely. She has a side that you've never suspected--a tender, sensitive side--she has ideals.... Well, do you realise what it would mean, with a girl like that? No one knows her as I do. I'm quite startled sometimes, to find how fond she is of me. Oh, have some sympathy! It's difficult, I know--it's terribly difficult. But she loves me--that's the truth--and a young girl's love--why, she might throw herself into the river! Oh yes, you smile--but she might! What do *you* know of life, with your Blue-books? Anyhow, I daren't risk it. By-and-by--there's no hurry, is there? And I put it to you--be merciful! You're not the ordinary woman--you have a brain--you're not conventional. Don't act like the others. Don't drive this girl out of the house. It would end in tragedy. Believe it!

MRS. WESTERN. You can't really expect me to keep a girl here, as governess to my children, who, as you say, is in love with you.

HARVEY. [*Pleading.*] I expect you--I'm asking you--to help her--and me.

MRS. WESTERN. [*Shaking her head.*] That's too much. We won't turn her out to-night--I'll give her a reference, and all that--

HARVEY. [*Springing to his feet again.*] Alice, I can't let her go!

MRS. WESTERN. [*Conciliatorily.*] Ask Tom, ask any one--

HARVEY. [*More and more passionately.*] I tell you, I can't let her go!

MRS. WESTERN. Be sensible, Harvey--you must realise yourself there's no alternative--

HARVEY. [*With a violent and uncontrollable outburst.*] I vow and declare to you--if she goes, I go too! And the consequences will be on your head!

[MRS. WESTERN *has also risen--they stand face to face, looking at each other--and for a moment there is silence. The door opens, and MISS FARREN comes in, dressed as before. She walks straight to* MRS. WESTERN.

MISS FARREN. Mrs. Western, my things are packed, and on the cab--

HARVEY. [*Wildly.*] My poor child, you're *not* to go--I told you.

MISS FARREN. [*With a demure glance at him, stopping him as he is moving towards her.*] Of course I must--I can't stay here--that's not possible. My sister will take me in for to-night.

MRS. WESTERN. Miss Farren, my husband has explained to me--I withdraw all--

MISS FARREN. [*Carelessly.*] Oh, that's all right--though thank you all the same. And it really doesn't matter much. I was going to give notice to-morrow anyway--

HARVEY. [*Starting violently.*] What!

MISS FARREN. Well, I put it off as long as I could, Mr. Western, because ... But the fact is I'm going on the stage--musical comedy--

HARVEY. [*Breathless, staggering back.*] You--are--going--

MISS FARREN. I've accepted an engagement--oh, I'm only to be a show-girl at first--but they believe I'll do well. They've been wanting me some time. And my *fiancé* has persuaded me.

HARVEY. [*Collapsing utterly, dropping into the chair by the fire.*] Your--

MISS FARREN. [*Gravely.*] My *fiancé*--yes. He's one of the comic men there.

MRS. WESTERN. [*Who has been watching them both with an unmoved face.*] I'll write a cheque for your salary, Miss Farren.

[*She goes to the desk at back.*]

MISS FARREN. [*Coquettishly, to HARVEY.*] I ought to have told you, I know, Mr. Western. But it *was* so dull here--and you've been most awfully good to me. I can never be sufficiently grateful.

HARVEY. [*With difficulty, his face turned away.*] Don't mention it. And I hope you'll be happy.

MISS FARREN. [*Lightly.*] Thank you. I mean to try!

[MRS. WESTERN *returns with a cheque which she hands to MISS FARREN.*]

MRS. WESTERN. Here, Miss Farren.

MISS FARREN. [*Putting it into her bag.*] Thank you so much. Good-bye.

MRS. WESTERN. If you should ever need a reference, don't be afraid to--

MISS FARREN. Oh, thanks, no more governessing for me. Good-bye!

[*She trips out, without another glance at HARVEY, who sits huddled by the fire. MRS. WESTERN moves slowly to the door. At the threshold she pauses, turns, and looks at HARVEY.*]

MRS. WESTERN. I'll take care that the next governess--shall be quite as pretty as this one, Harvey.

[*She opens the door and goes. HARVEY doesn't stir.*]

THE CURTAIN FALLS