

The Camberley Triangle

BY A. A. MILNE
A COMEDY IN ONE ACT

CHARACTERS

KATE CAMBERLEY. CYRIL NORWOOD (her lover). DENNIS CAMBERLEY (her husband).

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This play was first produced by Mr. Godfrey Tearle at the Coliseum on September 8, 1919, with the following cast:

Dennis Camberley--GODFREY TEARLE. Kate Camberley--MARY MALONE. Cyril Norwood--EWAN BROOK.

THE CAMBERLEY TRIANGLE

(It is an evening of 1919 in KATE'S drawing-room. She is expecting him, and the Curtain goes up as he is announced.)

MAID. Mr. Cyril Norwood.

(He comes in.)

NORWOOD (for the MAID'S benefit, but you may be sure she knows). Ah, good evening, Mrs. Camberley!

KATE. Good evening!

(They shake hands. NORWOOD is sleek and prosperous, in a morning coat with a white slip to his waistcoat. He is good-looking in rather an obvious way with rather an obvious moustache. Most women like him--at least, so he will tell you.)

NORWOOD (as soon as they are alone). My darling!

KATE. Cyril!

(He takes her hands and kisses them. He would kiss her face, but she is not quite ready for this.)

NORWOOD. You let me yesterday. Why mayn't I kiss you to-day?

KATE. Not just yet, dear. I want to talk to you. Come and sit down.

(They sit on the sofa together.)

NORWOOD. You aren't sorry for what you said yesterday?

KATE (looking at him thoughtfully, and then shaking her head). No.

NORWOOD. Then what's happened?

KATE. I've just had a letter from Dennis.

NORWOOD (anxiously). Dennis--your husband?

KATE. Yes.

NORWOOD. Where does he write from?

KATE. India.

NORWOOD. Oh, well!

KATE. He says I may expect him home almost as soon as I get the letter.

NORWOOD. Good Heavens!

KATE. Yes. . . .

NORWOOD (always hopeful). Perhaps he didn't catch the boat that he expected to. Wouldn't he have cabled from somewhere on the way?

KATE. You can't depend on cables nowadays. *I don't know--What are we to do, Cyril?*

NORWOOD. You know what I always wanted you to do. (He takes her hands) Come away with me.

KATE (doubtfully). And let Dennis come home and find--an empty house?

NORWOOD (eagerly). You are nothing to him, and he is nothing to you. A war-wedding!--after you'd been engaged to each other for a week! And forty-eight hours afterwards he is sent out to India--and you haven't seen him since.

KATE. Yes. I keep telling myself that.

NORWOOD. The world may say that you're his wife and he's your husband, but--what do you know of him? He won't even be the boy you married. He'll be a stranger whom you'll hardly recognise. And you aren't the girl *he* married. You're a woman now, and you're just beginning to learn what love is. Come with *me*.

KATE. It's true, it's true. But he *has* been fighting for us. And to come home again after those four years of exile, and find--

NORWOOD. Exile--that's making much too much of it. He's come through the war safely, and he's probably had what he'd call a topping good time. Like enough he's been in love half-a-dozen times himself since--on leave in India and that sort of thing. India! Well, you should read Kipling.

KATE. I wonder. Of course, as you say, I don't know him. But I feel that we should be happier afterwards if we were quite straight about it and told him just what had happened. If he had been doing what you say, he would understand--and perhaps be glad of it.

NORWOOD (uneasily). Really, darling, it's hardly a thing you can talk over calmly with a husband, even if he--We don't want any unpleasantness, and--er--(Taking her hands again) Besides, I want you, Kate. It may be weeks before he comes back. We can't go on like this . . . Kate!

KATE. Do you love me so very much?

NORWOOD. My darling!

KATE. Well, let us wait till the end of the week--in case he comes. I don't want to seem to be afraid of him.

NORWOOD (eagerly). And then?

KATE. Then I'll come with you.

NORWOOD (taking her in his arms). My darling! . . . There! And now what are you going to do? Ask me to stay to dinner or what?

KATE. Certainly not, sir. I'm going *out* to dinner to-night.

NORWOOD (jealously). Who with?

KATE. You.

NORWOOD (eagerly). At our little restaurant? (She nods) Good girl! Then go and put on a hat, while I ring 'em up and see if they've got a table.

KATE. What fun! I won't be a moment. (She goes to the door) Cyril, you will *always* love me?

NORWOOD. Of course I will, darling. (She nods at him and goes out. He is very well pleased with himself when he is left alone. He goes to the telephone with a smile) Gerrard 11,001. Yes . . . I want a table for two. To-night . . . Mr. Cyril Norwood . . . Oh, in about half an hour . . . Yes, for two. Is that all right? . . . Thank you.

(He puts the receiver back and turns round to see DENNIS CAMBERLEY, who has just come in. DENNIS is certainly a man now; very easily and pleasantly master of himself and of anybody else who gets in his way.)

NORWOOD (surprised). Hallo!

DENNIS (nodding pleasantly). Hallo!

NORWOOD (wondering who he is). You--er----?

DENNIS. I just came in, Mr. Norwood.

NORWOOD. You know my name?

DENNIS. Oh yes, I've heard a good deal about you, Mr. Cyril Norwood.

NORWOOD (stiffly). I don't think I've had the pleasure of--er----

DENNIS (winningly). Oh, but I'm sure you must have heard a good deal about *me*.

NORWOOD. Good God, you don't mean----

DENNIS. I do, indeed. (With a bow) Dennis Camberley, the missing husband. (Pleadingly) You *have* heard about me, *haven't* you?

NORWOOD. I--er--Mr. Camberley, yes, of course. So you're back?

DENNIS. Yes, I'm back. Sometimes they don't come back, Mr. Norwood, and sometimes--they do. . . . Even after four years. . . . But you *did* talk about me sometimes?

NORWOOD. How did you know my name?

DENNIS. A little bird told me about you.

NORWOOD (turning away in anger). Pooh!

DENNIS. One of those little Eastern birds, which sit on the backs of crocodiles, searching for--well, let us say, breakfast. He said to me one morning: "Talking of parasites," he said, "do you know Mr. Cyril Norwood?" he said, "because I could tell you an interesting story about him," he said, "if you care to--"

NORWOOD (wheeling round furiously). Look here, sir, we'd better have it out quite plainly. I don't want any veiled insults and sneers from you. I admit that an unfortunate situation has arisen, but we must look facts in the face. You may be Mrs. Camberley's husband, but she has not seen you for four years, and--well, she and I love each other. There you have it. What are you going to do?

DENNIS (anxiously). You don't feel that I have neglected her, Mr. Norwood? You see, I couldn't come home for week-ends very well, and--

NORWOOD. What are you going to do?

DENNIS (pleasantly). Well, what do you suggest?

NORWOOD (taken aback). Really, sir, I--er--

DENNIS. You see, I feel so out of it all. I've been leading such a nasty, uncivilised life for the last four years, I really hardly know what is--what is being done. Now *you* have been mixing in Society . . . making munitions . . .

NORWOOD (stiffly). I have been engaged on important work for the Government of a confidential nature--

DENNIS. You, as I was saying, have been mixing in Society, engaged on important work for the Government of a confidential nature----

NORWOOD. It was my great regret that I had no opportunity of enlisting----

DENNIS. With no opportunity, as I was about to say, of enlisting, but with many opportunities, fortunately, of making love to my wife.

NORWOOD. Now look here, Mr. Camberley, I've already told you---
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DENNIS (soothing him). But, my dear Mr. Norwood, I'm only doing what you said. I'm looking facts in the face. (Surprised) You aren't ashamed of having made love to my wife, are you?

NORWOOD (impatiently). What are you going to do? That's all that matters between you and me. What are you going to do?

DENNIS. Well, that was what I was going to ask you. You're so much more in the swim than I am. (Earnestly) What *is* being done in Society just now? You must have heard a good deal of gossip about it. All your friends, who were also engaged on important work of a confidential nature, with no opportunity of enlisting--don't they tell you their own experiences? What *have* the husbands been doing lately when they came back from the front?

NORWOOD (advancing on him angrily). Now, once and for all, sir---
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(KATE comes in, with a hat in each hand, calling to NORWOOD as she comes.)

KATE. Oh, Cyril--which of these two hats--(she sees her husband)--Dennis!

DENNIS (looking at her steadfastly). How are *you*, Kate?

KATE (stammering). You've--you've come back? (She puts the hats down.)

DENNIS. I've come back. As I was telling Mr. Norwood.

KATE (looking from one to the other). You--?

DENNIS (smiling). Oh, we're quite old friends.

NORWOOD (going to her). I've told him, Kate.

(He takes her hands, and tries to look defiantly at DENNIS, though he is not feeling like that at all.)

KATE (looking anxiously at DENNIS). What are you going to do?

(She can hardly make him out. He is different from the husband who left her four years ago.)

DENNIS. Well, that's what Cyril keeps asking me. (to NORWOOD) You don't mind my calling you Cyril?--such an old friend of my wife's--

KATE (unable to make him out). Dennis! (She is frightened.)

NORWOOD (soothingly). It's all right, dear.

DENNIS. Do let's sit down and talk it over in a friendly way.

KATE (going to him). Dennis, can you ever forgive me? We never ought to have got married--we knew each other so little--you had to go away so soon--I--I was going to write and tell you--oh, I wish--

DENNIS. That's all right, Kate. (He will not let her come too close to him. He steps back and looks at her from head to feet) You've altered.

KATE. That's just it, Dennis. I'm not the girl who--

DENNIS. You've grown four years younger and four years prettier.

KATE (dropping her eyes). Have I?

DENNIS. Yes. . . . You do your hair a new way.

KATE (surprised). Do you like it?

DENNIS. I love it.

NORWOOD (coughing). Yes, well, perhaps we'd better--

DENNIS (with a start). I beg your pardon, Cyril. I was forgetting you for the moment. Well, now do sit down, (NORWOOD and KATE sit down together on the sofa, but DENNIS remains standing) That's right.

KATE. Well?

DENNIS (to KATE). You want to marry him, eh?

NORWOOD. We have already told you the circumstances, Mr. Camberley. I need hardly say how regrettable it is that--er--but at the same time these--er--things will happen, and since it--er--has happened--

KATE. I feel I hardly know you, Dennis. Did I love you when I married you? I don't know. It was so sudden. We had no time to find out anything about each other. And now you come back--a stranger--

DENNIS (jerking his head at NORWOOD). And he's not a stranger, eh?

KATE (dropping her eyes). N-no.

DENNIS. You feel you know all about *him*?

KATE. I--we--(She is unhappy.)

NORWOOD. We have discovered that we love each other. (Taking her hands) My darling one, this is distressing for you. Let *me*--

DENNIS (sharply). It wouldn't be distressing for her, if you didn't keep messing her about. Why the devil can't you sit on a chair by yourself?

NORWOOD (indignantly). Really!

KATE (freeing herself from him, and moving to the extreme end of the sofa). What are you going to do, Dennis?

DENNIS (looking at them thoughtfully, his chin on his hand). I don't know. . . . It's difficult. I don't want to do anything melodramatic. I mean (to KATE) it wouldn't really help matters if I did shoot him, would it?

(KATE looks at him without saying anything, trying to understand this new man who has come into her life. NORWOOD swallows, and tries very hard to say something)

NORWOOD. I--I--

DENNIS (turning to him). You don't think so, do you?

NORWOOD. I--I--

DENNIS. No, I'm quite sure you're right. It wouldn't really help. It is difficult, isn't it? You see (to KATE) *you* love *him*--(he waits a moment for her to say it if she will, but she only looks at him)--and *he* says *he* loves *you*, but at the same time I *am* your husband. . . . (He walks up and down thoughtfully, and then says suddenly to NORWOOD) I'll tell you what--I'll fight you for her.

NORWOOD (trying to be firm). I think we'd better leave this eighteenth-century nonsense out of it.

DENNIS (pleasantly). They fight in the twentieth century, too, Mr. Norwood. Perhaps you hadn't heard what we've been doing these last four years? Oh, quite a lot of it. . . . Well?

NORWOOD. You don't wish me to believe that you're serious?

DENNIS. Perfectly. Swords, pistols, fists, catch-as-catch-can--what would you like?

NORWOOD. I do not propose to indulge in an undignified scuffle for the--er--lady of my heart.

DENNIS (cheerfully). Nothing doing in scuffles, eh? All right, then, I'll toss you for her.

NORWOOD. Now you're merely being vulgar. (to KATE) My dear--

(She motions him back with her hand, but does not take her eyes off DENNIS.)

DENNIS. Really, Mr. Norwood, you're a little hard to please. If you don't like my suggestions, perhaps you will make one of your own.

NORWOOD. This is obviously a matter in which it is for the--er--lady to choose.

DENNIS. You think Mrs. Camberley should choose between us?

NORWOOD. Certainly.

DENNIS. What do you say, Kate?

KATE. You are very generous, Dennis.

DENNIS (after a pause). Very well, you shall choose.

NORWOOD (complacently). Ah!

DENNIS. Wait a moment, Mr. Norwood. (to KATE) When did you first meet him?

KATE. A year ago.

DENNIS. And he's been making love to you for a year? (KATE bends her head) He's been making love to you for a year?

NORWOOD. I think, sir, that the sooner the lady makes her choice, and brings this distressing scene to a close--After all, is it fair to her to--?

DENNIS. Are you fair to *me*? You've been making love to her for a year. *I* made love to her for a fortnight--four years ago. And now you want her to choose between us. Is *that* fair?

NORWOOD. You hardly expect us to wait a year before she is allowed to make up her mind?

DENNIS. I waited four years for her out there. . . . However, I won't ask you to wait a year. I'll ask you to wait for five minutes.

KATE. What is it you want us to do, Dennis?

DENNIS. I want you to listen to both of us, for five minutes each; that's all. After all, we're your suitors, aren't we? You're going to choose between us. Very well, then, you must hear what we have to say. Mr. Norwood shall have five minutes alone with you in which to present his case; five minutes in which to tell you how beautiful you are. . . . and how rich he is . . . and how happy you'll be together. And I shall have *my* five minutes.

NORWOOD (sneering). Five minutes in which to tell her lies about *me*, eh?

DENNIS. Damn it, you've had a whole year in which to tell her lies about yourself; you oughtn't to grudge me five minutes. (to KATE) Well?

KATE. I agree, Dennis.

DENNIS. Good. (He spins a coin, puts it on the back of his hand, and says to NORWOOD) Call!

NORWOOD. What on *earth*--

DENNIS. Choice of innings.

NORWOOD. I never heard of anything so--Tails.

DENNIS (uncovering it). Heads. You shall have first knock.

NORWOOD (bewildered). What do you--I don't--

DENNIS. You have five minutes in which to lay your case before Mrs. Camberley. (He looks at his watch) Five minutes--and then I shall come back. . . . Is there a fire in the dining-room, Kate?

KATE (smiling in spite of herself). A gas-fire; it isn't lit.

DENNIS. Then I shall light it. (to NORWOOD) That will make the room nice and warm for you by the time you've finished. (He goes to the door and says again) Five minutes.

(There is an awkward silence after he is gone. KATE waits for NORWOOD to say something, but NORWOOD doesn't know in the least what is expected of him.)

NORWOOD (looking anxiously at the door). What's the fellow's game, eh?

KATE. Game?

NORWOOD. Yes. What's he up to?

KATE. Is he up to anything?

NORWOOD. I don't like it. Why the devil did he choose to-day to come back? If he'd waited another week, we'd have been safely away together. What's his game, I wonder?

(He walks up and down, worrying it out.)

KATE. I don't think he's playing a game. He's just giving me my chance.

NORWOOD. What chance?

KATE. A chance to decide between you.

NORWOOD. You've decided that, Kate. You've had a year to think about it in, and you've decided. We love each other; you're coming away with me; that's all settled. Only . . . what the deuce is he up to?

KATE (sitting down and talking to herself). You're quite right about my not knowing him. . . . How one rushed into marriage in those early days of the war--knowing nothing about each other. And then they come back, and even the little one thought one did know is different. . . . I suppose he feels the same about me.

NORWOOD (to himself). Damn him!

KATE (after a pause). Well, Cyril?

NORWOOD (looking sharply round at her). Well?

KATE. We haven't got very long.

NORWOOD (looking at his watch). He really means to come back--in five minutes?

KATE. You heard him say so.

NORWOOD (going up to her and speaking eagerly). What's the matter with slipping out now? You've got a hat here. We can slip out quietly. He won't hear us. He'll come back and find us gone--well, what can he do? Probably he'll hang about for a bit and then go to his club. We'll have a bit of dinner; ring up your maid; get her to meet you with some things, and go off by the night mail. Scotland--anywhere you like. Let the whole business simmer down a bit. We don't want any melodramatic eighteenth-century nonsense.

KATE. Go out now, and not wait for him to have *his* five minutes?

NORWOOD (impatiently). What does he *want* with five minutes? What's the *good* of it to him? Just to take a pathetic farewell of you, and pretend that you've ruined his life, when all the time he's chuckling in his sleeve at having got rid of you so easily. *I* know these young fellows. Some Major's wife in India is what *he's* got his eye on. . . . Or else he'll try fooling around with the hands-up business. You don't want to be mixed up with any scandal of *that* sort. No, the best thing we can do--I'm speaking for *your* sake, Kate--is to slip off quietly, while we've got the chance. We can *write* and explain all that we want to explain.

KATE (looking wonderingly at him--another man whom she doesn't know). Is that playing quite fair to Dennis?

NORWOOD. Good Lord, this isn't a game! Camberley may think so with his tossing-up and all the rest of it, but you and I aren't children. Everything's fair in a case like this. Put your hat on--quickly--(he gets it for her)--here you are--

KATE (standing up). I'm not sure, Cyril.

NORWOOD. What d'you mean?

KATE. He expects me to wait for him.

NORWOOD. If it comes to that, he expected you to wait for him four years ago.

KATE. Yes. . . . (Quietly) Thank you for reminding me.

NORWOOD. Kate, don't be stupid. What's happened to you? Of course, I know it's been beastly upsetting for you, all this--but then, why do you want to go on with it? Why do you want *more* upsetting scenes?

You've got a chance now of getting out of it all, and--(He looks at his watch) Good Lord!

KATE. Is the five minutes over?

NORWOOD. Quick, quick! (He puts his fingers to his lips) Quietly. (He walks on tiptoe to the door.)

KATE. Cyril!

NORWOOD. H'sh!

KATE (sitting down again). It's no good, Cyril, I must wait for him.

(The door opens, and NORWOOD starts back quickly as DENNIS comes in.)

DENNIS (looking at his watch). Innings declared closed. (to NORWOOD) The dining-room is nicely warmed now, and I've left you an evening paper.

NORWOOD (going to KATE). Look here, Mr. Camberley, Kate and I--

DENNIS. Mrs. Camberley, no doubt, will tell me.

(He holds the door open and waits politely for NORWOOD to go.)

NORWOOD. I don't know what your game is--

DENNIS. You've never been in Mesopotamia, Mr. Norwood?

NORWOOD. Never.

DENNIS. It's a very trying place for the temper. . . . I'm waiting for you.

NORWOOD (irresolute). Well, I---- (He comes sulkily to the door) Well, I shall come back for Kate in five minutes.

DENNIS. Mrs. Camberley and I will be ready for you. You know your way?

[NORWOOD goes out.

(DENNIS shuts the door. He comes into the room and stands looking at KATE.)

KATE (uncomfortably). Well?

DENNIS. No, don't move. I just want to look at you. . . . I've seen you like that for four years. Don't move. . . . I've been in some dreary places, but you've been with me most of the time. Just let's have a last look.

KATE. A last look?

DENNIS. Yes.

KATE. You're saying good-bye to me?

DENNIS. I don't know whether it's to you, Kate. To the girl who has been with me these last four years. Was that you?

KATE (dropping her eyes). I don't know, Dennis.

DENNIS. I wish to God I wasn't your husband.

KATE. What would you do if you weren't my husband?

DENNIS. Make love to you.

KATE. Can't you do that now?

DENNIS. Being your husband rather handicaps me, you know. I never really stood a chance against the other fellow.

KATE. I was to choose between you, you said. You think that I have already made up my mind?

DENNIS (smiling). I think so.

KATE. And chosen him?

DENNIS (shaking his head). Oh, no!

KATE (surprised). You think I have chosen *you*?

DENNIS (nodding). M'm.

KATE (indignantly). Really, Dennis! Considering that I had practically arranged to run away with him twenty minutes ago! You must think me very fickle.

DENNIS. Not fickle. Imaginative.

KATE. What do you mean? And why are you so certain that I am going to choose you? And why in that case did you talk about taking a last look at me? And what--?

DENNIS. Of course, we've only got five minutes, but I think that if you asked your questions one at a time----

KATE (smiling). Well, you needn't *answer* them all together.

DENNIS. All right then, one at a time. Why am I certain that you will choose me? Because for the first time in your life you have just been alone with Mr. Cyril Norwood. That's what I meant by saying you were imaginative. The Norwood you've been thinking yourself in love with doesn't exist. I'm certain that you've seen him for the first time in these last few minutes. Why, the Archangel Gabriel would have made a hash of a five minutes like that; it would have been impossible for him to have said the right thing to you. Norwood? Good Lord, he didn't stand a chance. You were judging him all the time, weren't you?

KATE (thoughtfully). You're very clever, Dennis.

DENNIS (cheerfully). Four years' study of the Turkish character.

KATE. But how do you know I'm not judging *you* all the time?

DENNIS. Of course you are. But there's all the difference in the world between judging a stranger like me, and judging the man you thought you were in love with.

KATE. You *are* a stranger to me.

DENNIS. I know. That's why I said good-bye to the girl who had been with me these last four years, the girl I had married. Well, I've said good-bye to her. You're not my wife any longer, Kate; but if you don't mind pretending that I'm not your husband, and just give me a chance of making love to you--well, that's all I want.

KATE. You're very generous, Dennis.

DENNIS. No, I'm not. I'm very much in love; and for a man very much in love I'm being rather less of a silly ass than usual. Why should you love me? You fell in love with my uniform at the beginning of the war. I was ordered out, and you fell in love with the departing hero. After that? Well, I had four years--alone--in which to think about *you*, and you had four years--with other men--in which to forget *me*. Is it any wonder that--?

(NORWOOD comes in.)

NORWOOD (roughly). Well?

DENNIS. You arrive just in time, Mr. Norwood. I was talking too much. (to KATE) Mrs. Camberley, we are both at your disposal. Will you choose between us, which one is to have the happiness of--serving you?

NORWOOD (holding out his hand to her, and speaking in the voice of the proprietor). Kate!

(KATE goes slowly up to him with her hand held out.)

KATE (shaking NORWOOD'S hand). Good-bye, Mr. Norwood.

NORWOOD (astounded). Kate! (to DENNIS) You devil!

DENNIS. And only a moment ago I was comparing you to the Archangel Gabriel.

NORWOOD (sneeringly to KATE). So you're going to be a loving wife to him after all?

DENNIS (tapping him kindly on the shoulder). You'll remember what I said about Mesopotamia?

NORWOOD (pulling himself together hastily). Good-bye, Mrs. Camberley. I can only hope that you will be happy.

(He goes out with dignity.)

DENNIS (closing the door). Well, there we agree.

(He comes back to her.)

KATE. What a stupid little fool I have been. (She holds out her arms to him) Dennis!

DENNIS (retreating in mock alarm). Oh no, you don't! (He shakes a finger at her) We're not going to rush it *this*.

KATE (reproachfully). Dennis!

DENNIS. I think you should call me Mr. Camberley.

KATE (with a smile). Mr. Camberley.

DENNIS. That's better. Now our courtship begins. (Bowing low) Madam, will you do me the great honour of dining with me this evening?

KATE (curtseying). I shall be charmed.

DENNIS. Then let us hasten. The carriage waits.

KATE (holding up the two hats). Which of these two chapeaux do you prefer, Mr. Camberley?

DENNIS. Might I express a preference for the black one with the pink roses?

KATE. It is very elegant, is it not? (She puts it on.)

DENNIS. Vastly becoming, upon my life. . . . I might mention that I am staying at the club. Is your ladyship doing anything to-morrow?

KATE. Nothing of any great importance.

(He offers his arm and she takes it.)

DENNIS (as they go to the door). Then perhaps I may be permitted to call round to-morrow morning about eleven, and make inquiries as to your ladyship's health.

KATE. It would be very obliging of you, sir.

[They go out together.]