

The Dover Road

BY A. A. MILNE

ACT I

What MR. LATIMER prefers to call the reception-room of his house is really the hall. You come straight into it through the heavy oak front door. But this door is so well built, so well protected by a thick purple curtain, and the room so well warmed by central heating, that none of the usual disadvantages of a hall on a November night attaches to it. Just now, of course, all the curtains are drawn, so that the whole of this side of the hall is purple-hung. In the middle of the room, a little to the right, is a mahogany table, clothless, laid for three. A beautiful blue bowl, filled with purple anemones, helps, with the silver and the old cut glass, to decorate it. Over the whole room there is something of an Arabian-night-adventure air. In the daytime, perhaps, it is an ordinary hall, furnished a trifle freakishly, but in the night time one wonders what is going to happen next.

DOMINIC, tall, stout, and grave, the major-domo of the house, in a butler's old-fashioned evening-dress, comes in. He stands looking at the room to see that all is as it should be, then walks to the table and gives a little touch to it here and there. He turns round and waits a moment. The Staff materialises suddenly—two footmen and two chambermaids. The men come from the left, the women from the right; over their clothes, too, MR. LATIMER has been a little freakish. They stand in a line.

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DOMINIC. The blue room in the east wing is ready?

THE MEN. Yes, Mr. Dominic.

DOMINIC. The white room in the west wing is ready?

THE WOMEN. Yes, Mr. Dominic.

DOMINIC. The procedure will be as before.

THE FOUR. Yes, Mr. Dominic.

DOMINIC. See to it that I have no fault to find. That will do.

(They go out. He looks at his watch and then follows the men. He is hardly out of the room when a bell rings. He returns slowly, draws the curtain from the front door, and opens it. LEONARD, in fur-coat and cap, is seen standing outside. He is a big, well-made man of about thirty-five—dark, with a little black tooth-brush moustache. When the door opens he gets his first sight of the interior of the room, and is evidently taken by surprise.)

LEONARD. Oh—er—is this—er—an hotel? My chauffeur said—we've had an accident, been delayed on the way—he said that we could put up here. *(He turns round and calls)* Here, Saunders! This can't be the place. *(To DOMINIC)* Perhaps you could tell me——

ANNE *(from outside, invisible)*. Saunders has gone, Leonard.

LEONARD *(turning round)*. Gone! What the devil——*(He plunges into the darkness.)*

DOMINIC. Saunders was perfectly correct, my lord. This is a sort of hotel.

ANNE *(getting out of the car, but still invisible)*. He went off as soon as you got out of the car. Leonard, are you sure——?

(She comes into the light; he is holding her arm. Pretty she is, to the first sight; but what holds you is the mystery of her youthfulness; her aloof, untouched innocence; her grave coolness; her—well, we shall let her speak for herself. Just at present she is a little upset by the happenings of the night.)

DOMINIC. Saunders was perfectly correct, my lord. This *is* a sort of hotel.

LEONARD (*puzzled*). What the devil's happened to him? (*He looks out into the darkness.*)

DOMINIC. Doubtless he has gone round to the garage to get the doors open. Won't your lordship——

LEONARD. You can put us up? Just for to-night. My—er—wife and myself——

DOMINIC. If your lordship and her ladyship will come in—— (*He waits for them.*)

LEONARD (*to ANNE*). It's the best we can do, dear. I'm frightfully sorry about it, but, after all, what difference——

ANNE (*giving him a look which means "Don't talk like this in front of hotel servants"*). I daresay it will be quite comfortable. It's only for one night. (*She comes in, followed by LEONARD.*)

DOMINIC. Thank you, my lady.

(He shuts and bolts the doors, then draws the curtains. There is an air of finality about it. ANNE looks back at the noise of the bolts going home with something of a start. They are locked in now for good. LEONARD, his eye on the supper-table, is saying to himself, "Dashed rummy sort of hotel.")

DOMINIC. Allow me, my lady. (*He helps them off with their coats.*)

LEONARD. You can give us something to eat?

ANNE. I don't want anything, Leonard.

LEONARD. Nonsense, dear.

DOMINIC. Supper will be served in five minutes, my lord.

ANNE (*suddenly*). Do you know who we are?

DOMINIC. I have not that pleasure, my lady.

ANNE. Then why do you call me “my lady”?

LEONARD (*disliking a scene*). My dear!

ANNE (*waving back LEONARD’S protesting arm*). No, Leonard. (*To DOMINIC*) Well?

DOMINIC. His lordship mentioned that your ladyship was his wife.

ANNE. Y—yes.... Then you know *him* by sight?

LEONARD (*complacently*). Well, my dear, that need not surprise you.

DOMINIC. I know his lordship’s rank, my lady. Not his lordship’s name.

LEONARD (*surprised*). My rank? How the devil——

DOMINIC. Supper will be served in five minutes, my lady. (*He bows and goes out.*)

(*There is silence for a little. They look at the table, at the room, at each other. Then LEONARD says it aloud.*)

LEONARD. Dashed rummy sort of hotel!

ANNE (*coming closer and holding his arm*). Leonard, I don’t like it.

LEONARD. Pooh! Nonsense, dear.

ANNE. It almost seems as though they had expected us.

LEONARD (*laughing*). My dear child, how could they? In the ordinary way we should have been at Dover—why, almost at Calais by this time.

ANNE. I know. (*In distress*) Why aren't we?

LEONARD. The car—Saunders, a fool of a chauffeur—a series of unfortunate accidents——

ANNE. Do you often have these unfortunate accidents, Leonard?

LEONARD. My dear Anne, you aren't suggesting that I've done this on purpose!

ANNE. No, no. (*She leaves him, and goes and sits down.*) But why to-night of all nights?

LEONARD. Of course, it's damned annoying missing the boat, but we can get it to-morrow morning. We shall be in Paris to-morrow night.

ANNE. To-morrow night—but that makes such a difference. I hate every hour we spend together like this in England.

LEONARD. Well, really, I don't see why——

ANNE. You must take it that I do, Leonard. I told you from the first that it was run-away or nothing with me; there was going to be no intrigue, no lies and pretences and evasions. And somehow it seems less—less sordid, if we begin our new life together in a new country. (*With a little smile*) Perhaps the French for what we are doing is not quite so crude as the English.... Yes, I know it's absurd of me, but there it is.

LEONARD (*with a shrug*). Oh, well! (*Taking out his case*) Do you mind a cigarette?

ANNE (*violently*). Oh, why do men *always* want to smoke, even up to the moment when they're going to eat? Can't you breathe naturally for five minutes?

LEONARD (*sulkily, putting his case back*). I beg your pardon.

ANNE. No, I beg yours.

LEONARD. You're all to bits.

ANNE. Nerves, I suppose.

LEONARD. Nonsense! My Anne with nerves? (*Bitterly*) Now if it had been Eustasia——

ANNE (*coldly*). Really, Leonard, I think we had better leave your wife out of the conversation.

LEONARD. I beg your pardon.

ANNE (*to herself*). Perhaps you're right. In a crisis we are all alike, we women.

LEONARD (*going over to her*). No, damn it, I won't have that. It's—it's blasphemy. Anne, my darling——(*She stands up and he takes her hands.*)

ANNE. Oh!... I *am* different, aren't I?

LEONARD. Darling!

ANNE. I'm not a bit like—like anybody else, am I, not even when I'm cross?

LEONARD. Darling!

ANNE. And you do love me?

LEONARD. Darling! (*He wants to kiss her, but she stops him.*)

ANNE. No. Now you're going to smoke. (*She settles him in his chair, takes a cigarette from his case, and puts it in his mouth*) I'll light it for you. Matches? (*She holds out her hand for them.*)

DOMINIC (*who has a way of being there when wanted*). Matches, my lady. (*He hands them to her. They are both rather confused.*)

ANNE. Thank you.

LEONARD (*annoyed*). Thanks. (*He gets up, takes the matches from ANNE, and lights his cigarette. DOMINIC gives a professional touch to the table and goes out.*) Damn that fellow!

ANNE (*smiling*). After all, darling, he thinks I'm your wife.... Or don't wives light their husband's cigarettes?

LEONARD. I believe you're right, Anne. There's something odd about this place.

ANNE. So *you* feel it now?

LEONARD. What did he mean by saying he knew my rank, but not my name?

ANNE (*lightly*). Perhaps he looked inside your cap—like Sherlock Holmes—and saw the embroidered coronet.

LEONARD. How do you mean? There's nothing inside my cap.

ANNE. No, darling. That was a joke. (*He nods tolerantly.*)

LEONARD. And the table laid. Only one table.

ANNE. Yes, but it's for three. They didn't expect *us*.

LEONARD (*relieved*). So it is.... It's probably a new idea in hotels—some new stunt of Harrods—or what's the fellow's name?—Lyons. A country-house hotel. By the way, what will you drink?

DOMINIC (*there as usual*). Bollinger 1906, my lord. (*He has startled them again.*) Mr. Latimer will be down in two minutes, my lady. He asks you to forgive him for not being here to receive you.

LEONARD. Mr. Latimer? Who on earth's Mr. Latimer?

DOMINIC. If you would wish to be shown your room, my lady——

ANNE (*who has not taken her eyes off him*). No, thank you.

LEONARD (*stepping forward*). Look here, my man, is this an hotel or have we come to a private house by mistake?

DOMINIC. A sort of hotel, my lord. I assure your lordship there is no mistake. Thank you, my lady.

[*He goes out.*]

ANNE (*laughing half-hysterically as she sits down*). Very original man, Harrod. Or is it Lyons?

LEONARD. Look here, I'm going to get to the bottom of this. (*He starts after DOMINIC.*)

ANNE. Why bother? Mr. Latimer will be here in two minutes.

LEONARD (*turning back*). Yes, but who the devil's Mr. Latimer?

ANNE (*with interest*). Leonard, do you always arrange something fascinating like this when you elope? I think it's so romantic of you. But don't you think that the mere running away is enough just at first? Leaving the fogs and the frets of England, the weariness and the coldness of it, and escaping together to the warm, blue, sun-filled South—isn't that romantic enough? Why drag in a mysterious and impossible inn, a mysterious and impossible Mr. Latimer? You should have kept them for afterwards; for the time when the poetry was wearing out, and we were beginning to get used to each other.

LEONARD. My dear girl, what *are* you driving at? I say again—do you really think that I *arranged* all this?

ANNE. Well, somebody did.

(*The two Footmen and the two Chambermaids come in and take up positions on each side of the table. They are followed by DOMINIC.*)

DOMINIC. Mr. Latimer!

(MR. LATIMER comes in, looks at the visitors, goes off absent-mindedly with DOMINIC and his Staff, and then comes apologetically back again.)

LATIMER. Good evening!

(He bows with an air; an airy gentleman, neither young nor old, dressed rather fantastically as regards his tie and his dinner-jacket and the flower in his button-hole, and enjoying impishly every word of it.)

LEONARD. Good evening. Er——

LATIMER (*confidentially*). You will forgive me for being announced in my own house, but I find that it saves so much trouble. If I had just come in and said, “I am Mr. Latimer,” then *you* would have had to say, “And I am—er—So-and-so, and this is—er——” Exactly. I mean we can get on so much better without names. But of course——

LEONARD. You will excuse me, sir, but——

LATIMER (*going happily on*). But of course, as you were just going to say, we must call each other *something*. (*Thoughtfully*) I think I shall call you Leonard. There is something about you—forgive the liberty—something Leonardish. (*With a very sweet smile to ANNE*) I am sure you agree with me.

ANNE. I am wondering whether this is really happening, or whether I am dreaming it.

LATIMER (*his back to LEONARD*). And Leonard isn’t wondering at all; he is just tapping his forehead with a great deal of expression.

(*LEONARD, who was doing this, stops in some confusion.*)

LEONARD (*coldly*). I think we have had enough of this, Mr. Latimer. I was giving you the benefit of the doubt. If you are not mad, then I will ask you for some other explanation of all this nonsense.

LATIMER (*sniffing at the flower in his button-hole*). An impetuous character, Leonard. It must be so obvious to everybody else in the room that an explanation will be forthcoming. But why not a friendly explanation following a friendly supper?

ANNE. Are we your guests?

LATIMER. Please.

ANNE. Thank you.

LATIMER. But there is still this question of names. Now we agreed about Leonard——

ANNE (*looking at him fearlessly*). My name is Anne.

LATIMER. Thank you, Miss Anne.

LEONARD (*awkwardly*). Er—my wife.

LATIMER. Then I am tempted to leave out the “Miss.”

LEONARD (*annoyed again*). Look here——

LATIMER (*turning to him*). But there is nothing to look at if I do, Leonard. (*The Staff comes in.*) Ah, supper! Will you sit here, Anne? (*He goes to the head of the table, and indicates the chair on the right of him.*) And you here, Leonard? (*The chair on the left.*) That’s right. (*They all sit down.*)

(*DOMINIC and the Staff serve the supper. Five of them, so things go quickly.*)

LATIMER. “A little fish, a bird, a little sweet. Enough to drink, but not too much to eat.” I composed that in my bath this morning. The wine has been waiting for you since 1906. How different from the turbot! ’Twas but yesterday it scarce had heard the name of Le-o-nard. (*They are all served with fish, and the wine has been poured out.*) Dominic, dismiss the Staff. We would be alone. (*They are alone. He*

rises, glass in hand) My friends, I will give you a toast. (*He raises his glass*) A Happy Ending!

ANNE (*lifting her glass*). A Happy Ending!

LATIMER. You don't drink, Leonard. You would have the adventure end unhappily, as is the way of the modern novel?

LEONARD. I don't understand the beginning of it, Mr. Latimer. I don't—you will forgive me for saying so—I don't see how *you* came into it. Who *are* you?

ANNE. Our host, Leonard.

LEONARD. So it seems, my dear. But in that case, how did we come here? My chauffeur told us that this was an hotel—your man assured me, when I asked, that it was an hotel, a sort of hotel. And now it seems that we are in a private house. Moreover, we seem to have been expected. And then again—if you will forgive me—it appears to be an unusual kind of house. I tell you frankly that I don't understand it.

LATIMER. I see your difficulty, Leonard.

LEONARD (*stiffly*). Nor am I accustomed to being called Leonard by a perfect stranger.

LATIMER. What you are saying for yourself is, “Who is this man Latimer? Is he *known*? Is he in the Stud Book?—I mean Debrett. Is he perhaps one of the Hammersmith Latimers, or does he belong to the Ealing Branch?”

ANNE (*calmly eating*). What does it matter?

LATIMER. Yes, but then *you* like the fish. Leonard doesn't.

LEONARD. I have no fault to find with the fish. You have an excellent cook.

LATIMER (*gravely bowing*). I beg your pardon, I thank you. (*DOMINIC comes in.*) His lordship likes the fish.

DOMINIC. Thank you, sir. I will inform the cook.

[He goes out.]

ANNE. When you are giving us your tiresome explanations after supper, Mr. Latimer, I wish you would just add one more to them.

LATIMER. But of course!

ANNE. Your Mr. Dominic's appearances are so apt. How is it done?

LATIMER *(pulling down his cuff)*. Yes, I'll make a note of that. *(He writes on it)* Dominic—Apt appearance of.

DOMINIC reappears.

LATIMER. Admit the bird, Dominic.

[DOMINIC goes out.]

LEONARD *(rising stiffly)*. I'm afraid we shall have to be getting on now, Mr. Latimer.... Anne, dear.... We are much obliged for your hospitality, but—er—I imagine we are not far from Dover——

LATIMER. On the Dover Road, certainly.

LEONARD. Exactly. So if you would—er—have instructions given to my chauffeur—er—— *(He hesitates as the Staff comes in.)*

LATIMER. Dominic, his lordship's glass is empty. He wishes to drink my health.

DOMINIC. I beg your pardon, my lord. *(The glass is filled.)*

LATIMER. And while he is up, just find his lordship a more comfortable chair. He has been a little uneasy on that one all through the fish.

DOMINIC. I beg your pardon, my lord. *(The chair is changed.)*

LATIMER (*rising with his glass and drinking to LEONARD*). Your happiness! (*He sits down, and LEONARD mechanically sits down too.*) Now for the bird. (*To ANNE*) I like these little ceremonies in between the courses. Don't you?

ANNE. I'm liking my supper.

LATIMER. I am so glad. (*As ANNE is helped*) I shot this bird myself. (*He looks at it through his glass*) What is it, Dominic?

DOMINIC. *Poulet en casserole* with mushrooms, sir.

LATIMER. *Poulet en casserole* with mushrooms. I shot the mushrooms.... A large help for his lordship, Dominic. (*To LEONARD*) Let me introduce your chicken to you, Leonard. One of the Buff-Orpingtons. I daresay you know the family. His mother was a Wyandotte. He was just about to contract an alliance with one of the Rock girls, the Plymouth Rocks, when the accident happened.

(*They are alone again now, plates and glasses well filled. LEONARD, who has been waiting impatiently for the Staff to go, pushes back his chair and gets up.*)

LATIMER. Dear me! Not a third chair, surely?

LEONARD. Now look here, Mr. Latimer, this farce has gone on long enough. I do not propose to sit through a whole meal without some further explanation. Either we have that explanation now, or else—Anne, dear—or else we'll be getting on our way.

LATIMER (*thoughtfully*). Ah, but which is your way?

LEONARD. Dover. My chauffeur seems to have got off the track a little, but if you can put us on to the Dover Road——

LATIMER (*to himself*). The Dover Road! The Dover Road! A dangerous road, my friends. And you're travelling in the dark.

LEONARD. Really, Mr. Latimer, that needn't frighten us.

ANNE (*putting her hand on his arm*). What do you mean?

LATIMER. A strange road, Anne, for *you*. A new, untravelled road.

LEONARD. Nonsense. She's often been this way before. Haven't you, dear?

ANNE (*shaking her head*). No.... But I'm not frightened, Mr. Latimer.

(*There is silence for a little. Then DOMINIC appears noiselessly.*)

LATIMER. Dominic, supper is over. His lordship loved the chicken—too well to eat it. He adored the mushrooms—in silence. Inform the cook.

DOMINIC. Yes, sir.

LATIMER (*offering his case to ANNE*). A cigarette?

ANNE. No, thank you.

LATIMER. You permit it?

ANNE. Of course.

LATIMER. Thank you.

DOMINIC (*to LEONARD*). Cigar, my lord?

LEONARD. Er—er—(*but they are good ones*)—thanks.

LATIMER. Well, shall we——?

(*They get up, and move into more comfortable chairs, LATIMER talking.*)

LATIMER. Which chair would you like, Anne? There? (*She sits down.*) That's right. Now then, Leonard, we want something especially comfortable for you. You are a little finicky about chairs, if

you don't mind my saying so.... What about *that* one? Just try it and see how you like it. (*LEONARD tries it, and sinks into it up to the neck.*) Yes, I think you will be happy there. And I shall sit here. Now everything is ready. (*They are alone again.*)

LEONARD (*with as much dignity as is possible from that sort of chair*). I am waiting, Mr. Latimer.

LATIMER. I am waiting, Leonard, for your questions.

ANNE. Let me begin with one. (*He turns to her.*) Your table was laid for three. For whom were the other two places intended?

LATIMER. For yourself and Leonard.

ANNE. You expected us?

LATIMER. Yes.

ANNE. How did you know we were coming?

LATIMER. Saunders had his instructions to bring you.

LEONARD (*starting up from his chair—or trying to*). Saunders! My chauffeur! Do you mean to say——

LATIMER. Let me help you up, Leonard. You have the wrong chair again. It is difficult to be properly indignant in that one. (*He helps him into a sitting position*) That's better. You were saying——

LEONARD. You mean to tell me that you had the audacity to bribe my chauffeur?

LATIMER. No, no, Leonard. What I mean is that *you* had the foolhardiness to bribe my friend Saunders to be your chauffeur.

LEONARD. Upon my word——

ANNE. Who is Saunders?

LATIMER. Saunders? He's Joseph's brother. Joseph was the gentleman in orange. He helped you to fish.

LEONARD (*out of the chair at last*). How dare you interfere in my concerns in this way, sir!

ANNE. Before you explain how you dare, Mr. Latimer, I should like to know *why* you are so interested in us. Who are you?

LATIMER. No more than Mr. Latimer. It is a purely impersonal interest which I take—and I take it just because you are going the Dover Road, my dear, and it is a dangerous road for a young girl to travel.

ANNE (*very cool, very proud*). I don't think I asked you to be interested in me.

LATIMER. Nobody does, my dear. But I am. Very interested. In all my fellow-travellers. It is my hobby.

LEONARD. Anne! (*He means, "Let's get out of this." He makes a movement to the front door.*)

LATIMER. The door is locked, Leonard.

LEONARD (*bending over him and putting his face very close to LATIMER'S*). Ah! Then I will give you one minute in which to open it.

DOMINIC has come in.

LATIMER. Dominic, his lordship's face is just a little too close to mine. Could you—thank you! (*LEONARD has started back on noticing DOMINIC.*) Coffee? Excellent. (*The Footmen are there with coffee.*)

ANNE. No, thank you.

LEONARD. No, thanks. (*He sits on another chair.*)

LATIMER. No, thank you. By the way, Dominic, did you go round to the Hospital this afternoon?

DOMINIC. Yes, sir. The young gentleman is getting on nicely. He was able to take a little bread-and-milk this morning.

LATIMER. Ah, I'm glad. Nothing solid yet?

DOMINIC. No, sir. The jaw is still very tender.

[He goes out.]

LATIMER *(to LEONARD)*. He bumped it against my knuckles last week. An impetuous young fellow. He was running away with—dear me, I forget her name—I always forget names. I think he called her Pussy. She had several children. *(Unconsciously he has shot his cuff, and sees suddenly the note he has made)* What's this? “Dominic—Apt appearance of.” Ah, yes. *(He turns to ANNE)* It's very simple. A little fad of mine. There are bells everywhere in this room—in every chair, on the table, in the floor; wherever I am, I can press a bell for Dominic. He is always close at hand on reception-evenings. Yes.

ANNE. That was a little warning which you were giving us just now?

LATIMER *(apologetically)*. Yes. I thought it better. Leonard is so impetuous. Joseph and Jacob were both amateur champions in their day. Dominic is a very heavy fall-er. He never has to fall on a man twice. If all this is quite understood at the beginning, it makes it so much easier.

ANNE *(getting up)*. Mr. Latimer, I assure you that this is not a sudden freak of fancy, and that I know my own mind. I ask you, as a gentleman, to open the door.

LATIMER *(shaking his head)*. I am afraid it is impossible, Anne. *(She shrugs her shoulders and sits down.)*

LEONARD *(calm for the moment)*. So we are kept here by force?

LATIMER. Need we insist upon it? Let us rather say that you have postponed your visit to France in order to spend a few days with a friend.

LEONARD. I prefer to say force.

LATIMER (*with a bow*). I do not dictate your words to you. Your movements for the moment, yes. So let us say “force.”

LEONARD. We are prisoners, in fact?

LATIMER. Within the limits of my house.

LEONARD. And if my—my wife chooses to walk out of your front door to-morrow morning, your—your fellow-conspirators would lay hands on her and stop her?

LATIMER. My dear Leonard, why should your—your wife want to walk out of the front door to-morrow? What would she want to do in the garden in November? Do be reasonable.

LEONARD. Suppose she wished to walk to the nearest police-station?

LATIMER (*to ANNE*). Do you?

ANNE (*with a smile*). Could I?

LATIMER. If you stood on Leonard’s shoulders you might just reach the top of the wall.... Dominic tells me that they have lost the key of the gates. Very careless of them.

LEONARD. Well, I’m—— It’s monstrous!

ANNE. Yes, but we can’t keep on saying that. Here we are apparently, and here we have to stay. But I still want to know very much *why* Mr. Latimer has this great desire for our company.

LEONARD. You have the advantage of me now, sir, but you will not always have it. The time will come when I shall demand satisfaction for this insult.

LATIMER (*with an air—rising and bowing*). My lord! Letters addressed to me at the Charing Cross Post Office will always be forwarded!

LEONARD (*slightly upset*). This gross insult to myself and—er—my wife.

LATIMER. No, no, not your wife.

LEONARD. How dare you!

LATIMER (*in alarm*). Surely I haven't made a mistake. (*To ANNE*) You and he are running away together, aren't you?

LEONARD (*a step nearer*). Look here, sir——

ANNE. Oh, Leonard, what's the good? We aren't ashamed of it, are we? Yes, Mr. Latimer, we are running away together.

LATIMER. Of course! Why not? Leonard, *you* aren't ashamed of it, are you?

LEONARD. I object to this interference in my private affairs by a—
—

LATIMER. Yes, yes, but you've said all that. It's interfering of me, damnably interfering. But I am doing it because I want you both to be happy.

LEONARD. I can look after my own happiness.

LATIMER. *And* this lady's?

LEONARD. She is good enough to believe it.

ANNE. I am not a child. Do you think I haven't thought? The scandal, the good name I am going to lose, the position of that other woman, I have thought of all these things.

LATIMER. There is one thing of which you haven't thought, Anne.

ANNE (*how young she is*). I am afraid you are old-fashioned. You are going to talk to me of morality.

LATIMER (*smiling*). Oh no, I wasn't.

ANNE (*not heeding him*). Living alone here, a bachelor, within these high walls which keep the world out, you believe what the fairy-books tell us, that once two people are married they live happy ever after.

LATIMER. Oh, no, I don't.

ANNE. I am the wicked woman, coming between the happy husband and wife, breaking up the happy home. Is that it, Mr. Latimer?

LEONARD. Rubbish! The happy home! Why, this is my first real chance of happiness.

LATIMER. His first real chance of happiness! As he said when he proposed to Eustasia.

LEONARD (*upset*). What's that?

LATIMER (*to ANNE*). May I ask *you* some questions now?

ANNE. Yes?

LATIMER. Eustasia will divorce him?

LEONARD. We shall not defend the suit.

LATIMER. And then you will marry Anne?

LEONARD. Another insult. I shall not forget it.

LATIMER. I beg your pardon. I simply wanted an answer.

ANNE. He will marry me.

LATIMER. I see. And then, as the fairy-books tell us, you will live happy ever after? (*ANNE is silent.*)

LEONARD. I need hardly say that I shall do my best to——

LATIMER (*to ANNE*). And then, as the fairy-books tell us, you will live happy ever after? (*ANNE is silent.*) I live within my high walls which keep the world out; I am old-fashioned, Anne. You are modern, you know the world. You don't believe the fairy-books, and yet—you are going to live happy ever after?

LEONARD. I don't see what you're driving at.

LATIMER. Anne does.

ANNE (*raising her eyes to his*). I take the risk, Mr. Latimer.

LATIMER. But a big risk.... Oh, believe me, I am not so much out of the world as you think. Should I have known all about you, should I have brought you here, if I were? I know the world; I know the risks of marriage. Marriage is an art—well, it's a profession in itself. (*Sharply*) And what are you doing? Marrying a man whose only qualification for the profession is that he has tried it once, and made a damned hash of it.

LEONARD. Well, really, sir!

LATIMER. Isn't it true?

LEONARD. Well—er—I admit my marriage has not been a happy one, but I venture to say—well, I don't wish to say anything against Eustasia——

LATIMER. Go on. Life is too short for us to be gentlemen all the time.

LEONARD (*explosively*). Well, then, I say that not even St. Michael and all his angels could have made a success of it. I mean, not even St. Michael.

LATIMER. Yet you chose her.

LEONARD. Er—well—— (*But he has nothing to say.*)

LATIMER (*after a pause*). Miss Anne, I am not being moral. You see, I am a very rich man, and we know on good authority that it is difficult for a very rich man to be a very good man. But being a very rich man I try to spend my money so that it makes somebody else happy besides myself. It's the only happy way of spending money, isn't it? And it's my hobby to prevent people—to try if I can prevent people—making unhappy marriages.... It's wonderful what power money gives you. Nobody realises it, because nobody ever spends it save in the obvious ways.... You may say that I should have prevented Leonard from marrying Eustasia in the first place. I have done that sometimes. I have asked two young people here—oh, properly chaperoned—and guests, not prisoners as you are—two young people who thought that they were in love, and I have tried to show each to the other in the most unromantic light.... Sometimes the engagement has been broken off. Sometimes they have married and—lived happy ever after.... But mostly it is my hobby to concentrate on those second marriages into which people plunge—with no parents now to restrain them—so much more hastily even than they plunge into their first adventure. Yet how much more carefully they should be considered, seeing that one at least of the parties has already proved his utter ignorance of the art of marriage.... And so, my dear friends, when I hear—and a rich man has many means of hearing—when I hear that two people are taking the Dover Road, as you were taking it to-night, I venture to stop them, and say, in the words of the fairy-book, “Are you *sure* you are going to live happy ever after?”

LEONARD. Your intentions may be good, but I can only repeat that your interference is utterly unwarranted, and you are entirely mistaken as to the power and authority which your money gives you.

LATIMER. Authority, none. But power? (*He laughs*) Why, my dear Leonard, if I offered you a hundred thousand pounds to go back to your wife to-night, this lady would never see you again.

LEONARD. Well, of all the damnable things to say——

LATIMER. How damnable the truth is! Think it over to-night, Leonard. You are a poor man for your position—think of all the things you could do with a hundred thousand pounds. Turn it over in your mind—and then over and over again. A hundred thousand pounds.

(For a moment it seems as if LEONARD is beginning to turn it, but ANNE interrupts.)

ANNE *(scornfully)*. Is this part of the treatment? Am I being shown my lover when he is mercenary?

LATIMER *(with a laugh)*. Oh no! If that were part of my treatment, there would be no marriages at all. Oh no, it isn't a genuine offer. *(To LEONARD)* It's off, Leonard. You needn't think it out any more. *(LEONARD wakes up suddenly, a poor man.)* Besides, you misunderstand me. I don't want to separate you by force—I have no right to.

ANNE. But how modest suddenly!

LATIMER *(with a bow and a smile)*. Madam, I admire your spirit.

ANNE. Leonard, I am receiving the attentions of another man. Beware of jealousy.... All part of the treatment, Mr. Latimer?

LATIMER. You're splendid. *(Seriously)* But I meant what I said just now. I am not preventing you from going the Dover Road, I am only asking you to wait a few days and see how you get on. It may be that you two are the perfect soul-mates; that your union has already been decreed in Heaven and will be watched over by the angels. If so, nobody will rejoice in your happiness more than I. I shall not say, "You have no right to be happy together. Leonard must remain with his lawfully-wedded Eustasia." Believe me, I do not waste my money, my time, my breath in upholding the sanctity of an unhappy marriage. I was brought up in the sanctity of an unhappy marriage; even as a child I knew all about it. *(Less seriously)* But oh, my dear Anne, let us have a little common sense before we adventure marriage with a man who is always making a mess of it. We know what Leonard is—how perfectly hopeless as a husband.

ANNE. I don't think that is quite fair.

LATIMER. Well, as far as we can tell. You've never made a happy marriage yet, have you, Leonard?

LEONARD (*sulkily*). I don't want to say anything against Eustasia—
—

LATIMER. Good God, man, aren't you shouting it all the time? Why else are you here? But don't try to pretend that it's all Eustasia's fault.

LEONARD (*doubtfully*). Well——

LATIMER. Or that it will be all Anne's fault *next* year.

LEONARD. What do you mean, next year?

LATIMER. I beg your pardon. I should have said the year after next.
(*There is a little silence.*)

ANNE (*getting up*). I think I will go to bed. How long do you want us to wait?

LATIMER. Can you spare a week? You with so many years in front of you.

ANNE (*deciding that the moment has come to put MR. LATIMER in his place*). I have a father. I left him a note to say what I was doing. We don't see much of each other, but I thought it polite.
(*Triumphantly*) Does *that* interfere with your plans at all?

LATIMER (*smiling*). Not at all. There was a little mistake about the delivery of that note. Your father is under the impression that you are staying with friends—in Kent.... A great power, money.

ANNE (*deciding, with dignity, that the moment has not come*). I congratulate you on the perfection of your methods. Good night.

(*DOMINIC is in the room.*)

LATIMER. Her ladyship will retire.

DOMINIC. Yes, sir.

[He goes out.]

LATIMER. Good night, Miss Anne.

ANNE (*holding out her hand suddenly*). Without prejudice.

LATIMER (*bending over it gallantly*). Ah, but you are prejudicing me entirely.

A MAID comes in.

MAID. This way, my lady.

(She leads the way to a door on the right, and ANNE follows her.)

LATIMER (*pleasantly, to LEONARD*). And did *you* leave a note for *your* father, Leonard?

LEONARD. You ought to know. You appear to have your conspirators everywhere. Saunders—and, I suppose, Anne's maid—and God knows who else.

LATIMER. Money, Leonard, money. A pity you refused that hundred thousand pounds. You could have bribed the Archbishop of Canterbury to curse me.... Well, a week here won't do either of you any harm. Have a whisky and soda?

LEONARD. I am not at all sure that I ought to drink in your house.

LATIMER. You will be thirsty before you go.

LEONARD (*hesitating*). Well——

(A Footman appears with the whisky.)

LATIMER. That's right. Help yourself, won't you?

LEONARD (*helping himself*). Please understand that I do this, as I do everything else in your house, under protest.

LATIMER (*shooting his cuff and taking out his pencil*). Your protest is noted.

LEONARD (*returning to the too comfortable chair*). As I have already said, your conduct is perfectly outrageous. (*He sinks into its depths.*)

LATIMER. And as I have already said, you can't do moral indignation from that chair. Remember what happened to you last time.

LEONARD. Perfectly outrageous. (*He drinks.*)

LATIMER. Have another cigar?

LEONARD. I shall go to bed as soon as I have drunk this. (*He drinks.*)

LATIMER. You wouldn't care for a game of billiards first?

LEONARD. I am not in the mood for billiards.

LATIMER. By the way, we have another runaway couple here. But their week of probation is just over. They expect to leave to-morrow.

LEONARD. I am not interested in your earlier crimes.

LATIMER. I think you would be interested in *this* couple, Leonard.

LEONARD. I assure you I am not.

LATIMER. Ah! (*Picking up a review and settling himself*) Very good article this month by Sidney Webb. You ought to read it.

LEONARD. I am not interested in Sidney Webb.

LATIMER. Breakfast is at ten o'clock. In here.

LEONARD (*struggling out of his chair*). I shall eat it under protest.

LATIMER. You're off? Then I'll say good night.

(*DOMINIC and the two Footmen, JOSEPH and JACOB, have come in.*)

LEONARD (*stiffly*). Good night.

(*He walks up to the door on the right. JACOB is in front of it. LEONARD is pulled up at sight of him. DOMINIC indicates the door on the left.*)

DOMINIC. *This way, my lord.*

LEONARD. Er—er—thank you.

(*He goes out, followed by JOSEPH.... MR. LATIMER is alone with Sidney Webb.*)

ACT II

It is next morning. EUSTASIA, LEONARD'S wife (who should be sitting patiently at home wondering when he will return), is having breakfast with a harmless young man called NICHOLAS. She is what people who talk like that call a "nice little thing," near enough to thirty-five to begin to wish it were twenty-five. At present she is making a good deal of fuss over this dear boy NICHOLAS. Breakfast is practically over. NICHOLAS, in fact, is wiping his mouth.

* * * * *

EUSTASIA. Finished, darling?

NICHOLAS. Yes, thank you, Eustasia.

EUSTASIA. A little more toast?

NICHOLAS. No, thank you, Eustasia.

EUSTASIA. Just a little tiny teeny-weeny bit, if his Eustasia butters it for him?

NICHOLAS. No, thank you. I've really finished.

EUSTASIA. Another cup of coffee?

NICHOLAS (*with a sigh*). No, thank you, Eustasia.

EUSTASIA. Just a little bit of a cup if his Eustasia pours it out for her own Nicholas, and puts the sugar in with her own ickle fingers?

NICHOLAS. No more coffee, thank you.

EUSTASIA. Then he shall sit in a more comfy chair while he smokes his nasty, horrid pipe, which he loves so much better than his Eustasia. (*He gets up without saying anything.*) He doesn't really love it better?

NICHOLAS (*laughing uneasily*). Of course he doesn't.

EUSTASIA. Kiss her to show that he doesn't.

NICHOLAS (*doing it gingerly*). You baby!

EUSTASIA. And now give me your pipe. (*He gives it to her reluctantly. She kisses it and gives it back to him.*) There! And she doesn't really think it's a nasty, horrid pipe, and she's ever so sorry she said so.... Oh! (*She sees a dish of apples suddenly.*)

NICHOLAS. What is it?

EUSTASIA. Nicholas never had an apple!

NICHOLAS. Oh no, thanks, I don't want one.

EUSTASIA. Oh, but he must have an apple! It's so good for him. An apple a day keeps the doctor away. You *must* keep the doctor away, darling, else poor Eustasia will be miserable.

NICHOLAS (*with an effort*). I've finished my breakfast.

EUSTASIA. Not even if his Eustasia peels it for him?

NICHOLAS. No, thank you. I assure you that I have had all I want.

EUSTASIA. Sure?

NICHOLAS. Quite sure, thank you. Where are you going to sit?

EUSTASIA (*indicating the sofa*). Nicholas sit there and Eustasia sit next to him.

NICHOLAS (*without much enthusiasm*). Right. (*They sit down.*)

EUSTASIA. Shall Eustasia fill his pipe for him? (*She takes it.*)

NICHOLAS (*taking it back*). No, thank you. It is filled. (*They are silent for a little, and at last he speaks uncomfortably*) Er—Eustasia.

EUSTASIA. Yes, darling.

NICHOLAS. We've been here a week.

EUSTASIA. Yes, darling. A wonderful, wonderful week. And now to-day we leave this dear house where we have been so happy together, and go out into the world together——

NICHOLAS (*who has not been listening to her*). A week. Except for the first day, we have had all our meals alone together.

EUSTASIA (*sentimentally*). Alone, Nicholas.

NICHOLAS. Four meals a day—that's twenty-four meals.

EUSTASIA. Twenty-four!

NICHOLAS. And at every one of those meals you have asked me at least four times to have something more, when I had already said that I didn't want anything more; or, in other words, you have forced me to say "No, thank you, Eustasia," ninety-six times when there was absolutely no need for it.

EUSTASIA (*hurt*). Nicholas!

NICHOLAS (*inexorably*). We are both young. I am twenty-six, you are——

EUSTASIA (*hopefully*). Twenty-five.

NICHOLAS (*looking at her quickly and then away again*). You are twenty-five. If all goes well, we may look to have fifty years more together. Say two thousand five hundred weeks. Multiply that by a hundred, and we see that in the course of our joint lives you will, at the present rate, force me to say "No, thank you, Eustasia," two hundred and fifty thousand times more than is necessary. (*He relights his pipe.*)

EUSTASIA (*pathetically*). Nicholas! (*She applies her handkerchief.*)

NICHOLAS. I wondered if we couldn't come to some arrangement about it. That's all.

EUSTASIA. You're cruel! Cruel! (*She sobs piteously.*)

NICHOLAS (*doggedly*). I just wondered if we couldn't come to some arrangement.

EUSTASIA (*completely overcome*). Oh! Oh! Nicholas! My darling!

(*NICHOLAS, his hands clenched, looks grimly in front of him. He winces now and then at her sobs. He tries desperately hard not to give way, but in the end they are too much for him.*)

NICHOLAS (*putting his arms round her*). Darling! Don't! (*She goes on sobbing.*) There! There! I'm sorry. Nicholas is sorry. I oughtn't to have said it. Forgive me, darling.

EUSTASIA (*between sobs*). It's only because I love you so much, and w-want you to be well. And you m-must eat.

NICHOLAS. Yes, yes, Eustasia, I know. It is dear of you.

EUSTASIA. Ask any d-doctor. He would say you m-must eat.

NICHOLAS. Yes, darling.

EUSTASIA. You m-must eat.

NICHOLAS (*resignedly*). Yes, darling.

EUSTASIA (*sitting up and wiping her eyes*). What's a wife for, if it isn't to look after her husband when he's ill, and to see that he eats?

NICHOLAS. All right, dear, we won't say anything more about it.

EUSTASIA. And when you had that horrid cold and were so ill, the first day after we came here, I did look after you, didn't I, Nicholas, and take care of you and make you well again?

NICHOLAS. You did, dear. Don't think I am not grateful. You were very kind. (*Winching at the recollection*) Too kind.

EUSTASIA. Not too kind, darling. I love looking after you, and doing things for you, and taking care of you, and cossetting you. (*Thoughtfully to herself*) Leonard was *never* ill.

NICHOLAS. Leonard?

EUSTASIA. My husband.

NICHOLAS. Oh!... I'd never thought of him as Leonard. I prefer not to think about him. I've never seen him, and I don't want to talk about him.

EUSTASIA. No, darling. *I don't want to either.*

NICHOLAS. We've taken the plunge and—(*bravely*) and we're not going back on it.

EUSTASIA (*surprised*). Darling!

NICHOLAS. As a man of honour I—— Besides, you can't go back now—I mean I took you away, and—— Well, here we are. (*With determination*) Here we are.

EUSTASIA. Darling, you aren't regretting?

NICHOLAS (*hastily*). No, no! (*She takes out her handkerchief ominously.*) No, no, no! (*She begins to sob.*) No! No! (*He is almost shouting.*) Eustasia, listen! I love you! I'm *not* regretting! I've *never* been so happy! (*She is sobbing tumultuously.*) So happy, Eustasia! I have never, never been so happy! *Can't* you hear?

EUSTASIA (*throwing herself into his arms*). Darling!

NICHOLAS. There, there!

EUSTASIA (*drying her eyes*). Oh, Nicholas, you frightened me so! Just for a moment I was afraid you were regretting.

NICHOLAS. No, no!

EUSTASIA. How right Mr. Latimer was!

NICHOLAS (*with conviction*). He was indeed.

EUSTASIA. How little we really knew of each other when you asked me to come away with you!

NICHOLAS. How little!

EUSTASIA. But this week has shown us to each other as we really are.

NICHOLAS. It has.

EUSTASIA. And now I feel absolutely safe. We are ready to face the world together, Nicholas. (*She sighs and leans back happily in his arms.*)

NICHOLAS. Ready to face the world together.

(He has his pipe in his right hand, which is round her waist. Her eyes are closed, her left hand, encircling his neck, holds his left hand. He tries to bend his head down so as to get hold of his pipe with his teeth. Several times he tries and just misses it. Each time he pulls her a little closer to him, and she sighs happily. At last he gets hold of it. He leans back with a gasp of relief.)

EUSTASIA (*still with her eyes closed*). What is it, darling?

NICHOLAS. Nothing, Eustasia, nothing. Just happiness.

(But they are not to be alone with it for long, for MR. LATIMER comes in.)

LATIMER. Good morning, my friends, good morning.

(They move apart and NICHOLAS jumps up.)

NICHOLAS. Oh, good morning.

EUSTASIA. Good morning.

LATIMER. So you are leaving me this morning and going on your way?

NICHOLAS (*without enthusiasm*). Yes.

EUSTASIA. But we shall never forget this week, dear Mr. Latimer.

LATIMER. You have forgiven me for asking you to wait a little so as to make sure?

EUSTASIA. Oh, but you were so right! I was just saying so to Nicholas. Wasn't I, Nicholas?

NICHOLAS. Yes. About a minute ago. About two minutes ago.

LATIMER. And so now you are sure of yourselves?

EUSTASIA. Oh, so sure, so very sure. Aren't we, Nicholas?

NICHOLAS. Absolutely sure.

LATIMER. That's right. (*Looking at his watch*) Well, I don't want to hurry you, but if you have any little things to do, the car will be here in half an hour, and——

EUSTASIA. Half an hour? Oh, I must fly. (*She begins.*)

NICHOLAS (*not moving*). Yes, we must fly.

LATIMER (*going to the door with EUSTASIA*). By the way, you will be interested to hear that I had two other visitors last night.

EUSTASIA (*stopping excitedly*). Mr. Latimer! You don't mean another—couple?

LATIMER. Yes, another romantic couple.

EUSTASIA. Oh, if I could but see them before we go! Just for a moment! Just to reconcile them to this week of probation! To tell them what a wonderful week it can be!

LATIMER. You shall. I promise you that you shall.

EUSTASIA. Oh, thank you, dear Mr. Latimer!

(*He goes to the door with her. As he comes back, NICHOLAS is coming slowly towards him.*)

NICHOLAS. I say?

LATIMER. Yes?

NICHOLAS (*thoughtfully*). I say, what would *you*—I mean—supposing—— Because you see—I mean, it isn't as if—— Of course, *now*—— (*He looks at his watch and finishes up sadly*) Half an hour. Well, I suppose I must be getting ready. (*He goes towards the door.*)

LATIMER (*as he gets there*). Er—Nicholas.

NICHOLAS. Yes?

LATIMER. Just a moment.

NICHOLAS (*coming back to him*). Yes?

(*LATIMER takes him by the arm, and looks round the room to see that they are alone.*)

LATIMER (*in a loud whisper*). Cheer up!

NICHOLAS (*excitedly*). What?

(*LATIMER has let go of his arm and moved away, humming casually to himself. The light dies out of NICHOLAS' eyes, and he shrugs his shoulders despairingly.*)

NICHOLAS (*without any hope*). Well, I'll go and get ready.

[*He goes out.*

(*DOMINIC comes in and begins to rearrange the breakfast-table.*)

LATIMER. Ah, good morning, Dominic.

DOMINIC. Good morning, sir. A nicish morning it seems to be, sir.

LATIMER. A very nicish morning. I have great hopes of the world to-day.

DOMINIC. I am very glad to hear it, sir.

LATIMER. We must all do what we can, Dominic.

DOMINIC. That's the only way, isn't it, sir?

LATIMER. Great hopes, great hopes.

DOMINIC (*handing him "The Times"*). The paper, sir.

LATIMER. Thank you. (*He looks at the front page*). Any one married this morning? Dear me, quite a lot. One, two, three, four ... ten. Ten! Twenty happy people, Dominic!

DOMINIC. Let us hope so, sir.

LATIMER. Let us hope so.... By the way, how was his lordship this morning?

DOMINIC. A little depressed, sir.

LATIMER. Ah!

DOMINIC. There seems to have been some misunderstanding about his luggage. A little carelessness on the part of somebody, I imagine, sir.

LATIMER. Dear me! Didn't it come with him?

DOMINIC. I'm afraid not, sir.

LATIMER. Tut, tut, how careless of somebody. Can't we lend him anything?

DOMINIC. Joseph offered to lend him a comb, sir—his own comb—a birthday present last year, Joseph tells me. His lordship decided not to avail himself of the offer.

LATIMER. Very generous of Joseph, seeing that it was a birthday present.

DOMINIC. Yes, sir. Unfortunately Joseph had come down to the last blade of his safety razor this morning. His lordship is rather upset about the whole business, sir.

LATIMER. Well, well, I daresay a little breakfast will do him good.

DOMINIC. Yes, sir. Are you ready for breakfast now, sir?

(ANNE comes in. All this is rather fun. She is not so sure of LEONARD now, but LEONARD doesn't matter. Dover is a long way off. Meanwhile this is fun. The jolly house, the excitement of not knowing what will happen next; and MR. LATIMER—to be put in his place.)

LATIMER *(getting up and going to her)*. Good morning, Anne. May I hope that you slept well?

ANNE. Very well, thank you.

LATIMER. I am so glad.... All right, Dominic.

DOMINIC. Thank you, sir.

[He goes out.]

LATIMER. You are ready for breakfast?

ANNE. Quite ready. But what about Leonard?

LATIMER. Leonard?

ANNE. I made sure that I was to have a practice breakfast with Leonard this morning. I have been thinking of a few things to say up in my room.

LATIMER *(smiling)*. Say them to me instead.

ANNE. They are very wifely. *(She sits down.)*

LATIMER. But think what good practice.

ANNE. Very well. (*At the cups*) Tea or coffee, darling?

LATIMER. Oh no, that will never do. You know by now that I always have coffee—half milk and three lumps of sugar.

ANNE. Of course, how silly of me. (*She pours out the coffee.*)

LATIMER (*taking the covers off the dishes*). Omelette—fish—kidney and bacon?

ANNE. Now *you're* forgetting.

LATIMER (*putting back the covers*). No, I'm remembering. Toast and marmalade—isn't that right?

ANNE. Quite right, dear.

LATIMER (*to himself*). I knew she would like marmalade. No wonder that Leonard ran away with her. (*He puts the toast and marmalade close to her.*)

ANNE. Your coffee, darling.

LATIMER. Thank you, my love.... "My love" is very connubial, I think.

ANNE. Delightfully so. Do go on.

LATIMER. Er—I am sorry to see in the paper this morning—which I glanced at, my precious, before you came down—— How do you like "My precious"?

ANNE. Wonderfully life-like. Are you sure you haven't been married before?

LATIMER. Only once. Eustasia. You had not forgotten, Eustasia?

ANNE. I am afraid I had. In fact, I had forgotten for the moment that you were being Leonard.

LATIMER (*bowing*). Thank you. I could wish no better compliment.

ANNE (*laughing in spite of herself*). Oh, you're too absurd.

LATIMER (*in LEONARD'S manner*). Of course I don't wish to say anything against Eustasia——

ANNE. My dear Leonard, I really think we might leave your first wife out of it.

LATIMER. Yes, you want to get that off pat. You'll have to say that a good deal, I expect. Well, to resume. I am sorry to see in the paper this morning that Beelzebub, upon whom I laid my shirt for the 2.30 race at Newmarket yesterday—and incidentally your shirt too, darling—came in last, some five minutes after the others had finished the course.... Tut, tut, how annoying!

ANNE. Oh, my poor darling!

LATIMER. The word “poor” is well chosen. We are ruined. I shall have to work.

ANNE. You know what I *want* you to do, Leonard?

LATIMER. No, I have forgotten.

ANNE (*seriously*). I should like to see you in the House of Lords, taking your rightful place as a leader of men, making great speeches.

LATIMER. My dear Anne! I may be a peer, but I am not a dashed politician.

ANNE (*wistfully*). I wish you were, Leonard.

LATIMER. I will be anything you like, Anne. (*He leans towards her, half-serious, half-mocking.*)

ANNE (*with a little laugh*). How absurd you are! Some more coffee?

LATIMER (*passing his cup*). To which I answer, “A little more milk.” Do you realise that this goes on for fifty years?

ANNE. Well, and why not?

LATIMER. Fifty years. A solemn thought. But do not let it mar our pleasure in the meal that we are having together now. Let us continue to talk gaily together. Tell me of any interesting dream you may have had last night—any little adventure that befell you in the bath—any bright thought that occurred to you as you were dressing.

ANNE (*thoughtfully*). I had a very odd dream last night.

LATIMER. I am longing to hear it, my love.

ANNE. I dreamt that you and I were running away together, Leonard, and that we lost our way and came to what we thought was an hotel. But it was not an hotel. It was a very mysterious house, kept by a very mysterious man called Mr. Latimer.

LATIMER. How very odd. Latimer? Latimer? No, I don't seem to have heard of the fellow.

ANNE. He told us that we were his prisoners. That we must stay in his house a week before we went on our way again. That all the doors were locked, and there were high walls round the garden, that the gates from the garden were locked, so that we could not escape, and that we must wait a week together in his house to see if we were really suited to each other.

LATIMER. My dear, what an extraordinary dream!

ANNE. It *was* only a dream, wasn't it?

LATIMER. Of course! What is there mysterious about this house? What is there mysterious about this—er—Mr. Latimer? And as for any one being kept prisoner—here—in this respectable England—why!

ANNE. It is absurd, isn't it?

LATIMER. Quite ridiculous.

ANNE (*getting up—now she will show him*). I thought it was. (*She goes to the front door and turns the handle. To her surprise the door opens. But MR. LATIMER mustn't know that she is surprised.*) You see, I thought it was! (*She steps out into the garden.*) You see, the gates are open too! (*She comes back.*) What an absurd dream to have had! (*She sits down again.*)

LATIMER. There's no accounting for dreams. I had an absurd one too last night.

ANNE. What was it?

LATIMER. A lonely house. Father and daughter living together. Father old, selfish, absorbed in his work. Daughter left to herself; her only companion, books; knowing nothing of the world. A man comes into her life—the first. He makes much of her. It is a new experience for the daughter. She is grateful to him, so grateful, so very proud that she means anything to him. He tells her when it is too late that he is married; talks of an impossible wife; tells her that she is his real mate. Let her come with him and see something of the world which she has never known. She comes.... Dear me, what silly things one dreams!

ANNE. Absurd things.... (*So he knows! He knows all about it! But she will not be treated as a child. She will carry it off yet.*) When can we have the car? (*Now she is carrying it off.*)

LATIMER. The car?

ANNE. Leonard's car.

LATIMER. You wish to continue the adventure?

ANNE. Why not?

LATIMER. Dear, dear! What a pity! (*Looking at his watch.*) In twenty-five minutes?

ANNE. That will do nicely, thank you.

LATIMER. We must let Leonard have a little breakfast first, if he is to cross the Channel to-day. (*He gets up.*) In twenty-five minutes then.

ANNE (*half holding out her hand*). I shall see you again?

LATIMER (*bending over it*). If only to wish you Godspeed.

(She looks at him for a moment, and then turns and goes out. He picks up his paper and settles with it in an arm-chair, his back to the breakfast-table. LEONARD comes in. He is in a dirty, rather disreputable, once white, bath-gown. His hair is unbrushed, his cheeks—the cheeks of a dark man—unshaved and blue. He has a horrible pair of bedroom slippers on his feet, above which, not only his socks, but almost a hint of pantaloons, may be seen on the way to the dressing-gown. He comes in nervously, and is greatly relieved to find that the breakfast-table is empty. He does not notice MR. LATIMER. On his way to the table he stops at a mirror on the wall, and standing in front of it, tries to persuade himself that his chin is not so bad after all. Then he pours himself out some coffee, helps himself to a kipper and falls to ravenously.)

LATIMER. Ah, good morning, Leonard.

LEONARD (*starting violently and turning round*). Good Lord! I didn't know you were there.

LATIMER. You were so hungry.... I trust you slept well.

LEONARD. Slept well! Of all the damned draughty rooms—— Yes, and what about my luggage?

LATIMER (*surprised*). Your luggage?

LEONARD. Yes, never put on the car, your fellow, what's 'is name—— Joseph says.

LATIMER. Dear me, we must enquire into this. Lost your luggage? Dear me, that's a very unfortunate start for a honeymoon. That means bad luck, Leonard. (*DOMINIC comes in.*) Dominic, what's this about his lordship's luggage?

DOMINIC. Joseph tells me there must have been some misunderstanding about it, sir. A little carelessness on the part of somebody, I imagine, sir.

LATIMER. Dear me! Didn't it come with him?

DOMINIC. I'm afraid not, sir.

LATIMER. Tut, tut, how careless of somebody! Thank you, Dominic.

DOMINIC. Thank you, sir.

[*He goes out.*]

LATIMER. Lost your luggage. How excessively annoying! (*Anxiously*) My dear Leonard, what is it?

LEONARD (*whose face has been shaping for it for some seconds*) A-tish-oo!

LATIMER. At any rate I can find you a handkerchief. (*He does so. LEONARD takes it just in time, and sneezes violently again.*)

LEONARD. Thank you.

LATIMER. Not at all. That's a very nasty cold you've got. How wise of you to have kept on a dressing-gown.

LEONARD. The only thing I had to put on.

LATIMER. But surely you were travelling in a suit yesterday? I seem to remember a brown suit.

LEONARD. That fool of a man of yours——

LATIMER (*distressed*). You don't mean to tell me——(*DOMINIC comes in.*) Dominic, what's this about his lordship's brown suit?

DOMINIC. Owing to a regrettable misunderstanding, sir, his lordship's luggage——

LATIMER. Yes, but I'm not talking about his twenty-five other suits, I mean the nice brown suit that he was wearing yesterday. It must be somewhere. I remember noticing it. I remember—— (*He holds up his hand*) Just a moment, Dominic——

LEONARD. A-tish-oo!

LATIMER. I remember saying to myself, "What a nice brown suit Leonard is wearing." Well, where is it, Dominic?

DOMINIC. Yes, sir. I seem to remember the suit to which you are referring. I regret to say that Joseph had an unfortunate accident with it.

LEONARD (*growling*). Damned carelessness.

DOMINIC. Joseph was bringing back the clothes after brushing them, sir, and happened to have them in his arms while bending over the bath in order to test the temperature of the water for his lordship. A little surprised by the unexpected heat of the water, Joseph relinquished the clothes for a moment, and precipitated them into the bath.

LATIMER. Dear me, how extremely careless of Joseph!

DOMINIC. Yes, sir, I have already reprimanded him.

LEONARD. The fellow ought to be shot.

LATIMER. You're quite right, Leonard. Dominic, shoot Joseph this morning.

DOMINIC. Yes, sir.

LATIMER. And see that his lordship's suit is dried as soon as possible.

DOMINIC. Yes, sir. It is being dried now, sir.

LATIMER. But it must be dried thoroughly, Dominic. His lordship has a nasty cold, and——

LEONARD. A-tish-oo!

LATIMER. A very nasty one. I'm afraid you are subject to colds, Leonard?

LEONARD. The first one I've ever had in my life.

LATIMER. Do you hear that, Dominic? The first one he's ever had in his life.

DOMINIC. Yes, sir. If you remember, sir, Mr. Nicholas, and one or two other gentlemen who have slept there, caught a very nasty cold. Almost looks as if there must be something the matter with the room.

LEONARD. Damned draughtiest room——

LATIMER. Dear me! You should have told me of this before. We must have the room seen to at once. And be sure that his lordship has a different room to-night.

DOMINIC. Yes, sir; thank you, sir.

[He goes out.]

LATIMER (*sympathetically*). My dear fellow, I am distressed beyond words. But you know the saying, "Feed a cold, starve a fever." You must eat, you must eat. (*He pushes all the dishes round Leonard.*) We must be firm with this cold. We must suffocate it. (*Pressing more dishes upon him.*) You were quite right not to shave. The protection offered by the beard, though small, is salutary. But I was forgetting——perhaps your razor is lost too?

LEONARD. Damned careless fellows!

LATIMER. I must lend you mine.

LEONARD (*feeling his chin*). I say, I wish you would.

LATIMER. I will get it at once. Meanwhile, eat. No half measures with this cold of yours. My poor fellow!

(*He hurries out. Just as LEONARD is getting busy with his breakfast again, ANNE comes in.*)

ANNE. Leonard, my dear! (*She observes him more thoroughly*) My dear Leonard!

LEONARD (*his mouth full*). G'morning, Anne.

ANNE (*coldly*). Good morning.

LEONARD (*getting up, napkin in hand*). How are you this morning? (*He comes towards her, wiping his mouth.*)

ANNE. No, please go on with your breakfast. (*In alarm*) What is it?

(*His face assumes an agonized expression. He sneezes. ANNE shudders.*)

LEONARD. Got a nasty cold. Can't understand it. First I've ever had in my life.

ANNE. Do you sneeze like that much?

LEONARD. Off and on.

ANNE. Oh!... Hadn't you better get on with your breakfast?

LEONARD. Well, I will if you don't mind. Good thing for a cold, isn't it? Eat a lot.

ANNE. I really know very little about colds.... Do get on with your breakfast.

LEONARD (*going back*). Well, I will, if you don't mind. You had yours?

ANNE. Yes.

LEONARD. That's right. (*Resuming it*) Did you have one of these kippers?

ANNE. No.

LEONARD. Ah! A pity. I will say that for Latimer's cook. She knows how to do a kipper. Much more difficult than people think.

ANNE. I really know very little about kippers.

LEONARD. I have often wondered why somebody doesn't invent one without bones. (*He takes a mouthful.*) Seeing what science can do nowadays—— (*He stops. ANNE'S eye is on him. He says nothing, but waves his hand for her to look the other way.*)

ANNE. What is it? (*He frowns fiercely and continues to wave. She turns away coldly.*) I beg your pardon. (*He removes a mouthful of bones.*)

LEONARD (*cheerfully*). Right oh, darling.... After all, what do they *want* all these bones for? Other fish manage without them. (*He continues his kipper.*)

ANNE. Leonard, when you can spare me a moment I should like to speak to you.

LEONARD (*eating*). My darling, all my time is yours.

ANNE. I should like your undivided attention if I can have it.

LEONARD. Fire away, darling, I'm listening.

ANNE (*going up to him*). Have you finished your—kipper? (*She takes the plate away*) What are you going to have next?

LEONARD. Well—what do you recommend?

ANNE (*taking off a cover*). Omelette? I don't think it has any bones.

LEONARD. What's in that other dish? (*She takes off the cover.*) Kidneys? What are the kidneys like?

ANNE. Well, you can see what they *look* like.

LEONARD. Did you try one?

ANNE (*impatiently*). They're delightful, I tried several. (*She helps him*) There! Got the toast? Butter? Salt? What is it?

LEONARD. Pepper.

ANNE. Pepper—there. Now have you got everything?

LEONARD. Yes, thank you, my dear. (*He picks up his knife and fork.*)

ANNE (*putting them down again*). Then before you actually begin, I have something I want to say to you.

LEONARD. You're very mysterious. What is it?

ANNE. There is nothing mysterious about it at all. It's perfectly plain and obvious. Only I do want you to grasp it.

LEONARD. Well? (*He blows his nose. She waits for him to finish.*) Well? (*He is still flourishing his handkerchief. She waits patiently. He puts it back in his pocket.*) Well?

ANNE. The car will be here in a quarter of an hour.

LEONARD. The car?

ANNE. The automobile.

LEONARD. But whose?

ANNE. Ours. More accurately, yours.

LEONARD. But what for?

ANNE (*patiently*). We are running away together, dear. You and I. It had slipped your memory perhaps, but I assure you it is a fact. The car will take us to Dover, and the boat will take us to Calais, and the train will take us to the South of France. You and I, dear. When you've finished your breakfast.

LEONARD. But what about Latimer?

ANNE. Just you and I, dear. Two of us only. The usual number. We shall not take Mr. Latimer.

LEONARD. My dear Anne, you seem quite to have forgotten that this confounded fellow Latimer has got us prisoners here until he chooses to let us go. (*With dignity*) I have not forgotten. I eat his kidneys now, but he shall hear from me afterwards. Damned interference!

ANNE. Have you been dreaming, Leonard? *Before* all these kippers and kidneys and things?

LEONARD. Dreaming?

ANNE. The car will be here in a quarter of an hour. Why not? It is *your* car. This is England; this is the twentieth century. We missed the boat and spent the night here. We go on our way this morning. Why not?

LEONARD. Well, you know, I said last night it was perfectly ridiculous for Latimer to talk that way. I mean, what has it got to do with *him*? Just a bit of leg-pulling—that's what I felt all the time. Stupid joke. (*Picking up his knife and fork*) Bad taste too.

ANNE. You did hear what I said, didn't you? The car will be here in a quarter of an hour. I don't know how long it takes you to—(*she glances him over*) to shave, and—and dress properly, and—and brush your hair, but I fancy you ought to be thinking about it quite seriously. (*Kindly*) You can have some more kidneys another time.

LEONARD. B-but I can't possibly go like this.

ANNE. No, that's what I say.

LEONARD. I mean I haven't got any luggage for one thing—and, with a cold like this, I'm not at all sure——

ANNE. You've lost your luggage?

LEONARD. Apparently it was left behind by——

ANNE (*with anger*). You let yourself be tricked and humiliated by this Mr. Latimer, you let *me* be humiliated, and then when I say that, whatever happens, I won't be humiliated, you—you lose your luggage!

LEONARD. *I* didn't lose it. It just happens to *be* lost.

ANNE. And you catch a cold!

LEONARD. *I* didn't catch it. It caught *me*.

ANNE. The—the humiliation of it!... And what do you propose to do now?

LEONARD. As soon as my luggage turns up, and I am well enough to travel——

ANNE. Meanwhile you accept this man's hospitality——

LEONARD. Under protest. (*Helping himself from the dish.*) I shall keep a careful account of everything that we have here——

ANNE. Well, that's your third kidney; you'd better make a note of it.

LEONARD (*with dignity*). As it happens I was helping myself to a trifle more bacon.... As I say, I shall keep a careful account, and send him a cheque for our board and lodging as soon as we have left his roof.

ANNE. Oh!... I had some coffee and one slice of toast and a little marmalade. About a spoonful. And a cup of tea and two thin slices of bread and butter upstairs. Oh, and I've had two baths. They're extra, aren't they? A hot one last night and a cold one this morning. I think that's all. Except supper last night, and you wouldn't let me finish that, so I expect there'll be a reduction.... You want a note-book with one of those little pencils in it.

LEONARD (*reproachfully*). I say, Anne, look here——

ANNE. Do go on with your breakfast.

LEONARD. You're being awfully unfair. How can we possibly go now? Why, I haven't even got a pair of trousers to put on.

ANNE. You're not going to say you've lost those too!

LEONARD (*sulkily*). It's not my fault. That fellow—What's 'is name——

ANNE (*wonderingly*). What made you ever *think* that you could take anybody to the South of France? Without any practice at all?... Now, if you had been taking an aunt to Hammersmith—well, you might have lost a bus or two ... and your hat might have blown off ... and you would probably have found yourselves at Hampstead the first two or three times ... and your aunt would have stood up the whole way ... but still you might have got there eventually. I mean, it would be worth trying—if your aunt was very anxious to get to Hammersmith. But the South of France! My dear Leonard! It's so audacious of you.

LEONARD (*annoyed*). Now, look here, Anne——

(*MR. LATIMER comes in cheerily with shaving-pot, brush, safety-razor, and towel.*)

LATIMER. Now then, Leonard, we'll soon have you all right. (*He puts the things down.*) Ah, Anne! You don't mind waiting while Leonard has a shave? He wanted to grow a special beard for the Continent, but I persuaded him not to. The French accent will be quite enough. (*Picking up the razor*) Do you mind Wednesday's blade? I used Tuesday's myself this morning.

ANNE (*all sweetness in a moment*). Oh, Mr. Latimer, I find that we shall not want the car after all.

LATIMER. No?

ANNE. No. Poor Leonard is hardly well enough to travel. I hope that by to-morrow, perhaps—— But I am afraid that we must trespass on your hospitality until then. I am so sorry.

LATIMER. But I am charmed to have you. Let me tell your maid to unpack.

ANNE. Don't trouble, thanks. I've got to take my hat off. (*Very lovingly for LATIMER'S benefit*) I shan't be a moment, Leonard darling.

(*She goes out, her chin in the air. She is still carrying it off.*)

LATIMER. Now then, Leonard darling, to work.

LEONARD (*picking up the things*). Thanks.

LATIMER. But where are you going?

LEONARD. Upstairs, of course.

LATIMER. Is that wise? With a cold like yours?

LEONARD. Damn it, I can't shave down here.

LATIMER. Oh, come, we mustn't stand on ceremony when your life is at stake. You were complaining only five minutes ago of the

draught in your room. Now, here we have a nice even temperature—
—

LEONARD. Well, there's something in that.

LATIMER. There's everything in it. Of course you've never had a cold before, so you don't know, but any doctor will tell you how important it is to stay in one room—with a nice even temperature. You mustn't dream of going upstairs.

LEONARD (*surrendering*). Well——

LATIMER. That's right. Got everything you want? There are plenty of mirrors. Which period do you prefer? Queen Anne?

LEONARD. It's all right, thanks.

LATIMER. Good. Then I'll leave you to it.

(*He goes out. Standing in front of a glass on the wall, LEONARD applies the soap. His cheeks are just getting beautifully creamy when NICHOLAS enters.*)

NICHOLAS. Hallo!

LEONARD (*looking round*). Hallo!

NICHOLAS. Shaving?

LEONARD (*exasperated*). Well, what the devil did you think I was doing?

NICHOLAS. Shaving. (*He sits down. LEONARD gets on with the good work.*)

LEONARD. A-tish-oo!

NICHOLAS. Got a cold?

LEONARD. Obviously.

NICHOLAS (*sympathetically*). Horrid, sneezing when you're all covered with soap.

LEONARD. Look here, I didn't ask for your company, and I don't want your comments.

NICHOLAS. Well, if it comes to that, I was here first, and I didn't ask you to shave in the hall.

LEONARD (*with dignity*). There are reasons why it is necessary for me to shave in the hall.

NICHOLAS. Don't bother to tell me. I know 'em.

LEONARD. What do you mean?

NICHOLAS. You're the couple that arrived last night.

LEONARD (*looking at him, thoughtfully*). And you're the couple that is leaving this morning.

NICHOLAS. Exactly.

LEONARD. Yes, but I don't see——

NICHOLAS. You haven't tumbled to it yet?

LEONARD. Tumbled to what?

NICHOLAS. The fact that a week ago there were reasons why it was necessary for *me* to shave in the hall.

LEONARD. You!... You don't mean——

NICHOLAS. Yes, I do.

LEONARD. You lost your luggage?

NICHOLAS. Yes.

LEONARD. You woke up with a cold?

NICHOLAS. Yes.... Horrid, sneezing when you're all covered with soap.

LEONARD (*excitedly*). I say, that fellow—what's 'is name—didn't drop *your* clothes in the bath?

NICHOLAS. Oh, rather.... Damned smart chap, Latimer.

LEONARD. Damned scoundrel.

NICHOLAS. Oh no. He's quite right. One learns a lot down here.

LEONARD. I shall leave his house at once ... as soon as I have shaved.

NICHOLAS. You still want to? (*LEONARD looks at him in surprise*) Oh, well, you've hardly been here long enough, I suppose.

LEONARD. What do you mean? Don't *you* want to any more?

NICHOLAS. Latimer's quite right, you know. One learns a lot down here.

LEONARD (*shaving*). What about the lady?

NICHOLAS. That's the devil of it.

LEONARD. My dear fellow, as a man of honour, you're bound to go on.

NICHOLAS. As a man of honour, ought I ever to have started?

LEONARD (*little knowing*). Naturally I can't give an opinion on that.

NICHOLAS. No.... You want to be careful with that glass. The light isn't too good. I should go over it all again.

LEONARD (*stiffly*). Thank you. I am accustomed to shaving myself.

NICHOLAS. I was just offering a little expert advice. You needn't take it.

LEONARD (*surveying himself doubtfully*). H'm, perhaps you're right. (*He lathers himself again. In the middle of it he stops and says*) Curious creatures, women.

NICHOLAS. Amazing.

LEONARD. It's a life's work in itself trying to understand 'em. And then you're no further.

NICHOLAS. A week told *me* all I wanted to know.

LEONARD. They're so unexpected.

NICHOLAS. So unreasonable.

LEONARD. What was it the poet said about them?

NICHOLAS. What didn't he say?

LEONARD. No, *you* know the one I mean. How does it begin?... "O woman, in our hours of ease——"

NICHOLAS. "Uncertain, coy and hard to please."

LEONARD. That's it. Well, I grant you *that*——

NICHOLAS. Grant it me! I should think you do! They throw it at you with both hands.

LEONARD. But in the next two lines he misses the point altogether. When—what is it?—"When pain and anguish wring the brow"——

NICHOLAS (*with feeling*). "A ministering angel thou."

LEONARD. Yes, and it's a lie. It's simply a lie.

NICHOLAS. My dear fellow, it's the truest thing anybody ever said. Only—only one gets too much of it.

LEONARD. True? Nonsense!

NICHOLAS. Evidently you don't know anything about women.

LEONARD (*indignantly*). *I!* Not know anything about women!

NICHOLAS. Well, you said yourself just now that you didn't.

LEONARD. I never said—— What I said——

NICHOLAS. If you did know anything about 'em, you'd know that there's nothing they like more than doing the ministering angel business.

LEONARD. Ministering angel!

NICHOLAS. Won't you have a little more of this, and won't you have a little more of that, and how is the poor cold to-day, and——

LEONARD. You really think that women talk like that?

NICHOLAS. How else do you think they talk?

LEONARD. My dear fellow!... Why, I mean, just take my own case as an example. Here am I, with a very nasty cold, the first I've ever had in my life. I sit down for a bit of breakfast—not wanting it particularly, but feeling that, for the sake of my health, I ought to try and eat something. And what happens?

(*LATIMER has come in during this speech. He stops and listens to it.*)

LATIMER (*trying to guess the answer*). You eat too much.

LEONARD (*turning round angrily*). Ah, so it's you! You have come just in time, Mr. Latimer. I propose to leave your house at once.

LATIMER (*surprised*). Not like that? Not with a little bit of soap behind the ear? (*LEONARD hastily wipes it.*) The other ear. (*LEONARD wipes that one*) That's right.

LEONARD. At once, sir.

NICHOLAS. You'd better come with us. We're just going.

LEONARD. Thank you.

LATIMER. Four of you. A nice little party.

ANNE comes in.

LEONARD. Anne, my dear, we are leaving the house at once. Are you ready?

ANNE. But——

EUSTASIA (*from outside*). Nich-o-las!

(*LEONARD looks up in astonishment.*)

NICHOLAS (*gloomily*). Hallo!

EUSTASIA. Where are you?

NICHOLAS. Here!

EUSTASIA comes in.

EUSTASIA. Are you ready, darling? (*She stops on seeing them all, and looks from one to the other. She sees her husband*) Leonard!

NICHOLAS (*understanding*). Leonard!

LEONARD. Eustasia!

ANNE. Eustasia!

(They stare at each other—open-mouthed—all but MR. LATIMER. MR. LATIMER has picked up “The Times,” and seems to have forgotten that they are there....)

ANNE *(after hours and hours)*. Oh, isn't anybody going to say anything? Mr. Latimer, while Leonard is thinking of something, you might introduce me to his wife.

LATIMER *(recalled suddenly from the leading article)*. I beg your pardon! Eustasia, this is Anne.

ANNE. How do you do? *(Not that she minds.)*

EUSTASIA. How do you do? *(Nor she.)*

LATIMER. Leonard, this is Nicholas.

NICHOLAS *(nodding)*. We've met. Quite old friends.

LEONARD *(indignantly)*. I repudiate the friendship. We met under false pretences. I—I—Well, upon my word, I don't know *what* to say.

NICHOLAS. Then don't say it, old boy. Here we all are, and we've got to make the best of it.

LEONARD. I—I—*a-tish-oo!*

EUSTASIA *(alarmed)*. Leonard, you have a cold?

NICHOLAS. A very nasty cold.

ANNE *(coldly)*. It will be better when he has finished his breakfast.

LEONARD *(hurt)*. I *have* finished my breakfast. A long time ago.

ANNE. I beg your pardon. *(She indicates the towel round his neck)* I misunderstood.

LEONARD *(pulling it away)*. I've been shaving.

EUSTASIA. But, Leonard dear, I don't understand. I've never known you ill before.

LEONARD. I never have been ill before. But I am ill now. Very ill. And nobody minds. Nobody minds at all. This fellow Latimer invaygles me here—

LATIMER. Inveegles.

LEONARD. I shall pronounce it how I like. It is quite time I asserted myself. I have been too patient. You invaygle me here and purposely give me a cold. You—(*pointing accusingly to ANNE*)—are entirely unmoved by my sufferings, instead of which you make fun of the very simple breakfast which I had forced myself to eat. You—(*to NICHOLAS*)—run away with my wife, at a time when I am ill and unable to protect her, and you—(*to EUSTASIA*)—well, all I can say is that you surprise me, Eustasia, you surprise me. I didn't think you had it in you.

LATIMER. A masterly summing up of the case. Well, I hope you're all ashamed of yourselves.

EUSTASIA. But, Leonard, how rash of you to *think* of running away with a cold like this. (*She goes up and comforts him*) You must take care of yourself—Eustasia will take care of you and get you well. Poor boy! He had a nasty, nasty cold, and nobody looked after him. Mr. Latimer, I shall want some mustard, and hot water, and eucalyptus.

LATIMER. But of course!

LEONARD (*to ANNE*). There you are! As soon as somebody who really understands illness comes on the scene, you see what happens. Mustard, hot water, eucalyptus—she has it all at her finger-ends.

Enter DOMINIC.

DOMINIC. Yes, sir?

LATIMER. A small mustard and water for his lordship.

EUSTASIA. It's to put his feet in, not to drink.

LATIMER. A large mustard and water.

DOMINIC. Yes, sir.

EUSTASIA. Hot water.

DOMINIC. Yes, my lady.

EUSTASIA. And if you have any eucalyptus——

DOMINIC. Yes, my lady; we got some in specially for his lordship.

LATIMER. Did Mr. Nicholas absorb all the last bottle?

DOMINIC. Yes, sir.

NICHOLAS (*with feeling*). I fairly lived on it.

DOMINIC (*to EUSTASIA*). Is there anything else his lordship will require?

NICHOLAS. What about a mustard-plaster?

LEONARD. Please mind your own business.

EUSTASIA. No, I don't think there's anything else, thank you.

NICHOLAS. Well, I call that very unfair. I had one.

LEONARD (*asserting his rights as a husband*). Oh, did you? Well, in that case, Eustasia, I certainly don't see why——

LATIMER (*to DOMINIC*). Two mustard-plasters. We mustn't grudge his lordship anything.

DOMINIC. Yes, sir.

[*He retires.*

EUSTASIA (*to LEONARD*). Now come over here, darling, away from the door. (*She leads him to an arm-chair in the corner of the room*)
Lean on me.

ANNE. Surely one can walk with a cold in the head!

NICHOLAS. No, it's very dangerous.

LATIMER. Nicholas speaks as an expert.

EUSTASIA (*settling LEONARD*). There! Is that comfy?

LEONARD. Thank you, Eustasia.

EUSTASIA. We'll soon have you all right, dear.

LEONARD (*pressing her hand*). Thank you.

LATIMER (*after a little silence*). Well, as Nicholas said just now, "Here we all are, and we've got to make the best of it." What are we all going to do?

ANNE. Please leave me out of it. (*She is beaten, but that doesn't matter. The only thing that matters now is to get out of this horrible house.*) I can make my own arrangements. (*She gives them a cool little bow as she goes out.*) If you will excuse me.

(*DOMINIC comes in with a clinical thermometer on a tray.*)

DOMINIC. I thought that her ladyship might require a thermometer for his lordship's temperature.

EUSTASIA. Thank you. I think it would be safer just to take it. And I wondered if we couldn't just put this screen round his lordship's chair.

DOMINIC. Certainly, my lady, one can't be too careful. (*He helps her with it.*)

EUSTASIA. Yes, that's right.

LATIMER (*to NICHOLAS*). Did *you* have the screen?

NICHOLAS. Oh, rather.

LATIMER. And the thermometer?

NICHOLAS. Yes.... Funny thing was I liked it just at first. I don't mean the actual thermometer, I mean all the fussing.

LATIMER. It's a wonderful invention, a cold in the head. It finds you out. There's nothing like it, Nicholas, nothing.

EUSTASIA (*to DOMINIC*). Thank you. And you're bringing the other things?

DOMINIC. Yes, my lady, as soon as ready.

[*He goes out.*]

EUSTASIA. Thank you. (*To LEONARD*) Now, dear, under the tongue. (*She puts it in his mouth.*)

LEONARD (*mumbling*). I don't think I ever——

EUSTASIA. No, dear, don't try to talk.

(*And now it is the turn of NICHOLAS.*)

NICHOLAS (*coming close to LATIMER*). I say——

LATIMER. Well?

NICHOLAS (*indicating the screen*). I say, not too loud.

LATIMER (*in a whisper*). Well?

NICHOLAS. Well, what about it?

LATIMER. What about what?

NICHOLAS. I mean, where do I come in? As a man of honour, oughtn't I to—er—— You see what I mean? Of course I want to do the right thing.

LATIMER. Naturally, my dear Nicholas. It's what one expected of you.

NICHOLAS. I thought that if I slipped away now, unostentatiously....

LATIMER. With just a parting word of farewell——

NICHOLAS. Well, that was what I was wondering. Would anything in the nature of a farewell be in good taste?

LATIMER. I see your point.

NICHOLAS. Don't think that I'm not just as devoted to Eustasia as ever I was.

LATIMER. But you feel that in the circumstances you could worship her from afar with more propriety.

NICHOLAS (*waving a hand at the screen*). Yes. You see, I had no idea that they were so devoted.

LATIMER. But their devotion may not last for ever.

NICHOLAS. Exactly. That's why I thought I'd slip away now.

LATIMER. Oh, Nicholas! Oh, Nicholas!

NICHOLAS (*a little offended*). Well, I don't want to say anything against Eustasia——

LATIMER. The house is full of people who don't want to say anything against Eustasia.

NICHOLAS. But, you see—— Look out, here's Miss Anne.

ANNE comes in.

LATIMER. Anne, you're just in time. Nicholas wants your advice.

NICHOLAS. I say, shut up! We can't very well——

ANNE (*with all that is left of her dignity, but she is only a child after all*). Mr. Latimer, I went upstairs to get my things and find my way to the nearest railway station. But—but there is a reason why I am not going after all. Just yet. I thought I'd better tell you.

LATIMER. Were you really thinking of going? (*She nods.*) I'm so glad you've changed your mind.

ANNE (*with a smile*). There are reasons why I had to.

LATIMER. Bless them!... Nicholas, I believe she stayed just so that she might help you.

ANNE. What does Mr. Nicholas want?

NICHOLAS. I say, it's awfully good of you and all that, but this is rather—I mean, it's a question that a fellow ought to settle for himself.

LATIMER. What he means is, ought *he* to get his things and find his way to the nearest railway station?

ANNE (*dismayed*). Oh no!

LATIMER. There you are, Nicholas.

NICHOLAS (*rather flattered*). Oh, well—well—— (*He looks at her admiringly*) Well, perhaps you're right.

EUSTASIA (*the three minutes up*). There! (*She takes the thermometer out and comes from behind the screen in order to get nearer the light.*)

LATIMER. His temperature! This is an exciting moment in the history of the House of Lords. (*He follows EUSTASIA to the window.*)

NICHOLAS (*to ANNE*). I say, do you really think I ought to stay?

ANNE. Please, Mr. Nicholas, I want you to stay.

NICHOLAS. Righto! then I'll stay.

LATIMER (*over EUSTASIA'S shoulder*). A hundred and nine.

LEONARD (*putting his head round the screen*). I say, what ought it to be?

NICHOLAS. Ninety-eight.

LEONARD. Good Lord! I'm dying!

EUSTASIA. It's just ninety-nine. A little over normal, Leonard, but nothing to matter.

LATIMER. *Ninety-nine*—so it is. I should never have forgiven myself if it had been a hundred and nine.

NICHOLAS (*coming up to LATIMER*). It's all right, I'm going to.

EUSTASIA (*surprised*). Going to? Going to what?

NICHOLAS (*confused*). Oh, nothing.

LATIMER. What he means is that he is going to be firm. He thinks we all ought to have a little talk about things. Just to see where we are.

EUSTASIA. Well, things aren't quite as they were, are they? If I'd known that Leonard was ill—but I've seen so little of him lately. And he's *never* been ill before!

NICHOLAS. Of course we ought to know where we are.

LATIMER. Yes. At present Leonard is behind that screen, which makes it difficult to discuss things properly. Leonard, could you——

EUSTASIA. Oh, we mustn't take any risks! But if we moved the screen a little, and all sat up at that end of the room——

LATIMER. Delightful!

NICHOLAS (*leading the way*). Sit here, Miss Anne, won't you?

(*They arrange themselves. LATIMER in the middle.*)

LATIMER. There! Now, are we all here?... We are. Then with your permission, Ladies and Gentlemen, I will open the proceedings with a short speech.

NICHOLAS. Oh, I say, must you?

LATIMER. Certainly.

EUSTASIA (*to LEONARD*). Hush, dear.

LEONARD. I didn't say anything.

EUSTASIA. No, but you were just going to.

LATIMER (*severely*). Seeing that I refrained from making my speech when Leonard had the thermometer in his mouth, the least he can do now is to listen in silence.

LEONARD. Well, I'm——

LATIMER. I resume.... By a fortunate concatenation of circumstances, ladies and gentlemen—or, as more illiterate men would say, by a bit of luck—two runaway couples have met under my roof. No need to mention names. You can all guess for yourselves. But I call now—this is the end of my speech, Leonard—I call now upon my noble friend on the right to tell us just why he left the devoted wife by his side in order to travel upon the Continent.

LEONARD. Well, really——

LATIMER. Naturally Leonard does not wish to say anything against Eustasia. Very creditable to him. But can it be that the devoted wife by his side wishes to say anything against Leonard?

EUSTASIA. You neglected me, Leonard, you know you did. And when I was so ill——

LEONARD. My dear, you were *always* ill. That was the trouble.

LATIMER. And you were never ill, Leonard. *That* was the trouble.... You heartless ruffian!

EUSTASIA (*to LEONARD*). Hush, dear.

LATIMER. Why couldn't you have had a cold sometimes? Why couldn't you have come home with a broken leg, or lost your money, or made a rotten speech in the House of Lords? If she could never be sorry for *you*, for whom else could she be sorry, except herself? (*To EUSTASIA*) I don't suppose he even lost his umbrella, did he?

ANNE (*feeling that anything is possible to a man who mislays his trousers*). Oh, he must have lost that.

LATIMER. Eustasia, ladies and gentlemen, is one of those dear women, those sweet women, those delightful women—(*aside to ANNE*)—stop me if I'm overdoing it—those adorable women who must always cosset or be cosseted. She couldn't cosset Leonard; Leonard wouldn't cosset her. Hence—the Dover Road.

EUSTASIA. How well you understand, Mr. Latimer!

LATIMER. Enter, then, my friend Nicholas. (*Shaking his head at him*) Oh, Nicholas! Oh, Nicholas! Oh, Nicholas!

NICHOLAS (*uneasily*). What's all that about?

LATIMER. Anything you say will be used in evidence against you. Proceed, my young friend.

NICHOLAS. Well—well—well—I mean, there she was.

LATIMER. Lonely.

NICHOLAS. Exactly.

LATIMER. Neglected by her brute of a husband—(*As LEONARD opens his mouth*) fingers crossed, Leonard—who spent day and night rioting in the House of Lords while his poor little wife cried at home.

NICHOLAS. Well——

LATIMER. Then out spake bold Sir Nicholas—(*Aside to ANNE*) This was also composed in my bath——

Then out spake bold Sir Nicholas, An Oxford man was he; “Lo, I will write a note to-night And ask her out to tea.”

NICHOLAS. Well, you see——

LATIMER. I see, Nicholas.... And so here we all are.

ANNE. Except me.

LATIMER. I guessed at you, Anne. Did I guess right?

ANNE (*meekly*). Yes.

LATIMER. And so here we all are.... And what are we all going to do? My house is at your disposal for as long as you wish. The doors are open for those who wish to go.... Eustasia?

EUSTASIA. My duty is to stay here—to look after my husband.

LATIMER. Well, that settles Eustasia.... Anne?

ANNE. Of necessity I must stay here—for the present.

LATIMER. Well, that settles Anne.... Nicholas?

NICHOLAS. I stay here too—(*looking at ANNE*) from choice.

LATIMER. Well, that settles Nicholas.... Leonard?

(DOMINIC, followed by all the Staff, comes in, together with a collection of mustard-baths, plasters, eucalyptus, etc., etc.)

LATIMER *(looking round at the interruption)*. Ah!... And this will settle Leonard.

(It settles him.)

ACT III

Three days later, and evening again. ANNE is busy with a pencil and paper, an A.B.C., and her purse. She is trying to work out how much it costs to go home, and subtracting three and fourpence ha'penny from it. Having done this, she puts the paper, pencil, and purse in her bag, returns the A.B.C. to its home, and goes towards the door. One gathers that she has come to a decision.

* * * * *

ANNE *(calling)*. Nich-o-las!

NICHOLAS *(from outside)*. Hallo!

ANNE. Where—are—you?

NICHOLAS. Coming. *(He comes.)* Just went upstairs to get a pipe. *(Putting his hand to his pocket)* And now I've forgotten it.

(They go to the sofa together.)

ANNE. Oh, Nicholas, how silly you are! *(She sits down.)*

NICHOLAS *(sitting close)*. I don't want to smoke, you know.

ANNE. I thought men always did.

NICHOLAS. Well, it depends what they're doing.

(There is no doubt what he is doing. He is making love to ANNE, the dog, and ANNE is encouraging him.)

ANNE *(looking away)*. Oh!

NICHOLAS. I say, it has been rather jolly here the last three days, don't you think?

ANNE. It *has* been rather nice.

NICHOLAS. We've sort of got so friendly.

ANNE. We have, haven't we?

NICHOLAS. You've been awfully nice to me.

ANNE. You've been nice to *me*.

NICHOLAS. I should have gone, you know, if it hadn't been for you.

ANNE. I don't know *what* I should have done if you had gone.

NICHOLAS. You did ask me to stay, didn't you?

ANNE. Yes, I couldn't let you go.

NICHOLAS. Do you know what you said? You said, "Please, Mr. Nicholas, I want you to stay." I shall always remember that. *(Fatuously to himself)* "Please, Mr. Nicholas, I want you to stay." I wonder what made you think of saying that?

ANNE. I wanted us to be friends. I wanted to get to know you; to make you think of me as—as your friend.

NICHOLAS. We *are* friends, Anne, aren't we?

ANNE. I think we are now, Nicholas.

NICHOLAS (*with a sentimental sigh*). Friends!

(ANNE looks at him, wondering if she shall risk it; then away again; then summons up her courage and takes the plunge.)

ANNE. Nicholas!

NICHOLAS. Yes?

ANNE (*timidly*). I—I want you to do something for me.

NICHOLAS. Anything, Anne, anything.

ANNE. I don't know whether I ought to ask you.

NICHOLAS. Of course you ought!

ANNE. But you see, we *are* friends—almost like brother and sister—
—

NICHOLAS (*disappointed*). Well, I shouldn't put it quite like that—
—

ANNE. And I thought I might ask you——

NICHOLAS. Of course, Anne! You know I would do anything for you.

ANNE. Yes.... Well—well—— (*In a rush*) Well, then, will you lend me one pound two and sixpence till next Monday?

NICHOLAS. Lend you——!

ANNE. To-day's Friday, I'll send you the money off on Sunday. I promise. Of course I know one oughtn't to borrow from men, but you're different. Almost like a brother. I knew you would understand.

NICHOLAS. But—but—I *don't* understand.

ANNE (*ashamed*). You see, I—I only have three and fourpence ha’penny. And it costs one pound five and twopence to get home. (*Indignantly*) Oh, it’s a shame the way men always pay for us, and then when we really want money we haven’t got any.... But I will pay you back on Sunday. I have some money at home; I meant to have brought it.

NICHOLAS. But—but why do you suddenly——

ANNE. Suddenly? I’ve been wanting it ever since that first morning. I went upstairs to get my hat, meaning to walk straight out of the house—and then I looked in my purse and found—(*pathetically*) three and fourpence ha’penny. What was I to do?

NICHOLAS. Any one would have lent you anything.

ANNE (*coldly*). Leonard, for instance?

NICHOLAS (*thoughtfully*). Well ... no.... No. You couldn’t very well have touched Leonard. But Latimer——

ANNE. Mr. Latimer! The man who had brought us here, locked us up here, and started playing Providence to us—I was to go on my knees to *him* and say, “Please, dear Mr. Latimer, could you lend me one pound two and sixpence, so that I may run away from your horrid house?” Really!

NICHOLAS. Well, you seem to have been pretty friendly with him these three days.

ANNE. Naturally I am polite to a man when I am staying in his house. That’s different.

NICHOLAS. As a matter of fact, Latimer has been jolly decent. Anyway, he has saved us both from making silly asses of ourselves.

ANNE. And you think I am grateful to him for that?... Doesn’t *any* man understand *any* woman?

NICHOLAS (*annoyed*). Are you suggesting that *I* don't understand women?

ANNE. I'm suggesting that you should lend me one pound two shillings and sixpence.

NICHOLAS (*sulkily, feeling in his pockets*). Of course, if you're in such a confounded hurry to get away from here—— Do you mind all silver?

ANNE. Not at all.

NICHOLAS. In such a confounded hurry to get away from here—— (*He counts the money.*)

ANNE. Why ever should I want to stay?

NICHOLAS. Well—well—— (*With a despairing shrug*) Oh, Lord!... Ten shillings ... fourteen and six ... why should she want to stay! Why do you think *I'm* staying?

ANNE (*wickedly*). Because you're so fond of Mr. Latimer. He's so jolly decent.

NICHOLAS (*looking at the money in his hand*). One pound two shillings and sixpence. I suppose if I told you what I really thought about it all, you'd get on your high horse again and refuse the money from *me*. So I won't tell you. Here you are.

ANNE (*gently*). You didn't think I was in love with you, Nicholas? (*NICHOLAS looks uncomfortable.*) In three days? Oh, Nicholas!

NICHOLAS. Well—well, I don't see—— (*He holds out the money. But ANNE won't take it on those terms.*)

ANNE. From a friend?

NICHOLAS. From a friend.

ANNE. Lent to a friend?

NICHOLAS. Lent to a friend.

ANNE (*taking it*). Thank you, Nicholas. (*She hurries out, clasping the precious money. NICHOLAS will never see her again.... And then, suddenly, her head comes round the door*) Thank you very much, Nicholas! (*She is gone.*)

NICHOLAS. Well, I'm damned!

(*He sits there gloomily, his legs stretched out, and regards his shoes. So far as we can tell he goes on saying, "Well, I'm damned" to himself. EUSTASIA and LEONARD come in. He is properly dressed now, but still under EUSTASIA'S care, and she has his arm, as if he were attempting a very difficult feat in walking across the hall.*)

NICHOLAS (*looking round*). Hallo! (*Getting up*) Do you want to come here?

LEONARD (*hastily*). Don't go, old boy, don't go. Plenty of room for us all.

EUSTASIA. Thank you so much. Leonard is not very strong yet. His temperature is up again to-day. (*To LEONARD*) You will be better on the sofa, darling. (*Distantly to NICHOLAS*) I'm so sorry to trouble you.

NICHOLAS. Not at all. I was just going anyhow.

LEONARD (*sitting on the sofa*). Oh, nonsense. Stay and talk to us. Plenty of room for us all.

NICHOLAS (*feeling in his pockets*). Got to get my pipe. Left it upstairs, like an ass.

LEONARD (*taking out his case*). Have a cigarette instead?

NICHOLAS. Rather have a pipe, thanks. (*He makes for the door.*)

LEONARD (*anxiously*). But you'll come back?

NICHOLAS (*unwillingly*). Oh—er—righto.

[*He goes out.*]

LEONARD. Come and keep us company. (*To EUSTASIA, who is tucking him up*) Thanks, Eustasia, thanks. That's quite all right.

EUSTASIA. Another cushion for your back, darling?

LEONARD. No, thanks.

EUSTASIA. Quite sure?

LEONARD. Quite sure, thanks.

EUSTASIA. I can easily get it for you.

LEONARD (*weakly*). Oh, very well.

EUSTASIA. That's right. (*Getting the cushion*) You must be comfortable. Now, are you sure that's all right?

LEONARD. Quite all right, thank you.

EUSTASIA. Sure, darling? Anything else you want, I can get it for you at once. A rug over your knees?

LEONARD. No, thank you, Eustasia. (*Now he is saying it.*)

EUSTASIA. You wouldn't like a hot-water bottle?

LEONARD (*with a sigh*). No, thank you, Eustasia.

EUSTASIA. You've only got to say, you know. Now shall we talk, or would you like me to read to you? (*She settles down next to him.*)

LEONARD (*choosing the lesser evil*). I think read—no, I mean, talk—no, read to me.

EUSTASIA. It's for you to say, darling.

LEONARD (*his eyes closed*). Read to me, Eustasia.

EUSTASIA (*opening her book*). We'll go on from where we left off. We didn't get very far—I marked the place.... Yes, here we are. "... the sandy deserts of Arabia and Africa.... 4." And then there's a little footnote at the bottom; that's how I remember it. (*Reading the footnote*) "Tacit. Annal. l. ii., Dion Cassius l. lvi. p. 833, and the speech of Augustus himself." That doesn't seem to mean much. "It receives great light from the learned notes of his French translator, M. Spanheim." Well, that's a good thing. Spanheim—sounds more like a German, doesn't it? Now are you sure you're quite comfortable, dear?

LEONARD (*his eyes closed*). Yes, thank you, Eustasia.

EUSTASIA. Then I'll begin. (*In her reading-aloud voice*) "Happily for the repose of mankind, the moderate system recommended by the wisdom of Augustus was adopted by the fears and vices of his immediate successors. Engaged in the pursuit of pleasure or the exercise of tyranny, the first Caesars seldom showed themselves to the armies or to the provinces; nor were they disposed to suffer that those triumphs which their indolence neglected should be usurped by the conduct and valour of their lieutenants." (*Speeding up*) "The military fame of a subject was considered as an insolent invasion of the Imperial prerogative; and it became the duty as well as interest of every Roman General to guard the frontiers entrusted to his care"—(*recklessly*) "without aspiring for conquests which might have proved no less fatal to himself than to the vanquished barbarians."... And then there's another little footnote. Perhaps it would be better if I read all the little footnotes afterwards—what do you think, darling? Or shall we take them as they come?

LEONARD (*without opening his eyes*). Yes, dear.

EUSTASIA. Very well. This is footnote 5. "Germanicus, Suetonius Paulinus and Agricola"—(*she stumbles over the names*)—"were checked and recalled in the course of their victories. Corbulo was put to death." Oh, what a shame! "Military merit, as it is admirably

expressed by Tacitus, was, in the strictest sense of the word——” well, there are *two* words, and they are both in Latin. I suppose Tacitus wrote in Latin. But it doesn’t really matter, because it’s only a little footnote. (*Anxiously*) Are you liking the book, darling?

LEONARD. Very much, dear.

EUSTASIA. It’s nicely written, but I don’t think it’s very exciting. I don’t think Mr. Latimer has a very good taste in books. I asked him to recommend me something really interesting to read aloud, and he said that the two most interesting books he knew were Carlyle’s *French Revolution* and——and——(*looking at the cover*) Gibbon’s *Roman Empire*.... Fancy, there are four volumes of it and six hundred pages in a volume. We’re at page 3 now. (*She reads a line or two to herself.*) Oh, now, this is rather interesting, because it’s all about *us*. “The only accession which the Roman Empire received during the first century of the Christian era was the province of Britain.” Fancy! “The proximity of its situation to the coast of Gaul seemed to invite their arms, the pleasing though doubtful intelligence of a pearl fishery attracted their avarice.” And then there’s a little footnote—I suppose that’s to say it was Whitstable. (*Getting to it*) Oh no——“The British pearls proved, however, of little value, on account of their dark and livid colour.” How horrid. “Tacitus observes——” well, then, Tacitus says something again.... I *wish* he would write in English.... Now where was I? Something about the pearls. Oh yes. “After a war of about forty years”——good gracious!——“undertaken by the most stupid, maintained by the most dissolute, and——”

(*NICHOLAS returns with his pipe.*)

NICHOLAS. Oh, sorry, I’m interrupting.

LEONARD (*waking up*). No, no. Eustasia was just reading to me. (*To her*) You mustn’t tire yourself, dear. (*To NICHOLAS*) Stay and talk.

NICHOLAS. What’s the book? Carlyle’s *French Revolution*?

EUSTASIA (*primly*). Certainly not. (*Looking at the title again*) Gibbon’s *Roman Empire*.

NICHOLAS. Any good?

EUSTASIA. Fascinating, isn't it, Leonard?

LEONARD. Very.

NICHOLAS. You ought to try Carlyle, old chap.

LEONARD. Is *he* good?

NICHOLAS (*who has had eight pages read aloud to him by EUSTASIA*). Oh, topping.

EUSTASIA (*looking at her watch*). Good gracious! I ought to be dressing.

LEONARD (*looking at his*). Yes, it *is* about time.

NICHOLAS (*looking at his*). Yes.

EUSTASIA. Leonard, darling, I don't think it would be safe for you to change. Not to-night; to-morrow if you like.

LEONARD. I say, look here, you said that last night.

EUSTASIA. Ah, but your temperature has gone up again.

NICHOLAS. I expect that's only because the book was so exciting.

LEONARD. Yes, that's right.

EUSTASIA. But I took his temperature *before* I began reading.

NICHOLAS. Perhaps yesterday's instalment was still hanging about a bit.

EUSTASIA (*to LEONARD*). No, darling, not to-night. Just to please his Eustasia.

LEONARD (*sulkily*). All right.

EUSTASIA. That's a good boy. (*She walks to the door, NICHOLAS going with her to open it.*) And if he's very good, and Eustasia is very quick dressing, perhaps she'll read him another little bit of that nice book before dinner.

[*She goes out.*]

LEONARD. I say, don't go, old chap. You can change in five minutes.

NICHOLAS. Righto.

(*He comes back. There is silence for a little.*)

LEONARD. I say!

NICHOLAS. Yes?

LEONARD (*thinking better of it*). Oh, nothing.

NICHOLAS (*after a pause*). Curious creatures, women.

LEONARD. Amazing.

NICHOLAS. They're so unexpected.

LEONARD. So unreasonable.

NICHOLAS. Yes....

LEONARD (*suddenly*). I hate England at this time of year.

NICHOLAS. So do I.

LEONARD. Do you go South as a rule?

NICHOLAS. As a rule.

LEONARD. Monte?

NICHOLAS. Sometimes. We *had* thought—I half thought of Nice.

LEONARD. Not bad. We were—I think I prefer Cannes myself.

NICHOLAS. There's not much in it.

LEONARD. No.... (*After a pause*) Between ourselves, you know—quite between ourselves—I'm about fed up with women.

NICHOLAS. Absolutely.

LEONARD. You are too?

NICHOLAS. Rather. I should think so.

LEONARD. They're so dashed unreasonable.

NICHOLAS. So unexpected....

LEONARD (*suddenly*). Had you booked your rooms?

NICHOLAS. At Nice? Yes.

LEONARD. So had I.

NICHOLAS. At Cannes?

LEONARD. Yes.... I say, what about it?

NICHOLAS. Do you mean—— (*He waves a hand at the door.*)

LEONARD. Yes.

NICHOLAS. Evaporating?

LEONARD. Yes. Quite quietly, you know.

NICHOLAS. Without ostentation.

LEONARD. That's it.

NICHOLAS. It's rather a scheme. And then we shouldn't waste the rooms. At least, only one set of them. I'll tell you what. I'll toss you whether we go to Nice or Cannes.

LEONARD. Right. (*He takes out a coin and tosses.*)

NICHOLAS. Tails.

LEONARD (*uncovering the coin*). Heads. Do you mind coming to Cannes?

NICHOLAS. Just as soon, really. When shall we go? To-morrow?

LEONARD. Mightn't get a chance to-morrow. Why not to-night? It seems a pity to waste the opportunity.

NICHOLAS. You mean while Eustasia's dressing?

LEONARD. The—er—opportunity. Sleep the night at Dover and cross to-morrow morning.

NICHOLAS. She'll be after us.

LEONARD. Nonsense.

NICHOLAS. My dear man, you don't know Eustasia.

LEONARD. I don't know Eustasia? Well!

NICHOLAS (*with conviction*). She'll be after you like a bird. You've never seen Eustasia when she has got somebody ill to look after.

LEONARD. I've never seen Eustasia? Well!

NICHOLAS. My dear chap, you've only had three days of her; I've had six.... Lord!... Look here. We shall have to——

Enter LATIMER.

LATIMER. What, Leonard, all alone?

NICHOLAS. I say, you're the very man we want.

LEONARD (*frowning*——). S'sh.

LATIMER. Leonard, don't "s'sh" Nicholas when he wants to speak to me.

NICHOLAS (*to LEONARD*). It's all right, old chap, Latimer is a sportsman.

LATIMER (*to LEONARD*). There! You see the sort of reputation I have in the West End. (*To NICHOLAS*) What is it you want to do? Run away?

LEONARD. Well—er——

NICHOLAS. I say, however did you guess?

LATIMER. Leonard's car has had steam up for the last twenty-four hours, waiting for a word from its owner.

LEONARD (*seeing the south of France*). By Jove!

LATIMER. And you are going with him, Nicholas?

NICHOLAS. Yes. Thought I might as well be getting on. Very grateful and all that, but can't stay here for ever.

LATIMER (*wondering what has happened between NICHOLAS and ANNE*). So you are going too! I thought—— Well! Nicholas is going too.

LEONARD. I say, you do understand—I mean about—er—I mean, when I'm quite well again—start afresh and all that. Cosset *her* a bit. But when you're ill—or supposed to be ill—— Well, I mean, ask Nicholas.

NICHOLAS. Oh, rather.

LATIMER. My dear Leonard, why these explanations? Who am I to interfere in other people's matrimonial affairs? You and Nicholas are going away—good-bye. (*He holds out his hand.*)

NICHOLAS. Yes, but what about Eustasia? She's not going to miss the chance of cosseting Leonard just when she is getting into it. She'll be after him like a bird.

LATIMER. I see. So you want me to keep her here?

NICHOLAS. That's the idea, if you could.

LATIMER. How can I keep her here if she doesn't want to stay?

LEONARD. Well, how do you keep *anybody* here?

LATIMER. Really, Leonard, I am surprised at you. By the charm of my old-world courtesy and hospitality, of course.

LEONARD. Oh! Well, I doubt if that keeps Eustasia.

LATIMER (*shaking his head sadly*). I am afraid that that is only too true. In fact, the more I think of it, the more I realise that there is only one thing which will keep this devoted wife from her afflicted and suffering husband.

LEONARD and NICHOLAS. What?

DOMINIC comes in.

LATIMER. His lordship and Mr. Nicholas are leaving at once. His lordship's car will wait for them outside the gates. See that a bag is packed for them.

DOMINIC. Yes, sir.

LATIMER. And come back when you've seen about that.

DOMINIC. Yes, sir.

[*He goes out.*]

LATIMER. The car can return for the rest of your luggage, and take it over in the morning.

NICHOLAS. Good!

LEONARD. Er—thanks very much. (*Anxiously*) What were you going to say about the only way of—er——

LATIMER. The only way of keeping this devoted wife from her afflicted and suffering husband?

LEONARD (*gruffly*). Yes. What is it?

LATIMER. Somebody else must have a temperature. Somebody else must be ill. Eustasia must have somebody else to cosset.

NICHOLAS. I say, how awfully sporting of you!

LATIMER. Sporting?

NICHOLAS. To sacrifice yourself like that.

LATIMER. I? You don't think *I* am going to sacrifice myself, do you? No, no, it's Dominic.

DOMINIC (*coming in*). Yes, sir.

LATIMER. Dominic, are you ever ill?

DOMINIC. Never, sir, barring a slight shortness of the breath.

LATIMER (*to the others*). That's awkward. I don't think you can cosset a shortness of the breath.

NICHOLAS (*to DOMINIC*). I say, you could pretend to be ill, couldn't you?

DOMINIC. With what object, sir?

NICHOLAS. Well—er——

LATIMER. Her ladyship is training to be a nurse. She has already cured two very obstinate cases of nasal catarrh accompanied by debility and a fluctuating temperature. If she brings one more case off successfully, she earns the diploma and the gold medal of the Royal Therapeutical Society.

NICHOLAS. That's right.

DOMINIC. And you would wish me to be that third case, sir?

NICHOLAS. That's the idea.

DOMINIC. And be cosseted back to health by her ladyship?

LATIMER. Such would be your inestimable privilege.

DOMINIC. I am sorry, sir. I must beg respectfully to decline.

NICHOLAS. I say, be a sport.

LEONARD (*awkwardly*). Of course we should—— Naturally you would not—er—lose anything by—er——

LATIMER. His lordship wishes to imply that not only would your mental horizon be widened during the period of convalescence, but that material blessings would also flow. Isn't that right, Leonard?

NICHOLAS. A commission on the gold medal. Naturally.

DOMINIC. I am sorry, sir. I am afraid I cannot see my way.

NICHOLAS. I say——

LATIMER. Thank you, Dominic.

DOMINIC. Thank you, sir.

[He goes out.]

NICHOLAS. Well, that's torn it. *(To LATIMER)* If you're quite sure that you wouldn't like to have a go? It's the chance of a lifetime to learn all about the French Revolution.

LATIMER. Well, well! Something must be done. *(He smiles suddenly)* After all, why not?

LEONARD *(eagerly)*. You will?

LATIMER. I will.

NICHOLAS. I say——

LATIMER *(waving them off)*. No, no. Don't wait. Fly.

LEONARD. Yes, we'd better be moving. Come on!

NICHOLAS *(with a grin, as he goes)*. There's an awfully good bit in the second chapter——

LATIMER *(holding up a finger)*. Listen! I hear her coming.

LEONARD. Good Lord!

(They fly.)

LATIMER, left alone, gives himself up to thought. What illness shall he have? He rings one of his many bells, and DOMINIC comes in.)

LATIMER. Oh, Dominic. In consequence of your obstinate good-health, I am going to sacrifice myself—I mean, I myself am going to embrace this great opportunity of mental and spiritual development.

DOMINIC. Yes, sir. Very good of you, I'm sure, sir.

LATIMER. What sort of illness would you recommend?

DOMINIC. How about a nice sprained ankle, sir?

LATIMER. You think that would go well?

DOMINIC. It would avoid any interference with the customary habits at meal-time, sir. There's a sort of monotony about bread-and-milk; no inspiration about it, sir, whether treated as a beverage or as a comestible.

LATIMER. I hadn't thought about bread-and-milk.

DOMINIC. You'll find that you will have little else to think about, sir, if you attempt anything stomachic. Of course you could have the usual nasty cold, sir.

LATIMER. No, no, not that. Let us be original....

DOMINIC. How about Xerostomia, sir? Spelt with an x.

LATIMER. Is that good?

DOMINIC. Joseph tells me that his father has had it for a long time.

LATIMER. Oh! Then perhaps we oughtn't to deprive him of it.

DOMINIC. I looked it up in the dictionary one Sunday afternoon, sir. They describe it there as "an abnormal dryness of the mouth."

LATIMER. I said I wanted to be original, Dominic.

DOMINIC. Quite so, sir.

(They both think in silence.)

LATIMER. Perhaps I had better leave it to the inspiration of the moment.

EUSTASIA *(off)*. Dominic! Dominic!

DOMINIC. This appears to be the moment, sir.

LATIMER. Quick. (*Bustling him off*) Don't let her ladyship come in for a moment. I must assume a recumbent position.

DOMINIC. Yes, sir.

[*He goes out.*

(*LATIMER lies down at full length on the sofa and begins to groan; putting a hand first on his stomach, then on his head, then on his elbow. EUSTASIA does not come. He cautiously raises his head; the room is empty.*)

LATIMER (*disappointedly*). Throwing it away! (*He hears footsteps, and settles down again.*)

(*ANNE comes in, hat on, bag in hand. She is just at the door when a groan reaches her. She stops. Another groan comes. She puts down her bag and comes towards the sofa with an "Oh!" of anxiety.*)

LATIMER. Oh, my poor—er—head! (*He clasps it.*)

ANNE (*alarmed*). What is it? (*She kneels by him.*)

LATIMER. Oh, my—— (*Cheerfully*) Hallo, Anne, is it you? (*He sits up.*)

ANNE (*still anxious*). Yes, what is it?

LATIMER (*bravely*). Oh, nothing, nothing. A touch of neuralgia.

ANNE. Oh!... You frightened me.

LATIMER. Did I, Anne? I'm sorry.

ANNE. You were groaning so. I thought—I didn't know what had happened.... (*Sympathetically*) Is it very bad?

LATIMER. Not so bad as it sounded.

ANNE (*taking off her gloves*). I know how bad it can be. Father has it sometimes. Then I have to send it away. (*She has her gloves off now*) May I try?

LATIMER (*remorsefully*). Anne!

(*She leans over from the back of him and begins to stroke his forehead with the tips of her fingers. He looks up at her.*)

ANNE. Close your eyes.

LATIMER. Ah, but I don't want to now.

(*She laughs without embarrassment.*)

ANNE. It will go soon.

LATIMER. Not too soon....

ANNE (*laughing suddenly*). Aren't faces funny when they're upside down?

LATIMER. You have the absurdest little upside-down face that ever I saw, Anne.

ANNE (*happily*). Have I?

LATIMER. Why do you wear a hat on your chin? (*She laughs.*) Why do you wear a hat?

ANNE. I was going away.

LATIMER. Without saying good-bye?

ANNE (*ashamed*). I—I think so.

LATIMER. Oh, Anne!

ANNE (*hastily*). I should have written.

LATIMER. A post-card!

ANNE. A letter.

LATIMER. With many thanks for your kind hospitality, yours sincerely.

ANNE. Yours *very* sincerely.

LATIMER. P.S.—I shall never see you again.

ANNE. P.S.—I shall never forget.

LATIMER. Ah, but you *must* forget....

ANNE (*after a pause*). Is it better?

LATIMER (*lazily*). It is just the same. It will always be the same. It is unthinkable that anything different should ever happen. In a hundred years' time we shall still be like this. You will be a little tired, perhaps; your fingers will ache; but I shall be lying here, quite, quite happy.

ANNE. You shall have another minute—no more.

LATIMER. Then I shall go straight to the chemist and ask for three pennyworth of Anne's fingers. (*They are silent for a little. Then she stops and listens.*) What is it?

ANNE. I heard something. Whispers.

LATIMER. Don't look round.

(*LEONARD and NICHOLAS, in hats and coats, creep cautiously in. Very noiselessly, fingers to lips, they open the front door and creep out.*)

ANNE. What was it? Was it——

LATIMER. An episode in your life. Over, buried, forgotten....

ANNE (*pleadingly*). It never really happened, did it?

LATIMER. Of course not! We must have read about it somewhere—
or was it in a play?

ANNE (*eagerly*). That was it! We were in a box together.

LATIMER. Munching chocolates. (*With a sigh*) What a child she
was—that girl in the play—with her little, funny, grown-up airs!

(*DOMINIC comes in, and stops suddenly on seeing them.*)

DOMINIC. Oh, I beg your pardon, sir.

LATIMER. Go on, Anne. (*Happily*) I am having neuralgia, Dominic.

DOMINIC. Yes, sir. A stubborn complaint, as I have heard, sir.

LATIMER. Miss Anne is making me well.... What did you want?

DOMINIC. Her ladyship says will you please excuse her if she is not
down to-night.

LATIMER (*to ANNE*). Shall we excuse her if she is not down to-
night?

DOMINIC. The fact is, sir, that Joseph is taken ill suddenly, and——

LATIMER (*to himself*). I never thought of Joseph!

ANNE. Oh, poor Joseph! What is it?

DOMINIC. A trifling affection of the throat, but necessitating careful
attention, her ladyship says.

LATIMER. Please tell her ladyship how very much I thank her for
looking after Joseph ... and tell Joseph how very sorry I am for him.

DOMINIC. Yes, sir. [*He goes out.*]

LATIMER. You can't go now, Anne. You will have to stay and chaperone Eustasia and me. (*She laughs and shakes her head.*) Must you go?

ANNE. Yes.

LATIMER. Back to your father?

ANNE. Yes. (*He looks at her. She is so very pretty; so brave.*)

LATIMER (*it must be somebody else speaking—he hardly recognises the voice*). Let us say good-bye now. There is a magic in your fingers which goes to my head, and makes me think ridiculous things. Let us say good-bye now.

ANNE (*taking his hand*). Good-bye! (*Impulsively*) I wish you had been my father.

(*Then she goes out. And she has won, after all. For MR. LATIMER stands there dumb, wondering what has happened. He walks across to a mirror to have a look at himself. While he is there, DOMINIC comes in to superintend the laying of the table.*)

LATIMER (*at the mirror*). Dominic, how old would you say I was?

DOMINIC. More than that, sir.

LATIMER (*with a sigh*). Yes, I'm afraid I am. And yet I look very young. Sometimes I think I look too young.

DOMINIC. Yes, sir.

LATIMER. Miss Anne has just asked me to be her father.

DOMINIC. Very considerate of her, I'm sure, sir.

LATIMER. Yes.... To prevent similar mistakes in the future, I think I shall wear a long white beard.

DOMINIC. Yes, sir. Shall I order one from the Stores?

LATIMER. Please.

DOMINIC. Thank you, sir.... Is Miss Anne leaving us, sir?

LATIMER. Yes.... Don't overdo the length, Dominic, and I like the crinkly sort.

DOMINIC. Yes, sir.... One of our most successful weeks on the whole, if I may say so, sir.

LATIMER (*thoughtfully*). Yes.... Well, well, we must all do what we can, Dominic.

DOMINIC. That's the only way, isn't it, sir?

(They stand looking at each other. Just for a moment DOMINIC is off duty. That grave face relaxes; the eyes crease into a smile.

MR. LATIMER smiles back.... Very gently they begin to laugh together; old friends; master and servant no longer. "Dear, dear! These children!" says DOMINIC'S laugh. "How very amusing they are, to be sure!" LATIMER'S laugh is a little rueful; a moment ago he, too, was almost a child. Yet he laughs. "Good old DOMINIC!"

Suddenly the front-door bell rings. Instinctively they stiffen to attention. They are on duty again. They turn and march off, almost, as it were, saluting each other; MR. LATIMER to his quarters, DOMINIC to his bolts and bars. He draws the curtains and opens the big front door.)

A MANLY VOICE. Oh, is this—er—an hotel?

DOMINIC. A sort of hotel, your Grace.

HIS GRACE (*coming in, a lady on his arm*). My chauffeur said—we've had an accident—been delayed on the way—he said that—

*(Evidently another romantic couple. Let us leave them to
MR. LATIMER.)*