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PLAYS IN THE FOURTH SERIES

THE FOUNDATIONS

(An Extravagant Play)

By John Galsworthy

[ACT I](#)

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PERSONS OF THE PLAY

LORD WILLIAM DROMONDY, M.P.
LADY WILLIAM DROMONDY
LITTLE ANNE
MISS STOKES
MR. POULDER
JAMES
HENRY
THOMAS
CHARLES
THE PRESS
LEMMY
OLD MRS. LEMMY
LITTLE AIDA
THE DUKE OF EXETER

Some ANTI-SWEATERS; Some SWEATED WORKERS; and a CROWD

SCENES

SCENE I. *The cellar at LORD WILLIAM DROMONDY'S in Park Lane.*

SCENE II. *The room of old MRS. LEMMY in Bethnal Green.*

SCENE III. *Ante-room of the hall at LORD WILLIAM DROMONDY'S*

The Action passes continuously between 8 and 10.30 of a summer evening, some years after the Great War.

ACT I

LORD WILLIAM DROMONDY'S mansion in Park Lane. Eight o'clock of the evening. LITTLE ANNE DROMONDY and the large footman, JAMES, gaunt and grin, discovered in the wine cellar, by light of gas. JAMES, in plush breeches, is selecting wine.

L. ANNE: James, are you really James?

JAMES. No, my proper name's John.

L. ANNE. Oh! [A pause] And is Charles's an improper name too?

JAMES. His proper name's Mark.

L. ANNE. Then is Thomas Matthew?

JAMES. Miss Anne, stand clear o' that bin. You'll put your foot through one o' those 'ock bottles.

L. ANNE. No, but James—Henry might be Luke, really?

JAMES. Now shut it, Miss Anne!

L. ANNE. Who gave you those names? Not your godfathers and godmothers?

JAMES. Poulder. Butlers think they're the Almighty. [Gloomily] But his name's Bartholomew.

L. ANNE. Bartholomew Poulder? It's rather jolly.

JAMES. It's hidjeous.

L. ANNE. Which do you like to be called—John or James?

JAMES. I don't give a darn.

L. ANNE. What is a darn?

JAMES. 'Tain't in the dictionary.

L. ANNE. Do you like my name? Anne Dromondy? It's old, you know. But it's funny, isn't it?

JAMES. [Indifferently] It'll pass.

L. ANNE. How many bottles have you got to pick out?

JAMES. Thirty-four.

L. ANNE. Are they all for the dinner, or for the people who come in to the Anti-Sweating Meeting afterwards?

JAMES. All for the dinner. They give the Sweated—tea.

L. ANNE. All for the dinner? They'll drink too much, won't they?

JAMES. We've got to be on the safe side.

L. ANNE. Will it be safer if they drink too much?

[JAMES pauses in the act of dusting a bottle to look at her, as if suspecting irony.]

[Sniffing] Isn't the smell delicious here—like the taste of cherries when they've gone bad—[She sniffs again] and mushrooms; and boot blacking.

JAMES. That's the escape of gas.

L. ANNE. Has the plumber's man been?

JAMES. Yes.

L. ANNE. Which one?

JAMES. Little blighter I've never seen before.

L. ANNE. What is a little blighter? Can I see?

JAMES. He's just gone.

L. ANNE. [Straying] Oh!... James, are these really the foundations?

JAMES. You might 'arf say so. There's a lot under a woppin' big house like this; you can't hardly get to the bottom of it.

L. ANNE. Everything's built on something, isn't it? And what's THAT built on?

JAMES. Ask another.

L. ANNE. If you wanted to blow it up, though, you'd have to begin from here, wouldn't you?

JAMES. Who'd want to blow it up?

L. ANNE. It would make a mess in Park Lane.

JAMES. I've seen a lot bigger messes than this'd make, out in the war.

L. ANNE. Oh! but that's years ago! Was it like this in the trenches, James?

JAMES. [Grimly] Ah! 'Cept that you couldn't lay your 'and on a bottle o' port when you wanted one.

L. ANNE. Do you, when you want it, here?

JAMES. [On guard] I only suggest it's possible.

L. ANNE. Perhaps Poulder does.

JAMES. [Icily] I say nothin' about that.

L. ANNE. Oh! Do say something!

JAMES. I'm ashamed of you, Miss Anne, pumpin' me!

L. ANNE. [Reproachfully] I'm not pumpin'! I only want to make Poulder jump when I ask him.

JAMES. [Grinning] Try it on your own responsibility, then; don't bring me in!

L. ANNE. [Switching off] James, do you think there's going to be a bloody revolution?

JAMES. [Shocked] I shouldn't use that word, at your age.

L. ANNE. Why not? Daddy used it this morning to Mother. [Imitating] "The country's in an awful state, darling; there's going to be a bloody revolution, and we shall all be blown sky-high." Do you like Daddy?

JAMES. [Taken aback] Like Lord William? What do you think? We chaps would ha' done anything for him out there in the war.

L. ANNE. He never says that he always says he'd have done anything for you!

JAMES. Well—that's the same thing.

L. ANNE. It isn't—it's the opposite. What is class hatred, James?

JAMES. [Wisely] Ah! A lot o' people thought when the war was over there'd be no more o' that. [He sniggers] Used to amuse me to read in the papers about the wonderful unity that was comin'. I could ha' told 'em different.

L. ANNE. Why should people hate? I like everybody.

JAMES. You know such a lot o' people, don't you?

L. ANNE. Well, Daddy likes everybody, and Mother likes everybody, except the people who don't like Daddy. I bar Miss Stokes, of course; but then, who wouldn't?

JAMES. [With a touch of philosophy] That's right—we all bars them that tries to get something out of us.

L. ANNE. Who do you bar, James?

JAMES. Well—[Enjoying the luxury of thought]—Speaking generally, I bar everybody that looks down their noses at me. Out there in the trenches, there'd come a shell, and orf'd go some orficer's head, an' I'd think: That might ha' been me—we're all equal in the sight o' the stars. But when I got home again among the torfs, I says to meself: Out there, ye know, you filled a hole as well as me; but here you've put it on again, with mufti.

L. ANNE. James, are your breeches made of mufti?

JAMES. [Contemplating his legs with a certain contempt] Ah! Footmen were to ha' been off; but Lord William was scared we wouldn't get jobs in the rush. We're on his conscience, and it's on my conscience that I've been on his long enough—so, now I've saved a bit, I'm goin' to take meself orf it.

L. ANNE. Oh! Are you going? Where?

JAMES. [Assembling the last bottles] Out o' Blighty!

L. ANNE. Is a little blighter a little Englishman?

JAMES. [Embarrassed] Well-'e can be.

L. ANNE [Mining] James—we're quite safe down here, aren't we, in a revolution? Only, we wouldn't have fun. Which would you rather—be safe, or have fun?

JAMES. [Grimly] Well, I had my bit o' fun in the war.

L. ANNE. I like fun that happens when you're not looking.

JAMES. Do you? You'd ha' been just suited.

L. ANNE. James, is there a future life? Miss Stokes says so.

JAMES. It's a belief, in the middle classes.

L. ANNE. What are the middle classes?

JAMES. Anything from two 'undred a year to supertax.

L. ANNE. Mother says they're terrible. Is Miss Stokes middle class?

JAMES. Yes.

L. ANNE. Then I expect they are terrible. She's awfully virtuous, though, isn't she?

JAMES. 'Tisn't so much the bein' virtuous, as the lookin' it, that's awful.

L. ANNE. Are all the middle classes virtuous? Is Poulder?

JAMES. [Dubiously] Well. Ask him!

L. ANNE. Yes, I will. Look!

[From an empty bin on the ground level she picks up a lighted taper,—burnt almost to the end.]

JAMES. [Contemplating it] Careless!

L. Ate. Oh! And look! [She points to a rounded metal object lying in the bin, close to where the taper was] It's a bomb!

She is about to pick it up when JAMES takes her by the waist and puts her aside.

JAMES. [Sternly] You stand back, there! I don't like the look o' that!

L. ANNE. [With intense interest] Is it really a bomb? What fun!

JAMES. Go and fetch Poulder while I keep an eye on it.

L. ANNE. [On tiptoe of excitement] If only I can make him jump! Oh, James! we needn't put the light out, need we?

JAMES. No. Clear off and get him, and don't you come back.

L. ANNE. Oh! but I must! I found it!

JAMES. Cut along.

L. ANNE. Shall we bring a bucket?

JAMES. Yes. [ANNE flies off.]

[Gazing at the object] Near go! Thought I'd seen enough o'them to last my time. That little gas blighter! He looked a rum 'un, too—one o' these 'ere Bolshies.

[In the presence of this grim object the habits of the past are too much for him. He sits on the ground, leaning against one of the bottle baskets, keeping his eyes on the bomb, his large, lean, gorgeous body spread, one elbow on his plush knee. Taking out an empty pipe, he places it mechanically, bowl down, between his dips. There enter, behind him, as from a communication trench, POULDER, in swallow-tails, with LITTLE ANNE behind him.]

L. ANNE. [Peering round him—ecstatic] Hurrah! Not gone off yet! It can't—can it—while James is sitting on it?

POULDER. [Very broad and stout, with square shoulders,—a large ruddy face, and a small mouth] No noise, Miss.—James.

JAMES. Hallo!

POULDER. What's all this?

JAMES. Bomb!

POULDER. Miss Anne, off you go, and don't you—

L. ANNE. Come back again! I know! [She flies.]

JAMES. [Extending his hand with the pipe in it] See!

POULDER. [Severely] You've been at it again! Look here, you're not in the trenches now. Get up! What are your breeches goin' to be like? You might break a bottle any moment!

JAMES. [Rising with a jerk to a sort of "Attention!"] Look here, you starched antiquity, you and I and that bomb are here in the sight of the stars. If you don't look out I'll stamp on it and blow us all to glory! Drop your civilian swank!

POULDER. [Seeing red] Ho! Because you had the privilege of fightin' for your country you still think you can put it on, do you? Take up your wine! 'Pon my word, you fellers have got no nerve left!

[JAMES makes a sudden swoop, lifts the bomb and poises it in both hands. POULDER recoils against a bin and gazes, at the object.]

JAMES. Put up your hands!

POULDER. I defy you to make me ridiculous.

JAMES. [Fiercely] Up with 'em!

[POULDER'S hands go up in an uncontrollable spasm, which he subdues almost instantly, pulling them down again.]

JAMES. Very good. [He lowers the bomb.]

POULDER. [Surprised] I never lifted 'em.

JAMES. You'd have made a first-class Boche, Poulder. Take the bomb yourself; you're in charge of this section.

POULDER. [Pouting] It's no part of my duty to carry menial objects; if you're afraid of it I'll send 'Enry.

JAMES. Afraid! You 'Op o' me thumb!

[From the "communication trench" appears LITTLE ANNE, followed by a thin, sharp, sallow-faced man of thirty-five or so, and another FOOTMAN, carrying a wine-cooler.]

L. ANNE. I've brought the bucket, and the Press.

PRESS. [In front of POULDER'S round eyes and mouth] Ah, major domo, I was just taking the names of the Anti-Sweating dinner. [He catches sight of the bomb in JAMES'S hand] By George! What A.1. irony! [He brings out a note-book and writes] "Highest class dining to relieve distress of lowest class-bombed by same!" Tipping! [He rubs his hands].

POULDER. [Drawing himself up] Sir? This is present! [He indicates ANNE with the flat of his hand.]

L. ANNE. I found the bomb.

PRESS. [Absorbed] By Jove! This is a piece of luck! [He writes.]

POULDER. [Observing him] This won't do—it won't do at all!

PRESS. [Writing-absorbed] "Beginning of the British Revolution!"

POULDER. [To JAMES] Put it in the cooler. 'Enry, 'old up the cooler. Gently! Miss Anne, get be'ind the Press.

JAMES. [Grimly—holding the bomb above the cooler] It won't be the Press that'll stop Miss Anne's goin' to 'Eaven if one o' this sort goes off. Look out! I'm goin' to drop it.

[ALL recoil. HENRY puts the cooler down and backs away.]

L. ANNE. [Dancing forward] Oh! Let me see! I missed all the war, you know!

[JAMES lowers the bomb into the cooler.]

POULDER. [Regaining courage—to THE PRESS, who is scribbling in his note-book] If you mention this before the police lay their hands on it, it'll be contempt o' Court.

PRESS. [Struck] I say, major domo, don't call in the police! That's the last resort. Let me do the Sherlocking for you. Who's been down here?

L. ANNE. The plumber's man about the gas—a little blighter we'd never seen before.

JAMES. Lives close by, in Royal Court Mews—No. 3. I had a word with him before he came down. Lemmy his name is.

PRESS. "Lemmy!" [Noting the address] Right-o!

L. ANNE. Oh! Do let me come with you!

POULDER. [Barring the way] I've got to lay it all before Lord William.

PRESS. Ah! What's he like?

POULDER. [With dignity] A gentleman, sir.

PRESS. Then he won't want the police in.

POULDER. Nor the Press, if I may go so far, as to say so.

PRESS. One to you! But I defy you to keep this from the Press, major domo: This is the most significant thing that has happened in our time. Guy Fawkes is nothing to it. The foundations of Society reeling! By George, it's a second Bethlehem!

[He writes.]

POULDER. [To JAMES] Take up your wine and follow me. 'Enry, bring the cooler. Miss Anne, precede us. [To THE PRESS] You defy me? Very well; I'm goin' to lock you up here.

PRESS. [Uneasy] I say this is medieval.

[He attempts to pass.]

POULDER. [Barring the way] Not so! James, put him up in that empty 'ock bin. We can't have dinner disturbed in any way.

JAMES. [Putting his hands on THE PRESS'S shoulders] Look here—go quiet! I've had a grudge against you yellow newspaper boys ever since the war—frothin' up your daily hate, an' makin' the Huns desperate. You nearly took my life five hundred times out there. If you squeal, I'm gain' to take yours once—and that'll be enough.

PRESS. That's awfully unjust. Im not yellow!

JAMES. Well, you look it. Hup.

PRESS. Little Lady-Anne, haven't you any authority with these fellows?

L. ANNE. [Resisting Poulard's pressure] I won't go! I simply must see James put him up!

PRESS. Now, I warn you all plainly—there'll be a leader on this.

[He tries to bolt but is seized by JAMES.]

JAMES. [Ironically] Ho!

PRESS. My paper has the biggest influence

JAMES. That's the one! Git up in that 'ock bin, and mind your feet among the claret.

PRESS. This is an outrage on the Press.

JAMES. Then it'll wipe out one by the Press on the Public—an' leave just a million over! Hup!

POULDER. 'Enry, give 'im an 'and.

[THE PRESS mounts, assisted by JAMES and HENRY.]

L. ANNE. [Ecstatic] It's lovely!

POULDER. [Nervously] Mind the '87! Mind!

JAMES. Mind your feet in Mr. Poulder's favourite wine!

[A WOMAN'S voice is heard, as from the depths of a cave, calling "Anne! Anne!"]

L. ANNE. [Aghast] Miss Stokes—I must hide!

[She gets behind POULDER. The three Servants achieve dignified positions in front of the bins. The voice comes nearer. THE PRESS sits dangling his feet, grinning. MISS STOKES appears. She is woman of forty-five and terribly good manners. Her greyish hair is rolled back off her forehead. She is in a high evening dress, and in the dim light radiates a startled composure.]

MISS STOKES. Poulder, where is Miss Anne?

[ANNE lays hold of the backs of his legs.]

POULDER. [Wincing] I am not in a position to inform you, Miss.

MISS S. They told me she was down here. And what is all this about a bomb?

POULDER. [Lifting his hand in a calming manner] The crisis is past; we have it in ice, Miss. 'Enry, show Miss Stokes! [HENRY indicates the cooler.]

MISS S. Good gracious! Does Lord William know?

POULDER. Not at present, Miss.

MISS S. But he ought to, at once.

POULDER. We 'ave 'ad complications.

MISS S. [Catching sight of the legs of THE PRESS] Dear me! What are those?

JAMES. [Gloomily] The complications.

[MISS STOKES pins up her glasses and stares at them.]

PRESS. [Cheerfully] Miss Stokes, would you kindly tell Lord William I'm here from the Press, and would like to speak to him?

MISS S. But—er—why are you up there?

JAMES. 'E got up out o' remorse, Miss.

MISS S. What do you mean, James?

PRESS. [Warmly] Miss Stokes, I appeal to you. Is it fair to attribute responsibility to an unsigned journalist—for what he has to say?

JAMES. [Sepulchrally] Yes, when you've got 'im in a nice dark place.

MISS S. James, be more respectful! We owe the Press a very great debt.

JAMES. I'm goin' to pay it, Miss.

MISS S. [At a loss] Poulder, this is really most—

POULDER. I'm bound to keep the Press out of temptation, miss, till I've laid it all before Lord William. 'Enry, take up the cooler. James, watch 'im till we get clear, then bring on the rest of the wine and lock up. Now, Miss.

MISS S. But where is Anne?

PRESS. Miss Stokes, as a lady—!

MISS S. I shall go and fetch Lord William!

POULDER. We will all go, Miss.

L. ANNE. [Rushing out from behind his legs] No—me!

[She eludes MISS STOKES and vanishes, followed by that distracted but still well-mannered lady.]

POULDER. [Looking at his watch] 'Enry, leave the cooler, and take up the wine; tell Thomas to lay it out; get the champagne into ice, and 'ave Charles 'andy in the 'all in case some literary bounder comes punctual.

[HENRY takes up the wine and goes.]

PRESS. [Above his head] I say, let me down. This is a bit undignified, you know. My paper's a great organ.

POULDER. [After a moment's hesitation] Well—take 'im down, James; he'll do some mischief among the bottles.

JAMES. 'Op off your base, and trust to me.

[THE PRESS slides off the bin's edge, is received by JAMES, and not landed gently.]

POULDER. [Contemplating him] The incident's closed; no ill-feeling, I hope?

PRESS. No-o.

POULDER. That's right. [Clearing his throat] While we're waitin' for Lord William—if you're interested in wine—[Philosophically] you can read the history of the times in this cellar. Take 'ock: [He points to a bin] Not a bottle gone. German product, of course. Now, that 'ock is 'sa 'avin' the time of its life—maturin' grandly; got a wonderful chance. About the time we're bringin' ourselves to drink it, we shall be havin' the next great war. With luck that 'ock may lie there another quarter of a century, and a sweet pretty wine it'll be. I only hope I may be here to drink it. Ah! [He shakes his head]—but look at claret! Times are hard on claret. We're givin' it an awful doin'. Now, there's a Ponty Canny [He points to a bin] if we weren't so 'opelessly allied with France, that wine would have a reasonable future. As it is—none! We drink it up and up; not more than sixty dozen left. And where's its equal to come from for a dinner wine—ah! I ask you? On the other hand, port is steady; made in a little country, all but the cobwebs and the old boot flavour; guaranteed by the British Nary; we may 'ope for the best with port. Do you drink it?

PRESS. When I get the chance.

POULDER. Ah! [Clears his throat] I've often wanted to ask: What do they pay you—if it's not indelicate?

[THE PRESS shrugs his shoulders.]

Can you do it at the money?

[THE PRESS shakes his head.] Still—it's an easy life! I've regretted sometimes that I didn't have a shot at it myself; influencin' other people without disclosin' your identity—something very attractive about that. [Lowering his voice] Between man and man, now-what do you think of the situation of the country—these processions of the unemployed—the Red Flag an' the Marsillaisy in the streets—all this talk about an upheaval?

PRESS. Well, speaking as a Socialist—

POULDER. [Astounded] Why; I thought your paper was Tory!

PRESS. So it is. That's nothing!

POULDER. [Open-mouthed] Dear me! [Pointing to the bomb] Do you really think there's something in this?

JAMES. [Sepulchrally] 'Igh explosive.

PRESS. [Taking out his note-book] Too much, anyway, to let it drop.

[A pleasant voice calls "Poulder! Hallo!".]

POULDER. [Forming a trumpet with his hand] Me Lord!

[As LORD WILLIAM appears, JAMES, overcome by reminiscences; salutes, and is mechanically answered. LORD WILLIAM has "charm." His hair and moustache are crisp and just beginning to grizzle. His bearing is free, easy, and only faintly armoured. He will go far to meet you any day. He is in full evening dress.]

LORD W. [Cheerfully] I say, Poulder, what have you and James been doing to the Press? Liberty of the Press—it isn't what it was, but there is a limit. Where is he?

[He turns to Jams between whom and himself there is still the freemasonry of the trenches.]

JAMES. [Pointing to POULDER] Be'ind the parapet, me Lord.

[THE PRESS mopes out from where he has involuntarily been. screened by POULDER, who looks at JAMES severely. LORD WILLIAM hides a smile.]

PRESS. Very glad to meet you, Lord William. My presence down here is quite involuntary.

LORD W. [With a charming smile] I know. The Press has to put its— er—to go to the bottom of everything. Where's this bomb, Poulder? Ah!

[He looks into the wine cooler.]

PRESS. [Taking out his note-book] Could I have a word with you on the crisis, before dinner, Lord William?

LORD W. It's time you and James were up, Poulder. [Indicating the cooler] Look after this; tell Lady William I'll be there in a minute.

POULDER. Very good, me Lord.

[He goes, followed by JAMES carrying the cooler.] [As THE PRESS turns to look after them, LORD WILLIAM catches sight of his back.]

LORD W. I must apologise, sir. Can I brush you?

PRESS. [Dusting himself] Thanks; it's only behind. [He opens his note-book] Now, Lord William, if you'd kindly outline your views on the national situation; after such a narrow escape from death, I feel they might have a moral effect. My paper, as you know, is concerned with—the deeper aspect of things. By the way, what do you value your house and collection at?

LORD W. [Twisting his little mustache] Really: I can't! Really!

PRESS. Might I say a quarter of a million-lifted in two seconds and a half-hundred thousand to the second. It brings it home, you know.

LORD W. No, no; dash it! No!

PRESS. [Disappointed] I see—not draw attention to your property in the present excited state of public feeling? Well, suppose we approach it from the viewpoint of the Anti-Sweating dinner. I have the list of guests—very weighty!

LORD W. Taken some lifting—wouldn't they?

PRESS. [Seriously] May I say that you designed the dinner to soften the tension, at this crisis? You saw that case, I suppose, this morning, of the woman dying of starvation in Bethnal Green?

LORD W. [Desperately] Yes-yes! I've been horribly affected. I always knew this slump would come after the war, sooner or later.

PRESS. [Writing] "... had predicted slump."

LORD W. You see, I've been an Anti-Sweating man for years, and I thought if only we could come together now....

PRESS. [Nodding] I see—I see! Get Society interested in the Sweated, through the dinner. I have the menu here. [He produces it.]

LORD W. Good God, man—more than that! I want to show the people that we stand side by side with them, as we did in the trenches. The whole thing's too jolly awful. I lie awake over it.

[He walks up and down.]

PRESS. [Scribbling] One moment, please. I'll just get that down— "Too jolly awful—lies awake over it. Was wearing a white waistcoat with pearl buttons." [At a sign of resentment from his victim.] I want the human touch, Lord William—it's everything in my paper. What do you say about this attempt to bomb you?

LORD W. Well, in a way I think it's d—d natural

PRESS. [Scribbling] "Lord William thought it d—d natural."

LORD W. [Overhearing] No, no; don't put that down. What I mean is, I should like to get hold of those fellows that are singing the Marseillaise about the streets—fellows that have been in the war— real sports they are, you know—thorough good chaps at bottom—and say to them: "Have a feeling heart, boys; put yourself in my position." I don't believe a bit they'd want to bomb me then.

[He walks up and down.]

PRESS. [Scribbling and muttering] "The idea, of brotherhood—" D'you mind my saying that? Word brotherhood—always effective—always—

[He writes.]

LORD E. [Bewildered] "Brotherhood!" Well, it's pure accident that I'm here and they're there. All the same, I can't pretend to be starving. Can't go out into Hyde Park and stand on a tub, can I? But if I could only show them what I feel—they're such good chaps— poor devils.

PRESS. I quite appreciate! [He writes] "Camel and needle's eye." You were at Eton and Oxford? Your constituency I know. Clubs? But I can get all that. Is it your view that Christianity is on the up-grade, Lord William?

LORD W. [Dubious] What d'you mean by Christianity—loving—kindness and that? Of course I think that dogma's got the knock.

[He walks.]

PRESS. [Writing] "Lord William thought dogma had got the knock." I should like you just to develop your definition of Christianity. "Loving—kindness" strikes rather a new note.

LORD W. New? What about the Sermon on the Mount?

PRESS. [Writing] "Refers to Sermon on Mount." I take it you don't belong to any Church, Lord William?

LORD W. [Exasperated] Well, really—I've been baptised and that sort of thing. But look here—

PRESS. Oh! you can trust me—I shan't say anything that you'll regret. Now, do you consider that a religious revival would help to quiet the country?

LORD W. Well, I think it would be a deuced, good thing if everybody were a bit more kind.

PRESS. Ah! [Musing] I feel that your views are strikingly original, Lord William. If you could just open out on them a little more? How far would you apply kindness in practice?

LORD W. Can you apply it in theory?

PRESS. I believe it is done. But would you allow yourself to be blown up with impunity?

LORD W. Well, that's a bit extreme. But I quite sympathise with this chap. Imagine yourself in his shoes. He sees a huge house, all these bottles; us swilling them down; perhaps he's got a starving wife, or consumptive kids.

PRESS. [Writing and murmuring] Um-m! "Kids."

LORD W. He thinks: "But for the grace of God, there swill I. Why should that blighter have everything and I nothing?" and all that.

PRESS. [Writing] "And all that." [Eagerly] Yes?

LORD W. And gradually—you see—this contrast—becomes an obsession with him. "There's got to be an example made," he thinks; and—er— he makes it, don't you know?

PRESS. [Writing] Ye-es? And—when you're the example?

LORD W. Well, you feel a bit blue, of course. But my point is that you quite see it.

PRESS. From the other world. Do you believe in a future life, Lord William? The public took a lot of interest in the question, if you remember, at the time of the war. It might revive at any moment, if there's to be a revolution.

LORD W. The wish is always father to the thought, isn't it?

PRESS. Yes! But—er—doesn't the question of a future life rather bear on your point about kindness? If there isn't one—why be kind?

LORD W. Well, I should say one oughtn't to be kind for any motive— that's self-interest; but just because one feels it, don't you know.

PRESS. [Writing vigorously] That's very new—very new!

LORD W. [Simply] You chaps are wonderful.

PRESS. [Doubtfully] You mean we're—we're—

LORD W. No, really. You have such a d—d hard time. It must be perfectly beastly to interview fellows like me.

PRESS. Oh! Not at all, Lord William. Not at all. I assure you compared with a literary man, it's—it's almost heavenly.

LORD W. You must have a wonderful knowledge of things.

PRESS. [Bridling a little] Well—I shouldn't say that.

LORD W. I don't see how you can avoid it. You turn your hands to everything.

PRESS. [Modestly] Well—yes, Yes.

LORD W. I say: Is there really going to be a revolution, or are you making it up, you Press?

PRESS. We don't know. We never know whether we come before the event, or it comes before us.

LORD W. That's—very deep—very dip. D'you mind lending me your note-book a moment. I'd like to stick that down. All right, I'll use the other end. [THE PRESS hands it hypnotically.]

LORD W. [Jotting] Thanks awfully. Now what's your real opinion of the situation?

PRESS. As a man or a Press man?

LORD W. Is there any difference?

PRESS. Is there any connection?

LORD W. Well, as a man.

PRESS. As a man, I think it's rotten.

LORD W. [Jotting] "Rotten." And as a pressman?

PRESS. [Smiling] Prime.

LORD W. What! Like a Stilton cheese. Ha, ha!

[He is about to write.]

PRESS. My stunt, Lord William. You said that.

[He jots it on his cuff.]

LORD W. But look here! Would you say that a strong press movement would help to quiet the country?

PRESS. Well, as you ask me, Lord William, I'll tell you. No newspapers for a month would do the trick.

LORD W. [Jotting] By Jove! That's brilliant.

PRESS. Yes, but I should starve. [He suddenly looks up, and his eyes, like gimlets, bore their way into LORD WILLIAM'S pleasant, troubled face] Lord William, you could do me a real kindness. Authorise me to go and interview the fellow who left the bomb here; I've got his address. I promise you to do it most discreetly. Fact is—well—I'm in low water. Since the war we simply can't get sensation enough for the new taste. Now, if I could have an article headed: "Bombed and Bomber"—sort of double interview, you know, it'd very likely set me on my legs again. [Very earnestly] Look! [He holds out his frayed wristbands.]

LORD W. [Grasping his hand] My dear chap, certainly. Go and interview this blighter, and then bring him round here. You can do that for one. I'd very much like to see him, as a matter of fact.

PRESS. Thanks awfully; I shall never forget it. Oh! might I have my note-book?

[LORD WILLIAM hands it back.]

LORD W. And look here, if there's anything—when a fellow's fortunate and another's not—

[He puts his hand into his breast pocket.]

PRESS. Oh, thank you! But you see, I shall have to write you up a bit, Lord William. The old aristocracy—you know what the public still expects; if you were to lend me money, you might feel—

LORD W. By Jove! Never should have dreamt—

PRESS. No! But it wouldn't do. Have you a photograph of yourself.

LORD W. Not on me.

PRESS. Pity! By the way, has it occurred to you that there may be another bomb on the premises?

LORD W. Phew! I'll have a look.

[He looks at his watch, and begins hurriedly searching the bins, bending down and going on his knees. THE PRESS reverses the notebook again and sketches him.]

PRESS. [To himself] Ah! That'll do. "Lord William examines the foundations of his house."

[A voice calls "Bill!" THE PRESS snaps the note-book to, and looks up. There, where the "communication trench" runs in, stands a tall and elegant woman in the extreme of evening dress.] [With presence of mind] Lady William? You'll find Lord William —Oh! Have you a photograph of him?

LADY W. Not on me.

PRESS. [Eyeing her] Er—no—I suppose not—no. Excuse me! [He sidles past her and is gone.]

LADY W. [With lifted eyebrows] Bill!

LORD W. [Emerging, dusting his knees] Hallo, Nell! I was just making sure there wasn't another bomb.

LADY W. Yes; that's why I came down: Who was that person?

LORD W. Press.

LADY W. He looked awfully yellow. I hope you haven't been giving yourself away.

LORD W. [Dubiously] Well, I don't know. They're like corkscrews.

LADY W. What did he ask you?

LORD W. What didn't he?

LADY W. Well, what did you tell him?

LORD W. That I'd been baptised—but he promised not to put it down.

LADY W. Bill, you are absurd.

[She gives a light tittle laugh.]

LORD W. I don't remember anything else, except that it was quite natural we should be bombed, don't you know.

LADY W. Why, what harm have we done?

LORD W. Been born, my dear. [Suddenly serious] I say, Nell, how am I to tell what this fellow felt when he left that bomb here?

LADY W. Why do you want to?

LORD W. Out there one used to know what one's men felt.

LADY W. [Staring] My dear boy, I really don't think you ought to see the Press; it always upsets you.

LORD W. Well! Why should you and I be going to eat ourselves silly to improve the condition of the sweated, when—

LADY W. [Calmly] When they're going to "improve" ours, if we don't look out. We've got to get in first, Bill.

LORD W. [Gloomily] I know. It's all fear. That's it! Here we are, and here we shall stay—as if there'd never been a war.

LADY W. Well, thank heaven there's no "front" to a revolution. You and I can go to glory together this time. Compact! Anything that's on, I'm to abate in.

LORD W. Well, in reason.

LADY W. No, in rhyme, too.

LORD W. I say, your dress!

LADY W. Yes, Poulder tried to stop me, but I wasn't going to have you blown up without me.

LORD W. You duck. You do look stunning. Give us a kiss!

LADY W. [Starting back] Oh, Bill! Don't touch me—your hands!

LORD W. Never mind, my mouth's clean.

They stand about a yard apart, and banding their faces towards each other, kiss on the lips.

L. ANNE. [Appearing suddenly from the "communication trench," and tip-toeing silently between them] Oh, Mum! You and Daddy ARE wasting time! Dinner's ready, you know!

CURTAIN

ACT II

The single room of old MRS. LEMMY, in a small grey house in Bethnal Green, the room of one cumbered by little save age, and the crockery debris of the past. A bed, a cupboard, a coloured portrait of Queen Victoria, and—of all things—a fiddle, hanging on the wall. By the side of old MRS. LEMMY in her chair is a pile of corduroy trousers, her day's sweated sewing, and a small table. She sits with her back to the window, through which, in the last of the light, the opposite side of the little grey street is visible under the evening sky, where hangs one white cloud shaped like a horned beast. She is still sewing, and her lips move. Being old, and lonely, she has that habit of talking to herself, distressing to those who cannot overhear. From the smack of her tongue she was once a West Country cottage woman; from the look of her creased, parchmenty face, she was once a pretty girl with black eyes, in which there is still much vitality. The door is opened with difficulty and a little girl enters, carrying a pile of unfinished corduroy trousers nearly as large as herself. She puts them down against the wall, and advances. She is eleven or twelve years old; large-eyed, dark haired, and fallow. Half a woman of this and half of another world, except when as now, she is as irresponsible a bit of life as a little flowering weed growing out of a wall. She stands looking at MRS. LEMMY with dancing eyes.

L. AIDA. I've brought yer to-morrer's trahsers. Y'nt yer finished wiv to-dy's? I want to tyke 'em.

MRS. L. No, me dear. Drat this last one—me old fengers!

L. AIDA. I learnt some poytry to-dy—I did.

MRS. L. Well, I never!

L. AIDA. [Reciting with unction]

"Little lamb who myde thee? Dost thou know who myde thee, Gyve thee life and byde thee feed By the stream and oer the mead; Gyve the clothing of delight, Softest clothing, woolly, bright; Gyve thee such a tender voice, Myking all the vyles rejoice. Little lamb who myde thee? Dost thou know who myde thee?"

MRS. L. 'Tes wonderful what things they tache ya nowadays.

L. AIDA. When I grow up I'm goin' to 'ave a revolver an' shoot the people that steals my jools.

MRS. L. Deary-me, wherever du yu get yore notions?

L. AIDA. An' I'm goin' to ride on as 'orse be'ind a man; an' I'm goin' to ryce trynes in my motor car.

MRS. L. [Dryly] Ah!—Yu'um gwine to be very busy, that's sartin. Can you sew?

L. AIDA. [With a Smile] Nao.

MRS. L. Don' they tache Yu that, there?

L. AIDA. [Blending contempt and a lingering curiosity] Nao.

MRS. L. 'Tes wonderful genteel.

L. AIDA. I can sing, though.

MRS. L. Let's 'ear yu, then.

L. AIDA. [Shaking her head] I can ply the pianner. I can ply a tune.

MRS. L. Whose pianner?

L. AIDA. Mrs. Brahn's when she's gone aht.

MRS. L. Well, yu are gettin' edjucation! Du they tache yu to love yore neighbours?

L. AIDA. [Ineffably] Nao. [Straying to the window] Mrs. Lemmy, what's the moon?

MRS. L. The mune? Us used to zay 'twas made o' crame cheese.

L. AIDA. I can see it.

MRS. L. Ah! Don' yu never go wishin' for it, me dear.

L. AIDA. I daon't.

MRS. L. Folks as wish for the mune never du no gude.

L. AIDA. [Craning out, brilliant] I'm goin' dahn in the street. I'll come back for yer trahsers.

MRS. L. Well; go yu, then, and get a breath o' fresh air in yore chakes. I'll sune 'a feneshed.

L. AIDA. [Solemnly] I'm goin' to be a dancer, I am.

She rushes suddenly to the door, pulls it open, and is gone.

MRS. L. [Looking after her, and talking to herself.] Ah! 'Er've a-got all 'er troubles before 'er! "Little lamb, a made'ee?" [Cackling] 'Tes a funny world, tu! [She sings to herself.]

"There is a green 'ill far away Without a city wall, Where our dear-Lord was crucified, 'U died to save us all." The door is opened, and LEMMY comes in; a little man with a stubble of dark moustache and spiky dark hair; large, peculiar eyes he has, and a look of laying his ears back, a look of doubting, of perversity with laughter up the sleeve, that grows on those who have to do with gas and water. He shuts the door.

MRS. L. Well, Bob, I 'aven't a-seen yu this tu weeks.

LEMMY comes up to his mother, and sits down on a stool, sets a tool-bag between his knees, and speaks in a cockney voice.

LEMMY. Well, old lydy o' leisure! Wot would y' 'ave for supper, if yer could choose—salmon wivaht the tin, an' tippy cyke?

MRS. L. [Shaking her head and smiling blandly] That's showy. Toad in the 'ole I'd 'ave—and a glass o' port wine.

LEMMY. Providential. [He opens a tool-bag] Wot dyer think I've got yer?

MRS. L. I 'ope yu've a-got yureself a job, my son!

LEMMY. [With his peculiar smile] Yus, or I couldn't 'ave afforded yer this. [He takes out a bottle] Not 'arf! This'll put the blood into yer. Pork wine—once in the cellars of the gryte. We'll drink the ryyal family in this.

[He apostrophises the portrait of Queen Victoria.]

MRS. L. Ah! She was a praaper gude queen. I see 'er once, when 'er was bein' burried.

LEMMY. Ryalties—I got nothin' to sy agynst 'em in this country. But the STYTE 'as got to 'ave its pipes seen to. The 'ole show's goin' up pop. Yer'll wyke up one o' these dyes, old lydy, and find yerself on the roof, wiv nuffin' between yer an' the grahnd.

MRS. L. I can't tell what yu'm talkin' about.

LEMMY. We're goin' to 'ave a triumpherat in this country Liberty, Equality, Fraternity; an' if yer arsk me, they won't be in power six months before they've cut each other's throats. But I don't care—I want to see the blood flow! (Dispassionately) I don' care 'oose blood it is. I want to see it flow!

MRS. L. [Indulgently] Yu'm a funny boy, that's sartin.

LEMMY. [Carving at the cork with a knife] This 'ere cork is like Sasiety—rotten; it's old—old an' moulderin'. [He holds up a bit of cork on the point of the knife] Crumblin' under the wax, it is. In goes the screw an' out comes the cork. [With unction]—an' the blood flows. [Tipping the bottle, he lets a drop fall into the middle of his hand, and licks it up. Gazing with queer and doubting commiseration at has mother] Well, old dear, wot shall we 'ave it aht of—the gold loving-cup, or—what? 'Ave yer supper fust, though, or it'll go to yer 'ead! [He goes to the cupboard and taken out a disk in which a little bread is sopped in a little' milk] Cold pap! 'Ow can yer? 'Yn't yer got a kipper in the 'ouse?

MRS. L. [Admiring the bottle] Port wine! 'Tis a brave treat! I'll 'ave it out of the "Present from Margitt," Bob. I

tuk 'ee therr by excursion when yu was six months. Yu 'ad a shrimp an' it choked yu praaperly. Yu was always a squeamy little feller. I can't never think 'ow yu managed in the war-time, makin' they shells.

LEMMY, who has brought to the table two mugs and blown the duet out of; them, fills them with port, and hands one to his mother, who is eating her bread and milk.

LEMMY. Ah! Nothin' worried me, 'cept the want o' soap.

MRS. L. [Cackling gently] So it du still, then! Luke at yore face. Yu never was a clean boy, like Jim.

[She puts out a thin finger and touches his cheek, whereon is a black smudge.]

LEMMY. [Scrubbing his cheek with his sleeve.] All right! Y'see, I come strytle 'ere, to get rid o' this.

[He drinks.]

MRS. L. [Eating her bread and milk] Tes a pity yu'm not got a wife to see't yu wash yureself.

LEMMY. [Goggling] Wife! Not me—I daon't want ter myke no food for pahder. Wot oh!—they said, time o' the war—ye're fightin' for yer children's 'eritage. Well; wot's the 'eritage like, now we've got it? Empty as a shell before yer put the 'igh explosive in. Wot's it like? [Warming to his theme] Like a prophecy in the pypers—not a bit more substantial.

MRS. L. [Slightly hypnotised] How 'e du talk! The gas goes to yore 'ead, I think!

LEMMY. I did the gas to-dy in the cellars of an 'ouse where the wine was mountains 'igh. A regiment couldn't 'a drunk it. Marble pillars in the 'all, butler broad as an observytion balloon, an' four conscientious khaki footmen. When the guns was roarin' the talk was all for no more o' them glorious weeds-style an' luxury was orf. See wot it is naow. You've got a bare crust in the cupboard 'ere, I works from 'and to mouth in a glutted market—an' there they stand abaht agyne in their britches in the 'oases o' the gryte. I was reg'lar overcome by it. I left a thing in that cellar—I left a thing.... It'll be a bit ork'ard for me to-mower. [Drinks from his mug.]

MRS. L. [Placidly, feeling the warmth of the little she has drunk] What thing?

LEMMY. Wot thing? Old lydy, ye're like a winkle afore yer opens 'er—I never see anything so peaceful. 'Ow dyer manage it?

MRS. L. Settin' 'ere and thenkin'.

LEA. Wot abaht?

MRS. L. We-el—Money, an' the works o' God.

LEMMY. Ah! So yer give me a thought sometimes.

MRS. L. [Lofting her mug] Yu ought never to ha' spent yore money on this, Bob!

LEMMY. I thought that meself.

MRS. L. Last time I 'ad a glass o' port wine was the day yore brother Jim went to Ameriky. [Smacking her lips] For a teetotal drink, it du warm 'ee!

LEMMY. [Raising his mug] Well, 'ere's to the British revolution! 'Ere's to the conflygrytion in the sky!

MRS. L. [Comfortably] So as to kape up therr, 'twon't du no 'arm.

LEMMY goes to the window and unhooks his fiddle; he stands with it halfway to his shoulder. Suddenly he opens the window and leans out. A confused murmur of voices is heard; and a snatch of the Marseillaise, sung by a girl. Then the shuffling tramp of feet, and figures are passing in the street.

LEMMY. [Turning—excited] Wot'd I tell yer, old lydy? There it is —there it is!

MRS. L. [Placidly] What is?

LEMMY. The revolution. [He cranes out] They've got it on a barrer. Cheerio!

VOICE. [Answering] Cheerio!

LEMMY. [Leaning out] I sy—you 'yn't tykin' the body, are yer?

VOICE. Nao.

LEMMY. Did she die o' starvytion O.K.?

VOICE. She bloomin' well did; I know 'er brother.

LEMMY. Ah! That'll do us a bit o' good!

VOICE. Cheerio!

LEMMY. So long!

VOICE. So long!

[The girl's voice is heard again in the distance singing the Marseillaise. The door is

flung open and LITTLE AIDA comes running in again.]

LEMMY. 'Allo, little Aida!

L. AIDA. 'Allo, I been follerin' the corfin. It's better than an 'orse dahn!

MRS. L. What coffin?

L. AIDA. Why, 'er's wot died o' starvytion up the street. They're goin' to tyke it to 'Yde Pawk, and 'oller.

MRS. L. Well, never yu mind wot they'm goin' to du: Yu wait an' take my trousers like a gude gell.

[She puts her mug aside and takes up her unfinished pair of trousers. But the wine has entered her fingers, and strength to push the needle through is lacking.]

LEMMY. [Tuning his fiddle] Wot'll yer 'ave, little Aida? "Dead March in Saul" or "When the fields was white wiv dysies"?

L. AIDA. [With a hop and a brilliant smile] Aoh yus! "When the fields"—

MRS. L. [With a gesture of despair] Deary me! I 'aven't a-got the strength!

LEMMY. Leave 'em alone, old dear! No one'll be goin' aht wivaht trahsers to-night 'cos yer leaves that one undone. Little Aida, fold 'em up!

[LITTLE AIDA methodically folds the five finished pairs of trousers into a pile. LEMMY begins playing. A smile comes on the face of MRS. L, who is rubbing her fingers. LITTLE AIDA, trousers over arm, goes and stares at LEMMY playing.]

LEMMY. [Stopping] Little Aida, one o' vese dyes yer'll myke an actress. I can see it in yer fyce!

[LITTLE AIDA looks at him wide-eyed.]

MRS. L. Don't 'ee putt things into 'er 'ead, Bob!

LEMMY. 'Tyn't 'er 'ead, old lydy—it's lower. She wants feedin'— feed 'er an' she'll rise. [He strikes into the "Machichi"] Look at 'er naow. I tell yer there's a fortune in 'er.

[LITTLE AIDA has put out her tongue.]

MRS. L. I'd saner there was a gude 'eart in 'er than any fortune.

L. AIDA. [Hugging her pile of trousers] It's thirteen pence three farthin's I've got to bring yer, an' a penny aht for me, mykes twelve three farthin's: [With the same little hop and sudden smile] I'm goin' to ride back on a bus, I am.

LEMMY. Well, you myke the most of it up there; it's the nearest you'll ever git to 'eaven.

MRS. L. Don' yu discourage 'er, Bob; she'm a gude little thing, an't yu, dear?

L. AIDA. [Simply] Yus.

LEMMY. Not 'arf. Wot c'her do wiv yesterdy's penny?

L. AIDA. Movies.

LEMMY. An' the dy before?

L. AIDA. Movies.

LEMMY. Wot'd I tell yer, old lydy—she's got vicious tystes, she'll finish in the theayter yep Tyke my tip, little Aida; you put every penny into yer foundytions, yer'll get on the boards quicker that wy.

MRS. L. Don' yu pay no 'eed to his talk.

L. AIDA. I daon't.

Ice. Would yer like a sip aht o' my mug?

L. AIDA. [Brilliant] Yus.

MRS. L. Not at yore age, me dear, though it is teetotal.

[LITTLE AIDA puts her head on one side, like a dog trying to understand.]

LEMMY. Well, 'ave one o' my gum-drops.

[Holds out a paper.] [LITTLE AIDA brilliant, takes a flat, dark substance from it, and puts it in her mouth.]

Give me a kiss, an' I'll give yer a penny.

[LITTLE AIDA shakes her head, and leans out of window.]

Movver, she daon't know the valyer of money.

MRS. L. Never mind 'im, me dear.

L. AIDA. [Sucking the gum-drop—with difficulty] There's a taxi-cab at the corner.

[LITTLE AIDA runs to the door. A figure stands in the doorway; she skids round him and out. THE PRESS comes in.]

LEMMY. [Dubiously] Wat-oh!

PRESS. Mr. Lemmy?

LEMMY. The syme.

PRESS. I'm from the Press.

LEMMY. Blimy.

PRESS. They told me at your place you wens very likely here.

LEMMY. Yus I left Downin' Street a bit early to-dy! [He twangs the feddle-strings pompously.]

PRESS. [Taking out his note-book and writing] "Fiddles while Rome is burning!" Mr. Lemmy, it's my business at this very critical time to find out what the nation's thinking. Now, as a representative working man—

LEMMY. That's me.

PRESS. You can help me. What are your views?

LEMMY. [Putting down fiddle] Voos? Sit dahn!

[THE PRESS sits on the stool which LEMMY has vacated.]

The Press—my Muvver. Seventy-seven. She's a wonder; 'yn't yer, old dear?

PRESS. Very happy to make your acquaintance, Ma'am. [He writes] "Mrs. Lemmy, one of the veterans of industry——" By the way, I've jest passed a lot of people following a coffin.

LEMMY. Centre o' the cyclone—cyse o' starvytion; you 'ad 'er in the pyper this mornin'.

PRESS. Ah! yes! Tragic occurrence. [Looking at the trousers.] Hub of the Sweated Industries just here. I especially want to get at the heart——

MRS. L. 'Twasn't the 'eart, 'twas the stomach.

PRESS. [Writing] "Mrs. Lemmy goes straight to the point."

LEMMY. Mister, is it my voos or Muvver's yer want?

PRESS. Both.

LEMMY. 'Cos if yer get Muvver's, yer won't 'ave time for mine. I tell yer strytle [Confidentially] she's get a glawss a' port wine in 'er. Naow, mind yer, I'm not anxious to be intervoeed. On the other 'and, anyfink I might 'eve to sy of valyer——There is a clawss o' politician that 'as nuffn to sy—Aoh! an' daon't 'e sy it just! I dunno wot pyper yer represent.

PRESS. [Smiling] Well, Mr. Lemmy, it has the biggest influ——

LEMMY. They all 'as that; dylies, weeklies, evenin's, Sundyes; but it's of no consequence—my voos are open and aboveboard. Naow, wot shall we begin abaht?

PRESS. Yourself, if you please. And I'd like you to know at once that my paper wants the human note, the real heart-beat of things.

LEMMY. I see; sensytion! Well; 'ere am I—a fustclawss plumber's. assistant—in a job to-dy an' out tomorrer. There's a 'eart-beat in that, I tell yer. 'Oo knows wot the mower 'as for me!

PRESS. [Writing]. "The great human issue—Mr. Lemmy touches it at once."

LEMMY. I sy keep my nyme aht o' this; I don' go in fer self-advertisement.

PRESS. [Writing] "True working-man—modest as usual."

LEMMY. I daon't want to embarrass the Gover'ment. They're so ticklish ever since they got the 'abit, war-time, o' mindin' wot people said.

PRESS. Right-o!

LEMMY. For instance, suppose there's goin' to be a revolution—— [THE PRESS writes with energy.] 'Ow does it touch me? Like this: I my go up—I cawn't come dahn; no more can Muvver.

MRS. L. [Surprisingly] Us all goes down into the grave.

PRESS. "Mrs. Lemmy interjects the deeper note."

LEMMY. Naow, the gryte—they can come dahn, but they cawn't go up! See! Put two an' two together, an' that's 'ow it touches me. [He utters a throaty laugh] 'Ave yer got that?

PRESS. [Quizzical] Not go up? What about bombs, Mr. Lemmy?

LEMMY. [Dubious] Wot abaht 'em? I s'pose ye're on the comic pypers? 'Ave yer noticed wot a weakness they 'ave for the 'orrible?

PRESS. [Writing] "A grim humour peeped out here and there through the earnestness of his talk."

[He sketches LEMMY'S profile.]

LEMMY. We 'ad an explosion in my factory time o' the war, that would just ha' done for you comics. [He meditates] Lord! They was after it too,—they an' the Sundyes; but the Censor did 'em. Strike me, I could tell yer things!

PRESS. That's what I want, Mr. Lemmy; tell me things!

LEMMY. [Musing] It's a funny world, 'yn't it? 'Ow we did blow each other up! [Getting up to admire] I sy, I shall be syfe there. That won't betry me anonymiety. Why! I looks like the Prime Minister!

PRESS. [Rather hurt] You were going to tell me things.

LEMMY. Yus, an' they'll be the troof, too.

PRESS. I hope so; we don't—

LEMMY. Wot oh!

PRESS. [A little confused.] We always try to verify—

LEMMY. Yer leave it at tryin', daon't yer? Never, mind, ye're a gryte institootion. Blimy, yer do have jokes, wiv it, spinnin' rahnd on yer own tyles, denyin' to-dy wot ye're goin' to print to-morrer. Ah, well! Ye're like all of us below the line o' comfort—live dyngerously—ever' dy yer last. That's wy I'm interested in the future.

PRESS. Well now—the future. [Writing] "He prophesies."

LEMMY. It's syfer, 'yn't it? [He winks] No one never looks back on prophecies. I remembers an editor spring o' 1916 stykin' his reputytion the war'd be over in the follerin' October. Increased 'is circulytion abaht 'arf a million by it. 1917 an' war still on—'ad 'is readers gone back on 'im? Nao! They was increasin' like rabbits. Prophesy wot people want to believe, an' ye're syfe. Naow, I'll styke my reputation on somethin', you tyke it dahn word for word. This country's goin' to the dawgs—Naow, 'ere's the sensytion—unless we gets a new religion.

PRESS. Ah! Now for it—yes?

LEMMY. In one word: "Kindness." Daon't mistyke me, nao sickly sentiment and nao patronizin'. Me as kind to the millionaire as 'im to me. [Fills his mug and drinks.]

PRESS. [Struck] That's queer! Kindness! [Writing] "Extremes meet. Bombed and bomber breathing the same music."

LEMMY. But 'ere's the interestin' pynt. Can it be done wivaht blood?

PRESS. [Writing] "He doubts."

LEMMY. No dabt wotever. It cawn't! Blood-and-kindness! Spill the blood o' them that aren't kind—an' there ye are!

PRESS. But pardon me, how are you to tell?

LEMMY. Blimy, they leaps to the heye!

PRESS. [Laying down-his note-book] I say, let me talk to you as man to man for a moment.

LEMMY. Orl right. Give it a rest!

PRESS. Your sentiments are familiar to me. I've got a friend on the Press who's very keen on Christ and kindness; and wants to strangle the last king with the—hamstrings of the last priest.

LEMMY. [Greatly intrigued] Not 'arf! Does 'e?

PRESS. Yes. But have you thought it out? Because he hasn't.

LEMMY. The difficulty is—where to stop.

PRESS. Where to begin.

LEMMY. Lawd! I could begin almost anywhere. Why, every month abaht, there's a cove turns me aht of a job 'cos I daon't do just wot 'e likes. They'd 'ave to go. I tell yer stryke—the Temple wants cleanin' up.

PRESS. Ye-es. If I wrote what I thought, I should get the sack as quick as you. D'you say that justifies me in shedding the blood of my boss?

LEMMY. The yaller Press 'as got no blood—'as it? You shed their ile an' vinegar—that's wot you've got to do. Stryke—do yer believe in the noble mission o' the Press?

PRESS. [Enigmatically] Mr. Lemmy, I'm a Pressman.

LEMMY. [Goggling] I see. Not much! [Gently jogging his mother's elbow] Wyke up, old lydy!

[For Mrs. LEMMY who has been sipping placidly at her port, is nodding. The evening has drawn in. LEMMY strikes a match on his trousers and lights a candle.]

Blood an' kindness—that's what's wanted—'specially blood! The 'istory o' me an' my family'll show yer that. Tyke my bruver Fred—crushed by burycrats. Tyke Muvver 'erself. Talk o' the wrongs o' the people! I tell yer the foundytions is rotten. [He empties the bottle into his mother's mug] Daon't mind the mud at the bottom, old lydy—it's all strengthenin'! You tell the Press, Muvver. She can talk abaht the pawst.

PRESS. [Taking up his note-book, and becoming, again his professional self] Yes, Mrs. Lemmy? "Age and Youth—Past and Present—"

MRS. L. Were yu talkin' about Fred? [The port has warmed her veins, the colour in her eyes and cheeks has deepened] My son Fred was always a gude boy—never did nothin' before 'e married. I can see Fred [She bends forward a little in her chair, looking straight before her] acomin' in wi' a pheasant 'e'd found—terrible 'e was at findin' pheasants. When father died, an' yu was cumin', Bob, Fred 'e said to me: "Don't yu never cry, Mother, I'll look after 'ee." An' so 'e did, till 'e married that day six months an' take to the drink in sower. 'E wasn't never 'the same boy again—not Fred. An' now 'e's in That. I can see poor Fred—"

[She slowly wipes a tear out of the corner of an eye with the back of her finger.]

PRESS. [Puzzled] In—That?

LEMMY. [Sotto voce] Come orf it! Prison! 'S wot she calls it.

MRS. L. [Cheerful] They say life's a vale o' sorrows. Well, so 'tes, but don' du to let yureself think so.

PRESS. And so you came to London, Mrs. Lemmy?

MRS. L. Same year as father died. With the four o' them—that's my son Fred, an' my son Jim, an' my son Tom, an' Alice. Bob there, 'e was born in London—an' a praaper time I 'ad of et.

PRESS. [Writing] "Her heroic struggles with poverty—"

MRS. L. Worked in a laundry, I ded, at fifteen shellin's a week, an' brought 'em all up on et till Alice 'ad the gallopin' consumption. I can see poor Alice wi' the little red spots is 'er cheeks—an' I not knowin' wot to du wi' 'her—but I always kept up their buryin' money. Funerals is very dear; Mr. Lemmy was six pound, ten.

PRESS. "High price of Mr. Lemmy."

MRS. L. I've a-got the money for when my time come; never touch et, no matter 'ow things are. Better a little goin' short here below, an' enter the kingdom of 'eaven independent:

PRESS. [Writing] "Death before dishonour—heroine of the slums. Dickens—Betty Higden."

MRS. L. No, sir. Mary Lemmy. I've seen a-many die, I 'ave; an' not one grievin'. I often says to meself: [With a little laugh] "Me dear, when yu go, yu go 'appy. Don' yu never fret about that," I says. An' so I will; I'll go 'appy.

[She stays quite still a moment, and behind her LEMMY draws one finger across his face.]

[Smiling] "Yore old fengers'll 'ave a rest. Think o' that!" I says. "'Twill be a brave change." I can see myself lyin' there an' duin' nothin'.

[Again a pause, while MRS. LEMMY sees herself doing nothing.]

LEMMY. Tell abaht Jim; old lydy.

MRS. L. My son Jim 'ad a family o' seven in six years. "I don' know 'ow 'tes, Mother," 'e used to say to me; "they just sim to come!" That was Jim—never knu from day to day what was cumin'. "Therr's another of 'em dead," 'e used to say, "'tes funny, tu" "Well," I used to say to 'im; "no wonder, poor little things, livin' in they model dwellin's. Therr's no air for 'em," I used to say. "Well," 'e used to say, "what can I du, Mother? Can't afford to live in Park Lane:" An' 'e take an' went to Ameriky. [Her voice for the first time is truly doleful] An' never came back. Fine feller. So that's my four sons—One's dead, an' one's in—That, an' one's in Ameriky, an' Bob 'ere, poor boy, 'e always was a talker.

[LEMMY, who has re-seated himself in the window and taken up his fiddle, twangs the strings.]

PRESS. And now a few words about your work, Mrs. Lemmy?

MRS. L. Well, I sews.

PRESS. [Writing] "Sews." Yes?

MRS. L. [Holding up her unfinished pair of trousers] I putt in the button'oles, I stretches the flies, I lines the crutch, I putt on this bindin', [She holds up the calico that binds the top] I sews on the buttons, I press the seams—Tuppence three farthin's the pair.

PRESS. Twopence three farthings a pair! Worse than a penny a line!

MRS. L. In a gude day I gets thru four pairs, but they'm gettin' plaguey 'ard for my old fengers.

PRESS. [Writing] "A monumental figure, on whose labour is built the mighty edifice of our industrialism."

LEMMY. I sy—that's good. Yer'll keep that, won't yet?

MRS. L. I finds me own cotton, tuppence three farthin's, and other expension is a penny three farthin's.

PRESS. And are you an exception, Mrs. Lemmy?

MRS. L. What's that?

LEMMY. Wot price the uvvers, old lydy? Is there a lot of yer sewin' yer fingers orf at tuppence 'ypenny the pair?

MRS. L. I can't tell yu that. I never sees nothin' in 'ere. I pays a penny to that little gell to bring me a dozen pair an' fetch 'em back. Poor little thing, she'm 'ardly strong enough to carry 'em. Feel! They'm very 'eavy!

PRESS. On the conscience of Society!

LEMMY. I sy put that dahn, won't yer?

PRESS. Have things changed much since the war, Mrs. Lemmy?

MRS. L. Cotton's a lot dearer.

PRESS. All round, I mean.

MRS. L. Aw! Yu don' never get no change, not in my profession. [She oscillates the trousers] I've a-been in trousers fifteen year; ever since I got to old for laundry.

PRESS. [Writing] "For fifteen years sewn trousers." What would a good week be, Mrs. Lemmy?

MRS. L. 'Tes a very gude week, five shellin's.

LEMMY. [From the window] Bloomin' millionairess, Muvver. She's lookin' forward to 'eaven, where vey don't wear no trahsers.

MRS. L. [With spirit] 'Tidn for me to zay whether they du. An' 'tes on'y when I'm a bit low-sperrity-like as I wants to go therr. What I am a-lukin' forward to, though, 'tes a day in the country. I've not a-had one since before the war. A kind lady brought me in that bit of 'eather; 'tes wonderful sweet stuff when the 'oney's in et. When I was a little gell I used to zet in the 'eather gatherin' the whorts, an' me little mouth all black wi' eatin' them. 'Twas in the 'eather I used to zet, Sundays, courtin'. All flesh is grass— an' 'tesn't no bad thing—grass.

PRESS. [Writing] "The old paganism of the country." What is your view of life, Mrs. Lemmy?

LEMMY. [Suddenly] Wot is 'er voo of life? Shall I tell yer mine? Life's a disease—a blinkin' oak-apple! Daon't myke no mistyke. An' 'umen life's a yumourous disease; that's all the difference. Why— wot else can it be? See the bloomin' promise an' the blighted performance—different as a 'eadline to the noos inside. But yer couldn't myke Muvver see vat—not if yer talked to 'er for a wok. Muvver still believes in fings. She's a country gell; at a 'undred and fifty she'll be a country gell, won't yer, old lydy?

MRS. L. Well, 'tesn't never been 'ome to me in London. I lived in the country forty year—I did my lovin' there; I burried father therr. Therr bain't nothin' in life, yu know, but a bit o' lovin'— all said an' done; bit o' lovin', with the wind, an' the stars out.

LEMMY. [In a loud apologetic whisper] She 'yn't often like this. I told yer she'd got a glawss o' port in 'er.

MRS. L. 'Tes a brave pleasure, is lovin'. I likes to zee et in young folk. I likes to zee 'em kissin'; shows the 'eart in 'em. 'Tes the 'eart makes the world go round; 'tesn't nothin' else, in my opinion.

PRESS. [Writing] "—sings the swan song of the heart."—

MRS. L. [Overhearing] No, I never yeard a swan sing—never! But I tell 'ee what I 'eve 'eard; the Bells singin' in th' orchard 'angin' up the clothes to dry, an' the cuckoos callin' back to 'em. [Smiling] There's a-many songs in the country—the 'eart is freelike in th' country!

LEMMY. [Soto voce] Gi' me the Strand at ar' past nine.

PRESS. [Writing] "Town and country—"

MRS. L. 'Tidn't like that in London; one day's jest like another. Not but what therr's a 'eap o' kind'eartedness 'ere.

LEMMY. [Gloomily] Kind-'eartedness! I daon't fink "Boys an' Gells come out to play."

[He plays the old tune on his fiddle.]

MRS. L. [Singing] "Boys an' Gells come out to play. The mune is shinin' bright as day." [She laughs] I used to sing like a lark when I was a gell.

[LITTLE AIDA enters.]

L. AIDA. There's 'undreds follerin' the corfin. 'Yn't you goin', Mr. Lemmy—it's dahn your wy!

LEMMY. [Dubiously] Well yus—I s'pose they'll miss me.

L. AIDA. Aoh! Tyke me!

PRESS. What's this?

LEMMY. The revolution in 'Yde Pawk.

PRESS. [Struck] In Hyde Park? The very thing. I'll take you down. My taxi's waiting.

L. AIDA. Yus; it's breathin' 'ard, at the corner.

PRESS. [Looking at his watch] Ah! and Mrs. Lemmy. There's an Anti-Sweating Meeting going on at a house in Park Lane. We can get there in twenty minutes if we shove along. I want you to tell them about the trouser-making. You'll be a sensation!

LEMMY. [To himself] Sensytion! 'E cawn't keep orf it!

MRS. L. Anti-Sweat. Poor fellers! I 'ad one come to see we before the war, an' they'm still goin' on? Wonderful, an't it?

PRESS. Come, Mrs. Lemmy; drive in a taxi, beautiful moonlit night; and they'll give you a splendid cup of tea.

MRS. L. [Unmoved] Ah! I cudn't never du without my tea. There's not an avenin' but I thinks to meself: Now, me dear, yu've a-got one more to fennish, an' then yu'll 'eve yore cup o' tea. Thank you for callin', all the same.

LEMMY. Better siccumb to the temptytion, old lydy; joyride wiv the Press; marble floors, pillars o' gold; conscientious footmen; lovely lydies; scuppers runnin' tea! An' the revolution goin' on across the wy. 'Eaven's nuffink to Pawk Lyne.

PRESS. Come along, Mrs. Lemmy!

MRS. L. [Seraphically] Thank yu,—I'm a-feelin' very comfortable. 'Tes wonderful what a drop o' wine'll du for the stomach.

PRESS. A taxi-ride!

MRS. L. [Placidly] Ah! I know'em. They'm very busy things.

LEMMY. Muvver shuns notority. [Sotto voce to THE PRESS] But you watch me! I'll rouse 'er.

[He takes up his fiddle and sits on the window seat. Above the little houses on the opposite side of the street, the moon has risen in the dark blue sky, so that the cloud shaped like a beast seems leaping over it. LEMMY plays the first notes of the Marseillaise. A black cat on the window-sill outside looks in, hunching its back. LITTLE AIDA barks at her. MRS. LEMMY struggles to her feet, sweeping the empty dish and spoon to the floor in the effort.]

The dish ran awy wiv the spoon! That's right, old lydy! [He stops playing.]

MRS. L. [Smiling, and moving her hands] I like a bit o' music. It du that move 'ee.

PRESS. Bravo, Mrs. Lemmy. Come on!

LEMMY. Come on, old dear! We'll be in time for the revolution yet.

MRS. L. 'Tes 'earin' the Old 'Undred again!

LEMMY. [To THE PRESS] She 'yn't been aht these two years. [To his mother, who has put up her hands to her head] Nao, never mind yer 'at. [To THE PRESS] She 'yn't got none! [Aloud] No West-End lydy wears anyfink at all in the evenin'!

MRS. L. 'Ow'm I lukin', Bob?

LEMMY. First-clawss; yer've got a colour fit to toast by. We'll show 'em yer've got a kick in yer. [He takes her arm] Little Aida, ketch 'old o' the sensytions.

[He indicates the trousers THE PRESS takes MRS. LEMMY'S other arm.]

MRS. L. [With an excited little laugh] Quite like a gell!

And, smiling between her son and THE PRESS, she passes out; LITTLE AIDA, with a fling of her heels and a wave of the trousers, follows.

CURTAIN

ACT III

An octagon ante-room of the hall at LORD WILLIAM DROMONDY'S. A shining room lighted by gold candelabra, with gold-curtained pillars, through which the shining hall and a little of the grand stairway are visible. A small table with a gold-coloured cloth occupies the very centre of the room, which has a polished parquet floor and high white

walls. Gold-coloured doors on the left. Opposite these doors a window with gold-coloured curtains looks out on Park Lane. LADY WILLIAM standing restlessly between the double doors and the arch which leads to the hall. JAMES is stationary by the double doors, from behind which come sounds of speech and applause.

POULDER. [Entering from the hall] His Grace the Duke of Exeter, my lady.

[His GRACE enters. He is old, and youthful, with a high colour and a short rough white beard. LADY WILLIAM advances to meet him. POULDER stands by.]

LADY W. Oh! Father, you ARE late.

HIS G. Awful crowd in the streets, Nell. They've got a coffin— couldn't get by.

LADY W. Coin? Whose?

HIS G. The Government's I should think—no flowers, by request. I say, have I got to speak?

LADY W. Oh! no, dear.

HIS G. H'm! That's unlucky. I've got it here. [He looks down his cuff] Found something I said in 1914—just have done.

LADY W. Oh! If you've got it—James, ask Lord William to come to me for a moment. [JAMES vanishes through the door. To THE DUKE] Go in, Grand-dad; they'll be so awfully pleased to see you. I'll tell Bill.

HIS G. Where's Anne?

LADY W. In bed, of course.

HIS G. I got her this—rather nice?

[He has taken from his breast-pocket one of those street toy-men that jump head over heels on your hand; he puts it through its paces.]

LADY W. [Much interested] Oh! no, but how sweet! She'll simply love it.

POULDER. If I might suggest to Your Grace to take it in and operate it. It's sweated, Your Grace. They-er-make them in those places.

HIS G. By Jove! D'you know the price, Poulder?

POULDER. [Interrogatively] A penny, is it? Something paltry, Your Grace!

HIS G. Where's that woman who knows everything; Miss Munday?

LADY W. Oh! She'll be in there, somewhere.

[His GRACE moves on, and passes through the doors. The sound of applause is heard.]

POULDER. [Discreetly] would you care to see the bomb, my lady?

LADY W. Of course—first quiet moment.

POULDER. I'll bring it up, and have a watch put on it here, my lady.

[LORD WILLIAM comes through the double door followed by JAMES. POULDER retires.]

LORD W. Can't you come, Nell?

LADY W. Oh! Bill, your Dad wants to speak.

LORD W. The deuce he does—that's bad.

LADY W. Yes, of course, but you must let him; he's found something he said in 1914.

LORD W. I knew it. That's what they'll say. Standing stock still, while hell's on the jump around us.

LADY W. Never mind that; it'll please him; and he's got a lovely little sweated toy that turns head over heels at one penny.

LORD W. H'm! Well, come on.

LADY W. No, I must wait for stragglers. There's sure to be an editor in a hurry.

POULDER. [Announcing] Mis-ter Gold-rum!

LADY W. [Sotto voce] And there he is! [She advances to meet a thin, straggling man in eyeglasses, who is smiling absently] How good of you!

MR. G. Thanks awfully. I just er—and then I'm afraid I must—er— Things look very—Thanks—Thanks so much.

[He straggles through the doors, and is enclosed by JAMES.]

POULDER. Miss Mun-day.

LORD W. There! I thought she was in—She really is the most unexpected woman! How do you do? How awfully sweet of you!

MISS M. [An elderly female schoolboy] How do you do? There's a spiffing crowd. I believe things are really going Bolshy. How do you do, Lord William? Have you got any of our people to show? I told one or two, in case—they do so simply love an outing.

JAMES. There are three old chips in the lobby, my Lord.

LORD W. What? Oh! I say! Bring them in at once. Why—they're the hub of the whole thing.

JAMES. [Going] Very good, my Lord.

LADY W. I am sorry. I'd no notion; and they're such dears always.

MISS M. I must tell you what one of them said to me. I'd told him not to use such bad language to his wife. "Don't you worry, Ma!" he said, "I expert you can do a bit of that yourself!"

LADY W. How awfully nice! It's SO like them.

MISS M. Yes. They're wonderful.

LORD W. I say, why do we always call them they?

LADY W. [Puzzled] Well, why not?

LORD W. THEY!

MISS M. [Struck] Quite right, Lord William! Quite right! Another species. They! I must remember that. THEY! [She passes on.]

LADY W. [About to follow] Well, I don't see; aren't they?

LORD W. Never mind, old girl; follow on. They'll come in with me.

[MISS MUNDAY and LADY WILLIAM pass through the double doors.]

POULDER. [Announcing] Some sweated workers, my Lord.

[There enter a tall, thin, oldish woman; a short, thin, very lame man, her husband; and a stoutish middle-aged woman with a rolling eye and gait, all very poorly dressed, with lined and heated faces.]

LORD W. [Shaking hands] How d'you do! Delighted to see you all. It's awfully good of you to have come.

LAME M. Mr. and Mrs. Tomson. We 'ad some trouble to find it. You see, I've never been in these parts. We 'ad to come in the oven; and the bus-bloke put us dahn wrong. Are you the proprietor?

LORD W. [Modestly] Yes, I—er—

LAME M. You've got a nice plyce. I says to the missis, I says: "'E's got a nice plyce 'ere," I says; "there's room to turn rahnd."

LORD W. Yes—shall we—?

LAME M. An' Mrs. Annaway she says: "Shouldn't mind livin 'ere meself," she says; "but it must cost'im a tidy penny," she says.

LORD W. It does—it does; much too tidy. Shall we—?

MRS. ANN. [Rolling her eye] I'm very pleased to 'ave come. I've often said to 'em: "Any time you want me," I've said, "I'd be pleased to come."

LORD W. Not so pleased as we are to see you.

MRS. ANN. I'm sure you're very kind.

JAMES. [From the double doors, through which he has received a message] Wanted for your speech, my Lord.

LORD W. Oh! God! Poulder, bring these ladies and gentleman in, and put them where everybody can—where they can see everybody, don't you know.

[He goes out hurriedly through the double doors.]

LAME M. Is 'e a lord?

POULDER. He is. Follow me.

[He moves towards the doors, the three workers follow.]

MRS. ANN. [Stopping before JAMES] You 'yn't one, I suppose? [JAMES stirs no muscle.]

POULDER. Now please. [He opens the doors. The Voice of LORD WILLIAM speaking is heard] Pass in.

[THE THREE WORKERS pass in, POULDER and JAMES follow them. The doors are not closed, and through this aperture comes the voice of LORD WILLIAM, punctuated and supported by decorous applause.] [LITTLE ANNE runs in, and listens at the window to the confused and distant murmurs of a crowd.]

VOICE OF LORD W. We propose to move for a further advance in the chain-making and—er—er—match-box industries. [Applause.]

[LITTLE ANNE runs across to the door, to listen.]

[On rising voice] I would conclude with some general remarks. Ladies and gentlemen, the great natural, but—er—artificial expansion which trade experienced the first years after the war has—er—collapsed. These are hard times. We who are fortunate feel more than ever—er—responsible—[He stammers, loses the thread of his thoughts.]—[Applause]—er—responsible—[The thread still eludes him]—er—

L. ANNE. [Poignantly] Oh, Daddy!

LORD W. [Desperately] In fact—er—you know how—er—responsible we feel.

L. ANNE. Hooray! [Applause.]

[There float in through the windows the hoarse and distant sounds of the Marseillaise, as sung by London voices.]

LORD W. There is a feeling in the air—that I for one should say deliberately was—er—a feeling in the air—er—a feeling in the air—

L. ANNE. [Agonised] Oh, Daddy! Stop!

[Jane enters, and closes the door behind him. JAMES. Look here! 'Ave I got to report you to Miss Stokes?]

L. ANNE. No-o-o!

JAMES. Well, I'm goin' to.

L. ANNE. Oh, James, be a friend to me! I've seen nothing yet.

JAMES. No; but you've eaten a good bit, on the stairs. What price that Peach Melba?

L. ANNE. I can't go to bed till I've digested it can I? There's such a lovely crowd in the street!

JAMES. Lovely? Ho!

L. ANNE. [Wheedling] James, you couldn't tell Miss Stokes! It isn't in you, is it?

JAMES. [Grinning] That's right.

L. ANNE. So-I'll just get under here. [She gets under the table] Do I show?

JAMES. [Stooping] Not 'arf!

[POULDER enters from the hall.]

POULDER. What are you doin' there?

JAMES. [Between him and the table—raising himself] Thinkin'.

[POULDER purses his mouth to repress his feedings.]

POULDER. My orders are to fetch the bomb up here for Lady William to inspect. Take care no more writers stray in.

JAMES. How shall I know 'em?

POULDER. Well—either very bald or very hairy.

JAMES. Right-o! [He goes.]

[POULDER, with his back to the table, busies himself with the set of his collar.]

POULDER. [Addressing an imaginary audience—in a low but important voice] The—ah—situation is seerious. It is up to us of the—ah—leisured classes—

[The face of LITTLE ANNE is poked out close to his legs, and tilts upwards in wonder towards the bow of his waistcoat.]

to—ah—keep the people down. The olla polloi are clamourin'—

[Miss STOKES appears from the hall, between the pillars.]

Miss S. Poulder!

POULDER. [Making a volte face towards the table] Miss?

MISS S. Where is Anne?

POULDER. [Vexed at the disturbance of his speech] Excuse me, Miss— to keep track of Miss Anne is fortunately no part of my dooties.

[Miss S. She really is naughty.]

POULDER. She is. If she was mine, I'd spank her.

[The smiling face of LITTLE ANNE becomes visible again close to his legs.]

MISS S. Not a nice word.

POULDER. No; but a pleasant haction. Miss Anne's the limit. In fact, Lord and Lady William are much too kind 'earted all round. Take these sweated workers; that class o' people are quite 'opeless. Treatin' them as your equals, shakin 'ands with 'em, givin 'em tea— it only puffs 'em out. Leave it to the Church, I say.

MISS S. The Church is too busy, Poulder.

POULDER. Ah! That "Purity an' Future o' the Race Campaign." I'll tell you what I thinks the danger o' that, Miss. So much purity that there won't be a future race. [Expanding] Purity of 'eart's an excellent thing, no doubt, but there's a want of nature about it. Same with this Anti-Sweating. Unless you're anxious to come down, you must not put the lower classes up.

MISS S. I don't agree with you at all, Poulder.

POULDER. Ah! You want it both ways, Miss. I should imagine you're a Liberal.

MISS S. [Horrified] Oh, no! I certainly am not.

POULDER. Well, I judged from your takin' cocoa. Funny thing that, about cocoa-how it still runs through the Liberal Party! It's virtuous, I suppose. Wine, beer, tea, coffee—all of 'em vices. But cocoa you might drink a gallon a day and annoy no one but yourself! There's a lot o' deep things in life, Miss!

Miss S. Quite so. But I must find Anne.

[She recedes.]

POULDER. [Suavely] Well, I wish you every success; and I hope you'll spank her. This modern education—there's no fruitiness in it.

L. ANNE. [From under the table] Poulder, are you virtuous?

POULDER. [Jumping] Good Ged!

L. ANNE. D'you mind my asking? I promised James I would.

POULDER. Miss Anne, come out!

[The four footmen appear in the hall, HENRY carrying the wine cooler.]

JAMES. Form fours-by your right-quick march!

[They enter, marching down right of table.]

Right incline—Mark time! Left turn! 'Alt! 'Enry, set the bomb! Stand easy!

[HENRY places the wine cooler on the table and covers it with a blue embroidered Chinese mat, which has occupied the centre of the tablecloth.]

POULDER. Ah! You will 'ave your game! Thomas, take the door there! James, the 'all! Admit titles an' bishops. No literary or Labour people. Charles and 'Enry, 'op it and 'ang about!

[CHARLES and HENRY go out, the other too move to their stations.] [POULDER, stands by the table looking at the covered bomb. The hoarse and distant sounds of the Marseillaise float in again from Park Lane.]

[Moved by some deep feeling] And this house an 'orspital in the war! I ask you—what was the good of all our sacrifices for the country? No town 'ouse for four seasons—rustygettin' in the shires, not a soul but two boys under me. Lord William at the front, Lady William at the back. And all for this! [He points sadly at the cooler] It comes of meddlin' on the Continent. I had my prognostications at the time. [To JAMES] You remember my sayin' to you just before you joined up: "Mark my words—we shall see eight per cent. for our money before this is over!"

JAMES. [Sepulchrally] I see the eight per cent., but not the money.

POULDER. Hark at that!

[The sounds of the Marseillaise grow louder. He shakes his head.]

I'd read the Riot Act. They'll be lootin' this house next!

JAMES. We'll put up a fight over your body: "Bartholomew Poulder, faithful unto death!" Have you insured

your life?

POULDER. Against a revolution?

JAMES. Act o' God! Why not?

POULDER. It's not an act o' God.

JAMES. It is; and I sympathise with it.

POULDER. You—what?

JAMES. I do—only—hands off the gov'nor.

POULDER. Oh! Really! Well, that's something. I'm glad to see you stand behind him, at all events.

JAMES. I stand in front of 'im when the scrap begins!

POULDER. Do you insinuate that my heart's not in the right place?

JAMES. Well, look at it! It's been creepin' down ever since I knew you. Talk of your sacrifices in the war—they put you on your honour, and you got stout on it. Rations—not 'arf.

POULDER. [Staring at him] For independence, I've never seen your equal, James. You might be an Australian.

JAMES. [Suavely] Keep a civil tongue, or I'll throw you to the crowd! [He comes forward to the table] Shall I tell you why I favour the gov'nor? Because, with all his pomp, he's a gentleman, as much as I am. Never asks you to do what he wouldn't do himself. What's more, he never comes it over you. If you get drunk, or—well, you understand me, Poulder—he'll just say: "Yes, yes; I know, James!" till he makes you feel he's done it himself. [Sinking his voice mysteriously] I've had experience with him, in the war and out. Why he didn't even hate the Huns, not as he ought. I tell you he's no Christian.

POULDER. Well, for irreverence—!

JAMES. [Obstinately] And he'll never be. He's got too soft a heart.

L. ANNE. [Beneath the table-shrilly] Hurrah!

POULDER. [Jumping] Come out, Miss Anne!

JAMES. Let 'er alone!

POULDER. In there, under the bomb?

JAMES. [Contemptuously] Silly ass! You should take 'em lying down!

POULDER. Look here, James! I can't go on in this revolutionary spirit; either you or I resign.

JAMES. Crisis in the Cabinet!

POULDER. I give you your marchin' orders.

JAMES. [Ineffably] What's that you give me?

POULDER. Thomas, remove James!

[THOMAS grins.]

L. ANNE. [Who, with open mouth, has crept out to see the fun] Oh! Do remove James, Thomas!

POULDER. Go on, Thomas.

[THOMAS takes one step towards JAMES, who lays a hand on the Chinese mat covering the bomb.]

JAMES. [Grimly] If I lose control of meself.

L. ANNE. [Clapping her hands] Oh! James! Do lose control! Then I shall see it go off!

JAMES. [To POULDER] Well, I'll merely empty the pail over you!

POULDER. This is not becomin'!

[He walks out into the hall.]

JAMES. Another strategic victory! What a Boche he'd have made. As you were, Tommy!

[THOMAS returns to the door. The sound of prolonged applause cornea from within.]

That's a bishop.

L. ANNE. Why?

JAMES. By the way he's drawin'. It's the fine fightin' spirit in 'em. They were the backbone o' the war. I see there's a bit o' the old stuff left in you, Tommy.

L. ANNE. [Scrutinizing the widely—grinning THOM] Where? Is it in his mouth?

JAMES. You've still got a sense of your superiors. Didn't you notice how you moved to Poulter's orders, me boy; an' when he was gone, to mine?

L. ANNE. [To THOMAS] March!

[The grinning THOMAS remains immovable.]

He doesn't, James!

JAMES. Look here, Miss Anne—your lights ought to be out before ten. Close in, Tommy!

[He and THOMAS move towards her.]

L. ANNE. [Dodging] Oh, no! Oh, no! Look!

[The footmen stop and turn. There between the pillars, stands LITTLE AIDA with the trousers, her face brilliant With surprise.]

JAMES. Good Lord! What's this?

[Seeing L. ANNE, LITTLE AIDA approaches, fascinated, and the two children sniff at each other as it were like two little dogs walking round and round.]

L. ANNE. [Suddenly] My name's Anne; what's yours?

L. AIDA. Aida.

L. ANNE. Are you lost?

L. AIDA. Nao.

L. ANNE. Are those trousers?

L. AIDA. Yus.

L. Arms. Whose?

L. AIDA. Mrs. Lemmy's.

L. ANNE. Does she wear them?

[LITTLE AIDA smiles brilliantly.]

L. AIDA. Nao. She sews 'em.

L. ANNE. [Touching the trousers] They are hard. James's are much softer; aren't they, James? [JAMES deigns no reply] What shall we do? Would you like to see my bedroom?

L. AIDA. [With a hop] Aoh, yus!

JAMES. No.

L. ANNE. Why not?

JAMES. Have some sense of what's fittin'.

L. ANNE. Why isn't it fittin'? [To LITTLE AIDA] Do you like me?

L. AIDA. Yus-s.

L. ANNE. So do I. Come on!

[She takes LITTLE AIDA'S hand.]

JAMES. [Between the pillars] Tommy, ketch 'em!

[THOMAS retains them by the skirts.]

L. ANNE. [Feigning indifference] All right, then! [To LITTLE AIDA] Have you ever seen a bomb?

L. AIDA. Nao.

L. ANNE. [Going to the table and lifting a corner of the cover] Look!

L. AIDA. [Looking] What's it for?

L. ANNE. To blow up this house.

L. AIDA. I daon't fink!

L. ANNE. Why not?

L. AIDA. It's a beautiful big 'Ouse.

L. ANNE. That's why. Isn't it, James?

L. AIDA. You give the fink to me; I'll blow up our 'ouse—it's an ugly little 'ouse.

L. ANNE [Struck] Let's all blow up our own; then we can start fair. Daddy would like that.

L. AIDA. Yus. [Suddenly brilliant] I've 'ad a ride in a taxi, an' we're goin' 'ome in it agyne!

L. ANNE. Were you sick?

LITTLE AIDA. [Brilliant] Nao.

L. ANNE I was; when I first went in one, but I was quite young then. James, could you get her a Peche Melba? There was one.

JAMES. No.

L. ANNE. Have you seen the revolution?

L. AIDA. Wot's that?

L. ANNE. It's made of people.

L. AIDA. I've seen the corfin, it's myde o' wood.

L. ANNE. Do you hate the rich?

L. AIDA. [Ineffably] Nao. I hates the poor.

L. ANNE. Why?

L. AIDA. 'Cos they 'yn't got nuffin'.

L. ANNE. I love the poor. They're such dears.

L. AIDA. [Shaking her head with a broad smile] Nao.

L. ANNE. Why not?

L. AIDA. I'd tyke and lose the lot, I would.

L. ANNE. Where?

L. AIDA. In the water.

L. ANNE. Like puppies?

L. AIDA. Yus.

L. ANNE. Why?

L. AIDA. Then I'd be shut of 'em.

L. ANNE. [Puzzled] Oh!

[The voice of THE PRESS is heard in the hall. "Where's the little girl?"]

JAMES. That's you. Come 'ere!

[He puts a hand behind LITTLE AIDA'S back and propels her towards the hall. THE PRESS enters with old MRS. LEMMY.]

PRESS. Oh! Here she is, major domo. I'm going to take this old lady to the meeting; they want her on the platform. Look after our friend, Mr. Lemmy here; Lord William wants to see him presently.

L. ANNE. [In an awed whisper] James, it's the little blighter!

[She dives again under the table. LEMMY enters.]

LEMMY. 'Ere! 'Arf a mo'! Yer said yer'd drop me at my plyce. Well, I tell yer candid—this 'yn't my plyce.

PRESS. That's all right, Mr. Lemmy. [He grins] They'll make you wonderfully comfortable, won't you, major domo?

[He passes on through the room, to the door, ushering old MRS. LEMMY and LITTLE AIDA.] [POULDER blocks LEMMY'S way, with CHARLES and HENRY behind him.]

POULDER. James, watch it; I'll report.

[He moves away, following THE PRESS through the door. JAMES between table and window. THOMAS has gone to the door. HENRY and CHARLES remain at the entrances to the hall. LEMMY looks dubiously around, his cockney assurance gradually returns.]

LEMMY. I think I knows the gas 'ere. This is where I came to-dy, 'yn't it? Excuse my hesitytion—these little 'ouses IS so much the syme.

JAMES. [Gloomily] They are!

LEMMY. [Looking at the four immovable footmen, till he concentrates on JAMES] Ah! I 'ad a word wiv you, 'adn't I? You're the four conscientious ones wot's wyin' on your gov'nor's chest. 'Twas you I spoke to, wasn't it? [His eyes travel over them again] Ye're so monotonous. Well, ye're busy now, I see. I won't wyste yer time.

*[He turns towards the hall, but CHARLES and HENRY bar the way in silence.]
[Skidding a little, and regarding the four immovables once more]*

I never see such pytient men? Compared wiv yer, mountains is restless.

[He goes to the table. JAMES watches him. ANNE barks from underneath.]

[Skidding again] Why! There's a dawg under there. [Noting the grin on THOMAS'S face] Glad it amooses yer. Yer want it, daon't yer, wiv a fyce like that? Is this a ply wivaht words? 'Ave I got into the movies by mistyke? Turn aht, an' let's 'ave six penn'orth o' darkness.

L. ANNE. [From beneath the cable] No, no! Not dark!

LEMMY. [Musingly] The dawg talks anywy. Come aht, Fido!

[LITTLE ANNE emerges, and regards him with burning curiosity.]

I sy: Is this the lytest fashion o' receivin' guests?

L. ANNE. Mother always wants people to feel at home. What shall we do? Would you like to hear the speeches? Thomas, open the door a little, do!

JAMES. 'Umour 'er a couple o' inches, Tommy!

[THOMAS draws the door back stealthily an inch or so.]

L. ANNE. [After applying her eye-in a loud whisper] There's the old lady. Daddy's looking at her trousers. Listen!

[For MRS. LEMMY'S voice is floating faintly through: "I putt in the buttonholes, I stretches the flies; I 'ems the bottoms; I lines the crutch; I putt on this bindin'; I sews on the buttons; I presses the seams—Tuppence three farthin's the pair."]

LEMMY. [In a hoarse whisper] That's it, old lydy: give it 'em!

L. ANNE. Listen!

VOICE OF LORD W. We are indebted to our friends the Press for giving us the pleasure—er—pleasure of hearing from her own lips—the pleasure—

L. ANNE. Oh! Daddy!

[THOMAS abruptly closes the doors.]

LEMMY. [To ANNE] Now yer've done it. See wot comes o' bein' impytient. We was just gettin' to the marrer.

L. ANNE. What can we do for you now?

LEMMY. [Pointing to ANNE, and addressing JAMES] Wot is this one, anywy?

JAMES. [Sepulchrally] Daughter o' the house.

LEMMY. Is she insured agynst 'er own curiosity?

L. ANNE. Why?

LEMMY. As I daon't believe in a life beyond the gryve, I might be tempted to send yer there.

L. ANNE. What is the gryve?

LEMMY. Where little gells goes to.

L. ANNE. Oh, when?

LEMMY. [Pretending to look at a match, which is not there] Well, I dunno if I've got time to finish yer this minute. Sy to-mower at. 'arf past.

L. ANNE. Half past what?

LEMMY. [Despairingly] 'Arf past wot!

[The sound of applause is heard.]

JAMES. That's 'is Grace. 'E's gettin' wickets, too.

[POULDER entering from the door.]

POULDER. Lord William is slippin' in.

[He makes a cabalistic sign with his head. Jeers crosses to the door. LEMMY looks dubiously at POULDER.]

LEMMY. [Suddenly—as to himself] Wot oh! I am the portly one!

POULDER. [Severely] Any such allusion aggeravates your offence.

LEMMY. Oh, ah! Look 'ere, it was a corked bottle. Now, tyke care, tyke care, 'aughty! Daon't curl yer lip! I shall myke a clean breast o' my betrayal when the time comes!

[There is a alight movement of the door. ANNE makes a dive towards the table but is arrested by POULDER grasping her waistband. LORD WILLIAM slips in, followed by THE PRESS, on whom JAMES and THOMAS close the door too soon.]

HALF OF THE PRESS. [Indignantly] Look out!

JAMES. Do you want him in or out, me Lord?

LEMMY. I sy, you've divided the Press; 'e was unanimous.

[The FOOTMEN let THE PRESS through.]

LORD W. [To THE PRESS] I'm so sorry.

LEMMY. Would yer like me to see to 'is gas?

LORD W. So you're my friend of the cellars?

LEMMY. [Uneasy] I daon't deny it.

[POULDER begins removing LITTLE ANNE.]

L. ANNE. Let me stay, Daddy; I haven't seen anything yet! If I go, I shall only have to come down again when they loot the house. Listen!

[The hoarse strains of the Marseillaise are again heard from the distance.]

LORD W. [Blandly] Take her up, Poulder!

L. ANNE. Well, I'm coming down again—and next time I shan't have any clothes on, you know.

[They vanish between the pillars. LORD WILLIAM makes a sign of dismissal. The FOOTMAN file out.]

LEMMY. [Admiringly] Luv'ly pyces!

LORD W. [Pleasantly] Now then; let's have our talk, Mr.—

LEMMY. Lemmy.

PRESS. [Who has slipped his note-book out] "Bombed and Bomber face to face——"

LEMMY. [Uneasy] I didn't come 'ere agyne on me own, yer know. The Press betryed me.

LORD W. Is that old lady your mother?

LEMMY. The syeme. I tell yer stryete, it was for 'er I took that old bottle o' port. It was orful old.

LORD W. Ah! Port? Probably the '83. Hope you both enjoyed it.

LEMMY. So far-yus. Muvver'll suffer a bit tomower, I expect.

LORD W. I should like to do something for your mother, if you'll allow me.

LEMMY. Oh! I'll allow yer. But I dunno wot she'll sy.

LORD W. I can see she's a fine independent old lady! But suppose you were to pay her ten bob a week, and keep my name out of it?

LEMMY. Well, that's one wy o' YOU doin' somefink, 'yn't it?

LORD W. I giving you the money, of course.

PRESS. [Writing] "Lord William, with kingly generosity——"

LEMMY. [Drawing attention to THE PRESS with his thumb] I sy— I daon't mind, meself—if you daon't——

LORD W. He won't write anything to annoy me.

PRESS. This is the big thing, Lord William; it'll get the public bang in the throat.

LEMMY. [Confidentially] Bit dyngerous, 'yn't it? trustin' the Press? Their right 'ands never knows wot their left 'ands is writin'. [To THE PRESS] 'Yn't that true, speakin' as a man?

PRESS. Mr. Lemmy, even the Press is capable of gratitude.

LEMMY. Is it? I should ha' thought it was too important for a little thing like that. [To LORD WILLIAM] But ye're quite right; we couldn't do wivaht the Press—there wouldn't be no distress, no coffin, no revolution—'cos nobody'd know nuffin' abaht it. Why! There wouldn't be no life at all on Earf in these dyes, wivaht the Press! It's them wot says: "Let there be Light—an' there is Light."

LORD W. Umm! That's rather a new thought to me. [Writes on his cuff.]

LEMMY. But abaht Muvver, I'll tell yer 'ow we can arryng. You send 'er the ten bob a week wivaht syin'

anyfink, an' she'll fink it comes from Gawd or the Gover'nment yer cawn't tell one from t'other in Befnal Green.

LORD W. All right; we'll do that.

LEMMY. Will yer reely? I'd like to shyke yer 'and.

[LORD WILLIAM puts out his hand, which LEMMY grasps.]

PRESS. [Writing] "The heartbeat of humanity was in that grasp between the son of toil and the son of leisure."

LEMMY. [Already ashamed of his emotion] 'Ere, 'arf a mo'! Which is which? Daon't forget I'm aht o' wori; Lord William, if that's 'is nyme, is workin 'ard at 'is Anti-Sweats! Wish I could get a job like vat—jist suit me!

LORD W. That hits hard, Mr. Lemmy.

LEMMY. Daon't worry! Yer cawn't 'elp bein' born in the purple!

LORD W. Ah! Tell me, what would you do in my place?

LEMMY. Why—as the nobleman said in 'is well-known wy: "Sit in me Club winder an' watch it ryne on the dam people!" That's if I was a average nobleman! If I was a bit more noble, I might be tempted to come the kind'earted on twenty thou' a year. Some prefers yachts, or ryce 'orses. But philanthropy on the 'ole is syfer, in these dyes.

LORD W. So you think one takes to it as a sort of insurance, Mr. Lemmy? Is that quite fair?

LEMMY. Well, we've all got a weakness towards bein' kind, somewhere abaht us. But the moment wealf comes in, we 'yn't wot I call single-'earted. If yer went into the foundytions of your wealf—would yer feel like 'avin' any? It all comes from uvver people's 'ard, unpleasant lybour—it's all built on Muvver as yer might sy. An' if yer daon't get rid o' some of it in bein' kind—yer daon't feel syfe nor comfy.

LORD W. [Twisting his moustache] Your philosophy is very pessimistic.

LEMMY. Well, I calls meself an optimist; I sees the worst of everyfink. Never disappynted, can afford to 'ave me smile under the blackest sky. When deaf is squeezin' of me windpipe, I shall 'ave a laugh in it! Fact is, if yer've 'ad to do wiv gas an' water pipes, yer can fyce anyfing. [The distant Marseillaise blaes up] 'Ark at the revolution!

LORD W. [Rather desperately] I know—hunger and all the rest of it! And here am I, a rich man, and don't know what the deuce to do.

LEMMY. Well, I'll tell yer. Throw yer cellars open, an' while the populyce is gettin' drunk, sell all yer 'ave an' go an' live in Ireland; they've got the millennium chronic over there.

[LORD WILLIAM utters a short, vexed laugh, and begins to walk about.]

That's speakin' as a practical man. Speakin' as a synt "Bruvvers, all I 'ave is yours. To-morrer I'm goin' dahn to the Lybour Exchyng to git put on the wytin' list, sy me as you!"

LORD W. But, d—-it, man, there we should be, all together! Would that help?

LEMMY. Nao; but it'd syve a lot o' blood.

[LORD WILLIAM stops abruptly, and looks first at LEMMY, then at the cooler, still cohered with the Chinese mat.]

Yer thought the Englishman could be taught to shed blood wiv syfety. Not 'im! Once yer git 'im into an 'abit, yer cawn't git 'im out of it agyne. 'E'll go on sheddin' blood mechanical—Conservative by nyture. An' 'e won't myke nuffin' o' yours. Not even the Press wiv 'is 'oneyed words'll sty 'is 'and.

LORD W. And what do you suggest we could have done, to avoid trouble?

LEMMY. [Warming to his theme] I'll tell yer. If all you wealfy nobs wiv kepitel 'ad come it kind from the start after the war yer'd never 'a been 'earin' the Marseillaisy naow. Lord! 'Ow you did talk abaht Unity and a noo spirit in the Country. Noo spirit! Why, soon as ever there was no dynger from outside, yer stawted to myke it inside, wiv an iron'and. Naow, you've been in the war an' it's given yer a feelin' 'eart; but most of the nobs wiv kepitel was too old or too important to fight. They weren't born agyne. So naow that bad times is come, we're 'owlin' for their blood.

LORD W. I quite agree; I quite agree. I've often said much the same thing.

LEMMY. Voice cryin' in the wilderness—I daon't sy we was yngels— there was faults on bofe sides. [He looks at THE PRESS] The Press could ha' helped yer a lot. Shall I tell yer wot the Press did? "It's vital," said the Press, "that the country should be united, or it will never recover." Nao strikes, nao 'omen nature, nao nuffink. Kepitel an' Lybour like the Siamese twins. And, fust dispute that come along, the Press orfs wiv its coat an' goes at it bald'eaded. An' wot abaht since? Sich a riot o' nymes called, in Press—and Pawlyement. Unpatriotic an' outrygeous demands o' lybour. Blood-suckin' tyranny o' Kepitel; thieves an' dawgs an' 'owlin' Jackybines—gents throwin' books at each other; all the resources of edjucytion exhausted! If I'd bin Prime Minister I'd 'ave 'ad the Press's gas cut 'orf at the meter. Puffect liberty, of course, nao Censorship; jist sy wot yer like—an' never be 'eard of no more.

[Turning suddenly to THE PRESS, who has been scribbling in pace with this harangue,

and now has developed a touch of writer's cramp.]

Why! 'Is 'end's out o' breath! Fink o' vet!

LORD W. Great tribute to your eloquence, Mr. Lemmy!

[A sudden stir of applause and scraping of chairs is heard; the meeting is evidently breaking up. LADY WILLIAM comes in, followed by MRS. LEMMY with her trousers, and LITTLE AIDA. LEMMY stares fixedly at this sudden, radiant apparition. His gaze becomes as that of a rabbit regarding a snake. And suddenly he puts up his hand and wipes his brow.] [LADY WILLIAM, going to the table, lifts one end of the Chinese mat, and looks at LEMMY. Then she turns to LORD WILLIAM.]

LADY W. Bill!

LEMMY. [To his mother—in a hoarse whisper] She calls 'im Bill. 'Ow! 'Yn't she IT?

LADY W. [Apart] Have you—spoken to him?

[LORD WILLIAM shakes his head.]

Not? What have you been saying, then?

LORD W. Nothing, he's talked all the time.

LADY W. [Very low] What a little caution!

LORD W. Steady, old girl! He's got his eye on you!

[LADY WILLIAM looks at LEMMY, whose eyes are still fixed on her.]

LADY W. [With resolution] Well, I'm going to tackle him.

[She moves towards LEMMY, who again wipes his brow, and wrings out his hand.]

MRS. LEMMY. Don't 'ee du that, Bob. Yu must forgive'im, Ma'am; it's 'is admiration. 'E was always one for the ladies, and he'm not used to seein' so much of 'em.

LADY W. Don't you think you owe us an explanation?

MRS. LEMMY. Speak up, Bob.

[But LEMMY only shifts his feet.]

My gudeness! 'E've a-lost 'is tongue. I never knu that 'appen to 'e before.

LORD W. [Trying to break the embarrassment] No ill-feeling, you know, Lemmy.

[But LEMMY still only rolls his eyes.]

LADY W. Don't you think it was rather—inconsiderate of you?

LEMMY. Muvver, tyke me aht, I'm feelin' fynte!

[Spurts of the Marseillaise and the mutter of the crowd have been coming nearer; and suddenly a knocking is heard. POULDER and JAMES appear between the pillars.]

POULDER. The populace, me Lord!

LADY W. What!

LORD W. Where've you put 'em, Poulder?

POULDER. They've put theirselves in the portico, me Lord.

LORD W. [Suddenly wiping his brow] Phew! I say, this is awful, Nell! Two speeches in one evening. Nothing else for it, I suppose. Open the window, Poulder!

POULDER. [Crossing to the window] We are prepared for any sacrifice, me Lord.

[He opens the window.]

PRESS. [Writing furiously] "Lady William stood like a statue at bay."

LORD W. Got one of those lozenges on you, Nell?

[But LADY WILLIAM has almost nothing on her.]

LEMMY. [Producing a paper from his pocket] 'Ave one o' my gum drops?

[He passes it to LORD WILLIAM.]

LORD W. [Unable to refuse, takes a large, flat gum drop from the paper, and looks at it in embarrassment.] Ah! thanks! Thanks awfully!

[LEMMY turns to LITTLE AIDA, and puts a gum drop in her mouth. A burst of murmurs from the crowd.]

JAMES. [Towering above the wine cooler] If they get saucy, me Lord, I can always give 'em their own back.

LORD W. Steady, James; steady!

[He puts the gum drop absently in his mouth, and turns up to the open window.]

VOICE. [Outside] 'Ere they are—the bally plutocrats.

[Voices in chorus: "Bread! Bread!"]

LORD W. Poulder, go and tell the chef to send out anything there is in the house—nicely, as if it came from nowhere in particular.

POULDER. Very good, me Lord. [Sotto voce] Any wine? If I might suggest—German—'ock?

LORD W. What you like.

POULDER. Very good, me Lord. [He goes.]

LORD W. I say, dash it, Nell, my teeth are stuck! [He works his finger in his mouth.]

LADY W. Take it out, darling.

LORD W. [Taking out the gum drop and looking at it] What the deuce did I put it in for?

PRESS. ['Writing] "With inimitable coolness Lord William prepared to address the crowd."

[Voices in chorea: "Bread! Bread!"]

LORD W. Stand by to prompt, old girl. Now for it. This ghastly gum drop!

[LORD WILLIAM takes it from his agitated hand, and flips it through the window.]

VOICE. Dahn with the aristo—[Chokes.]

LADY W. Oh! Bill—oh! It's gone into a mouth!

LORD W. Good God!

VOICE. Wet's this? Throwin' things? Mind aht, or we'll smash yer winders!

[As the voices in chorus chant: "Bread! Bread!" LITTLE ANNE, night-gowned, darts in from the hall. She is followed by MISS STOKES. They stand listening.]

LORD W. [To the Crowd] My friends, you've come to the wrong shop. There's nobody in London more sympathetic with you. [The crowd laughs hoarsely.] [Whispering] Look out, old girl; they can see your shoulders. [LORD WILLIAM moves back a step.] If I were a speaker, I could make you feel—

VOICE. Look at his white weskit! Blood-suckers—fattened on the people!

[JAMES dives his hand at the wine cooler.]

LORD W. I've always said the Government ought to take immediate steps—

VOICE. To shoot us dahn.

LORD W. Not a bit. To relieve the—er—

LADY W. [Prompting] Distress.

LADY W. Distress, and ensure—er—ensure

LADY W. [Prompting] Quiet.

LORD W. [To her] No, no. To ensure—ensure—

L. ANNE. [Agonized] Oh, Daddy!

VOICE. 'E wants to syve 'is dirty great 'ouse.

LORD W. [Roused] D—if I do!

[Rude and hoarse laughter from the crowd.]

JAMES. [With fury] Me Lord, let me blow 'em to glory!

[He raises the cooler and advances towards the window.]

LORD W. [Turning sharply on him] Drop it, James; drop it!

PRESS. [Jumping] No, no; don't drop it!

[JAMES retires crestfallen to the table, where he replaces the cooler.]

LORD W. [Catching hold of his bit] Look here, I must have fought alongside some of you fellows in the war. Weren't we jolly well like brothers?

A VOICE. Not so much bloomin' "Kamerad"; hand over yer 'Ouse.

LORD W. I was born with this beastly great house, and money, and goodness knows what other entanglements—a wife and family—

VOICE. Born with a wife and family!

[Jeers and laughter.]

LORD W. I feel we're all in the same boat, and I want to pull my weight. If you can show me the way, I'll take it fast enough.

A DEEP VOICE. Step dahn then, an' we'll step up.

ANOTHER VOICE. 'Ear, 'Ear!

[A fierce little cheer.]

LORD W. [To LADY WILLIAM—in despair] By George! I can't get in anywhere!

LADY W. [Calmly] Then shut the window, Bill.

LEMMY. [Who has been moving towards them slowly] Lemme sy a word to 'em.

[All stare at him. LEMMY approaches the window, followed by LITTLE AIDA. POULDER re-enters with the three other footmen.]

[At the window] Cheerio! Cockies!

[The silence of surprise falls on the crowd.]

I'm one of yer. Gas an' water I am. Got more grievances an' out of employment than any of yer. I want to see their blood flow, syme as you.

PRESS. [writing] "Born orator—ready cockney wit—saves situation."

LEMMY. Wot I sy is: Dahn wiv the country, dahn wiv everyfing. Begin agyne from the foundytions. [Nodding his head back at the room] But we've got to keep one or two o' these 'ere under glawss, to show our future generytions. An' this one is 'armless. His pipes is sahnd, 'is 'eart is good; 'is 'ead is not strong. Is 'ouse will myke a charmin' palace o' varieties where our children can come an' see 'ow they did it in the good old dyes. Yer never see rich waxworks as 'is butler and 'is four conscientious khaki footmen. Why—wot dyer think 'e 'as 'em for—fear they might be out o'-works like you an' me. Nao! Keep this one; 'e's a Flower. 'Arf a mo'! I'll show yer my Muvver. Come 'ere, old lydy; and bring yer trahsers. [MRS. LEMMY comes forward to the window] Tell abaht yer speech to the meetin'.

MRS. LEMMY. [Bridling] Oh dear! Well, I cam' in with me trousers, an' they putt me up on the pedestory at once, so I tole 'em. [Holding up the trousers] "I putt in the button'oles, I stretches the flies; I lines the crutch; I putt on this bindin', I presses the seams—Tuppence three farthin's a pair."

[A groan from tote crowd,]

LEMMY. [Showing her off] Seventy-seven! Wot's 'er income? Twelve bob a week; seven from the Gover'ment an' five from the sweat of 'er brow. Look at 'er! 'Yn't she a tight old dear to keep it goin'! No workus for 'er, nao fear! The grive rather!

[Murmurs from the crowd, at Whom MRS. LEMMY is blandly smiling.]

You cawn't git below 'er—impossible! She's the foundytions of the country—an' rocky 'yn't the word for 'em. Worked 'ard all 'er life, brought up a family and buried 'em on it. Twelve bob a week, an' given when 'er fingers goes, which is very near. Well, naow, this torf 'ere comes to me an' says: "I'd like to do somefin' for yer muvver. 'Ow's ten bob a week?" 'e says. Naobody arst 'im—quite on 'is own. That's the sort 'e is. [Sinking his voice confidentially] Sorft. You bring yer muvvers 'ere, 'e'll do the syme for them. I giv yer the 'int.

VOICE. [From the crowd] What's 'is nyme?

LEMMY. They calls 'im Bill.

VOICE. Bill What?

L. ANNE. Dromondy.

LADY W. Anne!

LEMMY. Dromedary 'is nyme is.

VOICE. [From the crowd] Three cheers for Bill Dromedary.

LEMMY. I sy, there's veal an' 'am, an' pork wine at the back for them as wants it; I 'eard the word passed. An' look 'ere, if yer want a flag for the revolution, tyke muvver's trahsers an' tie 'em to the corfin. Yer cawn't 'ave no more inspirin' banner. Ketch! [He throws the trousers out] Give Bill a double-barrel fast, to show there's

no ill-feelin'. Ip, 'ip!

[The crowd cheers, then slowly passes away, singing at a hoarse version of the Marseillaise, till all that is heard is a faint murmuring and a distant barrel-organ playing the same tune.]

PRESS. [Writing] "And far up in the clear summer air the larks were singing."

LORD W. [Passing his hand over his hair, and blinking his eyes] James! Ready?

JAMES. Me Lord!

L. ANNE. Daddy!

LADY W. [Taking his arm] Bill! It's all right, old man—all right!

LORD W. [Blinking] Those infernal larks! Thought we were on the Somme again! Ah! Mr. Lemmy, [Still rather dreamy] no end obliged to you; you're so decent. Now, why did you want to blow us up before dinner?

LEMMY. Blow yer up? [Passing his hand over his hair in travesty] "Is it a dream? Then wykin' would be pyne."

MRS. LEMMY. Bo-ob! Not so saucy, my boy!

LEMMY. Blow yet up? Wot abaht it?

LADY W. [Indicating the bomb] This, Mr. Lemmy!

[LEMMY looks at it, and his eyes roll and goggle.]

LORD W. Come, all's forgiven! But why did you?

LEMMY. Orl right! I'm goin' to tyke it awy; it'd a-been a bit ork'ard for me. I'll want it to-mower.

LORD W. What! To leave somewhere else?

LEMMY. 'Yus, of course!

LORD W. No, no; dash it! Tell us what's it filled with?

LEMMY. Filled wiv? Nuffin'. Wot did yet expect? Toof-pahder? It's got a bit o' my lead soldered on to it. That's why it's 'eavy!

LORD W. But what is it?

LEMMY. Wot is it? [His eyes are fearfully fixed on LADY WILLIAM] I fought everybody knew 'em.

LADY W. Mr. Lemmy, you must clear this up, please.

LEMMY. [TO LORD WILLIAM, With his eyes still held On LADY WILLIAM— mysteriously] Wiv lydies present? 'Adn't I better tell the Press?

LORD W. All right; tell someone—anyone!

[LEMMY goes down to THE PRESS, who is reading over his last note. Everyone watches and listens with the utmost discretion, while he whispers into the ear of THE PRESS; who shakes his head violently.]

PRESS. No, no; it's too horrible. It destroys my whole—

LEMMY. Well, I tell yer it is.

[Whispers again violently.]

PRESS. No, no; I can't have it. All my article! All my article! It can't be—no—

LEMMY. I never see sick an obstinate thick-head! Yer 'yn't worvy of yet tryde.

[He whispers still more violently and makes cabalistic signs.] [LADY WILLIAM lifts the bomb from the cooler into the sight of all. LORD WILLIAM, seeing it for the first time in full light, bends double in silent laughter, and whispers to his wife. LADY WILLIAM drops the bomb and gives way too. Hearing the sound, LEMMY turns, and his goggling eyes pan them all in review. LORD and LADY WILLIAM in fits of laughter, LITTLE ANNE stamping her feet, for MISS STOKES, red, but composed, has her hands placed firmly over her pupil's eyes and ears; LITTLE AIDA smiling brilliantly, MRS. LEMMY blandly in sympathy, neither knowing why; the FOUR FOOTMAN in a row, smothering little explosions. POULDER, extremely grave and red, THE PRESS perfectly haggard, gnawing at his nails.]

LEMMY. [Turning to THE PRESS] Blimy! It amooses 'em, all but the genteel ones. Cheer oh! Press! Yer can always myke somefin' out o' nufun'? It's not the fust thing as 'as existed in yer imaginytion only.

PRESS. No, d—it; I'll keep it a bomb!

LEMMY. [Soothingly] Ah! Keep the sensytion. Wot's the troof compared wiv that? Come on, Muvver! Come on, Little Aida! Time we was goin' dahn to 'Earf.

[He goes up to the table, and still skidding a little at LADY WILLIAM, takes the late bomb from the cooler, placing it under his arm.]

MRS. LEMMY. Gude naight, sir; gude naight, ma'am; thank yu for my cup o' tea, an' all yore kindness.

[She shakes hands with LORD and LADY WILLIAM, drops the curtsey of her youth before Mr. POULDER, and goes out followed by LITTLE AIDA, who is looking back at LITTLE ANNE.]

LEMMY. [Turning suddenly] Aoh! An' jist one frog! Next time yer build an 'ouse, daon't forget—it's the foundytions as bears the wyte.

[With a wink that gives way, to a last fascinated look at LADY WILLIAM, he passes out. All gaze after them, except THE PRESS, who is tragically consulting his spiflicated notes.]

L. ANNE. [Breaking away from Miss STOKES and rushing forward] Oh! Mum! what was it?

CURTAIN

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