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HALL-MARKED AND OTHERS

From Six Short Plays

By John Galsworthy

[HALL-
MARKED](#)

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HALL-MARKED

A Satiric Trifle

CHARACTERS

HERSELF.
LADY ELLA.
THE SQUIRE.
THE MAID.
MAUD.
THE RECTOR.
THE DOCTOR.
THE CABMAN.
HANNIBAL and EDWARD

HALL-MARKED

The scene is the sitting-room and verandah of HER bungalow. The room is pleasant, and along the back, where the verandah runs, it seems all window, both French and casement. There is a door right and a door left. The day is bright; the time morning. [HERSELF, dripping wet, comes running along the verandah, through the French window, with a wet Scotch terrier in her arms. She vanishes through the door left. A little pause, and LADY ELLA comes running, dry, thin, refined, and agitated. She halts where the tracks of water cease at the door left. A little pause, and MAUD comes running, fairly dry, stolid, breathless, and dragging a bull-dog, wet, breathless, and stout, by the crutch end of her 'en-tout-cas'].

LADY ELLA. Don't bring Hannibal in till I know where she's put Edward!

MAUD. [Brutally, to HANNIBAL] Bad dog! Bad dog!

[HANNIBAL snuffles.]

LADY ELLA. Maud, do take him out! Tie him up. Here! [She takes out a lace handkerchief] No—something stronger! Poor darling Edward! [To HANNIBAL] You are a bad dog!

[HANNIBAL snuffles.]

MAUD. Edward began it, Ella. [To HANNIBAL] Bad dog! Bad dog!

[HANNIBAL snuffles.]

LADY ELLA. Tie him up outside. Here, take my scarf. Where is my poor treasure? [She removes her scarf] Catch! His ear's torn; I saw it.

MAUD. [Taking the scarf, to HANNIBAL] Now!

[HANNIBAL snuffles.] [She ties the scarf to his collar]

He smells horrible. Bad dog—getting into ponds to fight!

LADY ELLA. Tie him up, Maud. I must try in here.

[Their husbands, THE SQUIRE and THE RECTOR, come hastening along the verandah.]

MAUD. [To THE RECTOR] Smell him, Bertie! [To THE SQUIRE] You might have that pond drained, Squire!

[She takes HANNIBAL out, and ties him to the verandah. THE SQUIRE and RECTOR Come in. LADY ELLA is knocking on the door left.]

HER VOICE. All right! I've bound him up!

LADY ELLA. May I come in?

HER VOICE. Just a second! I've got nothing on.

[LADY ELLA recoils. THE SQUIRE and RECTOR make an involuntary movement of approach.]

LADY ELLA. Oh! There you are!

THE RECTOR. [Doubtfully] I was just going to wade in——

LADY ELLA. Hannibal would have killed him, if she hadn't rushed in!

THE SQUIRE. Done him good, little beast!

LADY ELLA. Why didn't you go in, Tommy?

THE SQUIRE. Well, I would—only she—

LADY ELLA. I can't think how she got Edward out of Hannibal's awful mouth!

MAUD. [Without—to HANNIBAL, who is snuffling on the verandah and straining at the scarf] Bad dog!

LADY ELLA. We must simply thank her tremendously! I shall never forget the way she ran in, with her skirts up to her waist!

THE SQUIRE. By Jove! No. It was topping.

LADY ELLA. Her clothes must be ruined. That pond—ugh! [She wrinkles her nose] Tommy, do have it drained.

THE RECTOR. [Dreamily] I don't remember her face in church.

THE SQUIRE. Ah! Yes. Who is she? Pretty woman!

LADY ELLA. I must get the Vet. to Edward. [To THE SQUIRE] Tommy, do exert yourself!

[MAUD re-enters.]

THE SQUIRE. All right! [Exerting himself] Here's a bell!

HER VOICE. [Through the door] The bleeding's stopped. Shall I send him in to you?

LADY ELLA. Oh, please! Poor darling!

[They listen.] [LADY ELLA, prepares to receive EDWARD. THE SQUIRE and RECTOR stand transfixed. The door opens, and a bare arm gently pushes EDWARD forth. He is bandaged with a smooth towel. There is a snuffle—HANNIBAL has broken the scarf, outside.]

LADY ELLA. [Aghast] Look! Hannibal's loose! Maud—Tommy. [To THE RECTOR] You!

[The THREE rush to prevent HANNIBAL from re-entering.]

LADY ELLA. [To EDWARD] Yes, I know—you'd like to! You SHALL bite him when it's safe. Oh! my darling, you DO—[She sniffs].

[MAUD and THE SQUIRE re-enter.]

Have you tied him properly this time?

MAUD. With Bertie's braces.

LADY ELLA. Oh! but—

MAUD. It's all right; they're almost leather.

[THE RECTOR re-enters, with a slight look of insecurity.]

LADY ELLA. Rector, are you sure it's safe?

THE RECTOR. [Hitching at his trousers] No, indeed, LADY Ella—I—

LADY ELLA. Tommy, do lend a hand!

THE SQUIRE. All right, Ella; all right! He doesn't mean what you mean!

LADY ELLA. [Transferring EDWARD to THE SQUIRE] Hold him, Tommy. He's sure to smell out Hannibal!

THE SQUIRE. [Taking EDWARD by the collar, and holding his own nose] Jove! Clever if he can smell anything but himself. Phew! She ought to have the Victoria Cross for goin' in that pond.

[The door opens, and HERSELF appears; a fine, frank, handsome woman, in a man's orange-coloured motor-coat, hastily thrown on over the substrata of costume.]

SHE. So very sorry—had to have a bath, and change, of course!

LADY ELLA. We're so awfully grateful to you. It was splendid.

MAUD. Quite.

THE RECTOR. [Rather holding himself together] Heroic! I was just myself about to—

THE SQUIRE. [Restraining EDWARD] Little beast will fight—must apologise—you were too quick for me—

[He looks up at her. She is smiling, and regarding the wounded dog, her head benevolently on one side.]

SHE. Poor dears! They thought they were so safe in that nice pond!

LADY ELLA. Is he very badly torn?

SHE. Rather nasty. There ought to be a stitch or two put in his ear.

LADY ELLA. I thought so. Tommy, do—

THE SQUIRE. All right. Am I to let him go?

LADY ELLA. No.

MAUD. The fly's outside. Bertie, run and tell Jarvis to drive in for the Vet.

THE RECTOR. [Gentle and embarrassed] Run? Well, Maud—I—

SHE. The doctor would sew it up. My maid can go round.

[HANNIBAL. appears at the open casement with the broken braces dangling from his collar.]

LADY ELLA. Look! Catch him! Rector!

MAUD. Bertie! Catch him!

[THE RECTOR seizes HANNIBAL, but is seen to be in difficulties with his garments. HERSELF, who has gone out left, returns, with a leather strop in one hand and a pair of braces in the other.]

SHE. Take this strop—he can't break that. And would these be any good to you?

[SHE hands the braces to MAUD and goes out on to the verandah and hastily away. MAUD, transferring the braces to the RECTOR, goes out, draws HANNIBAL from the casement window, and secures him with the strap. THE RECTOR sits suddenly with the braces in his hands. There is a moment's peace.]

LADY ELLA. Splendid, isn't she? I do admire her.

THE SQUIRE. She's all there.

THE RECTOR. [Feelingly] Most kind.

[He looks ruefully at the braces and at LADY ELLA. A silence. MAUD reappears at the door and stands gazing at the braces.]

THE SQUIRE. [Suddenly] Eh?

MAUD. Yes.

THE SQUIRE. [Looking at his wife] Ah!

LADY ELLA. [Absorbed in EDWARD] Poor darling!

THE SQUIRE. [Bluntly] Ella, the Rector wants to get up!

THE RECTOR. [Gently] Perhaps—just for a moment—

LADY ELLA. Oh! [She turns to the wall.]

[THE RECTOR, screened by his WIFE, retires on to the verandah to adjust his garments.]

THE SQUIRE. [Meditating] So she's married!

LADY ELLA. [Absorbed in EDWARD] Why?

THE SQUIRE. Braces.

LADY ELLA. Oh! Yes. We ought to ask them to dinner, Tommy.

THE SQUIRE. Ah! Yes. Wonder who they are?

[THE RECTOR and MAUD reappear.]

THE RECTOR. Really very good of her to lend her husband's—I was— er—quite—

MAUD. That'll do, Bertie.

[THEY see HER returning along the verandah, followed by a sandy, red-faced gentleman in leather leggings, with a needle and cotton in his hand.]

HERSELF. Caught the doctor just starting. So lucky!

LADY ELLA. Oh! Thank goodness!

DOCTOR. How do, Lady Ella? How do, Squire?—how do, Rector? [To MAUD] How de do? This the beastie? I see. Quite! Who'll hold him for me?

LADY ELLA. Oh! I!

HERSELF. D'you know, I think I'd better. It's so dreadful when it's your own, isn't it? Shall we go in here, doctor? Come along, pretty boy!

[She takes EDWARD, and they pass into the room, left.]

LADY ELLA. I dreaded it. She is splendid!

THE SQUIRE. Dogs take to her. That's a sure sign.

THE RECTOR. Little things—one can always tell.

THE SQUIRE. Something very attractive about her—what! Fine build of woman.

MAUD. I shall get hold of her for parish work.

THE RECTOR. Ah! Excellent—excellent! Do!

THE SQUIRE. Wonder if her husband shoots? She seems quite-er—quite—

LADY ELLA. [Watching the door] Quite! Altogether charming; one of the nicest faces I ever saw.

[THE DOCTOR comes out alone.]

Oh! Doctor—have you? is it—?

DOCTOR. Right as rain! She held him like an angel—he just licked her, and never made a sound.

LADY ELLA. Poor darling! Can I—

[She signs toward the door.]

DOCTOR. Better leave 'em a minute. She's moppin' 'im off. [He wrinkles his nose] Wonderful clever hands!

THE SQUIRE. I say—who is she?

DOCTOR. [Looking from face to face with a dubious and rather quizzical expression] Who? Well—there you have me! All I know is she's a first-rate nurse—been helpin' me with a case in Ditch Lane. Nice woman, too—thorough good sort! Quite an acquisition here. H'm! [Again that quizzical glance] Excuse me hurryin' off—very late. Good-bye, Rector. Good-bye, Lady Ella. Good-bye!

[He goes. A silence.]

THE SQUIRE. H'm! I suppose we ought to be a bit careful.

[JARVIS, flyman of the old school, has appeared on the verandah.]

JARVIS. [To THE RECTOR] Beg pardon, sir. Is the little dog all right?

MAUD. Yes.

JARVIS. [Touching his hat] Seein' you've missed your train, m'm, shall I wait, and take you 'ome again?

MAUD. No.

JARVIS. Cert'nly, m'm. [He touches his hat with a circular gesture, and is about to withdraw.]

LADY ELLA. Oh, Jarvis—what's the name of the people here?

JARVIS. Challenger's the name I've driven 'em in, my lady.

THE SQUIRE. Challenger? Sounds like a hound. What's he like?

JARVIS. [Scratching his head] Wears a soft 'at, sir.

THE SQUIRE. H'm! Ah!

JARVIS. Very nice gentleman, very nice lady. 'Elped me with my old mare when she 'ad the 'ighsteria last week—couldn't 'a' been kinder if they'd 'a' been angels from 'eaven. Wonderful fond o' dumb animals, the two of 'em. I don't pay no attention to gossip, meself.

MAUD. Gossip? What gossip?

JARVIS. [Backing] Did I make use of the word, m'm? You'll excuse me, I'm sure. There's always talk where there's newcomers. I takes people as I finds 'em.

THE RECTOR. Yes, yes, Jarvis—quite—quite right!

JARVIS. Yes, sir. I've—I've got a 'abit that way at my time o' life.

MAUD. [Sharply] How long have they been here, Jarvis?

JARVIS. Well—er—a matter of three weeks, m'm.

[A slight involuntary stir.]

[Apologetic] Of course, in my profession I can't afford to take notice of whether there's the trifle of a ring between 'em, as the sayin' is. 'Tisn't 'ardly my business like.

[A silence.]

LADY ELLA. [Suddenly] Er—thank you, Jarvis; you needn't wait.

JARVIS. No, m'lady. Your service, sir—service, m'm.

[He goes. A silence.]

THE SQUIRE. [Drawing a little closer] Three weeks? I say—er— wasn't there a book?

THE RECTOR. [Abstracted] Three weeks—I certainly haven't seen them in church.

MAUD. A trifle of a ring!

LADY ELLA. [Impulsively] Oh, bother! I'm sure she's all right. And if she isn't, I don't care. She's been much too splendid.

THE SQUIRE. Must think of the village. Didn't quite like the doctor's way of puttin' us off.

LADY ELLA. The poor darling owes his life to her.

THE SQUIRE. H'm! Dash it! Yes! Can't forget the way she ran into that stinkin' pond.

MAUD. Had she a wedding-ring on?

[They look at each other, but no one knows.]

LADY ELLA. Well, I'm not going to be ungrateful.

THE SQUIRE. It'd be dashed awkward—mustn't take a false step, Ella.

THE RECTOR. And I've got his braces! [He puts his hand to his waist.]

MAUD. [Warningly] Bertie!

THE SQUIRE. That's all right, Rector—we're goin' to be perfectly polite, and—and—thank her, and all that.

LADY ELLA. We can see she's a good sort. What does it matter?

MAUD. My dear Ella! "What does it matter!" We've got to know.

THE RECTOR. We do want light.

THE SQUIRE. I'll ring the bell. [He rings.]

[They look at each other aghast.]

LADY ELLA. What did you ring for, Tommy?

THE SQUIRE. [Flabbergasted] God knows!

MAUD. Somebody'll come.

THE SQUIRE. Rector—you—you've got to—

MAUD. Yes, Bertie.

THE RECTOR. Dear me! But—er—what—er—How?

THE SQUIRE. [Deeply-to himself] The whole thing's damn delicate.

[The door right is opened and a MAID appears. She is a determined-looking female. They face her in silence.]

THE RECTOR. Er—er—your master is not in?

THE MAID. No. 'E's gone up to London.

THE RECTOR. Er—Mr Challenger, I think?

THE MAID. Yes.

THE RECTOR. Yes! Er—quite so

THE MAID. [Eyeing them] D'you want—Mrs Challenger?

THE RECTOR. Ah! Not precisely—

THE SQUIRE. [To him in a low, determined voice] Go on.

THE RECTOR. [Desperately] I asked because there was a—a—Mr. Challenger I used to know in the 'nineties, and I thought—you wouldn't happen to know how long they've been married? My friend marr—

THE MAID. Three weeks.

THE RECTOR. Quite so—quite so! I shall hope it will turn out to be—Er—thank you—Ha!

LADY ELLA. Our dog has been fighting with the Rector's, and Mrs Challenger rescued him; she's bathing his

ear. We're waiting to thank her. You needn't—

THE MAID. [Eyeing them] No.

[She turns and goes out.]

THE SQUIRE. Phew! What a gorgon! I say, Rector, did you really know a Challenger in the 'nineties?

THE RECTOR. [Wiping his brow] No.

THE SQUIRE. Ha! Jolly good!

LADY ELLA. Well, you see!—it's all right.

THE RECTOR. Yes, indeed. A great relief!

LADY ELLA. [Moving to the door] I must go in now.

THE SQUIRE. Hold on! You goin' to ask 'em to—to—anything?

LADY ELLA. Yes.

MAUD. I shouldn't.

LADY ELLA. Why not? We all like the look of her.

THE RECTOR. I think we should punish ourselves for entertaining that uncharitable thought.

LADY ELLA. Yes. It's horrible not having the courage to take people as they are.

THE SQUIRE. As they are? H'm! How can you till you know?

LADY ELLA. Trust our instincts, of course.

THE SQUIRE. And supposing she'd turned out not married—eh!

LADY ELLA! She'd still be herself, wouldn't she?

MAUD. Ella!

THE SQUIRE. H'm! Don't know about that.

LADY ELLA. Of course she would, Tommy.

THE RECTOR. [His hand stealing to his waist] Well! It's a great weight off my—!

LADY ELLA. There's the poor darling snuffling. I must go in.

[She knocks on the door. It is opened, and EDWARD comes out briskly, with a neat little white pointed ear-cap on one ear.]

LADY ELLA. Precious!

[SHE HERSELF Comes out, now properly dressed in flax-blue linen.]

LADY ELLA. How perfectly sweet of you to make him that!

SHE. He's such a dear. And the other poor dog?

MAUD. Quite safe, thanks to your strop.

[HANNIBAL appears at the window, with the broken strop dangling. Following her gaze, they turn and see him.]

MAUD. Oh! There, he's broken it. Bertie!

SHE. Let me! [She seizes HANNIBAL.]

THE SQUIRE. We're really most tremendously obliged to you. Afraid we've been an awful nuisance.

SHE. Not a bit. I love dogs.

THE SQUIRE. Hope to make the acquaintance of Mr—of your husband.

LADY ELLA. [To EDWARD, who is straining]

[Gently, darling! Tommy, take him.] [THE SQUIRE does so.]

MAUD. [Approaching HANNIBAL.] Is he behaving?

[She stops short, and her face suddenly shoots forward at HER hands that are holding HANNIBAL'S neck.]

SHE. Oh! yes—he's a love.

MAUD. [Regaining her upright position, and pursing her lips; in a peculiar voice] Bertie, take Hannibal.

THE RECTOR takes him.

LADY ELLA. [Producing a card] I can't be too grateful for all you've done for my poor darling. This is where we live. Do come— and see—

[MAUD, whose eyes have never left those hands, tweaks LADY ELLA's dress.]

LADY ELLA. That is—I'm—I—

[HERSELF looks at LADY ELLA in surprise.]

THE SQUIRE. I don't know if your husband shoots, but if—

[MAUD, catching his eye, taps the third finger of her left hand.]

—er—he—does—er—er—

[HERSELF looks at THE SQUIRE surprised.]

MAUD. [Turning to her husband, repeats the gesture with the low and simple word] Look!

THE RECTOR. [With round eyes, severely] Hannibal! [He lifts him bodily and carries him away.]

MAUD. Don't squeeze him, Bertie!

[She follows through the French window.]

THE SQUIRE. [Abruptly—of the unoffending EDWARD] That dog'll be forgettin' himself in a minute.

[He picks up EDWARD and takes him out.] [LADY ELLA is left staring.]

LADY ELLA. [At last] You mustn't think, I—You mustn't think, we —Oh! I must just see they—don't let Edward get at Hannibal.

[She skims away.] [HERSELF is left staring after LADY ELLA, in surprise.]

SHE. What is the matter with them?

[The door is opened.]

THE MAID. [Entering and holding out a wedding-ring—severely] You left this, m'm, in the bathroom.

SHE. [Looking, startled, at her finger] Oh! [Taking it] I hadn't missed it. Thank you, Martha.

[THE MAID goes.] [A hand, slipping in at the casement window, softly lays a pair of braces on the windowsill. SHE looks at the braces, then at the ring. HER lip curls.]

Sue. [Murmuring deeply] Ah!

CURTAIN

DEFEAT

A Tiny Drama

CHARACTERS THE OFFICER. THE GIRL. DURING THE GREAT WAR. EVENING. An empty room. The curtains drawn and gas turned low. The furniture and walls give a colour-impression as of greens and beetroot. There is a prevalence of plush. A fireplace on the Left, a sofa, a small table; the curtained window is at the back. On the table, in a common pot, stands a little plant of maidenhair fern, fresh and green. Enter from the door on the Right, a GIRL and a YOUNG OFFICER in khaki. The GIRL wears a discreet dark dress, hat, and veil, and stained yellow gloves. The YOUNG OFFICER is tall, with a fresh open face, and kindly eager blue eyes; he is a little lame. The GIRL, who is evidently at home, moves towards the gas jet to turn it up, then changes her mind, and going to the curtains, draws them apart and throws up the window. Bright moonlight comes flooding in. Outside are seen the trees of a little Square. She stands gazing out, suddenly turns inward with a shiver.

YOUNG OFF. I say; what's the matter? You were crying when I spoke to you.

GIRL. [With a movement of recovery] Oh! nothing. The beautiful evening—that's all.

YOUNG OFF. [Looking at her] Cheer up!

GIRL. [Taking off hat and veil; her hair is yellowish and crinkly] Cheer up! You are not lonelee, like me.

YOUNG OFF. [Limping to the window—doubtfully] I say, how did you how did you get into this? Isn't it an awfully hopeless sort of life?

GIRL. Yees, it ees. You haf been wounded?

YOUNG OFF. Just out of hospital to-day.

GIRL. The horrible war—all the misery is because of the war. When will it end?

YOUNG OFF. [Leaning against the window-sill, looking at her attentively] I say, what nationality are you?

GIRL. [With a quick look and away] Rooshian.

YOUNG OFF. Really! I never met a Russian girl. [The GIRL gives him another quick look] I say, is it as bad as they make out?

GIRL. [Slipping her hand through his arm] Not when I haf anyone as ni-ice as you; I never haf had, though. [She smiles, and her smile, like her speech, is slow and confining] You stopped because I was sad, others stop because I am gay. I am not fond of men at all. When you know—you are not fond of them.

YOUNG OFF. Well, you hardly know them at their best, do you? You should see them in the trenches. By George! They're simply splendid—officers and men, every blessed soul. There's never been anything like it—just one long bit of jolly fine self-sacrifice; it's perfectly amazing.

GIRL. [Turning her blue-grey eyes on him] I expect you are not the last at that. You see in them what you haf in yourself, I think.

YOUNG OFF. Oh, not a bit; you're quite out! I assure you when we made the attack where I got wounded there wasn't a single man in my regiment who wasn't an absolute hero. The way they went in—never thinking of themselves—it was simply ripping.

GIRL. [In a queer voice] It is the same too, perhaps, with—the enemy.

YOUNG OFF. Oh, yes! I know that.

GIRL. Ah! You are not a mean man. How I hate mean men!

YOUNG OFF. Oh! they're not mean really—they simply don't understand.

GIRL. Oh! You are a babee—a good babee aren't you?

[The YOUNG OFFICER doesn't like this, and frowns. The GIRL looks a little scared.]

GIRL. [Clingingly] But I li-ke you for it. It is so good to find a ni-ice man.

YOUNG OFF. [Abruptly] About being lonely? Haven't you any Russian friends?

GIRL. [Blankly] Rooshian? No. [Quickly] The town is so beeg. Were you at the concert before you spoke to me?

YOUNG OFF. Yes.

GIRL. I too. I lofe music.

YOUNG OFF. I suppose all Russians do.

GIRL. [With another quick look tat him] I go there always when I haf the money.

YOUNG OFF. What! Are you as badly on the rocks as that?

GIRL. Well, I haf just one shilling now!

[She laughs bitterly. The laugh upsets him; he sits on the window-sill, and leans forward towards her.]

YOUNG OFF. I say, what's your name?

GIRL. May. Well, I call myself that. It is no good asking yours.

YOUNG OFF. [With a laugh] You're a distrustful little soul; aren't you?

GIRL. I haf reason to be, don't you think?

YOUNG OFF. Yes. I suppose you're bound to think us all brutes.

GIRL. [Sitting on a chair close to the window where the moonlight falls on one powdered cheek] Well, I haf a lot of reasons to be afraid all my time. I am dreadfully nervous now; I am not trusding anybody. I suppose you haf been killing lots of Germans?

YOUNG OFF. We never know, unless it happens to be hand to hand; I haven't come in for that yet.

GIRL. But you would be very glad if you had killed some.

YOUNG OFF. Oh, glad? I don't think so. We're all in the same boat, so far as that's concerned. We're not glad to kill each other—not most of us. We do our job—that's all.

GIRL. Oh! It is frightful. I expect I haf my brothers killed.

YOUNG OFF. Don't you get any news ever?

GIRL. News? No indeed, no news of anybody in my country. I might not haf a country; all that I ever knew is gone; fader, moder, sisters, broders, all; never any more I shall see them, I suppose, now. The war it breaks and breaks, it breaks hearts. [She gives a little snarl] Do you know what I was thinking when you came up to me? I was thinking of my native town, and the river in the moonlight. If I could see it again I would be glad. Were you ever homeseeck?

YOUNG OFF. Yes, I have been—in the trenches. But one's ashamed with all the others.

GIRL. Ah! Yees! Yees! You are all comrades there. What is it like for me here, do you think, where everybody hates and despises me, and would catch me and put me in prison, perhaps. [Her breast heaves.]

YOUNG OFF. [Leaning forward and patting her knee] Sorry—sorry.

GIRL. [In a smothered voice] You are the first who has been kind to me for so long! I will tell you the truth—I am not Rooshian at all—I am German.

YOUNG OFF. [Staring] My dear girl, who cares. We aren't fighting against women.

GIRL. [Peering at him] Another man said that to me. But he was thinkin' of his fun. You are a veree ni-ice boy; I am so glad I met you. You see the good in people, don't you? That is the first thing in the world—because—there is really not much good in people, you know.

YOUNG OFF. [Smiling] You are a dreadful little cynic! But of course you are!

GIRL. Cyneec? How long do you think I would live if I was not a cyneec? I should drown myself to-morrow. Perhaps there are good people, but, you see, I don't know them.

YOUNG OFF. I know lots.

GIRL. [Leaning towards him] Well now—see, ni-ice boy—you haf never been in a hole, haf you?

YOUNG OFF. I suppose not a real hole.

GIRL. No, I should think not, with your face. Well, suppose I am still a good girl, as I was once, you know; and you took me to your mother and your sisters and you said: "Here is a little German girl that has no work, and no money, and no friends." They will say: "Oh! how sad! A German girl!" And they will go and wash their hands.

[The OFFICER, is silent, staring at her.]

GIRL. You see.

YOUNG OFF. [Muttering] I'm sure there are people.

GIRL. No. They would not take a German, even if she was good. Besides, I don't want to be good any more—I am not a humbug; I have learned to be bad. Aren't you going to kees me, ni-ice boy?

She puts her face close to his. Her eyes trouble him; he draws back.

YOUNG OFF. Don't. I'd rather not, if you don't mind. [She looks at him fixedly, with a curious inquiring stare] It's stupid. I don't know—but you see, out there, and in hospital, life's different. It's—it's—it isn't mean, you know. Don't come too close.

GIRL. Oh! You are fun—[She stops] Doesn't it light. No Zeps to-night. When they burn—what a 'orrble death! And all the people cheer. It is natural. Do you hate us veree much?

YOUNG OFF. [Turning sharply] Hate? I don't know.

GIRL. I don't hate even the English—I despise them. I despise my people too; even more, because they began this war. Oh! I know that. I despise all the peoples. Why haf they made the world so miserable —why haf they killed all our lives—hundreds and thousands and millions of lives—all for noting? They haf made a bad world — everybody hating, and looking for the worst everywhere. They haf made me bad, I know. I believe no more in anything. What is there to believe in? Is there a God? No! Once I was teaching little English children their prayers—isn't that funnee? I was reading to them about Christ and love. I believed all those things. Now I believe noting at all—no one who is not a fool or a liar can believe. I would like to work in a 'ospital; I would like to go and 'elp poor boys like you. Because I am a German they would throw me out a 'undred times, even if I was good. It is the same in Germany, in France, in Russia, everywhere. But do you think I will believe in Love and Christ and God and all that—Not I! I think we are animals —that's all! Oh, yes! you fancy it is because my life has spoiled me. It is not that at all—that is not the worst thing in life. The men I take are not ni-ice, like you, but it's their nature; and—they help me to live, which is something for me, anyway. No, it is the men who think themselves great and good and make the war with their talk and their hate, killing us all—killing all the boys like you, and keeping poor People in prison, and telling us to go on hating; and all these dreadful cold-blood creatures who write in the papers —the same in my country—just the same; it is because of all of them that I think we are only animals.

[The YOUNG OFFICER gets up, acutely miserable.] [She follows him with her eyes.]

GIRL. Don't mind me talkin', ni-ice boy. I don't know anyone to talk to. If you don't like it, I can be quiet as a mouse.

YOUNG OFF. Oh, go on! Talk away; I'm not obliged to believe you, and I don't.

[She, too, is on her feet now, leaning against the wall; her dark dress and white face

just touched by the slanting moonlight. Her voice comes again, slow and soft and bitter.]

GIRL. Well, look here, ni-ice boy, what sort of world is it, where millions are being tortured, for no fault of theirs, at all? A beautiful world, isn't it? 'Umbog! Silly rot, as you boys call it. You say it is all "Comrades" and braveness out there at the front, and people don't think of themselves. Well, I don't think of myself verree much. What does it matter? I am lost now, anyway. But I think of my people at 'ome; how they suffer and grieve. I think of all the poor people there, and here, how lose those they love, and all the poor prisoners. Am I not to think of them? And if I do, how am I to believe it a beautiful world, ni-ice boy?

[He stands very still, staring at her.]

GIRL. Look here! We haf one life each, and soon it is over. Well, I think that is lucky.

YOUNG OFF. No! There's more than that.

GIRL. [Softly] Ah! You think the war is fought for the future; you are giving your lives for a better world, aren't you?

YOUNG OFF. We must fight till we win.

GIRL. Till you win. My people think that too. All the peoples think that if they win the world will be better. But it will not, you know; it will be much worse, anyway.

[He turns away from her, and catches up his cap. Her voice follows him.]

GIRL. I don't care which win. I don't care if my country is beaten. I despise them all—animals—animals. Ah! Don't go, ni-ice boy; I will be quiet now.

[He has taken some notes from his tunic pocket; he puts them on the table and goes up to her.]

YOUNG OFF. Good-night.

GIRL. [Plaintively] Are you really going? Don't you like me enough?

YOUNG OFF. Yes, I like you.

GIRL. It is because I am German, then?

YOUNG OFF. No.

GIRL. Then why won't you stay?

YOUNG OFF. [With a shrug] If you must know—because you upset me.

GIRL. Won't you kees me once?

[He bends, puts his lips to her forehead. But as he takes them away she throws her head back, presses her mouth to his, and clings to him.]

YOUNG OFF. [Sitting down suddenly] Don't! I don't want to feel a brute.

GIRL. [Laughing] You are a funny boy; but you are verree good. Talk to me a little, then. No one talks to me. Tell me, haf you seen many German prisoners?

YOUNG OFF. [Sighing] A good many.

GIRL. Any from the Rhine?

YOUNG OFF. Yes, I think so.

GIRL. Were they verree sad?

YOUNG OFF. Some were; some were quite glad to be taken.

GIRL. Did you ever see the Rhine? It will be wonderful to-night. The moonlight will be the same there, and in Rooshia too, and France, everywhere; and the trees will look the same as here, and people will meet under them and make love just as here. Oh! isn't it stupid, the war? As if it were not good to be alive!

YOUNG OFF. You can't tell how good it is to be alive till you're facing death. You don't live till then. And when a whole lot of you feel like that—and are ready to give their lives for each other, it's worth all the rest of life put together.

[He stops, ashamed of such sentiment before this girl, who believes in nothing.]

GIRL. [Softly] How were you wounded, ni-ice boy?

YOUNG OFF. Attacking across open ground: four machine bullets got me at one go off.

GIRL. Weren't you verree frightened when they ordered you to attack?

[He shakes his head and laughs.]

YOUNG OFF. It was great. We did laugh that morning. They got me much too soon, though—a swindle.

GIRL. [Staring at him] You laughed?

YOUNG OFF. Yes. And what do you think was the first thing I was conscious of next morning? My old Colonel bending over me and giving me a squeeze of lemon. If you knew my Colonel you'd still believe in things. There is something, you know, behind all this evil. After all, you can only die once, and, if it's for your country—all the better!

[Her face, in the moonlight, with, intent eyes touched up with black, has a most strange, other-world look.]

GIRL. No; I believe in nothing, not even in my country. My heart is dead.

YOUNG OFF. Yes; you think so, but it isn't, you know, or you wouldn't have 'been crying when I met you.

GIRL. If it were not dead, do you think I could live my life-walking the streets every night, pretending to like strange men; never hearing a kind word; never talking, for fear I will be known for a German? Soon I shall take to drinking; then I shall be "Kaput" verree quick. You see, I am practical; I see things clear. To-night I am a little emotional; the moon is funny, you know. But I live for myself only, now. I don't care for anything or anybody.

YOUNG OFF. All the same; just now you were pitying your folk at home, and prisoners and that.

GIRL. Yees; because they suffer. Those who suffer are like me—I pity myself, that's all; I am different from your English women. I see what I am doing; I do not let my mind become a turnip just because I am no longer moral.

YOUNG OFF. Nor your heart either, for all you say.

GIRL. Ni-ice boy, you are verree obstinate. But all that about love is 'umbog. We love ourselves, noting more.

At that intense soft bitterness in her voice, he gets up, feeling stifled, and stands at the window. A newspaper boy some way off is calling his wares. The GIRL's fingers slip between his own, and stay unmoving. He looks round into her face. In spite of make-up it has a queer, unholy, touching beauty.

YOUNG OFF. [With an outburst] No; we don't only love ourselves; there is more. I can't explain, but there's something great; there's kindness—and—and——

[The shouting of newspaper boys grows louder and their cries, passionately vehement, clash into each other and obscure each word. His head goes up to listen; her hand tightens within his arm—she too is listening. The cries come nearer, hoarser, more shrill and clamorous; the empty moonlight outside seems suddenly crowded with figures, footsteps, voices, and a fierce distant cheering. "Great victory—great victory! Official! British! 'Eavy defeat of the 'Uns! Many thousand prisoners! 'Eavy defeat!" It speeds by, intoxicating, filling him with a fearful joy; he leans far out, waving his cap and cheering like a madman; the night seems to flutter and vibrate and answer. He turns to rush down into the street, strikes against something soft, and recoils. The GIRL stands with hands clenched, and face convulsed, panting. All confused with the desire to do something, he stoops to kiss her hand. She snatches away her fingers, sweeps up the notes he has put down, and holds them out to him.]

GIRL. Take them—I will not haf your English money—take them.

Suddenly she tears them across, twice, thrice, lets the bits. flutter to the floor, and turns her back on him. He stands looking at her leaning against the plush-covered table, her head down, a dark figure in a dark room, with the moonlight sharpening her outline. Hardly a moment he stays, then makes for the door. When he is gone, she still stands there, her chin on her breast, with the sound in her ears of cheering, of hurrying feet, and voices crying: "'Eavy Defeat!" stands, in the centre of a pattern made by the fragments of the torn-up notes, staring out unto the moonlight, seeing not this hated room and the hated Square outside, but a German orchard, and herself, a little girl, plucking apples, a big dog beside her; and a hundred other pictures, such as the drowning see. Then she sinks down on the floor, lays her forehead on the dusty carpet, and presses her body to it. Mechanically, she sweeps together the scattered fragments of notes, assembling them with the dust into a little pile, as of fallen leaves, and dabbling in it with her fingers, while the tears run down her cheeks.

GIRL. Defeat! Der Vaterland! Defeat!.... One shillin'!

[Then suddenly, in the moonlight, she sits up, and begins to sing with all her might "Die Wacht am Rhein." And outside men pass, singing: "Rule, Britannia!"] CURTAIN

A Scene

CHARACTERS THE GIRL. THE MAN. THE SOLDIER. THE SUN A Girl, sits crouched over her knees on a stile close to a river. A MAN with a silver badge stands beside her, clutching the worn top plank. THE GIRL'S level brows are drawn together; her eyes see her memories. THE MAN's eyes see THE GIRL; he has a dark, twisted face. The bright sun shines; the quiet river flows; the Cuckoo is calling; the mayflower is in bloom along the hedge that ends in the stile on the towing-path.

THE GIRL. God knows what 'e'll say, Jim.

THE MAN. Let 'im. 'E's come too late, that's all.

THE GIRL. He couldn't come before. I'm frightened. 'E was fond o' me.

THE MAN. And aren't I fond of you?

THE GIRL. I ought to 'a waited, Jim; with 'im in the fightin'.

THE MAN. [Passionately] And what about me? Aren't I been in the fightin'—earned all I could get?

THE GIRL. [Touching him] Ah!

THE MAN. Did you—? [He cannot speak the words.]

THE GIRL. Not like you, Jim—not like you.

THE MAN. Have a spirit, then.

THE GIRL. I promised him.

THE MAN. One man's luck's another's poison.

THE GIRL. I ought to 'a waited. I never thought he'd come back from the fightin'.

THE MAN. [Grimly] Maybe 'e'd better not 'ave.

THE GIRL. [Looking back along the tow-path] What'll he be like, I wonder?

THE MAN. [Gripping her shoulder] Daisy, don't you never go back on me, or I should kill you, and 'im too.

[THE GIRL looks at him, shivers, and puts her lips to his.]

THE GIRL. I never could.

THE MAN. Will you run for it? 'E'd never find us!

[THE GIRL shakes her head.]

THE MAN [Dully] What's the good o' stayin'? The world's wide.

THE GIRL. I'd rather have it off me mind, with him home.

THE MAN. [Clenching his hands] It's temptin' Providence.

THE GIRL. What's the time, Jim?

THE MAN. [Glancing at the sun] 'Alf past four.

THE GIRL. [Looking along the towing-path] He said four o'clock. Jim, you better go.

THE MAN. Not I. I've not got the wind up. I've seen as much of hell as he has, any day. What like is he?

THE GIRL. [Dully] I dunno, just. I've not seen him these three years. I dunno no more, since I've known you.

THE MAN. Big or little chap?

THE GIRL. 'Bout your size. Oh! Jim, go along!

THE MAN. No fear! What's a blighter like that to old Fritz's shells? We didn't shift when they was comin'. If you'll go, I'll go; not else.

[Again she shakes her head.]

THE GIRL. Jim, do you love me true?

[For answer THE MAN takes her avidly in his arms.]

I ain't ashamed—I ain't ashamed. If 'e could see me 'eart.

THE MAN. Daisy! If I'd known you out there, I never could 'a stuck it. They'd 'a got me for a deserter. That's how I love you!

THE GIRL. Jim, don't lift your hand to 'im! Promise!

THE MAN. That's according.

THE GIRL. Promise!

THE MAN. If 'e keeps quiet, I won't. But I'm not accountable—not always, I tell you straight—not since I've been through that.

THE GIRL. [With a shiver] Nor p'raps he isn't.

THE MAN. Like as not. It takes the lynch pins out, I tell you.

THE GIRL. God 'elp us!

THE MAN. [Grimly] Ah! We said that a bit too often. What we want we take, now; there's no one else to give it us, and there's no fear'll stop us; we seen the bottom of things.

THE GIRL. P'raps he'll say that too.

THE MAN. Then it'll be 'im or me.

THE GIRL. I'm frightened:

THE MAN. [Tenderly] No, Daisy, no! The river's handy. One more or less. 'E shan't 'arm you; nor me neither. [He takes out a knife.]

THE GIRL. [Seizing his hand] Oh, no! Give it to me, Jim!

THE MAN. [Smiling] No fear! [He puts it away] Shan't 'ave no need for it like as not. All right, little Daisy; you can't be expected to see things like what we do. What's life, anyway? I've seen a thousand lives taken in five minutes. I've seen dead men on the wires like flies on a flypaper. I've been as good as dead meself a hundred times. I've killed a dozen men. It's nothin'. He's safe, if 'e don't get my blood up. If he does, nobody's safe; not 'im, nor anybody else; not even you. I'm speakin' sober.

THE GIRL. [Softly] Jim, you won't go fightin' in the sun, with the birds all callin'?

THE MAN. That depends on 'im. I'm not lookin' for it. Daisy, I love you. I love your hair. I love your eyes. I love you.

THE GIRL. And I love you, Jim. I don't want nothin' more than you in all the world.

THE MAN. Amen to that, my dear. Kiss me close!

The sound of a voice singing breaks in on their embrace. THE GIRL starts from his arms, and looks behind her along the towing-path. THE MAN draws back against the hedge, fingering his side, where the knife is hidden. The song comes nearer. "I'll be right there to-night, Where the fields are snowy white; Banjos ringing, darkies singing, All the world seems bright."

THE GIRL. It's him!

THE MAN. Don't get the wind up, Daisy. I'm here!

[The singing stops. A man's voice says "Christ! It's Daisy; it's little Daisy 'erself!" THE GIRL stands rigid. The figure of a soldier appears on the other side of the stile. His cap is tucked into his belt, his hair is bright in the sunshine; he is lean, wasted, brown, and laughing.]

SOLDIER. Daisy! Daisy! Hallo, old pretty girl!

[THE GIRL does not move, barring the way, as it were.]

THE GIRL. Hallo, Jack! [Softly] I got things to tell you!

SOLDIER. What sort o' things, this lovely day? Why, I got things that'd take me years to tell. Have you missed me, Daisy?

THE GIRL. You been so long.

SOLDIER. So I 'ave. My Gawd! It's a way they 'ave in the Army. I said when I got out of it I'd laugh. Like as the sun itself I used to think of you, Daisy, when the trumps was comin' over, and the wind was up. D'you remember that last night in the wood? "Come back and marry me quick, Jack." Well, here I am—got me pass to heaven. No more fightin', no more drillin', no more sleepin' rough. We can get married now, Daisy. We can live soft an' 'appy. Give us a kiss, my dear.

THE GIRL. [Drawing back] No.

SOLDIER. [Blankly] Why not?

[THE MAN, with a swift movement steps along the hedge to THE GIRL'S side.]

THE MAN. That's why, soldier.

SOLDIER. [Leaping over the stile] 'Oo are you, Pompey? The sun don't shine in your inside, do it? 'Oo is he, Daisy?

THE GIRL. My man.

SOLDIER. Your-man! Lummy! "Taffy was a Welshman, Taffy was a thief!" Well, mate! So you've been through it, too. I'm laughin' this mornin' as luck will 'ave it. Ah! I can see your knife.

THE MAN. [Who has half drawn his knife] Don't laugh at me, I tell you.

SOLDIER. Not at you, not at you. [He looks from one to the other] I'm laughin' at things in general. Where did you get it, mate?

THE MAN. [Watchfully] Through the lung.

SOLDIER. Think o' that! An' I never was touched. Four years an' never was touched. An' so you've come an' took my girl! Nothin' doin'! Ha! [Again he looks from one to the other-then away] Well! The world's before me! [He laughs] I'll give you Daisy for a lung protector.

THE MAN. [Fiercely] You won't. I've took her.

SOLDIER. That's all right, then. You keep 'er. I've got a laugh in me you can't put out, black as you look! Good-bye, little Daisy!

[THE GIRL makes a movement towards him.]

THE MAN. Don't touch 'im!

[THE GIRL stands hesitating, and suddenly bursts into tears.]

SOLDIER. Look 'ere, mate; shake 'ands! I don't want to see a girl cry, this day of all, with the sun shinin'. I seen too much of sorrer. You and me've been at the back of it. We've 'ad our whack. Shake!

THE MAN. Who are you kiddin'? You never loved 'er!

SOLDIER. [After a long moment's pause] Oh! I thought I did.

THE MAN. I'll fight you for her.

[He drops his knife.]

SOLDIER. [Slowly] Mate, you done your bit, an' I done mine. It's took us two ways, seemin'ly.

THE GIRL. [Pleading] Jim!

THE MAN. [With clenched fists] I don't want 'is charity. I only want what I can take.

SOLDIER. Daisy, which of us will you 'ave?

THE GIRL. [Covering her face] Oh! Him!

SOLDIER. You see, mate! Put your 'ands down. There's nothin' for it but a laugh. You an' me know that. Laugh, mate!

THE MAN. You blarsted—!

[THE GIRL springs to him and stops his mouth.]

SOLDIER. It's no use, mate. I can't do it. I said I'd laugh to-day, and laugh I will. I've come through that, an' all the stink of it; I've come through sorrer. Never again! Cheerio, mate! The sun's a-shinin'! He turns away.

THE GIRL. Jack, don't think too 'ard of me!

SOLDIER. [Looking back] No fear, my dear! Enjoy your fancy! So long! Gawd bless you both!

He sings, and goes along the path, and the song fades away.

"I'll be right there to-night Where the fields are snowy white; Banjos ringing, darkies singing All the world seems bright!"

THE MAN. 'E's mad!

THE GIRL. [Looking down the path with her hands clasped] The sun has touched 'im, Jim!

CURTAIN

PUNCH AND GO

A Little Comedy

"Orpheus with his lute made trees And the mountain tope that freeze....." PERSONS OF THE PLAY JAMES G. FRUST.....The Boss E. BLEWITT VANE.....The Producer MR. FORESON.....The Stage Manager "ELECTRICS".....The Electrician "PROPS".....The Property Man HERBERT.....The Call Boy OF THE

PLAY WITHIN THE PLAY GUY TOONE.....The Professor VANESSA
HELLGROVE.....The Wife GEORGE FLEETWAY.....Orpheus MAUDE
HOPKINS.....The Faun

SCENE: The Stage of a Theatre.

Action continuous, though the curtain is momentarily lowered according to that action.

PUNCH AND GO The Scene is the stage of the theatre set for the dress rehearsal of the little play: "Orpheus with his Lute." The curtain is up and the audience, though present, is not supposed to be. The set scene represents the end section of a room, with wide French windows, Back Centre, fully opened on to an apple orchard in bloom. The Back Wall with these French windows, is set only about ten feet from the footlights, and the rest of the stage is orchard. What is visible of the room would indicate the study of a writing man of culture. (Note.—If found advantageous for scenic purposes, this section of room can be changed to a broad verandah or porch with pillars supporting its roof.) In the wall, Stage Left, is a curtained opening, across which the curtain is half drawn. Stage Right of the French windows is a large armchair turned rather towards the window, with a book rest attached, on which is a volume of the Encyclopedia Britannica, while on a stool alongside are writing materials such as a man requires when he writes with a pad on his knees. On a little table close by is a reading-lamp with a dark green shade. A crude light from the floats makes the stage stare; the only person on it is MR FORESON, the stage manager, who is standing in the centre looking upwards as if waiting for someone to speak. He is a short, broad man, rather blank, and fatal. From the back of the auditorium, or from an empty box, whichever is most convenient, the producer, MR BLEWITT VANE, a man of about thirty four, with his hair brushed back, speaks.

VANE. Mr Foreson?

FORESON. Sir?

VANE. We'll do that lighting again.

[FORESON walks straight of the Stage into the wings Right.] [A pause.]

Mr Foreson! [Crescendo] Mr Foreson.

[FORESON walks on again from Right and shades his eyes.]

VANE. For goodness sake, stand by! We'll do that lighting again. Check your floats.

FORESON. [Speaking up into the prompt wings] Electrics!

VOICE OF ELECTRICS. Hallo!

FORESON. Give it us again. Check your floats.

[The floats go down, and there is a sudden blinding glare of blue lights, in which FORESON looks particularly ghastly.]

VANE. Great Scott! What the blazes! Mr Foreson!

[FORESON walks straight out into the wings Left. Crescendo.]

Mr Foreson!

FORESON. [Re-appearing] Sir?

VANE. Tell Miller to come down.

FORESON. Electrics! Mr Blewitt Vane wants to speak to you. Come down!

VANE. Tell Herbert to sit in that chair.

[FORESON walks straight out into the Right wings.]

Mr Foreson!

FORESON. [Re-appearing] Sir?

VANE. Don't go off the stage. [FORESON mutters.]

[ELECTRICS appears from the wings, Stage Left. He is a dark, thin-faced man with rather spikey hair.]

ELECTRICS. Yes, Mr Vane?

VANE. Look!

ELECTRICS. That's what I'd got marked, Mr Vane.

VANE. Once for all, what I want is the orchard in full moonlight, and the room dark except for the reading

lamp. Cut off your front battens.

[ELECTRICS withdraws Left. FORESON walks off the Stage into the Right wings.]

Mr Foreson!

FORESON. [Re-appearing] Sir?

VANE. See this marked right. Now, come on with it! I want to get some beauty into this!

[While he is speaking, HERBERT, the call boy, appears from the wings Right, a mercurial youth of about sixteen with a wide mouth.]

FORESON. [Maliciously] Here you are, then, Mr Vane. Herbert, sit in that chair.

[HERBERT sits on the armchair, with an air of perfect peace.]

VANE. Now! [All the lights go out. In a wail] Great Scott!

[A throaty chuckle from FORESON in the darkness. The light dances up, flickers, shifts, grows steady, falling on the orchard outside. The reading lamp darts alight and a piercing little glare from it strikes into the auditorium away from HERBERT.]

[In a terrible voice] Mr Foreson.

FORESON. Sir?

VANE. Look—at—that—shade!

[FORESON mutters, walks up to it and turns it round so that the light shines on HERBERT'S legs.]

On his face, on his face!

[FORESON turns the light accordingly.]

FORESON. Is that what you want, Mr Vane?

VANE. Yes. Now, mark that!

FORESON. [Up into wings Right] Electrics!

ELECTRICS. Hallo!

FORESON. Mark that!

VANE. My God!

[The blue suddenly becomes amber.] [The blue returns. All is steady. HERBERT is seen diverting himself with an imaginary cigar.]

Mr Foreson.

FORESON. Sir?

VANE. Ask him if he's got that?

FORESON. Have you got that?

ELECTRICS. Yes.

VANE. Now pass to the change. Take your floats off altogether.

FORESON. [Calling up] Floats out. [They go out.]

VANE. Cut off that lamp. [The lamp goes out] Put a little amber in your back batten. Mark that! Now pass to the end. Mr Foreson!

FORESON. Sir?

VANE. Black out

FORESON. [Calling up] Black out!

[The lights go out.]

VANE. Give us your first lighting-lamp on. And then the two changes. Quick as you can. Put some pep into it. Mr Foreson!

FORESON. Sir?

VANE. Stand for me where Miss Hellgrove comes in. FORESON crosses to the window. No, no!—by the curtain.

[FORESON takes his stand by the curtain; and suddenly the three lighting effects are

rendered quickly and with miraculous exactness.]

Good! Leave it at that. We'll begin. Mr Foreson, send up to Mr Frust.

[He moves from the auditorium and ascends on to the Stage, by some steps Stage Right.]

FORESON. Herb! Call the boss, and tell beginners to stand by. Sharp, now!

[HERBERT gets out of the chair, and goes off Right.] [FORESON is going off Left as VANE mounts the Stage.]

VANE. Mr Foreson.

FORESON. [Re-appearing] Sir?

VANE. I want "Props."

FORESON. [In a stentorian voice] "Props!"

[Another moth-eaten man appears through the French windows.]

VANE. Is that boulder firm?

PROPS. [Going to where, in front of the back-cloth, and apparently among its apple trees, lies the counterfeitment of a mossy boulder; he puts his foot on it] If, you don't put too much weight on it, sir.

VANE. It won't creak?

PROPS. Nao. [He mounts on it, and a dolorous creaking arises.]

VANE. Make that right. Let me see that lute.

[PROPS produces a property lute. While they scrutinize it, a broad man with broad leathery clean-shaven face and small mouth, occupied by the butt end of a cigar, has come on to the stage from Stage Left, and stands waiting to be noticed.]

PROPS. [Attracted by the scent of the cigar] The Boss, Sir.

VANE. [Turning to "PROPS"] That'll do, then.

["PROPS" goes out through the French windows.]

VANE. [To FRUST] Now, sir, we're all ready for rehearsal of "Orpheus with his Lute."

FRUST. [In a cosmopolitan voice] "Orphoos with his loot!" That his loot, Mr Vane? Why didn't he pinch something more precious? Has this high-brow curtain-raiser of yours got any "pep" in it?

VANE. It has charm.

FRUST. I'd thought of "Pop goes the Weasel" with little Miggs. We kind of want a cock-tail before "Louisa loses," Mr Vane.

VANE. Well, sir, you'll see.

FRUST. This your lighting? It's a bit on the spiritool side. I've left my glass. Guess I'll sit in the front row. Ha'f a minute. Who plays this Orphoos?

VANE. George Fleetway.

FRUST. Has he got punch?

VANE. It's a very small part.

FRUST. Who are the others?

VANE. Guy Toone plays the Professor; Vanessa Hellgrove his wife; Maude Hopkins the faun.

FRUST. H'm! Names don't draw.

VANE. They're not expensive, any of them. Miss Hellgrove's a find, I think.

FRUST. Pretty?

VANE. Quite.

FRUST. Arty?

VANE. [Doubtfully] No. [With resolution] Look here, Mr FRUST, it's no use your expecting another "Pop goes the Weasel."

FRUST. We-ell, if it's got punch and go, that'll be enough for me. Let's get to it!

[He extinguishes his cigar and descends the steps and sits in the centre of the front row of the stalls.]

VANE. Mr Foreson?

FORESON. [Appearing through curtain, Right] Sir?

VANE. Beginners. Take your curtain down.

[He descends the steps and seats himself next to FRUST. The curtain goes down.] [A woman's voice is heard singing very beautifully Sullivan's song: "Orpheus with his lute, with his lute made trees and the mountain tops that freeze". etc.]

FRUST. Some voice!

The curtain rises. In the armchair the PROFESSOR is yawning, tall, thin, abstracted, and slightly grizzled in the hair. He has a pad of paper over his knee, ink on the stool to his right and the Encyclopedia volume on the stand to his left-barricaded in fact by the article he is writing. He is reading a page over to himself, but the words are drowned in the sound of the song his WIFE is singing in the next room, partly screened off by the curtain. She finishes, and stops. His voice can then be heard conning the words of his article.

PROF. "Orpheus symbolized the voice of Beauty, the call of life, luring us mortals with his song back from the graves we dig for ourselves. Probably the ancients realized this neither more nor less than we moderns. Mankind has not changed. The civilized being still hides the faun and the dryad within its broadcloth and its silk. And yet"—[He stops, with a dried-up air-rather impatiently] Go on, my dear! It helps the atmosphere.

[The voice of his WIFE begins again, gets as far as "made them sing" and stops dead, just as the PROFESSOR's pen is beginning to scratch. And suddenly, drawing the curtain further aside] [SHE appears. Much younger than the PROFESSOR, pale, very pretty, of a Botticellian type in face, figure, and in her clinging cream-coloured frock. She gazes at her abstracted husband; then swiftly moves to the lintel of the open window, and stands looking out.]

THE WIFE. God! What beauty!

PROF. [Looking Up] Umm?

THE WIFE. I said: God! What beauty!

PROF. Aha!

THE WIFE. [Looking at him] Do you know that I have to repeat everything to you nowadays?

PROF. What?

THE WIFE. That I have to repeat—

PROF. Yes; I heard. I'm sorry. I get absorbed.

THE WIFE. In all but me.

PROF. [Startled] My dear, your song was helping me like anything to get the mood. This paper is the very deuce—to balance between the historical and the natural.

THE WIFE. Who wants the natural?

PROF. [Grumbling] Umm! Wish I thought that! Modern taste! History may go hang; they're all for tuppence-coloured sentiment nowadays.

THE WIFE. [As if to herself] Is the Spring sentiment?

PROF. I beg your pardon, my dear; I didn't catch.

WIFE. [As if against her will—urged by some pent-up force] Beauty, beauty!

PROF. That's what I'm, trying to say here. The Orpheus legend symbolizes to this day the call of Beauty! [He takes up his pen, while she continues to stare out at the moonlight. Yawning] Dash it! I get so sleepy; I wish you'd tell them to make the after-dinner coffee twice as strong.

WIFE. I will.

PROF. How does this strike you? [Conning] "Many Renaissance pictures, especially those of Botticelli, Francesca and Piero di Cosimo were inspired by such legends as that of Orpheus, and we owe a tiny gem—like Raphael 'Apollo and Marsyas' to the same Pagan inspiration."

WIFE. We owe it more than that—rebellion against the dry-as-dust.

PROF. Quite. I might develop that: "We owe it our revolt against the academic; or our disgust at 'big business,' and all the grossness of commercial success. We owe—". [His voice peters out.]

WIFE. It—love.

PROF. [Abstracted] Eh!

WIFE. I said: We owe it love.

PROF. [Rather startled] Possibly. But—er [With a dry smile] I mustn't say that here—hardly!

WIFE. [To herself and the moonlight] Orpheus with his lute!

PROF. Most people think a lute is a sort of flute. [Yawning heavily] My dear, if you're not going to sing again, d'you mind sitting down? I want to concentrate.

WIFE. I'm going out.

PROF. Mind the dew!

WIFE. The Christian virtues and the dew.

PROF. [With a little dry laugh] Not bad! Not bad! The Christian virtues and the dew. [His hand takes up his pen, his face droops over his paper, while his wife looks at him with a very strange face] "How far we can trace the modern resurgence against the Christian virtues to the symbolic figures of Orpheus, Pan, Apollo, and Bacchus might be difficult to estimate, but——"

[During those words his WIFE has passed through the window into the moonlight, and her voice rises, singing as she goes: "Orpheus with his lute, with his lute made trees..."]

PROF. [Suddenly aware of something] She'll get her throat bad. [He is silent as the voice swells in the distance] Sounds queer at night—H'm! [He is silent—Yawning. The voice dies away. Suddenly his head nods; he fights his drowsiness; writes a word or two, nods again, and in twenty seconds is asleep.]

[The Stage is darkened by a black-out. FRUST's voice is heard speaking.]

FRUST. What's that girl's name?

VANE. Vanessa Hellgrove.

FRUST. Aha!

[The Stage is lighted up again. Moonlight bright on the orchard; the room in darkness where the PROFESSOR'S figure is just visible sleeping in the chair, and screwed a little more round towards the window. From behind the mossy boulder a faun-like figure uncurls itself and peeps over with ears standing up and elbows leaning on the stone, playing a rustic pipe; and there are seen two rabbits and a fox sitting up and listening. A shiver of wind passes, blowing petals from the apple-trees.] [The FAUN darts his head towards where, from Right, comes slowly the figure of a Greek youth, holding a lute or lyre which his fingers strike, lifting out little wandering strains as of wind whinnying in funnels and odd corners. The FAUN darts down behind the stone, and the youth stands by the boulder playing his lute. Slowly while he plays the whitened trunk of an apple-tree is seen, to dissolve into the body of a girl with bare arms and feet, her dark hair unbound, and the face of the PROFESSOR'S WIFE. Hypnotized, she slowly sways towards him, their eyes fixed on each other, till she is quite close. Her arms go out to him, cling round his neck and, their lips meet. But as they meet there comes a gasp and the PROFESSOR with rumpled hair is seen starting from his chair, his hands thrown up; and at his horrified "Oh!" the Stage is darkened with a black-out.] [The voice of FRUST is heard speaking.]

FRUST. Gee!

The Stage is lighted up again, as in the opening scene. The PROFESSOR is seen in his chair, with spilt sheets of paper round him, waking from a dream. He shakes himself, pinches his leg, stares heavily round into the moonlight, rises.

PROF. Phew! Beastly dream! Boof! H'm! [He moves to the window and calls.] Blanche! Blanche! [To himself] Made trees-made trees! [Calling] Blanche!

WIFE'S VOICE. Yes.

PROF. Where are you?

WIFE. [Appearing by the stone with her hair down] Here!

PROF. I say—I—I've been asleep—had a dream. Come in. I'll tell you.

[She comes, and they stand in the window.]

PROF. I dreamed I saw a-faun on that boulder blowing on a pipe. [He looks nervously at the stone] With two damned little rabbits and a fox sitting up and listening. And then from out there came our friend Orpheus playing on his confounded lute, till he actually turned that tree there into you. And gradually he-he drew you like a snake till you—er—put your arms round his neck and—er—kissed him. Boof! I woke up. Most unpleasant. Why! Your hair's down!

WIFE. Yes.

PROF. Why?

WIFE. It was no dream. He was bringing me to life.

PROF. What on earth?

WIFE. Do you suppose I am alive? I'm as dead as Euridice.

PROF. Good heavens, Blanche, what's the matter with you to-night?

WIFE. [Pointing to the litter of papers] Why don't we live, instead of writing of it? [She points out unto the moonlight] What do we get out of life? Money, fame, fashion, talk, learning? Yes. And what good are they? I want to live!

PROF. [Helplessly] My dear, I really don't know what you mean.

WIFE. [Pointing out into the moonlight] Look! Orpheus with his lute, and nobody can see him. Beauty, beauty, beauty—we let it go. [With sudden passion] Beauty, love, the spring. They should be in us, and they're all outside.

PROF. My dear, this is—this is—awful. [He tries to embrace her.]

WIFE. [Avoiding him—an a stilly voice] Oh! Go on with your writing!

PROF. I'm—I'm upset. I've never known you so—so—

WIFE. Hysterical? Well! It's over. I'll go and sing.

PROF. [Soothingly] There, there! I'm sorry, darling; I really am. You're kipped—you're kipped. [He gives and she accepts a kiss] Better?

[He gravitates towards his papers.]

All right, now?

WIFE. [Standing still and looking at him] Quite!

PROF. Well, I'll try and finish this to-night; then, to-morrow we might have a jaunt. How about a theatre? There's a thing—they say —called "Chinese Chops," that's been running years.

WIFE. [Softly to herself as he settles down into his chair] Oh! God!

[While he takes up a sheet of paper and adjusts himself, she stands at the window staring with all her might at the boulder, till from behind it the faun's head and shoulders emerge once more.]

PROF. Very queer the power suggestion has over the mind. Very queer! There's nothing really in animism, you know, except the curious shapes rocks, trees and things take in certain lights—effect they have on our imagination. [He looks up] What's the matter now?

WIFE. [Startled] Nothing! Nothing!

[Her eyes waver to him again, and the FAUN vanishes. She turns again to look at the boulder; there is nothing there; a little shiver of wind blows some petals off the trees. She catches one of them, and turning quickly, goes out through the curtain.]

PROF. [Coming to himself and writing] "The Orpheus legend is the— er—apotheosis of animism. Can we accept—" [His voice is lost in the sound of his WIFE'S voice beginning again: "Orpheus with his lute—with his lute made trees—" It dies in a sob. The PROFESSOR looks up startled, as the curtain falls].

FRUST. Fine! Fine!

VANE. Take up the curtain. Mr Foreson?

[The curtain goes up.]

FORESON. Sir?

VANE. Everybody on.

[He and FRUST leave their seats and ascend on to the Stage, on which are collecting the four Players.]

VANE. Give us some light.

FORESON. Electrics! Turn up your floats!

[The footlights go up, and the blue goes out; the light is crude as at the beginning.]

FRUST. I'd like to meet Miss Hellgrove. [She comes forward eagerly and timidly. He grasps her hand] Miss Hellgrove, I want to say I thought that fine—fine. [Her evident emotion and pleasure warm him so that he increases his grasp and commendation] Fine. It quite got my soft spots. Emotional. Fine!

MISS H. Oh! Mr Frust; it means so much to me. Thank you!

FRUST. [A little balder in the eye, and losing warmth] Er—fine! [His eye wanders] Where's Mr Flatway?

VANE. Fleetway.

[FLEETWAY comes up.]

FRUST. Mr Fleetway, I want to say I thought your Orphoos very remarkable. Fine.

FLEETWAY. Thank you, sir, indeed—so glad you liked it.

FRUST. [A little balder in the eye] There wasn't much to it, but what there was was fine. Mr Toone.

[FLEETWAY melts out and TOONE is precipitated.]

Mr Toone, I was very pleased with your Professor—quite a character-study. [TOONE bows and murmurs] Yes, sir! I thought it fine. [His eye grows bald] Who plays the goat?

MISS HOPK. [Appearing suddenly between the windows] I play the faun, Mr Frost.

FORESON. [Introducing] Miss Maude 'Opkins.

FRUST. Miss Hopkins, I guess your fawn was fine.

MISS HOPK. Oh! Thank you, Mr Frost. How nice of you to say so. I do so enjoy playing him.

FRUST. [His eye growing bald] Mr Foreson, I thought the way you fixed that tree was very cunning; I certainly did. Got a match?

[He takes a match from FORESON, and lighting a very long cigar, walks up Stage through the French windows followed by FORESON, and examines the apple-tree.] [The two Actors depart, but Miss HELLGROVE runs from where she has been lingering, by the curtain, to VANE, Stage Right.]

MISS H. Oh! Mr Vane—do you think? He seemed quite—Oh! Mr Vane [ecstatically] If only—

VANE. [Pleased and happy] Yes, yes. All right—you were splendid. He liked it. He quite—

MISS H. [Clasping her hand] How wonderful Oh, Mr Vane, thank you!

[She clasps his hands; but suddenly, seeing that FRUST is coming back, fits across into the curtain and vanishes.] [The Stage, in the crude light, as empty now save for FRUST, who, in the French windows, Centre, is mumbling his cigar; and VANE, Stage Right, who is looking up into the wings, Stage Left.]

VANE. [Calling up] That lighting's just right now, Miller. Got it marked carefully?

ELECTRICS. Yes, Mr Vane.

VANE. Good. [To FRUST who is coming down] Well, sir? So glad—

FRUST. Mr Vane, we got little Miggs on contract?

VANE. Yes.

FRUST. Well, I liked that little pocket piece fine. But I'm blamed if I know what it's all about.

VANE. [A little staggered] Why! Of course it's a little allegory. The tragedy of civilization—all real feeling for Beauty and Nature kept out, or pent up even in the cultured.

FRUST. Ye-ep. [Meditatively] Little Miggs'd be fine in "Pop goes the Weasel."

VANE. Yes, he'd be all right, but—

FRUST. Get him on the 'phone, and put it into rehearsal right now.

VANE. What! But this piece—I—I—!

FRUST. Guess we can't take liberties with our public, Mr Vane. They want pep.

VANE. [Distressed] But it'll break that girl's heart. I—really—I can't—

FRUST. Give her the part of the 'tweeny in "Pop goes".

VANE. Mr Frust, I—I beg. I've taken a lot of trouble with this little play. It's good. It's that girl's chance—and I—

FRUST. We-ell! I certainly thought she was fine. Now, you 'phone up Miggs, and get right along with it. I've only one rule, sir! Give the Public what it wants; and what the Public wants is punch and go. They've got no use for Beauty, Allegory, all that high-brow racket. I know 'em as I know my hand.

[During this speech MISS HELLGROVE is seen listening by the French window, in distress, unnoticed by either of them.]

VANE. Mr Frost, the Public would take this, I'm sure they would; I'm convinced of it. You underrate them.

FRUST. Now, see here, Mr Blewitt Vane, is this my theatre? I tell you, I can't afford luxuries.

VANE. But it—it moved you, sir; I saw it. I was watching.

FRUST. [With unmoved finality] Mr Vane, I judge I'm not the average man. Before "Louisa Loses" the Public'll

want a stimulant. "Pop goes the Weasel" will suit us fine. So—get right along with it. I'll go get some lunch.

[As he vanishes into the wings, Left, MISS HELLGROVE covers her face with her hands. A little sob escaping her attracts VANE'S attention. He takes a step towards her, but she flies.]

VANE. [Dashing his hands through his hair till it stands up] Damnation!

[FORESON walks on from the wings, Right.]

FORESON. Sir?

VANE. "Punch and go!" That superstition!

[FORESON walks straight out into the wings, Left.]

VANE. Mr Foreson!

FORESON. [Re-appearing] Sir?

VANE. This is scrapped. [With savagery] Tell 'em to set the first act of "Louisa Loses," and put some pep into it.

[He goes out through the French windows with the wind still in his hair.]

FORESON. [In the centre of the Stage] Electrics!

ELECTRICS. Hallo!

FORESON. Where's Charlie?

ELECTRICS. Gone to his dinner.

FORESON. Anybody on the curtain?

A VOICE. Yes, Mr Foreson.

FORESON. Put your curtain down.

[He stands in the centre of the Stage with eyes uplifted as the curtain descends.]

THE END

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