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THEATRE CRAFT

THE ORGANISED THEATRE

FOUR ONE-ACT PLAYS

THE MAGNANIMOUS LOVER
PROGRESS ◘ OLE GEORGE
COMES TO TEA ◘ SHE
WAS NO LADY

BY

ST. JOHN G. ERVINE

LONDON
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"The Magnanimous Lover" was published for the first time in 1912. The other plays were published for the first time in 1928

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TO

WILLIAM ARMSTRONG

CONTENTS

	PAGE
THE MAGNANIMOUS LOVER	13
PROGRESS	35
OLE GEORGE COMES TO TEA	57
SHE WAS NO LADY	81

THE MAGNANIMOUS LOVER

CHARACTERS

William Cather, a Shoemaker.
Jane Cather, his Wife.
Maggie Cather, his Daughter.
Samuel Hinde, a Grocer.
Henry Hinde, his Son.

" The Magnanimous Lover " was performed for the first time at the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, on October 17, 1912. *It was produced by* LENNOX ROBINSON, *with the following caste :*

JANE CATHER	*Mon Beirne*
WILLIAM CATHER	*Sydney G. Morgan*
SAMUEL HINDE	*J. A. O'Rourke*
HENRY HINDE	*J. M. Kerrigan*
MAGGIE CATHER.	*Maire O'Neill*

THE MAGNANIMOUS LOVER

The scene is laid in the kitchen and living-room of WILLIAM CATHER'S *cottage in the North-Irish village of Donaghreagh. The room is large, and well lighted by the two windows, through which the Irish Sea can be seen. The windows are tightly shut, and probably have never once been open since they were inserted in their frames; but this does not affect the ventilation of the room to any great extent, for the cottage door, which is in two sections, is always open either to its full extent or, as now, half open.*

Immediately facing the street door, on the other side of the house, is a door leading to the best bedroom. The wall in which this bedroom door is placed terminates in another door which leads to the scullery and the garden at the back of the house. The space in this wall between the two doors is occupied by a large dresser, piled with crockery of many hues and shapes.

A large, round pot is suspended over the open fire which burns in the wall stretching between the front and the rear of the house, farthest from the street door. Over the mantelshelf, on which are articles of cheap china, a clock and a tea-caddy, hangs a large oleograph showing King William the Third in the act of crossing the Boyne. On either side of this picture are two oblong mottoes printed in floral letters on a black background, the legends reading: "Thou, God, seest Me" and "What is Home without a Mother?"

Between the two windows is a large, unstained deal table above which hangs another oleograph, revealing the Secret of England's Greatness, and a further motto: "There's no Place like Home."

There are other mottoes scattered over the walls; some shield-shaped, some oblong, some circular, of smaller size than those already mentioned; all bearing texts from the Bible; "What Shall It Profit a Man if He Gain the Whole World, and Lose His Own Soul?" "Jesus Wept,"

" Blessed Are the Humble and Meek," " God Is Here."
It is the afternoon of a late summer day.

(SAMUEL HINDE *puts his head over the lower half-door, which is barred. There is no one in the kitchen.*)

SAMUEL HINDE. Are you in, Mrs. Cather ?

MRS. CATHER (*speaking from the scullery*). Aye, indeed I am. (*She comes into the kitchen.*) Och, is that yourself, Sam ? Sure, come on in.

SAMUEL HINDE (*unbarring the door, and entering*). I've something very important to say to you, Mrs. Cather. Very important !

MRS. CATHER. Have you, Sam ?

SAMUEL HINDE. Aye. Where's William ?

MRS. CATHER. Aw, he's down the garden. Will I call him ?

SAMUEL HINDE. Aye, I wish you would.

MRS. CATHER (*calling at the scullery door*). Hi, William, come on in a minute.

WILLIAM CATHER (*answering from the garden*). What do you want ?

MRS. CATHER. Come on in a minute. I want you.

WILLIAM CATHER. All right, I'm coming.

SAMUEL HINDE. Where's Maggie the day ?

MRS. CATHER. Aw, she's over to Killisle ; but, sure, she'll be back soon. Were you wanting her ?

SAMUEL HINDE. Not just yet a wee while. It'll do later.

(*Enter* WILLIAM CATHER, *a lean, kindly man with a leathern apron bound round his loins.*)

WILLIAM CATHER. What do you want ? (*Seeing* SAMUEL HINDE.) How are you, Sam ?

SAMUEL HINDE. Sure, I'm rightly. I want to talk to you a minute. It's about Maggie.

MRS. CATHER. About Maggie ?

SAMUEL HINDE. Aye. Henry's come back. By the two o'clock train.

MRS. CATHER. Come back ! (*Her voice hardens.*) Has he come back to make Maggie a respectable woman ?

SAMUEL HINDE. Aye, he has.

MRS. CATHER. Oh, thank God !

WILLIAM CATHER. Sit down, will you, Sam ?

SAMUEL HINDE. I will in a minute, but I'd better call Henry in first. He's just waiting round the corner.

WILLIAM CATHER. Aye, bring him in, will you.

(SAMUEL HINDE *goes to the door, and beckons to his son,* HENRY HINDE, *who enters.*)

SAMUEL HINDE. Here's Henry, Mrs. Cather.

MRS. CATHER. How are you, Henry?

HENRY HINDE. I'm bravely, thank you. How is yourself?

MRS. CATHER. I'm brave and well, thank you. Sit down, will you.

WILLIAM CATHER. I'm glad to see you again, Henry.

HENRY HINDE. Thank you, Mr. Cather.

WILLIAM CATHER. Your father was saying something about you and Maggie, Henry! . . .

SAMUEL HINDE. Aye, I was saying! . . .

WILLIAM CATHER. Maybe, it would be better if Henry was to speak for himself, Sam.

SAMUEL HINDE. Aye, maybe it would.

HENRY HINDE. Mr. Cather, I did you a great wrong ten years ago.

WILLIAM CATHER. You did, Henry.

HENRY HINDE. And sorry I am for it.

WILLIAM CATHER. You could have been sorry sooner with advantage.

HENRY HINDE. I was headstrong and wayward, Mr. Cather. I was in the devil's grip; but a change has come over me. The old life has dropped away from me, and I've been washed in the Blood of the Lamb

MRS. CATHER. Are you saved, Henry?

HENRY HINDE. Yes, thank God, I've been saved, Mrs. Cather. I was a wilful, hell-deserving sinner when I lived here. I wanted my own way in everything, and I didn't care about nobody else. The devil was in me. When I went to Liverpool, after the child was born, I led a wayward life; but God was watching over me, and He saved me at last. I've got on, too, beyond my deserts. The Almighty's been very gracious to me. I've got a great deal to be thankful for.

WILLIAM CATHER. I'm glad to hear it, Henry. Maggie! . . .

HENRY HINDE. It's about Maggie I've come back. Yesterday morning as I was contemplating God's goodness to me, I was wondering what I could do to show my gratitude to Him. I owe Him a great debt, and I want to pay Him back something. And I heard a voice within me, saying, Henry Hinde, you once did a woman a wrong. You left her with a bastard child! . . .

MRS. CATHER. Aw, don't say the word, Henry!

HENRY HINDE. Isn't it true, Mrs. Cather? Didn't I leave Maggie with a child that I was the father of? I was headstrong in my sin, and I wouldn't marry her. My sin was deep, Mrs. Cather, and you can't make little of it. And when I heard the voice of God telling me to go back to the woman I had ruined and make her respectable, I just took the next boat from Liverpool, and I got to Belfast this morning, and I came here without a word of warning to anyone.

SAMUEL HINDE. Aye, you could have knocked me down with a feather when I saw him standing in the door. Sure, I thought it was a ghost.

HENRY HINDE. I felt it to be my duty to come back. Mind, it's not because I couldn't get anyone else. It's because it's the will of God. Not my will, O Lord, but Thine be done. I could marry a minister's daughter if I wanted to.

SAMUEL HINDE. Aye, a minister's daughter, mind you. Over in Liverpool. An Englishwoman.

HENRY HINDE. But I put all desires away from me, and came back to do the will of God.

MRS. CATHER (*weeping softly*). I thank God for this day.

WILLIAM CATHER (*sullenly*). We've waited ten years for the voice of God to speak. Ten years is a long time, Henry.

HENRY HINDE. What is ten years to eternity?

SAMUEL HINDE. Aye, indeed, what is it?

HENRY HINDE. If I had not come back at the bidding of God, He might have damned my soul for ever. How was I to know that He wasn't testing me as with fire.

SAMUEL HINDE. Aw, that's true—that's true! Lord bless me, it would be a terrible thing to go to hell.

HENRY HINDE. Is the child all right?

WILLIAM CATHER. Aye. He's running about the street somewhere.

SAMUEL HINDE. I was thinking myself the other day, he was a wee bit wild. Running about the street too much, maybe. It's not good for a child to be running about the street much.

MRS. CATHER. Indeed, Sam Hinde, he's not running wild about the street. There's no child in Donaghreagh that's better looked after nor he is, for all he is—for all his mother's not married.

HENRY HINDE. I feel it's my duty to bring that child up in the fear of God. He came from the devil, and he must be given to God. Does Maggie go to church regular?

MRS. CATHER. Not since her trouble, Henry.

HENRY HINDE. She has a soul to be saved, Mrs. Cather, and by the help of God I mean to save it. Aw, I'm glad I listened to His voice. I feel I shall be the instrument for much good in His hands.

WILLIAM CATHER. Do you mean to marry her?

HENRY HINDE. I do. It's the will of God that I should.

SAMUEL HINDE. You know, he could marry a minister's daughter if he liked. Over in Liverpool there. And mind you, they're queer and particular in England.

WILLIAM CATHER. I daresay you're right, Sam, but that's not the question. The question is, What will Maggie say? You see, Henry talks about his duty to God; but he doesn't say anything about his duty to Maggie. And after all, it was her that was wronged, not God. Not that I would make little of our duty to God. There's no man knows more about that duty nor I do. But we're men, Sam—you and Henry and me. Maggie's a woman, and women don't think so much of their duty to God as men do. It would be a bit awkward for some of us, if they did. You don't love Maggie, Henry?

SAMUEL HINDE. Och, man alive, didn't I tell you about the minister's daughter over in Liverpool? It's her he loves.

WILLIAM CATHER. Do you love her, Henry?

HENRY HINDE. As a fallen sister! . . .

WILLIAM CATHER. Do you love her as a man should love the woman he wants to marry?

HENRY HINDE. I'll do my duty by her. It's a debt I owe to God. I'll be a good husband to her, and I'll try to bring her to the paths of peace. Will she be long before she comes back?

MRS. CATHER. I don't know. She said she wouldn't be long. Maybe, she'll be back soon.

WILLIAM CATHER. I wonder if she'll have you, Henry. Women think more of loving a man nor they do of loving God. But you never know. I wish she was here.

HENRY HINDE. I hope she won't be long, for I must get back to Belfast to catch the boat for Liverpool the night. I can't leave the shop more nor a day.

SAMUEL HINDE. He's doing queer and well in the shop. Aren't you, Henry?

HENRY HINDE. Aye, the Lord has prospered me. I have two assistants and a vanman. The minister thinks a terrible lot of me. He took a fancy to me the minute he saw me in the chapel.

MRS. CATHER. Chapel! You've not turned a Catholic, are you?

HENRY HINDE. No, Mrs. Cather; I'm a Protestant, thank God. They call churches chapels in England unless they're Episcopalian places of worship. They call us Dissenters and Nonconformists, and they think far more of Catholics than they do of us.

MRS. CATHER. Heth, it must be the queer funny place.

HENRY HINDE. But Catholics have souls to be saved, the same as Protestants. We should never make little of them that has not been born so enlightened as ourselves.

MRS. CATHER. Aw, indeed, many's the time I've said that. Sure, there's good and bad alike in all religions.

HENRY HINDE. There's no bad in my religion, Mrs. Cather. There's no room for bad where God is.

MRS. CATHER. Aw, well, maybe you're right.

HENRY HINDE. I am.

MRS. CATHER. But sure, it's not worth fighting about. Maybe, we're all wrong. You never know.

WILLIAM CATHER. I wish Maggie was here till we tell her.

MRS. CATHER. I hope she'll have you all right, Henry.

SAMUEL HINDE. Have him! Of course, she'll have him! She's not daft, is she?

HENRY HINDE. She's not in a position to choose, Mrs. Cather. A woman that's had a bastard! . . .

MRS. CATHER. Aw, don't say it, Henry!

WILLIAM CATHER. You were its father, anyway. If there's no choosing for her, there's no choosing for you.

HENRY HINDE. There's no choosing for either of us. It's the will of God.

SAMUEL HINDE. But all the same she gets the best of it. Look at him—look at the way he's dressed! Like any gentleman! And him got a shop, and two assistants, and a vanman, and could marry a minister's daughter if he liked. I don't think there's much doubt about who's being favoured by the Almighty.

WILLIAM CATHER. Maybe, Sam, maybe. (*He goes to the door and looks out anxiously.*)

MRS. CATHER. Will you be married soon, Henry?

HENRY HINDE. As soon as possible. I'll tell Mr. Macmillan the night before I go, and I'll come over again in a month's time, and marry her.

WILLIAM CATHER. Here's Maggie now.

HENRY HINDE. I'm glad to hear it.

(MAGGIE CATHER *enters, wearing a plaid shawl over her head. She enters hurriedly, throwing the shawl aside as she does so. She does not see* HENRY HINDE *at first.*)

MAGGIE CATHER (*to* SAMUEL HINDE). Is that you, Mr. Hinde? (*She sees* HENRY.) Henry! (*There is a short, painful pause, but she recovers herself.*) I hope you're well.

HENRY HINDE. I'm well enough, thank you.

MRS. CATHER. What kept you, Maggie? You're queer and long getting back.

MAGGIE CATHER. I was kept longer nor I thought. I hurried home as quick as I could. (*To* HENRY.) I suppose you're over for your holidays.

WILLIAM CATHER. Maggie, dear, Henry's come back.

MAGGIE CATHER. So I see, father.

WILLIAM CATHER. He's come back to make you an offer.

MAGGIE CATHER. A what?

WILLIAM CATHER. He wants to marry you.

(*She looks from one to the other like one who does not quite understand what is being said. Then she turns away, laughing.*)

MRS. CATHER. What are you laughing for, anyway? Sure, it's in earnest he is.

MAGGIE CATHER. Henry, is it true you've come back to marry me?

HENRY HINDE. Aye, it is. And now you know, I'll just go and tell the minister to arrange for the wedding. I've got to catch the boat back to Liverpool the night, and I haven't much time to lose.

MAGGIE CATHER. It's ten years since you went away, Henry.

HENRY HINDE. It is.

MAGGIE CATHER. And now you've come back to marry me.

HENRY HINDE. Aye. I'll be back in a month's time for the wedding.

MAGGIE CATHER (*pointing, with sudden fury, to her mother*). Henry Hinde, do you see that old woman?

HENRY HINDE. Aye, I do.

MAGGIE CATHER. Do you remember nothing about her? Do you not mind her and me meeting you one night in the Cregagh Loaning before the child was born?

HENRY HINDE. Aye, I think I do.

MAGGIE CATHER. Do you mind her begging you to marry me?

HENRY HINDE. Aye.

MAGGIE CATHER (*the fury still in her voice*). Do you mind her going down on her knees to you, and begging you for the love of God to marry me? Do you mind me pleading with you, too?

HENRY HINDE. Aye, I do, but what does that matter?

MAGGIE CATHER. Do you mind what you said to us, Henry?

HENRY HINDE. No, I forget.

MAGGIE CATHER. You said I was a bad woman, and you weren't going to marry a whore!

MRS. CATHER (*whimpering*). Maggie, for God's sake don't bring it all up again!

HENRY HINDE. Aye, I do mind that.

MAGGIE CATHER. If I was one then, Henry, I'm one now. I'm just as you left me.

HENRY HINDE. I'm not asking what you are. I know what you are, and I know what I am too. I know what we all are before God—hell-deserving sinners. I've not come back for what you are. I've come back to marry you because it's the will of God.

MAGGIE CATHER. Well, it's not my will, then.

SAMUEL HINDE. Not your will! Woman, you mustn't set yourself up against God.

MAGGIE CATHER. I'm not setting myself up against God. I'm setting myself up against Henry.

MRS. CATHER. Maggie, dear, hold your tongue, and talk sense. Sure, it's all for the best.

WILLIAM CATHER. Leave her alone.

MAGGIE CATHER. Me and my mother did to you, Henry, what no woman should ever do to any man—we went down on our knees to you. Do you hear that? I pleaded with you to save me from shame, and you wouldn't. You ran away, and left me to face it myself. It wasn't easy to face either. My God, when I think of it! I couldn't go to the Sabbath-school nor the meeting. Everybody knew I was going to have a child, and I wasn't married. I used to pretend there was nothing the matter with me. . . . Once the minister preached an awful sermon about the woman taken in sin. Aw, I felt that every eye in the place was on me. There was no pity, no mercy.

HENRY HINDE. Think of the mercy of God, Maggie.

MAGGIE CATHER. I couldn't see it. I could only see the disgrace and the shame.

MRS. CATHER. Aw, but don't think of it, Maggie. Sure, it's all over, now. Henry'll marry you, and you'll be all right again.

MAGGIE CATHER. I won't, I tell you, I won't. I'm not going to marry him.

SAMUEL HINDE. Maggie Cather, you must be out of your mind. Do you know he's got a shop, and two assistants, and a vanman?

MAGGIE CATHER. I don't care if he's got fifty shops, and fifty thousand vanmen, I won't marry him.

WILLIAM CATHER (*soothingly*). Maggie!

SAMUEL HINDE. Aye, and he could marry a minister's daughter if he liked.

HENRY HINDE. Aw, hold your wheesht, father. Maggie, there's no one knows better nor I do what I've done. You've good reason to be angry and bitter, but I've not come back to make excuses. I'm a guilty sinner, the same as you are, but I've been saved. Thank God for that! I've had a call from the Father, and I must answer the call at my soul's peril.

MAGGIE CATHER. You've not come back because you love me, then?

HENRY HINDE. The lusts of the flesh! . . .

MAGGIE CATHER. Aw, stop, stop, man, stop! I want none of your religion.

MRS. CATHER. Maggie, dear! . . .

WILLIAM CATHER. Leave her alone.

SAMUEL HINDE. I must say I don't think your manners is very genteel, Maggie Cather.

MAGGIE CATHER. Listen, Henry Hinde! All the time you were away in Liverpool where nobody knew you, I was here where everybody knew me. Do you know what that means? People staring at me, and turning up their noses at me? There was nothing but contempt for me at first. I was a bad woman, and I wasn't asked nowhere. Fellows in the street treated me like dirt beneath their feet. They spoke to me as if I was a bad woman. And all the time you were in Liverpool, and were thought a lot of. It wasn't fair. And it wasn't me only. I mind once I was coming down an entry, and I saw a lot of children tormenting the child. He was standing in the middle of them, and they were making him say things after them. I heard them saying, "What are you, Willie?" And then they made him say, "I'm a wee bastard!" Aw, if I could have laid hands on you then, Henry, I would have throttled you.

MRS. CATHER. But sure, it's all over now.

MAGGIE CATHER. Aye, they don't treat me with contempt now. I've lived that down. They just pity me

now. Sometimes when I go past their doors, an old woman'll hear me passing, and ask who it is, and they always say, "It's only poor Maggie Cather." I could thole their contempt better nor their pity, but I didn't run away from either of them. I faced it all, and I've brought up the child as good as any of them. And now, when I've bore the hardest of it, you come back to marry me. Maybe, you'll be ordering me about, and bossing the child. I'm to do what you tell me. I've to love, honour, and obey you. What for, Henry, that's what I'd like to know?

HENRY HINDE. I've come back at the command of God.

WILLIAM CATHER. Maggie, dear, maybe you don't understand it all. You'd better think it over a bit.

MAGGIE CATHER. I understand perfectly, father.

WILLIAM CATHER. Aye, but wait a bit, Maggie. There's more in it nor you think. The lad's getting big, you know, and the time'll soon be here when you'll lose your hold on him. You know, Maggie, every woman loses her grip on her man or her child some time or other and it just depends on wee things whether they ever get it back again. The child needs a man to look after him.

MAGGIE CATHER. Aren't you good enough for him?

WILLIAM CATHER. I'm too old. Old men are worse nor old women for controlling young people. You are never controlled so well as you are by someone near your own age. He'll be leaving school in a year or two, and neither you nor me'll be any younger then. You want a man to look after him.

MRS. CATHER. Aye, dear, indeed you do.

MAGGIE CATHER. I can look after him myself.

WILLIAM CATHER. No, you can't. Not when he finds things out. It's the between age, Maggie, when men is neither boys nor men—the only time when men never cling to women. It's the time they go quickest to the devil.

HENRY HINDE. I was thinking myself of giving the lad a good schooling over in Liverpool. I had a feeling as I was coming over in the boat that maybe if I was to have

the child trained for a minister, he could wipe out some of the debt I owe to God.

MRS. CATHER. Do you hear that, Maggie! Henry's going to make a minister of Willie. Sure, the child'll be a credit to you yet.

MAGGIE CATHER. He's a credit to me now.

WILLIAM CATHER. Aye, Maggie, he is.

SAMUEL HINDE. I'm sure it's queer and considerate of Henry considering what he might do.

MAGGIE CATHER. If I was to marry you, Henry, would you treat the child the same as you would one that was not a—not a . . .

HENRY HINDE. I'll treat him just the same as if he was a child of God instead of a child of sin.

MAGGIE CATHER (*bitterness returning to her voice*). It wasn't his fault.

HENRY HINDE. The sins of the fathers are visited upon the children unto the third and fourth generation.

MAGGIE CATHER. Aye, and you'll take damned good care my child doesn't escape. You'll hurt him, and say it's the will of God! . . .

SAMUEL HINDE. Maggie Cather, your language is most unbecoming!

HENRY HINDE. She is possessed of a devil, father. Leave her to me. I'll save her soul by the help of God.

MRS. CATHER. Maggie, dear, say you'll have him.

WILLIAM CATHER. It'll be all right for the child, Maggie.

MAGGIE CATHER. I'll think about it.

HENRY HINDE. I must know now. It's not me you're answering, it's God Himself. You can't put God off.

WILLIAM CATHER. Maybe, if we were to leave Maggie to talk it over with you alone, Henry, you could both come to a decision. Jane and me'll just show your father a shed I'm putting up in the garden for the leather. Come on, Sam.

SAMUEL HINDE (*jovially*). Aye, indeed, William, that's the queer good notion of yours. I was just going to make it myself. Aw, you know, when a man and a woman get together, sure, they like to be alone. It's a queer thing when you come to think it over; but there it is. Och,

aye ! human beings is a funny lot, William ; they are that. Well, well, let's go and have a look at your shed.

(*Exit Samuel by the scullery.*)

MRS. CATHER. Maggie, dear, you'll take him, won't you ? Don't be proud with him. Men can't stand pride, Maggie. Just take him, dear, and he'll make you a respectable woman again.

WILLIAM CATHER. Come on, woman, come on. All right, Maggie, all right.

(*They go out together.*)

HENRY HINDE. Maggie, I haven't much time.

MAGGIE CATHER. Did you ever love me, Henry ?

HENRY HINDE. I suppose I liked you, Maggie.

MAGGIE CATHER. But you don't love me now ?

HENRY HINDE. It's ten years since I saw you last.

MAGGIE CATHER. Do you love this minister's daughter your father was talking about ?

HENRY HINDE. That's neither here nor there, Maggie. When God tells to put our desires aside, we've got to bow our heads and say, Thy Will, O Lord, not ours, be done.

MAGGIE CATHER. Is she a good woman ?

HENRY HINDE. Aye, she is.

MAGGIE CATHER. She never had a child ?

HENRY HINDE. No, she's a good woman.

MAGGIE CATHER. She's worthy of you, maybe ?

HENRY HINDE. Aye, she is. She's worthy of any good man.

MAGGIE CATHER. And I suppose I'm not worthy of you ?

HENRY HINDE. You have fallen short of the glory of God.

MAGGIE CATHER. We both fell at the same time, Henry.

HENRY HINDE. I'm saved and you're not. I'm in a state of grace, and you're in a state of sin.

MAGGIE CATHER. Then I'm not as good as you are ?

HENRY HINDE. No, you're not.

MAGGIE CATHER. If I was saved, too, would I be as good as you are ?

HENRY HINDE. That's for God to say, Maggie, not me.

MAGGIE CATHER. Do you think I'd be as good as you? Leave God out of it for a minute. If I committed a sin, you committed one, too.

HENRY HINDE. I'm not denying it.

MAGGIE CATHER. Aye, but you think I'm a bigger sinner nor you were; and if I was saved, too, you'd still think I was worse nor you, wouldn't you?

HENRY HINDE. I would.

MAGGIE CATHER. Why would you?

HENRY HINDE. Because you're a woman. Because it was through women that sin first came into the world to damn the souls of men. Because it's women that keeps sin in the world with their shameful, lustful bodies. God Himself came down from heaven to save men from their sins, and suffered the pangs of hell that they might be saved, and sin be swept out of the world. But man turns from the high God to the low woman to his own damnation, and God may weep in His Heaven for the souls of men for ever, and no man will heed Him. Aw, the sin and the shame that women have brought into the world! Every soul that writhes in hell was sent there by a woman.

MAGGIE CATHER. You want to marry me, Henry?

HENRY HINDE. Because it's a debt I owe to God. If I could save your soul I'd be paying Him back.

MAGGIE CATHER. And if I don't marry you?

HENRY HINDE. I shall have tried all the same. I can do no more.

MAGGIE CATHER. Henry, you're worse nor I thought you. You're not thinking of me, nor the wrong you did. It's yourself you're thinking of. You're afraid of God, and you want to use me to buy Him off. You can well call yourself a God-fearing man, Henry. I'm nothing to you. The child you're the father of is nothing to you. You're just frightened out of your wits for fear you should go to hell for all you're saved. I won't marry you. I'm as good as you are for all I'm not saved. I'm better nor you are, for I'm not afraid of God. (*She goes to the door leading to the scullery.*) Come on in, will you.

(*Samuel, Jane, and William enter in the order named.*)

MRS. CATHER. Have you took him, yet?

MAGGIE CATHER. No. Father, I've decided not to marry Henry.

WILLIAM CATHER. You're sure, Maggie?

MAGGIE CATHER. I am, father.

WILLIAM CATHER. Maybe, you know best, Maggie.

MRS. CATHER. William Cather, will you stand there and let your daughter make a fool of herself?

SAMUEL HINDE. I must say I think you're right, Mrs. Cather.

WILLIAM CATHER. We don't want to know what you think, Sam. Jane, you needn't say any more.

MRS. CATHER. I will say more. I've been patient all these years, and said nothing, but I'll be patient no more. We're a shamed family. Yes, we are. A bastard in the house! There never was no shame in my family, no, nor yours either, William Cather, before Maggie.

WILLIAM CATHER. Well, well, it can't be helped.

MRS. CATHER. And when she has a chance of putting herself right, and making a respectable woman of herself, she hangs back, and won't take it. And you stand by, and let her do it.

MAGGIE CATHER. I am a respectable woman.

MRS. CATHER. You're not, you know you're not. You're a bad woman, you know you are. Maybe, if the truth was known, you led this good man into the trouble!

WILLIAM CATHER. Hold your tongue, woman! My God, if you speak like that, I'll strike you down.

MRS. CATHER. I'm your wife, William Cather, and I've been a good wife to you, too. I've submitted to you in everything since we were married. I've stood by, and bore cuts from people that was lower-born nor me because of Maggie. I've stood them without saying anything because you told me to. But I hoped and prayed to God that some day Henry'd come back, and make her a respectable woman again. I was that glad when he came in with Sam, and said he'd marry her!—and now,—aw, William, William, make her marry him. Henry, you'll take her still, won't you?

HENRY HINDE. Aye, I'll take her still.

SAMUEL HINDE. I'm sure it's very magnanimous of you, Henry, after the way you've been treated.

WILLIAM CATHER. It's for Maggie to say, not for me.

MRS. CATHER. Ask her again, Henry.

HENRY HINDE. Maggie Cather, I solemnly ask you before God your Maker to marry me.

MAGGIE CATHER. No.

HENRY HINDE. I'll give you another chance, Maggie. Will you marry me?

MAGGIE CATHER. No.

SAMUEL HINDE. Well, I suppose there's nothing for it, but to go home. It's a pity you wasted your money coming over, Henry.

MRS. CATHER. No, don't go yet, Henry. Give her time to think it over. When she sees the child she'll change her mind. I'll go and get him.

WILLIAM CATHER. Stay where you are.

HENRY HINDE. Maggie, for the last time, will you marry me?

MAGGIE CATHER. Am I as good as you?

HENRY HINDE. You know what I said before. Will you marry me?

MAGGIE CATHER. No, no, no.

HENRY HINDE. Very well, then, Maggie, I'll just say good-bye.

SAMUEL HINDE. That's your last chance, my lady. You'll get no more. Heth, you're a fine one to be putting on airs. Anyone would think you were a decent woman by the way you talk.

WILLIAM CATHER. Samuel Hinde, if you don't want to be hurried before your Maker before your time, you'll get out of this house without another word.

SAMUEL HINDE. Aw, indeed. I like the conceit of you. That man could buy and sell you and your daughter twice over, and not notice it. He's a gentleman, and could marry the daughter of a minister, but he's good enough to come and offer to marry the daughter of a cobbler that's disgraced herself; and he's treated like dirt. A man that has a shop and two assistants! . . .

WILLIAM CATHER. Aye, we heard all that before, Sam. You needn't wait any longer.

SAMUEL HINDE. Come on, Henry. Sure, you're only demeaning yourself here.

HENRY HINDE. I came here to do the will of God. I've done my best. (*He shuts his eyes and prays.*) Lord, Thou knowest the weakness of Thy servant. If I have failed to move this sinful woman's heart through lustful desires after another, forgive me, O Lord, for Thy Name's Sake. Amen. I'll say good-bye, to you, William. If we should never meet on this side of eternity, I would bid you consider this. What Shall It Profit a Man, if He Gain the Whole World, and Lose His Own Soul? Good-bye to you all.

(*Samuel and Henry Hinde go out together.*)

MAGGIE CATHER. Was I wrong, father?

WILLIAM CATHER. God only knows, Maggie.

MRS. CATHER. It's a sin, it's a sin. To throw away the chance of being respectable.

MAGGIE CATHER. There isn't much difference between you and me, mother. You've had a child, and so have I.

MRS. CATHER. I'm a married woman.

MAGGIE CATHER. You've only been to the minister, and I haven't. There's not much difference between us. Maybe, I'm a better woman nor you. I had a son, and you only had a girl.

MRS. CATHER (*in dreadful fury as though she would strike her daughter*). How dare you? How dare you make a mock of me?

WILLIAM CATHER. Jane, woman, you forget yourself. You're an old woman. You shouldn't be so bitter, Maggie.

MRS. CATHER. Why wouldn't you marry him? Wasn't he good enough?

MAGGIE CATHER. He was too good. If you heard what he said to me. He said I was a sinful, lustful woman, and could never be as good as he is. It wasn't me he was thinking of; it was himself. I'm not needing to marry, but if I do, I'll marry to save my own soul, and not Henry Hinde's.

WILLIAM CATHER. Aw, well, dear, it doesn't matter about Henry. Maybe, you were right not to have him. (*He pats her affectionately on the shoulder.*)

MAGGIE CATHER. I hope I was, father.

WILLIAM CATHER. I hope so, dear. You never know.

(*He goes out through the scullery door to the garden. Maggie takes up her shawl, and goes into the bedroom, leaving Mrs. Cather weeping by the fire.*)

PROGRESS

CHARACTERS

PROFESSOR HENRY CORRIE, D.Sc.

MRS. MELDON, his Sister.

A SERVANT.

"Progress" was performed for the first time at the Little Theatre, London, on April 3, 1922. It was produced by LEWIS CASSON, *with the following cast:*

PROFESSOR HENRY CORRIE, D.Sc. ..	*Lewis Casson*
MRS. MELDON	*Sybil Thorndike*
HANNAH	*Cecily Oates*

PROGRESS

The scene of the play is laid in the study of PROFESSOR HENRY CORRIE *in a remote village in the North of England in a Spring Day in the year* 1919. *The room is tidy enough, with the tidiness of a house dominated by a bachelor who is dominated by his work rather than by domestic comfort; and on the large table near the centre of the room there is a litter of scientific apparatus employed by* PROFESSOR CORRIE *in the experiment in which he is now engaged. On the walls of the room are a number of diagrams, showing sections of very large bombs. There is a model of a big bomb on a stand underneath one of these diagrams. There are sectional diagrams of aeroplanes and airships to be seen, and also fairly large models of aeroplanes and airships.*

PROFESSOR HENRY CORRIE, *aged between fifty and sixty, is sitting at the centre table watching a chemical process in a large retort. He has cold, humourless eyes, and his mouth, if it were not concealed by a thickish beard, would be seen to have cruel lines about it. He does not, however, impress the casual visitor as a cruel man—indeed, he seems to be a harmless, kindly, inconsequent person, completely absorbed, of course, in his work. It is when he is angry that something of his cruelty is observable—he is inclined to utter wolfish snarls if he is thwarted or hindered in any way. But the most certain sign of his fundamentally cruel character is his absorption in his scientific work. Nothing is of greater importance to him than that, and a human being is of less consequence to him than the success of even a minor experiment.*

He regards the retort very closely, muttering to himself as he does so. Sometimes his mutterings are of satisfaction, sometimes of anxiety, and once of rage that turns again to satisfaction. A knock is heard on his study door, but he does not hear it. It is repeated. He leans forward to glance more closely at the retort, and then, with a shout of

pleasure, rises up and contemplates it. The knock is heard for the third time.

CORRIE (*bending over the retort and ending the experiment*). Ah, at last, at last! By Heaven, I've done it at last. (*A very loud knock on the door. He turns round in a puzzled fashion.*) Eh? Oh, oh! Come in! *Come* in!

(*The door opens, and an elderly servant enters.*)

SERVANT. Mrs. Meldon! . . .

CORRIE. Yes, yes, Hannah, what is it?

HANNAH. Mrs. Meldon wants to know whether you'll come downstairs to tea or have it up here?

CORRIE. Has she got back?

HANNAH. Yes, sir. She expected you to meet her at the station, sir. She waited a long time in the cold, and then got Marshall to drive her up.

CORRIE. I meant to go, but I was busy, and then I forgot. But she's quite capable of coming home by herself.

HANNAH. Yes, sir. Will you come downstairs to tea, sir, or have it up here?

CORRIE. The drawing-room's so cold! . . . Tell Mrs. Meldon I'll have it up here. I've news for her. Tell her I've good news for her. My experiment is ended, and it's a success.

HANNAH. Is it, sir?

CORRIE. Yes—but it's no use telling you about it. You wouldn't understand.

HANNAH. No, sir.

CORRIE. But I'm a proud man, Hannah. Perhaps you'll understand that. Go and tell Mrs. Meldon.

HANNAH. Yes, sir.

CORRIE. Don't forget to tell her that my experiment is a success. Or, no!—you'd better not tell her. I'll do that myself. You're sure to make a mess of it. She'll be as pleased as I am.

HANNAH. She's not very happy to-day, sir.

CORRIE. Not happy! Why? I'm happy, aren't I?

HANNAH. Well, you see, sir, it's three years ago to-day since her son was killed in the War! . . .

CORRIE (*almost forgetting his grievance*). Oh, yes! I'd

forgotten that! Of course, one can't keep on thinking about these things! . . .

HANNAH. She does, sir.

CORRIE. I'm sorry I didn't meet her at the station. But I had to attend to my experiment, Hannah. I wish she wouldn't dwell on Eddie's death. It's not right for the living to think so much of the dead. She's a woman, of course, and a mother—a bereaved mother. We must make allowances, Hannah. That's all. Now if I tell her about my successful experiment, how would that do?

HANNAH (*dubiously*). I don't suppose it would make her feel any worse than she is now, sir.

CORRIE. Well, tell her to come up here and have her tea with me. See? And I'll tell her about my experiment.

HANNAH. Very good, sir. (*She turns to go.*)

CORRIE. Oh!—and Hannah, tell her I'm very sorry I couldn't meet her at the station. That'll break the ice a bit. Then when she realises how important my work is and how much depends on it, she'll be all right.

HANNAH. Very good, sir. (*She goes towards the door. Then she stops and turns towards him.*) She really isn't happy, sir. Her nerves aren't at all right. You see, she can't forget, sir!

(*But the* PROFESSOR *is back at his table, intently regarding his experiment, and, except for a grunt, he does not reply.* HANNAH *goes out. The* PROFESSOR *makes some calculations on paper, and then sits back in his chair regarding them with delight. His manifestations of joy are interrupted by the entrance of his sister,* MRS. MELDON, *aged about forty-three. She is dressed in black, partly because she is a widow, but chiefly because of her son's death. She is a sensitive-looking woman, now plainly suffering deeply from her memories, but her nervous sensibilities give her a strength on occasions which is hardly credible. She is not a fretful, complaining woman who behaves as if she were the only person in the world who had suffered a bereavement, and when, in the course of the play, she speaks of her loss she does so with grave and beautiful dignity.*)

MRS. MELDON. Henry!

CORRIE. Eh? (*turning*). Oh, my dear Charlotte, I'm sorry I did not meet you at the station! . . .

MRS. MELDON (*seating herself by the fire*). It doesn't matter, Henry. Only I thought you were coming—you said you would—and I waited a long time in the cold! . . .

CORRIE. Yes, I'm sorry about that, but, you see, I was busy, Charlotte. I've succeeded at last. I've got just exactly what I wanted, Charlotte. Absolutely *the* thing. This will bring fame and fortune to me. I shall be rich now, but more than that, I shall be famous. My name will live for ever. When I saw how well the experiment was going, I said to myself, "Charlotte won't really expect me to meet her just when everything's going so right, and after all, she's a grown-up woman and she knows the way home as well as I do!" So I didn't go. I stayed here and did my work. I knew you'd understand. And it's a success, Charlotte, the greatest and most wonderful success I've ever had.

MRS. MELDON. Oh, yes.

CORRIE (*dashed*). Well, you don't seem very excited about it.

MRS. MELDON. Of course, I'm glad it's a success, Henry, whatever it is, but, you see, you've never told me anything about it.

CORRIE. No, that's true. I've always believed in keeping secrets to myself. Tell no one anything until you are obliged to, that's my principle. No one knows that I have been working at this thing—except myself. The secret of successful invention, Charlotte, is reticence! But now, I can tell you what it is. The component parts are still my secret and will remain such until I can get a binding offer from some Government! . . .

MRS. MELDON. Government! Is it a Government matter?

CORRIE. I should think it is. I shall offer it first to the British Government, of course, but if they won't pay my price, I'll offer it to somebody else. Too many inventors have been let down by the British Government, Charlotte. But they will not let me down. No. I can take care of myself. But then, when they hear what my invention is, they'll jump at it.

MRS. MELDON. Will they ?

CORRIE. Of course they will, though you're quite justified in feeling sceptical about them. It was very hard to get them to use Tanks in the War—very hard. These cavalry generals had to be forced to use them. They ought to be horse-knackers, instead of soldiers. And tin hats, too ! Look what a time it was before that damned War Office could be persuaded to use 'em ! . . . But I'm sorry, Charlotte. I ought not to be talking about the War to you—especially to-day.

MRS. MELDON. I don't mind, Henry. And after all, the War Office isn't the War !

CORRIE. No, that's true.

MRS. MELDON. What is your invention, Henry ?

CORRIE. Ah, Charlotte ! There's something interesting to talk about.

(HANNAH *enters with a tea-tray.*)

HANNAH. Here's the tea, sir.

CORRIE. Damn ! Oh, all right ! Put it down there !

(HANNAH *arranges the tea-tray in front of* MRS. MELDON. *The* PROFESSOR, *meantime, is back at his table and his retorts and his formulæ. Now and again he exclaims to himself.*)

MRS. MELDON. Has everything been all right, Hannah ?

HANNAH. Yes, ma'am. Gage, the gardener, brought up the wreath you ordered for the War Memorial, ma'am. I've got it in the kitchen now. Shall I fetch it for you ?

MRS. MELDON. Yes, do, please, Hannah.

(*And then* HANNAH, *having finished with the tea-table, goes out.*)

MRS. MELDON. Come and have your tea, Henry !

CORRIE. All right ! (*But he does not stir.*)

MRS. MELDON. Come along, Henry !

CORRIE. Eh ? Oh, all right ! In a minute !

MRS. MELDON. Your tea will get cold if you don't come now !

CORRIE (*getting up and coming to the tea-table*). Oh, how women do fuss ! Your sex is most extraordinary, Charlotte. Always willing to break off things for other things. No application. No concentration. No capacity for complete, impersonal devotion. That's why no woman

have ever been great artists or scientists. Because they will nor forsake everything and follow—well, whatever it is they ought to be following!

(HANNAH *returns, carrying a bunch of flowers to which a label is attached.*)

HANNAH. Here it is, ma'am.

CORRIE. What's that?

MRS. MELDON (*taking the flowers from* HANNAH). I ordered it from Gage to put on the War Memorial. It's for Eddie! . . .

CORRIE. Oh, yes, yes!

MRS. MELDON. I shall take it down there after tea. Will you come with me?

CORRIE. I'd like to, of course, but I really must finish up these things.

MRS. MELDON. Very well, Henry. (*To* HANNAH.) Thank you, Hannah. I'll keep the flowers here.

(*Exit* HANNAH.)

MRS. MELDON (*to her brother*). They're very beautiful, aren't they, Henry?

CORRIE. Oh, yes! Quite nice! You know, Charlotte, this invention of mine . . .

MRS. MELDON. Will you have some more tea, Henry?

CORRIE (*vaguely*). Oh-h-h-h! (*Then definitely.*) Yes. Half a cup!

(*He hands the cup to her, and she fills it and returns it to him while the following speeches are uttered.*)

CORRIE. I was saying this invention of mine will revolutionise warfare.

MRS. MELDON. Will it abolish warfare?

CORRIE. Abolish war! . . . My dear Charlotte, don't be childish!

MRS. MELDON. I'm very interested in that subject. It seems to me more important than anything else in the world, Henry. You don't realise how deeply women like me feel about this . . . this organised butchery of boys. Look at me! I had a husband and a son when the War began. I had neither when it was over. I am a most lonely woman . . . cruelly alone! . . .

CORRIE (*a little annoyed by what seems to him sentimental harping on one string*). I know, of course, that the War hit

you very badly, Charlotte—what with Eddie being killed and Tom taking his death so badly ! . . .

MRS. MELDON. Tom died of a broken heart, Henry. That may sound sentimental and unscientific to you, but it's true. I sometimes wonder why I was not granted the mercy of death—why I should be compelled to live on alone ! . . .

CORRIE. Oh, come, come, Charlotte ! Not alone ! No, no, not alone ! You're happy enough with me, aren't you ? Your only brother ! . . .

MRS. MELDON. You're not a very good substitute for a son, Henry !

CORRIE. Well, no, I suppose not, but still there's no need for despair. Let me tell you about my invention.

(*He puts his cup down and prepares to explain.*)

MRS. MELDON. Will you have some more tea ?

CORRIE. No, thanks ! Now, Charlotte, when I say that war ought to be revolutionised, I mean that it ought to be made more expeditious. The War we've just had lasted for a ridiculous period. Five years—or nearly five years. Perfectly preposterous. It ought not to have lasted more than five weeks.

MRS. MELDON. Have you invented a means of restricting the duration of wars ?

CORRIE. Well—yes, I think you might put it like that. What the combatants ought to aim at, in war, is to get the first blow in so hard that the other side immediately succumbs to it.

MRS. MELDON. I see.

CORRIE. That means that the weapons of war must be made immeasurably more horrible and devastating than they now are.

MRS. MELDON. More horrible ! Is that possible ?

CORRIE. Yes. Oh, yes ! We haven't yet reached the limits of horror in war ! Oh, dear me, no !

MRS. MELDON. My son was nineteen, Henry, and he was killed in a fight of which he knew very little. That seems to me a horrible thing !

CORRIE. Oh, a mother's feelings, of course, but look at the matter from a broad point of view. Put your own feelings aside ! . . .

MRS. MELDON. I can't do that, Henry. The whole War for me comes down to this one thing, that my son, a boy new from school, was taken away from me, just when his life was beginning to open out, and killed. I'm not a clever woman, Henry. I can only feel things as they touch me and mine. Eddie was my only son, my darling, my heart's joy! I expected so much from him—and he's gone, and there's nothing . . . nothing . . . nothing!

CORRIE (*being very gentle with her*). Yes, I know, Charlotte, but you really ought not to dwell too much on your sorrow. It isn't good for you. You ought to take a broad point of view. Imagine yourself a statesman! . . .

MRS. MELDON. If Eddie had been a statesman, he would not have gone to the War. He would have compelled some other person to go.

CORRIE. Oh, now, don't be bitter, Charlotte; don't be bitter!

MRS. MELDON. My dear Henry, I'm beyond being bitter. Do you know what I discovered to-day?

CORRIE. No.

MRS. MELDON. You know I've never really known how Eddie died. I found out to-day.

CORRIE. I wish you wouldn't think so much about it.

MRS. MELDON (*with sudden passion*). I must think about it. I can't help thinking about it! . . . I met a young man in town to-day who had been in the same battalion as Eddie, and he told me about it. Poor lad, it slipped out before he realised that I hadn't known before! . . .

CORRIE. People oughtn't to talk so much about the War. Much better forget about it!

MRS. MELDON (*recovering herself*). You remember the C.O. of the battalion wrote to me and said that Eddie had been killed by a piece of shell and that he had been buried behind the line somewhere?

CORRIE. Yes, I remember.

MRS. MELDON. That comforted me very much. It made things easier to think that he wasn't . . . mutilated . . . that even when he was killed he was still my dear and beautiful boy . . . a soldier, buried by soldiers, in a soldier's grave! . . . But he wasn't buried, Henry!

CORRIE. Wasn't buried?

MRS. MELDON. No! There was nothing to bury. The shell came and . . . and . . . there was nothing. (*They are silent for a moment or two.*) Don't you think *that* is horrible, Henry? There was no decency in his death! . . . Oh, my God! my God! You tell me to take a broad point of view about that! My son! . . . They'd been in a little, shallow trench, Eddie and his men, sitting there for eight days and nights, waiting and waiting and waiting; and then a shell came right into the middle of a group of them and destroyed them . . . utterly destroyed them. Five of them . . . nothing left . . . nothing left!

(*She sits back in her chair and both of them are silent. Then the* PROFESSOR *goes to his table and sits down before his papers and retorts.*)

MRS. MELDON. What is your invention, Henry?

CORRIE. Oh, I think we'd better not talk about it! You're upset! That chap ought not to have told you about Eddie.

MRS. MELDON. He thought I knew. What is your invention?

CORRIE. I'll tell you another time.

MRS. MELDON. I'd like to know now. Something to make war more expeditious! To end it quickly!

CORRIE (*swinging round to her*). Really, Charlotte, this is a most humanitarian invention. I don't believe, mind you, that wars will ever end. No. We're altogether too pugnacious, we human beings. So the only thing to do then is to make war so horrible that no nation will engage in one unless absolutely driven to it. That's where I come in. I'm going to make war horrible, *really* horrible!

MRS. MELDON. Yes.

CORRIE. I've got something here, Charlotte . . . the formula for a bomb that will make war not only stupendously horrible, but will end it almost as quickly as it began.

MRS. MELDON. On that table? (*She rises and goes to him.*)

CORRIE. Yes. I've made tests and I've worked out the formula with mathematical precision, and I've discovered a combination of gases and explosives that will obliterate thousands at once. Thousands!

MRS. MELDON. Thousands?

CORRIE. Yes.

MRS. MELDON. Obliterate them . . . just like Eddie.

CORRIE. Oh, my dear Charlotte, you really must not be so morbid. We've got to deal with the world of fact, and if this country is going to maintain her position in the world, she will have to use every device she can employ to keep her there. I consider that I'm performing a highly patriotic act in offering this discovery to my country. Now, listen! By means of my formula, we can make a bomb, a big bomb, not one of those little footling things the Germans used to drop on London, but an enormous bomb, full of corrosive gas, which will be dropped from a powerful aeroplane or airship—that has to be settled yet—but it's not really my job. Now, when the next war breaks out! . . .

MRS. MELDON. The next war?

CORRIE. Yes, I should say we'd have another in twenty or thirty years, wouldn't you? Not more than fifty, anyhow. Well, when it comes, our ultimatum will consist of a number of airships or aeroplanes dropping these big bombs on the country with which we're at war—just in the way the Japanese declared war on the Russians by blowing their ships to pieces. Only ours will be much more effective than that. The Japs only sank a few ships. We'll utterly obliterate whole cities . . . perhaps a whole nation.

MRS. MELDON. Yes.

CORRIE. When this bomb falls, the explosion will devastate a wide tract of the district in which it falls, and at the same time will release a powerful, spreading gas, without colour or smell, which will spread over a wide area and poison every person who inhales it. They won't know that they've inhaled it until they see their bodies rotting. And nothing will save them then! With a single bomb we could wipe out the population of a city as big as Manchester. Single bomb, Charlotte!

MRS. MELDON. But that would mean everybody—men and women and children.

CORRIE. Oh, yes. After all, nowadays, there is no logical distinction between a civilian and a soldier. What's the difference between the girl who makes munitions and

the man who uses them in the trenches? You know Charlotte, it's a terrific thought, to think that I can sit here at this table, with a formula written out on those sheets of paper which will enable a few men to go up into the air and wipe out a whole city. And I'm the only man in the world who knows how to do it.

MRS. MELDON. Aren't there men like you in other countries using their brains for the same purpose?

CORRIE. Yes, but I don't imagine anyone will discover as powerful a weapon as this. If I had made this discovery in 1914, the War would have been over before the end of that year, and there probably wouldn't be any Germans left now. They'd be an extinct race.

MRS. MELDON. Perhaps an enemy of this country might make a similar discovery, Henry, and use it on us.

CORRIE. We'll have to take the risk of that. Anyhow, my discovery will be available to our people, and if a war does come along, we've only got to get our bomb dropped on them before they get theirs dropped on us, and the trick's done.

MRS. MELDON. I suppose it was someone like you who invented the kind of shell that destroyed Eddie . . . that obliterated him!

CORRIE (*rising and patting her on the shoulder*). Now, now, don't go back to that subject, Charlotte. Come over here by the fire, and try and take a more cheerful view of life.

MRS. MELDON. Cheerful view! My dear Henry, I sometimes wonder whether, in spite of your cleverness, you aren't really the stupidest man on earth.

CORRIE. Oh, come!

MRS. MELDON. I'm not clever. It seems odd that I should be your sister, a quite ordinary, commonplace woman, with nothing in my life but my love for my husband and my son. But when I hear you telling me to take a broad, statesmanlike view of my son being blown to pieces, I begin to think that you're a fool, Henry—just a dull, unimaginative, bloodless fool. And when you ask me to rejoice because you've invented a bomb that will destroy a whole city in a few minutes, I think you're . . . you're mad—wickedly, horribly mad.

CORRIE. My dear Charlotte ! . . .

MRS. MELDON. One moment, Henry. I want you to try and realise my point of view, the point of view of an ordinary woman without any pretensions. Think of Eddie as I think of him ! . . .

CORRIE. This isn't good for you.

MRS. MELDON. Oh, yes it is. I go back now to the very beginning, and I think of Tom and me, very young and foolish, I suppose, but very happy, too, Henry, and our queer pleasure and fright when we knew that Eddie was coming. And I think, too, of myself, sometimes at night, awake, with Tom lying asleep beside me ; and how I thought about the little child I was going to bear him, and how I loved it and loved him for being its father, and how sure I was that it would be a boy ! I was frightened, too, sometimes, because I thought I might die and never know my son, who would grow up and have no knowledge of me. And then he was born, such a dear, little, clutching child, so terribly dependent on me. Tom was very pleased and proud, but never so pleased and proud as I was. We both watched him grow—you know how handsome he was !

CORRIE. Yes, he was a good-looking lad.

MRS. MELDON. And we made plans for him. He was to be great and liked—people did like him ; even you liked him, Henry, didn't you ?

CORRIE. Yes, I . . . I liked him. He was an attractive boy. But don't you think . . .

MRS. MELDON. And then he was ill. You remember how we all thought that he would die, and Tom, poor Tom, who never could express himself very aptly, went about as if he were stunned. I can't tell you what I thought then, Henry. I just can't tell you, but oh ! I prayed for him, Henry—prayed for him so that my whole mind was a prayer. Well, he got better, and seemed to grow stronger, and at school he did very well. I can see him now, the first time he played in a cricket match, very pleased with his blazer, and how excited he was when he came to tell me that he had made ten runs. Ten runs he made, my little son, in his first cricket match. All the other boys of his age were very respectful to him, and I was so glad when he let me walk about with him, just as if he hadn't had a

triumph. And Tom was frightfully pleased, too, and gave him a sovereign! . . . (*Her tears overcome her, and she raises her hands to her lips in a gesture of grief.*) My little boy! . . .

CORRIE. This is distressing you, my dear. Don't talk about it any more.

MRS. MELDON (*recovering herself*). He hadn't been at Oxford long when the War began, and then he went off and enlisted. We didn't know whether to be proud of him or to be angry with him, but chiefly we were proud. I loved him in his clumsy uniform and his great, rough boots, just as much as I loved him later on in his officer's uniform. And when he went off to France, I tried to be worthy of my son and not to cry. It was frightfully hard to smile, Henry, but I did smile. I felt that that was what Eddie would wish me to do, not to shame him before the other people, and so I smiled and made a little silly joke about the fear of the Germans when they heard of his arrival. But I was in terror, Henry, and all the time that he was away I was in terror. The sight of a telegraph-messenger made my heart sink! . . . And then he came home on his first leave, and my little son wasn't my little son any more, but a strangely-grown man, young to look at, but full of extraordinary knowledge. I felt shy with him. He'd seen so much and knew so much. And then I think I felt prouder of him than ever before, because he was a man and I could depend upon him. We were very happy during that leave, Henry, so happy that I hardly had time to be miserable because it would so soon be over, and when he went back, although I cried a little when he wasn't looking, I didn't mind so much as I thought I should, because I persuaded myself to believe that he wouldn't be killed. When he had his second leave and was a captain, I was sure that he would come home to me, quite safe. Even Tom, who had always felt we should lose him, began to believe that he'd come home again. But he didn't. Immediately he got back to France, he had to go into the line, and three days later, he was killed—just obliterated, as you say, by men who had never seen him, who didn't even know that they'd killed him. And all my years of love and hope and desire and pain—gone! I'd nursed him and cared for

him and taught him little lessons and been proud of him—and then in a moment my beautiful son was . . . obliterated, Henry! (*There is a slight pause while she recovers herself.*) You see, don't you, Henry, that I can't take a broad view of that. I can only see my son's body mutilated and destroyed. That's all.

CORRIE. Well, of course, I quite see your point of view, Charlotte. It is hard. I admit that. But we have to keep our feelings under control. And after all, there's the consolation that Eddie did his duty to his country. I daresay he accounted for a good many Germans! . . .

MRS. MELDON. That doesn't comfort me, Henry. I can't get any pleasure out of the thought that some poor German woman is suffering just as I'm suffering. No, Henry, I feel that I should want to take sides with her against men like you.

CORRIE. Men like me!

MRS. MELDON. Yes. People with broad views. Because you're such fools. Someone like me, not clever, creates a beautiful thing like my son, and you, with all your cleverness, can only destroy it. That's why I think you're a fool, Henry.

CORRIE (*nettled*). Well, of course, Charlotte, with your views, I can hardly expect you to appreciate me or my work, but I fancy that my countrymen, if they have any sense, will know how to value me. My bomb will make my name known to the most ignorant man in the country. People will talk about the Corrie bomb, just as they used to talk about the Mills bomb during the War. I shall have to ask for a large lump sum in payment of the invention, because a royalty wouldn't pay me at all. Mills got a royalty on each of his bombs, but then they were small and hundreds of thousands of them were used. My bombs will be big, and one of them will suffice for a city. Yes, I shall have to ask for a large lump sum. Now that they're spending several millions pounds on a battleship that is generally believed to be useless, I'm entitled to ask for a very large sum for my bomb which will certainly decide the war. I wonder how much I ought to ask for? Charlotte, how much ought I to ask for? They won't give me what it's worth, that's absolutely certain. They might pay

a quarter of a million. Charlotte, what would you ask for if you were me ?

MRS. MELDON. I should ask for my son.

CORRIE. Now, now, now, Charlotte, not again, please. Not again. We must think of the future, not of the past. I don't want to ask for too much, because I shan't get it, and I don't want to ask for too little, though I shall probably get that anyhow. What do you think, Charlotte ? Do you think it would be better to let them name a price ?

MRS. MELDON. I don't know.

CORRIE. Well, you might take a little interest in the matter. It's very important to me. They ought really to give me a title, too. Supposing I say a couple of hundred thousand pounds and a peerage ! . . .

MRS. MELDON. Why not say thirty pieces of silver ?

CORRIE (*thoroughly angry*). Really, Charlotte, you're insufferable ! You're absolutely insufferable ! I put up with a great deal from you because you're in distress, but there are limits to endurance, you know. You haven't congratulated me, even perfunctorily, and you've made yourself and me thoroughly miserable by this . . . this moaning over what can't be helped. You've even made Hannah miserable. My dear Charlotte, I'm talking to you now for your good. You really ought not to let your mind dwell on things in the way you do. It isn't good for you, and it's very unpleasant for me and for others who associate with you. Your boy was killed—so were other people's boys—but we can't spend the rest of our lives in lamentation. I have my work to do ! . . .

MRS. MELDON. Your bomb ?

CORRIE. Yes.

MRS. MELDON. Which will make the bodies of men and women and little children rot if it does not blow them to pieces.

CORRIE. The fortune of war, my dear Charlotte. After all, what does it matter to a man whether he is blown to pieces by a bomb or stabbed to death by a bayonet ? As a matter of fact, the bomb is the more merciful of the two. It isn't any use being sentimental about these things. The purpose of war is killing, and the side which kills the most people in the shortest time is going to win the wars of the

future. My bomb will enable those who possess it to conduct a war in a rapid and efficient fashion. No reasonable person can deny that I have performed a service to my country in inventing this bomb for its use, and even you, if you were not distracted by what you heard this morning and the fact that this is the anniversary of Eddie's death, would agree with them.

MRS. MELDON. No one but you knows the secret of your invention, Henry?

CORRIE. No—not that I am aware of.

MRS. MELDON. If you were to destroy your invention, never reveal its secrets, thousands of boys like Eddie might live without fear of being destroyed?

CORRIE. Oh, I don't know. It's a fantastic thought, that, but there's nothing in it. Other people will invent things even deadlier than my bomb.

MRS. MELDON. But, Henry, if you were to suppress your invention!

CORRIE. Suppress it!

MRS. MELDON. Yes, if you were to destroy your formulæ, and people were to know what you'd done, perhaps you'd do a great deal to change people's hearts! . . .

CORRIE. My dear Charlotte, most sensible people would think I'd gone off my head. A few cranks and religious maniacs might praise me, but the average person would think I was a fool—besides being damned unpatriotic.

MRS. MELDON. Henry, I beg you to destroy your invention.

CORRIE. You what?

MRS. MELDON. I beg you to destroy it. Let that be your memorial to Eddie! . . .

CORRIE. My dear Charlotte, I begin to believe that grief has unhinged your mind. Destroy my invention! . . .

MRS. MELDON. Your bomb will destroy life, Henry. I beg of you to destroy it! . . .

CORRIE. Rubbish, woman, rubbish.

MRS. MELDON. Then I will destroy it for you! . . .

(*She goes to the table where the retorts are and hurls the table over so that the retorts are smashed.*)

CORRIE. What the hell are you doing?

MRS. MELDON. I'm destroying your foul invention.

CORRIE (*laughing harshly*). That won't destroy it. I've got it all in my head. All that you've done, Charlotte, is to make a mess on my floor. Damned silly, I call it.

(*He stoops down and begins to clear up the mess.*)

MRS. MELDON (*standing behind him*). It's all in your head!

CORRIE. Of course it is. Anybody but a fool of a woman would have realised that. Making a confounded mess like this! . . .

MRS. MELDON. It's all in your head?

CORRIE. Yes, yes. Don't keep on repeating yourself, but come and help to clear up this mess you've made.

MRS. MELDON. Henry, won't you do what I ask you?

CORRIE. Don't be a fool. (*Looking round.*) Give me that cloth over there so that I can mop up this stuff.

(*He continues to collect the pieces of broken glass, etc.; while she goes towards the table where the cloth is. When she reaches the table, she sees a long knife lying there, and half unconsciously she picks it up and looks at it.*)

CORRIE (*impatiently*). Hurry up. What on earth are you doing?

MRS. MELDON. I'm looking at something—this knife!

CORRIE. Well, you can look at it afterwards. Fetch the cloth now. Here's Eddie's wreath under the table. You've made a mess of it, too!

MRS. MELDON. Eddie's wreath! (*She comes towards him, the knife in her hand*).

CORRIE. Yes.

MRS. MELDON. If you were to give up your invention, Henry, I wouldn't mind about the wreath. Your offering would be better than mine.

CORRIE. Well, I shan't. Give up my invention for a lot of damned sentiment! Not likely!

MRS. MELDON. It'll destroy life, Henry.

CORRIE. What's that got to do with it? Give me that cloth. (*He snaps it out of her hand, but does not see the knife in her other hand.*)

MRS. MELDON. You won't destroy it, Henry?

CORRIE (*almost in a snarl*). NO!

MRS. MELDON (*raising the knife above him*). Then I . . .

(With a queer moan of despair, she drives the knife into his back. He sways a moment, uttering a choking sound, and then, clutching at the air, he pitches forward on to his face.)

(She stands above him, looking down on his body in a dazed way. She is crying hysterically, and suddenly she stoops and picks up the broken wreath. She holds it to her breast, and stares distractedly in front of her.)

MRS. MELDON. Eddie, dear, I had to, I had to, Eddie! . . .

OLE GEORGE COMES TO TEA

CHARACTERS

'Enery Parsons.

Agnes Parsons, his wife.

Ole George 'Alliday.

The scene is laid in the living-room of a workman's house in a street off the Walworth Road, London, S.E.

The time is the early afternoon of a Saturday in July of the present time.

"Ole George Comes to Tea" was performed for the first time at the Playhouse, Liverpool, on May 27, 1927. It was produced by WILLIAM ARMSTRONG, *with the following cast:*

AGNES PARSONS	*Doreen Moss*
'ENERY PARSONS	*Sebastian Shaw*
OLE GEORGE 'ALLIDAY	*James Harcourt*

OLE GEORGE COMES TO TEA

It is the early part of a Saturday afternoon in July, and MRS. 'ENERY PARSONS, *a slight, fair woman of twenty-one, is busy in the living-room of her home in a street off the Walworth Road, London, S.E.*

The room is furnished after the fashion of the better-paid working-class. The furniture is new and is obviously part of a suite purchased on the hire system. A door leading to a passage giving admittance from the street is on the spectator's right, and just beyond this door is a flight of stairs. At the back of the room are two doors, adjoining each other; one leading to the scullery, the other to the best bedroom. Between the door leading to the best bedroom and the end of the wall there is a sofa covered with American cloth, and elsewhere in the room are a couple of roomy arm-chairs. Other chairs are in various parts of the room, and in one corner is a sewing-machine. The table normally stands in the space between the foot of the stairs and the scullery-door, but it is now standing in the middle of the room and is spread for a meal. There are a number of cheap prints, including highly unveracious portraits of the King and Queen, on the walls, and a calendar or two.

MRS. 'ENERY PARSONS *is bending over the fire, attending to some cooking operation, when the curtain ascends. Her appearance is slightly untidy, and she looks ill and harassed. When the curtain has risen, she straightens herself, looks about the room with a look of bewilderment in her eyes, and groans. Then she proceeds with the cooking.*

Her husband, MR. 'ENERY PARSONS, *enters boisterously from the street. His age is about twenty-four, not more than that, and he is an eager-looking, decent, kindly, but astonishingly obtuse young fellow, who does not see things unless they are thrust under his nose, and even then is quite likely not to observe them. He throws his*

cap on the sofa and, rushing up to his wife, puts his arm about her and kisses her rather roughly.

'ENERY. 'Illo, ole girl! 'Ere we are again, eh? (*He kisses her again.*) 'Ow are yer?

AGNES (*pushing him from her, and speaking in a fractious tone*). Oh, stop it, 'Enery! You're 'urting me!

'ENERY (*abashed*). 'Illo, 'illo! Wot's up 'ere, eh? (*He looks closely at her.*) W'y, you bin cryin'!

AGNES (*turning away from him*). No, I 'aven't, then!

'ENERY. Yes, you 'ave, Aggie! (*He catches hold of her and turns her towards him again.*) 'Ere, let's 'ave a squint at you!

AGNES (*pulling herself free from his grasp*). Oh, leave me alone, can't you! I got the dinner to cook yet.

'ENERY. W'y ain't it ready yet?

AGNES. No, it ain't—not nearly!

'ENERY (*with an air of injury*). That's all right, that is. It ain't much cop for a chap, comin' 'ome on a Saturday afternoon, an' 'is wife got the 'ump, an' 'is dinner not ready!

AGNES. I 'aven't got the 'ump.

'ENERY. Yes, you 'ave. Anybody can see you 'ave.

(*He moves towards the scullery door, taking off his coat as he does so, but before he reaches it, he turns to look questioningly at his wife, who is again attending to the meal. She looks up and sees that he is watching her.*)

AGNES. W'y ever don't you go an' get washed an' ready to 'ave your dinner? Standin' there lookin' like nothink!

(*He returns to the centre of the room.*)

'ENERY. I say, ole girl, wot's up, eh?

AGNES. Nothink!

'ENERY (*his tone changing from one of concern to one of indifference*). Oh, all right, then! All right! Only, you know, I shouldn't look so misable about nothink, if I was you.

AGNES. Wouldn't you?

'ENERY No I wouldn't. Give you my word! W'y,

you look as cheerful as if your Uncle 'Orace 'ad died an' left you nothink !

(*He goes towards the scullery again, and then stops short and regards his wife for a second or two.*)

AGNES. Wot you standin' there for ? Why don't you go an' get ready for your dinner, silly ?

'ENERY (*coming quickly to her side*). Look 'ere, ole girl, wot is it ?

AGNES. Nothink !

'ENERY (*catching hold of her*). 'Ere, come on ! Cheer up an' gimme a kiss !

AGNES (*pushing him forcibly from her*). Lemme be, can't you ! Messin' about !

'ENERY (*astonished*). Blimey ! (*He turns away.*) Absolutely gives a chap the 'ump, this does. Absolute ! (*He goes towards the scullery again.*) Call yourself a lovin' 'elpmate—you ain't no lovin' 'elpmate ! (*He stands still in the doorway of the scullery, looking at her.*) Wot's for dinner, eh ?

AGNES (*without looking up*). 'Ash !

'ENERY (*with frightful disgust in his voice*). 'Ash ! So 'elp me God ! (*He returns to the kitchen and thumps the table with the palm of his hand.*) 'Ow many times 'ave I said I 'ate 'ash ?

AGNES. I dunno, an' I don't care neither. It's all you're goin' to get, an' chance it. This ain't the 'Otel Sissl !

'ENERY (*glancing round the room*). No, it ain't ! Give you my word, it ain't. I guessed that much when I come in an' see you standin' there lookin' bright an' merry ! 'Ash ! Muck ! That's wot I calls it. Muck ! 'Ogwash !

AGNES. It's good enough for you anyway, wotever it is.

'ENERY. Oh, is it ? Well, it ain't then, see ?

AGNES (*wearily*). Ain't you never goin' to wash yourself or anythink ?

'ENERY. Oh, all right ! 'Ash ! God in 'Eaven, 'ash !

(*He goes into the scullery to make himself tidy.* AGNES *completes the arrangements for the meal.*)

AGNES (*snappily*). You needn't be all day washin' yourself.

'ENERY (*coming to the scullery door ; he has soap on his face*). I'll be as long as I like, see ?

AGNES. You can stay there all day, if you like, only your 'ash'll be cold.

'ENERY. Yah-ah-ah! (*or some similar sound to denote inarticulate disgust. He returns to the scullery.*)

(*She sits down at the table to wait until he is ready. Her look of puzzled distress deepens. She calls out "'Urry up!" not so much because she desires him to do so as because she wishes to say something to relieve her mind.*)

('ENERY *returns to the kitchen, towelling himself vigorously.*)

'ENERY. Don't 'alf liven you up, a wash don't!

AGNES (*listlessly*). Your dinner's ready.

(*He stops towelling himself, and looks at her. She has her back to him, and he goes behind her and puts his arms round her, drawing her face close to his.*)

'ENERY. Wot is it, ole girl, eh? You look all any'ow. You snap the 'ead off me, an' your 'air ain't done proper. (*He pats her head as he speaks, and her hair falls on to her shoulders.*) There, now, it's loose. You don't 'alf look a kid neither. No one wouldn't think you was a married woman to look at you. (*He moves round her chair so that he is facing her, and as he does so she leans forward so that her head rests on his shoulder, and begins to cry.*) 'Ere, Aggie, wot's up, eh? As anyone been rowin' you or anythink?

AGNES. I didn't mean to be nasty or nothink, 'Enery! (*She weeps helplessly.*)

'ENERY (*patting her affectionately*). No, of course you didn't! *Of* course not! I know that all right. Wot's up, eh?

AGNES (*sitting up and drying her tears*). I dunno! I don't feel well, some'ow! Sort of don't know whether I'm on my 'ead or my feet! I be all right bimeby!

'ENERY (*kissing her*). That's right, ole girl! You be all right when you 'ad your dinner. You come an' sit up to the table an' 'ave some 'ash!

(*He leads her to the table as he says this.*)

AGNES. I wish I 'adn't made 'ash, now!

'ENERY (*briskly*). That's all right, ole girl, that's all right. 'Ash 'as its good points, same as anythink else 'as. Of course, I ain't never seen 'em, but I dessay they're there

all the same. (*He sits down at the table and begins his meal.*) Don't taste 'alf bad, neither. Plenty of people 'ud be glad to 'ave a dinner like this, 'ash or no 'ash. Of course, if you didn't 'ave to 'ave it, you wouldn't 'ave it, would you? I mean to say, the King wouldn't 'ave 'ash for 'is dinner, not without makin' a row about it any'ow. (*He glances across the table at his wife, who is leaning listlessly on the table, neither listening to him nor eating her dinner.*) 'Ere, you ain't eatin' nothink!

AGNES. I don't fancy nothink to-day some'ow.

'ENERY. Come on! This won't do, you know! Can't 'ave you starvin' of yourself, can I?

AGNES. I be all right in a minute or two.

(*She tries to smile brightly, but begins to cry again instead.*)

'ENERY. Now, look 'ere, Aggie, this 'as got to stop, see? You been upsettin' of yourself or somethink, that's wot you been doin' of. Now, you 'ave somethink to eat, see, an' you'll be all right. (*He tries to tempt her with the food, but she refuses it.*) Now, now, now, Aggie, it ain't no good goin' on like that, you know. Cryin' an' refusin' your food won't do you no good. I mean to say, you got to buck up! (*She tries to buck up.*) There, that's right. Now, just you tell me all about it, see? Was it Mrs. Toop wot annoyed you?

AGNES. No, 'Enery! . . .

'ENERY. Well, it's lucky for 'er she didn't. I'd 'ave knocked the 'ead off her 'usband if she 'ad. Or anybody else either for the matter of that.

AGNES. I don't know wot it is—I'm just not well, that's all!

'ENERY (*trying to puzzle this out*). Look 'ere, I know wot! I'll just run up to the Walworth Road an' get a little drop of whiskey or brandy or somethink, eh? That'll make you feel all right, eh?

AGNES (*dispiritedly*). No, thank you, 'Enery, I'd rather not. I promised I wouldn't touch, taste, nor 'andle, so I'd rather not.

'Enery. This aint touch, tastin', nor 'andlin'! This is medicine, this is.

AGNES. No, thanks, I'd rather not. I'll go an' lie down for a while, an' p'raps I'll be all right this evenin'.

'ENERY. Wot! Ain't you comin' out with me this afternoon?

AGNES. I don't feel up to it, 'Enery! Straight I don't.

'ENERY. Go on! You're all right! W'y, we ain't missed a single Saturday afternoon up at the Park ever since we was married. Not one. 'Ave we now?

AGNES (*wearily*). I'm sorry, 'Enery, but I ain't up to it. Not to-day, I ain't.

'ENERY. It'll do you good to get out in the fresh air an' see all them ole chaps playin' bowls. Funny game, that is. I always want to laugh when I see them at it. It ain't the sort of game I'd play, though I dessay it's all right for ole chaps when they get past this 'ere golf. They do say you grow like a kid when you get old—second childhood—an' when I see them ole chaps playin' bowls, so 'elp me God, I believe it! Look 'ere, Aggie, you better come. It'll do you good to 'ave a laugh!

AGNES. I'd rather lie down for a bit, 'Enery, thanks. You finish your dinner an' go out yourself. P'raps I'll be all right by tea-time.

'ENERY (*returning to his seat*). I don't like goin' out without you, Aggie. Straight, I don't. First time since we been married.

AGNES. I dessay it won't be the last.

(*There is a knock on the street door.*)

AGNES. W'y, 'ooever can that be?

'ENERY. I dunno.

AGNES. I do 'ope it ain't a visitor or anythink, an' me not well. It would be just like your Aunt Emmer to call when we are upset.

'ENERY. More like your Uncle 'Orace. 'E seems to 'ave a instinct for awkward moments.

AGNES. You better go an' open the door an' see 'oo it is.

('ENERY *goes to the door leading to the street, and opens it.* OLE GEORGE 'ALLIDAY *is standing in the doorway. He is an elderly, bearded man of affable temperament, and he extends his hand very heartily to* 'ENERY.)

OLE GEORGE 'ALLIDAY. 'Ow are you, 'Enery?

'ENERY. W'y, if it ain't Ole George!

OLE GEORGE 'ALLIDAY. That's me, 'Enery. Ole George 'Alliday! (*Wrings his hand warmly.*) An' 'ow are you, 'Enery?

'ENERY. I'm all right, ole chap. Come in, won't you?

OLE GEORGE 'ALLIDAY (*stepping inside*). Thanks! I don't mind if I do! (*To* AGNES.) Good afternoon, Mrs. Parsons.

AGNES (*hastily putting up her hair*). Good afternoon!

'ENERY. Oh, I ain't interdooced you yet, 'ave I?

OLE GEORGE 'ALLIDAY. That's all right, ole chap, that's all right. No need for interdoocin' among friends. I'm your pal, an' so, of course, you two bein' one flesh, as the parson says, I'm 'er pal, too. That stands to reason, don't it? Besides, it's too late now. We've spoke, 'er an' me. 'Aven't we, Mrs. Parsons? . . .

'ENERY. I'll just interdooce you, George, if you don't mind. I mean, me an' my wife ain't snobs or nothink, but we like doin' things proper. This is my wife. Aggie, this is Ole George 'Alliday, wot you've 'eard me talk about.

OLE GEORGE 'ALLIDAY (*shaking* AGNES'S *hand very warmly*). Pleased to meet you, I'm sure.

AGNES. Pleased to meet *you*!

OLE GEORGE 'ALLIDAY. 'Ow are you? Well, I 'ope!

AGNES. I got a little bit of a neadache. I was just goin' to lie down when you came to the door.

OLE GEORGE 'ALLIDAY (*concernedly*). I'm sorry to 'ear you ain't up to the mark. 'Eadaches is nasty, real nasty! I've never 'ad one myself, but I've 'eard about 'em from people wot 'ave 'ad 'em, an' from all I can make out they're real nasty. I 'ope I 'aven't kept you up or anythink.

AGNES. Oh, no, you ain't!

OLE GEORGE 'ALLIDAY. You see, 'Enery 'ere ast me to pop in one day when I was passin' an' see 'ow you was both gettin' on, so I just thought I'd pop in to-day, not 'avin' nothink else to do, see? I'm sorry to 'ear you ain't well. It's this 'ere weather, that's wot it is. Knocks you up somethink crool.

AGNES. I dessay that's wot it is. You'll excuse me, I 'ope, if I go an' lie down now.

OLE GEORGE 'ALLIDAY. Certainly, certainly. (*As she turns to go towards the bedroom.*) You know, me an' 'Enery's

pals really, though I'm a good bit older'n wot 'e is, so of course when he ast me to pop round an' see you, I just popped, sort of. You know! 'E said to me one day in the ware'ouse . . . yes, that's where it was . . . in the ware'ouse . . . or was it in the foundry? Where was it, 'Enery?

'ENERY. Where was wot?

OLE GEORGE 'ALLIDAY. Where was it you tole me just to pop round one Saturday—was it the ware'ouse or the foundry?

'ENERY. I dunno.

OLE GEORGE 'ALLIDAY. It was either in the ware'ouse or the foundry, I know that, but I can't remember which. . . . Well, any'ow it doesn't matter where it 'appened, does it, so long as it *did* 'appen somewhere?

AGNES. No, Mr. 'Alliday. Good afternoon! (*She makes a fresh move towards the bedroom, but when* OLE GEORGE *speaks she turns back to listen again.*)

OLE GEORGE 'ALLIDAY. 'E come up to me, an' 'e says . . . it was the ware'ouse! I remember now because it was on a Toosday, an' I'm always in the ware'ouse of a Toosday. I thought I should remember where it was if I went on long enough. Funny thing, your memory is, isn't it?

AGNES (*a little impatiently*). Yes, it is. (*She half turns away, but before she can move towards the room,* OLE GEORGE *is at her again.*)

OLE GEORGE 'ALLIDAY. 'E come up to me, an' 'e said, "Look 'ere," 'e said, "w'y don't you pop roun' one Saturday an' see me an' my missus, Ole George!" . . . That's wot they call me, you understan'. Ole George! Ever since I was that 'igh they called me Ole George. (*He indicates an impossibly small size.*) An' I says, "Right, 'Enery, I will!" An' so I 'ave, an' 'ere I am. See?

AGNES (*blankly*). I see, Mr. 'Alliday.

OLE GEORGE 'ALLIDAY. I'm sorry you ain't feelin' up to it. Of course, if I'd knowed you was ill, I wouldn't 'ave come, only 'Enery 'ere, 'e said to me, 'im an' me bein' ole friends, you know . . . well, like wot you might say yourself to anyone you was acquainted with. . . . "Look 'ere," 'e said . . . you see me an' 'im works together—well,

as a matter of fact, I taught 'im 'is trade, see? I'm responsible for 'im. In a manner of speakin, it was me married 'im to you, see? I taught 'im 'ow to earn the money to keep you, see? An' of course when 'e said to me in the ware'ouse on Toosday—not last Toosday, but *one* Toosday—when 'e said, "Just you pop roun' one Saturday, an' 'ave a look in!" well, of course, I 'ad to say yes, 'adn't I?

AGNES (*a little fuddled by all this eloquence, and looking anxiously towards the bedroom*). Of course, you 'ad, Mr. 'Alliday.

OLE GEORGE 'ALLIDAY. Of course, if I'd knowed . . . if 'Enery 'ere 'ad only tole me you wasn't well, I wouldn't 'ave come, only I didn't know, did I?

AGNES (*edging towards the bedroom*). No, of course not, Mr. 'Alliday.

OLE GEORGE 'ALLIDAY. No, an' any'ow it can't be 'elped, now!

AGNES. That's true!

OLE GEORGE 'ALLIDAY. You know, Mrs. Parsons, you oughtn't to be up, not with a neadache, you oughtn't. You ought to be lyin' down an' 'avin' a good rest. 'Enery, I'm surprised at you allowin' 'er to be up. You know, you ain't got any imagination, 'Enery, or you wouldn't do it.

'ENERY (*hurt*). I like that. . . .

OLE GEORGE 'ALLIDAY (*to Agnes*). Now, you just go an' 'ave a good rest. Me an' 'Enery'll attend to everythink. I'll keep 'im out of mischief while you're 'avin' your sleep, see?

'ENERY. Yes, Aggie, you go an' 'ave a lie-down, see, an' you'll be all right bimeby. Me an' Ole George'll 'ave a talk an' a smoke, an' p'raps 'e'll stay to tea an' 'elp me to get it ready.

OLE GEORGE 'ALLIDAY. Now, that's real kind of you, 'Enery, an' I accept your kind invitation. Real kind, it is.

AGNES. You better call me when you want your tea. You won't know 'ow to get it.

OLE GEORGE 'ALLIDAY. Ah, that's just where you're wrong, Mrs. Parsons. I could tell you a few tales about that . . . only I'd be keepin' you from your rest, like 'Enery 'ere, an' I don't want to do that. You go on now!

(AGNES *goes into the bedroom.* OLE GEORGE 'ALLIDAY *plants himself in one of the armchairs, while* 'ENERY *sits disconsolately at the table.*)

OLE GEORGE 'ALLIDAY. Well, 'Enery, 'ow's marriage, eh? (*Takes out his pipe and begins to fill it.*)

'ENERY. It's all right.

OLE GEORGE 'ALLIDAY. I'm glad to 'ear that.

'ENERY. I'm sorry she ain't well enough to entertain you, George, but I'm glad to see you all the same.

OLE GEORGE 'ALLIDAY. That's all right, 'Enery—that's all right. (*He points to the dinner débris.*) 'Adn't you better clear that stuff away? I'll 'ave a smoke if you don't mind.

'ENERY. P'raps I 'ad. There's matches over your 'ead.

(*He gets up and begins to clear away the plates, etc., while* OLE GEORGE *lights his pipe. During the following speeches he passes in and out of the scullery until the table is cleared.*)

OLE GEORGE 'ALLIDAY. Bit off colour, eh?

'ENERY. Yes. I can't make it out myself. You know, George, we ain't missed a Saturday up at the Park since we was married, not one, we 'aven't. An' when I come 'ome to-day, blowed if she wasn't cryin'! Cryin'!

OLE GEORGE 'ALLIDAY. Wot's she cryin' about?

'ENERY. I dunno. I could see there was somethink the marrer with 'er, the minute I come inside the 'ouse. Very short-tempered she was, too. Fair snapped me 'ead off when I said anythink, an' then to crown all there was 'ash for dinner!

OLE GEORGE 'ALLIDAY. Well, wot's the marrer with 'ash, eh?

'ENERY. Everythink's the marrer with it. I 'ate the blasted stuff.

OLE GEORGE 'ALLIDAY. You're too pe'tickler, 'Enery, that's wot's wrong with you. I don't 'old with that sort of thing, grumblin' at good food.

'ENERY. I dessay I said more'n I ought to 'ave, but I wouldn't 'ave said anythink if she'd been in a good temper. Of course, I didn't know then that she 'ad a neadache. I thought she was just 'umpified. You know!

OLE GEORGE 'ALLIDAY. I know.

'ENERY. When I ast 'er wot was up, she said she didn't know, an' then she wouldn't eat 'er dinner or do nothink but 'owl. I dunno! (*He glances round the room.*) The place don't look 'alf the same neither. I mean to say, it's all right, you know. Clean an' all that . . . only it don't look as if 'er 'eart was in it some'ow. Don't 'alf give a chap the 'ump, I can tell you.

OLE GEORGE 'ALLIDAY. Got anythink in the 'ouse to drink, 'Enery?

'ENERY. Yes, water!

OLE GEORGE 'ALLIDAY (*startled*). Wot?

'ENERY. Water!

OLE GEORGE 'ALLIDAY. So 'elp me God, 'Enery, you ain't turned teetotaller, 'ave you?

'ENERY. Yes, I done it to please 'er.

OLE GEORGE 'ALLIDAY. Well, so 'elp me! An' that's wot matterimony 'as done for you, eh? Ain't been married a year, an' off goes your beer. I don't 'old with that, 'Enery. The 'usband ought to be the 'ead of the 'ouse, an' if 'e don't 'ave 'is beer reg'lar 'ow's 'e to show that 'e's the 'ead, eh? You oughtn't to give in to 'er, you oughtn't.

'ENERY. I 'ad to.

OLE GEORGE 'ALLIDAY. You 'ad to! Now, if my brother Arthur was to 'ear you talkin' like that, 'e'd be proper shocked, 'e would. 'E don't 'old with matterimony, 'e don't! 'E says 'e's seen too much of the 'ollowness of it!

'ENERY. 'Ow du mean, the 'ollowness of it?

OLE GEORGE 'ALLIDAY. Well, in a manner of speakin' 'e was married 'isself. In a manner of speakin'.

'ENERY. I didn't know 'e 'ad a wife.

OLE GEORGE 'ALLIDAY. Well, 'e 'adn't wot you would call a wife, 'e 'adn't—not strictly speakin', I mean, but all the same 'e nearly 'ad one. I mean to say 'e got as far as the church door, but she didn't. She funked it at the last moment, 'Enery. That's wot she done! Funked it!! An' then they says women 'as the courage of men! Of course, a nexperience like that didn't do my brother no good. It turned 'im bitter, an' that's why 'e don't 'old with matterimony. She said afterwards that 'e put 'er

off somehow. An', of course, it ain't nice to 'ave things like that said about you, is it? I ast you, 'Enery, is it nice to be tole you put someone off? Your face, I mean! Is it now?

'ENERY. No, it ain't, George.

OLE GEORGE 'ALLIDAY. Of course, I know 'e ain't wot you might call 'andsome, but 'e 'as 'is points, 'Enery, an' wotever 'is face is like, it is not nice to be tole wot 'e was—not at the altar steps any'ow.

'ENERY. I dessay it isn't.

OLE GEORGE 'ALLIDAY. Any'ow, that put 'im off. "George," 'e says to me, "beware of matterimony 'enceforth." Of course, it was too late then to say that to me because I was married an' 'ad two kids, an' any'ow I didn't agree with 'im on the subject. No one 'ad ever made no remarks about me or me face, so, of course, I 'adn't no complaint to make again marriage, 'ad I?

'ENERY. No, of course not!

OLE GEORGE 'ALLIDAY. As a matter of fact, 'Enery, I think marriage is all right as a ninstitootion. As a ninstitootion, mind you! I dessay it's all wrong for some people, but, on the 'ole, it's all right. That's w'y I don't like to 'ear you givin' in to your missus over the beer, because that sort of thing gives a nandle to my brother Arthur, see? 'E'd use that again marriage, see? I must say, though, if she 'adn't knocked off your beer, 'e'd 'ave used that, too. 'E'd 'ave said she was drivin' you to drink.

'ENERY. I wonder if she ought to 'ave a noliday or somethink!

OLE GEORGE 'ALLIDAY. 'Oo?

'ENERY. Aggie, of course!

OLE GEORGE 'ALLIDAY. No! Wot's she want a 'oliday for, eh? Wot's the good of 'em? Only fit for toffs an' people like that! 'Olidays is nothink but expense, 'Enery, that's all. Your 'and ain't never out of your pocket while you're 'aving 'em. Tuppence 'ere an' tuppence there—w'y at some of them seaside places the people expects to be paid for sayin' good mornin' to you. Of course, 'olidays is all right for the railways an' the 'otel-keepers, but they don't do no good to no one else.

'ENERY. Oh, yes, they do, George. It's the change of air.

OLE GEORGE 'ALLIDAY. Well, you can get change of air in London, can't you, without spendin' money on it? I sleeps in Walworth an' I works in Islington—that's change of air, ain't it? You know, I think all this talk about fresh air is 'umbug! It ain't natural to be sittin' about in a draught fit to blow your 'ead off. An' then they goes an' 'as a bath in the sea! The sea! ! ! I don't 'old with the sea!

'ENERY. There's a lot of things you don't 'old with, George!

OLE GEORGE 'ALLIDAY. Yes, an' there's a lot of things wot didn't ought to be 'eld with, neither.

'ENERY. The sea's all right. Wot's the marrer with the sea?

OLE GEORGE 'ALLIDAY. There's too much of it for one thing, an' it wobbles for another. I went to Brighton once because I'd 'eard of this 'ere sea, an' I thought I might as well 'ave a look at it just to see wot it was like. I didn't mind Brighton itself—it was just like 'ome. I could shut my eyes an' fancy I was at the Elfincassel! But I couldn't stand the sea, wobblin' all the time.

'ENERY. I like to see the waves 'eavin'!

OLE GEORGE 'ALLIDAY. Well, I don't. I felt like 'eavin' myself when I sawr it. No, 'Enery, wot I likes is streets an' crowds in 'em. I ain't the sort to go wanderin' about in the dark by myself, an' that's about all you can do in the evenin' at the seaside or the country. It's worse'n the seaside, the country is. Nothink but a lot of grass! I'd rather 'ave ten yards of the Walworth Road than all the sea in the world.

(*He begins to hum "A Life on the Ocean Wave."* AGNES *in the bedroom, knocks on the door and calls out "'ENERY!"*)

'ENERY. 'Illo, that's 'er callin'. (*Getting up and going towards the bedroom.*) Excuse me, George, won't you?

OLE GEORGE 'ALLIDAY. That's all right, ole chap.

('ENERY *goes into the bedroom shutting the door behind him.* OLE GEORGE *sits smoking, and then*

begins to sing a music-hall song. He sings one verse, and then the door opens, and 'ENERY *looks out.*)

'ENERY. I say, ole chap, do you mind not makin' a noise. She says it disturbs 'er!

OLE GEORGE 'ALLIDAY. I beg pardon, 'Enery. I'm sorry I sung.

'ENERY. That's all right, ole chap. That's all right. You didn't mean no 'arm. (*He comes a little way into the room, pulling the door behind him, and speaks in a whisper.*) She's been cryin' again!

OLE GEORGE 'ALLIDAY. Cryin' again, 'as she?

('ENERY *tiptoes back to the bedroom, shutting the door behind him.*)

OLE GEORGE 'ALLIDAY. Cryin' again! This looks serious, this does. Lemme see! 'Ow long they been married? . . . um! (*Pauses.*) I better get off 'ome, I think! (*He glances about the room.*) I might give a nand with the tea any'ow. 'E's a silly young fool, that 'Enery is. (*He goes into the scullery, and fetches the tea-things, which he lays on the table. The remainder of the soliloquy is spoken while he is doing this.*) That's wot 'e is—silly, cock-eyed young fool. 'Olidays! 'E don't know nothink, 'e don't. As if 'olidays was any good. That's the worst of these young fellers wot gets married nowadays—they don't know nothink. Got no understandin', they 'aven't. 'Olidays! 'Ow would it be, now, if I was to make some buttud toce, eh? It 'ud be all right, I think! Buttud toce! (*He cuts some slices of bread, and begins to toast them in front of the fire.*) 'Im an' 'is 'olidays!

('ENERY *returns to the room.*)

'ENERY. She's all right again—she's just 'avin' a sleep. . . . 'Illo, wot you been doin' of?

OLE GEORGE 'ALLIDAY. Makin' the tea, silly. Ain't you got no eyes?

'ENERY. Wot's the marrer with you, eh?

OLE GEORGE 'ALLIDAY. You didn't ought to ast wot's the marrer with me, 'Enery. You ought to ast wot's the marrer with yourself. That's wot you ought to ast.

'ENERY. Of course, we're pals, George, an' all that, an' I don't object to you makin' yourself at 'ome, but I

do think it's a bit thick to come into a man's 'ouse an' start makin' tea for yourself without astin' leave.

OLE GEORGE 'ALLIDAY. 'Oo's makin' tea for 'isself?

'ENERY. Of course, if you're goin' to let us 'ave some, too, that does make a difference. All the same, it would 'ave been more gentlemanlier to ast permission to make the tea.

OLE GEORGE 'ALLIDAY (*pointing to a chair with the toasting-fork*). Sit down, 'Enery.

'ENERY. Thanks! It's very kind of you to ast me to sit down in my own 'ouse.

OLE GEORGE 'ALLIDAY (*pushing him into a chair*). Sit down, an' don't jawr so much.

'ENERY (*starting up angrily*). Look 'ere, George!

OLE GEORGE 'ALLIDAY. 'Ush! You'll wake 'er up!

'ENERY (*abashed*). Well, not so much of it, then. This is my 'ouse. . . .

OLE GEORGE 'ALLIDAY. I know that, 'Enery—I know that. An' I'll tell you somethink else wot I know. Do you know wot you are?

'ENERY. I don't want no cheek, George. . . .

OLE GEORGE 'ALLIDAY. You ain't goin' to get no cheek, 'Enery! You're goin' to get tole the truth, see? The truth, the 'ole truth, and nothink but the truth, so 'elp me, God!

'ENERY. You was all right when I left you a few minutes ago—I say, you ain't suddenly gone off your 'ead, 'ave you?

OLE GEORGE 'ALLIDAY. Do you know wot's the marrer with your missus?

'ENERY. 'Ow the 'ell should I know, eh! (*In alarm.*) Look 'ere, George, it ain't anythink serious, is it? 'Ad I better go an' fetch a doctor?

OLE GEORGE 'ALLIDAY (*scornfully*). Fetch a doctor! Fetch your bloomin' grandmother!

'ENERY. I can't. She's dead.

OLE GEORGE 'ALLIDAY. 'Enery Parsons, you're a nijit, that's wot you are! When I said, "Fetch your grandmother!" I was speakin' sarcastic, as well as metaphoric. I didn't mean you was to go an dig the old girl up an' bring 'er 'ere.

'ENERY. Well, wot do you mean, then?

OLE GEORGE 'ALLIDAY. Wot I say! You know, 'Enery, you ought to be in a 'Ome for 'Elpless Orphans or somethink, that's where you ought to be.

'ENERY. 'Ow du mean?

OLE GEORGE 'ALLIDAY. 'Ow do I mean! 'Ark at 'im! 'Ow does anyone mean? Ain't you got no gumption or nothink? Chaps like you didn't ought to be allowed to get married. You don't know nothink.

'ENERY. It strikes me you got somethink the marrer with you, too. Talkin' to a chap like that. Wot you mean by it, eh?

OLE GEORGE 'ALLIDAY. Now, now, 'Enery, don't go an' lose your temper or nothink. That won't do no one no good. 'Ere! Ain't you never 'eard of nothink?

'ENERY. 'Eard of wot?

OLE GEORGE 'ALLIDAY (*scornfully*). 'Eard of wot! W'y, wot the 'ole bloomin' world, exceptin' you, 'as 'eard of!

'ENERY. I dunno wot you're drivin' at.

OLE GEORGE 'ALLIDAY. Where *was* you born, eh? Where was you brought up, eh? W'y, 'Enery, the 'eathen in 'is blindness wot bows down to wood an' stone knows more'n wot you do.

'ENERY. You know, George, I can't 'elp thinkin, you must be barmy. Wot 're you gettin at, eh? It ain't my fault I don't know nothink, is it?

OLE GEORGE 'ALLIDAY. Yes, it is. You didn't ought to know nothink.

'ENERY. Well, w'y don't you tell me then 'stead of callin' me out of my name.

OLE GEORGE 'ALLIDAY. 'Enery, you're like the doo-drops. . . .

'ENERY. Look 'ere! . . .

OLE GEORGE 'ALLIDAY. 'Alf a minute, 'Enery, if you please! I 'adn't finished my quotation, an' it's rude to interrupt, see? I'll just light my pipe again. . . . (*Does so.*)

'ENERY. Wot about this 'ere toce you're makin'?

OLE GEORGE 'ALLIDAY. You can finish it presently, see?

'ENERY. But . . .

OLE GEORGE 'ALLIDAY. 'Ush, 'Enery! Now, listen

'ere. It's my opinion you're goin' to do your dooty by the State.

'ENERY. 'Ow du mean?

OLE GEORGE 'ALLIDAY. Now, look 'ere, 'Enery, my boy, wot does doin' your dooty by the State mean, eh? You know! Engalan', the Hempire! Wot's the good of education if you don't know that yet. (*There is no look of enlightenment on* 'ENERY'S *face, and* GEORGE *proceeds in disgust.*) 'Enery, you're the thickest chap I ever struck. Straight, you are! A elephant ain't 'alf as thick as you! It's my opinion you're goin' to be a nappy father. Now, du understand, eh? That's wot you're going to be. Absolute!

'ENERY (*starting to his feet*). Wot's that you say?

OLE GEORGE 'ALLIDAY. Wot I 'ave said, I 'ave said. You didn't ought to be one by rights, not a chap wot don't know nothink.

'ENERY. So 'elp me, God!

OLE GEORGE 'ALLIDAY. Bit of a oner, ain't it?

'ENERY. Fancy me bein' . . . Look 'ere, George, you ain't 'avin' me on or anythink? It's all right, wot you say? No 'ank or anythink?

OLE GEORGE 'ALLIDAY. Of course, it ain't 'ank. When you're my age, 'Enery, you'll know it ain't a subject you can 'ank about.

'ENERY. I can't 'ardly realise it some'ow. . . .

OLE GEORGE 'ALLIDAY. I know.

'ENERY. Absolute knock-out, this is.

OLE GEORGE 'ALLIDAY. You're right, 'Enery.

'ENERY. It . . . it sort of makes you think, don't it? You . . . you know! Fair pulls you up! So 'elp me! (*He gets up and goes towards the bedroom.*) I better go and see 'ow she is, 'adn't I?

OLE GEORGE 'ALLIDAY. No, let 'er 'ave 'er sleep. Best to leave 'er to 'erself.

'ENERY. Wot I can't get over is me bein' a father. I mean to say, ME!

OLE GEORGE 'ALLIDAY. Funny, ain't it?

'ENERY. It sort of makes you feel queer. (*Suddenly.*) I say, George, you ain't 'avin' me on, are you?

OLE GEORGE 'ALLIDAY. No, 'Enery, I ain't. This is

earnest, this is. We 'ad six! My wife died when the last one come. . . . I never liked talkin' about it, 'Enery, because . . . you see, 'er an' me was pals, good ole pals, we was, like you an' your missus, an' it sort of . . . sort of 'urt when she was took.

'ENERY. Poor ole George!

OLE GEORGE 'ALLIDAY (*pulling himself together*). That's all right, ole chap. I didn't ought to 'ave tole you about it after 'er (*he motions towards the bedroom*) tellin' me to keep you company. (*They sit in silence for a few seconds.*) You know, 'Enery, it 'urts us as much as it 'urts them. They don't think it does, but it does, old chap! They think they 'ave to bear it all, but that ain't true, 'Enery! We ain't got the same sort of sufferin' as they 'ave, but we got some wot's pretty bad, I can tell you! It's sittin' waitin' in the dark, p'raps, an' not knowin' nothink. You 'ear people movin' about upstairs, an' you keep on thinkin' and thinkin' . . . You take my word for it, 'Enery, bein' a man's as 'ard as bein' a woman. I seen things in my time, an' I ain't wot you'd call a sloppy chap, am I?

'ENERY. No, George, you ain't.

OLE GEORGE 'ALLIDAY. No, I ain't, give you my word, but I don't mind tellin' you, 'Enery, I cried every time a kid come to our 'ouse. I did! Sat in the kitchen an' 'owled. Not able to do nothink, that's wot knocks me over! Just 'elpless!

'ENERY. It seems crool, don't it?

OLE GEORGE 'ALLIDAY. Everythink's crool if you looks at it like that—the ole world an' everythink, but it's worth it in the end. I wouldn't be without my lot, not even the one wot . . . wot . . . 'Ere, wot about this buttud toce, eh? (*He listens.*) I believe I can 'ear 'er movin'. 'Ere, you go an' look after 'er. ('ENERY *goes towards the bedroom.*) Listen, 'Enery!

'ENERY (*turning back*). Yes, George.

OLE GEORGE 'ALLIDAY. The great thing is not to get down in the mouth if she turns nasty-tempered sometimes, see? That's the great thing. You know wot it is, see? If you *didn't* know, you might go an' lose your temper, too, but as you *do* know, you won't. See, 'Enery?

'ENERY. I see, George.

OLE GEORGE 'ALLIDAY. Now, go in an' give 'er a kiss an' cheer 'er up, an' when you come back you can fill the tea-pot. It's all ready, 'ere.

'ENERY. You're a good ole pal, George. I'll tell 'er wot you done, an' she'll thank you 'erself when she comes out.

OLE GEORGE 'ALLIDAY. That's all right, ole chap—that's all right. Now, you go and see after 'er.

('ENERY *goes into the bedroom, closing the door behind him. When he has done so,* OLE GEORGE 'ALLIDAY *puts on his hat and tiptoes towards the street door. He stops for a second to listen.*)

OLE GEORGE 'ALLIDAY. They won't want me 'ere—they got somethink better to do than to bother about me.

(*He opens the door very quietly, and goes out, closing it as quietly behind him. The curtain falls.*)

SHE WAS NO LADY

CHARACTERS

Sir Alfred Pickles, K.B.E., M.P.

Henry Learmouth, a Private Enquiry Agent.

Lady Pickles.

Mrs. Graveney, a Caretaker.

SCENE I

Sir Alfred's study in his sumptuous mansion in Park Lane.

SCENE II

A room in an empty house in Deanery Street. Twenty minutes later.

The time is the present.

NOTE TO THE PRODUCER

ALTHOUGH this one-act play is divided into two scenes, it is not necessary to provide two sets. All that need be done to indicate the change from the sumptuous study in Park Lane to the empty room in Deanery Street is to take away all the furniture and alter the lighting.

"She Was No Lady" was performed for the first time at the Playhouse, Liverpool, on September 27, 1927. It was produced by WILLIAM ARMSTRONG *with the following cast:*

SIR ALFRED PICKLES, K.B.E., M.P. ..	*Lloyd Pearson*
HENRY LEARMOUTH	*Leslie Kyle*
LADY PICKLES	*Doreen Moss*
MRS. GRAVENEY	*Isobel Thornton*

SHE WAS NO LADY

The First Scene.

We are in the sumptuous study of Sir Alfred Pickles's *sumptuous house in Park Lane. The agents used that word to describe it when they were selling it to* Sir Alfred, *and, liking the sound of the word, he bought the house.* Lady Pickles *had been doubtful about it. She said it would take a lot of cleaning, but* Sir Alfred *reminded her that they would have a retinue of servants, both indoor and outdoor, and assured her that there was no need for her to worry her head about anything. She could leave all that to him. So she raised no other objections, despite the disapproval that remained in her expression. It is not quite clear what it is that* Sir Alfred *studies in the study, for there are no books in the room, not even a telephone directory, but the furniture is certainly sumptuous and the arm-chairs very comfortable. Not that* Sir Alfred *is in any mood at this moment to appreciate their comfort. He is deeply worried, and worry is not good for a man of his years, which are fifty-six. He drums his fingers on the desk at which he is sitting. Then he drums them on his teeth. Finally, he gets up, thrusting his hands under his coat-tails, and stands before the fire-place, where he murmurs* "Tcha!" *and* "Psst!" *and other phonetic symbols for annoyance. These, however, afford him no relief. He clasps his forehead with one of his hands, and murmuring,* "Aw, my God, isn't it horrible!" *paces across the room as far as the screen which conceals from the audience the door which leads to a little room off the study, and then, after murmuring* "After thirty years, this!" *paces back again. It will be noticed that* Sir Alfred, *who made his own fortune and not so long ago either, jibs a bit every time he runs up against an aitch. Sometimes he gets safely over it, but sometimes, and especially when he rushes at it, he takes a toss. He is about to make another*

journey across the room, when the telephone bell rings. He rushes eagerly to it, murmuring, " Ah, at last ! " *and lifts the receiver.*

SIR ALFRED (*sharply, as one speaks to an inferior*). Yes ! Speak up, man—speak up ! Yes ! Tell him to come up. He knows the way. And wait ! Wait ! Dammit, man, don't ring off 'til I tell you ! I'm not to be disturbed, d'you hear ! No one.

(*He replaces the receiver on the telephone and emits a heavy sigh. His eyes rest on a photograph of* LADY PICKLES *and he takes it in his hand and gazes at it in a distracted, but devoted, manner, sighing heavily and repeatedly as he does so. Then he puts it down, again saying,* " After thirty years ! " *and is on the point of pacing the room anew, when the door opens, and* MR. HENRY LEARMOUTH *enters.* MR. LEARMOUTH *might be an undertaker's assistant or a canvasser for a cheap encyclopædia, but he is neither the one nor the other ; he is a private-enquiry agent, and the privater the enquiry is, the better he likes to make it. There is nothing against the man, but one does not like him. One feels that he has taken up his profession from sheer love of knowing the worst about people.*)

SIR ALFRED. Come in, Learmouth, come in.

LEARMOUTH. Good afternoon, Sir Alfred.

SIR ALFRED (*who has seated himself at his desk*). Well !

LEARMOUTH. I 'ave not quite completed my enquiries, Sir Alfred ! . . .

SIR ALFRED (*impatiently*). Tch-Tch-Tch !

LEARMOUTH (*hurriedly*). But I 'ave gained a considerable amount of information. Important information that may lead to something.

SIR ALFRED (*leaning forward eagerly*). Ah ! Well ?

LEARMOUTH. The 'ole thing, Sir Alfred, is very mysterious. Very mysterious ! In the 'ole course of my professional career, I 'ave never come across a case that is more mysterious than this one ! An' my experience of the world, of course, Sir Alfred, is both unique and 'arrowin' !

SIR ALFRED. Well, get on with it, man—get on with it !

LEARMOUTH (*declining to be hurried*). I am baffled, Sir Alfred. That's wot I am! Baffled! I frankly and freely and unreservedly confess it. I cannot understand what Lady Pickles is up to!

SIR ALFRED. My God!

LEARMOUTH. I 'ave followed 'er movements for a month with the closest attention, but she 'as me baffled an' 'oodwinked. That's a terrible admission for a man like me to make.

SIR ALFRED (*tragically*). Is it another man?

LEARMOUTH. I don't know.

SIR ALFRED. You don't know?

LEARMOUTH. No, Sir Alfred, I don't.

SIR ALFRED. But—but what does she do?

LEARMOUTH. Every Monday an' Friday, she leaves 'ere about 'alf-past three and goes straight to a nempty 'ouse.

SIR ALFRED. Empty 'ouse—*h*ouse!

LEARMOUTH. Yes, Sir Alfred! (*He pauses, and then adds impressively*) But it isn't always the same empty 'ouse!

SIR ALFRED. Do you mean to say? . . .

LEARMOUTH (*now enjoying himself so much that he actually interrupts* SIR ALFRED). The first time I followed 'er, a month ago to-day, she went to a nempty 'ouse in Upper Brook Street. That was on a Monday. She went there again on the following Friday.

SIR ALFRED. Yes.

LEARMOUTH. But on the next Monday, she went to a nempty 'ouse in 'Ay 'Ill.

SIR ALFRED. 'Ay 'Ill? Oh, yes, Hay Hill! I know! Go on.

LEARMOUTH. She went there for a fortnight. Two Mondays an' two Fridays.

SIR ALFRED. Didn't you try to find out what she was doin'?

LEARMOUTH (*wounded*). Sir Alfred, you 'urt me, when you ask that question! I am a professional man, an' I 'ave my professional pride. Findin' out what people are doin' is not only a dooty to me, Sir Alfred, it's a pleasure! Of course, I tried to find out wot she was doin'.

SIR ALFRED. Well, what was she doin'?

LEARMOUTH. I don't know!

SIR ALFRED. Why don't you know? What the devil do I pay you for?

LEARMOUTH (*being very patient with the angry man*). Listen, Sir Alfred. My professional pride is piqued!

SIR ALFRED. What?

LEARMOUTH. Piqued, Sir Alfred! I'm wot you might call roused by this case, an' I 'ave sworn to unravel it or retire an' leave Scotland Yard a clear field. I said I didn't know wot Lady Pickles was up to, but I didn't say I would never know. As a matter of fact, I 'ope to catch 'er this afternoon!

SIR ALFRED. Catch 'er!

LEARMOUTH. Red-'anded, as the sayin' is!

SIR ALFRED. Oh! How?

LEARMOUTH. I'll explain. Last Monday, 'er ladyship changed 'er venoo! . . .

SIR ALFRED. Talk English, man!

LEARMOUTH. She went to another empty 'ouse, just round the corner from 'ere.

SIR ALFRED. Round the corner!

LEARMOUTH. Yes, Sir Alfred, in Deanery Street.

SIR ALFRED. Good God! Almost on my doorstep!

LEARMOUTH. Yes, Sir Alfred, as you say! I got orders to view these 'ouses, but I found nothin' inside any of 'em that could account for 'er ladyship's be'aviour. Except one thing!

SIR ALFRED. What was that?

LEARMOUTH. The same person—a woman—was caretaker at each 'ouse!

SIR ALFRED. And what does that explain?

LEARMOUTH. Nothing, but it's curious. I call it a strange coincidence.

SIR ALFRED. Did you question her?

LEARMOUTH. I did—last Friday. She denied all knowledge of 'er ladyship, an' when I reminded her that 'er ladyship 'ad been in the 'ouses in Upper Brook Street and 'Ay 'Ill, she reminded me that I 'ad been in 'em, too! Deep, I call 'er—deep! There's one other thing, Sir Alfred! 'Er ladyship only stops goin' to these 'ouses when they're let or sold. For obvious reasons, of course!

SIR ALFRED. This is a great shock to me, Learmouth! I don't mind telling you when I found that she was stealing off twice a week like that, I was upset. I love my wife, Learmouth!

LEARMOUTH. That does credit to a man in your position, Sir Alfred!

SIR ALFRED. Everything I've done 'as been done for 'er. I've always wanted to get on for 'er sake.

LEARMOUTH. An' you 'ave got on, Sir Alfred! Member of Parliament! One of the richest men in England. 'Ouse in Park Lane! Mansion in 'Ampshire! Deer forest in Scotland! Villa on the Riviera! . . .

SIR ALFRED. Aye, an' ten years ago, where was I?

LEARMOUTH. In 'Uddersfield, wasn't it?

SIR ALFRED. Thereabouts! I was a poor man, with only one wish—to get on! And on!

LEARMOUTH. An' you 'ave!

SIR ALFRED. But what's the good of it, Learmouth, if my wife! . . . Oh, God! (*He is genuinely upset.*)

LEARMOUTH. Wot do you suspect, Sir Alfred?

SIR ALFRED. I don't know! She's not the sort that—that goes after! . . . No, no!

LEARMOUTH. Well, of course, there's no accounting for woman's ways. Give a woman 'er 'ead an' she'll take it!

SIR ALFRED. I only took my title to please her. And a pretty penny! . . . Well, never mind about that! I thought it would be nice for 'er to be Lady Pickles! My lady!

LEARMOUTH. 'Ave you ever asked 'er about it yourself, Sir Alfred?

SIR ALFRED. Yes. She lied to me!

LEARMOUTH. Lied!

SIR ALFRED. Yes. Last Monday I asked her, casual-like, you know, where she'd been, and she said she'd been for a walk in the Park. On Friday she said she'd been to the Ideal Home Exhibition at Olympia.

LEARMOUTH (*ominously*). I don't like the sound of that.

(*The door opens and* LADY PICKLES *appears in the doorway. She is handsomely dressed, and is an attractive-looking body, a working-class woman,*

despite her finery and her grand house. She is dressed for the street.)

LADY PICKLES. Oh, I'm sorry, Alfred; I didn't know you were busy!

SIR ALFRED. It's all right, my dear. This is Mr. Learmouth.

LADY PICKLES (*going to* LEARMOUTH *and shaking hands with him*). Oh, how do you do! Quite a nice day, isn't it?

LEARMOUTH. Yes, my lady!

LADY PICKLES. You'll excuse me, won't you, for interrupting you like this, but I forgot to draw any money from the Bank this morning, so I thought I'd just ask my husband for some. Alfred, can you let me 'ave some money?

SIR ALFRED. How much do you want?

LADY PICKLES. Oh, a few pounds will do until to-morrow!

SIR ALFRED (*taking out his pocket-book*). Are you going out?

LADY PICKLES. Yes, I think I'll go for a little walk in the Park!

SIR ALFRED. In the Park!

LADY PICKLES. Yes.

SIR ALFRED (*to* LEARMOUTH). Lady Pickles is very fond of walking in the Park. She often goes there.

LADY PICKLES. Yes, I'm quite fond of it. I always think 'Yde Park is such a refined Park.

SIR ALFRED. Let me see—you went there last Friday, didn't you, dear?

LADY PICKLES. Yes.

SIR ALFRED. Or did you go to the Ideal Home Exhibition that day?

LADY PICKLES. Oh, yes, of course! I forgot! . . . I . . . (*She seems to be confused.*) Silly of me to forget, but I always get so mixed up. I've no 'ead for figures, Mr. Blearmouth.

LEARMOUTH. Learmouth, my lady, not Blearmouth.

LADY PICKLES. I am sorry, I got all confused.

SIR ALFRED (*handing notes to her*). There's five pounds for you, Maggie. Will that be enough?

LADY PICKLES. Oh, yes, thank you, Alfred, I think it

will be quite sufficient! Good afternoon, Mr. . . . Learmouth!

LEARMOUTH. Good afternoon, my lady!

SIR ALFRED. If you'll wait a little while, Maggie, I'll come with you. A walk in the Park would do me good!

LADY PICKLES (*hurriedly*). Oh, no, Alfred, don't bother! I don't want to take you away from business!

SIR ALFRED. I can easily put it off! . . .

LADY PICKLES. No, no, dear! To-morrow! Good afternoon, Mr. Learmouth!

LEARMOUTH. Good afternoon, my lady!

LADY PICKLES. I'll be back in good time for dinner, Alfred!

SIR ALFRED. Won't you be in to tea?

LADY PICKLES. No, I . . . I . . . Well, I've given up tea. They say it's very fattening.

(*With that she goes out. The two men sit in silence for a few moments, staring at each other. Then* SIR ALFRED *speaks.*)

SIR ALFRED. You heard her, Learmouth, lying to me! She couldn't even remember what lies she *had* told me! You saw 'ow upset she was, when I suggested going to the Park with her. She didn't want me, Learmouth!

LEARMOUTH. Most mysterious, Sir Alfred! An' yet, you know, she don't look like a flyaway piece.

SIR ALFRED. I'd 'ave trusted 'er with anything. Well, come on! Let's follow 'er!

LEARMOUTH. Give 'er a few minutes. We know where she's goin'! Let 'er get well settled down before we do anything.

SIR ALFRED. I never thought my wife would do a thing like this!

LEARMOUTH. 'As she seemed un'appy or discontented or anything?

SIR ALFRED. Well, of course, she 'asn't taken to this life quite as naturally as I 'ave. Women aren't generally good at risin' above their station, but still she seemed 'appy enough. Why shouldn't she be 'appy! I've given 'er everything a woman can wish for—furs, joolry, motor-cars, money, a sumptuous 'ouse, town an' country, an' I've made a lady of 'er. Everything I 'ave is of the best. We 'ave

the most sumptuous 'ome in Park Lane! What more can a woman want?

LEARMOUTH. I don't know, Sir Alfred, what any woman wants. God 'Imself don't know, so it's not likely I do.

SIR ALFRED. She's mixed with some of the most 'igh-class families in England. Of course, I know the way some of the aristocracy go on, but I never 'eard of any of 'em gettin' up to tricks in empty 'ouses before. An' to think that Maggie! . . . (*He buries his head in his hands. He is a broken man.*)

LEARMOUTH. Ah, Sir Alfred, society ain't wot it used to be. Nothink like!

SIR ALFRED. What do you know about it?

LEARMOUTH. Well, Sir Alfred, I've read all Mr. Michael Arlen's books, an' I reckon I know somethin' about 'igh life! All mixed up, it is! Film stars pretendin' to be aristocrats, an' aristocrats pretendin' to be film stars.

SIR ALFRED (*rising*). Well, let's go now.

LEARMOUTH. When we get to the 'ouse, I'll ring the bell, see! An' then I'll stand at the side, so the caretaker don't see me. You'll say you 'ave a norder to view, an' if she says it isn't convenient, you say you must see over the 'ouse at once, see! an' threaten to report 'er to the 'ouse-agent, see! We'll 'ave to rush the place, if necessary!

SIR ALFRED. Rush it! I'll pull it to pieces before I've done with it! If she's picked up with one of these young whipper-snappers that live on old women, I'll . . . . I'll . . . !

(*They go out together, and the curtain falls. When it rises again, we see*——)

THE SECOND SCENE.

Which is a large, empty room in a house in Deanery Street. The wall-paper is faded, and show marks where pictures used to hang. There is a wooden chair near the window. Double doors admit to the room, and a single door leads off it to an ante-room. The double doors open, and MRS. GRAVENEY *enters, followed by* LADY PICKLES.

LADY PICKLES. Thank you, Ellen!

MRS. GRAVENEY. Oh, I do wish you wouldn't come 'ere like this. Wotever would your 'usband say if he knoo?

LADY PICKLES. He'd be mad!

MRS. GRAVENEY. I don't like it! There's been a very funny sort of a man nosin' around 'ere lately, with orders to view. 'E 'ad orders to view the 'Ay 'Ill 'ouse an' the one in Upper Brook Street!

LADY PICKLES. That's nothing!

MRS. GRAVENEY. 'E asked about you last week.

LADY PICKLES. Me?

MRS. GRAVENEY. Yes, proper nosey 'e was, but I soon told 'im off! 'Ooever do you think you're addressin'!' I said. 'You 'ave the advantage of me,' I said. 'You mind your own business,' I said, 'and I'll mind mine,' I said! . . .

LADY PICKLES (*who has taken off her hat and coat during this discussion and laid them on the chair by the window*). Quite right, too, Ellen. You can't be too careful with strangers.

MRS. GRAVENEY. That's wot I say! I do 'ope nothin' comes of all this. If the agents should get to 'ear about it! . . .

LADY PICKLES. You needn't worry, Ellen. I told you I'd make it all right for you if anything 'appened. Is everything ready?

MRS. GRAVENEY. Yes, you'll find all you want in there! (*She points to the small door.*) Though wot a woman in your position wants to go carryin' on like this for, I don't know. Can't you be content with your 'ome an' your 'usband?

LADY PICKLES. No, I can't. (*She goes to the small door and opens it.*) Eh, it's beautiful! Just beautiful! Don't

forget to lock the door after me, Ellen. If anybody comes with an order to view, you know what to say! (*Then she goes into the small room and shuts the door behind her.* MRS. GRAVENEY *locks it.*)

MRS. GRAVENEY. I wouldn't be'ave like 'er if I was 'er! Silly way to go on, I calls it.

(*She picks up the coat and hat from the chair by the window, and is about to carry them away when she hears the street door-bell ringing, and in her agitation she puts them down again on the chair.*)

MRS. GRAVENEY. Oh, dear, 'ooever can that be at this hour? (*She goes to the window and looks out, but evidently does not see anyone.*) I shan't answer! It's after the hours for viewin' the 'ouse any'ow, an' they'll think I'm out. (*The bell rings again.*) Oh, damn that bell! (*She hesitates for a moment or two, and then goes to the window again, but still she cannot see anything. The bell rings a third time.*) I dunno! Any'ow, if anything does 'appen, it's 'er lookout, not mine!

(*She goes out, leaving one of the double doors open. There is silence for a few moments, then the sound of voices, angry and expostulatory, is heard. One distinguishes* MRS. GRAVENEY'S *petulant protests,* SIR ALFRED'S *angry demands, and* MR. LEARMOUTH'S *suave tones. The voices become more distinct, and presently* SIR ALFRED *bursts into the room, followed by* MRS. GRAVENEY *and then* LEARMOUTH.)

MRS. GRAVENEY. You 'ave no right, sir! . . .

SIR ALFRED. Right! I'll show you what right I have! Where's my wife?

MRS. GRAVENEY. Your wot, sir?

SIR ALFRED. My wife. Don't pretend you don't understand me!

MRS. GRAVENEY. I dunno wot you're talkin' about, I'm sure!

SIR ALFRED. You know all right! Where is she?

MRS. GRAVENEY. No, sir, I don't, sir! There's nobody 'ere but me. There ain't a livin' soul in the 'ouse, sir, except me—an', of course, you two gents.

LEARMOUTH (*pointing to the coat and hat on the chair*). I suppose these are yours?

MRS. GRAVENEY (*gasping*). Oh!

SIR ALFRED (*taking them up*). They're my wife's! She is here! Where is she? Answer me, woman, or by God! I'll . . .

MRS. GRAVENEY (*pulling herself together*). No, I won't tell you. She made me promise not to tell no one nothink an' I shan't neither. I'll 'old me tongue.

SIR ALFRED (*pointing to* LEARMOUTH). That man's a detective!

LEARMOUTH. An' I warn you that you will 'ear more about this from 'igher powers!

MRS. GRAVENEY (*frightened*). Oh, lor!

SIR ALFRED. Now, will you tell me where my wife is? She's somewhere in this house!

MRS. GRAVENEY (*obstinately*). No, not if you was ever so, I won't!

SIR ALFRED. Very well, then, we'll 'ave to search for 'er. (*His aitches have now gone completely phut.*) Learmouth, just keep your eye on the stairs, will you?

LEARMOUTH. Yes, Sir Alfred.

SIR ALFRED (*pointing to the door behind which* LADY PICKLES *is concealed*). What's in that room?

MRS. GRAVENEY. Nothink!

(*He moves towards it, but* MRS. GRAVENEY *gets to it before him.*)

MRS. GRAVENEY. No, sir, you can't go in 'ere. This room is private.

SIR ALFRED. Private be damned! Get out of the way!

MRS. GRAVENEY. No, sir. This is my room, an' I forbid you to enter. It's . . . it's not tidy!

LEARMOUTH. 'Er room's down in the basement, Sir Alfred!

MRS. GRAVENEY. Oh, you liar!

SIR ALFRED. Come on! Out of it! (*He seizes* MRS. GRAVENEY *and swings her aside. Then he tries to open the door but finds it locked.*)

SIR ALFRED. 'Ell! It's locked!

MRS. GRAVENEY. Yes, an' I 'ave the key!

SIR ALFRED. Give it to me! Come on!

MRS. GRAVENEY. Not while I 'ave breath in my body!

SIR ALFRED (*beside himself, he rattles the handle of the door*). Maggie, Maggie, let me in!

LADY PICKLES (*on the other side of the door*). Is that you, Alf?

SIR ALFRED. Yes. Open the door or I'll burst it open

LADY PICKLES. I can't. Ellen's got the key!

SIR ALFRED (*to* MRS. GRAVENEY). You hear! Open the door!

MRS. GRAVENEY (*to* LADY PICKLES). Shall I open it, Maggie?

SIR ALFRED. Maggie! Is that how you speak to Lady Pickles?

MRS. GRAVENEY. Yes, Alf, it is! I knoo 'er before you did! Shall I open it, Maggie?

LADY PICKLES. Yes, Ellen!

(MRS. GRAVENEY *unlocks the door, and* LADY PICKLES *enters the room. But this is not the richly-dressed lady whom we saw entering it. She is wearing the every-day, indoor dress of a working-woman. Her sleeves are rolled up. She is wearing carpet slippers. There is a scrubbing-brush in her right hand.*)

SIR ALFRED. Good Heavens, Maggie, what does this mean?

LADY PICKLES. What, dear?

SIR ALFRED. This! (*He takes the scrubbing-brush from her.*)

LADY PICKLES. Oh, that! Well, you see, Alf! . . .

SIR ALFRED. Alfred, Maggie, Alfred!

LADY PICKLES. I like calling you Alf! . . .

LEARMOUTH. Alfred, Lord Tennyson, yes, my lady, but Alf, Lord Tennyson, never!

LADY PICKLES. Well, any'ow, this is my day for scrubbing the floor.

SIR ALFRED. Scrubbing the floor! . . .

LADY PICKLES. Yes, Alf! You see, I 'aven't the courage to do any scrubbing at 'ome—not with all them servants about—so when I met Ellen again by accident—she an' me was friends long ago—I asked her to let me 'ave a room in any 'ouse——

SIR ALFRED. House, Maggie, *house!*

LADY PICKLES. I can't seem to say it some'ow when

I'm in these clothes. It's much easier, Alf, to leave the aitches out. I asked 'er to let me 'ave a room in any 'ouse she 'ad to look after, an' I'd put some furniture in it so's it 'ud look like . . . like our 'ouse in 'Uddersfield before we got rich and went in for bein' classy! Of course, it's a nuisance 'avin' to keep on shiftin' the furniture about from 'ouse to 'ouse, but Ellen's very good about it. 'An I come 'ere twice a week, Alf, an' pretend I'm 'appy again in my own 'ome in 'Uddersfield.

SIR ALFRED (*completely knocked*). Oh, Maggie, Maggie!

LADY PICKLES. I do a bit of washin' some days, an' a bit of bakin' other days. To-day, I was just scrubbin' the floor. I did enjoy it, Alf! Some'ow the smell of soft soap is very 'omely. It makes me want to cry!

SIR ALFRED. An' I thought I was makin' you so 'appy, too! I raised you above your station and made a lady of you!

LADY PICKLES. Yes, Alf, an' I know you meant well, but I do wish you 'adn't.

MRS. GRAVENEY (*to* LEARMOUTH). 'Ere, you, Nosey Parker, 'op it!

LEARMOUTH (*indignantly*). I beg your pardon, I'm sure!

MRS. GRAVENEY. Come on! This is no place for detectives! The basement's the place for you! (*And she pushes him out before her.*)

LADY PICKLES. I'm sorry, Alf, but I'm really not fit to be a lady. I 'aven't the nerve for it!

SIR ALFRED. But you'll 'ave to be one, Maggie. I'm a gentleman now, an' you must be a lady.

LADY PICKLES. I suppose so. Isn't it awful, Alf? I miss 'Uddersfield terribly! It's so lonely 'ere in London. I don't understand the 'alf the people say. They 'ave a very funny way of talkin' down 'ere in the South, an' they aren't a bit friendly! Don't you remember Saturday night at 'ome, Alf, when we used to go out shoppin' together, and you treated me to a 'am-an'-egg tea in the town! Them was nice times, Alf! I did enjoy 'em!

SIR ALFRED. I didn't think you'd fall back like this, Maggie. I thought you was one of Nature's ladies.

LADY PICKLES. Per'aps I am, Alf, but I'm not one of London's ladies. Alf, let's go back to 'Uddersfield!

SIR ALFRED. No, Maggie, we can't do that. We're in Society, an' in Society we've got to stay.

LADY PICKLES. It's like bein' in jail! (*She reflects for a moment.*) Listen, Alf, you stay 'ere in Society—you've got the nerve for it—an' I'll go back to 'Uddersfield! . . .

SIR ALFRED. What! And leave me!

LADY PICKLES (*faltering*). I'd 'ate that, Alf! You could come for the week-end, couldn't you?

SIR ALFRED. But the 'ouse—house in Hampshire, Maggie! An' the villa on the Riviera! An' the deer forest in Scotland!

LADY PICKLES. I forgot them! Oh, Alf, it's an awful muddle!

SIR ALFRED. I don't know, I'm sure! What am I to do? I want to make you happy, Maggie!

LADY PICKLES. 'Ow did you get to know I was 'ere, Alf?

SIR ALFRED. That chap, Learmouth! . . .

LADY PICKLES. Yes, 'e was in your study this afternoon, I remember!

SIR ALFRED. 'E's a detective!

LADY PICKLES. Detective?

SIR ALFRED. Yes. I was fair puzzled an' upset when I found you were disappearin' twice a week, an' I got 'im to watch you! . . .

LADY PICKLES (*distressed*). Watch me! A detective! Oh, Alf, 'owever could you!

SIR ALFRED. Well, what was I to do?

LADY PICKLES. You never did anything like that at 'Uddersfield!

SIR ALFRED. No, an' you never did anything like this!

LADY PICKLES. I didn't 'ave to!

SIR ALFRED. When you told me lies! . . .

LADY PICKLES. I never!

SIR ALFRED. Yes, you did! You said you was at the Ideal Home Exhibition!

LADY PICKLES. Oh, that! I don't call that a lie! It was only something to say.

SIR ALFRED. A lie's a lie whatever you call it! And, of course, when I caught you tellin' lies, I thought you'd got a bit too familiar with these Society ways, so I got Learmouth to watch you!

LADY PICKLES. What did you expect to see, Alf!

SIR ALFRED. Well, I thought per'aps! . . . Oh, never mind, Maggie.

LADY PICKLES. Out with it, Alf!

SIR ALFRED. I thought per'aps—I'm sorry, Maggie! . . .

LADY PICKLES. Yes, Alf?

SIR ALFRED. You'd got a feller!

LADY PICKLES. A feller! Me! At my age! An old woman like me! Oh, Alf!

SIR ALFRED. Well, why not! You're still a good-looking woman, Maggie. I wouldn't be a bit surprised if one of these nobs took a fancy to you.

LADY PICKLES. Don't be silly, Alf!

SIR ALFRED. I've 'eard that a lot of these old Society women! . . .

LADY PICKLES. Bosh!

SIR ALFRED. Learmouth says so, too! An' 'e's a very well-read man, Learmouth. 'E's read the 'ole of Michael Arlen's works!

LADY PICKLES. Well, I suppose I'll 'ave to go back to Park Lane an' try to be a lady. But it's 'ard, Alf.

SIR ALFRED. Make an effort, Maggie.

LADY PICKLES. Alf!

SIR ALFRED. Yes, Maggie!

LADY PICKLES. Couldn't you buy me a little 'ouse somewhere near Park Lane, where I could go whenever I felt like doin' a bit of washin' or scrubbin'.

SIR ALFRED. Don't suggest such a thing, Maggie.

LADY PICKLES. It might 'elp me to be a lady if I could just work off my low instincts now an' again.

SIR ALFRED. Do you think it would make you really happy, Maggie?

LADY PICKLES. Oh, yes, Alf. Ellen could look after it when I wasn't there to look after it myself. It 'ud be like a little bit of! . . .

SIR ALFRED. 'Eaven?

LADY PICKLES. No, 'Uddersfield!

CURTAIN.

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