

Harley Granville Barker's
The Madras House

refinished

A version

by

Andrew Hilton



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Why a Version?

Harley Granville Barker's plays seem to me to contain the finest dramatic writing from the Edwardian period, the best of it superior to Shaw's. The voices are richly and accurately distinct, the satire gentle but far-reaching. But in the case of *The Madras House*, and to a lesser extent the more widely known and admired *The Voysey Inheritance*, Barker attempts in their conclusions to move from the observation at which he is clearly a master to prescription: his leading characters ask 'how should we live together, we men and women?'; worse, he attempts answers. In *The Madras House* Philip moves from a subject of the play to a spokesman for its author, and the play loses its forensic clarity, its vigour and satirical edge. The critic, and editor of the 1977 Eyre Methuen edition, Margery Morgan, remarks that 'Disaster sets in when Philip and Jessica are finally alone'. Barker clearly struggled with the problem himself, revising the play and rewriting that last dialogue extensively in 1925, but to insufficient effect; he still clung to his reflective and prescriptive purpose.

It is this - and not only its challengingly huge cast - that I believe has consigned *The Madras House* to obscurity; and it is this that I have attempted to address in a new version of the last movement of the play, following the final departure of Constantine Madras to live out his life in Arabia.

Elsewhere, I have used the first, 1909, edition as my basis, importing just a few of Barker's 1925 revisions and one or two of my own. I add the 1909 text of the final passage as an addendum.

Granville Barker died in 1946, his works entering the public domain in the UK in 2016.

Andrew Hilton

Characters

(with possible doublings suggested)

The Madras Family

Philip Madras

Jessica Madras

Constantine Madras

Amelia Madras

Maid at Phillimore Gardens *(and Clara Huxtable)*

The Huxtable Family

Henry Huxtable

Mrs Huxtable

Julia Huxtable *(and Mrs Brigstock)*

Laura Huxtable *(and Miss Yates)*

Emma Huxtable *(and Mannequin)*

Jane Huxtable *(and Mannequin)*

Minnie Huxtable

Clara Huxtable

Maid at Denmark Hill *(and Mannequin)*

The Fashion Business

Major Hippisly Thomas

Mr Brigstock

Mrs Brigstock

Miss Chancellor *(and Amelia Madras or Mrs Huxtable)*

Miss Yates

Mr Belhaven

Eustace Perrin State

Mr Windlesham

3 French Mannequins

8 Men, 9 Women

Act One

The Huxtable Residence at Denmark Hill.

A Sunday morning, a bright day in October. The family are still at church and the drawing-room is empty. The door opens and the PARLOURMAID shows in PHILIP MADRAS and his friend MAJOR HIPPISLY THOMAS who moves across the room to the big French windows which open on to a balcony and look down on the garden.

PHILIP MADRAS is about thirty-five, a year or two younger than his friend. The MAID has secured Major Thomas' hat and stands clutching it. As PHILIP passes her into the room he asks ...

Philip About how long?

Maid In just a few minutes now, I should say, sir. Oh, I beg pardon, does it appen to be the third Sunday in the month?

Philip I don't know. Tommy, does it?

Thomas Don't ask me. Well, I suppose I can tell you. *[He vaguely fishes for his diary]*

Maid No, I don't think it does, sir. Because then some of them stop for the Oly Communion and that may make them late for dinner, but I don't think it is, sir.

She backs through the door, entangling the hat in the handle.

Philip Is my mother still staying here?

Maid Mrs Madras, sir. Yes, sir.

The MAID vanishes.

Philip Well, my dear Tommy, what are the two most important tests of a man's character? His attitude towards money and his attitude towards women.

Thomas Yes, you're full up with moral precepts. Why behave about money as if it didn't exist? I never said don't join the County Council.

Philip It is quite impossible for any decent man to walk with his eyes open from Waterloo to Denmark Hill on a Sunday morning without wishing me to stand for the County Council.

THOMAS entrenches himself on a sofa.

Thomas You've got what I call the Reformer's mind. I shouldn't cultivate it, Phil. It makes a man unhappy and discontented, not with himself, but with other people, mark you ... so it makes him conceited and puts him out of condition both ways. Don't you get to imagine you can make this country better by tidying it up.

Philip But I'm very interested in England, Tommy.

Thomas We all are. But we don't all need to go about saying so. Even I can be interested in England, I suppose, though I have had to chuck the

Army and take to business to earn bread and treacle for a wife and four children ... and not a bad thing for me either. I tell you if every chap would look after himself and his family and lead a godly, righteous and sober life - I'm sorry, but it is Sunday - England would get on a damn sight better than it will with all your interference.

Philip It's a muddled country. One's first instinct is to be rhetorical about it ... to write poetry and relieve one's feelings. I once thought I might be self-sacrificing - give my goods to the poor and go slumming - keeping my immortal soul superior still. There's something wrong with a world, Tommy, in which it takes a man like me all his time to find out that it's bread people want, and not either cake or crumbs.

Thomas There's something wrong with a man while he will think of other people as if they were ants on an ant heap.

Philip Tommy, that's perfectly true. I like having a good talk with you; sooner or later you always say one sensible thing.

Thomas Thank you; you're damn polite. And as usual, we've got right off the point.

Philip The art of conversation!

Thomas Go on six County Councils if you like. But why chuck up seven hundred a year and a directorship if State wants you to keep 'em? And you could have double or more and manage the place if you'd ask for it.

Philip Tommy, I loathe the Madras House. Your Mr State may buy it and do what he likes with it.

JULIA and LAURA arrive. Sunday frocks, Sunday hats, best gloves, umbrellas and prayer books.

Julia Oh, what a surprise!

Philip Yes, we walked down. Ah, you don't know ... Let me introduce Major Hippisly Thomas ... my cousin, Miss Julia Huxtable ... and Miss Huxtable.

Julia How do you do?

Thomas How do you do?

Laura How do you do?

Julia Have you come to see Aunt Amy?

Philip No, your father.

Julia He's walking back with her. They'll be last, I'm afraid.

Laura Will you stay to dinner?

Philip No, I think not.

Laura I'd better tell them you won't. Perhaps they'll be laying for you.

LAURA goes out, decorously avoiding a collision with EMMA, who comes in at the same moment.

Philip Hullo, Emma!

Emma Well, what a surprise !

Philip You don't know ... Major Hippisly Thomas ... Miss Emma Huxtable.

Thomas How do you do?

Emma How do you do? Will you stay to dinner?

Philip No, we can't. I've just brought Thomas a Sunday morning walk to help me tell Uncle Henry a bit of news. My father will be back in England tomorrow.

Emma Oh!

Julia It's a beautiful morning for a walk, isn't it?

Thomas Wonderful for October.

Emma I think he knows.

Philip He sort of knows.

Emma Why are you being odd, Philip?

Philip Emma ... I have enticed a comparative stranger to be present so that your father and mother cannot in decency begin to fight the family battle over again with me. I know it's very cunning, but we did want a walk. Besides, there's a meeting tomorrow ...

EMMA goes to the door and calls through it:

Emma Mother!

Mrs Huxtable *[Off]* Yes, Emma?

Emma Cousin Philip!

Enter MRS HUXTABLE.

Mrs Huxtable What a surprise! Will you stay to dinner?

Emma No, Mother, they can't.

Philip May I introduce my friend ... Major Hippisly Thomas ... my aunt, Mrs Huxtable.

Mrs Huxtable How do you do, Major Thomas?

Philip Thomas is Mr Eustace State's London manager.

Thomas How do you do?

MRS HUXTABLE takes an armchair with the air of mounting a throne, and begins polite conversation. Her daughters distribute themselves, so do PHILIP and

THOMAS.

Mrs Huxtable Not in the Army, then, Major Thomas?

Thomas I was in the Army.

Emma Jessica quite well, Philip?

Philip Yes, thanks.

Emma And Mildred?

Philip I think so. She's back at school.

Mrs Huxtable A wonderfully warm autumn, is it not?

Thomas Quite.

Mrs Huxtable Do you know Denmark Hill well?

Thomas Not well.

LAURA returns.

Mrs Huxtable We have always lived here. I consider it healthy. But London is a healthy place, I think. Oh, I beg your pardon ... my daughter Laura.

Laura How do you do?

EMMA, in a mind to liven things up, goes to the window.

Emma We've quite a good garden, that's one thing.

Thomas I noticed it. I am keen on gardens.

Mrs Huxtable Julia, where are you going?

Julia To take my things off, Mother.

JULIA departs.

Emma That's the Crystal Palace.

Thomas Is it?

Mrs Huxtable Philip, I don't consider your mother's health is at all the thing!

Philip It never is, Aunt Kate.

Mrs Huxtable That's true.

Philip Uncle Henry keeps better, I think.

Mrs Huxtable He's well enough now. I have had a slight cold. Is it true that your father may appear in England again?

Philip Yes. He has only been on the Continent. He arrives tomorrow.

Mrs Huxtable I'm sorry.

Laura Mother!

At this moment arrives MR HUXTABLE himself; one glad smile.

Mr Huxtable Ah, Phil ... I ad an idea you might come over. You'll stay to dinner. Laura, tell your aunt ... she's taking er bonnet off.

LAURA goes out again.

Who's that outside?

Philip Hippisly Thomas. We wanted a walk; we can't stay.

Mr Huxtable Oh.

Mrs Huxtable Have you come on business?

Philip Well ...

Mrs Huxtable On Sunday?

Philip Not exactly.

THOMAS comes from the balcony.

Mr Huxtable Ow are you?

Thomas How are you?

Mr Huxtable Fine morning, isn't it? Nice prospect this ... see the Crystal Palace?

Philip You see, Aunt Katherine, tomorrow afternoon we have the first real conference with this Mr State about buying up the two firms, and my father is passing through England again to attend it.

Mrs Huxtable Of course, Philip, if it's business I know nothing about it. But is it suggested that your uncle should attend too?

Philip My dear aunt, naturally.

Mr Huxtable What's this?

Mrs Huxtable Constantine.

Mr Huxtable That's definite now, is it?

Mrs Huxtable You dropped a hint last night, Henry.

Mr Huxtable I dessay. I dessay I did.

Mrs Huxtable Quite out of the question it seems to me.

LAURA comes back.

Laura Aunt Mary's coming.

Mr Huxtable Oh. My daughter Laura ... Major Thomas, Major Hippisly Thomas.

Laura Yes, Father.

Mrs Huxtable You are naturally not aware, Major Thomas, that for family reasons into which we need not go, Mr Huxtable has not spoken to his brother-in-law for a number of years.

Mr Huxtable Thirty years very near. Wonderful, isn't it? Interested in the same business. Wasn't easy to keep it up.

Thomas I had heard.

Mr Huxtable Oh yes, notorious.

Mrs Huxtable And well it may be, Henry.

MRS MADRAS comes in. She is a pale old lady, shrunk a little, the life gone out of her.

Mrs Huxtable Amy, your husband is in England again.

PHILIP presents a filial cheek. It is kissed.

Philip How are you, Mother?

Mr Huxtable Oh, tact, Katherine, tact!

Philip Perhaps you remember Reggie Thomas?

Thomas I was at Marlborough with Philip, Mrs Madras.

Mrs Madras Yes. Is he, Katherine?

She finds her way to a sofa.

Mrs Huxtable I am utterly unable to see, Philip, why your uncle should break through his rule now.

Mr Huxtable There you are, Phil!

Philip Of course it is quite for Uncle Henry to decide.

Mr Huxtable Naturally ... naturally.

Philip But since Mr State's offer may not be only for the Madras House but Roberts and Huxtable into the bargain ... if the two principal proprietors can't meet him round a table to settle the matter ...

Thomas Yes ... a little awkward ... if I may say so ... as Mr State's representative, Mrs Huxtable.

Mrs Huxtable You don't think, do you, Major Thomas, that any amount of awkwardness should induce us to pass over wicked conduct?

Mr Huxtable. Oh, talk of something else ... talk of something else.

Pause.

Mrs Madras When did you hear from your father?

Philip A letter from Marienbad two or three days ago and a telegram yesterday morning.

Mrs Huxtable And have you left the Army long, Major Thomas?

Thomas Four years.

Mrs Huxtable Now what made you take to the Drapery Trade?

Philip Mr State is an American financier, Aunt Kitty, who has bought up Burrow's, the big mantle place in the city, and is about to buy us up too, perhaps.

Mrs Huxtable We are not in difficulties, I hope.

Philip Oh, no.

Mrs Huxtable No. No doubt Henry would have told me if we had been.
There appears up the steps and along the balcony the last arrival from Church, MINNIE.

Mr Huxtable Ullo! Where have you been?

Minnie I went for a walk.

Mrs Huxtable A walk, Minnie! Where to?

Minnie Just the long way home. I thought I'd have time.

Laura Did you notice what a short sermon?

Mr Huxtable Oh, may I .. . My daughter Minnie ... Major Ippisly Thomas.

Minnie How d'you do?

Thomas How d'you do?

Minnie How d'you do, Philip?

Philip How d'you do?

Mr Huxtable By the way, Phil, remind me to ask you something before you go ... rather important.

Philip I shall be at your place in the morning. Thomas is coming to go through some figures.

Mr Huxtable Yes ... I shan't.

Philip The State meeting is in Bond Street, three o'clock.

Mr Huxtable I know, I know. I'm slacking off, Major Thomas, slacking off. Ever since I was ill I've been slackening off.

Mrs Huxtable You are perfectly well now, Henry.

Mr Huxtable Not the point. I want leisure, you know, leisure. Time for reading ... time to think a bit.

Mrs Huxtable Nonsense! Major Thomas will excuse me.

Mr Huxtable Oh, well ... a man must ... some portion of his life ...

Thomas Quite. I got most of my reading done early.

Mrs Huxtable The natural time for it.

Mr Huxtable Ah lucky feller! Educated, I suppose. Well, I wasn't. I've been getting the books for years - good editions. I'd like you to see my library. But these geniuses want settling down to ... if a man's to keep pace with the thought of the world, y'know. Macaulay, Erbert Spencer, Grote's Istory of Greece! I've got em all there.

Mrs Huxtable I thought the sermon dull this morning, Amy, didn't you?

Mrs Madras No, I didn't.

Minnie Mother, somebody ought to speak about those boys ... it's disgraceful. Mr Vivian had actually to turn round from the organ at them during the last hymn.

JULIA re-appears.

Mr Huxtable Ah, my daughter Julia ... Major -

Julia We've been introduced, Father.

Mr Huxtable Oh, I beg pardon.

Mrs Huxtable Close the door, please, Julia.

Julia I'm sorry, Mother.

PHILIP closes the offending door. JULIA obliterates herself in a chair, and the conversation comes to an intolerable standstill. At last LAURA makes an effort.

Laura Is Jessica quite well, Philip?

Philip Yes thank you, Laura.

Mrs Huxtable And dear little Mildred?

Philip Yes thank you, Aunt Kate.

Further standstill.

Minnie Do you still like that school for her?

Philip It seems to provide every accomplishment that money can buy.

Mrs Huxtable Have you been away for the summer, Major Thomas?

Thomas Oh ... yes ...

Philip Tommy and Jessica and I took our holidays motoring around Munich and into it for the operas.

Mrs Huxtable Was that pleasant?

Philip Very.

Mrs Huxtable And where was dear Mildred?

Philip With her aunt most of the time ... Jessica's sister-in-law, you know.

Minnie Lady Ames?

Philip Yes.

Mrs Huxtable Very nice for her.

Mr Huxtable We take a Ouse at Weymouth as a rule.

Mrs Huxtable Do you know Weymouth, Major Thomas?

Thomas No, I don't.

Mrs Huxtable George III used to stay there, but that is a hotel now.

Mr Huxtable Keep your spare money in the country, y' know.

Mrs Huxtable Oh, and there is everything one wants at Weymouth. You think

more of Bognor, Amy, I know.

Mrs Madras Only to live in, Katherine.

The conversation is dead.

Mr Huxtable I'm going, to change my coat.

Philip I think perhaps we ought to be off.

Mr Huxtable No, no, no, no, no, I shan't be a minute. Don't go, Phil; there's a good fellow.

He goes.

Philip Do you like this house better than the old one, Laura?

Laura It has more rooms, you know.

Mrs Huxtable Do you live in London, Major Thomas?

Thomas No, I live at Woking. I come up and down every day. I think the country's better for the children.

Mrs Huxtable Not a cheerful place, is it?

Thomas Oh, very cheerful!

Mrs Huxtable I had thought not for some reason.

Emma The cemetery, Mother.

Mrs Huxtable Perhaps.

Minnie And of course there's a much larger garden. We have the garden of the next house as well.

Laura Not all the garden of the next house.

Minnie Well, most of it.

This stimulating difference of opinion takes them to the balcony. PHILIP follows. JULIA follows PHILIP.

Julia Do you notice how near the Crystal Palace seems? That means rain.

Philip Of course ... you can see the Crystal Palace.

Mrs Huxtable Julia, do you think you won't catch cold on the balcony without a hat?

Julia I don't think so, Mother.

Mrs Huxtable Yes, we used to live not so far along the hill; it certainly was a smaller house.

Philip That's Ruskin's house, is it? Yes, I see the chimney pots.

Mrs Huxtable I should not have moved, myself, but I was overruled.

Emma Mother, we had grown out of Hollybank.

Mrs Huxtable I was overruled. Things are done on a larger scale than they used

to be. Not that I approve of that.

Thomas Of course one's family will grow up.

Mrs Huxtable People spend their money now-a-days. I remember my father's practice was to live on half his income. However, he lost the greater part of his money by unwise investments in lead, I think it was. I was at school at the time in Brighton. And he educated me above my station in life.

Minnie Julia, the Agapanthus is out at last.

Julia Oh!

They crowd in to see it. PHILIP crowds in, too.

Mrs Huxtable We are told that riches are a snare, Major Thomas.

Thomas It is one I have always found easy to avoid, Mrs Huxtable.

Mrs Huxtable And I have noticed that their acquisition seldom improves the character of people in my station of life. I am of course ignorant of my husband's affairs ... that is to say, I keep myself as ignorant as possible ... but it is my wish that the ordering of our household should remain as it was when we were first married.

Thomas *[Forestalling a yawn]* Quite so. Quite so.

Mrs Huxtable A family of daughters, Major Thomas ...

Emma Mother!

Mrs Huxtable What is it, Emma?

But EMMA thinks better of it and goes to join the Agapanthus party, saying -

Emma Nothing, Mother, I beg your pardon.

Mrs Huxtable What were we saying?

Thomas A family of daughters.

Mrs Huxtable Yes. Were you in the war?

Thomas I was.

Mrs Huxtable I find that people look differently on family life to what they used. A man no longer seems prepared to marry and support a wife and family by his unaided exertions. I consider that a pity.

Thomas *[Near another yawn]* Quite ... quite so.

Mrs Huxtable I have always determined that my daughters should be sought after for themselves alone. That should ensure their happiness. Any eligible gentleman who visits here constantly is always given to understand, delicately, that nothing need be expected from Mr Huxtable beyond his approval. You are married, I think you said, Major Thomas.

Thomas Yes, oh, dear me, yes.

Mrs Huxtable And a family?

Thomas Four children ... the youngest is only three.

Mrs Huxtable Pretty dear!

Thomas No, ugly little beggar, but has character.

Mrs Huxtable I must take off my things before dinner. You'll excuse me. If one is not punctual oneself ...

Thomas Quite.

Mrs Huxtable We cannot induce you to join us?

Thomas Many thanks, but we have to meet Mrs Phil for lunch in town at two.

Mrs Huxtable I am sorry.

THOMAS opens the door for her with his best bow and she graciously departs. MINNIE, who has now her things to take off, crosses the room, saying to PHILIP, who follows her from the balcony -

Minnie Yes, I'll tell father, Philip. I'm going upstairs.

THOMAS opens the door for her, but only with his second best bow, and then turns to PHILIP with a sigh.

Thomas Phil, we ought to be going.

Philip Wait till you've seen my uncle again.

Thomas All right.

Philip How long do you stay in town, Mother?

Mrs Madras I have been here a fortnight. I generally stay three weeks.

Philip Jessica has been meaning to ask you to Phillimore Gardens again.

Mrs Madras Has she?

Philip Her time's very much occupied ... with one thing and another.

Mrs Madras I wish to see your father, Philip.

Philip He won't be here long, Mother.

Mrs Madras No, I am sure he won't.

With three strides THOMAS lands himself on to the balcony.

Philip Tommy being tactful! Well, I'll say that you want to see him.

Mrs Madras No, please don't. Tell him that I think he ought to come and see me.

Philip He won't come, Mother.

Mrs Madras No, I know he won't. He came to England in May, didn't he? He was here till July, wasn't he? Did he so much as send me a message?

- Philip** No, Mother.
- Mrs Madras.** What was he doing all the while, Philip?
- Philip** I didn't see much of him. I really don't know what he came back for at all. We could have done this business without him, and anyway it hasn't materialized till now. This is why he's passing through England again. I don't think there's much to be gained by your seeing him, you know.
- Mrs Madras** You are a little heartless, Philip.
- Philip** My dear mother, you and he have been separated for ... how long is it?
- Mrs Madras** I am his wife still, I should hope. He went away from me when he was young. But I have never forgotten my duty. And now that he is an old man and past such sin and I am an old woman, I am still ready to be a comfort to his declining years, and it's right that I should be allowed to tell him so. And you should not let your wife put you against your own mother, Philip.
- Philip** Really!
- Mrs Madras** I know what Jessica thinks of me. Jessica is very clever and has no patience with people who can do their best to be good ... I understand that. Well, it isn't her duty to love me ... at least it may not be her duty to love her husband's mother, or it may be, I don't say. But it is your duty. I sometimes think, Philip, you don't love me any longer, though you're afraid to say so.
- Philip** If I didn't love you, my dear mother, I should be afraid to say so.
- Mrs Madras** When are you to see your father?
- Philip** We've asked him to dinner tomorrow night.
- EMMA comes in briskly.*
- Mrs Madras.** Emma, why do you come bouncing in like that when I'm trying to get a private word with Philip?
- Emma** Really, Aunt Amy, the drawing-room belongs to everyone.
- Mrs Madras** I'm sure I don't know why I come and stay here at all. I dislike your mother intensely.
- Emma** Then kindly don't tell me so. I've no wish not to be polite to you.
- Philip** Emma, I think Uncle Henry ought to attend this meeting tomorrow.
- Mrs Madras** *[Beginning to cry]* Of course he ought. Who is he to go on like this about Constantine! My handkerchief's upstairs.
- Emma** Shall I fetch it for you, Aunt Amy?
- Mrs Madras** No, I'll be a trouble to no one.
- She goes out.*

- Philip** What's more, he really wants to attend it.
- Emma** I'm sorry I was rude ... but she does get on our nerves, you know.
- Philip** Why do you invite her?
- Emma** Oh, we're all very fond of Aunt Amy, and anyhow mother would think it our duty. I don't see how she can enjoy coming though. She never goes out anywhere ... never joins in the conversation ... just sits nursing herself.
- Philip** You're all too good, Emma.
- Emma** Yes. I heard you making fun of Julia in the conservatory. But if one stopped doing one's duty how upside down the world would be! I say ... I suppose I oughtn't to tell you about Julia, but it is rather a joke. You know Julia gets hysterical sometimes when she has her headaches.
- Philip** Does she?
- Emma** Well, a collar marked Lewis Waller¹ came back from the wash in mistake for one of father's. I don't think he lives near here, but it's one of these big steam laundries. And Morgan the cook got it and she gave it to Julia ... and Julia kept it. And when mother found out she cried for a whole day. She said it showed a wanton mind.
- Philip** I don't think that's at all amusing, Emma.
- Emma** Don't you?
- Philip** How old is Julia?
- Emma** She's thirty-four. No ... it is rather dreadful, isn't it? It isn't exactly that one wants to get married. I daresay mother is right about that.
- Philip** About what?
- Emma** Well, some time ago, a gentleman proposed to Minnie. And mother said it would have been more honourable if he had spoken to father first, and that Minnie was the youngest and too young to know her own mind. Well, you know, she's twenty-six. And then they heard of something he'd once done and it was put a stop to. And Minnie was very rebellious and mother cried ...
- Philip** Does she always cry?
- Emma** Yes, she does cry if she's upset about us. And I think she was right. One ought not to risk being unhappy for life, ought one?
- Philip** Are you all happy now, then?
- Emma** Oh, deep down, I think we are. It would be so ungrateful not to be. When one has a good home and ... ! But of course living together

¹ A lead actor, and actor-manager at the Theatre Royal, Haymarket in the mid-1890s.

and going away together and being together all the time, one does get a little irritable now and then. I suppose that's why we sit as mum as maggots when people are here, we're afraid of squabbling.

Philip Do you squabble?

Emma Not like we used. You know till we moved into this house we had only two bedrooms between us, the nursery and the old night nursery. Now Laura and Julia have one each. There wasn't a bigger house to be got here or I suppose we could have had it. They hated the idea of moving far. And it's rather odd, you know, father seems afraid of spending money, though he must have got lots. He says if he gave us any more we shouldn't know what to do with it ... and of course that's true.

Philip But what occupations have you girls?

Emma We're always busy. I mean there's lots to be done about the house and there's calling and classes and things. Julia used to sketch quite well. You mustn't think I'm grumbling, Philip. I know I talk too much. They tell me so.

Philip Why don't you go away, all four of you?

Emma Go away!

Philip Out of it.

Emma Where to?

Philip Ah, that's just it.

Emma How could one? And it would upset them dreadfully. Father and mother don't know that one feels like this at times ... they'd be very grieved.

Philip Emma, people have been worrying your father at the shop lately about the drawbacks of the living-in system. Why don't you ask him to look at home for them?

MR HUXTABLE returns, at ease in a jacket. He pats his daughter on the shoulder.

Mr Huxtable Now run along, Laura ... I mean Emma ... I want a word with your cousin.

Emma Yes, Father.

EMMA obediently disappears.

Philip I've come over, as you asked me to.

Mr Huxtable I didn't ask you.

Philip You dropped a hint.

Mr Huxtable Did I? I dessay I did.

Philip But you must hurry up and decide about the meeting tomorrow.

Thomas and I have got to go.

Mr Huxtable Phil, I suppose you're set on selling.

Philip Quite.

Mr Huxtable You young men! The Madras Ouse means nothing to you.

Philip Nothing unsaleable, Uncle.

Mr Huxtable Well, well, well! Well just a minute, my boy, before your aunt comes down ... she's going on at me upstairs, y'know! Something you must do for me tomorrow, like a good feller, at the shop in the morning. Have you heard this yet about Miss Yates?

Philip No.

Mr Huxtable Disgraceful! Disgraceful!!

Philip She got on very well in Bond Street ... learnt a good deal. She has only been back a few weeks.

Mr Huxtable Learnt a good deal! Oh, come in, Major Thomas. Shut the window if you don't mind; we don't want the ladies to hear this.

THOMAS shuts the window and MR HUXTABLE spreads himself to the awful enjoyment of imparting scandal.

Mr Huxtable I tell you, my boy, up at your place, got hold of she's been by some feller ... some West End Club feller, I dessay ... and he's put her in the ... well, I tell you! Major Thomas will excuse me. Not a chit of a girl, mind you, but first and in our Costume room. Buyer we were going to make her and all!

Philip What do you want me to do?

Mr Huxtable You wait, that's not what's the worst of it. You know Brigstock.

Philip Do I?

Mr Huxtable. Oh, yes, third man in the Osiery.

Philip True.

Mr Huxtable Well ... it seems that more than a week ago Miss Chancellor had caught them kissing.

Philip Caught who kissing?

Mr Huxtable I know it ain't clear. Let's go back to the beginning ... Major Thomas will excuse me.

Thomas Not at all.

Mr Huxtable Wednesday afternoon, Willoughby, that's our doctor, comes up as usual. Miss Yates goes in to see him. Miss Chancellor - that's our ousekeeper, Major Thomas - overears, quite by accident, so she says, and afterwards taxes her with it.

Philip Unwise.

Mr Huxtable No, no, her plain duty ... she knows my principle about such things. But then she remembers about the kissing and that gets about among our young ladies. Somebody stupid there, I grant you, but you know what these things are. And then it gets about about Miss Yates ... all over the shop. And then it turns out that Brigstock's a married man ... been married two years ... secret from us, you know, because he's living in and on promotion and all the rest. And yesterday morning his wife turns up in my office and has hysterics and says her husband's been slandered.

Philip I don't see why Miss Yates should come to any particular harm at our place. A girl's only out of our sight at weekends and then we're supposed to know where she is.

Mr Huxtable Well ... I had er up the day before. And I don't know what's coming over me. I scolded her well. I was in the right in all I said ... but ... Have you ever suddenly eard your own voice saying a thing? Well, I did ... and it sounded more like a dog barking than me. And I went funny all over. So I told her to leave the room. And you must take it on, Phil ... it ought to be settled tomorrow. Miss Yates must have the sack and I'm not sure Brigstock hadn't better have the sack. We don't want to lose Miss Chancellor, but really if she can't hold er tongue at her age ... well, she'd better have ...

Philip Oh, nonsense, Uncle.

Mr Huxtable No, I will not have these scandals in the shop. We've always been free of em ... almost always. I don't want to be hard on the girl. If the man's in our employ and you can find im out ... punish the guilty as well as the innocent ... I'm all for that. But I do not know what's coming over me. Before I got ill I'd have tackled this business like winking. But when you're a long time in bed ... I'd never been ill like that before ... I dunno how it is ... you get thinking ... and things which used to be quite clear don't seem nearly so clear ... and then after, when you start to do and say the things that used to come natural ... they don't come so natural as they did and that puts you off something ...

This is interrupted by the re-appearance of MRS HUXTABLE, lace-capped and ready for dinner.

Mrs Huxtable Is it the fact, Philip, that if your uncle does not attend the meeting tomorrow that this business transaction with Mr - I forget his name - the American gentleman ... and which I of course know nothing about, will be seriously upset?

Mr Huxtable Kitty, I don't see why I shouldn't go. If Constantine chooses to turn up ... that is his business. I needn't speak directly to him ... so to say.

Mrs Huxtable A quibble, Henry.

Mr Huxtable If he's leaving England now for good ...

Mrs Huxtable But you do as you like, of course.

Mr Huxtable I should so like you to be convinced.

Mrs Huxtable Don't prevaricate, Henry. And your sister is just coming into the room. We had better drop the subject.

And in MRS MADRAS does come.

Mr Huxtable Now if Amelia here was to propose seeing im -

Mrs Huxtable Henry ... a little consideration!

Mr Huxtable Well, I want to go, Kitty, and that's all about it. And I dropped a int, I did, to Phil to come over and elp me through it with you. I thought he'd make it seem as if it was most pressing business ... only he asn't ... so as to hurt your feelings less. Because I'd been bound to have told you afterwards or it might have slipped out somehow. Goodness gracious me, here's the Madras House, which I've sunk enough money in these last ten years to build a battleship very nearly ... a small battleship, y'know ... it's to be sold because Phil won't stand by me and his father don't care a button now. Not but what that's Constantine all over! Marries you, Amelia, behaves like a duke and an archangel mixed for eighteen months and then -

Mrs Huxtable Henry!

Mr Huxtable All right, all right. And I'm not to attend this meeting, if you please!

The little storm subsides.

Mrs Madras It's to be sold, is it?

Philip Yes, Mother.

Mrs Madras It was started with my money as well as yours.

Philip Yes, Mother, we know.

Mrs Madras And if that's all you've lost by Constantine, I don't see you've a right to be so bitter against him.

She is still ignored.

Mr Huxtable D'you know, Major Thomas, that twenty years ago when that shop began to be the talk of London, Duchesses have been known to go to all intents and purposes on their knees to him to design them a dress. Wouldn't do it unless he pleased - not unless he approved their figure. Ad Society under his thumb.

Mrs Huxtable No doubt he knew his business.

Mr Huxtable Knew his business! Knew his business! My boy, in the old days ... asked everywhere like one of themselves very nearly! First of his sort to break that barrier. D'you know, it's my belief that if Mrs

Gladstone ad been thirty years younger and a fashionable woman ... he could have had a knighthood.

Mrs Huxtable He was untrue to his wife, Henry.

Mr Huxtable Yes, I know, and Amy did what she should have done. You see it wasn't an ordinary case, Major Thomas. It was girls in the shop. And even though he took em out of the shop ... that's a slur on the whole trade. A man in his position ... you can't overlook that.

Mrs Madras I could have overlooked it if I had chosen.

Philip My dear mother, you were unhappy with my father and you left him ... the matter is very simple.

Mrs Madras I beg your pardon, Philip ... I was not unhappy with him.

Mrs Huxtable Amy, how could you be happy with a man who was unfaithful to you? What nonsense!

LAURA and JULIA, from the balcony, finding the window locked, tap with their finger-nails upon the pane.

Mr Huxtable No, no, they can't come in. *[He mouths at them through the window]* You can't come in.

LAURA mouths back.

Mr Huxtable What? ... No, it isn't ... two minutes yet.

MINNIE returns.

Mr Huxtable. Oh, damn! Well, I beg pardon. Let me introduce ... my daughter Minnie ... Major Thomas.

Minnie We have met, father.

Mr Huxtable Well ... how can I tell ... there are so many of you!

Mrs Huxtable I think, Henry, you had better go to this meeting tomorrow.

Mr Huxtable You think I ought?

Mrs Huxtable You know you ought not.

Mr Huxtable No ... I don't know I ought not. It isn't so easy to know what ought and ought not to be done as you always make out, Kitty. And suppose I just do something wrong for once and see what happens.

Mrs Huxtable Henry, don't say such things.

Mr Huxtable *[To Thomas]* Well, since I've been ill -

EMMA now returns. LAURA and JULIA, finding their exile a little unreasonable, rattle hard at the window.

Mr Huxtable Oh, let 'em in, Phil ... there's a good feller.

Thomas Allow me. *[And he does so.]*

Emma Oh, what's it all been about?

Mrs Huxtable Never mind, Emma.

Mr Huxtable You know, Major Thomas, Constantine could always get the better of me in little things.

Julia Minnie, your frog's dead ... in the conservatory.

Minnie *[Hurrying to the glass house of death]* Oh, dear.

Mr Huxtable ... After the difference I began to write to him as Dear Sir, to this day he'll send me business letters beginning Dear Arry.

Julia I buried it.

Mr Huxtable ... Always at his ease, you know.

Philip I'll try to see you again before you go back to Bognor, Mother.
The gong rings.

We'll be off, Aunt Katherine.

Mrs Huxtable Philip ... never think I mean to be self-righteous about your father. But he made your mother most unhappy when you were too young to know of it ... and there is the example to others, isn't there?

Philip Yes ... of course, Aunt Kate. I know just how you feel about it ... I'm not fond of him either.

Mrs Huxtable My dear boy ... and your own father!

Julia *[With THOMAS on the balcony]* Yes, it means rain ... when you see it so clearly.

Philip Well, see you tomorrow, Uncle Henry.

Mr Huxtable Yes, I suppose so. Oh, and about that other matter....

Philip What can I do?

Mr Huxtable I'll telephone you in the morning.

Philip Good-bye, Mother.

Thomas Good-bye, Mrs Huxtable.

Mrs Huxtable You have excused this domestic discussion, I hope, Major Thomas ... it will happen sometimes.

Thomas I've been most interested.
MINNIE comes back sadly from the frog's grave.

Mr Huxtable You really won't stay to dinner?

Philip Good-bye, Laura.

Thomas Thanks, no. We meet tomorrow.
The general post quickens, the chorus grows confused.

Laura Good-bye.

Thomas Good-bye.

Philip Good-bye, Emma - oh, pardon.

A confusion of crossed hands. Apologies, withdrawals, a treading on toes, more apologies.

Emma Good-bye, Major Thomas.

Philip Now good-bye, Emma.

Thomas Good-bye, Mrs Madras.

Philip Good-bye.

Thomas Good-bye.

The chorus and the general-post continue, until at last PHILIP and THOMAS escape to a tram and a tube and their lunch, while the HUXTABLES sit down in all ceremony to Sunday dinner: roast beef, horse-radish, Yorkshire pudding, brown potatoes, Brussels sprouts, apple tart, custard and cream, Stilton cheese, dessert.

Act Two

The offices of Roberts and Huxtable are tucked away upon the first floor somewhere at the back of that large drapery establishment. The waiting room - the one in which employee sits in shivering preparation for interviews with employer - is one of the very ugliest rooms that ever entered into the mind of a builder and decorator.

MRS BRIGSTOCK, sitting stiffly on the plush bench, in brown quilled hat and coat and skirt, is, one would guess, a clerk of some sort. She is the product of fifteen years or so of long hours and little lunch. She sits twisting her gloved hands, pulling at a loose thread, now and then biting it. Otherwise she bites her lips; her face is drawn and she stares in front of her with only a twist of the eye now and then towards her husband, MR BRIGSTOCK who is uncomfortable upon a chair a few feet away.

On the other side of the room sits MISS CHANCELLOR, the company's Housekeeper. She is planted squarely on her chair, as it might be in easy authority, but looking closely, one may see that it is a dignified resentment keeping her there unmoving.

In the middle of the room by the table sits MISS YATES. She is not a lady, nor is she well educated, and ten years' shop-assisting has left its marks on her.

They wait silently and the tension increases. At last PHILIP comes in briskly, his hat on, a number of unopened letters in his hand. They get up to receive him with varying degrees of respect and apprehension.

Philip Good morning, Miss Chancellor. Good morning, Miss Yates. Good morning, Mr Brigstock.

Mr Brigstock *[Introducing her]* Mrs Brigstock.

PHILIP nods pleasantly to MRS BRIGSTOCK, who purses her lips in a half frightened, half-vengeful way, and sits down again. Then he puts his hat on the mantelpiece and settles himself in the master position at the table.

Philip I'm afraid I've kept you waiting a little. Well, now -
There is a sharp knock at the door.

Philip Come.

Enter BELHAVEN who is seventeen, perhaps, on the climb from office boy to clerk.

Philip Oh, good morning, Bellhaven.

Belhaven I've put Major Thomas in your room, sir, as the papers were there, but Mr Huxtable's is empty if you'd like ...

Philip No, this'll do.

Belhaven Major Thomas said would you speak to him for a minute as soon as you came.

Philip I'll go in now.

Belhaven Thank you, sir.

Philip *[To the waiting four]* Excuse me one minute, please.

BELHAVEN bolts back his outer office and PHILIP goes to find THOMAS through the other. There is silence again. At last MRS BRIGSTOCK, least able to bear it, gives one desperate wriggle fidget.

Mr Brigstock Will you sit here, Freda, if you feel the draught?

Mrs Brigstock No, thank you.

Silence again, but soon broken by PHILIP, who comes from the other room, throwing over his shoulder 'All right, Tommy.'

Philip Well, now ...

Mrs Brigstock It's slander, Mr Madras, and I request that it shall be retracted immediately ... before everybody ... in the public press ... by advertisement.

Mr Brigstock Oh, Freda ... not so eadstrong.

Philip Miss Chancellor.

Chancellor Yes, sir.

Philip I think we might inform Mrs Brigstock that we're sorry the accusation has become so public ... it has naturally caused her some pain.

Mrs Brigstock I don't believe it ... I didn't believe it ... if I'd have believed it -

Mr Brigstock Oh, Freda!

Chancellor I saw them kissing. I didn't know Mr Brigstock was a married man. And even if I had known it ... I saw them kissing.

Miss Yates. Oh ... what sort of a kiss?

Chancellor Are there different sorts of kisses, Miss Yates?

Miss Yates Well ... aren't there?

Mrs Brigstock He owns he did that, and he knows he shouldn't have and he asked my pardon ... and whose business is it, but mine ... ?

Mr Brigstock Oh, Freda!

Mrs Brigstock Hussy to let him ... hussy ... hussy!

Philip Mrs Brigstock.

Miss Yates All right ... Mr Madras, I don't mind.

Philip But I do. Mrs Brigstock, I shall not attempt to clear up this business unless we can all manage to keep our tempers.

Miss Yates I've been friends with Mr Brigstock these twelve years. We both came into the firm together ... and I knew he was married ... p'raps I'm the only one that did. And when I told him ... all I chose to tell him as to what had happened to me ... I asked him to kiss me just to show he didn't think so much the worse of me. And he gave me one kiss ... here *(she dabs with one finger the left top corner of her*

- forehead*) and that is the truth of that.
- Philip** You might have given this explanation to Miss Chancellor.
- Miss Yates** She wouldn't have believed it.
- Chancellor** I don't believe it.
- Mrs Brigstock** William! William!! William!!!
- Mr Brigstock** Freda, be quiet ... haven't I sworn it to you on the Bible?
- Chancellor** I may say I have known other young ladies in trouble and whether they behaved properly or improperly under the circumstances ... and I've known them behave both ... they did not confide in their gentlemen friends ... without the best of reasons.
- Philip** There is no reason that they shouldn't, Miss Chancellor.
- Chancellor** They didn't.
- Miss Yates** Well ... I did.
- Chancellor** I had no wish for the scandal to get about. I don't know how it happened.
- Miss Yates** Ask your little favourite, Miss Jordan, how it happened.
- Chancellor** Mr Madras, if I am to be accused of favouritism -
- Philip** Yes, yes ... we'll keep to the point, I think.
- Chancellor** If Mr Brigstock wasn't the man -
- Mrs Brigstock** William!
- Chancellor** Why shouldn't she tell me who it was?
- Miss Yates** Why should I?
- Chancellor** Am I here to look after the morals of these young ladies or am I not?
- Mrs Brigstock** A set of hussies.
- Mr Brigstock** Freda, you'll get me the sack!
- Philip** Brigstock, if I wished to give any one the sack, I should not be taking the trouble to discuss this with you all in - I hope - a reasonable way.
- Mrs Brigstock** Oh, give him the sack, if you please, Mr Madras. It's time he had it for his own sake.
- Mr Brigstock** No, Freda!
- Mrs Brigstock** You've got your way to make in the world, haven't you? He's got to start on his own like other people, hasn't he?
- Mr Brigstock** In time, Freda.
- Mrs Brigstock** Now's the time. If you're not sick of the life you lead ... seeing me

once a week for an hour or two ... then I am. And this libel and slander makes about the last straw, I should think.

Philip How long have you been married, Mrs Brigstock?

Mrs Brigstock Four years.

Philip Four years!

Mrs Brigstock Four years!

Philip My dear Brigstock, why not have come to the firm and told them? It could have been arranged for you to live out with your wife.

Mr Brigstock Well, I have been thinking of it lately, sir, but I never seem to happen on a really likely moment. I'm afraid I'm not a favourite in my department.

Mrs Brigstock No fault of his!

Mr Brigstock And its sometimes a very little thing makes the difference between a feller's going and staying ... when all those that aren't wanted are cleared out after sale time, I mean, for instance. And of course, the thirty pound a year they allow you to live out on does not keep you ... it's no use my saying it does. And when you're married ...

Mrs Brigstock I agreed to it. I have my profession too. We've been saving quicker. It's three hundred pounds now, all but a bit ... that's enough to start on. I've got my eye on the premises. It's near here, I don't mind telling you. Why shouldn't we do as well as others ... and ride in our carriages when we're fifty!

Mr Brigstock Well, I've asked advice ...

Mrs Brigstock You think too much of advice. If you'd value yourself higher! Give him the sack, if you please, Mr Madras, and I'll say thank you.

Miss Yates He has asked my advice, and I've told him to stay where he is.

Mrs Brigstock Oh, indeed!

Miss Yates. He's as steady as can be. But his appearance is against him.

Mrs Brigstock Well, I never!

Mr Brigstock A feller does think of the future, Marion.

Miss Yates I wouldn't if I were you. I don't know where we all get to when we're fifty and I've never met anyone who did. We're not in the shop any longer, most of us, are we? And we're not all in our carriages.

Mr Brigstock I suppose it can be done.

Miss Yates Oh ... premises near here and three hundred pounds. Perfect foolery and William ought to know it is. This firm'll undersell you and eat you up and a dozen more like you ... and the place that's trusted you for your stock will sell up every stick and there you'll

be in the gutter. I advised him to own up to you and live out and do the best he could.

Mrs Brigstock I'm much obliged I'm sure ... I've my own opinion ...

Philip You've no children, Mrs Brigstock?

Mrs Brigstock No, I've no children. How can you save when you have children? But if it was his child this hussy was going to have and I thought God wouldn't strike him dead on the spot, I'd do it myself, so I would ... and he knows I would.

Mr Brigstock Haven't I taken my oath to you, Freda?

Mrs Brigstock How can I tell if he's speaking the truth ... I ask you how can I tell? I lie awake at night away from him till I could scream with thinking about it. And I do scream as loud as I dare ... not to wake the house. And if somebody don't open that window, I shall go off.

Philip Open the window, please, Mr Brigstock.

Mr Brigstock opens the window.

Miss Yates Look here, don't you worry. I could have married William if I'd wanted to. That ought to be proof enough.

Mr Brigstock There you are, Freda.

Miss Yates Before he knew you.

Mrs Brigstock Did you ask her?

Miss Yates No, he never asked me ... but you know what I mean.

Mrs Brigstock Yes, I know. Oh, I don't believe it really.

Chancellor Do you wish me still to remain, Mr Madras?

Philip One moment.

Miss Yates Oh, you'll excuse my back, sir.

Philip I don't think I need detain you any longer, Mr and Mrs Brigstock. Your character is now quite clear in the firm's eyes, Brigstock, and I shall see that arrangements are made for you to live out in the future. I apologise to you both for all this unpleasantness.

Mr Brigstock Well ... thank you ... sir ... and ...

Mrs Brigstock No, William.

Mr Brigstock All right, Freda! We are very much obliged to you, sir, but I do not see how I can remain with the firm unless there has been, with regard to the accusation, some definite retraction.

Philip My good man, it is retracted.

Mrs Brigstock Publicly.

Philip Nonsense, Mrs Brigstock.

- Mrs Brigstock** Is it indeed ... how would you like it? Well, I beg pardon. I'm sure we're very sorry for Miss Yates and I wish she were married.
- Miss Yates** So do I!
- Chancellor** Then you wicked girl, why didn't you say so before ... when I wished to be kind to you? And we shouldn't all be talking in this outrageous indecent way. I never did in all my life. I don't know how I manage to sit here. Didn't I try to be kind to you?
- Miss Yates** Yes, and you tried to cry over me. No, I don't wish I were married.
- Mr Brigstock** Of course it's not for me to say, Marion, but will the way you're going on now stop the other young ladies tattling?
- Mrs Brigstock** How's Mr Brigstock to remain in the firm if Miss Chancellor does?
- Philip** That is my business, Mrs Brigstock.
- Chancellor** What ... when I saw him kissing her ... kissing her!
- Mrs Brigstock** William!
- Philip** That has been explained.
- Chancellor** No, Mr Madras, while I'm housekeeper here I will not countenance loose behaviour. I don't believe one word of these excuses.
- Philip** This is just obstinacy, Miss Chancellor.
- Chancellor** And personally I wish to reiterate every single thing I said.
- Mrs Brigstock** Then the law shall deal with you.
- Chancellor** You can dismiss me at once, if you like, Mr Madras.
- Mrs Brigstock** It's libellous ... it's slander ... !
- Mr Brigstock** Oh, Freda, don't.
- Mrs Brigstock** Yes, and she can be put in prison for it.
- Chancellor** If Miss Yates and Mr Brigstock stay with this firm, I go.
- Mrs Brigstock** And she shall be put in prison ... the cat.
- Mr Brigstock** Don't, Freda!
- Mrs Brigstock** The heartless cat! Do you swear it isn't true, William?
- Philip** Take your wife away, Brigstock.
- Mrs Brigstock** Yes, and he takes himself away ... leaves the firm, I should think so, and sorry enough you'll be before we've done. I'll see what the law will say to her ... and they're not a hundred yards off ... on the better side of the street too and a plate glass window as big as yours.
- Mr Brigstock** Do be quiet, Freda!
- Mrs Brigstock** Three hundred pounds and how much did Maple have when he

started ... or Whiteley ... and damages what's more ... And me putting up with the life I've led ... !

MRS BRIGSTOCK is a mass of sobs. BRIGSTOCK edges her towards the door.

Philip Wait ... wait ... wait. You can't go into the passage making that noise.

Mr Brigstock Oh, Freda, you don't mean it.

Mrs Brigstock I'm sure I hope I've said nothing unbecoming a lady ... I didn't mean to.

Philip Not at all ... it's natural you should be upset.

Mrs Brigstock And we're very much obliged for your kind intentions to us ...

Philip Wait till you're quite calm.

Mrs Brigstock Thank you. You needn't hold me, William.

WILLIAM follows her out. PHILIP comes back to his chair.

Philip I'm afraid you've put yourself in the wrong, Miss Chancellor.

Chancellor One often does, sir, in doing one's duty. Thirty years have I been with the firm ... only thirty years. I will leave tomorrow.

Philip I hope you recognize it will not be my fault if you have to.

Chancellor Miss Yates can obviate it. She has only to speak the truth.

Philip Miss Chancellor, are we quite appreciating the situation from Miss Yates's point of view? Suppose she were married?

Miss Yates I'm not married.

Philip But if you told us you were, we should have to believe you.

Chancellor Why, Mr Madras?

Philip It would be good manners to believe her. We must believe so much of what we're told in this world.

Miss Yates Well, I did mean to stick that up on you ... if anyone wants to know. I bought a wedding ring, and I had it on when I saw Dr Willoughby. But when she came in with her long face and her 'What can I do for you, my poor child?' ... well, I just couldn't ... I suppose the Devil tempted me and I told her the truth.

Philip That's as I thought, so far. Miss Yates, have you that wedding ring with you?

Miss Yates Yes, I have ... it's not real gold.

Philip Put it on.

Miss Yates, having fished it out of a petticoat pocket, rather wonderingly does so.

Philip Now where are we, Miss Chancellor?

Chancellor I think we're mocking at a very sacred thing, Mr Madras.

Miss Yates Yes ... and I won't now.

She slams the ring upon the table.

Philip True ... true ... I beg both your pardons. But suppose the affair had not got about, Miss Yates?

Miss Yates Well ... I should have had a nice long illness. It'd all depend on whether you wanted me enough to keep my place open.

Philip You are an employee of some value to the firm.

Miss Yates I reckoned you would. Miss McIntyre'd be pleased to stay on a bit now she's quarrelled with her fiance. Of course if I'd only been behind the counter ...

Chancellor This is how she brazened it out to me, Mr Madras. This is just what she told Mr Huxtable ... and you'll pardon my saying he took a very different view of the matter to what you seem to be taking.

Miss Yates Oh, I've got to go now I'm found out ... I'm not arguing about it.

Chancellor Mr Madras, what sort of notions are you fostering in this wretched girl's mind?

Philip I was trying for a moment to put myself in her place.

Chancellor You will excuse me saying, sir, that you are a man ...

Philip Not at all!

Chancellor Because a woman is independent and earning her living, she's not to think she can go on as one pleases. If she wishes to have children, Providence has provided a way in the institution of marriage. Miss Yates would have found little difficulty in getting married, I gather.

Miss Yates Living in here for twelve years !

Chancellor Have you been a prisoner, Miss Yates? Not to mention that there are two hundred and thirty-five gentlemen employed here.

Miss Yates Supposing I don't like any of em.

Chancellor My dear Miss Yates, if you are merely looking for a husband as such ... well ... we're all God's creatures, I suppose. Personally, I don't notice much difference in men, anyway.

Miss Yates Nor did I.

Chancellor Lack of self-control ...

Miss Yates Is it!

Chancellor ... And self-respect. That's what the matter is. Are we beasts of the field, I should like to know? I simply do not understand this unlady-like attitude towards the facts of life. Is there nothing for a woman to do in the world but to run after men ... or pretend to run away from them? I am fifty-eight ... and I have passed, thank God,

a busy and a happy and I hope a useful life ... and I have never thought any more or less of men than I have of any other human beings ... or any differently. I look upon spinsterhood as an honourable state, as my Bible teaches me to. Men are different. But some women marry happily and well ... and all women can't ... and some can't marry at all. These facts have to be faced, I take it.

Philip We may take it that Miss Yates has been facing them.

Chancellor Yes sir, and in what spirit? I have always endeavoured to influence the young ladies under my control towards the virtues of modesty and decorum ... so that they may regard either state with an indifferent mind. If I can no longer do that, I prefer to resign my charge. I will say before this young person that I regret the story should have got about. But when anyone has committed a fault, it seems to me immaterial who knows of it.

Philip Do you really think so?

Chancellor Do you require me any more now?

Philip I am glad to have had your explanation. We'll have a private talk tomorrow.

Chancellor Thank you, sir. I think that will be more in order. Good morning.

Philip Good morning.

MISS CHANCELLOR exits.

Miss Yates I'm sure she's quite right in all she says.

Philip She may not be. But are you the sort of woman to have got yourself into a scrape of this kind, Miss Yates?

Miss Yates I'm glad you think I'm not, sir.

Philip Then what on earth did you go and do it for?

Miss Yates I don't know. I didn't mean to.

Philip Why aren't you married?

Miss Yates That's my business. Oh ... I've thought of getting married any time these twelve years. But look what happens ... look at the Brigstocks ...

Philip No, no no ... that's not what I mean. Why aren't you to be married even now?

Miss Yates I'd rather not say.

Philip Very well.

Miss Yates I'd rather not talk about that part of it, sir, with you, if you don't mind. I took the risk. I knew what I was about. I wanted to have my fling. And it was fun for a bit. That sounds horrid, I know, but it was.

- Philip** Miss Yates, I've been standing up for you, haven't I?
- Miss Yates** Yes.
- Philip** That's because I have unconventional opinions. But I don't do unconventional things.
- Miss Yates** Why don't you?
- Philip** I shouldn't do them well. Now you start on this adventure believing all that the other people say, so I'm not happy about you. As man to man, Miss Yates ... were you in a position to run this risk?
- Miss Yates** Yes ... I shall be getting a hundred and forty a year living out. I've planned it all. There's a maisonette at Raynes Park and I can get a cheap girl to look after it and to take care of ... I shall call him my nephew, like the Popes of Rome used to ... or why can't I be a widow? I can bring him up and do him well on it. Insurance'll be a bit stiff in case anything happens to me. But I've got nearly two hundred saved in the bank to see me through till next summer.
- Philip** Where are you going when you leave here? What relations have you?
- Miss Yates** I have an aunt. I hate her.
- Philip** Where are you going for the winter?
- Miss Yates** Evercreech.
- Philip** Where's that?
- Miss Yates** I don't know. You get to it from Waterloo. I found it in the A.B.C.
- Philip** But my dear girl ... !
- Miss Yates** Well, I want a place where nobody knows me, so I'd better go to one which I don't know, hadn't I? I always make friends. I'm not afraid of people. And I've never been in the country in the winter. I want to see what it's like.
- Philip** Well ... granted that you don't want a husband ... it's your obvious duty to make the man help you support his child.
- Miss Yates** I daresay. But I won't. I've known other girls in this sort of mess - one or two ... with everybody being kind to them and sneering at them. And there they sat and cried and were ashamed of themselves! What's the good of that? And the fellows hating them. Well, I don't want him to hate me. He can forget all about it if he likes ... and of course he will. I started by crying my eyes out. Then I thought that if I couldn't buck up and anyway pretend to be pleased and jolly well proud, I might as well die. And d'you know when I'd been pretending a bit, I found that I really was pleased and proud.... And I am really proud and happy about it now sir ... I am not pretending. I daresay I've done wrong ... perhaps I ought to

come to grief altogether, but -

A telephone on the table rings.

Miss Yates Oh, I beg pardon.

Philip Excuse me. *(Then answering)* Yes. Who? No, no, no ... State. Mr State. Put him through ... Morning! Who? My father ... not yet. Yes, from Marienbad.

Miss Yates gets up.

Miss Yates Shall I ...

Philip No, no; it's all right.

BELHAVEN knocks, comes in and stands waiting by PHILIP, who telephones on.

Philip Yes? Well? ... Who ... Mark who? ... Aurelius.² No. I've not been reading him lately ... Certainly I will ... Thomas is here doing figures.... d'you want him ... I'll put you through.... No, wait. I'll call him here, if it's not private. *[Calling out]* Tommy!

Belhaven Major Thomas is in the counting house, sir.

Philip Oh ... If you'll hold the line I can get him in a minute ... Say Mr State's on the telephone for him, Belhaven.

Belhaven Yes, sir ... and Mrs Madras is below in a taxicab, sir, and would like to speak to you. Shall she come up or, if you're too busy to be interrupted, will you come down to her?

Philip My mother?

Belhaven No, not Mrs Madras ... your Mrs Madras, sir.

Philip Bring her up. And tell Major Thomas.

Belhaven Yes, sir.

Belhaven exits.

Philip Where were we?

Miss Yates It is hot in here, isn't it?

Philip The window's open.

Miss Yates Shall I shut it?

She turns and goes to the window.

Philip What's the matter, Miss Yates?

Miss Yates Oh, I'm sure Miss Chancellor can't expect me to marry one like that now ... can she?

Philip Marry who?

² This reference to Marcus Aurelius is an obscure in-joke, involving a debate in Shaw's 'Misalliance', premiered in the same year - 1910 - as this play.

Miss Yates Not that I say anything against Mr Belhaven ... a very nice young man. And, indeed, I rather think he did try to propose last Christmas. The fact is, y'know, it's only the very young men that ever do ask you to marry them here. When they get older they seem to lose heart ... or they think it'll cost too much ... or ... but anyway, I'm sure it's not important ...

Philip There's one more thing I'm afraid I ought to ask you. This trouble hasn't come about in any way by our sending you up to Bond Street, has it?

Miss Yates Oh, of course it was most kind of you to send me to Bond Street to get a polish on one's manners ... but I tell you ... I couldn't have stood it for long. Those ladies that you get coming in there ... well, it does just break your nerve. What with following them about and the things they say you've got to hear, and the things they'll say ... about you half the time ... that you've got not to hear ... and keep your voice low and sweet, and let your arms hang down straight. You may work more hours in this place, and I daresay it's commoner, but the customers are friendly with you.

Philip ... Because, you see, Mr Huxtable and I would feel a little more responsible if it was anyone connected with us who ...

Miss Yates No, you needn't ... indeed you needn't ... I will say there's something in that other place that does set your mind going about men. What he saw in me I never could think ... honestly, I couldn't, though I think a good deal of myself, I can assure you. But it was my own fault, and so's all the rest of it going to be ... my very own ...

Enter THOMAS.

Thomas Here's Jessica.

Philip State on the telephone.

Thomas Thank you ...

JESSICA comes to the open door.

Jessica Am I interrupting?

Philip No, come in, my dear.

Thomas Hullo !

Philip Well, Miss Yates, I want to see if I can that you are not more unfairly treated than people with the courage of their opinions always are.

Thomas Hullo!

Philip Oh, you don't know my wife. Jessica, this is Miss Yates, who is in our costume room. You're not actually working in your department now, I suppose?

Miss Yates I am.

Thomas Hullo! Hullo!

Philip Very well. That'll do now.

Miss Yates Thank you, sir. I'm sure I hope I've not talked too much. I always was a chatterbox, madam.

Philip You had some important things to say, Miss Yates.

Miss Yates Not at all, sir. Good morning, madam.

Jessica Good morning.

Exit MISS YATES.

Thomas They've cut him off!

JESSICA produces an opened telegram, which she hands to PHILIP.

Jessica This ... just after you left.

Philip My dear, coming all this way with it! Why didn't you telephone?

Thomas Hullo ... is that Mr State's office? No! Well ... Counting house, are you still through to it?

Jessica I hate the telephone, especially the one here. Hark at you, Tommy, poor wretch! They put you through from office to office ... six different clerks ... all stupid and all with hideous voices.

PHILIP has now read his telegram.

Philip Well, I suppose she must come if she wants to.

Jessica What'll your father say?

Philip My dear girl ... she has a right to see him if she insists ... it's very foolish. Here, Tommy! *(He ousts him from the telephone and deals expertly with it.)* I want a telegram sent. Get double three double 0 Central, and plug through to my room ... not here ... my room.

Thomas Thank yer.

Jessica Got over your anger at the play last night?

Thomas Oh, sort of play you must expect if you go to the theatre on a Sunday. Scuse me.

Having admiringly sized up JESSICA and her costume, he bolts. PHILIP sits down to compose his telegram in reply. JESSICA hovers.

Philip Can you put her up for the night?

Jessica Yes.

Philip Shall I ask her to dinner?

Jessica She'll cry into the soup ... but I suppose it doesn't matter.

Philip Dinner at eight?
Jessica I sound inhospitable.
Philip Well, I've only said we shall be delighted.
Jessica But your mother dislikes me so. It's difficult to see much of her.
Philip You haven't much patience with her, have you, Jessica?
Jessica Have you?
Philip I've known her longer than you have.
Jessica I only wish she wouldn't write Mildred silly letters about God.
Philip A grandmother's privilege.
Jessica The child sends me on another one this morning ... did I tell you?
Philip No.
Jessica Miss Gresham writes, too. She puts it quite nicely. But it's an awful thing for a school to get religion into it.

Enter Belhaven.

Belhaven Yessir.
Philip Send this at once, please.
Belhaven Yessir.

Exit BELHAVEN. PHILIP starts attending to the little pile of letters he brought in with him. JESSICA, neglected, hovers more widely.

Jessica Will you come out to lunch, Phil?
Philip Lord, is it lunch time!
Jessica It will be soon. I'm lunching with Margaret Inman and Walter Muirhead at the Dieudonné.
Philip Then you won't be lonely.
Jessica Margaret may be if you don't come.
Philip I can't, Jessica. I'm not nearly through.
Jessica Phil, you might come out with me a little more than you do.
Philip My dear, not at lunch time.
Jessica Attractive little woman you'd been scolding when I came in.
Philip Is she?
Jessica Didn't you think so?
Philip D'you know ... I don't find that women attract me.
Jessica What a husband!
Philip D'you want them to?

Jessica Yes ... in theory.

Philip Why, Jessica?

Jessica For my own sake. Last day of Walter's pictures. He has sold all but about five and there's one I wish you'd buy.

Philip Can't afford it.

Jessica I suppose, Phil, you're not altogether sorry you married me.

Philip Good heavens, Jessica! Well, we've got through eleven years, haven't we?

Jessica Are you in the least glad you married me?

Philip My dear ... I don't think about it. Jessica, I cannot keep up this game of repartee.

Jessica I'm sorry, I know I'm interrupting.

Philip No, no; I didn't mean that. These aren't important.

But he goes on with his letters.

Jessica But there are times when I get tired of waiting for you to finish your letters.

Philip I know ... I never quite finish my letters now-a-days. You've got a fit of the idle-fidgets this morning ... that's what brings you after me. Shall we hire a motor car for the week-end?

THOMAS bundles in, saying as he comes ...

Thomas He'll make you an offer for the place here, Phil.

Philip Good.

Jessica Tommy, come out and lunch ... Phil won't.

Thomas I'm afraid I can't.

Jessica I've got to meet Maggie Inman and young Muirhead. He'll flirt with her all the time. If there isn't a fourth I shall be fearfully in the cold.

Philip Oh, Jessica!

Thomas Yes, of course you will. But I'm afraid I can't.

Jessica Well, I won't drive to Peckham again of a morning. Wednesday, then, will you call for me?

Thomas Wednesday?

Jessica Symphony Concert.

Thomas D'you know I'm afraid I can't on Wednesday, either.

Jessica Why not?

Thomas Well ... I'm afraid I can't.

Jessica We settled it only last night. What's the time?

Philip Five to one.

Jessica I must go. I shall be late.

Thomas Have you got a cab?

Jessica I think so.

Thomas We might do the next, perhaps.

Jessica All right, Tommy ... don't be conscience-stricken. But when you change your mind about going out with me, it's pleasanter if you'll find some excuse. Good-bye, you two.

Philip I shall be in by seven, my dear.

Exit JESSICA.

We've so organised the world's work as to make companionship between men and women a very artificial thing.

Thomas Have we?

Philip I think so. What have we got to settle before this afternoon?

Thomas Nothing much. But I want three minutes' talk with you, old man.

Philip Oh!

Thomas D'you mind if I say something caddish?

Philip No.

Thomas Put your foot down and don't have me asked to your house quite so much.

Philip Why not?

Thomas I'm seeing too much of your wife.

Philip My dear Tommy!

Thomas I don't mean one single word more than I say.

Philip Tommy, you always have flirted with Jessica.

Thomas I don't want you to think that I'm the least bit in love with her.

Philip Naturally not ... you've got a wife of your own.

Thomas Right. That's good horse sense.

Philip And though, as her husband, I'm naturally obtuse in the matter ... I really don't think that Jessica is in love with you.

Thomas Not for a single minute.

Philip Then what's the worry, you silly old ass?

Thomas Well, Phil, this is such a damned subtle world. I don't pretend to understand it, but in my old age I have got a sort of rule of thumb experience to go by ... which, mark you, I've paid for.

- Philip** Well?
- Thomas** Phil, I don't like women and I never did ... but I'm hardly exaggerating when I say I married simply to get out of the habit of finding myself once every six months in such a position with one of them that I was supposed to be making love to her.
- Philip** What do they see in you, Tommy?
- Thomas** God knows, old man ... I don't. And the time it took up! Of course I was as much in love with Mary as you like or I couldn't have asked her to marry me. And I wouldn't be without her and the children now for all I ever saw. But I don't believe I'd have gone out of my way to get them if I hadn't been driven to it, old man ... driven to it. I'm not going to start the old game again now.
- Philip** What's the accusation against Jessica? Let's have it in so many words.
- Thomas** She's a very accomplished and a very charming and a very sweet-natured woman. I consider she's an ornament to society.
- Philip** You're quite right, Tommy ... what are we to do with them?
- Thomas** What d'you mean?
- Philip** Well ... what's your trouble with her?
- Thomas** There ain't any yet ... but ... well ... I've been dreading for the last three weeks that Jessica would begin to talk to me about you. That's why I'm talking to you about her. I am a cad!
- Philip** My standing for the County Council must be a most dangerous topic.
- Thomas** But that's just how it begins. Then there's hints ... quite nice ones ... about how you get on with each other. Last night in the cab she was talking about when she was a girl ...
- Philip** I walked home. Tactful husband!
- Thomas** Phil ... don't you be French.
- Philip** But, Tommy, do you imagine that she is unhappy with me?
- Thomas** No, I don't. But she thinks a lot ... when she's bored with calling on people and her music and her pictures. And once you begin putting your feelings into words ... why, they grow.
- Philip** But if she were I'd rather that she did confide in you.
- Thomas** No!
- Philip** Why shouldn't she? You're friends.
- Thomas** Yes ... there's no reason ... but I tell you, it always begins that way.
- Philip** You silly ass ... can't you let a woman talk seriously to you without making love to her?

Thomas Damn it, that's what they say ... but it never made any difference.

Philip Tommy, you're a perfect child!

Thomas I remember when I was twenty-four ... there was one woman ... years older than me ... had a grown-up son. She took to scolding me for wasting my time flirting. Told me she'd done it herself once ... then told me why she'd done it. I kept off kissing her for six weeks and, I'll swear, she never wanted me to kiss her. But I did.

Philip Did she box your ears?

Thomas No ... she said she couldn't take me seriously. Well ... if I'd gone away that would have been priggish. And if I'd stayed I'd have done it again.

Philip Which do you do?

Thomas Oh ... never you mind.

Philip Well ... you have my permission to kiss Jessica if you think she wants you to.

Thomas Thanks, old man ... that's very clever and up to date and all the rest of it ... but I asked you to chuck me out of the house to some extent.

Philip I'm not going to.

Thomas Then you're no friend of mine.

Philip Let us put it quite brutally. If Jessica chooses to be unfaithful to me how am I to stop her ... even if I've a right to stop her?

Thomas If you're not prepared to behave like a decent married man you've no right to be married ... you're a danger.

Philip Also, Tommy, if you caught me making love to your wife you might talk to me ... but you wouldn't to her about it.

Thomas Mary's different. And I'm not making love to your wife! I told you so.

Philip Then if she's making love to you, run away for yourself.

Thomas She isn't making love to me. But if you can't take a hint -

Philip A hint! Well ... I'm dashed!

Thomas Well, old man, I give you fair warning of the sort of fool I am ... and I'll take no more responsibility in the matter.

Philip Don't warn me ... warn Jessica. Tell her you're afraid of making a fool of yourself with her ...

Thomas But that'd be as good as doing it. Good lord, you can't behave towards women as if they were men!

Philip Why not?

Thomas You try it!

Philip I always do.

Thomas No wonder she wants to grumble about you to me.

Philip Look here, Tommy, I know Jessica pretty well. She doesn't want to be made love to.

Thomas Yes, she does. I don't mean that unpleasantly ... but all women do. Some of em want to be kissed and some want you to talk politics ... but the principle's the same.

Philip What a world you live in!

Thomas ... And the difficulty with me is that if I try to talk politics I find they don't know enough about it ... or else that they know too much about it ... and it's simpler to kiss em and have done.

Philip Oh, much simpler!

Thomas But I'm married now and I want a quiet life ...

A knock at the door interrupts him.

Philip Come in.

Enter BELHAVEN.

Belhaven Will you lunch, sir?

Philip What is there?

Belhaven I'm afraid only the Usual, sir.

Philip Can you manage the Usual, Tommy? What is it, Belhaven?

Belhaven Boiled mutton and a jam pudding, I think, sir. Rolypoly.

Thomas Right. I hope it's strawberry jam.

Philip Sure to be. Put it in Mr Huxtable's room, will you ... that's airy.

Belhaven Yessir.

BELHAVEN vanishes.

Thomas Not plum, y'know ... plum's no use.

PHILIP gathers up his papers.

Philip I'll give the wicked woman your message.

Thomas No ... do it off your own bat! She won't mind, then.

Philip Tommy, I cannot assume the turban of the Turk. My sense of humour and my sense of decency towards women won't let me.

Thomas I believe I'd better not have told you.

Philip Why not? Next to telling her, the most commonsense thing to do.

Thomas She won't think so.

Philip She'll have to.

Thomas Phil, d'you ever thank God you're not a woman?

Philip No.

Thomas When I think what most of 'em have to choose between is soft-hearted idiots like me and hard-headed devils like you ... I wonder they put up with us as they do.

Philip You've made it again, Tommy.

Thomas What?

Philip Your one sensible remark. Come along.

Thomas Look here ... what d'you mean by One Sensible Remark? It's like your infernal ...

They go. The room is alone with its ugliness.

Act Three

Three o'clock on the Monday afternoon is when the deal is to be put through, if possible, and it is now five minutes to. MAJOR THOMAS is there, sitting at the table; papers spread before him, racking his brains at a few final figures. PHILIP is there, in rather a school-boyish mood. He is sitting on the table, swinging his legs. MR HUXTABLE is there, too, dressed in his best, important and nervous, and he is talking to MR EUSTACE PERRIN STATE.

MR STATE has a rugged, blood and iron sort of face, utterly belied by his soft, smiling eyes; rightly belied, too, for he has made his thirty or forty millions in the gentlest way - as far as he knows. You would not think of him as a money-maker. As a matter-of-fact, he has no love of money and little use for it, for his tastes are simple. But moneymaking is the honourable career in his own country, and he has the instinct for turning money over and the knack of doing so on a big scale. His shock of grey hair makes him look older than he probably is; his voice is almost childlike in its sweetness. He has the dignity and aptitude for command that power can give.

From the little canopied door comes - he has the gait of a water-wagtail - MR WINDLESHAM, present manager of the establishment. He is a tailor-made man; and the tailor only left off for the wax modeller and wigmaker to begin. For his clothes are too perfect to be worn by anything but a dummy, and his hair and complexion are far from human. Not that he dyes or paints them; no, they were made like that. His voice is a little inhuman, too, and as he prefers the French language, with which he has a most unripe acquaintance, to his own, and so speaks English as much like French as his French is like English, his conversation seems as unreal as the rest of him.

HUXTABLE is making conversation.

Huxtable A perfect barometer, as you might say - when your eye gets used to it.

Windlesham *[To PHILIP; and with a wag of his head back to the other room]*
They're just ready.

State Is it really? The Crystal Palace! But what a sound that has.

Huxtable *[With modest pride]* And a very ealthy locality!

Philip Come along and meet State.

He jumps off the table, capturing WINDLESHAM's arm.

State *[Enthusiastic]* Denmark Hill. Compliment to Queen Alexandra!

Huxtable Was it now?

State Herne Hill ... Herne the Hunter! That's the charm of London to an American. Association. Every spot speaks.

Philip This is Mr Windlesham ... our manager. He's going to show us some new models.

STATE impressively extends a hand and repeats the name.

- State** Mr Windlesham.
- Windlesham** Most happy. I thought you'd like to see the very latest ... brought them from Paris only yesterday.
- State** Most opportune! *[Then with a sweeping gesture]* Mr Philip, this room inspires me. Your father's design?
- Philip** Yes.
- State** I thought so.
- Philip** That used to be his private office.
- State** *[Reverently]* Indeed! Where the Duchess went on her knees! An historic spot. Interesting to me!
- Philip** Something of a legend that.
- STATE, intensely solemn, seems now to ascend the pulpit of some philosophic conventicle.*
- State** I believe in legends, sir ... they are the spiritual side of facts. They go to form tradition. And it is not given to man to found his institutions in security of mind except upon tradition. That is why our eyes turn eastward to you from America, Mr Huxtable.
- Huxtable** *[In some awe]* Do they now?
- State** Has it never struck you that while the progress of man has been in the path of the sun, his thoughts continually go back to the place of its rising? I have at times found it a very illuminating idea.
- Philip** *[Not indecently commonplace]* Well, have them in now, Windlesham, while we're waiting.
- Windlesham** You might cast your eyes over these new girls, Mr Philip ... the very best I could find, I do assure you. Faces are hard enough to get, but figures ... well, there! *[Reaching the little door, he calls through]* Allons Mes'moiselles! Non ... non ... par l'autre porte et a la gauche. *[Then back again]* You get the best effect through a big doorway.
- He further explains this by sketching one in the air.*
- One, two and four first.
- He exhibits some costume drawings he has been carrying, distributes one or two, and then vanishes into the other room, from which his voice vibrates.*
- Windlesham** *[Off]* En avant s'il vous plait. Numero Un! Eh bien ... numero trois. Non Ma'moiselle, ce n'est pas commode ... regardez ce corsage - là ...
- Huxtable** *[Making a face]* What I'm always thinking is, why not have a manly chap in charge of the place up here.
- State** Mr Windlesham may be said to strike a note. Whether it is a right

note ...?

Through the big doorway, WINDLESHAM ushers in a costume from Paris, the very last word in discreet and costly finery, delicate in colour, fragile in texture; a creation. This is hung upon a young lady of pleasing appearance, preoccupied with its exhibition, which she achieves by slow and sinuous, never-ceasing movements. She glides into the room. She wears a smile also.

Windlesham One and two are both Languilliere, Mr Philip. He can't get in the Soupçon Anglais, can he? Won't ... I tell him. Promenez et sortez Ma'moiselle.

The young lady, still smiling and sinuous, begins to circle the room. She seems to be unconscious of its inhabitants, and they in return, rather dreadfully pretend not to notice her, but only the costume.

Windlesham Numero Deux.

Another costume, rakishly inclined, with a hat deliberately hideous. The young lady contained in them is again slow and sinuous and vacantly smiling.

But this is chic, isn't it? Promenez.

State What is the Soupçon Anglais?

Philip A Frenchman will tell you that for England you must first make a design and then spoil it.

Thomas *[Whose attention has been riveted]* Don't they speak English?

Windlesham Oh, pas un mot ... I mean, not a word. Only came over with me yesterday ... these three.

Thomas Because this frock's a bit thick, y'know.

Windlesham Numero Trois!

A third costume, calculated to have an innocent effect. The accompanying young lady, with a sense of fitness, wears a pout instead of a smile.

Philip What's this?

Windlesham *[With a little crow of delight]* That's the new hat. La belle Hélène again!

State *[Interested, still grave]* La belle Hélène. A Parisian firm?

Windlesham *[Turning this to waggish account]* Well ... dear me ... you can almost call her that, can't you?

Suddenly he dashes at the costume and brings it to a standstill.

Oh, mon Dieu, Ma'moiselle! La gorgette ... vous l'avez derangé.

He proceeds to arrange la gorgette to his satisfaction, also some other matters which seem to involve a partial evisceration of the underclothing. The young lady, passive, pouts perseveringly. THOMAS is considerably shocked and whispers violently to PHILIP:

Thomas I say, he shouldn't pull her about like that.

Windlesham *[Skipping back to admire the result]* Là .. comme ça.

The costume continues its round; the others are still circling, veering and tacking, while WINDLESHAM trips admiringly around and about them.

Philip La belle Hélène, Mr State, is a well known Parisian cocotte ... who sets many of the fashions which our wives and daughters afterwards assume.

Mr Huxtable Don't say that, Phil; it's not nice.

Philip Why?

Mr Huxtable I'm sure no ladies are aware of it.

Philip But what can be more natural and right than for the professional charmer to set the pace for the amateur!

Windlesham Quite la haute cocotterie, of course.

State *[Solemnly]* Do you infer, Mr Madras, a difference in degree, but not in kind?

Philip *[Courteously echoing his tone]* I do.

State That is a very far-reaching observation, sir.

Philip It is.

Thomas Do you know the lady personally, Mr. Windlesham?

WINDLESHAM turns, with some tag of a costume in his hand, thus unconsciously detaining the occupier.

Windlesham Oh, no ... oh, dear me, no ... quite the reverse, I do assure you. There's nothing gay in Paris to me. I was blasé long ago.

State But touching that hat, Mr Windlesham.

Windlesham Oh, to be sure. Attendez, mademoiselle.

Tiptoeing, he dexterously tilts the straw hat from the head it is perched on.

Windlesham It's not a bad story. Sortez.

By this two costumes have glided out. The third follows. STATE, who has found it hard to keep his eyes off them, gives something of a sigh.

State If they'd only just smile or wink I might get over the extraordinary feeling it gives me.

WINDLESHAM, caressing the hat, takes up an attitude for his story.

Windlesham Well ... it appears that a while ago out at the Pré Catalan ... there was Hélène, taking her afternoon cup of buttermilk. What should she see but Madame Erlancourt - one knows enough about that lady, of course - in a hat the very twin of hers ... the very twin. Well ... you can imagine! Someone had blundered.

- State** No, I don't follow.
- Philip** Some spy in the service of that foreign power had procured and parted with the plans of the hat.
- State** Madame What's-her-name might have seen it on her before and copied it.
- Philip** Mr State, Hélène doesn't wear a hat twice.
- State** My mistake!
- Windlesham** So there was a terrible scene ...
- Thomas** With madame ...?
- Windlesham** *[Repudiating any such vulgarity]* Oh, no. Hélène just let fly at her chaperone, she being at hand, so to speak.
- State** Her what! *[Then with humorous awe]* No, I beg your pardon ... go on ... go on.
- Windlesham** She fetched in out of the Bois the ugliest little gamine she could find ... put her own hat on its horrid little head ... sat it at her table and stuffed it with cakes. Then she sent to the kitchens for one of those baskets they bring the fish in ... *[He twirls the hat]* ... you see. Then she ripped a yard of lace off her underskirt and twisted it round. Then she took off both her ... well ... La Belle France, you know ... there is something in the atmosphere! It was her garters she took off ... blue silk.
- State** *[Puritan]* In public?
- Windlesham** *[Professional]* Oh ... it can be done. Hooked them together and fastened the bit of lace round the basket this way. Très simple! That's what she wore the rest of the afternoon and back to Paris. This is what's going to be the rage.
- He hands the hat to STATE, who examines it.*
- Philip** La belle Hélène has imagination, Mr State. She is also, I am told, thrifty, inclined to religion, a vegetarian, Vichy water her only beverage; in fact, a credit to her profession and externally ... to ours.
- STATE hands back the hat, with the solemnest humour.*
- State** Mr Windlesham, I am much obliged to you for this illuminating anecdote.
- Windlesham** Not at all ... Will you see the other three?
- State** By all means.
- Windlesham** They won't be long in changing ... but there's one I must just pin on.
- State** No hurry.

He has acquired a new joy in WINDLESHAM, whom he watches dance away. Then a song is heard from the next room ...

Windlesham Allons ... numero cinq ... numero sept ... numero dix. Ma'moiselle Ollivier ... vous vous mettez ...

And the door closes. PHILIP looks at his watch.

Philip But it's ten past three. We'd better not wait for my father.

They surround the table and sit down.

State Major Thomas, have you my memoranda?

Thomas Here.

He hands them to STATE, who clears his throat, refrains from spitting, and begins the customary American oration.

State The scheme, gentlemen, for which I desire to purchase the Madras House and add it to the interest of the Burrows enterprise, which I already control is - to put it shortly - this. The Burrows provincial scheme - you are aware of its purpose - goes well enough as far as the shareholding by the local drapery stores is concerned. It has been interesting to me to discover which aspects of the Burrows scheme suit which cities ... and why. An absorbing problem in the psychology of local conditions! Now, we have eliminated from the mass a considerable number of cases where the local people will not join with us. And in your Leicesters and Norwiches and Plymouths and Coventrys ... there the unknown name, the uninspiring name of Burrows, upon a fire-new establishment next door might anyhow be ineffective. But beyond that I have a reason ... and I hope a not uninteresting reason to put before you gentlemen ... why it is in these provincial centres that we should look to establish our Madras Houses ... New Edition. Is that clear so far ?

During this CONSTANTINE MADRAS has arrived. He turned aside for a moment to the door that the models came from, now he joins the group. A man of sixty, to whom sixty is the prime of life. Tall, quite dramatically dignified, suave, a little remote; he is one of those to whom life is an art of which they have determined to be master. It is a handsome face, Eastern in type, the long beard only streaked with grey. He does not dress like the ruck of men, because he is not of them. The velvet coat, brick-red tie, shepherd's-plaid trousers, white spats and patent boots, both suit him and express him subtly and well - the mixture of sensuous originality and tradition which is the man. PHILIP is purposely casual in greeting him; he has sighted him first. But STATE gets up, impressed. It is part of his creed to recognise greatness; he insists on recognising it.

Philip Hullo, Father!

State Mr. Madras! Proud to meet you again.

Constantine [*Graciously, without emotion*] How do you do, Mr. State.

Philip You know everyone, Father. Oh ... Hippisly Thomas.

Constantine How do you do, sir. *[Then, with a mischievous smile, he pats Huxtable on the shoulder]* How are you, my dear Harry?

Huxtable I'm quite well, thank you.

Constantine, with one more pat in pardon for the rudeness, goes to his chair.

State A pleasant trip on the continent?

Constantine Instructive. Don't let me interrupt business. I shall pick up the thread.

State I was just proceeding to place on the table-cloth some preliminary details of the scheme that has been elaborating since our meeting in June last to consolidate your name and fame in some of the most important cities of England. We had not got far.

He consults his notes. CONSTANTINE produces from a case a slender cigarette holder of amber.

Constantine You've some new models, Phil.

Philip Yes.

Constantine The tall girl looks well enough. May I smoke?

State Allow me. *[Whipping out his cigar case]*

Constantine A cigarette, thank you, of my own.

He proceeds to make and light one. STATE offers cigars generally, and then places one to his own hand.

State I occasionally derive some pleasure from a cold cigar. I was not for the moment entering upon the finance of the matter because I entertain no doubt that ... possibly with a little adjustment of the proportion of shares and cash ... that can be fixed.

Huxtable *[In emulation of all this ease and grace]* I'll ave a cigarette, Phil ... if you've got one.

PHILIP has one. And every one makes himself comfortable, while STATE continues enjoyably . . .

State And I suspect that you are no more interested in money than I am, Mr. Madras. Anyone can make money, if he has capital enough. The little that I have came from lumber and canned peaches. Now, there was poetry in lumber. The virgin forest ... I'd go sit in it for weeks at a time. There was poetry in peaches ... before they were canned. Do you wonder why I bought that mantle establishment in the city?

Philip Why, Mr. State?

State Because, Mr. Philip, I found myself a lonely man. I felt the need of getting into touch with what Goethe refers to as the woman-spirit

... drawing us ever upward and on. That opportunity occurred, and it seemed a businesslike way of doing the trick.

Constantine

And satisfying?

State

I beg your pardon ?

Constantine

Has the ready-made skirt business satisfied your craving for the eternal feminine?

State

Mr. Madras ... that sarcasm is deserved ... No, sir, it has not. The Burrows business, I discover, lacks all inner meaning ... it has no soul. A business can no more exist without a soul than a human being can. I'm sure I have you with me there, Mr. Huxtable.

Poor HUXTABLE quite chokes at the suddenness of this summons, but shines his best.

Huxtable

I should say so, quite.

State

There was fun, mind you ... there still is ... in making these provincial milliners hop ... putting a pistol to their heads ... saying 'Buy our Goods or be Froze Out'. That keeps me lively and it wakes them up ... does them good. But Burrows isn't in the Movement. The Woman's Movement. The Great Modern Woman's Movement. It has come home to me that the man, who has as much to do with Woman as manufacturing the bones of her corsets and yet is not consciously in that Movement is Outside History. Shovelling goods over a counter and adding up profits ... that's no excuse for cumbering the earth ... nothing personal, Mr. Huxtable.

Huxtable

No, no ... I'm listening to you. I'm not too old to learn.

State

Mind, I don't say I haven't taken pleasure in Burrows. We've had Notions ... caused two ideas to spring where one sprung before. There was Nottingham.

Huxtable

I know Nottingham ... got a shop there?

State

In two years the Burrows establishment in Nottingham has smashed competition. I've not visited the city myself. The notion was our local manager's. Simple. The Ladies' department served by gentlemen ... the Gentlemen's by ladies. Always, of course, within the bounds of delicacy. Do you think there is nothing in that, Mr. Huxtable?

Huxtable

Oh ... well ...

State

But are you the Mean Sensual Man?

Huxtable

[Whose knowledge of the French language hardly assists him to this startling translation] No ... I hope not.

State

Put yourself in his place. Surrounded by pretty girls ... good girls, mind you ... high class. Pay them well ... let them live out ... pay

for their mothers and chaperones, if necessary. Well ... surrounded by Gracious Womanhood, does the Sensual Man forget how much money he is spending or does he not? Does he come again? Is it a little Oasis in the desert of his business day? Is it a better attraction than Alcohol, or is it not?

Philip Is it?

State Then, sir . . . Audi Alteram Partem. I should like you to see our Ladies' Fancy Department at its best ... just before the football season.

Philip I think I do!

State Athletes everyone of em ... not a man under six foot ... bronzed, noble fellows! And no flirting allowed ... no making eyes ... no pandering to anything Depraved. Just the Ordinary Courtesies of our Modern Civilisation from Pure Clean-minded Gentlemen towards any of the Fair Sex who step in to buy a shilling sachet or the like. And pay, sir ... The women come in flocks!

Huxtable Is this how you mean to run your new Madras Houses?

State Patience, Mr. Huxtable. It's but six months ago that I started to study the Woman Question from the point of view of Burrows and Co. I attended women's meetings in London, in Manchester, and in one-horse places as well. Now, Political claims were but the narrowest, drabbest aspect of the matter as I saw it. The Woman's Movement is Woman expressing herself. Let us look at things as they are. What are a Woman's chief means ... how often her only means of expressing herself? Anyway ... what is the first thing that she spends her money on? Clothes, gentlemen, clothes. Therefore, I say ... though at Cannon Street we may palp with good ideas ... the ready-made skirt is out of date ...

WINDLESHAM, pins in his mouth, fashion plates under his arm, and the fish-basket hat in his hand, shoots out of the other room.

Windlesham Will you have the others in now? *[Then back through the door]* Allons, Mesdemoiselles si vous plait. Numero cinq le premier. *[Then he turns the hat upside down on the table]* I thought you'd like to see that they've actually left the handles on. But I don't think we can do that here, do you?

There comes in as before the most elaborate evening gown that ever was.

Windlesham *[As he searches for the design]* Numero cinq . . . number five.

Thomas I say ... by Jove !

But the cold, searching light seems to separate from the glittering pink affair the poor, pretty, smiling creature exhibiting it, until, indeed, she seems half naked. MR.

WINDLESHAM'S aesthetic sense is outraged.

Windlesham Mais non, mais non . . . pas en plein jour. Mettez vous par la dans

le . . . dans l'alcove . . . a cote du velours noir.

The costume undulates towards the black velvet platform. THOMAS is lost in admiration.

Thomas That gives her a chance, don't it? Damn pretty girl!

Philip She'll understand that, Tommy.

Thomas She won't mind.

State How they learn to walk like it ... that's what beats me !

WINDLESHAM turns on the frame of lights which bear upon the velvet platform. The vision of female loveliness is now complete.

Windlesham There . . . that's the coup d'oeil.

The vision turns this way and that to show what curves of loveliness there may be. They watch, all but CONSTANTINE who has sat silent and indifferent, rolling his second cigarette, which he now smokes serenely. At last PHILIP's voice breaks in:

Philip And are we to assume, Mr. State, that this piece of self-decoration really expresses the nature of any woman? Rather an awful thought!

Thomas Why?

Philip Or if it expresses a man's opinion of her ... that's rather worse.

Thomas It's damned smart. Ain't it, Mr. Huxtable?

Huxtable *[Who is examining closely]* No use to us, of course. We couldn't imitate that under fifteen guineas. Look at the ... what d'you call it?

Windlesham *[Loving the very word]* Diamante.

Thomas Just for England, of course, you might have the shiny stuff marking a bit more definitely where the pink silk ends and she begins.

Huxtable But it's a beautiful thing.

State Fitted to adorn the presiding genius of some intellectual and artistic salon. More artistic than intellectual perhaps ... more likely to be the centre of Emotion than Thought!

Windlesham I could almost tell you who we shall sell that to. Mrs. ... Mrs. ... dear me ... you'd all know the name. Assez, Mamoiselle ... sortez.

He turns off the light. The vision becomes once more a ridiculously expensive dress, with a rather thin and shivering young person half inside it, who is thus unceremoniously got rid of.

Numero sept.

State Now here again. Green velvet. Is it velvet?

Windlesham Panne velvet. Promenez, s'il vous plait

State And ermine.

Huxtable Good Lord ... more buttons !

State The very thing, no doubt, in which some peeress might take the chair at a drawing-room meeting.

Philip Either of the Humanitarian or of the Anti-Sweating League. Indeed, no peeress could dream of taking a chair without it.

State Sarcasm, Mr. Philip.

Philip I really beg your pardon.

Windlesham Numero dix.

A third costume.

Philip What about this?

State Grey with a touch of pink ... severely soft. An Anti-suffrage Platform.

Philip No ... it's cut square in the neck. Suffrage, I should say.

State *[Rubbing his hands]* Good! There is purpose in this persiflage, Major Thomas. Woman allures us along many paths. Be it ours to attend her, doing what service we may.

Constantine You are a poet, Mr. State.

State I never wrote one in my life, sir.

Constantine How many poets should cease scribbling and try to live such perfect epics as seems likely to be this purchase of yours of the Madras House!

State I shall be proud to be your successor. But it is the Middle Class Woman of England that is waiting for me. The woman who still sits at the Parlour window of her Provincial Villa, pensively gazing through the Laurel bushes. I have seen her on my Solitary Walks. She must have her chance to Dazzle and Conquer. That is every woman's birthright ... be she a Duchess in Mayfair or a doctor's wife in the suburbs of Leicester. And remember, gentlemen, that the Middle Class Women of England ... think of them in bulk ... they form one of the greatest Money Spending Machines the world has ever seen.

Huxtable Yes . . . their husbands' money.

State All our most advanced thinkers are agreed that the economic independence of women is the next step in the march of civilisation.

Huxtable Oh ... I beg pardon.

State And now that the Seed of Freedom is sown in their Sweet Natures ... what Mighty Forest ... what a Luxuriant, Tropical, Scented growth of Womanhood may not spring up around us. For we live in an Ugly World. Look at my tie! Consider your vest, Major

Thomas! *[His eye searches for those costumes, and finds one]* This is all the Living Beauty that there is. We want more of it. I want to see that Poor Provincial Lady burst through the laurel bushes and dash down the road ... Clad in Colours of the Rainbow.

WINDLESHAM has indeed detained the severely soft costume and its young lady, and there she has stood for a while, still smiling, but wondering, perhaps, behind the smile, into what peculiar company of milliners she has fallen. THOMAS, suddenly noticing that she is standing there, with the utmost politeness jumps up to hand his chair.

Thomas I say, though ... allow me.

Windlesham Thank you ... but she can't. Not in that corset.

State Dear me, I had not meant to detain Mademoiselle. *[Then to amend his manners, and rather as if it were an incantation warranted to achieve his purpose]* Bon jour.

The young lady departs, a real smile quite shaming the unreal.

You clean forget they're there. We gave some time and money to elaborating a mechanical moving figure to take the place of ... a real automaton, in fact. But sometimes it stuck and sometimes it ran away ...

Thomas And the cost?

Philip Flesh and blood is always cheaper.

State You approve of corsets, Mr. Windlesham?

Windlesham Oh, yes ... the figure is the woman, as we say.

State Have you ever gone deeply into the Psychology of the question? A while ago I had a smart young Historian write Burrows a little Monograph on Corsets ... price one shilling. Conservative, summing up in their favour. And we made up a little Museum of them ... at Southampton, I think ... but that was not a success. Major Thomas ... we must send Mr. Windlesham a copy of that Monograph. You will find it very interesting.

Windlesham I'm sure I shall. Can I do any more for you?

Philip See me before I go, will you?

Windlesham Then it's au'voir.

And he flutters away. There is a pause as if they had to recollect where they were.

Philip I sometimes wonder if we realise what women's clothes are like ... or our own, for that matter.

Huxtable What's that?

Philip Have you ever tried to describe a costume as it would appear to a strange eye? Can you think of this last? A hat as little like a hat as anything on a creature's head may be. Lace. Flowers of a colour it

never pleases God to grow them. And a jewelled feather . . . a feather with stones in it. The rest might be called a conspiracy in three colours on the part of a dozen sewing women to persuade you that the creature they have clothed can neither walk, digest her food, nor bear children. Now ... can that be beautiful?

State *[To whom this is the real conversational thing]* Mr. Philip, that notion is a lever thrust beneath the very foundations of Society.

Huxtable Oh ... trying to upset people's ideas for the sake of doing it ... silly.

Thomas I think a crowd of well-dressed women is one of the most beautiful things in the world.

Philip Have you ever seen an Eastern woman walk into a Bond Street tea shop?

Thomas No.

Philip I have.

Constantine Ah.

With one long, meditative exhalation he sends a little column of smoke into the air. STATE turns to him deferentially.

State We are boring you, Mr. Madras, I'm afraid. You were Facile Princeps upon all these questions so long ago.

Constantine No, I am not bored, Mr. State ... only a little horrified.

State Why so?

Constantine You see ... I am a Mahommedan ... and this attitude towards the other sex has become loathsome to me.

This bombshell, so delicately exploded, affects the company very variously. It will be some time before HUXTABLE grasps its meaning at all. THOMAS simply opens his mouth. STATE has evidently found a new joy in life. PHILIP, to whom it seems no news, merely says in light protest . . .

Philip My dear Father!

State A real Mahommedan?

Constantine I have become a Mahommedan. If you were not, it would be inconvenient to live permanently at Hit ... a village upon the borders of Southern Arabia ... that is my home. Besides, I was converted.

Thomas I didn't know you could become a Mahommedan.

Constantine You can become a Christian, sir.

Thomas Ah ... not quite the same sort of thing.

State But how very interesting! To a broadminded man ... how extraordinarily interesting! Was it a sudden conversion?

Constantine No ... I had been searching for a religion ... a common need in these times ... and this is a very fine one, Mr. State.

State Is it? I must look it up. The Koran! Yes, I've never read the Koran ... an oversight.

He makes a mental note. And slowly, slowly, the full iniquity of it has sunk into HUXTABLE. His face has gone from red to white and back again to red. He becomes articulate and vehement. He thumps the table.

Huxtable And what about Amelia?

State Who is Amelia?

Philip Afterwards, Uncle.

Huxtable What about your wife? No, I won't be quiet, Phil! It's illegal.

Constantine Harry ... I dislike to see you make yourself ridiculous.

Huxtable Who cares if I'm ridiculous? I've not spoken to you for thirty years ... have I? That is ... I've not taken more notice of you than I could help. And I come here to-day full of forgiveness ... and curiosity ... to see what you're really like now ... and whether I've changed my mind ... or whether I never really felt all that about you at all ... and damned if you don't go and put up a fresh game on me! What about Amelia? Religion this time! Mahommedan, indeed ... at your age! Can't you ever settle down? I beg your pardon, Mr. State. All right, Phil, afterwards! I've not done ... but you're quite right ... afterwards.

State But do you indulge in a Harem ?

HUXTABLE is on his feet, righteously strepitant.

Huxtable If you insult my sister by answering that question . . .

With a look and a gesture CONSTANTINE can silence him. Then with the coldest dignity he replies ...

Constantine My household, sir, is that of the ordinary Eastern gentleman of my position. We do not speak of our women in public.

State I'm sure I beg your pardon.

Constantine Not at all. It is five years since I definitely retired from business and decided to consummate my affection for the East by settling down there. This final visit to Europe ... partly to see you, Mr. State ... was otherwise only to confirm my judgment on the question.

State Has it?

Constantine It has. I was always out of place amongst you. I was sometimes tempted to regret my scandalous conduct ... Hush, Harry ... hush! But I never could persuade myself to amend it. It is some slight personal satisfaction to me to discover ... with a stranger's eye ... that Europe in its attitude towards women is mad.

State Mad!

Constantine Mad.

Thomas I say!

Constantine You possibly agree with me, Major Thomas.

Thomas No ... I don't think so.

Constantine Many men do, but - poor fellows - they dare not say so. For instance, Mr. State, what can be said of a community in which five men of some ability and dignity are met together to traffic in ... what was the Numero of that aphrodisiac that so particularly attracted Major Thomas?

THOMAS is shocked even to violence.

Thomas No ... really. I protest -

State Easy, Major Thomas. Let us consider the accusation philosophically. Surely that is a gross construction to put on the instinct of every beautiful woman to adorn herself.

Constantine Why gross? I delight in pretty women, prettily adorned. To come home after a day's work to the welcome of one's women folk ... to find them unharassed by notions of business or politics ... ready to refresh one's spirit by attuning it to the gentler, sweeter side of life ...

Thomas *[Making hearty atonement]* Oh! Quite so ... quite so.

Constantine I thought you would agree with me. Major Thomas. That is the Mahommedan gentleman's domestic ideal.

Thomas Is it?

Constantine But you don't expect to find your wife dressed like that ... the diamante and the ...

Thomas No ... that was a going out dress.

Philip Oh ... Tommy! Tommy!

Thomas But I tell you if my wife would ... that is, if any chap's wife will ... I mean ... If a woman always kept herself smart and attractive at home then a man would have no excuse for gadding about after other women.

Huxtable She sits looking after his children ... what more does he want of her?

Constantine Harry is a born husband, Major Thomas.

Huxtable I'm not a born libertine, I hope.

Thomas Libertine be damned.

State Gentlemen, gentlemen ... these are abstract propositions.

- Huxtable** Gadding after another man's wife, perhaps! Though I don't think you ever did that, Constantine ... I'll do you justice ... I don't think you ever did.
- Constantine** I never did.
- Philip** Oh, Tommy, Tommy ... can you say the same ?
- Thomas** Phil, that ain't nice ... that ain't gentlemanly. And I wasn't thinking of that, and you know I wasn't. And ... we ain't all so unattractive to women as you are.
- State** Ah ... Sour Grapes, Mr. Philip. We mustn't be personal ... but is it Sour Grapes?
- Philip** Thank you, Tommy ... I can attract just the sort of woman I want to attract. But as long as it's Numero Cinq, Six or Sept that attracts you ... well ... so long will Madras Houses be an excellent investment for Mr. State.
- Constantine** Phil is a cold-blooded egotist, and if women like him that is their misfortune. I know his way with a woman ... coax her on to the intellectual plane, where he thinks he can better her. You have my sympathy, Major Thomas. I also am as susceptible as Nature means a man to be ... as all women must wish him to be. And I referred to these going out dresses because - candidly - I found myself obliged to leave a country where women are let loose with money to spend and time to waste. Encouraged to flaunt their charms on the very streets ... proud if they see the busmen wink ...
- Huxtable** Not busmen.
- Constantine** Proud, my dear Harry, if they see a cabman smile.
- Huxtable** Yes, it's true. I'd deny it any other time, but I've been thinking a bit lately ... and the things you think of once you start to think! And it's true. Only they don't know they do it. They don't know they do it. D'you think they know they do it, Phil?
- Philip** Some of them suspect, Uncle.
- Huxtable** No, what I say is it's Instinct ... and we've just got to be as niceminded about it as we can. There was Julia, this summer at Weymouth ... that's one of my daughters. Bought herself a dress ... not one of the Numero sort, of course ... but very pretty ... orange colour, it was ... stripes. But you could see it a mile off on the parade ... and her sisters all with their noses out of joint. I said to myself ... Instinct ...
- State** Yes, sir ... the noblest Instinct of all ... the Instinct to Perpetuate our Race. Let us take High Ground in this matter, gentlemen.
- Constantine** The very highest, Mr. State. If you think that to turn Weymouth for a month a year into a cockpit of haphazard love-making, with all the consequences that custom entails, is the best way of

perpetuating your race ... well, I disagree with you ... but it's a point of view. What I ask is why Major Thomas and myself ... already perhaps in a creditable state of marital perpetuation ... should have our busy London lives obsessed by ... What is this thing?

Philip La belle Helene's new hat, father.

Constantine Now, that may be ugly ... I hope I never made anything quite so ugly myself ... but it's attractive.

Philip No, father.

Constantine Isn't it, Major Thomas ?

Thomas Well ... it makes you look at 'em when you might not otherwise.

Constantine Yes ... it's provocative. Its intention is that none of the world's work shall be done while it's about. And when it's always about I honestly confess again that I cannot do my share. It's a terrible thing to be constantly conscious of women. They have their uses to the world ... as you so happily phrased it, Mr. State ... their perpetual use ... and the world's interest is best served by keeping them strictly to it. Are these provocative ladies remarkable for perpetuation now-a-days?

State I can't bear this, sir ... I can't bear to take such a view of life ... no man of feeling could. Besides, it's Reactionary ... you're on the wrong tack. You must come back to us, sir. You gave us Joy and Pleasure ... can we do without them? When you find yourself once more among the Loveliness you helped us to Worship you'll change your mind. What was the end of that little story of the Duchess? How, on the appointed night, attired in her Madras Creation, she swept into the Ball room with a frou-frou of silk skirt wafting Perfume as she came ... while her younger rivals Pale before the Intoxication of her Beauty, and every man in the room ... young and old ... struggles for a Glimpse ... a Word ... a Look. A Ball room, sir ... isn't it one of the Sweetest Sights in the World? When bright the lamps shine o'er Fair Women and Brave Men. Music arises with its Voluptuous Swell. Soft eyes look Love to eyes which speak again. And all goes Merry as a Marriage Bell! Byron, gentlemen, taught me at my mother's knee. The poet of Love and Liberty ... read in every school in America.

Constantine Mr. State, that is my case. The whole of our upper class life, which everyone with a say in the government of the country tries to lead ... is now run as a ballroom is run. Men swaggering before women ... the women ogling the men. Once a lad got some training in manliness. But now from the very start ... ! In your own progressive country ... mixed education ... oh, my dear sir ... mixed education!

State A softening influence.

- Constantine** Of course it is. And what has it sunk to, moreover ... all education now-a-days? Book-learning. Because woman's a dab at that ... though it's of quite secondary importance to a man.
- Thomas** That's so.
- Constantine** And moral influence. Woman's morality ... the worst in the world.
- Philip** Slave morality.
- Constantine** Yes. Read Nietzsche ... as my friend Tarleton³ says. At Oxford and Cambridge it grows worse ... married professors ... Newnham and Girton ... suffrage questions ... purity questions.
- Huxtable** Of course, some of the novels ...
- Constantine** From seventeen to thirty-four ... the years which a man should consecrate to the acquiring of political virtue ... wherever he turns he is distracted, provoked, tantalised by the barefaced presence of women. How's he to keep a clear brain for the larger issues of life? Why do you soldiers, Major Thomas, volunteer with such alacrity for foreign service?
- Thomas** Good God ... I never thought of that.
- Constantine** What's the result? Every great public question ... all politics, all religion, all economy is being brought down to the level of women's emotion. Admirable in its way ... charming in its place! But softening, sentimentalising, enervating ... lapping the world, if you let it, in the nursery cotton wool of prettiness and pettiness. Men don't realise how far rotted by the process they are ... that's what's so fatal. We're used to a whole nation's anger being vented in scoldings ... or rather we're getting used to the thought that it's naughty to be angry at all. Justice degenerates into kindness ... that doesn't surprise us. Religion is a pretty hymn tune to keep us from fear of the dark. You four unfortunates might own the truth just for once ... you needn't tell your wives.
- State** I am not married.
- Constantine** I might have known it.
- State** *[A little astonished]* But no matter.
- Constantine** Women haven't morals or intellect in our sense of the words. They have other incompatible qualities quite as important, no doubt. But shut them away from public life and public exhibition. It's degrading to compete with them ... it's as degrading to compete for them. Perhaps we're too late already ... but oh, my dear sentimental Sir, if we could replant the laurel bushes thick enough we might yet rediscover the fine manly world we are losing.

Except PHILIP, who sits detached and attentive, they are all rather depressed by this

³ A further reference to 'Misalliance'.

judgment upon them. THOMAS recovers sufficiently to ask ...

Thomas Are you advocating polygamy in England?

Constantine That is what it should come to.

Thomas Well ... I call that rather shocking. *[Then with some hopeful interest]* And is it practical?

Constantine I did not anticipate the reform in my lifetime ... so I left for the East.

Philip You did quite right. Father. I wish everyone of your way of thinking would do the same.

Constantine Are you prepared for so much depopulation? Think of the women who'd be off tomorrow.

HUXTABLE wakes from stupefaction.

Huxtable Never!

Constantine Wrong, Harry.

Huxtable No, I'm not wrong just because you say so! You ought to listen to me a bit sometimes. I always listened to you.

Constantine Bless your quick temper.

Huxtable Oh ... go on ... tell me why I'm wrong ... I daresay I am.

Constantine Even if you have liked bringing up six daughters and not getting them married ... how have they liked it? You should have drowned them at birth, Harry ...

Huxtable You must have your joke, mustn't you ?

Constantine Therefore, how much pleasanter for you ... how much better for them ... if you'd only to find one man ready, for a small consideration, to marry the lot.

Huxtable Now if I was to tell my wife that she wouldn't see the umour of it.

Constantine The woman emancipator's last ditch, Mr. State, is the trust that women will side with him. Don't make any mistake. This is a serious question to them ... of health and happiness ... and sometimes of bread and butter. Quite apart from our customers here ... kept women, every one of them ...

State You don't say!

Constantine Economically. Kept by their husbands ... or if they live on their dividends, kept by Society.

Philip What about men who live on their dividends?

State No ... now don't let us go on to politics.

Constantine ... And apart from the prisoners in that chaste little fortress on Denmark Hill ... we used to employ, Harry, between us ... what? ... two or three hundred free and independent women ... making

clothes for the others, the ladies. They are as free as you like ... free to go ... free to starve. How much do they rejoice in their freedom to earn their living by ruining their health and stifling their instincts? Answer me, Harry, you monster of good-natured wickedness.

Huxtable What's that?

Constantine You keep an industrial seraglio.

Huxtable A what!

Constantine What else is your Roberts and Huxtable but a harem of industry. Do you know that it would sicken with horror a good Mahommedan? You buy these girls in the open market ... you keep them under lock and key ...

Huxtable I do?

Constantine Quite right, Harry, no harm done. But you coin your profits out of them by putting on exhibition for ten hours a day ... their good looks, their good manners, their womanhood. Hired out it is to any stranger to hold as cheap for a few minutes as common decency allows. And when you've worn them out you turn them out ... forget their very names ... wouldn't know their faces if you met them selling matches at your door. For such treatment of potential motherhood, my Prophet condemns a man to Hell.

Huxtable Well, I never did in all my born days! They can marry respectably, can't they? We like em to marry.

Philip Yes, Uncle ... I went into that question with Miss Yates and the Brigstocks this morning.

Constantine I ask you all ... what is to happen to you as a nation? Where are your future generations coming from? What with the well-kept women you flatter and aestheticise till they won't give you children, and the free women you work at market rates till they can't give you children ...

Huxtable Miss Yates has obliged us, anyhow.

Philip And we're going to dismiss her.

Huxtable What else can we do? But I said you weren't to be hard on the girl. And I won't be upset like this. I want to take things as I find em ... that is as I used to find em ... before there was any of these ideas going around ... and I'm sure we were happier without em. Stifling their instincts ... it's a horrid way to talk. And I don't believe it. I could send for every girl in the shop, and not one of em would hint at it to me. Not that that proves anything, does it? I'm a fool. It's a beastly world. But I don't make it so, do I?

Philip Who does?

Huxtable Other people. Oh, I see it coming. You're going to say we're all the other people or something. I'm getting up to you.

Constantine What is this about a Miss Yates?

Philip A little bother down at Peckham. I can tell you afterwards if you like.

Constantine No ... there is no need.

Something in the tone of this last makes PHILIP look up quickly.

State Gentlemen, are you aware of the time? I may mention that I have a City appointment at four o'clock.

Constantine Are we detaining you, Mr. State? Not universal or compulsory polygamy, Major Thomas. That would be nonsense. The very distribution of the sexes forbids it. But its recognition is one of the logical outcomes of the aristocratic method of government. And that's the only ultimate method ... all others are interim plans for sifting out various aristocracies. The community of the future will specialise its functions. Women will find, I hope, some intellectual companions like my son, who will, besides, take a gentle interest in the County Council. There will be single-hearted men like Harry, content with old-fashioned domesticity. There will be poets like you, Mr. State, to dream about women and to dress them ... their bodies in silks and their virtues in phrases. But there must also be such men as Major Thomas and myself ...

Thomas No, no! I'm not like that ... not in the least. Because a fellow has been in the Army! Don't drag me in.

State As Stimulating a conversation as I remember. A little hard to follow at times ... but worth far more than the sacrifice of any mere business doings.

CONSTANTINE takes the hint graciously, and is apt for business at once.

Constantine My fault! Shall we agree, Mr. State, to accept as much of your offer as you have no intention of altering? We are dealing for both the shops?

State Yes. What are we proposing to knock off their valuation, Major Thomas?

Thomas Eight thousand six hundred.

Constantine Phil, what were we prepared to come down?

Philip Nine thousand.

Constantine A very creditable margin. Your offer is accepted, Mr. State.

State I should prefer to knock you down only eight thousand.

Constantine Isn't that merely romantic of you, Mr. State ... not in the best form of business art?

- Thomas** But the conditions, you know?
- Constantine** We accept your conditions. If they won't work you'll be only anxious to alter them. So the business is done.
- Huxtable** But look here.
- Philip** Uncle Harry has something to say ...
- Huxtable** *[Assertively]* Yes.
- Constantine** Something different to say, Harry ?
- Huxtable** *[After thinking it over]* No.
- So CONSTANTINE returns happily to his subject.*
- Constantine** What interests me about this Woman Question ... now that I've settled my personal share in it ... is to wonder how Europe, hampered by such an unsolved problem, can hope to stand up against the Oriental revival.
- Thomas** What's that?
- Constantine** You'll hear of it shortly. Up from the Persian Gulf to where I live we could grow enough wheat to feed the British Empire. Life there is simple and spacious ... the air is not breathed out. All we want is a happy, hardy race of men, and under a decent government we shall soon beget it. But you Europeans! Is this the symbol you are marching to the future under? *[He has found again la Belle Helene's new hat]* A cap of slavery! You are all idolaters of women ... and they are the slaves of your idolatry.
- State** Mr. Madras, I am proud to have met you again. If I say another word, I may be so interested in your reply that I shall miss my appointment. My coat? Thank you, Mr. Philip. I have to meet a man about a new system of country house drainage that he wants me to finance. I can hardly hope for another Transcendental Discussion upon that.
- Constantine** Why not?
- State** If you were he! Good-bye, sir. Good-day, Mr. Huxtable. Till tomorrow, Major Thomas. No, Mr. Philip, don't see me down.
- He is off for his next deal. PHILIP civilly takes him past the door, saying ...*
- Philip** Your car's at the Bond Street entrance, I expect .
- Thomas** That's how he settles business. But leaves us all the papers to do. I shall take mine home. The four-thirty gets me indoors by a quarter to six. Time for a cup of tea! Phil, have you got China tea?
- Philip** Downstairs.
- Huxtable** I must be getting back, I think.
- Constantine** Harry ... you're running away from me.

Huxtable Yes ... I was. Habit, y'know ... habit.
Constantine Suppose I go with you ... part of the way. How do you go?
Huxtable On a bus.
Constantine Suppose we go together ... on a bus.
Huxtable It's all right ... they won't see me with you. We don't close till seven.
Constantine No, to be sure. Phil, I can't come to dinner, I'm afraid.
Philip Oh, I was going to tell you. Mother will be there. Tommy, you know the tea room.
Thomas Oh, quite!
Philip Straight downstairs, first to the left and the second passage. I'll follow.

THOMAS departs, CONSTANTINE says, indifferently ...

Constantine Then I'll come in after dinner.
Philip You don't mind?
Constantine No.
Philip It's afterwards now, Uncle. Fire away.

And he leaves.

Huxtable Look here ... don't let's talk about Amelia.
Constantine No ... never rake up the past.
Huxtable Lord! What else has a chap got to think of?
Constantine That's why you look so old.
Huxtable Do I now?
Constantine What age are you?
Huxtable Sixty.

The two sit down together.

Constantine You should come and stay with me at Hit ... not far from Hillel ... Hillel is Babylon, Harry.
Huxtable What's it like there?
Constantine The house is white, and there are palm trees about it ... and not far off flows the Euphrates.
Huxtable Just like in the Bible. Constantine ...
Constantine Yes, Harry.
Huxtable You've said odder things this afternoon than I've ever heard you say before.

Constantine Probably not.

Huxtable And I haven't really minded them. But I believe it's the first time I've ever understood you ... and p'raps that's just as well for me.

Constantine Oh ... why, Harry?

Huxtable Because ... d'you think it's only not being very clever keeps us ... well behaved?

Constantine Has it kept you happy?

Huxtable *[Impatiently]* Anyone can be happy. What worries me is having got to my age and only just beginning to understand anything at all. And you can't learn it out of books, old man. Books don't tell you the truth ... at least not any that I can find. I wonder if I'd been a bit of a dog like you ... ? But there it is ... you can't do things on purpose. And what's more, don't you go to think I'd have done them if I could ... knowing them to be wrong. *[Then comes a discovery]* But I was always jealous of you, Constantine, for you seemed to get the best of everything ... and I know people couldn't help being fond of you ... for I was fond of you myself, whatever you did. That was odd to start with. And now here we are, both of us old chaps ...

Constantine I am not old.

Huxtable *[With sudden misgiving]* You don't repent, do you?

Constantine What of?

Huxtable Katherine said this morning that you might have ... but I wasn't afraid of that. You know ... you evil-doers ... you upset us all, and you hurt our feelings, and of course you ought to be ashamed of yourself. But ... well ... it's like the only time I went abroad. I was sick going ... I was horribly uncomfortable ... I ated the cooking ... I was sick coming back. But I wouldn't have missed it ...!

Constantine Come to Arabia, Harry.

Huxtable Don't you make game of me. My time's over. What have I done with it, now? Married. Brought up a family. Been master to a few hundred girls and fellows who never really cared a bit for me. I've been made a convenience of ... that's my life. That's where I envy you. You've had your own way ... and you don't look now as if you'd be damned for it, either.

Constantine I shan't be.

HUXTABLE shakes a fist, somewhat, though unconsciously, in the direction of the ceiling.

Huxtable It's not fair, and I don't care who hears me say so.

Constantine Suppose we shout it from the top of the bus.

Huxtable But you know, old man ... you'll excuse me, I'm sure ... and it's all

very well having theories and being able to talk ... still, you did treat Amelia very badly ... and those other ones, too ... say what you like! Let go my arm, will you!

Constantine Why?

Huxtable Well ... p'raps you needn't. Are you really going away for good this time?

Constantine Tomorrow.

Huxtable Then come home and see mother and the girls.

THOMAS comes back, looking about him.

Thomas Excuse me ... I left my hat.

Constantine It will make them very uncomfortable.

Huxtable D'you think so? Won't it do em good ... broaden their minds?

PHILIP comes back, too.

Huxtable Phil ... shall I take your father ome to call?

Philip Certainly.

Constantine I'll be with you by nine, Phil.

Huxtable I say ... better not be too friendly through the shop.

CONSTANTINE smiles still, but does not loose his arm. Off they go.

Thomas Where the devil did I put it?

Philip Pity you can't take father's place at dinner, Tommy.

Thomas Are you chaffing me?

Philip We might get some further light on the Woman Question. My mother's opinion and Jessica's upon such men as you and my father.

He picks up some papers and sits to them at the table.

Thomas Look here, Phil ... don't you aggravate me into behaving rashly. Here it is.

Philip With Jessica?

Thomas Yes ... a damned attractive woman.

Philip After all ... as an abstract proposition, Tommy ... polyandry is just as simple a way ... and as far as we know, as much Nature's way as the other. We ought to have put that point to the gentle Mahommedan.

Thomas Phil, I should like to see you in love with a woman ... It'd serve you right.

Philip Tommy ... what's the purpose of it all? Apart from the sentimental wallowings of Mr. Eustace Perrin State ... and putting that Lord of

Creation, my father, on one side for a moment ... what do we slow-breeding, civilised people get out of love ... and the beauty of women ... and the artistic setting that beauty demands? For which we do pay rather a big price, you know, Tommy. What do we get for it?

Thomas I don't know.

Philip It's an important question. Think it over in the train.

Thomas Old chap ... I beg your pardon ... the County Council is the best place for you. It'll stop your addling over these silly conundrums.

Philip On the contrary.

Thomas What do you mean?

Philip Get out ... you'll miss that four-thirty.

THOMAS gets out. PHILIP gets desperately to loathed business.

Act Four

PHILIP, his mother AMELIA, and JESSICA are sitting, after dinner, round the drawing-room fire in Phillimore Gardens. JESSICA, rather, is away upon the bench of her long, black piano, sorting bound books of music, and the firelight hardly reaches her. But it flickers over AMELIA and though it marks more deeply the little bitter lines on her face, it leaves a glow there in recompense. She sits, poor, anxious old lady, gazing, not into the fire, but at the shining, copper fender, her hands on her lap, as usual. Every now and then she lifts her head to listen. PHILIP is comfortable upon the sofa opposite; he is smoking, and is deep, besides, in a weighty volume, the Longman Edition of the Minority Report of the Poor Law Commission.⁴

It is a charming room. The walls are grey, the paint is a darker grey. The curtains to the two long windows are of the gentlest pink brocade; the lights that hang on plain little brackets from the walls are a soft pink, too, and there is no other colour in the room, but the mazziness of some Persian rugs on the floor and the mellowed brilliancy of the Arundel prints on the walls. There is no more furniture than there need be; there is no more light than there need be; yet it is not empty or dreary. There is just nothing to jar, nothing to prevent a sensitive soul finding rest there.

The PARLOUR MAID comes in; she is dressed in grey, too, capless, some black ribbons about her. She brings letters, one for Jessica, two for Philip, and departs.

Philip Last post.

Jessica Half-past nine. I suppose your father means to come?

Philip He said so.

Amelia Is your letter interesting, Jessica?

Jessica A receipt.

Amelia Do you run bills?

Jessica Lots.

Amelia Is that quite wise?

Jessica The tradesmen prefer it.

With that she walks to her writing table. JESSICA's manner to her mother-in-law is over-courteous, an unkind weapon against which the old lady, but half conscious of it, is quite defenceless. PHILIP has opened his second letter, and whistles, at its contents, a bar of a tune that is in his head.

Jessica What's the matter, Phil?

To emphasise his feelings he performs the second bar with variations.

Jessica As bad as that?

⁴ The Minority report, headed by the Fabian socialist Beatrice Webb, was one of two reports published by the Royal Commission on the Poor Laws and Relief of Distress 1905–09. It called for a system that was radically different from the existing Poor Law. Overleaf I allow Philip to mention the Webbs.

For final comment he brings the matter to a full close on one expressive note, puts the letter away, and returns to his reading.

Amelia How absurd! You can't tell in the least what he means.

Jessica No.

Pause.

Amelia Philip buried in a book, as usual. Is it a book, Philip?

Philip The Minority Report of the Poor Law Commission, Mother. The work of the Webbs, Beatrice and Sidney, if you are familiar with them?

Amelia I most certainly am not. Socialists, I believe. Well ... You might play us something, Jessica ... just to pass the time.

Unobserved, JESSICA casts her eyes up to the ceiling.

Jessica What will you have?

Amelia I am sure you play all the latest things.

Jessica I'm afraid you don't really like my playing.

Amelia I do think it's a little professional. I prefer something softer.

JESSICA leaves the piano.

Jessica I'm afraid we are giving you a dull evening.

Amelia Why do you never call me mother, Jessica?

Jessica Don't I?

Amelia You know you don't.

Jessica I suppose I don't think of you just like that.

Amelia What has that to do with it?

Jessica Nothing ... Mother.

Amelia That's not a very nice manner of giving way, either, is it?

Jessica It seemed to me sufficiently childish.

Amelia I don't know what you mean. It's easy to be too clever for me, Jessica.

Philip Mother, what do you think parents gain by insisting on respect and affection from grown-up children ?

Amelia Isn't it their right?

Philip But I asked what they gained.

Amelia Isn't it natural? When an old woman has lost her husband, or worse, if she's to lose her children, too, what has she left?

Jessica Her womanhood. Mother.

Philip Her old-womanhood. It may be a very beautiful possession.

The PARLOUR MAID announces 'Mr Constantine Madras'. There stands CONSTANTINE in the bright light of the hall, more dramatically dignified than ever. As he comes in, though, it seems as if there was the slightest strain in his charming manners. He has not changed his clothes for the evening. He goes straight to JESSICA and it seems that he has a curious soft way of shaking hands with women.

Constantine How do you do, Jessica? I find you looking beautiful.

JESSICA acknowledges the compliment with a little disdainful bend of the head and leaves him, then with a glance at Philip leaves the room. CONSTANTINE comes towards his wife. She does not look up, but her face wrinkles pathetically. So he speaks at last.

Constantine Well, Amelia?

Amelia Is that the way to speak to me after thirty years?

Constantine Perhaps it isn't. But there's not much variety of choice in greetings, is there ?

PHILIP, nodding to his father, has edged to the door, and now edges out of it.

Constantine They leave us alone. We might be an engaged couple.

She stays silent, avoiding his eye. He takes a chair by her.

Well, Amelia? I beg your pardon. I repeat myself, and you dislike the phrase. I hope, though, that you are quite well? Don't cry, dear Amelia ... unless, of course, you want to cry. Well, then ... cry. And, when you've finished crying ... there's no hurry ... you shall tell me why you wished to see me ... and run the risk of upsetting yourself like this.

Amelia I don't often cry. I don't often get a chance.

Constantine I fear that is only one way of saying that you miss me.

The handkerchief is put away, and she faces him.

Amelia Are you really going back to that country tomorrow?

Constantine Tomorrow morning.

Amelia For good?

Constantine For ever.

Amelia Will you take me with you?

Constantine No, Amelia, I will not.

Amelia I'm sure I don't want to go, and I'm sure I never meant to ask you. But you haven't changed a bit, Constantine ... in spite of your beard. I have.

Constantine Only externally, I'm sure.

Amelia Why did you ever marry me? You married me for my money.

Constantine It is so long ago.

- Amelia** It isn't ... it seems like yesterday. Didn't you marry me for my money?
- Constantine** Partly, Amelia, partly. Why did you marry me?
- Amelia** I wanted to. I was a fool.
- Constantine** You were a fool, perhaps, to grumble at the consequence of getting what you wanted. It would have been kinder of me, no doubt, not to marry you. But I was more impetuous then, and, of course, less experienced. I didn't realise you never could change your idea of what a good husband must be, nor how necessary it would become that you should.
- Amelia** How dare you make excuses for the way you treated me?
- Constantine** There were two excuses. I was the first. I'm afraid that you ultimately became the second.
- Amelia** I only stood up for my rights.
- Constantine** You got them, too. We separated, and there was an end of it.
- Amelia** I've never been happy since.
- Constantine** That is nothing to be proud of, my dear.
- Amelia** What happened to that woman and her son ... that Flora?
- Constantine** The son is an engineer ... promises very well, his employers tell me. Flora lives at Hitchin ... quite comfortably, I have reason to believe.
- Amelia** She was older than me.
- Constantine** About the same age, I think.
- Amelia** You've given her money?
- Constantine** Certainly ... they were both provided for.
- Amelia** Don't you expect me to be jealous?
- Constantine** Still, Amelia?
- Amelia** Do you ever see her now?
- Constantine** I haven't seen her for years.
- Amelia** It seems to me she has been just as well treated as I have ... if not better.
- Constantine** She expected less.
- Amelia** And what about the others?
- Constantine** No, really, it's thirty years ago ... I cannot fight my battles over again. Please tell me what I can do for you beyond taking you back with me.
- Amelia** I didn't mean that. I don't know what made me say it. But it's

dreadful seeing you once more and being alone with you.

Constantine Now, Amelia, are you going to cry again?

Amelia *[Setting her teeth]* No.

Constantine That's right.

Amelia What I really want you to do, if you please, Constantine, is not to go away. I don't expect us to live together ... after the way you have behaved I could not consent to such a thing. But somebody must look after you when you are ill, and, what's more, I don't think you ought to go and die out of your own country.

Constantine My dear ... I have formed other ties.

Amelia Will you please explain exactly what you mean by that?

Constantine I am a Mahommedan.

Amelia Nonsense!

Constantine Possibly you are not acquainted with the Mahommedan marriage laws.

Amelia D'you mean to say you're not married to me?

Constantine No ... though it was not considered necessary for me to take that into account in conforming to it ... I did.

Amelia Well ... I never thought you could behave any worse. Why weren't you satisfied in making me unhappy? If you've gone and committed blasphemy as well ... I don't know what's to become of you, Constantine.

Constantine Amelia, if I had been a Mahommedan from the beginning you might be living happily with me now.

Amelia How can you say such a horrible thing? Suppose it were true?

Constantine I came from the East.

Amelia You didn't.

Constantine Let us be quite accurate. My grandfather was a Smyrna Jew.

Amelia You never knew him. Your mother brought you up a Baptist.

Constantine I was an unworthy Baptist. As a Baptist I owe you apologies for my conduct. What does that excellent creed owe me for the little hells of temptation and shame and remorse that I passed through because of it?

Amelia Did you, Constantine?

Constantine I did.

Amelia You never told me.

Constantine I should think not.

Amelia But I was longing to have you say you were sorry, and let me forgive you. Twice and three times I'd have forgiven you ... and you knew it, Constantine.

CONSTANTINE recovers his humour, his cool courtesy, and his inhumanity, which he had momentarily lost.

Constantine Yes, it wasn't so easy to escape your forgiveness. If it weren't for Mahomet, the Prophet of God, Amelia, I should hardly be escaping it now.

PHILIP comes delicately in.

Philip I beg pardon ... only my book.

Constantine Don't go, Phil.

So PHILIP joins them.

Philip How are you getting on?

Amelia Philip, don't be flippant. It's just as your cousin Ernest said. Your father has gone and pretended to marry a lot of wretched women out in that country you showed me on the map, and I don't know what's to be done. My head's going round.

Constantine Not a lot, Amelia.

Amelia And if anybody had told me, when I was a girl at school, and learning about such things in History and Geography, that I should ever find myself in such a situation as this, I wouldn't have believed them. Constantine, how are you going to face me Hereafter? Have you thought of that? Wasn't our marriage made in Heaven? I must know what is going to happen to us ... I simply must. I have always prayed that you might come back to me, and that I might close your eyes in death. You know I have, Philip, and I've asked you to tell him so. He has no right to go and do such wicked things. You're mine in the sight of God, Constantine, and you can't deny it.

Constantine Woman ... be silent! Philip, I have several things to talk over with you. Suggest to your mother that she should leave us alone.

Philip I shall do nothing of the sort. While my father's in England, and you're in our house, he can at least treat his wife with politeness.

Amelia I'd rather he didn't ... it's only laughing at me. I'll go to bed. I'd much rather he lost his temper.

She gets up to go. CONSTANTINE'S bitter voice stops her.

Constantine Phil ... when you were a boy ... your mother and I once quarrelled in your presence.

Philip I remember.

Constantine I'm ashamed of it to this day.

Amelia Well ... I'm sure I don't remember it. What about?

Constantine Oh ... this terrible country. Every hour I stay in it seems to rob me of some atom of self-respect.

Amelia Then why did you come back? And why haven't you been to see me before ... or written to me ?

Constantine Amelia, don't aggravate me any more. Go to bed, if you're going.

Amelia I wish I'd never seen you again.

Philip Good night, Mother.

PHILIP gets her to the door and kisses her kindly.

Constantine Good-bye, Amelia.

She turns, the bright hall light falling on her, looks at him hatefully, makes no other reply, goes.

I'm sorry. I'm upset. I was upset when I came here.

Philip What about? The visit to Denmark Hill?

Constantine No ... I didn't go there, after all.

Philip Funked it?

Constantine I daresay. Once we were off the bus, Harry began to mutter about hurting their feelings. I daresay I was funking it, too. I told him to tell them how unbendingly moral he had been with me. He shed three tears as we parted.

Philip Yes ... my mother was alone here. She's a disappointed woman ... peevish with ill health. One has her at a disadvantage. But Aunt Kate ... unveiled and confident, with six corseted daughters to back her!

Constantine You think, of course, that I've always treated your mother badly?

Philip I can't help thinking so. Was it the only way to treat her?

Constantine Was I meant to pass the rest of a lifetime making her forget that she was as unhappy as people who have outlived their purpose always are?

Philip Personally, I have this grudge against you both, my dear father. As the son of a quarrelsome marriage, I have grown up inclined to dislike men and despise women. You're so full of this purpose of getting the next generation born. Suppose you thought a little more of its upbringing.

Constantine What was wrong with yours?

Philip I had no home.

Constantine You spent a Sunday with me every month. You went to the manliest school I could find.

- Philip** Never mind how I learnt Latin and Greek. Who taught me that every pretty, helpless woman was a man's prey ... and how to order my wife out of the room?
- Constantine** My dear boy ... they like it.
- Philip** Do they?
- Constantine** Well there may be some that don't, these abominable suffragists among them, but ... how else are you to manage them?
- Philip** 'Manage' them? Father, don't you realise that ... in decadent England, at least, this manliness of yours is getting a little out of date ... that you and your kind risk looking foolish at last? Or worse?
- Constantine** I daresay. Thank God, I shall be quit of the country tomorrow! I got here late this evening because I travelled three stations too far in that Tube, sitting opposite such a pretty little devil. She was so alive ... so crying out for conquest ... she had that curve of the instep and the little trick of swinging her foot that I never could resist. How does a man resist it? Yes. That's ridiculous and ignominious and degrading. I escaped from England to escape from it. Old age here ... a loose lip and a furtive eye? I'd have asked you to shoot me first.
- Philip** But now the women of Arabia must pay for your convalescence.
- Constantine** That is a wholly inaccurate characterisation.
- Philip** Is it?
- Pause.*
- Father, what do you know about this Miss Yates affair?
- Constantine** What you've told me.
- Philip** No more?
- Constantine** Is there more to know?
- PHILIP fishes out and hands his father the letter over which he whistled.*
- Philip** This has just come from Miss Chancellor.
- Constantine** Who's she?
- Philip** The housekeeper at Peckham, who rashly accused Brigstock of being the other responsible party.
- Constantine** Is he?
- Philip** I think not. But she encloses this - a letter she's just had from Brigstock's solicitors to the effect that both an apology and compensation are due to him unless the slander is to come into court. Hers faithfully, Meyrick & Hodges.
- Constantine** I don't know them.

Philip We were all still making personal remarks at half-past twelve today ... so by their expedition I should say they both are and are not a first-class firm. But suppose the whole thing is made public ... then the question of the parentage must be cleared up. Miss Yates says it's nobody's business but hers. That's an odd idea, in which, if she chooses to have it, the law seems to support her.

Constantine Phil, I saw the little baggage when the shop closed. I insisted on her meeting me. You know how I've always behaved over these matters. No one could have been kinder. But she refused money.

Philip Well ... I might have guessed. Oh ... you incorrigible old man!

Constantine She insulted me ... said she'd done with me ... denied me the right to my own child. I'd even have taken her away. But you're helpless. I never felt so degraded in my life ...

Philip Serve you right!

Constantine ... But the girl's mad! Think of my feelings. What does it make of me? Did she know what she was saying?

Philip Possibly not ... but I'm thankful some woman's been found at last to put you in your place.

JESSICA walks in.

Jessica I heard your mother going to bed.

Philip Yes.

Jessica Am I intruding?

Constantine Well ... what does Miss Chancellor want?

Philip She asks my advice.

Constantine Dismiss Baxter.

Philip D'you mean Brigstock?

Constantine Brigstock, then. Dismiss him.

Philip What's he done to deserve it?

Constantine He seems a nonentity of a fellow, and without grit enough to own up to his wife and risk his place. D'you want to protect a man from the consequences of what he is?

Philip Society conspires to.

Constantine Then pay him fifty pounds for the damage to his silly little reputation. That'll be a just consequence to you of sentimentalising over him.

Philip And stick to Miss Chancellor?

Constantine Certainly. Thank her from the firm for nosing out such a scandal.

Philip And what about Miss Yates?

Jessica The girl in your office this morning?

Philip Yes.

Jessica In the usual trouble?

Philip *[Sharply]* How d'you know that?

Jessica By the tone of your voice.

Constantine Dismiss Miss Yates. Keep your eye on her ... and in a year's time find her a better place ... if you can ... in one of these new Madras Houses of State's. He seems to pay very well. Let us change the subject. How is Mildred, Jessica?

Jessica Growing.

Constantine I've an appointment with my solicitor tonight ... ten o'clock. There will be two or three thousand pounds to come to that young lady by my will. I mean to leave it as a dowry for her marriage ... its interest to be paid to her if she's a spinster at thirty ... which Heaven forbid.

Philip What are you doing with the rest, Father?

Constantine There are one or two ... legacies of honour, shall I call them? What remains will come to you.

Philip Yes ... I don't want it, thank you.

Constantine It isn't much.

Philip Take it to Hit, that charming village on the borders of Southern Arabia. Stick it in the ground ... let it breed more corn and oil for you. We've too much of it already ... it breeds idleness here.

Constantine Dear me!

Jessica If I may be permitted to speak, we're discussing a reduction of our income by a few hundreds a year.

CONSTANTINE looks to PHILIP.

Philip Yes. I'm refusing State's directorship.

Jessica I'm waiting for Phil to tell me where the saving's to come in.

Philip We should change that school of Mildred's, for one thing.

Jessica Nonsense, Phil!

Philip My dear father, I spent a day there with the child, and upon my word, the only thing she's being taught which will not be a mere idle accomplishment is gardening. And even there ... no vegetables allowed!

Jessica Phil, I don't mean to have any nonsense with Mildred about earning her living. Accomplished women have a very good time in this world ... serious women don't. I want my daughter to be

happy.

Constantine Could you get your maid to get me a taxi? It had started raining when I came.

Philip There'll be one on the stand opposite.

Constantine Of course. I mustn't be too late for Voysey. He makes a favour of coming after hours.

Jessica I cultivate expensive tastes, and make no apology. I like to have things beautiful around me. I don't know what else civilisation means.

Constantine I am sure that Philip can refuse you nothing.

Philip If I do dismiss Miss Yates, I wonder if I could do it brutally enough to induce her to accept some compensation.

Jessica What for?

Philip She won't take money from this gentleman ... whoever he is ... that is, she won't be bribed into admitting her shame.

Constantine If your auditors won't pass any decent sum, I should be happy to send you a cheque, Phil.

Philip That would be very generous of you, Father.

Constantine Good-bye, Jessica.

Jessica Good-bye.

Constantine Philip is fortunate in his marriage.

Jessica So good of you to remind him of that.

Constantine You have a charming home. I wonder how much of your womanly civilisation it would have needed to conquer me. Well ... I leave you to your conversation. A pleasant life to you.

He bends over her hand as if to kiss it. She takes it, as if fastidiously, out of his soft grasp. So he bows again and leaves her.

Constantine Victoria at eleven o'clock tomorrow, Philip.

Philip Yes ... I'll see you off.

Constantine I have to do a little shopping quite early.

Philip Shopping? What can the West send the East?

Constantine Oh, one must take back a trinket or two.

Philip Of course.

PHILIP sees him out. Jessica moves about as if to free the air of this visitation, and when PHILIP comes back ...

Jessica Does your father usually scatter cheques so generously and carelessly?

- Philip** Jessica, while I have every respect for that young lady's independence ... still two hundred pounds would be all to the good of the child's upbringing ... and why shouldn't Miss Yates keep her secret?
- Jessica** [*Casting her eyes to heaven*] I see. I like your father less and less. And I'm sometimes afraid that you're only an intellectual edition of him. Of course, while it's thoroughly immoral to seduce every woman that catches your fancy, it's very vital to go about seducing everybody to your own way of thinking. But it's not quite civilised. You ought to learn to talk about the weather.
- Philip** I cannot talk about what can't be helped. And I wonder more and more what the devil you mean by 'civilisation'. This room is civilisation, is it? Well, it's not ours. Whitechapel High Street is our civilisation.
- Jessica** I don't know it.
- Philip** Then you don't much matter, I'm afraid. No more than my father with his view of life as a love-chase. Persian carpet on the floor, old Dutch tiles around the grate; and a fine piece of Ming on the mantelpiece. This is a museum. And that precious school of Mildred's - what are they cultivating in her mind but another museum ... of good manners and good taste and ... ? Are we going to have a row about this?
- Jessica** I rather feel we are [*i.e. having one*]. If you Idealists want Mildred to live in the Whitechapel Road ... make it a fit place for her.
- Philip** When she lives in it it will become so.
- Jessica** Really? I don't understand. What is it you'd like to cultivate in Mildred's mind?
- Philip** Why not a sense of ugliness? Haven't you ever really looked at a London street ... walked slowly up and down it two or three times ... testing it with every one of your cultured senses?
- Jessica** Actually, yes, I have ... most of them are loathsome.
- Philip** Then what have you done?
- Jessica** What do you mean?
- Philip** You've come home to play a Beethoven sonata! To drown the sight and the sound and the smell of it.
- Jessica** Why not? That's one thing - among many - that Beethoven does rather well.
- Philip** Not for me ... my God, not for me! Neither Art nor Religion nor good manners have made of the world a place I'll go on living in if I can help it. We have to teach Mildred to look beyond our graceful rooms and our exclusive concert halls. Teach her what

love of the world really means. Those six thin girls at my uncle's ... what does the world get from them or they from the world? Little Miss Yates, now ... her transgressions may be the most profitable thing about her ...

Jessica Sometimes you can be so patronising, Philip. I cannot imagine how hard 'little' Miss Yates' life will be, when your father's sop to his conscience is spent. I hope the County Council understands just how much you expect of it. And what the new generation of serious women will expect of it, for that matter.

Philip What do you mean?

Jessica Where will your cultivated 'sense of ugliness' end? Have you thought of that? Or is it sufficient that we voiceless women will be brought to think like you?

Philip Of course not! And I've no wish to cut some sort of fine figure on the Council. But to be on a committee or committees. Not to talk finely even then ... Lord keep me from the temptation ... but to do dull, hard work over drains and disinfectants and ...

Jessica Why, Phil? I hope I may be permitted to know.

Philip To save my soul alive.

Pause. Then JESSICA goes to sit at the piano. As she does:

Jessica Well, I'm sure we shall enjoy discussing the drains over dinner. My fear, Philip, is that if you insist on this absurd upheaval, then before long all three of us shall be gravely disappointed. Now, if it won't offend your conscience too deeply, I'm going to play some Beethoven.

Philip Please - go ahead ... Oh, but before you do ... I've a message for you from Tommy.

Jessica Yes?

Philip Not so much a message. More one of his little bursts of childlike confidence.

Jessica About me?

Philip What it comes to is this: will you please not flirt with him any more, because he hasn't the time, and he's too fond both of me and his wife to want to find himself seriously in love with you.

Jessica Thank you.

Philip He doesn't at all suppose you are in love with him ... seriously or otherwise.

Jessica Do you?

Philip No.

- Jessica** And is this the first time you've discussed me with Tommy or anyone?
- Philip** Are you angry, Jessica?
- Jessica** I'm more than angry.
- Philip** I'm sorry.
- Jessica** How I despise men! I despised them when I was fifteen ... the first year I was conscious of them. I've been through many opinions since ... and I come back to despising them.
- Philip** He was afraid you wouldn't be pleased with him. But he has my sympathy. Tommy is what the entertaining Mr. State called this afternoon the Mean Sensual Man.
- Jessica** Exactly. When we're alone, having a jolly talk about things in general, he's all the time thinking I want him to kiss me.
- Philip** While what you really want is to have him wanting to kiss you but never to kiss you.
- Jessica** No!
- Philip** And the Mean Sensual Man calls that being made a fool of.
- Jessica** How dare you, Phil? I have never tried to flirt with Tommy ... except perhaps once or twice when he has been boring me. How can you flirt with a man you know well, and when he rattles on endlessly about his children? But it's caddish of him to speak to you about it.
- Philip** So he said ... so he said.
- Jessica** Worse than caddish ... outrageous! I never heard of such a thing ... how could you let him?
- Philip** Should I have taken off my jacket and asked him to step outside?
- Jessica** I wish you had.
- Philip** Little savage.
- Jessica** It's not funny, Phil. Have you any idea of what a woman feels when men treat her like this? Degraded and cheapened.
- Philip** I can tell you what the man feels. He'll be either my father or me. He's my father when he believes you've put on your best frock to seduce him, or he's me when he honestly says that he'd rather you wouldn't. Do you want him to be me or my father?
- Jessica** I want a man to treat a woman with courtesy and respect.
- Philip** And what does that come to? Don't you know that the Mean Sensual Man looks on all of you as choice morsels - with your pretty frocks, your music and your art as so much sauce to his appetite? Which only your virtue - and a little matter of the law -

prevents him from indulging by force. Don't you see that?

Jessica I have tried my best not to see that.

Philip Do you really believe that most men's good manners towards most pretty women are nothing more but good manners?

Jessica Most? There are exceptions then - of which you, of course, are one? But in return for your real respect Mildred and I are to be hauled willy-nilly into your social experiment? Does that really add up? Do we have a say in this, Phil? Or are we just to be sacrificial lambs on the altar of your guilt?

Philip My what?

Jessica Your guilt, your hair-shirt self-loathing. 'Cultivate a sense of ugliness'? I dare you to stand on Whitechapel High Street and publicly embrace its ugliness. What would you do - *apologise* for your Latin and your Greek and your beautifully cut suit? Do you think you'd have the remotest chance of getting onto the County Council if your *address* were in Whitechapel, or if you were a Brigstock or a Belhaven? You cannot become like them by giving up your income, Phil. It's a peculiar kind of vanity.

Philip Tommy accused me of conceit this morning.

Jessica Yes, well, stupid as he is, he does occasionally have something sensible to say.

Pause.

Philip Yes.

Jessica I would like to be friends with men. I'd sooner be friends with them. But it seems that is not within my power. They will flirt with me. Why?

Philip Of course I've forgotten what you look like, and I never notice what you have on ... but I suspect it's because you're rather pretty and attractive.

Jessica Do you want women not to be? Do you want me not to be?

Philip No.

Jessica If I had dozens of children, and grew into a tired and shapeless old woman with the last one, I should be quite out of danger. But you don't want me to be that, do you? Do you?

Philip No.

Jessica We make homes for you, we women. We entertain your friends. It may be at great cost to your precious soul but you want all this done. My culture ... my civilisation ... mayn't be quite up to earning the 'mean sensual' man's friendship, but it has its uses.

Philip Are you not my friend, Jessica? As well as ... you know?

Jessica I'm not sure that I am. You wouldn't lavish diamonds like these on a friend, but you might take him into your confidence, you might allow his mind to be on a par with your own. What is to be my place - what is to be Mildred's place, Philip, in your ugly new world?

Philip I ...

Jessica I would be obliged if you would give that question some attention.

She returns to the piano and commences Beethoven's Hammerklavier Sonata Op 106. PHILIP stares after her for a few moments, then goes as if to place his hands on her shoulders as she plays, thinks better of it, looks round at the civilised room, then sits and picks up the Minority Report of the Poor Law Commission, but does not read.

The lights fade slowly as JESSICA plays on.

This is the original 1909 conclusion to the play:

Constantine You have a charming home. I wonder how much of your womanly civilisation it would have needed to conquer me. Well ... I leave you to your conversation. A pleasant life to you.

He bends over her hand as if to kiss it. She takes it, as if fastidiously, out of his soft grasp. So he bows again and leaves her.

Constantine Victoria at eleven o'clock tomorrow, Philip.

Philip Yes ... I'll see you off.

Constantine I have to do a little shopping quite early.

Philip Shopping! What can the West send the East ?

Constantine I must take back a trinket or two.

Philip To be sure. We do the same on our travels.

PHILIP sees him through the hall to the front door, hails a stray cab, and is quit of him. Jessica moves about as if to free the air of this visitation, and when PHILIP comes back ...

Jessica Does your father usually scatter cheques so generously and carelessly?

Philip Jessica, while I have every respect for that young lady's independence ... still two hundred pounds would be all to the good of the child's upbringing ... and why shouldn't Miss Yates keep her secret?

Jessica Yes. I don't like your father. And I'm sometimes afraid that you're only an intellectual edition of him. It's very vital, of course, to go about seducing everybody to your own way of thinking. But really it's not quite civilised. You ought to learn to talk about the weather.

Philip I cannot talk about what can't be helped.

He had settled to a chair and a cigarette, but on the impulse he abandons both and starts a lively argument instead, Philip's excited arguments are carried on in short dashes about the room and with queer un-English gestures.

And I wonder more and more what the devil you all mean by civilisation. This room is civilisation. Whose civilisation? Not ours.

Jessica *[In mock despair]* Oh, dear!

Philip Cheer up. Didn't you marry me because I thought more of Bach than Offenbach? Why shouldn't you share a fresh set of

convictions? This sort of marriage is worthwhile, you know. Even one's quarrels have a certain dignity.

Jessica Go ahead ... bless your heart.

Philip *[Shaking his fist at the world in general]* Whitechapel High Street's our civilisation.

Jessica I don't know it.

Philip Therefore you don't much matter, my dear ... any more than my father did with his view of life as a sort of love-chase. Persian carpet on the floor. Last supper, by Ghirlandaio, over the mantelpiece. The sofa you're sitting on was made in a forgotten France. This is a museum. And down at that precious school what are they cultivating Mildred's mind into but another museum ... of good manners and good taste and ... Are we going to have a row about this?

Jessica If you Idealists want Mildred to live in the Whitechapel Road ... make it a fit place for her.

Philip When she lives in it it will become so. Why do I give up designing dresses and running a fashion shop to go on the County Council ... if I can get on? And not to cut a fine figure there, either. But to be on a committee or committees. Not to talk finely even then ... Lord keep me from the temptation ... but to do dull, hard work over drains and disinfectants and ...

Jessica Well ... why, Phil? I may as well know.

Philip To save my soul alive.

Jessica I'm sure I hope you may. But what is it we're to cultivate in poor Mildred's soul?

Philip Why not a sense of ugliness ? Have you ever really looked at a London street ... walked slowly up and down it three times ... carefully testing it with every cultured sense?

Jessica Yes ... it's loathsome.

Philip Then what have you done?

Jessica What can one do?

Philip Come home to play a sonata of Beethoven! Does that drown the sights and the sounds and the smell of it?

Jessica Yes ... it does.

Philip Not to me ... my God ... not to me!

Jessica For so many women, Phil, art has to make life possible.

Philip Suppose we teach Mildred to look out of the window at the life outside. We want to make that impossible. Neither Art nor Religion nor good manners have made of the world a place I'll go on living in if I can help it. D'you remember in my young days when I used to spend part of a holiday lecturing on Shelley?

Jessica Yes.

Philip I remember once travelling in the train with a poor wretch who lived ... so he told me ... on what margins of profit he could pick up by standing rather incompetently between the corn field and the baker ... or the coal mine and the fire ... or the landowner and the tenant ... I forget which. And he was weary and irritable and unhealthy. And he hated Jones ... because Jones had done him out of a half per cent, on two hundred and fifty pounds ... and if the sum had been bigger he'd have sued him, so he would. And the end of Prometheus was running in my head ... This, like thy glory Titan is to be Good, great and joyous, beautiful and free ... and I thought him a mean fellow. And then he told me how he dreaded bankruptcy, and how his uncle, who had been a clerk, had come to the workhouse ... and what a disgrace that was. And I'm afraid he was a little drunk. And I wondered whether it would be possible to interest him in the question of Shelley's position as a prosodist ... or whether even the beauties of Prometheus would comfort him at all. But when he asked me what I was going to Manchester for ... do you know, I was ashamed to tell him?

Jessica Yes ... a terrible world ... an ugly, stupid, wasteful world. A hateful world!

Philip And yet we have to teach Mildred what love of the world means, Jessica. Even if it's an uncomfortable business. Even if it means not adding her to that aristocracy of good feeling and good taste ... the very latest of class distinctions. I tell you I haven't come by these doubts so easily. Beautiful sounds and sights and thoughts are all of the world's heritage I care about. Giving them up is like giving my carefully created soul out of my keeping before I die.

Jessica And into whose?

Philip I'm afraid into the keeping of everybody we are at present tempted to dislike and despise. For that's Public Life. That's Democracy. But that's the Future. I know it's even harder for you women. You put off your armour for a man you love. But otherwise you've your Honour and Dignity and Purity ...

Jessica Do you want a world without that, either ?

Philip I rather want to know just what the world gets by it. Those six thin girls at my uncle's ... what do we get from them or they from the world? Little Miss Yates, now ... her transgressions may be the most profitable thing about her ...

Jessica Two wrongs don't make a right.

Philip They often do ... properly mixed. Of course you women could serve yourselves up to such lords of creation as my father quite profitably, in one sense, if you would.

Jessica Thank you ... we're not cattle.

Philip No. Then there's a price to be paid for free womanhood, I think ... and how many of you ladies are willing to pay it? Come out and be common women among us common men? Jessica, do you feel that it was you shot that poor devil six months ago? ... that it's you who are to be hanged tomorrow?

Jessica I don't think I do.

Philip That it's your body is being sold on some street this evening?

Jessica I hate to think about such things.

Philip Then there's precious little hope for the Kingdom of Heaven upon earth. I know it sounds mere nonsense, but I'm sure it's true. If we can't love the bad as well as the beautiful ... if we won't share it all out now ... fresh air and art ... and dirt and sin ... then we good and clever people are costing the world too much. Our brains cost too much if we don't give them freely. Your beauty costs too much if I only admire it because of the uglier women I see ... even your virtue may cost too much, my dear. Rags pay for finery and ugliness for beauty, and sin pays for virtue. Why can nothing keep for long more beauty in a good man's eyes than the ugliest thing on earth? Why need no man be wiser than the biggest fool on earth? Why does it profit neither man nor woman to be more righteous than the greatest sinner on earth? These are the riddles this Sphinx of a world is asking me. Your artists and scholars and preachers don't answer them ... so I must turn my back for a bit on artist and scholar and preacher ... all three.

Jessica Meanwhile, my dear Phil, I shall not stop subscribing to the London Symphony Concerts ... and I shall expect you to take me occasionally.

Philip Oh ... that reminds me ... I've a message for you from Tommy.

Jessica Have you? He was really irritating this morning.

Philip We must take Tommy with a sense of humour. It wasn't so much a message as one of those little bursts of childlike confidence ... he endears himself to one with them from time to time.

Jessica About me?

Philip Yes. What it comes to is this. Will you please not flirt with him any more, because he hasn't the time, and he's too fond both of me and his wife to want to find himself seriously in love with you.

Jessica Thank you for the message.

Philip He doesn't at all suppose you are in love with him ... seriously or otherwise.

Jessica Do you?

Philip No.

Jessica And is this the first time you've discussed me with Tommy or anyone? Please let it be the last.

Philip Are you angry, Jessica?

Jessica I'm more than angry.

Philip I'm sorry.

Jessica I despise men. I despised them when I was fifteen ... the first year I was conscious of them. I've been through many opinions since ... and I come back to despising them.

Philip He was afraid you wouldn't be pleased with him. But he has my sympathies, Jessica.

Jessica Has he!

Philip Tommy is what the entertaining State called this afternoon the Mean Sensual Man.

Jessica Yes. When we're alone, having a jolly talk about things in general, he's all the time thinking I want him to kiss me.

Philip While what you really want is to have him wanting to kiss you but never to kiss you.

Jessica No!

Philip Oh, yes, Jessica.

Jessica Well ... I can't help it if he does.

Philip You can, of course. And the Mean Sensual Man calls it being made a fool of.

Jessica I give you my word I've never tried to flirt with Tommy ... except

once or twice when he has been boring me. And perhaps once or twice when I was in the dumps ... and there he was ... and I was boring him. I know him too well to flirt with him ... you can't flirt with a man you know well. But he's been boring me lately, and I suppose I've been a bit bored. But suppose I have been flirting with him ... I thought he was safe enough. And a caddish thing to go speaking to you about it.

Philip So he said ... so he said.

Jessica Worse than caddish ... outrageous! I never heard of such a thing ... you shouldn't have let him.

Philip Should I have knocked him down when he mentioned your name?

Jessica Yes ... I wish you had.

Philip Little savage.

Jessica I can't laugh about this. I'm hurt.

Philip My dear, if you have any sense at all, you'll ask him to dinner and chaff him about it ... before me.

Jessica Have you any understanding of what a woman feels when men treat her like this? Degraded and cheapened.

Philip I can tell you what the man feels. He'll be either my father or me. That's your choice. Tommy's my father when you've put on your best gown to attract him, or he's me when he honestly says that he'd rather you wouldn't. Do you want him to be me or my father? That's the first question for you.

Jessica I want a man to treat a woman with courtesy and respect.

Philip And what does that come to? My dear, don't you know that the Mean Sensual Man ... no, not Tommy for the moment, but say Dick or Harry ... looks on you all as choice morsels ... with your prettinesses, your dressings up, your music and art as so much sauce to his appetite. Which only a mysterious thing called your virtue prevents him from indulging ... almost by force, if it weren't for the police, Jessica. Do you like that?

Jessica I don't believe it.

Philip Do you really believe that most men's good manners towards most pretty women are anything else but good manners?

Jessica I prefer good manners to yours. No ... that's rude.

Philip I treat you as a man would treat another man ... neither better nor worse. Is the compliment quite wasted ?

Jessica I want to be friends with men. I'd sooner be friends with them. It's they who flirt with me. Why?

Philip Of course I've forgotten what you look like, and I never notice what you have on ... but I suspect it's because you're rather pretty and attractive.

Jessica Do you want women not to be?

Philip No.

Jessica It's perfectly sickening. Of course, if I had dozens of children, and grew an old woman with the last one, I should be quite out of danger. But we can't all be like that ... you don't want us to be.

Philip No.

Jessica I do my share of things. I make a home for you. I entertain your friends. It may cost your precious world too much ... my civilisation ... but you want all this done. And Phil ... suppose I'm not much nicer by nature than some of you men? When I was a baby, if I'd not been fastidious I should have been a sad glutton. My culture ... my civilisation ... mayn't be quite up to keeping the brilliant Tommy a decent friend to me, but it has its uses.

Philip Look here, if it's only your culture keeps you from kissing Tommy ... kiss him.

Jessica Phil ... I sometimes think I'd sooner have been married to your father.

Philip Why?

Jessica If you went on as he did instead of as you do ... I should be sorry ... I should despise you ... but it would string me up and add to my self-respect enormously! But it's when you're inhuman, Phil ... that I'm ever so little tempted.

Philip I know I am. But I do so hate that farm-yard world of sex ... men and women always treating each other in this unfriendly way ... that I'm afraid it hardens me a bit.

Jessica I hate it, too ... but I happen to love you, Phil.

Philip Yes, my dear. If you'd kindly come over here ... I should like to kiss you.

Jessica I won't. You can come over to me.

Philip Will you meet me half way?

They meet half way, and kiss.

Philip Do you know the sort of world I want to live in?

Jessica Should I like it?

Philip Hasn't Humanity come of age at last?

Jessica Has it?

Philip Mayn't we hope so? Finery sits so well on children. And they strut and make love absurdly ... even their quarrelling is in all good faith and innocence. But I don't see why we men and women should not find all happiness ... and beauty, too ... in soberer purposes. And with each other ... why not always some touch of the tranquil understanding which is yours and mine, dear, at the best of moments?

Jessica Do you mean when we sometimes suddenly want to shake hands?

Philip That's it. And I want an art and a culture that shan't be just a veneer on savagery ... but it must spring in good time from the happiness of a whole people.

Jessica Well, what's to be done?

Philip I've been making suggestions. We must learn to live on a thousand a year ... put Mildred to a sensible school ... and I must go on the County Council. That's how these great spiritual revolutions work out in practice, to begin with.

Jessica Where's my share of the job?

Philip How is a man to tell you? There's enough to choose from.

Jessica Ah, you're normal. Nobody sizes you up as a good man or a bad man ... pretty or plain. There's a trade for bad women and several professions for plain ones. But I've been taught how to be charming and to like dainty clothes. And I dare say I'm excitable and emotional ... but I can't help it. I'm well off, married to you, I know. You do make me forget I'm a female occasionally.

Philip Male and female created He them ... and left us to do the rest. Men and women are a long time in the making ... aren't they?

Jessica *[Enviously]* Oh . . . you're all right.

Philip Are we?

Jessica But I tell you, Phil, it isn't so easy for us. You don't always let us have the fairest of chances, do you?

Philip No, I grant it's not easy. But it's got to be done.

Jessica Yes ...

She doesn't finish, for really there is no end to the subject. But for a moment or two longer, happy together, they stand looking into the fire.